

CAUCASUS WORLD

The Chechens

A handbook



Peoples of the Caucasus

Amjad Jaimoukha

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The Chechens

The ancient Chechen nation has been living in its idyllic homeland in the North Caucasus for thousands of years, building states, creating its own civilization, and forging relations and interacting with other Caucasian and Near Eastern civilizations.

The only comprehensive treatment of the subject available in English, this book provides a ready introduction and practical guide to the Chechen people, and to some little known and rarely considered aspects of Chechen culture, including customs and traditions, folklore, arts and architecture, music and literature. *The Chechens* also includes:

- Chechen history from ancient times, providing sketches of archaic religions and civilizations;
- the present political situation in Chechnya;
- the esoteric social structure and the brand of Sufism peculiar to the Chechens;
- analysis of Chechen media development since the early twentieth century, and of the short-lived Chechen film industry; images of the Chechens carried by Russian and Western medias;
- a section on proverbs and sayings;
- appendices detailing social structure, the native pantheon, bibliographies and periodicals pertaining to the Chechens and Chechnya, and a lexicographic listing;
- a comprehensive bibliography, with many entries in English, for further reading.

This handbook should prove a corrective to the negative stereotypes that have come to be associated with the Chechens and put a human face back on one of the noblest—yet least understood—of nations. This book is an indispensable and accessible resource for all those with an interest in Chechnya.

Amjad Jaimoukha is Assistant President of the Royal Scientific Society in Jordan. Educated in England, he has written a number of books and articles, including *The Circassians* (also published by RoutledgeCurzon), *Kabardian—English Dictionary*, *The Cycles of the Circassian Nart Epic* and *Circassian Proverbs and Sayings*. He is also a member of the Central Eurasian Studies Society at Harvard University.

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 **RoutledgeCurzon**
Taylor & Francis Group

LONDON AND NEW YORK

First published 2005 by RoutledgeCurzon 2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

Simultaneously published in the USA and Canada by RoutledgeCurzon 270 Madison Ave, New York, NY 10016

RoutledgeCurzon is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group

This edition published in the Taylor & Francis e-Library, 2005.

“To purchase your own copy of this or any of Taylor & Francis or Routledge’s collection of thousands of eBooks please go to <http://www.ebookstore.tandf.co.uk/>.”

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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data A catalog record for this book has been requested

ISBN 0-203-35643-8 Master e-book ISBN

ISBN 0-203-68299-8 (Adobe e-Reader Format)
ISBN 0-415-32328-2 (Print Edition)

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Foreword

Since 1722, the Chechens have struggled against successive Russian regimes in a bloody cycle of invasion, resistance, bloodshed and deportation. The bitter winter of 1944 saw the wholesale deportation of the Chechens to Central Asia and Siberia, many in cattle trucks, while those in the mountains who could or would not be moved were burnt alive in their villages. Their land was literally erased from the Soviet maps. The following decades saw the Chechens rebuild their land until, in 1991, they declared themselves a sovereign nation. But, with grim inevitability, wars with Russia followed in 1994 and 1999, resulting in the razing of Chechnya. As Alexander Solzhenitsyn wrote, describing the conditions in the Soviet gulags: ‘There was one nation that would not give in, would not acquire the mental habits of submission—and not just individual rebels among them, but the whole nation to a man. These were the Chechens.’

But this was a struggle for more than political survival. The Chechens have also been fighting to preserve their cultural identity and heritage. The 1994–1996 War, for example, saw the destruction of the national archives in Grozny, a unique, irreplaceable accumulation of Chechen culture that had only finally come together in the previous few years.

Caught as their homeland is between international power blocs and the deadly practicalities of energy politics, perhaps their greatest challenge still lies ahead. Indeed, the Chechens are at a major crossroads in their existence, where the choice is stark: exile or assimilation. Either way it amounts to the murder of a people, since the difference brought by the twentieth and now the twenty-first centuries is simple: the amputation of the people from their homeland.

Behind the romantic image of indomitable mountaineers lies a welcoming people whose migrant communities have helped build countries like Jordan, Turkey and even Russia. Significantly, the Chechens, for all their warlike reputation, have never sought to invade another country or enslave another people. And, while one cannot ignore the scale of Russian savagery against the Chechens, one cannot ignore the interdependence that has grown between the two peoples. Yet recent years have seen Russia and the West link the entire Chechen people to a wider, international pattern of ‘Islamic terrorism’—once more branded a ‘suspect people’, as Stalin had previously labelled them. While no one can deny the existence of terrorist attacks carried out by Chechen guerrillas, these have little to do with international terror networks, but everything to do with three centuries of oppression of a people no more and no less Islamic than the British are Anglican. Indeed, the Chechen character is less Islamic and more Caucasian, related neither culturally nor linguistically to their northern neighbours.

For a people who are supposed to represent such a strategic threat, beyond the welter of expert reports on the ongoing crisis, very little has been written about them. As Amjad Jaimoukha says, there is a jigsaw here that needs to be pieced together before it is too late. This book itself is the first such work to present a complete picture of the people in any language. The Chechens have fought long and hard with their own resources and

those of neighbouring Caucasians to maintain their right to their way of life in their own land. Now it is time we lent a hand. Otherwise what is endangered may become extinct. The present destruction of the Chechen homeland is particularly a catastrophe for the diaspora, since this has meant the loss of the central place that links them, while the refugee communities face their own crisis of identity and assimilation.

This book, therefore, is meant not to be a catalogue of deportations and massacres, nor is it a glorification of a noble warrior people. Instead this is a celebration of a unique culture and so warns of what may be lost to us all. This, therefore, is a handbook for survival: one we may dare to hope may help others to stem this loss of a unique heritage.

Nicholas Awde
London, 2004

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my undying gratitude to Nicholas Awde for his very informative suggestions and comments on this book, and for effecting a most dramatic transformation in my life and career. JonArno Lawson, apart from his significant contributions to this work, was a source of inspiration with his heightened sense of aestheticism. I am indebted to the editorial staff at Taylor & Francis who worked on the book, especially Heidi Bagtazo, the commissioning editor, Jocelyn Lofstrom, the production editor, Grace McInnes, for her help and considerateness, and Emma Davis, who efficiently prepared the manuscript for production. Jumana Belbeisi checked and edited some sections of the manuscript. I would also like to thank Richard Willis, the project manager, and Jane Olorenshaw, the copy-editor.

I gratefully acknowledge the contributions of the following: Said Bino, specifically his account on Iraqi Chechens, and appreciate his presentation to me of his informative books on the Chechens; Dr Moshe Gammer of Tel Aviv University sent me a list of his valuable materials on Northeast Caucasian history; Alexandre Grigorianz presented me with his wonderful book *Les damnés de la Russie*, which proved to be a useful source of information on Jordanian and Syrian Chechens; Dr Andrew McGregor, Director of Aberfoyle International Security Analysis, provided me with some of his published materials on Chechen issues; Frédérique Longuet Marx sent me her book *Tchéchénie*, which I found to be very useful.

I am thankful for the interview granted by Magomed Atsaev, Chechen Minister of Communal Affairs, where Jamil Akho was kind enough to act as translator and Ali Kassay and Malik Athamneh as facilitators. I am also grateful for the information and help provided by Dina Birmamit, Ismat Bino, Farida Bahaeddeen, Ramadan Rais, Roza Bino, Zuhra Shishani, Asma' Bahaeddeen, Nart Shekim, Mirna Janbek, Metin Sönmez, Ma'moun Bino, Delphine Evmoon, publisher of *Faits et Projets Magazine*, and many other people who have chosen to remain anonymous.

Nadia Bisha and Dumasara Jaimoukha provided warmth and support during a period of intense toil and anguish. Despite his tender years, Sanjalay Jaimoukha's challenge inspired me to go even further.

The figures in this book previously appeared in two publications:

- Buzurtanov, M. (ed.) (1982) *Checheno-Ingushetiya* [Chechen-Ingushetia], Moscow: Planeta.
- Anonymous (1989) *Checheno-Ingushetiya. Daimokhk.* [Chechen-Ingushetia], Grozny: unknown publisher.

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JonArno Lawson would like to express his gratitude for the very helpful comments, contacts, suggestions, sources and translations provided by Amjad Jaimoukha, Nicholas Awde, Lyoma Usmanov, Albina Digaeva, Nadezhda Banchik, Johanna Nichols, Emma Gilligan, Thomas Goltz, Moshe Gammer, Tom de Waal, Daniel Pallathy, Miriam Lansky, Jane Spender, Elliot Lerner and George Hewitt. My very deep gratitude also to Amy Freedman, Sophie and Asher, for their love, patience and support.

<http://www.geocities.com/jaimoukha>

Introduction

Yet, what most Western coverage of Chechnya lacks is background. Because of inadequate background knowledge, Western reporting is full of speculation in which the unknown is fitted into pre-existing theories.

(P.Armstrong 1999)

Writers on Chechen issues have to deal with the problem of a dearth of information, which becomes especially acute for non-Russian and non-Chechen speakers, given that most of the references are in these two languages. This lack of sources, compounded by the ‘introverted’ nature of the Chechens, leads in turn to the tendency by many of these writers, be they Chechen, Russian or Western, to make sweeping statements and backward projections based on particular and stereotypical features of Chechen society, in order to emphasize a particular point of view, or perhaps implement an agenda. On the one hand, the Chechens want their conception of the ideal model of their society to be regarded as the proto-democratic organization of human development—on a par with the ancient Greek democratic ethos. Westerners, on the other hand, in their effort to understand the esoteric Chechen society, seem to rely mainly on reference materials, predominantly in Russian, on the recent and relatively well-known past, for it is uncomfortable to go back beyond Russian intervention in the Caucasus in the eighteenth century AD for lack of readily available sources of information and because of the considerable effort required to delve more deeply into Chechen affairs.

For example, it is commonly stated that the Chechens had never developed a feudal society. However, egalitarianism had become a leading beacon in Chechen society only since the late Middle Ages, when the Chechen rank and file ousted their local and foreign feudal lords. R.Wixman’s (1980) blanket generalizations and wholesale dismissals regarding the North Caucasians form a case in point. He had as informants the exiled North Caucasian nationalists who promoted the image of North Caucasian unity in all aspects, to the detriment of the historical and cultural particularities of each of the North Caucasian peoples. From mere statistical data he concluded that ‘none of the languages of the North Caucasus is in fact a “literary language”’ (p. 161), and, amazingly, ‘Can one speak of a distinct Chechen history or Avar history? Certainly not’ (p. 167). It is hoped that the chapters on history will show that most definitely the Chechens had a discrete history, which, however, does not negate the fact that at times it coincided with that of other peoples in the vicinity, the Avars included.

It is also claimed by some authorities that it was the encounter with the Russians that shaped and honed the warlike character of the Chechens and later engendered their national identity. Again this is short-sighted, for the ancestors of the Chechens had to deal with the most ferocious of medieval hordes—the Tatar-Mongols. Particularly, it is the age-old spirit of national preservation that had carried the Chechens through the trials and

tribulations of the last few centuries, including the ghastly 1944 deportation. Furthermore, it was not in the wilderness of Central Asia that the Chechens had developed their consolidation strategies, rather it was the application of their already sharpened 'survival skills' that allowed them to display the proverbial aloofness popularized by Solzhenitsyn, whilst the spirit of most of the other exile nations was broken.

The journalist Sebastian Smith had tried for a long time to find out the significance of the Sufi fraternities in the Chechen ethos:

The Chechens...were able to survive by retreating into the inner world of the Sufi brotherhoods—the same secretive, sometimes fanatical organisations which led resistance to the tsarist armies and then the Bolsheviks. On the deportees' return to their homelands...what became known as 'parallel Islam' thrived in private houses across Chechnya.

(S.Smith 1998:77)

The self-same author was struck by the reticence and reluctance of the Chechens to divulge information on all matters pertaining to them. The esoteric nature of Sufism was a perfect fit with, and a continuation of, the earlier peculiar North Caucasian system of Men's Houses and Unions.

Thus the amalgam of misconceptions associated with things Chechen could fairly be attributed to a joint failure by the Chechens and the rest of the world, the former for requiring the latter to just leave them in peace and the latter's either indifference, or reluctance to step on Russia's toes.

The history of Chechnya is not widely known beyond the familiar terrain of the last three centuries. The Russian—Caucasian War is well documented, with archives in London, Istanbul, St Petersburg, Tbilisi, Baku and Makhachkala, some of which go back to the sixteenth century. However, little research had been done on ancient and medieval Chechen history, and even the terra cognita was besmirched by communist drivel. Even Ya.Akhmadov's (2002) important work on Chechen history carried an obvious Russian bias in its latter parts. An attempt is made in this book to piece together a coherent history of the Chechens from ancient times. Still, Chechen historians have the daunting task of rewriting their history sans foreign coercion with the few archival materials that have escaped the destruction of the past decade. But first, the urgent matter of survival must be attended to.

It is most important to emphasize that Chechen history does not start with Chechnya being part of Russia. International perspective in general can cast back only to the establishment of Soviet power and the subsequent arbitrary designation of the North Caucasian entities as autonomous republics and regions of the Russian SSR. This myopic view of the Chechen issue does not encompass the genocidal nineteenth-century Russian—Caucasian War.

On the other hand, the North Caucasian perspective goes back to the most ancient of Caucasian cultures, dating back to more than five millennia ago. For thousands of years, the Vainakh lived in their North Caucasian domicile, which waxed and waned as invaders came and went, but was preserved more or less intact due to the nation's remarkable tenacity.¹ Linguistic evidence ties Vainakh culture to the ancient Hurrian and Urartian

civilizations that flourished in the Near East a few millennia ago. The Vainakh also constituted an important element in the eneolithic Kura-Arax culture in the Trans-Caucasus. However, it has not been absolutely established whether Vainakh culture is a continuation of these ancient civilizations, or just a close kin. A tentative connecting line is drawn from the earliest Hurrians to the present-day Vainakh, with the qualifying statement that much more research needs to be done in this area.

The conquest of the Caucasus was a bloody affair, with the Russians destroying villages, slaughtering civilian populations and deporting, to achieve victory. The Chechens defended their homeland for almost a century, but in the end sheer numbers vanquished valour and the Chechen population was literally decimated, and, by the middle of the nineteenth century, the strength of the nation was almost completely sapped, enabling Russia to incorporate Chechnya. Population census figures are included as indicators of the horrific loss of human life that the Chechens have been periodically sustaining in their continuous confrontation with the Russians. Whereas archaeological monuments and finds in the Northwest Caucasus are regularly designated as part of 'Russian' culture, with no serious challenge from the largely pacified indigenes, no such claim can be made on Chechen heritage, thanks to the aggressive assertion of Chechen identity.

A large Chechen diaspora was created in the Middle East and Turkey as a result of mass expulsions. The Chechens that remained in the Caucasus after the war were able to reorganize their shattered lives by falling back on their deeply ingrained traditions and stable social structures. Unlike the Circassians, who were almost exterminated and scattered over a wide geographic area, the Chechens managed to keep their traditional domicile, albeit with some population shifts dictated by Russian policy. One consequence of this was that whereas the Circassians were more or less subdued, the Chechen martial spirit never waned, even after Stalin's horrific deportation of the whole Chechen nation. The Chechens never reconciled themselves to Russian hegemony and had always been on the look-out for a chance to rid themselves of the bloody occupiers. In the interim, they have 'institutionalized' vigorous procreation as a defence against Russian genocide.

Although there is some coverage in this book of the most pressing issues of war and politics—in order not to underestimate the dangers facing the very existence of the Chechen nation—the bulk of the work is concerned with often neglected aspects of the Chechen issue, including culture, customs and traditions, folklore, arts and architecture, music and literature. A case is made that this culture has something to offer human civilization and ethos, provided the Chechens are vouchsafed a safe place under the sun.

The chapter on politics and current affairs presented a tough challenge at many levels. The ongoing conflict and the circumstances surrounding it are very different from the 1994–1996 War. The Chechen struggle against Russian occupation had transformed to religious and civilizational contexts by the detrimental input of the Wahhabis and the '11 September' affair. Part of Chechen diplomatic and media energy was diverted to trying to reassure the West that the old struggle was purely nationalistic, that Bin Laden's interest in the Chechens was not a reciprocal affair. The most recent war had caused the physical destruction of tens of thousands of Chechen civilians. At the dawn of the new millennium, all aspects of Chechen culture were interred in the soil of obscurity. Stemming from the fact that the book touches a very sore spot on the world body politic, and to preserve neutrality, competing views on the future of Chechnya are presented in

Chapter 5. The reconstruction of post-war Chechnya is dependent on revival of the economy, and the West and other countries must do their bit in this regard.

The Chechens have to deal with the (mis-)conception that their country is part of the Russian Federation. The double standards by which the international community views the conflict do not only stem from lack of understanding of the historical background to the conflict. Bias is a very undermining factor. Why could the Russians commit genocide in broad daylight and escape scot-free, whilst Chechen reaction is scrutinized to a fault, the Chechens having to go out of their way to 'assure' the world that they would not play dirty? 'Moderate' Chechens have come to realize that the idea of an independent Chechnya must get the approval and support of the West. However, in the West, Chechnya and Chechens are in general perceived as part of the Muslim world, non-European as it were, and as such alien to the Western ethos. Although this view is certainly one explanation of Western apathy towards the Chechens, it is not the only one. The West forcefully intervened on the side of the Muslim Bosnians and Albanians and saved them from ethnic cleansing by the Christian Serbs. Not only did they bring Serbia to heel, they also ousted Milosovic and eventually brought him to justice. This could have been motivated by the fact that conflicts were right in the middle of Europe, not on the murky periphery. The Russians were not very happy with this development, for it had set a disturbing precedent. It would seem that killing Muslims wantonly, which the Russians had been doing for hundreds of years, was no longer an acceptable thing. Although Serbia was a more manageable target than Russia, perhaps a time will come when the Russian war criminals will also be brought in handcuffs to The Hague. It would also seem that Chechen 'aloofness' and atypical reactions to calamity (the Chechen 'stiff upper lip' syndrome) are generally off-putting to a Western audience, when open expression of pain and misery is expected instead of highlander stoicism.

The al-Qaeda attacks on the USA of 11 September 2001 resulted in a major setback to the Chechen cause and robbed the Chechens of the modicum of sympathy they had had in the West. Russia played its cards right and quickly associated the Chechen legitimate struggle for independence with Muslim extremism. The West became even more indifferent to Chechnya and Chechens—but not for long. In early 2002, the Europeans and Americans became more vocal in condemning the inordinate use of force by the Russians and categorically stated that Maskhadov was a crucial element in the peace equation. Despite initial delay and voluble protest from the Russians, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty started to broadcast in Chechen, Circassian and Avar in early April 2002—a significant event for the three language communities.

The Chechens must face the fundamental question as to why justice stops at their doorsteps. They are in the unenviable position of being spurned by co-religionists, demonized and brutalized by the Russians, treated with indifference, or even hostility by some of their fellow North Caucasians, and kept at arm's length by the West. Many in the world would be happy if the Chechen 'problem' would just go away. The Russians have killed, tortured, maimed, mass-expelled and raped Chechens for more than two centuries with absolute impunity, without stirring undue concern from the rest of the world. The Russian action in Chechnya could be likened to the British Army reducing Edinburgh to rubble and expelling a couple of million Scottish people in response to a unilateral declaration of independence by Scotland. Some Chechens see an orientation towards the West as the best stance by which to achieve and maintain independence. It would seem

that Maskhadov's government had been earnestly cultivating such an attitude, but was thwarted by many inside and outside factors. Nevertheless, the moderates still have leanings towards the West, despite fervid Russian attempts to lump them with the small radical minority, who had been thriving on the conflict and chaos. Pluralism and respect for the point of view of the other is of paramount importance in a Chechen context.

Most interested intellectuals and scholars have sympathies with the Chechen cause, but Western governments in general turn a blind eye to Russian conduct, sacrificing the 'insignificant' Chechens on the altar of national interests—realpolitik at its ugliest. The world community cannot act deaf, dumb and blind forever to the plight of the Chechens and their rightful demand to self-determination. The West need not feel threatened by the Chechens. On the contrary, Chechen culture, and in general North Caucasian culture, has a lot to contribute to world culture—a missing jigsaw piece on the universal cultural landscape. The Chechen issue is of concern to many people around the world, be it from a purely humanistic point of view or from political and other considerations. Even genuine friends of the Chechens are worried enough to want to know how things would develop in a post-war Chechnya. Will the old factious behaviour prevail, or will the Chechens come to the realization that unity is the Holy Grail, to be sought not only during conflicts, but also in the all-too-crucial process of nation building? Perhaps the optimistic streak could be extended to mend the chinks between the Chechens and Ingush introduced and fostered by the Machiavellian Russians.

The main realms of the esoteric universe of the Chechens are the traditional clan system, the eclectic ancient belief complex and the more recent Sufi orders, the amalgam of customs and traditions and the unique folklore.

At the start of this venture, the aim with regard to social structure was to elucidate the *tukhum-taip* system and present it as a model of Chechen society. However, it transpired that controversy surrounds even some fundamental points relating to this issue. What is more, complicating dynamic factors make any static model a rough approximation at the very best. Not least of these compounding elements is the imposition of Sufism and its maze of fraternities on the already complex system. A compromise would be to first present an ideal system and then qualify it by adding known disturbance factors to depict a more realistic picture, although the extent of the approximation of the final model to reality cannot be determined—Chechen society has been in chaotic flux for such a long time.²

There is a tendency to portray the Chechens as a primordial people that preserved its ancient highland culture in a pristine state, at least until Russian intrusion in the North Caucasus. This view lacks proper retrospection, as the Vainakh did not remain isolated in their mountain strongholds and their society did not stay static throughout the past. In the history sections, a conscious attempt is made to portray the historical development of Vainakh society, the transformations it had undergone and the dynamics that gave rise to the traditional social structure.

The hope of using the model to account for past behaviour and predict post-war Chechen society proved to be over-optimistic, as one had come to realize that a dimension of that society was beyond scrutiny—probably a 'survival' dynamic that incidentally confounds outsiders. Attempts are made to construct models to explain various phenomena and developments. Although the robust social system had undoubtedly been a major factor in the preservation of the nation, the Russians were able

at times to exploit cracks in the monolith in order to attempt to hack it to pieces. Differences between northern and southern tribes, the so-called ‘plain—mountain opposition’, mainly in some cultural aspects and with respect to attitude towards Russia, the Sufi—Wahhabi standoff, and even polarization of far-away communities, such as the Chechens in Jordan, had rent the Chechen social fabric.

Reconstruction of the ancient creed is of importance in trying to grasp the nature of the eclecticism of the Vainakh and to place the atavistic features of the belief system in a historic-religious context. It is also important in as much as it facilitates understanding of Chechen attitudes and modes of behaviour. The fact that the Nakh evolved a complex pantheon indicates that they had developed a full-fledged civilization, as such a system cannot be produced by a primitive society.³ The breaking down of conceivable reality into manageable portions as an adjunct of social specialization led to the differentiation of godly provinces, with the collective of deities representing the sum total of this reality. The daunting task posed by this ‘epiphany’ was the identification of this civilizational stage in Nakh social development. Fortunately, relics of this ancient civilization have been preserved in ancient religion and literature, and were culled to make an attempt at a skeletal reconstruction.

There is an anecdote about a Chechen who was so disillusioned by the apathy of the Muslim world towards the Chechen cause that he half-jokingly suggested that all his people convert back to the Christian faith, preferably to Catholicism or Protestantism, in order to motivate the West to come to their rescue. The controversial writer Naipaul, 2001 winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature, lamented the demotion of native cultures and their superseding by Islam. There are perceptible contradictions between indigenous, Muslim and Western cultures, and this has polarized Chechen intellectuals. But to be fair, Naipaul’s thesis could also be extended in some respects to Western cultures that have been supplanted by Christianity.

One aim of the book is to uncover the ancient native culture. This is not an easy task due to two historical circumstances. Up to the early years of the nineteenth century, the Chechens preserved their ancient customs and traditions almost intact. The influence of the Avar *imams*, who led the struggle of the Northeast Caucasians against Russian encroachment, was negative in as much as they sought to suppress the native culture in favour of spreading the Sufi ethos. Some cultural pursuits were frowned upon and a few were actively interdicted, especially music and poetry, the principal vehicles of orally transmitted lore. According to foreign visitors of the time, they were hard-pressed to find story-tellers and minstrels to give them a glimpse of ancient folklore.

The other factor in the diminution of cultural heritage is definitely Russian genocidal conduct towards the Chechens in the last three centuries, and the incessant drive to impose an adventitious set of morals and modes of conduct. Expulsion, transfer, mass deportations, massacres and full-scale invasions have taken a very heavy toll on Chechen society. The explanation of the fierce clinging of many Chechens to their culture and dreams of independence does not reside solely in the fact that the Chechen nation is the largest in the North Caucasus. Recourse must also be made to the fact that their culture has a robust mechanism for internalizing their history and propagating it through esoteric institutions. This system was tested time and time again throughout history. Contrary to other nations, say the Circassians, who were decimated and had the spiritual dimension of their culture seriously compromised, the home-grown close-knit *tukhum-taip* social

system of the Chechens was cemented by Sufism, an import system that had nevertheless played a principal role in preserving Chechenness. The Chechen brand of Sufism could not be accused of being docile, playing as it did a leading role in the struggle against Russian encroachment by providing an organizational framework and inculcating iron discipline into its adepts. The confraternities of Sufism were built upon the Men's Houses and Unions prevalent in the North Caucasus in the nineteenth century. Native culture was so intimately intertwined, one might say confused, with Muslim dogma, that when there was a call to revert to Islamic *shariat*, the Chechens discovered that their version of Islam was not in complete harmony with the 'pure' one. When the Sudanese version of *shariat* was imported wholesale and a hasty decision was made to implement it in the late 1990s, the Chechens were not impressed by the alien diktats and penal codes and they had come to realize that their brand of Islam was different.

At some deep layer, most North Caucasian nations, whether indigenous or imported, share many cultural features, and one is tempted to describe the situation as a common North Caucasian culture with regional variations. Comparative studies and extrapolations would shed light on obscure aspects of Chechen culture. *Adat*, the pan-North Caucasian corpus of customs and traditions, is referred to as '*nokhchalla*' by the Chechens, '*xabze*' by the Circassians, and so on. All indications are that all share a common cultural origin and throughout history they were subjected to similar outside influences: Scythian, Greek, Roman, Persian, Byzantine, Gothic, Georgian, Mongol, Tatar, Turkic, Muslim and Russian. In addition, the similarity of the physical nature of their countries had played a part in inducing a common 'mountaineer' culture and identity, for example the cult of hospitality. Delving into the accounts, first of the Circassians then the Chechens, one comes face to face with the similarities in the culture. Those who read *The Circassians* would be struck by a sense of *déjà vu* when reading the sections on Chechen culture and folklore. In addition, these similarities furnish the opportunity to develop some themes broached in the earlier book and even add a few new ones without undue intrusion, for example Caucasian connections to the Christmas Tree, Kabardian domination in Western Chechnya, traditional medicine, common beliefs and superstitions, and so on.

One can roughly discern two native perspectives on culture, as one would expect in Chechen society, polarized as it is. One outlook, espoused by pro-independent elements, views Chechen culture as totally separate from that of Russia, which it accuses of being the source of corrupting influences. It finds a balance between native and Muslim cultures to produce a hybrid culture. The other perspective is an amalgamation of native, Russian and consequently Western cultures, with only lip service to Muslim heritage. In general, diaspora Chechens in Russia espouse the second point of view, being well-educated and in well-off positions in general. Ironically, these very same 'Russified' Chechens are being harassed by the increasingly racist and xenophobic Russians. The nationalists and the diaspora in the Middle East adopt the first point of view. There is also a dichotomy between the plains and mountain populations, with the southerners being more attached to their ancient roots.

As one delves deeper into Caucasian issues, an uncanny similarity emerges between Georgian and North Caucasian civilizations. Some authorities assert that comparative studies indicate that in ancient times there had been cultural uniformity across the Caucasus. In addition, there had always been cultural exchanges and influences across the

Caucasus, and many customs and traditions are still held in common. Georgians exported Christianity to the North Caucasians in the Middle Ages, and, most probably, North Caucasian polyphonic music was an import from Georgia. As this work progressed, it had become clear that Georgian materials were of importance in shedding light on some aspects of North Caucasian cultures.

It may be useful to construct a virtual model of proto-North Caucasian culture that does not necessarily imply or deny a common root, but pre-supposes at least some active cultural interaction at some points in the histories of the North Caucasian peoples, say at the age of the great cultures: Maikop, Meot, Sindika, Kura-Arax, and others. It is not unlikely that there were cultural connections between the North Caucasians and the ancient Western cultures, such as that of the Celts. The similarities suggest that perhaps at one time a common culture may have encompassed Eastern and Western Europe. One could mention tree worship and rites associated with it, veneration of fire, festive celebrations, including Chechen festal rites very similar to Hallowe'en and Beltane.

Folkloric themes and traditions broached include ancient and traditional costumes, standards of beauty, cuisine, folk medicine, festivals and holidays, sports, and so on. Beauty was a highly prized quality, honed by resplendent costumes, vigorous training and austere diets. The martial traditions of the Chechens have made a smooth transition to modern sports, especially wrestling. Chechens share their flair for wrestling with other North Caucasian nations, whose athletes were well represented in recent Russian national teams. A succession of European, World and Olympic champions, incommensurate in number with the tiny size of the Chechen nation, have impinged impressively on the world sporting stage in the last three decades, representing mainly the Soviet Union, then Russia and other CIS countries, and Turkey, but rarely Chechnya itself. Despite the vicious war, Chechen athletes are keeping up the tradition and a new generation of sportsmen is also vying to uphold Chechnya's excellence.

It is very tempting to stereotype the Chechens. When looking at a different culture it is most important to beware of and compensate for preconceived ideas and established paradigms. This is particularly important in a Chechen context because of cultural peculiarities that cannot be readily pigeon-holed. To borrow a metaphor from science, no observation is accepted as orderly unless it falls within the familiar paradigm. You need a framework to pin your observations on; otherwise they would make no sense.

There is a blind spot in the Russian ethos concerning the North Caucasus that renders Russians unable to understand the peoples of the area—to the detriment of the cultures of all concerned parties. Historically, Russia's relation with the North Caucasians was based on confrontation. The Russians destroyed and conquered, then by their myopic heavy-handed policies caused the build-up of feelings of resentment—a squeezing of the coil that would inevitably rebound in great violence. If the Russians had just realized one sacred tenet of the Chechen code of chivalry, that a guest is treated with reverence, then Russia could have conducted her affairs with the Chechens in a civilized fashion. A feature of the turbulent Chechen-Russian relationship is that the Chechens as a whole never harboured ill will towards the Russians as a people, although they had every reason to do so.

For a long time, the Russians have been working diligently and in a deliberate fashion at projecting negative images of the Chechen in the average Russian mind—empathy not being one of the fortes of the Russian ethos. The process was initiated by Russian

romantic writers of the nineteenth century. The dominant theme put forth was the noble North Caucasian savage that was in dire need of the ‘civilizing’ mission of Russia. The Russians view foreigners with morbid suspicion, considering them as potential enemies ready to pounce on Mother Russia and reduce it to bondage at the slightest chance. The Tatar-Mongol legacy is still a heavy load on the Russian psyche. It is quite telling that whereas the Westerners who came in contact with the North Caucasians were so impressed by the people that some of them speculated that the area was the cradle of the white race, the xenophobic and bleak Russians could only discern ‘savages’ and ‘blacks’.⁴

The Russians have more recently been exporting this contrary perception to the West. With dramatic images tending to stick most in mind, stage-managed events and choice pictures can do wonders towards sullyng a nation. It is most important that counter-measures be taken to offset such propaganda. In the madness and chaos that surrounds the Chechen issue, there is a dire need to present a sober view of Chechen culture. To continue the scientific metaphor, it is hoped that this work would make a contribution towards effecting a paradigmatic revolution so that when the terms ‘Chechen’ and ‘Chechnya’ are mentioned positive notions come to mind. It is hoped that the Russians may remove the blinkers of nationalism and discover the beauty in the peoples that they have been oppressing for so long. The Russians are sowing the seeds of their own self-destruction as a people. It is a sobering thought that Russian culture can only be traced back a thousand years, whereas those of the North Caucasians go back for millennia. The purported oldest written record in Russian Cyrillic is associated with contacts between the Russians of the Tmutarakan principality and the Circassians in the Caucasus in the tenth century AD.⁵

The Vainakh took their poetry and music very seriously. The stock and ware of the story-tellers (*tueiranchash*) can be fashioned as the annals of pre-eighteenth-century Chechen history. The major encounters with invaders and foes were witnessed by detached bards, whose only function it was to record the account in an elevated language and immortalize the feats of heroes. Romance was expressed in verse and melody, but only by the fair sex. The balladeers were respected by all and they achieved a good standard of living and enjoyed a high social status. Fortunately, many of the songs of yore were recorded starting in the nineteenth century, in the hope of preserving them for posterity. However, with the cultural destruction brought about by deportation and the two post-independence wars, the musical heritage suffered severe losses. The Chechens, as did all North Caucasians, immediately took to classical music in the Soviet era. Music schools were opened and many talented musicians emerged after the exile, some of whom achieved international renown.

The Caucasus has been famed since antiquity for the large number of its languages and for the exotic grammatical structures of its indigenous language families. This diversity testifies to millennia of peaceful co-existence of the different nationalities in the region. In Chapter 13, the Chechen language is discussed in terms of its position among world languages and with some theories on its origin. The topics of orthography and education in Chechen are also broached.

In Chapter 14, Chechen literature will be exposed in as much detail as is appropriate in such a work to drive home the idea that the Chechens have produced both outstanding writers and literary outputs. Works from the period of Chechen Islamic literature, which

began in the seventeenth century and flourished in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, through Soviet literature, up to the full development of national literature, are noted. Also, the post-Soviet and diaspora literatures are considered.

Discussion of the media in a Chechen context is of importance, since it could be a crucial determinant of the fate of the nation. It would seem that the world needs to be prodded every now and then to rouse it from its lethargy towards the whole affair. There is a cyber war going on between the Chechens, who are trying desperately to draw world attention to their plight, and the Russians, who are sparing no effort to screen the republic from international attention. The Russians had become a bit sensitive to Western accusations of flouting human rights in Chechnya and so they launched dedicated web sites trumpeting the return of normality to Chechnya and portraying Chechen culture from a Russian perspective.

The Ingush will be discussed in as much as they affect the story of the Chechens. It is generally accepted that the separation of the two nations, collectively called 'Vainakh', only took place in the latter Middle Ages. Thus, besides having the same ethnicity and similar languages, the two peoples share a long history. In fact, the study of the Ingush, who converted much later than the Chechens to Islam, and thus had been less exposed to Muslim influence, would shed light on the ancient culture and beliefs of the Chechens. Tsarist Russia drove a wedge between the Chechens and Ingush, exploiting the latter's less hostile attitude towards its hegemony and policies. The Soviets, on the other hand, lumped both peoples together and (mal-)treated them equally. Thus a joint entity was created in 1934 and both peoples were deported *en masse* to Central Asia and Siberia in 1944 on trumped-up charges. By the end of Soviet rule, the Ingush were almost as anti-Communist as were the Chechens. So much for the Soviet nationality policy!

It is the hope that this book may go some way to providing 'adequate background knowledge' on Chechnya and do justice to the tyrannized and maligned freedom-loving Chechens who have been paying dearly for upholding their national ethos and cherished ideals.

Note on the written Chechen language

Given the multitude of sources and different cultural and dialectical backgrounds of informants, A.G.Matsiev's *Chechen-Russian Dictionary* (1961), which is based on official and literary Chechen, was adopted, whenever possible, as the standard for Chechen words and expressions, for consistency. The one-to-one (hence reversible) Cyrillic-Latin conversion system used in this work is as follows:

а=а

б=в

в=в

г=г

гI=gh (Parisian [r])

д=д

e=e

Ж=zh

З=z

и=i

к=k

КХ=kkh (combination of '[k]' and '[x]')

Қ=q (soft velar occlusive-guttural voiceless affricate; Arabic ق)

КІ=k'

л=l

м=m

н=n

о=о

п=p

пІ=p'

Р=r

с=s

т=t

тІ=t'

у=u

Ф=f

х=kh (soft velar fricative voiceless phoneme)

хь=h (guttural-fricative voiceless phoneme; Arabic ح)

ХІ=kh'

ц=ts

цІ=ts'

ч=ch

ЧІ=ch'

ш=sh

ъ="" (glottal stop)

Ѣ(as umlaut indicator)=e

э=è

ю=yu

я=ya

ɪ=ʔ (occlusive-guttural voiced phoneme; Arabic ع)

In Arabic words, the glottal stop (*hamza*) is indicated by ʔ. The diacritic that marks long vocalic morphemes is rendered as doubling of the vowel, e.g. пĕpacKa= pʔeeraska (Friday). In cases where confusion may arise, a hyphen is inserted to separate two distinct letters, e.g. s-h=схъ, whereas sh=ш.

1

People and land

People

Appellations

The Chechens refer to themselves as ‘Nokhchii’ (sing. ‘Nokhchi’ or ‘Nokhcho’), or ‘Nokhchiin qam’ (‘The Chechen People’), and call their country ‘Nokhchichoe’ (literally: ‘The Chechen Home’), ‘Nokhchiin mokhk’ (‘The Chechen Country’), or ‘Daimokhk’ (‘Fatherland’). A number of these names derive from the ethnonym and toponym of a large Chechen tribe, the Nokhchmekhkakhoi, and its domicile in southeast Chechnya, which is also called ‘Ichkeria’. First mention of this ‘proto’ community, as ‘Nakhchmateans’, is found in the medieval Georgian and Armenian Chronicles.

Arabic sources in Georgia referred to ‘Chechens’ as far back as the eighth century AD using a term thought to be an adoption from the Iranian name for the Nokhchii. Russian sources started to use the terms ‘Chechen’ and ‘Chechnya’ in the seventeenth century AD, presumably from Kabardian ‘Shashan’ (stress on second syllable).¹ Tradition has it that it was after a historic skirmish in 1732 in which the Nokhchii defeated a Russian army contingent at Chechen-Aul on the Argun that the term came into use. However, the term ‘Chechen’ was used as early as 1692 in Russian sources and ‘Chechnya’ was shown on a map of the North Caucasus that goes back to 1719, which puts paid to the traditional spin (N.G.Volkova 1973). According to A. P.Bergé (1991 [1859; 140]), the term ‘Chechen’ first appeared in a 1708 treaty between the Russians and the Kalmyks. Modern Russian appellations for the Chechens are ‘Checheni’ or ‘Chechentsi’, and for their country ‘Chechnya’, which has become the prevalent term in the English language, albeit Chechen intellectuals and nationalists prefer (the more regular and ‘neutral’) ‘Chechenia’, or even ‘Chechenya’. The Georgians refer to Chechens as ‘Chechnebi’ (sing. ‘Checheni’) (and to both Chechens and Ingush as ‘Kistebi’—sing. ‘Kisti’), the Circassians—‘Shashan’, the Ossetians—‘Tsatsan’, the Avars—‘Burtichi’ or ‘Burtiyaw’, the Lezgins—‘Chachan’, the Kumyks—‘Michikish’ or ‘Michigish’, which name (‘Misxish’) is also used by the Circassians, but only to refer to the Ingush.

Nakh, Vainakh and Chechens

The term ‘Nakh’ (‘People’) refers to the Chechens, Ingush, Kist and Tsova-Tush (Bats), all of whom speak languages of the Nakh branch of Northeast (NE) Caucasian and share common descent and culture.² In this work, the Malkhi, considered in some sources as a separate Nakh ethnos, is considered one of the (divergent) Chechen tribes. ‘Nakh’ also denotes the ancient ancestors of the Chechens from the purported separation of the Nakh from the other Northeast Caucasians, but more concretely from the middle of the first

millennium BC, when they were first mentioned as ‘Nachos’ in historical annals, to the early Middle Ages, when the North Caucasian Vainakh emerge as a distinct nation. ‘Vainakh’ refers to present-day Chechens and the related Ingush and Kist, considered as a collective, and to the Chechens in the Middle Ages down to the time of their differentiation into a nation distinct from the Ingush.

One proposal was that the separation of the Ingush from the rest of the Chechen nation began in the seventeenth century AD and was completed in the first part of the nineteenth. Chechen historian Ya. Akhmadov (2002) suggested the first part of the eighteenth century as the time when the Ingush swarmed off the Vainakh collective. A third proposition has a separate Ingush nationality taking shape in the late nineteenth/early twentieth centuries. The first two hypotheses seem to be more in tune with the fact that the Ingush made a collective decision to remain neutral during the Russian-Caucasian War, which accentuated their distinctiveness. Also, two of the earliest references on the Ingush in Russian sources were in the works of I.Shtelina and I.Georgi in 1770 and 1776, respectively.

Nevertheless, ethnic designations had remained fuzzy right through the early years of the twentieth century. In most Russian eighteenth-century documents, the ethnonym ‘Chechens’ was used for both Chechens and Ingush. In 1870, the Ingush writer Chakh Akhriev entitled a work on Ingush epic tales *From Chechen Legends*. The 1897 Russian census listed the Ingush as one of the Chechen tribes. Many attempts were made by Chechen and Ingush intellectuals to restore national unity, the last being at the beginning of the 1920s—but to no avail. Although the generic ‘Vainakh’ was used in the 1930s, paradoxically a time of emphasis of Ingush separate identity, the nominal separation was institutionalized, resulting in further differentiation between the two ‘nations’. At present, it may be legitimate to talk about two nationalities in the modern sense, with the proviso that the final chapter on their relationship has not been written yet.

There is also a perceivable differentiation, mainly in some cultural aspects and with respect to attitude towards Russia, between the plains and mountain Chechens, but it is not pronounced, and is mostly the result of a certain Machiavellian maxim.

Nationhood³

The Chechens are accustomed to democratic ways, their social structure being firmly based on pluralism and deference to individuality. Until the Russian conquest, they had formed an independent nation with its own language and definite territory, and peculiar, albeit stable, social and political structures based on autonomous clans with mutual support relations that linked them into larger tribal confederations (which generally coincided with dialects). Each clan was headed by a respected elder and decisions were taken by elected councils or plebiscites. By the beginning of the Russian encroachment, feudal classes had disappeared and social distinction had to be earned the hard way—by performance of extraordinary feats of valour.

Nationalism as conceived by the Chechens and other North Caucasian peoples, at least at the outbreak of the war with Russia, does not completely coincide with the Western concept thereof, as both developed in different circumstances. Therefore, Western researchers should take this into consideration when applying the tools for gauging North

Caucasian nationalism. The Vainakh had developed a unique brand of national consolidation a very long time ago, the most conspicuous evidence being the complex warning system of watchtowers extending from the foothills to the remotest Vainakh mountainous settlements. The social structure was such that at the perception of an external danger all the super-tribes (*tukhums*) would unite in a seamless manner in face of the threat. The relationship among these *tukhums* was finely balanced between detachment in times of peace (to minimize the number of spanners that could be thrown in the works) and perfect synchronicity and meshing when the need arose. Thus, there was an awareness of an over-arching ethnic identity encompassing all tribal formations. An outsider would most probably miss this dimension when looking at the micro-level and overlook mechanisms that would be set in motion by emotive stimuli.

A Chechen is caught in a web of supra-national, ethnic, national and a plethora of sub-national identities: Caucasian, Mountaineer, North Caucasian, Northeast Caucasian, Nakh, Vainakh, Nokhcho (Chechen), member of *tukhum*, *taip*, *aul*, *vaer*, *gar*, *neqe* and *doezal*. Religion adds another identity complex: Muslim, Sunni, Shafii, Sufi, *tariqat* adept, *virid* follower.

Demography

The Chechens are the largest North Caucasian nationality and the fourth largest in the Caucasus after the Azeris, Georgians and Armenians. According to the historian A. Rogov, there were about 1.5 million Chechens in the Caucasus in 1847. However, as a result of the Russian-Caucasian War and subsequent mass expulsion, the Chechens were decimated, only 140,000 remaining in the Caucasus in 1861. Subsequent massacres and expulsions had further reduced the number to 116,000 by 1867.

According to the 1897 Russian census, there were 226,496 Chechens, almost double the number of 30 years before. The population of the Chechen Oblast (Region) of the Mountain Soviet Socialist Republic in 1924 was 525,800. The 1926 census gave 318,522 as the number of ethnic Chechens in the Soviet Union, with 291,400 in the Chechen Autonomous Oblast (AO), which also had 7,500 Russian citizens (2.4 per cent). For both Vainakh groups the census gave 393,713 language speakers. The 1937 census gave 436,000 as the number of Chechens in the USSR, whereas that of 1939 gave 407,690, the diminution in number being a direct result of Stalin's brutal 1937–1938 purges. The 1959 census gave 418,756 Chechens. The minuscule increase over the previous census figure, given the traditionally high birth rate of the Chechens, was a reflection of the horrific humanitarian disaster that befell them during the 1944 deportation and exile. The figure for the 1970 census was 612,674, whereas that of the 1979 census was 756,000, an incredible increase of 80 per cent in 20 years, despite a high mortality rate—a collective response to attempted genocide.

The 1989 census figures gave 956,879 Chechens, of whom 77 per cent resided in their republic, and 237,438 Ingush. The same census gave 1,270,000 as the population of the Chechen-Ingush Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (ASSR). Of the areas currently part of Chechnya, there was a total population of 1,084,000, of whom about 715,000 were Chechens, 25,000 Ingush and 269,000 Russians and Cossacks. Of the 242,000 Chechens living outside their republic, 58,000 resided in Daghestan, 19,000 in what is now called 'Ingushetia', and about 75,000 in Kazakhstan. The population of Chechnya

was estimated at 1.2 millions in 1994. A census carried out in 1998 gave an approximate population of 800,000.

According to the 2002 Russian census, there were 1,088,816 people living in Chechnya, not counting the tens of thousands of refugees in the neighbouring regions of Ingushetia, Daghestan, Stavropol, North Ossetia, Georgia and other places. However, there was a consensus that the figure was highly exaggerated, by as much as 200,000 in some estimates.⁴ It would seem that the local authorities were keen to inflate figures to increase Federal funds allocated to the republic. Despite the upheavals of the current war, the rate of population growth is still very high, easily exceeding 3 per cent.

There are Chechen diaspora communities in Russia, Turkey, Kazakhstan, Kirghizistan, Georgia, Azerbaijan, Jordan, Syria, Iraq, USA and scattered speakers in Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Germany and other countries.

Land

Boundaries

The Caucasians practised age-old customs of hospitality, allowing peaceable peoples to live in their midst, and respected other people's historical rights to their lands. On the other hand, aggressors were always fought with vehemence. The custom requiring people to remember many ancestors was useful in delimiting boundaries and resolving land disputes, as an errant claim could face a chorus of independent, but roughly matching, counter-evidence.

Historically, Chechen and Ingush lands lay to the east of the Georgian Military Highway, with the headwaters of the Terek forming the western limit. The northern frontier was defined by the middle course of the Terek River and the Kachkalikov Mountains, which formed the barrier with the Kumyk Steppes. The traditional easternmost water boundary was demarcated by the basins of the Sulak and Andi Koisu, which are now in Daghestan. The main ridge of the Caucasus formed the southern boundary.

The Chechens lived in the fertile plains between the Terek and Sunzha Rivers, the Black Mountains along the foothills of the Caucasus, and the mountainous regions to the south and east. Little Kabarda had a mixed Kabardian and Chechen population. To the east of the Chechens lived the various peoples of Daghestan; in the plains to the north, the Russians and Kumyks; to the west, the Ingush and, to their west, the Ossetians; and to the south, South Ossetians and Georgians.

After occupying Chechnya in the nineteenth century, the Russians systematically removed Chechens from economically important areas and replaced them with Slavs and Cossacks, which fact accounts for the mixed population of the cities and the northern lowlands. In addition, some place names were replaced by Russian appellations, which process became systematic following the 1944 deportation. Fortunately, the Chechen scholar Akhmad Suleimanov mounted a number of expeditions in the 1970s and 1980s in Vainakh territories and recorded ancient toponyms in his monumental onomastical works *Toponymy of Chechen-Ingushetia* and *Toponymy of Chechnya*, which also included a number of folkloric tales and legends.

Until the twentieth century, the land of the Nokhchii included parts of modern-day Ingushetia, some of the high mountains of Georgia, and portions of Daghestan out to the Caspian Sea. During the Soviet period, the size of Chechnya waxed and waned in tune with central diktats. After the 1944 deportation, Stalin apportioned chunks of Chechen land to the surrounding regions and ordered the blotting-out of Chechnya from all maps. This has left a legacy of boundary disputes that could escalate into destabilizing conflicts, as the Chechen people try to recover their traditional territories. The temporary demarcation line between Chechnya and Ingushetia was hastily drawn in 1992.

Climate

Despite its small size, Chechnya enjoys a variety of climatic conditions, ranging from the seasonal extremes of the semi-desert Terek-Kuma Lowlands in the north to the alpine weather of the mountainous south. There are local and large-scale factors that affect the Chechen climate, including the terrain and the proximity of the Caspian Sea. The lofty Caucasus insulates the Northern Caucasus from the southern Mediterranean weather systems, but the area is subject to continental systems from the north and east. Chechnya has long warm summers and short cold winters. Temperature is roughly dependent on elevation. The average temperatures in January and July in the north are -3°C and $+25^{\circ}\text{C}$, respectively, -4°C and $+23^{\circ}\text{C}$ in central parts, and -5° to -12°C and $+21^{\circ}$ to $+25^{\circ}\text{C}$ in the south. Average rainfall is 300–400 mm in the Terek-Kuma Lowlands, 400–600 mm in central regions, and 600–1,200 mm in the south. Snow covers most areas of the mountainous south for a considerable part of the year, with permanent cover starting at 3,800 m. The foehns (dry and warm winds) that blow down mountain slopes in winter and spring have baneful effects on the flora.

*Flora and fauna*⁵

Forests of beech, birch, hornbeam and oak cover about a fifth of the area of Chechnya and are located mainly on mountain slopes. Besides their other benefits, these forests are the only defence against relentless attack on the precious soil by mountain torrents. Desert vegetation, represented by sagebrush and saltwort, and semi-desert vegetation, such as feather-grass, are found in the north. On the left bank of the Terek there are acorns, wild fruits, berry-bushes, medicinal herbs and mushrooms. Deciduous forests dominate in the mountains at heights of 1,800–2,000 m. Sub-alpine and alpine meadows can be found higher up in the mountains.

The fauna of Chechnya comprises bears, wild boars, roe-deer, wild goats, bezoar-goats, chamois, wolves, foxes, jackals, badgers, otters, racoons, martens, hares, molerats, ermines, grass-snakes, steppe constrictors, adders, lizards and Greek tortoises. Birds include bustards, cranes, doves, ducks, grouse, pheasants, pygmy cormorants and steppe eagles. There are some 50 species of mammals and 150 kinds of birds in the semi-desert Terek-Kuma Lowlands.

There are a number of reserves, ranging in size from 12,000 to 100,000 hectares. The beech forests of the largest reserve, the Shatoi, located between the Chanti-Argun and Sharo-Argun Rivers, furnish valuable wood and abound in berry-bushes, nuttrees, medicinal plants, melliferous herbs and mushrooms. The pine and birch forests are home

to bears, wild boars, roe-deer, badgers, martens, grey hares, squirrels and lynxes. The sub-alpine meadows boast birch groves with thickets of rhododendron and azalea. The Veden reserve, which encompasses Lake Kazenoi (Qoezan-'Am), has ash, beech, cherry, hornbeam, lime, maple and oak, and boasts of a wide variety of herbal plants. The fauna is represented by bears, wild boars, wild cats, goats, bezoar-goats, badgers, squirrels and Caucasian black grouse. The flora of the Urus-Martan reserve includes ash, beech, horn-beam, lime, maple, oak, pine, apple, cherry, pear, blackberry, wild strawberry and ramsons. The forests of the Shali reserve abound in berry-bushes, fruit-trees, yew-trees and herbal plants. The fauna comprises wild boars, roe-deer, bears, badgers, minks and martens. The Argun reserve is rich in fruit-trees, berries, herbs and mushrooms. Resident fauna include red deer, roe-deer, martens and pheasants.

*Relief and terrain*⁶

About half of the area of Chechnya is covered by plains, almost a third by hilly regions (300–1,200 m), 11 per cent by mountains of medium height (1,200–2,400 m), and 8 per cent by high mountains. The surface of the republic is composed mainly of sedimentary rock of the Mesozoic and Tertiary Periods. There are chestnut and light chestnut soils in the north, meadow and black soils in central parts, and mountain soils in the south.

The relief of Chechnya is divided into four regions: the Northern Plains, the Terek-Sunzha Ridges, to the south of the Terek, the Chechen Plains in the centre and the mountainous south. These regions differ not only in the structure of their surfaces, but also in climate, soil, and flora and fauna, which elements determine to a large extent the conditions of life and economic activities of their human populations.

Northern Plains

The northern part of the republic is dominated by the sandy ridges and hills of the southern Terek-Kuma Lowlands, which are located between the Terek in the south and Kuma in the north, and between the Stavropol Range in the west and the Caspian Sea in the east. During the Quaternary Period, most of the area, which lies below sea level at the lower reaches of the Terek, was repeatedly inundated by the waters of the Caspian. Dry steppe vegetation characterizes this zone, which turns to desert in the extreme north.

Terek-Sunzha Ridges

In the triangular section between the Terek in the north and Sunzha River in the south stretch the Cainozoic Terek-Sunzha Ridges, which are made up of two parallel low mountain chains, the Terek to the north and Sunzha-Lesser-Kabardian to the south, each of which, in turn, is divided into a number of sub-ridges. The surface of the ridges is formed of a combination of gypseous clay, ferruginous sandstone, shingles and loam sediments. The northern slopes have more abrupt and deeper gorges than the southern ones. The fertile Terek and Sunzha valleys of western Chechnya, which enjoy ample rainfall, are Chechnya's main agricultural centres.



Map 1.1 Principal towns and cities in Chechnya. The relief of the republic consists of the Northern Plains, Terek-Sunzha Ridges to the south of the Terek, Chechen Plains in the middle, and the lofty Caucasus Mountains in the south.

The Terek Ridge, which stretches for almost 120 km, has its highest points at Tokareva (707 m) and Malgobek (652 m), whilst the highest summit of the central and eastern parts

is 515 m in height. To the north of the Ridge lies the Nadterechny Plain, which has a slight downward inclination to the north. The western part of the Ridge, from the valley of the Kura up to Mineralnoe, has a latitudinal direction. At Mineralnoe, the Ridge branches off in a northwesterly direction to the lower Èldar Ridge, with the longitudinal Kalausskaya Valley acting as a boundary between the Terek and Èldar ridges, while the main Ridge turns in a southeasterly direction, keeping this orientation up to Khayan-Korta Mountain, and then turns latitudinally. From the eastern end of the Ridge extends the Bragun Ridge, and from the northern chain stretches the 30-km Gudermes Ridge, which has its highest point at Geran-Korta (428 m), and which is incorporated into the spurs of the Black Mountains at the Aksai River. There is a narrow passage called 'Gudermes Gate' between the Bragun and Gudermes ridges through which the river Sunzha breaks on to the Terek-Kuma Lowlands. Whilst the northern slopes of the Terek Ridge are distinguished by many indentations, those of the Èldar, Bragun and Gudermes ridges are less broken-up.

The southern chain consists of three ridges: Sunzha, Lesser-Kabardian and Zmeiski (Snaky). The Sunzha Ridge extends for about 70 km and has its highest point at Mount Albaskina (778 m). It is separated from the Lesser-Kabardian Ridge by the Achaluk Gorge and from the Grozny Ridge in the east by the Andreev Gorge. To the southeast of the Sunzha Ridge, between the rivers Sunzha and Dzhalka, extends the Aldinski Ridge, which is divided by the Khankala Gorge and a valley of the Argun into three separate parts. The Terek-Sunzha Ridges divide the Alkhanchurt Valley, which extends for some 60 km.

Chechen Plains

The Assa spur sections the Terek-Sunzha Plains into the Chechen and Ossetian Plains in the east and west respectively. The Chechen Plains lie to the south of the Sunzha Ridge, extend to Grozny and Gudermes in the east, and are bordered by the Black Mountains in the south. The Plains slope gently in a northeasterly direction, going down in height from 350 m to 100 m, and their surface is crossed by a number of river valleys. This is a very fertile area of Chechnya and has the highest population density.

Caucasus Mountains

To the south of the Chechen Plains, four parallel latitudinal ridges gradually rise, crossed by deep gorges. The relief of the mountains is a result of long geological processes, with the torrents and rivers taking some credit for the artwork. The most ancient rocks belong to the Jurassic and Cretaceous systems, with three divisions of the Jurassic present. The sediments of the Lower Jurassic make up the greatest thickness, up to 4,500 m, and consist of black clay slates with layers of sandstone and aleurolite. The Middle Jurassic is composed of dark grey clay slates and sandstone. The Upper Jurassic, which has a massive thickness of up to 1,500 m, is composed of homogeneous limestone.

The most northern and lowest of the ridges is the Black Mountains, which received their name from the dark green, almost black, hue of the rich forests when viewed from a distance. The Black Mountains, whose tops have soft and rounded outlines, are cut by

gorges and gullies, and as such do not form a continuous chain. The highest point of the ridge stands at 1,200 m.

To the south of the Black Mountains extends the Pastbischni Ridge (which name signifying abundance of lush mountain pasture), some of whose peaks exceed 2,000 m in height. In the western part, the Ridge branches into two and sometimes three parallel ridges interspersed with ravines. It forms the Peshkhoiski Mountains in the central part and in the east it abuts the Andi Ridge, from which many spurs issue forth.

To the south of the Pastbischni Ridge lies the Skalisti (Rocky) Ridge, which is crossed by a number of river valleys, such as the Targim Gorge of the Assa. The slopes of the Skalisti, though abrupt, are smooth and do not form rocky ledges. The western part of the Ridge, called 'Ts'e-Lam', stretches between the rivers Terek and Assa, while the eastern section, 'Tsore-Lam', extends to the Guloi-Khi and ends at Khakhalgi (3,036 m), the highest point of the Skalisti. The 40-km latitudinal stretch from the Terek to Guloi-Khi reorientates itself in a northeasterly direction. Between the Skalisti and Bokovoi ridges extends a narrow strip of clay and sandstone mountains sectioned by rather wide valleys.

Along the southern border of the republic stretch the snow-capped mountains of the giant Bokovoi (Lateral) Ridge. It is here that Tebulos-Mta, the highest mountain in Chechnya and the Eastern Caucasus, is located. Also called 'Borz-Lam' ('Wolf-Mountain'), it stands at 4,493 m (14,741 ft). The relief of the Bokovoi, mainly alpine in character, was to a large extent shaped by glacial erosion, and is dominated by the valleys of the Assa and Chanti-Argun. Caucasian glaciers have been shrinking and receding since the last years of the nineteenth century AD. The Bokovoi is not clearly defined in the western part of Chechnya, whereas in the east it is bounded in the north by the Guloi-Khi Valley and in the south by the valleys of the Assa and Chanti-Argun tributaries. Further to the east lies the Pirikitelski Ridge, where Tebulos-Mta and Komito-Dattakh-Korta (4,271 m) are located, and the Snegovoi (Snowy) Ridge, the highest point of which is Diklos-Mta (4,274 m). All these ridges form the Vodorazdelni (Watershed) Ridge, which stretches uninterruptedly for 75 km between the upper reaches of the Chanti-Argun and Sharo-Argun and the Pirikitelski Alzan and Andi Koisu.

River systems, canals and lakes

The main rivers of Chechnya include the Terek, Sunzha, Argun, Aksai and Assa. The Terek originates in the environs of Mount Kazbek (Bash-Lam: 5,047 m) in the Georgian part of the central Caucasus, and flows first in a northerly direction across North Ossetia, and then moves northwestwards to Kabardino-Balkaria. It snakes back in an easterly direction to North Ossetia, flows through Chechnya and Daghestan, and eventually pours into the Caspian. The Terek is the major source of irrigation in the Northern Plains, but it is not navigable. Its width ranges between 100 m and 250 m, with a depth of 2–3 m. There are many fords and a large number of small islands. The Terek is one of the natural wonders of the Caucasus, and was a source of inspiration for the Russian 'Caucasian' romantics.

The Sunzha also has its sources in the Central Caucasus and has a path that mimics that of the Terek, but on a smaller scale. It connects with the Terek to the northeast of Gudermes. Its tributaries include the Argun, Assa, Fortanga, Gekhi and Martan. The Argun is formed by the confluence of the Sharo-Argun and Chanti-Argun, both of which

have their sources in the Central Caucasus. It moves in a northeasterly direction until it joins the Sunzha. The Argun is traditionally considered the boundary between lowland and highland Chechnya. Other rivers include Dzhalka, Goiti, Guloi-Khi, Khul-Khulau, Osu-Khi and Pirikitel'ski Alzan. All rivers, except for the Terek, Sunzha and Argun, are fordable in autumn and winter, but not so in spring and summer.

The river valleys occupied by the Chechens, from east to west, are: Yaraksu, Yamansu, Benoi-Asi, Aksai, Michik, Gansol, Gums, Okholitlau, Kharachoi, Elistani, Bass, Sharo-Argun, Chanti-Argun, Martan, Gekhi, Valerik, Shali and Netkhoi. Fortanga is considered the traditional frontier between the Chechens and Ingush.

Irrigation canals, which are mostly located in the and Northern Plains, include the Alkhanchurt, which irrigates the Alkhanchurt Valley, the Nadterechny, which waters the plains of the same name, and the Lenin. The Naur-Shelkovsky branch of the Terek-Kuma Canal passes through northern Chechnya for some 168 km. Other canals include the Assa-Sunzha, Samashki, Khankala, Bragun and Burunnaya, an offshoot of the Naur-Shelkovsky Canal. The canal system in Chechnya has fallen into disrepair as a result of war and neglect.

There are a few lakes on the plains and a number of glacial mountain lakes, including Kazenoi, the largest in the North Caucasus at 2 sq km in area and 72 m in depth. At an altitude of 1,869 m, the picturesque lake on the Chechen-Daghestani border used to be a tourist site in more peaceable times.

The Chechen Republic

The Chechen and Ingush regions had been part of the Soviet Mountain Republic until 1924, when separate Chechen and Ingush autonomous oblasts were set up. In 1934, the two oblasts were joined to form the Chechen-Ingush AO, with an area of 15,700 sq km and a population of about 700,000. In 1936, the status of the Oblast was upgraded to a full Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic. In 1944, the Chechen-Ingush ASSR was abolished after the Chechens and Ingush were deported to Central Asia and Siberia on charges of collaboration with the invading Germans. The Republic was reinstated in 1957 with an (increased) area of 19,300 sq km. The Chechen-Ingush ASSR had 12 administrative rayons (districts) and 17 cities and towns. In 1991, Chechnya declared its independence unilaterally, while Ingushetia opted to separate from the composite republic in the following year and rejoin the Russian Federation as a constituent republic. In January 1994, Chechnya changed its name to 'Chechen Republic-Ichkeria', the suffix being the name of a large region in the southeast traditionally associated with the birth of the Chechen nation.⁷

Present-day Chechnya has an area of some 17,000 sq km, making up only 0.1 per cent of the total area of the Russian Federation (to put this into perspective, you need one thousand Chechnyas to cover one Russia). It is bounded by the Stavropol Krai and Daghestan to the north, Daghestan to the east, Ingushetia and North Ossetia to the west, Georgia to the southwest and Daghestan to the southeast. There are 15 administrative districts: Achkhoy-Martan, Grozny, Gudermes, Itum-Kala, Kurchaloi, Nadterechny, Naur, Nozhai-Yurt, Shali, Sharo, Shatoi, Shelkovsky, Sunzha, Urus-Martan and Vedeno.⁸

In 1929, the Autonomous City of Grozny was joined to the Chechen AO and became the administrative capital. Grozny, which lies in the valleys and lowlands of the central

region and is traversed by the Sunzha, was founded in 1819 as the Russian fort of Groznaya during the Russian conquest of the Caucasus.⁹ Grozny, which had only some 6,000 inhabitants in 1876, became an important centre in 1893 with the discovery of oil. Its population grew to 34,000 in 1913, 97,000 (68,000 Russians) in 1926, 175,000 in 1939, and 397,000 (210,000 Russians) in 1989. In 1991, Russian residents of Grozny began to move out to Russia proper, while many Chechens flocked to the city from the countryside. In 1994, the city's population was estimated at 370,000. According to the 2002 census, Grozny had 205,000 residents. Grozny, which suffered great destruction in the last two Russian-Chechen wars, had been an important cultural and industrial centre in the North Caucasus, boasting oil refining complexes and major petrochemical works, and it used to be a hub of rail and road transport, as well as of oil and gas pipelines, including the important Baku-Grozny-Novorossiisk line, which was used, among other things, to transport Caspian oil to the Black Sea.

Other urban centres include Urus-Martan, with a population of over 40,000, Gudermes (33,500), Shali (24,000), Argun (23,000), and Vedeno, the centre of Ichkeria. In all, there are some 360 towns and villages. More than two-thirds of the population lived in rural areas in 1989. This proportion has increased significantly after many Chechen city and town dwellers sought refuge in the countryside to escape war.

After 1991, the Chechens reverted to using the original Chechen onomastic system for geographical terms and they were shown on maps in Latin script. For example, 'Argun' was rendered 'Orga'; 'Urus-Martan'—'Khalkha-Marta'; 'Vinogradnoe'—'Bammat-Yurt'; 'Assinovskaya'—'Eksa-Borze'; 'Atagi'—'Ataga'.

According to the 1989 census, there were 293,000 Russians (and Cossacks) (cf. 336,000 in 1979), 14,800 Armenians, 12,600 Ukrainians, 9,800 Kumyks, 6,800 Nogai, 6,200 Avars, 5,100 Tatars, and 2,600 Jews resident in the Chechen-Ingush ASSR. Most of the Cossacks, who had been concentrated in the Naur (Tersky), Shelkovsky and Nadterechny districts, left Chechnya after its declaration of independence. By the end of 2000, the Armenian and Jewish populations had dwindled to insignificance. There were attempts by the Russian authorities to resettle the 200,000 or so Russians who fled Chechnya after the outbreak of war back in the republic to augment the puny 10,000 who had 'elected' to stay.

The Chechens in Daghestan

The Akkintsi (Chechens), also called 'Aukh', form one of the larger ethnic groups in Daghestan, numbering 57,877 in 1989, with current estimates putting the group size at more than 70,000 people, not counting the refugees from the recent wars in Chechnya. The Akkintsi are counted among the fourteen titular groups in the republic, in accordance with the 1994 Daghestani Constitution.

2

History from the earliest to the end of the eighteenth century AD

Vainakh history is perhaps the most poorly studied among those of the various peoples of the North Caucasus. Much research effort had been expended on the history of the Russian-Caucasian War, most of it being falsified at that. Other eras were at best patchily and inadequately studied and were generally victims of subjective views. For example, up to the end of the nineteenth century archaeologists in general considered that the North Caucasians settled in their present domicile during the Iron Age, at most three thousand years ago. E.Veidenbaum, citing Stone Age evidence, argued that their settlement took place much earlier. Also, the Georgian historian G.A. Melikishvili maintained that the formation of the Vainakh took place much earlier than the first century BC. Though evidence of Nakh settlement was found on the southern slopes of the Caucasus in the second and first millennia BC, he did not rule out the possibility of their residence in the northern and eastern regions of the Caucasus. It is traditionally accepted that the Vainakh have existed in the Caucasus, with their present territory as a nucleus of a larger domicile, for thousands of years, and that it was the 'birthplace' of their ethnos, to which the peoples who inhabited the Central Caucasus and the steppe lands all the way to the Volga in the northeast and the Caspian Sea to the east contributed.

Some authorities believe that the Nakh nation was an offspring of the Hurrians and Urartians, builders of magnificent civilizations in the Near East that had profound influences upon other cultures of the region. It is certain that the Nakh constituted an important component of the Hurrian-Urartian tribes in the Trans-Caucasus and played a role in the development of their influential cultures. K.M.Tumanov (1913) was the first to mention the existence of the Nakh in ancient times in the Trans-Caucasus and Western Asia. However, it is a moot point as to whether the Hurrians came down south from the Caucasus or one of their subgroups emigrated north to find a home in the area. E.A.Speiser (1941) suggested that the Trans-Caucasus was the original Hurrian homeland. Some scholars also proposed the existence of a (linguistic and cultural) NE Caucasian and Hurrian (later Urartian) spatial continuum. If this were correct, then the NE Caucasians would be the only distinct remnants of this once mighty conglomerate.

The Nakh were first mentioned as an ethnic group ('Nachos') in chronicles that go back to the fourth century BC. Their domicile straddled the northern and southern slopes of the central Caucasus. The North Caucasian Vainakh are at least partial descendants of the peoples of the Koban and Kayakent-Kharachoi cultures, who had mastered working iron as early as the beginning of the first millennium BC, and who maintained contacts, albeit not always very cordial, with the Iranian-speaking Scythians, Sarmatians and Alans in the north and Georgians, Armenians and Persians in the south.

The North Caucasus has been subject to innumerable invaders since time immemorial. In all of recorded history and inferable prehistory, the small Vainakh nation had never initiated battle except in self-defence, fighting fiercely to maintain its independence. During the Middle Ages, the Vainakh defended their homeland against the Romans, Huns, Persians, Khazars, Arabs and the fearsome Mongols and Tatars. The Chechens played a crucial role in slowing down the expansion of tsarist Russia in the Caucasus in the period from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century.¹

One of the first native Vainakh historians was Umalat Laudaev, who was born in 1828 and served in the Russian Army. His seminal work *The Chechen Tribe* (1872) is the first modern account by a Chechen of the history and culture of his people.

Ancient history: the evidence of archaeology

The ancient history of the Nakh has attracted few researchers, and as a result there is a lack of published works, while archaeological materials still need to be properly studied and categorized. Pioneering archaeological expeditions were undertaken by J.A.Güldenstädt and P.S.Pallas at the end of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth centuries. More serious, though still haphazard, work started in the 1880s after A.P.Bergé formulated the primary goals of studying archaeology in the Caucasus. V.B.Antonovich and V.L.Berensham excavated several barrows in the piedmont of Chechnya. In the 1890s, excavations were carried out by P.S.Uvarov near Grozny, Vertepov at Zakan-Yurt and Dolbezhev in Nesterovskoi and Psedakh. In the Soviet period, more systematic work was carried out, and many publications came out inventorying some of the ancient sites.

There is evidence of mountainous cave settlements that go back to 125,000 BC. In time, tools were utilized, fire was mastered and animal skins were used for warmth and other purposes. Traces of human settlements that date back 40,000 years were found near Lake Kazenoi. Cave paintings, artefacts and other archaeological findings indicate that there has been continuous habitation in Chechnya for some eight millennia. The drawings, some in the form of petroglyphs found in ancient underground dwellings, included anthropomorphic and animal pictographs and depictions of burial rites and celestial phenomena. Some medieval combat and dwelling towers had petroglyphs, usually placed above the loop-holes, taken from more ancient dwellings, affording some evidence of their function as religious protective symbols.

A distinct culture in the mountain regions could be discerned based on an art style reminiscent of early Mesopotamian civilizations. The people of the area mastered metallurgy and maintained trade relations with neighbouring regions. There is reason to believe that rudiments of cuneiform writing appeared in this era.

Kura-Arax culture

The Kura-Arax culture, called after the river valleys in the Trans-Caucasus where excavations revealed its remains, extended from the fourth/third millennium BC to the Early Bronze Age. It was one of the major civilizations of its time, on a par with those of Mesopotamia, with which it established trade relations. This culture is considered

indigenous to the Caucasus, and one of its important variants is believed to have been established by the ancestors of the Nakh-Daghestanis. The first finds in Chechnya that could be attributed to this culture were in the Lugovoe and Serzhen-Yurt settlements. Other variants were found in other parts of the Caucasus, for example in Terpek-Kala in south Daghestan. It is believed that the Hurrian civilization gave rise to this Trans-Caucasian eneolithic culture, which later spread to parts of Asia Minor and the Middle East.

The Kura-Arax was contiguous, and had mutual influences, with the Maikop culture in the Northwest Caucasus. According to E.I.Krupnov (1969:77), there were elements of the Maikop culture in the early memorials of Chechnya and Ingushetia in the Meken and Bamut kurgans and in Lugovoe and Serzhen-Yurt. Similarities between some features and objects of the Maikop and Kura-Arax cultures, such as large square graves, the bold-relief curvilinear ornamentation on pottery, ochre-coloured ceramics, earthen hearth props with horn projections, flint arrowheads, stone axes and copper pitchforks, are indicative of a cultural unity that pervaded the Caucasus in the Neolithic Age. The economy of the Kura-Arax culture was based on agriculture and cattle breeding. Contacts were maintained with the highland tribes of Western Asia and Asia Minor. According to Krupnov (1969:76–7):

The main features of this culture are open congregations of dwellings arranged in ‘tepe’ formation on the plains and settlements built on hills in mountainous areas, as well as a special type of dwellings on the ground, rounded or rectangular in shape, with weak stone foundations made of half-baked earthen blocks. Portable round hearths of clay and various earthen hearth supports were an essential feature of such settlements. The most typical finds in settlements of this type were samples of splendid earthenware. The pottery had a dark and polished surface, in the North Caucasus of a red colour.

Copper Age: Kayakent culture

The Kayakent, after the name of the most ancient monument of this culture in the NE Caucasus, spread in Chechnya and Daghestan, and although it began in the Palaeolithic, it saw its florescence in the Copper Age. Extant monuments of the Kayakent consist mainly of burial grounds at Belgatoi, Dargo, Duba-Yurt, Kharachoi and Serzhen-Yurt. The oldest copper artefacts of this eneolithic culture were dated to the first half of the third millennium BC. Unwrought stone and clay were used as building materials. Agricultural was well developed in the early Kayakent (third millennium BC), as attested by copper sickles with flint blades inserted in wooden or bone handles, which had remained in use until the Iron Age. Bone remains indicate that neat and small cattle, such as sheep and goats, were raised.²

Bronze Age: Kharachoi culture

Most finds pertaining to the Early Bronze Age, puny though they may be, were found in a burial ground in the settlement of Isti-Su. The presence of clay jugs and stone grain

containers indicate a relatively high level of cultural development. Animal bone remains furnish some clues as to the lifestyle of the people of this period, including the fact that hunting was a major occupation. Also, bones of some rare animals found in this region indicate wider distribution in the past. It is noteworthy that no pig bones were come across, which means that most probably the animal was not around at the time.

Major finds, including burial grounds, dated to the Late Bronze Age at a settlement near Kharachoi, and other monuments discovered at Belgatoi and Duba-Yurt, had allowed the reconstruction of some features of the Kharachoi culture, destroyed many times over, and the determination of the extent of its distribution.

Bronze artefacts dated to the nineteenth century BC provided archaeological evidence of a northern (Nakh?) culture that was contemporaneous with, and possibly related to, the Hurrian civilization. By the first millennium BC, iron had become the principal substance of industry, supplanting stone, copper and bronze.

Koban culture in Chechnya

The Koban culture, established by the indigenes of the North Caucasus, extended to Chechnya at the end of the second millennium BC. Archaeological evidence indicates that a settlement near Serzhen-Yurt was an arena of this culture from the eleventh to the seventh centuries BC. Remains include dwellings, cobble bridges, altars, metal objects, clay, stone articles and bones. The abundant finds had made it possible for archaeologists to reconstruct some aspects of what could be termed the Chechen variant of the Koban. People tilled the land, as could be evidenced from sickles and stone grain grinders, growing wheat, barley and rye, and raised animals, including cattle, sheep, goats, horses, donkeys and pigs. Artisans worked in pottery, bronze-casting, stone-polishing and bone-carving shops. Metallurgy was at an advanced stage of development, with differentiated professionals organized at the clan level.

It is probable that the Chechen Koban culture was undone by the invading Scythians and Cimmerians in the seventh or sixth centuries BC. According to V.I.Kozenkova (2001), it is possible that the Kobans of Chechnya were partial ancestors of the Vainakh, but that more research still needs to be done on this issue.

Iranian tribes

Three phases of interaction of the NE Caucasians and the invading Iranian tribes can be discerned. The Scythian-Cimmerian period extended from the seventh to the fourth centuries BC. The Scythians had cultural contacts with the 'Chechen' Kobans, but relations between the two groups were often turbulent, preventing the Vainakh from settling for extended periods in the plains. Nevertheless, in propitious times, the Vainakh ventured down from the mountains to establish settlements, for example near 'Aliroi, Bamut, Mairtup, Serzhen-Yurt and Zandaq, where they farmed, bred animals, smelted metal and made pottery.³ In the latter part of the first millennium BC, Nakh tribes inhabiting the Central North Caucasus were displaced by Iranian tribes, partial ancestors of the present-day Ossetians. Herodotus mentioned the presence of Scythians in the NE Caucasus in the fifth century BC. Amazingly, the German Caucasologist Heinz Fähnrich (1988) has identified lexical traces of Nakh-Svan contacts prior to the advent of the

Iranians. Some North Caucasian Nakh states set up ties with the Bosporan kingdom, established by Greek colonists on the northeast Black Sea shores in 480 BC. Adermakh, emperor of the Nakh Malkh nation, married a daughter of the Bosporan king.

The Sarmatians, who arrived in the northeast Black Sea steppes in the late fourth century BC, had become dominant in the third century BC, and their influence extended up to the third century AD. Two tribes, the Siraci and Aorsi, gradually expanded their territories, and by the second century AD they had occupied large parts of the North Caucasus and the northwestern Caspian steppes. Part of the Nakh population was settled along the Terek and Sunzha in fortified villages. Archaeological finds show that there was a healthy cultural exchange between the Sarmatians and the North Caucasians. Caucasian-made objects were found in abundance in Sarmatian burial grounds. The Nakh seem to have been on the whole more advanced in their material culture than the Iranians, who were, among other things, not familiar with foundry work and the potter's wheel. On the other hand, the Sarmatians, with their tribal kings and aristocracy, had superior social organization and military know-how (Ya.Z. Akhmadov 2002). The Sarmatians and Nakh were instrumental in establishing the Iberian (Kartlian) State in the third century BC. It is noteworthy that when Greek and Roman historians of the first century BC referred to Sarmatians and Sarmatia, they subsumed the North Caucasians and their dominions under these appellations.

The nomadic Alans arrived in the central regions of the North Caucasus in the second century AD, filling the gap created by some of the departing Sarmatians. They adopted the Nakh settled lifestyle and soon after they established colonies at present-day Ali-Yurt (Ingushetia), Alkhan-Kala on the Sunzha, Goryachi Istochnik, Mozdok (North Ossetia) and Sernovodsk. Villages were built close to one another, and around them arose giant burial mounds, some of which are still intact. It is believed that the fortified town near Alkhan-Kala was the Alan capital Magas.

The Alans allied themselves with kindred nations, remnants of the Sarmatians, and formed close relationships with the local peoples, assimilating a part of the Nakh population. The process of ethnic and cultural interaction had given rise to the distinct North Caucasian Alans by the end of the fourth century AD. The multi-ethnic Alan feudal state survived well into the tenth century.

Genealogy, linguistic evidence and the historical record

Partial ancestors and kindred peoples

The most probable theory on Nakh ancestry is that it was the (re-)union of the Caucasian Nakh, the location of whose original domicile is still a moot point, and some of the Urartian remnants of the break-up of the kingdom of Urartu, with the Trans-Caucasus being the most likely locality at which this fusion took place. It is thought that the proto-Caucasian Nakh and proto-Hurrians had common ancestry. Thus, at least part of the genealogy of the Nakh peoples can be attributed to the Hurrians and their descendants, the Urartians. From Hurrians to modern Vainakh there were many nation-tribes that can be viewed as forming connecting links in the genealogical chain. Some Urartian tribes were incorporated into other peoples, but the Vainakh and Tsova-Tushians resisted

assimilation, and are considered as the only linguistic and ethnic remnants of the Hurrians and Urartians.

Hurrians or Hurrites

Despite the obscurity of their origins, the Hurrians became one of the great and influential peoples in the Near East from the third millennium BC to the fourteenth century BC. Their original homeland was probably the south Caucasus down to the Armenian Plateau and the Zagros-Taurus Mountains. Later they expanded to Anatolia, Mesopotamia and Northern Syria. The Hurrian language was neither Indo-European, nor Semitic, but was akin to the NE Caucasian languages (or Alarodian languages, descendants of Urartian), including Chechen and Lezgian. Hurrian civilization reached its acme in the period from the sixteenth to the fourteenth century BC.⁴ The generally accepted date for the downfall of Hurrian civilization is 1365 BC.

The numerous clans of the Hurrians, such as the Gutis, Hattians,⁵ Kassites (established the Kassite kingdom of Babylon in the fifteenth century BC), Kurti (proto-Kurds?), Mitannis, Mushki and Urartians, formed empires and city-states which bore their names. The Kura-Arax culture is also attributed to the Hurrians. It is generally accepted that a number of small Hurrian states gradually united to form the Empire of Mitanni.

The Hurrians were so ubiquitous that many Indo-Iranian and Indo-European peoples are believed to have substantive Hurrian contributions in their ethnogenesis. For example, the Kurds consider themselves and their culture as descendants of the Hurrians and their civilization, despite linguistic differentiation. There are also suggestions that the ancestors of the Armenians were a mixture of Hurrians and Indo-European Phrygians. However, linguistic evidence suggests that the NE Caucasians are the genuine descendants of the Hurrians.

It is thought that the Horites who populated the Dead Sea area in pre-Abrahamite times were a Hurrian tribe. The Jebusites of Jerusalem, who ruled the city until it was conquered by David (II Samuel 5:6, 7), roughly in 1000 BC, had mixed Hurrian and Semitic ancestry, and one of their rulers was called Abdi-Heba, a Semitic-Hurrian compound name. In Hebrew, freemen were called 'Bnei Horin' ('Sons of Hurrians').

Mitannis

The Empire of Mitanni (Mittani) appeared in 1550 BC, probably to the southwest of the Armenian Plateau, and was made up at least partially of Hurrian subjects. Although there is some indication that the ruling class was of Indo-European extraction, Hurrian was used as the language of state. The capital Wassukani was most likely located at Tell al-Fakhariyeh in Northern Syria, and Nineveh was at the easternmost edge of the empire. Mitanni annexed Assyria in 1472 BC. The Mitanni culture, a unique blend of native Hurrian traditions and Sumerian and Akkadian cultural inputs, had in no small measure influenced the civilizations of the Hittites and other peoples. The Mitannis perfected the two-wheeled war chariot, which had such a large impact on warfare from the fifteenth century BC. Mitanni was undone in 1300 BC after having been subjected first to Hittite and then Assyrian attacks.

Urartians

The Urartians, also called 'Khaldu', but self-designated as 'Biainili', were first mentioned in an Assyrian record that goes back to 860 BC. Of Hurrian stock, they lived on the Armenian Plateau, with the capital at Tushpa on Lake Van. It is thought that the Chaldeans who lived to the south of Babylonia were a swarm of the Khaldu. The Urartian language was very akin to Hurrian, probably a direct descendant, and was written in cuneiform characters. The kingdom of Urartu, which was made up of several small states, flourished in the ninth through to the seventh centuries BC, and extended to the North Caucasus at the peak of its power. Xenophon visited remnants of the Urartians around 400 BC.

The Urartians were only partially assimilated by the Armenians, and some of their tribes in the Central Caucasus managed to preserve their independence and culture. It is thought that the Alarodians, Nakhchmateans, and Dzurduks (Durduks: from the town of Durdukka on Lake Urmia in northwest Iran) were remnants of the Urartians, with the latter two peoples being direct forebears of the Nakh.

Nakh in the Trans-Caucasus

Some Hurrian-Nakh tribes had been residing in the central and eastern Trans-Caucasus well before the destruction of Urartu. According to G.A.Melikishvili, the precipitate population of the Trans-Caucasus by Urartian nation-tribes could be explained by their kinship to the local inhabitants. Yet evidence of Hurrian and Nakh residence in the Trans-Caucasus can only be traced as far back as the post-Urartian period, probably due to lack of records. However, the *Georgian Chronicles* of Leonti Mroveli (*Kartlis Tskhovreba*=The Life of Georgia, eleventh century AD) mention that after Alexander the Great's invasion of the land of the Kartlians in the fourth century BC, the Chaldeans (Urartians?) returned to the Trans-Caucasus.

The Èrs, one of the Urartian nation-tribes, had been proposed as the link between the Hurrians and the Nakh. The Arax (Eraskhi or Yeraskhi) was attributed to the Èrs, where 'khi' is a Hurrian-Nakh hydronym-forming suffix.⁶ Furthermore, the name of the Urartian city 'Èribuni' (=Yerevan?) probably referred to 'the land of the Èrs' (*bun* =shelter, in Chechen). In the vicinity of the Yeraskhadzor (Hurrian-Nakh-Armenian toponym='Yeraskhi Gorge'; *dzor*=gorge, in Armenian) lived the Nakhchradzor community, most probably a component of Chechen ancestry. According to Leonti Mroveli, the Oreta (Ereta) Sea (Lake Sevan) formed a boundary of the Targamos State.

At the turn of the new era, the Nakh peoples in the Trans-Caucasus were comprised of the Dzurduks in the north, the Tsanars in the south, the Dvals in the west, and the Èrs in the east. The Kakh(etians), who used to call themselves Kabatsas and their territory Kakh-Batsa, were surrounded by Nakh tribes and were themselves thought to be Tushians of Nakh extraction. The eighteenth-century historian Vakhushhti asserted that the Kakh considered the Gligvs, Dzurduks and Kist as their ethnic kin. The Trans-Caucasian Chaldeans, Tabals and Tibarens also spoke Nakh dialects. Some authorities believe that the Khevsurs, Svans and Udi are also of Nakh origin. It would seem that the Georgians (Kartlians) gradually prevailed over the Nakh nationtribes in the Trans-Caucasus, pushing some of them north and assimilating most of the rest.⁷

Across the Caucasus

Genetic relatedness between the Vainakh and Hurrian-Urartian languages led to the hypothesis that elements of the Urartians migrated across the Caucasus after the breakup of their state, which is borne out by some writings of antiquity. According to Strabo (*Geography*, XI, V, pp. 1–49), the Gargareans (*gergara*=kindred in Nakh), presumably a proto-Nakh, or Nakh-related people, and the Amazons migrated from Asia Minor to the Eastern Caucasus, in the Keraunian Mountains, above (Caucasian) Albania, where they met Eobeoans and Thracians who came from the west.⁸ A legend has it that the Gargareans and Amazons, who lived in separate but adjoining regions, indulged in procreative rituals that lasted for two months on a border mountain, sharing the offspring such that the Gargareans kept the males, the Amazons the females. If the hypothesis that the Amazons were one of the elements that went into forming the Circassian nation, and the Gargareans the Chechens, then this cute myth might provide another clue on the putative connectedness between the two peoples.⁹

Georgian and Armenian Chronicles

The *Georgian Chronicles* of Leonti Mroveli, which refer to events that go as far back as the pre-Christian era, include the first written record of the Nakhchmateans, progenitors of the Nokhchii.¹⁰ According to Mroveli, the Nakhchmateans were descendants of Targamos, the mythical progenitor of the Caucasian peoples, who moved together with his sons to the Caucasus from Assyria. Before his death, Targamos divided the country amongst his sons, with Kavkasos, the eldest and most noble, receiving the Central Caucasus. Kavkasos engendered the Chechen tribes, and his descendant, Dzurdzuk, who took residence in a mountainous region, later called ‘Dzurdzuketia’ after him, established a strong state in the fourth and third centuries BC. According to the *Armenian Chronicles*, which are essentially translations of Mroveli’s work, the Dzurdzucs defeated the Scythians and became a significant force in the region in the first millennium BC. They helped Farnavaz, first King of Georgia, against his unruly vassals and consolidated his reign. The marriage of Farnavaz to a Dzurdzuk princess cemented the Iberian-Kartvelian alliance with the Dzurdzucs. The *Chronicles* also provide a rough picture of the political entities that existed in the Caucasus at the boundary of the seventh and eighth centuries AD.

Roman domination and Byzantine-Sassanid wars

In 66 BC, Pompey led a successful campaign in the Trans-Caucasus, conducting fierce battles against the Armenians, Georgians and (Caucasian) Albanians. Trajan conquered the Western and Eastern Caucasus, Iberia and Albania, respectively, in Roman chronicles, soon after 114 AD and placed them under Roman dominion. Supported by some northern highland tribes and the Sarmatians, Iberia became a dominant power in the Caucasus in the second century AD. However, by the middle of the third century, it had been exhausted by virtually incessant wars with the Sassanids, who also attempted to subjugate the Nakh in the north, but without much success.

Armenia and Iberia adopted Christianity in the fourth century AD, in reaction to Sassanid aggression, and Rome sent troops to the area in their support. However, the

Iranians had managed to prevail by the end of the century, decisively defeating the Romans and driving them out of most of their dominions in the Caucasus. The Sassanids tried to impose their state religion, Zoroastrianism, on the Christian Georgians and Armenians. Sassanid influence even reached the Nakh and Alans in the North Caucasus.

The political and religious Byzantine-Sassanid conflict, which extended from the fifth to the seventh centuries AD, also involved the Georgians, Armenians, Nakh and other North Caucasian nations, as both superpowers also vied to dominate the Caucasus. The protracted wars eventually led to the weakening of both empires and the diminution of their military might, setting the stage for new actors in the area. In the seventh century, the Arab Caliphate was to demolish the Sassanid State in a spectacular fashion, occupy Byzantium's dominions in Asia Minor, and later push against the walls of the Caucasus.

The nomadic Turkic Huns invaded the North Caucasus and overran the Alans and other North Caucasian peoples in the latter part of the fourth century AD, occupying a large area, including Vainakh territories, and forcing the plains peoples to take refuge in the highlands. The Huns were weakened in the middle of the sixth century by the invading Avars, who in their turn remained dominant for a century or so.

Medieval Nakh nation-tribes and kingdoms

In the first few centuries AD, the Nakh developed a distinct culture at the interface of the Great Steppe, on one side, and the South Caucasus and Southwest Asia, on the other, being subject to cultural, political and economic influences from Georgia, Armenia, Rome and Persia. In the fifth to seventh centuries AD, the world of the Nakh was surrounded by the kindred Daghestanis in the east, the Alans in the north and west, and the Georgians in the south. In the sixth century, the Nakh tribes in Georgia and near its northern border were Christianized by the Georgians.

The Nakh tribes that lived in the North Caucasus in the first half of the first millennium AD included the Dzurduks, Gligvs,¹¹ Khamekits, Kist, Malkhi, Nakhchmateans and Sadiks, some of which have retained their names to this day. The Nakh tribes located in the Trans-Caucasus included Diaukhs, Èrs, Ga-Nakh, Kakh, Khalibs (=Chaldeans?), Khons, Makhelons, Sods, Tabals and Tsanars.

The majority of medieval Vainakh lived in areas between ridges and in river valleys roughly in their present domicile. The early Middle Ages witnessed the flourishing of stone construction in the mountains as a result of economic and social development. All valleys in the upper reaches of the Argun, Assa, Darial and Fortanga boasted complex architectural stone structures such as towers, castles, burial vaults, shrines and churches. Later, entire settlements sprang up. In these propitious circumstances, the Vainakh, together with kindred neighbouring peoples, established a number of Caucasian states.

Kingdom of Sarir

Sarir (Serir) was a city-state established in the mountainous regions of Chechnya and Daghestan in the fourth/fifth centuries AD, with its capital at Khunzakh in Daghestan. It was perhaps the first complex social organization achieved by the NE Caucasians beyond the tribe in the Middle Ages, its structure being based on rudimentary feudalism. Sarir

later adopted Christianity as a state religion, but the masses remained faithful to their ancient animist and polytheistic beliefs.

Sarir became a tributary of the Alans in the fifth century. The Hunnic Savirs reduced Sarir to vassalage in 630, the Khazars taking over in 651. The people of Sarir fought against the invading Arabs in the seventh and eighth centuries. Arab travellers referred to the ruler of the kingdom as ‘Sahib al-Sarir’ (‘Lord of the Throne’). Al-Massoudi, who visited the Caucasus in the tenth century, mentioned that Sarir was in league with the Alans against the Khazars. In 1032 AD, a coalition of the Sarirs, Alans and the Rus of Tmutarakan raided Shamakhiya (Shemakha), capital of Sharwan (Shirvan, in present-day Azerbaijan), but were routed on their way back by the Muslim Emir Mansur of Darband (present-day Derbent, on the southern Daghestani Caspian coast). Sarir was undone in the eleventh/twelfth century.

Khazars

Political hegemony in the NE Caucasus passed over to the Khazar Kaganate in the seventh century AD. The Khazar Kagan reduced the Alans and the Turkic tribes of the North Caucasus to vassalage. The Khazars built a number of fortresses in Chechnya’s northeastern steppes. It is believed that the first Khazar capital, Semender, was built on the Terek near the Caspian Sea. Khazaria adopted Judaism as a state religion in the eighth century.

In the middle years of the 960s, the Vainakh fought on the side of Prince Svyatoslav of Kiev (reigned: 969–972) against the Khazars, whose empire was irrevocably weakened in consequence. Mstislav I, Svyatoslav’s grandson, ruled the Tmutarakan principality, which became a dominant force in the area for some time. In the eleventh century, Mstislav, in league with the Kassogs (Kabardians), routed the Khazars in the Crimea and took their capital Sarkel. According to Kabardian tradition, the Kassogs themselves destroyed Tmutarakan some time later.

Arab invasion

In the middle of the seventh century AD, the Arab armies destroyed the Sassanid Empire, and pushed north towards Asia Minor and the Caucasus. The Trans-Caucasian states were overpowered in their turn, and Tbilisi was captured in 645 AD. The Arabs ventured forth across the Caucasus, but were confronted with the formidable combination of the Khazars and their allies the Nakh-Daghestanis. The Muslim push was arrested and the two sides engaged in a protracted war from the late seventh to the early eighth centuries that exhausted them both. The conflict subsided by the ninth century, by which time Arab rule in Georgia had been weakened, in no small measure due to the incessant attacks by the Trans-Caucasian Nakh Tsanars, called ‘Sanar’ in Arabic sources.

The Turkic Seljuks overran Georgia in 1068 AD and laid waste to it. King David IV of Georgia led a force against the Seljuks and liberated Tbilisi in 1122, and gradually rolled back Seljuk domination. The Georgians went on to establish a formidable kingdom whose dominion extended over parts of the North Caucasus.

Ninth-thirteenth centuries AD

Following the neutralization of the northward Muslim push, there was an extended period of relative peace and stability, with the Alans dominating in the northern plains and the Nakh enjoying autonomy in the southern regions. Remarkable levels of social, economic, and cultural development were achieved by the Nakh. Dwelling and military towers were erected. The east-west trading route from the Khazar city of Semender to the Black Sea ports and the north-south route across the Darial Pass allowed mercantile ties with Byzantium, Khazaria and Georgia, and from there, to Europe and the Near East. Archaeological finds of this period included smithies and artisan shops. The forbidding mountains still acted as shelters for foreign peoples, some fugitives from crusader persecution. Although Alan culture remained significant in this period, Georgian cultural and religious influences became apparent in the twelfth century AD and reached a peak during the reign of Queen Tamara in the early thirteenth century. Some Vainakh tribes were converted to Orthodox Christianity and temples were erected in the highlands. Societal organization into more integrated structures brought feudalism into its own with the formation of complex feudal unions. The Trans-Caucasian Nakh took active part in the political life of Georgia, and they joined some of the military campaigns mounted by its monarchs, their exploits preserved for posterity in the *Georgian Chronicles*.

Starting from the ninth century AD, nomadic Turkic tribes, ancestors of some of today's Turkic peoples in the North Caucasus, began to make their presence felt in the pre-Caucasian steppes. First came the Pechenegs, who would later control the steppes north of the Black Sea, and later, in the eleventh century, the Kipchaks, including the Polovtsians. The Alans engaged in drawn-out conflicts with these encroachers. According to *The Tale of Igor's Campaign* (also immortalized in Borodin's opera *Prince Igor*), the Vainakh took part in Prince Igor's expedition of 1185 AD against the Polovtsians, where the captured prince was offered refuge in the mountains amongst Ovlur's people, i.e. the Chechens.

Simsim

The Simsim (Simsir) feudal principality, a strictly Chechen affair, was founded around the settlement of Simsir in southeast Chechnya. It flourished from the twelfth to fourteenth centuries AD roughly in the present-day districts of Gudermes and Nozhai-Yurt. The principality attracted highland Chechens to build villages on its outskirts. Simsim came under the direct influence of the Golden Horde in the fourteenth century, and consequently adopted Islam as a state religion. One of its most important potentates was Gayur Khan. The Simsim principality was undone by the marauding Tatars at the end of the fourteenth century.

Mongol invasion

In the 1230s, the Mongols invaded the North Caucasus via Derbent and swept across the plains of Chechnya. The Alans, temporarily in league with the Polovtsians, tried to resist Genghis Khan's hordes, but to no avail, as the Alan kingdom in western Chechnya was

annihilated. Vainakh settlements were torched, and most of the populace either massacred or reduced to slavery. All aspects of Vainakh life were adversely affected by the onslaught, and progress in all spheres was arrested for a very long time after. Some Chechens of the plains escaped to the mountains, where, together with their highland kin, they put up fierce resistance in defence of their land and way of life. It was during this time that the Chechens brought to perfection their system of co-ordinated defence, with strategically located massive towers and formidable fortifications. Thus was the rump of the nation able to evade annihilation and preserve language, customs and culture.

The Vainakh still retain some legends on their unequal battles with the ferocious Mongols, coincident with historical accounts by Western travellers. During his papal mission to the Mongol khan in 1245–1247 AD, John of Plano Carpini asserted that the Khan's warriors failed to take a mountainous part of the land of the Alans, to which they had been laying siege for 12 years, because of the valiant fight put up by the defenders. In Carpini's words, 'Many Tatars, noblemen to boot, had been killed.' It was most probably the Chechens who mounted that adamant resistance, since they lived in the highlands at the time.¹² Guillaume Rubruquis (Rubrukvis), who journeyed in the Caucasus in 1253 as an emissary of the King of France to Khan Sartak, son of Batu and heir to the throne, wrote that the Circassians never bowed to Mongol rule, despite the Khan's commitment of a fifth of his troops to conquer their country (G.Rubruquis 1735).

Tamerlane

In 1390 AD, an even more fearsome invader, Tamerlane, followed on the Mongols' heels. Having defeated the Golden Horde, he embarked on a devastating incursion into Chechnya, undoing the Simsim principedom, whose ruler, Gayur Khan, had been an ally of the Golden Horde, and then attacking mountainous Chechnya. His massive force of hundreds of thousands of fearsome Tatars met with stubborn resistance, but in the end sheer numbers overcame heroism, and part of the region succumbed to the Tatars, who wreaked vengeance on the populace. The Chechens took refuge in mountain nooks and crannies, and bided their time.

The physical, material and cultural losses of the Vainakh people were so great that the historical link of times and cultures was once again broken. Overcrowding and lack of arable land caused the Chechens to devise methods to adapt to their new situation, including terracing plots of land and covering them with soil.

Emergence of the modern Vainakh

By the fifteenth century AD, the Nakh nations had been reduced to the (North Caucasian) Vainakh and the Tushians in the Trans-Caucasus, the others having been destroyed, expelled, or assimilated by the Kartlians. After the demise of the Tatars, some Vainakh descended from the mountains and reclaimed the plains. Good economic relations were set up with the neighbouring Daghestanis and Georgians.

The onset of a minor global cooling period in the sixteenth century AD caused glaciers to dominate in the high mountains and shortened crop cycles, forcing many Vainakh to seek the relative warmth of the foothills and plains. This brought them into direct contact with the Kumyks, Nogai and Kabardians, which resulted in protracted struggles against

these peoples for control over pastureland.¹³ Some epic legends (*illesh*) of the Vainakh date back to this period, which also saw the intensification of confrontation between the remnants of the Golden Horde and the North Caucasians, prompting the latter to seek help from their co-religionists, the Russians.

Nevertheless, these were halcyon years that witnessed progress on all sides. Farming and livestock breeding reached relatively high levels of development. Tower architecture reached its peak in this era. Specialized artisans took their crafts to ever-loftier aesthetic standards, making jewellery, domestic utensils and weapons of iron, copper, zinc and silver, items which were discovered in abundance in Vainakh territories. A standard of literacy of sorts was achieved in this propitious era, which lasted through the sixteenth century. Burial and religious sites confirm that in the latter Middle Ages there existed a unique blend of pagan, Christian and Islamic traditions.

Major societal transformations were afoot as the ordinary people started to question the legitimacy and efficacy of the feudal system, and there began a drive to abolish serfdom and the hereditary rule of the Vainakh aristocracy. The traditional *tukhuntaip* social structure was crystallizing, as was the national ethos. Besides the feudal principalities, like Bragun, Gernenchuk and Aldi, free communities sprang up based on the trinity of democracy, personal freedom and equality, and guided by the common law of *adat*. The ancient pagan *lamkerst* customs persisted in the highlands.

However, before the institution of meritocracy, Vainakh society had to go through the intermediary stage of importing foreign potentates to rule over them. After internecine tribal conflicts over supremacy, a compromise was reached whereby Kabardian and Kumyk princes and khans were brought over as chieftains, for it was easier to banish an imported detached ruler than a native dynast. Although the practice was largely discontinued soon after, with leaders chosen from the local communities on merit, there were some instances of foreign princes invited to rule Chechen localities right up to the middle of the eighteenth century.

According to some authorities, the mantra of 'democracy, liberty and equality' turned against the invokers, as these principles were taken to extremes and tenaciously adhered to, handicapping further societal development.

Ottomans and Persians

After conquering Constantinople in 1453 AD, the Ottomans embarked on a project to spread their hegemony over the Western Caucasus. In 1475, they took Kaffa in the Crimea, ending Genoese mercantile and maritime domination in the eastern Black Sea, and reduced the Crimean Khanate to vassalage. By the middle of the sixteenth century, the Ottoman Porte had extended its control over Georgian ports.

Persia, on the other hand, held sway in the eastern regions of the Caucasus, including Kartli and Kakhetia in eastern Georgia. The Iranians tried to impose their Shi'i brand of Islam upon the peoples of the Caucasus, but were met with fierce resistance from the Christian Georgians and Armenians, and the North Caucasians, with only the Turkic Azeris converting to Shi'ism *en masse*. The interplay of the ambitions of Sunni Turkey and Shi'ite Persia (and later that of the still detached Russia) in the Caucasus would to a large extent determine events in the area in the next few centuries.

Cossacks

The Cossacks had played a significant role in the history of the North Caucasus from the time they made their first appearance in the area in the early years of the sixteenth century AD until the establishment of the Soviet Union in the early twentieth century, when they were essentially marginalized. The Cossacks initially colonized the steppes north of the Sunzha River and along the lower reaches of the Terek, Tarki and Andreyevo being among their earliest settlements. The arrival of the Cossacks roughly coincided with the mass descent of the Vainakh from the mountains to the plains to escape adverse conditions engendered by climatic cooling.

At first, relations between the Cossacks and the Northern Caucasians were cordial, no real menace being perceived by the local population. The newcomers, later dubbed 'Greiben' and 'Terek' Cossacks, mixed with the Kabardians and Chechens and acquired many of their customs and methods of agriculture, and, in general, they emulated the Caucasian way of life. According to J.Baddeley, the Cossacks of that day were at the very most equal in civilization to the Chechens.

Russian ambitions in the Caucasus

The Caucasus had been an arena of incessant conflicts stemming from the vying of the Ottomans, Persians and the Khanates of the Golden Horde for control of the strategic area. In the middle years of the sixteenth century AD, a new player made a fateful debut on the Caucasian stage. After throwing off the Tatar yoke in 1480, the Principality of Muscovy (later Russia) set out on an expansionist course that lasted for centuries. The Russian occupation of Astrakhan and the destruction of the Tatar Khanate in 1556 marked the beginning of Russia's interest in the Caucasus. At first Russia was not conceived of as a threat by the North Caucasians, but as an ally against the Khanates, with whom they were in constant conflict.

Russia pushed south into the northern steppes of the Caucasus in a process of gradual encroachments, pushing Caucasian principalities ever southwards, and setting up fortresses for consolidation of gains and as bases for further expansion. In 1559, a fortress was built at Tarki on the mouth of the Sunzha, and in 1567 another was built on the confluence of the Terek and Sunzha. This set off Russia on a collision course with Persia and the Ottoman Porte. However, Russia was compelled to abandon its forts as a result of attacks by local and Ottoman forces in the late 1570s.

In 1561, Tsar Ivan IV (nicknamed 'the Terrible': reigned 1533–1584) married Princess Maria, daughter of the powerful Kabardian Prince Temriuk, inaugurating Russia's policy of co-opting the North Caucasian elites as a means of extending its influence in the area. Driven by their animosity towards the Persians and Turks, a number of Chechen princes sided with Russia, allowing the building of fort Terek Gordok in 1587. These same princes were also on good terms with Temriuk. The first Chechen 'ambassador' to the tsarist court, Shikh-Murza Okotsky, later entitled 'Duke', presented his credentials in 1588, at the same time as the influential Kabardian Prince Alkhas.

In the late 1580s, a union was established between Russia and the (Christian) Kakhétians and Tushians, who had invoked the tsar for help to fend off Persian and Daghestani incursions into their lands. In 1593–1594, a combined Daghestani, Chechen and Kabardian force routed a Russian army sent to aid Alexander II of Kakhétia in a

battle fought on the Sulak in Daghestan. Okotsky was slain and other ‘collaborators’ were forced to flee and join tsarist service. Thus, the first Russian attempt at co-optation of the local North Caucasian elites proved fruitless. The Russians abandoned their strongholds in Chechnya and their expansive plans were put on hold for a while.

In 1604, Tsar Boris Godunov (reigned 1598–1605) attempted to establish a foothold in the North Caucasus as a springboard for his ambitions in Persia. He sent out troops from Kazan and Astrakhan, but despite heavy involvement of the Terek Cossacks, the Russians were roundly defeated by the combined forces of the NE Caucasians and Ottomans in 1605. Tsarist aspirations in the Caucasus were checked for more than a century thereafter.

Separation of the Ingush

It is thought that sometime in the late seventeenth or the first half of the eighteenth century AD, the Angusht nation-tribe broke off from the Vainakh in the west to form the nucleus of the Ingush nation. The rest of the Vainakh society was based on ten tribal conglomerations, which gave rise to more complex social units, better described as princedoms, such as Okotsky (centre at Aukh), Gekhinsky and Chechensky. The economy was based on agriculture, cattle breeding, crafts and trade with other North Caucasians, Georgia, Russia and eastern countries.

Peter the Great’s Caucasian forays

Tsar Peter I (‘the Great’) of Russia (reigned 1682–1725) adopted a two-pronged expansion strategy in the Caucasus. On the western flank, he managed to take Azov from the Ottomans and their allies the Crimean Tatars in 1696. The fortress had been blocking Russian access to the Black Sea. However, the Russians were forced to cede it in 1711 after their defeat at the hands of their perennial enemies the Ottomans at Stanilasti in Eastern Europe.

With the conclusion of the Russian—Ottoman Treaty of Peace of 1700, the two powers vied to rally support from the North Caucasians, resulting in the polarization of Chechen warlords into pro-Russian and pro-Ottoman camps, the Bragun Beks being the most prominent among the former.

In 1706, Peter I revived Russian plans to conquer the Eastern Caucasus. The NE Caucasians responded by defeating invading Russian forces and razing Tarki in 1707. However, the set-back did not deter the tsar from implementing his scheme, as he determined to take Persian-controlled Eastern Caucasian provinces as a prelude to conquering Persia itself, and then onwards to British-dominated India. In 1708, the Russians forged an alliance with the Kalmyks, who pledged on their part to wage war on the Nokhchii.

By the turn of the eighteenth century, relations between the North Caucasians and Cossacks had soured as a result of the latter’s push into North Caucasian territories, and raids and counter-raids became the order of the day. The Cossacks submitted to Peter I in 1712 (the same year in which the seat of Russian government was moved to St Petersburg) and were incorporated into the tsarist war machine, becoming a potent force

in the relentless Russian drive to warm waters, and playing a major part in the unfolding Russian—Caucasian War.

In 1718, a large Cossack force attacked Chechen villages. The Chechens, pro-Russian and all, responded by allying themselves with the Daghestanis and Crimean khans and attacking the Russian Terek fortifications. In 1722, a large Russian army landed on the Daghestani coast, taking swathes of land as far south as Baku. However, the inland campaign into mountainous Chechnya in 1722 was checked by a combined Vainakh and Kumyk force near Enderi on the Aktash.

In 1729/30, Russia was compelled to abandon the Eastern Caucasian provinces, keeping only a few fortifications on the left bank of the Terek. Although their ambitions were thwarted, the Russians gained familiarity with the terrain, and, more importantly, they forged a more coherent Caucasian policy. In the meantime, the Cossacks kept the pressure on the North Caucasians, maintaining as usual a warm cauldron for more ‘auspicious’ times.

In the early 1730s, the Crimean Tatars routed a Russian force that was sent to attack them, and then proceeded to Chechnya, where they were soundly defeated by the Nokhchii. That was to be the last foray into that country by the Crimean khans. In 1735, the Russians built a fort on the Terek at Kizliar in Daghestan. In 1747, Dawlat-Girey Cherkassky, a Kabardian officer in the Russian Army, was invited by the inhabitants of the former principality of Germenchuk to rule over them in the hope of obtaining preferential trade terms with the Russians.

Catherine II's Caucasian policy: prelude to war

In the middle of the eighteenth century, Russia was preoccupied in Europe, where most of her forces were concentrated, whilst the Cossacks defended Russian territorial gains in the North Caucasus. In 1757, Empress Elizabeth I of Russia (reigned 1741–1761) ordered a campaign to be mounted to pacify Chechnya and ‘restore’ tsarist authority. Daghestani warriors joined the Chechens against the Russian forces, and the conflict was only resolved in 1760 through negotiations.

Following the Treaty of Versailles of 1763 and relaxation of tension on the European front, Empress Catherine II (reigned 1762–1796) embarked on an ambitious plan to sever the Caucasus from Turkish influence and annex it to her ever-expanding empire. The Russian scheme involved hemming the northern frontier of Caucasia with fortresses to be used as springboards for further expansion. In 1762/63, the Russians established Fort Mozdok in Lesser Kabarda (now part of North Ossetia). This was a significant development because it brought the Russians closer to the strategically located Darial Pass in the Central Caucasus. The Kabardians, who felt betrayed by Russia, mounted a series of attacks in the period 1765–1779 against Russian forces, with the assistance of their Chechen allies. In the 1760s and 1770s, a new line of Don Cossacks was established between Mozdok and Chervlyonnaya, this time to clamorous protests from the Chechens. By 1769, the line had been extended eastwards to Kizliar.

The Ottomans, sensing the menace posed by the fortifications, attacked the Military Line in 1768 during the Second Russian-Ottoman War. The Kabardians and Chechens joined the fray on the Ottoman side, attacking and sacking Kizliar, the main base of Russian expansion in the Caucasus at the time. In the early 1770s, the Chechens engaged

in frequent clashes with Russian forces under General Medem on their forays in their country. The Chechen chieftain Ali-Sultan Kazbulatov attacked Russian fortifications on the Terek several times, but was compelled to swear fealty to the Russian court upon defeat in February 1770. Other warlords, such as the Bragun princes Kudenet Bammat and Raslanbek Aidemir, were co-opted in turn.

Upon defeat, the Ottoman Porte was forced to cede Kabarda, Ossetia and the Crimea in 1774—lands it never had legitimate claims on—to Russia in the Treaty of Kuchuk Kaynarji. Significantly, Russia gained control of the Darial Pass, the gateway to the Trans-Caucasus. This victory emboldened the tsarina to promulgate in 1777 ‘the Greek Project’, whereby the Northern Caucasus was to be annexed gradually as Russia pushed the Military Line further south by erecting fortresses and dislodging the local peoples and replacing them with the loyal Cossacks.

In summer 1779, General Jacoby conducted an offensive deep into Kabarda, and in September, making effective use of his artillery, he routed a combined Kabardian and Chechen force near the Malka River in a decisive battle dubbed ‘Kabardian Nightmare’ by the Kabardians. The North Caucasians were totally demoralized, losing the cream of their military, and Kabardian might was irrevocably broken. In 1783, Russia subdued and annexed the Crimean Khanate, thus removing a major hurdle on its determined path to conquer the Caucasus. In response to constant Persian harassment, King Irakli II of Kartli-Kakhetia signed the Treaty of Georgievsk with the Russians in 1783, effectively placing eastern Georgia under Russian protection. The Georgian Military Highway and the town of Vladikavkaz were constructed. The noose was slowly but surely tightening around the lofty Caucasus.

3

History from the Russian-Caucasian War to the Second World War

With the removal of the Crimean Khanate from the scene and Russia's alliance with the Georgians, the occupation of the North Caucasus became the focus of Russian policy in the Caucasus. The economy of the mountaineers was based on trade with the plains communities, and with Russian disruption of free access between mountain and plain, the peoples of the North Caucasus began to feel the pinch. Surrounded in their redoubts, they began to view the Russians as a collective enemy, and the built-up pressure found release in the launching of an implacable struggle against Russian expansionist ambitions.

Sheikh Mansur Usharma

Mansur was born in 1732 in the village of Aldi near the Sunzha.¹ He was a follower of the Naqshabandi brand of Sufism, and some sources credit him with founding the Naqshabandi Sufi fraternity in Chechnya.² Having been trained in Daghestan under strict Islamic law, Mansur returned to Chechnya, where he advocated the cessation of pagan practices and the replacement of *adat* with *shariat*. He banned the cult of the dead and smoking, among other things. This was not particularly easy in a land where people held tenaciously to their ancient customs and beliefs, and where Islamic traditions, especially in the mountainous regions, were not as deep-rooted as they were in Daghestan.

In 1784, Mansur was proclaimed 'Sheikh' and then 'Imam'. According to tradition, he was the first leader to consider a united North Caucasian front as the antidote to Russian encroachment. He declared 'Holy War' and launched concerted attacks against the Russians. His first mark on the history of the North Caucasus was made in 1785. A Russian force that had been sent to Aldi to capture him managed to destroy the village, but on its way back, Mansur and his fighters ambushed it and killed more than 600 Russian soldiers and captured 200 more in what became known as 'the Battle of the Sunzha'.

Mansur's early brilliant feats attracted large numbers of warriors from Daghestan in the east and Kabarda in the west to serve under his banner. However, he failed to take Kizliar in August 1785, and he was defeated at Tatartup in Kabarda in November by General Pavel Potemkin. These set-backs marked a reverse of fortune in Mansur's military career, as his fickle allies, the Kabardians and Daghestanis, and even his own people, abandoned him. He took refuge in Western Circassia, where he reassembled his forces and co-ordinated his actions with the Ottomans. In the meantime, the Russians fortified their settlements and withdrew forces from Georgia to the Terek Line. In 1786, the Russians abandoned Vladikavkaz, which was not built again until 1803.

The Ottomans kept a presence on the northeast coast of the Black Sea in the fortresses of Anapa, Sukhumi, Poti, Anaklia and others. Anapa, which was constructed in 1784, served as the base from which the Ottomans maintained their political and mercantile contacts with the Northwest Caucasians. It was the central stage on which the power struggle between Russia and the Ottoman Empire was played at the time. The Russians considered coastal towns under Ottoman control as compromising to their strategy to strangle the Circassians, as they acted as breathing ports.

In 1787, fighting resumed between the Russians and Ottomans, and in September, the former destroyed a joint Circassian-Nogai force under Mansur, who subsequently took refuge in Anapa, which was attacked in 1788 and 1789, but was only taken by the Russians in 1791. Mansur fell into Russian hands, and, according to one account, he was imprisoned for life in Schlüsselburg Fortress, where he died in April 1794.

Mansur was the precursor of the imams who were to take up the struggle in the NE Caucasus some 40 years later. His early exploits later became the stuff of legend and were cloaked in a romantic shroud. He was accorded official recognition as a national hero as soon as the Chechens reclaimed their independence two centuries later.

Annexation of Georgia and Ingushetia

Russia annexed the kingdom of Kartli-Kakhetia in 1801, and Imeretia in western Georgia in 1804, thus securing a permanent presence in the south of the Caucasus. One of the main Russian aims of the time was to secure the road from Vladikavkaz to Tbilisi, which passed through the Darial Pass. This necessitated the pacification of tribes residing along the way. The Ingush submitted to Russian suzerainty in 1810.

A war broke out between Russia and Persia in 1804, which ended in the latter's defeat and the signing in 1813 of the Treaty of Gulistan in which Persia ceded Daghestan, among other provinces, to Russia. It should be noted that Persia had no claim whatsoever on the NE Caucasus, and as such it had no business giving away lands that it did not rightfully possess. Yet another war broke out between the two empires in 1826, which ended in the 1828 Treaty of Turkmanchay, which essentially emphasized the secession of Daghestan to Russia. With Russian influence in the Trans-Caucasus increasing, the incorporation of Chechnya, an independent enclave in an ever-expanding empire, became of paramount importance.

Yarmolov: the terror of the Caucasus

In 1816, General Aleksei Yarmolov was appointed governor and chief administrator of the Caucasus, and was given a free hand in the Caucasus, with full support from Tsar Alexander I (reigned 1801–1825). Yarmolov never bothered to hide his contempt for the mountaineers, indeed for all non-Russian peoples, but the Chechens were ranked right at the top of his racial scale of loathing.

Yarmolov divided the North Caucasian front into three sections: western, middle and eastern, with the latter comprising Chechnya and Daghestan. His method of control was to link forts and to shut off conquered areas. He built a series of fortifications, with

intentionally awe-inspiring names, as springboards for his campaign of terrorizing the mountaineers into submission. Groznaya (Terrifying) was erected in 1819 on the Sunzha, Vnezapnaya (Surprise) opposite Enderi in 1820 in eastern Chechnya, and Burnaya (Stormy) near Tarki in 1821 in Daghestan, completing the line. The Chechens, for their part, kept harrying the Russians and hampering the construction process.

Yarmolov despicably enslaved Chechen women as concubines for his officers, and as a gesture of humiliation. Rape of native women was in the usual run of affairs. In one episode he mercilessly massacred all the inhabitants of Dadi-Yurt on the Terek in September 1819 to compel the Chechens to flee south of the Sunzha. The heroic defence of their village has ensured the martyrs an eternal niche in Chechen national memory. After crushing Kabardian resistance for good in 1822, Yarmolov turned his complete attention to the Chechens in 1824. His atrocious policy had aroused a unified sense of purpose among the NE Caucasians, who had resolved to bury internal feuds and jealousies to present a consolidated front against the marauders.

Sufism: a rallying cry

A new ideological force appeared in the NE Caucasus in the early 1820s. Chechen national leaders, who were seeking a means to pool the efforts of the disparate tribes, found their quest in the unifying teachings of Sufism. However, Sufism was only organized and consolidated into a cogent force with the appearance of the first imam a few years later. It should be noted that it required extraordinary circumstances, a particularly nasty foe in this case, for an innately pacifist movement such as Sufism to adopt militaristic ideology.

The Chechens joined forces with the Daghestanis, especially the Avars, to resist the Russian Army in the NE Caucasus, which numbered more than 40,000 men. In 1824, the Chechens were led by the new Sufi converts Avko from Germenchuk and Beibulat Taimiev, a brilliant military commander and an accomplished diplomat from Greater Chechnya. The NE Caucasians, who made formidable warriors indeed, had the upper hand in the first few encounters, the Russians being fully familiar neither with the ways of the land nor with the war tactics of their foes.

In July 1825, a Chechen contingent seized and destroyed a Russian fortress at Amir-Haji-Yurt. A few days later, General Grekov, commander of the Sunzha Line, was mortally wounded by Uchar Haji. According to M.Gammer (1994a:35–6), Grekov was even crueller than his superior and carried out his instructions to the letter, destroying villages and massacring innocent civilians. The uprising kept going strong, despite Yarmolov's ruthless reprisals, until the middle of 1826, when it petered out, mainly due to internal wrangling. Nevertheless, the Russian military did not hesitate to claim full credit for this 'victory'.

Chechnya was covered with thick forests, and its southern parts were mountainous—perfect terrain for the Chechens to defend their land and mount counter-attacks on the invaders. This made Russian progress painfully cumbersome. Frustrated by the heroic feats of the Chechens, Yarmolov ordered that tracts of forest be cleared to allow his armies unharried movement. In the meantime, the policy of terrorizing the plain and foothill communities into abandoning their villages for the mountains was continued. The

Russians burnt villages, slaughtered civilians, including women and children, and destroyed livestock and crops. This caused untold hardships on the peaceful and long-suffering population. Yarmolov also initiated a policy of deporting captured Chechens to Siberia—a forerunner of the mass exile of the next century.

Yarmolov's brutal war tactics eventually led to his dismissal from his post in 1827, despite his protestations that the Chechens were evil savages that had to be extirpated, and his replacement by Count I.F.Paskevich. For the next three years or so, the Russians were kept busy warring with the Persians and Ottomans, and the Chechens were essentially left in peace. In June 1828, the Russians defeated the Turks and captured Anapa. Nearly all the Trans-Caucasus had come under Russian control by that time. The left and right flanks of the North Caucasus, on the other hand, had remained largely independent. This included mountainous Chechnya, Ingushetia and Daghestan in the east, and the Kiakh (Western) Circassians and Abkhazians in the west. The Kabardians and Ossetians had been essentially subjugated by that time. Turkey gave Russia a free hand in the Caucasus in the Treaty of Adrianople in 1829. With the Turks removed from the scene, Paskevich was given his marching orders: suppression or extermination of the mountaineers. In 1830, the Russians resumed their campaigns against the NE Caucasians. In July 1831, Taimiev ('the Terror of the Caucasus', according to Pushkin) was treacherously shot dead near Tangi-Chu. Many of his followers were exiled to Siberia.

Ghazi Mohamed

The struggle of the Sufi imams against Russian encroachment in the NE Caucasus can be divided into three phases. The first included the campaigns of the first and second imams, Ghazi Mohamed (1825–1832) and Hamza Bek (1832–1834), the coming to power of Shamil, the third imam, and the fall of his stronghold at Akhulgo. The second phase, during which Shamil reached the acme of his power, extended from 1840 to 1849. The last phase, from 1850 to 1859, saw the gradual erosion of Shamil's might and the brutal subjugation of the NE Caucasians.

Ghazi Mohamed ibn Ismail of Daghestan was born in Ghimri, Daghestan, in the early 1790s. He was initiated into the Naqshabandi Sufi order by Sheikh Mohammed Yaragsky. Following on the traditions of Sheikh Mansur, Ghazi called for the unification of the Chechens and Daghestanis in 1828 and called on the mountaineers to jettison *adat* and make *shariat* their sole law. He declared war on Russia soon after he was proclaimed imam in 1829. His overtures to win over Pakhu Bike, regent of Avaria, who had ceded the country to Russia following her husband's death, proved unsuccessful.

In 1830, Hamza (Gamzat Bek), a disciple of Ghazi Mohamed, conducted several raids against the Russians along the Caucasian Line. Early successes brought Ghazi many followers, swelling the ranks of his *murids*. In May 1830, he sent one of his deputies, Sheikh Abdallah of Ashilti, to Chechnya to co-ordinate concerted action with the Chechens, who were driven by Russian cruelty to ally themselves with the imam. In October and November 1830, Ghazi attacked several forts, including Kizliar, Tarki and Nazran. The Russian commander Velyaminov conducted a campaign of terror in early 1831 in which some 35 Chechen villages were destroyed. In June 1831, Abdallah laid siege to Vnezapnaya. A Russian force under Emmanuel, commander of the Caucasian

Line, relieved the besieged fortress on 10 July, and then went on to pursue Ghazi's fighters, only to be ambushed in a thick forest near Aktash Aukh, where he lost hundreds of his men. This victory boosted the reputation of the imam and increased the number of his followers, even mobilizing a section of the mainly pacifist Ingush. In September 1831, Emmanuel was replaced by Velyaminov, who razed more than a dozen Chechen villages towards the end of the year.³

In October 1831, Tsar Nicholas I (reigned 1825–1855) appointed Baron Grigory Rosen as commander-in-chief of the Caucasian Corps. The following year, Ghazi threatened Groznaya, Vladikavkaz, Vnezapnaya, Derbent and some Georgian regions. In late July to early August 1832, Rosen and Velyaminov conducted separate campaigns against the Ingush and Karabulak, respectively, destroying some 25 villages. In mid-August, the two forces, with a combined strength of some 20,000 men, united to wreak wanton destruction upon Lesser Chechnya. The imam moved to relieve the beleaguered Chechens, and on 31 August his army ambushed a Cossack unit of 500 men, killing and wounding nearly a third and capturing two cannons. On 10 September, Ghazi pulled back to Ghimri, unable to withstand the onslaught. His peace overtures were curtly dismissed by Klugenau, a local Russian commander, which rebuff caused the imam to hasten the fortification of his position at Ghimri.

On 29 October 1832, Rosen attacked Ghimri, killing the imam and almost wiping out his forces. Only Shamil and another defender miraculously survived the carnage, albeit with grave injuries. The death of Ghazi did not bring the devastating war to an end, as the Russians had hoped. Soon after, Hamza, another Avar from Daghestan, was proclaimed as the new imam and he took up the banner of struggle against the invaders.

Hamza Bek

Hamza Bek ibn Ali Iskandar Bek al-Hutsali (Gamzat Bek), who was born in 1789 in Avaria, was made *naib* (*naaib*=deputy: of Arabic origin) of Ghazi Mohamed in 1830. However, at the death of the imam, not all communities acknowledged Hamza's right to succession, and he had to resort to force to establish his authority. In 1833, Hamza offered to make peace with the Russians in return for allowing *shariat* to become the law of the land, but Rosen not only dismissed the overture, he also called upon the Avar leaders to deliver Hamza to the Russian authorities. The imam responded by seizing Khunzakh, the capital of Avaria, and executing most members of the Avar ruling house in August 1834, thus spreading his authority all over Daghestan. In September 1834, Hamza was assassinated in revenge, and a few days later Shamil was proclaimed as the new imam.

Shamil⁴

Shamil, who was born *c.* 1797, was the son of the Avar nobleman Dengau. Despite his weak constitution in early years, Shamil grew up into an adult of extraordinary strength and stature—head and shoulders above his contemporaries. Shamil was initiated into the Naqshabandi *tariqat* by Ghazi Mohamed. His proclamation as imam was at first opposed

by Haji Tasho (Vokkha Hazhoo=Great Haji), an influential Kumyk military commander based in Chechnya who had been instrumental in the introduction of Sufism in Chechnya. However, Shamil was able to co-opt Tasho, who had remained loyal until his fall in battle in the 1840s. After assuming the reins of the imamate, Shamil consolidated his power base, which spread over large parts of Daghestan and Chechnya, and organized the military. His 'reforms' included the introduction of a strict penal code to enforce discipline among his men and the populace at large. By mid-1836, Shamil had emerged as the most powerful potentate of the NE Caucasus.

The main success of Shamil consisted in stemming the tide of Russian encroachment for 25 years. His main aim was the unification of the Caucasus under his banner as a precursor to ridding the area of Russian presence. He also worked diligently to establish law and order, and he vehemently attacked the pagan aspects of the *adat*, especially in Chechnya, specifically targeting the deep-rooted custom of blood feud, which posed a serious challenge to his unific aims. He capitalized on the legends surrounding his daredevil escapes, and cultivated an image of a man on a holy mission. His forces never in a position to face the Russian military in open battle, Shamil adopted guerrilla warfare tactics, scoring spectacular victories at times.

Shamil was helped by the circumstance that the Russians were simultaneously engaged in active conflict in the Northwest Caucasus. The bloody campaign conducted by Velyaminov against the Circassians and Abkhazians in 1835 and the counsels of British 'envoys' in Circassia, especially that of Scotsman David Urquhart, convinced many Northwest Caucasians of the importance of tribal solidarity. Concerted campaigns were mounted resulting in the razing of many Russian fortresses. The Circassians declared their independence, and emissaries were sent to Turkey, Paris and London to solicit support.

In the meantime, resistance fighters under Haji Tasho in Chechnya harried Russian positions along the Caucasian Line, the Russians responding with counter-raids and punitive expeditions.⁵ The deteriorating situation in the eastern flank caused Rosen to redirect some of his resources from the western front in the summer of 1836. He ordered Pullo to attack Tasho's forces in Chechnya and Réoute to engage Shamil in Daghestan. In early September 1836, Pullo, after massacring the defenders, took Zandaq in Greater Chechnya (in present-day Nozhai-Yurt District). In 1836, Shamil offered the Russians peace in return for allowing the rule of *shariat*, but the only counter-offer he got was for his unconditional surrender.

Shamil refused to meet up with Tsar Nicholas I on his tour of the Caucasus in October 1837 to offer his submission, which slight led the tsar to determine to deal a final blow to the imam and pacify the NE Caucasus once and for all. For this purpose, a massive force of some 200,000 men was deployed to take on Shamil's mere 28,000 warriors. The Russians laid siege to Shamil's headquarters in Akhulgo towards the end of June 1839, and only managed to take the stronghold in early September, sustaining heavy losses in the process. Shamil succeeded in slipping away, just as the final battle was being fought, and he made his way to Ichkeria.

Although Providence once again smiled upon Shamil, his position was undermined in Daghestan. He went into a depressive state, not least for having to give his son as an *amanat* (hostage) to the Russians. It looked as if Russia was finally in a position to assume full control of the NE Caucasus. However, a harsh policy towards the Chechens

galvanized their resolve to resist Russian oppression, and when Shamil appeared in Ichkeria, they welcomed him as a rallying figurehead, marking the umpteenth rebirth of the Phoenix.

War in Chechnya

The Russians introduced direct rule into lowland Chechnya through a network of local inspectors who supervised the villages under their jurisdiction. While taxes were collected, belongings were confiscated, and many people were arrested. Furthermore, the Russian military were given a free hand to sequester livestock, food, arms and ammunition. Personal weapons, including swords used in battles for centuries, were part of a Chechen's heritage and objects of his pride, and he took great exception to being deprived of them. The Russians also forbade the people of the plains to have any contact with their mountain kin, to further isolate the highlanders and precipitate their submission.

When Shamil arrived in Ichkeria in September 1839, he was immediately installed as leader and imam. Russian strong-arm tactics and corrupt ways had pushed most Chechens to the point of despair, and they saw in Shamil an emancipator. The imam sought to convert the still semi-pagan mountain Chechens to Islam, and to institute the strict laws of the *shariat*, including the banning of alcohol and tobacco, as well as to abolish *adat*. He set up *madrasahs*, or religious schools, in the mosques. He steadily rebuilt his power base in eastern Chechnya. His path back to dominance was not without obstacles, as pretenders to his title began to surface after his defeat at Akhulgo. However, by the end of 1840 Shamil had re-emerged in full strength, having absorbed the lessons of the past.

Chechnya sundered

The differentiation into plains and mountain Chechens took place during the Russian-Caucasian War. The savagery of the Russian tactics and the counter-measures adopted by Shamil combined to create a schism in Chechen society that has survived to this day. The cleavage was geographic and it ran across the line separating the northern plains and the mountainous south. The Sunzha Line had the function not only of blocking the Southern Chechens in their mountains but also of separating them from their northern kin, called 'Chechens of the Plains', 'Peaceful Chechens' or 'Nadtirechny Chechens' by the Russians. The latter were more exposed to the Russians, both militarily and culturally, and after a number of harrowing punitive campaigns and massacres perpetrated by the Russian Army, had little choice but to submit to Russia and assume neutrality.⁶ The mountain Chechen communities, on the other hand, remained fervently anti-Russian on the whole, except for a few clans that were forced by Shamil's harsh laws and anti-*adat* position to leave the mountains and place themselves under Russian 'protection'. Chief among the pro-Russian clans was the Tyerekhsloi, a formation of various fugitive mountain *taips* that found a new home in the Terek region.⁷

The North Caucasus rises

The year 1840 saw simultaneous, though hardly co-ordinated, action in the Northeast and Northwest Caucasus. Having been struck by famine resulting from an unusually harsh winter, and isolated from the outside world by the Russian cordon, the Northwest Caucasians attacked Russian forts to break out of the stranglehold. In addition, a new force had emerged in the Middle East, namely Muhammad Ali of Egypt, who sent envoys to the North Caucasians informing them of his intention to intervene on their behalf. In the first few months of 1840, the Circassians captured and razed four forts, and effectively isolated the southern section of the Caucasian Black Sea Line. However, the euphoria soon turned to apathy, and the Circassian forces dispersed before consolidating their gains. The Russians capitalized on this short sight and launched a counter-offensive that undid Circassian successes.

Animated by the feats of the Circassians, the Chechens rose against the Russians in 1840, forcing Golovin, who had taken over from Rosen in December 1837, to seek negotiations with Shamil in October—a remarkable reversal of his earlier snub of the imam. In 1841, Pullo led brutal campaigns against Chechen villages along the Terek, causing the people of the area to flee to the mountains, where many of them joined the ranks of the *murids*, or devotee warriors. In June and July 1842, the imam inflicted two heavy defeats upon the Russians under General Grabbé, who was relieved of his post on account of mounting losses and his harsh and alienating measures against the Chechens. Aleksandr Neidhardt took over military command and endeavoured to pursue political means to further Russian aims, which allowed a spell of relative peace and quiet in both Chechnya and Daghestan that lasted for a year starting in August 1842. By the end 1843, Shamil had managed to liberate almost all the NE Caucasus. In 1845, he defeated a Russian force of 30,000 troops under Vorontsov, Viceroy of the Caucasus, at Dargo. Shamil was at the height of his might.

A second deportation of Chechens began in 1844. The Russians constructed Fort Vozdvizhenskoe (Exaltation of the Cross) on the Argun as the starting point of the so-called ‘Great Russian Highway’, which extended to the village of Achkhoi in Chechnya. It was also the first of a string of forts of the ‘Advanced Chechen Line’. Chechens living north of the line were expelled by force to the south.

Uniting the North Caucasian fronts

In 1840, Shamil began to entertain the idea of pooling the military efforts of the Northeast and Northwest Caucasians. He sent Hajj Muhammad in 1843 as his envoy to the Western Circassians to urge them to join forces with him. However, Muhammad was killed in battle in 1844, and the Circassians demanded of Shamil another to take his place. The following year, the imam appointed Suleiman Effendi as a replacement. However, Suleiman’s attempt to cross Kabarda from the west and join forces with Shamil in the east was foiled by the Russians.

In April 1846, the imam took matters into his own hands and led a foray into Kabarda in the hope of stirring the Kabardians to revolt. However, nothing came out of this effort, as General Freytag managed to outsmart the imam and eventually chased his forces out of

Kabarda. The Kabardians, weary of a long war and subject to cruel punitive campaigns, were apathetic towards this campaign.⁸ The Russians, who were aware of the indifference of the Circassians to Sufism and the disinclination of many of them to join forces with Shamil, and who also had in place a tight network of spies that forewarned them of any threatening moves, were not unduly worried by lack of progress in the Northwest Caucasus. They lived in the luxury of being able to concentrate their efforts in one area without compromising their position in the other. After his return from Circassia in October 1846, Suleiman fell out with Shamil and defected to the Russian side. In 1848, Shamil sent another envoy, Muhammad Amin, to the Abzakh in Western Circassia. This deputy proved to be a competent organizer and he co-ordinated Circassian resistance for some ten years. However, Shamil's long-cherished dream was fated not to turn into reality.

Subduing Lesser Chechnya

In 1845, Vorontsov adopted a systematic siege strategy to reduce the resistance of the mountaineers. Chechnya was to be aggressively targeted to dislodge it from Shamil's sphere of influence, and thence the noose was to be tightened around him. Construction of forts was resumed, and forests were felled to cut down Chechen resistance. The Russians pursued the carrot and stick policy, co-opting some Chechens and not neglecting the time-honoured practice of torching villages and depriving their inhabitants of their livelihoods. Vorontsov's campaign in Lesser Chechnya in the west culminated in October 1850 with resettling the population beyond the Terek. It is noteworthy that Shamil was later to acknowledge that the new strategy set the Russians on the right track in their drive to conquer the NE Caucasus.⁹

Greater Chechnya

In early 1850, Vorontsov concentrated his operations in Greater Chechnya, to the east of the Argun River, directing the war effort as much at thinning the forests as against Shamil's forces. Mountain villagers were transferred wholesale to the plains. After many years of attacks and counter-attacks, the Chechens were driven to exhaustion in this war of attrition, and they began to get weary of the imam's rule. The Russians were slowly but surely gaining the upper hand. One of Shamil's aides, Hadji Murad, hero of the famous novel by Leo Tolstoy, deserted his master in 1851, not wanting to be undone in one of his intrigues. This marked the beginning of the end for Shamil.

In 1853, fighting in Greater Chechnya came to a halt, with Russia having to turn its attention away from the Caucasus to a new international conflict that had been brewing for some time.

The Crimean War

Western Circassia, Greater Chechnya and Avaria had not yet fallen under Russian control when the Crimean War broke out in 1853. Having dealt the Russian naval fleet devastating blows, the British and French navies roamed the Black Sea unhindered. The imam tried to enlist the help of the Allies, but they had no plans to intervene in the Caucasus, and the best that the British could do was to bombard Cossack positions along the coast, affording temporary relief to the beleaguered Circassians.¹⁰

In the autumn of 1855, the Turks landed troops at Sukhumi in Abkhazia, and marched inland towards Kutaisi, in the hope of stirring the oppressed Caucasians to rise up against the Russians. Shamil, in his turn, raided Kakhetia and was poised to pour down the mountain passes to take Tbilisi. However, nothing came out of this expedition, as the link between the two forces never obtained, and the Ottoman forces evacuated Sukhumi at the end of the war. The only gain gleaned by the North Caucasians from this episode was that they were spared Russian aggression for three years.

In the Treaty of Paris, signed in March 1856, the Allies chose to ignore the Caucasian issue altogether, which fact engendered in the North Caucasians feelings of resentment and betrayal. This oversight was interpreted by Russia as a signal that the British and French were not fundamentally against its policy of annexing the North Caucasus. Istanbul also forsook the region for other gains. Thereafter, relieved of a costly war and a humiliating defeat, Russia wreaked her vengeance on the hapless mountaineers.

Downfall of Shamil

Prince Bariatinski, who was appointed as Viceroy of the Caucasus in mid-1856, had as his aim the subduing of the mountaineers once and for all. One of his devilish schemes envisioned the wholesale deportation of the Chechens to the Manych Basin to the east of Rostov-on-Don. However, the Chechens caught wind of Russian machinations and the plan was foiled. The vicious war against the North Caucasians was continued, with the Russians gaining control of the plains of Greater Chechnya by April 1857.

In 1858, a schism developed between the Chechen and Avar leaderships. The NE Caucasians had become utterly worn out by the protracted and merciless war, and their ammunition and food supplies were running dangerously low. In these circumstances, the Russians made good progress, tightening their vicious claws around the remaining 'trouble' spots.

Shamil's support among the mountaineers started to crumble in face of the relentless Russian push. In April 1859, his headquarters in Vedeno fell. On 6 September 1859, the imam surrendered following the capture of his stronghold at Gunib.¹¹

Annexation of Chechnya

The surrender of Shamil did not spell the end of Chechen resistance, even though Chechnya had been almost completely devastated. Sheikh Baisungur Beno, a deputy of Shamil's and a legendary warrior in his own right, refused to surrender with the imam, and kept fighting the Russians for a couple more years, until he was captured and hanged in 1861. In May 1860, an uprising flared in Argun and Ichkeria under the leadership of Atabay Ataev and Uma Duev. The Russians responded by burning villages, including 15 in Ichkeria, committing massacres against civilians, and deporting many Chechens to Siberia. The campaign of terror continued through the autumn of 1861, and by the end of the year the rebellion had been crushed and its leaders sent to exile. Russia deployed a large number of troops in fortified garrisons to firm its grip on Chechnya.

With the annexation of Chechnya to Russia in 1861, the war was formally concluded. Chechnya was incorporated in the Terek District, which was established in February 1860, and which also included Kabarda, Ingushetia and North Ossetia. The Chechen defeat allowed the Russians to turn more of their resources to subduing the Northwest Caucasians, who resisted for a couple more years before succumbing in their turn to the Russian juggernaut.

Chechen losses

The Chechens suffered horrific losses in human life during the long war. From an estimated population of over a million in the 1840s, there were only 140,000 Chechens left in the Caucasus in 1861—a literal decimation. By 1867, the number had gone even further down to a lowly 116,000 (N.G.Volkova 1973:121). According to M.Vachagaev (1995:35), the Chechens lost more than half a million people in the war.

As part of a master plan to empty the North Caucasus of its original inhabitants and replace them with Cossacks and Slavs, mass deportation of some 80,000 Chechens to Ottoman lands was inhumanely carried out in 1860. A central figure in this scheme was the conspiratorial Musa Kundukhov, a high-ranking officer in the Russian Army, of Ossetian origin.

The policy was continued despite a decree issued by no less than Tsar Alexander II (reigned 1855–1881) allowing the peoples of the North Caucasus to keep their lands and practise their religion and customs. In summer 1865, the Russians, in collusion with Kundukhov and the Ottoman government, coerced some 5,000 Chechen Qadiri families (23,000 people) to emigrate to Ottoman lands, in an effort to suppress the Qadiri movement.¹² In all, more than a hundred thousand Chechens were deported. In addition, the Russians continued their punitive raids on the already depleted Chechen populace and expropriated fertile lands. The local economy was left in shambles.

Despite their neutral stance during the war, many Ingush were also forced to leave their ancestral lands. Although some Circassians were deported during the early 1860s, the floodgates were lifted after their final defeat in 1864, when hundreds of thousands were expelled from the Caucasus.¹³

The emigrants encountered harsh conditions on their way to their new settlements in Ottoman lands, and a large number of them expired *en route*. Many regretted their decision to leave their homeland and pleaded with the Russian authorities to allow them to move back, even agreeing to convert to Orthodox Christianity. Despite Russian refusal, a few Chechens attempted to make the journey back, falling to Turkish and Russian hails of bullets in the process.

Rise of the Qadiri movement

The years following the defeat were very crucial in Chechen history, as fundamental societal transformations engendered inimical antagonism towards Russian hegemony, which led to periodic rebellions. The Chechens started to regroup in 1861 in secretive societies formed by the Qadiri followers of Sheikh Kunta Haji. In 1862–1864, waves of unrest swept over Chechnya. In early January 1864, the Russian authorities, alarmed by the fast-growing number of Qadiri *murids* and convinced that a new revolt was in the offing, arrested and deported Kunta Haji and several dozen of his followers to Novocherkassk. On 18 January, some 4,000 of Kunta's followers massed outside the Shali fortress and demanded the release of their spiritual leader. When their request was rudely denied, the *murids* entered into a frenetic *zikr* dance, the exotic scene causing the terrified Russian soldiers to fire at the crowd, slaying more than 200 people and wounding about a thousand. This incident, dubbed 'Sha'altan T'om' ('Shali Battle of Daggers'), has left a deep imprint on Chechen psyche ever since. As for Kunta, he was exiled to Ustyuzhko in the Novgorod District, where he died in May 1867, purportedly of exhaustion and famine. A number of other Qadiri leaders were either imprisoned or deported. However, Kunta's *tariqat* was not officially outlawed, only the associated loud *zikr* was banned outright.

However, despite the crushing defeat and subsequent harsh measures, the Qadiri movement did not only survive (by going underground), but also spread like wild-fire in Chechnya and Ingushetia. Russian estimation that it had been dealt a crippling blow proved overly optimistic, as its *murids* rose up in many a revolt in the following years. Russian oppression, as it did to the Naqshabandi ethos in the North Caucasus a few decades earlier, effected a transformation in Qadiri ideology such that pacifism was discarded and armed struggle against occupation gained acceptance. Followers of both Sufi movements were united in their repugnance to Russian occupation.

In May 1865, Taza Ekmirzaev from Kharachoi advanced with a bunch of his followers to Mount Kkheetashoo—Korta, where traditionally national meetings were held, and proclaimed himself imam. Before the Russians moved to quell the small uprising, the locals had done the job for them. The powerful warrior Vara operated in Chechnya for several years, attempting to revive the political fortunes of the Qadiri movement. Although the 'Naib of the Order of the Son of Kisha' found an early death in battle, his military feats earned him a permanent placing on the list of favourite folk heroes, as he was immortalized in song (Y.Z.Akhmadov *et al* 2000).

Russian-Ottoman War, 1877–1878

In April 1877, war erupted between Russia and Turkey. A force made up of NE Caucasian emigrés was assembled on the eastern Turkish front under Ghazi Mohamed, eldest son of Shamil, who had been residing in Istanbul. Another force of Circassian volunteers under the ageing Khadzhi-Berzek engaged the Russians on the European front in the west. The Chechens and Daghestanis rose up in revolt under Ali-Bek Haji Aldanov and Haji Mohammed, respectively, with followers of both the Naqshabandi and Qadiri orders united in this effort.

The emigré and local forces attempted to link up. However, a massive Russian army under the command of General Svistunov ruthlessly quelled the revolt. After Turkish defeat and signing of the Treaty of San Stefano in March 1878, Russia wreaked a terrible retribution on the NE Caucasians, hanging the leaders of the uprising, including Ali-Bek Haji, and deporting thousands to the wastelands of Siberia.¹⁴ Many Chechens in Turkey began to return home at the end of war without Russian permission.

Tsarist rule

The period up to the downfall of tsarism was characterized by some religious and cultural tolerance. The Chechens were allowed to retain most of their traditions, and national schools kept their doors open. However, the tsarist policy of rewarding Cossacks for their role in the war by allotting them Chechen lands in the north to colonize caused resentment among the rightful owners and ignited the old warrior spirit. What brought things to a boil was the imposed judicial system, whereby Russians and Cossacks were tried in civil courts, whereas Chechens were dealt with by military tribunals. In 1898, a major rebellion broke out in Chechnya, and again in 1904–1906 the Chechens and Ingush rose up to reclaim their ancestral lands, forming guerrilla bands that threatened Vladikavkaz and Grozny. The Russians responded by deporting thousands of Chechens to Siberia.

Although the Chechens and other North Caucasian peoples were exempt from compulsory military service, even after the implementation of universal conscription in Russia in 1874, they contributed volunteers in time of war. At the beginning of the First World War, the major North Caucasian nations formed separate regiments that made up the Caucasian Cavalry Division, which distinguished itself by the military prowess, bravery and discipline of its members. In 1916, after sustaining horrific losses, the Russian Army sought to recruit more men from North Caucasian nationalities. In the Russian Civil War, the Division sided against the Red Army and it was consequently disbanded at the end of 1919.

The industrial exploitation of oil in Chechnya at the end of the nineteenth century increased its economic importance and drew thousands of Russian and foreign oil workers. In contrast, the Chechens were generally excluded from jobs related to the lucrative industry.

Revolution and civil war

The peoples of the North Caucasus had grown weary of tsarist rule and they longed for the creation of an independent republic in which their aspirations and dreams of freedom could be realized. The first Russian Revolution in early 1917 presented the North Caucasians with the opportunity to cast off the oppressive yoke and reclaim their independence. In May 1917, the First North Caucasian Congress convened in Vladikavkaz and elected the Central Committee of the Union of the North Caucasus and Daghestan as a provisional Terek-Daghestan government to prepare for becoming an independent state, with both the North Caucasians and Terek Cossacks united in this aim. Earlier, the Chechen Congress elected a committee of sheikhs and elders to prepare for the new phase of independence.

The North Caucasian Mountain Republic

The Central Committee met on 28 July 1917 in an extraordinary session to prepare for the Second Congress, which was scheduled to take place in Andi, Daghestan. The main resolution was the establishment of a committee to prepare for the creation of a standing army. Local meetings were held in August 1917 to elect delegates to the Congress. In September, a provisional constitution was ratified by the Congress. The North Caucasian Mountain Republic seceded from Russia in 1917 and declared its independence on 11 May 1918. It signed an alliance with Turkey and was formally recognized by the Central Powers, Germany, Austria-Hungary and Turkey, and by Great Britain.¹⁵ The main figures in the Mountain Republic were the Chechen oil tycoon Tapa Chermoev, who acted as president, the Ingush chairman of parliament Vassan-Giray Jabagi (Djabagui) and Haidar Bammate, minister of foreign affairs. Other ministers included Pshemakho Kotsev, a Kabardian, Aytek Namitok, an Adigean, Abdul Rashid Katkhanov, Ahmet Tsalikov and Alikhan Kantemir.

In 1918, the Russian Civil War spread to the Caucasus, with both the Reds and Whites in earnest to control the vital region. On 8 June 1918, a team of exiled North Caucasian instructors from the Turkish army arrived in Daghestan to organize a North Caucasian force, which, together with the help of 15 Turkish divisions under Izzet Yusuf Pasha, a Circassian, routed the White forces of Bicherakhov. However, the Turks failed to consolidate the military position of the North Caucasians, as they had to withdraw from the Caucasus under the provisions of an armistice. Yet again, an attempt by diaspora North Caucasians to free their lands was botched.

Initially there was some degree of affinity between the mountaineers and Whites, both being united in their anti-communist stance. However, the principal aim of the Whites was the restoration of the Russian Empire and reincorporation of all its former colonies. For North Caucasians that meant going back to square one. Denikin, the commander of the White Army in the Caucasus, refused to recognize the Mountain Republic and he resolved to undo it by force. In February 1919, contingents of the White Army penetrated into mountainous Chechnya, where they encountered stiff resistance. The Red Army only offered half-hearted support to the out-gunned mountaineers. In August 1919, after quelling serious resistance in Kabarda and North Ossetia, Denikin invaded Ingushetia and

Chechnya, burning towns and villages, including Alkhan-Yurt, Chechen-Aul, Dolakovo, Ekazhevo, Gherzel, Gudermes and Stari-Yurt. With the nationalists crushed to a pulp, the Mountain Republic was no more.

The North Caucasian Emirate

In August 1917, a congress of Muslim leaders held in Andi elected Uzun Haji and Najmuddin Hotso (Gotsinsky), Chechen and Avar Naqshabandi sheikhs respectively, as imams of Chechnya and Daghestan. The delegates resolved to reintroduce *shariat* and expel the Russian occupiers. An army of over 10,000 men was raised which engaged the Russians towards the end of 1917 and managed to liberate some mountain territories. The Russians and Cossacks responded by conducting a pogrom against the Chechen residents of Grozny and massacring Sheikh Arsanov and his men, who were sent to negotiate with them. The Cossacks of Mozdok attacked their Chechen and Ingush neighbours to settle old scores.

In September 1919, Kabarda, Ossetia, Chechnya and Daghestan declared the North Caucasian Emirate an independent state under Uzun Haji, who sided with the Bolsheviks against the Russian nationalists, for the former, in their effort to win over the mountaineers, recognized his government *de facto* and promised full autonomy and restoration of *shariat* and *adat*. The Fifth Army under Nikolai Gikalo was put at the disposal of Uzun Haji. Ironically, Denikin's defeat of the army of the Emirate in the autumn of 1919 spelled the doom of the Whites. The campaigns in the North Caucasus demanded the engagement of his best troops in the region, which enabled the determined Bolsheviks to win the decisive Moscow campaign. In February 1920, the White Army retreated from the North Caucasus, allowing the Emirate to enjoy a few months of relative peace. Uzun Haji died in March 1920 at the age of 90.

The Reds in their turn proved to be far from considerate towards the North Caucasians, and relations between the two sides soon turned sour. After securing Georgia, Azerbaijan and Armenia, the Red Army moved to the Daghestani lowlands. In August 1920, Said Bek, great-grandson of Shamil, and Hotso led a revolt in Chechen-Ingushetia and Daghestan. However, it was an unequal contest, with the 10,000 or so ill-equipped mountaineers no match for the 40,000 soldiers of the Red Army. Open conflict came to an end in May 1921 with the fall of Gidatl in Daghestan to the Bolshevik forces.¹⁶ After the defeat of the White Army in September 1921, the Communists occupied the North Caucasus and abolished the Emirate soon after, renegeing on their earlier promises. However, some mountaineers kept the uprising alive until it was finally crushed in 1925.

The Mountain Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic

After the demise of the Emirate, the political situation in the North Caucasus was far from being well defined, as there was no unanimity in the Communist Party as to the future of the region. In 1920, the Caucasian Revolutionary Committee, which was established in Vladikavkaz, formed the core of the Mountain Autonomous Soviet

Socialist Republic (ASSR), whose establishment in January 1921 was overseen by Stalin in person. Chechnya was incorporated into the republic on 21 January 1921. Other nations encompassed included the Ingush, Ossetians, Kabardians, Balkars and Karachais. Daghestan was initially given the status of a full union republic (SSR), but was soon relegated to an ASSR in the Russian SSR. The mountaineers were given promises of political and cultural autonomy within the framework of the Soviet Union. Thousands of Cossacks were removed beyond the Ural Mountains and lands that had been given to them during and after the Russian conquest were returned to their lawful owners—two birds hit with one stone. However, Stalin was placating the North Caucasians only to buy time until the full establishment of Soviet power.

The Mountain ASSR did not survive for long. It started to fall apart on 30 November 1922, when Chechnya was detached from the republic by main force and reconfigured as the Chechen Autonomous Oblast (AO). Some 10,000 mountaineers were expelled to the lowlands in the framework of the policy of tightening control over the area. In 1924, the Soviets started to crack down on Islamic practices. On 7 July 1924, with the separation of the last two entities into the Ingush and North Ossetian AOs, the Mountain ASSR was abolished. The detached regions were incorporated into the North Caucasian Krai.

From 23 August to 12 September 1925, the Red Army surrounded Chechnya, whilst the secret police conducted an operation to quell the rebellion, which had been kept alive by the remnants of the army of the Emirate and other nationalists, and to disarm the Chechens. Hotso and other ringleaders were captured and executed. Sheikh Ali Mitaev, leader of the Bammatt Giray *vird*, who had been co-opted by the Soviets, was also executed, having outlived his usefulness.

Collectivization and revolt

In 1929, the borders of the Chechen AO were expanded with the incorporation of the Autonomous City of Grozny (70 per cent Russian population), the Sunzha Okrug (almost 97 per cent Slavic population), and the Russian-populated southwestern part of the Terek Okrug, in an obvious attempt to dilute the Chechen population in the Oblast and expedite Russification.

By 1929, Soviet power had been consolidated throughout the former Russian Empire, and the policy of tolerance towards the North Caucasians was scrapped. Instead, collectivization as an economic and social policy was initiated. In Chechnya, land was confiscated and property incorporated into collective farms in lowland areas, and joined up into larger plots in the mountains. This led to the disruption of traditional economic and social structures. Chechen political figures and intellectuals were subjected to ruthless systematic pogroms. The policy of centralization, another name for direct rule by Moscow, was pursued at all cost, with all decisions, no matter how trivial, being made in the capital and local initiative frowned upon, to say the least.

Whilst collectivization was being carried out, units of the Red Army were stationed along the borders of Chechnya. The Chechens, under Shita Istamulov, Mulla Akhmet and Kuriev, rose up in revolt in many towns and villages, including Benoi, Goiti and Shali, their basic demands being the abrogation of the abhorred collectivization, the restoration of their lands, and the reinstatement of *shariat* and *adat*. Despite the granting of amnesty

to the insurrectionists by Stalin in spring 1930, the Soviets tried to arrest the ringleaders, which short-sightedness only served to spread the uprising to Daghestan, North Ossetia, Kabarda, Balkaria and the Karachai region. Istamulov was treasonably assassinated in 1931, but the situation was only brought under control in 1933 when the authorities conceded to several demands of the rebels. But the pay-up was deferred until 1937, when Stalin was to wreak his vengeance on the North Caucasians in grand style.

Joining Chechnya and Ingushetia

On 15 January 1934, the Chechen and Ingush AOs were combined to form the Chechen-Ingush AO, and on 5 December 1936, the AO was elevated to a full autonomous republic in the Russian SSR, and pompously called the Chechen-Ingush Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic, in accordance with the new Soviet constitution. Celebrations were held in the republic on the occasion, and the people were filled with optimism that a new and better era was being ushered in.

It is significant to note that although autonomous republics had the trappings of sovereignty, such as local constitutions, Supreme Soviets and councils of ministers, they did not enjoy the 'right' to secede from the USSR, as did the 'full' SSRs, which fact would prove fateful for the Chechens half a century later.

Stalin's purges and the Israilov-Sheripov uprising

In spite of the promises of the authorities, the collective farm system was brought back. The oppressive measures of the NKVD (People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs) not only kept the mountain uprising alive, but also led to the alienation of the Chechen elite, who met up with Sergo Ordzhonikidze, a high-ranking communist leader of Georgian origin, in the spring of 1935 in Pyatigorsk to air their grievances. Ordzhonikidze revoked the bans on donning daggers as part of the national costume and on possession of saddle-horses and the situation calmed down somewhat from the middle of 1935 to the end of 1936. Even resistance in the mountains, led by Saadullah Magomaev, abated for a while. But that was just the proverbial calm before the storm.

On 31 July 1937, the NKVD launched operation 'Removal of Anti-Soviet Elements', in which 'suspects' were arrested by the secret police and summarily tried by a tribunal composed of Russians, including Egorov, the First Secretary of the Republican Committee. In October and November of 1937, local communist leaders, including Aslanbek Sheripov and Gapur Akhriev, erstwhile 'heroes' who helped to establish Soviet rule in the North Caucasus, were arrested and tried wholesale. These 'reactionaries' and 'enemies of the people' were accused of 'national deviation' and plotting to set up a separate North Caucasian republic in cohorts with Turkey and Great Britain, traditional bugbears of Russia. Most of those arrested were executed, the rest sent to concentration camps. It is estimated that 14,000 people were liquidated in the republic in 1937 alone. The depletion of the political cadres and their replacement by outsiders created a gaping chasm between the government and the people, further aggravating feelings of resentment, hopelessness and alienation. Other ludicrous charges were fabricated for each

of the other categories of detainees. Writers, artists and intellectuals, such as A.Matsiev, A.Avtorkhanov, D.Malsagov and M.Mamakaev, were removed from the scene, causing cultural life in the republic to slip further into darkness. The reign of terror lasted until November 1938.

In early 1940, Hassan Israilov, a Chechen writer of note, led a popular uprising to wrest Chechen-Ingushetia out of Soviet control. By February, Israilov was in control of most mountain areas. A national congress was convened in Galanch'ozh to proclaim the establishment of the Provisional Popular Revolutionary Government of Chechen-Ingushetia, with Israilov as its head. In February 1942, Mairbek Sheripov, who had led an insurrection in Shatoi and Itum-Kala, joined forces with Israilov. The Chechen nationalists, who had been appalled by the conduct of the German Army in the Ukraine, informed the German High Command in no uncertain terms that they would not tolerate replacing one tyrant with another. The Russians used deadly air power to quell the uprising, bombing many 'liberated' villages into submission in the spring of 1942.

A distinguishing feature of this uprising was that it was led not by Sufi sheikhs, as had been the case since the late eighteenth century, but rather by intellectuals and 'children' of the Soviet State. It was at this point in the history of Chechen struggle against Russian hegemony that this pattern became dominant, as the events that would unfold in Chechnya starting in 1990 would bear out.

The Second World War

When Germany invaded the Soviet Union in 1941, many Chechen and Ingush men took active part in the so-called 'Great Patriotic War' in defence of the Soviet Union. After initial reluctance on the part of the military authorities, the 242nd Mountain Rifle and 317th Rifle divisions were formed in the Chechen-Ingush ASSR. The all-volunteer 255th Chechen-Ingush Cavalry Task Regiment and Chechen-Ingush Cavalry Squadron joined the front in 1942. All in all, more than 30,000 Chechens and Ingush were enlisted in the Soviet war effort, a substantive proportion of the able-bodied men in the republic.

The Nazi propaganda machine proclaimed that the Germans were on a mission to liberate the North Caucasus from the Russian yoke. Some elements among the local population saw this as their chance to regain their freedom, and a number of volunteers joined Vlasov's pro-German 'Russian Liberation Army'. The Caucasian contingent of some 5,000 men was under the command of General Sultan Kylych Girey, a Circassian who fought in the Civil War and left the Caucasus afterwards. It is noteworthy that tens of thousands of Cossacks, including a large number from the diaspora, formed regiments that fought against the Red Army.

German forces briefly occupied some of the western regions of the North Caucasus in the second half of 1942. Grozny was partially destroyed by German aircraft bombings. Chechen soldiers fought heroically against the advancing forces of Marshal von Bock in Mozdok and Grozny in late 1942. When the North Caucasus was 'liberated' by the Red Army in early 1943, Caucasian sympathizers and militiamen left with the retreating Germans. In March 1945, the Caucasian contingent surrendered to the British in Austria. In accordance with the terms of the Yalta Conference of February 1945, all Soviet civilians and servicemen were to be repatriated in a secret operation. Girey, who had

never been a Soviet citizen, was handed to the Soviets in May 1945, but not before arranging for the escape of hundreds of his men to freedom. He and a number of senior officers of the Caucasian regiments were hanged in Moscow in early 1947.¹⁷

The Chechen and Ingush soldiers in the Red Army were arrested and exiled to Central Asia in the course of 1944. Chechen and Ingush soldiers of the Red Army who had been prisoners of war in Germany refused to go home after their release, preferring to settle in Germany, Turkey and the USA. It does not matter whether you fight for or against Russia, for if you are a Chechen you are doomed either way.

4

History from the deportation to the 'Second' Chechen War

Chechen doomsday¹

On 23 February 1944, the Soviet authorities started to implement a plan to deport the Chechens and Ingush *en masse* to Central Asia and Siberia. Code named 'Lentil', the week-long secretive operation, which was carried out by thousands of NKVD and Red Army troops, was a brainchild of Stalin himself, who wanted to get rid of the 'troublesome' Chechens once and for all and to replace them with more trustworthy Slavic elements—ethnic cleansing at its vilest.

Although the Chechens had suffered a number of deportations at the hands of Russians before, none of these even approached this one in its brutality and scale.² Hundreds of thousands of people were herded to collection points and then jam-packed into bleak trains that were especially commissioned for the purpose. The journeys to the exile destinations were absolutely horrendous affairs that lasted for many days and even weeks. At least one-quarter and perhaps as much as half of the deportees perished in the process and during the first few months of exile. The most horrific act committed by the Soviet troops was in the remote mountainous village of Khaibakh in Galanch'ozh, where on 27 February some 700 people were burnt alive locked in a barn, an action which obviated the need for the authorities to take the trouble to transport them to the nearest collection point. Thousands of residents of the Galanch'ozh District were summarily shot and their bodies dumped in Lake Galanch'ozh. Many elderly and sick people were callously executed on the spot. Even the Chechens of Daghestan were not spared the treatment. The more placid Ingush suffered exactly the same fate as the Chechens. However, some of the Kist were allowed to stay in their homeland. There was some protracted resistance in the mountains by die-hard Chechen guerrillas that lasted until 1972.

It was only as late as June 1946 that the news of the deportation was made public and the Chechen-Ingush ASSR was declared abolished. The republic was divided among the Stavropol Krai, North Ossetia, Georgia and Daghestan. The rump Grozny Oblast was extended in the northeast to the shores of the Caspian by annexing the northern regions of Daghestan. The Chechen-Ingush ASSR was erased from the face of the earth! Tens of thousands of Russians, Ukrainians and Daghestanis were ordered by the authorities to resettle in the Grozny Oblast, mainly in the lowland villages vacated by the deportees.

About 240,000 Chechens were deposited in camps in Kazakhstan and 71,000 in Kirghizia, with the rest scattered in Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Irkutsk and the Yakut ASSR in Siberia.³ Those Chechens who dared to resist arrest were doomed to hard labour in concentration camps in Siberia, never to be rehabilitated.

The scheme could only have been conceived by the sickest of minds. But, at the time, humanity was in a particularly low trough, its conscience in torpor. Half a century later, the spectre of mass deportation reared its hideous head once again, as some twisted characters blew the dust off the old archives and proposed a final 'final solution' of the Chechen problem.

Life in exile⁴

The survivors of this horrific deportation were placed in special settlements, mainly in the form of *kolkhozes* and *sovkhozes*, collective farms and state farms respectively, run by the NKVD Department of Special Settlements, the successor of the GULAG (Main Administration of Corrective Labour Camps), made so famous by the Russian writer Alexander Solzhenitsyn.

The conditions under which the 'special settlers' found themselves were appalling, even by NKVD accounts. They were not allowed to leave their areas of residence, and heads of families were required to report changes in status to the authorities. There was chronic lack of food and clothing, which caused many illnesses and untold number of deaths among the deportees. Yet, despite the adverse circumstances, five years into exile, the Chechens and Ingush pulled off the extraordinary feat of going back to a positive natural population growth rate (W.Flemming 1998:81–2).

One result of the deportation was that the exiled peoples, Chechens, Ingush, Balkars, Karachais, Crimean Tatars and so on, had developed an affinity towards each another, becoming 'comrades-in-genocide', as it were. These special relations were maintained even after the return of deportees to their homelands. For example, the Crimean Tatars fully sympathized with the plight of the Chechen people during the Russian invasions in 1994 and 1999. An unforeseen consequence of the contacts between the exiles and their host communities was that the Chechens managed to convert many Muslims of Central Asia to Sufism, thus strengthening mutual bonds.

Rehabilitation

At the Twentieth Communist Party Congress in 1956, Khrushchev announced the rehabilitation of the exiled peoples, including the Chechens and Ingush, as part of his campaign to discredit Stalin and undo his pernicious deeds. This announcement was preceded by the gradual easing of restrictions on the special settlers following the tyrant's demise in 1953. For example, in the latter half of 1954, they were allowed to become free citizens of the republics and regions of residence. After incessant 'illegal' attempts to return to their ancestral lands, and after refusing a host of propositions to set them up in a different homeland, the authorities grudgingly gave in and officially allowed the Chechens and Ingush to return in November 1956.

In January 1957, the Chechen-Ingush ASSR was restored, but with altered geography, as three predominantly Cossack sub-districts of the Stavropol Krai, namely Naur, Shelkovsky and Kargalinsky, with a combined area of 5,200 sq km, were incorporated into the republic, presumably to reduce the relative number of the indigenes, boosting its

area to 19,300 sq km.⁵ However, the Prigorodny District, which had been given to the North Ossetians, was not returned—the seed of a later conflict in the area between the Ingush and North Ossetians.

Before proceeding to the next historical phase, it should be emphasized that this horrific episode passed without a single person being held accountable and brought to justice. The ability of the Russians to abuse the Chechens, and other North Caucasians for that matter, with impunity throughout the last three centuries, has had the subsidiary effect of inducing the lulling perception that this is in the usual run of things—an internal affair, as the Russians would have the world believe. The way out of this vicious circle is to somehow impress upon the Russians that this kind of behaviour could not be tolerated any longer. But, whence a chastiser?⁶

Post-rehabilitation

A committee headed by Muslim Gairbekov, who would later become Chairman of the Council of Ministers of the Chechen-Ingush ASSR, the highest-ranking Chechen in the republic at the time, was set up to oversee and facilitate the return of deportees and rebuild Chechen-Ingushetia. The local authorities, which envisaged a gradual return of the Chechens and Ingush over several years, were overwhelmed by the tens of thousands who flocked back home in the first few months. Friction soon developed between the repatriates and the settlers, who were reluctant to give up their homes. One particular bone of contention was the desecration of Chechen cemeteries and the removal of the headstones—a crude attempt at erasing history. Tensions came to a head in August 1958 after an incident in which a Russian sailor was killed in a brawl with an Ingush man, and the Russians conducted a pogrom against the Chechens and Ingush in Grozny that lasted for several days. The authorities only intervened when the rampageous mob, who had been somewhat bewildered by the self-restraint of the Chechens and Ingush, turned to looting. None of the rioters was ever brought to justice.

Though rehabilitated and allowed return to their ancestral lands, the Chechens and Ingush lost land, economic resources and civil rights. They had also been targets of official and unofficial discrimination right until the late 1980s. They were regularly excluded from high official and sensitive security posts. For example, ever since the creation of the Chechen-Ingush ASSR in 1936, the position of First Secretary of the Communist Party, effectively head of the republic, had been occupied by a succession of 11 ethnic Russians imposed from outside.⁷ It was only in 1989 that an ethnic Chechen assumed this position, even then in the face of considerable official opposition. Through the 1970s, the Soviet regime treated Grozny as enemy territory, where night-time curfews were imposed routinely.

The deportation had profound effects on the Chechen psyche. For three decades after return, a temporarily subdued and disoriented people worked hard to find its bearings. The spontaneous ‘periodic’ uprisings, which had been the open manifestations of Chechen recalcitrance against Russian tyranny for more than a century, were conspicuous by their absence in those years. The ‘exile generation’ in general internalized their harrowing experiences, many even going into denial, selectively erasing whole episodes in their exile years—a natural self-defence mechanism to preserve their battered self-

image. Even after rehabilitation, the stigmas of 'criminality' and 'treason' were still used by the authorities to legitimize discrimination and keep the Chechen national spirit depressed. Some Chechens genuinely believed the Soviet drivel churned out in later years that they were deported to rescue them from the 'barbaric' German hordes! According to Abdurahman Avtorkhanov, 'the Chechen push for independence from Russia was simply a revolt of the children in revenge for the deaths of their fathers and mothers during deportation and exile.'⁸ The principal commanders of the Chechen resistance in the 1994–1996 War were born in exile.

Nevertheless, the Chechens displayed extraordinary resilience and remarkable collective discipline. They quietly rebuilt their shattered lives and restored their traditional institutions against overwhelming odds. Their numbers more than doubled in the thirty years after return. Slowly and surely the nation was regenerating, and by the end of the 1980s the Chechens were ready to reassert their right to their country. Fortunately, a part of the Chechen intelligentsia survived the exile, including U. Dimaev, Ėlmurzaev, Usmanov, A.Arsanov, M.Mamakaev, and they set upon the task of rebuilding the cultural life in the republic (R.Karcha 1959a:10).

Soviet historiographers wrote Chechen history in accordance with Party ideologies and diktats. Adding insult to injury, the historian Vitaly Vinogradov, a citizen of the Chechen-Ingush ASSR of Russian origin, fabricated a convoluted and ridiculous theory that the Chechens were voluntarily incorporated into the Russian Empire in the eighteenth century. Thus, in an historical conference convened in Grozny in 1973, the First Secretary of the Republican Committee, K.Kh.Bokov, hailed such 'voluntary' incorporation as the event that saved the Chechens and Ingush from extinction and set them on the path to glory—an echo of a theme trumpeted earlier in the other North Caucasian republics and regions. In fact, celebrations were held in 1982 commemorating the 200th anniversary of this fictitious union. The Russians were portrayed as the all caring, sharing 'Big Brothers' that saved the other Soviet peoples from the vagaries of fate and offered them protection in their bosom. Dissenting voices, such as those of the notable Chechen historians Magomed Muzaev and Abdula Vatsuev, were swiftly muffled.

Gorbachev releases the genie

With the incredible increase in the relative number of Chechens in their republic, from just over a third in 1959 to almost 58 per cent in 1989, Chechen nationalism gradually became more assertive. Both Chechen and Russian nationalists turned more vocal in the early 1980s, but it was only the heavy-handedness of the authorities that prevented matters from getting out of control.

With the introduction of the reformist policies of *perestroika* and *glasnost* by Gorbachev in the mid-1980s, people were allowed more freedom of expression. Bottled-up feelings of resentment were unleashed in Chechnya, and the Chechens began to assert their rights and demand to have more say in their republic. Informal organizations sprouted all over and civic action groups began to organize. The Popular Front of Chechen-Ingushetia was set up in summer 1988 with an ecological agenda, which soon turned political as the Front mobilized public opinion against a proposal to build a

biochemical plant in Gudermes. Other organizations of the time included Kavkaz (Caucasus), which was mainly concerned with cultural issues, and Bart (Unity), which transformed to the Vainakh Democratic Party in February 1990. Leaders of Bart attended the First Congress of the Confederation of Mountain Peoples held in Sukhumi in August 1989.

Chechen intellectuals began their campaign of emancipation and correction by attacking the officially sponsored view of Vinogradov that Chechnya had voluntarily joined Russia. In a conference on the North Caucasian struggle against Russian occupation held in Makhachkala in 1989, only Vinogradov characterized it as reactionary, the other scholars emphasizing the heroic and anti-imperialistic aspects of it. Vinogradov was discredited and stripped of his republican citizenship in 1991 for his anachronistic views.

In June 1989, Doku Zavgaev, a Chechen, was appointed First Secretary of the Communist Party, replacing Russian Vladimir Foteev, mainly as a result of mounting pressure of Chechen nationalism. The Chechen National Congress (CNC), which was established in November 1990 with Dzhokhar (Zhovkh'ar) Dudaev, a member of the small Karabulak tribe, as Chairman of its Executive Committee, demanded the elevation of the status of Chechen-Ingushetia from an autonomous to a full-fledged Soviet republic, with the concomitant right to secession from the Soviet Union. On 27 November 1990, the Supreme Soviet of the Chechen-Ingush ASSR duly declared state sovereignty of the republic. Many of the Chechens who had opted to stay in 'exile', gravitated back to their 'independent' homeland, whilst Russian citizens tended to go back to Russia proper.

The State Council of the Chechen Republic (Mekhkh Kkhel), a voluntary organization of clan chieftains, was created in 1991. It functioned as an arbiter in inter-clan and inter-ethnic disputes, and several times it proposed the adoption of Islam as a state religion. In April 1991, the Council passed a law exonerating the deportees from all lingering accusations and introduced a system of compensation for the damages suffered by them, specifically calling for the restoration of their pre-exile lands and properties, including the Aukhovskiy and Prigorodny districts in Dagestan and North Ossetia respectively. The Cossacks in their turn demanded the return of the Shelkovskiy, Kargalinskiy and Naur districts to the Stavropol Krai, raising more tension with the Chechen nationalists.

Separation of Chechnya and Ingushetia

In June 1991, the CNC offered the Ingush the opportunity to decide their own political status and determine their relationship with Chechnya through a plebiscite. In September 1991, an assembly of Ingush deputies called for the formation of an Ingush Republic within Soviet Russia. The Ingush, who had been deprived of the Prigorodny District since 1944, were reluctant to join an independent Chechnya for fear of compromising their territorial claims. In April 1991, a Russian law was passed on the restoration of the frontiers of national territories of exiled peoples after a transitional period, keeping alive Ingush hopes of reclaiming their lost ancestral lands.

Referendum results on 1 December 1991 in three predominantly Ingush districts showed that the majority of voters approved the proposed separation from Chechnya. In June 1992, Ingushetia was officially declared a constituent republic of the Russian

Federation. However, in October, a conflict broke out between the Ingush and North Ossetians that resulted in the expulsion of most Ingush from Vladikavkaz and the Prigorodny District, after active intervention of the Russian Army on the side of the Ossetians. So much for Russian justice!

The Yanayev putsch

Passions in Chechen-Ingushetia, which kept simmering during the summer of 1991, came to a boil following the failed 19–21 August coup by Yanayev and his junta, which sent shock waves across the whole North Caucasus. Although the machinators were soon neutralized, this incident served as the catalyst needed by Chechen nationalists to start implementing their agendas. The CNC wasted no time in denouncing the plotters as criminals and accusing the republican leadership of tacitly supporting the coup. Zavgaev, who had been in Moscow during the whole episode, was unable to reassert his authority upon his return, whilst Dudaev's popularity soared for his forceful condemnation of the putsch and his well-calculated order for his followers to pull down Lenin's statue in the centre of Grozny. The Chechen-Ingush parliament declined to endorse a statement signed by almost all parliaments of the other autonomous republics to the effect that the integrity of the Russian Federation must be preserved at all costs (M.Bennigsen-Broxup 1992b:224–5).

Yeltsin, having emerged as a hero from the debacle, strove to reassert Russian authority in Chechen-Ingushetia. However, a game of tug of war, with the Soviet autonomous entities as the rope, ensued between Yeltsin and Gorbachev, each hauling hard to gain their support in the underlying power struggle, with Gorbachev offering to upgrade the status of the autonomous republics to full republics, whilst Yeltsin straining to maintain the status quo to prevent Russia from going the way of the Soviet Union.

Chechnya becomes independent

In late August 1991, Dudaev took control of the Grozny television station and established a National Guard. In early September, the CNC passed a resolution transferring power in the republic to its Executive Committee. On 6 September, Dudaev's supporters seized the parliament and main government buildings and forced Zavgaev to relinquish power.⁹ On 15 September, the Provisional Council (PC) was set up to run affairs until the presidential and parliamentary elections, which were scheduled for 27 October. However, the PC proved a liability for Dudaev in his face-off with the conservative clique and other opposition groups.

In the October 1991 presidential elections, Dudaev, running against three other candidates, achieved a resounding victory, receiving about 90 per cent of the ballots cast. The elected parliament was basically pro-Dudaev, at least initially. In late October, the CNC announced the introduction of Chechen citizenship, and on 1 November, Dudaev issued a decree proclaiming state sovereignty—effectively seceding Chechnya from Russia. A week later Yeltsin, who had been rattling the sabre, declared a state of emergency in the republic and sent air-borne troops to Grozny to arrest Dudaev, who

responded by declaring martial law and mobilizing the National Guard, who blocked the deployment of the Russian force. On 10 November, the Russian Supreme Soviet, reluctant to use force to quell 'domestic' unrest, voted not to extend the state of emergency, and Russian troops were withdrawn in ignominy.

Chechnya asserted the prerogatives of an independent state, whilst Russia continued to regard the breakaway republic as one of its own. Dudaev categorically refused to accept the Tatarstan model of substantial autonomy in return for staying in the Russian fold. A stifling economic blockade was imposed by Moscow on Chechnya that only helped to worsen the internal situation. At any rate, an uneasy *modus vivendi* prevailed for some three years between the two states. Some attempts were made to negotiate a solution to the impasse, but Moscow mainly followed a policy of benign neglect, except in the international arena, where its adamant stance *vis-à-vis* Chechen independence prevented any country from extending diplomatic recognition to Chechnya.

In February 1992, Russian troops were deployed in Chechnya. The next month, the Chechen parliament approved the State constitution, with independence and secularism as principal articles. On the other hand, Article 65 of the 1993 Russian constitution listed Chechnya as one of the 89 subjects of the Federation, with the two Federation Council seats assigned to Chechnya listed as vacant. In June 1992, the Russian forces evacuated Chechnya, leaving behind a huge arsenal of weapons and equipment. Chechnya was rid of all Russian troops on its territory—a feat not boasted by any of the other former Soviet republics. The humiliation associated with this armless withdrawal in no small measure influenced the Russian decision to invade Chechnya in 1994. At the flare-up of hostilities between the Georgians and Abkhazians in 1992, Dudaev sent troops to fight on the side of the latter, who were able to oust the Georgian invaders from their country in the following year.

Throughout this period, the official policy was to encourage citizens of Chechnya of Slavic origin to stay in the republic, and no discriminatory policies were enacted against them.¹⁰ Be that as it may, many Russians and Cossacks chose to leave the increasingly ethno-centric republic as a result of the economic slump and lack of security.

Dudaev asserts his power

Hardly had the Chechens freed their land of foreign domination than they turned against each other. In June 1992, Dudaev clashed with parliament and introduced direct presidential rule. A state of emergency was declared in November 1992. Tensions kept mounting as the speaker of parliament Husein Akhmadov declared in January 1993 his intentions to negotiate a treaty with Moscow. Matters reached a head in June with Dudaev's dissolution of the parliament in response to the legislature's passing of a motion impeaching him in April. The National Guard defeated parliament supporters in a show-down in Grozny in June. On 23 February 1994, the day that marked the 50th anniversary of the deportation, President Dudaev issued a decree declaring it the 'Day of Revival of the Chechen Nation', as opposed to 'Day of Mourning'.

Moscow stoked the flames of civil discord by co-opting the Chechen opposition, which found strongholds in Umar Avturkhanov's fiefdom of Nadterechny in the north and Bislan Gantamirov's Urus-Martan. In December 1993, the Provisional Council of the

Chechen Republic was set up as a government in waiting, with Avturkhanov as chairman. The Russians provided the Council with money and weapons to create a proxy force to topple Dudaev. A protracted low-key conflict erupted into open confrontation in the Nadterechny District on 6 August between government and opposition forces, with the former asserting their military superiority. On 26 November, the opposition forces, in league with Russian troops, launched an assault to capture the Presidential Palace in Grozny. The defenders routed the invading forces and captured many Russian soldiers, who were only released after an embarrassing public admission by Moscow of its involvement in the debacle.

The resilience of the Dudaev regime nonplussed the Russians, leaving them embarrassingly with no options—that is except for direct military intervention. In December, Russian troops were given their marching orders to launch ‘a small victorious war’.

1994–1996 War

On 11 December 1994, Russia invaded Chechnya. Russian troops were met with little resistance as they converged on Grozny. However, the attack on the city on New Year’s Eve was met with ferocious opposition, with Russian forces suffering horrendous losses. It was only on 19 January 1995 that the Russians were able to dislodge the Chechen resistance fighters from the capital. Moscow interpreted world silence in face of the massive assault as tacit acquiescence. Chechen troops withdrew to the southern mountainous regions to regroup and engage in guerrilla warfare. In March 1995, Moscow installed Salambek Khadzhiev as interim head of the Chechen administration.

Russia’s subsequent policy was to terrorize the Chechens into submission, with indiscriminate massacres committed by Russian forces, the most horrific being the one at Samashki, where dozens of civilians were murdered in cold blood in April 1995. In June, Chechen soldiers under Shamil Basaev took their military campaign inside Russia proper, seizing a hospital in the town of Budennovsk in the Stavropol Krai and taking hundreds of hostages. The subsequent stand-off was only resolved when the Russian Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin acceded to Basaev’s conditions, namely cessation of military action by Russian forces in Chechnya, initiation of peace talks, and a safe passage back to Chechnya for the Chechen contingent.

In October, Khadzhiev was replaced by Doku Zavgayev, who went on to win the December 1995 presidential elections, which were largely boycotted by the Chechen electorate, viewing them as nothing more than a charade to legitimize Moscow’s puppet regime. The Chechen resistance kept up the pressure on Russian troops, and at times engaged them in open battle. When in January 1996 Chechen commander Salman Raduyev, son-in-law of President Dudaev, seized the Daghestani village of Pervomaiskoe, the Russians laid siege to it and then launched a massive attack, causing the Chechen detachment to scurry back home with heavy losses.¹¹

On 21 April 1996, the Russians intercepted a satellite call by Dudaev in an open field near the village of Gekhi-Chu and dispatched a warplane that struck him with a rocket and killed him. The president’s burial was a surreptitious affair, the exact location of his

grave never divulged by his inner circle. Political and military command was assumed by the Vice-president Zelimkhan Yandarbiev in a seamless transition of power.

With the approach of the Russian presidential elections, Yeltsin was desperate for some good news from the front to appease the disgruntled electorate. In May 1996, Russia asked the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) to act as an intermediary to resolve the conflict. In May and June, two agreements were signed to end hostilities and initiate peace negotiations. However, Chechen nationalists boycotted the June parliamentary elections in Chechnya and the Russian presidential elections, which were won by Yeltsin. With the imperative posed by electoral considerations lifted, Russian forces relaunched attacks in July, the escalating violence drawing criticism from the USA, Germany and the OSCE. The Chechens accused Moscow of contravening the peace agreements. The Russian Duma demanded an end to the war and resumption of peace negotiations. The Russian State Commission on Chechnya offered to negotiate with the Chechen nationalist leaders. However, these initiatives were given the cold shoulder, as Yeltsin pushed his policy of military resolution of the issue into a blind alley. The Chechens had realized that the only way out of their predicament was to overwhelm the already demoralized occupiers militarily.

On 6 August 1996, Chechen forces stormed Grozny in a spectacular and well-coordinated operation, inflicting heavy losses on enemy troops and surrounding their formations. The flabbergasted Russian leadership frantically looked for a face-saving exit from the Chechen quagmire. The Kremlin hawks were pushed into the background, and the doves were given a full mandate to negotiate a settlement to the conflict. A peace treaty was signed on 31 August 1996, ending more than 20 months of war. The last of the Russian troops in Chechnya were withdrawn in December 1996.

Motives for invasion

Chechnya of the early 1990s was considered a paragon by many North Caucasian nationalists, especially in Dagestan and Kabardino-Balkaria, who yearned for freedom and the end of Russian domination in their republics. In fact, the Kabardian nationalists came very close to assuming power in their republic in 1992 (A.Jaimoukha 2001:97–8). As centrifugal forces were gathering momentum, Russia was facing the prospect of a repeat of the break-up of the Soviet Union, and so it reckoned that licking Chechnya into shape would serve as a sobering lesson to nationalist dreamers everywhere in the North Caucasus.

Russia also aimed to wrest control of the section of the Caspian oil pipeline that passed through Chechnya and so project an image of regional stability to dispel notions of alternative routes through Georgia and Turkey. The Russian military, which had been thwarted in its attempts to take Chechnya prior to the full-scale invasion, wanted to restore its tattered image. There was also the perceived need to sever the purported links between mafia groups in Chechnya and Russia (B.Fowkes 1998:54).

As for the reasons for the Russians' ignominious defeat, these were succinctly categorized by Pontus Sirén (1998:119) as, 'poor planning of the operation, the poor standard of Russian troops, and the high quality of Chechen resistance'. The spectacular Chechen victory was achieved despite a depleted population pool—an 'Achilles heel'

that Russia would later target with vengeance. The itch to avenge its military humiliation was a major motive behind Russia's next foray in the Caucasus.

Maskhadov's presidency

Aslan Maskhadov, Chief of Staff of the Chechen military during the liberation war, won the presidential elections on 27 January with some 65 per cent of the vote, almost three times more than the second-placed Shamil Basaev, a very popular warlord at the time. Yandarbiev, the acting president, who only managed 10 per cent of the vote, despite being endorsed by Dudaev's widow Alla, stepped down on 12 February in a smooth transition of power. Other also-rans included Akhmed Zakayev, Movladi Udugov, Salambek Maigov and Yusup Soslambekov. Movladi Udugov was appointed as acting prime minister and was entrusted with orchestrating Grozny's Russian policy. In the parliamentary elections, 63 MPs were elected for a five-year term.

After fits and starts, and despite Russia's intransigent stance against the issue of independence, Chechen and Russian negotiators drafted the Treaty on Peace and the Principles of Russian-Chechen Relations, which was duly signed by Maskhadov and Yeltsin on 12 May 1997. It was decided to defer the thorny issue of independence until 2002, when a referendum was scheduled to take place. On its part, Russia pledged never to use force again against Chechnya.

Following its resounding defeat in Chechnya and the undermining of its authority in the area, Moscow restructured and bolstered its political and military presence in the North Caucasus, with the military given more say in political issues. Three federal bodies, the North Caucasus Military District, the Prosecutor Office and the Border District, were established under the supervision of the Ministry of Internal Affairs to safeguard Russia's interests in the area.¹²

Russia wasted no time in declaring that it would not tolerate Chechen independence. Instead, it offered Chechnya an 'associate membership' in the Russian Federation. Maskhadov refused any compromise on the issue of independence, and he suspended talks with Russia for its failure to fulfil its pledges. In November 1997, Grozny accused Moscow of incubating a Chechen government in exile and undermining stability in Chechnya.

Foreign relations

In August 1997, an office of Chechnya was opened in North Ossetia to foster political, economic and cultural ties between the two republics and to oversee the repatriation of Chechen refugees. Relations with Makhachkala had been tense, the Daghestani authorities, ever the Russian puppets, accusing Grozny of harbouring expansionist ambitions.

In November 1997, Maskhadov visited the USA for the first time in an effort to bolster Chechnya's standing in the West and to hold talks on the transport of Caspian oil through Chechnya. Maskhadov also met with Turkish politicians and businessmen on his way back home. In March 1998, Maskhadov travelled to the United Kingdom as the

private guest of Baroness Margaret Thatcher, the former British prime minister, and Lord McAlpine, to solicit Western support for his country's independence. He visited Turkey and the USA again in early August 1998.

Maskhadov hemmed in

During his period of tenure as president Maskhadov was confronted by mounting internal problems and by lack of progress in negotiations with Russia, which was prevaricating on the issues of restoring Chechen economy and rebuilding the devastated republic, notwithstanding signed agreements and memoranda. In addition, international response to pleas for assistance in reconstructing Chechnya was woefully inadequate.

These were also factious times in Chechnya, with organizations sprouting left, right and centre, espousing inchoate dogmas referring to some form or another of Caucasian unity.¹³ Yandarbiev headed the Caucasian Federation, a political party aimed at creating an independent Caucasian state.¹⁴ A number of Chechen and Daghestani movements established the Islamic Nation Organization.

Kidnappings and brutal murders of humanitarian workers and Western nationals were starting to reflect very badly on the Chechen leadership.¹⁵ Maskhadov had fully realized that if the security situation was not radically improved in Chechnya, no substantive investments would be forthcoming and the economy would remain in the doldrums. In July 1997, the president took steps to stamp out lawlessness and insubordination, including the creation of a Chechen professional army to replace the motley collection of militias under a plethora of warlords. Salman Raduyev, who openly admitted involvement in some of the sordid affairs, refused to disband his men. In October, the president admonished the wayward elements of his government to toe the line and asked parliament to grant him special powers to deal with the aggravating political and economic situations. A low-key conflict between president and parliament ensued, as the two sides differed on many issues, including the controversial matter of Chechnya's status as a secular or religious state.

An attack on Russian forces in Daghestan in December 1997, which was blamed on maverick Chechen elements, drew condemnation from Grozny, which saw it as a deliberate attempt to undermine the peace treaty and provoke a new war. Moscow claimed the right to intervene in Chechnya to put an end to the violence in the area. Grozny retorted that any Russian military strikes against bases in Chechnya would reignite the war. Tensions grew high as Russian troops amassed on Chechnya's border and Chechen forces were put on high alert.

In January 1998, Maskhadov dismissed the government and asked Shamil Basaev to form a new one, with security to be high on its agenda. Chechen passports started to be issued in Latin Chechen and English, but Moscow refused to recognize the documents. Raduyev continued his ramblings on destabilizing the situation in Russia, declaring civil disobedience in February 1998. At the same time, Ivan Rybkin, Secretary of the Security Council of Russia, was dismissed from his post, which effectively put the final bullet in the already moribund Chechen-Russian dialogue. Maskhadov appealed to the peoples of the Caucasus to unite in face of the destabilizing influence of Russia in the region.

The Congress of the Peoples of Chechnya and Daghestan was established in April 1998 with Shamil Basaev as leader. The maverick organization had the express aim of creating an independent Islamic state in both Chechnya and Daghestan, which put it at loggerheads with both the Chechen and Daghestani governments.

The security situation reached crisis point in the middle of 1998, when a state of emergency was declared. On 21 June, government troops clashed with Raduyev's militia in Grozny, forcing him into isolation. In mid-July, government troops undid the Wahhabi stronghold in Gudermes, and the sect was outlawed. However, the fundamentalists managed to find a new seat at Urus-Martan. Significantly, Basaev maintained neutrality during these clashes, but he resigned his government post soon after and joined the opposition. An attempt on Maskhadov's life was made on 23 July, an event which conferred upon the president a large dose of public sympathy. The representative of the Russian government in Chechnya Akmal Saidov was murdered.

Constitutional conundrum

In October 1998, opposition factions set up the Centre of Public and Political Parties and Movements whose aim was to oblige the government to adhere to the Constitution. However, the effect was to plunge the republic even more into chaos. In November, an anti-crime plan targeting kidnappers and criminal gangs came into effect.

In December 1998, the Supreme Shariat Court made a decision to suspend parliament and dismiss its speaker Ruslan Alikhadzhiev. The parliament countered by declaring the Court to be an illegitimate entity, since it was established by presidential decree, not by parliament, in contravention of the constitution. The opposition threw its lot behind the parliament. In January 1999, Maskhadov consulted with the clergy and the leaders of political parties and movements on how to deal with the crises facing the republic. The president, succumbing to tremendous pressure, announced that Chechnya would become an Islamic state. He set up the Shura (Consultative) Council with prominent political, military and religious members, to rule over the republic in accordance with the Muslim law or *shariat*. This contravened the provision on secularity of the state in the 1992 constitution. The opposition countered by establishing a rival shura council.

In January 1999, Maskhadov accused Russia of provoking internal strife in Chechnya and fostering an atmosphere of distrust between the two states by wholesale persecution of Chechen nationals in Russia. The case of two Chechen women sentenced by a Russian court to prison for allegedly masterminding an explosion in Pyatigorsk in 1997 became a bone of contention between Grozny and Moscow in early 1999. The Russian air force struck Chechnya's border regions in April. The drums of war were sounded louder as Russian officials considered the possibility of aggression against Chechnya to stop so-called terrorist activities. A scheduled meeting between Maskhadov and Yeltsin was put off indefinitely.

In July 1999, Ilyas Akhmadov was appointed as foreign minister, which added a measure of sanity to the situation. The Chechen government accepted the concept of a confederation with Russia as an interim phase towards full independence. In a bid to stave off a crisis that would provide Russia with a pretext to invade and to foster internal harmony and solidarity, an agreement on power-sharing was reached in August between

Maskhadov and parliament. Maskhadov appealed to the West and the UN to jump-start Chechen-Russian negotiations.

The 'Second' War

In August 1999, Chechen opposition armed groups subordinate to the Congress of the Peoples of Chechnya and Dagestan infiltrated Ingushetia, North Ossetia and Dagestan, purportedly to sever the North Caucasus from Russia. Nothing came out of the venture, but Russian media blew things totally out of proportion and harped on the old theme of Islamic threat to Russia's territorial integrity and stability. Moscow saw in this episode the perfect pretext to invade Chechnya. Anti-Chechen sentiment in Russia reached fever pitch in September, when Moscow blamed the Chechens for a string of apartment building bombings in Moscow, Volgograd and Buinaksk, which left some 300 people dead.¹⁶ The plan to attack Chechnya, already drawn up, was set in motion.¹⁷

The Russian air force pounded Chechnya for a number of days in late September 1999 before the order to mount a land invasion was given. Forces from the north and the west overran the Chechen borders on 30 September. Thousands of Russian troops, backed by some 1,000 armoured vehicles, found little resistance in the northern plains, but were met with fierce resistance on the outskirts of Grozny, which prompted massive and indiscriminate artillery and air strikes on the capital—'overkill', as opposed to the 'walk-over' attitude of the previous war. Tens of thousands of people took refuge in the countryside, Ingushetia and Dagestan. Having defended their capital against overwhelming odds for many weeks, Chechen forces evacuated the city from the west and south on New Year's Eve, sustaining heavy losses in the process. This is how Paul Quinn-Judge, *Time Magazine's* Moscow bureau chief, described the cumulative destruction wrought on Grozny in the two wars:

From that point on we could see why they [the Russians] did not want us to go into the city. Bosnia, Somalia, Vietnam pale in comparison. It is totally, utterly destroyed. I was left wondering through what bizarre thought processes a man has to pass before describing this city as liberated. They have pulverized it. I'm reminded of Tacitus: they create a desert and they call it peace. We were speechless.¹⁸

An already exhausted and disoriented Chechen contingent that in March 2000 took refuge in the southern village of Komsomolskaya was ambushed and decimated by Russian troops. The rump of the Chechen nationalist army took base in the southern mountainous redoubts and resorted to guerrilla warfare. However, Putin's pigheaded resolve, coupled with his high approval rating among the Russian public, Chechen heavy losses, war weariness, the destruction of the Chechen economy and sustaining infrastructure, internal discord, the indifference of the Western governments, media isolation, the disastrous consequences of '11 September', and even high oil prices, which replenished Russian coffers, all combined to sap the morale and undermine the clout and resilience of the Chechen nationalists. Russian forces engaged in brutal mop-up operations, which only served to further alienate Chechen civilians and swell the ranks of the liberation army. A

deadlock ensued for a number of years, with neither side capable of achieving a decisive victory.

5

Politics and current affairs

In the March 2000 Russian presidential elections, Acting President Vladimir Putin gained 50.6 per cent of votes in Chechnya, Gennady Zyuganov, leader of the Communist Party, about 23 per cent, Grigory Yavlinsky, leader of the liberal Yabloko Party, 9.2 per cent, Umar Dzhabrailov, a Moscow-based Chechen businessman, 5.8 per cent, and Vladimir Zhirinovskiy, leader of the Liberal Democratic Party of Russia, 2.6 per cent, on a turnout of 79.4 per cent. With Putin firmly at the helm, he pushed through his policy on Chechnya. In June 2000, former Mufti of Chechnya Akhmad Kadyrov was appointed head of the Chechen administration. Although Kadyrov fought alongside the nationalists in the first war, he later fell out with Maskhadov, accusing him of tolerating the Wahhabis.¹ In January 2001, Kadyrov formed a government with Stanislav Ilyasov, formerly head of the Stavropol Krai, as prime minister.

Chechnya is allocated two seats in the Russian Federation Council, or Upper House of Parliament, and one seat in the Russian State Duma. In August 2000, Moscow-based Aslambek Aslakhonov, retired general and head of the All-Russia Islamic Congress, was elected as Chechnya's deputy in the State Duma. In the event, Aslakhonov obtained 27 per cent of the votes, Adam Deniev, leader of Adamalla, 22 per cent, and Lecha Magomedov, head of Bart, 9 per cent. In late 2000, Kadyrov appointed Akhmar Zavgaev, younger brother of Doku, as one of Chechnya's representatives on the Federation Council, and in July 2003 the Chechen State Council elected Adnan Muzikaev as the other. In the December 2003 Duma elections, Akhmar Zavgaev, Kadyrov's favourite candidate, won the Chechnya seat. In 2004, Umar Dzhabrailov and Musa Umarov, both Moscow-based entrepreneurs, took over from Zavgaev and Muzikaev as Chechnya's representatives on the Federation Council. There were representatives of the government of the Chechen Republic in 22 regions of the Russian Federation, including Moscow, St Petersburg, Ivanovo, Perm, Ekaterinburg, and in all regions of the South of Russia. In January 2001, the Slav administrators of the Naur and Shelkovskiy districts resigned their posts in protest against lack of government support, which led, according to them, to the diminution of the number of Slavs in the two districts to just 10 per cent of a total population of 90,000.

Ever since the appointment of Kadyrov as head of administration, Chechen nationalists had sought to undermine his authority, and even made several attempts on his life. Indeed, a number of his relatives and close associates were assassinated, for example, Adam Deniev, a deputy head of the Chechen administration, was killed in April 2001.

The Southern Federal District

In May 2000, Putin introduced changes to the structure of the Russian federal system, such that the 89 territorial entities were organized into seven districts under administrators appointed by and accountable to the president himself. All North Caucasian republics, namely, Chechnya, Ingushetia, Dagestan, North Ossetia, Kabardino-Balkaria, Karachai-Cherkessia and Adigea were placed in the Southern Federal District, which includes some 21 million people, making up 15 per cent of Russia's population. The standard of living in the District is generally lower than the Russian average, despite the abundance of natural resources. In Moscow's drive to pressure regional leaders in the North Caucasus to toe the Russian line, it inadvertently enhanced the already surging feelings of nationalism among the North Caucasians and led to increased tensions in the federal structure. With the numbers of Russians dwindling significantly in the region, Russia would probably lose its grip on it in the long run by default. On the other hand, in the estimation of Russian strategists, the war in Chechnya, as well as the creation of the Southern Federal District, had helped to counteract centrifugal tendencies in the North Caucasus. As of March 2003, the District's administrator was Viktor Kazantsev, a retired general.

'11 September'

In the aftermath of the 11 September 2001 attacks on the USA by al-Qaeda, a fundamentalist Muslim organization led by Saudi-born Osama Bin Laden, Putin was quick to jump on the bandwagon and label the Chechen nationalists as terrorists intimately associated with the 'terrorist' network. Although the US government conceded that there were elements in the Chechen resistance movement in league with al-Qaeda, it maintained its position that the only way out of the Chechen quagmire was through peace negotiations. The president of the United States of America George W. Bush called on Maskhadov to sever all alleged relations with Bin Laden. As for the so-called Chechens fighting with al-Qaeda in Afghanistan, according to S. Vaknin:

The mentioning of Chechens... is more designed to satisfy the propaganda purposes of Russia.... There are less than one million Chechens and they have a very harsh war going on in Chechnya. Chechens who choose to go to Afghanistan instead must be quite unpatriotic.²

In early 2002, Maskhadov launched a diplomatic blitz aimed at explaining to Western diplomats the Chechen point of view regarding the war and his vision of peace. According to him, negotiations with Moscow should start without any prior conditions, in accordance with the requirements of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE). Chechnya should be made a subject of international law, for the threat of genocide would always be looming as long as it remained in Russia. The reluctance of the Russian side to start negotiations, despite the fact that the war had reached a dead-

end, would only prolong the suffering of both the Chechen and Russian peoples. There were signs that the Russian reductionist view that the Chechen struggle was a facet of international terrorism was wearing thin in the West, and there was a growing realization that the war should be stopped in order to prevent further radicalization of the North Caucasus.

Maskhadov consolidates his power base

The Chechen parliament issued a resolution extending the authority of the president, government, parliament and local authorities from 28 January 2002 until free elections could be held after Russian withdrawal from Chechnya. Maskhadov, who had been pinning hopes on a political settlement to the war, realized that Moscow needed strong prodding to bring her to the negotiating table. He resolved to strengthen his position by reconciliation with other nationalist leaders. In spring 2002, Maskhadov patched up differences with Yandarbiev, Ruslan (Khamzat) Gelaev, the moderate leader of a Chechen contingent believed to have been based in the Pankisi Gorge,³ and Udugov after they had renounced their opposition to his presidency, and consultative and defence councils were formed, with Shamil Basaev given overall charge of the military.⁴ In August 2002, the State Defence Council declared general mobilization of all Chechens inside and outside Chechnya, and subsequently military operations were conducted on a larger scale, a sure sign that the nationalist resistance movement was recovering from the initial blows it had received at the beginning of the war and that the disparate military leaders were co-ordinating their war efforts more closely.⁵ By the end of 2002, Maskhadov seemed to be in control of most Chechen nationalist factions.

In October 2002, a group of Chechen fighters took hundreds of hostages in a Moscow theatre, demanding a Russian troop pull-out from Chechnya. Russian security forces ended the siege by pumping poisonous gas into the building, killing more than 200 hostages and 41 Chechen fighters in the process. Putin's stance on Chechnya hardened considerably following this incident, dismissing any talk of negotiations with Maskhadov. An obscure Chechen splinter group called 'Ghaazootan Murdash' ('Ghazavat Murids') emerged on the scene in early 2004 claiming responsibility for a deadly attack on the Moscow underground.

In November 2002, Ilyasov was appointed as Federal Minister for Chechen Affairs, and the post of Chechen prime minister was given to Mikhail Babich, who was soon replaced by Anatoly Popov after a tiff with Kadyrov, who had been steadily building up his power base in the republic. Popov was later relieved of his post on account of his failing health and replaced by Sergei Abramov in March 2004. In December 2002, Putin fired Gennady Troshev, commander of the North Caucasus Military District, and replaced him with Vladimir Boldyrev, and opened the door on possible negotiations with Chechen separatists who had put down their arms.

In February 2003, Maskhadov promulgated a new vision for the resolution of the conflict based on 'conditional independence under an international administration' which would last for several years, with the scheme involving withdrawal of Russian troops from Chechnya and their replacement by UN peacekeepers for the interim period until final agreement on the status of Chechnya is reached through negotiations.⁶ He also

appointed Salambek Maigov as his representative in Moscow. On 23 March 2003, a referendum on a new Chechen constitution was willy-nilly passed in a plebiscite. Subsequently, the Chechen State Council (Mekhk Kkhel) was set up with two representatives from each of the 21 major population centres to act as a provisional legislative body. In the absence of other viable candidates, Kadyrov predictably won the Chechen presidential elections, which were held on 5 October 2003. However, these developments did little to improve the political and security situation in Chechnya. In the meantime, it would seem that the Chechen conflict has degenerated into a mere piquing issue in the Russian presidential perspective. Predictably, Putin won the Russian presidential elections, which were held on 14 March 2004. However, Kadyrov's assassination on 9 May 2004 put Putin and his Chechnya policy in a difficult predicament. Alu Alkhanov was elected president in August 2004.

Human rights situation

The Russians had long shed any pretence to humanitarian behaviour, and they seemed bent on evirating young people, literally and morally, in order to deplete the gene pool of the Chechen nation. Russian forces perpetrated many heinous crimes against Chechen civilians, including the notorious massacres at Staropromyslovski, Alkhan-Yurt and Novye Aldi, committed between December 1999 and February 2000.⁷ There were accounts of large-scale and systematic tortures conducted in Russian prison camps in Chechnya, with evidence indicating a general policy rather than isolated cases. Human Rights Watch published a report (October 2000) detailing human rights abuses in Chechnya. It was common practice for Russian military units to capture Chechen civilians as hostages and then demand ransom from their relatives to secure their release.⁸ There was also an active trade in corpses.

There are no reliable figures on the number of Chechen war casualties, but many estimates put the figure at tens of thousands of civilians. The Russian side claimed that by the end of 2002 more than 14,000 Chechen fighters had found perdition in the long-drawn-out campaign, compared to 4,700 Russian troops killed and 13,000 injured. However, other sources say the true figure of Russian deaths is at least three times greater than the official one. According to some economists, the war was consuming as much as 30 per cent of the Russian budget.

In the opinion of many analysts, the Chechen war has done serious damage to the process of liberalization and democratization in Russia. The absence of open condemnation of Russian policy in Chechnya by the world community has strengthened the hands of the hard-liners and muffled the voices of the moderates and the independent media. The peaceful resolution of the Chechen issue and subsequent support for a Chechen state would impel Russia a long way towards joining the civilized world.

Russian human rights organizations include Memorial, which in December 1999 renounced the principle of self-determination for Chechnya, prompting Elena Bonner, the high-profile wife of the late Soviet dissident Andrei Sakharov, to tender her resignation from the organization, and from the Russian-Chechen Friendship Society, which was established in the spring of 2000 under the sponsorship of the National Endowment for Democracy with branches in Chechnya, Ingushetia, Moscow and other regions. The

society runs an internet site in both Russian and English (friendly.narod.ru/2002e/indexe.htm) detailing atrocities committed by Federal troops, which made it a target of Russian security forces, who allegedly assassinated some of its prominent members, including Ruslan Akhmatov, Luisa Betergirieva and her brother Akhmed Ezhev.

In May 2000, the Committee on Conscience of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum has placed Chechnya on its 'watch' list for 'past persecution of Chechens as a people, the demonization of Chechens as a group within Russian society, [and] the level of violence directed against Chechen civilians by Russian forces'. In April 2001, the UN Human Rights Commission in Geneva adopted a resolution condemning the 'disproportionate' degree of force used by Federal authorities in Chechnya. At the G-8 summit in Genoa in July 2001, the leaders failed to criticize Putin for human rights abuses, thus missing a golden opportunity to censure Russia for its excesses. In July 2002, the International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights announced that systematic disappearances in Chechnya were 'bordering on genocide'. In the same month, Abdul-Khakim Sultygov, a Chechen sociologist, was appointed Special Representative for Human Rights in Chechnya. In January 2003, the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg agreed for the first time to hear cases filed by Chechen civilians alleging violations by Russian forces. A suggestion was also made to set up an international tribunal to prosecute war criminals. Human rights organizations considered these as positive developments, signalling as they did to Russians that criminal behaviour could not go unchecked forever. Also, the United Nations Commission on Human Rights was urged to adopt a resolution condemning abuses in Chechnya and Russia's reluctance to investigate them.

Foreign observers drew particular attention to Chechen reluctance to commit acts of terrorism, as this runs against their spiritual culture, and the noble attitude of the Chechen fighters towards enemy prisoners, except for those bandits who came to the Caucasus as mercenaries to murder and rob civilians. The Chechens declared many times that they were against the war, and demanded that the Russian government abolish the policy of total terror against their nation. But in the atmosphere of absolute impunity, many demoralized Chechens were pushed to extremes, leading to a rise in the number of suicide attacks inside and outside Chechnya, some of which perpetrated by 'Black Widows', Chechen women with scores to settle with the Russians.

Russian public opinion

A Russia-wide poll taken by the independent research centre ROMIR in March 2001 showed that 42.8 per cent of respondents supported the war, with 46.4 per cent opposing it. In late July, an opinion poll conducted by the All-Russia Centre for the Study of Public Opinion (VTsIOM) showed that 36 per cent of Russians wanted the war in Chechnya to go on, and 53 per cent were in favour of talks with Maskhadov. A public opinion survey released in early August 2001 showed that 69 per cent of those polled wanted to see an end to the war and withdrawal of Russian troops, and, more significantly, 77 per cent wanted Chechnya out of the Federation.

In early September 2001, a majority of respondents to an VTsIOM opinion poll were not against granting Chechnya independence as the price to end the war. In late September, however, a poll by the same centre showed that 41 per cent of Russians wanted the war in Chechnya to go on, and 44 per cent were in favour of negotiations, marking a surge in militant sentiments among the Russians following '11 September'. In December 2002, a VTsIOM poll showed that 56 per cent of respondents were for peace talks, and in June 2003, this number went up to 61. It remains to be seen at what cut-off point Putin would start to seriously consider untangling Russia from the Chechen quagmire, and cut the mounting Russian losses. Unfortunately, the Russian government deprived VTsIOM of its independent status in late 2003, robbing researchers of a most valuable impartial source of information on Russian public opinion on Chechnya.

Political intelligentsia

Lyoma Usmanov, the Chechen envoy to the USA, is a well-known statesman and public figure in the Caucasus. In the late 1980s, he co-founded the Kavkaz cultural organization and Bart political movement. Akhmed Zakayev, an actor-turned-warlord-turned-politician, grabbed the headlines when he was arrested in Denmark in October 2002 upon Russian request following the meeting of the International Chechen Congress in Copenhagen. After the rejection of the Russian request to extradite him by the Danish authorities, Zakayev went to London in December, only to be arrested again. Vanessa Redgrave, the famous British actress and co-founder of the International Campaign for Peace and Human Rights in Chechnya, lobbied hard in support of Zakayev and heightened the British public's awareness of the real situation in Chechnya. In November 2003, the British justice system refused to extradite Zakayev to Russia, and he was later granted political asylum in Britain.⁹ According to Zakayev, the only path to peace was for the West to pressure Russia to hold talks with the nationalists and to send forces to keep the peace after the resolution of the conflict. Zelimkhan Yandarbiev, ex-president of the Chechen Republic—Ichkeria and later, until late 2002, Maskhadov's envoy in Muslim countries, was assassinated in February 2004 in Qatar.

Ruslan Khasbulatov played an ambiguous role in recent Chechen events, seemingly courted and distrusted by all sides. He had become very critical of Russia's conduct in Chechnya and the vilification and tarnishing of the image of Chechnya and the Chechens in the media. Other political figures include Lecha Magomedov, Abubakar Arsamakov, president of the Moscow Industrial Bank, Malik Saidullaev, head of 'Russian Lotto' and co-chairman of the Fund for Humanitarian Assistance to the Chechen Republic.

International Chechen Congress

In 1994, Moscow convened a conference of delegates from Chechen communities all over the world to sanction its intended invasion of Chechnya, but the majority of those who attended were opposed to the move. In the following year, representatives of the Chechen diaspora met in Istanbul and elected Muhammed Shishani, a Chechen professor of US citizenship, to lead the International Chechen Congress (ICC). Early in 2002, the

Turkish government buckled under Russian pressure and banned a scheduled meeting of the ICC in Istanbul. However, the Congress delegates convened in Copenhagen in October 2002, to discuss Chechen issues, principally the resolution of the conflict in Chechnya. The decency, courage and firm democratic traditions of the Danes withstood Russian diplomatic blackmail.

The Confederation of the Peoples of the Caucasus¹⁰

The Confederation of the Peoples of the Caucasus (KNK) was established in 1991 as a voluntary conglomeration of a number of indigenous peoples of the North Caucasus, excluding the Daghestanis, to fill the power vacuum created by the ebbing Soviet State. Its principal aim was the re-establishment of the North Caucasian Mountain Republic. It had always been independent of, and sometimes at loggerheads with the local authorities, which were inimical to any form of political change. Chechnya was an exception in that its leadership was in tune with the nationalistic wishes and aspirations of the majority of the populace. After his dissolution of the Chechen parliament in 1993, Dudaev based the organization in Grozny, considering it a vehicle for his ambitions to unite the North Caucasian peoples into one independent political entity.

At first, the KNK enjoyed overwhelming popular support and scored some notable successes. In August 1992, its parliament declared war on Georgia and sent a few thousand Abaza, Adigean, Cherkess, Kabardian and Chechen volunteers to join forces with Abkhaz army units.¹¹ This intervention played a decisive role in effecting the spectacular Abkhaz victory of September 1993.

The Russian invasion of Chechnya in 1994 disrupted the tacit and coincidental alliance between Russia and the North Caucasians. Moscow, which had been turning a blind eye to the activities of the Confederation, started to view them as a major threat to its domination in the North Caucasus. Thenceforward, neutralizing the pan-North Caucasian movement became a priority in Russia's Caucasian policy. Although the KNK backed the Chechen drive for independence, support was not as whole-hearted as in the case of Abkhazia. Few Adigean, Cherkess and Kabardian volunteers joined the Chechens in their struggle. Apparently, the Chechen leadership was not in need of fighting men as they did political support.

In 1999, the KNK, which had been banned by the Russian authorities, voiced support for the Chechens. The head of the then weakened organization, Yusup Soslambekov, a Chechen gunned down in cold blood in Moscow in July 2000, had called for negotiations between the Russians, Aslan Maskhadov and the Chechen parliament on ending the war and on the future relations between Grozny and Moscow.

UNPO

In 1991, Chechnya joined the Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization (UNPO), which served as an international forum for the Chechen nationalists in the first war. However, Dudaev fell out with the organization and withdrew Chechnya's membership in 1995, but later it was reinstated. In July 1997, the Fifth General Assembly of the

UNPO condemned the war in Chechnya and supported the peace process. In September 2000, UNPO condemned the genocidal war against the Chechen nation and called upon Russian leaders to enter into peace negotiations with Maskhadov. Aslambek Kadiev, special representative of the Chechen Republic—Ichkeria in Europe, is also Chechen representative in the organization.

Legal basis of Chechen independence

According to Francis Boyle, professor of international law at the University of Illinois and attorney of record for the Chechen Republic-Ichkeria, the 1997 Treaty on Peace and the Principles of Russian-Chechen Relations constitutes a *de facto*, but not *de jure*, recognition of Chechnya (as a state) by Russia under international law and practice, and therefore, it could be used by the former to obtain recognition as an independent nation state by the world community. He interpreted pronouncements made by Putin in an interview in the *Financial Times* (15 December 2001) as *de jure* admission of Chechen independence.

Competing concepts for the future of Chechnya

Emil Pain, former advisor to Yeltsin and director of the Centre for Ethno-Political and Regional Studies in Moscow, proposed the establishment of a heavily guarded '*cordon sanitaire*' around Chechnya and the incorporation of the northern Naur, Shelkovsky and Nadterechny districts into Russia. Boris Nemtsov, leader of the Union of Right Forces faction in the State Duma, suggested that Moscow should negotiate with Chechen leaders 'who had no blood on their hands'. Chechnya should become a parliamentary rather than a presidential republic, with a state council representing all Chechen tribes and a governor-general at the head of the civil and military administration. However, if a peaceful resolution to the conflict could not be found, Chechnya ought to be partitioned such that the districts of Naur, Shelkovsky and Nadterechny would be severed and joined to the Stavropol Krai, and the border with stump Chechnya should be sealed.

Yet a third version of the partition solution was proposed in 2002 by Khozh-Akhmed Nukhaev, the oil magnate and former deputy prime minister of Chechnya. In his scheme, Chechnya would be divided into two entities, one in the northern plains, to be administered by Russia, and an independent country in the south. Nukhaev drafted a blueprint for a system of government based on traditional institutions, namely a state council (*mekhk kkhel*), with members from all *taips*, invested with the power to elect a president (*mekhk daa*), or head of the executive branch, legislative council (*lor iss*; literally: 'nine wise men'), with one elected representative from each of the nine *tukhums*, and the supreme judiciary (*yust iss*).

According to Sergei Kovalev, 'Chechenization' of the conflict was a 'wrong and very ineffective model' that would lead to civil war. Having had no support from Moscow or the West, Maskhadov had to compromise to appease his more radical comrades-in-arms and thus avoid such an outcome. The only way out would be for a negotiated settlement

with Maskhadov. Furthermore, in a post-war Chechnya, the West and Russia should assist and support Maskhadov in the arduous task of rebuilding his devastated country.

Jabrail Gakaev, head of the Chechen Culture Centre in Moscow, proposed that the Chechen intellectual elite should develop Sheikh Kunta Haji's pacifist teachings with regard to self-preservation and national development, for the greatest threat to the Chechen nation was the loss of the language and culture, and not religious restrictions. He accused the Wahhabis of sacrificing the Chechen nation at the altar of rigid dogma. According to Gakaev, it is essential to ensure a high standard of living for the people and preserve the Vainakh system of spiritual development encapsulated in *nokhchalla*. Gakaev's argument is not without merit, but it does precious little in undoing Russian hegemony.

The 'Liechtenstein Plan', which envisages a Chechnya with special status within Russia, came into being in August 2002 as an amalgam of several ideas of some key figures, including Ruslan Khasbulatov, Ivan Rybkin, Aslambek Aslakhonov and Akhmed Zakayev.

Putin, in his drive to increase the say of the centre in the affairs of the Federal republics, introduced measures to reduce the status of Tatarstan and thwarted the effort to revert to Latin script for Tatar, which has led to increasing tensions in the largely Muslim republic. Thus, it would seem that the Tatar formula, touted as a model for Chechnya, is heading towards failure.

Attitude of North Caucasian republics

On their way to invade Chechnya in 1994, Russian troops ran into sporadic resistance in Ingushetia, which formally pledged its support to Chechnya in its war against Moscow and also hosted thousands of Chechen refugees. However, the much-anticipated North Caucasian conflagration in response to the assault never materialized. The best that other North Caucasian governments could do was to call for an end to the conflict. In the absence of even vocal support, the Chechens had to go it alone.

In the 'second' war, the Ingush leadership urged Russia to negotiate with Maskhadov and offered to mediate in the conflict. Ruslan Aushev, the then president of Ingushetia, had been vehemently opposed to attempts to repatriate Chechen refugees just to give the impression that the situation in Chechnya was normalizing. For his contrariety, Aushev was pressured not to stand in the 2002 Ingush presidential elections, which were won by Murat Zyazikov, an ex-Federal Security Service (FSB) general, amidst widespread allegations of vote-rigging. Zyazikov proved more pliant with Russian demands, and the process of refugee repatriation was started soon after his inauguration. Relations between pro-Russian Chechen administration and Ingushetia improved considerably, and there was talk of reuniting the two republics. The pro-Maskhadov Chechen Committee of National Salvation is based in Nazran, Ingushetia, and is headed by Ruslan Badalov, a Chechen.

In May 2001, Gadzhi Makhachev, an Avar deputy in the Duma, warned that the Chechen conflict was having a destabilizing effect on Dagestan and that Russian excesses could embroil his republic in the conflict. The lionization of Colonel Yuri

Budanov, who in March 2000 brutally raped and murdered the Chechen girl Kheda Kungaeva, created negative feelings among the North Caucasians.

Chechnya and the West

Western intellectuals and governments see the Chechen conflict from different perspectives. Whereas the latter see in Russia a lucrative economic partner, intellectuals see the conduct of Russia in Chechnya for what it is—a mindless and vicious destruction of a people and a way of life.

The most vehement critics of Russian conduct in Chechnya were the French philosophers Bernard-Henri Levi and André Glucksmann, who in December 1999 delivered an emotive diatribe in Moscow against Russian policies in Chechnya and proposed erecting a memorial to innocent Chechen victims of the war.¹² An open letter signed by 500 intellectuals was published on the eve of Putin's visit to France in 2000, criticizing the stance of European governments towards the war.

At the onset of the 'second' war, France became the most vocal opponent of Russian tactics. When Yevgeny Primakov visited Paris in November 1999, both President Jacques Chirac and Prime Minister Lionel Jospin roundly condemned the brutality of Russian forces. However, this principled stance witnessed an about-face following 11 September 2001. In 2002, the German organization, Society for Foreign Policy, which has close ties to the German Foreign Ministry, founded the Chechen Bureau in Berlin.

The US government pressed Moscow on several occasions to stop the war and engage the Chechens in political dialogue, and issued strong statements of concern over atrocities and the use of excessive force by the Russian troops. In February 2001, the Republican Senator Jesse Helms submitted Senate Resolution 27 on the 1944 deportation of the Chechen people, in which the war in Chechnya was considered a continuation of the Russian legacy of abuse. However, suspension of diplomatic relations or military intervention had never been seriously proposed, with other concerns taking precedence: nuclear disarmament, democratization in Russia and the inclusion of Russia in the Group of Eight. Not only are the governments of the West turning a blind eye to the unfolding genocide, some are even abetting the heinous operations of the Russian forces (L.Kim 2000).

Although they lack no confidence that they would eventually prevail over the Russian occupation forces in Chechnya, Chechen nationalists are aware that the resolution of the conflict on a permanent basis could only be achieved through the agency of Western governments and institutions.¹³ Nevertheless, some Chechen intellectuals have blamed the West for betraying the innately democratic Chechen nation and abandoning them to their dark fate.

OSCE

The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) set up a presence in Chechnya in 1995, its main mission being to find a political solution to the conflict and to dispense humanitarian aid. It oversaw the 1997 Chechen presidential and parliamentary

elections and gave them a clean bill of health. For its persistent criticism of Moscow for excessive human rights abuses by Russian forces and its refusal to drop its political mandate in Chechnya and limit its work to the humanitarian sphere, the office of the Organization in Znamenskoe was closed at the end of 2002.

The Council of Europe

The Council of Europe, the body tasked with safeguarding democracy on the continent, set up the Chechnya Commission in the mid-90s to deal with the Chechen issue. It exerted pressure on the Russian leadership to negotiate with the Chechens during the 1994–1996 War. In 1996, Russia was admitted to the Council, despite fierce criticism of its brutal military campaign in Chechnya and abysmal human rights record. As a member, Russia was obliged to respect human rights, protect minorities and outlaw torture. Its failure to respect its end of the bargain resulted in the suspension of its voting rights in the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) in April 2000—the first country to receive such punishment. However, the sanction was revoked in January 2001 after a fact-finding mission by a PACE delegation reported ‘improvements’ in the humanitarian situation in Chechnya. In July 2002, the Ichkeria mission at the Council was closed, to the rapturous applause of Moscow.

The American Committee for Peace in Chechnya

The American Committee for Peace in Chechnya (ACPC), which was founded in 1999, aims at promoting peace in Chechnya and is the most prestigious support forum for the Chechens in the West. Based in Washington and co-chaired by the veteran American politicians Zbigniew Brzezinski and Alexander Haig and directed by Glen Howard, the ACPC has some 100 illustrious figures as members. It has given Chechen diplomats and activists the chance to put their points of view and visions for the future of Chechnya and has facilitated meetings between them and US officials. For example, in October 2000, a meeting was set up between Ilyas Akhmadov, Chechen foreign minister, with a high-ranking representative of the US Department of State.

In a commemorative function held by ACPC marking the sixtieth anniversary of the Chechen deportations, Brzezinski was quoted as saying, ‘More people died by deliberate design in the twentieth century than in all previous centuries combined. And the principal victims, if we were to rank them, were the Jews, the Gypsies and the Chechens.’

The Muslim world and Baltic countries

It would seem that support for the Chechen cause among the Muslim countries is dampened by fear of incurring Russian ire. Counter-intuitively, Iran had come out in sympathy with Russia’s actions in Chechnya, mainly due to the controversial nuclear technology transfer issue, Iranian fear of unrest of its own peripheral ethnic groups, and the fact that, from an Iranian perspective, the Chechens are on the ‘wrong’ side of the

great Muslim (Sunni—Shi'i) schism. Russia had hoped that the Iranians would co-opt fringe Islamic movements in the North Caucasus and temper their implacability towards Russian domination.¹⁴ Inexplicably, and adding injury to insult, both the League of Arab States and the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) sent observers to the 2003 Chechen presidential elections and duly offered a clean bill of health, when they could have politely declined the Russian invitation to attend, as did all respectable organizations in the West.

In contrast, the Baltic states have always identified with the Chechen cause, having suffered Russian occupation for more than four decades. In Estonia, Dudaev is still considered a hero for refusing to take part in suppression of the national movement when he was commander of the air force base in early 1990. In fact, in February 1995 the Estonian parliament demanded that the government recognise Chechnya's independence. The Lithuanian authorities refused to close down the Centre of Chechen Information and Culture in Vilnius in November 2002, despite intense pressure from Moscow following the theatre incident in Moscow. Support organizations include the International Parliamentary Group for Chechnya in Vilnius.

Other potential conflicts

The Chechens in Daghestan

The strip of land between present-day Chechnya and the rivers Andi Koisu and Sulak in Daghestan, traditional Chechen territory occupied mainly by the Aukh, or Akkintsi Chechens, was incorporated into the Daghestan SSR (later demoted to ASSR) in the early 1920s. In 1944, the 'Chechen' areas of Daghestan, namely the Aukhovsky and Khasav-Yurt districts, were cleansed of their 30,000 Akkintsi residents, who were dumped in the waste-lands of Central Asia. The Aukhovsky District was resettled by Lak, Avar and Dargin mountain villagers by main force, and was renamed 'Novolaksky'. Upon return from exile in 1957–1958, the some 25,000 Akkintsi were given new homes mainly in the Khasav-Yurt and Kazbekovsky districts of Daghestan, near the border of the re-formed Chechen-Ingush ASSR. However, the Akkintsi never dropped their claim to the Aukhovsky District, and they started to voice their demands publicly in 1991.¹⁵

The Daghestani Assembly acceded to the demand of the Chechen National Council of Daghestan to restore the Aukhovsky District, and a scheme was initiated to resettle Laks and Avars in other areas of Daghestan. However, the Federal authorities had been dragging their feet on this issue and most of the settlers stayed put. In September 1992, conflict erupted between the Akkintsi on the one hand and the Laks and Avars on the other, prompting the imposition of martial law. Independent Chechnya expressed its support for the aspirations of the Akkintsi and even attempted to reclaim its sequestered territories.

The Akkintsi refused to get involved in the 1994–1996 War, despite a direct appeal from Dudaev, and also kept their distance in the 'second' war. The present leader of the Akkintsi is Basir Dadaev. Akkintsi organizations include 'Vainakh'.

The Pankisi Gorge

The Kist of the Pankisi Gorge have always sympathized with their fellow Chechens in their periodic ordeals. Despite the added strain on their already suffering economy, the Kist, in accordance with age-old customs, took on some 7,000 Chechen refugees after the 1999 Russian invasion. The Russians claimed that the region had become a base for Chechen fighters resting from the rigours of war, but only to sneak back to Chechnya when refreshed. There is also a perceived conflict between the Wahhabis and the traditionalists. The Russian government pressured the Georgian authorities to put a check on the activities of Chechen forces in the region. Georgia, for her part, is very wary of arousing yet another ethnic conflict, having been twice involved in open war in South Ossetia and Abkhazia, and still grappling with another issue, that of rehabilitating the Meskhetian Turks. Antagonizing the Chechens would destabilize the northern border, giving Russia the excuse it needs to step in.¹⁶ It is believed that Chechen elements in the Pankisi were used by the Georgians in their failed attack on Abkhazia in October 2001.¹⁷

6 Society

Vainakh society is firmly based on patriarchal-patrimonial clan and familial structures and patron-based organization and it is characterized by tribal solidarity. Nevertheless, there are relics of ancient matriarchy manifest in the fact that women enjoy a number of privileges, including a measure of financial independence, and the special status of the maternal uncle in the lives of his nephews and nieces. Some of the earliest accounts of the traditional social structure of the Chechens were furnished by Russian travellers and historians who visited the North Caucasus in the nineteenth century.¹

Like the Circassians, the Vainakh are generally exogamic on both lines within the ethnic group and endogamic without, with men having more leeway in this regard. Marriage redemption was sanctioned. A rather complex law about whom one can and cannot marry played a role in regulating inter-clan relations, exogamy being an important factor in cementing them. But endogamy within the extended tribe ensured that at times of national crises no consideration would hamper joint action of all the super-tribes to defend the fatherland.

The present village and clan structures are considered in popular tradition as the basic societal institutions existing since ancient times. However, the actual age of the clan system is still a moot point. The Chechen scholar M. Mamakaev maintained that the *taips* were primordial tribal sub-units, whereas the Russian scholars Yan Chesnov and Viktor Chasiev argued that they were a more recent development in response to the tyranny of native and foreign feudal lords—a pet theme of Russian and Soviet scholars. The fact that the basic clan is referred to as *taip(a)* (from Arabic *t'ā'ifa*=group, community) would give some credence to the temporal component of the argument of the latter, as there is no reason why a relatively recently introduced foreign word should be used to refer to a fundamental ancient institution, unless this import was used to replace a native designation.²

The relatively stable tribal and clan structures have been major formers of the Chechen character and spirit, and have played an important role in the preservation of the Chechen ethnos, with the ancient customs and traditions regulating social interaction. It would be most useful and illuminating to construct idealized models of traditional Chechen society. These constructs could be qualified by discussing the dynamics of interaction of the various 'blocks', and the modes of departure from such 'moulds'. Inevitably, elements in Chechen society could be found that do not adhere to such standards, or whose connections to their clans are merely nominal.

There exist several oppositions inside Chechen society. In the last few centuries, a polarity has been developing between mountain and plain *taips*. Some Chechens still talk about proper *taips* and those of foreign origin, sometimes with a tinge of disapproval.³ There is also the *adat*—*shariat* opposition, which is still unresolved, and the Sufi Naqshabandi—Qadiri duality. The traditional majority versus the extremist minority duel

is causing social and political problems, with the whole population sometimes conveniently painted with the images associated with the latter.

Like other Caucasian mountaineers, the Chechens are known for their longevity—that is, in the absence of *force majeure*. At 124 years of age, Zabani Khachukaeva is thought to be the longest living woman in the world.⁴

Matriarchy and patriarchy

Classical Chechen society went through two phases of gender domination, as did most other indigenous North Caucasian societies, with society being initially matriarchal, later transforming to patriarchy when the physically more powerful males took control. According to the Russian anthropologist Maxime Kovalevsky (1893), there were some aspects of the customs and traditions of the North Caucasians that could only be explained by assuming an antecedent matriarchal society. He constructed a model of archaic North Caucasian society in which confraternities were the basic units of social structure. The clan system of the Chechens is perhaps the most preserved vestige of Kovalevsky's proposed system. The *taip* corresponds perfectly with the confraternity in which exogamous marriage was prescribed, and the 'bought' bride became a communal possession. In one sense, all members of the same *taip* were considered siblings, and the term '*vasha*' ('brother') was commonly used to refer to a fellow clansman. Marriage was prohibited between members who share common descent up to the twelfth ancestor. Chechen custom had it that a widow could only remarry one of the brothers of her deceased husband, or any other member of the *taip*, with the offspring of the union being considered those of the deceased. In Kovalevsky's model, the widow was allowed to remarry outside the group only if she could redeem her price.

Some Western travellers of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries and Russian scholars commented on the looseness of sexual morals in Chechen society, being unable to appreciate fully the complex social processes at work. For a married woman to have a lover was not considered as a shame. In fact, husbands felt proud and were flattered that other men admired their wives and took interest in them. In Ingush society, the wives of a dead man passed on to his sons, except for the biological mother, who would be claimed by a brother of the deceased.

Another vestige of matriarchy in Vainakh society was the dominant role of the maternal uncle. In Ingush society, a man had the right to give away his sister in marriage without her consent. It was enough to drink a toast to the honour of the man proposing marriage and to receive a present from him to clinch a deal. If a promised fiancée were not delivered to her man after presentation of gifts, the injured party would wreak vengeance on the brother as if it were a blood feud. It was also the custom that when a nephew attained adulthood, he would receive a present, usually a horse, from his maternal uncle. This custom was so institutionalized that the nephew could secure his 'right' by fair means or foul, using ruse or resorting to robbery or theft. This was a throwback to the matriarchal custom of the nephew inheriting from his maternal uncle.

Feudalism and its downfall

Although traditional Chechen society is characterized by lack of social differentiation based on status, at some time in their history the Chechens developed a social structure based on feudalism. Some time in the early Middle Ages a feudal system evolved among the Vainakh, similar to that of the neighbouring Daghestanis. Feudal princedoms, such as Simsim, and even mini-states appeared in the middle period of the Middle Ages. At the apex of the pyramidal feudal structure was the prince (*èèla*),⁵ then came the nobility and vassals (*oezdanash*, better known as *uzdens*), freemen (*halkhoi*), servants (*yalkhoi*, including bondwomen *gharbashash*), serfs (*lesh*: sing. *lai*), and finally the slaves and war captives (*yiisarsh*).⁶ Clergymen were classified with the *uzdens*. Slaves could secure their manumission (*aazat*) through pecuniary means.

Disillusioned by local 'blue blood', the Chechen rank and file disenfranchised their masters after the ebbing of Tatar influence in the fifteenth century. Later they 'imported' foreign aristocracy in the form of Kabardian and Kumyk princes and noblemen, half-willingly making them their masters, rather than setting a precedent of elevating some of their own to sublime ranks for fear that they would become permanent fixtures in society.⁷ The foreign rulers could be ousted and banished almost at will, as they had no roots to bond them to the land. This vehement abhorrence of feudalism must have been the result of a cataclysmic event or series of events that etched a deep impression on Chechen psyche. By the eighteenth century, the *tukhumtaip* egalitarian system was in place, as the non-native aristocrats were expelled for good.

Men's Houses and Unions

The Chechens had secretive societies called 'Men's Houses' and 'Men's Unions' that had no religious affiliations. These were ancient institutions that could be regarded as continuations of the cadet stage of upbringing. At a set time in the year, men would gather in groups and engage in martial exercises. It was an occasion for enhancing male bonding and emphasizing the code of chivalry. The binding blood feud law was suspended during this period. These unions served to defend the community against attack.⁸

Traditional social structures

Tukhum

The largest social unit is the *tukhum* (properly: *tukkham*; probably from Arabic *tukhum*=border, outlying district), which consists of a number of clans (*taips*) that are either kindred, or brought into union for defensive or economic purposes. *Tukhums* could vary in size from a few *taips* to several dozen. In Chechen society, size mattered, since influence and power were generally commensurate with how big the family, clan and

tribe were, and this partly explains the Chechen obsession with procreation and the enthusiastic welcome of 'asylum seekers'.

According to one legend, the nine Chechen *tukhums*, namely Aekkkhii, Chaberloi, Chanti, Ėrstkhoi (Karabulak), Malkhi, Nokhchmekhkakhoi, Sharoi, Shatoi and T'erloi, are descendants of as many brothers.⁹ Another has it that the first *tukhum*, composed of a score or so proto-Vainakh, formed in the Nashkha area in the Caucasus Mountains, and that other tribes swarmed off to give rise to the Vainakh nation.

Tukhums were stable, autonomous and fairly insular structures in terms of territory and interaction with other tribes. In the mid-nineteenth century, the nine *tukhums* comprised about three-quarters of Chechen *taips*. Everyday issues were deliberated by the council of elders composed of equal representatives of all *taips*. Members of a *taip* were generally not allowed to marry within the clan, but were obliged to seek marriage partners from without the *taip*, but within the *tukhum*. This system ensured that despite strife within them, *tukhums*, among themselves, were on the best of terms. The wisdom of this arrangement manifested itself several times in Chechen history with the entire nation standing as one in the face of many an external foe. *Tukhums* were leaderless in normal conditions, but in case of external danger, leaders would be quickly chosen and empowered to deal with it.

Taip and aul

Taips are sub-units of *tukhums*, and are of various sizes. Members of the same *taip* claim descent from a common ancestor, and are considered blood relatives and *uzdens* of equal rank. Each clan had a distinct name derived from its founder, occupied a definite territory, but not necessarily in a single area, and possessed an eponymous mountain. A *taip* consisted of one or more villages, and as such clan loyalties could cut across geographical divides.¹⁰ The ancestral land of a *taip* was held as sacred and was intimately associated with the Chechen identity and modes of conduct; it was, amongst other things, the resting place of the progenitors of the clan. It was delimited by the clan's potent symbols: cemetery, tower and sanctuary. Members of the clan would have defended it with all their might, willingly sacrificing their lives in the process.

One of the means of perpetuating clan loyalty was teaching the young their familial histories. Traditionally, a Chechen man was expected to know the names and places of origin of his paternal ancestors going back for several generations. Some women could also trace their ancestors in this way, whilst some keener people could recite their maternal ancestors as well. This tradition, which is not uniquely Chechen-Ingush but generally North Caucasian, means, incidentally, that large-scale territorial disputes in the North Caucasus among the indigenes should in theory be resolvable, since all parties know whose ancestors lived where and when.¹¹

Each *taip* had its own elected council of elders, court of justice and its own version of customs and traditions.¹² The civilian chief (*kh'alkhancha*, or *thamda*)¹³ chaired the council of the elders and managed mundane affairs, whereas the military leader (*baechcha*) was called upon to lead the men in military action. The size of a clan was a function of its period of existence, barring catastrophes and incidents of swarming.

The number of *taips* has been varying. In the early nineteenth century, there were 59 *taips*, increasing to 100 by its middle years. One mechanism for generating new *taips* was

for a large sub-clan (*gar*) to be ambitious enough to break off and claim the title and trappings of a *taip*. Nowadays, there are about 170 *taips*. Some *taips* do not belong to any *tukhum*, most probably being remnants of extinct tribes.

Vainakh society was known for its tolerance of foreigners who took refuge or just elected to live in their land, allowing them to join the existing clan system or form clans of their own, adopting the local languages, customs and values in the process. The origin of some of these *taips* could be discerned from their names. Although *taips* acted independently in peaceful times, all clans and tribes banded together in face of an external danger.

Auls, or villages, varied in size from a few families up to a few dozen. An *aul* (*èvla* in Chechen: *aka p-ha*) could accommodate a whole *taip*, or be one of several settlements of the same *taip*. The village elders (*dai*: sing. *daa*) played a crucial role in maintaining stability and order in their communities.

Vaer, gar and neqe

Sub-divisions of the *taip* include, in descending order, *vaer*, *gar* (properly: *gaara*), and *neqe* (properly: *neegee*). A *gar* is a number of *neqes* forming a lineage. A *neqe* is a group of households sharing the same surname, usually deriving from the name of the fourth or earlier ancestor.

Dooezal, or ts'a

The basic social unit was the extended family, *dooezal*, consisting of the parents and the families of their male offspring, usually comprising three generations, with four not being very uncommon. They lived in a large house or several residences surrounded by a stone or mud wall with a large gate. The granary and cattle-sheds were located in the spacious yard. Married daughters always lived with their spouses, usually in a different village, as it was unthinkable for a son-in-law to lodge with his wife's parents. Brothers shared the same plot of land and each household took what it needed from the common stock.

Family matters

Traditional customs regulated familial relations, which had always been characterized as being very strong and built on the sacred principle of equality. Each individual had his sets of rights and responsibilities, and all treated each other with dignity and respect. It was considered unseemly for the man of the house to interfere in womanly affairs. There was a strict hierarchy within the family, though the elders and the young ones had reciprocal feelings of responsibility for each other. The former were tasked with keeping family relations intact and fostering harmony and understanding. Children had congenial relationships with their grandparents and were taught to venerate and obey them. They referred to their grandfather as 'big father', and to their grandmother as 'mother'. If children could sometimes get away with disobeying their mother, such behaviour was not acceptable with respect to the grandparents. The patriarch (*dooezalan daa*) had the final say in important and contentious issues.

Tiffs among children and womenfolk were settled by the eldest male or female member of the family. It was in bad taste to pay excessive attention to children's petty quarrels. If someone hurt the feelings of her children, a woman would not normally complain to her husband, but instead consulted one of his relatives. The elders were in general very considerate towards their daughters-in-law. A paternal uncle had a special relationship with his nephews and nieces, being most attentive to their requests and needs, more so than to those of his own children.

According to an ancient custom, parents, in their old age, were lodged in an adjacent residence built for them by their sons, who would spare no effort or expense to provide means of comfort for the elders and would make sure that their needs were meticulously attended to.¹⁴ The first thing that sons did upon return from work was to check up on their parents and make sure that all their needs were catered for. A good daughter-in-law started her morning by cleaning her in-laws' house before attending to her own household chores.

One peculiarity of Chechen society that reflected the strength (and weight) of kinship relations was that a man or a woman with a relative in another clan treated analogous members of that clan as if they were relatives of the same status. For example, a man showed all female members of his mother's clan (usually different to his own) the same respect and consideration that he would show to his maternal aunt.

National and local councils

In normal times, clans and villages were autonomous, governed by elected councils, which arbitrated local lawsuits, decided on war and peace issues, entered into negotiations with outside parties, and formed or broke unions with other clans. Council verdicts were final and decisions were binding. The council of elders (*akhsaks*) was a national council with equal representations from all *taips* invoked in extraordinary circumstances, such as in response to outside military threats. The *mekhk kkhel* (state council) was the national legislative assembly whose members were representatives of town (*ghaala kkhel*) and village councils (*èvla kkhel*, or *yurt kkhel*). Its laws were drawn up mainly from the precepts of *nokhchalla*. In the more ancient past, issues relating to women's rights, and those relating to military ethics, among others, were within its jurisdiction, in addition to the regulation of land holdings and commerce. The mandate of a military council ended by the expiration of the threat. These councils stand to regain their essential role in post-war Chechnya, and could even play a role in resolving the present conflict, if they are allowed to do so, as they still enjoy widespread respect.

***Taip-tukhum* models: ideals and reality**

The model that has just been depicted, which is best preserved in the mountain regions, gives an ideal structure of Chechen society, with internal modes of interaction based on customary law and the tenets of Sufism. Although the constructs explain many aspects of Chechen society and its response to internal and external events, at some stage of analysis need arises for a more realistic representation to account for some anomalies. As was

pointed out by A.Lieven (1998), traditional constructs are cracking at the seams, and the whole traditional social system has been undergoing a long period of transformation, not to say decline. In recent times, the 1944 deportation and the two latest wars have undermined some social mechanisms, some say irreparably. One salient aspect of this deterioration is that the authority of the clan elders is not as binding as it used to be.

It would seem that unions of extended families inhabiting contiguous areas are competing with *taips* as vertical social units and are in some instances supplanting them, especially when they are scattered in disconnected locations. Neighbourly and marriage relations among families of different clans have gained importance, as clan exclusiveness has become less pronounced.

All nine *tukhums* had historically presented a united front against foreign invaders, but in the Russian case, the protracted conflict, now in its fourth century, and active Russian attempts to undermine Chechen society have led to some breakdown in national solidarity. Lieven, in the course of his discourse on Chechen society, draws attention to a Russian government briefing paper of 1994 in which the Federal Counter-Intelligence Service (FSK) gave its conception of the social structure:

The key to understanding Chechen politics and society was the Chechen system of...teips. These [are] largely closed, internally cohesive and mutually exclusive building blocks, which take hidden but mainly united political decisions, and which give their allegiances as teips to different political causes and leaders.... The Chechen national revolution of 1991 [was] a revolt of excluded teips against the 'Tyerekhskoi' clan, [which] had come to dominate the local Communist and state structures.... [This] caused burning resentment among other groups.¹⁵

When Dudaev assumed power, the Tyerekhskoi were deposed, and subsequently they formed the main opposition in the North. The (tribal) power vacuum was taken up by an alliance of mainly Dudaev's small Èrstkhói *tukhum* and that of his principal allies, the conservative Malkhi. In the first years of independence, *taips* were restructured and engaged through their various councils in active lobbying of state institutions. The chaos that characterized this period was in part caused by tribal jealousies and jockeying for power. However, when the Russians attacked in December 1994, almost all southern Chechens stood as one in defence of the homeland, confounding the Russians, who were severely mauled in the first stages of the assault.¹⁶ At the microlevel, knowledge of the *taip/tukhum* affiliation of an individual, and that of his/her spouse, would afford an extra dimension in understanding (some aspects of) his/her attitudes and behaviour—a step closer to 'empathy', as it were. However, it is beyond the scope of this work to delve deeper into the matter, but suffice it to say that there are only a few hundred Chechen 'family names', so the task of identification is not prohibitive.

According to Lieven (1998:343), the Sufi fraternities are largely hereditary and are closely linked to kinship groups. The assumption that the *taip* leadership is roughly the same as that of the Sufis, or else they are closely connected, reduces the complexity of description of the social system introduced by the Sufi factor.

Land and property

Land had always been scarce in mountainous Chechnya. After the expulsion of the foreign feudal lords, each *taip* claimed a definite area of land. At first land was owned and cultivated collectively, but later, although common ownership was maintained, individual cultivation of land became the norm. Land was distributed by drawing lots and demarcated by stones adorned by special marks taken from the local place of worship. Land disputes were very rare on account of the extended collective and personal memories, and because the delimitation of land was accompanied by oathmaking rituals. Chechen women had the right to own property.

In traditional villages, land was divided amongst kinsmen equally. The bigger the group, the larger the piece of land it was allotted. This led to congregations of family households. If someone's wealth were deemed to have exceeded a set limit, the village council would confiscate the excess and give it to other, less fortunate members of the community. The Chechens vehemently opposed Soviet nationalization and collectivization, as they meant disruption of their traditional land allocation schemes.

Family and clan honour

Each member of a family had the onerous responsibility of upholding family honour, for a *faux pas* by any of them would bring disgrace to all. The parents had high stakes riding on the proper upbringing of their children, the father tasked with imposing punishment on the errant ones. The Chechens never believed in fatalism, a nefarious creed in Eastern lands. Every person had to bear the consequences of his/her actions, answering to society, the forefathers and to the young generation. A good deed, on the other hand, reflected positively on the family, particularly the father. The spirit of positive competitiveness, *yah*, was vigorously inculcated in the young ones, with each vying to be better than the rest. However, they were also taught to protect the weak and refrain from picking quarrels with others.

Work ethic and inculcation of discipline

Tales and legends abound extolling toil as a virtue. The Vainakh work ethic was centred around the pragmatic concept of *haenal* (literally: 'honesty, integrity'), meaning roughly that prosperity was a function of hard work. Young children were inculcated with *haenal* and were expected to do their share in the household. They were also taught to appreciate the value of wealth earned the hard way.

Martial, though democratic, rule was established in the Nashkha Mountains. Legends abound depicting how iron discipline was inculcated. The council of elders would check battle readiness by sounding the alarm unexpectedly. All heeded the call instantly, as he who would arrive last was punished by being pushed down a cliff. A touching story has a cadet away wooing his fiancée at another village when one night the alarm was sounded. One of the absentee's considerate friends hid in a thicket near the marshalling area and did not declare his own arrival. When the suitor finally made his appearance and was

about to be doomed, his friend came out to be pronounced last. However, when the truth of what had happened was revealed, both cadets were spared punishment, in a rare display of clemency.

What role for individuality?

A Chechen would sacrifice his life on the altar of the fatherland, and would die upholding his principles and convictions. Heroic selflessness, or sheer foolhardiness, depending on your perspective, is firmly etched on the Chechen psyche.¹⁷ Upholding one's duty and honour with respect to one's family and clan had always been one of the highest priorities of a Chechen. Obeying decisions by councils was obligatory, even if it meant enduring hardship. Yet, life is not all about lofty ideals and fancy notions, and continual national threats, and the Vainakh, despite their clannishness, emphasized individuality, considering the ultimate good as that which elevated the individual and at the same time upheld the honour of the family and ancestors. A Chechen had the inalienable democratic right to voice his opinions at council meetings, and for the most part of his life, he acted firmly as an individual, going about his usual business.

Exogamy and endogamy

To ensure the good health of their offspring, a prerequisite in the harsh mountainous environment, the Chechens tabooed not only close-relative marriages on both sides, but also interdicted association with any blood relative, which included all members of a clan. This meant that a man was constrained to seek his marriage partner from outside the clan, but from within the tribe: *taips* were strictly exogamous, whereas *tukhums* were endogamous entities. These traditional values are still adhered to even among city dwellers. Sources are not unanimous as to the prescribed degree of consanguineous removedness between potential marriage partners. It could be that there is no uniform rule espoused by all *tukhums*. However, at least three generations is the span of disconnectedness commonly agreed upon. Some *taips* of 'foreign' origin do not proscribe close kin marriages, this custom hinting at non-Caucasian or Daghestani origin. Whereas marriage outside the group by Chechen women was frowned upon and oftentimes punished, a man had the right to thus pick his spouse.

Status of women

There are some indications that women enjoyed high status in the olden days. A 'state daughter' (*mekhk yo'*) embodying leadership qualities was elected for an indefinite term, until another was chosen. Women were expected to act as guardians of traditions and culture. Men had to go out of their way to uphold the honour of womenfolk. Etiquette prescribed that a man dismounted before entering the village where the relatives of his mother or wife lived, as a mark of deference. Lack of respect for one's mother and her relatives was a total disgrace to a man. Curses involving a man's female relations were

anathema in Chechen culture, and would have incurred a vehement instant response, the Chechens not known to tarry in redressing insults. The phrase ‘mother tongue’ is used to indicate decent behaviour and ‘mother milk’ as a reprimand for objectionable conduct.

A woman could stop a raging fight by merely dropping her kerchief between the warring parties, or by sending one of her children holding a mirror to face the fighters with. This pan-Caucasian female prerogative seems to be a relic of the matriarchal era. G.Wlastov (1856) cites a Chechen legend in which a matriarch managed to put an end to a rampant fight between two bands of males, and thus became acknowledged as a peacemaker. According to Wlastov, such episodes indicate that Chechen women enjoyed a higher status in the ancient past. If a man touched the hem of a woman’s dress, then he was considered under her protection, and as such could not be harmed. Suckling at a woman’s breast, or at least going through the motion of doing so, rendered him a ‘milk-son’ of hers, with the privileges and interdictions of kinship relations coming into effect instantaneously.

In some respects, women had a subordinate position in traditional Chechen society, and they did not participate fully in the social life of the *taip*, for example they were interdicted from voting in council meetings. In traditional settings a Chechen woman was not allowed to eat with her husband and she was not allowed to travel unless she was accompanied by him or a male member of his family. She had to walk behind him, not as a mark of inferiority, but for her own protection from the vagaries of mountain terrain. The prevalence of this custom to this day is an example of a practice losing its utility but preserving its form. Nevertheless, *adat* afforded women some protection. Russian sociologists had been harping on the theme of the inferior social status of Chechen women, again expending considerable energy on discrediting yet another aspect of the Chechen way of life.

Extramarital relations were punished severely by the community. If a man had an unlawful relation with a married woman, he had to pay ten cows before being banished for good from the community. A similar offence with an unmarried woman or a widow was penalized by the payment of seven cows. If a man took his wife’s life, he had to pay 85 cows to her family if the marriage was childless and only 12 otherwise.

Rape and sexual assault are still taboo subjects in Chechen society. A man known to have committed either of these vile acts was slain instantly by the woman’s kin when and if he was caught. On top of being traumatized physically and psychologically, married rape victims were also likely to be divorced. The family of a raped unmarried woman kept silent about the fact, so as not to compromise her marriage prospects.

Slavery

Although the institution of slavery existed at some stage in Chechen society, it did not play a significant part in the latter Middle Ages, as it did among the neighbouring Circassians, due to the dismantling of the caste system and relative isolation. Slaves were mainly taken from war captives or visitors with no bona fide hosts, and were mainly tasked with agricultural work and menial jobs. Some were redeemed (for ransom) and others sold to Ottoman harems. Slavery was officially abolished in 1864.

Friendship and sworn brotherhood

Friendship was a sacred institution sealed by vows of fidelity for good. A Chechen would equally stand by his sworn friend (*dui bi''na dottagh*) in the good times and in his hour of need. The duties to one's friends were at least as exacting as those towards one's relatives. One was duty-bound to show courtesy towards one's friends at all times, going out of one's way not to slight them at all. A friendship could be consecrated in three ways: by mutual pledges in front of witnesses; sharing a bowl of milk into which a gold ring had been immersed so as not to 'rust' the relationship; or by mixing blood from cuts made on the fingers, to symbolize a consanguineous union.¹⁸ Gifts were exchanged upon completion of the rituals, and the good news was promulgated. As such, blood brothers formed close-knit social groups. In contrast to the one-to-one relationship fostered by sworn brotherhood, foster-brotherhood related all members of the families of both concerned parties. A classic example of a sworn friendship was that between Sado, the epitome of the 'good' Chechen, and Leo Tolstoy, the token of friendship being an immaculate (and still preserved) sword presented by Sado to his Russian friend.

Conversely, Chechens would become implacable enemies to those who antagonize them and then some.¹⁹ It is to the detriment of both the Chechens and Russians that the latter remain so woefully ignorant of the Chechen conception of friendship and enmity. Had Russia played its cards right, it could have gained Chechnya as a friend and ally and spared both nations the mortal embrace.

Charity and mutual aid

The closeness of social ties and the difficult mountain conditions gave rise to a complex system of mutual help and charity called '*belkhi*'. These traditions, which were prevalent all over the North Caucasus, played a role in fostering social cohesion. Farmers banded together to do strenuous chores in rugged terrain. They would tie themselves altogether with one rope to cut the grass on sheer slopes. If a calamity befell a family, say the loss of its bread-winner, people offered succour, and if an old person needed a hard job done, neighbours would rush to do it for him. Men, women and even children would pool their resources to build houses for the needy and to fix those destroyed in war or by accident, with the affairs splashed with merriment in the form of song and dance and other amusements.

Intricate etiquette regulated the mechanisms of offering and accepting assistance, to save face. The greeting ritual had an embedded help-offering component, which was not a mere formal adjunct. There was also a corpus of sayings exhorting people to mutual assistance. In modern times, *belkhi* was invoked time and time again in the construction of cultural and public infrastructures. It is hoped that this spirit would be instrumental in restoring peacetime Chechnya.

Chechen names and Russian patronymic

Chechens use the name of their immediate ancestors as surnames.²⁰ Personal names mainly derive from native and Arabic/Islamic cultures, with Russian names being very rare. The *taip* names, on the other hand, have remained intact because the *taip* system works at a level beyond officialdom. As was the case with other peoples under Russian hegemony, the Chechens were given Russianized forms of their family names by suffixing the nearest Russian form of the original Chechen name with the Russian patronymic *ov/ova (ev/eva)*. Thus, each person would have two names, one used in the official sphere and one in the ethnic domain. It is noteworthy that the combination of using ancestral names for surnames and the Russian patronymic suffix has resulted in many Chechen family names losing their native character. In general, the Northwest Caucasians have clung more tenaciously to their ancient patronyms than their Northeastern cousins, the use of the Russian patronymic notwithstanding.

It is a bit puzzling as to why, for their fierce independence and rejection of the Russian ethos, the Chechens have kept the Russianized forms of their names, even after escaping the Soviet yoke.²¹ The legislation of the Russian Federation does not limit the rights of persons belonging to national minorities in using their surnames. Specifically, the Federal Law on the Civil Status Acts gives persons over 14 the right to change their name and/or surname.

Plain vs. mountain tribes

Since the latest descent of the Chechens to the piedmont and plains as a result of overcrowding and the onset of a global cooling period in the sixteenth century, there has been a cumulative differentiation between mountain and plain folk. In general, the former have clung more to their ancient ways, whereas the latter have been more influenced by neighbouring peoples. Before the upheavals of the 1990s, there were about 100 mountain and some 70 plain *taips*. During the latter days of the Soviet period, the plain *taips* enjoyed a virtual monopoly on high positions in the Chechen-Ingush ASSR. Dudaev and Maskhadov (who belongs to the 'Aliroi *taip* of the Nokhchmekhkakhoi *tukhum*) were supported mainly by the independent-minded but poor mountain *taips*, whereas the anti-Dudaev coalition was based on plain *taips*. The former predominated in independent Chechnya, while the latter formed the opposition.

Russification and Sovietization

During the Soviet years, the Communists did their best to destroy the traditional social structures, and used procrustean methods to impose their ethos and enforce uniformity. Communist ideology had it that the *taip* organization was unlawful and contradicted the philosophy of the state. All traditional laws of the mountaineers were banned and the Soviet legal system was imposed, without taking local sensitivities into consideration.

However, the Soviets had only limited success in undermining traditional Chechen society. Chechens in general devised ways to circumvent Russian conventions and resorted to the ancient laws to settle disputes and defend and claim their rights.

The process of urbanization of the Chechens had been slow right until independence. In 1926, only 1 per cent of Chechens in Chechnya lived in urban centres. In 1970, the number went up to 22 per cent, about a fifth of the urban population in the republic. Even as late as 1989, more than 70 per cent of Chechens lived in rural areas, creating a surplus and disgruntled work force. However, starting in 1991, large numbers of Chechens left their villages and settled in urban centres in the hope of making a better living for themselves.

In Soviet times, a prerequisite for an ambitious Chechen to reach a top military or political position was to be married to Russian woman, Dudaev's rise to the highest echelons in the air force affording a case in point. Chechen men take Russian women as girlfriends and spouses as this gives them more acceptance in Russian society and permits them to be registered in Russian cities.

Deportation

Parents shied away from talking about Chechnya and things Chechen to their children. Very few children were told about their history, especially the deportation. This created the paradox of a generation that was a victim of state atrocity but loyal to that state. Many of the survivors went into denial, absolving the authorities of guilt. The experience brought the Chechen nation closer together, facilitating the adoption of fateful collective resolutions to redress the humiliation and to compensate the horrific loss of life. The already steely national character was made firmer still. The internal Chechen universe expanded to uncharted frontiers of human experience.

Nevertheless, children of exile were raised with consummate care, which allowed them to fit into society upon return, instead of harbouring feelings of resentment against the system. Many Chechens joined the Red Army. Writers, artists, musicians and academicians made their mark, contributing to national and Soviet cultures. In the relative freedom of Gorbachev's *glasnost* years, the story of the deportation unfolded, to the horror of the nation. The delayed resentment hit the young generation with full force. This led to feelings of the need to extricate the nation from the Russian hold.

Repercussions of war

The last two wars had horrendous consequences on the social life of the Chechens, including high unemployment, instability of social structures and destruction of civil society and traditional values. Children and young people were particularly badly affected both physically and psychologically. Hundreds of thousands of people fled their homes to escape the ravages of war. The creation of a pro-Moscow police force resulted in internal conflict in Chechen society which threatened to turn into civil war.²²

There are two opposing views on the effect of the war on the *tukhum-taip* social system. According to a number of Chechen commentators, the mass exodus of towns-

people to the countryside caused them to rediscover ties with their kin in their villages of origin and hence led to the strengthening of their tribal allegiances.²³ Contrariwise, in the estimation of the reporter V. Batuev the war exposed certain weaknesses in the command structure of the *tukhums*, which diminished their influence on the course of events.²⁴

The war in Chechnya has had a profound effect on gender roles in Chechen society. Because many Chechen men have had either to take up arms or to go into hiding, women have been obliged to take up the slack, acting as protectors of and providers for their families and even assuming leading roles in society, becoming, among other things, newspaper editors-in-chief, heads of important utilities and government spokespersons.²⁵ This has created severe familial strain and resentment among men, who have become embittered by their diminished roles and helplessness. It is no wonder that some men have chosen to join the ranks of the nationalists to reassert their manhood, and to earn some cash. All this means that the basic social unit is under threat, the Chechen sociologist Abdul-Khakim Sultygov even suggesting a possible reversion to matriarchy.

7

Economy

Traditionally, lowland Chechens were grain farmers and agriculturists, whereas the highlanders raised fine-fleeced sheep and cattle. Bee-keeping was initially practised in the wild, but the business was later domesticated. Broadcloth, felt rugs and clothes were made from wool. Ropes were made from horsehair or strips of leather. Chechen master craftsmen manufactured wagons, water-mills and other sophisticated machinery. Chechens built bridges and dug irrigation canals. The Chechen horse was known for its hardiness, stamina and staying power. According to the nineteenth-century Russian General Velyaminov, a Chechen horse, if specially trained, could carry its rider some 160 km in one summer day (J.F.Baddeley 1940, I:121). Velyaminov was also full of praise for Chechen horsemen who were ‘very superior in many respects both to our regular cavalry and the Cossacks. They are all but born on horseback.’ A horse fair used to be held biannually in Grozny, which attracted horse-sellers and merchants from many parts of the Caucasus, including Cossacks and Russians, and from far-away Persia.

Prior to the advent of the Russians and Cossacks, the plains of northwest Chechnya were under the control of Kabardian princes. The Chechen population in the area became vassals of the Kabardian princes, as were the Balkars, Karachais and Ossetians. Chechen mountain stock-breeders came down to the plains for winter pasture. At the time of first contacts with the Russians, the lowlands were wealthy and produced surplus grain, which was exchanged for highland animal produce, such as wool and eggs. It is this dependence of upper Chechnya on the lowlands that the Russians exploited in their attempt to starve the mountaineers into submission during the Russian-Caucasian War. Chechnya, being the granary of the NE Caucasus, maintained the state of Shamil and paid the cost of the war.

There are still extant legends that tell of how the Vainakh mastered forging metals. Scissors, domestic knives, hearth flails, cauldrons, sickles and other implements of economy had been produced since ancient times.

Tsarist period

After the formal annexation of Chechnya, the Russian government confiscated large areas of the country and allocated them to Cossack settlements and distributed plots of land to high-ranking officials. The local elite were allotted large tracts of choice lands and steppe pastures, whilst ordinary folk were reduced to subsistence economy, living off mainly small plots rented from local and Cossack landlords, using primitive agricultural methods, modern machinery being affordable only by kulaks (well-off peasant farmers). Many villagers were obliged to become farm labourers and some left for urban centres in

search of work. Chechnya was still a backward region at the end of the nineteenth century.

In the first half of the nineteenth century, oil was extracted from locally dug wells using leather buckets. However, industrial exploitation started in 1893, when a well was constructed at Grozny, which soon turned into an important industrial centre. In 1913, oil-prospecting reached fever pitch as Russian and foreign companies scampered to exploit the seemingly endless gush using cheap local labour. Crude and wasteful methods were used to extract oil, which was processed in shoddy refineries, kerosene and black oil being the principal products. The oil industry was devastated during the Civil War, and was only restored in the early 1920s. Other important enterprises included small metal-working factories serving mainly the oil sector, and the food-processing industry. The Sunzha Valley, the main industrial centre where major oil deposits were located, had been off limits for Chechens until 1917.

Early Soviet years

After the devastation of the Civil War, the 1920s was a period of restoration and development of the national economy in Chechnya. In a short time, many enterprises were rebuilt and expanded, and new ones were established. Development of industry was accompanied by growth of number of workers, especially among the Chechens. Chechnya played a significant role in fuelling the industrialization of the USSR, thanks to its huge oil reserves. It was only second to Baku in volume of production, but produced more than half the benzine in the USSR.

In the 1930s, the mainstays of the economy were agriculture, livestock-breeding and the petroleum industry. Chechnya became the most advanced industrial republic in the Northern Caucasus. Major industries included oil and natural gas production, refineries, production of chemicals, manufacture of oil-extracting equipment, food-processing and light and cottage industries. The abundance of curative mineral waters led to the creation of a health resort industry. However, until 1990 there had been a limit imposed on the number of tourists that could visit the republic, and therefore the development of the industry was not taken to the limit. Despite the discovery of new oil fields at Malgobek and Gorskaya, there was a sharp decline in oil production. Chechnya, however, remained an important centre of oil-refining, oil-machinery production and the petrochemical industry.

In the early 1940s, Chechnya produced 3–4 million tons of oil annually. There was a marked decline in oil extraction following the exile of Chechens and Ingush in 1944, as many experienced technicians and engineers were abruptly removed from the scene with no adequate replacements. Production peaked in 1971, when almost 22 million tons were extracted, and thereafter it gradually dropped.

Economic development was accelerated by large doses of capital investment, which grew from one five-year plan to the next. For the period 1918–1990, more than 12 billion roubles in total were invested in large agricultural works, development of transport and communication, the social sphere, construction of new industrial enterprises and refurbishment of existing ones.

Despite the richness of the land, the Chechen-Ingush ASSR always figured among the poorest regions of the Russian SSR in economic indices. For example, the national income of the republic never exceeded two-thirds of the average for Russia, indicating that it gave more than it received in economic terms.

Soviet industries¹

Oil, gas and chemical industry

The oil and gas industry had been the backbone of Chechen industrial economy for more than century. It is estimated that more than 400 million tons of oil were extracted in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In 1991, only slightly more than 4 million tons were produced in Chechnya, representing about half of the national industrial production in the republic. The oil refining industry used to employ some 25,000 workers, a considerable chunk of the Grozny workforce. Production reached a peak of 20 million tons just before the collapse of the Soviet Union. During independence years, production went down dramatically due to lack of maintenance and the Russian blockade. The oil and gas industries were developed conjointly. In the period 1928–1990, about 80 billion cubic metres of gas were extracted. Gas distribution infrastructure was laid to supply cheap energy for industrial and domestic uses. The Grozny State Petroleum Institute, which was opened in 1929, had eight departments in its heyday offering 16 majors to more than 5,000 students.

The first chemical complex was inaugurated in 1954. The republic used to produce large quantities of phenol, acetone, synthetic ethyl alcohol, polyethylene and synthetic tannin, and it was the largest producer of liquid and solid paraffin in the Soviet Union. Other products included detergents, oil paints, varnish, linoleum and consumer goods. These products were until 1992 exported to other Soviet regions and abroad, mainly to the USA, Austria, Germany, Sweden, France, Switzerland, Spain and Finland.

Power industry

Until 1917, there had been no large power stations in Chechnya. There were some small-scale diesel electrical installations built in the 1890s at oil wells and oil refineries, but these belonged to private concerns and joint-stock companies. However, the rapid development of the oil industry gave rise to a need for a support power industry. In 1929, the power station Komintern was inaugurated, at the time the largest in the North Caucasus. After the Second World War a number of thermal power stations were built. Pre-war per capita production of electric power was larger than that of Japan, France and Italy. All rural facilities were electrified, and the share of agriculture in power consumption increased steadily. Large thermal power stations of the republic were connected to the North Caucasian power grid. With the sharp reduction of oil and gas production, there grew a need to consider alternative energy sources for the national economy. Geothermal energy is both abundant and cheap. Studies show that it is possible to extract 40–50 million cubic metres of thermal water annually, allowing the saving of more than a million tons of fuel.

Mechanical engineering

After 1917, large machine-building and metal-working industries were established in Chechnya. At first enterprises were concentrated in Grozny, but later they spread out to other cities and towns of the republic. There were more than 30 enterprises, including 15 machine-building factories, manufacturing a wide range of products, including machinery for the oil, processing and chemical industries, tractor trailers, garage equipment, transformer substations, conveyor systems, automation systems, electrographic machines, photocopiers, electrical drilling machines, radio receivers, medical equipment and precision instruments. These products were in high demand both inside and outside the USSR. Other activities included metal-cutting and mechanical repairs.

Light industry

Light industry was on a small scale in comparison with other industries in the republic. Products included clothes, footwear, knitted wear, textile haberdashery, linen, hardware and crafts. The largest enterprises were a shoe factory and sewing workshops in Grozny. Primary materials for the industry were either local raw materials or by-products of other industries. The 4,000 tons of wool and 1.5 million sheepskins produced annually were processed outside the republic due to lack of facilities. Although traditional manufactories were capable of meeting local demand for some consumer goods, the republic had to import many others. For the period 1985–1990, production of commodities accounted for only a quarter of total industrial output of the republic. In 1992, there were 143 enterprises engaged in light industry. With proper planning and investment, light industry could play a considerable role in economic recovery in post-war Chechnya.

Building industry

The building industry developed on a massive scale after the Second World War. Mechanized brick-works were established in Grozny, Gudermes and other cities. Sand, gravel and rubble stones were extracted at mechanized quarries. There was a large factory of ferro-concrete designs in Grozny, and in Argun there was a house-building combine and a factory of ferro-concrete designs for agriculture, whose products were exported all over the North Caucasus. Before 1994, Chiri-Yurt was the second largest centre of production of cement in the Caucasus after Novorossiisk. Despite having rich sources of raw materials, such as limestone, plaster, marl, clay, building and quartz sand, gravel and rubble, the Chechen-Ingush ASSR used to import many building materials.

Wood and wood-working industries

Forests in Chechnya occupy a fifth of its territory and consist mainly of beech, hornbeam, plane and oak. Despite the poor quality of most of the tree stock, the forest industry contributed well to the national economy. Enterprises cultivated and exploited wood for the furniture industry. Mechanized felling of trees took place in the Black Mountains, Urus-Martan, Shatoi, Achkhoy-Martan and Veden. Large-scale wood-processing

enterprises included the Terek and Alkhan-Kala combines, which produced furniture, parquet, plywood, wood-shaving plates and so on.

The contribution of the wood-working industry to the national economy did not remain constant. In pre-revolutionary years, wood served as the main building material and fuel. In the 1920s, the wood-working industry became a major contributor to the national economy. However, its share in the overall industrial output gradually diminished with the development of heavy industry in the 1930s. Nevertheless, the volume of wood consumed grew steadily with the rise in demand from the private sector. For 75 years after 1917, more than 20 million cubic metres of wood were cut down. Over-exploitation threatened to deplete this precious resource, as the annual volume of used timber reached 130,000 cubic metres. In 1989, a ban was imposed on forest logging, except for medicinal purposes.

Agriculture and food-processing industry

Almost a third of the area of Chechen-Ingushetia is arable. Radical restructuring of the agricultural sector, aka collectivization, was undertaken in the early years of Soviet power. Privately owned plots of land were replaced by *kolkhozes* and *sovkhazes*, large collective and state farms, respectively. According to government sources, by 1938 over 400,000 hectares of land were incorporated into the *kolkhoz-sovkhaz* system, including almost 93 per cent of peasant holdings. The area of arable land during the Soviet period increased by 1.6 times and the area under irrigation by more than 50 times through the construction of dams, canals, drainage systems and water pipelines. All districts had irrigated lands except for mountainous Vedeno and Shali. In 1956, the sown area was 429,000 hectares. Animal husbandry was a vital sector represented mainly by poultry- and sheep-farming and the production of wool. A new kind of sheep with superior quality, high-yield wool was bred locally. The state farm system was not scrapped after 1991, as it was in harmony with the tribal structure, where people of the same *taip* worked together in the same farm.

The major crops were corn, wheat, barley, rice, fodder grass (43 per cent), potatoes, vegetables, grapes, sugar beet, sunflower, cotton, tobacco, alfalfa seeds and horticultural produce. About 300,000 tons of grain were produced in 2001. Agricultural products included honey, sugar and flour. Vineyards occupied some 10 per cent of arable land. Most wine-making enterprises were located in the Naur District. Best-known wine brands were 'Naurskoe Desertnoe' and 'Terek', and famous cognac names included 'Vainakh' and 'Èrzi'.

The large food-processing industry played a significant role in Chechen economy, making up, as it was, 33 per cent of manufactured consumer goods and 15 per cent of total industrial production in 1990. The industry had tracked the steady growth of raw produce through the early 1990s. Several enterprises were established for processing grains, grapes, fruits, vegetables and livestock products. There were three large processing factories in Grozny, Assa and Samashki, producing canned fruits and vegetables, marinades, tomato and fruit juices, preserves and jam. In total, more than 260 million jars and cans of a wide variety of food-stuffs were produced annually.

The bakery Khleboprom, which was established in 1992, used to produce 20 tons of bread and confectionery items daily. There was a large meat-packing plant in Argun.

Milk was processed at a plant in Grozny. There were creameries in Sunzha and Naur, and a cheese-dairy in the Shelkovsky District. Other enterprises included a macaroni factory, wine factories and a sugar-processing plant. Specifically in rural areas there were factories that satisfied the basic needs of the population in bread, sausage products, soft drinks, juices and basic confectionery items.

Fishing had never been an important industry, Chechnya being landlocked, and the mountaineers not particularly enamoured of fish dishes. The limited stock of fish, mainly trout, was drawn from rivers and lakes. Pollution and destructive methods of fishing had been threatening the piscine stocks in the republic. Some of the fish of the Caspian Sea, like sturgeon, stellate sturgeon, salmon and sterlet, spawn in the Terek, and can be found right up to Mozdok. Only small fish live beyond.

Transport

There are two main highways that traverse Chechnya, the M29 Rostov—Baku and Mozdok—Kizliar. The former, also called ‘Caucasus Highway’, passes through Prokhladny, Beslan, Nazran, Grozny, Argun, Gudermes, then on to Khasav-Yurt and Baku. The latter goes through Kalinovskaya, Chervlyonnaya and Kargalinskaya in northern Chechnya, then on to Kizliar and Astrakhan. There is a road that goes across the Caucasus Mountains connecting Vedeno to Botlikh in Dagestan. In all, there are more than 3,000 km of main roads in Chechnya. The three main bridges that link the left bank of the Terek to the rest of the republic are at Ichsherskaya, Chervlyonnaya and Grebenskaya.

Grozny is connected by rail to the industrial centres of Russia and to ports on the Black and Caspian Seas through the Rostov—Baku and Rostov—Astrakhan main lines. The total length of railway lines inside the republic is slightly more than 300 km. The two railway lines that traverse the country fork off at Prokhladny in Kabardino Balkaria to merge again at Gudermes. The Rostov—Astrakhan line passes through Mozdok in North Ossetia, Kalinovskaya, Chervlyonnaya, a short distance after which it branches off to northern and southern routes. The former carries on to Kargalinskaya, Kizliar in Dagestan and then to Astrakhan, while the latter crosses the Terek and the confluence of the Sunzha and Argun and connects with the Rostov—Baku line at Gudermes. The Rostov—Baku line goes through Beslan in North Ossetia, Nazran in Ingushetia, Grozny and then Gudermes, whence it continues to Khasav-Yurt, Makhachkala and then on to Baku.

The airport at Grozny, which, prior to 1991, had been used only for internal flights in the Soviet Union, was renamed ‘Sheikh Mansur Airport’ after independence. It was partially destroyed in the first war, but was later restored. The national carrier, Ashab, flew to ex-Soviet countries and abroad. According to agreements reached after the 1994–1996 War, the airport was to be accorded international status, but Russia kept prevaricating on the issue.

Rehabilitation

The returnees faced tremendous problems, not least of which was that their homes and farmsteads were occupied by settlers, who at first were reluctant to give the Chechens back their properties. Within a few years the traditional rural economy was restored as life went back to a semblance of normality.

In the 1970s and 1980s, new socio-economic problems arose from industrial development and urbanization. Given the extremely high birth rate of the Chechens in post-exile years, a surplus work force in rural areas began to emerge. According to the 1989 census, over two-thirds of the Chechens lived in the countryside. This overcrowding, together with the fact that some economic spheres, especially in industry, were virtually closed to Chechens, drove many rural folks to seek seasonal employment in other regions of the Soviet Union. There was great demand for specialists in the growing industrial enterprises, and many were enticed to the Caucasus from the Ukraine, Central Russia and Siberia. Tensions in the republic increased as a result of the widening disparity in the standards of living between the urban and rural populations. This gave rise to a parallel economy that the authorities tolerated to some extent but never officially recognized.

Years of independence

As movement restrictions were lifted in the late 1980s, the 'surplus' Chechens left the countryside for the cities to seek employment and, more importantly, to claim back their republic. Following independence, the management of the Chechen economy under Dudaev's government was not very inspired, to say the least. In general, standards of living plummeted and prices of consumer goods rocketed sky-high. There was a gradual decline in GDP, industrial production and agricultural output starting from 1991. However, Federal funds kept being paid as usual. Its failure to control the situation in 1991 prompted Russia to impose a blockade on Chechnya, which made the economic situation even worse. Siberian oil supplies to the Grozny refineries were cut off, causing production to drop from 18 million tons in 1991 to 1.5 millions in 1994. Despite the blockade and Dudaev's nationalization of the Chechen oil industry, the Russians allowed Chechen oil to continue to be exported through the Novorossiisk-Boliv pipeline, the proceeds being shared by both the Chechens and Russians. In 1992, oil production was slightly more than 3.5 million tons, and the refining industry produced 6.5 million tons of petroleum products. In the following year, 2.6 million tons of oil were extracted, the figure falling to 1.2 million tons in 1994.

In the early 1990s, the national economy of the republic was still integrally connected with the economies of many regions of the Russian Federation and the countries of the CIS. However, there were striking imbalances inherited from the command structure of the Soviet system, specifically, poor emphasis on production of consumer goods. Chechnya imported industrial raw materials, technical equipment and machinery from the ex-Soviet republics, while exporting various products to many regions of the CIS.

According to the Bureau of Statistics, in 1991 Chechnya's exports to the CIS, including the regions of Russia, totalled 2,228 million roubles, of which industrial and technological products (2,009 million roubles) and consumer goods (219 million roubles). Imports from the same countries cost 1,939 million roubles, of which industrial and technological products (1,291 million roubles) and consumer goods (685 million roubles). Thus, the trading balance was in favour of Chechnya. In the same year, the share of industry in the national economy was about 41 per cent, agriculture 34 per cent, construction 11.2 per cent and transport and communication 4.3 per cent. There were 194 major industrial enterprises at the time.

Other economic activities included production of chemicals and refined fuels, building materials, telecommunications equipment, textiles, artificial limbs, radio equipment and pharmaceuticals (in Gudermes). There were also canning facilities for fruits and vegetables, and honey was commercially produced.

A strategic road connecting Chechnya to Georgia, called the 'Georgian-Chechen Highway', was started in the early 1990s as an alternative to the Georgian Military Highway, the only route traversing the Central Caucasus. However, work on the vital project was halted in 1999 because of the invasion.

In 1993, the Chechen branch of the Institute of Management and Business in Makhachkala was opened in Gudermes. The National Bank of Chechnya was established in this period. A national currency, the nakhar, was due for circulation in 1995. Local stamps were printed in the periods 1990–1994 and 1996–1999.

The 1994–1996 War caused destruction of all aspects of the economy on a massive scale. Unemployment at 80 per cent became a chronic problem. While Russia was defaulting on war reparations, set at 30 billion dollars, the Chechen diaspora was playing some role in keeping the economy afloat through modest remittances. The situation became even worse due to the Russian financial crisis of 1998. President Maskhadov initially lowered taxes imposed on enterprises, and when this proved inadequate, he cancelled their debts to the government in late 1998. A two-year tax moratorium on investments by foreign firms was enacted.

The main industrial activities of the second period of independence were crude oil production, pipeline and rail transport of crude oil, and production of building materials, telecommunications equipment and textiles. Oil output was estimated at 1.5 million tons per year in the period. However, there was no proper control of the oil industry and revenues. The media tycoon Boris Berezovsky had a stake in Chechen economy, controlling the only mobile phone company together with a high-ranking government official. However, it is generally accepted that Berezovsky had a destabilizing effect on Chechnya.

Power outages were quite common, due to the advanced state of dilapidation of the supply plants. In July 1997, Grozny and Moscow signed an accord on Chechnya's oil sector and transport of Caspian oil to Novorossiisk via Chechnya. However, Russia prevaricated on the oil transport issue, even proposing a new pipeline to circumvent Chechnya altogether.

In the late 1990s, the West became more interested in getting economically involved in the North Caucasus, Chechnya included. In 1997, the idea of a Caucasian common market was floated by the oil tycoon Khozh-Akhmed Nukhaev, which drew interest both from the West and Georgia. A series of investment and business guides for the North

Caucasian republics, including Chechnya (2000), was published by USA International Business Publications. These developments caused irritation in Moscow, as it perceived increasing Western interference in the Caucasus.

Present situation

The 1999 invasion caused the collapse of the industrial sector in Chechnya and the physical destruction of most economic enterprises. Minister of Petroleum Alkhazur Abdulkarimov estimated the damage to the oil industry at over \$100 million. The number of oil sector employees dropped from 16,000 before the war to a mere 7,000 in 2002. The infrastructure, including railway and road transport systems, was severely damaged. Electricity supply utilities were destroyed and the little available power was being produced by small generators.

The last two wars have had a catastrophic impact on the environment.² Oil spillages litter the bleak landscape of Grozny, with many sections of the city not fit for human habitation and the water table hardly fit for drinking. A plethora of illegal mini oil refineries have made the situation even worse. The waters of the major rivers, such as the Terek, Argun and Sunzha, are being compromised by unchecked in-flowing pollutants. To attempt to counteract these urgent problems, a state environment protection committee was set up in 2000. Another consequence of war has also been the spread of diseases, such as tuberculosis, which reached epidemic proportions among refugees both in Chechnya and Ingushetia. Land-mines have been steadily taking their toll. The problem was aggravated by the lack of maps showing mined areas, which were estimated at the end of 1999 to cover more than 240 sq km. Chechen authorities do not have the expertise nor the funds to deactivate the mines, and Russia and the West have offered little assistance in this regard.

Despite grandiose restoration plans by Federal authorities, the economy had largely reverted back to its traditional bases of agriculture and cattle-breeding, as much of the allocated funds had either not been paid or were plain misappropriated. Three agricultural industries had been restored by 2001, namely poultry-farming, meat-processing, and grain-processing. According to official sources, a total of 220,000 hectares were sown in 2001, and the republic was on the verge of self-sufficiency in grain production for the first time in a decade. In 2002, there were some 138,000 hectares of irrigated land. In April 2001, after a two-year break, railway services between Chechnya and Moscow were restored.

By the end of 2001, more than 3,000 tons of oil were being produced daily, with 4,000 projected for 2002. The total produced for 2001 was 640,000 tons.³ In July 2001, the Elektropribor plant for making electrical tools and plastic articles, one of the largest in the Chechen Republic, restarted work in Grozny after being destroyed in 1999. By 2002, 15 building plants were restored, including cement and brick production facilities. The food-processing plant in Meskhety in the Nozhai-Yurt District, which used to export its products to many areas of the Soviet Union, had been restored, producing high quality jams and preserves, among other things.

According to Shaarani Shuaipov, head of the Business Promotion Agency in Chechnya, most Chechens were engaged in small business enterprises in 2001. Ruslan

Khasbulatov proposed that federal taxes be abolished for Chechnya, or that they should be re-injected into the republic for reconstruction. Salambek Khadzhev, the Chechen president of (the Russian) Rosbiznesbank, proposed that the state should buy goods produced in Chechnya and that railway transport tariffs should be reduced.

The Sernovodsky Agricultural School, which was established in the late 1920s, is the oldest and only technical secondary school in Chechnya. It has been grounding its students in plant-growing, poultry-farming, viticulture, wine-making, processing of agricultural products and other fields. There were plans to revive the agricultural training complex under the supervision of the Chechen Ministry of Agriculture and Foodstuffs.

The Union of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs of the Chechen Republic, set up in 2001, comprised a number of diaspora businessmen eager to play a role in restoring Chechen economy. Providing jobs for the young, according to them, eased the pressure on them to join the ranks of the Chechen fighters. In 2001, Khanpasha Amirov reopened a brick factory in Gudermes. A group of businessmen invested in a sugar factory and bakery in Argun, and wine and vodka plants in Naur and Gudermes. The state enterprise 'Chechentsement' in Chiri-Yurt, which before the war employed 2,200 people, was reconstructed in 2002 to produce 300,000 metric tons of cement, limestone and other construction materials. There is a need for large investment in the building sector to restore Chechnya in the post-war period. It is hoped that the efforts of Chechen expatriate businessmen would be looked upon favourably by both parties to the conflict, and not be regarded as endorsing one side at the expense of the other. While the situation is in limbo, it behoves all sides to bless any effort to alleviate the hardship of the long-suffering people of Chechnya.

Chechnya still possesses substantive natural resources that if properly exploited could fire post-war economic recovery. There are oil, natural gas, fertile land, hydropower, timber, mineral water, gold, diamond, copper, lead, zinc, phosphorus, limestone and sulphur. It is estimated that there are up to 370 million tons of oil reserves in Chechnya.⁴ Fortunately, the oil industry was spared the worst of the Russian bombardment in the second war, obviously for self-serving purposes. With a sensible policy and proper investment, about 20 million tons of oil could be produced annually. There are also supplies of natural gas of up to 67 billion cubic metres. The small business sector, with appropriate government support, could also prove one of the engines for economic recovery and progress.

According to Edward W. Walker (1998–1999), Chechnya's small size bears no significance as to the viability of its independence, and that the argument that the republic is too small to become independent is without merit. He cites the prosperous mini-states of Europe, such as Luxembourg and Liechtenstein, as examples. He significantly says that Russia, with its huge size, has a 'very poor record of economic performance'. Lack of natural resources is also not considered a handicap. The crucial point in Walker's argument is that had Chechnya been allowed to secede peacefully, there would have been a chance for both her and Russia to gain from such a move. It is hoped that the combination of Chechen tenacity and international largesse will one day charm the phoenix up from the ashes.

8

Religion and beliefs

The ancestors of the Vainakh developed, adopted and adapted many religious beliefs throughout their turbulent history. In order to reconstruct primeval beliefs, universal constructs of animism, totemism and paganism, including rough dating, are used as frameworks to assemble the bits and pieces gleaned here and there, and form connections between seemingly unrelated phenomena. Traces of the rituals and rites of the past are still preserved in legends, folklore, ancient monuments and archaeological finds. Religious traditions tend to linger most in the culture of a nation, some even surviving conversion to other faiths. Study of ancient Chechen religions, beliefs and myths would shed more light on connections with other cultures of the ancient world.

The Vainakh shared common ancient religions and beliefs. Since the Ingush and Kist preserved the ancient beliefs and rites better than the Chechens, who embraced Islam much earlier, the study of Ingush and Kist native religions would be most helpful in reconstructing that of the Chechens. Bashir Dalgat recorded many aspects of the ancient Vainakh religion and published some of his research in 1893. More than a century later, his daughter Uzdyat published his complete work on the subject.

The pre-Islamic Vainakh had an eclectic religion and believed in a plethora of deities. Archaeological evidence in the form of artefacts, monuments, and burial and sacrificial sites, suggests that ancient religion was based on cycles of nature and astronomy. The Nakh developed a differentiated Pantheon with complex rituals and a cosmic view of the universe that can only be the products of a full-fledged civilization.

Traditional North Caucasian culture was tolerant towards all kinds of beliefs and convictions, and the North Caucasus had been a safe haven for a multitude of peoples throughout history. The legendary hospitality of the locals ensured a good deal for the newcomers. This introduced to the area many customs and beliefs, some of which were adopted by the natives and incorporated into their way of life.

Church ruins indicate that by the eighth century at least some Chechens had converted to Christianity, which maintained some influence until the Mongol destruction of Georgia. According to legend, the first preachers of Islam in Chechnya were Bat, Bers and Termol. Tradition has it that force was first used to convert the populace to Islam. By the mid-nineteenth century, practically all Chechens were converted to Islam, at least nominally. Ancient traditions and superstitions blended with traditional Islamic beliefs and practices to produce a unique amalgam. Arabic, as the language of religious instruction and ritual, became prominent.

The Chechens are nominally Sunni Muslims of the Shafii School of jurisprudence. Religion, as it is practised today, is an amalgam of orthodox Muslim tenets, Sufi rituals, ancient customs and traditions and pre-Islamic beliefs, including vestiges of Christianity and the earlier Zoroastrianism. A good example of this symbiosis was the *kkhel*, the council of religious sheikhs and clan elders, whose edicts were based on both the *adat*,

native customs and traditions, and *shariat*, Muslim jurisprudence. Chechen society is unique in the world in that Sufism (*Suepalla*) is the predominant creed, almost a state religion, as opposed to being a marginal cult. Snippets of the ancient beliefs and traditions can still be detected in Chechen society. To this day some Chechens use oaths invoking animist terms, for example 'Golden Sun', 'Earth', and 'Bread'.

The ancient Chechens had many similar beliefs and traditions to the Celts, including a corpus of superstitions. Both believed that spirits infested the earth on New Year's Day, and that they had to be appeased in order to escape their mischief-making. The North Caucasians also used masks (*tuetm'aezhigash*, in Chechen) during some rituals, for example on their hunting expeditions, and there is ground to believe that, like the Celtic peoples, they donned them during New Year festivals to ward off evil. The North Caucasian veneration of the tree is also reminiscent of the still dominant animist/pagan ritual associated with the Christmas Tree, including the rite of dancing around it, which is closely connected with the May Pole. There was also a common veneration of fire and sacrificial rites associated with it, and belief in its cleansing power. All these points raise the question as to whether the animist and pagan cultures in the North Caucasus and the West had developed separately, or that they were the scions of a more ancient overarching (proto-Pontic?) civilization.¹

Ancient religions

The pre-Christian Vainakh had an amalgam of religions and cults, including animism, totemism, paganism, polytheism, familial-ancestral and agrarian and funereal cults. Stone sanctuaries and chapels were erected in honour of patrons in the mountain settlements. Objects of cultic rituals discovered at excavation sites include metallic amulets, hand-bells, deer-teeth, tips of arrows, bear-claws and human figurines. Subterranean petroglyphs, dating back to the fourth/fifth millennium BC, showed solar signs, figures of anthropomorphic animals, and plants.

According to K.Sikharulidze, archaeological, ethnographic and linguistic data confirm that at some time in its ancient history, there existed cultural uniformity in the Caucasus. Specifically, comparative study of North Caucasian and Kartvelian archaic mythologies indicates unity of the world outlook and religious views. Relics of Caucasian Titanomachy and Theomachy, the warfare of Titans and gods respectively, have been preserved in a number of legends. The main part in this opposition was given to the goddess, mother of the oldest generation of gods, who had been punished together with her male progeny. It could be that an earlier manifestation of Satanay, the Nart matriarch, represented this godly figure and that the transition to patriarchy was accompanied by her deposition and chastisement. It is only in Caucasian folklore that a myth about a bound goddess is encountered, while the site of the manacled torture of giants was always on one of the pinnacles of the Caucasus. The Caucasian model of Titanomachy is of local origin, and it was engendered much earlier than the Nart Epos, with some of its details included in the epic cycle as rudiments.²

Animism

Animism is probably the most ancient religion of the Vainakh, and it was prevalent among all peoples of the North Caucasus. Its origin probably dates back to the Palaeolithic Age, or the Old Stone Age, more than 10,000 years ago. E.B.Tylor defined animism as a general belief in spiritual beings and he considered it as a minimum definition of religion.³ The basic tenet of animism was the belief that a soul resided in every object, animate or inanimate, functioning as the motive force and guardian. In animistic thought, nature was all alive. In a future state the spirit would exist as part of an immaterial soul. The spirit, therefore, was thought to be universal. Ghosts, demons and deities inhabited almost all objects, rendering them subject to worship. Ritual services were associated with some of the more important sites, like (Mount) Ts'e-Lam and Lake Galanch'ozh. Khin-Naana (River-Mother) was the guardian naiad of mountain rivers and Huenan-Naana (Forest-Mother) was the wood-nymph, or dryad.

According to H.Spencer, 'The rudimentary form of all religion is the propitiation of dead ancestors,'⁴ and the worship of the dead was the one and all of religion, whereas Tylor considered it as an important subdivision of animism. It is with the help of Spencer's formulation that some light can be shed on Vainakh animism and its connection with the veneration of ancestors and the belief in the indestructibility of the soul. It could be that the spirits of the ancestors were thought to animate objects of nature, like trees, rocks and rivers, and then at a more developed stage of religious evolution these souls were transformed to deities and associated with these objects. Fetishism as the doctrine of spirits embodied in and conveying influence through certain animals or material objects is considered a subordinate department of animism.

The Vainakh, like most North Caucasians, used to worship trees, especially the pear, and considered them as totems, believing that they housed invisible deities. Many ritual services were developed associated with particular trees and sacred groves were visited by supplicants in processions. The rites were not unlike those practised by the ancient Circassians and Ossetians, whereby animals were sacrificed at the foot of trees and feasts held in celebration.

Totemism

Totemism, defined as

the intimate relation supposed to exist between an individual or a group of individuals and a class of natural objects, i.e. the totem, by which the former regard the latter as identified with them in a mystical manner and in a peculiar sense their own belongings, so that they bear the name of the totem and show this belief in certain customs. The conviction of the intimate union constitutes the religious aspect of totemism; the customs which result therefrom form its sociological aspect,⁵

is at the root of primitive religion and is intimately related with animism. It constitutes the group of superstitions and customs of which the totem is the centre. The Vainakh practised clan totemism, whereby a union existed between the village collective and a class of natural objects, but, given their clannish character, it is unlikely that they engaged in the individual variety.

Paganism and polytheism

Although paganism is a broad term that refers to religions and beliefs other than Judaism, Christianity and Islam, it is used in this context to refer to the next stage of religious development of the Vainakh. The path moved from animism and the associated totemism to paganism, the belief in the possession of some objects of nature of supernatural powers, and a primitive conception of deities and patrons. Paganism did not conceive of heaven and hell, but believed in the indestructibility of the soul, a concept more akin to nature. Paganism may have found origin in the Neolithic Age, more than seven millennia ago.

Polytheism segmented the universe into manageable units, with each unit generally governed by an individual deity. As a rule, every natural phenomenon or heavenly body had its own god. The collective of deities, gods, and patrons, who were part of the natural world and controlled all its aspects in a collective manner, formed a Pantheon with a presiding god. Special rites and ceremonies came to be associated with each deity for appeasement and supplication. Depending on the nature of the wish, offerings were made to this or that god, be it the god of sun, rain, war, love or fertility. Since the transition to polytheism pre-supposes a civilizational stage of social development, some time after the fifth millennium BC, the ancestors of the Vainakh must have established their own civilization, or at least formed an integral part of one. One tentative connection is that the Hurrians evolved their own Pantheon from the Sumerians, putative originators of Polytheism in the third millennium BC.

Fortunately, archaeological research revealed enough to reconstruct a skeletal picture of the polytheistic Vainakh. Underground burial vaults from the third millennium BC had carved niches, perhaps as receptacles for offerings. Underground dwellings and shrines dating from the second millennium BC until the middle Middle Ages suggest a wide variety of gods associated with the forces of nature and the stars.

Pagan temples were erected on village outskirts and at graveyards to protect both the living and the dead and as places of worship. Prayers were said in front of the shrines and domestic animals were sacrificed. Here an amalgamation of animism and paganism is evident. The wide range of sanctuaries testifies to a developed Pantheon of gods and a complex ritual system.

The animist-pagan period in Chechnya warrants more research to obtain a more comprehensive picture of the ancient cults and to establish connections with Near Eastern civilizations in antiquity.⁶ The pictograms and magic signs on stone towers and tombs would provide crucial clues, as they often date back to earlier periods than the structures themselves.

Creation, cosmology and astrology

The Earth and Heavens were created by Deela (Dela), the supreme god. Earth was thrice larger than the Heavens, so the Lord squashed Earth, puckering up mountains and valleys. Earth was propped up on the horns of a gigantic bull tethered to a post. The bovine was exempt from work on Tuesdays. After creating the Universe, the roaming Deela took Earth in one hand and squeezed out woman in the West, then in the other to engender man in the East.

The ancient Vainakh conceived the universe as consisting of three inter-connected abodes, forming two vertical circles having a common point of contact with the centre of the horizontal Earth circle—the hearth.⁷ In the Vainakh universe everything was held in place by the hearth-chain (*toykhanan z'ee*),⁸ which still retains symbolic functions. The Empyrean was the realm of the gods, the abode of the Pantheon, corresponding to the Greek Olympus and Circassian Julat. The earthly world of humans was created in three years. All beings and objects in this world were of divine origin, and as such of equal worth—to be respected and treated with utmost care. Nothing was created in vain. Reverence for nature is still one of the cornerstones of the Vainakh ethos.

Deeli-Malkhi, the Subterranean Kingdom to which souls transmigrated upon death, was ruled by Ishtar-Deela.⁹ It was larger than the abode of humans, requiring seven years to build. When the sun set in the west, its light and warmth were transferred to the underworld, so the worldly day corresponded to subterranean night, and vice versa. Death was only an interval stage, life in the netherworld being conceived of as an extension of earthly existence, with similar social structures. This meant that there was no concept of judgement in life after life, heaven and hell being later (Christian) introductions. As Muslim influence became more pronounced, the netherworld was forsaken for a heavenly (or hellish) abode.

In this holistic metaphysical scheme, man was at the centre of the Universe, in direct connection with its constituent worlds and charged with maintaining universal harmony through control of the hearth. This, however, implied onerous duties rather than a superior status. Chechens consider human beings as being united in a system of blood kinship, in which all share a basic core with secondary differences manifest in the multitude of languages, religions, and customs and traditions. The common human condition sets a basis for human solidarity and equality.

The sun was venerated as Deela-Malkh (Sun-God) and had a central role in religious celebrations, as evidenced by solar depictions on extant petroglyphs. The main festival was Birthday of the Sun, marked on 25 December. The east was the direction to which supplicants turned, and to which temples and house façades were orientated. The sun rose from and set into the sea. At summer and winter equinoxes, the sun went to visit her mother Aza in a journey that took her six months to complete. Though considered a sibling of the sun, the moon had a lesser status.

Cromlechs in the form of concentric stone circles were perhaps used in astrological observations and to foretell natural phenomena, besides their function as burial sites. Celestial bodies had their distinctive names, such as Milky Way: Mottig Taacha Tinkada (Ingush name; literally: 'place strewn with straw'), Triangulum: Kkhokogseeda ('Trivet-Star'), Ursa Major: Vorkh' Veshin Vorkh' Seeda ('Seven Stars of the Seven Brothers', aka 'Children of the Blizzard', i.e. Dartsa-Naana), Ursa Minor: Chukhchaher, and the

North Star: Qilbseeda ('South-Star'). Sueireenan Seeda and Sakhuelu Seeda were the Vainakh equivalents of the Greek Eosphorus, the Morning Star, or Venus. A comet was called 'Ts'ogadolu Seeda' ('Tail Star'), and it presaged contagion, war or the birth of a great man.

Nakh Pantheon

The Nakh Pantheon was remarkable for its complexity and high level of development. Representations of deities were placed in sanctuaries and temples and a form of idolatry was practised. Deela was the supreme deity, presiding over a crew of gods, semi-gods, deities and patrons, each controlling one aspect of the universe. He commanded complete obedience from the other gods, refractory behaviour drawing harsh punishment, as when he gouged out the eye of his own son Elta.¹⁰

Seela (Sela) was the god of thunder and lightning, streaking across the skies in his fulgurant glory. Maettsil was god of agriculture and harvest and protector of the weak. His day, Maettsil Sunday (Maettsil-K'irande), was celebrated during his month (Maettsil-Butt=Maettsil-Month), roughly from 23 June to 22 July. Maetskhal was honoured three weeks after Maettsil Sunday. Ishtar-Deela was lord of life and death and ruler of the Subterranean Kingdom. He punished the guilty by turning the disembodiment of their souls into drawn-out agonizing affairs—thus the need for prayers and offerings to placate the offended deity. Molyz-Yerdi, the indestructible god of war and victory, led the Vainakh into battle. One-eyed Elta son of Deela was initially only god of the hunt and patron of hunters, to whom offerings were made from plentiful bags.¹¹ Later, his divine calling extended to patronizing the harvest, as his animals had been tasked with threshing. However, he was to be later relieved of his second duty by Maettsil.

Minor deities included Amgali(-Yerdi), whose day was celebrated two weeks after Maettsil Sunday on Mount Ėrstkhoi. Taamash(-Yerdi), lord of fate, assumed the shape of a Lilliputian astride an equine, but who would wax gigantic upon ire. He was venerated on the day after that of Amgali, and was identified by some people with St Timothy. Maettsil, Amgali and Taamash were considered as brothers.

In pre-Christian times, goddesses enjoyed prominent positions in the Pantheon, especially during the matriarchal phase of social development. The advent of monotheism reduced the importance of female deities, Tusholi being the only survivor of the principal cast. Minor goddesses included Dartsa-Naana (Blizzard-Mother), deity of blizzards and rock and snow avalanches, who haunted lofty summits, and Mokh-Naana (Wind-Mother), goddess of wind, venerated on Mondays, and Seelasat (literally: 'Oriole'), protectress of virgins.

Below the universal deities came the provincial and clan patrons who, upon recognition of all the Vainakh, could be elevated to the principal class. Village and family patrons perhaps were a product of neo-paganism, when the Vainakh reverted to their ancient beliefs and sidelined Christianity with the decline of Georgian influence in the thirteenth century.

There were also super-beings that never really made it to the ranks of the gods. Pkharmat (P-harmat) established order in the world and negated chaos by separating the earth and the sky using his extraordinary powers. Mighty Seska-Solsa, the head of the

Narts and himself a progeny of a god, was later identified with Jesus Christ.¹² The Nakh also had a Pandemonium, with demons characterized by contrariety and lack of guile.

Rites of devotion to specific deities¹³

Seela the Thunderer

According to legend, only Seela, patron of the cosmic and family hearths and fire, possessed fire in his hearth at the creation of the world. One day, a thief crept into his abode to steal a brand. Furious, Seela hurled at the intruder a burning log, glowing embers of which splintered down to Earth, transforming it from a cold, gloomy place to a warm, bright habitat. It was forbidden to handle embers and ash on his day (Seela-Kkhaara), which fell on a Wednesday of his month (Seela-Butt), reckoned from May 23 to June 22. Although this particular legend does not say it, the thief was no other than our hero Pkharmat, who was to be chained on top of Bash-Lam (Mount Kazbek) for his transgression. This is the Chechen version of the Caucasian legend of the hero chastized on the mount, which later gave rise to the Promethean pyro-tale of the Greeks.¹⁴

Seela was lord of justice and upholder of the code of ethics. He was also god of the stars and lightning. A thunderbolt was conceived as his torch (*Seela-khaeshtig*), and the rainbow as his hunting bow (*Seela-'ad*).¹⁵ Sites hit by lightning streaks were considered sacred and people thus struck dead were held in high honour, being accorded special ceremonial burials, with particular chants and dances, and entombed in full armour in sitting positions in crypts of stone slabs.¹⁶ Ruins of temples dedicated to Seela are still extant in Vainakh country, and, together with sacral remains, indicate complex service rites, including offerings and prayers:

Our Lord Seela!
 Let no harm come our way.
 Make the skies burst forth with thunder.
 Will warm sunrays to make us whole.
 Let the rains anoint Earth,
 And save our crops from hailstorms and floods,
 That we may reap a rich harvest.
 Nill autumn winds to fan cruel.

Deities had their 'dark' sides too. Seela was partial to beautiful women, a foible he shared with Zeus, the supreme Greek god. In one episode of the Nart epic, Seela, thwarted in his endeavours to have a woman of exquisite beauty by the formidable Seska-Solsa in her lifetime, had her on the third night of Seska's vigil, as the chief Nart nodded off. The progeny of necrophily was goddess Seelasat—even fairer than her mother.¹⁷ Seela kept his status in the Christian era as he was identified with the prophet Elijah.

Gal-Yerdi

Protector of cattle and patron of their breeders, Gal-Yerdi was worshipped on Nakh New Year's Day, with sacrifices and offerings of metal orbs and candles posited in temple niches. This deity was considered as a spirit and he was incorporated in the Nakh Christian service. Here is a still extant prayer invoking him:

He who abhors toil for our daily bread,
 Let him never prevail upon us.
 Lord Almighty!
 Will it that we never bow to mere mortals,
 And keep us not farther than Your right hand
 While in supplication.

Sacrifices and offerings

In very ancient times, human beings were offered for sacrifice, to be replaced later by animals. According to a Nart legend, Batiga-Shertko had the ability to cross over to the other world and visit the 'dead'. Asked by a distraught Nart about his recently deceased mother and how she was faring, Batiga-Shertko counselled him to make a sacrifice, and then went to the world beyond accompanied by a man chosen by the Nart in mourning. Both saw the mother with the immolated rooster and hen, and went back to tell the Nart the good news. From that day on, sacrifice became a wide-spread ritual among the Vainakh (B.Dalgat 1893). After blissful events such as the birth of a male child or the recovery of a gravely ill person, families made offerings to the gods, with the number of animals slaughtered being commensurate with the status of the god. These rituals were presided over by a special class of priests.

Oaths and vows

A touchstone of truth was the *doo* (pl. *doerchii*) a large basket for storing corn-cobs, with the suspect being required to swear his innocence with his back to it.¹⁸ Dread of the dead and ancestor worship were so deeply ingrained that vows (*duinash*) made in vaults were deemed most effective as counters. Making a false oath invoking a deity was anathema, while it was strictly forbidden to swear in the name of Molyz-Yerdi for fear of being smitten with infertility.

Cults

Fertility and phallus

This is a cult formed mainly around Tusholi, the goddess of spring and fertility. Her day, Tusholi-K'irande, fell on the last Sunday of the first month of spring, i.e. April (Tusholi-Butt). The hoopoe, harbinger of spring in national folklore, would have reappeared in Chechnya by that time. The sacred avian, *Tusholi kootam* (Tusholi's hen), could only be hunted upon permission from the high priest, and then only for medicinal purposes. It was considered a propitious sign if a hoopoe nested near a house or in an attic.¹⁹

The complex rituals associated with Tusholi on her day were performed in a sanctuary on Mount Deela-T'e, where her effigy and banner were kept. The flagstaff was brought from the sacred forest which no one was allowed to enter without permission from the high priest, where no cattle was allowed to graze and whose trees were not allowed to be cut down. Women and children would bring horns of red deer, bullets and candles to the sanctuary on Tusholi's Day. The priest blessed the offerings consecrated to the goddess and women prayed for male offspring:

Our Lady Tusholi!
 Bless the barren ones with progeny,
 And destine all born ones
 To live to ripe old age.
 Bestow upon us a rich harvest,
 Pour down anointing rain on us,
 And bless us with healthful sunshine.

The adoration of Tusholi was later downgraded to a cult of woman and associated with the cult of progeny. Nowadays, her day is marked as 'Women and Children Holiday'.

Cult of family hearth

The cult of the hearth was intimately connected with the veneration of Seela. Every home had a permanently lit hearth with a wrought iron chain hanging down the chimney. All native North Caucasian religions regard the family hearth with special reverence and it was the principal place at which family rituals were conducted, principally offerings and sacrifices. A new bride was 'unchained' from her father's hearth and 'joined' to that of her father-in-law in special ceremonies. Similar cultic practices were prevalent among the Circassians and Daghestanis.

Cult of ancestors

The Vainakh venerated the spirits of their ancestors and believed they continued to dwell in the natural world and had possession of the power to influence the lives of the living. On the other hand, evil deeds by the descendants did the ancestors harm in the after-world. A corpus of rituals was developed whereby the dead kin were propitiated and invoked.

Cult of saints and holy places

This cult goes back to pre-Islamic times and is essentially just one aspect of the cult of the hero. A Sufi saint (*èvlaya*”; from Arabic *wali*=a person under divine protection) was thought to have the power of divination of the will of God. After the death of a famous religious leader, his grave would become a pilgrimage site, or *mazar* (*ziyart* in Chechen, which also signifies ‘pilgrimage’). There are pagan, Christian and Sufi *mazars* in Chechnya and Ingushetia. For example, the tomb of Uzun Haji in Dishne near Vedeno is the most popular holy place in Chechnya, even drawing pilgrims from other regions of the North Caucasus.

For an anti-hero, Chechens would erect a ‘damnation heap’ (*k’orlagha*), as a stigma. The ‘cenotaph’, usually sited by a roadside, grew more imposing and vitriolic with time, as passers-by, with time to spare, flung stones and curses at the ‘satanic’ pile.

Horse cult

According to Herodotus’ *History* of the fifth century BC, horse death cults were brought to the Caucasus by the Scythians.²⁰ The cult of the horse is deep-rooted among the Vainakh, who still have a number of extant songs on equine themes.

Priesthood

The Vainakh deemed their priests as intermediaries between them and the deities. Men of cloth were wrapped up in halos of sanctity and were clad in white. A priest (*ts’uu*) was the first to address the deity in prayer and he alone could enter the sanctuary at will. He was the one to go to for counsel in lean years or in case of illness.

The sacerdotal caste included high priests, sacrificial clerics and vicars. There was also a special class of female priests called ‘*maelkh-aeznii*’ (literally: ‘sun-maidens’). High priests used sacred water to heal the sick and restore defective eyesight. The temple guardian (*ts’ai-sag*: literally ‘festival-man’) officiated festal rituals and sacrificial offerings. The priests devoted themselves to learning and preserved ancient lore. They also acted as medicine men and sorcerers, auguring, among other things, the harvest and weather. Like their Pharaonic counterparts, Vainakh priests had recourse to oneirocriticism, or interpretation of dreams, to divine the wishes of the gods. For example, the spirits inspired dreamers as to the sites where shrines were to be built.

Vainakh priests were responsible for maintaining social stability and settling civil law issues. They did not cultivate the land for sustenance, relying on villagers to till the fields assigned to them instead. The clergy were presented with offerings from their parishes, including jewellery, as can be attested by the discovery of gems in temples. With the introduction of the feudal system in the Middle Ages, the role of ecclesiastics became more involved.

Zoroastrianism

At one time, the influence of Zoroastrianism (Mazdeism) covered most of the Caucasus, including the lands of the Nakh. In the third century AD, the Persian Sassanids mounted vigorous campaigns to impose it, their state religion, on the Caucasian peoples. By the end of the century, they were pressuring the Armenians, who had not converted to Christianity by that time. Early in the fourth century, St Gregory the Illuminator succeeded in Christianizing the Armenians, who formed a formidable bulwark against the expansion of Zoroastrianism, which eventually lost out in the conversion war in the Central and Western Caucasus, although it kept looming in the background until the Sassanid empire was undone by the Arabs in the seventh century.

Some authorities impute all aspects associated with pyrolatry, including the cult of the family hearth, to the ancient Persian religion, whose rituals were conducted before the sacred fire, a symbol of god. Vainakh 'fire-worshippers' were called '*ts'ergakhoi*' (*ts'e*=fire), their high priest '*ts'uura*'. It could be that the custom of the eternal upkeep of fire in the family hearth is a relic of Zoroastrian religion in the area. It may be that initially fire-keepers acted as priestesses overseeing domestic rituals.

It is also possible that the cult of fire and hearth is of a more ancient origin, probably stemming from Indo-Aryan customs. It could also be that certain aspects of the cult of fire were developed locally in the Caucasus in association with the discovery of fire and manipulation of metals. It is noteworthy that the ancient Jews also kept permanent fires on their altars.

Christianity

The conversion of the Armenians to Christianity, together with active Roman proselytizing in the fifth century, after Emperor Justinian's war against the Laz in the Southwest Caucasus, proved crucial factors in the gradual spread of the faith in the Caucasus. The Armenians later converted the Georgians, who in their turn converted the Northcentral Caucasians (Chechens, Ingush, Ossetians and Kabardians) apparently in two major waves.

There is some evidence to believe that at least part of the Chechen nation was christianized some time in the Middle Ages. It is known that the Trans-Caucasian Nakh were converted in the sixth century. From the tenth century, Georgian influence in the Central Caucasus became more pronounced. In the eleventh century, the Georgians conducted vigorous missionary work in Vainakh country and, despite initial fierce resistance by the pagan mountaineers, were able to baptize some local tribes by the

twelfth century, mainly in the southern highland regions. Christian influence reached its peak during the reign of Queen Tamara of Georgia (1184–1207).

At least two churches around Tkhaba-Yerdi can be traced back to the Georgian era. Tkhaba-Yerdi ('Two Thousand Saints'), in present-day Ingushetia, was built by Georgian architects and consecrated to St Thomas. It is the largest extant church in both Chechnya and Ingushetia, with an area of 100 sq m. The Vainakh had venerated the site until as late as the nineteenth century. The discovery of burial sites underneath the church suggests that it was erected on the site of an earlier pagan temple devoted to Tkhaba.²¹ Worshippers gathered in the temple once a year on the Sunday after Easter to sacrifice cattle and entreat Yerdi for a plentiful crop. Other Georgian-style temples along the Assa included Albi-Yerdi and Targim. Crosses were common finds.

At least two hand-written psalm-books in the Georgian alphabet were discovered, one in Tkhaba-Yerdi in the late nineteenth century, the other in the Magi-Yerdi sanctuary in Ingushetia in the early twentieth century. During the christianization of the region, local masters built sanctuaries in the Orthodox Christian style in honour of local saints, such as Taamash-Yerdi, who was reminiscent of St George.

There is linguistic evidence that the Chechens kept the (Christian) fast (*markha*) and that they marked Easter (*markha dostu de*). Christian terminology was adopted from Georgian, including the words for cross *zh'aara* (Georgian=*jvari*; cf. Circassian *zhor*) and hell *zhooezhakhati* or *saehar-zhoezhakhat'ee*. In addition, the word for 'week' (*k'ira*) and the names of some weekdays have their origin in Georgian. Christians (and, in general, non-Muslims) are referred to as '*Kerstanash*'. Another term used for non-Muslims is '*gaaur*'. A priest was called '*mozghar*'.

The Tsova-Tush (Bats) are the only Nakh people that are still formally of the Christian faith. The first records of Christianity in Tushetia date from the sixteenth century, though the actual conversion probably took place a few centuries earlier. From there the faith spread to the Chechens and Ingush.

Pagan beliefs were never abandoned completely by the Vainakh. The mountaineers were not amenable to the alien teachings of the Christian Church. In fact, isolated groups clung tenaciously to their ancient cults.²² In addition, the proselytizing activities of the Georgian missionaries came to an abrupt end with the advent of fresh invaders in the foothills of the Caucasus.

Reversion to paganism

The Mongol invasion of the thirteenth century dealt a crippling blow to Christianity in the North Caucasus and to Vainakh culture. Temples and churches were largely abandoned. The Vainakh found themselves cut off from the outside world and were reduced to subsistence economy. The arrival of the Tatar hordes perpetuated the misery and isolation. In these circumstances 'neo-paganism', or the reinvigorated old religion, surged forth, as deeply ingrained ancient beliefs and cults gained ascendancy.

Pagan temples dedicated to patron deities were rebuilt in the twelfth and thirteenth, and Christian symbols were corrupted. The pagan Pantheon was restored to its past glory. The decline of Christianity and reversion to ancient cults was reflected in the change of architectural design of local sanctuaries. Sanctuaries of the thirteenth and fourteenth

centuries were nearly as big as temples but later edifices were built on a smaller scale and their interiors grew simpler. The residual influence of Christianity was further eroded by the advent of Islam.

Islam

As is the unfolding pattern in interpretation of many Chechen issues, there is more than one account of the manner in which the Chechens were first converted to Islam. The more prevalent version has Islam penetrating into Chechnya from Daghestan starting in the seventeenth century, with conversion gaining momentum in the first half of the nineteenth.

The second perspective sees the process as starting back in the fourteenth century with the adoption of Islam as state religion in the Simsim principality. Islam was also adopted by the Nashkha community of freemen, whose territory lay outside the control of the Golden Horde, as they moved to the plains. On the other hand, southwestern regions inhabited by the Malkhi, Kist and Lam-Aekkkhii remained nominally Christian. According to this version, most Chechens had been converted to Islam by the sixteenth century.

There is yet a third story, supported by some archaeological and sepulchral evidence, that Christianity and Islam co-existed in some parts of Chechnya between the eighth and eleventh centuries, with an admixture of ancient rites and rituals. This could be explained by some Arab influence penetrating across the Caucasus leading to temporary conversion of some southern Vainakh to Islam. Be that as it may, Sunni Islam had never taken deep root in Chechnya, as it was initially in earnest competition with native beliefs and traditions and later superseded by Sufism—a creed more akin to Vainakh esotericism.

Sufism²³

Before mentioning the role of Sufi orders in Chechnya, it is important to take note of some cautionary words by the Sufi writer and scholar Idries Shah: ‘A Sufi, the Sufis, cannot be defined by any single set of words or ideas. By a picture, moving and made up of different dimensions, perhaps’ (1964:17). It has been made clear by Sufi writers that the Sufis can only be studied or described by non-Sufis superficially. The account that follows is therefore inadequate, though still necessary, since the Sufi orders have played such an important role in NE Caucasian life. Orders that describe themselves as Sufi may or may not actually be Sufi, but to say one way or the other is, apparently, beyond the purview of anyone but a Sufi.

Chechens readily accepted Sufism as it was more akin to their introverted character and fitted well with their social system. According to Vakhit Akaev, Director of the Humanities Research Institute of the Chechen Republic:

Sufi ideology easily lends itself to adapting to popular beliefs, customs and traditions. This peculiarity, enabling the incorporation into Islam of elements of popular culture related to the cult of ancestors, elders, native

land and etiquette, led to its massive dissemination among the Nakh and Daghestanis.

New converts had to go through initiation ceremonies. Mystic Sufism in its regional form appears to combine asceticism, the search for personal union with God, submission of the novice or *murid* (*murd* in Chechen) to the sect's leader, and the glorification of *ghazavat* (*ghaazot* in Chechen; from Arabic *ghazawat*, pl. of *ghazwah*=raid, incursion), or holy war, as a defence against foreign occupation. It is, however, noteworthy that 'The Naqshbandis were never a militant Order, but... either had a militant section or tended on occasion to become militant' (I.A.Shah 1971:112).

The NE Caucasian *tariqats* (*t'eriqat* in Chechen; from Arabic *t'arīqa*=way, path), or Sufi orders, had developed distinctive regional characters. Sufism merged with nationalism and traditional martialism to produce a potent force inimical to any form of foreign domination. Between 1877 and the 1917 revolution, almost all of the adult population of Chechnya and Ingushetia belonged either to the Naqshabandi or Qadiri *tariqats*. Even in the Soviet era the majority of the Chechens and Ingush were members of a *murid* brotherhood. Up to the Israilov—Sheripov uprising of the early 1940s, all revolts were initiated and conducted by the *tariqats*.

The Sufis promoted literacy in the NE Caucasus. The rate of illiteracy among Chechens and Daghestanis was one of the lowest in tsarist Russia in the early twentieth century (A.Bennigsen 1981). *Muridism* (*murdalla*), interpreted as a seeking of the truth, is considered a heretical sect by Orthodox Muslims on the ground that all truth has already been laid down in the Qur'an.

Sufi *tariqats*

Naqshabandi

The original *tariqats* preached mysticism and Sufism. They consisted of orders of dervishes that arose in the twelfth century and later spread in the Ottoman Empire in the regions of the Marmara and Black Seas. The orders operated independently and their leaders, or sheikhs, had the right of autonomy. Sufi fraternities are subdivided into branches (*virids*), generally founded by religious leaders and usually named after them.²⁴

The Naqshabandi *tariqat* played an important role in Chechen history. Following the savagery shown by the Russians, the Naqshabandi movement gained momentum and became the main motive force behind NE Caucasian resistance in the first half of the nineteenth century. *Muridism* arose in the late eighteenth century as an adjunct to the Naqshabandi revival effected by Isma'il Effendi, who was later banished to Turkey. The teachings of Mullah Muhammad played a major part in the spread of the order. Two of his disciples were destined to play pivotal roles in Caucasian history, namely Ghazi Mohamed and Shamil.

The spread of the *tariqat* in Chechnya took place in the 1820s, the first preachers coming from Daghestan. The movement was based on strict hierarchy and demanded iron discipline and total dedication to its ideals. This explains the epic resistance of the Caucasian mountaineers to Russian conquest in which not only the leaders but also the

majority of the fighters were followers of the movement. The fraternity, which introduced Islam into the animist areas of upper Chechnya, had become so deep-rooted by the end of the war that it survived defeat in 1859 and the subsequent massive emigration of the Chechens.

Qadiri

The Qadiri movement in Chechnya is also known as Kunta Haji *tariqat*. Kunta Haji was a Kumyk shepherd who in 1849 started to advocate non-resistance to evil and the acceptance of infidel domination for the sake of preserving the nation.²⁵ The Naqshabandis regarded Kunta's work as undermining of their resistance movement and they forced his exile from the Caucasus. Kunta returned in 1861 and resumed his preaching until his arrest by the Russian authorities in January 1864. Kunta's teachings proved very popular among the war-weary mountaineers, and the movement gained many followers. In the early 1990s, Kunta Haji was reconfigured as the 'Chechen Gandhi'.

According to Y.Z.Akhmadov (2000):

For someone to be a follower of the 'Son of Kisha' means to accept him as 'a spiritual father'—one's representative before God. This acceptance implies carrying out a number of additional prayers or formulas, such as the loud 'zikr'. At the same time, the *murid* agrees to embrace a set of rigid moral and ethical rules. The Order worships as holy places the tomb of [Kunta's] mother Khedi in the village Hadji-Aul in Veden, as well as the remains of the Sheikh's courtyard in the village of Eliskhan-Yurt. The Order has no centre, each village brotherhood being led by an elected *Turkh* (leader).²⁶

Whereas Naqshabandi followers are mostly concentrated in the east of Chechnya, the Qadiri movement predominates in the west and in Ingushetia. Nowadays, six Qadiri *virde* are present in Chechnya. The Kunta Haji *virde*, whose main tomb is situated near Grozny, is considered at present the most powerful in Chechnya, followed by the Vis Haji *virde*, which gained many followers after 1957. The Bamat Giray *virde* of the Gunoi *taip* has its stronghold in Avtury. The Chim Mirza *virde* is based in Mairtup. R.Shah-Kazemi (1995:11) mentions Hajj Ali Mitaev as yet another *virde*. The Batal Haji *virde*, based in Ingushetia, had been extremely anti-Soviet. It is estimated that Kunta's active *murids* in Chechnya number about 20,000 and passive followers number in the hundreds of thousands.

Zikr

The *zikr* (*zuekar* in Chechen) is the liturgical component of the Sufi trinity, the two others being theology and ethics. It is composed of a melange of sayings from the Qu'ran, recital of mystic poems, and invocations of the (99) names of God. Two forms of *zikr* are extant. The Naqshabandis practise silent individual *zikr*, whereas the Qadiris, individually or in groups, practise the loud *zikr*, with dances and songs combining to induce ecstatic fervour in the participants.²⁷ It is thought that Kunta Haji introduced the choreographic

element of Sufism after his return from his journey to Baghdad. The Naqshabandis were initially opposed to this development and Shamil downright outlawed it. The *zikr* had become a potent symbol of Chechen resistance to foreign domination, and an expression of the deep-rooted yearning for freedom and independence. Here is R.Chenciner's description of the primeval effect of the *zikr* dithyramb (1997:212):

The hypnotic male chanting, swaying from a single voice to the roar of the whole company was like the sea. Only this was no normal sea: it may have begun there but soon it changed into the waters of the Old Testament Creation and moved about the firmament. It felt dangerous to hear that primal music which could stir the forgotten roots of humanity, releasing unknown powers. The chant took everything along its path or *tariqat* towards the mystic experience where man communicated directly with God. The only equivalent might be the opposite effect of the Dionysiac chants, releasing their pagan murderous energy among the group of possessed women, described in the Ancient Greek play, the Bacchae by Euripides.

Tsarist policy

Islam was more or less tolerated during the tsarist period. The Grand Muftiate in Ufa, Bashkiria, was established by Catherine II as the highest Muslim religious authority in Russia, and it kept its prestige until the fall of the Soviet Union. There were some half-hearted attempts at (re-)converting the North Caucasians to the Orthodox faith, but they met with little success. The Daghestanis, being religiously more educated than their neighbours, often used to serve as mullahs in the villages of Chechnya until the early 1920s. At the establishment of Soviet rule, there were hundreds of mosques, many religious schools (*huezharsh*), and a few churches and temples in Chechnya.

Soviet persecution

Islam was a target of anti-religious campaigns and atheist propaganda of the Communists. Mosques were closed and 'unofficial' clergy were oppressed. Many local communist leaders were Sufis, a fact that could not be tolerated by the system. Late in 1923, *shariat* courts were abolished all over the North Caucasus. In early 1924, the Red Army disarmed the Chechen population and liquidated many Sufi activists. Muslim education was prohibited and the printing of religious books was banned. In the 1920s, attempts were made to co-opt Islam to the new ideology, and official clerics delivered sermons in line with communist dogma.

In the 1930s, most mosques were destroyed and Muslim clerics were oppressed as 'reactionaries' and 'counter-revolutionaries'—Islam was driven underground. Connections with the Muslim world were severed. After rehabilitation, religious life was regulated by the Spiritual Administration of the Muslims of the Northern Caucasus, whose leaders were considered as Moscow lackeys. This official body coexisted with

clandestine orders that upheld Muslim traditions and preserved some ecclesiastic literature. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, Sufis in the North Caucasus were hunted down as criminals and subjected to show trials. The severe policy resulted in some detachment of the bulk of Chechens from the formal rites and rituals of Islam.

Religious persecution eased somewhat towards the end of the 1970s, when a few mosques were allowed to open their doors to worshippers. However, the invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 prompted a new spate of anti-Islamic propaganda in the Soviet Union. By 1985, only three mosques and three churches were legally operational in Chechnya, compared to more than 200 clandestine places of communal worship.

***Glasnost* and independence**

Liberalization gained momentum during *glasnost* years and by the end of the 1980s confessional freedom was restored and hundreds of mosques were reopened. Religion reclaimed its place in the social life of the people and festivals and holidays were openly observed. Contacts with the Muslim world were gradually restored and students were dispatched to Egypt, Jordan and Saudi Arabia to study Arabic language and *shariat*. In 1990, Bislan Gantamirov set up the Islamic Path Party, the first of its kind in Chechnya.

The year 1991 saw the establishment of the first Islamic institute in Chechnya and the publication of the first religious magazine. An edict was passed restoring confiscated religious properties, including those of Christians and Jews. By 1994, there were about 400 mosques, more than ten churches, and one synagogue serving the Jewish community, which made up about 2 per cent of the population of the republic. However, after the Russian invasion of 1994, most Jews emigrated to Israel and the USA.²⁸

During the Dudaev years, the Naqshabandi *tariqat*, headed by Deni Arsanov and with followers in Tolstoy-Yurt, Urus-Martan, and in Nadterechny, stood in opposition to the Qadiri *tariqat*, to which Dudaev belonged. There were also two opposing religious councils, the official Muftiate of Chechnya, which had severed its connections with the Grand Muftiate in Ufa, and the opposition Muftiate of the Chechen Republic.

Dudaev was careful at first not to politicize Islam, the 1992 Constitution promulgating Chechnya as a secular democratic state. It was the threatening Russian moves that forced the president to play the religious card. After the breakout of hostilities in 1994, Dudaev proclaimed holy war and called on all Muslims of the ex-Soviet Union, especially the kindred North Caucasians, to join forces with his people.

In 1997, Muslim leaders put pressure on Maskhadov to institute *shariat* as the law of the land. After some hesitation, the president acquiesced to this demand, with a provision for introducing a secular criminal code for non-Muslims. Most Chechens were not very impressed with these developments. When an order was issued requiring Chechen women to abide by the Islamic dress code, it was largely ignored. Many Chechens discovered that punishments meted out the Muslim way were degrading and at odds with their customs and traditions.

The Chechens of Ingushetia follow the Muftiate of the Republic of Ingushetia. The majority of the Chechens of Daghestan belong to the Qadiri *tariqat* and follow the Spiritual Board of the Muslims of Daghestan, created in 1990 in Makhachkala and supported mainly by the Avars and partly by the Chechens and Dargins.²⁹

Wahhabism

Wahhabism in its strictest sense refers to a hard-line off-shoot of the strict Hanbali school of (Sunni) Muslim jurisprudence. The sect was founded by Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab (1703–1787) and is prevalent in Saudi Arabia. In a wider context, ‘Wahhabism’ is used, mainly by the Russians, to refer to Muslim fundamentalists who reject all innovations appended to Islam, including the cult of saints and dervishes, so central to the Sufi ethos, and who might resort to violence to achieve their aims.

Before 1991, the Wahhabis in the USSR worked underground. Dudaev, who was not known for his religious fanaticism, was able to keep them at bay during his period of tenure. However, the influence of the Wahhabis increased significantly after Dudaev’s assassination in 1996. They had their own newspaper and TV channel, disseminating their brand of religious dogma. Maskhadov was at first tolerant of the militant members of the sect, but eventually their excesses caused the president to send government troops in July 1998 to flush them out from Gudermes. The sect was subsequently outlawed.

The muftis of the North Caucasian republics set up the Co-ordinating Council of the Muslims of North Caucasus in 1998 in an effort to create a united front against ‘Wahhabism’. Mufti Akhmad Kadyrov maintained that the ‘anti-Muslim’ movement was inimical to Chechen traditions and singled out the Congress of the People of Chechnya and Daghestan as a most reactionary wing of the sect.

Many Kunta Haji followers have assumed a neutral stance in the face of the 1999 Russian invasion, including Kadyrov, head of the pro-Russian Chechen administration. Some analysts explain this apathy as a result of the alleged involvement of Wahhabis in Maskhadov’s forces. The present Chechen mufti, Akhmad Khadzhi Shamaev, is virulently anti-Wahhabi, and so is the Council of Spiritual Leaders. Shamaev’s ‘nationalist’ counterpart is Abdul-Halim, spiritual head of the United Chechen Jamaat.

9 Customs and traditions

Nokhchalla

Customs and traditions, which have always been at the centre of the Chechen way of life, are enshrined in *nokhchalla*, the code of conduct and system of ethics that regulated Chechen society for centuries. It is the tome defining the norms of personal and social behaviour, the law according to which judicial councils pronounced their decisions. *Nokhchalla* derives from ‘*Nokhcho*’ (‘Chechen’), with a state-expressing suffix, and can be rendered as Chechenness—the quality of being a Chechen. Although it was updated and developed at certain stages of social history, its kernel goes back to the most ancient of times.

Of the many codes of the erstwhile feudal system, only one version has survived, most probably that of the commoners, which is nowadays almost universally applicable, with some local variations. This is to be contrasted with the systems of the stratified societies of other North Caucasian nations, say the Circassians, where multiple codes—a different one for each caste—are still preserved.¹ Chechens obey the rules of *nokhchalla*, if not of their own free will, then out of fear of infamy and compromise of honour in a tight-knit community—the anonymity of modern society is one of the amenities still lacking among the Chechens. Whether this is good or bad is a matter of opinion and is certainly dependent on one’s cultural bias. However, disputes are inevitable even in the most regulated of societies, and in Vainakh communities special councils had the function of ironing out and mending the wrinkles and tears in the fabric of society. The Chechens, strictly bound to their code of morality, are genuinely bewildered by behaviour that contravenes this code. When Chechen fighters entrust themselves to the Georgians, whom they consider fellow Caucasians, they do so with the conviction that their lives would be protected as ‘guests’ of the Georgians. When they begin to be extradited to Russia, the Chechens are disoriented by such ‘traitorous’ conduct.

Some aspects of customs and traditions are relics of ancient practices, surviving long after the purposes they used to serve expired. They may be used as clues to reconstruct some aspects of society that had disappeared long ago. For example, the custom of marrying a widow to her brother-in-law had sense in the context of the bride being inducted into another clan. A corresponding example in English tradition would be the observance of Boxing Day as a holiday, even though the custom of giving Christmas boxes on this day has long become obsolete.

A few rules of etiquette and personal demeanour are posited in a number of proverbs and sayings. Economy of expression, which is a cherished trait, is exhorted in “‘I don’t know” make “one” word; “I know, I saw” lead a thousand.’ Thinking should always precede pronouncing judgements—‘A sabre wound would heal but that of the tongue festers forever.’

Despite the vigorous and sometimes brutal attempts first by the tsarist and later Soviet authorities to undermine local traditions, going as far as banning *nokhchalla* in the 1920s, and replacing them by Russian imports and ‘socialist principles’, the Chechens resisted the procrustean onslaughts and adhered tenaciously to their age-old customs, surreptitiously at times. *Nokhchalla* continues to play a central role in Chechen society.

Adat, lamkerst and shariat

The *adat* (‘*aadat* or ‘*eedalsh* in Chechen), or customary law of the North Caucasians, is used synonymously with *nokhchalla*.² However, *adat* is used in a pan-North Caucasian context, whereas *nokhchalla* is strictly the Chechen version taking account of national peculiarities. The code of *adat* comprised some two dozen items that governed all spheres of life, within and without the *taip*, and according to which judges (*kkheelakhoi*) pronounced their decisions after deliberation. Issues of national importance pertaining to *adat* were discussed on Mount Kkheetashoo-Korta (‘Council Summit’) near the village of Tsentoroi (Ts’entaroi). There was a clannish element to *adat*, such that loyalty to the *taip* defined to a great extent the individual’s modes of behaviour.

Lamkerst was the collection of pagan customs upheld in some Vainakh mountain societies. *Lamkerst* was characterized by severity and some of its tenets were iniquitous, the following examples serving as illustrations. Once, Zelimkhan (Gushmazuko), the twentieth-century Chechen Robin Hood, came across a grief-stricken woman whose child was snatched in a blood feud. Even though *adat* strictly forbade taking one’s revenge on women, children and elderly people, pagan customs sanctioned such retribution. The *abrek* (outlaw horseman) caught up with the two kidnappers and pleaded with them to return the babe to its mother, but to no avail. When he started threatening them, the obdurate abductors wantonly cut the baby’s throat. In the event, signalling his rejection of *lamkerst* and abhorrence of their heinous deed, Zelimkhan slew the two men.

If someone stole a horse and then came to harm while riding it away, the owner would have been held accountable for the incident, and would have been obliged to pay compensation in accordance with the severity of the tort. In the extreme, if the thief were to die, his kin would take revenge on the horse’s owner. *Adat*, on the other hand, would lay the blame fairly and squarely on the robber, and his kin would be shamed into apologizing for his felony and return the horse plus a proper compensatory gift.

Adat was the more prevalent and acceptable law in Chechen society, at least in the last few centuries, while the influence of *lamkerst* in society is almost negligible. Chechen ethnographer Said-Magomed Khasiev differentiated between *adat* that elevate man and help him become better and *lamkerst*, which ‘most Chechens reject.’³

Shariat has never had a major role to play in Chechen society, despite vigorous attempts by Imam Shamil to impose it in the nineteenth century—the Chechens were too inured in the old ways. In November 1997, the Chechens largely ignored a government decree prescribing Moslem dress code for women. This was perhaps the first encounter by most Chechens of one of the aspects of formal Islam and they deemed it contrarious to their traditional values—yet another instance of the perennial *adat*—*shariat* opposition. Because there is extensive and readily available literature on *shariat*, no systematic attempt is made herein to portray its tenets.

Courtship

Courtship traditions, some going back for centuries, have been preserved that demonstrate the high moral values expected of those who were about to enter into the sacred bond of marriage, and they also show the respect accorded to women. One fairytale tells of a sultan who courted his fiancée for eight years—a significant feminine number in Chechen folklore. Chechens usually married outside their own clans, a minimum degree of unrelatedness being prescribed.



Figure 9.1 Girls at (secluded) fountain being serenaded by men on ancient and modern *pondars*. Public show of intimacy was frowned upon by the austere Caucasians.

Women started to be considered for marriage from their mid- to late teens, whereas men started to look for partners at a slightly older age. Dance parties were the venues at which men and women gathered to enjoy themselves and to be introduced to one another. In far-away days, bride-shows were put on on Tusholi's Day. This red-letter day was of particular significance, as marriages contracted on it were believed to be especially blessed.

A suitor was allowed to court the woman of his choice in her house, but only in accordance with strict etiquette. He would be accompanied by a trusted friend and she would have female companions. It was unseemly for a man to pay court to a young woman in her house or associate with her in public in the presence of any of her male relatives. It was taboo for men to touch women, even if they were their 'fiancées', prudence requiring them to keep a safe distance. Touching a woman (*kueigash tookhar*), even inadvertently, was considered as defilement, the punishment for which was execution of the culprit by the family of the 'tainted' woman. The tortfeasor could escape certain retribution by suckling at the breasts of the woman's mother, by force if need be, thus becoming her foster-brother. The downside of this was that he would be interdicted from marrying her.

Nuptials

Marriage has been a very important institution in Chechen society since time immemorial. Traditional ceremonies were so elaborate (and cost so much) that it took many months to prepare for the event. Men had recourse to the custom of *zudayador* (also *nuskaldador*), similar to Western elopement and Circassian *k'wese*, to secure their fiancées. A proper scenario would have a suitor propose to a woman, who would signal her approval by offering him a token of her commitment in the form of a ring or a personal effect. However, it was she who set the time of elopement and wedding date. Traditionally, weddings took place either after the harvest or before sowing campaigns. Infrequently, the 'abduction' would take place against the will of the woman, but even then the man was obliged to ask her if she had another one in her life. If the answer were in the affirmative, the hapless man was obliged to turn into a match-maker (*zaakhal*) to bring the two lovers together.

At the appointed time, the bridegroom-to-be and his merry men, who would have devised an 'abduction' plan, would 'snatch' the woman from her parents' house and posit her in safe keeping at the place of a close friend or relative of the suitor. There she would be kept in the company of a group of females until the wedding day, receive instructions on her future role from the lady of the house, and be visited by members of the bridegroom's family for mutual acquaintance. But before the wedding ceremonies could start, the important business of getting the consent of the woman's family had to be attended to.

A delegate, usually a respected elder, would be dispatched to the bride's father to solicit a proactive approval and discuss the wedding arrangements. Trouble could ensue in case the woman's family insisted on her return home and the suitor stuck to his guns. However, assuming the best, the elders would determine the bride-money (*taw*=ransom, compensation), which was paid to the bride's family upon closing the marriage contract. This was always high and often prohibitive, a virgin 'costing' more than a divorcee or widow. On the other hand, the bride-to-be was obliged to bring a special dowry (*qovlam*) to her husband's house, as a contribution towards readying it for marital life. A dowry was payable by the man to his wife in case he decided to divorce her—a Muslim tradition.

Wedding ceremonies

The customs and rituals associated with the wedding were elaborate with a fair amount of good cheer, the Chechen word for ‘wedding’ (*‘lovzar’*) being also rendered as ‘amusement, fun, game’. The connubial ceremonies were interspersed with rough antics and diversions, including hostage-taking, roadblocks for ransom, hair-raising sporting competitions, dances and capers, ample doses of merry-making and tom-foolery, story-telling and songs. For the bride and groom it was a time of ritual and display of humility. The whole picture depicted a wholesome people extracting healthful pleasure out of life.

On the wedding day, a procession made up of relatives and friends of the bridegroom (the participants in the wedding procession were collectively called *‘zamoi’*) would go to the bride’s home to ‘collect’ her. In the olden times, the ceremony of ‘disengaging the bride from the hearth-chain’ was conducted. The best man (*nevts-naaqost* literally ‘bridegroom-friend’) (in later times, the bride’s maid) led the veiled bride thrice around the lit hearth while her girl-friends chanted hymns wishing felicity and fertility. Then the best man took the bride in one hand and the chain in the other and shook it as a symbol of severance of the connection between the bride and her father’s household. Free from her bond, the bride was then taken out of the house by one of the bridegroom’s friends: an unenviable task, as he was subjected to swearing and curses and was the target of physical abuse by the bride’s kin, in symbolism of their reluctance to let go of one of their own. In later times, the vehemence of this custom was toned down to a demand for ransom (*yooekhana*) for the bride, where young people from the bride’s clan would ‘hold the door’ (*ne’ laatsa*) and lock the gate until they received money or presents. In more modern versions of this curious custom, roadblocks were set up using logs, felt cloaks were laid on the ground, or ropes tied across the path, to stop the wedding procession and extract ‘bribes’. Donning her wedding dress, the bride was conducted to her new home, with ritual songs and dances performed along the way.

The rituals would resume at the bridegroom’s father’s house with the bride stepping over a rug and a broom deliberately misplaced on the threshold. A ‘good’ woman would put the two items in their right place and thus restore order. A ‘hag’, on the other hand, would cross the threshold negligently—to the misfortune of the bridegroom, his family and clan. In another version, the bride’s humility and respect for the elders were gauged by placing a rug in her path, proper conduct dictating that she rolled it out and beseeched them to walk in first. In yet another version, the bride collected the items for pecuniary rewards.

Once inside the house, the bride was positioned in the place of honour, by the window opposite the entrance, decorated by a special wedding curtain (*kirha*) hung up by a cord (*arkkho*) to drape her. This was part of the induction ceremony, but also a celebration for inclusion of an extra clan member. The bride was handed a first-born son (male and female tots, in another version) in the hope of her begetting many male offspring to propagate the father’s name and add to the strength and weight of the family and clan. The guests presented the couple with gifts, with women offering cloth, rugs, candy and money, and men, money and sheep.

With the first instalment of rituals out of the way, the real fun, in which all villagers were free to take part, would begin. Horse races and games were held to cheer the celebrants and as avenues for the intrepid ones to compete. In one race a group of

horseman tried to snatch shawls placed on the backs of horses of the other team, who had been given a head start on the pursuers. Helmet and chain-mail races also involved two teams, one donning 'helmets' of nut twigs and suits of chain-mail, the other attempting to rob the garb and put them on themselves. The items were thrown to the crowd in the case of failure. A long-distance race (15–65 km), refereed by an elected official, took place just before dawn, with prizes for the first three placers.

After all the excitement and fun, a multi-course banquet (*toi*) was served in the house with participants segregated according to gender. Counter-intuitively, the people of the bride and groom's generation would be seated first at the tables, with the older generations sitting around waiting their turn. After the fare had been consumed and guests refreshed, everyone assembled for the dance party. In another version, a frolicsome exchange would take place after the meal between the guests and the bride. All chattered endlessly, cracked jokes and appraised the bride's looks, but the bride was expected to keep her composure throughout, as verbosity on her part was considered a mark of silliness and immodesty. People would ask for water of the bride, who was allowed to oblige and offer curt wishes of good health. In a variety of this game, the bride would resist trickery by male guests designed to get her talking until she received adequate money 'bribes'. This was a watered-down version of the ancient custom of 'holding one's tongue', in which the bride maintained a code of silence with respect to her older in-laws, which was only broken at the end of the wedding in a special ceremony. The master of ceremonies was called '*inarla*'.

The fiancé, who was interdicted from attending the main wedding ceremonies, his best man and groomsmen acting as his delegates, had separate festivities held in his honour. It was deemed unseemly for him to be seen entering his bride's room for the consummation of the marriage, ruse or patience being reverted to in order to attain surreptitious carnal pleasures. As in other North Caucasian societies, open gratification was considered a mark of feebleness and lack of self-control among the Chechens.

The family and clan of the bride also stayed away. The cult of the family master had it that perpetuation of a household was ensured by the continual replenishment by new adherents from other clans, and the wedding ceremony was the family's way of expressing joy at the new acquisition. The bride's family, on the other hand, had no cause to celebrate the loss of a member.

On the third day, a procession led the bride to the river in accompaniment of ritual music played by the bards. Cornmeal pancakes and cheese cookies were thrown into the water and shot at, after which the bride collected water and returned home. This ancient ritual was supposed to protect the bride from the evil river spirit by symbolically slaying it as it came up to collect the goodies, and thus render safe the chore of fetching water. It was usually in the evening of the third day that the agent of the bride's father, the bridegroom and the witnesses went to register the marriage. The next day, the bride became mistress of her new household.

According to B.Wartanoff (1943), if either the bridegroom or the bride were to die at the point of marriage, the ceremonies would nonetheless be taken to a conclusion, and the dead would be united with the living. On such occasion, the father of a deceased bridegroom would have no compunction claiming the dowry already fixed by his 'married' son. There were also accounts of marriages contracts involving recently deceased couples.

Religious weddings were considered as backward by the Soviets, and attempts were made to eradicate them, but to no avail. After going through the motions of a civil ceremony Chechen couples would go to a clergyman for registration and blessing of the union (*makhbar, mahar*).

Customs of newly-weds

Having broken away from her father's hearth-chain, it was important to reintroduce the bride into the universal scheme of things by attaching her to that of her father-in-law. A special ceremony was held during which she circumambulated the hearth as a symbol of her admission into her new realm—the Chechen version of the cult of Dade of the Circassians (see A.Jaimoukha 2001:228). She was also tasked with a variety of duties in the first phase of her marriage, from which she was later exempted in a ceremony called '*nesalara yakkkhar*' (roughly 'the way of living of the daughter-in-law').

Married women enjoyed a distinguished social status, as they were entrusted since time immemorial with the ritual upkeep of fire. The groom's mother lit the hearth in the new household with a brand from her own fire and then bestowed the title of 'Ts'e-Naana' ('Fire-Mother') on the bride—a propagation of tradition, as it were. The technique for perpetuating fire was to feed it with logs for cooking and heating, the embers collected in one corner of the hearth and covered with ash when not in use. One of the principal yardsticks for gauging the quality of a woman was the permanence of her fire. If the fire were to go out, it would have reflected badly on the lady of the house and would have been considered an evil omen. 'May the fire in your hearth go out!' was a particularly horrible malediction (*sardam*).

A month after the wedding, the bride visited her parents' house together with some of her husband's female relatives and presented her parents and sisters with gifts. The accompanying women (*zaghaloi*) were given presents in return and returned home on the same day, whilst the bride spent a month there in order to prepare her dowry and gifts for her in-laws.

The bridegroom had certain duties to fulfil (*nevtalla leeloo*: literally 'to uphold the position of being a bridegroom') towards his bride's parents and other relatives (collectively called '*stunskhoi*'). His first visit to his in-laws' house, which was upon invitation, was undertaken according to a custom called '*nuts guchuvakkhakar*' (literally: 'laying bare, exposing the bridegroom'). Accompanied by his best man, he took pains to bear considerable gifts, including a fattened ram. Nevertheless, he was kept standing in a corner whilst his in-laws poked fun at him in a concerted effort to disconcert him. The best man did his best to rebut the jokes on behalf of his companion and lessen his ordeal, as it was considered unseemly for the groom to retort himself, even in face of blatant ridicule. Showing respect to one's in-laws was considered a mark of good breeding. The son-in-law had to bribe the children who solicited him for gifts. The identification of a man as a jackass by his in-laws seems to have been prevalent in most of the North Caucasus. The best man was presented with a gift, usually a shirt or suit, as a token of the bride's parents' gratitude for accompanying their son-in-law. Subsequent visits were not eagerly awaited by either party.

Avoidance customs entailed proper isolation of the bride from mutually embarrassing chance encounters with the head of the household and her brothers-in-law. A curious custom, called '*ts'ekkhaabar*' ('guarding the name') among the Chechens, whereby the bride was interdicted from using the real names of her in-laws, had been prevalent among the peoples of the North Caucasus; instead she had to devise a hypocorism for each one of them or use euphemistic allusions.

Conjugal relations

Newly married couples were presented with gifts, usually in the form of household goods. This, together with the patrimony, helped them to start their new lives on a good footing and ensured some degree of independence. Proper care was taken so that a woman was not overburdened with domestic duties. On the other hand, Chechen women were not allowed a period of reprieve from housework after consummation of marriage. The relationship between man and wife was formal, and such pleasantries as smiling were in short supply. Men showed indulgent restraint in the treatment of their wives. It was forbidden for men and women to call their partners by their names, but alluded to them by the term '*heenekh*' ('someone'). It was anathema for a man to talk about his wife. In contrast, a woman had closer relationships with her brothers.

Birth and upbringing

Although Chechens actively sought large progeny, it was considered reprehensible to show one's joy at having children. In the past three centuries children have acquired extra value, as vigorous procreation has been adopted as a self-defence mechanism to counteract persistent attempts at physical liquidation of the nation.

When in labour, women were isolated from menfolk in outlying cabins, husbands in particular being strictly prohibited from attending the birth. Women and their new-born babies were thought to be especially tainted during child-birth and for some time after. It was only after a period of seclusion accompanied by 'cleansing' rituals that mother and child were reintroduced gradually into the community. These customs were prevalent among other Caucasian peoples. Chechen babies were muffled in swaddling-clothes (*kokhka*) to restrict their movement. Having babies did not entitle women to a break from toil, so they strapped the wooden cradles of their children on their backs before heading to the fields. Such cradles are still used by some Chechen women.

The *ataliqate* (from Turkic *atalik*=*foster-father*, tutor; fatherhood) institution, whereby the children of the upper classes were brought up by noble vassals, did not apply in the classless traditional Chechen society. However, prior to the egalitarian transformation the custom of entrusting children to liegemen was the norm among the Vainakh. Foster-brotherhood meant that children suckled at the same breast were considered foster-siblings, with concomitant application of marriage restrictions. In some communities, mothers of new-born babies also suckled the young offspring of the neighbours to nurture closer relations through foster-brotherhood.

Children were in general raised by example and guidance and the qualities cherished by society were inculcated in them. The father treated his progeny with a combination of sternness and indifference bordering on neglect, except when untoward behaviour needed straightening out, though physical punishment was not very common, as it was thought to compromise a child's self-respect. It was taboo to call them by their names in the presence of strangers. Women had more leeway in expressing their affection to the offspring, but still on the Spartan side. Excessive attention or pride in one's children usually drew immediate and severe censure. Nevertheless, lullabies were sung to both boys and girls, the ones for the former connected first with hunting and later with farming and shepherding, whereas those of the latter 'extolled the virtues of material well-being, daily life and practical accomplishments—all to prepare them for a life of toil' (R.Chenciner 1997:81). In the olden days of matriarchy, and to a lesser extent afterwards, the eldest maternal uncle had a considerable say in the upbringing of his nephews, who would expect gifts from him upon attaining adulthood. To this day, maternal relationships are still very strong among the Vainakh.

Parents passed on to their offspring the corpus of customs and traditions and the relevant information on familial and clan origins, including the clan's original highland village and towers. The young ones were taught that every-day opportunities to do good or evil presented themselves in nines. It was by making a conscious effort to purge malevolent thoughts from one's mind that one learned to choose the righteous path.

According to an old custom, *bovdakkkhar*, a son would receive a portion of his patrimony from the master of the household on attaining adulthood, upon marriage or after the birth of the first child, in a special ceremony to initiate him into the realm of independent manhood. This was taken to extreme among the Ingush, with the son, upon reaching the above-mentioned milestones, sanctioned to use force to obtain his 'inheritance' from his father.

An institution called '*amanat*' or '*anamat*' (from Arabic '*amāna*=surety, pledge), whereby the children of princes and nobles were given as pledges of faith, was widespread in the North Caucasus. It is thought that it was developed during the time of the Golden Horde, when princes voluntarily sent their children to the court of the Khanate to learn the Mongol language and etiquette. It later became associated with offering of hostages to cement treaties. These could be put to death or committed to slavery in case of forfeiture.

Children were considered the 'possession' of the father's family, and, as such, in the case of divorce or death of the husband, the woman could not demand custody of her children if she were to decide to leave her husband's house.

Divorce and polygamy

The structure of pre-Muslim Chechen society, as was the case with most other North Caucasian ones, was firmly based on monogamy and interdiction of divorce, reflecting both pagan and later Christian influences. With the advent of Islam, polygamy was instituted and divorce (*zudaintar*) sanctioned. However, a polygamous man was required to treat all his wives equally and fairly, at least as far as material requirements were concerned, the affairs of the heart being considered beyond man's control. Divorce cases

had remained rare until the Soviet period, and they became very common following rehabilitation. Although Islam allows divorce, it is regarded as 'the most abhorrent of man's rights', only to be reverted to as a last resort. The Soviet system prohibited polygamy, and all marriages were required to be registered officially. This however did not stop clandestine marriages or official ones being blessed by men of religion.

Before the institution of divorce, it was very difficult for a woman to leave her father-in-law's household, even after the death of her husband. Other members of the household could lay claim on her as wife, or she could be obliged by the father-in-law to remarry within his clan. According to a strict code of sexual ethics, a woman of loose morals was considered the ultimate disgrace to her family. An unfaithful wife was returned to her family in ignominy; crimes of honour were rare on account of the code of revenge. In the olden days, incidents of public lynching of offending women took place every now and then.

During their long and unequal struggle against Russian hegemony, the Chechens sought to compensate for the horrific loss in life by actively encouraging polygamy to redress the demographic imbalance.

Death and obsequies

Ancient burial rites, including ceremonial mourning (*kadam*) and ritual lamentation (*belkhar*), were recorded by ethnographers, the accounts being borne out by archaeological evidence. After keeping vigil over the deceased fully clothed and with the whole panoply of insignias and weaponry for two to four days, the body was taken to a crypt and entombed on a shelf in the presence of the mourners. Women sat round the vault for a week, uttering their lamentations (*tiizham*) and striking themselves on their faces. The dead man was periodically supplied with victuals and everyday items needed on his journey to the next world and for some time after. The newly deceased was considered particularly polluted and certain 'cleansing' rituals were deemed essential. The horse of the deceased, or that of a relative if he had had none, was taken to the crypt and the bridle placed in the dead man's hand. The horse was led three times around the crypt with accompanying prayer chants and then was dedicated to the deceased by slicing off its right ear and throwing it in the crypt (in earlier custom the equine was itself sacrificed). According to A.Sjögren (1846), 80 years prior to his visit of the Caucasus, a widow would have had her ear cut off and thrown into the tomb, but the mutilation was later reduced to a symbolic clipping of the topknot of her hair.

The Vainakh never cremated their dead, the practice being in contradiction with their ancient belief in life after life, in which the body resumed its normal functions. When the head of a family passed away, women of the household would go out of the house with their heads covered with the hearth cauldrons to indicate that there was nobody in the house to light the hearth and cook for. The ancestors would also be left without offerings, and they would be reduced to begging for their 'sustenance'.

People of a village would arrange for the widow and children of the deceased to be taken care of, including provision of victuals. The neighbours would hold their gates wide open as a sign of shared grief. All the villagers would pay their condolences and offer help and support. Relatives and neighbours would take turns to provide funeral

repasts and other funereal services. On returning home, the first thing a traveller would do was to offer condolences to the families of the deceased.

Funeral wakes and repasts were important events held at specific intervals after the event, each having a particular function. It was believed that the soul of the deceased needed to be appeased so as not to cause the living harm. Lavish feasts were the norm at these celebrations, the regaling of the living being thought of as benefiting the soul of the dead. After harvest, families prepared special dinners as offerings to deceased relatives at which prayers were said.⁴

The first wake was held on the day after the funeral. For three days the crowds of guests would be sumptuously regaled. The second obit, known as 'bed wake', was held to enable the dead to rise in the next world. This involved special bed rites, another follow-on feast and sporting competitions, the main event of which was a horse race. The villagers picked the best horses and sent them to a village some distance away. For the outward journey, the leader was given a small white flag as his badge and his companion riders held forked sticks with apples and nuts fastened on them to present to their host and the elders of the village. The return journey started the following day. First the horses would be ridden at a walking pace, but about 15 km from the village they would be set to a gallop. The horse owners would dispatch riders from the village to urge the competitors to go faster. Due to the whipping and the great distance of the race, the last stages of the race would see even the most resilient of horses only going at a slow trot. Up until the mid-nineteenth century, the custom had been to present the winner with the dead man's weapons, but then the clothes of the deceased or new items of clothing were offered, and later the prize was downgraded to a piece of mutton and three loaves of bread, with the winning horse being offered beer. An elder who was an initiate of the cult would ask the owner of the winning horse if he would offer it to the deceased to take it wherever he wished. If the answer were in the affirmative, the elder would consecrate the horse to the dead man, who would make avail of it on his journey to the world beyond. The next three horses were pledged to his ancestors.⁵

Wakes were held on the second and third years too, the former being the most lavish affair. The last obsequies were held by the deceased's wife, after which she took off her mourning garb and was free to remarry.

Stone stelae (*chartash*) inscribed with prayers and epitaphs, were erected on common graves, whereas the more affluent were commemorated by elaborate mausoleums. Women had special decorative designs engraved on their tombstone stelae. The cult of the dead entailed the erection of high stone monuments along the village path leading to the cemetery. The 'adored' needed not be physically interred in the village graveyard, for he might be buried in a distant land or just missing. Those who passed these memorials stopped by and said a few prayers.

After the introduction of the Muslim faith, a period of symbiosis existed between pagan and Muslim rites of burial. For example, pagan stelae were erected over Muslim graves. The Muslim funeral rites as presently practised by the Chechens are well documented. The corpse is ritually washed and then covered in a white shroud. Graves are usually visited on Fridays and other holidays.

Whereas in the olden days Chechen warriors were buried with their full arsenal of weapons, during the bleak phases of the nineteenth-century war this custom was discarded as weapons were at a premium. Imam Shamil interdicted the hiring of

mourners for funeral ceremonies. Funeral rites were reduced to just a prayer and a few words of condolence. In recent funeral practices, it was considered a shame to display sorrow and pain in public, and as such Chechens were expected to retain their composure in the face of danger or personal tragedy. In this setting, open mourning was unheard of. In the Chechen ethos, sorrow is explained away as a minor version of some greater grief.

Chechens are exceedingly finicky about interring their dead in their ancestral graveyards (*keshnash*). Upon their homecoming in the late 1950s, some exiles brought back the remains of their long-deceased relatives and reburied them according to tradition. Cemeteries were also meticulously restored.

Suicide was unheard of in Chechen society, being considered an ignoble act of cowardice that brought ignominy not only upon a person, but also on his family and clan.

Greetings

There were many different ways of greeting, depending on circumstances. The principle of equality, and the anathema attached to conceit, percolated down to the minutia of the greeting ritual. For example, a rider was obliged to utter his salute first upon encountering a person on foot, and he who went downhill always greeted those coming up. The weak and poor were always met with particularly warm words. Women and elders had to be greeted in a standing posture, and always accorded the right of way. If an elderly woman passed by a group of men, all would stand up in respect, the older men acknowledging her by a lesser gesture. When a man and a woman met, it was the former who had the duty of initiating the greeting formalities. Herdsmen greeted each other, or were greeted, with the salutatory expression '*deebiila!*', essentially a wish for increased cattle size.

Most common greetings were essentially expressions of reverence for peace and freedom. In fact, the word for 'greetings, salute' (*'marshalla'*) is intimately related to the words for 'peace, safety, freedom' (*'maershalla'* and *'maershoo'*). Upon arrival to a place, one was greeted with '*Marsha doghiila!*' ('Come in peace!'). When taking one's leave, one said, '*Marsha 'oila!*' ('I leave you in peace!'), the response being '*Marsha ghoila!*' ('Go in peace!'). In the same vein, one invoked peace and freedom to convey one's regards (*marshalla dala*).

The three pillars of Vainakh virtue

Decency (*ghillakkh*) was a function of three parameters. The Vainakh code of masculine ethics was embodied in '*yah*' (literally: 'pride'; thought to be connected with *yueh*=face) and its tenets (*yahyan kostash*), namely fortitude, valour, modesty, moderation, generosity, charity and competitiveness. The Chechen folklorist Adam Dolatov summed up the spirit of *yah* as follows:

Endeavour to fathom the deepest recesses of your soul and gain the deepest insight of your ancestors. Never compromise your *yah*, always live in dignity and decency. You should never fear death. It would be

more terrifying to lose one's *yah* and live life devoid of dignity and decency, for this means that freedom would be forfeited as well.

(Ë.Isaev 1999)

The possession or otherwise of *yah* said a lot about a man's character and his status in the community. To be said to have *yah* was the highest possible praise that could be heaped upon a man, implying that he was a paragon to be emulated by the young ones. On the other hand, to be devoid of *yah* meant that he lacked manly qualities, and as such would not be accorded respect in his village. The antithesis of *yah* was the repugnance engendering *hagh*. Many *illi* epics end with the wish that no mother would ever give birth to a son without *yah*.

The two other major formers of Chechen character and morality were the concepts of '*bekhk*', the sense of duty and responsibility, and '*èh*', the sense of shame and guilt.

Cornerstones of code of chivalry

Hospitality and reverence for guests

Hospitality was a sacred institution prevalent all over the Caucasus and respect for guests was a source of pride for all Caucasian peoples. In classical Chechen society, a cult had developed around hospitality, bestowing reverence upon the guest (*haasha*; cf. Circassian *hesch'e*). Turpal Nokhcho (literally: 'Hero-Chechen'), the legendary ancestor of the Chechens, was born with a piece of iron in one hand and a portion of cheese in the other. Many legends and sayings have come down to us depicting the high status and some details of this institution. The inhospitable terrain and inclement weather had a lot to do with the development of this institution. Hospitality was certainly an important and interesting aspect of the social life of the Vainakh.

Chechens received their guests with open arms, literally, as a token of sincerity and absence of malice. The etiquette of proper guest reception, lodging and subsequent delivery to the next destination or host (*heeshan daa*) was very involved. All Chechens were conversant with proper table manners and seating arrangements at home and as guests. A guest was not only put up for as long as he wished, but was also lodged in the best quarters and offered the choicest victuals, sometimes at the expense of the host's family. He was always seated in the place of honour (*barch*) in a room or at the table. It was improper to enquire of the guest about the purpose of his visit in the first three days. Hospitality was not conditional and no compensation was expected, any offer in this regard being considered a grave insult. A guest, however, could present the children of his host with gifts.

Refusing to receive a visitor, even if a fugitive or inveterate criminal, was a stigma that stuck for life. The guest in return was expected to follow specific rules of etiquette and not to overburden his host. He was also expected to lodge with the same host on his next visit to the village, failure to do so being considered an indictable breach of etiquette.

A guest-chamber (*sovts'a*, or *heeshan ts'a*) was always kept in tip-top shape. In extended dwellings, it was usually located near the quarters of the head of the family,

with separate entrance from the common terrace, as a mark of respect and deference. Special provisions were set aside for guests. Slaughtering a sheep for a visitor was considered the ultimate culinary honour bestowed upon him. Womenfolk were also expected to do their share. An ancient custom had the daughter or daughter-in-law of the master of the house assisting the guest take off his shoes and overcoat. A guest was introduced to the villagers during a dance party held in his honour. It was considered unseemly for a host to retire to bed before his guest.

The host bore the onerous responsibility of safe delivery of his guest to the next host or destination. A host would defend his guest's life, honour and property, even at the risk of his own life. If a guest was harmed in any way, the host was obliged to avenge the tort as if he were one of his own family members; failure to do so would have brought eternal shame and infamy. Anecdotal accounts abound of hosts dying while defending their guests.⁶ Infringement of any of the rules of hospitality entailed severe censure, and sometimes cases were submitted to arbitration by special councils. The murder of a guest while on a visit was atoned for by giving seven cows to the host and 63 to the family of the victim.

Greetings and hospitality were causally connected; for to be greeted implied an offer of cosy lodgings. On the other hand, travellers with no bona fide hosts were considered as hostile and were usually taken as prisoners or slaves.

Respect for elders

The ritual veneration of the elders was closely associated with the cult of ancestors. The village elders were the ultimate arbiters in all affairs. Obedience to one's seniors was one of the binding rules of the code of conduct, its contravention being regarded as a grave censurable defect. Elders always had the right to speak first and the right of way and it was considered unseemly to interrupt or butt in during their conversations. It was anathema to talk back to them or smoke and drink alcohol in their presence. A person stood up in respect when an elder came into a room and remained standing until entreated to sit down by his senior. In more recent times, young people offered senior citizens the most comfortable seats on public transport. On level ground, a man walked to the left of his senior(s) in age, unless he had need to use his weapons, in which case he assumed the rightmost position. A junior walked behind when going uphill and in front when going downhill to act as a support should his elder slip. One never called one's seniors by their names, but used endearing appellations instead.

Blood revenge

Blood revenge (*ch'ir, p-ha*) and blood price were meticulously regulated in the chivalric code. Had it not been for the deterrent punishments laid out against murder and mutilation, chaos would have ruled the land and human life would not have been respected. Although internecine vendettas raged every now and then, these were exceptional occurrences, the normal state of affairs being peaceful co-existence.

Before the promulgation of a vendetta (*dov*), rigorous attempts would have been made by third parties to effect reconciliation, or at least to limit the scope of punishment to the guilty party and spare other members of his family and clan. The state of constant threat

on his life in which the offender found himself before his fate was decided was called '*luralla*'. There were three ancient means for a murderer to escape immediate retribution and defer his case to a tribal council. He could take refuge in the house of the murdered man and suckle, willing or not, at the breast of his mother (later, mere touching of the breast did the trick), thus retroactively becoming his milk-brother. The second method was to touch the hearth-chain in the dead man's house, signalling his joining the victim's household. The third was to let one's hair and beard grow and then go without weapons to the grave of the deceased in dilapidated attire and contrite state and let the kin of the deceased know that he was earnestly asking the gods for forgiveness. The charade was put on for the benefit of the village elders who would presumably take pity on the sorry figure and intercede on his behalf.

A special *taip* council had the responsibility of deliberating and pronouncing judgement on blood revenge suits and of determining compensation (*tam*). Upon the death of a member of the community, it would convene to decide on the means to avenge the deceased. Generally, only members of the family and close relatives of the dead had the right to take part in the vendetta (collectively called '*ch'irkhoi*'= 'avengers'), whereas the role of the other members of the *taip* was to ostracize the murderer. Neutral clans would often act as intermediaries in the conflict. *Makha*, or compensation for murder, was a function of the clout of the victim's clan. For example, the murder of a member of a large clan was atoned for by giving his family 63 cows, whereas the rate for that of a less powerful one was only a third of this amount. In *adat*, compensation for injury depended on the side of the body on which the wound was inflicted.

Wholesale outlawing of one or several villages in blood feuds was reported as late as 1917. In 1923, the Soviets abolished blood revenge, and the number of incidents associated with it somewhat diminished. However, relatives of feud victims remained adamant in their resolve to exact revenge the Chechen way, even in cases where the state had meted out its punishment to the transgressors. As recently as 2002, some Chechens called for the restoration of the canon, in order to reinstate the state of law, while others demanded its banning for a number of years, to give the shattered society a chance to heal its festering wounds. A commission had been set up in Chechnya to reconcile families and clans involved in internecine vendettas. It would seem that in Soviet times a similar body functioned under the council of ministers of the republic.

It is noteworthy that during the recent conflicts, the Chechen army shied away from killing so-called collaborators, except in extreme circumstances—for a Chechen to take the life of another Chechen was never a light affair.⁷ On the other hand, the indiscriminate and flagitious extermination of civilians in the mopping-up operations by Russian troops in Chechnya had only served to swell the ranks of the Chechen resistance fighters, as relatives of the victims considered this the only way of wreaking vengeance. The scale of Russian savagery prompted Ruslan Khasbulatov to consider the rejoining of Chechnya to the Russian Federation to be an untenable proposition due to the implacable hatred felt by the Chechens towards everything Russian and the inevitable retribution.

Lamkerst had codified different blood revenge rules. For example, if fighting broke out in the village square, the farther from the square a fighter lived, the more he had to pay for injuries inflicted on others. *Shariat* interdicted blood revenge, but it never had a significant influence on traditional practices.

One dynamic of blood feuds was that, as families escaped retribution, some dispersion of population had been taking place within Chechnya, and even beyond, mainly to Daghestan and northern Georgia, the process being facilitated by hospitality traditions.

Modesty, selflessness and bravery

In Chechen society, modesty was highly valued and arrogance thoroughly abhorred. Courtesy and considerateness towards others were institutionalized. It was deemed detestable to flaunt one's superior status or worldly blessings, for in the Chechen ethos there is always a superior to oneself in any field or endeavour. Be that as it may, occasional flashes of bravado and displays of wealth by the young ones were inevitable in a strict society as means of letting off steam, especially in freer foreign settings.

Selflessness and self-sacrifice were developed as mechanisms geared towards the preservation of communal units and ideologies, starting from the *dooezal* to pan-Nakhism, and, cutting across ethnic borders, to pan-Caucasianism and, in the limit, ending in the peculiar Vainakh humanitarianism, holism and universal harmony. It was rare to encounter Chechens with blatant *primo mihi* syndrome, the sufferers being shunned by society. Bravery was a cherished attribute and its antonym a most loathsome personal stigma.

Liberty

Love of freedom has been a principal and unalienable component of the Chechen make-up. Chechens refuse to be subjugated by anybody, at the same time desisting from aggression against other peoples, unless provoked. Their history attests to adamant resistance against invaders and occupiers, but there is almost no mention of Chechen forays into foreign lands. Chechens were brought up as warriors with the sense of duty of protecting their own and their land no matter the price. Chechens adore independence and in their personal domains strive to become masters of their own affairs.

Tolerance

Tolerance is an integral part of the Vainakh ethos. There had never been traditions of religious or racial discrimination and persecution in Chechen history. According to popular belief, an injury inflicted on a fellow Muslim could be atoned for on Judgement Day, since all Muslims would meet then. However, no such second chance would be available if the injured person were of a different faith—conscience niceties taken to an extreme. Chechen society had always welcomed individuals and groups to live in its midst and some *taips* can still trace their origin to foreign nationalities. Though rare, there had been instances in which some of the ills that had befallen the nation were imputed by 'pure' Chechens to 'foreign' elements in society.

Contemporary customs and traditions

For some two centuries the various manifestations of Russian imperialism have been heavy-handedly trying to impose alien systems of morality on the Chechens. In the nineteenth century, the tsarist criminal code and judicial system were imposed throughout the Caucasus, to be replaced in the twentieth by the Soviet versions. Native writers in the Soviet period were instructed to pen works denigrating customs and traditions, the most notorious being A.A.Aidamirov's *Across the Mountain Paths* (1975). Nevertheless, the old customs and traditions have largely survived the onslaught. In 2002, the Russian criminal code was officially reinstated in Chechnya.

There is still an opposition in contemporary society between *adat* and *lamkerst*. Khasiev advocated banning the latter and institutionalizing the former as a means of reviving national morality.⁸ The antagonism perceived between *adat* and *shariat*, though of lesser magnitude, could potentially decline into conflict that would further tear the fabric of society. It remains to be seen what system the Chechens would choose to regulate their affairs in the post-war period and whether prudent compromise would rule the day.

10 Folklore

Many native and Russian researchers have worked on Vainakh folklore and ethnography, including G.A.Bertepov, Ya.Chesnov, B.G.Dalgat, Adam Dolatov, Serazhdin Èlmurzaev, P.I.Golovinsky, I.F.Grabovsky, A.P.Ippolitov, V.F.Miller, Ismail Mutushev, N.P.Semenov, Zaurbek Sheripov and I.V.Treskov. Georgian ethnographers, such as A.Robakidze, have published many works on this topic, but mostly in Georgian. Western Caucasologists include the German Adolf Dirr, who, like Adolf Bergé before him, was fascinated with Caucasian culture and folklore. He published a collection of Caucasian folk-tales and translated B.G.Dalgat's seminal work *The Primeval Religion of the Chechens* into German. The Scientific Society (later, the Ethnographic Research Centre) was established in 1929 to conduct ethnographic research. Modern Chechen folklorists include Sh.A.Dzhambekov and Kh.M.Khalilov. I.A.Dakhkilgov published a seminal work on Ingush folklore in 2000.

National costumes¹

Costumes were a reflection of prevalent aesthetic values and traditional lifestyles. Two stages of national costume development can be traced. The traditional costumes associated with the Vainakh are relatively recent introductions and were mainly an influence of the Kabardians, who came into close contact with the Vainakh in the latter part of the Middle Ages. Previously, the Vainakh had other modes of dress, but still in the general Caucasian style, as can be evidenced in several legends of old, which also furnish some clues on the ancient symbolisms they bore. Study of costumes had shed some light on some aspects of the history of the Vainakh and on their medieval social system and economic situation. Archaeological evidence suggests that the form of costumes of the Caucasus in the Middle Ages came in the general course of development of the material culture. According to Z.V.Dode (1997):

An interpretation of the Nart epic shows Caucasian peoples as having separate cultural identities, but the clothes were used in similar ways. This means the mode of acculturation is similar in all regions... Moreover, the formation of the material culture of the peoples of the Caucasus contained in the epic are like an artistic representation, reflecting historical reality.

Female costumes

Traditional female attire showed little differentiation with respect to age and social status. Women in the nineteenth century wore cotton or silk tunics with short neck-to-breast

cuts. A dress reached down to the ankle and had a small stand-up collar with a single neck button. A breast decoration (*tueidargash*) was part of the national costume. The sleeves covered the hands, but in more festive tunics were long enough to touch the ground. Casual slack trousers that gradually narrow and become curly round the ankles were worn under the dress. More formal trousers had silk decorations on their lower parts. A dress, trousers and an appropriate head-cover made up the usual outdoor outfit.

A short tight caftan was sometimes put on over the dress, usually buttoned down to the waist and often topped with a small stand-up collar. Its fasteners were made of gold, silver, turquoise, tinted glass, filigree and black enamel, in designs that go back to the Middle Ages. The sleeves and lap of the caftan were often embroidered in gold. Sometimes, a buttonless and collarless gown reaching to the floor was worn over the caftan, with a big breast dent and a fastener at the waist. The sleeves were usually open right up to the shoulders, went beyond the hands, and were rounded at the ends. The preferred materials for more festive gowns were velvet and thick silk. Recent traditional casual outfits consisted of a wide-cut long gown, a buttoned shirt with a cut collar, wide trousers, and a quilted coat called '*ghovtal*', better known in the Caucasus as '*besmet*'. Gallons (*sirash*) were sewn on dresses for show.

Women put on head-covers outdoors or when receiving strangers at home. The rule of covering the hair was less strictly applied to young girls. Head-cover for everyday use consisted of a rectangular kerchief folded in a triangle with the ends passed under the chin and knotted at the back of the neck. A married woman would put on a *chukhta*, a cloth bag with braids, which was then covered by the head-dress, whereas young girls only donned the kerchiefs. In the Middle Ages, notable women donned a felt or leather head-dress called '*kur-kharts*', in the form of a bent horn covered with luxurious fabrics and decorated with a round silver pendant and ornaments. Scarves and shawls of various sizes were used. The waist belt was made of cloth or leather, with silver as an option for rich client, and had a large silver buckle. It was considered as an heirloom, passed from mother to daughter, alongside other precious dress paraphernalia. Footwear of old included *turs laetsna maachash*, which had ornamental borders along the edges.

The wedding dress (*chokkhi*) was made from silk, velvet and brocade (*makhmar*), and decorated with metal fasteners in two lines. The sleeves narrowed down to the elbow, and each had an extension in the form of a long dangling blade. The gown, which was made to hug the figure, reached down to the floor. A little cap in the form of a truncated cone decorated with gold and silver embroidery covered the head.

Male costumes

The elegant male dress was aesthetically designed not only to accentuate the good form of the body, namely narrow waist and broad upper body, but also for convenience and comfort, being well suited for both hot summers and freezing winters. The main articles of the costume were the shirt, *cherkesska*, *besmet*, trousers, belt, *burka*, *papakha* (cap), *bashlik* (hood), boots and underwear. Materials used for male costumes included locally produced leather, sheepskin, wool, woollen cloth and thick felt. The dagger, without which no Chechen man would be seen, was considered part of the attire. Other armaments were donned, as the occasion demanded. The shirt, trousers and *besmet* were worn under the *cherkesska*, the *burka* (*verta* in Chechen) being the over-coat. The *bashlik*

(*bashlakkh*) and *besmet* were usually brightly coloured, in contrast with the rest of the outfit. Well-off men often sported lily-white *burkas*, *besmets* and *papakhas*.²

The *besmet*, a caftan-like garment, had a narrow waist and reached down to 2–4 inches above the knees. It had string buttons and buttonholes from the waist to the collar, and a stand-up collar and banana sleeves with buttons of the same type. *Besmets* were made of cotton cloth, woollen cloth or satin and silk, with the latter used by the richer folk and some people of lesser means on special occasions. Sometimes *besmets* were lined with wool or cotton wool for added warmth. Colours included dull grey, bright red and blue. In more ancient styles, no undergarment was worn underneath the *besmet*.

On festive occasions (*dezde*), a *cherkesska* (*choa*) was worn over the *besmet*. The *cherkesska*, a long-waisted tight fitting outer garment, had become the national Caucasian dress by the eighteenth century, and was a potent folkloric symbol. It was made from tough woven wool, with common colours of black and grey, but other hues were not unknown, including dark blue, red, white, ochre and brown. The collarless vest was open at the chest with a single button on the waist and reached down to the mid-thighs, with flared sleeves extending beyond the hands, but they were usually rolled up. It was distinctively adorned by a row of 14 to 20 capped cartridge cases ('*bustamash*' in Chechen, but commonly called '*gazirs*' in the North Caucasus), made of nielloed silver or wood, with iron, ivory, stag-horn, walrus tusk or silver caps inserted into flaps sewn on each side of the chest. These cases were initially used as handy stores for gunpowder and lead-shot for personal light muskets, hence the name (=ready). The advent of the repeat rifle in the late nineteenth century reduced the function of the '*gazirs*' to mere decoration, with cloth loops replacing the cartridge cases.

Under the *cherkesska*, a collared shirt was worn made of embroidered (white) linen with a buttoned vertical cut at the front. The narrow leather belt was adorned with silver platelets and dangling bands, previously used for strapping small cases. The silver-plated belt was worn round the *cherkesska* and drawn so tight that not even a finger could wriggle through. Dagger and sword sheaths and a pistol case were attached to the belt.

Trousers, usually made of coarse woollen material, were worn tight and were tucked under knee-high stockings of woollen cloth, usually with leather garters under the knee. On the other hand, B.Plaetschke (1929) described wide trousers with no opening at the front and with a strap at the waist. The underwear was made of silk.

Sheepskin fur and felt cloaks were indispensable components of the costume. The *burka* was a semi-circular sleeveless felt cloak that hung from the shoulders and covered the whole body. It was made to fit the shoulders by the insertion of a gore, was tied with strings at the neck, and was often lined with silk or calico. The opening for the neck and the seams over the chest were trimmed with braid (*chimcharcha*). Black and black-brown were the common colours, with white found not infrequently. Sometimes the wool was not removed on the outside.

The *burka* afforded warmth in winter by keeping the rain out and insulating the body from the chill and acted as a parasol to protect the wearer against the burning sun in summer. It doubled as a blanket or a personal tent. A small group of men on the road could build a makeshift shelter by hanging their great coats on three stakes dug in the ground, constructing a rather cozy tepee. During clement weather, the cumbersome coat was rolled up and tied to the croup.

The basic head-dress consisted of a large round or conical caracul cap called '*kholkhazan kui*', better known as '*kalpak*' or '*papakha*', mostly black or grey in colour. A wide-brimmed felt hat (*mangal-kui*) was also common. Peaked caps became in vogue in the 1920s. Men in the mountains still wear hats for the most part. In cold weather, the head was muffled with a *bashlik*, a hood whose ends could be used as a shawl, slung around the neck, or twirled round the head in the shape of a turban. *Bashliks* were mostly made of wool, but cloth was also used, in which case they were either edged with *khorkha*, tasselled Caucasian gold or silver braid, or decorated with ornamental gold piping. Specimens with ornamental designs (*tikmanash*) embroidered in silver or gold thread were also worn for show. Footwear consisted of soft morocco leather or rawhide heelless boots (*maehsi*), light, usually morocco, high boots (*peezagash*), and rawhide bast shoes (*ne'armaachash*), which were principally used in mountainous terrain.

The traditional male costume was perfectly suited for mountain guerrilla warfare and hunting. A warrior's outfit, which was donned from boyhood, consisted of a *cherkesska*, *papakha*, *bashlik*, *burka*, soft Caucasian boots, allowing a 'cat-like' gait, perfect for military manoeuvres, and an assortment of personal weapons. Leather straps on the waist belt carried carved boxes with flints, wads and gun oil. According to I. Askhabov (2001), Chechens often used to don brown or red coats for battle to conceal wounds, as they were loath to present their enemies with reasons to gloat. Older men in rural areas still don their traditional outfits, while younger folks take off their modern garbs for traditional ones on some occasions.

Ideals of beauty

The Vainakh conception of the ideal male and female human bodies goes back for millennia and was depicted in ancient art. The Spartan diets of girls and punishing training exercises of young men had as one of their purposes the attainment of some of the ideals of physical perfection. The tight-fitting costumes were in turn designed to show off the carefully sculpted physiques.

The yardsticks of female beauty were a medium stature, shapeliness, mainly implying a slender waist, large black eyes, thick eyelashes, thin white neck, graceful hands and a gainly gait. Cherished physical attributes in a man included tall stature, slim waist, broad shoulders and chest, thick neck, fine-calved tall legs, small feet, straight nose, broad eyebrows, small mouth and ears, and white skin colour. A lively gait of straight quick steps was a mark of good character. Wearing a beard and moustaches, a pre-Islamic custom, had folkloric significance, for binding vows were made on the beard, and the moustache was a mark of manlihood. Unmanly behaviour was censured, among other things, by an admonition to shave off the facial hair.

Cuisine³

The Chechens had their own particular cuisine, somewhat different from that of the other peoples of the North Caucasus, although some dishes of neighbouring ethnic groups were added to the Chechen table. Chechen cuisine had been known for its richness and variety

built around the mountaineers' obsession with hospitality and the cult of the guest. If not through goodwill, the Chechens were obliged by tradition to regale and feast their visitors for several days, and surely those affairs would have been boring, not to say tiresome, had it not been for the melange of succulent dishes served at opportune times. Away from the firm dictates of hospitality, Chechens were usually frugal in their daily eating and drinking habits. Nineteenth-century staple foods included unleavened wheat or barley bread, cheese and milk, with meat only had occasionally.

Though characterized by simplicity in preparation, Chechen food is both nutritious and easy to digest. Traditional cuisine is based on meat, wheat- and corn-flour, dairy products, honey and vegetables. The North Caucasians were master experts in the herbal arts, using herbs and condiments to garnish dishes and for medicinal purposes. The Vainakh diet also included products of hunting and fishery. Fruits and nuts were freely available from orchards and forests.⁴ Legumes and salted meats were stored in well-ventilated rooms for winter consumption. It was not until the late nineteenth century that tomato, cabbage and radish made their debut in Chechen cuisine. Chechens had been almost self-sufficient in foodstuffs, except for spices and sweetmeats. A peculiarity of Chechen cuisine was that, except for soups, and even then in small quantities, herbs and condiments were not added to the food while cooking, but served separately in a side dish.

The most famous meat dishes include *zhizhig-galnash* (meat-dumplings), a dish of meat, ravioli and garlic sauce; the tasty pan-Caucasian *shashlik*, pieces of lamb meat on skewers roasted over embers; *dalla(nash)*, liver pie; *ba'ar*, sausage stuffed with liver, rice and onion; and the dainty *korta-kueigash*, sheep's head and legs, where the former is offered first to guests, as a mark of respect. *K'ald-daetta*, curds mixed with oil, *ch'epalgash*, round scones filled with curds (or potatoes), and sour clotted milk (*etshura*) are the main dairy-food offerings. Grain and flour dishes include *churek*, the erstwhile unleavened bread staple; *kuerzanash*, similar to ravioli; *loqam*, fritters, not unlike Circassian *lakum*; *siskal*, thick round corn-flour scone; and *khingal*, thin semi-circular scone filled with sweet pumpkin jelly.⁵ *Ghaghal* was the Chechen version of matzoth (unleavened bread eaten at the feast of the Passover). *Dolma*, stuffed cabbage, and *naers-beeram*, national salad of cucumbers, potatoes and green onions, are the principal vegetable offerings. *K'oo-beeram* is a piquant sauce made of sour milk and either onion or garlic. Nut halva (*hovla*), *ghoz-hovla*, another kind of halva, and corn-pudding are the principal sweetmeats. Kalmyk-tea (*ghalmakkhchai*), a drink prepared by boiling (green) tea and adding scalded milk, salt, black pepper and butter to taste, is had all over the North Caucasus. For beverages, the Vainakh brewed beer (*nikha*), made wine (*chaaghar*) and fermented *boza*.

Chechen cuisine was adversely affected by the devastating wars of the nineteenth century and subsequent mass emigration. During exile, there were mutual influences between host and guest cuisines, but the Chechens managed to hold on to their basic culinary traditions.

Traditional medicine⁶

Traditional medicine was based on practical know-how and ancient beliefs and superstitions. Medical men (*haekimash*: sing. *haekim*) were held in high reverence, and the names of the more famous ones have been preserved in the collective memory. Herbal and plant medicinal preparations were prepared for most of the diseases and illnesses that smote the people. Operations were performed, among other things, to set broken bones, amputate limbs and remove bullets. The range of medical instruments included the *p-hatuukha*, which was used for phlebotomy, and *gam*, which was used for trepanation of the skull.

It is generally accepted that the Caucasians were the first to discover inoculation through careful observation of circumstances surrounding a certain deadly and disfiguring disease. The matter from pustules of smallpox was injected into the hands of healthy people to infect them with a mild form of the disease and thus provide immunity against the real thing.⁷ The technique remained in use by Chechen medicine men as late as the 1920s.

The most dreadful contagious disease was the plague, which used to decimate the Vainakh every now and then. Malaria was endemic in the large tracts of bog land in the north. A person afflicted with the disease was doused with water or had a frog thrown on his shirt-collar as a form of shock recovery. Music and song were thought to have magical healing powers, and as such were performed by the bed of the sick.

Toast-making

Toasts had been essential components of the oral tradition. They were first pronounced by the animist Nakh to unlock the powers of their objects of adoration and to propitiate the spirits. In the polytheistic phase, the utterances were directed to the gods of the Pantheon. Every undertaking of importance was preceded by a ceremony of toast-making and festivals were inaugurated and then dotted throughout by a profusion of salutatory and salutary sayings. With the redirection of most invocations to Allah and the diminishing role of the Pantheon, toast-making witnessed a considerable decline during the Muslim period.

Jokes and humour⁸

Humour permeated all aspects of Chechen life—and death. Though Chechen jokes were usually straightforward and harmless, they were not without poignancy. In the rare cases of raillery degenerating into mockery, it was considered unseemly to be seen to take offence, although quarrels emanating from caustic gibes were not unknown. Facetiousness and inane laughter were scoffed at. The main anecdotal folk characters were Molla-Nesart, Tsagen and Chora.

Chechen types and Russian stereotypes

Chechen men aspired to a number of ideals and personal characteristics, including love of the fatherland, bravery, hard work, hospitableness, respect for women and elders, courteousness, restraint and straightforwardness. They were expected to uphold personal, family and clan honours, and promote familial and inter-clan harmony and concord. The spirit of compromise was not alien to Chechen nature, but it was invoked only when appropriate. A Chechen could not be predatory because he was shackled by a web of 'dos' and 'don'ts' that tamed his natural and acquired strength. Dastardliness was an utterly abominable characteristic—a Chechen would never harm a fallen foe nor shoot a man in the back.

Women-folk were considered as bastions of national culture and folklore, whose articles they were tasked with transmitting to the young ones. They were also expected to be true and devoted to their husbands. Thriftiness and hard work were highly praised attributes in the lady of a household. Personal hygiene and cleanliness of the immediate environment were of paramount importance. Both sexes were bound by *nokhchalla* to be polite.

The Russians have always harboured negative stereotypes of the Chechens: bandits, cut-throats, threateningly virile, clannish, and so on. The Russian romantic movement of the nineteenth century found its culmination in the lofty Caucasus, with such writers as Pushkin, Lermontov and Tolstoy etching indelible marks on the psyche of the Russians with regards to things Caucasian. Although some character traits were extolled, like bravery, love for freedom and generosity, the underlining trend was for negative portrayals to blanket the whole exercise as a moral duty of Russia to civilize the 'half-savages'. A hackneyed cliché about the North Caucasians is found in Lermontov's 'Cossack Lullaby':

Muddy waters churn in anger,
Loud the Terek roars,
And a Chechen with a dagger
Leaps onto the shore.

In 'Izmail-Bei', the Russian poet wrote about the North Caucasians:

The tribes living in those gorges are savage,
Their god is freedom, their law is war.

It is the endless propagation of such stereotypes that is partially responsible for the perpetuation of the Chechen-Russian antagonism. It is very dangerous when a whole nation is reduced to a finite number of defining sayings, even in the disguise of 'great literature'. The vicious cycle must be broken if the two peoples are ever to learn to live together.⁹

Folkloric symbols and heroes

The wolf

The wolf (*borz*) is a potent national symbol, and its character traits are considered paragons to be emulated. Chechen men would be proud to be compared to wolves. 'He was nursed by the She-Wolf,' is a compliment implying adroitness and courage.¹⁰ Legend has it that it was the wolf that redeemed the world by standing heroically in face of the fury unleashed on doomsday. According to the Chechen ethos, the wolf is the only animal that would enter into an unequal match, making up for any disadvantage by its agility, wit, courage and tenacity. If it loses the battle, it lies down facing the foe in full acceptance of its fate—Chechen poise equivalent to the famed British 'stiff upper lip'. This wolfish allegory is a depiction of how the Chechens have dealt with outside invaders for millennia.

According to mythology, god had created sheep for the wolf to enjoy, but man tricked it out of its 'patrimony', so it had to resort to ruse and robbery to reclaim its right. The cult of the wolf was widespread in olden times, and the observance of its day, Saturday, afforded immunity from lupine raids on one's ovine stock.

The abrek: hero or villain?

Blood revenge led to the common North Caucasian phenomenon of the *abrek* (*obarg* in Chechen), the outlaw horseman who would live in the wild and without the norms of society until the feud was resolved, which could be never. In the Russian and Soviet eras the reference was extended to those wanted by the authorities, in this context becoming local and sometimes national heroes, eulogized in music and verse. North Caucasian literati were duly obliged to denigrate the *abreks* as anti-heroes.

The Chechen history of vehement struggle against the Russians is rife with *abreks* who would later assume mythical characters. One of the most famous heroes of the early years of the twentieth century was Zelimkhan Gushmazuko (of the Kharachoi clan), around whose exploits legends were spun, literature written, lullabies sung and even a film (*Zelimkhan*, which lacks an ending) made (by Oleg Frelich in 1929). He was a real personage caught in a vendetta and hunted down by the Russians. He was transformed into a symbol of Chechen yearning for freedom and abhorrence of foreign domination. Zelimkhan was killed (c. 1913) resisting arrest by the Russians, after being ratted on by one of his relatives—a recurring theme in such heroic tales. The last of the legendary *abreks* was Khasukhi Magomadov, who escaped the deportation net in 1944 by fleeing to the mountains, whence he mounted guerrilla-style attacks against the Soviet troops stationed in Chechnya until he fell fighting in 1979.¹¹ If the *abrek* is a paradigm to be emulated in North Caucasian folklore, he is a bandit to be eliminated in Russian estimation. This is but one point of many at which the minds of the North Caucasians and Russians shall never meet.

Calendar¹²

The Chechens had their own names for the days of the week derived from the appellations of their deities. Later, with the introduction of Christianity, the days of the week became Monday=orshot (an de); Tuesday=shinara (shinarin de); Wednesday=kkhaara (kkhaarin de); Thursday=yeara (yearin de); Friday=p'eeraska (nan de); Saturday (Sabbath)=shot (shoetan de); Sunday=k'irande. The names for Sunday, Monday, Friday and Saturday were direct adoptions from Georgian, with the last two ultimately attributable to the Greek calendar. In this system, the Vainakh considered Monday as the start of the week, as did the Circassians. Festivals and rituals to the gods were usually conducted on Sundays and Wednesdays.

A relative system of reference to the days of the week, which is still in use, has 'today' rendered 'takhana', 'tomorrow', 'kkhaana', 'the day after tomorrow', 'lama', then, 'ula', 'ts'aka', 'ts'asta', 'ts'umoka', 'ts'ula'; 'yesterday' was 'selkhana', and 'the day before yesterday', 'stoomara'.¹³

Months were reckoned according to the lunar calendar (*butt* means both moon and month in Chechen-Ingush), and they were mainly called after the Pantheon deities: Tusholi-Butt (roughly 23 March–22 April); Seela-Butt (23 May–22 June); Maettsil-Butt (23 June–22 July), Maetskhal-Butt (23 July–22 August), and so on. In the modern Chechen calendar, the old names of the months have been fitted on to their nearest Gregorian equivalents, for example, Tusholi-Butt is April and Maettsil-Butt is July.¹⁴

Festivals and holidays

New Year's Eve and Spring Festival

Since time immemorial, the Chechens had timed the beginning of a new farming season to the vernal equinox. The first day of Spring Holiday, which fell on March 22 and marked the beginning of the New Year, was one of the most important red-letter days in the Chechen calendar and a celebration of abundance—a retention of the ancient sun-worship rituals. It was a very busy time for women-folk, as they had to wake up early to clean and tidy up their houses and courtyards. They rubbed the bronze and copper kitchen utensils to a shining red and took them out to the yard to invoke the rays of the sun. The festivities started, as they always had done in the North Caucasus, with the performance of rituals. All members of the family gathered before dawn to receive the rising sun. Invocations were uttered to preserve the household in the coming year. All made wishes to have new clothes to wear all through the year. The New Year's log, whose length determined the ceremonial schedule, was prepared in advance by drying a standing tree, most often an oak, but never a fruit-tree, and then cutting it down whole. One end of the log was used to light the 'new fire', symbolizing the start of the New Year, while the other lay outside the house. It was on this fresh fire that the New Year's meal was prepared and bread with all kinds of filling was baked, in addition to the ritual round bread with radiating 'spokes'—a symbol of the effulgent sun. The eldest male member of

the family was offered a square-shaped loaf whilst guests were presented with round ones. The party began as soon as the shrinking log allowed the door to be closed. People danced and jested, then regaled themselves sumptuously on choice dishes and beverages. All creatures, great and small, were fed to satiety.

In the evening, the young ones lit large bonfires—sun symbols in Vainakh folklore—and people gathered round them. The men-folk would leap over the fire as a display of bravado and to cleanse themselves of the sins of the past year. Children revelled in entertainment and clownery. Young boys rubbed their faces with soot, wore their sheepskin coats inside out, and put on felt hoods with horns. They went from house to house showing off their costumes and singing carols for treats. On the second and third day of the festival, horse races and other competitions were held. Nowadays, these celebrations have lost any association with the harvest, the occasion degenerating into a mere social gathering to mark the passing of one year and arrival of another.

Ploughing Festival

On the fourth day of the Spring Holiday, the two-day Ploughing Festival was inaugurated. It was the custom for each household to make an offering (*sah dakkkhar*) in the form of grain produce before the ceremonies, and present three neighbouring families with portions of the harvest of the year before. The oxen were adorned for the occasion, with copper plugs in the horns, red ribbons tied to the horns and tails, the hair round the horns cropped short, and the necks and horns anointed. The procession of ploughmen and oxen was seen off by the wives standing at the gateways holding a water bucket in each hand.

The ploughmen would be ceremoniously reintroduced to the field. The person to make the first furrow was carefully chosen, as he was supposed to be of impeccable reputation, of medium size, and with ample hair cover on his body—a folkloric sign of fertility. This was an onerous assignment, as the blame for a failed crop would be laid squarely on him. After the fields have been ploughed and sown, a meal was served to replenish sagging energy and refresh the partakers for the end-of-the-day festivities. The villagers made sure the returning procession was drenched in water to invoke rain.

Other festivals

Pkharmat's Day, which fell on 20 June, was consecrated to the creator of order in the world. The Birthday of the Sun, the Chechen version of the winter solstice celebrations, was marked on 25 December.¹⁵ This was a particularly joyous occasion that filled the people with optimism, as the sun was observed to rise above its lowest position on the horizon, initiating the count-down to the end of winter. Both festivals, which are considered relics of the ancient sun worship rituals for their connection with solar solstices, had been marked until the middle of the eighteenth century, when they were superseded by Muslim holidays.

There were also other red-letter days associated with the various deities of the Pantheon. Modern national holidays include 'Independence Day', or 'Republic Day', depending on your political bias, and 'Day of Honour', celebrated on 27 January and on which (nationalist) presidential and parliamentary elections are held in election years.

Rain rituals

The success of the crops of the agrarian Chechens was mainly dependent on adequate rain. Superstitious folks devised many rituals to bring forth the rains. A masked, buffoon-like character called '*qorshqali*' went from one courtyard to another, pouring water and invoking rain. From the observation that snakes came out of their holes in rainy weather, the poor creatures were lured out of their holes, killed, and hung up as charms to invoke rain. It was thought that the destruction of a crow's nest brought forth the drought, as the bird was considered a harbinger of good weather.

Another method of summoning the rains was for two separate teams of men and women to plough dry river-beds. Men would gather by the house of a respected and wealthy villager, harness themselves to the plough, and drag it back and forth across the river-bed, splashing themselves with water in the process. Women would drag their plough two or three times across the river, with each making sure to fall down and splash her team-mates with water. The women-folk pushed hapless male villagers who happened to pass by during the ritual into the river, for added effect. The 'ploughwomen' would then solicit the villagers for gifts.

The next rain rite was reminiscent of human sacrifice. A boy covered with meadow grass and elder or hemp twigs would be paraded around the village by his friends, donning their sheepskin coats inside out. The lead character in this charade saw next to nothing because he was covered. Alternatively, a sack and a mass of grass would be tied around his head. Male villagers in mountainous Chechnya threw pebbles in rivers whilst praying for rain. The idea was that the water touched by the pebbles would return as rain. Sacrificial animals were then slaughtered and a feast was held.

Superstitions, divinations, oracles and auspices

There was a plethora of good and evil spirits inhabiting the Vainakh world. It was believed that to each person there was attached a spirit, *taram*, perhaps of one of the ancestors, which acted as a guardian angel against the dark forces, but was also known to chastise its companion's wrong-doing. Native spirits were transformed to *jinn*s (*zhinash*) with conversion to Islam. Meteorites were thought to be stars shot by angels at *jinn*s who eavesdropped on celestial secrets and transmitted them to humans. A baby who saw itself in a mirror within the first eight months of its birth came to no good. Chechens spat on little children and objects of admiration to ward off the evil eye. It was believed that some animals and inanimate objects could change form.

Ancient Chechens believed that the forces of darkness stepped up a gear on New Year's Eve, which necessitated the strewing of items of steel in the house and cattle-shed to repel the evil spirits.¹⁶ On this hallowed evening, Chechen women hid stuff inside fancy breads for fortune-telling purposes. Also, a young woman had recourse to divine her future spouse by baking three salty pieces of bread, one eaten by her, the others placed under her pillow. The man who offered her a drink in her parched dream would be destined to be her husband.¹⁷

Fortune-telling (*pal*) was a developed 'craft' among the Vainakh, who had special classes of people with vatic powers and a number of oracular devices, including a book of

divinations (*seeda-zhaina*: literally ‘star-book’), at their disposal. Diviners would spend the night in a sanctuary, lying face down and keeping their ears pressed to the floor to hear the deity’s revelations and convey them to an eager audience the next morning. Scapulimancers divined the future by scapulae, holding the ram shoulder-blades to the light and interpreting the marks, the spots predicting the harvest, weather and even familial events.¹⁸ In addition, women soothsayers sized pieces of cloth, wrapped spoons with cotton and used lithomancy, hyalomancy, akin to crystalgazing, and catoptromancy to foretell the future. Auspices and augury had religious and practical applications, for example using the arrival of the hoopoe to predict the advent of spring.

Warlocks’ brews and witches’ brooms

There are still signs visible on extant ancient ruins that indicate that the belief in magic and ghosts (*ghaalartash*) was widespread among the Vainakh. There were different forms of magic wielded by witches (*gheemash*), old sorceresses (*eeshapash* and *chabaabanash*) and warlocks. A special class of magicians, called ‘*gham-sag*’ (‘witch-human’), had the power to depart from their bodies and haunt those of animals. If during this spiritual transmigration the body were annihilated, the magician would have remained in limbo and eventually perished. Witches had special canes that could be turned into steeds when dyed with charm potions. In their defence against sorcery, mere mortals had recourse to amulets, the one made from quince (*haibanan dechig*) being also ‘effective’ against injury and disease. Conjury (*bozbu-unchalla*) was practised by a special class of people called ‘*bozbu-unchash*’.

The *almaz* or *hun-sag* (‘forest-human’) were evil forest creatures (in other accounts, *almaz* is rendered as ‘spirit of rock’) that had their powers residing in their hair, the removal or the grasping of which rendering them subservient. Their hideous hirsute males had axes embedded in their chests, whereas the females were of exquisite beauty, with golden hair flowing down to their heels and such large breasts that they had to throw them behind their shoulders when they indulged in their favourite pastime: dancing naked under the moon.¹⁹

Other folkloric creatures and fairy-tale characters included *adam-lilbaz* (‘man-devil’), *huenan-yo* (‘forest-lass’), *lain-aezni* (‘snow-maiden’), *ghuura-daada* (‘frost-daddy’), *mazh-daada* (‘beard-daddy’), *zhoera-baaba*, a mythical hag, *uubar*, a bloodthirsty vampire that had the cunning to possess animals, *b’oba*, a particularly mischievous imp that got its thrills out of scaring children, *munda* or *z’ooemalg*, the scarecrow, and *saermak*, the dragon.

Sports and amusements

Traditional

The North Caucasians took particular pride in four martial skills, namely horse-manship, shooting, fencing and wrestling, all of which were honed throughout the ages. In classical times, veteran instructors took seven-year-old charges, up to 14 at a time, to form

physical education (PE) classes. The strenuous Vainakh PE system was geared to the 'production' of redoubtable warriors capable of defending the fatherland. The cadets were subjected to arduous training regimes that built up their strength and stamina and promoted agility and speed. There were exercises that took place in the mountains, such as hikes and climbing. In the valleys, the pupils practised horse-riding, fencing, archery, stone-throwing, wrestling, weightlifting, swimming, tree-climbing and camouflage techniques. The training grounds were located far from inhabited areas, for it was deemed undignified for the villagers to watch the trainees. The rite of passage took the form of a week-long gruelling exercise, in which the trainees were expected to get their sustenance from the land. At graduation, competitive games were held to assess the skill and expertise of the cadets. During the long Caucasian wars, the PE system was disrupted and many of the traditions and techniques were lost forever. However, unlike in the Northwest Caucasus, the martial spirit has never ebbed among the Chechens. In each village there was a square (*p-hoekha*; also used to refer to the actual gathering) where villagers assembled for debates, games, festivals and dance galas.

Horsemanship

The cult of the horse was well developed in the North Caucasian ethos. The Nart and other ancient epics abound with tales depicting the special rapport and reciprocal loyalty of rider and mount. To the equine was attributed the faculty of reason and speech to convey counsel to stumped protagonists. Flights of imagination created winged steeds with magical powers. Horsemanship was intimately connected with the code of chivalry. The knight (*qoonakh*) led an honourable and selfless existence as a guardian of his community.

The North Caucasians were masters of *haute école*. At equestrian competitions *dzhigits*, or intrepid horsemen, would perform breath-taking feats, showing off their immaculate skills. *Dzhigitovka* (*govrhovzor* in Chechen), or trick riding, was later adopted by neighbouring peoples, including the Cossacks. Dressage performances offered more sober displays of co-ordination and control. Horse games go back to very ancient times and are the stuff of legend. Of the many kinds of horse competitions, 'brink races' were by far the most dangerous, drawing daredevil riders from across the land. A line drawn some 20 m from the edge of a precipice served as a marker at which the horsemen at full speed initiated the halting manoeuvre, the horses having been trained to brake abruptly by heaving down on their hindquarters. It was mostly the best of the best that could just manage to stay on the right side of the precipice, lesser competitors finding themselves, more often than not, hurtling into the abyss. But it was not a fatal affair, a bruised ego a more serious damage than any physical injury.

Horse races were held and 'dead man' games were played during funereal festivals. The more valuable the prizes, the higher were the number and calibre of competitors. Those who coveted the dead man's dagger had to ride with their own daggers clenched tight between their teeth. Children were also allowed to take part in special marathon races, the trophies being the less coveted clothing items. Modern horse races are very popular, the one held in Gudermes attracting competitors even from outside the republic.

Shooting and fencing

Mounted archery competitions go back to antiquity. In one game, the cavaliers with bows and arrows galloped one after the other. As the target (*ghakkh*) of an earthenware pitcher on a pole was approached, the archer would let go of the reins, assume shooting position, and then release the arrow. Firearms were later to replace bows and arrows in shooting competitions.

The sabre played a central role in the Vainakh systems of military and physical education, with songs of praise and a plethora of heroic tales woven on the theme. Fencing as a sport went back for millennia. During their tirocinium, apprentices were equipped with wooden sabres, keen edges deemed dangerous in green hands. A dueller fended off blows with both sabre and shield. In classical times, mounted competitions drew the best sword-wielders in the land and large spiritfult crowds. The 'plume fight' was usually inaugurated by a clash of the best two participants and the event climaxed in an open mock battle, where scoring was achieved by cutting the 'feather' in one's opponent's cap. Those with ruffled feathers had to come down from their high horses and mark their defeat by keeping their hands above their heads. The 'plume' took the shape of mown meadow grass or the crown of a young tree attached to the military head-gear.

Braving the mountain torrent

The techniques of crossing rivers both on horseback or in person with full panoply of arms and gear were taught at North Caucasian military cadet schools in summer. The personal effects of the trainees were secured to their backs sealed in leather bags. The torrent was negotiated either on horseback or in person. In the nineteenth century, river-crossing competitions used to be held in which representatives of a number of North Caucasian peoples, including Russians and Cossacks, took part.

Chechen rugby

In 'cheese-ball', two teams on horseback or on foot, each with a lump of cheese covered in leather, endeavoured to take possession of the other team's 'ball' while defending their own, the final aim of the game being to secure both cheese-balls and run them to goal. A match could last for hours, with the clamorous crowds egging the teams on to victory. This game was so tough, certainly more physical than rugby, the players being allowed to knock off the opponents, pin down their heads, pinion their arms and legs, or simply carry off the ball-holder, that it needed to be refereed by the top authority in the community, the eldest (male) villager.

Walking the tight rope

In the olden day, funambulists (*pelhoonash*: roughly: 'free fliers') were crowd favourites throughout Vainakh lands and they were a source of pride to their families. Cadets were taught the art of funambulation from early age. The repertoire included the regular walk, jumps, one-leg hops, about-faces and other feats of derring-do with the eyes and legs

variously handicapped. For balance, funambulators held long poles or fan-shaped frames. There was also a special class of clownish entertainers (*zhukhargash*)—best rendered as ‘zanies’—whose task was to provide comic relief from the tension in the air created by the funambular antics and capers at timely intervals. At a later stage, rope-walkers adopted fools’ make-up and masquerade for effect, which detracted considerably from the prestige associated with their vocation.

Children’s games and entertainment

Climbing the slippery pole

Climbing the pole was a pan-North Caucasian sport in which young teens took part on festive occasions. The competitors climbed long thin spars fixed to the ground and daubed with animal fat. The first to the top brought down his prize of a basket of motley articles. Some wily contenders gained unfair advantage by rubbing their palms with salt, sand or ash hidden in their pockets, for a better grip.

Other children’s games included *lechqardigekh lovzar*, hide-and-seek, *habbaarekh lovzar*, blind-man’s-buff, *ghulgekhh lovzar*, the Chechen version of knuckle-bones, *ch’eshalgekhh lovzar*, where pieces of wood were thrown from a distance at a triangular board of wood, *langekhh lovzar*, a game in which a piece of sheepskin or cowhide with a thin layer of tin was kicked around, *t’ulgekhh lovzar*, a game of ‘stones’, *lain mizhargekhh lovzar*, snowball fight, *kkholgoonakh lovzar*, where three reed chocks were struck with a stick in one go, *gala-ghozhmekhh lovzar*, another game of chocks, *gala*, a kind of skittles, and *kuella*, tip-cat. The Chechen versions of tag were *buerkanakh lovzar* and *toek*.²⁰ *Tueshakh lovzar* is a game in which balls are rolled into holes. In *gibarekh lovzar*, a triumphal march was conducted with the winner riding piggyback on the vanquished. Chechen children also played with whirligigs and whipping-tops (*daendargash*).

Puppet shows

Puppet theatre is a relatively recent introduction in Chechnya, the Grozny Puppet Theatre making its debut with *The Miraculous Rubber Shoes* in November 1935. One of the first Chechen productions was *The Grey-Winged Dove*. Early actors included A.Tashukhadzhieva, S.Shaipova, T.Zakriev, and R.Mekhtieva. Stage directors included Bilal Saidov, Garun Batukaev, and Khasan Shaipov. Performances were also taken to schools and regional houses of culture.

The theatre was destroyed by war, but has been restored by a group of enthusiasts in Ingushetia. Among its modern repertoire are *The Mystery of the Cave* by Chechen playwright Arbi Usmanov and *The Adventures of Chervig* by Musa Akhmadov. Well-known actresses include Zara Gazolapova and Aina Vakueva.

Modern sports

In the Soviet period, physical education was formalized by the setting up of sports schools that emphasized modern sports, but neglected traditional ones. Before the recent wars, there were some 60 such schools and seven major sports complexes in Chechnya.

All major sports are governed by federations and in their entirety overseen by the Regional Committee for Sport and Youth Affairs.

Strength sports

The cult of the strong man was, and still is, widespread in the North Caucasus. Some of the finest wrestlers that represented the Soviet Union, and later Russia, hailed from the North Caucasus, mainly Chechnya, Dagestan, Kabarda and Adigea. Modern wrestling and judo are the sports at which Chechen sportsmen have really excelled, with weightlifting, taekwondo, boxing and karate following hard on their heels. Some eight Chechens competed for various former Soviet republics at the 1996 Atlanta Olympics, mostly in wrestling and weightlifting. Chechen athletes won a total of three gold medals at the 2000 Sydney Olympics, two in freestyle wrestling and one in judo. No less than six Chechen sportsmen were selected to represent Russia in the 2004 Athens Olympics: Olympic and World freestyle wrestling champions Bouvaisa and Adam Saitiev, European freestyle wrestling champion Zaur Bataev, judoists Islam Matsiev and Salam Mezhidov and weightlifter Aslambek Ediev. Given their track records, it is not inconceivable that these athletes would make their mark on these games. It is most probable that there would be Chechen athletes representing other countries taking part in the Olympics.

Even Chechen refugees have taken up sports in their new homes, those in the Pankisi Gorge setting up the 'Bash-Lam' sports club jointly with their Kist kin and taking part in Georgian sporting events under the Chechen nationalist flag!²¹ Chechen athletes usually represented other nations, including the former Soviet Union, Russia, Ukraine, Turkey, Azerbaijan, Central Asian republics, Moldova and Belarus. Nowadays, Chechen athletes are regularly passed off as Russians, and they usually keep a low profile on the ethnicity issue. Only on a few occasions have they been able to represent their country. Many world-class athletes had joined the ranks of the Chechen freedom fighters, with quite a few either falling in battle or getting wounded—to the great loss of world sport.

Wrestling

Wrestling is one of the ancient sports of the Vainakh. The Nart epic abounds with tales depicting the brute strength of the Nart heroes and their wrestling duels. The Chechens, as did the other North Caucasian peoples, developed wrestling techniques throughout the centuries. Most of these, unfortunately, had been lost by the time Chechnya came under Russian rule and the subsequent mass emigration began. Modern Chechen wrestlers have distinguished themselves on the world stage, winning World and Olympic championships and innumerable tournaments, with more than a score of athletes winning gold.²²

Degi Bagayev, Merited Coach of the Soviet Union, is perhaps the most successful Chechen wrestling coach. Among his early trainees was World Champion Khasan Ortsuev. He is currently working as head coach at a Moscow wrestling school. Khasan Ortsuev won a junior tournament in Alma-Ata in the 90-kg category in 1973, and then went on to win the world junior championship. Injury kept Ortsuev out of competition for a few years, but he staged an impressive comeback in 1979, winning the World Cup in the United States and the World Championship. An annual tournament used to be held in his honour in the late 1980s. Aslanbek Bisultanov won the World Freestyle

Championship in 1977 in the 100-kg category representing the USSR. Freestyle wrestler Salman Khasemikov reigned supreme as World Champion in the over 100-kg category from 1979 to 1983. Adlan Varayev, who was placed second in the 1986 World Championships in freestyle wrestling in the 74-kg category, went on to win gold at the event and the Olympic silver medal in Seoul two years later. Aslan Israilov was an USSR wrestling champion. Ibragim Shavkhalov, winner of many a Russian national title, won the World Cup and placed second in the World Greco-Roman Wrestling Championships in the 100-kg category, both in 1993. The Kazakh Chechen Bisultan Detsiev won the 1988 Greco-Roman Wrestling European Championship in the 74-kg category, four World Cup championships and a number of international tournaments. He later turned to coaching, with considerable success. Islam Duguchiev won the Greco-Roman Wrestling European Championship in 1990 and 1993 in the 68-kg category.

The freestyle wrestler Elmadi Jabrailov won the World Championship in the 82kg category in 1989 and Olympic silver for the Unified Team in 1992 in Barcelona. Lucman Jabrailov won the World Championship in the same category in 1994. In the 1996 Atlanta Olympics, Elmadi of Kazakhstan faced Lucman of Moldova. The Chechen brothers, representing different countries, were poised for a decisive match. Elmadi managed to win the day, but was knocked out of the competition in the semi-finals. Saghid Mourtasaliyev (Sahid Murtazaliyev), representing Ukraine, won gold medal in the 1996 Atlanta Olympics in freestyle wrestling in the 100-kg category. Mourtasaliyev's feats continued with a win at the World Championship in 1999 in the 97-kg category, this time representing the Russian Federation, and another gold at the Sydney Olympics, dominating the final against Kazakhstan's Islam Bairamukov 6–0.

Bouvaisa Saitiev is the first Chechen to win Olympic gold.²³ Born in 1975 in Khasav-Yurt, Bouvaisa moved in 1994 to Krasnoyarsk. He won five world championships in the 74-kg (76-kg) category in 1995, 1997, 1998, 2001 and 2003. He became Olympic Champion in Atlanta in 1996 in the 72-kg category. His defeat by Brandon Slay of the USA in a 76-kg preliminary freestyle match was one of the major upsets of the 2000 Sydney Olympics. Undaunted by his defeat, Bouvaisa went on to win the European and World titles the following year. Adam Saitiev, Master of Sports of Russia, won the Russian Wrestling Championship in 1997 and became World Champion in 1999 in the 76-kg category. In the Sydney Olympics, Adam won gold in the freestyle competition in the 85-kg category, defeating Yoel Romero of Cuba by fall. He also won the 2002 World Championship. The Saitiev brothers hoped to make it double gold in the 2004 Athens Olympics (Bouvaisa won gold).

Young Chechen athletes still uphold the tradition, despite the ongoing war. In May 2002, 22-year old Zaur Bataev won gold in freestyle wrestling in the 66-kg category in the European Championship in Baku. In a junior wrestling championship held in Denmark in February 2002, of five Chechen competitors taking part, three clinched first place: Adam Makhauri in the 60-kg category, his brother Arby (55-kg), and Askhab Vagapov (50-kg). Among future hopes is Musan Abdulmuslimov, winner of a number of junior European and World championships.

Martial arts, boxing and weightlifting

There are a number of judo schools in Chechnya, the most famous being the one at Argun. The current head of the school is former USSR Champion Apti Yusupov. Huseyin Ozkan, who emigrated from Chechnya in 1993, gave Turkey its first Olympic judo gold medal in the Sydney Olympics. The 28-year-old Ozkan beat World Champion Larbi Benboudaoud in the 66-kg category final, avenging his loss to the Frenchman in the final of the World Championship in 1999. The victory was celebrated both in Turkey and Chechnya.

Islam Matsiev, a Chechen judoist representing Russia, won three A-tournaments in the 2000 pre-season to qualify for the Sydney Olympics, where he was considered one of the favourites. However, he was beaten in the last 16 round. Matsiev won gold in the 66-kg category at the Paris Open Judo Tournament in 2001, and bronze in the 2002 European Championships. The Chechen-born giant, Selim Tataroglu, won three European championships in the 1990s in the open category representing Turkey. He narrowly missed out on bronze in the Sydney Olympics, but compensated by coming third at the 2001 European Championships in France. Promising judoists include Rustam Deniev, Salam Mezhidov and Ruslan Chapaev.

Khassan Baiev, a one-time member of the combined SAMBO (acronym of Russian words for 'Self-Defence Without Weapons') wrestling team of the USSR, became (in)famous as the conscientious and duty-bound surgeon who indiscriminately treated Chechen and Russian war casualties, incurring the wrath of both sides to the conflict in the process, and who operated on the injured Shamil Basaev following the Russian siege at Alkhan-Kala in the winter of 2000. Under pressure, Baiev left Chechnya for the USA, where he competed in a number of championships in the middleweight division. Baiev was offered the chance of representing Russia in these championships, but he preferred to don Chechen colours instead.²⁴

Karate and taekwondo are growing sports in Chechnya, with specialized schools and dedicated instructors. A new crop of young champions is making its mark on the world scene. Lechi Kurbanov won the 2001 European Karate Championship in the heavyweight division and went on to win gold at the Japan Karate Open Championship in 2002 as a super heavyweight. He came second at the All-American Open Karate Championships in June 2002. Kurbanov and his cadet Shamil Lakaev won European Cup titles in Hungary in May 2002 in the super heavyweight and lightweight divisions, respectively. Other champions of note include Hussein Elikhanov and Askhab Mataguev, both middleweights. Young hopefuls include Apti Daudov, winner of a number of international junior competitions.

Inevitably, Chechen politics spilled over to the sports arena. After allowing Ali Tepsurkaev to represent Chechnya in the World Taekwondo Championship in Toronto in July 2002, the organizers rescinded after vehement protestations from the Russian team officials. The Chechen accepted an invitation from the German contingent to represent Germany on condition that he would also be allowed to implicitly represent his country. Tepsurkaev won the super weight (2nd Dan) title in the event, and in the victory ceremony the Chechen flag was also raised, to the utter consternation of the Russians.

Chechen-born Khavazhi Khatsygov won the junior flyweight title at the 2002 European Boxing Championship, representing Belarus. Up and coming boxers include heavyweight Alibek Dudaev, under-21 European Champion. Thai boxing is a budding sport in Chechnya.

Weightlifters of note include Aslambek Ediev, seven times Champion of Russia in the 85-kg category (best total of 382.5 kg) and European Champion in 1993, and Ramzan Musaev, winner of the 2001 Russian Championship in the 69-kg category.

Team sports

Football, basketball and volleyball are the major team sports played in Chechnya, but football is by far the most popular. There were two large stadiums in Grozny, including Dynamo, and 15 stadiums in other cities and towns. The Grozny Soccer School was one of the best in the Caucasus. In the early 1990s, the republic had two teams in the Russian football league, Terek Grozny and Ėrzu Grozny. During the years of independence, football was accorded due attention, despite the isolation. Shamil Basaev, a player and ardent fan of the game, headed the football association for some time and organized a number of national tournaments.

The Terek Grozny football team was Chechnya's first professional soccer team, set up in the late 1940s. In 1994 it withdrew from the Russian league as relations between Chechnya and Russia had grown sour. However, after seven years in the doldrums, the team rejoined the Russian league in early 2001, was promoted to the first division in 2002, pulled off an incredible feat by winning the Russian Cup in 2004 to secure a place in the UEFA Cup, and was eyeing a place in the premiere division for the 2004 season. One of Terek's star players of the 1980s, Haidar Alkhanov, had been the driving force behind the club's comeback in his new role as Chechen sports minister.²⁵ The club publishes the newspaper *Sportivnaya Chechnya*, which also deals with other sports besides football.

11

Arts, crafts and architecture

Arts

The arts and crafts of the Nakh were expressions of their world outlook, religious beliefs, rituals, and myths and legends, and they have their source in an ancient culture that also spawned the brilliant Hurrian and Urartian civilizations, which share similar artistic styles and features with extant Nakh art. Throughout the centuries, the Vainakh were influenced by the cultures of the peoples with whom they established contacts and have preserved relics of their traditions. Scythians, Sarmatians, Alans, Georgians, Khazars, Turkic peoples, Muslims and Russians have left traces in Chechen art. All Nakh peoples share a common artistic culture and architectural traditions, with slight regional variations.

Ancient and traditional

Earliest pottery styles are dated to the end of the fourth millennium BC. Ceramics that go back to the early second millennium BC were uncovered in the village of Alkaste. In the late Bronze Age, ceramics were ornamented with geometric shapes encrusted with white paste. Ceramic implements with depictions of animal figures were used in ritual ceremonies. Other finds included clay clichés, bone and horn awls, handles and bronze articles (R.Traho 1957:76).

Symbols carved on the walls of towers, vaults and sanctuaries open up a fascinating esoteric world spanning the period from the Bronze Age to the Late Middle Ages. They include the human hand (ancient symbol of strength, power and skill), cross in a circle, swastika (representation of eternal fire and purification) and intricate rosettes and spirals symbolizing the sun and heavenly bodies. Archaeological finds indicate that the moon figured high among the ancient motifs of the Vainakh. There was also a preponderance of design patterns based on fertility symbols, which are still used by the modern Vainakh in their applied arts. On ancient pagan stelae ornamental designs depicted items that were buried with the deceased, including national costumes and weapons, as well as images of people, animals and birds. The Nakh had been masters of stone-working since the most ancient of times.

A dominant motif in traditional art was plant ornaments executed with a highly developed sense of artistry, still extant at historical sites all across Vainakh territory.¹ The raw materials for art- and craftwork were wool, wood, stone, bone and metals. Islamic ornamental patterns included the crescent, sun and water waves.

Hurrian—Urartian art

Many Hurrian artistic themes went into the amalgam that made up Hittite art. The colourful style of Urartian art manifested itself in enamel and stone accents in metalwork and wall paintings with bright colours with geometric, animal and plant motifs. Among other items, Urartian artisans made bronze weapons, shields, helmets, cauldrons, panels and belts, and a miscellany of iron articles. The products were of such high quality that they were exported as far off as Etruria. The Urartians, who had a tradition in stone-cutting and construction, built magnificent temples, colourful palaces and imposing fortresses.²

Painting

Pyotr Zakharov (1816–1846) was the most famous Chechen painter of the nineteenth century. He was sent by General Yarmolov, who had adopted the talented orphan, to study painting in Moscow under Pyotr Dubrovin and later under Karl Brullov at the Imperial Arts Academy in St Petersburg. Upon graduation, he worked in the Caucasus and then in Moscow until his untimely death. Despite being a subject of racial discrimination on account of his ethnic background, Zakharov went on to become one of the best portrait-painters of nineteenth-century Russia and was made a member of the Academy of the Arts. His portraits of Yarmolov and Lermontov were displayed in the Russian State Museum and his ‘Self-Portrait’ and ‘A Portrait of Ladyzhenski’ were principal exhibits in the Grozny Art Gallery. The Russian Museum of St Petersburg and other museums have his works on permanent display. The Museum of Fine Arts in Grozny was named after him.

In 1943, the Union of Painters of the Chechen-Ingush ASSR was established and art education was formalized. After repatriation, art schools were set up, producing as graduates a steady stream of artists who enriched the artistic and cultural life of the republic.

Amandi Asukhanov, Merited Artist of the Chechen-Ingush ASSR and a member of the Union of Artists of the USSR, was born in 1939 and graduated from the Republican Art School in Makhachkala. Among his works are ‘Lilac Castle’, and ‘Views of My Native Land’. His later works, such as ‘The Wounds of War’, were reflections of the sanguine conflict in Chechnya. Lechi Abaev, born in 1957 in Haydarkan in Kirghizistan, graduated from the Leningrad Institute of Arts. His works were exhibited in Grozny, Leningrad and Krasnodar. Unfortunately, many of the artist’s paintings were destroyed in the first war. Hassan Sediev, who was born in Sary Atagi in 1960, graduated from the Academy of Art in Grozny and held his first exhibition in 1983. Sediev’s works, including ‘Waterfall’, ‘In the Mountains’ and ‘By the Water Spring’, reflected the natural beauty of his native land. He also depicted the timeless Vainakh watchtowers. In 2001, Sediev joined the Russian Union of Artists, which organized an exhibition of his works in Moscow. A number of his paintings are exhibited at the Modern Art Museum in Moscow.

Zamir Yushaev (Jouschaev), born in 1965 in Daghestan, graduated from the Repin Academy in St Petersburg in 1992. Yushaev is a versatile artist and cartoonist and is now based in Leipzig, Germany. His works include portraits of famous Western personalities.

Many of the works of Shamil Shamurzaev, Merited Painter of the Russian Federation, were destroyed in the war. Among his better known works are 'Woman' and 'An Abstract Painting'.

Other painters of note include Abu Pashaev, with his works 'Cannibalism', 'Carpet Pattern', 'Prayer' and 'Goat'; Albina Digaeva, 'Tower', 'Trees', 'Cup' and 'Toilet Paper'; Shamsuddin Akhmadov, 'Signs of Presence'; Ramzan Malsagov, 'Crescent' and 'Morning of a Great Day'; Vakhid Zaurayev, 'Flowers of Paradise'; Vakhid Bolatkhanov, 'Father and Son'; Said-Emin Elmirzaev; Khamzat Dadaev; Akhmed Asukhanov; and Ramzan Mansagov.

The conflicts of the last decade have had a devastating effect on the art scene in Chechnya, including the destruction of all art schools. According to Vakha Umarsultanov, Chairman of the Union of Painters of the Chechen Republic, as of end of 2001, there were 46 members in the Union, half of them being refugees outside Chechnya. Inevitably, a considerable part of recent Chechen art has been devoted to the themes of liberty and freedom, and the portrayal of the horrors of war. The exhibition of works by young art students from Grozny held in Moscow in June 2002 was an expose on the impact of the war on young and tender psyches.

However, it was not all doom and gloom for Chechen artists. Works by Chechen painters were put on display at the Moscow Museum of Modern Art towards the end of 2001, with support from the Union of Artists of Russia, and an exhibition of some 100 works by 37 contemporary Chechen artists was held at the Russian Academy of Fine Arts in Moscow in May-June 2002. A number of Chechen artists, including up and coming painters Ramzan Izhaev and Musa Daldaev, took part in the 'Peace to the Caucasus' exhibition, which took place in Krasnodar in the North Caucasus in November-December 2003.

Sculpture, engraving and monuments

The Chechens have been master builders since time immemorial. The magnificence of the stone carvings of the ancient Vainakh, including sculptures of gods and goddesses, can be seen in the ruins dotting the mountainous landscape. Stone engraving reached a high level of development, with objects treated including tombstones and tethering posts. Traditional wood engravers developed many artistic styles, decorating houses, domestic utensils, personal arms and tools.

Modern artists include Ilyas Dutaev and Iles Tataev, both wood-sculptors of extraordinary talent. Dutaev, the first People's Artist of the Chechen Republic, graduated from the Abramtsevo School of Art and is considered a pioneer in the art of miniature wood-carving. Some of his sculptures depict aspects of national culture and traditions. Among his works are 'Gluttons', 'Expectation of a Son' and 'Dancing Son'. His son, Aslambek, is also an accomplished wood-sculptor. Tataev, Merited Artist of Russia and the Chechen-Ingush ASSR, used tree burls, branches and roots to fashion his works of unusual themes. After a series of set-backs in 1994, Tataev managed to exhibit a number of his burl sculptures at the State Duma Hall in June 1999, including 'The Tenth Wave', 'When a Man Loses His Head', 'A Radar of the Planet', 'A Lady with a Dog', 'An Idea', 'Danko', 'Salvador Dali—Symphony', and 'Motherhood'.

There is a quaint story about a statue of Yarmolov in Grozny that had a vile quotation from the General about the Chechen nation as an inscription. The detestable monument was erected in tsarist times, removed by the Soviets, and then restored by them in 1949 during the Chechen exile. Several attempts were made by the Chechens to blow up the monument to tyranny, starting from 1969. Eventually, it was cast in the oblivion of the Sunzha River in 1990.



Figure 11.1 Ancient stone relief of a man. Chechen-Ingush State Museum. The Chechens had been brilliant artisans and master craftsmen throughout the ages.

Soviet sculpture consisted of public monuments erected to glorify the regime and remind the people of its beneficence, with the omnipresent statue of Lenin ‘adorning’ central squares. The Statue to the Friendship of Peoples in Druzhba Square in Grozny, which was sculpted by I.D.Bekichev, was erected as a memorial to the ‘heroes’ of the Civil War, the Chechen Aslanbek Sheripov, the Ingush Gapur Akhriev and the Russian ‘Big Brother’ Nikolai Gikalo. In the post-Soviet period, offending Soviet monuments were removed and replaced by national ones, which were later vandalized by the invading Russians.

Crafts

Some of the items manufactured by Vainakh craftsmen were a testimony to wonderful natural talent and elevated aesthetic taste. Master craftsmen perfected volumetric and relief techniques. Their creative resources were manifested in the genres of sculptural works, decorative domestic articles, and in the techniques of carving on dry wood. The Folk Craft Centre in Grozny was set up to preserve and develop traditional craftwork.

Domestic utensils, woodcraft and pottery

There was a class of artisans in each village that manufactured a range of domestic items. What a community did not make, it imported through barter from others. There were many kinds of household utensils (*p-heegha*) made from different materials, including brass bowls, mugs, tubs and pots. Traditional wooden and brass items and earthen tableware were exclusively used until the late nineteenth century. Later, other materials started to be used. Ornaments on glazed crockery (*sir dillina p-heegha*) included geometric and floral designs. Baskets were made from reed and willow twigs in the plains. Bowls and vessels were usually on the big side, with the shape depending on their function. For example, large narrow-necked copper pitchers (*k'udalsh*) were used to carry water and to store melted butter, whereas wide-necked ones were used to hold milk. Narrow-necked clay jugs (*guemalgash*) and small earthenware pots (*buekanash*) were also in use. Grain stocks were kept in earthenware containers. Beer was brewed in large copper tuns. Some items of old are either still in use today or guarded as heirlooms.

Wood-working played a significant role in the economy of the Vainakh. The traditional wooden table was round, three-legged and about half a metre in height. Wooden tableware, such as trays, mugs and cups, spoons, ladles and churns were made with lathes from the hardest kinds of timber, especially oak and maple. The carving and shaping of some wooden utensils were done in water-mills. A North Caucasian cradle (*aaga* in Chechen) had a unique toilet 'drainage' mechanism (*sippa*) consisting of a shaft of cored sheep leg bones ending in a clay potty (*toek*). Other utensils made from wood included wagons and vases.

The potter's craft was characterized by a variety of products and designs, including vessels for storage of grains, jugs, mugs, cups with wavy ornaments, and so on.

Weaving

The wool and felt industry was of great importance in traditional Vainakh economy. Felt was an indispensable material as an insulating lining and was used to make mattresses and blankets. The slender and light Chechen *burkas* were popular all over the North Caucasus. Weaving capes was a female preserve, each item requiring between one week and a month to make. Chechen women also made *cherkesskas*, *bashliks* and pistol holsters (*khump'arsh*). Chechen broadcloth was in large demand in the nineteenth century, especially in central Russia, where it was used to make uniforms for government

officials. It was woven on special looms, soaked in warm water, then rolled out and left to dry in the roller.

The Chechens also wove quality carpets (*kuuzash*). *Istang*, a woollen or felt tapestry-rug, similar to Daghestani *dumi*, had simple designs of ornamental patterns of ringlets, animal horns and symmetrical plants, in a full range of bright colours. It was usually decorated with red and blue fringe-work (*cheechakkh*). *Istangs* were hung horizontally on the walls of the master's chamber and the guest-room.

Leather, tanning and saddlery

The tanning craft and processing of leather were popular crafts. There were six tanning centres in nineteenth-century Grozny run by famous Chechens. Items manufactured included footwear, mattress sheaths and warm sheepskin coats. Boots and shoes were made of morocco and shagreen leather. Highland hunters and shepherds donned rawhide footwear with soles plaited with straps. By the end of the nineteenth century, mass-produced factory footwear had become widespread. Other leather products included tobacco-pouches, belts and knife-cases.



Figure 11.2 Istang showing common patterns. It took nine piles (iss tong) of wool, each from a whole lamb, to make one rug.

Saddle-making was a complex process requiring the skill of a number of artisans. Besides saddlers and harness-makers, blacksmiths made bits, stirrups and horseshoes. Chechen saddles were known for their lightness, and, together with the harnesses and bridles, were often decorated with silver. Saddle-bags (*taelsash*) were made of soft carpet or woollen fabrics. To ensure the comfort of the mount, a horse-cloth and soft felt pads were used. Chechen harnesses were of good quality, but were not as richly decorated as Kabardian ones.

Jewellery and ornaments

Vainakh jewellers of the Middle Ages took their craft to a high level of development. In the olden days, bronze was the principal manufacturing material, but later, silver became more dominant. Items made by jewellers included bracelets, necklaces, rings, temporal rings, earrings and pendants. Exquisite specimens made in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were sought after by connoisseurs in Russia and the West, and some have survived to this day. Female costume decorations included breastplates, belts and wedge-shaped buttons for bodices. Crescent-shaped tasselled silver pendants were used in barter.

*Weapons*³

Chechens had always been very proud of their weapons, which symbolized freedom and honour in the highlander ethos. A friendship was sealed by an offering of a sword or a dagger, and peace was struck by the exchange of personal arms. Every adult male up to the age of 60 was regarded as a warrior and, as such, expected to answer the call to arms in full gear. Men of modest means were helped to acquire arms by the community. The quality of weapons and their decorations were a reflection of the social status of the owner, and hence all aspired to upgrade their armouries. Weapons were hung on carpeted walls as adornments. The 'cult of personal arms' is still prevalent in the Caucasus.⁴

The making of weapons was a time-honoured and essential occupation in the North Caucasus, affording the artisans high social status. Armourers could not afford compromising their reputation by churning out products of inferior quality. Blacksmiths had an aura of mysticism as guardians of their trade, the secrets of which they passed on to their progeny. It would seem that at first the Vainakh mined their own raw materials from the mountains, but later on they imported steel. Legend has it that an ancient conscientious Vainakh armourer who came across the secret of steel forsook forging damascene blades because he realized their potency and potential abuse.

It would seem that the Chechens had sophisticated combat organization, as can be evidenced from a plethora of military terms which they used for infantry, cavalry, archers, guards, spear-bearers, orderlies, swordsmen, shield-bearers, and company, regiment and army commanders, and so on.

Ancient weapons

The earliest stone weapons found in Chechnya date back some 40,000 years ago. In the fourth millennium BC, copper weapons were manufactured, including tanged daggers. Bronze had become the dominant forging material by the third millennium BC. Iron

weapons made their appearance in the first millennium BC. Archaeological finds that go back to these eras include swords, sabres and daggers.

Slings were used to catapult sharp-pointed and round stones. Javelins were thrown long-range from a contraption consisting of a pair of wild goat's horns fixed on a wooden stand with leather belts or tendons stretched between them. Clubs were wielded in close combat. *Khalkhan* was a weapon of personal defence in the shape of a metal spear half a metre in length with a thick wooden haft used to clutch and break the enemy's sword. A coat of mail (*ghagha*) and a leather-covered shield were used for personal protection.

Traditional weapons

Bows ('*eedash*: sing. '*ad*) and arrows (*pkherchii*: sing. *pkha*) and spears were made of the wood of hornbeam (*pkha*), an abundant but sacred tree. Arrows were shot from big, two-stringed composite bows with horn on the inside and sinew on the back, the shafts usually wrapped in leather. Bows and arrows had been in use until the early eighteenth century, when they were superseded by more potent weapons. The arbalest (*seekkha*-'*ad*) was also a projectile weapon of choice. The Nakh hunted birds using bows and stone missiles carried in a shoulder bag until the early years of the twentieth century.

Caucasian sword types included the *shashka* (*sashkho* in Chechen, from Circassian *seshxwe*=sabre). The blade of a *shashka* was slightly curved towards the point and the hilt was made guardless, for unfettered draw. It was hung from a diagonal strap across the right shoulder or from a belt. The most prized *shashka* types were '*gurda*' and '*ters-maimal*', which was so light and flexible that it could be placed into a 40-cm sieve. However, retrieving it, an exercise called 'waking the wolf', without suffering harm was a challenge indeed. The *kaldam* was a kind of broadsword with a straight single-edged wide blade. It typically had two or three flues and carried the sign of the cross, intimating Georgian influence. Chechen swords and sabres were highly valued by the Cossacks and Russian Army officers serving in the Caucasus.

The dagger (*shaelta*) was a popular weapon, used in combat, hunting, work and dancing. Archaeologists have uncovered polished and burnished daggers up to 60 cm long and 9 cm wide. At some point in the Middle Ages, a law was passed that forbade the use of the dagger in stabbing, allowing only for cutting action. The dagger grew much smaller and lighter in the nineteenth century as its combat role diminished and customs changed. The blade, however, remained of superb quality, capable of severing a blacksmith's tongs in two. Outstanding specimens changed hands for up to several dozen sheep. Caucasian knives had a reputation of being well hardened and tough. Early daggers had special recesses on the inner side of the scabbard for multi-purpose knives.

It took an armourer and his apprentice about two weeks to make a dagger and more than a month to forge a sabre. Originally, *shashkas* and daggers were not decorated. The maker would only polish the blade with iron flakes from the anvil and darken the handle by rubbing it in a mixture of vegetable oil and powdered charcoal. In the second half of the nineteenth century, handle materials like wood and horn started to give way to ivory, walrus tusk and silver, and ornaments of silver and gold began to appear on the sheath. Blades of *shashkas* of the wealthy were often ornamented over their full length.

Steel weapons dating back to the Russian-Caucasian War are very hard to come by on account of heavy wear and tear and due to the fact that the scarcity of manufacturing

materials necessitated the reforging of damaged weaponry into new items. Later specimens can be more frequently come across.

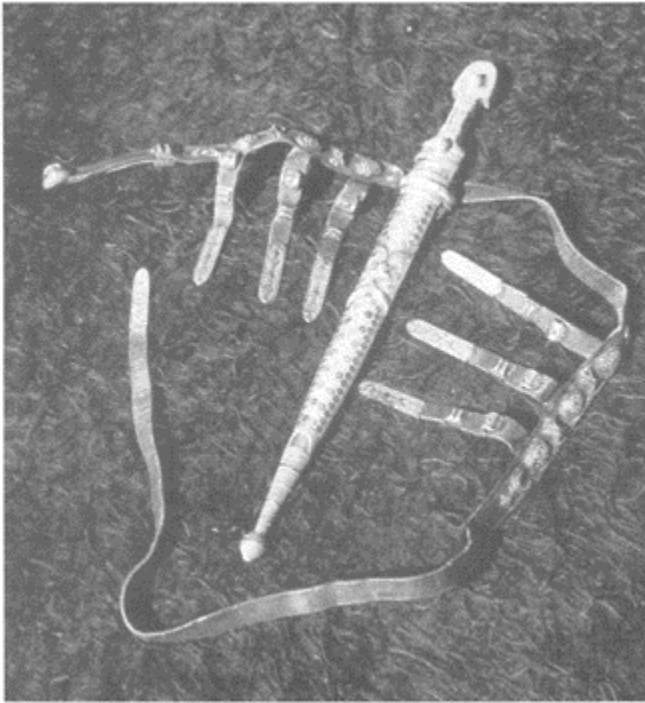


Figure 11.3 Dagger and belt on a *burka*. No mountaineer went outside his home without his dagger—a potent symbol in North Caucasian folklore.

Firearms

The Vainakh used fusils and guns as far back as the seventeenth century. They produced matchlocks and later flintlocks, and concocted gunpowder. In the eighteenth century, both firearms and traditional weapons were in use, but as the former became more widespread, they drove the bow and arrow and the protective gear into obsolescence. The Chechens used firearms in the nineteenth century against the Russians. Most guns were manufactured locally, but some were imported from Russia, Hungary and the Crimea. By the early 1840s, Shamil had realized the potency of heavy weaponry, as the Russians demonstrated on his forces on many occasions, and he began to make his own cannons in Dargo, which had become one of the major weapon-making centres of his state.

Ornamental decorations on firearms in niello, including sun-like rosettes, geometrical figures, commas, bullhorns and flowers, had survived until the damascened floral designs of Daghestani craftsmen became dominant. Accoutrements strapped to the belt included

silver-decorated powder-flasks and primers made from wood, horn, bone or silver, in various sizes. The traditional powder-flask (*ghuura*) was made of animal horn wrapped in morocco for safety and to keep out moisture.

Firearms have been better preserved than swords and sabres. The Moscow State Historical Museum boasts a large collection of Caucasian weaponry and accoutrements, including sabres, daggers, bows and arrows, quivers, helmets, guns, pistols, breast-cartridges and powder-flasks. The ban on firearm manufacture by the tsarist authorities and the introduction of more advanced weapons caused this craft to be discarded.

Museums and art galleries

The P.Z.Zakharov Museum of Fine Arts, which was established in the mid-1930s in Grozny, was an important cultural centre in the North Caucasus. It included works by Zakharov, Rubo, Aivazovksy, Vereschagin, Makovsky, Kuindzhi, Korovin, Tropinin and Tyranov, and hundreds of paintings by Caucasian masters. Some of the exhibits were donated by Russian museums, for example the Hermitage bestowed works by Flemish and Dutch masters of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The Grozny Art Gallery was opened in 1961, housing more than 3,000 exhibits.

The Chechen-Ingush State Museum, which celebrated its centenary in 2004, had been one of the largest of its kind in the North Caucasus, boasting an extensive collection of items dating from the Bronze Age, including domestic utensils, garments, musical instruments and weapons. The archaeological exhibits of the Ethnic History Museum in Grozny had either been looted or destroyed. The Republican Museum of Local Lore, History and Economy, which was established in 1924, housed some 100,000 archaeological, numismatic, ethnographic, botanical, and zoological items.

After local museums were destroyed in the 1994–1996 War, some of the surviving exhibits were combined into the United Chechen State Museum, whilst others found their way to Russian museums. Some 60 pictures were restored at the Grabar National Restoration Centre in Moscow and were subsequently displayed at the Tretyakov National Picture Gallery in 2002. In 1999, more destruction was wrought on the already depleted museum pieces.

Architecture

Vainakh architecture had been the most varied and developed in the North Caucasus. Extant structures include whole villages, towers, castles, shrines and temples, crypts, mausoleums and necropolises. The stone architecture of the Chechens and Ingush goes back for millennia, and extant monuments date back to more than 1,500 years. Some structures were built using material from even more ancient monuments, perhaps going back to the first millennium BC. These ancient structures and monuments have furnished some valuable information on Vainakh society and culture, and are indispensable as sources for clues with which to unravel some of the mysteries of the past, including animist and polytheistic beliefs and rituals. There are common elements between the material and artistic culture of Chechnya and the civilizations of Asia Minor and the

Mediterranean, perhaps pointing at yet another validation of the Hurrian-Urartian-Nakh continuum.

Cyclopes represent one of the early grandiose styles of architecture in the Caucasus that goes back to the third/second millennium BC. These gigantic structures were constructed of enormous stone blocks, and their ruins can still be found in Chechnya and Ingushetia, for example near the villages of Doshkhakle and Tsecha-Akhk. According to legend, they were built by the Vampals, one-eyed giants corresponding to the Cyclopes in Greek mythology.

The working of stone had been an integral part of the industrial activity of the Vainakh, who had always been expert masons; the secrets of the trade were passed on from one generation to the next. Household, funeral and cultic monuments of the Middle Ages were wrought from stone. Itinerant Vainakh builders roamed the Caucasus, lending their skills to other peoples. Chechens are still to this day renowned architects and builders.

The different styles of architecture in the North Caucasus reflected the defence mechanisms adopted by the various peoples and the mores of those peoples. In Chechnya, one of the functions of towers was to serve as warning beacons. In the Northwest Caucasus, houses were built modularly and in such a way as to be easily dismantled in case of an impending invasion. The upper classes were loath to build stone fortifications as this was considered a stigma of cowardice.

In an effort to preserve and study ancient architectural marvels, or at least part of them, the 240-hectare Argun reserve was set up in 1988 to encompass dozens of old villages and hundreds of towers, ancient temples, a necropolis and many burial vaults.

Towers

Hundreds of stone towers, some nearly a thousand years old, are spread across the mountainous south. However, these only form a fraction of the thousands of edifices that had existed well into the eighteenth century and which stretched all the way to (today's) Grozny and even beyond. The craftsmanship of the builders reached its peak in the thirteenth to sixteenth centuries. The last towers were built no later than the early part of the nineteenth century, as other architectural designs and styles had become dominant. The towers of the Vainakh, veritable architectural gems, served several purposes at different levels. A (combat) tower was one of the seminal symbols of the *taip*. The towers also functioned as dwellings and sanctuaries for targets of revenge until tempers cooled down and the sense of injustice was assuaged. Traditional tower settlements in the mountains were located on slopes or in deep gorges.

Fragments of cyclic constructions assembled from huge stones, found, for example, in Doshkhakle, Kart, Orsoi and Tsecha-Akhk, indicate that the first towers could be dated back to at least the earliest Middle Ages. A web of folklore and legend had been woven around these structures. The first known mention of them is in an Arabic manuscript dating from the tenth century AD. Pre-Islamic edifices have pagan markings, which make them important sources in the reconstruction of ancient Chechen culture. The most intact collection of towers can be found in the Argun Valley, or 'Tower Gorge', as it is also known. Two military towers stood at the entrance and many hundreds more stood along its perimeter, right up to the Georgian border.

There were four kinds of towers: dwelling (*ghaala*), combat (*b'ov, voi*), semicombat and siege.⁵ The first consisted of two to three floors, reached heights of up to 12m, and usually had rectangular bases of 8–10-m sides, but square ones were not unknown. The thickness of the wall at the base was about 1 metre. The flat earthen roof was stacked with stones for reinforcement. A central column of large stone blocks served to anchor the inter-floor ceilings. There were outside stairs for access to the upper floors, and inner ladders made of tree trunks with jutting branches or notched footholds for use in emergencies. There were engravings on door-posts and sometimes on the walls.

Combat towers were usually four-storeyed, reached heights of 12–16 m, and had squarish bases of 4 m sides. They had roofs in the shape of step-pyramids with protruding sharpened white stones. The entrance on the second floor, which had a single stone block (*kor-kkheera*=*window-stone*) as a keystone, was accessed by a ladder. The inter floor ceilings were made from stone and wood. Top floors had protected loop-holes and overhanging floorless balconies (*mashikul*) for shooting and for pouring noxious materials on the attackers. Of special interest was the Golgotha cross found on some towers, serving as a protection sign. Classical combat towers of the fourteenth to seventeenth centuries were much more imposing, with five or six floors reaching heights of 25–30 m and square bases of 6 m sides.

In general, combat towers were not found alone, but usually amongst a number of residence towers. According to B.Plaetschke (1929), combat towers were not inhabited in normal conditions, but were only used during an attack. Whereas dwelling towers were private properties, combat towers were for the whole community. Defensive walls used to be built in the Middle Ages.

Semi-combat towers, which combined residence and defensive functions, were smaller in size than dwelling towers, but a bit broader than combat ones, and had loopholes and *mashikuls*. Decoration was rather modest, consisting of petroglyphs of prayers, solar signs, depictions of animals and human hands, and toasts.

Siege towers were used as sanctuaries in blood feuds. The master's apartment in the top floor was decorated with the national symbols of art, music and war, namely *istang*, *pondar* and *shashka*. The entrance was usually about 3 m above the ground, with a portable ladder used for access. When the Soviets abolished blood revenge, siege towers lost their function and they were gradually abandoned.

An elaborate warning system was set in place in the mountains. As soon as invaders made their appearance in the valleys, fires were lit on top of the towers, which were at visible distances from one another, and the danger signal was transmitted from one watchtower to the next. The cry '*Ortsa daala*' (literally: 'raise the alarm') alerted people to the impending danger and exhorted women, children and old men to seek shelter and able-bodied men to take up arms in defence of the land.

Chronicles from the time of Genghis Khan describe battles with the peoples of stone towers and the destruction wrought on the structures themselves. Five hundred years later, during Russia's colonial wars in the Caucasus, tsarist soldiers wilfully destroyed hundreds of towers and dismantled many more to use the stones to build forts. During the deportation, the secret police blew up towers to prevent the Chechens from hiding in them and carted away many priceless tower artefacts. More damage was visited upon the towers in the last decade. These magnificent symbols of Chechen identity and culture remain under real threat of obliteration.⁶



Figure 11.4 A tower village high up in the mountains. The stouter residence structures were built near combat towers for a quick response to surprise attack.

Temples and shrines

Temples (*selingi*, *èlgats* or *ghishloo*) started out as primitive sacrificial sites, usually in the shape of low rectangular stone pillars with easterly niches as receptacles for offerings, such as candles, and for worshippers to insert their heads into. As the Pantheon developed, elaborate shrines were built and consecrated to specific deities. Some shrines, like the one dedicated to Maettsil on Mat-Lam (Mount Mat) near Vladikavkaz, were in the form of small houses with ridged step-roofing. Temples had an east-west axis, east being the sacred direction of sunrise.

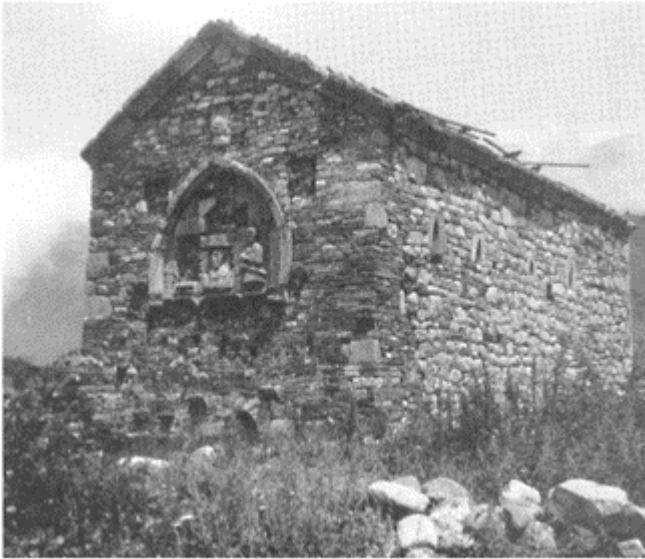


Figure 11.5 The medieval Georgian-style Christian-cum-pagan Tkhabyerdi temple has withstood the vicissitudes of time to become one of the salient features of Vainakh culture.

Crypts, mausoleums and necropolises

Monuments to the dead were of particular importance to the ancestor-worshipping Vainakh. Archaeological evidence suggests that crypts (*keshnash*) were used continuously for many centuries. Each family had its own vault, built either wholly underground or only partially so, in which case it was called '*maelkhan keshnash*' ('sun cemetery'). Dead people were placed on special shelves in the crypts, fully clothed, decorated and armed. Mausoleums housed the remains of important and wealthy people. Necropolises, which were located on the outskirts of villages, also served as sanctuaries, with dummy vaults of overlapping stones.

Muslim architecture

The first known monument of Muslim architecture in the Vainakh country is a mausoleum called 'Borg-Kash' near the village of Plievo in the Nazran District of Ingushetia, erected in the early years of the fifteenth century in memory of the Nogai prince Bek-Sultan, son of Khudainado. Important ecclesiastic structures include an amazing sixteenth/seventeenth-century mosque at Makazhoi on the Daghestani border and the eighteenth/nineteenth-century shrines at Etkala and Khimoi. These edifices were built in the Muslim style, but the minarets were shaped like miniature combat towers,

with step-pyramidal roofs and narrow loop-holes. Stone stelae were inscribed with Muslim prayers and epitaphs.

Village plans

There were two kinds of communal aggregations in the Middle Ages, namely tower and castle. A castle (*ghaala*) had both dwelling and combat towers, and was protected by a stone wall. Traditional village lay-outs were dependent on the locality and surroundings, which were chosen with convenience and security as paramount considerations. There was need for arable land to sow, grass fields to graze animals in and, of course, nearby water. Defensive measures included a stone wall surrounding the village and combat towers. Contingency plans for unexpected dangers were also drawn. Land was at a premium, so houses were even built on the top of cliffs. Stone was the main building material, but wood, clay and straw were also used.

A typical mountain village (*aka p-heeda*) was a haphazard collection of buildings with no construction plans and with streets snaking their way through. Every village had a main square for public gatherings and events and on which a mosque was built. The lower and upper parts of a mountain village were called '*p-hadukhee*' and '*p-hakoochee*', respectively. On the other hand, villages of the lowlands were built on river-banks or across roadways and were better planned and larger than their mountainous counterparts, housing hundreds of families as opposed to a few dozen in the latter. Some were built in circles with compact house formations to fend off attacks. Chechens, always the master builders, dug irrigation canals and constructed bridges and water-mills to grind their grain produce.

Traditional households

The commonest type of traditional building in mountainous Chechnya was the flat-roofed one-storey house, built of stone or, less frequently, of straw brick. Two-storeyed houses were occasionally built. A family holding consisted of the living quarters, a tower and the outhouses, the lay-out depending on the locality.

Other construction materials were used in lower Chechnya besides stone and brick. For house walls, a mixture of clay, chaff and fresh dung was used. The roof truss consisted of a framework of lateral transoms (*varkkhalsh*) of sturdy unbarked tree trunks and a grid of truss-beams to support the roofing materials, which consisted of branches and hay, a layer of tree bark, and a covering of clay or earth. The roof was tamped with a special wooden rammer (*pistig, paeshtig*) after rain so as not to allow grass to grow. Chechen houses had no regular windows, a shuttered square opening reaching down to the floor being used instead. The wooden-jointed double doors were made from heavy wood planks.

Houses of single-family units consisted of two quarters having two separate entrances, but no internal connection. The master of the house lived and received guests in one, whilst the other was used by his wife and children. In larger houses or dwellings of extended households, the residence of each family had separate egress to a common terrace, which invariably faced east. The porch was covered by extensions of the roof transoms whose ends rested on a thick wooden girder held by curved wooden pieces

attached to the tops of columns placed about 2 m apart. The guestroom was located next to the master's chamber, and both were decorated with sabres, swords, daggers, firearms, *burka* and silver-ornamented whip, all displayed on wall carpets. When not in use, the precious saddle and bridle were kept inside the house for show.

For cooking and heating, a chimneyed stove/oven (*pesh*) was used, placed in the middle of the front wall. A clay-covered wicker smokestack was placed about a metre above the floor. A fire was kept alight in an earthen hearth, just beneath the chimney. A cauldron was hooked up to a chain that hung down from the ceiling. A large oven (*kuerk*), located outside the house, was used for cooking in summer and roasting corn for winter stock. The corn seeds were stirred using a wooden pole with a blade at one end called '*ghaalakkh*'. The earth closet (*nishkee*) was placed at some distance from the house. A more modern convenience was referred to as '*hashtagha*'.

The traditional Chechen house was simple, bordering on the ascetic. There was an absolute minimum of furniture consisting of portable wooden beds-cum-sofas (*dechigmaengesh*), small (three-legged round food) tables (*shannash*; sing. *shun*), three-legged round stools (*zh'aighantash*), the master's armchair, a few low benches (*ghantash*) and bolsters (*mutaakhash*). People usually slept on the floor. Household things (*yiibar*) such as carpets, rugs, mattresses, blankets and tableware and crockery were kept either on wide shelves lining the inside walls or in wooden chests. Despite the austerity, good-quality wood and brass crockery and other utensils were used.

Russian and Soviet influences

It was not until the nineteenth century that Chechens started building houses after the Russian fashion: with regular windows, one entrance door, an iron stove and a tiled roof. These novel dwellings were built of straw brick or logs of wood. There were some 30 brick and tile factories in Chechnya in the late nineteenth century.

Grozny and the other big towns of Chechnya had some Russian, but mainly Soviet, styles of architecture. In 1932, the Union of Soviet Architects was set up to control the practice of architecture. Individualism and regional styles were frowned on. Post-Second World War utilitarian and standardized architecture was characterized by drab, unimaginative and monotonous designs. These eyesores continued to be built throughout the Soviet period, with occasional slight uninspiring modifications. No attempt was made to integrate new housing projects with old ones, and many relics of the past were destroyed by the myopic policy. One result of ignoring local colour in architectural designs was that Soviet towns and cities were eerie replicas of each other.

In the 1960s, high-rise buildings and prefabs sprouted in Grozny. The construction of palaces of culture and stadiums also began in this period. In 1980, the first 16-storey building was erected in downtown Grozny.

Architecture was taught at the Grozny Design Institute. One of the best-known architects of the post-deportation era was Yusuf Geroev, a scion of an Ingush family of masons. His prolific designs of houses, buildings, refineries, airports, villages and town districts earned him many rewards and prizes, including the Badge of Honour.

In the early 1990s, an attempt was made to resurrect traditional house and village designs, as a reaction against Russian cultural domination during the previous century.

Villages were built in the traditional manner, centred around a mosque. However, the experiment was nipped in the bud in late 1994.

12 Music and dance

Music

According to the ethos of the Caucasian mountaineers, the soul of a people resides in its music and dance. Music and poetry have had a special place in the Vainakh world, as is evidenced by the still extant corpus of legends, and were the principal means by which much of the history, culture and traditions were preserved. Many social occasions were graced by the music and stories of the minstrels and story-tellers, who employed melodic verses to make the tales more attractive and thus easier to incorporate in the national ethos. Music and song were the perfect vehicles to convey romantic words of love and the mysteries of life. Reconciliatory terms were pronounced in song, as were binding oaths, not forgetting maledictions that stuck to their subjects for ages. Music was even thought to have soothing and curative properties, and, as such, chants were part and parcel of the stock-in-trade of folk doctors, hymned by the bed of the sick as invocations to ward off evil spirits. Song and dance were also used as war implements to animate the warriors to perform feats of glory. Their adoration of music was a salient indication of the Vainakh's healthful attitude to life.

Song and dance have their roots in the most ancient of Nakh religions, animism, being integral components of the rituals of appeasement of the spirits. National memory still retains a song or two from this ancient past. Some legends were preserved in the beautiful amber of catchy tunes (*uzamash*) to survive the vicissitudes of time and come down to us as snippets of ancient history and culture.

The folk music of the Chechens and Ingush consisted of songs, instrumental compositions, dance music and marches. Musicians were revered, not least for their mission to preserve snippets of history for posterity, and they were strictly exempt from engaging in battle, their sole role being to watch and 'record', and later to set the event to music and words. Their high status and integrity precluded any possibility of later bards tampering with the masterpieces, and thus distorting national history, as it were.

Traditional musical instruments were surrounded by legendary halos, with each having its own tale to sing. Some stories were of credible historical events, say that of the *pondar*, while others, the stuff of imagination—Pkharmat's 'accidental' manufacture of the reed-pipe. Georgian and Chechen musical folklores share at least four musical instruments: *pondar*, *ch'oendarg*, *zurna* and *doul*.

Chechen classical music was effectively born and developed in the Soviet period, when initially Russian musicians wrote music on Chechen themes. Later on, native musicians took up the banner, and a union of musicians was set up. However, there were simply too many interruptions and set-backs for a classical tradition to be fully established. Nevertheless, some memorable music was penned.

Characteristics of folk music

The collective of Chechen folk music has much in common with regards to stops and frets, structure of melodies, and harmonious texture. The commonest fret is the Dorian, but Mixolydian and Phrygian are also found. In national music variable scales are often used. Melodies have neither the chromatic scales nor the extended seconds that characterize the music of some of the other Caucasian peoples.

The structure of national harmonies has distinctive features. The tonic triad of the Dorian stops re-fa-la is functionally connected to an unstable triad do-mi-sol. In these basic triads the third tone is sometimes replaced by a higher or lower auxiliary tone, i.e., instead of re-fa-la, re-mi-la or re-sol-la, and instead of do-mi-sol, do-re-sol or do-fa-sol. These chords, also met in the main body of compositions, sound in the finales of songs and dance melodies as unresolved detentions of those of third construction. Sometimes, harmony of the stops delays the introduction of the third chord. There is also manipulation of triads with a replaced third tone, with such consonance presenting itself as a fourth. For example, the triad re-sol-la gives fourth chord la-re-sol. Consonance consists of seconds and fifths or fourths and fifths. The basis of national harmony is the fourth triad, instead of the classical third construction. In instrumental and vocal compositions, it is frequently possible to observe parallel fourth exploration. In addition, many national songs and dances terminate in a fourth.¹

Music genres

Song

In the olden days, polyphonic choral songs were prevalent in the Vainakh musical repertoire. It is thought that polyphonic music arose in the Caucasus in the pre-Christian era. With the advent of Christianity in Georgia, chants and hymns were initially delivered monodically, but later the deeply ingrained polyphonic tradition came to dominate liturgical pieces. Parallel developments took place in the North Caucasus after the convergence of the southern and northern musical traditions with the spread of Christianity in the Central Caucasus. Both religious and secular songs were performed polyphonically. Whereas this archaic music style is still prevalent in Georgia, and to some extent in the Northwest Caucasus, the tradition associated with it has witnessed considerable diminution amongst the Chechens. Fortunately, the Kist of Georgia have preserved some of their polyphonic traditions, and a number of songs of this genre are still performed by the female song ensemble 'Aeznash' ('Voices').

A characteristic of Vainakh folk music was that songs often had a slow or moderate beginning, but gradually picked up tempo to grow into lively dances. Folk songs, including religious chants, were often delivered in a declamatory manner, reminiscent of recitatives. Many were delivered as dialogues. The male soloist would start a song, to be joined by the male chorus after a time. Then the female soloist would merge in, later to be accompanied by the female chorus. Finally, the song would erupt into a lively rhythm as a cue to the young men and lasses to take the floor. Modern national songs, usually in couplets, are performed in many voices, sometimes with elements of counterpoint. In three-voice songs, the basic melody (*muqam* in Chechen; from Arabic *maqām*) is usually

carried by the middle voice. Sometimes melodiousness is replaced by recitative-declamatory episodes. Syncope is typical of national songs. Stops on one of the sounds of a melody are characteristic, usually at the beginning of songs.

There are many kinds of songs. *Illi* refers to epic legends and heroic ballads, depicting the struggle for freedom—a principal theme in the Vainakh ethos—and extolling the exploits of heroes (*baechchanash*), and condemning anti-heroes. These songs were usually performed by male singers (*illiaalarkhoi*). Mention of *illancha*, or *illi* bards, goes back to the Tatar invasion. The corpus of the *illi* legends may be considered as a historical chronicle and specifically a reflection of the process of nation-building in the latter Middle Ages. *Yish* (pl. *èèsharsh*) is a genre of songs usually sung by women-folk with the words ‘written’ by the performers. It includes comic songs (*zaabaree èèsharsh*), romantic and love ballads (*beezaman èèsharsh*) lullabies (*aaganan èèsharsh*) and melancholy songs (*ghiila èèsharsh*). The hypnotically primeval religious hymns (*nazmanash*; sing. *nazma*) were chanted by either male or female singers (*nazmanchash*). *Yir* are usually non-Chechen songs that had become part of the national repertoire.

Lyrical folk-songs with anti-Russian overtones became popular in the second half of the nineteenth century, replacing *illi* as the principal song genre. Some of the more famous songs included ‘Song of a Siberian Exile’, ‘Song of a Hard Labour Convict’, ‘To a Bird’, ‘Don’t You Cry, My Lad’, ‘An Old Chechen Ditty’, and ‘The Red Deer’. The heart-rending ‘Lofty Mountains’ was typical of the genre:

Oh ye lofty Mountains,
 Sprawling across the land!
 So many hapless orphans had taken shelter
 On your forbidding heights.
 Perchance to share my sorrows with the Heavens!
 But surely they would stoop in despair—
 For, there is so much anguish in my heart!

Chechen warriors intoned ‘The Song of Death’ at sensing their doom:

If we perish, we shall never arise.
 When we grow hoary, youth is forever gone.
 Alas, our mothers would never engender us again!

Вай делча ден лур дац,
 Къанделча къон лур дац,
 Вай динчу наноша,
 Вай юха дийра дац ...

Instrumental music

Instrumental music is differentiated into music for listening (*ladugh yish*), marches and dance music. There is a large corpus of programmed 'listening' compositions performed on a *dechigan-pondar* or accordion, with the pieces often improvised and generally having harmonious textures and marked by syncope. Usually, the titles give indications of the themes.

The Prayer of Shamil is one of the best-known national instrumental pieces. Legend has it that having been trapped in a remote mountain nook by superior Russian troops with only a few of his devout *murids*, the Imam was on the verge of despair. When all seemed lost, Shamil hit on the idea of animating his dejected men through dance, despite his abhorrence of this form of entertainment as leading away from the 'true path'. He first spread his carpet to say his 'last prayers'. The *zurna* player intoned the call to prayer, and the *murids* lined up behind their Imam. Once he finished his prayers, Shamil threw himself into a frenzied dance, to be followed by his men, after overcoming their initial shock. Infused with fortitude induced by the ecstatic dance, the *murids* pounced on their bewildered besiegers and broke out of their predicament. The tale inspired the celebrated accordion-player Magomaev from Shatoi to compose the piece in two movements: the first was solemn and melancholy, reflecting the *murids*' desperation, the second gradually developing into an energetic dance tune. This composition became very popular among Chechen accordionists, who play it in several variations.²

National marches are performed in the tempo of cavalry marches, one of the best-known pieces being *Gazi Magomi* (Ghazi Mohamed, First Imam) composed in the first half of the nineteenth century.

Troubadours or 'ch'oendargoi'

Every community had its share of bards (*ch'oendargoi*, *chunguroi*), who composed and performed national songs, including *illi*. Minstrels were considered relatives in the same *taip*. N. Dubrovin called them the professional union or brotherhood. They were highly respected and considered the most honourable group in society.³ Many are still retained in national memory. Song festivals were held in which musicians and singers from a number of towns and villages competed.

Troubadours inspired their compatriots to die for freedom and incorporated their convictions and aspirations into lyrical songs. They accompanied armies on their expeditions to raise morale and instil courage. However, they were not allowed to join the fray even in total defeat, their sole task being to immortalize the battle in song. According to legend, after the devastation of the Chechen army by the Tatars, Timur asked if the national instrument (*pondar*, symbol of national spirit) had been won from the Chechens. When the answer came in the negative, he ordered that the *illancha* be brought to him, and the Tatar potentate handed him his sabre as a token of his desire for the valiant Chechens to become his allies. The *illancha* in turn presented it to nine pregnant women, who passed it on to nine young boys. It is believed that the sabre and many other treasured relics were appropriated and taken to Moscow in 1944.



Figure 12.1 'Illi, or Dancing Grandson', a wood-carving by I.Dutaev. Chechen bards roamed the land, entertaining people and extolling heroes as paragons for the young ones. The bowed instrument is the 'adkhokhku-pondar, the other dechigan-pondar.

In the poem 'Ismail-Bey' (1832), Lermontov offers his depiction of the Chechen bard:

Around the fire, hearkening to the minstrel,
The intrepid youth have crowded,
And old gray-haired men in a line
At complete attention.
On a grey stone, unarmed,
Sits a complete stranger,—
The order to battle is not necessary for him,
He is proud and indigent.
It is the bard!

Progeny of the steppes, minion of the sky,
 Without gold he is, but not without bread.
 There he goes:
 Three strings really start to strum under his hand.
 And vividly, with wild simplicity,
 He sets on the songs of yore.

Modern-day minstrels

In the twentieth century, national music was developed and propagated by a new class of professional folk musicians, who produced music sheets and wrote music pieces, mainly inspired from the rich heritage of the Vainakh and usually named after the composers and players.

The family Bisirkhoev handed down the art of music from one generation to the other. Talented accordion-players included Magomaev, composer of *The Prayer of Shamil*, Yusup Gadaev, Sekinat Dudaeva and Dashukaev. Born in 1908 into a musical family, the talented accordion virtuoso Umar Dimaev, People's Artist of the Chechen-Ingush Republic, has left some 30 compositions for the accordion and hundreds of recordings of folk music, including 'A Dance for Makhmud Èsambaev' and 'Two Friends'. His three sons, Said, Ali and Amarbek, continued the musical tradition. Latter-day minstrel Ibragim Bataev specialized in epic songs. Many memorable songs were written by national bard Baudin Suleimanov. Valid Dagaev, a contemporary *illancha* and accomplished *dechigan-pondar-player*, sang to liberty and in celebration of the valour of his people at the Festival de l'imaginaire in Paris in March 2002.

Many melodies and songs became popular under the influence of folk-tale narrator Balkan Anzorova, singer of oriental folk-songs Maryam Aidamirova, accordion-player Esit Ganukaeva, *dechigan-pondar-player* Idris Tsitskiev, and Nozhai-Yurt-based group 'Songs of the Mountains'.

Study of musical folklore

The Chechens were introduced to Russian music through cultural exchange in the nineteenth century. It was in this period that the accordion and some other musical instruments were adopted by the North Caucasians. On the other hand, Chechen musical folklore drew the attention of Russian composers. In the middle of the century, a Russian Decembrist exile in the Caucasus recorded music notations of several national tunes. I.Klinger (1900), a Russian prisoner of the Chechens for some 30 months in the late 1840s, published music scores of some Chechen melodies. In 1918, the Chechen Aslanbek Sheripov published *From Chechen Songs* in Vladikavkaz.

In the Soviet period, study of musical folklore became more systematic. Many composers of different nationalities worked on Chechen folk music and on its basis created many interesting compositions of different genres, some of which can be found in musical collections kept in the record library of Russian Radio. N.S.Rechmensky started to collect and study Vainakh music in 1938 and A.M.Khalebsky wrote down many

national melodies during his tenure as art director of the State Song and Dance Ensemble. Other musicians of note included A.Aleksandrov, V.I.Ashkenazy, E. Kazanovsky, M.Koval, N.Narimanidze, A.Rozenberg, S.Ryawzov (Russian composer, published a music-book of Kabardian songs in 1947), A.Shargorodsky, V.I.Shnaper, V.Shvedov and E.Zakharovich.

Work on collection and recording of musical folklore resumed in 1957. Sixty-six ancient and contemporary Vainakh songs and dances were published in 1959 by E. A.Kolesnikov, A.M. and M.M.Khalebsky, Supyan Tsugaev and Rechmensky. The Republican House of National Creative Work was also engaged in collecting national music. Personnel of the local radio made recordings in villages and art festivals. Two volumes of musical folklore were published by the Institute of Humanities, with Kh. Akhmadov, U.Beksultanov, S.Èlmurzaev, A.Shakhbulatov and Tsugaev taking part in the epic project. The composer Magomed Dikaev published *Songs of the Vainakh* in 1972.

Orchestra of Folk Instruments

The influential composer G.Kh.Mepurnov, V.M.Belyaev and M.M.Khalebsky were the masterminds behind the creation of the Orchestra of Folk Instruments in 1936. National instruments were designed and manufactured for the group by P. A.Shoshin, who had been involved in similar projects in other Soviet republics. Basing his work on the *dechigan-pondar* and *'adkhokhku-pondar*, he created piccolo, tonic, alto, tenor and bass versions of the instruments. A balalaika contrabass, accordion, *zurna* and percussion instruments were also incorporated. Mepurnov, who acted as director, had collected many Vainakh melodies and wrote many compositions on national themes for the orchestra.

Classical music

Prior to the Soviet period, the Vainakh did not have an established classical musical tradition, and it was only in the 1930s that its basics took root. Music schools were opened in Grozny and some other large towns. In 1936, the Chechen-Ingush Philharmonic Society was set up in the former building of the Lermontov Theatre in Grozny. Together with the State Song and Dance Ensemble, it played a leading role in the development of the musical culture in the republic. Initially, musicians who wrote Vainakh classical music were of foreign origin, except for Muslim Magomaev (Sr), and it was only in the late 1950s and early 1960s that local talent began to etch its mark on this music genre.

Opened in 1937, the Grozny Music College spawned a large number of pianists, violinists, singers, accordionists, conductors and music critics. The College had seven departments, namely piano, singing, string, wind, conducting, folk music and music theory. Students took part in music competitions and occasionally teamed up with their teachers to give public performances. Promising graduates of the piano department went on to study at the Gnessins Music Institute in Moscow and the Leningrad Conservatory. Graduates of the singing department worked with opera companies in the Soviet Union, including the Lunacharsky Opera and Ballet Theatre in Saratov and the Yerevan Opera Company. Many graduates of the college went on to achieve fame, such as Adnan Shakhbulatov, a well-known composer whose name is now borne by the College.

Composer Said Dimaev and his brother Ali, a famous pianist and singer, studied here, the latter under Maina Snitko.

Early classical composers

Muslim Magomaev (Sr) (1885–1937)—Of Chechen origin and Azeri nationality, Magomaev's predilection for classical music, which was alien to Chechen culture at the time, was totally anachronous. It was therefore very propitious that circumstances took him from his native Stary Atagi to Azerbaijan in the early twentieth century, where he was able to cultivate his composing and conducting talents in his adoptive homeland. Magomaev is credited with forming Azeri national music into classical moulds. He wrote symphonic pieces on Azeri materials, such as *On the Fields of Azerbaijan* and *A Liberated Azeri Woman's Dance*, composed the operas *Shah Ismail* (1919) and the famous *Nargiz* (1935), and also wrote music for films.⁴ However, Magomaev remained true to his origins, composing symphonic pieces and other compositions based on Chechen musical folklore, such as *A Chechen Dance* and *Songs and Dances of Chechnya*. His grandson Muslim Magomaev (Jr) would become a famous composer and singer in his turn.

Alexander Alexandrovich Davidenko (1899–1934)—Davidenko, who was born in Odessa in the Ukraine, took part in the 1925 art expedition, when he sojourned in Chechen villages and wrote down some of the local melodies, including historical, ceremonial, love and dance songs. His work was published in 1926 by the Musical Sector of the State Publishing House in Moscow under the title 'Thirty Treatments of Chechen National Melodies for Piano in Two Hands'. His choral work 'Prisoner' is based on Pushkin's classic.

George Mepurnov (1900–1957)—Georgian by nationality, Mepurnov played a significant role in the development of Chechen classical music. He received his musical education at the Moscow Conservatory, and worked in Chechnya in the 1930s, studying the folk music of the Vainakh, collecting and treating national melodies, and producing his own arrangements and original pieces of music. A versatile musician, the gifted composer was co-founder and director of the Orchestra of Folk Instruments. Unfortunately, his creative work was put on hold during the purges, and many of his valuable manuscripts were lost in the subsequent chaos.

Exile and rehabilitation

Music archives were either burnt or plundered in 1944 and much of the national lore was lost during the deportation years. Music development was not only put on hold, it also suffered a severe reverse. Only one genre of music witnessed a bloom—dirges. One especially chilling lament went like this:

Oh Chechen!
 Now that you are free to go home,
 What are you lugging in your bag?
 What possessions are there in a foreign land?

Nothing but your parents' bones
To inter in the homeland.

Towards the end of the deportation years, as rehabilitation gained momentum, a renewed interest in music was evidenced. The committee for the reconstruction of the Chechen-Ingush Republic, among whose members were playwright Abdul-Khamid Khamidov and the composer Khalebsky, scouted for talent to establish a folk song and dance company. Among the people who were discovered this way were Shita Adilsultanov, Tamara Alieva, Alvi Deniev, Umar Deniev, Sultan Magomedov, Zulai Sardalova and Yaraghi Zubairaeu.

The music establishment was reconstructed after 1957. The deportation had resulted in the delay of the appearance of classical musicians, in comparison with, say, Kabardino-Balkaria, where native composers made their debuts in the early 1950s. Nevertheless, music schools mushroomed in many of the towns and villages of Chechnya. The efficient Soviet system of musical education was geared to spot young talent. After an audition, six-year-old students were admitted to these seven-year elementary schools. Upon graduation, students had the option of entering secondary music schools. Prodigious children could join one of the ten-year boarding schools at conservatories, and then study at the latter after graduation. Many Chechen composers who received their higher education in Moscow and St Petersburg started to appear in this period. Some of the musicians tried to amalgamate national folk heritage with classical and modern music. TV and radio played an important role in the propagation and popularization of Chechen music.

Modern composers and singers

Adnan Shakhbulatov—Merited Artist of the Russian Federation, Shakhbulatov studied composition at the Gnessins Music Institute in Moscow. He composed symphonic works and chamber pieces based on national melodies. His works included the vocal cycle 'From Chechen-Ingush National Poetry' and 'Separation'.

Said Dimaev—Composer and student of musical culture, Said Dimaev wrote songs, romances, film sound-tracks, symphonies and suites, with the oratorio 'Time for Action' rated among his best works. He was for ten years art director of the Chechen-Ingush Philharmonic Society and served as the chief conductor and art director of the Folk Band of the Chechen-Ingush Radio and TV Company.

Ali Dimaev—The legacy of the influential composer and song-writer Ali Dimaev was his endeavour to bring modern and folk music closer together. He founded the band 'Zaama' in 1982, and released a number of albums, including *Geenara Serloo* in 1999. He wrote the music to the Chechen national anthem and the song 'Nokhchichoe'. In 1999, Ali went to Moscow and applied his talents working at the Bazhaev Children Art Academy 'Vainakh'.

Amarbek Dimaev—After graduating from Grozny Music College, Amarbek enrolled in the Rostov-on-Don Conservatory, majoring in piano and teaching. Upon graduation he joined the State Philharmonic Society. Amarbek took first prize in the 1985 World Youth

Festival in Moscow. His compositions were a combination of the modern and traditional. He is currently based in Germany.

Other composers of note included Supyan Tsugaev, Ramzan Paskaev, Umar Beksultanov, Chergizbiev and Umar Sagaitov.

Sultan Magomedov, who grew up in exile, made his mark on the republican music scene in 1957. Merited Artist of the Chechen-Ingush ASSR, Magomedov worked as a soloist with the Chechen-Ingush State Song and Dance Ensemble. His songs included 'Away from My Motherland', 'The Beautiful Morning of the Caucasus', 'Along the Mountain Roads', and 'A Shepherd's Song'. He tragically died at the early age of 35.

Modern classical singers include Muslim Magomaev (Jr), Movsar Mintsaeve, and Sultan Baisultanov. Magomaev (Jr), People's Artist of the USSR, studied in Baku upon invitation from the Azeri composer Gadzhiev. In a brilliant career that started in the 1960s and spanned more than three decades, the superstar baritone sang classical arias, Russian songs and, fittingly, Aslan-Shah's aria from his grandfather's opera *Shah Ismail*. He co-wrote a number of songs, such as 'Azerbaijan', and 'The Last Chord'.⁵ Mintsaeve, Merited Artist of the Russian Federation, is a graduate of the Moscow Conservatory of Music and is considered one of the best baritone singers in Russia. He performed in the Bolshoi Theatre productions of Modest Musorgsky's opera *Boris Godunov*, Rossini's *Il Barbiere di Siviglia*, and Mozart's *Le Nozze di Figaro*. He sang the baritone role in a CD recording of Glinka's *Fantasia on Ruslan and Ludmila*. Baisultanov, People's Artist of the Chechen-Ingush Republic and Kazakhstan, graduated from the Leningrad Conservatory and joined the Abai Opera and Ballet Theatre in Alma-Ata in 1979 as a tenor, singing the roles of German in Tchaikovsky's *The Queen of Spades* and Cavaradossi in Puccini's *Tosca*, amongst others. Baisultanov, who is currently director of the theatre opera, took part in the gala concert opening the days of Kazakh culture in Russia in May 2002.

Post-1991 and present

No systematic efforts have been made to resurrect Chechen traditional songs and musical forms that had been largely neglected during some 70 years of Soviet rule, and buried under the ruins of more than a decade of chaos and war. However, some musicians on personal initiative tried to take up the slack. Two pioneers in this effort were Angela Yakhyaeva and Bilal Dibashev, a husband and wife team who had selected traditional Chechen music and transposed it for the violin, played by Angela, who studied the instrument at the Astrakhan Conservatory. Bilal formed a quartet in 1996 based on three traditional instruments, *dechigan-pondar*, *doul* and accordion, and on the violin. He uncovered some musical archives in the Ministry of Culture. Angela and Bilal's effort to record an album was thwarted by the 1999 Russian invasion.

Popular singers and musicians include Honoured Artist of the Chechen Republic Ichkeria Birlant Ramzaeva, whose Chechen and Russian repertoire includes patriotic songs. She gave charity concerts in refugee camps in Ingushetia and the Pankisi Gorge and toured Europe to promote Chechen culture. Suleiman Tokkaev, People's Artist of the Chechen Republic, studied music in Grozny and Rostov and worked at the Chechen Drama Theatre. Tokkaev has a powerful tenor voice, his most popular songs including 'A Vainakh Song' and 'Freedom or Death'. Imran Usmanov, Honoured Artist of the

Chechen Republic, is a singer and song-writer whose career has spanned more than three decades.

Other popular singers and musicians include rock star Sultan Makkaev, with his anthem 'My Chechnya', Bekkhan Barakhoev, Tamara Dadasheva, Umar Sagaipov, Hussain Rasaev, Sakhab Mejidov, Maryam Tashaeva, who is based in Moscow, Raisa Tagermanova, who sings in Chechen, Russian, Turkish and Arabic, Makka Mejieva, with the famous album *Nana*, Timur Mutsuraev, with the album *Jerusalem*, Zina Anasova, who sings mainly war songs, Malika Utsaeva and Liza Akhmatova, a rock singer. Famous groups include 'Irs', with their album *Daimokhk*, and 'Yurt-Daa'. Young and upcoming accordion-players include Khizir Putsigov, Movla Yusupov and Khasan Aktulaev.

Many of these artists were obliged to flee Chechnya, leaving behind a desultory and bleak music scene. The few remaining music schools are in desperate need of restoration. The little preservation work done inside Chechnya and by some diaspora communities is not enough to effect a renaissance. Unless peace and stability return to Chechnya, and work is commenced in earnest to restore the lost gems of the past, the Chechens, and the world, will be the poorer for the loss of musical heritage.

Said Gaitukaev, the Chechen art director of the Karachai-Cherkess State Philharmonic, is very active in the process of restoration of the classical music scene in Chechnya. In 2002, the Chechen State Philharmonic Society was restored by the present director Movladi Khomdiev, and the Chechen State Philharmonic Orchestra was reassembled. The Society supported the male choral ensemble 'Illi', led by Ilyas Abdulkarimov, the women's vocal group 'Zhovkh'ar', the instrumental troupe 'Daimokhk' and the pop band 'Èkspansiya'. The Solntse Fund, headed by Chechen businessman Jamaldin Kurumov, had been very active in the preservation and promotion of Chechen musical traditions, publishing a musical notebook of works by Said Dimaev and releasing a music album for children in 2000, and printing music textbooks and a collection of works by Umar Dimaev, Paskaev, Tokkaev, Mintsaeve and Dagaev in the following year.

Musical instruments

Chechen folk music is usually played with national instruments, including the ancient *pondar* (*pondur*, *pondura*) and the more recent Caucasian accordion.⁶ National musical instruments, apart from singing ancient and traditional stories, have their own tales to tell. *Pondar*⁷—Generic name of traditional string musical instruments considered the oldest, most widespread and favourite of the Vainakh. The *dechigan*- and *'adkhokhkupondar* are relatively simple instruments, consisting of three strings (*pkheenash*; sing. *pkha*) and a wooden case wholly hollowed from a tree log. The two to four strings on ancient instruments were made of horsehair, dried veins or tendons, with bovine scapulae and, later, decorated pumpkins being used for the case. Ancient story-tellers used to sing to the accompaniment of this instrument.

Dechig(an)-pondar (literally: 'wooden-*pondar*')—This is perhaps the most ancient of the known Vainakh musical instruments. It has a wooden case of an oblong shape, hollowed from a whole piece of a tree-log. The sounding board has a flat top and curved bottom. The stops and frets are located on the finger-board. The three strings are transversally tied

up on the neck. Sounds are produced by impact of the fingers on the strings, either from the top downwards or the other way, tremolo, clanking and pizzicato. The sound of old instruments has a soft timbre of rustling character. The pitch of this instrument is: first string—sol of the first octave, second—mi, and third—re of first octave.

'Adkhokhku-pondar (literally: 'bow-driven-pondar')—A bowed instrument with a wooden hemisphere for a case, a finger-board, and a support leg. It is bowed whilst set in a vertical position, with the neck held with the left hand and the leg resting on the left knee of the player. The sound produced is reminiscent of that of the violin, and the pitch is first string—la, second—mi, and third—re of first octave.

*Ch'oendarg (chungur)*⁸—This four-stringed instrument used to be played in the fields to procure the rapid growth of grain crops and during the mating season of sheep to enhance the number of lambings. Bards were collectively called '*ch'oendargoi*' (literally: '*ch'oendarg* players').

Balalaika, guitar, and mandolin—Relatively recent introductions in folk music.

Fiddle—The resonators of fiddles used to be made of pumpkins.

Sheedag—The Vainakh reed-pipe. According to legend, it was Pkharmat who invented this instrument—all by accident. Before his journey up from the Underworld, Pkharmat was given a reed with a piece of ember inside by his eldest brother. Whilst on his ascent, the attraction of the Fire-Mother on the ember was so powerful that it burnt through the core. By the time Pkharmat reached Earth, the ember had made eight holes—the number on a traditional reed-pipe. The instrument used to be played on 20 June, Pkharmat's Day, round about the summer solstice, before the sun shone on the summer-house.⁹

Ch'izhargha—A pipe made from elder wood.

Ma'a—A kind of horn.

Zurma—*Zurna*, an oboe-like wind instrument with peculiar and somewhat sharp sounds, used all over the Caucasus.

Shok—Whistle.

Caucasian accordion (pondar, keekhat-pondar)—Nowadays, the principal national musical instrument. The accordion is a relatively recent introduction, as a Russian influence during the Caucasian wars. The first accordions were made from wood. At first it was shunned by men, the girls taking an immediate liking to it. The keyboard, located on the right, is basically a diatonic scale with several chromatic sounds that limit the performance of compositions with change of tonalities and with chromatic sequences. The left keyboard has bass keys, the 'ready chords', which are used sparingly as they have third recapitulation, not characteristic of national music. The sound is distinct from that of the Russian *bayan* (button accordion) and is sharp and tremulous. Ramzan Paskaev, National Artist of Chechen-Ingushetia, is considered one of the most accomplished contemporary accordionists.

Vota (baraban)—A drum with cylindrical case, mainly played with sticks (*t'ergash*), but could also be struck with the fingers. It is an integral accessory of instrumental ensembles, especially when playing national dance tunes.

*Doul*¹⁰—A hand-held drum. The most famous contemporary *doul* player is Mahomed Israpiliv.

Geema—A flapper used at weddings as a rhythm instrument replacing clapping of the hands.

Zhirgha—Tambourine. It has become widespread as a percussion instrument.

The Chechens also used a kind of hand organ.

Dance

Caucasian dance initially arose as a religious rite, a kind of spirited prayer to mimic nature and appease its spirits. Later, it was transformed into a festive celebration, keeping some of its ritual significance. It was only in recent times that dance turned into a pastime devoid of religious meaning. In mythical times, the Narts held annual festivals and tournaments at which dances were held. Ancient dances have preserved some of the old tales and customs of the Vainakh.

Dance, which is based on rich national materials, has always had a special place in the life of the Vainakh, who have been particularly fond of dance music. It is nowadays the most popular kind of folk art. No public or family festivity was complete without a round or more of dancing, which kept the young and old in tip-top shape thanks to the energetic tunes. The wild and dizzying movements, sometimes in the form of war dances, afforded the dancers the requisite exercise to perform the feats in real-life situations. Many a victory celebration culminated in a vigorous dance. Music and dance are of such potent force in society that they stand to play a central role as rallying cries in national revival and the rebuilding of devastated Chechnya once the war is over.

It is often hard to distinguish song and dance music, as usually they make one whole. Dance melodies (*khalkhar*) are characterized by distinctive rhythms and often utilize variable scales, with interplay of six-lobed, three-lobed, or mixed scales.

Ancient and traditional

Ancient dances have retained some elements of the old legends and myths. Many old Vainakh melodies have been diligently preserved, including *Dance of Old Men*, *Dances of Young Men*, and *Dances of the Maidens*. In national dances, especially in ancient ones, the rhythmic patterns of the dance often vary. In *Dance of Old Men* the main melody of the first eight-step is replaced by a syncopated rhythm of the second, which gives the music an original and contrasting character.

Folkloric dances are a reflection of the national spirit and the customs and traditions of the Vainakh. For example, a woman throwing her handkerchief on the ground was a last-ditch effort to stop men from fighting. The main themes of traditional dances are love, struggle for freedom and pride in the fatherland. In traditional dance, both men and women perform flowing and graceful movements, but fiery dancing is the preserve of the former. It was taboo for a male to touch his female dance partner. This is most probably a Muslim import, since the prohibition does not apply among other Caucasian nations.

Traditional dances include the lively *Nokhchi*, or the pan-Caucasian *Chechen* dance, *Dance of the Daggers*, a demonstration of a highlander's sharp dagger-wielding skills, and *Dance of the Dzhigit*. Many melodies of national dances are named after talented dance virtuosi, such as *Dance of Sadik* and *Dance of Salman*. Today's dance repertoire includes old and new group dances, duos and solos. New dances include *Dance of the Crop*, *Dance of Friends* and *Maidenly Dance*.

The most famous Vainakh dance is *khalkhar*, better known as *lezghinka*, with every village having its own version, the best-known being those from Atagi, Gudermes, Shali and Urus-Martan. It is perhaps the only dance that has no vocal introduction and is performed either by a couple or by one male dancer, enacting mainly real-life stories and military feats. In the intro of the first variant, the duo approach the centre of the floor circle from opposite directions, each moving to the right side in a spiralling motion. Then they move out again, untwisting the spiral from the centre to the periphery, the whole while the man staying behind his partner and taking the lead from her. With the undoing of the spiral, the dancers go back to their respective groups and stand before them for some time. The second part of the dance is performed with the man firmly in the lead, showing off his choreographic heroics, while the woman hovers around him, moving sedately but gracefully (L.Usmanov 1999a). The dance is an enactment of an ancient legend and is reminiscent of the *Geranos* (Crane) dance performed at Delos in Greece depicting Theseus' escape from the Labyrinth and his initiation.

The demanding solo version requires the man to beat time with his feet (*boh boogha*), to express himself in aquiline gestures, and to precipitately drop to his knees and leap up again. Some dance connoisseurs can still interpret the symbolic movements. An exciting feature of the male performance is the dance *en pointe*, or toe-dance, where the dancer walks, runs, hops on one foot, pirouettes and leaps on his toes. This technique, adopted by some Russian ballet companies, demands rigorous training and a fine sense of balance. Metal sculptures of the Bronze Age Koban culture depict toe-dancing men.

Dance parties

Dance was arguably the most enjoyable staple item in any celebration. Dance parties were socially acceptable venues at which unmarried young men met girls of marriageable age in a healthy and fun environment. In the olden times, music was provided by the *ch'oendargoi*, but later bands of an accordionist and drummer had become the norm. Participants clapped their hands in rhythm.

There were two kinds of dance parties. *Lovzar* was a dance and song festival held in the village square open for all to take part in. *Sinqeeram* was a more private affair, held in a household with attendance upon invitation. In both varieties, the participants would separate into two gender groups facing each other. Unmarried women stood in the first line whilst pre-teen girls took the second. Married women did not take part in dancing, but they watched the goings-on all the same, either to pick up a tale or two, or to choreograph a matching ritual.

The dance was supervised by the master of ceremonies, who held a decorated staff that he used to indicate the next person to dance. Men, one at a time, chose their partners with a bow of the head. If this gesture were not enough, a man would resort to other means to persuade a woman to dance with him, all this being done in good spirit. Since men and women of the same *taip* were not allowed to consort, a woman approached by a man she recognized to be of her own clan would decline by answering discreetly that there was someone from her *taip* in the party. She would stand as a mark of respect if he were to take the stage with another woman. In general, the men took the lead in dancing and the women followed in synchronicity. A dance could last for a long time, but the woman signalled her desire to end it by clapping near her leg.

Soviet times

In the Soviet period, national dance academies were established. Traditional dance was modernized and professional choreography introduced. At first, the main institute specializing in Caucasian dance and choreography was the Tbilisi State Dancing School in Georgia. Chechen and Ingush graduates went on to establish troupes in their republic. In time, choreographic institutes were set up in Chechen-Ingushetia. The repertoires of all North Caucasian troupes consisted of a melange of folkloric dances from the various nationalities in the region, to reflect the multi-cultural traditions of the Soviet peoples, as was dictated by Party dogma.

Dance troupes

State Folk Dance Group 'Vainakh'

The Chechen-Ingush State Song and Dance Ensemble was formed in 1939 by the prominent folk dancer Vakha Dakashev, playwright Abdula Khamidov and Vakha Tataev, the then minister of culture. The company of 15 dancers and large choir toured cities in the Caucasus and the Soviet Union. During the latter years of exile the company was re-formed in Kirghizistan, and resumed its artistic mission upon its return in 1957.

In the 1960s, the Ensemble attracted the best talent in the land, including the singer Maryam Aidamirova, the *illanča* Valid Dagaev, the accordionist Umar Dimaev and Zulai Sardaelova. Performers from other Caucasian nationalities took part in portraying their folk dances. In 1969, Tapa Èlimbaev took over as director of the company, changing its name to State Folk Dance Group 'Vainakh' in 1974, signalling a phasing out of the vocal section. At the peak of its success in the 1970s, the company toured many countries in Europe, South America, the Middle East and Africa, pleasing audiences and winning a number of prizes at international dance festivals.

The some 150 performers offered a varied repertoire of disparate and colourful Caucasian and other dances of the peoples of the Soviet Union. Graceful steps would suddenly erupt into dizzying wild movements depicting battle scenes, the choreography being performed to the accompaniment of traditional musical instruments. The dance of lovers and that of the daggers provide a break from the frantic pace. Dance *en point* and spectacular stunts are a revelation on human movement and expression. Among the favourite dances was *Under the Sky of the Vainakh*. Outstanding dancers of that era included Romzan Abazov, Lidiya Aidamirova, Magomed Didigov, Tamara Didigova, Vakha Idrisov, Turko Khasimikov and Adash Mamadaev.

'Vainakh' broke up in 1999, but managed to re-form in Nalchik around 2001 under the directorship of Dikal Muzakaev with funds from the Russian Ministry of Culture. The troupe, which is currently based in Gudermes, took part in an international folk festival in France in summer 2002 and set out on European tours in 2003 and 2004.

Chechen Dance Group 'Lovzar'

'Lovzar' is a reincarnation of 'Nokhcho', the Chechen Children State Ensemble, which was formed in 1983 and won several international awards. Of the 200 members of the

Ensemble, only 60 remained after the 1994–1996 War. ‘Lovzar’, with some 45 young dancers, moved to Moscow after the flare-up of hostilities in 1999. It held a concert at the Rossiya Concert Hall in Moscow in June 2001 to raise money for maimed children in Chechnya, and took part in the Chechen cultural festival held in Moscow in November 2002 under the directorship of Magomed Takhaev. The troupe also toured abroad. There are also local folk dance troupes in Achkhoi-Martan, Nozhai-Yurt, Shatoi and Vedenó.

‘Daimokhk’

The Children Dance Ensemble ‘Daimokhk’ was established in February 1999 by the department of culture in Grozny, with Ramzan Akhmadov, a Chechen dance soloist decorated with Soviet honours, as director. Its members were chosen from school children between the ages of 8 and 14. The instruments used by the orchestra were the (ancient) *pondar*, accordion, *zurna* and *doul*. The troupe, whose repertoire consists of traditional dances of the Chechens and other Caucasian peoples, has won a number of prizes at dance festivals and competitions.

The latest Russian invasion caused the group to break up, with some dancers joining the Ingush Dance Ensemble and others quitting dancing altogether. However, with support from the Centre for Peacemaking and Community Development (CPCD), ‘Daimokhk’ was re-formed to tour the North Caucasian republics and Russian regions to promote Chechen culture and raise funds for needy children in Chechnya. The troupe also performed in London and staged spectacular shows at the Théâtre du Soleil in Paris in 2002 and 2003.

Other active children’s dance groups include ‘Ziya’, established by Tapa Èlimbaev in 1999 with Ramzan Paskaev as music director; the group ‘Goryanka’, formed in 2001 in the Nozhai-Yurt District and overseen by ex-‘Vainakh’ artist Kurman Chirgizbekova; ‘Maershoó’, set up in the Sputnik refugee camp on the Chechen-Ingush border in 2001; ‘Serloo’, formed by the choreographer Abdula Bakhaev in Moscow in 2002. It would seem that many of these groups were formed as makeshift ‘nurseries’ to preserve and propagate culture until more propitious times.

Choreography

Stage dancing started in the first half of the twentieth century. A choreography department was set up at the Grozny College of Culture. The first professional choreographer in Chechnya was Tapa Èlimbaev, who studied stage production and choreography at the Moscow State Institute of Theatrical Art. He worked in Germany for some time, staging two one-act ballets at Berlin theatres. Starting in 1969, Èlimbaev led the Chechen-Ingush State Song and Dance Ensemble for two decades. Among his original productions were *Under the Sky of the Vainakh*, *Dance of the Shepherds*, *A Mountain Legend*, *Dance of the Horsemen*, *Beno Dance*, and the comic numbers *Married Bachelors* and *The Party*. Èlimbaev, Merited Artist of the Russian Federation and National Prize Laureate, is currently director of the Bazhaev Children Art Academy ‘Vainakh’ in Moscow.¹¹

Makhmud Èsambaev, who was born in Stary Atagi in 1924, devoted all his life to dancing. He joined ‘Vainakh’ at 15 and the Operetta Theatre of Pyatigorsk four years

later. Èsambaev did his bit to entertain Soviet troops during the Second World War, and he was rewarded with a banishment edict to Kirghizistan. Exile, however, did not prove a totally bleak destiny for Èsambaev, for his extraordinary talents guaranteed him a place as a soloist in the Kirghiz Theatre of Opera and Ballet, playing lead roles in Tchaikovsky's 'Swan Lake' and 'The Sleeping Beauty', and Boris Asafiev's 'The Fountain of Bakhchisarai'. He was one of the founders and leading figures of Kirghiz choreography.



Figure 12.2 Èsambaev performing one of his own exotic choreographies. The Chechen dance wizard had a pliant and expressive body.

Following rehabilitation, Èsambaev worked as a soloist in the Chechen-Ingush Philharmonic Society. In the 1960s, he toured the world with other famous Soviet ballet stars, always collecting folk dances of the countries he visited and composing novelette-dances based on them. Later, he set up his own dance company, choreographing folk dances. Èsambaev won three international competitions, was made People's Artist of the Soviet Union, and awarded the title of 'Hero of Socialist Labour'. In his eulogy of

Èsambaev in 2000, the famous choreographer Igor Moiseyev succinctly summed up the Chechen dancer's ethos:

A representative of a proud nation, Makhmud Èsambaev always endeavoured to bring people closer together. It is not surprising, then, that his repertory spanned dances of so many nations. He held friendship, kindness and beauty as lofty ideals and his outlook combined all those fine qualities.

13

Language and linguistic policy

Chechen, Ingush, Kist (considered by some authorities as a divergent dialect of Chechen) and Tsova-Tushian (Batsbi) make up the Nakh branch of the Nakh-Daghestani, or NE Caucasian language family, which comprises more than 30 languages, most of which are spoken in Daghestan. The language group is indigenous to the Caucasus and is comparable in age to Indo-European. The split of the Nakh branch from the rest of the family took place about 5,000–6,000 years ago.

Chechen (*nokhchiin mott*) and Ingush are collectively referred to as ‘kistinskije yaziki’ (‘Kist languages’) in Russian. This comes from the name of the Chechen clans the Georgians came in contact with, which was later extended to all Chechens. It is generally accepted that speakers of Chechen make the largest North Caucasian language group.¹ Chechen has both literary and official status, being used in education, the media and government. According to the 1989 census, 73.4 per cent of the Chechens in the Chechen-Ingush ASSR spoke Russian as a second language.

Language speakers and bilingualism

As in most North Caucasian societies, many Chechens were bilingual or multilingual, mainly in Kumyk, a prestigious lowland Turkic language used for inter-ethnic communication. Russian gradually took over this role starting in the late nineteenth century. A few Chechens, mainly ecclesiastics, were knowledgeable in Arabic. There was some bilingualism at the Chechen-Ingush interface. According to N.G.Volkova (1978), the Khevsur-Vainakh frontier was one of the fourteen inter-ethnic ‘contact zones’ in Georgia, and as such there was significant bilingualism among the two language groups.² In a broader context, North and South Caucasian mutual linguistic (and cultural) influences have been going on for centuries, leading to many Georgian borrowings in Chechen and vice versa. Iranian and Turkic invaders and traders also brought over some of their word-stocks over the centuries. Christian and Muslim terms were mainly taken from Georgian and Arabic, respectively. Other influences have come from the languages of the neighbouring Daghestanis, Ossetians and Kabardians.³ Russian has been the main source of the large number of technical and other introductions since the middle of the nineteenth century.

The 1959 and 1970 censuses showed that more than 99 per cent of Chechens in their republic spoke their native tongue, whereas the figures for language retention in those years were 97.7 per cent and 94.5 per cent respectively for those residing in other areas of the Soviet Union. There was a further differentiation between urban and rural areas, but the percentage of urbanite Chechens unfamiliar with their mother tongue never exceeded 5 per cent. According to the 1989 census, 98.7 per cent of the Chechens in their nominal

republic spoke their native language. During the Soviet period, knowledge of Russian kept increasing with time, not least due to the homogenizing effect of military service in the post-rehabilitation era. Today, practically all Chechens speak Russian, and many are even more literate in it than Chechen. The 1994–1996 and ‘Second’ wars had a negative effect on the status of Russian and literacy in it, not least for the diminishing exposure of Chechen children to the language in education.

There is an indefinite number of Chechen speakers in Turkey, and a few thousands in Jordan. The number of Chechens who still maintain competence in their mother tongue in Syria is small, as assimilative forces are substantial. Diaspora Chechens also speak the languages of their host societies, and many are conversant with Western languages.

Origin of Chechen

Japhetic Theory and Sino-Caucasian super-family

The Japhetic Theory of the Soviet linguist N.Y.Marr proposed that all native language families in the Caucasus, including Northwest, Northeast and South Caucasian belonged to the same ‘Japhetic’ language group, which in linguistics implied common ancestry.⁴ This theory, one of the products of Soviet ideological drive to emphasize the ethnic and linguistic unity of all Caucasian nations, was later discredited and superseded by the theory of language super-families, in which languages and language families that have common roots and basic lexicons are lumped together into conglomerations called ‘super-families’.

The linguist S.A.Starostin proposed the existence of the Sino-Caucasian superfamily, which encompasses Nakh-Daghestani and the related Hurrian-Urartian and Etruscan,⁵ and Northwest Caucasian, namely Circassian, Abkhaz-Abaza and Ubykh, and the related Hattian. In addition, this super-family, also called ‘Dene-Caucasian’ or ‘Sino-Dene-Caucasian’, includes Sumerian and its proposed descendants Iberian and Basque,⁶ Pelasgian (pre-Hellenic language of Greece), Sino-Tibetan, Burushaski, spoken in the Karakoram Mountains of Pakistan,⁷ Yeniseian, and Na-Dene, which includes Tlingit and Eyak in western Canada and Alaska and Navajo and Apache in the southwest USA. It is thought that (Caucasian) Albanian, a dead language that used to be spoken in the Eastern Caucasus, was also related to Nakh-Daghestani. On the other hand, genetic connection between Kartvelian and North Caucasian is negated in this scheme, apparent links between the two groups being explained away as results of neighbourly contacts. Instead, Kartvelian, together with Indo-European, is posited in the ‘Nostratic’ super-family.

Starostin and S.L.Nikolaev, who had been spearheading an ambitious project to reconstruct proto-North Caucasian as the parent language of both proto-NE Caucasian and proto-Northwest Caucasian, came up with a comparative dictionary of North Caucasian languages. However, this work stirred up a controversy between its proponents and J.Nichols, who expressed her scepticism about these efforts to reproduce proto-North-Caucasian, negating the existence of relations between NE Caucasian and any other language group.⁸ According to the other camp, it was the linguist N. Troubetzkoy who first demonstrated firm connectedness between the two groups by establishing regular phonetic correspondences.

Proto-Nakh-Daghestani

J.Nichols proposed that the Nakh-Daghestani language family is long indigenous to the Caucasus suggested by ‘fairly seamless archaeological continuity for the last 8,000 years or more in central Daghestan’.⁹ This is also reinforced by the distribution of loanwords from ancient Mesopotamia into early Nakh-Daghestani. The structure of the Nakh-Daghestani family tree, with the greatest divergence within and between branches lying in their southern reaches, would suggest that pre-*proto-Nakh-Daghestanis* spread into the Caucasus from the southwest. Furthermore, there are indications that the process of language spread from the highlands to the northern plains had continued until Cossack encroachment in the sixteenth century AD.¹⁰ Efforts had been made to reconstruct *proto-Nakh*, the parent of all Nakh languages.

Near Eastern connections

A cuneiform style of writing and runic-type inscriptions are found on ancient monuments in Chechnya, some dating back to the third millennium BC. However, no serious work has been done to interpret them. Nakh has roots that can be traced to some languages of ancient Mesopotamia. There is a general consensus that the Hurrian-Urartian and Nakh-Daghestani language families are connected. I.M. Diakonov and S.A.Starostin (1986) have demonstrated more than 100 common roots between the two language groups.¹¹ Some Nakh words are also linked to Akkadian.¹² There are suggestions that the cuneiform of the state of Errata of the first millennium BC can be interpreted using Chechen.

Language divisions

The split of the Vainakh language into Chechen and Ingush resulted from the physical separation of the two nations. Although some linguists consider Chechen and Ingush as distinct languages due to differences in grammar and vocabulary, with time a Chechen and an Ingush can understand each other without much difficulty, with each conversing in his own language. Chechen has the largest number of speakers and is the most widespread among the Nakh languages. Ingush, with no more than 400,000 speakers, displays no dialectal variations. Tsova-Tushian, spoken by the Tsova-Tush (Bats) in Georgia, has been strongly influenced by Georgian and has become largely incomprehensible to Chechens and Ingush.

Chechen is subdivided into a number of close dialects: Plains Chechen, Akkin (Aukh), Chaberloi,¹³ Kist(in), M’ aistoi and Malkhi (Galanch’ozh). Sub-dialects include Ichkerian, Karabulak or Ęrstkhoi (sub-dialect of Malkhi),¹⁴ Khildeharoi, Nadterechny, Nozhai-Yurt, Sharoi and Shatoi (Itum-Kala). These dialects and sub-dialects roughly correspond with *tukhum* divisions and are spoken on the territory of Chechnya, except for Akkin, which is spoken by the Akkintsi in Daghestan, and Kist, spoken in Georgia. Zerq’ is a dialect spoken in Zarqa and other settlements in Jordan.¹⁵

The literary and official language is based on Plains Chechen spoken in the areas encompassing Grozny and Urus-Martan. It has the fullest implementation of umlaut and no subsequent phonemic mergers of unlauded vowels. All dialects are mutually

intelligible, differing only in the presence or absence of umlaut and its phonemic treatment. Kist is the most divergent Chechen dialect, heavily influenced by Georgian. A speaker of a northern Chechen dialect and a Kist would need some time to get smooth communication going. Malkhi is considered the transitional dialect to Ingush.

Characteristics of Chechen¹⁶

Like other indigenous North Caucasian languages, (literary) Chechen has many consonantal phonemes, 32 of them, including occlusive, fricative, voiced and voiceless consonants. However, this number is nowhere near Kabardian's 45 consonants. All Chechen consonants are pronounced with sharp aspiration. On the other hand, Chechen boasts 16 vocalic phonemes (e.g. а, и, о, у, э), including a number of diphthongs (e.g. аь, ий, оь, уь)—head and shoulder above vowel-starved Kabardian. The vocalic phonemes are neatly divided into short and long (eight each) and labial and non-labial vowels (again, eight each). Indigenous Chechen words always have the stress on the first syllable. The orthography currently in use does not distinguish all of the sounds of Chechen, especially the vowels. Nakh languages are distinguished from other NE Caucasian languages by a multitude of consonant combinations as well as by the specific feature that consonant clusters are found in initial position.

Like its sister languages, Chechen has a complex grammar. It has extensive inflectional morphology including six classes and a dozen nominal cases. Each class originally consisted of nouns that shared similar characteristics: roundness, largeness, length, human, and so on. The class referring to human beings is predictable, while the others are not. There are nominative, genitive, dative, ergative, instrumental, locative, comparative and allative cases in Chechen.¹⁷ Nouns have cases both in singular and in plural, and they do not retain their nominative stems in the oblique case. The class of the noun in the nominative case is reflected in the verb. Verbs have gender agreement with the direct object or intransitive subject, but no person agreement.

A typical feature of Nakh syntax is that the case system is ergative, where the subject of a transitive verb is in the ergative (oblique) case and the direct object in the nominative case, as is the subject of an intransitive verb. Long and complex sentences are formed by chaining together participial and adverbial-participial clauses. Verbs take no person agreement, but some of them agree in gender with the direct object or intransitive subject. The verb usually comes at the end of the sentence and adjectives always precede nouns. A comparative is made by suffixing *-kh* to the adjective, e.g. *dika* 'good'—*dikakh* 'better'. In pronouns, the category of inclusive-exclusive is distinguished. There are no definite and indefinite articles, the meaning being understood from the context. The plural is usually formed by suffixing *-(a)sh*, *-nash*, or *-i* (*belkhaloo* 'worker'—*belkhaloi*) to nouns, which sometimes results in modification of the original noun, e.g. *az* 'voice', *aeznash*, but there are a few irregular cases, e.g. *ett* 'cow'—*heelii*, *stag* 'man; person'—*nakh* 'people', *yo* 'girl'—*mekhkarii*.

Description of Chechen

The earliest Russian description of the Vainakh languages is found in the eighteenth-century *The Big Comparative Dictionary of Russian Empress Catherine the Great*, which listed about 400 Chechen words with their Ingush and Tsova-Tushian equivalents. However, systematic work began in the nineteenth century, when Baron P.K. Uslar, on instructions from the general staff of the Russian Army, set about describing the Caucasian languages. His *The Chechen Language*, with sections on grammar, legends, fairy tales and proverbs, was published in Tbilisi in 1888. Nikolai Yakovlev (1892–1979) published a work on the syntax of the Chechen literary language in 1940.

Native scholars began to make contributions in the first part of the twentieth century. Zaindi Dzhamalkhanov, the ‘People’s Academic’, did some work on Chechen grammar, and published a number of school textbooks on language and literature. Akhmat Matsiev (1902–1968) was one of the most prolific native linguists. In 1995, the first grammar of Chechen in English, based on Matsiev’s work, was published in the USA posthumously, being translated, adapted and edited by P.A.O’ Sullivan.

Language policy and education

Traditional

Under the influence of the spread of Islam and the proselytizing work of Muslim clerics, a Chechen language script based on Arabic characters was devised early in the eighteenth century. Only a few people became literate in Chechen and the works produced were mainly of religious nature. Sufism had the effect of increasing literacy among the initiated.

Apart from and preceding the Sufi sheikhs, there was a class of erudite tutors in every village called ‘*huezharsh*’ (sing. ‘*huezhar*’), who instructed students (*muta’eelamash*; a word of Arabic origin) in philosophy, jurisprudence, mathematics and medicine.¹⁸ The *huezharsh* used Arabic script to write their Chechen manuscripts (*teptarsh*). On their ascension to power, the Communists destroyed a great number of these manuscripts, and many of the remainder were either burnt or carried off by the Russians in 1944. Only very few specimens have survived to this day, those possessed by Chechens being jealously guarded.

Tsarist period and Mountain Republic

The first Cyrillic-based Chechen alphabet was devised and published in Tbilisi in 1862 by the Chechen Qedi Dosov (Kedy Dosoyev) and Uslar, who had been tasked with devising alphabets for the North Caucasian languages.¹⁹ Uslar played a pivotal role at the time in promoting literacy in Chechen, opening the first ethnic Chechen school in Grozny in the 1860s. The first Chechen primers were compiled by Dosov and Uslar in the 1860s, and by Ivan Bartolomei and the Chechens Dzhemal-Eddin Mustafin, Edyk Bocharov and

Akhmatkhan Tramov, in 1866. This latter work would later be approved as the official Chechen primer in 1939.

The main thrust of the official language policy in the period 1864–1917 was to undermine local languages by excluding them from education and literary usage, with Russification of the various ethnic groups as the ultimate goal. Russian was the only official language in the North Caucasus and the sole medium of instruction in secular schools. Arabic was used in the few religious schools. Only a minority of Chechens was bilingual in Russian. In 1911, Tashtemir Èldarkhanov, an educator and a member of the Duma in 1906–1907, published a Chechen ABC book in Cyrillic in Tbilisi. He espoused the concept of improving education of the Chechens as an essential prerequisite for economic progress.

In the short life of the independent North Caucasian Mountain Republic, primary education was conducted in both Chechen and Arabic, while Turkish, also declared as an official language, was used at the secondary level.

Soviet period

The motto of the early Soviet years was language modernization. A language policy was inaugurated aiming to facilitate sovietization of the different peoples and nations encompassed in the vast empire. In 1921, Russification was abandoned and instead national languages were developed and promoted to be used in education and other spheres. In this liberal atmosphere, the status of local languages witnessed marked improvements. Chechen was on its way to be recognized as a literary and official language in Chechnya, alongside Russian. National schools were established offering a curriculum with national content and instruction in Chechen. New professional and technical words were coined based mainly on roots found within Chechen itself, although a smaller number of terms were borrowed from Russian. However, despite the linguistic leeway, Russian was still envisaged as becoming the lingua franca of all peoples that made up the Soviet Union, with the national languages only being used in the nominal republics and regions.

In the early 1920s, there were attempts to devise an encompassing written language for both Chechen and Ingush.²⁰ However, these unificatory overtures proved unsuccessful, and the two languages subsequently followed divergent orthographic trajectories. In 1923, a Latin script devised by the Chechen author Khalit Oshaev was introduced for Chechen. Latin was used rather than Cyrillic to mitigate anti-Russian feelings, as adopting the latter would have been conceived as yet another step towards Russification. The switch to Latin undermined the importance of Arabic, which had been used as a language of instruction—thus a wedge was driven between the Chechens and their Muslim heritage. One advantage of this was that the status of Chechen was elevated, and it began to be used systematically in education, but only for a while.

Some linguists worked hard to promote the status of Chechen, holding a number of conferences for this purpose. In 1930, the New Alphabet Committee of the Nationalities Soviets attempted to unify the scripts of North Caucasian languages—a very ambitious project indeed, given the marked linguistic divergences. However, this valiant endeavour was soon to be overtaken by new plans for conversion of Chechen to Cyrillic script already being drawn up in the Kremlin.

By the 1931/1932 scholastic year, most Chechen schools had textbooks in the native language using the Latin alphabet. Barely had Chechen completed the switch to Latin when the pressure to change to Cyrillic began in the mid-1930s, marking a new phase in language policy. New words and terms were to be borrowed from Russian, as opposed to being derived from the national language. Some educationalists opposed this move and other detrimental edicts that were undermining Chechen language and culture. The authorities accused nationalist educators of resisting teaching Russian language and literature in schools and avoiding the terminology of the ‘Soviet people’ (read Russian) in their translations and instead ‘were using bourgeois nationalist terms and concepts, such as “Turkism” and “Arabism”’ (R.Karcha 1959b:34). These educators were denounced as ‘enemies of the people’ and their activities were deemed as counter-revolutionary. During the purges, many of them were arrested and either executed or sent to concentration camps, thus depriving the nation of a generation of much-needed pedagogues. Chief amongst them was Khalit Oshaev, director of the Mountain State Pedagogical Institute and later of the Institute for Research on the Culture of the Peoples of the North Caucasus. As time went by, Chechen and Ingush became laden with loan-words. One marked consequence, apparent by the late 1960s, was further divergence of the standard languages used in the Caucasus from those dialects used in the diaspora.

With the local education authorities hammered into shape, new language policies were enacted. In 1937/38, a switch was made to Cyrillic, based on Dosov’s alphabet (with the additional symbol ‘I’). The government claimed that the peoples themselves demanded such a move to facilitate learning both native languages and Russian. No one dared to challenge this rationale—people had become wise after the event. An edict was passed requiring Russian to be taught as a second language in all non-Russian schools beginning at age seven starting in 1938/39. Concurrently, the number of hours of instruction in Russian was increased and its teachers were given substantive pay rises. The size of Russian classes was reduced to 15 students and provisions were made to ensure that Russian textbooks for scientific and technical subjects were available in plentiful supply. In 1940, Chechen language textbooks written in the new script were published and made available in republican schools.

Cyrillic Chechen, in which the bulk of national literature has been written, has 34 monographs (e.g. **Г, К, О, Т, Х**) and 15 digraphs (e.g. **ГІ, КЪ, ОБ, ТІ, ХЪ**), giving a total of 49 characters (consonants and vowels) to cope with the intricacies of the language. Since Chechen does not have ‘f’ as a native sound, it had been regularly turned to ‘p’ in adopted words, e.g. ‘Sherif’—‘Sherip’ (personal name). However, when a directive called ‘The Common Rule’ was issued in 1940 requiring Russian loan-words in other ‘Soviet’ languages to retain their original form, ‘f’, and a number of other letters, was formally introduced.

The Cyrillic orthography does not correspond well to the sound system of Chechen, and as a result makes it difficult to sound out new words and spell correctly. Although it distinguishes consonants well and is economical in its use of the Russian letters, it greatly under-differentiates the vowels, hampering word recognition and thus hindering the spread of literacy in Chechen. One consequence of these limitations is the differing transliterations and pronunciations of Chechen terms and names.

The principle of proportional representation in education meant that, depending on the size of nationality and the level of development of its language, use of the native tongue

in education could vary from a couple of years of elementary schooling to full university education. Chechen was initially placed in the middle of the range, used as the language of instruction at the school level but not in higher education.

In the period 1944–1957, education in Chechen was effectively put on hold, the deportees being wholly preoccupied with the issue of survival. Chechen children had limited access to education in any language, let alone instruction in the native language. After rehabilitation, the returnees, acutely aware of their falling far behind in almost all areas, set about restoring the education establishment. It took about three years for a semblance of a system to be reassembled. However, the intrusive Soviet education policy put the process of Russification into higher gear. The sole language of instruction at schools and institutes of further education was Russian, and only in rural schools were children exposed to Chechen, but even then merely as a subject. Russian became predominant in all spheres.

In the 1958/59 educational ‘reforms’, the requirements that non-Russian children study Russian and Russian children study local languages were scrapped in ‘ethnic’ republics. Although parents were given the freedom to choose language of instruction for their children, the North Caucasian peoples saw this as detrimental to the status of their languages, since children with no Russian education soon found themselves at a disadvantage, with no prospects of going on to higher education, which was only available in Russian in all North Caucasian republics and regions. The Chechens, ever the pet targets of Soviet discrimination, were even denied this choice. Predictably, only very few Russian citizens opted for their children to be taught local languages.

In the late 1970s, the process of Russification was systematized, which put extra pressure on the local vernaculars. In 1978, a law was passed that made Russian the sole language of instruction at schools and the native languages came to be studied as foreign languages, despite the fact that the majority of pupils in the republican schools were non-Russians. The status of Chechen, which was already dangerously very low, suffered even greater degradation. By the mid-1980s, instruction in Chechen was almost moribund.

Glasnost allowed greater freedom of discussion of language policy in the North Caucasian republics. A gradual process of decentralization was set in motion, with new ministries of education beginning to emerge in the autonomous republics and regions and local authorities claiming more control of the education system. The Chechen-Ingush branch of the Institute of National Education Problems of the Russian Ministry of Education was set up to overcome the difficulties facing the local education system. Be that as it may, as late into *glasnost* as the 1989/90 scholastic year, the Chechens had no instruction available in their native language beyond the second grade. It was no surprise that the Chechens scored lowest (4.67 per cent) amongst Soviet nationalities in the number of higher degree holders in 1989.

Post-Soviet developments

At independence in 1991, the nationalists started to lay great emphasis on the upgrading of the status of Chechen and to reduce the influence of Russian. The Institute of Research on the Chechen Language was established and President Dudaev spearheaded a campaign to latinize Chechen that culminated in a 1992 parliamentary resolution instituting a new Latin orthography. The script, which was devised by Zulai Khamidova, Edward

Khachukaev and Vissarion Gugushvili, included 15 specifically Chechen letters. From 1993, Chechen language newspapers were issued and books printed in this script. Although a positive development, the switch in script, the third in the twentieth century, meant that literate Chechens had to learn reading and writing anew. The new script never really caught on, with many Chechens continuing to use the more familiar Cyrillic script. Most of the small number of Latin publications were destroyed in the 1994–1996 War, the rest stowed away in private collections. It should be noted that the Azeris, a much larger Turkic-speaking independent Caucasian nation that used to be within the Russian sphere of influence, only converted from Cyrillic to Latin in 2001, with the late President Heidar Aliyev of Azerbaijan declaring this event a national triumph. It is worthy of mention that the Azeris managed the switch with some prodding and plenty of support from Turkey and following the example of Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.

After the restoration of Chechen independence in 1996, tentative moves were made to convert Chechen script from Latin to Arabic. This was yet another manifestation of the struggle between the two principal cultural camps, the radical Muslims on one hand and the traditionalists and intellectuals on the other. In August 1997, the Chechen parliament passed a law making Chechen the only official language in the republic, which contravened Article 68 of the Russian Constitution stipulating Russian as the ‘first’ official language in all subjects of the Federation. Although the edict was popular, it was very difficult to implement due to lack of resources and expertise. After the re-establishment of Russian authority in 1999, a reversion was made to the Cyrillic script and education in Russian was restored. However, Russian textbooks were in short supply and Chechen ones were almost non-existent. Two language laws were passed in 2002, one making Russian the sole medium of instruction in Chechen schools, while demoting Chechen to a compulsory subject, the other requiring all official languages in the republics of the Russian Federation to use only Cyrillic-based scripts.

N.Awde and M.Galaev (1996) have suggested a new (practical) Latin script, which they used in their dictionary.²¹ This orthographic system is web-friendly, employs no diacritics and is instantly readable. In the Latin orthography developed by a team at the University of California, Berkeley (UCB), a variant of the literary standard dialect was chosen as the norm, with an easier spelling system that has no diacritics and no special symbols while also purporting to distinguish all the sounds of the language.²² The ‘UCB’ script was used in J.Nichols and A.Vagapov’s dictionary (2004).

Publication in Chechen

The number of publications in Chechen is not very large due to continual turbulence in Chechnya since the early nineteenth century. Also, there had never been serious attempts to take education in Chechen beyond the elementary level. The number of books published in Chechen between the introduction of Cyrillic in 1938 and the return from exile was negligible. In the period 1957–1960, a mere 228 books were published in Chechen, of which more than half were translations from Russian. If this were not bad enough, there was a subsequent steep drop in the total number of publications, for example only 217 books were published from 1965 to 1973! In addition, the number of copies of any one publication never exceeded a few thousands at best. Most of the already few books in Chechen were destroyed during the two recent wars, and much of

what remains can only be found in private collections. Only two books on the Chechen language were published in 1999–2002.

Schools, institutes and libraries

By the end of the 1930s, there were over 118,000 students in the Chechen-Ingush ASSR attending 342 primary and secondary schools. By the early 1970s, illiteracy had been almost eradicated. On the eve of the first war, there were 450 comprehensive schools, 11 vocational schools, and three institutes of higher education in Chechnya.

Higher education and scholarly institutes include the Chechen(-Ingush) State University, founded in Grozny in 1972, the Chechen(-Ingush) Academy of Science, which had been restored and had begun to publish again, the State Technical University, the State Islamic University and the State Medical Institute. The Pedagogical Institute, opened in 1981, had seven departments. In 1998, the Chechen branch of the Modern University was established against all the odds.

In 1994, there were some 360 libraries in Chechnya, including the National Library (formerly Chekhov Library), the National Children's Library and the National Library for the Blind. The National Library, which was established in 1904, contained more than 2.5 million items—the biggest collection in the North Caucasus. It boasted a rare collection of Chechen (and Ingush) books published in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and also included Chechen works written in Latin script in the 1920s and 1930s and some of the first Chechen materials published in Cyrillic. In his book *Prominent Chechens* (1999)—a valiant attempt at reproducing Chechen history, duly banned by Russian authorities—Musa Geshaev stated that in 1944 the Soviets burned Chechen books for several days in Grozny and reduced libraries and museums to rubble and ash, purposefully obliterating the history and culture of a whole nation. Attempts were made in 1995–1996 to restore the dilapidated library system, but they met with little success. By 1997, only a few dozen libraries had been left with a total collection of some two million works, mostly literature from the Soviet period. The situation became even worse following the 1999 Russian invasion, with only six libraries remaining open in Grozny.²³

Current situation

In the period 1994–1996, institutions of higher education and secondary schools were partially destroyed, but were later restored. However, the damage inflicted in 1999–2000 was much more severe. Only schools in the larger villages of the plains were spared, whereas those in smaller villages had been closed since the first war for lack of funds and teachers. Most schools in the mountains had been destroyed, leaving children without an education of any kind and raising the ugly spectre of illiteracy.

The Ministry of Education claimed that out of a total of 340 schools in the northern and central parts of Chechnya, 278 had been restored by June 2000. However, only 41 schools were functional in Grozny by September 2000, lacking some basic amenities at that. The 88,000 pupils in the republic were taught by some 7,000 teachers. According to Russian sources, in the 2001/2 scholastic year, some 400 out of 452 schools, four institutes and 12 vocational schools were operational.

In the 2001/2 scholastic year, 20,000 copies of a new Chechen primer printed (by Nizhpoligraf) in Nizhny Novgorod was issued for first-graders, marking the return to Cyrillic orthography in education. In this sense, the ideological struggle between the nationalists and the pro-Russian authorities found yet another battleground in the education system. Local authorities vowed to make Chechen textbooks available for the 2002/3 scholastic year. UNESCO had been doing its bit in supporting the Chechen education system since 2000.

Chechen refugees get little education, with international organizations doing most of the work in this regard. The Centre for Peacemaking and Community Development (CPCD), a peace-promoting organization based in London, inaugurated an educational programme in refugee camps in Ingushetia and had built a number of schools with UNICEF support. CPCD also sponsored the publication of a collection of traditional Chechen fairy tales in Chechen, Russian and English in an effort to ameliorate the negative view of Chechens in Russian society.

The future of Chechen

The preservation of Chechen, apart from its importance to humanity as a whole, is also crucial to the perpetuation of culture and traditions. According to J.Nichols:

Each language has something unique and distinctive to offer. In addition, Chechen culture, which is closely bound up with the language, is interesting and potentially valuable for humanistic studies... For instance, social standing in Chechen culture comes from showing courtesy and respect, rather than wealth—customs wrapped in language... It has kept the society coherent and strong for centuries.²⁴

The current situation in Chechnya augurs ill for the future of Chechen. The education system had been dealt crippling blows in the long conflict. Chechen linguists and educationalists are keenly aware of the dangers facing Chechen, and have been demanding that its status be substantially improved. Although practically all Chechens speak their language, lack of education in it would lead in the long-term to its reversion to an oral language, and, with the unchecked influx of Russianisms, would result in a hybrid tongue disjointed from traditional lore. Already, more than a quarter of Chechen vocabulary is made up of Russian words. Furthermore, if the Chechen economy continues to suffer and unemployment and mass homelessness continue to undermine the social structure, there is the danger that Chechen will be functionally reduced to a household language and will then yield completely to Russian, with concomitant loss of much of the cultural heritage.

Ingush, Kist and Tsova-Tushian

Two different scripts were developed for Chechen and Ingush at the very outset, despite the closeness of the two languages, which caused differences to be institutionalized. On

the other hand, it could be argued that it is impractical for the Vainakh languages to be made one. The best thing for both languages would be to develop separately and to familiarize the children of each group with the language of the other, which would result in the promotion of both their literatures.

Although Ingush in the Chechen-Ingush ASSR was for the most part an official language, it was subordinate to both Chechen and Russian. Many of the best-educated Ingush worked in Grozny, which was in the Chechen part of the republic, and their children had no recourse to schooling in their mother language and generally grew up Russian-dominant and barely able to read Ingush. The exile generation was schooled only in Russian, Ingush being officially banned, which meant further degradation of native language competency.

It is ironic that despite the fact that Ingush has smaller number of speakers compared to Chechen, it has undergone more development in recent years than its sister language, mainly owing to the relative stability of Ingushetia. Ingush is probably in the best position it has ever had, despite the fact that it is merely taught as a subject, Russian being the language of instruction at schools. Proposals for further strengthening the position of Ingush include making it the language of instruction in elementary schools and publishing books in it on all aspects of culture.²⁵ Nevertheless, Ingush is still in a precarious position, despite the fact that there has been marked improvement in its status vis-à-vis Russian. According to a survey conducted by the Ingush Research Institute for Humanities (c. 1998), only one in six Ingush respondents said they knew their native language fully, two-thirds could read and write only with difficulty, the remainder being either able to read but not write or totally illiterate.²⁶

The Kist mainly use their native language among themselves, but speak Georgian with outsiders. However, Kist is neither an official nor a literary language, Georgian being the language of instruction in schools. Some work on Kist was done by the Chechen philologist I.Yu.Aliroev, who published a monograph on the language in 1962 and a comparative study of the Nakh languages in 1978.²⁷ Two of the most prominent early Kist writers and educators were Mate Albutashvili and Usup Margoshvili (S.Kurtsikidze *et al* 2002).

Tsova-Tushian is not mutually intelligible with any other Nakh language, though it is closest to Kist. It is estimated that at best only a tenth of the words of Chechen and Tsova-Tushian are the same. Education as well as folk traditions and culture were closely connected with Georgian institutions, especially the church. The first Tsova-Tush 'intellectual' was Dmitri Tsiskarshvili, who was born in the seventeenth century and educated at the Telavi Seminary in Tbilisi and at St Petersburg. The first primary school in Tsova-Tush country was opened in 1864 in the village of Zemo Alvani, with Georgian and Russian as the languages of instruction. Tsova-Tushian was subject to Soviet linguistic policies, and had never really enjoyed any significant status. In the 1970s, only half of the inhabitants of the village of Zemo Alvani could speak Tsova-Tushian, and even then it was only used at home, communication in the main being conducted in Georgian.²⁸ In 1953, Yu.D.Desheriev published a book on Tsova-Tushian. Contemporary linguists who have done work on Tsova-Tushian include D.A.Holisky and R.Gagua.

14

Literature

JonArno Lawson

Background

The literature of Chechnya is terra incognita to all but a handful of Western scholars and readers. Even within the former Soviet Union Chechen literature is not widely known. Cultural life in Chechnya has been very much influenced by both Christian Europe to the north, and the Muslim Middle East to the south. In this geographically advantageous position (from a cultural, not a military point of view), they have been able to draw on the best of both civilizations, combining them with ancient Chechen cultural traditions to create their own distinctive form of the North Caucasian ethos. Mountains and mountain people the world over tend to attract and collect myths, and because of their island-like existence, to maintain them to an unusual degree, as has also been seen in both Afghanistan and Tibet.

Closer to home, Chechnya's immediate neighbours—the Daghestanis, Georgians, Ossetians and Kabardians—also have highly developed and distinctive oral and written literatures which draw heavily and richly from ancient myths and from the two civilizations they sit between. A major comparative study of how these Caucasian literatures have influenced each other would no doubt reveal many fascinating parallels.

The *illesh*—Chechen heroic ballads

Johanna Nichols, in a brief background survey of Ingushetia and Chechnya, notes that Chechnya's

native poetic tradition relies on assonance, kennings, and grammatical parallelism, and includes epic songs, with a fixed line length but no clear metrical structure, and lyric songs, metrically strict and highly structured (and including the ghazal, a classical Persian genre).¹

The epic songs, or heroic ballads, are referred to as *illesh* (sing. *illi*). The word *illi* is extremely old and appears to have been first used during the Sumer-Akkadian period. Lyoma Usmanov indicated that the word has been found in Mesopotamian cuneiform Sumer-Akkadian writings dating from 3,000 BC.² This ancient rhyming form of the heroic ballad, which has been passed down until recently as oral literature, is peculiar to the Chechens. It is their oldest form of self-expression as a people. It has, however, been pointed out by Donald Rayfield that 'links between the Georgian heroic epos and other

autochthonous Caucasian folk poetry—the Chechen heroic ballad the *illi*, for instance—are almost unexplored'.³ What elements the *illesh* share with neighbouring literatures, in terms of form and content, has yet to be researched in depth.

There have been three historical periods when the *illi* form flourished. The first period was in the distant past—accurate dating of this period is nearly impossible, but perhaps as long as three thousand years ago—when *illesh* such as 'Pkharmat', 'Regarding the Earth's Cataclysm' (related to the universal Flood story) and 'How God Punished Mankind' are believed to have been composed. The second period, which witnessed large-scale composition of *illesh*, was the Middle Ages. Many of these *illesh* dealt with the struggle for equality against the oppression of the local princes. The third period is the modern period. These modern *illesh* have emerged from the struggle against Russia's colonial wars and subsequent oppression of the Chechens, which has been going on for several hundred years continuing up to the present moment.⁴ As with ballads, *illesh* are nearly always anonymous.

Nart Sagas and folk traditions

Chechens have their own versions of the Nart Sagas, common to most peoples of the Caucasus, though apparently there is much material 'peculiar to the Northeast Caucasus'⁵ in the Chechen/Ingush versions. The Prometheus figure who appears in the Chechen Sagas is called Pkharmat. Pkharmat is undoubtedly one of the key figures in Chechen folk literature, and the history of publication for *Pkharmat* under Russian occupation is nearly as dramatic as Pkharmat's own legend, as reported by Lyoma Usmanov:

The Chechen ethnographer Akhmad Suleimanov in Itum-Kala discovered the masterpiece of *Pkharmat* in two similar versions in 1937. One of the versions was entitled '*Pkhari*' and the other was called '*Pkharmat*'. Later on, another Chechen ethnographer, Dr Said-Magomed Khasiev, found another version.

Despite the importance of these masterpieces, their publication was prohibited during the Soviet era. In 1977, after scientific research by Kati Chokaev, they were published in Grozny, but after review at the local KPSS by the Official Ideologist, the whole print run of 1,000 copies was completely destroyed. Chokaev was subsequently persecuted as a dissident. In 1980, the persecution of many other Chechen writers who dared to organize the Chechen literature club Pkharmat also took place.

Why did this happen? The Prometheus legend belongs, in fact, to almost all Caucasian nations except, perhaps, the Armenians and the Azeris. The problem was that the Chechen stories about Prometheus were amazingly similar to the famous version that was passed down by the Ancient Greeks.

According to even the Greek version, the very similar Prometheus story took place in the Caucasus as well. The title '*Pkharmat*' in Chechen meant 'Blacksmith (*p-har*) of the country (*mat*)' [another interpretation has the blacksmith chained to the holy Mat-Lam (Mount Mat)], and the

similar names of the Gods and Goddesses as well lead to the possible conclusion that the Greek version was borrowed from the Caucasus, including even its title! This possibility did not sit well with the Russian authorities.

Fortunately, at least two Chechen versions were already published in Chechen before the recent war, though the third version was apparently burnt by the Russians with the whole archive of Dr. Khasiev during the 1994–1996 War. The unique archives of Dr. Chokaev, as well as many other archives, were also deliberately burnt.⁶

The Nart Sagas, in general, have many myths in common with the Ancient Greeks and the Old Norse.⁷ The only major English translation of the Nart Sagas *Nart Sagas from the Caucasus* (from Abaza, Abkhazian, Circassian and Ubykh sources) was published by John Colarusso in 2002. It is an excellent and delightful introduction to the ancient world, mind-set and literature of the Caucasus in general, and will hopefully stimulate interest in the translation of what is left of the Chechen and Ingush versions. See also *The Circassians* for a fine critical description and appreciation of the Nart Epos.⁸

Nikolai P. Semenov (1823–1904) collected fairy tales and legends and published *Skazki i legendi chechentsev* (Fairy-Tales and Legends of the Chechens) in 1882. In English, two Chechen folk-tales were published in 1925 in Adolf Dirr's *Caucasian Folk-Tales*. One is about the exploits of a brave Nart named 'Nasni', and the other is an animal tale about a clever partridge tricking a foolish fox.⁹ Chechen proverbs also appear in English throughout Oleg Shamba's *Proverbs and Sayings of the Caucasian Mountain Peoples* published in Sukhumi, Abkhazia, in 1992. (For more about Chechen proverbs see the section on this subject which appears on pages 241–249.)

One extremely important Chechen tale is known as the Legend of Lake Kazenoi. In this tale an old beggar walks into one of the mountain villages. He begs at every door, but everyone turns him away. Finally, the poorest family in the village lets him in and treats him with the greatest hospitality, even denying themselves so that he will not have to go without. The old beggar shows his gratitude by telling them to leave the village as God will flood the entire area and drown all the villagers the next day. The family leaves immediately. All the other villagers are drowned. In the place of the village there formed a deep mountain lake.

The legend has become a kind of gravitational centre around which many other tales and superstitions orbit. These include the claim that the bottom of the lake leads to the centre of the earth; that the lake has a mind of its own and mystical powers; and that those who have claimed to be prophets can prove this by going to the lake and praying on a rug resting on the water. If they do not drown, they are prophets of God. Of greatest interest however is the emphasis on caring for guests. The importance of treating guests well is ingrained in Chechen and all Caucasian cultures.

In the Eastern world in general, which has influenced Caucasian culture so deeply, there is still a high value placed on the hospitable treatment of guests and strangers. At one time this was also true of the Western world, especially during medieval times when Muslim influence was at its strongest. While Western media focus on a handful of kidnappings and killings of foreigners in war-torn Chechnya, the much more commonplace stories of Chechens welcoming foreigners, journalists and even wounded

Russian soldiers into their homes have not been considered newsworthy. In the poems and stories of the Chechens, however, as well as in their everyday lives, these values continue to be reinforced.

Future research on Chechen folk poetry and traditions will be difficult because of the destruction of Chechnya's archives. Ovkhad Dzhambekov, Chair of Chechen literature and folklore at the Chechen State University, has indicated that he did manage to save some 2,000 manuscript notebooks of recorded folklore during the recent war.¹⁰ Hopefully they (and he) have survived more recent bombardments.

Arab literature in Chechnya

Into Chechnya's rich and ancient oral tradition, Arab literature appeared towards the end of the seventeenth century. Arabic was used as the literary, scientific and business language throughout the Northeast Caucasus: in Daghestan, Chechnya and Ingushetia. As a result of this stimulus from the world of Arab letters, and concomitant with its arrival, written Chechen literature started to evolve. As English literature of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was revitalized by translations from and imitations of Latin, Greek and Arabic originals, Chechen literature also experienced a new flowering under the influence of translations and imitations of Persian, Arabic and Turkish originals.

The medieval Muslim world produced such giants of literature as Rumi, Sanai, Al-Ghazzali, Saadi and Khayyam, amongst others. All of these figures were steeped in the teachings of the Sufis, and some were themselves Sufi teachers. Sufi writers are noted for their mastery of teaching stories—stories which are designed to wake the desire for truth in those who encounter them. The Qadiri and Naqshabandi are the two Sufi teaching orders which were active in this part of the Caucasus. The following is a brief story used by the Qadiri order, to give a sense of what their literature is like:

The Teacher and the Dog

A Sufi teacher, walking along a road with a student, was assailed by a ferocious dog. The disciple was furious and cried out:

‘How dare you approach my master in such a manner?’

‘He is more consistent than you are,’ said the Sage, ‘for he barks at anyone, in accordance with his habit and proclivities; while you regard me as your master and are wholly insensitive to the merits of the many illuminates whom we have already passed on this journey, dismissing them without a second glance.’¹¹

The Sufi orders were very successful in their penetration into the Caucasus—they survive there down to this day. Where the orders were strongest, the resistance to the Russians has been strongest as well. This was seen also in Afghanistan, where Sufi teaching orders have been active for centuries. Their literature, which also encourages self-discovery and the service of humanity, found widespread acceptance in Chechnya, and helped to shape their sharp response to the alien pro-Russian nationalism which their northern neighbours have tried to impose on them. As the Chechen author Musa Akhmadov points out,

The concept '*nokhchalla*' (Chechenness) has never been thought of by our ancestors as something higher than '*adamalla*' (humaneness), a vivid example of which is our folklore where the main positive characters often are not only Chechens but representatives of other nationalities.¹²

The '*nazmy*' (*nazma*) genre of religious songs gained wide currency during the mid-nineteenth century at the time of the Caucasian wars, as religious Muslim leaders fought the invading Russians with great courage and skill. Some captured political leaders of Chechnya took to writing during their imprisonment under the Russians. Atabay Ataev, for instance, composed a eulogy in the Arabic language at this time. As early as the 1870s, however, some Chechens started turning to other genres and many started to adopt the Russian alphabet. Chakh Akhriev and U.Laudaev are the best-known Vainakh authors from this period for initiating a new view of their country, stemming from their highly regarded essays and travel sketches which focused on social, political and economic problems. Only a very few Chechens wrote in Arabic in the early twentieth century; amongst them were S.Gaisumov, S.Sugaipov and A.Tuchaev, who wrote mostly in verse. A few translations from Arabic appeared at the same time, undertaken by Islamic clergymen. Understandably, these were, in the main, translations of religious teachings.

Though Chechens have been active in the military in Middle Eastern countries, their cultural influence has been less noticeable (see Diaspora section on pp. 000–000). In the 1980s though, Hamid Yunis, an officer in the Jordanian army of Chechen background, became interested in making Chechen culture more accessible to Arabic-speaking Chechens and other peoples in the Middle East. He arranged for translators to render several books from Chechen into Arabic, including Abuzar Aidamirov's *A Brother's Testament, Long Nights, and Across the Mountain Paths*. Aidamirov is best known for his novels dealing with the expulsion of Chechens to Turkey during the 1860s and 1870s, and for his descriptions (though now viewed by some as overly critical) of the *adat*, or customary law.¹³

Script transitions

The earliest inscriptions found in Chechnya were left on Christian architectural monuments by Georgian evangelists in the tenth century AD,¹⁴ but Chechens did not have any means of recording their own language for another 700 years.

A major difficulty for Chechen scholars, and for the Chechens themselves, emerges from the fact that the Chechen language changed scripts three times in the twentieth century. The Arabic alphabet became the first Chechen script in the late seventeenth century. Few Chechens, however, could read or write. The Latin script was introduced to replace Arabic lettering in the 1920s and Latin lettering was replaced with the Cyrillic script at the end of the 1930s. With each change a large body of work became inaccessible to the next generation of Chechens, especially because knowledge of how to read (as well as efforts to teach) previous scripts during Stalinist times was suspect and punishable by imprisonment or death. Stalin's purges at the end of the 1930s followed by the Second World War and the expulsion of the Chechens in the 1940s created enormous difficulties for those trying to keep the culture, the language and themselves alive. From

the mid-1940s until the end of the 1950s, no Chechen books were published, and all Chechen literary activities were actively suppressed.

Soviet literature

The first secular generation of Chechen intellectuals, T.Èldarkhanov, the Mutushev brothers and Sheripov brothers, came from army and merchant backgrounds, and were schooled in Russia. They shared with their Russian contemporaries the same desire for freedom of speech and other aspirations for self-determination.

No account of Chechen literature in the early twentieth century would be complete without mentioning Nazarbek and Aslambek Sheripov. Nazarbek was Chechnya's first playwright. His first two plays, *At a Party* and *The Bear*, staged in 1912, aimed to record and dramatize the old ways of Chechen life. Aslambek started out by doing artful translations of Chechen folk-songs and stories into Russian. His Gorky-influenced *From Chechen Songs* was published in Vladikavkaz in 1918. Many regard this book as the beginning of Chechen Soviet literature. The song 'Asir-abrek' is of central importance in his work, noted for its rebellious and romantic overtones. Aslambek became a popular and outspoken journalist during the Civil War. He died in 1919. Aslambek's elder brothers, Denilbek and Zaurbek Sheripov, were both powerful political leaders in Chechnya during the 1920s. Zaurbek also collected Chechen folklore, and compiled and published *A Short Russian-Chechen Dictionary* (1928), which helped the spread of the Russian language in Chechnya.

Another important fraternal pair of literary Chechens were Akhmetkhan and Ismail Mutushev. Their work was mainly in the form of high-quality journalism which took on historical, social, cultural, economic and contemporary issues. Akhmetkhan's articles dealt mainly with the urgent problems facing the Chechen people and other nations of the North Caucasus. He fought against the British occupation of Baku, and later became a functionary in the government of Soviet Azerbaijan. After that he worked as part of the Chechen Soviet, and opened several schools. Ismail Mutushev started his literary work collecting folklore. He was extremely interested in bringing modern education, technology and culture to Chechnya. He made enormous efforts to bring information of all kinds to his isolated brethren in the mountains. He was killed in the Civil War, in 1919, while working towards setting up a Chechen public education system.

Important poets of the 1920s and 1930s include A.Dudaev, S.Sagaipov, M.Salmurzaev, Kh.Oshaev, M.Mamakaev, S.Baduev and A.Nazhaev. Pushkin, Lermontov, Tolstoy and Gorky all had a major influence on poets and authors of this era. These poets also drew on historical poems, emphasizing famous early figures of Chechnya who fought for the common good. An unfortunate aspect of many of these works was the glorification of the Soviet system. Simultaneously, and perhaps paradoxically, there was also an endeavour, at least initially, to experiment with new literary forms. Folklore, however, remained as an important bridge between the pre-Soviet and Soviet eras, and it did again between the Soviet and post-Soviet, contemporary eras.

Said Baduev is considered by many to be the founding father of Chechen literature. He often wrote critically of the Chechen customary law. He is also credited with the creation

of Chechnya's national theatre. During the later 1920s and early 1930s Baduev wrote his most famous stories reflecting his attempts to capture and articulate the internal and external struggles of those whose lives are caught in the borderlands of the ending of one era and the beginning of another. A highly regarded contemporary of Baduev's was Said-Bei Arsanov, whose novel *The Two Generations* came out at the same time (around 1931) as S.Baduev's famous *Petimat*. Arsanov blends fact and fiction to portray the lives of Chechen peasants participating in Russia's revolution.

In the late 1930s some Russian poets, including E.Bagritsky, N.Tikhonov, D.Osin, B.Turganov, amongst others, translated a great deal of Chechen poetry into Russian. At the same time, more and more works by Russian authors started to appear in Chechen. By the end of the 1930s, hundreds of translations were being made into Chechen from other languages, though censored by the authorities of the time.

Fear of Stalin's collectivization programme and concentration camps, which started in their full-blown form in the early 1930s, weakened much of the literature of this time period because of compromises authors were forced to make to avoid being imprisoned and/or murdered. Unfortunately, thousands of texts, and also the histories of these texts, were lost when Russian troops destroyed public and private library collections as the Chechen people were deported from their land in February 1944. Some manuscripts and books survived the decimation and diaspora, either through being taken along by the deported Chechens, or through being salvaged and protected by people in nearby republics.

From the 1950s to the 1980s Chechen literature became more and more diverse, as the Soviet Union moved slowly away from Stalinism. An important event, of course, was the restoration in 1957 of the Chechen-Ingush ASSR. The deportation and return of the Chechens had an enormous impact on the imaginative life of the people who had undergone these hardships. The need to look inward at the whole question of what it means to be Chechen, and at the same time to try to digest the brutal vagaries and rich inheritance thrust upon them by the interfering and apathetic world, brought about the atmosphere that made possible new talents such as R.Akhmatova, S.Arsanukaev, M.Kibiev, K.Satuev and many others, who saw themselves as part of a much larger human community. Much of their poetry deals with an ever-expanding circle of concern starting with Chechnya, brimming out to the rest of the Caucasus, and then spilling over to encompass Russia. Subjects reflecting everyday-life conditions in both poetry and prose became more and more common. The well-known authors of this period include A.Aidamirov, Sh.Okuev, M.Akhmadov, I.Èlsanov, M.Sulaev and S.-Kh.Nunuev. An ongoing interest in the moral and ethical traditions of Chechnya continues to take a central place in much of the literature.

As the 1930s saw a great wave of literary translation to and from Chechen, the 1960s to the 1980s found many Chechen authors translating works by poets and authors from Daghestan, North Ossetia, Kabardino-Balkaria and other Soviet republics and regions. This led to a greater regional self-awareness and a continuing enrichment of the literature, as authors became increasingly familiar with works from beyond their borders.

Shima Okuev, a talented prose writer who died young, was best known for the historical novel *Republic of Four Governors*, which moves in setting from a mountain *aul*, to industrial Grozny, impoverished areas of St Petersburg, and then to the battlefields of the First World War and the subsequent Civil War in Russia.

Magomed Sulaev was well known for his wide-ranging talents as a writer of short love lyrics, philosophical musings, short quatrains, epic poems, short stories and novels. His novel *Tovsultan Leaves the Mountain*, dealing with the 1944 exile of Chechens to Kazakhstan and Central Asia, the time in exile, and then the return, had great critical acclaim.

Deportation led, not surprisingly, to an emphasis on dirges and laments. This is reflected in a well-known poem by Chechen national poet Ismail Kerimov, which is about the 1944 massacre in the village of Khaibakh (comparing it to the widely known Katyn Forest massacre, where thousands of Polish officers were ruthlessly murdered by the Soviet NKVD):

I ache,
 I am thousands.
 Thousands of tears
 Shed under the roar of the wheels in February of 1944.
 I am a sea.
 I am hundreds,
 I am thousands of bodies collected in obscure stations.
 I am a tombstone, a monument,
 I am the despair of shattered mothers,
 With frozen prayers.
 I am the sky,
 I am Khaibakh, Katyn and the Gulag,
 The bloody throne of a dictator.
 I am *glasnost*,
 I am the heart of a poet, nature, song,
 A growing soreness in the throat,
 I am a voice and I command you
 ‘Remember!’

Another anti-clerical ‘Soviet’ dirge on the theme of the nineteenth century expulsion is found in Aidamirov’s *A Brother’s Testament* (note that the Russians are spared any blame for the disaster):

...

Бусалба паччахьо ша волчу доьхура,
 Къераста паччахьо цаьх совца бохура,
 Къематде хIуттуш ду молланаша бохура,
 Це йоцуш, мох боцуш Нохчичоь йогура,
 Мел дезарг дIатесна вай махках девлира.
 Паччахьийн багахь берг ямарт мотт хиллера,
 Алхазан и Муса сийна це хиллера,
 Iуспанан СаIдулла царна мох хиллера,
 Тешхачу молланаша вай Iехош хиллера,
 Цара вай кхачий—кха къематан кху дийне.

...

The Muslim Sultan says come,
 The Christian Tsar says stay,
 The mullahs promise resurrection,
 The land of the Chechens is consumed but with no fire nor air.
 We abandoned the land, and all that we hold dear,
 And the lying tongues of the sultans have become bare.
 Alkhaz Musa is a scorching fire,
 Stoked by 'Uspi Sa'dulla.
 The treasonous mullahs have enticed us with false promises,
 And have taken us to our doom.

Another prolific writer with an assured place in the history of Chechen literature is Nurdin Muzaev. Though compromised by his association with the Soviet authorities, he still wrote some important works, such as *Legends of Chechen-Ingushetia*, *Hot Hearts* and *Beibulat Taimiev*. These were written after the rehabilitation of the late 1950s.

The outstanding place held in Soviet literature as a whole, by a Chechen author, is occupied by the poet and prose writer Magomet A.Mamakaev (1910–1973). He was the author of one of the first modern Chechen poems, 'Bloody Mountains', in 1928.

I love one above all on earth,
 All my life belongs to just one,
 From the first years, clanging at daybreak,
 To old age, full of gray hair.
 She was and will always be right,
 In her darling in this world she shall not find
 That I am guilty—let her condemn.

I love this one all the same.
 There is no one more perfect and bright,
 Without her I know not day from night.
 She blossoms all the more brightly, never growing old,
 Oh, it's the one and only my native land!¹⁵

Many believe that M.Mamakaev's work is of the same importance as that by other well-known representatives of Caucasian poetry, such as Rasul Gamzatov (Avar), Alim Kishokov (Kabardian) and Kaisin Kuliev (Balkar). Mamakaev's works also include short stories, sketches and articles on miscellaneous subjects. Later he also wrote novels.

Chechen literature is known for its comedy, especially after the rehabilitation of the 1950s. The most successful and best-known comic writer in Chechnya is A.Khamidov, who developed his reputation through his work in the theatre.

Although publishing in Chechen was possible again after 1957, some poets and writers preferred to work in Russian. One of the great contemporary Chechen writers, Abdurahman Avtorkhanov, who lived in West Germany during the post-war era, wrote his books, *The Technology of Power* and *The Secret of Stalin's Death*, in Russian rather than in Chechen. These works, along with Solzhenitsyn's *Gulag Archipelago* and Orwell's *1984*, were banned in the Soviet Union.

Post-Soviet literature

A new chapter in Chechen literature began with the end of the Soviet Union, and with renewed Russian military aggression against Chechnya. To give a general picture, Nichols states: 'Traditional songs continue to be composed and performed. Modern poets occasionally use Russian conventions such as rhyme. Traditional prose makes much use of humour (as does conversation in modern everyday life). Modern literature includes the standard European genres.'¹⁶

After the fall of the Soviet Union, socialist realism was rejected, and some wished to reject everything that had been created during the Soviet period. This was probably an inevitable, though perhaps misguided approach. 'Soviet literature' is a mixed bag, like any other literature, and needs to be assessed book by book—to do anything else is to resort to Soviet methods of collective dismissal and destruction.

At the same time, the most outstanding works of the Soviet era did tend to be written by those who marched to the beat of their own drums—which is true of works in all times and cultures. To think Western authors were or are free of political, religious and financial coercion is a very common misapprehension, and yet most of us read and study our literature as if this were a given. A more fruitful approach is to try to see where a work succeeds, and where, if it doesn't, politics or an author's poverty or personal vulnerability might have played a part. Few authors of the twentieth century were not seduced at some point by fascism, communism or the inanity of Hollywood—and in the case of North America, nobody was faced with a concentration camp as an alternative.

Musa Geshaev published a book, *Prominent Chechens*, in three volumes in 1999 in Belgium. In violation (as usual) of its own laws, the government in Moscow is not letting this book into Chechnya, and is trying to prevent its distribution in Russia. This book is about Chechen history, famous and important personalities, and has sections on Raisa Akhmatova and Makhmud Èsambaev. On a related note, Raisa Akhmatova's entire archive (over 600 files) was destroyed when the Russians burned the Chechen National Archives in the 1994–1996 War.¹⁷

Perhaps the greatest Chechen poet of the current time is Aпти Bisultanov, who was born in 1959. Bisultanov connects old Chechen traditions with modern trends. His poems have elements of everything from the heavy rhythms of the Chechen *illesh* to modern free verse. He is religious, and belongs to the Qadiri order of Sufis. His poems have been translated into Russian, Turkish, Finnish and German, and he participated in the 2002 International Literaturfestival Berlin.¹⁸ His book *Shadow of Lightning* (1991) contains the poem 'What Happened in Khaibakh', which is dedicated to the victims of Stalin's deportation of the Chechens in February 1944. Bisultanov received the Chechen People's Prize for literature for this poem in 1992.¹⁹ He has been identified as a 'Scholar at Risk' by the Scholars at Risk Network, and it is hoped that this recognition will soon allow him to travel to the United States to work on English translations of his own and other Chechen authors' works.

The following poem by Khizar Akhmadov is a graphic illustration of the impact the current wars have had on Chechen literature:

Do you know the land where folks are crying?
 Where puffs of smoke are near and far?
 Where craft with bombs are flying?
 Where bombs make people dying?
 This land is called 'Chechnya'.
 All homes are ruined there.
 There beats front-line thunder.
 There is hell everywhere,
 And frozen people hunger.
 This land is called 'Chechnya'.

Ruslan Yusupov is also known as an important voice in the current generation of Chechen poets caught up in the crisis of the current war.

There are some noteworthy contemporary Chechen authors in the diaspora, especially in Turkey. Tarik Cemal Kutlu wrote a couple of novels in the mid-1980s. He also translated M.Mamakaev's novel *Zelimkhan* into Turkish. He was involved with the journal *Birleşik Kafkasya*, Istanbul, in the 1960s.

In conclusion

Dire problems face anyone interested in conducting research on the literature of Chechnya, as library collections and archives have been decimated by more than a decade of war.

Like other peoples of the Caucasus, Chechens have had to organize and improvise resistance to manifold pressures, most of them coercive and destructive, over the past 150 years. Instead of giving up or giving in, the Chechens have proved to be remarkably resistant to pressures of all kinds. Much of their resilience can be attributed to the reliance they put on the value of their ancient customs, and their pride in their culture. You cannot eat a poem or a well-crafted story or joke; but poems, stories and humorous anecdotes have many times saved and sustained the hungry as they've hunted for food and fought themselves out of difficult corners. It is sad to think what a large mark war will leave on much of Chechnya's literature in the first decade of the twenty-first century, at a time when Chechnya should be enjoying the benefits of national independence. Chechen cultural vitality will no doubt outlast the current oil wars being waged by Russia and the United States in their pre-established zones of imperial interest, but at a huge price.

It is appropriate I think to finish with an English translation of the Chechen national anthem, which captures the poetry and persevering spirit of this hard-pressed nation:

We were born at night, when the she-wolf whelped.
 In the morning, as lions howled, we were given our names.
 In eagles' nests, our mothers nursed us,
 To tame a stallion, our fathers taught us.

We are devoted to our mothers, to our people and our native land,
 And if they need us—we'll respond with courage.
 We grew up free, together with the mountain eagles,
 Difficulties and obstacles we overcame with dignity.

Granite rocks will sooner fuse like lead,
 Than we lose our nobility in life and struggle.
 The Earth will sooner be breached by the boiling sun,
 Than we appear before the world, losing our honour.

Never will we appear submissive before anyone,
 Death or freedom—we can choose only one way.
 Our sisters cure our wounds by their songs,
 The eyes of the beloved arouse us to the feat of arms.

If hunger gets us down—we'll gnaw the roots.
 If thirst harasses us—we'll drink the grass dew.
 We were born at night, when the she-wolf whelped.
 God. people. and native land—

We devote ourselves only to their service.²⁰

The hymn in Chechen:

Буйсанна борз ехкаш дуьненчу девлла тхо,
 Гуьйранна лом уггуш тхан цIераш техкина.
 Аьрзонийн баннашкахь наноша дакхийна,
 Тархаш тIехь дой хьийзо дайша тхо Iамийна.

Халкъана, махкана наноша кхоьллина,
 Цаьршинна эшначохь, майра дIахIиттина.
 Ламанан лечарчий маршонехь кхиййна,
 Халонех, бохамех курра чекхдийлина.

Мокхаза ламанаш даш хилла лаларах,
 Дахарехь, къийсамехь яхь оха дIалур яц!
 Бос Iаьржа ва латта молханах лелхарах,
 Тхешан сий доьхкина, тхо лаьтта доьрзур дац.

Тхо цкъа а цхьаннена къарделла совцур дац,
 Iожалла, я маршо – шиннех цхьаъ йоккхур ю!
 Йижараша тхан чевнаш эшаршца ерзайо,
 Хьомсарчу бIаьргаша хьуьнаршна гIиттадо.

Мацалло хьовзадахь, орамаш дуур ду,
 Хьогалло тхаш бIарздахь, бецан тхин мийра ду!
 Буйсанна борз ехкаш дуьненчу девлла ду,
 Халкъана, махкана, Далла а муьтIахь ду.

15

Media and film

The press

Early development

Pre-Soviet press consisted of a number of pan-North Caucasian publications that reflected the views of the succession of short-lived entities that appeared in the North Caucasus following the 1917 revolution. For example, *Gorskaya zhizn* ('Mountain Life') was the newspaper of the Central Committee of the Union of the North Caucasus and Daghestan, first published in Rostov-on-Don in 1917.

After the establishment of the Mountain ASSR, regional newspapers with reddish hues began to appear, such as *Severo-Kavkazski Krai* ('The North Caucasian Krai'), published in Rostov-on-Don from 1922 to 1924. After secession of the Chechen Autonomous Oblast from the Mountain ASSR, newspapers and periodicals began to be published at the oblast level. The *Bulletin of the Chechen Oblast Executive Committee* was mainly concerned with indoctrination issues and churning out propaganda material. The newspaper *Groznenski rabochi* ('Grozny Worker'), which started coming out as early as 1920 (some sources give 1918), was later made the organ of the Chechen Oblast Party Committee, the City Party Committee and the Supreme Soviet of the Worker's Deputies, and published five times a week in Grozny. By the early 1930s, there were 16 newspapers published in the Chechen AO.

The first Chechen-language newspaper *Daimokhk* ('Fatherland') was first issued in the latter half of the 1930s. Other Chechen-language newspapers included *Komsomol Generation*, which was published by the Chechen-Ingush Oblast Committee of the Young Communist League starting in 1937. There were a couple of newspapers published in the Nogai language in the oblast. Magazines included the monthly *Chechenski Bolshevik* ('Chechen Bolshevik'), published by the Chechen Oblast Party Committee starting in 1930.¹

In the diaspora, Chechen and other North Caucasian intellectuals and statesmen who left the North Caucasus after the Civil War, set up a number of press publications in the West, aided by European governments antithetical to the Soviet regime. It was these publications that acted as counter-balances to news and claims of the Soviet authorities regarding the situation in the North Caucasus. During the Second World War, the weekly newspaper *Gazavat* ('Holy War') used to be published in Berlin in Chechen, Circassian, Avar and Russian, under the editorship of Manius Mansur.

Exile and rehabilitation

For more than a decade after the deportation, there had been no Chechen-language newspapers in any of the republics to which the Chechens were exiled. With the advent of Khrushchev and his admission of the ‘mistakes’ of the past, the situation of the Chechens eased a bit. In 1955, the weekly *Qinheegaman Bairakkh* (‘Banner of Labour’), a Chechen-language edition of *Znamiya truda*, was published in the Kazakh SSR. In addition, a radio program in Chechen was broadcast for the deportees. These concessions were prelude pieces to the act of rehabilitation, and definitely served as propaganda ploys to demonstrate that, even in exile, the cultural needs of Soviet peoples were still catered for. The diaspora publications played a leading role in drawing world attention to the horrors of the deportation.

In the post-exile years, *Daimokhk* and *Komsomol Generation* were continued, and a number of other Chechen-language periodicals began to be published in 1957 in Grozny, including *Leninan Neq* (‘Lenin Path’), the organ of the Oblast Party Committee, the Grozny Party Committee, and the Supreme Soviet, and ‘Light’, a republic-wide newspaper. By 1959, there were seven Chechen-language newspapers, issuing 17,000 copies in total, and two Ingush ones, with 4,000 printed copies in all. In 1970, there were nine Chechen and only one Ingush newspapers, issuing 34,000 and 5,000 copies, respectively. All-Union newspapers included *Pravda*, *Komsom-olskaya pravda*, *Trud* and *Pionerskaya pravda*, all of which were published only in Russian.²

The media was heavily censored and editors were constrained by the rigid official Party line. Journalist unions were founded which admitted media workers from the press, radio and television, news agencies, publishing houses, as well as news photographers and artists. In the 1980s, there were two major printing houses in Chechen-Ingushetia, one wholly devoted to newspaper publication. The total number of copies of newspapers printed locally in each of the three principal languages are given as rough indications of their prevalence and status: 10–15,000 for Ingush, 15–20,000 for Chechen, but a massive 50–60,000 for Russian.

Glasnost and independence

By the end of the 1980s, there were 20 newspapers published in the three republican languages, and four regional magazines. *Glasnost* allowed the media more latitude in broaching taboo subjects, and the repressed Chechens jumped on the bandwagon, despite occasional draconian measures against ‘deviants’. In 1988, Movladi Udugov established the dissident newspaper *Orientir* (‘Orientator’), which was banned by the communist authorities in 1989. *Golos Checheno-Ingushetii* (‘Voice of Chechen-Ingushetia’), the republic’s social and political newspaper, started publication in Grozny in August 1990 five times a week. After the split-up of Chechnya and Ingushetia, the name of the newspaper was changed to *Golos Chechenskoi Respubliki* (‘Voice of the Chechen Republic’), as of 21 May 1992. It was continued by a weekly social and political reincarnation of *Groznenski rabochi* that started coming out in June 1995, but was restored in the second period of independence. The newspaper ceased publication in the autumn of 1999, but there were plans to restore it again in 2003. *Maershoov* (‘Freedom’),

formerly *Novaya gazeta*, was an independent weekly published in Grozny starting in 1991, with a circulation of 10,000 copies.

In the heady days of 1990–1991, Udugov headed the Information Committee of the Chechen National Congress, and was appointed by Dudaev as his personal press secretary. In December 1991, Udugov was entrusted with the press and information portfolio. During the 1994–1996 War, he oversaw the nationalist propaganda machine, and was chief architect of Chechen patriotic ideology. He pulled off a media coup by connecting Dudaev via TV to an American audience.

In both independence periods, there was a wide range of local newspapers, a significant number of which were published by political parties and public movements. Many of these publications were ephemeral affairs, vanishing into thin air once the sponsoring entities had ‘achieved’ their set goals or exhausted their finances. Besides local printed media, such as *Groznenski rabochi*, *Ichkeria* and *Chechenets* (‘The Chechen’), national Russian newspapers and magazines were distributed free of charge in Chechnya. The Russian-language newspaper *Put Dzhokhara* (‘Path of Dzhokhar’) was launched in 1997. The Chechens of Daghestan publish the newspaper *Khalqan Az* (‘The Voice of the People’).

Present press

Movladi Udugov, propaganda minister of the nationalist government, is head of Kavkaz-Tsentr News Agency, and runs the Press Centre of the Information Agency of the Government of the Chechen Republic—Ichkeria (Informtsentr). A pro-independence Chechen newspaper is published in Georgia and another in Khasav-Yurt in Daghestan. *The Chechen Times* is an independent nationalist newspaper published in Georgia in both English and Russian with Albert Batoukaev as editor-in-chief. Sponsored by the Chechen Democratic Association in the Netherlands, it is distributed in Great Britain, Germany, the Netherlands and Georgia, and is also published online <chechnya.nl/index.php?lang=eng>.

ChechenPress, Information Agency of the Government of the Chechen Republic—Ichkeria, has been based in Tbilisi since March 2000. It runs an informative website in English, Russian and Turkish. Its presumed director, Taisa Isaeva, was arrested by the Russians in June 2000 on allegations of collaboration with Chechen nationalists. Mairbek Taramov, president of the Independent Union of Caucasian Journalists, is editor-in-chief of *Kavkazski vestnik* (‘Caucasian Bulletin’), a newspaper that was first published in Grozny in 1997 as an organ of the Union, and which during the ‘second’ war was published in Azerbaijan and distributed clandestinely in the North Caucasus.

By 2002, there were 14 newspapers (three republican, two city and nine district) distributed in Chechnya and either published by the pro-Russian authorities or tolerated by them. The government-run weekly *Vesti respubliki* (‘News of the Republic’) started to be published in both Russian and Chechen in 2001, and *Groznenski rabochi* resumed publication in 2001. The republican newspaper *Daimokhk*, which had been published in Chechen for some 60 years before it was scrapped during Maskhadov’s tenure, resumed publication in early 2002 under the editorship of Sherip Tsuruev. City newspapers include *Orga* (‘Argun’) and *Vesti Groznogo* (‘News of Grozny’). District newspapers include the daily (weekly up to 1999) *Gums*, published in the Gudermes District (it used

to be the forum of some anti-Maskhadov elements of the Chechen intelligentsia), *Khalqan Dosh* ('The Word of the People') in the Nozhai-Yurt and Vedenov districts, *Maershoo* in Urus-Martan, *Terkiist* in Nadterechny, *Territoriya mira* ('Territory of Peace') in Itum-Kala, *Terskaya nov* ('Terek Virgin Soil') in Shelkovsky, *Terskaya pravda* ('Terek Truth') in Naur, *Yiman* in Achkhoy-Martan, *Zaama* ('Time') in Shali, and *Zov zemli* ('Call of the Land') in the Grozny Rural District. *Vozrozhdenie* ('Renaissance') and *Molodyozhnaya smena*, which started to be published in 2003, are among the newspapers that deal with issues that concern the youth. Other newspapers include *Selskaya pravda* ('Rural Truth'). The pro-Maskhadov *Khalqan Az*, which is published in Makhachkala, is considered among the chief opposition newspapers. 'Wahhabi' newspapers include *Way of Jihad* and *Sign of Jihad*.

Some newspapers were published in neighbouring North Ossetia and Dagestan in the first phase of the current war, but in early 2002 a printing house was opened in Znamenskoe in the Nadterechny District and gradually all pro-Russian newspapers came to be printed inside Chechnya. Print runs of regional newspapers range between five and ten thousand copies. Yugpress Agency, founded by the Union of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs, distributes newspapers, journals and books, and plans to set up more printing works. The literary magazines *Orga* and *Vainakh* and the children's magazine *Steela'ad* ('Rainbow'; *Raduga* in Russian) resumed publication in 2002. By the end of 2003, 17 newspapers (including five republican ones) and three magazines were being published in Chechnya. Yet, the press and printing industry are still well below par, as a result of the ongoing war. In February 2001, the journalist Hodzha Gerikhanov was elected head of the re-created Union of Journalists of the Chechen Republic, whose aim was the relaunching of Chechen-language newspapers and setting up of electronic media.

A regional newspaper *North Caucasus*, with offices in all republics of the North Caucasus, had been published from 1990 with a circulation of 75,000, with some of its articles published on the web. Diaspora newspapers include *Obedinyonnaya Chechenskaya Gazeta* ('United Chechen Newspaper'), a Moscow-based newspaper published by the movement New Times and edited by Mansur Magomadov, *Daimekhan Az* ('The Voice of the Motherland'), and *Spravedlivost* ('Truth'), edited by Lecha Saligov and published in Dedovsk near Moscow.

Radio and TV

The Radio Company of Chechnya started broadcasting in May 1928. The transmissions included a few programmes in Chechen and Ingush, but these were usually on the short side. In 2000, the pro-Moscow authorities inaugurated the mobile radio station Chechnya Svobodnaya ('Free Chechnya'), broadcasting in Chechen (for two hours), Russian and Arabic. By the end of 2001, Chechen Radio was broadcasting in Chechen and Russian for six hours a day. Radio, TV and newspaper personnel were trained in Moscow and Rostov-on-Don.

The Chechen-Ingush Radio and TV Company provided local radio and TV services in the republic. In the 1980s, there was an integrated television network that included almost 120 TV centres all over the USSR. In addition to Central Television broadcasts, the local TV station transmitted programmes in Chechen and Ingush. However, as in other ethnic

republics and regions, the times allotted to native-language broadcasts were certainly insufficient to enhance their status. In fact, the Chechens and their culture were pet targets of discrimination throughout the Soviet period. In 1991, along with the national TVI and TVN channels, local independent TV stations run by various political groups began to appear, such as Caucasus Channel, probably set up by Salman Raduyev. Russian TV and radio stations continued to broadcast to Chechnya.

During the 1994–1996 War, President Dudaev's Prezidentski Kanal ('Presidential Channel') broadcast from a secret location in the mountains. This unusual station had a group of dedicated staff ready to risk their lives in order to bring home the truth. The story of camerawoman Khazman Umarova was a fine example of the Chechen tenacity of spirit. Lacking any technical training and coming into the post quite by accident, she managed to document some of the harrowing episodes in the war, escaping some sticky situations by the skin of her teeth.

After the close-down of national TV stations, including the state cultural channel Nokhcho in 1999, the Chechen resistance set up TV and radio transmitters and an information and analytical department in each sector of Chechen territory under the control of the local military commander. In February 2001, federal agents destroyed a TV transmitter used by the nationalist Kavkaz station in Oktyabrskoe, near the Daghestani border. Subsequently, Kavkaz bulletins were recorded on videotapes and distributed.

The federally funded Chechen State Television and Radio Broadcasting Company, which was restored in early 2000, airs programmes in both Chechen and Russian. In 2001, 125 million roubles were allocated to launch a more effective media policy. Russian national TV and radio channels restarted broadcasting in Chechnya in March 2001. Central Russian television channels could be received in the republic, in addition to ORT, NTV and TNT. The Grozny State Television and Radio Company started broadcasting in 2003. The Daghestani State Television and Radio Broadcasting Company transmits programmes in Chechen, among other languages.

The internet

The official websites of the Government of the Chechen Republic-Ichkeria <<http://www.chechengovernment.com/>> and <<http://www.chechenpress.info/>> are both published in English and Russian. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Chechen Republic-Ichkeria maintains its website <<http://www.chechnya-mfa.info/>> in English. The Kavkaz-Tsentr website <<http://www.kavkazcenter.com/>> is mainly concerned with the military aspects of the war, reporting Chechen successes against Russian forces. This site, together with Nokhchichyo (properly Nokhchichoe), is run by Movladi Udugov, probably from Georgia. In 2002, the Russian government filed papers with the Turkish authorities for the extradition of Udugov.

The Chechen Republic Online website <<http://www.amina.com/>> is run by the nationalists from the USA. It carries news items, background to the conflict and some useful cultural and linguistic materials in English. There are a number of internet sites run jointly by Europeans and Chechens that support the Chechen nationalist cause. For example, the organization 'Ichkeria' in Holland runs a good site <<http://www.ichkeria.org/>> maintained by people from Chechen, Dutch and Russian

backgrounds. The Russian-language Kavkazski Vestnik <<http://www.kvestnik.org/>> is run by Mairbek Taramov from Azerbaijan.

The information on the official website of the Chechen 'government' <<http://www.chechnya.gov.ru/>> is only carried in Russian. The pro-Russian website <Chechnya Free.Ru> contains a vast amount of interesting materials on literature, theatre, folklore, religion and other issues in a fair manner. However, when it comes to politics and history, the account veers radically from impartiality. In December 2001, <Strana.Ru> inaugurated the Russian-language website <Kavkaz.strana.ru> as an attempt by the Kremlin to counteract the perceived propaganda success of the Chechen nationalists.

Western media on Chechnya

Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty's (RFE/RL) Chechen service, which was inaugurated in the 1970s under Abdurahman Avtorkhanov's directorship and discontinued late in the decade, was relaunched in April 2002, together with Circassian and Avar services. Moscow reacted negatively to this development, perceiving outside broadcasting to the North Caucasus in languages other than Russian as a threat to state security. RFE/RL also publishes the weekly *Caucasus Report*, which is also available on line. Perhaps in response to the Americans muscling in on the airwaves of the Northern Caucasus, the United Television Channel of the Southern Federal District was launched in May 2002 with news coverage of the situation in Chechnya.

The Chechnya Weekly is published by the Jamestown Foundation in co-operation with the American Committee for Peace in Chechnya (ACPC), which runs a very neat website <<http://www.peaceinchechnya.org/>>, mainly concerned with political issues. According to the Foundation, its mission is to inform policymakers, the media and the public of developments in Chechnya, discuss the origins of the conflict, and explore the possibilities for peace.

Online Western resources on Chechnya include 'The Christian Science Monitor (on Chechnya)' <csmonitor.com/atcsmonitor/specials/chechnya/chl.html>, 'The Guardian (on Chechnya)' <www.guardian.co.uk/chechnya>, 'Center for Defense Information, Crisis in North Caucasus' <www.cdi.org/issues/Europe/ncaucasus.html>, 'Radio Free Europe (on Chechnya)' <www.rferl.org/nca/special/chechnya>, and many others.

In May 2000, the International Federation of Journalists presented the European Media Award 2000 for television to the German journalist Andreas Maus for his programme 'Chechen Refugees to be Expelled', which condemned the ambivalent attitude of the German authorities, on the one hand accusing the Serbs of genocide in Kosovo and making provisions for displaced Albanians, whilst extending no welcome to Chechen refugees. The programme caused the authorities to reverse their expulsion decision and prompted a review of policy with regard to Chechen refugees.³

'Deadlock: Russia's Forgotten War', a Michael Gordon documentary shown on CNN in June 2002, was a balanced account of the two positions of the combatants, with the powerful message that it was high time for a political settlement to be found. It was an echo of President Bush's call upon the Russians to take a leaf from the American book on

how to deal with 'terrorism' without terrorizing a whole nation and driving it still further into extremism.

Anna Politkovskaya, one of the very few journalists allowed to cover the raging war in Chechnya, has distinguished herself by her unwavering determination to reveal the truth by breaching the wall of secrecy. Her heart-rending first-hand accounts were collected in *A Dirty War: A Russian Reporter in Chechnya* and published in 2001 in London. The French journalist Anne Nivat, who in the first phase of the second war travelled incognito in Chechnya to circumvent the ban on the media, related the horrors that she was witness to in another moving book *Chienne de Guerre: A Woman Reporter Behind the Lines of the War in Chechnya* (2001).

Thomas de Waal, Caucasus editor with the Institute for War and Peace Reporting in London, is known for his fair and balanced coverage of the Chechen issue.⁴ Nadezhda Banchik, deputy editor-in-chief of *The Chechen Times* and editorial director of the Chechnya Peace Action website <<http://www.chechnyapeaceaction.org/>>, has written a number of succinct articles on the Chechen conflict.⁵

All in all, concerned Western journalists are aware of Russian excesses in Chechnya and of the historical background to the conflict. After the dreadful events of 11 September 2001, Russian politicians and media seized on the opportunity to characterize the Chechen conflict as Russia's own struggle against international terrorism. The shifting policy of the West towards the Chechen war was seen as a dangerous development by discerning journalists. The Zakayev affair of late 2002 caused the Chechen issue to impinge more on Western consciousness (and conscience).⁶

The journalist Matt Bivens wrote frustrated about the (lack of) power of the media to effect change, specifically in the Chechen context:

There are two reactions [to Chechen stories]. One is glassy-eyed incomprehension. I get that a lot. But the other...is indignation—about assertions that were often in their newspaper that very morning. It's like they're hearing it all for the first time, and they're outraged, shocked, really quite concerned and troubled. It's easy to laugh at this naiveté, but it's also awe-inspiring—and chastening evidence of the limitations of the storytellers. Clearly most people, if they really understood how the *zachistki* [security sweeps]...drive the war, would be bellowing at President Vladimir Putin to be a man, for God's sake, and stop.... But they don't know it in their bones.⁷

Media war⁸

To avoid one of the mistakes of the first war, when the independent and assertive media relayed horrendous war images all over the world, playing a significant role in sapping Russian support for the military campaign and drawing severe international criticism, Moscow had issued guidelines on war reporting at the very start of the 1999 invasion and imposed crippling restrictions on the media. Civil servants had been briefed on how to deal with the media. New cadres of spin-doctors were added to the press ministry and government press centre in Moscow. Whereas in the first war a special commission was

set up to accredit correspondents, no such provision was made in the second. The battle for public opinion was also being waged on the airwaves. Chechen nationalists were operating more than 20 radio networks in their country.

In May 2000, Russian security forces arrested Vakha Dadulagov, editor of the underground newspaper *Ichkeria*, thought to be the official organ of the Maskhadov government, and destroyed the newspaper's printing press in Alkhan-Yurt. The last remnant of the pre-war Chechen press, *Groznenski rabochi*, was still being printed in Ingushetia and widely distributed across the Caucasus. Although the Russians had done little to censor the paper, its pre-war circulation of 50,000 dropped to a mere 3,000 by mid-2000. *Ichkeria* and the two magazines *Mekhk Kkhel* and the Chechen-language *Varis* were still published in 2002.

Russia launched a media offensive in Chechnya in early 2001, with TV transmitters in Grozny relaying RTR and Radio Russia broadcasts. The pro-Russian newspaper *Free Chechnya* was distributed for free. A radio station of the same name broadcast to about a quarter of the republic and the television station Vainakh was opened in Gudermes. The Russian TV channel ORT started broadcasting in Chechnya in May 2001.

The cyber war takes the form of attempts by the Russian authorities (and hackers) to disrupt anti-Russian Chechen websites, especially Kavkaz-Tsentr, and counter-measures by the latter to stay on line.

In March 2003, the Co-ordinating Council for Information Policy was established in Grozny to control media coverage in the whole of Russia of developments in Chechnya. Bislan Gantamirov, former mayor of Grozny, was appointed Minister of Information in June 2003 but was soon fired for incurring Kadyrov's ire for daring to air support for another presidential candidate. It is generally accepted that the Russians had emerged winners of the media war, helped to a large extent by the repercussions of the fateful events of 11 September.

Film

In the Soviet period, the management of the film industry was the business of the State Committee of the USSR for Cinematography, which had complete control of the whole film-making process. Initiative and private endeavour were actively discouraged, the artists reduced to pawns in the hands of the all-powerful bureaucrats. Film theatres were built in towns and many villages of Chechen-Ingushetia. Would-be actors from Chechen-Ingushetia were taught at the Chechen-Ingush National Studio of the Leningrad State Institute of Theatre, Music and Cinematography, and a similar institute in Moscow. In 1989, the Department of Acting Art was set up at the Chechen-Ingush State University, headed by Kheda Bersanokaeva.

Early actors included Dikalu Muzukaev, Honoured Actor of the RSFSR. Dagan Omaev, an accomplished theatre actor, started his film career in 1972, taking part in more than a score of films at Lenfilm, Mosfilm and other studios, and landing a role in the film *Come Free*. In 2000, Nakh Studio was set up under the directorship of Mimalt Soltsaev, People's Artist of Russia, at the State Academy of Culture and Arts in Moscow for Chechens to study acting and directing. Budding actors include Emma Dadaeva, Aslan and Supyan Jabrailov, Lana Sugaipova and Roza Tsatsaeva. In 2002, an effort was made

to revive the moribund film industry by the re-establishment of the Chechen State Motion Picture Department.

Local film-makers

Film-makers and professional workers in the cinema industry were required to become members of the Union of Soviet Film-Makers and the Union of Soviet Cinema Workers, respectively. The first local films were made well into the Soviet period. Iles Tataev was Chechnya's first film director, directing and writing scripts for more than 30 films, some of which won awards at film festivals. He was also an accomplished stage-manager and sculptor. In 2001, the Moscow-based Tataev declined to make a film on the war in his country because of his crippling emotions at the carnage being visited upon his people and because, in his opinion, the whole truth about the affair would not be known for many years to come.

Film director Sulambek Mamilov, Honoured Artist of the Chechen-Ingush Republic, was an ethnic Ingush with a good command of Chechen. After graduating in acting from the Leningrad State Institute, he worked at the Chechen-Ingush State Theatre, playing many roles, including Kazbek in Stanislav Rostovsky's film *A Hero of Our Time*, based on Lermontov's classic. In the late 1960s, he switched to directing and worked in television in Grozny. He later went to work at the Gorky Studio in Moscow, where he produced Russian-language documentary, musical and feature films, including *Extremely Dangerous People* (1979), *Ladies' Tango* (1983), *Day of Wrath (Dies Irae)* (1985), based on S. Gansovsky's short story, *Murder on Zhdanovskaya Street* (1992), a depiction of the conflict between the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the KGB during the Brezhnev years, and *Good Luck Gentlemen!* (1992).

Mamilov's *A Golden Cloud Spent the Night* (1989), aka *Children of the Blizzard*, based on Anatoly Pristavkin's novel, is a heart-rending yet hope-inspiring film based on a tragic story of the deportation. The film describes the experiences of two Russian brothers, whose orphanage was removed to Chechnya, and their entanglement in the conflict between Red Army soldiers and the doomed Chechen locals. Mamilov co-wrote the scenario for the film *Myatlam: The Holy Mountain*, in which Chechen, Ingush and Russian actors will take part, the leading role going to Aleksei Petrenko.

The Chechen journalist and director Raisa Talkhanova made *Inside Chechnya*, a film depicting life in Grozny during the 1999 siege. Produced by the BBC and Wilton Films, it was nominated for an International Emmy Award. Chechen director Murad Mazaev, a graduate of the Georgian State Theatre and Cinema Institute, made *Maershoo* (2002), a short film about a young man caught up in the vicious war. The low-cost project, which was sponsored and supported by the Chechen diaspora in Turkey and by Akhmed Zakayev and Vanessa Redgrave, was featured at the 56th Locarno International Film Festival in Switzerland in 2003. Other up-and-coming Chechen directors based in Georgia include Surkho Idiev.⁹

Western films on Chechnya

Hollywood director Phillip Noyce of *Patriot Games* and *The Bone Collector* directed and produced *Bloodline* (2000), a film about two brothers (actually one was an adopted child

of Chechen descent) who get entangled in the Chechen web when they journey from America to visit the homeland of their Russian emigrant parents and end up fighting on opposite sides of the conflict. Noyce, who visited Chechnya twice in 1997 upon invitation from Chechen officials, was impressed by the people's extraordinary resilience and their dogged determination to forge their own nationhood. *Immortal Fortress: A Look Inside Chechnya's Warrior Culture* (1999), an award-winning documentary film produced and directed by Dodge Billingsley, depicts the war mentality of the Chechens and their just struggle against their Russian oppressors through the ages.

The documentary *Making of a New Empire* by the Dutch film-maker Jos de Putter tells the story of the Chechens in their own voices, with Khozh-Akhmed Nukhaev as a central figure. Vanessa Redgrave produced and narrated the documentary film *Children's Stories: Chechnya* (2000), about the young and innocent victims of the senseless war.¹⁰ *Assassination Attempt on Russia* (2002), a documentary that purports to connect the FSB (Federal Security Service) to the 1999 Moscow apartment building explosions, was directed by Charles Denier and sponsored by Boris Berezovsky. Predictably, the film was banned from public screenings in Russia. The award-winning Czech documentary *Dark Side of the World* about the Chechen war by Petra Procházková and Jaromir Stetina earned the journalists prominent rankings on the blacklist of people denied Russian visas! The Nino Kirtadze documentary *Chechen Lullaby: Once Upon a Time There Was Chechnya*, winner of the 2002 Adolf Grimme Award, is based on interviews with journalists of different origins who worked in Grozny during the last two wars. The French film-maker Mylène Sauloy has made a number of documentary films, including *Dancing Through the Ruins* (2002), *Grozny le 51* (2002), and *Le Loup et l'Amazonie* (2000), all on the theme of war and people's struggle to get on with their lives.

Russian films on Chechnya

The Prisoner of the Caucasus (1996), an Oscar-nominated film by Sergei Bodrov (Sr), was an adaptation of Tolstoy's famous short story. The tale unfolds in a small Chechen village during the 1994–1996 War and revolves around the lives of two Russian soldiers captured by an elderly Chechen villager in the hope of exchanging them for his imprisoned son. The film depicts the struggle of the protagonists to resolve conflicts emanating from the war and raises questions on Russia's role in the Caucasus. Eventually, the Russian captives and the family of the elder come to see the human side in each other.¹¹ Sergei Soloviev's *Tender Age* (2001) tells the story of a young Russian soldier's involvement in the first Chechen war. Alexander Rogozhkin's 1998 drama *The Checkpoint* underscored the absurdity of war. *Moscow Chechnya Bubble Gum* (2000) by Inal Sheripov was a protest against the protracted war.

House of Fools, winner of the Grand Prix at the Venice Film Festival in 2002, underlines the futility of war by portraying the true story of patients at a mental home in the Chechen town of Shali who were abandoned by staff in the first war. Directed by Andrei Konchalovsky, it features Bryan Adams, a famous Canadian rock star who had become a spokesman against the war in Chechnya, in a role playing himself. *War* (2002) is a propaganda film about the abduction of a British woman and her boyfriend's attempt to rescue her. Directed by Alexei Balabanov, it was shot mainly in the Elbrus region of Kabardino-Balkaria, with Chechens and students from the North Caucasian Art Institute

taking part in acting and making the film. Other relevant films include *Time of the Dancer* (1997) by Vadim Abdrashitov, *Purgatory* by Alexander Nevzorov and *Caucasian Roulette* (2002) by Feydor Popov.

Andrei Babitsky's documentary films on Chechnya were balanced. Sergey Rozhenzev's *Peacemakers* depicts the attempts of a Chechen priest, Father Anatoly, to bring the warring parties closer together, only to be futilely killed in the process. In 2002, Ossetian director Temina Tuaeveva made the documentary *Unexpected Interlude* on Chechen theatre.

In 2003, the Chechnya Film Festival was held in the UK, USA and Russia. The Festival, which was sponsored by a number of human rights organizations, aimed 'to bring the best independent films made about the conflict in Chechnya to audiences around the world'. The films shown were *Deadlock: Russia's Forgotten War*, Paul Mitchell's *Greetings from Grozny*, *Chechen Lullaby*, Jos de Putter's *Dance, Grozny, Dance*, Dan Reed's *Terror in Moscow*, Krysina Kurczab-Redlich's *Murder with International Consent*, *Assassination Attempt on Russia* and *Babitsky's War*.

16

The diaspora

There are Chechen diaspora and refugee communities in many parts of the world. In Turkey and the Middle East the diaspora formed mainly as a consequence of the Russian-Caucasian War in waves of forced migrations, though there had been earlier minor emigrations to Turkey and Persia following major clashes between the Russians and Chechens starting from the seventeenth century. In 1860 alone, 80,000 Chechens left for the Ottoman Empire, to be followed in 1865 by another 23,000, some of whom were settled in the Balkans. The Russians had no compunction calling what had happened a forced expulsion. One of the last mass emigrations took place following the Russian Civil War. Nowadays, tens of thousands of Chechens and Ingush live in Turkey, Jordan, Syria, Iraq, Egypt, Saudi Arabia and other Persian Gulf countries. Because it is generally difficult for an outsider to distinguish between the Chechens and Ingush, and since the former are more numerous, both groups are referred to as Chechens in this account. Chechens who joined the French Foreign Legion spread across France's colonies, their descendants still to be encountered in Algeria, Morocco and Central Africa.

The Chechen diaspora in Russia formed mostly in the Soviet period as a consequence of the dispersion of Chechens across the territory of the USSR in search of better prospects and to escape discrimination at home. These Chechens have been to some extent assimilated into Russian culture and economy, as opposed to the mountainous folks that have more or less stuck to their traditions. The Chechen diaspora in Central Asia consists mainly of the descendants of the 1944 exiles who chose to remain there. After the Second World War, Chechen members of the Red Army who were prisoners of war in Nazi Germany refused to return to Chechnya, since the Chechen nation had already been exiled in 1944, preferring to settle in Germany, Turkey and the USA.

Many of the refugees of the 1994–1996 War had not returned home, effectively becoming part of the diaspora. A new wave of refugees formed as a result of the Russian invasion in 1999. In June 2001, more than 300,000 Chechens were living outside of their homes in Chechnya and had been officially registered as temporarily displaced persons. Some of these refugees may also end up as diaspora statistics. In general, Chechen refugees have settled in regions where their kinsmen had already established communities, taking advantage in their hour of need of kinship relations and traditions of hospitality. International organizations, such as UNHCR and the UN World Food Programme, provide indispensable humanitarian support for Chechen refugees in the North Caucasus. It is worthy of note that the majority of the Ingush who fled Chechnya (roughly 25,000 in number) decided to settle on a permanent basis in Ingushetia.

It is impossible to overstate the importance of the Chechen diaspora. Outside Russia, most diaspora communities actively support their kin's struggle against Russian occupation. In Russia, the diaspora communities work diligently to preserve and develop native language and culture, and have proved essential supporters of the dilapidated

cultural life at home. Some Chechens in Russia are also very critical of the conduct of Russian troops in Chechnya. Diaspora communities both inside and outside Russia stand to play significant roles in post-war Chechnya, though it is perhaps the outcome of the war that would determine which group would be more dominant.

Turkey

There is a large Chechen community in Turkey, probably the largest outside Russia. Most of the Chechen emigrants of the nineteenth century found refuge in mainland Turkey, the rest going south to Syria, Jordan and Iraq. Besides constituting substantive communities in large metropolises, the Chechens are concentrated in Adana, Maraş, Muş and Sivas.¹ The Chechens in Turkey are not officially considered as an ethnic minority, in accordance with the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne, which only acknowledges non-Muslim religious groups as minorities. This, together with the restrictions imposed on non-Turkish language use in schools, the media and publishing enshrined in Article 42.9 of the Constitution, had led to the marginalization of the Chechen language and large-scale assimilation of the Chechens. However, restrictions on the use of local languages other than Turkish, specifically in the media and publication, were lifted in 2002.

Almost all North Caucasians in Turkey support the Chechen cause. Recalling the massive support during the Abkhaz-Georgian War, the North Caucasians voiced vociferous backing for the Chechen nationalists in the last two wars. According to E.Wesselink (1996):

Encouraged by massive sympathy among the Turkish public for the Chechen resistance against Russia, the diaspora organizations have rediscovered their *raison d'être* and they attract increasing numbers of assimilated North Caucasians who used to show little interest in the North Caucasus.²

The Caucasian-Chechen Cultural Association and the Caucasian-Chechen Solidarity Committee are both located in Ankara and headed by Alavdi Sinan. The Committee planned a meeting of the International Chechen Congress in Istanbul in May 2002, but Turkish authorities bowed to direct Russian pressure to ban the event.³ Other Chechen organizations include the Caucasian Cultural Society in Ankara, the Sivas Chechen Committee and the Istanbul-based Çardak Society, established by people originating from Çardak, who also form the nucleus of the Daimokhk Caucasus-Chechen Committee, established in direct response to the 1994 Russian invasion of Chechnya. The Committee and its president Fazil Özen actively support Chechen independence.

Turkey, which had been forging strong economic ties with Russia, is treading a thin line between maintaining these and appeasing its North Caucasian diaspora. Moscow repeatedly asked the Turkish government to clamp down on the activities of Chechen organizations, but to no avail. Many Turkish politicians espouse Chechnya's nationalist cause, thus increasing tension in Turkey's already troubled relations with Russia.⁴

Jordan⁵

The Chechens found a home in Jordan at the turn of the twentieth century, establishing four villages. About 70 families settled on the banks of the Zarqa River in 1902 to form the village of Zarqa, to the northeast of (the then Circassian village of) Amman.⁶ These were a swarm of a larger group of emigrants belonging to the Naqshabandi Sufi *tariqat* under Sheikh Tao Sultan Doghtiq, aka Muhammad Amir al-Nourani, who had urged his followers to leave Chechnya to preserve their freedom and faith. Some 700 families left Khasav-Yurt in western Chechnya in 1899, most of them settling in Turkey, but some going further south to Syria and Jordan. According to another account, of the 700 families, 200 decided to return home, 300 remained in Turkey, and 200 headed to Jordan. Another group settled in Jordan after having sojourned in Ras al-Ain in Syria since 1869.

The houses of Zarqa were built in the Caucasian style, arranged in a compact circle with towers and loop-holes on the roofs for defence.⁷ The settlement had three gigantic gates and two main streets running east to west and north to south. The settlers built a bridge across the Zarqa, irrigation canals in the river-valley, and a water-mill—a novel introduction in the area. A swarm broke off to establish Sweileh in 1904. Sukhneh near Zarqa was established in 1911 by a group of (mainly Akkintsi) immigrants that had settled in Zarqa since 1908. Chechen-Azraq came into being in 1912 in a picturesque desert oasis to the southeast of Zarqa following an agreement between a group of Zarqa Chechens and the local inhabitants. Nowadays, it is estimated that there are some 15,000 Chechens living mainly in their traditional settlements and in Amman.⁸

The Chechens and Circassians are considered as one group by other Jordanians, and are thus treated socially, politically and tribally, although the Chechen issue has created a dynamic of its own. Most books on Jordan do mention these ‘quaint’ ethnic communities as pioneers in the establishment of modern Jordan and as traditional mainstays of the Hashemite dynasty. The Tribal Council, a joint Chechen and Circassian affair, was set up to resolve inter-communal disputes, in accordance with the local (unwritten) tribal laws, and to maintain social stability and harmony. North Caucasian *adat* has no relevance in inter-tribal affairs, although its vestiges can still be noticed.

There are three seats in parliament reserved to North Caucasians, with a Chechen usually elected in Zarqa and two Circassians in the Third and Fifth districts of Greater Amman.⁹ However, in the 1997 elections, a Circassian clinched the Zarqa seat, due mainly to internal divisions in the Chechen community brought about by the 1994–1996 War. In the next elections in 2003, the tables were turned, and for the first time ever two Chechens were voted into the same parliament, representing the Fifth District of Greater Amman and the ‘North Caucasian’ Zarqa District.¹⁰

The anti-war (of independence) party is represented by Sheikh Abdul-Baqi Jammo, a seasoned Jordanian politician who had considered Dudaev’s confrontation with the Russians as suicidal. The pro-independence faction is nowadays headed by Badr al-Din Beno al-Shishani, an activist and a humanitarian worker.¹¹ President Maskhadov’s envoy in Jordan is Magomed Atsaev, Chechen Minister of Communal Affairs.

Most Chechens in Jordan nominally belong to the Naqshabandi *tariqat*. However, the whole Sufi institution had become marginalized since the early 1990s, when the last sheikh did not even nominate a successor. The Chechens, unlike the Circassians, have more or less preserved their language and culture. Chechen is still the language of

communication inside the group, whilst Arabic is mainly used with outsiders. The Chechens in Jordan have developed their own distinctive dialect, Zerq' (from Zarqa), which is prevalent in all communities except in Sukhneh, where Akkin predominates.

Stereotypical careers are in the security forces and government, but there are growing numbers of engineers, technicians and entrepreneurs.¹² A Chechen is appointed to ministership every now and then. The multi-branched Chechen Charity Association is mainly concerned with the welfare of needy members of the community and runs a national dance group. The Zarqa-based Caucasian Club, the oldest in the country, was established in 1932 in Sweileh and is mainly engaged in sporting activities.

The Society of the Friends of the Chechen Republic was established under the patronage of Prince El Hassan bin Talal upon the Russian invasion of 1994 as a support forum for Chechens in the Caucasus. The present president of Society is Senator Sameeh Bino. Chechen refugees found a home among their kin in Jordan following each of the two recent conflicts. The Chechen Women Charitable Organization was established in 1981 in Sweileh with the aim to raise women's awareness to enhance their role in society.

Syria, Iraq and Yemen

Chechen emigrants in Syria found new homes in the Golan Heights, mainly in (Qurnet es-)Safha, Ras al-Ain and Qamishly (near the northeastern border with Turkey), and Riqqa and Deir al-Zur (on the Euphrates). The initial phase of their settlement was marked by conflict with the local Arab and Druze inhabitants.¹³ In the absence of reliable figures, estimates of the number of Chechens in Syria range between 6,000 and 35,000. The community in the Golan Heights was evicted following the 1967 Arab-Israeli War, with many refugees finding new homes in Damascus and some emigrating to the USA with the help of the Tolstoy Foundation. Whereas the Chechens of Jordan have managed to preserve their language and culture, those of Syria (and Iraq) have been far less successful in this regard, in no small measure due to the less tolerant disposition of the ruling regime. A considerable number of Chechens work in the petroleum industry.

The Iraqi Chechens are mainly descendants of the men of the Chechen brigade and their families who accompanied Midhat Pasha from Turkey and al-Jazeera in Syria when he was appointed governor of Iraq c. 1869. There are two Chechen villages, one near Ba'quba to the north-east of Baghdad and Hamidiyya in the Haweeja District in Kirkuk. Some Chechens and Daghestanis live in Baghdad. One estimate puts the number of Iraqi Chechens at 15,000. According to Turkmen sources, by end of 2001 more than 20 Chechen families had been resettled near Kirkuk as part of the Iraqi regime's plan of 'deforming the demographic characteristics of the regions of Kurdistan'. Said Bino, a Jordanian Chechen ex-minister who studied in Iraq in the late 1940s, estimated the number of Iraqi Chechens at that time at about 2,000, at the same time doubting the existence of a Circassian community in the country. The Chechens of Iraq are in general highly educated but have lost their mother tongue. During the war with Iran in the 1980s, the Iraqi Army counted eight Chechen generals in its ranks.

There is a small Chechen contingent in Yemen, descendants of some 150 cavalry soldiers of the Ottoman Army and their families who were based in the province in the First World War.

Russia

Chechens are scattered all across the Russian Federation. According to the 1989 census, there were 2,000 Chechens in Moscow, 15,000 in the Stavropol Krai, 8,329 in Kalmykia, 7,886 in Astrakhan, 6,000 in Saratov, and 11,140 in Volgograd, with practically all speaking their native language. An estimate put the number of Chechens in Russia proper in 1994 at 200,000, including 40,000 in Moscow. However, the figure shot up dramatically as a result of war. It was estimated that in 2002 there were 100–300,000 Chechens in Moscow, 20,000 in St Petersburg, 60,000 in the Volgograd Oblast, 30,000 in the Rostov Oblast and 17,000 in Saratov. There are also Chechen communities in Bashkortostan, where some 2,000 Chechens live, with their own cultural and social centre ‘Bart’, Komi (500), Mordovia (descendants of builders settled in the Soviet period), Pskov (1,000), Samara (500), Tambov (4,000) and Tyumen (6,000 Chechens and Ingush). The Chechens in Yaroslavl (8,000) were drawn there in the mid-1970s to work in collective farms. Many entrepreneurial members of the community went on to become heads of collective farms and construction companies. The cultural society ‘Vainakh’, established in the early 1990s and headed by Nur-Al Khasiev, publishes a newspaper and organizes art exhibitions.

In the North Caucasus, Chechen communities are found in Ingushetia, North Ossetia, Kabardino-Balkaria and Karachai-Cherkessia. The Chechens in Daghestan, known as ‘Akkintsi Chechens’ or ‘Aukh’, are not considered part of the diaspora since their lands were severed from Chechnya in the early 1920s—the final chapter on the status of the Chechen districts of Daghestan has not been written yet. The Stavropol Krai Cultural Centre of the Vainakh (‘Bart’), established in 1994 and headed by the human rights activist Kharon Deniev, is concerned with maintaining good relations between the Vainakh and the other peoples in the area. Nevertheless, some Chechen families in the Krai were expelled to Chechnya following border skirmishes in June 1999.

Chechen organizations and movements in Russia include the Chechen State Council, an assembly representing the interests of the Chechen communities in the CIS, Russian Congress of Vainakh, a political movement set up in 1996, the Chechen Congress of Russia, headed by Deni Teps, leader of the Chechen community in St Petersburg and active advocate of peace negotiations with Maskhadov, Socio-Political Movement for National Revival of the Chechen People, which was critical of Maskhadov’s administration of Chechnya, New Times, a movement for the development of cultural and political ties with Chechnya with offices in 24 regions, and Chechen-Ingush Culture Centre (Daimokhk) in Moscow, headed by Abuezid Apaev. The pro-Russian Chechen government representatives in major Russian cities are tasked with ameliorating the negative image of the Chechens in Russia and solicit assistance in the process of reconstruction of their republic.

Putin’s rise to power by stoking the flames of hatred against the Chechens in particular and North Caucasians in general has set a dangerous trend for other politicians, who have come to regard nationalism and anti-Chechenism as campaign mantras. Grotesque figures, such as the governor of Ulyanovsk Oblast Vladimir Shamanov, who called for the forced repatriation of all Chechens in Russia, have become national heroes. The Russians regularly refer to peoples of the Caucasus as ‘Blacks’. Such open racism would have solicited immediate censure in a civilized country. However, the Russians are

oblivious to the subtle differences between patriotism and racism. The Chechen communities in Russia are very susceptible to callous government and media statements concerning the Chechen conflict. Fights between Russian gangs and Chechens are not infrequent. Russians in general have the perception that the diaspora Chechens wallow in wealth, but are reluctant to contribute towards rebuilding Chechnya. The situation of the Chechens in Russia had become even worse following the theatre hostage crisis in Moscow in October 2002.¹⁴

Trans-Caucasus

The Kist call themselves ‘Vaeppii’, the Georgians refer to them as ‘Kisti’ or ‘Kisturi’, and the Karabulak as ‘Arshte’. It is noteworthy that they are never referred to as ‘Nokhchii’. There are four Kist tribes: Ĕrstkha, a swarm of the Chechen Ĕrstkhoi *tukhum*, Khildehar, a swarm of the Khildeharoi *taip* of the Chanti *tukhum*, M’aista, a break-off from the M’aistoi *taip*, and Malkha, an offshoot of the Malkhi *tukhum*. Their domicile, the Pankisi Gorge in the northeastern Georgian highlands on the upper Assa, Argun and Alazani Rivers, is in the north of the Akhmeta District in Kakhetia. The main town is Duisi, which is home to a house of culture. Other population centres include Birkiani, Dzhokolo, Dzibakhevi, Kvemo Omalo, Shua Khalatsani and Zemo Khalatsani. It is thought that the Kist settled in this area about three centuries ago, although Georgian nationalists offer the later date of the early nineteenth century. N.G.Volkova (1969:7–8) suggested the middle years of the said century as the time for the emigration of the Kist to the Pankisi, for lack of land. The 1897 and 1926 censuses gave the number of Kist as 413 and 1,094, respectively. Estimates of the present-day number range between 2,000 and 16,000. The Kist speak their own particular Nakh language and Georgian. Some spoke Ingush until the beginning of the twentieth century. The Kist are nominally Sunni Muslims. Kist economy is based mainly on agriculture, animal husbandry, carpet-weaving and manufacture of national head-dresses.¹⁵

Strictly speaking, the Kist are not considered a diaspora community. However, resident with the Kist are a number of Chechen refugees who found a home in the region in the 1990s. According to official Georgian figures, the Gorge was home to almost 2,000 Kist and 1,500 Chechen refugees, a considerable drop from the figure of 5,000 reported in 1999. Although the Georgians are generally well disposed towards both the Kist and Chechen refugees, they do not fail to mention that even the Kist are earlier refugees in Georgia.

The proximity of the Pankisi to Chechnya had created a difficult situation for both the Kist and the Georgian authorities, with constant Russian pressure on Tbilisi to oust alleged Chechen fighters in the area, whom Moscow claimed were also used as pawns in Georgia’s conflict with Abkhazia. Fearing for their own safety, Chechen refugees, mostly hailing from the southern Itum-Kala District, had categorically refused persistent Russian demands for their repatriation. The Chechens of the Pankisi Gorge were catapulted to world fame following the US decision to help Georgian security forces take control of the region in 2002 to flush out alleged al-Qaeda elements and to dampen Russian criticism.

The Tsova-Tush are considered a separate group from the Chechen, but belong to the same Nakh ethnos. Their self-designation, which is also used by other Nakh peoples, is

'Batsbi' (pl. of 'Batsaw') or 'Batsba Nakh' ('Bats People'), and their language 'Batsba motiti'. The Kartvelians call the Bats 'Tsova-Tush', the Didos 'Tsuva-Ak', and the Russians 'Batsbitsi', 'Tsova-Tush', or 'Tush'. The country of the Tsova-Tush is located in the Akhmeta District, near the land of the Kist, the main village being Zemo Alvani, near Telavi. There are also a few Tsova-Tush families in Tbilisi and other Georgian towns. According to the 1926 Russian census, there were seven ethnic Tsova-Tush and 2,459 Tsova-Tushian speakers! Subsequently, censustakers did not consider the Tsova-Tush as a separate ethnic group, but lumped them with the Georgians. The population was estimated at 3,000 in the 1960s, with a present population of some 5,000. Unlike other Nakh peoples, the Tsova-Tush are Eastern Orthodox Christians. The Tsova-Tush traditionally bred cattle, sheep and horses.¹⁶

There are upwards of 10,000 Chechens in Azerbaijan, 1,500 to 3,000 of whom live in Baku. The Chechen community, especially the refugees, had been harassed by the police, with regular raids on their homes and humiliating check-ups. The extradition of two alleged Chechen field commanders to Russia in March 2001 caused resentment among the Chechen community and negative reactions in Chechnya. The Chechen cultural centre in Baku was closed by the authorities following the Moscow theatre siege in October 2002. In 2003, the Azeri authorities allowed the children of Chechen refugees to attend public schools.

Central Asia

There were as many as 75,000 Chechens in Kazakhstan in 1989. However, as a result of attacks by Russian citizens, who felt jealous of the Chechens' higher standards of living wrought mainly by their traditional building skills, many Chechen escaped to Chechnya in 1989. After independence, the Kazakh authorities, at the time of the pogrom impotent to interfere, issued an apology to the Chechens and invited them back to the republic. However, the Chechens continued to flock back to their independent republic full of hope for a better future. The process was reversed following the 1994 Russian invasion, as several thousand Chechens sought refuge with kith and kin. At the end of the war, the outward flow from Kazakhstan resumed, to reverse again after the outbreak of fighting in 1999. The 12,000 or so refugees are not recognized as such by the authorities, but they are granted residence permits until such a time as it is deemed safe for them to go back home. Most Kazakh Chechens live in the Akmola Oblast, Astana, Almaty and Aktau. Instruction in Chechen is offered at some regular schools. Kazakhstan still has positive connotations for many Chechens, as it acted as a haven for them in some of the bleak periods of their recent history.

In February 2000, Akhmed Muradov, head of the Kazakhstan Chechen Association, dismissed Russian claims of involvement of Kazakh Chechens in the war. However, it would seem that Russia, which had been wary of the expanding position of the Kazakh Chechens, imagined a bugbear in every bush. The Chechen-Ingush Centre is located in Almaty. Amancha Gunashev is the official representative of the nationalist Chechen government. The present size of the Chechen community in Kazakhstan is estimated at tens of thousands.

Kirghizistan has around 5,000 Chechens as descendants of the 1944 deportees and about twice that number as refugees. There are small Chechen communities in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan.

Western Europe

After the First World War, the political elite and nationalist activists of the North Caucasian Mountain Republic moved to Poland to escape Communist oppression. When Poland was divided between Nazi Germany and the USSR, the Caucasian nationalists removed to the safety of France, where their descendents live to this day.

The Association of Chechen Refugees in Europe, which is headed by Ramzan Ampoukaev, represents the interests of thousands of Chechen refugees in the European Union and lobbies European governments to support the Chechen cause. Le Comité Tchétchénie de Paris was established in 1999 to offer help to Chechen refugees in France, foster cultural relations and spread awareness of the Chechen issue.¹⁷ In 2000, the French and Russian interior ministries agreed to mount joint search operations against the Chechen community in France. In Germany, support for Chechens is rendered by the Caucasus-German Committee, and in the UK, this function is undertaken by the Daimokhk Centre, under the directorship of Bulat Betalgiry.

USA

The first Chechen settlers arrived in the USA in the 1950s and 1960s. The estimated 150 Chechen families live mainly in Paterson, New Jersey, and form part of the larger North Caucasian community there. The Chechens are generally hard working and highly motivated. Traditions have more or less been preserved and the progeny are encouraged to marry within the group. The social safety net peculiar to North Caucasians has been maintained, and new immigrants are helped on their way to establish themselves in the new environment. The Chechens and other North Caucasians feel passionately about Chechen independence, and have staged demonstrations against the 1999 Russian invasion of Chechnya, which activism led to heightened awareness of the American public of their North Caucasian compatriots.¹⁸ The Chechen-Ingush Society of America in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and the Young Generation of Chechnya organization in New Jersey are headed by Muhammed and Zura Shishani, respectively.

Chechnya and its diaspora

The diaspora North Caucasians, especially in Turkey, have never given up hope of liberating their ancestral homeland. They took active part in the 1878 Russian-Turkish War. In 1924, the Committee of Liberation of the Caucasus was founded in Istanbul. Relations with the homeland were non-existent for some four decades after the establishment of Soviet power. The first contact between the Chechens of Jordan and the homeland took place in the year 1962, when a delegation of three people visited

Chechnya. Soon after, reciprocal visits became common and people on both sides rediscovered their relatives.

During its independence years from 1991 to 1994, Chechnya established closer contacts with its diaspora in Turkey and the Middle East. A Chechen-Turkish College was built in Grozny and hundreds of Chechen students enrolled in Turkish, Jordanian, Syrian and Egyptian universities. The Chechen government urged Moscow to desist from initiating or condoning persecution of Chechens in Russia, the usual retort being that such claims were groundless.

Maskhadov's government spared no effort to foster closer relations with the diaspora. Leading Chechen figures in Russia were invited by the Chechen parliament to attend one of its sessions in February 1998 to debate the problems facing the diaspora communities and discuss their role in the restoration of the economy. One of the nine tasks of the March 1999 Chechen cabinet was management of relations with the Chechen diaspora.

The response of the diaspora to military intervention in Chechnya has been a factor of distance from Russian wrath and reach. Predictably, Chechens in Russia have in general come out in support of the Russia's Chechen policy. For example, the Chechen community in Volzhsky in the Volgograd Oblast issued a statement in 1999 condemning the separatist activities of 'political adventurers' in Chechnya as leading to 'a prolonged bloodbath' in the name of 'the growth of ethnic awareness'.

On the other hand, most Chechens in the Middle East and the West have been most vocal in their support of Chechen independence and their condemnation of Russian excesses. Like the Abkhazians in 1992, when their ancestral country was attacked, the Chechens of Turkey responded to the 1994 invasion by setting up their separate societies and committees as support forums for the nationalist cause, when before they worked within larger North Caucasian organizations. They raised funds and provided humanitarian assistance, including providing medical care for injured Chechens. Some North Caucasian and Turkish volunteers joined the ranks of the Chechen freedom fighters. However, the numbers were never high, as the Turkish government, wary of antagonizing Moscow, put a damper on the process. In January 1996, a group of Chechen sympathizers hijacked the ferry *Avrasya* in the Turkish port of Trabzon, demanding an end to the Russian siege of Pervomaiskoe.

Diaspora support and assistance for the nationalist cause are likely to continue, which may lead to further complications in Russia's relations with countries like Turkey, Jordan and Syria. In 2001, Akhmad Kadyrov, the head of the Chechen administration, and a number of clerics visited Egypt, Syria, Jordan and Iraq to meet with state officials and members of the Chechen communities and discuss assistance issues. However, Kadyrov was branded as a traitor and snubbed by the Chechens. A trip to Jordan undertaken in the following year was deemed more successful diplomatically.¹⁹

As for Kadyrov's relation with the Chechen diaspora in Russia, according to Zaindi Choltaev, former deputy foreign minister of the Chechen Republic-Ichkeria:

Kadyrov is striving not only to concentrate in his own hands all power within Chechnya; he also wants the Kremlin to treat him as the head of all ethnic Chechens living anywhere in the Russian Federation... Kadyrov [is sparing no effort] to bring under his personal control the Chechen societies across the Russian Federation—using money and political

pressure available to him from both Chechen and federal resources... [For], he understands quite well that the Chechens living outside Chechnya constitute a political and economic force that has its own connections with the federal government and its own abilities to influence the situation within his republic.²⁰

Afterword

The core aim of this work was to describe an ancient people and its unique culture. Given the general lack of available literature on the Chechens and scarcity of informants, the task proved to be like doing a jigsaw puzzle with many of the pieces missing. What is more, a fair number of the eventually reconstructed fragments had jagged edges, making for a rough narrative at times. Some stories, like the rise and fall of the detestable statue of Yarmolov in Grozny, took months to assemble. An exercise in empathy was also called for to facilitate understanding of a private nation most heroic (foolhardy?) and persistent in the defence of its freedom and age-old values.

When I set out on this work, I thought I knew a fair bit about the Chechens, being a fellow North Caucasian and of the same cultural background. However, the deeper I delved into Chechen affairs, the more I realized how little I knew. People have a tendency to take issues at face value and people for granted, without attempting to ‘really’ understand them, falling back more often than not on convenient stereotypes. Yet, even after three years of painstaking research one was at times left with an empty feeling that one had merely scratched the surface of the subject, for so much more still needed to be investigated and researched, so many connections to be arrived at. Nevertheless, the research on a number of topics was taken to its logical limit and the accounts were detailed to the extent allowed in such a general work. It is the hope that everyone who reads this book would find in it something interesting and new.

With so many sensitivities to take account of, mostly pertaining to the Chechens themselves, writing this book was like treading on thin ice. Therefore, it was deemed prudent that the major opposing, yet complementary, Chechen existential views be taken into consideration to ensure that the narrative (by a ‘detached outsider’) would be as unbiased as could be.

This book is in one sense partly a product of the age of the internet, with a fair bit of the research involving sifting through thousands of documents and making connections using the virtual library of a few billion items. For example, Chechen *almaz* was linked to Circassian *almesti*, and then traced back to its Mongol origin. Whereas the worry at the beginning of the undertaking was a dearth of information on the Chechens, as the work progressed the other extreme of excess in some issues, especially those connected with the current conflict, loomed large. But what is the cut-off point for information, and how much time and effort is to be spent on screening the data? Since it was clearly impossible to find and investigate all relevant documents, it was deemed most appropriate to provide the reader with cues on how to access further information.

Doing a second volume on the North Caucasian peoples afforded the chance to discover how much the North Caucasians are similar and in what ways—the feeling of *déjà vu* having been not infrequent on this account. This also allowed the uncovering of some of the missing pieces in the first (Circassian) puzzle. The initial scope of the book included a comparative study of the Nakh peoples. However, space restrictions necessitated the removal of most materials on the Ingush, Kist and Tsova-Tush, and

stymied consideration of other North Caucasian cultures. Perhaps the metaphoric mosaic could one day be extended to depict the whole North Caucasus. On the positive side, considerable portions of the stories of the Ingush and Kist are already revealed herein.

This book is an earnest attempt to reach out, and embodies an appeal to the Russians (and other peoples of the world), not only on behalf of the Chechens, but also the other peoples under Russia's shadow who want out. Whereas racism is usually associated with small segments of society in the West, it is widespread in Russia. An enjoyable pastime in Moscow and other Russian cities is to persecute and expel 'persons of Caucasian nationality'. Is there a means to release the Russian mind-set from its bleak and irrational thoughts regarding other peoples? Could the image of the Chechen as a dagger-wielding savage ready to pounce at whim ever be obliterated from the collective Russian ethos? If Russia insists on keeping its colonies, it must educate its people about other cultures encompassed by the Federation and inculcate tolerance in its young, in the Chechen fashion. It would be healthy for the average Russian to feel some compunction at the annihilation of a whole people. On their part, the North Caucasians must do a lot more to promote their cultures, specifically to actively support initiatives of members of their own, and enter into dialogues with the other peoples of the world to dispel misconceptions and foster mutual understanding and sympathy.

Proverbs and sayings

JonArno Lawson and Amjad Jaimoukha

Although humanity shares a common wisdom reflected in the proverbs and sayings of all nations, those of the peoples of the North Caucasus have their own particular value, stemming as they do from an ancient and rich multi-ethnic region that has been almost completely neglected by Western scholars and thinkers. The difficult terrain has both fostered and protected wisdom traditions, which, until recently, have been in abeyance in the Western world.

Fifty or sixty years ago it was still common for older people in Europe and North America to inculcate their children and grandchildren with proverbs and sayings that were pithy and apt—to instruct, to admonish, to encourage, but especially to emphasize morals. In countries where the English language predominates, there is now almost a taboo against repeating anything. As a result, many of our proverbs—meant to be repeated—which helped put difficult social, ethical and spiritual problems into perspective, have almost disappeared from everyday speech. This has not been the case in Chechnya, where the horrors of war and deportation have given hard-won traditional wisdom an even greater value.

The Chechens have had to battle a living out of a difficult geography, and they have been forced to fight long and ugly wars against endless incursions into their land. In spite of this, or maybe because of it,

Chechen proverbs and tales teach a child to respect all living beings and nature. There is nothing unimportant in life: As the saying goes, ‘If you leave a peg in the ground, you’ll have a headache, if you kill a frog, a cow will die, if you catch a butterfly, your sister will lose her joy of heart’ (L.Usmanov 1999a).

If ‘Discerning people must exchange maxims’, as proposed by a poet in the Exeter Book (*Anglo-Saxon Poetry*, London: J.M.Dent, 1995, p. 346), perhaps discerning nations should as well. It may be hoped that the wisdom contained in the proverbs of the Chechens spreads beyond the bookshelves of scholars and libraries to return to the world they emerged from, and the role they were intended for, amongst those struggling to live with a modicum of decency in the everyday world.

To end with a simple truism—It is hard to be a Chechen. From this hardness springs the good sense that follows.

JonArno Lawson

Customs and traditions

- **Воккхачо бохург динам дохковаьлла вац.**
– He who obeys the elder will not regret it.
- **Воккхачуьнга лацадоьгІнарг – ор чу вожна.**
– He who didn't listen to the elder fell in the pit.
- **ДоттагІчо беллачу динна бага ма хьежа.**
– Don't look a gift horse in the mouth.
- **КІалдмарзаш а ца юуш, вахна хьаша.**
– Waiting for the cow to calve, the guest went away empty-handed [literally: without having the beestings].
- **Нохчи хила хала ду.**
– It is hard to be a Chechen.
- **Хьаша-да ца лорург Далла а лорур вац.**
– God is mean to inhospitable people.

Personal qualities, demeanour and beauty

- **Бедере ма хьажа, стаге хьажа.**
– Don't scrutinize the clothes, observe the man.
- **Вон къиг вон Іаьха.**
– A bad crow sounds bad.
- **Вон хила атта ду, дика хила хала ду.**
– It is easy to be bad, but very hard to be good.
- **Дош – дош дацахь, дуй – дуй а бац.**
– If a word, not a word, and if an oath, not an oath.
- **Дукхалер – дети, ІадІар – деши.**
– Silence is golden.

• **Къуьнна къу вевза.**

– It takes a thief to know a thief. Birds of a feather flock together.

• **Лоха стаг дегала хуьлу.**

– A short man is touchy. He that has a great nose thinks everybody is speaking of it.

• **Стеган куц а, сий а дийриг тІеюьйхина бедар ю.**

– Demeanour, honour and toil make the man.

• **Хаза йоІ тиша коч юьйхича а хаза ю.**

– A beautiful girl is beautiful even in old clothes.

• **Хазалла – сарралц, дикалла – валлалц.**

– Beauty lasts till the evening, good manners till death.

• **Чоа дуьйхинчо со а ца юьгу, гІовтал юьйхинчуьнга со а ца йоьду.**

– If I have a *cherkesska* on, I wouldn't have a care (in the world), but if I am wearing a *beshmet*, I wouldn't go out.

Humility, conceit, bad luck and malice

• **Дас хастийна говр хьалха ца яьлла.**

– The horse that had been praised to the skies was left behind.

• **Декъазчунна гоьнан маьгІиг а яьлла.**

– An unfortunate man would be drowned in a tea-cup.

• **Мел мекара цхьогал а гуьро лаьцна.**

– The most cunning fox had fallen in the trap.

• **Уггар хазчу стагана – цуьна-м ворта еха яра, аьлла.**

– Even about the handsome man they said he had a long neck.

• **Хьо цхьогал делахь а, цхьогалан цІога-м со а ду хьуна.**

– If you are a fox, then I am a fox's tail. I am more cunning than you.

• **ХІор хинбеда а шен Іам хестабо.**

– Every sandpiper praises his own bog. Every cook praises his own broth.

Bravery, rashness, prudence and cowardice• **Аьтто болчохь лата, аьтто боцчохь вада.**

– When you can, strike, when you can't, run.

• **Барзах кхаьруш ша велахь, хьуьнах ма г'ю.**

– He who is afraid of wolves must not go in the wood.

• **Бегаш – девнан юьхьигаши.**

– A joke is the beginning of a quarrel.

• **Г'паз т'лаьхьа хьадча, Бекха а ца вoьхна.**

– (Ironic) And Bek did not panic when the goose ran after him!

Диканиг х'ун ду аьлча, пхьагало жоп делла: ша ж'аьлена галэ шена

• **ж'аьла гар ду, аьлла.**

– When asked 'What is good?', the hare replied: 'To see the dog before it sees me.'

• **Ирчу туьрна а оьшу дика да.**

– A cutting sword needs sharp wit to wield it.

• **Котам а хилла вехачул, н'аьна а хилла велча тоьлу.**

– Rather than live like a chicken, it is better to die a cock.

• **Кхера ма кхера, хьайн бехк бацахь.**

– Don't be afraid if you are innocent. A clear conscience laughs at false accusations.

• **Кхузза юета, цкъа д'ахадае.**

– Measure thrice and cut once.

Нохчийн вордана хигьча, нохчийи илли ала; г'умкийн вордана хигьча,

• **г'умкийн илли ала.**

– When you ride in a Chechen cart, sing a Chechen song; when you ride in a Kumyk cart, sing a Kumyk song. Do in Rome as the Romans do.

• **Ойла йоцуш леттарг ка доцуш велла.**

– Don't enter rashly into a futile fight. Look before you leap.

• **Сих а ма ло, виц а ма ло.**

– Don't rush, and don't doze off.

• **Сихалла – сонталла, собар – кхетам.**

– Rashness is folly, patience is a talent.

• **Турпалхочун нана ца йоьлху.**

– The mother of the hero doesn't cry. Safe bind, safe find. Caution is the parent of safety.

• **Туьр-тоьпан чов йоьрзуш ю, меттан чов йоьрзуш яц.**

– A sabre/gun wound would heal but that of the tongue festers forever. Many words cut more than swords.

• **Паьхьене ладийгИнчух кьонах ца хилла.**

– He who thinks about consequences cannot be brave.

• **Хи чу ма вала, нека хууш вацахь.**

– Don't go into the river, if you can't swim.

• **Хьалха хьажаза ког ма баккха, тIехьа хьажаза дош ма ала.**

– Take no step before you look in front of you, utter no word before you look behind you.

• **Чохь майралла – арахь стешхалла.**

– Bravery at home, cowardice outside. Brave before a lamb, but a lamb before the brave.

• **Шен кетIехь нIаьна а хуьлу майра.**

– A cock is valiant on his own dunghill. Every dog is valiant at his own door.

Шина балдал арадаллалц хьан лай ду дош, арадели – хьо цуьнан лай

• **ву.**

– Until a word escapes from your lips, it is your slave; once it escapes, you become its slave.

• **Яьсса хIума чIогIа ека.**

– Empty vessels make the loudest sound.

• **Iаьхча – барзо боь, ца Iаьхча – Iуьно боь.**

– If you bleat, the wolf will carry you away; if you keep quiet, the shepherd will cut your throat. Damned if you do, and damned if you don't.

Work, utilitarianism, mutual benefit and sloth• **Аьхка мало – Iай хало.**

– Idleness in summer, torment in winter. They must hunger in winter that will not work in summer.

• **Аьхкенап цхьана дийио Iаьнан бутт кхобу.**

– A summer's day labour provides for a whole month of winter.

• **Болх бар – цхьа кьинхьегам, ца бар – ши кьинхьегам.**

– To work is only one hardship, not to work is two.

• **Ворда йоьхча – дечиг, сту белча – жижиг.**

– If the wagon breaks—wood, if the bull dies—meat.

• **Дан дезарг кханенга дехкинарг дезачух хьоьгуш ваьхна.**

– Never put off till tomorrow what may be done today.

• **Куьйго куьг дуьлу.**

– One hand washes another. You scratch my back and I'll scratch yours.

• **Охуш аьлларг оруш карийна.**

– One must reap as one has sown.

• **Сту оза ца хилча, цIа дерстана хир дац.**

– If the ox doesn't become emaciated, the family won't become fat.

• **Хазчу бIаьстенал юьзна гуьйре тоьлу.**

– A replenishing autumn is better than a beautiful spring.

• **Халонах ма кхера, аттаниг ма леха.**

– Don't be afraid of asperity, and don't look for the easy way out.

Knowledge, common-sense, wise men and fools• **БухIанна дийнахь са ца гарх, малхана бехк ма била.**

– The sun is not to be blamed if the owl doesn't see in the daylight.

• **Виран цIога льцнарг хе ваьхна, динан цIога льцнарг ваьлла.**

– He who grasps the tail of an ass will be drowned, and he who holds on to the tail of a horse will come off unhurt.

• **Вирна ша вир юйла ца хиъна, лерг лаьцча бен.**

– It was only when they pulled at his ear that the ass was reminded that he was an ass.

• **Гурахь сел карахь лекъ тоьлу.**

– A quail in the hand is better than a deer in autumn. A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush.

• **Дешар – серло, цадешар – бода.**

– Knowledge is light, ignorance is darkness.

• **Дийц-дийцанарш дерриг а дац бакъ хуьлушю.**

– Not everything that is said is true.

• **Зударша тIаргIа биттича, цхьогало шен цIога диттина.**

– Seeing the woman washing the wool, the vixen washed her tail. [Said of absurd imitation]

• **Коьртехь хъекъал ца хилча, когаша къахьогу.**

– When the head is empty, the legs must suffer.

• **Лиьр воцуш санна деша, вала кичча ваха.**

– Learn as if you will never perish, [and] always live as if ready to die.

• **Нахана даьккхинчу ор чу ша кхетта.**

– He that dug a hole for others fell in it himself. He that mischief hatches, mischief catches.

• **Тпехь стом ца хилча, диттана гIаж ца кхуссу.**

– If there is no fruit on the tree, don't throw a stick into it. You can't do the impossible. What cannot be cured must be endured.

• **«Хаац», «дац» – цхъа дош, «хиира», «дайра» – эзар дош.**

– 'I don't know' make 'one' word; 'I know, I saw' lead a thousand.

• **Хазчу дашо Iуьргара лаьхъа баьккхина.**

– A nice word enticed the snake out of its hole.

• **Хих ведда хъера кЈел иккхина.**

– He escaped from the water only to throw himself under the mill. Out of the frying-pan into the fire.

• **Хъокхах хЈоз хилла бац, вирбокъах дин хилла бац.**

– A stick won't bend to form a wheel rim, nor will an ass grow up to be a horse. What is bred in the bone will not go out of the flesh.

• **Јовдало яьккхина шаьлта майрачу стага яьккхинчүл кхераме ю.**

– A dagger drawn by the fool is more dangerous than that drawn by the brave.

Fate, outlook on life, human nature and the nature of things

• **Вочу дийнах дика де хилла, вочу стагах дика стаг ца хилла.**

– A rainy day may turn into a fine one, but a bad man never transforms into a good person. Can the leopard change his spots?

• **Газа йиъначу коьртах цЈе яьлла.**

– He who has eaten up the goat has his head on fire. An uneasy conscience betrays itself.

• **Генара зурма хазахета.**

– The distant *zurna* is (more) pleasant. The grass is always greener on the other side.

• **ЙогЈучу набарна гЈойла хъашт яц.**

– If you are sleepy, there is no need for a head for the bed.

• **Куьпчичо пхъегЈийн тЈам шена луъучу буллу.**

– The potter places the vessel handle wherever he wants.

• **Къанвелларг къон лур вац, велларг ден лур вац.**

– When we grow hoary, youth is forever gone, and if we perish, we shall never arise. [Reminiscent of 'The Song of Death']

• **Къуьнна къола дича, дела а велавелла.**

– When they robbed the thief, even God laughed.

• **Лам ламанах ца кхета, адам адамах кхета.**

– A mountain does not meet with a mountain, but man does meet with man.

• Литтана тIе маккхал хиъча, гуъйре тIекхачаран, билгало ю.

– The kite perched on the stook—[a sure sign that] autumn will soon be here.

• Маккхал тIехиъна колл а маърша яц лурвоьллачу стагана.

– Even the bush on which the kite perched fears the blood enemy. Once bitten twice shy.

• Нехан вонах ца кхийринарг шен диканах вийлина вац.

– He who has never dreaded evil doesn't know what joy is. He knows best what good is that has endured evil. Who has never tasted bitter knows not what is sweet.

• Стиглахъ марха йоцуш догIа доьлхур дац, кийрахъ бала боцуш бIаърг боьлхур бац.

– There is no rain without clouds, and tears won't well up without grief in the heart.

• ТIаьхъа дика доцуш, вон догIур дац.

– Every cloud has a silver lining.

• ЦIе йоцуш кIур хир бац.

– There's no smoke without fire.

• Юткъа йоллучохъ хеда.

– The chain is no stronger than its weakest link.

• Ялахъ ХIата ца ялахъа – Минга билггал велла.

– A shot to kill is taken at Kh'ata, but it misfires; (however) Minga perishes for certain. Whatever will be, will be. There is no escaping fate.

**On one's native land, home, familial relations, friends, neighbours
and ancestors**

• Ала йоIе, хаза несе.

– Say it to the daughter so that the daughter-in-law might hear. [North Caucasian way of dropping a hint to daughter-in-law]

• Аьтто мел бу – гергара, аьтто боьхча генара.

– A friend in need is a friend indeed.

• Барт боцу юрт а, барт боцу доьзал а хIаллакхилла.

– A village without unanimity and a family not in accord will both perish. There is strength in union.

• **Ваша воцу ваша – тІам боцу леча.**

– A brother without a brother is like a falcon without a wing.

• **Вочу тІаьхьено дай буьйцу.**

– A bad generation praises the ancestors (instead of the descendants).

• **Генарчу йиш-вешел гергара лулахо тоьлу.**

– Better a close neighbour than a distant relative.

• **Даймохк – ялсамане, нехан мохк – жоьжахате.**

– The fatherland is heaven, a foreign land is hell.

• **Дика лулахо – тешам, вон лулахо – эшам.**

– A good neighbour—that’s confidence; a bad neighbour—that’s a deficiency.

• **Дикачу кІантана доттагІий ца эшна.**

– A worthy man is never short of friends.

• **КІапта зуда ялийча ненан бойна букъ – йоІ марс яхча нисбслла.**

– The son gets married, the back of the mother bends; the daughter marries, it becomes straight (again).

• **Ненан оьгІазло ло санна ю: дуккха а догІа, амма сиха деша.**

– A mother’s anger is like snow: quick to come and quick to go.

• **Цџера вон дахча, арара дика ца догІу.**

– If evil comes out of the house, good will not come from without. Do as you would be done by. As the call, so the echo.

• **Шен цІа – цІийн цІа, – аьлла бен боьхначу хьозано.**

– ‘My house is a blood home,’ said the sparrow about its squalid nest. [Conveys love for one’s home]

• **Ши мостагІ цхъана тхов кІел ца тарло.**

– Two enemies cannot live under the same roof.

• **Эзар доттагІ верг ваьлла, эзер сту-етт берг вайна.**

– Having a thousand friends—you are saved; having a thousand head of cattle—you perish.

• **Юьртана а дерг ловзар ду.**

– That which concerns the entire village is a festival. Company in distress makes trouble less.

• **Іаж Іожана гена ца бужу.**

– An apple does not fall far from the apple-tree. Like father like son.

Health, wealth and cleanliness

• **Могашалла базарахь юккуш яц.**

– Health is not sold at the bazaar.

• **Могуш велахь вехаш ву.**

– Health is wealth.

• **Хох – исс дІовш, саьрамсекх – исс дарба.**

– Onion is nine poisons, garlic is nine remedies.

• **ЦІоналла – могашалла.**

– Cleanliness is health.

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Appendix 1

The Chechen *tukhums* and *taips*

Tukhums

1 Aekkkhii (Akkhi, Akkin): Consisted of Lam-Aekkkhii (Mountain Aekkkhii) and Aaree-Aekkkhii (Plains Aekkkhii), occupying western and eastern Chechnya, respectively. The Aaree-Aekkkhii, better known as ‘Akkintsi Chechens’, are considered a swarm of the Lam-Aekkkhii, and their domicile is called ‘Aukh’ (‘Aukhovsky District’). The Aekkkhii consisted of the Barchakhoi, Nokkkhoi, P-harchakhoi, P-harchoi, Vaeppii, Zhevoi and Z’ogoi *taips*. (For a historical account of the *tukhum*, refer to A.Adilsultanov 1996. For structure of the *tukhum*, see ‘Iz Aukha’, *Terskie vedomosti*, nos. 16 and 29, 1868, and no. 8, 1869.)

2 Chaberloi (Ch’eebarloi): Lived in southeast Chechnya, to the north of Sharo-Argun Valley. Constituent *taips* included D’ai, Makazhoi, Sadoi, Sandakhoi, Sikkkhakhoi and Sirkkhoi.

3 Chanti (Ch’aentii): Occupied the upper reaches of the Chanti-Argun, and were neighbours of the T’erloi. The *tukhum* comprised the Borzoi, Doerakhoi, Hacharoi, Khildeharoi, Kkhuokkhadoi, Tumsoi and Zumsoi (Bugharoi) *taips*.

4 Èrs(h)tkhoi: Also called ‘Karabulak(ov)’, the Èrstkhoi occupied the Fortanga Valley. Most members of this *tukhum* had emigrated to the Ottoman Empire by 1870, and it is now considered one of the smaller *tukhums*. The Èrstkhoi had been variously categorized as Chechens proper, Ingush, or a separate Vainakh ethnos. Like all other Chechens, they consider Nashkha in Chechnya as the birthplace of their tribe and Turpal Nokkho as their progenitor. They call themselves ‘Baloi’, and their ancestral domicile in Galanch’ozh ‘Aekkkha’ (‘Lam-Aekkkha’) or ‘Baloi-Lam’. They consider the Aekkkhii as their ancestors, and in some legends as a related tribe. The Karabulak-Galais (Galashevs) are descendants of a swarm of the Galoi *taip*, which moved to a district on the Assa and founded Galashki. The Èrstkhoi included the *taips* ‘Andaloi, Belkharoi, Galoi, Ghandaloi, Gharchoi, Hevkhakharoi, Merzhoi, Muzhakhoi, Ts’echoi and Yalkharoi. It also comprised the (detached) *neqes* ‘Alkha, Boka, Bulguchan, Ferg, Org and Vaelkha. (For more information on the Karabulak, refer to Yu.A. Aidaev (ed.) 1996, pp. 208–9.)

5 Malkhi (Maelkhii): Lived in southwestern areas of Chechnya bordering on Ingushetia and Georgia. Constituent *taips* included ‘Amkhoi, B’aestii, B’enastkhoi, Ch’arkhoi, Èrkhoi, Italchkhoi, Kamalkhoi, K’egankhoi, Kkhoratkhoi, Meshii, Sakankhoi and Teratkhoi.

6 Nokhchmekhkakhoi: The *taips* of this largest of all Chechen *tukhums* were located in the east, southeast and in parts of central Chechnya, with Vedeno as principal town. The Nokhchmekhkakhoi is considered the *proto-tukhum* of all Chechens, bestowing upon them their national name (‘Nokhchii’). In addition, the name of the region occupied by the *tukhum*, ‘Ichkeria’, was assumed by independent Chechnya. According to Harsha

Ram (1999, p. 1), Dudaev used Lermontov's designation 'Ichkeria' for Chechnya in acknowledgement of his favourite poet, but this was contradicted by Lyoma Usmanov. Constituent *taips* included 'Aliroi, Belghatoi, Benoi, Biltoi, Chartoi, Chermoi, Dishnii, Èghashbatoi, Èlistanzhkhoi, Ènakkhaloi, Ènganoi, Gendargenoi, Ghordaloi, Gunoi, Ikh'irkhoi, Ishkhoi, Kharachoi, Kurshaloi, Sesankhoi, Shuonoi, Ts'entaroï, Yalkhoi and Zandaqoi.

7 Sharoi: Living in the upper reaches of the Sharo-Argun, the Sharoi included the *taips* Hakmadoi, Khikhoi, Khoi, Kinkhoi, Rigakhoi and Shiqaroi.

8 Shatoi (Shuotoi): Lived in central Chechnya, in the lower reaches of the Chanti-Argun. Constituent *taips* included Ghattoi, Hakkoi, Keloï, Marshaloi, Nikhaloi, Nizhaloi, P-hamtoi, Saettoi, Varandoi and Vashandaroi.

9 T'erloi: Occupied the upper reaches of the Chanti-Argun. It included the *taips* B'avloi, Boeshnii, Èltp-harkhoi, Kkhenakhoi, Mats'arkhoi, Niqaroi, Oeshnii, Ottoi, Sanakhoi, Shuendii and Zh'airakhoi.

There were also some *taips* that did not have *tukhum* affiliations: Ch'inkhoi, Kei, M'aistoi, Nashkhoi, Peshkhoi (considered a *tukhum* in its own right by some) and Zurzaqkhoi. Elements of the Akhshpatoi, Biltoi, Gunoi and Varandoi *taips* rejected *shariat* and left their ancestral lands in the nineteenth century to settle on the Terek and form the Tyerekhskoï (Terkakhoi) *taip*. Other sources assert that the migration took place in the seventeenth century as an escape from forced Islamization.

The Chaberloi, Chanti, Sharoi, Shatoi and T'erloi *tukhums* were resettled further north in the lowlands upon return from exile in 1957, whilst the Malkhi were forcibly transferred to the plains. One result of this transmigration has been the blurring of *tukhum* boundaries. The anti-Russian Nokhchmekhkakhoi is the only *tukhum* that has clung tenaciously to its historic domicile.

Taips

Achaloï, Agishbatoi, Aitkkhaloi (Atkkhaloi), Akhshpatoi, 'Aliroi (Yaliroi, Kushbukhoi), 'Amkhoi, 'Andaloï, 'Andii, 'Arbii, Barchakhoi, B'aestii, B'avloi, Belghatoi, Belkharoi, Belkhoi, B'enastkhoi, Benoi, Betsakhoi, Bigakhoi, Biltoi, Borzoi, Boeshnii, Bosoi, Ch'arkhoi, Chartoi, Chergasii, Chermoi, Ch'inkhoi, Chungaroi, D'ai, D'aikhoi, Dattakhoi, Dishnii, Doerakhoi, Èghashbatoi, Èlistanzhkhoi, Èltp-harkhoi, Ènakkhaloi, Ènganoi, Èrkhoi, Èrsanoi, Galoi (Giloi), Gendargenoi, Ghandaloi, Gharchoi, Ghattoi, Ghazghumkii, Ghazkkhii, Ghoi, Ghordaloi, Ghumkii, Gilnoi, Goitii, Guerzhii, Gukhoi, Gunoi, Hacharoi, Hakkoi (Ts'ogankhoi), Hakmadoi, Hevkhakharoi, Hurkoi, Ikh'irkhoi (Ikh'iroi), Ilshanchoi, Ishkhoi, Italchkhoi, Kamalkhoi, K'egankhoi, Kei, Keloï, Khalkhii, Kharachoi, Khersanoi, Khikhoi, Khildeharoi, Khimoi, Kh'irii, Khoi, Khulandoi, Khurkhoi, Kinkhoi, Kkharatoi, Kkhenakhoi, Kkhoratkhoi, Kkhuokkhadoi, Kuloi, Kupchi, Kurshaloi, Lashkaroi, M'aistoi, Makazhoi, Marshaloi, Mats'arkhoi, Melardoï, Merloi, Merzhoi, Meshii, Mulqoi, Muzhakhoi (Muzhgankhoi), Nashkhoi, Nikarkhoi, Nikhaloi (Nikhoi), Niqaroi, Nizhaloi, Nokkkhoi, Nooghii, Oeshnii, Ottoi, Peshkhoi, P-hamtoi, P-harchakhoi, P-harchoi, Qureishii, Rigakhoi, Sadoi, Saerbaloi, Saettoi, Sahandoi, Sakankhoi, Sanakhoi, Sandakhoi, Selkhoi, Sesankhoi, Shiqaroi, Shirdoi, Shpirdoi, Shuendii (Shoendii), Shuonoi, Sikkkhakhoi, Sirkkhoi, Sueilii, Tarkkhoi, Teratkhoi, Tsadaharoi, Tsatsankhoi, Ts'echoi, Ts'entaroï (Sontroï), Tulkkhoi, Tumsoi, Turkoï,

Tyrekhsloi, Vaepii, Varandoi, Vashandaroi, Vashtaroi, Yalkharoi, Yalkhoi, Yamakhoi, Zandaqoi (Zantkhoi), Zh'airakhoi, Zhevoi, Zhugtii, Zlechoi, Z'ogoi, Zuerkhoi, Zumsoi (Bugharoi), Zurzaqkhoi (Zurzakkhoi).

Appendix 2

The Vainakh Pantheon

Universal gods

Angali-Yerdi	Minor deity.
Bolam-Deela	
Dartsa-Naana	Deity of blizzards and avalanches.
Deela (Daela in Ingush)	The supreme god. Equivalent to Greek Zeus, Roman Jupiter, Germanic Wodan and Circassian Theshxwe.
Deela-Malkh	Sun-God. Equivalent to Apollo.
Elta	Son of Deela and patron of the hunt. Corresponded to Greek Artemis and Circassian Mezithe.
Gal-Yerdi	Patron of cattle-breeders. Equivalent to Circassian Amisch and Ax'in.
Ishtar-Deela	Lord of the Subterranean Kingdom. Equivalent to Hades and Circassian Hedrix.
Khagya-Yerdi Maetskhal(i)	Lord of the rocks.
Maettsil (Maettazal; Matseli in Ingush)	God of agriculture and harvest. Equivalent to Greek Demeter and Circassian Theghelej.
Mattir-Deela	
Meler-Yerdi	Patron of plants and grain beverages.
Mokh-Naana	Goddess of wind. Corresponded to Roman Tempestates and Circassian Zchithe.
Molyz-Yerdi	God of war and patron of warriors. Equivalent to Greek Ares, Roman Mars and Circassian Tetertup.
P'eerska	Keeper of time (literally: 'Friday'). Probably of Greek origin.
Seela	God of stars, thunder and lightning, and patron of fire and hearth. Corresponded to Greek Hephaestus and Circassian Zchegwpathe and Sozeresh, patrons of family hearth. His thunderous exploits were reminiscent of those of Jupiter, Germanic Thor and Circassian Schible.
Seelasat	Daughter of Seela and protectress of virgins. Corresponded to Roman Virgo.
Sosul-Deela	

Taamash-Yerdi	Lord of fate (literally: 'lord of wonder').
Tkhaba	Later manifestation of Tkhya.
Tkhaba-Yerdi	
Tkhya	Ancient pagan deity.
Ts'uu	Generic name for deity.
Tusholi	Goddess of fertility.
Yerdi	Generic name for god.

Provincial deities

Bodtsokh-Yerdi	Venerated in Khuli.
Dolge	
Gurmet-Ts'uu	
Gushmala	
Itaz-Yerdi	
Magi-Yerdi	Adored by people of Chamchin, his day was celebrated in November on Mount Magi.
Mizr	Venerated by the Akkintsi in Galanch'ozh. Considered as a universal deity in some other accounts.
Zh'airakh-Deela	Worshipped in Zh'airakh in Chamchin once every winter.

Clan idols

Albi-Yerdi	Venerated in Aga-Ghaala on the Assa.
Beni-Seela	Worshipped by the Benoi (<i>taip</i>). Lost importance to the more 'powerful' Maettsil.
Erdzeli	
Morch-Seela	
P-hamt-Yerdi	Venerated by the P-hamtoi (<i>taip</i>) in Zh'airakh in November.
Tumga-Yerdi	Patron of Tumgoi village in Chamchin. His festival was celebrated for three whole days.

Familial patrons

Ausha-Seela

Temple near Albi-Yerdi on the Assa.

Dik-Seela

Appendix 3

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Notes

Introduction

- 1 'Vainakh' (*vai*=‘our’ in its inclusive sense, as opposed to ‘tkho’, which designates the exclusive sense, *nakh*=‘people’) is a collective self-designation used by the Chechens and the kindred Ingush and Kist.
- 2 A seminal work that presents a detailed model of Chechen society is that of A.Lieven (1998). It describes how present society departs from the classical norms. However, the book must be read with due care, as many contradictions and undue assumptions had been made, mainly the amazing assertion that ‘before the arrival of the infidel Russians the Chechens had never had any close contact at all with any major or serious state’ (p. 331). In fact, the Chechens had intimate contacts with Georgia for centuries before the devastating Mongol invasion of the thirteenth century AD. The Chechens themselves did establish kingdoms and principalities in the Middle Ages, not to mention earlier city-states and empires. This present work has the ambitious aim of qualifying such sweeping statements.
- 3 ‘Nakh’ designates the Vainakh and the related Tsova-Tush (Bats), who live in Georgia.
- 4 The terms ‘Caucasian’, ‘white’ and ‘European’ have become synonymous thanks to the German anthropologist Johann Blumenbach (1752–1840), who identified the peoples of the Caucasus as the embodiments of his ideal of physical beauty and named the European race after them. According to him, Mount Caucasus was the cradle of humanity, with inhabitants still adhering to the primeval paragon, with non-white races being degenerations from the ideal. This theory was discredited, yet the association between the terms has lingered in popular tradition.
- 5 According to Sergei V.Rjabchikov, the text on the earthenware pot made in Tmutarakan reads: ‘To the Qwschhe Mountain [Circassia] (it takes) four days.’
<<http://public.kubsu.ru/~usr02898/s11.htm>>

1

People and land

- 1 See M.Vasmer, *Russisches etymologisches Wörterbuch III*, Heidelberg, 1958.
- 2 The term ‘Tsova-Tush’ is used herein, as ‘Bats’ might be conceived as pejorative by the people designated by it, although it is commonly used in literature.
- 3 For a powerful and compelling analysis of post-Soviet reorientation of Chechen nationalism and its relationship to the national historical narrative, refer to M.Gammer, 2002. The ethos of Chechenness in a nutshell is found in L.Usmanov, 1999a.
- 4 Russian authorities proposed two dynamics to explain the unexpectedly high figure, namely the return of Chechen exiles in the early 1990s (counteracting Russian emigration) and the extremely high birth rate of the Chechens.
- 5 For a comprehensive treatment of flora and fauna in Chechnya, see I. (Yu.) Aliroev, 2001.
- 6 For extra details on topic, refer to Yu.A.Aidaev, 1996, pp. 73–82.
- 7 Ichkeria is roughly made up of the present-day Nozhai-Yurt and Vedeno districts.

- 8 The centres of the districts are usually the towns of the same name, except for the Nadterechny District, whose centre is at Znamenskoe.
- 9 Groznaya was renamed Grozny in 1870, as it was transformed into a town, but still Chechens were forbidden residence in it. The Chechen name for Grozny had been Sulzha Ghaala, but this was changed to Zhovkh'ar (= Pearl) (Ghaala) in 1997, after independent Chechnya's first (martyred) president.

2

History from the earliest to the end of the eighteenth century AD

- 1 It is a matter of speculation as to how much North Caucasian resistance to Russian aggression had contributed to the creation of instability in Russian society and the eventual downfall of tsarism. Perhaps a point can be made that Russia's obsession with the Caucasus has hampered its healthful historical progress to no small measure.
- 2 For more information on the Kayakent and Kharachoi cultures, refer to V.I.Markovin, 1969, and 'Kaiakent-Khorochoi Culture', in *The Modern Encyclopedia of Russian and Soviet History*, vol. 15, no. 144, Academic International Press, 1997.
- 3 For more details of Scythians and Sarmatians in the North Caucasus, refer to V.G. Petrenko, 1995, and M.Abramova, 1995 and 1997.
- 4 I.Velikovsky and R.H.Hewsen suggested that this should be adjusted to eleventh-ninth century BC. If this chronological shift of five centuries is accepted, then the end of the Hurrians ties in neatly with the establishment of the Urartian State in the ninth century BC. See R.H.Hewsen, 'Eastern Anatolia and Velikovsky's Chronological Revisions, I, (II)', *Kronos*, vol. 1 (4), no. 3 (1), 1975 (1978).
- 5 The relationship of the Hattians and the (kindred?) Kaskians (Karkisa; origin of Cherkess?), purported ancestors of the Circassians and Abkhazians, might provide a clue on the Nakh-Northwest Caucasian connection.
- 6 This suffix is central to the Hurrian-Nakh connection. The Hurrians called the Tigris 'Arantsakhi' ('Lowland River'). The Chorokhi ('Country River') was named by the Hurrian Makhelons and Khalibs, who colonized the Western Caucasus. The ancient name of the Terek, Lomekhi, is interpreted as 'Lam-Khi' ('Mountain River'), and the Liakhvi (Leuakhi) as 'Glacier River'.
- 7 See K.Tuite (1996b) for a glimpse of (Georgian) research on 'Georgian invaders and Nakh autochthones', and a reference to a Nakh substrate in Northeast Georgian dialects. Tuite is more inclined to explain Nakh 'loans' as a result of close neighbourly relations, as opposed to 'the scenario of a massive displacement of one linguistic community by another'.
- 8 For more information on Gargareans and their written language, refer to Y.Jaffarov, 2001. The scholarly consensus is that Udi, a NE Caucasian language that is related to Nakh, is the nearest modern language to Gargarean and Caucasian Albanian.
- 9 Amazon is explained by some scholars as deriving from Circassian *maze*=moon. It is thought that the female warriors doubled as moon priestesses.
- 10 For a modern translation of the chronicles, see R.W.Thomson, 1996.
- 11 Cf. with 'Ghlighvi', Georgian name for the Ingush, whose self-designation is 'Ghalghai'.
- 12 Carpini's accounts can be found in C.R.Beazley, 1967, and C.Dawson, 1980.
- 13 Evidence of Kabardian domination in western Vainakh territories in the latter Middle Ages is provided by Circassian onomastics and toponyms, for example, the village of Psedakh (*psidaxe*=beautiful river) in the Malgobek District of Ingushetia.

3

History from the Russian-Caucasian War to the Second World War

- 1 Many legends arose on Mansur's origin, the most exotic being that he was an Italian knight-errant bent on rolling back the dark shadow of Russia.
- 2 According to M.Gammer (1994a, pp. 39–40), Mansur did not establish the Naqshabandi order in the Caucasus, but that this was done later by the Naqshabandi-Khalidis.
- 3 In his analysis of the legacy of the first imam, M.Gammer (1994a, p. 64) stated that he 'endeavoured to accustom [the mountaineers] to long manoeuvres beyond their immediate areas'. This should be contrasted against the Northwest Caucasians' war ethos of only defending their local turf against the Russians, and their inability to orchestrate their military campaigns in terms of long-term strategies.
- 4 For a bibliography on Shamil and the *murids*, refer to M.Gammer, 1991, and T.Tatlok, 1959.
- 5 Tasho's *mazar* in Sayasan was maliciously blown up by the Russians in 2002 'because he fought against Russia in the nineteenth century'.
- 6 It is suggested that the duality of Chechen society in the cultural, political, economic spheres has its origin, or at least became more pronounced, in this period. The Sufi dichotomy was to surface two decades later with the rise of the Qadiri movement.
- 7 It is to this clan that Doku Zavgaev, the first Chechen president of the Chechen-Ingush ASSR, belonged. Although all Chechens were subjected to cruel deportation in 1944, when it came to co-opting the Chechens it was *taips* like the Tyerekhsloi that proved more amenable to persuasion. According to Federal Counter-Intelligence Service (FSK) reckoning, the 1991 Chechen 'revolution' was initiated by the traditionally anti-Russian clans against the domination of pro-Russian Chechen elements (A.Lieven, 1998, pp. 336–7).
- 8 Full treatment of Shamil's incursion into Kabarda can be found in M.Gammer, 'Ghabarta', 1994a, pp. 162–71.
- 9 M.Gammer, 1994a, p. 181. According to Gammer, it had dawned on Shamil that his limited resources were no match to those of Russia, and that there was need for divine intervention.
- 10 Notwithstanding the snubbing of the Allies, Shamil's exploits had made him very popular indeed in the West, especially in America. He excited a wave of romanticism in Victorian Britain, and a dance tune, *The Shamil Schottische*, was written after him.
- 11 The date given by other sources for the surrender of Shamil, 25 August, is reckoned according to the Old Style. The Soviet historiography of Shamil was a reflection of the shifting attitude of the authorities towards the history of the struggle of the North Caucasians against tsarist Russia, since the imam had become a symbol of this struggle. For details, see M.Gammer, 1992a; P.Henze, 1958a; T.Tatlok, 1959; L.R.Tillet, 1962; and R.Traho, 1956. It is also worth noting that the Chechens have always had an ambivalent attitude towards Shamil, many, significantly, not ranking him high in their list of war heroes. Shamil's severity and uncompromising stance against Chechen traditions and beliefs drove some clans into the Russian lap. These clans, in some sense, have been the co-opted section of society ever since—the soft underbelly of Chechnya, from a nationalist point of view. They opposed Dudaev's regime in the early 1990s, and formed Moscow's proxy army. Nonetheless, Chechnya officially celebrated the bicentennial of Shamil's birth in July 1997, when an impressive memorial was inaugurated in Vedeno.
- 12 S.A.Isaev, 'Traitorous Turkish Policy during the Organization of Deportation of the Mountaineers from the Caucasus,' *Orga Magazine*, no. 4, 1988, Grozny, p. 90. W.Kolarz (1953, p. 186) gave the high figure of 39,000 as the number of Chechen emigrants in 1865, more than a quarter of the population at the time. The story of this group is movingly portrayed by A.A.Aidamirov in his short novel *A Brother's Testament*.
- 13 For an account of Circassian defeat and mass exodus, see A.Jaimoukha, 2001, pp. 68–70.
- 14 For a chronicle of the Chechen uprising, see 'Khronika chechenskogo vosstaniya 1877', *Terski sbornik*, Vladikavkaz, no. 1, 1890.

- 15 A.Avtorkhanov, 1992[a], p. 152. On 11 May 1984, US Congressman Robert Roy addressed the House of Representatives on the anniversary of the proclamation of the Mountain Republic. The Congress documents also included 'Brief Historical Note on the Struggle by the Oppressed Peoples of the Northern Caucasus for Independence'.
- 16 For more details on the uprising, see M.Bennigsen-Broxup, 1992c.
- 17 For more on this secretive episode, refer to N.Bethell's *The Last Secret: Forcible Repatriation to Russia, 1944–1947*, London: Basic Books, 1974; and N.Tolstoy's *Victims of Yalta*, 1978 (title of American edition: *The Secret Betrayal*, Scribner).

4

History from the deportation to the 'Second' Chechen War

- 1 Major works on the deportation in English include R.Conquest, 1970, and A.Nekritch, 1978. For a more recent study taking account of publications by Russian historians since 1989, see W.Flemming, 1998. See B.G.Williams, 1999, for impact of deportation on Chechen collective memory. For Russian sources, see N.F.Bugai's works and those of V. N.Zemskov.
- 2 Earlier major deportations took place in the early 1790s, middle 1820s, early 1830s, 1836–37, 1859–60, 1864–65, 1878 and 1913.
- 3 NKVD sources give 380,397 Chechens and Ingush as settled in Kazakhstan, 83,617 in Kirghizia, 1,357 in Vologda Oblast, 1,207 in Kostroma Oblast and 787 in Ivanovo Oblast.
- 4 A.Solzhenitsyn's *The Gulag Archipelago* offers graphic description of the situation of the Chechens in their exile. More recent works on the physical and cultural survival of the Chechens in exile include those of M.Pohl, 2002, and B.Brauer, 2002.
- 5 In the long run, these districts were depleted of their Cossack inhabitants, who removed to the safety of the Stavropol Krai during the 1990s, thus thwarting the nefarious scheme. Suggestions for resolving the current war included the reincorporation of these three districts into the Stavropol Krai and isolating the rump republic into submission.
- 6 On 26 February 2004, the European Parliament recognized the (1944) deportation of the Chechen people as an act of genocide.
- 7 This should be contrasted with the situation in the other non-Russian union and autonomous republics, where the Soviets instituted the policy of indigenization, such that the leadership of the republic was given to a local, and the second-in-command, usually a Russian, appointed by Moscow.
- 8 Avtorkhanov, who was arrested during Stalin's purges on accusations of being 'an enemy of the people', emigrated to the West in 1943. His books, one of the first of which was *Revolution and Counter-Revolution in Chechnya* (1933), were avidly read by Soviet dissidents. A hero in his native land, he was rehabilitated in post-Soviet Chechnya. He died in 1997.
- 9 It is on this date that Chechen Independence Day is celebrated. Although state sovereignty was declared a couple of months later, the ousting of the loathsome Communists was deemed a more important event to mark for posterity. In 2002, Akhmad Kadyrov, head of the pro-Russian Chechen administration, declared this day as 'Republic Day' or 'Day of Civil Accord and Unity', carefully adding that this had no connotation whatsoever with dissociation from Russia.
- 10 Dudaev was married to a Russian woman, and his career was enacted in a Soviet setting, so it would seem that he had no personal grudge against the Russians, despite being a member of the 'exile generation'.
- 11 There is some evidence that Raduyev, who would later assume the prickly role of a thorn in Maskhadov's side, had been acting as an agent of the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD)

- throughout his notorious career, notwithstanding the FSB's trumpeting his capture in March 2000 as a 'triumph'. For more on Raduyev, refer to A.McGregor, 2002.
- 12 More details in S.J.Main, 'North Caucasus Military District: Defending Russia's Interests in the Caucasus', in A.C.Aldis (ed.), 2000, pp. 38–64.
- 13 For more details on the fractious situation in Chechnya and the fractures that afflicted Chechen society during the second period of independence, refer to M.Lanskoy, 2003.
- 14 Not to be confused with the 'Caucasian Confederation', which was established in 1992 by Dudaev and Zviad Gamsakhurdia, ex-president of Georgia, to encompass political movements in the North Caucasus, Georgia and Azerbaijan.
- 15 It is most probable that the gruesome beheadings of Westerners were perpetrated by groups associated with Wahhabi leaders Arbi Baraev and the Akhmadov brothers, all of whom thought to have been closely associated with the FSB. See *Chechnya Weekly*, vol. 2, issue 25, 28 June 2001; *Moskovskie Novosti*, 8 August 2000; and *Obschaya Gazeta*, 3 August 2000.
- 16 In a personal interview with the author conducted in Amman in October 2002, Magomed Atsaev, pro-Maskhadov Chechen Minister of Communal Affairs, stated that Basaev was paid two million dollars by Boris Berezovsky, an oil and media tycoon with close ties with the Kremlin at the time, to carry out the incursion into Daghestan, as part of the mogul's scheme to promote Vladimir Putin to Russian leadership. Berezovsky himself would later blame the bombings on the FSB. In an article published in *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* on 12 October 1999, Vitaly Tretyakov was emphatic that the Chechens were lured by the Russian Special Forces into Daghestan in order to provide a pretext for launching a military offensive in Chechnya and that the operation was sanctioned by the Kremlin. The same theme was echoed in Aleksandr Prokhanov's *Mr. Hexogen* (2002). A case can be made that the decision to commit Russian forces to Chechnya was taken before the incursions into Daghestan and the bombings. It is noteworthy that no Chechens were ever charged with the bombings, and the question of who was behind the terrorist explosions remains open.
- 17 According to R.Khalilov (2000), the main causes of the Russian invasion were the overwhelming urge of the Russian armed forces to settle the score for the 1996 defeat, the desire of the Russian ruling dynasty for Putin to take over power, the failure of the Chechens to establish political stability in their country, and the lame response of the international community to the 1994–1996 War.
- 18 'Chechnya Diary. Day Four: Mud and Madness', *Time Europe*, 21 February 2000.

5

Politics and current affairs

- 1 It would seem that the traditionally anti-Russian Benoi *taip*, to which Kadyrov belonged, had made a collective decision not to join the Chechen resistance on account of the inordinate influence exerted on it by 'Islamist hardliners', perceived as antithetical to ancient traditions and Sufism. Thus, whilst the plain-mountain opposition was the main characteristic of the internal Chechen component of the 'First' war, the Wahhabi wedge splintered the solidary stance of the mountain tribes in the 'Second'. Kadyrov relied mainly on the members of his clan to build his power base in Chechnya, to the discontent of other excluded *taips*. In a wider context, followers of the Kunta Haji *tariqat*, which included Kadyrov, had been either antipathetic or openly hostile towards Chechen resistance, again for the same reason. Nevertheless, some members of the Benoi *taip* maintained their anti-Russian stance throughout the 'Second' War, acting as apologists for the *taip* and going out of their way to explain that it was rather Kadyrov's *neqe*, a sub-clan of the Benoi *taip*, that had turned

- against the Chechen nation. See, for example, 'Entretien avec Oumar Khanbiev', in F. Longuet Marx (ed.), 2003, pp. 102–3.
- 2 S. Vaknin, 'Afghan Myths: An Interview with Anssi Kullberg, Part III', *The Amateur Pundit*, 3 December 2001. According to the journalist Carlotta Gall (*New York Times*, 1 January 2002), not a single Chechen was found among the thousands of Taliban fighters captured by American forces. See also A. McGregor, 'Ghost Soldiers: Osama Bin Laden's Chechen Legion', *Shout!*, June/July 2002.
 - 3 The alleged presence of Gelaev's men in the Gorge was a bone of contention between Georgia and Russia, and it led the former to ask the USA in 2002 to provide special operations military instructors to train its troops to handle the situation. One Russian estimate put the number of Chechen fighters in the Gorge at up to 700. Gelaev fell in battle in Daghestan on 28 February 2004.
 - 4 For the power bases of Maskhadov, Basaev and Udugov, see C.W. Blandy, August 1998, Annex A.
 - 5 According to the International Institute for Strategic Studies publication *The Military Balance 2003–2004*, the Russian forces in Chechnya suffered 4,749 casualties (13 per day) between August 2002 and August 2003, the 'highest figure in one year since the current Chechen conflict began,' casting serious doubt on Russia's repeated assertions that the war was over and that the situation in Chechnya was returning to normal.
 - 6 For text of the peace initiative, see *The Russian-Chechen Tragedy: The Way to Peace and Democracy*. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Chechen Republic-Ichkeria, February 2003. Available online: <http://www.chechnya-mfa.info/paper/en_text.pdf> (accessed 1 March 2004). On 26 February 2004, the European Parliament requested the European Commission to study this plan.
 - 7 See the reports by Human Rights Watch, February, April and June 2000, respectively.
 - 8 See, for example, Human Rights Watch, 'Last Seen...: Continued "Disappearances" in Chechnya', *HRW Reports*, vol. 14, no. 3 (D), April 2002.
 - 9 One is tempted to let one's imagination go and hope that the British judge who decided the fate of Zakayev—effectively saving him from almost certain death in a Russian prison cell—would also be given the task of looking into the case of the Chechen nation on the same principles after calling for a stay of execution of the collective death sentence being administered with such relish by the Russians.
 - 10 See C. Oğuz (1999) for the role played by the Confederation in the 1990s.
 - 11 The Chechen detachment was led by Shamil Basaev.
 - 12 A. Legolasov, 'The Philosopher Offended the General', *The Express Chronicle*, no. 47 (602), 20 December 1999.
 - 13 In an interview conducted by the author in October 2002 with Isa Temirov, Acting Chairman of the Parliament of the Chechen Republic-Ichkeria, he had this message to the West: 'To all peoples of the West! Please exert every effort and influence to stop this wilful genocide. Everything in our republic has been levelled to the ground and turned to ashes. But there are still people there suffering the torments of war and deprivation. Please, save these souls! Don't let them kill off our nation!' Temirov would later turn his coat and be stripped of his authority. A few weeks before the 2003 Chechen presidential elections, Temirov issued an impeachment of Maskhadov. However, a majority of the surviving Chechen MPs (elected in 1997) published a statement denying that they had anything to do with Temirov's sycophantic antics.
 - 14 For a discussion on Iranian attitude towards the war in Chechnya, refer to A. William Samii, 'Iran and Chechnya: Realpolitik at Work', *Middle East Policy*, vol. 8, no. 1, March 2001.
 - 15 More details in: 'Descendants of Deported Chechens Demand Return of their Land', *Jamestown Foundation Monitor*, vol. 4, no. 15, 27 August 1998.
 - 16 P. Jinchardze, 'Several Aspects of the Caucasus Regional Security Problems in the Light of Global Political Background', presentation made at The Development and Peace Foundation

Workshop: The Precarious Transformation of War-Torn Societies, 9–11 November 2000, Bad Honnef.

- 17 For a venomous account by a Russian on Chechen-Georgian relations, read A. Skakov, 'On Two Sides of the Border: Georgia and Chechnia', *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, no. 2, 2000.

6

Society

- 1 See, for example, P. Golovinsky, 1878, and I.M. Popov, 1870.
- 2 It could be that 'vaer' was the original term that was displaced by 'taip'.
- 3 Throughout their history, the Chechens readily welcomed new citizens, as increased numbers spelled more power. Representatives of many nationalities settled with the Chechens and formed clans that in time became integral constituents of the nation. Some twenty 'non-autochthonous' *taips* are nowadays distinguishable, the origins of most of which being readily inferred from the names: 'Andii (swarm of the Andi people of Daghestan), 'Arbii (Arab), Chergasii (Circassian), Ghazghumkii (Kazikumukh, or the Lak from Daghestan), Ghumkii (Kumyk), Guerzhii (Georgian), Gunoi (Terek Cossack), Kh'irii (Ossetian), Kupchii (Kapucha of Daghestan), Melardoi, Nooghii (Nogai), Sueilii (Daghestani, mainly Andi-Dido), Tarkkhoi (town of Tarki in Daghestan), Tsadaharoi (Tsudakhar, or the Dargwa from Daghestan), Turkoii (of Turkic origin), Zhugtii (Jewish), Zumsoi (Georgian). Other *taips* were formed from Russians (Ghazkkhii), Poles and Ukrainians. The Cossacks were referred to as 'Ghaalaghazkkhii' (literally: 'Town-Russians'), the Kalmyks as 'Ghalmakkhii', and the Khevsurs as 'Pkhi'. A number of Germans were assimilated into the Chechen ethnons during the 1944–1957 exile.
- 4 *Agence France-Presse*, 29 July 2003. For more details on the long-living Vainakh, refer to B.G. Kindarov, 1971.
- 5 The spouse of a prince was referred to as 'stuu' and was addressed as 'stulla'.
- 6 For more details on Chechen feudal structure, see Ya.Z. Akhmadov, 2001, pp. 260–72.
- 7 Kabarda took up the slack left by the spent Tatars in the Central North Caucasus and established a large state that reached its zenith in the sixteenth century.
- 8 For more details on Men's Houses and Unions in the North Caucasus and Daghestan, refer to Yu. Karpov, 1996, and R. Chenciner, 1997, pp. 28–32, respectively.
- 9 There is an ethnographic map of Chechnya showing *tukhums* and *taips* as they existed in the eighteenth century in Ya.Z. Akhmadov, 2001, p. 247.
- 10 The number of *taips* with eponymous villages went down from 25 before 1944 to only 17 at present, namely 'Aliroi, Belghatoi, Benoi, Dattakhoi, Èlistanzkhkoi, Ènganoi, Èrsanoi, Ishkhkoi, Kharachoi, Kurshaloi, Makazhoy, Nikhaloi, Sharoi, Ts'entaroii, Vashandaroii, Yalkhoy and Zandaqoi. As the Chechens came down from the mountains and began to exploit the plains, clan relations were largely maintained. This led to the phenomenon of some kindred villages being at considerable distances from each another. For example, the Benoi live in Benoi and Benoi-Vedeno in the southeast and in the somewhat distant Benoi-Yurt in the Nadterechny District. The Belghatoi and Ts'entaroii have two eponymous villages each.
- 11 The case of the North Ossetians and Ingush was complicated by Russian support for the former, who had flouted traditional wisdom.
- 12 For an idea of the traditional legal system of the Vainakh, refer to N.N. Kharuzin, 1888.
- 13 A Circassian word (*themade*=leader, elder, toast-master) that was adopted by neighbouring peoples, including the Georgians, Cossacks and Russians.
- 14 Other accounts maintain that parents usually lived with one of their sons in their old age.

- 15 A.Lieven, 1998, pp. 336–7. Lieven slightly mixes his *tukhums* and *taips*. For example, the Ėrstkhoi and Malkhi, two of the nine *tukhums*, are designated as *taips*, and the Tyerekhskoï is variously treated as a *taip* and *tukhum* (pp. 193, 336–7). On the other hand, there has never been a cast-iron rule as to which entities should be designated as *tukhums*.
- 16 There is a model of the behaviour of Chechen society in times of war and peace in M. Emerson and N.Tocci (eds), 2000. For an interpretation of Chechen politics in terms of the *tukhum-taip* system, see D.Makarov and V.Batuev, 1996.
- 17 According to M.A.Mamakaev (1973), ‘The demise of an individual was not considered as a misfortune, because it was pre-ordained by Deela, the supreme god. It was the threat to a *taip*’s existence that was regarded as the highest evil.’
- 18 Cf. with the Norse ritual of ‘mingling the blood’ in the amalgam of the foster-brotherhood ceremonies.
- 19 According to an ancient custom, the right arm, ear or head of a dead enemy was severed and kept as a war trophy (*ts’etta*).
- 20 In a personal interview with the author, the Chechen philologist Zuhra Shishani stated that the most prevalent traditional naming scheme was for the name of the grandfather to come first, followed by the father’s name, and then the first name, with the name of the (territory of the) *taip* mentioned if further introduction were necessary. A married woman usually retained her pre-marital patronymic (*deen ts’e*). A.Lieven (1998, p. 422) noted that ‘surnames as such were however only introduced under Russian and especially Soviet rule’.
- 21 The Beno and Zandaqi family names were the only exceptions found by the author.
- 22 Or, could this be yet another elaborate Chechen survival mechanism: to infiltrate the pro-Moscow security power structures and then turn against the Russians when the time is right? One learns to keep an open mind when it comes to consider things Chechen, as they are not always what they seem.
- 23 Read, for example, the accounts of O.Khanbiev and A.Vagapov in F.Longuet Marx (ed.), 2003, p. 102 and pp. 109–10, respectively.
- 24 F.Mereu, ‘Russia: War Destroyed Chechnya’s Clan Structure (1)’, *RFE/RL Weekday Magazine*, 4 January 2002.
- 25 S.Lambroschini, 2000.

7

Economy

- 1 For more details on (Soviet) industries in the Chechen-Ingush ASSR, refer to Yu.A. Aidaev, 1996, pp. 117–30.
- 2 An assessment (in Russian) of the detrimental effects of the first war on the natural environment can be found in M.Ch.Zalikhonov and M.I.Tisov, ‘Preliminary Evaluation of the Natural Environment of Chechen Republic’, *Nauchnaya misl Kavkaza*, vol. 3, 1998.
- 3 Grozneftegaz, the company with virtual monopoly on oil extraction in Chechnya, is 51 per cent owned by Rosneft, the rest by the Chechen Republic. The company’s revenues reached 1.84 billion roubles in 2001.
- 4 Cf. with total of some 430 million tons extracted during more than 100 years of oil production in Chechnya.

8

Religion and beliefs

- 1 Research has been done to try to establish a connection between proto-Indo-European and proto-Northwest Caucasian (and by extension proto-Northeast Caucasian) that goes back some twelve millennia. See, for example, J.Colarusso, 1997.
- 2 Details (in Georgian) in K.Sikharulidze, 2000.
- 3 E.B.Tylor, *Primitive Culture*, London, 1891.
- 4 H.Spencer, *The Principles of Sociology*, London, 1876–97.
- 5 J.T.Driscoll, ‘Totemism’, *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 14, 1912.
- 6 For comparison with the Hurrian Pantheon, refer to relevant articles by E.Laroche in Y.Bonnefoy (compiler), *Mythologies, Vol. I*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991. For comparison with the Uartian Pantheon, see M.Salvini, 1989. For details on the Circassian Pantheon, refer to A.Jaimoukha, 2001, pp. 138–47 and 318–19. For a reconstruction of the Daghestani Pantheon and Pandemonium, refer to R.Seferbekov and R.Ismailov, 2000.
- 7 There is evidence that at one point of their civilizational development the proto-Nakh had a ‘hearth-city’ as the centre of their universe, which may well have been Tushpa, the capital of Urartu. In Chechen, *tush*=hearth cavity, *p-ha*=settlement, *pkha*=artery. Tushpa is also interpreted as the land of the storm-god Teshup of the Hurrians and Urartians.
- 8 Significantly, ‘z’ee’ also means ‘connection, bond’.
- 9 Cf. to Mesopotamian goddess Ishtar’s descent to the Underworld, the realm of her sister Ereshkigal.
- 10 Deela preserved his supremacy even after the introduction of Islam, and was never really completely supplanted by ‘Allah’, being still invoked in supplications by present-day Nakh.
- 11 In Svan folklore, Dæl was the goddess of game animals. According to K.Tuite (2001), it is almost certainly related to Deela, underlining the cultural proximity of the Nakh and North Kartvelian nations. For a corpus of Caucasian hunt legends and their place in Eurasian mythology, see K.Tuite, 1997.
- 12 In Chechen, Nart=*naert*, *naertkhoo*, or *naert-èrstkhoo*.
- 13 Detailed accounts of Pantheonic rites and rituals can be found in B.Dalgat, 1893.
- 14 For a comparative work on Pkharat, refer to R.Nashkoev, 2002. In the Circassian legend of Tilala, the chained hero acted as the saviour of the world when the time for it to perish drew near. Some authorities suggested that this might be the source of the concept of Christian Redemption. For a Greek version of the chained hero, refer to P.Roche, *Aeschylus: Prometheus Bound*, Bolchazy-Carducci Publishers, 1962, 1990.
- 15 In Chechen, ‘*khaeshtig*’ means both torch and lightning. In A.G.Matsiev (1961), ‘lightning’ and ‘rainbow’ are rendered ‘*s(t)eelakhaeshtig*’ and ‘*s(t)eela’ad*’, respectively, the first element in each word being interpreted as ‘divine’.
- 16 The beatification of lightning victims was widespread in the North Caucasus. For an account of beliefs and rituals of other peoples of the North Caucasus associated with lightning strikes, refer to K.Tuite, 2000.
- 17 The name of Seela’s wife, Furki, a goddess in her own right, was used by astrogeographers to designate a feature on Venus as ‘Furki Mons’ (‘Furki Mountain’), later changed to ‘Furki Tholus’ (‘Furki Hill’). This is most probably the Ingush version of the appellation, as Chechen native words do not have ‘f’ in them, which letter may be considered as a ‘shibboleth’ for outsiders to differentiate between Chechen and Ingush speakers.
- 18 Cf. with Circassian *du*, a large wattledepository for corn-cobs or grain storehouse.

- 19 In classical Greece, the swallow was considered as the harbinger of spring. It was associated with resurrection and the Mother Goddess and it augured the auspicious return of Dionysus with new growth on the vine. The cuckoo was the archetypal herald of spring in Europe.
- 20 His *Book IV* (pp. 71–6) depicts the rite of horse burial with a deceased Scythian king.
- 21 Cf. with *Tkhya* or *Tkha*, an ancient Nakh pagan deity, and Circassian *The*, a deity of the Pantheon.
- 22 For a description of a nineteenth-century Kist Christian-cum-pagan religious feast in honour of Yerdi, see Nesvitski, 1847.
- 23 This section was contributed by JonArno Lawson. For a bibliography of Soviet sources on Sufism, refer to A.Bennigsen, 1983. For English and Spanish sources on contemporary Sufism, visit <<http://www.ishkbooks.com/>> and refer to the books of Idries Shah.
- 24 ‘*Vird*’ is the Chechen rendering of Arabic ‘*wird*’=‘portion of the Qur’an recited with consistency’. According to A.G.Matsiev (1961), ‘*vird*’=‘commandment’.
- 25 According to Y.Z.Akhmadov (2000), Kunta was a Chechen of the Gukhoi *taip*. However, the general consensus is that this view is incorrect, and that only his mother had Chechen connections. Kunta’s followers still consider it taboo to utter his name.
- 26 According to A.G.Matsiev (1961), ‘*turkkh*’=‘town crier, herald’.
- 27 A (video) film of a *zikh* dance in the ruins of Grozny was winner of Best Dance Documentary at the Monaco Dance Forum’s Dance Screen 2000.
- 28 Kh.Deniiev, ‘Religion [sic] Freedom in Chechnya’, report presented at *International Human Rights Conference*, Budapest, March 1997.
- 29 *Ibid*.

9

Customs and traditions

- 1 For an account of Circassian codes of conduct, see A.Jaimoukha, 2001, pp. 172–89.
- 2 *Adat* (from Arabic ‘*ādāt*=customs) is a relatively recent introduction. The Daghestani Avar and Kaitag versions of the code were written down in the seventeenth century by Ummu-Khan (Kh.M.Khashaev, 1948) and Rustem Khan, respectively. For more details on customary law, refer to V.K.Gardanov, 1960. For comparison with Daghestani customs, see N.Lvov, 1867, and P.G.Przhetslavsky, 1860, 1867.
- 3 From chechnyafree.ru website, from newspaper *Daimekhkan Az*.
- 4 The deprivations of war caused sumptuous feasts to be replaced by decidedly more frugal affairs, with defaulting on offerings of food not being unknown. It should be noted that the Wahhabis frowned upon this non-Muslim festal rite, maintaining that it is unseemly to feast at somebody’s decease.
- 5 In the Tushetian *dalaoba* obit, a horse race in which riders from the dead man’s family and his maternal clan participated took place from the village of the deceased to that of his maternal uncles, and back again, symbolizing the path trekked by the soul after death (and by a new-born member of the community) (K.Tuite, c. 2001).
- 6 An instance of hospitality was immortalized in Tolstoy’s *Hadji Murad*. Old man Sado received the protagonist in his house despite ‘a proclamation to all the inhabitants of Chechnya forbidding them to receive Hadji Murad on pain of death’, issued by Shamil after falling out with him. Sado reiterated to his honoured guest, ‘Whilst thou are in my house and my head is on my shoulders no one shall harm thee.’
- 7 The elimination of pro-Russian Chechens has become more common starting from 2002, with the war increasingly assuming a fratricidal character.
- 8 See note 3.

10

Folklore

- 1 For an authoritative account of North Caucasian clothes, see E.N.Studenetskaya, 1989. For a description of Circassian attire, refer to A.Jaimoukha, 2001, pp. 192–7. There are a number of plates of North Caucasian costumes in M.Tilke, *Oriental Costumes: Their Designs and Colors*, Berlin, 1922 <<http://www.indiana.edu/~librcsd/etext/tilke/p2.html>>.
- 2 The connotations of piety and purity of the colour white is a pagan legacy, as this was the holy hue of clerical vestments.
- 3 For further information on Chechen cuisine and eating habits, refer to I.Sheripova, 1990, and I.Aliroev and L.Dadaev, 2001. The latter work is of a wide scope, including relevant proverbs and sayings, parables, legends and a comparative study with other Caucasian cuisines.
- 4 The hazel had special significance in Chechen folklore and was an object of pride for the master of the house. It was usually grown from a sapling taken from the father or grandfather's tree—a self-propagating heirloom.
- 5 There is a saying, 'The thinner her *khingal*, the better is the cook!'
- 6 A detailed account of Vainakh traditional medicine can be found in Yu.A.Aidaev (ed.), 1996, pp. 323–43. For a general narrative on Caucasian folk medicine, refer to A.Dirr, 1928/1929. Also of interest is A.Dirr, 1928a.
- 7 According to Voltaire, the route by which the smallpox inoculation technique reached Europe went from the Caucasus to Turkey, and then through an enlightened English lady the knowledge was transmitted to grateful England. This was well before Jenner's famous cowpox vaccine preparation at the end of the eighteenth century. The rest of Europe was initially sceptical, but in due time the technique won universal acceptance. See Voltaire's 'Letter XI: On Inoculation', in *Letters on the English or Lettres Philosophiques*, c. 1778.
- 8 For some details on Chechen jokes, read Ya. Chesnov, 'What do Chechens laugh at?', *The Chechen Times*, 19 January 2003.
- 9 For more elaboration on the romantic and not-too-romantic mutual influences of the Russians and North Caucasians, refer to K.Hokanson, 1994; S.Layton, 1995, 1997; and H.Ram, 1999, in which a list of other interesting works on the theme can be found.
- 10 This recalls the story of Romulus and Remus, fabled founders of Rome, who, as outcasts, were found and nursed by a she-wolf.
- 11 The story of Khasukhi is told in 'Posledni iz abrekov [The Last of the *Abreks*]', in M.Geshaev, 1999.
- 12 For an article on the national Chechen and Ingush calendar, see Z.A.Madaeva, 1980.
- 13 A.G.Matsiev (1961) has *ts'ula* for 'sixth day (after today)', instead of *ts'umoka*, which is not listed in the dictionary.
- 14 The names of the months according to the modern Chechen calendar, with the month equivalent to January coming first, are as follows: Nadzhigantskhoi, Markhi, Bièkarg, Tusholi, Seela, Mangal, Maetsil, Maetskhal, Tau, Ardar, Èrkhi, Ogoi. In this system, Seela is honoured with the fifth month, instead of the more appropriate sixth.
- 15 It is believed by some that the timing of the celebration of Christmas suggests that it was fitted on to an older festival associated with the winter solar solstice.
- 16 Cf. with the Celtic Samhain bonfire festival, when the boundaries between the human and spiritual worlds lifted and people had need of special measures to protect themselves from evil wrought by the spirits. The Celts offered treats to the roaming ghosts to appease them and dissuade them from entering their homes to possess them in their effort to escape the afterlife. This was the origin of the ritual, turned children's amusement, of Trick or Treating.
- 17 On Hallowe'en, the Celtic 'old year's night' observed on the last eve of October by the Druids as the end of summer, young women invoked trickery to divine their future husbands.

- 18 The Circassians had a specialized ‘shoulder-blade divining’ priestly caste called ‘*mamisch*’. The Chinese prophesied by perforating the scapula of oxen. Vainakh soothsayers, as did their Circassian counterparts, expected to be paid a gratuity (*kkha*) for conveying a piece of good news.
- 19 *Almaz* (Circassian *almesti*) is apparently a Mongol word that means ‘wild man’. Sightings of the creature were recorded in the Caucasus and Central Asia, the earliest reference being by a Bavarian captive of the Mongols in the fifteenth century. It could be that the Mongol name, introduced during the Golden Horde’s sojourn in the North Caucasus, was used for already existent ‘native creatures’. For more information on the wild man of the Caucasus, refer to J.Colarusso, 1980.
- 20 ‘*Toek*’ also denotes the flat piece of clay that is slammed hard against the ground in a particular kind of children’s game.
- 21 D.Tutakhshia, ‘Under the Flag of Ichkeria’, *Kavkaz-Tsentr*, 7 June 2003.
- 22 Information on Chechen world-class champions is available on the internet. The account presented here is merely representative and is by no means exhaustive.
- 23 The first Vainakh to win Olympic Gold was the Ingush Israil Arsamakov, who clinched the 1988 Olympic weightlifting title in the light heavyweight division and set an Olympic record with his massive lift of 377.5 kg (832 pounds). Six years earlier, he set new world records in both the snatch (170 kg) and jerk (215 kg) at the Juniors World Weightlifting Championships in Brazil!
- 24 For Baiev’s autobiography, see K.Baiev *et al.*, 2003.
- 25 K.O’Flynn, ‘Pride of Grozny’, *Chechnya Short-List*, 2 March 2001. For more information on the club, read S.Dakhshukaeva, ‘Chechnya’s Sporting Chance’, *BBC News*, 11 June 2003.

11

Arts, crafts and architecture

- 1 Details on the applied arts of the Chechens and Ingush can be found in V.A.Tataev and N.Sh.Shabanyants, 1974, and Kh.M.Akieva, 1984.
- 2 For details on Urartian art, refer to G.Azarpay, 1968, and M.N.van Loon, 1966.
- 3 A comprehensive account of Chechen weaponry (in both English and Russian) can be found in I.Askhabov, 2001. The book describes the weapons utilized by the Chechens at different historical epochs and emphasizes the cultural unity of the North Caucasians.
- 4 For the extent of proliferation of personal arms in the Caucasus, see Saferworld, *The Caucasus: Armed and Divided: Small Arms and Light Weapons Proliferation and Humanitarian Consequences in the Caucasus*, 2003.
<www.saferworld.co.uk/CaucasusRep.htm>
- 5 For illustrated descriptions of Vainakh arts and architecture, refer to B.Plaetschke, 1929.
- 6 ‘War Threatens a Towering Symbol of Culture’, *New York Times*, 8 December 1999.

12

Music and dance

- 1 For more information on Chechen national music, refer to Yu.A.Aidaev (ed.), 1996, pp. 297–305.
- 2 Nicolas Matthey’s Oriental Orchestra made a recording of *The Prayer of Shamil*, amongst other Caucasian gems, with Decca.

- 3 Medieval European troubadours were the shining knights of poetry and some were ranked as high as knights in the feudal class structure. It was they who made chivalry a high art, writing poems and singing about chivalrous love, creating the mystique of refined damsels, and glorifying the gallant knight on his charger. However, the repertoires of North Caucasian minstrels did not include romantic ballads, as these were considered part and parcel of the stock-in-trade of women-folk, aired in the privacy of their homes.
- 4 In his article, 'The Decline in Azerbaïdzhani Opera' (*Caucasian Review*, no. 2, 1956, p. 62), D.Souz stated that *Nargiz* was written with a 'revolutionary' theme in mind to stave off criticisms by the communist authorities of pre-revolutionary Azeri national operas.
- 5 For online song recordings by M.Magomaev (Jr), visit (magomaev.narod.ru). The internet offers a wealth of information on some famous Chechen composers and singers, and other personalities and themes for that matter.
- 6 My Chechen informants in Jordan call the accordion '*pondar*' and the *pondar* '*mirzpondar*' (*mirz*=string). It would seem that the assumption by the accordion of the lead role as musical instrument furnished upon it the prestigious name, whereas the original instrument was qualified as the string version. This is a similar pattern to the Circassian *pshine*, which originally denoted the string instrument, then later the more popular accordion.
- 7 Pandore, pandora, pandure, in modern European languages from late *Latin pandura*, from Greek *πανδοῦρα*—three-stringed lute, probably of Oriental origin—*The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*. The pandore is a three-stringed long-necked lute of Ancient Greece and Byzantium. It is not clear where the Chechens got *their pondar* from, but it could have been an influence of the Georgian fretless three-stringed *panduri* or *phanduri*. Be that as it may, the *pondar* went through an acculturation process, as did the other lute-based instruments that were diffused in many parts of the world. It is also worthy of note that the sitar, the Eastern manifestation of the lute, had its resonator made from gourd.
- 8 Cf. with the Georgian *changuri*, a four-stringed instrument with one string being considered as an unalterable pedal, starting from the middle of the handle.
- 9 In several world mythologies, the maker of the reed would become the patron of the musical instrument. Refer, for example, to the story of Pan, the Greek god of fauna.
- 10 Cf. with Georgian *doli*, a drum with the skins spread over the wooden edges so as to be played with the hands.
- 11 For an account on Èlimbaev's work with 'Vainakh', see S.Kishkovsky, 'Chechens Hope their Muses are Louder than Bombs', *New York Times*, 23 May 2000.

13

Language and linguistic policy

- 1 With the carnage inflicted upon the Chechens and the steady and substantive increase in the populations of the other North Caucasian language groups, one could cast doubt on this often-stated truism. Preliminary results from the 2002 Russian Census suggest that the number of Circassian speakers in the Northwest Caucasus, including the bilingual Abazas of Karachai-Cherkessia and Armenians of Armavir, may have surpassed that of Chechen speakers in the North Caucasus.
- 2 Information obtained from K.Tuite, 1996b.
- 3 Words borrowed (directly) from Kumyk include '*bairakkh*' (flag), '*boolat*' (steel) and '*yiskhar*' (broadcloth); from Persian: '*az*' (voice, sound), '*daari*' (kind of bright silk cloth) and '*èzar*' (thousand); from Georgian: '*kherkh*' (saw), '*k'ir*' (white-lime) and '*zh'aela*' (dog); from Arabic: '*din*' (faith, religion), '*ilma*' (science) and '*maktab*' (school); from Ossetic: '*yai*' (pot, cauldron) and '*zh'ov*' (hammer).

- 4 See W.K.Mathews, *The Japhetic Theory*, London, 1948, and L.L.Thomas, *The Linguistic Theories of N.Y.Marr*, Berkeley, 1957.
- 5 For Nakh—Etruscan connections, see R.S.Pliev, 1992.
- 6 In his article ‘Is Basque Isolated?’ (*Dhumbadji!*, vol. 2, no. 2, May 1995), J.D.Bengston defends the case for a Basque—North Caucasian connection. Furthermore, in ‘The Macro-Caucasic Hypothesis’ (*Dhumbadji!*, vol. 1, no. 2, May 1993), he outlines evidence ‘for the existence of a Macro-Caucasic language phylum, encompassing Basque, Caucasian and Burushaski, and held to be at a time depth comparable to that of Indo-European.’ See also J.D.Bengston, 1997, and G.F.Meier, 1980.
- 7 For further details on pre-historic Caucasian-Burushaski links, see K.Tuite, 1998a, 1997.
- 8 See S.A.Starostin and S.L.Nikolaev, 1994; Nichols’ critique in J.Nichols, May 1997b; Starostin’s retort in S.Starostin, May 1997.
- 9 J.Nichols, 1997e. Nichols is professor of linguistics at the Slavic Department, UCB.
- 10 Among modern Western linguists who have done work on NE Caucasian languages are Wolfgang Schulze and Kevin Tuite.
- 11 Urartian-Chechen word correspondences include: airi-aaree (field), arze-t’ aerzee (lad), asi-èèsa (calf), asti-stee (wife), daushe-dosh (word), epeli-aapari (canal), garu-gaara (branch), iese-as (I), khazine-khaza (beautiful), lie-aala (speak, say), sure-sur (army), tish-tisha (old). This ancient connection has led some Chechen nationalists to believe in the destiny of the Chechen nation to become dominant in the Caucasus.
- 12 For Swadesh-100 word lists of Hurrian, Urartian, Akkadian, Sumerian and Hattic, see V.Blazek, ‘Basic Word Lists of Ancient Languages of the Near East’, *Dhumbadji!*, vol. 3, no. 1, January 1997.
- 13 Considered very archaic. According to B.Plaetschke (1929), other Chechens used to poke fun at Chaberloi speech and speakers.
- 14 According to J.Reineggs (1796–1797), both Ingush and Kist differed from Karabulak, despite physical proximity. It was M.R.Ovkhadov (1983) who classified Karabulak as a sub-dialect of Malkhi.
- 15 For studies on Zerg’, see P.Fallon, 1997, 2000.
- 16 This section is based mainly on A.G.Matsiev (1961), N.Awde and M.Galaev (1996) and J.Nichols (1994c).
- 17 The allative case, marked by the ending *-kh*, conveys in the main the being or movement of an object or a being inside a (usually liquid) mass (e.g. *govr khikh eelira*: the horse crossed the river).
- 18 According to custom, students received victuals (*napgha*) from the villagers.
- 19 Dosov’s work was reproduced in *The Annual of Ibero-Caucasian Linguistics*, Tbilisi, 1979.
- 20 See, for example, Z.M.Malsagov, 1924.
- 21 The dictionary has a diagram showing the official Cyrillic script and equivalents in modern ‘official’ Latin script and the authors’ proposed orthography.
- 22 For more information on project, refer to <<http://socrates.berkeley.edu/~chechen/>>.
- 23 ‘The Status of Libraries in the Chechen Republic’, *Dispatches from Chechnya*, no. 4, 13 November 2000.
- 24 M.Locke, ‘Effort to Save Chechen Dictionary’, *Associated Press*, 4 April 2000.
- 25 Information on the status of Ingush was obtained from UCB Ingush Project <<http://ingush.berkeley.edu:7012/ingush.html>>.
- 26 For more information, refer to ‘Restoring Knowledge of Our Native Language’, in *Respublika Ingushetiya* (brochure), c. 1998.
- 27 For more details on Kist, refer to R.Pareulidze, 2000.
- 28 Information on the status of Tsova-Tushian was obtained from A.Humphreys and K.Mits (eds), 1993.

14 Literature

- 1 J.Nichols, 1997e.
- 2 Lyoma Usmanov, personal communication.
- 3 D.Rayfield, *The Literature of Georgia: A History*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994, p. 218.
- 4 Lyoma Usmanov, personal communication.
- 5 J.Colarusso, 2002, p. 6.
- 6 Lyoma Usmanov, personal communication.
- 7 J.Colarusso, 2002, p. 5.
- 8 A.Jaimoukha, 2001, pp. 263–8.
- 9 A.Dirr, 1925e, p. 110 and p. 174, respectively.
- 10 Z.Bagalova (ed.), 1999, p. 41.
- 11 I.Shah, 1968, p. 140.
- 12 Z.Bagalova (ed.), 1999, p. 113.
- 13 Amjad Jaimoukha, personal communication.
- 14 T.Mgaloblishvili, *Ancient Christianity in the Caucasus*, Richmond: Curzon Press (Caucasus World), 1998, p. 11.
- 15 A.Peredreev's translation.
- 16 J.Nichols, 1997e.
- 17 Z.Bagalova (ed.), 1999, p. 101.
- 18 For more details, refer to the website <http://www.d-k-g.de/html/apti_bisultanov.html>.
- 19 An excerpt from the poem appeared in a publication from *The 2nd International Literaturfestival Berlin*, Berlin: Vorwerk, 2002.
- 20 The words to the national anthem were written by Abuzar Aidamirov, the music composed by Ali Dimaev.

15 Media and film

- 1 For lists of newspaper and periodical publications in Chechnya from 1920 to 1959 and of periodicals published outside the Soviet Union by Caucasian emigrés, refer to R.Ashemez, 1959, pp. 113–14 and 122–3, respectively.
- 2 Bibliographical works on Soviet periodicals up to 1957 include *The Periodical Press in the USSR from 1917 to 1949*, Moscow, 1957, and *Forty Years of the Press in the USSR from 1917 to 1957*, Moscow, 1957.
- 3 K.Denayer, 'Journalist Awards for Tolerance in Journalism', *Griot*, issue 13, 26 May 2000.
- 4 See, for example, his article 'Chechnya's Forgotten Majority', *The Moscow Times*, 29 November 2002, p. 8.
- 5 Read, for example, her online article 'Uprising in the Chechnya Ghetto', *Antiwar.com*, 13 May 2003.
- 6 See, for example, J.Meek's powerful and moving article 'Silent Screams', *The Guardian*, 14 December 2002.
- 7 'Chechnya? Chichnya? Chechenia?', *The Moscow Times.com*, 9 June 2003.
- 8 For more information, see P.Feuilherade, 'Russia's Media War over Chechnya', *BBC Monitoring*, 19 November 1999; L.Sheets, 'Russia's Media Policy in Chechnya', *Contemporary Caucasus Newsletter*, issue 10, autumn 2000; T.L.Thomas, 'Manipulating the Mass Consciousness: Russian and Chechen "Information War" Tactics in the Second Chechen-Russian Conflict', in A.C.Aldis (ed.), 2000, pp. 112–29; and L.Fuller, 'Russia Launches Media Offensive in Chechnya', *Caucasus Report*, vol. 4, no. 9, 2 March 2001.

- 9 Both Mazaev and Idiev belong to a group of students that was sent to study at Georgian higher education institutes during the first period of independence with the assistance of the then Minister of Culture Akhmed Zakayev. These ‘envoys’ are working hard to preserve and promote Chechen culture in Georgia. For more details, refer to G.Chikhladze, ‘Nice “Shot” in Pankisi’, *Civil Georgia*, via *The Chechen Times*, 27 August 2003.
- 10 Western intellectuals and personages who adopt a (Caucasian) cause tend to play considerable roles in promoting it in the West, since they can attract more media attention than indigenous spokesmen.
- 11 B.Iervolino, ‘Russian Film Brings Tolstoy to Modern Era’, *The Herald*, 12 February 1999. For further details on this and other Russian films on Chechnya, refer to A.Khrenov, ‘Postmodernist Plurality and Chechen Issues in Post-Soviet Cinema’, *The Third Annual Pittsburgh Russian Film Symposium*, 30 April–6 May 2001.
<www.rusfilm.pitt.edu/2001/andrei.html>

16

The diaspora

- 1 For a map showing Chechen-Ingush and other North Caucasian settlements in Turkey, see A.Jaimoukha, 2001, p. 24.
- 2 Wessellink provides accounts of Chechen and other North Caucasian organizations in Turkey and their reaction to the 1994 Russian invasion.
- 3 Russian manipulation of Turkish policy in the North Caucasus is not a new phenomenon. In the 1830s, the embassy of the Circassian prince Seferbi Zhanoq in Istanbul was compromised when Russia pressured the Sublime Porte to exile him to the provinces (A.Jaimoukha, 2001, pp. 69–70).
- 4 E.Rumer and B.Shaffer, ‘An Islamist Challenge in Russia?’, *Policywatch*, no. 418, 22 October 1999.
- 5 Fascinating accounts of the establishment of the Chechen (and Circassian) immigrants in Jordan can be found in A.Grigoriantz, 2002, pp. 209–234. For some details of Chechen identity-retention dynamics in the diaspora, see W.Kailani, ‘Chechens in the Middle East: Between Original and Host Cultures’, unpublished rapporteur’s report of a seminar held by Caspian Studies Program, John F.Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University, 18 September 2002.
- 6 Some accounts hold that the year of arrival was 1903. The story of this group can be found in the [Arabic] memoirs of Mirza son of Salmirza, still kept by his descendants in Jordan. In fact, there are a number of unpublished chronicles of this episode. The Circassians, on the other hand, have no written records of their own emigration.
- 7 For a study on Chechen (and Circassian) architecture in Jordan, see A.Khamash, 1986.
- 8 There are no available official census figures of the number of Chechens (and Circassians) in Jordan, the whole issue of the ethnic make-up of Jordanian citizenry being perceived by the authorities as of great sensitivity. Mike Dravis’ (1996) estimate of 250,000 for the number of Chechens in Jordan is grossly overestimated.
- 9 The 2001 Electoral Law changed the districts in which Circassian-Chechen candidates could run in Greater Amman from Third and Fifth, to Fifth and Sixth, to the chagrin of the Circassians of the Third District.
- 10 The 2003 elections witnessed the first time that a ‘North Caucasian’ parliamentary candidate, or any other figure for that matter, went against the grain and criticized the Jordanian government publicly for not condemning the 1999 Russian invasion of Chechnya. Ironically, it was the Circassian eventual winner of the Sixth District of Greater Amman, Rohi Sch-haltighw, who made this proclamation in his manifesto.

- 11 R.Working, 'Jordan's Chechens Divided by War', *BBC News*, 6 February 2002.
- 12 It should be stated that the ceremonial Royal Guard in Jordan is a wholly Circassian affair, with no Chechens involved in the detail.
- 13 In the battle of Majdal-Shams in 1889, the Chechens joined ranks with the Circassians to raze the Druze village. Hostilities only abated after direct intervention from Istanbul.
- 14 For graphic details of abuse systematically meted out to Chechens, refer to Human Rights Watch, 'On the Situation of Ethnic Chechens in Moscow', Briefing Paper, 24 February 2003.
- 15 For a detailed study of the Kist of the Pankisi Gorge, refer to S.Kurtsikidze and V.Chikovani, 2002, and C.W.Blandy, 2002. See also A.Zisserman, 1851.
- 16 Much of the information on the Tsova-Tush was obtained from A.Humphreys and K.Mits (eds), 1993. Most references on the Tsova-Tush are in Georgian.
- 17 Committee's website is at <tchetchenieparis.free.fr>.
- 18 H.Burke, 'A Mix of Love, Miracles', *Herald and News*, 9 January 2000.
- 19 According to Sameeh Bino, effective head of the Chechen community in Jordan, the sole role of the Chechens of Jordan in the Chechen conflict was to offer help to legitimate refugees in Jordan. See 'Jordanian-Chechens Do Not Back Rebels in their Native Country', *Associated Press*, 28 January 2003. Most of the members of the Bino (Benoi) clan in Jordan have remained firm in their opposition to Russian occupation, in contrast to many of their fellow clan members in Chechnya.
- 20 Z.Choltaev, 'Kadyrov Seeks Leadership of All Ethnic Chechens in Russia', *Chechnya Weekly*, vol. 4, issue 21, 12 June 2003.

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- *Laemniin neqashkakhula* [Across the Mountain Paths], Grozny, 1975.
- *Neean dog* [Mother's Heart], Grozny, 1985.
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