Scope

The aim of the Association for the Study of EthnoGeoPolitics (EGP), or EthnoGeoPolitics in short, is to further the study of and teaching on the cultural, social, ethnic and (geo-)political characteristics, processes and developments in different areas of the world, at universities, institutes and colleges in and outside the Netherlands. The association's journal, Forum of EthnoGeoPolitics, is above all intended to elicit analytic debate by allowing scholars to air their views, perspectives and research findings—with critical responses from others who may hold a different view or research approach. One can submit manuscripts—main articles (to be peer-reviewed), critical responses (published peer-reviews), short articles and/or book reviews—to info@ethnogeopolitics.org. At www.ethnogeopolitics.org, one can find information about the association's foundation, founding members, aims, activities and publications—particularly freely downloadable copies of the journal's issues.

Editorial Board

Editor-in-Chief: Dr. Babak Rezvani, University of Amsterdam & Chairperson EGP
Executive Editor: Caspar ten Dam, University of Leiden & Secretary EGP
Associate Editor: Servet Sahin, Free University of Amsterdam & Treasurer EGP
Associate Editor: Dr. Oybek N. Makhmudov, University of Uzbekistan, Tashkent, Uzbekistan
Senior Editor: Dr. Jason E. Strakes, Politics & Security Programme OSCE Academy Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan
Assistant Editors:
Arnav Anjaria, Centre for Human Rights, University of Hyderabad, India
Steven Pelletier, Department of English Language & Literature, University of Michigan

Recommendation and Advisory Committee

Prof. Jacek Czaputowicz, Institute of European Studies, University of Warsaw, Poland
Dr. Olivier M. Ribbelink, T.M.C. Asser Institute International and European Law, The Hague
Dr. Françoise Companjen, Intercultural Management and Conflict, VU University of Amsterdam
Dr. James M. Dorsey, S. Rajaratnam School International Studies, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore
Prof. John Clark, President International University of Central Asia, Tokmok, Kyrgyzstan
Table of Contents

Page 5  
*Editorial*  
Democratic Transition, Transformation and Development in times of War and Peace: Conceptualisations and Observations  
Caspar ten Dam

Page 19  
*Main Article*  
Yezidis: An Ethno-Religious Group in Turkey  
Çakır Ceyhan Suvari

Page 39  
Review of the article “Yezidis: An Ethno-Religious Group in Turkey” (Critical Response)  
Adam Szymański

Page 40  
*Editorial Note*  
Caspar ten Dam

Page 42  
*Main Article*  
Soft Power Models in the Middle East  
Fadi Elhusseini

Page 51  
*Editorial Note*  
Caspar ten Dam

Page 53  
*Dorsey’s Column*  
Qatar’s Soft Power efforts: Two Steps Forward, One Step Back  
James M. Dorsey

Page 57  
*Review Essay*  
The Tragic Tale of the Chechen Independence Struggle  
Caspar ten Dam
( Announcement)

**International Data Responsibility Group**

**3rd Annual Conference**

3 March 2017, The Hague, Netherlands

**Preliminary Programme | March 3rd 2017 08:30**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>05:00</td>
<td>Word of Welcome, Introductions and Launch of IDRG Annual Report</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>05:30</td>
<td>Dissecting the Humanitarian Data Ecosystem: Panel, Responses and Moderated Q&amp;A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:30</td>
<td>Coffee Break (3 Poster Presentations) (VR installation)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:45</td>
<td>Next Steps for the Humanitarian Data Ecosystem: Panel, Responses and Moderated Q&amp;A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11:45</td>
<td>Coffee Break (3 Poster Presentations) (VR installation)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12:00</td>
<td>Showcasing the IDRG Fellows Field Visit Results: Fellowship Results Report and Responses from Supporting Organisations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13:00</td>
<td>Lunch Break</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14:30</td>
<td>Data Responsibility Scenario Sessions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16:00</td>
<td>Coffee Break (3 Poster Presentations) (VR installation)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16:15</td>
<td>Abstract Presentations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16:45</td>
<td>Report Back - Next steps for the IDRG</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17:15</td>
<td>Closing Note</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17:30</td>
<td>Reception</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19:00</td>
<td>Speakers Dinner (Invitations Only)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

www.responsible-data.org
Editorial

Democratic Transition, Transformation and Development in times of War and Peace: Conceptualisations and Observations

Caspar ten Dam

Introduction

Many post-colonial, post-communist and/or (other) post-separatist societies in the world today are in a perilous state, even if they do not face war or other forms of armed conflict and (political) violence or have not suffered such ills in recent years or decades. Too many of these societies within or across countries with recognized borders are still or at best in a fragile, even doubtful stage of formal transition—let alone true transformation—toward post-conflict, post-separatist (whether the separatist project is successful or not) societies with even minimal levels of democracy, pluralism and socio-economic wealth and wellbeing i.e. development.

This troubling state of affairs is of the highest importance to the multidisciplinary field of ethnogeopolitics, if only because most if not all of these societies are conflict-ridden, tense, poverty-stricken, corrupt or otherwise underdeveloped because of historically grown and recently aggravated animosities between ethnic groups. I believe this to generally hold true, even if I have cautioned elsewhere that “one should not presume that all internal conflicts, or even all conflicts per se, are ethnic in character depending on one’s definition of ethnicity” (Ten Dam 2015c: 14).

Actually, even the most developed and established democracies in Europe are under pressure by increasing discontent, populism and consequent polarisation, mainly due to or at least enhanced by the 2008-2009 financial crisis sparked by the US credit crunch that still reverberates today, the continuing terrorist attacks by Islamist extremists in particular, and the more recent refugee crisis mainly born from the Syrian War and other intractable conflicts in the Middle East (partially caused and exacerbated by the same Islamist extremists).

Savvas Katsikides and Pavlos I. Koktsidis suggest that the financial crisis alone has led to an “increasing lack of confidence and trust in .. the governance of financial institutions and the free market overall” and in the “democratic institutions and politics at European, national or local levels” among Europe’s citizens (Katsikides & Koktsidis 2015: 1). At the same time, they stress that “East European states have remained particularly vulnerable to the fluctuations and shocks of the international economic system despite variable efforts to align their economies to match with EU standards” (Ibid: 2)—and I stress that this vulnerability is mainly due to the fact that practically all these states are former communist ones and thus still struggle with the legacies and after-effects of communism.
Therefore, studies within and beyond the field of ethnogeopolitics of democratic transition, pluralist transformation and socio-economic development, in both relatively peaceful and violence-ridden (war-ravaged) societies, should no longer exclusively or predominantly focus on so-called ‘developing’ countries in the so-called Third World or traditionally conceived ‘South’. This biased focus seems to be still prevalent in the mainstream schools within the field of Development studies in particular.

Thus Babak Rezvani has lamented in the very first Editorial of the maiden issue of this journal that “Africa and Latin America get much attention from scholars in Europe and the USA. Also South, East and Southeast Asia get fair attention from scholars from the UK, the Netherlands and elsewhere. Nevertheless, Central Eurasia—i.e. the Caucasus, Central Asia and the Iranian Plateau—does not get sufficient attention, and the facilities to study it are very meager” (Rezvani 2013a: 5-6).

I myself have put the following question to the highly knowledgeable, skilled, experienced and practice-oriented members of the Knowledge Platform Security & Rule of Law during its annual conference in The Hague in June 2015:

Is the Platform’s focus—and consequent expertise and knowledge—not too exclusively focused and limited to Africa, the Middle East and Central and Southern America, i.e. to primarily the South and the so-called Third World, at the expense of particularly South-Eastern Europe (Balkans) and Eurasia, i.e. those once belonging to or falling under the sphere of Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union, once known as the Second World? Thus would it not be wise and indeed urgent to compare the histories, deprivations and current fragilities of post-colonial countries in the (former) Third World and those of post-communist countries in the (former) Second World? 1

Transition and Transformation towards Democracy, Pluralism and Development

Arguably there are, or one could distinguish conceptually and theoretically, three types of ‘progress’ in any fragile societies, perhaps in conjunction to separatist, post-separatist and/or anti-separatist state-building efforts by the opposing communities concerned:

1) transition towards a functioning democracy with free and fair elections and other formal requirements of popular influence on and participation in decision-making (in a wider sense: formal change from one political system to another);

2) transformation towards a mature, tolerant and pluralist democracy with a vibrant civil society helping to ensure full civic and (other) human rights for all inhabitants (in a wider sense: durable change from one political system to another that signifies changes in society);

3) development towards a democracy or any other political system that is able to secure sustenance, safety, security, livelihood and a minimum of (equal, fair or reasonable distribution of) wealth amongst its citizens and other inhabitants.
According to my circumscriptions of these ‘progress-concepts’, development is the most overarching one of the three, incorporating both transition and transformation: without these, development arguably remains incomplete, even in the most enlightened autocracies and oligarchies—yet it almost invariably must include socio-economic rights, aspirations and achievements, irrespective of political rights and the political system.

As greater wealth, wellbeing and equitability including socio-economic equality presume basic and improving levels of survival and safety for and among people, one should also include security as a concept and phenomenon into that of development—above all bottom-up human security “based on (but not limited to) the basic freedoms “from want” and “from fear”” (Ten Dam & Rezvani 2015: 5).

As Françoise Companjen points out in the 2015 Special Issue on Human Security of our journal, “security is growing more dependent on political, economic and social development, and concomitantly on issues of (dis)trust in local government and identity threats against transnational influences being part and parcel of feelings of (in)security” (Companjen 2015: 7).

Actually many scholars circumscribe and apply concepts like security and transition as (references to) negative i.e. reprehensible or at least troubling phenomena rather than positive i.e. commendable and sought-after ones, like a period of transition being one “in which the credibility of major ideological foundations and behavioral norms, essential to providing legitimacy to the previous type of social and political organization, are put into question, and to which all current misfortunes are attributed” (Katsikides & Koktsidis 2015: 5).

By implication, the ‘previous type’ of political system may be a democratic one and the transition in question may constitute a highly volatile and possibly violent process away from both formal and pluralist democracy. Thus transition in a wider sense may not involve democratisation at all, but rather the reverse—or a change from one non-democratic system to another, like from an oligarchic dictatorship to a communist one or vice versa.

I hereby basically adopt the concepts of transition and transformation which Companjen and other fellow scholars apply on regions like the North Caucasus including Chechnya, Dagestan and other autonomous republics in southern Russia, and the Transcaucasus i.e. Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan (Companjen, Marácz & Versteegh 2010; esp. Companjen Ibid 2010, Chapters 1,5).

The tenuous transitions and incomplete transitions (if at all) of these countries from communist to post-communist political systems and societies, seem to be part of a “third wave” of democracy as conceptualised by Samuel P. Huntington (1927-2008). Huntington has distinguished between three waves of democracy or democratisation in the world, regarding the number of countries answering at least the basic requirements of free and fair elections and peaceful transfers of power during and after elections: the first wave in the period
1820–1926; the second wave in 1945–1962; and the third wave which began in 1974 and arguably continues to this day. These waves were interspersed by periods of declining democracy or “reverse waves” which already began during the former periods, like the rise of Mussolini in 1922 in Italy (Huntington 1991a: esp. 12-13; Huntington 1991b).

Though Portugal’s April 1974 Carnation Revolution by military officers against the authoritarian Estado Novo (New State) regime is generally seen as the beginning of the third democracy wave, its continuation, depth, duration or end are highly contested issues. Huntington himself wondered, at the time when liberalisation and democratisation had just started in Central and Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union but the communist regimes were just gone or still in place: “At what stage are we within the third wave? Early in a long wave, or at or near the end of a short one?” (Huntington 1991a: 12).

If the “third wave of the 1970s and 1980s was overwhelmingly a Catholic wave” (Huntington, 1991a: 13) in Southern Europe (Portugal and Spain) and Latin America, one could consider the democratisations in most of Central and Eastern Europe and the Eurasian continent as a fourth wave in primarily Christian-Orthodox, Muslim and mixed Orthodox-Muslim countries. This wave may be true and discernible on that continent, even during and despite the armed conflicts and the retrenchments by former and present authoritarian(-minded) rulers like Slobodan Milosevic in Serbia, Vladimir Putin in Russia and Islam Karimov in Uzbekistan. The Arab Spring, which started in December 2010 in Tunisia, could be considered part of this fourth wave, or even a distinct fifth wave for so far the fragile (semi-) democracies in Tunisia, Libya, Egypt and elsewhere in the Middle East prove to be tenable.

Clearly, democratisation “after the Arab spring has not proceeded as successfully as many had wished and hoped”, as this, “particularly in circumstances of experimentation, tension and even violent conflict, is not—and can hardly ever be—a smooth and easy process which can succeed in a few years” (Rezvani 2013c: 4).

Alternatively, one could speak of a lengthy if unstable, fluctuating third wave of democracy ever since Portugal’s Carnation Revolution, that more or less continues with many ups and downs to the present day—if one includes formal yet ‘hollow’ democracies racked by clientelism and lacking true pluralism and civil societies.

Part of the confusion or uncertainty about the duration of the ‘third’ wave of democracy may lie in the lack of “major reverse waves” (Huntington 1991a: 17) i.e. undeniable, obvious reversals from democracy to authoritarianism. Such reverse waves characterised the ends of the first and second democracy waves, respectively the rise of Fascism in Europe in the 1920s and 1930s, and the proliferation of both right-wing and left-wing dictatorships in especially Latin America and Africa in the 1960s and 1970s.

Another, perhaps more important reason for the contestability of the third-wave concept, or even of the democracy-wave concept in general, lies in the challenge of defining and
identifying a 'real', durable, high-quality democracy in each and every case. Thus there seems to have been some confusion and lack of clarity—admittedly also on my part—on the precise distinction and differences between the concepts of transition and transformation (Ten Dam 2012b: 369-374, esp. 371).

For now, I circumscribe transformation as involving far-reaching changes in norms and values that could or should accompany and underpin the transition from one political system to another, in this context from a non-democratic to a democratic one.

Like Companjen, I essentially agree with Thomas Carothers' critique on what he calls the transition paradigm and its "core assumptions" (Carothers 2002: esp. 6-8) that arguably have been dominant among Western and particularly American analysts and practitioners of democracy promotion, aid and assistance—ranging from advice on how to conduct free and fair elections, to supporting civil society groups, labour unions and new political parties—since the 1980s or even earlier. Companjen summarises the core assumptions underlying this transition paradigm as follows:

1) all post-communist and other post-dictatorial countries are moving towards democracy;
2) democratisation unfolds through a "set sequence of stages" (opening, breakthrough, consolidation);
3) elections are of "determinative importance";
4) structural, i.e. societal factors like political-ethnic, socio-cultural and socio-economic traditions and cleavages are "not major factors" affecting transition or its (un)successful outcome; and
5) democratisation [especially the one during the ‘third wave'] implies and “improves” an already functioning state (Companjen, in: Companjen, Marác & Versteegh 2010: 112 (quotes)).

Carothers shows that none or few of the five transition assumptions have transpired—rather the exact opposites of those—for most of the new democracies ever since Portugal's 1974 Carnation Revolution. He and other scholars (e.g. Collier & Levitsky 1997; Ottaway 2003; Ottaway & Choucair-Vizoso 2008) have shown that many countries have stayed or reverted to semi-autocracies or semi-democracies, falling into a wide “gray [grey] zone” covering variable political systems that lie somewhere between “outright dictatorship and well-established liberal democracy” (Carothers 2002: 9).

Carothers has noted and criticised in many of his works (e.g. Carothers 1999, 2004) particularly America's transition-to-democracy premises, based on his extensive experience as a democracy promoter and programmer for many international and American organisations during the 1980s and 1990s, including USAID. Carother's conception of and
critique on the transition paradigm has gained some conditional support among some scholars. Thus Ghia Nodia at first seems to basically agree with him, observing that countries in the “gray zone” might “make progress toward greater democracy, or they might not. Neither eventuality should surprise us” (Nodia 2002: 14).

Still, Carother’s critique, against the often ideologically driven assumptions of Western and especially American democracy promotion, aid and assistance, remains surprisingly controversial and contested to this day.

Even Nodia disagrees with some parts of Carother’s analysis, such as the latter’s contention that the “most common political patterns to date among the “transitional countries”—feckless pluralism and dominant-power politics—include elements of democracy but should be understood as alternative directions, not way stations to liberal democracy” (Carothers 2002: 14): “any given “gray zone” country may or may not become a liberal democracy eventually, but the conditions in which these countries find themselves still can only be understood in terms of how near or far they are from democracy” (Nodia 2002: 16).

In the normative sense, and thus also in the sense of conceptually framing and empirically categorising countries along the authoritarian-democratic continuum, the transition paradigm “remains valid” (Nodia 2002: 16)—at least according to Nodia and (many) others: “unless and until such [transitional, grey-zone i.e. hybrid, semi-democratic and semi-authoritarian] countries come up with some kind of systemic alternative to democracy, it remains correct to try to understand their experience within the framework of democratic transition” (Ibid: 17).

However, not all scholars endorse or depart from the democracy-transition paradigm or even from the democracy paradigm per se. Provocatively, Huntington insists that the “primary problem is not liberty but the creation of a legitimate public order” (Huntington 1968: 7). Even if Communism is as bad as (or worse than) Capitalism in “maximizing welfare”, “the one thing communist governments can do is to govern: they do provide effective authority” (Ibid: 8). This implies that Communist aid to developing countries have helped the latter to establish minimally stable polities more than Western (neo-)liberal aid ever did to their recipients.

The long-term effectiveness, viability and legitimacy of communist states and state-building projects can be called into question—remember the gradual and perhaps inexorable systemic declines of the Soviet Union since the early 1970s and Yugoslavia since the early 1980s. Still, it may well be true that developing countries in Africa, Latin America and elsewhere have been better served by the nationalisation and state-building advice from the Communist East, than from the privatisation and liberalisation advice from the Capitalist West: perhaps the former helped to strengthen state functions however inefficiently, while the latter undermined these however efficiently.
To this day, scholars continue to explicitly or implicitly lambast the apparently corrosive effects of (neo-)liberal modernisation on the nascent state in the developing world. Even many NGOs, often dependent on subsidies from Western and other rich countries, “have their own ideological agenda (e.g. supporting a political ideology or faction, or self-described democratisation, liberalisation, emancipation, etcetera) and count these as “developmental cooperation and aid”. They often go to countries with a weak state. Worryingly, the NGOs interference in these weak states tends to take the form of deliberately or effectively sidelining or even further weakening the state and thereby serve global capitalism and neo-liberalism” (Rezvani 2013d: 50).

Babak Rezvani observes that the “statebuilding process has been rudimentary in many “Third World” countries. These are usually countries which are repeatedly affected by many types of internal conflict. The best remedial strategy would be to strengthen state structures and to encourage good governance and democratisation at the same time” (Rezvani 2013d: 51).

Essentially, a transformation paradigm as true and durable democratisation “reverses the transition paradigm’s fourth assumption, by hypothesising [instead] that societal traditions and cleavages are major factors determining and above all hampering (the degree of) democratisation, thereby “problematising” all the paradigm’s other assumptions” (Ten Dam 2012b: 371). Indeed, as Companjen points out, these structural, societal features “do play a role in the onset and outcome of the transition process, or after twenty years ... Georgia, Azerbaijan and Armenia would have been more democratic, viable states than they are today” (Companjen, in: Companjen et al. 2010: 126).

Revealingly, Nodia is sceptical about promoting and strengthening democracy through political party formation—thereby ironically agreeing with Carothers’ essential argument that structural i.e. socio-cultural and socio-economic factors do play vital, determinative roles:

   The first Western political consultants who came among us after post-Soviet Georgia announced its plans to democratize took on the task of helping to develop proper political parties. These consultants failed spectacularly. Why? Most likely because, to borrow an image from Jonathan Swift’s account of the Academy of Projectors in *Gulliver’s Travels*, trying to build parties artificially with almost nothing but outside help is like trying to build a house from the roof downward. I am at an even greater loss to understand what “bridging the gap” between citizens and formal polities through outside assistance would mean in specific terms (Nodia 2002: 18-19).

Nevertheless, I apply the term transition as formal democratisation—or formal change to any other political system—in a broader sense than many other scholars. Thus I do not necessarily imply with it (all) the presuppositions contained in Carothers’ delineation of the transition paradigm. As I have stressed before, successful, durable “transition plausibly hinges on true transformation, i.e. a fuller sense and realisation of democracy through
societal pluralism, i.e. a vibrant civil society, not just the superficial procedures and trappings of democracy through (a set sequence of) electoral, constitutional, and judicial reforms and procedures” (Ten Dam 2012b: 372).

Conditions and Legacies of Conflict affecting Democracy, Pluralism and Development

Most if not all post-colonial, post-communist, post-conflict and/or post-separatist societies are in the midst of a fragile, contested, even reversible transition towards a formally functioning democracy, let alone a transformation towards a true i.e. genuinely pluralist democracy—and development towards a democracy or any other political system able to secure sustenance, safety, livelihood and wealth amongst its citizens and other inhabitants.

For instance, both Chechen and Albanian communities continue to struggle with the legacies of the post-communist, separatist conflicts in Chechnya (1994-1996, 1999-present (if counting the bouts of low-intensity conflict after 2000) ) and Kosovo (1997-1999), as do other, often opposing communities such as those of the Serbs and Russians.

Corrosive processes of brutalisation i.e. increasing resort to terrorism and other forms of violence violating local and/or international norms (see for definitions Ten Dam 2015a: Appendix) limit the prospects and chances of democratisation and development after the (high-intensity) armed conflict or a state of tension between different (ethnic) communities, even the chances of (inter)community survival and peaceful (co)existence (see on my Brutalisation theory and research, and the theory's variables violence-values, combat-stresses, grievances, avarices, interests and ideologies: Ten Dam 2010, 2011, 2012, 2015b, 2015c).

Therefore, the prospects of a durable resolution of the simmering conflict in Chechnya and the frozen conflict in Kosovo remain challenging if not bleak, given the historic animosities and grievances between the different ethnicities, and the mutually exclusive aspirations of self-determination and territorial integrity. This may lead to renewed armed conflicts in the more distant or even immediate future, perhaps more brutal than the preceding ones.

Consequently, one must assess the saliencies of internal factors that have affected such conflicts and post-conflict situations in different fashions and degrees, like significant 'Islamic extremism' (Salafism) among Chechen rebels—and the almost complete lack of such extremism among their Kosovar counterparts. One also needs to account for such factors, i.e. identify the factors-behind-the-factors, to explain for instance “why an ethno-nationalist conflict emerged in Chechnya, and diffused and transformed [to a considerable degree] into a Wahhabi/Salafi religious conflict” (Rezvani 2014: 871).

Thus Babak Rezvani has found that, at least on the Eurasian continent and in the Caucasus and Central Asia in particular, a "so-called mosaic type of ethno-geographic configuration" of "highly homogeneous pockets of ethnic concentration" in a certain circumscribed territory
or area, is the most important necessary, conflict-inducing condition accounting for the occurrence of ethno-territorial conflict (Rezvani 2013b: 15).

Indeed, this mosaic can best explain such conflicts in combination with other, typically sufficient-making, conflict-triggering conditions, above all the “possession of territorial autonomy” (Ibid: 327)—especially if it makes and privileges one ethnic group into a ‘titular nation’ at the expense of other ethnicities in the territory, as was fatefuly encouraged and enshrined in the “hierarchical ethno-territorial federalism” of the Soviet Union (Ibid: 327 (quotes) ). Yet such factors only make any conflict truly likely, in a time of interethnic tensions and state fragmentation, when the ethnicities concerned live next to each other in concentrated pockets (mosaic configuration) within ethno-politically constructed territories.

Be that as it may, it would be interesting to see whether these “explaining conditions” (Rezvani 2013b: 281) of armed conflict in general and ethno-territorial conflict in particular can also account for the occurrence or absence of significant and durable transition, transformation and development in the post-conflict phases of the societies in question—though it would be more difficult to identify these conditions in slow, incremental, fluctuating and often all-too fuzzy processes of democratisation and socio-economic development.

Apart from the kinds and degrees of brutalisation and radicalisation, the apparent success (Kosovo) and failure (Chechnya) of separatist state-building projects, are also due to the local impact of environmental or external factors like globalisation in general, and the still-continuing War on Terror and the still ongoing financial-economic crisis in particular.

Arguably, these factors are at least as important in shaping the fate of societies such as those in Kosovo and Chechnya as the internal factors of culture, brutality, grievance, greed and selfish interest, and (consequent) national-separatist aspiration. These factors continue to simmer in Chechnya for instance, just below the surface of apparent ‘stability’.

As Donna Winslow, René Moelker and Françoise Companjen point out, “Russian-style reconstruction does alleviate living conditions, but does not remediate the frozen conflict character of the present situation” (Winslow, Moelker & Companjen 2013: 129). They are among scholars who have shown the mutual feedbacks of internal and external factors in fragile conflict-affected societies such as the one in Chechnya, through the globalisation and glocalisation concepts of Roland Robertson (Robertson, apud Featherstone et al. 1995; Roberston et al. 2014)9 to capture the interplay between “globalizing forces from below and above” (Winslow, Moelker & Companjen 2013: 129).

These forces from above range from the “transnational economic and political interests” (Ibid: 136) of governments, multinationals and (inter)governmental organisations in oil, other resources and the mass media, to the same kinds of interests from below of separatist rebel movements and other non-state actors to get access to oil, money and other resources through the “worldwide criminal economy” (Ibid: 139) and above all the internet to
gain and maintain support and attention. These global and local factors do affect the prospects of democracy, pluralism and economic wealth in those societies; that may seem rather obvious, but these factors have been long neglected in mainstream, neoliberal development and democratisation studies, as discussed earlier.

Conclusion

Transition is not simply or necessarily a precondition for transformation, nor the latter a precondition for development. In many countries, any progress may depend on a reverse order: first socio-economic development in a non- or semi-democratic state, then transformation towards a civil society, and only thereafter the attainment of all the trappings of democracy and civil liberties.

However, such an incremental process may be drawn out indefinitely, and used as an excuse by authoritarian leaders to delay (formal) democratisation indefinitely, arguing that “the people are not ready” for participatory responsibilities. In that regard, the proponents of ‘shock democracy’ do have a point when they warn about indefinitely delaying necessary political reforms, if only because self-interested actors may manipulate and misuse arguments for incremental reform or indefinitely delayed reform—so as to effectively forestall and kill off any (such) reform.

Therefore, a careful, case-by-case analysis and application of the transition-transformation-development sequence seems the best course to take. One must avoid adopting the neoliberal doctrine of democratisation-and-privatisation which arguably underpins Carother’s criticised transition paradigm, which has created so many disasters and near-disasters in post-colonial and/or post-communist countries.

However, this does not mean that one should wholeheartedly embrace the alternative neo-Marxist doctrine of developmental incrementalism, however successful it may seem on the surface in China and other ‘post-developmental’ countries with an authoritarian regime. In the end, redistribution toward socio-economic equality without participation in the political process will always be incomplete and tenuous i.e. reversible, so long as people cannot claim and fall back on guaranteed rights.

Caspar ten Dam, Executive Editor Leiden, January 2017

Endnotes


2. Katsikides and Koktsidis appear to apply development as an overarching concept as well in their co-edited study on “the nexus of economic, political and security repercussions on social transformation” in Europe (Katsikides & Koktsidis 2015: 2), though they appear to apply the terms...
(and thereby concepts) of transition and transformation interchangeably. I will assess in a planned book review their definitions (if any) and applications of these terms in more detail, as well as those by the contributors to their *Societies in Transition*.

3. The Arabic Spring “started in Tunisia, when people took to the streets to demand the resignation of President Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali ... after the suicide of the fruit-seller Mohamed Bouazizi in December 2010 due to relentless harassment and humiliation by the police ... . After numerous protests and over 300 fatalities, Ben Ali’s regime fell in January 2011, followed by free elections in October of the same year” (Ten Dam 2013: 21 & note 6: Groothuis 2013: 4-5).

4. Companjen criticises these transition assumptions accordingly, by “showing their non-validity in the three Transcaucasian states” (Companjen, in: Companjen, Marácz & Versteegh 2010: 112).

5. However, according to Carothers the tendency by numerous scholars to describe “countries in the gray [grey] zone as types of democracies”—like “semi-democracy, ... façade democracy, pseudo-democracy” and so on—show that “analysts are in effect trying to apply the transition paradigm to the very countries whose political evolution is calling that paradigm into question” (Carothers 2002: 10). Indeed, Ghia Nodia points out that “the very term “gray zone” suggests our problem in understanding the nature of such regimes” (Nodia 2002: 15).

6. Carothers rightly “wants us to be modest in our expectations and skeptical about a positivist interpretation of the transition paradigm ... but ... does not offer a new paradigm” (Nodia 2002: 17).

7. Some scholars note the apparent correlation between democratic transition attempts and weak states, without specifying whether this is due to neoliberal or other ideological thinking. Thus “faltering transformations often exist against the backdrop of failing or structurally weak states. Indeed, in some cases it is extremely difficult to tell whether the failure of democracy or the failure of the state itself is the more basic difficulty (I am inclined to think it is more often the latter)” (Nodia 2002: 18).

8. Rezvani acknowledges the relevance of multiple factors accounting for internal armed conflicts—particularly grievances of severe deprivations in the past and demographical size and dominance of the initiating (rebelling) party—as well (see Rezvani 2013b: esp. 227-249 (Chechnya); Rezvani 2014 (on Chechnya); Rezvani 2015 (updated, shortened and improved version of Rezvani 2013b) ).

9. Robertson has coined the ‘globalisation’ concept as well, or at least helped to introduce it as an alternative to the more clumsy expression “‘modernization of the whole world’” (Robertson *et al.* 2014: 447): “Consciously, I first heard it from my own mouth” in 1979 (Ibid). I still am ambiguous and skeptical about globalisation as a usable concept, testable theory, or even true phenomenon. I find most discourses using and applying the term rather abstract and obtuse—no doubt due to the concept’s typical blandness. I would prefer to more narrowly and concretely circumscribe it, if one can.

References—Bibliography


______________, The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century Norman, OK/London/etc.: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991. ‘1991b’


Robertson, Roland, ‘The Limitations of Military Psychology: Combat-stress and Violence-values among the Chechens and Albanians’ (pp.577-627) in: U. Bläsing, V. Arakelova & M. Weinreich


Main Article

Yezidis: An Ethno-Religious Group in Turkey

Çakır Ceyhan Suvari

Abstract

The most distinguishing feature of the Yezidi religion is its ethno-religious character. For Yezidi belief and its practices and symbols have heavily influenced the Yezidi culture and shaped its organizational structures. Its exclusive character, confining the privilege of being a Yezidi only to those born of Yezidi parents, further supports the conception of ethno-religion. This article draws upon the author's fieldwork among the Yezidis of Viranşehir (Şanlıurfa), Mardin and Batman in Turkey.

Key words: Yezidism, Yezidi, Kurd, ethno-religion, Malak Tawus (Peacock Angel), Angel

Introduction

One may consider the question of who the Yezidis are. Many Kurdish researchers argue that The Yezidis are non-Muslim Kurds (e.g. Tori 2000; Mihotoli 1992; Bender 2000; Şanak 1997). Or are they Turks? Some of Turkish researchers argue that there are shamanistic items in Yezidi faith and therefore Yezidis are a Turkish group (e.g. Başıbüğ 1987). Or do they belong to an entirely different identity (i.e. community or group with an identifiable identity)? In this respect how can the Yezidis be defined?

It is generally considered that there are two basic approaches that are applied in defining ethnic identities. First of these is the emic perspective in which the group defines itself basically in terms of “who we are” or “what we are”. The important thing in this definition is the self-acceptance of the groups’ intention. The racial and language (linguistic) characteristics of the group do not play a determining role in this definition. The second perspective (definition) is an etic one which is based on the definition of the group by the understandings of the other groups (see Aydin 2003).

Definitions and names, which are provided by groups within themselves (emic) and perceptions by the others (etic), differ largely. While a person looking from an outside point of view takes the physical criteria as the basis, whereas a person from the inside takes the common grounds as a basis which the group members consider to be common among themselves (Somersan 2004: 23).

I have paid attention to conclude the analyses of the collected data with the emic approach by considering how groups perceives themselves. In this respect it is necessary to divide the Yezidis into two groups in terms of considering their social and religious perspectives. The first one is the intellectual group who have read written sources about their religious beliefs and other social problems, who have generally received higher education and are living abroad. This group could narrate the negativities which they see in the religious structure.
due to manipulation. Thus, their personal opinions are overriding especially in the field of belief. The second group consists of the ordinary followers who are illiterate, who are mainly living in Turkey, and the verbal tradition predominates in the religious beliefs of this group. Although the author has tried to benefit from the knowledge of both of these groups in this article, the second group forms a better sample considering the purity of the information given in general.

Fieldwork

This article is based on the fieldwork I have carried out at different times between the years 1999-2010. I have started my research in 1999 in Beşiri district of the province of Batman located in the south-eastern region of Turkey. The fieldwork has been expanded by including the settlements located in the provinces of Mardin and Şanlıurfa in light of the former references.

I have paid strict attention to find references in order to be accepted in the research place before going to that place where the research would be carried out. Among these references, I arranged a preliminary meeting with Veysi Bulut who is one of the notables of the Yezidis who are living in the district of Beşiri. Beside this meeting, I arranged a preliminary research in the region and these formed the background of the fieldwork.

The Yezidis coming from abroad in recent years and Yezidis who preferred to remain in their own lands, have formed suitable sample groups for a comparative research. For this reason, all efforts have been made to talk with any Yezidi of any age that could be reached during the research. Unfortunately, many of the Yezidi villages have been evacuated over time. Many of these Yezidi people have immigrated to the Western countries. For this reason, an intense and rapid dissolution is observed in the traditions and beliefs of the Yezidi people.

The Yezidi people whom I have met with, just mainly gave idealized information about the traditions and beliefs of these people which belong to the past. Many of the traditions are tried to be kept by group of Yezidis living in Turkey. Thus the information given in the article must be evaluated by considering these changes.

I have paid attention to use a number of data collection methods at the same time for making a grounded research. I have benefited from one to one interviews and life stories beside the participant observation method. I have made every effort not to ask limiting questions to the people during the interviews, and I have preferred the dialogical approach which provides the interaction within the group, in the form of mutual interviews.

I have observed that, while there was a physical oppression on the Yezidi people in the past, now there is a more purely psychological pressure being applied on them. The Yezidi people whom I wanted to talk with were previously shy and distrustful towards me. However, a calm ambience could be created after a mutual conversation.
On this subject, a Yezidi follower stated that previously other visitors had visited their villages and talked with them and upon this, the security forces of the state had arrived at their villages and interrogated them about these visitors with questions like ‘why have these visitors come to the village’ and ‘why have the security forces not been informed of the situation’ and even detained them.

This distrust among the Yezidis towards outside visitors can thus be traced back to this psychological oppression as well as the physical attacks held in the past—and has been a tool for adhesion which keeps their identity or identities alive. Consequently the Yezidi people are keeping their sorrows alive in order for the following generations to learn about these sorrows. In this way, they can protect their group identities despite the existing psychological oppression.

Yezidi Territory and Etymology of the Name “Yezidi”

Yezidi people live in a wide geography stretching from Syria to Iraq and from Turkey to the Caucasus. Besides, it is known that a great number of Yezidis have immigrated to Western European countries, mainly to Germany. In accordance with the estimations carried out in recent years (Suvari 2002: 26), it has been recorded that between 200,000 (Khenchelaoui 1999: 20) and 750,000 Yezidi people are living in the Near East and Middle East, mainly in Iraq and Syria as well as Turkey, the Caucasus and Russia. However the main part of the Yezidi population is located in the lands of Iraq.

There are different explanations about the source of the Yezidi name. A widely opinion tells that the name originates from the name “İzid” which means Angel in the Avesta language. It is also stated that the name originates from the name “Yezdan” which means God in the Avesta language. In this respect İzidi and Yezdani mean the believer of angel in the former and the believer of God in the latter (Suvari 2002: 30-32). The name “Yezdan” forms part of all introductionary sentences of the Yezidi prayers: “In the name of pure, merciful and generous Yezdan...” (Khenchelaoui 1999: 20).

On the other hand, there are some researchers who claim that the name Yezidi originates from the Caliph Yezid Bin Muaviye (Turan 1993: 3; Figlali 1908: 221). The Yezidi people call themselves İzdi or Ezidi in Turkey. The names İzdi and Ezidi have the meanings of “the ones created by God, the ones who worship God.”

Nevertheless, the Yezidi people are called by different names in different countries. For example “Dasnai” 1 in Syria, in Turkey, the Yezidi people especially located within and around the province of Batman are mentioned with the name “Khaldi” (Suvari 2002: 73). Thus “Among the Armenians they are known by the name of Thondrakians 2 and Policheans (Politians), or alternatively Arevortis, a word that means ‘worshippers of the Sun’ in Armenian” (Khenchelaoui 1999: 21). However, generally all Muslim people use the name Yezidi which has comes to mean “believers of Satan”.

---

1 Dasnai
2 Thondrakians
Emergence of the Yezidi belief

The historical background of the Yezidian belief is demonstrated by the appearance of the Adeviye order. Bulut (2000: 58), explains the formation of the Adeviye order and the emergence of the Yezidi belief as follows:

When the Sheik, deceased in the year 1162, was buried in his temple, his temple transformed into a sepulcher. The nephew of Sheik, Abu'l Bereket bin Sahr was selected as his successor. The followers of the order were mentioned as the “Adavians” under his leadership; the order was named as “Adavi” and also “Sohbeti” in the later periods. His son Adiy bin Abu'l Bereket (II. Adiy) was selected as his successor. Muzafferdin Kikburi, the commander of Saladin of the Ayyubids who reigned over the territories of Syria and Egypt and who was well known for his strikes against the crusaders, became a follower of Sheik II. Adiy and also married to his sister. Hasan bin Adiy born in 1195, who ascended the throne of his religious father, became a religious leader who regulated the Adavian Order located in Lalëş. This Sheik, who formed the basis of today's Yezidi belief, also entered into religious discussions. It is told that the second holy book of the Yezidis “Mushaf-

Roger Lescot (2001: 18) who also puts forward similar opinions, explains that the sermons of Sheik Adiy directed the action towards mysticism between the years 1130 and 1160 AD and Adiy formed an order composed of a great number of people. But this order was divided into two groups after a period and the first group which settled in Syria and Egypt was eliminated.
after a short time and the other group which remained in the Sincar region forgot the Sunni principles and formed the first core of the Yezidi society (Lescot 2001: 18).

Lescot also claims that after this first stage of the Yezidi period, the belief became a new religion during the reign of Hasan ibn Adiy Şemseddin and states that during the reign of Şemseddin who came to power after his father Şakir Ebul Bereket who was the nephew of Sheikh Adiy, the followers got extremely adhered to their own Sheikh at the level of defiance and the Sheikh ignored this. The ruler of Mosul was disturbed by the situation and sent an army against Hasan ibn Adiy Şemseddin and caught the Sheikh and murdered him. But this attack and similar attacks made the Addavian religion more valuable which was then to be protected with weapons; this heterodox cult of Islam then withdrew, went underground, and thus became a new religion (see also Arakelova 2004; 2010).

The Concept of God and the Angel belief among Yezidis

The concept of God in the Yezidi belief is complicated and difficult to understand. There is a religious hierarchy composed of seven angels, in which the Malak Tawus (Peacock Angel) is located on top. These angels are positioned as secondary gods or semi-gods under the leadership of the Malak Tawus. There is a certain and abstract concept of God in Yezidi belief which is named Khuda. However the Khuda is in the position of a passive God who left all responsibilities of the earthworks (earthly tasks and creations) to the Malak Tawus.

This Khuda belief locates the Yezidi religion among the monotheistic religions. However the religion is also in the form of a polytheistic religion due to the facts that Khuda distributed his authorities to seven angels, especially to the Malak Tawus, and that the mentioned angels are seen as semi-gods and Malak Tawus is authorized with a divine power and strength. As a matter of fact, the angel concept and the duty partition between the angels in the monotheistic religions are limited with certain boundaries but the Yezidi belief is mainly based on the angel cult.

In this respect, as mentioned before, the Yezidi belief is a religion in which the boundaries between the Khuda and Malak Tawus becomes diffuse, indeed somewhat confusing. Thus it is better to position the Yezidi belief in a place between the monotheistic religions and the polytheistic ones.

Malak Tawus (Peacock Angel)

The Malak Tawus belief was mainly used as a justification by others for the attacks against the Yezidi belief and Yezidi people. Because, the Malak Tawus is thought to be the same creature as Satan, who is damned in the holy books of Muslim, Christian and Jewish religions. The facts that the names “Satan” and “Lucifer” are prohibited in the Yezidi belief, that Malak Tawus is the first angel created by God, that Malak Tawus did not grovel to Adam, that he made Adam eat the forbidden fruit, events which both take part in the semitic
religions and Yezidi belief, are put forward as evidence for the identification of Malak Tawus with Satan.

The Malak Tawus is so important in the Yezidi belief that the prayers are made in his name, and even its sculptures are toured by the Fakirs and Kavals in Yezidi settlements and in certain periods of the year. The sculptures which are made in the name of Malak Tawus are called “Sencak” or “Sancak” and are in the shape of peacock or rooster (Turan 1993: 66).

There are many reasons for giving such importance to the Malak Tawus in Yezidi belief. The first and most important of these reasons is the given that God has left the responsibility of all earthworks and the responsibility of the other angels to him. The interpretation of the Malak Azazil (Malak Tawus), who is believed to be damned for not groveling to Adam and for making Adam eat the forbidden fruit in other religions, is far different in the Yezidi belief.

It is told in the Yezidi mythology that Azazil loves God so much and does not grovel to anyone apart from God as God is the only creator (Lescot 2001: 47). The Yezidi people respect this behavior of Malak Tawus and they think that God did not damn the Malak Tawus after the examination for trying him. The fact that Malak Tawus made Adam eat the forbidden fruit is interpreted as the will of God in Yezidi belief. The story is told in Mushaf-i Reş (The Black Book) as follows:

Malak Tawus asked the Khuda “If Adam does not eat this apple, how his generation could reproduce?”. Khuda answered: “I have left the order and providence to your hands”. Then Malak Tawus came to Adam and asked “Did you eat this wheat?”. Adam replied: “No, Khuda has forbidden me”. Malak Tawus said: “Eat!, it would be better for you”. Adam ate this fruit and his stomach grew.

Another reason why the Yezidi people respect the Malak Tawus is the event in which Malak Tawus extinguished the fires of hell with his tears. Malak Tawus who threw himself upon Khuda was sent to hell and stayed there for seven thousand years. He regretted his behavior against God and cried a lot; seven big cubes became full of his tears and these tears extinguished the fires of hell (Turan 1993: 61).

The Yezidi people whom I had conversation with during the field research, also insists that the Malak Tawus is not the same creature as Satan. A Yezidi follower explained that the Malak Tawus is one of the assistants of Ahura Mazda in Zoroastrianism and supports his claim that the peacock figure also forms part of the Zoroastrianism belief. In addition to this, Malak Tawus is certainly not seen as a God. He is only the assistant of Khuda and the one who establishes the relationship between the people and Khuda and the most important angel who has an executive power only to the extent allowed by Khuda.

A Yezidi follower explains the following about the position of the Malak Tawus:
“The great Khuda is independent in our belief, he does not deal with the earthworks; Malak Tawus deals with these works instead of him. The humans can not become prophets in our belief, because the humans have weaknesses; only the angels who were created in magnificent ways can be prophets. Malak Tawus is the biggest and leader of these angels. The fact that Malak Tawus is not the same phenomenon as Satan can be easily understood if you think that believing in God is difficult and even impossible in such a geography where the Muslim religion and Christian religion are mainly dominant.”

When this follower was asked why the words Satan and similar names and expressions are prohibited in the Mushaf-ı Reş, he stated that this is related to the hatred against the bad and villainy, and added that:

“This situation is not related with the Malak Tawus. Malak Tawus is not a Satan but an execution force. But Satan is a concept which is related to villainy and the creator of bad actions. This exists in Ahriman in Zoroastrianism and reached from that day till today. The fact that we refrain from pronouncing his name and the reaction we show is based on this historical background.”

Another Yezidi follower made a similar explanation and told that:

“We are the descendants of our ancestors who refused the villainy thousands of years ago and absorbed the dependence to Khuda, mentioned with special names such as Khuda and Yezdan, who orders goodness and made this belief their life style and we are the successors of the people who escaped from Ahriman, the source of villainy at the time; how could we be now the believers of Satan, the source of bad action after five thousand years.”

In this respect, the Azazil is believed to be damned and punished by God in other religions; though he were to be forgiven by God after his repentance as his punishment was not endless and he became the most important assistant of God and the guidance of goodness, a beautiful creature in the shape of a peacock.

Mushaf-ı Reş and Kitab El-Cilve

The Yezidi people have two written sources, the names of which are Mushaf-ı Reş (The Black Book) and Kitab El-Cilve. The “Kitab el-Cilve” contains the addressing of the holy God to his souls (Turan 1993: 72). Kitab el-Cilve is a small book; the whole of the book is composed of eight pages, and 109 lines and also composed of five sections (Tori 2000: 134).

The “Mushaf-ı Reş” (The Black Book) is bigger in size. The original book of Kurdish origin is in the form of a bundle which is composed of 152 lines and written with an encoded style (Turan 1993: 53). The book was named “Mushaf-ı Reş”, referring to the event telling that God landed on the Kara Dağ (Black Mountain) which forms part of this book (Semenow 1931: 53).
The creation of the universe, angels and Adam and Eve; the arrival of Sheik Adiy to Laleş and the story of Malak Tawus and the Flood as well as the issues such as food culture, new year and marriage and information about some of the earthworks (earthly tasks and creations) and the divine orders, are given in the Mushaf-ı Reş.

The issues that form part of both of the books and some of the religious orders were known verbally by the Yezidi people whom I had met with during the fieldwork. The Yezidi people whom I had conversation with, told me that they did not see any of these two books. The Yezidi people living in Turkey who did not read the mentioned texts, stated that they had learned this information from the Kavals and Fakirs who visited their villages in the past.

As a matter of fact, these books which belong to the Yezidi belief are claimed not to be revelation books as in the Semitic religions and some claims put forward state that these books are written by the Yezidi sheiks. “Pir Hıdır”, who is a Yezidi of Iraq, stated that he had never seen these books and added that the Yezidi religion does not have any book during an interview in 2006. “Pir” added “our book is our hearth” and told that their religion is not based on writing but on oral discourse.

In addition to this, the claims that the Yezidi people wrote an ostensible book against the letter of the Abbasid caliph El-Memnun ordering them to “Either become Muslim or adopt a religion with a sacred book” and also in order to survive in a geography under the dominance of the Muslims ⁶ (Khenchelaoui 1999: 25) correspond to the statements of Pir Hıdır.

Furthermore, the statement “I tell without books” which takes part in section III of Kitab el-Cilve also proves that the mentioned books are not the books of revelations. However this situation does not mean that these books do not constitute a religion and are just written to deceive El Memnun; both books are the ones in which the Yezidi mythology is written down, and which is told verbally and the religious practices and orders are ‘collected’ by. In this respect, the books are important, indeed primary sources in which the Yezidi belief have been recorded, despite the fact that these are not considered books of revelations.

Yezidi Self History Approach

The Yezidi people whom I talked with, have given variable information and insights about their religious beliefs and religious practices. Still, I observed that they mainly agree on the effect of Zoroastrianism on the Yezidi belief. Muhammet Altan, 70 years old, living in the Kharabiya village in the district of Midyat within the province of Mardin, explained that their religion came from Zoroastrianism. When I asked Altan, who is illiterate, where had he learned this from, he answered that he learned this from the Kavals and Fakirs visiting their villages in the past.

In the same way, Veysi Bulut, living in Beşiri, has also told that the Yezidi belief came from the Zoroastrian religion and claims that in this respect, their religion is the oldest monotheistic religion. Bulut explains this process as follows:
“The origin of the Yezidi belief is Zoroastrianism. There were gods and goddesses taking orders from a great God in Babel and Ninova. This situation reached Zarahustra after the evolution during the historical process. There is the concept of one single God in Zoroastrianism. The King Nebuchadnezzar brought the Children of Israel to the lands of Babel. The Children of Israel met with the concept of a single God here and they returned to Palestine and formed the well known monotheistic religions.”

Bulut hereby states that Zoroastrianism, which he sees as the first monotheistic religion, also effected other monotheistic religions apart from the Yezidi belief. Other Yezidi people like Bulut are seeing themselves as the main representatives or descendants of Zoroastrianism belief. For this reason, they claim that their history dates back to the Assyrian and then to Zoroastrianism and they insist that they are one of the oldest societies of Mesopotamia.

These explanations should made us realize that the effect of the Zoroastrianism on the Yezidi belief is highly remarkable indeed. Some of the Zoroastrian motives within the Yezidi belief also support this idea. The peacock figure, the dualist approach, believing the holiness of sun, the existence of clergy and such motives form part of both religions. However many ancient and new traditions which do not form part of Zoroastrianism, form part of the Yezidi Belief.

For example, traditions such as circumcision, pilgrimage, alms and baptism and various Sufistic order traditions are also as effective as Zoroastrian motives. Apart from these, the most important difference between the Yezidi religion and Zoroastrianism is that the latter is an expansionist religion while the former has no such claims and aims. Because, the Yezidi belief is only allowble for the ones born from a Yezidi mother and father.

The traces of modern history are clearly seen in this belief of the Yezidi people. Because it is widely known that a remarkable rate of Yezidi population is living in the West. Thus, it is quite natural that Yezidis who are educated in the West are inspired from ideas there. The samples of the minimalist method seen in modern history writings can also be observed in the Yezidi history approach. The most remarkable of these samples are the tendency to base their religion on an ancient history and a society of civilization, and their specifications which explain that their religion is the oldest monotheistic religion and other monotheistic religions are formed under the effect of their belief. Besides, it can be observed that they have developed a historical approach in which the Kurds are not included as a reaction to the Kurdish authors and politicians who assert a common historical background with them.

Self Identity Definitions of the Yezidis and Kurds

Another issue concerns how these Yezidis define themselves and what kind of relationships they establish with the Muslim Kurds, as they speak the Kurmanci dialect of the Kurdish language.
The author was telling the Yezidi people that the reason of his visit was to know them, when he was arriving at their villages, but their first reactions were rather negative despite the fact that he had a reference. The unrest, discontent and distrust could be easily observed in the facial expressions of the people.

I was gaining their trust only, and only partly, after long-lasting and relaxing persuasive conversations. I could sense that this reaction of Yezidi people was based on their distrust of and opposition to the official policies, and distrust against the people outside their region.

In such an atmosphere, when I asked how they define themselves, they were putting forward their Yezidi identity. Besides, they trace themselves and their religion back to the oldest ages of human history. A Yezidi stated by giving a certain date: “We are living in these lands for five thousand years and we are keeping this religion alive. Our religion exists since the arrival of Zoroastrianism and is the oldest monotheistic religion of the world. We are children of Şahit bin Car who descends from Adam.”

When asked what kind of relationships they have established with the neighbors, the Kurds, a Yezidi follower replied:

“There are deep gaps between us. We have no spiritual unity ranging from the daily life to our behaviors. This does not stem from us. We are more dependent of the principle of laicism because our religion is laic itself.”

Another Yezidi follower told that “How can we be brothers, they murdered us!”

In addition to the follower telling that, other Yezidis are remembering the things especially Bedirhan did. The same follower added “we can be friends with the Muslims [Here the Muslims are mainly the Kurdish people who are their neighbors] but we never give our girls and never took girls from them”. It has been observed that the endogamy tradition is strictly applied among the Yezidi people. So much so that this endogamy rule is strictly applied for both genders.

A follower has described the endogamy tradition as follows:

“Our religion is like milk. White, clean and pure. For this reason, when we give a girl to outside, our girl changes her religion. If we took a girl from outside, we change our religion and go under the religion of that girl. Because if the hands of an outsider touch our pure religion, it will be polluted and damaged.”

Unlike the others, Muhammet Altan living in Mardin, Midyat, told that he introduced himself sometimes as Yezidi and sometimes as Kurd. In fact, what Altan has told is valid for the others. Because there is no difference between the Yezidi people and the other groups with respect to their physical appearance. Only the distinctive, long moustaches of some older or middle aged Yezidis are reflecting a specific Yezidi character.
Apart from this, the Yezidis resemble the other people living within the region both with respect to the language and the physical appearance. The people benefit from this situation, because in this way they can camouflage their religion which they keep as a secret and they protect their religion from all kinds of negativities.

When I told the interviewees that some Kurdish authors identify the Yezidis as Kurds, they intensely objected to this view, because they do not establish any connection with the Kurds in today's conditions. They are also explaining that "some of the Muslim Kurdish tribes were Yezidis before but they changed their religion so the Yezidis had no more connection with them".

In the same way we see that the Yezidis living in Northern Iraq are also sharing similar ideas. So much so that, despite the Kurdish dominance within the region, the Yezidis in Northern Iraq are intensely refusing the historical and ethnic links between themselves and the Kurds. They even feel themselves closer to the Assyrian people and they claim that they are also of Assyrian origin.

In this respect, a speech of Prince Anvar Muaviye Ismail, Chairman of the Yezidi Religious Center, also forms part of Sever’s book (Sever 1996: 127) titled ‘Yezidis and Origin of the Yezidis’, reflects the opinion of the Yezidis against the Kurdish identity:

> Both the Yezidis and Assyrians were founded with a common history, on common lands and with the principle of a single flag and by sharing the same fate [faith]. History has taught us that the Assyrians and the Yezidis are the real descendants of the great Assyrian Empire. They have a common nationality. These two societies have been connected to each other with strong fraternal links during the different ages of history, especially in the times of massacre and disaster. They survived next to each other against the attacks. Fortunately, the protection of common nationalities are permanent as solid rocks. I would like to define once more in front of all related international organizations; the Assyrians and Yezidis have the same fate [faith] and single nationality and they are hoping to live in peace under the same flag. With this announcement, we warn all Kurdish parties especially Mesut Barzani and Celal Talabani to stop representing the Yezidis at all international levels and stop their unfounded lies telling the Yezidis belong to the Kurdish nationality and stop their demands in Sincar and Şekhan under the authority of their administrative regions ....

The author has observed that even those Kurds who have not seen any Yezidi in their lives know something about the Yezidi people during the conversations the author has made with the Kurds apart from the Yezidis. Some of them told that they were also Yezidis a few generations ago.

Some of the Kurds are telling stories about the Yezidis embellished with negative things. These are generally the stories related to the conflicts in the past. Some of them tried to deter me when they heard that I would visit the Yezidi villages. They were convinced that if
someone visited a Yezidi village, he would be cut down at night. They were denigrating citizens of Yezidi origin with remarks like “his grandfather is Yezidi, They are dirty dogs”. They thus tend to humiliate the latter in a ‘humorous manner’. Another phrase of the Kurds “Eat at the house of a Yezidi but sleep at the house of a Christian” is another sample of the distrust against the Yezidis. When they were asked why a person could comfortably eat at the house of a Yezidi despite this distrust against them, they replied that the Yezidis are so delicate on the issue of cleanliness.

The perceptions and prejudices about each other between the Yezidis and the Kurds are based on mutual denial, and seem as uncompromising as ever. Yet despite the fact that the Yezidis do not recognize any historical and spiritual intimacy with the Kurdish people, they prefer the Kurdish identity if they (have to, are forced to) change their religion and become a Muslim. Such examples can be frequently seen in the region.

For example, the Sıpki tribe was Yezidi one or two generations ago; but their Kurdish identity came to prominence after they became Muslim. Thus they were started to be accepted as Kurdish by the people of the region, and they also stared to perceive themselves as Kurds. So much that the Sıpki tribe people living in the regions of Ağrı and Tutak are known with their name adhesion to their Kurdish identity.

Apart from their beliefs and caste systems emanating from their beliefs, the Yezidis share similarities with the Kurdish people: the tribal organization which also forms the basic form of society among the Yezidi people; the Kurdish language they speak; the emirate structure related to a feudalism which is also dominant Yezidi society, as well as their life style. Thus, in case of a change of religion (for so far voluntary), Yezidis do not have any difficulty in choosing the Kurdish identity.

Despite the fact that the Yezidis speak the Kurdish language, they do not see themselves as Kurds and do not even perceive or establish any historical connection with them. This demonstrates that the cultural characteristics which define and differentiate the group-member identities of the Yezidis and the Kurds, as well as the organizational structures of the groups in question, have changed over time due to differences in belief. Each society has specific, different valuing standards as a consequence.

The formation of different ethnical groups becomes easier in line with the difference between these value judgments (Barth 2001: 21). The value judgments of the Yezidis are mostly defined by their belief. The basis of the difference between the Yezidis and the Kurds can be found in the fact that they (the Yezidis) believe they are the descendants of a different generation i.e race or ethnicity; the strict prohibition of marriage with people of other religions for both of the genders; exclusion of any person from the religion in question if he/she violates this prohibition; and the fact that some of their intellectual and practical applications are diametrically opposed to the rules of the Islamic religion.
The exclusion and alienation which have emerged as a reaction to the physical attacks of Muslim(-extremist) groups who do not recognize the Yezidi belief as a Semitic religion, have also played a large role in this difference.

Explanations of the Yezidi belief

As mentioned previously, none of the Yezidis living in Turkey have read *Kitab El-Cilve* and *Mushaf-ı Reş* (The Black Book), have limited information about these books and received their religious knowledge from the Kavals and Fakirs who once visited their villages. However, the elderly of the villages are now keeping and transferring the religious knowledge to the following generations instead of the Kavals and the Fakirs.

The Yezidi people do not have a common knowledge and judgment in religious affairs, that must be why the people whom I talked with and interviewed gave different information about Sheik Adiy and some of their religious practices. Among these people, only Veysi Bulut knew the real identity of Sheik Adiy and the period he lived and his effects on the Yezidi belief. Bulut also bases the caste system existing in the Yezidi belief on the tribe organization which has remained from the reign of Sheik Adiy. The woman named Nuriye Çelik believes that Sheik Adiy is still alive and residing in Germany. Another follower believes that Sheik Adiy lives in a spiritual form and that he is a Yezidi coming from Iran.

All Yezidis are mainly emphasizing the concept of goodness which forms the basis of their belief. The people define that regularly; they (should) refrain from doing bad actions and they (should) never think bad things. A Yezidi follower has told the following about this aspect of their belief:

“We reply to the bad action with good action. This passed from us to Christianity. The concept of eternity can only be reached by goodness. Wars, battles, fights, treacheries and the destruction of nature and life are great sins in our religion. Badness is never appreciated in our belief. There is no great or small villainy so the punishment of this villainy is inevitably executed by excommunication or with the direction of Khuda after death. The sins can be forgiven among Muslims with repenting and among Christians through confession, but there is no mercy for the sins in our religion and these sins are absolutely punished.”

The same follower also refuses the idea or concept of reincarnation. He believes that the reincarnation statement in the *Mushaf-ı Reş* was said by God only for demonstrating his strength. However the reincarnation beliefs among other followers are very strong. These followers believe that the person who did a bad action shall be reborn in the form of an animal after death.
Another follower said that “we have nothing to do with villainy, we are also against the usury, we never take or give”. Some of the Yezidis, especially the ones who are living in the West and who have received higher education, have put forward that their religion puts emphasis on the mind.

In this respect, these Yezidis demonstrate the faith of Four Elements in order to prove this. The blessing of the air, water, fire and earth which are the basic sources of life is interpreted as the harmonization of the religion which is the metaphysical category with the material world itself. This tradition is recognized as a product of a faith that emerged thousands of years ago with Zoroastrianism, and for this reason they explain that they have the utmost respect for nature i.e. the natural world.

They explain the concept of the superior human being which exist in their religion as follows:

“A person can not be a Yezidi afterwards. Only the ones born from a Yezidi mother and father can be Yezidi. For this reason, our religion is not an expansionist religion. There is expansionism and dominance in other religions. There is no dominance in our religion as there is no expanding. This keeps our religion far from being aggressive. The concept of the superior human being in our religion brings us to God. There is the idea of elevation by committing no bad actions in Zoroastrianism and this continues in the Yezidi religion.”

Therefore, during the fieldwork it has been observed that the basic concept which forms the essence of the Yezidi belief is good action. This gives extreme importance to goodness, the damnation of bad action and even the prohibition of words which connote villainy. This in turn falsifies the notion of resembling or equating the Malak Tawus with Satan in the Semitic religions, which comes from the stories telling that the Malak Tawus is the first angel to be created by God. Malak Tawus is the leader of all other angels and he did not grovel to Adam and made him eat the forbidden fruit which takes part in the other sources written and told by the other Semitic peoples apart from the Yezidis.

The Yezidi people have great respect for the Malak Tawus as they believe that God left all responsibilities of the earthworks (earthly tasks and creations) to the Malak Tawus as well as ruling over the other angels. They also believe that the Malak Tawus is a mediator between the people and God, that he did not grovel to Adam due to his respect for God, that he made Adam eat the forbidden fruit with permission from God and thus provided the reproducing of the human race and that he extinguished the fires of the hell with his tears.

Lastly, we are talking about the word Yezidi. All Yezidis refuse the relationship between their names “Yezidi” and “Yezid” who was the son of Caliph Muaviye. In this subject, they are telling that “we are using the word Ezidi, and this originally comes from the word Ezdan-Yezdan and it means God. The son of Muaviye, Yezid is a personality who lived in the recent past. The Yezidi in our religion is much older”.

Forum of EthnoGeoPolitics Vol.4 No.2 Winter 2016
As seen in the previous explanations, the reflections of the historical dissertations peculiar to the modern age can be especially found in the explanations related with Zoroastrianism and the harmonization of the Four Elements faith with modern rationalism.

Concluding Observations on the Identity and Current plight of the Yezidis

Both the written sources and the self explanations of the Yezidi people demonstrate that some practices and ideas of the former Mesopotamian religions, especially Zoroastrianism and the ideas and practices of the other Semitic religions, are observed in the Yezidi religion. The fact that the Yezidi religion emerged in the Middle East—a region acting as a source for many religions and where monotheistic religions developed among the polytheistic religions and expanded around world with universal statements (doctrines)—has played an important role in this.

From this point of view, the Middle East is still the religious center of attraction even in today's world. In this way, we can expect the formation of a distinctively independent religion, even considering both the ideas and the practices within such a region where the mentioned religions were harmonized and emerged in history.

The Yezidi people should be recognized as a single and independent ethno-cultural group in the cultural sense because they fulfill all the recognized criteria of an ethno-cultural group identity. The endogamy-type marriage which they strictly apply, their exclusion of themselves from the other groups due to their beliefs, their caste system apart from the tribal organization which defines their group identities, and their self identity perception all constitute an independent Yezidi identity (see also Arakelova 2010).

Moreover, the Yezidis want to establish neither a historical nor a spiritual cooperation with the Kurds with whom they share the same language. The difference in faiths plays an important role in this. But the alienation based on the “Yezidi Massacre” in the 19th century which they solidify with the leader “Bedirhan”, is also an important factor accounting for their hard-won identity. This historical reality is still the reason for their distrust of and often hostile responses against the Kurdish people even today. As a matter of fact, they base their origins on the ancient Assyrian identity even though they are connected to different beliefs, and thus can establish a sense of intimacy with the Assyrians.

The primary statement of being the descendant of a different origin which forms a basic part of the Yezidi religion, is among the most important factors which define the Yezidi perception of their identity. This conviction, which distinguishes and alienates them from the other (neighboring) peoples, constitutes a crucial adhesive source of their group identity. This statement of being the descendant of a different origin, is the reason why Yezidis are closed to the outside world and possess an endogamic structure. The rule of exclusion from
the religion of a Yezidi married to someone outside their religion in accordance with their belief which they call *White and Pure Milk*, has played an essential role in the formation of the Yezidi religion until today.

For this reason, we can say that the belief of the Yezidis is the most important reference source in their identity definition. Their society structure and perception of the world have generally been shaped according to the rules defined by their religion. The fact that they do not allow anyone outside their breed to adopt the religion demonstrates the central importance of their belief in their social life. Therefore, their belief which defines the boundaries of the Yezidi identity can also be assessed as their ethnical identity beyond the religion in the narrow sense. In other words, the Yezidi religion ought to be seen and accepted as an "ethnical religion".

The statement of being the descendant of a different origin which forms such a central part in their mythology, has certainly been spiritually effective. In taking their belief as the basic reference point defining their group identity, it has strengthened this identity however disadvantageous this may have seemed given the harsh reality of recurrent harassment and persecution.

The fact that they have been attacked for centuries because of their religion, their consequent exclusion, and also the fact that they live in isolated mountainous regions in order to be protected from such attacks, have paradoxically been more effective in solidifying their identity than weakening it. As their belief (not their languages or their origins) has been demonstrated as the reason for the Kurdish attacks, the Yezidi people have been connected to their religion more and more and even have started to protect their religion at the risk of their own lives. In this way their religious identity became to be identified above all other (kinds of) identities.

On the other hand, the Yezidis’ changing their religion and choosing to be the follower of Islam or any other religion is negatively affecting the population of the Yezidis. Their tradition of not allowing any one outside to choose their religion is also relevant here. Because, due to this belief, the followers of the other cults can not become members of Yezidi religion; at the same time, former Yezidis who have changed their religions can not return to their previous ‘native’ religion. Thus, despite the fact that this tradition has helped the formation and survival of the Yezidi religion to this day, it also has engendered a ‘loss of blood’ for the Yezidi belief considering the demographical situation.

In addition to this, the protection of ethnic identity is still the basic aim for the Yezidi people, despite the loss of population as mentioned before. But this is getting more and more difficult as the Yezidi population is scattered disjointedly across different countries. It has been understood from the data obtained during the fieldwork, that the Yezidi people living in Iraq are much stronger and more strong-minded than the Yezidis living in Turkey considering the effective protection (or lack of it) of their ethnical identities in the respective countries.
I am of the opinion that the difference between the economical and social structures of Turkey and Iraq, and the ethnic and religious conflicts seen in Iraq, are playing an important role in this respect.

Prof. Çakır Ceyhan Suvari is Assistant Professor at the Department of Anthropology in the Faculty of Literature at Yüzüncü Yıl University, Van, Turkey. ceyhansuvari@yyu.edu.tr

Endnotes

1. Dasnai is the name of a great Yezidi tribe who immigrated from the regions of Hakkari.
2. Thondraki is a Christian cult emerged among the Armenians during the reign of Byzantium.
3. Sheikh Adiy Bin Musafer. He was born in 1075 A.D. in Lebanon. According to Yezidis Sheikh Adiy was a prophet.
4. The creation of the angels by Khuda (God) is explained as follows in the first section of Mushaf-i Reş: "Khuda created an angel named Azazil in the first day, Sunday, and this is the leader of all "Malak Tawus". He created the Malak Dardail on Monday, this is the Sheikh Hasan. He created the Malak Israfil on Tuesday and this is Sheikh Şemseddin. He created the Malak Michael on Wednesday, this is Sheikh Ebu Bekir. He created the Malak Gabriel on Thursday, this is the Şecaddin. He created the Malak Şemnail on Friday and this is Nasreddin. He created the Malak Nurail on Saturday, this is Yadin (Fahreddin). [Khuda] made the Malak Tawus the leader of these".
5. The social structure of the Yezidis are formed by various castes. The caste system of Yezidis are divided into eight categories in terms of their functions. According to this the following hierarchical system can be defined as: 1-Mirs; 2-Sheiks; 3-Pirs; 4-Kavals; 5-Fakirs; 6-Koçeks; 7-Fakriyats; 8-Mürits (Followers) (Suvari 2002: 108).
6. This situation would make the Yezidi belief a religion with a sacred book and they would benefit from the tolerance of Muslim belief as shown to the Jewish and Christian religions (as they are assumed as religions with sacred books).
7. The empire of David crumbled in a short period of time after his death. The Empire was demolished for a temporary period when Nebukhadnetzor B.C. 586 conquered Jerusalem and exiled many Jewish people to Babel (Harris 1995: 136). And Bulut has made the explanation in question with respect to this historical event.
8. The Yezidi belief which explains that they are coming from a generation or race different from all other humans lies at the basis of this idea. This situation is explained by the creation myth in the 21st Article of Mushaf-i Reş as follows: A discussion appeared between Adam and Eve considering whether the child was born from the mother or the father. Because, each one of them wanted to be the only source of the next generations. This discussion appeared when Adam and Eve saw the animals copulate with each other in order to create a child which resemble themselves and their common relationships. After longstanding discussions, each one of them poured their seeds to a jug and sealed with their own seals and they waited for nine months. After this time, they opened their jugs, there was Şahit bin Car in the jug of Adam. The Yezidis are the descendants of Şahit bin Car. After that Adam and Eve had sexual intercourse. Eve gave birth to a girl and a boy. Jews, Muslims, Christians and other nations and cults are the descendants of these.
9. The author is of the opinion that this answer was a strategical one in order to soften the historical tension between themselves and the official authorities, as he has been perceived as a representative of the latter.

10. This Yezidi follower stated that he was educated in Europe. Thus he rejects the ideas which he deems irrational or he puts his own interpretations on the religious subjects.

References—Bibliography


Review of the article “Yezidis: An Ethno-Religious Group in Turkey”  
(Critical Response to Çakır Ceyhan Suvari’s “Yezidis: An Ethno-Religious Group in Turkey”)

The question of the community of Yezidis is a topic taking the interest of scholars in different fields of social science, including e.g. ethnography, sociology or political science. Over the last few years we have heard about this community in the media as the victims of persecution from the militants of the so called Islamic State.

However, not many scholars have decided to do thorough research on the Yezidis as a community, a group. It concerns also the case of Yezidis living in Turkey. One of the reasons for the lack of sufficient studies on this community is that Yezidis belong to these groups who are difficult to identify due to the complex characteristics of their belief and ethnicity, as well as variety of religious and ethnic groups with whom they live together in a particular territory.

However, the author of the article took up the challenge, and with a quite good result too. The main question posed is who actually are Yezidis living in the Turkish territory. One of the main purposes of research within social science is to explain different phenomena and processes. The author of the article explains who are the Yezidis in Turkey, taking into consideration all important aspects and trying to answer fully the questions which are usually posed with reference to Yezidis but which often remain unanswered (e.g. relationship with the Kurds).

The author is right to begin with an essential remark that the identification of one group requires taking into consideration different perspectives. The article focuses on the emic perspective, i.e. self-identification of Yezidis, which is very important. In this context the fieldworks carried out by the author in 1999–2010 period are valuable. It is really a pity that the part about the fieldworks is so short—there are not sufficient details concerning this research, for example the interview questions, the number of interviewees as well as research methods. However, the etic perspective (identification by other groups) is also present. Without this perspective it would very difficult to explain different aspects of Yezidis’ identity.

The author managed to explain in this context first of all some misunderstandings and stereotypes about the group, concerning among other things the concept of Malak Tawus (Peacock Angel). What readers would expect (maybe as the continuation of the research) is the analysis of the question of the mutual influence of these perspectives, particularly the impact of the perceptions of other groups on the self-perception of Yezidis.

It is explained step by step who are the Yezidis in Turkey, starting from the name of the group and then focusing on its origin, history, belief and cult. The author managed to present the complexity of all these issues, proving that none of the main questions has a simple, unambiguous answer. There are for example many names for the Yezi people, different traditions have shaped their belief, Yezidis’ belief is somewhere between monotheistic and
polytheistic religion, and there are some groups of the Yezidis connected with the Kurds but the rest have nothing to do with them.

The author has come also to the conclusion (not explicitly expressed though) that we can talk about different Yezidis who see their identity in a different way—depending on whether we talk about intellectual groups or ordinary followers, Yezidis living in Turkey/Middle East or in Europe, Yezidis living in different Turkish provinces, etc. Although the heterogeneity of the community makes the task of presenting what is common for all groups of Yezidis extremely difficult, the author has fulfilled it in a satisfactory way, particularly with reference to important concepts of Yezidis’ belief.

Some readers may only feel unsatisfied that the author did not present sufficiently the other important aspects of Yezidis identity and behavior, i.e. particularly those related to exclusion and alienation. It would be interesting, also from the perspective of the main question posed in the article, to elaborate more on the reasons for this issue as well as the mechanisms of exclusion. It is another topic for further research on Yezidis—within different fields of social science.

- Prof. Adam Szymański, specialised in Turkish domestic and foreign policy, European integration, Democratisation, De-democratisation and Islam, whose major works include *Between Islam and Kemalism: Problem of Democracy in Turkey* (Warsaw 2008; in Polish) and *Turkey and Europe—Challenges and Opportunities* (ed., Warsaw 2012), is Associate Professor at the Institute of Political Science, University of Warsaw. arszymanski@uw.edu.pl

Editorial Note

The second peer-review, anonymous and unpublished in accordance with that reviewer's wishes, is more critical of the article's theoretical framework and "way of dealing with the subject" than Szymański's published peer-review. Nevertheless, the editorial board has decided to publish Suvari's article without further major changes—though it has sent the second peer-review in anonymised form to Suvari for his perusal and consideration for his future research and publications.

- Caspar ten Dam, Executive Editor

NB: do you have any comments on Çakır Ceyhan Suvari's article and/or the critical response? Please send these to info@ethnogeopolitics.org, or through the contact form at www.ethnogeopolitics.org. Some of the comments on this and any other contribution, we may publish as Critical Responses (maximum 3,000 words) in the next issue(s) of the journal. Extensive critical responses with own source references may be published as full-fledged, separate articles. Please supply your name, contact details, academic and/or other professional titles and affiliations, as well as your specialisms and any major publications.
(Announcement)

My new Cartoons and other Illustrations  Caspar ten Dam

In recent years, I am (once more) producing cartoons and other illustrations for customers and clients. I am also experimenting with new cartoons such as the one about the “[Terrorism] Expert”, some examples of which have been reproduced in some recent issues of this journal. Shown below is a page of my experimental, wordless cartoon story “The Encounter”. See for these and other cartoons www.ctdamconsultancy.com and https://stripkunst.wordpress.com.

In any private, small-scale use of these cartoons and illustrations, my authorship (“Copyright C. ten Dam”) must stay visible in reproductions. For any commercial, large-scale use, my prior permission is required.
Main Article

Soft Power Models in the Middle East

Fadi Elhusseini

Abstract
The Middle East remains of major geostrategic importance. Global powers found in the recent developments an opportunity to chart their way into the region; sending troops and reinforcements, rebuilding alliances and restoring old relations. Amidst this chaotic environment, a number of regional forces opted to adopt a different approach: soft power. It is obvious that such forces have found in soft power an efficient tool that can achieve what tanks and jets have failed to do. In this article, four soft power models in the Middle East are assessed and analysed: those employed by Turkey, Iran, Qatar and Oman.

Introduction: What is Soft Power?

Soft power refers to the ability to change what others think and do through attraction and persuasion rather than compulsion and coercion. Scholars are still divided and fail to agree on an exact definition of soft power, which thus remains a loose and vague concept. Joseph Nye was first to coin the term "soft power" and his definition of soft power is "getting others to want the outcomes that you want—co-opts people rather than coerces them" (Nye 2004).

Nye (2004: 5) finds that the crux of soft power is shaping the preferences of others; yet resources (either culture or laws or institutions) are significant in determining the effectiveness of soft power. The resources that produce soft power come chiefly from the values an actor (either an organization or a state) expresses in its culture, that can be transmitted through various means including commerce, tourism, personal contacts, visits, and exchanges.

Throughout his book Soft power, Nye tries to demonstrate the various means of soft power, including public diplomacy, speeches, state branding, drama and TV shows, movies, education (universities, books, and scholarships), scientific centres, culture and notions (globalization and democracy), sport and Olympics, food, music, immigration, Nobel Prizes, Internet, video games, NGOs, brands i.e. brand names (cars and electronics), peacekeeping missions, and assistance to poor and developing countries (Nye 2004: 8-13).

Soft power and hard power can work in conjunction and the lack of clarity and the difficulty to assess its success led to the emergence of "smart power" as a new, hybrid concept. Nye conceptualizes smart power as something lying between hard and soft power that can be considered a sort of "third way". To elaborate, this new concept in foreign policy studies (and practices) is based on the combination of: a) thesis: to coerce through hard-power means (military, economic and financial power); b) antithesis: to attract the other so as to achieve
interests through soft-power means of attraction and persuasion; and c) synthesis: a third way that is neither hard nor soft power, but a skilful combination of both—“smart power”.

Nevertheless, the influence of soft power remains fragile and subject to distraction i.e. befuddlement, disagreement and misunderstanding. Instability, chaos and wars are among various conditions that undermine the effects of soft power.

Turkey and Soft Power

For Turkey’s part, Turkish statesmen have repeatedly stressed the importance of soft power in achieving Turkey’s vision and strategy toward the Arab World. Turkey could skilfully utilize its interdependence concept and soft power skills to bridge differences and bury old doubts. With its economic success story (ranked 16th economy in the world; fully-emerged as a regional hub for international investments) Turkey’s economic capabilities have been employed as a successful soft power instrument others might wish to emulate and this has become known as the “Turkish Model”. The latter is deemed an important soft power tool that Turkey has nourished over the years and it is widely seen as a product of the compatibility of Islam and democracy and the moderation of Turkish Islam and Turkish modernization on the country’s long path of democracy that is based on state-instilled secularism (Göksel 2012: 104-110).

As soft power has accompanied and facilitated the new Turkish posture in the Arab World, Turkey’s intensified engagement and active presence varied in forms between direct political involvement, economic and financial assistance, cultural and educational support, social and artistic aspects, mediation and humanitarian aid. Turkey also launched various political initiatives including the Tehran Research Reactor (TRR) agreement in collaboration with Brazil in 2010. The latter agreement served Turkey in its state branding and public diplomacy where it demonstrated to Middle Easterners it being the instigator of independent policies rather than a follower of particularly the US foreign agenda.

Intriguingly, Turkey also has intensified its mediation efforts that included mediation between Syria and Iraq, Syria and Israel and Hamas and Israel. Through its aid organization the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (Türk İşbirliği ve Koordinasyon İdaresi Başkanlığı, TİKA) and other NGO’s, Turkey provided economic assistance to various Arab countries including Somalia, Sudan and Palestine.

Humanitarian aid varied and came in either the form of official assistance or through Turkish organizations and business associations. Culturally, Turkey held numerous academic conferences and seminars and offered a lot of scholarships for Arab students. Among the various tools of Turkey’s new foreign policy, the “culturalist” aspect played a significant role in the formation of specific impacts and perceptions within the Arab world toward Turkey. For instance, Turkey was able to enjoy unprecedented popularity in the Arab world making soap operas as one of the most effective soft-power tools Turkey could employ. Since 2008,
any average Arab citizen would sense the evolution in Turkish drama and its cultural effect on Arab societies (Ari & Pirincci 2010: 6).

This engagement policy has paid off in several ways and Arab intellectuals, activists, youth leaders, and even officials have taken a keen interest in this activism and called to emulate what became known as the Turkish Model. For example, the leader of Al-Nahda, Rachid Ghannouchi referred to Turkey as “the right model” for Tunisia (Göksel 2012: 60). However, with the outbreak of the Arab Spring, the ensuing developments defused much of the effect of Turkey’s soft power. As such, many Arabs began to brand Turkey as a hard power, which as been threatening to intervene militarily (the case of North Iraq), calling to ouster of heads of state (such as Assad in the case of Syria) and even being engaged in military actions (like the case of downing the Russian fighter jet at the Syrian-Turkish border in November 2015).

Iran and Soft Power

In contrast, Iran has been typically branded as a hard power, especially given its record of wars (like with Iraq right after the Islamic Revolution), alliances with regimes and groups widely recognized as violent or supporting terrorism and with fierce rhetoric against either the West or Israel. Nevertheless, whether one likes it or not, Iran is moving slowly but steadily towards an extraordinary soft- or smart-power status and role in the Middle East. It has succeeded in introducing a unique pattern whereby it is adept at converting hard power and coarse policies into effective and efficient soft-power tools that serve its image and reputation. Throughout the past decade, it used soft power at times, hard power and both, in what Nye and other scholars labelled as smart power (Cammack 2008).

Ali Bakeer finds that Iran's soft power is based on three main pillars. First and foremost is a history and culture that is based on a three-thousand-year-old civilization that always has had an impact on neighbouring regions. In the same context, tourism and cultural events are other important sources and Iran is classified as one of the best ten destinations in terms of history and archaeological sites.

The Persian language can be seen as a major source of attraction since it has entered in the synthesis of many other languages including Turkish, Hindi, Urdu, Armenian, Georgian, Swahili and others. The five million Iranians in the Diaspora play also a significant role in spreading Persian culture through Iranian restaurants, goods, songs and other social aspects.

The second pillar concerns political values. Iran has introduced a unique political model that stems from its hybrid political system which adopts the concept of “religious democracy”. As a unique model of its kind and source of Iranian soft power, this model constitutes a substitute for traditional systems and is considered an appealing model for religious Muslims.

The third pillar is a foreign policy which is the largest source of soft power. The Iranian Constitution refers clearly to the role of a foreign policy which is based on “Islamic” values,
fraternal commitment to all Muslims and full protection of the oppressed around the world. These offerings, along with the Iranian propositions on revolutionary and religious principles, are considered the bases of Iran's soft power (Bakeer 2013).

In light of the aforesaid observations, Iran, thus far, has adopted an ever-widening array of instruments to bolster its soft power and build alliances and partnerships throughout the Muslim and the Arab worlds. Shiism became a palpable policy and Iran has been contacting Shiites in many countries around the world, through media campaigns, establishing cultural and religious centres, financially supporting Shiite minorities and recently politically and militarily assisting Shiite communities with the aim of strengthening their role and influence within their societies (for example Houthis in Yemen and Hezbollah in Lebanon).

Taking advantage of the widespread regional dismay about US policies, anti-American rhetoric became part of Iran's official speeches. This was deemed one of the vital state branding tools that would promote Iran's status as a regional leader in face of foreign "hegemony". As a result, Iran was able to form a network of regional allies under the name of "Resistance Axis".

Similar to other Middle-Eastern leaders, Iran has used also pro-Palestinian slogans to gain popularity among the Arab masses. Iran also tries to expand its influence through trade and investment. For instance, Iran cooperates with Turkey and Malaysia to design and manufacture cars for Islamic markets and its state-owned Khodro Company emerges as the largest carmaker in the region, exporting over one million cars, trucks, and buses to over thirty countries in 2007 (Chorinm & Malka 2008).

Finally, the Nuclear Deal gave Iran's soft power another boost, especially it was thus able to avoid a war with the United States and/or Israel, lift the sanctions and evade any disadvantageous bargaining results on other issues (e.g. Hamas, Hezbollah, support for the Syrian regime).

Qatar and Soft Power

In practice, Qatar represents an evident illustration of the successful use of soft-power tools in the Arab World. State-branding proved to be a successful tool to Qatar's desire to promote itself as a neutral and progressive leader in the Arab and Islamic World and to gain more regional and international recognition. Not limited to state-branding, Qatar utilized various soft-power means, including hosting conferences, sport games (e.g. the Twelfth Arab Games in 2011), investments in various realms (like Islamic charities, culture and education, sport clubs, banks, Aljazeera, Qatar Airways, and in 2008 Qatar unveiled Qatar National Vision (QNV) 2030 on a generational project of State-branding (Ulrichsen 2014: 38-45).

Hence, one could argue that Qatar's soft power rests on three main pillars. First is a state-branding whereby the Qatari leadership has tried to promote the status of Qatar internally and externally. Domestically, the Qatari leadership worked on bolstering the national
identity through investments in national and cultural monuments, symbols and events (e.g. the first Qatar National day was declared in 2007).

Externally, Qatar has worked on promoting its status on two levels: politics and leisure. On the political level, Qatar has been proactive in appearing as a neutral and progressive leader in the region through various activities including hosting the Islamic Conference, investing in Islamic charities, mediating between political rivals in Lebanon, intra-Palestinian factions, Yemen, Syria, Libya, Darfur and recently in freeing Djibouti prisoners in Eritrea.

On the leisure level, Qatar has been working hard to appear with a different identity and qualities when compared to its proximity. Hosting fashion, art and sport events like tennis championships, Arab Games, organizing the upcoming Soccer World Cup in 2022, investing in and buying famous European clubs, and investments in tourism and travel—notably Qatar Airways is just a case in point.

The second pillar of Qatar's soft power that helps in state-branding as well, is Aljazeera TV channel which has been founded in 1996. Aljazeera was able to achieve unprecedented success in the Arab world and served as the voice of many ordinary Arabs in various realms. Opposing the American and Western narrative, Aljazeera gained fame among Arabs and represented a pan-Arabism[ist] view, especially with the 9/11 tragic events and the ensuing developments (Ulrichsen 2014: 48-49). The significance of Aljazeera appeared clearly with the eruption of popular revolts during the Arab Spring in 2011 where the channel was widely believed to have a crucial role in inspiring and mobilizing Arab masses.

The third pillar of Qatar's soft power is investment in education, culture and research. The most notable initiative in that regard is the Qatar Foundation of Education, headed by the wife of Emir Hamad, Sheikha Mozah. With this in mind, again Qatar has been able to project itself as an educational and cultural hub, providing a wide array of programs, services, scholarship and launching successful initiatives and hosting academic and cultural conferences and events.

Not limited to the Qatar Foundation, Doha (Qatar's capital city) has founded numerous educational and cultural centers, think tanks and universities such as the Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies, the Brookings Doha Center, the Rand-Qatar policy institute and others (Ulrichsen 2014: 52). In a similar way, Qatar has made assiduous efforts to pioneer in the field of research and development of clean(er) energy fuels.

With these notable achievements Qatar has been able to attain and cement a novel status seemingly incompatible to its size and far removed from the traditional stereotype of the Gulf region. Not surprisingly then, Qatar's rise has become the center of scholar and academic attention.
Oman and Soft Power

In the midst of the regional critical developments in the region, Oman appears as a peaceful oasis that rests aloof from the enticements of sectarian strife and power politics. This reality comes as a result of Oman's entrenched set of qualities, beliefs and values that prioritize peace. For Oman, soft power means peace. Oman's soft power rests basically on two basic foundations; peace-making and state-branding. These are naturally interlocked and Oman has been adept enough in realizing noteworthy results thanks to its domestic stability. In other words, stability is a crucial element in this equation and this encompasses both domestic and foreign (mainly regional) stability (Choe 2012).

Domestically, Oman is a peaceful and internally stable country. With the assistance of Iran (under the reign of the Shah), Pakistan and Britain, Oman preserved its unity and was able to crush a foreign-backed Marxist insurgency in the 1970s in the westernmost province of Dhofar (Cafiero 2016). Sultan Qaboos demonstrated a unique ability to absorb this wave of grievances with the message that the government would allow the province to develop its distinctive culture and identity and introduced huge development programmes and promoted strong economic growth. As a result, Dhofaris have responded well to the Sultan's policy (Wheeldon 2014).

Similarly, as part of the popular revolutionary wave a series of demonstrations erupted in Oman during 2011, albeit these protests were peaceful and showed respect for the Sultan. In return, Sultan Qaboos accepted the petitions and undertook a number of steps to contain the unrest, including reshuffling the governing cabinet and promising to give the Legislative Council more powers. The Sultan also pledged to create 50,000 government jobs and provide a monthly benefit of $390 to the unemployed (Worrall 2012: 106-115).

Consequently, domestic stability has been an important asset for Oman and has played a crucial role in attracting foreign direct investments and when others averted other regional projects, the Omani ones have appeared more appealing and promising. Not limited to economic gains, domestic stability, renaissance projects and good governance served raising Oman's status and hence the goal of state-branding. Since the Sultan took power in 1970, the country was revolutionized, modernized and transformed strikingly through substantial investments in various fields.

Oil revenues were pumped into public and private sectors, allowing business to provide consistent growth and an increasing number of jobs. A huge network of roads, schools and hospitals were built and as an eventual result, the WHO (World Health Organization) ranked Oman's healthcare system as the eight-best in world in 2000 (Wheeldon 2014). In a report issued in November 2010, the UNDP (United Nations Development Programme) ranked Oman as number one out of 135 countries in the world in terms of human development achievements for the period of 1970-2010 (Choe 2012).

With a crossroads of cultures, Oman's multicultural identity gave the country the chance to promote itself as such. The famous slogan in Oman's capital Muscat became "a country
where people of different ethnic backgrounds live in harmony and open to other peoples, irrespective of religion, customs and heritage”. State-branding was not limited to international recognition, but also building and bolstering a national pride at home. The Sultanate tried to rejuvenate this feeling of pride among Omani nationals through upping Oman's long history and tradition (Choe 2012).

Perhaps Oman's activism in the field of mediation and international peace demonstrates Muscat's soft-power capabilities and highlights the second aspect of its strategy towards foreign and regional stability. Oman believes that any dispute between countries should be resolved through dialogue. Ibrahim al Hamdani, Adviser at Oman's Ministry of Information says: "Oman has always been the peacekeeper and a strong advocate of international friendship and harmony since the blessed Renaissance and has always kept its ideals of keeping away from any conflicts whatsoever. This neutral position gives Oman the unique advantage of being a mediator in international issues".

In this respect, Oman played a valuable role in narrowing differences between various parties in recent disputes. When the other Gulf States opposed the US-Iran nuclear deal, Oman did not only support it but it also hosted the secret talks between the two governments.

Oman's neutral position gave the country a unique advantage of being a mediator in international issues. It played an instrumental role in freeing three American hikers arrested by Iran on espionage charges in 2011 (Gupta 2015). This position made Sultan Qaboos succeeds in maintaining the trust and confidence of both the Americans and the Iranians and bringing them across the table behind closed doors. One must stress then that the successful signing of the Nuclear Deal has revealed an unanticipated and crucial Omani role.

This policy is not novel and holding the secret talks between the two rivals during the Iraqi-Iranian War in Muscat is just a case in point. In Yemen, when Houthis are in control of the capital, Oman remains the only Gulf country whose embassy in Sana is still operational.

Oman did not take part in the Saudi-led “Decisive Storm” military campaign against the Houthis and former President Saleh's loyalists and kept channels open with them. It also played a pivotal role in handing over the body of a Moroccan pilot whose fighter jet fell in territories controlled by the Houthis. Not surprisingly then, Muscat would be the logical destination for any potential negotiations between the warring parties.

Not limited to the Yemeni debacle, Oman has leveraged its neutrality to develop trustworthy relationships with all sides in the Syrian crisis, enabling the Sultanate to serve as an acceptable mediator that no other Arab or Gulf country could. When almost every Arab and Gulf country boycotted and attacked the Syrian government of President Bashar al-Assad, Oman maintained its relations with the Syrian regime.

In August 2015 Syria’s foreign minister met his counterpart in Muscat and in October of the same year the Omani foreign minister Yusuf bin Alawi had met with Assad in Damascus.
(Cafiero 2016). In the same year, the Sultanate mediated in Algeria in order to help containing an unexpected, sudden sectarian crisis between Ibadi Amazigh and some Arabs associated with the Maliki School (see Noon Post Editorial 2015).

Conclusion

A comparative analysis of the aforementioned models or policies of four Middle Eastern countries has been deemed necessary to highlight another form of competition in the region: soft power. The employment of each model depends on certain tools and carries different goals. Nonetheless, the influence of soft power remains fragile and subject to distraction. Instability, chaos and wars are among various conditions that ultimately undermine the effects of soft power.

Turkey has been able to achieve unprecedented accomplishments through its soft power, yet it has been hard to maintain these gains with the eruption of the Arab Spring and resulting regional instability. Likewise, Qatar has been able to raise its regional and global significance in record time, yet with the mounting state of polarization all the achievements have been undermined dramatically at a later stage.

Iran's soft power model lies chiefly on ethnic and revolutionary values and reflects expansionist objectives as well. However, the Iranian soft power model does not rest on solid ground as its values intertwine with other values that can be a source of conflicts and hence can easily be transformed into hard power.

Finally, Oman has utilized low-profile soft-power tools and strategy with the aim of maintaining its status as a neutral actor and evade the effects of prevalent regional polarization. This quiet approach has paid off and produced Oman with coveted results.

In a nutshell, one may argue that both Turkey's and Qatar's soft power models have proved to have ephemeral effects only; Iran's soft power model can paradoxically be another source of regional instability if it either resorts to hard-power tools or if its soft-power tools have unanticipated escalatory, polarizing effects; and Oman's soft power model arguably seeks stability and peaceful resolution of conflicts—and successfully so.

Fadi Elhusseini holds a PhD at the University of Sunderland in the UK, and is an Associate Research Fellow at the Institute for Middle East Studies in Canada (www.imesc.org). fadihusseini690@gmail.com

A previous (already peer-reviewed) August 2016 version of this article can be found on E-International Relations: www.e-ir.info/2016/08/08/soft-power-in-the-middle-east-the-invisible-skirmish/.

Forum of EthnoGeoPolitics Vol.4 No.2 Winter 2016
References—Bibliography


Editorial Note

The article presents a timely and sorely needed analysis of the soft-power (and hard-power) policies of four countries in the Middle East since the rise (and arguable fall) of the Arab Spring; two of these (Turkey and Iran) are major powers in that region and beyond. Yet the small Arab Gulf states Qatar and Oman also turn out to be central players; particularly their conflict-resolution efforts have been more crucial and effective than their small size would suggest.

There remain some issues with the central concepts applied in the article, however. Fadi Elhusseini rightly points out that scholars do not agree on common definitions of “soft power”. But then one starts to wonder whether there are agreed, or at least good, definitions of “hard power”. The author does not further debate the contestability of these and other concepts, like “smart power”.

The author’s descriptions of the supposedly well-intentioned and effective ‘soft power’ policies of Turkey, Iran, Qatar and above all Oman—at least in the largest parts of each section on these countries—may be contestable as well. One certainly should critically review and ‘test’ any specific, self-congratulatory claims by the governments in question. Particularly statements from any Ministry of Information—hardly an objective and independent source even in the best of times—should not be taken at face-value.

Thus regarding the “fraternal commitment to all Muslims” stated in the Iranian Constitution, one should a) critically ask and assess the veracity of this statement in practice, and b) ascertain whether it refers to both Sunnis and Shi’ites, including heterodox Sufis within both or even outside these branches of Islam—or whether it just refers to ‘true’ Muslims i.e. Shi’ites as understood by Iran’s theocracy.

On a broader note, the author could also have discussed in more detail—and discarded or confirmed if possible—the frequent reports of these countries’ contributions to sectarian tensions and conflicts in neighbouring countries (Syria, Yemen, etc.), whether through soft- or hard-power means. Think for example of the recent incursions of the Turkish Army in Northern Iraq and even Northern Syria. They seem to be examples of hard power. At the very least Turkey attempts in these instances to apply ‘smart power’ i.e. a combination of hard and soft power.

Incidentally, one should not automatically assume that all soft power is ‘good’ and all hard power is ‘bad’. It all depends on the timeliness and proportionality of the means chosen, and on the motivations behind it.

Fadi Elhusseini does make some good critical observations in the Conclusion. But some of these could have been made in the preceding sections as well, so that the reader then is reassured that the author does indeed critically review the claims made by the governments of the countries in question.
Finally, some more observations on the cumulative effects of these soft-power policies by these countries would have been preferable. For instance, do they reinforce each other and really help to bring peace and stability—or do they compete with each other, and thereby hamper conflict resolution or even paradoxically help to stoke or even bring about violent conflicts? How optimistic can one be about the ‘rise of soft power’ in the Middle East, and how optimistic can one be that this soft power will really help to end, solve and prevent future conflicts in the region?

- Caspar ten Dam, Executive Editor

NB: do you have any comments on Fadi Elhusseini’s article? Please send these to info@ethnogeopolitics.org, or through the contact form at www.ethnogeopolitics.org.
Qatar's efforts to leverage its 2022 World Cup hosting rights, so as to create the soft power status the Gulf state needs for its own stability and credibility abroad, it also needs to punch above its weight and ensure a sympathetic hearing in the international community during times of emergency in the entire Middle East. But to this date, Qatar's efforts in this regard almost unavoidably has to operate on the Leninist principle of two steps forward, one step back.

Take the events in November 2016 as an example.

On the plus side, Qatar's ambition to host not only the World Cup but also an Olympic Games was boosted with a declaration by Thomas Bach, the President of the International Olympic Committee (IOC), that he was open to a renewed Qatari bid. Qatar's last bid failed in part due to criticism of its controversial labour sponsorship or kafala system that restricts workers' rights and puts them at the mercy of their employers.

Mr. Bach's statement may well reflect the emergence of a world in which human and other rights count for less with the rise of President-elect Donald J. Trump in the United States and of illiberal, if not authoritarian leaders elsewhere, in countries ranging from Russia, China and Turkey to those in Eastern Europe.

Mr. Bach could nonetheless come to regret his remark if predictions by Trump insiders prove correct that the new President, reluctant to confront Saudi Arabia head on, is likely to pick on Qatar as a state that plays both ends with its close alliance with the West and hosting of a major US military base, while at the same time allegedly supporting militant Islamist and jihadist forces.

Also on the plus side, in a significant gesture to human rights groups and trade unions in a part of the world that refuses to engage with its critics, Qatar's 2022 World Cup organizing committee and a major international trade union, Building and Wood Workers' International (BWI), agreed to launch unprecedented joint inspections of the working and living conditions of migrant workers involved in World Cup-related projects.

The latter agreement is intended to demonstrate Qatari sincerity in reforming the kafala system at a time that it is under fire for moving too slowly. Human rights and trade union activists have charged that Qatar is going through the motions rather than embarking on truly substantive reform.

Yet, activists are unlikely to be satisfied even if the inspections prove that living and working conditions of World Cup-related migrant workers have substantially changed and improved. The activists are demanding that far-reaching change be incorporated in national legislation.
applicable to all workers in the Gulf state—and effectively enforced. Changes in national law expected by the end of 2016 are likely to fall short of activists’ expectations.

A 52-page Amnesty International report published earlier in November 2016 documented what it called “appalling” abuses of the rights of workers employed in the renovation of the Khalifa International Stadium. The Qatari World Cup organizing committee said most of the issues in the report that date back to 2015 have since been addressed.

Finally, Qatar’s willingness to entertain whatever degree of change and engage with its critics is prompting limited change and debate of the labour issue elsewhere in the Gulf. Prominent Saudi journalist Khaled Almaeena, a regime insider, in an article in early November 2016 denounced the kafala system as “slavery and ownership.”

Mr. Almaeena was speaking from experience. “I was for 25 years the editor of the Arab News and for two years the Saudi Gazette, both English language Saudi newspapers. They were the eyes and ears of both Saudis and expatriates, probably more so of the latter. To them, we were a helpline. They wrote to us for advice, assistance, inquiries and support. Most of the letters dealt with working conditions, the breaking of contracts, unfair dismissals and unjust accusations.... There was no recourse to legal aid...” he wrote.

On the minus side for Qatar, the backlash of the rise of illiberal leaders, the decline of concepts of tolerance and human rights, and a wave of conservatism, if not ultra-conservatism, throughout the world are making themselves felt.

Qatar University recently cancelled a lecture on women in Islam by prominent Saudi women’s activist Hatoon Al Fassi, a member of the university’s faculty as well as that of Saudi Arabia’s King Saud, after faculty and students demanded on Twitter that she be sacked for challenging Qatari and Islamic values.

Similarly, the Qatari World Cup committee, in a further indication that Qatar may be backtracking on promises, said that current restrictions on alcohol consumption would be upheld during the World Cup. Qatar had earlier said that venues for alcohol consumption would be expanded from hotel bars to specific locations around the country during the tournament.

Not that alcohol is the litmus test of a successful Qatari World Cup given that the tournament may attract a different demography with far more fans from the Middle East, North Africa and the Muslim world who care less about alcohol than their Western counterparts.

Reinforcing perceptions of wrongdoing in Qatar’s World Cup bid, the world soccer body FIFA (Fédération Internationale de Football Association), banned Saoud al-Mohannadi, the Vice President of Qatar’s 2022 committee, for one year for refusing to help in a corruption investigation. The ban dashed Mr. Al-Mohannadi’s ambition to become Vice-President of the Asian Football Confederation (AFC) and ultimately of FIFA’s governing council.
Finally, in a bow to Saudi intolerance of any criticism, Qatar recently fired Jaber Salim Al-Harmi, the editor of *Al Sharq* newspaper, for tweeting that "other (Gulf) countries slash their citizens' salaries, while Qatar increases wages. We thank Allah Almighty first and foremost then we thank our leadership which uses national resources for its people's welfare."

Mr. Al-Harmi’s comment hit at austerity measures across the Gulf, but particularly in Saudi Arabia, that effectively rewrite social contracts under which citizens enjoy state-provided cradle-to-grave welfare in exchange for surrendering political rights.

Saudi Arabia has been particularly hard-hit with stark increases of utility prices and mass layoffs. Qatar has recently promised by contrast that it would raise by up to 100 percent the salaries of government employees, the bulk of the Gulf state’s indigenous labour force.

At the bottom line, Qatar’s massive investment in sports as a soft power tool has yet to withstand a cost-benefit litmus test. Without doubt, Qatar has enacted changes that put it among Gulf states in a class of its own. Yet, it has still to convince many (observers, activists, workers and other concerned citizens) that those changes are only the beginning of a process that will ultimately lead to true reform.

*Dr. James M. Dorsey is a senior fellow at the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, and co-director of the University of Würzburg’s Institute for Fan Culture. He is the author of The Turbulent World of Middle East Soccer blog, a recently published book with the same title, and also just published Comparative Political Transitions between Southeast Asia and the Middle East and North Africa, co-authored with Dr. Teresita Cruz-Del Rosario. jmdorsey@questfze.com*

*An earlier version of the article appeared at [https://mideastsoccer.blogspot.nl/2016/11/qatari-soft-power-efforts-two-steps_19.html](https://mideastsoccer.blogspot.nl/2016/11/qatari-soft-power-efforts-two-steps_19.html).*
THE TURBULENT WORLD
OF MIDDLE EAST SOCCER

JAMES M. DORSEY

James M. Dorsey introduces the reader to the world of Middle Eastern and North African football — an arena where struggles for political control, protest and resistance, self-respect and gender rights are played out. Politics was the midwife of soccer in the region, with many clubs being formed as pro- or anti-colonial platforms and engines of national identity and social justice. This book uncovers the seldom-told story of a game that evokes deep-seated passions.

Football fans are shown to be a major political force and one of the largest civic groups in Egypt after the Muslim Brotherhood: their demands for transparency, social justice, and an end to corruption sparked vicious street battles that left scores dead and thousands wounded. Discontent in Algeria erupts regularly at matches where fans demand the ouster of military leaders. A folk-song crooning national goalkeeper leads protests in Homs, Syria’s third largest city and scene of some of the worst violence perpetrated by Bashar al-Assad’s regime. In a country that bans physical education for girls, Saudi women have established clandestine football clubs and leagues. The book further tells the story of Somali child soldiers turned soccer stars and Iranian women who dress as men to smuggle themselves into stadiums to watch matches.

‘A rare combination of scholar and journalist, James Dorsey offers us a fresh lens through which to look at contemporary events in the Middle East and North Africa. Insightful, provocative, and fun to read, this is a welcome addition to the meagre scholarship on sports and politics in this region.’

— Raanan Rein, Tel Aviv University, author of Futbol, Jews, and the Making of Argentina

‘This might well be the single most important and informative book on the Arab Spring yet written. A must read for anyone who wants to understand the deeper social and cultural processes underlying the uprisings and counter-revolutionary processes that have shaken the region the last five years.’

— Mark Levine, Professor of History at the University of California, Irvine

‘Dorsey masterfully conveys the complex machinations of politics and culture through his analyses of the words and actions of real people expressing their passions about their lives through the medium of “the kicking sport.” Sports fans and political junkies will greatly enjoy and learn from this fascinating book.’

— Louis W. Goodman, School of International Service, American University

April 2016 / Paperback / 344pp / 9781849043311 / £15.99


BUY FOR ONLY £9.99 WITH FREE P&P: https://goo.gl/7Ieai6
Review Essay

The Tragic Tale of the Chechen Independence Struggle


Caspar ten Dam

An abbreviated version of this review essay will be published in the peer-reviewed journal *Iran and the Caucasus* (Brill) in one of its issues this year; its editorial board has given permission for the current extended version to be published here in our own journal. NB: citations and other references from each of the books under review are indicated by its year of publication and the relevant page numbers, e.g. '(2010: p.1)', '(2013: p.100)', etcetera. These references are different in format than the other source references in this review essay.

Introduction

Ilyas Akhmadov’s book *The Chechen Struggle: Independence Won and Lost*—with co-author Miriam Lanskoy, Director for Russia and Eurasia at the National Endowment for Democracy—is an insightful, searing and moving account of the Chechen independence struggle in the Northern Caucasus against Russia. The same is true for Akhmadov’s more recent book *Chechnya's Secret Wartime Diplomacy: Aslan Maskhadov and the Quest for a Peaceful Resolution*—with Nicholas Daniloff, a renowned journalist and former Director of the Northeastern University School of Journalism, as the co-author.

The latter book presents in separate chapters the transcripts of twenty-four secretly sent audiotapes by Chechen President Aslan Maskhadov between 1999 and 2003 to Akhmadov as Foreign Minister of the separatist government abroad from 1999 to 2005. The last chapter presents a letter by Maskhadov to the European Union of 25 February 2005 shortly before his
violent death on 8 March 2005. Each chapter ends with a commentary by Akhmadov of each translated audiotape or letter in question.

The translations into English of these “surviving tapes” (2013: p.vii, A Note on Translation) have been shortened for reasons of a) readability as Maskhadov often spoke hurriedly and repetitively, being “constantly moving around to avoid capture” (Ibid: p.vii); b) the safety of people concerned, particularly those “wanted by the Russians for treason” (Ibid: p.viii); and c) the requirement to remain within the book’s word limit. The full copies of the tapes, 60% in the Chechen language and 40% in Russian (Ibid: p.vii), will become available “for perusal by specialists after a period of at least 15 years” (Ibid: p.viii).

It remains unclear exactly how many audiotapes from Maskhadov to Akhmadov and vice versa—and to others and vice versa, like the ones to Maskhadov’s military commanders—have survived, and how many have been destroyed or lost. One wonders about the full, exact content of Akhmadov’s own audiotapes (and occasional short conversations by satellite phone) to Maskhadov.

Arguably Chechnya’s Secret Wartime Diplomacy would have been even more comprehensive and grounded if Akhmadov would have been able and willing to transcribe and publish his own audiotapes (if any survived) to Maskhadov as well.¹ Hopefully other audiotapes by Maskhadov—and others—to other individuals (associates, allies, rivals, etc.) and vice versa will resurface, be transcribed, translated in English and published in order to have a more complete understanding of the history of the Chechen independence struggle.²

Particularly in the Chechen Struggle, but also in Wartime Diplomacy, Ilyas Akhmadov (b. 1960) recounts his own active participation in Chechnya’s independence struggle and his travails as Chechnya’s Foreign Minister abroad to defend (the justifiability of) the struggle and find a peaceful resolution to the conflict. But these books also recount the roles of many more, generally more well-known figures in that struggle.

Furthermore, Akhmadov offers penetrating observations of the heavy odds arranged against Chechnya’s independence from the very start, odds that would have been extremely difficult to surmount even if (m)any of the major figures on both sides would or could have avoided the fateful decisions or mistakes they have made.

The odds described by Akhmadov roughly correspond to Lanskoy’s identification of “five over-arching problems” accounting for “Chechnya’s failure to develop into a functioning state” and “avert the catastrophe of a second war with Russia” by the end of the twentieth century: i) “absence of resources for postwar reconstruction”; ii) “profound confusion about the structure of the new state” mainly due to “surprising and unpredictable combinations of traditional, Soviet, Islamic and democratic norms” (Lanskoy 2003: 187 (quotes) ); iii) “weak political leadership in the person of President Aslan Maskhadov”; iv) the “proliferation of private armies”; and v) “failure in Moscow to undertake constructive policies for building relations with Chechnya” (Lanskoy 2003: 185 (quotes) ).³
Akhmadov tends to be more forgiving of the shortcomings exhibited by Maskhadov and other major players in the tragic tale of Chechnya’s independence, arguing that they have had few if any opportunities to act differently than they did. Both of his books therefore contain several laudable and impressive features.

Portraits of Maskhadov and other Figures in the Chechen Independence Struggle

First of all, *The Chechen Struggle* and *Chechnya’s Secret Wartime Diplomacy* offer close and personal portraits of the characters, apparent motivations, political convictions, personal relationships and fateful decisions of major figures in that struggle. These portraits include some of the most famous or notorious ones, including:

- General Johar Musayevich Dudaev (b. 1944), the first elected President of the self-styled, separatist and unrecognised Chechen Republic of “Nokhchi” (Noxçiyn Respublika Noxçiyçö, NRN) or “Ichkeria” in October 1991 until he was killed in April 1996 reportedly by a Russian air- or ground missile;

- General Aslan Khalid Maskhadov (b. 1951), chief-of-staff of Nokhchi’s armed forces since March 1994 and Nokhchi’s Interim Prime Minister and Defence Minister after Dudaev’s death, until he was elected President in January 1997 (he was killed on 8 March 2005 after Russian forces finally cornered him); and


However, Basaev became a ‘Wahhabist’ or rather Salafist notorious for his ‘terrorist’ acts like the Budennovsk hostage crisis in June 1995 in southern Russia, and the incursion into Dagestan in August 1999. He was killed in July 2006 in Ingushetia, reportedly by an explosive of Russia’s secret service, the Federal Security Service of the Russian Federation (*Federal’naya Sluzhba Bezopasnosti Rossïîskoy Federatsii*, FSB), though different versions of his death exist, including one by “accidental explosion” (Askerov 2015: xxii).

Khattab reportedly participated in major events like Grozny's famous New Year's Eve 1994 battle—and led with Basaev the short-lived 'invasion' of neighbouring Dagestan in August 1999 in a vain effort to establish a Chechen-Dagestan Islamic republic there. FSB commandos finally managed to track him down and kill him (by poison) on or around 20 March 2002 (precise date of his demise remains contested).

Obviously, *Chechnya's Secret Wartime Diplomacy* primarily deals with Maskhadov; through this book the reader gets to know him better and more intimately than through any other published English-language accounts of the Chechen conflict to date. Indeed, one must empathise with Maskhadov's ordeals as leader of Chechnya's independence struggle and his attempts to "end the war and find a political solution through negotiations" (2010: p.184) with Russia with help from the West until his violent death in 2005.

Akhmadov counts as many as six stillborn peace plans between 2001 and 2003 alone (2013: pp.236-239), most of them proposed by Russian politicians that envisaged Chechen autonomy rather than independence, but also one proposed by Akhmadov himself based on the example of Kosovo and reluctantly supported by Mashkadov: conditional independence through a UN protectorate for an interim period of ten to fifteen years (2010: pp.211-215 (‘Akhmadov plan’)).

Maskhadov's diplomatic efforts seem practically doomed in hindsight, given Russian President Vladimir Putin's utter unwillingness—despite some formal, shallow, insincere overtures as asserted and described in both of Akhmadov's books—to negotiate with Maskhadov or other representatives of the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria (ChRI) so as to avoid granting any legitimacy to the latter.

Maskhadov's voice—often desperate, isolated and paranoid, but also brave, persistent and thoughtful—is heard loud and clear through the transcribed and translated audiotapes. Maskhadov "knew full well that he would be a target of the Russians" (2013: p.4)—and knew full well that his predecessor Dudaev was reportedly killed "while using a satellite phone" which thus led him to "employ the most primitive but reliable method of courier mail" which came to include the said audiotapes—actually "mini-cassettes because they were easier to hide in cigarette packs or elsewhere than ordinary cassettes" (Ibid: p.27).

Maskhadov also assigned his successor by decree if he were to be killed or rendered incapable to continue his duties as President and supreme commander of ChRI's armed forces; this he told Akhmadov in his 17th audiotape in November 2001, though he did not divulge the intended successor's identity. It turned out to be Abdul Khalim Salamovich Saidullaev (b. 1956), but the latter did not last long: (pro-)Russian forces killed him in June 2006.  

Maskhadov probably has made the extensive audio recordings also for posterity's sake, especially if the worst would happen to him—or to his country's survival and freedom,
despite his frequently expressed ‘desperately-optimistic’ assertion that the latter scenario would never happen.

Yet one sign of Nokhchi’s impending collapse at the time is the increasing difficulty and danger of maintaining communications abroad and safeguarding i.e. hiding the state’s archive at home against Russian search parties. The tapes sent back and forth became increasingly rare, with an interruption of over nine months between Maskhadov’s 22nd and 23rd transcribed audio-tapes to Akhmadov from April 2002 till January 2003 due to Akhmadov’s visa problems in the US after Russia had asked Interpol to arrest him.

The reliance on infrequent smuggled audiotapes for information, feedback and simple human contact was affecting Mashkadov’s position and state of mind. He told Akhmadov more than once that he was “in a terrible condition due to lack of the news from you and impossibility to call you” (2013: p.187). He repeatedly urged Akhmadov to send him a cassette once or even twice a week as he was “tired of being in the dark ..., from not knowing what is going on there [abroad]” (Ibid: p.167)—an impossible demand, given the logistical difficulties of transporting these cassettes in secret across different countries and time zones.

Both Mashkadov and Akhmadov also have had numerous disagreements and misunderstandings on the particular texts and formulations of official documents like those on peace overtures and negotiations. The actual physical distance and consequent perceptual difference between them exacerbated these differences. In his last surviving and transcribed audiotape to Akhmadov dated 30 March 2003, Mashkadov states angrily (as he has done more than once) that “you are man who is absolutely unaware of what is going on here” (2013: p.242). Still, Akhmadov commendably keeps showing deep sympathy and understanding for him despite the latter’s often harsh criticism of the former.

Maskhadov also wanted to defend through the tape recordings his oft-criticised policies and decisions, such as his continuing if ambivalent efforts to work with jihadists, secular militants, bandits and corrupt politicians. Already in the first transcribed audiotape to Akhmadov of late July 2000, he argues that if he had confronted or even sought to isolate and defeat the likes of Shamil Basaev during 1999 or even earlier, it would have deepened the split in Chechen society between secularists and Islamists. This would have weakened Chechnya’s position even further vis-à-vis Russia. Additionally "I did not want a civil war to be a cause for Russia to begin its aggression" in late 1999 by invading Chechnya again (2013: p.12).

And that was why Maskhadov did not publicly condemn people like Basaev, former Information Minister Movladi Udugov and former Vice-President Zelimkhan Yandarbiev (2013: p.12 & note 11, p.259). He even tried in vain to pacify the latter by such measures as introducing (or proclamation to introduce) Shari’a (Islamic law) in February 1999.

Akhmadov understands and sympathizes with Maskhadov’s predicament; yet the latter repeatedly employed the same maneuver, and it proved to be fatal. He tried to implement
his opponents’ program” (2010: p.99). Indeed as the radicals “did not make similar compromises, his compromises became one-sided concessions” (Ibid: p.78).

Maskhadov thus rarely condemned the beliefs and actions of both jihadist and secular militants in public when he was, either formally or informally, the political and military leader of the independence struggle from 1994 till his death in 2005. He did privately condemn the beliefs and actions of his radical(ised) rivals on his confidential audiotapes. Thus he repeatedly berates commander Ruslan Gelaev—in involved in Basaev’s Confederation of the Mountain Peoples (KNK) and the Abkhaz Battalion in the early 1990s and a major commander in the First Russo-Chechen War—for his apparent insubordinations. Mashkadov thus condemns Gelaev for the latter’s supposed refusal to engage the Russian forces in the early days of the Second Russo-Chechen War—even though Gelaev’s troops fought “a whole series of battles” (2013: p.52) according to Gelaev’s own account and that of many sources. Thus at the Battle of Komsomolskoe (Saadi-Kotar) in March 2000, Gelaev’s troops were decimated during the village’s siege by Russian troops. Maskhadov blames Gelaev for “turning 600-800 of our most desperate fighters into corpses” (Ibid: p.69) at the village there, though other estimates speak of ‘just’ several hundred Chechen fighters killed against several dozen or more Russian casualties.

Maskhadov demoted Gelaev and branded him a deserter for moving his dwindled troops to the remote Shatili valley in Georgia in late 2000 and then to that country’s Pankisi Gorge by early 2001, and recuperate and train there indefinitely and in fact until 2002. Akhmadov argued against Gelaev’s demotion “for fear of driving a deeper wedge in relations with the radical commanders” (2013: p.261, note 4 (p.69))—thereby showing himself to be the greater pragmatist at least on this occasion.

After his return Gelaev was “continually ostracized” even though Maskhadov reinstated him, which according to Akhmadov eventually drove him to try to return to Pankisi; he was killed on 28 February 2004 during the attempt (2010: p.183 (incl. quote)).

Akhmadov’s Role in the Chechen Independence Struggle

The second laudable feature of The Chechen Struggle and also Chechnya’s Secret Wartime Diplomacy is that they offer intriguing, insightful and moving accounts of Akhmadov’s own role in the Chechen independence struggle, and of his frequently fraught, ambivalent yet close relationships with some of the major figures in that struggle.

Thus Akhmadov attained a closer relationship with Maskhadov, and—perhaps surprisingly—Basaev, than with Dudaev, possibly due to the latter’s oft-reported irascibility, aloofness, secretiveness and intolerance of other viewpoints. Akhmadov served under each of them in different capacities, and can be considered a major if lesser-known figure in the independence struggle.
Akhmadov served as a senior civil servant in the Chechen Republic’s Foreign Ministry’s political department under President Dudaev since early 1992 (or late 1991; sources differ or are unclear on this). Then he became a senior aide to Basaev tasked with training, equipment and record keeping in the latter’s Abkhaz Battalion in July-August 1994, until he sustained a “knee injury” by “accidentally” stepping in a hole (2010: p.15) at the battalion’s base when Basaev’s main force was attacking one of the anti-Dudaev forces in Argun, those led by notorious gangster Ruslan Labazanov.

Akhmadov received treatment in St. Petersburg—he was invited there by one of his university friends, presumably from the time he studied political science at Rostov State University—and thus was absent when Basaev’s battalion defeated and drove Labazanov’s forces out of Argun on 4-5 September 1994.

Eventually Akhmadov flew to Rostov, and drove to Grozny with a friend (bribing Russian soldiers to let them through on the way), arriving in the Chechen capital on December 30—right before Russia’s disastrous New Year’s Eve offensive into the city. He “experienced the battle of Grozny as total chaos. … I couldn't understand what was happening on the next block, or sometimes, in the next building” (2010: p.17). The Russian armed forces eventually occupied the entire city by early March 1995 or at least claimed they had full control over it, but only after massive bombardments and (thus) inflicting and sustaining heavy losses.

When Akhmadov was finally able to meet up with Basaev (then commander of the Grozny garrison) in February 1995, the latter suggested that he should join Maskhadov’s newly formed general staff then located near Argun and help set up “an analytical or information service” (2010: p.26) as Basaev put it. At first the commander-in-chief remained quite aloof when Akhmadov met him for the first time, while he became a much closer friend of Maskhadov’s aide-de-camp, Husein Iskhanov.

Still, Akhmadov were to increasingly identify himself with Maskhadov and his political viewpoints, progressively distancing himself from an increasingly radical and unpredictable Basaev—who first became widely known and notorious to the outside world with his raid into Budennovsk in southern Russia and the consequent hostage crisis at the hospital there in June 1995. Yet in the 14th transcribed audiotape of August 2001, Maskhadov asks Akhmadov straight out why and how he continues to maintain close contacts with self-proclaimed Islamists like Basaev, Udugov and Yandarbiev. Akhmadov claims that Maskhadov misunderstood the extent and nature of these contacts, exacerbated by the lack of “constant and systematic communications” between them (2013: p.147).

During many travails and narrow escapes from Russian bombs and other dangers (like contracting tuberculosis in late 1995, for which he was able to receive treatment and recover in France over several months), Akhmadov stayed in Maskhadov’s general staff as a kind of public affairs chief, at least up to the end of the First Chechen War (1994–1996). Thereafter, he had a short-lived political career as founding chairman of Basaev’s small, “radical separatist” (Sokirianskaia 2009: 223) and unsuccessful Marshonan Toba (Freedom Party)—
until he, heavily disillusioned, dissolved the party in the Winter of 1999. Apparently, this constitutes the last activity and period in which he has tried to work with Basaev, the “leader and the inspiration” of *Marshonan Toba* (2010: pp.94, 141(quote)). Why he still tried to work with Basaev remains obscure; probably a strong sense of friendship and loyalty must have played a role in this.

In the meantime, Maskhadov had been democratically elected as Ichkeria’s new President in January 1997, due to his leading role in the remarkable recapture of Grozny on 6 August 1996 and the signing of the peace accord with the Russian government at Khasavyurt, Dagestan, on 30 August 1996.

Maskhadov eventually appointed Akhmadov as Ichkeria’s Foreign Minister in late July 1999 (confirmed by parliament in September), who left Chechnya the same year to represent and promote the fledgling self-styled state abroad and mainly in the United States until he was finally dismissed sometime in 2005 by Maskhadov’s successor, Abdul Khalim Saidullaev. To this day, Akhmadov—who sought political asylum in the United States in 2002 and eventually received it in 2005—has been unable to revisit his homeland, let alone safely settle there.

As its main foreign representative, Akhmadov had to deal with the persistent isolation of the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria (ChRI) abroad, while it was losing the information war against both the Russian state(-controlled) media and those of internal opponents like Movladi Udugov’s increasingly Islamist Kavkaz Tsentr (Kavkaz Center) website at the expense of Akhmed Zakaev’s generally secular-nationalist Chechenpress website. The former website became the main voice-piece of the ‘North Caucasus Emirate’ (later renamed ‘Caucasus Emirate’) declared by Saidullaev’s successor Doku Umarov in October 2007, which effectively abolished the ChRI apart from a residual government-in-exile in London.

In November 2007 Zakaev resigned as Ichkeria’s Foreign Minister in protest against President Umarov’s declaration of a ‘(North) Caucasus Emirate’, only to be re-elected as Prime Minister by the parliament-in-exile, which formally took the President’s post away from Umarov but seemed powerless to stem Islamist irredentism as the expressed goal of most remaining insurgents on the ground.

Consequently, long before the announcement of the Caucasus Emirate, there was a “lingering suspicion in the United States that our government … might be harboring terrorists or allowing extremists into the leadership circle” (2013: p.86). Akhmadov believes Maskhadov’s refusal to distance himself from Kavkaz Tsentr and shut it down was the latter’s “biggest mistake” of all: “this website destroyed our ability to present ourselves as anything other than radicals and terrorists. Maskhadov should have nipped it in the bud” (2010: p.184 (quotes)).

Above all the frequent kidnappings (including foreigners) in and around Chechnya were mainly blamed on factions, Islamist, criminal-opportunist or otherwise, within or loosely associated with Ichkeria’s increasingly fractious and fractured government. These
kidnappings hurt its authority and credibility at home and abroad, even though many an
abduction appears to have been orchestrated by (pro-)Russian actors. In this regard
Akhmadov’s analysis of how “the hostage trade grew out of the treatment of prisoners” (2010:
p.101) during the First Chechen War—particularly due to the far worse treatment of
prisoners on the Russian side at the time—is insightful and convincing.

Ichkeria’s increasing isolation, lack of funds and damaged reputation explains why both
Mashkadov and Akhmadov so eagerly embraced and lauded any outside support they
received, like from the American Committee for Peace in Chechnya, one of whose co-chairs,
former U.S. National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski, wrote the Foreword to The
Chechen Struggle.

At times Akhmadov rather excessively praises Ichkeria’s rare supporters abroad, like
Brzezinski (e.g. 2010: pp.195-196; 2013: pp.62-63); but this is understandable given Ichkeria’s
severe predicaments including its factionalism and very survival at home. Brzezinski’s
Committee for Peace in Chechnya actually helped to sustain Western sympathy for the
Chechen cause as understood by the proponents of Chechen independence.

Yet Akhmadov’s reach remained limited: through Brzezinski’s committee he did have “good
access to members of Congress but almost no ability to meet high US officials” (2013: p.114);
the meetings with two senior State Department officials, secretly yet quite friendly with one
of them in October 2000 (Ibid: p.120) and publicly if quite frigidly with the other in March

Moreover, there were “only a few hundred Chechens in the United States and I had no means
of reaching them” or trying to “mobilize them” (2013: p.185). Doing this would have violated
and undermined his precarious status of being a “simple foreign visitor” rather than a
“registered foreign representative” (Ibid) in the States—and that of an asylum seeker after he
learned in May 2002 that an Interpol arrest warrant had been issued against him on Russia’s
request.

On the point of “becoming a man without a country” unable to travel abroad (his Russian
passport about to be expired) he made the “excruciating difficult” decision to “ask for
political asylum” while remaining Ichkeria’s Foreign Minister for a considerable while after
his asylum had been granted a few years later (2013: pp.248-249 (incl. quotes) ).

At the time Akhmadov was acutely aware that the United States, despite their criticism of
Putin’s authoritarian policies and (consequent) Russian brutalities in Chechnya (and
elsewhere), “considered Chechnya to be an integral part of the Russian Federation” and that
“the Chechen resistance was unlikely to get any assistance in combating the Russians as the
Afghans had received after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan” (2013: p.115). The latter case
was arguably or at least to some extent a case of foreign aggression by a superpower against a
fragile neighbouring state. But the case of Chechnya was quite different. Obviously the US
would never dare or even contemplate to intervene militarily within the internationally recognised territory of a major nuclear superpower like Russia, or offer military aid to opponents of Russia's territorial integrity.

Yet in 2001 Mashkadow still hoped that countries like the US with “large organizations that have huge financial capabilities” (according to Akhmadov, Mashkadow had particularly the “Central Intelligence Agency in mind”) would come to their aid (2013: p.123 & note 1 (quotes)).

However, the US-led War on Terror in response to ‘9-11’, arguably the most destructive terrorist act to date, effectively dashed any hopes and prospects of substantial US aid to Ichkeria: on 11 September 2001, a dozen members of Osama Bin Laden's Islamist-fundamentalist Al Qaeda ('The Base') network hijacked airplanes and plunged them into the Twin Towers in New York and the Pentagon in Washington DC, killing 2973 people, almost all civilians, 2749 of them in New York.

Russia's President Vladimir Putin “understood immediately how he could benefit from Al-Qaeda's attack” (2010: p.200). Putin had an easy time to convince the West, and the US Administration of President George W. Bush in particular, to consider and ostracise most or all Chechen separatists as Al-Qaeda-like or Al-Qaeda-connected terrorists. Putin's task was made all the easier as Chechen separatists, increasingly relying on actual terrorism, gangsterism and foreign mujahid assistance, already had made a bad press for themselves.

The post-9-11 world also put Maskhadov in an near-impossible quandary: severing the ties with Basaev, Udugov Khattab and other ‘terrorists’ as demanded by the US would severely, perhaps fatally weaken the armed struggle and “practically justify the aggression, Russia's genocide” (2013: p.161) in Chechnya by such an ‘admission of guilt’; but refusing to do so would—and did—worsen and solidify Ichkeria's isolation in the West.

As Maskhadov understandably put Ichkeria's immediate survival above the improvement of its international standing, he chose to disregard the American demand. Still his decision had detrimental effects on the independence struggle as it gave Putin more free rein in Chechnya than before, with tacit US acquiescence. Akhmadov observes that the intensified “Russian-American antiterrorism cooperation” after 9-11 was “short lived, but had … profoundly negative consequences for the Chechens” (2010: p.200).

Akhmadov’s Analysis of Brutalities during the Chechen Independence Struggle

The third laudable feature of Akhmadov’s two books is that both contain controversial and counter-intuitive yet thought-provoking, plausible and convincing observations on the Russo-Chechen conflicts in general and some major violent incidents during these conflicts in particular.

Above all Akhmadov’s thoughtful comments on brutalisation, a ‘degenerative’ process of increasing violations of local and/or international norms of violence, are worth mentioning—and are highly useful to the reviewer’s ongoing research and testing of his Brutalisation
theory, which nowadays consists of the variables violence-value (variable 1), combat-stress (variable 2) and the conflict-inducing (variable 2) and conflict-induced (variable 4) motivations of grievance, avarice, interest and ideology (Ten Dam 2015a: 5 & note 2; see on older version theory: Ten Dam 2010: 332; see further Ten Dam 2015b: 9-11).

Thus Akhmadov frequently refers to the morally corrosive tit-for-tat retributions, with ever declining respect for the Geneva Conventions and its provisions like decent treatment of prisoners. This brutalisation particularly took hold since the “Russians introduced cleansing operations, zachistky, ostensibly to identify fighters, but they mostly killed and terrorized the population”—while “on the Chechen side this process evolved more slowly and was more a reaction to what was being done to us than a deliberate policy” (2010: pp.38-39). Indeed, in the Russian “filtration camps” (Glavnoe Upravlenie Operativnykh Shtabov, GUOSh) “thousands if not tens of thousands people were tortured and humiliated” (Ibid: p.115).

Maskhadov was fully right by late 2000 to be “speechless” in shock about the Russian “brutalities, cruelties”, especially by underfunded, impoverished “contract soldiers”, taking place in his homeland (2013: pp.21(quotes)-22); he repeatedly refers to these brutal cleaning-up operations (zachistky) on the audiotapes.

According to Maskhadov, even special police OMON (Otrjad Mobilnij Osobogo Naznatsjenija, Special Purpose Mobility Unit) and military intelligence GRU (Glavnoye Razvedyvatel'noye Upravleniye, Main Intelligence Directorate) forces were as underfunded as ordinary contract soldiers, with the Russian military command unable or unwilling to pay them the promised “1,000 dollars a month” allowance or offer any other compensation (2013: p.34). Thus they looted and demanded bribes from hapless citizens or plundered their belongings after they killed them, especially during cleaning-up operations, encouraged by the Russian authorities to “Grab, rob, do what you like” *(Ibid: p.56).

These contract soldiers also forced husbands to undress their wives to supposedly check whether they bore the marks (imprints, scrapes) of sniper or other armed activities on their bodies, but only did this to humiliate both husbands and wives—and “take away and rape” the latter (2013: p.210).

Maskhadov’s harsh and bleak assessment of Russian misdeeds and atrocities appears to be generally true; by and large Chechen violations of humanitarian and human rights law, though grave and recurrent, did pale in comparison both in severity and scale to those committed by the Russians during the 1990s and the first decade(s) of the 21st century. He insists that “I have been doing everything within my power to keep actions of the Chechen resistance within the internationally recognized rules of war” even if he could not prevent all terrorist and other brutal(ised) actions by “isolated elements of the resistance” (2013: p.253).

Be that as it may, Akhmadov’s own observations on conflict and violence broadly concord with the reviewer’s own conceptions of brutality and brutalisation, and with his own
definitions of terrorism and other forms of (atrocious, brutal) violence, like terrorism as "sudden lethal violence without preceding warning of the act for whatever purpose against (groups of) unarmed or weakly armed and thereby effectively defenceless civilians, unarmed off-duty security personnel, soldiers and policemen, and other defenceless non-combatants" (Ten Dam 2015a: 16).

For instance Akhmadov argues that he cannot put the June 1995 Budennovsk hostage crisis “in the same category as other acts of terrorism” (2010: p.52), as “there was no cruelty toward the hostages; there were no cases of rape, or other types of abuses” (Ibid; pp.52-53).

Indeed, unlike the hostage crises at Moscow’s Dubrovka Theater during the performance of the musical Nord-Ost (North-East) in October 2002 and at Beslan’s primary (and secondary) school in North Ossetia in September 2004—Basaev claimed responsibility for both, though Akhmadov believes he was only truly responsible for and involved in the latter hostage-taking action (2010: pp.205, 223)—“in Budennovsk the hostage-takers took risks to get water” for the hostages as “none was being supplied” from the outside (Ibid: p.53 (quote); pp.224-225 (comparing Beslan and Budennovsk)).

Akhmadov also argues that Khattab “wasn’t a terrorist” (2010: p.202), as his “cruelty in the form of beheadings and cutting of limbs” of either dead or alive Russian soldiers” should be regarded as “war crimes and gross violations of the Geneva Conventions” rather than terrorism (2010: p.203): “Khattab never acted against the civilian population and his actions were directed against military targets” (Ibid).16

Whether that assessment is true or not, the scale and degree of terrorism and other forms of excessive violence by Chechen insurgents has continued to pale in comparison to those committed by the Russian state. Thus in both ‘Nord-Ost’ and ‘Beslan’ the Russian responses to ‘neutralise’ the hostage takers showed little if any regard for the well-being of the hostages, with hundreds of casualties among the latter that could well have been avoided.

Conclusion: Causes, Dynamics and Prospects of the Chechen Independence Struggle

The given of Russia’s political and military superiority vis-à-vis a small nation such as the Chechens, begs the question why so many Chechens were ready to forcibly secede from Russia in the 1990s, as most of them would have known full well that the long-term prospects of Chechen independence would be slim at best against Russia’s might. At least five interrelated factors appear to account for Chechnya’s extraordinary independence struggle and the consequent ethno-territorial conflict:

i) the saliency of historic grievances like the wholesale deportation of the Chechens people (amongst others) in 1944 on orders of Stalin;

ii) the still vibrant martial culture of defiance that obliges Chechens to avenge such historical wrongs when given the chance and seek safety from such wrongs in the future through independence;
iii) the Chechens being by far the biggest indigenous nation in the North Caucasus, thus having the demographic critical-mass to at least try to secede from a major power like Russia (Ten Dam 2010: esp. 333-334, 345-349; Ten Dam 2011: esp. 247-252); and because

iv) Chechnya exhibits the “so-called mosaic type of ethno-geographic configuration” of “highly homogeneous pockets of ethnic concentration” (Rezvani 2013: 15) which makes it vulnerable to conflict, especially if combined with

v) a “politicization of ethnicity” (Rezvani 2013: 55) in a hierarchical-territorial ethno-political system whereby some ethnicities get a higher autonomy and/or nationality status and thus more privileges in defined territories than others (Ibid: esp. 116-120).

It is the combination of all these factors—acting as either necessary or sufficient-making conditions—that account for the Chechen conflict, as “there are many cases of ethno-territorial groups in the (post-)Soviet space that enjoy territorial autonomy and a dominant demographic position therein, but nevertheless have not waged a war of independence” (Rezvani 2013: 249).

One also needs to account for these factors themselves, i.e. identify the factors-behind-the-factors, to explain thus “why an ethno-nationalist conflict emerged in Chechnya, and diffused and transformed [to a considerable degree] into a Wahhabi/Salafi religious conflict” (Rezvani 2014: 871 (quote); see further esp. 886, note 57).

The three impressive features of both books described earlier do not mean that either Wartime Diplomacy or even the broader-oriented Chechen Struggle exhaustively cover the characters and lives of all the major personalities in the Chechen independence struggle, let alone all the apparent reasons, events and complexities of that struggle. Such exhaustiveness would have been too much to ask for, given the limited size, (auto)biographical focus and topical range of both books.

Even so, Akhmadov’s descriptions of his own role and motives in the Chechen independence struggle, those of some major figures in that struggle and his relationships with them, and some crucial aspects, developments, outcomes and prospects of that struggle, remain more ambiguous and equivocal than they could have been.

Nevertheless, one should not put too much weight on such shortcomings, if only because these may be at least partially due to Akhmadov’s understandably sensitive position in the United States and beyond as a once major figure in the Chechen independence struggle. Concurrently, he may not wish to divulge too much of his own personal beliefs, motivations and judgments of his own role and that of his compatriots and (former) participants in that struggle.

Moreover, he is right in suggesting that his own participation in the struggle and the positions he occupied have been significant, but not such that he could have had full insights.
of the motivations and actions of all the major participants: “I knew all the main Chechen leaders, but even so, there are many things about which I can only speculate” (2010: p.235).

Be that as it may, Akhmadov’s expectation that “the Chechens will seek to control their own affairs again” and once more “will seek independence” (2010: p.247), that the “desire for independence has been pushed underground only temporarily” and will rise again “in 50 years” time if not sooner (2013: p.240), is not as farfetched as it may seem at first glance.

Despite the horrors of the first Russo-Chechen War of 1994–1996 and the second Russo-Chechen War that started in late 1999 and arguably continues to this day, both Islamist and secularist Chechens refuse to acknowledge defeat. Even those who have laid down their arms still try to sabotage Russia’s hold over their homeland by any means—and take up arms again whenever they see the slightest chance to succeed.

This resolve can also be found among former rebels and supporters who are presently exhausted and demoralised. Many reluctantly accepted the amnesty offer by Chechnya’s President Ramzan Kadyrov (b. 1976), effectively installed by Russia’s President Vladimir Putin in 2007. Insurgents had assassinated his predecessor and father, Akhmad Kadyrov (b. 1951) through a bomb blast in Grozny on 9 May 2004 that killed dozens of people (estimates vary).

Akhmad Kadyrov was once appointed Grand Mufti of Chechnya by Dudaev in 1995 and one-time proponent of independence in the First Russo-Chechen War—until he switched sides, apparently because he considered Islamism of Wahhabi and Salafi varieties a greater threat to Chechen society than Russian domination. Many observers discern merely or mainly self-serving motives, yet Akhmadov’s view of Akhmad Kadyrov is more nuanced than most. Thus he rejects allegations that Akhmad was a FSB agent and suggests that his “aggressively anti-Wahhabi” stance was a major and perhaps primary reason that “he had gone over to the Russian side” (2010: p.164 (quotes )).

The lethal bomb attack in May 2004 that killed Akhmad Kadyrov and scores of others, for which Basaev claimed responsibility, was followed by the ‘election’ of Alu Alkhanov as the new President. Nowadays the latter’s successor, Ramzan Kadyrov, a former warlord notorious for his ruthlessness (some who surrendered disappeared), intimidates the populace into submission—for now. At present “Chechens are exhausted and to survive they have to accept Kadyrov’s reign, hang his portrait everywhere, and pretend that the conflict is over” (2010: p. 246). But eventually “the spring [toward independence] will uncoil with greater force” (Ibid).

Indeed some analysts refer to a trend of Kadyrovisation, the unintended (side-)effect of Putin’s so-called Chechenisation policy of installing an indigenous yet pro-Moscow government by making the Kadyrovs so powerful locally that even Moscow may be unable to control them fully or even partially.

The Kadyrovs actually belong to and lead the benoy clan clan (gar, neqi), which reportedly “amounts to 15% of the Chechen population” (Sokirianskaia 2005: 456), apparently making it the largest Chechen clan, as large or larger than many a tuqum or (multi-)tribal union of multiple clans.
Thus one reason for the Kadyrov family's power and influence—and the decision by Putin to utilise them—appears simply to be the immense size of the clan they belong to. This in fact by itself may paradoxically further Chechen autonomy and even (de facto) independence on the long term.

As scholars, historians, anthropologists and social scientists in particular, we can and should try to predict, or at least assess, with our theories, hypotheses and empirical research which of Maskhadov's and Akhmadov's particular observations turn out to be prescient of Chechnya's seemingly doomed attempt to definitely break away from Russia. But in the end only the future will tell.

Caspar ten Dam is a conflict analyst and PhD-researcher on Chechen and Albanian insurgencies at the Institute of History of Leiden University, the Netherlands. c.t.ten.dam@umail.leidenuniv.nl

Endnotes

1. Wartime Diplomacy does not clarify the fate of Akhmadov's own tapes to Maskhadov. If many, most or all of these tapes or transcripts have survived, Akhmadov's reticence to publish these may be due to their sensitive content and his own contentious asylum bid in the US at the time.

2. Other audiotapes between Maskhadov and others did exist, though most of these are probably lost or destroyed forever. Maskhadov refers to these other audiotapes more than once, like those received by and sent to Ichkeria's then Deputy Prime Minister Akhmed Zakaev (2013: e.g. pp. 175,191,206,215).


4. Also called the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria (ich keri: "place over there" in Kumyk) or ChRI, after the south-eastern 'heartland' of Chechnya. The ChRI actually encompasses the entire Chechen region within the former Chechen-Ingush Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (ASSR) or ASSR Checheno-Ingushetia.

5. The "way Dudayev was killed remains mysterious"; the one being "killed by a [air or ground] rocket that identified and targeted him from a signal on his satellite phone" constitutes just one if "dominant" version of the event (2010: p.250, note 1 of Chapter 4; see p.64). In Wartime Diplomacy Akhmadov reiterates that Dudaev was apparently killed by a ground (or air) rocket "while using a satellite phone", though the "exact nature of his death has still not been entirely clarified" (2013: p.4; see also p.18).

6. Just like Wahhabism, Salafism is a purist version of Islam within the Sunni branch (see on the similarities and differences between Wahhabis and Salafis: Ten Dam 2011: 245-246).

7. Ali Askerov thus asserts that “it is very likely that he [Basaev] was killed accidentally" (Askerov 2015: 59). Though I do not always agree with his observations, I recommend Ali Askerov's Historical Dictionary of the Chechen Conflict (Rowman & Littlefield, 2015) as a useful and insightful source of reference; I plan to write a book review on it in the near future.
8. Akhmadov himself speaks of “a Saudi guerrilla fighter named Ibn al-Khattab” (2010: p.123) by which he clearly means the famous or rather notorious “Khattab” whom he met “several times” (Ibid). Askerov also states that “Thamir Saleh Abdullah Al-Suwailem” was “born in Saudi Arabia” (Askerov 2015: 119).


10. See note 5.

11. Maskhadov seemed to have considered Saidullaev as capable and willing to “carry out his policy” and “develop reasonable relations with his internal opponents” (2013: p.174; see also 2010: pp. 229-234).

12. Udugov “left Chechnya but remained very influential as the dominant propagandist of the radical wing and force behind the Kavkaz Tsentr website” (2010: p.183). His whereabouts remain unknown.

13. Akhmadov states that Gelaev was “killed on February 28, 2005” (2010: p.183)—but that probably is a typo error, as sources generally agree that he was killed on 28 February 2004 while attempting to withdraw (alone or with a few of his surviving troops) into Pankisi Gorge after a (failed) raid into Dagestan (see e.g. Waynakh Online, www.waynakh.com/eng/2008/05/khamzat-ruslan-gelayev/ (acc. 14 Nov 2016)

14. Akhmadov’s account of his injury differs from those of other sources. Thus Waynakh Online claims that “Akhmadov was wounded during the fighting with forces of Ruslan Labazanov in Argun” in August 1994: www.waynakh.com/eng/2008/05/iIyas-khamzatovich-akhmadov/ (acc. 7 April 2014), suggesting that he was in the thick of it.

15. Reportedly, Akhmadov “retired to private life” right after the end of the war in August 1996: see e.g. www.waynakh.com/eng/2008/05/iIyas-khamzatovich-akhmadov/ (last acc. 26 Sep 2016).

16. However, beheadings and other cruelties against soldiers and other combatants who have surrendered, been wounded or otherwise rendered unable to defend themselves should be regarded as acts of terrorism—even if the victims are formally still combatants rather than non-combatants (see e.g. Ten Dam 2015a). Such acts of terrorism are then at the same time violations of humanitarian law.

17. Babak Rezvani acknowledges the relevance of multiple factors accounting for internal armed conflicts—particularly grievances of severe deprivations in the past and demographical size and dominance of the initiating (rebelling) party (Rezvani 2013: esp. 227-249 (Chechnya); Rezvani 2014 (on Chechnya); Rezvani 2015 (updated, shortened and improved version of Rezvani 2013) ). Yet he stresses that such factors only make any conflict truly likely, in a time of interethnic tensions and state fragmentation, when the ethnicities concerned live next to each other in concentrated pockets (mosaic configuration) within ethno-politically constructed territories. Thus “in addition to their demographic dominance in their autonomous homeland, the burden of trauma caused by their genocidal deportation [in 1944] as well as a certain peculiarity of the Caucasus—probably its mosaic type of ethno-geographic configuration—are crucial factors, which in combination can explain the Chechen conflict” (Rezvani 2013: 249; see also Rezvani 2014: 886).

References—Bibliography


(Announcement)

The Moscow Cathedral Mosque in the Life of Migrants from Central Asia

with Sophie Roche, University of Heidelberg

In this discussion, Sophie Roche will unfold the social life of migrants in, around and through the main mosque in Moscow, Prospekt Mira. This mosque is important for Putin’s politics of Islam as well as for inner-Russian Islamic sectarian tensions, and is increasingly linked to ordinary migrants from Central Asia, who constitute the large majority of the believers. Whereas inside the mosque migrants meet along ethno-linguistic lines and discuss religious as well as political issues, migrants profit most from the mosque’s administrative, social and economic services. Sophie Roche will look at these social activities, relating them to the politics and inner-Russian Islamic sectarian discussions. She argues that with Prospekt Mira a context is offered through which migrants integrate ideologically into an administratively hostile country and a society that
turns increasingly Islamophobic. The material for this presentation has been collected through ethnographic fieldwork in Moscow since 2010.

This event is part of the CERIA Initiative, generously funded by the Henry Luce Foundation.

Tuesday, February 21, 2017
4:30-6:00pm
Voesar Conference Room
1957 E St NW, Suite 412
Washington, DC 20052

REGISTER

Sophie Roche is currently leading the junior research group at the Cluster of Excellence “Asia and Europe in a Global Context” at the University of Heidelberg. She worked at the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology in Germany and received her PhD from the Martin-Luther University Halle-Wittenberg in 2010. She has published Domesticating Youth: Youth Bulges and their Socio-Political Implications in Tajikistan (Berghahn Books 2014) and The Faceless Terrorist: A Cultural Enquiry of Jihad (forthcoming in new open access series HeiUP). She has extensive ethnographic experiences in Tajikistan, in Russia among migrants from Central Asia and among Muslims in Germany and Turkey.