

Cluster of Competence  
**The rehabilitation of war-torn societies**  
A Project coordinated by the  
Centre for Applied Studies in International Negotiations (CASIN)

UNDERSTANDING VIOLENCE  
FOR  
POST-CONFLICT RECONSTRUCTION  
IN CHECHNYA

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## Abstract

Based on extensive study of the war-torn Chechnya and of the war effects for the Russian State and society the author worked out strategies for post-conflict reconstruction. Accomplished destructions, huge losses, and ongoing severe fighting make the prospects for peace and stability a long and complex process. There are two key strategic issues: a) the possibility of reaching consensus on policy toward Chechnya in the Russian politics and society at large and b) the readiness of the state and the public to allocate resources for the post-war reconstruction of the region. No less important is a capacity of the Chechen society to participate and to define the peace-building process. The dilemma is that severely damaged Chechen society is incapable to provide internal coherence and resources for restoration and at the same time Chechnya can not be restored without local mobilization for peace-building process and for post-war reconstruction. There are main directions for reconstruction efforts:

1. dismantling from the mental space unrealized doctrines of non-negotiable full secession from Russia and working out a proposal for internal self-determination and sovereign governance with legal and political guarantees of this status.
2. measures for changing public climate in and around Chechnya and promoting reconciliation through recognizing shared sufferings and shared responsibilities.
3. urgent pan-Russian campaign for assistance and help to suffering people of Chechnya and refugees outside of Chechnya.
4. building 'peace corp' from civilian volunteers ready to provide resources and labor for reconstruction works in Chechnya.
5. social therapy among local population how to return to a peaceful life and provision of opportunities for descent labor and payments.
6. restoration of internal cohesion among Chechens, especially among elite elements, including those who left Chechnya and reside in other parts of the country.
7. safeguarding elementary social order and arming peace coalitions with resources and power.
8. minimizing military presence and putting under shared control of federal and local administrations military activities in Chechnya.
9. restoration of life-subsistence structures, including water and energy supplies, medical service, pension payments, demining arable lands, etc.
10. special programs for targeted groups, like children warriors, wounded combatants, orphans, and homeless people.
11. restrictions for irresponsible outside manipulations and for the war-sponsoring actors in Russia and other countries.
12. continuation of military operations against Chechen fighters and terrorist groups leaving a space for negotiating cease-fire and peace with military commanders.
13. monitoring human rights violations, especially on a part of Russian military.





## Part 1. Lessons on How the War Happened

*The entire territory of the post-war republic is an aggressive space (Aset Vazayeva, Chechen journalist)*

*If we talk of this war in detail - about this or that separate operation - it seems we understand it. But to put it all together, to show the links, so that each little thing falls in place - well, that's something only you, scholars, may be able to do. I wish to say just one thing - I had no heart to go to that war, and now it's over, I don't feel like a hero, though I have many decorations. Pointless business it is - I mean war. (Taus A.).*

The Chechen war can be described as an intra-state conflict, underlain by the striving of one side to secede from the existing state and to build a new state. Usually separatism is born and its protagonists (both the leaders and the rank-and-file participants) are mobilized on the basis of the doctrine and political practice of ethnic nationalism. This holds that each people – understood not as a territorial association (*demos*) but as an ethnic community (*ethnos*) or ethno-nation – has the right to self-determination, to ‘its own’ state. Even though this doctrine fails to correspond to international legal norms and contradicts national legislation of all the states in the world, and despite its practical impossibility, this is a doctrine with many supporters in today’s world. Contemporary ‘wars of independence’ or ethno-nationalist conflicts are the most wide spread form of violent conflict<sup>1</sup> and they are the main challenge to international security. They are also a tool of global and regional rivalries as well as a strategy of local actors to acquire resources, status and power.

In ethnic (mainly secessionist) conflicts, at least one side could be identified as belonging to a culturally distinct (ethnic/religious) group or at least mobilized on behalf of this group. The Chechen war belongs to this category. This evaluation is not changed by the fact that non-Chechen nationals are among the leaders and rank-and-file participants of the conflict on Chechnya’s side, nor by the fact that on the opposite side there is a state with a ‘non-ethnic’ military machine. This is the way things most often are in the world. Cases of ethnic conflicts in their ‘pure form’ – with one group acting against another because of some ‘natural’ hostility – are rarely encountered, although as violence escalates, ethnic or religious affiliation can emerge as the sole elective principle in the choice of victims.

Many representatives of the intellectual and political elite of Russia stimulated and supported the ‘Chechen revolution’ since the autumn of 1991. In a doctrinal and political sense, Chechnya’s ‘national self-determination’ was initiated and legitimated precisely by Russian (Soviet) ideology and political practice of those years when it seemed to many that along with improving government there was a simpler, more natural way to realize democratic transformations: and that was to create sovereign polities on an ethnic basis.<sup>2</sup>

For many reasons, Chechnya became one of the first actors to implement such radical scenario in the Russian Federation after the break up of the USSR into 15 multi-ethnic states (also partly through the tool of ethno-national self-determination). First, the Chechens, as one of the largest peoples in the Russian state and probably the least assimilated to the Russian core culture from the point of view of identity, had experienced events in relatively recent history which generated feelings of injured collective dignity and extreme forms of self-assertion. Neither the state nor Russian society managed to understand this. The leaders of the state, including the President Boris Yeltsin, could not find a compromise approach which would be acceptable to the periphery’s political actors.

Second, Chechnya suffered from many social problems; these included surplus labor resources and unemployment, a relatively low standard of living among rural population, and a general lack of modernization. This provided the human material for mass political manipulation, extra-legal activity, and later supplied a good number of recruits for the ranks of paramilitaries and militias. The ethnic factor in Chechnya was to act as a line of resistance: in the republic and even in the country as a whole, a situation often developed in which social, political and cultural inequalities and injustices followed ethnic boundaries – or were perceived as doing so.

Third, from the 1960s and through the 1980s, many Chechens, especially the urban dwellers, traveled an accelerated path of modernization. They acquired higher education and became major administrators of the economy, or soldiers, politicians, and scholars. Under the collapse of the unitary Soviet system and weakening of the Party *nomenklatura*, this new elite began formulating claims in ‘the name of the people’ for the redistribution of power in their favor, and for priority access to resources. Independence from the federal Center and national (i.e. Chechen) sovereignty promised such rewards to the leaders – but not to the people, given the limited resources, the character of the economic ties, and even the geographical situation. However, the most bombastic leaders, with the direct and even decisive support of outside politicians and experts together with representatives of ‘internal’ (inside Russia) and foreign Diasporas, managed to mobilize part of the population around the slogan of struggle with Communism and the idea of independence. Dudayev’s accession to power in 1991 began as a variant of the de-Communization conducted by the Center, was invested with the form and rhetoric of popular revolution, and was completed in the form of political mutiny.

Fourth, decisive for the *coup d’état* separatism implemented by the Chechen authorities was the transfer of weapons from the arsenals of the Russian Army. This guaranteed Dudayev the opportunity to strengthen Chechnya’s declaration of independence with threats of pure force, and then to organize impressive resistance to federal armed forces.

The Chechen crisis could have been resolved without using the army by various means and methods. Such possibilities continued to exist right up until December 1994. It is impossible to agree with the President of the Russian Federation that ‘state coercion was used in Chechnya when the federal regime had exhausted all other means of influence’.<sup>3</sup> The federal regime left undone much of those things which it ought to have done.

First, throughout the entire crisis, not one of the government top leaders contacted President Dudayev to listen to his position and propose ways of resolving the collision. Emotional arrogance combined with lack of tradition or skills in political compromise, as well as self-limitation in the main key figures of the conflicting sides, became a tragic and subjectively personal but vital feature in the escalation of the crisis.

Second, a whole complex of necessary measures were not adopted in the field of economics, control of the borders and of air space. These are measures that states will normally adopt with the appearance of rebellious regions, in order to demonstrate the impossibility of forcible separatism.

Third, Russia – and primarily the Ministry of Foreign Affairs – did not declare this internal crisis to the international community. Nor was any mention made that a process of regulating relations with one of the subjects of the Federation was taking place, and that any support – even indirect – or establishment of contacts with representatives of the rebellious regime would be viewed as hostile to relations with Russia.

Fourth, there was an impermissible political double standard: here I refer to the pro-separatist positions on the part of (among others) the Russian military personnel and some politicians during involvement in analogous events in Georgia, when participation of the Russian citizens in the so-called 'Abkhazian battalion' (ironically, they were led by Shamil Basayev) on the side of the Ardzinba government was permitted.

All these major miscalculations and mistakes can partially be explained by the complexity of the general situation in Russia and also by the insufficient experience of the new generation of politicians. This is not to say that the war in Chechnya was predetermined by the existing situation. This crisis could still have been played out on a much lower level of confrontation; indeed, with certain changes in the situation in Chechnya, it could even have been resolved within Chechnya itself.

**No fatal threat to the territorial unity of Russia existed, except that which it allowed itself. This was the same myth as the myth about Chechen independence. Those who believed in these myths and allowed themselves to make decisions on that basis – it is they who should be labeled the chief culprits in the tragedy which has befallen the country.**

### *Evaluation of War Escalation*

The 1994-96 Chechen war in Russia was an armed rebellion against a state by one of its ethno-territorial autonomies which in 1991 unilaterally proclaimed its secession from the Russian Federation to form an independent state. There were similar attempts of armed separatism in the former Soviet Union region: Nagorny-Karabakh in Azerbaijan, Abkhazia and South-Ossetia in Georgia, Transdnistria in Moldavia. Practically, all of them enjoyed a kind of military victory in fighting central authorities, but no one has reached its political goals.<sup>4</sup> In Russia, the attempt at placing the breakaway region under central control led to a prolonged destructive campaign which ended in a withdrawal of federal troops from Chechnya, complete loss of authority over Chechnya, and in the agreements between the warring parties signed in August 1996 and May 1997 followed by a new war in less than three years.

With the purpose of widening the area of armed separatism, under the slogan of spreading 'true Islam' by a holy war against infidels (*jihad*), armed attacks were launched from the territory of Chechnya on neighboring Russia's Republic of Dagestan in August 1999. This resulted in a new round of war called 'anti-terrorist operation' with thousands of killed and wounded among the federal troops, the Chechen combatants, the foreign mercenaries, and the civilian population. Now, the city of Grozny looks like gone from the map. This new cycle of war erupted in the fall 1999 and is still not over even if the major Chechen fighting groups have been crushed. The Russian military suffer everyday mortal casualties from terrorist acts. Parts of the territory (mountain areas) are not controlled by federal and local authorities. Small armed groups of Chechen separatists and their most flamboyant leaders (Maskhadov, Basayev, Udugov, Gelayev, Khattab, and others) still possess resources for resistance and still enjoy a certain degree of support from local population.

The war in Chechnya resulted in disastrous human and material losses: about 40-50,000 people were killed, over half the territory's population (some 500,000) became refugees in their own country, the city of Grozny and many other settlements suffered heavy destruction. It was a tragedy for the Chechen people and the worst crisis in Russia's new history. The conflict between Russia's federal government and the Chechen armed secessionists is still unresolved and

the war's consequences are still there. **The instability in Chechnya and the adjacent North Caucasian lands, as well as the crisis of Russia's statehood in the period of its deep transformation, generate large-scale violence on a routine everyday basis with poor prospects for stability and reconstruction.**

### *Defining the Author's Position*

The Chechen war has been for years one of the most painful problems of Russia's society. For various reasons, mainly of humanitarian concerns, it has drawn the attention of other states, of major international organizations, and of the world public opinion. The conflict has been the subject of many journalist descriptions and academic studies (see, enclosed bibliography). The latter mostly include historiographic or political science analysis. Some authors provided anthropological backgrounds and they suggest valuable insights into Chechen war ethnography. The study offered here is done primarily in the disciplinary framework of socio-cultural anthropology. It is not so much a version of the Chechen war as an ethnography of the Chechen war-torn society, which has not been written though it amply deserves it.

I do not place my analysis into any holistic theory of conflict nor do I find any useful scholarly results in costly and widely claimed war-torn society projects. The weakness of dominant conflict theories lies primarily in its ontological vision of groups as collective bodies with 'needs', 'will', and 'universal motivations', not as a situation, a feeling, and a speech act or a criminal action. The backside of these meta-approaches is that their real intention is to formulate prescriptions rather than produce new knowledge. This vision is a serious predicament of science because it ignores uncertainty and creativity, the role of human projects and their rational and irrational strategies, even mistaken decisions and choices. What is even more serious, is the excessiveness of invested resources and the expectations to prove the analysis and, thus, the creditability of costly research as well. As is the case with post-conflict problematic most research undertakings deliberately ignore any analytical value and prefer to use a kind of surrogate 'group research' for organizing the very process of post-conflict reconstruction.

I can hardly claim to have 'put it all together and shown the links' in a consistent version of the war, as one of my Chechen informants bade me to do. On the contrary, my version and conclusions are so radically different from all that has been written on Chechnya that it may only add to the intellectual discord, methodological morass, and stir up unwanted debate on the part of those who had already invested their emotions, intellect, and career rewards into the 'Chechen cause' seen as a *fait accompli* 'national revolution' for independence. My primary goal is to bring here the direct voices of the participants in the drama, give vent to 'their' (indigenous) versions of the events, and to follow them with my own understanding of the story as recorded in my collected data and observations.

This does not mean a lack of my own political stance. There is one outside evaluation of my position done by the ideological *guru* of the Chechen resistance, by Mouvladi Udugov on his Internet site ([www.kavkaz.org](http://www.kavkaz.org)) where he placed the full text of my confidential proposals written for the Head of the Russian Government, Viktor Chernomyrdin, while I was a member of the Russian governmental committee on working out the peace plan for Chechnya in 1995. Udugov provided his introductory comments which I cite below: "The following text by the Russian specialist in ethnography, Tishkov, is one of many evidences that practically all Russian politicians, public figures, and scholars, instead of promoting natural right of every people for freedom, independence, and its own statehood, propagate scholarly-like recipes on how to keep people fighting for freedom in the imperial cage of Russia".

This last comment discloses one of the most fundamental problems of post-conflict reconstruction drastically underestimated by experts and policy makers. **This is a problem of conflict generating doctrinal legacies and of fighting arguments in favor of ongoing violence.**

### *Fighting Categories and Forged Data*

Conflicts starts with words and words can kill no less then bullets. In order to fight effectively one should not only be trained on how to master Kalashnikovs and grenade launcher but also be explained why it is necessary to fight, who is the enemy, and why is the warrior's honor to die for a nation. Without these arguments of verbal training people are poor fighters, and for sure this is not the case with Chechens. Those who fight in Chechnya do it in an effective way, so much so that it made some analysts search for fantastic analogies with ancient mythological heroes, like 'Aeneas with grenade launcher' in Anatol Lieven's words<sup>5</sup>. Moral/ideological justifications are needed not only for those who are in the battlefields but for those who issue orders, rule front-line communities, organize political rallies, produce illegal gasoline, take hostages for sale, and execute killing.

These - that I call 'fighting categories' - have their own moments of origin and embodied propagators. These categories express vested emotions and interests; they live their own lives amidst elite and mass mentalities, and they can be destroyed (dismantled) only through purposeful efforts to display their destructive natures and their political decrepitude. Some of these categories are a part of sophisticated academic constructions; some are a reflection of an everyday language loaded with explicit or poorly realized conflict generating politics. Here are some of these 'mental killers' which should be disclosed and detained in a framework of conflict reconstruction.

Neither the cultural nor the geographic/political identities are neutral with respect to the Chechen war discourse. It is 'Russia', 'Moscow', 'the Russians' that are chiefly projected as one of the conflicting sides and blamed for the recent tragedy. These names (labels) represent to many people, including Chechens, the most frequently cited categories in the explanatory models of the war, of its reasons and culprits. As one of my assistants, Kheda A., told me, her colleague at Chechen Republic's representation in Moscow asked her once, "Isn't he ashamed to write about it all after what the Russians did to Chechnya?"

I noticed, however, that 'Russia', 'Moscow', 'the Russians' as a collective image of the culprit is predominant among the Chechens who live in Chechnya. Even then the blame is laid on the direct perpetrators of violence, the rest of Russians are seen as 'passive culprits'. In the words of my Chechen reviewer, their guilt lies in the fact that "Russians did not protest actively enough and so failed to prevent the war" (Rustam K.). Chechen researcher, Zalpa Bersanova, who did a serious sociological work during a time of war, asked in 1995 a question "Do you regard the Russian people to be guilty of a tragedy that happened to the Chechens?" (In the first round of this research in 1992 this question has even not been asked.) She received the following results: among elder people (60 - 80 years) 15% said "Yes" and 67% - "No" (18% could not answer); among young people (17 - 30 years) 32% said "Yes" and 46% - "No" (22% could not answer). As Bersanova concluded, "the Chechens differentiate clearly *Rossiia* (more precise transliteration of the state's title), its authorities, and Russians (*Russkie* as a ethnic entity); and the very fact that, in spite of all sufferings, the Chechen majority does not blame the Russian people speaks for a potential of tolerance on the part of the Chechen".<sup>6</sup>

The world public is not familiar with this important semantic differences when it operates a simplistic ‘Russia-Chechnya’ dichotomy. Partly, this dichotomy repeats everyday the language used in Russia itself as synonyms for ‘center’ and ‘periphery’ of this country. The problem is that ‘Russia’ (precisely *Rossiya*) means for many people not more than ‘Moscow’ and ‘the Kremlin’ as a kind of symbolic categories without a denial of belonging to one country and of sharing a common citizenship. Chechens are not Russians in ethnic terms but they are *Rossians* in terms of civic and political identities which does not make their cultural identity mutually exclusive. As Movladdi Movsayev, one of the field commander in Chechnya, told me: ‘I am a Chechen, but I am a Russian (*Rossiaynin*) also’. It is a predominant feeling of double non-exclusive identity among Chechens which is deliberately ignored or despised by mentalities and language produced by the conflict. This is probably a major semantic discrepancy which makes improper language produce improper politics.

No doubt, the war drew a more rigid line between the Chechens and others and heightened their sense of distinction not only on the level of group identity. But I cannot accept the premise that my partners and interviewees are people of another civilization. My materials do not substantiate that. Yes, there are marked differences in life situations, also some important distinctive cultural characteristics. Still, I find more in common between a Russian professor in Moscow and a Chechen professor from Grozny than between the latter and a Chechen combatant from a mountain village, even if the professor originates from that same place. **The cultural watershed results from the conflict and it divides members of the war-torn society from outsiders and those who are on the fringes of the conflict. In a certain sense, it is the conflict that constructed Chechens, not vice versa! But we have also discovered that the conflict tore apart the Chechen society first and most and it made the surrounding society ready to push this segment out of its own ranks.** With this observation the cliché ‘Russian invasion of Chechnya’ sounds no less trivial than the ‘American invasion of California’.

There are many other conflict-generating and conflict-generated metaphors. One of the most mobilizing one is coined by the Chechen émigré political scientist, Abdurakhman Avtorkhanov who wrote a book on *Nation-killing* with one of the first painful account of the Chechen-Ingush deportation. By scholarly standards, it was a poor book but being translated into Russian and widely circulated in the country in the late 1980s and early 1990s it became a powerful argument against the state that permitted and executed *narodoubiistvo* (nation-killing) towards Chechens. It has been a form of revenge of the old generation who suffered from Stalin and who wanted to bring through their fighting grandsons. It became a tragedy of the living people and of their future which both became hostages of the past traumas. **Post-conflict reconstruction should learn this lesson of ‘the burden of the past’ and include measures preventing the misuse of history for sponsoring imagined pain, hate and discontent.**

By tracing the language of the conflict, we established the conflict generating logic on how a superficial and politically motivated category of *fighting for freedom* became, at a certain moment, a category of rigid prescription and of moral blessing. That is a category of *freedom fighters*. Some of my Chechen informants, who were fighters (*boeviks*), told me how local villages mullahs explained to young people what it means to be a *shakhid* (those who fight and die for Islam) first, and only then ‘they selected from each village two most clean and brave young men to serve in Dudayev’s national guard’ (Akhyad’s testimony). *Freedom fighters* became a common denomination for Chechen combatants among the Western mass media and public to the extent that when blatant terrorist acts had been committed before and during the

war they were categorized as committed by ‘hostage takers’, not terrorists. Through this mild and sympathetic category the door for potential executors of violence has been left opened because outside understanding and even support has been promised.

Some conflict generating categories are a great predicament for negotiating peace and reconciliation. Among them is the *Chechen independence* as a non-negotiable category in Dudayev’s, Maskhadov’s, and other leaders’ words. Out of this independentist rhetoric came one more absurd category, e.g. being a ‘subject of international law’ which post-Soviet radicals read unanimously as being recognized as a separate collective entity. Equally, on a federal side policy-makers fight for (or against) words with no real meaning as well. “I do not care what you are negotiating there. In all cases, there should be words that ‘Chechnya is a subject of the Federation’”, cried by phone from a Russian military base, Mozdok, the acting Minister of Nationalities and Yeltsin’s special envoy to Chechnya, Nikolai Yegorov, when a leader of the Russian delegation at the negotiations in Vladikavkaz in December 1994 (the days the war in Chechnya started) tried to convince his superior to accept a milder formula avoiding definition of status and demanding the simultaneous withdrawal of the federal troops and the disarmament of the Chechen military formations. A rare chance of stopping the war on its infant stage has been lost partly because of verbal cages and verbal instructions limiting a search for innovative peace strategies.

**Thus, before starting major reconstruction programs something should be done to bring into political and public discourse the attitudes which clean the road of the conflict and do not close the door for the Chechens to exercise these shared identities. There is no ‘Russia-Chechnya’ identity disposition. Otherwise, Chechens are excluded from the country’s populace justifying not only atrocities on the part of the military but also a politics of caging representatives of the whole group into a category of ‘no-citizens’ or ‘enemy citizens’ without rights and privileges. This is an impossible start for post-conflict reconstruction.**

## Part 2. The Total Violence of the Chechen War

*I envied the dead. But I didn’t want to die.*(Zareta)

*I think we have all been brutalized by the war.*(Khizir)

*After long and painful thinking I calmed down myself with the belief that everything is in Allah’s hands and that He will judge. There were many who asked Dela [God] to give them death at the gazavat, and they would die in his name.*(Ilyas)

Chechnya is so pervaded with extreme and overall violence that, tragically, it provides an excellent, though dangerous, field for the study of its ethnography. As it has been mentioned, from the socio-political point of view, this is a *group-versus-state* conflict, not one between two ethnic groups or two states. Essentially, it boils down to a revolt in one of the Russian Federation’s ethno-territorial autonomies by part of its population exiting its legal system. This departure took the form of an armed confrontation staged by a group of radical ethnic separatists. With time the conflict acquired its own momentum under the impact of certain internal and external factors, not least of them being the intrinsic logic of a war-torn society, or also the new geo-political rivalries around the North Caucasus.

One of the characteristic features of the so-called ‘national revolution’ in Chechnya, since its takeover by the separatists, was the new regime’s violence towards its own population. The

violent forms of behavior in their own environment, between various groups of Chechen people, were the hallmark of the movement. Armed force and total violence gradually became the only basis for actions by the militant and political leaders of the break-away republic and remained as a standard of behavior within it after the end of the war. The ultimate defeat of those leaders lay in their inability to stop the violence and restore at least relatively harsh regulation of social behavior after the seeming victory of the insurgents.

Another peculiarity of the conflict lays in the fact that the federal power, more exactly the Presidents Boris Yeltsin and Vladimir Putin, took decisions on a large-scale army and internal troops' operations and launched it to the area of armed separatism without a solid legal basis or technical preparation. Why were those decisions taken and how was the moral and political climate set for such ruthless conduct by the Russian forces in that part of their own country? The most likely version was voiced by the State Duma Deputy Sergei Yushenkov at a round-table session in Moscow, at the Yegor Gaidar Institute for Socio-Economic Reforms of the Transition Period:

*Honestly, I racked my brain a long time to try and figure out what interests, that is what forces or groups, might be interested in the war? But there are no such interests, there's only imbecility. Or if there is any, it's just Yeltsin's close circle. I had a telephone talk with Lobov: I fumed over the President's decree promulgating an emergency situation in Chechnya, and he told me cynically, 'Never mind, we need a small victorious war, as in Haiti, to raise the President's rating.' That was the only interest, no other. It looked as if Yeltsin might not be re-elected president again, and his hangers-on were worried. They were ready for anything - send the country into a spin, introduce a police-state rule, call off elections, and so on. (Minutes of the meeting, p.32).*

The 'small victorious war' did not result in suppressing the revolt, but instead made it develop into a long large-scale conflict. The monstrous escalation of violence was triggered off not only by the Chechen separatists' armed resistance, but also by the cruelty on the part of the army and internal troops towards the civilian population as well as the militant groups.

The phenomenon of total violence against people within one state, with the use of various modern weapons and combat methods, is poorly explained by experts. How was it possible for Russia's state and society to have such a self-destructive war as the one in Chechnya? The question is unclear both to researchers and to the very forces involved in the conflict - dismissing, of course, the crude propaganda versions. There are certain fundamental factors rooted in the character of the state institutions, the legal and political culture, the mentality and historical heritage of Russia's people. Without analyzing all those factors it is difficult to understand the causes, the nature, the impact and the perception of violence which accompanies war and constitutes its essence.

### ***Legitimization of Violence***

We are interested in the extreme brutality of the Chechen war - what I call a *total violence* - and the cultural substratum that made it possible. To begin with, I reject as invalid the common opinion of 'natural' cruelty of the Chechen people and the low value attached by them to human life. No less absurd and politically engaged are the literary and journalistic images of Chechens as gallant noble warriors. Equally unacceptable is the view of some pre-ordained cruelty of Russia's force in Chechnya, still less of ethnic Russians making up its majority. What is then the anthropological nature of violence that surfaced in that conflict and in the



Chechen society as a whole? Still more important - what happens to society and to an individual in a situation of total violence?

The phenomenon of violence is not in itself a socio-cultural anomaly. The nature and conditions of violence in human society have been the subjects of numerous studies.<sup>7</sup> However, the Chechen conflict is peculiar for its indiscriminate violence and the vague image of the enemy, i.e. the object of violence, also the exceptional brutality demonstrated by the subjects of violence. And those are precisely the characteristic features of the *demodernization* phenomenon in which the accepted *norm of violence* is lost and society lapses into chaos.

It is known that a certain acceptable norm of violence may be an element of a traditional social structure, such as the norms of warfare and of peace in an average modern society. Legitimate level of violence is set by the state and international law in respect of the combatants' behavior during the hostilities. But in none of the recent wars I know of were those norms observed, particularly in internal conflicts. One of the early enthusiasts of peace-making in Chechnya and the founder of the Russian branch of the non-governmental organization The Non-violence International, Andrey Kamenshikov complained to me:

*The first couple of weeks I would bring from Moscow to Chechnya knapsacks full of brochures on the humane norms of warfare and peace-keeping. I handed them out to soldiers and Chechen fighters, but soon I saw it was useless: nobody wanted to read them or to listen to my talk about it, let alone follow such norms. I even experienced a sort of mental crisis over my inability to influence the situation. I looked as a naive idealist even to my own eyes, and to the combatants' still more so. What kind of crank is it getting underfoot? May be a spy? And I decided to pull away from all that madness.*

Similar reactions are frequent among outsiders - politicians, experts, journalists - who come into contact with war or happen to be its victims. "They are all out of their minds in Yugoslavia, they have turned into utter barbarians", or "The conflict has roused the most primitive, animal instincts", were typical comments on the wars and armed conflicts of recent years. As I was riding in a car along Tbilisi's central avenue, smashed in the recent civil unrest, to meet Eduard Shevardnadze in 1992, the official accompanying me said pointing to the ruins all around, "Look, Mr. Minister, at how the Georgians may become suddenly all insane!" And, concerning Chechnya, views were often voiced that the war there had ceased to be part of a political conflict and passed into an inhuman state outside normal social life: a world of unreality where the combatants have but one aim - to kill.

**With all such views, we must admit that war is a possible human reality with all the victims and perpetrators of violence, the latter often being caught in a spiral of violence which may have been generated by them, but which they are unable to control. Violence becomes an end in itself and a daily routine, not a means or a message, as in the classical theory of violence. War and violence are not outside the culture of human behavior. Just as altruism or creativity, they are constructed within that culture. This is a special kind of potential which is realized by certain people in certain conditions and the phenomenon can only be understood in this context.**

But if war and violence form an integral part of human culture, how can we reconcile them with the modern moral and legal rejection of killing people? And how can we penetrate the essence of life in conditions of violence if each conflict or war is unique in its configuration of

a social crisis with unique responses and actions of people subjected to violence or exercising it?

What seemed most amazing in the ethnography of the Chechen war was the combination of a social paralysis in face of uncontrollable forces and factors (when ‘planes zoom as regularly as a bus running to a timetable’) and of the wondrous inventiveness and adaptability of human endeavor under an endless pressure of needs and concerns (where to get food, which way to run, whence to expect danger, when to attack, where to shoot?) The main distinction of war or any other form of violence from peaceful life (which is only a relative notion) is its sudden challenges that have to be met immediately. And there are few standard social prescriptions for coping with violent situations or surviving in them.

Another amazing discovery in the study of the Chechen war was an elusive, but real link between the realm of death and the realm of life, when the phenomenon of violence clearly demonstrates its affinity to the sphere of life manifestations. What is the principal difference of this approach and interest from many other records of violence and death by authors of various reports and histories of the brutal war? It is in trying to conceptualize war not only as death or crime, but as a form of life in its most extreme and dramatic manifestations. Air raids, artillery bombardment, battles, torture, executions, fear, and tears are inseparable from a variety of other human manifestations - namely: peace, victory, joy, songs, humor, rumors, boredom, war folklore, etc. It is important to see war not only as death and ruins, but as an inimitable recipe for the culture of survival absorbing many elements of economy, psychology, politics, mobilized socio-cultural institutions, and daily innovations.

War is not only in the trenches or on the battlefield. It is also in the people hiding in the cellar fearing that they may not be fast enough to dart out for getting some drinking water. It is in a mother’s horror when her teenage son has gone out and disappeared, or her daughter has caught the eyes of a squad of soldiers. It is in an endless crop of war stories in which fact and fancy are hard to sort out. And in lots and lots of other things. To show the variety of the ethnographic war palette let me quote two examples of life in war conditions:

*I stayed in the President’s palace to the last days. It was held mainly by lads from Dudayev’s guard - not more than 100 or 200 of them. I had a sore throat, couldn’t talk, was in high fever, with aches in all my bones. And I found a bottle of brandy in a cupboard - left by one of the commanders, I suppose. It was French cognac in a fancy bottle - I’d never seen such a bottle before. I wanted to open it, but the guys tried to stop me, said I shouldn’t drink or if I was killed I’d get into hell instead of heaven. I told them I wasn’t yet going there, but I needed something against my cold. I opened it and took a drink - and I felt better at once. I went and picked up the hand grenade-thrower to try to get the Russian sniper on the second floor - he’d held the corridor under fire for days and nobody could do anything about him. He shot at me, but missed, so I got closer to his window and blasted the spot where he was. And no more was heard from him. I went back to the guys to have another drink, but the bottle was empty. Still, my throat was better next day. (Akhyad)*

*I went to Chechnya during the war. I had a cousin in the Staropromyslovsky rayon [administrative part of Grozny]. When I came to her place, she wasn’t home. I was told she’d come at six. I decided to go to the center which was all in ruins. What could happen to me there? It was all fenced off. I went to the place where a garden used to be in the central square, sat down on a bench and tried to restore in my memory what it had looked like before. The weather was very hot, I was deep in thought. I was brought back to reality when I felt somebody standing over me. It was a Russian sol-*

*dier, from the armored vehicle which had stopped on the other side of the street. He demanded my documents. I rummaged in my bag - couldn't find my passport, found my post-graduate student card and produced it. He couldn't understand what it was, asked me where that college was. I said - in Moscow. He wanted to round me up for an identity check. I refused to come with him. I searched my bag again and found my passport with 600 dollars inserted in it which I was to hand over to my relatives. I was about to remove the money, but he grabbed it, counted it, and put it in his pocket.*

*'You are suspicious,' he said. - 'Why?' - 'You stayed in one place too long.' He threw such a look over me - I felt uncomfortable, I was sorry I was dressed brightly. His fellows called him, 'Leave her, let's go!' There was no one around, just an old Russian woman passed by and also said, 'Leave her, son, what are you doing?' He told her to mind her business.*

*At that moment some Chechen youths drove up in a black jeep, all dressed in black denim. 'What's going on?' one of them asked in Chechen. I could hardly answer, I was about to break down and cry. 'I'm taking her away,' he told the Russian soldier. 'I won't let you,' was the answer. The Chechen boy saw my passport and the money sticking out of the soldier's pocket, asked me, 'Is it yours?' and took them. He told me to get into their jeep, I bowed down and walked over to it, the soldier shot at me from behind. The bullet struck the jeep, it would've hit me hadn't I ducked. The two groups had a brawl between them, but no more shooting. Finally the Chechens got me away in their jeep and gave me back my passport and money. I never saw them again. I looked for them, asked around - they said, yes, there were such guys driving about in a black jeep, but I couldn't find them. It was in summer 1995. (Kheda A.)*

The two stories are somewhat similar, yet also different. The first one is one day in Akhyad's two years of war, the second is one day of war on a visit to Grozny in Kheda's otherwise peaceful life in Moscow. But the tension and fear are the same as in Akhyad's years of war (during which he begot two children in intervals between battles - 'it just took a day to visit home', he said).

Mass violence always needs the image of the enemy - a group or an institution that is to be punished or annihilated. That image is usually created and cultivated by the initiators of violence who use it as a means of mobilization or as a direct target. When violence escalates to an outright war - with a frontline and a military organization - the enemy image is simplified to the army sense of the word: those fighting across the dividing line, may be wearing a different uniform, may be speaking another language. But in internal conflicts the distinctions are vague. To the Chechens the enemy was defined as the 'Federals', 'Russians', 'occupants', 'aggressors', 'gyaours' (i.e. 'infidels'). To the federal Russian soldiers the enemy meant 'bandits', 'doukhi' (from the Afghan douchemans), 'nokhchi', 'Chechens', 'boyeviks', 'terrorists'. But under whatever name, they were 'not ours', though actually they were compatriots - as one of our Chechen informants put it, 'I could serve in the same army with them'.

How can such a deep split occur so suddenly, how does that 'enemy' notion permit the use of lethal weapons, removes the normal barrier to killing fellow-creatures? The question calls up another one: what is primary in the logic of violence - its object or its means? In the Chechen conflict and in Russia's overall context the latter question is quite appropriate. It is the access to weapons - a Kalashnikov or any other make of personal firearms - that dictates the need to devise an enemy image. Otherwise the armed personality loses all sense or purpose. Such sense and purpose are most often construed as defense (of one's life, home, family, country, etc.). When both arguments - the enemy and defense - fall in place, any violence in any form finds justification. In the Chechen conflict that happened at the stage of the already unleashed war. After December 1994 violence in Chechnya acquired a total character on both sides, it became unlimited and indiscriminate.

The image of the enemy crystallized and the violence erupted to a level unthinkable before at the moment when the federal forces were introduced in Chechnya and began a campaign of ruin first in Grozny, then also in other regions of the republic. The sequence of events in December 1994 and January 1995 has since been described many times, but it is little known what ordinary citizens and fighters on both sides experienced and felt.

### *Shock Experience*

Nearly all the stories we have about the beginning of the war contain the motif of disbelief and a sense of unreality of what was happening. The majority of the population felt they were citizens of the great country and even the most strenuous propaganda voiced in Grozny against Russia failed to make them think of rejecting that state or even the then federal powers. The march of the Russian army into Chechnya was met with shock and horror as something remote and hardly probable.

*I met the war in Grozny, but at first I failed to recognize it. I thought rather long that it was some kind of misunderstanding. It had never entered my head that such a thing was possible. I see now that the Soviet power had accustomed us to a kind of security: we felt that, with all its defects, it was our own state that could never turn against us. It was unthinkable that our country's authorities should kill their own people. My mind was all upside down. But the whole world had overturned. Yeltsin had defended the Soviet power and served it all his life. Then he became a turncoat, just as many other former regional Party secretaries or the Central Committee members. Giving it out as they'd been misled and now had their eyes opened, vilifying what they'd been serving all their lives. The same goes for the war: when it began, all things overturned. (Mudar)*

*Until 1993 I'd worked in my specialty on the state farm. Then it all fell to pieces - no work and, naturally, no pay. I had to make trips to Georgiyevsk to sell our home produce on the town market. My parents had long had no wages either. Mother had also worked on the state farm, father was a school master. It was a poor situation, but nobody supposed that a real horror was yet in store. Dec 11, 1994 my friend and I went to Malgobek. And on our way there we saw armored vehicles, tanks, riding over the fields and along the roads, with planes circling overhead. Some Ingush people tried to stop them on the border, but a tank just rode over three of them. All who were passing along the road or were near it were held up, their documents checked, their bags searched. It was a horrible picture, it seemed to us they were coming in such numbers that there must be ten soldiers and one tank per each Chechen man or woman. We understood something awful had begun and feared we wouldn't be able to get back home. When we finally got back in the evening, all our village was in high alarm for part of that armada had passed through our region. All were talking about what was happening, some thought naively that Russians had come to help us. One Hadja, they said, had even showered the tanks with flour blessing them. It turned out later they had shot thirteen people that day - a drunken captain amused himself that way. (Khava I.).*

Chechnya's people were most awfully shocked by the artillery bombardment and air bombing at the beginning of the war. The destruction and deaths were beyond any adequate reaction. People's minds were paralyzed with horror and helplessness. The cellars of apartment blocks were the only available shelters in the cities and the villages lacked even that. Air raids were made not only on Grozny, but also on other settlements. There are conclusive proofs that the greater part of casualties both among the combatants and the civilians occurred in the initial period of the war. Many cases are known when during the bitter fighting in Grozny and elsewhere the dead and the wounded were not picked up and taken away from the battlefield. The theme of abandoned bodies runs through many a war story complicated with monstrous rumors circulated and trusted after the war.

*I saw many terrible things. The value of human life in wartime is next to nothing. During the war bodies were stacked in piles in the streets and the Russians didn't let us bury them. At the outset of the war the Russians didn't count their dead. More exactly, they counted them, but kept no record of persons. Shall we say, a battalion of 100 has lost half its force, the commander presents 50 dead bodies, otherwise he's to be demoted or even arrested. So, if he hasn't the right number, his men pick up any corpses, let it be of Chechens, or even dig some up, let them be fresh, smash the heads to make identification impossible, and he signs the act of handing them over. That resulted in those mix-ups, when people in Russia didn't know who they buried. (Vissit M.).*

### ***The Cruelty of the Federals***

The treatment of civilian population by the federal forces gave rise to horrifying stories of cruelty towards Chechen men who were nearly all suspected of participation in the armed actions. Not even old men were spared who, about fifty years ago, had fought in the Second World War and had the status of Soviet war veterans, that entailed certain privileges. The shock experienced by those elders is indescribable. They felt they were persecuted by the generation of children whose future they had defended in the battles against Hitler's Germany.

*I always kept a cow - raised four grandchildren on the milk, thanks to my living in a suburb. The milk they sell in the government's shops - what good is it? Before the war the cattle kept around here made up a whole herd, we even had to hire a herdsman. When I was in better health, I took that job. As the war began, I hid my cow in a dugout. I'd made it in a former warehouse that had been ransacked, covered the entrance with old crates. My younger son helped me to feed and water it, and what a clever animal! - it never mooed since the war started, not a sound, just would look at you with its clever sad eyes.*

*But once we were caught by drunken soldiers. They hit my son on the head with a gun butt and dragged him into the house. I told them I was a war veteran, showed them my certificate, my war awards. And the sergeant smashed my last remaining teeth, said, 'I know you, you all shoot at us from behind.' They beat us up. Never mind me, it was my son, just seventeen, I was worried for. They put us against a wall, prepared to shoot us down. I could hardly stand, they'd hurt my one good kidney, my son supported me. Young as he was, he never even moaned. At that moment a captain walked in from the street. Asked what was going on. They answered, 'doing away with enemies'. 'What enemies - this old man and his boy?' Then the sergeant ran up to my son and shoved something in his pocket. I looked - a handful of cartridge-cases. I was flabbergasted. But the captain was an experienced man, he didn't believe the sergeant. He looked at my son's hands - no traces of weapons on them. He went to report to the battalion commander and told the soldiers to do nothing till his return. We waited, I fell down again. The young guard who'd been left with us was sorry for me. His name was Ravil. My son had revived a little and asked the guard to let him go feed the cow, 'I'll come back, I can't leave my father alone.' Ravil went to ask the sergeant for permission. The sergeant came back with two drunken soldiers and let us off to feed the cow, 'You have half an hour, don't come back before that.' I didn't see at first why. But when we returned, they were gone, the house was robbed. They'd cleared out everything - all the valuables, even my son's tape recorder hidden in the larder under old rags, all the warm clothes too. And what they couldn't carry, they'd mucked up. But never mind our possessions. My son changed since that time, became sad and silent, not bitter, but withdrawn. (Vadud)*

No less tragic was the situation of those Chechens who had served in the local militia and thought of themselves as Russia's loyal citizens. They were automatically rolled up together with the 'enemy' by the federal forces, though some of them had welcomed the introduction of the troops in the hope they might restore order in the republic. In fact, there is much evidence

that the unleashed violence and social decay had affected the Chechens not less than the Russians.

*I'm convinced now that war is always senseless. It's dark, insane. I had a neighbor, a lieutenant-colonel of militia, young for his rank. When the federal troops came, they began a house-to-house search for weapons. I was away on a trip then, but my wife saw that man hand over his regulation gun to the patrol, produce his documents. She heard him address them as comrades and colleagues, 'Well, lads, we'll soon put things here to order', he said. The commander of the patrol accepted his gun and then roared, 'To the wall, black mug!' and discharged his magazine into him. Later it became known those were contract soldiers recruited in prisons.*

*People were seized in the streets, in the cellars. Some of them were former officials with papers and guarantees from central high institutions or from Grozny's commandant. Such citizens were allowed, as a legal formality, to pass through the nearest blockpost. And when they relaxed believing Russia's lawful authorities had taken over, they were rounded up and shot dead - the whole crowd, young and old, women too, and hastily buried in common graves. I happened to dig up and take away from those pits the bodies of people known to me. Enough of it, I can't tell you any more. (Said M.)*

Subsequent investigations by human rights organizations failed to find such mass burials containing 'men and women, young and old'. It could be an exaggeration produced by a traumatized mind. Nevertheless, I proceed from the position of trust towards my informants, for even if their stories contain some exaggeration, that also has a certain socio-cultural meaning. With all their improbability and absurdity, some observations look to us doubtless and important.

First, this is the role of alcohol - that constant companion and condition of violence in Chechnya on the part of the federal army. Alcohol is not only Russia's socio-cultural problem of a national scale, but the scourge of its politics and its armed forces. During the war vodka was supplied to Chechnya in enormous quantities. It was ubiquitous: from high-level HQ-s to soldiers' knapsacks. Alcoholic intoxication relieved a man of moral constraints and legal barriers. A drunken commander was likely to organize and order violence with more ease though with less competence. Russia's civil and military leaders including the then Defense Minister Pavel Grachov regularly consumed large dozes of alcohol while being in Chechnya. The Minister was not sober during most of his meetings with journalists, which was recorded by TV cameras. His fatal decision to send a tank column in a storm to Grozny on the New Year night of 1995 was taken in a state of alcoholic intoxication. Many officers and rank-and-file soldiers were drunk during the military actions. That certainly exacerbated the unjustified cruelty and disproportionate violence demonstrated by the Federals. As a journalist remarked upon arriving in Vladikavkaz from Ingushia after the first day of the war, with his camera smashed and his car bullet-holed, 'They are nearly all drunk there and it looks no-limit is the order of the day.'

Second, it is important how the violence has been met in a society which has been usually depicted as intrinsically violent because of a totalitarian political regime. The war was an unprecedented situation for the civilian population of Chechnya. Most of the people - Chechens, Ingush, and Russians - grew up in peace time after the Second World War, at least since their return from exile in 1957. This generation had never witnessed such hostilities, nor experienced mass violence against civilians on the part of their own army. So, their first reaction was shock and disbelief, perception of the events as a bad dream or a tragic mistake. Therefore they felt despair and helplessness over their inability to launch a complaint or protest or to influence the situation in any way. But the worst was their fear for their lives and their families and concern over their property.

### *The Cruelty of the Chechens*

There emerged an extensive mythology of the Chechens' cruelty among Russia's military and society at large. However, some evidence collected by human rights organizations confirms it. Widespread were torture of the wounded and desecration of the dead. Captured contract soldiers and air-force pilots were nearly always executed. Rank-and-file conscripts were held hostage and used as slave-labor for various works from building fortifications to domestic chores. It was after the war that the lucrative business developed of holding hostages to ransom and subjecting them demonstratively to torture and mutilation. That was often video-taped to hand the cassette to the family of the prisoner to urge their paying the ransom.

*After Grozny was taken by the Russians, we didn't let them relax for a day. The war was cruel, of course. The fighters of our battalion never took Russian prisoners, they killed even the wounded. There were some sadists among us who enjoyed cutting up Russian prisoners, letting out their entrails. I never did that, I find it revolting. I wouldn't do that to a pig. Most of our lads disliked and condemned it.*

*Once our commander saw the sullen middle-aged man Shakhri who'd recently joined us start cutting up a shot Russian prisoner. He shot that man dead with his own hands in front of the battalion. Later it turned out that sullen man had come out of a lunatic asylum. But I admit we had all sorts of men. And I think we were all brutalized by the war. Then, I, for one, have never liked Russians because I heard so many stories of what they did to Chechens in 1944 and after our return from exile. (Khizir I.)*

*I never thought such a war was possible at the end of the XX<sup>th</sup> century. It was the first time such things happened to us. I had a sense of nightmare. Houses turned to skeletons, trees burnt to charcoal. In May we returned to the city. We reopened our business, but we had few customers. We had no contacts with soldiers. Lawlessness ruled the city. Soldiers rolled in tanks about the streets at a high speed, crushing the cars. We were always in fear. We witnessed an incident in our market: two Russian officers with a girl walked about the market looking at expensive audio and video equipment. They stopped to buy some tapes and found the price too high. They just took the tapes and were about to leave without paying. The seller asked them to pay, and the girl snapped at him, 'You can do without it, black mug.' Then, in an instant, a young man, of an intellectual appearance, stopped by, grabbed the girl by the hair, and shot down her throat. She fell, and he shot down the officer who was next to her, ran into the market pavilion and was lost in the crowd. The guards held us up at gunpoint demanding who had fired. All were frightened terribly, dived under the stalls. I thought it was the end, I hardly hoped to get back home. The market was surrounded by troops, a search was mounted, but that man was never found. It was perfect work - he made them pay dearly for their words. Russians were often killed in public places, in large crowds. They provoked people by their vulgarity and insults, behaving like masters. Few of our people can stand it. (unidentified informant)*

This conflict invented a new form of sophisticated violence-cum-business. That is taking hostages for ransom or exchange. Chechens insists that it were the Federals who started to use this practice first when, right after the invasion of troops into Chechnya in December 1994, they had arrested many men and detained them in special 'filtration camps'. One of the ways to escape sufferings and tortures in these camps was an exchange of captured Russian military or important civilians, or journalists. Sometimes they just demanded to pay money for the release of detained Chechens. In a mean time, this practice has started earlier and especially flourished among Chechen fighting groups which were not subordinated to high commanders. By Russian official data, since 1992, there were about 1800 people abducted in Chechnya, and only 892 were released or exchanged.

### Part 3. Post-conflict Discourse

*Today, many people talk about whether it would have been possible to avoid the war. We are not destined yet to know all the details, but I think it was a fatum. Dzhokhar has nothing to do with it. If not him, then somebody else. It was impossible to avoid this war because it has been planned somewhere on a top. I am absolutely sure that there are no winners in this war and that there cannot be any after so great losses on both sides. (Ilyas)*

*I think that this war has brought up all sorts of scum and vermin from the bottom of the mire. And it will take a huge effort to force them back into the pit. The evil one lurks in all men and any mutiny or armed clash will always loosen their moral barriers. The result is a fiendish whirl which is hard to stop. (Mussa P.)*

*War, death, and ruin - those horrors are right under our feet, so close to us that a man can sink into the abyss any time. It means that the very foundation of human life is insecure. In fact, we all walk, as it were, over a thin crust and may fall through it into the depth at any moment. (Said M.)*

This section is about how the war has been perceived, discussed and propagated in the Chechen society after August 1996. Military success over the Federals made the conflict into textbook category of “The Second Russo-Chechen War” (meaning under ‘first war’ Imam Shamil resistance during the Caucasian War in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century). Warlords who all took power over the Chechen people unleashed a brutal and messy style of governance. Those few intellectuals left in Chechnya rushed into primitive but effective glorification of “the greatest victory in military history”. Apart from apologetic versions, I discovered internal indigenous versions of the war as well as surrounding politics and participating individuals. Mythopoetic images and explanations of violence demonstrated how deeply traumatized and socially destroyed the Chechen society is after the war. A society which became a hostage of militant sects, and a society of militants - hostages of decrepit doctrines and unrealized political projects on the part of mainly external actors.

The constant characteristic of any violence is that it can never last interminably, but will sooner or later come to an end. This is its basic difference from peace which owing to its ‘functional naturalness’ can last indefinitely, sometimes very long. Some communities and societies have done without violence and war ever since their formation as social coalitions and this ‘society at peace’ phenomenon attracts new attention among students of war and violence.<sup>8</sup> Practically all accept the postulate that it is violence and war that interrupt peaceful life, not the other way around. Though the history books seem to tell us an endless story of wars and other dramatic events just following a genre of popular narration.

Why is it then that violence, which may also last rather long and acquire a cyclic character, will always have to peter out or even be replaced by positive cooperation between former enemies? How does it happen that after most devastating wars resulting in huge losses and ruin which seem to only build up the symbolic capital of violence, there comes a turn of the social process in the opposite direction? The formerly non-negotiable principles suddenly become a matter of concessions, and the irreconcilable enemies become partners - even to the point of sharing the Nobel peace prize. That is what we witnessed in the Middle East, Northern Ireland, and Salvador. But what a learning curve has come from this modest experience for our case?

Serious prospects for breaking escalating violence emerged several times in the course of the Chechen war: at the time of the Budennovsk hostages crisis, after signing the Nazran agree-



ments in June 1996 and then after signing the Khasavyurt agreements in August 1996. And the Russian minister Mikhailov (main negotiator in Nazran) later quoted the Chechen President Aslan Maskhadov as saying in June 1996, "We, the Chechens, are emotional people, and we'll be able to get over it all and forget it in favor of good relations with the Russians."<sup>9</sup> Why in this case did not lasting peace come to Chechnya? This question is not only for political scientists and for practical negotiators. This is a cultural issue as well, especially when looking not only at institutional failure but at what people were talking about.

In the conflicts on the territory of the former USSR and in other regions of the world we observed time and again that in the course of talks, in a situation of peace, there emerged a sense of absurdity of the occurred violence and inability to explain how the horror had come about. The lines of functional interaction ousted as less important the former divisions on ethnic, religious, or doctrinal lines. The question 'What were we fighting for?' becomes central in the public and political discourse, particularly among the rank-and-file participants in the events. We have recorded these reflections among the Chechens including the most active fighters and political militants. Whereas the previous section of my paper dealt with the ideological preparation of the war, the mobilization and the legitimization of violence, here we are interested in the indigenous versions of the war after its past drama. Actually, it happened between two cycles of violence because a new war erupted in the fall of 1999.

The total violence of a full-scale war takes a long time to get over and is subject to an intensive discussion among victims after its end. The past experience of violence enters the daily life and politics, particularly where the conflict was not resolved by a positive peace, even though Yeltsin and Maskhadov may have announced in the Kremlin that Russia's 400-year-long fight with the Chechens was over with the signing of a three sentence document in May 1997.

The people in Chechnya went on thinking and talking of the war after the end of hostilities in August 1996. Most of our interviews date to the period right after the war when the triumphant local propaganda 'of the greatest ever victory over the world's largest army' had not yet conditioned the mass consciousness. That was a time for deep and painful reflections by ordinary people who found themselves in a desperate situation. For sure, not all of them and not all the time.

While on the political/activist levels from Grozny to Washington (I mean the audience I observed at the conference organized by the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace in September 1996) victorious euphoria and a spirit of getting rewards reigned, the local society has been in a state of disarray. Few of our interviews, even those given by Dudayev's devoted followers, were single-mindedly apologetic in their evaluation of the past war. And their apologetics did not follow the lines of official slogans, such as 'a just war for independence' or 'a national revolution', but were consciously simplified to *gazavat* [holy war] for their homes and their families. We came across only one pronouncement that was unquestionably in favor of the war:

*I'm a working man and I don't know any of your intellectual ruses. I can give you my story simply, without any fancy. The war was just, it was gazavat. I had expected that war all my life, because people had grown to be unruly, self-willed. That had to be put an end to. Order should be first in all things. (Khalid)*

The theme of *gazavat* emerged again in an interesting interpretation, as an outside scenario, while there were no other choice for the Chechens:

*Most of the Chechen people didn't want that war. They were pulled in, immersed in it against their will. That can best be seen on the example of the notion of gazavat. One of the most respected theologians in Chechnya who had twice held the post of Mufti said at the beginning of the war that by the Islamic canon it wasn't gazavat. He was removed from office and replaced by a more accommodating man who changed his principles like gloves. But the people didn't trust him. Then our leaders resorted to some foreign Islamic authorities who equated our war with those in Yugoslavia, Afghanistan, India and declared the Chechens were in the first ranks of fighters for the faith. But after the horrible genocide of 1944 in which the Chechens lost nearly half their number they were unwilling to accept the dubious honor of dying as one man in the name of the global gazavat. They didn't feel ready now to be wiped out of their historic territory for that idea.*

*I'm no good at theology, but I think that only in the last months of the war we could call it gazavat. By that time all our people's economic and cultural life had been ruined. A majority of Chechen families had lost some of their members, many families had perished altogether. The barbarous mass bombing and shelling of civilians which went on to the accompaniment of Zavgayev's cynical talk about Chechnya's clear sky put in question the very existence of our people. Then those who had so far stayed apart took up arms. They had no choice. It was a matter of life or death for our nation. We had been decimated, and the bombardment of towns and villages had grown even worse. (Said M.)*

An apologetic version, particularly by a direct participant of the war, often contains the motif of being forced to fight under moral obligations or out of despair, when 'our hands reached for the arms involuntarily to defend our homes and families.' This is the most wide-spread version which has gained still more ground among the Chechens in the zones occupied by the federal troops in the new round of war in autumn 1999.

*When the war began my brother-in-law was killed. Then my niece was taken away by the Russian troops and we haven't found her to this day. Then Russian troops began to extort money for the bodies of Chechens killed by them. And my hands reached for the arms involuntarily. I sold my Moskvich car and bought an automatic gun. I can tell you that our army wasn't really provided with arms. Dudayev and his pack had sold all the weapons left by the Soviet Army before the war. Actually, Dudayev had no proper army - no call up, no strategic reserves. It was all bluff that Dudayev had some sort of secret weapons, that he would make war on the enemy's territory, that he would blow up the atomic power plants there - nothing but barefaced shameless lies. He had no fronts, no army. What sort of army could it be, tell me, if at the peak of the war he had a few over 1000 men moving from place to place in the mountains? Two brigade generals per each ten men - just a laugh, like kids playing war. And with that baloney he hoodwinked the whole nation - I could howl with vexation! The real war began when the people took up arms to defend their homes and their families. Look at me - I hadn't wanted to make war. But no, they made me! I knew about the contract soldiers with their atrocities and outrages. When I thought that my daughter could fall into their hands, my hands reached for the gun. So I had to take part in the war. (Kyura)*

On November 30<sup>th</sup>, 1999 Russia's Independent TV channel transmitted a talk between the federal troops and the people of a Chechen settlement vacated by the boyeviks at the request of its population and then occupied by the Russian army without fighting:

- *And you, did you fight in that first war?* - the Russian general asks a young man.

- *No, I didn't take part in the war, I just defended my village from both the Russian army, and the boyeviks, and from some sort of bearded Arabs.*

The man is wearing a new camouflage uniform of the Russian army (the common attire of all combatants on both sides) with a Kalashnikov at the shoulder - a member of a new Chechen armed formation led by Beslan Gantamirov, opponent of President Maskhadov, organizer of a new Chechen resistance to 'international terrorists and their sponsors'. How can we penetrate the thoughts and motives of that young Chechen man? It may be a world of moral drama, or of much simpler practical decisions. We may misunderstand even that simplicity - easy for choosing the line of behavior, but still hard in the sense of elementary survival. **We can't expect each individual in the extreme situation of an armed conflict, under discordant ideological impacts, to devise a consistent and highly-motivated life strategy, even less to indulge in self-reflection. In conditions of total violence all thoughts and energy are likely to be chained to the current moment of existence (whence to expect bombing or shooting, where to run for safety, where to get food and water, how to get warm, etc.). It's not for us to sit in moral judgement.**

### *War as Evil Conspiracy*

The most common version of the war among the Chechens is that it was a dark conspiracy against the people by self-interested forces - above all, leaders bent on deceiving the people with sham slogans and promises, aiming to 'anger the Chechens', to make them killers against their own will. This version is quite different from those which dominated during the war: national revolution, liberation war, resistance to aggression, defense of motherland, etc. It is a legitimization of the violence through rejecting it as an imposed action which was unwanted by the ordinary people, but which occurred because they had no part in deciding the issue. The people are seen as victims, not as the main force of historical events which is always right, as represented by Yandarbiyev and other ideologists of the Chechen resistance. This evil conspiracy version is often extended to be applied to all Russia whose people fell victim to machinations of politicians and businessmen. There is yet another version - that the war was utterly senseless.

*It was the dirtiest war, the most criminal and disgusting of all I ever happened to read about. In other wars the ruling elite would often betray its people and gain fabulous profits from their country's bloodshed. But here a man who was alien to our nation by his origin, faith, upbringing, language, and way of life succeeded in deceiving it, tempting and mesmerizing it as if with a siren's voice. He led it astray like the Pied Piper of Hamelin and drowned it in its own blood. He buried our people under the debris of their own homes. By the way, it was noted by many that while Dudayev traveled around in his comfortable wagon equipped with all conveniences and means of communication, the federal aviation would always make a raid on the place where he'd stopped about seven or ten minutes after his departure. But where in history could you find another nation that being led to the slaughter would applause its idol, make verses in his honor, and extol him above the prophets? (Alik, schoolmaster)*

*I think that people of different nationalities, Russians and Chechens in the first place, were made to get at each other's throats like wild beasts by the leaders on both sides. I'm convinced that the war was needed by politicians in order to divert the conflagration to Russia's outskirts. And in the long run the war benefited businessmen who had unleashed it to batten on the blood of both peoples, to*

*rob Russia, to break its back, so that it could never rise again. I'd bring to the people's justice those men of Jewish and Chechen origin who have made great fortunes on the war, who possess as a result villas and yachts from Switzerland to the Canary Islands and from America to Israel. (Mudar)*

*I rack my brain over the question: was it worthwhile destroying the Chechen republic, killing tens of thousands of people, in order to bring to power a bunch of mere nobodies, of dirty rascals and adventurers? What kind of sovereignty or national freedom is it that we had to pay such a price for them? I can swear, I polled people about it, that 99% of our population don't understand that word 'sovereignty', and never thought of the USSR as an empire. The Chechen men had actually made good business by traveling all over the country as seasonal labor. I know from my own experience that the ordinary people of all nations never think of sovereignty as long as it doesn't come to war. Isn't that a paradox of history? The people had no wish, no intention to fight, but politicians made them kill each other. It's a true saying that history can't teach us any lessons... (unidentified informant)*

*The war stunned me, I was lost. I'd had a good business, I'd been doing well. Maybe for that reason it seemed to me the war would soon come to a close. They would shoot a little, I thought, then write off some machinery, property, and ammunition, as usual, and that would be the end of it. But no, month after month the war went on. At first they threw young pups, untrained conscripts, into it. Later I understood they had done it deliberately to anger the people, to stir up mutual hatred. Then both sides used contract soldiers - mercenaries. I saw they aimed at mass murder of civilian population, or they'd never get a full-scale war needed by the instigators. They must have pursued their own deep and far-reaching goals, and the people were doomed. When I saw my whole nation was at stake, that huge fortunes were being made on its blood, villas and palaces were built in the West, also palaces in Chechnya raised on the people's bones, I couldn't stay aside. I left my family and returned to Chechnya from Dagestan by mountain paths. Grozny was destroyed, villages were smoking in ruins, there was no family that hadn't lost some of its members. I was caught under fire many times, my house had been blown up. I went to live with my parents, but I still refrained from taking up arms. Something held me back, though I'm far from a timid man, I'd never hesitate to fight for the right cause.*

This version sometimes has the motif of temptation added to it: the restraint and non-interference of 'honest and decent people' were broken in the course of the events by slogans, promises, and expected rewards.

*I keep thinking of the destiny of our people led into temptation by slogans. I'm convinced that the people didn't want war, or gazavat. They were involved in it, forced to make war. A majority of what we call honest and decent citizens preferred for a long time the position of non-interference, as observers. They hoped things would settle down, the unrest would subside, life would take its normal course. It wasn't indifference. It was hope that their restraint and self-control would help bring about peace and calm. Vain hopes, only playing into the hands of those who had immersed the people in the slaughter. And when it happened, the way back was just as hard as the way forward. (Said M.)*

*I didn't even want to hear of that man Dudayev, but he turned out to be our Commander-in-Chief. But I can tell you it was so only in words. There was no single system of command. When we were in the mountains, suffering from cold in our dugouts in the forest, I never heard his name mentioned. Never a word of encouragement from the commandment, nor even first aid materials sent from them. So many of our wounded died for lack of proper medication and bandages. The war wasn't won by Dudayev, but by the people. When they saw what the Russian soldiers were doing, they understood what was in store for them, and their wrath boiled up. So, it was the people's militia that was the main force, and Dudayev had little to do with it, just as some of the fronts' commanders. I saw them: shall we say, our guys would win an operation by their own wits, then a commander would pop up from nowhere. He hadn't even known about it before, but after the victory he would jump on the*

wagon - analyze what was right and what was wrong. But the fighters on the spot saw much better what to do. (Taus A.).

The indigenous version of the war comes not from the Chechen propagandists or politicians, but from those who ‘hailed dead bodies for identification’. Those men were neither among the instigators, nor the perpetrators of violence. They were a sort of scouts or porters - one might call them Sherpas of that war. One of them suggested an oddly mystic interpretation of war and death as an existential substance which is ‘right under our feet’. The gist of his idea is that though violence is not what the human society is exclusively made for, it is always near at hand, and the line dividing war and peace, life and death, is very fragile, so that ‘we can fall into the abyss any time.’ That gives war a truly mystic religious sense: it is seen as the inferno, the anti-life.

*I took bodies in my truck to Urus-Martan, to the Terek, to be identified by their relatives. And people were, on the whole, grateful to me. I happened to find the remains of people I'd known, sometimes for years, or all my life. We'd gone to school together or met while bringing up our children. Our town is small, we all know each other, at least remember the faces. I understood then that war isn't always brought to us from outside. War, death, and ruin - those horrors are right under our feet, so close to us that a man can sink into the abyss any time. It means that the very foundation of human life is insecure. In fact, we all walk, as it were, over a thin crust and may fall through it into the depth at any moment. The bodies I hauled had quite recently been live people who loved, hoped, trusted. Then the crust cracked under their feet and they fell into the dark pit. I can't forget the body of a young man - fair, handsome, casually clad in jeans. So pure, tranquil, so beautiful - as if asleep. With a bunch of wilted roses still clutched in his hand... It's not often you'd see a Chechen boy carrying flowers - he must have been going to meet a girl, may be give her flowers for her birthday. He must have just left home, bought a bunch of flowers, and then was suddenly caught in an unexpected air-raid. His body was piled up with others, the bunch of roses still in his hand. He hadn't even changed his good-natured expression, his face seemed alive, only one of his shoes was missing. He looked as if he'd just risen from looking for his lost shoe and to go on his way. (Said M.)*

### **War as Collective Madness and Inferno**

Close to this version is the motif of a ‘stirred up bog’, somewhat like a modern thriller, with all kinds of ‘vermin’ and ‘monsters’, ‘the black fiends’ lurking in a man’s soul or living next to him released to do their carnage.

*I think that this war has brought up all sorts of scum and vermin from the bottom of the mire. And it will take a huge effort to force them back into the pit. The evil one lurks in all men and any mutiny or armed clash will always loosen their moral barriers. The result is a fiendish whirl which is hard to stop. Now the boyeviks strut around with their dirty beards, decorated with rows of medals, sleeping with their automatics. How could anyone make them work even if there were jobs for them? Or send them to study. They don't want any of it, they are used to ‘free life’ and easy gain. So, they roam our roads robbing people, pretending to fine drivers as traffic police. I think we need a ruler with an iron hand who would be able to curb all those unleashed ‘fiends’ - or we'll never do any good. (Mussa P.)*

This version of collective insanity was not the most popular in Chechnya with its extreme ideological stance, but still no less important and interesting for understanding the local war-torn society. It was valid for the deeply traumatized people whose familiar social environment had been disrupted by the war and its aftermath - the rat race for power, privileges, and lucra-

tive posts among those who, in their eyes, had no right to command or sit in judgement over others according to some new laws.

After the war there came a stark situation which polarized society into those who had taken part in the war and therefore claimed their rights to all the best things, and those who had not fought and now had to knuckle under. The 'war veterans' ruled the day: nearly every village had its armed veteran who told people what to do. In Kheda Abdullaeva's village, she said, people went now to seek his judgement in any dispute which the local authorities were powerless to solve, 'and he just sat there with his automatic and ordered people about though he was incompetent in most questions and hadn't enjoyed any public respect before the war.'

**In post-war Chechnya there emerged a new social hierarchy and norms of behavior which had to be accepted by the population against their will for they found themselves to be hostages of an armed sect. The Chechen people compared that kind of life to that of some primitive African tribes (as far as they knew about them from reading). Their new destiny increasingly worried them and roused their protest and rejection.**

Hence came the motif of 'tribal savagery' which is close to our academic notion of demodernization, though they have some different nuances of meaning.

*My son has lost his hearing. I also suffered from shell-shock - my memory is weak now. But what did we fight for, I ask you? After the war all rushed to seek some official posts, to occupy the seats of the 'khalims'. But most of them are ignorant or at least little qualified for the jobs. They've never worked in the government apparatus, have no proper notion of official service, they mix up the state institution with their own house. Long queues of more post-seekers wait at their doors - all their relatives. I guess African chiefs behave that way. But then it isn't a state, it's just tribal life. We aren't developed enough for a proper state. What did we fight for then? Though my sons have obtained official posts, I still doubt that we can build a real state. Other people must also be thinking about it, just as I am. And to evade the issue of what so many people died for, they answer - 'for freedom'.*

*But what kind of freedom is it if the commanders have built for themselves mansions costing hundreds of thousands of dollars, and ordinary people are desperate with poverty, starvation, and hopelessness? How can those commanders sleep peacefully in their mansions and feast in company with their many wives? It's their vogue now to vie with each other for the number of wives. Of course, an Islamic state permits them to have at least four wives. But there are many ambitious young men who are less lucky and who will certainly try to win for themselves a place under the sun of power, moving up or ousting the present masters. That means we can't have either freedom or stability in the near future.*

*In general, I think that people without education will never be able to build a proper state. We must treasure educated, knowledgeable people, collect them, invite them to take part in the government. But the present rulers are afraid of intelligent and competent specialists. They are busy providing posts for all the boyeviks and do nothing to consolidate society for building our first state. They think that a state can abide the co-existence of several private armies, but such a thing was never successful in history. If even I can see it - a man who has worked a lifetime in cooperative trade - why isn't it clear to those who claim the supreme state power? No, things won't work this way, we seem to have badly strayed aside from the right direction. And again, in fear of the question what so many people died for, we say - for the revolution, for freedom. (Vissit M.)*

The theme of delusion and deception is continued in the theatre of the absurd into which the post-war Chechnya has turned. The absurdity is seen in the new forms of injustice, in the low

motivations of people after all the total violence they suffered. Some of our respondents comment sadly that ‘people have changed little’ as a result of the war:

*My attitude towards any war is negative. There are no issues that can't be settled over the negotiating table. The war was a great tragedy. But I hoped that having passed through that hell people would come out morally purified, with better values. But when I was in Grozny in February 1995, I was surprised to hear my neighbors talk not of the ruined city, but of what had been stolen from them. It made me sick to hear that. The war hadn't changed all people. (Ramzan Dzh.)*

*My native village X. is three times smaller than Aleroi and we never had any boyeviks in it. But when summer came, ours was bombed onto the ground, and not one bomb or shell fell on Aleroi. Our village is where the Mufti of Chechnya has his residence. At the height of fighting he faced his house with marble. And that was the only house which remained untouched with even one stray bullet. I just couldn't understand how it was: our modest little houses, like mine for instance, our unpretentious settlement - except the Mufti's residence, of course - bombed to pieces, and Aleroi left unscathed. Do you think the Russians didn't know the boyeviks had their head-quarters there and their best experienced troops? Of course they knew, but they didn't touch them. I'm quite baffled over it. A strange kind of war. It would seem real - so many people killed, such devastation. But with all that, it was also a kind of theatre, pretence, make-belief, as if children playing a war game. (Ismail K.)*

**That leads us to consider war not only in the usual dramatic light as irrational and anti-social, but also as part of man-constructed cultural performance. War and violence are part of life, not just the domain of death. As such, they have their own legitimization, i.e. justification, or explanation.** However, the ordinary human mind finds it hard to accept this theoretical premise. It is more inclined to mythic or poetic versions, even to literary borrowings. Here is an interesting reference to Cervantes:

*I had my family moved to the mountains and then withdrew from the fighting. They found me after some time, asked me to return. I said no, I'm already over age. I had such a revulsion from war and from all mankind, come to that. I took a job as a guard, couldn't find any other. I wanted to be a forester - I come of the mountain Chechens, after all. But what's left of our forest now! During the war unleashed by Dudayev they had cut down all the valuable timber for firewood because there was no other heating source. But war got me again in August 1996. You wouldn't believe it was a real war, in earnest, if only they hadn't killed so many people, hadn't destroyed towns and villages. There was a lot of play-acting about it: brigade generals, generalissimos, fronts - all kinds of nonsense. I read Don Quixote, how he fought with giants. His eyesight was sort of dimmed. So was Dudayev with his generals playing the game of war, but the people had their eyesight dimmed. And they were beaten nearly to extinction for it. I can't help being sorry for them - dying like that for nothing. (Kyura)*

To sum up we consider the phenomenon of violence as a variety of human actions, norms, and ideas in a specific socio-cultural (viz. Chechen) context. **One of our general conclusions is that the crucial factor in explaining a violent conflict is its context as a methodological condition which, in turn, follows from recognizing the primary importance of a specific social situation for the interpretation of human institutions and behavior. The main thing is to study in various social environments concrete human responses to the general existential problems including war.**

That methodological condition helped us to consider the Chechen war more adequately from the point of view of ordinary Chechen people rather than of their self-styled leaders, semi-



educated ideologists, and field commanders. The scale of violence experienced (and partly perpetrated) by the Chechens looks irrational and cannot be legitimate either socially or morally. But during the war the Chechen society still demonstrated certain sociality, let it be distorted, aimed at cooperation and peaceful behavior. The phenomenon of demodernization manifested itself in that society falling victim, or hostage, (more exactly surrendering) to a small but powerful group of protagonists of a violent scenario, participants in new geopolitical rivalries pursuing global 'de-communization', 'de-colonization', and 'islamization'. **Not even the end of the war in 1996 released Chechnya from the imposed role of the vanguard in fighting against 'the last empire'. No positive peace was obtained by post-war Chechnya, which was fraught with a new cycle of violence, a new war. In the fall of 2000, Chechnya is still not free of this usurpation and it is one of the main post-conflict reconstruction strategies to empower local people with the assurance that they can think and act along their own visions and interests.**

#### **Part 4. In the Name of the 'Great People'**

*This war is a dirty business. On the other hand, this is a revolution, it can't be without some dirt. We are creating our first state - a tall task, isn't it? And with the kind of people we have I'm not sure we can do it. Commanders are like wolves, always ready to get at each other's throats. Yandarbiyev against Maskhadov, Basayev, too, ready to tear him to pieces. Gelayev is a loner. And Maskhadov, he's a military man, not a politician, not an organizer. He's been president nearly a year. What has changed? A few poor women badly in need of some wages sweep the street from one end to the other - that's all the economic revival we have. Maskhadov is incompetent in selecting his cadres. First he proclaimed he was going to give employment to all the veteran combatants (he said they were a few hundred). But now the number of those dirty beards is over 70 thousand. How can you feed so many scroungers? What sort of a state is this? It's a lawless band. (Vissit M.)*

It is not easy to reconstruct what happened to the war-torn society in the three years until the outbreak of a new war in autumn 1999. Many things are known: the damaged environment, the exodus of the population, the economic collapse, the hard social problems, the power crisis, the disintegration of civil institutions, the religious and inter-clan clashes, the armed sects' terror against the rest of the population, criminal business of kidnapping and selling hostages. Still something important, if not the main is missing in the picture. How does Chechnya differ from other societies that have gone through deep violent conflicts? How people were muddling through in their everyday strategies? How, after this conflict, does Chechnya differ from the rest of the Russian Federation? And why did a new cycle of violence erupt - a new war with no speedy *finale*?

#### **The Illusion of 'a Great Victory'**

The main thing is that the war did not really end for Chechnya in August 1996. The war went on in the minds and actions of many people, particularly the armed 'veterans', the neophyte politicians, and the 'warriors of intellectual front' (poets, journalists, historians, and others). The war was daily replayed in the propaganda of the 'great victory', in extolling the Chechen military gallantry, in asserting Chechen superiority over the rest of the world, in cultivating the image of the enemy - Russia and the Russians, and in ideological messianism, particularly in the form of the 'Caucasian liberation project'. The war was also fanned by many outsiders - the inveterate supporters of Chechnya's independence from Russia. It was these actors who generated exalted romantic (mytho-poetic) attitudes and superficial historical references that inspired part of the local society to follow the path of uncompromising secession and further

social disruption under the slogan of 'national state'. In 1999, Dmitri Furman, editor of the book "Chechnya and Russia: Societies and States" writes in the preface, "The Chechens' resistance and victory were a kind of miracle, which were made possible by the same reasons that had led to the war. If the Chechens had a different system of values and a different historic memory, if they had been led not by ignorant(semi-literate) field commanders, many of them with a criminal past, but by usual ('normal') post-Soviet communist party officials turned nationalists, - in a word, if the Chechens were more rational, 'modern' people, they would have never risked such a resistance and, still less, would have won. For such a war and a victory they needed complete unwillingness and inability to 'bow (subdue) to reality' - only that helps to reverse and overcome this very reality. The Chechen resistance was led by two factors: the desperate resolve by a (the) people that had been subjected to genocide to never let that happen again (similar to the Jews whose tiny state defeated huge Arab armies) and a revolutionary popular upsurge, similar to the victorious French revolutionary wars or the Bolshevik army defeating the flower of old Russia's officers and generals supported by nearly all outside world."<sup>10</sup>

Seeing the rise of extreme anti-Semitism in the post-war Chechnya, one may suppose the comparison with the Jews is not exactly flattering to the "Frenchmen of the Caucasus", but the parallels with the French revolution and the Bolsheviks are quite inspiring to them for they had been nurtured for decades on those heroic images. "The people" (in Furman's terms) went still further in their heroic fantasies and victorious projects: "If the Chechens made war with all the available forces, they might go as far as La Manche," declared Aslan Maskhadov soon after his inauguration as the President of Chechnya.

All those three years Chechnya was moving towards a new war, as though literally taking the advice given by the well-known Moscow ultra-radical activist Valeria Novodvorskaya in an interview with Chechen television, "A peace treaty is a good thing, of course. But knowing how unpredictable Russia is, I would advise the Chechens to trust Allah, but to keep the camel tied up. As long as the Chechens have arms, the peace will be observed. So, they should not lay arms down. Russia is a godless country where Patriarch Alexis II is a KGB man who gives a blessing to Russian soldiers going to war with Chechnya, as if killing civilians was charity, or opposes taking Lenin's mummy out of the Mausoleum. Therefore, the Chechens should by no means lay down arms if they want peace." (*Put Dzhokhara* No.9, July 28<sup>th</sup> - August 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1997, p.4)

**The circle of those who wished that the Chechens continue to fight after August 1996 was even wider and more influential than during the war. The script of Russia's disintegration - first losing Chechnya, then other Muslim regions - seemed more and more plausible. In the geopolitical sense the 'international community' (argot for western countries and their allies) began to see that idea as preferable even in the face of other global risk factors: 'Islamic threat', international drug traffic, uncontrolled nuclear weapons, and others.** After the Khasavyurt agreements of August 1996 and the treaty signed by Yeltsin and Maskhadov in May 1997 the external world took the question of Chechnya's independence as decided *de-facto* and waiting for a few legal procedures to be finalized. Chechnya was treated as an independent state by many - from the expert and academic community to journalists and the general public. The French journalist Brice Fleutiaux who was released from Chechen captivity in summer of 2000 said he actually "did not know Chechnya was part of Russia" when he was crossing its border from Georgia.

**The external attitude towards Chechnya, as well as towards its imagined independence, suffered the most tangible blow from the Chechen leaders transferring their allegiance from the West to the Islamic world. That was due both to changes in the political positions of the leading western countries (limiting their attention and moral support for Chechnya) and to Chechnya's growing reliance on the ideological and military resources of the Muslim Arab allies. The Chechens' ideas of the external world had radically altered: the West began to be seen as a traitor, Israel and Russia as arch-enemies, the Muslim world as the only friend besides Azerbaijan and the Baltic countries.**

In February 1998 the Chechen military newspaper *Zashchitnik Otechestva* (No.1, February 1998, p.1) reported on the visit by Chechnya's Defense Minister Khamzat Gelayev to Pakistan to take part in the 'World Muslim congress' (in his words, 'with delegates from 170 countries with a total population of four million, lasting for 40 days'). Here is an excerpt from Gelayev's impressions of that visit:

*...In Pakistan there lives an elderly emir, head of the Muslim society. I had a long talk with him. I asked him to say a prayer for alleviating the suffering of Chechnya. After some time I met him again. He said that he and his followers had said (read) 125,000 prayers for peace in Chechnya - more than they ever said in 70 years of his preaching Islam. They said Allah had blessed the Chechens who, though small in numbers, have chosen the way of Gazavat. So, the Almighty sent them victory and all the Muslim world loves them.*

*Our delegation was given a top-level reception. For the opening of the Muslim congress they had built a shrine modeled on the Kaaba. After a long deliberation the holy (Shura) council decided that the new shrine (ziyarat) should be consecrated by the Chechen clergy. That surprised the Arab guests, descendants of the Prophet Mohammed (may Allah bless and greet him) in whose language the Koran was written. Pakistan also has famous Alims who work hard for the good of Islam. They have 20 million followers who know the Koran by heart. They were also surprised by the preference given to the Chechen delegation.*

Thousands of similar reports on the external (outside) world (rather on the Chechen imagined version of it) were absorbed by the Chechen internal discourse, or at least by the readers of the newspaper *Zashchitnik Otechestva* which was popular among the armed part of the population. Thus, the internalization of the idea of Chechnya's independence, i.e. inculcating it as part of individual as well as collective identities, was, in fact, an overall undertaking. The impersonal public discourse was no less important in it than individual experience and the learned postulates of the local propaganda.<sup>11</sup> **Owing to the multi-faceted trauma of war, and also to the victorious euphoria, Chechnya had lost its capacity for social self-organization and control over the state of its own society. It followed irrational fantasies and superficial recipes concerning its administration - all in a rigid context of outside prescriptions. As a result, Chechnya was involved in a new war which proved to be just as senseless and destructive as the first one.**

The worst fallacy of both the Chechens and the external world was the misperception of the efforts made by Russia's authorities and larger society to keep up the basic social and economic structures in Chechnya during the war and after it. Some of the special studies and reports on the international and humanitarian aspects of the Chechen war deliberately ignore the fact that from spring 1995 to August 1996 two successive governments functioned in Grozny - led by Salambek Khadzhiyev and Doku Zavgayev - that, with the support of the federal au-

thorities, provided the fundamental life necessities and carried out large-scale restoration works. When I visited Grozny in October 1995, all its schools and hospitals were working. The same was true of the other regions which were less affected by war than Grozny. Russian and foreign (mainly Turkish) construction firms had started repairing and restoring the damaged or ruined buildings. The international humanitarian organizations deliberately refused to cooperate with the governments of Khadzhiyev and Zavgayev labeling them pro-Moscow “puppet” regimes. Instead they used any opportunity to grant humanitarian and other kind of aid to the Chechen militants. That position - actually encouraging violence - explains the failure of international aid, which was never admitted by western analysts.<sup>12</sup>

Later the Chechen politicians and propaganda experts found many ways to represent the Russian policy in Chechnya in the most negative way, and the federal aid as a due reparation by a foreign state for its aggression and the damage caused by it. However, for three years Chechnya received free federal supplies of electricity and gas, the financing of social benefits (old age and invalids’ pensions, child benefits, and others) and of salaries for the basic categories of state employees (doctors, teachers, civil servants). Under agreements between Moscow and Grozny grain was supplied (for example 10,000 tons of wheat in 1999). Considerable aid was rendered by Russia’s other regions including the neighboring North Caucasian republics, particularly Dagestan.

It can’t be said that the people of Chechnya failed to see that without help from the Russian authorities and the rest of the country their republic would really face a humanitarian disaster. They couldn’t voice that observation for the notions of ‘state’ and ‘country’ had been uncompromisingly proclaimed in the separatist sense, any discussion of those categories being ruled out on pain of severe punishment. Universally imposed was the opinion that the independent country of Ichkeria should be restored and revived by those who had ruined it, that the culprits are to compensate the damage to the victims of the war. The newspaper *Groznensky Rabochiy* (No.29, August 5-11, 1999, p.1) carried an announcement under a grumbling headline - “Free Bounty Ends “ of charges being introduced for public utilities: 20 rubles a month for gas and 10-30 rubles for electricity (approximately from 35 cents to \$1).

**The illusion of a “great victory” was the main obstacle to efforts for restoring Chechen society and public order after the war. The predominant trend of thought in Chechnya was to blame the overall post-war crisis on Russia’s alleged financial-economic and political-diplomatic blockade of Chechnya.** My study does not include an analysis of the federal policies and the social, political, and economic situation in Chechnya after August 1996. That kind of analysis has been carried out by my Chechen colleagues - Dzhabrail Gakayev and Musa Yusupov.<sup>13</sup> However, certain phenomena and facts must be noted here.

### *Survival Strategies*

The 1994-96 war resulted in a devastating ruin of Chechnya. The economic collapse and pilage of state resources which had begun under Dudayev were further exacerbated by the destruction of a large part of Grozny and of about two dozen large villages, also by the damage caused to roads and bridges, by wiping out forests, by spoiling nearly a third of arable fields with military vehicles and land mines, by contaminating water sources, and so on. Most production facilities were destroyed except some of the large petrochemical industries, much of the property was just pilfered. The state and public institutions were lost. And probably worst of all - within a short time the Chechen society, the Chechen people within and outside Chechnya changed, as well as their image in the outside world.

The strategy of post-war life for most Chechens and other residents of Chechnya, many of them ethnic Russians, was based on innovative enterprise and amazing endurance. And it required hard work. The total social experience of war and violence did not mean that the whole population was involved in fighting - daily peaceful activities still formed the basis of life in the local communities. The global image of 'fighting Chechnya' ousted in public consciousness the image of 'working Chechnya': journalists and press photographers almost never produced pictures of schools functioning or farmers working in the fields. But in actual fact, the regular customary labors still occupied a lot of people, particularly in the rural areas. New occupations were also added to them if they could produce any results (food, money, services, support, etc.). Here are some confirming observations by the Russian officer Grigory Stitzberg, deputy-commander of a riot police unit sent to Chechnya from the town of Ivanovo, published upon his return by the local newspaper *MK-in-Ivanovo* (June 14-21, 2000, pp.2-3):

*...being on a mission in Chechnya we all the time observed the local life as if from outside. The Chechens get up early, they start working at five in the morning - they ride out on horseback, or more often on bikes, to mow the grass. Many of them have six or eight cows, about a hundred geese, and other animals. They are very industrious folk. For what is Chechnya, come to think of it? They have one big city - Grozny, which has been nearly wiped out, a medium-size town Gudermes, and just a little town Argun. All the rest is countryside. Now it is a predominantly peasant land, most people farming, for they have nothing else to do unless they are fighting. All their thoughts are about how to get spare parts for farm machinery. They come to the Federals asking for fuel oil, lubricants, ball bearings, and other things. They are good with their hands, they know how to handle machines, you can get on with such people all right. As to those who are hostile, you've got to know how to talk to them. They respect force, so if you give them to understand that their force will be matched by yours, they will settle down in no time.*

*In general, I don't think the Chechens are some kind of beasts. Russians also have their share of killers, rapists, and robbers. It's true that many of them have become unused to working, but we have a lot of that thing in Russia too. And they are unwilling to learn - what for, if they can take a hostage and get a ransom? But it's also true, that if during the last war their children threw stones at the Federals with cries of 'Allah Akbar', now they wave their hands at us with smiles on their faces - the parents have taught them to do so. And if you stop to ask for a drink of water, they will even offer some bread, though they may be short of it themselves.*

*... As we rode from Grozny to Mozdok, we passed about a dozen villages. There we saw children - little ones and teenagers - going to school. The girls turned out in ribbons and white aprons, school bags behind the back. On May 25 they had the school-leavers' ceremony of the last school bell - there were crowds of children, all carrying flowers... In the last war the schools were forgotten, but now they have begun working. In the morning people gather by the collective farms' offices, then go out to the fields to work. That's what meets your eye now.*

*You've got to distinguish between the country up to the Tersk mountain range, on the left bank of the Terek - the flat land, known as the smaller (minor) Chechnya, and the great Chechnya in the mountains where the people think of themselves as 'the real Chechens'. The relations between those two parts of Chechnya are very uneasy. We hear all the time reports on television: Chechens abduct many Russians, Jews, and foreigners. But it's less known - we hear no talk about it - that hundreds and even thousands of Chechen highlanders abduct their lowland countrymen. They don't care for nationality, the main thing is to get a ransom paid. I talked once to a Chechen whose 80-year-old father and*

*16-year-old son had been abducted. He knew who had done it by name and address, he could even go there and see his father and son, but he couldn't get them out without paying a ransom.*

*...But isn't there anything else to show us about Chechnya? They'd better show us, particularly here in Ivanovo, the way Chechens had put in order their ruined Grozny for the Victory Day, May 9. We never take so much trouble, not even for our City Day. It was lovely: they cleared the ruins, swept the streets, whitewashed the curbs and tree trunks, cleaned the garden paths. In the past four or six weeks they'd been out every day with rakes and brooms putting things to order. Trucks and buses were taking parties of men, women, and children to all ends of the city to do so. We drove through Grozny at 90 km/hour on smooth asphalt though before that the streets hadn't been repaired for ten years. The shell holes are being filled. The Chechens have great self-respect, that's why they work that way. With so much ruin about, the city electric power plant already has a fence on a cement foundation around it, its grounds are being swept. They have a love of order in their blood...*

It must be admitted that Grigory Stitzberg shared impressions rather different from the predominant opinion of the Chechens' cruelty, treachery, and laziness. Anna Sinyukhina, the journalist who was interviewing him, remarked aptly, "Each man brings back his own Chechnya in his heart." In fact, **Chechnya is not all uniform, but has many different places, individual actors, and social groups that create a dramatic cacophony of post-war reality. Whereas for the majority of Chechens it was a time of hard work for restoring their disrupted life, for the armed minority it was continued strategy of violence. But common for all was neglect of rules set by the state and by the cultural tradition, also self-deception resulting in a sharp conflict between illusions and real life. What was also a powerful moment is a rhetoric of complaining by the powerless ones.**

I want to cite here also some data from the interviews with Grozny dwellers done by Vakhit Akayev in Summer 1999. They are local university teachers with Chechen rural roots.

V. A.: *Tell me, what is your life now, how you support your family, what sources make your budget, and what are your monthly spends?*

Apti Tepsayev, associate professor at the Chechen State University: *My brother in Moscow, when he comes here helps me with money. My wife's relatives from Shalazhi village help with wheat meals, meat and sour cream. Relatives give 50 - 100 dollars to my children. By existing prices, we need for the family about 1000 - 1200 rubles to allow eating meat once a week. This is when you have a middle size family of 4 - 5 members. It is possible to live on tea and bread only. One can eat only potatoes for weeks. But it is a hard thing. A lot depends on one's talents to manage a household affairs. My family spends on living around 1000 rubles (40 dollars) a month. But, practically, it is only for food. In case someone gets sick - that is the end, only God can help you. Yet, we are lucky being supported by relatives. What can those do who live without this support? Many people live in misery and they complain.*

Aslambek Labazanov, teacher at the department of physics, Chechen State University: *I am repairing radio and TV sets, do some home lesson mentoring. These are our sources of living. I teach illiterate children who were brought from the mountains to our city quarter. When I have 5 - 7 pupils, I collect 150 - 200 rubles a month from everyone. That is how we live.*

*These children's parents are eager to educate their kids, and kids want to study. But many of them in the third-fourth grade do not know what will be five plus seven. That is a sign of our state of misery: no other way out but to raise a national rebellion. That is what all neighbors talk. Our men talk that it is time for rebellion and that there is no other perspective. It is bullshit: they do not allow us to dig*

*a condensate here and themselves they dig and deliver everything somewhere. And how the people can survive on what? Haven't you seen what is going on behind the university building? A hall here, a hall there for extracting condensate. Now, these armed men took everything under their hat and sell it outside. If there is no labor what people are to do? Destined to die? Let them eat alycha (wild palm - V. T.) and mushmula!<sup>14</sup>*

V. A.: *Can rebellion improve your conditions?*

A. T.: *Any rebellion makes the government thinking of the policy that destroys ordinary people. And any ruler must understand it. Take, for example, elementary facts. Ayatollah Khomeini, when he raised a rebellion against the Shah, against such a mighty power, his house had only two rooms. All ministers arrived to his place by public bus: he forbade them to go by cars. If our rulers consider themselves real Muslims, let them follow the Ayatollah Khomeini's example and abandon all these "Mishubishi" jeeps to pay people pensions instead.*

V. A.: *You teach at the university. How do students live?*

A. T.: *They want to study but they cannot afford to pay 2, 4, and even 8 rubles for public transportation to get to the place. There is no dormitory and many live in villages. They live hard.*

Khaidar Burchayev, head of the university's chair in geometry: *I work directly with students. Those who became students recently are poorly prepared. They do not know even simple fractions and simple mathematics transformations. What school pupils are obliged to know in the fifth grade. Only accepting that kind of students we were able to fill all vacancies, this year - only 70%. The situation deteriorates with each year. No textbooks and other instruction materials, not enough premises for classes. Teachers are also degrading and they are losing their eagerness to teach. Because they are not paid first of all. Plus, the whole situation is discouraging and sad. It would be very hard to return to normality. A lot of resources are needed.*

V.A.(addressing Khaidar Burchayev): *You visited your native village Yalkhoi-Mokh. How do rural people live there now?*

Kh. B.: *The general mood is depressing. They complain of not seeing meat for months. We have very few pastures and very little cattle there.*

A. T.: *For example, in our Shatoi rayon situation is better than in Nozhai-Urtovskii rayon (Khaidar Burchayev is from this region - V. T.). Shatoi people are OK with food, they need cash only. (addressing Khaidar Burchayev) Do you have oil there? Is there no pipeline nearby?*

Kh. B.: *No, we live far away of the pipe (tube). The situation is critical. People are smashed. Where is a way out?*

### ***The Post-conflict Economy***

Many experts take the revival of street market trade as the leading indicator of transition from war to peace.<sup>15</sup> Chechnya was not an exception to that rule, but it had a number of peculiarities. First, it was a combination of armed force and trade (it was next to impossible to go out on the market with serious goods and without armed support). Though the *Groznenski Rabochiy* (No.25, July 7-13, 1999, p.2) reported under the headline "Who is the Master of the Market" that "most part of Ichkeria's population are busy trading on the large and small markets," it seems to have been rather exaggerated. True, the number of traders in the ruined Chechnya was large - all who could produce, acquire, or steal anything promptly offered it for sale in places where any demand at all could be expected - private shops and cafes, the markets, booths, stalls, from hand to hand, or laying the goods out right on the ground. The main trading center was Grozny's central market.

The above-mentioned report contains revelations by a city's tax serviceman:

*We have a hard job to do for most people can't make both ends meet. Frankly, it's a shame to collect taxes from traders who sell next to nothing in a long summer day. But what can we do - that's our service. On the other hand, the bane of our life is the market sharks - the wholesale traders. They break all the official rules and threaten us with physical violence. The result is that most of the taxes are collected from the poorest traders, while nothing is done about big business. We have no protection on the part of the armed services. How can a few policemen patrolling the market control the insolent "money-bags"? So, we collect taxes in sweat and blood. Legally we are entitled to 10% of the collected sum, but in reality we never see that. We are put upon by the bullies who pinch our share, but accuse us of penny-pinching. We face "inspectors" who produce dubious papers or don't even bother to give their names. The impression is that they really specialize in racket and blackmail.*

If the market trade signalized the life of society, the agriculture on the flat lands provided the basic needs of post-war Chechnya though farm production had been greatly damaged by the war. It functioned in various property forms: private gardens round farm houses, small rented farms, and also large state farms surviving in some areas. Still working were the state farms: *Yubileiny, Solnechny, Prigorodny, 60th Anniversary of October, Znamensky, Kruglovsky, Ilyinsky, Marsho*. The first good crop was raised in the government sector in summer 1999: the state farm *Yubileiny* near Grozny had sown 530 ha with wheat and barley and produced a crop of 21 cwt. per ha. With the republic's wealth of oil, the farms suffered from the shortage of fuel and lubricants, also of farm machinery (tractors, harvesters). The entire livestock in Chechnya was now equal to what just one big farm used to have before Dudayev.

Private farms produced just enough for their own family use sharing what they had with city relatives. On the market they sold only vegetables grown in greenhouses (cucumbers, tomatoes). Some resold soda, cigarettes, and candies just to get a tiny fringe making 'live money' (*zhyvye den'gi*). Latest evidences provided by Ibrahim Aliroev who visited Grozny in July 2000 were quite remarkable:

*It is a miracle! The market in Grozny is fantastic now. One can buy everything again. Meat of the best quality costs only 40 rubles a kilo. There are not only a good variety of agricultural products. Clothes, different brands of beer and cigarettes, medicines, construction materials, and all prices are lower than in Nalchik or in Vladikavkaz and Makhachkala. Many buyers are Russian military. They are receiving half of service payments right in Chechnya and the rest is accumulated at their accounts at the military commissariats. Thus, they spend money in Chechnya and local population wins a lot from this practice. Otherwise, in the past they had behaved sometimes as poor beggars asking for cigarettes and liquor.<sup>16</sup>*

Under Maskhadov the question of free sale of land was not raised. What's more, Musa Yusupov and other experts assured me that **private property of land would not be supported by the population. In that Chechnya follows the pattern of the entire North Caucasus and even all Russia. Nevertheless, in the villages, particularly in the mountains, land formerly used by the collective farms and around them were being divided between private owners. Many disputes arose in that process. Most of them were resolved through the traditional institutions: intermediaries, arbitration, justice of the peace, mullah's decision.** Nevertheless, the situation was far from simple.



“Highlanders Return to their Lands in Hay Mowing Time” was the headline of a report in the *Groznenski Rabochiy* (No.29, August 5-11, 1999, p.1) on the advent of hay-mowing time in the Cheberloy *rayon* warning that the unmown grass might be covered with snow:

*The isolated farmsteads in the mountains have lost most of their inhabitants: all have gone to the flat lands or left Chechnya altogether. But life prompts many of them to return to their old homes for the hay-mowing time - not to work, but to share out their hereditary land between share-croppers from Dagestan who mow the grass, get their share, and pay the land owners. The trouble is that all those ‘animal feed producers’ who live on the flat lands and travel in chick foreign-made cars have no intention to work and, what’s more, none of them knows for sure the boundaries of their former land. That does not promote public peace in the mountains. Many disputes arise. Some of the villagers in Khoi, Kezenoi, Tsanechu, and Buni propose convening all the people in their family halls and re-distribute the plots of land.*

In the highland and foothill districts the main problem of the *rayon* administrations was not so much the development of the local economy and infrastructure as the prevention of barbaric deforestation and the annihilation of poppy crops grown for producing narcotics. The areas were controlled by the local war lords, their main sources of livelihood were either the scant hay crops and beehive honey or the criminal gains of the “new Chechens” from hostage taking and ransoms.

In the lowland country, of its former industrial capacity Chechnya kept some large enterprises that had switched over to the production of household goods. The *Electropribor* plant that had produced electrographic equipment turned to casting forms for baking bread, to making plastic lids for jars of vegetable preserves and linen clips. The *Krasny Molot* plant, instead of petroleum industry equipment, began producing iron gates and other domestic appliances. Before the latest war a prefab construction plant had been restored in Grozny, a mill and sugar refinery had been repaired in Argun, but they were not put into operation for lack of raw materials and qualified personnel. Of light industries only the *Druzhba* cardboard factory continued working. Of the former 44 industrial enterprises only 17 were functioning in 1999, which made up about 5-8% of the pre-war industrial production.

In the three post-war years the private sector has grown - mostly in public catering, automobile repairs and service, and filling stations. But the general information in this sphere was so meager that I could not gather, from a distance, scattered pieces of information into one holistic picture. My apology to the readers this time.

Since 1992 the Chechen republic has not drawn its state budget and thus has not controlled its income or expenditure. Taxes were ceased to be collected, so that in 1999 the state treasury received no revenue it might have expected from the sales of oil and oil products. But since 1998 the pillage of oil resources had reached unprecedented proportions. Clashes of economic interests came up between the government and the armed opposition, particularly in the oil business. Most oil wells were seized by the armed groups. The state industrial oil production dropped to a daily 400 tons in 1999 compared to the 4,200 tons daily output in 1998. The rest was pilfered directly from the wells and pipelines.

The small-scale private oil production became a curse for Chechnya. There were over 200 clandestine oil refineries in just one Chechen settlement. It was more disastrous for the environment than the damage caused by the war. My Chechen acquaintances told me that as they

descend from their mountain heights to the lowlands, they are dismayed by the smog enveloping the villages on the plain and making it difficult to breathe. The *Groznenski Rabochiy* (No.28, July 28-August 3, 1999, p.3) wrote:

*Thousands of privatized and stolen vehicles, many of them oil tanks, without registration number plates, run up and down crumbling dusty roads throwing clouds of dust and exhaust fumes on the villages they pass. All that smoke and soot descends, like flour from a sieve, on the Kurchaloi hospital, on the trees, and on the people's houses. Black clouds gather over the villages due to that pernicious private oil production. If we fail to see what harm it does to our own and our children's health, if we just wait for the authorities to put things to order, we may be forced to guzzle that poison for a long time to come. It's no secret to the local people who is doing it and where. But we haven't yet seen a precedent of the villagers going out on to the road and blocking the traffic of those oil tankers through their settlements and their lands.*

### **Social Life**

The period of conflict including the past three years have seen changes in Chechnya's demographic structure, in its system of social relations, and living standards. We have no precise data on the emigration from Chechnya after the war, but there is general evidence that only less than half of its pre-war population remains there, i.e. 500,000 - 600,000. About 100,000 people have left Chechnya since a new war broke out in autumn 1999. Work staffs of various industries and organizations have dwindled ten times or more, most of the trained personnel have emigrated. Only some 15,000 are still employed in the state industries. There are about 150,000 old-age pensioners in the republic. Both categories have been receiving their wages and pensions with long delays.

The living standards have sharply dropped for the majority of the population. Tens of thousands of people have lost their homes, cars, valuables, livestock, and savings. Finding no sources of income they are reduced not just to poverty, but to downright starvation or malnutrition. Health problems are wide-spread among all categories of the population. But few doctors remain in the republic, some of the hospitals have closed, there is a shortage of medical equipment and medicines. Epidemics break out, child mortality has reached a level unprecedented in the post-Soviet space - more than 100 of babies from 1000 under a year's age. The prenatal mortality is also high, a third of it falling on the Kurchaloi *rayon* which has turned into one big area of primitive oil production with some 15 hundred clandestine oil refineries. And about 30 oil wells have been constantly burning in Chechnya.

**The typical social phenomena in the post-war Chechnya have been corruption and stealing reaching pandemic proportions. All that can be stolen anywhere is being lifted. This is rooted, of course, in the economic devastation, violence, ruin, chaos and consequent degradation of all legal norms. But there is a doubt that the reason lies only in the destitute poverty - we rather have here a more complex phenomenon of a post-conflict society. In fact, this large-scale thievery arose in many forms and in all strata of society back in Dudayev's time. It was spontaneous expropriation of state property which suddenly appeared to belong to no one. In that Chechnya was similar to the rest of the Russian Federation with that difference that here the state judicious system became totally disrupted and the power was seized by the armed section of the population.**

War gave a *carte blanche* to robbery which was seen as legitimate war booty or a compensation for the losses. Both sides indulged in it - the Chechen combatants and the Federals. Large-scale embezzlement went on in the first period of restoration works under the governments of Khadzhiyev and Zabgayev. The disappearance of the federal financing was so patent and scandalous that it had to be admitted even by President Yeltsin who said, "God knows where that money has gone." Maskhadov's government that came to power in January 1997 even instituted criminal investigations against the former officials who had left the republic. No one was convicted in Chechnya and in Moscow - only the former Mayor of Grozny, Beslan Gantamirov, who was later released from prison to lead the Chechen militia supporting the federal forces in the new war of 1999-2000 and finally resumed the mayor's position.

What seems to be a mystery is why the corruption and thievery, instead of diminishing, became still more rampant under that much-desired 'own statehood' the fighting was all about and that had made the Chechen society more homogeneous. There may be several explanation, the economic deprivation being far from being the main factor. To begin with, the new leaders of Chechnya - the military and the civil administration - were in the first ranks of large-scale embezzlement and expropriation. The shadow economy under Dudayev acquired a sophisticated character and even its own philosophy. Not that Maskhadov's government publicly blessed stealing and embezzlement. Overtly it proclaimed combating those evils, as well as abductions. But the evils proved to be stronger. The newspaper *Zashchitnik Otechestva* (No.1 (75), February 1998, p.4) carried the following article:

*Billions embezzled in agriculture, in the construction industry, and oil production of Chechnya show that the corruption has stepped on the path of war with the state. It's no longer an exception that bribe-takers, extortionists, and swindlers in public offices trample on the law. They use their posts and influence in various power structures to grab millions before they have to withdraw into the shadows, into the commercial sphere, where they can't begin empty-handed. The new time has opened large possibilities to state officials. The old proverb "Would you be near a spring and not drink?" has acquired a new sinister meaning. They don't just assuage their thirst of gain, they suck our state's, our own lifeblood, they wish that some should rise to the heights of wealth, while others are left in misery. Neither the new - mostly impotent - laws, nor the undermined moral precepts can protect us from the rampant corruption...*

*Particularly many channels are open for draining the "social money" (meaning the federal funds transferred for pensions and social benefits -V.T.) Not just thin trickles, but gushing torrents go down those channels. Particularly large-scale embezzlement is going on under the contracts for the purchase of computers, copiers, and medical equipment... On the background of economic ruin, of devastated industry and agriculture, a special niche is reserved for the shadow economy. Profits received from such informal activities constitute a large part of the population's total income. Examples of such shadow economy are private little oil refineries, condensate productions, plunder of the forest resources.*

There was also a lot of small-time thefts by individuals without recourse to a sophisticated organization or financial operations. Just as in other parts of Russia, stealing was going on of steel frames, industrial equipment, non-ferrous metals. But in Chechnya it was so common that one of Grozny's largest and most up-to-date productions - the *Anisimov* oil refinery (with the annual output of 450,000 tons of petrol and 1.8 million tons of diesel fuel) was totally ransacked after August 1996. Some of the damaged buildings of architectural value that could be restored were taken apart for building materials. *Moscow News* journalist Dmitri Balburov told

me that he spent his first week in Chechen imprisonment cleaning bricks from the dried cement because all this had been brought into someone's courtyard - from a dismantle construction somewhere - in order to build a new private house.

In summer 1999 the Vedeno *rayon* in the mountains was left without electricity because the generator and the lines had been stolen (*Groznensky Rabochiy*, No.25, July 7-13, 1999). About the same time Grozny had a chronic shortage of water (*Groznensky Rabochiy*, No. 29, August 5-11, 1999, p.2) not so much due to the war-damaged water reservoirs, but to the pilage of non-ferrous metals: some armed robbers had lifted the entire equipment of the Staro-sunzhensk water supply system.

Another report from the same newspaper:

*"The copper electric lines have been stolen from the Gudermes-Ishcherskaya railway. It means the electric suburban trains will not run. Other facts also confirm that non-ferrous metals thieves are at large. In the Nadterechny rayon and other settlements they have stolen the telephone cable. And there is no sense in restoring it for they just wait for that opportunity to steal again. As a result, a large part of Znamensky village was left without telephone communications. In Nadterechny over 300 people couldn't use their phones."* (No. 28, July 28-August 3, 1999, p.1)

That was followed by petty theft even in the mountain villages which used to take pride in personal honesty as one of the basic virtues. *Groznensky Rabochiy* (No. 29, August 5-11, 1999, p.1) complained that the old custom is at an end of putting out a pitcher of cool drinking water by the road near one's house so that a tired traveler could assuage his thirst, have a rest in the shade, and pray for the good people who had offered that service. No more so - because the copper pitcher will be stolen and sold to the illegal traders in non-ferrous metals.

A correct diagnosis of social climate in Chechnya was made by Chechen journalist Aset Vazayeva:

*The entire territory of the post-war republic is an aggressive space. The gutted houses, dirty markets at every turn (there is no other sources of income), heaps of garbage even in the center - and crowds of men in camouflage fatigues, all armed, always gloomy. Total unemployment, most of the people living below the poverty line, young people having no prospects. An environment devoid of any aesthetic impulses - depressing, alienating, embittering. No wonder we have in today's Chechnya so many destructive people, so few creative ones.*

*Journalists find it hard to work in such a situation. Not only because they constantly face a real threat to life which has dropped in value now that groupings of armed combatants recognize only one law - the law of Kalashnikov, and there are so many unbalanced people around whose psychic problems have been aggravated by the war. We, journalists, also have our own problems well-expressed in these poetic lines:*

*When your soul is in discord,*

*Your line can't come out well -*

*It has to bear the stamp,*

*The ring of that discord.*

*It's hard to cope with discord in your soul when you see no prospect, when "the fathers of the nation" drive it into an abyss with their feuds... I have come to hate politics and politicians who so thoughtlessly pushed a peaceful people into the flames of war. They deprived me... no, not of my home and property (in August 1996 Aset lost in Grozny her hard-earned apartment and all her property - V.T), but of much more - my native city, my republic, and my countrymen. And I don't mean only those killed, but also those who were unable to stand the trials of war and turned from human beings into beasts.*<sup>17</sup>

### **Group Rivalries and Collapse of Governance**

The 'national revolution' and the war destroyed the basis of the civic system and the old political structures. A great number of new political parties and public organizations emerged having neither real influence, nor outstanding leaders, nor resources. For three years after the war Chechnya actually had no civil institutions. The formerly close-knit staffs of various enterprises and organizations had disintegrated. The main actors on the political scene were the military authorities, the military-political and religious-political groupings. Some internal Chechen conflicts emerged or revived (power struggle, social and clan contradictions, clashes between mafia groupings, etc.) A new social structure was created with the armed part of the population on top - that amazed even many of the Chechen observers. A leading Chechen businessman in Moscow - Malik Saidullayev, once appointed by the Kremlin administration as head of the Chechen republic's State Council, made a trip to Chechnya and Ingushia late in 1999. As he returned, he remarked, "*I can't believe I'm back in Moscow, I have a feeling I have returned to a normal society from another planet of vicious beings who cry all the time. That planet is run by the force of arms, by the right of might.*" (*Versia*, No. 1 [75], January 11-17, 2000, p.8)

The dominant positions in society have really been seized by the war veterans who have the formal designation of the PRM (Participants in the Resistance Movement). They speak in the name of the "*shahids* who gave their lives in the centuries-long war for independence" and claim their right to the highest posts, better living conditions, and special privileges. A state commission was set up in the republic on the PRM affairs, with regional branches. The chairman of the Grozny Region's branch Keipa Mezhiyev announced that it had registered 1,347 people who are divided into four categories: close relatives of the fallen soldiers, organizers and participants of the rallies, those who actually fought in the war, and those who gave them material and moral support. The first three categories have special identity cards, the fourth - just certificates. The PRM are entitled to free use of public transport and preferences in admittance to educational establishments. "*The material aid to shahids (many of whom have no jobs and wages, or whose pensions are paid with delays) is being regularly issued. Since the commission was set up we have received food parcels seven or eight times.*" (*Groznensky Rabochiy*, No. 28, July 28-August 3, 1999, p.1)

The government tried to take some measures for the social rehabilitation of war veterans and for the aid to the children of the fallen in battle. Maskhadov issued a decree on preferences in admitting them to the secondary and higher education establishments - 10% of the state quota (i.e. free of charge) to be reserved for the war veterans and resistance activists and 5% for the orphans having no guardians. The problem was that the number of claimants exceeded by far the available seats, jobs, and posts, and the resources were often used by persons who had never exposed themselves to the dangers of battle. That caused bitter squabbles that gave rise to contradictions of religious and ideological or military and political nature.

A political split came up immediately after the war. Some of the field commanders were unwilling to lay down arms and favored exporting their “liberation revolution” to the other autonomous republics of the North Caucasus. They proceeded from the idea that Chechnya can achieve its full independence only after liberating all the North Caucasus and gaining access to both the Caspian and the Black Sea coasts. Another part of the military and political elite preferred the way of peaceful development and supported Maskhadov’s efforts to open talks with Russia and ensure the republic’s participation in the projects of transporting the Caspian oil.

Certain consolidation between them was seen only for threatening actions towards the outside world including their closest neighbors. Thus, in summer 1997 five Chechens were arrested in North Ossetia. That was most probably a counter-measure by the Ossetian administration seeking a release of several Ossetian citizens, including a high official, who had been abducted and kept hostage in Chechnya. July 20 a “council of Chechen warriors” was convened at the *Dynamo* stadium by the Vice-President of Ichkeria Vakha Arsanov. This is what he said on that occasion:

*“The initiative of calling this meeting is mine, I beg your pardon for distracting you from your affairs. But since you have elected Aslan and me as the top leaders of Ichkeria, we are guarantors of the rights and safety of Chechen citizens. I have no right to waste my words, I appeal to you with the question: what shall we do with Vladikavkaz (North Ossetian capital - V.T.) - liberate it or annihilate it? (Put Dzokhara, No. 9, July 28-August 3, 1997, p.1)*

His words were met with the loud cry of “Allah Akbar”, all agreed they should liberate the arrested Chechens by force, and Salman Raduyev called for “wiping out those infidels” (the majority of Ossetians are Orthodox Christians - V.T.). “Real Caucasians”, he continued, “particularly Muslims, never forgive treachery. If the Ossetians were true people of the Caucasus, they wouldn’t have shot us in the back when we were fighting the Russian armada. They are low cowards and should be talked to as such.” (ibidem)

Maskhadov’s government took measures to cope with the problems of the former combatants and the uncontrolled armed formations. It was much harder to deal with the prominent leaders who had passed into the opposition to Maskhadov: the radical Islamists - Khatlab, Basayev, Raduyev, later joined by Gelayev, Udugov, and others. Maskhadov began a campaign against them under the slogan of combating “the hostage-takers”. In the early autumn of 1998 he issued a decree on disbanding the illegal armed formations and the forces loyal to him launched an operation “for liberating hostages”. It was an open declaration of war on the uncontrolled field commanders: in fact, the “hostage-takers” and the opposition were the same people. In 1998 there were armed clashes in Gudermes with losses on both sides between the supporters of Wahhabites and the pro-Moskhadov forces. It was a rebuff of an attempt by Barayev’s band to take control of the Gudermes area.

July 3, 1999 a Congress of War and Resistance Veterans passed a resolution of eight items on Chechnya’s internal contradictions, particularly on the choice between its traditional Tarrikat Islam and Wahhabism and on the prospects of establishing the Shariah law rule. First, the Congress proclaimed “a universal agreement between all the war veterans and patriotic forces in the cause of strengthening the Islamic state.” Second, it resolved to settle internal contradictions peacefully, in keeping with the Shariah law. Third, it banned religious persecution (meaning measures against the Wahhabites). Fourth, it declared abductions of people to be “the

worst crime against the Chechen state under the Shariah law". The Congress ruled to set up a National Security Council (*Shura*) including the leaders of the resistance movement and other prominent people. It recommended Maskhadov to create a legal basis for independent Shariah courts, also to suspend all political rallies, marches, and manifestations in the republic.

But Maskhadov's government was unable to control the situation. The split between the leaders was so deep that he launched an appeal to the nation, "Chechens, citizens of Ichkeria, brothers and sisters!" asking them why Chechnya had failed to reach its set goal:

*...Leaders of Jihad! Be worthy of the love and respect of the Chechen people, shake off your arrogance in the name of that great people (sic! - V.T.). You are flesh of its flesh, so rally your ranks against our common enemy! Our fight is not over, it takes on other - low and treacherous forms aimed at draining at all costs the blood of the Chechen people, at alienating you from your people, at discrediting the warriors of Jihad. Stop basking in the rays of the past glory! There is but a step from the people's esteem to their hatred. Better take a step towards each other, towards unity and accord. We still have a chance - a great chance of a final victory of the Chechen people - a nation of toil, of war, and of triumph in its centuries-long hard struggle for independence and sovereignty." (Groznsky Rabochiy, No. 27, July 21-27, 1999, p.1)*

### **Shariah Law for Chechnya?**

The Shariah law as the basis for a new order had long been a cherished dream of the extremist Chechen leaders. When Zelimkhan Yandarbiyev became president of the republic after Dudayev's death, he issued a decree on enacting the Criminal Code with the purpose "of consolidating the basis of the state's independence and legal system on the principles of the Shariah law given by the great Allah, gracious and merciful, the Lord of the worlds." (*Ichkeria*, No. 25, 1996, p.2) As Vakhit Akayev points out<sup>18</sup>, the Criminal Code was fully copied from that of Sudan which, in all probability, had been specially translated into Russian for Chechnya and, most likely, outside its borders (see the full Russian text in *Ichkeria*, Nos. 24-26, 1996). In that case we have here a graphic example of external prescriptions influencing the course of events in a conflict-torn society.

In August 1996 a military Shariah tribunal was introduced in Chechnya as a branch of the Supreme Shariah Court of Ichkeria. The tribunal tried all the cases of members of the armed services and activists of the resistance movement. It also executed the sentences including death penalty. In September 1998 Maskhadov by his decree founded a special regiment of the Shariah courts and police commanded by Colonel Rizvan Daudov. The regiment's functions included guarding the Shariah courts, escorting the accused, enforcing court summons, and observing the compliance with the Shariah norms by officials and ordinary citizens. Daudov said in an interview with *Groznsky Rabochiy* that, in his opinion, "we should gradually oust the European style of dress in our republic, introduce uniforms at schools conforming to the Islamic traditions, and we should indoctrinate Islam beginning with the young age". In cooperation with the Shariah guard his regiment made raids through rural settlements and districts of Grozny to see if there were any breaches of the Shariah norms, particularly the use of and trade in alcohol and narcotics. Just in one day - July 27, 1999 - they destroyed 600 bottles of vodka and detained seven drunken men who were punished with 40 strokes of the stick (*Groznsky Rabochiy*, No. 28, July 28-August 3, 1999, p.2).

Maskhadov officially declared a “full” introduction of the Shariah law in February 1999. He did that in order to deny his opponents their best arguments in the struggle for power, but it was also his complete surrender to the radical Islamists. His power in Chechnya became just nominal and his opponents from the Yandarbiyev-Basayev grouping demanded abolishing the president’s post and electing an Imam, i.e. a religious head of state. This is how the introduction of the Shariah law was assessed by Dzhabrail Gakayev:

*“Essential at this new stage of confrontation between Maskhadov and his opponents is not the fact of introducing the Shariah norms in Chechnya, but that such norms are not applicable in it by definition. What the leaders of ‘Ichkeria’ pass for Shariah norms is nothing but the Chechen common law - adats. Shariah law never functioned in Chechnya in its pure form, but was incorporated in the local customs and traditions, in the popular (Tarrikat) Islam. The Sunnite tradition has for ten centuries rejected the right of idjtihad - human interpretation of the Koran and the sunna. According to that conception “the gate of idjtihad is closed”.*

The Shariah court in Chechnya cannot be based on the opinion of the judges, consequently it is senseless and illegal from the point of view of the canonical Sunnite Islam. However, the Wahhabite judges of the Shariah courts who represent the highest legal authority in Chechnya were educated in the Arab countries. Thus, the process of ‘Arabization’ (and not ‘Islamization’) of ‘Ichkeria’, contrary to the old religious tradition, has become a reality.”<sup>19</sup>

There is abundant evidence that the “reality” was far from welcomed by the Chechen population. The public execution in 1996 of two Chechens who had no family support shocked not only the external world, but also Chechnya. Shocking was also the death of the well-known singer Apti Dalkhanov after he was punished with 80 strokes of the stick. A similar execution was meted out to the former Mufti of Dudayev’s time M.Kh.Alsabekov who had at first declared the war against Russia as *gazavat*, then repudiated that declaration and left Chechnya. The majority of Chechens who had lived the greater part of their lives under the rule of civil law, as well as many of their religious leaders, could not accept such gross violence on the part of an extremist sect trying to overturn the foundations of their society. **The question of Shariah law caused an ideological and political split in Chechnya and still further paralyzed the state control of the republic. The weakened society was unable to oppose the dictate of the extremists, but disapproved of it. That situation could not last long and had to erupt in an open conflict.**

## Part 5. Chechnya as a Stage and as a Role

*I have a dream that a new stage director should come to Grozny - a brave man who wouldn't be put out by fear of abductions and of all our difficulties, who would breathe a new life into our company. We are thirsting for work, for new productions, for new roles. (leading Chechen actress Zura Raduyeva)*

### ***How Fruitful is a Search for a Truth in Post-conflict Reconstruction?***

Immediate post-conflict situation is the most painful, emotional and highly politicized moment. It is a moment for legitimization of one exclusive version of the conflict in order to justify the chosen cause and method by a winner. Soon after the Kosovo’s ‘liberation’, crying in front of TV camera President Bill Clinton spoke about ‘tens of thousands of people killed by Serbs’ promising to establish ‘real truth’ about the ‘the most bloody butcher’. Cooled down he never



referred to this lie again. President Putin and Russian generals spoke of ‘foreign invasion’ by ‘armies of mercenaries’ and they stopped to mention it after Chechen fighters went underground or to remote mountain shelters. Propaganda of a ‘great victory’ is a part of ended wars as well as obsession with ‘establishing a truth’. My position here is that these are counter-productive strategies of post-conflict reconstruction. This position needs serious elaboration because it questions established cliches representing a ground for a policy of revenge (often presented as ‘punishment’) and a feeding soil for another circle of violence.

Another fundamental question, both theoretical and practical, has to be faced: what is the truth in such a conflict. Is there a reliable, undoubted version of the events that may be accepted by all the parties involved? This question is not only for the historiographer to answer. It is a part of cultural analysis as well. Primarily, because Chechens themselves debate more the past than the nowadays situation, not speaking of the future. With all my efforts to keep a researcher’s distance from the events while collecting reliable information, I see that a deep conflict, driven to its extreme form of war when the madness of local nationalism is raging and the global propaganda machines are grinding, leaves no room for a single and universally accepted version. It is hard to expect, now or in any foreseeable future, the people of Chechnya, the participants in the “Russian-Chechen war”, and the rest of Russia’s society to agree on a kind of common history of the conflict. It doesn’t depend on how well informed we all may be or how deeply involved emotionally and politically we all are, nor on our professional competence. The question remains - what is the truth in a deep conflict like this? If a common view of that kind of things exists, there wouldn’t be any conflict: wars begin in people’s minds and minds cannot extract themselves from the war debates.

This question about truth comes up after every great social upheaval and destructive war. It has to be faced by the scholars as well as by the participants in the drama. Truth-finding commissions were set up in various parts of the world under liked conditions: in Chile, in Argentina upon the fall of their military juntas, in East European countries in the process of their “decommunization”, in the Baltic countries carrying out “desovietization”, in South Africa after the apartheid regime. After the second world war in Germany and, recently, after the war in Yugoslavia international tribunals were sitting to find the truth on the level of culprits and war criminals aiming at punishing them in order to intimidate those willing to commit atrocities. To some extent, that certainly helps to bring about peace not only in the sense of ending hostilities, but also in the sense of reconciliation.

If there are no external arbitration or internal judgement held by the former enemies to establish the truth and pass a formal act on it, the need for such a procedure may become an *idée fixe*, as in the case of Turkey’s genocide of Armenians in 1915. Generations of Armenians have been seeking a formal recognition by Turkey and by the international community. What’s the sense of such insistence? It is not only in to find the real facts and the true role of historical actors. It is a ritual legitimizing the status of a victim and branding the guilty party before the whole world not on the individual, but on the collective level (Armenians versus Turkey, Jews versus Germany, Balts versus Russia, Chechens versus Russia). This collective status is used then by members of the victimized group as an important element of its identity and solidarity, as an advantage in professional careers, as an argument in debates.

Therefore, belonging to a collective victim, a victim “once and for all”, one might say, becoming a kind of “professional victim” in the interests of the entire nation, gives a special moral and political advantage in the course of deep ethnic conflicts when at least one of the warring

parties is mobilized along ethnic boundaries. The German ethnologist Ina-Maria Greverus justly criticized Croatian anthropologists for their politically engaged efforts to construct a victimization complex among the Croats in the period of Yugoslavia's disintegration, "The step from being a victim of the enemy to becoming a 'professional victim for national image'; and the national claim can be a short and a small one."<sup>20</sup> A reply of Croatian ethnographers with an attempt to prove their "parallel effort to represent deprivation, struggle, and resistance, on the one hand, and to keep up-to-date in terms of theoretical concerns, on the other", does not look persuasive. Their 'insiders' experience 'from within a war-burdened community' proved rather weak : through references such as "none of the Croatian war ethnographers had been victimized by the war", but... "the bullet that destroyed some of the books in our institute's library in 1991 provided a perfect metaphor for our reality-anchored position."<sup>21</sup>

As we can read from Maja Povrzanovic, a group of female ethnographers from the Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Research in Zagreb saw as their 'being insiders' mission to look at "small world/real life insights as a corrective of the dominant media-promoted national narrative" and as a result produced a number of cultural studies of war in Croatia.<sup>22</sup> The Western audience was crying when they cited collected children's stories about the war in Croatia. Surely, it were Croats ('defenders'), not Serbian ('attackers') stories. And these stories serve what a new country has been involved in - ethnic nation state-building by the people whose former citizenship was what the 'war ethnographers' place despicably in between inverted commas, i.e. 'ex-Yugoslavia'.<sup>23</sup>

**Likewise, the Chechens made a major effort of creating a memorial saga of suffering and sacrifices to build up a group image calling for sympathy from outsiders. It was needed not so much for establishing the truth (for the crime of their deportation under Stalin is a recognized fact) but as a justification for rejecting the laws of the country and resorting to armed actions by those who had not personally experienced the trauma of deportation. The image of a victim was used for shedding all moral and civil obligations and replacing them by the arguments of historical revenge for asserting, in fact, the power of armed sects and their right to a criminal behavior.** That attitude was encouraged not only by the Chechen ideologists, but also by some outside experts: "Chechens are in fact usually remarkably frank and open in talking about their criminal activities with outsiders - 'admitting' would not be the right word, for there is no implication of guilt or apology... The reasons for this approach seem threefold: in the first place, as noted, it is a respectable part of their tradition[?!]; secondly, Chechens do not in the end give a damn what anyone else, or any other people thinks about them[?!]; and thirdly and most importantly, after their experiences of the past two centuries, there is an underlying feeling that they owe no moral obligation to any other people, state or set of laws[?!] - and with the Russians, of course, they have on the contrary a long score of their own to settle".<sup>24</sup>

I am not going to discuss to what extent the history of the past two centuries may release the Chechens or anybody else from their obligations to the law, the state, and the people. First, I can't see much difference in their experience from that of other peoples of the Northern Caucasus and other regions of Russia, or from the experience of the French Canadians, Northern Irish, Kurds, New Zealand Maoris, American Indians, Hawaiians, and of hundreds of other peoples who, to put it softly, went through asymmetric relations as a framework of a single state. Second, I have no evidence confirming that the Chechens really adhere to such a tradition of moral license. It was only Russia's former interior minister Mikhail Barsukov who publicly stated his thinking that "all the Chechens are thieves and bandits". Third, "the long score

to settle with Russians” is a malicious slur, for most Chechen families have Russian relatives, and the “antirussism” in the pronouncements by Dudayev, Yandarbiyev, and Udugov was an anomaly not universally shared among the Chechens even in the war years.

That does not mean that the Chechens had no basis for constructing the image of victims - that basis was even more recent than 200 years back: the period under Stalin, particularly the mass deportations administered by Stalin and Beria (both are ethnic Georgians) who were criminal and amoral. But equally amoral is the use of myths of ‘genocide’, ‘colonial order’, and ‘pre-modern traditionalism’ for non-negotiable challenge of the existing social order, for violence against the non-Chechen part of the republic’s population, more exactly for an ethnic cleansing which was surprisingly unnoticed by all the human rights activists. That’s the way a spiral of violence begins leading to a tangle of charges and counter-charges and to mutually exclusive versions and moral arguments.

A debate on the genuine truth of the Chechen war is a weak research strategy which I would like to avoid in the concluding section. In the words of Michael Ignatieff, “The truth that matters to people is not a factual or a narrative truth but a moral or interpretative truth. And this will always be an object of dispute in the Balkans.”<sup>25</sup> That’s precisely what will happen over the conflict in Chechnya - there will always be several “moral and interpretative truths”. But it’s all the more important to hear the versions of those people who have no Internet sites like the Chechen ideologist Movladi Udugov, nor TV cameras and newspaper columns like the professional “heralds of truth”. Those resources are at the disposal of the conflicting elites and external actors, not of common people who are plunged into the conflict as fighters or victims.

Just as Michael Ignatieff on the Balkan war, I think it is an illusion to expect an outsider to produce an impartial and objective view of the conflict in Chechnya. A stranger can’t offer a moral interpretation that would be accepted by the conflicting sides. The very fact of being an outsider undermines instead of supporting such an objective view. I don’t believe that my version may be accepted on both sides of the divide even if I get some positive comments from participants in the events and from my fellow-outsiders. “For there is always a truth that can be known only by those on the inside. Or if not a truth - since facts are facts - then a moral significance of these facts that only an insider can fully appreciate. The truth, if it is to be believed, must be authored by those who have suffered its consequences. But the truth of war is so painful that those who have fought each other rarely if ever sit down to author it together.”<sup>26</sup>

This is not an apology of boundless relativity of the truth versus absolute knowledge. This is a recognition of the fact that a violent conflict has no truth in between because it is impossible to reach a compromise between the opposite versions: either Russia’s federal authorities launched an aggression against Chechnya (the version of many Chechens, Western public, and of the Resolution on Chechnya passed by the Council of Europe) or there was an armed *coup-d’etat* in Chechnya resulting in an aggressive para-military regime challenging the state and the army (the version of the Russian authorities, the military, the majority of the Russian public and a part of the Chechens). The two versions can hardly ever be in agreement. Nor can we ever expect a single historical narrative of this war, as there was none concerning the incorporation of Chechnya into the Russian state, nor of the XIX<sup>th</sup> century Caucasian war and of the role played in it by Imam Shamil. One or the other version usually gets the upper hand depending on the current political situation or on the angle chosen by this or that author. I see

the maximum possible agreement in recognizing the suffering and the damage borne and caused by both sides.

But there is another problem here: the higher the responsibility of those who planned and perpetrated the violence, the less inclined they are to admit it. Only once have I heard Boris Yeltsin say from a truck platform in Yekaterinburg during the election campaign of 1996 that the war in Chechnya was his worst mistake. An indirect admission was also made by his daughter Tatyana Dyachenko that her father felt himself responsible for that war. But then nothing was heard of it from the first President of Russia, now a retired politician. Nothing like that was ever admitted by Dudayev or Yandarbiyev or Maskhadov. As Michael Ignatieff writes, “peoples who believe themselves to be victims of aggression have an understandable incapacity to believe that they too have committed atrocities. Myths of innocence and of “victimhood” are powerful obstacles in the way of confronting responsibilities, as atrocity myths about the other side.”<sup>27</sup>

Therefore I see my research task in *empowering through expression* those individuals whose voices, whose visions, are least of all heard in the course of a conflict, who are least of all responsible for it, but who suffer the most. The leaders or the experts usually speak in their names. Here my position corresponds to that of a Croatian ‘war ethnographer’: “It is upon us, narrative ethnographers, to record witnessing, trauma testimonies, personal accounts of everyday life in pre-war and war time and interpret them or evaluate them as a contribution to the “more history” approach... Domestic ethnographers should display such analyses which could activate the tacit background knowledge necessary to recognize cliches, quotations, cultural or mythological stereotypes, and ready-made statements as the way of understanding multifaceted social realities.”<sup>28</sup>

### ***War-lovers’ Texts and Images***

I refer to the notion of ‘texts’ also for the visual images which drew my attention at the final stage of this work when I had to select the photographs for my book. My own snaps and those taken by Dan Smith during our trip to Chechnya in October 1995 contain only the images of ruined Grozny, and the faces of my informants and research partners. They are supplemented with several pictures of pre-war Chechnya and Chechens that I was able to obtain from family albums and archives. I was struck by the fact that many Chechens had no family albums or any photos at all because they had lost them during the war. It was a graphic evidence of how a war can uproot a society, deprive it of visually recorded memory. The resulting void can then be filled only by imagination.

However, the Chechen conflict has been one of the most visually documented with all the variety and volumes of photo and video materials possible. Liza Factor who created the Internet site *photographer.ru* organized in the autumn of 2000 a large exhibition of about a dozen professional photographers presenting a few thousand works on Chechnya. Still earlier, in spring of 2000, Oleg Klimov held a photo exhibition entitled “It’s Just a War” at the Open Society Institute. The opening of that exhibition was attended by George Soros. It was when I visited it that I got the idea of supplementing my book with professional photographs.

Sorting out what the US photographer Jason Ashkenazi, who had also taken pictures in Chechnya, called *images* (not merely photographs) I faced certain problems. To begin with, it was the typical collision of visual anthropology: the domination of the artistic element over the ethnographic veracity. The choice of themes by professional photographers (most of them vis-

iting Chechnya for the first time in their life and having no more information on it than the NTV or CNN reports) was narrow and ideologically biased. They usually went for the generally accepted assortment of subjects: Chechen elders, the *zika* dance in the central square of Grozny (the show was actually perpetuated thanks to the endless stream of reporters wishing to video-tape it), handsome Chechen militants in full combat gear smiling into the camera or saying prayers, the ruined central part of Grozny (never the intact districts outside it or any of about a hundred schools which were repaired and functioned until 1999), the appalling living conditions of refugee women and children (never the normal life in a preserved Chechen home), the dirty and brutal federal soldiers (at least that's how they were always shown before 1999).

The press photographers usually obtained the funds for their missions from their papers or TV companies, some of them enjoyed special subsidies and grants from various foundations in Russia and abroad, they won prizes and awards for the results of their work. Many of their 'images' contained a share of the truth, though never all of it - still, I have included some of them in my text. It would be better to devote a special chapter to the visual anthropology of a violent conflict, but then it would be necessary to study the political orientation, also the emotional and psychological attitudes of the professional image producers. For instance, Liza Factor's Internet site features some authors who obviously relish the images of blood and death. Those are precisely 'the war lovers' about whom John Hersey wrote his famous novel.

Most photographs of Chechnya carry, above all, their authors' messages which are never devoid of politics. What is presented as objective 'reality' often represents a deliberate search for the odious and sometimes even falsifications. Let alone the characteristic professional staging: the whole of Chechnya was their big stage, but they contrived to arrange their own small stage within it to be able to render on their film... their own conception or idea. To illustrate this statement I put into my book a few 'pairs' of photographs of similar subjects taken by different authors. I happened to find by chance the first of such pairs when I compared the snaps taken in October 1995 of three Russian soldiers (who were guarding the place where my companions Dan Smith, Pavel Bayev, and I were staying in Grozny) with the photo of Russian soldiers published on the book cover by Anatol Lieven. Then I found a pair of photos of Chechen fighters, then another one - of Chechen children under the protection of the warriors. That series could be continued endlessly demonstrating how differently the war can be read by seemingly 'objective' lenses (ironically, the Russian for *lens* is *obyektiv*).

On the whole my conclusion on visual images of Chechnya is that, while they can be enjoyed as a fine art, they can hardly be trusted unreservedly as a source of information for they are highly selective, politically motivated, and sometimes even misleading. However, those images have become an integral part of the war, without them the war would be invalid, it might even grind to a halt in their absence: it's a known fact that some of the Chechen commanders wouldn't begin a military operation until a video camera was brought along to record their next act of fighting. The tape was to show their strength and morale and to send a message to their supporters and sponsors. For several months since the autumn 1999 the outside world received visual images from Chechnya through the only western news agency - France Press. In reality that was all camera work by one single "stringer" from Georgia. Though his professional level was far below the standards of the famous agency, he satisfied it by producing the 'right picture' of the refugee camps or of Grozny blockaded by the federal troops. To a certain measure the strong anti-Russian bias in France on the question of Chechnya may be explained by that particular circumstance.

Some other journalists also resorted to such contrived collisions in order to obtain wider publicity and reach their ideological goals. **It can be said that whereas the Russian military admittedly terrorized the civilian population and journalists by their excessive brutality and closeness, such professional creators of war images terrorized the Russian military, the Russian authorities, and the Russian society in general. This tangle is hard to unravel, but it's also hard to deny that modern conflicts, including the Chechen war, have been usurped by the politicized, myth-forging media discourse.**

In the period between the first and the second Chechen wars yet another factor surfaced stemming from the inertia of pro-Chechen sympathies which had formed at the beginning of the first war and even earlier, also as an element of the anti-Russian stance which, in turn, was a rudiment of the cold war mentality. The West couldn't part with the image of the "big" enemy which had so long consolidated its ranks, it had nothing equal to substitute for it: neither the Islamic threat, nor communist China, nor yet North Korea attained to that role - a great hostile state armed with nuclear missiles. That inertia of fear as a means of consolidating the western community was added to by new geopolitical rivalries. The great Western powers and other major states (Turkey, Saudi Arabia) hastened to assert their influence on the suddenly emerged *terra nullis* - the new independent states formed on the periphery of the former USSR. Lurking behind those rivalries was the global business - particularly oil and gas and military-industrial complexes.

Capitalizing on Russia's 'near abroad' position and ousting it from that space seemed such an enticing and easy prospect that the radical ethno-nationalisms in the Northern Caucasus, better still the armed secession of Chechnya, looked like a good sign for treating Russia like a 'staggering state'. Then, all the support for Dudayev's regime and the 'Chechen resistance' invested in the first war which ended, as it seemed to the external actors, in complete triumph for Chechnya (the title of Anatol Lieven's book is "Chechnya: The Tombstone of the Russian Power") made it hard to accept Russia's subsequent retaliation and the crunch of the separatist project. A firm (though false) conviction that Chechnya's independence was an accomplished fact made the 'international community' assume an inadequately harsh tone and position towards Russia. As to the foreign Islamic radicals, they openly chose to give Chechnya direct support in its armed struggle with Russia including arms supplies, money, and mercenaries prepared to fight in the fanatic *Jihad*.

The intellectual 'anti-war terror' was led not even by journalists, but by novelists, philosophers, and other cultural figures of our time. The international Pen Club held its 67<sup>th</sup> congress in Moscow, in May 2000, and passed a resolution on 'the last mass crime of the XX<sup>th</sup> century'. The document contained the entire ideological menu needed for mobilizing the armed formations in Chechnya to go on with the war: the rigid definition of the warring sides (Russia is waging an undeclared war on the territory of the independent republic of Chechnya); the extreme dramatization of "the tragedy acted out before the whole world"; condemnation of "the second attempt by the Russian authorities to resolve the tragic situation by military means"; recognition of "the legitimate government of Maskhadov being ready for a peace settlement"; demand that Russia should end the war immediately and start negotiations; reference to "the Chechen ethnos" (learning the jargon of Soviet ethnography) whose "normal development is impossible without the lost cultural values and institutions". All that is coached in the moral tones of humanism and democracy strongly upheld by the Pen Club and its Russian Center.

Who wouldn't join the condemnation of violence and destruction? Who wouldn't lament the losses and deprivations suffered by the people of Chechnya? But the undoubtedly sincere concern of the writers was tainted with intellectual arrogance, intolerance, and inability to see the other side of the coin. They fancied themselves as the ultimate arbiters on the humanist principles entitled to moral terror - like the French writer André Glucksmann who called on the large audience of the international conference on Chechnya, held in Moscow in December 1999, to honor the memory of those fallen there by standing during the five minutes of his speech.

**Such 'liberal interventionists' reject war and violence as totally evil and, in the spirit of the western anti-military tradition, they point to the state as the main agent of violence and the source of war. They dehumanize the state failing to see the people who constitute it, treating it as an impersonal power, and, on the other hand, they ascribe all human values to the 'ethnos' failing to see any bandits or extremist leaders in its midst who might have chosen a tragically fallacious path for that same 'ethnos'.** I agree with Michael Ignatieff when he writes, "However paradoxical it may sound, the police and armies of the nation-states remain the only available institutions we have ever developed with capacity to control and channel large-scale violence."<sup>29</sup>

In that light we may ask the questions: to what extent do people who remain in the zones of relative security help those who find themselves in a zone of violence to recreate those viable and effective institutions of the state and, to what extent may our external interference further exacerbate the situation if we supply the conflicting sides with more weapons encouraging them to continue the conflict? One of the prudent answers is the following: "Sometimes, hard as it is, the best thing to do is to do nothing: to let a victor emerge and then to assist him to establish and sustain the monopoly on violence upon which order depends. In the other case, where the adversaries are too evenly balanced to allow a decisive outcome, we may have to intervene on the side that appears to be most in the right and assist it to consolidate its power. This means, of course, accepting that war may be an unavoidable solution to ethnic conflict. It means accepting a moral pact with the devil of war, seeking to use its flames to burn a path to peace."<sup>30</sup>

This explicit statement is not for social scientists but for policy-makers. But in some cases it is relevant from the point of view of restraint and non-intervention. With certain reservations it can be applied to intellectuals often interfering with local societies and conflicts in a partial way - by conducting their research or staging public and political actions. I found an expression of local actors' contrasting position only once - in the publications of the Sakharov Fund which I mentioned above (*Chechnya: The Right for Culture*, 1999; Furman 1999). Surprisingly the texts written by local Chechen authors contained more tolerance and reserve than others concerning the events in Chechnya and its relations with the rest of Russia. Those authors wrote about Russia as their own country, expressed their loyalty to it, a sense of being its citizens, though the editors of that collection had prescribed by its title that the discussion was of two different states and societies. They condemned the war without mentally exiting the common state while demonstrating their strong Chechen identity and local patriotism. But their tentative and difficult message to the rest of society was either ignored or, in some cases, censored by the Moscow civil rights activists who stifled that dissonance with the texts by foreign and Russian authors publishing their own versions of the Chechen war.

I think that one of the principles of the anthropologist's professional code not to disturb the integrity and social balance of the society one is studying and writing about was badly violated in Chechnya. I blame those who, having previously never even heard the name of Chechnya, let alone acquired any deeper knowledge of its society, assumed the right of interference and incitement. Their pro-separatist bias was really caused either by a set-back of their chronic anti-Russian syndrome or by the liberal utopia of ethnic 'self-determination of the oppressed minorities'. But I don't observe similar sympathies or incitement in favor of the armed separatism of the Turkish Kurds (though there are some in favor of the Iraqi Kurds) or the armed separatists in the Basque country or in Northern Ireland. The label of a democratic country, the NATO and EU membership evidently make the use of force by the state justified in those cases. But the same 'liberal interventionist' club caused destabilization in Tibet by supporting the actions of the local Buddhist monks against the Chinese state as early as the 1950s. The latest victims of that 'international concern' were the Kosovo Albanians who were given arms, training, and political support from outside in order to complete the process of destruction ('self-determination') of the new Yugoslavia. Talking of double standards is not just empty rhetoric: this is the sad reality of external forces manipulating the local scenes chosen as targets for geopolitical rivalries and utopian projects. Chechnya has become one of such scenes on which external actors stage their performances.

Where, when, and why is this or that spot on the globe chosen as a scene for yet another violent conflict or destructive war? It would be wrong and naive to think that this can be done without some internal conditions and enthusiastic participation from the local activists. The world abounds in situations that can be summarily described by the formula 'minorities at risk'. The risk factors may consist in the local state being unable to maintain tolerable living standards for its people; or being unwilling to permit some part of the population to preserve its cultural and group identity; or the state failing to provide security for local communities and individuals. All such factors may indeed breed fear and concern, even a desire to withdraw from the common political space. But most often those feelings and demands are learned and articulated by the activists of such groups, by some radicals who mobilize an irreconcilable, militant opposition.

To what extent do such irreconcilable radicals express the 'will of the people' is usually greatly questionable and the answer to that question forms the opinion on how 'just' or 'unjust' their struggle is. And that 'just - unjust' dichotomy has become the curse of our modern world including within the space of the former USSR. True, it was the USSR that adhered to the moral principle of distinguishing between 'just and unjust wars' as one of the basic points of the Marxist ideology of the world revolution. In actual fact, the conception of just and unjust wars has far deeper roots than the USSR and Marxist theory. This notion has a long history and is still being used both in social anthropology and in real politics, it is a popular truism in the jargon of political writers. Even such a thorough thinker as Michael Ignatieff did not avoid a bow to that dubious dichotomy in writing, "In Afghanistan and Chechnya wars that began as genuine national uprisings against foreign occupation have degenerated into vicious fights for territory, resources, drugs, and arms among militias who are often no different from criminal gangs."<sup>31</sup>

Why then is Chechnya listed together with Afghanistan and not with Tibet, Sri Lanka's Tamils, Iraqi and Turkish Kurds? Aren't the slogans and the 'inside narrative truth' quite similar in all those cases? Maybe because only in those two places the 'foreign occupation' was by the USSR-Russia still treated as the arch-enemy? China has not yet graduated to that impor-



tant role, Sri Lanka is on the periphery of world politics, Iraq has been punished and its Kurds have the US air protection, Turkey is NATO's outpost in Asia - so, who would worry about Ocalan's death sentence? I would like to find answers to these questions in Michael Ignatieff's postface to my book.

In most cases the national states cope adequately with their ethno-cultural and ethno-political problems through bettering governance, talks, affirmative actions, concessions, or by the use of law inducements and, if necessary, armed force. **Ethnic radicalism and ethnic wars arise not where they are caused by group fear, but where the state itself encourages ethnic divisions as a basis of its system of governance (as it was in the USSR and still is in the post-Soviet states) or where the state loses its grip on the law and order, its control over the arms arsenals, and permits a rise of irregular armed groups led by ethnic impostors and irresponsible adventurers.** That's the weak spot and the opportune moment for the external forces to construct the image of an 'enslaved people' struggling for its freedom and independence.

To make that image radically different from the rest of the country's population such actors make use of naively romantic ethnography and mythologized history depicting the ethnic group in question as a 'Muslim nation' or *noble savage*, warriors like the ancient Aeneas armed with grenade-throwers. Thus, the chosen stage also receives a prescribed role. What role was assigned to the Chechens by internal and external script-writers many of whom will never agree, never even suspect that they belong to the stage managers of the war drama?

### ***Forging Chechens from Ethnographic Trash***

Paradoxical as it may seem, it wasn't so much the Chechen people who generated a deep conflict in the country (surely, with the participation of the Russian state and its army) as the war generated that image, but the role in which the Chechens were presented to the outside world that had earlier never heard of their existence. Just as the Serbs and Croats before the war in Yugoslavia had identified themselves less on their ethnic characteristics, but more on belonging to certain civic networks or local communities, so the Chechens before 1991 had defined themselves first and foremost as Soviet citizens, some of them as members of the Communist Party and local administrative bureaucracies, as Muslims or atheists, as members of various professions, age-groups, and family circles. Even their secret brand as 'formerly deported' was not entirely exclusive because there were millions of other people of all nationalities who had been deported, exiled, dispossessed, limited in their rights, released after serving long terms in the prison camps, etc. That was the legacy of the Stalin's period borne by several generations including that of myself as well as of Khasbulatov, Dudayev, and Maskhadov.

The evidence collected by me and my research partners shows that for the pre-war (the 1990s) generation of Chechens neither their ethnic identity, nor the fact of deportation constituted their main social status or identity. As to the tribal (*teip*) affiliation, very few of them made any references about it. They were concerned with their earnings and living, chances of getting a good education, professional careers, army and other state services, etc just as the rest of the population of the Soviet Union. In their hierarchy of personal social identification ethnicity was not in the frontline and Chechens were no different from any other ethnic group, least of all from the other Northern Caucasian nationalities (Ingush, Dagestani, Kabardins, Balkars, and others)<sup>32</sup>.

The reification of *Chechenness* arose in conditions of a conflict and of the deep social transformations of the Gorbachov-Yeltsin time. It happened in a dramatic, mythologized form, constructed from the available historic and ethnographic material (most of it fictitious), from literary and pseudo-scientific fantasies, also from deliberate political prescriptions. All of it served to impose on the Chechens a kind of primordial and pre-modern identity and a special role based on a mixture of nationalistic narcissism, victimization complex, messianic ideas of being 'grave-diggers of the empire', 'liberators of the Caucasus', and 'the vanguard of Islam'.

*Pain and fear* are often presented as the *idee-fixe* of Chechen identity, of the Chechen internal world and *self-defense* as a basis for fighting. Frankly speaking, I have a problem to reject or to accept it in this context. Probably, it needs more research or maybe this is an impenetrable fabric for a stranger. What I am sure of is that my explanatory power is no weaker than that of my colleagues among journalists or social scientists obsessed with historic-ethnographic references as a proof of a high standard analysis. I give here some examples of scholarly abuse of history and ethnography and how they travel from one text to another and from one level of discourse to another. Finally, irrelevant and mytho-poetic Chechen past forges the image of living Chechens and prescribe their present day role. This forging procedure destroys relevant things around, including everyday regularities and concerns which do not correspond to the constructed image. This forging provokes beliefs and expectations which empty the mental and behavioral space around. At a certain time and in place it can be filled with gunfire only.

I put the blame here on those who, through superficial historicity and cultural fundamentalism, reduce the whole group to a level of primordial 'pre-modern nation' 'with a unique fighting morale' and thus deprive it of a chance to participate in peaceful transformations towards better governance and secure life. I understand that it is a serious accusation against some persons, many of whom I know personally as good individuals and devoted scholars. However, what I am first blaming is an inadequate state of the art in Russian social science and the hasty borrowings from this reservoir by other experts.

It is interesting how arguments are travelling from one text to another. In this article we analyzed many things from the world of ideas, mentalities, debates and political fantasies among Chechen people. Much of what looks like a manifestation of a society crisis and demodernization phenomenon can be found first in academic texts as postulates or presuppositions. References to history and ethnographic data are later borrowed by journalists and policy-makers. Then it becomes a part of everyday talks and rumors as a hard reality. The abuse of history and ethnography in the Chechen case is just striking. Articles published by a member of my Institute, Dr. Yan Chesnov are most often a source of references for Chechen ethnography and some authors regard it as 'irreplaceable work on the structures of Chechen traditional society'<sup>33</sup>. On the contrary, I think my colleague made a decisive contribution to forging myths of a unique Chechen civilization and of 400 years' fight between Chechens and Russians - one of the main sources of nationalistic narcissism - later parroted by Yeltsin and Maskhadov. The following is one of his superficial but 'politically correct' observations: "Russian totalitarianism always attempts to suppress the mountain democracy of the nationalities of the Caucasus, and first and foremost that of the Vainakhs, in the most barbaric fashion. It has already been 400 years since the Vainakh civilization liquidated the institutions of a feudal aristocracy and of a natural, inherited inequality among people. The individual's natural freedom is the essence of the Vainakh democracy. This freedom found powerful support in the institutions of the Islamic religion. For totalitarian, imperial regimes, a free nationality within the composition of Russia is not simply a thorn in the side, but by its example is dangerous for the enslaved fellow-

citizens of the entire country...[We should recognize] that the ancestors of these peoples once lived on the shores of the Tigris and the Euphrates, where the great beginnings of the spiritual life of humanity were born. These nationalities are the creators of the unique Vainakh civilization, about which we know that it maintains the freedom of the individual as the most important value. Among the Chechens, this concept is so highly developed that I had the opportunity to record the following assertion: 'One cannot be a slave - even to circumstances'.<sup>34</sup>

Sergei Arutiunov, an outstanding Russian anthropologist, also tends to focus on the traditional Vainakh military democracy and historical memory in explaining the high degree of mobilization of the Chechens in the conflict: "Chechnya was and is a society of military democracy. Chechnya never had any kings, emirs, princes, or barons. Unlike other Caucasian nations, there was never feudalism in Chechnya. Traditionally, it was governed by a council of elders on the basis of consensus, but like all military democracies - like the Iroquois in America or Zulu in southern Africa - Chechens retain the institution of military chief. In peacetime, they recognize no sovereign authority and may be fragmented into a hundred rival clans. However, in time of danger, when faced with aggression, the rival clans unite and elect a military leader. This leader may be known to everyone as an unpleasant personality, but is elected nonetheless for being a good general. While the war is on, this leader is obeyed."<sup>35</sup>

These two Russian authorities on Chechnya serve as a basis for many other texts whose authors repeat or elaborate further these postulates: "They are a nationality with no identification with the state and the society in which they live, and no motivation whatsoever to conform with its laws; equipped with ancient traditions which are in contradiction to those of 'enlightened', 'pluralist' and 'progressive' liberalism; with social forms which make them opaque to outside investigation; internally cohesive, and remarkably efficient and ruthless in pursuit of their aims; and in a country in which a mixture of poorly institutionalized 'democracy', social disintegration, state weakness and state corruption have opened up the most enormous opportunities and spaces for organized criminal activity. One might almost say, to adapt a phrase of Robert Musil's, that if the modern Western bourgeoisie could dream, it would dream Chechens."<sup>36</sup>

Anatol Lieven calls "the Russian intervention" "an error of colonial ethnography", meaning that there were fundamental misconceptions among the Russian KGB and military experts regarding the nature of the Chechen clan system, and their society, "traditional, irrational, divided, static and inflexible".<sup>37</sup> We confront here a more serious phenomenon of anthropological neo-colonial reductionism when, for a variety of reasons, a culturally distinctive but modern people is qualified as an 'ancient tribal ethnos' or 'pre-modern nation'. The logic of this academic neo-colonialism leads to the conclusion that because of radical differences from the rest of society a group deserves unquestionable sympathy, patronizing, support, and protection. By citing poorly proved or even fictitious data on their fundamental cultural differences and by rejecting commonalities, this kind of anthropology believes it demonstrates both high disciplinary standards and political correctness.

**Putting modern Chechens into iron ethnographic cages and granting them a *carte blanche* for despising law, committing crime, and ruthlessly fighting, this approach only provides lip service to the people.** I did my own field research among the Iroquois and remember well when the Grand Chief Joseph Norton from the Kahnawake reserve told me that his main concern was to make his people observe laws and custom regulations on the U.S.-Canadian border while engaging in tobacco and casino business on the reserve. Why do the

above cited recipes not extend to these peoples of so-called 'military democracy'? Why are their 'military chiefs', such as Leonard Pelletier and Joseph Banks, serving life prison terms for challenging the state order by organizing at the Pine-Ridge reservation an armed 'resistance' to FBI agents?

I have a dream also - a dream that the Chechens will be able to escape the Western bourgeoisie's dreams of Chechens. The imposed role is a hard mission and it is not easy to avoid it. One should observe that the same kind of ethnography praising Chechen freedom-fighting efficiency is now being used to explain their failure as well. "Blood is everything in Chechnya...In 1994, all Chechens were united as a *k'am* [entire Chechen people] in their common struggle with Russia. However, in the course of the war and during subsequent years, Chechen military and social structures gradually reverted to their tribal foundations. A member of one *teip* is loath to place himself under a commander from another *teip*, and conversely all Chechen field commanders became alderman of their *teips*. After the war this peculiarity became the major obstacle for the formation of the national political institutions and state discipline... Except in the most acute crisis, Chechens will never submit to leadership from any *teip* other than their own, and each *teip* will remain a rival of the others. Chechens function as a *k'am* only in the face of a clear external threat and are unable to unite themselves under their own power. They simply lack a tradition of a supra-familial political organization, and, in this respect, may be regarded, however unpalatably, as a premodern society [Are Dagestani modern?!] The result has been a catastrophic social implosion which has engulfed all of Chechnya, and within which the current war is merely the latest phase."<sup>38</sup>

Thus, the Chechen independence project was found to be unrealizable for several reasons. Among them, Enver Kisriev and Robert Ware have noted Russian politics, the impact of Chechen lawlessness upon its neighbors (such as cross-border incursions, hostage taking and other forms of criminal activity), and the failure of Chechnya's economic, social, and political development. "Chechnya lacks capital, infrastructure, non-military investment, and viable trade routes through non-Russian territory. It has essentially no civil society and hardships imposed by its lawlessness are even greater for ordinary Chechens than for citizens in the neighboring territories. It has developed no authoritative political order and it has inspired little confidence abroad. Some of these problems can be traced to traditional Chechen social structure."<sup>39</sup>

As we see from my data, during the war, Chechens were not united in their struggle with Moscow, while the Russian society was deeply divided in its views of that disastrous war. In three years after the war, the Chechen society disintegrated even more with in-group rivalries and political/military factions. Power has been divided between the regime that was relatively conciliatory in its approach to Moscow and an opposition that turned towards a militant expansionist stance and political Islam in an effort to acquire legitimacy. This polarity was not stable and it has been confined mainly to the armed factions of society. More and more people who did not fight were moving toward the opposition to both warring sects. The main watershed of Chechen society was caused by deep economic and political chaos and personal insecurity. However, this majority lacking Kalashnikovs could not raise its voice without an immediate punishment. These people were hostages of an extreme non-conformist ideology and of the *Shariah* watchdogs.

The Chechen society did not fail to build its own nation state because of the absence of a history of overreaching political organization. There were several other more 'contemporary'

factors which have inhibited the building of a new functioning polity out of the chaos of Chechnya's war-torn society.

First, many Chechens found comfort in their national mythology enriched by the post war discourse of a "great victory". Heroic mythology served well as an inspiration in a time of fighting, but it provided mere lip service in a time of reconstruction and negotiating the conflict with the warring party. "This warrior mythology is self-destructive particularly because it is self-perpetuating".<sup>40</sup>

Second, a new born Chechen self-conception during the conflict included Islam as an expediting factor through which many Chechens sought to address the deficiencies of their political situation. But traditional Sufi brotherhoods reemerged in Chechnya in a poorly religiously educated populace with strong secular Soviet legacies. Further, the expected pacifying role of *tariqatist* Islam did not take place. It was damaged by warrior mythology, ethnic/regional cleavages and high level of post-Soviet atheism that excluded the idea of united Islamic *umma*. It was complicated by an ideological intensification that occurred during the last three years as competing clan and military sect leaders staged appeals to Islam in order to acquire political legitimacy and supremacy. The process of Islamic return into Chechen society has been greatly damaged by the introduction of Wahhabi Islamic fundamentalism, which spread through most militant factions of the society against a non-united but recognized *muftiat* and Maskhadov's weak but legitimate government. This destructive foreign prescription came with the help of moral and material supporters in the Persian Gulf, Pakistan and Afghanistan.

Third, nor is it simply the case that Wahhabism, and more tangible influences from the Gulf, have interfered with Chechen fragile intra-group balance. They have reanimated during the violent conflict inter-teip cleavages, and more afterward political rivalries, found expediency in puritanical Islam. This expedient was crucial insofar as these same cleavages prevented the Maskhadov regime from establishing the civic foundations of political legitimacy: law and order, economic sustainability, public services, etc.

Finally, no less important, but often ignored by analysts is the fact that it is the Chechen revolution of double negation when both destroyed the Soviet system of rule and its ideology, and simultaneously indulged in an unrealized elitist project of restoring the imagined order (based on clan structure or on religion) which has never existed in the past, at least since the time of incorporating Chechnya into the Russian state. The most realistic option was in restoring the 1991 pre-revolution order but the last one has vanished in the rest of the post-Soviet space and has been completely "delegitimized" by internal and outside actors. **The war-torn society has been placed into a drama of building a future through invented images of the past or according to prescribed recipes alien to the Chechen society.**

## **Post-conflict reconstruction plan**

### **A. The long-term peace objectives for the region are:**

1. Strengthening the rule of law and the protection of human rights;
2. Meeting the basic needs of the populations;
3. Ensuring personal security for the Chechen people;
4. Economic development (particularly access to employment and education), and
5. Improving relations between Chechens, other North Caucasus peoples and the larger Russian society.

### **B. The risk factors and challenges for rehabilitation in the Chechen republic are:**

1. The absence of consistent and well funded Russian state policy of post-conflict reconstruction;
2. Lack of national political consensus towards the war and peace in Chechnya;
3. Low morale and order among federal troops;
4. Alienation and social disorientation of the Chechen civilian population;
5. Profiteering from the war;
6. Widespread human rights abuses;
7. Poor consolidation of local power in Chechnya;
8. Internationalization of the conflict and external support for Chechen separatists.

### **C. The response directions and specific activities are:**

Accomplished destructions, huge losses, and ongoing severe fighting make the prospects for peace and stability a long and complex process. There are three key strategic issues:

- a) the possibility of reaching a consensus on policy toward Chechnya in the Russian politics and society at large;
- b) the readiness of the state and the public to allocate resources for the post-war reconstruction of the region;
- c) the capacity of the Chechen society to participate and to define the peace-building process.

**The real dilemma is that the severely damaged Chechen society is incapable to provide internal coherence and resources for restoration and at the same time Chechnya can not be restored without local mobilization for peace-building process and for post-war reconstruction. The long-term and complex process of reconstruction presents great challenges and it is important that peacemakers with adequate resources and competence at all levels are involved.**

There are main directions for reconstruction efforts:

1. There must be coordination of the efforts of the Russian Presidential administration, the Russian government and legislature, the Chechen Republic administration and local authorities, and the Representative of the President in the Southern Federal District to implement reconstruction of Chechen economy and society. After the immediate need of hu-

manitarian support for the vulnerable Chechen population and for IDPs outside Chechnya, the priorities for the Federal centre must be funding for the reconstruction of Grozny, housing, the agricultural sector and the petroleum industries, restoration of life-subsistence structures, including water and energy supplies, medical service, pension payments, demining arable lands, etc. Reconstruction must also be linked to the return of IDPs, and the revival of the Republic's economy will be dependent on their return. Urgent pan-Russian public campaign for assistance and help to suffering people of Chechnya and refugees outside of Chechnya is needed.

2. Social reconstruction must also address the issue of marginalization, instituting job-creation schemes, and health, education and awareness-raising programmes. The commercial sector will be key to the reconstruction process, and the Russian corporate sector and Chechen entrepreneurs must be encouraged to invest in the major industries and other social services. The establishment of co-ordinating bodies to facilitate investment and humanitarian support would be helpful in achieving these objectives.
3. A political settlement of the problem in Chechnya is essential, and positive public commitments to ending the conflict and to proceed with the process of reconstruction will be vital if a lasting settlement is to be achieved. Critical for the settlement process is the definition of Chechnya's legal status within the Russian Federation. This last issue cannot be a subject of negotiation with armed separatists but negotiations with armed groups to end the violence is needed. Decision on the country's status must be taken by the Chechnya's populations themselves.
4. Another key component of a lasting settlement will be the development of strong and representative power institutions in Chechnya and the conciliation of competing interests' groups. Democratic elections, and the legitimate authoritative power they will provide for the Republic, must be the focus of any settlement process that will be able to provide any long-term resolution of this protracted conflict.
5. It is essential that positive and constructive policies be adopted with regard to radio and TV broadcasting in and outside of Chechnya. Broadcasts should not only represent Chechen society externally, but should be oriented to the needs of the Chechen people. Awareness-raising can be used to help consolidate and encourage peace-oriented sentiments within Chechen society, and to help dismantle anti-Chechen feelings within Russian society. Transparency regarding settlement efforts and negotiations will be key in consolidating public support for any final settlement. Media projects can play an instrumental role in supporting transparency of reconstruction and settlement efforts.
6. The state of minds is crucial for bringing peace and that is why ideological and emotional efforts must include dismantling from the mental space unrealized doctrines of non-negotiable full secession from Russia and working out a proposal for internal self-determination and sovereign governance with legal and political guarantees of this status. Equally important are measures for changing public climate in and around Chechnya and promoting reconciliation through the recognition of shared sufferings and shared responsibilities.
7. One of the most delicate missions is the implementation of professional social therapy work among local population on how to return to a peaceful life and provision of opportunities for descent labor and payments. Special programs for targeted groups, like children warriors, wounded combatants, orphans, homeless people are needed with the use of international experience and actors.

8. Stable peace is impossible without restoration of internal cohesion among Chechens, especially among elite elements, including those who left Chechnya and reside in other parts of the country. Internal cohesion should follow arming peace coalitions with resources and power.
9. Building peace means minimizing military presence and putting military activities in Chechnya under shared control of federal and local administrations. Law and order must be upheld and the indiscriminate and unrestrained use of firearm must be stopped. Special rules and codes of conduct in relation to the civilian population, combatants and other soldiers must be established and adhered to. The struggle against terrorism and crime must be more professional and consistent and should strictly observe the rule of law. Continuation of military operations against Chechen fighters and terrorist groups should leave a space for negotiating cease-fire and peace with military commanders.
10. Together with monitoring human rights violations in Chechnya, joint international efforts are needed to bring restrictions for irresponsible outside manipulations and for the war-sponsoring actors in other countries and in Russia as well.

**D. Strategic principles include:**

1. Integrated approach to reconstruction in Chechnya, involving the Russian Federal and the local Chechen governments, local communities, NGOs and international organizations.
2. Political settlement should not be excluded or delayed by military activities, and definition of the status and the mode of governance should be implemented by the population of the Chechen republic.
3. Transparency and accountability in the reconstruction and political settlement process are critical.

Moscow, January 2001



## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> See, Dan Smith. *The State of War and Peace. Atlas*. New edition. London: Penguin, 1997.
- <sup>2</sup> For a more elaborate presentation of this position see, Galina Starovoitova. *National Self-Determination: Approaches and Case Studies*. Thomas J. Watson Jr. Institute for International Studies. Occasional Paper # 27. Brown University, Providence, 1997.
- <sup>3</sup> Boris Yeltsin. *Poslanie Prezidenta Federal'nomu Sobraniu Rossiskoi Federatzii* [Presidential Message to The Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation], Moscow, 1995, p. 30.
- <sup>4</sup> See, my overview of the situation in: Valery Tishkov, 'Ethnic Conflicts in the former USSR. The Use and Misuse of Typology and Data,' *Journal of Peace Research*, vol. no. , August 1999, pp.
- <sup>5</sup> Anatol Lieven. *Chechnya. Tombstone of Russian Power*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1998, p. 327.
- <sup>6</sup> Zalpa Bersanova. 'Systema zennostei sovremennykh chechentsev (po materialam oprosov) [The Values system of contemporary Chechens (results of sociological surveys)]', pp. 223 - 249 in Furman 1999.
- <sup>7</sup> Riches, D. *The Anthropology of Violence*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1986. Fieldwork under Fire. Contemporary Studies of Violence and Survival. Ed. by C. Nordstrom and A. Robben. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995. D. E. Apter (ed.). *The Legitimization of Violence*. L., MacMillan Press, 1997.
- <sup>8</sup> See: Signe Howell and Roy Willis (eds). *Societies at Peace. Anthropological Perspectives* - London: Routledge, 1989
- <sup>9</sup> Personal communication with Vyacheslav Mikhailov, July 1996, Moscow.
- <sup>10</sup> Dmitri Furman, ed. *Chechnya i Rossiya: Obschestvo i gosudarstvo* [Chechnya and Russia: State and Society]. Moscow: 1999, p. 14.
- <sup>11</sup> On the complicated nature of internalization see: Kirsten Hastrup and Peter Hervik, eds. *Social Experience and Anthropological Knowledge*. London and New York, 1994, p.7.
- <sup>12</sup> Greg Hansen and Robert Seely. *War and Humanitarian Action in Chechnya*. Thomas J. Watson Jr. Institute for International Studies. Occasional Paper #26. Providence, 1996; Gail Lapidus
- <sup>13</sup> D.Gakayev. Chapter in "Ways of Peace in the North Caucasus", independent expert report edited by V.A.Tishkov. Moscow, Aviaizdat, 1999, p.33-42; M.Yusupov. Chapters on Chechnya in the annual reports by the Network of Ethnological Monitoring and Early Warning of Conflicts "Inter-Ethnic Relations and Conflicts in Post-Soviet States", annual reports of 1998, Moscow, 1999.
- <sup>14</sup> Here is indirect reference to Dzhokhar Dudayev sarcastic statement in front of angry Vedeno school teachers demanding salary payments: "Go to the forest and pick up mushrooms" (*hkamzish* - in Chechen language).
- <sup>15</sup> See, data on Guatemala, Nicaragua and Somalia in the War-Torn Societies Project's publications.
- <sup>16</sup> Personal conversation with Aliroev, 24 July 2000, Moscow.
- <sup>17</sup> Chechnya. *A Right to a Culture*, pp. 36-37
- <sup>18</sup> V. Akaev. *Suffism and Wahhabism in the North Caucasus*. Working Papers in Urgent and Applied Ethnology. # 127. Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology, Moscow, 1999.
- <sup>19</sup> D.Gakayev. *Ways of Peace in the North Caucasus*, p.p.36-37
- <sup>20</sup> Ina-Maria Greverus. *Speak up or be silent? On an ethno-anthropological approach to war. Anthropological Journal on European Cultures*, 1995, vol. 4, no. 2, p. 92.
- <sup>21</sup> Maja Povrzanovic. *The Imposed and the Imagined as Encountered by Croatian War Ethnographers. Current Anthropology*, vol. 41, no. 2, April 2000, p. 152.
- <sup>22</sup> Cale Feldman, Lada, Ines Prica, and Reana Senjikovich, eds. *Fear, death, and resistance: An ethnography of war, Croatia 1991-1992*. Zagreb: Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Research, 1993; Jambresic Kirin, Renata and Maja Povrzanovich, eds. *War, exile, everyday life: Cultural perspectives*. Zagreb: Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Research, 1996.
- <sup>23</sup> Maja Povrzanovich. *Op. cit.*, p. 153-154.
- <sup>24</sup> Anatol Lieven. *Op. cit.*, p. 353.
- <sup>25</sup> Michael Ignatieff. *The Warrior's Honor. Ethnic war and the modern conscience*. London: Vintage, 1999, p. 176.
- <sup>26</sup> *Ibidem*.
- <sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 176.
- <sup>28</sup> Jambresic Kirin, Renata. *Testimonial discourse between national narrative and ethnography as social-cultural analysis. Collegium Anthropologicum*, vol. 19, no. 1, p. 26.
- <sup>29</sup> Michael Ignatieff. *Op. cit.*, p. 160.
- <sup>30</sup> *Ibidem*.
- <sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 125.

<sup>32</sup> См.: Социальная идентификация личности. Отв. ред. В.А.Ядов. Москва, 1993 (особенно таблица на стр. 132 - 133).

<sup>33</sup> Anatol Lieven. Op. cit., p. 335.

<sup>34</sup> Yan Chesnov. Civilization and the Chechen. *Anthropology & Archeology of Eurasia*, vol. 34, no. 3, Winter 1995-1996, (pp. 28-40), p. 30, 32.

<sup>35</sup> Sergei Arutiunov. 'Ethnicity and Conflict in the Caucasus' in Fred Wehling, ed. *Ethnic Conflict and Russian Intervention in the Caucasus. Policy Paper # 16*. Institute on Global Conflict and Cooperation, University of California, San Diego, August 1995, p. 17.

<sup>36</sup> Anatol Lieven. Op. cit., p. 354.

<sup>37</sup> Anatol Lieven. Op. cit., p. 335 - 339.

<sup>38</sup> Enver Kisriev and Robert Ware, 2000, pp. 6-7.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., p. 36.

<sup>40</sup> Ibidem.