

**SHEIKHS, SALAFIS, AND THE STATE:
THE EVOLUTION OF MUSLIM POLITICS IN CHECHNYA**

By

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Abstract: Current discourse regarding the contemporary status of Islam in Chechnya tends toward one of two narratives. In the first, Islam becomes merely a political tool wielded in the hands of nationalists, warlords, and now the pro-Russian Chechen government seeking to unite the North Caucasian ethnic groups in the aftermath of a Soviet collapse. In the second, Islam is bound up in the Chechen identity and viewed as a form of resistance to Russia and distinguishing cultural trait. In both narratives, Chechen Muslims are studied in isolation from wider trends within the Central Asian region and the greater Islamic realm. This paper situates events in Chechnya within the context of movements across the Middle East and Central Asia. Through the examination of symbols, rituals, and rhetoric employed by the state and by dissident groups within Chechnya, I analyze the current struggle between the state and dissident Islamists in Chechnya to establish a dominant discourse of Islamic practice. Through this analysis, I move beyond labels of “fundamentalist” Islam and “traditional” Islam often assigned within the Chechen context to demonstrate how Islamic tradition and practice are being re-imagined in the wake of the Soviet collapse and the failed separatist conflict in Chechnya.

Chechnya catapulted into the international scene and the purview of scholars following the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the beginning of a brutal conflict between the republic's leadership and Russia's central government over the territory's sovereignty. Since the start of the first Russo-Chechen conflict, numerous accounts and analyses of the conflict have attempted to explain its roots in terms of Russian colonial policy or Soviet nationalities policy or rights of ethnic self-determination. In the post-9/11 period, many of the analyses have turned to Huntington's Clash of Civilizations thesis or reframed the conflict in terms of terrorism and counter-terrorism in an attempt to explain the persistence of violence in the region or prescribe a course of action for the Russian government or other members of the international community, and the proliferation of such analyses is certain to continue in the wake of the tragedy in Boston. Most of these studies come out of the fields of political science, security studies, post-Soviet studies, and international relations. Many provide excellent insight into many of the political, social, and economic facets of the Russo-Chechen conflicts as well as some of the factors that may have influenced the failure of Chechen attempts at statebuilding in the two periods of de facto independence before and after the first war. However, few studies have handled the question of the role of Islam in the Russo-Chechen conflicts or in post-conflict Chechen society well. This paper provides both a history and an analysis of Chechen Islamic discourse in hopes of shedding light on the tremendous role that Islamic practice plays in modern Chechnya.

There are two keys to understanding modern Islamic discourse in Chechnya. The first is geography. Located in the lofty Caucasus Mountains, home to Europe's highest peak, Chechnya's people and history have been shaped in part by its terrain. Beyond the

physical geography, however, one cannot study Chechnya without acknowledging its neighbors, without a study of some sort of cultural or perhaps political geography. Chechnya, as with the rest of the Caucasus, lies at the crossroads of Europe and Asia, wedged between what we might deem “Western Civilization,” “Russian Distinctiveness”, and the “Islamic Realm.” (Such classifications are a bit overly simplistic but convey the cultural and political friction bound to occur along such a border.) Turks, Russians, Persians, invaders, colonizers, influencers, priests, prophets, princes— all have played a sculpting role as well. The second key is that which Dale Eickelman and James Piscatori (1995) deem “Muslim Politics”: “the competition and contest over both the interpretation of symbols and control of the institutions, formal and informal, that produce and sustain them” (5). Eickelman and Piscatori trace the unfolding of this competition across the greater Islamic realm, from Egypt to Saudi Arabia to Pakistan. Over the course of the last twenty years, this struggle for interpretative dominance and institutional control has taken shape in Chechnya, where the emergence of this struggle has serious implications for the future of Russian governance. However, before diving into the nuances of “Muslim politics” and their manifestation and implication in Chechnya, I would like to first consider Chechnya’s geography and people.

An Introduction to Chechnya

The Caucasus region derives its name from the towering peaks of the Caucasus Mountains, hulking monoliths that have facilitated the development of the diverse cultures and tongues amidst their ridges and valleys. The mountains, home to Europe’s highest peaks, including Mounts Elbrus, Dykh-Tau, Shkhara, Koshtan-Tau, Janga,

Kazbek, and Pushkin, have long been steeped in myths and stories: according to Greek myth, one of the range's peaks served as the site of Prometheus' captivity and torture until his release by the hero Hercules. On either end of the mountains lie the two great seas of the region: the Black Sea, known as a warm-weather escape, and the oil-rich Caspian Sea. If one could see across the seas, glimpses of distant Europe or the shores of Persia might give a better sense of just where this region is situated. The mountains, however, have served as buffer and bulwark against the outside world, giving the region a sense of an island that prompts study of its peculiarities in isolation. Such an approach is ill advised, however, as we will see later. The Caucasus Mountains themselves are divided into two ranges, the Greater and Lesser Caucasus ranges. The former lies along the current border between the Russian North Caucasus and the now independent states of the Southern Caucasus, and it is with these mountains we will concern ourselves.

The Chechen people live in the eastern part of the Caucasus Mountains, both in villages up on the mountain heights and down below in foothills and fertile plains between the Terek and Sunzha rivers. To the east live the peoples of modern Daghestan: Kumyks, Avars, Dargans, and others. To the west are the lands of the Ingush and Ossetians; to the south, Georgians and more Ossetians. Jaimoukha (2005) notes that the area inhabited by the Chechens can be divided into four rather distinct regions: the dry, steppe-like Northern Plains; the two low mountain chains of the Terek-Sunzha Ridges, between which lie the fertile, well-watered Terek and Sunzha River Valleys; the gently-sloping, fertile, and densely populated Chechen Plains; and the jagged rising peaks of the Caucasian foothills, steeply ascending from the low Black Mountains to the alpine pinnacle of Tebulos-Mta, the highest point in the Eastern Caucasus (15-20). This

landscape has lends itself well to the practice of agriculture and animal husbandry, and through these means the Chechen people have sustained themselves.

Both a lack of research into the histories of the ethnic groups of the Caucasus and the biases of the existing research make untangling the history of the Chechen people quite challenging. The Caucasus region possesses tremendous ethnic linguistic diversity, due largely to its geography. As one of the primary land routes between Europe and Southern and Central Asia, the area served as a corridor for mass movements of humanity, which included invasions by the Romans in the first and second centuries, Sassanids in the third and fourth, Huns in the fourth and fifth, Avars in the sixth, Arabs in the seventh, the Mongols in the thirteenth, Tamerlane in the fourteenth, and a few attempted incursions by the Ottomans and Persians in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries (Jaimoukha, 2005: 29-36). In times of invasion, the mountains served as places of refuge for both the native populations of the region and for foreign groups seeking to escape oncoming armies or expanding empires, and the physical barriers provided by the harsh landscape allowed the development of numerous languages and cultures side by side. These many ethnic groups are generally differentiated by language, and by this classification Chechens belong to the Vainakh tribes .

Vainakh society from the 9th century onwards was, on the most basic levels, quite similar to that of the other cultures of the North Caucasus, based on patriarchal and patrilineal clans. The extended family (*dozal* or *tsa*), led by the family patriarch, formed the most basic unit of society. Closely related families formed sub-clans (*gar* or *neqi*), a few sub-clans formed clans (*teips*), and tribes formed loose federations (*tukhums*). At each level of society, these organizations were led by well-respected male elders. Issues

concerning all tribes (*tukhums*) could be addressed by the *Mekh-Qel*, a council of elders that represented all tribes. The *teip* served as the primary means of governance amongst the Vainakhs: each *teip* possessed a council of elders, court, and variety of the customary code of conduct (*adat*). These *teips* generally lived in one or perhaps several villages (*auls*), which were governed by the village elders (Jaimoukha, 2005: 83-95; Zelkina, 2000: 15-20). Overall, Vainakh society prior to the 18th century remained largely decentralized, with the majority of interaction occurring within or perhaps between *auls*. Unlike other regions of the Caucasus, such as Georgia to the south, united kingdoms or feudal systems failed to develop, perhaps again due to the mountainous terrain that made such consolidations of power difficult. Moshe Gammer (2006) notes the importance of freedom in Vainakh culture, evidenced by their lack of social stratification, their admiration of the wolf, a courageous and free creature, as a symbol of their people, and the use of freedom in their greetings (5-6).

Economically, the Vainakh primarily subsisted through agriculture and animal husbandry. Jaimoukha (2005) notes that the primary means of economic livelihood was determined again by terrain; peoples living on the plains grew grain while those in the mountain highlands raised sheep and cattle (96). As a result of this division, a healthy trade in grain and animal products took place between highland and lowland villages. With so many economic activities tied to the soil, control of arable land and pasture played a vital role in the success of a village, but private ownership of land was not guaranteed. Extended families privately “owned” arable fields while pasturelands were communally owned within the *teip*. The village elders and the *adat* governed use of the land, as well as the allotment of new land that might be acquired through confiscation or

the migration of another *teip* (Zelkina, 2000: 21-23). Due in part to this uncertain nature of land ownership, as well as their vitality to the economic well being for Vainakh families, livestock provided the basis for wealth in Vainakh society (Gammer, 2006: 4; Zelkina, 2000: 22).

The importance of livestock in Vainakh society plays a part in another phenomenon long emphasized by scholars of Chechen cultures: raiding. Raids frequently occurred between villages, where young men would seek to prove their courage by stealing livestock from a rival *teip* (Gammer, 2006: 5). These raids generally ended without harm to human life. However, at times, they could trigger a more serious part of the *adat*, that which governed blood feuds. The *adat* demanded a life for a life, and thus the killing of an individual could spark a vendetta between families or *teips* until proper retribution was carried out or the offender took one of the three courses of action for peaceful reconciliation (Jaimoukha, 2005: 36-37). Jaimoukha (2005) additionally notes that, along with the rules governing blood feuds, the *adat* also required hospitality and great reverence for guests, who came under the familial protection of their hosts, as well veneration of elders. Observation of the *adat* served to uphold the pillars of Vainakh ethics: by carefully following the *adat*, a man protected his pride or honor (*yah*), fulfilled his responsibilities (*bekhk*), and avoided shame (*eh*) for himself, his family, or his *teip* (134-136). In Vainakh culture, familial honor, maintained through good conduct, came above all else, and shame was avoided at all costs. This meticulous maintenance of honor ensured societal stability, for as long as the *adat* was observed, the elders, who governed *teips* and villages, were certain to be obeyed and the status quo maintained.

Beginning in the 18th century with the incursions of Peter the Great, this status quo would be fundamentally shaken and challenged, broken and reshaped, stripped and augmented, eventually producing the Chechnya we now behold. It would be wholly false to insist that today's Chechens, shaped by a secessionist conflict, Soviet collapse, deportation, collectivization, revolution, colonization, and the like, are the same as the Chechens one might speak of in the 17th century (if one could call them Chechens at all). Many voices insist that this is true, from the proclamation in the 1996 Khasavyurt Agreement between Moscow and Grozny that celebrated the end of 400 years of war to historians who lay the past twenty years' conflicts at the feet of the Chechen cultural love of freedom. Indeed, in one of the primary narratives of current scholarly discourse regarding the contemporary status of Islam in Chechnya, the modern Russo-Chechen conflicts originate in a centuries-old clash between Christian Russia and Muslim Chechnya that was never truly extinguished under the Soviet Union (M. Bennigsen, 1999; Dunlop, 1998; Gammer, 2006; Lapidus, 1998). In this view, Islam is bound up in the Chechen identity and viewed as a form of resistance to Russia as well as distinguishing cultural trait. These works fall under what I deem the "historicist approach" and are exemplified in Gammer's (2006) book, *The Lone Wolf and the Bear: Three Centuries of Chechen Defiance of Russian Rule*. According to Gammer's argument, the recent conflicts between the Russian Federation constitute a continuation of a cycle of conflict that started with Russian colonization of the region in the mid-eighteenth century. Through the book, he provides valuable analysis of some of the more potent symbols from Chechen history used by the Chechen nationalist movement as well as some consideration of the current Chechen context in terms of a post-colonial

experience. However, in focusing on the historical roots of the conflict, he often fails to consider the evolution and re-imagination of Chechen identity and history, juxtaposing instead a relatively monolithic “traditional” Sufi Islam rooted in the region’s history with an imported “Wahhabi” fundamentalism.

Not all works buy into a historicist argument that emphasizes such cultural and historic “conflict at first sight.” A second narrative exists, in which any Chechen Islamic historical narrative is largely pushed aside in favor of political and economic analysis or analysis of the “traditional” social structure apart from Islam. In this view, Islam becomes merely a political tool wielded in the hands of nationalists, warlords, and now the pro-Russian Chechen government seeking to unite the North Caucasian ethnic groups in a struggle for independence in the aftermath of a Soviet collapse. These works compose the “contemporary approach,” in which current Chechen identity and politics are largely divorced from any notion of true Islamic practice or identity (Hahn, 2011; Hayden, 2000; Hughes, 2001; Lanskoj, 2003; Lieven, 1998; Mahomedov, 2002; Russell, 2008). Valery Tishkov’s (2004) book, *Chechnya: Life in a War-torn Society*, largely embodies this approach. Tishkov, a Russian ethnographer, argues that modern Chechen identity has been created by the Russo-Chechen conflicts of the past two decades. Tishkov denies any concept of an organic Chechen Islam, contending that Chechen society was overwhelmingly secularized under the Soviet Union. As a consequence, he overlooks the potential cultural and social capital provided by Islam and fails to account for the resonance of frames rooted in Islam.

To note the flaws in the aforementioned studies is not to wholly discard them. Gammer’s book provides one of the most comprehensive and insightful accounts of the

whole sweep of Chechen history, and Tishkov's study remains one of the best ethnographic studies of Chechnya to date. Both authors also manage to avoid one of the more troubling patterns in the current literature, that of the "War on Terror" narratives. These accounts, best embodied in Yossef Bodansky's (2007) book, *Chechen Jihad*, frame the conflict in Chechnya as only the latest front in the "Global War on Terror" against Al-Qaeda. Though these accounts vary widely in their assessment of the importance of foreign groups and funding in Chechen terrorism, they carry with them the similar claim that the world has been duped by the Chechen rebels' nationalist and independence ploys and failed to see the simmering pot of fundamentalist terrorism ready to boil over into Europe (Bodansky, 2008; Hahn, 2009, 2011; Mukhina, 2006). In these accounts, "Islam" becomes synonymous with "fundamentalism," which becomes synonymous with "terrorism," belying the worst of a dependence on the Clash of Civilizations thesis and Orientalism. A number of scholars in more recent years have provided a much more nuanced analysis of terrorism and the concept of "jihad" in Chechnya (Hughes, 2001; Lieven, 2002; Russell, 2009; Souleimanov & Dityrch, 2008; Sussex, 2004; Wood, 2001). However, most of these accounts take the same approach as Gammer (2006), dividing Muslims in Chechnya into the "traditional," "moderate," "native," Sufi camp or the "radical," "fundamentalist," "foreign," "Wahhabi" camp. These two groups are presented as monolithic and relatively unchanging, dictated entirely by the tradition from whence they came.

In both narratives, an overemphasis on tradition masks the wholly modern nature of current trends in Chechen Islam, while the study of Chechen Muslims in isolation from wider trends within both the Central Asian region and the greater Islamic realm as well

overlooks the historic capital that the many actors in the current discourse draw from in order to legitimize themselves. The Chechen conflict and current Chechen society are generally viewed through the lens of Russian and Soviet history and in the current context of the Russian Federation. Few studies have attempted to situate Chechnya in the context of the Islamic movements and politics across the Middle East and Central Asia. This paper attempts to fill this gap by providing an analysis of current Islamic discourse in Chechnya that considers this wider context. Through the examination of symbols, rituals, and rhetoric employed by the state and by dissident groups within Chechnya, this paper analyzes the current struggle between the state and dissident Islamists in Chechnya over control of the dominant discourse of Islamic practice. This paper is undoubtedly limited due to the lack of data regarding both day-to-day Islamic practice in Chechnya and the inner workings of both opposition groups and the Chechen government because of ongoing political tensions and the secretive nature of these groups. However, despite these limitations, I demonstrate how Islamic tradition and practice are being re-imagined in the wake of the Soviet collapse and the failed armed struggle for independence in Chechnya.

“Muslim Politics”: The Reimagination, Functionalization, and Politicization of Islamic Practice

In the past fifteen years, a certain group of scholars has begun to use social movement theory to analyze possible incidents of Islamic social movements throughout the Middle East and Asia. Applying the whole of social movement theory to the Chechen case quickly proves problematic. Though a few popular groups did form before the

Soviet collapse, in the confusion of power struggles that unfolded in the resulting chaos, no clearly organized movements or groups emerged. Chechen political relations tend to be structured along the lines of personal networks closely related to kinship ties and villages of origin. Even during the conflict years, fighters tended to be organized through kin and hometown, with units frequently attached to particular villages (M. Bennigsen, 1999: 541). In the interwar period, clearer groups organized around charismatic authorities. However it is difficult to say that many of these groups had very clear demands. The second Russo-Chechen war gave rise to one of the first clearly delineated groups and, perhaps, true “social movements” in Chechnya— the Caucasus Emirate, which will be discussed at length later in this paper. However, despite the lack of many clearly defined social organizations in recent Chechen history, several aspects of social movement theory, namely the concept of framing and mobilization, do prove highly applicable to the Chechen case.

Social movement theory focuses primarily on three key aspects that influence collective action: political opportunity structures, mobilizing structures, and framing processes. Political opportunity structures refer to the opening and closing of political space that enables or impedes collective action (Morris, 2000: 446; Robinson, 2004: 116; Tarrow, 1994: 85). Changes in the external political structure alter actors and groups perceptions of the likelihood of success or failure of a movement, thereby impacting their decisions to mobilize or forestall action. In the Chechen case, the chief alterations in the political opportunity structure occurred first with the easing of social and political controls under *glasnost* and *perestroika*, followed by the dramatic reshaping of power structures that occurred with the collapse of the Soviet Union. The second aspect,

mobilizing structures, denote “collective vehicles, informal as well as formal, through which people mobilize and engage in collective action” (McAdam, McCarthy, & Zald, 1996; 3). These structures, which may take a variety of forms from informal personal networks based on a common hometown or more formalized relations within an established popular front, are used to assemble resources and recruit and “activate” individuals to participate in collective action (Morris, 2000: 446; Robinson, 2004: 116; Wiktorowicz, 2004: 10-13). In Chechnya, these structures most often take the form of informal networks, be they Sufi brotherhoods, village communities, or kinship networks. Finally, framing processes emphasize the cultural aspect of collective action. In the process of framing, movements identify a problem, provide solutions for that problem, and develop reasons to propel mobilization of collective action (Snow & Benford, 1992; Wiktorowicz, 2004: 15-16). Culture provides the “toolbox” or “repertoire” of stories, symbols, histories, ideas, belief systems, and rituals that movements employ to create frames that resonate with movement participants (Johnston, 2008: 321-322; Morris, 2000: 446-447; Robinson, 2004: 116-117; Snow, Rochford, Worden, & Benford, 1986; Swidler, 1986: 273). This final aspect of culture and framing proves particularly relevant in the context of the Chechen case, where Islam has played a significant role in the creation of both official frames and opposition frames that the state and its malcontents use to legitimize themselves in contemporary Chechnya.

The key problem with many of the current analyses of the role of Islam in Chechnya is the lack of attention to what social and cultural capital Islam brings to the realm of politics and social relations. Many studies focus solely on the political and economic dimension of the conflict, choosing to ignore the role of culture in the conflict

altogether (Hayden, 2000; J Hughes, 2007; Lanskoj, 2003). Those studies that do address the cultural dimension of the Chechen independence movement and the Russo-Chechen conflicts seem determined to de-emphasize the significance of Islam in Chechen culture. Tishkov (2004) writes that before the first war, “apart from some ritual mentions of Islam, the Chechens did not identify themselves as an ‘Islamic people’” (53). He illustrates his point by highlighting the poor understanding of Islam possessed by the first Chechen president, Dzhokar Dudayev (1991-1996), who once proclaimed that the Vainakh (Chechens) were the originators of the Muslim faith (51). However, in his attempts to demonstrate that the Chechen people and their leaders were not “proper” Muslims, Tishkov belies his own assertion that Islam played little role in the Chechen national imagination. Whether or not the Chechens can be described as “proper” Muslims, Islamic symbols, language, history, and rituals played a key role in both mobilization of the population for independence and in continuing struggles for legitimation of authority.

In his discussion of Islamic social movements, Quintan Wiktorowicz (2004) notes that social movements often must compete with “official frames” created by the state concerning how Islam should be practiced and conceptualized in the private and public spheres (18). In Chechnya, as in many other areas with predominantly Muslim populations, both the primary opposition frame(s) and the ruling regime’s frame are grounded in what Eickelman and Piscatori deem “Muslim politics.” According to Eickelman and Piscatori (1996), “Muslim politics involves the competition and contest over both the interpretation of symbols and control of the institutions, formal and informal, that produce and sustain them” (5). These struggles are political in the way they

constitute struggles for power and “Muslim” in the way that they engage a particular set of ideas unique to the Muslim faith, such as *shari’a*, *zakat*, and *jihad* (ibid., 5-21). In their discussion of these politics, Eickelman and Piscatori emphasize the fluidity of the supposedly “static” nature of Islamic tradition, invoking Eric Hobsbawm’s (1983) “invention of tradition”—the “process of formalization and ritualization, characterized by reference to the past” (4-5). Even as actors seek to recover “traditional” Islam, they are in actuality reimagining these “traditional” concepts in a modern era, often using a reformulation of tradition as a means to critique modern political developments or create frames for modern movements for or against the state (Eickelman & Piscatori, 1996: 28-36). Thus, far from being a monolithic entity, Islamic practice must be seen as partially a product of the time in which it is being practiced. For example, unlike the historicist conception of current Sufi practice in Chechnya being the very same as that practiced in the pre-colonial times of Shamil, the use of Sufi traditions in Chechnya must be viewed as reimagined in an era of Chechen nationalism, post-conflict societal disorder, and struggles to reestablish ties to the Russian central government.

In this reimagination lies another key process—the process of objectification, through which a religion becomes a “self-contained system” that can become easily distinguishable from other belief systems (ibid., 38). Muslims become conscious of “being Muslim,” identify themselves as such, and recognize that they are one of many across the world who identify with the same religious tradition. According to Dale Eickelman and James Piscatori, this process occurred across the Muslim world in the latter half of the 20th century with the spread of mass education and mass communication (39-42). In Chechnya, this process has really only begun since *perestroika*, as the easing

of restrictions allowed the reconnection of Muslim populations within the Soviet Union with the larger Muslim community outside its borders. With this objectification of “Muslim-ness” comes a new set of questions. What does it mean to be Muslim? How does a Muslim live? Who or what decides what is Muslim and what is not? Who speaks for Islam? The answers to these questions shape the current discourse around Islam in Chechnya and many other Muslim communities.

The question of who speaks for Islam, which Eickelman and Piscatori (1996) identify as central to Muslim politics, brings into question the nature of authority. Eickelman and Piscatori develop the concept of “sacred authority,” a kind of authority to interpret religious traditions and symbols and to determine what is “proper” in Islamic discourse and practice (57-59). Political leader, religious scholar, Sufi *sheikhs*, intellectuals, and other elites compete for sacred authority (68). In this competition, state actors, religious actors, and non-state groups leverage symbols and rituals to bolster their own sacred authority while diminishing that of others. Finally, as part of this process, actors seek to draw boundaries concerning how Islam can be practiced, where the state exercises control, and what is “proper” and what is not (Eickelman & Piscatori, 1996: 18). Actors, including both the state and non-state groups, seek to exert their authority through the process of this boundary-setting.

Currently in Chechnya, the state, led by the Ramzan Kadyrov regime (2007-present), is struggling to assert its own sacred authority and establish a hegemonic frame that dictates that “traditional” Sufism is the only real way to practice Islam in Chechnya. Opposition groups, of which the Caucasus Emirate is the most prominent, attempt to counter this frame with an alternative vision of society governed according to the

principles of the early followers of the Prophet. Leaders of both groups, as well as other prominent actors such as Sufi *sheikhs* that both support and oppose the current regime, are competing for sacred authority to speak for Islam, to control the current discourse, and to determine what is proper and improper practice of Islam. All of these processes resemble closely in certain aspects struggles occurring in other Muslim societies from Saudi Arabia to Morocco to Afghanistan. However, before discussing the way in which this contestation is unfolding around symbols, rituals, and rhetoric, it is important to examine Chechnya's history in order to better understand both Chechnya historic Islamic capital as well as the impacts of the Soviet period and the Russo-Chechen war on Islamic practice and discourse.

Chechnya's Islamic History

The Advent of Islam in Chechnya

The early spread of Islam into the North Caucasus coincided with the Arab conquests of the eighth and ninth century with the expansion of the Umayyad Caliphate into south-eastern Daghestan (Zelkina, 2000: 26-27). In the following centuries the links between the Caucasus and the central Islamic rulers greatly declined under the Abbasid caliphate. However, the spread of Islam throughout the Caucasus continued through the missionary activities and trade, now under the influence of the Turkish Saljuq dynasty (ibid.: 27-28). Daghestan became a major center for Arab-Muslim culture and for Islamic scholarship and education, in part due to an influx of Arab settlers and scholars as well as the travel of local 'ulama to other Islamic educational centers in Yemen, Egypt, and other parts of the Muslim world (ibid.: 30-31). However, though Islam firmly took hold in

Daghestan, which geographically was much closer to the Caspian and to the influence of the Muslim Caliphates and empires than the rest of the Caucasus region, by the end of the 16th century, the spread of Islam inland over the mountains into Chechnya occurred at a much slower pace. Through the activities of various missionaries from the surrounding region, Islam penetrated the Chechen lowlands and just began to reach the mountain highlands during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (Meskhidze, 2002: 302-304; Zelkina, 2000: 34-39). From the beginning Islam in Chechnya was intertwined with Sufism, the mystical dimension of Islam that served as the vehicle for much of the religion's expansion out of the Middle East.

Sufism's early origins lie in practices of mysticism and asceticism, particularly in Basra and Baghdad, during the Umayyad and early Abbasid Caliphates in the eighth and ninth century. The ascetics of this period sought immolation of self in pursuit of intimacy and complete surrender to God through meditation on Quranic verses, piety and imitation of the Prophet's life, voluntary poverty and hardship, and strict obedience to the law (Knysh, 2000: 7-12). The habits and prescriptions of early ascetics and proto-Sufis were codified into a more coherent practice in the 10th and 11th centuries with the writing of a number of biographies of early Sufi saints and manuals of "Sufi science" and practice. Most significantly, the writings of famed Sunni scholar Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad al-Ghazali (d. 1111) on Sufism, along with his resounding refutation of Neo-Platonism, served to reconcile Sufism with orthodox Sunni Islam (ibid., 140-149). This reconciliation and legitimation of Sufi practice allowed the development of Sufism into a system of social institutions known as *tariqas* or Sufi orders. Alexander Knysh (2000), traces the origins of the *tariqas* to a fundamental shift in the nature of the teacher-disciple

relation that has always been at the center Sufi practice. From the 10th century onward this relation grew more formal and rigid, with more casual instruction circles being replaced by formal training courses taught by a Sufi master (*sheikh*) to a group of disciples (*murids*). The “set of rules, rituals, and pious formulas” prescribed by a Sufi *sheikh* to his students was known as that *sheikh*’s “method” or *tariqa*. Over time, *tariqa* came to describe the entire institution of disciplines and dogma practiced by the *murids* of a particular *sheikh*. A *tariqa* was generally named after its founding *sheikh* and propagated by the *murids* of that particular *sheikh*. As each *murid* completed his training, he was given a license to take his own *murids*, and through chains of discipleship, Sufi *tariqas* spread out from their founding cities across the Islamic realm and beyond (170-174).

It is important to note at this point that Sufism is not a separate branch of Islam but rather a complement to the practice Sunni or Shi’i Islam. Sufism aims to achieve the annihilation of one’s self (*fana*) and union with God (*baqa*). The means to this aim is the Sufi path (*tariq*), which can be divided into three stages: complete surrender to God’s will in the form of complete obedience to the Quran and *Sunna* (the state of *islam*), realization of the deeper meaning of the Quran and *Sunna* (the state of *iman*), and finally the full realization of God’s presence (the state of *ishan*). As individuals travel along this path, they encounter “spiritual states” (*hal*) and “stations” (*maqam*) and engage in the struggle (*mujahada*) against their own selfish desires; and at each of these stations, the seeker is expected to follow particular rules or requirements generally delineated by the Sufi *sheikh* guiding their journey. The nature of these rules and requirements, as mentioned above, gave rise to the use of the term *tariqa* to delineate different Sufi orders

(Knysh, 2000: 301-309). Key to the traversing of the Sufi path (*tariqa*) are the methods of self discipline which Sufi seekers use to enter mystical states and overcome one's selfish urges. Knysh (2000) highlights three key disciplines employed by Sufis: *khalwa* (seclusion and solitary retreat), *sama* (listening to or chanting poetry or music, often accompanied by dancing, with the aim of achieving spiritual ecstasy), and *dhikr* (ritual prayer meant to encourage mindfulness of God's presence). The practice of these disciplines varies widely amongst different Sufi orders (*tariqas*).

Many early missionaries to Chechnya carried the title of “*sheikh*” and, according to legend, possessed the ability to perform miracles (Meskhidze, 2002; Zelkina, 2000: 47-51). The mystical nature of Sufism was well received amongst the previously animistic Nokchay, though there is little record of formal Sufi brotherhoods of any particular order until the eighteenth century. Little is known about the earliest missionaries besides a few legends.¹ Anna Zelkina (2000) writes that Islam in Chechnya was “not so much disseminated by learned scholars and through Islamic institutions, but rather through divinely inspired holy men” (50). Islamic scholarship, jurisprudence, and educational institutions such as those in Daghestan failed to develop in Chechnya, likely due to the more informal, mystical nature of Islam propagated by the early missionaries, but by the end of the eighteenth century Islam had taken a firm hold throughout the region.

Russian Expansion and the Islamic Imamate

¹ For an account of some of these legends, see Meskhidze (2002)

² For an excellent discussion of the slave trade in the Caucasus, see Grant (2009: 22-42).

³ Several legislative-like bodies, including the *shura al-'ulama* (council of religious scholars), *majlis al-nuwwab* (council of *naibs*), and *divan-khaneh* (imam's council), existed over the course of the Imamate to review Shamil's decision and ensure their compatibility with the *shari'a* (Zelkina, 2000: 215-217). Shamil also created a separate set of laws based on his own rulings as a scholar called *nizams* that served to reinforce the *shari'a* or adapt it to the Caucasian circumstance (Gammer, 1994: 232-235; Kemper, 2002: 269-270; Zelkina, 2000: 217-221).

At the dawn of the eighteenth century, the Caucasus lay at the junction of three major empires: the sprawling Sunni Ottoman Empire, stretching from North Africa up through the Levant and Anatolia into the Balkans, the Shi'i Safavid Empire in Persia, and the budding Russian Empire to the North. Crisscrossing the Caucasus were a network of trade routes along which goods and bodies were exchanged, linking the empires and the populations between them.² It is in this context that Russia, led by the modernizing tsar Peter the Great, first entered the Caucasus, seeking to cultivate Russian trade connections in the Caspian region. Peter's mission, moving south along the Caspian shore from Astrakhan, was met with great resistance in what is now Daghestan, prompting Russian retreat. Under Catherine the Great, Russia's southern expansion resumed with the construction of the "Caucasian Line," a series of fortresses stretching from the existing defense line along the Terek River near the Caspian Sea to the Black Sea, built in part to requests from the Caucasian khanates for protection from Ottoman and Persian raids (Baddeley, 1908: 14-36; Gammer, 2006: 8-15; Grant, 2009: 19-42; Meskhidze, 2002: 308-309). The motives behind this expansion were primarily geostrategic and economic: Catherine's foray into the Caucasus aimed to establish a launching pad for further expansion into Persian-controlled territory as well as a means of access to the Black Sea and cultivation of trade routes south and east into Asia. However, this Russian push southward was cloaked in the language of giving what anthropologist Bruce Grant (2009) deems "the gift of empire." The Caucasian conquest, like the colonial ventures of the Western European powers, became a civilizing mission to bring Western enlightenment and development to the East (46-47). This gift, however, was not very well received.

² For an excellent discussion of the slave trade in the Caucasus, see Grant (2009: 22-42).

The experience of Russian colonization firmly entrenched Islam in local society and culture, as Islam established itself as a potent mobilizing force for anti-colonial resistance. Not surprisingly, the most powerful symbols and frames in both the Chechen nationalist movement and the Chechen Islamist movement originate in this period of early Russian colonization in mid-nineteenth century. In the context of Russian expansion into the North Caucasus, religious leaders became the primary figures in anti-colonial resistance movements and, in the process, transformed the practice of Islam in Chechnya. These religious leaders took the form of imams who were chosen from within the ranks of prominent Naqshbandi *sheikhs*. The first three imams, *Sheikh* Mansur, Ghazi Muhammad, and Hamzat Bek, preached a message of strict adherence to *shari'a* and observance of Islam's five pillars and called for unity of the Muslims of the Caucasus while leading military campaigns against the newly established Russian forts based on the notion of *ghazavat*, defensive resistance to the encroachment of nonbelievers on Muslim lands (Gammer, 1994; Meskhidze, 2002; Zelkina, 2000). These leaders both spread the practices of the Naqshbandiyya *tariqa* throughout Chechnya and Daghestan and laid the groundwork for what would become known as Shamil's Imamate, the first Islamic proto-state in the Caucasus.

Imam *Sheikh* Mansur emerged as the first significant Chechen Muslim leader in the late eighteenth century. After receiving religious training in Daghestan, he preached as a *mullah* in the Chechen village of Aldi, where he received the title of "*Sheikh*" from local religious leaders. Mansur led a revival of Islam in many Chechen settlements and united much of the Northeast Caucasus, declaring his intention to spread Islam to the Karabulaks, Ingush, to Kabarda, and finally to the Russians, declaring that "Islam will

unite all the peoples” (Meskhizde, 2002: 307). However, the religious revival quickly turned into an anti-colonial struggle.). Armed clashes between Russian forces and followers of Imam Mansur began in 1785, in which the Imam’s forces had some successes but suffered heavy losses from Russian punitive raids. Mansur’s armed resistance continued through the Russo-Turkish War of 1787-1792 until Mansur’s capture in Anapa in 1790 (ibid., 309-319; Zelkina, 2000: 65-66). Under Mansur, the Islam’s potential as a unifying and mobilizing force across ethnic and tribal cleavages in resistance to colonization was first realized.

Though Mansur exhibited many traits of a Naqshbandi Sufi leader, no clear historical evidence exists to establish him as such. The Naqshbandi Sufi branch (*tariqat*) would be officially established in Chechnya under Chechnya’s second significant Sufi leader, Ghazi Muhammad. The Naqshbandiyya *tariqa* traces its roots to 14th century Bukhara in what is now Uzbekistan, where Baha al-Din Muhammad (born as Muhammad Naqshband) departed from the practices of his Sufi master in engaging in the practice of a silent, sober, and introspective performance of the *dhikr* (Knysh, 2000: 218-221). The Naqshbandiyya *tariqa* spread into Persia and Turkey in the centuries following Naqshband’s death, and in India Naqshbandi *Sheikh* Ahmad Sirhinid, known as the *Mujaddi alfi thani* (“Renewer of Islam”), gave the *tariqa* a more effective organizational structure while reaffirming the commitment of the order to strict orthodox observance of *shari’a* and obedience to the Quran and *Sunna* and cultivating close relations with the ruling regime to provide religious guidance. In Turkey the *tariqa* significantly evolved under the guidance of Kurdish *Sheikh* Mawlana Khalid Baghdadi in the 18th century. Khalid and the *sheikhs* of the Naqshbandiyya-Khalidiyya *tariqa* that followed him

actively sought to garner influence within the Ottoman ruling regime to promote strict adherence to *shari'a* that would preserve the Ottoman state as a stronghold of Muslim strength (ibid., 224-234). The Naqshbandiyya-Musjaddidiyya-Khalidiyya *tariqat* began to spread into the North Caucasus at the beginning of the 19th century through the Azerbaijani-based *Sheikh* Isma'il al-Shirwani al-Kurdamiri, a deputy (*khalifa*) of the *tariqa's* *Sheikh* Khalid, for whom the *tariqa* is named (Zelkina, 2000: 100-130). Through the work of al-Shirwani, both Muhammad al-Yiraghi and Jamal al-Din, two of the most significant early spiritual authorities in the Caucasus, were initiated into the Naqshbandi *tariqa*; these two men, as elder men with extensive tribal connection and religious prestige, would exert significant influence on religious life in the Caucasus under the three imams who followed Mansur.

The first of these imams, Ghazi Muhammad, an Avar *Sheikh* with a religious education in Daghestan, rose to fame in his native village of Gimrah, preaching a message of fundamentalist adherence to *shari'a*, calling for the replacement of traditional *adat* with *shari'a* as the basis of society and governance, for the strict following of the five pillars, and for religious education. According to Ghazi Muhammad, local religious and secular leaders were to blame for the political decline of the North Caucasus, and only through the leadership of a righteous ruler who governed according to *shari'a* could the community be saved (Zelkina, 2000:136-143). Following his appointment as imam and a declaration of *ghazavat* in 1831, he mounted military against Russian fortresses in the North Caucasus, which met with initial success but began to decline in 1832 under Russian punitive raids, culminating with Ghazi Mohammed's death at the hands of Russian forces (Gammer, 2006: 46-48). His successor, Hamza Bek, a fellow Avar and

one of Ghazi Muhammad's deputies who focused primarily on the political task of *ghazavat*, was assassinated in a blood feud in the second year of his rule after executing the ruling family of the Avar Khanate (Zelkina, 2000: 160-168; Gammer, 1994: 62-63). Despite the short tenures of both these leaders, Ghazi Muhammad and Hamza Bek played a significant role in solidifying Naqshbandi networks in Chechnya and in advancing adherence to *shari'a*, developments that would lay the framework for Shamil's proto-state.

The assassination of Hamza Bek led to a crisis of leadership amidst the Naqshbandiya, which culminated in the rise of Imam Shamil, the most influential of the Naqshbandi imams. Shamil, an Avar Naqshbandi *sheikh*, built on the network of local deputies (*naibs*) established by previous imams to create the first unified government in Chechnya and Daghestan based on the foundation of *shari'a* law. Zelkina (2000) notes that Shamil's leadership in Chechnya marked the first occasion in which a leader of Chechnya based his legitimacy on *shari'a* and religious authority rather than traditional *adat* or military prowess (201). As imam, Shamil held the ultimate religious and political authority, while under him lay a pyramid of deputies (*naibs*) who held military and administrative power as well as judges (*qadis*) and teachers (*muftis*) who possessed judicial powers. Added to this structure were elected officials (*mazuns* and *turkhs*), who represented their districts, the elders who governed villages, and *mudirs*, superintendents of sorts, who oversaw the *naibs* and reported directly to Shamil. Shamil also undertook the task of creating a financial support network for the state and an organized, self-sustaining military. The state drew much of its revenue from military spoils, of which roughly a fifth went to the state as *khums* (the "fifth" of military spoils whose giving as

alms is mandated in the Quran) and the rest were divided amongst participants (Gammer, 1994: 231). The *khums* were divided according to the *sharia*, with some going to those who claimed descent from the Prophet, some going to the poor and needy, especially victims of the war, some going as rewards for distinguished warriors, and the surplus being used for construction of infrastructure (Zelkina, 2000: 208). Shamil also created a traditional Muslim tax system of land tax levies (*kharaj*) and income tax levies (*zakat*). State revenues were supplemented by income from fines levied on the population for legal infractions (Gammer, 1994: 230-231; Zelkina, 2000: 208-210). This state lasted from the early 1840s to the mid-1850s, when increasing pressure from the Russian Army and internal fiscal crisis led to the crumbling of the state from within. Shamil finally surrendered to Russian forces in Daghestan on 6 September 1859, marking the end of the most significant era of anti-colonial resistance in the North Caucasus (Baddeley, 1908; Gammer, 2006; Zelkina, 2000).

Islam under the Imamate

The imams of the resistance period significantly altered the practice of Islam in Chechnya. First, the Naqshbandiyya-Musjaddidiyya-Khalidiyya *tariqa* became firmly rooted in the region through the preaching of the imams and their deputies. This suborder of the Naqshbandi *tariqa* developed through the leadership of both *Sheikh* Ahmad Sirhindi al-Faruq of the 16th century Moghul Empire in India, and *Sheikh* Diya al-Din Khalid al-Shurazuri al-Kurdami of the 18th century Ottoman Empire, both of whom taught that only through strict observance of *shari'a* by all Muslims and the rule of a righteous Islamic ruler who grounded all his actions in the *shari'a* could salvation be achieved and the Muslim *umma* resist Western domination (Zelkina, 2000, 90-98;

Gammer, 1994, 42-45). The spread of this *tariqa* in conjunction with the rule of the imams greatly increased the importance of *shari'a* and altered the balance of power between traditional authorities and religious authorities. All of the imams preached a message of total adherence to *shari'a* and called for the replacement of *adat* with *shari'a*. In Shamil's Imamate, *shari'a* became the supreme constitution of the state and his implementation of it remained one of the primary sources of his legitimacy³ (Gammer, 1994: 236-238). During the period of the imams, religious authority superseded traditional authority. Islam became the basis for the legitimacy of the state and *shari'a* its primary law.

This shift in the basis of legitimacy for political authority is evidenced by the wide employment and counter-employment of scholars to support and to undermine Shamil's state. According to Zelkina (2000), Russian officials sought to coopt local *mullahs* and 'ulama and brought in 'ulama from Tatarstan and Crimea in order to undermine Shamil's state, going so far as to open Islamic educational institutions to create a religious elite loyal to the Empire (213). Most of Russian-employed polemicists against the Imamate emphasized the internal aspects of Islam, such as piety, over outward acts such as *ghazavat* and a *sharia*-based state, and some compared Shamil to the four rightly-guided caliphs in order to critique his regime (Kemper, 2002: 266-269). One particular Russian-supported scholar sought a *fatwa* supporting the anti-Imamate position from a *mufti* in Mecca, but the Meccan *mufti's* answer instead supported Shamil (*ibid.*,

³ Several legislative-like bodies, including the *shura al-'ulama* (council of religious scholars), *majlis al-nuwwab* (council of *naibs*), and *divan-khaneh* (imam's council), existed over the course of the Imamate to review Shamil's decision and ensure their compatibility with the *shari'a* (Zelkina, 2000: 215-217). Shamil also created a separate set of laws based on his own rulings as a scholar called *nizams* that served to reinforce the *shari'a* or adapt it to the Caucasian circumstance (Gammer, 1994: 232-235; Kemper, 2002: 269-270; Zelkina, 2000: 217-221).

268). On Shamil's side, Daghestani *qadi* Murtada- Ali al-Uradi wrote two legal treatises supporting the Imamate using the Quran and *Sunna* as well as the works of traditional Shafi'i scholars⁴. Al-Uradi's works provide religious legitimacy for Shamil's *nizams* and legislation, for violent *ghazavat*, for violence against other Muslims, and for the existence of the Imamate apart from the Ottoman Empire, using doctrines such as *ijtihad* (independent reasoning) and *malasha* (the good of the believers) to justify these practices (ibid., 270-274). This discourse evidences the key significance of Islam and Islamic discourse as a means of legitimizing or de-legitimizing the rule of the imams in Chechnya and Daghestan.

Islamic education greatly increased during the period of the imams. Ghazi Muhammad sought that all people should know the *al-Fatiha* (the first *sura* of the *Quran*), the compulsory prayers, and the *al-Tashahhud* (Zelkina, 2000: 140). Under the Imamate, Shamil set up Muslim schools in every mosque and required at least primary-level religious education for all boys, while his *naibs* were instructed to teach core Islamic concepts during Friday prayers at the mosque, which all men were obligated to attend (Zelkina, 2000: 219). Mosques became social centers as they provided both places of prayer and the site of primary education for both children and adults. Islam not only became the foundation of the state but also became intertwined with education, thereby diffusing through education Islamic principles and practices throughout Chechen and Daghestani society. The Imamate provides some of the richest cultural capital to be re-imagined in post-Soviet Chechnya. Zelkina (2000) writes, "the time of the imamate became seen increasingly as the 'golden era', the return to which was a goal and an

⁴ The Shafi'i *madhhab* is of the five prominent *madhhabs* (schools of law) in Islam. However, most Chechens belong to the Hanbali *madhhab*, the oldest Islamic *madhhab*.

obligation of every true Muslim” (237). This time in history has become a point of return for movements seeking to invoke a traditional notion of Chechen Islam, an Islamic state, or anti-Russian resistance.

The Caucasus in the Greater Islamic Realm

Beyond the symbols and cultural capital rooted in this period, the time of the imams also provides links and points of comparison between the North Caucasus and the wider Muslim world. Kaj Ohrnberg (2002) relates the diaries of a Finnish traveller recounting the reactions of the people of Cairo to Shamil’s victories in the Caucasus. The eagerness with which the citizens of Cairo greeted news of Muslim victories in the Caucasus, a region long studied in isolation from the rest of the Islamic world, confirms that there were indeed some connections between the North Caucasus and other Muslim societies. That between the North Caucasian imams and Muslim powers become even more clear in Gammer’s (2000) discussion of Shamil’s relations with the Ottoman and Qajar Empires. Shamil sought the military intervention of a Muslim imperial power on behalf of the North Caucasian mountaineers in order to balance the Russian military superiority. He actively pursued the support of the Ottoman Sultan while spurning the overtures of the Qajar Shah due to the opposition of Naqshbandi doctrines to the Shi’i sect. In 1839, an extensive correspondence between Shamil and Egyptian Pasha Muhammad Ali greatly boosted the imam’s prestige. As a result, the pasha allegedly sent both funds and military engineers and officials to help train his army and administer his state (12-17; see also Gammer, 2012).

Links between the North Caucasus and the greater Islamic region in the realm of scholarly discourse are further evidenced by episodes such as the exchange between the

Meccan Mufti and the anti-Shamil scholar cited by Michael Kemper (2002) as well as the international aspect of the Naqshbandi *tariqa*, brought to the North Caucasus through an Ottoman *sheikh* via India. The remnants of Shamil's library, a collection of 70 Arabic manuscripts bearing the stamp of Shamil's *waqf* that have been preserved in the Princeton University library and chronicled by Natalya Tahirova (2002), bear evidence that the imam was well-versed in Shafi'i legal works of 'ulama from all across the Muslim world. His library also contained a number of well-known books of Muslim law that were taught in North Caucasian *madrassas*, many theological texts and interpretations (*tafsir*) of the Quran, along with a good many texts written by Daghestani 'ulama. These texts suggest a North Caucasian 'ulama who were very much a part of the discourse of the *Shafi'i madhab* and the greater Islamic world.

Beyond tangible links between the North Caucasus and Muslims in the surrounding regions, events unfolding in Chechnya and Daghestan closely paralleled similar events in other parts of the Muslim world. The accounts of several German travelers in the Caucasus during this period compare the Russian expansion in the Caucasus to the French colonization of Algeria and draw parallels between Shamil and 'Abd al-Qadir (Sidorko, 2002). Indeed, the North Caucasian *ghazavat* bore a close resemblance to the anti-colonial resistance in North Africa. In Algeria, Muhi al-Din, the leader of the Qadiriyya brotherhood in Algeria as well as the political leader of western Algeria, led military resistance against the French following the French invasion of Algeria in 1830. His son 'Abd al-Qadir soon succeeded him as imam, leading an alliance of tribes to resist French colonization (Laremont, 2000: 34-36). Laremont (2000) discusses the key reasons for the success of the Qadiriyya in leading political and military

operations citing their networks of *zawiyas* (sites for religious study, schooling, and living quarters), their ability to organize and disseminate propaganda, and their use of an ideology that resonated with the larger population. Their ideology was fourfold: *jihad* against the foreign forces, social justice, implementation of *shari'a*, and the appointment of a righteous political leader who adhered to the *shari'a* (36). Laremont also analyzes the success of 'Abd al-Qadir's leadership, concluding that his moral standing and knowledge of *shari'a*, his support network of *qadis* and leaders, his success in *jihad*, and his implementation of *shari'a* formed the key basis for al-Qadir's political legitimacy (37). Thus, in many ways, the Algerian Sufi resistance led by 'Abd al-Qadir took a similar form to Shamil's resistance. Both movements were grounded in *shari'a* and in a belief in the need for righteous leaders, and both drew heavily on the idea of *jihad* against non-Muslim rulers in order to mobilize local populations and protect the Muslim community.

Algeria and the North Caucasus are far from the only cases of anti-colonial resistance rooted in Islam⁵. These sorts of movements and views are echoed throughout the Muslim World in the mid-nineteenth century. The beliefs of the North Caucasians and Algerians mirrored those of both *Sheikh* Khalid of the Ottoman Empire and Sirhindi in India: only the pure practice of Islam could protect the Muslim community from European domination. The North Caucasian Sufi resistance to Russian colonization was one part of the greater Muslim resistance to European colonization throughout the Muslim world.

⁵ The most notable instances of anti-colonial resistance intertwined with Sufism occurred in Northern and Sub-Saharan Africa, including Libya, Chad, Somalia, and Mauritania. For an excellent discussion of Sufism in a variety of regional contexts, see Chapter 9 of Knysh (1999).

Chechnya in the Russian Context

Russian Colonization: Domination without Hegemony

The end of Shamil's resistance marked the beginning of consolidation of Russian power in the region and a fundamental shift in Chechen daily life, as the new Russian rulers sought to remove any lingering traces of the charismatic leader from politics and society. Following Shamil's defeat in 1859, the Russian administration separated Chechnya from Daghestan and placed it under the authority of the Terek *oblast*. Russian authorities built on Shamil's administrative structure but replaced Shamil's *naibs* with pro-Russian Chechens in order to expunge the Islamic components of this structure and promote a return to the *adat*. This pacification of region after multiple decades of steady resistance could be seen as the final success of Russian colonization attempts in the Caucasus. However, as multiple scholars note, Russian colonization in the Caucasus and beyond possessed many unique characteristics.

Mark Bassin (1999), in his work on Russian expansion into the far eastern Amur region, argues that just as Europe turned its gaze across the seas and colonized Africa, the New World, and parts of Asia, Russia colonized within its own borders and expanded outward. The Russian historian, Vasilii Kliuchevsky, echoing the views of his teacher, Sergei Soloviev, wrote, "The history of Russia is the history of a country that colonizes itself" (quoted in Etkind, 2011: 67). Alexander Etkind, going further, writes that "Russia has constituted itself through the process of colonization" (ibid., 67-68). The continual expansion of the empire proved the superiority of Russian civilization and the uniqueness of the Russian nation.

A group known as the Cossacks played an instrumental role in the Russian colonization process. The Cossacks were not truly an ethnic group but rather a military estate that developed as early as the fourteenth century from a number of free villages along the Don and Volga regions in Russia. The people of these villages were well known for their military prowess, and in the 16th century, the Don Cossack Host, as they were known, allied itself with the early Russian empire that ruled from Moscow. In exchange for their continued freedom from the feudal system that characterized Russia until the abolition of serfdom in 1861, the Cossacks served in the Russian military and lived on the frontiers of the empire, assisting in the subjugation and assimilation of new lands and peoples into Tsarist Russia. In the eighteenth century, they were officially established as a military estate by the Russian state, a designation that gave them special privileges such as land grants on the frontier, local governmental autonomy, salaries, and freedom from taxation. However, as Thomas Barrett (1999) notes, these privileges came with expectations and challenges. Cossacks were expected to properly outfit and equip their own military units, which spared the Russian government much expense. More significantly, Cossacks were expected to spread Russian civilization into the frontier regions they occupied, to integrate local economies into that of the larger Russian empire, and to maintain military control of the region. Though the Cossack system functioned smoothly in many regions of the empire, it ran into obstacles in the stubborn North Caucasus.

Etkind (2011) characterizes Russian colonization as “domination without hegemony” (119). Despite its military control of its expansive empire, Russia remained unable to impose a cultural uniformity throughout its empire or to cultivate a national

“Russian” identity amidst its new subjects. As evidence for his assertion, Etkind emphasizes the development of “Creole” cultures in Siberia and the Caucasus as Russian officers assimilated into the local populations (115-120). Nowhere was this process of domination without hegemony more evident than in the North Caucasus. The Terek Cossacks, who were charged with the task of pacifying and colonizing the Caucasus found themselves woefully overextended. Barrett (1999) writes:

The weakness of the Russian state in the North Caucasus allowed Cossacks to maintain a large degree of independence; the weakness of the Russian economy made them dependent on native economies and labor power; the particularity of the local environment encouraged them to adopt native material culture. While Russian power expanded, Russian civilization contracted...the imperial mission failed as much as it succeeded. (6).

Multiple factors explain the failure of the Terek Cossacks to establish hegemony in the North Caucasus. Some stem from environmental conditions. As Barrett (1999) notes, the deforestation of Chechnya destroyed the region’s primary source of fuel, crippling the local economy, and frequent flooding of the Terek River stymied agriculture and viticulture and caused public health crises (59-77). These environmental difficulties in turn contributed to the fundamental problem of economic dependence on the indigenous population, a situation that rendered any attempt to grasp hegemony near impossible. As mentioned above, Cossacks were expected to outfit their own military units and to serve militarily when called up. However, the demand of continually supplying troops left the Terek Cossacks with a profound shortage of able-bodied labor, compounded by the poor quality of the land in the region (ibid., 89-91). This shortage of labor was filled with

seasonal workers from the indigenous mountain tribes, whose people brought with them highly valued tools and instruments. The local people developed a *de facto* monopoly on artisanal work, many food products, weapons, and fuel. Barrett characterizes the economic colonization of the region as a “complete failure” (101). Through the trade of essential goods, the colonizing Cossacks became dependent on the population they were to subjugate, and the imbalance of power implicit in this relationship rendered their task impossible.

The defeat of Shamil and military pacification of the Caucasus completed the domination of the region and marked the beginning of a shift in favor of Russian authorities. Russia stepped back from its attempt to more directly colonize in favor of more indirect rule, but simultaneously authorities sought to shift the economic balance of power in their favor. Land was confiscated from many of Shamil’s supporters and redistributed to Cossacks and collaborating Chechens, leading to several small revolts that were quickly quelled (Gammer, 2006: 68-72). Over time, the indigenous people found themselves to be the ones now facing famine and deprivation, which, coupled with the psychological blow of Shamil’s defeat, constituted a low point for the Chechen people in this period. At this time of despair, a new Sufi *tariqat* led by Kumyk *Sheikh* al-Hajj Kunta al-Michiki al-Iliskhani (Kunta Hajji) began to spread through the region (Bennigsen & Wimbush, 1985: 9; Gammer, 2006: 73-74).

Rise of the Qadiri tariqa

The Qadiriyya *tariqa*, founded by Abd al-Qadir al-Ghilani, originated in Baghdad in the tenth century. Abd al-Qadir, himself a Hanbali scholar, promoted orthodox adherence to the *shari’a* and taught an introspective piety that sought to guide Muslims

communally on the path to salvation (Knysh, 2000: 179-183). It remains one of the most extensive and influential *tariqas* in the Muslim world, with branches in the Arab Middle East, the Maghreb, parts of Central Asia, India, and Turkey, though practice between these branches differ considerably due to the lack of specific instructions for the performance of rituals given by Abd al-Qadir. Early on, the *tariqa* spread into Central Asia but was taken over by the Naqshbandi *tariqa* in the fourteenth and fifteenth century (Bennigsen & Wimbush, 1985: 9). Kunta Hajji, the chief founder of the *tariqa* in the Caucasus, was born under the rule of imams in the Northeastern Caucasus and given religious training from an early age under prominent ‘*ulama* and *sheikhs*. In 1848 he and his father performed the *hajj*, during the course of which he was presumably initiated into the Qadiri *tariqa* in Baghdad (Gammer, 2006: 74). Upon return to the North Caucasus, Kunta Hajji began propagating the new *tariqa*, teaching the loud *dhikr* and a doctrine of personal rather than communal salvation. In this vein, Kunta Hajji supported withdrawal and dissociation from the Russian colonizing forces, rather than armed resistance, allowing for peaceful acquiescence without risking one’s salvation (Gammer, 2006: 74-75). This met with opposition from Shamil, who encouraged him to leave on a second *hajj*. However, amidst a war-weary population, the Qadiri *tariqa* spread quickly, eventually supplanting the Naqshbandi *tariqa* in Chechnya.

Upon Kunta Hajji’s second return in 1861, the movement even garnered the brief support of Russian authorities who viewed the less militant views of this *tariqa* as preferable to the Naqshbandi *tariqa*’s dominance. As the *tariqa* spread, though, the Russians reversed this position and arrested the *sheikh* in 1864, sparking mass unrest amongst his followers. The *dhikr* was banned, a number of the *sheikh*’s *murids* were

deported, and Kunta Hajji himself died in Russian custody in 1867 (Gammer, 2006: 76-78). Despite the death of Kunta Hajji, the Qadiri *tariqa* continued to spread, rapidly overtaking the Naqshbandi *tariqa* in much of Chechnya. The most prominent distinction between the Naqshbandi and Qadiri *tariqa* remains that between their practice of the *dhikr*. Naqshbandis practice a silent *dhikr*, while the Qadiri *dhikr* is loud and passionate, often involving chanting, singing, and even dancing (Bennigsen & Wimbush, 1985: 11). Alexandre Bennigsen and S. Enders Wimbush (1985) note that the Qadiri *tariqa* in Chechnya (also called the “Kunta Hajji” *tariqa* in some sources) possesses a much more centralized structure than the Naqshbandi *tariqa* (11). Following the precedent set by the Naqshbandi, this structure would soon become another potent tool for collective mobilization.

Chechen Islam in the late Russian Empire

In the late nineteenth century, pressing economic and political concerns amongst the Chechen people began to push the Qadiri towards action. Following Kunta Hajji’s arrest, Russian authorities forced nearly 20,000 Chechens and Ingush to migrate to the Ottoman Empire (Gammer, 2006: 80). Under the Russian administration, most land was distributed to Cossacks and peasant settlers rather than the indigenous people, leading to a shortage of land that placed tremendous pressure on Chechen society. Agriculture and animal husbandry withered. On top of this, an imperial tax levied on each household was introduced in the Terek *oblast* in 1866 (Dunlop, 1998: 33-34; Gammer, 2006: 82-83). These economic and political factors, in combination with the heavy persecution of the Sufi *tariqas* in the Caucasus led to a collective revolt led by both Naqshbandi and Qadiri leaders in both Daghestan and Chechnya in 1877. This revolt took a form very similar to

the military campaigns of the imams: a noted Sufi *sheikh* was elected imam and calls were made for the restoration of *shari'a*. In Daghestan, *Sheikh* Hajji Muhammad, a Naqshbandi *sheikh*, led the resistance, while in Chechnya, Qadiri leader and Chechen *'alim* (scholar) Albik Hajji was elected imam and took leadership of approximately forty-seven *auls*. Russian forces quelled the rebellion in 1878 and executed the leaders of the revolt. Thousands of Chechen and Daghestani Sufi followers (*murids*) were deported to Siberia and Inner Russia, while a second wave of families emigrated to the Ottoman Empire (Broxup, 1992:118-119; Bennigsen & Wimbush, 1985, 22; Gammer, 2006: 84-103; Lemercier-Quelquejay, 1983: 9).

The 1877 revolt marked one of the last attempts at armed resistance to the Russian Empire. From 1878 onwards, the Sufi *tariqas* largely abandoned the idea of *ghazavat* or *jihad*, but this by no means indicated the decline of the *tariqas*. According to Soviet scholar A. A. Salamov, quoted in Chantal Lemercier-Quelquejay (1983), “between 1877 and the Revolution of 1917, almost all the adult population of Chechnya and Ingushetia belonged either to the Naqshbandiyya or Qadiriyya *tariqa*” (9). Bennigsen and Wimbush (1985) note that the Sufi *tariqas* seemingly “absorbed” the official Islamic establishment, with most leading Islamic scholars in Daghestan and Chechnya belonging to one of the *tariqas* (23). Over the course of this period, certain geographical and socioeconomic differences emerged between the *tariqas*. The Naqshbandi formed the dominant *tariqa* in Daghestan, while the Qadiri were primarily based in Chechnya and Ingushetia. The Naqshbandi took on a more aristocratic characteristic, with disciples from the more educated and higher classes of society, while the Qadiri appealed to the more rural and

less educated population. Around this time the Qadiri additionally split into four groups led by four different disciples of Kunta Hajji (Bennigsen & Wimbush, 1985: 23).

On the part of the Russian authorities, the post-1877 period was marked by religious tolerance. Marie Bennigsen Broxup (1992) notes that little attempt was made to truly colonize the region, as the terrain was too harsh to attract potential settlers; rather the Caucasus served primarily as a military outpost that protected Russian interests from both the Ottomans and the Persians (119). The tsarist authorities forbade the Orthodox Church from proselytizing in Chechnya or Daghestan, and the indigenous people of Daghestan and Chechnya were additionally exempted from military conscription. *Shari'a* courts operated with little interference. Thousands of Islamic schools (*madrassas*) operated in the region, teaching both the Quran and classical Arabic along with other subjects. Chechnya reportedly possessed more than 800 active mosques (Broxup, 1992: 119-121; Dunlop, 1998: 32-35). Islam was thus allowed to remain very much the center of social life in the Caucasus under the rule of the Russian Empire, even apart from its initial role as a part of anti-colonial resistance.

During this period before the Revolution, a development emerged that would greatly alter the historical trajectory of the region. In the mid-1880s, oil was discovered in Chechnya. Grozny quickly transformed from a small military town to a booming oil town as millions of barrels of oil began to flow out of Chechnya into the rest of the Russian Empire. However, despite this significant shift, the oil economy had little effect on the lives of Chechens; few Chechens found employment in the oil industry, choosing instead to remain separate from the Russian population in the rural regions of the *oblast* (Gammer, 2006: 104-107). As a consequence, no native elite or highly-educated class

truly formed, from which native leaders could be co-opted to rule by proxy for the Russian government. Instead, the educated population possessed religious training and a knowledge of Arabic, and most native leaders continued to emerge from the *'ulama* and the Sufi *sheikhs*. Thus, though most of the Chechen population lived peacefully under the Tsarist authorities in this period, there was very little exchange between the Chechen and Russian populations, and the Chechens were in no way assimilated into the Empire.

Despite the relative quietism of this period, there remained a few segments of the population that did not willingly submit to Russian rule. Gammer (2006) compares Chechnya in this period to the “Wild West” where banditry was common, especially in light of the economic hardships suffered by the Chechen population due to the land shortage (110). In this environment, *abreks* emerged as legendary Robin Hood-like figures. An *abrek* in pre-colonial Chechen culture was typically a fugitive who fled to the mountains to avoid a blood feud, but in the colonial context, these fugitives became the embodiment of anti-Russian sentiment, bandits who struck back at the riches of empire for the sake of the Chechen people (Gammer, 2006: 114; Gould, 2007: 280). Rebecca Gould (2007), in writing of the “transgressive sanctity” of the *abreks* describes these figures as “the ultimate tool of Chechen self-expression” (274). *Abreks* as conceptualized in the Chechen psyche symbolized power against the Russian colonizer; they embodied justice and honor and sustained the traditions of the *adat* (ibid.). These *abreks* can be situated in Eric Hobsbawm’s work on social bandits as a sort of primitive rebel figure of resistance. This sort of resistance happens on the individual scale; unlike the imams, the *abreks* were not revolutionary leaders pioneering a new order but rather isolated bandits who at times may have helped their community (or not). Hobsbawm (1969) describes

these individuals as “symptoms of crisis and tension in their society” in their quest to escape peasant society but also emphasized their roles as a sort of revolutionary who rejected the colonizer’s hegemony (19). Still, the appearance and tactics of the Chechen *abreks* remains significant, as their embedded “Islamic-ness” demonstrates the continued significance of Islam as a part of Chechen identity in opposition to the colonial “other.”

Abreks carried with them a significant religious aspect. In her study, Gould (2007) analyzed two novels depicting the life of Zemlikhan, the most famous Chechen *abrek*. In the novels, Zemlikhan sings Muslim prayers in Arabic at the time of his death, an act that is imbued with power in the eyes of the author (299-300). In this moment, he is submitting to the will of Allah and thus achieves victory over his enemies. The Russian authorities identify Zemlikhan as a religious fanatic and one of the “Zikrists” (Sufis) who drew support from both Sufi *sheikhs* and village elders in the region (Gammer, 2006: 116). According to a Chechen source of the period, Zemlikhan and some of the other *abreks* were viewed in the eyes of many of the population as “continuers of Shamil and his *na’ibs*.” In this way, the *abreks* became part of the anti-colonial resistance, due to their high stature as a result of their perceived righteousness in their knowledge of Islam.

The Tsarist period was thus one of both constancy and change. Shamil’s Islamic Imamate was dismantled and replaced with a secular administration under the control of the Russians. The Chechen people suffered both economic and political hardship under the Russian colonial regime, and the last attempt at a religiously-based revolt failed, sending thousands into exile. The Qadiri *tariqa* largely replaced the Naqshbandi as the primary religious affiliation of the Chechen population. However, the Russian colonial experience did little to transform Islamic practice in Chechnya. Mosques and *madrassas*

operated freely, and despite some persecution the Sufi *tariqas* continued to thrive. Islam continued to be intertwined with resistance through the figures of the *abreks* as defiant and righteous bandits who struck back at the Russian colonizers. The Chechens remained largely unassimilated, continuing the practice of Islam and their agricultural ways outside the burgeoning oil-town of Grozny. This, however, would soon change.

The Soviet Experience

October 1917 marked a cataclysmic shift in Russian history, as the Bolsheviks, led by Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, revolted and overthrew the tsarist regime. The October Revolution sparked the Russian Civil War, which would rage between the Bolshevik Red Army and the tsarist White Army for the next several years. The Bolshevik victory initiated a massive upheaval of Russian society, as landowners and nobles were forced into exile or executed, the proletariat was raised to the most esteemed class in society, most assets were nationalized, and processes of collectivization began. Lenin and the Bolsheviks aimed to shepherd a managed transition into socialism in which the proletariat dominated a revolutionary state through the leadership of a vanguard party and hoped to spread the revolution internationally. However, in the effort to create this state, the Bolsheviks ran into a serious problem, that of the Russian empires under-developed, non-Russian colonies, where nothing resembling a proletariat could be found.

The modern Chechen “nation” as conceptualized today first came into existence under the Soviet nationalities policy of the 1920s, which aimed to address the problem of the missing proletariat. The policy, known as *korenizatsiya* (indigenization) sought to rapidly develop the under-developed peoples of the empire’s internal colonies into modern nations that could support a proletariat and an indigenous communist party.

These new nations would each possess a common territory, language, economy, and culture, which would be promoted by the Soviet center. Though the policy on its face seemed to encourage nationalism, the goal remained to mold these peoples into citizens who would be first Soviet citizens and second national citizens of their new “nation.”⁶ Though the 1917 Revolution provided the impetus for another religiously led revolt that continued throughout the civil war between Bolshevik and Tsarist forces until the early 1920s, by 1921, the Bolsheviks had consolidated their power in the Caucasus. From there, Soviet authorities embarked on a project to create modern “nations” out of the peoples of the Caucasus. In the Chechen region, the Chechen Autonomous Republic was founded in 1922, and in 1925 a new Chechen language using a Latin alphabet was declared literary (Bennigsen & Lemerrier-Quellejey, 1967: 126-130; Gammer, 2006: 138-147; Tishkov, 2004: 22-23). The creation of national languages and national identities marked a significant shift in the history of the region. Though the people groups of the Caucasus did have distinct languages before the Soviet period, the primary written language was Arabic, and early attempts to create written languages for the Chechens and other groups used Arabic script. In creating written languages apart from Arabic, the

⁶ Bennigsen and Lemerrier-Quellejey (1967) note the existence of a peculiar phenomena in the period immediately following the Revolution that they deem “Muslim Communism.” This movement developed out of Tatarstan and other more highly developed Muslim provinces in Russia that had produced an educated Muslim class well-versed in the ways of the Russian elite. The leaders in the Muslim Communist movement emerged out of *jadid* movement of the late 19th century that sought to reform and modernize Islam for a “modern” world. Dissatisfied with the disenfranchisement of Muslims under the Russian tsarist regime, many of the young reformers of the *jadid* movement after the turn of the 20th century joined forces with the Bolsheviks. They sought to reconcile Marxism and Islam on the basis of social justice, the value they felt lay at the core of both ideologies. The Muslim Communists enjoyed some success in the first decade after the Revolution, even possessing their own *soviet* (committee) at one point in Moscow. However, as the goals of the Soviet state shifted from an international revolution to a more inwardly-focused aim of “Socialism in one country,” the Muslim Communists were slowly stripped of any positions of power and finally exiled and executed in the purges of the 1930s. This movement never truly included the Muslim people of the Caucasus, likely due to the lack of a highly educated class, the poor integration of the Caucasian people into the empire during the Tsarist period, and the total rejection of the *jadid* movement in the Caucasus.

Soviet authorities linguistically divorced the region from the larger Islamic realm. The creation of “modern nations” out of the Caucasian people groups led to the fragmentation of the peoples who in decades past had collectively mobilized through the unifying force of a common language and religious practice. This early Soviet experiment with the creation of a modern Chechen nation can be seen as the beginning of Chechen nationalism as we now know it.

The new Soviet nationalities policy sought to eliminate inequalities within the proletariat by enhancing the status of non-Russians in the Soviet Union and doing away with the old colonial system. Beyond fashioning “modern nations,” the Soviet administration emphasized education, and even ethnic nationalism and cultural pride to a certain extent, to achieve this aim. In Chechnya, this translated into an explosion of schools, universities, and literary works in the Chechen language. Chechnya’s first Chechen-language newspaper emerged in 1927, followed shortly thereafter by a Chechen-language radio station and a Chechen writers union. Universal compulsory education was mandated in 1930. A number of indigenous Chechens began to move into the regional Soviet bureaucracy, a vast departure from the prior tsarist administrative policy (Bennigsen & Lemerrier-Quellejay, 1967: 124-137; Tishkov, 2004: 22-23). Though significant inequalities remained, the Soviet policy appeared to be a dramatic shift away from the hands-off policies of the Tsarist colonial administration. However, Bennigsen and Lemerrier-Quellejay (1967) note that all of these changes were enacted in a top-down manner from the center through the upper echelons of bureaucracies dominated by ethnic Russians. Though Chechens and other indigenous peoples rose into

the bureaucracy, the Communist Party held power, and the Party pursued the interests of the primarily Russian proletariat (136-137). Inequality persisted.

Soviet Policy towards Islam varied widely depending on the period. In accordance with the tenets of Marxist-Leninism, the state advanced atheism, espousing that religion is the “opiate of the masses.” The Soviet authorities actively sought to control and eliminate religions, and in this pursuit they commandeered all church property and executed many Orthodox priests and bishops. However, in the early years of the Soviet state, the Bolsheviks forged an uneasy truce with Islam. In order to court the support of Muslim populations, *shari’a* and *adat* courts were allowed to persist, and mosques and *madrassas* continued to operate freely. However, as Stalin consolidated power and steered the Communist Party towards the five year plans and notions of “Socialism in one country,” Soviet authorities began to undermine the *‘ulama* and Islamic institutions through creeping mandates. By the 1930s, most Islamic practices were outlawed, mosques and schools closed, *waqf* lands confiscated, and Muslim leaders and their believers in their care were labeled “counter-revolutionaries” (Bennigsen & Broxup, 1983: 44-50; Bennigsen & Lemerrier-Quelquejay, 1967: 124-137). Soviet authorities banned both the *hajj* and payment of *zakat*, two of Islam’s five pillars. Mosques and *madrassa* were closed and converted into spaces for public entertainment. Bennigsen and Lemerrier-Quelquejay (1967) compare this persecution to that suffered by the Russian Orthodox church (151). Despite an initial tolerance of Islam, Soviet authorities quickly subjected Islamic institutions to the same treatment as all other religions in the Soviet Union.

The assault on Islam was paired with an attack on the new nationalism of the newly formed “modern nations” created under Soviet nationalization policy. *Korenization* was abandoned and later repealed in favor of Russification and suppression of minorities. In 1938, purges swept away newly formed intelligentsia in Chechnya and the rest of the Caucasus, the NKVD in Chechnya arrested 14,000 people in the Chechen and Ingush ASSR, including most of the ethnic Chechens who had risen to high posts (A. Bennigsen & Wimbush, 1985: 27-29; Tishkov, 2004: 23). Beyond the purges, Soviet authorities mandated that all newly written languages, including Chechen, must use the Cyrillic alphabet, relegating the whole of the new Chechen intelligentsia to only functional literacy (Gammer, 2006: 156-157; Tishkov, 2004: 23). The purges were only a precursor to one of the most significant events in Chechen collective memory. Beginning on 23 February 1944, nearly 500,000 Chechens and Ingush were packed into railroad cars and sent east to the Kazakh and Kyrgyz Soviet Socialist Republics. In the course of the deportation, somewhere between thirty and fifty percent of the population died due to disease, exposure, starvation, or execution (Dunlop, 1998: 186-187; Gammer, 2006: 166-178; Tishkov, 2004: 25-31). The deportation became a traumatic event seared into Chechen collective memory. During the period of deportation, the Chechen people very much preserved a strong sense of their identity, culture, and religious practice, largely due to the strength of the Qadiri *tariqa* amongst the Chechen people. Though most of the population was forced to learn Russian in schools, Chechen was spoken in the home and several Chechen and Ingush newspapers and radio programs, though under government control, did emerge in both the Kazakh and Kyrgyz SSRs. Tishkov (2004) argues that the deportation promoted urbanization as the Chechens, detached from their familial farms,

moved to the cities for better livelihoods (29). Sufi *tariqas*, particularly the Qadiriyya, became the primary means of preserving ethnic identity and community solidarity, as well as serving the practical purpose of maintaining extensive communication networks for the reuniting separated family members (Bennigsen & Wimbush, 1985: 63-64; Bennigsen and Broxup, 1983: 33-36). Beyond its effect on Islamic practice, the trauma of deportation became the inspiration for a large body of art and literature during the period of *glasnost*. If the period of Soviet nationalization created the modern Chechen nation, the experience of deportation both solidified national identity and created one of the chief collective memories of Chechen culture.

In 1957, the Chechen and Ingush were rehabilitated under Khrushchev, and the Chechen-Ingush ASSR was restored. Mass repatriation back to the Caucasus began, and educational and cultural establishments multiplied in the reconstituted republic. However, large inequalities remained between the Russian and indigenous populations. Tishkov (2004) notes that ethnic discrimination led to a sharp divide in the economic sphere, where Russians consistently dominated the more highly developed and specialized industries while the indigenous population was primarily employed in agricultural and migrant labor (41). Education in the rural areas of the republic remained at a much lower standard than that of the cities, leading to an exclusion of most village-born Chechens from higher education. Russian-speaking Chechens from urban areas fared somewhat better than their rural counterparts, but no strong Chechen intelligentsia emerged (Gammer, 2006: 188-198; Tishkov, 2004: 40-48). The pattern of internal colonization begun under the tsars continued as the Chechen oil industry provided valuable resources to the center, leaving the indigenous population largely marginalized.

During this post-deportation period, two very different pictures of Islamic practice in the Chechen-Ingush ASSR emerge in the literature. Tishkov (2004) and Olcott (1982) both argue that “Muslim” had become much more of a cultural marker than an indicator of religious practice. Tishkov asserts that the young and middle-aged population became atheists, and quotes one of his sources who states that he “knew no real [Muslim] believers” (167). In this view, Islam in Chechnya had been reduced to some cultural rites and practices, and to be Muslim meant that one came from an ethnic group that historically practiced Islam. However, the study of Sufism in the Soviet Union provided by Bennigsen and Wimbush (1985) challenges this perspective. According to Bennigsen and Wimbush, though the official Islamic establishment tolerated by the Soviet state remained very small and weak, “parallel Islam” continued to thrive in the form of the Sufi *tariqas* and underground mosques, where religious beliefs and practices were maintained and reinforced outside the control of Soviet authorities⁷.

Soviet policy towards Islam again shifted in the post-Stalin period as the government abandoned wholesale oppression in favor of cooptation of the religious establishment. Four regional spiritual directorates were created under the *Soveta po delam religioznix kul'tov* (Council for the Affairs of Religious Cults) to oversee the affairs of Sunni and Shi'i Muslims⁸. Soviet authorities, aiming to limit the practice of Islam to the private sphere like other religions and remove all of its influence on public life, allowed prayers and rituals to be practiced, but strictly forbade payment of *zakat*,

⁷ Dissent in Soviet Times often was found in the practice of daily life, that part of life that was personal and outside of official control. This practice of “parallel Islam” could be paralleled to the maintenance of icon corners by Orthodox believers. However, the practice of Islam in this period is significantly distinguished by its communal aspect.

⁸ Under the guidance of the Spiritual Directorates, a small amount of religious literature was allowed to be printed, and two Islamic educational institutes were reestablished to train *mullahs* and *muezzins* (Bennigsen & Lemercier-Quelquejay, 1967: 172-176).

maintenance of *waqf* lands for mosques and *madrassas*, Islamic education, and enforcement of *shari'a* law (Bennigsen & Lemerrier-Quelquejay, 1967: 172-176; Bennigsen & Wimbush, 1985: 16-17). In 'normalizing' relations between Muslim religious authorities and the state in the same manner as relations were reestablished with Christian Orthodox authorities, the Soviet government sought to eliminate the power of Islam as a mobilizing and uniting ideology for resistance. In this period, official, Soviet-sanctioned Islam remained very weak. Most attendants to the official mosques were over the age of 60, and outside of the most rural areas few observed Islamic rites besides those guiding births, deaths, and marriages (Bennigsen & Lemerrier-Quelquejay, 1967: 178-183). However, this picture does not account for the persistence of the Sufi *tariqa*, deemed "Parallel Islam" by Soviet authorities, in the Chechen Ingush republic.

Accurate estimation of the number of Sufi adherents in the Soviet period proved difficult, largely due to the practice of *taqiya* (denial) in Sufi Islam, which allowed believers to deny their faith or even engage in activities forbidden in the Quran without fear of sin if these actions are necessary to preserve one's life; but, according to the several surveys quoted in Bennigsen and Wimbush (1985), up to half of the Chechen population in the 1960s and 1970s was part of a Sufi *tariqa*, and over three-quarters of the population considered themselves believers (51-52).). According to Bennigsen and Wimbush (1985), the typical Sufi adherent (*adept*) in this period tended to be middle-aged, though there were a high number of *adepts* amongst young people. Sufism was more strongly entrenched in rural areas and in the middle and lower classes in the cities but still attracted a number of adherents from amongst the more highly educated, including Communist Party members (65). Significantly, Sufi adherents did not merely

claim Sufism as a cultural identification. A 1972 survey of the residents of a Chechen village indicates that a third of the respondents identified themselves as “believers by conviction” who joined their particular Sufi brotherhood (*virḍ*) by personal choice. Another third of those surveyed identified themselves as “believers by tradition” who joined the Sufi brotherhood (*virḍ*) of their parents (Bennigsen & Wimbush, 1985: 59-60). This data indicates that a significant portion of the Chechen population practiced Sufism, and of these adherents, many viewed their practice as their own choice rather than a cultural obligation.

Several factors explain the resilient nature of Sufism in the Chechen-Ingush ASSR. First, Sufism was often practiced within the family; thus the Sufi *virḍs* were bound together by strong familial ties. Elders, who are held in high esteem in Chechen society, often comprised the core of the *virḍs*, and these elders introduced the rest of their families to the *virḍ* (Bennigsen & Wimbush, 1985: 63-64). These Sufi *virḍs* were also strengthened through the course of the deportation, as they became the primary means of preserving ethnic identity and community solidarity. Additionally, discrimination against ethnic Chechens meant that much of the Chechen population remained in rural areas, where Soviet control was weaker and traditional community norms stronger. Beyond cultural factors, several key aspects of both Islam and Sufism specifically enhanced their ability to withstand Soviet repression. Bennigsen and Wimbush (1985) note that Islamic practice, unlike Orthodox Christianity, requires no clergy or formal religious establishment, thereby allowing Muslims a large degree of flexibility. Most of the five pillars can easily be practiced within the family or on a community level; and such practices occurred in the many “underground mosques” that emerged in Chechen villages

(47). Sufism, called an “out of mosque” form of Islam by Bennigsen and Wimbush, allowed even more flexibility. The Sufi doctrine of *taqiya*, which allows for outward disavowal of one’s faith in case of personal danger, enabled Chechen Muslims to assimilate into Soviet society to whatever degree necessary while still maintaining their faith (ibid., 67). In this, many Chechen Communist Party members, state-authorized clergy, and others were able to rise within the Soviet system while still maintaining membership in a Sufi *virḍ*. The flexible nature of Sufi Islam allowed it to thrive despite Soviet attempts to co-opt its leaders and promote anti-religious propaganda.

Sufism in Chechnya played a significant role in maintaining Islamic practice. Common activities of Sufi *virḍs* in this period included religious instruction for children, collection of voluntary contributions (*sadaqa*) for mosques, maintenance of Islamic marriage traditions, and creation of youth religious groups (65-66). Regular practices in both Qadiri and Naqshbandi *tariqas* involved the public or private performance of the *zikr*, fasting, Friday prayers, payment of *zakat*, and pilgrimages to the tombs of Sufi saints. Sufi *adepts* filled the traditional roles of Muslim *clerics* in leading traditional rites, prayers, and maintaining clandestine houses of prayer (76-86). These practices enriched Chechen identity and a sense of community amidst Sufi adherents while maintaining knowledge of Islam, despite the attempts of the Soviets to eradicate Islamic education and communal practice. Bennigsen and Wimbush (1985) described Sufi communities as “‘closed societies’ which live outside the Soviet legal establishment... a resonant milieu from which Soviet Russian messages are routinely discarded” (108-109). The tight syncretism between cultural identity and practice and Islamic identity and practice within

Chechen society helped to create tight networks within which Islamic practice was maintained, ethnic identity preserved, and Soviet propaganda rejected.

An understanding of Soviet governance in Chechnya remains key to understanding both the Russo-Chechen conflicts and modern dynamics of Chechnya. In many ways, the Soviet state created the Chechnya we now know through the process of delineating the boundaries of the region, providing a new language and a national identity apart from other peoples of the region, and the creation of a collective memory of the deportation. However, despite the upheaval of the period, Sufi Islamic practice remained a key component of Chechen identity and society, and Islamic practice perhaps became even more entrenched due to its role as a means of preservation and resistance to Soviet hegemony. Thus, as the Gorbachevian policies of *glasnost* and *perestroika* swept away much of the Soviet social controls, Chechen Islam was ripe for re-imagination.

The Reimagination of Islamic Practice

The Opening: Perestroika and the Push for Independence

In the mid-1980s, Communist Party General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev undertook the policies of *glasnost* (“openness”) and *perestroika* (“restructuring”), which led to a dramatic reshaping of culture and the economy throughout the entire Soviet Union. In Chechnya, the easing of governmental restrictions provided the opening necessary for an explosion of nationalism. The nationalist “Chechen Revolution,” as it came to be called, possessed few outwardly religious components in its early stages. However, as the movement progressed, its leaders began to adopt the language, symbols, and rituals of Islam in order to leverage Islam’s cultural and historic capital in the region

to mobilize the Chechen people. The declaration of Chechnya's independence following the dissolution of the Soviet Union eventually sparked the first Russo-Chechen war of 1994-1996, which, after a brief interlude of three years in which the Chechens failed to build any sort of functioning state, was followed by the Second Russo-Chechen war of 1999-2008. As this process unfolded, the role of Islam in public discourse and conceptions of how politics should be conducted increased as competing actors leveraged Islamic symbols and language in order to enhance their own legitimacy, making way for the current struggle between the Russian-sanctioned government and regime and opposition groups as to what constitutes true Islamic practice.

The same easing of restrictions that allowed the Chechen Revolution also allowed a resurgence of public Islamic practice. Following the easing of restrictions on religious practice during *perestroika*, closed mosques were re-opened and new mosques built, classes on the Quran and classical Arabic began en masse, and the Sufi brotherhoods emerged from underground (Zelkina, 1993: 120). Lehmann (1996), in one of the first large-scale quantitative studies of Islam in the post-Soviet Russia, found that Chechens and Daghestanis exhibited one of the highest levels of religiosity in Russia. According to her 1993 study, 71% of Chechens surveyed self-identified as practicing believers while the remaining 29% identified as non-practicing believers (26). Significantly, among the Chechen and Daghestani population, in contrast to other Muslim regions of Russia, a high percentage of the highly educated population, the urbanized population, the young, and the male population identified as engaging in "active worship" (13-15). Such results demonstrate both the resilience of Islam in the Caucasus despite Soviet persecution and also the continuing importance of Islam in everyday life in Chechnya.

Chechnya's progression toward independence began in 1988 with the establishment of the "Chechen-Ingush Popular Front in Support of Perestroika" (ChINFSP). The demands of ChINFSP included religious freedom, preservation of indigenous languages, and total rehabilitation and reparations for the deportees of 1944, and their protests led to some concessions from Soviet authorities (Dunlop, 1998: 88-90, Gammer, 2006: 200-201; Tishkov, 2004: 57-58). However, in 1990, a more radical faction within ChINFSP splintered from the Front and formed a more nationalist movement, the All-National Congress of the Chechen People (OKChN)⁹, demanding that the Chechen-Ingush ASSR be upgraded to a full Union Republic and that the current Soviet authority in the republic be disbanded (Gammer, 2006: 200-201; Hayden, 2000: 56; Tishkov, 2004: 60). An external shift in the power struggle, the failed putsch of 1991 and the ascent of Yeltsin to the presidency of a rapidly-crumbling Soviet Union provided the impetus for an OKChN takeover. Dudayev won contested presidential elections by a landslide, and on 1 November 1991, the "Chechen Republic of Ichkeria" declared itself an independent and sovereign state (Dunlop, 1998: 91-115; Gammer, 2006: 202-204; Hayden, 2000: 56; Lapidus, 1998: 12-13, Tishkov, 2004: 60-63; Wood, 2007: 49-51).

Given the high level of religiosity amongst the Chechen population, it is not surprising that the nationalist movement began to turn to Islam for legitimacy and mobilization. Common Islamic rituals and symbols were leveraged as means to provide the new independence movement both wider appeal and greater legitimacy. A primary demand of the early ChINFSP, the front that birthed the Chechen nationalist movement, was the end of persecution of Islam, and from this point on, the Chechen nationalist

⁹ Zelimkhan Yanderbiyev, leader of the Bart ["Harmony"] Party (later called the Vaynakh Democratic Party), Beslan Gantemirov, founder of the Islamic Path Party, and Yaraghi Mamodayev formed part of the core leadership of the new assembly (Gammer, 2006: 201; Tishkov, 2004: 58).

movement incorporated a significant Islamic element into their protest repertoire and into their framing of the conflict with the Russian state. During the initial OKChN protests following the failed coup, Chechen elders led mass, public performances of the Qadiri *dhikr* in Grozny's central square, which according to Georgi Derluguian (2005) was the first time such a public display of *dhikr* had ever taken place (53). Such a public demonstration demonstrates a significant shift in the public's conception of Islam. Several authors, when relating description of the public *dhikr*, relate it to the religious practice undertaken by Shamil and other historic imams before engaging in battle. However, this practice was undertaken in a fundamentally modern context—that of an expression of nationalism in a nation that had only come into being in the first half of the 20th century. Through the independence movement in Chechnya, Islam began to be reimagined as part of a modern nationalist identity; to be Chechen was to be Muslim and expressions of both began to syncretize.

The Development of the Salafi Movement in the Caucasus

The period following *perestroika* and *glasnost* also provided the impetus for the “objectification of Muslim consciousness” described by Eickelman and Piscatori (1996). Most believers in Chechnya at this point belonged to one of the *virids* (brotherhoods) of either the Qadiri or Naqshbandi Sufi *tariqa*, and though Sufi practice itself was being reimagined in the development of the nationalist movement, the most significant evidence of the objectification came through the split in Muslim thought that soon occurred in the Caucasus. The opening of society to the world outside the Soviet Union also gave rise to a Salafi movement¹⁰ in Chechnya and other parts of the Soviet Union.

¹⁰ The Salafi movement refers to a movement amongst Sunni Muslims in which adherents seek to follow the example of *al-salaf al-salih* (the early followers of Mohammed). This movement can take a variety of

The earliest Salafi movement appeared in Daghestan with the preaching of Bagauddin Mukhamad (Kebedov) and Akhmad-kadi Akhtayev in underground mosques in the 1970s, but the opening of the Soviet Union provided a way for missionaries from the Gulf region to make their way into the Caucasus, leading to a greater dissemination of preaching and ideas (Shterin & Yarlykapov, 2011: 311). Salafi doctrines and practice began to take root amidst the young urban population in larger cities in the Caucasus (Kurbanov, 2011: 351; Moore, 2008: 415). Salafi adherents (or “New Muslims” as they call themselves) in the Caucasus profess the same goal as other Salafi movements across the Middle East—a return to the lifestyle of the early followers of the Prophet (*al-salaf al-salih*) (Hegghammer, 2009: 249; Kurbanov, 2011: 350). Kurbanov (2011) terms this Salafi movement “New Islam,” describing it in part as a response to the inability of “traditional” Sufi “Old Islam,” consisting of a synthesis of Sufi practices and local traditions held over from pre-colonial times, to fit modern times (374). The very existence of this divide demonstrates the development of the questions regarding what it means to be Muslim. Did being Muslim mean practicing the Sufi rituals long practiced in the Caucasus, or did it mean a strict adherence to the Quran and *Sunna*? Who speaks for Islam, the Sufi *sheikhs* and elders traditionally given authority in Caucasian society, or the new, educated individuals who can read the Quran for themselves? This divide would later become the faultline around which the competition for sacred authority in Chechnya would occur.

In most popular contexts, Salafi adherents gained the label of “Wahhabi” (Akayev, 2008: 70; Bennigsen, 1999: 548; Kurbanov, 2011: 349). These “Wahhabis”

forms, but is generally characterized by a sole reliance on the Quran and Sunna. Salafism is often associated with a puritanical practice of Islam and strict orthodoxy. However, some Salafi adherents favor using the Quran and *hadith* to advance ideas of social justice and the ‘modernization’ of Islam.

would later be identified with the Chechen resistance and terrorist incidents in Russia, but early Salafi adherents tended to be highly educated young men who sought to bring reform to Islamic practice in their communities. The core of the Salafi movement in the Caucasus were the *jamaats* or “brotherhoods”, tight-knit, semi-underground religious communities centered around the creation of a new lifestyle. Shterin and Yarlykapov (2011) describe the *jamaats* in the republic of Karabardino-Balkaria as “alternative communities” that provided a new identity for its members. Joining a *jamaat* meant forsaking prior relationships ways of living and embracing the community of believers within the *jamaat* and the authority of the leader of the *jamaat* (312). Members of a *jamaat* abandoned traditional styles of dress (moustaches, long trousers, bright clothes) in favor of “pious” dress, characterized by long beards for men and the *niqab* for women. Life was reorganized around the mosque, which was usually located in the house of a member (Shterin & Yarlykapov, 2011: 313). The decisions of the elected *amir* (leader of the *jamaat*) dictated decisions in daily life, in religious practice, and in work and education, and in politics (ibid., 313). Concerning doctrine, Salafi adherents abandoned the teachings of scholars in favor of relying solely on the Quran and *Sunna*, often interpreted by those in the Salafi movement who possessed a religious education from abroad (Kurbanov, 2011: 354). International connectedness remained a significant aspect of the Salafi movement. Beyond the involvement of foreign missionaries, most of the Salafi *jamaats* possessed a strong online presence, either running their own websites or participating extensively in online forums (Kurbanov, 2011: 356-357; Shterin & Yarlykapov: 309). International connections were further cultivated by the leadership of

the Salafi movement across the Caucasus, most of whom maintained strong international personal networks.

Most of the leaders in the Salafi movement possessed a foreign education. Musa Mukozhev and Anzor Astemirov, leaders in the Karabardino-Balkarian Salafi movement, both graduated from universities in Saudi Arabia. Mukhammad Karachai Bidzhiyev, a leader in Karachai-Cherkessia, graduated from an Islamic university in Pakistan. Yasin Rasulov and Abu-Zagir Mantayev, the primary leaders of the Daghestani Salafi movement, both possessed doctoral degrees from Russian universities, and Mantayev had also earned a degree from al-Azhar in Egypt (Kurbanov, 2011: 357). Most of these leaders held positions in prominent religious research institutes and organizations either in Russia or abroad and remained well connected to Islamic researchers abroad (*ibid.*, 357). Chechen Salafi leaders were somewhat of an anomaly in this trend. Though *jamaats* were known to be operating in the Chechen capital of Grozny at this time, little is known about their structure, as the upheaval sparked by the independence movement precluded much research during this period of early development before the first Russo-Chechen war in 1994. The most prominent leaders of the Salafi movement in Chechnya instead were very involved in the All-Union Islamic Renaissance Party (IRP), founded in 1990 with branches in many areas of the former Soviet Union (Akayev, 2008: 77-18; Moore & Tumelty, 2009: 83). Islam Khalimov, a Chechen doctor, Movladi Udugov, and Isa Umarov, some of the earliest members of the IRP, formed the core leadership of the early Chechen Salafi movement and went on to serve as religious advisors for Dudayev in the initial independence movement (Moore & Tumelty, 2009: 83). However, as the

independence movement developed into an intrastate conflict, the make-up of the Chechen Salafi movement would rapidly change.

Conflict, Statebuilding, and the Competition for Sacred Authority

For the first three years after the declaration of independence, the Chechen “state” existed in a state of chaos. The Russian center, still caught in its own power struggles, mounted several half-hearted and unsuccessful attempts to regain control of the wayward republic but managed only to increase local support for Dudayev’s regime in the face of “Russian aggression.” The region dissolved into a state of lawlessness, serving as a “free zone” for a number of illicit smuggling operations (Hayden, 2000; 57-63; Isaenko & Petschauer, 2000: 9–14). The OKChN, now in power, splintered further. Mirroring the struggles in Moscow, Dudayev and the parliament led by Prime Minister Yaraghi Mamodayev soon came into conflict, which resulted in Dudayev’s dissolution of parliament by presidential decree and armed clashes between Dudayev and parliamentary supporters. By 1993, as many as three separate governments were operating in the republic: the presidential regime led by Dudayev, a reconvened parliament led by Mamodayev, and the Russian-supported Provisional Council led by Zavgayev (Hayden, 2000; 57-63; Isaenko & Petschauer, 2000: 9–14). In the struggle to maintain legitimacy in the face of numerous challengers, Dudayev became one of the first leaders to invoke sacred authority. He turned to prominent Sufi leaders for support of his regime, and under his authorization, the a council of elders (the *mehk qel*), modeled on the traditional councils found in pre-colonial Caucasian societies and in which both clan and Sufi leaders participate, was reestablished (Zelkina, 1993: 122-123). Lenin Square was renamed *Sheikh* Mansur Square, in reference to the early Chechen imam (Johnston, 2008:

332). He supported the construction of a number of mosques and *madrassas* as well as an Islamic university in Grozny (*ibid.*, 334). In 1994, as his grip on power in the republic was seriously threatened, Dudayev declared his intention to create an Islamic state governed on *shari'a* (Dunlop, 1998: 148). However, the inter-elite struggle for governmental control was quickly interrupted by an external threat. Negotiations between Yeltsin and Dudayev failed in late 1994, and on 10 December 1994 Russian military forces invaded Chechnya, marking the start of the First Russo-Chechen conflict (Dunlop, 1998: 124-163; Gammer, 2006: 204-208; Hayden, 2000: 58-68; Lapidus, 1998: 15-21; Tishkov, 2004: 63-74; Wood, 2007: 52). The conflict would continue on for the next two years.

The first war brought a number of changes to both the Chechen power structure and Islamic discourse in the republic. First, during the conflict, almost all framing undertaken by Chechen leaders carried a religious aspect. Dudayev and other prominent leaders called for a *ghazavat* against the Russians and invoked past histories of the anti-colonial wars (Gammer, 2006: 214). This frame resonated amidst the Chechen population and their neighbors. According to Gammer (2006), “Islam proved the strongest rallying call inside Chechnya and more effective than secular ideologies in calling for unity and mobilizing support among other North Caucasian nationalities” (214). Second, the war led to the political ascent of a number of Chechen commanders. Aslan Maskhadov, a former artillery commander and extremely successful military leader of the official Chechen forces, gained the most prominence from his experience in the war, but the informal nature of the Chechen fighting force led to the rise of small commanders as well. Chechen fighting “units” were generally organized by village, with the most militarily-experienced fighter serving as the field commander. The success of the

Chechen forces during the course of the conflict launched many field commanders, most notably Shamil Basayev and Salman Raduyev, into positions of political prominence following the conflict's end (M. Bennigsen, 1999: 541; Gammer, 2006: 209-214; Lieven, 1998: 102-146). Finally, the conflict also introduced a small number (approximately 80 according to Chechen commander Aslan Maskhadov) of foreign fighters from the Middle East and Central Asia who came to be called the "Wahhabis"¹¹ (Moore & Tumelty, 2008: 418).

In actuality, as Cerwyn Moore and Paul Tumelty (2008) emphasize, most of the foreign fighters who came to Chechnya were ethnic Chechens from the Chechen diaspora in Jordan (415-416). The first of the real "foreign fighters" to arrive in Chechnya was actually an elderly Jordanian electrical engineer and veteran of the Soviet-Afghan war, Fathi Mohammed Habib (*Sheikh* Ali Fathi al-Shishani), who came to Chechnya in 1993 to establish a Salafi *jamaat* (Moore & Tumelty, 2008: 416). Fathi undertook a mission of *da'wa* among Chechen youth, preaching a lifestyle of complete adherence to *shari'a*, and advocating the spread of Islamic principles through *da'wa* and education (Sagramoso, 2012: 573). Following the outbreak of the war, Daghestani Salafi preacher Bagauddin Mukhamad (Kebedov) and a number of his followers relocated to the Urus-Martan area of Chechnya, where they too undertook *da'wa* in an attempt to further spread their movement in Chechnya, and through their efforts Zelimkhan Yandarbiyev, vice president under Dudayev, came to identify with the Salafi movement (ibid., 573). In 1995, Fathi,

¹¹ These foreign fighters have been widely blamed for the spread of "radical" Islam and increase in the use in terrorist tactics in Chechnya, and estimates of their numbers have ranged from a few dozen to more than five hundred (Bodansky, 2008; Gammer, 2006; Hahn, 2009, 2011; Lieven, 1998; Mukhina, 2006; Tishkov, 2004; Wood, 2004). However, as mentioned before, the Salafi movement had well-established roots in the region before the outbreak of the Chechen war. Additionally, most accounts of the foreign fighters fail to take into account the large Chechen diaspora composed of the descendants of Chechens who fled to the Ottoman Empire and other places following the Russian conquest of the Caucasus and the Bolshevik Revolution.

who maintained an extensive network of contacts throughout the Middle East, supposedly invited Samir Salih Abdallah al-Suwaylim, a Saudi veteran of the Soviet-Afghan war, better known by his *nom de guerre* “Emir Khattab,” to join the Chechen separatist movement (Moore & Tumelty, 2008: 416; Sagramosa, 2012: 574). Khattab formed a small fighting unit composed of Chechens from Fathi’s *jamaat* as well as some fellow veterans of the Soviet-Afghan war recruited from abroad, and his military successes quickly earned him the respect of fellow field commanders (Moore, 2008: 417). Both Fahti and Khattab maintained extensive personal networks outside of Chechnya, and these connections allowed them to procure a number of resources from outside Chechnya, particularly financial support from the Gulf region (Moore & Tumelty, 2008: 418). A strong web presence further helped efforts to mobilize resources (*ibid.*). In part due to this ability to procure funds and other helpful resources, the Salafist movement quickly gained the following of many of the prominent field commanders, including Shamil Basayev, Salman Raduyev, and Arbi Barayev (Wilhelmsen, 2005: 38). Whether the motivation for joining the Salafi movement was religious or material, the addition of such prominent individuals to the movement helped to set up the conflict that was to come.

Fighting between Russian and Chechen forces ended in 1996 with the signing of the Khasavyurt Peace Accord, a document that granted Chechnya *de facto* independence while postponing the official settlement of Chechnya’s sovereignty for five years. The two-year long conflict decimated the republic’s infrastructure and led to the death or displacement of nearly half of the republic’s one million inhabitants (Gammer, 2006: 210). The civilian population absorbed the brunt of the violence, caught between the

indiscriminate military tactics of the Russian forces and Chechen insurgents who often used civilian shields¹². Dudayev was dead, and Zelimkhan Yandarbiyev had become president (Gammer, 2006: 208). The peace accord provided another opportunity for an attempt at building an independent Chechen state. However, with a number of field commanders vying for power, a still-armed, disorganized fighting force, and the presence of several very different ideas on how a state should be run, the prospects for the state were not promising. In the post-war period, the struggle for control of the state would quickly center on a competition for sacred authority.

The Chechen government returned to the presidential-parliamentary republic model, and Aslan Maskhadov, the official commander of the Chechen armed forces, won the 1997 presidential elections with over sixty percent of the vote, promising an Islamic-based government with a modern order that would bring stability, peace, and rebuilding of the economy (Lieven 1998:145). Basayev was incorporated into the new government as prime minister, along with many of Maskhadov's other rivals, including Raduyev and Yandarbiyev (Bennigsen, 1999: 545-549). Despite early promises, the republic quickly slid into chaos again, with a resurgence of crime and extralegal activities (Gammer 2006: 211; Hughes 2007: 85). Elite conflict quickly crippled the government. Basayev left his post as prime minister and created the Congress of Peoples of Chechnya and Daghestan to promote a pan-Islamic state in the North Caucasus that included the neighboring republic of Daghestan (Hughes 2007: 86-91). Raduyev, Yandarbiyev, and Movladi

¹² According to most accounts of the conflict and reports by Human Rights Watch and Memorial, the majority of human rights violations were perpetrated by Russian forces, including numerous cases of torture and extrajudicial executions. Events such as the massacre of the entire population of the village of Samashki in 1995 and attacks on refugee convoys gained widespread international condemnation. However, during the first war, Chechen forces also used terror tactics to increase their leverage in negotiations. Most famously, field commander Shamil Basayev and a small force of men took several hundred hostages at a hospital in neighboring Stavropol Krai (Levin, 1998: 124-125).

Udugov agitated together for the abolition of the current government and the establishment of an Islamic regime along the lines of the Salafi vision. In 1999, Maskhadov attempted to out-manuever his opposition by suspending the 1992 constitution, ordering parliament to draft a new Islamic constitution, and instituting *Sharia* law; but Yandarbiyev, Udugov, Basayev, and Raduyev broke away and formed their own rival government called the *Mehk-Shura* (Hughes 2007: 91; Lanskoj 2003: 191-192). In August 1999, Basayev, Khattab, and a band of fighters invaded neighboring Daghestan, and Russian forces responded by invading Chechnya one month later, marking the beginning of the Second Russo-Chechen War and the end of the Chechen statebuilding experiment (Hughes 2007: 92).

In these competitions for control of the new state, sacred authority became the key point of contention. Every party involved attempted to ground their actions in protecting Islamic practice and governance based on Islamic principles. Maskhadov appealed to Sufi “traditions” and to Sufi leaders for legitimacy, and his implementation of *shari’a* law was couched in the invocation of the leadership of Shamil, under whom *shari’a* had also served as the law of the state (M. Bennigsen, 1998: 546-549). Maskhadov maintained a large base of support among the Chechen population, who viewed him as a moderate and as a protector of both Islam and Chechen identity. The Salafi movement, with its calls for abandonment of most of the Sufi rituals along with the cultural code (*adat*) long associated with being Chechen, rankled the Sufi leaders, who still held significant authority among the Chechen people (M. Bennigsen, 1998: 546-547; Gammer, 2006: 214-215). Leaders from the Salafi movement, such as Basayev, Udugov, and Yandarbiyev, did find some support for their cause. Their frame, similar to that of other

Islamist movements across the Middle East, included the simple statement, “Islam is the solution,” which resonated with a Chechen population tired of the chaos of war and the general state of lawlessness within Chechnya (M. Bennigsen, 1998: 546-548; Gammer, 2006: 214-215). Their calls for the implementation of *shari'a* law found support amidst the population, and when Maskhadov instituted *shari'a* courts, most of those chosen to head the courts were from the Salafi movement (M. Bennigsen, 1998: 549). The movement’s continued access to resources also helped garner support, as they provided the means for supporting many of the young male fighters who found themselves unemployed after war’s end (Lanskoy, 2003: 190-192; Tishkov, 2004: 106). However, the interwar period also marked a serious split in the Chechen Salafi movement.

Following the death of Fathi in 1997, the movement began to splinter between those who wished to continue educational and *da'wa* activities and eschew political involvement and others who wanted to push for a pan-Caucasian Islamist state (M. Bennigsen, 1998: 551). The more quietist branch, led by Abdul Halim, supported Maskhadov, while the pan-Caucasian branch, championed by Khattab, Udugov, Basayev, and the Daghestani Salafis, began to prepare for military action (ibid.). Amidst a war-weary population, such agitation found little support, and Basayev was increasingly seen as a loose cannon (Gammer, 2006: 216-218). Basayev and Khattab’s failed excursion into Daghestan can be seen as part of this shift to a pan-Caucasian focus.

In light of the actions of Basayev and Khattab as well as the Salafi rhetoric of *jihad* against the Russians, the Russian government framed the Second Russo-Chechen war as a counter-terrorism operation, a frame that gained more international resonance following the events of 9/11. Russian forces employed a total war strategy, which, while

devastating to the civilian population, proved effective in neutralizing most of the Chechen fighting force. By 2004 Chechen forces were able to do little more than stage sporadic guerrilla attacks. Deadly terrorist attacks by Chechen rebels on a Moscow theatre in 2002 and a school in Beslan in 2004, combined with the rising Russian military death toll, placed immense pressure on the Kremlin to end the war in Chechnya and led to a restructuring of Russian strategies (Osmayev, 2008: 25-29). Beginning in 2004, Vladimir Putin embarked on a new strategy of conflict management within Chechnya deemed “Chechenization,” which consisted of devolution of power from the central government in Moscow to loyal Chechen elites (Russell, 2008: 663-664; Sakwa, 2010: 606). Akhmad Kadyrov, a prominent clan leader, Sufi *sheikh*, and former Grand Mufti of Chechnya during the interwar period, was the chosen Chechen leader, and after his “democratic” election in 2004 he began to consolidate power by eliminating rival leaders (Osmayev, 2010: 23-34; Russell, 2008: 663; Sakwa, 2010: 606). However, Chechenization policy quickly hit a major setback with the assassination of Kadyrov only a few months after his election, after which Alu Alkhanov assumed the presidency. Putin however took Kadyrov’s son, Ramzan Kadyrov, as a protégé of sorts and assisted him in rising quickly through the ranks of power (Osmayev, 2010: 37-40; Russell, 2008: 663-664; Sakwa, 2010: 606). In 2007, Putin appointed Ramzan Kadyrov as the new Chechen president. Though lacking in political experience or a formal education, Kadyrov quickly proved to be an adept leader, rapidly consolidating his power as the sole leader of Chechnya (Sakwa, 2010: 606-609; Souleimanov, 2006: 4-5). He remains president today.

Modern Chechen Islamic Discourse

The State and Sufism: Promoting “Traditional” Islam

Akhmad Kadyrov, as the former Grand Mufti of Chechnya and a respected Sufi leader, quickly laid claim to sacred authority upon his ascent to the presidency. By 2004, with most of the regular Chechen fighting units disabled and Maskhadov’s influence waning, Salafi-aligned fighters formed the majority of the limited resistance (Wilhelmsen, 2005: 50-52). Kadyrov, a vocal opponent of the Salafi movement from the interwar period, attacked the Salafi factions as un-Chechen and sought to undermine their credibility with the population, though his assassination a few months after his election precluded any real progress in his endeavors (Osmayev, 2008: 32-34). Though Alkhanov succeeded the elder Kadyrov as president, Ramzan Kadyrov, as the prime minister of the republic, quickly became the dominant political figure in Chechnya. His quick consolidation of power hinged on his ability to monopolize nearly all of the state-authorized funds entering the republic with the establishment of the Akhmad Kadyrov Memorial Fund, through which all aid disbursed from Moscow was funneled (Russell, 2011: 1081). He established his own militia, known as the *kadyrovsty*, to take over most police and military activities; and the *kadyrovsty* quickly gained a reputation for being effective but brutal, with numerous human rights organization recording widespread use of torture, hostage-taking, and extrajudicial executions to intimidate militants and the families of militants (Matveeva, 2007: 8-9; Russell, 2011: 1081-1082). Despite the unpopularity of the *kadyrovsty*, the improved security situation bolstered Kadyrov’s popularity amongst the general population (Matveeva, 2007: 3-4). The government under Kadyrov reverted to a secular presidential-parliamentary structure with no mention of *shari’a*. However, as his primary source of legitimacy, Kadyrov set out to cultivate an

image as both a champion of “traditional” Chechen culture and “traditional” Chechen Islam. Given that the central Russian government has ceded nearly all authority in the region to Kadyrov, little has prevented the Chechen leader from cultivating a state closely tied to religious practice and authority.

The Kadyrov-led government advanced a frame that only through observing “traditional” Sufi Islamic practices could one be a true Chechen Muslim. Further, Kadyrov has sought to bolster his own authority through the public practice of many key rituals emphasized by his own *virḍ* (the Kunta-Hajji Kishiyev brotherhood of the Qadiri *tariqa*) and through the invocation of Islamic symbols and virtues (Akayev, 2008: 69). He frequently participated in the public performance of the Qadiri *dhikr* with older elders from his *virḍ*, and he funded the restoration of numerous Sufi shrines, including several belonging to Naqshbandi *virḍs*, and promoted pilgrimages to these shrines (Akayev, 2008: 84-85; Swirszcz, 2009: 79). The Kadyrov regime has supported the building of more than 300 mosques in the republic, the most famous of which is Hajji Akhmad Kadyrov or “Heart of Chechnya” mosque, the largest mosque in all of Europe (Akayev, 2008: 86; Doukaev & Fuller, 2007, n.p.; Russell, 2011: 1082). In 2005, the Kadyrov-led government undertook a campaign to promote the education of schoolchildren in “traditional Islam” in both schools and through televised broadcasts of Friday sermons from local mosques (Molodikova & Galyapina, 2011: 270-271; Swirszcz, 2009: 79). In 2009, the Kunta-hajji Kishiyev Russian Islamic University, another of Kadyrov’s construction projects, opened on the same grounds as the Akhmad Kadyrov Mosque in order to provide higher religious education on the basis of “traditional Islamic values” in the Caucasus. The university complex also includes a new building for the Spiritual

Directorate for the Muslims of the Chechen Republic and the Islamic Library (Akayev, 2008: 86). Through the employment of these symbols and rituals, Kadyrov has bolstered his own sacred authority in the eyes of the Chechen population while promoting Sufi practice as the “traditional” and correct Chechen Islamic practice.

Kadyrov has also sought to control Islamic discourse in Chechnya through control of religious leaders. Both the official clergy—the imams and muftis of the Spiritual Directorate—and prominent Sufi leaders have been co-opted by the state. Most official religious leaders and Sufi leaders support Kadyrov’s religious agenda. Akayev (2008) notes that the official clergy have publicly announced on multiple occasions their support for Kadyrov’s efforts “to revive the spiritual foundations of the Chechen nation” (85). Sufi *sheikhs* have prominently endorsed Kadyrov’s attempt to position Sufism as the proper form of Islam in the Caucasus (Knysh, 2012: 324). However, Kadyrov’s state also exerts much control over what happens in the state-constructed mosques, schools, and Spiritual Directorate. Interviews conducted by Molodikova and Galyapina (2011) indicate that Friday sermons preached by imams are closely monitored, and that those imams deemed “unreliable,” namely those that preach a message too close to that of the Salafis, are put under FSB (Federal Security Service) watch (275). This control of what happens in the mosque is significant for the state’s ability to control Islamic discourse. Molodikova and Galyapina’s (2011) interviews and analysis of schoolchildren’s essays in Ingushetia and Chechnya led them to conclude that local imams hold the highest degree of religious authority in young peoples’ lives. Most of those students interviewed indicate that their daily and weekly activities center around prayers and Friday sermons at local mosques and that the local imam sets norms for behavior in any particular village (269-

270). Through controlling religious leaders and activities in the mosques, the Chechen government further enhances its power to determine the boundaries of what is “proper Islam” and what is not.

Finally, as in other Muslim populations, an area in which the government struggles to exert control over setting the norms for proper “Islamic” behavior is in the realm of women’s bodies. Beginning in 2007, Kadyrov launched a campaign for the “revival of female virtue.” This new campaign required all women working for state institutions and attending Chechen universities and schools to wear a veil, regardless of marital status (Human Rights Watch, 2011: 11-13). This requirement, though part of the campaign to promote “traditional” Islamic values, belied the “traditional” nature of the campaign. In both the pre-colonial and Soviet period, only married women wore veils to protect family honor. In the reinvention of “traditional” Islam under Kadyrov, however, the veil became a “traditional” value and a means of enforcing control of society. The *kadyrovsty* enforced the new dress code through a punitive campaign in the summer of 2010, during which women seen in public without a veil or with short sleeves or a skirt above the knee were publicly ridiculed and shot with paintball guns (Human Rights Watch, 2011: 19-25). Regarding this, as well as Kadyrov’s personal habit of discharging firearms during public performance of *dhikr*, Liz Fuller and Alsan Doukaev (2007) claimed that Kadyrov was “promoting a brand of ethno-territorial nationalism based largely on popular Islam, but that also selectively borrows -- and sometimes grotesquely distorts -- the symbols and rituals of Chechen Sufism, even as it ignores its essence” (n.p.). Kadyrov and his government, through the control of imams and speech in mosques, the control over women’s bodies, and the appropriation of religious symbols

and rituals, have sought to build sacred authority and to control Islamic discourse in Chechnya in order to define the boundaries of what constitutes “proper Chechen Islam.”

The Caucasian Emirate: Promoting a Counter-Discourse

The Caucasian Emirate (CE) has emerged as one of the few groups outside of foreign human rights groups to challenge the state’s discourse and sacred authority. The assassination of Aslan Maskhadov in 2005 in a FSB operation created a political opening for the small but persistent Chechen resistance movement. Following Maskhadov’s death, Abdul Sadulayev took over for a short-lived stint in leadership before his assassination. In 2007, Doku Umarov subsequently ascended to the “presidency” of the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria and declared over the Internet the dissolution of the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria and the establishment of the CE, instating himself as *Amir* of this new state (Knysh, 2012: 316). His declaration deemed all of the Caucasus *dar al-harb* (abode of war) and called for *jihad* to expel *kuffar* elements, including both Russian forces and their indigenous collaborators, and reinstate the Caucasus as *dar al-islam* (abode of Islam) (Knysh, 2012: 316-317). The CE leadership included most of the prominent Salafi actors who had not been killed by Russian forces. Movladi Udugov served as the movement’s information minister, and Anzor Astemirov of the Karabadino-Balkarian *jamaat* (brotherhood) held the position of Chief *Qadi*. Rasulov and Mantayev, the prominent leaders of the Daghestani *jamaats*, were both killed in Russian attacks between 2005 and 2006, as was Shamil Basayev in 2006 and Khattab in 2002 (Knysh, 2012: 317-320; Kurbanov, 2011: 362). Joining this leadership was an assortment of several hundred of young Salafi adherents from *jamaats* across the North Caucasus. Generally young and well-educated, many of these young men had begun fighting with

Chechen militant units around 2004 and 2005 as persecution against Salafi adherents increased across the region and kidnappings of young men who were considered “of age” to be militants increased as well (Knysh, 2012: 317-320; Kurbanov, 2011: 362; Sagromosa, 2012: 578-590). Though most of the significant actors involved in the Caucasian Emirate became infamous for their involvement in terrorist attacks in the North Caucasus and other parts of Russia, much of the movement’s energy was focused on its ideological competition with the government and religious leaders of the region for sacred authority through its internet presence in the form of the KavkazCenter.com website.

The Caucasian Emirate’s frame rejects nearly all of the foundations of the state’s frame of “traditional Chechen Islam.” First and foremost, the CE leadership and the Salafi movement generally rejected the notion of a “nationalized” Chechen Islam. Umarov, in his “Declaration of the Caucasian Emirate,” emphasizes the CE as part of the global Muslim *umma* and part of the global *jihad* against *kafir* regimes (Knysh, 2012: 318). On KavkazCenter, Udugov and other writers for the movement, drawing on the writings of Sayyid Qutb, divide the world into Muslims, who follow of *shari’a*, and *kafir* (unbelievers) who follow man-made or pagan laws (ibid., 323). In making this distinction, the CE delegitimizes and strips the Kadyrov regime of its sacred authority. However, certain boundaries are drawn to delineate levels of critique. While ordinary Muslims and secular resistance leaders are merely denounced as “hypocrites” (*munafiq*) the harshest criticisms are leveled at the Kadyrov regime, the Russian government, and Sufi leaders. Kadyrov himself, far from the image of a traditional Caucasian hero, is denounced as an idolater and *murtad* (apostate) who cooperates with the *kafir* Russian

government, celebrates Russian “pagan” holidays, and supports the Sufi *tariqas* (Knysh, 2012: 323-324). The CE condemns Sufi practices as *shirk*, and further denounces Sufi leaders as a pack of “dogs of Hell” for cooperating with a *kafir* regime and leading people astray (ibid., 324-325). By attacking both the sacred authority of the regime and the authority of the Sufi religious leaders, the CE denies that these actors have any authority to determine what is proper Islam. Furthermore, by holding to the Salafi teaching of emulating the early followers of the Prophet, members of the CE lay claim to a tradition far older than the “traditional” Islam espoused by the Kadyrov regime.

To build their own sacred authority, the Caucasian Emirate also draws on a number of symbols and styles of rhetoric. First, as mentioned in the earlier discussion of the *jamaats*, CE members set themselves apart from other Muslims in the Caucasus by their manner of dress, most distinctively by their long beards. However, since most members of the CE are in hiding, their style of dress is not generally seen in public (Knysh, 2012: 330). Second, and much more significantly, CE members, especially those who are most vocal on KavkazCenter, extensively use Arabic and Islamic terminology to increase their perceived sacred authority. By extensively quoting the Quran and *Sunna* and using theological terms, CE members are able to regularly critique the official clergy of Chechnya and other republics in the Caucasus for their lack of knowledge in these areas (Knysh, 2012: 325-326). Knysh (2012) notes that as the CE has publicized these critiques, its opponents have attempted to respond in kind, leading to a transformation of the Arabic language and Islamic terminology into “a site of contestation for both the Emirate’s *mujahideen* and their ideological opponents who are usually classified as either ‘Sufis’ or adherents of ‘traditional Islam’ (326).” Finally, though the CE claims to be part

of an international movement, its members have drawn on the historic Islamic capital of the Caucasus in order to improve their resonance with the Chechen people. Udugov stated that the “Declaration of the Caucasian Emirate” intended to restore *shari’a* as the basis for the state in the Caucasus referenced the trans-Caucasian proto-states established under *Sheikh* Mansur and Imam Shamil as the model to which the CE wished to return (Knysh, 2012: 318). Through this invocation of historic cultural capital along with the construction of sacred authority through the use of the Arabic language, holy texts and Islamic theological terminology, the Caucasian Emirate has constructed a counter-discourse to the state’s frame of “proper” Islam as Sufi “traditional” Chechen Islam. This discourse, while suppressed from the mosques and from physical public spaces, continues to have a strong presence in virtual public space through the international reach of the KavkazCenter website.

Conclusion: Muslim Politics in Chechnya, Russia, and Beyond

Since the shift in Russian strategy in the Caucasus to Chechenization, the Chechen government has sought to co-opt the religious establishment and Sufi leaders in order to build sacred authority and control the boundaries of Islamic practice in Chechnya. However, in the last five years, the Caucasian Emirate has emerged in the Caucasus as one of the first groups that could be considered an organized Islamic social movement. The CE possesses a clear frame and ideology, an organized leadership intent on pursuing a strategic course, and an alternative vision of a trans-Caucasian state governed in accordance with *shari’a*. With the emergence of the CE has come a cohesive challenge to the Chechen government’s attempts to control Islamic discourse and define

the boundaries surrounding what constitutes “proper” Islamic practice. Both sides have engaged in what Eickelman and Piscatori (1996) call “Muslim Politics” as they have sought to develop their sacred authority and to legitimize or de-legitimize the state based on Islamic practice and principles. The process of objectification has unfolded in Chechnya as it has in many other Muslim areas of the world, as Chechens have come to develop their own Muslim identities and participate in a discourse regarding how Islam should or should not be practiced and what the role of Islam in politics should or should not be. As both sides continue this process of contention over who should speak for Islam and how Islam should be practiced, these competing discourses are likely to persist and perhaps evolve.

Beyond the realm of discourse, little seems likely to change in the Caucasus in the short run. While the Caucasian Emirate runs a vibrant organization through the web with many followers both in and outside of the Caucasus, among many Chechens the Salafi frame fails to resonate or to successfully lead to mass mobilization. Amongst the older generation, many resent the Salafi attacks on what they see as their cultural way of life. The calls for *jihad* and the use of terrorist tactics further erode any positive views on the Caucasian Emirate and its ideology. However, among young people, the Caucasian Emirate finds much more sympathy with its calls for social justice, an end to government abuses, and promise of social mobility in a region with high unemployment and few economic prospects. As one of Molodikova and Galyapina’s (2011) interviewees stated, “For many people going into Wahhabism is a protest against injustices” (273). As Chechnya recovers from the conflicts and more young people gain mass education and desire better opportunities, it is not unlikely that the Caucasian Emirate could find an

even wider base of support in the coming years. Despite this potential increase in popular support, the Caucasian Emirate or any other Islamic social movement that arises in Chechnya faces a unique set of political constraints that may severely limit prospects for mobilization. Chechnya and the other North Caucasian republics are still a part of the Russian Federation, which is not supportive of an Islamic-based government in any of its federal regions. As such, enacting any serious political change seems unlikely; Putin himself placed the Kadyrov regime in power and has essentially given Kadyrov free reign in the Chechen Republic as long as he keeps conflict from breaking out again. Given that Kadyrov and the *kadyrovsty* can operate with impunity, the options for any social movement remain highly limited. However, though regime change or an Islamist takeover seems unlikely, the shifting demographics and growing mass education of Chechen young people promise that in the next few years, discourse regarding the boundaries and nature of Islamic practice will continue to grow and evolve.

The long-term impacts of the current use of sacred authority to legitimize or delegitimize the Chechen state provide a more interesting puzzle. The fear in much of Russia and the surrounding world, the same fear that in part prompted the second Russo-Chechen war, was that Chechnya was becoming an Islamic state. However, one could argue that today we see an essentially Islamic state in the Caucasus led by Ramzan Kadyrov. Granted, this state endorses a form of Islam considered less radical and therefore less dangerous by the government in Moscow. However, Russia will soon have to confront the reality of an Islamic state in the Caucasus. Given that a similar process of reversion to traditional values and the cultivation of a strong relationship between a religious establishment and the state is now occurring in Russia between the Orthodox

Church and Putin's government, this confrontation could prove highly challenging for Russian federalism and legitimacy in the Caucasus.

Several factors must influence one's assessment of the future of Russia's strategy in the governance of Chechnya. First, despite growing concern in Moscow over Kadyrov's governing strategy, he still enjoys the full support of President Putin, and barring some catastrophe this support seems unlikely to falter in the short run. With the Sochi Olympics quickly approaching, the regime seems most keen to sweep any lingering problems in the Caucasus under the proverbial rug. Kadyrov, in the meantime, has proved an adept leader who has ably maneuvered to eliminate any legitimate rivals to his power that Moscow would consider reasonable replacements. Given these developments, the Russian federal government will likely find the task of replacing Kadyrov without sparking massive unrest in the region nearly impossible. The shift in the basis of government legitimacy from a rational-legal authority rooted in laws and bureaucracy to a more traditional form grounded in sacred authority centered on the practice of Islam precludes the possibility of dispatching a new technocrat from Moscow to take over governance. Many analysts of Russian politics have noted Putin's creation of a "*vertikal*" of power, a chain of command that is directly answerable to and easily controlled by him. However, Chechnya and the strategy of "Chechenization" provide a case where, though it originally fit into the general trend of centralization of power in the hands of the executive leader, the vertical of power has created a regional government more autonomous and uncontrollable than any other region in Russia.

What are the prospects for Chechnya in the next ten years? Though future events cannot be predicted with any high degree of certainty, Islam has become an integral part

of regional politics and will continue to play a key role in the governance of the region. A concerted push for independence, such as the one that followed the breakup of the Soviet Union, remains unlikely to reoccur, though the calls for an independent Islamic state in the Caucasus like those advanced by the Caucasian Emirate are unlikely to cease. At some point, the Russian federal government must decide just how much autonomy is appropriate for Chechnya. Is it to become a republic like the other republics in the Russian Federation, or will it continue to be a more independent, autonomous zone? The question of leadership looms large in Chechnya's future. Though Kadyrov could rule for the next twenty or thirty years barring an assassination or policy shift in Moscow, his cultivation of a cult of personality and of sacred authority means that any successful predecessor must also be able to play the game of Muslim politics. Given the trajectory of the last twenty years, Russian authorities might be best off if they learned to play this framing game as well. Over the last two decades, Chechnya has joined the ranks of states across the Middle East in its practice of Muslim politics and use of Islamic symbols and rhetoric to lend legitimacy to the state, fueled by the development of Muslim consciousness amongst its people. Whether the development of these framing discourses reinforces the status quo of authoritarian rule or possesses the potential to spark an "Arab Spring"-style revolution has yet to be seen.

The similarities between Chechen society and the societies of other Muslim majority states is likely to increase in the next ten years, due in large part to the ever-increasing reach of the Internet and its effect on youth culture. Much emphasis in the Boston bombing investigation has focused on the online activities of the Tsarnaev brothers, emphasizing their Chechen identity that was bolstered through participation on

Vkontakte (a Russian social networking site) and their “radicalization via the Internet.” As we have seen in the case of the Caucasian Emirate, the Internet can provide a medium outside of state control through which alternative frames can be freely disseminated. As such, it remains unsurprising that radical groups have used the Internet to spread their message and tactics globally. However, the Internet has an even more significant potential for impact beyond a means of message dissemination: that of community creation. Benedict Anderson (1983), in his work *Imagined Communities*, discusses how the advent of print and particularly the newspaper allowed the development of “imagined communities” where people could identify and group themselves with other people (in this case, their fellow countrymen), whom they had never met. Today, the Internet serves to connect people across national borders and physical boundaries and has the potential to create new forms of identity apart from ethnicity and country of origin. In the case of Chechen youth, though ethnic identity is unlikely to fade, it is not difficult to imagine Muslim identity in a more global sense quickly overtaking any sense of identity as citizens of the Russian Federation, bolstered by the ability to participate in virtual Muslim communities via the Internet.

The development of a greater global Muslim identity and community is undoubtedly aided by the emphasis on community in Islam. Throughout the Quran, Islamic scholarship, and Islamic history, much attention is given to the global Muslim *umma*. In Chechnya we now see increased participation and sense of belonging in this Muslim *umma* after decades of isolation during the Soviet period, and this participation is likely to increase. The consequences of this participation and of the primacy of Muslim identity amongst Chechen youth are yet unclear. While security experts in Russia and in

the West certainly will emphasize the possibility for further radicalization and recruitment into extremist groups, it remains essential to remember the potential for positive influence. Based on this newfound Muslim identity, Chechen youth may in the future create movements for social justice, Muslim finance, education, healthcare, or a number of other goals that motivate other movements throughout the Islamic world. Given the turbulence of the region, it is near impossible to predict the trajectory of Chechnya over the next few years. However, two things are certain. First, Islam will continue to play a central role in the republic's politics, culture, and society and serve as an arena of contention for authority between the state and anti-state groups. Second, Chechnya's future lies in its youth, and it is their choices regarding Islam, regarding political participation, regarding Russian politics, and regarding social activism, that will create a post-conflict Chechnya.

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