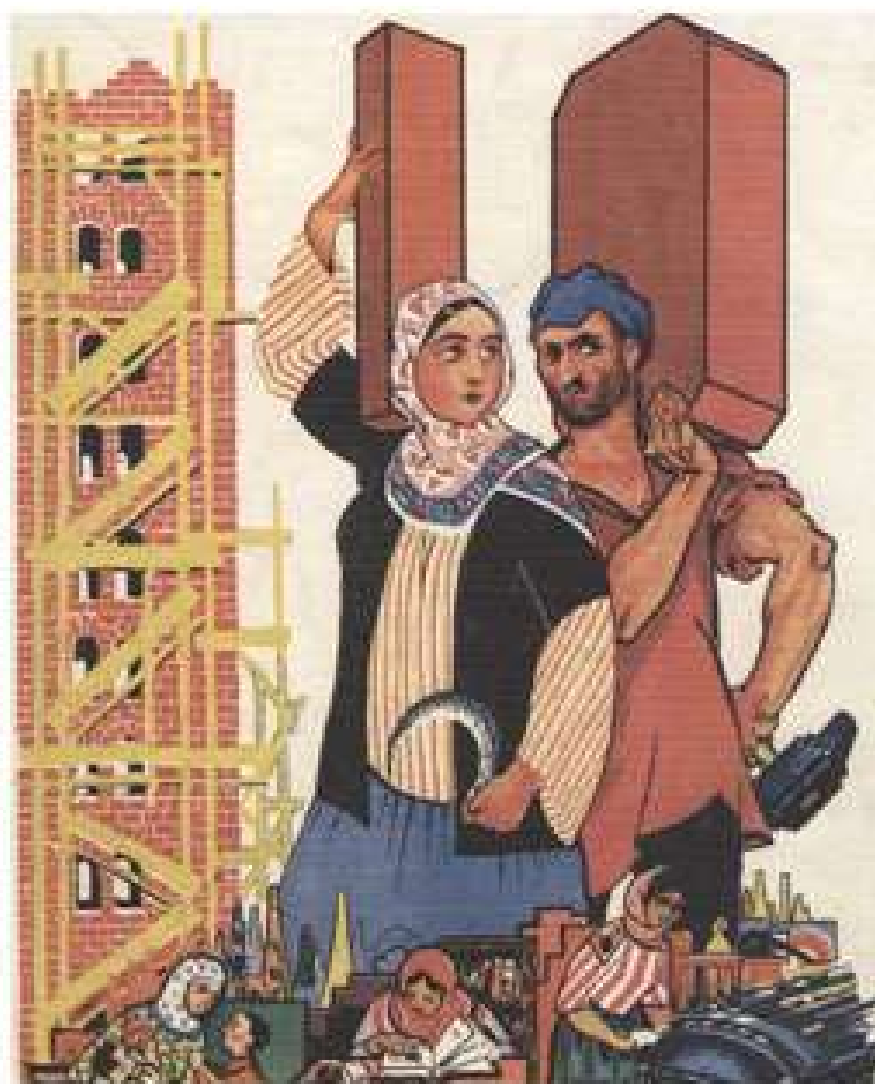




# Caucasus Paradigms

Anthropologies, Histories and  
the Making of a World Area

*Edited by Bruce Grant and Lale Yalçın-Heckmann*



# Caucasus Paradigms

## Anthropologies, Histories and the Making of a World Area

This volume brings together a dozen specialists in anthropology, linguistics, archaeology and cultural history, who seek to identify patterns in how the Caucasus as a region has figured on the world stage through both politics and scholarship. It seeks to turn a longstanding handicap – the perceived ‘unknowability’ of the Caucasus – into a theme. Certainly, ‘to know’ the Caucasus has never been simple, even for those who live there. Some have found it even harder to imagine it as a world area. We therefore ask: what does it mean to know a world area, or to be part of one? How do the expectations that one brings to the study of any part of the world shape lives and knowledges? For centuries the Caucasus – a topographically diverse region bounded by Russia to the north, Iran to the south, the Black Sea and Turkey to the west, and the Caspian to the east – has confounded easy answers to these questions. Like so many parts of the world, the Caucasus marks its earliest histories through conquest. The list is a long one, of armies and empires, from Greeks to Turks, Arabs to Mongols, and Persians to Russians, to name only some of the most prominent actors. What do these long lines of conquerors and would-be conquerors have in common? In each case, their respective Caucasus campaigns began as little more than a staging ground for broader ambitions, staking out a crucial territory in a set of geopolitical projects that relied on this region as an ‘absent presence’. In the post-Soviet world, little seems to have changed – the Caucasus continues to be most widely known as the crucible of broader Russian sovereignty in the case of Chechnya, or of NATO designs on Russia and the Middle East aided by new strategic partners.

The contributions to this volume seek to analyse and increase our understanding of what we have identified as the most prominent of such Caucasian paradigms, for example the region’s famous cultural, linguistic, religious, political and economic pluralisms, alongside its reputations for violence, savagery, conflict and corruption, as well as of nobility, hospitality, natural beauty and severity. Such paradigms present a paradox: despite such histories of diaspora, migration, conquest, and cohabitation, the Caucasus is most often conjured as a place of closure to those ‘from outside’. Drawing on ethnographic knowledges in tandem with the fine tunings of cultural histories, these essays invite readers to reflect on pluralism and its logics in a world area where cultural difference has, remarkably, long been singled out as the driving cause of violence despite centuries of conquest by others.



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# Caucasus Paradigms

Anthropologies, Histories  
and the Making of a World Area

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LIT



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## **Preface and Acknowledgements**

What does it mean to think ethnographically in a world region where peoples have for so long been so closely connected yet so consciously divided?

For centuries, the Caucasus have been home to a dense conglomeration of religions, languages and communities imperfectly drawn together around changing allegiances of empire, Silk Road trade and state socialism. A long line of conquerors – Greek, Roman, Turk, Arab, Mongol, Persian, Ottoman, Russian and Soviet – changed the rules of Caucasus life in multiple ways. Yet despite such evident histories of diaspora, migration, conquest, and cohabitation, the Caucasus is renowned for images of closure.

In recent modern history, perhaps no state has so masterfully achieved the high modernist goal of mapping its constituents as thoroughly as the USSR, and Caucasus ethnography has inherited the legacy of this encyclopaedic corpus. But at the very historical moment when restrictions on a more open understanding of this world region vanished, so too did the research infrastructure for the hundreds of scholars in the USSR who had so laboriously presented the region to non-Armenian, non-Azerbaijani, non-Chechen, non-Dagestani and non-Russian readers (and to themselves) for decades. In the past fifteen years, transitology seemingly has given way to conflictology, producing a wide mix of journalism, policy study and traditional research.

In order to discuss these themes a dozen specialists in the ethnography and cultural history of the Caucasus region got together at a workshop in March 2006 at the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology in Halle/Saale to ask what these varied experiences in understanding the Caucasus might suggest for the related practices of ethnography and cultural history as a whole. This volume evolved out of the discussions during the workshop and includes further invited contributions which complement the themes of March 2006. We would like to recognise the excellent contributions of Mathijs Pelkmans and Nona Shahnazarian who presented and gave excellent commentary at the March 2006 event but could not contribute to this volume.

We thank the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology for the generous sponsorship of the March 2006 workshop as well as the subsequent production team that made this volume possible. The Max Planck's co-director, Chris Hann; research coordinator, Bettina Mann; departmental secretary, Berit Westwood, who also took charge of the final production of the book; cartographers Jutta Turner and Robert Goßmann; and members of the Research Team, 'Caucasian Boundaries and Citizenship from Below', Florian Mühlfried, Milena Baghdasaryan, Teona Mataradze and Neşe



Özgen, and student assistants Norman Prell, Anne-Christine Wahl and Oliver Götzschel all ensured the best support for this project. We are grateful to Volker Adam from the University Library of Martin-Luther University in Halle who had very useful ideas for the visual material and supported the bibliographic research. An earlier version of Seteney Shami's essay appeared as 'Prehistories of Globalization: Circassian Identity in Motion', *Public Culture* 12, no. 1 (2000): 177–204. We thank Duke University Press for the permission to reprint it here. Anne Dunbar-Nobes undertook the copy-editing and we are thankful to her for her diligent work.

Bruce Grant

Lale Yalçın-Heckmann

## **Note on Transliterations**

Armenian usage follows the Library of Congress system with exceptions in the main text for accepted anglicised renderings of Yerevan (rather than Erevan) and the names of well-known political figures.

Azerbaijani usage follows the Latin transcriptions adopted by the Republic of Azerbaijan in 1991.

Georgian usage follows the Apridonidze-Chkhaidze system.

Russian usage follows the Library of Congress system, with established exceptions such as Yeltsin rather than El'tsyn. Apostrophes indicate soft signs.



Map 1.1. General map of the Caucasus

## ***Chapter 1***

### **Introduction**

Bruce Grant and Lale Yalçın-Heckmann

paradigm: [fr. Ancient Greek παράδειγμα, pattern, example, precedent < παρά . . . + δέγμα, sample, pattern . . . after παραδεικνύναι, to exhibit beside, show side by side.] 1. A pattern or model, an exemplar; (also) a typical instance of something, an example . . . A conceptual or methodological model underlying the theories and practices of a science or discipline at a particular time; (hence) a generally accepted world view.

Oxford English Dictionary

What does it mean to know a world area, or to be part of one, for that matter? For centuries the Caucasus – a topographically diverse region of some 175,000 square miles (440,000 square kilometres) bounded by Russia to the north, Iran to the south, the Black Sea and Turkey to the west, and the Caspian to the east – has confounded easy answers to this question.<sup>1</sup> Like so many parts of the world, the Caucasus marks its earliest histories through conquest. As early as the eighth century BCE Greek ships sailed east to command new lands that would help to feed growing armies; Turks, Ottomans, Arabs and Persians used the Caucasus as a theatre of competition between Sunni and Shi'i military campaigns at the height of empire; Mongols took Caucasian lands as part of one of their final bids to march on Central Europe; and Russians aspired to push south and west to warm seas, using the Caucasus as their launching ground. What do these long lines of conquerors and would-be conquerors have in common? In each case, their

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<sup>1</sup> Published figures for the size of the Caucasus are rare, given the shifting borders and changing perceptions of the region over time. This figure includes the three South Caucasus republics of Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia, with the North Caucasus territories of Chechnya, Ingushetia, Dagestan, North Ossetia, Adygheia, Kabardino-Balkaria, Karachai-Cherkessia, Krasnodar Krai, and Stavropol' Krai, yielding 175,678 sq. miles, or 439,195 sq. kilometers. While the Russian Federation currently includes Rostov Oblast' in its North Caucasus Economic Zone, only small parts of that region are traditionally included in the Caucasus; we have not factored those populations here.

respective Caucasus campaigns began as little more than a staging ground for broader ambitions, staking out a crucial territory in a set of geopolitical projects that relied on this region as an ‘absent presence’. In the post-Soviet world, little seems to have changed – the Caucasus continues to be most widely known as the crucible of broader Russian sovereignty in the case of Chechnya, or of NATO designs on Russia and the Middle East aided by new strategic partners.

This longstanding tradition of sovereign ambitions over such a small space has left a deep imprint on how this part of the world is understood. Greeks were among the first, but by no means the last, to depict the peoples of the Caucasus as less than welcoming to would-be foreign overseers (Aeschylus 1932). Yet what came first – resistance to invasion, or naturally occurring belligerence? How one answers this question often tells more about the observer than the observed, about which sides in a long, shared history of conquest and colonisation one recognises, and indeed, about the constitution of areal knowledge itself.

The briefest survey of the most prominent ‘Caucasus paradigms’ begins to paint a picture of a region famous for its cultural, linguistic, religious, political and economic pluralisms; its violence, savagery, conflict and corruption; its nobility, hospitality, natural beauty and severity. Already this presents a paradox since, despite such evident histories of diaspora, migration, conquest and cohabitation, despite such intense evidence of mobilities and crossings, the Caucasus is most often conjured as a place of closure to those ‘from outside’.

This volume therefore seeks to turn a longstanding handicap – the perceived ‘unknowability’ of the Caucasus – into a theme. Bringing together a dozen specialists in anthropology, linguistics and cultural history, we look to identify patterns in how the Caucasus has figured on the world stage through both politics and scholarship. Certainly, ‘to know’ the Caucasus has never been simple, even for those who live there. Using standards common to any canonically mapped world area, serious study of Caucasian life up to the nineteenth century requires a command of at least one of the dominant languages – Arabic, Persian or Turkish – and, under ideal circumstances, more than one. For the twentieth century, a knowledge of Russian surges in importance. And for all periods, the need for essential competence in one of the larger republican or regional languages – Adyge, Avar, Armenian, or Azerbaijani – only begins to suggest the challenges that scholarly study poses. Historically, few scholars have been up to this task. Yet fragments of all of these knowledges come alive every day. To match the punning vocabulary of almost any street vendor in Yerevan, Tbilisi or Baku, one has to start with a working knowledge of Greek, Roman, Arab, Mongol, Turkic,

Persian, Ottoman and Russian invasions. Most scholars who are new to the region take refuge under the covers, and return to (or stay behind in) London, Moscow, Istanbul or Tehran.

The Soviet Union, which held a distinct advantage on account of its sweeping print and literacy campaigns, set the standard for scrupulously interpreting the vast archives left behind by those who came before them. In one of the very few reflections on the history of Caucasus area studies, Natal'ia Volkova observes that amongst the works of early Russian greats of Caucasus studies before 1917 – Miller, Kovalevskii, Uslar and the benighted Marr – at least two distinguishing factors stand out. The first is a portrait of a world area unified through shared culture and history rather than one divided by difference.

For the *coryphae* ['leading lights'] of Russian Caucasology it was quite evident that for all the multi-tribalism and multi-lingualism of the Caucasus, for all the complexity of the ethnic history of the region – after mass migrations of entire peoples, processes of assimilation, integration, and mutual influence – the peoples of the Caucasus had retained a certain intimacy, indeed, an often surprising similarity at the level of the most basic elements of daily life, reflecting deep genetic commonality and a natural convergence of ethnocultural development (1992: 7).

The second and equally important factor is an abiding interdisciplinarity common to much early social science, emergent from Faculties of Natural History, Geography and Law, as well as in a Russian Empire where the poetry of conquest could be far more powerful than any academic prose (Volkova 1992: 8; see also Layton 1994). For Volkova, the early days of Soviet work in the Caucasus saw an extension of Russia's already vaunted fieldwork tradition, with an extraordinary number of committees, expeditions and monographic work set in motion to both better understand and transform the legacy of empire. The Soviet post-World War II period, which she sees as no less accomplished, nonetheless became more rigidly organised along disciplinary lines, and more decidedly supportive of a shifting Soviet nationality policy that encouraged greater attention to particular peoples at the expense of earlier commonalities (Volkova 1992: 23–35). Beyond modes of production, Soviet anthropologists and historians alike were expert at mapping what they described as the folklore or cultural history of the Caucasus, where folklore (alongside its Sovietised referent, 'spiritual culture') endured as the most politically acceptable way of identifying the centuries of recorded civilisational history in the USSR's southern reaches.

However circumscribed some Soviet studies may have been, few failed to make a significant mark. A notable Azerbaijani ethnographer of the early Soviet era, Alesker Alekperov for instance, meticulously recorded the settlements, social life and material culture of Kurds in the Laçın and Kelbacar regions. Faithful to a historical materialism that laboriously identified preternaturally developed class structures among a peasantry oppressed by empire, he went on to observe how lives of Kurds worsened during the brief years of independence, only to be alleviated by the arrival of socialism (1936: 33–4). This scripted teleology nonetheless left him ample room to make quite sophisticated arguments about the difficulty of differentiating between peoples he understood as Kurds and Turks (Alekperov's terms) who had been settled in these regions for centuries, and who thus would seem to have long forged nearly identical economic and social structures. Appropriately resistant to nationalist sentiments that would point to a Greater Kurdistan or to any form of pan-Turkism, Alekperov could not escape the fate of many other intellectuals of his time in Azerbaijan and died in exile in Siberia following purges in the academy (Bünyadov 1993: 139).

During the Cold War, restricted access for international researchers, in turn, meant that scholarship leaned heavily on metropolitan life and 'top-down' policy-making. But Soviet ethnography continued to face its own restrictions. Intellectually alive as a community, ethnographers found that their fieldwork nonetheless became limited most often to brief summer expeditions that favoured a particular kind of data collection, focused on highly defined questions, rather than drawing on the holistic tradition of extended fieldwork and field-based monographs which were the hallmark of Russian ethnography in the late nineteenth century. Another feature of Caucasus ethnography in the Soviet period was the frequent absence of ethnographers studying any place and people outside their own national space. Thus, in effect, ethnic Azerbaijanis, Armenians and Georgians working in their respective republics were encouraged to study themselves. In many cases, this deepened the divides of knowledge required to understand Caucasian societies.

The end of the Soviet Union brought to a close the generous state funding that had sponsored its many Academies of Science, institutions that supported the hundreds of highly trained Caucasus scholars in Moscow, Leningrad, Nal'chik, Makhachkala and elsewhere, from prestigious research institutes to the corridors of provincial museums. Caucasian and international scholars alike rapidly fixed on the questions of the day in a bid to respond to the most pressing sources of concern (and funding) – namely, ethnic violence and development of the region's rich mineral resources.

After 2001, heightened security concerns joined this policy mix. For good reasons, the international community still labours to fashion responses to ongoing wars, the struggles of breakaway regions, resource crises and the election of autocrats. This has brought Caucasus area studies closer to what Bruce Cumings has described elsewhere as knowledge production of regions working at the ‘state/intelligence/foundation’ nexus (1997: 12; cf. also Harootunian and Miyoshi 2002). But, with few exceptions, there is remarkably little literature on the experiential dimensions – the cultural and historical codings of these questions – that are so essential for anchoring policy decisions in the first place.

Those scholars trained at the advanced research institutes of the Caucasus themselves – who are among the best poised to undertake just this work today – are often at the greatest disadvantage. At the very moment when restrictions on a more open understanding of this world vanished, so too did the research infrastructure for the hundreds of specialists in the USSR who had so laboriously presented the region to non-Armenian, non-Azerbaijani, non-Chechen, non-Dagestani and non-Russian readers (and to each other) for decades. In the past fifteen years, transitology has given way to conflictology, producing a wide mix of journalism and policy study, but rather little in the way of classic research.

Yet, as the essays in this volume demonstrate, understanding the Caucasus offers potentially rich dividends in showing, for example, how cultural knowledge can inform the management of pluralism. From questions of sovereignty and suzerainty to citizenship, changing social codes across political borders and historical periods, idioms of property, the dynamics of national, cultural and religious movements, migration and diaspora, transnational events in public health, crisis management and war, gender and performance, and language politics – the anthropologies and histories of the Caucasus, to recall Volkova’s observation, show remarkable patterns of borrowings, common platforms and shared experience.

How then have such paradigms of closure reigned for so long? Sheer topography has played some role, for mountains and the natural barriers they present to those who would cross them have long acted as places of myth, not least in political terms of perceived intractability or unknowability (Todorova 1997). Thus, the earliest Greeks saw the Caucasus as a place of mythic exile, where, in the case of Prometheus, time stood still (Hesiod 1983). Later Russians would cast the entire area from north to south as defined by the mountain range that crossed it, thus combining the lands known as Circassia (the contemporary Adygeia, Kabardino-Balkar and Karachai-Cherkess republics of the Russian Federation), along with Dagestan and Chechnya as the North Caucasus, *Predkavkaz’e*, or



‘Ciscaucasia’ or the lands near the Caucasus mountains; and the South Caucasus (the independent republics of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia) as *Zakavkaz’e*, or ‘Transcaucasia’, that which lies beyond. No matter how diverse the actual topographies of the region, from the coastal wetlands of the Black Sea coast to the long, dry plains of the Apsheron Peninsula, mountains have made the metaphor.

Political geography, rather than physical geography, has proved far more important: successive imperial powers saw the Caucasus as a transit zone to be conquered. But as authority over local power structures proved elusive from ancient times right through to 1917, the fascination with an extraordinarily diverse region whose best-known unifying code was found in its resistance to foreign rule took strong root. Yet as so many recent historical studies have laboured to show, the forms of resistance could look different indeed (Gordin 2000; Geraci 2001; Werth 2002; Mostashari 2006). Thus, while the best-known nationalist hagiographies of recent days emphasise an almost unalloyed distaste for nearly 200 years of Russian rule, one need not look far to see a picture necessarily more complicated. Consider the biography of one of the famous leaders and intellectuals of independent Azerbaijan of 1918–20, Ahmet Agayev (Ağaoğlu). Upon the death of Tsar Aleksandr II, assassinated in 1881 at the hands of revolutionary populists, Agayev describes the reaction of his schoolteacher, a deeply pious Muslim and ulema.

He came into our class under the influence of his feelings. No sooner had he seated himself than he drew out pen and ink from his sash, demanded a piece of paper from us ... A short time later he set himself to writing. He wrote, he crossed things out, and finally he addressed us. ‘On your feet and face the Kaaba’, he commanded. We all stood and turned to the south. ‘Now listen’, he said and he read us the eulogy he had written for Alexander II ... I well remember that the crux of his composition consisted of two Russian words whose meaning was ‘vile sons of dogs’. The ahund<sup>2</sup> cursed the perpetrators, praised the Tsar and read a prayer for his soul. At the same time he admonished us, telling us that the Tsar was chosen and appointed by God and he added, ‘Whoever has raised his hand against him [the Tsar], it is as though he has raised his hand against God and his death is required; he is absolutely a cursed infidel. Beware, my children and conform yourselves to this kind of guidance. Otherwise, God, having become angry, will annihilate not only you, but your

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<sup>2</sup> A Muslim theologian.

fathers, mothers, and relatives; he will destroy you, root and branch'.<sup>3</sup>

With alliances so multiplex, moving across religious, administrative, cultural, economic and political lines, all manner of allegiance could be found. Historians have long known that all empires take incentive from the civilising missions they look to enact, but in this particular case, just who would be civilising whom depended very much on whom you asked in the very part of the world that boasted some of the oldest traditions of Zoroastrianism, Christianity, Judaism and Islam.

In the age of the nation-state that followed modernising projects around the globe, the drive to map communities in the form of nations did as much to confuse as it did to enlighten, given the rough mismatch between such plural allegiances and the narrower categories of belonging by dint of language, religion or race that nationalist discourses allowed. The enormous and highly developed apparatus of the Soviet Academy of Sciences entered the study of the Caucasus in the context of such a nation-state approach, where cataloguing the peoples and social movements of this world area became a crucial technology of rule (Hirsch 2005). While it may have shared with its imperial predecessors an interest in natural history and ancient religions, its extraordinary capacity to document encyclopaedically every political corner of the Caucasus made it distinct among modernising states. Yet, as a result of this deeply particularist approach, one finds less attention to the possibility (and great likelihood) of a shared Caucasus civilisation from before the age of recorded conquest, when this lush and quite accessible part of the earth would have seen a broad system of exchange of the kind found today perhaps only in sagas of the mythical Nart people, the subject of shared mythologies across north and south (Abaev 1945; Colarusso 2002). Alongside early folklore studies, archaeologists and linguists did a better job of mapping these shared civilisational structures, given their longstanding mechanisms for looking at cultural transmission. It is precisely this record of cohabitations that so quickly comes under assault in contemporary political writings more disposed to neatly drawn boundaries (Kohl and Tsetskhladze 1995).

With the fall of the Soviet Union came high expectations that studies of the Caucasus and Central Asia would soon be absorbed by Middle East Studies, a seemingly natural home for a part of the world with such significant Muslim populations. Some anticipated that a new 'Soviet Middle East' would be identified (Hooson 1994: 139). Indeed, more than religion

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<sup>3</sup> Shissler (2003: 50) citing from the memoirs of Ağaoğlu's son, Samet Ağaoğlu (1940). For more on how Azeri intellectuals perceived and reacted to their colonisers, see Mustafayev (2004).

was shared: like the Caucasus, the borders of the Middle East have long been notoriously difficult (and to some, undesirable) to define for many reasons, be they political, economic, historical or academic. While ‘the Middle East’ as such has never been unaware of its uneven contours, ranging from North Africa to Central Asia, it has almost always bypassed both South and North Caucasian states and societies. Paradigms shift slowly, of course, yet there is cause for optimism. Only now do we see growing numbers of scholars, both in Russia and abroad, who have been trained in both Middle Eastern and Russian/Soviet historiographic traditions (Khalid 1998; Sivertseva 1999; Bobrovnikov 2002; Reynolds 2005), as well as more frequent reflections on the Soviet tradition itself (Arutiunov and Anchabadze 2001). As area studies influences go, the most interesting question may be why Middle Eastern studies seemed such a suitable match in the first place. The Caucasus and the Middle East share a deep legacy of Arab, Persian and Ottoman periods of rule, but it is Islam that occupies centre stage in any crossover scholarship. Why has this been so markedly the case?

Seteney Shami offers one answer to this question, one that resonates with how most area studies have long focused on ‘developmental’ states, eschewing a focus on Russia, Europe or North America for decades in favour of how ‘peripheral’ zones could catch up to metropolises.<sup>4</sup> As Shami points out, studies of the Caucasus focusing on Islam after the Soviet Union drew attention to its ‘emergence’ and ‘awakening’, much as nationalists did for years with more specific political units. Thus, in the same way that all Western scholars had long been replicating categories of Soviet thought while somehow challenging them – foremost by calling up North Caucasus peoples along Soviet systems of naming without questioning the politics of their Soviet-era incarnations – Middle Eastern scholars often unwittingly showed special interest in the pre-Soviet, populist traditions of Islam now ‘resurgent’. As Shami writes,

Such arguments for the dominance of a syncretic, popular Islam apparently resisted the efforts of Sovietisation and lay in wait, so to speak, for the opportunity to ‘re-emerge’. Islam, in these representations, is not a ‘civilisation’ or a ‘discursive tradition’ ... or even a social movement. It is essential, organic, integral and embedded, inscribed with all the force of tradition and ‘collective consciousness’, and hence, enduring and perhaps even eternal (1999: 191).

Thus

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<sup>4</sup> For perspectives on how developmentalism informed much of early Middle Eastern studies, see Halpern 1962; Khalidi 1995; and Mitchell 2003. For Central Asia, see Kandiyoti 2002.

One may note a more than double standard in the positive evaluation of Islam when it resists ‘repugnant’ Sovietisation ... in contrast to the highly negative evaluation of the self-same Islam when it resists Westernisation. Apparently, for all the purported homogeneity of Islam, it matters a great deal on which side of the border it is being followed (Shami 1999: 191).

What is striking to observe is that Central Asia, in some contrast to the Caucasus, has found more followers among scholars trained in the classic Middle East tradition, largely in areas where early Arabic texts have greater resonance (though Dagestan would again be an exception to this logic) (Lindholm 2002). As Deniz Kandiyoti has argued with regard to recent literature on Central Asia, questions of identity, Islam and Soviet nationality policies have predominated at the expense of other knowledges. ‘The socio-cultural effects of Sovietisation and Russification have been routinely privileged over any serious engagement with the economic institutions of state socialism and their local manifestations’ (2002: 240).

For English-language readers, what kind of ethnographies and social studies do we have on the Caucasus from the Soviet era? Despite the lack of established anthropological models of social action, such as those of acephalous societies of East Africa, segmentary tribal confederations of North Africa and the Middle East, or of perceived Oriental despotism in Asia, lesser known ethnographic studies during the socialist era in the Caucasus such as that of Tamara Dragadze (2001) [1988] drew extensively on both Soviet and British scholarly traditions. Dragadze’s *Rural Families in Soviet Georgia* provided a rare monograph of daily life in a rural Caucasian setting. Having carried out fieldwork in the Ratcha region of western Georgia in the 1970s, she focuses on kinship and household in ways that engage with broader questions of exchange, gender roles and identity under Georgian, Russian and Soviet modernities. She supplies ample ideas for comparative discussion of the continuity between presocialist and socialist systems in Georgia, specifically where peasant production, as well as domestic social units, began to change and at what pace. At a time when so much of the lived socialist world, experienced in rural and small town contexts, was ethnographically unknown and therefore hard to reconstruct without support from local sources, works such as Dragadze’s have been a pivotal source for English-language readers looking to map the extraordinary change wrought over the last thirty years.<sup>5</sup> Its greatest and perhaps most

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<sup>5</sup> Villa and Matossian (1982) offer a more standard approach based on reconstructed sources for pre-revolutionary rural life in Armenia. While not an ethnography in the conventional sense, Derluigi (2005) goes a long way to revising many of the same idioms of closure to which this volume draws attention.

provocative resonance today comes in how readily scholars of Armenia, Azerbaijan and the North Caucasus will recognise so many of the same practices and beliefs.

This volume similarly looks to provoke thought on these commonalities by directing attention to how such consistent paradigms have so long defined the Caucasus region. English-language scholars of the South Caucasus already benefit from wide-ranging collections on the Caucasus rooted in culture, history and politics (Suny 1996 [1983]; Saroyan 1997). Here, by foregrounding the particular purchases of ethnographic knowledge – grounded in the experiential – alongside the fine tunings of cultural histories known to broad swathes of both North and South Caucasus worlds, we invite readers to reflect on how an abiding historical consciousness, language politics, mobilities and sovereign struggles invoke an attention to pluralism rarely seen in most Caucasus studies.

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In **Part One**, we reflect on the layers of knowledge that have been formed, deposited and transmitted in the Caucasus through some of the region's most famous icons and archetypes. To state that the Caucasus has long been known for its pluralisms is at times an understatement: for example, on the question of communication, writers have historically struggled to describe the hundreds of languages and dialects found over such compact territory. While most linguists may have been interested principally in the proliferation of, structures of and contact between languages, the advent of linguistic nationalism (and evolutionism before that) has meant that such diversity has come to be attended by a wider audience of intellectuals, politicians and laymen. Any pursuit of linguistic models in the Caucasus over time makes compellingly clear how fraught linguistic history can become in such contested spaces. What one can hope for under the circumstances is a public sphere where genuine debate over languages and their origins – rather than nationalist hyperbole and the closure of scholarly exchange – can take place.

If the 'surfeit of languages' is one of the Caucasus' most famous branding elements, the romance of mountain life is never far behind. But how this romance of mountains proceeded (or romance in the mountains, for that matter) has always been the subject of some mystery. In a remarkable set of parables on presence and absence in the production of knowledge about the Caucasus, Paul Manning's essay reminds us of the prices paid when longstanding custom and modern mores restrict public discussion of what one might consider to be otherwise 'unfettered' cultural pursuits. Manning directs us to the village of Shatili, in the Khevsur region of

Georgia, which was forcibly evacuated by the government in the early 1950s as part of the Soviet Union's broader plans for the perceived efficiencies of population concentration. Shatili did not remain empty for long, however. Once free of the real Khevsurs who once thrived there, Shatili became a popular movie set for a series of films extolling the virtues of a fantastically sanitised Khevsur existence. Only when cleared of its true mountaineers could the Khevsur mountain romance thus truly begin.

Manning cannily tracks this play of presence and absence in Caucasus life by considering a source on romance itself among Khevsurs, in a book by native ethnographer Natela Baliauri (1896–1988), published not long after her death. Baliauri penned an elaborate account of rituals of courtship and marriage among Khevsurs, where romance might be considered among co-villagers or even co-clan members, endogamously, but where actual marriage itself was strictly exogamous. According to Manning, Baliauri's work helps us understand how mountain romance, as displayed in a custom of pre-marital sexual play of erotic attraction and sexual restraint, came to be placed at the core of artistic and ethnographic imagination. Yet the story of Baliauri's own life is equally key: to pay for her sin of having been abducted by a co-villager at the age of 18, Baliauri was exiled along with her husband. They went on to become highly accomplished specialists in the history and ethnology of Khevsurs in their own right, entirely of the Khevsur intelligentsia, yet entirely outside it. Manning's ingenuity in pursuing the doubling in romantic mountains and mountain romance invites us to consider both the physical and narrative distancing on which such classic paradigms of Caucasian life rely. Thus the highlands are forcibly frozen in time so that the lowlands can be modern; and local ethnographers are absented from the community they later devote their lives to presenting.

It must be noted that Baliauri's crime was not to succumb to bride-kidnapping itself, but to have somehow allowed herself, instead, to be kidnapped by someone from the wrong social category. This complex grammar of the exchange of bodies between Caucasus communities becomes the subject of Bruce Grant's chapter. Beginning with Pushkin's famous narrative poem of 1822, 'Prisoner of the Caucasus', Russian readers have been active consumers of the kinds of captivity narratives that were popular earlier in England, the Americas and the Ottoman Empire. These documents render the Caucasus somehow as one vast collection of stolen bodies. Yet ethnological understandings of how men and women crossed community boundaries in the pre-Russian and early Russian eras – which is to say, why actual bodies were given or taken – have been rarely explored. Through an exploration of three of the most famous kinds of 'traffic' in bodies across the Caucasus – as found in competition over mythical ancestors, bride-

kidnapping, and the men who ritually depart their communities to plot blood vengeance – Grant argues that each of these practices says more about the maintenance of boundaries between communities, and thus about the micro-structures of pluralism, than about the more sensational folklores of violence or brigandage. Thus, as myth and history surrounding such practices have been reincorporated and reinterpreted within communities, they have taken on enormously generative capacities. Relying on classic anthropological questions of exchange, Grant turns each of these canonic realms into questions of personhood, property and local history. The question he leaves to the reader is whether the chronicles of such boundary crossers served the minimisation of violence, rather than its advance.

So much attention has been given to violence in the Caucasus that many readers have had to ask whether the region was ever anything more than a site of endless jihad. Colonial documentary histories long showcased the resistance of Caucasus peoples to their would-be overseers, and this has been no less so today in the careful scrutiny of ethnic and military conflicts across the region. The result makes the entire Caucasus somehow emblematic of ‘natural belligerence’. Georgi Derluguian takes a refreshingly different approach, reading the historical political economy of the North Caucasus and the slow rise to armed conflict there through its place in the world system. In order to consider the case of Kabardins, he first looks to comparative elements in the political economy of the late Middle Ages, when warlords were protecting sedentary communities from nomads and thus advancing codes of their own distinction and nobility. Showing how the military superiority of a Kabardin stratum of overlords came to an end with the gunpowder revolution, he shows how peasant democratisation flourished as the North Caucasus began to host a flourishing cottage industry in the production of inexpensive guns. This was one peasant revolution, however, that Soviet scholars were reluctant to embrace as it ran counter to Marxist-Leninist doctrines of historical evolution. Peasant revolt does not give us cause to look backwards at Islamic militarisation, Derluguian adds, nor to the entrenchment of firmly held cultural and political boundaries. Instead, the radicalisation of Islam came comparatively late to this region, not least given the peripheral status of the region among otherwise warring Shi’i Persians and Sunni Ottomans. Thus, to look for ‘jihad’, a term once confined to moral struggles within oneself, which only came to be associated with mass political causes around the globe in the early 1970s, requires the more careful attentions of the kind Derluguian delivers.

**Part Two** of this volume segues from classic icons of Caucasus life – its perceived mountain of tongues, mountain romance, kidnappings, and

violences – to struggles over history itself. With his case study in the history of one South Caucasus republic, Azerbaijan, Shahin Mustafayev shows us the gamut of canonic readings of a single area, and how vastly they can differ. Whether seen as struggles over the articulation of territories and their boundaries; as part of a broader Turkic diaspora; as migrant Turks themselves; or as generalised citizens of a modern, independent state distinct unto itself, Mustafayev makes clear that all formations of statehood have leant heavily on the dominant models of changing times. His chapter is not only a rich illustration of the alternatives now available to all former Soviet scholars with the relative freeing of archives and publishing, but an eager attempt to write against the tide of nationalist hagiography that has become so prevalent across the Caucasus since the fall of the Soviet Union.

What happens, however, when pens are freed, yet the best-trained minds are unable to make a living in the immediate aftermath of dramatic social change? Who is left to represent history for wider readerships? This has been the problem confronting all scholarship in the Caucasus since 1991, and some of the results are plumbed in a fittingly scorching chapter by archaeologists Murtazali Gadjiev, Philip Kohl and Rabadan Magomedov. Here they take up three enormously popular contemporary amateur historians, whose loosely substantiated, home-grown genealogies of peoples across the North Caucasus have played havoc with the otherwise more carefully managed pluralisms of the Soviet period, and have fed nationalist violence. The accounts in question are a far cry from the more carefully considered works of provincial intelligentsia seen in Paul Manning's essay on Khevsurs. Languages are collapsed upon each other, famous ancestors are, as in Grant's chapter, claimed by nationalist fiat, and neighbours are everywhere demonised. While such inflammatory works are normally left out of scholarly review for reasons of diplomacy, Gadjiev, Kohl and Magomedov join a chorus of scholars concerned with the long-term effects of books finding wide readerships and, increasingly, homes in international library collections. Thus, by their reading, multiple histories may be salutary, but not if they sacrifice the kind of agonistic debates essential for any scholarship to remain credible.

Where Gadjiev, Kohl and Magomedov assail the Caucasus' new homegrown history industry, Rebecca Gould takes us inside the life of one of those quietly (and sometimes not so quietly) toiling authors, Suleiman Gumashvili, to enquire into the motives behind these new literary productions. To be sure, all societies have known competition between popular and scholarly accounts, with the greater print runs always accruing to the former. Rather than offering us a standard scene of competition for voice or authority, Gould argues that authors like Gumashvili all too



faithfully *imitate* the very premises of the all powerful nation-state from which so many peoples in the Caucasus have come to find themselves excluded. According to Gould's rendering, it is no less than the remaking of entire world areas that such gentleman (and gentlewoman) historians seek. In Suleiman, we find the classic case of the mountain eccentric, a 'language dreamer' issuing forth theories and apothegms on the history of race, language and culture from his Pankisi Gorge redoubt. How much can the works of these home-grown scholars be assailed, Gould asks, before we are not first required to interrogate the arbitrary premises by which more canonic scholarships validate ever unstable historical records of times past, or by which the questionable nexus of territory, language and race finds its validation in more conventionally accepted but sometimes equally non-rigorous academic texts.

In an enchanting chapter on mountains and their patriotic admirers, Levon Abrahamian, in turn, demonstrates the many ways by which history can be made (or remade) through popular spectacle. In what began as a modest effort to connect an Armenian provincial town to the national capital, as many as half a million average citizens across Armenia joined efforts (and literally, hands) on 28 May 2005, in a complexly orchestrated festival of national solidarity. Just how far was this regional centre, Aparan, from the capital, Yerevan? Just what was the altitude of the site? Just how long was the road around the mountain around which this dance of the people was performed? Abrahamian richly chronicles how fact gave way to fiction as planners made efforts to orchestrate the experience of the event as close to mythic. Thus reporters soon found themselves explaining that music for the dance was collected from sixteen provinces; that, whatever surveyors might say, Aparan was 160 km as the crow flies; that 1600 bonfires would therefore be lit on the eve of the dance to commemorate the 1600th anniversary of the founding of the Armenian alphabet; and, in turn, 160,000 trees would be planted in honour of the occasion, namely a dance taking place at an elevation of 1600 metres. As Abrahamian shows so clearly, this is the magic of statecraft – one that manages to endure long after the critics have had their say.

While the chapters in Part Two largely concern struggles over sovereignty in scholarship and public ritual, **Part Three** is devoted to the borders that divide the Caucasus from worlds within and around it, and the means by which they are crossed. Seteney Shami's deeply original chapter begins this section by juxtaposing scenes from the life of a young Circassian woman, Shemsigul, sold into slavery in 1854, with that of another young woman, Shengul, migrating from Turkey to Nal'chik, the home of her Circassian

grandparents, in the 1990s. Despite these two women's experiences being separated by nearly 140 years, Shami demonstrates how much they had in common. Both women were, in effect, expendable family members whose social standing sent them across the Black Sea to experience the traumas of exile and the disappointments of arrival. What Shami offers us is not only a picture of a globalising world already in motion long before the late twentieth century declared it to be so, but a window onto the deeply unequal (and in this case, very gendered) premises on which so many migrations have been launched. Along the way, she invites us to conjure more 'liquid vocabularies' than those normally used in social sciences to match the actual experiences of those who find that identity is always a work in progress rather than a site or physical location that one contains within borders, or crosses over such borders to reach.

Many others made such voyages across the Black Sea. In his chapter, Anton Popov considers another recent migration phenomenon in the North Caucasus, that of the Pontic Greeks migrating from and travelling to Greece. In his fieldwork, Popov tracked the gradual shifts of self-identification among Pontic Greeks in Krasnodar Krai and the Adygeia Republic to map the symbolic cornerstones of these mixed populations. Here again we find language used, learned or forgotten in other prehistories of globalisation that chart how early Greeks made their way across Black Sea shores. Popov makes clear that stories of displacement from the populations, languages and religions of the Ottoman Empire all became important elements in these negotiations. Most importantly, Popov's discussion shows how boundaries can be drawn both temporally and spatially. In this light, citizenship regimes as well as cultural boundaries between the North Caucasus and Greece are narrated so as to provide for new openings and closures.

Lest any of this become too abstract, Erin Koch reminds us that perhaps nothing crosses borders as efficiently as epidemics; indeed tuberculosis might merit an entire prehistory of globalisation on its own. In theory, Georgian doctors should be embracing any potential aid directed to their TB crisis (guided by the accepted World Health Organisation (WHO) protocol, DOTS), yet this was not the case after the fall of the Soviet Union. WHO officials, by Koch's account, were not only not getting through to Georgian doctors, they went a good way to alienating them with consistent misunderstandings of the considerable Soviet achievements in medical care, and Georgian idioms of bodies politic. More striking still, Georgia, once the pride of the late Russian Empire and Soviet Union for its enviable record of TB prevention, currently faces a situation so fraught that prisoners intentionally risk contracting TB solely to escape the confines of the almost unfunded, life-threatening Georgian detention system. Yet Koch helps us to

look past these classic diagnoses of crisis in the Caucasus to reveal energetic and passionate debates among Georgian medical personnel about how and why certain medical preventive techniques should be adopted or not. The debates require Georgians not only to present their own achievements to outsiders, but to reconcile medical as well as cultural systems through the standardisation of technologies. In these vivid ways, Koch provides far more than a portrait of health care reform and everyday life in the contemporary Caucasus. She shows how very particularly globalisation is rooted in inequalities that make entrance into the world system far smoother for some than for others.

Much of Koch's fieldwork revealed a shadow market in uncontrolled and cheap medicines that crossed national boundaries far more than most Caucasus governments would like to acknowledge. Lale Yalçin-Heckmann looks at these very same kinds of markets in Azerbaijan to query the role of such informal economies in the articulation of new national belongings and citizenship regimes across the region. If much of the world long ago accepted the reasoning of Marx and Engels that the bourgeoisie wields the nation as a weapon for its own self-advancement, Yalçin-Heckmann's ethnography suggests that a sizeable and growing class of traders across the Caucasus may be harbingers of a kind of market pluralism whose effects are yet to be fully understood in scholarly studies. Her chapter explores the connection between the emergence of such markets at border regions, as well as far away Russian cities, and citizenship regimes; at these markets there is as much a turnover in migrant labour as there is in fruits and vegetables. Despite the enormous importance of such markets for the livelihood of millions of Caucasians – not only in the Caucasus proper, but across Russia where hundreds of thousands of young men and women have set out to earn money for their families in small trading – Yalçin-Heckmann points out that such markets and informal economies are largely unaccounted for. Her chapter is a clarion call for making such informal social and economic structures part of any sociological analysis of the Caucasus that aims to match political system to economic practice. Noting how the range of military conflicts in the South Caucasus renders the analysis of border crossing and access to informal markets all the more pressing, Yalçin-Heckmann asks how far such informal links set up through trade have implications for challenging and shaping idioms of belonging across the Caucasus, in ways that may or may not mark citizens in states. This invites consideration of a very different kind of belonging seen at the end of Mustafayev's chapter, suggesting that, whatever identifications might exist for persons on paper, the Caucasus continues to see the kinds of

flexible and porous social status long ago established in a part of the world best known for its mobilities.

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## **PART ONE**

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### **ARCHAEOLOGIES OF KNOWLEDGE**

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## ***Chapter 2***

# **Love, Khevsur Style: The Romance of the Mountains and Mountaineer Romance in Georgian Ethnography**

Paul Manning

The most picturesque village in all of Georgia is the Khevsur village of Shatili, in the furthest part of mountainous Khevsureti, a stone's throw from Chechnya. Shatili remains one of the most recognisable symbols of Georgia, next to Mount Qazbegi (Russian: Kazbek). The population of Shatili, along with that of the rest of Khevsureti, was resettled in the plains in the early 1950s, allowing Shatili to stand for Georgia in general, since no specific Georgians actually lived there any longer. Thus, Shatili, the home of the Khevsurs, the brave and hospitable Khevsurs, came to symbolise all that is



Plate 2.1. The village of Shatili.

purest and best about the Georgian past. The mountain villages, emptied of living Khevsurs, became museums of an unchanging traditional life as if frozen in a photograph. The confrontation of tradition and modernity for the Khevsurs themselves was not played out there in the mountains. Socialist modernity would not come to them in the mountains; rather, the mountain peoples would have to come to socialist modernity, down on the plains.

The emptied Shatili occasionally bubbled with life. By the early 1960s, the picturesque landscape of the empty village was used as a setting for a series of films about the lost life of the mountains (tragic *Khevsuruli Balada*, 1965; comic *Shexveda Mtashi*, 1966, and Tengiz Abuladze's inscrutable rendering of a Vazha Pshavela poem, *Vedreba*, 1967). The mountains, and Pshavi and Khevsureti in particular, had until then already been imagined as a living museum, an outcropping of the past in the present, in contrast to the plains of Georgia. Pshav-Khevsureti is an image of the past that has been lost in the plains of Georgia: in the nineteenth century the ethnographer Khizanashvili described it as 'a photographic picture of the past, of the life of the ancestors. This picture we find only here, in Pshavi and Khevsureti' (Khizanashvili 1940: 1). Khizanashvili identifies the opposition between mountains (Pshav-Khevsureti) and plains (Kartli and especially the city of Tbilisi) with the incursion of the past into the present (tradition), and the future into the present (modernity), respectively:

Here [in the inaccessible mountains of Pshav-Khevsureti], in their homeland the Pshav-Khevsurs have preserved unchanged until today their ancient, ancestral customs, life, past traditions. In this respect the Pshav-Khevsur is more Georgian [*kartveli*] (if it can be said so), than the Kartlian [*kartleli*, resident of Kartli, the central Georgian province] himself. The Kartlian lives more in the present, in the future. If he has not turned his back on the past, still, he avoids facing it (Khizanashvili 1940: 1).

Yet there were still some Khevsurs in the mountains, somewhere. Two Georgian ethnographers, the married couple Aleksi Ochauri and Natela Baliauri, themselves Khevsurs who had become intelligentsia and ethnographers, were spared the more famous resettlement, partly because *they had already been exiled from Khevsureti*, moving nearby to the Pshavian village of Shuapkho. In this way they escaped the blow that descended on their relatives in 1952. The couple were exiled for violation of a certain rule concerning exogamy, specifically the requirement of exogamy between members of the same village, and their exile provided the separation that transformed them into an indigenous intelligentsia and the nucleus of a circle of Khevsur and non-Khevsur ethnographers who form the core of the ethnographic tradition in Georgia.

This chapter, then, is about the romance of the mountains in Georgia, which, it could be argued, is a central Caucasian paradigm for the Georgian tradition of ethnography, since Khevsureti is the central focus of Georgian ethnography, the place in which exemplary Georgians are also exemplary Caucasian mountaineers. It is, in the first instance, about ‘real’ *mountaineer romance*, that is, Khevsur traditions, and particularly traditions of romance, *sts’orproba*, that have captured the imagination of Georgian intelligentsia. It is also about *the romance of the mountains*: the association of romance in general, a rather more denatured form of romantic associations, with the general constellation of exotic ethnographic features otherwise associated with Khevsureti and the mountains in general (some of which, of course, are in part a general inheritance from Russian romanticism (Layton 1992)). The theme of *sts’orproba* forms a central part of this more general romance of the mountains, allowing a more general romantic exoticism with regard to the mountains to be elided more specifically into love and desire. The romance of the mountains allows Khevsureti to be a paradigmatic locus for the Georgian ethnographic imagination; mountaineer romance allows Khevsureti to become a paradigmatic locus for ‘traditional’ love stories, particularly filmic ones.

Secondly, this chapter is about another Caucasian paradigm, namely, the imagined and real relationship between the indigenous intelligentsia and the ‘people’, as figured in this ‘Romance of the Khevsurs’. This relationship is often figured as featuring the same conflation of general romanticism about Khevsurs with a more concrete romantic relationship of a Georgian man (intelligentsia) with a Khevsur woman (folk). Echoing the way Russian romantics moved from ethnographic alterity (and fantasies of conquest of savage mountaineers) to romantic alterity (fantasies of sexual conquest of Circassian mountain maids) (Layton 1992), the Khevsur moves from being the prototypical object of the intelligentsia’s romantic ethnographic imagination to being the prototypical object of intelligentsia romantic desire.

Lastly, this raises a consideration of how Georgian (and generally East European) ethnography differs as a discipline from American and British anthropology in that it is not epistemically predicated on an assumption of essential alterity but on essential identity. Tamas Hofer’s classic statement of the opposition and its intellectual antecedents and consequences summed it up as ‘the study of one’s own culture vs. the study of other cultures’ (Hofer 1968: 311), views of culture ‘from the inside’ versus views of culture ‘from the outside’ (Lévi-Strauss, cited in Hofer 1968: 313). However, both disciplines shared, at least until recently, an assumption that in certain important respects the people they study are very unlike themselves, distantiated in time, not modern, ‘traditional’, ‘backwards’, ‘primitive’,

‘savage’. Just as anthropologists assumed initially that their object of study was to be found not in cities but in villages, and hence housed their artifacts in museums of natural history, while their own artifacts (those of ‘white man in America’) go in museums of history and technology (Hofer 1968: 312), so too ethnographers assumed that their proper object of study was not the urban intelligentsia, but the rural folk (Hofer 1968: 311). Hence, ethnography rests on an asymptotic identification between ethnographer and folk, an identification within the framework of a ‘national culture’ which can never be fully achieved, because the ethnographer and the folk belong to different strata of this same national culture. In the case of Georgia, this asymptotic identification of ethnographic subject and object most closely approaches the limiting point of identity when a Khevsur emerges not only as the prototypical object of Georgian ethnography, but also as the prototypical subject, the Khevsur ethnography written by a Khevsur ethnographer.

Yet even here, where the observer and participant are one and the same, we find this insistent alterity again dividing the two. The native ethnographer seeks to separate out the two voices, to erase autobiography from ethnography, so constituting the voice of the ‘intelligentsia’ as being different from the voice of the ‘folk’, the writer and the written about. In many narratives that fall within this general scheme of the intersection of ‘mountains’ and ‘romance’, the theme of romance mediates the opposition between intelligentsia and folk, modern self and traditional alter ego. Most often it is a male who acts as narrator – he comes from the plains and either desires or consummates desire for the female figure (a Khevsur).

In the case of the ethnographer Natela Baliauri, however, the ethnographer and object of ethnography – intelligentsia and folk – are the same. But this is hidden in the biographical details, for it is nowhere apparent in the voicing that her ethnography is autobiography. The frame of the text is written using a third-person perspective typical of intelligentsia ethnography. It is precisely this identification that provides the epistemic point of view needed to provide an adequate description of Khevsur private life, and it is in the peculiarly intimate voicing of attributed quoted speech that her membership among the ‘folk’ becomes most apparent.

### **Khevsur romance: *Sts’orproba***

The mountains of Khevsureti are not only associated with romance in the most general senses of the word, but also in a very particular form (*sts’orproba*), whose features at once hauntingly reflect and confound our own (and Georgian!) cultural expectations. Being an intimate form of relationship, it was described rather late: nineteenth-century ethnographers

of Khevsureti concerned themselves primarily with the ritual and juridical conventions of the native ‘public’ life, aside from marriage, and they largely passed over in silence the details of intimate, private life. As a result, the ethnographic record is essentially blank regarding the practice of *sts’orproba* and the related Pshavian practices of *ts’ats’loba* until the early 1920s. When it is described, *sts’orproba* is usually described as a set of ‘rules’ that constitute a recognised set of pre-marital romantic relationships that are everywhere opposed to affinal relationships of marriage (hence Tuite (2000) quite fairly characterises it as ‘anti-marriage’) and, less clearly, to ‘natural kinship’ relationships between consanguineal, coresidential siblings (Tuite 2000). *Sts’orproba* is also called *dobil-dzmobiloba* (‘sworn-sister-sworn-brotherhood’, implying a sworn siblingship between the sexes as opposed to one holding within a given sex) and *ts’ola-dgoma* (named after its chief practice of ‘lying down and getting up’; that is, spending the night together) (Baliauri 1991: 9).

*Sts’orproba* (which literally means something like ‘the relationship of being equal and similar’ and can be used more generally for a range of elective relationships between peers, from friends to lovers (Gogochuri 1974: 128)) is normatively possible only between consociates of a degree of relationship intermediate between coresidential siblings and the persons with whom it is possible to marry exogamously. It is possible to varying degrees within the exogamous social groupings of the village community (persons coresident within the village, the *temi*) and people who share the same surname (*gvare*) (Baliauri 1991; Tuite 2000). The nature of the specific rules of physical comportment of ‘lying down and getting up’ vary depending on the degree of kinship distance, and hence the danger that the relationship will be confused with a purely sexual relationship (Tuite 2000). Baliauri makes clear that there is a difference within the class of relationships that go under this name, in that properly speaking, ‘spending the night together’ with someone makes them a *sts’orperi*, but does not make them a ‘sworn brother’ (the term *dzmobili* ‘sworn brother’ is used for both men and women in this relationship). A ‘sworn brother’, in this sense, is a unique and durable relationship that is special within the class of people that are one’s *sts’orperi*. In general, one has many *sts’orperi*, but only one *dzmobili*. The *dzmobili* relationship as an affective relationship does not end with marriage, though the practices of ‘lying down and getting up’ may. Romance forms a special intermediate class of relationships between the sexes, standing between siblinghood and marriage (so that the term ‘brother-spouse’ and ‘sister-spouse’ are sometimes used as terms for the romantic dyad (Tuite 2000)),

consisting of liaisons that normatively begin around late puberty and last until marriage (in the late twenties).<sup>1</sup>

Khevsur 'romance' ('anti-marriage') is at all points opposed to Khevsur 'marriage'. Marriage is exogamous with respect to coresidential categories (*temi*, the village community) and categories of descent (*gvvari*, the community of people who share a surname); anti-marriage is 'endogamous' with respect to these categories. Anti-marriage begins during early adulthood (ages 16–17) and continues until marriage. The physical relationship is different; in particular, marriage is intended to be consummated with sexual relations that lead to childbirth. Sexual relations are not supposed to occur within the anti-marriage context; if they do, they must not be allowed to produce children. While both coresidential male kin and affinally related males are subject to pollution by a woman's menstrual blood, this is not the case for anti-marriage partners (Baliauri 1991: 63; Tuite 2000: 47). Marital relations are recognised at shrine events, which constitute the 'indigenous public sphere', but anti-marriage relationships are sharply interdicted and must lead to avoidance during public events related to shrines (this is variable in itself since among the neighbouring Pshavians this is not the case).<sup>2</sup> Lastly, while the marital relationship is a relationship between strangers, not chosen by the partners themselves but easily ended by them, and is consequently not a powerful affective commitment, anti-marriage relationships that have progressed to the final stage are considered to be durable, lasting even into marriage, and emotionally powerful, the topic of considerable cycles of love poetry found among the Khevsurs. The affective bond between male and female *dzmobilis* is stronger than either consanguineal or affinal kinship ties, resembling the 'sworn-brother' relationship of the same name between men.

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<sup>1</sup> The Khevsurs, importantly, do not speak of 'love' in these relationships, but 'desire' (Baliauri 1991: 155), nor is there any ethnographic evidence that these represent a 'platonic' relationship with no 'carnal' dimensions simply because the actual act of coitus is forbidden (as is frequently alleged by Georgian ethnographers, e.g. Kiknadze), nor is there ethnographic evidence that the opposition between desire and marriage is ever reconciled, as in other arranged marital systems ('first marriage, then love', *vel simile*).

<sup>2</sup> Interestingly, divinities are themselves not understood to have engaged in the practice of marriage, but only anti-marriage. Each male shrine divinity has associated with him a number of semi-demonic female others, called *dobilis*, 'sworn sisters' (which may explain why *both* men and women in the human 'anti-marriage' are called *dzmobilis* 'sworn brothers') and the relationship between the male divinity and his female consorts is understood to be a kind of 'anti-marriage'. However, these female shrine divinities routinely violate the rules of anti-marriage; they are highly promiscuous and their couplings with humans, divinities and each other are always understood to produce offspring like themselves (Makalatia 1984: 236–7).



Plate 2.2. Mzekala (Sopiko Chiaureli) on a balcony in Shatili. *Khevsur Ballad* (Kartuli Pilmi 1965).

Nothing better illustrates the way that Khevsureti instantiates all that is romantic about Georgia than the film, *Khevsuruli Balada* [*Khevsur Ballad*] (1965), appropriately enough, a love story. Surely love stories could be set elsewhere in the mountains of Georgia, but for some reason the equally picturesque mountainous regions of Svaneti are appropriate for a film like *Salt for Svaneti* (1930), but not a romance.

This ethnic imagining of the antinomy between idealism and materialism, desires and needs, moral and material worlds, ballads and salt, served not only to place the romantic Khevsurs and the primitive Svans in opposition, but also recursively to divide narrative viewpoints, *epistemes*, that could be used in antinomic characterisations of the Khevsurs themselves in the nineteenth century. The first is a materialist realism that saw the Khevsurs as being, like the Svans, exhaustively describable in terms of their material poverty.



The life of the Khevsur is such a straightened life that a plainsdweller cannot imagine it. In the winter they bake bread on an iron plate over a fire of dry, small shrubs and manure; human warmth itself is lacking by reason of lack of firewood and fire. When you enter a house, you see terrible poverty. They wear on their bodies woolen shawls woven by their own women and til today they have not seen a cotton shirt; their bodies have never come into contact with soap and terrible filth has become rooted on their skin. They are in such a savage life and they know as little about the world, as a forest hunter.<sup>3</sup>

Opposed to this narrative approach is a romantic idealism that saw the Khevsurs as transcending their material conditions and embodying all that is best about Georgian-ness (the Khizanashvili quotation above is representative of the type). Sometimes the material stood to the ideal as cause to effect: even though Khevsurs were the pinnacle of savagery, as children of nature they were also noble and free, their antagonistic relation to the extremity of nature producing an inimitable *vazhk'atsoba* (machismo).

Is it possible that even here, in these deserted mountains, cliffs and vales, people of the Georgian tribe dwell? I said to myself: How do they preserve themselves?! They have no firewood, grain does not grow, the raising of sheep is impossible, because they do not have sufficient pasture.... Woe to such a life, as live the Khevsurs! From the very day of their birth begins a battle for life against nature: As soon as little Khevsurs stand up on their feet, their parents tether them to a post of the house with a rope, so that they don't fall off a cliff! For this reason it is not surprising, that Khevsurs were always famous in Georgia for bravery, fearlessness and selflessness in battle.<sup>4</sup>

The film *Khevsuruli Balada* is shot through with the interplay of this opposition between romantic idealism and realist materialist views of mountain life. The opposition becomes a structuring one, in which socialist technical modernity intervenes as a *deus ex machina* at the last minute to save the Khevsurs from their material conditions – but only much later. Ironically, of course, the film tells a story of the socialist government building roads into (a factually empty) Khevsureti in the 1960s, when the Khevsurs had already long since been relocated to the plains. At the same time, the resettlement of the Khevsurs to the plains is represented (somewhat ambivalently) as something they choose to do to escape their harsh material conditions.

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<sup>3</sup> P., 'Khevsurebis Q'opa', *Droeba* 1883, no.78: 3–4.

<sup>4</sup> Anonymous, 'Mgzavris Shenisvnebi', *Droeba* 1880, no. 107: 1.

The film covers three historical periods: first, contemporary socialist modernity (circa 1965); secondly, the presocialist period of unadulterated Khevsur tradition; and lastly a middle period some time in the 1920s and 1930s where the bulk of the narrative occurs, and where tradition and modernity confront one another within the context of a star-crossed romance between Imeda, a modernised Khevsur boy, who returns to Khevsureti, and a traditional Khevsur girl, Mzekala. The bulk of the film, told retrospectively by the aging hero, the artist Imeda, to a visiting Georgian doctor, is simply a tragic love story. As a boy, Imeda's father is killed in a duel, and the orphaned boy is taken to live in Tbilisi by a wandering member of the intelligentsia who is first to arrive on the scene. The boy learns to write and paint. Now an adult, a childhood friend comes to Tbilisi to introduce him to his natal village, and more importantly, to Mzekala. He falls in love with Mzekala, but runs foul of another of Mzekala's suitors, Torghva. In a duel, Imeda manages to kill Torghva. The star-crossed lovers flee on foot into the snows of the Khevsur winter, pursued by Torghva's brothers. Imeda's sworn-brother, Apareka, strives to lead the pursuers astray in the snow, but to no avail. The brothers, who are mounted, eventually track the lovers down and, while attempting to kill Imeda, kill Mzekala instead. At first blush, then, *Khevsuruli Balada* is a romance, a tale, told retrospectively, of the tragic romance of a modernised Khevsur man and a traditional Khevsur woman. At the same time, on a covert level, the operative dyad is the opposition between the intelligentsia and the people. The tragic romance between the modernised Khevsur boy and traditional Khevsur girl is also seemingly a rumination on the difficulties of indigenising local elites ('rooting', Russian *korenizatsiia*). Imeda becomes a city-dweller (*kalakeli*), and a member of the intelligentsia (a painter), but his attempt to return to the village proves tragic. Is the underlying truth simply that a member of the 'folk' can leave a village and become an urban *intelligent*, but never go home?

The main argument of the film, however, is about romance, traditional romance. Traditional social relations among the Khevsurs are presented as if characterised by extremes – love and violence are everywhere, often in tandem. In a sense, the Khevsurs are more savage, more backward, more violent, and the institution that is employed to characterise this is the duel, presented as a social curse that animates much of the narrative: Imeda's father is killed in a duel, his duelling weapons adorn Imeda's wall in Tbilisi as a reminder of his past; Imeda kills Torghva in a duel, bringing the film to a tragic end. On the other hand, social relations are characterised by great loyalty. If the duel represents the overtness of negative social relationships, positive ones are recognised between men in the form of the ritual of sworn brotherhood (between Imeda and his friend Apareka), and between men and

women in the form of openness of flirtation and romance (the highly elective character of romance is stressed). The main difference between this film and other literary accounts in which these opposing motifs occur (the duel, the sworn brother, the romance) is that romance is imagined *in the film* among the Khevsurs as being essentially *teleologically identical* with the plains, in that it has as its *goal* marriage, the formation of families and social reproduction. In reality, and in other literary and ethnographic accounts, the locally recognised form of romance *is specifically opposed* to marriage, and to a lesser extent to *sexual relations*. Here, an uneasy and often violated complementarity holds between the endogamous relations of romance and exogamous relations of marriage. In ‘real’ Khevsur life, romance is much closer to sworn brotherhood than to marriage: sworn brotherhood (the relation between Imeda and Apareka) and endogamous romance use the same terminology (both use the term *dzmobili* ‘sworn brother’) and some of the same ritual apparatus.

A story set in Khevsureti must have duels, the visitor to Khevsureti must also always have a sworn brother. But, most of all, there must be romance. Other literary representations of Khevsureti are fascinated by the particularity of form of Khevsur romance, namely the endogamous practice of elective pre-marital romance, *sts'orproba*, that is systematically opposed to exogamous marital practices. City-dweller visitors to Khevsureti in novels and stories pick up a dalliance of this sort with a local girl much as they pick up a sworn brother. In such narratives (from the 1920s and 1930s), to varying extents, the custom and its associated practices, as well as, perhaps, incomprehensibility to the average plains Georgian male, are depicted faithfully. Such narratives belong more to the bohemian Georgian literature of the twenties and thirties, but the 1960s film *Khevsuruli Balada* is much more firmly grounded in the narrative and normative expectations regarding romance of the Soviet version of Hollywood. Hence, in the film, the ethnographic specificities of Khevsur forms of romantic liaison are elided into a more ‘universal’ expression of romance, inasmuch as romance is understood as leading to marriage in Khevsureti, as elsewhere.

Among the actual Khevsur, romance is endogamous, marriage exogamous. In the film, by contrast, the opposition between romance and marriage is elided into a format acceptable to the norms of the plains, one where romance leads to marriage. However, the exogamy rule is retained for marriage. How then can a budding flirtation be *narrated* in film if the two partners must be, in effect, strangers? The solution is somewhat tortuous: Mzekala is the sister of Aluda’s wife, and Imeda quickly learns that she is not from Shatili, but from Arkhoti. After the death of her mother, she came to Shatili to live with her sister. Hence, since marriage is exogamous, she is a

potential wife for Imeda. But, since she now lives in Shatili, she is a potential romantic partner for flirtation and romance, which can only easily be narrated if the people involved are in close proximity. Exogamy implies avoidance, distant relations with strangers, endogamy implies easy familiarity and flirtation between consociates.

One might argue that Khevsur romance has been completely denatured, that the film *Khevsuruli Balada* owes more to Hollywood and its Soviet imitators than Khevsur ethnographic realia. That is partially true: Khevsureti becomes a romantic locale perhaps because of its ethnographic reputation for romance, but the filmic version of Khevsureti replaces this ethnographically specific form of romance with a completely generic form of romantic content. However, I would argue that just as some of the fake Khevsur poetry from the film is based on actual Khevsur poetic practices and even drawn from folkloric texts, so too are traces of the custom of *sts'orproba* present in the film, emerging obliquely in one peculiar scene.

In this pivotal scene, Mzekala wanders into Imeda's room at night, ostensibly to return his flashlight. Mzekala's boldness in wandering into Imeda's room at night is matched only by the way this action reminds us of the parallel practices of *sts'orproba*, where a woman comes to a man at night. The substance of their conversation, too, touches closely on matters related to this otherwise conspicuously absent custom. Mzekala reflects that he probably has a lover in the city, which he denies. She tells him he is a liar, and reflects that the women of the city know nothing of love, though she has never been to the city, she would never go there, but still, she would like to see, from afar, at a glance, how the people of the city live and dress. In turn, Imeda takes an interest in whether Mzekala loves anyone in Shatili, perhaps Torghva, perhaps Apareka? She admits that there are many who love her, but whom she loves is a secret. He asks, more directly, if she has ever 'spent the night with Torghva'. She replies that she has never spent the night with anyone. 'Spending the night' can only be an oblique reference to *sts'orproba*, to 'lying down and getting up', though, again, here it is imagined as happening exogamously, between people who might eventually be married to one another, a premarital union tending towards marriage. He touches her, one time too many, which angers her and she gets up to leave (many of the rules of 'lying down and getting up' have to do with the specific regulations on who gets to touch who where: Mzekala freely touches Imeda, but Imeda, it seems, is not allowed to reciprocate). She wonders if he is really a Khevsur, and prepares to leave; he assures her that he is indeed a 'real Khevsur'. To reassure her he lies back, crossing his arms to show he will not touch her, but wonders if it was some 'local custom' that brought her here. She leaves at dawn, though all they have done is talk. Thereafter,

their relationship takes on the more easily recognisable dimensions of romantic flirtation; there is no more talk of ‘local customs’ in the film. Here, then, we find one kind of erasure – ‘anti-marriage’ is elided into marital courtship, leaving behind, as I have argued, only traces of itself in this strange scene.





Plates 2.3. Mzekala (Sopiko Chiaureli) and Imeda (Tengiz Archvadze): *Khevsur Ballad* (1965).

### **Mountaineer romance: The story of Natela, native ethnographer**

The foregoing scene seems to be some curious trace or shadow of *sts'orproba*, mangled and tortuously twisted to make it fit a marital format, which, perhaps, is why it is so confusing as a scene. But then, just how is it that we know enough about *sts'orproba* to know this is the case? After all, *sts'orproba* is a custom mentioned only obliquely by nineteenth-century travel writers. The poet-folklorist-ethnographer Vazha Pshavela briefly describes its Pshavian cousin *ts'ats'loba*, and the nineteenth-century ethnographer Khizanishvili seems completely unaware of its existence among the Khevsurs. It is not until the 1920s and 1930s that there is an explosion of ethnographic and novelistic description of the practice

(Tevdoradze 1930; Robakidze 1994 (originally published in the same period as the others); Makalatia 1998 [1925]; Javakhishvili 2004 [1926]). Long after the mountains had already become associated with romance and romanticism in general, the specific character of mountaineer romance came to light. And, indeed, epistemically and sociologically, none of this would have been possible without the rise, at the same time, of *indigenous elites*, specifically ethnographers. I argue that all these ethnographies and depictions of this hidden aspect of Khevsur life have behind them a single figure: the native ethnographer Natela Baliauri (1896–1988), who not only wrote her own manuscript on the topic (finally published posthumously in 1991), but whose household served as hosts and consultants for many visiting ethnographers who would later write on the topic. In fact, the most noted ethnographer of the group, Sergi Makalatia, became related to Natela affinally (his brother Niko (a teacher) married her sister, Melano (an ethnographer herself)). And it was precisely Makalatia who was first to publish a full description of the practice equivalent to *sts'orproba* among the neighbouring Pshavians (Makalatia 1998 [1924]). This story 'about love' cannot be told without telling the story of the conditions of the possibility of its telling, the story of the creation of an indigenous elite. In the case of Natela Baliauri, this story is *also* a story about love.

Natela Baliauri's account of *Sts'orproba in Khevsureti* (1991) is unique because it provides an insider's perspective on a set of rituals and relations that, unlike shrine rituals and other 'public' customs of the Khevsurs, are not easily accessible to outsiders. Her ethnography provides a unique look at the inner, intimate face of the group; indeed, it is really the sort of ethnography of intimacy that could *only* have been written by an insider. And yet, for all the intimate insider 'folk' knowledge upon which this account is predicated, it is written from the detached analytic perspective of third-person objective reportage. Seldom does one find the pronoun 'I' of autobiographical voicing in the text, even in those places where, almost certainly, the account is autobiographical. The editor of this ethnography, Zurab Kiknadze, makes much of the epistemological value of the materials as both being an 'interior' view from 'within', and also, oddly, the *objectivity* (by which he presumably means the lack of distortions of prurience, romanticism and exoticism that often characterise 'outsider' views of the same customs). But this seems an odd pairing because, as an insider's view, Baliauri's account should, if anything, be *more subjective*, in the positive sense of giving us a full and rounded personal perspective on what otherwise might seem like a series of schematic rules.

In our scientific literature there does not even exist an objective, adequate description of this custom, that we might speak about its

origin and the scientific study of its social function. N. Baliauri's sketches are especially valuable in this respect, that they represent a description of *sts'orproba* 'from within', by an eye-witness and not an external observer, for whom this custom is an exotic fruit (Kiknadze 1991: 4).

Kiknadze stresses that what makes the account so valuable is that the ethnographer is herself a Khevsur, an indigenous *intelligent*, an ethnographer and a native. What is not mentioned there, nor anywhere else in that book, however, is the particular irony of her own biographical relationship to the practices of *sts'orproba*. The striking fact is that it was her own violation (as a member of the folk) of an associated prohibition on endogamy that led her to being exiled from Khevsureti, leading ultimately to her writing (as a member of the intelligentsia) an ethnographic description of the practice. Baliauri's status as *intelligent* arose from a biographical problem, from her inability to remain a member of the folk, and the root of the problem is her own personal involvement in the very custom she is describing: as one who has violated the taboos of this custom. Here are the brief details of her life:

[N. Baliauri] was born in 1896 in Pirikit Khevsureti, in the village of Akhieli in the *Temi* of Arkhoti. At 18 years of age she married an inhabitant of the same village, Al. Ochiauri and since they broke the rule forbidding a boy and a girl from the same village marrying each other, they were forced to disappear (into exile). Thus they appeared in in the Pshavian village of Shuapkho, where they settled permanently (T. Ochiauri 1995: 4).

So Natela Baliauri's relationship with Khevsureti was, from very early on, the relationship of an exile. Becoming an *intelligent* observer of the Khevsurs from the near-far, she also chose to write about the very custom of which she ran foul. But this account is strange, an oddly objective and detached account of the most intimate details of Khevsur life. By a kind of hypercorrection, attempting to decentre her autobiographical perspective into an authoritative narrative 'voice from nowhere', she writes an account that is even more decentred, more objective, than similar ethnographic accounts written by outsiders, yet in other ways, more intimate.

The strange mixture of voicings in the account, I believe, echoes the strange, liminal position of the author. Natela Baliauri and her husband and co-exile, Aleksi Ochiauri, both exemplify a liminal group, a hybrid between the opposed categories of 'folk' and 'intelligent', particularly typical of the discipline of ethnography, which, after all, is essentially describable as 'intelligentsia writings about the folk', unlike western ethnography, partially reflexive, because one mostly writes about *one's own folk* (Hofer 1968), and yet, in so doing, always produces and reproduces the distinction between



literate society and illiterate folk in the very act of writing about the folk. The first place to look at the contradictory locus of the native ethnographers is, then, to examine their hybrid position as authors and authorial voices within two opposed worlds of textuality, the literate world of intelligentsia writing, and the folk world of oral textuality.

Owing to their status as ousted, exiled insiders, and their location on the boundary of Pshavi and Khevsureti, the household of Natela Baliauri and Aleksi Ochiauri became the host household to generations of ethnographers, folklorists, philologists and archaeologists who worked on Pshav-Khevsureti (Kalandadze 1995). It also became the centre of a small circle of mountaineer ethnographers and linguists in the 1920s and 1930s whose numbers included the noted Georgian linguist Akaki Shanidze, as well as the ethnographers Tevdoradze and Makalatia (affinally related to Natela Baliauri). In the texts of these other linguists and ethnographers, these two and their near relations occupy a shifting hybrid position, figuring now as members of the intelligentsia, now as members of the folk, now as collaborators, now as local informants. As local informants they are sometimes represented as Pshavians (of Shuapkho, their place of exile), other times as Khevsurs (from Arkhoti, their natal village). While A. Ochiauri had led a mixed career before the revolution, being a soldier as well as a local orthodox deacon, after the revolution he and his wife entered a *rabfak* (worker's faculty) and acquired a higher education. According to all accounts, the philologist Akaki Shanidze, who played an important role in the founding of Tbilisi State University (Cherchi and Manning 2002), was pivotal in recruiting these and other mountaineers into the ranks of the intelligentsia in this period. As exiled Khevsurs in Pshavi, they were also liminal to two worlds: they were partial outsiders to the Khevsureti, which they spent the rest of their life writing about, and they were also partial outsiders to the world of the educated elite, for they were village intelligentsia, products of the *rabfak* education system. This conversion of the folk into intelligentsia paralleled Akaki Shanidze's folkloric conversion of voices of the folk into chrestomathic data, a decentering of folkloric materials from biographical indexical anchorings that paralleled the way that Akaki Shanidze's own first informants were themselves often removed from the context of their own communities.

This hybrid position as both intelligentsia and folk could lead to confusions of voice and voicing. Natela's husband, Aleksi Ochiauri, *recollected* for Shanidze the traditional poems (composed by others) he knew (as informant) and *collected* others (as colleague). However, as collector, he also included many of his own compositions, which found their way into Shanidze's folkloric collections as anonymous voices of 'the folk'.

In the course of telling us the story of her parents' exile from Khevsureti, Tinatin Ochiauri, herself a noted Khevsur ethnographer, noted the existence of a 'famous poem' about their exile: a poem which confuses the normal expectations of folklore where 'folk' is a category opposed to individual authorship:

My mother and my father got married. My mother was 18 then, but they both lived in the same village. According to local tradition, a boy and a girl of the same village could not marry one another. The village was exogamous. That's why they fled from Arkhoti to Pshavi. There is even a well-known poem about it:<sup>5</sup>

*raqel shvil gamauvida,  
zeze ubanshi mtvralasa,*

*k'as ertsac ar maigonebs,  
sul gonobs xatabalasa,  
idzeven baliurni  
dilas natelas, kalasa.*

What kind of child did he have  
Mtvrala of the upper neighbour-  
hood<sup>6</sup>

No one is thinking anything good,  
They are all thinking it is a disaster,  
The Baliauris are seeking  
Their daughter, Natela in the morn-  
ing.

This poem is about when he [A. Ochiauri] abducted her [N. Baliauri]. This poem is folk (*xalxuri*), I think it is my father's poem completely. 'Upper neighbourhood' (*Zeze ubani*) is the upper part of the village, where the Ochiauris live. This poem was published in Akaki Shanidze's "Khevsur Poetry" which came out in 1931 (Tinatin Ochiauri, interview with author).

This poem was famous, of course, because it was ultimately printed in Shanidze's famous chrestomathy of Khevsur folk poetry as an example of 'folk' (*xalxuri*) poetry. The full poem is printed under the title of 'The abduction of a woman', Number 402 in the Chrestomathy (Shanidze 1931: 158–9). Here 'folk' poet and 'intelligent' collector of folk poetry are the same, a poem published anonymously as 'folklore' turns out to be from the hand of the collector, as Akaki Shanidze himself surmises in the notes to the poem (Shanidze 1931: 528):

This poem must have been composed by Aleksi Ochiauri: first Aleksi himself appears in the poem in the first person ... and, aside from this, Aleksi included it in the notebook where his own poems

<sup>5</sup> I have restored the original version from Shanidze (1931), inasmuch as the version reported by Tinatin Ochiauri has some lacunae (reading *ka's ertsac* for *arcertsac*, *sul gonobs* for *sugonobs*, and adding the line *idzeven baliurni* missing from the existing transcript).

<sup>6</sup> Mtvrala would be A. Ochiauri's father.

are – this poem was composed ‘at the time of the marrying of Aleksī’s wife, when he abducted a village woman [N. Baliauri] and it wasn’t her wish’.

As mentioned above, this represents one response to a hybrid position, assimilation to the voice of the folk, and eliminating the individual authorial voice of the *intelligent*: one’s own words become the words of no-one in particular, the collective agency of the folk. The other solution for a hybrid folk-intelligent is a kind of hypercorrection in the other direction, an absolute distancing, an objective, detached ‘voice from nowhere’, the authoritative voice of the *intelligent*, which characterises in the most general terms Natela Baliauri’s ethnography. Both approaches involve a kind of erasure. In the case of Ochiauri, the autobiographical incident is represented directly, but the author elides his authorial identity into the anonymous mass of the folk. In the case of Baliauri, the author’s identity is known, but she elides her autobiographical connection to the incidents she describes in the text. In both cases, however, traces remain.

But for all its detachment, in certain places Baliauri’s ethnographic text is also curiously intimate, curiously close to the phenomenon. Like other such ethnographies, this ethnography abounds with the poetry that is associated with *sts’orproba*, of course, and this poetry is usually represented as being occasioned by a certain kind of situation, a certain typical generic context that this specific example of poetry is used to illustrate. Such voicing of folk texts can be found in any ethnography of the mountains. But strikingly, and unlike other ethnographies, she also creates illustrative conversations, large numbers of them, engaging in a kind of intimate ventriloquism that one seldom finds in other ethnographies from the period, where indirect discourse would be more usual. The better part of the first chapter illustrating the rules of courtship is devoted to imagined intimate dialogues, and many of the sections illustrating violations of the rules take the form of typical dialogues. These are quite intimate scenes, which could not have been witnessed or confidently reconstructed by any but those who took part in them: ‘In general their conversation [between a boy and a girl] is not limited. They talk about whatever they want to. Afterwards the boy kisses the girl shyly and embraces her ...’

Again they begin talking about ‘girls and boys’. Frequently they argue and defend the virtues of their own sex. They laugh. The boy will ask first, who the girl likes or who she ‘knows’. The girl convinces him that she doesn’t like anyone and doesn’t ‘know’ anyone.

-- Girl, then, you. Haven't you grown up? It seems like you no longer joke. Maybe it's me who's gotten old. And who doesn't grow old having to deal with Khevsur girls!

-- How do the girls bother you?

-- What do they do except bother me?... Now, I want to question you as to who you 'know', or who you like, but my heart trembles with fear, lest you get angry with me.

-- About that question there is no need for your heart to tremble. If I 'knew' anyone, you would know that even sooner than I would, but I neither 'know' anyone nor do I like anyone. Nor is there anyone likeable, pleasing. Who in the world are you worrying yourself about!

-- Then, you seem to like no one. You like Bina too...

-- I don't like anyone, aren't I saying that?

-- Then I am losing sleep day and night for no reason....

-- Then who do you 'know'?

-- Oh, I know many many girls... Well, what do I know, I know many others besides, and I know you too, now.

"Who do you know"—this expression in Khevsureti is a *double entendre*. The first: it means a person you recognize by sight and by character, the second: a boy and a girl getting to know each other at the time of lying together, by lying together.

[N.B. 'know' not in the sense of carnal knowledge—P.M.] (Baliauri 1991: 14–15).

The very intimacy and adolescent banality of the conversation is what makes this ethnography, otherwise so stern and often downright prudish, so touching. There are several ways in which Natela Baliauri's ethnographic account of *sts'orproba* differs from all the others. One is the internal contradiction that Kiknadze finds praiseworthy: that is, of course, an insider's view of the folk that treats its topic with the stony-faced objectivity of an *intelligent*. I am arguing that this is a form of narrative hypercorrection by which Natela Baliauri, the intelligent *manqué*, detaches her authoritative voice from her own messy autobiographical involvement with the facts of romance as a member of the folk. And why not? After all, in all honesty, who of us would relish writing an ethnography of our adolescent traumas, crushes and errors of judgement without some shift of perspective from the self? In Baliauri's account there is no sign of narrative cross-over, the voice of the folk is never an 'I', the only trace of it is the way that (unlike other ethnographies) the narrator confidently places words in the mouths of her informants. Whole conversations, often extremely intimate ones, are fluently imagined to illustrate the proceedings, along with the more usual samples of

actual quoted speech in the form of the poetry that attends other ethnographies. How strange, then, to have in front of us a text that is so very historically reflexive and autobiographical, in that it describes the very customs that defined the life course of the author, and yet this autobiographical connection is erased: the text presents itself as decentred, non-reflexive, the autobiographical moment surviving only in traces, in intimate conversations attributed to anonymous speakers.

### **Conclusion: Ethnographic alibis?**

Unlike many ethnographic descriptions of normative orders of custom that are presented as being unperturbed by any messy violations, rules without exceptions, Baliauri's ethnography is rife with attention to places where the rules do not apply, where violations are not merely the occasion for the application of redressive and restorative normative machinery, but are themselves the by-products of that same normative machinery. By looking at precisely the moment in the text where Baliauri's own biographical predicament caused her to leave Arkhoti for Pshavi in 1914, and her own attention to the historical circumstances surrounding it, perhaps we can discern both the historicity in this text as well as traces of the autobiographical details that have been erased.

As mentioned above, in most novelistic and ethnographic accounts Khevsur marriage is opposed to anti-marriage in rather strict normative terms. Baliauri's account differs from others in the way that it presents the relationship between marriage and anti-marriage not as being a fairly clear complementary relationship, but one that is continuously fraught with conflict (Baliauri 1991: 33–63), and indeed, an order that undergoes revolutionary changes before our very eyes (Baliauri 1991: 156–73). A closer look at these reveals that a number of insurrections occurred in the world of sexuality (that is, in the definitions of romance and marriage) at exactly the same time as Natela Baliauri was herself married in 1914.

Natela Baliauri was abducted by Aleksi Ochauri at the age of 18, in 1914, from her village of Arkhoti in transalpine 'far' Khevsureti upon his return from military service. According to his poem on the subject, the main problem was the fact of abduction, of not asking permission of the parents (only Shanidze, interestingly, notes that 'it was not her wish', either). The other problem was the violation of exogamy rules: both were from Arkhoti, therefore, members of the same *temi* (village community) and theoretically better able to engage in romance than marriage. Baliauri's ethnography gives a quite lengthy exposition of the typical reaction to exactly this violation of marriage rules, which, it can be imagined, is at least partially simply an ethnographic retelling of the same events recorded in Ochauri's 'folk' poem

(Baliauri 1991: 36ff). There is a violation of the rules that separate romance from marriage, and a violation of the rules of marriage itself. In effect, Natela Baliauri describes her own marriage as an instance of a certain kind of violation of the rules, illustrating it with intimate but anonymous dialogue. However, she also contextualises this singular violation within a more general discussion of revolutionary changes in the marriage system itself, indicating that exceptions like hers were becoming more like a nascent ‘rule’ during the period of World War I (in which many Khevsurs, like Ochiauri and other informants of Shanidze, participated as soldiers).<sup>7</sup>

As Baliauri points out, it is not as if the desire to marry one’s romantic partner did not arise before this time; indeed, it was generally accepted among the youth that, occasionally, they would like to have romantic marriages rather than elective romance followed by arranged marriage to strangers. Here too one of these intimate imagined dialogues illustrates this desire:

In Khevsureti in the past a *dzmobili* boy did not marry his *dzmobili* girl, and vice versa. Their marrying was a great shame. When they betrothed a girl, it was possible that she would not like her fiancé. Then with crying and with pleading she would address her parents and brothers, ‘I don’t like him and don’t marry me to him.’ The parents’ response was like this: ‘So what, you don’t like him, he’s not a *sts’orperi* [romantic partner], that you might love. If you want pleasure and love, go marry a *sts’orperi*’ (Baliauri 1991: 33).

Such a response would be sarcastic only in a normative environment where the mixture of these opposed categories was unimaginable. Marrying a *sts’orperi* or *dzmobili* was considered the equivalent of marrying a member of one’s own lineage (*gvari*). The definition of *garq’vnileba* (lewdness, fornication) was essentially found in this mixture (frequently attributed to Russians), those who married their *sts’orperi/dzmobili* were considered weak-willed fornicators, unable to engage in the self-control required for proper conduct of romance (Baliauri 1991: 34).

After all, divorce was traditionally a comparatively easily arranged affair (Baliauri 1991: 34). However, as Russian rule and the Society for the Restoration of Orthodoxy slowly managed to bring changes, with state and church regulation of marriages in Khevsureti, marriage rituals and divorce became an increasingly expensive and intractable matter (Baliauri 1991: 33).

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<sup>7</sup> Since this chapter cannot cover all the changes in the broader social system or the marriage system that influence changes in the system of romance, I only note here that it is significant that these changes not only occurred at the same time as the Orthodox church was making marriage more intractable in Khevsureti, but at a time when many Khevsur men, like Aleksei Ochiauri, were mobilised to fight as soldiers, many never to return.

As a result, marriageable people became more inclined to find out as much as possible about their prospective spouses (Baliauri 1991: 33–4), or simply to marry people they already ‘knew’.

In the years 1914–1917 the women of cisalpine (‘near’) Khevsureti announced their opposition to coerced marriage (*dzalit gatxoveba*). They demanded that ‘We be allowed to marry who we want and no longer ask anyone, because the Russians now marry us, which makes separation from an undesirable husband difficult.’ ... Many boys and girls gave voice to this idea. The problem was also that many girls and boys of good lineages (*gvare*) often couldn’t marry one another, because they were *dzmobilis*... All this made them forget their shame and daringly they demanded that they be allowed to marry whoever they themselves wanted. It also brought in changes in the rules of ‘lying down and getting up’. Now it became possible for *sts’orperis* and *dzmobilis* to marry (Baliauri 1991: 34).

The details of this attempted revolution will wait for another time, but one can see here that Natela Baliauri’s own somewhat prudish stance to this revolution is to a certain extent overcompensatory for her own position as a willing or unwilling member of the *avant garde*! At the same time, she historicises her own autobiographical predicament, perhaps affording herself an alibi, showing that, in a place nearby and not too much later in time, a revolution occurred (which she seems to fully disapprove of!) in which young people in effect make her own autobiographical *exception* into *their* ethnographic *rule*. In this peculiar way, then, we owe much of what we know about mountaineer romance to a single, concrete instance of a somewhat star-crossed Khevsur romance, a violation of the rules that separated romance from marriage, leading to the creation of an indigenous elite, a married couple, the ethnographers A. Ochauri and N. Baliauri, both of whom oddly seemed to write themselves quasi-anonymously into texts about the folk, Ochauri including his self-justifying, almost vaunting autobiographical poem about the abduction in Shanidze’s folk poetry collection as ‘folk’ poetry, Baliauri’s objective distance to her topic traceable only in the curious ways in which she produces intimate imagined conversations between Khevsurs and discusses changes of the very system of rules which she ran foul of. Part of this ambivalent voicing, too, comes from the way in which the relationship between intelligentsia and folk is imagined as being a qualitatively distinct kind of voices, the written and the spoken (and written about) (Manning 2004). For marginal intelligentsia–folk hybrids, one of these voicings must always be erased, and yet traces of the voice under erasure always remain.

Rural intelligentsia such as Ochiauri and Baliauri, like their equivalents today, represent a series of contradictions, a kind of subaltern class within the intelligentsia, one which is worthy of our sustained attention. Appearing at the margins of an imagined monolithic and asymmetric divide between two spheres of circulation – ‘folk’ and ‘intelligentsia’, with their own kinds of texts (spoken, written), authors (anonymous, autographed), and potential life courses, and at the same time charged with overcoming this very distinction by overseeing modernisation and programs of enlightenment – this class shows all the ambivalence of any subaltern elite. Here, this ambivalent position is registered in the ambivalent voicing of their ethnographic and folkloric texts, which seek to recreate the very monolithic divide between ‘folk’ and ‘intelligentsia’ voicings that the very process of creating such indigenous elites should efface. But such marginal elites, elites of the margins of this imagined divide, do not necessarily elide this imagined difference. As Ochiauri and Baliauri before them, contemporary mountain and rural elites have complex and ambivalent relations with the state, the urban intelligentsia who are still interested in imaginaries of the ‘folk’ and not ‘civil society’, and their own communities (see Gould, this volume). As marginal intelligentsia, they still write grammars and folklore and especially poetry, as they did under socialism, sometimes published, sometimes circulated in tattered notebooks, folk *samizdat*. But this poetry is written, it is not ‘folk’, and being written by marginal intelligentsia, too, it has few publics among the urban intelligentsia. As members of the ‘folk’, they still preside over matters of community concern (for example, mediation in blood feuds), serve as religious experts (putting them in covert competition with the church), and serve as local mediators with the state. As local eminences, they are hosts, guides and brokers to the local community for the urban intelligentsia, who in turn act as their patrons (or do not, as the case may be) to outside publics. They are everywhere visible, they are everywhere writing, and yet they are nowhere to be seen in writing.

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### *Chapter 3*

## **Brides, Brigands and Fire-Bringers: Notes towards a Historical Ethnography of Pluralism**

Bruce Grant

Since earliest recorded times, the Caucasus has been famous for its extreme cultural pluralisms – and its violence – brought about by successive waves of foreign intervention: Greek, Roman, Khazar, Arab, Turk, Mongol, Persian, Ottoman and Russian. The legacies of such foreign invasion, abetted by centuries of Silk Road trade which made the region famous for its mobilities, markets and social porosities, advanced this pluralism all the more. It was for good reason that the tenth-century Arab geographer al-Mas’udi, trying to capture the diversity of languages and peoples in constant motion across the Caucasus region, described the area as *jabal al-alsun*, or ‘a mountain of tongues’ (Catford 1977; Tuite 1999).

Despite this ample record of commerce, open travel and complex cohabitations, the Caucasus is perhaps best known not for its pluralisms but, by contrast, for its divisions and its conflicts. The region’s seeming intractability, rooted in centuries of resistance to foreign invasion, has earned it a reputation that has at one time or another embraced almost every society under its banner. Alongside accounts of the region’s peaceful settlement, natural beauty and holy sites, we most prominently find a ‘natural’ predilection for violence, military prowess and secretive closure. As early as the fourth century BCE at the time of their conquest by Alexander the Great, the peoples of the Caucasus had already seen themselves cast by Aeschylus, a century earlier, as ‘Araby’s flower of martial manhood, who upon Caucasian highlands, guard their mountain-cradled stronghold, host invincible, armed with keen spears, in the press of battle’ (1932: 81).

Little appeared to have changed over two millennia later when nineteenth-century Russian leaders, historians and popular writers alike spared no ink in the florid descriptions of the Caucasus as a site of brigandage, vexed, as all foreign invaders seem to have been, by the degree of local resistances to even suzerain rule. Historically commonplace to associate the region with theft, Tsar Nicholas I referred to the Caucasus as a

‘den of thieves’ (*razboinich’i vertepi*), while the poet Katenin was one of many who likened it to a ‘bandits’ hide-out’ (*priton razboinikov*) ‘where thieves have lived since ancient times’ (*tam izdrevle zhili vory*) (Sultanov 2004: 24; cf. also Bobrovnikov 2002: 20–2). Thus the contemporary historian Andrei Zubov, writing in the influential Russian journal *Znamia*, argued that only chaos could come, as it always had, of such an intensely pluralist environment, and that only Russia can and should take up ‘the burden of pacification’ by restoring all the North and South Caucasus to Russian dominion again (2000: 171).

In a separate work I have argued that the dramas and melodramas of violence in the specific form of kidnapping became one of the dominant idioms by which successive Russian and Soviet publics have come to understand their southern landholdings over the past 200 years (Grant 2005). This line of thinking has benefited enormously from the uncommonly rich scholarship that has built up around questions of Russian literature and empire (most notably in Layton 1994; Ram 2004; and many others). However, English language scholarship offers comparatively less to go by when considering how equally varied Caucasus publics have organised, received, interpellated and recast these same political legacies and events.

This chapter responds to that call by looking at extant historical, folkloric and ethnographic sources on practices in the ‘exchange of persons’ across the Caucasus in order to consider alternate readings of captivity, violence and sovereignties in this long-conquered region. What emerges is a deep archive on the subject of theft and captivity that suggests ends that are as performative as they are instrumental; concepts of ‘detachable persons’ in the forms of men and women who move across lines of kin, clan and region as social and political boundary-makers; and sovereignties that are forged through micro-practices such as the exchange of persons, as much as by broader diplomatic and military interventions.

In this context, the premise of this chapter is that violence is rarely a ‘natural’ event and never, for that matter, a ‘cultural’ one, but something produced if not greatly advanced by changing political, economic and historical circumstances. By looking to these alternate records – particularly through the keystone idioms of theft and gift, captivity and freedom – we can explore patterns that say as much about the forces exerting power in and around the Caucasus as they do about the region proper.

## Structures of conjuncture

‘Structure of conjuncture’ is a term introduced by Marshall Sahlins in his landmark study of the British colonial presence in the Hawaiian islands, *Historical Metaphors and Mythical Realities* (1981). Many readers know the

legendary story of Captain Cook, whose military diaries chronicled a seemingly lyrically generous reception among island peoples when his ship set anchor in the archipelago in 1779. After some weeks of feasting, however, Hawaiian warriors set upon Cook and his men, decimating the British contingent, killing Cook himself, and allowing the surviving members of his crew back to Britain to declare the Hawaiians to be the savages that Cook should have long earlier suspected. Yet as Sahlins suggests, ample records in Hawaiian history and folklore – little attended by the British but well known among most Hawaiians themselves – offer a very different play of events, one where Cook seems to have faithfully played the part of Lono, a messianic figure who would arrive from over the seas after a long absence, circle the islands, be feted for twenty-three days, and then sacrificed.

Sahlins' treatment of the Cook/Lono events has generated a remarkable debate within the discipline of anthropology, most notably from Sri Lankan scholar Gananath Obeyesekere who has questioned the probity of a reading where colonisers are somehow always mistaken for gods.<sup>1</sup> But Sahlins' initial premise is what should concern historiographies of the Caucasus more immediately: how often does anyone consider how the diversely configured peoples of the Caucasus have variously understood, responded to and realigned their own social movements through empire?

Sahlins' central argument is that history advances through 'structures of conjuncture', where all cultures are transformed in encounters benevolent or antagonistic, and the task of the historian, as well as the anthropologist, is to consider multiple understandings of complex events.<sup>2</sup> Thus, rather than considering the melodramas of captivity solely from the point of view of Russian soldiers and aristocrats, as so many Russians have done since Pushkin ignited the very popular language of *Kavkazskii plennik* in 1822, or engage in the kinds of equally closed languages of nationalist hagiography in the non-Russian republics since the fall of the former Soviet Union, let us

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<sup>1</sup> See Obeyesekere 1992a, 1992b, 2003; Sahlins 2003. For a considered juxtaposition of these approaches see Geertz 2000: 89–107.

<sup>2</sup> For parallel examples, see the work of Richard Price examining Dutch colonial history in the Caribbean (1983); and Pauline Turner Strong, who considers indigenous categories of host and guest in the captivity scenarios of the Americas (1999). I take 'structures of conjuncture', however dated the term may already seem in anthropology proper, to be more resilient than some contemporary discussions of 'middle ground' or 'contact zones', such as those advanced by the historian of the Americas Richard White (1991 [1947]), as conjuncture does not insist on the shared and emergent so much as multiple and competing understandings that can be pursued as effectively in isolation as they may be in tandem with other understandings.

consider some very different kinds of recorded exchanges across the Caucasus.<sup>3</sup>

### **The trade in famous ancestors**

For many across the Euroamerican world, Prometheus' status as fire-bringer and long-suffering god seems quite straightforward. To others, his enchainment at the top of Mount Caucasus has seemed more than just a coincidence. For Charachidze, a French scholar of Georgian descent, the debated provenance of the Prometheus myth recalls the once 'ancient canvas stretched across all of eastern Eurasia' (1986: 341). Charachidze's most prominent spur is the cycle of retellings of the story of Amirani, a hero claimed widely under different guises across the Caucasus, from Armenia to Georgia to Ossetia and beyond.

As with Prometheus, Charachidze distils two key phases in Amirani's mythography. In his simplest renditions, Amirani, like Hesiod's Prometheus, enters punished. Rather than the sin, it is the performance of divine sovereignty through the exclusion of the limit-figure that takes centre stage. God punishes Amirani in three phases: first, he chains him to a post fixed deeply in the ground; second, he buries him under an enormous dome-like structure on a mountain top, opening the dome only once each year for air; finally, Amirani, still chained, is entombed in the belly of a monster (Charachidze 1986: 28–38). The trick, however, is that Amirani is not constant through these privations. Captivity makes him stronger: his strength grows, rather than diminishes with each struggle (80). The story of Amirani, therefore, is about a struggle over human autonomy – about men capable of becoming as strong as or stronger than their overlords, and about keeping potential usurpers in check.

In the second set of legends, according to Charachidze, tellers introduced Amirani's sins as a series of causal factors. Amirani suffers because of women and their idle talk, opposing his cause to the fairer sex. Nor, too, is he a friend of the blacksmiths who chain him to his post, iron-workers whom Charachidze casts as representatives of an increasingly commercial social order, modern industry, and not least, the makers of cult religious objects (122). Like Prometheus before, after or alongside him, Amirani's subversion of regnant codes of rule lands him at the top of Mount Elbrus (the actual peak, in contrast to the fictional Mount Caucasus of Hesiod and Aeschylus' imagination).

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<sup>3</sup> In a longer version of this chapter in Grant (forthcoming), I look also at histories of slavery in the Caucasus, as well as the more formal military exchanges of hostages under the rubric of *amanat*.

Who came first, Prometheus or Amirani? Alongside Charachidze, Tuite has been among the most scrupulous in mapping the traffic in early Caucasus mythologies. In the kinship between Prometheus and Amirani, he finds ‘an imaginary world-order of abundance and unconstraint, in which one could live off the riches of nature without having to engage in labor or exchange’ (1998: 306). It is a world ‘marked by the absence of principal constraints imposed by civilization, settled life, marriage through alliance and exchange, the toil and risk of agriculture’ (1998: 307). As with any legend of such proportions, provenance is a question little attended by scant written records that shift between myth and history.<sup>4</sup> In the cases of Prometheus and Amirani, what the evidence does show is the ready potential for mythographic borrowings, and sporting thefts, in all directions. Charachidze points out that well before Hesiod, in the ninth century BCE, a shared Mycenaean civilization crossed eastern Eurasia (1986: 326). Other records demonstrate how, a century later, by which time Hesiod is understood to have penned the first Prometheus tale, Greeks had set out across the Black Sea, north and east to the shores of Colchis, driven by hunger in search of fish to supply growing armies (Ascherson 1995: 50). Was neighbouring eastern Anatolia an *Urheimat* of Indo-European civilization, as Tuite has asked (1998: 289)? Charachidze replies with the metaphor of the ancient canvas.

Indo-European groups similar to the Greeks of the future, perhaps their precursors, even their penultimate ones, found themselves in enduring contact between the Balkans and Central Asia with peoples of other origin whose descendants now occupy the southern Caucasus and particularly the lands of ancient Colchis. Such a cohabitation implies a certain cultural community by dint of proximity, exchange, and war, manifesting itself in lifestyles, shared conceptual systems, and common lived experiences. This favors a

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<sup>4</sup> Tuite has elsewhere advanced the Caucasus’ prior claims to putatively foundational Greek myths, in the case of a ‘proto-Achilles’ (1998: 331). Wilhelm (1998) offers an extended consideration of Charachidze’s historical geographies, being somewhat more confident on the subject of the ‘significant colonization’ of the Caucasus by the Greeks in the seventh century BCE. He is also right to note that whatever the borrowings, ‘mythic entities are seldom if ever borrowed completely from one culture to another [with] name, personality, attributes, and exploits all in one package’ (1998: 151). Abrahamian (n.d.) takes the question of a wide ‘proto-Caucasian context’ (11) most ambitiously by considering the chthonic origins of Prometheus as son of Iapetos, his relationship to rock formations, and the possibility of myths set in sky and sea having more in common than normally realised via the mediating status of the chthonic figure chained to rock at great heights. Rather than comparing Prometheus to Amirani, Abrahamian looks to earlier Creto-Mycenaean sources on the Minotaur and the labyrinth as a holding zone.

practice of collaboration and of confrontation either deliberate or involuntary between the mythologies in motion (1986: 326).

The riddle of the ancient slowly untangles in light of gradual and increasing evidence of the mobilities and border crossings for which so many Caucasians later became known. Remarking on early Christian Georgia, for example, Rayfield writes

From the fourth century Georgians were sent to monastic colonies in Jerusalem, Antioch, and Constantinople. From there, under Arab pressure, they spread to Saint Katherine's monastery on Mount Sinai, and by the tenth century to Mount Athos. This brought them into contact with most of the nations of the near east and eastern Mediterranean: the resulting waves of translation thus far outweigh in quantity, if not in quality, the original literature that was yet to come. Georgian was not merely a recipient, however, but very often an intermediary, as texts might be translated, through Georgian, from Arabic or Assyrian into Greek or Armenian, in endless permutations, frequently leaving only the Georgian version to survive barbarian or Islamic attack intact ... [Thus] Some Georgian writers, such as the prince Peter the Iberian (traditionally 409–88), became purely Greek writers (1994: 20).<sup>5</sup>

What is striking in these debates are the opposing categories of theft and exchange. Exchange presumes a shared currency, an equivalence of some absolute value, material or ideological, by which trade is negotiated. By contrast, theft (and its cousin, the gift) requires no such recognition. Historically, the social question has been whether Caucasian societies developed such elaborate codes of giving and taking because of a 'natural bellicosity'. But centuries of invasion by colonisers and clansmen alike should also invite us to ask how any society would not raise military systems to high art under such circumstances, making these practices central to mythographies and other forms of historical knowledge.

In a magisterial work of reconstructive scholarship, Colarusso (2002) tracks the epic legends of the Narts, a mythical people claimed as shared ancestors across the North Caucasus, but especially among those glossed as Circassians (Cherkess, Adyge, Kabards), as well as Abkhaz, Ossetians, Ingush and others. Their very shared status alone challenges the more conventional doctrine that the compartmentalised Caucasian kingdoms rarely interacted. But the more striking element is the 'sporting theft' that emerges

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<sup>5</sup> Dragadze (1988: 9), echoing Garsoian (1996) who speaks more broadly of the Caucasus as a whole, concedes that Georgians have had a long tradition of claiming kinship with the Greeks in order to suggest their superiority to other Soviet-era nationalities. For more examples of contested mythologies, see Maksimova 1965; Arans and Shea 1994, and Schulze 1999.

across the epic landscape. ‘Since social rank was inherited and prestige was measured by valor’ across the north Caucasus, Colarusso writes, the possession of goods was less important than the means of their circulation. ‘In fact, a sort of sporting theft was common, so that goods tended to circulate outside the community’ (2002: 2).<sup>6</sup>

Colarusso’s sources for the Nart epics are necessarily the extant print versions of these otherwise predominantly oral genres, most published in Russian and north Caucasus language editions from the age of Russian imperial and later communist censorship structures. Their relatively recent provenance helps explain some thematic confluences after centuries of distillation, not least after Prometheus became coded as a Greek classic of more prominent retellings, making them for some all the more worth appropriating (or stealing back). What emerges is a galaxy of narrative givings and takings. In one myth, the ‘Circassian’ Sosruquo travels to a mountain fortress to steal millet from an ogre and distribute it to his people (2002: 202). In another, it is the nectar of the gods (216), and in still another, Sosruquo steals fire from a Cyclops in a cave in a ravine (222). In many stories, mountain tops are the homes of villains and horrors for captives (169–70, 200).

In published accounts of the same vintage, the nineteenth-century Cherkess writer Khan-Girei reports on the life of Diandeko-Sevai, the most famous ancestor of Bzhedug princes of the Cherkess lineage. Kidnapped at birth by the enormous falcon Shamgur, Diandeko-Sevai is raised by this ‘feathery thief’ on a mountain top so high that it looked down with contempt on thunder and lightning (1893: 3). Tellers of the tale had much to draw on from the frequent real-life cases of the capture of children for purposes of redrawing lineages from Byzantium through Persia. Here mythology suggested a paradoxical lesson: Captivity itself was not the end point. Adoption by abduction, and a childhood spent in the house of the falcon made Diandeko-Sevai into the god he became.

Across the spectrum of these givings and takings, process, rather than product, makes the leader. When Warzameg, son of Meghazash, wins the Damsel Patina,

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<sup>6</sup> Many sources from across the Mediterranean and the Middle East make clear that sporting theft was not limited to the Caucasus, even if it did not become as axiomatic of those regions. Lale Yalçın-Heckmann writes (personal communication) that the Turkish *talán*, meaning pillage, carries this sporting theft as well. For ethnographic examples of the extent of this practice, see Gilsenan (1996) and Herzfeld (1985).



He is carrying her off not to be his bride but to prove his might. This is his way of seeking [in turn] a worthy opponent from among the Narts, a hero capable of defeating him (23).<sup>7</sup>

In short, if the Prometheus of Hesiod was a morality tale about autocracy, yielding to the Prometheus of Aeschylus as a morality tale about democracy, the comparable Nart sagas shift the register to the moralities of individual valour, hearth and clan.<sup>8</sup> Some might call this theft or brigandage – others called it a functional social order in the absence of durable state structures. This does not give us cause to romanticise theft, genuine or sporting. But it does give us ground to recall the basic messages of Lévi-Strauss and Malinowski, that myth speaks to subjects unresolved, charters for action not yet laid properly into habit, and needing of corrective guides. In the mountains, the social outcome may sound libertarian, but the reality was likely far from it. These myths dwelt on questions of sovereignty, collective and individual, because those always fragile sovereignties, challenged on such a continual basis, were so hard won.

### **The traffic in women**

Thus far we have considered identity shifts of key mythic figures, literally, across borders of time and space. But what of the known living persons whose passages across identity-divides created the kinds of functioning social wholes, and more specifically, the social levellings that were understood to keep these small societies of ‘mountain aristocrats’ in check? Perhaps no persons have garnered as much attention as the women given and taken in marriage in virtually all societies of the Caucasus. At once the salacious focus of travel writers who saw erotic melodrama in young women’s plights, the bride continues today at the centre of debates over human rights, social reproduction and rule by custom rather than rule by law.

In this section, I take the image of the ‘limit-figure’ further by exploring the ways by which the marriageable woman – as central to any group’s putative reproductive potential as any member can be – nonetheless took on the status of what we might call (adapting the work of Strathern, see below), ‘the detachable hero’. This is the protagonist whose transferability across perceived social boundaries both enforces those borders, and necessarily, speaks to concerns over their very logics and durabilities.

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<sup>7</sup> In her work on contemporary Kurdistan, Yalçın-Heckmann points out that when bride abduction was undertaken so publicly with the intent of dishonouring the bride’s family or clan, the bride’s honour could still be considered intact upon her release (1991).

<sup>8</sup> The comparable Armenian cycles of Artawazd, retold as a redemptive project for the Armenian people at the hands of oppressors, is one significant exception where Nart sagas are closer to the emancipatory visions of Aeschylus (Colarusso 2002: 102).

In his foundational 1949 [1969] study, *Elementary Structures of Kinship*, Lévi-Strauss contended that the exchange of women in early societies marked the centre, if not the very genesis of the culture concept. Following the earlier arguments of Freud in *Totem and Taboo* (1950) that the incest prohibition marked one of the earliest triumphs of culture over nature and thus, the onset of civilization, Lévi-Strauss reasoned that the self-control shown by sons toward the women of their immediate family (in the form of out-marriage or exogamy) rested on a generalised reciprocity whereby socially proximate but sufficiently distant kin groups would exchange their own women in return. As with Freud's work on the prohibition of incest, exogamy, in Lévi-Strauss' terms, made society.

Like exogamy, the prohibition of incest is a rule of reciprocity, for I will give up my daughter or my sister only on condition that my neighbour does the same. The violent reaction of the community towards incest is the reaction of a community outraged. Unlike exogamy, exchange may be neither explicit nor immediate; but the fact that I can obtain a wife is, in the final analysis, the consequence of the fact that a brother or father has given her up. But the rule does not say in whose favour the person shall be given up. On the contrary, the beneficiary, or in any case the beneficiary class, is delimited in the case of exogamy. The only difference then is that in exogamy the belief is expressed that the classes must be defined so that a relationship may be established between them, while in the prohibition of incest the relationship alone is sufficient to define continually in social life a complex multiplicity, ceaselessly renewed by terms which are directly or indirectly solidary (1969: 62).

By this logic, women were the primal gifts in human civilization, extended from one family to another, by carefully drawn lines of relatedness, and to functionalist ends of social advancement. 'Thus,' wrote Lévi-Strauss, 'a continuous transition exists from war to exchange, and from exchange to intermarriage, and the exchange of brides is merely the conclusion to an uninterrupted process of reciprocal gifts, which effects the transition from hostility to alliance, from anxiety to confidence, and from fear to friendship' (1969: 68).

More than a small number of critics have shown up the limitations of such a neatly drawn origin story, yet another where the idiom of giving glosses a vast range of events that more predominantly include takings and, frequently, assault. As Gayle Rubin has remarked:

Exchange of women is a shorthand for expressing that the social relations of a kinship system specify that men have certain rights in

their female kin, and that women do not have the same rights either to exchange themselves or to their male kin (1975: 177).

Thus, Rubin observes, while taking women's status out of the clutches of biological determinism is a necessary first step, Lévi-Strauss does not go far enough. The goal is to see women's subjectivities and women's subjection in a series of comparative historical and political frames in order to track the very man-made nature of their social positions.

Not all who have joined in Rubin's comparativist drive have come to the same conclusions. The problem remains that for all the gradations of voluntarism, custom and coercion, some anthropologists have found that for at least some societies, the terms of debate which focus on subjects and objects in the respective forms of persons and property may well miss the point. Marilyn Strathern takes up the case of contemporary Daulo women living in the Mount Hagen region of highland New Guinea. The Daulo community where Strathern worked saw women as key producers of income in the coffee-driven cash economy where proceeds from women's labour, as well as the young marriageable women themselves, seemed to circulate at the sole behest of men. Yet Strathern points out that few women found this situation strange or directly degrading. At stake for Strathern is a realization of culturally specific ideals of 'persons', gender and property. She remarks:

It is the western dichotomy between subject and object which informs the anthropological desire to make women the proper subjects for analysis, to treat them in our accounts as actors in their own right. We are terrified of rendering them as mere 'objects of analysis' because this diminishes our own humanity (1984: 162).

In this vein, Strathern argues that Lévi-Strauss never meant to imply that because women were being exchanged they were less than persons. But he did convoke us to think of how personhood is articulated in societies where persons – constituted by social relations in a myriad of ways – are not always coterminous with bodies. Thus 'it is not the male or female persons who are exchanged ... What is exchanged is the sign they represent' (1984: 164).

We should not be particularly disturbed if Daulo women are sometimes compared with shells or trade stores. To imagine they are being treated as objects is based on our own antithesis between persons and things, a false premise in the circumstances (1984: 166).

In the case of Daulo, Strathern argues that gender comes of social relations rather than fixed objects or bodies, such that items exchanged can have male and female characteristics, as can bodies.<sup>9</sup> Thus, 'gender is evinced through

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<sup>9</sup> This focus on the relative constitution of personhood is part of Strathern's larger project of looking not at 'individuals' but at 'dividuals', persons whose understandings of self are

what Melanesians perceive as the capabilities of people's bodies and minds, what they contain within themselves and their effects on others' (1988: 182). What sets women apart in this context is their 'detachability', their capacity to circulate more widely than men, who are seen as more sedentary. In this way, we are invited to look at 'capacities' as well as constraints.

Women as well as men have a male identity. They are nurtured clan members. Their efforts and achievements, however, are to different ends. Whereas men augment this maleness through their transactions, women make the increment detachable. In this metonymic sense men's 'on the skin' attributes are female. Whereas some women are pre-eminently detachable, men become so only in specific contexts ... . [Women's] very detachability points as a source of nurture and productivity separate from men's (1984: 170).

My goal in linking one intensely populated set of highland communities in one part of the world to another is not to diminish any of the efforts by contemporary activists looking to reduce human trafficking and to advance the status of women across the Caucasus. But it urges us to recognise that, whatever the vectors of power, justice and potential humanity that adhere to any given scenario, certain widely entrenched codes of the movement of male and female bodies across social lines are to some degree read into each event. What Prometheus and brides have in common are qualities of detachability whereby border crossers become border makers.

Orthodox forms of marriage in the Caucasus vary as widely as do the languages, religions and political systems of those who live there (Luzbetak 1951). But it becomes difficult to tell the orthodox from the renegade when such seemingly unorthodox a practice as the kidnapping of a young woman against her will for the purposes of marriage finds such longstanding currency in the histories and discourses of Caucasus life. However unevenly we might be able to map a tradition that rebuffs scrutiny by design, marriage by capture today appears to have lost none of its force as a keystone in debates over social justice, gender equity and the sovereignty of persons.

The capture of women in marriage, rather than the 'capture of men' in marriage (a feature introduced with the figure of Pandora in the later Prometheus), dates back as far as legend and written record allow, not least in the oldest Greek, Roman, Aramaic, Arabic, Turkic, Mongol and Persian-

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constituted across lines of social relations (1988: 13). Thus, she writes 'To concentrate on the objectifications of Melanesian cultures appears to eliminate subjectivity. The acting agent is seemingly not required in my explanation of how people manage their affairs – and I write as though cultures proceed independently with their reifications, persons appearing only as the reflex of relationships. In fact, the individual subject has been present in my account all along; she/he just does not take the shape we are used to seeing' (1988: 268).

speaking societies of those people who conquered the Caucasus prior to the Russians. Genghis Khan famously captured his wife, and one of the best-known early sixteenth-century Russian explorers in the region, Stenka Razin, immediately set about abducting a local princess during his first trip down the Volga River. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, however, Russians and Caucasians alike generated a veritable cottage industry of kidnapping scholarship, not least for the same reasons that Engels, in *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State*, and Morgan, in *Systems of Consanguinity* later made clear: conquering nineteenth-century empires, abetted by increasing abilities to survey and appropriate their constituencies, took an aggressive interest in idioms of property, and ultimately, its transfer. However wide the discrepancies in causes and outcomes across varied settings – whether such abductions were, in fact, consensual or semi-consensual elopements or simply outright assault, whether they ended in good favour or in grief – it is clear that across the region they were a constant source of negotiation, observation and debate.

Leontovich's 1882 study of customary law in the mountains is one of the most extensive histories in this context. Writing of the mid-nineteenth century, he observes that questions of *adat*, or custom, and their proper adjudication were not taken lightly anywhere in the Caucasus. Elder representatives of villages, churches and mosques were constantly holding meetings and discussions to proceed along mutual lines in the most thorough fashion. No circumstances were perhaps better recorded than bride thefts between long-time rivals among Cherkess and Nogai of the Kuban' region in the North Caucasus. The story of one couple who attempted elopement led to the killing of both a Nogai woman and her Cherkess would-be suitor. In this case, the elder Cherkess from Beslan, the home of the captor, advocated a resolution on the basis of shari'a law which would have required that they make only modest financial repairs. Nogai princes from the wounded party shamed them, however, by making an appeal to perceived pre-Islamic customs, or *adat*, thus forcing a higher price. The Beslan Cherkess conceded, but in the ensuing years, made no additional gestures. Nogai, who historically considered themselves superior to the Cherkess, took offence that not a single Cherkess came to extend customary rites of apology to the injured family. Only two full years later did acts of vengeance cease (Leontovich 2002 [1882]: 173–5; cf. also Kudaev 1988 for similar events).

Marriage by capture has of course never been limited to the Caucasus, yet as studies from around the world show, it has often been easier to theorise this secretive-by-design practice in the abstract (Kisliakov 1959; Maksimova 1965; Ayres 1974; Diesel 1979; Smirnova 1979; Pershits 1982;

Barnes 1999) than it has been to document it in the concrete.<sup>10</sup> In a wide-ranging comparativist study, Dumézil has ventured that marriage by gift or dowry dominates in societies governed by clerics; marriage by capture dominates in societies governed by warriors; and marriage by bride-price dominates in proto-industrial contexts organised around more complex forms of production, exchange, and monetary systems (1979; cf. also Allen 2000). Soviet-era scholars, by dint of ideology and inclination, have strained to argue the material determinants for all three of these forms of marriage, with special attention to marriage by capture as a means of social or class levelling, the overthrow of oppressive hierarchies. Their contemporary counterparts among Caucasus specialists, eager to suggest the overcoming of backwardness where bride-theft as such might be recognised as a social good in itself, argued in chorus that its persistence was due solely to grounds of penury – by the ability to pay even a token bride-price, or the more substantial expenses of a wedding to which residents of one or more entire villages might be invited (Babaeva 1964; Gagieva 1973; Alimova 1989).<sup>11</sup>

Though contemporary activists have laboured to produce first-person accounts of all manner of human trafficking in the Caucasus, historically speaking, evidence is less clear. Yet what is striking is that across nineteenth- and twentieth-century accounts, even those which in no way strain to minimise the violence inherent in any person's abduction, the vast majority observe that non-consensual events – where the vectors of consent are foremost between a bride and her parents before, during, or after a woman's kidnapping, rather than between the bride and her suitor – were crimes pure and simple, against which all communities laboured to protect their daughters (Leontovich 1882; Sandrygailo 1899; Inal-Apa 1954; Gagloiti 1974; Smirnova 1983; Alimova 1986: 1989; Kudaev 1988; Ter-Sarkisants 1989). Of nineteenth-century Avars in Dagestan, Tsadasa writes that if a young woman objected to the marriage forced upon her by parent or captor, it was not uncommon to commit suicide, most commonly by drowning herself in a fast-moving river or in the most extreme cases, by self-immolation (1965: 55). The overture across these accounts is that while these marriages were by no means free of the cultures of militarism and performative aspects of theft by which they took place, crimes recognised as such were strictly repudiated.

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<sup>10</sup> Some notable exceptions to this trend from beyond the Caucasus include work on Central Asia (Amsler and Kleinbach 1999; Edgar 2004; Werner 2004), France (Haase-Dubosc 1999), the Philippines (Kiefer 1974), and Turkey (Sertel 1969; Bates 1981).

<sup>11</sup> For contemporary English-language accounts of the strains presented to marrying parties in this hospitality-intensive part of the world, see Platz 1996, and Yalçın-Heckmann 2001.

One of the ironies in the historical record is that in many parts of the Caucasus the Russian imperial administration made a tacit but consistent policy of allowing pre-Islamic practices such as bride-kidnapping, perceived as having originated before the Arab conquest in the eighth century and therefore glossed as *adat*, so as to combat what they considered to be the far better organised and thus more threatening rule by Muslim religious law or *shariat* (from the Arabic *shar'ia*). In his study of Dagestan and Azerbaijan in the late nineteenth century, Sandrygailo observes that while Russian overseers took the question of bride-kidnapping seriously enough to everywhere include it in their criminal codes, Russian officials rarely enforced these rules in order not to be seen as interfering in domestic (as opposed to religious) matters. Given how deeply entrenched practices of bride capture were, and yet how easily they could escalate into blood feud, were surely among the reasons why local governments would have looked to regulate the practice rather than ban it outright. On paper, according to Sandrygailo, if a woman effectively elopes, then the man is obliged to pay only a 30 ruble fine, plus seven kettles valued at 2 rubles to every *turkag* (judge's deputy) in the *okrug*. If the abduction was without the woman's consent, then the fine rises to 50 rubles. If the woman was married, then all of the abductor's property is transferred to the woman's husband (where Sandrygailo insisted there were no known incidences of such dramatic assaults and adulteries, the force of the threat may have been prohibition enough) (1899: 94). In some counties where couples attempted to integrate themselves after non-violent elopements, the man would be asked to produce as many as seven bulls as a community offering (Sandrygailo 1899: 119; see also Gagieva 1973: 20 and Smirnova 1983: 106 for comparable examples). In the Soviet period, early Bolshevik activists rushed to condemn these backward and aggressive practices, resulting in rapid legislation that varied by region.

In 1930, Akopov surveyed new legislation that had been introduced the previous year in a Decree of the Plenum of the Supreme Court of the RSFSR 21 May 1929, 'On judicial practice on matters of crimes of daily life' (*o sudebnoi praktike po delam o bytovykh prestupleniakh*). The original penalty for attempting bride capture was set at two years, but in other areas such as the Bashkir SSR, where the struggle was seen as more intense, the term was five years (Akopov 1930: 58–60). In the nine autonomous oblasts of the North Caucasus (Ingush, Osetin, Chechen, Adyge, Kabardino-Balkar, Karachai, Oirat, Cherkess and Kalmyk), 155 such 'crimes of custom' were prosecuted between 1926 and 1927, and among the condemned, 80% were

illiterate (Akopov 1930: 63).<sup>12</sup> Eventually, the prohibition against bride-capture became law evenly across the entire RSFSR. As Gagiev notes for Kabardino-Balkaria in the 1970s, few were unaware of the threats posed to such actions by the Criminal Code, but when cases were shown to involve consent, cases were less harshly prosecuted (Gagiev 1977: 78).<sup>13</sup> In the post-Soviet age, governments no less eager to be seen as modern and progressive, nonetheless found themselves with more pressing battles on their hands, and cases of bride-capture in circumstances of duress appear to have risen everywhere.

### Detachable men

Across the Caucasus there were longstanding ways to shift categories of identity – through slavery, child and adult adoptions, and the kidnapping of brides, to name just some examples. But perhaps no figure is more prominent in popular consciousness than that of the *abrek*: by competing definitions a disgraced village exile, a hostage never to return, a lone wolf in hiding to return in order to right historical wrongs, and a revolutionary looking to overturn oppressive established orders. Russian writers have devoted an extraordinary amount of attention to the *abrek* figure: in hostile terms when the oppressive order in the mid-nineteenth century was their own empire; in admiring terms simply because the free will exemplified by these ‘mountain pirates’ seemed so far from the close supervision of daily life under the tsars; in precarious but admiring terms when some of these same mountain pirates sided with Bolsheviks to change the political landscape; and in precarious terms again when the wars in Chechnya that began anew in the 1990s inspired legions of young men to head to the hills once more.<sup>14</sup>

This section aims to sort out some of the genealogies of the figures who have become known in Russian under the name of the *abrek*, what in Arabic has been considered the *amanat*, what in Turkish is called the *qaçaq*, and what in Persian has been called the *aparaq*. What they share with brides of arranged marriages is that they are viewed also to some common degree as ‘detachable kin’ – those figures in the community not simply intended for temporary or permanent exile because of blood feuds, but those limit-figures

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<sup>12</sup> Of the 155 crimes in question, 66 (or 42%) were for bride-kidnapping, 44 were for marriage by bride-price, 6 were for marriages forced upon youth by their parents, 27 were for polygamy, and 12 were for sexual assault (Akopov 1930: 61).

<sup>13</sup> The articles of the Criminal Code of the RSFSR discussed by Gagiev include Article 232 forbidding payment or acceptance of bride-price, Article 233 the forcing into marriage or restraint from free marriage decisions of a woman, including kidnapping, Article 234 against under-aged marriages, and Article 235 against bigamy or polygamy (Gagiev 1977: 78).

<sup>14</sup> For a famous example from neighbouring Turkey, see Kemal 1961.



whose entry into new communities were often seen as serving the consolidation of those who received them. But the degrees of their detachability, as with women, has been nothing if not exaggerated in a figure whose very notoriety was central to the advancement of the figure of the violent mountaineer.

In the 1860s, looking back on four decades of both lyrical encomia and harsh condemnations – both signs of the degree of fascination that the lone autocrat of the mountains seemed to evoke – the Russian linguist P. K. Uslar remarked

In the age of romanticism [1820s–1840s] neither land nor people in the Caucasus found much understanding ... It is as if we were unable to see the hill peoples as possessed by some kind of frenzy [*besnovanie*], as if they all suffered from inflammation of the brain, lashing out left and right before they create yet another generation of madmen [*besnuiushikhsia*]. And there was a time when these mad streams [*neistovye chada*] of our poetic fantasy brought half the Russian reading public to ecstasy! Other readers of the more judgmental sort also believed in the existence of these raging lunatics, but instead of expressing delight, recommended that they be ripped up from the roots (Uslar 1868: 4–5).<sup>15</sup>

Indeed it was from among the latter readers that the Russian etymologist Vladimir Dal' issued his brief definition of the abrek in 1880 as

m. *Cauc.* A desperate mountaineer, having given an urgent pledge or promise not to spare his own head and to fight furiously; *also* fugitive, ready to join the first band of robbers he sees (1882: 2).<sup>16</sup>

A more ethnographic reading than Dal's, however, suggests a far more complex and diverse set of practices by which a man from any number of societies across the North or South Caucasus could find himself leaving his own community in search of other callings.

The contemporary Russian scholar Vladimir Bobrovnikov traces the etymology of the word to the Persian *aparak*, or the more recent *avara*, meaning wanderer, and robber, suggesting that the word became entrenched in a variety of Caucasus languages through both Persian and Turkic influences (2000: 24).<sup>17</sup> Some scholars have suggested that the abrek must be

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<sup>15</sup> Cited in Bobrovnikov 2000: 22.

<sup>16</sup> Markelov 2002 and Matveev 2002 are two contemporary examples that diverge little from Dal's definitive rendering.

<sup>17</sup> Bobrovnikov cites Anchabadze, Aglarov, and Kazharov, each separately, to list the Kabard forms *abredzh*, and *abreg'*; the Abkhaz *abrag'*; the Ossetian *abyreg*; the Megrelian and Svan *abragi*, though he notes that these are used in these languages to suggest much less violent actors. Yalçın-Heckmann (personal communication) points out that in Turkish, *avare* has roots in religious orders, signalling dervishes, healers, and saintly characters, seekers who

understood somehow around the pivot of Russian intervention, which is to say, the abrek before Russian colonisation, when he represented the sporadic figure who left his community as a result of vengeance, and the abrek after the Russians' arrival, the more popular colonial-era figure whose turn to the hardships of mountain exile worked towards the expulsion of the infidel from his lands (Kazharov 1754 in Botiakov 2004: 8). But this already induces us to see Russians as the first and only coloniser in a region that was far from the savage *terra nullius* that more conservative imperial historians might prefer.

The Georgian anthropologist Marina Kandelaki prefers instead to begin with what she calls the institution of *amanatstvo*, referring to the Arabic word *amanat*, an object held for safe-keeping. Kandelaki points to the use of the term as it has morphed across the Arabic, Persian, Crimean Tatar, Ukrainian, Azeri, Avar, Ingush and Kabard, where the most important reference is the shift in meaning from objects to persons. Although the earliest uses of the term were invariably to designate objects held while men went off into battle, or as collateral in complex treaty arrangements, eventually it could designate all manner of persons.<sup>18</sup> In Dagestan, a bride could be referred to as *amanat*, entrusted to the safe-keeping of her new family; an orphan or even a guest could earn the same title (Kandelaki 1987: 9). Yet surely the best-known example was the man cast out of his community for crimes and misdemeanours, or a wounded counterpart who goes into hiding to plan a revenge assault.

Slander, theft, insult, and transgressions of marriage rules – all this qualifies as failure to submit to the internal order established by the community. Kidnapping, want of land, and unfavourable natural-climatic conditions for maintaining survival with limited resources also spurred mountain residents to consider the status of an *amanat* (1987: 20).

Likewise, this does not exclude the better-known forms of the exchange of first-born sons as guarantors of treaty arrangements between rival leaders, a practice actively pursued across the Russian, Persian, and Ottoman empires (Khodarkovsky 2002).

In eastern Georgia, the most canonic form of *amanat* was sanctioned by the keeper of one of the village's religious shrines. Having gathered the

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were themselves often sought out for their healing abilities. For more etymologies see Botiakov (2004: 5-8).

<sup>18</sup> In early Persian society, Lambton writes that *aman*, 'the custom of giving protection or safe conduct ... to strangers or outsiders had prevailed among the Arab tribes before Islam. By it a stranger who was in principle outlawed outside his own group received for his life and property the protection of a member of a group to which he did not belong and the protection of that group as a whole' (1981: 202).

community at the gates of the sanctuary, the keeper of the site would explain the circumstances that brought the seeker to their door. After testimony from the fugitive, senior male members of the community would alternately grill him on the theme of his vengeance predicament, and remind him of errant amanats whom the community quickly regretted having admitted to their midst. If the man were allowed to stay, all would agree upon a day whereby the seekers would be expected to make an offering to the shrine or the community more broadly. A probationary period of anywhere from one to three years would be established to limit any premature considerations of marriage, or other more formal absorptions of the man into the host community. If well received, an amanat could be coded strictly as a guest, and would be urged to do little labour in his first year of shelter. But risks were considerable for the sheltering community, as they were automatically joined to any retributive vengeance held against the fugitive by his opponents. For this reason, if the amanat had taken shelter not far from his home village, it would be expected that he make secretive visits by cover of night to make penance at his natal shrines, in order to lessen the force of any retributions planned. In the most integrative circumstances, the rules of fictive kinship would direct the transformation of the amanat's identity *in toto* (Kandelaki 1987: ch. 2).

Kandelaki locates the difference between the amanat and the abrek primarily as a question of voluntarism. The amanat is most often the offending party in a blood feud, whose accidental killing or insult of another has set off a lifetime of organised counter-assaults that leaves him little choice but to surrender his labour and his identity to any distant patron who will give him shelter. The abrek, by contrast, is more often the injured party, who, rather than seeking the company of strangers will tend to seek out the villages of nearby relatives to plan retribution. The abrek may also follow the rules of identity shifting by taking on new kin obligations during his exile, but he is not cultivating a long-term transfer (106–110).

Whether amanat or abrek, the point to be made for our purposes here is less the liminal status of the figure cast between two worlds, than the fact that he is still affirmed as a member in both, suturing the two together for better or worse. For all the transformations wrought by fictive kinship, Kandelaki intones, the amanat 'still remains under the equal protection of his former community' (125). It is for these reasons that the languages of long-sought bride, honoured guest, and nervously received fugitive so easily overlap. An 1846 article in a Tbilisi-based newspaper, *Kavkaz*, observed that such customs were observed 'even among Armenians', reflecting the widespread sense that Christian peoples should otherwise be free of such customs.

No attention is paid to whether protection is offered to someone in the right or in the wrong. For this reason, every bandit pursues their malefactions in the hope of finding such protection. Having offered respite, the host will not give up his guest until feuding parties have reconciled, or until blood has been paid with blood. If the matter can not be resolved by either of these two means, then it will be referred to shar'ia law (a religious judge). When a judge decides to hand over a murderer to the leader of the wounded parties, the host is obliged to place the accused in the hands of his avengers, who then proceed as they see fit – submitting him to strangulation, drowning, or a life of slavery (*Kavkaz* 1846: 167).

Protection was everything, but no identity could shift entirely. Put most simply, as the Azeri ethnographer Karakashly did in his study of South Caucasus social structures, '*arxalı köpək qurd basar*' [a dog with *arxa*, protection or backing, can crush a wolf] (1970: 312), but he will still be an animal of a different sort.

For Botiakov and many others, the abrek poses as a central liminal figure whose near shamanic abilities to cross borders between worlds material and sometimes even spiritual is what suggests their role as binding elements across alien lines. But this did not mean that mere mortals could not exercise the finer points of social leveraging between the categories of amanat and abrek. Consider the story of the legendary warrior Beslan Abat as told by Khan-Girei, a Cherkess aide-de-camp to the Russian imperial army in the mid-nineteenth century, famous for his own abilities to adjudicate multiple lines of allegiance (1847). Abat had been born in Beslan, a Shapsug of the Khakutcho lineage. During a famous conflict, which he incited between himself and fellow Khakutcho clansmen, a conflict in which he quickly found himself on the losing side, Abat took the unprecedented stance of seeking amanat status among neighbouring Abazekhs, a stronger rival clan whose strength foreclosed the possibility of further attack by Abat's kinsmen.<sup>19</sup> The appeal for Abazekhs was manifold: their prestige was advanced by the absorption of a famous warrior from a rival clan into their own; and Abat himself brought with him substantial wealth which he shared in the form of sacrifices and tribute to his Abazekh hosts. Technically, the advantages went still further.

The client acquires a bulwark, while the protector earns the right to demand fines for any insult brought upon his client, as insults to the

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<sup>19</sup> For comparative purposes, Gilsenan (1996) again is an excellent source on the ways in which these kinds of actions relied on complex balances of family, clan, and broader social groupings in intended balancings of perceived social structures.

client are redirected to the noble protector himself and therefore merit compensation as according to Cherkess law (1847: 170).

Thus, not only was Abat's case remembered for its audacity, but also for his willingness to sacrifice his status as leader of one of the most noble clans of his people, recalling the idiom of social levelling in such active use throughout Caucasus folklore. His diminished social status, however, did little to diminish the more storied qualities of the detachable man who drew the lines of Khakutch'o and Abazekh all the more clearly by crossing them.

[His] initiative was bold, but his unprecedented success demonstrated that such an agile man with a presence of mind could succeed in still more things, whose name would remain on the lips of Shapsugs everywhere (1847: 170).

With the more formal onset of the Caucasus wars in the mid-nineteenth century, and even with the capture of the legendary Dagestani leader Imam Shamil in 1859 – the single man most famous for his armed opposition to tsarist rule (Gammer 1993) – all agree that the figure of the abrek changed dramatically, making it increasingly difficult for observers to separate the mountain loner whose exile was pitched against a clan-based community from the band of mountain loners whose common cause was the overthrow of a foreign imperial presence. From a limit-figure of exceptional status whose sporadic appearances in history and folklore underscored existing lines of division, the abrek became a more common and more violent figure whose presence around all mountain communities was increasingly the norm as Russian rule advanced across the North and South Caucasus. Some ethnographers, such as Bobrovnikov, see the abrek alongside other institutions as crucial binding elements that managed the fragile pluralisms in the region.

Men's alliances, the cult of the dzhigit warrior, blood vengeance, and hospitality – all enabled small communities of mountaineers to survive under circumstances of near constant civil strife and armed struggles from north to south, saving them from descent into anarchy (2000: 29).

The special salience here for those who see Pushkin and the many other Russian authors as having introduced growing Russian reading publics to an always already violent southern region is that his tales of Russian soldiers and aristocrats being held captive in the Caucasus mountains entered a semantic landscape where plotlines and thus, potential outcomes, were far from predetermined. The 'detachable male' could be transformed, re-identified, sold into slavery or remade as kin. Moreover, his proxy status as collateral against more sweeping conflicts, in the case of the amanat, or his ability to seek shelter in neighbouring communities so as to follow exact

codes of social order, in the case of the abrek, were understood to serve the minimisation of violence, rather than its aggrandisement.

The reconstruction of such legacies naturally beg a scrutiny of the provenance of all historical and ethnographic sources in such troubled contexts. The character of the unofficial Cherkess spokesperson, Khan-Girei, one of the Russian imperial army's more storied linguistic and cultural interpreters, recalls the role of creolised civil servants in other parts of the globe, such as nineteenth-century Spanish South America, where local hired guides would intently exaggerate the savagery of their kinsmen in order to argue and extend their own indispensability as middlemen (Taussig 1986; cf. also Çelebi 1988). By the late nineteenth century, the image of the violent Caucasus seemed irrevocably fixed in popular Russian imaginations, but it may have equally served communities across the North and South Caucasus whose accessions to Russian sovereignty were as uneven as they were unsteady.

## Conclusions

Historians and policy-makers alike rightly contend that many societies of the Caucasus do have well-developed cultures of militarism. But where such habits and violences come from is another matter. Few if any scholars from outside the region seem to entertain the possibility that a highly developed language of militarism should not be a logical outcome after near constant foreign interventions since the onset of the written record. It is as if, to recall the insights of Shami (1999), the entire physiognomy of a region – ‘the violent Caucasus’ – is taken as a given from before the age of colonisation, rather than as a result of it.

In historical and ethnographic terms, it seems to be clear that from at least Prometheus and Amirani onwards, the Caucasus has long been a site of social and cultural transformations – not only for persons held captive, moved, given, traded, ostracised or re-identified – but for entire cultural and political systems. In the Russian colonial and Soviet communist periods, the transformations, and the violences, clearly moved in all directions. The highly advanced Caucasus military systems made the Russian army fiercer, according to the decorated general Grigorii Zass. *S volkami zhit', po-volchi vyt'* – to live with wolves is to howl like the wolves – is a proverb Zass relied upon to explain Russia's encounter with another symbol of Caucasus manhood, the Chechen wolf (Lunochkin and Mikhailov 1994). Others have shown that the popular perception of kidnapping as a ‘language’ of force inclined early Bolsheviks to institute widespread hostage-takings as part of its early Sovietising Caucasus campaigns (Cherkasov 2004).

But it was also the very question of political freedom that made so many Russian readers look to the *vol'nost'*, that is to say, the wildness and perceived integrity of the Caucasus peoples suggested to them by Pushkin, Tolstoy and others, that inclined many to imagine paths away from tsarist autocracy. In the face of such accomplished lyricisms, Caucasus publics too found themselves transformed. The Avar poet, Rasul Gamzatov, made it clear that 'It was not a general before whom the Caucasus bowed, but the poetry of a young lieutenant [that is, Lermontov]' (1970: 224).

Whether or not practices of the exchange of men and women across kin, alliance or broader political lines contributed to a more balanced landscape of competing sovereignties in the Caucasus – as most accounts of practices of *amanat*, not to mention most forms of arranged marriage sought to achieve – is something specific to each given exchange. The case of *abreks* and *amanats* suggests an open expression of enmity that is nonetheless mutually adjudicated through the proxy of a limit-figure towards peaceful ends. This is a far cry from the kinds of contemporary peace negotiations normally advocated by leaders who wait for the ceremonial smiling handshake, or the mythical non-violent surrender. The careful balance between enmity and the keeping of the peace seems a more prominent staple of the rough cohabitations achieved in the Caucasus long ago than they do of those today. But what ethnographic records of the transformative traffic in sons, daughters and lone wolves suggests is that anyone who entered the space of the Caucasus – Russian aristocrat, soldier or Komsomol leader – should be expected to be defined as significantly by the terms of others as they are by their own.

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## *Chapter 4*

# **The Forgotten Complexities of the North Caucasus Jihad**

Georgi 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 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 direct domination by 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 'barbarian' periphery in the world-systems generated around agrarian empires (Earle 1997). Functionally, the North Caucasus was akin to Tropical Africa – another far-off outlier of core Islamic empires. Albeit with an important difference deriving from cultural prejudice: in the Islamic Middle East, white slaves were valued as far more prestigious. Captive boys from the Caucasus were inducted into the elite Mameluk armies, while girls usually ended up in the harems of Muslim rulers (Kurtynova-Derluguian 1996).

The peripheral position of the North Caucasus during the fifteenth and eighteenth centuries CE, however, did not mean that this was a stagnant backwater. The ‘barbarian’ 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 (McEvedy 1992). This analogy in the relations between empires and tribal periphery in two different epochs seems very illuminating 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 effort<sup>1</sup> – had to fight on two fronts simultaneously: against the advancing Russian empire and against 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 terms that they regard at best with suspicion: tribes, barbarian, periphery. While I join most colleagues in eschewing 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

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<sup>1</sup> The original meaning of ‘jihad’ is precisely that – effort.

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.

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 (Tilly 1985; Volkov 2002). 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 caste-like 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 (Bgazhnokov 1999). 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 (Brown and Morgan 2006), 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 a 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 (Earle 1997). Today this code of behaviour is proudly called Adyge Habze. It is considered the common repository of values and rituals of all Adyge 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, saber 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 (Astvatsaturian 1994: 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 (McNeill 1982). 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 mid-nineteenth century, at the peak of this early industrialisation, Dagestan alone produced up to 20,000 rifles a year (Astvatsaturian 1994: 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 (Astvatsaturian 1994: 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 highway.<sup>2</sup>

The dispersion of affordable and well-crafted rifles allowed the Caucasus communal smallholders to resist the tribute-collecting noblemen on horseback. 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 (Khodarkovsky 2002).

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 (Panesh 1988). 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 (1986), the doctrine of

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<sup>2</sup> I thank Dr. Barasbi Bgazhnokov for sharing this story.

‘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 (Zelkina 2000) – and then Islam spreads like bushfire. This could not be explained outside the contemporary context of struggles between the elites and commoners.



Plate 4.1. A Georgian village with ancient clan towers on the border with Chechnya.

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 any 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.<sup>3</sup> 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.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Among the most explicit examples, see the numerous newspaper articles, essays and interview of the Moscow-based anthropologist Ian Chesnov dating to the mid-1990s. In the late 1990s the ideology of 'native Chechen democracy' was espoused by the alleged mafia leader and warlord Khoj-Akhmed Nukhaev. The American journalist Paul Klebnikov wrote an exceedingly sensationalist book of interviews with Nukhaev titled *Razgovor s varvarom* [Conversation with a Barbarian] (2003). A year later, Klebnikov was murdered in the streets of Moscow. The Russian police accused Nukhaev of ordering the assassination. Some journalists, however, cast doubts on the motives and investigations of the police.

<sup>4</sup> Due to the proximity of Middle Eastern markets and the huge price differentials, it was far more profitable to sell the captives immediately to the merchant intermediaries. Only the less desirable slaves stayed as the dependent members of their master's household (Kurtynova-Derluguian 1996).

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 legitimization 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 (Knysh forthcoming).

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.<sup>5</sup> 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.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> But roughly a fifth of all Ossetians still became Muslim. Curiously, this causes no tension, and Muslims are found in the same family circles with the Christian Ossetians. See Bobrovnikov et al. forthcoming.

<sup>6</sup> In 1992 the tension between Ossetians and Ingush erupted in a fierce territorial dispute. An excellent, sober analysis is provided by Tsutsiev (1998).

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 (Collins 1999). 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 (Pokrovskii 2000). 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 and all the way to Dutch East India (modern Indonesia). 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 Arabic.<sup>7</sup> In fact, many popular preachers, especially in Chechnya, were illiterate. The contemporary Russian reports are confused and exceedingly biased for the

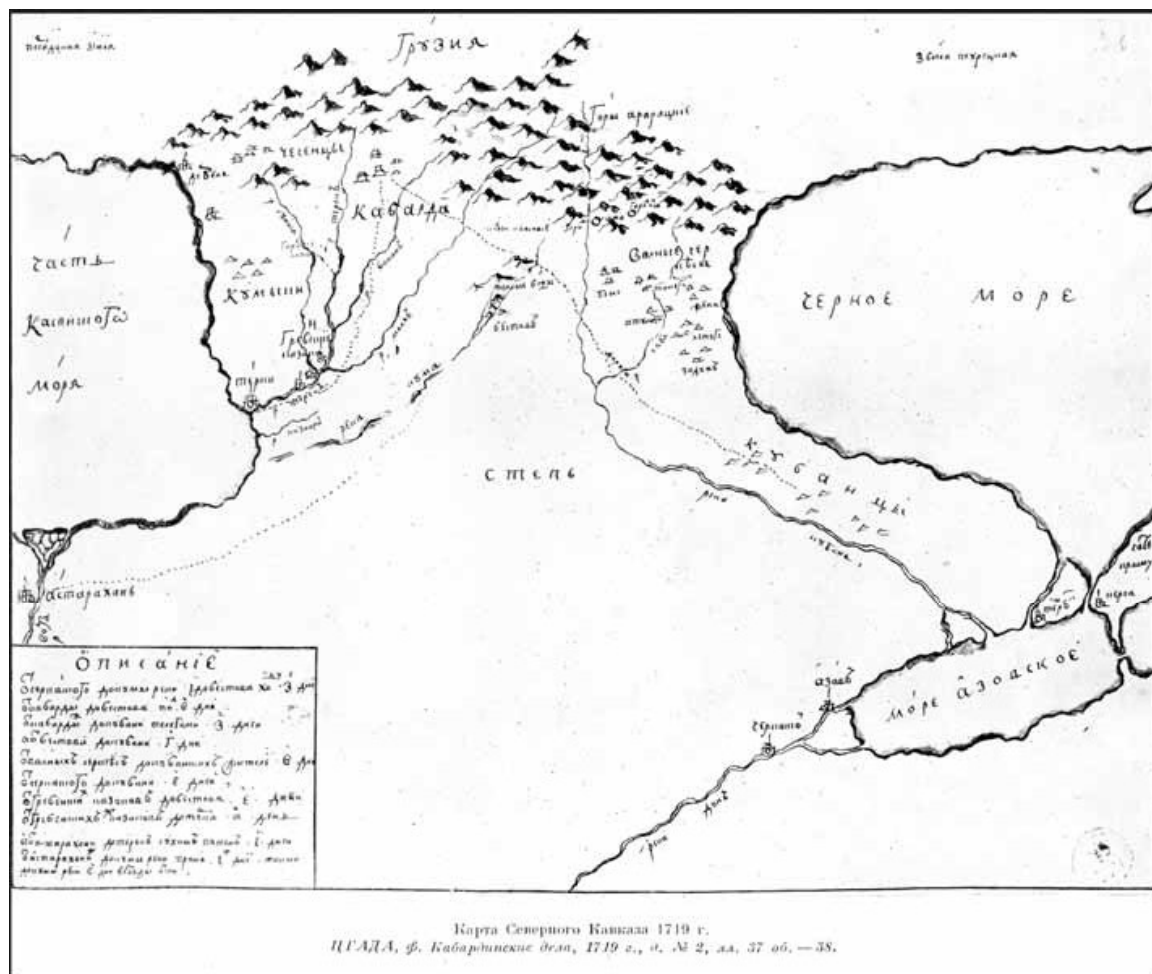
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<sup>7</sup> For an overview of Arabic texts from the Caucasus, see Gammer 1994.

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’ (Pokrovskii 2000). 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 social-normative message expressed in the demand for installing the universalistic norms of *shari’a* Islamic law (Babich 2003). 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’ (Kazharov 1994).

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 (Pokrovskii 2000; Bobrovnikov et al. forthcoming). 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 (Siver 2002).

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.



Map 4.1. 1719 Map of the North Caucasus.

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 (Bobrovnikov et al. forthcoming: ch. 6). 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 (Azamatov 1994). 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 (2001) 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 (Gakaev 1997).

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 (Brubaker 1996).

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 (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983). 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* (1984). 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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## **PART TWO**

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### **THE REMAKING OF A WORLD AREA**

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## ***Chapter 5***

# **The History of Sovereignty in Azerbaijan: A Preliminary Survey of Basic Approaches**

Shahin Mustafayev

The historian and philosopher Nikolai Berdiaev's concept of the 'messianic' spirit of Russian history has continuously influenced the sentiments and souls of the people in the twentieth century and to a great extent has predetermined the historical paths of the former USSR (Berdiaev 1990). It has transformed the historical vision of the Soviet era, which interpreted the essence of history not as chaotic movement of events and human will, but rather as a great mission, an advancement towards a single and final cause, a sort of law-governed process of inevitable unification of humanity into a harmonic social society without exploitation of man by man and with every possible condition for the spiritual growth of personality.

Around the world, many ancient and medieval teachings have centred on the concept of a 'golden age' – an era of justice and prosperity, which was accepted as a model for imitation. In its time, the Soviet historical sciences did their best to shift this 'golden age' from the past to the future, thus imparting an extraordinary dynamism and optimism to history with its nostalgic spirit of the past. History made the Russian people responsible for leading mankind into a bright future. Even in the Soviet era this historical vision remained imbued with profound idealism, despite traditional references to Marxist materialism and economic laws.

The history of the non-Russian peoples of the Soviet Union occupies a special place in this context. The legitimacy and prestige of scores of leaders of post-Soviet states, headed almost exclusively by members of former Soviet elites and nomenklatura, rely heavily on perceived antiquity and historical 'glory' of the state, rather than democratic orientation and reforms. Across the former Soviet Union, the need for real democratisation has largely been superseded in public opinion by an appeal to great ancestors. The beginning of the 1990s witnessed historical canonisation and emergence of an official cult of the Samanids in Tajikistan and Timurids in Uzbekistan.

For the non-Russian peoples of the Soviet Union, it was their proximity to Russian destiny, sharing values in the building of a bright future, which accounted for the 'synchronisation' of the historical destinies of Russia and its suggested fraternal peoples. Yet the Soviet-era histories of these national districts and peripheries took up an insignificant and subservient place in Soviet textbooks. Their purpose was to endorse the main idea of their 'voluntary incorporation' into the Russian Empire and the 'progressive consequences' of these acts upon their people's destinies. Yet, arguments about this 'progressiveness' varied in each case, even if they were not known for their great diversity. Soviet historians, depending on various regions and peoples, laid an emphasis on two main postulates.

The first postulate insisted upon Russia's mission as an emancipator and as a saviour of peoples from foreign invaders. For instance, this assertion equally applied to the Azerbaijanis, Georgians and Armenians, who for many centuries 'suffered from the Turkish and Persian yoke'. The absurdity of this version is obvious. How could these three peoples have been regarded identically when, unlike Georgians and Armenians, Azerbaijanis had been a part of the so-called 'Turkish and Persian world'? Yet, it was essential to prove the unity and integrity of the destinies of these peoples and their inevitable rapprochement with Russia. The same version was applied to the histories of other peoples as well – for example, Belorussians and Ukrainians, 'rescued' by Russia from the Turkish-Tatar invasions and aggression of their Polish oppressors.

The second postulate proceeds from a civilisational position. As a country with a higher level of development, Russia emerged as the champion of the civilising mission. Lesser-developed peoples had a great opportunity, as part of the Russian Empire, to remove the 'reactionary' feudal order in their own countries and adapt themselves to a world culture. In doing so, each group of people was noted for its officially recognised historical figures, largely workers of culture or statesmen. All of these were designed to symbolise the 'eternal unity of these peoples with Russia', for instance, B. Khmelnytskii and T. Shevchenko from Ukraine, Ch. Valikhanov from Kazakhstan, M. F. Akhundov from Azerbaijan, S. Iulayev from Bashkortostan, Kh. Abovian from Armenia, and so forth. Hence, they also drew inspiration from Berdiaev's 'messianism' – a concept that tells us a great deal about the official histories normally produced about peoples of the former USSR (Berdiaev 1990).

Thus, with different names, cultures and languages, the peoples of the Uzbek SSR, Georgian SSR, and many others found themselves with little in common except their standardised historical destinies within a framework of a fraternal alliance. Not surprisingly, the inquisitive minds of Soviet

intellectuals, both Russian and otherwise, could not always reconcile themselves with such approaches. Any ideological irregularities evoked close attention from both society and the ideological leaders of the state. Thus, to give just a single well-known example, the publication of Olzhas Suleimenov's *Az i Ia* caused an ideological scandal and stormy debates in the intellectual circles of the USSR (Ram 2001).

The situation sharply changed after the dissolution of the USSR. The collapse of unified political and economic space was accompanied by the disintegration of a common ideological and informational zone. The so-called 'parade of sovereignties' gradually grew into the 'parade of national histories'.

The newly independent states needed to re-evaluate their place in the world arena in order to comply with their imagined historical status. The new power elites needed political prestige supported by a 'glorious' historical past, a syndrome common to many post-colonial elites, and certainly common in the former Soviet republics. Under new conditions, history continued to direct social order and remains to be an object of political manipulations. Perceived historical rights to land are thus instrumental in the Armenian–Azerbaijani and the Georgian–Abkhazian conflicts. Historical stereotypes, rather than political and legal standards, predetermined people's attitudes towards the problem of Crimea, both in Ukraine and Russia. This is, of course, one of the ultimate Caucasus paradigms – a scene of plurality driven by competition, most often solved by might. Yet here we find that more and more political leaders understand the pen to be just as mighty as the sword, perhaps even more so. Or, to put it differently, across the Caucasus, one rarely finds a republic today where the pen and sword do not go hand in hand. It is the subject of this chapter to explore how internal debates in the former Soviet Union and the contemporary independent republic of Azerbaijan have produced just such debates.

The problem of sovereignty is topical for Azerbaijan as across the former USSR. This is no longer an issue for academic discussions today, for sovereignty is perceived by society within the context of the legitimacy of national statehood, territorial integrity and national identity. There are several factors that contribute to the exacerbation of the issue, such as the continuation of the Armenian–Azerbaijani conflict, and sensitive relations with Iran. In this chapter, I present some of the most influential views on Azerbaijani sovereignty as they have emerged in scholarly writings to date. Later, I reflect on some further viewpoints that circulate in contemporary Azerbaijani society but have yet to find their historical voice.

## The principle of territory

The factor of territory shapes the structure of this principle, which calls for a certain integrity of historical development of the Azerbaijani ethnos and statehood from ancient times to the present. Within this concept, the history of statehood on the territory of Azerbaijan starts from the state of Manna (ninth century BCE) and embraces all subsequent states in the given territory up to the present.

This approach was elaborated and adopted in the Soviet era as the official concept of the history of Azerbaijan in the USSR. A powerful testimony to this fact was the first academic publication of *The History of Azerbaijan* issued in Baku in the 1950s (Guseinov 1958), and later academic publications and textbooks such as *The Great Soviet Encyclopaedia* and *The Soviet Historical Encyclopaedia*.

This territorial principle was drawn up in close relationship to the so-called 'theory of ethno-genesis' of the Azerbaijani people and it played a key role in the consolidation of Azerbaijanis in the twentieth century. It was a feeling of adherence to a common historical homeland and the realisation of a common destiny that rallied people together and intensified patriotic sentiments. Despite Soviet ideological control, an Azerbaijani patriotism increasingly grew, favouring the consolidation of Azerbaijani identity. High school and university courses on native history contributed, though often superficially, to the spreading of this historical knowledge in Azerbaijan. To paraphrase B. Anderson, 'print-socialism' also contributed to the creation of the 'imagined communities' (Anderson 1991).

An interesting situation arose: recognised as historical heroes were Javanshir, the Christian king of Caucasian Albania in the seventh century; Babek, the leader of an insurgent anti-Arab and anti-Muslim movement in Azerbaijan in the ninth century; and Shah Ibrahim Derbendi, the ruler of the state of Shirvan in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Introducing these figures from different epochs with different ethno-religious origins became possible only within the framework of Azerbaijani patriotism. Within the official paradigm, all of them served the cause of Azerbaijani statehood.

But this concept is unconvincing and thus vulnerable to critique. In my view, it enjoyed an official status within the Soviet nation-building policy's framework (Brubaker 1996: 26–48). Within the USSR's regional divisions, the Transcaucasus was considered to be a specific economic and geographical region, and concurrently a cultural entity with three nations incorporated by their ethno-psychological make-up and cultural traditions. Accordingly, historical destinies of these peoples were 'synchronised'; in particular, they were 'recognised' neighbours from time immemorial, who supported each other against foreign invaders and 'freed themselves from the

Turkish and Persian yoke' with the help of Russia. As has been noted above, Azerbaijanis did not blend with this stereotypical pattern.

It would be appropriate to recall that this paradigm enjoyed an official status for political reasons as well. At the apex of the struggle against so-called 'pan-Turkism' during the 1920 and 1930s, Soviet ideologists felt it was necessary to undermine its position in Azerbaijan, one of its supposed outposts in the USSR. The very mention of the Turkic roots of Azerbaijani culture was eradicated and the ethnonym 'Turk' was replaced by 'Azerbaijani'; the same was true of the names of all public and cultural institutions. This campaign was likely initiated by Stalin himself. A letter written in 1938 by the composer U. Hadjibekov to the then-Communist leader of Azerbaijan, M. D. Bagirov, leads us to a similar conclusion. As is known, during the celebration of 'Ten Days of Azerbaijan Culture in Moscow', Stalin, pleased with Hadjibekov's new opera 'Koroglu', cordially received him. In his letter, Hadjibekov expressed the idea that until the most recent times his people were perplexed by such ethnonyms as 'Tatars' and 'Turks', which were bestowed upon them by people who did not know the history of Azerbaijan; yet, Stalin gave the only accurate name for the people 'Azerbaijanis', which he derived from the history and the territory (Ismailov 2003: 277). It is most likely that the aforementioned concept of the history of Azerbaijan has been initiated in the framework of the same campaign.

Thus, we have a paradigm of ethnic and, hence, political history of Azerbaijan that laid the groundwork for the official paradigm. Azerbaijanis emerged as the direct heirs of all states that had ever existed on the given territory. As a result of this manipulation, from now on, many issues of ancient and medieval history had to be considered within the territorial limits of Azerbaijan without addressing the broad area of Turkic culture and Islamic civilisation. It is not surprising that the structure of the Institute of the History at the Azerbaijan Academy of Sciences was organised in such a way that the scope of its scientific research would focus exclusively within the historical and geographical borders of Azerbaijan. However, this imposed 'limitation' was compensated by the 'acknowledgement' of Azerbaijanis as an indigenous population. Note that the latter became an *idée fixe* among a myriad of Azerbaijani researchers. Academician Igrar Aliev, one of the architects of this concept, revealed its ethno-genesis component as follows:

Under this concept, contributing to the formation of the Azerbaijani people were tribes and nationalities that inhabited Atropatena (South Azerbaijan) and Caucasian Albania (North Azerbaijan) – Manneians, Kaspians, Medes (Atropats-Adurbadagans), Albanians, etc. who spoke languages of different families, including Caucasian

(Albanians) and Iranian (for instance, Medes). Various tribes (Kimmerians, Scythians, Saks, Alans, Huns, Khazars, Oghuzes, etc.) penetrated the historical territory of Azerbaijan throughout centuries. They played also an important role in the ethnogenesis of Azerbaijani settling. The transition of the population of this region towards Turkic language occurred in the final period of ethnogenesis – the Middle Ages. This is a brief history of the shaping of Azerbaijani identity (Aliiev 1995: 11–12).

Thus this concept is like a double-edged sword and far from perfect. Contributing to the cause of national consolidation, the concept nevertheless made it impossible to take into account the specificity of the historical development of Azerbaijan. Even worse, it became increasingly entangled in questions of ethnicity. This approach to the history of Azerbaijan influenced other humanitarian sciences within Azerbaijani studies, including linguistics and literary criticism with their highly sensitive issues of ethnic identity. It is astonishing that school and university textbooks presented Avesta's Gats as examples of ancient Azerbaijani literature, for example, since Zoroastrianism, as viewed by the authors of these textbooks, was territorially attributed to Azerbaijan (Safarli and Yusifov 1982: 9–16). Simultaneously, works by medieval Turkish poets and *aşıqs*<sup>1</sup> of Anatolia, such as Yunus Emre, were presented as those written by foreign authors, though both were linguistically and thematically identical to the works of their Azerbaijani contemporaries.

It is obvious that people seeking to realise their identity, especially inquisitive intellectuals, could not reconcile themselves with this situation. In the late 1960s, immediately following Khrushchev's Thaw, this paradigm suffered a fissure during the preparation of the first volume of the *Azerbaijan Soviet Encyclopaedia (ASE)*. There were some inadmissible 'liberties' in the interpretation of the history and culture of Azerbaijan, which ran counter to official ideological guidelines. For this reason, the first volume was quietly rejected and deemed counter to generally-accepted Soviet standards. Its editor-in-chief, the well-known poet Rasul Rza, was relieved of his post.

In particular, in this volume there was published a single article entitled 'Azerbaijan' in which the authors state that this is 'a country that is located on the Asian continent, south-east of the Caucasus, and north-west of Iran, and has been populated since ancient times by Azerbaijanis' (Rasul Rza 1970: 111). Thereafter, the entire historical regions of the country, from Derbent in the north to Zendjan in the south, from Nakhichevan and Urmiya in the west to the Caspian Sea in the east, are enumerated. The article further

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<sup>1</sup> Traditional, wandering bards and musicians.

states that, in accordance with the Gulistan (1813) and Turkmanchay (1828) treaties between Russia and Iran, Azerbaijan had been divided into two parts of which the northern portion was incorporated into Russia and the southern part into Iran.

In itself, the presence of such an article with this sort of title in the first Azerbaijani encyclopaedia should scarcely be able to provoke bewilderment or serious objection, unless considering it within a Soviet ideological context. However, from the position of the official ideological point of view, the perception of Azerbaijan in public opinion as a somewhat autonomous historical-cultural entity, or 'country', isolated from Soviet reality was evidently interpreted as a dangerous tendency and a manifestation of nationalist sentiments. Just one reality had to be imprinted upon mass consciousness – the Azerbaijan Soviet Socialist Republic. Its historical past in entirety and its centuries-long cultural experience had to work towards the perpetuation of this image. Most significant was that the country and its history had to be interpreted and perceived through the prism of Soviet reality.

It is not by chance that the structure of the *Soviet Historical Encyclopaedia* (*SHE*), the main ideological authority in the sphere of historical sciences of the USSR, was constructed in this way. In contrast to the first Azerbaijani encyclopaedia, the first volume of the *Soviet Historical Encyclopaedia* (published 1961) devoted an article to Azerbaijan titled 'Azerbaijan Soviet Socialist Republic' (Zhukov 1970: 225–65). Symptomatically in this article Azerbaijan is characterised not as a 'country', but merely in a geographical context as a territory, which 'is located in the eastern part of Transcaucasia on the banks of the Caspian Sea' (p. 225). Noteworthy in this definition is that the southern part of Azerbaijan, so-called 'Iranian Azerbaijan', is completely absent. At the same time, this political reality of Azerbaijan SSR is presented here with the standard official phrases such as, 'a socialist state of workers and peasants, a sovereign Soviet republic, voluntarily united with the other equal soviet republics in the Union of Socialist Soviet Republics' (p. 225). In this manner, it is obvious that a conspicuous inconsistency exists between the Azerbaijani *Encyclopaedia* and the direction of the *Soviet Historical Encyclopaedia*.

The first volume of the discredited *ASE* was published in 1970, nine years after the publication of the *SHE*. The act of neglecting the official Soviet encyclopaedia's structure and its ideological principles and the publication of an article under the title of 'Azerbaijan', equipped with several historical colour maps, apparently served as a significant and ample cause for the *ASE*'s ideological rejection.



The *ASE*'s article was filled with other no less intriguing nuances that went beyond the boundaries drawn by Moscow. For instance, concerning the question of the Azerbaijani people's ethnic origin, the *SHE* adhered to the official Soviet concept that 'in the ethnogenesis of Azerbaijanis, the ancient local tribes of Atropetena (southern Azerbaijan – Sh. M.) and Caucasian Albania (northern Azerbaijan – Sh. M.): Manneians, Kaddusis, Kaspians, part of Medes, Albanians and others possess a determining significance' (Zhukov 1970: 265). Thus, the ethnic roots of the people were tied to this blend of ancient, local, multi-linguistic tribes without any certain or clear ethnic character. In the discredited volume of the *ASE*, in contrast to the aforementioned thesis, it was noted that 'in the origin of Azerbaijanis and Azerbaijani language an important role was played by the Huns, Bulgars, Khazars, On Oghurs (On Oghuz), Basils, Pechenegs, and other tribes which settled in the territory of Azerbaijan in the first millennium A.D.' (Rasul Rza 1970: 111). It is not difficult to note that, in contrast to the Moscow thesis, the authors of the *ASE* were inclined to tie the ethnic roots of Azerbaijani people first of all to the Turkic tribes, which settled in these lands during the era of the great migration of peoples.

Moreover, the *ASE*'s evaluation of Russian colonial policy towards Azerbaijan at the end of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, particularly on such sensitive questions as the 'voluntary' incorporation of the Azerbaijani khanates into Russia, did not quite adhere to official lines. Having analysed the results of the expeditionary corps of V. A. Zubov, which was sent by Catherine II to Azerbaijan in 1796, the authors of this article noted, 'The submission of the Khanates to Russia was not in the interests of the Azerbaijani khans. Rather than concern themselves about the loss of their khanates, they contemplated strengthening their power via Russian assistance. Yet, the entire aim of V. A. Zubov's expedition was not to assist the khans, but to incorporate the territory of Azerbaijan to Russia' (Rasul Rza 1970: 117). Thus, after the signing of the Gulistan Treaty between Russia and Iran in 1813, 'the territory of Azerbaijan was divided into two parts – Ganja, Karabakh, Sheki, Shirvan, Quba, Baku, and Talish were incorporated into Russia and the southern part of Azerbaijan stayed within the realm of the Iranian monarchy' (p. 117). Most intriguing is that the encyclopaedia's authors make no statement about the 'voluntariness' of the incorporation of northern Azerbaijan into Russia, and the 'progressiveness' of this event is noted in the most trivial manner, using satisfactorily dubious phrasing.

The academic discussions of the 1970s and 1980s about the ethnogenesis of the Azerbaijani people are also noteworthy. An official concept, as set forth by the Institute of History of the Academy of Sciences of

Azerbaijan, was that Azerbaijanis are a linguistically Turkified nation shaped on the basis of an ethnic mixture of various tribes of Iranian, Caucasian and, later, Turkic origins. However, following the analysis of linguistic material, a group of researchers opposed this point of view, insisting on the Turkic origin of Azerbaijanis. The group published its research results in *The Proceedings of Azerbaijani Philology* in 1984 (Arasli 1983; Cafarov 1984). Not only did these debates overstep the boundaries of academia, but they were also of ideological-political significance. It was no mere coincidence that the Azerbaijan Communist Party Central Committee attached great importance to these debates.

It is interesting to note from a sociological point of view that there was a latent rivalry between the faculty members of the Academy of Sciences and the university professors in the humanities within the organisation of scientific research in Azerbaijan during the Soviet period. Whereas Academy professors were reputedly more conservative, their university counterparts ventured to interpret history more freely.

In T. Hadjiyev and K. Veliyev's monograph *The History of the Azerbaijani Language* (1982), these two university researchers retraced the fashionable idea of the ancient Sumerian-Turkic linguistic ties as a 'new view' on the ethnic history of the Azerbaijani people (Hajiyeve and Veliyev 1982). Their attempts ran counter to the official concept and provoked outbursts of indignation. The same was true of the research work of another philologist, A. Mamedov, who used more sound and comprehensive linguistic material (Mamedov 1985).

The results of Stalin's manipulation of ethnic history of Azerbaijani people once augured badly for me when I was a student at Baku University in the early 1980s. Having studied in the Department of Oriental Studies, I was able to read philological and historical literature in eastern languages, which was inaccessible to the majority of the population, in our department library. One of my deepest passions was reading the works of leading Turkish scholars on the history of Turkic peoples. Familiarity with other, non-Soviet historical schools left a strong imprint on my understanding of the history of Azerbaijan. I treated the official interpretation of native history, which we had to learn from first grade, quite sceptically. I was reminded of a former teacher of the history of Azerbaijan, Professor Korenberg: owing to his intense enthusiasm for his subject, Professor Korenberg stood out in the stagnant and routine environment that surrounded us at Baku University. He was often able to inspire the lecture hall with a non-standard style of teaching that centred on a series of controversial questions. Once he began our lecture with a seemingly simple question, 'Who are Azerbaijanis?' The majority of students were surprised by such a

direct question for which the answer seemed so obvious, especially since a significant portion of the lecture hall was comprised precisely of Azerbaijanis. 'What do you mean by "Who"?!!' Puzzled answers were heard, 'Azerbaijanis are Azerbaijanis'. 'We are Caucasian Albanians', said one person. In the general choir of voices, I spoke up and said that 'Azerbaijanis are the descents of Oghuz Turks, who migrated to this territory in the Seljuk era in the eleventh century.' To my surprise, Professor Korenberg's reaction was harsh. He immediately ceased the discussion and addressed the lecture hall, firmly saying, 'What you have heard right now is the manifestation of the Pan-Turkist view on the history of Azerbaijan. Azerbaijanis are an ancient and indigenous people whose roots are deeply entwined with the history of this land. You are the descendents of many ancient peoples and tribes who inhabited this territory from time immemorial.' A significant section of the class was satisfied with such a flattering characterisation of their people that a professor with the surname 'Korenberg' had given. As to me, to be honest, I was a bit concerned by these discomfiting words. Even though the Stalinist era had passed – a time when the word 'Pan-Turkism' had cost the lives of thousands and the better part of the Azerbaijani intelligentsia had been annihilated by this standard accusation – this label could still be detrimental to one's career and 'good name' even in the early 1980s. All the more alarming was the fact that in every institution in the USSR, including universities, the First Special Department, which was under the KGB and controlled the 'political-ideological atmosphere of the collective', still existed. Fortunately for me, either these words did not exit the walls of the lecture hall or did not appear to be worthy of attention by those individuals who could have made such decisions.

Still, in this particular case, I was convinced that the manipulation of Azerbaijani ethnic history, which had been carried out between the 1930s and the 1950s, bore not so much of a scientific character as a political underlying motive with far-reaching political aims. Several decades after the formation of the official concept of the history of the Azerbaijani people, even I, a young student, received my share of political 'accusation' because I manifested a thought contradictory to this approach.

Soon after independence in 1991, Azerbaijani researchers were for the first time able to discuss freely the political and ethnic history of the country. Particularly fierce debates flared up on the pages of the press and in academic books concerning the issue of the people's self-identification and their language. Crushed in the Soviet period by repression and persecution, Turkic self-consciousness expressed itself with a firm, booming voice in the first years of independence. The following statement from the press of the

early 1990s is a typical expression of this sort of sentiment: ‘By depriving us of our title “Turks”, they deprived us of our national history as well ... If we accept the word “Azerbaijani” as our national title, according to this logic, though it is ridiculous, we would have to accept that we are just a fifty-three-year-old nation with no history, roots, or character; a nation whose recognition began in 1938. That is the bitter result of our Turkic title being sacrificing for the title of “Azerbaijani”, which actually indicates no more than a geographical meaning’ (Bakhishov 1991).

Contributing to these debates was the position of the Popular Front, which came to power in 1992. Despite decades-long Soviet propaganda, the Popular Front declared that ‘Turkic’, not ‘Azerbaijani’, was the state language of Azerbaijan. However, the old official concept of history managed to survive, mostly on the grounds that it had been used for decades and numerous academics had undertaken solid scholarly research that had been published within this paradigm. However, under Heydar Aliiev, the previous name of the state language (‘Azerbaijani’) has been restored following long discussions and consultations between intellectuals and researchers, the majority of whom were the followers of such older historical concepts. Soon after these academic exchanges, a seven-volume academic *History of Azerbaijan* was issued to comply with the previously established paradigm (Maqsudov 1998–2003).

It was the restoration of political independence of the country that gave impetus to a re-interpretation of Azerbaijan’s history. Together with works written in an ‘anti-colonial’ manner, there appeared collective works on the general history of the republic. Some of them tried to revise the fundamental principles of the official paradigm, including sovereignty. Again, it was largely the researchers at the universities, not in the Academy of Sciences, who took the lead. In 1994, a book on the general history of Azerbaijan was published, rejecting all the achievements of the historical science regarding the ancient period (Buniyatov and Yusifov 1994). Specifically, the Turkic component in the Near East, and in Azerbaijan in particular, became ‘older’ by several millennia. Accordingly, changes were made in the subsequent ethno-political history of Azerbaijan. A basic work on the general history of Azerbaijan from ancient times to the 1870s was published in 1996 (Aliyarli 1996). In Aliyarli’s commentary, he wrote that ‘the work attempts to create an alternative interpretation of the historical development of Azerbaijan to comply with new scientific categories and rejects dogmatic falsifications’ (Aliyarli 1996). Despite bold experimentation with ethnic history and the introduction of new elements into research methods, the authors themselves were ensnared by the traditional paradigm.

Nevertheless, the idea of the re-interpretation of Azerbaijan's history remains topical. Some researchers, mainly from university circles, are openly dissatisfied with the results achieved and the experience accumulated. An article by G. Gasanov, entitled 'The Problem of Azerbaijani History Re-Interpretation', notes:

Owing to historical circumstances, some aspects of our history have been falsified and misinterpreted. As a result, Azerbaijan's image in the world historiography is preconceived. It was a preconception, and one-sided methods of research in the Azerbaijani historiography of the Soviet period that led to misjudgments and delusions. In my view, incorrect methods have been applied and a defective history of statehood and ethnic genesis was advocated. It was the lack of generally recognised methods of historical analysis that mislead Azerbaijani historiography. As a result, it fell prey to the imperial ambitions of tsarist Russia and the USSR and contiguous countries as its successors (Gasanov 2003: 286).

Further, the author discusses at length the large-scale revision of Azerbaijani history: its methods, and strategic issues of ethnic history and statehood, and periodisation. Touching upon the problem of statehood, the author points out that 'the political history of Azerbaijan cannot be explained by means of assessments we apply in our historiography, that is, the history of different states with incoherent ethno-political genetics' (Gasanov 2003: 289). Thus, a new generation of researchers is sure to continue their efforts to revise decades-long concepts of destiny by ethno-history.

### **The ethno-historical principle**

The second approach is based on an ethno-historical principle that interprets the history of Azerbaijani statehood as an integral part of a common Turkic history. It is difficult to regard this approach as an elaborated concept of the history of sovereignty in Azerbaijani because its followers are reluctant to admit the existence of an independent and particular statehood with its distinctive features and with a structure-forming role in shaping the Azerbaijani people during the Middle Ages. In fact, a comprehensive study reflecting this approach to a full extent does not exist. Yet it does appear to a certain degree in the works of some Turkish academics. Of interest is Z. V. Togan's *Introduction to All-Turkic History*, which classifies medieval states in the territory of Azerbaijan as universally Turkic-Mongol or Turkic-Oghuz in compliance with categories of this ethno-historical approach (Togan 1979). Togan gives territorial descriptions along geographical lines only. Of the same view is F. Sümer in his famous work, *The Role of Anatolian Turks in Shaping the Safavid State* (Sümer 1972).

These two authors' approach to history was to use broad brush-strokes. Therefore, they did not concentrate on local issues, and, more specifically, did not consider the role of the states within the territory of Azerbaijan during the population's ethnic consolidation nor the changes in the dynamics of ethno-identification. To be fair, both Z. V. Togan and F. Sümer do consider these issues in some articles, though, not in their central research (Togan 1946: 91–118; Sümer 1957: 429–47).

The above-mentioned works came as a response to the established tradition of Western oriental studies. The latter regards the Mongol and Turkic states in the territories of Azerbaijan and Iran within the limits of the continuous succession of Persian statehood. A testimony to such Persian-centrist views in Western oriental studies is the firm conviction that the Safavid state marked the rebirth of the Persian 'national spirit' (Hinz 1936; Browne 1953: 3–4, 12–15; Boyle 1975: 633–58). Over the past few decades, researchers have revised this point of view stating that the Turkic element played a key role in shaping these states. Contributing to this revision were the works of the above-mentioned authors.

It should be noted that against the background of these two confronting theories – 'Iranian' and 'Turanian' – the issue of Azerbaijan had improperly been interpreted merely as a 'local phenomenon'. The Azerbaijani historiography of the Soviet period considered it important, as the saying went, 'to repulse bourgeois falsifiers of the medieval history'. When criticising Iranian and Western authors who presented the history of Azerbaijan as an integral part of Persian history, Azerbaijani historians also criticised the works of the Turkish researchers who advocated an ethno-historical approach to the history of Azerbaijan. One example is an article by O. Efendiev, a well-known Azerbaijani expert on the history of Safavids (Efendiev 1979: 133–8). Efendiev criticised F. Sümer's monograph for failing to recognise the 'Azerbaijani nature' of the Safavid state and for presenting the history of Azerbaijan in the reviewed period during this period as a continuation of Anatolian Turkic history: 'For example, F. Sümer divides Turks by their place of residence – 'Turks of Anatolia', 'Turks of Iran', 'Turks of the Caspian'. For him, there are not an Azerbaijani people with their own language, there are only 'Turks of Iran' (Efendiev 1979: 138). Efendiev's critique of the ethno-historical principle is particularly important in revealing its insufficiencies pertaining to the distinction between Turkic ethnic groups.

At the same time, the works of these authors played a role in developing Azerbaijani historiography and are referred to when creating world history textbooks. As distinguished from the Soviet period, the history

of ancient and medieval Turkic states of Central Asia and the Near East rank high in these texts.

### **The ethno-territorial principle**

Within this third principle both the territorial factor and ethnic component of sovereignty are of proportional value. In this respect, analyses of the historical process of statehood development within the territory of Azerbaijan and of the role of the Turkic element as an ethnic substrate for the shaping of the Azerbaijani people are of particular importance. By maintaining that Turkic tribes sporadically penetrated into the territory of Azerbaijan in ancient times, researchers are, nevertheless, inclined to believe that the genesis of the Azerbaijani Turkic people and the related formation of Azerbaijani statehood go back to the Seljuk epoch in the eleventh century CE. This view found its expression to a certain degree in the works of some prominent Orientalists, for instance, V. Bartol'd and Z. Bunyatov (Bartol'd 1963: 651–772; Bunyatov 1978).

Despite the scientific validity of the principle, it is not widely prevalent in Azerbaijan. In the Soviet period, followers of the territorial principle disapproved of the very idea of ethnic dispersion in Azerbaijan's history. Meanwhile, of crucial importance is the notion of historical unity and continuity of Azerbaijani statehood throughout millennia, despite ethno-political changes in these territories. For this reason, ancient Manna of the ninth century BCE, or Christian Albania of the sixth century CE might be regarded as stages in Azerbaijani statehood, just as would the Turkic-Muslim states of Aqqoyunlu or early Safavids in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

Some followers of this trend jealously defend the idea of the Turkic ethnic make-up of the Azerbaijani people and its culture. To their thinking, the linguistic Turkisation of Azerbaijan does not necessarily mean inherent changes in the ethnic component, since the Azerbaijani people had formed a cultural ethnic community long before its adoption of the Turkic language. In their view, the Turkic nomads were too few in number relative to the local population to influence the formation of an ethnic substrate. The followers of this concept hold that, for this reason, the Turks were assimilated by the local population. In doing so, the local population adopted the Turkic language. It is obvious that this concept is illogical from a scientific point of view, yet it is still being advocated by many researchers in Azerbaijan.

On the other hand, their eternal opponents, followers of the so-called 'philological' approach to the history of Azerbaijan, also disagree with deriving Azerbaijan's history from the Seljuks. As has been noted above, drawing largely upon linguistic material and folklore data, they link the

ethno-political hegemony of the Turkic ethnos on the territory of Azerbaijan and some regions of the Near East to ancient times (Smith et al. 1998: 50). For example, Q. Kazimov, the author of *The History of Azerbaijani Language*, considers 'the proof of the Turkic presence in the Near East in the third to first millennia BCE to be the great scientific achievement of the last decades' (Kazimov 2003: 6). With reference to the works of several historians (Y. Yusifov, G. Geybullayev), he concludes that 'the aboriginal population of Azerbaijan was Turkic-speaking' (Kazimov 2003: 6). In accordance with such notions, the Azerbaijani people, with their Turkic ethno-cultural specificity, had thus been shaped long before the Seljuks' influx in the eleventh century; the Seljuks merely contributed to the final formation of the Oghuz ethnic identity of Azerbaijanis. Hence, these scholars regard the previous history of Azerbaijani statehood to be of Turkic origin. According to this logic, the majority of states that existed in these territories must have had a Turkic hue – for instance, the Media or Scythian state, since the ancient population of Azerbaijan was of Turkic origin (Alibeyzade 1998: 11, 280). There is no need to note that this view is emotionally charged and far from having a solid scientific background.

Thus, the question of a chronological starting point for Azerbaijani statehood remains a subject of debate. Further complicating the case are current territorial claims, the Armenian–Azerbaijani war, the loss of Karabakh and related lands – all of these create serious psychological traumas for the present generation of Azerbaijanis. Today, this issue is of paramount importance. Public opinion in Azerbaijan assumes that it would be politically incorrect (at the very least) to trace back signs of statehood only as far as the Seljuks, such a late period of history, when other regional neighbours have made a tradition of celebrating the 'alleged' thousandth anniversaries of their states and capitals.

It is interesting that this 'controversial' view of history was first expressed in Azerbaijan at the beginning of the twentieth century, a period that was as interspersed with conflicts and rivalries as today. However, it was not expressed by a historian, but by a poet of classical Azerbaijani literature, M. A. Sabir. Today, those who are under the spell of the fashionable search for 'the national idea' in Azerbaijan should go back and apply Sabir's legacy, for it was traditionally poets, not historians, who were the custodians and exponents of collective memory in Azerbaijan. Besides, the image of the statesman in the history of Azerbaijan is inseparably linked with the image of the poet. It is sufficient to recall the names of rulers such as Qadi Burhanaddin (fourteenth century), Jahanshah Qaraqoyunlu (fifteenth century) and Shah Ismail Safavi (sixteenth century), as classic authors of



medieval Azerbaijani literature and the Vizier of the Karabakh Khanate, Vagif, as the greatest Azerbaijani poet of the eighteenth century.



Plate 5.1. Sabir.

It is astonishing that with a mere traditional religious education and no special historical training, Sabir succeeded in embracing the historical milestones of Azerbaijani statehood in his short poem. Note that no comprehensive work on the history of Azerbaijan appeared in the country in the reviewed period. Sabir's poem, 'Fakhriyye' or 'We are the Turanians' (Sabir 1980: 92–3) was a satirical imitation of the well-known patriotic work by Turkish poet Namık Kemal, 'We are the Ottomans'. It would be appropriate to recall that the Azerbaijani intellectuals of the early twentieth century were swept up with the ideas of Turkic identity, history and culture. However, often half-baked intellectualism and amateurishness lingered behind the romanticism of growing nationalism. The laborious task of educating the masses was substituted for idle talk and useless arrogance concentrating on the greatness of Turkic history. In his poem, Sabir

admonished the lackadaisical sentiments of the greater portion of Azerbaijani intellectuals with his sarcastic depiction of the alternative side of Turkic historical grandeur – the destructive internecine wars, the disregard for the destinies of the nation, the betrayal and fratricide:

We are the Turanians, faithful followers of our ancestors.

We are a burden on our native people (Sabir 1980: 92).

Sabir ironically exposes the tragic side of the greatness of Turkic history in this way. Speaking on behalf of the ‘Turanians’, the poet makes his historical conclusions comply with the history of Azerbaijani statehood. He retraces all the major stages of this history. It would be interesting to take the periods of history that Sabir gives in his poem, and fill them with academic evidence and content. Following Sabir’s logic, the historical stages of Azerbaijani statehood would be as follows.

### ***The Seljuk period***

At the outset, Sabir presents an unpleasant ethno-psychological archetype of his people and elaborates on how this archetype has behaved through each period of Azerbaijani statehood. But what is important is that he begins with the Seljuks, namely with Melikshah, a powerful sultan of the eleventh century. As is known, the Seljuks succeeded in changing the ethno-political image of the Near Eastern world and thus paved the way for century-long hegemony of the Turkic element in the region. This epoch saw the formation of the state of the Azerbaijani Atabeks, which in my view may be regarded as the historical starting point of Azerbaijani statehood. Under the Atabeks, the territorial borders of Azerbaijan for the first time merged with the dominating Turkic ethnic component. Deserving attention is the fact that the word ‘Azerbaijan’ was mentioned for the first time in the name of the state. A fragment of the ruined Seljuk Empire, the state of the Atabeks, turned into a powerful political entity of the Muslim world in the twelfth century. Under the Atabeks, Azerbaijan became a pre-eminent centre and several mighty states and empires were thus established around it throughout the centuries, from Ilkhanides to Safavids.

### ***The Mongol period***

Further on in his poem, Sabir refers to the war against the crusaders, complaining of the disloyalty of those who declined to support Jalaladdin Khorezmshah and thus indirectly assisted the Mongols in conquering the country. Meanwhile, the heathen Mongols managed to destroy mosques and madrasas. Thus, Sabir points out that ‘we are not only a burden on our people’, but also ‘a burden on our belief’ (Sabir 1980: 92). Leaving aside his

poetic expressions, we should admit to the historical truth of his evaluations. Indeed, in 1219 the army of Genghis Khan conquered Khorezm, and Jalaladdin, who escaped the Mongols, seized power in Azerbaijan. In his effort to resist the Mongols jointly with the neighbouring Muslim ruler, Jalaladdin lost his life in the war against the Seljuks of Anatolia. In 1239, the Mongols finally conquered Azerbaijan. During the first years of the occupation, the country indeed suffered major destruction.

However, with the formation of the Mongol state of the Ilkhanides in the mid-thirteenth century, with its centre in Azerbaijan and capitals in Maragha and Tabriz, the situation changed for the better, and a period of economic and cultural prosperity followed. In general, the role of the Mongol era in the history of ethno-political development of Azerbaijan has not yet been studied properly. Basically, the one-sided negative evaluation of the Mongol period is due to the influence of Russian historiography, which traditionally laid an emphasis on unmasking the so-called 'Mongol-Tatar yoke'. But an undeniable fact is that, under the Mongols, the Turkic ethnic element living in the territory of Azerbaijan predominated. The very emergence and expansion of classical Azerbaijani Turkic literature dates back to this period. Note that the Ilkhanides themselves were assimilated quickly and became part of the Turkic ethno-cultural environment of Azerbaijan. Also, traditions of the Turkic-Mongol state in the Near East increasingly intensified under the Mongols. Standards of customary law of Turks and Mongols, the *Töre* and the *Yasa*, were applied in Azerbaijan in subsequent centuries as well. It was the religious pluralism in the Mongol period that paved the way for dissidence in Islam and more extensive dissemination of heterodox trends. Note that the ideological embryo of the future Shiite state of Safavids – the Ardebil Safavid order in Azerbaijan – emerged during the Ilkhanide period. To retrace the historical development of Azerbaijani statehood, however, it is essential to thrash out this issue more fully.

### ***The Turkman period***

Further in the poem, Sabir expresses distress concerning the division of a united people into two hostile camps in the war between the Central Asian conqueror, Timur, and the Ottoman Sultan, Bayazid. This war led to the destruction of the 'nation'. This assessment of an all-Turkic history was prevalent and found its parallel in many literary and historical works, especially among the authors of the so-called 'Turanian' trend; for instance, in the works of the famous Azerbaijani dramatist Huseyn Cavid. At the same time, in the narrow sense of the word, this applies to the history of Azerbaijan as well. As is known, the ruler of north-eastern Azerbaijan,

Shirvanshah Ibrahim I, who was declared the historical hero of Azerbaijan in Soviet historiography, was loyal to Timur. His troops joined Timur in combat against the Ottoman Empire. At the same time, Qara Yusuf, head of the Confederation of Turkman tribes, Qaraqoyunlu, was an enemy of Timur. Note that Ibrahim I and Qara Yusuf were rivals in an attempt to consolidate their own power over the entire territory of Azerbaijan. After Timur's death, Qara Yusuf attained his goal; he ousted Shirvanshah and founded the new state of Qaraqoyunlu with Tabriz as its capital in 1410. Sabir was correct in maintaining that 'we were an arrow and the target at the same time' (Sabir 1980: 92).

Nevertheless, the short reign of Timur proved to be a crucial stage in the history of Azerbaijan. In the early fifteenth century Turkic-Oghuz (Turkman) dynasties came to power again in the form of Qaraqoyunlu and Aqqoyunlu states. This period is of particular importance in the history of Azerbaijani statehood. Sabir stresses the bloody consequences of the rule of these dynasties, mutual enmity and wars lasting many decades:

We slaughtered each other so much that we got tired of killing.

Yet, we kept on killing, being tired (Sabir 1980: 93).

Nevertheless, Azerbaijani statehood was consolidated during these internal wars. Small principalities of the Qaraqoyunlu and Aqqoyunlu came to life in Eastern Anatolia, but became formally acknowledged states only after they moved to Azerbaijan and established Tabriz as their capital. In the same period, Azerbaijani Turkmans dissociated themselves from the common Turkic ethnic environment and thus identified their interests with the political borders of Azerbaijan and contiguous areas. In so doing, Azerbaijani Turkmans opposed other Turkic-Muslim states – the Ottoman Empire to the west and the Timurids to the east. It is no mere coincidence that medieval sources of this period mention the representatives of the Turkman dynasties as 'rulers of Azerbaijan' and 'Azerbaijani shahs' (Evliya Çelebi 1314 (1898): 135, 162). In an effort to establish their legitimacy, these dynasties appealed to Oghuz ethnic values and genealogical myths of the 'Oghuz-name'. The legislative activities of the rulers of these states relied upon Turkic-Mongol traditions rather than Iranian-Islamic statehood. For example, the legislative codes of Uzun Hasan were called '*Yasa*' like the heathen, non-Islamic traditions of Genghis Khan. Likewise, the Azerbaijani Turkic language and literature flourished during these dynasties.

### *The Savafid period*

The next of phase of the history of Azerbaijani statehood, following Sabir's logic, would be the Safavid state. The poet again expresses distress, but in this case it is directed towards Islam and its division into two dominant sects

(Sunnism and Shiism), which brought so many misfortunes to the nation, especially in the form of religious wars between the Ottoman Sultan Selim and the Safavid Shah Ismail. Indeed, in the early sixteenth century Shah Ismail, leader of the Safavid order in Ardebil, backed by his followers from the bellicose Turkic tribes of *qizilbash*es, dethroned the dynasty of Aqqoyunlu in Azerbaijan and declared a new state with its capital in Tabriz. Shah Ismail declared Shiism the official religion, and victimised adherents of Sunnism. Thereafter, the wars between the Safavid state and the Ottoman Empire followed, lasting more than a hundred years.

The first Safavids continued the traditions of the previous Turkic states within the territory of Azerbaijan and relied, first of all, on the military and political might of the Azerbaijani Turkic population. Azerbaijani Turkic was the language of the court and army, and even of diplomatic correspondence. Classic and folk literatures in this language were well developed and circulated widely. Despite all its negative consequences, the firm Shiite political stance of the Safavids, which instigated confrontation with the Ottomans in the west and the Uzbeks in the east contributed to ethnic consolidation of Azerbaijani Turks and ultimate ethnic disunity between the Turks of Anatolia and Azerbaijan. These wars resulted in great devastation and economic decline in Azerbaijan. Under Shah Abbas, the capital of the state moved to the central part of Iran. The Safavid state gradually took on a more recognisably Persian political formation.

### ***The Khanates period***

A landmark in the history of the entire Near East was the reign of Nadir Shah from the Turkic tribe of Afshar in the 1730s and 1740s. Of interest is the fact that prior to the Soviet epoch, in the search for a historical hero, Azerbaijani national literature had repeatedly appealed to Nadir Shah's character as a great statesman. An eloquent testimony to this fact is N. Narimanov's drama *Nadir Shah*, published in 1899 in Baku. Sabir also reaffirms positive aspects of this remarkable ruler, who tried to save his people from the appalling consequences of the religious split and the Sunnite–Shiite wars. However, the people, Sabir concedes, proved to be true to their convictions, not beliefs, and confirmed that 'we are a burden on our religion' (Sabir 1980: 93). Indeed, this extraordinary man came to power after the collapse of the Safavids thanks to his political abilities and military talent and his contribution to the patriotic wars against foreign invaders – Afghans, Russians and Ottomans. Relying upon the ancient Turkic-Mongol traditions of statehood, he was announced Shah of Iran at the congress (*Qurultay*) convened in 1736 in the Mughan steppe of Azerbaijan. To put an end to religious enmity and wars with Turkey, Nadir Shah suggested to the

Ottoman Sultan that they should jointly reform Islam, which was indeed a revolutionary suggestion for its time. Yet, he faced the conservatism and inertness of the Muslim clergy.

Nadir Shah was perfidiously done away with and his intentions remained unrealised. The assassination of Nadir Shah was followed by centrifugal tendencies that led to a new stage in the history of Azerbaijani statehood. In the period after Shah Abbas, the position of the Azerbaijani Turkic military-political elite in the state administrative system appreciably weakened. Ruling circles primarily represented the interests of the Persian bureaucracy and the Shiite clergy. For this reason, the formation of independent and semi-independent Azerbaijani khanates after Nadir Shah's death may be regarded as an important step towards the development of Azerbaijani statehood. In the mid-eighteenth century, Karabakh, Ganja, Quba, Sheki and other khanates estranged themselves from the central power and behaved as autonomous state formations. Likewise, independent relations with the Ottoman Empire, Russia, rulers of North Caucasus and Georgia were designed to reaffirm their status as independent states.

It was the Russian invasion of the Caucasus early in the nineteenth century that radically changed this situation, resulting in the collapse of the Azerbaijani khanates. Yet, this period of the khanates also left historical traces. Azerbaijani folk literature mentions 'the glorious times of independent khans' even after a century of Russian colonial rule, as in the heroism of Cavad Khan, ruler of Ganja, who lost his life in the struggle against Russian troops.

### **The national-civic principle (1918–1920): By way of conclusion**

Sabir died in 1911, several years before the disintegration of the Russian Empire and formation of the Azerbaijan Republic in 1918. This poet, who deeply loved his people and was therefore merciless towards the negative aspects of their lives, probably would have found much to criticise harshly about this period as well. But the important point is that this first democratic republic, which existed for just two years before falling victim to the Red Army, became a new stage in the history of Azerbaijani statehood. One of the founders of this republic, M. E. Rasulzade, expressed its meaning as follows: 'It is the first republic in the entire Islamic world. At the same time it is a Turkic state' (Rasulzade 1923: 8).

Thus, the next phase of Azerbaijani statehood relies upon the national-civic principle, based on the idea of the nation-state as a product of the French Revolution and Western nationalism. This wave reached the Caucasus in the early twentieth century. Hence, by this final principle, the formation of the first Azerbaijan Republic in 1918 is the real starting point in

the history of Azerbaijani statehood. While much has been said on the Soviet twentieth century in the South Caucasus from the point of Sovietology, this phase of statehood has been hardly explored or analysed by local historians, now working with newly opened archives. We anticipate that fresh research will soon give us a much fuller picture of the struggles and compromises over sovereignty throughout this increasingly nationalist period.

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## ***Chapter 6***

# **Mythologising the Remote Past for Political Purposes in the North Caucasus**

Murtazali Gadjiev, Philip L. Kohl, and Rabadan G. Magomedov

The concept of the remote past as underwriting contemporary ideologies or bolstering the constructions of collective national identities is today well recognised (for example, Kohl and Fawcett 1995; Diaz-Andreu and Champion 1996; Kohl 1998; Meskell 1998; Biehl, Gramsch and Marciniak 2002; Gadjiev, Kuznetsov and Chechenov 2006; Kohl, Kozelsky and Ben-Yehuda 2007). While many have strained to best define the makings of a nation, our own irreverent and somewhat regretful sense is that a nationality or nation can be best understood as a group united by a common dislike of its neighbours and by a shared mistake about its ancestry. We therefore take as our focus here the consciously manipulated and mistaken conceptions of different groups' historical roots and the politically determined quest for them throughout the North Caucasus since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. We are all used to seeing how such rewritings of the past operate, relying on claims of cultural, if not biological, superiority; priority of occupation of some parcel of land; maximal definition of one's homeland; denigration of the achievements or land claims of one's neighbours; and even the denial of the earlier presence or accomplishments of other peoples in an area claimed as one's own. The specific forms such claims take vary from place to place and the intensity to which they are adhered also varies depending upon the immediate social and political context.

Understandably, many often simply ignore these accounts, preferring to engage only solid works of rigorous scholarship built on years of training and dialogue. Yet the recent experience of the Caucasus, like many other areas, demonstrates that there is a heavy price to pay for overlooking the rising popularity of loosely assembled, politically driven work done misleadingly in the name of science. These are indeed new Caucasus paradigms in the making. In this chapter we focus on the epidemic of such politicised interpretations of the remote past which accompanied the collapse of the Soviet Union, works that have continued to flourish throughout the

Caucasus ever since. It should be emphasised at the outset that such politicised reconstructions can be observed throughout the former USSR and are very common among Russian publicists and propagandists in search of a mythical maximally defined ‘Aryan’ (that is, proto-Russian) homeland. One broadly popular account even extends the ethnogenesis of the ancient Rus or later Russians back into Upper Palaeolithic times (Petukhov 2000), fuelling the competition among non-Russians for even earlier or more glorious ancestors.

The beautiful but conflicted region of the Caucasus is arguably most acutely afflicted with contested and highly problematic interpretations of the past due to its relatively long historical consciousness, its inherent ethnic and linguistic diversity, and, most tellingly, the number and variety of ethno-administrative units established by the Soviet state, several of which have been redefined and fought over during post-Soviet times. This chapter principally discusses examples from the North Caucasus since this area is less constrained by historical evidence and since the manipulations of the past in Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan are better known in the West than their counterparts on the other side of the Great Caucasus Range (Shnirelman 2001).

Two additional points must be mentioned here. First, attraction to history and the determination of one’s distant ancestors comprise an integral part of the world-views of almost all Caucasian peoples, as reflected in the high esteem accorded all specialists engaged in historical reconstructions. This deep concern with history predates Soviet times. At least from the late nineteenth century, history in the Caucasus can be viewed as a contested field in which it is not difficult to observe the clash of national interests and prejudices.<sup>1</sup> This already existing concern was exacerbated during Soviet times as a result of Soviet nationality policy and has continued to intensify over the last 15 years. Secondly, our earliest historical sources already mention the linguistic and ethnic diversity for which the Caucasus is renowned, but this evidence and the archaeological record also reveal a general sharing of features within this diversity that define the Caucasus as a separate, well-demarcated cultural region. Diversity within unity is manifest from at least the time of the Early Bronze Age Kura-Araxes culture-historical community of the late fourth and early third millennia BCE onwards. Ironically, the multi-ethnic diversity tolerated and promoted by ancient Caucasian states has been replaced by the aspirant ethnic exclusivity

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<sup>1</sup> See for example the exchanges between Georgian and Armenian scholars, as found in I. G. Chavchavadze’s 1902 article: ‘Armianskie uchenye i “vopoiushchie kamni”’ and Kh. A. Vermishiev’s pointed response ‘Materialy dlia istorii gruzino-armianskikh otnoshenii’, published in 1904.

of modern ones. This chapter explores how this negative tendency advanced in Soviet times and how it continues to flourish today.

### **Archaeological knowledge in Soviet times**

Francine Hirsch's recently published book, *Empire of Nations: Ethnographic Knowledge and the Making of the Soviet Union* (2005), focuses on the role ethnographers played in the formation of the USSR, particularly the way ethnographic knowledge was used to establish what became the 53 ethno-administrative units set in the quadripartite hierarchy of 15 Soviet Socialist Republics, 20 Autonomous Republics, 8 Autonomous Provinces, and 10 Autonomous Regions. Following Benedict Anderson's discussion of censuses, maps and museums in his *Imagined Communities* (1983), she documents how ethnographic knowledge was instrumental in demarcating the borders of these ethnically based units, in devising censuses and counting the numbers of different accepted ethnic groups, and in establishing ethnographic museums where the 'traditional' customs and material expressions of different, officially recognised ethnic groups could be publicly exhibited.

Her book begins by describing the 'paradigm shift' in Soviet studies that followed in the wake of the collapse of the USSR – in terms both of Western scholarship and Russians' study of themselves. Suddenly the focus was less on the centralised totalitarian state, where all decisions emanated from Moscow, and more on the contradictory goals of Soviet nationality policy that reinforced collective national identities and led to the dissolution of the state along the lines formed by the 15 Soviet Socialist Republics. According to Hirsch, the Soviet Union was both a 'maker' and 'breaker' of nations. It emerged as a federal state divided by the ethnically administered units it had created and represented a unique form of empire, determined to bring all the peoples within it up to an advanced social level postulated by Marxist ideology. It thus reinforced and sometimes even created different peoples' sense of themselves, their identities.

As we know, this carefully constructed edifice eventually collapsed. A *sovetskii narod* never really materialised or, at least, did not do so to the extent that the state had triumphantly predicted. The contradictions inherent in Soviet nationality policy could not be overcome: constant reinforcement of one's ethnic identity through passports, censuses and ethnically distinguished territorial units cut against and undermined the concept of a modern, advanced and progressive Soviet people. When the state went belly up, it did so along the administrative lines that it had itself created.

What role did the memory of the remote past play in this process of state dissolution along national lines? What was the role and significance of

Soviet archaeology and allied disciplines, especially that of historical linguistics? Were they in any way roughly analogous to those of Soviet ethnography, as argued by Hirsch? How were selective remembrances of the past used to fuel the disputes and occasional violent conflicts that developed during and in the wake of the collapse of the Soviet state? Answers to such questions still cannot be satisfactorily provided. Here our aims must be more modest: to describe selectively examples of politicised pasts and their common or recurrent features; analyse their deficiencies in terms of accepted practices of historiography; and highlight their very troublesome political implications.

Archaeology was considered an historical science in Soviet times; accordingly, it played an important role in the documentation of cultural evolution and the successive emergence and collapse of distinctive socio-economic formations through at least feudal times when the historical record became paramount. Unlike ethnography, archaeology was not co-opted initially by the nascent Soviet state and began only to transform itself during the early 1930s, first by adopting an international or evolutionary Marxist perspective and even by abandoning temporarily the enshrined Three Age system in favour of a precocious social evolutionary archaeology culminating in the origin of the family, private property and the state. This adoption of an officially sanctioned, somewhat vulgar form of Marxism continued to characterise certain archaeological projects throughout Soviet times (e.g. Fedorov 1951; Mongait 1959). But this 'official' Marxist archaeology was soon undercut by the glorification of national origins, the ethnogenesis of specific peoples that began to structure archaeological research, first into the origins of the Russians and early Slavs and then of everyone else, a process – as V. Shnirelman (1995) has documented – that was well under way by the late 1930s when war clouds were gathering and the German threat seemed all too imminent.

Soon the concept of archaeological culture, which had been extensively utilised earlier in Russian archaeology, was back in vogue, and, as in Germany and elsewhere, such cultures were unproblematically identified as ancestral to contemporary ethnic or national cultures. These spatial distributions had political consequences: 'homelands' could be demarcated that were always drawn up maximally to the benefit of the group in question. The determination of ethnogenesis became one of the central tasks of Soviet archaeology (cf. Chernykh 1995; Shnirelman 1995). Ironically, the effect of this transformation was to have every ethnicity/nationality alike – Russian and non-Russian – engaged in this ethno-genetic mandate or search for its origins. The ethnos was conceived principally in biological, not cultural, terms. Different ethnoses had their

distinct beginnings (or 'births'), and different peoples wanted to determine when they first came into being and what they could authentically claim as their original homeland. Competition over the remote past was fuelled by the ethnogenetic imperative, and this task was intimately tied to the very structure of the Soviet multi-ethnic federal state (Suny 1993; Tishkov 1997). It was an easy and logical step to transform the precisely defined borders of these units into the national territory or homeland of the eponymous ethnos. This process, in turn, could be legitimised through the selective ethnic interpretation of the archaeological record, reifying the political unit by according it great antiquity. In the Soviet context, the concept of ethnogenesis was tied to a primordialist or essentialist conception of the ethnos. Once initially formed, the ethnic group possessed nearly all its defining characteristics, and it was the task of the archaeologist to document this record of continuous development and hallowed antiquity, justifying attachment or control over its maximally defined homeland (e.g. the discussion of the ethnogenesis of the Georgians in Melikishvili and Lordkipanidze 1989: 30–4, 180–91).

Thus, Soviet archaeology was characterised by two contradictory features – perhaps directly analogous to the inherently contradictory features of Soviet nationality policy: (1) an officially sanctioned universal evolutionary Marxism (which was sometimes merely paid lip service to and at other times sincerely believed in, including by some local non-Russian political elites); and (2) a search for hallowed national origins, a search usually made at the expense of one's neighbours. This latter feature was also fervently adhered to by nationalist intellectuals who became more and more visible and politically active during Gorbachev's period of *glasnost* and *perestroika*. The role of intellectuals, particularly those with training in historical disciplines (such as archaeology, ethnology, folklore, oriental studies and comparative philology), in the outbreak of ethnic conflicts and separatist political movements that emerged in the late 1980s and continued into the 1990s is well recognised (Chernykh 1995). This role will be apparent in our examples of distorted ancient histories from the North Caucasus.

### **Popular myths of the remote past in the Caucasus**

These then are some of the distinctive features of the Caucasus that facilitate the myth-making enterprise: a long historical consciousness and a deep respect for one's ancestors and things that happened a long time ago; an incredible ethnic and linguistic diversity, itself obviously a product of complicated processes of the fusing and fissioning of cultures over an extended period of time; and an extremely complex, ethnically based

political geography that was created by the Soviet state to accommodate this diversity. The actual dates of the first historical references to specific peoples in the Caucasus (such as, for example, the Armenians or the Chechens) vary greatly, and this disparity itself fuels competition over the past. For whatever reasons, myth-makers may lay false ancestral claims to areas extending far beyond, for example, ‘historic Armenia’.<sup>2</sup> But while unequivocal historical records mention an Armenian presence in the Caucasus from at least the sixth century BCE, others, in order to compete, see themselves as having to claim an indigenous status based on dubious linguistic/ethnic identifications with no longer extant peoples mentioned in still earlier historical accounts. Such destructive competition distorts what is actually known and results in the proliferation of certain myths that occur over and over again. We briefly list a few of the most common ones:

- (1) Myths of autochthonous development and primordial homeland – the attempt to document the most ancient history of a specific people and show its indigenous roots extending over a territory typically far beyond where it currently resides, often, indeed, extending ‘from sea to sea’ (the Caspian, Black and Mediterranean Seas are all claimed).
- (2) Myths of famous ancestors – the demonstration of direct, ethnically pure genetic links to some famous ancient people that is typically associated with an early complex, ideally literate state, a connection that ‘legitimizes, as it were, the groups’ aspirations for the attainment of statehood in the present time’ (Shnirelman 2000: 22-23). Perhaps most frequently, linguistically distinct peoples of the North Caucasus are identified with the Sumerians.
- (3) Myths of the ethnic family and unity – the assertion that the territory of a specific group was a region of ethnic formation not only for itself, but for related peoples, some of whom settled elsewhere, but all of whom remained ethnically and linguistically unified and formed a great, complex, but related cultural-historical community.
- (4) Myths of inveterate enemies – the belief that the group initially formed and sustains itself by perpetual conflict with sworn foreign foes.

Such myths flourished in the politically unstable and ideologically uncertain conditions that accompanied the collapse of the Soviet Union. They both reflected and fuelled these developments, and, sadly, their presence is still worryingly noticeable today. We illustrate their destructive tendencies by

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<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Anonymous, *Istoricheskaia spravka* (1992), an enigmatic document possibly concocted by non-Armenians to incite anti-Armenian sentiments.

examining the myths surrounding three groups from the North Caucasus: (1) Lezgis; (2) Turkic speakers; and (3) Chechens.

### **Lezgis: Appropriating the history of Caucasian Albania for contemporary state-building purposes**

*Perestroika* and the subsequent disintegration of the USSR were accompanied by an intensification of socio-economic difficulties and ethno-political tensions, including a wave of ethnic national movements demanding self-determination and sovereignty. In multi-ethnic Dagestan – the small north-eastern Caucasian Republic inhabited by more than 30 different indigenous peoples – roughly ten such mono-national movements emerged. One of them was the Lezgi National Movement or *Sadval* ('Unity'), which was formed in July 1990 and registered in May 1992. The main task outlined in *Sadval*'s program was the reunion of all Lezgis, a people who had been divided in Soviet times between Russia (principally in southern Dagestan) and north-eastern Azerbaijan. *Sadval* also called for the establishment of the independent state of Lezgistan. One pervasive nationalist strategy that they adopted involved manipulation of the historical record. An item in *Sadval*'s official program stated: 'The history of the Lezgis requires objective research and interpretations without ideological and nationalistic violence' (Programma 1995: 536). In response to this appeal, Professor G. A. Abduragimov, a leader of *Sadval* and Doctor of Physics and Mathematics, published two large studies: *Caucasian Albania–Lezgistan: History and Modernity* (1995) and *Lezgis and the Ancient Civilizations of the Near East: History, Myths, and Stories* (1998; co-authored with his daughter D. G. Abduragimova).

If, in the first book, Abduragimov tries to prove a direct genetic connection of modern Lezgis with the ancient Caucasian Albanians as based on the so-called *Albanian Book* (a modern forgery per Gadjeiev 2007), in the second study the authors 'prove' Lezgis' historical relationship with several famous ancient peoples: Sumerians, Hurrians and Urartians. It should be noted here that while Hurrian and Urartian are related languages, the former being documented in the second millennium BCE and the latter in 800–700 BCE, neither is related to Sumerian which was spoken in southern Mesopotamian in 4000–3000 BCE. The establishment of genetic connections with great ancestors and with great civilisations of antiquity consequently leads to the claim of glorious cultural (especially writing) and political (presence of ancient state) achievements.

Abduragimov maintains that his books are scientific studies based on the materials compiled by historians, archaeologists, linguists and other



specialists and embody the scientific method (Abduragimov 2000). The use of citations and references to the opinions of well-known, professional scholars frequently accompanies such works to give them a certain credibility or appearance of scientific acceptance, although such references appear in a different light when taken out of their appropriate historical context. Most strikingly, the historical-linguistic ‘treasures’ of the Abduragimovs are juxtaposed among numerous, well-established findings of other investigators that are completely correct and based on the current level of accepted standards of history and linguistics.

In the course of such manipulations, the authors of *Lezgis and the Ancient Civilizations* reach the following fundamental conclusion: ‘Our investigations have shown that the Sumerians had a direct genetic tie to the Lezgis’ (Abduragimov and Abduragimova 1998: 48). The Abduragimovs observe that ‘this central conclusion has been reached on the basis of the analysis of linguistic, historical, archaeological, and folkloristic data’ (p. 48). In other words, the authors are claiming to manifest, as it were, the knowledge and methods of four academic disciplines by assuming the roles of linguist, historian, archaeologist and folklorist. At first glance, the discoveries made by them seem to be based on a very broad encyclopaedic knowledge, revealing deep erudition in four academic disciplines. Properly attired in scientific robes, these studies seem attractive to the unsuspecting reader – and sometimes even specialists jump at their bait. For example, a historian reading such a work may believe that the author is incorrect in his historical reconstructions, but could imagine that their linguistic and other assertions are persuasive. The linguist or folklorist, conversely, may take the linguistic or folkloristic arguments to be false, but may perceive the historical arguments as sufficiently weighty. In fact, if one digs a little deeper, then the looseness of the Abduragimovs’ work becomes more evident. What matters most in this case is the wide circulation of their works across the public sphere, from international library collections to their regular appearances in the popular press.

Characteristic of the Abduragimovs’ methods is their substitution of established ethnic and linguistic designations by incorrect terms. Confidently striding through the centuries and through the peoples, they introduce new ethnonyms such as ‘Gutian-Sumerian-Hurrian-Urartian-Albanians (Lezgis)’, ‘Proto-Lezgi Gutians’, ‘the Gutian-Sumerian-Albanian-Lezgi people’, ‘Hurrian-Lezgis’, ‘Lezgi-speaking-Hurrians’, ‘Lezgi-speaking Gutians’, ‘Lezgi-speaking Sumerians’ and so forth – all of which are meant each time to demonstrate to the unprepared reader the direct genetic tie linking these peoples. They subordinate and change the term ‘Eastern Caucasian’ or ‘Nakh-Dagestani languages’ to ‘Lezgi-Nakh’ or ‘Nakh group of languages

based on Lezgi-speaking Hurrians (Uartians)' (p. 96) to achieve this same goal and to demonstrate the imaginary and exclusive role of the ancient Lezgis in cultural-historical and ethno-linguistic processes. The Kaitag(h)s, Dargins, Laks and Avars 'either emerged from the Lezgis or borrowed their language and culture in the process of their mutual merging or "resemblance" as they developed their productive and economic cultural-historical community' (p. 97). The absurdity of these assertions is obvious to the historian or linguist, but they are intended instead for a broader readership not conversant in the nuances of history and linguistics. There is not a single word about other Dagestani peoples, such as the Tabasarans, Rutuli, Tsakhuri, Aguli, Udins and others, whose languages form part of the Lezgi group of languages. It is obvious that our authors simply consider all these peoples as Lezgis. Here again it should be noted that Sumerian is not directly related to any known language; the linguistic affiliations of the Gutians, who are recorded as living in the Zagros mountains of Luristan east of central Mesopotamia (or Akkade) in the second half of the third millennium BCE, are not clear (Gragg 1995: 2162); and while the general connection of Hurrian and Uartian to the *family* of languages of the north-eastern Caucasus (or Nakh-Dagestani languages) has been cautiously advanced by serious linguists (e.g. D'iakonov and Starostin 1988), such a tie cannot be identified as principally or exclusively with the Lezgis, who are only one of numerous peoples in the Nakh-Dagestani family of languages. The Abduragimovs' invented terminology unwarrantedly places Lezgi as the mother language for this entire family of languages.

The Abduragimovs make their own contribution to archaeological terminology: the Kura-Araxes culture is renamed the 'culture of the Gutian-Hurrian-Uartians; that is, the culture of Lezgi-speaking peoples' (p. 96). The ethnic identification of the Kura-Araxes culture is a very complex problem about which specialists sometimes express quite contradictory opinions and suggestions, including the proposition that the bearers of this culture were the original Dagestan-Nakh people. Our revisionist historians have decided once and for all to resolve this problem and cut the 'Gordian knot.'

So easily do the Abduragimovs answer difficult questions and problems of ethnic developments. This facility is evident from the following passage in which, having cited a series of authorities, they conclude:

The Gutians (Utii) in southern Mesopotamia in the 5<sup>th</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> millennium BC received a new name – the Sumerians; the Gutians (Utii) in northeastern Mesopotamia in the 4<sup>th</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> millennia were renamed the Hurrians; in the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 1<sup>st</sup> millennia the Lezgi-speaking peoples settled on the Armenian plateau near Lake Van and received

the new designation Urartian; and in the state of Caucasian Albania—the people were named Alpans. It is interesting to observe that in the state of Caucasian Albania (4<sup>th</sup> century BC to 7<sup>th</sup> century AD the names Alpans and Udins (Gutians) were synonyms; in the 4<sup>th</sup> century AD these people received a new designation – Lezgis (Abduragimov and Abduragimov 1998: 95–6).

In such a fashion, from the depths of centuries past, the ethno-genetic footbridge is crossed to the present day and direct genetic continuity is established simply by ascertaining the successive renaming of the same people. Such ‘conclusions’ are grossly simplified and far-fetched; they distort historical facts and cannot be sustained by even elementary criticism. Suffice it to say that the Albanians and Udins did not receive the new designation of Lezgis, a name that is well known at the beginning of our era as ‘Legis’ or ‘Lekis’ (later ‘Legis’, ‘Lakzis’ and ‘Lezgis’). Such terms do not refer to the same peoples, but to related peoples. This differentiation is maintained throughout the entire history of the Caucasian Albanian state (for more detail and references, see Gadjiev, Kuznetsov and Chechenov 2006: 120–1, fn. 218).

Besides the myths and legends of the Sumerians and Hurrians (about Enlil, Enkidu, Inanna, Ishtar and Gilgamesh), the authors make use of a great number of still seemingly extant legends and tales of former times, referring to the Achaemenids, Caucasian Albanians, Alexander the Great, Darius, various Albanian kings, Roman commanders, and the like. The authors recount these tales to create for the reader the illusion of the preservation of an indisputable ‘historical memory’ in the deepest layers of the folklore of the Lezgi people, a memory that proceeds from the Albanians through the established ‘direct genetic link’, a connection that in turn ties the Lezgis to the Sumerians, Gutians, Hurrians and even the Pelasgians – a people(s) recorded by ancient Greeks as occupying parts of the Greek mainland, Crete and the Aegean prior to the arrival of the Greeks; other than not speaking Greek, the linguistic affiliations of the Pelasgians are unknown.<sup>3</sup> They pursue these contemporary myths, as well as those derived from ancient Near Eastern mythologies (the unprepared reader not differentiating between the newly devised and real legends and traditions of antiquity) not only to achieve their stated goals, but also to instil the idea of the consolidation of the people, its former power and fame, its highly developed spiritual culture, and its love of freedom and other positive qualities, such as, in fact, are possessed by every people.

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<sup>3</sup> Cf. Wikipedia entry on Pelasgians with references, at <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pelasgians>. Last accessed February 2007.

Then Iskender [that is, Alexander the Great] came to the Pelasgians [according to the Abduragimovs, these are ‘Albanians, who occupied the Balkans more than three thousand years ago’] and cried: ‘Pelasgians, You are the descendants of the Hurrians and Gutians, once mighty peoples who occupied half the world and endowed its peoples with a high culture. Your brothers [that is, Albanians and Urartians, according to the Abduragimovs] now find themselves in a state of bondage among the Persians. Fight to free your kinsmen from slavery (pp. 299–302).

Such are the patriotic contrived legends and traditions of our contemporary fairy-tale tellers. As Shnirelman (2000: 15) has noted:

[Such contemporary ethnocentric and ethno-political myths] direct one’s attention to the past and to the future, but completely or almost completely ignore the present, a time that appears dim and void of any internal sense. Invoking the past, the mythmakers actually construct a scheme that is ahistorical, representing a people as eternal and unchanging. In particular, they announce traits of the ‘national character’ or ‘national spirit’ that invariably place the given people above all other peoples. Thus, the contemporary period is perceived as a time of collapse and moral disintegration, but heroic and great traditions are linked to a remote past. Such an approach promotes the florescence of an irrational, mystical conception of history according to which the heroic past should ensure the people a glorious future. In sum, the ethnocentric myth creates the basis for an ideology of force and functions to incite the energy of the masses to fulfill some ethnopolitical goal.

Such a concrete goal was declared in the official program of the *Sadval* movement: the creation of an independent Lezgi state.

### **Fantasies of Turkish history and culture (or Jesus, son of Tengri-Khan)**

Since the early 1990s, many new histories have been created for various Turkic-speaking peoples (Karachais, Balkars, Kumyks, and so forth) throughout the North Caucasus. They typically incorporate the most popular mythic themes (of autochthonous origins, primordial homelands, glorious ancestors, and inveterate enemies). In most respects, they closely resemble the Abduragimovs’ accounts of Lezgians. In this section we analyse the writings of Murad Adzhiev (or Adzhi), the founder and director of the ‘St. George’ international charitable foundation. He is one of the best known of the new Turkic myth-makers, and his popularity extends far beyond the

North Caucasus, encompassing most areas of the former Soviet Union with significant Turkic-speaking populations. Adzhi considers himself a representative of the so-called ‘unofficial science’, though he presents himself as a ‘Professor’ (a title bestowed on him by Baku State University for his widely read book, published in 1994, *Wormwood of Polovetskii Field* (50,000 copies of which were published in Moscow)).

In a series of book-length studies (Adzhi 1994, 1997, 1998) and numerous articles published in the central state and local presses, Adzhi asserts that Christianity, with all its attributes, liturgies and dogmas is derived from the religion of the ancient Turks. Ancient Turks constitute a composite category for Adzhi, who does not distinguish Huns, Khazars, Kipchaks, Uzbeks and other Turkic peoples from each other. We dwell briefly here on one cornerstone to his theory: his surprising identification of St. George the Victorious with St. Gregory the Illuminator.

According to Adzhi, George-Gregory became acquainted with the religion of Turk-Kipchaks at the beginning of the fourth century CE, accepted it, and, just like ancient Tengrians, adopted ‘baptism by water and submitted to the Cross as a sign ... of obedience to God [Tengri]’ (1997: 54–5, 80). George-Gregory then began the process of proselytising the knowledge of the divine truth among Europeans; that is, converting them to Tengrianity (or Christianity). Adzhi’s assertions were well timed to the perceived discovery of what the Russian popular press hailed as St. George’s tomb in Dagestan, a find that was sensationalised by the mass media (for more detail, see Gadjiev, Kuznetsov and Chechenov 2006: 90–2: fn. 173).

What matters most in this context is the fact that Adzhi’s writings have acquired such an international resonance (pp. 95–6, fnn. 174–6).<sup>4</sup> The great martyr St. George the Victorious is well known and revered by many peoples in many lands, and the new conception of the origins of Christianity (as well as his ‘investigations’ on the ethnogenesis and ethnic history of Turkic, Slavic, Caucasian and other peoples) has been widely publicised in nationalist circles. This directly facilitates the worsening of inter-ethnic and political relations among various peoples. Consider Adzhi’s simple statement that: ‘Attila and his tribesmen brought Christianity to Europe’ (1994: 215; see also 1997: 17; 1998: 147). Or ‘The Bulgars, Serbs, Croats, Czechs, Hungarians, Austrians, Bavarians, Saxons, the inhabitants of

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<sup>4</sup> Adzhi’s books, which are published in huge editions, are in great demand in the Republics of the Russian Federation (Tatarstan, Bashkortostan) and the newly independent states of the former USSR (Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan). Certain circles in Turkey also support him. For example, a Dr. Kamil Güner published a favourable review (*Emel* magazine, Ankara, 1996) of one of M. Adzhi’s book and noted the deep symbolic connection of Adzhi’s book with similar works, such as *Oğuzlar* by F. Sümer (Istanbul, 1992), *Kıpçaklar* by F. Kırzioğlu (Ankara, 1992) and *Az i la* by O. Suleymenov (Alma-Ata, 1975).

Northern Italy, Germany, Spain, Swiss, Eastern France, England, Northern Europe... America and Australia – all are aware of their Kipchakian [that is, Turkic] past, and, yes indeed many of their ancestors were considered great horsemen, spoke Turkish, and called themselves Kipchaks' (1998: 11).

Adzhi bases his discoveries about the young Gregory (not George!) principally on the information provided by the Armenian historian Faust Byzantine who wrote in the fifth century AD. In his *History of Armenia* Faust Byzantine described the preaching activities of young Gregory, the first priest of Caucasian Albania, in southern Dagestan near Derbent (Gadjiev, Kuznetsov, and Chechnov 2006: 90–1). Gregory was murdered when he spread Christianity among the Maskuts, who spoke an Iranian language (not Kipchak/Turkic) and lived along the coastal plain south of Derbent. We do not know exactly when he died but sometime in the 330s, soon after the death of Trdat, King of Armenia (Gadjiev, Kuznetsov, and Chechnov 2006). According to Faust, the Maskuts at first encountered and accepted Christianity from Gregory. But when they began to realise what acceptance of its laws entailed, their king Sanesan changed his mind and listened to his troops. They seized Gregory, tied him to the back of a wild horse, and drove the horse through a field. Later a chapel was built at the place of his death roughly 20 km south of Derbent near the village of Beliji, and this site became one of the holiest sanctuaries of Christian Gregorians of the eastern Caucasus.

For Adzhi the names Gregory (Grigoris) and George, as well as their derivatives, are identical and he connects the events described by Faust Byzantine with George. This identification is simply unsustainable. The names have totally different etymologies. But he is neither a historian nor a linguist: He finds fanciful Turkish etymological origins for a number of Christian terms, such as the Russian *Bog* (God), *altar*, and *ikon*, as well as glosses on the English and Latin roots for *klir/klirik* (clerics), *Psalter*, *Catholicos*, *amen*, *monastery*, *abbot*, *heresy*, *nimbus*, and others. He maintains that all such terms are Turkic in origin and were brought by the Tengrian Kipchaks into the Christian world (p. 92, fn. 173). In fact, St. Gregory and St. George had different origins and lived at different times, and both the Armenian Gregorian and Georgian Orthodox churches distinguish between them.

To proceed properly one must distinguish Gregory the Illuminator (*Lusavorich*, in Armenian; *Prosvetitel'* in Russian), the saint who brought Christianity to Armenia at the beginning of the fourth century from his grandson St. Gregory, the Illuminator of Caucasian Albania, who, as we have seen was killed sometime in the 330s south of Derbent when he was conducting missionary activities among the Maskuts. According to the

ancient authors, the body of St. Gregory, who was murdered by the Maskuts, was carried by his Christian followers to the Khaband district in the Amaras village ‘and there placed in a church near the cathedra on its northern side’ (Dasxuranci 1961: 23). In 1969 Azerbaijani archaeologist R. Geiushev discovered an ancient grave and a tombstone with an Armenian inscription during excavations at the Amaras Monastery (in Nagorno-Karabakh/Artsakh). The inscription read: ‘This is the tomb of Saint Gregory—a sensible man’ (Geiushev 1984: 34). Adzhi has offered nothing as credible to challenge this long-understood resting place.

Who then was the martyr St. George? According to Simeon Metaphrast’s *Stories* (*Kniga, nazivaemaia raem*, 2006) and ecclesiastical historical tradition, he came from a noble Cappadocian family and held a high military post. During the brutal persecutions of Christians at the time of the Emperor Diocletian (284–305), he resigned from his military position and became a teacher of Christianity. For his devotion to the faith of Christ and after suffering much torture, George was beheaded c. CE 303 in Nicomedia supposedly on the 23rd of April, the day most commonly observed as St. George’s Day.<sup>5</sup> According to the ecclesiastical tradition, his head is buried in Rome in the cathedral named after him. The historical sources, in short, show that St. Gregory of Caucasian Albania and St. George of Cappadocia are united only by their halo of sanctity and by their martyrdom. There is nothing else they share in common: not their names, their origins, their places of work, nor the places where they were martyred. St. George was even killed before the birth of St. Gregory of Caucasian Albania. There is no tomb of St. George in Dagestan, contrary to media reports, nor does Christianity spring from Turkish roots.

Adzhi asserts that St. George’s grave is in the village of Jalghan near Derbent, at the place of a medieval Muslim holy site (*pir* or *ziyyarat*, shrines found in many villages of Dagestan), which is respected by the local inhabitants (Gadjiev, Kuznetsov, and Chechenov 2006: 94–5, fnn. 174–5). Only the consonance of the toponym Jalghan and the name Jarghan (the Turkic version of the name George, according to Adzhi) provide the grounds to ‘find’ here the tomb of the Great Martyr, while, in fact, the etymology of the toponym Jalghan has local roots.

The inhabitants of the village of Jalghan, however, were very pleased with this discovery of ‘St. George’s tomb’. Numerous material benefits followed in the wake of Adzhi’s sensational discovery. The transformation of Jalghan into the second Mecca or Jerusalem signified the arrival of an improved water supply, an asphalt road, and gas. In Adzhi’s opinion, it is

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<sup>5</sup> Personal communication. ‘K sviatomu Georgiiu budut ezdit’ v Derbent’, *Novoe Delo*, no. 17, 25 April 1997.

essential to build here in the village an appropriate infrastructure for the pilgrims' reception; the tomb of the saint must become one of the centres of religious pilgrimage, and the creation of such a sacred centre ultimately will facilitate local economic development in Dagestan (cf. *Novoe Delo* (newspaper) no. 17, 25 April 1997).

Unfortunately, organisations and influential people such as the Prime Minister of Tatarstan, and the Counsellor of the President of Azerbaijan were among those who accepted the temptation and verified the 'discoveries' of M. Adzhi. In June 1997, the Deputy of the State Duma of the Russian Federation, V. Baiunov, wrote a letter to the Vice Prime Minister O. Sisuev 'to support the initiative of the International Charitable Fund "St. George" [for the establishment of] an organization of an All-Russian Cultural and Religious Center of "St. George" in Derbent' (V. Baiunov's official letter no. 172/7-110, 25 June 1997). Substantial financial investments and revenues for the International Charitable Fund 'St. George' were promised at least for the initial preparatory stages of this project. Thus the new theory of the origins of Christianity acquires its popularity.

### **Chechens: From mythical pasts to present horrors**

The current dramatic history of Chechnya has engendered a substantial number of accounts of the antiquity and glorious achievements of the Chechen nation, about their great role in world culture, and about their direct ethno-genetic relationship with different famous peoples of antiquity, including Sumerians, Etruscans, Hurrians, Urartians, and even Egyptians. Chechen intellectuals inspire such thoughts for their people, portraying them as exceptional and superior to neighbouring peoples. Together with other such propaganda, such as the Zionist plot against Chechens and Muslims or the primordial Chechen ownership of contiguous territories, these myths secure an ideological basis for their military uprising, their territorial claims, their right to self-determination and state sovereignty, and their rightful place in the contemporary world.

The Chechen writer S-Kh. M. Nunuev is one such well-known intellectual figure in today's Chechnya. He is a representative in the principal sector of economic security of the State Duma of the Russian Federation and a member of a group of peoples' diplomats under the auspices of the State Duma of the Russian Federation and the Parliament Assembly of the European Union. Nunuev's work is an open mix of fact and fiction, circulating between works he presents as novels and others are that presented as conventional histories. The point in both cases is how widely he is read, and how frequently he is cited. Nunuev penned the novelistic essay *Nakhi, proroki, sud'ba* [*Nakhi, Prophets, Fate*] (1996) throughout which are



sketched various historical excursions and references to scientific and pseudo-scientific works. It is noteworthy that the narrative in this fictional work takes place in a futuristic 2004 when the author presumed the existence of an independent Vainakh Republic of Nachkeria. The author sets in the mouths of his characters such phrases as ‘The Hurrian tribes of the Etruscans brought culture to Rome.... The Egyptian pharaohs were honoured to be related to our distant, primordial ancestral Hurrians. For example, the Egyptian queen Nefertiti is the great primordial grandmother of our present-day Vainakh beauties’ (1996: 218). Or ‘the Nakh peoples are the sole and closest descendants of the Hurrian-Urartians’ (p. 229). ‘Finally, one must realise that our ancestors the Hurrians built the first astronomical observatory on earth and that the Hurrian-Etruscans brought culture and civilisation to ancient Rome’ (p. 409). The famous Roman she-wolf is depicted on one of the pages of the book with the caption: ‘The proto-Nakhian (Etruscan) she-wolf nourished Romulus and Remus’ (p. 409).

In a subsequent work presented as a scholarly historical account, *Nakhi i sviashchennaia istoriia* [Nakhi and Holy History] (1998), he continues along the axiom that ‘the Hurrians = the Nakhi’. This book is not just an artistic literary production, but also a work with scientific pretensions and concrete socio-political objectives. The book begins with the articulation of a series of ‘truths’ among which, for example, are the following. ‘The prophet Ibrahim was, first of all, of Hurrian origin’ (1998: 7). ‘The ancestors of the Chechens and Ingush – the Hurrians – were present at the birth, by the grace of Allah the Most High (He who is holy and great) of the Holy Manuscript, at the birth of monotheistic spiritual religion’ (p. 8). ‘As is well known, the following messengers of Allah – Ismail, Isaac, Yusuf (peace be to him), and Muhammad – belong to the family of Ibrahim’ (p. 9).

The highest spiritual truths, treasures, and ideas, which were sent down by the Most High, initially appeared in the Sumerian, Hurrian, and Middle Eastern kingdoms from the Caucasus to Egypt, and later spread throughout the entire Near East, among the Jews, Arabs, and other peoples. The Chechens and the Ingush among all the peoples today living on earth are the most direct descendants of the Hurrians, miraculously surviving in the ravines of the Caucasus mountains and preserving to this day their physical anthropological form and intellectual, moral, and brilliant mental ability. Their statehood, writing, and historical continuity of generations were lost with a great amount of assimilation (pp. 9–10).

Nunuev writes that ‘these truths can help in the formation of a new national identity in new historical circumstances, serving as the basis for the birth of a new ideological concept for the Vainakhs – *the concept of a spiritual nation*’ (p. 10, italics added). Having determined the nationality of

the prophet Ibrahim, it then becomes possible to relate to the same lineage the prophets Ismail, Isaac, Yusuf and Muhammad (that is, all of them are also related to the Chechens), and the author then establishes a new social and historical status for the Chechens. God has made them a new chosen people with a world peace-making mission.

Nunuev asserts 'The promulgation of the scientific determination of the Hurrian origin of the great prophet Ibrahim (peace be unto him) will elicit unpleasant objections and protests from those peoples and forces who do not want to have doubt cast on their chosen status [referring to the Jews – our insertion]' (Nunuev 1998: 80) and advances the proposition of 'the new ideology of a spiritual nation'. He continues:

The Almighty never has permitted nor will permit that the descendants of the prophet Ibrahim (peace be unto him), lose their spirit, be conquered, or have outrages committed against them .... Recognizing that the prophet Ibrahim (peace be unto him) stood at the sources of three worldwide monotheistic religions: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam (in fact, just Islam, since both Judaism and Christianity are deviations from Islam), we Vainakhs ought to see our role as unifiers, reconcilers of ideologies, religions, and peoples. Our mission was determined historically: we – the nation are greater than all the victimizations and sufferings; geographically we are situated at the crossroads of the Islamic and Christian religions, of western and eastern culture; morally, no one has paid such an inestimable price for its freedom and independence as we have (p. 82).

The author's enthusiasm for his people, who have been exhausted by the wars, deportations and deprivations that they have experienced throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, is understandable. Nevertheless, there are no people who do not aspire to freedom, who are not proud and full of self-respect, and who do not endure during the course of their history wars, invasions, trials and sufferings. But why then create a new version of a people 'chosen by God', 'a new ideology of a spiritual nation' that is built on false conceptions and assertions, on conjectures and delusions? Among his answers to this question, Nunuev asserts, 'Having been established as a spiritual nation, it will be easy for us to discuss with world organizations the question of our status as a subject of international law' (1998: 83) [that is, on the question of our status as an independent state – our insertion]. To achieve this goal there is no reason to fabricate the false 'concept of a spiritual nation', to propose imaginary ethnic affiliation with the prophets. On the contrary, there are no people who do not possess spirituality even in circumstances of profound collapse and moral decline.

## **A requiem for ethnogenesis**

The works we have been exploring build on biological metaphors of relatedness, genetic connection and birth. As with almost all more mainstream nationalist and culturalist movements, the independent variables of biology, culture, and language are conflated, violating perhaps the most fundamental principle of ethnography. Recently, V. A. Tishkov (2003) has argued for ‘a requiem for the ethnos’, which is to say an abandonment of the view of cultures as primordially formed and stable from their distant origins. He proposes a different approach to the concept of a people – one that can and does change and benefit from its continuous interactions with its neighbours; and one that is not set or given but constantly transformed or ‘in the making’.

As the concept of ethnos deserves to be overhauled or discarded, so does the overused (but much beloved by mythmakers) concept of ethnogenesis. Here the biological metaphor is explicit, and the dangers of analysing cultural phenomena in biologically reductionist terms are omnipresent. As anthropologists have been arguing for many decades, another conceptual vocabulary is needed: cultures are not ‘born’ at some point in time. Rather, distinctive cultural forms emerge, typically containing elements from diverse sources, and manifest themselves for a while, as reflected dimly in the archaeological or linguistic record, before disappearing or transforming themselves into something new. They do not ‘die’ but exist in different forms or continue to influence the cultures that succeed them.

Scholars of the remote past – archaeologists and historical linguists, in particular – have to account not only for cultural transformations, but also for long-lived continuities in distinct cultural traditions, durable features that are often sustained or reinforced by literacy and written records. Reliable historical references to the Armenians date back at least to the sixth century BCE, though the concept of what being an Armenian means has continuously redefined itself over the last two and a half millennia (Kohl 1996). Biological evolution and cultural evolution describe different processes that proceed by different principles: natural selection is decisive in the former, while Lamarckian inheritance of acquired characteristics and borrowings and adoptions from others are dominant in the latter. As traditionally employed, the concept of ethnogenesis is misleading and potentially dangerous; it needs either to be re-conceptualised or abandoned for a more satisfactory alternative that does not conflate biology and culture. Such an alternative still needs to be devised.

Finally, as archaeologists we should note that our discipline is far less misused by the mythmakers than that of historical linguistics. The reasons

for this disparity are not totally clear. Possibly, archaeological cultures defined on the basis of mute material remains are inherently more ambiguous as to their ethnic affiliations than historical records that explicitly mention ancient peoples and, to some extent, record their languages. Archaeological data certainly is misused and interpreted in ways that cannot be proven (Kohl 1998). When archaeological cultures are defined on the basis of the similarity of material remains, the tendency is to equate them with specific peoples. The concept of an archaeological culture often can be inherently misleading in that it implies a correspondence between the archaeological *culture* and the *cultures* studied by ethnographers. In fact, the archaeological culture is often nothing more than a convenient device for grouping together similar looking assemblages of artifacts. The fit between it and the culture of the ethnographer is imprecise; we can never be certain that similar material remains relatively restricted in space and time signify a single or multiple groups. Similarly with different material remains. Are we dealing with two or more groups or the same group performing different activities? Ethnographers, of course, study living cultures and recognise that that group or people is a distinct cultural community that considers itself such and, to a great extent, is also considered such by its neighbours. There is no necessary *material* correlate to such reflection and consciousness. Self-recognition is archaeologically invisible, and, correspondingly, ethnicity and language cannot be determined in the absence of intelligible inscriptional evidence.

We necessarily are forced to return to historical records, multiple as they may be. The North Caucasus lies in the penumbra of the ancient Near East where early cuneiform sources extend back to the beginnings of the Bronze Age and mention diverse peoples who can easily be claimed as ancestors. Similarly, southeastern Europe lies in the shadow of the classical world, and Greek and Roman sources record different Iron Age barbarians (Scythians, Ilyrians, Dacians and so forth) who are there, as it were, to be identified as ancestors to Ukrainians, Albanians, Romanians or whomever. A superior Aryan race that originated in some mythical homeland is, of course, essentially a linguistic construct, even though various archaeological cultures in various parts of the Old World have been tortuously identified as Aryan (cf. examples in Kohl et al. 2007). German prehistory was strongly developed and used by the Nazis to maximally define an expansive Indo-Germanic *Urheimat* in the middle of Europe, but much more political use was made of the Aryans than the far from spectacular potsherds and dwellings characteristic of Bronze and Iron Age Europe. Even Hitler realised that the late prehistoric remains on German soil could not compare with those found further south in classical lands, but the mythical Aryans could be

romanticised as much as was politically desired (Arnold and Hassmann 1995). Thus, paradoxically, while archaeological data is concrete and tangible, it is largely opaque to ethnic identification; conversely, the reconstruction of extinct languages and their relations with other languages directly imply the existence of the speakers of those languages, specific peoples seemingly amenable to adoption as ancestors.

Most of the works that we have examined have postulated direct genetic connections between a specific ancient people recorded in historical texts and a contemporary people or aspirant nationality. Our writers appear as linguists proposing novel etymologies and ethnonyms and conflating language with culture. The connections are made to appear direct even though millennia have elapsed and even though the linguistic relatedness, if present at all, constitutes a general similarity, not permitting the identification of an historically mentioned ancient people with a specific contemporary people. The metaphor of a tree with a trunk and diverging branches is often used by historical linguists to trace relations within distinct families of languages: ancestral or proto-languages constitute the trunk and the later related languages within the family are the various branches of the tree. This concept too needs to be re-examined: similarities among languages may occur not only as a product of divergence (the branches of the tree), but also of convergence (becoming similar due to shared participation in larger economic and social processes). Linguistic developments too are also continuous and ongoing, not beginning at one point in time in some ancestral mythical homeland.

In short, there is much work to be done in the responsible reconstruction of the remote past. This chapter has attempted to perform the negative, though essential, task of identifying false and politically motivated historical works. Multiple perspectives may be salutary, but the links between these new histories and their violent entitlements are all too painful in an area that has already suffered more than its share of ethnic conflict. Responsible reconstructions must reflect the historical sources as objectively as possible. These new historical myths, which deliberately ignore or distort basic historiographic principles, are recipes for disaster and should be exposed for the dangerous fictions that they are.

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## ***Chapter 7***

# **Language Dreamers: Race and the Politics of Etymology in the Caucasus**

Rebecca Gould

The cleanness of tribes and nations ... is an idealistic fiction, the result of dominance by the class which has confiscated power. There can be no isolated culture, just as there can be no isolated race, and there are no languages which derive from race.

Nikolai Marr, Georgian philologist and linguist<sup>1</sup>

Perhaps the most famous attempt to link one language to another occurs in the *locus classicus* of Indo-European linguistics, William Jones' 1789 address to the Asiatic Society of Calcutta, in which he declared that 'the Sanskrit language ... is of a wonderful structure; more perfect than the Greek, more copious than the Latin and more exquisitely refined than either, yet bearing to both of them a stronger affinity, both in the roots of the verb and in the forms of grammar, than could possibly have been produced by accident'. This linkage is 'so strong, indeed, that no philologist could examine them all three, without believing them all to have sprung from some common source, which, perhaps, no longer exists' (Jones 1789). A historian of India has recently characterised Jones' discovery as the proposition 'that there was once a single, original language, from which all the languages ... descend' (Cohn 1996: 54). The significance of this claim for linguistic affiliation through genetic properties is that it is established scientifically: 'The establishment of membership in the language family [is] based on the comparison of formal features, displayed lexically, syntactically, morphologically and phonetically ... The end of the exercise [is] the reconstruction of the 'unrecorded languages of the past' (Cohn 1996: 54).

What does it mean to break down a speech code into elements which are then reassembled in terms of linguistic hierarchies? I am by no means qualified to comment on this subject in terms of the history of Indo-

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<sup>1</sup> Mikhankova, V. A. (1948).

European linguistics, but I do know of one place high in the Caucasus mountains where this sort of thinking has penetrated. It is here, and not only in the academies of Europe and the offices of colonial administrators, that genetic affiliation (and its concomitant appeal to an ancient originary language from which all humanity descended) exerts a profound sway over particular intellectuals who see themselves as the leaders of their nation. I refer to the Pankisi Gorge in the Republic of Georgia, home of the Kists.

Kists are a group of Chechens who migrated from Chechnya (in the days when the border was not so impenetrable) in the mid to late nineteenth century. Their migration coincided with the defeat of Imam Shamil, and the incorporation of the North Caucasus into the Russian Empire. The language politics of the group I am studying is therefore that of an endangered minority. Seven thousand Kists are alive today, most of whom live in Pankisi, but the language itself has become so assimilated to Chechen (thanks to the recent wave of refugees during the 2000 bombing of Grozny) and Georgian, that Kist as a language is widely believed to be on the verge of extinction.

It is for this reason, I argue, that some of the leading intellectuals within the Kist community have turned to the technique of genetic affiliation, a method of historical reconstruction borrowed from Indo-European linguistics. Suleiman Gumashvili, the Kist intellectual who is the subject of this chapter, has undertaken to prove that in Chechen (or its more local variant, Kist) lies the origin of all the languages of humanity. His argument about Chechen is part of his overall goal of demonstrating the ancient lineage of the Vainakh people, as speakers of Chechen are called. In the case of Kists, the pressure to demonstrate ancientness coincides with the threat of extinction. I seek to demonstrate that these two moments are linked by more than coincidence.

‘Language dreamers’ is the term I use to describe the class of post-Soviet intellectuals who have undertaken to advance their ethnic group by demonstrating the ancient roots of the languages they speak. The present chapter deals with only one of them, but language dreamers are dispersed throughout the Caucasus. I have observed a similar rhetoric among Udi and Balkar, who are also endangered ethnic minorities.<sup>2</sup> But Suleiman

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<sup>2</sup> Mamuli Neshumashvili is the Udi I referred to. I made his acquaintance during the summer of 2005 in the village of Zinobiani, in Georgia, not far from the border with Dagestan. It is one of the three historic homes of the Udis, who used to rule the Caucasus until the tenth century. Neshumashvili has published *Dionysis’ Ghimili* (Dionysus Smile, 1999) which argues that Udi was the original language of humanity. The villagers of Zinobiani paid for the publication of this book, which was published in a print run of 1,000 copies. The Balkar I refer to is Zeitun Khamidovich Tolgurov, chair of the Department of Balkar Literature at Kabardino-Balkaria State University, and the most renowned living Balkar writer, who

Gumashvili has carried these ideas further than his Caucasian peers; he is an established writer and an intellectual with a breadth of erudition to which few of his competitors in the field of 'linguistic genesis' can lay claim. I have encountered them in the most unexpected contexts, in the most obscure settings, generally in villages rather than urban spaces, and almost always in private homes rather than public gatherings. Many commentators on the contemporary Caucasus have dismissed language dreamers as nationalists or simply madmen.

Rather than debate the veracity of language dreamers' scholarship, I ask here a separate set of questions that are easily lost in the drive to formulate canons of scholarly objectivity. What motives inform the discourse of language dreaming? What purpose is served by arguments about genetic affiliation? How do these 'madmen' emerge as inheritors and imitators of the very theories of linguistic nationalism that have been part of a systematic lack of recognition of their and other minority struggles around the world? By exploring the work of one 'language dreamer' in the Caucasus, my goal is to turn attention back upon accepted Euroamerican, Eurasian, and Middle Eastern scholarly conventions that themselves have often gone unquestioned. It very much seems to me that what is at stake is not only a struggle over the proper classification of historical and linguistic data, but the recognition of how deeply political these systems of classification have always been, and continue to be. Anthropology has long recognised that all societies have their own myths of preeminence, where the lines between myth and history are drawn most fiercely in times of upheaval.

It has recently been argued that even the most avowedly essentialist forms of knowledge are 'strategic' in the sense that they aim to produce particular kinds of effects.<sup>3</sup> I do not doubt that the particular knowledge-formation under examination here, which links language, race and nation, is fundamentally strategic in a way which holds for all those who espouse views on this subject, and who develop theories in service of those views.

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informed me that Balkar toponyms were to be found throughout the Caucasus, particularly in those places, such as the Argun River, that had been 'claimed' by the Chechens.

<sup>3</sup> On the subject of 'strategic essentialism', Spivak writes: 'a restorative genealogy cannot be undertaken without the strategic blindness that will entangle the genealogist in the chain' (1988: 207). In other words, a certain amount of essentialism – of which the presumption of a link between language and race is one example – is necessary for knowledge to produce its desired effect. More important than determining whether such essentialism is good or bad (since most strategies are value-neutral anyway when considered in purely formal terms) is a consideration of the politics which such knowledge entails. It does not, I think, require much argument to determine the kind of politics Jones' essentialism was employed to serve (whether or not it was intended to do so). But what kind of politics does Suleiman's appropriation seek to achieve? This is a more complicated question because Suleiman has two audiences: his fellow Kists, and an (imagined) world of Western academia.

My concern is to recognise both the strategies of writers such as William Jones, noted above, and Suleiman Gumashvili in the same context. Though the forms and the content of such knowledge are quite different, the goals they serve, and often even the strategies they employ, are the same.

A consideration of Suleiman's motivations brings under greater scrutiny the question of the relationship, in Suleiman's perspective, between language and ethnicity. Appiah (1992) intriguingly proposes that racialism is a 'cognitive rather than a moral problem' (p. 13), a form of 'false consciousness' (p. 14) enabled by an ideology which, like all ideologies, succeeds 'to the extent that it is invisible'. Race, in Appiah's precise formulation, is 'an attempt at a metonym for culture' which works 'at the price of biologizing ... ideology' (p. 45). In invoking race, then, I do not necessarily imply racism, insofar as it can also signify an organizing trope. The issue at hand is much more basic than racism as a form of moral discrimination; it is simply used here to mean the organisation of peoples into groups based on physical and linguistic characteristics, and the presumption of a continuity between past and present speakers of the same language. This kind of thinking is not necessarily good or bad, but it is the source of a particular kind of language ideology.

In the Caucasus, the groundwork for such thinking was laid by the 1860's generation of Georgian writers, such as Ilya Chavchavadze, the first generation of Georgians who received a university education in Russia as a matter of course (if they were wealthy enough, and even in many cases when they were not wealthy). Ilya's success within Russian society and with the Russian government was due in no small degree to his efforts to modernise the Georgian language by bringing it more closely in line with European orthographic canons. It is only during the Soviet era that the link between language and nation became a matter of explicitly articulated dogma in, for example, the 'catechisms' of Josef Stalin, in particular 'Marxism and Problems of Linguistics', published in the newspaper *Pravda* in 1950. But such categorisations as those built on by Stalin (and which Marr contested) were part of everyday nationalistic discourse from the very beginnings of Georgia's birth as a nation.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> This is in a sense a controversial presentation, given that Marr was widely known as the Stalinist linguist par excellence, until the attack on his work by Chikobava. But Marr's views on nationhood (as the epigraph to this chapter should indicate) were quite different from Stalin's view that 'A nation is a historically constituted, stable community of people, formed on the basis of a common language, territory, economic life, and psychological make-up manifested in a common culture' (1913).

### Suleiman Gumashvili, language dreamer

Suleiman Gumashvili is a resident of the village of Joqolo and a self-styled writer, linguist, politician, historian and critic. By his own account he is the most ‘creative’ member of the Kist intelligentsia. Until recently the leader (*khelkho* in Chechen, *tavmjdōmari* in Georgian) of Pankisi Gorge’s Council of Elders (*mekh-kxel* in Chechen, *ukhutsesta sabchos* in Georgian<sup>5</sup>), Suleiman is also distinguished from the other members of the intelligentsia by the fact that he is not a scholar in the traditional sense. Though he calls himself a ‘linguist, historian, critic, and sportsman, winner of gold medals in wrestling, soccer, and racing’, he is first and foremost, he says, a creative writer.

Suleiman is the author of several books of poetry. The book in which he takes most pride was published in Chechen in Grozny in 1994, and is full of poems dedicated to Chechnya’s heroes. The poems were subsequently translated by Suleiman and published in Georgian in Tbilisi in a print run of 3,000 copies in 2001. Suleiman publishes his poems regularly in journals such as the prominent *literaturuli sakartvelo* (Literary Georgia). Suleiman is also a prolific translator. He has translated the Georgian (Khevsur) poet Gabriel Jabushanuri, as well as Vazha Pshavela’s ‘Host and Guest’ and ‘Aluda Ketalaure’, into Chechen. He also translated into Chechen the Russian and Georgian texts which appeared in a trilingual book published by Tbilisi’s Caucasian House called *Malkh Nana Yu Sa* (the title is in Chechen and means literally: Sun, My Mother). He has published widely in the Chechen language press, in journals such as *Daimokh* (Homeland) and *Orga* (Chechen for the Argun River) during the late Soviet and post-Soviet pre-war period of the early 1990s. He is the only person ever to be a member of both the Georgian and the Chechen Writers’ Union.

Suleiman’s most ambitious project, however, concerns the resurrection of a lost Vainakh history by way of etymological analysis of words from the Georgian, Hebrew, Arabic, Russian and various ancient (Hurrian, Sumerian, Urartian, Akkadian) languages. The purpose behind these etymological reconstructions is to demonstrate the ancient origins of

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<sup>5</sup> According to most experts, Kist and Chechen are the same language, Kist being a dialect of Chechen. This is the scientific position, with which I concur, as Kist and Chechen are mutually intelligible. However, given Kists’ own attempts to trouble and perhaps exaggerate the boundaries between their language and Chechen, I am leaving the question of the difference between the two intentionally open, in the way that it is for most Kists, who do not employ scientific terminology such as ‘language’ and ‘dialect’ when they describe the language they speak, or who employ it intentionally strategic ways, to make arguments for or against national belonging. I believe it would be more accurate to see the boundaries between Kist and Chechen as ‘fuzzy’ in the sense used by Kaviraj (1995: 113).

the Vainakh language and to reveal it as the source for a host of other Semitic, Caucasian and Indo-European languages. His recent scholarly work attempts to show that Chechen was the spoken language of the population of Urartu, in the territory of present-day Armenia, including present-day eastern and south-eastern Anatolia and north-western Iran, and that it is the linguistic ancestor of contemporary Chechen/Kist Sumerian. One implication which follows from this is that Chechens are ethnically related to the former inhabitants of the Urartu valley, in other words, to an ethnic group associated in the Caucasian mind with Mesopotamian civilisation. After the collapse of Mesopotamian civilisation, according to this version (which is widely accepted by most Chechens, scholars and laymen), Chechens migrated north to the Caucasus mountains. They were, according to Suleiman, the original inhabitants not only of the North Caucasus but of the South Caucasus as well. Georgians only arrived much later, during the reign of Queen Tamar (1160–1213). Before then, they lived in Egypt where they were the slaves of Vainakhs.

Though his linguistic arguments obviously rest on shaky scholarly foundations, my broader interest in Suleiman's work stems from the fact that his scholarship stands as an important contribution to questions of local languages and literature in the Caucasus. His work on literary history is most notable; Suleiman's dissertation for the *kandidat nauk* degree (roughly similar to a PhD) is scheduled for publication by the Georgian Union of Writers. Completed in 1999, it is devoted to the issue of the influence of Vainakh traditions on the oeuvres of the Georgian writers Aleksandre Qazbegi and Vazha Pshavela. As the only substantial scholarly examination of Georgian-Vainakh literary influences available in any language, it is an important and original work of scholarship, which provided the occasion for my first acquaintance with him as a scholar.

Suleiman takes pride in the profligacy of his interests. In his frequent comparisons of himself with other members of the Kist intelligentsia, he points out to me that he is the only one among his peers who dreams big, who does not limit himself to the narrow spheres of linguistics, literature and history, but who considers all these scattered disciplines as a single unified whole. While other scholars distract themselves with narrow topics, neglecting to critically analyse their own material, Suleiman aims for the stars: his goal is to reconstruct the entirety of human history, and to win for the Vainakh people pride of place in this chronicle. When I pushed him for a title, he hesitated, and finally suggested *Nakh-Georgian Relations (nakh-kartuli urtiertobani)*.

I spent four months with Suleiman and his family in Pankisi during 2005 and 2006. My original goal was to advance both the Georgian and

Chechen language training I had been pursuing in Tbilisi, but with an ethnographic dimension that would suggest the relevance of Chechen language texts in the context of Kist life. As a result, my regularly structured conversations with Suleiman most often turned to etymology and history.

One evening, before we finished our day's work, Suleiman launched into a by now familiar critique of all his scholarly acquaintances who did not take him seriously. He criticised an article by a Georgian friend that argued that St. Nino, bringer of Christianity to the Georgians in the fourth century, lived in Pankisi. The argument was ridiculous, according to Suleiman. 'He wants to incorporate Pankisi into Georgian history', Suleiman complained. 'If he can prove that Nino passed through Pankisi that means that it's really the land of Georgians, not the land of Kists.'

Suleiman had his own reasons for being interested in St. Nino. 'She was from Cappodocia', he explained. 'Cappodocia is a Chechen word. If Nino came from an area with a Chechen toponym, then she must have been Chechen as well.' Unlike his Georgian colleague, Suleiman based his case for Nino's ethnic origins on language rather than history. For Suleiman, language *is* history; the story of humanity's migrations is inscribed into the etymology of words.

Then he asked me why his Georgian colleague was praised for his 'silliness' (sisulelebi), even as he, Suleiman, was denied his god-given right to broadcast his 'silliness' publicly. Behind this lies the question of what constitutes scholarly legitimacy. Judging by Suleiman's experience, it is clear that legitimacy has more to do with the extent to which a discourse is adopted than the internal cogency of the arguments made.

### **The power of small distinctions: Of dialects and languages**

Suleiman experiences the joy of expounding his theories most intensely while creating them. Proof, for Suleiman, is an analytical afterthought, irrelevant to the substance of his argument. His etymologies are performances, statements about the how he wishes Vainakhs to appear in history. His methodology consists of broadcasting his voice with his pen, creating a community through the act of speech and the infinitely delayed hope of publication. To achieve this end, a sympathetic audience is as important as the writer himself, and it is no accident therefore that Suleiman's theories can only truly be understood when they are experienced in performance. As his scholarly texts are as yet unpublished in any language, I attempt to reproduce some of Suleiman's performances here.

Suleiman meets many forms of reception. Some listeners (mostly Georgians) walk away with the conviction that they have spoken with a madman who is using linguistic theories towards spurious ends. Other



listeners, particularly if they are Chechen, and even more so if they are Kist, walk away feeling as though they have hooked into a discourse which stands a chance of withstanding the affronts which have assaulted the Vainakh people. Suleiman's theories tell a story not only about the oppression of one endangered ethnic group by a more powerful one; they speak no less eloquently about tensions within the Vainakh community, in which Kist, Ingush and Chechen are terms with precise political implications.

Even more important than what they reveal about Vainakh articulations of selfhood, Suleiman's etymologies concerning linguistic origins argue for the porousness of ethnicity itself, and of its problematic while at the same time deeply analogous relationship to language. (Lest I seem to be ignoring the realities within which Suleiman's ideas are embedded, I should acknowledge that Suleiman's ideas are significant not only for their philosophical consequences; the entire community of Kists in the Pankisi Gorge and particularly in his village of Joqolo has latched onto them, because they seem to provide a meaningful history of origins for a group which has been denied such a history.)

I understood Suleiman's view on the relationship between language and ethnicity best when I asked for his opinion of Nikolai Marr, a Soviet philologist (himself an ethnic minority, half-Georgian and half-Scottish, who wrote mostly in Russian) who spent much of his life trying to prove that the languages of the Caucasus belonged to the Japhetic language family, which formed the basis of all languages known to humanity. The Japhetic languages (a linguistic category first named by Leibniz in his *New Essays on Human Understanding* (*Nouveaux essais sur l'entendement humain*, 1704), and which Leibniz conceived in opposition to Aramaic), among which Marr included not only North Caucasian languages such as Chechen and Abkhaz, but also (contrary to Leibniz) Semitic languages such as Hebrew and Arabic, were according to this view, the best, the most important, and the most sacred languages in the world.

According to Marr, it was only European imperialism that prevented Japhetic languages from being acknowledged as the founding languages of humanity. In other words, while Marr drew deeply on Indo-European linguistics for its methodologies, the crucial difference between Marr and the Indo-Europeanists is that Marr displaced the primacy of the 'Indo-European' signifier to make room for previously cursed and derivative languages such as the Semitic family (denigrated by Renan (4: 1878) and others) and the ignored branch of Caucasian languages (which had not been so much despised as ignored by mainstream Indo-European linguistics). Suleiman sees himself as following in Marr's intellectual tradition.

‘He was a lucky man’, he told me in response to my query. ‘Marr had many admirers, many people to take care of him and make him famous. Even after his death, they wrote hagiographies. As for me, I have no one to honour me, no-one to make me great after I die. I tell my daughter: make me great, show the world what a miracle your father is. But she just laughs, like you’re laughing right now. So I have to do the job myself. I have to create my own greatness’.

Suleiman invents without shame because for him everything is invention, including the elaborate theories upon which more respectable scholars build their careers. As he knows that no-one else will do the job for him, he creates the fame himself. Suleiman’s love of contradicting himself appeared in stark relief during our discussion of whether Kist was a dialect of Chechen or a separate language. The differences between Kist and Chechen are limited to lexicon (bread for example is *bepig* in Chechen and *kordjum* in Kist, which borrows the Ossetian term) and verb conjugation (Kist conjugates the first person of ‘I go’ as ‘as voidas’, whereas the Chechen verb does not conjugate according to person at all).<sup>6</sup> Aside from differences in terms of conjugation, Kist and Chechen grammar and syntax are nearly identical. Every Chechen can understand every Kist and vice versa, and it is not for nothing that when Kists and Chechens refer to Chechen *in Chechen* they call it *vainmott* (with a nasalised, barely audible *n* in the middle), rather than *nokhchin mott* (Nokchi is the Chechen self-ethnonym) or *kistin mott*.<sup>7</sup>

*Vainmott* could be translated as ‘our language’, since *vai* is the first-person plural inclusive pronoun ‘we’ and *mott* means language. More saliently, *vainmott* refers to Vainakh, the ethnonym shared by Kists, Chechens, Ingush and Tsova-Tush. *Vainmott* thus stands both for the language itself, which can variously be called Chechen, Kist, Ingush or Tsova-Tush, as well as for whatever language it is that those who call themselves Vainakh speak, be they Kist, Ingush or Tsova-Tush. (The slippage in meaning is by no means a trivial matter of word mechanics. The

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<sup>6</sup> Scholars debate whether the first-person conjugation which is evident in Kist and in the neighbouring Vainakh Tsova-Tush language is due to the influence of Georgian or whether it marks an internal development within the language itself. It seems more likely that the first person ‘s’ ending on certain Kist and Tsova-Tush verbs marks a development within the language itself because the ‘s’ ending parallels the ergative form of the first-person pronoun I (as) rather than the Georgian first-person verb marker ‘v’. Thanks to Rostom Pareulidze and Bella Shavkhelishvili for sharing their insights on this issue.

<sup>7</sup> For more details, see Nichols 1994. Nichols’ characterisation is consistent with the rest of the literature on this subject, ‘Chechen has a number of dialects, which differ primarily in the presence or absence of umlaut ... the dialects are mutually intelligible, though not always with ease; communicating with speakers of the distinctive Kisti dialect of Georgia may take a day or two of practice for a northern lowland speaker hearing it for the first time’ (p. 3).

very fact that the term for the language itself and the term 'our language' are identical has specific implications for the Vainakh world-view, as well as for other peoples in analogous positions.<sup>8</sup>)

Suleiman knows these facts as well as anyone else; he has published and taught in both standard Chechen and the Kist dialect. That is why I believe it was out of sheer perversity that after Suleiman informed me that the famous Chechen linguist Aliroev had been his teacher when he studied Chechen in Grozny State University during the Soviet period, and I asked Suleiman for his opinion of his teacher's book *The Kist Dialect* (1969), he shot back angrily, 'I am a scholar of Kist, not of Chechen. Kist, in my scholarly-scientific view, is a language, not a dialect.'

I then asked whether Chechens and Kists had problems understanding each other. Presumably, if Chechen and Kist were indeed separate languages, speakers wouldn't be able to communicate with each other in their own separate languages; they would either have to use one language or the other or switch to a third, mutually comprehensible language, such as Russian. 'Chechens and Kists understand each other perfectly', Suleiman replied. 'There is no problem in mutual comprehension.'

Linguistic difference at the level of grammar, lexicon and syntax matters less here than the issue of cultural and political affiliation. Suleiman is acutely aware of the cultural prestige assigned to particular languages, and how this prestige is used to establish a hierarchy. Much work has been done on the relationship between the language a person speaks and the social class to which they belong. Yet how much do we know about the relationship between the language spoken by territorially defined groups and the political power granted to them on the basis of the prestige accorded to the language they speak? Access to one's own culture is itself predicated on the prestige accorded one's language. With Chechen, for example, if the language cannot be shown to be ancient, then Chechens are effectively denied a history. The argument for Chechens' right to culture must therefore take place via the discourse of genetic affiliation. Hence the need for Suleiman's (and not only

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<sup>8</sup> Consider, for example, the words of Ruth Benedict in *Patterns of Culture*, 'A great number of the tribal names in common use, Zuni, Dene, Kiowa ... are names by which primitive peoples know themselves, and are only their native terms for 'the human beings', that is, themselves' (1952 [1934]: 56). By contrast, ethnicity as a discourse is heavily invested in making distinctions, much more so than, for example, 'Vainakh', in which the first-person plural designates a group identity only later defined as 'ethnic'. In both Benedict's and my own examples, the perception of collective selfhood is quite distinct from what is implied by the term 'ethnicity'. In these examples (and, as we shall later see, Sheldon Pollock's findings with regard to premodern India) group identities, even when derived from territorial affiliation and language, are not essentialised as immutable categories. The non-Western category for collective subjectivity in all three cases seems less interested in establishing difference.

Suleiman's) attempts to demonstrate a genetic link between Chechen/Kist and Sumerian. (Apparently, both Chechen and Sumerian share the same word for 'mother': *nana*, and Kist bears the traces of Sumerian even more profoundly than Chechen does.)

The relationship between language as a scientific category and power is of course not transparent; it is not as though many people in positions of power openly endorse the racial hierarchies that have proved to be such useful organising tools for the phenomenon of linguistic diversity. But whether or not racism is openly embraced, it still is the case that thinking in terms of race as a category is an almost universally accepted way of perceiving the social world at present, and in most parts of the world.

Suleiman understands the importance of linguistic hierarchies and their relationship to race; this is why he has modified Vainakhness away from its indigenous meaning, and adapted it to the essentialising discourse of ethnicity. He has done this by borrowing (however inaccurately) from the methodologies of linguistics. Suleiman's etymologies are his way of reacting to the onslaught of political marginalisation, cultural assimilation and war. He knows that a language is never more powerful than when it can be shown to be ancient, and as the source for other genetic affiliations. The more persuasively Suleiman can frame Kists linguistically, the better their chances of survival. It is a time-honoured tradition pursued across the globe since, as Hegel once observed, history is the province of victors.

While Suleiman invents linguistic difference with regard to Chechen and Kist, he is extraordinarily sensitive to the power of national languages to subsume the less powerful ones, particularly when a plausible argument can be made for genetic affiliation. Unlike Chechen and Kist, Georgian and Mingrelian are not mutually intelligible, yet it has been argued by Georgians that the two languages are the same. A question I posed to one of Suleiman's guests provided the occasion for this comparison.

We had just finished eating dinner. As Suleiman's guest Said was himself a native of Pankisi, but had lived in Chechnya for so many years that he did not know Georgian, I thought he would have a good perspective on the relationship between Ingush and Chechen. It was a question I was curious about, but which Kists themselves could not help me to resolve, as they were more familiar with their own Vainakh dialect than with either Ingush or standard Chechen. So I asked Said to what extent Ingush and Chechen resembled each other, and whether they were different dialects of the same language or different languages in their own right. Suleiman listened to our conversation with interest as Said drew parallels with Georgian, Mingrelian and Svan. 'Every region in Georgia has its own dialect but they are all basically Georgian', he explained to me, unaware how much

he sounded like a Georgian nationalist. The likeness was of course purely accidental, but Suleiman was not pleased.

Suleiman interrupted his guest's train of thought, angered by Said's words, 'That's where you're wrong! Chechens and Ingush understand each other when they speak their own languages, but the average Georgian can't understand Mingrelian, and Svan is even more distant. We Vainakh don't need translators to speak with each other. It's Georgians who need translators to speak to Svans and Mingrelians.'

Suleiman then repeated the words which I recognised from multiple conversations with different Georgians, views which are articulated in often identical terms. The difference with Suleiman was that his citation of the clichéd formula that the Svans and the Mingrelians were at bottom ethnic Georgians had an unexpected twist:

If you tell a Svan or a Mingrelian that he isn't Georgian, he'll beat you up, but I say to all those Mingrelians: Why are you so offended? When Gamsakhurdia was President, the Georgian government screened several movies in Mingrelian on TV. I asked all my Georgian friends, just to provoke them, whether they understood the Mingrelian movies. 'No, not a word', said my friends. It was all a mystery to them. How can Mingrelians be Georgians if they speak a different language? They shouldn't be proud of calling themselves Georgians, they should be ashamed. The Mingrelians say that they speak Georgian as well as they speak Mingrelian. By those standards, we Kists might as well call ourselves Georgian. We Kists speak Georgian. We speak it even better than the Mingrelians. The Mingrelians aren't any more Georgian than we are. Their native language is Mingrelian, not Georgian, and that is what counts. Their first language determines their nationality, not their second language.

Thus, in spite of the dominant discourses from the media which claim to present timeless national truths concerning the transcendent status of the Georgian nation and people, Suleiman senses that taxonomies like ethnicities and languages are artificially constituted. He perceives these short-circuits and non-reflexive positionings within the discourse itself and reveals their flaws, while at the same time he uses these flaws to his advantage, to make his case for the Vainakh. Suleiman is therefore both inheritor to and transformer of the intellectual traditions which precede him, both those of Indo-European linguistics and its Ibero-Caucasian counterpart.<sup>9</sup> That the

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<sup>9</sup> On the differences between these two related traditions, as well as the divergences between Marr and Ibero-Caucasian linguistics, see Cherchi and Manning 2002. Kevin Tuite (personal communication) in particular urges that attention be paid to the differences between various

alliance between language and groups of speaker-populations has articulated itself differently in different places and times does not alter the consistency of the linkage made within these traditions between language and ethnicity. This is a discourse which Suleiman's work builds on, but which he also alters, simply by virtue of the marginalised context within which he elaborates his arguments.

Suleiman once remarked to me that the only substantive difference between Turkic Karachais and Ibero-Caucasian Kabardins (and, by implication, the Balkars from the Cherkess, whose languages and ethnic identities are analogous to the former) is the languages they speak. Many natives and scholars argue that there is no essential difference between the Karachai and the Balkar, on the one hand, and the Cherkess, Kabardin and other Adyge peoples on the other. Such distinctions are the result, according to the Balkars and Kabardins with whom I have spoken, of the divide-and-rule politics of the Soviet period. His argument for a certain degree of fluidity within categories which are themselves largely Soviet inventions is therefore not entirely revolutionary.

Suleiman's theory, however, went beyond arguing that Soviet distinctions needed to be collapsed. His point was that not only are the Karachai and the Balkars the same, but even all Turkic and the Ibero-Caucasian peoples of the North Caucasus are the same as well, if you remove the variable of language. Within this world, language equals difference, but the interesting twist is that this not used to prove any kind of indigeneity; the mark of language testifies to a history of migrations and mixing with other races. With the arrival of Turkic tribes to the Caucasus in the middle ages, some of the mountaineers 'converted' to the language of their masters, from whence were born the Karachai and Balkar languages, while other mountaineers remained steadfast and loyal – these were the ones who later came to be known by the ethnonyms Kabardin, Cherkess and Adyge.<sup>10</sup>

The implications of such an argument would be obvious to any native speaker of the languages in question: if ethnicity is a matter of history, then

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thinkers who contributed to Indo-European linguistics, rather than reducing all of them to a 'single narrative thesis'. On the other hand, the linkage between language and race (not by the linguists so much as by their interpreters) does seem to be a consistent theme in much literature on this subject. It makes more sense to see linguistics as responding to and in some cases resisting general social trends rather than as the unthinking handmaiden of colonial ideology. I do not want to be read as making an argument like this. I thank Kevin for bringing these issues to my attention.

<sup>10</sup> This theory is not so different from that of Levan Azmaiparashvili of the Chikobava Institute, who holds that, biologically, the Balkars are Ibero-Caucasian, and that they are only Turkic in the linguistic sense.

ethnicity cannot be said to exist in any absolute sense. Rather than carry this insight to its final logical consequence, however, Suleiman manipulates linguistic categories to insert Chechens into a science which has otherwise marginalised them. Thus, by appropriating for himself the methodologies of Indo-European linguistics (as filtered through Ibero-Caucasian linguistics) Suleiman both initiates the unravelling of this ideology and demonstrates for us why it may not sustain itself forever. At the same time he internalises the very ideology he resists, thereby granting it a new kind of longevity. In Suleiman's world, race determines language (the categories of slave and master unfold in history, but they are fixed in advance) but, at the same time, race is irremediably severed *from* language, a fact demonstrated by the way in which Suleiman reverses the referents for discursive terms he employs.

The implications of the intellectual work in which Suleiman is engaged for the ways in which the identities of indigenous and otherwise minority Caucasian peoples will be articulated in the future should be obvious as part of a broader political struggle. Much scientific credibility, as such, clearly gets sacrificed along the way. Yet rather than rejecting members of the 'creative intelligentsia' outright, as falsifiers, what if we turned that lens back on the very categories of knowledge that they pursue? By asking the question in this manner, I point to intellectuals such as Suleiman as people we can learn from, who understand far more than we give them credit for. His very approach to language, to its construction, and to the creation of etymologies which he then maps onto specific territories, demonstrates that he is a skilled master when it comes to improvising a variety of Indo-European, Eurasian or Middle Eastern visions of language and nation.

Suleiman's *taip*, his clan affiliation, is of more than accidental interest in this context. Suleiman's proposed pseudonym, Melkhi Vainakhi, refers to Suleiman the Melkh (-i is a Georgian ending, curious that he should retain a Georgian form for his pseudonym in spite of his impassioned rejection of Georgian identity). This *taip* has the unique honour among all the Vainakh clans of being neither Ingush nor Chechen; it exists in an indefinable border region between the two ethnicities.

Suleiman once told me the story of one Melkh girl who was asked in school what nationality she belonged to. The teacher expected her to answer either 'Ingush' or 'Chechen'. It was a multiple choice question with a fixed set of variables, and Melkh was not one of them. When the girl answered that she was neither Ingush nor Chechen, the teacher gave her a failing grade and expelled her from school. 'You see', Suleiman explained, 'the Ingush and Chechens always want to claim every *taip* for themselves. But some of us don't fit. We slip between the cracks. And they punish us for being

different. We don't belong to anyone. We are yet another Vainakh nation which no one recognises.'

I once asked Suleiman what he hoped to accomplish with *Nakh-Georgian Relations*. He told me that his goal was to prove that the Vainakh people were the 'founders of humanity'. When I asked Suleiman if by 'Vainakh' he really meant 'Kist', he nodded his head in agreement: 'Among Vainakhs, Kists are the first (*pirveli da pirvandeli*).' Aside from the fact that this statement runs counter to the views of Pareulidze, Aliroev and Desheriev (I list here only the most prominent native authorities on the subject), all of whom unanimously see Kist as a dialect of Chechen no more than two centuries old, Suleiman's statement contradicts the simple facts of history: there was no Vainakh population in the Pankisi Gorge until the arrival of refugees from blood revenge, the Caucasian Wars and Shamil's dictatorship (so-called by many Chechens) in the nineteenth century.<sup>11</sup>

Suleiman knew the facts of Pankisi's history as well if not better than anyone else. He was not arguing against the scholars; instead, he was looking beyond their focus on facts and scientific truth toward a less accessible but no less significant story, not recorded in any historical text, document or archive. Suleiman skipped from the nineteenth-century emigration to thousands of years earlier, to the dawn of civilisation in Mesopotamia: Urartu, Babylon, Chaldea. Language was the basis of his jump into prehistory; though he pointed out to me many times that his research was based firmly on 'texts'. In actual fact his sources were words, and the etymologies he contrived from them (and the texts which they subsequently produced).

He employed a deductive method, searching for linguistic origins via roots and laws of phonology used by Indo-European linguists engaged in historical reconstruction. First, he had to prove that Georgians were descended from Semites of Egypt (all Egyptians, according to Suleiman, are Semitic; any non-Semitic Egyptians living in Egypt in ancient times are *a priori* defined as Vainakh). Vainakhs brought a group of Semites from Egypt to Georgian territory in the days when they ruled the territory which extended from the northern tips of the Caucasus to present-day Armenia (formerly Urartu, Chaldea and/or Babylon; there are important distinctions

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<sup>11</sup> Scholars have noted settlements of Vainakh peoples (particularly the Tsova-Tush) in Pankisi before the nineteenth century, but the numbers are incidental, and do not approximate the migrations during and after Shamil's era. For more details on the specific reasons and dates of the Vainakh (mostly Chechen) emigrations to Pankisi see, in English, Kurtsikidze and Chikovani (2002), and, in Russian, Shavkhelishvili (1990). A good Georgian source is Albutasvili (2005). The definitive source on the subject of Shamil's rule and its consequences is Gammer (1994), which provides a useful context for making sense of the history referred to here.



between these entities, but not for Suleiman) in the south. According to Suleiman, the names of ancient dynasties such as Chaldea are all of Vainakh derivation. Thus, *khal*, according to Suleiman is Chechen for ‘wealth’, while ‘de’ is derived from *din* (the n is nasalised and barely audible), which means faith in Chechen (also derived from Arabic, though Suleiman would say the Arabic word is derived from Chechen).<sup>12</sup>

Another important *din*-based derivation is the Alaverdi, the famous twelfth-century church not far from Pankisi. Until recently, when this position was usurped by the Trinity Cathedral in Tbilisi, Alaverdi was the largest cathedral in Georgia. The cathedral is named in honour of a Persian official who funded its construction. The obvious Islamic roots of the founder’s last name, beginning with ‘Allah’, do not dissuade Suleiman from attributing to it, and by implication to the man who bore it, a Vainakh genesis, which would therefore precede Islam historically. Suleiman noted that in Chechen ‘*ala*’ is a verb meaning ‘to announce’ (according to Suleiman; it can also simply mean ‘to say’). He sees the ‘v’ as the male class marker while ‘er’ means ‘arrived’. *Din* means faith (in Arabic as well as Chechen). Suleiman interprets these four units together as meaning: ‘he arrived to preach the faith’. The faith in question is of course Christianity, the implication being that in a country where Georgians take pride in being one of the most ancient Christian nations in the world, Vainakhs were the original Christians.

Suleiman established the ancient lineage of Kist in relationship to Chechen by presuming that whatever distinguishes Kist from Chechen lexically is a mark of Kist’s antiquity. As we worked through poems published in Chechen in his 1989 collection *Long Live my Homeland!* (*San daimokh bekhilla bekh!*), he frequently pointed out to me how he had provided footnotes for those words which were not to be found in contemporary Chechen but which did exist in the Kist dialect. For example: *tsermartkho* (pagan) (p. 16), *piel* (bowl) (p. 56), *saghdar* (temple) (p. 90). I cite these examples in particular because they all have obvious roots in Georgian (*tsarmartuli*, *piali* and *saqdari*). But when I asked Suleiman in Georgian where these words came from, he said that they were Kist, that the Georgian words were derived from Kist. When we remember that the Kist migration to Pankisi occurred in the nineteenth century, the extent to which Suleiman’s derivations must seem like figments of the imagination, even to himself, becomes clear. Even as he invented, however, Suleiman insisted that these words were part of the ancient Vainakh lexicon.

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<sup>12</sup> ‘Khal’ is not in any of the Chechen dictionaries I consulted, (Matsiev 1961; Pareulidze 2003; Nichols 2004), but this by no means should be taken to imply that the word does not exist, as the Vainakh lexicon is rich and, to a large extent, undocumented.

Given the way his etymologies were structured, Suleiman could not allow for the possibility that the Kist emigration to Pankisi in the nineteenth century was the first one. However, he was not terribly concerned with demonstrating in material terms the existence of Kists in Pankisi before this time. He argued through etymology, because he saw language as the bearer of the most important kinds of histories, the kinds which reach back into antiquity, bypassing intervening millennia. These millennia are irrelevant to the arguments he seeks to make about his people's history. The only non-linguistic argument Suleiman made to demonstrate a pre-nineteenth century Vainakh presence in Pankisi was his rejection of the commonly accepted view that the Kipchaks, a Turkic people from whom the present-day Balkars, Nogais and Kumyks are said to be descended, served as border guards (much like the Cossacks) to the Georgian state during the sixteenth century, and that many of them resided in Pankisi during this time, after which they assimilated into the local Georgian population. Suleiman asked me by way of proof:

If it was really Kipchaks, and not another race who guarded Georgian borders and stayed behind to assimilate in Georgian society, don't you think they would have left some trace in the Georgian population? ... The Kipchaks were a narrow-eyed people, they were Turkic. Why is it that there are no narrow-eyed people among Georgians today? If the Kipchaks had ever settled in Georgia, their blood would have mixed with Georgians. There is only one possible explanation for this anomaly: it was not Kipchaks who guarded the Georgian border in the sixteenth century. It was Vainakhs.

Other than this attempt to appropriate the Kipchak presence in Georgia for Vainakhs, Suleiman freely admitted that all traces of the ancient Kist presence in Pankisi had been erased with the passage of time. Contrary to many historians and theorists of migratory patterns, he did not wish to translate Vainakh (or any other people's) history into a fixed schemata; his goal was to keep it malleable and open-ended, so he could shape his narrative according to the needs of the present and of the linguistic histories he sought to map. For Suleiman, the language of the present determined the shape of the past. The Kist language provided an index, or what he referred to as a 'key' (*gasaghebi*) (echoing, in ways he probably was unaware of, Casaubon's key in *Middlemarch*, which was intended to unlock the secret origins of world mythology), to the map of ancient history, and the Kist language, he sought to demonstrate, had remained essentially unchanged for the past five thousand years.

### **Thinking beyond language and race**

The genetic affiliation thesis being advanced by Suleiman received its fullest, or at least its most famous, articulation in Western Europe. Many writers who explored the consequences of genetic affiliation and interpreted the findings of Indo-European linguistics for popular constituencies defined the history of world migration and linguistic genesis according to the political priorities of the worlds within which they wrote. Renan (1878) and Gobineau (1854) can be cited here as the primary instances of such tendencies. But the consequences of the conclusions they reached, as well as the categories according to which they constructed their arguments, are by no means limited to Europe. The categories generated by such forms of thinking have proven decisive for determining the ways in which the language dreamers I met in the Caucasus seek to rescue their people from the oblivion of history. Suleiman's theories can perhaps be seen as the 'illegitimate' version of scientific trends which, in other contexts, when affiliated with different kinds of power, have received scholarly approbation. It has been part of my effort to note the commonalities between Suleiman's way of thinking and more respectable intellectual traditions within which he wishes to situate himself. It has been my goal, however, to use Suleiman's conclusions to ask new questions of old material, and reconsider ideas which are now taken for granted in the light of the consequences they have produced in little known parts of the world.

A serious look at the issues raised here would of course have to take account of the divergences and convergences between and among thinkers such as Jones, Renan, Gobineau and Marr, and other thinkers whose works I have not engaged with directly. It is not solely the complex version of Indo-European linguistics which has influenced Suleiman, but rather the simplistic, reduced version of it, which (it must be admitted) is better known to the world at large as well. But I do believe it is a worthwhile endeavour to take seriously the extreme uses and in some ways logically inconsistent uses to which apparently sane ideas are put. Doing so enables us to take a more critical look at the original claims. Also, it reminds us that knowledge is divided only with difficulty into categories such as scientific/non-scientific, legitimate/illegitimate, scholarly/amateur. Suleiman is uniquely qualified to remind us – especially those of us embedded inside these academic discourses of legitimacy – of their porousness.

Among contemporary thinkers on the diverse uses to which language has been put at various times and places, Pollock (2006) articulates this point best in his monumental study of the relationship between vernacular languages and Sanskrit in premodern India. In considering the 'tens of thousands of texts composed by premodern Indian writers in dozens of

languages' he writes that 'nowhere in the texts ... is it possible to point to a discourse that links language, identity, and polity; in other words, nowhere does ethnicity – which for the purpose of this discussion we may define as the political salience of kin group sentiment – find even faint expression' (p. 475). Pollock is also specific in his rejection (for the region to which his study is devoted) of the instinctual wedding of language and ethnicity, which is performed so reflexively in the West (and elsewhere by those influenced by Western intellectual traditions): 'It is equally impossible to locate evidence in South Asia for the linkage of blood and tongue so common in medieval Europe, or for cultures as associations restricted by so-called primordial ties' (p. 475). Instead, he argues, there is placeness, a sense of relating to a space, not as a sovereign territory, but simply in a sense of affiliation. This is not to say that power is an irrelevant category, but simply that it was articulated differently in non-Western worlds. Power, within the world of premodern India as Pollock describes it, is not so much about contestation through difference as it is in the West, and the definition of self in this context is more inclusive of multiplicity.

The connections here between the indigenous meaning of Vainakh as 'we', referred to above with regard to the language *Vainmott*, defined not in opposition to another collectivity, but rather referentially, with boundaries which are internal and not externally defined, should be clear.<sup>13</sup> Vainakh is composed of two elements: *vai* is the first-person plural inclusive pronoun. *Nakh* is the Vainakh word for people. The most precise translation of 'Vainakh' is therefore 'our people'. But this etymologic content of the term implies an entirely different range of associations than that contained within 'ethnicity' or 'race', which are stable, unchanging referents and do not depend on context for their meaning. A 'Georgian' is a Georgian regardless of where he or she happens to be at any given moment. But a 'Vainakh' person, in a strictly denotative sense, is only a person belonging to the group defined as 'our people', a category which changes depending on the context within which he or she happens to be located.

It goes without saying that this argument based on language does not necessarily correspond to practice. In current usage, Vainakh is hypostatized just as with any other ethnicity and made into a form which exists apart from the speaker's context, outside the particularities of time, space, and the

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<sup>13</sup> As I write these lines, I sense that it must seem overly simplistic to draw parallels between such disparate world-regions, especially on the basis of so few sources. There is also of course the danger that generalisations such as those offered here will reinforce other kinds of 'essentialisms' no better than those being critiqued. But even given these hesitations, I think it is important to keep open the comparative possibilities suggested here, as lines of inquiry to be pursued elsewhere.

specificity of the utterance. There is no reason, however, why we should assume that this present usage corresponds to the original usage of the term. I would argue the opposite, and I believe that the 'indexical' nature of Vainakh identity is strongly retained in the word's etymology. I do not refer to a lost layer of meaning which exists in the deep and unconscious structure of the word; rather, the indexicality of the term is abundantly present every time the word is used, alongside other, more modern, meanings.

This evidence provides the ground for a tentative proposition, which has been made compellingly for other parts of the world, particularly in premodernity (Pollock 2006) and for India and Africa (Appiah 1992; Kaviraj 1995): that outside the West and outside modernity, 'ethnicity' has no conceptual resonance. In other words, race, which we have learned to project onto the most violence-ridden parts of the non-Western world, is specific and unique to the Western modernity. On one level, this proposition seems to be intuitively true when we consider the normativity of heteroglossia and the multifaceted identity of many of the most 'ethnically' diverse parts of the world. On another level, however, this proposition, if true, has yet to be incorporated fully into scholarly discourses about the non-Western world.

If this proposition concerning the absence of the race concept in the premodern world is accurate, we would be justified in agreeing with Weber that the capitalist West does indeed represent a unique and unparalleled moment in world history. When he wonders why 'in Western civilization and in Western civilization only, cultural phenomenon have appeared which (as we like to think) lie in a line of development having *universal* significance and value' (p. 13; emphasis in original), one way to answer his question might be to reexamine the relationship between race and language and to ask how the ways in which we have organised humanity have enabled certain kinds of control, certain forms of power and certain ways of mastering the world. As for the Caucasus, however, though the race concept seems to be absent, the concept of community was and is amply present, evidenced in a kinship structure which has lost none of its power even today (in spite of the demographic changes wrought by the recent wars) and embedded within the semantics of the Vainakh language itself, in which ethnicity is at best a shifting referent.

Though it may well be unnecessary to argue against the hierarchical arrangement of the data of human experience, it is still useful to look at structural similarities among the systems into which human experience has been categorised. We see repeatedly in the history of modern Western thought how racial distinctions are mapped onto languages and linguistic distinctions are in turn mapped onto categories than come to be known as 'races'. In this context, we should think again of William Jones, who argued

in 'A Discourse on the Origin and Families of Nations' (1792) that 'the inhabitants of Asia, and consequently, as it might be proved, of the whole earth, sprang from three branches of one stem' and that 'the first race of Persians and Indians, to whom we may add the Romans and Greeks, the Goths, and the old Egyptians or Ethiops, originally spoke the same language and professed the same popular faith'.

This is not to say that such discourses have not been internalised and altered, as they certainly have, even to the extent that they are no longer wholly 'Western'.<sup>14</sup> It is rather to argue that so much of what we say against the Caucasus when we speak with fear of the eternal recurrence of wars and ethnic unrest, is actually better seen in the light of a critique against ourselves. The continuities between the colonial modes of thinking about language and race and post-colonial and post-socialist ways of conceiving of these categories are factors which (at least in my experience) most scholarly discourse continues to deny.

We cannot undo the history of the colonial encounter. But we can learn to think differently about it. We can read the past in ways which leave open possibilities for the future. But these shifts will only take place once we have a deeper understanding of the vernacular registers of Caucasian experience – for only then will we be able to step outside the categories of more familiar understandings of language and ethnicity. And it is only when we begin to disentangle these intimately wedded concepts, and thereby distance ourselves from modern categories of thought, will we be able to contemplate a world in which ethnicity does not lead to violence.

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<sup>14</sup> It is possible that (as has been indicated to me) I ascribe too much agency to the power of Western discourse in this account, but I am convinced that Suleiman's primary audience is the Western world, which of course he imagines in his own fashion. I believe this is true as well for most of his fellow post-socialist intellectuals writing about language, identity, nation, and ethnicity, in particular those who belong to minority populations.

Heckmann, for their close and critical readings. Above all, I would like to express my gratitude to Suleiman and his family, for hosting me and for bringing all the warmth of his friendship and wisdom into my life.

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## *Chapter 8*

# **Dancing Around the Mountain: Armenian Identity Through Rites of Solidarity**

Levon Abrahamian

On 28 May 2005, Armenia's Day of Independence, thousands of people gathered on the slopes of Mt. Aragats to participate in a 15-minute dance around the mountain. This event was discussed intensively before, during and after the event in every social and cultural stratum in Armenia, provoking a multifaceted, nationally oriented discourse. The aim of this chapter is to outline the issues raised in the course of this event and to take an anthropological view of this very modern mix of ritual and politics. The event drew upon archetypes by which the Caucasus has long been known: clan politics, the folk arts, diasporas, and the idioms of closure and encirclement – yet it took these keystones of public life in directions that few, not even the organisers, anticipated.

The original idea was that the event was to be 'just a regional one': the non-governmental charitable organisation 'Nig-Aparan',<sup>1</sup> had decided some years in advance to organise a festival with dancing on the highway connecting the town of Aparan with the capital, Yerevan – that is, a stretch of some 60 kilometres. The original idea suggested a radial scheme, focusing attention on the centre of the country with the activity radiating out towards its regional centre(s). Looking back at how events unfolded, it is difficult to locate this original intent today.

It should be noted at the outset that the image of the 'Aparaner', or person from Aparan, is one of the most ambivalent and equivocal in all of Armenia. On the one hand, Aparaners are considered safe and honest people (this is mainly an inner sub-ethnic opinion), while on the other hand, the classic and perhaps most stereotypical image conjures a well-known comic hero, the subject of a special class of jokes, and rendered by a single word,

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<sup>1</sup> Nig is the name of a province in medieval Armenia, which almost coincides with the present-day Aparan region located on the slopes of Mt Aragats.

*ēsh* (Arm., lit. ‘ass’, or ‘donkey’).<sup>2</sup> These jokes evoke deeper kinship with dull (the ‘dumb-ass’) policemen, especially because Aparaners, at least during Soviet times, formed an impressive part of the police force in Yerevan. Another sub-ethnic group of Armenians who bear the same ‘ass’ nickname are Karabakhers (people from the region of Mountainous Karabakh, the subject of Armenia’s ongoing dispute with Azerbaijan), but in this case the nickname signals stubbornness rather than foolishness. (Interestingly, the contemporary President of Armenia, Robert Kocharyan, is from Karabakh, and Armenia’s leading religious official, the Catholicos, is an Aparaner by descent.) It is natural, therefore, that the more satirical, ‘asinine’, dimensions of this event were never far from view, especially after the commemoration. A humorous one-liner doing the rounds among people post festum declared: ‘See how a single Aparaner made 160,000 Yerevaners dance.’ The reference is to Armenia’s Prosecutor-General, Aghvan Hovsepyan, a native Aparaner, and one of the festival’s leading proponents. The perceived dullness of Aparaners and the cleverness of their compatriots in the capital here are inverted. During the celebration, it was said that an enterprising Aparan peasant brought his donkey (and labelled it ‘a genuine ass from Aparan’) and allowed the dancers to pose for photographs with him for a small fee.<sup>3</sup>

The idea of this sub-ethnically oriented event was later expanded into a more grandiose idea of encircling Mount Aragats using a line of dancers in ‘the circle dance of unity’. This circle dance was intended to commemorate the country’s founding on 28 May 1918 and incorporate a series of other May commemorations as well. From a graphical perspective, a segment line from Aparan to Yerevan, the administrative centre of Armenia, was thus transformed into a circle around the mythological and symbolic centre of Armenia, this circle again running via Aparan, the newly mythical ‘ground zero’. This ‘zero point’, according to at least one television report broadcast on 26 May, was in fact marked by the tent of the coordinating organisers of the dance at a spot not far from Aparan at a height of 1,600 metres (let us keep in mind this number).

Soon it became clear, however, that the circle’s circumference was too big to be marked out only by Aparaners (it was more than 160 km along the

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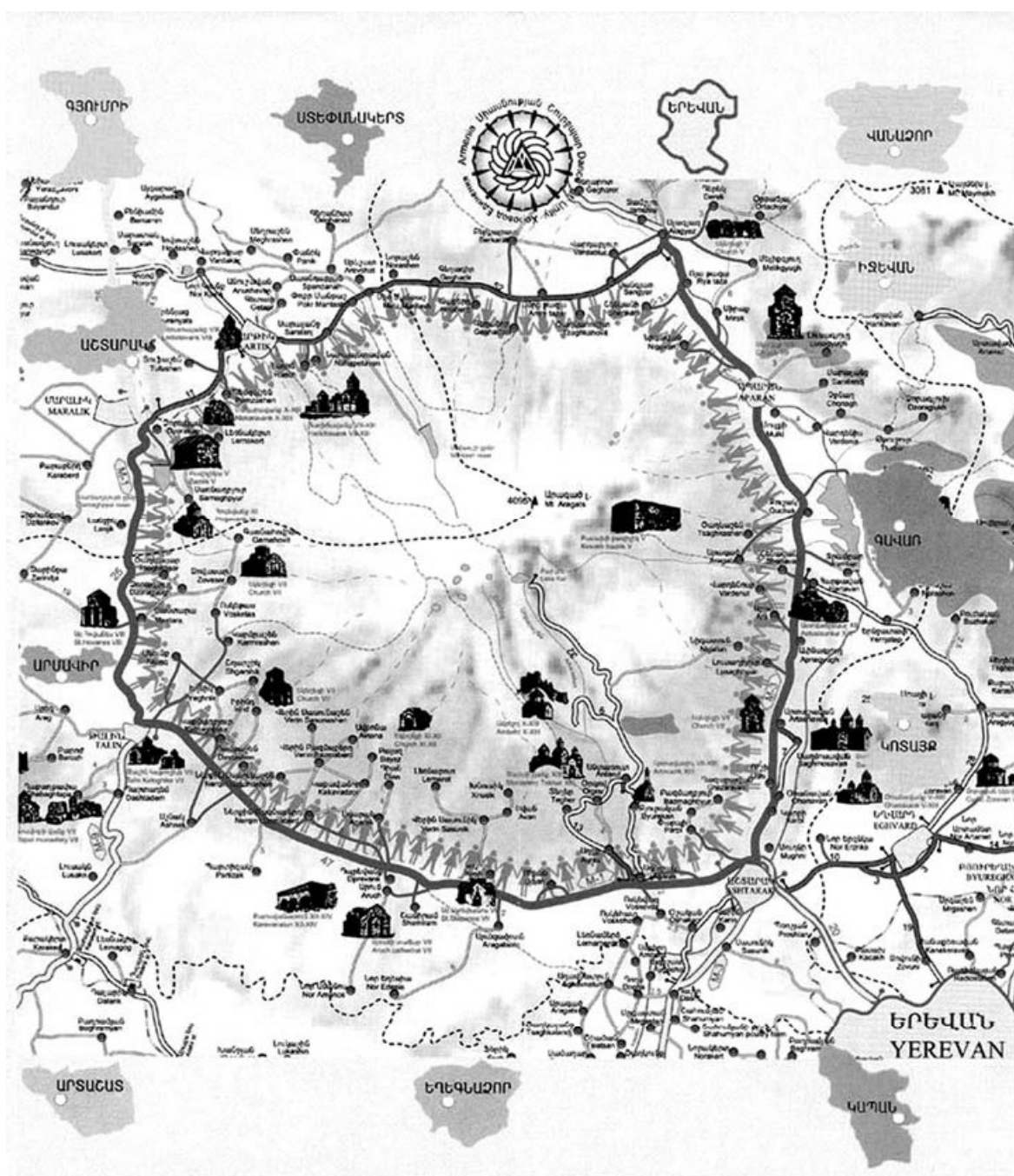
<sup>2</sup> According to the philologist and anthropologist Artsruni Sahakyan, this nickname could be traced back to the presently lost totemic name of the ancestors of the present-day Aparaners, who originated from the regions of Western Armenia (the region which was part of the Ottoman Empire and now of Turkey) with a number of ancient donkey-oriented names (personal communication).

<sup>3</sup> I was unable to establish whether this was a real private enterprise or another Aparaner-style joke.

highways surrounding the mountain), so a wider call for participation was issued, inviting almost all sub-ethnic and regional groups of Armenians, as well as minorities living in Armenia. Soon, an originally regional project became a nationwide project. The highways encircling Mt. Aragats, according to the proposed itinerary of the circle dance, ran through villages and towns where many descendants from Western Armenia found their new homeland, among them survivors of the genocide of 1915 in Ottoman Turkey and earlier migrants, like Aparaners, who had moved there in the first half of the nineteenth century. By holding hands, the line of the dancers would recreate the ethnographic mosaic of historical Armenia. When diaspora Armenians were also invited to take part in this dance, either by coming to the slopes of Aragats or by dancing simultaneously in their specific locations, this virtual union of Armenians became a mission. Television and radio channels were constantly inviting any Armenians who could not make the trip to participate by holding their own ‘mini’-circle dances outdoors, in their homes or indeed wherever they were at the moment of the event – 3.00 p.m., Yerevan time. At least two Armenians were said to be needed in order to constitute a true ‘circle dance’,<sup>4</sup> and the dancing was to last for exactly 15 minutes. These arrangements were especially convenient for an anthropologist who could thus study the structure of the circle on screen, gain information from different segments and observe how reporters were eager to show the solidarity of the dancers by interviewing the representatives of different groups and regions. This search for solidarity from above was met with regional patriotism from below, its most striking illustration being a monument raised at the spot where representatives of the Armavir marz (a region to the south of the celebration site) danced on 28 May 2005, the inscription reading ‘Here danced the Armavir marz at the all-Armenian circle dance’ thereby immortalising this event.

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<sup>4</sup> This was contested by Emma Petrosyan, a specialist in folk dances, who claimed that the minimal number of round dance performers should be three rather than two (personal communication).



Map 8.1. Map showing the route of the circle dance.

Without question, the idea that most excited observers was the dance as a sign of national solidarity. The song written especially for this occasion, ‘the hymn of the unity circle dance’, did not miss the opportunity to affirm that: ‘The Armenian is a friend, a brother, a relative to the Armenian.’<sup>5</sup> In order that this solidarity was understood most clearly in the ethnic sense, organisers seemed to overlook the fact that the dance would pass through

<sup>5</sup> Composed and performed by Leila Saribekyan, words by Sergei Harut‘yunyan.

regions where prominent non-Armenian minority communities of Yezidis and Kurds were living (although many minorities did eventually participate in the event, together with their relatives who came from Yerevan and beyond). Yet among the many TV reports, I could see only a single mention of the Yezidi section of the line. Other minorities were also ‘invisible’ despite their presence – Russians, Assyrians, Greeks, together with corresponding national organisations – but were ignored in the general euphoria of the overwhelmingly Armenian national solidarity processes. One has to remember that Armenia is one of the most mono-ethnic countries in the world (more than 97% of its people self-identify ethnically as Armenian, according to the 2001 census) and this ‘neglecting’ could be a reflection of this fact.<sup>6</sup> However, it is interesting to note that during the 1988 rallies in Yerevan, which were typologically close to a festival,<sup>7</sup> the people in the square enthusiastically greeted all groups who joined the ‘feasting’ rebels, despite the nationally oriented slogans like ‘Armenians, unite!’ or ‘Armenians of the world, unite!’.<sup>8</sup> This signals that while the show of solidarity in 1988 had taken place in the name of civil society rhetoric – at least partially and despite the ‘festive’ and momentary nature of this social phenomenon (Abrahamian 2001) – the solidarity during the 2005 circle dance took place mainly in a national context.

### **Before the celebration**

The idea for the circle dance of union, as already mentioned, belonged to Prosecutor-General Aghvan Hovsepyan, who in many interviews concerning this event preferred to cast himself merely as the honourable head of the Nig-Aparan NGO. He even formally went on leave for the period preceding the event in order to devote himself entirely to the difficult task of organising the event. However, those who opposed the idea of the circle dance never forgot his position as Prosecutor-General. ‘We don’t want to dance to the tune of authorities’ explained much of their unwillingness. The long hand of

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<sup>6</sup> Cf. the daily TV program ‘Good morning, Armenians!’ broadcast by a channel with the telling ‘Armenia’ name. At the same time there was another program (broadcast by the second Armenian TV channel) with the politically correct name ‘Good morning, Armenia!’

<sup>7</sup> The rallies in Yerevan were evoked by similar rallies in Mountainous Karabakh (Nagorno-Karabakh), an autonomous region in the Azerbaijani SSR with a majority Armenian population, which was fighting for secession from Azerbaijan and unification with Armenian SSR. In 1991, the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic was declared, which is not yet recognised. The rallies were followed by conflicts and a bloody war, which ended with a ceasefire in 1994, leaving the problem of Nagorno-Karabakh unresolved. For anthropological analysis of the 1988 rallies see, e.g. Abrahamian 1990: 70–86.

<sup>8</sup> The first being a ‘marching’ slogan with rhythmical syllabic structure in Armenian, and the last reflecting the famous communist slogan ‘Workers of the world, unite!’

the authorities was in any case visible throughout: although nobody was officially forced to join in this organisational frenzy, many people of different ranks found themselves obliged in practice as a result of their involvement in broader state structures overseen by the cabinet minister. This pseudo-voluntary participation of the state machine and other structures (including even semi-criminal ones)<sup>9</sup> required no formal ‘fieldwork’. In this sense the event resembled very much Soviet-era celebrations, which were organised exclusively from above. There was also some counter-organisation from below – for example by student groups – but the real organiser was always present, ensuring that the links to the executive power of the Republic remained open. As a simple example, consider the logistical problem of transporting thousands of participants from Yerevan and Gyumri to the event location – this was virtually impossible without the full participation of the higher authorities.<sup>10</sup>

The call to dance was naturally a great opportunity to demonstrate one’s loyalty or aversion to broader political forces evident around the country. Many deputies and political figures, both pro- and contra-authorities, used this event to express their opinions. Some pro-governmental deputies pledged to bring 1,000 participants each to the dance. Others avoided speaking too negatively about the idea of the dance, even if they were sceptical, since it would seem to be against the will of the people. This was the opinion of Viktor Dallakyan, the secretary of the oppositionist deputy faction ‘Justice’, for example, who suspected that many people would be forced to participate in the dance simply because the idea belonged to the Prosecutor-General (Yesayan 2005).

It has to be said that many people did not participate for exactly that reason – to oppose the Prosecutor’s initiative and avoid ‘dancing to his tune’. But participants of almost all political stripes found one reason or another to attend: in my own case, I knew some ‘average oppositionists’ who went to the celebration simply to spend an outdoor weekend with their children, to have fun, or share this new experience with friends and colleagues. One lamented, ‘If only this was not organised by the Prosecutor!’ Interestingly, among those who did not want to ‘dance to the Prosecutor’s tune’ but

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<sup>9</sup> The opposition periodical *Ch’orrord ishkanut’yun* [The Fourth Power] (no. 458 /Internet no. 618/, 5 April 2005, in Armenian) listed some people of shady reputation involved in the organisation of the celebration.

<sup>10</sup> This turned out to be, by the way, one of the most vulnerable points of the organisational work. Although ‘thousands of buses and minibuses were diverted from their service routes in Yerevan and other parts of the country to transport people to the scene’ (Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty, Monday 30 May 2005), many true volunteers couldn’t reach their segments on the circle around the mountain because of the lack of transport. Some people said that this was one of the reasons why the event was not registered in the *Guinness Book of World Records*.

nevertheless wanted to be counted among the people on the day of celebration, some undertook other associated activities. For example, one group of individualist celebrators climbed one of the peaks on Mt. Aragats, actually joining the 'official' mount-climbing component of the event (it was planned that on 26 May enthusiasts would climb up the mountain to light fires in the evening and later enjoy the fireworks that would light up the four peaks of Mt. Aragats). In another case, two young oppositionists danced their own mini-circle of protest in the Square of Independence, the traditional place of oppositionist rallies since 1988. Apparently they did not know that people had been explicitly invited to engage in circle dances anywhere in the world wherever there were at least two Armenians and one sacred place, the Square of Independence being listed among such places.

Later, after the circle dance, the same Viktor Dallakyan criticised the Prosecutor-General's idea even more severely: instead of doing the work of prosecutor, his dancing craze had tried to deflect public attention from the country's woes (Stepanyan 2005). Another oppositionist deputy, Aleksan Karapetyan, gave a more indignant speech in Parliament, which was broadcast on Armenian television, on 25 May: 'One should not intoxicate a whole nation by circle dances like those of aboriginal shamans. They dance around fires, we around mountains.' 'What is this dance dedicated to?' asked the agitated deputy as he listed the many unsolved problems of the Armenian nation. He concluded that this undertaking was a form of national madness. In the already cited *Ch'orrord ishkhanut'yun*, or *Fourth Power* (no. 458) the Prosecutor-General was blamed for organising buffoonery rather than responsible government.

Still other critics did not fail to observe that on 26 May the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil-pipeline led by Armenia's rival Republic of Azerbaijan was opened. As one informant of mine stated, Armenians organised their dance as an exclusive circle, while Azerbaijanis opened their exclusive circle, finding a way to the outer world.<sup>11</sup> On 27 May, the newspaper *Haykakan zhamanak* ('Armenian Times') published a photograph taken on 12 April 2004 of young men dancing during a protest organised by the opposition. It was an echo of the 2003 presidential elections, claimed by the opposition to have been subject to voting abuses. The rally was broken up later in the night and its members beaten, thus causing an outcry. A year later, observers noted that protesters in Yerevan were beaten up in 2004 because they were accused of blocking a half-kilometre stretch of one of the city's main avenues, while in 2005 the authorities were planning to close a 160 kilometre stretch along roads of international and national importance,

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<sup>11</sup> Cf. an oppositionist article in *Haykakan zhamanak* ('Armenian Time') with a subtitle 'They – at the source of the oil-pipe line, and we – on the slopes of Aragats' (28 May, p.7).



thereby violating the constitutional law guaranteeing citizens the right of free access to the nation's highways (*Haykakan zhamanak*, 27 May 2005). Thus we have two opposed circle dances, an earlier one stamped out by those who would later organise the homage to unity. I can add that this is not just a pun of my own. The protesters also used the dance language to stress their unity. Thus their youth wing chose an image of circle-dance performers as insignias on their 'unifying' pullovers for another occasion – a protest rock concert in autumn 2004, which took place well ahead of the circle dance of unity. Interestingly, among the performers, heroes of the epic *David of Sassun* were depicted, including their miraculous horses, with calls addressed to these heroes to join their dance of unity.<sup>12</sup>

The fact that it was the Prosecutor-General who organised this nationwide event was viewed by many local commentators as a manifestation of Hovsepyan's growing political ambitions. For example, *Ch'orrord ishkhanut'yun* as early as 5 April ventured that the Prosecutor-General would secure some 180,000 votes for the 2007 parliamentary elections if he were to gather the same number of dancers.<sup>13</sup> By involving administrative resources in the event's organisation (city and town mayors, heads of village communes, different types of officials), continued the commentator, he was actually testing their loyalty. Other oppositionists and general sceptics prophesied that the Prosecutor-General would found a new political party soon after the dance of unity which would signal a shift in the political tides of the country. One informant assured me that the organising principle of the circle dance – the hierarchical system of *hazarapets* ('commanders of the thousand'), *haryurapets* ('commanders of the hundred'), *tasapets* ('commanders of the ten')<sup>14</sup> – would serve as a useful template for a similar hierarchical system of administration in the authoritarian government that the Prosecutor-General would allegedly head in the future. Another informant assured me that Kocharyan was afraid that the many thousands of circle-dance participants would unite and march on Yerevan to dethrone him.<sup>15</sup> It is not improbable that such suspicions and

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<sup>12</sup> David of Sassun is one of the main heroes of the Armenian epic "Sasna tsrer" (Daredevils of Sassun), which is also often named after this particular hero. The epic has many ancient mythological layers, such as divine twins, magic colts, thunder god's 'combat myth', and Mithraic traditions, but is also thought to reflect some historical events and figures of the seventh to thirteenth centuries; in particular, the David of Sassun branch is thought to reflect the fight of the Armenians of Sassun against Arab invaders.

<sup>13</sup> In the end, Hovsepyan surprised many by not running as a candidate in the 2007 elections.

<sup>14</sup> An imitation of the structure of the ancient Armenian army, which is found throughout the Middle East and Central Asia, among Mongol-Turkic as well as Persian armies.

<sup>15</sup> This imaginary rebellion after the festival actually resembled the 'carnival to revolution' scheme – see Cohen 1993.

rumours were evoked unintentionally by President Kocharyan himself, who insisted before the event that he would not join the dance. (This was consistent with widespread popular opinion that the President disliked others' initiatives, being afraid that people would unite around his potential opponents.) There was even short-lived opinion that Kocharyan found himself temporarily in the same company as the opposition, which saw the Prosecutor-General as the President's opponent. However, when, in the end, both men took part in the dance (with the President explaining that he deliberately misled the public and media to avoid political 'exploitation' of the issue),<sup>16</sup> a new conspiracy theory claimed that the Prosecutor-General, in reality, was Kocharyan's protégé, and that in two months or so he would be appointed prime minister and go on to become the next president of Armenia, and conceal all their unsavoury dealings.

The period of preparation for the event was also thick with doubts and expectations. TV channels were literally deluged with patriotic and euphoric speeches and addresses, not surprising given that there was then no oppositional or even truly independent TV channel in Armenia. In turn, sceptics doubted whether enough people would gather on the slopes to perform; whether there would be enough transport; or whether participants would be provided with enough food. Optimists spoke of 10,000 sheep that would be distributed among villages to provide roast and boiled meat for all. Still others were anxious that scorpions and snakes (the true indigenous dwellers of the event site) would attack the dancers, especially those who, given the lack of adequate toilet facilities, sought out wilder spots on the mountain.<sup>17</sup> No stone was left unturned as people speculated that the dancers' urine (calculated at some 50,000 litres at least) would scorch a dead circle around the mountain.<sup>18</sup>

Like any grandiose undertaking, the organisation of the circle dance had its problems and shortfalls. Nevertheless the 'commanders' evoked patriotic and careerist zeal which succeeded in bringing people to the scene. Oligarchs and community leaders purchased sheep (the market prices for sheep rose before the event – TV *HI*, 22 May); organisers advertised antidotes for scorpion and snake bites, which are especially poisonous in May (TV *Armenia*, 24 May); and numerous, improvised toilet cubicles were

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<sup>16</sup> See, for example, *Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty*, Monday 30 May 2005.

<sup>17</sup> The problem of toilets especially troubled women and elderly men.

<sup>18</sup> Fears of this 'dead circle', fortunately, didn't prove true; the promised 'life circle' of planted saplings along the round dance route was also not so visible, although on 14 May it was announced that 100,000 trees had already been planted (Radio *Haylur*). The only truly visible circle seemed to be the rubbish marking the route (after the celebration, there were calls for a weekend clean-up along the route).

constructed along the circular route (every 100 metres). Despite criticisms and doubts, the event gradually took on a more concrete form. The circle dance was doomed to be held.

### Preparing to dance

Organisers remarked that 160,000 people would be enough to make the event a success – one dancer for every metre of the 160,000-metre long route. Its length was variously listed as 163 or 169 km, sometimes as 165 km. However, most commentators preferred to refer to 160 km, which became the iconic number of the event. One could even discern a tendency to refer to this ‘sacred’ attendance number rather than to the actual, much higher figures – a surprising reversal of the general tendency to exaggerate attendance at rallies. However, the rapidly increasing number of participants reduced the number 160 to an ‘ideal’ number. By February 2005, some 100,000 volunteers were said to have signed up (TV *Kentron*, 1 January 2006). One and a half weeks prior to the event this number was said to have exceeded 300,000. By the day of the celebration, according to the lists of the organisers, ‘350,000 people were due to take part in the arrangement’, whereas in actual fact, the number of participants totalled 500,000 (*Arminfo*, May 28, 2005).

Before this huge mass of people began its 15-minute performance at the appointed hour of 3 p.m. on 28 May, the technical and artistic peculiarities of the dance had to be addressed. There are different kinds of circle dances in the Armenian folk tradition, the most popular being the *k’och’ari*, where dancers put their outstretched arms on the shoulders of their neighbours to the right and left and make two steps to the right and one step back. This elementary formula is accompanied by the refrain: ‘*K’och’ari, erku gna, mek ari*’ (*k’och’ari*, two go, one come). However, during the preparatory fuss another popular pun emerged. It was based on the closeness (to the human ear) of the dance name ‘*k’och’ari*’ and that of the Armenian President, Kocharyan (*K’och’aryan*). Some people conjectured that by dancing *k’och’ari* the participants would express, even if unconsciously, their political loyalties,<sup>19</sup> while lovers of conspiracy theories made further ‘revelations’ concerning the real role of the Prosecutor-General in this game. However, it was decided that the dance of unity would not be the *k’och’ari* because of its relative complexity. Instead, organisers proposed a much simpler dance, where dancers had to join their little fingers and make one

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<sup>19</sup> This interpretation interestingly makes further parallels between the two circle dances, the round dance of unity and the one danced during the rally of protest on 12 April 2004, since this rally was a vote of no confidence in the President.

step forward, one step back. The *k'och'ari* way of holding hands, as specialists rightly considered, risked destroying the whole line of dancers should one of them stumble and fall. By contrast, when holding each other by the little finger, the awkward performer would simply be pulled out of the line. Others feared that *k'och'ari* steps could create a situation (at least theoretically) where a single stumble or mistake would result in a domino-style collapse of the entire circle. To and fro stepping, by contrast, would not create such dangers.<sup>20</sup>



Plate 8.1. The dance.

This technically simple and safe dance proposed for such a huge mass of performers was nevertheless opposed on symbolic and psychological grounds. The little finger connection was considered by some to be too weak to create a solid and strong row, while the *k'och'ari* way of embracing would help to support a suddenly weakened link, such as a participant who tires or falls ill. This way of forming a circle was seen as a symbol of solidarity and general power; in other words, of acquiring the desired state of unity. Vanush Khanamiryan, the former leader of the Armenian National Dance Ensemble who actively advocated the *k'och'ari* style, said that the

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<sup>20</sup> I am indebted to Zhenya Khach'atryan, a folk dance specialist, for clarifying specific features of the two dances.

arm-on-shoulders position would resemble an eagle, while the *k'och'ari* dancing, when seen from above, would look like a flame running around the mountain (TV talk show, 23 May). One has to guess who this aesthetic observer was supposed to be: a representative from the *Guinness Book of World Records* looking down from a helicopter<sup>21</sup> or the Lord from Heaven.

At the point of the circle's circumference where I was participating, a minor 'commander' conducted our moves by counting in 'fours': 'one, two, tree, four'. My colleague Emma Petrosyan professed a sense of relief when she learned about this counting, since she had been told that at other arcs along the circle the counting was in 'twos', which is a typical march beat: 'Thank God it didn't turn into a march.' This was not just a concern of the folk dance specialist: the supposed 'march around the mountain' would have put the event too close to Soviet-era parades organised from above, leaving very little space for more spontaneous festive 'dancing' coming from below.

Dance supposes music. Naturally, a special focus was placed on the choice of music to which the nation would dance. The composer Arthur Shakhnazaryan compiled various dance melodies representing musical traditions from the 16 provinces (again the 'magic' number 16) from whence the people presently living on the slopes of Mt. Aragats had come. However, the most surprising experience for the participants was the almost complete absence of music along the circle. This was later admitted to be a disappointing failure of the organisers: there were enough cars and minibuses along the route, but people had not been told which official radio frequency to tune into. It seems that the only spot where this melody was relayed was the stretch where President Kocharyan and his entourage were dancing. Certainly, at some places drivers found a suitable melody on the radio, and where the line drew close to villages, local musicians<sup>22</sup> joined the celebration.

An interesting example was reported from the segment running through the Lanjik Pass at the highest part of the route in the north. Participants entertained themselves before the actual dance by rehearsing to dance music which was relayed from a microbus. But when the time of the dance arrived at 3:00 p.m., they turned off the music and began to dance without it, as if waiting (according to a participant who experienced this situation) for the music to come from out of nowhere – perhaps the sky! The

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<sup>21</sup> Event organisers invited representatives of the *Guinness Book of World Records* to register this event. However, it was not registered because of breakdowns in some segments of the dancers' line.

<sup>22</sup> As a rule, they formed the traditional *dasta*: musicians playing *zurna* (a wind instrument belonging to the oboe family, with a sharp sound) and *dhol* (drums) – for outdoor dances sticks are used to beat the rhythm.

absence of music along many stretches transformed the circle dance into a strangely silent 15-minute mime – neither dance nor march (which also needs music). However, even those who participated in this soundless event reported an experience of unity – I turn to this in the last section of the chapter.

The circle dance evoked a strange feeling of history, especially among its many commentators and interpreters. In part, this was because Armenians used to perform circle dances when celebrating their victories. Armenian soldiers had danced the *k'och'ari* in Berlin near the fallen Reichstag; and a World War II veteran, a participant of that historical moment, was found among the unity dance participants. Armenian warriors had also danced the circle dance in celebration of more recent victories during the war in Karabakh. Television audiences in Armenia are therefore very aware of these dances from news reports. The circle dance is typical of Aparaners, as also for Yezidis and Kurds who live on the northern slopes of Mt. Aragats. After the genocide of 1915, many survivors from the Sassun (Sassoun) region of Western Armenia found refuge on the western slopes of Aragats as well. The Sassun contingent at the all-national circle dance was particularly visible. The general circle dance, through the circle dance of the Sassuntsy, revived (if only unconsciously) the epic daredevil heroes of Sassun, namely David of Sassun, whose monument is actually an emblem for Yerevan Armenians – and indeed Armenians in general. No wonder that Vanush Khanamiryan, the aforementioned advocate of the authentic circle dance, was used as a model for the David of Sassun monument by its author, the sculptor Yervand K'och'ar (one more *k'och'ari* allusion?). The dance-history connection is well expressed in a poem by Gevorg Ēmin, which was cited several times in relation to the unity circle dance:

Sassun danced, and the whole world understood  
That this is not a dance, but an ancient history of a country,  
Where even defeat has [a touch] of pride.

This history-linked interpretation of the unity circle dance was used by Ara Vahuni in his documentary 'K'och'ari' (2005): at the 28 May celebration an old Armenian woman 'remembers' the dramatic pages of her nation's history covering her life-long experience.

The language of dance thus became a renovated language for expressing national realities. Even the mountains were imagined as participants of the circle dance. One witness to the bonfire lighting on the four peaks of Mount Aragats on the eve of the main celebration later said (TV *H2*, 3 June) that it was as if the peaks themselves were joining in. Perhaps such mountain dancing is, in fact, something traditional for

Armenians – let us remember that the mountain range seen from Yerevan to the right of Mt. Masis (Ararat) is called *Haykakan par* ‘Armenian dance’.<sup>23</sup>

### **The sacred mountain and its symbolic substitutes**

Mount Aragats (4,090 m) plays a special role in Armenian history and culture. Its slopes are dotted with many monuments, from the ruins of the Arshakid dynasty kings’ burial-vault of the fourth century, to monasteries and fortresses of later medieval times. A legend tells that Grigor the Illuminator, the converter of Armenia and the nation’s first Catholicos, used to pray on the peak of the mountain. At night an icon-lamp shone to guide his way, the lamp hanging from heaven using no rope. Some say that the icon-lamp is still there, but only the worthy ones can see it (Ghanalanyan 1969: no. 810a). In his more recent blessing of the national circle dance, Catholicos Garegin II expressed his wish that ‘we always see atop Aragats the Illuminator’s icon-lamp, which from the high Armenian soil guards the life of the Armenians dispersed all over the world’. No wonder that large posters fixed on the way from Yerevan to the scene and elsewhere showed the four peaks of Mt. Aragats with the Illuminator’s icon-lamp hanging above them from heaven.<sup>24</sup> This same image was placed on the cardboard caps that were given to each registered dance participant. The prevailing colour of the cap was orange, which was said to symbolise one of the colours of the national flag, but also the colour of the sunset over Mt. Aragats (TV *HI*, 28 May).

Aragats is not the only mountain that is sacred to Armenians. It is often linked with Mt. Masis (Mt. Ararat), the principal symbol of Armenian identity (Petrosyan 2001: 33–9). In another ancient legend, for example, the two mountains were once loving sisters who parted after a quarrel (Ghanalanyan 1969: no.11). In modern times this departure is further accentuated, since the two mountains are presently separated politically, with Mt. Ararat being located in Turkey. However, Ararat is always present visually for Armenians – either physically (for example, I see it from my window) or symbolically, in the many visual representations, such as on the coats of arms of the three Republics of Armenia,<sup>25</sup> or virtual representations in numerous and various nostalgic poetical, political and even architectural<sup>26</sup>

<sup>23</sup> I am indebted to Harutyun Marutyan for this remark.

<sup>24</sup> One of such posters still decorates one of the central streets of Yerevan near St. Grigor the Illuminator Cathedral.

<sup>25</sup> The first Republic of Armenia (1918–20), Armenian SSR (1921–90), and the present-day Republic of Armenia proclaimed in 1991.

<sup>26</sup> The two windows of the State Museum of Ethnography of Armenia (architect R. Israyelyan) look respectively towards Mt. Ararat and Mt. Aragats.

representations. One could therefore expect that by focusing on Mt. Aragats, Mt. Masis/Ararat would also appear. This appearance took place simply by substituting the mountain of the circle dance with Mt. Masis/Ararat.

Such substitution could be defined as ‘peaceful irredentism’. In numerous TV and radio interviews the participants believed that they would also dance around Mt. Masis sometime in the future. As a young participant of the event remarked: ‘We will dance on the peak of Masis, we will not go there with war.’ In another dream-dance (produced by a prominent entrepreneur on 1 May) the circle dance around Mt. Masis was to be realised jointly with the Turks, with a view to building future friendly relations between the two countries. But, more often, it was discussed as a ‘regaining’ dance. As one poetic description of the event on 28 May chronicled: ‘Yesterday and today the grey-haired Ararat watched with grief the celebration that took place on the slopes of his<sup>27</sup> junior brother, with a hope that a day will come when he will gather all his sons around himself (TV *H1*, May 28).

The two mountains seemed to be connected also in a more mystical way. The weather forecast for 28 May was not at all promising – the early morning was gloomy and rainy, with further rain and even brief thunderstorms forecast for the rest of the day. Yet the participants of the celebration enjoyed sunny weather. However, an informant of mine in a southern region of Armenia in the Ararat valley witnessed a thunderstorm over Mt. Masis at the very moment of the dance, with lightning striking the higher slopes. Taking into account the mythological closeness of the two mountains and following the mytho-poetical tradition of TV announcers and journalists, one may say that the weather forecasting was correct, but was realised for Mt. Masis only, in accordance with the substitution discourse of the day. Such mysterious connection of the two mountains was ‘confirmed’ by observers of the bonfire lighting on the peaks of Mt. Aragats late in the evening of 27 May: the bonfires appeared to be a consequence of the lightning they saw over Mt. Masis (TV *H2*, 3 June). The ‘K’och’ari’ of Ara Vahuni begins with captions explaining that when bonfires were lit on the slopes of Mt. Aragats, ‘the mother mountain’ (that is, Mt. Masis) answered with its own bonfires. The film director assured me that he and his filmmaker colleagues saw these lights on the slopes of Mt. Masis but they were too dim to be shot for the film, so he placed this information in the

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<sup>27</sup> I used ‘he’ for the mountain here following the ‘brother’ context of this passage (Armenian language does not distinguish grammatical genders). Other contexts would need ‘she’ – e.g. in the story about sister-mountains or in more archetypical instances, when Mt. Masis is perceived as mother, which was, by the way, the reason why until modern times there was a rigid taboo about climbing this mountain (Petrosyan 2001: 37).



opening captions. Whatever the origin of these ‘reply’ lights, the situation correlated with another bonfire dialogue some 90 years ago, when Armenian *fedayis*<sup>28</sup> were said to use such bonfires to communicate in their fight against Turks (TV *H1*, 28 May).

The mountain theme in the dancing celebration was so explicit that there was even an assumption that the real symbolism of the circle dance was mountain worship (*Azg*, 31 May). However, the long list of substitutions of Mt. Aragats was so diverse – from Lake Sevan to various local churches and sanctuaries<sup>29</sup> – that the focus on the dance itself prevailed.

### The dance of unity

The circle dance was launched to commemorate the Day of Independence. However, by the time actual event came to fruition it had been convened in honour of multiple and competing commemorations. The month of May in general is dense with nationally memorable dates recalling the Avarayr Battle (26 May),<sup>30</sup> the Sardarapat Battle (27 May),<sup>31</sup> the Bash-Aparan Battle (29 May),<sup>32</sup> and the seizure of Shushi (8 May).<sup>33</sup> All these dates were ultimately linked in many interviews and TV announcements to the circle dance of unity on the Day of Independence (28 May). In this parade of victories, less mention was made of 9 May, the Day of Victory in World War II,<sup>34</sup> although Armenians used to pride themselves, especially in Soviet times, on the impressive list of war heroes of Armenian origin. Perhaps the nationally accentuated dates caused journalists (who were generally of a

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<sup>28</sup> *Fedayi* (*fidayi*) – sacrifice (Arab.), person sacrificing his life for the sake of an idea, which is equivalent to the Balkan *haydook* (the general name for Armenian guerilla warriors in the Ottoman Empire in the last quarter of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries).

<sup>29</sup> A telling substitute was the round temple Zvart‘nots‘ (seventh to tenth centuries) in the film loop presenting the ‘hymn’ of the circle dance. This temple played an important role in the Armenian world-view, particularly in the context of national solidarity and unification (see Abrahamian 1990: 78–9; Abrami‘a‘n 2005: nos. 206, 207; Abrahamian 2006: 130–3).

<sup>30</sup> Battle in 451 between the rebel Armenians and Persians. Although the Armenians lost this battle and their head Vardan Mamikonyan was killed, it is perceived as a spiritual victory, since it resulted in preserving the Christian faith for the Armenians. This event played and still plays a key role in establishing Armenian identity.

<sup>31</sup> Battle in 1918 won over Ottoman troops. It stopped the latter’s advance towards Yerevan.

<sup>32</sup> Another battle in 1918 won over Ottoman troops, at a spot on the route of the circle dance.

<sup>33</sup> This event in 1992 is considered to be a turning point in the course of the war in Karabakh.

<sup>34</sup> I wrote down only one announcement on the radio (*Haylur*, 14 May) about the parade of victories starting with 9 May to be commemorated on the Day of Independence. It has to be said that the radio tends to give more efficient and less politically engaged information. No wonder that in this same announcement national minorities were mentioned (were not ‘forgotten’) among other groups that had registered beforehand to participate in the event.

younger generation) to forget the once most important date in May.<sup>35</sup> The forgotten *mayovka*, the Soviet-era spring outing on 2 May was also remembered in connection with the circle dance event on 28 May (TV *Armenia*, 25 May). A further celebration joined the May parade when many school graduates decided to climb Mt. Aragats on 27 May to unite their traditional celebration of the Last Ring with the main event (according to the deputy L. Khach'atryan, one of the organizers of the event; TV *Armenia*, 25 May).

The May event also attracted some out-of-May commemorations, such as the ninetieth anniversary of the genocide. However, this anniversary remained a background unconscious layer of the celebration ('they tried to annihilate us, but we live, and this dance of ours is the proof of this'), which was verbalised not by the participants, but by journalists (see, for example, *The Observer*, 29 May; *The Associated Press*, 28 May) and visualised by interpreters (cf. Ara Vahuni's film).

In 2005, the Day of the First Republic coincided with the Day of Discharge of St Grigor the Illuminator from the prison-pit, where he had stayed for many years. The striking coincidence of this mobile national church festival with the national political commemoration added one more 'confirmation' to the significance of the moment, so that the Illuminator's icon-lamp went from being a metaphor to something more 'historic'.

Finally, there is the already noted coincidence of the 160 km length of the circle dance circle with the 1,600th anniversary of the invention of the Armenian alphabet by Mesrop Mashtots'. This 'coincidence' gave rise to a set of accordances: 160,000 trees 'of love towards the Fatherland' were scheduled to be planted along the dance route and 1,600 bonfires were said to have been lit on the evening of 27 May (TV *Haylur*, 28 May). Perhaps, this magical multiplication of the 'root' number 160 could be traced back to the event's central tradition-maker, the Prosecutor-General, especially as it was his initiative to create the 'grove of letters', the stone monument to the Armenian alphabet, which was opened on 21 May with the blessing of the Church and all the corresponding rites of endorsement. I leave the discussion of the details of this event for another occasion; here we need only consider those moments that fed the circle dance itself.

This cultural landscape was created on the slopes of Aragats, at a height of 1,600 metres, each letter being 1.6 metres high. It was located at the starting point of the circle dance route: it was here that Catholicos Garegin II gave his blessing and here that President Kocharyan took part in

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<sup>35</sup> This date was not included among the officially recognised holidays until a few years after independence, when some extremist anti-communists used to label negatively everything related to the Soviet past.

the dance. A day before the circle dance, the Prosecutor-General noted that the idea of unity was already realised in the alphabet and added: ‘A single letter does not become a word, a single word does not become a thought’ (TV *HI*). These words changed only slightly when they were repeated by a young girl at a pivotal moment for the television cameras: now the unity of the letters and words was compared explicitly with the unity of the nation (TV *Mir*, 28 May). Thus the idea of unity, which was present in the name of the event, was played up in many ways. (Let us also remember what a great role the introduction of the national alphabet played in early national (or rather pre-national) unification processes in Armenia – see Abrahamian 2006: ch. 7).

The Prosecutor-General made another remark before the event, which became in a sense the formula for the event, one repeated by TV announcers, journalists and school children alike. He said that ‘we have reached a point where we are united’ and that in the course of the circle dance everyone would be united irrespective of their social position. Peasants would hold hands with government officials, soldiers, policemen, sportsmen, and artists – all would be as one. This formula actually embodies the model of an ideal festival, with an intermixing of all social and professional groups. Other ideal pictures of maximal intermixing were the optimistic announcements before the dance about the diverse natures of the registered participants. For example, an announcement on 14 May (Radio *Haylur*) declared that among the 200,000 registered participants there were diaspora representatives, minorities (it was here that they were finally given a place), invalids and even prisoners (though it was difficult to imagine how their participation would have been organised – despite the main organiser being the Prosecutor-General). The oldest registered participant was said to be a 107-year-old woman from the Aparan region, and the most famous guest was Charles Aznavour (although he did not participate in the dance). The most junior participants were infants in arms. Other announcements before and during the event added many other constituents of the nation. In this way, a truly all-national event, a genuinely popular festival,<sup>36</sup> was seemingly unfolding on the slopes of Mt. Aragats. However, such an ideal intermixed picture was a reality only along the short section of the line where President Kocharyan danced hand in hand with an old man and a child. Other sections, as a rule, were composed of larger separate groups that came together to participate in the event; hence the general picture was closer to that of

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<sup>36</sup> On the carnival-type archaic festival with maximally intermixed structural groups, see Abrami‘a‘n 1983; on its modern political parallels, see Abrahamian 1990.

Soviet-era parades, which in compressed form reproduced the structure of the society.<sup>37</sup>



Plate 8.2. A dancer's certificate.

At least one thing can be definitely said: a genuine dance of unity did take place on 28 May, even if the event was never quite as organically driven as claimed, nor reached the kind of success all organisers professed. It is characteristic that those who advocated or criticised the idea of unity in the dance of unity event, including the Prosecutor-General,<sup>38</sup> understood festival solidarity as an everyday situation.<sup>39</sup> Certainly, a feeling of unity and solidarity was experienced by many (if not all) participants. Some described this feeling as a mystical experience: ‘When you hold hands, it seems as if an electric current strikes you. You feel the influence of all these thousands of people’ (a young man); ‘it’s as if some force was flowing into you’ (an

<sup>37</sup> On Soviet parades as the hyper-structure of the society, see Abrami‘a‘n and Shagoyan 2002.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. his words cited above: ‘we have reached a point where we are united’ relating to the situation before the dance, which were followed by the festival situation of unity during the event.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. the talk show on the circle dance after the event with the writer and *Dashnakts‘ut‘yun* party functionary Ruben Hovsep‘yan (TV *Armenakop*).

elderly woman). Leila Saribekyan, the author and performer of the official ‘hymn’ of the event, described an wave of energy rising to Aragats (or rather Ararat), which she had experiencing during the performance (TV *Kentron*, 27 May); and a sceptical woman hoped that the energy field of the dancers’ circuit would heal her acquaintance (the author of this chapter) who had some health problems at the time of the event.

A key concept for the unity circle dance was the idea of kindness. ‘How could malice produce unity?’ asked the Prosecutor-General, rhetorically, when advocating kindness as the guiding principle of the circle dance. ‘Let’s become kind, let’s become strong, become a power’ echoed the ‘hymn’ of the circle dance. These appeals to be kind and good would have looked somewhat naïve, had they not repeated almost verbatim the expressed aim of some archaic rites of solidarity (Abrahamian 1990: 76).

The appeal to be strong prevailed: ‘Victory through dancing’ was one peasant’s evaluation of the event, while another peasant declared that ‘If an enemy approaches, we will defeat him.’ I would like to add that these and many similar statements, including those about national unity, were not just patriotic or politically arranged expressions (cf. President Kocharyan’s contrary statement that ‘what happened today shows that we have a national idea, the idea of statehood’ (TV *Mir*, 28 May)), but reflected the magical effect of the circle dance – its capacity to protect against the forces of evil.<sup>40</sup> This ancient feature of the circle dance was still alive for at least some of the participants were aware of it, either from ethnographic descriptions (a school girl referring to folk traditions) or from living traditions within their family (an elderly man). In any case, this idea was present in one form or another, whether in radio announcements portraying the dance as ‘our ethnic defence’ or in expressed hopes that ‘the spirits of our ancestors will watch over us’. A general view was that at last Armenia would be seen to be more than just ‘a crying nation’, as is usually believed, but that Armenians ‘also know how to dance properly’. The words of one middle-aged woman perhaps summed up this sentiment best: ‘It is good that we danced as one nation. At least there is one thing we can do well.’

**Postscript.** September 2006. One year after the dance, instead of the promised repetition of the circle dance, Nig-Aparan and its leader, the same Prosecutor-General, initiated a new action – the ‘Tree Planting of Unity’ – with the aim of planting 3.2 million trees across Armenia, the number of saplings corresponding to the official population of the country.<sup>41</sup> In March

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<sup>40</sup> On the magical round dance see Lisitsian 1972: no. 81 (The dance of annihilating the evil sorcerer); Pikichian 2001: 259; Khach‘atryan 2002: 24–33.

<sup>41</sup> There is a widespread belief that the real figure is lower by at least 300,000.

2006, over 40 NGOs responded to this call (TV *Shant'*, 2 March 2006). By 28 May, the Day of Independence, the spring phase of the planting was to have been accomplished, and participants were invited to commemorate the anniversary of the circle dance of unity at the monument of stone letters. The planting was scheduled to restart in autumn 2006, and this green initiative will take place each year over the next ten years (TV *Armenia*, 20 May 2006). As we see, the 'round number' of the unity dance event has now changed to another 'round number' (mystically, these two nevertheless are somehow related:  $3,200,000 / 2 = 1,600,000$ ). Thus the historically significant number has been replaced by a new figure, which many people believe is being used by authorities to manipulate elections: there are allegedly many more ballot papers than there are numbers of actual voters. But this is a theme for another chapter in some future volume, dedicated to further Caucasus paradigms.

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## **PART THREE**

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### **MOBILITIES AND BORDERS**

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## ***Chapter 9***

# **Prehistories of Globalisation: Circassian Identity in Motion**

Seteney Shami

However undisciplined the term *globalisation* might still be, there is increasing agreement as to the kinds of processes that it points to in the world. Whether interpreting alternative modernities, cultural hybridities, commodity circulations, transnational migrations, or identity politics, globalisation theory largely looks to the future, attempting to prefigure the new millennium while eschewing notions of linearity, teleology and predictability. Concomitantly, the notion of *modernity* has acquired remarkable fluidity, indicating that it has become plural, uneven, contested and ‘at large’ (Appadurai 1996). Building on ideas of the past as constructed, invented and produced, globalisation presents itself as a theory of the present moment. Powerfully expressing that ‘we now live in an almost/not yet world’ (Thrift 1996: 257), it captures the in-betweenness of a world always on the brink of newness.

Modernisation theory has also been concerned with process, innovation and rupture but it is differently invested in notions of the past. In its earlier, more concrete, more confident era, modernity invented an array of pasts. There is the past as Tradition, a timeless, static past whose value lies not in explanation but in revealing the alter ego either as the anachronistic self or the distant other. A different past is History. In one variant, this focuses on the rise of European hegemony, producing a causal narrative of how, why and when modernity started. Quite different again is the past as Evolution, an indexical, ascending past that naturalises the present. A fourth type of past, Antiquity, is indispensable to modernity’s prime embodiment, the nation-state, which it territorialises. A fifth is the past as Civilisation, a foundation myth featuring the migrations of the spirit of the West from Ancient Greece to present-day democracies. One could go on enumerating pasts, following the lines of Fabian’s (1983) discussion of the different notions of Time that, among other things, served the anthropological production of self and other. Anthropology, history, archaeology and other

disciplines jostle one another to lay authoritative claims to the pasts of modernity: alternative pasts characterised by fixed temporalities, marked epochs and bracketed periods, which work together to define, explain, enhance and anchor the notion of modernity.

Will pasts be invented by globalisation? What kinds of pasts will they be? How will globality trace its genealogies? These are the questions with which this paper grapples at its most general level. They are questions that speak to ongoing theoretical and ideological deliberations: Does globalisation represent rupture or continuity? Postmodernity or late modernity? Americanisation or glocalisation? I do not presume to give answers, and typologies or classifications would clearly not be the route to follow given the critical differences between the premises of globalisation theory and modernisation theory (Appadurai 1996). I will instead explore the issue through a closer look at an emergent notion that might be called the *prehistory of globalisation*. Further, I will focus on how the pasts of one small diasporic group, the Circassians, act upon their present engagements with globality and the ways in which they experience a newly accessible homeland in the North Caucasus. In looking at the linkages between Circassian pasts and presents, mobility and migration emerge clearly as a constitutive element of Circassian identity.

To explore the relationship between motion and identity I will juxtapose two texts from different time-spaces. The first is an ethnographic text, narrating a journey undertaken by a Circassian woman in 1993 from diaspora to homeland, from Turkey to the Caucasus. The second is an historical text dating from 1854 and documenting the journey of a Circassian woman from homeland to slavery, from the Caucasus to Egypt. The unexpected divergences, convergences and counterintuitive insights illuminated by the juxtaposition illustrate the changing trajectories of migration, memory and imagination. They help assess the utility of *prehistory* as a conceptual link between past and present and reveal the profoundly gendered nature of globalisation and its pasts.

### **Circassian migrations and the diasporic imagination**

Migration and imagination are historically linked processes that produce memorable moments in the pasts of peoples, nations, communities and individuals. Each sustains the other, expanding circumscribed experiences and elaborating localised meanings. How do new forms of mobility and transgressions of boundaries invoke new imaginations? How are experiences, acts, utterances and thoughts made meaningful given changing relations of mobility and incarceration? Situated at the nexus of such transformations, diaspora populations hold special promise for insights into

cultural dimensions of globalisation. They constitute 'crucibles of a postnational political order' (Appadurai 1996: 22) generative of hopes for 'nonabsolutist forms of citizenship' (Clifford 1997: 9). Diaspora identities are constructed in motion and along different lines than nation-states. They affirm multiple attachments, deterritorialisation, and cultural hybridity.

The Adyge, better known by outsiders as Circassians (or Çerkez, Sharkass, Tcherkess), are an example of identity in motion. Circassians trace their origins to the Northwest Caucasus, which was historically part of the interconnected regions of the Black and Mediterranean Seas, as chronicled by the voyages and tribulations of Odysseus, Jason and Prometheus. The Caucasus was also a source of warriors and slaves for various empires in the area (Toledano 1998). One example is the Circassian Mameluk slave-dynasties in thirteenth - to sixteenth-century Egypt, whose descendants, augmented by later individual and group migrations, came to form a Turco-Circassian elite. The history of the Caucasus in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries is largely framed by the conflicts between the Russian and Ottoman Empires in which local peoples were pawns, partisans and victims (Berkok 1958). Mass migrations of Circassians and other Muslim Caucasian peoples to the Ottoman Empire started in the 1850s, and the earliest immigrants were settled by the state in the Balkans. There they were immediately embroiled in the ongoing conflicts that resulted in the withdrawal of the Ottomans from the region. Within a few decades of settlement, therefore, they became part of the inflow of Muslim populations from the Balkans into the Anatolian and Syrian provinces of the Ottoman Empire. Together with the continuing flows from the Caucasus, the number of Circassian settlers by the beginning of the twentieth century reached an estimated total of 1.5 million (Karpas 1985).

Within a few decades again, the Circassians found themselves not Ottoman subjects but citizens of the newly formed states of Turkey, Syria, Jordan, Palestine (soon to become Israel). In the Soviet Caucasus, Circassians were allocated the three small administrative units of Kabardino-Balkaria, Cherkessk-Karachaevo and Adygeia, parts of Russia's 'ethnic fringe'. Although Circassians were not among the 'punished peoples', many were resettled and exiled during the Stalinist period, especially to Central Asia. During World Wars I and II, there were migrations out of the Caucasus to Europe and the United States. Middle Eastern wars produced further displacement, such as from Galilee in Palestine and from the Golan Heights in Syria. More recently, rural to urban relocation has drawn Circassian migrants from Anatolian villages to Ankara and Istanbul, and labour markets have drawn others to Germany, Holland and the United States (especially New Jersey and California).

Throughout this long history of displacement, Circassian identity has been formed and transformed. The particularities and symbols of distinctiveness in each locality articulated with translocal ethnic connections and collective sensibilities. From the vantage point of Circassians living outside the Caucasus at the present moment, two particular migrations stand out: the first as a starting point of Circassian history in the diaspora and the second as a possible exit into a different future. At one end is the historical rupture with the homeland: the emigration into the Ottoman Empire that reached its peak in 1864. At the other end are the post-1989 'return' migrations.

The break-up of the Soviet Union and the sudden access to territories behind the Iron Curtain were momentous for Circassians, many of whom have now travelled to the Caucasus, some intending to settle permanently.<sup>1</sup> About two hundred families, mainly from Turkey and Syria but also from Jordan and the United States, have since settled in the cities of Nalchik (capital of Kabardino-Balkaria) and Maikop (capital of Adygeia). Increasing numbers of young people are going as university students and staying on. There are also short-term and seasonal migrations, with many Circassians spending the summer months in the Caucasus, some buying houses and flats and participating in business ventures.

For the scattered descendants of those who left the Caucasus, the prospects of return and of nationhood are appealing, even compelling (Shami 1998). However, unease, cultural dissonance and mutual misunderstandings surround relations between Circassians of the Caucasus and those coming from abroad. Despite friendships and business partnerships with local Circassians, returnees tend to be critical of lifestyles, moral values and social relations in the Caucasus (Shami 1995).

Now a central node in the formation of a Circassian diaspora, the Caucasus is the terrain where transnational encounters occur and economic and political organisations are formed. Still, notions of homeland remain fluid and unstable. Visions of nation and diaspora coexist and contest each other in Circassian discourses and political practices (Shami 2000). Motivations to return, and the journeys that ensue, are experienced and articulated differently by different people. Some explain their decision as reflecting the national necessity of building a homeland, others stress the opportunities of building social and economic bridges between countries of origin and settlement. Through these journeys, some are seeking kin and community; others are seeking faith in themselves. Some find home, others

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<sup>1</sup> The is true of Abkhaz, Armenians, Azerbaijanis, Chechens, Ingush, Georgians, Dagestani groups, Ossetians, Kalmyks, Karachais, Balkars and Lezgis, to name but a few of the groups dispersed from the Caucasus.

frustration; some find new livelihoods, others have lost their lives. In all these ways Circassians are situating themselves in a global context. That identity and the future are simultaneously viewed from both 'elsewhere' and the 'homeland' demonstrates a diasporic imagination employing temporal and spatial strategies: those of remembering and forgetting, inscription and erasure.

### Migrations in the 1990s: Shengul

How does diasporic memory link past and present and construct futures? Such linkages were often present in the narratives I solicited about why and how individuals made the journey to the homeland, as in the one that follows. When I met her in the Caucasus in August 1993, Shengul was 37 years old, a single woman who had migrated from Turkey eighteen months before. This is how she related her journey:

We came by boat from Istanbul to Novorossiisk. Due to bad weather the boat could not leave the port in Istanbul for four days and we had to stay aboard. We could only go on the landing stage and get tea from the fire station. We were all in such bad shape and hungry. I had given up wearing a skirt and was in sweat pants. At that time, I had just had my hair permed and dyed blonde, and so people on the boat thought that I was Russian. Anyway, finally we set off, but it was still very rough, and it took several days. I spent most of the time in my cabin, but close to when we were about to arrive, I decided to go out on the deck and look out. I went to the balcony on the side of the boat. The *sefalet* (misery, degradation) of the past few days, the waves and the motion suddenly were too much for me. I became dizzy and fainted. I remember there was some water on the deck and I might have slipped. The water may have revived me a little because I remember being carried and then nothing. I woke up to find a very handsome white-haired man bending over me. My first thought was: '*Bütün bu senelerce taşıdığım şeyi böyle mi kaybedeceğim?*' (Is this how I will lose this thing that I have carried [cherished] all these years?).

Imagine that this is what I thought, I must have been in very bad shape. It turned out that the man was a doctor from Azerbaijan who was on the ship. The next thing I knew he was asking me: '*Nereni beğenmiyorsun?*' (What part [of your body] do you not like?) Of course in their language this means 'where does it hurt?'<sup>2</sup> But when I heard this I fainted again. Finally, I revived and was resting when

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<sup>2</sup> Azerbaijani differs significantly from spoken Turkish.

my [male] cousin came, angry and shouting: 'We looked for you all over the boat, where have you been?' I cried back, '*Yahu, baygındım!*' (Hey, I was passed out!).

Soon after, we arrived at the port of Novorossiisk. We got off the boat, and the city seemed to be full of churches and crosses, those old ancient buildings were loaded down with crosses. I said, 'What is this Christian place that I have come to?' I felt scared. However much I had said that I was an atheist, this was the feeling I had when I saw all these crosses.

First impressions are so strong, and yet later it all becomes routine and you stop noticing things. You should interview people when they first come, because people like me don't remember anymore.

The overwhelming tone of Shengul's narrative is that of loss: loss of self, loss of consciousness, loss of honour, and loss of religion. Paradoxically, on a journey 'back' to the 'homeland' that is meant to be about the recovery of identity and the redemption of history, she starts out by being mistaken for a Russian and ends the journey feeling that she is in an alien and foreign land, two instances of loss. The anxieties evoked by her crossing the Black Sea threaten fundamental aspects of her individual and collective identity. She vacillates in a space of in-betweeness, pulled in two directions at once, between a past that is interior and familiar (Turkey, family, her cabin on the ship) and a future that is exterior and strange (Caucasus, aloneness, the ship's deck). Interiority, or being inside, signifies both bondage and safety, while the outside is perceived alternately as freedom and as exile. The dilemma is embodied in the two male figures of her cousin, representing home, and the doctor, representing the Caucasus (Azerbaijan). Her cousin is familiar, but irritated that she has escaped surveillance. The doctor is a threatening stranger, but offering release from pain. The two figures are condensed symbols of Circassianness as she has experienced it in Turkey and Circassianness as she imagines it in the Caucasus. There is no recourse in family; her cousin's voice is an angry one. As for strangers, their kindness only reminds her of all that is at stake. Literally and metaphorically, she succumbs to motion sickness and defends herself against her predicament through fainting and oblivion.

Why was Shengul making this journey to the Caucasus? At first, her reasons echo those of others from Turkey who describe themselves as *dönüşcü* (literally, returnists). These are activists linked to Circassian associations who, since the late 1970s, have advocated that the only way to save Circassian culture from extinction is to return to the Caucasus and build a nation (see Emine's narrative in Shami 1998). While *dönüşcü* ideology attempts to reverse history, Shengul's account is more complex. It is

saturated with, and reproduces, cultural memories of displacement. Her narrative recalls the original migrations away from the Caucasus: danger-filled sea crossings, unsafe boats, hunger and misery (*sefalet*). Even though Shengul's is a journey 'home', it is marked by loss and arrival in the unknown. Her reference to atheism reflects the radical, secularist politics of the *dönüşcüs*, but it also echoes narratives that stress Islam and escape from life under Russian and Christian rule as the main reason for seeking refuge in the Ottoman domain. Shengul experiences the return to the Caucasus as a threat to her Muslim identity, even though, as a *dönüşcü* she had conceived herself as an atheist. The reversal of history is also a journey back in time. Threats that had earlier compelled migration are still present in the Caucasus.

Shengul's narrative resonates with that of an elderly woman interviewed in 1979, who spoke of her memories of the turn-of-the-century journey that brought her at the age of nine from the Caucasus to what eventually became Jordan.

A big boat, it was full on top and below. Some went to Turkey, some Syria, some Baghdad, some Amman. They were not from the same places [in the Caucasus], some [groups] were twenty families, some thirty families . . . There was no Russian pressure on the villages but the reason [for the emigration] was that they were going to make a school – Russia – and they were going to take their children [sons] to the army.<sup>3</sup> But I am not sure – this is what we heard – I did not see it. A Russian ship to Sevastopol', then usually they would change and take a Turkish boat in Iskilu, but ours went directly. They would not let us get off in Istanbul. People from the government took the passports – they said to us, those who want to go back, go back. And those who don't want to, give us the passport. They let us off in another faraway port. They pulled back the gangway quickly. A day and night by boat, then we got off. People from the government came and they gave each family seven *mejidiyes* [an Ottoman coin] and some food, but they would not let us off. After the boat, we came to a beautiful large land. People from the government, they distributed us [from] there.

In the Caucasus, they were farmers far from the cities. They were friends with the Russians, made bazaars with them. They don't want the school. They don't want to become Christians again.<sup>4</sup> We were

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<sup>3</sup> The migration being described was among the last waves out of the Caucasus. By 1900 the Russians may not have been using direct means of deportation.

<sup>4</sup> Islam spread late in the North-West Caucasus (sixteenth to seventeenth centuries), only partially replacing Greek Orthodox Christianity and indigenous belief systems. In the



backward (*mutakhallifin*). They would have become people (*bani admeen*) and educated and more advanced (*arqa*) [she put her finger to her head and shook it to indicate how stupid they were].<sup>5</sup> The main reason for the emigration was that they would take their sons to the army and they would fight the Muslims.

The boat journey is again the central image, the link between there and here. While the boat is the vehicle for escape from Russia, it becomes itself a sort of prison, from which the immigrants are not allowed to disembark until they have been divested of their former identity. While the moments that punctuate the narrative are similar to Shengul's – embarkation, ship deck, arrival – there are clear differences. Most noticeable, perhaps, is that there is no particular trauma associated with the travel, although the drama of the experience is apparent in the pulling back of gangways, the giving up of passports and the dispersal to different destinations. Unexpectedly, however, the arrival is a hopeful one in a beautiful land, in sharp contrast with the threatening landscape portrayed by Shengul. This could be taken as a sign for the often-mentioned desire of Circassians to come to the land of Islam.<sup>6</sup> Still, the original motives for the emigration are questioned. The whole narrative is remarkably free of nostalgia and contrasts the quest for religious freedom with that of modernity and progress. Also noticeable is the heavy presence of the state, forbidding and permitting movement. In Shengul's narrative, on the other hand, nature (the storm at sea) and individuals (the cousin, the doctor) play this role. Anti-nostalgia in this second narrative is accompanied by a clear and precise memory, a meticulous attention to what was experienced, what was seen as opposed to what was heard. There is no recourse to oblivion, as with Shengul.

With these kinds of narratives still alive and circulating in diasporic memory, it is perhaps not surprising that Shengul and others would anticipate the return to the homeland as the reversal of both history and time. The actual experience of the Caucasus, however, though mediated by this expectation, is of a different order. As Shengul elaborates her story, past and present are brought together to reveal multiple layers of meaning.

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Caucasus there are Christian Circassians living in and around the town of Mezdok in the republic of North Ossetia.

<sup>5</sup> This elderly woman, who had no formal education, had absorbed both the spirit and the language of Jordanian modernity. *Mutekhalif* connotes reactionary/traditional as well as backward. To become a *bani adam* (plural *bani admeen*), literally a son of Adam, is to become fully human, to realise your full potential and *arqa* means refined/evolved as well as advanced.

<sup>6</sup> Narratives of the migration among Circassians in Jordan invariably mention that the first immigrants took off their shoes when arriving in Syria because they were on 'holy land'.

Shengul came from a family living in one of the many small Circassian villages in central Turkey. Before the migration from the Caucasus, her great-grandfather had been 'a Kulak for the Pshi of the village' as she described him, using newly found words, and freely juxtaposing cultural categories.<sup>7</sup> When he came to Turkey, the family was well off, but their situation deteriorated when he became disabled. Shengul's father worked hard to secure a livelihood for the family and was exhausted in the process. When it became possible to travel to the Caucasus, the family decided that it would be good to have a foothold there – for nationalistic reasons, but also for economic ones, and as a safeguard for the future – for no one knows what will happen in Turkey or the region. But who was to go and establish the foothold? The sons were all working and married with children in school. Shengul, on the other hand, was unmarried and hence 'free'. And so it was decided. She made the trip with a cousin, who returned to Turkey after lodging Shengul with newly found relatives.<sup>8</sup> The idea was that she would begin the process of obtaining residence permits and buy a flat, since at the time prices were cheap. She established residency, but the family did not send the money in time, and flat prices went up.<sup>9</sup> After renting a flat on her own for a while, Shengul was forced to move back with her relatives.

I did not discuss with Shengul my feeling that a rather large sacrifice had been demanded of her. However, I did once comment to another returnee, Emine, that I found it surprising that families who had been so protective of their daughters in Turkey would send them off to the Caucasus, to an unknown and turbulent society with whose lifestyle they felt such unease. Emine herself was in a similar position and had introduced me to Shengul by saying, 'She came here alone, like me.' Emine's *dönüşcü* rhetoric was stronger than Shengul's, and she made it clear that coming to the Caucasus had been her own decision, over her mother's objections. But she also emphasised that her brothers had encouraged her and that they would 'one day' join her. When I met another woman from Syria who related a similar story, it seemed clear that these women, in their thirties and hence with no more expectations of marriage, were the expendable members

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<sup>7</sup> *Kulak* is the Russian term for a well-off landowning peasant, while *Pshi* is the Circassian term for prince or ruler.

<sup>8</sup> People trace their kin in the Caucasus through the family name or the village of origin. The kin links that are forged sometimes hold and sometimes collapse under the burden of the expectations placed upon them (Shami 1995).

<sup>9</sup> Those who came in 1990 could buy a three-room flat for about \$2000 from ethnic Germans whose return to Germany was being facilitated at the time. By 1993, prices had gone up to \$5000 or more.

of the family who could be sent off to stake out the future homeland.<sup>10</sup> Trying to find a way to ask Emine about this, I said, 'It seems to me that, for families, this is a new . . .', but as I searched for the appropriate word, Emine completed the sentence for me. 'Tactic?' she offered.

Unfolding the narrative of Shengul's journey reinforces the trope of loss, even of exile, but also discloses hidden hopes. In Turkey, Shengul had finished high school but had neither worked nor continued her education. Her brothers had not allowed her, she said. Now she had a job. Significantly, she was working at the city museum and had put together an exhibition about the returnees. She was thinking of enrolling in the university. People had been very kind and had spoken to the officials of the university, even the president, to make it possible for her to be admitted. Her journey, therefore, can be seen in a different light. Her permed and dyed hair, her immodest sweat pants, and her being mistaken for Russian may suggest anticipations of social and corporeal trespasses, rather than (or in addition to) loss of ethnic identity.<sup>11</sup> Perhaps Shengul's sudden recall of her Muslim identity was a rejection of the restrictions of *dönüşcü* ideology? Perhaps that 'thing' that she had 'carried' all these years was a burden she would have liked to be rid of?

Shengul's journey is not only a migration but also a transmutation. This came through in her criticisms of the lifestyles of local women, which had more than a touch of ambivalence about them. She said that it was difficult for her to get used to the idea that women had extramarital sexual relations, dressed immodestly, and even had illegitimate children. But she immediately followed this by saying that she had become friendly with some of the same women and had accepted that she should not compare them with girls in Circassian villages of Turkey but with those in Istanbul or European cities. This acceptance was quite radical given the near uniform disapproval of such matters by Circassians coming from the diaspora.<sup>12</sup> In another

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<sup>10</sup> Ferhunde Özbay informs me (in a personal communication) that it is a pattern in labour migration in Turkey that women are sent to, or left behind in, the place that is considered a 'secondary' economic location. If the village of origin is the secondary source of livelihood, then women are left behind. If the city provides fewer economic resources, then women are sent there.

<sup>11</sup> In Turkey and other countries receiving tourists and suitcase traders, people from the former Soviet Union all tend to be called 'Russian' indiscriminately. Diaspora Circassians coming to the Caucasus also sometimes slip into calling the local Circassians 'Russian'.

<sup>12</sup> Such freedoms seem much rarer in the Caucasus than 'in Istanbul and European cities'. Also they are met with disapproval by most local Circassians and read as signs of 'Russification'. For the valorisation of the domestic sphere as a site of resistance to Sovietisation, see Shami (2000).

turnaround, however, Shengul mentioned that some women with whom she had become friends now, under her influence, dressed more modestly.

Ambiguity pervaded all of Shengul's statements about life in the Caucasus. On one hand, there was the possibility of independence, work and education. On the other hand, the society she was flung into was alien in all aspects of everyday life. For example, among Circassians in the diaspora, cleanliness is a prized value that is spoken of in identical idioms in households throughout various countries. At every appropriate and inappropriate moment, Shengul lamented the lack of cleanliness in houses, shops and roadside stalls, and compared them constantly with what she knew in Turkey. 'Where', she asked, 'is that cleanliness of the Circassian house? The way we wash dishes? Here they just pass hot water over the plate, and that is all.'<sup>13</sup> Still, she said that she had become used to it all, even to the way they used each other's utensils. 'After all', she said, 'if a person drinks from my cup and doesn't get sick even though I must have some microbes, then why would I get sick from drinking from her cup?' Immediately afterwards, however, in a style that was becoming familiar, she went on to say that they might still be influenced and taught to be cleaner.

Perhaps more poignant, and more challenging to 'incorporated practices' (Connerton 1991: 90), were manners of deportment. In Shengul's household in Turkey, they had strictly observed Circassian etiquette of decorum, formality and authoritarianism between generations and age groups. Family members neither sat nor spoke in the presence of elders and never saw each other in a state of undress. Upon arriving in the Caucasus, Shengul stayed in a house that was crowded and not very clean. They queued up to use the bathroom every day, each carrying a towel. 'Imagine this', Shengul said, 'when in all my life, my brothers had never ever seen me even with wet hair. I was so ashamed.' 'But', she added, 'I got used to it. What could I do?'

Shengul's memories and commentaries express a preoccupation with her bodily integrity but also acknowledge constant transformation of her external and internal self. She inaugurates her journey by altering her own appearance. But when this threatens to transform her beyond recognition (from a Circassian to a Russian) she retreats into the safety of the cabin or unconsciousness. Loss of honour is threatened by a range of experiences from seasickness to indecency in the homes of strangers. Shengul experiences herself as exposed, penetrated and polluted by what she perceives to be improper ideas, behaviours and hygiene. Still, in all of my

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<sup>13</sup> To my eye, the variations in the cleanliness of both private and public spaces in the Caucasus and Turkey make it difficult to rank unequivocally one above the other in this regard.

conversations with her, Shengul maintained that she had grown so used to things in the Caucasus that she no longer noticed anything about the place. Within five months she felt like she had lived there all her life. 'They are so warm and so nice that it makes up for everything.' Making friends with women in the Caucasus opens up the possibility of interpenetration and exchange, even if, at the moment, Shengul will only extend this mutuality to the microbes in the shared utensils. The intensity with which she insists that 'I have become just like them', that she no longer notices anything, emphasises both her hopes of a new life and her lack of fit. She is still in an in-between state, still suffering from cognitive motion sickness. It was not coincidental that she ended the detail-filled narrative of her journey to the Caucasus by insisting that she should not be interviewed, because she no longer remembers.

### **Memory and prehistory**

Implicated in the migrations of Circassians to and from the Caucasus are processes that configure the past in new ways. An emergent notion that helps conceptualise such processes is that the era of globalisation has a prehistory. Buell, for example, argues that 'Globalization thus traces prehistories to our current hyperawareness of the interrelationship between local and global interactions, histories that, for some, date back to the expansion of the West, for others the Middle Ages, and for still others early civilizations and before' (1998: 259). Similarly, Clifford employs the phrase 'prehistory of post-colonialism' (1997: 9, 277) in his proposition that diasporic relations pre-existing the colonial state become the kinds of transnational networks, or at least provide the grounds so to speak, on which post-coloniality and even perhaps post-nationality can be built. In this sense, the concept appears to be deployed descriptively, simply to refer to a period before modernity that informs the present. However, Clifford assigns the concept more power when he suggests that it is 'about recovering non-Western, or not-only-Western, models for cosmopolitan life, nonaligned transnationalities struggling within and against nation-states, global technologies, and markets – resources for a fraught coexistence' (1997: 277). How is the recovery of such models to be achieved?

The term *prehistory* is deployed by various authors as both a concept and a metaphor. As a concept it is an example of 'typological time' (Fabian 1983), referring to a time before history, before writing, before the state, before humanity in the full sense of the term; a time of the subordination of culture to nature, which merges in popular memory with mythological time. But prehistory is also a historical device – more a way of thinking about the past than a fixed reality. In consequence, it is a mobile concept, referring to

10,000 BCE in one place and 1000 CE in another. Prehistory as metaphor makes use of the attributes associated with the concept but applies them paradoxically to conjure new meanings. A powerful use of the term is Walter Benjamin's. As Susan Buck-Morss (1999: 64) explains, Benjamin described bourgeois capitalist society as existing in a 'prehistoric state' due to its being subject to the 'natural laws' of capitalism. In spite of the promises of early modernity, for Benjamin, 'so long as people were held under the power of these blind forces, the promise of a universal human history could not come into its own' (Buck-Morss 1999: 64). In this way, the notion of prehistory can mobilise the collective imagination 'for a revolutionary break from the recent past by evoking a cultural memory reservoir of myths and utopian symbols from a more distant ur-past' (1999: 116).

There is promise in such a strategy. A prehistory of globalisation seeks pasts characterised by mobility, cosmopolitanism and vertical and horizontal linkages that displace a notion of the past as stagnant and bound by empire and tradition. It excavates beneath the nation-state and decentres it from the narrative of the present. In such a usage, prehistory denotes a past prefigurative of a non-national future. The use of the term does not aim to fix the characteristics of a certain age, but to enable the mobilisation of alternative pasts in order to challenge the teleological certainty of the present. Clifford affirms that 'counterhistories can support strategies for nontotalizing "globalization from below"' (1997: 276). This is only true if they do not replicate modernist fascinations with the order of things, and do not become as totalitarian as the national imaginary, simply silencing different voices along their way. If the notion of prehistory is to be deployed to reveal, rather than to gloss, ways of seeing, then I would suggest that it has to be reconceptualised in three ways:

First, a new use of the term should reveal the predisposition of history to categorise, objectify and impose fixedness through the construction of 'periods'. It should question history as 'the rise of the West' and its (inevitable?) protagonist, the nation-state. Thus the first deployment of the term should be to see through categorisations of time that produce the past as a foreign country.

Second, the notion of prehistory should alert us to strategies of territorialising identity. It should question the way nationalism reaches beyond empire, beyond recorded history (which often does not represent *its* past but that of the *other*) for the scientific recovery of the nation's origins and boundaries from the archaeological record, buried 'in time'. As Anderson offers rhetorically: 'Supposing "antiquity" were, at a certain historical juncture, the *necessary consequence* of "novelty"' (1991: xiv; Anderson's emphasis). A new notion of prehistory has to deterritorialise

identity and capture it while 'in motion'. Reinterpreting the archaeological connotation of prehistory as metaphor means recognising that 'The archaeological object, in its widest sense, acquires another and new stratigraphic level each time it enters into the perceptual order of the present.' (Seremetakis 1994b: 140–1; Seremetakis' emphasis).

Third, the teleological necessity of prehistory unfolding into 'real' history should be interrogated. Deconstructing the national imaginary has shown that the past is used, reinterpreted and subjugated to the politics of the present, highlighting the contingency of social formations and cultural meanings. Modernity constructs a continuum through the idea of progress, employing the tools of inattention, distraction, erasure and silencing (Klein 1997). Yet it is not enough to read the past as the politics of the present. The genealogical and archaeological links to the world 'before European hegemony' (Abu-Lughod 1989) are yet to be discovered, through memory/imagination. Prehistory, therefore, has to 'map erasures' (Klein 1997: 9).

In sum, a prehistory of globalisation has to reinforce the break with modernisation theory in the ways identified by Appadurai (1996: 9). It has to help discard teleology, focus on everyday cultural practice, leave open the question of prognosis, and highlight the transnational. Further, it has to reveal the practices of modernisation as freezing the potential of transformation while presenting itself as newness. It has to emphasise mobility as a contemporary 'structure of feeling [that] is able to capture the importance *and* 'thisness' *and* liminality of much new experience' (Thrift 1996: 284; Thrift's emphasis). In all of this, the 'work of the imagination' which is so central to globalisation processes (Appadurai 1996: 3) involves equally the ethnographer and the travelling subject.

An exemplary text in this vein is Amitav Ghosh's *In an Antique Land*, upon which Clifford relies in developing his argument. Ghosh's work is simultaneously a contemporary narrative of an Indian doing ethnography in Egypt and a history of linkages between Egypt, North Africa, India and South Asia in the twelfth century. Ghosh describes, with acuity and humour, how he and his interlocutors continuously fall into the hegemonic divide of East and West. In contrast, it is a slave in the twelfth century who represents a superseded world of interconnections. The archaeological object ('in its widest sense') of Ghosh's excavation is the slave who enters the 'perceptual order of the present' not through national memory but through a manuscript (number H.6) from the forgotten Jewish Geniza archive. Ghosh's story of how these documents are scattered from their historic depository in Cairo implicates missionaries, scholars, universities, travellers and religious institutions. The gradual awakening to the 'value' of the Geniza documents

uncovers the story without which the past would be unknowable and unimaginable. Ghosh's journey in search of paper fragments, sales deeds, letters and jottings on waste paper gives the slave of MS H.6 a name (Bomma), a home and family, a lineage and life. In return Bomma provides a prehistory for Nabeel, a migrant worker from an Egyptian village and a figure of Ghosh's contemporary narrative who is lost in Iraq during the Gulf war of 1990–91. Searching for him on the TV screen broadcasting the exodus of millions from Iraq, Ghosh and the Egyptian villagers realise that 'There was nothing to be seen except crowds: Nabeel had vanished into the anonymity of History' (1992: 353).

I have read Shengul's narrative against the history of Circassian mass emigration out of the Caucasus. This represents her journey as one of going back, of return, of recovering pure identity. While her narrative includes moments of resistance, it is framed by the *dönüşcü* discourse, which conceives of the past as dispossession and the future as national. Yet, the possibilities offered by the transnational encounters of the present can be explored in light of different pasts, such as pasts that foreground interconnections, histories of movement that complicate notions of home and exile, of self and other. The possibilities of transcending the discursive space of the national imaginary present themselves when Shengul's narrative is set against a different migration, against the story of Shemsigul.

### Migrations in the 1850s: Shemsigul

Although the diasporic imagination of the Circassians finds its 'beginning' with the mass migrations of the late nineteenth century, complex economic and political relations between the Caucasus and the adjacent empires long precede 1864. Human traffic was continuous through wars, trade routes and pilgrimages. One particular type of trade made for particularly complex interpenetrations: the slave trade. Extracted from the anonymity of history we find the story of 'Shemsigul: A Circassian Slave in Mid-Nineteenth-Century Cairo' (Toledano 1993).

There, in the old pages of a police register at the Egyptian National Archives, in Ottoman Turkish, unravels a troubled chapter of a woman's life that began in a Circassian village in the Caucasus, continued in Istanbul, and ended in Ottoman Cairo ... (p. 60).

Born into a poor Circassian family, Shemsigul was brought to Istanbul by a relative or a slave dealer, who offered her for sale in the Ottoman capital, where the slave dealer Deli Mehmet<sup>14</sup> purchased her ... (p. 61).

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<sup>14</sup> Meaning 'Mad Mehmet'. Mehmet is the Turkish pronunciation of Mohammed.



During the police interrogation on 30 June 1854, Shemsigul recounts her journey to Egypt two years previously and her sale to the household of Mehmet Ali Pasha, the governor general of Egypt, by Deli Mehmet. Five months after this transaction Deli Mehmet removes her from the governor's house because it is discovered that she is pregnant.

Question: By whom did you become pregnant?

Shemsigul: I became pregnant by Deli Mehmet.

Questions: You state that you became pregnant by Deli Mehmet. Where, then, did he have sexual relations with you? And, since you became pregnant, how come he sold you [this being illegal]?

Shemsigul: In the boat, on the way here, he forced me to have sexual relations with him; he continued to sleep with me until he sold me. Before the sale, I told him: 'Now you want to sell me, but I have missed my period, and I think that I am pregnant by you.' When I asked him later what would happen, he did not listen, but went away, brought back some medicines, and made me drink them [to induce an abortion]. Finally, he sold me to the palace (p. 62).

Shemsigul describes how Deli Mehmet returns with her to his house, and his wife hires a midwife to perform an abortion. The pregnancy, however, is too advanced, and when the midwife refuses, Deli Mehmet's wife beats Shemsigul on the stomach and back with a clothes-press and a mincing rod. A woman neighbour who witnesses the beating reports it to a dignitary, Selim bey, whose wife takes pity on Shemsigul and takes her into her house.

Shemsigul: When the child was expected to come into the world, Deli Mehmet's wife came and stood at the bedside. As he was born, she took the child to another room and passed him through her shirt to mark that she was adopting him. To me she said that he died. Later she went to her house, brought in a wet nurse for the child, and gave [the baby] to her [care]. One day, Selim bey's wife brought the baby [home] secretly and showed him to me (p. 63).

Deli Mehmet then gives Shemsigul to one slave trader after another, but none are able to sell her, in part because Deli Mehmet has stipulated that her buyer must not live in Egypt. Finally she is sold to Timur, another slave dealer.

Questions: Did you at any stage from the beginning [of the story], inform the slave dealer Timur, or anyone else, that you had been pregnant and that you were badly beaten? If you did not, why?

Shemsigul: As a slave, I was afraid to say anything about my suffering so I did not tell Timur [or anyone else] (p. 64).

A woman's life is determined by another journey across the Black Sea – this time from the Caucasus to Turkey and onwards to Egypt – and a rape while

on board. Toledano estimates Shemsigul's age at the time of this interrogation as being around fourteen or sixteen years old.<sup>15</sup> He explains that, 'from a legal perspective, the slave dealer Deli Mehmet was the owner of Shemsigul and, as such, was allowed to have sexual relations with her. The law did not require the slave's consent, thereby allowing rape in case of the woman's resistance. The dealer was aware, of course, that when the slave lost her virginity, her market value automatically declined. Moreover, if the slave became pregnant, as indeed happened to Shemsigul, the law forbade her sale' (p. 67). Furthermore, the children of such a union were legally free, and the woman is freed upon her owner's death. Clearly, for these reasons Deli Mehmet's wife was anxious to get rid of Shemsigul who would, in effect, be her co-wife. Deli Mehmet himself was anxious to sell Shemsigul outside Egypt so that his breach of the law could not be exposed. The child that Shemsigul bore from Deli Mehmet was ritually adopted by his wife and made to disappear.

All is revealed however, when someone informs Timur that Shemsigul had borne Deli Mehmet a son. Timur complains to the head of the slave dealers' guild, who investigates the case and then turns the matter over to the police. After their investigation, and despite Deli Mehmet's prevarication, the police department accepts Shemsigul's version of the story and passes its recommendation to that effect to the court.

At this point the document ends. 'What happened to Shemsigul afterwards must be left to the imagination', Toledano writes, speculating that, as a result of the court ruling, Shemsigul probably obtained manumission (p. 72). But then where would she go? Toledano suggests that she perhaps sought patronage from Selim bey, whose kindly wife had helped Shemsigul. If so, she would have worked in his household, and he would have had the responsibility for marrying her off well. Toledano stresses that 'While concubinage was hardly an ideal arrangement for women like Shemsigul, it was socially respectable and, if a child was born, also legally binding on the man. However, especially for women, but for men too, freedom had its own disadvantages, limited choices, deprivation and oppression' (p. 72).

By the nineteenth century, changes in the internal structure of the Ottoman Empire meant that slavery had become largely domestic rather than military, agricultural or industrial (Erdem 1993). Furthermore, British anti-slavery pressures on the Ottoman Empire had drastically decreased the black slave trade through North Africa. The remaining trade was largely in

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<sup>15</sup> Toledano does not explain whether her age is mentioned in the document, or whether he is making an assumption. He states in the introduction that the majority of slave girls from the Caucasus were sold in their early teens.

women, among whom Circassians were in high demand.<sup>16</sup> Why would Shemsigul's family sell their daughter into slavery? Toledano gives various reasons: that a special class of agricultural slaves had existed among Circassians for centuries; that extreme poverty among Circassian slave families as well as the free lower classes forced them to sell their young children; that parents believed that they were improving the chances of their offspring for better living conditions through an entry into the Ottoman harems and consequently into elite society. He goes on to say, 'As we consider how they ultimately fared, we should weigh the loss of family and legal freedom (for those who had not been born slaves) against the possibility that they might thereby have gained access to a better life' (p. 61).

In offering these reasons for the Circassian slave trade, Toledano echoes a number of sources contemporary to these events. Erdem (1993) documents in detail the opinions of both Ottoman and European authorities and observers that 'Circassians came to Istanbul willingly "to become the wives of the Sultan and of the Pashas, and the young men to become Beys and Pashas"' (1993: 236, n. 39). An Ottoman document explains that the slave trade did not need to be forbidden since, through slavery, Circassians were being taken from 'primitivism to civilization, from poverty and need to prosperity and happiness' (quoted in Erdem 1993: 209 and Şen 1994: 175).

There is evidence enough that there were bondsmen among the Circassians in the Caucasus; however, the nature of this status or of the stratification system is hardly clear.<sup>17</sup> Travelogues from the nineteenth century describe slaves as comprising an admixture of Circassian prisoners from inter-group raiding and non-Circassian war prisoners (mainly Russians, Cossacks and Poles). There were also practices, such as contracting disobedient sons into the service of another family and exile as punishment, which added individuals to this rank. All these types of bondage seem to have been temporary and surrounded by complex sets of rights and reciprocity. However, the sale of offspring to overseas slavery must be seen as a distinct practice and as an outcome of historical relations with imperial systems rather than a result of an indigenous system of slavery.

Would poverty drive slave parents and poor free parents to sell their children? This assumes that slave parents are allowed to sell their children,

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<sup>16</sup> It should be noted that 'Circassian' as an outsider term was often applied indiscriminately to the peoples of the North Caucasus. Given the complex mixture of peoples and languages, individuals referred to as Circassian in historical sources could belong to any one of a number of groups.

<sup>17</sup> Stratification among Circassians included the following: *Pshi* (princes), *Werk* (nobles), *Thfoqotl* (freemen), *Pshitl* (slaves, literally the Prince's man). There were also various degrees within each rank.

who would presumably belong to the parent's owners. Furthermore, why was poverty so rife among Circassians? Shemsigul's story takes place in 1852–4; the mass emigration of Circassians and other Caucasian peoples had already begun and would peak some years later. At its highest volume, the sale of young women and male children by Circassians was prevalent enough to cause Ottoman authorities a great deal of anxiety.<sup>18</sup> The Ottoman documents take pains to make it clear that the sales were necessitated by the need of immigrants to defray the costs of passage to Ottoman ports and the costs of settlement.<sup>19</sup> The economic necessity thus emerges from a society in a state of massive dislocation.

The mid-nineteenth century recorded sharp increases in the supplies of women and children slaves and lower prices in the markets. New practices emerged, such as 'mortgaging' children to slave-traders, to be repossessed by their parents if they found the money within a stipulated time period (Şen 1994). The state forbade the Circassian slave trade in 1862 and again in 1871, but trade continued and new markets appeared. At the same time, however, large numbers of women sold into slavery were appealing to the courts for their freedom. The extent of the problem is evident in this communication dated 4 June 1873.

To the Exalted Ministry of Justice and the Most Excellent Directorate of Immigrants:

Being slaves of Circassian immigrants and being sold by their owners to buyers in Istanbul, most slave women, after being sold, are applying to the government with claims of freedom, and until their trials are ended and their freedom or slavery is established, they have been, with the knowledge of the Coordination Committee of the Ministry of Justice, placed as guests in the house of Duacı Salih Aga, and for each soul, six kuruş daily is being given to the mentioned Aga. Yet even so, in order to settle the disputes of these [women] and [for them] to be safeguarded and ordered [protected] in a more suitable manner as required and because they must be taken

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<sup>18</sup> Erdem (1993) points out that Ottoman anxiety was partly due to the pressure being exerted by the British to abolish the slave trade if not slavery itself. However, it was also due to the fact that the authorities were increasingly faced with illegal sales, where the persons sold were not of slave origin, or had not been enslaved legally according to Muslim shari'a law. The documents state that about 150,000 slaves came with the Circassian migration. Clearly this mass phenomenon was of a different order than the earlier slave trade with the Caucasus.

<sup>19</sup> The Ottoman discourse is extremely interesting. On one hand, slavery is a religiously sanctioned status, though governed by strict laws as regards sales, manumission, and treatment. On the other hand, enlightenment terms such as liberty, freedom, humanity saturate the documents.

into a more acceptable order,<sup>20</sup> from now on such slaves as apply to the government with the claim of freedom will not be given by the Coordination Committee to the house of the said Salih Aga. [Rather] the old laissez-passez [internal travel document] office, which belongs to the property of the police department, and is an abandoned place, for its repair will be allocated seven-hundred-odd kuruş and assigned as a residence for them. And for the slaves to be [placed] under the supervision of Sadıka Hanım, the employee of the police station's women's detention centre, and another woman of good morals to be with the slaves on a constant basis, and this woman be given five kuruş every day and the mentioned Sadıka Hanım be given eight and a half kuruş daily, and for such sundries as candles and soap a hundred kuruş a month to be allocated, and for each one of the slaves, five kuruş daily to be given to their own hands. Thereby having been placed in an proper manner, [given] the expenses that were incurred over the past three years, [through] the manner described here the expenses that will be incurred by the treasury will be up to nine thousand kuruş less, and in addition there will be improvement in every way...[dated] 7 Rebiülahır 1290.<sup>21</sup>

The fact that 'most women' were protesting their slavery leads the Ottoman state to institute a special system and budget for processing their cases. Clearly not all Circassian girls saw slavery as a route to 'prosperity and happiness'. Even through the dry language of official documents, the pathos of these women comes through. Used and abused by the likes of 'Prayerful' Salih and 'Mad' Mehmet, one wonders how many were able to resort to state protection and how many remained silent. Shemsigul says, 'As a slave, I was afraid to say anything about my suffering.' The 'willingness' of Circassian girls to be sold into slavery, therefore, should be weighed not against life in the Ottoman imperial harem but against life in an Ottoman detention centre.

### **Multiply-authored histories and silences**

Shemsigul's story can be read in three ways, each of which evokes different time-spaces. First, it can be read, as Toledano does, as a story of premodern Empires and slave-based societies. The pathos of her story is then mitigated by the perception of that time-space as one where bondage was preferable to freedom for the likes of Shemsigul. The assumption is that premodern

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<sup>20</sup> The implication appears to be that Duacı ('Prayerful') Salih Aga was improperly availing himself of the opportunity of having young slave women in his house.

<sup>21</sup> The directive continues with a paragraph on the details of the implementation. Başbakanlık Archives, Ayniyat Defteri, No. 1141. My translation.

sensibilities would not interpret experiences and notions of freedom and bondage in modern terms. A second reading, which I present above, sees Shemsigul's particular experience of slavery as an outcome of the mass migration of Circassians. The negotiations within Ottoman society over the meanings of slavery and slave trading, the struggles between the Ottomans and the British over anti-slavery measures, and the judicial system for dealing with legal transgressions all point to a modernising society and state. In general, the resettlement of the Circassians played into Ottoman policies of political and economic consolidation, centralisation and modernisation, especially in the Syrian province (Rogan 1991; Shami 1992). These processes determined the nature of the nation-states that emerged from the break up of the empire after World War I. Shemsigul then becomes one of the resources that are used up and spat out by modernisation, an example of the many ways by which the nation is constituted through women's bodies.

A third reading of Shemsigul's story would see it as a prehistory of Shengul's story. The coincidences between the two experiences are remarkable. In both narratives a sea voyage constitutes a turning point (a sea change?) in the protagonist's life. It is a journey from home to exile, but at the same time it is touched with shades of a homecoming. For Shengul, it is a 'return' to the homeland, her place of origin and natural domicile, in a sense. For Shemsigul, her journey from the periphery to the centre of Empire is supposed to deliver her to an elite household, in which she would enjoy 'welfare and happiness'. Instead, both women are left exposed and alone by the decisions of their families. Shemsigul's vulnerability is forcibly brought home to her through rape, while for Shengul the realisation awakens in a fear of rape. Both women's unstable status in the liminal space of the boat is not resolved at their destination. Both continue to inhabit an ambivalent space that constantly shifts between bondage and freedom. If Shemsigul is manumitted, she will only have the freedom of destitution and perhaps outright prostitution. For Shengul, she may escape the stifling family context, but to partake fully in the freedom of her new context would cast her out of her own values, out of her own society. For both, religion appears as a protection, although at different levels. In Shemsigul's case, Shari'a-based law offers her recourse to some justice. For Shengul, its apparent loss invokes her deeper, 'true' beliefs. But ultimately both women may end up trying to integrate into a family not their own, to recreate a situation of bondage, rather than remain in the world on their own. Having set out, or been sent out, on this journey, they find that at its end there is no arrival.

Each of these texts exists in its particular time-space. The motivations for the journeys they narrate are different and the trajectories lead in opposite directions. The women in them, however, mirror one another and

meld with one another. Each reveals hidden meanings in the other. Shemsigul's story comes to us in the form of a police document, an official interrogation with little room for emotion. Shengul provides Shemsigul's sensibility, her sensory memory of the disequilibrium wrought by the sea journey, in the transmutation involved in the migration. Shemsigul, in turn, illuminates Shengul's unspoken nightmare, revealing the equivocal nature of 'freedom' in a patriarchal world. Even the divergences in the two stories reinforce the parallels. Shemsigul is sixteen while Shengul is thirty-seven, but in both cases it is their age that selects them for their journeys. In their very names, the contrapuntal relation between these two lives comes through. Shemsigul [Şemsigül] means sun-flower and Shengul [Şengül] means happy-flower, an irony compounded by Shengul being the real name of the protagonist<sup>22</sup> while Shemsigul is likely not a real name, since names of slaves were routinely changed after they were sold.

The parallels between the stories extend further, from narrated experience into context. Both women's lives are subordinated not only for the sake of the family's economic survival but also for the sake of the reproduction of the ethnic group. Women like Shemsigul were sold to enable families to survive and to settle in their new country. Women like Shengul are sent ahead to pave a way for resettlement in the homeland, to create an alternative to insecure livelihood. Group identity is safeguarded at the expense of notions of self-identity and accepted gender roles. Shengul is sent off at the last moment when she could have possibly found a marriage partner, to a place where marriage may be inevitably foreclosed. The perception of local Circassians as dissolute and irresponsible enables male returnees to marry local women (to redeem them in a sense), but makes it unacceptable for female returnees to marry local men. As for Shemsigul, it is not her marriage potential but her sexual function that determines her value as a commodity. Furthermore, if she marries it will not be into her ethnic group. If she bears a child as a concubine it does not belong to her, as was made manifestly clear to her by Deli Mehmet's wife, and her child does not perpetuate her own, her family's or her group's identity.

In this aspect, thousands of Circassian girls share in Shemsigul's fate, for out-marriage of girls has been a clear strategy (a 'tactic' in Emine's words) in Circassian communities of the diaspora, cementing alliances and securing patronage. As an elderly woman in Turkey once commented to me, 'We have given away our girls to everybody.' Thousands of girls also share Shengul's fate, not able to marry into the group, for a variety of reasons, and yet not allowed to marry out. On one hand, Shengul and Shemsigul give up

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<sup>22</sup> I thank and admire Shengul more than I can say for her generosity in allowing me to share her story and for her discerning understanding of my task as an ethnographer.

central values of their ethnic identity, namely marriage and reproduction for the group. On the other hand, they ensure the reproduction of the group not through their own reproductive functions but paradoxically by giving up (or rather being denied) this function, or reproducing for 'the other'. It is perhaps due to the subordination of the individual to the collective that both narratives end with an insistence on silence. Shemsigul says that as a slave she does not have the right to complain of her suffering, to speak. Shengul, in a manner not so different, insists that she simply doesn't remember.

Globalisation has produced new flows that open up the potential for new imaginations and memories. Without Shengul's journey, Shemsigul's story could not have been recovered and redeemed; it would have remained the story of premodern practice and sensibility, something to be transcended and looked back at with understanding and pity for the archaic other inhabiting a foreign country. Without Shemsigul, Shengul's story could not be layered in quite the same way. Shemsigul is not part of Shengul's cultural repertoire or of her memory, and yet they become part of the same diasporic imaginary in which 'the word 'unfolding' has a double meaning. A bud unfolds into a blossom, but the boat which one teaches children to make by folding paper unfolds into a flat sheet of paper' (Benjamin 1992 [1968]: 118). The boats on which Shengul and Shemsigul travel appear to contain clear meanings once they have been unfolded into flat sheets of paper. They tell of empire and nation, exile and homeland, loss and redemption. On the other hand, the stories of Shengul and Shemsigul, Happy-flower and Sun-flower, unfold like buds, revealing their layers but receding into oblivion just when the heart of the blossom is glimpsed.

Reflecting the heart of the matter is the image of a woman on a boat. This image is truly a Benjaminian 'dialectical image' which "'interrupts the context into which it is inserted" and thus "counteracts illusion"' (Buck-Morss 1999: 67).<sup>23</sup> Juxtaposing the two texts interrupts a linear history of Circassian migrations and identity. It shows that 'it isn't that the past casts its light on what is present or that what is present casts its light on what is past; rather an image is that in which the Then [and There] and the [Here and] Now come together into a constellation like a flash of lightning' (Benjamin quoted in Pred 1995).

It is the possibility of juxtaposing the two narratives, the bifocality that it entails, that brings into a different light the mediating story of migration and documentation through which these two lives, the past and

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<sup>23</sup> See Benjamin's discussion of Brecht's dramatic strategy where 'the discovery (alienation) of conditions takes place through the interruption of happenings' and the notion of the 'quotable gesture' where 'interruption is one of the fundamental devices of all structuring' (Benjamin 1992 [1968]: 147–8).



present, are linked. The juxtaposition produces a past that reveals both the continuities and the new promises contained in processes and discourses of globalisation. The strategies for recovering this past are the work of the imagination, and make use of various resources: narratives, texts, objects. These are not fixed in particular 'periods' but shift depending on the vantage point of the present.

Is it a coincidence that Ghosh's excavations and mine both yield slaves and slavery? At the very least, this opens up a link with the world of 'the black Atlantic' which has generated much of the inspiration for post-colonial possibilities. The Indian Ocean, the Arabian Sea, the Black Sea offer new and appropriately agitated spaces in/on/under/through which 'we can map the postcolonial by charting its submarine flows', generate 'a liquid vocabulary that identifies diaspora cultures and identities as flow dynamics', and discover 'a self which manifests itself not as an essence but as a meandering' (Baucom 1997: para. 17, 7).

In mapping these flows, however, gender differences should not be submerged. Wolff (1993) has shown how metaphors of travel may reproduce androcentrism by not acknowledging the differential access of men and women to travel and their different experiences of it. Both Shemsigul's and Shengul's journeys are enmeshed in the patriarchal and dominant structures of their day. Thus, marginality and interstitial status are not only attributes of fixed places. Incarceration can be, and often is, mobile, as in slave ships and migrant households. Rather than 'the middle-class idea of the chosen and leisured journey' (Wolff 1993: 225), these Circassian journeys are better compared with other more-or-less forced migrations of single women, like those from Britain to Southern Africa in the past (Swaisland 1993) and with present refugee flows (Buijs 1993). Still, Wolff's point that 'destabilizing has to be *situated*, if the critic is not to self-destruct in the process' is an important one (1993: 235; Wolff's emphasis). If the past is described through metaphors of liquidity and the present is characterised by 'a nauseatingly decentred global interactiveness' (Buell 1998: 577), then Shengul's motion sickness may be, after all, an appropriate reaction to how identity, self and gender are situated in a globalising world.

### **Postscript 1999**

In Circassian oral history, there are narratives of sea crossings and dispersal, but silences about the means and costs of resettlement. Left unspoken is the story of Shemsigul. It is an imagination, that of the ethnographer, that brings together texts that are not linked and that do not 'belong' together in any necessary way. However, it is that contrapuntal juxtaposition, the attempt at uncovering a multiply-authored history, that produces Benjamin's 'flash'.

The flash, and the image that is generated, illuminate Circassian memories but also reveal the silences and the erasures within them.

It was not my intention to give Shengul's story a happy ending. In 1993, as I listened to her struggle with her ambivalent feelings it was clear that there was no resolution or closure. Since then things have changed. Shengul has obtained a university degree. She continues to work in the museum, prepare radio shows about the diaspora, and read the radio news in Turkish twice a week. She lives in her own apartment, having left the house of her relatives. 'I don't know why I am happy here', she says. 'Maybe it is because I came from that small village, all the restrictions that I lived with there, the way I was somewhere between being and not-being. I have found myself here.' It is not Shengul's reconciliation with her personal past, however, but a phone conversation in 1999 that leads me to a different ending.

I called Shengul from Uppsala to explain exactly how I was framing her story and the narrative of her journey to the Caucasus. As I began to tell her about Shemsigul, she interrupted. 'You mean the story of the girl who is sold to Egypt, raped by the slave trader, and beaten by his wife?' Over my astonished silence, she explained. A synopsis of Toledano's article had appeared in a volume entitled *Circassians in Print* (Güven 1993), put out by one of the Circassian youth associations in Turkey just a few months after our first conversations. 'I felt very sad for the girl when I read the story', Shengul said. 'I thought of translating the article into Circassian and publishing it here. Then I thought that I should not give the Russians any more ammunition. They sold us in the past. I should not give them more power in the present.'

Shemsigul has now become part of Shengul's repertoire. Hers is not a forgotten story any more. *Circassians in Print* contains a whole section on slaves and slavery. Still Shengul wishes to silence this memory or at least to limit its circulation. Fear in the present continues to censor the past. Since the silence has been broken, however, can it be replaced by nostalgia in its transformative sense?

Nostalgia is the desire or longing with burning pain to journey [to the homeland]. It also evokes the sensory dimension of memory in exile and estrangement; it mixes bodily and emotional pain and ties painful experiences of spiritual and somatic exile to the notion of maturation and ripening ... Nostalgia, in the American sense, freezes the past in such a manner as to preclude it from any capacity for social transformation in the present, preventing the present from establishing a dynamic perceptual relationship to its history. Whereas the Greek etymology evokes the transformative impact of

the past as unreconciled historical experience (Seremetakis 1994a: 4).

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## ***Chapter 10***

# **Are Greeks Caucasian? The Multiple Boundaries of Pontic Greek Life in Southern Russia**

Anton Popov

### **Introduction**

The Caucasus is often called ‘the land of a hundred peoples’. It might also be called ‘the land of a hundred atlases’ (Tsutsiev 2006). Anthropologists and historians have long tracked the ways in which this famously pluralist region has seen competition over land and legacy in ways that frequently overlap with rival state projects. But with the exceptions of the best-known diasporic communities of Armenians or the peoples known as Circassians, little attention is given to how ‘age-old’ Caucasian identities are so intimately tied with those of other world areas in ways that continually challenge the perceived belonging of those who have occupied their lands for centuries. In this chapter, I explore just such a case, that of Pontic Greek communities in the two southern Russian (North Caucasus) regions of Krasnodar Krai and Adygeia.

In the summer of 1994, an elderly Greek woman from a Black Sea coastal village was surprised when I asked her: ‘Do you speak *Pontiaka* [the Pontic Greek dialect]?’ She was amused and almost insulted: ‘What! *Pontika*, that’s a mouse!’<sup>1</sup> This is to say, she had confused the Greek linguistic term for Pontic dialect with the Greek word for a mouse.<sup>2</sup> This dialogue, however, shows how little most Greeks in the former Soviet Union at the time identified themselves as Pontic Greeks. In everyday life, they continued to define themselves in the old Byzantine-Ottoman way as *romeoi* (literally, Romans) and their language as *romeika*, or preferred to use

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<sup>1</sup> This dialogue took place in August 1994 during one of my earlier fieldwork trips to the village of Kabardinka, one of the oldest compact Greek settlements in Krasnodar Krai (Russia). The participant in this conversation who was confused by my question about her Pontic identity, Anastasia P, then in her eighties, was born in the Black Sea region of Turkey, that is, the Pontos.

<sup>2</sup> The Greek word for ‘mouse’ is *pontika*.

Russian concepts of *greki* (Greeks) for their ethnicity and *grecheskii* (the Greek language) for their language. Ten years later, almost all my Greek informants considered themselves Pontians or Pontic Greeks and some of them called the Greek language *pontiaka*. Such considerable changes in local Greek identity coincided with the development of mass migration by former-Soviet Greeks to Greece and Cyprus in the late 1980s which transferred their communities into a 'transnational migrant circuit' (Rouse 2002).<sup>3</sup> In Greece, (former) Soviet Greeks' Ponticness was cited to attest to their otherness, as culturally different from 'native' Greek citizens. Pontic identity of the Greek migrants also suggests their identification with Russia and more generally, with the former USSR as the territory of their origin.

Displacement, then, plays a significant part in forming Pontic Greek identity of former Soviet Greeks. However, this new identity is then imported through the transnational circuit to Russia where it is reproduced in home communities in conditions of regional citizenship regimes and cultural politics in the Russian North Caucasus. In contemporary southern Russia, association of an individual or group with the Caucasus and its peoples might have a negative connotation, since in the regional public discourses 'Caucasian migrants' are represented as 'culturally incompatible' with the 'native' Russian population (Rakachev and Rakacheva 2003: 76).

In this chapter, I try to demonstrate that Pontic identity is constructed through heterogeneous discourses which often originate from outside the Caucasus region and are imported via transnational circuits of ideas, things and people. For local Greek communities their Ponticness, however, acquires a new meaning which challenges an essentialist perception of Greek ethnicity. The chapter also shows that as a group Pontic Greeks live on multiple boundaries which my informants draw alongside the lines of their citizenship, the languages they speak, and the histories of their migrations. Within the Caucasian paradigm of ethnic groups' competition for ancient rights to the regions' history and culture, such pluralism also disrupts contradictory nationalist claims of 'indigenous' connections to the region. Thus, for communities who see in their new Pontic identity their attachment to both the Greek nation and their home region of the Black Sea coast and the Caucasus, the question of whether Greeks are Caucasian is both a very difficult and an important one.

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<sup>3</sup> Roger Rouse refers to a 'transnational migrant circuit' as a multi-sited but single community which is constituted by 'the continuous circulation of people, money, goods, and information' (2002: 162).

## The location and the 'locals'

This chapter draws from my ethnographic study of two Greek communities in southern Russia and the North Caucasus region. Two settlements, the town of Vitiazevo in Krasnodar Krai and the village of Gaverdovskii in the Republic of Adygeia, became the sites of my fieldwork research.

Vitiazevo and Gaverdovskii are the largest settlements of a compact Greek population in Krasnodar Krai and Adygeia respectively. There are, as of 2003, 3,182 Greeks in Vitiazevo which represents 38.8 per cent of the 8,200 inhabitants of the town. In Gaverdovskii, there are about 130 Greek households comprising around 1,500 people or 35 per cent of the 4,100 inhabitants of the village.<sup>4</sup> The dominant population in both settlements is, nonetheless, Russian, although Armenians and Germans in Vitiazevo and Adyge in Gaverdovskii form a significant proportion of inhabitants. In both places, there are active Greek national-cultural organisations established in the early 1990s. They keep in close contact with Pontic Greek cultural associations in Greece and act as principal agents for the so-called Pontic cultural revival in the region, representing the local Greek population as a Pontic Greek segment of the Hellenic world.

At the same time, the two groups, Vitiazevo and Gaverdovskii Greeks, have different cultural backgrounds. Greeks came to resettle from eastern Georgia, the *Tsalka* district, to Gaverdovskii in 1938.<sup>5</sup> However, a

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<sup>4</sup> The figures for the Greek population of Vitiazevo reflect the data received in the course of the 2002 Russian Census. This statistic was taken from an information letter issued on request of the Vitiazevo town administration by the Krasnodar Krai Statistics Committee. A copy of this letter was kindly given to me by the head of the juridical department of the town administration. The figures of Greek households and residents in Gaverdovskii were calculated by me using data obtained from the Gaverdovskii household registers for 2002–3. I want to thank the chairwoman of the Gaverdovskii's Committee of Territorial Communal Self-Government (KTOS) who made these village household registers accessible to me.

<sup>5</sup> The reasons behind this migration are not absolutely clear. Some long-term residents of Gaverdovskii connected this resettlement from Georgia with the construction of the Hram dam, in the late 1930s, which resulted in the flooding of several Greek villages in the Tsalka district. The population of these villages was resettled in the Northern Caucasus, in particular to Stavropol' Krai (Kolesov 1997: 93). But the villages from which the first migrants' families originated were not flooded, and Gaverdovskii was not a destination for the Greek migrants from abandoned villages. An alternative explanation might be that officially permitted migration from the area of dam construction could have been used as a cover for resettlement by families from other villages who sought better living conditions than in rural highland Tsalka during the first decade of collectivisation. These unofficial migrants might have used their family ties with people resettled from flooded villages as a means to facilitate their own movement to the North Caucasus. Stavropol' Krai, for example, is mentioned in the family histories of many Greek long-term residents as the first destination of their parents on route from Tsalka to Gaverdovskii. Some of my Gaverdovsk informants consider that Greek families might even have come to Gaverdovskii on their way to Greece (Vasilii, born 1949,



significant proportion of Gaverdovsk Greeks are recent migrants, they are people who moved to the village from Georgia during the 1990s. This migration was partly determined by a sense of ethnic alienation and socio-economic degradation which Greeks experienced as a 'non-titular nationality' in conditions of the heightening of ethno-nationalism in newly independent Georgia. On the other hand, existing family connections with the Greek residents of Gaverdovskii made this migration easier for those Georgian Greeks who were 'pulled' to Russia by its relative economic and political stability.<sup>6</sup> The mother tongue for the majority of Gaverdovsk Greeks is Turkish, which they speak alongside Russian. The ancestors of the contemporary Tsalka Greeks, who now live in Gaverdovskii, migrated from the Eastern Anatolian provinces of the Ottoman Empire to the Russian Caucasus in the early nineteenth century (see Map 10.1.). The Vitiazevo Greeks, for their part, are chiefly a locally born population, although a significant proportion are people who were exiled during the Stalinist period or born in exile and who moved to the town from Central Asia (the former Soviet republics of Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan) and Siberia in the latter decades of the twentieth century. Most Greeks in Vitiazevo are Russian-speaking, but old and middle-aged people also know the Pontic Greek dialect. The core of the Greek population of Vitiazevo is composed of descendants of migrants from the Pontos, i.e. from the *vilayet* of Trebizond in the Ottoman Empire, who emigrated in the second half of the nineteenth century (see Map 10.2.).<sup>7</sup>

The construction of the cultural and ethnic identities in the contemporary Russian Federation is affected to a significant extent by the regional 'citizenship regimes', which, as Caroline Humphrey (1999: 31–2) suggests, have emerged from the Soviet principle of the territoriality of state

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Gaverdovskii). The new large wave of Greek emigrants from the Soviet Union in 1937–9 was a response to the Stalinist persecution of the Soviet Greek national movement in the 1930s (Vergeti 1991: 388). At that time the Black Sea port of Novorossiisk in Krasnodar Krai, where the Consulate of the Kingdom of Hellenes was located, was one of the departure points for Greece.

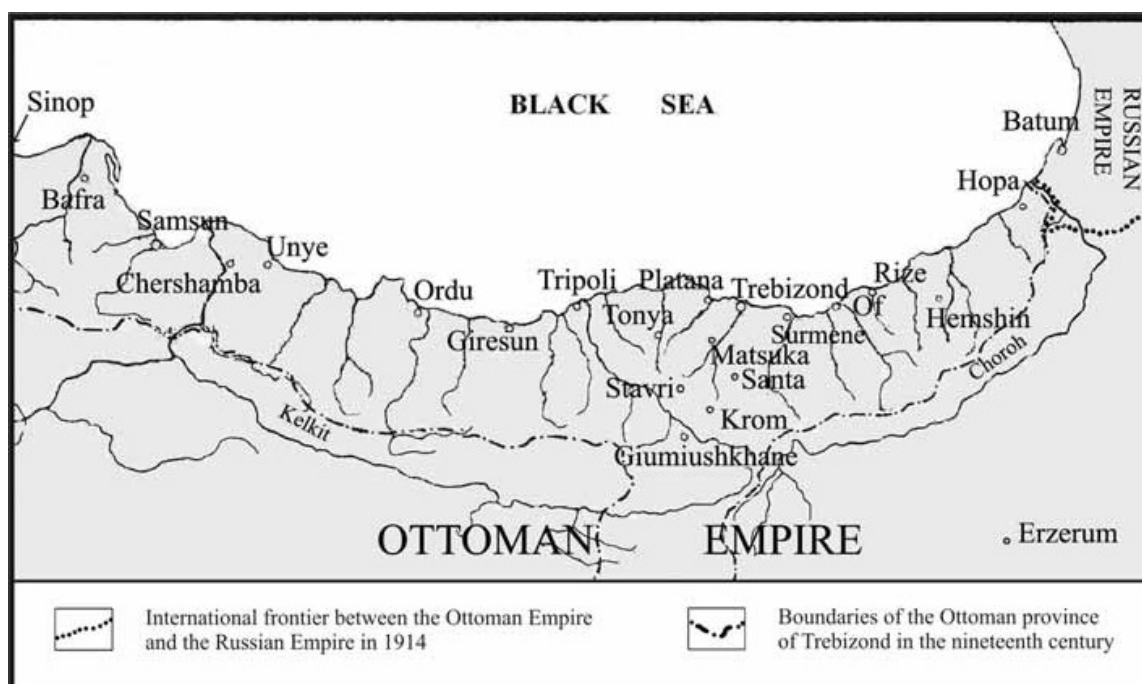
<sup>6</sup> Analysing the motivations for the mass migration of the Russian-speaking population from the newly independent states in the aftermath of socialism, Pilkington comes to the similar conclusion that migrants' narratives clearly illustrate that the decisions of many to leave the former republics were affected by the growing nationalism in both state policy and everyday social interactions. At the same time, these 'ethnic issues' are inextricably entwined in the migrants' articulation of their motivations with 'socio-economic and political dissatisfactions' (Pilkington 1998: 139).

<sup>7</sup> The articles of Anthony Bryer, which are collected and reprinted in two volumes (1980 and 1988), are the best guides to the history of the Pontos and Pontic Greeks before their mass exodus from the region in 1923 as a result of the population exchange between Greece and Turkey.

administration. Exploiting regional specifics, such as ethnicity, religion and the cultural peculiarities of the local population, the regionalist ideologies have been used to mobilise regional identities for the support of provincial political regimes (Humphrey 1999: 43–4).



Map 10.1. Pontic Greek migration to the Caucasus and southern Russia.



Map 10.2. The Pontos in the nineteenth century.



Map 10.3. Krasnodar Krai and the Republic of Adygeia.

Adygeia and Krasnodar Krai are geographically and historically contiguous (in fact, this is one continuous region within the north-western Caucasus bordering the Black Sea): the territory of Adygeia lies within Krasnodar Krai and until 1991 it was an autonomous part (oblast') of the Krai (see Map 10.3.). At the same time, the ethnic composition of the population is varied and the political regimes in these regions are distinct. Adygeia is a republic within the Russian Federation which was founded on the ethno-territorial principles of cultural and political autonomy for Adyge, who are an ethnic group of North Caucasian origin, although the ethnic majority in the Republic are Russians. Krasnodar Krai, in contrast, is one of the so-called 'Russian regions' in the Northern Caucasus where Russians comprise the absolute majority of the population. These differences in the ethnic composition and political systems of the two neighbouring regions are one reason for the variations in their policy towards ethnic minorities. However, in both regions, their 'citizenship regimes' have adopted legislative systems and policies which institutionalised discrimination against so-called 'migrants' and ethnic minorities associated with them who are opposed to the 'local' or 'indigenous population' which in Krasnodar Krai and Adygeia are defined as 'Slavs' and 'Adyge' respectively (Osipov 2002: 9). This, as I demonstrate in the following sections of this chapter, affects the construction of Pontic Greek identity and demarcation of its cultural and ethnic boundaries in the two regions in different ways.

### **Spatial and temporal boundaries of Pontic identity in southern Russia**

In southern Russia, Pontic Greek identity is constructed through demarcating cultural boundaries both in space and in time. The term 'Pontic Greek' has geographical as well as ethnic meanings. The Pontos is the region situated on the south-east coast of the Black Sea, which is thought of as a 'historical homeland' in the Pontic Greek ethno-nationalist imagination. Colourful maps of Pontic territory hang in practically every Greek national-cultural society's office in southern Russia. Yet popular ideas about the location of the Pontos are quite different from its actual historical geography. The post-Soviet Greeks trace their origin to the ancient Greek name for the Black Sea, *Euxinos Pontos*, which they find in Soviet textbooks in their history lessons. For example, a Gaverdovsk Greek, Akim, gave the following definition of Pontic Greeks:

Many people don't understand what '*Ponti*' means... '*Ponti*' [means] a sea (sic). Pontic Greeks, they are the 'overseas (*zamorskie*) Greeks'. That's it... (Question: When did you hear this

expression ‘Pontic Greeks’ for the first time?) Me? Oh-h! How can I tell you! I have known this, since we started to read the History of Ancient Greeks in the sixth or seventh grade [at school]... (Akim, born 1937, Gaverdovskii<sup>8</sup>).

This reference to ‘Ancient Greek History’ also imposes temporal boundaries for Pontic Greek presence in the Black Sea region. In Greek cultural revivalist discourse in southern Russia, Pontic Greeks are seen as the descendants of the legendary Argonauts who came to the Caucasus for the ‘golden fleece’. The Gaverdovsk Greek society, for instance, is called ‘Argo’ after the legendary ship which delivered the ancient Greeks across the Black Sea to the coast of the Caucasus. An ancient Greek galley, presumably the ‘Argo’, is also pictured in the logo of the largest Greek newspaper in the region, called *The Euxinos Pontos*, which is published by the Russian Association of Greek Public Organisations (AGOOR) in the Black Sea coastal city of Novorossiisk.

The idea that they are the direct heirs of ancient Greek civilisation and culture is very popular among the Caucasian Greeks. From the perspective of pan-Hellenism, this idea brings new meaning to the cultural boundaries between Pontic Greeks and Greeks from Greece, or Hellenes. Paradoxically, it transforms the marginal status of the former-Soviet Pontians into purity and true Greek-ness. For instance, the distinctiveness of the Pontic Greek dialect, which is incomprehensible to speakers of Modern Greek, is interpreted by informants as an archaic relic of the Ancient (meaning ‘proper’) Greek language

Pontic [Greek] is Ancient Greek [the language]. Pontic [Greek] is the most ancient [language] and the Hellenes’ language [the informant here means Modern Greek – AP] has developed from it later. The Pontians are more ancient [people than the Hellenes] (Vasilii, born 1949, Gaverdovskii).

Such a representation of Pontic Greeks as a people deeply rooted in the land next to the Black Sea is also driven by the regional cultural politics and the anti-migrant discourse of ‘indigenisation’ in southern Russia, which opposes the so-called Slavs and/or Cossacks (referred to as the ‘indigenous population’, *korennoe naselenie*) to other ethnic groups, who are labelled ‘migrants’.<sup>9</sup> Thus, Fedor, a Vitiazevo local historian and activist in the Greek

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<sup>8</sup> Informants are referred by their pseudonyms (that is, their changed given names), years of birth and the name of the place where the interviews or conversations were recorded.

<sup>9</sup> The limited space of this chapter does not allow more detailed analysis of the regional discourses of ethnicity, migration and culture. I have discussed elsewhere the role of provincial ‘migration and nationality policy’ in the construction of regional identities in

cultural revival in the town, emphasised in his interviews the political implications of Greeks' rootedness in this region and the Caucasus in general. Striving to prove that Greeks are an indigenous people in the Caucasus, he rejected the concept 'Pontians' as too narrow to describe the whole complexity of Greek history in the region. Instead of 'Pontic', he suggested the term 'Ionian Greeks' (*ioniiskie greki*), which would include all the descendents of the ancient *Ionian Greeks* who used to live in Asia Minor and on the Black Sea coasts (Pontians being among them). At one point, Fedor cited some passages from the manuscript of his book about the history of the Vitiazevo Greeks, which demonstrated the effect of the provincial migration policy on the construction of Pontic Greek indigenusness in the Black Sea region.

Contemporary studies of the settlement of Greeks of Asia Minor in the Caucasus and the North Black Sea region have strengthened the misconception, which is quite widespread in the history of Greeks of Russia and the whole former USSR, that Greeks resettled in Russia from the Ottoman Empire in the mid nineteenth century, [and] that, during World War I, southern Russia was full of Greek refugees from Turkey ... The biggest danger of this nonsense is not that someone wants to oppose us to the majority of the population, to the Russians, Belorussians and the Ukrainians. No. It will not work with Greeks. But the biggest danger is that someone wants to represent us as rootless people who have no links to this land where we are living ... Let us make a short historical digression ... As is well known, Greeks founded their colonies on the Bosphorus and the Black Sea coasts in the sixth century BC (sic). However, the emergence of these Greek cities was not a spontaneous act of colonisation. Despite the historical darkness of the ancient Greeks' perceptions of the Caucasus, the Black Sea and the Sea of Azov, they felt some distant attachment to these places. Prometheus was chained here. It is known from history that he was definitely here in the Caucasus. [He periodically interrupted his reading to make such asides – AP]. His son Deucalion, who renewed humankind, came from here ... Jason and the Argonauts sailed to the Pontic coast for the 'golden fleece'. The God of the Winds, Boreas, used to live here (sic), up in the mountains. He still remains here, but now he is in the mountains in the Novorossiisk area (sic). There are many such examples ... All this points to the ancient attachment of Greeks to ... the coasts of the

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southern Russia and Krasnodar Krai in particular (see for example Popov 2002, Popov and Kuznetsov forthcoming).

Black Sea. This is the main argument which runs through my entire book (Fedor, born 1947, Vitiazevo).

Archaeological findings of ancient Greek settlements on the Black Sea shores of Krasnodar Krai are also utilised in regional cultural politics by the Greek revivalist movement. Although one can say that state politics of migration control and the cultural and/or national revivalist movement among some ethnic groups are separate, and in the regional context even opposite, processes, they often become interrelated and influence each other. Some ethnic minorities who are struggling for recognition of their 'indigenous' (*korennoi*) status raise the issue of their cultural property in the region in response to the 'indigenisation discourse' of the provincial regime.<sup>10</sup> The Greek national-cultural organisations also claim their right to the cultural heritage of the 'Ancient Greek civilisation' in the Black Sea region. The 'ancestral' rights to the history and the territory of the region are seen as compulsory conditions for the survival of Pontic Greeks as an ethnic group in southern Russia. Thus Fedor writes in his unpublished book:

Today we have come to the point where we will cease to exist as an ethnic group; a group which used to be the most gifted, patient, human, peaceful and proud people, the most entrepreneurial and cultured people. The history of our people, the history of Greeks of the Pontos, is in every potsherd washed up by the Black Sea, in every piece of land on the coasts of the *Euxinos Pontos*. This is our history which we can and must be proud of (Fedor, born 1947, Vitiazevo).

Such a discursive construction of the Greek 'indigenesness' through the 'privatising' of the ancient Greek ruins and potsherds found in the region is understood quite literally by the leaders of the Greek national-cultural organisations and by 'ordinary' Greeks. In August 2002, a group of archaeologists from St. Petersburg renewed the excavation of the ancient settlement of 'Labrit', which was probably founded by the Milesian (Ionian)

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<sup>10</sup> The Krasnodar authorities officially do not recognise as indigenous any group except the Cossacks, or the Russian majority. However, the Black Sea Shapsugs, who are a subgroup of the Western Adyge living in Krasnodar Krai, have been included in the 'General List of Small Indigenous Peoples' of the Russian Federation since 2000. Now the Shapsugs are struggling for acknowledgement of their indigenous status at the regional level. They also raise the issue of their cultural property, insisting that all the archaeological artifacts found in the territory which they inhabited and which are from the 'pre-colonial' period (before the Russian colonisation of the north-western Caucasus) are part of their cultural heritage, being 'the graves of their ancestors'. In 2002, the Shapsug NGO 'Adyge Khase' invited an archaeologist from the Russian Ethnographic Museum to examine the condition of such artifacts located around their *auls* (villages) (this information received from the Krasnodar anthropologist Igor Kuznetsov).

Greeks in the sixth century BCE, but was later populated and governed by a Hellenised Sarmatian-Meotian population. This ancient city was situated only 35 km from Vitiazevo. Archaeologists had known that Vitiazevo was a 'Greek' town and therefore asked the local Greek society for financial support for the excavation. At the time this request was made, the town was full of rumours that golden treasures of 'ancient Greeks' had been found on the excavation site. Neighbours told each other a story about 'some rich Armenian buying our gold [or, more specifically, 'a golden ring with a big ruby'] from archaeologists'. Naturally, the requested support was given and Greek leaders visited the archaeological site. On their way back to Vitiazevo, they were joking that they should declare this place their ancestral land and demand it for housing construction. The quotation from the fieldwork diary demonstrates that this joke reflected the Krasnodar Krai nationality policy and its bitter implications for ethnic minorities in the region:

[The chairman of the Greek society] walked amazed around the excavation site. From time to time he bent over to pick up pieces of ancient ceramics, which had been scattered about everywhere in the field surrounding the excavation site, repeating with irony in his voice: 'You see, what a smart [people] Greeks were'. He asked the leader of the archaeologists, in jest, if only they could find some ruins of ancient Greek towns under Gai-Kodzor or Rassvet [the Armenian villages in the Anapa district which are situated near Vitiazevo – AP]. Then he continued with the same joking intonation: 'Now they teach us that the Cossacks were here before Greeks, but the land keeps its [true] memory (Fieldwork Diary, 13 August 2002, Vitiazevo).

In Vitiazevo, consciousness of the historical succession from the ancient Greek population of the region is embodied in the name of the local Greek society, 'Gorgippia', which is the name of the ancient Greek settlement on the place of the district capital Anapa. This pursuit of historical memory is also projected onto the contemporary representation of the Greek heritage in the regional politics of culture. During the Soviet period, the excavated ruins of ancient Gorgippia became an archaeological museum and the image of the ancient Greek galley (was it the 'Argo'?) was incorporated in the Anapa district's coat of arms.

Thus, Pontic Greeks' representation as a people historically and culturally rooted on the Black Sea coast of the Caucasus is developed within diverse and unrelated discourses, such as a pan-Hellenic movement for Pontic Greek cultural revival, post-Soviet regionalism and nationalism in southern Russia. At the same time, such heterogeneity in the discursive construction of Pontic rootedness in southern Russia corresponds to the



transnational character of Pontic Greek identity which acquires its meanings through the exchange and interpretation of discourses and practices which originated from different places. In fact, emerging from the intersection of such dissimilar ideologies, the notion of Greeks' indigenisation in the region is a new one. But does it really suggest that Greeks of southern Russia consider themselves to be a Caucasian people?

### **The Caucasian identity of Pontic Greeks in southern Russia?**

Pontic Greeks' cultural attachment to the Caucasus is challenged by regional nationality politics. In southern Russia and Krasnodar Krai in particular, the quasi-ethnic concepts of 'Caucasians' (*kavkaztsy*) or 'individuals of Caucasian nationality' (*litsa kavkazskoi natsional'nosti*) operate extensively within provincial migration discourse, creating the image of migrants as ethnically, or culturally, alien to the local or 'native' population, who are ethnically Russian. Therefore, the association of Pontic Greeks with the Caucasus could make them vulnerable to both institutionalised ethnic discrimination and the anti-Caucasian attitudes of the Russian majority.

Identity politics in southern Russia have an impact on varied aspects of everyday life.<sup>11</sup> The regional anti-migrant (anti-Caucasian) discourses have shaped and have also been reproduced through micro-political processes, property relations and migrants' strategies (see for example Popov 2003). The cultural boundaries, or 'cultural distance', between 'local' Greeks and the 'Caucasian migrants' are also structured to a significant extent by official xenophobic discourse. Fedor (born 1947), for example, described the border between the local Greeks and the 'population arriving from Transcaucasia' in terms of 'cultural incompatibility' (*kul'turnaia nesovmestimost'*) and 'ethnic conflict'.<sup>12</sup> It is also important that, in the

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<sup>11</sup> In the USSR ethno-national federalism and the ethnic self-identification of citizens were institutionalised through the organisation of government and administration along ethno-territorial lines and through the introduction of an ethno-national population classification (Brubaker 1996: 30–1). A citizen's ethnicity, for instance, became fixed in various identity documents, such as passports, birth certificates, etc. The political and administrative structures in the national autonomies were formed in a way which reflected the ethnic composition of the region or territory. As a rule, the representatives of the titular nationalities predominated among the republican/regional officials. As Suny states, in the Soviet Union, '[titular] nationality had taken on a new importance as an indicator of membership in the relevant social and cultural community' (Suny 1993: 121).

<sup>12</sup> Using such terms as 'cultural incompatibility' and 'ethnic conflict', Fedor referred to the dominant discourses of 'nationality and migration policy' in the region. Regional 'nationality policy' is determined by the 'interests of national security' (*interesy natsional'noi bezopasnosti*), the most important of which is the 'prevention of inter-ethnic conflicts' (*predotvrashchenie mezhnatsional'nykh konfliktov*). The concept of 'ethnic conflict' is

following quotation from his interview, Fedor implicitly related the idea of cultural and ethnic differences with the concept of citizenship. This might indicate an important role which the state plays in people's understanding of their rights, loyalties, statuses and, indeed, their differences.

You understand that Greeks of Russia are all Russian subjects (sic)... All of us are Russian citizens... The officials always tell us that we are all Russian citizens and there is equal treatment for all Russian citizens... Our relationships with the authorities always were normal, loyal relationships. In fact, here in Kuban' [this geographical term is commonly used for Krasnodar Krai – AP], there never was any conflict between the Greek and the Russian population, or the Slavic population. (Generally, most of them are Ukrainians here, although they are officially [recorded as] Russians). There have been no conflicts. Here the main conflict, which, in my opinion, has been provoked by the authorities, might be with that population which is coming from Transcaucasia. Well, because they [the people from Transcaucasia] have an absolutely different character, their nature is different. Let's say, their values are different, their culture is different. Even their approach to life is different. It is incompatible with the attitudes of the Russian and the Greek population in the region (Fedor, born 1947, Vitiazevo).

In fact, the local Russians tend to have a rather racialised perception of the so-called 'Caucasians' as people with darker skin and hair than their own. And the local Pontic Greeks are often 'confused' with other Caucasians, such as Armenians. The following illustrative quotation comes from a speech by the deputy head teacher of Gaverdovskii secondary school, who is herself Russian; it was tape-recorded at the round table conference 'Greeks in Adygeia' in October 2002.

You know, our school is full of very beautiful children today, they are Greeks. They are beautiful in their own way, especially their girls. You know, we come in [to the class] and look [at them] ... At

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elaborated in regional ethnic and migration studies in southern Russia as an inevitable phenomenon in the life of contemporary polyethnic/polycultural societies (see, for example, Savva and Savva 2002: 32). Some Krasnodar academics view the roots of ethnic conflict in cultural differences which they believe to exist between the 'native Slavic population' and 'non-Slavic migrants'. Elsewhere I investigate the role of academics as key actors in the production of regional ethnic discourses (see Popov and Kuznetsov forthcoming). However, it is important to note here that regional researchers share a rather essentialist perception of ethnic culture as a stable structure founded on 'values and normative predispositions' (*tseennosti i normativnye ustanovki*), which are common to all members of the ethnos (Petrov 2003: 87). Hence, ethnic conflict is also 'a clash of incompatible fundamental values' (Rakachev and Rakacheva 2003: 76).

the beginning, we thought that they were Armenians, they look a little bit similar [she remarked with laughter – AP] ... But then we saw that their surnames sounded Russian.<sup>13</sup> Do you understand? (Round Table Conference ‘Greeks in Adygeia’, 3 October 2002, Gaverdovskii).

In southern Russia, Armenians are seen as ‘stereotypical Caucasians’. Furthermore, the regional anti-migrant policy is often accompanied by the anti-Armenian rhetoric of officials (see Kondratenko 2000; Anonymous 2000; Beketov 2001; Osadchii 2002), which has resulted in the growth of anti-Armenian attitudes among the local population.

Greeks in Vitiazevo – like the locals – distance themselves from Armenians living in the town, who are mainly recent migrants. At the same time, they are aware that the ethnic and cultural borders existing between these two groups are rather blurred for outsiders and the Russian majority.

Anti-Armenian feelings are often projected onto the tragic events in Pontic Greek history when they are being reinterpreted. Thus, on occasion, Greek informants explained that their persecution at the beginning of the twentieth century by the Ottoman authorities and their mass exodus from the Pontos were a result of associating with and helping their Armenian neighbours (Matvei, born 1924, Vitiazevo; Yannis, born 1948, Vitiazevo).

Greek informants fear that their mistaken identification with Armenians both as ‘Caucasians’ and as a people who have been involved in migration throughout their history might provoke xenophobic attacks upon them by radical Russian nationalists. This concern was expressed during an unrecorded conversation with Foma (born 1955), who had been a permanent resident of Greece since 1995, but regularly visited his native Vitiazevo. He told me, with deep sadness in his voice, that once before the (Pontic) Greeks had lost their homeland because of Armenians and it could happen again.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Sometimes it is difficult to differentiate Tsalka Greeks from Russians by their surnames alone because typical Russian family names, such as Afanas’ev, Mikhailov or Popov, are common among Greeks from Georgia. However, Gaverdovsk Greeks often have surnames with a Turkish stem and Russified endings *-ov/-ev*. For the deputy head teacher of the Gaverdovskii school, these surnames also ‘sound Russian’ because of their contrast with the ‘stereotypical’ Armenian surnames with the endings *-ian*, which, perhaps, she expected from the somewhat Caucasian appearance of her Greek students. Nonetheless, Tsalka Greeks’ family names may be interpreted as ‘Turkish’ and ‘Muslim’ in the context of other ethnic/cultural boundaries.

<sup>14</sup> The worst expectations of my Greek informants seemed to become reality on 22 March 2005 when Armenian and Greek young people, who had been celebrating a birthday together in a Novorossiisk café, were attacked by a group of Cossacks. This incident spilled over into further violent attacks on Armenian shops and other property in Novorossiisk by Cossacks and demands for the deportation of all Armenians from the area (information received from

Greeks' sensitivity to the issue of cultural differences from Armenians is perhaps rooted in religious differences between the two groups. Despite disagreement over dogma between the Greek Orthodox and Armenian Gregorians, which can be traced back to the early Middle Ages (see Kartashev 1994), the 'folk' understanding of the religious differences between these two groups is more symbolic than actual. Despite the fact that in the past as Christians, Armenians and Pontic Greeks occupied the same subordinate social status in the Ottoman ethno-religious realm, Greeks did not see Armenians as proper Christians. The old Greek proverb says that a Turk might be converted to Christianity if he were christened once, but an Armenian has to be baptised seven times to become a proper Christian.

These rather 'traditional' Greek suspicions towards their Armenian neighbours have been accentuated recently by anti-Caucasian discourses in post-Soviet southern Russia. Ideologists of Pontic Greek revival are concerned that the authenticity of Pontic Greek culture could be corrupted by Armenian influences. The 'cultural traits', or even vocabulary common to different ethnic groups across the South Caucasus and eastern Anatolia are being reassessed now by Greeks in southern Russia as culturally alien borrowings from Armenians and/or Turks. For example, in his interview, Fedor criticised some ethnographic accounts of the 'Pontic Greeks' in the North Caucasus published by ethnologists of the Krasnodar-based Centre for Pontic and Caucasian Studies (Kuznetsov 1997; Popov 2000) for the use of terminology which from his point of view is 'Turkish or Armenian'.

At the same time, contrasting their 'traditional' culture with 'the Caucasian (Armenian, Turkish, or Muslim) influence', the Vitiazevo Greeks position themselves closer to the Russian majority or 'the local Slavic population'. This relocation of 'Pontic culture' from the Caucasus was conveyed by Fedor:

You write that people dressed in black at the funeral. But I'll show you the [old] photos where the women wore white shawls, absolutely white, without a spot. Do you know the word '*pechalnik*' [literally, 'the grief-marking' – AP]? Don't you? This is the name for these white shawls. The word is Russian, but the Russians borrowed this [shawl] from Greeks later. In the past, Greeks wore all white during funerals. In general, white was a colour of mourning for Greeks. Black is [used by] Muslims (sic); Greeks took it from the Turks. The Turks prohibited them [from wearing white during funerals] and they [Greeks] retain the white shawls for women as a

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an expert of the NGO 'Novorossiisk Human Rights Committee', Vadim Karastelev, on 5 April 2005; see also 'Prokuratura vyiasniaet obstoiatel'stva draki v Novorossiiske' 2005).

symbol (Fedor, born 1947, Vitiazevo; see Popov and Tortopidi 1997).

For Gaverdovsk Greeks, however, their Caucasian identification has a rather different and much more acceptable meaning in their own eyes. The majority of Greek residents in Gaverdovskii were born in Georgia, and for them 'Caucasians' mean 'we' rather than 'they'. Unlike their Vitiazevo counterparts, Gaverdovsk Greeks, especially those who are migrants themselves, underline their 'Caucasian-ness'. This allows them to connect themselves with other Caucasian peoples and to explain their cultural differences from the Russian majority and 'Europeanised' Greece.

I came here in 1973 ... If it is possible to say so, I think here, the south of Russia, is the best place because of both the climate and the human relationships ... You understand. In some places people have no modesty; in Europe, for example, they are completely open, you know, they walk around there almost naked. Here [in Russia] people still keep themselves within limits. [Our people] are not like in Islam, you know, [but] the Caucasian (*kavkazets*) is always a Caucasian. You know, of course, that Georgia and Armenia, it is not Islam, it is Christianity. We have the same laws in our society as there [the informant meant in the Caucasus in general – AP]. I think this is very good (Efim, born 1957, Gaverdovskii).

The Caucasian-ness of Gaverdovsk Greeks is also more welcomed in the Republic of Adygeia because the regional ethno-nationalist regime promotes the rights of Adyge as a titular nationality 'native' to the North Caucasus, at the expense of the Russian majority. Therefore, Greeks here are represented as Caucasian people who have a long relationship with indigenous Adyge.

The leaders of the Greek national-cultural organisation in Adygeia trace their history in the region from the ancient Greeks via the so-called Circassian Greeks who, until the beginning of the nineteenth century, lived among Adyge, had customs similar to theirs and until the beginning of the nineteenth century spoke the Temergoi dialect of the Adyge language, but considered themselves to be Greek Orthodox Christians. The last compact settlement of the Circassian Greeks in the territory of Adygeia was the *aul* (village) of Bzhedugkhabl', where several families of their Russified descendants still live (Kuznetsov 1997; Kolesov 2004). At the round table conference 'Greeks in Adygeia', the case of the Circassian Greeks was presented by the speaker, a PhD student from History Department of the Adyge State University, who himself was a descendant of the Circassian Greeks of Bzhedugkhabl', as an example of 'Greek-Adyge cultural syncretism':

The first reference to the foundation of Bzhedugkhabl' is dated 1787 (sic). But according to sources and the oral histories of the *aul*'s long-time residents, the first Adyge settlers in the *aul* met Greeks who inhabited this place. This means that Greeks were living there already. Thus, this syncretism, this specific culture, which we call now the Circassian Greeks, was gradually formed (Round Table Conference 'Greeks in Adygeia', 3 October 2002, Gaverdovskii).

At this conference, which was held in the village of Gaverdovskii, the chairman of the republican association of ethno-national societies, the 'League of Peace', stated that the village of Gaverdovskii had inherited its role as 'the Greek centre in Adygeia' from Bzhedugkhabl'.

The Turkish language is another aspect of Gaverdovsk Greeks' cultural identity that puts them closer to the stereotypical 'Caucasians' than to the local Slavs. The Turkish language of the 'Tsalka Greek' migrants is also a critical mark of the 'internal cultural boundary' between them and the 'local' Pontic-speaking Greeks. Indeed, the phenomenon of Greeks' Turkophonism becomes a core issue for Pontic cultural identity in southern Russia.

### **The internal other: Turkishness and Pontic cultural identity**

The Turkish language is the mother tongue for many 'Pontic' Greeks in the Caucasus. As has been mentioned already, in southern Russia, the Turkish-speaking Greeks are usually associated with recent migrants from Georgia and more precisely from Tsalka District. 'Local' Greeks in southern Russia are mainly Hellenophones, or rather the old and middle-aged among them speak Pontic Greek, although Turkish was used until the beginning of the twentieth century as a *lingua franca* by their ancestors, who themselves were newly arrived migrants from the Ottoman Empire at the time.<sup>15</sup> Thus, Pontic

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<sup>15</sup> The Turkish language was spoken more extensively by those Pontic Greeks who resettled from the western Pontos (the Samsun and Bafra areas) and the Greek refugees from Kars Oblast', who fled this former Russian territory in north-eastern Anatolia after it had been recaptured by the Turks in 1919. In the North Caucasus, the representatives of these groups retained the Turkish language longer than the Greek settlers from the eastern Pontos, especially the Trebizond area. In Krasnodar Krai, there are still some Samsolidhes families who are tri-lingual: as well as Russian, they use Pontic Greek to communicate with other Greeks and speak Turkish as a home language (Popov and Tortopidi 1997: 156). In Vitiazovo, for example, several 'local' families who are identified by other locals as 'Kudakoy' continue to use Turkish as a home language. These families had settled in the town after their return from exile in Kazakstan where they were sent from the village of Grecheskii in Krasnodar Krai (now Novo-Krymskii) which was founded in 1865 by Greek settlers mainly from the Samsun area (Gololobov, Girnik, Kolesov and Popov 1997: 145). This village is sometimes

cultural identity in southern Russia is contested by the linguistic differences between Turkish- and Greek-speaking 'Pontic' Greeks, which are also complicated by the post-Soviet 'migration policy' and cultural politics in the region.

In (post-)Soviet society, the primordialist understanding of the ethnic group (or the *ethnos*) as a human collective with its own unique cultural traits and its own language has become deeply rooted within the institutionalised ethno-territoriality and Soviet nationality policy. Not surprisingly, the nationalist principle 'one people, one nation, one language' is highly influential among Greeks in contemporary southern Russia. Hence, the Turkish language spoken by some Caucasian Greeks is seen as a sort of cultural deviance both by those who consider themselves Hellenophones and the Turkish-speakers themselves.

'Greek-speakers' often make the arrogant comment towards their Turkish-speaking neighbours that the latter are not 'proper Greeks' but rather 'Turks'. This popular opinion about 'Tsalka Greeks' was graphically expressed in an interview conducted in Vitiazevo with a 'Georgian Greek' who himself originated from a Greek-speaking village in Georgia (the Tetrtskaro District):

Tsalka's, Tsinstkaro's [the Turkish-speaking Greek village in the Tetrtskaro District – AP] Greeks ... Well, it is between us and, without offence, I can say to them [to Tsalka Greeks] right to their face: 'You are Turks'. Why? Look, I have lived among Muslims. I worked twenty-three years in Tajikistan after my graduation from the institute and then I came here. So, the customs of our Greeks, those who call themselves Greeks, are Turkish ones! Everything is the same; even their way of life is Turkish. They lived under them [the Turks] for a long time and because of this they probably took everything from them ... They even think in Turkish! Do you understand? (Nikolai, born 1944 (o.e.),<sup>16</sup> Vitiazevo).

Turkish-speakers regard this kind of comment as very offensive, not only because it challenges their Greekness but even more because it calls into question their religious identification as Christians. As in the above quotation, the ethnic category 'Turk' was and still is often used by people in the Caucasus and southern Russia as a synonym for 'Muslim'. This 'folk'

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called by its old Circassian name Kudako, pronounced Kudakoy in the Turkish way by its Greek residents.

<sup>16</sup> During my fieldwork, I did not always ask my informants for their exact year of birth and, indeed, it was not always ethical to make such enquiries. In these cases, I make my own estimate of the informant's age. In the chapter, such guesses are indicated as 'o.e.', that is, 'own estimate'.

and historical association of Islam with Turks was, perhaps unintentionally, strengthened by Soviet ethnos theory which incorporated 'traditional religion' into the ethnic classificatory grid (Bromlei 1973). Thus, essentialists' statements that religion and language are fundamental to ethnic identity led to the confusing assumption that the language, ethnicity and religion of a particular group are always interdependent.

Another aspect of (post-)Soviet institutionalised ethnicity was a 'personal nationality', which was manifested through the records of the individuals' ethnicity in Soviet passports and other personal documents (Brubaker 1996: 31). In Soviet popular discourse, ethnicity was a compulsory personal property which had different external indicators, such as surnames which are typical (or stereotypical) of a particular 'nationality'. Therefore, surnames with a Turkic stem and Russified ending *-ov/-ev*, which are common among the Turkish-speaking and some Greek-speaking Greeks from Transcaucasia, are considered by the majority of the post-Soviet population to be 'Asian' or 'Muslim'. Perhaps these Turkish-like family names of Tsalka Greeks (and some other groups of Greeks from Georgia and Armenia) make the Greek-speakers even more doubtful of the Greekness of the Turkish-speaking Greek migrants from Transcaucasia. Thus, a question about the number of 'Tsalka Greek' families in the town during a conversation with my Vitiazevo hosts, Elena (born 1954) and her son Mikhail (born 1975), who are 'local' Pontic-speakers, provoked the following comments:

Then our conversation touched upon Tsalka Greeks. I asked, 'Are many of them in the town?' Misha replied that there are about 20 families, 'moreover, their families are big' ... Elena Grigor'evna added: 'They call themselves Greeks, but their family names are sort of Muslim ones. [She mentioned a couple of Tsalkalis' family names as examples – AP]. Okay, I understand they are Greeks and speak Turkish, but their surnames ought to be Greek' (Fieldwork Diary, 13 August 2002, Vitiazevo).

Their complex linguistic, religious and ethnic identification sometimes appears to disorient Tsalka Greeks themselves. In Gaverdovskii and Vitiazevo, for instance, they call themselves Urums (*urumlar*) which is the Turkish (Ottoman) word for Orthodox Christians (presumably Greeks) living in Anatolia and they use the Turkish word *Müsülmanca* (lit. 'in the 'Muslim language') for their language (Vasilii, born 1949, Gaverdovskii; Efim, born 1956, Gaverdovskii; Aphrodita, born 1960 (o.e.), Vitiazevo). The story told by 73-year-old Iosif shows how Urums struggle to explain and justify such a controversial identification:



Once I was travelling to Armenia and met an Armenian on the train. He seemed to be a scientific worker or something. He asked me: 'What is your nationality?' I answered: '[I am] an Urum'. 'That's not right', he said, 'The Urum is [a word which has] some Roman origin. You are not Urums, but Greeks.' Then I didn't know that Greeks also used to live in Rome, in Italy and that's why we were called Urums ... (sic). Now I don't know whether it is right that we ... that they call us Urums? Are we right or [wrong] when we call ourselves Urums? In fact, we are Greek in origin, though we speak the Turkic (sic) language.<sup>17</sup> But our ancestors knew ... and when they lived in Turkey they knew the Greek language. Eventually, they were forced to leave, to reject this language. But our [people] kept the faith. We decided that it was better to lose our language than our faith. We remain Christians (Iosif, born 1929, Gaverdovskii).

Most Turkish-speakers see their mother tongue as a shameful stigma and a painful aspect of their identity. At the same time, their Turkish language acquires a symbolic meaning: the collective memory of Greeks' suffering for their Christian faith. The legend about the exchange of Greek for Turkish as the linguistic cost of preserving their Christian faith is often recounted by the Turkish-speaking Greeks as an excuse for their 'wrong' language.<sup>18</sup> This legend also hints at a latent conflict between (Pontic) Greek-speakers and Turkish-speakers. Paradoxically, the Turkishness of the Urums is an accusation directed at the 'Hellenophones' whose ancestors saved their Greek language, but at a price. Aphrodita, a Turkish-speaking Greek from Georgia who is now living in Vitiazovo, conveyed this suspicion of the Urums towards their Pontic-speaking counterparts when she told me about the people from the (Pontic) Greek-speaking villages in her native Tetritskaro District.

Well, there were also others, who didn't speak [Turkish] like us. They seemed to speak some sort of Greek. They lived in the villages of Iraga and Ivanovka ... It happened like this. When we lived in Turkey, the Turks told us: 'You have to change either your tongue or your faith.' We saved our Christian faith, but changed our language. And those [who lived in Iraga and Ivanovka] saved their language,

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<sup>17</sup> In order to underline the distance between the standardised Turkish language and its East Anatolian dialect which is spoken by Tsalka Greeks (see Eloeva 1995), Iosif deliberately used the academic term 'Turkic languages' for his mother tongue. On many other occasions, the Turkish-speaking Greeks emphasised these dialectical peculiarities, when they wanted to insist that their language was not 'pure Turkish' or that they could not understand the 'real Turks' completely.

<sup>18</sup> Interestingly, similar stories are told by Greeks from Armenia as an explanation of their 'Turkish' surnames, although they speak Pontic Greek (Svetlana, born 1963, Vitiazovo).

but the faith ... I don't know, they say that they are Greeks. But my father says that they may not even be Christians and not Greeks (Aphrodita, born 1960 (o.e.), Vitiazevo).

In Georgia, Pontic Greek-speakers were called 'Laz' by the Turkish-speaking Greeks. The term 'Laz' is both an ethnic concept (the Lazi are a Muslim people in north-eastern Turkey who speak a language related to Georgian) and a regional one used by people from inner Anatolia for the people of the Black Sea coast.<sup>19</sup> As the following quotation from an interview with a Gaverdovsk Greek, Efim, shows, in the context of the Caucasian Greeks' intra-group boundaries, the term 'Laz' acquires a meaning of 'change', or more precisely, of the religious conversion:

These Laz ... they are some sort of Greeks. The Laz, in my opinion, are those who have changed something. Now in Turkey, there are Laz, they are Mingrelians, Georgians, Armenians and Greeks, they are all Laz [there]; this is because they changed their faith, probably. You know, they are called Laz. Well, maybe not all of them changed [their faith], maybe they changed it there, then came here, lived with us, you know and also became [Christians]. Well, they are cunning (Efim, born 1956, Gaverdovskii).

Thus, in the Caucasus, Greek ethnicity, as a relatively new form of identification, is challenged by previously dominant religious and regional identities.

Perhaps it would be an oversimplification to state that their Turkish mother tongue is altogether rejected by the Turkish-speaking Greeks. In fact, the Turkish language remains at the centre of their cultural identity and, moreover, it opens for the Turkish-speaking Greeks new opportunities for adaptation to both a new cultural environment as migrants and to the shifting socio-economic conditions of a post-Soviet people.

The Turkish linguistic identity of the 'Tsalka' Greeks was mobilised during their commercial trips to Turkey in the early 1990s. Since the fall of the Iron Curtain, for many in the former Soviet Union shuttle-trading across newly opened borders with neighbouring countries has become the only way to survive economically. The simplified visa regime and relatively cheap transport make Turkey very attractive for post-Soviet shuttle-traders.

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<sup>19</sup> The word Laz is meaningful from the Anatolian perspective, because it matches the tradition of jokes about the Laz as war-like and hot-tempered people from the primitive outer reaches of the Ottoman Empire (Meeker 1971: 321; see also Meeker 2002: 95). From the Muslim perspective, Lazistan (the south-east coast of the Black Sea) has a contradicting reputation. On the one hand, the region was in the past notorious for its sectarian fanaticism. On the other hand, the Laz, or the Lazi, who were converted to Islam in the seventeenth century, are viewed by their neighbours, the Hemshils and the Turks, as insincere and unreliable Muslims (Bellér-Hann and Hann 2001: 160–1).

Knowledge of the Turkish language was used by the 'Tsalka' Greeks to their advantage in overcoming the hazards of crossing borders and travelling on Turkish territory. Their identification as Turkish-speakers suddenly became useful and even desirable, as can be seen from the stories of Efim and Gavriil cited below.

We went [to Turkey] and our goods were stolen there ... Then I said to one of these Turks: 'I don't understand that and how you can be proud of it!' Well, he immediately shouted to the others, 'Aren't you ashamed? These are our people and they are ashamed of us!' Of course, I was speaking Turkish ... We told them there that we were Turks, not Greeks (Efim, born 1956, Gaverdovskii).

As you [cross the border], they [the Turks] ask you your nationality. Let's say, [you answer:] 'Urum.' Then, you are stopped by the police or even some private [Turkish] drivers stop you and ask: 'What is your nation?' You answer: 'Urum.' They say, 'You are our man. Your people have your own land here. You are ours ...' If they hear '*Yunan*' [the Turkish word for Greeks who are citizens of Greece – AP], you are in trouble (Gavriil, born 1957 (o.e.), Gaverdovskii).

The use of the Turkish language also demarcates a private space in the cultural practices of Turkish-speaking Greeks. While Russian is the official language of the state and most people in southern Russia, and Greek is associated with external pan-Hellenic nationalist discourses and the public representation of their ethnicity, Turkish remains the language of everyday communication between family members, relatives and neighbours. In Gaverdovskii, Turkish is the language of pleasure and entertainment for recent Greek migrants from Georgia. Gaverdovsk Greeks watch Turkish television via satellite and listen to Turkish pop records, which they purchase in the increasingly globalised local market of Maikop (capital of Adygeia). Furthermore, they invite Meskhetian Turk musicians from the neighbouring Belorechensk District of Krasnodar Krai to play at their weddings. Thus, the Turkish language and the cultural practices which are associated with it constitute intimate aspects of the Turkish-speaking Greeks' everyday life, although public anti-Caucasian discourses and Greek ethno-nationalism enhance negative perceptions of their mother tongue.

### **Conclusion: Cultural boundaries of Pontic identity and the diversity of Greek experience in southern Russia**

The linguistic heterogeneity and diversity of Pontic Greek communities in the Caucasus and southern Russia challenges the essentialist perception of

Pontic culture as having boundaries fixed in space and time. The tensions between the Greek-speaking and Turkish-speaking Greeks indicate that the cultural boundaries of Ponticness are floating rather than fixed.

Gaverdovsk Greeks put their 'Turkish characteristics', such as language and their surnames, at the centre of their identity as Pontians, while they consider the 'local' Greeks from the neighbouring city of Maikop, who have 'Greek' surnames and speak (Pontic) Greek dialect, to be Hellenes:

Well, here we all consider ourselves to be Pontians ... Well, I know a little bit about this matter; so I heard, the Pontians are those who were sort of refugees from Turkey. But [those who have] such pure [Greek] family names as *V-di* and so on ... they are from the coast [of the Black Sea] and they are not Pontians. To cut a long story short, they are Hellenes (Vasilii, born 1949, Gaverdovskii).

Later in this interview, the informant speculated that the language spoken by Gaverdovsk Greeks might be not Turkish at all but the 'Pontic language'.

Thus, Gaverdovsk Greeks accept Pontic identity because they find in it an explanation for their cultural difference from the 'rest of Greeks' and a way out of their marginality within 'global Hellenism'. In becoming Pontians, they redefine their Turkishness. It could be argued that, for the Urums, to be Pontian means to be Greek. At the same time, the meaning of Ponticness is also changing in the context of the Greek cultural revival in the Republic of Adygeia, where Gaverdovsk Greeks now play a central role. Those Maikop Greeks who do not identify themselves with the Georgian Greeks may reject Pontic identity altogether because of its association with the Turkish-speaking Greeks of Gaverdovskii. For instance, at the time of his interview in 2001, Oleg was living in Maikop, but his family originated from Bhzedughabl', the Circassian Greeks' stronghold in Adygeia. During the interview Oleg was asked whether he identified himself as a Pontian. He answered with a smile: 'No, I am a Greek. What sort of Greek, I don't know. But definitely I am not a Pontic Greek.' He called the activists of 'Argo', the Greek national-cultural society, 'Greeks who speak Turkish' and contrasted them with the distant relatives of his wife in Gelendzhik (a town on the Black Sea coast), 'whose grandmothers spoke Greek' (in fact, they almost certainly spoke the Pontic dialect).

On the Black Sea coast, however, Turkish-speaking Greek migrants from Georgia saw Pontic Greek cultural identity from a different perspective. So, in Vitiazevo, where the 'local' Greeks are mainly (Pontic) Greek-speakers and Pontic identity is promoted by the Greek society 'Gorgippia', oriented towards the 'locals', a Turkish-speaking Greek woman, Aphrodita, who resettled in the town from Tetrtskaro (Georgia) in

1993, was not absolutely sure whether her people (meaning Turkish-speaking Greeks) were Pontians or not.

[Question: Have you heard the expression ‘Pontic Greeks’?] They, the locals, call themselves this when they go to Greece. They are called ‘Russians’ or ‘Ponti’ there. So, they call themselves ‘Pontic’, that is, ‘from here’. [Question: Are your Greeks from Georgia Pontians as well?] Well ... [long pause] ... Probably, we are Pontic Greeks as well (Aphrodita, born 1960 (o.e.), Vitiazevo).

An understanding of Pontic culture is dependent on different historical, linguistic and social factors and on the life trajectories of the individuals who do, or do not, consider themselves to be Pontic Greeks. It is difficult, if not impossible, to map Pontic cultural boundaries, which could ultimately and not ambiguously include the whole diversity of the Greek cultural and social experience in the region. In southern Russia and the Northern Caucasus, the life of the Pontic Greek communities is characterised by multiple boundaries which are a result of a complicated intersection of different languages, cultures, histories, political discourses, economic strategies and individual experiences. Since Pontic Greek identity is a product of the transnational circuit of culture, the configuration of its boundaries is perpetually renegotiated through the exchange of meanings as part of people’s cultural, economic and political practices, which often stretch across national and ethnic borders.

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## *Chapter 11*

# **Recrafting Georgian Medicine: The Politics of Standardisation and Tuberculosis Control in Postsocialist Georgia**

Erin Koch

The collapse of the Soviet centralised medical infrastructure, combined with political, economic and social instability throughout the former Soviet Union, brought about dramatic declines in overall population health, and increased incidence and prevalence of chronic and infectious diseases, such as tuberculosis.<sup>1</sup> In Georgia, the general decline in health care delivery systems has been exacerbated by civil war, poverty and an ongoing energy crisis, even as the country rebuilds a national health care system with tremendous assistance from international donor and aid organisations. Here I examine the contested cultural terrain of Georgian medicine as it wrestles with global requisites of standardisation while reeling from cultural and national instability.

Within a larger picture of Georgian history and culture, the paradigm of instability is teamed with images of invasion and chaos, largely attributed to ethnic diversity throughout the Caucasus and Georgia's geopolitical location. Boundaries shared with Armenia, Azerbaijan, Turkey, Russia and the Black Sea has made Georgia a strategic crossroads for empire building and trade. For more than fifteen centuries Georgian history has been punctuated by invasions from empires and nations seeking control over trade routes between East and West (Sunny 1994). This central geopolitical location at the 'crossroads of East and West' supports representations of Georgia as a strategic battlefield for larger, more powerful warring parties, a positioning that historically has emphasised the alleged inadequacies of the Georgian government. These paradigms of invasion, instability and chaos inform how

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<sup>1</sup> 'Incidence' refers to the number of new cases of a particular disease or health condition during a specific period of time, such as a year. 'Prevalence' is the total number of cases or events related to a particular disease or health condition within a population at a point in time, regardless of the date of diagnosis or duration of disease.

Georgians see themselves as part of the world today, as well as how Georgia is perceived by outsiders.

In this chapter, I argue that such assumptions about deeply rooted aspects of Georgian history and culture also shape contemporary popular and medical discourses about tuberculosis (TB) in Georgia. In particular, I focus on changes in the production of knowledge about TB – and what counts as medical expertise – to chart how this legacy of national tumult articulates with the current TB crisis and, in part, shapes responses to the disease by local and international authorities. I demonstrate that efforts to implement the World Health Organization's (WHO) standardised protocol for TB control and treatment in Georgia is framed by assumptions that the WHO model – and the larger paradigms of modern Western biomedicine that it represents – offer a necessary and 'rational' response to what international organisations perceive as the 'irrational' and 'chaotic' nature of the Soviet approach to TB control as it was realised in Georgia. In particular, I analyse changes in knowledge production practices and criteria for expert knowledge within the Georgian National Tuberculosis Program (hereafter NTP), which was established in compliance with the WHO protocol, in order to question commonplace western biomedical assumptions about the Soviet system of TB control. This same set of standard Western biomedical assumptions has been widely and indiscriminately mapped onto all former Soviet countries, including Georgia. My examination of the implementation of the WHO protocol reveals important misrepresentations of Georgian medical practice and culture, and challenges perceptions that the Soviet TB control system was inherently chaotic, irrational and narrow-minded.

This chapter draws on fifteen months of ethnographic research conducted between 2000 and 2005. Research consisted of interviews with scientists, healthcare workers, administrators and representatives of international donor and aid organisations.<sup>2</sup> I also conducted participant-observation research with affiliates of Georgia's NTP, at the National TB Reference Laboratory (NRL), in clinics, at training sessions for health professionals, and in the prison sector where TB cases concentrate.

### **The 'old' and the 'new' in Georgian medical history**

Georgia's medical tradition is a longstanding source of national pride, and in these terms Georgians historically position and distinguish themselves by employing a rich chronicle that is at once cosmopolitan and tumultuous. Its most recent pivot towards a free market economy is no less so. Among historians – and historians of Georgian medicine in particular – the story of

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<sup>2</sup> Unless otherwise stated, all names provided are pseudonyms.

Medea (who allegedly traveled with Jason from Colchis (now western Georgia)) is a common reference point for emphasising both the ancient history of Georgia as one of the oldest nations of the world, and Georgia's deeply rooted past of medical innovation (Shengelia 2002; Loria 2004).<sup>3</sup> While Georgian history is certainly characterised by cosmopolitanism and prosperous trade relations within and beyond its territorial borders, historically it has also been concerned with possibilities of foreign invasions, and has thus also fostered a long history of militarism. However, militarism for the protection of national borders cannot be culturally collapsed into ideas of a 'closed' Soviet system. With this militarism, there comes a particularly long lineage of concern with bodies, borders and incursion by groups of people as well as by disease. At present, such debates about national and public health are taking shape within a broader context of globalisation in which infectious diseases are crossing borders at an increasing rate.

However, Western biomedical arguments promoting the need for transformations in the TB infrastructure refer not to Georgian medicine *per se* but rather to the legacy of Soviet medicine. The early accomplishments of Georgian medicine are ignored by arguments asserting the need to cast off the 'old' Soviet mentality and implement 'new', global and 'modern' standards of TB diagnosis, treatment and management via the WHO. The idea that Georgian medicine is just a relic of antiquity and the concomitant notion that the Soviet model of TB control was 'closed' to the advances of Western biomedicine together support narratives about the necessity of WHO protocol implementation. During an interview with Dr. Surguladze, who held a prominent administrative position in the NTP from 1995 until 2005, one of the distinguishing characteristics of TB control during the Soviet era was closure. In his words, 'There was no ongoing contact with international organisations ... this was a classic Soviet institute. No contact with foreigners.'

From his perspective, one oriented towards fully adopting Western biomedical practices in Georgia, closure is interpreted as a sign of stagnancy, and has contributed to the current low status attributed to Soviet medicine by such institutions as the WHO. In addition to having a rich history of relative openness, involving trade, communication and cosmopolitanism dating back to the fifth century, Georgia was also one of the first former republics of the

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<sup>3</sup> According to Ascherson (1996), who does not provide footnotes, Medea never really was from Georgia at all, but was a character first wholly Greek, and then only relocated to Georgia so they could make her into a child-killer. Nonetheless, Georgians extend tremendous importance and pride to Medea as a figurehead who represents the long history of medical practice in Georgia, and its cultural significance.

Soviet Union to welcome aid and interventions from the United States and Europe. As many healthcare practitioners with whom I spoke emphasised, Georgia was also one of the first formerly Soviet countries to introduce the WHO protocol known as DOTS, which stands for Directly Observed Treatment, Short Course. This in itself is heralded as a sign of Georgia's commitment to eschewing the Soviet approach to TB control. Thus the relative closure of the Soviet medical system in the twentieth century is all too quickly read into the more specific history of Georgian culture and people, obscuring the fact that while the former may indeed have been quite 'closed', the latter possesses a long tradition of relative openness.

A second alleged limitation linked to Soviet-era healthcare systems involves the emphasis on specialisation in all fields. Dr. Surguladze elaborated: '[There was a] special network of TB facilities ... but this system was not effective ... and it was very difficult to control through this network ... in the Soviet period the program had special TB doctors. *Only* TB doctors, not just physicians, not pulmonologists, TB doctors, psthisiologists'! Thus, despite the success of the centralised Soviet medical system that provided basic services to the entire population, this emphasis on specialisation is seen as a lack of modernity in the current era of primary health care.

With the dismantling of the centralised Soviet healthcare infrastructure, Georgia undertook a difficult period of decentralisation combined with nation-building. Georgian state institutions inherited, among other things, under-resourced and overburdened medical facilities. This transformation has been under way as an official project in Georgia since 1995, when the Georgian NTP was launched, in concert with the first WHO-sponsored pilot project for implementing a standardised anti-tuberculosis protocol there. These standards, marketed and packaged as DOTS, are part of a larger response to the dramatic rise and spread of TB and multidrug-resistant TB (MDRTB) worldwide.<sup>4</sup> The forms of knowledge and expertise that distinguish the DOTS protocol are also dramatically different to the

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<sup>4</sup> DOTS is implemented primarily as a technical intervention that will fit any cultural context. The protocol consists of five key components: government commitment to sustained TB control activities; case detection by sputum smear microscopy among symptomatic patients self-reporting to health services; standardised treatment regimen of six to eight months for at least all sputum smear positive cases, with directly observed therapy (DOT) for at least the initial two months; a regular uninterrupted supply of all essential anti-TB drugs; a standardised recording and reporting system that allows assessment of treatment results for each patient and of the overall performance of the TB control program. Multidrug-resistant TB is among the deadliest of drug resistant strains because it is resistant to the two most powerful antibiotic weapons in the anti-TB arsenal – isoniazid and rifampicin – which are most commonly used in combination in standardised therapies.

Soviet model of TB control, which comprised an important and largely successful aspect of the centralised Soviet medical infrastructure.<sup>5</sup>

The cultural and political aspects of this collision between two systems of medical knowledge and TB control are at the heart of this enquiry. From an anthropological perspective I ask: What cultural assumptions about both the former Soviet Union and the modernising value of market reforms underlie seemingly value-neutral health protocols? How do perceptions about the Soviet Union's 'closed' medical system bleed over into misinterpretations of Georgia as an isolated and 'closed' culture? How are the WHO standards taken up, contested and transformed to meet local needs on the ground in Georgia? I argue that 'transitions' from one medical system to another are not as linear or predictable as standardisation policies might suggest because, contrary to popular conceptions, they are not built onto linear and uniform national histories, but specific and circuitous ones. As Michele Rivkin-Fish demonstrates, social analyses that are successfully unhinged from teleological assumptions about the nature of the social and economic transformations under way since the collapse of the Soviet Union are better able to analyse 'the contested values people assert in establishing a sense of newness, difference, progress, or loss, as they face increasingly stratified opportunities and pressures' (2005: 8).

### **Standardisation and the 'global tuberculosis emergency'**

Once believed to be under medical control, resurgent, drug-resistant TB is one of the primary infectious causes of adult death worldwide. In 1993, in an unprecedented move, the WHO declared a Global Tuberculosis Emergency. This international alert was issued to raise concern about the dramatic rise of TB and multidrug-resistant TB in the late 1980s and early 1990s worldwide, and to urge public health officials at local, regional and national levels to put TBs back on the map. More than a decade later, despite the production and global distribution of DOTS as a standardised protocol for diagnosis, treatment and management, not much has changed. Today, one-third of the world's population is infected with TB, with one new infection occurring

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<sup>5</sup> Elsewhere I provide a detailed analysis of the Soviet model of TB control (Koch n.d.). In summary, from the period immediately following the October Revolution until the dissolution of the USSR, the Soviet TB control program emphasised mass screening, vaccinations and long-term hospitalisation in sanatoria, as well as mass training of TB specialists. In short, widespread primary prevention and identification limited knowledge on a one-to-one basis. Diagnosis was based primarily on X-ray evaluations, and treatment regimens relied heavily on the professional expertise and knowledge of individual TB doctors. Although treatment generally consisted of surgery combined with anti-TB drugs, there was limited emphasis on standardised case definitions or treatment regimes (Perelman 2000).

every second, and approximately two million adult deaths annually.<sup>6</sup> This is especially alarming, given that TB is preventable and curable, and emphasises that it is a political as well as medical issue.

The DOTS protocol is structured around laboratory-based diagnosis and treatment regimens using first-line anti-TB drugs (rifampicin, isoniazid, ethambutol and pyrazinamide).<sup>7</sup> In this protocol, standard case definitions are necessary because they perform particular functions in organising services. Most importantly, they link diagnostic categories with appropriate aspects of patient registration and case notification; they prioritise treatment for patients who test positive for the bacterium that causes TB; and they enable the evaluation of cases in terms of treatment history, bacteriology and site of the disease (pulmonary or extra-pulmonary), as well as analyses of treatment outcomes on a large scale. The stakes in finding a rapid and affordable system for treating and controlling the spread of TB are high throughout the former Soviet Union, where the number of cases has more than doubled since the mid-1990s (Farmer and Walton 2003; Stern 2003). However, prescribed cures are cumbersome. With drug regimens involving the observed ingestion of these four antibiotics daily for six to nine months, DOTS places incredible burdens on ministries of health, healthcare providers, patients and their families.

In Georgia, administrators from the Tbilisi-based NTP face numerous obstacles in conducting routine surveillance and monitoring, especially in mountainous regions which are largely inaccessible to outreach teams. These obstacles include shortages of staff and transport – and of funds to pay for fuel and accommodation.<sup>8</sup> In rural and mountainous regions, DOTS is difficult to administer because patients, nurses and physicians alike lack the funds necessary to travel from one region to another on a regular basis. These problems are present in the Northern Caucasus, for example, where Chechnya and neighbouring republics are flooded with war refugees living in overcrowded camps where TB spreads readily (Abdullaev 2000; Estemirova 2003). In Dagestan the Ministry of Health has expressed interest in adopting the WHO approach to TB control, ‘but the prevailing opinion among the republic’s health workers is that introducing DOTS corresponds with social conditions that are more ideal than reality offers’ (Abdullaev

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<sup>6</sup> Statistics from the Global Alliance for TB Drug Development. [http:// www.tballiance.org/2\\_1\\_C\\_GlobalThreat.asp](http://www.tballiance.org/2_1_C_GlobalThreat.asp). Accessed 3 November 2003.

<sup>7</sup> In Georgia, as in many places worldwide, streptomycin (which is more readily available and affordable) is also often integrated into the first-line drug regimen.

<sup>8</sup> Several administrators explained this situation to me, emphasising that it is not possible for them to stay as guests with doctors while conducting supervisory visits. Occupying the role of guest in Georgia, hosted by those they are monitoring, would risk compromising their objective position, as generous hosts might expect a generous evaluation in return.

2000: 3). As is the case throughout the Caucasus region, many physicians have resisted the DOTS protocol not only because it undermines their expertise, but because the treatment and monitoring standards are impossible to meet in conditions of social upheaval, war and economic collapse.

The WHO DOTS protocol is dominated by a ‘techno-fix’ ideology that holds that it is a value-neutral healthcare delivery system that can be equally effective in any situation regardless of context. Thus, technical advisors and donors often imagine that the components of the protocol will accommodate any local context. In this view, if the technical components fit the protocol – diagnosis of sputum by smear microscopy, direct observation of medicine ingestion, and so on – then the social and economic factors that both contribute to the spread of the disease and limit the reach of the TB service providers become irrelevant. As one representative from Medical Service Corporation International (MSCI), a Virginia-based health services development company funded by USAID to help improve DOTS implementation in Georgia, explained to me, implementing DOTS should be relatively straightforward with the proper governmental support. If the NTP is supported by the state using DOTS, other social factors that contribute to TB are not major obstacles.

I think our approach is quite technical. Knowing that DOTS is a solution for TB control, people will say ‘Yes, but if you don’t change the total social infrastructure, if you don’t change the entire health infrastructure it won’t work.’ I would answer ‘Yes it works. [With DOTS] your TB program works under all conditions: in refugee camps, in prison, wherever. If you take your patients’ sputum, you diagnose correctly, you get results.’ That’s a good message. But how sustainable is it? Well of course this is a preoccupation for us but it’s not the main preoccupation. The main preoccupation is we know what we can do in the short term, and we do it. We know that it will take one or two generations, but not that long to get definite solutions ... If you do your program you can forget about the big social economic approach.

Here, the question of standards and standardisation is central to understanding how large-scale projects fall short on the ground. The DOTS protocol is a ‘standardised, bureaucratic product’ (Bowker and Star 2000: 1). Its distribution as an allegedly context-independent mobile package at a global scale begs for a critical anthropological analysis to foreground issues of professionalism, biopolitics, governance and the relationships between disease, the state and society. For Georgian doctors and health administrators who are trapped by the tension between two different systems of tuberculosis control, such factors are critical. Standardisation is not a linear but a



fragmenting process in particular cultural contexts: the implementation of the DOTS protocol creates tensions and contradictions in disease control, drawing service providers and seekers into a confusing maze of categories, institutions and priorities.<sup>9</sup> According to anthropologists Adriana Petryna and Arthur Kleinman, ‘global standards are difficult to enforce ... they are much more than cross-cultural quality assurance mechanisms’. As they argue, because standards also mediate action to the extent that ‘can provide desired outcomes and purveyors of those standards ... as standards travel, their social and economic embeddedness is revealed’ (Petryna and Kleinman 2006: 12; see also Bowker and Star 2000: 17). The DOTS protocol is one example of a highly standardised protocol that transforms the nature and meaning of knowledge production in cultural and political terms that are unveiled through the processes of implementation and an anthropological analysis thereof.

In the remainder of this chapter I focus on two aspects of standardisation that highlight the cultural importance of medicine in Georgian historical consciousness, and the politics of standardising TB control in Georgia. First, I map how changes in the hospital sector in Tbilisi, which is organised by international organisations, are underlined by cultural assumptions about what counts as rational, modern knowledge. These assumptions cast the Soviet medical system and Georgian medical practice in a negative light that perpetuates images of the Caucasus as an innately chaotic world area. Second, I assess reactions by healthcare practitioners to the implementation of the DOTS protocol and the displacement of local clinical knowledge in particular. What emerges is not a strict dichotomy between old and new systems, but a productive tension within which doctors negotiate their own hopes for the future and nostalgia for the past. In this case, hope for the future emerges from a need for economic and institutional stability necessary to ensure a viable healthcare system and livelihood for healthcare practitioners. Nostalgia, however, is rooted in pride in the successes of the Soviet medical system and TB infrastructure, and the value of clinical expertise within that system even as it is compromised and obscured by DOTS protocol. To tease apart the discontinuities and contradictions – without adopting the polarised assumption that the highly effective Soviet approach to TB control was extreme while the DOTS

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<sup>9</sup> Healthcare, taken to be a basic human right at the level of UN resolution, relief organisation and social movement discourse, is chronically neglected among impoverished populations. To be sure, the conundrums, contradictions and tensions I address here are not unique to Georgia or to health transitions in the post-Soviet context more generally. Furthermore, the support from international organisations is welcome and necessary, as are desires for adopting ‘Western’ practices and participating in international public health networks.

protocol is rational – I invoke the diverse voices, perspectives and experiences of doctors, administrators and representatives, looking closely at the problem of service delivery in Georgia today. I am particularly interested in how processes of ‘optimisation’ and ‘rationalisation’ are assessed and tackled by differently positioned actors.

## Reforms for health in Georgia

Numerous factors influence healthcare reforms and the ways in which clinical and hospital services are offered, denied, accessed and avoided. Here, I analyse the implementation of market-based health services within a former Soviet medical infrastructure and the limits of such services that emerge through a clash of medical paradigms. I draw on the experiences of national TB specialists and representatives of international organisations working in the healthcare and TB sectors in Tbilisi to shed light on the reorganisation of hospital and clinical facilities, and shifting forms and roles of clinical knowledge in TB control. Changes in the production of knowledge about and distribution of services concerning TB in Georgia have brought about a cultural tug of war in which cultural representation and misrepresentations play a central role in shaping emergent medical knowledge production practices through standardisation. In the Georgian context, these paradigmatic collisions bring into sharp relief the competing logic of medical expertise in Georgia’s postsocialist context.

Almost every doctor with whom I worked and spoke, told me, ‘*janmrtebis reporma ar aris!*’ (There is no reform for health!), highlighting the gap between commitments made on paper and changes not yet realised on the ground. Amid upheaval, poverty, uncertainty and failed reforms, important questions arise about what kinds of services are available, how they are received and resisted, which jobs are and are not secure, and how these conditions are determined by technical and financial interventions and investments from the World Bank (and others) in Georgia, as well as throughout the former Soviet Union.

The World Bank is now the largest source of funds for health reforms in the world. Overall, their health reform projects focus on rationalising so-called inefficient systems and introducing a market-based family practitioner mode of healthcare. According to Dr. Gabashvili, who was working on World Bank human development projects in Georgia at the time of our interview, the Bank was funding three main healthcare projects in Georgia, two of which I discuss here. I focus on these two projects because they illuminate the cultural assumptions about the ‘irrational’ and ‘chaotic’ nature of the Georgian healthcare system under Soviet management, and the

equally irrational and chaotic effects of globalised, standardised health reforms at the local level.

The first project that we discussed aimed to establish a foundation for a market-based primary healthcare system in Georgia. Dr. Gabashvili emphasised that launching this project was a challenge, in part because the World Bank had no prior experience in this region: 'The Bank only had experience in Africa and Latin American countries, but the former Soviet Union, Europe and Central Asia were absolutely unknown to them.' Unlike certain areas of the developing world, where medical infrastructures are often scarce, or at least invisible to the eyes of would-be developers, health facilities throughout the former Soviet Union were not only present, but sometimes even redundant. The project's main goals were (1) to create a public health department within the Ministry of Health (MoH; now Ministry of Labour, Health and Social Affairs, MoLHSA); (2) to help with licensing and accreditation of healthcare facilities; and (3) to promote a 'healthy lifestyle' ethic within the general population. Hopefully, they presumed, if people 'took better care' of themselves, they wouldn't need excessively costly health services anyway. She added that, 'The project turned out to be too ambitious; [they] did not know what they were getting into.'

As part of this project, the World Bank also helped set up the State Medical Insurance Company (SMIC) and the Basic Benefits Package (BBP), launched in 1995.<sup>10</sup> One of the main sources of the BBP is a supplemental fund drawn from a 3% payroll tax paid by employers, with employees paying 1%. The BBP is among several policies established in 1995 in Decree 269 of the Georgian Healthcare Reform package. The decree states that the state-sponsored package provides coverage for services such as maternal and child healthcare, emergency care for children aged 1–15 years; care for veterans and the population under the poverty line; prevention of communicable diseases, including AIDS and other STDs; critical and urgent care; inpatient and outpatient care for tuberculosis and mental health problems; insulin for insulin-dependent patients; pain relieving drugs for oncology patients; and medical care for victims of disasters and epidemics (Gzirishvili and Mataradze 1999: 10–11). However, it has not always been made clear to patients which TB-related costs are covered by the package and which are not. Additionally, many of those services that are covered remain prohibitively expensive. As Gabashvili clarified:

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<sup>10</sup> More specifically, SMIC 'is a separate government entity, established according to the laws on medical insurance. It collects mandatory healthcare premiums and finances state programmes [such as the NTP]. Though the SMIC is an independent governmental agency, it maintains close connections to the MoH' (Gzirishvili and Mataradze 1999: 8).

Each patient has to pay for an X-ray and refer themselves to TB services. X-rays cost three *lari* for adults and two *lari* for children.<sup>11</sup> However, X-rays with TB services should be free. *If you are diagnosed with TB you don't have to pay and if you are not diagnosed with TB you have to pay.* This [she added sarcastically] is really encouraging people to come forward.

Additionally, as was the case in Soviet times, many patients are required to make under-the-table payments to physicians. This is less a matter of 'corruption' or 'chaos' than it is of livelihood: the average salary for doctors and nurses is approximately \$50 per month, and they rarely receive salaries on time. Patients receiving treatment in Abastumani, a mountainous region, reported to international health workers that they had had to pay \$300–\$400 per month for treatment, when the entire course of DOTS should cost around \$50 (Bird 2003). Patient uncertainty over which costs are covered by the health package has had the unintended consequence of actually deterring patients from seeking care at health facilities (Skarbinski et al. 2002).

The second project discussed with Dr. Gabashvili was the 'hospital sector optimisation' project, which aimed to scale down the number of hospitals in Tbilisi as part of the drive for greater efficiency. The approach was in part based on a master plan developed by Georgian counterparts of the World Bank team, but technical assistance and guidance were provided by Kaiser Permanente International, a subsidiary of Kaiser Permanente dedicated to international consultancy and development work. Hospital sector rationalisation was a component of larger structural adjustment credit. The goal, in Gabashvili's words, was to downsize staff: 'to come up with a rationalised functional plan to get rid of excess buildings and assets'. The TB network was restructured under this larger optimisation plan.

'Optimisation' was planned according to a reconfiguration of health needs in different regions of Tbilisi. They divided the 57 hospitals in Tbilisi into three main groups: those that would remain in the public domain; those that would be consolidated and privatised as medical facilities and moved into the public domain; and those that would be closed down altogether and privatised as real estate. She explained further:

All the proceeds of privatisation are accumulated in the 'hospital restructuring fund', the so-called new body that will pay the severance packages to the dismissed staff, which would also reinvest in the public hospitals, in renovation and improving the building

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<sup>11</sup> The *lari* is the Georgian unit of currency. At the time of writing, one *lari* equals approximately US\$0.57. According to the CIA World Fact book, the estimated average per capita GDP in Georgia for 2005 was US\$3,300. <https://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/gg.html#Econ>, accessed 24 August 2006.

conditions, providing the equipment or training or whatever is necessary. That is quite an ambitious project and politically very difficult to implement, but at least it's something.

However, from her perspective there are large gaps between policy and actual practice. Specifically, Georgian people have a difficult time coming to terms with the fact that 'healthcare is not something you can get free of charge anymore. You need to pay. To avoid the financial burden you may consider changing your health behaviour, and have a healthier lifestyle.' However, there are unintended consequences of the BBP and so-called rationalisation that prevent individuals from living their lives according to this version of a 'healthier lifestyle'. One such consequence is a schism between the level of financial contributions people make to the BBP and their use of the services offered. This hitch, as Dr. Gabashvili insisted, is directly linked to the problem of government regulation of the new market-oriented system in Georgia.

It is too early to talk about the private issues because the social and economic levels of the population are very low and there is no market for the private insurers to base their contributions on. The contributions are not linked to the actual users of the system. This creates distrust and people are not motivated to contribute to the system ... the benefits and the contributions are not linked ... we went to the market economy and to a certain extent this market economy is very good at promoting competition, healthy competition between different providers. The government has to regulate the market, but the government is failing to regulate.

In summary, the World Bank-guided healthcare reforms are based on a market-oriented perspective that the Soviet healthcare system was hampered by the emphasis on specialisation, a result of the form of centralised organisation that controlled the system. Many people are frustrated with the overburdened medical arena today. For example, Elizabeth, a representative of *Médecins Sans Frontières* (MSF), emphasised the ways in which local, formerly Soviet forms of social relations and networks, often shorthanded as 'corruption', challenge transitions to a primary care model of health service delivery.

The World Bank plan of consolidating 55 hospitals into four or five is a good plan but I don't know if it will work. Who is going to fire all of these doctors? Everything was based on connections here. I don't know who is going to agree to fill in for the person who has been kicked out ... There has to be a plan for the doctors who will be left out. They need to be retrained but most of them probably are not willing to do that. I assume that a lot of them are older. Here they are

only seeing maybe three to five patients a day, and the same nurse makes them coffee every four hours. These changes won't be easy. Here, discontinuities in medical cultures emerge not only in terms of deep social ties and hierarchical relationships between doctors, but among doctors and health seekers as well. In the TB sector, such discontinuities are even more pronounced, as the implementation of DOTS brings about a displacement of clinical knowledge in favour of laboratory-based procedures upon which definitive diagnosis is based and treatment success is monitored.

### **Implementing DOTS, displacing clinical expertise**

With the implementation of the DOTS, the NTP has also initiated a long-term project of 'rationalisation', that is, reducing the number of TB treatment facilities in Tbilisi, and consolidating management within a new administrative body, the National Center for Tuberculosis and Lung Disease (NCTLD), of which the NTP is one segment. However, streamlining and downsizing within the TB sector was more challenging than the participants from both local and international institutions had anticipated. In Dr. Gabashvili's words: 'This rationalisation did not make our adjustment as we imagined it would. The physical merging of the facilities took place but we also have to downsize, lay off excess staff, and come up with a rationalised functional plan to get rid of excess buildings and assets.' 'Rationalisation' and DOTS implementation bring about new techniques of management and forms of accountability. For doctors, taking on managerial responsibilities and becoming accountable to multiple levels of local, national and international surveillance radically transforms standards of medical expertise and their own sense of themselves as professionals.<sup>12</sup> At another level, introducing new modes of surveillance and accountability can also intimidate doctors who fear that in the midst of 'rationalisation' their TB facility will be closed down if there is not a demonstrated need for their services. As a result, doctors sometimes falsify their numbers or 'hyper-diagnose'. For example, in 2003 TB administrators discovered that doctors at one dispensary in Tbilisi had invented 300 patients on paper for fear that their ward would be shut down.

The impacts of standardisation on the role of doctors are also apparent in changes in case definitions and treatment regimens. Dr. Kekelidze, a pulmonologist who has worked in what is now the NTP since 1978, discussed the fact that case definitions were widely shared under the Soviet

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<sup>12</sup> Here, it is important to note that similar structural changes are carried out in many countries where they cause just as much anxiety and frustration.

model, but their use was less standardised. As a result, patients remained in the system much longer than under the DOTS protocol.

In the Soviet period, the case definition 'cured' did not exist. Of course we decided if people were cured or not. But such a person was still a patient and doctors would treat them every year. They stayed on a list of TB patients and stayed under the control of the TB system for many years ... we didn't have categories such as 'new cases'. We had new cases, of course but this category had a different meaning. Now, if there is a smear conversion we call that person 'cured' and they are not infectious any more, and they can go home ... The Soviet approach was based on the opinion of doctors. Now 'chronic' refers to a patient who has gone through standardised treatment twice. In the Soviet period this would have been a patient who had been treated for 2 or 3 years, and it was not standardized treatment. The criteria were not in place for these things.

For many, the Soviet system was burdensome compared with today's system. Dr. Beridze, the director of the Centre for TB and Lung Disease when I interviewed him in 2001, gave the following opinion: 'In the Soviet period there was no differentiation between severe cases and less severe ones. So it was up to the doctor who needed more or less medicines for their sickness, and this decision was made by the doctor.' These reflections suggest that, under the DOTS protocol, treatment is assigned per individual and not in comparison to the needs of other patients and there is less individual decision-making on the part of doctors as they weigh the relative sickness or health of one patient compared to another. Dr. Kekelidze echoed this opinion, emphasising that within the Soviet model of TB control.

Treatment was according to each doctor's individual thinking about the patient's cure, how they thought the drugs should be prescribed. Second, in the Soviet period, there was no distinction between first-line drugs and second-line drugs. Doctors could treat patients with a combination of these drugs. Mixing drugs like that led to a high level of [drug] resistance.

As another doctor who has also been working in the Georgian TB sector since the 1970s explained:

In the Soviet period doctors could use all the resources that administrators made available. They were not standardised. When a doctor decided that one patient needed something these resources were ultimately taken from another patient. He has one stock and he has a lot of patients. He did not treat by standards but took one drug from the treatment regimen of one patient to give to another; it was not synchronised.

While the ‘synchronised’ treatment that DOTS advocates is welcomed by many healthcare practitioners, implementing a treatment protocol designed for ‘developing’ countries generates nostalgia for times past, even as they embrace the new. Dr. Beridze stressed that prior to the breakup of the Soviet Union:

Our country was strong and we did not have any financial debts. There was no deficit of drugs, food or salaries. In 1991 we became independent and found ourselves with no funds, no drugs, nothing. This is true not only for the TB network but for all health services, mainly because of the war [the Abkhaz-Georgian civil war of the early 1990s]. We were going the wrong way. Human nature needs some air to breathe, which is why we needed to make some reforms ... The changes are according to the WHO. With their help we created a National TB Program. Now, according to these standards, we have a shorter regimen and more control. The Soviet model was for lazy people. Everything was set out for you in advance. All services could be taken for granted and you did not have to think. Now we have to think about everything at each step, and calculate everything.

When I asked him if there are any problems with implementation in Georgia his response was overwhelmingly positive: ‘The DOTS program has been implemented and we are moving forward. The government is poor and we do not have enough resources. But we have good results anyway; if we had good financial support it would be even better.’

Dr. Beridze, who had assured me that there are no problems with implementation in Georgia, also assured me that doctors are receptive to the new model. When I asked if there were any obstacles to training, or any resistance, he said ‘*p’roblema ar aris*’ [‘It’s not a problem’]. Frustrated by his simple response, I returned to the question of training, this time specifically focusing on extending resources to doctors in regions of Georgia outside the capital city, many of which are rural with difficult access due to the poor quality of roads and the lack of travel resources for doctors and outreach workers.

Again, he assured me that the NTP faces no difficulties with these tasks.<sup>13</sup> ‘People came from the regions [for training], this isn’t a problem. We have covered the whole country in training TB medical people.’

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<sup>13</sup> When I returned the following year for two months of research, I was at the NTP main offices catching up, when one of the women who works there told me that Dr. Beridze and another administrator at the NTP had recently been fired. Someone had called Dr. Khechinashvili with an anonymous tip-off that they were stealing money from the hospital, keeping the two *Lari* (\$1) per day that was provided to buy food for each individual receiving



There are many formal and informal ways in which Georgian medical professionals learn to incorporate the standardised and rationalised methods of the DOTS protocol, while simultaneously retraining themselves in their professional capacities. In May 2001, for example, I was able to attend a training session at the NTP that was attended by ten doctors from across Georgia to learn the ‘new’ standards of TB diagnosis, treatment and management. With limited financial or technical support from the state, the NTP relied on a small grant from the Soros Foundation to fund the meeting. The stakes were high for Georgian health professionals in attendance; the training session concluded with a practice test that was followed a few months down the line by a state-administered exam. The results of the exam determined which doctors, nurses and lab technicians had learned the new methods – and as a result – which of them would lose or retain their jobs during the ongoing World Bank-sponsored ‘optimisation’ and ‘rationalisation’ of health services throughout the country. During the course of this particular training session, an intriguing interaction took place that highlighted the ways in which institutionalisation of medical practices also involves cultural struggles over representation and power – in short, the ways in which medicine is embedded in a global ecumene of the more and less ‘civilised’ nations, more or less ‘modern’ medical cultures and who lays claim to which. During the introductory presentation by Dr. Surguladze an argument about Georgia’s place in modernity erupted during a lecture about the importance of adopting the WHO-based global standards for TB control: This was but one instance during my research when I witnessed resistance to the implementation of DOTS in practice.

At this particular moment, the geopolitical imaginings that are mapped onto international and local disease control were articulated by Dr. Surguladze, who was discussing the importance of standardised patient registration and reporting throughout Georgia, and globally. When he mentioned that the DOTS protocol was proven to be effective in Africa and India, one doctor interrupted him and declared ‘but we are not like Africa or India, Georgia is a civilised country’. This physician was resistant to the suggestion that Georgia – which could boast some of the highest rates of literacy, education and medical service provision in the Soviet Union – is a developing country. He and others also resisted the rigidity of the protocol, and the ways in which their professional expertise is undermined through standardisation. With a nod in my direction, Dr. Surguladze noted that it was

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inpatient services. Poverty among healthcare professionals and loss of control over the production of knowledge (in some ways, it is not as if the Soviet system was apolitical) shows that the tensions between old and new are not dichotomous as the World Bank and WHO would have it.

the successful implementation of the DOTS protocol in New York that stopped the epidemic of MDRTB in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Shifting their attention to the West, rather than East and South, the doctors agreed that if DOTS is good enough for the USA, then it is good enough for Georgia. This was another moment when I witnessed Georgian TB specialists negotiating the meaning and place of competing paradigms of TB control in action; at the heart of the issue was Georgia's place in modernity, expressed and experienced through the implementation of a highly standardised medical protocol in the Georgian context.

The following afternoon, during the final lecture about protocols for record-keeping during patient registration, case management and reporting, I listened carefully as an argument exploded about the use of so many forms. The young doctor who had been providing an overview of the numerous sheets of paper that accompany the DOTS protocol had been drowned out by several Georgian physicians participating in the training, who started yelling in protest. Dr. Surguladze interrupted, reminding participants that these were the new rules, and that there are numerous problems in regions such as Tbilisi and Rustavi, where doctors do not fill out the forms properly or submit them on a regular basis to the NTP, which is important for epidemiological surveillance, nor do they adhere to new case definitions and treatment. Of primary concern, Dr. Surguladze insisted, is the falsification of numbers, namely of the number of patients that doctors treat in their local dispensaries and cabinets.<sup>14</sup> They over-report the numbers of patients they see to the NTP because they think that high numbers will give them access to greater resources, or at least ensure that their facility remains open.

Participants responded with an uproar in which national politics, articulated according to regional divisions within Georgia, were displayed and debated in terms of local responses to tuberculosis. In particular, the doctors emphasised that these kinds of practices are really only seen in Adzharia, a Muslim region of south-west Georgia which, at the time of the training session, was insisting that it was an autonomous region, not part of Georgia proper, even though no nation recognised this distinction.<sup>15</sup> According to the doctors at the session, of course physicians in Muslim Adzharia were involved in corrupt practices, where bribery is more common than in Tbilisi. They argued that Adzharia is more akin to Africa or India than the rest of the country. During an interview the following week, Dr.

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<sup>14</sup> A dispensary is a clinic, a cabinet is a smaller unit of a clinic – usually a single room – devoted to a single disease, such as tuberculosis.

<sup>15</sup> In 2004 Adzharia was officially reintegrated into the Georgian economy and political system. This was one of the first 'successes' of Mikhail Saakashvili, who was elected president in January 2004 following the Rose Revolution of late 2003.

Surguladze emphasised that most of these problems are also apparent at the central level, where doctors are reluctant to 'change their mentality' and use DOTS-based knowledge in practice. The issue did not involve the amount of paperwork per se (which of course was legendary in the Soviet era too) but rather it was the fact of having to conform to a standardised protocol that threatened the Georgian medical profession's sense of independence and expertise. In addition, the association with 'less developed' regions added insult to injury by implying that Georgian doctors were potentially morally lax, corrupt and, therefore, 'less developed'.

As a result, from the perspective of Catherine, a representative of Medical Emergency Relief International [MERLIN] who was implementing DOTS in Shida Kartli, a region of Georgia north-west of Tbilisi, the DOTS protocol cannot be fully implemented in Georgia on account of intertwined cultural, political, and economic factors.

You must bear in mind that a pension is \$7 a month, and those who are unemployed do not receive their pension anyway. They are living in the villages, they do not have any money, they have food, some of them have food and it costs two *lari* for a return journey into town. Forget it. And while doctors are not being paid I like to think none of the doctors in Gori are asking for payments. But I suspect that they are, and that pride is a factor. So, with the cost of transport and with the potentially high costs of treatment, patients are not continuing their [proper] treatment and there is a high default rate.

She emphasised 'DOTS doesn't look like DOTS in Georgia, I'm afraid ... They compromised –they kept the TB services as TB services but they carried on DOTS. OK, there was a lot of diagnosis going on and they branched out, but they still have the [separate] TB services very active ... Again, it's that transitional period that is so chaotic.'

Obstacles created by the implementation of DOTS in Georgia and broader reforms of 'optimisation' presuppose chaos and excess, but they can also create such chaotic conditions, as well as the need or desire to engage in 'corrupt' practices. Donors and others who intervene with much-needed aid and technical assistance encounter many barriers to the 'optimisation' of DOTS or more general health reform, none of which can be attributed to 'innate' Caucasus character attributes any more than they can be attributed to structural causes. The frustrations of healthcare providers who are at once under- and over-qualified for the program meet the irrationalities and fissures of a 'market economy in development'. Thus, amid standardisation and changes in what counts as expert knowledge about TB in fledgling primary healthcare systems, fear of job loss, nostalgia for the past and hope

for the future contribute to producing a uniform map of a highly variegated process on the ground. A particularly alarming unintended consequence of standardisation that reflects such variegated processes is the widespread availability of pharmaceuticals without prescription in Tbilisi.

### Medicines on the market

Nowhere is the gap between market-based or ‘rationalisation’ reforms and actual treatment possibilities more glaring than in the local pharmaceutical markets. From the perspective of pharmaceutical availability, ‘market-based medicine’ takes on a whole new meaning as most medicines are readily available in the hundreds of *aptiaki* (pharmacies) and in the *bazroba* (collective market). The outdoor markets are hectic, dirty and crowded. One of the largest is at the railway station below the NTP; I often spent time there on my way home from conducting interviews, or participant observation of daily work in the lab. Perishable food including produce, eggs, meat, cheeses and breads, as well as spices, are the primary goods sold there. At the time of my research, there was also a massive, labyrinthine area comprising expansive rows of small stalls with tarpaulin roofs, where people sold anything and everything ranging from light bulbs, duct tape and matches; cleaning products, shampoos, soaps and toothpastes; socks, hosiery, clothing and shoes; notebooks, books and pens; plants; the ubiquitous *khach’ap’uri* (Georgian cheese bread); and guns and knives. Among these basic staples were more surprising wares including medical supplies and medicines, surgical tools, gloves, syringes, and rows and rows of pills. Amid the uncertainty, lack of resources and distrust, people preferred to bypass health services and go straight to the pharmacy or the market in search of a remedy. As one representative for MSF explained, this is not a black-and-white situation.

The regulation of pharmaceuticals is really bad here. I think that they’ve managed to stop the distribution on the streets, in the markets like at the *bazroba*. You walk around and you think to yourself ‘OK, tomatoes, cucumbers, streptomycin.’ But I think that it serves a purpose because people who really cannot go to the doctor go to the pharmacists and they treat them like the doctor and they only have to pay for the medicine, they don’t have to pay for the consultation.

This sentiment was also echoed by Dr. Abashidze during an interview in 2005. Dr. Abashidze, who had recently been appointed Executive Director of the National Centre for Tuberculosis and Lung Disease, as well as Manager of the NTP, framed the issue in socio-economic terms.

The biggest problem is that even when there are some restrictions on the sale of [anti-tuberculosis] drugs, you can still get them anywhere. This is because people working in the pharmacies also need to make money. And many people [seeking services] do not go to the doctor; they just go to the pharmacy.

To deepen the analysis of the local and international politics and economies in which both regulatory and consumption practices described above emerge, medical anthropologists and their allies have begun tracking the globalised production, distribution, and consumption of 'Big Pharma's' commodities (Nichter and Vukovic 1994; Petryna, Lakoff and Kleinman 2006).

Overwhelmed by the abundance of pharmacies throughout Tbilisi, as well as the rows of medicines for sale in the outdoor markets, I wanted to talk with pharmacists and sellers about the rising practices of 'self-medication' and the role pharmacies increasingly play in the changing healthcare system in Georgia. Specifically, I sought insights into the commonality of medicines in both legal/licensed and unauthorised sites, and how the act of prescribing by pharmacists provides a communicative bridge between customers and suppliers which circumvents provision of services and monitoring by health professionals including the NTP (Whyte et al. 2002). However, it seemed clear that people would be reluctant to talk openly about these issues with an outsider, given the potential professional, economic and legal ramifications of selling unregulated and/or grey-market medicines. I recruited the assistance of a Georgian colleague who agreed to see what would happen if someone less visibly marked as a person of means could obtain pharmaceuticals easily. To no one's surprise, in every pharmacy he entered he was offered antibiotics that are supposed to be sold only with a prescription. The availability of pharmaceuticals through these channels is an indication of the day-to-day strategies people employ to maintain their own health in a setting where there is a historical distrust of regulatory bodies and where a struggling healthcare system is caught between local economic and service provision limitations and the resource/personnel-thirsty protocols of the WHO. The prevalence of self-medication without the diagnosis and supervision of trained doctors suggests that the incomplete implementation of the DOTS program, alongside a reluctance to participate in stigmatising TB control programs, may be contributing to the spread of TB, and drug-resistant strains of TB, in particular.

Research conducted among doctors, nurses and the public supported perceptions of the inadequacy of DOTS implementation in Georgia and how the program has neglected to address dissemination of TB program publicity

and crucial medical knowledge among personnel who might supply 'grey market' medicine. From September to December 2004 the MSCI project staff sponsored a four-part survey designed to assess knowledge about TB; awareness about the availability of DOTS services among TB doctors, government officials and the public; stigma; and the availability of anti-TB medicines in pharmacies and the awareness of pharmacists about DOTS.

Research conducted by the Nicollo M Company group of researchers for MSCI about pharmaceutical practice among the 1600 pharmacies in Tbilisi was derived from 40 semi-formal interviews with pharmacists. The research confirmed that one in two patients pursue the advice of a pharmacist concerning appropriate medicines (Niccolo M Group 2005). While the majority of those surveyed emphasised that they knew that they should be collaborating with the NTP when working with customers who might be positive for TB, the research data revealed a frightening lack of knowledge about antibiotic resistance and the availability of DOTS services. According to results from pharmacists surveyed, the majority (exact number not provided) of respondents could not provide a working definition of drug resistance. Moreover, 37 out of 40 respondents 'do not know anything about the DOTS program' (Niccolo M Group 2005). This is a shocking example of the failure to fully implement the DOTS protocol in Georgia.

Again, Dr. Gabashvili pointed out that the widespread availability of antibiotics fills the gap in medical services in Georgia, linking the inaccessibility of medical services to state failure and regulation:

Patients pay \$150 million for pharmaceuticals a year in Georgia ... the majority of them bypass medical services and they self-prescribe the drugs. They just buy them at the market ... The main reason for not going to the doctor or seeking a medical treatment is that they can't afford it ... The government should regulate the market whether that would be the pharmaceutical market, human resources market, or even the provider market.

'Market-based medicine' is also a factor here, with both first- and second-line drugs randomly available in pharmacies. The experiences of Elizabeth, the MSF worker who established a free clinic for vulnerable populations in Tbilisi, are telling of the severity of the situation.

We've sent four and five people to one of the TB dispensaries in town [Tbilisi]. There are always people who we are concerned have tuberculosis, people do not want to get diagnosed. Maybe if it is really bad they will get diagnosed and the people we have sent there for diagnosis have not gotten sputum tests. They get prescriptions and advice such as: 'Why don't you try these two or three anti-TB drugs for a couple of weeks and see how you feel.' That's not in the

regions but here in town. Streptomycin, rifampicin, ethambutol. Doctors tell them ‘take these three drugs and see how you feel for a couple of weeks, if you can only afford five days of streptomycin then that is OK’.

The DOTS protocol, in its systematicity, has neglected to address the potential public health benefits of acknowledging self-medication and the role of pharmacists in the provision of healthcare, instead favouring the employment of protocols that strictly adhere to standards of professional diagnosis and monitoring which are, in all likelihood, more effective among affluent populations.

### **Conclusion: Standardisation and rationalisation in Georgian TB control**

This chapter has demonstrated that in contemporary Georgia efforts to promote health and alleviate the burden of disease – in this case tuberculosis – are hampered by perceptions and misperceptions about the nature of Georgian (medical) culture and history. The multiple experiences with DOTS implementation that I have mapped here reveal the hegemonic cultural imprints that accompany assistance and interventions from international organisations, and Western market-based biomedical institutions and practices more generally. An anthropological analysis of standardisation and its side-effects speak to the larger issues of disease governance in relation to Georgian historical consciousness, competing logics of expertise, and whether DOTS ‘makes sense’ in Georgia – a question raised and interrogated by several voices heard in this text. Two concluding points, in particular, should be highlighted here.

First, this anthropological analysis demonstrates that the exclusion of other possibilities – of other forms of expertise – is a form of displacement that is also characteristic of daily life in a formerly Soviet context. Tuberculosis is a biosocial instability that arises, in new and old forms, out of war, disenfranchisement and poverty. Here, then, the dispossessed include people ‘who have been deprived of property, work and entitlements, but we can also understand them as people who are themselves no longer possessed. That is, they are no longer inside ... [the social domains] which confer a social status on their members’ (Humphrey 2002: 21). I have argued that health professionals who are dispossessed of claims to expert knowledge and rationality with the displacement of the Soviet model of TB control struggle within a terrain of competing logics of expertise in the midst of profound social upheaval. Importantly, while upheaval and instability may be seen throughout the annals of Georgian history, there is nothing inherently chaotic

that lends Georgia or the Caucasus to these trends. Rather, geopolitics, as well as the cultural misperceptions such as those discussed here, have taken control of the paradigms through which this world area is known.

Second, the alarming trends that contribute to the rise of drug-resistant tuberculosis, which are emerging from efforts to transform the ‘old’ system from something irrational to a ‘new’ and more modern version of standardised tuberculosis control, are the unintended consequences of DOTS implementation in Georgia and elsewhere. One such trend is the lack of trust patients have for the emergent primary healthcare system in Georgia, and how DOTS seems to exacerbate the social stigma that they face as people with TB. What follows is the unregulated, but widespread availability of anti-TB medicines in *aptiaki* not only in Tbilisi, as discussed here, but throughout the country.<sup>16</sup> Accounting for these trends in terms of instability or chaos will only make matters worse. If circumstances such as those discussed here continue to go unchecked, drug resistance will surge, as market forces hamper the development of new and affordable anti-TB medicines, as globalisation provides the forms of structural violence in which TB spreads and goes untreated. It is imperative to recognise a world without borders in dealing with disease, but we also very much need to recognise borders, boundaries and other world-views when it comes to managing public health.

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<sup>16</sup> This phenomenon is not unique to Georgia, or the former Soviet Union.



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## ***Chapter 12***

# **Openings and Closures: Citizenship Regimes, Markets and Borders in the Caucasus**

Lale Yalçın-Heckmann

In attempting to visit Georgia and Armenia from Azerbaijan, especially if travelling from Baku to Tbilisi by train, one must be prepared for some surprises and a high degree of uncertainty. To begin with, the traveller needs to hold a valid passport and sometimes a visa,<sup>1</sup> which is relatively novel for the local population but of course common practice among international travellers. Secondly, each train ticket needs to be personalised – it can be bought only by producing a valid passport and (if required) a valid relevant visa. Compared with journeys undertaken during the Soviet period, these requirements are also a novelty for residents of the South Caucasus republics. The puzzle, at least to a European traveller, however, is that one cannot buy, for instance, two tickets with one traveller's document. On the ticket the identity details of the traveller, the valid passport number and visa are recorded, and only one ticket can be issued per person.

The need to produce a valid passport when buying a train ticket to Tbilisi is not so easily understood in Azerbaijan. Azerbaijani citizens have recently been issued new identity cards, and although these IDs are officially called *şəxsi vəsigə*, they are more commonly referred to as passports, similar to the passports issued under the Soviet system. In order to differentiate between *şəxsi vəsigə* and a traveller's document, the latter are called *xarici pasport*, meaning international traveller's document. Trying to buy my ticket for Tbilisi and wanting to have a sleeping compartment for myself, I asked my friends in Baku to help me by bringing an additional personal travel document, so that I could buy two tickets, even if I wanted to travel alone; this was suggested at the ticket office as a solution to my wish to be alone in the compartment of the night train. Yet I needed to explain to my friends that

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<sup>1</sup> Azerbaijani citizens do not need a visa to go to Georgia, but foreign nationals travelling from Azerbaijan to Georgia do, depending on the agreement between Georgia and the respective country.

they had to show their *xarici pasport* (and not their ID), which had to be valid and new, for buying a ticket to Tbilisi.

In addition to such confusing information about which document needs to be shown when buying a train ticket, further uncertainties arise with respect to how the border police would interpret visa and other official travel documents. Due to the unresolved conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh, direct travel between Armenia and Azerbaijan is not possible, at least not without special permission. When one travels to Armenia via Georgia as I did (and incidentally as many traders do), the border police in Sadakhlo on the Georgian–Armenian border stamp the entries and exits with the name Sadakhlo. This stamp alone is apparently taken as proof by the border police that someone has been to Armenia. Normally, foreign visitors have to abide with the travel and visa regulations of these countries and no one can reprimand them, as long as the documents are complete and correct. Yet the Georgian border policeman checking my documents on the way back from Tbilisi asked me (in Azerbaijani), whether I had been to Armenia and upon my positive answer hinted that I would probably have trouble with the Azerbaijani border police. He said: ‘What would you say to the Azerbaijani police if they find out that you have been to Armenia and want to interrogate you about your trip?’ I replied that all my documents were correct and that I didn’t understand why the police should ask me anything. Indeed, there was no need for concern as the border police on the Azerbaijani side gave back my passport without any comment or question. Yet I had been apprehensive about a possible investigation and felt insecure, wondering whether I had broken some rules when crossing these borders.<sup>2</sup>

Passports and travel documents are essentially legal documents identifying individuals as members of certain political entities and guaranteeing certain rights of travel to the traveller as long as the rules and regulations are obeyed. These latter are, in general, nationally and internationally defined and written down. Once one is informed about these

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<sup>2</sup> Apparently these apprehensions were not all unfounded and I may have been particularly lucky for not having been picked up by the border police, as an Azerbaijani colleague living in Germany later told me. There have been problems getting into Azerbaijan when the traveller has an Armenian visa in the passport. According to my colleague, the issue with train tickets could have been resolved more easily if one ‘knows’ that the management of each sleeper car is ‘trusted’ to its conductor. The conductor ‘guarantees’ comfort and a single compartment for a passenger, for instance, when he/she is ‘paid’ directly instead of buying the ticket at the train station ticket office. The conductor provides his/her personal services for a smaller fee than the ticket sold at the office, but in this case one does not get a travel document. For a similar story of an uncertain border crossing by an Azerbaijani journalist, see the report by Alekber Aliyev, in *Day.az*, 17 July 2006, ‘Politika – Puteshestvie iz Baku v Erevan – Chast’ pervaya’, accessed on 22 February 2007, at <http://www.day.az/print/news/politics/54681.html>.

and fulfils and follows them, the procedure of showing documents and crossing the border should be straightforward. Yet border regimes around the world have never been as transparent as one thinks they might or should be. Recent anthropological studies looking at borderlands and border regimes have described how border regimes – referring primarily to physical structures and objects such as border fences, posts, passports and identity documents – convey multiple meanings about practices of access, and of ethnic, gendered and national identities. Accordingly, borders are ways of conceiving and defining political entities towards one's own citizens as much as towards those across the border; they are not homogeneous and 'help us to understand the imprecise fit between nations and states' (Wilson and Donnan 1998: 25; see also Donnan and Wilson 1999; Migdal 2004). For instance, people living in borderlands may be drawn away from the border inwards, towards the political power and cultural centre of the state, through citizenship, state nationalism and various other social ties.<sup>3</sup> What, then, will an emphasis on borders and border regimes offer to a study of the South Caucasus proper?

The South Caucasus has undergone immense changes in its transition from the Soviet system of connectedness to the post-Soviet system of muddling through, and the new states have been subjected to different pressures. Consequently, borders and the border regimes in the South Caucasus display instability, tensions and uncertainties. Mathijs Pelkmans, for instance, shows that the Turkish-Georgian post-Soviet border in Adzharia is a 'sensitive borderland' for the modern Georgian state which seeks to control the movement of people and goods across the border. By issuing and managing the use of passports, a state 'disciplines its subjects [and] also documents that inculcate specific identities' (Pelkmans Forthcoming).<sup>4</sup> Furthermore certain agents of the state, such as customs officers, may manipulate their own power and by ranking individuals not only according to the territories and states to which travellers belong, but also according to class, ethnicity, and gender, they can extort services and cash for themselves (Pelkmans Forthcoming).<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Wilson and Donnan 1998: 13, cited in Özgen 2005: 103.

<sup>4</sup> For further discussions of the impact of trade and travel across the same border shortly after its opening and with a focus on Turkish views and discourses, see Hann and Bellér-Hann (1998).

<sup>5</sup> Florian Mühlfried, who is conducting research in another border area of Georgia for his postdoctoral project at the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology, comments that the kind of arbitrary extortion which existed at Georgian border posts has now been stamped out following new reforms carried out by Saakashvili and the almost complete change of customs and border staff (personal communication).

Other studies such as those by Madeleine Reeves and Laura Assmuth, who look at the Tajik-Kyrgyz and Uzbek-Kyrgyz borders and the Estonian, Latvian and Russian borderlands respectively, show that the meaning and legitimacy of these borders are contested in many other parts of the former Soviet space.<sup>6</sup> There is a continuing and new need for border crossings in order to secure access to markets, for visiting family and relatives and/or visiting religious or pilgrimage sites,<sup>7</sup> but also restrictions and even decreased mobility because border crossings require resources such as money and petrol which are often in short supply, and new visas and passports (Reeves forthcoming). This need is linked to fears of reprimands from various reference groups, be it one's own national group, the border officials or the community across the border. Returning to my experiences of the Azerbaijani-Georgian border, feelings of uncertainty are of course not alleviated by the lengthy wait of two-and-a-half hours on each side of the border at the border control post. In this way, a total of five hours of the 15-hour journey are eaten up at the border – for a journey of about 680 kilometres. Yet these borders are certainly passable and even perhaps vital to many traders and their families; Sadakhlo, for example, has in fact been one of the busiest small market towns for people with Georgian, Armenian or Azerbaijani passports. Even if the boom in markets and small trade can be seen as evidence of a successful passage to a liberal market economy (and central governments have ambivalent attitudes towards this), the passport regimes do not necessarily follow the logic of market economies since they aim to restrict the freedom and scale of travel and trade.

In this chapter I explore how border and citizenship regimes reflect and interact with new economic and political realities and relations within the South Caucasus. This is particularly important as travellers, government

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<sup>6</sup> For studies of uncertainties of border regimes in the former Soviet space, in addition to that of Pelkmans (2006) who explores the Georgian borderlands, see also Assmuth (2003a and 2003b); for Uzbek-Kyrgyz borders see Megoran (2002) and Reeves (2005). Reeves looks at the Tajik-Kyrgyz and Uzbek-Kyrgyz border regions, criticises the specific 'conflictological' approach to the new regimes in these regions, notes that the incongruity between ethnic identity, location of residence and unclear border markings are seen as being 'problematic' in the eyes of observers as well as governments, but that it is 'precisely the *ambiguity* of border' (emphasis in the original, p. 68) that contributes, according to the local people, to the maintenance of peace in the region. For further discussions of new and old border regimes in another former Soviet space, that of Bessarabia, see the contributions to the special issue of *The Anthropology of East European Review*, 'Bessarabian Borderlands: One Region, Two States, Multiple Ethnicities' 2006.

<sup>7</sup> This point of wanting to cross borders in order to have access to significant religious sites I owe to Krisztina Kehl, who reports that the new and strict border regime between Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan hinders people from visiting the graveyards of their ancestors which were always across the border but accessible under the Soviet regime (personal communication).

officers, and historians have, for centuries, described the Caucasus as a region of closure. This is a paradigm that takes as given a series of encapsulated territorial entities as well as social, ethnic and religious groups which are routinely understood as self-conscious, hostile and antagonistic towards one another.<sup>8</sup> Against this background of historical stereotypes, there is the more recent journalistic and politological literature of ethnic conflicts and animosities, which highlight the boundedness of territory in imaginations and political actions of social and institutional entities (O'Balance 1997; Waal 2003), or the literature on the significance of the past, memory and landscapes (Suny 1993; Büttner and Peltz 2006) in producing and reproducing closure and borders.<sup>9</sup> While such attention to macropolitical processes in 'times of trouble' makes proper sense, it can also overlook the simple fact that traders, religious pilgrims, refugees and assorted networks of kin and friends continue crossing even the disagreeable and seemingly impenetrable borders in order to pursue long-held habits or to cut new economic pathways for themselves. This chapter therefore argues that ethnographic attention to the social and economic life of borders tells us a great deal about Caucasus pasts, presents and futures.

### **Informal economy and markets**

The emergence of markets outside state control long ago gave rise to the notion of an 'informal economy'.<sup>10</sup> Keith Hart explains the appeal of this concept to many institutions such as the ILO (International Labour Office) and to economists, as well as other intellectuals, with its 'language of paired negation' since "informal" refers to the absence of form, to the lack of established regularity, in this case to the economic evasion of the

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<sup>8</sup> Viktor Shnirelman, who studies the history and myth-making in the Caucasus and explores continuity or discontinuity with the Soviet traditions and politics, argues that primordialism 'enjoyed great respect within Soviet ideology' (Shnirelman 2001:4). His study illustrates how these paradigms have been incorporated and reproduced by local intellectuals and ideologues across the different Caucasian Soviet and post-Soviet republics. This is not to say that the Caucasus has not also been the subject of other and contrary myths, which suggests different peoples of the Caucasus share common values of tolerance and hospitality with one another, and which have sometimes been linked to further myths of common origins. For more on this, see the chapters by Gadjeiev et. al. and Gould in this volume.

<sup>9</sup> Thomas de Waal, for instance, starts his gripping documentation of the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh with an introductory chapter on crossing borders; this is, however, a front-line border between Nagorno-Karabakh's Armenian forces and the Azeri forces close to Terter, a no-man's-land created after the 1994 ceasefire (2003: 1–9). This borderland is certainly in stark contrast to the bustling border markets like that at Sadakhlo or even other state borders such as that at Batumi (as described by Pelkmans Forthcoming), and is a sad reminder of how wars can transform border landscapes and the people around them.

<sup>10</sup> See Hart 1997 [1973] and 1992.



bureaucratic rules which underpin state management of the national economy' (Hart 1992: 217). As the South, or 'Third World' states as they were formally labelled, grappling with vast economic changes and state capitalism, could not cope with employment demands, the 'informal economy' came to be seen as a solution, as a 'form of self organised unemployment relief' (Hart 1992: 218). These assessments could be seen to pertain to postsocialist states as well; the rise of the informal economy and petty trade can be seen on the one hand as a result of failing or weak states, or, on the other hand, as unemployment relief. Yet Hart is not satisfied with the explanatory framework and limited causality of these existing interpretations. He draws our attention to the spread of economic informalisation as a global phenomenon,

[e]mbracing the international drug traffic, bribery by multinational corporations, corrupt arm deals, tax evasion, smuggling, embezzlement by bureaucrats, speculation by politicians, offshore banking, 'grey' markets, insider trading, the black market of communist regimes and organised crime ... Everywhere, the commanding heights of the informal economy lie close to the centres of power and reach down to the petty enterprises which first caught [Hart's] attention (Hart 1992: 218ff).

Questions about the emergence and change of informal economies – whether it is the state bureaucracies that control the markets, the macrostructures of international trade links and the bodies that organise the trade, or actors engaging in economic activities that exercise their agency and create space outside or complement the state – are often met with either/or answers. The more comprehensive and analytically promising way of approaching this phenomenon would be to examine the interconnectedness of state, market, transnational economies and individual actors within the framework of citizenship practices from below. With such an approach, we can overcome the opposition which social and economic scientists have assumed to exist between market and state and between individuals and the collective:

The dialectic of individual and society has been polarised in the twentieth century as an extreme contradiction between market individualism and state collectivism. This has had the effect of marginalising intermediate levels of association, many of which are compatible with the market. It has also diminished the power of more inclusive notions of civilisation, capable of unifying people across political boundaries through shared religious or humanist values (Hart 1992: 222).

What Keith Hart refers to as intermediate forms of association, which function to unify people across political and other boundaries and take place

in addition to the interaction between the state and individual around the markets, resembles the concept of base which Stephen Gudeman has been developing (2001, 2005). Gudeman describes an economy's base as 'the social and material space that a community or association of people make in the world. Comprising shared material interests, it connects members of a group to one another, and is part of all economies' (Gudeman 2005: 94). Since the base of a community and economy change over time (p. 98), we can conceive of informal markets in the postsocialist space as comprising the common base for divided communities, with a shared Soviet history, which entailed a super state and a common socialist market. If these recently divided communities make their base in the space of informal economies, this could certainly be expected to have an impact on larger economies and states, and hence on citizenship.<sup>11</sup>

Let us return to the example of Sadakhlo to examine how this base of community and market operates in the Caucasus. Markets like those in Sadakhlo are crucial for the economic survival of large sections of the local population, the divided communities, but also a source of economic gains for others, be it non-local actors or government bodies (see also Juvarly and Shabanov 2004). Although in 2004 Sadakhlo appeared to be losing its leading role as an international and informal market according to the Caucasus Reporting Service,<sup>12</sup> it had earlier served as 'the lifeline for Armenia' since Armenian, as well as Georgian and Azerbaijani traders, all traded there in the late 1990s. The local population as well as the travelling traders were dependent on this economic niche:

In the Sadakhlo market's heyday in 2001, the then Armenian finance minister Vartan Khachaturian said that traders there were doing business worth between 300 and 400 million US dollars a year – equivalent to Armenia's entire budget revenue – and neither the Georgian nor Armenian government was collecting customs duty on this money (Caucasus Reporting Service No. 240, 1 July 2004).

One could obviously question whether the surrounding states were really uninterested or incapable of controlling such a vast source of economic

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<sup>11</sup> In fact, similar assumptions have led a group of researchers to study the links between informal economies, trade and the restoration of peace between the states and regions of the South Caucasus (International Alert 2004). They have studied the informal economies and trade relations across the borders between Georgia, Turkey, Abkhazia, South Ossetia, Armenia and Azerbaijan and explored the degree to which such economic relations are an indicator for and a means to achieve a peaceful coexistence among the political formations in conflict.

<sup>12</sup> This is an electronic news report prepared by the Institute for War and Peace in London. The news item and issue mentioned here is No. 240, 1 July 2004, 'Armenian-Georgian market losing its role' by Karine Ter-Saakian and Lela Iremashvili.

wealth.<sup>13</sup> Yet, it is surely at least as important to ask how such markets come into being. In other words, which forces, actors and mechanisms contribute and shape their formation or decline? Furthermore, if these markets do indeed generate such immense wealth, how do they affect citizens and citizenship regimes?

The study by Juvarly and Shabanov provides some answers to these questions. For one thing the common base defined by Gudeman seems to have been present in Sadakhlo (or Sadakhly as Juvarly and Shabanov spell it). They indicate that although there were Armenians, Georgians and Azerbaijanis involved in the informal economy, the extent of their participation and their roles differed. The economic base of this market seems to have been the ethnically mixed regions where the various groups have been living until recently. The international market was on the Georgian side of the Georgian-Armenian border, but on the Armenian side there was a village inhabited by Azeris until the war and on the Georgian side there are still many villages and some towns where the Azeri population of Georgia have lived for many generations. According to the authors it was mainly Armenians and Georgian Azeris who were involved in the trade as buyers, sellers and service providers, whereas Azeris/Azerbaijanis from Azerbaijan were fewer in number and came only as customers (Juvarly and Shabanov 2004: 228). Hence, not only ethnic identities but citizenship regimes were important factors in determining the roles of those involved in trade and market activities. Another detail brought out in this study has to do with the history of this economic base and market: the authors indicate that there had been a weekly market in Sadakhly since 1935. Yet the new international market, they add, was 'formed under very different circumstances from the old bazaar. While the previous market mostly served the local population, the new market became a trading zone for the entire South Caucasus' (Juvarly and Shabanov 2004: 229). This information is particularly interesting as it suggests a continuity and tradition of trade as well as new structures possibly related to the change of borders and border regimes, as well as economic decline and opening of free market goods flowing into all of these countries.

Such markets therefore are not only locally produced and have local functions but are also regionally and internationally connected.<sup>14</sup> Another

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<sup>13</sup> In fact Juvarly and Shabanov note that the introduction or ban on the sale of certain goods in this market depended on the interests of and was controlled by power holders far away in the capital cities of Georgia and Armenia (2004: 229).

<sup>14</sup> See also the report and photos by Karine Simonyan and German Avagyan respectively, 'One day on the Armenian-Georgian border', published 1–8 June 2004 (<http://www.hetq.am/eng/society/0406-sadakhlo.html>) accessed on 1 March 2006. This report also includes a short

report describes the market conditions and the centrality of Sadakhlo not only for Armenians from Armenia but also from Karabakh, with links to markets in Turkey, Russia and elsewhere.<sup>15</sup> Harsh economic and social conditions

have forced many unemployed Karabakhis to seek migratory work in Russia, Turkey or Iran. And many traders prefer to do business with the Azerbaijanis rather than their ethnic kin across the western border. Susanna Atayan buys goods in Istanbul and Sadakhlo, in Georgia, then sells them at Stepanakert markets. She became her family's only bread-winner after her husband, Vladimir Ovsepiyan, was badly wounded during the war. 'Beyond the borders of Nagorny Karabakh, there are plenty of Azerbaijanis, Armenians and Turks who haven't got time for old hostilities, says Atayan. 'Trade unites them and forces them to forget old problems' (Caucasus Reporting Service No. 59, 24 November 2000).<sup>16</sup>

Given the need for and emergence of an informal economy and trade at such markets, the borderlands of these new states have become social and economic fields where allegiances and relationships as much as goods can be creatively and strategically exchanged and interpreted.

### **Citizenship and markets in South Caucasus**

The empirical foundation and sustainability of the statement that 'trade unites people and forces them to forget hostilities' needs to be further explored, for it is my contention here that markets unite and allow people from different (and often hostile) citizenship regimes to overcome exclusionary mechanisms.<sup>17</sup> In a sense, market mechanisms 'travel' to allow

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history of the market, how it began as a market for agricultural produce in 1991 but expanded to cover other goods and produce involving citizens of all the neighbouring states and Karabakh. The market was at the same time becoming institutionalised, with walls, checkpoints and controls by local political, military and administrative forces. Money earned in Russia was being used as capital to buy products to be sold in Sadakhlo. Local contacts of my colleague Florian Mühlfried report that the market was officially and formally closed down in the spring of 2006, but that some smaller versions have survived (personal communication).

<sup>15</sup> Caucasus Reporting Service, No. 59, 24 November 2000: 'Tensions grow in Stepanakert' by Anatoly Kuprianov in Yerevan.

<sup>16</sup> We do not need to assume that this is primarily a post-conflict and post-Soviet development. Thomas de Waal (2003: 125) writes that even if the present hatred and prejudice between the Armenians and Azerbaijanis of Karabakh are thought to date from earlier times, during the Soviet period there was ample evidence that the Karabakhis from these two ethnic groups did get along well together.

<sup>17</sup> The authors of the study on Sadakhly, Juvarly and Shabanov, give a cautious answer, and indicate that 'the potential impact of 'small' economic projects on finding a solution to the

for the political and economic articulation of local populations beyond the regimes of given nation-states – as well as beyond the borderlands of these states. As in the historical experiences of Israel or the autonomous region of Kurdistan in northern Iraq, they can also signal emergent states or states-in-the-making. Thus, we know that communities affirmed through such markets and economic experiences are produced or reproduced in other systems of belonging and classification, such as citizenship, residential ties and documents, kinship, ethnic identity, and partnership. In the following sections I explore these themes on the basis of certain trends in informal economies, markets, production systems and citizenship regimes in Azerbaijan and engage in contemporary debates on citizenship as far as they offer models to study and understand the emerging citizenship regimes in South Caucasus.

I first sketch two ethnographic fieldwork sites in Azerbaijan where I have been looking at changes in property relations after the Agrarian Reforms of 1996 and privatisation in agriculture. With these ethnographic sketches I aim to illustrate the significance of the availability of markets for rural production and suggest how this link between informal markets and production is connected to migration and citizenship. The two sites present a strong contrast in terms of land ownership and use of agricultural land: one field site is a large village in the west of the country, in the *rayon* (district) of Şəmkir. This is the village of Təzəkənd. The other site is Pir, a settlement of internally displaced persons (IDPs, in Azerbaijani *məcburi köçkünlər*),<sup>18</sup> in the *rayon* of İsmayilli, to the centre north of the country.

The village of Təzəkənd during Soviet times had a *sovkhoz* (state farm) for vine production, which included a wine and cognac factory, then a *kolkhoz* (collective farm) for animal production and cotton, the *rayon*'s station for agricultural and construction machines and vehicles (RTS), two schools, a hospital, a depot for distributing oil to the *rayon* (*baza*), and of course the village administrative body (*kənd soveti*) as well as other administrative bodies of the *kolkhoz* and *sovkhoz*. In 2000 it had a population

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conflict is not as significant as expected' (2004: 241–2). This, of course, is a more specific question and expectation and the answers are based only on this limited study, without addressing any further and broader implications and trajectories diachronically or synchronically.

<sup>18</sup> Displaced persons in Azerbaijan are generally referred to as *qaçqın*, yet more accurately and legally this is the term for refugees, people displaced across international borders. Internally displaced persons, who are forced to leave their homelands because of war, are legally referred to as *məcburi köçkün*. The latter are all citizens of Azerbaijan, whereas the refugees usually have non-Azerbaijani, and quite often only former Soviet, citizenships. The refugees are primarily protected by international agreements and the UNHCR while the IDPs receive international support mediated through government agencies.

of over 7,000 people. During the 1980s all the above production bodies and administrative units were affected by the decline of the former Soviet economy, and especially by the demise of vine production after Gorbachev's anti-alcohol campaign in the second half of the 1980s. In Azerbaijan in general, between 1985 and 1993, nearly half of the vineyards were destroyed; by the late 1990s there were hardly any vineyards left in the *rayon* of Şəmkir. The Agrarian Reforms passed in 1996 led to the privatisation of almost all state-owned lands, following the dissolution of all *kolkhoz* and *sovkhoz* structures. According to the *rayon*'s statistics, agricultural production after the reforms has been improving, though not yet to the level of 1990. Beyond this general statement about agricultural productivity there are ample variations and unexpected results from the Reforms. To begin with, not many of the privatised land shares in Təzəkənd are being cultivated by their new owners. Cultivators are focusing on cash crop production at the level of household plots (*həyat yanı* or *məhlə* in Azerbaijani), which they had 'owned' under the socialist regime.<sup>19</sup> The reasons are many, ranging from the proximity of these plots to their houses and the lack of irrigation for privatised plots to the availability of labour in the household and the economic situation of the producer. But the primary motivating force for producing cash crops on household plots (for example, herbs and tomatoes) and for ignoring the privatised and freely acquired land shares is the demand for these products on the Russian market. Approximately 90 per cent of the produce from these *məhləs* are sold on Russian markets, especially during the high season from October to March.

The accessibility of these markets is not always straightforward. Many markets are illegally organised and informally accessed. The produce is bought by local and regional traders (*alverçi*) either directly from the fields or on village markets. In the first case, the traders arrive by car and small truck, examine the produce and then make a deal with the producing household, and agree to collect the produce regularly a few times each week during the high season. The herbs are then taken to the airport in Ganja and transported to Moscow or St. Petersburg. To my knowledge this trade is not regulated, in the sense that the quality of goods is not controlled nor do the parcels receive special treatment as vegetable produce. The traders I spoke to assured me that the parcels are treated simply as cargo, although everyone knows that they contain herbs. The amount which could be sent as one lot needs to be informally negotiated as well as the bribes which need to be paid

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<sup>19</sup> Almost all households were cultivating their household plots in 2001 and only 16% of households were cultivating their own privatised land shares. Of the total amount of privatised land shares, however, 50% was under cultivation, suggesting the common practice of share cropping on these parcels.

to the police and customs. If the deals go wrong, the parcels may get delayed, and the produce in the cartons will rot and so be ruined. Further details of this informal trade are unnecessary here; the core point is that the whole village, or rather one large settlement group in the village, is strongly dependent on income coming from Russia. As the phrase goes, '*Rusiya olmaz isə, hamı acından ölər*' (Were it not for Russia, all would die of hunger). This may be an exaggerated perception, since the issue is not this accumulation in Təzəkənd, especially in the settlement groups where the *məhləs* are only about survival, but the accumulation of modest wealth. I have observed some of this accumulation in Təzəkənd, especially in the settlement groups where the *məhləs* are slightly larger and suitable for cash crop production. A household plot, for example, covering 0.06–0.08 hectare in a good neighbourhood with water, cost at least US\$300 in 2002, whereas a woman I knew sold her fairly fertile *pay*<sup>20</sup> land of approximately 0.5 hectare for US\$500, hence the land for household plots can cost four times more than the privatised land.

The contrast to the other fieldwork site, Pir, is in the use of land and access to markets. Pir has been a small settlement for the Meskhetian Turk refugees (*qaçqın* in Azerbaijani) from Uzbekistan, who arrived in 1988 and were given household plots and houses in this location. Like the previous policies for integrating and settling forced migrants in Soviet history, these refugees found a place to live in a *sovkhos* and had been working in the *sovkhos* for a few years when the Soviet regime ended and the independent republic of Azerbaijan came into being. The settlement grew rapidly from 1992 onwards as the IDPs from Laçın, Kəlbəcər and Ağdam started arriving with their animals. Some of the *sovkhos* lands were suitable as pasture for the sheep and cattle brought by the animal herders. Several structural changes then occurred: IDPs could also work for the *sovkhos* but only temporarily since this, like all other agricultural farms at the time, was decaying and the vineyards were no longer being cultivated. Instead, the vines were plundered by the settlers to be used for planting hedges, constructing roofs for their barracks or burned for heating and cooking. The Meskhetian Turk refugees seem to have been both pushed out by the newcomers and also pulled out for migration to Russia or Kazakhstan, although they retained ownership of the half-built houses, which they had received upon settlement in 1988 and which were now occupied by the IDPs.

The IDPs could at best be depicted as being 'hungry for land'; they needed arable land to cultivate and pastures to herd their animals. Yet their legal status as IDPs prevented them formally from being recipients of the

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<sup>20</sup> *Pay* is the term for the land share received after privatisation.

privatised land shares, which all rural residents received if they had been residing at a rural locality at the cut-off date in 1996. Although the IDPs had been residents of Pir since 1992–3, they were not eligible to receive land in Pir, since the lands they should have been receiving in their home countries were under Armenian occupation and they only had entitlements to the lands in those *rayons*. This formal and legal hindrance, related to their citizenship, residential and political status, was exacerbated by the IDPs' economic and social situation of having to be integrated into a new community, albeit with a familiar system of agricultural and herding production. This affected the IDPs' relations with the state and the government, making them particularly dependent on state support and vulnerable to manipulation by governmental politics. The refugees and IDPs were, on the whole, politically vocal and could be seen as a lobby group in public discourse. Politicians as well as bureaucrats could not afford to ignore their interests especially if these were aired at election times. The IDPs in Pir used their formal links to administrative bodies, tried to establish informal and patronage links to local politicians in the *rayon* where they are now settled, as well as mobilising relations with those of the *rayons* from whence they came. The IDPs used their representatives to voice their demands for services and infrastructure for their settlement – such as rebuilding the school, improving roads and constructing the water supply system – to which they were entitled but rarely received. The only investments I was able to observe between 2000 and 2005 were the construction of a new school building in 2004 – which as of 2007 still had no heating system – and the improvement of electricity and telecommunications networks in the locality. The road remained a dirt road of the poorest quality and the single well from which 60 households had to fetch water saw no improvement.

The IDPs in Pir had strong personalities among their group: their locally resident leader was an elderly man, a former director of an animal *kolkhoz* in Laçın and a member of the newly elected municipality (*bələdiyyə*), who managed to put pressure on local administrative bodies and secure access to former *sovkhoz* pastures in Pir. This land was leased to the IDPs as pastures; however, the IDP leader also enforced the IDPs' right to cultivate the arable land in the locality around their settlement, arguing on the basis of a presidential decree, which guaranteed IDPs rights of usage to municipality lands. The land they eventually occupied, however, was in fact given as privatised shares to the residents of another village (hence it was not the property of the municipality); yet the IDP leader resorted to threats, saying they would not allow other villagers to approach the fields, and hence openly challenged the authorities and their ability to enforce law. The local authorities had to give in to this open challenge, since they did not want to



draw public and political attention to a case which could be seen as the 'tragic fate of IDPs being worsened by unjust land distribution'. The neighbouring villagers did not apparently dare to take up the challenge either, although they made their complaints to the authorities. The point here is that the moral claim of the IDPs was shared in general by public opinion: refugees and IDPs are seen as losers not only of the so-called transition economy but also of the war. They also have a special claim to state support and protection, even if some other economically vulnerable groups (such as the villagers who were deprived of their privatised shares) might resent this. Because of the special status given to the IDPs and refugees, they in turn could exploit this position and invest their energies in establishing patronage networks with politicians rather than exploring individualist economic niches like the rural residents of Təzəkənd. There is hardly any emigration to Russia among the IDPs, as they have neither the networks nor the start-up capital or other economic means to undertake such a move. Instead they try to accumulate enough from pastoral production to enable their migration to an urban centre, or better to Baku, where they hope to engage, like many other thousands of rural-urban migrants, in the metropole's informal economy as petty traders or try their luck as unqualified workers in the booming construction sector.

The contrast of limited access to property to enhance agricultural production for local markets, as in the case of the IDPs in Pir, and free access to privatised land shares but differential land use and intensified cash crop production for markets in Russia in the case of Təzəkənd, indicates the limits of the state-led and internationally supported transition to a market economy. The economic measures and agrarian reforms of the transition period have been designed to alleviate the financial pressures on rural producers by allocating them free land plots (Əliyev 1997; İbrahimov 1998). Yet the economy's base where production is to take place favours the emergence of new markets, sometimes across borders, forcing producers to make informed and individual judgements about costs and benefits and then to choose the produce and land according to the demands of the market. This market is, however, in a grey zone, since it is neither formally designed nor controlled by states or formal international bodies, and hence it challenges the existing citizenship regimes, drawing people away from their own state and economy to engage in more profitable but risky markets across international borders. Azerbaijani traders in Russia, for instance, especially the petty traders (*alverçi*) like those from Şəmkir and Təzəkənd, receive hardly any state support or benefit from state regulations, either from the Azerbaijani or from the Russian side. On the contrary, in order to pursue their market activities, they have to find ways of coping with the corrupt

systems of bribery and extortion operated by customs, police, racketeers, trade mafias and the like. They are also subject to racialised policies for controlling traders in Russian markets – recent news reports indicate that new quotas are being introduced for issuing work permits to those residents of countries with visa-free agreements with Russia, so as to “protect the native population” in the country’s markets’.<sup>21</sup>

Similar types of notions and practices developing in the fields of state-society-market-trader relationships have been eloquently taken up by Caroline Humphrey in her essay on ‘Traders, “Disorder” and Citizenship Regimes in Provincial Russia’.<sup>22</sup> She argues that trade and traders, as well as markets and borders, are commonly associated with ‘disorder’ in contemporary Russia, even if the informality as well as use of force around the various kinds of trade hardly render the use of the term informal economy, since these were attributes of the state and shadow economies under the socialist regime as well.<sup>23</sup> The paradoxical notions involving the desirability of consumer goods but the ‘disorder’ introduced with the trade through which these goods are accessed lead to new regimes of citizenship (Humphrey 2002 [1999]). This is possible through mechanisms whereby citizens have differential access to resources and are classified differently by governmental bodies, and mapped with differentially powerful documents, laws, protection systems and networks.

The presence of informality in the state sector and the mix of protection, power and favouritism with economic activities within the formal and informal sectors can also be seen in the case of Azerbaijani traders in Moscow. There the state education sector, more specifically the school system, was implicated in the redistribution of economic gains from Moscow’s informal markets. During my brief visit to Moscow in 2002 to follow the traders from Təzəkənd who were living in or commuting to Moscow to sell tomatoes and fresh herbs, I met Çəmən, a middle-aged

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<sup>21</sup> See the report in Today Az, *The Moscow Times*, ‘Not one Russian is knocking on the door’. ([www.today.az/print/news/business/35698.html](http://www.today.az/print/news/business/35698.html)) accessed on 1 January 2007. The German newspaper *Die Welt* (20 January 2007) also reports that the new immigration laws are directed primarily at controlling the migrants from CIS countries working and trading under dire conditions in Russia’s markets and so are playing into the hands of nationalist groups lobbying with slogans like ‘Russia for Russians’.

<sup>22</sup> Humphrey 2002. This chapter was first published as Humphrey 1999.

<sup>23</sup> See also Rasanayagam 2003 for a similar argument. For an ethnographic account of the change from second economy to informal trade in Tashkent’s markets see Kaiser (1997), and for further ethnographic examples of the continuities and changes in notions and practices of the market in the postsocialist countries, see Mandel and Humphrey (2002). Ghezzi and Mingione (2003) extend the discussion beyond the axis of postsocialist and non-socialist economic spheres and bring in comparative elements from post-Fordist and postsocialist transitions.

woman from the city of Ganja who has been involved in the trade of herbs from Ganja to Moscow over the past decade. She told me how women teachers from Ganja acquired a dominant position in the sale of these herbs in Moscow's vegetable wholesale markets. According to her, the collegial and friendship networks among teachers were crucial in building this dominance: the women helped each other arrange 'leave of absence' from their secure teaching positions in Ganja's schools so that they could travel to Moscow, find accommodation and also assist their male relatives to become traders in the locality, buying herbs from producers around Ganja and bringing the parcels to the airport to be taken to Moscow. The school director was described by Çəmən to have been a crucial collaborator in this organisation. He received payments for allowing women teachers to take 'informal' leave of absence from their teaching obligations during the herb high season in winter. To increase his personal wealth even more, he demanded additional payments from women wishing to be hired as substitute teachers to fill the temporary vacancies. When the herb season was over, the subcontracted teaching positions were terminated. Thus the trade generated income not only for the traders but also for the substitute women teachers and the school director as well. Following Humphrey's arguments, the new citizenship regimes – in which entitlements and privileges were differentially distributed according to the systems of protection and favours – were also dependent on the functioning of informal economies and reproduced the economic networks of international trade.

### **New citizenship regimes, ethnicity and migration**

Following Humphrey's arguments that individual traders and different kinds of traders are subjects of the new regimes of citizenship, we can also see how ethnic and regional identities and groups become targets of prejudices and governmental policies. Thus, for example, 'Caucasian' traders or the Chinese would be seen in the Far East Russian provinces as 'the Other' and the source of criminal practices, economic and social problems and disorder. The important point she raises in this context is the strength of local identities, how these identities could be mobilised in order to protect local economic interests and how individuals and groups could suddenly come to be classified as non-nationals, non-locals traders, or 'the others'. Whereas the Caucasians could be lumped into one group in the Far East, the local, ethnic and regional identity differences could play different roles in the local informal markets in the Caucasus, as we have seen in the case of the Sadakhlo market.

The ethnic basis of new citizenship regimes in post-Soviet states has been a topic discussed by many authors (see Brubaker 1992; Kymlicka

2005). David Laitin (1999), for instance, argues that a new cultural identity and corresponding citizenship regimes are being constructed in the Soviet successor states since the 'Russian speakers' who formerly had a different status are now mobilised in the contemporary postsocialist societies to form a new category and to become a new social group. Although these debates are interesting for comparisons with the Western experiences of multiculturalism, ethnic and cultural identities, especially those of migrant groups, and their representation in Western states and societies (see Taylor 1994; Kymlicka 1998 [1995]; Soysal 1998 [1994]), they are more concerned with the intersection of state and culture in citizenship (Tilly 1999: 414), and less with the intersection of market and citizenship. Although such comparisons between the western European experiences with migrant populations in the postcolonial setting of multicultural societies on the one hand, and the experiences of postsocialist societies and their newly migrating large population groups on the other, might be useful to understand how migration has an impact on citizenship regimes, the actual and complex processes of post-Soviet migratory movements still need to be carefully studied.<sup>24</sup> This is not an easy task as these migrations are multiplex and large in scale but unaccounted for. Furthermore, these new migratory movements for jobs and trade need to be assessed in relation and in contrast to the former migratory experiences within the Soviet system, where migratory movements were forced on the basis of political and developmental reasoning and purposes.<sup>25</sup>

As Katherine Verdery points out, the new citizenship regimes concerning the new minorities and majorities are not only the result of new migrations:

This has not happened because people chose or were forced to move, as is more usual with transnational ethnic communities of refugees, exiles or immigrants; when new diasporas in the former Soviet bloc were formed, what moved was not people but borders (Verdery 1998: 295).

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<sup>24</sup> For a pioneering work on post-Soviet migrations, especially of Russians to the Russian Federation, see Pilkington 1998.

<sup>25</sup> The research projects of Teona Mataradze and Milena Baghdasaryan at the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology look at new labour migrations from Georgia and forced displacement of Armenians from Azerbaijan respectively and explore the links between these processes and the new citizenship regimes in South Caucasus. Certainly not all migrations in the former Soviet or currently independent countries have been forced; there were also cultural, professionally motivated and educational kinds of migrations and mixing of populations. The focus of these projects, however, is on the more forced aspect of displacement and emigration for work than the voluntary and structured kinds of migrations.

The creation of diasporas in the Caucasus supports Verdery's thesis, as in the case of Azerbaijanis in Georgia and Armenians in Georgia becoming diasporas through the changes in international, state, and border regimes.<sup>26</sup> But migrations and forced displacement are equally significant for the existence of new diasporas in the region.

The tension between the formation of citizenship regimes for migrant groups, where cultural rights and issues of recognition are of relevance, and those of the displaced and exiled, where the emotional aspects of belonging and social incorporation are at stake, has been dealt with by May Joseph in her study on citizenship entitled *Nomadic Identities: The Performance of Citizenship* (1999). In relation to the social landscapes of and around the Tanzanian socialist Asians in exile, Joseph discusses their existence as immigrants as 'nomadic citizens' and elegantly weaves the themes of nomadic and conditional citizenship, how their stories of migration and their tenuous status as immigrants are interrelated and 'how citizenship is performed under conditions of migrancy' (1999: 3). As Joseph points out, the experience and condition of being displaced or exiled works throughout the social and emotional relationships among the gendered and generationally differentiated categories of those in exile or displaced and is articulated in silences as well as in performances. Nona Shahnazarian and I (2005) have comparatively explored the practice of remembering and communicating the experience of displacement among the Armenians from Azerbaijan and the Azerbaijani IDPs, finding that urban-rural and gender differences were significant in the narratives of lived displacement. For instance, urban Armenian refugees who fled from Baku felt a stronger sense of displacement and downward mobility when they had to take refuge with their relatives in Karabakh and had to adjust to rural values concerning patriarchal control over women. Rural Azerbaijani women who became displaced, like the ones in Pir, had perhaps fewer problems in adjusting to the IDP camp life and animal herding, yet the loss of property, of household goods and products over which they had formerly so much control, activities which helped them accumulate social capital, a name and reputation within their own community, was acutely felt and formed the cornerstones of their narratives of lost hometowns and villages.

Following Joseph's arguments concerning the links between the legal, cultural, emotional and performative aspects of citizenship, questions such as

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<sup>26</sup> See also Arutiunov (2002: 92–3) who criticises the contemporary debates about the creation of diasporas in the former Soviet countries and draws attention to how the flow between diasporas and not-diasporas could be in both directions, especially if borders are unstable or absent, as they have been in South Caucasus during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

how and why Armenian refugees from Azerbaijan with strong ethnic Armenian feelings, and hence social and emotional affinity with the majority population in Armenia, resist naturalisation,<sup>27</sup> could be more satisfactorily dealt with. Here, economic reasons, such as the possibility of securing economic livelihoods more easily in Russia than in Armenia, seem to influence the forced migrants' choice and practice of citizenship. In all these discussions of new citizenship regimes, together with migration, displacement and trade, the role of markets, in a general sense as well as in more concrete terms as a location, as in the example of Sadakhlo, seems to be of crucial importance.

### **Social citizenship and new market economies**

With the creation of new independent states in this region, beyond nationalising borders and deterritorialising population groups, social citizenship was experienced as a shift in state–individual relationships. Social citizenship and rights are in fact understood as being breached by the withdrawal of the state and the opening up of production and consumption to free market and global influences.<sup>28</sup> The most-often cited characteristic of the contemporary postsocialist states with transition economies has been the retreat of the state from various domains of individuals' lives, along with the policies of privatisation. The disappearance of social rights is usually the reason given for the need to trade, even if in illegal and informal (hence risky) markets and/or for emigration.<sup>29</sup> Even if these are not articulated in terms of a breach of citizenship rights, they are certainly articulated as a critique of the nature of the changing state. In Təzəkənd during my interviews and discussions with former *kolkhoz* and *sovkhos* workers, my interlocutors, in order to illustrate how the present inequality contrasts with the formerly 'existing' equality under the Soviet and socialist system, often cited how they were able to compare their own status to those above them. 'I was able to dress exactly like the *kolkhoz* director. Look at us now', one

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<sup>27</sup> Milena Baghdasaryan, who explores this question in her dissertation project reports that approximately only a quarter of the refugees from Azerbaijan had taken up Armenian citizenship in 2005 (personal communication).

<sup>28</sup> Here I am referring to the social aspect of citizenship in Marshall's sense as developed in his classical study on the history and development of civil, political, and social citizenship (Marshall 1998 [1963]). As Shafir points out 'civil rights provide protection from the state; social rights establish claims for benefits guaranteed by the state' (1998a: 14).

<sup>29</sup> The compulsion of a deteriorating economy is, of course, felt not only in the rural sector but perhaps even more harshly in urban centres. For a sensitive discussion of women traders in Azerbaijan's capital Baku, and their narratives of how they are ashamed of but also forced to carry out petty trade, see Heyat (2002).

former *kolkhoz* worker complained. 'I was able to travel to Crimea to the health resort there, exactly like all those miners and workers from Siberia, any time I wanted to,' said another man, who, as a World War II veteran apparently had the rights (and privileges) to these state-supported health resort vacations.

Within this picture the individual's social and economic rights and entitlements are bound to be newly defined as well. In the case of Azerbaijan, the state's role as welfare provider has largely 'disappeared', yet I believe that the image of the state as the provider of welfare and social security is still strong and intimately linked to the present presidential regime and to the cult of the president and his family. The state still cultivates its image as the provider, especially when this image could be exploited for political advantages by power holders, as in times of elections, by raising salaries of certain state pensioners, or in times of seeking support from the citizens in international negotiations concerning the unresolved Karabakh conflict. In the latter case, the state calls on organisations such as those of the Karabakh veterans and promises them additional or continuing social and economic benefits. The social and social class aspects of citizenship, therefore, offer an important arena for exploration in the South Caucasian context.

### **Concluding remarks**

In this chapter I have looked at the relationship between citizenship regimes and markets, new border practices and movements of people and goods across the borders in the postsocialist South Caucasus region. The exit from the former Soviet system has been particularly painful for the new states of this region as the dissolution of the former system of economic and political connectedness was accompanied by wars and displacement, together with aggression and negative sentiments among various social groups. Nevertheless, there are strong signs that not everything has to boil down to ethnic and national animosity and antagonism. The region is not only ruled by the paradigm of closure. Quite the contrary, for the processes of economic survival and accumulation exemplify migratory movements of people seeking new markets and thereby accelerating the processes of drawing up new regulations for controlling the movement of goods and people via immigration laws, visas, controlling illegal trade and privileging certain groups over others in access to citizenship and economic resources. The workings of markets indicate how citizens perceive their own state and how they compare the states in the past and present.

The way markets control and offer possibilities of individual and collective economic action is shaped through the behaviour and policies of

individuals: bureaucrats, police, mediators and related overseers. The actions of these persons seem on the one hand to be shaping the imaginations of the state in its multiplex forms. In these interchanges around the markets, the economy's base is created and juxtaposed to the political arena and polity.<sup>30</sup> Individuals from different ethnic and national backgrounds interact with one another within the economic base, sometimes on the margins of state control or at least circumscribing its control by using mediators, hence displacing the state away from any direct and immediate presence in their lives. This process in turn influences the notions of social citizenship, namely ideas about what people expect from the state, in turns of security and support.

In the processes described above we see little justification for reading citizenship as hybrid and multicultural identity processes as so often discussed in other contexts of a postcolonial and post-industrial West and in North America. However, the critical voice raised in these debates and the warning many authors have put forward about using identity, space and culture as overlapping concepts which reduce migrant and diaspora identities to deterritorialized ones also apply to this region. It is misleading to read too much into the role of ethnic and cultural specificities or to overemphasise the role that central governments play in shaping the economic and political structures in the region. When we look at citizenship from below in order to analyse processes such as labour migration and the informal economy and markets for trade, it becomes evident that they have more cross-cutting qualities than simply being specific to ethnic and national or international contexts.

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<sup>30</sup> Here I am using Gudeman's general concept of the base in a slightly different form, closer to his concept of 'limited base', which he says 'is allocated and appropriated by community rules' (2005: 100). In a similar fashion the community rules around these informal markets exclude the polity as the other, and appropriate the base as a sphere where the state is marginally existent.



suggestions. The remaining errors are of course mine. Finally this chapter reflects findings and ideas from work in progress which is carried out by different but related projects of the Research Group mentioned above.

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## **AFTERWORD**

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## ***Chapter 13***

### **Notes on the Making of a World Area**

Sergei Arutiunov

Is the Caucasus a world area? Has it been an area since time immemorial or is it an area-in-the-making? Will it remain an area in the future, or will it somehow decompose, so that its parts are absorbed into other, and larger, adjacent areas? The chapters in this book suggest that the Caucasus' future as a world area seems well insured. But what kind of Caucasus will it be, and what will it be known for?

As Bruce Grant and Lale Yalçın-Heckmann remind us in their Introduction to the book, the Russian imperial tradition emphasised a certain unity to the Caucasus that many scholars today have somehow lost sight of. Almost a century ago, Adolf Dirr wrote:

While studying the mythologies and belief systems of Caucasian aborigines, one can hardly dismiss that once upon a time one common religion existed in the Caucasus, a shared faith that later became obscured and partly forced out by [historically more established competitors]. But this old religion is still maintained among many tribes of Caucasus in the form of survivals, superstitions and folklore (1915: 113).

Or consider the observations of the giant of Soviet folklore studies, Vasilii Abaev, who wrote:

One soon forms the impression that notwithstanding all the impenetrable multilingualism in the Caucasus, a common cultural world was being formed over time, [a world] that was united in all its essential features. A lexical thesaurus does exist, which is common not to one or to two neighbouring languages, but to three, four and more languages, sometimes very much removed from each other – in other words, a Pan-Caucasian thesaurus. Notwithstanding an extreme linguistic parcellization, a common Caucasian ethnic culture does exist (1949: 89).

What then are we to make of these commonalities? In the Soviet school, at least since 1955, the idea of the Caucasus as a complex but coherent region



has been an indispensable starting point. One key phrase, *istoriko-kul'turnaia oblast'*, 'historical and cultural region', came into active circulation with a landmark article by Maksim Levin and Nikolai Cheboksarov (1955) that encouraged post-war Soviet ethnographers to revive an interest in areal knowledges. From this time on, whenever the word 'area' occurred, most Soviet anthropologists had this in mind.

From the standpoint of geography, the boundaries of the Caucasus area are very precise in the North and rather vague in the South. In the North it is bounded by the Kuma-Manych depression, an almost straight line of lakes, marshes, semi-dry creeks and rivers extending from the mouth of the Don to the nearly dry Kuma delta. But no natural border like this can be found in the South. Where does the Caucasus end and the non-Caucasus begin? The political borders of Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan have been shaped more or less arbitrarily by the usual course of political events. In turn we find 'Western Armenia' (in contemporary Turkey), Lazistan and Tao-Klardjeti (each straddling the Turkey-Georgia border), and 'Southern Azerbaijan' (in contemporary Iran). Each of these extended communities occupies territories physically larger than the post-Soviet states who so actively remember them. In some cases, they constitute even larger populations than their respective kinsmen in former Soviet space. When they are not being politically claimed by nationalist activists, they are well remembered both historically and culturally. Does that not make them part of the Caucasus too? So far not. Otherwise the southernmost limits of the Caucasus would have to be sought somewhere just north of Iraqi Kurdistan.

Apart from mountain ridges, lakes, and rivers, we can map other distinguishing features such as isoglosses and isograms (or isopragms, as they are more often spelled in Russian texts). The former demonstrate the territory of distribution of certain words, sounds or grammar forms, and the latter that of certain cultural features. And there is at least one isogram that very precisely defines the cultural limits of the Caucasus. It is the universal free man's dress in the Caucasus, the so-called *cherkesska* in the Russian vernacular, *chokha* in Georgia, *cei* in Adyge, *chuha* in Lak and a number of other Dagestani languages, *chepken* in Karachai-Balkar, and so forth. The Caucasus of the eighteenth century, even that of the nineteenth century, could be defined as the land where every free man wore a *cherkesska*.

Nobody wears the *cherkesska* in the Caucasus anymore, unless it is the kind of special occasion where it approximates an officer's ceremonial uniform, a bridegroom's attire at weddings (albeit rarely), or the dancers' costume of long-entrenched folklore. Today men in the Caucasus wear tweed coats, leather jackets, denims, fatigues, and perhaps most often, Adidas track suits, with the track suits, especially, showing up on some most

inappropriate occasions. (One such occasion was when Ramzan Kadyrov met Russian President Vladimir Putin, just after the assassination of Kadyrov's father, then President of Chechnya, in May 2004.) But no matter how they are dressed, every Caucasian male enjoys his bluster, and will tell you that, if only in their minds, they are always clad in cherkesskas, with the inevitable imagined dagger at their side. (In reality, daily life at least in rural areas still means that many families and individuals do own arms, but the dagger has long given way to the lamentably more practical automatic firearm.) Today these brave modern men are more often obese than thin, and no wonder: if anyone can afford feasting he will feast, while fasting is a rather rare phenomenon in the Caucasus. But in their thoughts they see themselves being as lithe and elegant as a liqueur glass (though chances are that something like a wineskin would be a fairer comparison).

The days of continual violence are, with recent and well noted exceptions, long gone from this part of the world, but a certain degree of machismo can be found in almost all everyday discourses of Caucasian life. The drive to daring-do in so many Caucasian narratives blends with the vocal energy of nearly all languages of the Caucasus, with the possible exception of Azerbaijani, which to my ear appears softer and better fit for lyric poetry. The expressivity of Caucasian languages is mainly focused on beamishly heroic motives, and one often hears that Shakespeare in Georgian is even more Shakespearean than in English. Vocalism is usually limited to five basic vowels or less, Nakh languages (and Azerbaijani, again) being an obvious exception for the richness of their vowels. Consonantism is excessively rich, reaching more than eighty consonants in Ubykh and about sixty in Abkhaz (but with only two vowels, 'a' and 'ə', in both). Faringal, laringal, abruptive, geminated, palatalised, lateral consonants abound.

Even with these deliberately limited examples one can see how complicated the linguistic space of the Caucasus can be, with all its multiple strata, substrata, adstrata, superstrata, and more than abundant obliterated, resembling a veritable puff pastry. Our earlier quotation from Abaev perfectly describes this situation, which makes not only related or possibly related indigenous languages, but also entire languages of families of once foreign provenance such as Iranian and Turkic, easily claimable as Caucasian.

Consider two examples: both Kartvelic and Dagestani languages employ a multitude of plural suffixes. But one of them, '-bi' (or '-ebi') is the most widespread both in Georgian and Tsez (Didoeli) languages. The two are in all probability unrelated. But being close neighbours, with permanent and close contacts, they have exchanged many words and developed many features in common. Consider another suffix, the Turkic *-dan*, and the

Georgian *-ithgan*. Every evidence suggests that the widespread Georgian-Turkic bilingualism in medieval Georgia had favoured, if not directly caused, the contraction of *-ithgan* into *-dan*.

Such linguistic and ethnic profusion provides fertile soil for innumerable disputes, hypotheses and theories. Some of them, such as the works of the famed historical linguist Sergei Starostin, can take on the complexity and abstractions of modern astrophysics, and are perhaps best left to the professionals. It is one thing when scholars reach deep into the past to pursue the most difficult of debates, as linguists Georgii Klimov and Arnold Chikobava have done in their studies of the 'Ibero-Caucasian' hypothesis, namely the belief that Caucasian language families are distinctly descended from a common source. (For his abiding creativity and scholarly mind, some have even compared Chikobava to the legendary Nikolai Marr, though such comparisons seem to me to be misplaced, as there has been no one quite like Marr after him.) But when the many Abduragimovs, the Adzhis or the Nunuevs (see Gadjeiev *et al.* in this volume) begin to present their work as scholarship, or when mountain poets such as Suleiman Gumashvili (see Gould in this volume) aspire to reach out to wider audiences, most academics tend to step aside and stew in their uffish thoughts. Here, instead, the chapter by Gadjeiev, Kohl and Magomedov demonstrates why we should do more to identify truer paths, while Rebecca Gould obliges us to consider how closely and uncomfortably writers such as Gumashvili mimic the least attractive nationalist discourses of the already existing mainstream.

The social sciences have long been susceptible to these struggles in ways that mathematics or chemistry have not (where 'amateur mathematician' is not a category seen as threatening to the world of science). Yet as the chapters in this volume all convey implicitly or explicitly (especially those of Anton Popov and Shahin Mustafayev), struggles over language, history and memory multiply everyday. To identify the politicised follies of the most extreme cases, our society needs many more Shnirelmans, Gadjeievs, Chechenovs and Kuznetsovs – among the better known scholars in Russia who have taken on the thriving world of 'para-science'. It is a rather thankless job, and very few scholars are willing to undertake it.

Yet as so many of the chapters in this volume suggest, it is the exception when struggle rarely takes place across such clear lines of truth and falsehood. The Caucasus region has been colonised so many times over so many centuries, and each empire brought its own scribes. In the rapid rise to independence following the end of the Soviet Union, nationalist vanities took centre stage. As a result, historical maps published in Tbilisi, Yerevan and Baku look as if they come from parallel (and very different) worlds.

These may be the work of creative penmanship, but on reflection, they are no different from the better known efforts to define cultural identities. We see this in the romanticisation of highlander life in 'Khevsur Ballad', a film that offers not a single hint of the outrageous poverty and degradations of mountain life, as discussed by Paul Manning; we find it too in the renovated traditional dances around the sacred peaks of Aragats so tellingly brought to life by Levon Abrahamian. All of these phenomena are intrinsically similar.

One might even go so far as to say that behind all of these calls of national pride, deliberate arrogance, sovereign grandeur, and Oriental superiority, we find the classic inferiority complex of small lands invaded many times over by their larger neighbours. Yet, as Ernest Gellner showed so liberally in his landmark work on nationalism, the age of empire and the path to modernisation left almost everyone with a cause to consider themselves victimised, offended, deprived, oppressed, humiliated, impoverished, robbed, defamed or denigrated (1983: 112). This applies to Cherkess, Karachais, Chechens, Avars, Dargins, Lezgins, Abkhaz, Georgians, Armenians, Azerbaijanis, Ossetians (to mention only the most prominent examples) and last but not least, Russians, both within the Caucasus and beyond it. Historiographically speaking, it is a veritable *bella omnium contra omnes*, in which there are no – alas, there can be no – victors. Everybody loses.

Much remains to be said, but my charge here is brief. The Caucasus has survived as a significant world area for millennia and stands every likelihood of remaining as such. It has lived through wars, internecine rivalries, feuds and vendettas, proving itself as – if nothing else – an arena for eternal competition of ever successive (but never entirely successful) triades of great powers (from Asia Minor, from Iran and from the North). It is an area very similar to the Balkans, unique in its own way but familiar in many others. It is united by many features yet unbelievably fractioned and fragmented – multiconfessional, multilingual, multicultural and multi-ethnic – yet monolithic in its ability to absorb and digest any invader or newcomer. This is the kind of area it has been and is most likely to remain.

Better still would be if the Caucasus were to become an area of sound mutual understanding and cooperation among its constituent parts. As the chapters by Bruce Grant, Georgi Derluguian and Lale Yalçın-Heckmann show, there is a long history of mechanisms of social reciprocity and, especially, economic trade that already offers the kinds of vocabulary of boundary crossings we will no doubt be seeing more of in a globalizing world. These are languages of pragmatism, opportunism, shared political and economic values. For this to advance on a broad scale in a world area that

continues to be dominated very much by foreign powers will not be an easy task, and it will not happen overnight.

If trade alone drives the future, then the Caucasus must take this path. The Caucasus has very few resources. It once thrived on an agricultural sector that was unrivalled in the more halcyon days of the USSR, when the South held a near monopoly. Today Moscow can find better and cheaper produce from the Mediterranean. Ore mines, once so important, have been exhausted or are nearly negligible; and against all claims to the contrary, oil cannot last forever.

Along with the riches of the Silk Road trade came, as Seteney Shami shows so vividly, complex practices of slavery. Along with foreign NGOs and new access to home electronics in the wake of the USSR, as Erin Koch shows so ominously, came new strains of tuberculosis. Tourists, as many republics have been earnestly hoping, would be a welcome change. But for this to happen, still more boundaries will have to come down.

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## Contributors

**Levon Abrahamian** is head of the Department of Contemporary Anthropological Studies at the Institute of Archaeology and Ethnography at the National Academy of Sciences in Armenia, and also teaches at the Yerevan State University. He specialises in Armenian cultural anthropology, archaic festivals and modern national movements. His four books include the English publication, *Armenian Identity in a Changing World* (Mazda 2006).

**Sergei Arutiunov** is head of the Caucasus Sector at the Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology in Moscow, and is a Corresponding Member of the Russian Academy of Sciences. He has done fieldwork in Siberia, the Russian Far East, the Caucasus, South Asia and East Asia. He is co-author (with Iurii Anchabadze) of *Kavkaz* (Nauka, 2001).

**Georgi Derluguian** teaches Historical Sociology at Northwestern University, USA. Recent publications include *Pierre Bourdieu's Secret Admirer in the Caucasus: A World System Biography* (Chicago 2005). He is currently working on a new project about Chechnya.

**Murtuzali S. Gadjiev** works at the Institute of History, Archaeology and Ethnography at the Russian Academy of Sciences in Makhachkala, Dagestan, where he directs the Derbent Archaeological Expedition. Recent publications include (as co-author) *History in the Mirror of Para-Science: A Critique of Modern Ethnocentrist Historiography of the North Caucasus* (Moscow 2006) [in Russian].

**Rebecca Gould** is in the PhD program in Anthropology and Comparative Literature at Columbia University, USA. She has done fieldwork in the North Caucasus, Georgia and Azerbaijan. Recent publications include 'Transgressive Sanctity: The Abrek in Chechen Culture' in *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* (2007).

**Bruce Grant** teaches Anthropology at New York University. He has done fieldwork in the Russian Far East, Moscow, and the Caucasus. Recent publications include 'An Average Azeri Village: Remembering Rebellion in the Caucasus Mountains', *Slavic Review* (2004) and 'The Good Russian Prisoner: Naturalizing Violence in the Caucasus', *Cultural Anthropology* (2005).

**Erin Koch** teaches Anthropology at the University of Kentucky, USA. She has done fieldwork in Georgia and the United States. Recent publications include 'Beyond Suspicion: Evidence, (un)certainly and Tuberculosis in Georgian Prisons', *American Ethnologist* (2006). She is currently working on a book entitled, *Free Market Tuberculosis: Georgia and the Management of Disease after the Soviet Union*.

**Philip L. Kohl** teaches Anthropology and Slavic Studies at Wellesley College, USA. He has conducted extensive archaeological fieldwork in the Near East, Central Asia and the Caucasus. Recent publications include *The Making of Bronze Age*

*Eurasia* (Cambridge 2007) and (as co-editor) *Selective Remembrances: Archaeology in the Construction, Commemoration, and Consecration of National Pasts* (Chicago 2007).

**Rabadan G. Magomedov** works at the Institute of History, Archaeology and Ethnography at the Russian Academy of Sciences in Makhachkala, Dagestan, and has been a Senior Fulbright Scholar in the United States. He completed his Kandidat Degree at the Institute of Archaeology in Moscow on ‘Mountainous Dagestan and Southeastern Chechnya in the Middle Bronze Age (Ginchi Culture)’, and continues to be actively involved in excavations.

**Paul Manning** teaches Anthropology at Trent University, Canada. He has done fieldwork in Wales, Argentina and Georgia. Recent publications include ‘Describing Dialect and Defining Civilization in an Early Georgian Nationalist Manifesto: Ilia Chavchavadze’s Letters of a Traveler’, *Russian Review* (2004), and ‘Rose-Colored Glasses? Color Revolutions and Cartoon Chaos in Postsocialist Georgia’, *Cultural Anthropology* (2007).

**Shahin Mustafayev** is Deputy Director of the Institute of Oriental Studies at the Azerbaijan National Academy of Sciences. He has been a Senior Fulbright Scholar in the United States, and specialises in the history of the Ottoman Empire and Turkic peoples. Recent publications include ‘On the history of Ottoman-Aqqoyunlu relations’ in *Turkica and Ottomanica* (Vostochnaia Literatura, 2006) [in Russian].

**Anton Popov** is a Research Fellow in Sociology at the University of Warwick, UK. He works on the anthropology of postsocialism, cultural identity and migration. Recent publications include ‘Becoming Pontic: “Postsocialist” Identities, “transnational” geography, and the “native” land of the Caucasian Greeks’, *Ab Imperio*, (2003) and ‘Crossing Borders, Shifting Identities’, *Anthropology of East Europe Review* (2007).

**Seteney Shami** is Program Director for Eurasia, the Middle East, and North Africa at the Social Science Research Council in New York. She has done fieldwork in Jordan, Turkey and the North Caucasus. Forthcoming publications include ‘Amman is Not a City: Middle Eastern Cities in Question’, in *Locating the City* (Minnesota 2007).

**Lale Yalçın-Heckmann** heads the Research Group ‘Caucasian Boundaries and Citizenship from Below’ at the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology, Halle/Saale, Germany. She has done fieldwork in the Kurdish area of Turkey, Germany and Azerbaijan. Recent publications include ‘Retreat to the Cooperative or to the Household? Agricultural Privatisation in Ukraine and Azerbaijan’, in *The Postsocialist Agrarian Question: Property Relations and the Rural Condition* (Münster 2003) [together with Deema Kaneff] and ‘Remembering the Dead and the Living of the “Kolkhoz” and “Sovkhoz”: Past and Present of Gendered Rural Life in Azerbaijan’, *Ab Imperio* (2005).

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