

Radical Islam and the Chechen War Spillover: A Political Ethnographic Reassessment of the
Upsurge of Violence in the North Caucasus since 2009.

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Abstract:

This dissertation seeks to analyse the upsurge of insurgent violence in the North Caucasus following the end of the counter-terrorist operation in Chechnya in 2009. By looking at the development of radical Islam and the impact of the Chechen spillover in the region, this research suggests that these factors should be analysed and contextualized in each republic. By comparing the cases of Kabardino-Balkaria, Ingushetia, and Dagestan, this dissertation seeks to demonstrate the importance of vendetta, criminal activity, religious repression and corruption as local factors that contribute to the increase of violence. By focusing on the case of Dagestan, the author proposes a political ethnographic approach to study the mechanisms and details of religious repression and corruption in everyday life. This analysis permits us to map out the different pathways towards the participation in insurgent groups in Dagestan. By doing so, it demonstrates that one can identify three different generations of insurgent fighters in Dagestan. This dissertation demonstrates that the role of Salafist ideology is often marginal in the early stages of the process of violent radicalisation, and slowly gains importance as the involvement in violence increases. The emphasis should be placed on vengeance and religious repression as crucial triggering factors as they provoke a cognitive opening for young people in Dagestan to engage in violence.

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List of Acronyms:

ChRI	Chechen Republic of Ichkeria
CE	Caucasus Emirate
DIA	Defense Intelligence Agency
DUM	Spiritual Board of Muslims
DUMD	Spiritual Board of Muslims of Dagestan
DUMKB	Spiritual Board of Muslims of Kabardino-Balkaria
DUMSK	Spiritual Directorate of the Muslims of the North Caucasus
FSB	Federal Security Service
GRU	Russian Military Intelligence
KBK jamaat	Kabardina-Balkaria-Karachai jamaat
OMON	Paramilitary special forces of Interior Minister

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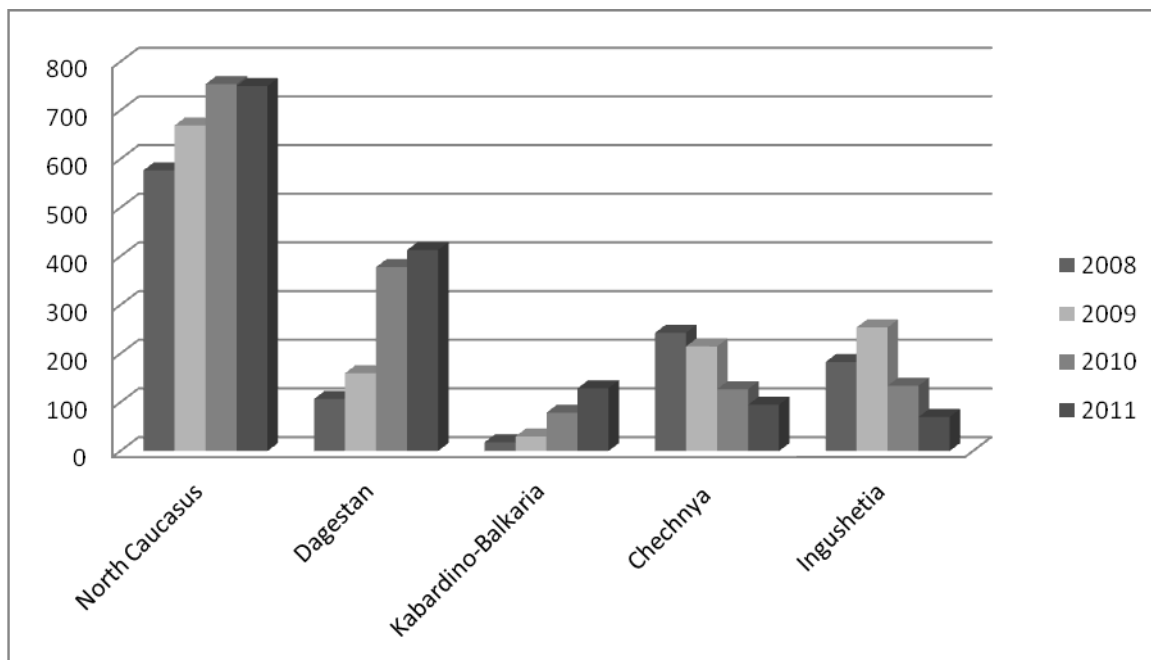
Early drafts of the chapters were presented at various conferences between 2009 and 2012. I would like to especially acknowledge the suggestions and comments I received at the Association for the Study of Nationalities (ASN) Annual World Convention throughout the years, the Wars Beyond War workshop at Colgate University in 2012, and the New Methodologies in Critical Security Studies Conference in Ottawa in 2011.

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Introduction

Graph 1: Acts of Violence in The North Caucasus¹



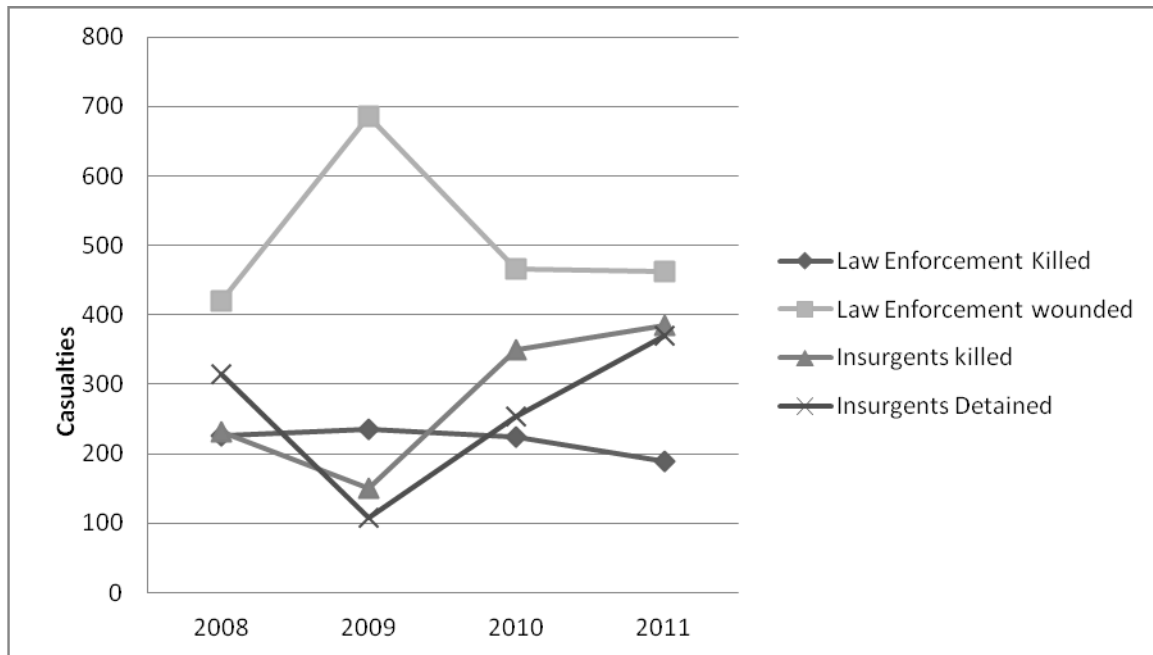
In the fall of 2007, the leader of the Chechen insurgency, Doku Umarov, proclaimed the creation of an Islamic State which would encompass the entire region of the Caucasus. Russia also witnessed an important increase in suicide attacks, mainly concentrated in the North Caucasus. Over 30 attacks had been committed against civilian and military targets. Three major terrorist attacks happened on Russian territory between November 2009 and January 2011. On November 2009, the express train between Moscow and St.Petersburg, the Nevsky express, exploded on route to its destination, wounding 87 people and killing 25.² In March 2010, two women detonated their explosive belts in the metro system in Moscow during the morning rush hour. The first explosion occurred at the Lubyanska metro station

¹ Source : Gordon Hahn, Islam, Islamism, and Politics in Eurasia Report 2008 and 2009; Kavkazskii Uzel for 2010 and 2011

² “Derailed Nevsky Express train was blown up - law enforcement source” RIA Novosti, 28 November 2009, <http://en.rian.ru/russia/20091128/157015151.html>

where the general headquarters of the Federal Security Service is located. The second bomb exploded around forty minutes later at Park Kultury station. The two blasts killed 38 people and injured 60³. The two young women originated from Dagestan, which is located in the North Caucasus. In January 2011, another suicide bomber detonated his bomb in the middle of the crowd at the Moscow Domodedovo International Airport, killing 37 people and injuring more than 120.⁴ The suicide bomber, Magomed Evloev, was a twenty-year old young man from Ingushetia. In May 2012, the Russian anti-terrorist committee claimed that it had uncovered a plot to launch terrorist attacks in the region of Sochi during the 2014 Winter Olympics⁵.

*Graph 2 : Insurgents and Law Enforcement Casualties in the North Caucasus (2008- 2011)*⁶



³ Aydar Buribayev, “Suicide bombers kill at least 38 in Moscow subway”, Reuters, 29 March 2010, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2010/03/29/us-russia-metro-blast-idUSTRE62S0FM20100329>

⁴ “Deadly suicide bombing hits Moscow's Domodedovo airport”, The Guardian, 24 January 2011 <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/jan/24/suicide-bomb-moscow-domodedovo-airport>

⁵ Miriam Elder, “Russia 'foils Islamist plot to attack Sochi 2014 Winter Olympics’” The Guardian, 24 January 2011 <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2012/may/10/russia-plot-sochi-winter-olympics>

⁶ Source : Kavkazskii Uzel available at <http://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/198756/>

Doku Umarov claimed responsibility for this new wave of terror on Russian territory. Although Umarov is a Chechen and his organisation is mainly established on the remnants of the Chechen national movement, Dagestani and Ingush were involved in the terrorist attacks. Moreover, in 2007, Umarov adopted a growing Islamist-jihadist ideology that promotes the creation of an Islamic state in the North Caucasus and the expansion of the jihad across Russia. Umarov and his organisation openly proclaimed their will to conduct terrorist attacks on Russian territory, and during the Winter Olympics. At the same time, violence had spread through the entire region of the North Caucasus, mainly in Dagestan, Ingushetia, and Kabardino-Balkaria. In the last three years, the level of violence in the North Caucasus has been systematically increasing and peaked in the summer of 2009 in the republic of Ingushetia, and in the summer of 2010 and 2011 for Dagestan. At the same time, the level of violence in the Republic of Chechnya has consistently been decreasing since the end of the counter-terrorist operation in April 2009.

For the Russian government, this upsurge of violence in the North Caucasus is mainly the result of the problematic economic situation in the region, corruption of local elites, and the development of radical Islam. The solutions put forward by the Russian government and Aleksandr Khloponin, Plenipotentiary Envoy of the President to the North Caucasus district, consist of a policy of economic development through infrastructure and investment programs. This program was announced to the international community at the World Economic Forum in Davos in February 2011, and it mainly focused on the construction of ski resorts across the region in order to force the modernization of the North Caucasus.

For many analysts (Schaefer, 2010; Hahn, 2007; Bodansky, 2007), the cause of this violence is the integration of the North Caucasus insurgency into the global Salafi network (*al-Qaeda*) and its contagion across the North Caucasus. For them, it is proof that we are witnessing a spillover of the Chechen wars across the region driven by a radical Islamic ideology (Trenin, Malashenko, and Lieven, 2004). For others, such as Kuchins, Malarkey, and Markedonov, “what is happening in the North Caucasus is not a unified region-wide conflict but rather a series of local conflicts stemming from local problems (2011: 20)”. An important tension exists between cross-regional factors and local factors or, in theoretical concepts, between structural and macro factors versus the micro-dynamics of the conflict.

These various analyses put forward crucial analytical factors that explain the upsurge of violence in the region. However, none of these factors could be taken individually to explain the actual situation. This research suggests that one should propose a multi-level explanation that takes into account the socio-political context in the North Caucasus, the effect of the two Chechen wars and local dynamics, including but not limited to, police repression, blood-feud or criminality in order to explain the upsurge of violence. Indeed, Charles King and Rajan Menon underline that the literature about the North Caucasus focuses too often on a single root cause factor to explain the upsurge of violence (2010). A recurrent problem in the literature usually portrays the violence in the North Caucasus as being driven strictly by radical Islam or on Russian repressive policies in the region. Other factors, such as greed (criminality), nationalism or vendetta, are often obliterated from theoretical frameworks. Gordon Hahn was one of the first analysts to propose a multi-causal model that looks into the development of “a network of terrorists (...) throughout the North Caucasus” (2007: 1).

The case of the North Caucasus insurgency, especially in the Republic of Dagestan, demonstrates the importance in revisiting how we approach our analysis of the micro-dynamics of violence in a civil war or in an insurgency. This research seeks to demonstrate the need to go further and to try and get a local understanding of the micro-dynamics of the upsurge of violence. One way to do this is to take seriously the theoretical concepts of radicalisation and violent engagement, and to try and identify when certain past experiences, preconditions, triggering events and context play a role in the participation in insurgent violence. Furthermore, this research makes the case for the need to try and theorize how these factors cohabit together and influence each other. In other words, I seek to explain, through a multi-level analysis, how ordinary people choose to join insurgent groups in the North Caucasus. Understanding the processes toward insurgent participation will also help explain the upsurge of violence in the region.

Trying to pinpoint a few causal factors to explain the situation in the region is very attractive in terms of research scope, but is probably misleading as the general often hides the specific or the heterogeneous nature of the phenomena. In reducing the ambition and scope of our research, we might be able to obtain a better understanding of the various mechanisms and processes responsible for a phenomenon, such as the upsurge of insurgent violence in the North Caucasus. It also implies the need to get closer to our object of study by engaging in fieldwork research, political ethnography and micro-level methodological design. “More interdisciplinary research agendas are necessary as radicalization simultaneously involves individual socio-psychological factors, social and political factors, religious dimensions, cultural identity and group dynamics. Capturing the dynamics and complexity of these interrelationships in specific national contexts and over time is a prioritized research theme” (Ranstorp, 2010: 13). McAllister and Schmid suggest building

comparative research programs focusing on fieldwork in conflict zones (2011). This follows Jeff Victoroff's statement about the over-reliance on secondary sources in terrorist studies (2005). Research on terrorism and insurgency often overly focuses on secondary sources and does not always build new knowledge about empirical cases. This research will thus seek to explain how an analysis of secondary sources and ethnographic research can be used in conjunction in order to explain the upsurge of violence in the North Caucasus.

In order to do so, I propose to use the growing literature regarding the micro-dynamics of violence in civil wars and political ethnography in order to establish the basis of my theoretical framework. I will then review the literature about the North Caucasus focusing on two major explicative trends: the Chechen spillover and Islamic radicalisation. However, before engaging in this discussion, a conceptual clarification of the meaning of civil war and violence is necessary.

The quantitative literature usually defines civil wars according to three major characteristics:

“(1) they involve fighting between agents of a state and organized nonstate groups that seek to capture control of the government or over a region or to influence government policy by means of violence; (2) the fighting kills at least 2,000 people over its course and 100 on average in every year; and (3) at least 100 people die on both sides of the conflict.” (Weinstein, 2007: 16)⁷

According to this definition, the insurgency in the North Caucasus could be labelled as a civil war. Weinstein underlines the need to separate civil wars in different categories in order to “narrow (...) theory building in the classical case of insurgency” (2007:17). Once again, the case under study in this research is an example of a classic insurgency according to the first characteristic cited above. In this paper, civil war is loosely defined as a military action

⁷ These characteristics are common in the literature. See Fearon and Laitin (2003) and Singer and Small (1994). For a conceptual discussion, see Sambanis (2004).

opposing the government forces and its proxies (incumbents) against one or more insurgent group(s) in order to challenge the control over a region subject to a common authority at the beginning of the conflict. This definition relies on the Singer and Small (1994) and also on Kalyvas (2006) conceptualization of civil war. For the sake of the argument of this thesis, the threshold of death is not central. Since the goals of this research is to explain the upsurge of violence in the North Caucasus and the participation in insurgent groups, the debate about the definition of civil war will not be further developed.

Peter Schaefer gives interesting numbers to establish a comparison between the North Caucasus insurgency and the cases of Afghanistan and Iraq, which are considered important civil wars and insurgencies. He claims that in 2009, 330 Russian policemen and military personnel were killed in the North Caucasus in comparison to 307 Americans in Iraq and 520 coalition forces in Afghanistan (2010: 3). Although these numbers are problematic and are usually under-estimated for the North Caucasus, it demonstrates the importance of the level of insurgent violence in the region. Indeed, the level of violence increased by around twelve percent in 2010 and 2011. The situation is slowly deteriorating and the violence in 2012 seems to be following a similar trend. At the same time, it is worth underlining that the population of Afghanistan and Iraq is more than three times higher to that of the North Caucasus. In relation to these other countries, the insurgent violence in the region is still highly problematic.

Two other concepts worth exploring before engaging in the main discussion are: violence as a construct, and “upsurge of violence” used as an expression. Violence is understood as the intentional use of force in order to constrain or threaten an individual or a group, and can or may result in physical and/or psychological harm. In adding non-physical forms of violence, this definition is sought to be more inclusive than the traditional definition

in the study of civil war focusing on physical violence (Kalyvas, 2006). As for the expression “upsurge of violence in the North Caucasus,” it is used to refer to the recent increase of insurgent activities in the region.

Although the concept of violence is central in understanding the socio-political situation in conflict zones, the focus on its physical component is limited and draws an incomplete picture of the heterogeneous dynamics in the North Caucasus. Nordstrom’s concept of “everyday of war (2004: 33)” captures this idea that war, or in this case insurgency, is much more complex than military and physical violence. Often, as civil war experts, we tend to build our understanding on physical violence as it is the most apparent form of violence. In the recent turn in the study of the micro-dynamics of violence in civil wars, most authors provide a caveat about the elusiveness of the concept of violence, yet choose to focus only on its physical aspect (Fujii, 2009a; Kalyvas, 2006). Although this conceptual choice is legitimate in order to reduce the scope of the inquiry, it nonetheless obliterates a whole side of civil wars. Indeed, a pervasive form of violence in conflicts is often described by journalists or human rights workers as rooted in social discrimination, profiling and marginalization. My personal experience in the North Caucasus highlights the relationship between physical and non-physical forms of violence. However, “writing about violence is not a simple matter” (Nordstrom, 1997:6)”, and “writing people’s experiences of violence is even more difficult” (Nordstrom, 1997:9). In order to reflect on the concept of violence in the North Caucasus, I will now review the literature regarding the micro-dynamics of violence in civil wars. By doing so, I will seek to demonstrate the importance of studying violence in its physical aspect, and also how fieldwork experiences can help us understand how insurgent violence develops.

The research program about civil wars, internal conflicts and ethnic conflicts has evolved significantly over the last 20 years following the end of the Cold War and of the Soviet Union. The predominance of internal wars since 1945, and the political situation after 1991 encouraged researchers to focus on the causes of the outbreak of internal wars. The scholarship on internal wars could be classified into three major groups. The first group of authors studied the causality between economic variables and the presence of certain types of natural resources, on the one hand, and the development of ethnic violence and civil wars, on the other (Collier and Hoeffler, 1998, 2004; Collier et al., 2003; Hegre and Sambanis, 2006; Ross, 2004a, 2004b, 2006; Sambanis and Elbadawi, 2002). A second group, mainly in comparative politics, sought to explain the outbreak of civil wars by focusing on state weakness (Fearon and Laitin, 2003; Laitin, 2007; Snyder, 2000) and the role of elites (Gagnon, 2004; Kaufman, 2001; Snyder, 2000; Snyder et Ballentine, 1996). A third group of authors, mainly from international relations, proposed to analyze the outbreak of violent ethnic conflicts by looking at nationalist aspirations, ethnic disputes and emotions among individuals (Brown, 1993; Horowitz, 1985; Huntington, 1993; Kaplan, 1994; Kaufmann, 1996; Petersen, 2002; Posen, 1993; Rose, 2000; Sambanis, 2001; Toft, 2003; Van Evera, 1994; Walter, 1997).

However, in recent years, the scholarship on civil wars has moved away from large-N and cross-national research to micro-focused research trying to explain how patterns of violence evolve during this type of conflict. This research aims to demonstrate the importance of the micro-political turn in the study of civil war, and the necessity to deconstruct reified labels associated with this field of research. Following Kalyvas' conceptual distinction between violence and civil wars, this research engages in the study of violence in civil wars, and not on what causes the onset of such conflicts (2006). Indeed, the

first generation of studies on civil wars have assumed that violence is a static concept. In fact, violence should not be viewed as a mere outcome of civil war but approached and examined as a process which is constantly re-performed throughout a conflict. In order to engage in the study of violence, this chapter will first present a literature review on the recent research in the scholarship of micro-dynamics of violence, mainly focused on civil wars, by demonstrating how this research program offers theoretical ways to surpass the greed and grievances debate. At the same time, this chapter will focus on the relative weaknesses and paucity of actual studies, and further explains how an ethnographically-driven theoretical framework can contribute to the study of the micro-dynamics of violence. This is because the micro-turn in the study of violence has mainly involved quantitative analysis of acts of violence. Ethnographic research on civil wars, although it directly engages in micro-dynamics of violence at the ground level, rarely engages in the theoretical debate found within the scholarship on civil wars. They usually restrict their theoretical discussions to the field of ethnography and anthropology. This research will seek to reflect on the role of ethnography and its possible contributions to the study of the micro-dynamics of violence in civil war.

1.1 The Limits of the Greed and Grievance Debate

The greed and grievance debate has occupied a central part of the recent literature in the study of the causes and duration of civil wars. In response to this important body of literature linking political grievances, such as economic inequalities or identity claims, to the onset of rebellion and civil wars, economists have focused on the structure of opportunities to engage in violence and the role played by cupidity for rational actors in civil war (Collier and Hoeffler, 2004). The presence of natural resources and the lack of career opportunity

favours violent engagement and rebellion (Weinstein, 2007). The greed and grievance dichotomy often forces scholars to choose and classify actors as economically or politically driven. In the first case, militias and insurgent groups are often portrayed as greedy political actors. Following this assumption, an important amount of literature has focused on the economic aspects of civil wars that see violence as simply the continuation of economics by other means (Keen, 1998: 11). Some scholars suggest that a new type of war is emerging (Kaldor, 1999; Holsti, 1996; Gray, 1997), with an increasing role played by criminal networks and private actors targeting civilians to extract resources from them. However, this argument about economic deprivation (Gurr, 1970) is not new in the study of violence and rebellion. In the second part of the dichotomy, many authors postulate that group identification, and by the same token group grievances, would drive people towards violence. The focus on political and identity grievances often excludes important actors in the dynamic of a civil war, such as criminal groups or actors engaged in both insurgent violence and criminal activities. There is no clear-cut border between political and criminal violence in civil wars but a porous frontier that allows actors to use them interchangeably or in conjunction with one another. The same observation could be made about the border between the so-called perpetrators and the victims, as it is often very difficult to separate them in the context of a civil war. Primo Levi coined the concept of the “gray zone” in order to talk about the ambiguous relationship between the perpetrators of violence and their victims (2003). A corollary following this reflection is that in the literature there is a tendency to depict civilians simply as victims of violence and deprive them from their agency (Kalyvas, 2006). These labels are by no means mutually exclusive and need to be challenged in order to understand violence in civil wars and insurgency as a process, and to map the micro-dynamics and mechanisms in place. Thereby, in order to explain civil war and

its dynamics of violence a theoretical framework should be able to explain the interaction between the state actors, criminals and insurgent groups. It should also be able to explain how greed and grievances cohabit and evolve differently according to the conflict itself and its context.

Indeed, the major problem with the greed and grievance dichotomy is that “civil wars are not binary conflicts but complex and ambiguous processes that foster an apparently massive, though variable, mix of identities and actions” (Kalyvas, 2003: 475). Fujii suggests that violence could be seen as a process involving “temporal and spatial unfolding of ambiguous actions, shifting contexts, and actors with multiple and contradictory motives” (2009a: 11). Therefore, the central aspects of the research concerning civil wars should not be whether the causes of violence are cupidity or politics, as in earlier research trends (Collier and Hoeffler, 2004), but rather when, how and why each of these factors leads to violence in a civil war. Brubaker and Laitin insist on the heterogeneous nature of conflict and to understand them as “a number of different types of actions, processes, occurrences, and events” (1998: 446).

The root causes of civil wars are thus not always correlated with the local dynamics of violence. As Kalyvas explains, the distortion between the local, the regional, and the conflict in general, limits our possibility to postulate a single-central cause of violent engagement and a common universal rationality amongst actors (2003; 2006). Local issues are often driven by banal and daily problems over a central narrative such as ethnic identity or religion. Although master cleavages might not be the triggering cause of violence, it becomes an opportunity to commit violence and to justify it even if it does not have a direct link with the intrastate war. “What do labels and identities really mean on the ground?” (Kalyvas 2003: 476). If the master cleavage of a civil war could not explain the violence at

the micro-level, what kind of theoretical assumptions and framework can? Kalyvas argues that “civil war can be analyzed as a process that transforms the political actors’ quest for victory and power, and the local or individual actors’ quest for personal and local advantage into a joint process of violence (2006: 365).” He uses the concept of alliance to link elite and dynamics on the ground as “a transaction between supralocal and local actors, whereby the former supply the latter with external muscle, thus allowing them to win decisive local advantage; in exchange, supralocal actors recruit and motivate supporters at the local level” (2006: 365). In order to theorize his formal model, Kalyvas chooses to approximate the behaviours of elites and local people in civil wars by proposing an ideal-type of rational decisions taken by actors at different levels. Although this simplification of civil war dynamics gives a general picture of the conflict and its local actors, I argue that it offers a static image of the phenomenon of engagement toward violence in civil wars. This research examines the relationship between the master cleavage of a conflict and local individuals by putting forward an interpretative theoretical framework inspired by the growing literature on the micro-dynamics of civil wars (Kalyvas, 2008a), and the micro-political turn in the study of social violence (King, 2004). I suggest that instead of proposing a formal model that isolates ideal types of behaviours, a theoretical analysis should focus on the eclectic nature of engagement toward violence in civil wars. In order to do so, I will propose to theorize the pathways and variables that push and pull individuals to engage in insurgent and terrorist groups during a civil war.

I will first review the scholarship of the micro-dynamics of violence to better situate the theoretical contribution that I intend to make. Indeed, the research program about the micro-dynamics of violence in civil war is often portrayed as a way to overcome the limits of structural analysis focusing on the onset of civil wars, and also on the duality of the greed

and grievance debate. At the same time, as mentioned earlier, this type of research program is mainly dominated by quantitative analysis relying on datasets of acts of violence. Fieldwork and ethnographic research are usually understood as a sub-method that cannot really offer the scientific advantages of the former. The next section will thus contextualize the actual place of ethnography in the research program, and how this research seeks to propose a theoretical contribution focusing on the role of political ethnography.

1.2 Micro-dynamics of Violence in Civil War⁸:

Cross-national and large-N researches have proposed numerous robust conclusions that postulate about the onset, duration, and termination of intrastate wars.⁹ However, one important limitation is the fact that aggregate data often misrepresents local variations in a conflict. Urban specifications are often taken as reliable proxies for the entire country when they typically depict a biased image of the local dynamics. Identities, motivations, practices, and narratives vary from village to village and thus should be analysed independently to grasp a better picture of a civil war. Brubaker and Laitin make “a plea for disaggregation” (1998) in order to explain ethnic violence to mainly challenge its homogeneous nature. Charles King suggests four characteristics to establish a new research program that seeks to disaggregate social violence at the local level: “a stress on engaging violence at analytical levels far below the nation-state; an attentiveness to how discrete episodes of violence are defined; a scepticism about the utility of labels applied to conflicts from the outside; and a commitment to finding ways of incorporating the voices of participants into the analysis” (King, 2004: 447). King’s suggestions follow Kalyvas’ reflection on the danger to dichotomize civil wars between greed and grievance. This exemplifies the necessity to put

⁸ The label comes from Kalyvas (2008a).

⁹ See Kalyvas (2006) for an exhaustive review.

forward an ethnographic methodology in order to gather research data on the eclectic and heterogeneous nature of these conflicts.

At the same time, it also raises a methodological debate inside the micro-turn in the study of violence. Indeed, in the quest to interrogate and disaggregate the violence below the master cleavage one has to ask what is the best methodological approach for this task. King's suggestion to ground the research on discrete local events of violence, local voices, and narratives seem to favour a research-design based on political ethnography. Ethnographers and anthropologists researching violence in civil wars have focused, for a long time, on its local dynamics and challenge the traditional war narratives (Robben and Nordstrom, 1995; Nordstrom, 1997).

The micro-turn in the study of violence is thus not new and should inspire itself through the use of existing literature in other academic fields such as ethnography and anthropology. Political ethnography is central in establishing this micro-political turn, as it is often the only way to collect research data where systemic aggregation of reliable information is difficult or even impossible to obtain; such is the case with civil wars. Schatz and Bayard de Volo insist on the central role played by political ethnography when "government statistics are suspect [or inexistent], media outlets are controlled by political interests, [free media are also inexistent or strongly repressed], (...) political violence impede survey research" (2004: 269).¹⁰ Political ethnography surely offers a way to experiment, report, and deconstruct violence in its daily effects on people and their lives. It also proposes a way to study the margins and interstices of power and violence in civil war, and to map the

¹⁰ Political ethnography as a stand-alone methodology is not limited to these situations as Schatz argues in the conclusion of the book *Political Ethnography: What Immersion Contributes to the Study of Power* (2009b, 304-305). Political ethnography can produce tangible and robust research results in almost any research settings. See also chapter 6.

various narratives and how local agents make sense and give meanings to the violence experienced in daily life. Ethnography and fieldwork thus play a central role in the research program about the micro-dynamics of violence in civil wars as a methodological tool, and also allows for an interpretation and understanding of violent events.

In chapter 6, I will explain in detail what political ethnography is, what the challenges are in conducting ethnographic research in a civil war, and how it can be used to draw conclusions about the micro-dynamics of violence. However, for the time being, I will mainly focus on the importance of ethnography in the actual theoretical discussion found in the scholarship on micro-dynamics. This discussion will seek to demonstrate how political ethnography, as a methodology, should be taken seriously in order to help in the analysis of violence in civil wars.

Three Trends in the Research Program of the Micro-dynamics of Violence

When one looks at the actual research program on micro-dynamics of violence in civil war and the state of its current literature, three major trends can be identified based on the role played by fieldwork and its importance for the researcher.¹¹ The first major trend is that researchers rely on ethnography as a central part of their research design. Elizabeth Jean Wood's research about collective action and civil war in El Salvador exemplifies how ethnography and the study of micro-dynamics could contribute to the debate on violent engagements and collective action (2003). If ethnography can lead to the establishment of a formal model, as in the case of Wood, it can also produce research focusing on the meanings and interpretations of precise acts of violence (Kakar 1996; Brass 1997; Malkki, 1995) or on

¹¹ The three trends and the examples given are mainly about violence in civil wars, although some books such as Varshney (2002) and Wilkinson (2004) focus on ethnic riots. Varshney himself argues that a theory of riots should be separated from a theory on civil wars (2002:11).

participant observations in civil wars (Finnegan 1992; Nordstrom 1997; Green 1999; Bayard de Volo 2001; Moran 2006; Thiranagama 2011). The second group of authors rely on fieldwork, which may or may not involve ethnography, that mostly focuses on interviews and surveys to build claims about violence in civil wars (Straus 2006; Humphreys and Weinstein, 2006; 2007; 2008 Weinstein 2007; Fujii 2009a). The last group of authors rely mainly on a quantitative analysis and datasets of discrete violent events to analyse violence at the local level (Varshney, 2002; Wilkinson 2004; Kalyvas, 2006; Lyall, 2009; 2010). Although field research (interviews, surveys, archives, or ethnography) is often part of their research design, quantitative analysis represents the main methodological tool in their research. Throughout all three trends, disaggregation offers valuable advantages as it provides a more nuanced and detailed description of violence and civil wars, as well as a larger sample of events to draw on empirical-based conclusions and challenge reified labels, social categories and narratives. The commonalities among the three give rise to important methodological and epistemological debates.

Multi-method in the Study of Violence

Most of the authors presented above seek to engage in the debate on the mechanisms leading to violence in civil wars by mixing various theoretical and methodological tools from formal models, quantitative research, fieldwork and ethnographic work. The metaphor of the toolbox to reflect on methodological tools, and the debate surrounding it, seems central to analyse the possibilities and the limits associated with this research program.

Ed Schatz reflects on the possibility to engage in a multi-method research involving political ethnography in the study of politics and violence (2009b). Using Feyerabend's analogy of language, he states that "the best protective device against being taken in by one

particular language is to be brought up bilingually or trilingually (Feyerabend, 1979: 91, quoted in Schatz, 2009b: 303). However, Schatz explains that researchers should not limit themselves to one method and should look for a multi-method research design. However, “speaking” about two or three methods in political science should not lead one to abandon their core assumptions, or to try and merge them into a single uniform approach to a research design. According to him, a combination of certain methods could lead to the transformation and the reduction of its values. He makes the case for a stand-alone ethnographic research, which can involve different interpretive methods in opposition to a multi-method approach that, according to him, risks relegating ethnography to a negligible role. In other words, ethnography could become subordinate to more “rigorous” quantitative methods or be seen as a “summer intern” in comparison to “senior partners” (Hopf, 2006, 18). However, Schatz explains the multi-method nature of ethnography, as it often involves participant observation, interviews, oral histories, and sometimes even archival work. The problem is not about the multi-method itself but the epistemological/ontological incoherence between different methods. A central question in the research program regarding the micro-dynamics of violence in civil wars is to assess the possibilities and validity of combining, on the one hand, formal models and quantitative analysis and on the other— interpretative methods.

Schatz exemplifies the concern about incommensurability using Ashutosh Varshney’s work, one of the authors associated with the micro-dynamic turn in the study of violence.¹² He argues that “Varshney’s use of ethnography is subsumed by his larger epistemological-ontological commitments. (...) Ethnography is reduced from being both an end-goal (production of insider meanings) *and* a process (person-to-person contact) to simply

¹² Schatz addresses similar comments about David Laitin’s work seeking to mix ethnography with formal modelling (1998).

the latter” (2007: 12). Schatz emphasises the tension between inductive-driven methods, such as ethnography, in opposition to Varshney’s work being mainly deductive, even if involving ground-level methodological techniques. According to Schatz, insider meanings and perspectives should have an important role in our research design. Thereby, the definition and the identification of the research concepts and variables should come from fieldwork and not from initial research assumptions. In other words, scholars should inspire their research by listening to the field and to local actors. An important question arises from Schatz’s criticism: what should be the place of insider meanings, perceptions and the research subjects’ own perspectives on our theoretical assumptions about violence in civil wars? In other words, what place should political ethnography occupy in our research design? Should it be understood in its minimalist definition insisting on the person-to-person contact and thus as a simple way to gather field material for deductive research, or should we understand it as an interpretive enterprise to engage directly on the micro-dynamics of violence in civil war?

Schatz’s critical point against a multi-method research design involving fieldwork is particularly important as it forces scholars to reflect on methodology and the way to study violence in civil wars. Contrary to the widespread belief in academia, access to people willing to share their stories and narratives concerning civil wars is relatively easy and researchers often encounter a “need to talk and talk” (Nordstrom 1997: 3-4).¹³ The methodological value of these narratives is debatable but political ethnographers usually agree that ethnography is the methodology best-suited to judge the validity of truth claims made by actors (Allina-Pisano, 2009). Contrarily, Charles Tilly explains the limit and danger

¹³ See Nordstrom (1997); Wood (2003); Nivat (2004) are a few examples of ethnographic researches conducted in civil war.

of focusing on “standard stories” obtained from participants in social events. Personal narratives could often lead us to miss or neglect larger causal mechanisms or social processes (cited in Wood 2009: 129). Wood, in opposition to Tilly, explains that “the choice to participate in a movement or not to do so rests on the perceptions on interpretations of structures and processes by individuals” (2009: 129). Her comment is central here, as it exemplifies the need to be able to relate macro processes to individual behaviours.

Wood has engaged in thorough research design about the Salvadorian civil war involving formal interviews (approximately 200), participant observation and a participatory mapmaking workshop to study the micro-foundations of collective action in a civil war. However, she admits herself that her book focuses more on formal interviews rather than on the ethnographic method (Wood, 2009: 120). Wood explains the importance of the comparative nature of her research design and therefore, the need for simultaneously studying various areas “so prolonged, sequential participant observation in a single area or a few areas was not an option (2009: 120).” She insists on the difficult access to certain regions where violence limits or prohibits ethnographic work. Wood further explains that her research design was a compromise between a multi-sited approach and the need for immersion in local communities. Her work is actually one of the very few studies of the micro-dynamics of violence in civil wars which is able to bridge ethnographic sensibility and the need for generalisations and external validity. The insider perspective and the role of ethnography is thus at the heart of the methodological debate on the way to study civil wars.

As it will be pointed out in the following chapters, many political scientists refrain from labelling their work as solely ethnographic, especially in the case of fieldwork conducted in conflict zones. Indeed, it is often difficult to conduct field research in conflict-ridden areas. A multi-method approach is thus seen as way to mitigate these difficulties

(Wood, 2003, Schatz, 2009a). This research proposes to follow Wood's steps and engage in research primarily driven by ethnographic fieldwork. Ethnographical experience becomes the basis for this entire inductive research. Analysis of secondary and primary sources is thus mainly aimed at verifying mechanisms and processes observed throughout my personal fieldwork.

Local Narratives versus Generalisation of the Civil War

A second major debate involving the role of ethnography in the study of violence in civil wars relates to the major objectives of the research. Within the confines of the micro-turn in the study of violence, an important recurrent debate opposes the particular and the general, namely, whether truth-claims from fieldwork should focus on the object of study as a whole or on the specificities of particular localities. In the case of civil wars, the debate is particularly crucial as the truth-claims and research scope usually addresses the war as a whole. One research strategy is to use the local in a comparative way in order to be able to draw conclusions on the war as a whole. Straus (2006), Fujii (2009a), and Wood (2003), although relying on their fieldwork differently, are probably the best examples of this type of research design; building on the local in civil wars, while seeking to draw conclusions with external validation. We further have anthropologists like Carolyn Nordstrom (1997), who often seek to present civil wars as a kaleidoscope of different war stories. This type of approach focuses on the importance of individual stories rather than on the war as a central narrative. The debate between the particular and the general, or in this case the logic of violence in a village or a region in opposition to the conflict in a whole, marks an important clash in the literature. This debate is thus also between the truth-value of local peoples' narratives and the will to homogenize categories and produce generalizable conclusions on

the conflict. Our understanding of concepts, such as violence or civil war, is often very different from that of people who encounter it on a daily basis. Kalyvas explains:

“On-the-ground descriptions of civil wars typically convey a perplexing and confusing world, entailing a mix of all sorts of motives that makes it difficult to neatly link the forces driving violence on the ground to the war’s stated motives and goals. Such descriptions suggest that a real disjunction between issues, identities, and motives at the local and national levels often exists.” (2006: 366).

Experiences from many field researchers in conflict zones have demonstrated the relative absence of physical violence where we expect it, such as battlefield fronts (Nordstrom, 2004). Most of the time, field work in conflict zones implies understanding the daily life of civilians and how various “non-violent” practices and behaviours are often crucial in understanding the dynamics of a conflict. Another important epistemological question is: how do we study violence in the context of civil war and insurgency?

A quick look at the research presented earlier, demonstrates the crucial importance set on physical violence, especially on the processes of violent engagement and the causes and mechanisms of civilian victimisation. The scholarship on the micro-dynamics of violence in civil war should obviously address these two central topics, yet it should also understand the impact of violence in daily life in conflict zones. The focus of most of the scholarship about the micro-dynamics of violence in civil wars is to look at precise acts of violence. Thereby, the objectives and the scope of the research often create a limited and narrow-view of the conflict. Political ethnography, through its bottom-up approach focusing on the voices of ordinary people, on the interstices of power and violence and participant observation in conflict zone, is particularly useful in helping the researcher adopt a completely different perspective of the violence in civil wars. “[T]he lived experience of violence—and the epistemology of violence—the ways of knowing and reflecting about

violence—are not separate. Experience and interpretation are inseparable for perpetrators, victims, and for ethnographers.” (Nordstrom and Robben, 1995: 4).

Political ethnography proposes solutions and research ideas to answer methodological and epistemological challenges associated with the study of the micro-dynamics of violence in civil wars. So far, very few researchers have engaged in ethnographic fieldwork and based their theoretical framework mainly on this approach. By using the case of the insurgency in the North Caucasus and the recent upsurge of violence in the region, this research will demonstrate how political ethnography can be used in order to reinforce our understanding of the mechanisms involved in violence in civil wars and insurgency. Moreover, it will seek to challenge recurring explanations on violence regarding the spillover of the Chechen wars and the Islamization of the conflict.

This dissertation offers three major contributions of a theoretical, methodological, and empirical nature. The most important is the empirical one, since this thesis proposes a multi-level analysis of the upsurge of violence in the North Caucasus. Indeed, this research will identify precise mechanisms that act at the structural and individual level in order to explain this phenomenon (chapters 3, 4, 5 and 8). In doing so, I will demonstrate the crucial role played by political ethnography and fieldwork in the study of the upsurge of violence. I will then explain the challenges of conducting this type of research in an environment of civil war (chapter 6). Finally, I will propose a theoretical framework that contributes to the study of micro-dynamics of violence in civil wars by focusing on the pathways toward violence and insurgent participation (conclusion). This framework will seek to explain participation in violence during civil wars by focusing on the individual aspects seen in the larger context of a civil war. By using the case of Dagestan seen in the context of the North Caucasus, this

research will underscore the complex intertwining of structural and ideological conditions in individual socio-psychological development.

In order to fulfill these ambitious objectives, the next two sections will be dedicated to a thorough analysis of the literature concerning the North Caucasus, including an exhaustive analysis of the development of radical Islam and violence in the region. This analysis will start by looking at the entire region by focusing on the two Chechen wars, and then by analysing the internal dynamics of each republic under study. This process will help identify major regularities in the three republics in order to compliment the single variable analysis focusing on the diffusion of the Chechen wars and the development of radical Islam.

Chapter 2: A Review of the Literature on Violence in the North Caucasus

An important part of the literature on the North Caucasus and its political situation focuses on the causes and the genealogy of the two Russo-Chechen wars (1994-1996 and 1999-2009). Moshe Gammer (1994; 2006), Charles King (2008), Robert Schaefer (2010), Robert Bruce Ware and Enver Kisriev (2009), and John Baddeley (1908) have written extensively on the historical roots of the North Caucasus, and the insurrection against the Russian Empire.¹⁴ Much was written about the first Chechen war, whether from media reporting on the ground (Nivat, 2001; Lieven, 1999; Gall and De Waal 1997), interviews with local actors (Baev 2003) or an academic perspective (Dunlop, 1998; Hughes, 2007: Ch. 1). The second Chechen war was also covered in depth by journalistic accounts (Politkovskaya 2003; Nivat 2004), while academics focused on the root causes and the dynamics of the conflict (Hughes, 2007; Wood, 2007; Russell 2007; Sakwa, 2005; Evangelista 2002). The main academic works that focus on the second Chechen war tend to utilize a comparative military analysis of the two wars (Kramer, 2005; Miakinkov, 2011); the importance of identity and ideology in Chechen society (Campana 2006; Tishkov 2004; Trenin, Malashenko and Lieven 2004; Comité Tchétchénie, 2005); the forms and dynamics of violence during counter-terrorist operations (Gilligan 2010; Lyall 2009, 2010; Speckhard and Akhmedova 2006a; 2006b; Kramer, 2005); the wars' impact on Russia's society (Trenin, Malashenko and Lieven, 2004), and the role of the global Salafi jihad (Bodansky, 2007) and radical Islam in the conflict (Murphy, 2004). In recent years, especially with the

¹⁴ Hughes (2007:3) calls the Baddeley book a “romantic history.”

proclamation of the Caucasus Emirate, the topic of the roots and causes of radical Islam in the region and its impact of violence there has become increasingly important. A corollary analysis implies that the violence in the neighbouring republics of Chechnya is the result of the spillover of the Chechen conflict and its fundamentalist ideology.

2.1 A Chechen War Spillover or the Chechenization of the North Caucasus?

Schaefer argues that it is a fundamental error to analyse the violence in Ingushetia and Dagestan as different from Chechnya (2011: 238). He explains that “[it] is wishful and dangerous thinking (...) to not view the violence across the entire North Caucasus as being related—even when nationalists or those alienated by the current regime are conducting the attacks (2011: 239, his emphasis)”. For him, the insurgency simply reorganized in 2006-2007 following the death of many key figures such as Shamil Basayev and Abu Hafs and what we are actually observing in the North Caucasus is simply the spread and the spillover of the insurgency beyond Chechen borders. For Schaefer, it is simply “another iteration of the 250-year-old North Caucasus insurgency” (2011: 239).

Schaefer’s view is a prime example of the theory of the Chechen insurgency spillover as the root cause of the upsurge of violence across the region. After the 2006 and 2007 reorganisation, the insurgency used the Caucasus Emirate as a common ideology to fight Russian troops and their proxy forces in the region. For these authors (Sagramoso, 2007), violence in the region must thus be studied with a Chechen-centric analysis. Schaefer proposes a border-line primordial analysis when he places the actual North Caucasus insurgency as a simple iteration of the historical clash between Russians and the mountainous people of the North Caucasus. In a more balanced approach, Pavel Baev suggests that the spillover is mostly the result of the degradation of the ruling regimes and

the growing discontent in North Caucasus societies (2012a: 118). Other authors, such as Souleimanov and Ditych, propose a more inspiring interpretation of the spillover theory, which posits “blood feud as a cause of the conflict regionalisation” (2008: 1217). Because of the clan-based society in Dagestan, Ingushetia and Chechnya, people are pulled into violence in order to preserve the honor of their clan, and to maintain collective responsibility. I will come back to this aspect in chapter 5.

This research does not deny the importance of the Chechen spillover as one of the main factors in explaining the recent upsurge of violence in the North Caucasus. However, it does challenge its predominance, and further seeks to engage in an interpretive theoretical and empirical reflection about the upsurge of violence in the North Caucasus and the regionalisation of the conflict. By looking at the political and social context in the region and in each republic (Dagestan, Ingushetia, and Kabardino-Balkaria), the assumption of the Chechen spillover will be put into context. It also needs to be analysed in relation to the development of Salafism and radical Islam in the North Caucasus since the end of the Soviet Union.

2.2 Al-Qaeda and the North Caucasus Insurgency: The Role of Radical Islam

The second predominant approach analysing the upsurge of insurgent violence in the North Caucasus focuses on the role played by the First and the Second Chechen war as a catalyst to processes of Islamic and violent radicalisation in other Republics. Robert Schaefer proposes two analytical trends in academia which seek to explain this phenomenon (2011: 144). First, certain scholars (Schaefer, 2011: 170-171, 184-186; Goldfarb and Litvinenko, 2007) blame the Russian government for not getting involved in the reconstruction of Chechnya following the Khasavyurt accords in 1996. Moreover, they contend that the Russian

government plotted dissension inside the Republic and even financed radical elements such as Shamil Basayev (Goldfarb and Litvinenko, 2007).¹⁵ According to these authors, violence was the result of the launch of the Second Chechen war in 1999, and the refusal of the Russian government to support Aslan Maskhadov in the rebuilding program of Chechnya (Evangelista, 2002).¹⁶ Conversely, others explain the upsurge by focusing on the role of al-Qaeda and the North Caucasus as a new front of Salafi jihad.

Understanding whether the early Chechen and the subsequent North Caucasian insurgency was, or is, still a part of a loose transnational terrorist network associated with Al-Qaeda, has become one of the recurrent debates in the scholarship on violence and the rise of radical Islam in the North Caucasus. The role of Islam throughout the history of the North Caucasian insurgencies has been analyzed by numerous authors (Gammer, 2006; King, 2008; Schaefer, 2011). Bodansky claims that Islam was an important ideological factor in the insurgency (2007), and that its role changed during the First Chechen War with the influx of foreign fighters and the support of Arab countries. The claims put forward about the role played by al-Qaeda were mainly based on the presence of “Afghan” Arabs¹⁷ in the region since the first Chechen War, and the subsequent establishment of various Islamic training camps in Serzhen-Yurt (Southern Chechnya) and the Pankisi Gorge (Georgia). Ibn-Al Khattab¹⁸, Abu al-Walid and Abu Hafs, three Arab fighters that came to Chechnya during the First Chechen War, were usually labelled as being al-Qaeda operatives by Russian elites and certain academics (Bodansky, 2007), due to their participation in the jihad against the Soviet

¹⁵ Shamil Basayev is the most notorious Chechen warlord. For a biography, see Wilhelmsen (2005) and Akhmadov and Lanskoj (2010)

¹⁶ Maskhadov was the elected President of Chechnya from 1997 to his death in 2005.

¹⁷ The expression “Afghan” Arabs refers to the Arab fighters that fought in Afghanistan during the 1980s to participate in the jihad against Soviet Union.

¹⁸ Ibn-Al Khattab is an Arab fighter that joined Chechen insurgency around 1995 and later killed in 2002. He also participated in the jihad against the Soviet Union in Afghanistan and the civil war in Tajikistan.

Union in Afghanistan along Osama bin Laden.¹⁹ As shown by Brian Glyn Williams (2004), this highly hierarchical view of al-Qaeda and the links between Khattab and bin Laden are debatable.

In fact, there is no real proof that Khattab took direct orders from bin Laden, and most of the evidence that is available is circumstantial and can [could] only demonstrate that they met during the Afghan jihad in the 1980's. Schaefer cites a declassified report from the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) which presents Khattab as a friend and a nucleus member of al-Qaeda. However, the American author questions the reliability of this document (2011, 165). What is usually accepted as being verified by various sources, Khattab, who fought in Afghanistan between 1988 and 1993, supposedly arrived in Chechnya in 1995, along with 300 other veterans from various jihad fronts such as Tajikistan, Bosnia, and Afghanistan. His armed formation contributed to the 1996 military victory against Russia. He also contributed to the military training and Islamic radicalisation of Chechen fighters between 1995 and 1999. However, the ex-Chechen President Aslan Maskhadov made the claim that Khattab stayed politically neutral during the interwar period (Vatchagaev, 2012a: 212; Akhmadov and Lanskoj, 2011).

A second link made between al-Qaeda and the Chechen insurgency was the presence of Ayman al-Zawahiri, Bin Laden's top lieutenant, in Dagestan and in neighboring Chechnya in the late 1990's, as well as his subsequent comment about the liberation of the Caucasus and the establishment of an Islamic emirate in the region. This story is part of what one can call the "al-Qaeda in the North Caucasus" folklore or narrative, which is still used by political actors and even certain academics as proof of the driving role played by al-Qaeda

¹⁹ Ideologists such as Abu Zaid al-Kuwaiti and Abu Omar al-Saif were also known associates to "Afghan" Arabs in Chechnya. For a complete biography of major foreign fighters in Chechnya, see Al-Shishani (2012).

operatives in the insurgency. However, if the DIA report is seen as reliable information, then al-Zawahiri's presence in Dagestan could be seen as part of a larger strategy to include the North Caucasus in al-Qaeda's larger strategic objectives following the end of the civil war in Afghanistan. Gordon Hahn quotes al-Zawahiri's speech:

“The liberation of the Caucasus would constitute a hotbed of jihad (...) and the region would [then] become the shelter of thousands of Muslim *mujahidin* from various parts of the Islamic world, particularly Arab parts. This poses a direct threat to the United States (...) if the Chechens and other Caucasian *mujahidin* reach the shores of the oil-rich Caspian Sea, the only thing that will separate them from Afghanistan will be the neutral state of Turkmenistan. This will form a *mujahidin* Islamic belt to the south of Russia that will be connected in the east with Pakistan, which is brimming with *mujahidin* movements in Kashmir. The belt will be linked to the south with Iran and Turkey that are sympathetic to the Muslims of Central Asia” (Hahn, 2007: 36-37).

Al-Zawahiri's speech also discusses the possible link between jihad in Central Asia (Uzbekistan and Tajikistan) and how it can lead to a global fight between the Muslim fundamentalist movement and an alliance between Russia, the United States, and other Western allies. Although the presence of an actual leader of al-Qaeda in Dagestan and his speech are anecdotally interesting, it does not provide a lot of information regarding the link between the Chechen resistance and al-Qaeda.²⁰ The newly independent Chechnya and its military victory against the Russian forces represented an extraordinary opportunity for al-Zawahiri and the Salafist network. With the establishment of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan in September 1996, Chechnya could appear as a second step in the establishment of a caliphate from the Kashmir to the Caucasus, as expressed by al-Zawahiri. Opportunity, however, does not equate to tangible links with the Chechen insurgency. The growing influence of the Arab Afghans was a consequence of the First Chechen War and not

²⁰ Al-Zawahiri in 1998 merged his terrorist organisation, Egyptian Islamic Jihad, with al-Qaeda. It is interesting, even if anecdotal, to ask what would have happened if al-Zawahiri would have reached Chechnya and Khattab's organisation, instead of Afghanistan and Bin Laden's organisation.

its cause. Al-Qaeda and the global Salafi network were, and still are, involved in numerous conflicts and one cannot deny the financial support received by Khattab and other Arab Afghans throughout the interwar period by various charities. It was also reported that bin Laden personally financed the wave of hostage-taking in the inter-war period in Chechnya.²¹ However, the hostage business was not limited to Chechnya but affected other republics like Dagestan. The crackdown on financing terrorist activities from the US government directly affected the funding available to the foreign fighters and the Chechen insurgency.

In an interview given in 2005, Basayev insisted on the low-cost of the Beslan operation (see following chapter) and on the fact that the external support (bin Laden) was not financing the operation. In the words of Basayev himself: “I have not met bin Laden. I received no money from him, but I would not have declined the offer.”²² Journalists and academics (Hahn, 2007; Bodansky, 2007) have always claimed that Basayev and other Chechen fighters trained in bin Laden’s camps in the 1990’s. Domitilla Sagramoso argues that al-Qaeda’s role should not be seen as military or financial support, but as a way of championing the struggle for Islam. Consequently, the association between the North Caucasian insurgency and the global salafi-jihad network would mainly be at the ideological level (Sagromoso, 2012: 564).

Although numerous hypotheses exist about the link between the Chechen insurgency and the al-Qaeda network, no one can actually present irrefutable proof regarding the accuracy of these claims. Most authors (Hahn, 2007; 2011a; Schaefer, 2011) rely on the 9/11 Commission to substantiate their claims. The Commission Report shows tangible links

²¹ “Britons killed 'by Bin Laden ally'” BBC NEWS, 18 November 2001 http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/1663278.stmThe Russian government along with Boris Berezovsky were also suspected of supporting and contributing indirectly to this lucrative business (Goldfarb and Litvinenko, 2007).

²² “Excerpts: Basayev Claims Beslan,” BBC News, 17 September 2004, available at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/3665136.stm>

between al-Qaeda and certain members of the Chechen insurgency (2004). Hahn adds that “there is no doubt that Basayev and other Chechen fighters strengthened their links with al-Qaeda during the inter-war period, that several foreign Islamists who until late 2001 had been running terrorists training camps in Afghanistan now came to Chechnya, and that at times during the second war as many as several hundred foreign jihadists were fighting alongside the Chechens” (2007:38). He adds that many Chechens and Dagestani have visited Afghanistan during the interwar period including, but not limited to, Movladi Udugov (2011a: 3). Basayev, in an interview, confirmed that Chechen fighters, including himself, spent time in Afghanistan for military training in 1994.²³ Although the links between Chechen insurgents and al-Qaeda at the beginning of the second Chechen war and up until late 2002 and 2003 are relatively well proven, researchers did not find the same level of tangible evidence for the period following the death of Khattab, Abu-Walid and Basayev. Thus, while certain foreign fighters remained active in the insurgency until very recently, their links with al-Qaeda remain unconfirmed. Vatchagaev brings up a strong point when he explains that the death of major figures from the Chechen insurgency (Basayev, Maskhadov, and Sadulaev) “did not elicit a single word of condolence from al-Qaeda representatives” (2012a: 214). The Chechen resistance did not openly target the West and the United States, focusing instead its grievances against the Russian government. However, the discourse of some *jamaats* slowly integrated more direct references to Israel, and the Jews of the West as potential enemies (Markedonov, 2010: 8).

This debate between the role and the importance of international terrorist networks in the North Caucasus has led some authors to portray the Second Chechen War and the proclamation of the Caucasian Emirate in October 2007, as evidence of the *salafisation* and

²³ “Terroritsy pronikliaiut v Rossiiu za dengi,” *Nezavisimaia gazeta*, 12 March 1996.

Islamisation of the conflict, as well as the North Caucasian insurgent's affiliation with al-Qaeda. Gordon Hahn recently published a research report that supports this claim, by claiming the existence of a link between the global salafi-jihadist network and the Caucasus Emirate (2011a). This report follows Hahn's argument made in his previous book (2007) and article (2008) about the central role played by foreign fighters ("Afghan" Arabs) and the longstanding relations between al-Qaeda and the Chechen insurgency. For him, "Chechens' radicalization [happened] under the influence of foreign, jihadist terrorist ideologies and movements funded, inspired and perhaps still coordinated by al-Qaeda" (2007:14). Chechen insurgents then exported this ideology across the North Caucasus, spreading a jihadist terrorist ideology. According to Hahn, Chechnya is part of "a loose global alliance of like-minded Salafist "takfirist" jihadis, who assist each other in various ways—theo-ideologically, politically, financially, technologically, and operationally—and divide among themselves the labor and the geography of the global jihad (2011a: 2)." Hahn insists on the financial links between al-Qaeda and the Chechen insurgents and their collaboration at the level of propaganda online (2011a: 5-8). He also underlines the role played by the North Caucasian diaspora in recent terrorist plots in Belgium and the Czech Republic (2011a: 9-12). Hahn rightfully adds that one cannot claim that the Caucasus Emirate (CE) is a virtual phenomenon, and argues that the Chechen insurgency is strictly a national-separatist movement (2011a: 13). At the same time, it would be false to assume that the CE is a strong hierarchical structure. It still relies on a loose confederation of insurgent and criminal groups with a large range of reasons to fight the local and federal government. The CE's central structure in command establishes a general strategy and ideology. However, because of the logistical conditions of the insurgency, the local insurgent groups enjoy a great level of autonomy in their daily activities.

Other authors, such as Yossef Bodansky, reach similar conclusions to Hahn's by focusing mainly on secondary and intelligence sources from outside the region, and describe the links between Chechen insurgents and the global jihadist network (2007).²⁴ Bodansky insists on the complete integration of the Chechen insurgency into the global Salafi jihad network (what he calls the Islamist-Jihadist movement) as early as the beginning of the Second Chechen War. According to him, many Chechens fought in various jihad fronts, mainly in Afghanistan and Iraq. He also underlines the presence of an important number of foreign fighters in the North Caucasus before the American invasions of Iraq (2007). Schaefer explains that if we observe a decrease in the involvement of foreign fighters in Chechnya and in the North Caucasus, it is mainly a result of the wars in Afghanistan and in Iraq which have attracted potential jihadist recruits (2011: 249; Soulemainov and Ditrych, 2008: 1208). Therefore, after 2002 young people from Arab countries and even Europe decided to fight the Americans instead of supporting the jihad against Russian forces. Schaefer and Bodansky, however, suggest that this trend could change following the withdrawal of Western forces from both countries. According to them, a tangible link between the global jihad and the North Caucasus does exist. Schaefer writes that "fighters are beginning to flow their way again from Arab countries as their cause has been taken up on the internet by Salafi-jihadists who support the [Caucasus] emirate. They are waiting for the fighting in Afghanistan to come to a lull so that more money and fighters will start to flow again (2011: 276-277)."

²⁴ Bodansky also emphasizes the presence of Chechen fighters in various insurgency theaters since 9/11, mainly Afghanistan (2007). This statement is one of the recurrent myths about the Chechen insurgency. Indeed, there is still no reliable evidence regarding the presence of Chechen fighters in Tora Bora in Afghanistan, in Iraq, or in Lebanon in 2006. There are cases of Russian-speaking individuals detained by Western forces, but they were usually Ouzbeks or Tajiks and not Chechens. Even Russian citizens in Guantanamo Bay were from Kabardino-Balkaria (2), Tatarstan, and Bashkortostan. Hahn reports that maybe some Dagestani fighters were in Afghanistan (2011:3). For a discussion about the myth, see Norbert Strade's Yahoo mailing list, Chechnya-sl. See also Williams (2004) and Soulemainov and Ditrych (2008). For a contrary view, see Hahn (2011: 3-4)

This assumption is particularly problematic as conclusions about foreign fighters are drawn from the presence of Arab fighters since the first Chechen war. These fighters changed the dynamics of the war and the post-war situation, even if their numbers were still marginal compared to the case of Iraq. Although it is not impossible that the end of the war in Iraq and Afghanistan could have led to an influx of fighters in the North Caucasus, it is far from certain. Indeed, other fronts of the Jihad are still active in areas such as Yemen or Somalia, which could also attract potential recruits. The access to the North Caucasus, especially Chechnya and Dagestan, is not easy for foreign recruits from the Arab world. In recent years, one can observe an increase of foreign fighters in these republics coming from Central Asia, mainly Kazakhstan, and not from Arab countries. The assumption about the link between the global Salafi jihad network and the North Caucasus is also problematic as it does not highlight the importance of the local dynamics and grievances.

A more nuanced picture of the role of the foreign fighters is depicted by authors like Brian Glyn Williams (2004), Julie Wilhemsen (2005), Emil Soulemainov and Ondrej Ditrych (2008), and Cerwyn Moore and Paul Tumelty (2008), who show how the Chechen nationalist resistance evolved toward a growing salafi-jihadi rhetoric. These authors propose a genealogy of the dynamics between nationalist and religious grievances in the North Caucasus and especially Chechnya. They postulate causal links between the presence of foreign fighters in Southern Chechnya, the generational change and cleavage in the region, the political situation during the interwar period, and the Second Chechen War to explain why Chechen insurgents decided to put forward a strategy of spillover, and the mounting role of radical Islam in the conflict. They also insist on the instrumental nature of Islamic claims

for warlords such as Basayev, Barayev or Raduyev.²⁵ Wilhelmsen rightly argues against the idea that radical Islam represents the causal factor explaining the Second Chechen War and the subsequent establishment of the Caucasus Emirate. However, at the same time, the North Caucasus cannot be analysed in a vacuum in relationship to what is going on in other Muslim countries, especially in Iraq and Afghanistan. One should be able to take into account the growing islamisation of various North Caucasus societies, the role played by foreign influences, as well as identifying other individual factors linked with the upsurge of violence.

2.3 A Multi-Causal Analysis of the Upsurge of Violence in the Neighbouring Republics around Chechnya

Unfortunately, an in-depth analysis of the processes and mechanisms responsible for the recent increase of violence and terrorist attacks in the North Caucasus, since 2009, and the recent establishment of the Caucasus Emirate (2007), is missing in the literature, even if certain authors have sought to engage in precise aspects surrounding this issue. Indeed, Hahn has regularly sought to describe and analyse the relationship between insurgent groups and the important political and religious actors inside the Emirate in his monthly newsletter *Islam, Islamism, and Politics in Eurasia*. He also published articles (2005, 2008) and a book (2007) about the internal dynamics of insurgent groups in the different republics of the region, and the factors leading to the growth of radical Islamism and Jihadism in the region. Apart from his work, many academics are looking at the development of the Emirate as part of, or in relation to, the two Chechen wars. King (2008) and Schaefer (2011) have proposed large historical analyses of the insurgency in the Northern Caucasus through the use of

²⁵ Arbi Barayev and Salman Raduyev were Chechen warlords who died during the Second Chechen War. For more details, see Wilhelmsen (2005).

historical and archival research, for the former, and military analysis, for the latter. The two authors offer a thorough overview of the historical processes at play in the North Caucasus, and the historical context of the establishment of the Caucasus Emirate. Nevertheless, this only gives a general survey of the dynamics and the actors in the region.

King looks at historical processes of the Northern and Southern Caucasus and puts into perspective the two Chechen wars, along with the development of the Caucasian Emirate. In the case of Schaefer, although his book talks about the insurgency in Chechnya and in the North Caucasus, his analysis mostly takes Chechnya as a proxy for the entire region. By focusing on the dynamics and genealogy of the Chechen resistance, he proposes to understand the development of the Caucasus Emirate as the strategic evolution of the insurgency in Chechnya. The actual upsurge of violence in the North Caucasus is thus understood as an extension of the Chechen problem to the entire region. The insurgency is depicted as having its epicenter in Chechnya and the violence simply diffusing to the other Republics (Ingushetia and Dagestan). This is a recurrent problem in the scholarship regarding the North Caucasus and the upsurge of violence: many studies claim to study the entire region when they mostly draw conclusions from the Chechen case and transfer their model to each republic. They do not take into account the eclectic and heterogeneous nature of each of these republics. Although the two Chechen wars set the context in which the region is currently plunged in, local issues and actors adapt the conflict to their own need and are not simple resources under the hand of the Chechen insurgency leadership.

Contrary to the case of the two Chechen wars and their causes and genealogy, the recent upsurge of violence in the region is understudied and many aspects need further analysis. Recently, the geographical analysis of the dynamics and the patterns of diffusion of the conflict permitted to draw early conclusions about the upsurge of violence in the North

Caucasus in the last decade (Toft and Zhukov, 2012; Zhukov, 2012; O'Loughlin, Holland and Witmer, 2011). The general context of violence in the North Caucasus has also started to gather more attention to the study of the micro-dynamics of the conflict. Indeed, recent academic works have focused on particular aspects in the region by proposing descriptive accounts of Islamic groups in the North Caucasus (McGregor 2006; Kurbanov, 2010) There has been a focus on certain processes of radicalisation such as blood feuds (Soulemainov and Ditych, 2008); the role of radical Islam (Markedonov 2010; Murphy 2010; Yemelianova 2010; Dannreuther and March 2010; Bloom 2011; Shterin and Yarlykapov, 2011) and its genealogy inside the jamaats (Sagramoso, 2012); the impact of economic, political and social context on local dynamics (O'Loughlin, Kolossov, and Radvanyi, 2007; Ware and Kisriev, 2009), and on the perception of citizens through surveys (Bakke, O'Loughlin and Ward, 2009; Gerber and Mendelson, 2009; Holland and O'Loughlin, 2010).

Most of the research tends to be descriptive, often relying on secondary sources in order to understand local issues in various republics or to draw general claims about the region. When they are based on primary sources or fieldwork, they usually address specific issues or problems without trying to theorize their conclusions. These problems are recurrent ones in studies about insurgent violence in general. A recent exception is the work of O'Loughlin, Holland and Witmer (2011), who have sought to establish dynamic models linking micro-aspects of politics to a general understanding and theorizing of the political situation across the North Caucasus.

The main topic of this research is the upsurge of violence in the North Caucasus following the end of the counter-terrorist operation in Chechnya in April 2009. In order to understand its ramifications, one has to return to the history of the two Chechen wars, and the history of the insurgency in the region. This chapter will begin by proposing a genealogy

of the development of radical Islam in the North Caucasus. It will then describe the political and social context of the establishment of the Caucasus Emirate in 2007, and the subsequent upsurge of violence in the region. Although the two Chechen wars are not the central topic of this research, I will discuss their role in the development of radical Islam in the North Caucasus. Before engaging in this discussion, it is important to put into context the economic, social and religious situation in the North Caucasus.

2.4 The Economic Situation in the North Caucasus

Jean Radvanyi notes the importance of federal transfers in the budget of each republic in 2009 — Ingushetia (91 percent), Chechnya (90 percent), Dagestan (78 percent), and Kabardino-Balkaria (57 percent), while the average across Russia is at 27 percent (2010: 19). His statistics also present the average monthly income for the four republics, which is between 180 Euros in Dagestan and 280 Euros for Chechnya (2010: 19). Shireen T. Hunter reports that the average Russian citizen made 900 rubles per month in 1998, compared to the North Caucasus which was around 300 rubles in Ingushetia, and 600 rubles in Krasnodar Krai (2004: 97). In 1998, poverty levels reached 57.5 percent in Dagestan, 76 percent in Ingushetia, and 44.5 percent in Kabardino-Balkaria, compared to a 21 percent average in Russia (2004: 99). In 2001, the monthly income of citizens for all three republics was still 50 to 70 percent lower than the average in Russia (Hunter, 2004: 100). These amounts, however, do not take into account the informal economy.

Gordon Hahn explains that the republics of the North Caucasus are amongst the poorest and least developed areas within the Russian Federation (2007: 6-7). Unemployment is rampant in all republics, especially amongst young people under thirty (30 to 80 percent). Precise numbers are difficult to establish because of the shadow economy and informal

structures. However, it is not risky to claim that at least 30 percent of the population is unemployed in the North Caucasus. The percentage of unemployment is even higher in Ingushetia and Chechnya. Quality jobs are usually filled by ethnic Russians from outside the North Caucasus, thus the economic development promoted by Russian authorities rarely produces economic growth for the local population.

At the same time, an important shadow economy has developed throughout the region by the local population. Sergey Markedonov claims “that the level of the shadow economy in North Ossetia was 80 percent, in Ingushetia 87 percent, and in Dagestan 75 percent, respectively. Those republics are simultaneously at the top of the most subsidized constituencies of the Russian Federation. In 2004, the Russian State lost 50 billion rubles to the shadow economy; though financial aid to the Caucasus republics was estimated to be 47 billion rubles” (2010: 5). The federal transfers also disappear in the shadow economy, especially in republics like Chechnya and Dagestan where government structures are plagued with corruption and clan favoritism.

The President of Russia, Dmitri Medvedev, summarized the problems in the North Caucasus in one of his speeches in 2009:

“The roots of the problem are in the makeup of our lives: in unemployment, poverty, in clans who do not give a whit about the people, but simply divide the cash flows arriving here among themselves, who fight for contracts and then with each other to settle scores, and in corruption, which, indeed, has become very widespread within the law enforcement agencies, too.” (Medvedev quoted in Russell, 2011: 1083).

At the same time, as in many Islamic parts of the world, there is an important demographic boom that is even more threatening to Russia, where the fertility rate is dangerously low despite recent Russian state policies encouraging births. Hunter reports that

the ethnic Muslim population has birthrates over 250 percent superior to ethnic Russians (Hunter, 2004:45). Hahn writes:

“Russia’s Muslim challenge has grown since the Soviet collapse. The lack of economic development combined with a demographic explosion in its Muslim-populated regions is likely to create greater demands on the Russian state to heed the interests of the Muslim community in terms of investment in the North Caucasus economy. If state-Muslim relations remain as they are, the Muslim demographic could transform the current slow narrow stream of young Muslims joining the North Caucasus jihad into a torrential river of jihadist volunteers by mid-century (2007: 28-29)”.

North Caucasus is thus in a paradoxical situation where its population increases at a very high rate, yet social mobility and working opportunities are extremely limited by clan-based structures and by an extremely weak economy that relies on resources and tourism. The North Caucasians regularly leave the region to find employment in Moscow in order to sustain their families. At the same time, the Russian government and its envoys in the region, proposed to implement a resettlement program to incite ethnic Russians to come to the region in order to stimulate the economy. For the federal government, it is a way to promote economic development through the influx of qualified workers in the region. Medvedev proposed in 2009 a “Strategy for the Social-Economic Development of the North Caucasian Federal District until 2025.”²⁶ The plan for 2012-2025 proposes a 15 billionUSD investment in the North Caucasus, including 9 billion directly from the federal budget. According to the government, the program would create more than 100,000 jobs in the region²⁷. However, this program has yet to be implemented, mainly because of security issues and the fact that the amount of money was exaggerated and excessive, and therefore it could not be realistically delivered in the coming years (Dzutsev, 2012d).

²⁶ “Strategiia sotsial’no-ekonomicheskogo razvitiia Severo-Kavkazskogo federal’nogo okruga do 2025 goda,” Available at <http://www.government.ru/media/2010/10/4/35578/file/1485.doc>

²⁷ Eric Pfanner, “Russia Has Ski-Resort Plans in North Caucasus” The New York Times January 26 2011, <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/01/27/business/global/27resort.html>

2.5 Islam in the North Caucasus

This section offers an overview of the major Islamic trends in the North Caucasus. It should be used as a guide and a reference for the reader in order to define some of the major concepts that will be used throughout this research. One can identify two trends in the Islamic revival in the North Caucasus following the end of Soviet Union: the traditional and non-traditional trend. However, this dichotomic view is problematic, as many different forms of traditional and non-traditional Islam cohabit in the region (Yarlykapov, 2010; Jourde, 2010). I will come back to this plurality further on. First, it is important to note that the North Caucasus is traditionally divided into two madhhabs (schools) of Islam: Hanafi in the North Western Caucasus and Shafii in the North East (Ingushetia, Chechnya and Dagestan). These schools explain the local differences between the two regions; however, for the sake of this thesis I will focus mainly the differences between traditional and non-traditional Islam.

Since the end of the Soviet Union, modern traditional Islam, according to Galina Yemelianova, is rooted in “the decentralization and multiplication of the Islamic Spiritual Boards [following the disintegration of] the regional Spiritual Board of Muslims (*Dukhovnoe upravlenie musulman* —DUM) of the North Caucasus” (2010: 128). Young imams and Islamic scholars led the charge against the “official Islam” from the Soviet period. Throughout the 1990s, each republic of the North Caucasus witnessed the creation of separate Spiritual Boards of Muslims, which were co-opted by local governments. Yemelianova explains that traditional Islam in the North Caucasus could be seen as a form of folk Islam “which presents a synthesis of Islam with pre-Islamic local *adat* (customary norms) and beliefs and is practically unaware of the intellectual form of Islam” (2010:123).

Thus, traditional Islam is understood as a local innovation in the practices of Islam, and is usually associated with Sufism.

Sufism is based on a mystical interpretation of Islam and traditional rituals such as *Zikr* (traditional dance during prayer) and the visitation of the tombs of Saints and Islamic scholars. It is established in *tariqas* (brotherhood), which are organised around a spiritual cleric or leader and promotes a personal interpretation of Islam.²⁸ In the eastern part of the North Caucasus (Ingushetia, Chechnya, and Dagestan) one mainly finds two *tariqas*, Naqshbandiya and Qadiriyya, but also two others, Shaziliyah and Jazuliyah. For Sufis in the North Caucasus, jihad is understood as a greater jihad—personal struggle for faith and self-improvement. Traditional Islam and Sufism follow the five Pillars of Islam; however, the practice of the religion is integrated in local customs and traditional rituals. These aspects are seen by non-traditional Islam as heretic.

Non-traditional Islam also arose in the North Caucasus after the end of the Soviet Union and is often labelled as Wahhabism or Salafism. This trend developed as an answer to a corrupt and deviant form of Islam taught by tariqatism and Sufism. “Salafism” is derived from the word *salaf* in Arabic, which means “ancient one,” referring to the companions of the Prophet Mohammed (Sageman, 2004: 1). Salafiyah is usually understood as the practice that advocates the strict following of authentic Islam, which takes its roots in a strict interpretation of the Koran, the Sunna and the Hadith, the stories of the practices and deeds of the Prophet and his followers (companions). Salafists seek to emulate the practices of the first companions of the Prophet and reject other non-puritanical forms of Islam, such as Sufism. They reject any form of innovation or contemporary practices of Islam, including but not limited to, intermediary actors between the believer and God, such as sheikhs, labelled as

²⁸ For a description of the *tariqas*, see Yemelianova (2010: 128-129)

polytheists (*shirk*). Therefore, intermediaries to God are condemned through the concept of *Tawhid* (the Unity of God/Monotheism). As Sagromoso explains, the concept of *Tawhid* is based on two core arguments (2012: 565). First, it established the unity of lordship with the famous Koran's quote "there is no God but God." The second core argument, which is one of the bases of the Salafi ideology, insists on the unity of worship. It proclaims the direct relationship between men and God, denying any intermediaries in between.

According to Salafi doctrine, "Islam became decadent because it strayed from the righteous path. (...) Recapturing the glory and grandeur of the Golden Age requires a return to the authentic faith and practices of the ancient ones" (Sageman, 2004: 4). Many practices of Islam are seen as non-Islamic or heretic, such as *Zikr*, pilgrimages to holy shrines and places (*ziyarat*), veneration of Saints, and the role of Sheikhs, Imams and *ulemas* (scholars). They see these practices as deviations from the true faith. In other words, Salafism rejects local interpretations and traditions of Islam. These elements are labelled as unlawful innovations (*bid'a*) and Islam is thus understood as a way of life based on precise rules and not only as a set of beliefs.

"Wahhabism" is often used as a synonym for salafism although the etymology of the word is different. It refers to another traditional and puritanical form of Islam based on Mohammad Ibn Abdul Wahhab from the eighteenth century (1703-1766). Gordon Hahn explains that it is more a theological approach than a political ideology (2007: 26). It advocates the purification from Islam of practices that are not in line with Mohammed's teachings based on a literal interpretation of the Koran and the Hadiths. Wahhabism does not advocate violence per se, even if it pushes for the replacement of elected governments by a

state based on Sharia.²⁹ This is probably the main difference one can see between Wahhabism and Salafism. The latter insists on the importance of the jihad as way to fight infidels and spread the right interpretation of Islam.

Most of the young people I interviewed throughout my fieldwork refused to identify themselves as Salafist or Wahhabist, but at the same time decried and condemned the unpure ways to practice Islam. Despite the fact that from my interviews in Dagestan and Chechnya the majority of individuals who adopted a pure form of Islam were young people between 17-30 years old, many individuals from the previous generation would also associate themselves with this form of Islam in the mountainous villages of Dagestan. However, they would also categorically refuse to be labelled as Salafist or Wahhabist. As many field researchers report, non-traditional believers usually refer to their practice of Islam as “Pure Islam.”

The concept of radical Islam is thus not associated here as a political stance, but as the interpretation of Islam as a religion. Traditional and non-traditional Islam should not be seen as mutually exclusive categories, as in practice it is often difficult to clearly delineate these two trends. Indeed, both trends follow the five pillars of Islam. In addition to that, opposing traditional Islam to Salafism often leads to the association of radical Islam with violent behaviour. Instead, one should understand Islamic radicalisation as the evolution toward a non-traditional interpretation of the religion. Shterin and Yarlykapov, using the case of Kabardino-Balkaria, explain how the pathways and processes of young people in the Republic evolve toward radical Islam (2011: 311). This process should not be seen as a sudden change from one extreme to another, but as a gradual process where they look for various forms of Islam to fill and answer their needs.

²⁹ Sharia is the religious law of Islam.

Shterin and Yarlykapov describe the generational cleavage between the older generation that grew and learned Islam under the Soviet Union, and the younger generation born with the fall of USSR and the growing tensions and problems in the North Caucasus (2011). The older generation started practising Islam, depending if they chose to practise at all, and attending the mosque later on in their lives. Often, their practice of Islam is limited to traditional local customs such as mourning, death or marriage. At the end of the Soviet Union, this form of Islam was institutionalized by the republican Spiritual Administration of the Muslims of Kabardino-Balkaria (2011: 310). For young people, Pure Islam is particularly attractive, as it does not put emphasis on the role of elders, as traditionalists do.

The post-Soviet generation came into contact with Islam earlier in their lives and often adopted a “purer” version following the practices of the companions of the prophet (*Salaf*). Although this form of Islam has no roots in the North Caucasus, it quickly found fertile soil amongst the youth. A recent survey amongst students in Dagestan showed that twenty percent of the respondents called themselves moderate Salafi and only 10 percent Sufi.³⁰ Salafism invites young people to interpret Islamic knowledge, such as the Koran, themselves instead of relying on local institutional interpretation from the DUM and its corruptand co-opted elites. It thus offers a way for the younger generation to contest the status quo within society and denounce socio-economic problems, such as the absence of social mobility or employment. As Shterin and Yarlykapov explain, Salafism is “malleable to particular concerns and interests; it can be well suited for challenging local establishments from a presumably universal high moral ground, which, in turn, can contribute to negotiated loyalties to both the universal cause and local interests” (2011: 311).

³⁰ Asia Kapaeva, “V Dagestane 12% uchashcheisia molodezhi podderzhivaet boevikov,” Kavkazskii uzel, 9 December 2011, available at <http://dagestan.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/197318/>.

The process of Islamic radicalisation also modifies the daily life and habits of the believer. “Their language became interspersed with Arabic words. (...) Social life time [is] reorganised too, around the necessity of observing the five daily prayers, Islamic holidays and meetings with the ‘brothers’ and ‘sisters’” (Shterin and Yarlykapov, 2011: 313).

Similarly problematic is how elites and journalists describe radical Islam as not being a religious choice. They portray practitioners of radical Islam as young, naive, and brainwashed, as well as victims of certain charismatic leaders or structural circumstances (poverty, clan structure). The radicalisation of their practice of Islam is associated with personal problems or mistakes, and not as a personal choice. This assumption stems from the depiction of radical Islam in Russia following the interwar period in Chechnya and the Chechen invasion of Dagestan, further reinforced by the wave of terrorism across the country in the 2000s.

The Islamic *jamaat* should not be understood as a synonym for an insurgent movement. In fact, young people adhere to a *jamaat* in their quest for a sense of belonging — in other words, for a community. *Jamaat* in Arabic means community or society, and is usually understood as “a grass-roots form of Muslim social organization which unites Muslims as a congregation for prayer. Ideally, a *jamaat* is a group of Muslims attending the same Mosque” (Yarlykapov, 2010: 141). Evangelista defines *jamaat* as “a village or a coherent group of villages that transcends blood relations and operates more or less like an ancient city-state” (2002: 93). This Islamic community permits them to practice a stricter form of Islam, to share their faith and practices with fellow members, and to adhere to a micro-society with rules based on Sharia law. Explaining the Kabardino-Balkarian *jamaats*, Shterin and Yarlykapov state that they “consisted of members, or brothers, who already knew each other, often from childhood, but their relationships were redefined through

becoming New Muslims” (Shterin and Yarlykapov, 2011: 312). If ordinary jamaats tend to be organised around a territorial basis, usually a village or an important Mosque, then separatist jamaats, as Yarlykapov calls them, usually incorporate a broad spectrum of people from different locations (2010: 142-143). In the literature on the North Caucasus, these politicized jamaats are often called combat jamaats, as they usually refer to insurgent groups.

Although individuals who join a jamaat are not usually ethnic outsiders, they experience an important change in their identity, as their faith and their interpretation of Islam play an increasingly central role in their life. Their practices and behaviours are also adapted to their new culture. From education to work, and from weddings to death, Islamic laws and the Sharia start to dictate the rules of conduct for their entire lives. Their new Islamic identity becomes overarching, and supplants family and kinship bounds. They reject ethnic Islam or Sufism as being local and corrupt forms of Islam. Condemnation of un-Islamic practices such as drugs, alcohol consumption, government corruption, or Sufi mystical practices become integrated in their vocabulary and their grievances. Radical Islamic customs, such as growing a beard, begin to replace local ethnic customs and traditions. These elements often provoke a clash between the younger and the older generation. Traditional Islam becomes associated with government actions, as radical Islamists see DUM as being co-opted by local and federal governments.

2.6 Political Islam: The Role of Religion in State-Building and Groups

In the North Caucasus, traditional Islam has been closely linked to political elites. Each republic in the North Caucasus has an official Muslim spiritual board (DUM) which coordinates Islamic activities within that republic. The respective government of each republic usually co-opts the DUM in order to control worship and Islamic activities on its

territory. It promotes a traditionalist form of Islam that does not seek to overthrow the government elites or to implement Sharia law. Official elites occupy an important political role in each republic and do not advocate directly the politization of Islam. This is particularly true for Dagestan, as many people are followers (*murids*) of living Sheikhs, compared to Ingushetia and Chechnya. Thus, religious elites play a central role in politics in Dagestan, as well as in Kabardino-Balkaria.

For non-traditionalists, the political goal associated with Islam is the establishment of an Islamic State under the Sharia law (Koranic law), along with *salaf* practices. The moderate wing of non-traditionalists insists on the need for peaceful means to spread Islam. *Dawa*, a call for Islam in Arabic, is seeking to convert non-Muslims and to re-introduce Muslims to “Pure Islam.” In this view, the evolution towards an Islamic society can be accomplished through proselytism or state institutions. This restraint is usually linked with the concept of *fitna*, which is described as “the two civil wars that tore the Muslim community apart within half a century of the Prophet’s death” (Sageman, 2004: 7). The moderate wing thus refrains from [to] identifying local Muslim as apostates.

By referring to Sayyid Qutb’s ideology and his concept of *jahiliyya*, radical political Islamists claim that a “state of barbarism and ignorance (...) prevailed in the Arabic Peninsula before Mohammed’s revelations” (Sageman, 2004: 8). This state of ignorance still exists in actual Muslim societies and has to be abolished by violent means only. Violence is the only way to establish an Islamic State on the rubbles of the infidel regimes. Violence is thus justified against any political regime that does not rule in accordance with the Koranic law. They are labelled as the near enemy that occupies Islamic land, whether they are foreigners or “corrupted” local regimes. Foreigners or “corrupt” local regimes are seen as the near enemy occupying Islamic land. The concept of *takfir* is associated with anyone

considered an apostate for advocating non-Islamic laws over Koranic laws. Jihad is necessary in order to abolish repressive political and ideological forces that limit free adherence to “Pure Islam.”

Global radical political Islamists advocate a violent struggle in order to expand the land of Islam (*dar al-Islam*), by waging an offensive jihad in the land of conflict (*dar al-harb*) against the far enemy (Sageman, 2004: 2). This strategy of targeting the far enemy became associated with the ideology of al-Qaeda.³¹ It acknowledges the need to eliminate infidels (*kafirs*) from the Holy Land of Islam. Kafirs are associated with “Jews and Crusaders,” according to Ossama bin Laden’s 1998 fatwa. This fatwa promotes jihad against the far enemy on their own territory (in Israel and in the West).

For the sake of this research, I use the label of Salafism to identify radical political Islamists, which advocates the establishment of an Islamic state through violent means. By now, the concept of Wahhabism has become negatively connotated in Russia and it will, therefore, only be used when I specifically refer to Russian political discourse. It also limits the confusion between the use of the Wahhabi as a derogatory term, and Wahhabi as a follower of radical Islam. Certain authors suggest that we should refrain from using the terms Wahhabism or Salafism, but should instead look at the ideological roots of foreign fighters and use the concepts of Qutbism or Azzamism (Schaefer, 2011: 151).³² In any case, it is rare that adherents of radical Islam in Dagestan and across the North Caucasus will agree to be called or labelled by the use of the terms Salafism or Wahhabism. They will instead insist on the purity of their interpretation of Islam. Therefore, when I will be discussing solely the

³¹ The notion of near and far enemies follows the idea of defensive jihad (protection) and offensive jihad (expansion).

³² Qutbism refers to Sayyid Qutb (1906-1966), an Egyptian theologian who inspired many radical political Islamist movements, including al-Qaeda. As for Azzamism, it relates to Sheikh Abdallah Azzam, one of the leading figures of the jihad against the Soviet Union during the 1980s.

practice of Islam and its non-political branch, I will use the label of “Pure Islam” or radical Islam.

In the next section, I will give a genealogy of the political development in the North Caucasus in order to identify the roots of the development of radical Islam and the upsurge of violence. I will mainly be focusing on the role of the two Chechen wars and its insurgency, local political and religious elites, federal policies, and structural factors.

Chapter 3: Genealogy of the two Chechen Wars and the Insurgency in the Region.

3.1 The First Chechen War and its Aftermath: “From Nationalism to Jihad”?³³

The First Chechen War was analysed and covered in depth, as it was part of the transformation of the USSR to what is now known as Russia. In addition, it was fairly easy for journalists and academics aiming to document the “ethnic” conflict across Soviet space to access the secessionist republic. Even though the purpose of this research is not to analyse the dynamics of the first Chechen conflict, certain historical events are nonetheless crucial in order to understand the more recent upsurge of violence in the region.

At the end of 1991, just before the implosion of the Soviet Union, Dzhokar Dudaev, a high-ranking military officer in the Soviet army, was elected President of Chechnya with over 80 % of the votes. It is however important to underline the problematic nature of the election as only 17% of the polling stations were opened in the country. Right after the election, Dudaev declared the creation of the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria (ChRI) on 1 November 1991.³⁴ At that moment, the Autonomous Republic of Checheno-Ingushetia was already split into two republics — Chechnya and Ingushetia — inside the republic of Russia. Much was written about the reasons why Chechnya was not able to conclude an agreement

³³ This quote is taken from the title of James Hughes’ book about the two Chechen wars. See Hughes (2007).

³⁴ Ichkeria usually refers to the Southern part of the actual Chechen Republic, delimited by the Caucasian mountains in the South, and the Terek River in the North. The Chechen Republic of Ichkeria (ChRI) was the name of the unrecognized independent Chechen state between 1991 and 2000. The Chechen government in exile kept the name ChRI until, and even after, the election of the new Chechen President Akhmad Kadyrov in 2003. The Chechen insurgency stayed under the affiliation of the ChRI until the establishment of the Caucasus Emirate in October 2007, even if Sadualey expanded the ChRI outside of Chechen borders in 2006. For an etymology of the term Ichkeria, see Derluguian (2005: 36-37).

on asymmetrical federalism with Moscow, as Tatarstan, Bashkortostan and Yakutia did (Hughes, 2007). Although it is far from the topic of this research, certain interpretations exemplify how the causes of the First Chechen War are understood by specialists. Some analysts insist on the political and personal clashes between Dudaev and Yeltsin to explain the outbreak of the war (Tishkov, 1997), the non-communist root of Dudaev's regime (Ware and Kisriev, 2001; Hughes, 2007), or the fear of Russian disintegration (Evangelista, 2002), as possible causes. Others focus on the historical conception of resistance amongst the Chechen people (Lieven, 1999), or on a clash of civilisations (Huntington, 1993). The roots of the Chechen wars are obviously multi-causal and have evolved throughout the two wars. For the sake of this research, we will review elements that play an important role in the upsurge of violence. By looking at the relationship between nationalism, religious radicalism and Chechen leaders, one can map out the way the conflict was framed and re-framed throughout the two wars.

Dudaev was born in Chechnya just before the 1944 deportations, but grew up in Kazakhstan. He served in the Soviet Army and reached the rank of Major-General until the end of the Soviet Union. Dudaev is not the typical Chechen nationalist that grew up in exile and came back to Chechnya in 1957 after Khrushchev's decree. He was raised in the Soviet society and could be identified as being Sovietized. He did not return to Chechnya, married a Russian woman, and built his entire career within the Soviet Army. It is often said that after being a witness to the nationalist Popular Front in Estonia, he decided to go back to Chechnya and engage in the same kind of movement at home. Dudaev was an outsider to the communist nomenklatura in Chechnya, and was not a recycled *apparatchik*, as was the case with many emerging leaders in other republics of the Soviet Union. Whether he chose to do it for opportunistic reasons or because of "true" nationalist feelings, Dudaev could not be

labelled a Chechen traditionalist, or even less a radical Islamist. His evolution towards the declaration of Gazawat, or holy war in the North Caucasus, should be seen in the social and political context of the end of the Soviet Union and the creation of ChRI.

Dudaev's rise to power happened in a moment of Chechen history where the salience and the importance of Islam was gaining momentum. The cleavage between nationalists and radical Islamists was already present at the moment of the declaration of sovereignty by Dudaev and his close associates like Zelikham Yandarbiev. Indeed, the first debates about the role of religion in the public and political sphere happened during the First Chechen Congress in 1989. Although secular and mostly nationalist, Dudaev quickly affiliated himself with religious political figures, such as Islam Khalimov and Movladi Udugov (Moore and Tumelty, 2009). Much was written on the secular nature of the first independent Chechen government, and how the regime slowly evolved from a nationalist rhetoric to a more religious one (Hughes, 2007; Wilhelmsen, 2005). Most Chechen nationalists were born in exile and were raised according to a secular education, while some, like Shamil Basayev, even supported Yeltsin's quest for sovereignty and supported him in Moscow during the 1991 coup.

Although the first generation of Chechen insurgents and nationalists were not religious, the first war that started in December 1994 was influenced by foreign fighters and Islamic organisations from the Persian Gulf region. They proved to play a central role in re-drawing the conflict's boundaries, as it was explained in the previous section. This phenomenon is not unique to the Chechen conflict: similar patterns were observed in Bosnia at the beginning of the 1990s. In order to create a national image to unite the Chechens, Dudaev and his associates drew from the traditional narrative of religious and mountainous resistance against Russian invaders. Dudaev understood the importance of using the concept

of holy war (gazawat) and religion as a mobilising force during the First Chechen War. However, the Chechen Major-General did not have an Islamic education and could hardly be called religious. As Tishkov writes, “[a]ttitudes toward Islam among Dudayev’s close followers and himself were cautious and uncertain, and they essentially remained nonbelievers. Dudayev was never seen praying; there were no Islamic symbols in his home or offices; and he never went to the mosque” (2004: 169). In a speech, Dudaev called for good Muslims to pray three times a day, although the Koran requires it be five times. Building an Islamic state was never part of Dudaev’s project for Chechnya. As Derlugian explains, “eventually, every powerful man in Chechnya (...) scrambled to acquire a degree of Islamic discourse and representation—beards grew longer, prayers became conspicuous, women were expelled from the remaining offices” (1999: 10 quoted in Evangelista, 2002: 72).

The independence of Chechnya and the choice to engage in a war against Russian forces was certainly not a consequence of the Islamic radicalisation amongst Chechen elites or the local population. As mentioned before, the growing importance of radical Islam became a way to mobilise and galvanize Chechen forces against the Russian invaders. “Dudaev’s use of Islam was often correlated with moments of extreme urgency, when his leadership [or the independence were] seriously threatened” (Hughes, 2007: 278).

The First Chechen War was launched in December 1994 as an operation to restore the “constitutional order” in the republic. Many authors have described the brutality and ruthlessness of the war (Lieven, 1999; Dunlop, 1998; Nivat, 2000). Conservative estimates usually report around 50,000 victims, including 35,000 civilians who were killed (Dunlop, 2000; Hughes, 2007). Certain elements of the war are crucial for this research. The level of violence and brutalization rapidly allowed the Chechen leadership to mobilize the population

around the survival of the nation, and the need to fight a holy war against Russian forces, as discussed earlier. Akhmad Kadyrov, the mufti of Chechnya, future President of Chechnya and Russian ally, openly called for the launch of a holy war against the Russian invaders. Consequently, Chechnya was seen as another front of jihad for Muslims around the world after Afghanistan, Bosnia and Tajikistan. Later in the war, in April 1996, Dudaev was killed by a Russian missile, an event that strengthened the conditions for Islamic radicalisation. Indeed, after Dudaev's death, Zelimkhan Yandarbiev was appointed as interim President until the 1997 election. Yandarbiev tried to establish an Islamic state and the imposition of the Sharia law over the old Soviet laws in the secessionist republic. He, however, encountered massive opposition from the local population.

At that moment, Chechnya and its political leaders presented their violent struggle in the name of a religious war against Russia in order to liberate oppressed Muslims. With the end of socialism, and the new struggle in the name of Islam, the Republic was entering a vacuum of ideology, which would mainly be filled by foreign Islamist fighters who also influenced Chechen warlords such as Arbi Barayev, Shamil Basayev, Salman Raduyev and Ruslan Gelaev. However, nationalism could have filled this vacuum just like in other Soviet republics. Most of the political actors have sought to instrumentalize religion as a way to mobilize individuals. As explained earlier in the chapter, foreign fighters arrived in the region in the middle of the war in 1995 when the Chechen government was openly calling for the gazavat.

With the presidential election coming in June 1996, Yeltsin was open for negotiations with the Chechen forces. At the same time, the military situation on the field changed drastically. In August of 1996, Aslan Maskhadov united almost all the military commanders and organised an assault on Grozny. The assault was labelled "*Operation jihad*", arguably an

omen to what the Chechen struggle would become during the Second War. As Chechen forces were able to encircle their Russian counterparts, the Russian generals sought to carpet bomb Grozny as the only solution. As a result, Yeltsin pushed for further negotiations with Maskhadov through his envoy Aleksandr Lebed' in order to get re-elected in June 1996. The war was highly unpopular in Russia. The negotiations ultimately led to the Khasavyurt accords in August 1996.³⁵ These accords did not resolve the Chechen sovereignty problem, but rather it set a deadline (December 31st 2001) for a final resolution. Despite the First Chechen War having ended, the door was left open for further problems and a possible Second War before the end of 2001. At the same time, the Chechen people had the opportunity to vote for a new national government that would engage in the reconstruction of the Republic.

Elections were organised at the beginning of 1997, just after the end of the war. Although the conditions in which the elections were held were difficult and precarious, the whole process met OSCE standards, and set the ground for the establishment of the political foundations of the ChRI. Aslan Maskhadov was elected President of Chechnya, with 59.3% of the vote, beating out Shamil Basayev (23.5%) and Zelikham Yandarbiyev (10.1%).³⁶ OSCE representative Tim Guldemann declared the election “exemplary and free,” and other international observers stated that the election was “legitimate and democratic” (Evangelista, 2002: 48). However, it is worth noting that the election was held in the context of the end of a bloody war, where military formations were not disbanded, and pro-Russian opposition political figures were *persona non grata* in the Republic. Hughes also underlines the fact that “ethnic Slav residents who would have accounted for about 25 percent of the vote, but also

³⁵ See Hughes (2007) for a more detailed account on the negotiation process and the end of the war.

³⁶ For a thorough analysis of the Chechen election, see Derluguian (2005: 29-64).

Chechen refugees, were denied participation” (2007: 95). In spite of these elements that could have favoured a more radically inclined vote, Maskhadov was able to secure a solid majority. It demonstrated the will of the Chechen electorate to move away from Yandarbiyev’s rather short presidency, and the growing Islamisation of the Chechen society. At the same time, the results suggested a certain ambivalence between the “moderate” government offered by Maskhadov and the support gathered by Basayev as a war hero. Already at the time of the election, one could observe that an important part of the population, roughly a third, was ready to support Basayev and Yandarbiyev in opposition to Maskhadov. It exemplifies how the coalition of the first war was already dissolving, resulting in a struggle for political and military power. Maskhadov was facing a heterogenous amalgam of field commanders that did not want to disband their personal militias. Many of them were using a growing Islamic rhetoric in order to challenge the legitimacy of the Chechen State and its administration.

At the same time, the Russian government “failed to deliver the economic and reconstruction aid promised and returned to its pre-invasions policy of blockade and subversion in Chechnya, and of securing its international isolation” (Hughes, 2007: 93). The Chechen government had the task of rebuilding the republic and its industries but without significant financial support from Russia or from the international community. One has to mention that from the money and help delivered by Moscow, a major part disappeared in corruption and often directly into warlords’ pockets. Along with the lack of economic capacity, one also has to note that the central authority of the Chechen government was minimal, and most of the field commanders and militias were not demobilized. The harsh economic conditions and the fragility of the Chechen state helped various warlords and

Islamic organisations attract more young people.³⁷ Indeed, politics in Chechnya between 1997 and 1999 was more driven by military capacities than actual skills to govern the newly independent state. Ilyas Akhmadov underlines that, in 1998 and 1999, most members of the government had their own personal militias and were former military commanders (Akhmadov and Lanskoj, 2011). Instead of seeing a military disengagement and foreign fighters leaving Chechnya, as was the case with the Dayton Accords after the Bosnian war, Chechnya witnessed an increase in militarisation and insecurity between 1997 and 1999.

The economic, social, and political situation set the ground for a context of lawlessness, in which the absence of the rule of law allowed major field commanders like Basayev, Khattab and Raduyev to become central political actors. They could thus seek to impose their political and religious views on the Chechen government. Evangelista describes how abductions and general lawlessness in Chechnya were mainly produced by field commanders in order to destabilize the reconstruction process, the re-establishment of the oil industry (pipeline), and the Maskhadov administration in general (2002: 46-62). Maskhadov was stuck between a rock and a hard place. He would not receive any significant financial or military support from Russia or the Western world to demobilize fighters and create the new Chechen state. However, the Russian government, through Boris Berezovskii's possible relationship with hostage-takers, would indirectly finance Maskhadov's political opposition (Evangelista 2002). However, this assumption was never proven by researchers or political elites.

At the same time, foreign fighters would attract money from Islamic foundations and groups, becoming stronger and more influential than the President and his close allies. Maskhadov did not want to confront them directly as he feared provoking a civil war inside

³⁷ On the failed attempt at State building in Chechnya, see Sakwa (2005: 4-11).

Chechnya. According to Hughes, the struggle for power in the aftermath of the First Chechen War was framed around the sectarian tensions between moderate and radical Islamists (2007: 94-95). Salafism established itself in the highlands of the Republic, mainly around Vedeno, Serzhen Yurt, and Urus-Martan. Hughes (2007) explains this phenomenon through the personal links between Basayev and Khattab, leading to the subsequent development of Wahhabi training camps in Southern Chechnya, which used money from Islamic charities, such as the al-Haramain foundation (Wilhemsen, 2005). As explained earlier in the chapter, these camps became the hub for all radical Islamists seeking military and ideological training. Chechens, and individuals from other republics, such as Ingushetia, Dagestan, and Kabardino-Balkaria, enrolled because of governmental repression or simply because of the opportunity. Approximately 1600-2500 fighters would have trained in these camps, most likely Chechens, Arabs, and Dagestanis, but also Balkars, Ingushs, and Central Asians.

Chechnya, especially the Gudermes and Serzhen Yurt district, became a safe haven for radical Islamists across the North Caucasus. Radical Islamism filled the ideological vacuum left by the extreme violence of the war and the end of communism. It also provided a financial opportunity for young people looking for work or purpose in a devastated republic which could not be governed or rebuilt by the central authority. Radical Islam also became a key aspect of the power redistribution between political actors after the war, and was often depicted as something external to Chechnya, and used by warlords to mobilize people or to reach their own personal goals. Wilhelmsen delves into the impact of foreign resources and money on the political views of Chechen warlords as a central factor for their Islamic radicalisation following the end of the First Chechen War. However, she argues that the instrumental nature of Islam does not preclude the fact that there were also possible true believers and fervent Islamists (2005). This aspect is central in order to understand how

radical Islam evolved in Chechnya at the time and how it now develops across the North Caucasus. Although it would be problematic to claim that foreign money had no impact at all on Chechen warlords and their grievances, it is also highly questionable to claim that their involvement towards radical Islam occurred because of greed. Following September 2001 and the subsequent crackdown on Islamic charitable foundations, radical Islam did not disappear and in fact expanded all over the region. Even when foreign Islamists like Khattab, in 2002, and Abu Hafs, in 2006, were eliminated by Russian services, radical Islam still flourished amongst the youth. It is still very difficult to identify with certainty the origin of the money that funded these training camps and the proportion of non-Chechen fighters in them. However, there is little doubt that it played a central role in the diffusion of violence across the North Caucasus in the last decade. I will come back to this aspect in further details in the following chapters when I will discuss the processes of Islamic radicalisation at the individual level in the North Caucasus.

If Islam played the role of ideological cement during the war, it was now the fault line between various military factions in Chechnya. As we saw, radical Islam seeks to engage in political processes in order to build a society based on the Koran and Sharia law. The grievances for the establishment of an Islamic State or imamate in the North Caucasus were not limited to Wahhabis and the foreign fighters, such as Khattab. As Hughes underlines, even members of Maskhadov's government, like Movladi Udugov, started to advocate for these ideas (2007: 103). Campana argues that the "politicisation of Islam in Chechnya [during the interwar period and the beginning of the Second War], either as a factor for internal reconstruction or as some new social cement for an utterly devastated society, has proved to be unsuccessful" (2006: 137). Although radical Islam could appear to be a solution for the lawlessness and anomic situation in Chechnya because of the incapacity

of the government, it mainly exacerbated the division inside the Chechen society following the end of the war.

The interwar period (1997-1999) saw a growing opposition between the early secular Maskhadov government and a heterogeneous amalgamation of radical Islamists, comprised of ethnic Chechens like Shamil Basayev, Salman Raduyev or Arbi Barayev, and foreign fighters, such as Khattab. As Schaefer rightly points out, as soon as the First War was over, the fragile coalition between Sufi, Chechen nationalists and radical Islamists eroded very quickly, a usual pattern following the end of a civil war (2011: 172-175). In order to co-opt and control the radical Islamists, Maskhadov appointed Basayev as Vice-Prime Minister and head of the government between 1997 and 1998. However, even Basayev was not able to re-establish order. Maskhadov was reluctant to order a crack-down on rampant criminal activities, such as hostage-taking and robberies across Chechnya, for fear of provoking a protracted civil war.

However, numerous clashes occurred between various military factions in Chechnya — mainly government forces, criminal groups and religious militias.³⁸ One of the most important clashes occurred in Gudermes in July 1998 between the forces of Sulim Yamadayev and Wahhabists led by Arbi Barayev and Abdul-Malik Mezhidov, when between fifty and a hundred soldiers were killed during a four-day conflict. It initially convinced Maskhadov to seek to expel foreign fighters and ban Wahhabism from the Republic. However, government forces were never able to enforce his policy, forcing Maskhadov to turn to radical Islamists to stabilize the country. At the same time,

³⁸ Paul Murphy proposes an extensive description of the interwar struggles and clashes for power between Chechen warlords (2004).

Yandarbiyev established an Islamic governmental structure, the Supreme Shariah Court, in order to compete with Maskhadov's legislative and executive power (Zürcher, 2007: 87).

In February 1999, as a result of his inability to govern, President Maskhadov decided to integrate Islamist elements in his cabinet and to re-introduce Sharia law in the republic. This step strengthened the cleavage between radical Islamists and Sufi traditionalists within the Chechen society. If they were able to cohabit during the First War, these groups now proved to be polarized when it came to the debate concerning Islam in Chechen society. Akhmad Kadyrov, the Mufti of Chechnya who called for the *gazavat* in 1995, was now firmly opposed to Salafist influences in the Republic. Other ex-insurgents, such as the Yamadayev brothers, also tried to oppose the growing force that the Salafists represented. As we will see later, the Russian government will build its strategy of Chechenization on these cleavages by co-opting the Kadyrovs and the Yamadayevs.

Meanwhile, Basayev, Udugov, Khattab, and, to a lesser degree, Yandarbayiev, saw the Chechen state as the first step toward the establishment of an Emirate in the North Caucasus.³⁹ The four radical Islamists formed an alternative Islamic governmental structure named Mekhk-Shura in February 2009 (Wood, 2007: 91). Khattab and Basayev also established what Hahn calls "terrorist structures" (2007: 38), with the establishment of the Congress of the Peoples of Dagestan and Ichkeria, and Khattab's infamous Islamic International Peacekeeping Brigade.⁴⁰ These "terrorist structures" could be seen as the first steps of the project of a caliphate across the North Caucasus (Chechnya and Dagestan at that

³⁹ Schaefer argues that Basayev did not really adhere to radical Islamic views and mainly used the ideology as a mobilisation tool (2011, 168). However, opinions about Basayev differ, as exemplified by Ilyas Akhmadov's book and his numerous personal stories involving his close friend Shamil Basayev (Akhmadov and Lanskoj, 2010).

⁴⁰ The Congress of the Peoples of Ichkeria and Dagestan was a political group led by Basayev and Khattab, which promotes the idea of the creation of a caliphate between Dagestan and Chechnya. The Islamic International Peacekeeping Brigade was militia composed of fighters that were trained in Khattab's insurgent camps in order to help in protecting Muslims and establishing the caliphate.

moment). According to Murphy, links were also established between Basayev and the Khachilayev brothers in Dagestan, a nationalist group seeking power in the republic and involved in a military operation seeking to seize the Dagestan State Council building in 1998 (Murphy, 2004).

At the same time, armed clashes started between federal forces and Islamic militants in Dagestan right after the end of the First Chechen War in 1997. Following the end of the war, Dagestan volunteers in the war came back home and sought to challenge the Spiritual Board of Muslims of Dagestan (DUMD), the official branch of Islam in the republic. The close relationship between state elites and religious officials was denounced by radical Islamists, which led to a ban by the DUMD on “Wahhabism and other extremism” in September 1996 (Wood, 2007: 149). In response to these acts, in August of 1998, radical Islamists proclaimed the imposition of Shariah law in certain villages in the mountainous region of Dagestan. Islamic jamaats led by Djarulla Radjbaddinov established these salafi enclaves in Karamakhi, Chabanmakhi, and Kadar. Surprisingly, the idea was well-received by the Russian government as the interior minister, Sergei Stepashin, agreed to send “humanitarian aid” to these villages and to accept the Islamisation process (Evangelista, 2002: 65). The Congress of the Peoples of Ichkeria and Dagestan, led by Basayev and Khattab, openly announced that they would defend these enclaves against Dagestani and Russian invasions. By the end of August, radical Islamists assassinated the local representative of the DUM, a moderate Sufi.

Numerous other violent outbreaks happened between police forces and the radical Islamists in 1997 in Karamakhi. Yandarbiev, and subsequently Khattab and Basayev, welcomed Baggaudin Kebedov (aka Baggaudin Magomedov) in Urus-Martan and other Dagestani salafists in Chechnya, while government repression increased in Dagestan

(Roschin, 2012: 172; Murphy, 2004: 93).⁴¹ Kebedov opposed the secular nature of the Dagestani government and openly advocated violent means to achieve the establishment of an Islamic State. In December 1997, Chechen forces crossed the Dagestani border to lead a raid in the city of Buinaksk against Russian forces. However, Kebedov was expelled by the Maskhadov government in Chechnya following the sectarian clash in Gudermes in 1998. Kebedov, along with a group of Dagestani fighters from Serzhen-Yurt, re-entered Dagestan and re-integrated the three villages under the Sharia law in Tsumandin and Botlikh districts as early as April (Hahn, 2007: 108) or June 1999 (Ware, cited in Evangelista, 2002: 78). Consequently, there was already an important link between Chechen radicals and the Islamic jamaat in Dagestan before the invasion of August 1999. In fact, military clashes between Dagestani radical Islamists and local police forces in July 1999 precipitated the Wahhabi invasion of Dagestan. An assassination attempt against Said Amirov, the mayor of Makhachkala, also happened in the same month (Hahn, 2007: 108). The republic of Dagestan was on a slow path to an outbreak of sectarian violence between Sufi and Salafi supporters.

Nevertheless, it would be incorrect to claim that Islamic radicalisation in Dagestan is largely the product of the First Chechen War. Salafism arrived in the mid-1980s in the republic (Wood, 2007: 148), and contrary to Chechnya, radical Islam had already had some roots in Dagestan. Radical Islam became a way to voice grievances against the State and the epidemic level of corruption in Dagestan.

Khattab and Basayev sought to offer direct support to the radical Islamist community in Dagestan in order to strengthen the idea of an Islamic imamate in the North Caucasus. They decided to lead a 1500-fighter squad to support Kebedov's new Islamic enclaves and

⁴¹ See Roschin (2012) for excerpts from an interview with Kebedov.

occupy more villages. On August 2, 1999, they invaded the Bolikh and Tsumandin districts. Instead of provoking massive popular support for the invasion, local Dagestanis fiercely rejected Kebedov's claims and opposed the Islamic brigade's invasion by siding with Russian forces.⁴² Many factors explain why local Dagestanis went to the Russian side. Resistance against the Wahhabi invasion was memorialized by many Dagestanis as a struggle against Chechen gruesomeness in the First War. Salman Raduyev's terrorist act on Kizlyar and Pervomayskoe in 1996, where many Dagestanis perished, certainly did not gather support for the 1999 Chechen invasion.⁴³ Mikhail Roschin underlines that the Andian ethnic group openly confronted Chechen fighters because of previous conflicts between the two ethnic groups (2012: 175). Gordon Hahn also put forward the explanation that previous ethnic clashes between Akin-Chechens and others nationalities such as the Laks, Dargins, and Avars, could explain the reluctance in supporting Basayev's and Khattab's invasion (2007: 108-110). During one interview, I spoke with the family of one of the members of the loyalist Dagestani militia in which they expressed a feeling of honor for their relatives who fought the Chechen aggression and defended Dagestan. By the end of August 1999, the Wahhabi squad was pushed back to Chechnya, setting the table for the Second Chechen War.⁴⁴

The Dagestani Interior Minister and its paramilitary special forces (OMON) responded by invading the Wahhabi enclave in the Kadar region, including the villages of Karamakhi and Chabanmakhi. Important clashes between Wahhabi and OMON forces followed. Basayev and Khattab launched a second invasion in one month in the Novolak

⁴² Many explanations were given to explain the choice to invade Dagestan. See Evangelista (2002: 63-85).

⁴³ Raduyev conducted a military and hostage taking raid on Dagestan territory in 1996 killing over 100 people. He took over 2000 people hostage in the village of Pervomayskoe, leading to a major military clash with Russian forces.

⁴⁴ See Saidov (2012: 194-195) for a rather different and more exhaustive discussion about the invasion.

region. By mid-September, Dagestani and Chechen forces had, once again, been pushed back towards Chechen territory (Ware and Kisriev, 2009: 123-125).

At that same time, a series of explosions occurred in apartment buildings across Russia. The first explosion detonated in Moscow at the end of August. A second explosion occurred in Buinaksk, Dagestan, leading to the death of 64 individuals and wounding 133. Three more bombs were detonated in Moscow (September 9th and 13th), and in Volgodonsk (September 16th). The five explosions provoked the death of over 300 people. Although Khattab and Basayev never claimed responsibility for these attacks, the Putin administration identified the radical Chechen Islamists as the perpetrators. Basayev even declined responsibility and told the BBC: “Again they want to sacrifice our people for the sake of elections” (quoted in Hughes, 2007: 110). Indeed, the role of Chechen forces are now disputed based on two major discoveries. In the first one, two members of the FSB were caught planting bags of white powder (which resembled Hexogen) and objects that looked like detonators in the basement of an apartment building in Ryazan on September 23rd. When confronted by the press and the local police, the FSB claimed that it was not a real bomb but a training exercise. The material, however, had already been identified as a bomb by the local wing of the agency.⁴⁵ A second argument against the Chechen involvement is that the Russian prosecutor’s office had finally convicted individuals from Karachevo-Cherkessia for the planning and execution of the bombings. Schaefer explains that the FSB investigation finally named Khattab as the one responsible for the military training, and a Karachai businessman as the mastermind behind the attacks (2011, 186).

⁴⁵ For more details about these events and the “conspiracy theories” surrounding them, see Schafer (2011, 185-186) or Evangelista (2002: 80-83). Although always circumstantial, the evidence usually lead to the involvement of FSB at the very least in the Ryazan event. See also Jack (2004: 88-130), and Ware and Kisriev (2009: 124-128).

This research does not seek to identify the truth about the various conspiracy theories regarding the apartment bombings in 1999. It is important, however, to explain the context in which the Second Chechen War was instigated, as many authors (Hahn, 2007; Schaefer, 2011) see these events as one of the primary causes of the upsurge of violence in the North Caucasus since the summer of 2009. The Second Chechen War was launched by mid-September with strategic bombardments with a pretext of a counter-terrorist operation against radical Islamists in Chechnya. The military operation on the ground started at the beginning of October 1999. Putin used the law against terrorism to justify the decision to support a military intervention in Chechnya. He would consistently underline the link between the Chechen insurgency, terrorism and global-salafi networks.

Whether or not the invasion of Chechnya was already planned by the Russian government, the explosions and the Wahhabi invasion of Dagestan gave a justification to re-occupy the entire Chechen Republic (Hughes, 2007: 110; Schaefer, 2011: 183). The Russian government used the fact that the Chechen administration was linked with radical Islamists like Basayev, and announced that, as a result of terrorist acts, President Maskhadov was sidelined from any future peace negotiations. The event of September 11th, 2001 only reinforced the labelling of the Chechen insurgency as “terrorist.” Even its more moderate leaders, like Aslan Maskhadov and Akhmed Zakaev, were depicted as terrorists and belonging to al-Qaeda. In 2002, Serguei Ivanov, the Russian Defense Minister, declared that negotiating with Maskhadov and the Chechen insurgents to end the war would be like asking President Bush to negotiate with Mullah Omar, the Afghan Taliban leader in order to stop terrorism.⁴⁶ The use of the label of terrorism has been covered in-depth in academic literature

⁴⁶ “Maskhadov on Attracting International Mediators to Negotiations on Chechnya,” Pravda.ru, 26 June 2002, <http://english.pravda.ru/news/russia/politics/26-06-2002/45088-0/>

(Campana and Légaré, 2010; Souleimanov and Dytrich, 2008; Hughes, 2007; Wood, 2007; Bacon et al., 2007) and will thus not be developed further.

Although this research does not aim to establish and analyse the causes and the accountability of actors for the outbreak of the Second Chechen War, it is worth noting that both sides bare the responsibility for the continuation of hostilities. The Russians heavily contributed to the rise of tensions in the region. I have explained the possible role played by Russian secret services in the destabilisation of the political situation in Chechnya and the refusal of the government to fulfill its duty of reconstruction according to the Khasavyurt accords. The Russian government had also established a military plan to re-invade Chechnya and occupy the Republic up to the Terek River, as early as the beginning of 1999.⁴⁷ For the Russian Army, and the *siloviki* in general, the First Chechen War was unfinished business. One cannot ignore the link between the launch of the Second Chechen War and the subsequent legislative and Presidential elections. Vladimir Putin's popularity skyrocketed in the months following the launch of the anti-terrorist operations in Chechnya in 1999. He was elected with 52.9 percent of the vote in March 2000 on the first round of the Presidential election. Putin moved from being another low profile Prime Minister to becoming the President of Russia in less than seven months.

At the same time, Chechen radical forces were responsible for many provocations against Russian forces at the borders of Dagestan, and fostered a sense of profound distrust between both sides. The development of jihadist training camps, recurrent rhetoric about establishing an imamate, and the general lawlessness in Chechnya, fuelled the tensions between Moscow and Grozny. The literature concerning political violence claims that

⁴⁷ See the comment made by Sergei Stepashin, the former Russian Prime Minister, in an interview with *Nezavisimaia gazeta*, 14 January 2000, quoted in Evangelista (2002: 61).

violent entrepreneurs usually prefer to evolve in an unstable political situation, which enables them to exert the full spectrum of their social and political influence (Fearon and Laitin, 2003; Zürcher, 2007). On both sides, the resumption of the war was an occasion to profit economically and ideologically, as we shall see in the next section.

3.2 The Military Phase of the Second Chechen War: A Dialogue of the Extreme

The Second Chechen War was launched at the end of 1999 and officially ended April 2009, when the Russian government officially announced the end of the counterterrorist operation. However, the intensity of the military campaign was reduced throughout the ten years of the operation. In the summer of 2000, the Putin administration transferred certain military operations to pro-Russian forces. The military phase of the counter-terrorist operations was terminated in April 2002, and the coordination of the field operations were given to the FSB and then to the MVD in the summer of 2003. This research does not seek to review the entire genealogy of the Second Chechen War, as many excellent analyses were published in the last decade (Evangelista, 2002; Hughes, 2007; Russell, 2007). Instead, it seeks to underline the major events and processes that are often identified as catalysts for the upsurge of violence across the North Caucasus after the end of the counter-terrorist operation in Chechnya in April 2009.

The battle of the low-lands and Grozny occurred between October 1999 and February 2000. For a good summary of that period and the violence against civilians committed by Russian forces, one can read Tony Wood (2007: 100-102), Human Rights Watch (2000) and Anna Politkovskaya (2003). As the Russian Army drove the Chechen resistance out of Grozny, relying on intensive, disproportionate and indiscriminate bombings of the capital, both sides chose to adapt their military strategies. The Chechen insurgency changed its

strategy and adopted guerilla warfare, with Khattab and Basayev launching a new phase of terrorist acts across Russia. Paul Murphy presents an exhaustive analysis of these attacks (2004: 112-126). As we shall see later in the chapter, Maskhadov decided to make an alliance with the radical Islamist field commanders in order to conduct its guerilla warfare, and subsequently to extend the war theater throughout the North Caucasus. For the Russian forces, instead of opting for a strategy of suppression to completely eliminate the Chechen forces, a different strategy was adopted to avoid a protracted guerilla war.

The Russian Strategy: Chechenization of the Conflict

The strategies of the Russian government during the Second Chechen War sought two major objectives: (1) to label the entire Chechen government and the members of the insurgency as terrorists and (2) to put forward a strategy of divide and conquer within the Republic, in order to fragment the military opposition and to provoke a civil war inside Chechnya. The first strategy was aimed at delegitimizing the Chechen government in order to establish a political regime favorable to Russia. The Russian government rejected any forms of negotiations with representatives of the Chechen government, such as ongoing peace talks or during hostage-taking attacks with insurgent forces. The Putin administration also sought to portray the insurgency as part of the global Salafi network even if the evidence was sparse. For many high rankings officials in the Putin administration, including Nikolai Patrushev and Igor Sechin, any form of negotiations could lead to a domino effect across Russia (Russell, 2008: 663). In order to pursue this strategy, the Putin administration had to find credible allies in Chechen society to establish a puppet regime that would be identified as the official government in the Republic.

By using local proxies to fight its war, the Russian government hoped it would limit its losses and help identify insurgents, and thereby fight the resistance more effectively.⁴⁸ In order to launch this strategy, the Russian government proposed an amnesty for fighters who surrendered before the beginning of the Second War. It led to the creation of two pro-Russian militias: the Vostok Battalion under the command of the Yamadayev brother and the Zapad Battalion commanded by Said-Magomed Kakiyev (Hughes, 2007: 118-119). The two battalions were incorporated in the 42th Guards Motorized Rifle Division of the Russian Army.

As alluded to above, the Russian government sought to provoke a civil war inside Chechnya between traditionalists and radical Islamists. This strategy came to be called the “Chechnization” of the conflict. I will only briefly discuss this concept, as it was covered in depth in many academic findings (Hughes, 2007; Russell, 2007; 2008; Sakwa, 2010; 2011). According to Russell, “Chechnization is understood (...) to mean the delegation of power (including countering separatist insurgents) from the federal centre in Moscow to approved officials in Chechnya who support Kremlin policies. The three procedural phases of Chechnization were a referendum (March 2003), a presidential election (October 2003) and parliamentary elections (November 2005)” (2008: 678). As in the case of the First Chechen War with Doku Zavgayev, the Russian forces tried to establish a parallel government and political force by co-opting influential moderate leaders. In this case, they focused on Akhmad Kadyrov, who openly opposed the Wahhabists in the interwar period, to establish their puppet regime. Other moderates, such as the Yamadayev brothers and Said-Magomed Kakiyev, were also co-opted. Kadyrov was dismissed from his Mufti position by Maskhadov in August 1999. He was thus a perfect candidate to build the Chechnization process with.

⁴⁸ See Kalyvas (2006) for a theoretical discussion and Lyall, 2010 for the case of Chechnya .

Kadyrov, who enjoyed a good reputation in Chechnya, feared losing his personal and religious influence, cut all ties with the insurgent government. He was in charge of the pro-Moscow Chechen administration in 2000, and was elected President of Chechnya in 2003.⁴⁹ The validity of the election was highly problematic, as Chechnya was still in the turmoil of the war. Kadyrov was later killed by a bomb in 2004, leading the way for his 28-year old son Ramzan to take control of the Chechenization process. Ramzan Kadyrov was also given the resources to build a paramilitary force head to fight the insurgency and to re-establish order in the republic. His personal militia is made up of 40 to 50 percent of ex-insurgent fighters (approximately 7000), according to Alu Alkhanov (quoted in Kramer, 2005).

The Russian strategy was meant to balance power amongst pro-Russian Chechen forces. The military high-ranking officials and the Russian Military Intelligence (GRU) supported the Vostok and Zapad battalion. The executive branch of the government and the Federal Security Service (FSB) supported the two Kadyrovs (Schaefer, 2011: 270). One can thus see an intra-government agency competition in the Chechenization process. At the same time, this competition led to an internal struggle between pro-Russian militias.

If Akhmad Kadyrov did not oppose the Russian strategy of balance of power, his son Ramzan, on the other hand, took a different path after his father's death in May 2004. Between 2004 and 2009, Kadyrov confronted Alkhanov and the Yamadayev brothers in order to consolidate his power and his control over the resources in Chechnya. Numerous violent incidents between Kadyrov's forces and other pro-Russian militias were reported, including, but not limited to, Borozdinovskaya in 2005, and an explosion in the barracks of the Vostok battalion in 2006 (Baev, 2012b: 140). In April 2008, the *Kadyrovtsy* and Sulim

⁴⁹ The Russian government also organised a referendum for a new constitution in March 2003, in the middle of the war.

Yamadayev's Vostok battalion were involved in a military clash (Smirnov, 2008a). Following this confrontation, Ramzan Kadyrov requested the dissolution of the battalion and Sulim Yamadayev's arrest for crimes committed against the Chechen population and human rights violations (Smirnov, 2008b). The president's troops claimed to have discovered some mass graves that they immediately linked to the Vostok battalion. The battalion was subsequently disbanded after fighting in the Russo-Georgian war in August 2008 (North Caucasus analysis, 2008a), and it was integrated in Kadyrov's militia. Sulim Yamadayev was later killed in Dubai, presumably under Kadyrov's order.

The clashes between pro-Russian Chechen forces were not limited to the Vostok Battalion. It also involved another GRU pro-Chechen force, the Zapad battalion stationed in Khankala military base. In November 2010, an important clash happened between Kadyrov's forces and the Zapad battalion when the latter refused to obey orders from the former. This clash was the last of a long history of conflicts between Kakiev's and Kadyrov's forces. Kadyrov was able to obtain Kakiev's dismissal in 2007, and try to assassinate his successor, Bislan Elikhanov, in 2008.

This competition between pro-Russian forces could be linked to the control of the federal subsidies and funds for reconstruction which represents over \$1 billion between 2002 and 2006 (Ware, 2011). Kadyrov was able to establish his complete influence over Chechnya through a campaign of targeted violence.⁵⁰ The control of the lucrative oil industry was also at the heart of Kadyrov's campaign against other actors in the Chechenization process. This allowed Kadyrov to create a governmental and military structure composed of mainly of his

⁵⁰ See John Russell for an exhaustive list of personalities that Ramzan Kadyrov was able to physically or politically eliminate (2011: 1074-1075).

own clan, the Benoi *teip*.⁵¹ Intra-group violence is a crucial factor that will be analysed in chapter 5.

In 2006, Kadyrov created two battalions made up of ex-insurgents following the amnesty, in order to consolidate his own power and to fight the rebels, the “Yug” and the “Sever.” The battalions were composed of 1,200 to 2,000 soldiers and were under the command of the Interior Minister in Chechnya. However, the Jamestown Foundation has reported that military clashes occurred between the “Sever” battalion and Russian MVD troops in 2010. It was claimed that “Sever” fired at the Russian servicemen and helped the insurgents (Dzutsev, 2010). Such claims have been made on a regular basis since the creation of the battalions. It was also claimed that many insurgents agreed to surrender in order to become informants inside the pro-Chechen government. These claims are hardly empirically verifiable. What is clear is that the creation of the two battalions helped Kadyrov assert his control over the entire republic.

Kadyrov’s consolidation of power also helped him secure a very large autonomy in the management of the republic with the consent of Moscow. In addition to the omnipresence of his personal forces and their lawlessness, Kadyrov was able to repress almost all forms of independent journalism in Chechnya. He also imposed a religious code, and a police force to enforce it, even if it directly infringes upon federal laws. Kadyrov maintained control of the federal funds for reconstruction. One could easily claim that he achieved more independence and control over the republic from the federal government than Djohar Dudaev and Aslan Mashkadov could have ever dreamed of.⁵²

⁵¹ Teip is a Chechen and Ingush clan.

⁵² See Russell (2008) for a thorough analysis of the Kadyrov regime and its role in Putin’s strategy.

Contrarily to other republics, Kadyrov used his autonomy to integrate many elements of Islamic law in the daily administration of Chechnya. Vatchagaev underlines that Kadyrov pushed for young people to wear Islamic headscarves and skullcaps. On the other hand, he publicly denounced the use of black hijabs, chadors, niqabs or other Islamic outfits, arguing that they are not part of Chechen culture (Vatchagaev, 2012i). Kadyrov created a space to practice Islam based on his own view, while at the same time fighting Salafist influence. One can even say that he established a religious code that limited the capacity of radical Islamists to claim that Chechnya is governed by infidels and apostates. It thereby directly affected the recruitment of disabused young Muslims in the insurgency. Recently, Kadyrov also sought to challenge the insurgent ideology of the Koran in order to reinforce his religious position in the republic. In May 2012, Kadyrov's government, Dagestan, and the federal government, organised an Islamic conference against radicalism in Moscow and in Grozny (2012f). The conference's main objective was to adopt a theological position and a fatwa against radicalism and the Caucasus Emirate ideology (Vatchagaev, 2012i). Kadyrov and the federal government thus try to undermine one of the most important recruitment arguments for the insurgency: the absence of freedom of worship (Vatchagaev, 2012e).

Although non-violent methods such as this one exist in Chechnya, Kadyrov's regime was mainly established on repressive force and the non-respect of human rights. The Russian government and the Putin administration gave near total freedom to the army, the secret services, the police forces, and their local proxies such as the Kadyrovtsy, the Zapad and the Vostok battalions, to fight the insurgency, condoning most of the human-right abuses and extrajudicial actions. A very important literature has sought to reveal these abuses (Human Rights Watch 2000; Politkovskaya, 2003) such as mop-up operations, filtration camps, extrajudicial killings, torture, and rapes. The Russian government also chose to tolerate a

shadow economy, which involved abductions, payment for the release of individuals in custody and for the return of dead bodies to their families, as well as weapon trafficking with insurgents. This shadow economy became an important source of violence in Chechnya amongst Chechen militias, but also as a trigger event for many insurgents. Indeed, if religious repression did not play a major role in pushing young people toward the insurgency, human-right abuses and gruesome behaviours from pro-Russian forces led to a widespread need to seek revenge.

The New Strategy of the Chechen Insurgents: Guerilla Warfare and a Terrorist Wave across Russia (2002-2004)

The Chechen insurgents changed their strategy following the Russian control of the main part of the lowlands. When Maskhadov's military plan failed in the summer of 2000, mainly because of the ruthlessness of the Russian force and Putin's strategy of co-optation of moderate Chechen forces (Chechenization), the President of ChRI resolved to accept to integrate radical Islamists in his government and military structure. With Russia's refusal to negotiate, and international support drying out following September 11th, Maskhadov agreed to create a Consultative Assembly known as *Madzhlisul Shura*. Hahn underlined its similarity with the al-Qaeda structure in a detailed analysis of the body (2011: 40-42; Murphy, 2004: 172-174). The central element for this research is the fact that Maskhadov agreed to give military control to Basayev and named Abdul-Halim Sadulaev the Chairman of the Shariah committee, making him his potential successor. Maskhadov also integrated foreign fighters to its military structure such as Abu al-Walid and Chechen nationalist fighters such as Doku Umarov.

Although Maskhadov and his close circle remained focused on their nationalist goals, and their strategy was still oriented toward a peace treaty with the Russian government, they

did not have the military forces to attain their objectives. These changes were thus implemented by Maskhadov in order to strengthen the guerilla warfare against the Russian forces by regrouping all field commanders together. However, the trade-off of this association was the crucial role given to Basayev, Sadulaev, and al-Walid in the military and ideological decisions. For the Chechen leader, it was a temporary strategy in order to reorganize its military force and use the field commanders in order to push forward its national agenda.

Although the structure of the resistance remained mainly Chechen-centric, some major changes occurred in the subsequent ideology of the insurgency, as most of the radical Islamists obtained the key positions. Maskhadov's choice was to favor the survival of the insurgency, even if he had to associate himself with Basayev and his military views. Consequently, the insurgency shifted away from its nationalist and military strategy to one based on terrorism against civilians and a growing Salafist ideology. At the same time, the nationalist ideology remained strong inside the Chechen insurgency. It created a growing tension inside the insurgency between the nationalist and the Salafist wing that had different goals but had to cooperate because of the war imperatives. This tension would rise again with Basayev's death in 2006. Terrorism and civilian victimisation also remained a source of tension between Maskhadov's close circle and the Salafist wing.

In the two previous years (2000-2002), Basayev and Khattab were mainly responsible for the first terrorist waves. For Murphy, the hostage-taking in Dubrovka in October 2002 marked the beginning of this new phase (2004:197) and would end with the Beslan terrorist attack in September 2004. He offers a thorough account of the numerous terrorist attacks across Russia (2004: 197-268). High-impact terrorist acts and suicide bombings became part

of the Chechen insurgency strategy. Although, Maskhadov condemned most of these attacks against civilians; he never dismissed or disowned Basayev and his radical followers.

Sadulaev's nomination also marked an important change, as he was a young fighter with a high-level of education in linguistics and in Islamic studies. He is the prototype of the new generation of Chechen fighters who possess military, religious and ideological skills. He was seen by Maskhadov as a way to satisfy the radicals. On the other hand, radical Islamists, such as Basayev and al-Walid, considered him as one of them (Hahn 2007: 41-42; Tumelty 2005). For Sagromoso, Sadulaev "was not a radical Wahhabi. He belonged to the Shafii juridical school of Islam, and did not espouse any strict Salafi doctrines. No reference was ever made in his speeches to the concepts of tawhid or takfir" (2012: 586).

According to Moore and Tumelty, the Second Chechen War and Russian fierce opposition forced the radical Islamists to review their military strategy (2009: 85). Basayev chose to promote a resistance network across the North Caucasus based on his personal contacts from the Abkhaz war, and on young people from various republics in the North Caucasus trained in Khattab's camp.⁵³ Radical Islamist insurgencies would thus be seeking to expand the war across the North Caucasus. It is difficult to determine if Maskhadov was ever supportive of the idea to expand the war to the entire region. Most of the authors (Tumelty, 2005) posit that the expansion was informally started by Basayev after 2002, but became the policy of ChRI after Maskhadov's death in March 2005. Hahn, however, underlines that Mashkadov openly supported military operations in Ingushetia, and more specifically that Basayev and Umarov took part in the raid on Nazran (See chapter 4). He also claimed, before his death, that all combat jamaats across the region were subordinated to

⁵³ See Vatchagaev (2012a: 216-217) for a discussion about Basayev's links with the jamaats of Shariah, Nogai and Yarmuk. See also McGregor (2006).

him (2007: 43). One should refrain to claim that Maskhadov opposed Basayev in the idea to extend the war to other republics. At the same time, he did not give it his full support as demonstrated by the ambivalence in his speeches and his actions. Hahn adds another caveat when he writes “although developments under Sadulaev are important, it would be wrong to regard his early steps (...) as marking a sharp break or “historical shift” in the Chechens’ strategy” (2007:46).

The Chechen insurgency engaged in large terrorism campaigns against civilian targets (Baev 2012b; Hahn, 2007; Murphy, 2004). Between the Dubrovka Theater hostage-taking in October 2002, and the seizure of Beslan elementary school in September 2004, the insurgency directly targeted civilians as a way to put pressure on the Russian government in order to force them into a negotiation to end the Second Chechen War.

On a similar note, one can also challenge the fact that the historiography of the North Caucasian conflict calls the Nazran raid in June 2004 the first major insurgent attack linked to the spillover strategy. While the raid can be seen as an extension of the theater of war in Ingushetia it should be emphasized that this military operation relied almost strictly on Chechen forces and that the target was very closely linked to the insurgency. Indeed, as one shall see later in the chapter, the Ingush jamaat was formed of Ingush citizens that fought in the Second Chechen War. Their leader, Magomed Yevloyev, also known as Emir Magas, coordinated the raid on Nazran with Basayev’s support (See chapter 4).

The Beslan terrorist attacks in September 2004 in Northern Ossetia could be seen as one of the first military operations involving Chechen and Ingush forces. Beslan should thus be seen as the first step towards the extension of the conflict or, in other words, the spillover of the Second Chechen War, and not the raid on Nazran in June 2004. As it will be demonstrated in the next section, the Beslan attack marked the end of the terrorist wave in

Russia, and the re-centralisation and verticalisation of power in the hands of the executive branch of the federal government.

3.3 Toward the Establishment of the Caucasus Emirate

The Beslan attack in September 2004 was aimed at forcing the Putin administration to negotiate the end of the war following the model of Basayev's attack on the Budyonnovsk hospital in 1995. At the same time, the Chechen insurgency, by co-opting Ingush fighters, was looking to spark ethnic tensions between Christian Ossetians and Muslim Ingush (Howard, 2012; Dunlop, 2006). A second grand strategy could be seen as another step in the spillover of the Chechen war outside of its borders.

Following the Beslan terrorist attack, the Putin administration chose to reform the federal system in order to tackle corruption at the local level, and thus increase security. Baev coined the term "counterterrorist mobilization" in order to describe Putin's centralisation strategy (2004). This process was not only the result of the Beslan attack, but it also greatly helped Vladimir Putin to consolidate the last bit of power into his hands. In December 2004, the Duma adopted a law that give the executive the power to nominate almost unilaterally the governors and the Presidents of the federal entities. According to Gorenburg, the growing intolerance of local authorities against radical Islam, and the fact that they made no distinction between insurgent and pious Muslims, was mainly driven by the change instituted by the Putin administration. The government replaced elected and respected elites, as well as local governors, with corrupt members of the security services (2009: 25). The most blatant case was in Ingushetia when the federal administration replaced the popular Ruslan Aushev with Murat Ziyazikov and his repressive approach to radical Islam in 2002. As it will be further explained, Ziyazikov's election occurred before Beslan,

demonstrating that the strategy was not created following the Beslan event but it was mainly used as a pretext to reinforce the vertical power in Russia.

At the same time, the Putin administration decided to appoint a new presidential envoy to the Southern Federal District in September 2004, Dmitrii Kozak, in order to modify its strategy in the region.⁵⁴ Under Viktor Kazantsev, a high-ranking military official in Chechnya, the federal district was mainly managed with military imperatives. Kozak was one of Putin's close associates known for his administrative and legal skills. He openly criticized the centralisation tendency, and sought to achieve success in the region by fighting corruption, the shadow economy and clan-base favoritism. Kozak was able to replace ex-Soviet apparatchiks from executive positions in Dagestan and in Kabardino-Balkaria, which ultimately helped diffuse critical issues and lower the tension in the two republics. Although violence throughout his mandate (2004-2007) remained relatively low, he was not able to address the root cause of the insurgency. The reduction of violence could be explained by other factors.

Beslan appears ex-post facto as the end of the terrorist violence between 2002 and 2004. The radical drop in terrorist attacks in the North Caucasus was often linked mistakenly with al-Qaeda's change of strategy in its global jihad war and the decision to focus their resources on Iraq and Afghanistan. However, this explanation is problematic as it seems to focus on the central role played by foreign fighters in the strategic use of terrorism in Chechnya. One should instead focus on the role played by local factors in order to explain the variations of violence across the North Caucasus.

Two explanations are put forward to explain the important decrease of terrorist acts following Beslan. The first one insists on the disastrous effect of the terrorist attack on

⁵⁴ Federal districts were established as a new federal entity by the Putin's administration in 2000.

international Muslim public opinion, as terrorists had targeted young children. Following the same logic, Schaefer argues that Basayev decided to change his strategy as he realised the intransigence of the Putin administration to negotiate with the insurgents, and his will to sacrifice innocent people in order to crush the insurgency. According to him, “Shamil’s urban terrorism strategy was beaten by Putin’s iron will, his reorganization of the government to give him more executive authority, and his ability to control information” (Schaefer, 2011: 233). Basayev openly admitted his astonishment that the Putin administration was willing to sacrifice children instead of opening negotiations with the insurgency. Hahn suggests a similar analysis when he explains that the change in the insurgency strategy could be explained by a variation in the targets moving from the far enemy (Russian civilians) to the near enemy (local regimes and officials). Yet for him, Beslan “marked a partial turn in the direction of the “near enemy”” (Hahn, 2007: 87).

If for some analysts like Schaefer, the re-organization of the Chechen insurgency was the result of Beslan fallouts, others focus on the death of Shamil Basayev in July 2006.⁵⁵ Following his death, insurgent and terrorist attacks drastically decreased in the North Caucasus, leading experts to claim that the Chechenization was a success and that the Russian government was able to destroy the “Islamic” insurgency. Basayev was seen as the operational channel between jamaats based on his personal networks. He was also portrayed as the leading figure in the will to use mass terror against civilians as a strategy in the war. Maskhadov, as well as Sadulaev, were often ambivalent in their support for mass terror. More than just the success of the Chechenization, Basayev’s death can explain the important

⁵⁵ Basayev died in an explosion while preparing terrorist attacks against the G8 in St-Petersburg. It is still unclear whether the FSB was able to assassinate him or if he would have killed himself haphazardly in an explosion. See Tom De Waal, “Basayev: From Rebel to Vicious Extremist, Institute for War and Peace Reporting” 20 July 2006, <http://iwpr.net/report-news/basayev-rebel-vicious-extremist>

decrease in terrorist and insurgent activity. The insurgency had to enter a restructuration period because of the elimination of major figures in the Chechen insurgency such as Basayev, Maskhadov, Sadulaev, and Hafs, as well as its disruptive effects on the military and terrorist structure of command. One should also look at the impact of the destruction of certain jamaat operational structures following the October 2005 uprising in Nalchik (Yarmuk), and counterterrorist operations in Dagestan (Shariat). These events will be analysed in the next chapter.

The impact of Beslan, along with the elimination of central Chechen leaders, seemed to have had a cumulative effect in the decrease of terrorist acts. Nevertheless, it would be deceptive, to impute this decrease solely on Basayev's disappearance. After all, terrorist acts remained relatively rare under Sadulayev's presidency (2005-2006) when Basayev was still alive, and even under Doku Umarov until 2009. When Umarov declared the establishment of the Caucasus Emirate in 2007, he made sure to insist on the will of the insurgency to target military objectives and not civilians. The strategy utilized by the insurgency would only change in April 2009 when Umarov would announce the re-activation of the martyr brigades in his speech, following the end of the counterterrorist operation in Chechnya

One can thus observe an important change between the terrorist wave attacks on Russian soil between 2002 and 2004, and a relative lull until the spring of 2009.⁵⁶ It is worth noting that this decrease of terrorist acts only applies to mass terror against civilians, and not on guerilla warfare activities. One can also observe a slow or steady spillover of the violence away from Chechnya. "Between 2004 and 2007, the percentage of events occurring in

⁵⁶ At the end of 2007, the re-organization of the insurgency was partially completed as the level of violent encounters between the Chechen and the Russian forces increased slightly. However, it was only in the spring of 2009 that the violence increased drastically. Umarov even re-activated the Riyad-us Saliheen, the martyr brigade of the Chechen insurgency.

Chechnya out of the total events in the North Caucasus fell from 90 percent to approximately 50 percent (O'Loughlin, Holland and Witmer, 2011: 9)". In order to understand the change in detail and how the structure of the Caucasus Emirate was established, the following section will focus on the transformation of the Chechen insurgency towards the Caucasus Emirate, and the upsurge of violence in the neighbouring republics of Chechnya.

Maskhadov's Death and the Establishment of the Caucasus Fronts

After Maskhadov's death, Abdul Khalim Sadulaev, a long time Chechen insurgent and supporter of radical Islam, was appointed the new President of the separatist Chechen Republic of Ichkeria (ChRI). Immediately after his nomination, Sadulaev sought to change the government structure of the ChRI. He broke out from most of secular and moderate political allies of Maskhadov in Western countries, like Ilyas Akhmadov, and gave the control of the ChRI to insurgents inside Chechnya (Hahn, 2007: 46-47). However, Sadulaev also kept some of Maskhadov's close associates in key positions, such as Akhmed Zakaev, who was named Vice-President Hahn writes "it is evident that the Islamists have taken over the ChRI and are transforming it fully from a nationalist separatist movement to a jihadist revolutionary one tied to the global Islamist terrorist network" (2007: 48).

Sadulaev also strengthened the strategy of diffusion of the conflict across the North Caucasus in order to reinforce the capacity of the Chechen insurgency in fighting Russian forces. Although Maskhadov's will was to contain the fight inside the Chechen borders, he was not directly opposed to the spillover strategy and tolerated Basayev's plan to establish a loose confederation of insurgent actors across the region. These groups were mainly the result of Basayev's personal relationship from the Abkhaz war and Serzhen Yurt.

Sadulaev established what he named the “Caucasian Front” in six republics and two territories: Dagestan, Ingushetia, North Ossetia, Kabardino-Balkaria, Karachaevo-Cherkessia, Adygea, and in the Stavropol and Krasnodar territory in May. These fronts officialised Basayev’s spillover strategy as the new ChRI insurgent strategy. Hahn explains that each front usually comprises around 35 sectors, each containing around 100 to 200 fighters in small detachments (2007: 71). These numbers were probably accurate for major sectors like Chechnya, Ingushetia, and Dagestan, but are an exaggeration for the less important sectors like North Ossetia, Stavropol, Krasnodar, Adygea and Karachaevo-Cherkessia. Sadulaev explained that the Chechen insurgents shared a common goal with other jamaats across the North Caucasus, namely, to fight “the colonial slavery and achieving freedom and independence” (McGregor, 2006). Hahn underlines that in the mid-2000s the statements coming from insurgent groups in the North Caucasus “are often more Islamist than those coming from the ChRI leadership. This suggests that their Islamist zeal is being generated internally, communicated through the internet and driven by the perceived relevance and attractiveness of the ideology/theology itself not only via direct contact with Chechen and foreign Islamists (2007: 76).” Sadulaev, contrary to Maskhadov, rejected any form of peace negotiations with the Russian government.⁵⁷

At the same time, the Chechen leadership maintained strategic control over all fronts, even if the tactical and the day-to-day operation were in the hands of local insurgents. One can observe the development of a tenuous network of combat jamaats, which were usually loosely coordinated by what Hahn calls republic-level nodes (2007: 60-65). All of the Caucasus fronts had to plead allegiance and take an oath of loyalty to the leader of the Chechen insurgency, Abdul-Khalim Sadulaev. The regionalisation of the conflict thus took a

⁵⁷ Accessible on : <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/chechnya-sl/message/44477>

step further as the local insurgent groups officially recognized their association with the Chechen insurgency. Although the grand ideological goals could be driven by the central structure of command, the dynamics of the insurgency followed local incentives. It might be the reason why Baev observes an absence of strategic coordination between terrorist acts in the North Caucasus between 2002 and 2004 (2012b). It might also explain why factors such as vendetta, criminal activities and local issues became more significant than Islamic grievances in the daily dynamics of the insurgency. As Hahn explains, it also protects each cell from infiltration by secret service agents, and ensures the vitality of the insurgency in the case of important arrests (2007: 64).

The name of the different fronts exemplifies this submission to Chechen control as all fronts were named based on their affiliation to the Chechen insurgency, as with the “Dagestan Front of Chechen Republic of Ichkeria.” In that vein, it is interesting to note that Kavkaz Center, the official propaganda website of the ChRI, and subsequently of the Caucasus Emirate, labelled the Nalchik raid insurgents in October 2005 as “subdivisions of the Caucasus Front (a structural subdivision of the Armed Forces of the [ChRI].”⁵⁸ This exemplifies the tension that was already present in 2005 between a broader Caucasus front in opposition, and a simple extension of the Chechen insurgency in the region. Shterin and Yarlykapov discuss the difficult situation in which various local jamaats find themselves linked to the religious fight in Chechnya but fear that supporting the insurgency could create problems for them: “The [jamaat of Kabardino-Balkaria] found itself in an uneasy and precarious relationship with Northern Caucasian militant jihadi groups, with the constant

⁵⁸ “Units of the Caucasus Front Enter Nalchik,” Kavkaz Center, October 13 2005, available at <http://www.kavkazcenter.com/eng/content/2005/10/13/4146.shtml>.

threat that its organisational basis could potentially be ‘socially appropriated’ by the latter” (2011: 318).

As early as the 2000s, one can observe a growing jihadisation and salafisation of the discourse of combat jamaat. This was particularly obvious in Chechnya but also Dagestan and Ingushetia (Hahn, 2007). Instead of being an external influence, this salafisation of the ideology was driven from inside the North Caucasian movement, as it will be demonstrated further in the following chapter. This ideology also entered the insurgent discourse in Kabardino-Balkaria as the movement was co-opted by Sadulaev’s Caucasus front. The Chechen insurgent supports in the Kabardino-Balkaria jamaat helped, and possibly forced, them to adopt a more radical view of the use of violence in replacement of non-violent strategies against government repression. The extension of the Caucasus front modified the local tactics and strategy of various jamaats in the three republics, and set the ground for a real pan-Caucasian movement. At the same time, the extension, or spillover, of the Chechen insurgency was mainly a strategy to counteract the growing success of the Chechenization strategy of the Russian forces and their proxy forces.

Basayev’s and Sadulaev’s death resulted in the appointment of Dokku Umarov, a veteran field commander in the Chechen insurgency⁵⁹, as the new leader and President of the separatist Chechen Republic of Ichkeria. One of Umarov’s first decisions was to extend the Caucasus front to the “Urals” and “Volga region.” This strategy was more of a wishful thinking approach to the extension of the insurgency, than a real threat to Russian security. Indeed, between 2006 and 2007, no major terrorist or insurgent attacks were conducted in these areas.

⁵⁹ Umarov fought in the two Chechen wars and was first associated with Ruslan Gelayev’s militia. See Vatchagaev for Umarov’s complete biography (2012a: 205-206)

Umarov was now in charge of an insurgent movement in a structuration phase. At the same time, he did not have the religious background or the charismatic qualities of Basayev and Sadulaev to promote recruitment across the region. Umarov is usually portrayed as a nationalist leader looking primarily to re-establish Chechen independence. As Sagromoso reports, he mainly focused on self-determination grievances against Russian colonial power in his first speeches as the President of Ichkeria (2012: 587). At that moment, Chechnya was no longer seen as the most at-risk and unstable republic in the North Caucasus. As explained earlier, the death of important field commanders, who had been responsible for the strategy of diffusion of the conflict, forced the insurgency to enter in a restructuration at the regional level, as well as in Chechnya. Dagestan and Ingushetia's internal stability became more worrisome than Chechnya for Russian authorities, as the Chechenization process had produced good results.

With Basayev's death in the summer of 2006, the Russian government proposed a general amnesty for insurgents known as the "Patrushev amnesty." As John Dunlop points out, the amnesty program was mostly a stunt for public relations rather than a real commitment to end the conflict (2012: 48-49). Indeed, the offer extended only to the insurgents that did not commit crimes or any terrorist acts according to Russian law. The need for an amnesty for crimes or terrorist acts that were not committed is problematic per se. It was however used as an occasion for insurgent fighters to join Kadyrov's militia, and also to infiltrate the pro-Russian forces. Thus, the amnesty program did not directly affect the structure of the insurgency.

Umarov began to change his views and be increasingly influenced by Islamic preachers inside the insurgency, mainly Anzor Astemirov. Sagromoso analyses how Umarov's discourse started to integrate more inferences to Islam, including references to the

importance of jihad against all the infidels that oppose Muslims and the instauration of Shariah in the North Caucasus (2012: 588-589). He appointed Supyan Abdullayev, a long-time insurgent and radical Islamist, to occupy the function of Vice-President of the insurgency in March 2007. Hahn suggests in the conclusion of his 2007 book that Umarov might have chosen to radicalise his discourse in order to gather support and funding from foreign Islamic groups (Hahn, 2007: 219). Indeed, following the elimination of major Islamic figures in the resistance and his rather moderate views on Islam, Umarov's radicalized ideology could have assured him of a broader support amongst radical combat jamaats in the North Caucasus and inside the global salafi-jihad network. At the same time, the number of insurgent attacks started to increase in the summer of 2007, mainly driven by an important upsurge of violence in Ingushetia. The Ingush situation was the result of years of repression under the Zyazikov regime, as we shall see in the next chapter.

Umarov's nomination marks a change in the relationship between the Chechen insurgents and the local jamaats in the various republics of the North Caucasus. Already in July 2007, Umarov named Ahkmed Yevloyev, an Ingush and leader of the Ingush jamaat, as a military amir of the Chechen republic of Ichkeria, and subsequently of the Caucasus Emirate. As the main instigators of the spillover strategy were eliminated, combat jamaats across the region started to perceive themselves as equal partners in the insurgency and not subordinate units to its Chechen fighters. Under the influence of Anzor Astemirov, Umarov declared in October 2007 the establishment of a Caucasus Emirate (CE), renouncing at the same time the Chechen-centric aspect of the insurgency and the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria. The Emirate was designed around a salafi platform that seeks the instauration of the Shariah and an Islamic state. According to Schaefer, "the insurgency had always contained multiple groups of fighters united against a common foe, but now Umarov took a bold step to

sharpen the resistance and give it an ideological footing that would strengthen the resolve of those who had decided to stay and fight (2011: 236).” However, the idea to establish an Islamic Emirate is often attributed to Anzor Astemirov, who contrary to Umarov, had an important Islamic education and could be seen as the ideological leader of the insurgent movement. Astemirov took credit for the establishment of the Caucasus Emirate in a letter/speech available on Kavkaz Center.⁶⁰ Vatchagaev underlines that Umarov’s influence outside of the Southwestern part of Chechnya and Ingushetia was relatively weak (2012a: 206). One can thus conclude that the establishment of the Emirate and the inclusion of non-Chechen prominent figures was a way to co-opt various jamaats under a single umbrella. Umarov was named Emir of the CE, and Astemirov became the number two of the insurgency and its main ideologist, Kadi of the Shariah court. It is rather interesting to note that most of the religious ideological figures since the establishment of the Emirate — Yasin Rasulov, Anzor Astemirov, Alexander Tichomirov aka Said Buryatskiy, Musa Mukozhev, Magomedali Vagabov, and Sheikh Abu Mukhammad Ad-Dagestani — were non-ethnic Chechens, with the exception of Abdul-Khalim Sadualev.

The announcement of the Emirate produced a schism inside the Chechen insurgency between the nationalist wing close to Maskhadov’s national and secular ideology, and the Sadualev’s pan-Caucasian religious ideology. Indeed, Umarov abolished all the previous secular structures of the insurgency established during the interwar period under Maskhadov’s leadership. Although this schism could be seen as being part of a generational clash, it obviates the fact that Umarov and some other close relatives were born and educated in the Soviet Union and fought the two wars mostly around nationalist ideas. Most of the

⁶⁰ Amir Sayfullah: "How We Prepared the Declaration of the Caucasus Emirate" Kavkaz Center, 1 January 2008, available at <http://www.kavkaz.org.uk/eng/content/2008/01/01/9264.shtml>

Chechen field commanders pledged loyalty to Umarov and the CE, leaving the nationalist wing without any major support inside the military structure on the field, except for Uvais Akhmadov, Isa Munaev and Said Askhabov (Sagromoso, 2012: 590). Zakayev, close to Maskhadov, even claimed that the establishment of the CE was coordinated by the FSB (Vatchagaev, 2008).

Gordon Hahn in his 2007 book already gives a very accurate picture of the ideology that would cement the establishment of the Caucasus Emirate. This ideology mainly evolved from the radical Islamists' discourse at the end of the interwar period, and its transformation throughout the Second Chechen War. Hahn writes that "the ideology of the ChRI and its Islamist network [and now of the Caucasus Emirate] is increasingly imbued with the Wahhabi theological foundations and Salafist political tenets of Islamist jihadism: the omnipotence and omnipresence of Shariah law in an Islamic state or caliphate, the rejection of ethno-nationalism and democracy as bases for caliphate-building, the obligation of jihad and the glory of martyrdom" (2007: 77). The ideology of Salafism insists on the need to engage in violent and revolutionary struggles (jihad) against infidel (kafir) regimes and apostates (munafik) in order to establish an Islamic caliphate strictly governed by Shariah law. Although the Caucasus Emirate is now officially proclaimed, the struggle seeks to establish its basis across the Caucasus, and subsequently in Russia. Sagromoso writes:

"The declaration of the Caucasian Emirate was the culmination of a process of Islamisation of the entire North Caucasian rebel movement, which began in the late 1990s, and was carried out more actively by Sheikh Sadulaev, when he became leader in 2006. It reflected the increasing influence of radical Salafi preachers on Chechen fighters, in particular, of Anzor Astemirov, the leader of the Kabardino-Balkariyan jamaat" (2012: 590-591).

She also underlines Umarov's growing radicalisation in order to explain the establishment of the Emirate and strategic aspects of the CE. Indeed, to transcend ethnic borders and

strengthen the spillover strategy, Umarov had to modify the structure of the insurgency (Sagromoso, 2012: 591). A crucial point not emphasized by Sagromoso is the fact that the Chechen leadership had to rely on non-Chechen elements to compensate ideological and military weaknesses in the movement. Umarov's radicalisation should thus be seen in this context. One should be careful to claim that Umarov fully supported the salafisation of the insurgency and its linkage to the global salafist network.

In March 2009, the Kadyrov administration announced the end of the counterterrorist operation in Chechnya and the withdrawal of the FSB and military Russian forces in the republic. The Russian government confirmed that statement later in April. Kadyrov lobbied the federal government for a long time in order to obtain full control over the antiterrorist operation, and subsequently the power attached to it. As the violence peaked in Ingushetia and Dagestan, Kadyrov actively sought to extend his influence on these two republics by proposing to conduct anti-terrorist operations in the borderlands. Kadyrov has been one of the most successful actors in the North Caucasus in converting military power into economic and political power.

The insurgency reacted to the announcement of the end of the counterterrorist operation in Chechnya by adopting a new strategy. The Riyadus-Salikhin martyr brigade was reactivated by Dokku Umarov in April 2009 in order to bring the war onto Russian territory once again. In the following two years, thirty-six suicide bombings occurred, mainly in Ingushetia, Dagestan and Chechnya (Hahn, 2011a: 15). In fact, 16 suicide attacks happened in 2009, 14 in 2010, and 6 in 2011 (Hahn, 2012). At least two major suicide attacks happened outside of the North Caucasus — the first in the subway system in Moscow in March 2010, and the second at Domodedovo International Airport in January, killing 40 and

37 people, respectively. Contrary to the usual beliefs surrounding suicide bombings based on the 2002 and 2004 trend, most of these attacks were conducted by men.

Schaefer estimates that in 2010 the insurgency was composed of around 50 sub-units, for a total of 500 full-time and 600-800 part-time fighters (2011: 242). Souleimanov, on the other hand, estimates the number of insurgents in Dagestan to be around 2,500, or about half of the entire number for the North Caucasus (2010). In a recent report reviewing various numbers given by the Russian authorities, Hahn suggests the possibility that 3,000-3,500 fighters are active in the North Caucasus (Hahn, 2011c). Vatchagaev argues that the most recent Shura in Chechnya, regrouping an important amount of the field commanders, demonstrates the strength of the insurgency (Vatchagaev, 2012g). Vatchagaev emphasizes that one has to add the fighters that withdrew their oath to Umarov in the summer 2010, and who did not reintegrate the CE structure in the summer of 2011, such as Tarkhan Gaziyeu (Vatchagaev, 2012g). (see below). These fighters are still active insurgents; however they are not under Umarov's control. It is very difficult to evaluate the number of fighters and facilitators in a movement like the Caucasus Emirate. As the level of attacks has increased significantly since the proclamation of the Emirate in October 2007, one has to assume that the number of fighters is probably rising too.

In the fall of 2011, Hahn claims that the CE insurgent structure committed "1,700 attacks on siloviki, civilian officials, and civilian since the CE's formation in October 2007" (2011: 20). O'Loughlin, Holland, and Witmer explain that between 2007 and 2011, insurgent violence moved away from Chechnya to Dagestan, Ingushetia, and Kabardino-Balkaria" (2011: 7). In 2009, the level of violence, in terms of death and insurgent attacks per republic, was not dominated by Chechnya anymore. Violence in numbers was higher in Dagestan and in Ingushetia. As we shall see in the next chapter, insurgent violence peaked in Ingushetia in

2007-2009, in Kabardino-Balkaria in 2010 and 2011, and continually increased in Dagestan between 2007 and 2011. The three authors “find that those associated with the police and military are disproportionately more likely to be the target of rebel attacks in comparison to civilians. During periods of conflict intensification (late 2009 to present in Dagestan, April 2010 to present in Kabardino-Balkaria, and 2008 and 2009 in Ingushetia) civilians and those unassociated with regional security organs are more likely to be casualties of violence” (2011: 27).

This increase in violence challenges the argument that the political reforms underwent by Dmitrii Kozak addressed the structural conditions leading to violence in the region. It also questions whether the Chechenization process was really a military success, as opposed to having the effect of pushing the insurgency into the neighbouring republics. As will be presented in the following chapter, the exportation of the Chechen model to Ingushetia, Dagestan, and Kabardino-Balkaria had a negative effect on the local insurgencies and contributed to the upsurge of violence. The Chechenization process seems to only have reinforced Kadyrov’s hegemonic vision of the region, and modified the Chechen insurgency’s strategy.

In order to deal with the problems of the region more effectively, the federal government decided to separate the North Caucasus federal district from the Southern district in January 2010. All of the ethnic republics of the North Caucasus (Dagestan, Chechnya, Ingushetia, North Ossetia, Kabardino-Balkaria, and Karachevo-Cherkessia), except for Adygea, were integrated into the North Caucasus district, as well as Stavropol Krai. It marks a change in the counter-insurgency strategy of the Russian government, moving from a strategy focused mainly around repression, to one targeting the “root causes” of the insurgency. It might be a way to isolate the North Caucasus from the rest of the Southern

federal district where the Winter Olympics will be held. Alexander Khloponin was appointed the new Presidential plenipotentiary envoy and deputy Prime Minister in the North Caucasus federal district. Just like Dmitrii Kozak before him, Khloponin is a *foreigner* to the North Caucasus and was mainly chosen for his managerial skills. If Kozak was named for his legal skills in 2004 in order to restructure the region, Khloponin was named for economic purposes.

Khloponin achieved impressive economic success in his previous function as the governor of Krasnoyarsk Krai. It is a clear sign that Moscow seeks to foster economic growth in order to target the basis of the insurgency. Khloponin also has the task of tackling the rampant corruption throughout the region. Sakwa argues that Khloponin's nomination sought to establish a balance of power in the political realm of the North Caucasus against Ramzan Kadyrov's growing power in the region (Sakwa, 2010).

One of Khloponin's first political moves was to nominate the Dagestani business man, Magomedislam Magomedov, as the new President of Dagestan in February 2010. This nomination was in line with the desire to stimulate economic development as a way to reduce Islamic radicalism in the republic. According to Ware, this nomination also demonstrated the local influence of Suliman Kerimov, one of the most prosperous businessmen in Dagestan (2011: 506). It follows Medvedev's modernization plan for Russia, and especially for the North Caucasus.

At the same time, Putin and Khloponin recently put forward the Strategy for Economic Development of the North Caucasus Federal District to 2025, which aims to facilitate the transfer of ethnic Russians in the region, and at the same time incite individuals of North Caucasian nationalities to look for employment in the rest of Russia. Khloponin

also suggested increasing the fertility rate amongst the Cossack minority in the North Caucasus.⁶¹

Simultaneously, a growing social movement in Russia advocated the end of the subsidies to the North Caucasus over derogatory statements such as “Russia for Russians” and “Stop Feeding the Caucasus.” The movement, composed of ultra-nationalists and liberal democrats, often calls for officially cutting the North Caucasus from Russia or at least cutting the subsidies, and limiting Caucasian immigration in the rest of Russia.

Khloponin also put forward a strategy to control federal subsidies in the North Caucasian in order to limit corruption and nepotism. Baev explains that the real problem lay in the paternalistic political system and not in the economic situation itself (2011). Limited investment in the region can be explained by the pervasive clan structure and its rent-seeking attitude. In addition, insurgent groups are often financed by various clans in order to launch turf wars and to retain their control over their local dominance. Baev adds, “paradoxically, it is not the Chechen rebels that are now the gravest security concern for Moscow but the maverick, despotic regime that was installed there as a means to enforce peace, however it saw fit” (Baev, 2011: 3).

At the same time, these regimes assured an important support to the federal government at the time of the Presidential and legislative elections. In the most recent Presidential election, Chechnya (99.7 percent), Dagestan (93 percent), and Ingushetia (92 percent) outrageously supported Putin’s re-election. In the case of the Duma election in December 2011, United Russia obtained slightly lower numbers: Chechnya (99.5 percent), Dagestan (91.4 percent), Kabardino-Balkaria (81.9 percent) and Ingushetia (78 percent). The

⁶¹ Луиза Оразаева, “Хлопонин призвал казаков Кабардино-Балкарии активнее участвовать в политической жизни” *Kavkazskii Uzel*, 16 December 2011 available at: <http://kabardino-balkaria.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/197742/>

local government, and their paternalistic networks, made sure to vastly increase the turnout and support for Putin's candidacy and his associates. Numerous irregularities were reported across the North Caucasus such as, monetary and physical threats in order to boost the votes. The local administrations were also involved in stuffing ballots in order to reach these electoral results. More votes often mean more subsidies and transfers for the North Caucasus administration.

So far, Khloponin's grand economic strategy for the North Caucasus did not materialize, nor were any positive results achieved in the region regarding the economic and political spheres. Yet, the Presidential envoy is expected to retain his position under the new Putin presidential administration.

The Caucasus Emirate: A Common Ideology but Heterogeneous Interests

In the summer of 2010, a schism occurred inside the CE when Umarov resigned for medical reasons and sought to leave his place to a younger mujahedeen before retracting himself a few days later. Aslambek Vadalov, Hussein Gakayev, Emir Muhannad, and Tarkhan Gaziyeu, announced that they were withdrawing their loyalty oath to Umarov following his retraction. Umarov had previously nominated Vadalov (potential successor to Umarov, Umarov's naib and first deputy emir of the Caucasus Emirate), Gakayev (military leader in Chechnya, emir of the Chechen Vilayat), Tarkhan Gaziyeu (Emir of the Southwestern Front in Chechnya) and Muhannad (military emir of the Caucasus Emirate) to key positions in the insurgency. Umarov dismissed all the rogue field commanders from the CE structure, although they remained part of the insurgency. In order to force them back into the insurgency, Umarov appealed to religious authorities in the Middle East to confirm his fatwa. (Vatchagaev, 2011a; Hahn, 2010a; 2010b)

For some analysts, this incident was a sign that a cleavage between radical Islamists and nationalists in the Chechen insurgency was setting in (The Jamestown 2010b). This claim was probably not reflective of the reality. Indeed, the speeches of the rogue field commanders openly remained oriented toward the main objectives of the Caucasus Emirate (Hahn, 2010a; 2010b). The representative of foreign fighters, Muhannad, was part of the splinter group making it highly improbable that they would favor a more nationalistic approach. A more probable explanation would be to look at a possible clash involving Umarov and some of the rogue field commanders about long-term strategic or tactical goals of the organisation or about the loss of importance of Chechen insurgents in the CE organisational structure. Vatchagaev suggests that the notion of civilian victimization was probably one of the most important factors between Umarov and the field commanders (2012c).

There is a possibility that the fact that Umarov was added to the U.S. Department of State's list of designated international terrorists with a \$5 million reward for his capture or his whereabouts incited other field commanders to seek to replace him at the top of CE organisational structure following the death of important figures, such as Emir Magas (Ingush), Anzor Astemirov (Kabardin), and Said Byriatskii (Buryat). Indeed, Vadalov, Gazyev and Muhannad were all appointed to the military structure of the ChRI in July and subsequently of the Caucasus Emirate. They probably demanded that Umarov re-establish the Chechen-centric nature of the movement. However, Umarov had closer ties with Ingush fighters and his network was mainly established in the borderland between Ingushetia and Chechnya. As mentioned earlier, Umarov rapidly gathered the support of non-Chechen jamaats after the schism making it more than likely that he planned to appoint non-Chechen

elements to key positions. In fact, he appointed an ethnic Dagestani as the new Qadi of the Shariah court.

Umarov retained the support of the combat jamaats and insurgent groups outside Chechnya, but lost control of important insurgent groups inside Chechnya. Although two high-profile attacks happened in Chechnya following the schism — a raid against Kadyrov's native village of Tsentoroi in August 2010 and a suicide attack at the Chechen parliament in Grozny in October 2010 — the Chechen insurgency remained relatively quiet compared to other republics in 2010 and 2011.

Both attacks demonstrate the relative fragility of Kadyrov's rule over Chechnya. The rebels were able to achieve an impressive victory in Kadyrov's home town. According to rebel sources, sixty fighters were involved and were able to take control of the entire village for several hours. In the case of the attack on parliament, a few suicide attackers were able to wreck havoc in Grozny and enter the legislative building of Chechnya. These attacks illustrated the military capacity of the rogue field commanders to engage in important military engagement with pro-Chechen forces. In fact, the bulk of the attacks are concentrated along the Chechen-Dagestan border, a sector under the command of the Hussein Gakayev. A recent clash between militants and Chechen forces demonstrate the growing tension around that border area (2012d). These two attacks point to important cracks in the narrative of Kadyrov's control and normalisation over the republic. It also shows that although Umarov is in charge of the Caucasus Emirate, the insurgent capacity in Chechnya remains in the hands of the rogue field commanders.

According to Vatchagaev, the schism was resolved after Muhannad and Supyan Abdullaev's death in the spring of 2011. Indeed, both insurgents were accused by Umarov and the rogue commanders of being responsible for the split. Although Gakayev's military

successes in Eastern Chechnya outnumbered Umarov's own successes, he was not able to secure financial support from the Diaspora (Vatchagaev, 2011a). Gakayev and Vadalov came back to the insurgency. Both field commanders keep a relative distance from Umarov's activities (Hahn, 2011b; Vatchagaev, 2012g). One can observe that Umarov re-establishes his control over a major part of the insurgency on the Chechen territory. At the same time, it reaffirms the fact that Umarov is far from controlling the bulk of the military forces inside the Caucasus Emirate.

As mentioned earlier, the insurgency shares a common ideology that is built on the basic principles of an Islamic state ruled by the Sharia law. The rogue field commanders never repudiated the main tenants of the CE ideology. Instead, their opposition is tactical, namely, how to fight the enemy and what goals to prioritize. Although the ideology defines the general goals of the movement, the actual underground structure of the Caucasus Emirate limits any direct control on the combat jamaats and terrorist cells across the region. Violence across the region is thus highly dependable on the local interests and networks of insurgents in each republic.

Although the violence increased in the region in 2010 and 2011, the Russian government and its local allies were able to eliminate the major part of the high-ranking leaders in the CE ideological (Anzor Astemirov in 2010, Said Buryatskii in 2010) and military structure (Supyan Abdullaev in 2011, Magomed Yevloev in 2010, Muhannad in 2011) as well as local insurgents in each republic (Umalat Magomedov in 2009, Magomedalo Vagabov in 2010). From the initial high-ranking members of the CE in 2007, the Russian government eliminated the entire commanding structure excluding its main *Emir*, Dokku Umarov. Multiple rumours have surfaced claiming that Umarov had to leave the North Caucasus in order to receive medical treatment (The Jamestown Foundation,

2011c). Yet, in order to understand the upsurge of violence, one should not focus on the leadership structure but on the local elements of the insurgency.

The network and the strength of the insurgency in the different republics affect how they can recover from important counterterrorist operations. In the case of Ingushetia and Kabardino-Balkaria, the elimination of its local leaders forced the insurgency to adapt their strategy (see next chapter). In the case of Dagestan, although the high-ranking leaders are killed on a regular basis, very few effects are observed on the strategies or intensity of the local insurgency. To the contrary, the level of violence increases. In order to understand the upsurge of violence in the North Caucasus, one has to analyze how insurgent groups have evolved in each republic. One also has to understand the factors that push people to join the insurgency in the different republics.

In the next section, I will review the social and political context of the three republics in great detail, in order to demonstrate the similarities and the differences in the development of the insurgency. I will thus be able to demonstrate which local factors explain the upsurge of violence in addition to the development of radical Islam and the spillover of the Chechen wars.

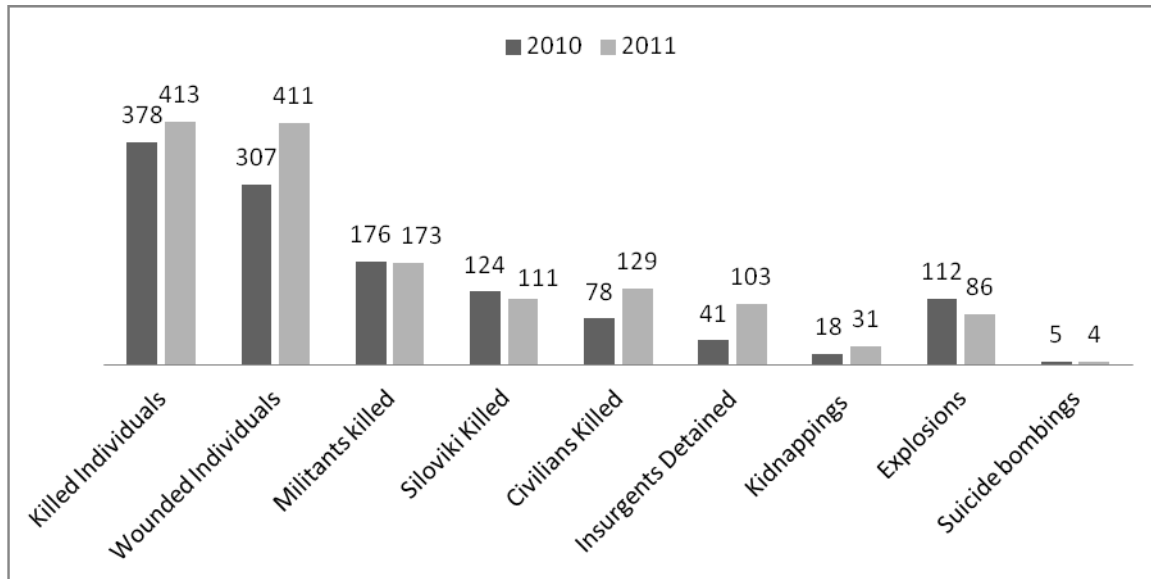
Chapter 4: An Analysis at the Republic Level

This chapter focuses mainly on the three more unstable republics at the epicenter of the spill-over of the Second Chechen War in the North Caucasus: Dagestan, Ingushetia, and Kabardino-Balkaria. Karachevo-Cherkessia, North Ossetia and the Stavropol territory also witnessed an upsurge of violence but will not be directly analysed in this chapter.⁶² Dagestan, Ingushetia, and Kabardino-Balkaria share major socio-political similarities. All three republics have witnessed the development of important neo-patrimonialist networks which control almost the entire economic activity. These networks are based on a high-level of corruption and are controlled by a very small portion of the local population. In order to maintain the dominance of these networks, all republics have established an extensive repressive system against political and religious opposition. Religious repression has become systematic in order to make sure that the population could not mobilize itself against corrupt elites. At the same time, all three republics share important economic problems that mainly affect young people (18-35 years old). By looking at each of these factors through a detailed analysis of each republic, this section will seek to explain the upsurge of violence in the region. At the same time, it will attempt to explain why the situation in the republic of Dagestan is worsening and is more problematic than Ingushetia and Kabardino-Balkaria.

⁶² One can refer to Sagromoso (2012) for the case of Karachevo-Cherkessia.; See also Dzutsev (2011d)

4.1 Dagestan

Graph 3 : Violence in Numbers in Dagestan⁶³



Dagestan is a unique republic in the North Caucasus and in the Russian Federation, as its population, which is now over 2.7 million (3 million people, according to the 2010 census) is composed of thirty-four ethnic groups. The five major ethnic groups are the Avars, Dargins, Lezgins, Kumyks, and Laks. Avars and Dargins are the largest groups and have always been politically dominant. Dargins, Avars and Laks traditionally occupy the highlands, while Kumyks inhabit the lowlands. Although the Avars are the largest ethnic group in the Republic, the powerful political positions have mainly been occupied by ethnic Dargins, such as Magomedali Magomedov as the Chairman (1994-2006), Said Amirov as the mayor of Makhachkala and Magomedov's son, and Magomed Magomedov, the actual President of the Republic since 2010. In between the two Magomedovs, Mukhu Aliyev was named the first President of Dagestan by Vladimir Putin in 2006 until February 2010. If

⁶³ Source : Kavkazskii Uzel available at <http://www.eng.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/19591/>

Dargins dominate the political life in Dagestan, the Avars control the religious sphere of the Dagestani society. The most important sheikh of the republic is Said-effendi Chirkeevskii, an Avar, and his followers control the Spiritual Board of Muslims of Dagestan (Roschin, 2012: 163).

Magomedali Magomedov, just like Valery Kokov in Kabardino-Balkaria, was an apparatchik that rose in the Soviet system and reached power at the end of the Soviet Union. Like many members of the Communist Party, he was able to recycle himself as a post-Soviet politician. In fact, Magomedov proved to be a better post-Soviet politician than an apparatchik during Soviet times. Magomedov was able to build a multi-ethnic coalition in order to stay and stabilize his power over the republic.⁶⁴

At the same time, Moscow chose to give ex-Communist local leaders, such as Magomedov, relative impunity and latitude in managing their republic in exchange for the guarantee of political stability and loyalty to the federal government. Through a series of bilateral treaties with ethnic republics, Boris Yeltsin sought to demobilize local elites and their ethnic claims by giving up centralisation and vertical power. In other republics, these treaties helped reinforce the power of ex-apparatchiks who reinvented themselves through ethnic mobilization and the appearance of a democratic turn. In Dagestan, the multi-nature of ethnic demands and the Chechen problem helped Magomedov and his close circle take control of the republic and its resources. Dagestan “came to be dominated by approximately two hundred powerful families, or six to seven thousand people (on 2.5 million), who dispose of nearly 85 per cent of the local wealth” (Derluguian, 1999: 12). These leading families “secured their powers through extended patronage networks entangling another

⁶⁴ See Ware and Kisriev (2009: 51-61) for a historiography of the political clash in Dagestan at the end of Soviet Union

200,000 people as more or less handsomely paid retainers or in clientelistic relations” (Derluguian, 1999: 12). Magomedov was able to capitalize on his political skills and Moscow’s fears and weaknesses in the 1990s.

At the beginning of the 1990s, many ethnic grievances were brought forward against the Dagestani government and the very nature of the Republic. Every ethnic group had its political movement: the Avars with Gadzhi Makhachev and his Imam Shamil Front, the Laks with the Kachilaev brothers and *Tsubarz*, the Nogais and *Birlik* supporting an autonomous Nogai region, *Sadval* pushing for an independent Lezginistan in the South and the Kumyk national movement named *Tenglik* (Holland and O’Loughlin, 2010: 299). Ware and Kisriev explain that all ethnic movements were formed by many local jamaats which used ethnic mobilization to compete for power on the republican level (2009: 47). Single jamaats were usually in control of the ethnic movement and sought to achieve political gains for a small number of individuals. The ethnic rhetorical argument was instrumental and was used as a means for local clans to reach political power.

In fact, throughout the early 1990’s period, ethnic nationalism was a greater threat to Dagestan’s stability than Islamic radicalism. Hahn quotes a survey which claims that “52 percent of respondents expressed a willingness to take part in an armed conflict in their ethnic group’s interests depending on the circumstances, and 20 percent were prepared to do so unconditionally” (Hahn, 2007: 100-101). Holland and O’Loughlin underline that the Kumyks, Lezgins, Laks, and Nogays have sought to obtain the dismantlement of Dagestan along the frontiers of smaller mono-ethnic republics at the end of the Soviet Union (2010). Just as in the case of Chechnya, Ingushetia, and Kabardino-Balkaria, the Stalinist deportations of 1944 affected the political stability of Dagestan. Indeed, the Akin-Chechens

were deported from their ancient territories and were subsequently resettled on territories populated by a majority of Laks, Avars, and Dargins.

Hahn explains that “the Dagestani state and society are a complex quilt of ethnic groups and clans under constant risk of being torn apart by ethnic fractiousness, radical Islam, limited de-Sovietization, and high levels of official corruption, crime, and poverty” (2007: 94). Yeltsin’s bilateral treaty assured a certain peace between ethnic groups but also helped Magomedali Magomedov and his inner circle to establish their control on the republic. Magomedov was able to maintain himself as the head of the Republic for more than fifteen years in opposition to the spirit of the 1994 Constitution and its consociational system (see below). Magomedov’s long reign allowed his clan and ethnic allies (Dargins) to establish an economic domination in the republic over others, such as the Avar and Kumyks.

Although ethnicity plays a central role, Dagestan is also composed of jamaats, understood as a group of villages socially bound together forming the basis of a clan system. These kinships and informal social networks are similar to the concept of *teip* in Chechnya. However, as Hahn explains: “a survey conducted in the late Yeltsin/early Putin era among Dagestan’s nine largest ethnic groups put identity with jamaat last across all groups. Identity was with Dagestan, Russia, ethnic group, and religion in descending order” (Hahn, 2007: 98). Throughout my own fieldwork research in Dagestan (see chapter 6 and 7), I observed a strong commitment to ethnic ties first, but also elements of Russian nationalism. People would openly mention how they perceive themselves as Russian citizens. They would insist on their pride, which was linked with Russian achievements in sports or politics. However, from my experience, identification with the Russian state seems weaker in the highlands culture, which emphasizes ethnic and clan linkages. It is worth noting that although ethnic identity seems to be stronger than its jamaat counterpart, the jamaat structure is probably

more important in the development of insurgent groups, as will be discussed later (Hahn, 2007: 98-99).

Following the asymmetrical federalism treaty with Moscow, Dagestan passed a new constitution in 1994, which established an inter-ethnic consensual political system to try to accommodate and integrate the largest nationalities in the executive and legislative branches. The Constitutional Assembly is composed of 242 members and elects one representative of each of the fourteen largest national groups in the republic to form the executive decisional structure, the State Council. Half of the Council delegates are elected in various cities and districts and the other half according to a system of proportional representation of the fourteen nationalities. An important particularity of Dagestan's political system allows the State Council to elect the leader of the executive branch, the State Council's chairman (Ware and Kisriev, 2001; 2009: 62-70).

Even though Dagestan is one of the poorest republics in Russia and its ethnic composition makes it vulnerable to ethnic violence, the republic was a prime example of political stability. Its consociational system and the intraethnic competition limited the possibility for significant ethnic mobilization. Zürcher explains that: "at the core of Dagestan's stability are two interlocking institutions: the traditional, informal system of the jamaats and the formal institution of the 1994 Dagestan constitution" (2007: 199). He also insists on the role played by the old Soviet nomenklatura, compared to Chechnya, to explain why Dagestan did not fall into ethnic violence. Indeed, at that period Magomedali Magomedov was able to use various strategies in order to defuse potential conflicts, through political and economical co-optation, to repressive measures. Kisriev adds:

“[t]he fact that in Dagestan it is not nationalities which oppose each other but ethno-parties signifies a greater pluralism of political forces than it might seem if only nationalities were to be singled out in the Dagestani political structure. That

also signifies a more complex intertwining of variegated alliances of political groupings, but at the same time the multiplication of possible causes of confrontation between them” (Kisriev, 2003 :124).

At the same time, the political system was mainly driven by a restricted number of elites that share a willingness to keep their position and their social capital. The system and its State Council were only as good as the elites that formed it. Their greed and thirst for power established perfect conditions for Magomedov to divide and conquer. If ethnic violence never really developed in Dagestan, the political system reinforced economic and social injustice. With the growing danger of Salafism and Chechen independence, Moscow contributed to destroy Magomedov’s last opponents by launching a series of political arrests (Ware and Kisriev, 2009: 61-87).

In 1998, after four years as the Chairman of the Council, Magomedov refused to step down and he co-opted Avar ethnic deputies in order to modify the rule that enforces an ethnic rotation at the head of the republic. He thus secured himself a second mandate which would be extended once again in 2002. These events triggered a growing Islamic radicalisation in the republic and the establishment of a Wahhabist enclave in the Kadar region (Lanksoy, 2002: 174-175). Religion thus became a sphere of contention as many resented the Dargin and Avar domination of the Dagestan DUM (DUMD) and created parallel structures. Although the DUMD occasionally opposed the government, such as in 1998 when it lobbied for the end of Magomedov’s leadership, it never became a political force and did not seek to play an important role as an opposition to the executive power. In fact, the DUMD was responsible for a law outlawing public activity linked to Wahhabism in Dagestan in 1997 and became, just as in the case of Kabardino-Balkaria, the strongest opponent to radical Islam. In the words of Hahn, “The law gave the DUMD extraordinary powers over Islamic affairs in the republic, including monitoring and controlling the

programs of institutions of religious study, and providing assessments of religious organizations to the republic's justice ministry for vetting and re-registration purposes" (2007: 111). The DUMD became co-opted by the Republican government following the adoption of the law. The Dagestani government also used the threat of Wahhabism to extract transfers from the federal government (Lanskoy, 2002: 171).

Earlier in 1998, Nadir Khachilayev, an ethnic Lak and political leader of the group, became one of the first important Islamic officials in the republic. He started his political career when ethnic clashes occurred between Laks and Akkin-Chechens in the Novolak district. Khachilayev then established a personal militia in order to control the Lak ethnic movement (Zürcher, 2007: 190). Along with his militia and his brother Magomed, Khachilayev openly challenged the political monopoly of Magomedov's clan, which centered on Dargins, by organising a raid against government buildings in the center of Makhachkala. According to Hahn, the Khachilayev brothers were mainly driven by political reasons and used Islamic rhetoric in order to seize power. He thus labels them as opportunist Sufi instead of radical Islamist insurgents (2007: 105). At the same time, Nadir Khachilayev was a well-known criminal in Makhachkala and in Moscow, since he was involved in the arms and kidnapping business (Zürcher, 2007: 189-190). This pattern is particular to Dagestan, compared to Ingushetia and Kabardino-Balkaria. Already in the 1990s, but increasingly after 2004, a recurrent strategy among criminal and ethnic groups was to frame their grievances within the Islamic narrative. Magomedov's government was able to survive once again by co-opting the Avar deputies with economic and political incentives (Lanskoy, 2002: 175). However, in August 1998, Saigidpasha Umakhanov, Gadzhi Makhachayev and the Avar ethnic movement openly challenged Magomedov's leadership. They demanded the resignation of the government and of the entire State Council (Ware and Kisriev, 2009: 107).

In order to counter-balance the Avar opposition, Magomedov granted political and religious privilege to the Wahhabis. Magomedov was thus able to divide the Avar opposition by playing on the religious aspect. Following the accord with the Salafists, the federal government started funding the Islamic jamaat through a program of humanitarian aid (Ware and Kisriev, 2009: 101-109).

By the end of the 1990s, Dagestan was already struggling with corrupt elites trying to balance ethnic grievances with religious grievances and vice-versa. This strategy was implemented to assure the political survival and the dominance of a very small group of elites over the entire republic. Despite being one of the poorest republics in the entire Russian Federation, a small number of clans were able to extract economic resources in order to enrich themselves. Ten percent of the population controlled the majority of the economic resources (2009: 44). More than three-fourths of the Republic's budget comes from federal transfers, and is controlled by about 200 clans composed of around 6,500 members. "The majority, 71 per cent of Dagestan's population, lived with an income under subsistence level in 1998" (Hunter, 2004: 99-100). Unemployment is somewhere between 20 and 40 per cent and is especially high amongst young people (30 to 60 per cent) (Hahn, 2007: 103). The perspective to find a job is limited by the high level of corruption. Mukhu Aliev, in 2005, claimed that "there is not a single post to which one could be appointed without bribe" (quoted in Wood, 2007: 140). The position of a low-level police officer reportedly costs \$3,000 to \$5,000, that of a district administration chief \$150,000, while one could become a minister for \$450,000-\$500,000 (Wood, 2007: 149). According to numerous interviews I conducted in the Republic, young people regularly report the difficulty or impossibility to find a job mainly because of the level of corruption limited social mobility associated with clan structures (see below), and because they need to complete their military service in order

to work in police forces or governmental structures but they are regularly rejected by the Russian conscription.⁶⁵ Indeed, in my interviews, young people reported that they had to pay a bribe in order to complete their military service. This situation is quite different from the ethnic Russians that regularly pay bribes to avoid the draft. The fact that so many young North Caucasians are not drafted for military service increased an already abnormal unemployment rate among people under 25.

Magomedov's strategy of co-opting traditional religious and ethnic actors limited the capacity of ordinary citizens to voice grievances against central problems such as corruption, Islamic practices and economic deprivation. This strategy helped the Wahhabi movement in Dagestan to reinforce itself by answering the basic needs of the local population. Radical Islamist preachers became the voice of opposition in the republic. If the jamaat structure, the preponderance of village networks and Dagestan's complex ethnic fragmentation helped Magomedali Magomedov build his paternalistic network and tighten his grip on power, it also set the conditions for the rise of a resistance network in Dagestan. Indeed, the jamaat structure also favoured the development of small terrorist cells, small religious jamaats and radical Islam. As Marc Sageman argues in his work about terrorist networks in Western countries, kinship and friendship are amongst the most important factors in terrorist recruitment (2004). The jamaat offers a trustful kinship network which can be used for recruitment, social support for its members and a cycle of revenge to avenge wrongs committed against a member of the jamaat. In the case of the political elites in power, it also

⁶⁵ The federal government limits the number of people of Caucasian extraction into the army. Indeed, many clashes took place between ethnic Russians and North Caucasian individuals inside the army. Another important reason to avoid Caucasian conscripts is to deny potential military training to future insurgents. In recent years the draft amongst individuals of Caucasian extraction was drastically reduced. There were even rumours suggesting that there would be no conscripts from the North Caucasus in 2012. See Paul Globe (2012), Valery Dzutsev (2012a)

offers a way to establish a loyal inner circle in order to control state institutions. Kinship and jamaats are thus at the center of the political power and resistance in Dagestan.

One of the many paradoxes of Dagestan lays in the fact that what brought political stability also planted the seed for the recent upsurge of violence and the rise of Islamism. Indeed, political manoeuvres and political fragmentation along clan affiliation led elites to establish patronage networks and insure their political survival instead of addressing major economic and social problems. Crime, nepotism and corruption became the price of stability in Dagestan. The local population's answers to these new problems were to be found in Islam, kinship relations and subsequently in violent engagement as a last resort.

The Religious Situation in Dagestan

The end of the Soviet Union and of its atheist policies allowed for the growing influence of Islam in Dagestan. Ware and Kisriev list three repercussions of the Islamic revival in Dagestan: “(1) a sharp increase in the observation of traditional Islamic rituals; (2) a revival and rapid development of *tariqat* orders; and (3) the proliferation of Wahhabi fundamentalism as a competing Islamic trend” (2009: 90). Already in 1989, radical Islamists started to be active in Dagestan by opposing the Spiritual Directorate of the Muslims of the North Caucasus (DUMSK) in charge of the Sunni Muslims in the region. The organisation was tasked by the Soviet state to limit the influence of Islam over the population. Radical Islamists rapidly contested the DUMSK and established parallel religious organisations in order to promote a purer form of Islam in Dagestan. Akhmed-Kadji Akhtaev became one of the first Salafist preachers in Dagestan when he founded his Islamic organisation, Islamia.⁶⁶ Roschin notes that “[b]y the mid-1990's, Dagestan became the ideological center of

⁶⁶ See Ware and Kisriev for a thorough description of Wahhabism in Dagestan (2009: 96-100)

fundamentalism in the Northern Caucasus, while Chechnya became its testing ground” (2012: 167).

Dagestan witnessed a growing influence of the Salafist preachers which intensified with the arrival of foreign fighters in Chechnya and the end of the First War in 1996. In the previous chapter, I discussed the establishment of the rule of the Sharia in the mountainous region and the growing influence of the Salafist ideology and of its leader, Baggaudin Kebekov. With the increase of corruption and greed of political elites and the co-optation of official religious elites, radical Islam became one of the only ways to oppose the government.

Kebekov along with Akhmed-Kadji Akhtaev rapidly became the central figures of the Salafist movement in Dagestan and in the North Caucasus. Roschin describes Akhtaev as a moderate figure in the fundamentalist trend and an advocate of non-violent preaching of pure Islam (2012: 168). Although critical of polytheism and of the Sufi veneration of saints and sheikhs, he favored education over repression. As a result, he did not call for an overthrow of the secular republican government (Bobrovnikov and Yarlykapov, 1999 quoted in Roschin, 2012: 168). Akhtaev was also a direct influence on the radicalisation of Islamists in Kabardino-Balkaria. Indeed, Anzor Astemirov and Musa Mukozhev, leaders of the Kabardino-Balkaria jamaat, were his students. The growing Islamization of the three Wahhabi enclaves in Kadar, Chabanmakhi and Karamakhi led to numerous violent clashes between Salafists and Sufists between 1996 and the Chechen invasion of Dagestan in 1999. When Akhtaev died, maybe by being poisoned, a more radical group of Salafists started preaching for waging jihad against the corrupt religious elites and the government. By capitalising on the Dargin-Avar tensions in the republic, Salafists were able to strengthen their position as a religious and military opposition in 1998 and 1999.

The invasion, the retreat of the Dagestani Wahhabi forces into Chechen territory at the end of August 1999 and the subsequent launch of the Second Chechen War radically transformed the force of radical Islamists in Dagestan. For the next three years, radical Islamist insurgent groups were mainly in a restructuration phase. At the same time, repression against radical Islam increased significantly. In September 1999, the Dagestani government reinforced the ban of Wahhabism on all Dagestani territories. Just as in the case of Yeltsin's bilateral treaty, official religious clerics were asked to ensure the establishment of a moderate form of Islam in the Republic to enforce stability. In exchange, they became embedded in the close circle of the patronage regime and its resources.

The outlawing of Wahhabism established the roots of an arbitrary system giving extraordinary powers to the local police and official clerics. This law had a major impact on the young people that choose to practice a form of radical Islam without engaging in any forms of violence. The DUM, by defining the correct practices of Islam and establishing a list of Wahhabis, pushed young people toward insurgent groups, just like the case of Kabardino-Balkaria, as we shall see. The law gives the power to arrest individuals that do not agree with the view of the DUM. As I will show in chapter 7, this law also had an impact on the daily lives of ordinary citizens and opened the way to arbitrary controls, arrests and ethno-religious profiling in Dagestan, and subsequently throughout the North Caucasus. Indeed, as no precise definition of Wahhabism was established, the law became an opportunity for religious elites and police forces to randomly target any opposition figures. The DUMD quickly radicalised itself in order to establish its political and religious power over the republic. Lanskoj quotes a representative of the DUMD: "Wahhabis can only be cured by a bullet" (2002: 180).

Ware and Kisriev conducted a survey in the spring of 2000 amongst 1,001 Dagestan citizens in order to analyze their perception of Wahhabism. Among the important findings revealed by the survey, a high number of people refused to answer, seemingly because they were afraid of the topic (2009: 109-114). According to their survey, people with a pro-Russian attitude often had an anti-Wahhabism stance. Another interesting finding is that town dwellers, women and older people tended to see Wahhabists as extremists. Avars, Dargins and Akkin-Chechens were the most sympathetic. Wahhabism was particularly supported by “young educated men, who were frustrated by a lack of economic opportunities, or whose education invited a critical attitude toward political realities” (Ware and Kisriev, 2009: 114).

Hahn quotes another survey which claims that in June 2011 85 percent labelled themselves as believers, although 23 percent performed all Islamic rites. This tendency offers important avenues for Salafist preachers (2007: 100). In the course of my fieldwork in Dagestan, I witnessed this Islamization process inside Dagestani society. Particularly, I observed this phenomenon among university students where I spent an important part of my time. A recurrent pattern was the creation of informal circles where radical Islamist students would engage in proselytism. This enabled me to identify the precise pathway of Islamic radicalisation amongst the students and map the evolution of the networks of believers.

A central question that resulted from this situation is: why did so many young people start to turn toward Islam and insurgent violence in order to voice their grievances against the state and the religious elites? The answer can certainly not be found in the spillover of the Second Chechen War. Although the proximity of the war and the window of opportunity it created helped the development of radical Islam, the causes remained locally induced. Part of

the answer lays in the reaction of the federal government to the Second Chechen War and the growing danger in Dagestan.

Following the Presidential election of March 2000 and Putin's victory, a major political reform seeking to re-centralize power was launched. Putin's political reforms until the Beslan incident were discussed earlier. It is nevertheless important to specify certain aspects of the reform in the case of Dagestan. Throughout the Yeltsin period, federal influence over Dagestani politics was minimal. This distance was seen in the Putin administration as one of the main causes of the development of radical Islamism in the republic and its growing instability. The re-centralisation of federal power became a priority. As we saw earlier, Dagestan was the only Republic with a non-elected executive leader, and its political system also had the only collegial executive in the Russian Federation (Ware and Kisriev, 2009: 165). Following a series of reforms driven by the federal government, the Dagestani political system changed from collegial executive to a Presidential system, and the proportional system for legislative elections was abrogated. Centralisation was strengthened following the Beslan event in the fall of 2004 with the executive leader now appointed by Moscow. Ware and Kisriev give an exhaustive analysis of this transformation; however, they summarize the new political situation as follow:

“Personal political power was no longer based upon internal political conditions, but upon the bureaucratic authority of official functionaries, leading for power on higher-level administrative organs that are connected ultimately to the Kremlin. (...) Moscow had become the guarantor of Dagestan's stability instead of Dagestan own internal social parameters. The local political elites would consider the views of Moscow leaders ahead of local social moods and the needs of their local supporters. As a consequence, the ruling elite might become further alienated from local needs and demands” (2009: 184-185).

With the Putin reform, the consensual nature of the political system was replaced by a competition in order to capture resources and the support from the federal government.

Corruption and nepotism sky-rocketed, it became impossible to obtain a job or to enter university without paying a bribe. Federal funds were used to feed paternalistic networks and to secure personal economic advantages (Ware and Kisriev, 2009: 212-213). Violence was now seen as one of the only ways to voice any kind of political grievance. Indeed, the system of balancing between various groups in the society was replaced by the dominance of unaccountable elites. The administration used the fear of Wahhabism in Moscow in order to extract subsidies in the name of security and the fear of the Chechen contamination. At the same time, Magomedov's inner circle mainly composed of Dargins from his own clan, used security forces to crackdown on various political and economic opponents. More than ever, political elites focused exclusively on their own agenda and stopped dealing with basic problems such as economic modernisation, crime or unemployment. These problems were mainly the source of the development of insurgent groups in Dagestan. Radical Islamism was seen as the only major problem.

Political power in Dagestan was now built on the strength of the state apparatus and not popular support. As a result, religious tensions, political instability and violence were on the rise. Several important political actors, such as Said Amirov, Gadzhi Makhachev and Mukhu Aliev, were targeted by terrorist attacks. As in the case of Ingushetia, Kabardino-Balkaria, and Chechnya, the Dagestani government's reaction to the increase of instability in the republic was to launch a repressive campaign against Wahhabi followers in order to suppress Islamic radicalism. For the ruling elites, Salafists were seen as the main danger as they could not be easily demobilized with economic incentives, as it was the case with ethnic political groups in 1990s. The government committed human-rights violations such as torture, abductions, and physical abuse, in order to repress radical Islam, feeding the insurgency.

During that time, Salafists started to regroup and organize themselves in underground groups. In 2002, Rappani Khalilov, an ethnic Lak and former associate of Basayev and Khattab, established an insurgent structure mainly comprised of ex-Dagestani fighters who fought and trained in Chechnya. The recruitment, however, did not extend further than the personal network of these fighters. Things would rapidly change, mainly because of the growing repression in Dagestan.

A major terrorist attack occurred during the celebrations for May 9th killing 42 people and injuring 150 in Kaspiisk, a neighbouring city of the capital Makhachkala. This attack marked the beginning of the instability in Dagestan. The period between 2004 and 2006 was particularly bloody. As the Chechen insurgency changed its strategy, Dagestan became one of the first republics to experience an increase in insurgent activities. The Jannat combat jamaat was probably founded by Rasul Makasharipov around 2002 or very early in 2003. Jannat was mainly active around Makhachkala and its suburbs. Makasharipov began to claim responsibility for insurgent activities. Other salafists that participated in the Chechen invasion of Dagestan — like Rappani Khalilov, Suleyman Ilmurzaev and Zaur Akazov — joined him to form the core leadership of the first combat jamaats in Dagestan. Basayev named Rappani Khalilov as the emir of the Dagestan front in April 2004 (Hahn, 2007: 117).

Hahn reports that this insurgent group “is said to have been responsible for the killings of some thirty Dagestani police officers and appeared to be behind a series of assassination attempts against various officials (2007: 118).” It also targeted economic objectives such as the gas and oil industry.

As early as 2005, Dagestan became the republic with the most terrorist acts in the North Caucasus. Russian forces estimated that as many as 2,500 rebels were active (Dunlop, 2012: 57). Although it was not yet a highly coordinated and hierarchical organisation, the

various small insurgent groups were able to openly challenge police forces (Sagramoso, 2012). The underground insurgency became particularly active with assassination attempts against the Minister of Internal Affairs, the Minister of Nationalities, Information and Foreign Relations in May 2005, and the District Attorney of Buinaksk in 2006.

As the violence was getting out of control, many political groups from various nationalities sought to challenge Magomedov's power. For them, the majority of Dagestan's problems were the result of a small group of elites that captured the political and economic power in the republic. Some of them even started using Islamic slogans in order to attract popular support. Mukhu Aliev, an Avar, was appointed President of Dagestan in 2006 in order to satisfy these demands for political change. His main political program was to reduce nepotism and corruption which he saw as the cause of the increase of radical Islam and Salafism in Dagestan. Aliev's nomination triggered a wave of protest against corruption and police forces' abuses. People saw his nomination as an occasion to voice their grievances openly. The protests were, instead, violently repressed by local forces with the tacit approval of the new President (Ware and Kisriev, 2009: 205-206). Repression was mainly aimed at radical religious groups as they represented the most problematic issue in the republic. Since the Chechen invasion, radical Islam was seen as a growing danger.

At the same time, radical Islam became for many Dagestanis the answer to many of their social problems. Local Salafist preachers start associating social problems within the republic to the secular nature of the government. They started promoting the development of a parallel society based on Sharia. According them, village-based jamaats organised around Islamic law permitted them to fight against corruption, poverty and cronyism as well as freely practising their religion. Sharia was rapidly seen as a solution against all these problems, and political Islam as a valid replacement for a corrupt political system in

Dagestan. For young people, Salafism represented a way to unblock their social mobility, to find a social community and to practice their religion according to their convictions.

Most of these people were not supporting the idea of a violent jihad or to transform the entire Dagestani political system into an Islamic State. Neither were they brainwashed by radical preachers from foreign organisations or Chechen Islamists. For many of them, living in peace in their village under certain basic principles of the Sharia was the limit of their vision of political Islam. However, the reaction of the local elites was to target these ordinary Muslims as members of underground Islamic combat jamaat. Local religious elites compiled lists of radical Islamists based on their faith and not their association with insurgents. Based on these lists, security forces started cracking down on many young radical Islamists, leading to numerous human-rights abuses including but not limited to torture, abduction and extrajudicial killings. Special operations also became an occasion to loot from people and to feed the nepotistic network of local elites. Many Muslims chose to join an insurgent movement as police abuses were intensifying and the judicial system was controlled by local elites. Dunlop quotes a survey completed in 2005 that shows “that 88 percent of the residents in the republic do not have faith in the Dagestani police” (2012:57). Gerber and Mendelson also report in their survey conducted in Dagestan, that there is an important distrust toward the government, the power structure, and the legal system (2009). Many young intellectuals and pious Muslims joined the insurgency because they were increasingly targeted by security forces. Although they were at first opposed to violent means to promote the role of Islam in the Republic, these young intellectuals such as Yasin Rasulov decided to join the insurgent movement as their last resort. For some of them, violence triggered a type of conviction making it the only way to communicate with non-devout Muslims or “infidels.” For others, their choice could be associated to the collective action dilemma where they had the choice

of either being abducted, potentially killed, or to join an insurgent group in order to defend themselves. Kalyvas and Mathew Kocher (2007) observe that in this kind of situation the collective action is reversed, as the biggest danger is often the result of non-participation.

A vicious circle was thus created where repression led to more people engaging in insurgent violence, forcing elites to intensify their repression. The insurgency entered a phase where it did not have to rely exclusively on insurgents who trained and fought in Chechnya. Locals became their pool of recruitment mainly based on their will for revenge or because they were seeking protection from security forces abuse.

The siloviki were able to effectively eliminate many of the early leading figures of the insurgency, and yet the insurgency went on. Rasul Makasharipov and many of the initial members of the Jannat jamaat were killed in Makhachkala in a series of raids in 2005. In reaction to these successes by security forces, Khalilov subordinated the insurgent forces under the umbrella of the new combat jamaat, Shariah, which included many small terrorist cells in Makhachkala, Buinaxsk, Kaspisk, Khasavyurt, Gubden, and Gimry. Some of these cells were already autonomous at the time, and planned their own attacks against the government. The recruitment and the funding were also decentralised, allowing small cells to survive the military crackdown against the leaders. Meanwhile, the insurgency openly started targeting civilians linked to security forces. This change could also be seen as the result of the broadening of the insurgent social basis and the growing discontent against political elites and bureaucrats amongst new recruits. Rappani Khaliov, the leader of the Shariah jamaat, took an oath to the Chechen leadership following the death of Maskhadov and the nomination of Sadulaev in 2005. The Shariah jamaat slowly developed a common ideology that would establish the basis of the Caucasus Emirate. At the same time, small insurgent cells had already acquired their own momentum and did not need this affiliation to increase

their insurgent activities. Indeed, local factors were driving the recruitment and not the takfirist-jihadist ideology adopted by Chechen elites.

Khalilov was killed in September 2007 just before the proclamation of the Caucasus Emirate. His death left Umarov, Astemirov and Emir Magas as the principal figures of the insurgency in the region. Although no Dagestani insurgents were directly implicated in the creation of the Emirate, violence did not decline in the republic. Umarov later nominated Abdul Madzhid as the next insurgent leader of Dagestan. Khalilov remains one of the central figures of the Dagestani insurgency, as he set an example for many insurgents. After his death, not a single emir or leader of the insurgency survived more than a year in Dagestan. The security forces in the republic were able to launch several direct attacks against the insurgent leadership: Abdul Madzhid (September 2008), Omar Sheikhulayev (February 2009), Umulat Magomedov (December 2009), Magomedali Vagapov (August 2010), Israpil Velijanov aka Emir Hassan (January 2011), and Ibragimkhalil Daudov (February 2012) also known as Amir Salikh were killed in succession. Nevertheless, the strength of the insurgency grew rapidly between 2007 and 2012. Repression and successes in counter-terrorist operations produced the opposite effect in Dagestan.

The death of Khalilov and Makasharipov marks an important generational change inside the insurgency. Many of the new figures of the Dagestani insurgency were not veterans of the Chechen wars and did not train with Khattab. Some of them, like Rasulov, were educated people driven to the insurgency by religious repression or police abuse. If the spillover of the Chechen veterans made the creation of an insurgent network in Dagestan possible and created a window of opportunity for ordinary citizens to radicalise themselves, the movement rapidly developed following Dagestan's fault lines and local problems.

Throughout his Presidential mandate (2006-2010), Mukha Aliev was unable to fight corruption, Islamic radicalism or stimulate the economy. In fact, the level of violence and instability grew exponentially during his Presidency. In February 2010, Magomedislam Magomedov, Magomedali Magomedov's son, was appointed President of the Republic by Aleksandr Khloponin in order to launch a new strategy to eliminate radical Islam and violence based on economic modernisation with Kerimov's support. The federal government chose not to appoint Aliev to a second term, mainly because he did not want to intensify the repressive campaign against the militants.

Following his nomination, Magomedov launched an ultimatum to the militants: to choose between surrendering, or to accept the consequences of their choice. The new President openly supported an increase in repression and a military answer to the upsurge of violence. The Russian federal government also started increasing its military presence by moving troops from Chechnya to Dagestan. In September 2010, the surge was mainly aimed at stabilizing the republic in order to conduct local elections. Instead, important tensions exploded during the local election process. The Dagestani government also put forward the idea of creating an ethnic battalion formed of Dagestanis, mirroring the concept of pro-Russian Chechen forces under Ramzan Kadyrov's control. The government announced its intention to recruit 700 members for this special battalion. Just like the "Yug" and "Sever" battalions created by Kadyrov in 2006, the Dagestan elites hoped that by creating their own militia they would be able to influence the balance of power between federal forces and republican forces with a view towards extracting more resources from Moscow. Indeed, by being able to rely on a powerful local militia, elites can negotiate with the federal center and impose their will as Kadyrov has been doing in the last six years.

The choice to intensify repression was in response to an important increase of militant activities in Dagestan. Violence in the Republic literally exploded from the beginning of 2010 to the end of 2012 (See graph 3). This upsurge led many people to claim that Dagestan was about to enter into a situation of sectarian civil war.⁶⁷ Dagestan became the epicenter of violence in the North Caucasus with Makhachkala, Kaspiisk, Derbent, Khasavyurt, Kizlyar, Sergokala, Untsukul, and Tsumada all becoming hotbeds of militant activities. Many of these districts are associated with Islamic jamaats that finds their roots in the 1990s in cities like Kizlyurt, Gubden, Chabanmakhi, and Karamakhi (Yarlykapov, 2010: 140). Certain sectors such as Kizlyar are becoming important hubs for insurgents, and where military clashes regularly happen (June 2011, January 2012). The strength of the local insurgents often requires the use of artillery and airpower in order to disperse the fighters. The importance of these special operations indicates that Dagestan security forces do not fight a light and unprofessional insurgency. In the first half of 2012, the level of violence in Dagestan did not decrease even if the federal government highly increased its military presence.

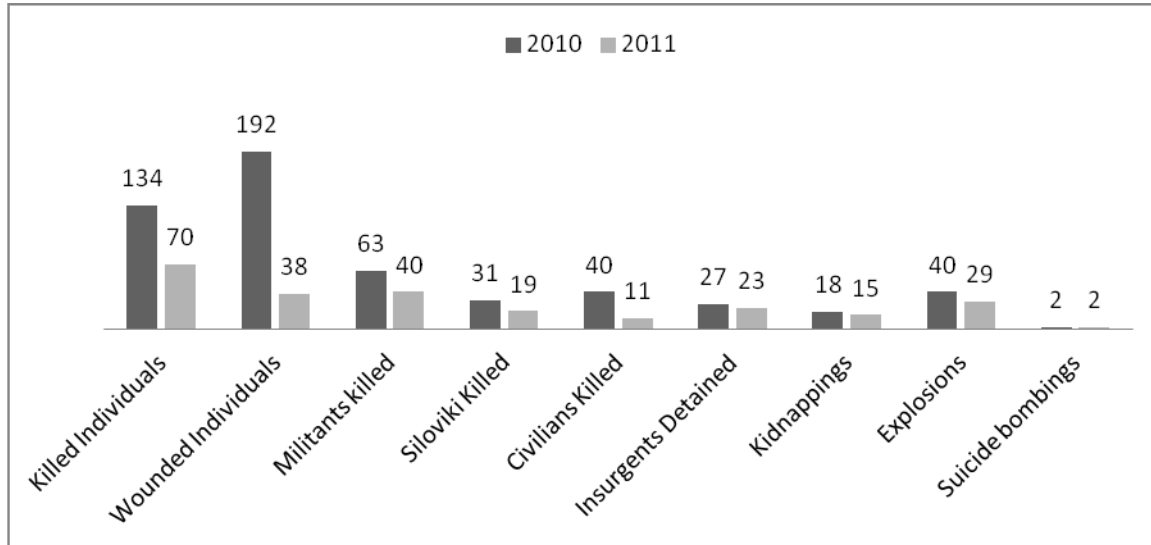
The year 2011 also saw an increase in popular protests against security services and human rights abuses (in June, August, and November). Many of the rallies were organised around Islamic themes as radical Islamists are the most targeted by security forces. In November, 2500-3000 people gathered in Makhachkala for a protest. Valery Dzutsev entitled one of his Jamestown reports: “Has the Arab Spring Arrived in Dagestan?”(2011e), and although this title is very evocative, it represents a form of wishful thinking. In fact, a

⁶⁷ See for example : Nick Paton Walsh, “Dagestan Edged Closer to Civil War” *The Guardian*, available at: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/guardianweekly/story/0,,1580912,00.html>. For local actors see: Steve Gutterman “Islamic cleric warns of civil war in Russia's Dagestan” *Reuters*, 29 August 2012, available at: <http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/08/29/us-russia-caucasus-attack-idUSBRE87S0ZJ20120829>

perspective from the field gives a completely different picture; I personally witnessed one of the protests in Makhachkala in June 2012. Local sources reported that between 3000 and 5000 people gathered in Makhachkala for the protest. The military deployment in the city was never so massive, not even for the visit of high representatives of the federal government such as the Presidential envoy in the region or the Minister of Interior. Access to the central place in Makhachkala and to the republican library where the main protest was taking place was limited to Special Forces and armed trucks. Makhachkala looked like a city under siege as the military deployment was bigger than what I witnessed in Chechnya for the Chechen Congress in the fall of 2010. The protest was not repressed, and the government tolerated Islamic slogans and the presence of many radical Islamists. However, repression occurred in other protests in the end of 2011.

4.2 Ingushetia

Graph 4: Violence in Numbers in Ingushetia⁶⁸



Ingushetia is the smallest of the three ethnic Republics in both territory and population (516,000 citizens according to the 2010 census). The ethnic breakdown is roughly 75 percent Ingush and 25 percent Chechen, although both nationalities share common traditions and a similar language. In fact, they are both related through the Vaynakh ethnic group. The Ingush and Chechens were also both deported by Stalin in 1944. Ingushetia is a fairly young Republic, formed after the split of the Checheno-Ingushetia ASSR in 1992. Ingushs were involved in a short but violent war with Ossetians in 1992 over the status of the Prigorodny region. This region was occupied and annexed by North Ossetia after the deportation. Ingushetia expected that the region would be returned to its territory following its decision not to follow Chechnya in its independence quest. However, through the summer of 1992, numerous clashes occurred between the two communities and the situation

⁶⁸ Source : Kavkazskii Uzel available at <http://www.eng.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/19549/>

degenerated into an open warfare in October. The conflict lasted for a week, killing over 500 people and leading to over 60,000 Ingush refugees. The Ingush were subsequently cleansed from North Ossetia, including from the Prigorodny region. Even if this violent event occurred in North Ossetia, it still plays an important role in Ingush internal politics.

Two years later, the outbreak of the First Chechen War led to a massive arrival of Chechen refugees in Ingushetia. Between 150,000 and 240,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs) were placed in temporary camps. Ingushetia's internal politics was greatly affected by refugees and by the same token its economic situation. However, Ruslan Aushev, the President of Ingushetia, was able to keep a certain level of stability in the Republic and was able to avoid having Ingushetia become the collateral damage of the two Chechen wars. Aushev put forward numerous policies to limit the influence of Islamic groups and radical ideology over young people. According to Derluguian, Aushev legalized polygamy, clan vendetta and established Sharia courts at the local level (2001, quoted in Evangelista, 2002: 135). The Ingush President was able to limit radicalisation amongst the youth by trying to offer social integration and employment programs.

At the same time, Aushev openly criticized the Second War in Chechnya and Moscow's policies in the region at numerous occasions. As a result, Putin decided to remove him from power and to promote a loyal ally. Murat Zyazikov, a high-ranking FSB officer, replaced Aushev as the President of Ingushetia after being elected in a forged election in 2002. Aushev resigned and obtained a position on the Federation Council in 2001 after a legal battle with Moscow about the length of his mandate.

Zyazikov was unable to build a stable political network in the Republic and mostly relied on brutal repression to establish his political power. His approach could be seen as an emulation of the methods adopted by Kadyrov's militia in neighbouring Chechnya, such as

mop-up operations, extra-judicial killings and abductions. He targeted Chechen refugee camps to prevent them from becoming safe havens for insurgents and potential Islamic fighters (Sagramoso, 2012). The Russian government and the Zyazikov administration often claimed that the instability was mainly the result of the success of the counter-terrorist operation in Chechnya, and therefore of the spillover of insurgent activities in its neighbouring areas.⁶⁹ These practices and the lawlessness of security forces quickly led to a mounting feeling of anger against the government. The human rights organisation MASHR reported several cases of abductions in the Republic, reaching over 40 in 2003 and 2004 (Amnesty international, 2012: 16)

This strategy created a major backlash as local civilians started seeking revenge against police force abuse. The entire Republic entered into a vicious circle of violence. The Ingush repression was one of the most gruesome and brutal in the entire North Caucasus, making some analysts claim that we were witnessing a transfer of Chechen practices to the neighbouring republics (Evangelista, 2004; Sakwa, 2010).

In response to this brutality, several people joined the local branch of the Chechen insurgency, the Ingush combat jamaat. According to Andrew McGregor, the Ingush Jamaat finds its origin in the battle of the Argun Gorge in 2000 during the Second Chechen War. Only a few Ingush fighters survived (seven) and they formed the core of the Jamaat in Ingushetia (McGregor, 2006). The main leaders were Magomed Yevloyev, a close associate to Basayev who fought in the Second War, and Ilyas Gorchkanov, who played a key role until his death in Nalchik in October 2005. Yevloyev stayed in command of the Ingush jamaat until June 2010 when the Russian forces captured him after being tipped off by an informant.

⁶⁹ See Nikolai Patrushev's comment in August 2006 reported by John Dunlop (2012:55).

The forces of the jamaat were mainly comprised of discontented people from Ingushetia and people seeking revenge from the abuse they had suffered. The level of violence started to significantly increase in 2004. In response to insurgent activities, the number of disappearances grew rapidly. The results were catastrophic as Ingushetia rapidly spiralled into a protracted war between insurgents and security forces. In June 2004, Basayev along with Yevloyev organised a major military raid against the city of Nazran. Ingush and Chechen forces attacked the Interior Ministry, the FSB, police headquarters, and numerous checkpoints. Over 90 people were killed during the raid and the rebels seized an important amount of weapons from security forces. This attack marked the beginning of a growing collaboration between Chechen and Ingush insurgents mainly driven by Basayev's personal network.

After Basayev's death and Umarov's nomination as President of the ChRI, the collaboration between insurgents intensified as Umarov also established personal contacts with the Ingush insurgents. Yevloev was appointed to replace Basayev as the military emir of the ChRI and the Caucasus Emirate. Said Buryatskii, an important ideologue and military commander (see below), was assigned to the Ingush jamaat to intensify military activities, suicide attacks and to engage in recruitment and proselytism amongst young Ingush.

Between 2007 and 2009, the level of violence reached the numbers of Chechnya. O'Loughlin, Holland, and Witmer, with their dataset of violent events in Ingushetia, demonstrate the continual upsurge of violence in Ingushetia during Zyazikov's seven year mandate (2002-2008) from a yearly average of 70 acts of violence in 2002, to 357 in 2008 (2011). This upsurge of violence is mainly the result of the important customs of blood feud in Ingushetia. Events such as the Nazran raid in June 2004 and the use of death squads against the insurgents produced a will on both sides to avenge the death of their relatives. As

the customs of blood feud is so strongly ingrained in Ingushetia, civilians that join the insurgency do not have the option to leave the insurgency to return to their ordinary life even if their will for vengeance was achieved. This phenomenon indirectly sustained the level of violence in Ingushetia.

Magomed Yevloev's suspect death on August 31 2008 (he was shot in the head in custody) triggered a political campaign to force Murat Zyazikov to resign from the presidency. Opposition against Zyazikov reached 80 percent in a local survey at the end of 2008, and Russian President Medvedev decided to replace Zyazikov with another siloviki officer, Yunus-Bek Yevkurov. Yevkurov openly declared his will to fight corruption in the Republic and to stop the highly-repressive regime established by his predecessor. He began to meet with opposition leaders, created a commission to disengage insurgent fighters and stop the blood feud cycle, and sought means to stimulate the Ingush economy. For Yevkurov, insurgent violence was not seen exclusively through the prism of religious problem but most likely the result of social problems such as unemployment, corruption, and vendetta. His approach was a middle-ground between efficient counter-terrorist operations and social programs to support the youth. However, the situation reached a critical level in 2009, with Ingushetia becoming the epicenter of insurgent attacks and suicide bombings in the North Caucasus.

The insurgency campaign was driven by Said Buryatskii, also known as Aleksandr Tikhomirov, an ethnic Buryat who converted to Islam and decided to join the jihad in the North Caucasus following the proclamation of the CE in 2007. Upon his arrival in the region, Buryatskii was assigned to Ingushetia and became a leading figure of the insurgency, as much for his ideological qualities as for his military skills. Until his death in the winter of 2010, he organized and even filmed his indirect participation in numerous suicide attacks

against the republican government. Yevkurov was targeted by a suicide attack in Nazran in June 2009 but survived and returned to office later that year.

In the spring of 2010, successful antiterrorist operations, probably triggered by a close informant in the insurgency, brought about the elimination of Said Buryatskii and the capture of Yevloyev, the leader of the Ingush jamaat and also the military emir (second in command) of the entire Caucasus Emirate. These two losses represented a major blow to the insurgent structure in Ingushetia. A major re-organisation of the jamaat was necessary and violent activities drastically dropped in 2010 and 2011. In the fall of 2010, the Ingush jamaat openly changed its insurgency strategy and associated their struggle for Islam with the struggle of the Ingush people. Following a suicide attack in the market of Vladikavkaz, which killed 18 people and injured over 100, the Ingush jamaat proclaimed that they would increase their militant activities in order to re-gain the Prigorodny region. The insurgent jamaat opposed Yevkurov's policy of leaving the Prigorodny issue aside in his relations with North Ossetia.

This incident provoked important ethnic clashes between Ingush and Ossets in North Ossetia, without, however, deteriorating into violence. The Ingush insurgents also announced that they would stop targeting indigenous police forces as part of their new nationalistic strategy.⁷⁰ It is difficult to evaluate if the change in the strategy was the result of a real ideological change or of a tactical decision to attract new recruits. The truce did not last long, as the level of violence began to increase at the end of 2011. Once again, the Ingush administration, now under Yevkurov, resorted to kidnapping and extrajudicial activities against the civilian population in an attempt to quell the insurgency. The President openly

⁷⁰ Radio Free Europe, "Ingushetia Militants Announce Moratorium On Killing Police" 6 October 2010, available at: http://www.rferl.org/content/Ingushetia_Militants_Announce_Moratorium_On_Killing_Police/2182877.html

admitted that security forces in Ingushetia were responsible for several cases of abduction. The indiscriminate violence perpetrated by security forces had the opposite effect of feeding the insurgency.

In addition to this campaign of repression, Yevkurov launched a program to register the mosques inside the Republic at the end of 2011. Only the registered mosques will be allowed to function after the period of registration. The Ingush government thus sought to control Islam inside its frontiers and limit the effect of radical preachers on the youth.

Thus far, Yevkurov's counter-insurgency strategy using repression and disengagement programs seems to be the most effective in the entire region. The disengagement commission did not deliver extraordinary results, although it has the merit to target the problem of the upsurge of violence through a different and less repressive angle. By trying to establish a dialogue with the insurgency and limit the role of blood-feud in pushing people to engage in violence, Yevkurov seeks to favour a social approach to the problems in Ingushetia. The actual improvement in the security situation demonstrates the inherent problem to try to export and translate the Chechen model to other republics. The recent round of discussions between moderate clerics and Salafists, as well as the instauration of a commission to disengage militants in Dagestan, demonstrate that the Ingush example could be seen a new regional strategy.

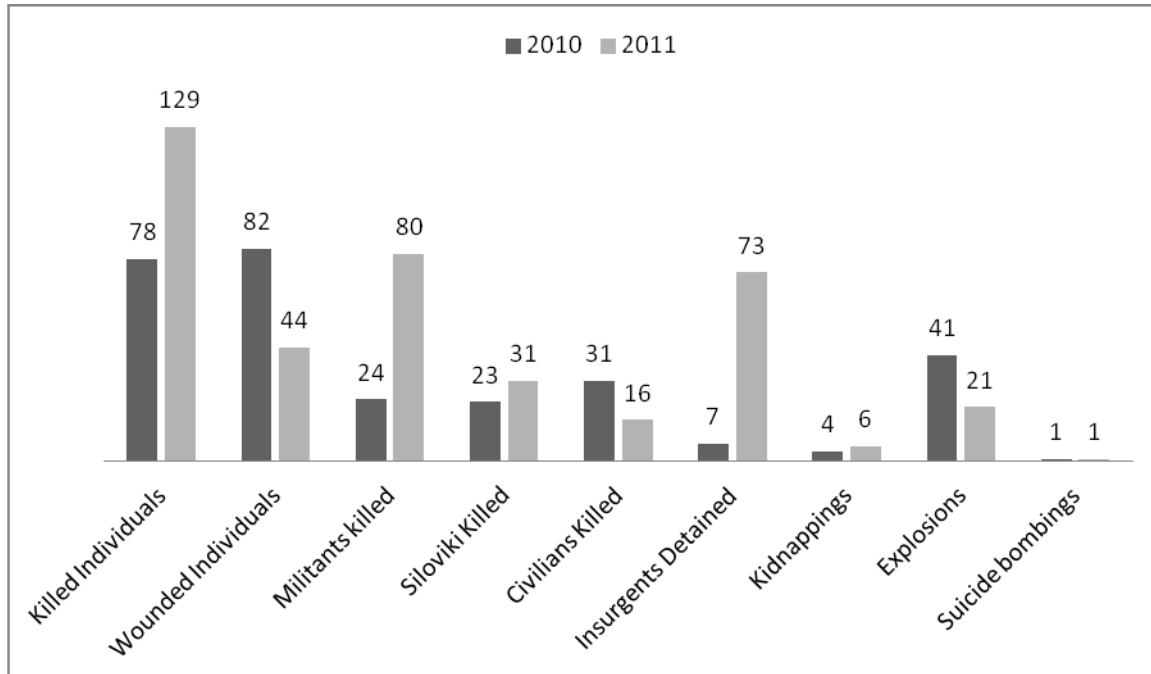
At the same time, the new President's support in the republic is dangerously low – ten percent, according to Vatchagaev (2012h) -- even if the level of insurgent violence has drastically decreased. Yevkurov is thus not faring better than Murat Zyazikov. In 2012, the civil opposition has started to put pressure on the Yevkurov administration to stop the extra-judicial abductions and killings in the republic. Activists are also now asking for Yevkurov's resignation.

With a growing opposition movement against President Yevkurov and the possible restructuration of the Ingush jamaat after the loss of its main leaders, Ingushetia will probably be facing a security threat in the up-coming year. It will be particularly interesting to see if the government will continue to apply its carrot and stick strategy or a more repressive model.

In any case, it would be imprudent to assume that the insurgency has been eliminated in Ingushetia, since many triggering factors have not been addressed. This situation could be seen as reminiscent of the lull in the Chechen insurgency following the death of Basayev and Sadullaev

4.3 Kabardino-Balkaria

Graph 5 : Violence Trend in Kabardino-Balkaria⁷¹



The population of Kabardino-Balkaria (around 860,000 people, according to the 2010 census) is split between three major ethnic groups: the Kabardins, who counts for about 50 % of the population, the ethnic Russians (25%), and the Balkars (11-12%). The first two ethnic groups are mostly spread in the low-lands, while the Balkars occupy the highlands of the republic. The Balkars were deported by the Stalinist regime during the Second World War creating similar problems as in the case of the Ingush.

The violence in Kabardino-Balkaria evolved very differently compared to Chechnya, Ingushetia and Dagestan. Indeed, if the importance of Islam and local customs are relatively similar in the North Eastern Caucasus (Ingushetia, Chechnya, and Dagestan), and the dynamics of violence tend to follow the same trend, the picture differs in the North Western Caucasus (North Ossetia, Kabardino-Balkaria, Karachevo-Cherkessia and Adygea).

⁷¹ Source : Kavkazskii Uzel available at <http://www.eng.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/19592/>

Although Kabardino-Balkaria witnessed an Islamic revival, just as the rest of the North Caucasus, it did not become an important factor of violent engagement before the end of 2005. In order to understand how violence developed in the republic, one has to go back to the end of Soviet Union.

In 1994, the republic signed a bilateral treaty with Moscow that established a certain degree of decentralization. The consequence of the treaty was “the preservation of the partocratic nomenklatura’s authoritarian form of rule” (Hahn, 2007: 143-144). Moscow favoured political and ethnic stability over freedom and reforms in the republic. Similarly to the case of Dagestan, it established the dominance of a small minority over the vast majority of the citizens. These unaccountable elites did not share a direct ethnic link but were mostly inherited from the Soviet period. Valery Kokov was the leader of the Communist party and was the President of Kabardino-Balkaria between 1985 and 2005. He was elected three times (1992, 1997, and 2002) in highly unfair elections with between 87 to 99 % of the vote (Hahn, 2007: 144). During his “reign,” he was regularly accused of corruption and neo-patrimonialism, as economic problems became extremely severe between 2000 and 2005. At the same time, the police and security services were reinforced to target political opponents. Illegal detention, torture, and religious repression became common practice.

Fatima Tlisova explains that “policemen interfered in all aspects of social life and came to control both businesses and the criminal world. The relationship between the security services and the populace came to be that of mutual hatred, with common people being financially dependent on the policemen.” (2012: 332). Following the beginning of the Second Chechen War in 1999, the local authorities with the help of a local Muslim center started collecting information and building a database of so-called “Wahhabis” in the republic (Yemelianova, 2005; Tlisova, 2012: 334). As in the case of Ingushetia and

Dagestan, Kokov's administration perceived radical Islamists as the most threatening political force.

In 1998, a splinter and marginal group vaguely associated with radical Islamists engaged in violence against security forces in the village of Khasanya. Although this clash was minor, the republican authority argued that they had to target radical Islam in order to avoid problems similar to Dagestan and Chechnya. It helped the regime to launch an important campaign of repression against radical Islam followers across Kabardino-Balkaria. The campaign resulted in the massive detentions of members of the Kabardino-Balkaria jamaat (Shterin and Yarlykapov, 2011); even certain Imams were arrested by security forces. The local Muslim Spiritual Board (DUMKB) played a crucial in the religious repression.

The DUMKB is closely associated with republican power since its main source of funding comes from governmental agencies. One of its main tasks is to combat religious extremism and "Wahhabism" in the republic (Tlisova, 2012: 323). It also engaged in an educational program to oppose violence and jihad against "infidels" during the 1990's, and controls the nomination and the speeches of Imams in the Republic. The DUMKB could thus be seen as a resource co-opted by the Republican government with the aim to establish a moderate version of Islam that will impede the radicalisation processes of young people and limit the influence of radical preachers.

In order to do so, it establishes a list of radical Islamists to be controlled by security forces. In 2003, local authorities restricted the access to mosques during Friday prayers. All mosques were closed in Nalchik and its suburbs in the summer of 2004 (Tlisova, 2012: 335). Republican forces "unleashed a literal terror against the Kabardino-Balkariaya jamaat. Believers were dragged out of mosques, beaten up by the hundreds, had [Orthodox] crosses shaved on their skulls, had their beards set on fire (Latynina, 2006 quoted by Dunlop, 2012:

59).” At that time, a survey in Kabardino-Balkaria showed that “70 percent of respondents stated that they did not trust Russian law-enforcement organs” (Dunlop, 2012: 60). The repression increased in intensity throughout 2005 leading to a reinforcement of the distrust and hatred against security forces.

Anzor Astemirov, Ruslan Nakushev and Musa Mukozhev were amongst the first ideological leaders of the jamaat in Kabardino-Balkaria. Astemirov and Mukozhev studied Islam abroad in Saudi Arabia and in Jordania, and they returned to Kabardino-Balkaria in order to preach a more radical form of Islam. Mukhozhev established himself as a popular Imam in the suburb of Nalchik (Volny Aul), raising suspicions from the federal authorities. He established the Kabardino-Balkaria Institute for Islamic Studies where Astemirov and Nakushev were also members. At the same time, Mukozhev created the early structure of the Kabardino-Balkaria jamaat and was elected as an emir in 1998. This jamaat was first focused on the study and practice of radical Islam and did not engage in any political actions. The Jamaat leaders were even very critical of Salafism before going underground in 2004 (Shterin and Yarlykapov, 2011: 311). The jamaat mainly engaged in the promotion of a purer form of Islam in the republic, and especially supported the freedom of worship (McGregor, 2006). The two leaders avoided an open confrontation with the DUMKB and its traditional Islamic elites. The Kabardino-Balkaria jamaat and radical Islamists sought to oppose the government control on religious practices with non-violent means. Shterin and Yarlykapov analyze the internal structure of the Kabardino-Balkaria jamaat. They note that the charismatic personality of Mukzhev and Astemirov and their eloquence helped them establish their influence over the jamaat and its members (2011: 313).

In 2004 and 2005, Mukozhev openly criticized the DUMKB for assisting the security forces in the repression of young Muslims practicing a more radical form of Islam. He also

openly challenged the Islamic knowledge and education of DUMKB leaders. Mukozhev was arguing once again for a purer form of Islam in the republic (quoted in Tlisova, 2012: 324-325). He pleaded for the end of the repression and the re-opening of mosques across the republic. Mukozhev's insistence for non-violent methods was shared by many members of the jamaat. Astemirov, even after being named Qadi of the Caucasus Emirate in the fall of 2007, remained reticent to promote violence as he would insist on the necessity to promote conversion and education over insurgent attacks against police forces and civilians. (Zhemukov and Ratelle, 2011). It seems possible to pursue the argument that until late 2004 the jamaat contained the radicalism of its young men rather than encouraging its translation into violent behaviour" (Shterin and Yarlykapov, 2011: 317).

In response to the intensification of the repression, Astemirov, Mukhozev and many of their followers went underground in 2004. As the official and legitimate channels to voice religious and political grievances were blocked, violence became the only way to "dialogue" with the political and religious elites. Ethno-religious profiling and repression became a crucial factor in violent engagement and helped the jamaat to recruit more adherents. At that same moment, Chechen insurgents were looking to expand and spread the war to other republics. The conditions were thus set for insurgents in Kabardino-Balkaria to establish an insurgent organisation closely attached to the Chechen forces.

A military branch of the jamaat evolved parallel to the religious repression in the republic. Muslim Atayev, along with 20-30 other volunteers, took part in the Second Chechen War around 2002. After acquiring military training and combat experience, the group returned to Kabardino-Balkaria to fight religious repression and spread the insurgency across the region (McGregor, 2006). The jamaat was closely linked to Basayev's network. McGregor and numerous people I interviewed suggested that Shamil Basayev was in Baksan

in 2003 in order to recover from combat injuries and to coordinate insurgent activities in Kabardino-Balkaria. With the support of Chechen insurgents, the small group of fighters began to target governmental forces. After numerous clashes with the police in Nalchik, Atayev was killed in January 2005. Astemirov, who went underground in 2004, took command of the military structure as well as the religious part of the jamaat. At the end of 2004, the armed wing of the jamaat was calling to take arms against religious repression. Mukozhev, unlike Astemirov, acknowledged the turn toward violent jihad only at the end of 2006.

A major uprising was organized in October 2005 by local insurgents involving around 150-200 individuals under Anzor Astemirov. Trisova explains that the socio-economic background of the insurgents was very broad, as it included “doctors, lawyers, teachers, businessmen, and the sons of wealthy and respected families being found among the dead” (2012: 339). The insurgents targeted the airport, FSB and MVD buildings, and engaged in shootouts with security forces leading to over 140 casualties, including nearly 100 insurgents. Another 58 individuals still await their trial in prison under difficult conditions.

Unlike the insurgent raid on Nazran in Ingushetia a year before, this uprising was mainly uncoordinated and poorly planned from a strategic standpoint. It was mainly composed of ordinary Muslims who were not professional military or trained to fight the government forces; no Chechen fighters were involved. The attack occurred as a reaction to the growing repression in the republic and was mainly an act of desperation by ordinary people pushed into the corner because of their religious faith. After many years of repression under the Kokov administration, radical Muslims perceived the uprising against government forces as the only viable solution in order to protect their faith. In Nazran, the military

operation was based on highly-trained and equipped fighters supported by Chechen forces. In Nalchik, young people were protesting and using violent means to denounce the active repression against Islam. In the former, the raid was mainly driven by tactical reasons, as the latter was a last resort in order to oppose repression.

One has to be careful not to postulate that Islamic radicalisation led to violent engagement and the Nalchik uprising. Indeed, local radical Islamists engaged in a non-violent repertoire of actions before being pushed toward violent means. Dunlop underlines that the phenomenon of police brutality and ethno-religious profiling became a crucial factor of violent radicalisation in the case of Kabardino-Balkaria, just like in Ingushetia under the Presidency of Murat Zyazikov (2012: 59). The development of insurgent groups in all three republics followed very similar patterns. Religious repression was aimed at radical Islamist groups that were not openly challenging the governmental structure. As the repression increased, many radical Islamists became more receptive to Salafist ideology that advocates violent means to impose Islamic law. The reaction of all three governments was to increase religious repression in order to eliminate the Salafist underground network. This vicious circle is usually associated with non-repressive methods seeking to disengage a minority of insurgents.

In the case of Kabardino-Balkaria, the security services and the government increased arbitrary detentions, violent interrogations, including torture, and created a new list of 5000 Wahhabists to control following the raid (Tlisova, 2012: 340). At the same time, a new President was appointed a month before the raid in order to propose a less repressive approach to radical Islam. Arsen Kanokov, a businessman, was appointed President of Kabardino-Balkaria in September 2005, replacing Valery Kokov. Kanokov openly acknowledged the mistakes made by his predecessor in closing mosques and repressing

young people. According to Pavel Baev, a major change was also launched when Khachim Shogenov, the Interior Minister in Kabardino-Balkaria, responsible for the repression against radical Islamists, was replaced in March 2006 (Baev, 2012a: 123).

An important decrease in insurgent activities was observed in the republic between 2006 and 2009. The fact that the government decided to engage in a more discriminate repression of radical Islamists probably helped alleviate the tensions. At the same time, the most probable explanation, just as in the case of Ingushetia and Chechnya, should be found in the need to rebuild the insurgency structure following the loss of over 150 potential followers.

The underground insurgency remained relatively inactive until the summer of 2009. However, it is only after Astemirov's death in March 2010 that the level of insecurity and violence peaked in the republic. A younger and more radical generation of insurgents came to the fore. Asker Jappuyev took the lead of the KBK jamaat along with Ratmir Shameyev and Astor Mamishev. They radically changed the insurgent military strategies by directly targeting civilians and increasing attacks against law enforcement officials and economic interests, such as the Baksan hydroelectric dam in July 2010 and the Elbrus ski resort in February 2011. Throughout the summer of 2010 and the beginning of 2011, Kabardino-Balkaria witnessed an important increase of insurgent activities. O'Loughlin, Holland and Witmer highlight the fact that during that period of the 111 events of violence in the republic which occurred in Kabardino-Balkaria, only 5 resulted from Astemirov's leadership. The diffusion of violence in Kabardino-Balkaria mainly affected the regions of Tyrnyauz, Baksan, Chegem, the Elbrus region, as well as Nalchik, which remained the epicenter of violence (2011: 25).

In reaction to this insurgent violence, an anti-Wahhabi paramilitary, the Black Hawks, was formed to protect and avenge members of security forces and their families that were targeted by the insurgents. The paramilitary group used symbols associated with Circassian nationalists in a promotional video where they openly threatened Islamic militants.⁷² Immediately after the video, the militia targeted Astor Mamishev's family by throwing Molotov cocktails at their house. The group went underground following the diffusion of the video. Government forces were put on high alert and incessant antiterrorist operations were launched, mainly in the southern part of the republic. In a very successful counter-terrorist operation, the security forces were able to eliminate the core leadership of the jamaat, including Asker Jappuev, Kazbek Tashuev and Ratmir Shameyev, in April 2011. The level of violence subsequently dropped as shown in the graph X. The period between May 2011 and the spring of 2012 were used by the insurgents to regroup. However, the parliament of Kabardino-Balkaria acknowledged that the situation did not get better in the last year and that the level of instability remained the same.⁷³

⁷² Circassian nationalism remains an acute political problem in the republic, however it did not translate into violence. With the forthcoming Sochi Winter Olympics, the Circassians (Kabardians, Cherkess, Adygeas, and Shapsugs) that the Olympics are held on their ancestral land from where they cleansed and victims of genocide—by the Russian empire in the 19th century. The Circassian movement has lobbied Moscow in order to obtain an official apology and also for the creation of a new republic englobing all Circassian population in Russia. This study will not engage with this aspect directly as Circassian nationalism was not directly associated with violence except in the case of this video.

⁷³ Екатерина Толасова, “Парламент КБР просит увеличить штат республиканского МВД” 4 April 2012, available at <http://www.parlament-kbr.ru/index.php?Page=news&id=771&idp=20>

Chapter 5: An Analysis of the Upsurge of Violence in the North Caucasus through the Concept of Collective Responsibility, Criminality, Capital and Violent ‘Dialogue’

In the last two chapters, I described the religious, economic, social, and political context in the North Caucasus, and in the three republics that are at the core of this research. Generally, the literature about the North Caucasus looked at the two main processes of the diffusion of violence: the insurgent spillover of the Chechen wars, and Islamic radicalisation. This research acknowledges the importance of these two processes but suggests that they should be understood in relationship to four other processes: violence as collective responsibility, violence as an illegal criminal venture, violence as capital, and violence as political and religious dialogue. By looking at the upsurge of violence in Dagestan, Ingushetia and Kabardino-Balkaria, I will analyse each of these processes by identifying the common elements between all three republics as well as the diverging factors that could explain the micro-dynamics of violence in the North Caucasus.

O’Loughlin, Holland, and Witmer (2011) seek to explain how the conflict evolved in the last 11 years by focusing on the changing nature and location of insurgent violence rather than the causes. In order to do so, the authors use a dataset of 17,438 violent events in the North Caucasus region between August 1999 and July 2011. The data shows an increase in civilian casualties (wounded or killed) in Ingushetia, Kabardino-Balkaria, and Dagestan, even though the absolute level of violence in the North Caucasus went down from its peak at the beginning of the Second Chechen War (1999-2002). We are thus witnessing a full-scale civil war in the region. Each republic, as we saw earlier, followed very different trajectories

in terms of security and violence. And yet, O'Loughlin, Witmer, and Holland observe that violence, in all three cases, is mostly concentrated in urban centers like Makhachkala, Nazran, and Nalchik following the establishment of the Caucasus Emirate. It marks an important change compared to the dynamics observed at the beginning of guerilla warfare between 2000 and 2002 (2011).

Especially in the case of Dagestan, one can observe an important increase in shootouts in the city, or at checkpoints, as well as targeted assassinations against moderate clerics and government officials. Almost 78 percent of violent acts occurred in a low-elevation zone (under 300 meters) in Dagestan, whereas in Ingushetia and Kabardino-Balkaria most of the attacks happened in mid-elevation (between 300 to 1500 meters). It should, however, not come as a surprise to anyone who regularly conducted field research in the region or to someone who follows media reports. Indeed, the early stage of the Second Chechen War following the withdrawal of Chechen forces led to the establishment of guerilla warfare under Maskhadov's command. As long as the fighting was restrained to the southern part of the republic, guerilla warfare, using the rough terrain, represented the best strategic alternative in order to counteract the effectiveness of the Chechenization process and Russian military superiority. However, when Basayev and Sadualev openly advocated a strategy of diffusion of the conflict and reinforced their relationship with local religious groups, violence started to increase in urban centers.

This observation needs further analysis as it contradicts James Fearon and David Laitin's hypothesis about the positive role played by rough terrains in the onset of civil wars and insurgencies (2003). Although this debate is outside the scope of this research, it is important to underline that rural and mountainous regions, especially in Chechnya and Ingushetia, still play a role in providing safe havens for insurgents, and make it easier for

insurgents to control and identify those who denunciate the insurgency. On the other hand, urban centers offer more tangible governmental targets and could also help with recruitment. At the same time, as mentioned earlier, it is often difficult to differentiate between criminal and insurgent violence. It is rather easy to misinterpret an increase of violence as an upsurge of insurgent activities instead of turfwar between criminal groups. The actual data available from the North Caucasus are disaggregated enough in order to draw conclusions about the role played by rural and urban settings. This is why this research focuses on the causes and patterns of engagement in insurgent groups.

In the case of each republic under study, the early insurgent structure was mainly composed of people who trained or fought in Chechnya between 1994 and 2002. In Kabardino-Balkaria, the military structure of the Yarmuk jamaat was headed by Muslim Atayev, in Ingushetia by Emir Magas, and in Dagestan by Rasul Makasharipov and Rappani Khalilov. These small insurgent groups were composed of experienced fighters with military skills and devotion to the Chechen leadership. The strategy of spillover remained mostly built on Basayev's network and a few dozens of ex-fighters.

Although the concept of Chechen contamination of the North Caucasus sounds catchy as a process to explain the expansion and diffusion of violence across the republic borders, it obviously does not take into account the fact that the death of Basayev and of his comrades in arms between 2005 and 2006 did not stem the violence in the three republics. To the contrary, the upsurge of violence in Dagestan and Ingushetia started as early as 2007 and 2008. How can one explain that a second generation of fighters that did not have any important links with the Chechen insurgency, and especially with Basayev himself, decided to join the insurgency under the umbrella of the ChRI and the CE?

The usual mono-causal explanation, criticized by King and Menon (2010) and Hahn (2007), is to look at the role of radical political Islam in the North Caucasus. However, one has to understand the important difference between radical Islam (Pure Islam) and radical political Islam (Salafism). Indeed, already in the 1990s, Kabardino-Balkaria and Dagestan had a relatively important community of followers of radical Islam. In Kabardino-Balkaria, Musa Mukozhev and Anzor Astemirov were already preaching radical Islam and establishing a Center for the Study of Islam even before the end of the First Chechen War. At the same time, their support for the Chechen struggle was relatively weak and they even refuted Basayev's call for violent jihad against Russia in the interwar period. The two leaders were students and followers of the Dagestani preacher Akhmed-kadi Akhtaev, who openly called for non-violent proselytical activities and for the central role of personal jihad (greater jihad). Mukozhev and Astemirov also challenged the religious domination of the DUMKB through theological debates instead of violent engagement in an insurgent movement.

The case of Dagestan is also similar to Kabardino-Balkaria as followers of radical Islam did not openly challenge the state structure through violent means. The work of Akhtaev denoted the presence of a non-violent branch of radical Islam in Dagestan in the 1990s. The development of the Islamic jamaats under the Sharia law in the Kadar region also exemplified the possibility that radical Islam can cohabit peacefully with secular governments in the North Caucasus. In the 1990s, the concept of an Islamic insurgency was mainly absent from the analysis of Dagestan. Finally, the Chechen invasion of Dagestan in August 1999 did not trigger a wave of support even amongst radical Islamists. Even if some Salafists decided to support the invasion, many openly radical Islamists did not jump on the occasion to be "liberated" by Islamic fighters. The Kachilaev brothers, although close collaborators of Basayev and Khattab, did not choose to support the "Islamic" invasion. Even

Makasharipov, a close associate of Basayev, accepted to leave the insurgency and return to ordinary life before re-engaging in an insurgent group after falling victim to law enforcement abuse.

This argument is not made to downplay the importance of the Salafist presence in Dagestan in the 1990s, but rather to underline the limits of a mono-causal explanation about the diffusion and the upsurge of violence in the North Caucasus. Indeed, one should have observed an earlier and stronger support to Chechen warlords associated with Salafism. Indeed, throughout the interwar period even if the possibilities to engage in Salafism in Chechen training was relatively easy for North Caucasians Muslims, only a minority chose to travel to Urus-Martan or Serzhen-Yurt.

Although radical Islam and Salafism now play an important role in sustaining the ranks of the insurgency all across the North Caucasus, it should not be analyzed in a vacuum. The four crucial processes identified earlier — violence as collective responsibility, violence as an illegal criminal venture, violence as capital, and violence as political dialogue — are crucial elements of the puzzle. The Chechen spillover and the development of radical Islam find a fertile soil in the three republics because of these four processes.

5.1 Violence as Capital

The concept of capital has been popularised by Pierre Bourdieu and remains regularly used in sociology. For Bourdieu, capital can be economic, social, cultural or symbolic. Social capital is defined as “the real as well as potential resources linked to a durable network of relationships” (Bourdieu, 1980: 2). Social actors accumulate different forms of capital by competing between each other in order to obtain and extract social advantage from their

position. Symbolic capital could be seen as an intangible or potential form of power which actors accumulate based on their position in a field or in a configuration.

In the case of the North Caucasus, one can identify four forms of capital — military, economic, social and symbolic — which all have an impact on the forms and levels of violence. The case of symbolic capital will be discussed in the section on vendetta and collective responsibility. This section will focus on the intertwined nature of the three other forms of capital. When specialists on the region approach insurgent and state violence as different forms of violence committed by mutually exclusive group of actors, it eliminates an important relational dynamic in which state actors, just like criminal and insurgent groups, actually engage in similar violent behaviours.

Military Capital into Economic Capital

When political elites or members of security forces engage in extortion or illicit activities, they are rarely identified as criminal actors in scholarly analysis. They are instead seen as political actors that convert their political or military capital into economic resources. The case of Dagestan is particularly conclusive in that regard. Thus, a local journalist describes the relationship between security forces and businessmen in these terms:

“the district attorneys, the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the FSB and the men who work in the courts all got their claws into businesses of the republic by the mid-1990s. (...) Today any shop in Dagestan, even if it has a daily revenue of several thousand rubles (...) has its own “supervisor”, a local beat cop who receives a portion of the profits on a monthly basis. Officials from the security services have essentially become owners of all vital objects within the republic” (Saidov, 2012: 184-185).

In republics like Dagestan or Kabardino-Balkaria, state actors are able to use their position of power to extract rent or other resources from ordinary citizens or businessmen. Saidov adds “it is simply impossible to speak of business being conducted legally today [in

Dagestan]. Therefore, it is quite reasonable to suppose that not all murders and terrorist acts directed against security services are cases of Islamic or some other type of radicalism. They are often the work of crushed and oppressed businessmen.” (Saidov, 2012: 185).

Security operations are also an occasion to extract money from the government and obtain promotion and symbolic capital. Security agencies profit from insurgent violence as they come to be seen as the only possible solution to avoid chaos and instability. “Even the FSB (...) cares more about converting its resources into economic assets than about eradicating terrorist networks” (Baev, 2011: 3). Kirill Kabanov, chairman of the Moscow-based National Anti-Corruption Committee, stated in July 2011 that counter-terrorist operations are a lucrative business which provided an occasion for promotion amongst security services. According to him, one day of an operation costs at least \$ 100,000 to the government (Dzutsev, 2011b).

A counter-terrorist operation is a military deployment where a village is sealed off and its road controlled with checkpoints. Often a curfew is also imposed to the entire village, and numerous home searches and arrests are done for a period between a few days or a few months, as in the case of the village of Gimry in Dagestan. This village is known for its religious fervor, the presence of many insurgents and the precedence of Sharia over Russian laws.

Similar counter-terrorist regimes were imposed on the Elbrus region following the insurgent or criminal attacks against the ski resort in February 2011. The counter-terrorist regime was lifted only in November 2011. The local Balkars saw the subsequent counter-terrorist regime as a way to undermine their own tourist infrastructures in order to favour Khloponin’s economic plan (Dzutsev, 2011c). It was also claimed that the counter-terrorist operation was launched in order to redirect tourist investment in Sochi instead of Kabardino-

Balkaria. Although closer to a conspiracy theory, this idea highlights the tension between the state-driven economic strategy favouring Moscow elites over the interests of the local population (Dzutsev, 2012b). Combating terrorists becomes an occasion to dictate who will control a very lucrative business in the North Caucasus.

Security actors also have the privilege to capitalize on their position of power to extract money and bribes in their day-to-day activities. During the Second Chechen War, Human Rights Watch reported a regular practice following mop-up operations in various villages:

“The majority of former detainees interviewed by Human Rights Watch reported that they were only released after their families had paid substantial bribes to their Russian captors and predatory intermediaries (...) In fact, bribes were demanded for release so often that in many cases, detention itself appears to have been motivated by the promise of financial gain, rather than by the need to identify rebel elements.(...) The guilt or innocence of the detainee seem to have little impact on the extortion process, except on the amount of money involved (...) and even confirmed Chechen fighters can be bought out for the appropriate amount” (2000: 5).

Numerous reports and academic works have reported that pro-Russian Chechen and Russian forces have used the mop-up operations (*zachitski*) to loot from ordinary citizens. This looting process is still regularly observed in Chechnya and Dagestan. In October 2011, it was reported by Memorial that Dagestani forces conducted a counter-terrorist operations by sealing off the village of Khutrakh for seven days.⁷⁴ According to testimonies collected by Memorial, the security forces looted money, material resources, and food, while at the same time terrorizing the local population with physical abuse.

⁷⁴ “Clean-up in Khutrakh village in Dagestan was punitive action, human rights activists assert” *Kavkazskii uzel*, 17 October 2011, available at <http://www.eng.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/18691/>

Bribes are not limited to mop-up operations but apply to routine activities such as crossing checkpoints or walking on the street. Policemen use their dominant position in the war against terror to extract money from ordinary citizens, most often devout Muslims. Indeed, especially in Dagestan, the anti-Wahhabi law offers them the opportunity to control any suspected Wahhabis. The same procedure exists at checkpoints or during counterterrorist operations. The evasive description of Wahhabi allows the security personnel to control and arrest almost anybody. In many occasions, the control is simply done to vulnerable people to extract a bribe:

“A young man, who attends Friday prayers, does not drink or use drugs and who has no criminal activity to his name would be at least suspected of supporting the “Wahhabites”. The release of such a man following his arrest could only be achieved if his family paid off the authorities. If no “ransom” were forthcoming, it would be simple to fabricate an indictment of illegally bearing arms or possession of ammunition. (...) The torture and beatings going on in the pre-trial holding cells have been described by all media outlets with the exception of the internal newspapers of the ministry of internal affairs and the attorney general’s office. *The police have become the most important threat to the safety of Dagestan’s citizens*” (Saidov, 2012: 187, emphasis is mine).

It was regularly reported by human rights workers and journalists that the police possess a list of “wahhabis” that are regularly stopped and controlled. In numerous incidents, it was reported that the police tried to plant drugs or other illegal substances on them or at their homes in order to arrest them. One can also observe an important number of cases where ordinary citizens are prosecuted for supporting, financially or materially, the insurgents (for instance, by buying cell phones) because they are on a Wahhabi list or refuse to collaborate with the police.

A similar use of military capital to create economic and symbolic capital is also observed in the number of ordinary citizens arrested, tortured and subsequently presented as members of the insurgency eliminated in special operations. Another recurrent pattern in

Dagestan, and also in Chechnya, is to shoot at cars that do not stop at checkpoints or that appear suspicious. Often when casualties happen, the scene is presented as an exchange of fire between police forces and militants, even when peaceful citizens are involved. In order to increase their symbolic capital, security agencies often claim to have “neutralized” an important number of suspected militants, while in fact many are only ordinary citizens. They also do so in order to hide their evident mistakes.

As a North Caucasus journalist and human rights worker reported recently, the Dagestani forces maintained a pool of kidnapped individuals who confessed under torture of being involved in the insurgency. These individuals are usually used as scapegoats when the number of arrests needs to be inflated following important insurgent or suicide attacks (Dzutsev 2012c). The prisoners are required to grow a beard in order to be identified as militants when the time will come. According to Memorial, the year 2011 saw an increase of fifty percent in abductions, with seventy documented cases in the North Caucasus.

The practice is by no way limited to Dagestan and extends to Chechnya, Ingushetia and Kabardino-Balkaria; the case of Batyr Albakov in Ingushetia in 2009 is a good example. Albakov was brought under custody in broad daylight by unidentified servicemen who refused to show any identification documents. He was later found shot dead with signs of torture (Amnesty International, 2012: 20-21). The government reported that he was killed in a shootout with police forces and was on the “wanted” militant list. Amnesty International presents several other cases in their report. One can observe recent cases being reported in Kabardino-Balkaria, as with Beslan Zeushev in Baksan (Dzutsev, 2011a).

Most of the time, the only way to prove that these people were not militants is through investigative reporting done by local journalists. Hadjimurad Kamalov and Natalya Estemirova (Sauloy, 2011), before their assassination, were known to regularly challenge the

official versions given after special operations. *Kavkazskii Uzel* conducted an interview with a young Dagestani from Shamilkala in Untsukul district who was kidnapped by the security services and subsequently released. The young man did not want to report his abuse as he believed that the Dagestani legal system could not prosecute members of the security services because of the level of corruption in the republic.⁷⁵

Military Capital into Political Capital

Chechnya is probably the most evident case when looking at the conversion of military into political capital. After the First Chechen War and the sectarian clashes in the interwar period, many insurgents chose to switch sides and fight with the Russians. Ruslan and Sulim Yamadayev and their militia were incorporated into the 42th Guards Motorized Rifle Division of the Russian Army. Because they had demonstrated their military capacity as insurgents during the First War and their will to fight Wahhabists in Chechnya, these ex-insurgents were able to integrate into the state security apparatus. Their new positions helped them secure tangible economic advantages by controlling reconstruction funds and the shadow economy in Chechnya.

Another example of this conversion of capital could be found in the various amnesties conducted by the federal government and the Kadyrov administration. In 2006, following the death of Shamil Basayev, an important number of Chechen insurgents were co-opted in Kadyrov's militia following a wave of amnesties to form the Yug and Sever battalions. Kadyrov's personal militia is made up of 40 to 50 percent of ex-insurgent fighters (7000) (Kramer, 2005). Sulim Yamadayev, after the murder of his brother Ruslan in

⁷⁵ Ахмед Магомедов, "Избитые силовиками жители Гимров чувствуют себя удовлетворительно, сообщил глава села" *Kavkazskii uzel*, 4 February 2012, available at <http://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/200535/>

Moscow, revealed the presence of many ex-Wahhabites in Chechen police forces (North Caucasus Analysis, 2008b).

One last example about the conversion of military to economic and political capital is the case of Ramzan Kadyrov himself. After the death of his father in May 2004, Kadyrov was able to build a 15,000 - 20,000 men personal militia to confront the insurgency. He succeeded in his plan to eliminate other warlords, and to centralise all military and economic power in his hands. Instead of being one element among others in Moscow's strategy, Kadyrov became a powerful local warlord with the power to dictate his conditions to the federal administration. Kadyrov's military power assured him the capacity to negotiate and request special treatment regarding federal transfers, local sovereignty, and religious policy. Indeed, Kadyrov openly defies federal law about the Islamisation of the Chechen Republic and his management of federal funds. Kadyrov's extravaganza is tolerated by the federal government because it does not have other options to stabilize Chechnya, and opposing him would probably lead to a painful military campaign.

Kadyrov is slowly but surely trying to push his influence over the entire region by using his military power. In April 2005, Emil Pain reported the growing number of military operations initiated by Kadyrov and his militia on Dagestan territory, especially around the city of Khasavyurt (2005). The official reason was to eliminate a Chechen military formation linked with Rappani Khalilov. Gunfights took place between local citizens and Kadyrov forces. Kadyrov claimed that the local police and citizens were supporting Chechen fighters. He also lobbied the federal government to be allowed to fight the insurgents in Ingushetia and other regions of Dagestan. Ingush and Dagestani leaders have formally opposed this option, as Kadyrov's methods are known to be primarily tailored to advance his personal economic incentives. As Pain points out, local residents have offered a different explanation

as to why they need to take arms against Kadyrov's militia: to prevent them from looting. The ethnic composition of Khasavyurt is in majority Akkin-Chechens, making it a valuable target for Kadyrov in his quest for transforming his military power into economic and political capital. Khasavyurt is one of the main points where Chechen oil is sold on the market, making Kadyrov more than willing to control the other end of the oil shadow economy in the North Caucasus. In January of 2012, Kadyrov finally concluded a deal with the Dagestan administration allowing him to carry out special operations on Dagestani territory. This deal comes after Kadyrov repeatedly claimed that Chechen insurgents were escaping or hiding in the borderlands between Chechnya and Dagestan. It is rather difficult to assess the reasons the Dagestani authorities accept to allow Kadyrov on their territory. Political pressure from the federal government could explain the situation. Similar claims were made about the Ingushetian borders where Kadyrov and the federal government claim that Doku Umarov, the leader of the Caucasus Emirate, is hiding.

The case of Chechnya demonstrates the importance of the transformation from a military and symbolic capital obtained while fighting the federal or the insurgent forces, to a political and economic capital. Violence is thus driven in this case by personal incentives over religious or nationalities grievances.

Social Capital in Economic Capital

North Caucasus political analysts can observe one last form of capital conversion regarding government activities in the region. Many state bureaucrats use their social capital (political position) to obtain personal and economic advantages. From police forces to university professors, the highly corrupt state of most of the North Caucasian bureaucracy creates the structural conditions for insurgent violence. In the last chapter, I discussed the

level of corruption in Dagestan where social mobility and the possibility to secure state employment is linked to clan connection and significant bribe taking. The ex-President Aliiev openly admitted that not a single bureaucratic posting could be obtained without a bribe. Many young people cannot afford to buy such positions or pay a bribe to obtain a chance to complete their military service or to obtain “illegally” the paperwork that proved that they did. Young people are trapped in a system where they do not see future perspectives, while they are increasingly the target of religious repression. Engaging in an insurgent group is often one of the only solutions they can consider if they choose to remain in the North Caucasus. Many young people choose to leave the North Caucasus and work in Russia where they are victim to ethno-religious profiling and ethnic intolerance. In chapter 7, it will be demonstrated in detail how humiliation and profiling contribute to the rise of violence in the region.

5.2 Blood Feud, Vendetta, and Collective Responsibility in the North Caucasus

Blood Feud (*krovnyaya mest'*) is a cultural practice in most of the North Caucasian nationalities, particularly in Ingushetia, Chechnya, and Dagestan. The feud, an old historical tradition is governed through a set of customary laws (*adat*) which establish the boundaries of the process of vendetta. They define the entire modus operandi of the blood feud including how it should be declared, and when and how it should cease.

Derluigian argues that clans and teips in Chechnya, and jamaats in Dagestan, can be analysed with the use of two major sociological concepts: social capital, and the network of trust (2005: 47). The *adat* emphasises the importance of the concept of reputation. The collective reputation of the teip or the jamaat can be seen as a form of social capital. Clan networks (teip and jamaat) are “traditional micro-solidarities of extended family and clan”

(Derluguian, 2005: 63), providing support against external problems. At the same time, customary laws oblige its members to protect the honour of the clan. Souleimanov writes that “Dagestani society [or jamaat] lives in line with the patriarchal code of honor where the main virtue of a woman consists in her purity and that of man in his courage, ability to revenge humiliation, and to ensure dignified livelihood and protection for his family members” (2010: 1). Valery Tishkov has argued that the two Chechen wars have destroyed the social links in Chechen society and provoked a demodernisation process in which vendetta became an important social practice no longer bounded by customs (2004). Indeed, if in the past the Council of Elders was overseeing the practice of vendetta to limit its spiralling effect, the Chechen wars then radically changed this tradition.

The practice of vendetta plays a central role in inciting individuals to join insurgent groups. Often vendetta becomes the only way for them to obtain a sense of justice in a society where the autonomy of the judicial system is not established. Ordinary citizens that cannot rely on a judicial system or independent police forces to report the abuse committed against them will turn to their clan and their customary laws to seek revenge.

Humiliation becomes one of the most important factors that lead to violence. In Dagestan, several cases of public humiliation involving radical Islamists have been reported. Security forces regularly force radical Islamists to shave their beards. The refusal usually leads to physical abuse, abductions and sometimes death. Government forces also cracked down on mosques associated with radical Islam during prayer time. In Magaramkent and Shamhal, in Dagestan, the followers were beaten as they were praying.⁷⁶

⁷⁶ Ахмед Магомедов, “В Дагестане избитые прихожане заявляют, что не могут подать жалобу на силовиков” *Kavkazskii uzel*, 17 May 2011, available at www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/185561/

It is crucial to understand that customary laws in North-Eastern Caucasus are not in line with the Sharia law. Indeed, Islamic law prohibits fellow Muslims to seek revenge against innocent civilians (Lieven, 1999: 28). At the same time, Sharia law can be interpreted in such manners that will allow violence against the infidels, including ordinary citizens. Customary laws and Sharia law can thus reinforce each other, depending on the situation. Soulemainov and Ditrych explain:

“In the North Caucasus, there has occurred over time a mutual intertwining of these two elements, of (regional) *jihadist* ideology and the mechanism of blood feud, which has resulted in an escalation and an expanding circle of persons involved. One may consider the blood feud as a specific means of mobilisation for this region, while local *jihadism* plays the role of a (supranational) ideology of the resistance” (2008: 1220).

Insurgent groups play on the feeling of lawlessness and the will of people to seek revenge. Soulemainov and Dytrich explain that younger people get more easily involved in the cycle of blood feud as they are physically more apt to do so and are more prone to risk-taking. Engaging in an insurgent group offers the possibility to avenge the wrongs committed against them. However, after being involved in insurgent groups, young people do not have to option to go back to civilian life. Indeed, insurgents often force new recruits to appear in propaganda videos in order to compel them to remain inside the insurgency.

At that moment, radical Islamic ideology begins to play an increasingly important role in their lives. Although they did not join an insurgent movement in the name of religion, their socialization inside a religious insurgent group leads them to engage directly with Salafist ideology. This is peculiar to the generational change in the insurgency in the North Caucasus. If older fighters that trained and fought in Chechnya chose to do so for religious reasons or nationalism, the new generation is often exposed to Islam after its engagement in

violence. These various pathways toward the insurgency will be further analysed in the chapter 8.

Insurgent groups are not the only political actors that rely on the importance of collective responsibility and honour. State actors also target ordinary civilians using the principle of collective responsibility. In Chechnya, Ramzan Kadyrov has put forward a strategy of vendetta targeting the families of the militants. The Chechen President has institutionalized that practice as an effective tool of counter-insurgency. Indeed, since early 2008, the Chechen forces regularly burn or bomb the house of the relatives of insurgents, with all their belongings, as a way to put pressure on the members of the insurgency.⁷⁷ Arson attacks against the relatives of militants were covered in depth by Natalya Estemirova before her murder in July 2009. The relatives are also kidnapped, beaten and tortured in order to force rebels out of the insurgency. It was reported that forty relatives of Magomed Khambiev, former Defense Minister of the ChRI, were abducted in order to force Khambiev to surrender. Similar actions were taken against the family of Aslan Maskhadov and Dokku Umarov (North Caucasus Analysis, 2005). Although Kadyrov's militia was the main source of this abduction strategy, other pro-Russian forces, such as the Vostok battalion, were involved. It could also explain why several members of the battalion were later abducted or killed in Chechnya and in Russia.

In April 2011, Magomed Taisumov, a member of the Vostok battalion, was abducted and subsequently killed in his village of Benoi in Chechnya. Investigators claimed to have uncovered a blood feud linked to Taisumov's military and/or criminal activities. A blood-feud existed between former members of the Vostok Battalion and the relative of Magomed

⁷⁷ For a recent example, see: "В Чечне сожжены дома родственников убитого в спецоперации Бангаева, сообщают местные жители" *Kavkazskii uzel*, 5 May 2012, available at <http://chechnya.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/206117/>

Khambiev.⁷⁸ Already Yuri Budanov's murder is suspected to be related to vendetta⁷⁹. Doku Umarov and the Caucasus Emirate claimed responsibility for the murder. They openly warned Russian war criminals that they would be targeted by the CE.⁸⁰ Even Ramzan Kadyrov openly voiced his disgust and hatred against Budanov in the last years. It demonstrates that although fighting between pro-Russian forces and rebels is still going, both sides share common enemies and objectives.

Ingushetia followed the path of Chechnya and established death squads to destroy the insurgency. Although it was not publicized as much as it was in Chechnya and Kabardino-Balkaria, the death squads directly targeted the relatives of the insurgents. Following the capture of Emir Magas in 2010, Ingush security services blew up two apartment buildings where his relatives were living. The security services claimed that the apartments contained explosives that could not be defused.⁸¹

Security services in Ingushetia also regularly abduct insurgent's relatives in order to force them to surrender or to force them to plead guilty in a closed trial to avoid public scrutiny. Amnesty International reported the case of Zalina Yelkhoroeva, the sister of a militant recently arrested. She was abducted at one of the checkpoints between North Ossetia and Ingushetia, probably by the FSB, and is still missing. Following the abduction, the judicial case of the militant was rapidly concluded when he pleaded guilty (Amnesty International, 2012: 27).

⁷⁸ "Earlier kidnapped Magomed Taisumov, Sulim Yamadaev's associate, found dead in Chechnya" Kavkazskii uzel, 1 April 2011, <http://www.eng.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/16644/>

⁷⁹ Yuri Budanov was Russian military officer convicted of abduction and murder against a young Chechen woman committed in March 2000.

⁸⁰ "Амир ИК Докку Абу Усман: «Участь Буданова ожидает и других преступников»" Kavkaz Center, 23 July 2011 available at <http://www.kavkazcenter.com/russ/content/2011/07/23/83755.shtml>

⁸¹ Vyacheslav Feraposhkin "Nine persons lost within a week in armed conflict in Northern Caucasus, March 11 2011 available at <http://www.eng.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/16385/>

This strategy of collective responsibility against the family of the insurgents also started to appear in Kabardino-Balkaria. We saw in the last chapter that the President of Kabardino-Balkaria openly supported the creation of an anti-Wahhabi militia in order to protect citizens and advocate a policy of collective responsibility against the families of militants. Indeed, the “Black Hawks” openly targeted members of the insurgency and their family. The authorities in Kabardino-Balkaria are also reported to claim that explosives are located in the houses of militants or their relatives and blow them up for security reasons (Dzutsev, 2011a)

Gadzhi Makhachev, Dagestan’s permanent representative in Moscow, called for the creation of paramilitary squads in order to avenge the murder of police forces at the end of 2009; he later retracted his statement (The Jamestown Foundation, 2009). However, in July 2012, a group of Dagestani vigilantes released a video where they described themselves as modern “Robin Hoods” and openly threatened members of the underground insurgency in the region of Kizlyurt. The President of Dagestan openly supported them in the summer of 2012. So far, the Dagestani group targets the militant themselves and their supporters but not their family (Vatchagaev, 2012j).

The importance of collective responsibility as a factor impelling individuals toward the insurgency is so central that political leaders have started to launch programs to break the cycle of vendetta. In February 2009, the Ingush President, Yunus-Bek Yevkurov, appealed to 180 families to drop their claims of vendetta and let the justice organs deal with the crimes committed under the Zyazikov regime.⁸² Yevkurov established an official commission in

⁸²“Ingush President Calls For End To Blood Feuds” Radio Free Europe, 17 February 2009 , available at http://www.rferl.org/content/Ingush_President_Calls_For_End_To_Blood_Feud/1494379.html

charge of this policy. The family of Magomed Yevloev, the former military emir of the ChRI, agreed to end the cycle of vendetta.

In September 2008, when Yevloev was killed while under custody, his family openly declared a blood feud against the ex-President Zyazikov, the Interior Minister, Musa Medov, and their families. In August 2010, a policeman, Ibragim Yevloev, responsible for the murder of Magomed Yevloev was shot dead in a café in Ingushetia (The Jamestown Foundation, 2010a). In the fall of 2008, an assassination attempt occurred against Zyazikov.

In 2010, Kadyrov launched a similar strategy to control the growing cycle of vendetta in the republic. During the Ramadan period, the Chechen leader claimed that 60 cases of blood feuds have been resolved.⁸³ Although the numbers are probably exaggerated, the claim itself still suggests that it represents a growing problem in Chechnya. Already in 2002, Akhmad Kadyrov had established a reconciliation commission to limit the effect of the vendetta cycle and facilitate the process of Chechenization in the republic.

Collective responsibility and the vendetta cycle also contribute to the increase of brutality done to police forces and insurgents. Innocent civilians are often killed simply because of their association with rebels or police forces. Indeed, relatives or friends of insurgents are regularly killed as collateral damage by security forces. On the insurgent side, collective responsibility extends to targeted assassinations committed by rebel forces or criminal groups. As an example, in September 2011, a high-ranking official in the FSB, Colonel Ibragim Jabrailov, was killed when his car exploded in Khasavyurt. His mother,

⁸³ “Alexander Vladimirov Cracking Down On North Caucasus Blood Feuds” Vestnik Kavkaz, 29 September 2010, available at <http://vestnikkavkaza.net/articles/society/6330.html>

sister, and niece were badly wounded in the explosions.⁸⁴ Often close relatives are killed as collateral damages as insurgents justify this practice as a way to fight “infidels”.

The blurred frontier between collateral damage and collective responsibility applies likewise to counter-terrorist operations perpetrated by security forces. While conducting operations against militants hidden in their house or apartment, the special services often killed the relatives of the militants. They are usually categorized as collaborators or insurgents, limiting any possible public inquiries about this form of violence as collective responsibility. Women are usually killed in special operations as police forces claim that they were wearing explosive belts and were potential suicide bombers. In Dagestan in July 2011, two women were killed in the village of Dagestanskie Ogni in nebulous circumstances because they were apparently wearing explosive belts (Vatchagaev, 2011a).

Finally, the importance of the collective responsibility also extends to the members of the family itself and how they could bring shame on their clan. In November 2008, the bodies of six Chechen women were discovered in Chechnya. They were probably murdered by their relatives because their behaviors were deemed shameful by their family and clan. In response to this event, the Chechen Ombudsman, Nurdi Nukhazhiyev, said: “Unfortunately, we have among us some women who are beginning to forget the code of conduct that should be followed by mountain women. The male members of their family who consider that they have been dishonoured carry out acts of mob justice.” (Council of Europe, 2010: 9). Although these murders are not directly linked to insurgent violence, often local murders are presented as such. It is extremely difficult for a researcher to identify ordinary criminal

⁸⁴“В Дагестане в результате взрыва погиб подполковник ФСБ Читайте подробнее” 1 September 2011, Forbes.ru, available at <http://www.forbes.ru/news/72936-v-dagestane-v-rezultate-vzryva-pogib-podpolkovnik-fsb>

violence in opposition to insurgency violence. The insurgency becomes an occasion to justify many criminal activities according to the master cleavage.

5.3 Violence as an Illegal Criminal Venture

Criminal violence is usually underestimated in the study of violence in the North Caucasus. A main reason is that it is difficult, if not impossible, to differentiate between criminal violence and insurgent violence. Thus, criminal groups increasingly use an Islamic rhetoric to justify their crimes. In Dagestan and Kabardino-Balkaria, Islamic jamaats have established a system of racketeering of local businesses to finance the insurgency. The system is officially presented as a form of Islamic tax, *zakat*. In practice, however, the line between an Islamic group and a profiteering group using an Islamic narrative to extract money from local people is extremely blurred. Magomedislam Magomedov, the President of Dagestan, stated that many businessmen complained that insurgent groups regularly collect the *zakat*, affecting the local economy.⁸⁵

This pattern is quite regular in Dagestan as members of criminal groups and/or insurgent groups regularly blow up alcohol-trading retail stores if the owners do not pay them on a regular basis. The criminal acts are usually claimed to be allowed under the Sharia law. Videos in the fall of 2010 have circulated about terrorist acts conducted against alcohol stores to demonstrate the danger of refusing the insurgent tax. These attacks were conducted in broad daylight in the center of Makhachkala.⁸⁶ In January 2011, *Kavkazskii uzel* reported

⁸⁵ Вефадер Меликов “Глава Дагестана призвал силовиков разобраться с распространителями «флешек» для бизнесменов” RIA Novosti, 16 January 2012, available at <http://www.riadagestan.ru/news/2012/1/16/131222/>

⁸⁶ “7 милиционеров погибли в результате нападения боевиков” RIA Novosti 11 November 2010 Available at www.riadagestan.ru/news/2010/11/11/105542/

that a bomb exploded in a café in Khasavyurt killing four people and wounding six.⁸⁷ Still in January, a previous attack was perpetrated in the suburb of Khasavyurt against another café.⁸⁸ According to the website, the attack was perpetrated against the café in retaliation for not paying the Islamic tax. In Khasavyurt, these attacks occur regularly against any establishment selling alcohol. Anzor Astemirov openly admitted that his insurgent group was collecting zakat on a regular basis in Kabardino-Balkaria. Valery Usov, the head of the Kabardino-Balkaria branch of the Russian Investigative Committee, stated that the rebels were mainly funding their activities from inside the republic through racketeering activities (Jamestown Foundation, 2011b).

The insurgent tax is not limited to businessmen; it also applies also to politicians and government members. Indeed, criminal groups often directly target politicians and threaten them of possible assassinations or abductions if they do not pay a large sum of money. The modus operandi is basic; the militants abduct the individuals, torture them, and send a USB stick to the family showing evidence of this torture in order to extract a ransom. While conducting interviews with local journalists in Dagestan, I came into contact with many of this extortion material. The region of Kaspiisk and its criminal group were identified as one of the hubs of this type of criminal activity. Recently, in a meeting with the highest-ranking officials in the North Caucasus, the Russian government acknowledged the intertwined relations between criminal and insurgent groups in Dagestan in the racketeering and

⁸⁷ “Explosion in Khasavyurt is qualified as an act of terror” Kavkazskii uzel, 27 January 2011, available at <http://www.eng.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/15938/>

⁸⁸ “Three persons lost in explosion in Khasavyurt” Kavkazskii uzel, 15 January 2011, available at <http://www.eng.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/15871/>

kidnapping business.⁸⁹ Vatchagaev reports that Ingush insurgents also engaged in similar racketeering activities (2012b).

Rebels or criminals are also engaged in other illicit activities. Drug trafficking has been reported to be a growing problem in Dagestan (Ware and Kisriev, 2009). I personally witnessed important criminal activity related to drug trafficking while conducting fieldwork in Makhachkala. One can postulate that a tangible link exists between insurgents and criminal groups engaged in importing and distributing drugs across the North Caucasus. Similar links can also be postulated between corrupt police forces and criminal networks. I personally encountered personal testimonies in the North Caucasus about policemen arresting people for drug possession in order to extract bribes from them.

The shadow economy, including criminal activities, plays a central role in the logistical aspect of insurgent groups. As Zürcher argues, the shadow economy was one of the main funding sources for many Caucasian wars, beginning with the two Chechen wars (2007: 113-114). The shadow economy is a necessary condition to sustain an insurgent movement and insure its survival in a context of increasing governmental repression. It is often the only way to finance its activities, since foreign financial support is increasingly difficult to obtain and many governments crack down on diaspora members sending money to support insurgent groups.

5.4 Violence as Political and Religious Dialogue

Violence is often used as a way to put forward political and religious voices when other non-violent channels are blocked. One can thus say that violence becomes an extreme form of dialogue between various groups. In Ingushetia and Dagestan, the government has

⁸⁹ Маирбек Агаев “В июле 12-го” Chernovik, 6 July 2012, available at <http://www.chernovik.net/news/499/ECONOMICS/2012/07/06/13781#>

established death squads mimicking Kadyrov forces in order to repress radical Islam and the support for insurgent groups. Masked individuals in cars without license plates break into the house of ordinary citizens at night. They do not show any identification papers and abduct people without giving any notice to their relatives. According to the Council of Europe, 536 were abducted in Chechnya, 186 in Ingushetia, and 671 in Dagestan between 2006 and 2009. (2010: 17 and 28). Since the beginning of the Second Chechen War, the number of missing people in Chechnya is between 3000 and 5000. The police forces and the death squads almost never apprehend insurgents. They are killed during their arrest allegedly because they offered resistance. Many of these extrajudicial killings happen at checkpoints where military forces or FSB troops claim that they came under attack, returned fire and killed a certain number of individuals. The usual pattern implies that explosives or arms are found in the car. It is rather rare that these cases are fully investigated.

In Ingushetia, the cases of Ibragim Gardanov and Magomed Chahkiev represent the best example of extrajudicial killings committed by Russian forces. On February 7, 2007, the two individuals were shot at point blank after being surrounded by security forces. The shooting happened prior to arresting the suspected militants and neither or the militants offered any resistance (Amnesty International, 2012: 32). Only ordinary citizens are arrested and kept in secret locations for interrogation and torture purposes. To the contrary, most of the special operations conducted outside the North Caucasus and on the rest of the Russian territory usually finish in arrests, whether they involve religious militants or Russian nationalists. Violence and murders are becoming the only way the government agrees to dialogue with insurgents. Indeed, high-ranking officials often remind the media and the local population that they will never negotiate with the insurgents. It creates a vicious circle where insurgents know that even if they surrender during special operations or to simply return to

civilian life, they will be either killed or tortured. Although commissions for reintegration of militants exist in Dagestan and in Ingushetia, the criteria to be accepted in the process are so limiting that most of the insurgents are usually excluded. A human rights worker linked to the commission confirmed to me that one insurgent had to wait several months in order for the commission to accept his application; during this time, he was killed by security forces.

Security forces and local forces also target independent journalists, NGO workers, and bureaucrats focusing on human rights abuses to intimidate them. The murder of journalists can be seen as an extreme form of political dialogue between the elites and local media. Anna Politkovskaya⁹⁰, Natalia Estemirova, Magomed Yevloyev, Maksharip Aushev, Rashid Ozdoyev and Hadjimurad Kamalov were all killed in the North Caucasus because they were trying to uncover corruption cases and human rights abuses. Most of these murders were probably committed by government forces, although no suspects were convicted.

Cases of torture happen on a regular basis in the North Caucasus, especially in Chechnya, Dagestan, and Ingushetia. Torture is used as a way to discourage the support of and the participation in the insurgent movement. Some cases illustrate this level of violence. Zelimkhan Chitigov, a twenty-year old ethnic Chechen resident of Ingushetia, was abducted at his home by 30 to 40 armed men in April 2010 (Amnesty International, 2012: 46-47). The standard procedures of abduction were in display: the armed men did not identify themselves; they did not give any reason for the abduction, and were driving cars without license plates. His hands were taped to his back and a bag was put on his head. He was brought to the Centre for Combating Extremism of the Ministry of the Interior. While being interrogated about militants, he was also coerced to confess terrorist activities. His refusal led

⁹⁰ Politkovskaya was killed in Moscow, however the murder was linked to her investigation on human rights in Chechnya.

to “beating, electrocution, pulling out of toe-nails, twisting of skin with pliers, and suspension on metal bars” (Amnesty International, 2012: 46). According to Chitigov’s testimony, both the Ingush forces and Russian federal forces considered killing him and presenting him as a local “emir” after his beard had grown for a few weeks. The torture lasted for three complete days without any food or water. Chitigov was finally placed in custody and interrogated by investigators. At that moment, the young Chechen could not walk and was brought in a wheel-chair in front of the judge. After losing consciousness, he was hospitalized for the next two months before being released by police forces. He was in critical condition, unable to talk or simply walk. A subsequent medical examination revealed he suffered from “head, spinal and internal organ injuries which in their assessment were probably the result of a combination of beatings and electrocution during which an electrode was placed in his mouth” (Amnesty International, 2012: 46). Chitigov was also a victim of several panic attacks after sustaining so much physical pain and atrocities.

The Karabulak police commander was later prosecuted for his actions in several cases, including Chitigov’s, after the personal involvement of the Ingush President. Nevertheless, this case constitutes the tip of the iceberg in terms of torture in Ingushetia, as most cases remained undocumented or the bodies are dumped in the forest and claimed to be killed during special operations.

Similar cases are observed in Dagestan, as described by the Dagestani Abdurashid Saidov about the methods of the Ministry of Internal Affairs:

“Torture methods have shocked even men from other security services. One such torture is completely grinding down the teeth of a strapped-down using a file. Another—inserting a tube into the anus, threading through a piece of barbed wire, removing the tube and then pulling the wire until the victim confesses. There is also the suspension of people by their handcuffed hands and forcing someone to sit on a bottle so that it penetrates the anus” (2012: 189)

The methods described are by no means anecdotal, as I personally witnessed several videos of torture while conducting interviews with journalists and human rights workers in Dagestan. In addition to the gruesome videos, I encountered similar stories while conducting interviews.

Insurgent violence can also be seen through the prism of extreme political dialogue. Insurgents are using violence in order to be able to influence political outcomes in the various republics. In the case of Kabardino-Balkaria, it was argued by local actors during local interviews that the important rise of violence was the consequence of opposition groups trying to force Moscow to name a new President in the fall of 2010.⁹¹ Insurgent groups seek to impose their political objectives through the use of violence. Similar dynamics can be observed in Dagestan and in Ingushetia.

Violence has also become a way to dissuade the government to use repression against the insurgents and their family. The violence against relatives of security forces and militants is growing in the region. Emir Salikh, leader of the Sharia jamaat, warned the government that if the insurgents' families continue to be targeted, Dagestani insurgent forces would start to target directly the family of security forces (quoted in Vatchagaev, 2011b). A similar violent dialogue has been observed between anti-wahhabi militia and insurgents in Kabardino-Balkaria in 2011. Both sides openly warned the other that they would target their relatives in order to force them to cease their activities.

In Ingushetia, the insurgent movement openly claimed responsibility for the attack against the market of Vladikavkaz committed in September 2010. According to the rebels, this attack was conducted in order to put pressure on the federal and republican governments

⁹¹“Mufti of Kabardino-Balkaria Anas Pshikhachev struggled with extremism and illegal persecution of Muslims” Kavkazskii uzel, 17 December 2010, available at <http://www.eng.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/15577/>

about the Prigorodny issue. Yevkurov, after his nomination in 2008, claimed that his government would not put forward any grievances about Prigorodny to the North Ossetia government. Insurgents used violence against civilians in order to raise this contentious issue. One can also claim that the Beslan terrorist attack was also used in order to activate a conflict between the Ossets and Ingush about Prigorodny. Violence can thus be used as way to voice territorial, political, and social grievances.

Violence also serves to instill fear amongst non-believers or individuals that do not adhere to Islamic law. As an example in August 2011, it was reported by that Islamic militants killed four individuals, including a policeman, who were drinking in a public place during the Ramadan in Khasavyurt district⁹². In July 2011, in the village of Mutsalaul in Khasavyurt district, a woman was targeted by the insurgency for selling alcohol. The insurgents first threw a grenade in her backyard and then a month later shot at her house with machine guns. In Makhachkala, in January 2011, three armed men entered into a local bar and opened fire inside the establishment; they then set the building on fire (The Jamestown Foundation 2011a). In November 2010, two bombs exploded in a liquor store in Malgobek, partially destroying it.⁹³ In January 2011, two fortune-tellers were killed in the capital city of Dagestan, Makhachkala (The Jamestown Foundation, 2011a). In May 2011, in the village of Mamaaul, a couple was killed because they were apparently engaged in non-Islamic practices such as fortune-telling and non-traditional medicine.⁹⁴

At the same time, violence is slowly becoming one of the only forms of dialogue between Sufis and Salafis. Ordinary Muslim followers often openly fight in the street in the

⁹² "Insurgent leader killed in Makhachkala" American Committee for Peace in the Caucasus, available at: <http://www.peaceinthecaucasus.org/newsletter/9814>.

⁹³ "В Ингушетии произошел взрыв возле магазина" Kavkazskii uzel, 9 November 2010, available at <http://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/176757/>

⁹⁴ "A fortune-teller's family fired upon in Dagestan, two persons wounded" Kavkazskii uzel, May 9 2011, available at <http://www.eng.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/17013/>

name of their faith and their interpretation of Islam. In June 2011, a street brawl exploded between Sufis and Salafis about the construction of a mosque in the village of Komsomol. Salafis denounced the local Imam as being controlled by the DUM of Dagestan. A similar massive street brawl happened in the village of Yuzhno-Sukhokumsk involving 150 people in January 2010.⁹⁵

Religious dialogues between Sufis and Salafis to establish a relative peaceful coexistence in Dagestan are usually spoiled by insurgents or local police officers by directly targeting the peace negotiators. In 2010, Bekmurzi Bekmurzaev, the head of the Ministry of National Affairs, Religion and External Communications, was killed by insurgents as he was responsible for establishing a dialogue with the rebels. Recently, in May 2011, a Salafi representative, Abbas Kebedov, was openly threatened by insurgents for his participation in the peace dialogue.

The murder of imams and moderate clerics in Dagestan and in Kabardino-Balkaria in the last three years (2010-2012) has been a new trend in the violent dialogue between sectarian groups in the North Caucasus. Insurgent groups have been directly targeting moderate clerics because of their alleged anti-Islamic activities. Some of these attacks have been claimed by insurgent groups. One of these cases is described in chapter 6 as one of the most important sheikhs in Dagestan was killed a few months after I conducted an interview with him. More recently, in August 2012, Said Efandi Chirkeisky, the most important Sheikh in Dagestan, was killed by a suicide bomber.⁹⁶ This signals the volatility of the religious situation and the growing sectarian violence in Dagestan. Another gruesome case is the

⁹⁵ “Supporters and opponents of Wahhabism stage massive fight in Dagestan” Interfax, 11 February 2011, available at <http://www.interfax-religion.com/?act=news&div=8184>

⁹⁶ “Daghestan Suicide Bomber Kills Venerated Sufi Spiritual Leader” Radio Free Europe, August 28 2012, available at <http://www.rferl.org/content/daghestan-suicide-bomber-kills-venerated-sufi-sheikh/24690895.html>

murder of the Imam of Kuchada in Shamilsky district. The Imam was killed along with his wife and three children in an arson attack where all five individuals were burnt alive because of proclaimed non-Islamic teachings (The Jamestown Foundation, 2010a).

In Kabardino-Balkaria, at the peak of the violence in 2010, the insurgency targeted official religious figures. In December 2010, the insurgent killed Aslan Tsiptiev, a Circassian ethnographer, and Anas Pshikhachev, a local mufti and the chairman of the Spiritual Board of Muslims of Kabardino-Balkaria. Both were identified by the insurgency as supporters of pagan practices in opposition to Islamic faith. Pshikhachev was also a vocal critic of radical Islam in the republic. The moderate cleric denounced the use of violence and jihad, while he claimed that there was no religious repression in the republic.⁹⁷

More than being a political way to express themselves, insurgents use violence as a way to reinforce the border between Sufis and Salafis. Violence defines the limit between the acceptable and the unacceptable practice of Islam in the North Caucasus. This form of extreme dialogue could be seen as a way to establish the identity of various insurgent groups by hardening the categories of identity.

The four factors should not be taken in a vacuum. They cohabit together and reinforce themselves, contributing to the increase of violence across the region. One way to try and clarify the various processes that lead to the upsurge of violence in the region is to engage in ethnographic research. Political ethnography can help us identify the internal dynamics in these processes. The next chapter will first discuss the possibilities of conducting fieldwork in a conflict zone such as the North Caucasus. It will then argue how political ethnography and immersion help to study the dynamics of violence at a personal

⁹⁷ “Mufti of Kabardino-Balkaria Anas Pshikhachev struggled with extremism and illegal persecution of Muslims” Kavkazskii uzel, 17 December 2010, available at <http://www.eng.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/15577/>

level. By using the case of ethno-religious profiling, I will seek to use my personal experience to recreate the socio-psychological situation in which radical Islamists find themselves in the North Caucasus. In doing so, the next section will shift from a structural and historical analysis to a socio-psychological one.

Chapter 6: Field Research in Conflict Zones

This section addresses the pitfalls, challenges, difficulties and possibilities of conducting fieldwork and ethnographic research in a conflict zone. In order to do so, I will review the concept of dangerous and difficult fieldworks as defined in the literature. This definition is particularly problematic as the notion is subjective and depends on many factors including, but not limited to, the researcher's experience, background and knowledge of the field.

Difficulties can be contextual and practical, such as conducting interviews for the first time or reaching a non-accessible site of research. They also can be cultural as in the case of learning and adapting to a new culture or learning a new language. Amy Ross suggests that "every research site can be considered a "difficult situation". Knowledge production is intimately linked to the production of power (...) [thus] every site of knowledge/production can be considered a difficult site" (2009: 187). She underlines the importance of intellectual difficulties. Emotional difficulties are often present in field research, as is the case when one has to isolate himself from his family or having to cope with unbearable emotions. Physical difficulties involve an array of possibilities from the need to sustain extreme conditions to the need to walk a long distance in order to conduct interviews. These difficulties are all valid challenges linked with fieldwork and the list is far from exhaustive. Difficult fieldwork is thus not the same as dangerous fieldwork. Boumaza and Campana (2007) explain that the definition of difficulty is mainly related to perceptions and should be understood in relational terms. However, the subjectivity and the broadness of the concept limit its analytical usefulness.

Looking at the definition of dangerous fieldwork and the concept of danger help to narrow down the subject studied in this section. Raymond Lee identifies two types of dangers during fieldwork, one could be labelled as the constant danger linked to general context of the research, such as war (ambient danger), and the other one being situational, where the presence of the researcher leads to negative reactions from the research subjects (1995). “Situational danger arises when the researcher’s presence or actions evoke aggressions, hostility, or violence from those within the setting” (Lee, 1995: 4). This definition of danger focuses mainly on danger involving the researcher; however, danger is not limited to him and could affect other people such as research participants. Danger, as the concept of difficulty, also extends to different aspects such as physical, mental and emotional. Although danger could probably be defined through objective criteria such as physical or mental integrity, the concept still covers a large spectrum of possibilities.

This research will thus approach the problem differently. Instead of focusing on the concept of danger or difficulty in order to identify the boundaries of this section, it will seek to discuss the difficulties and dangers involved in conducting field research in a context of civil war, by looking at civil war as a process.

6.1 Political Ethnography as a Methodology

Edward Schatz, in his introduction to the book *Political Ethnography: What Immersion Contributes to the Study of Power*, enunciates the two major principles of political ethnography (2009c: 5).⁹⁸ First, the scholarship on ethnography usually associates the term with participant observation and immersion. The researcher has to gain access to a

⁹⁸ Political ethnography has been around the discipline of political science for a long time now as demonstrated by James Scott’s work (1977), however the debate about its importance and role in the discipline have been increasing since the end of the 1990s.

particular community/region, immerse himself in a community or at the local level, and engage in its daily life and routines. It also necessitates an engagement to listen and establish contact with local people. Although ethnographers agree on the necessity of immersion to talk about ethnography, they often disagree on other criteria, such as the minimal duration and the methodology of immersion. The rule of thumb usually requires that the immersion is prolonged enough to produce an “insider” knowledge.

Schatz explains that the second principle of political ethnography is that the study uses “ethnography [as] a sensibility that goes beyond face-to-face contact. It is an approach that cares—with the possible emotional engagement that it implies—to glean the meanings that the people under study attribute to their social and political reality” (Schatz, 2009a: 5). Cédric Jourde explains that although a research experience might not be labelled explicitly as ethnographic, using the rigorous definition based on a full-participant observation and long-term consecutive fieldwork period (over 24 months in a row), it can still be viewed as research using an ethnographic sensibility (2009:202). Jourde, using Schatz’s definition, explains that using person-to-person contacts and experiences help the ethnographer develop this ethnographic sensibility. “Ethnographic sensibility can only be acquired by interacting extensively with (...) research participants and *their* social world” (Jourde, 2009: 2002, emphasis is his). Ethnographic sensibility permits the researcher to develop a unique perspective built on insider knowledge in order to interpret any aspect of his research. Cerwonka speaks of ethnography as a knowledge involving research sensibility, which is based on “understanding the process of ethnographic research and understanding ethnographic evidence” (2007: 20). Cerwonka emphasises a crucial point made by Clifford Geertz (1973) about conducting ethnographic research. ““Doing ethnography” is more than the sum total of the various tasks one does during fieldwork (interviewing, mapping fields,

and such)” (Cerwonka, 2007: 20). Ethnographic sensibility is also sometimes extended to what Robben calls “ethnographic imagination at a distance”, which implies a “leap of analytical and interpretive faith required to explain a phenomena that cannot be studied directly through ethnographic fieldwork. [It] transcends empiricist realities.” (2010: 2).

For Schatz, only one of the two principles is necessary for ethnographic research, although they usually reinforce each other. He also understands political ethnography as a methodology and not only as a method. Schwartz-Shea and Yanow explain that the term methodology refers to logic of inquiry and a corresponding set of methods in concordance with ontological and epistemological assumptions. As for methods, they are particular tools in the conduct of the research design (2012: 4). Thus, conducting interviews could or could not be part of an ethnographic methodology, just as fieldwork is not a synonym for immersion or ethnography.

One way to identify some of these assumptions in practice is to look at what the anthropologist Daniel Miller says about ethnography. He states four principles or “commitments” to describe what he calls a “particular perspective”, and what Lisa Wedeen labels as a “distinct sensibility” necessary to conduct interpretive ethnographical work:

1. “To be in the presence of the people one is studying, not just the texts or objects they produce”
2. “To evaluate people in terms of what they actually do (...) and not merely of what they say they do”
3. “To have a “long term commitment to an investigation that allows people to return to daily life that one hopes goes beyond what is performed for the ethnographer””
4. “To engage in a “holistic analysis, which insist that (...) behaviors be considered within the larger framework of people’s lives”” (Miller, 1997: 16-17 quoted in Wedeen, 2009: 85)

Thus, political ethnography takes seriously the fact that details derived from a person-to-person contact are used in order to understand their practices and the context in which

they occur. In the case of a theoretical framework relying on the socio-political context as a central explanatory factor, as with this research, ethnography offers a set of methods particularly well-suited to collect data. Indeed, as we will later see in this research, one of the central analytical claims on violent participation is that one cannot identify a precise profile or cause that explains why individuals choose to engage in insurgent violence. Pathways and contextual factors play a crucial role in this process.

If the definition of (political) ethnography is relatively recognised in the discipline, the same cannot be said about its role and importance. In the search for a united scientific method in political science, ethnography was often presented as ill-equipped to demonstrate causation between precise variables. Indeed, ethnography is usually seen as a sub-method, often compared to a summer internship (Hopf, 2006) in relation to formal and quantitative methods. Its role as a method is thus seen as an accessory in support to a more “rigorous” method. Although ethnographic research helps to identify and analyse a causal chain in positivist research design, ethnography, by itself, is not seen in the discipline as really equipped to attain the research standard and criteria established in the literature about methodology in political science (King, Keohane and Verba, 1994). According to Schatz, this methodological trend leads scholars to use ethnography but to dilute its contribution in these more rigorous methods. This point made by Schatz also brings back the debate regarding multi-method, which I have discussed earlier in the chapter, about the research program on the micro-dynamics of violence in civil war.

Although immersion and participant observation could be used as a research strategy for any kind of object of study and political situations, certain contexts are particularly well-suited for their use. Lorraine Bayard de Volo and Ed Schatz explain that political ethnography is particularly useful when “government statistics are suspect [or inexistent],

media outlets are controlled by political interests, [free media are also inexistent or strongly repressed], (...) political violence impede survey research” (2004: 269). Political ethnography is not restricted to these research specificities and it offers access to the interstices and the margins of power (in opposition to the center) for any political context. Ethnography is particularly crucial in the study of civil war as the discrepancies between the official narrative of a conflict and its local interpretations is one of the core reasons why various authors have advocated a micro-turn in the study of civil war in general. Particularities and forms of violence vary within a conflict and especially in the North Caucasus, where ethnic, religious and linguistic differences change from village to village. The local contexts and differences need to be studied and understood in order to explain the variations in violence in a conflict. As Nordstrom underlines “to capture war’s complexities, [it is crucial] to shift [the] focus from relying on traditional ethnography rooted in a single locale to looking for an understanding of the arena of conflict itself. (...) Ethnography [should be grounded] in a topic and a process, not a place” (Nordstrom, 1997: 78).

Contextualisation, Reflexivity and Truth-Value

The contribution of political ethnography is mainly its ability to underline how our theoretical generalisations hide the heterogeneous nature of political phenomena at the local level. As Allina-Pisano exemplifies with various fieldwork vignettes in her chapter in Schatz’s book (2009c), ethnography and deep-neck immersion permit the researcher to construct and establish a context necessary to understand causal mechanisms of political phenomena. This context also permits the researcher to assess the truth-value of its interviews and other fieldwork material he gathered. The importance of the context will also

be particularly emphasized in this research throughout the reflection about the processes leading and sustaining violent participation in an insurgency.

If for some authors like Allina-Pisano the contextualisation of knowledge permits us to seek causal mechanisms through ethnographic research, for many ethnographers the role of interpretation and context should uncover the multiple interpretations of the same phenomenon. Interpretation is thus understood as a personal sense making of a certain phenomenon based on a prior knowledge and socialization. The last two elements introduce the second core concept linked to ethnography and reflexivity. Reflexivity refers to the impact of our personal biases developed through our past experiences, education, and socialization on the interpretation of a political phenomenon. A reflective standpoint on our interpretation implies that interpretation could not be neutral and bias-free. In order to exemplify this concept, one can look at the way two different graduate students, one in political science and one in Islamic studies, observe a demonstration about worship freedom. The former will focus on the distribution of power at work and the mechanisms of political mobilization. The latter would probably focus on the theological nature of the religious claims. In both cases, the students see different interpretations or meanings of the same phenomenon.

Interpretive research is thus an overarching concept in which you find theoretical frameworks that are based on reflexivity. While interpretation and reflexivity play a crucial role in all ethnographic methodological frameworks, it would be problematic to associate political ethnography with interpretive research. Indeed, as mentioned in the case of Allina-Pisano, many ethnographers claim that our personal bias could be mitigated. In order to understand this debate inside political ethnography, one should go back to the epistemological tensions between mainstream positivists and interpretive frameworks.

Epistemological Debates

In a unique perspective, Schwartz-Shea and Yanow propose a distinction between quantitative, qualitative and interpretative research and methods. According to Yanow (2006: xv), qualitative methods and interpretative methods “do not live under the same philosophical umbrella when it comes to their respective procedural enactments of assumptions.”. The two authors seek to reject the association of the term qualitative with small-n research in opposition to quantitative large-N research (King, Keohane, and Verba 1994; Brady and Collier, 2004). Schwartz-Shea and Yanow insist on the difference between qualitative and interpretative as the former being based on positivist postulates, such as the possibility of objective knowledge and generalizations based on standards of science coming from natural science (Keohane, 2003: 11), and the latter on the core role played by interpretation and reflexivity (Schwartz-Shea and Yanow, 2012: 5).

This debate is often portrayed as mutually exclusive or where no middle-ground exists. Indeed, the opposition between objective and subjective knowledge is often used to demonstrate the incommensurability of these paradigms. By briefly introducing both epistemological positions I will demonstrate how ethnography, through its realist variant, offers a way to formulate a *via-media*. I will then explain how this *via-media* is particularly interesting in the case of this research.

According to Wedeen, an interpretive framework relies on major assumptions such as the social construction of the world [being socially constructed], the fact that individuals are embedded in that world (or context), and that knowledge is historically situated [and interpretive researchers are interested in language and symbolic systems (2009: 80-81). Hermeneutics, as applied to political ethnography, proposes to study daily behaviors as if

they were a text or, as Taylor would say, “text-analogs” (1971 quoted in Yanow, 2009). This context could be associated with the observer’s background and also more generally with the political and social situation. The hermeneutic circle is thus the dynamic relation between the text and its context (See Foucault, 1975 for a post-structuralist interpretation; see Brass, 1997 about political violence). Yanow identifies three hermeneutic moments in ethnographic research (2009:278). The first consists of the interpretations made by our subjects of research about their own actions and practices. The second moment is the interpretation of these actions made by the ethnographer himself or when interpreting his own field notes⁹⁹. The last moment of the triple hermeneutic is the interpretation between what the researcher writes and what the readers interprets. Interpretations are thus provisional layers of understanding in a process of establishing meaning (Yanow 2006a, 16). Knowledge and meanings of social realities are thus inter-subjective and contextual. Interpretive ethnography is mainly interested in understanding these layers, the context in which they are produced and usually refute the possibility to produce objective truth-claims and causality from them. “Interpretive ethnography provides a process of data collection and an epistemology that allows one to better understand human agency in the context of social and institutional discourses” (Cerwonka, 2007: 14). Gadamer challenges the possibility to transpose the scientific model to the social sciences and explains that understanding and interpretation is a process that could not be reduced to set of standards and systematic procedures (1999 quoted in Cerwonka, 2007: 14). According to him, research is a process of fusions of horizons where the researcher’s subjectivity and biases directly affects his object of study. Knowledge is

⁹⁹ This moment could be split in two steps: interpretation of an event through observation and interpretation in the process of writing.

contextual and historically situated and should be understood as a process of understanding between the researcher and the object of study.

On the other hand, mainstream political scientists, mostly relying on quantitative and formal model approaches, claim that there are ways to conduct objective problem-driven research and have established the standards for it. According to them, qualitative research should thus base its standard upon the quantitative one or what King, Keohane and Verba call the logic of inference. To paraphrase them, the only way to conduct valid research in the field of political science is to aim to produce generalizable knowledge based on the scientific method. Systematic and scientific production of knowledge is used to produce valid causal or descriptive inferences through the use of testable and falsifiable hypotheses (1994). The concepts of interpretation, reflexivity and bias are thus seen as factors to be eliminated from research design. These 'scientific' standards conflict with some core assumptions linked to (political) ethnography.

If we seek to narrow the debate about what constitutes the major differences between positivist qualitative and interpretative research, the focus should be placed on the role given to interpretation, reflexivity and the possibility to claim causality. For positivist qualitative researchers, methodology should seek to provide a causal chain, data aggregation, and a generalisation of research results. For interpretative research, the focus should be placed on the layers of interpretation. Another core tension is the way we understand the relationship between the researcher and the object of study. For objectivist proponents of a scientific method in political science, the world exists outside of the researcher and waits to be studied. This contrasts with the interpretive framework that claims that research is always rooted in the various subjectivities involved in the research process.

As mentioned earlier, one way to transcend this incommensurability between interpretive and small-N qualitative research is to look at the role played by ethnography in establishing a contextualisation of knowledge, based on deep-neck immersion. Realist ethnographers, who use what Allina-Pisano calls a neo-positivist framework, seek to build on the importance of causal claims and the incessant subjectivity implied in ethnographic research. Realist ethnographers share most of the interpretive assumptions about reflexivity and interpretation; however, they claim that they should not be seen as limiting the possibility to postulate causal claims.

Allina-Pisano explains that political ethnography could ground its epistemological foundations in a neo-positivist framework based on standards of evidence instead of simple faith commitments. Starting from the question “amid a societal commitment to epistemological pluralism, how ought we to adjudicate truth claims about the world?” (2009: 53) she then explains how ethnography adopting a realist approach could help social scientists uncover the truth. According to Allina-Pisano, realist ethnography, or ethnography with a realist sensibility, offers us a tool to contextualize and interpret our own subjectivity and thus be able to assert our impact on the field and our research (2009, 54-56). The ethnographer can assess, based on his knowledge of the context and the field, how (and if) he has an impact on the object of study and how he could mitigate it. Therefore, realist ethnography proposes a way to find a middle ground between the conflicting claims regarding the relevance of ethnography and social science theory.

The concept of self-reflexivity is thus crucial in order to understand the debate between neo-positivist and interpretative ethnographers. Self-reflexivity refers to a contemplation of our personal influence on our object of study. A great majority of

ethnographers agree that the observer has an impact on the object of study¹⁰⁰; however, they do not agree on its impact on the research itself. For realist ethnographers, this impact could be understood in order to mitigate its limitations on the possibility of postulating causal claims. In the case of interpretive ethnographers, they argue that there is no possible neutral or bias-free analysis in social science and therefore research should focus on studying the various interpretations as different layers of truth.

Both epistemological approaches agree that ethnography mostly relies on subjective observations made through immersions and interpretive social science. Knowledge construction is the result of subjective observations, personal fieldwork experiences, interlocutors' narratives and practices. "The community's traditions, practices, language, and other cultural elements provide the material out of which individuals craft their meaning making of everyday events (Yanow 2006a, 11)". These elements become the primary data that leads to the establishment of layers of truth and possible causal claims in the case of realist ethnographers. The ethnographers are thus able to make sense of the subjects' discourse and subjectivity through their proximity. "Both [approaches] (...) imply the existence of a social reality that is complex, multivocal, and multilayered but [the role] of ethnography diverge" (Schatz, 2009a: 12).

Interpretive ethnographers claim that this interpretation, or sense-making, is the goal of the research as it highlights the various perspectives of a single phenomenon that cohabit; however, there is no precedence between them. The focus of ethnography should not be to assess the truth-value of narratives and performances, but each interpretation should be analysed for what it displays. Interpretive ethnography is then particularly well-equipped to

¹⁰⁰ A small minority of field researchers refute the idea that their presence on the field affects the data the phenomena they observe.

study how certain concepts, such as Islamism, are understood by local people and how they make sense and use them on a daily basis. The strength of interpretive ethnography is thus to identify counterintuitive findings and evidences in how people make sense of their actions and their discourses in daily life. “[It] can negotiate the tensions between the particular lived experiences of social actors and the analytical categories we use to generalize about them” (Wedeen, 2009: 90).

Realist ethnographers propose a way to find a middle-ground between an interpretive approach and the need for social science to look for truth-claims and possible causal mechanisms. In such a situation, the ethnographer acquires insider knowledge through his immersion. Consequently, the ethnographer has the possibility to focus on what the research subjects say they do and what they actually do (practices). He can thus analyse the discrepancies between the narratives and the practices (Allina-Pisano, 2009). The discrepancies could be directly observed during immersion or put into context because of an intimate knowledge of the traditions. During the immersion, the intimate proximity between the researcher and the subject of study offers a way to contextualize truth claims when other methods cannot. It also offers a unique perspective on local actors in relation to structural forces in order to establish a coherent model.

A concrete example can probably clarify the similarities and the differences between the two trends and what makes ethnography better equipped than other methodologies following the tenants of mainstream political science. A researcher chooses to study the development of Islam in Dagestan. If he follows a mainstream approach, our researcher will probably favour the administration of a cross-national and cross-district survey in order to identify the local population’s perception of Islamism. This survey could also be extended to all republics of the North Caucasus in order to create a comparative study.

Political ethnographers whether they are interpretive or realist will favour a deep-neck immersion in order to identify the meaning and the interpretations of Islamism. The interpretive ethnographer will challenge the reified categories from the survey and demonstrate the nuances in the interpretations of Islamism inside categories such as Sufism or Salafism. His research objective will mainly be the deconstruction of these labels to foster a better understanding of the eclectic nature of Islamism in Dagestan. The research will probably demonstrate that the categories are unable to depict an adequate picture of Islamic trends in Dagestan.

The realist ethnographer will also challenge the categories of the survey but he will do so by focusing on his insider perspective in order to evaluate the truth-value of what social actors claim they do. The discrepancies between what Muslims claim they do and how they practice Islam on a daily basis will be used as evidence. The goal of the research will also be to underline the eclectic nature of Islamism in Dagestan; however the realist ethnographer will seek to identify causal mechanisms about the development of Islamism at the local level.

All three methodological approaches will propose valid findings about the situation of Islamism; however they will probably disagree on crucial ontological and epistemological aspects of their research. As explained in the introduction, all methodologies cannot cohabit together in a multi-method approach as their ontological claims are in opposition. In the case of the previous example, the categories of Islamism are a major ontological disagreement that would not be easy to overcome. The debate is thus not between an objective or a subjective way to study a problem but mainly focus on the goals and objectives of the researcher in conducting his research. Boumaza and Campana (2007) suggest that conducting fieldwork and ethnography necessitate a constant research of objectivity,

although this task is particularly difficult in zones of conflict. They suggest that one way to achieve it is to constantly challenge our perspectives and try to distance ourselves from the field, the research subjects and our own subjectivity (2007:16). Fieldwork and ethnography could be the best way to challenge our subjectivity or our understanding of a concept as in the case of Islamism in Dagestan. At the same time, if one is looking to first identify the major tendencies in Islamism, a survey might be a better methodological tool to achieve this objective.

In the case of the subject of this research, individuals are often reluctant to openly share their political and religious views. Surveys have a limited capacity in explaining the perception of local population about violent participation. In addition to that, surveys cannot be conducted amongst insurgent fighters. Political ethnography is thus offering us a better-equipped methodological method in order to study violent participation in the North Caucasus. As this chapter will seek to demonstrate, political ethnography and interviews in conflict zones and dangerous environments restrict the possibilities for research and often requires that the ethnographer interpret his findings by assessing the contextual conditions. Silences, body language or ‘lies’ are often the only way local people can express their grievances without putting their life in danger. The contextualisation based on insider knowledge of all interviews is thus crucial in order to be able to assess the truth-value of the information gathered and draw possible causal claims. This research follows Allina-Pisano’s neo-positivist assumptions about the role of interpretation in the study of participation in violence in civil wars.

As it will be argued later in this dissertation, research about engagement and participation in violence is rarely able to identify one causal mechanism in order to explain the phenomenon but usually relies on the concept of pathways or processes towards violence.

Even if causality is not the central epistemological concern of this research, adopting a neo-positivist framework and engaging in realist ethnography are crucial in order to theorize the processes involved in the participation in violence during civil wars.

Finally, political ethnography also offers a way to identify various layers of power struggles amongst actors, especially when dealing with informal processes. Contrary to traditional conflicts, civil wars are often fought by insurgents or irregular soldiers, such as death squads. In addition to this amalgam of formal and informal fighters, one should also look at various informal processes that add to the central conflict. Phenomena such as personal vendetta, racketeering activities, shadow economy or local corruption are important processes leading to violence in civil war. Political ethnography is well-equipped to get a grasp on these informal processes that are often central in order to explain a conflict, yet are over-shadowed by its master-narrative and political discourses. Immersion in a local context and daily participant observations allow the researcher to be aware of the importance of these processes and how they affect a conflict.

Thus, political ethnography offers an array of research possibilities that permit to revisit the way we understand civil wars and their dynamics. In the next chapter, I will discuss more precisely how political ethnography as a methodology proposes a unique way to approach the challenges of studying the micro-dynamics of violence. However, before entering in this discussion, it is central to explore the how-to conduct political ethnographic research in conflict zones.

Pitfalls, Limits and Dangers in Conflict Zones

In this section, I propose to reflect on the problems that could arise while conducting field research in conflict zones. Before engaging directly with the theoretical topic of

violence in civil war and the case study of this research, I consider it central to address the challenges that a political ethnographer could encounter on the field, how they could limit or affect the research result, and how they could be mitigated or avoided. This reflection seeks to build on an important literature, mainly in the field of anthropology, on conducting fieldwork in dangerous situations (Nordstrom and Martin, 1992; Nordstrom and Robben, 1995; Nordstrom, 1997; Boumaza and Campana, 2007; Wood, 2003; 2006; Sriram et al., 2007). In order to do so, I will introduce various aspects, events or details of my own fieldwork experience to exemplify how fieldwork in conflict zones is often a combination of planned improvisation, contextual interpretation, cognitive openness to challenge our own presuppositions, and a willingness to agree that we are not in control of the entire research process.

This section should not be read as an exhaustive guideline to conduct field research in conflict zones, but instead as an autobiographical reflection about my experience conducting ethnographic research in the North Caucasus. I believe that an important task that should follow any field research, even more so for an ethnographic one, is to conduct a post-mortem on the challenges, successes and failures encountered on the field. Although fieldwork and ethnographic research in difficult environments are not based on a set of precise rules, certain conventions (Wolcott, 1996) and practices (Cerwonka and Malkki, 2007) could be established in order to systematize our way to conduct fieldwork. Ethnographic research practices are, however, not static and are adapted to the particularities of the field. Whether fieldwork is seen as an art (Wolcott, 1996) or structured improvisation (Cerwonka and Malkki, 2007; Yanow, 2009), it is central to critically reflect on our fieldwork in order to better understand ethnographic practices.

Thus, the next section seeks to instigate a discussion on ethnography as a methodology and as a method in order to go beyond the typical advice given to a new political ethnographer: “you will learn on the field”. Jourde explains that: “the actual techniques to acquire (...) ethnographic sensibility are difficult to enumerate and specify” (2009: 216). However, political ethnographers need to engage in a reflection about these elements in order to reflect on them.

Indeed, new researchers are thus confronted with a recurrent tension between the importance of engaging in political ethnography and the relative absence of guidelines on how to cope with the various challenges of fieldwork. Ethnographic research is not bound by a set of specific practices and methods. Learning through vignettes and experiences of other researchers is thus one of the best ways to understand how to build an ethnographic sensibility and how to conduct fieldwork in general. Using vignettes and examples from fieldwork research also helps to develop common practices amongst political ethnographers. Carolyn Nordstrom explains that “to understand (...) war (...) is to multiply the small vignette (...) a thousand fold” (1995: 132). Studying a conflict is studying its daily life for ordinary people, looking at different forms of violence and understanding how these events intertwine to create a certain configuration. I do not pretend to cover the entirety of the North Caucasus socio-political situation, nor do I claim to describe all the micro-dynamics of the conflict; however, the vignettes and the reflection behind my fieldwork should help other researchers think about this case in a new manner.

This section also seeks to avoid a recurrent pattern linked to political ethnography research. In many cases, the theoretical model and reflections derived from months and years of fieldwork overshadow the complexity and heterogeneity of the fieldwork experience. Indeed, when the willingness to establish precise theoretical models predominates, what

surfaces from the research are regularities and recurrent patterns; in other words, a homogeneous image of the field. I believe that a complete ethnographic research should seek to produce a coherent theoretical reflection without erasing the eclectic and heterogeneous details and perspectives emanating from the prolonged immersion in a local context. In the case of this thesis, my experience through ethno-religious profiling seeks to understand the socio-psychological process of religious repression on ordinary individuals. By doing so, it is easier to understand how they evolve from a triggering factor to participating in an insurgent group.

Our final objective is to support one of Jeffrey Sluka's most important arguments about the possibilities to conduct fieldwork in conflict zones, which inspired me throughout my own fieldwork. According to him:

“Fieldwork is possible even in the most dangerous contexts. Anthropologists [and political ethnographers] should not select themselves out of research in such contexts on the basis of stereotypes, media images, or inadequate information concerning the dangers involved (...). The dangers are often exaggerated, and in most cases they are not insurmountable” (Sluka, 1995: 290-291).

Access in conflict zones and dangerous contexts is possible and often relatively easy. However, risks and dangers need to be systematically discussed in order to develop mechanisms and strategies to cope with them (Lee, 1995: 28). Sluka goes as far as saying that “the risk has to be negotiated as a gambler would do” (1990: 124). Sluka, in fact, insists on the importance to treat dangers and risks as important methodological elements (1995). Too many researchers decide to evacuate their personal experiences and trauma from their fieldwork analysis in order to comply with a more formal academic standard. Therefore, fieldworkers in conflict zones are too often seen by others as “the kinks of people who can put up with constant and dedicated hard work, loneliness, powerlessness, confusions, and

suffering at the hands of those being studied” (Lee, 1995: 64). Traumas, bad experiences and failures are crucial materials to be discussed following fieldwork experiences.

The following section will thus be structured on personal reflections about my fieldwork intertwined with methodological and theoretical discussions about political ethnography. This section could be seen as highly subjective and interpretive as it will mainly develop an ex-post facto analysis of my own personal experience. Coming back to Yanow’s hermeneutic moment (2006b), this section will be inspired by the first one (my own fieldwork journal written under stress and constraints), although the discussions and reflections will be seen through the second one (writing about your own journal and lived experiences). However, interpretation and subjectivity, I hope, will help in understanding my fieldwork experiences and draw helpful conclusions about the possibilities of conducting political ethnography in conflict zones.

Although an important part of literature used in the next section comes from the field of anthropology, I seek to demonstrate that one can use their field research experiences in order to complement our methodological approach in political science. As Schatz’s book makes clear, political ethnography has a lot to learn from anthropology and ethnography. If our final research objectives are often very different, the methodology should follow the same pattern.

6.2 A Journey through the North Caucasus

My fieldwork was conducted in Russia between 2009 and 2011 for a period of thirteen months, including six months in the North Caucasus, mainly in Kabardino-Balkaria and Dagestan. It was divided in four trips of roughly three months each, because of the Russian visa regime constraint and my unfamiliarity with the North Caucasus’ fieldwork

possibilities. During my first two trips in the summer of 2009 and the spring of 2010 I mainly planned on studying the Russian language in Moscow and to evaluate the possibilities to conduct ethnographical fieldwork in the region.

Nevertheless, I made sure to immerse myself in the daily life of ethnic Russians in order to understand their perspective about the North Caucasus' situation. I spent seven months living in a Russian host family and made sure to regularly visit public places like parks, restaurants or bars to discuss with ordinary Russians. I was thus able to map and understand, in more precise detail, the perceptions of ethnic Russians in regards to non-ethnic Russians, such as Caucasians or Central Asians. This ethnographic experience helped narrow my analysis on the internalisation of patterns of domination against people of Caucasian-extraction, as it will be demonstrated later in the chapter. On the other hand, it led me to create an image of the North Caucasus, which would be debunked by my subsequent fieldwork trips in Kabardino-Balkaria and Dagestan.

For my first fieldwork in the North Caucasus, in the summer of 2010, I had planned to travel across the region in order to be able to identify various sites of ethnographic research that could be accessible. I was looking to secure an academic affiliation at an institute or a university in Kabardino-Balkaria in order to find some support for conducting fieldwork and also to find an apartment for the second phase of fieldwork in fall 2010. I travelled throughout the North Caucasus for three weeks, spending time in Nalchik, Vladikavkaz, Nazran, Grozny, Makhachkala and Derbent. I left by train from Moscow and came back the same way in order to meet local people. In the North Caucasus, the pattern of ethnographic research was mainly exploratory. As I got to each new city, I was looking for a place to stay, usually at a local hotel, or preferably with local people. I would then engage in discussions with them about the security situation in the region and in the Republic.

The second fieldwork was again conducted across the North Caucasus region. I rented an apartment in downtown Nalchik (Kabardino-Balkaria) for a three-month period and I travelled every single week across the North Caucasus from Nalchik to Makhachkala (Dagestan), going through each Republic. This means that I would have to cross several checkpoints when I entered North Ossetia, Ingushetia, Chechnya, and finally Dagestan. I would spend usually two weeks *on the road* and I would come back to Nalchik in order to gather my field notes and rest for a few days. I would start the same research pattern again and again. This research design was mainly focused on [to] studying ethno-religious profiling at checkpoints and on public transportation (Marshrutkas, buses, and trains).¹⁰¹ In order to do so, I grew a long dark-beard and, since my physical features can easily make me pass for a North Caucasian, I was often labelled as a potential security threat.¹⁰² My physical features and my developed muscle structure would be associated with the typical insurgent profile for which security forces would be looking for on the street or at checkpoints. Therefore, I was regularly stopped, controlled and even arrested as a potential threat for security. My appearance thus opened me a door to conduct participant observation of one of the causes of violent engagement and participation identified in the majority of my interviews. I also pursued a more formal methodology by conducting structured interviews with journalists, human rights workers and ordinary people in Kabardino-Balkaria, Chechnya, and Dagestan. I also tried to get immersed in the North Caucasus' daily life by participating in local rituals, Muslim holidays and celebrations, attending Friday prayers,

¹⁰¹ Marshrutkas are collective taxis for public transportation inside a city or between cities of a same region. The concept of ethno-religious profiling was suggested by John Dunlop as the 2011 ASN Convention in lieu of ethnic profiling. This concept permits to encompass what Peete labels as "ethnic-national-religious" (2010: 97) profiling.

¹⁰² Personal physical characteristics are also part of the impact the ethnographer has on the field. Pachirat (2009) and Zirakzadeh (2009) also explain how physical features had an important impact on how they could immerse themselves in the field.

accepting all invitations of local people to spend nights or stay at their home. I thus spent short periods (between 2 to 10 days) in local people's apartments or in villages across the North Caucasus. These stays were mainly concentrated in Dagestan but also occurred in Chechnya. I was also able to reach particularly sensitive districts often labelled as unstable regions or hubs for insurgents. I could thus portray a more accurate picture of the whole region and I spent time in various areas and districts, some relatively quiet, others—dangerous and unstable.

The third and final stage of my fieldwork was conducted in the spring and summer 2011 and was exclusively concentrated in Dagestan. During my second fieldwork, I had noticed that it was easier to enter the circle of trust in Dagestan compared to other Republics.¹⁰³ My network was also more developed in Dagestan, compared to Chechnya and Kabardino-Balkaria. Dagestan and Makhachkala, in particular, were also the epicenter of insurgent and criminal violence in the North Caucasus. For all of these reasons, I decided to conduct the last three months of ethnographic research in Dagestan only. I was very lucky to be able to find accommodation with local people in Makhachkala where I was sharing a small room containing three beds with six other local students and workers. These individuals were from diverse nationalities (Avar, Dargins, Tabassaran, Turk) and social background, villages, with a broad range of views about Islam (mainly radical Islamists), relatively young (between 17 to 23 years old), and from different villages. They also spoke different local languages and had very distinct social networks. I became embedded in their daily lives since they would bring me along to most of their daily activities. Sharing the daily

¹⁰³ It is difficult to determine why it was the case. It perhaps had to do with local culture and customs in Dagestan, the fact that I felt at ease in the region, and the relative absence of foreigners in the region, which made people eager to talk. This eagerness is often triggered by complete absence of foreigners in certain republics such as Chechnya and Dagestan.

lives of people permitted me to access a whole different spectrum of perspectives, as I moved from the position of a relative outsider in daily life to an insider. As in the case of my second fieldwork trip, I was also immersed in local activities and rituals such as the 9th of May and other local celebrations, the Friday and daily prayers, Islamic lectures, University activities, visits at the national library, group discussions, dinners, and so forth.

People with whom I was sharing my life in Dagestan would also bring me to their local villages to visit and to learn about their local customs and lives. At the same time, I would still conduct interviews with local Imams, ex-insurgents, security apparatus members (MVD and FSB), journalists, Ministers, and members of the Dagestani republican government. I also pursued my participant observation on ethno-religious profiling in Dagestan, mainly in Makhachkala, where I was usually labelled an Avar because of my beard and general appearance.¹⁰⁴ Because of my long beard and the fact that I was sometimes carrying a backpack I was controlled, searched and arrested on a daily basis in Makhachkala during the last three months of my fieldwork.¹⁰⁵ However, as soon as I listened to local people's advice and decided to trim my beard, I automatically blended in and was not controlled even a single time by security forces. In the section about ethno-religious profiling, I will analyze in more detail various vignettes of ethno-religious profiling in order to demonstrate the extent to which the internalization of mistrust against radical Islam is widespread in Russian and the North Caucasian society.

¹⁰⁴ My picture was published online along with an interview I conducted with an Imam for a local newspaper. In the talkback section, local people commented on how my physical features were similar to the Avar ethnic group. Similar comments were made throughout my research trips in Dagestan by local people.

¹⁰⁵ Caucasian males rarely carry bags with them, as it is not in line with local traditions. Throughout my fieldwork, I often received comments about the fact that I was carrying my bag around. However, ethno-religious profiling would not stop when I would walk around with my backpack. Security forces would only be more alert as they would suspect me to carry explosive devices in my bag. I will come back to the details later in this chapter about the recurrent searches I was subjected to.

Throughout my six months in the North Caucasus, snowball exposure had been prioritised as a way to be able to conduct interviews and meet people in different localities. However, in order to avoid the problem of being stuck in a single network, I tried to activate various networks at the same time with limited links between each other. Obviously, during my first fieldwork trip, and partly during the second, I had to focus on the same snowballing network as I was new in the region, but by the end of the second fieldwork trip and the beginning of the third one, I was able to establish myself and stay involved in at least four or five reliable networks. The fact that I focused my entire third fieldwork trip in Makhachkala also helped me expand my networks.

Access to the Field

Access to the field is probably one of the biggest challenges a researcher is facing in the preparation for his ethnographic studies. In the case of a war zone, or conflict zone, access can be restrained by fighting and also by political and military elites. The important differences in terms of access to the field between the First and the Second Chechen War are very good examples on how military forces can choose to restrain and block the access to a particular region. During the First War, many journalists and academics had access to Chechnya and could even conduct interviews with Chechen forces. During the Second War, borders were closed to foreign journalists and academics. The few, who were able to access Chechnya, were either killed in nebulous conditions (Roddy Scott) or arrested by security forces (Anne Nivat (2004), Anna Politkovskaya (2003))¹⁰⁶. Since the end of the counter-terrorist operation in Chechnya in April 2009, the Republic became easier to access for

¹⁰⁶ Roddy Scott, a free-lance cameraman and journalist, was killed in Ingushetia during a shoot-out between Russian forces and the insurgent groups he was imbedded with. Scott joined Ruslan Gelaev's military groups in Georgia and followed them when they returned to Chechnya and Ingushetia. For Anne Nivat and Anna Politkovskaya, one can refer to their respective books.

journalists. Nevertheless, very few academics, have engaged in field research there, or in the neighboring Republics of Ingushetia and Dagestan.

Prior to accessing the North Caucasus for the first time in the summer of 2010, most academics with whom I discussed my research objectives thought that it was impossible to enter the region (mainly Chechnya or Dagestan) and if I could get there I would not be able to make contact with important actors or conduct interviews. With the few academics that took seriously my commitment to conduct ethnographic research in the region, the majority of them could not provide me with institutional entry, local contacts or an “opening” to the field. The perception from inside the discipline was hardly more encouraging, as Robben describes the possibility to conduct ethnographic research in unstable regions: “War and danger zones in Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Somalia, Sudan, Congo, and the Caucasus are off-limits to ethnographers. A few anthropologists with previous fieldwork experience might still venture into these places, but new field research has become *impossible*” (2010:7, the emphasis is mine). Thus, the very first challenge was mainly to find a way to “access” the field and to conduct interviews and ethnographic research.

Julie M. Norman presents her fieldwork experience in the West Bank and the difficulty of gaining access to the field site. She describes how Israeli security denied her access to the country on two occasions following extensive interrogations, internment and strip searches (2009: 75). Although one can expect similar control to access the North Caucasus based on journalist narratives from the Second War and its aftermath, my experience with the Russian government and the security forces was in complete opposition to that experienced by Norman. Building on journalistic accounts of the Second Chechen War (Nivat, 2004; Seierstad, 2008), I was expecting to be controlled and interrogated following my first (Summer 2010) or my second field trip (Fall 2010) in the North Caucasus

and probably denied access. However, I was never denied a visa by the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, nor ever interrogated by security forces in Moscow or at any airports about my research plan or interests, nor ever refused an official registration (*propiska*) by the local police forces. I was interrogated even after I published articles or gave interviews to local newspapers and radio stations in Dagestan.

My access to the field site and my ethnographic research challenge one of the most important recent narratives about the North Caucasus and its accessibility for foreign researchers. Indeed, as I will describe later in the text, I was regularly controlled by security forces in the North Caucasus, particularly in Ingushetia, Chechnya, and Dagestan at border checkpoints and “randomly” on the street because of my physical features. However, I was not denied any access to any places in the North Caucasus, including but not limited to, military zones, Chechen or Dagestani Mountains and major cities like Nazran, Grozny or Makhachkala. Comparing my personal experiences with Norman’s, my fieldwork contradicts the impression that getting access to the North Caucasus is difficult. It also challenges the myth that accessing a conflict zone is generally *impossible*. My situation was similar to what Nordstrom described about her “easiness” in carrying out fieldwork in war-torn Sri Lanka (1997: xvi-xvii). As previously mentioned, Sluka makes the argument that researchers often over-estimate the difficulties to conduct field research in conflict zones (1995). However, the possibility to access these regions does not mean that researchers are not confronted with important challenges.

Many researchers report being victims of government interference while conducting field research in a post-conflict zone, such as Rwanda (Thomson, 2009; Fujii, 2009b). In the case of my research, government meddling and official surveillance of my fieldwork was negligible. Nevertheless, I was forced to explain my research to government officials,

including members of security services and police forces. Other scholars and foreign journalists confirm this observation, as they were able to conduct ethnographic work and interviews in Dagestan.

However, certain academics in informal discussions reported to me that they were regularly interrogated by the FSB when they accessed particular places, such as districts known to support insurgents. In my case, I reported voluntarily to the FSB when I accessed certain restricted areas and encountered cooperation from them. I even had a discussion with them about my research and they offered to answer my questions in a structured interview. It would thus be naive to think that the government and the security apparatus were not well aware of my presence in the region and would not lie about the reasons I was travelling in the North Caucasus. My presence was rarely unnoticed by security forces, yet they tolerated it.

In October 2010, I was travelling to Grozny for the second time in order to observe the security deployment in the city during the Congress of Chechen People¹⁰⁷. I was rather surprised not to be controlled at the checkpoints between Ingushetia and Chechnya. On my way from Nalchik, the *marshrutka* was stopped only once in order to conduct a rapid passport check at the checkpoint between Kabardino-Balkaria and Ingushetia on the Caucasus Highway (M29 Rostov-Baku). Although Grozny looked like a fortress, with military forces all over the city, I was allowed to walk freely downtown, take numerous photographs in front of Special Forces without being controlled once. Three weeks later, when I was conducting field research in a village of the Chechen Mountains, local villagers in police uniform present with my host began a discussion with me. One told me that he was

¹⁰⁷ The Congress of Chechen People was organized by the Chechen government in October 2010 in order to promote the unification of Chechen people living in different countries.

a policeman in Grozny and asked me if I was there on October 12th, 2010. I was shocked by that question, as I was not able to remember the exact date I was in Grozny. The question did not seem intended to trap me or to interrogate me in any manner, as he simply wanted to know more about me and the reason I was in Chechnya. It seems that this particular example gives rise to a logistical question about fieldwork which contributes to the debate about field access in the North Caucasus.

Why would an ordinary policeman remember my presence in Grozny, since he saw numerous foreigners attending the congress that day? In the worst-case scenario, which I always thought rather impossible, the Chechen police was well aware of my presence at any moment in the Republic, especially for the Chechen Congress, when I met government officials and journalists. In the best scenario, the policeman simply remembered that a foreigner (maybe a tourist or a journalist) was taking pictures of crucial buildings in Grozny, a practice that usually leads to being controlled, interrogated and sometimes arrested in other North Caucasus cities. It is also worth noting that I was never controlled in Grozny throughout my three field trips in the Republic. Even if I spent many hours following Security Forces and observing their security practices at various intersections in Grozny, they never seemed to be bothered by my presence.

For whatever reason, security forces allowed me to enter Chechnya and to move freely across the Republic. I even accessed villages, including the mountainous regions where they usually restrain access. I encountered similar experiences in Dagestan where security services were well aware of my presence and my research, but would never interfere with my research directly. My personal experience differs from journalists (Sauloy, 2011) or other academics who conducted research in the region. However, it is important to recall that the visa regime, which limits the duration of field research to three months, as well as the

registration system, represent a logistical challenge for the ethnographer trying to access the region. Indeed, it requires that foreigners (and Russian citizens) register in any city where they stay for more than three consecutive days. The registration system thus becomes a way to control movements in the region, monitor the presence of foreigners and expel them if needed.

In the case of my research, I was able to obtain a business visa, which only requires a registration in Moscow.¹⁰⁸ I was thus free to circulate across the North Caucasus and not to register at any police stations in any cities. Although most policemen would usually claim that my registration was not valid for the region and I would have to pay a fine or bribe them, I would never accept to pay a bribe because I knew that my registration was in order. For a researcher that could not obtain a similar visa, access to the field could be more complicated and could thus increase the personal risk of extortion. However, one way to counter the registration problem would be to avoid staying longer than three days in any city. The ethnographic design should thus be adapted in consequence, as the researcher would have to frequently travel in different districts. One would have to be able to create new local networks or to carefully plan his travelling strategy. One example would be to travel across the region on a regular basis. Yet this would lead to an endless discussion each time a policeman would control the registration and the requirement of a bribe in certain occasion.

Another option would be to accept to pay a recurrent bribe at the time of registration and when controlled by policemen, or to register at a hotel. This procedure, however, is

¹⁰⁸ Although tourist visa are usually easier to obtain, they are limited to a 30-day consecutive period. In the case of business visa, they are usually limited to 90-day over a 3 or 6-month period. Tourists usually use business visa for longer trip in Russia. They, however, require a different paperwork and police forces can ask to it. The paperwork should explain the business reason why an individual obtained the visa. Although business visa are one of the only option to conduct ethnographic research in North Caucasus, they represent a possible bureaucratic problem for the researcher. In my case, my visa was obtained through an academic affiliation with the Centre Franco-Russe de Recherche en Sciences Humaines et Sociales de Moscou. The police was however always suspicious of my business affiliation as a field vignette will exemplify in the next chapter.

particularly difficult when counter-terrorist operations are launched. Hotels frequently refused to rent me a room because I was a foreigner. On the very first day of my last fieldtrip in Dagestan, four hotels turned me down, before I was able to find a room where they accepted to rent me a room, although they refused to register my visa. Access to the North Caucasus in order to conduct ethnographic research is thus not an easy task for anyone but it is clearly not impossible. The challenges remain in the bureaucratic technicalities that limit the researcher to settle in the region and the arbitrary behaviors of police forces.

An important point made here is that Russian and local governments, contrary to what one can expect, did not directly interfere with my research through logistical aspects such as denying a visa or limiting my contacts and my research possibilities on the field. Obtaining a visa and accessing the North Caucasus was, thus, not a major issue, compared to the case of the West Bank. This fact is particularly interesting in terms of a counterterrorist strategy if we compare how the Israeli government deals with the insurgent problems in contrast with its Russian counterpart. Indeed, it seems, from my experience and my point of view, that the Russian government and its security forces do not seem to really fear the presence of foreign researchers or even Western fighters in the North Caucasus. One could even claim that the Russian government, with the end of the counterterrorist operation in Chechnya in 2009, is more 'transparent' in regard to its counterterrorist strategies in the North Caucasus or openly condones human-rights abuse as the lesser evil. This does not mean that the Russian government and local governments reduced their human right abuses or increased their judicial accountability for these actions, but it seems that they do not seek to restrain foreign researchers to expose them, as they did during the Second Chechen war.

Risks and Security in Conducting Field Research in a Conflict Zone

After accessing the field, the importance of personal security is probably one of the most important aspects of conducting ethnographic research in a conflict zone. Julie Mertus explains that the ethical aspect of research has mainly been understood in relation to our subject of studies, but rarely about the personal responsibility to assure the researcher's own security (2009: 166). Indeed, the researcher needs to reflect on the potential physical dangers that he might encounter, but also on the possible psychological effects of conducting extensive research in a violent environment. Studying violence from an outsider's point of view (often labelled as such from the ivory tower) is already not an easy task, since it requires an important emotional engagement to analyze pain, suffering and death in various circumstances. Therefore, when an ethnographer chooses to immerse himself into a violent environment, he chooses to study the ontological foundations of violence. To paraphrase Nordstrom, the researcher could thus not separate the ontology from the epistemology of violence. It requires an important dedication as the research and the ethnographer's personal life become dangerously intertwined. Listening to testimonies and narratives of human rights abuses often leads to severe stress and anxiety for the researcher. At the same time, he exposes himself to several problems, such as police interrogations, imprisonment, physical and sexual abuses, future travel ban, and so forth.

Often, one of the strategies to cope with personal dangers and the lack of personal security is to put things in perspective. "Why should we focus on our own security when our subjects of study do not have this luxury?" I asked myself this question every single day after being involved in traumatic events ranging from physical abuses to psychological distress encountered in the field. I used to tell myself that since I had the luxury to leave the field at

any moment and go back home, I should never complain about my own security and focus on that of the local people. One problematic aspect of this strategy is that often the researcher will then picture his fieldwork experience as a sort of game. Indeed, in order to cope with danger on a daily basis, especially dealing with police interrogations and possible abuses, each moment could be seen as a game where winning is to collect research data by limiting negative impacts. However, as Sluka explains (1995), approaching fieldwork in conflict zones as a game is probably one of the worst strategies a researcher can adopt. Indeed, the potential is great to start to build a tolerance to risk-taking and to unfortunately push the limit too far. It is particularly not an easy task to assess the risk level one is able to manage and to accept in conducting field research in a conflict zone.

In the case of my fieldwork, I could never tell where should I draw the line in order to assess risk-taking. As my research topic is the processes of violent engagement, could I refuse an interview with any possible (ex-)insurgent if it involved travelling in a high-risk district? Should I have stopped to be controlled and to study ethno-religious profiling because I was taken under custody by Special Forces or physically abused while being searched by the local police? I chose to push the limits as far as I could in order to be able to come back from my fieldwork and not be “ashamed” of my research results. At that moment, I never really realised the impact this could have on my personal life. As I was still in a particular mindset, I was simply happy to come home alive. And yet, fieldwork had a tremendous effect on me.

The Distant Voyeur Feeling: Post-Traumatic Fieldwork Experience

Similar to what Thomas Goltz describes as a sort of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) when he returned from his assignment as a war correspondent in Chechnya in 1995

(2003: 214), the researcher might face an important shock at the moment of his return to “normal” life. By returning home, the researcher becomes once again an outsider to the conflict, although he re-lives the traumatic experiences on a daily basis in nightmares or through his personal reflections. Goltz talks about being “forced to watch [the conflict] as a distant voyeur” (2003:214). This tension might become difficult to manage and bare for the ethnographer as the conflict still goes on, leaving informants and research subjects trapped in it. Indeed, throughout the fieldwork, connections and often attachments develop between the researcher and the subject being studied. Leaving the field thus provokes an important wrench between the feeling of being an insider and the realization of having become a “distant voyeur”. The distant voyeur feeling was for me the worst moment of my entire fieldwork. Indeed, a profound feeling of helplessness develops as events often involving local informants, friends or interviewees happen on a daily basis. I felt an intense need to go back to the field, to share once again the daily life of these people and to bury my own personal traumas. One way to mitigate this distant voyeur moment is to first identify it, which is not always an easy task, especially because the researcher often feels voiceless when he tries to explain this feeling. Friends, colleagues and relatives have the slippery feeling that the fieldwork finishes when we come back home. While they expect spectacular stories of war and violence from the researcher, all he can express is a drab “You cannot understand...”. Pre-Fieldwork risk assessment must take into account the physical and psychological dangers on the field, but it should also consider the possible post-fieldwork consequences.

The topic of luck is also central in order to reflect on security in conflict zones. Sluka explains how getting caught at the wrong place at the wrong moment is always a possibility when studying political violence in the field (1995). Even if the researcher takes all the

precautions he can and possesses an ethnographic sensibility of the field, bad luck can happen at any moment. While I was conducting my last fieldwork trip in Dagestan, acts of violence, such as suicide bombings, shoot-outs, and attacks against security forces, were happening on a daily basis in Makhachkala, often at a very close range from my home. On numerous occasions during my fieldwork, I made last minute changes in my daily research plan and thus I luckily avoid being involved in shoot-outs or explosions. When reflecting on these events, an important question arises: how should one interpret the fact of not being caught in acts of insurgent violence in a conflict zone? One way is to agree with Sluka and simply accept the faith that at a certain moment we might be at the wrong place at the wrong moment. Another way to interpret this luck is to revisit the way we usually picture fieldwork in conflict zones. Although acts of violence are occurring on a daily basis in the North Caucasus, one cannot talk about being involved in an open civil war. Violence is diffused; often hidden and not accessible as in the traditional image we have of a war zone. Physical violence cohabits with non-physical violence and the researcher should be able to theorize and understand how these phenomena intersect and produce a particular context of violence. Surviving fieldwork in a conflict zone might be, as Sluka says, a matter of luck, planning and experience. However, it should not produce an image of the researcher being in constant danger. One of the challenges of conducting fieldwork in a conflict zone is thus to be able to theorize the elusive concept of violence in a protracted civil war, as in the North Caucasus.

Interviews: Memory, Trauma, and Truth

One of the most important questions while conducting fieldwork in conflict zones and about violence is how do we gather material and how do we assess its validity for social science research? Earlier in the chapter I have mentioned how ethnography is particularly

useful when governmental statistics are biased or absent or when the administration of surveys and interviews are skewed by the context of fear or retaliation from both sides in conflict. Conducting interviews in any political settings is particularly challenging, as the researcher has to reflect on the veracity and plausibility of the statements made by interviewees. Interviews about topics such as political violence and civil wars are particularly sensitive as it involves traumatic experiences and trigger various emotions that have an impact on individual memories. As mentioned earlier in the chapter, ethnography can help assess the validity of truth-claim obtained during interviews. In the following section, I will discuss various factors and dynamics encountered in interviews in conflict zones. I will use precise examples of fieldwork to discuss possible strategies.

Elizabeth Jean Wood looks at what she calls the social processes at work in the formation of memory. Various factors affect the way individuals in a civil war, or any kind of war, recall events of violence. She explains that the ability to recall precise events or images is based on their intensity and their unpleasantness. Based on recent laboratory studies, she explains that highly intense events are usually better remembered by individuals. Therefore, violent or traumatic events are the most likely to be well remembered. This assumption is in line with what we observe in research about post-traumatic stress disorder (Wood, 2003: 33-35).

During my own fieldwork, I encountered very intense and stressful moments where I thought (rightfully or not) that my life was in danger. Whether it was while being controlled and searched by security forces at night when I was travelling across the North Caucasus, while conducting interviews with armed individuals or when I was accessing insurgent hubs in Dagestan and Chechnya, I can recall precisely almost all the details of these events without going back to my field notes. I can also close my eyes and relive these moments as if

they happened yesterday. Regular nightmares about these events are as vivid and intense as if I was back on the field. “Those who suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder are haunted by intrusive memories and nightmares—they often remember too much of their past experiences, not too little” (Wood, 2003: 34).

To the contrary, for daily and banal experiences from fieldwork, I have to regularly go back to my field notes in order to remember the details of interviews I conducted or even to remember certain events that happened during my fieldwork or individuals I met. Without the high and intense stimuli associated with certain events, our memory often focuses on traumatic moments in comparison to other events. A similar process happens when ethnographers conduct interviews with ordinary people affected by the wars or ex-fighters. They will often focus on, or privilege, certain stories, not necessarily because it summarizes their experience in a better way, but mainly because this moment or this event is salient for them. As mentioned previously, salient moments are usually associated with traumatic events. Although researchers should take seriously these narratives, they should also be aware that war experience is not limited to traumatic events. Therefore, they should often dig further in order to identify contextual elements associated with the traumatic narratives and also focus on elements of daily life. It demonstrates a constant dilemma facing the researcher while studying violence in conflict zones. The researcher is stuck between a rock and a hard place, since one often has to choose to study the traumatic or recurrent daily events of life in a war-torn zone. Indeed, if traumatic events are salient they are also not occurring on a daily basis. Should the ethnographer give precedence to traumatic event or focus his research on the daily aspects of life in conflict zone? In the case of the former, research could focus on tragic events and their impact of civilians. However, by focusing on only these events, one risks to depict a distorted landscape of the conflict. Not all individuals have to cope with

such traumatic events. If the researcher focuses on the daily and ordinary life of individuals in conflict zones, he risks to silent or erase traumatic events that are crucial to understand the dynamics of a civil war.

A similar dilemma is present when one reflects on how an ethnographer can cope with his personal experience on the field. As discussed, the great majority of researchers who conducted field research in war-zones are haunted by what they saw throughout their experience. However, what is traumatic and memorable for the researcher is not always an accurate picture of the dynamics on the field. The ethnographer has to take his own subjectivity into account in order to analyse his fieldwork experience. Although traumatic events are salient and vivid, one has to engage in a reflective analysis about them. They can often hide ordinary events that are more meaningful. Carolyn Nordstrom analyses the memories of her ethnographic fieldwork in various conflict zones, such as Sri Lanka and Mozambique. Regarding the traumatic nature of what the researcher encounters, she argued that

Everyone grapples with violence in his or her own way. What is traumatic, difficult, hopeful is in all likelihood different for every person in the field. It is impossible to escape the impact of the sheer violence: I will carry with me images of violence for the rest of my life which are variously poignant and unsettling, absurd and tragic. (1995: 140).

Very few field researchers who encountered violent events or contexts did not experience personal traumas resulting from fieldwork experiences. The memories of events, narratives, ruins or encounters will probably never really fade away, at least according to my personal experience so far. Nordstrom's personal reflections about violence and how we remember these events bring up questions about the political ethnographer's reflexivity as mentioned

earlier. What can we consider as research material and what should be analysed as ethnographic data in a conflict zone?

Every researcher who comes back from a conflict zone is usually asked a series of insipid questions: “What was it like? Did you see many dead bodies?” (Nordstrom, 1995: 141) and “Were you involved in any shootout or terrorist acts?”. Horgan adds that people are “more intrigued by the fieldwork and would ask more questions about the practical aspects of my research than substantive issues of my findings” (2009: xvii). He summarizes perfectly well the nature of field research in conflict zones when he says: “the overwhelming majority of time, the reality of fieldwork on terrorism does not involve being bundled into cars, or being held at gunpoint. With appropriate preparations, one can arrange meetings, and interview participants in what would otherwise appear like perfectly normal and mundane circumstances” (Ibid). There exists a sort of danger in creating a *false* image about fieldwork in conflict zones. The researcher should be careful not to create a “sensational or heroic aura without justification” (Swedenburg, 1995: 25) when he discusses fieldwork in conflict zones.¹⁰⁹ Fieldwork experience is usually monotonous and necessitates more logistical preparation than courage, as underlined by Horgan. Nordstrom underlines a similar problematic question she has encountered when she came back from fieldwork in warzones, “people want to know why I do this research? (...) [And if] have I become addicted to the excitement of the frontlines?” (1997: 19). Nordstrom seeks to depict the questionable relationship between violence and thrill in Western societies. Indeed, it is not rare that people ask me to narrate them stories involving violence as if my fieldwork experience were some sort of a movie. I am always puzzled by the central dilemma triggered by this request.

¹⁰⁹ The point is also made by Boumaza and Campana (2007) in their discussion about difficult fieldwork.

On the one hand, wherever I conducted interviews in the North Caucasus one recurrent narrative would be raised by my interviewees: “Jeff, please tell people in Canada that we are not in a civil war and this great region is not dangerous”. They all insist on the normality of the life in the region. A local person even suggested establishing student exchanges between Dagestan and Canada. He looked rather puzzled when I told him that I doubted many people in Canada would accept to register to the program. As I said previously, I was never directly involved in insurgent violence even if I could see its stigmas across the North Caucasus. My daily life in Makhachkala was even “boring” at some point when I was spending my days at the university, at the national library or even at the beach. Obvious signs of a war-torn society were not always present during my immersion. A schizophrenic feeling then develops during these daily experiences as an ordinary citizen where the immersion in conflict zone cohabits with certain normality or should I say a moment where we forget that we are in a conflict zone.

On the other hand, the militarisation of daily life in the North Caucasus is so apparent that no one could claim that we were not in a conflict zone. Checkpoint guards by tanks and masked Special Forces, tanks driving on the main highway in Ingushetia and Chechnya, armed forces at almost every corner in Makhachkala and streets blocked by military trucks in every major cities. Acts of violence, such as shootings, abductions, suicide bombings, aerial bombardments and counter-terrorist operations, would happen on a weekly basis all across the region. Leaving my zone of comfort and my ordinary life built around my network of trust in Makhachkala, Grozny, and Nalchik to travel and conduct interviews in the countryside always reminded me of a completely different image of the region. At that precise moment, I felt once again like an outsider to the field or a distant voyeur, as I was facing the same level of daily dangers but without the support and the help of my local

networks. Suddenly, random interrogations, ethno-religious profiling, and insurgent violence were becoming a “real” threat again in my mind. The uncertainty of the environment and the proximity of dangers become unbearably stressful elements that still have a vivid impact on me. Without an appropriate network to access the countryside, I had to often travel and live with complete strangers. Once again, in these situations, I came to realize that the North Caucasus was indeed a conflict zone. My immersion was tugged between a feeling of life as usual versus the extreme experience of conflict zones.

The ethnographer is not the only one affected by this kind of schizophrenic feeling as local people also depict this kind of ambivalent reaction about their daily life. They claim that the region is stable and not dangerous but at the same time they regularly advised me not to travel in certain districts, to avoid public places during important holidays, and to postpone interviews with “unreliable” persons. Their actions spoke volumes in comparison to their narrative about normality.

One question is raised by these conflicting depictions of conflict zones: how should a political ethnographer present his fieldwork experience and research in order to give justice to these two sides? Indeed, these two sides are not mutually exclusive as they cohabit on a daily basis. Ordinary citizens, just like ethnographers, balance between these two worlds. Should the researcher listen to the request of the local people and depict a rather truthful perspective, albeit incomplete, in order to debunk recurrent myths presented in the literature? In this case, should the researcher focus on depicting ordinary life in conflict zones by portraying the way people cope with the surrounding dangers? How they are able to maintain a semblance of normal life in a conflict zone. To the contrary, should the ethnographer focus his analyses on crucial academic topics such as insurgent violence and focus strictly on the ethnographic narrative about this subject? These questions also underline the tensions

between the ordinary as a central research topic versus an atypical event with crucial importance such as suicide-bombings. One way to engage in this duality is to try to integrate ordinary life into our analysis of an atypical phenomenon like insurgent attacks. Later chapter 7, I will address this aspect by focusing on ethno-religious profiling.

How Social and Political Processes Can Reshape Memories in War-zones

Social and political processes can reshape the memories of people interviewed. Following a pattern of cognitive dissonance, individuals often revisit their interpretation of their own actions according to the new context in which they live in. “Memories of wartime events may be shaped by postwar outcomes” (Wood, 2003: 35). This pattern is particularly associated to a state-building narrative following a war, as is the case of liberation wars. New governments usually propose a re-interpretation of historical events in order to suit their narratives. A similar process is also at play for individual actors participating in civil wars or an insurgency. Individuals selectively recall certain events to further their political or personal goals. Whether it is to be able to deal with atrocities committed during a conflict, or to assure personal security following the war, many participants reconstruct and misrepresent the reasons why they choose to participate in violence. Beliefs, feelings or even loyalties can change drastically based on the post-war context, leading individuals to rethink their motivations to engage in violence (Portelli, 1997). Individuals might adapt their narratives for a more socially acceptable explanation in the new socio-political context or simply to satisfy the researcher’s insistence to obtain an answer.

Nordstrom proposes to differentiate between the concept of narrative and experience in order to understand the social processes of memory (re)construction. She explains that people use and construct narratives about their experience in order to organize their

experience and encounters with violence. For her, narrative also becomes a way to cope with violence and the unbearable things they witness during an armed conflict. Narratives “will never *be* the raw primary experience of which they speak. They can never be synchronous with that which they “tell about”, for raw experience is *now-to-now*, and narrative is a *now-to-then* process” (1997: 22). Ethnography permits to evaluate the truthfulness of the interview materials and also analyse the discrepancies between the narratives and the practices of actors. It gives the researcher the tools to go further than the actual content of the interview in order to interpret the interviewees’ demeanors and practices.

Interviews in the North Caucasus: What can we Learn from Deceitfulness and Omissions?

I conducted over 50 formal interviews throughout my six months in Kabardino-Balkaria, Chechnya and Dagestan with republican ministers, members of the security apparatus (FSB and MVD), local Imams, ex-insurgents and fighters, human rights workers, and journalists. In many cases, the interviews themselves did not lead to any important discovery or any material directly useable for my research. However, the context in which the interviews took place, the network necessary to obtain these interviews, their unspoken aspects and the reactions and behaviours of the interviewees helped me understand my object of study very differently. Two interviews in particular exemplify this tension of conducting interviews knowing perfectly well that all the answers given are ‘false’ or containing half-truths and euphemisms. How should the researcher react when confronted with the reconstructed narratives whose truthfulness is doubtful?

In the first case, I was arriving to Grozny on my way to Makhachkala when one of my local contacts proposed to conduct interviews with ex-fighters and local individuals in a

village of southern Chechnya. Although this contact was mainly a stranger to me, since I met him only once three weeks before and was advised not to deal with him, I accepted his offer, this being one of the only occasion I had to travel in the countryside of Chechnya. The village had a symbolic importance in the two Chechen wars and was known for the presence of insurgents. The cost of travelling with a complete stranger in order to meet with local people and possible *ex*-insurgents seemed to be a fair one in terms of danger, in order to gather my research material.

When I arrived in the village, I was introduced to a group of ten young people who agreed to talk to me about their life and the reasons why individuals join the insurgency in Southern Chechnya. If my research design was mainly built on formal discourse analysis, I doubt these interviews would have led to anything useful and I would probably have simply discarded them as incomplete interviews. Indeed, most of the questions asked about the reasons why young people participate in the insurgency and the role of the police forces in extra-judicial activities were received by a common silence. The young individuals refused to answer because they were afraid of the consequences on their families. Some of them were ready to collaborate if I was willing to give them money in order to obtain an interview. The individuals claiming to have been part of the insurgency were usually the fastest to tell me that I would need to pay in order to obtain information. Unfortunately, very few people would, at the end of the day, answer directly any of my questions with precise details or novel information for my research. Most of them would tell me that the reasons why people would join the insurgency were the ideological vacuum in the Republic and the effect of ideological brain-washing on younger people. One of them, in a short moment of possible honesty, or maybe should I say of bravery, offered a complex and nebulous analogy. He sought to draw a parallel between the opportunities to find a job in Canada and in the

Chechen mountainous region in order to explain to me how the insurgency could be seen as the unique window of opportunity in Chechnya. Although his narrative was deliberately hazy and broad, his intention was clearly to explain to me that there are concrete reasons why young individuals would join the insurgency outside of the usual narrative of an ideological vacuum.

This vignette demonstrates how conducting interviews in conflict zones, placing the interviewee in possible danger, produce a chilling effect on them or at least make them adhere to common group narratives. In the case of my personal experience, this village is known to have been the site of one of the most important civilian massacres of the two Chechen conflicts. However, even if I demonstrated a willingness to know about the memorialisation of that event and its impact on the process of radicalisation amongst younger people, not a single person, not even my contact from Grozny, wanted to talk about it. All of them asked me if I was aware of what happened in the village, which I would answer affirmatively trying to spark a reaction or by asking further questions. The only reaction I would get was an insistence for me to see the stigma of the violence. They would also want me to take photographs as “proof” of the massacre. They then explained to me that the village was never really rebuilt, even though reconstruction money from Moscow was flooding the Republic. As the night went on, they started to openly admit their dissatisfaction with the Kadyrov government and the fact that only the cities of Gudermes, Tsentoroi, and Grozny were rebuilt following the end of the Second War.

These elements are not conclusive for a researcher focusing exclusively on the content of the interview or looking to pinpoint one cause to explain participation in violence in the North Caucasus. Nonetheless, they are of particular value for a political ethnographer interested in daily details and practices. Indeed, throughout my only night in the village, I

could observe a dynamic of confidence developing between my subject of study and me. They slowly opened up to me by sharing small bits of important information for my research. Observing their behavior helped my understanding of the social dynamics in Chechen villages.

The predominance of precise social narratives about the conflict, in this case the brain-washing caused by *Wahhabism*, the way to deviate questions on mundane topics, the memorialisation of precise events of the recent past in the village, the willingness to discuss economic incentives in order to be interviewed or to participate in violence, demonstrate how interviews conducted with ethnographic knowledge permit to contextualize the answers received. Indeed, in this case, this short encounter with young Chechen people and possible *ex-insurgents*, focus our attention not on the materialistic demand or the social narrative, but mostly on the memorialisation process. Being able to identify recurrent social narratives, such as the brain-washing explanation, or recurrent behavior, such as the request for being remunerated in exchange of cooperation,¹¹⁰ allows the researcher to focus on other aspects; for instance, the relationship between memorialisation and the fear of repression. It leads the researcher to look in more detail at how the memorialisation of violent events manifests itself in informal practices. In the case of this vignette, fear of retaliation or future repression hinders people to talk, yet other dynamics could also produce the same outcome. Reasons to refuse to collaborate with an ethnographer or to agree to a formal interview can also include a lack of interest in the topic of the interview, disdain for the interviewer and his questions, or the fact that the interviewee looks for a possible compensation. An intimate knowledge

¹¹⁰ In recent years, many journalists or academics have reached Chechnya and were willing to pay people to interview or collaborate with local contacts. Although it would be false to claim that the majority of Chechens people are like this, since most of my contacts among them followed the traditional customs of mountainous people in terms of hospitality, Chechnya is also the only Republic where I encountered a demand or a will to be remunerated in order to help me with my research. Many people in the Republic and in the Diaspora have disparaged these actions as a loss of the traditional values of the Chechen society.

(ethnographic sensibility) of the socio-political context often helps to establish these factors and therefore the ethnographer is well-equipped to try to mitigate their effects on his research conclusions.

The ethnographer is also confronted with an ethical choice when he encounters lies and deception in an interview. Wood explains that field researchers have an important ethical choice in whether or not they choose to openly confront and challenge interviewees that lie to them. She notes that this dilemma is particularly painful and problematic when the researcher is confronted with perpetrators of violence lying about their participation in violence (Wood, 2006: 382). Following Wood, I also chose not to confront potential perpetrators of violence (ex-insurgents or members of security forces) when they openly denied their participation or support toward violence. Lies and deceptions often represent very valuable material for the researcher, as it can demonstrate ideological views or political stances of the interviewees. However, it would be incorrect to assume that it is an easy task for ethnographers to remain silent when confronted with lies, especially when the interviewees personally challenge the ethical values of the researcher. My second vignette emphasises how deceptive demeanor and/or open lies can help the researcher understand and map the power relationship and political dynamics in which his interviewee is involved. It also seeks to demonstrate how the researcher is often put in an uncomfortable situation when confronted with lies during the interview process.

During my field research in Dagestan, I was invited by a local newspaper to conduct an interview with one of the most important Imams in Dagestan. The interview was conducted in order to be published in a newspaper. My main interest, however, was to be able to use the material for my own research on the practice of Islam in Dagestan. The subject of the interview avoided addressing the factors and causes that lead young people to

approach radical Islam and, for some, to join the insurgent forces. Radical Islam and Salafism are usually seen as being an outsider ideological trend and are not related to North Caucasian history and local customs. Sufi Islam is seen as the dominant form of Islam in the region and this Imam was a leading figure of Sufism in Southern Dagestan.

The sheikh was particularly welcoming, as the Dagestani and North Caucasian customs stipulate, and received us for a feast in order to conduct the interview and to informally discuss Islam in Dagestan.¹¹¹ The interview, however, did not lead to any shocking information or discoveries about political and religious dynamics in Dagestan. On the contrary, the Imam deflected most of the more sensitive questions and questioned my own personal knowledge and understanding of the region, on the grounds, in his view, that I was a Roman Catholic from Canada.¹¹² According to him, I was trying to impose a false conception of the political and religious situation in Dagestan. People with faith, including radical Islamists (*wahhabist*), could not engage in violence, only people without soul or faith could join the insurgents. Instead of accepting his answer which, according to my observations, did not truthfully acknowledge the religious situation in the region, I sought to challenge his views. I asked him directly if he would say that there is no religious or political problem or tension at all in Dagestan and in the North Caucasus. He claimed that there was no problem in the region, criticized my insistence about this question and condemned, once again, young people for joining the insurgency in the name of Islam. I finally tried once more to address this topic by using the case of Yasin Rasulov (see chapter 8) in order to exemplify that young people with important Islamic education also join the insurgent movement. His answer was not different than the previous one and he insisted on the political aspect of

¹¹¹ Local people called the Imam, a Sheikh.

¹¹² He insisted to call me a Catholic, even if I openly told him I did not practice any form of religion.

Rasulov's participation in the insurgency and did not acknowledge his religious grievances.¹¹³

This interview exemplifies the tension created by the ethical dilemma discussed by Wood and the will to obtain information in order to document a particular research topic. In the case of the Sheikh, his views could not be labelled as a blatant lie or dishonest deception as he raises an important issue about the distinction between political and religious grievances. At the same time, his refusal to acknowledge the role of Islam is also potentially misleading. Indeed, while these young people are obviously not sharing his definition of Islam, they still believe that they are fighting the jihad in the name of Islam. When I listened to this interview again, I could not stop thinking about the value of engaging in a debate with my interviewee. Indeed, it is important to understand the context in which the Sheikh found himself when he answered my questions. The growing tension between moderate and radical Islam in Dagestan put a lot of pressure on moderate Imams like him to choose between state ideology and the insurgent one. In his case, he openly associated himself with the Dagestan authorities and promoted a moderate form of Islam in line with the governmental policies about religion. However, at the same time, what he condemned was not a more radical practice of Islam, but only insurgents fighting in the name of Islam. At that moment, I could not catch this very important nuance while conducting the interview. Now, when I analyse the material with a certain degree of perspective, I understand that I should have pursued further the nuance of his narrative, instead of confronting him directly, in order to obtain sensitive information. In the process of an interview for academic research, it is rather rare that the researcher can obtain sensitive or secret information. There is thus no reason to put

¹¹³ Interestingly, he did not know about the Rasulov case, contrary to most people I interviewed in the Republic. I will come to this aspect later in the dissertation.

pressure or to argue vainly with the interviewee. The nuances and the demeanours in his narrative are usually a lot more revealing than the actual message offered.

The Sheikh was murdered six months after the interview and local suspicions pointed to the involvement of underground insurgent forces. His murder was part of a series of attacks against moderate clerics in Dagestan and across the North Caucasus in 2010 and 2011. It exemplifies perfectly the dangerous situation in which my interviewee was answering my questions. This vignette demonstrates the importance for a political ethnographer to reflect on challenging divergent opinions and what he perceives at the moment as a lie or a distortion of reality.

The value of oral narratives and testimonies should, therefore, always be seen in their contexts and not as a final truth or truth with a capital T. One of the most important aspects of political ethnography is the access that it gives us on the meaning that local people or insiders ascribe to certain practices, behaviours or actions. The researcher should seek to listen and obtain the insider perspectives of local people and not try to impose a particular understanding. At the same time, he must be cognizant of the general context. In the case of my interview with the Imam, I was aware of the socio-political and religious context in which it was conducted. However, I lost sight of it in the heat of the interview. The Imam, throughout the interview, insisted on this precise aspect by challenging me on my outsider position in the conflict and on what he perceived was a form of arrogance and naïveté. His warning should have pushed me to think as a political ethnographer and not as a journalist, let alone as some kind of prosecutor. Instead of trying to prove my point of view, and most importantly to prove to the Sheikh that I was not merely an outsider, I should have returned to the basics of ethnographic research. When I think about this interview and I reflect on Wood's ethical dilemma I realise that the ethnographer should often times listen to his

subject of research and not try to challenge his narratives or statements. It is however not an easy task for the ethnographer to stay silent and detached in the context of an interview.

In my case, at the moment of the interview, I was already at the end of my fourth fieldwork trip and I had conducted numerous interviews in which I encountered two broad repetitive narratives. The first narrative, often presented by official governmental and religious elites, was portraying insurgents as vulgar criminals using religion as an opportunity to loot and engage in violence. The second narrative, prevalent among ex-insurgents or close family members, presents insurgents as ordinary people fighting inequalities and religious repression. In the case of the Sheikh, I felt particularly troubled by his insistence to reproduce the government narrative and refusal to acknowledge that many factors explain insurgent actions. I felt obliged to engage in a debate with him, rightly or wrongly, because I sensed at that moment that my research reached a critical point. I felt a sort of duty to the ordinary people I previously interviewed throughout my fieldwork to remind the Sheikh about the conflicting interpretation of Islam in the Republic. Although remaining silent is often the best approach when we conduct fieldwork (Ross, 2009: 178-181), it should not be seen as the only possible avenue.

Philippe Bourgeois tackled this dilemma in his writings based on fieldwork with Harlem crack dealers (2004). He stressed the ethical tension to interview[s] his subject of study, crack dealers, about the multiple rapes that they perpetrated on their minor victims and to use this as research material for subsequent publication. The author questioned himself as to whether he should publish at all his findings and analysis on this topic. When one looks at his numerous interviews with crack dealers, the author engaged in an ethical debate about their misdemeanors. He openly challenged their interpretation and condemned their actions

(Bourgeois, 2004). His work demonstrates the impossibility of staying neutral in a research about violence and as a bystander in an interview process.

However, listening to our subjects of study does not mean to take for granted their entire narratives. The ethnographer needs to engage in what Ricoeur calls the “*hermeneutic of suspicion*” (1970). Suspicion does not mean rejecting testimonies because the ethnographer sees them as untrue or deceptive. To quote Lee Ann Fujii: “the value of oral testimonies (...) does not lie solely in the truthfulness of their content. It also lies in the meta-data that accompany [them]” (Fujii 2009b, 148). Fujii understands meta-data as “the information people communicate about their interior thoughts and feelings” (Fujii 2009b, 148). The social and political contexts in which respondents are offering their oral testimonies to the political ethnographers are crucial in order to understand the silences or implicit meanings in each narrative. Inventions, ex post-facto truth reconstruction, and lies can also allow the ethnographer to understand the actors by focusing on their personal interests, state of mind, and the context in which they produce certain narratives (Portelli, 1991 quoted by Fujii, 2009b). Through lies, deceptions and inventions during their testimonies or interviews, actors often try to give a sense to their current life and the pathway that led them there. Nordstrom explains that sometimes informants are not unwilling to share their narratives or even lie about them; they are simply unable to talk about them (1997: 81). These reconstructions and re-interpretations of personal events also offer an important way for respondents to protect themselves and make sure their testimonies do not put them in danger. Often respondents will stay silent on local taboos, sensitive or delicate topics. Interpreting these silences is an important challenge the ethnographer faces, especially in conflict zones. A second challenge is how the ethnographer deals with the silence in relation to his research subjects. Although lies, silences and deceptions could affect the validity and

the robustness of ethnographical conclusions, one can mitigate these aspects by developing an understanding of the context in which he is immersed. As in the case of the Sheikh, his lies and silences about the religious situation underlined his fear to answer questions about this topic and his link to government activities.

Immersion provides a way to understand and contextualize the unspoken answers and the silences. “The type of knowledge acquired through ethnography allows the researcher to discern more intelligently the material condition of [testimonies], and to avoid misinterpretation that might so easily be produced through the use of other qualitative methods” (Allina-Pisano 2009: 63). The impact of the ethnographer on these elements is also crucial since the researcher will always affect how and what the respondents and research subjects share. Nordstrom refers to a “space of listening”, an ability to listen to people’s narratives (1997: 81). Often people will offer scripted performances and narratives, due to the foreign researcher’s presence. I regularly encountered this problem in places previously investigated by journalists or academics. Allina-Pisano explains that the absence of foreigners in the villages of Russia and Ukraine helped her research in relation with scripted performances from local actors. I also observed a similar pattern when I conducted fieldwork in Dagestan. Very few foreign journalists or academics immersed themselves in the region. Therefore, local actors did not seem to act following a precise pattern directed toward foreigners. In the same vein, Wood explains that members of various organisations that had numerous contacts with foreign visitors would offer testimonials that would be repetitive. In her words, a script was being played (2009: 136). She encountered very different narratives in villages that were never or rarely visited by foreigners.

A way to identify these scripts is to focus on identifying recurrent broad social narratives, strategic ambiguities (Warren, 1998), standard stories (Tilly, 1999 cited Wood,

2009: 129) or body language. Ethnographers are likely to obtain very different information depending on how they integrate in their community and how they build a trusting relationship with the people.

Although silences in interviews and participant observations are central in an ethnographic analysis, the researcher's silence can also produce an impact on the data the ethnographer gathers. Linda Green explains that she did not feel comfortable to pursue certain sensitive topics with Maya war widows and refrained from asking certain crucial questions because she felt morally unable to engage in this particular topic (1995). Allina-Pisano, using her fieldwork experience in post-soviet Ukraine and Russia, gives the example of her silence being interpreted not "as serious scholarly attention or fatigue, but as public comportment reminiscent of the secret police." (2009: 58).

During my fieldwork, I experienced a very similar situation where my silence affected how people perceived me and my research in general. Another one of my contacts in Grozny offered to take me to the Chechen mountainous areas for a religious holiday. As we were travelling through Chechnya, he suddenly asked me why I was so silent that day and especially why I was not asking as many questions as other foreign "journalists." My behaviour was, for him, very uncommon and certainly suspicious, judging by the way he was looking at me. Silence for me was most likely produced by the fact that I was in a car driving toward one of the most violent and unstable districts in Chechnya with a complete stranger and not having a single clue about how I would come back to Grozny or where I could sleep that night. While I was thinking about all these elements, I also knew that I did not inform anyone that I was leaving for Chechnya or for the mountains when I left my apartment in Nalchik. What was seen by my interlocutor as suspicious behaviour or a lack of interest in Chechnya was for me a moment of lucidity or self-protection. Coming back to the concept of

reflexivity, the actions of the ethnographer have a major impact on the field and the subjects he is studying. The same could be said about personal biases and the psychological situation in which the researcher “enters” the field.

Revisiting our Research Biases through Ethnographic Fieldwork

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, it is usually widely accepted that an ethnographer will have an impact on the field and his objects of study. “The personal emotional experience and state of mind during fieldwork have an impact on the way fieldworkers, in being their own instruments, practice their research” (Lecocq, 2002: 273). Indeed, when looking at my own fieldwork, I realise the central role played by my state of mind at the moment of “entering” the field for each of my three trips. It conditioned what I was expecting to encounter and what kind of data I was going to collect. My personal biases about my research topic were often so strong and imprinted in my mind that I was not able to be receptive to other perspectives or possible other interpretations that I was observing. My first fieldwork experience in the North Caucasus led me to rethink the way I was approaching my research object and forced me to understand my personal biases. Therefore, I had to review what I was expecting to study on the field and how I would do it.

My very first encounter with the field and my object of study, the violence in the North Caucasus, was in the summer of 2010. Although, my command of the Russian language was limited, I had decided to take the train from Moscow to Nalchik in order to explore the possibilities of conducting fieldwork and interviews in Kabardino-Balkaria.¹¹⁴ This *pre-fieldwork* was planned mainly to create academic links with a local institute and to

¹¹⁴ My Russian was good enough to travel across the region and talk to people. However, it was problematic in extremely stressful situations, such as police interrogations or difficult interviews.

try to understand the constraints and limits in conducting research in this republic.¹¹⁵ My mindset was entirely focused on the upsurge of violence that started in the spring of 2009 and exploded in the summer of 2010 all across the North Caucasus, and especially in Kabardino-Balkaria. I was convinced that I was now heading toward a conflict zone where violence and military forces were openly present in daily life and insurgent violence could be regularly observed across the region. To strengthen this unfounded assumption, my Russian friends in Moscow warned me not to go to the region because I would very likely get injured or even killed. They told me that a foreigner would be an open target for abduction or violence.

Insurgent violence and state repression thus became the central concern of my research and, therefore, of my observations in the field. The mindset in which I was “entering” the field conditioned the way I could encounter it and perceive its various dynamics. One can use Yanow’s formulation in order to understand the importance of the researcher’s mindset and the need for self-reflexivity when we analyse our research object. She explains that the ethnographer is “understood to bring prior knowledge to his or her experiences, thereby giving shape to the myriad sensate stimuli (...) vying for attention” (2006a: 9).

This familiarity with the field is also slippery, as we often use it in order to reinforce our belief about our object of study. Social scientists, and I particularly include myself here, feel reassured when their experience confirms their hypotheses. Being wrong about the research topic we have studied for years is particularly destabilizing for the researcher’s

¹¹⁵ I put pre-fieldwork in italic, since this is how I perceived it initially. However, I understood rapidly that the first experiences and encounter with the field and the object of study could not be labelled as preliminary. They are vivid memories and experiences that set the way I now understand the region. I also often come back to the mindset and my biases at that time to reflect on the way my fieldwork experiences transformed my research and my way to reflect about North Caucasus.

“ego” and can further cause insecurity and apprehensions when it happens while conducting field research in a dangerous and unfriendly environment. Preliminary field research design in a dangerous environment is usually set up in order to tackle potential problems, such as access to the field site, research material and to establish a precise methodological strategy.

In fact, according to Jourde:

“Ethnography is useful when political scientists (wrongly) think that they already know the right kinds of question to ask [or what to observe on the field]. Research programs that are “locked in” on a path often fail to identify new questions, as researchers involved in these programs believe the main objects of inquiry have already been identified” (2009: 203).

In my case, throughout the first three weeks of my *pre-fieldwork* in the summer of 2010, my observations, and by the same token my fieldwork diary excerpts, demonstrate a necessity or a will to observe hyper-securisation and violence. This insistence of observing physical violence hindered my capacity to observe other informal phenomena, such as the symbolic violence produced through ethno-religious profiling. However, ethnographic experience and sensibility, led me to approach the study differently. Nordstrom and Robben explain that “understandings of violence should undergo process of change and reassessment in the course of fieldwork and writing because it is not only unrealistic but dangerous as well to go to the field with ready-made explanations of violence so as to ‘find truths’ to support our theories” (1995: 4).

Cyrus Ernesto Zirakzadeh makes a similar point about his research in the Basque region in Spain (2009). He explains that the ethnographer needs to learn how to discard grand theories if they need to. By listening to the field and what they encounter as ethnographic experiences and data, the ethnographers should keep an open mind and be able to review their initial hypotheses based on prior outsider knowledge. Indeed, field encounters are usually multidimensional, eclectic and vary greatly according to different contexts. When

social scientists decide to propose grand theories in order to explain social phenomena, they choose to focus on regularities instead of its heterogeneous manifestation. Nordstrom adds on this topic: “the stories I collected and the massacre and ruins I saw in the north of Sri Lanka showed how the field reality is often quite different from pictures conveyed in the literature and the media” (1997, xvii). Ethnography permits to challenge the foundations of grand theories and formal models. In order to do that the researcher should be opened to challenges to his pre-conceptions and biases when he enters the field. It is thus “a continual tacking between ethnographic details and theoretical concepts” (Cerwonka, 2007:15). The theoretical aspects should be a preliminary scheme to interpret our first encounters in the field, yet, at the same time, there should be a constant interaction between the whole and the part, in other words, a “constant movement between the theoretical and the empirical” (Cerwonka, 2007: 15). “The hermeneutics of ethnography (...) involves a reading of social practices through theoretical concepts without simply reducing the practices to a mere “illustration” of the theory” (Cerwonka, 2007: 16).

Adam Ashforth reflects on his ethnographic fieldwork in South Africa: “[My friends] steered me toward what little understanding of their world I can now claim, though they do not always agree with the way I have come to understand this place. I have read widely in the years since I began getting to know Soweto, but the essence of whatever I know about this place I have learned through my friends” (2005: x-xi quoted in Tilly, 2006). If one takes seriously the idea of listening to the field and its actors, ethnographic research should be able to give a place to local and insider voices. In the case of ethnographic research in conflict zones, it should be able to reflect how local people perceive the conflict and how they understand and make sense of our theoretical understanding of the political situation.

On the first day of my arrival in Nalchik, I wrote in my diary “to my surprise the train platform is not at all controlled by the local police (...) I need to observe why so many ethnic Russians think that this Republic is not really part of the Russian Federation. (...) Very few Special Forces (OMON) are visible in the city. I followed them around but they do not seem to control anyone or be involved in counter-terrorist operations even if terrorist acts recently occurred in the city” (Fieldwork diary, July 23rd 2010). This excerpt from my fieldwork diary demonstrates inherent problems in the study of the North Caucasus. First, the scholarship of the region focuses mainly on the acts of physical violence, which are reported almost daily by the Jamestown Foundation (a web-based news reporting service) or NGOs. The corollary aspect of this incessant focus on insurgent violence is the depiction of a very biased image of the region. Indeed, previous to my first research trip in the region, I studied and followed the events on a daily basis for almost three years. I also discussed and contacted numerous specialists of the region. My views on the political situation always focused on physical violence and insecurity in the North Caucasus. Spectacular violent attacks, such as suicide-bombing, gathered much of the scholarly attention in the region and other forms of insidious violence were barely covered, except in human-rights reports. What I discovered is that ethno-religious profiling, security controls, checkpoints and the daily behaviour of security agents have an impact on the violent radicalisation of societal actors, an aspect which has rarely been covered in the literature about the North Caucasus.

Michel de Certeau proposes to look into the practice of everyday life in order to study certain phenomena (2011). In the case of the upsurge of violence in the North Caucasus, although physical violence is evident, other insidious violent dynamics are present in the everyday life and routine of civilians in the region. I came to realise that my fieldwork was also about understanding non-physical violence, such as symbolic violence, and its effect on

civilians, rather than seeking the region to strictly “observe” this physical violence. Violence, just like Michel Foucault’s concept of power (1972), is not something static, as it takes different forms in different contexts and should not be restricted to its physical aspect. “[It] is a slippery concept—nonlinear, productive, destructive, *and* reproductive. It is mimetic, like imitative magic or homeopathy” (Scheper-Hughes and Bourgeois, 2004: 1). Nordstrom, just like Kalyvas (2006) explains that the concept of violence is often mistakenly taken for granted and reified in (civil) war. She explains that we regularly talk about different wars, but we rarely take about different *violences* in a conflict (Nordstrom, 2004: 57). Anthropological researches (Das et al, 2000) coined the term “everydayness of violence” with the purpose of explaining how violence has an impact on social life and shapes subjectivity.

This pervasive form of violence in conflicts is often described by journalists or human-rights workers as rooted in social discrimination, profiling and marginalization. Nordstrom and Robben explain that “violence is a dimension of people’s existence, not something external to society and culture that “happens” to people” (1995: 2). Non-physical or *soft* violence is deeply internalised in socio-political structures and practices of actors on the field. It is a pernicious form of violence, which often could be labelled as structural or symbolic. By structural violence I refer to violence, which does not directly imply physical violence, but is based on social structures, institutions, or practices. Galtung (1969) differentiates between direct (physical) and structural violence as the latter engages with the effect societal structures have on individuals. Poverty, limited resources, opportunities, marginalization or oppression are included in the umbrella concept of structural violence which Galtung links to social injustices. Although social inequalities or injustices are a broad extension of the concept of violence and could dilute our objective to address the upsurge of

violence in the North Caucasus, Galtung's dichotomist understanding of violence introduces the need to take seriously other forms of violence imbedded in daily lives of people. The author later coined the term of cultural violence in order to look at the aspects of culture that legitimize and justify violence (Galtung, 1990). The use of violence is thus presented as needed or required and often simply as a way to achieve a particular goal. Although the concept of structural violence introduces the idea of marginalization and injustices, it seems to not fully cover the spectrum of practices of violence observed in the region. Indeed, structural violence mainly refers to how social structures reproduce the marginalization and the injustices. In this case, the neo-patrimonial regimes in the North Caucasus described in the chapter 4 are good examples of structural violence. My ethnographic experience about non-physical violence, however, addresses the practices of discrimination by security forces and ordinary people on a daily basis.

Pierre Bourdieu proposes the notion of symbolic violence, which refers to the internalization of patterns of domination by social actors. Elsewhere, in collaboration with Wacquant, he defines this concept as “violence which is exercised upon a social agent with his or her complicity” (1992: 167). Bourdieu explains that symbolic violence determines social interactions, since it unconsciously influences the choices made by the actors in society (Bourdieu, 1972; 1981). Symbolic violence is thus “unrecognizable, socially recognized violence” (Bourdieu, 1977: 191). Conditions of power and domination — in other words, the structure of violence — are embedded in social practices and are becoming part of daily life, behaviours, and dispositions of social actors. Bourdieu and Wacquant explain that the social agents (actors) take the world for granted and thus “their mind is constructed according to cognitive structures that are issued out of the very structures of the world” (1992: 168). Bourdieu says “the effect of symbolic domination (...) is exerted not in

the pure logic of knowing consciousnesses but through the schemes of perception, appreciation and action that are constitutive of habitus and which (...) set up a cognitive relationship that is profoundly obscure to itself” (2001: 37).

In this case, the social practice is the ethno-religious profiling put forward by security forces and ordinary citizens. In this situation, cognitive structures of these two groups perceive radical Islamists as a recurrent potential threat. By profiling in the name of security, security forces and ordinary citizens, they establish the basis of a discriminatory system that takes for granted that radical Islamists are terrorists. Because of their faith, ordinary Muslims are then perceived as “foreigners” or “dangers” in their own country. At the same time, the pattern of domination is also internalized by the victims of profiling. They start to see this security practice that discriminate them as a way to secure the society. In other words, discrimination is a small price to pay for them in order to prevent terrorism in the region. By accepting profiling on a daily basis and by not protesting, the victims cooperate in their own domination and discrimination. Western citizens followed a similar thought pattern following September 11th. Although a hassle for radical Islamists and ordinary non-Muslim people, the new security measures in airport and in daily life are rarely opposed by Western citizens. In the North Caucasus, one can observe social protests against the physical violence resulting from profiling such as extra-judicial abduction but very rarely against profiling itself. I will come back later on in the chapter to the main concept of ethno-religious profiling by using my fieldwork experiences to further explain the reasons behind this profiling and its effect on the processes of radicalisation and violent participation. I will, before that, return to the problematic dichotomy between physical and non-physical violence.

As exemplified by Bourdieu and Galtung’s analyses of violence, the researcher should seek to study various forms of violence at work in a civil war. Thereby, we can assess

how physical forms of violence cohabit with *soft* or non-physical forms of violence. Scheper-Hughes and Bourgeois explain that “violence can never be understood solely in terms of its physicality—force, assault, or the infliction of pain—alone. (...) The social and cultural dimensions of violence are what gives violence its power and meaning. Focusing exclusively on the physical aspect of torture/terror/violence misses the point” (2004: 1). Juliana Ochs writes that: “the blurring of fantasy and reality or violence and security transpires not only in Israel but also in other contexts of ongoing conflict where violence exists in either overt or more veiled forms” (2011: 166). At the same time, political ethnography is well equipped to study the presence and the impact of daily routines and practices of symbolic violence on ordinary people. Nordstrom and Robben describe the central role played by ethnography in the study of violence when they state: “the ontics of violence—the lived experience of violence—and the epistemology of violence—the ways of knowing and reflecting about violence—are not separate. Experience and interpretation are inseparable for perpetrators, victims, and ethnographers alike” (1995:4). In order to demonstrate what Nordstrom and Robben mean with this statement, I will first explain how I understood the importance of ethno-religious profiling as a form of symbolic violence. I will then explain how I approach the study of the phenomenon.

My research project was at first developed around the use of ethnography to uncover processes and practices linked to political violence understood as a synonym for physical violence. By immersing myself in the North Caucasus region, I was planning to get an insider perspective of the impact of physical violence in people’s daily lives. I could, then, map out, based on my interviews and my immersion into the field, how the violence by insurgents and incumbents affect local societies, why individuals participate in violent engagement, and the possible impact of religious and ethnic identity as a cause of

radicalisation and violent engagement. I was thus planning to travel across the North Caucasus to experiment violence in its daily encounters. My research methodology was in fact quite simple, as I was looking to immerse myself in unstable republics like Ingushetia, Chechnya and Dagestan in order to identify security agencies and insurgent groups who were perpetrating acts of violence, their practices, and their behaviours. I would also be travelling to local towns and villages to collect testimonies about violence.

However, in order to be able to access these republics I faced numerous police interrogations at checkpoints, security controls, searches and continuous ethno-religious profiling (described in details later in the chapter). This profiling has been the most difficult aspect of my fieldwork. My physical appearance, often labelled as “Caucasian” was quickly identified as a security threat by security forces in Moscow and in public transportation throughout Russia and in the North Caucasus.¹¹⁶ According to Trenin and Malashenko, “Having these characteristics are often sufficient grounds for Russian police to detain someone on sight. Especially in major Russian cities, therefore, the police effectively employ profiling, discriminating against anyone who does not look Slavic” (Trenin, Malashenko, and Lieven, 2004: 60). This phenomenon was reinforced throughout the 2000s by the return of Russian soldiers from Chechnya and their partial integration in police forces across the country. Identifying these (in)security practices was also part of my research design but had a secondary importance. The primary focus of my research remained explaining the strategic aspects of physical violence. Why do insurgent groups adopt certain strategies? What are the factors that affect these strategies? Although relying on political ethnography as a method, I already had a precise idea of what to expect on the field and how to encounter it. I expected

¹¹⁶The category of “Caucasian” in Russia is vaguely understood as any individual with relatively dark features, including skin tone, hair and eyes. Malashenko and Trenin give a very simple definition when they say it is “loosely applied to anyone having olive skin and dark curly hair (2004: 60).”

my field research to be challenging in terms of logistical and emotional aspects as I was entering a conflict zone, but I did not expect my entire research project to be challenged. Even if insurgent violence was imminently and constantly present around me, I could never experience the physical aspect of violence as a researcher. Every night, I would read the newspapers and the newsletters about the region and I would then realize that violent events, such as shootouts or suicide attacks, happened at very close range. However, I would never be able to observe it from a close range, let alone be directly involved. After almost three months in the field, I perceived this as a major failure in my methodological planning. Based on a rather romantic view of fieldwork in a conflict zone, I was expecting something different. After reading academics and journalists' life stories in the two Chechen wars, I thought that I would be involved in the challenge of a war environment. My first research objectives were thus impossible to attain, even by using an ethnographic methodology mainly based on participant observation.

Collecting ethnographic data and conducting interviews in the field, and particularly in conflict zones, follow a particular tempo that could provoke insecurity and uneasiness for the researcher. Indeed, as Cerwonka explains, various feelings are experienced while conducting field research. Anxiety and euphoria cohabit constantly on the field (2007: 5). While I was conducting my own research, these two feelings were intertwined very closely. In the first few weeks, I came to realize I was able to access all Republics and districts across the North Caucasus, including Chechnya and Dagestan. I was getting very euphoric, since I was finally able to prove wrong fellow colleagues who told me that the region was too dangerous or too closed-off to conduct ethnographic research. However, even if I had an access to the field, it would not mean I could have access to interviews or networks. Euphoria was thus accompanied by uneasiness and anxiety as the months were passing and I

was not able to secure any crucial interviews or observe physical violence. As Cerwonka emphasizes, this tension is particularly difficult to manage. In my case, I decided that, in order to obtain research material, I would review my elementary standards of security. If people would offer me to follow them in unstable regions or if I had the opportunity to access these regions I would not refuse or discard these possibilities. While incurring a lot more dangers on the field, these various experiences were not particularly useful for my research. I felt like I did not have the choice to do that, as my experience in the North Caucasus was so different in comparison to journalist experiences in Chechnya (Seierstad, 2008). My understanding was that if I did not encounter insurgent violence or state repression defined narrowly as *zachitski*, I was doing something wrong.

Although it might sound strange if one thinks about ethnography simply as a method, but failure is a centrally important concept in the process of conducting fieldwork. Often failure to observe a particular phenomenon or to grasp its complexity denotes that the researcher's theoretical model is erroneous or incomplete. The previous example demonstrated an important incoherence between outsider knowledge (empirical knowledge based on secondary sources) and what I encountered through immersion and insider knowledge.

Many studies focusing on the ethnographic method also identified flaws between theoretical models and ground-level dynamics. Allina-Pisano's research about privatisation in the post-Soviet space is a good example of this tension (2008). As a political ethnographer, one has to be able to adjust fieldwork strategies and be open to challenge a previous understanding of a particular object of study when confronted with counter-intuitive "facts" in the field. The concept of calculated improvisation is thus a central element of ethnographic research. Ethnography should be approached as a creative process and not

simply as a method. In the case of this research, ethnographic experience helped to challenge the theoretical model of the Chechen spillover in order to explain the upsurge of violence.

Cerwonka using Gadamer explains that it is impossible to reduce understanding and ethnography to a set of pre-existing steps or practices to be applied in the field (2007: 22). Gadamer's process of understanding, is linked by Cerwonka with the concept of research or ethnographic sensibility. According to Gadamer, one cannot reduce understanding and interpretation to a set of standard methods. Improvisation is thus a central concept to interpretive method and ethnographic research. Liisa Malkki (2007) recalls that Geertz qualified ethnography as a non-method where the importance should be placed on the understanding process and not on ethnography as a set of pre-existing methodological practices.

Improvisation does not mean that the ethnographer conducts field research in a non-systemic way. On the contrary, Yanow (2009: 292-293) and other authors (Malkki, 2007) suggest to draw a parallel with like jazz or theater, ethnographic improvisation draws from a repertoire of performances or "moves" that were learned on the field throughout fieldwork. Cerwonka talks about a "calculated improvisation" (2007: 25). Fieldwork is not a set of pre-existing steps, but an experience or a sensibility built on a continual learning process based on trial and error.

Daily and informal discussions or practices are often more valuable material than structured interviews or surveys, especially in conflict zones. Malkki, in correspondence with Cerwonka wrote, regarding ethnographic research: "It'd be easy to adopt a very rigid [...] interview style with Q & A flowing in neat rows and columns. Anthropological fieldwork doesn't look like that—or not only. Often the best material comes in strange forms" (2007: 24). When I reflected more in-depth on my fieldwork experience, I came to realise that I was

encountering violence everyday in the North Caucasus when I was observing ethno-religious profiling, “random” interrogations and detentions. This form of non-physical violence was not part of my initial research design, but based on my interviews and my participant observation (see chapter 6 and 7), I understood the importance of this topic in relation to physical violence.

I then decided to maintain a similar ethnographic methodology but I sought to map out the various practices and behaviours of security agencies. I travelled throughout five of the most violent republics (Dagestan, Chechnya, Ingushetia, North Ossetia, Kabardino-Balkaria) and one ethnic-Russian territory (Stavropol) of the North Caucasus. Checkpoints and ethnic profiling are analysed in depth in the case of the Palestine-Israel relationship, in particular in the work of Juliana Ochs (2011) and Julie Peteet (2005: 2009) work. Yet it has rarely been analysed in the case of the North Caucasus.

Peteet explains that “checkpoints are spaces where the body is forced to undergo a disciplinary regime of coercive and subordinating power” (2009: 93). The police forces are able, through checkpoints and daily controls, to (re)perform the relationship of domination between the controlled population and them. Often, as in the case of Palestine and the North Caucasus, this security practice is rooted in ethnic or religious markers that create a firm us/them boundary. According to Bourdieu, the structures of domination are “the product of an incessant (...) labour of reproduction, to which singular agents (...) and institutions contribute” (2001: 34). Therefore, individuals controlled at checkpoints come to accept and internalize often unwillingly and unwittingly their domination. They perceive the practices of ethno-religious profiling as a humiliating and unfair treatment in their own country, but nevertheless agree to comply. In other words, individuals re-enact and participate in their own domination and reproduce it every day. On the other hand, security apparatus members

also reproduce this domination and segregation as a habit or a habitual practice. Profiling is not always seen as a way to humiliate and dominate people at checkpoints but rather as a security practice that permits to increase security and avoid terrorist attacks.

At each checkpoint, or “random” security control, I made sure to identify which agency was involved and the type of security practices utilized, such as ethno-religious profiling, searches or interrogations, and who was labelled as a threat by (in)security practices. At numerous occasions I was myself taken aside and interrogated as a potential threat, along with other people identified as potential risks that were to be controlled. In the case of my participant observation, I was not simply seeking to observe the daily interactions of people at checkpoints, but also sought to be subjected to ethno-religious profiling. I tried to be seen as a danger, a threat to security as other North Caucasian people are perceived. In order to do so, I grew my beard as long as I could for a couple of months and, with my physical features very similar to Dagestanis, I was identified as a possible religious militant.

It offered me a unique experience, as I was able to observe how security actors all across North Caucasus are dealing with suspects. How do they profile people, what do they ask them, what kind of bribes they usually ask for, and so forth. It also created a unique opportunity to share time with these profiled individuals and listen to their narratives and testimonies. Often, at checkpoints, we would be rounded up outside of the bus and asked questions about our trip.¹¹⁷ Any “participants” in ethno-religious profiling rapidly develop an understanding of the script or the performance that is expected from the controlled individual. Peteet writes about the case of Palestine: “The participants know the script well; there is little ambiguity in this encounter. Enacting the script reaffirms and reproduces

¹¹⁷ The “we” here includes people with long beard, individual looking suspicious, women with head scarves, and people that were not properly registered.

Palestinian subordination and Israeli rule” (2009, 93). In the case of the North Caucasus, we would have to stand there for a few minutes waiting to be controlled or longer in order to pay a bribe to the police officers. Often, police officers would come in the *marshrutka* and ask all males for their passport. In other occasions, they would target specific individuals that look suspicious to them and ask them to get out of the *marshrutka* in order to be searched. Although most of the controls would be at checkpoints, suspicious individuals could and would be controlled on the street for no apparent reason other than their physical appearance. Peteet’s description of the Israeli procedures is remarkably similar to my experience in the North Caucasus (2009: 94). However, I was never denied access to any Republics or any regions and the waiting period was usually a lot shorter than in her narratives.

I was controlled approximately between eighty and one hundred times, mainly at checkpoints in Stavropol, North Ossetia, Ingushetia, Chechnya and Dagestan, as well as being *randomly* controlled in the street of Makhachkala. This participant observation helps me to understand the daily psychological and physical impacts of being profiled as a security threat by police forces. Although in my case, crossing checkpoints and being profiled was strictly done to access research sites and to collect data about profiling, the numerous controls grew on me and my capacity to endure them. Although bad events and abusive behaviour from security forces were rather rare, they rapidly occupied my mind at each checkpoint. In order to travel from Nalchik to Makhachkala, I would be subjected usually to three controls. Travelling through checkpoints quickly became an important burden on my shoulders and provoked anxiety periods, especially following recent abusive behaviour (see below). My own participant observation and personal experience helped me understand how illiberal security practices involving profiling or religious repression could favour insurgent violence. Even if I could understand the impact of profiling on those individuals based on

their testimonies, and because I was also controlled and profiled on a daily basis and identified as a security threat just like the others, I have to admit that my encounter of their daily lives was never complete and comparable. Indeed, my Canadian passport could always get me out of trouble, while they had to bribe the police officer in order to do the same.

Juliana Ochs, in her ethnography of daily life in Israel and her study of security, fear, and suspicion, analyzes how ethnic profiling becomes internalized and normalized in the everyday behaviour of civilians and security apparatus members. She shows how suspicion against the “Other is embedded in an Israeli’s life. Based on de Certeau, she proposes to analyse security as “everyday, routine, and sometimes unconscious engagements with national ideologies of threat and defense” (Ochs, 2011: 3). It follows Bourdieu’s idea that “relations of domination are made, unmade, and remade in and by the interactions between persons” (1977: 184). Violence could thus be interpreted through its everydayness repetitive and unconscious actions.

In order to engage critically with the concept of violence, this research could have focused on different aspects of the structural or symbolic violence as explained earlier in this section. As the focus of this analysis is the processes of violent engagement in the North Caucasus, I decided to focus my fieldwork research on the notion of ethno-religious profiling. By reflecting on Bourdieu’s theoretical concepts of symbolic violence and habitus, I seek to demonstrate how profiling is a form of physical and non-physical violence that plays a crucial role in pushing people toward insurgent groups.

Chapter 7: Ban-Opticon and Ethno-religious Profiling in Russia and in the North Caucasus

Ethno-religious profiling has always been related to my personal experience in Russia. As I mentioned in the previous chapter, Russians usually associate my physical features with people from Turkey, Central Asia (Uzbekistan) or the Caucasus (Armenia or North Caucasus). I thus had the “chance” to experiment how police forces, young extremists and even ordinary Russians perceive what they label as immigrants in Moscow and across Russia. Indeed, as I was often labelled a non-ethnic Russian immigrant, I was often treated as a danger or problem.

In my first stay in Moscow in 2006-2007, I spent six months in order to study at the Russian State University for Humanities. I arrived in Moscow in September 2006 following the murder of two young ethnic Russians in Kondopoga (Republic of Karelia) and subsequent riots between ethnic Russians and Chechens all across Russian, including Moscow. These events fostered a feeling of distrust against people of Caucasian extraction, mainly Chechens. Human Rights Watch already reported in 2003 about the growing extra-judicial profiling committed by police forces against Caucasian-looking individuals following the wave of terrorist attacks in Moscow (Human Rights Watch, 2003). The events of August 2006 were thus another catalyst for the establishment of a regime of profiling against a nebulous internal enemy, the individual of Caucasian extraction.

Therefore, throughout my stay in Moscow in 2006 and 2007, I was controlled on a weekly basis by security forces in Moscow and in other Russian cities. Even if I did not really speak Russian at the time, I understood I was being profiled because of my Caucasian

appearance, as my fellow colleagues were never controlled. This profiling was particularly present when on public transportation (train and metro) and near important touristic public places. In most occasions, the controls sought mainly to extract a few rubles for a bribe and were not interested in catching terrorists. However, local police forces seemed to precisely target vulnerable people, who usually do not have proper registration, as in the case of people with Central Asian and Caucasian features. My early impressions were that the local police was simply using recent events in Karelia as a pretext to obtain bribes or simply to harass immigrants as a pass-time.

At that time, my ethnic Russian friends highly advised me to avoid certain neighbourhoods at night, or simply not to go out on certain days because I could be mistaken for a Caucasian or Central Asian immigrant. I could thus be beaten up for no apparent reason. When I came back to Moscow a few years later (2009) in order to conduct the first part of the fieldwork for this research, I did not encounter such profiling by local police forces. I was puzzled by this important difference, as I had time to reflect on this particular security practice and its impact on individuals.

In order to prepare my fieldwork in the North Caucasus, I was registered for Russian language courses at Moscow State University in the summer of 2009 and in the spring of 2010. I was the guest of various ethnic Russian families and shared their daily lives for a period of approximately six months. I was particularly interested in asking questions about their perceptions of the North Caucasus and its socio-political situation. Although this period was not planned to be a part of my fieldwork experience in the study of the North Caucasian upsurge of violence, my research project began to take a different angle thanks to these interactions. A recurring narrative I observed links Caucasian culture to violence. Most ethnic Russians I interviewed underline the fact that violence has been a problem in the

North Caucasus since the 18th century. The solution suggested by the interviewees to settle the Caucasian problem is to create an informal border in order to control the number of Caucasian people in Russian cities. Some people also suggested the need to simply abandon the region, as it is a financial and security problem. For any of the solutions, the idea was to filter and control North Caucasians, and especially radical Islamists, in order to secure ethnic Russian territories.

This research will first reflect on the theoretical aspect of ethno-religious profiling by looking at concepts from bourdieusian sociology. This theoretical reflection will then be used as the basis to analyse my personal experience with ethno-religious profiling in order to understand how and why individuals participate in an insurgency. Participant observation and immersion are important in studying ethno-religious profiling in Russia and in the North Caucasus, as it offers a unique insider perspective in the study of symbolic violence in a conflict zone. At the same time, it permits us to study the continuum of violence and theorize the slippery concept of violence in civil wars and conflict zones.

7.1 Profiling as Violence

Bourdieu's concept of habitus permits to explain how social life is produced by a coordinated system of dispositions (Bourdieu, 1977). The habitus defined for Bourdieu as a:

“systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles which generate and organize practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary in order to attain them" (1990: 53).

This definition is probably the most frequently utilized in the literature. For this research, however, a more practical definition of the habitus is needed. Bourdieu, in another book,

explains the habitus as a “generative principle of regulated improvisations” (1977: 78). Judith Butler proposes a similar reflection, describing it as “embodied rituals of everydayness by which a given culture produces and sustains belief in its own ‘obviousness’ (1999: 114)”. Security practices could be analyzed as everyday rituals, which are reproduced over and over by actors at different locations, such as public transportation and checkpoints. Each actor possesses latitude to improvise and act according to the moment. However, this improvisation is limited by his social background and personal experiences. In the case of ethnic Russians working in security forces or as conscripts, their personal experience is derived from a feeling of fear or suspicion against radical Islamists and individuals of Caucasian extraction. Security practices are thus driven by a perception of constant danger in face of alterity.

One can then observe the internalization of a pattern of violence or even a habitus of violence, which is established through the reproduction of everyday security practices, such as checkpoints, ethno-religious profiling and security controls in the North Caucasus. Samer Shehata explains that “ethnography is best suited to exploring things that cannot be observed directly because they do not have a physical presence in the world, and yet these “things” shape it in very real ways: the implicit assumptions, operating principles, relations among concepts, and categories of thought and understanding that people take for granted and do not make explicit—in short, the “structuring structures” of daily life.” (2006: 260). Practices of violence and coercion become embedded in social practices through socialization and performances of social actors. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the concept of violence could thus be seen through the idea of governmentality put forward by Foucault in order to explain how power circulates and is not limited to a simple hierarchical form (1972).

Violence is not only present in its physical aspects but also in social institutions and practices of government agents.

Didier Bigo (2008) has coined the term “*ban-opticon*” to describe these practices, in his work focusing on security agencies and their illiberal practices in Western society. Basing his theoretical reflections upon Pierre Bourdieu’s concept of field and Michel Foucault’s concepts of pan-opticon and *dispositif*, Bigo explains that the “*ban-opticon*” is “characterized by the exceptionalism of power (rules of emergency and their tendency to become permanent), and by the way it excludes certain groups in the name of their future potential behaviour (profiling) and by the way it normalizes the non-excluded through its production of normative imperatives, the most important of which is free movement” (Bigo, 2008: 32). According to Bigo, this *dispositif* comes from the construction of a regime of truth established by security forces, who define what should be considered a threat and the strategies to control it. “As ethnographers, we [are] interested in understanding the specific technologies or dispositive of power through which states attempt to “manage” or “pacify” these populations through both force and a pedagogy of conversion intended to transform “unruly subjects” into lawful subjects of the state” (Das and Poole, 2004:9). Checkpoints are thus a prime example of the margins of power and the expression of symbolic violence.

Checkpoints and ethno-religious profiling are thus not aimed at controlling everyone, but only a restrained number of individuals stereotyped as dangerous by security agencies and ordinary people. In the case of this research, the danger is mainly viewed as being associated with Salafism as the source of terrorism and insurgent violence. As it will be demonstrated in the subsequent chapters of this dissertation, one cannot identify one profile of insurgents or terrorists. It thus seems naïve to try and identify possible insurgents or terrorists based on their physical features. The Russian policy is rather based on wishful

thinking than an actual proven strategy to control and limit the chances of terrorist acts. Security practices, such as ethno-religious profiling, rely on the interpretation and personal biases of security apparatus members. Other central objectives could then be identified in order to explain why security forces rely so much on this type of profiling.

Bigo explains that security agencies have the power to define who and what they see (or want to see) as a security threat. They have the power to identify the danger and the means and resources to deal with this threat. They, then, identify, monitor, and control this subjective threat to put forward their own organisational or personal interests (2008). Bigo's framework gives particular attention to organisational dynamics leading to the practices of security management on the field. Threat for him is thus a malleable concept used by security agencies in order to gather more resources, institutional prestige and capital. "Agencies use their analytical capabilities to anthropomorphize danger and construct a vision of the enemy [or the one to be controlled in order to apprehend the enemy]" (Bigo, 2008: 23). This dynamic has been covered in the section about the transformation of capital in the North Caucasus in chapter 5. I will thus not come back directly on it and instead relate my personal experience as an unintended participant in this conversion of capital.

Following Bigo's interpretations and framework, ethno-religious profiling in Russia and the North Caucasus should be studied as one form of security practices put forward by security agencies on the field in order to attain certain objectives. We should thus be able to compare how security agencies across the North Caucasus use and interpret ethno-religious profiling on the ground. Checkpoints and "random" controls could be understood as an occasion to promote personal or organisational interests. Through my immersion in the field, I sought to isolate the purposes, the techniques and the targets of ethno-religious profiling in each Republic, particularly at checkpoints and on the streets.

However, Bigo's framework, by insisting on the praxis of the security agencies, also neglects the importance of discursive practices and social constructions of the "other". How did the internalization of ethno-religious profiling as a habitual and repetitive security practice in Russia happen and become accepted by the population? How did ordinary people assent and recognize ethno-religious profiling as a valid way to fight against radicalism and terrorism? Why do profiled people accept to be submitted to such practices, which label them as a possible threats based on their physical features or their religious attributes? In order to understand this process, one has to look at how it is carried out in daily life, but also through what discursive practices this praxis entered security forces and ordinary people's minds.

7.2 The Caucasian or the Wahhabist as a Danger to Russian Society

When a Caucasian is identified as a "Chyorny" in Moscow or a "Wahhabist" in the Russian press and in the North Caucasus, one has to reflect on the discursive construction of otherness.¹¹⁸ How do ordinary Russian people internalize the discourse against the Caucasian individual? Does the social construction only involve security agencies' members, or does it extend to the population in general? One way to reflect on these questions is to come back to the study of the social construction of otherness in the study of political violence.

The construction of the "other" as a threat has been a recurrent topic in the study of violence over the last twenty to thirty years. Jacques Sémelin (2005) and Paul Brass (1997) explain how social and political actors (the State and security agencies, in our case) are using myths, metaphors, symbols, and history, to produce and construct imaginary narratives about the "other". These imaginary constructs and rhetorical claims seek to radicalize and transform collective anxiety into the fear of this "other" (Sémelin, 2005: 9-51). Sémelin, by

¹¹⁸ Chyorny is a derogatory term for people from Caucasian-extraction, literally meaning "black."

using the examples of Nazi Germany, Rwanda and Yugoslavia, explains that hatred and fear are exacerbated through elite discourses and practices and can lead to violence and massacres. This incendiary discourse can penetrate daily life, be internalized by ordinary people and slowly push them toward participating in violence or acknowledging the need for illiberal practices. “Entrenched in daily life, discourses of security do not resolve tensions between safety and danger, order and disorder, peace and violence, but rather hold these in perpetual opposition” (Ochs, 2011: 166). The line between the discursive aspect of violence and its practices (physical and non-physical) is usually very thin.

In this research, the imaginary constructs describe the “Caucasian” or the “Wahhabist” as an internal enemy and often a danger to Russian society and culture. However, this vision of the Caucasus as a danger is not a recent phenomenon. In 2004, Malashenko and Trenin were writing about the concept of *Caucasophobia* and Islamophobia (2004: 60-64). According to them, “in post-Soviet Russia, the new target of ethnic phobia has become “persons of Caucasian extraction (Trenin, Malashenko, and Lieven, 2004: 60)” or “‘people of Caucasian nationality’ (*litsa kavkazskoi natsional’nosti*)” (Foxall, 2007: 685). Trenin and Malashenko explain that Russian society developed a sort of fear and that “many Russians have come to believe that all Caucasians are their enemies, either openly or covertly, and that Caucasians ‘down south’ are killing ‘our boys’ with the goal of breaking up Russia” (Trenin, Malashenko, and Lieven, 2004: 61). Although this statement, as well as a Human Rights Watch report about ethnic profiling in Russia (2003), were made almost ten years ago, they remain very topical and a recurrent pattern in discussions with ethnic Russians. Indeed, throughout my stay in Moscow in 2009, 2010 and 2011, I conducted numerous informal interviews with ordinary Russians in my host families, at the university with professors and students, with my friends and in public places, such as parks, in the

subway and in restaurants. Two major narratives were recurrent in almost all interviews in a relatively representative sample.¹¹⁹ The first narrative associates the entire Caucasian culture to violence, as I previously explained. It depicts a profound cleavage between peaceful ethnic Russians victimized by violent Caucasians. The second narrative is derived from this sense of danger, as ordinary citizens perceive that violence in the North Caucasus is the result of a religious and cultural clash. Consequently, the problem in the North Caucasus is not social or political but simply cultural. The only possible answer is thus to halt or to eliminate the problem as it challenges the very nature of Russian identity. One can observe a growing tolerance for a *ban-opticon* against ordinary citizens of Caucasian extraction and radical Islamists. At the same time, a culture of violence as the only solution has been created amongst the Russian population when confronting Caucasians.

Drew Foxall addresses this phenomenon and these narratives in his analysis of the inter-ethnic violence that erupted in the Stavropol region in 2007 (2010). Recent violent events in Moscow in the summer and the fall of 2010 demonstrate that tensions between Caucasians and ethnic Russians are still palpable in Russia. In December 2010, after a young individual from Kabardino-Balkaria killed an ethnic Russian citizen, a series of protests against people of Caucasian extraction were organised in Moscow. These protests had slogans saying “Russia for Russians” and “Moscow for Muscovites”, which were chanted by the protesters. The federal government was overtaken by the strength of these protests and the popular support these ultra-nationalists received. The capacity to politicize a single event, like a murder in the streets of Moscow, demonstrates that the social construction and

¹¹⁹ Dvora Yanow suggests that ethnographers should not use the concept of “representative sample” and should choose instead “purposive or snowball exposure” (2009: 286). In this case, I discussed and interviewed young people born during the fall of the Soviet Union or even after and older people educated in the Soviet era male and female, people from very different social classes, occupations (academics, students, journalists, workers, sellers) and educational level.

internalization of violence against Caucasians and radical Islamists is extremely widespread in the Russian population.

If people from Caucasian extraction are usually profiled in Moscow and other big cities across Russia, then radical Islamists or “Wahhabists” are usually another important target, especially in the North Caucasus. In this case, the fear of the Caucasian people is added to Islamophobia in targeting a particular image associated with the practice of radical Islam, Wahhabism and *salafism*. These three concepts are seen as being synonyms, although they are in fact different, as explained earlier in this thesis. Caucasophobia and Islamophobia become very closely intertwined and reinforce each other. The fear of Caucasians is thus reinforced because of their religion that is seen as targeting the very nature of Russian society. Islamophobia flourished rapidly following the beginning of the Second Chechen war and the terrorist attacks on Russian territory.

The bombings of apartment buildings in Moscow, Volgodonsk, Buynaksk and the Chechen invasion of Dagestan helped galvanise public opinion in Russia to support a military intervention in the North Caucasus in 1999 and the launch of the Second Chechen War. At the same time, the Putin government was able to establish a tacit link in the social imaginary between all the North Caucasian rebels (mainly Chechens) and terrorist activities. The fear of Chechen terrorists as an Islamic threat was also used by political leaders to depict moderate Chechen political leaders, like Aslan Maskhadov or Ahmed Zakayev, as terrorists (Snetkov, 2007). The event of September 11th also greatly helped the Russian government foster and strengthen this association in Russian public opinion and in Western countries. Although the concept of fear, and how it was used to justify the Second Chechen War, was overwhelmingly covered in the literature (Bacon et al., 2007; Campana and Légaré, 2011;

Trenin, Malashenko, and Lieven, 2004), very little scholarly attention was given to its impact on society in Russia and in North Caucasus.

This research seeks to study how this Islamophobia and Caucasophobia are exploited by security forces in order to achieve precise objectives, as Bigo explained; however, it is not limited to security apparatus. Indeed, the fear and resentment against people labelled as radical Islamist is also deeply-rooted in ordinary people's mind. Whether in Moscow, in public transportation, or at a university in Makhachakala, ordinary citizens are on the lookout for suspicious individuals. Ethno-religious profiling follows many dynamics that were analysed in chapter 7. Indeed, three different dynamics can be identified: profiling for money and promotion, profiling for security, and profiling by fear.

In the next section, I will be using personal vignettes from my fieldwork in order to exemplify how the fear of radical Islamists and Caucasians creates a spectrum of behaviours among security forces and ordinary people that contribute to push certain individuals toward the insurgency.

7.3 Checkpoints and Profiling as a Racketeering Activity

Any foreigner who has travelled in Russia at some point in the last 20 years or so knows about this practice. Indeed, tourists are regularly controlled and questioned over their *propiska* (registration). Local police are usually able to extract bribes from tourists by claiming they are risking a possible fine for not having the correct paperwork. At the same time, the practice is also common against targeted minorities in Moscow, such as Central Asians and Caucasians, as they are often illegal immigrants and are not registered in Moscow; this becomes a business opportunity for a lot of policemen. At the same time, many of these police officers fought as conscripts in Chechnya and openly associate people of

Caucasian extraction as the enemy. This latter fact is often referred to as the Chechen syndrome. This situation is reinforced by the social context and narratives I described earlier in the chapter. The fight against terrorism, radical Islam and the *ban-opticon* also gives the local police an opportunity to impose a more formal system of racketeering.

Each checkpoint at the entrance of all the North Caucasian republics is usually administered by local police, along with Special Forces and soldiers in Ingushetia, Chechnya, and Dagestan. In order to travel from Nalchik to Makhachkala by road, an individual would have to go through four checkpoints. At each of them, a regular pattern of inspection and interrogation usually happens, which sets the stage for money extortion. One local resident of Nalchik told me: “When I crossed the checkpoint between Kabardino-Balkaria and North Ossetia, I was controlled by police officers. The police officer asked me: “Dear Mister, are you a generous man?”. While asking this question on a repetitive basis, the police officer was searching and inspecting the resident’s car. As other cars were easily crossing the checkpoint, the local resident understood the need to pay a bribe. After paying around 100 rubles to the police officer, he was free to leave.

This practice is far from being an exception. Indeed, throughout all my journeys in marshrutkas in the North Caucasus, I noticed that the driver had to pay a bribe in order to avoid being controlled at minor checkpoints. However, when entering Ingushetia from North Ossetia, all passports were always controlled but I never witnessed a single question being asked to the passengers. Most probably, passport control was a way to extract money from the driver more than detecting possible insurgents. I also witnessed this arbitrary form of control on the night bus between Makhachkala and Nalchik traveling through Stavropol *krai*. The bus was usually controlled at numerous occasions on the road, but passengers and their passports were only controlled at a precise checkpoint entering North Ossetia in Mozdok.

The same police officer would come in the bus and control everyone with a long beard or anyone wearing an Islamic scarf. As I was one of them, he would usually ask us to step outside in the middle of the night in order to be questioned. Although questions were often about religion or terrorist activities, the main reasons they were asked was to obtain a bribe. The questions would be hesitant and vague in order to set up a sense of awkwardness and uneasiness among us. He would insist on the problematic nature of our physical appearance and the fact that our registration papers were not proper. However, his explanations would be extended in order to put pressure on us or the driver to pay a bribe to go through the checkpoint. I never noticed any controls at this checkpoint that resulted in people being taken into custody or asked to leave the bus. Indeed, each time I would cross this checkpoint, the same policeman would target a restrained number of people that look more “suspicious” than others. From week to week, I would be controlled, or not, depending of the number of vulnerable people on the bus. Often, the policeman would simply look at my passport, while the following week he would ask me to step out of the bus and explain why I was travelling in the North Caucasus. He would insist on the fact that my registration was not properly completed even if numerous bureaucrats from the Office of Visas and Registration (OVIR) and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MID) confirmed to me that all my paperwork was in order.

I observed this practice also in trains where police officers would randomly come on board during stops to control passengers in order to extract money from them. I was once asked in Kizilyurt in a train from Makhachkala to Moscow to present my passport and registration. The two policemen would then ask me for a missing special document using their hand to mimic money. I claimed to not have any special document to give them and after a long discussion they left the train without further notice.

These few vignettes demonstrate that one should not take all controls at checkpoints as part of larger *ban-opticon* dynamics, but should also understand the individual interests behind them. If one thinks about borders between the republics and checkpoints as daily security practices which are defined and monitored by security agencies, as Bigo describes in his theory, we can, nonetheless, see the thin line between security objectives and business opportunities. Hoeffler and Collier (2004), as well as other scholars (Nordstrom, 2004; Kalyvas, 2003; King, 2001; Mueller, 2000), have shown how civil wars are often a lucrative business opportunity for insurgents, as much as for soldiers. Borders and checkpoints allow security actors to impose their definition of the threat and also to establish a worthwhile and very lucrative shadow economy. At the same time, ethno-religious profiling seeks to limit the capacity of insurgents to travel in the region and to conduct terrorist activities. In the next section, I will demonstrate that it is problematic to reduce profiling to a pretext for racketeering. Security forces and citizens engage in profiling as a way to promote security.

7.4 Profiling For Security at Checkpoints and Public Transportation

Pradeep Jeganathan proposes to take the checkpoint as a site of anthropological inquiry and object of study (2004, 70-71). Violence in its various forms could thus be observed and experienced at checkpoints. In this research, the concept of ethno-religious profiling as a moment of violence, whether at a checkpoint or other public spaces, becomes the ethnographic object of study. Security is a much contested concept and thus security forces, in practice, rely on their own interpretation of the threat. In the case of Palestine and Israel, Juliette Ochs describes her own experience as a volunteer in the Israeli civil guard during the Second Intifada. Her fieldwork experience was shared between Jerusalem and Arad. She notes important differences in the interpretation of suspicious people. If in

Jerusalem the embodied suspicion was associated with male Palestinians, in Arad it was linked with Bedouins because of their proximity and large population (2011). Suspicions against a particular group of people vary according to a precise socio-political context. In my research, I was able to identify different patterns of embodied suspicions.

Walter Richmond, relying on the border guard handbook in the Northern Caucasus, explains that the federal government advises the guards about the ways to identify Wahhabis and, by the same token, insurgents. The difference between Wahhabis and traditionalists is epitomized by the “beard and shortened pants” (2008:88). Similar ethno-religious profiling practices focus on women wearing head scarves or hijabs. Although the handbook dichotomizes wahhabism in two trends, moderate and radical, it does not give practical ways to differentiate them. Richmond explains that “a feature of the Hanbali and Maliki madhhabs is the obligatory wearing of a beard with trimmed mustache” (2008: 88)¹²⁰. Following the instructions given to police forces and border guards, an Islamic beard, and in most cases simply an untrimmed beard, becomes a criterion to control individuals.

The primary purpose of checkpoints and ethno-religious profiling is to limit the mobility of insurgents and eliminate a potential threat to security. As I explained earlier in the section, ethno-religious profiling can be seen as a particular security practice. The same can be said about the checkpoint itself. Jeganathan proposes to see checkpoints as governmental practice that seeks to limit the threat of insurgent actions and identify the “boundaries of a [possible] target” (2004, 69). O’Loughlin, Holland and Witmer have demonstrated that an important amount of insurgent violence happens at checkpoints and on major roads of the North Caucasus (2011). Insurgents in Dagestan and Ingushetia mainly hide in the major cities, as in Chechnya the majority of the insurgents are in the mountains.

¹²⁰ Madhhab refers to Islamic school of thought to interpret the Koran and the Sunna.

Thus, they are regularly controlled and monitored by security forces at checkpoints or on the street. With the exception of major insurgent attacks, violence usually occurs when security forces seek to stop or control cars containing insurgents or criminals. It is rather difficult to precisely know if the control first seeks to extract money from these people or interrogate them for security reasons. In any case, it usually results in firefights between security forces and insurgents. Checkpoints become an acute point of potential violence and fear. “Checkpoints (...) are spaces in which sovereignty, as the right over life and death, is experienced in the mode of potentiality—thus creating affects of panic and a sense of danger even if “nothing happens””(Das and Poole, 2004:19).

Checkpoints become a site of potential violence for security forces but also ordinary people. Jeganathan explains:

“pass[ing] through a checkpoint is to remember why checkpoints exist—it is to recall the possibility of a bomb [or an attack]. (...) But on the other hand, there is another kind of anticipation—that of the soldiers checking the flow of traffic and people, asking questions. They are anticipating violence in another way” (2004: 69).

On one side, policemen and security forces fear the potential of insurgent attacks and become extremely on edge while conducting controls. Profiling becomes a way to insure their personal security based on a constructed suspicion (*ban-opticon*). Profiling is thus not only based on a religious suspicion but on a rational reaction to the potential of a threat. At the same time, profiling and checkpoints becomes a potential threat to ordinary people as they see checkpoints as sites of religious oppression or racketeering. For them, the potentiality of violence is understood in its symbolic form as well as its physical aspect. Checkpoints thus become an acute stress situation for radical Islamists, as they are regularly humiliated or, at best, profiled as if they are a threat to their own society. “Humiliation

fosters a simmering anger when people are treated as foreigners in their own country” (Peteet, 2009: 96).

The concept of humiliation is significant in the process of radicalisation and engagement in insurgent groups amongst ordinary people, as it will be demonstrated later in the chapter. This situation creates an important psychological effect on ordinary people as they wonder at every checkpoint if their life will be jeopardized. In my case, looking like a radical Islamist and regularly crossing checkpoints became an important burden. Although it was part of my research design to be regularly controlled on the basis of my physical appearance, the arbitrary nature of the controls provoked the fear that at some point the security forces would commit an error and take me for an insurgent. However, it was easier for me to cope with this burden and danger, as it was temporary. Indeed, I always had the option of changing my research design, shave my beard or even return to Canada. Radical Islamists do not have any of these options. In order to assume their faith and practice their religion, they have to choose to be regularly controlled by security forces. Even if they choose the option to renounce partially their practice of Islam, many of them are already listed as Wahhabis and encounter possible repression from security forces.

At the same time, ordinary citizens, when being controlled on a regular basis by security forces, start to see their faith or personal features as being excluded or even outlawed by society. “The[ir] (...) body is perceived as transgressive and (...) subject to extensive regulation; [they are] punished for the least infraction and sometimes for none at all. Beatings, arrests, confiscation of the identity card, forces waiting, and shootings” (Peteet, 2009: 95) are standard procedures for them at checkpoints. Jeganathan describes the feeling experienced by ordinary individuals at checkpoints:

“Checkpoint is a place where we who have seen, heard, and felt destruction, terror, pain, and death and who anticipate with uncertain anxiety that which is to come to us and ours, sense for a moment a stilling of that foretelling of death, a moment where returning to that ever-so-familiar way of reading and writing will allow foreknowledge and therefore safety” (2004: 74).

In the North Caucasus, and probably in many counterinsurgency situations, ordinary life becomes regulated as a perpetual checkpoint. Indeed, policemen based on their experience at checkpoints learn to identify a threat and to manage it. By using personal vignettes involving ethno-religious profiling during my fieldwork, I will try to exemplify how radical Islamists’ ordinary life is always under pressure stemming from security forces. This pressure directly contributes to pushing individuals toward violent participation in the insurgency.

7.5 Ordinary Life Managed as Perpetual Checkpoints

In all of Russia, and particularly in Dagestan, radical Islamists mainly identified by their appearance are seen as potential danger. The ethno-religious profiling used by security services at checkpoints penetrates all spheres of ordinary life. Policemen control the population and ordinary citizens on a daily basis. Radical Islamists are thus constantly targeted in public transportation and on the street. They become foreigners in their own country. The next two vignettes I experienced as a Canadian citizen looking like a radical Islamist demonstrate the constant profiling and pressure imposed to ordinary citizens in Dagestan.

On the last day of my fieldwork in the North Caucasus I was scheduled to travel from Nalchik to Pyatigorsk (Stavropol krai) in a *marshrutka* early in the morning, and then take the train to Kiev, the capital of Ukraine. It was the last day of an intense six-month fieldwork experience in Russia, with more than half of the time spent in the North Caucasus. When I

reached the train station in Pyatigorsk, policemen were staring at me. This behaviour was not unusual since security services would always be on their guard when they would see me because of my physical features.

While sitting in the train travelling from Pyatigorsk to Kiev, two undercover agents working for the Ministry of Internal Affairs stopped me. After quickly identifying themselves as undercover agents, without giving me any chance to double-check their identification cards and badges, they aggressively asked for my documents (passport and visa) and the reasons for why I was travelling in the North Caucasus. The situation took me completely off guard and I started feeling awfully nervous and began shaking, even though I had been immersed in ethno-religious profiling for the last three months. I was, however, able to deal with their questions, their aggressive tones and behaviours. I usually had time to prepare for interrogations while travelling on the bus or *marshrutka*. I knew exactly which questions and information would be asked and what not to answer in order to be able to go through checkpoints and security controls. This interrogation was different, I felt powerless and both agents noticed my hands shaking and my obvious level of stress. They deduced that I had something to hide or even that I could be a “*boevik*” using a fake Canadian passport to travel across Russia to commit acts of violence.¹²¹

They asked me to follow them to a separate part of the train. While one of the undercover agents kept pushing me violently against the wall, his colleague kept asking questions about the reasons I was in the North Caucasus and where I had been throughout my journey. I tried to answer the questions but I kept stuttering and I felt the enormous

¹²¹ In the same month, the Russian government controlled a Canadian citizen suspected to be a member of the Dagestani insurgency and fingerprinted him in Khasavyurt. It might explain the growing suspicion to see another Canadian citizen travelling in the region with distinctive radical Islamic features. See <http://news.nationalpost.com/2012/08/21/rcmp-had-been-searching-for-canadian-turned-jihadist-nearly-two-years-before-he-was-killed-in-russia> .

pressure coming from this stressful situation. They proceeded to a complete body search looking for explosives. They asked me questions about the reasons I was travelling in Stavropol krai, if I ever used a gun, if I had travelled in the mountains or in sensitive regions like Chechnya or Dagestan, if I was ever in contact with any *boeviki* and so on. They asked me to take off my shirt, my belt and asked me numerous questions about my body scars, especially those on my forearms and my shoulders as they were suspecting they might come from my battlefield experience. They carefully inspected my fingers to see if I ever used an automatic rifle, my wallet and my pockets to compare all my identity cards with my passport and my visa.

In a situation where policemen or security services were particularly abusive or insistent, I usually reminded them that I owned a diplomatic visa issued by the French Embassy in Moscow. It was enough to scare most of the policemen looking for a bribe but these two undercover agents only became more suspicious about my identity. They asked if I had a letter that confirmed I was travelling for business (*komandirovka*) in the North Caucasus in the name of the French embassy in Moscow. They asked me numerous times to explain the link between the French Embassy and Canada, the reasons why I was speaking French, Russian, and many other questions related to Canada and France. Normally, I perceived interrogations and security controls at checkpoints as a game where I had to collect information for my dissertation, but this time I felt like something bad could happen if I did not cooperate with the security forces. For the first time during my fieldwork, I became more worried about my own security than about my dissertation. This impression was probably very far from reality and it is likely that nothing could really happen to me, but this stressful situation was barely manageable for me. I thought I built a very thick skin to high-stress situations while travelling in Ingushetia, Chechnya and Dagestan, but I realized it was not the

case after this incident. The policemen finally agreed to let me go, although they told me that they would keep me under surveillance. I was later controlled twice on the way to Kiev by border guards and policemen. Similar questions were asked although no physical abuse was committed.

Although this event could be seen as a unique experience in my fieldwork, especially because of the behaviour of the two policemen involving physical violence, controls based on random suspicions and illiberal practices were not. The concept of suspicion is broadly defined in the North Caucasus, as we saw. The police control people that presumably act suspiciously in order to check their documents and their registration. In my case, acting suspiciously was mainly limited to walking in a public place with a long beard and backpack, to staring at security forces or walking by sensitive places such as the President's personal house or the police department.

My experience confirms what Amnesty International reports about the case of Vakha Zhovbatyrov in Ingushetia in August 2011. Zhovbatyrov was heading to the local mosque for the evening prayer when he was stopped and controlled by unknown armed servicemen. They physically abused the young man, controlled his documents, and he was subsequently arrested or abducted. According to the report, the security forces were conducting a systematic control of every young person, checking and taking pictures of their passports (Amnesty International, 2012: 27).

While I was in Dagestan I witnessed these kinds of illiberal procedures several times. As I would be walking in the evening, often close to a mosque or a neighborhood known for being particularly religious, police cars or cars without license plates would stop next to me. I would be ordered to put my hands in the air, drop my bag and let someone search me. I would then be interrogated by one serviceman, mainly about my beard and my religious

conviction, while the other unknown individual would control my passport and sometimes photograph it. The individuals would never identify themselves and would ask me to shave and to return home.

My personal experience was thus often very similar to what one can observe in the media and human rights reports. My immersion in ethno-religious profiling allowed me to personally participate in my object of study. However, it is important to underline that I do not and cannot claim to be an objective observer in this participant observation. In chapter 6, I underlined the debate about scientific research and ethnography. In this case, the concept of scientific neutrality is particularly difficult to maintain. Indeed, although my research is based on the assumptions that political ethnography can help us establish truth claims, it was extremely difficult, if not impossible, to remain scientifically neutral when you realise that your own personal security might be jeopardized.

Indeed, my personal subjectivity, habitus and experiences from previous interrogations shaped how I reacted, recalled and described these vignettes. I cannot, without difficulty, claim that I recall this story without leaving any details aside. My vignettes are based on my personal experience and personal interpretation of ethno-religious profiling. As Lisa Wedeen explains, “practices, like human actions, are ultimately ‘dual’,” composed both of what “the outside observer can see and of the actor’s understandings of what they are doing” (Wedeen, 2010: 87). Indeed, most of the questions and the performances I could recall in this stressful situation were the ones I had already encountered in human right reports or previous fieldwork experiences, such as questions about scars, mountains and my physical appearance.

At the same time, it would be false to claim that, although I am not fully objective in this participant observation, the results of the research are scientifically invalid. This

personal experience inside ethno-religious profiling helped me get a better understanding of the practices and performances of security actors and, most importantly, offered me a way to understand the psycho-sociological dimension of individual profiling. Indeed, being personally profiled reminded me that, as researchers, we often aim to provide generalisations of the behaviours of individuals. By contrast, a personal experience with profiling is very personal and the threshold of every individual is different. For some people, the simple fact of being subjected to brutality and improper behaviour is reason enough to seek revenge. For other people, the strength and temperance provided by Islam allow oppressed Muslims to overcome humiliation and problems.

At the same time, if the profiling was restricted to security service behaviour, the situation would be difficult to manage for radical Islamists and Salafists, but could most likely be overcome through religious faith for the majority of them. However, ordinary citizens also engage in constant profiling in daily life in order to identify potential dangers. This profiling is based on the ideological rhetoric put forward by the government, moderate clerics and security services, which associate violence and instability with radical Islam. Ordinary citizens are thus extremely suspicious of radical Islamists, as they see them as representing a potential threat. Radical Islamists once again become indirectly excluded from society as ordinary citizens, and often refuse to enter in contact with them or simply report them to the police on a regular basis. The next two vignettes demonstrate from my own personal experience how radical Islamists are profiled and excluded from everyday activities, such as going to the beach.

I was invited to the Faculty of Management at Dagestan State University in order to meet a professor working on a topic related to terrorism and conflict studies in the Republic. While waiting in the hall for my meeting, I noticed that a small number of students were

staring at me, as if I was a threat to their security. They were depicting clear signs of nervousness and uneasiness because of my presence in the university halls. I was used to being examined as a potential terrorist threat because of my beard and did not pay much attention to them. However, a few minutes later, the person in charge of security on campus and of the personal security of the Dean approached me anxiously and started to interrogate me about the reasons I was there. He was extremely suspicious and asked me to wait in the hall while he confirmed my identity with the professor. He then came back with the professor laughing at this misunderstanding and apologized to me for thinking I could be an Islamic insurgent targeting female students. He then explained to me how students regularly report suspicious individuals to them in order to keep the university safe from terrorism. He highly advised me to shave my beard in order not to appear as a threat to ordinary citizens. It was not the first time I was controlled at a university, as it is a regular practice all across Russia, yet the nature of the control was particularly different.

Indeed, for my first few visits, I would usually be controlled by various security guards at the entrance of the university. They were extremely suspicious mostly because of my physical features and my weird accent when I was speaking Russian. They would usually search my backpack and sometimes would even conduct a full body search in order to make sure that I did not bring explosives into the university. However, I started to build a relationship of trust with most of them when they learned that I was a Canadian guest in Dagestan, or simply because they realized we had some common friends. The fact that I was a Canadian visitor completely changed the way they perceived my physical features, my beard and their level of suspicion. Instead of being controlled, they would usually insist that I stop at their office to have tea or just to chat. Fear and suspicion transformed itself into hospitality and friendship.

This vignette is interesting as Juliana Ochs observed a similar pattern in Israel in order to control suspicious individuals. She explains that the discourse on suspicious people and its association with Palestinian suicide bombers was slowly internalized between the first suicide bomb in 1993 and the beginning of the second Intifada (2011: 81). The Israelis became alert at identifying signs or attributes associated with suicide bombers ranging from physical Arabic features to signs of nervousness. She adds that “despite the ubiquity of suspicion, Israeli Jews rarely apprehended suicide bombers [or terrorists]. It was not so much the presence of ‘suspicious people’ as their absence that enabled the discourse to persist as part of daily life” (Ochs, 2011: 16). The absence of violence is thus not seen as a sign of security or stability, but as moments of uneasiness where the potentiality of violence affects the behaviour of ordinary people. Ordinary people or civil security members thus seek to manage their daily lives as if they were at a checkpoint. Ethno-religious profiling is, therefore, a way to virtually create a space of security, although the potential of violence is linked more with fantasy than a real threat.

The second vignette took place in Southern Dagestan when I was invited to spend a few days in a student holiday resort. Upon my arrival, I was assigned to a room by the director of the resort. As I was laying to rest from my trip, two professors in charge of the students opened my door and started yelling at me. They were asking me what a Wahhabist was doing in a student resort. People like me were not welcomed in the resort. They then called the local police to report me and required them to control my identity. After a discussion, I introduced myself as doctoral candidate from Canada and insisted that I was not a radical Islamist. Their reaction changed suddenly as they became extremely welcoming and wanted me to meet the students. A similar situation happened on a daily basis when I met new people outside of my personal networks. People meeting me for the first time usually

refrained from openly entering into extensive discussions since they associated me with Wahhabism.

At the beginning of my third fieldwork in Dagestan, a friend of mine suggested that I could live in a student dorm in order to be immersed in Dagestani culture and have regular contacts with students. When I first came to register to the supervisor of the dorm, the woman in charge looked at me with worry and uneasiness in her eyes and told me to immediately leave, as the students under her supervision were not interested in my Islamic teachings. She threatened to report me to the police if I did not leave the dorm. The situation was resolved when my friend later came to the dorm in order to confirm my personal identity.

These vignettes are only a sample of recurrent behaviours I encountered in the 13 months I spent in Russia. I chose to take vignettes exclusively from the North Caucasus, as this research is mainly about the upsurge of violence in the region. I could, however, use similar examples from my experience outside of the North Caucasus. The most important aspect that shows up following my immersion in the region and my personal participation as a “victim” of ethno-religious profiling, is the importance played by this security practice in the socio-psychological development of insurgents. My personal experience with profiling was viewed through the prism of field research. However, at some specific point the sustained pressure became extremely difficult to cope with. For many months, my personal experience was lived as an important trauma that was extremely difficult to deal with since I could never really talk about it as one. It was extremely difficult for me to admit that my experience had such a traumatic effect on me when it was barely what radical Islamists and insurgents are submitted to on a regular basis. Instead of seeing religious repression and profiling as the cause of violence in the region, I started to perceive it as an element in the

process toward violence. Moments of acute stress, like my experience in the train towards Kiev, changed my perspective on insurgents. As it will be demonstrated in chapter 8, the engagement in an insurgent group should be seen as a mental and sociological process where ethno-religious repression plays the role of a triggering factor toward the insurgency. My experience convinced me that in order to explain the upsurge of violence in the region one should seek to go further than just identifying major causes or mechanism that lead to violence. The actual situation should be approached through the prism of a socio-psychological approach in order to understand the impact of major factors, such as corruption, profiling, and repression.

If my personal experience was enough to drive into a situation similar to post-traumatic stress disorder, how could radical Islamists cope with this on a daily basis without any possible solutions? The only way out from this vicious circle is the reinforcement of their faith, a growing discontent with government and subsequently participation in the insurgency. Violent engagement becomes a way to protect themselves against numerous abuses and social rejection from society. As we saw in chapter 5, the North Caucasian culture often pushes individuals to seek revenge instead of falling into apathy. The next chapter will also insist on how Salafist ideology plays on this feeling of humiliation in order to recruit new insurgents. Humiliation often provokes a cognitive opening to radical Islam. In the last part of the dissertation, I will build on my interviews in the North Caucasus in order to identify the various pathways toward the insurgency. This empirical reflection about the region will then help me to propose a theoretical reflection that seeks to link the various levels of analysis presented in this research.

Chapter 8: Interviews in Dagestan and Pathways toward the Insurgency

This chapter is built from a series of interviews conducted mainly in Dagestan but also in Chechnya between October 2010 and July 2011. I officially and formally interviewed at least 50 people, mainly republican ministers, members of the security apparatus (FSB and MVD), local Imams, ex-fighters, human rights workers, and journalists. I also conducted a series of informal interviews (over 60) with ordinary citizens and radical Islamists. I asked all of them to identify the causes and mechanisms that explain why Dagestani citizens, mainly young people, choose to adhere to radical Islam and insurgent groups. I also inquired about their opinion about the link between the rise of radical Islam in the republic and the recent upsurge of violence. Most of the interviews were loosely conducted in order to leave room for interviewees to emphasize their own personal views about these two topics. I report in this chapter the answers obtained during the interview process. I will then discuss them in relationship with the theoretical literature about political violence, and finally propose empirical conclusions about the case of insurgent participation. This section aims to contribute to the scholarship about the study of “the mechanisms and processes that draw individuals toward participation in radical Islamic groups” (Wiktorowicz, 2005: 5).

It is important to mention that the objective of these interviews and this section is mainly centered on male participants in insurgent groups in Dagestan. This choice of Dagestan was made for several reasons; the principal one being the difficulty to conduct interviews about insurgent movements in republics other than Dagestan. I encountered several difficulties in Chechnya and in Kabardino-Balkaria, mainly due to security issues and/or governmental pressure not to discuss this topic. The focus on Dagestan is nonetheless

interesting as it is the republic which witnessed the highest insurgent activity in the last three years (2010-2012). However, the main conclusions should not be taken as valid and transposable to all republics in the North Caucasus. The local dynamics such as corruption, nepotism and the historical roots of Islam play a different role in Dagestan than in other republics.

The focus on male subjects is mainly driven by the fact that numerous studies were conducted on female suicide bombers in the North Caucasus (Speckhard and Akhmedova, 2006a; 2006b; Youzik, 2005; Bloom, 2011; Murphy, 2010). Although the male processes of radicalisation and violent engagement have been studied in detail by many authors (Sageman, 2004; 2008; Wiktorowicz, 2005), the case of the North Caucasus was mainly ignored in the literature. Finally, the participation into insurgent movements has been understudied compared to the engagement of suicide bombers following the events of September 11th 2001, to the exception of a few authors (Wood, 2003; Horgan, 2005; Taylor and Horgan, 2006).

The interviewees identified three main causes for the development of radical Islam among young people in Dagestan: an ideological vacuum following the end of the Soviet Union, the high level of corruption in the republic, including the official clergy, and the harsh economic conditions. Interviewees insisted on diverse factors, including one facilitating cause, three preconditions (structural conditions), and four triggering events to explain the increasing number of young people “leaving for the forest.”¹²² An ideological vacuum has once again been identified as a facilitating cause. The preconditions to the participation in the insurgency covered in the interviews were: the very high level of

¹²² Tore Bjorgo explains that we can classify the causes of terrorism in four main categories: structural (preconditions), facilitating, motivational, and triggering causes (2005: 1-14).

corruption in the republic, the limited social mobility because of the clan structure, and the very high level of social injustice and difficulty in finding a gratifying job in Dagestan. The triggering events or factors were identified as police repression against relatives, human rights abuses, humiliation and religious repression.

However, one can identify important tendencies amongst aggregated groups in Dagestan. Young people (18-23 years old) often identify unemployment, blocked social mobility, and corruption as the main factors to explain the increase of insurgent participation. Radical Islamists and rural individuals often insist on corruption, police repression, the important loss of traditions in Dagestan, and religious discrimination as the main factors to explain participation in insurgent groups. Many governmental and religious elites usually refuse to acknowledge the upsurge of violence and the insecurity in the republic. They often claim that violence is by no means a bigger problem compared to Moscow or New York. When they admitted the problem they usually insisted on its economic and social (corruption) roots and argued in favor of the program for modernisation launched by President Medvedev as the main solution for these problems. They also associate episodes of violence with criminality rather than religious insurgency. According to them, violence is mainly the result of clashes between criminal and political opponents often covering their crime with Islamic rhetoric. According to them, there is thus no religious problem or sectarian violence in the republic.

A common feature in all groups is a propensity to present Dagestan as a stable society where violence and insecurity are not central factors. At the same time, they all put forward a second discourse that warns me against the danger in travelling to religious areas or to attend to public ceremonies. One can thus identify a “schizophrenic” public discourse between an increasing insistence to depict the situation and life as normal in opposition with a constant

reality of insecurity. I personally started to reproduce the exact same behaviour when I interacted with people abroad. I insisted on the relative peaceful situation in the republic even if every single day a shootout or a bombing would occur at a relative close range. A form of trivialization of violence occurs when exposed to recurrent threats in a conflict zone. Therefore, the answers to my interviews should be seen in their context and not as a precise depiction of the social and political situation in Dagestan.

In the next section, I will present a breakdown of each factor in order to identify precise narratives and explanations observed in the interview process. I will separately review the structural factors and the triggering factors in order to emphasize the precise group of respondents that insisted on each.

8.1 Structural Factors: Ideology, Brainwashing, Religion, and Tradition

Education has been reported to be one of the main factors which contribute to pushing young people toward radical Islamism and also violence. Many members of the Dagestani government openly claimed that radical Islamists are mainly brainwashed individuals that are seeking to fill a void in their ideological life following the end of the Soviet Union. Journalists and ordinary individuals also insisted on the importance of an ideological vacuum following the end of Soviet Union, but concede that the government failed to provide guidance to these young individuals. For some journalists, the choice to seek answers to social and economic problems in radical Islam is a personal and rational choice. At the same time, however, certain journalists used the concept of “zombification” in order to explain violence. The Dagestani society is divided in their conceptualization of radical Islamists. This cleavage often follows ethnic boundaries, as shown by Ware and

Kisriev (2009). Avars, Akkins-Chechens, and Dargins offer a more positive view of radical Islam compared to Lezgins, Tabassarans, and Kumyk.

According to police forces, the average age of insurgent members moved from 25-40 to 18-30 in the recent years.¹²³ For opponents to radical Islam, including many journalists and ordinary citizens, young people choose to engage in insurgent groups because they are uneducated and naïve. The rapid degradation of education following the end of the Soviet Union, and the corrupt nature of the education system are the main causes of this situation. In fact, education rapidly became a question of money and clan network, instead of being based on work and intellectual capacities. An important number of ordinary citizens used the exact same social narrative in order to exemplify the level of corruption in the educational system. Indeed, according to them, the majority of the doctors in the republic bought their diploma and are thus unable to practice medicine. According to interviewees, this situation is common in all professions, leading the younger generation to be ill-equipped intellectually, and permits them to be victims of Salafi preachers. In order to exemplify this situation, a member of the government reported to me the case of a young teenager that killed his own father. The teenager committed his crime because a group of Salafists told him that in order to be a faithful Muslim he had to kill all policemen who are infidels (*kafirs*), including his own father.

It would be incorrect to assume that the bulk of the insurgent fighters in Dagestan are young, poor, uneducated and from rural areas. From what I could observe on the field and through primary and secondary sources, educated young people have become more

¹²³ *Ася Канаева* “В Дагестане 12% учащейся молодежи поддерживает” *Kavkazskii uzel*, 9 December 2011 available at <http://dagestan.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/197318/>. The survey was conducted by *the monitoring group Youth Protection of the Republic of Dagestan among 3,000 students in the major cities of the republic (Makhachkala, Kaspiisk, Khasavyurt, Derbent, Izberbash, and Kizilyurt)*.

Islamized and many openly support the Islamic insurgents. A recent survey (December 2011) in Dagestan indicated that twelve percent of high school and university students *approve* insurgents' actions.¹²⁴ According to the survey, these young people not only see insurgent actions as justified but also as the key solution for the problems of Dagestan. Twenty percent of these young people called themselves moderate Salafis. In the survey, moderate Salafi means practicing pure Islam. These numbers are very surprising as it is rather rare in Dagestan to encounter people that will openly identify themselves as Salafists, mainly because of the repression described in the previous chapters.

This survey supports what I obtained through my ethnographic research and my interviews. I was surprised by the importance of radical Islam amongst young people in Dagestan. For the few atheists I met, most of them were afraid to be identified as bad Muslims. On numerous occasions, they made me promise that I would not tell significantly religious people in their entourage about the fact that they enjoy drinking wine or smoking cigarettes.

This view is shared by many members of the Dagestani intelligentsia as numerous university professors and other intellectuals openly expressed the opinion that Salafists are usually educated and smart individuals. Many ordinary citizens insist on the new generation of young educated people that participate in jihad, such as Yasin Rasulov. These young people are often polyglots, have studied Islam abroad, and possess higher education. “[They see] themselves as both spiritually and politically democratic, opposing inequity and elitism in social, political, and theological terms” (Ware and Kisriev, 2009: 93). Religion is seen as an answer for many problems such as the absence of social mobility, low unemployment and the high level of corruption across the North Caucasus, especially in Dagestan.

¹²⁴ *Op. Cit.*

Many mountainous people (mainly Avars and Dargins), but also radical Islamists, associate the upsurge of violence in Dagestan with an important loss of traditions. In both cases, this view of the problem is common amongst younger individuals (18-23 years old). Many of them underline the way women dress in major cities in Makhachkala, the way young people act and how they forget about the importance of elders and clans. Western values are underlined as destroying the social links and the importance of jamaats in Dagestani culture. The interpretation of Shariah is in opposition with local customary law (adat) particularly on the institutionalisation of blood feud, clan tradition and the importance of elders (Lieven, 1999; Souleimanov, 2007: 30–33). This observation follows a pattern also observed in other Muslim societies: “Radicals often embrace takfiri Islam as a rebellion against family members and as a justification for rejecting various norms [and traditions]” (Ranstorp, 2010: 7).

The assumption that Dagestani or North Caucasian insurgents are brainwashed victims of insurgent groups is hardly persuasive. Ideology, in this case the radical practice of religion, usually plays a late role in the participation in insurgent violence in the second generation of fighters that did not participate in the two Chechen wars. At the same time, there are several hundreds, if not thousands, of people actually involved in the North Caucasus insurgency; only a minority of them are Islamic zealots or theologians.

All journalists openly warned me to reconsider my views about the link between violence and Islamism. According to them, violence is mainly driven by criminality, greed and individualism in the Dagestani society. For them, criminality is mainly the result of the corrupt social and political system based on a small numbers of clans. Journalists have repeatedly claimed that 25 to 30 percent of all acts of violence are criminally related and

showed me videos and statistics showing this trend. They also insist on the close link between criminals, businessmen and policemen in the republic.

Many young people in the republic talk to me about criminal groups using an Islamic discourse in order to establish protection racket and extract money from local businessmen. According to them, criminality is the main factor that drives the upsurge of violence in major cities like Makhachkala, Kaspiisk and Khasavyurt. Governmental elites also claim that insurgents are mostly filled by criminals hiding in the insurgency. For them, what we are witnessing in Dagestan is a struggle between criminals with a religious disguise and elites trying to put forward the federal plan of modernisation. The problems that need to be addressed are thus primarily social and not religious. This dichotomy between social and religious is problematic, as it shall be demonstrated. Both factors have a role in the process of insurgent participation in Dagestan.

8.2 Social Mobility

Many young people (over 50 percent) that I interviewed told me that the main factor for joining an insurgent group, after the desire of vendetta (see below), is the complete absence of social mobility. These young people came from different backgrounds and different nationalities. At the same time, ordinary citizens and government elites also stress the important proportion of young people in the republic compared to the older Soviet generation. The important pool of young people represents an important challenge in terms of employment for the government. Young people have less opportunity to access higher social classes even if they possess a higher education. Social mobility is mainly linked to personal and clan networks. In order to obtain an important position or job, individuals often have to pay an astronomical bribe. In this situation, many young people see the insurgency as

a valid option as a life opportunity. According to this narrative, the choice to join radical Islamic communities or insurgent movements is more in reaction to social problems than to religious or ethnic grievances. The young people with lower education I interviewed often joined the insurgency as a way to find a job, as it is impossible for them to find one in the current social system. They usually decried the importance of unemployment and corruption in the republic.

Unemployment was also linked to the question of military conscription. Over 95 percent of the young men I interviewed and interacted with throughout my fieldwork insisted on the importance in completing their military service in order to be able to find a job in the government or in the police in Dagestan. The only young individuals that did not mention the importance of the military service are those that were able to secure a good job in a non-governmental organisation. To my surprise, military service represents for many young Dagestanis a chance to change social classes. It represents a door for social integration and social mobility. The paradox of this situation is that many of them are what I would label as intellectual, and would not usually aspire to become a policeman or work for private security companies. They are educated young men who usually would prefer to continue their graduate studies in order to become part of the intelligentsia if job opportunities existed for students with higher education. This aspect explains partly why we witnessed an increase of intellectuals in the rank of the insurgency. Many of these individuals became leaders of combat jamaats.

One human rights activist explained to me that young people come to Makhachkala from mountainous regions of Dagestan in order to find a job and be able to sustain their future family. Instead, they discover the corrupt nature of the system, the impossibility to find a job and their blocked social mobility. The activist thus provided me with an analogy:

“the situation is like a river of young insurgents which flow from the mountains to Makhachkala.” The river is fed by the lawlessness of police forces. The exact same analogy was used by an important minister of President Magomedov’s cabinet when I discussed with him the social background of insurgents. A bureaucrat in charge of a youth integration program explained to me that in the Soviet Union, young people were given a clear path to follow. This supervision is now missing in post-Soviet societies and young people become victim of preachers, radical ideology, and criminal influence. According to a member of the intelligentsia, one of the solutions to insurgent violence is to create programs to support employment amongst young people.

A radical Islamist told me that insurgents play on the passion and the impulsive nature of young people. This tension is particularly interesting as very religious individuals decry how insurgent ideologues play on the impulsive nature of young people. Most of the time, however, they do not decry insurgent activity. In fact, this radical Islamist said that Salafi recruiters are very clever to base their recruitment on elements that resonate amongst young people. For instance, radical Islamists tend to present the insurgents as idealist people that use violence as a way to express themselves and not as criminals or terrorists. By contrast, government elites depict insurgents as greedy criminals. We see here the dynamics described in chapter 4 according to which the local government is not politically indebted to the local population but strictly to the federal government.

Many authors have cautioned against the theoretical limits of mono-causal explanations of terrorism and insurgent violence. Krueger and Malečková (2003), just as Sageman (2004; 2008) and Roy (2002), make evident the problem and link poverty and education with terrorism and insurgent engagement. Poverty is rarely a common denominator amongst terrorist and insurgent members. To the contrary, Krueger and

Malečková even find that poverty is negatively correlated with insurgent participation in Lebanon (2003: 133). In his analysis of 172 Al-Qaeda militants arrested or killed in Western countries, Sageman shows that a high proportion of them did not come from a lower social class and that they were relatively well educated (2004). Krueger and Malečková also conclude that the level of GDP per capita does not have a statistically significant effect on terrorism (2003). Thereby, poverty and low education are not a root cause of terrorism, but it does not mean they could not have an impact on the radicalisation process of individuals. “Although absolute poverty and other aspects of economic deprivation have a weak link to terrorism, a pervasive sense of humiliation and hopelessness does not” (Gupta, 2005: 27). Therefore, political and social grievances are necessary but not a sufficient condition to lead to insurgent violence and terrorism.

John Horgan adds that according to psychological studies the traditional frustration-aggression theory, which posits that terrorist activities result from the absence of political opportunities or the closure of the political system, is not conclusive. This theory “describes the response to frustration or blockage of attainment of one’s personal or environmental goals” (Horgan, 2005: 49). According to Horgan, the frustration-aggression hypothesis “and its derivatives (...) must remain seriously limited analytical tools in the context of explaining terrorism, both on individual and collective bases” (2003: 11). While personal frustration, limited social mobility, or a blockage to attain certain goals could lead to possible aggressive behaviour and engagement in terrorism, it does not solely explain why only a few individuals engage in terrorism. It also does not explain why people from higher social classes would engage in violence. In social sciences, this hypothesis has been developed by Ted Gurr’s research about deprivation (1970) and further analysis by recent scholars in the greed versus grievance debate (Collier and Hoeffler, 2004). For the case of terrorism, the question that

arises from the frustration-aggression hypothesis is why so few people become terrorists if frustration is widespread. In the case of insurgency and civil war, the same question does not have the same resonance.

Horgan proposes the concept of “openness to engagement” (2005: 90) in trying to explain the eagerness of certain individuals in choosing violent engagement over political activism or passivity. Indeed, people react very differently to political and social problems and voice grievances according to their personal life, context and environment. A whole spectrum of practices is available to them, ranging from non-violent political actions to violent engagement. For Taylor and Horgan, one should resolve this puzzle by focusing on “the psychological and emotional context of the individual on which the bigger and essentially non-psychological forces of opportunity and context operate” (2006: 588). Thus, one should look into the concept of triggering factors in order to get a more complete picture of the processes of insurgent participation.

8.3 The Closure of the Political System

Dagestan’s political system reinforces the gap between elites and the local population. Indeed, as free elections were replaced by federal nominations and highly corrupt practices of governance, the local population have been excluded from normal political processes. According to a local journalist, Salafism and radical Islam in general have become the only way to express a critical view against the political system and its paternalistic nature. The absence of democracy is thus one of the main reasons forcing people to join insurgent groups and to turn toward pure Islam communities. In interviews, ordinary citizens and journalists have repeatedly used the concept of “feudalism” to describe their society and the political system. An important Dagestani minister told me that the concept of modern

feudalism clashes with the tradition of local jamaats and thus becomes a source of friction between a minority of elites and the majority of the population. Jamaats, mainly based in mountainous regions, are based on a tradition of refusal to submit to outsider authority. Resistance in order to keep basic freedom of thought, beliefs, and religious practice is seen as a core element of their identity. Feudalism is thus seen as crushing their traditions and core aspects of their identity. Violence is once again in reaction to state actions seeking to impose a political and cultural system considered alien by the local population.

A human rights activist insisted that the situation would continue to degrade until Muslim radicals have a political channel where they can voice their grievances about religion, but also about life in general. This solution is openly rejected by most of the ministers interviewed as it is directly in opposition with federal laws. For them, the solution is mainly economical and necessitates a modernisation of the republic in order to create opportunities for young people. They openly deny the state of corruption in the actual system and its impact on the local population.

At the same time, many of the interviewees insist that Salafists are not looking to be integrated into the political system, as they reject it entirely. They usually look for two options: whether to destroy the actual political system in order to establish a state based on Sharia law or to isolate themselves in small communities ruled by Islamic laws, like in the village of Gimry. The closure of the political system thus plays a direct role on the choice of individuals in seeking potential solutions in religion or in insurgent movements. Violence becomes a way to speak the same language as local elites. Indeed, violence is seen by groups and by individuals as the only way to deal with the corrupt elites.

8.4 Corruption, Lawlessness and Injustice

Journalists and ordinary citizens in Dagestan all reported that policemen abuse the law against Wahhabism, and use their position of authority in order to sustain and promote their personal career. They are able to secure promotions and bribes because of the lack of judicial accountability. In fact, one journalist insisted on the fact that insurgents and police forces both need each other to promote their own interests. According to this journalist, insurgents and servicemen even collaborate in order to reinforce instability in the republic. Many ordinary citizens openly claimed that the government and the insurgency do not want to find a solution to the actual crisis, as the status quo is far better.

A journalist insisted on the fact that the siloviki mostly focus on the elimination of radical Islamists based on a list given by the official clergy. Therefore, special operations do not usually target insurgents, but simple ordinary citizens. This strategy feeds the feeling of lawlessness amongst young radical Islamists. Ware and Kisriev suggest that Wahhabism also offers a protection device against “the criminal free-for-all of the North Caucasus, Wahhabism has provided its adherents with an organized and armed force for their protection against the opportunistic transgressions of predators and the arbitrary brutality of the police. Sharia has become a means of sustaining order despite the failures of law enforcement and government agencies.” (2009: 92).

The *European Commission’s Expert Group on Violent Radicalisation* argues that radicalisation, and subsequent violent mobilization, usually sets its ground on a widely shared sense of injustice (2008). Individuals then start to seek a solution or remedy to this situation, whether it is a social, political, or material issue (Sprinzak, 1991; Moghaddam, 2005). If it is not possible, the individual will look to blame an “other” or an out-group for this problem. In the case of this research, the out-group is seen as the corrupt local elites and

security forces. If the perceived causes of injustice vary greatly between different groups, such as radical Islamists or extreme-right factions, they often lead to a similar reaction which is common to most forms of violent mobilization. It gives rise to a common narrative that claims: “we are a special or chosen group (superiority) who have been unfairly treated and betrayed (injustice), no one else cares about us or will help us (distrust), and the situation is dire—our group and our cause are in danger of extinction (vulnerability)” (European Commission, 2008: 426). The next stage is described by Moghadam as a moral disengagement from society and an engagement with a small group (2005). In Dagestan, the groups could be a local Islamic jamaat or insurgent groups. Inside these groups, the role and the influence of radical Islam increases rapidly as the individuals are usually isolated from society. Their perception of the importance of Sharia and radical Islam gets stronger and they start to perceive it as a solution to injustices. Involvement in violence becomes the final stage of the process of radicalisation.

Extra-judicial abuses thus become one of the most important factors that push people into the insurgency. In fact, many people choose to join the insurgency because they seek a way to avenge the wrongs committed against them.

8.5 Vendetta

The need to seek vengeance has been evoked by almost all respondents from different social classes, religious faith or nationality, except for a very small number of government officials. A recurrent narrative, especially in Dagestan, goes like this: “ethnic Russians hide from their problems in a bottle of vodka. For North Caucasians, especially mountainous people, they face their problems with weapons and blood feud.”. Although this narrative is heavily stereotyped and does not present an accurate picture of the region, it emphasizes the

importance placed on acting and fighting with honour in the North Caucasus. Many ordinary citizens have stressed that Dagestanis have “the blood and the genes” of resistance and thus cannot tolerate abuse or inequalities. This narrative is not unique to Dagestanis as I encountered the exact same discourse from Circassian veterans of the Abkhaz war. It can be heard from individuals of every social class I met in Dagestan, from intellectuals to manual workers, from rural citizens to people living in the major cities.

The notion of a culture of violence is extremely problematic and usually leads to a primordial approach to explain ethnic or religious violence (Goldhagen, 1996). In our case, the answers should not be analyzed in terms of culture itself but on the norms developed around this honour system. Honour plays a role of social capital and often represents the cement of kinship groups in the North Caucasus. Xavier Crettiez investigates cultural incentives to violent radicalisation (2011: 52). Extra-judicial abuses or religious repression have the capacity to act as a triggering factor for many individuals, either as direct victims or members of their clans. Some ordinary citizens framed this argument in terms of a tradition of opposition and resistance to invaders. In this narrative, the actual struggle is part of a resistance process that was launched several hundreds of years ago. As already mentioned, people from the mountainous regions are adamant that the jamaat and the strength of their kinship explain the cycle of violence in the republic. For them, it is normal for members of same jamaat or clan to unite to protect and avenge the wrongs committed against the collective.

The concept of shame is often mentioned to explain why people join insurgent movements. Police abuse, torture, and religious repression produce a reaction amongst pious Muslims or individuals for whom reputation is a core element of their socialization and their identity. Numerous government officials told me in private that they understand why people

engage in insurgency to take revenge or to protect their honour. They also often mentioned to me how fortunate they are not to be exposed to this kind of police brutality. They readily confided that they would react exactly like insurgents if a situation like that would happen to them or their family.

8.6 Religious Education Abroad and Foreign Influence

Many influential ministers in the Dagestani government mentioned to me the importance of young people studying Islam abroad. They suggest that their return to the republic creates problems as they import an outsider ideology. According to them, traveling abroad in order to study Islam should be regulated. A surprising number of people interviewed, including radical Islamists, ordinary citizens, and government officials, associate the upsurge of violence with the religious foreign influence. It was regularly mentioned to me that Iran, Saudi Arabia, Great Britain and the United States were the main ideological and financial supporters of radical Islamists in Dagestan. A government official told me that one of the main problems for the growth of Salafism in Dagestan is the fact that Western countries, such as Great Britain, allow Salafists to openly preach their ideology. According to him, if Western governments could be as proactive as the Dagestani government, the problem of Salafism would be rapidly eliminated all across the world. This view is, however, mostly present amongst low-level ministers and bureaucrats and not important members of the cabinet. The close circle of elites around the President of Dagestan acknowledge that financial support mainly come from inside the republic and not from abroad or from other republics.

A growing number of students are going abroad in order to study in various Islamic countries. Only a minority of them, however, engage in violence. When it is the case, one

can usually identify triggering factors that pushed the individual to join the insurgency. The argument of an imported ideology seems mainly constructed by elites in order to find a scapegoat for a problem that finds its roots in the local social and political dynamics.

The central question and challenge is to explain why only a few individuals are affected by these structural preconditions and triggering factors. One approach is to look at the combination of these factors in order to identify the pathways toward violent engagement in the republic. Religious repression and police abuse, such as torture, human rights violations or extra-judicial killings are crucial in explaining why people join the insurgency. Whether it is for blood feud or vendetta, for opportunity or for religious fervor, triggering factors are linked with preconditions that drive certain individuals toward the insurgency. In order to address the concept of trajectory toward insurgent participation, I will first be reviewing an interview I conducted with an insurgent that fought in the two Chechen wars but decided not to participate in the insurgency in Dagestan. This interview should help us to put into context the situation in which ex-fighters find themselves.

Conducting interviews with ex-insurgents and terrorists is particularly difficult in the North Caucasus, as most of them are usually killed in special operations. In addition, fighters that went through amnesty programs are normally under regular surveillance by the FSB. They are not easily available for an interview process. Throughout my fieldwork, I approached various political actors engaged in the Commission for Adaptation in Dagestan, which is in charge of the rehabilitation of insurgents.¹²⁵ Although political actors were willing to discuss the commission and its shortcomings, they were reluctant to let me meet with the thirty individuals (now thirty-seven) that were rehabilitated to civilian life. I was

¹²⁵ *Timur Isaev* "Dagestani authorities define guarantees for militants' return to peaceful life" *Kavkazskii uzel*, 17 November 2010, available at <http://www.eng.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/15227/>

told that the individuals were given new identities and it was not possible to conduct interviews with them. One can postulate that the government also does not want scholars or journalists to investigate the process of rehabilitation and analyse the thirty-seven cases in depth.

Nevertheless, I was able to conduct one formal and in-depth interview with an ex-insurgent in Dagestan, whom I contacted through mutual friends. This insurgent followed a known pathway in his participation in the insurgency enabling us to introduce the theoretical discussions about pathways and trajectories toward violence in the North Caucasus. After being dispatched to Chechnya to serve in the First Chechen War as a Russian conscript, this ex-fighter was disgusted by the fighting conditions offered by the Russian government and defected to fight along the Chechen insurgents. The individual, whom we will call, Rustam, joined a non-religious battalion under a fairly well-known Chechen warlord. He fought during the first and the second Chechen war. He finally joined the Aslan Maskhadov's Presidential Guard during the Second War and was captured by Russian forces in 2002.

He spent several months in filtration camps in Khankala and Chernokozovo, and in a Russian prison outside of the North Caucasus.¹²⁶ After serving his time in prison, he came back to Dagestan where he was allowed to settle back under the condition that he would report to the FSB on a regular basis (every week or other week). He refused to comment in depth about his parole procedure and his relationship with the FSB and other security services. He, however, openly admitted that the FSB would call him or visit his home randomly at night in order to make sure he is not involved in insurgent activities.

¹²⁶ Although it was not directly discussed in the interview, the filtration camp in Chernokozovo is usually associated with intensive torture against prisoners (Gilligan, 2010: 58-74).

According to his testimony, his prison experience was one of the main factors that led him to disengage from any insurgent activity. He did not comment on possible human rights abuses committed by Russian forces or pro-Chechen forces during his detention. He, however, insisted on the fact that the most important disengagement factor was his willingness to be able to live with his family and protect them from potential abuse. Nevertheless, he maintained that he made the right choice when he joined the insurgency in 1994 and would not change his personal choice if he had the opportunity. According to Rustam, at that moment in his life, he had the choice to fight along the Chechens or be considered as a cannon fodder by Russian forces. It did not have anything to do with religion or kinship relations with Chechens. It was strictly a strategic choice in order to save his life. Rustam openly mentioned that the Dagestan insurgency is still very strong and has the capacity to attract fighters. He claimed that the fighting in the republic and in Chechnya is far from being over but refused to elaborate on this aspect for security reasons.

Rustam's interview was a rather short one as it lasted around 30-40 minutes and was done in difficult conditions. Although he agreed to discuss the topic, Rustam did not want to elaborate about his relationship with the FSB and also with the actual insurgents in Dagestan. Often, he would start sentences and hope I would know what he meant based on the knowledge of the region. His story is not, at first glance, riddled with inconsistencies, since most of the facts are reliable according to my personal knowledge of the Chechen insurgency. I do not have reasons to doubt the veracity of his stories, although I lack evidence to confirm it. In this situation, it is very difficult to assess the truthfulness of all the claims.

Even if this story cannot be taken as absolute truth, one can nonetheless deduce interesting information about one of the pathways toward violent engagement for veterans of

the Chechen wars. Indeed, one of the general understandings about the spillover of the Chechen wars is that all North Caucasians who fought in Chechnya came back to their native republic in order to spread the war against the Russians and jihad. The case of Rustam suggests that some fighters are able to reintegrate themselves into ordinary life following their insurgency experience in Chechnya. They did not come back to their republic to spread the jihad or to open other military fronts against the Russians, as the literature often portrays. They came back because they disengaged from active fighting and insurgent activities. However, at the same time, they do not always deradicalise their beliefs. In that case, repression against them or their relatives could trigger an active re-engagement in the insurgency. In the next section, I should seek to present excerpts of insurgent life stories in order to exemplify the various pathways and trajectories toward engaging in violence.

8.7 Pathways and Trajectories toward the Dagestani Insurgency: Revisiting the Chechen Spillover

Rustam's life story brings to the fore the central aspect of the Chechen wars on the Dagestani population. Many radical Islamists have used the interwar period and Chechen training camps as a place to hide from governmental repression, to obtain military and religious training, and as an occasion to build networks. This period produced a generation of insurgent fighters that subsequently engaged in violence in Dagestan. During that time, the Dagestani insurgent groups gradually experienced a generational change where most of the fighters did not fight or train in Chechnya. The crucial question is what to expect from the second generation of fighters in the republic.

When studying terrorism and insurgent violence, one is often confronted with the claims that individuals who perpetrate these acts are psychopaths, brain-washed by ideology or are sociologically abnormal. As a matter of fact, the literature about terrorism has long

debunked these assumptions. Mitchell D. Silber and Arvin Bhatt, through studying how young people turn to radical Islam and subsequently toward violent engagement (terrorism), insist on the relative “normality” or “ordinary” lives of the future radicals at the phase of pre-radicalisation (2007). Sageman (2004) argues that these individuals have in common certain pathways or experiences in violence but that they do not share a similar psychological profile; this is contrary to what is regularly asserted in public discourse.

Looking for a specific insurgent profile or personality in order to explain terrorist and insurgent violence through psychopathology is not supported within the psychological literature, according to Horgan (2003:7) and others scholars (Silke, 1998; Sageman, 2008). It is rather difficult, if not impossible, according to the actual research to identify psychological dissimilarities between terrorists and non-terrorists. To quote McCauley “that is not to say that there is no pathology among terrorists [or insurgents], but the rate of diagnosable pathology, at least, does not differ significantly from control groups of the same age and background.” (1991: 132, quoted in Horgan, 2003: 17). Violent engagement cannot be linked to any psycho-pathologies in a clinical sense (Horgan, 2005). Alec Lyons and Helen Harbinson, by studying 106 murders in Northern Ireland, underline that politically motivated murderers generally come from a more stable background and suffer less psychological problems than “ordinary” murderers (1986). Sageman adds that an antisocial personality disorder is not observed in the case of the vast majority of terrorists involved in al-Qaeda (2008: 63). Horgan, in that same vein, is critical of the theory linking political violence and terrorism to the need to go back to childhood experiences or traumas (2003; Sageman, 2008: 68).

An argument reinforcing the normality of terrorists is made by Horgan when he claims that terrorists usually seek to achieve collective over individual goals.¹²⁷ In order to achieve these goals, members of terrorist and insurgent organisations require a commitment toward their political cause and, thereby loyalty to the movement. Psychopaths are unfit candidates for terrorist organisations as they usually demonstrate an extreme narcissistic personality and are not well suited to a clandestine life (Horgan, 2003; 2005; Sageman, 2008). Although true for terrorist organisations, similar conclusions could be reached for militias during internal conflicts and intrastate war. The need for self-sacrifice and altruistic qualities to ensure the organisation's security is often absent from individuals with antisocial disorder and psychopathologies. If this kind of individual can be found in militias during an open-warfare civil war, they are rather rare in an underground insurgent movement like in Dagestan.

Except for specific individuals that we can identify as suffering from psychopathology¹²⁸ based on empirical evidence and testimonies from the field, one should usually assume the ordinary status or the “normality” of people engaging in violence. The explanation of violent engagement should, thus, not be sought in the personalities of insurgents or terrorists.

In light of this assessment, one should presume that terrorists and insurgents are rational actors who take decisions in a particular socio-political context in order to achieve significant goals based on their personal preferences. According to the collective action literature, individuals accept a certain level of risk in order to achieve their goals. In this literature, non-participation in a collective movement is explained by the fact that individuals

¹²⁷ Except in the case of the lone-wolf terrorist which is very unusual in the North Caucasus.

¹²⁸ In Chechnya and the North Caucasus, the case of Salman Raduyev is probably the most well-known case.

will prefer to free-ride and benefit from the gains of the movement as public goods instead of participating and encountering costs (Olson, 1965). Mark Irving Lichbach has written extensively on this collective action dilemma in relationship to rebellion participation (1995). He underlines that although the collective action dilemma predicts that people would not participate in rebellion, they regularly do.

In opposition to this depiction of insurgent participation, Kalyvas and Kocher have shown that non-participation could be seen as the most risky choice when repression is particularly brutal (2007). Indeed, according to them, researchers often overemphasize the risk of participation and underestimate the risk of non-participation. In the case of the North Caucasus, although non-participation does not shield individuals from police force abuse, it is still a safer choice than joining an insurgent movement. However, for certain individuals the cost of non-participation is extremely high as demonstrated by the concept of collective responsibility. If one agrees to see rebellion as a collective action problem, participation could also be enhanced by selective incentives (Popkin, 1979), pre-existing social networks (Scott, 1977), political opportunity (McAdam, 1982), or coercion. Certain authors have insisted on the effect of repression in lowering the cost of participation and increasing the cost of non-participation (Goodwin, 2001).

The problem with the collective action theory is that it gives a valid explanation as to why so many people did not join a rebellion but does not provide an in depth understanding of those who did (Wood, 2003: 16). As Roger Petersen rightly argues, our understanding of rebellion participation should not be limited to a dichotomy between participation and non-participation (2001: 8). A more nuanced picture is required to understand the eclectic nature of insurgent participation in general. The focus should be placed on participation instead of non-participation.

Engaging in an insurgent movement in Dagestan or elsewhere in the North Caucasus could be seen as a form of high-risk activism (McAdam, 1986; Crettiez 2011). It is obvious that the personal gains, compared to the costs of fighting government forces in order to establish an Islamic emirate in the North Caucasus, are negative. This high-risk activity will most likely not deliver important gains in a near future for most of the insurgents. At the same time, the vast majority of them will be either killed or taken into custody. They will also place their relatives in a precarious situation in terms of collective responsibility.

At the same time, the claim to fight for the establishment of an Islamic Emirate could be seen as a public good as all Muslim citizens would benefit from it. There is then an incentive to free ride and share the benefit of the Islamic state without participating in the insurgency. The core question is: why would an individual choose to join the insurgency in order to fight the federal and republican forces? Wood's answer to this question is found in the concept of a new insurgent culture. Participation in the insurgency was justified "by the injustice of existing social relations and state violence, and to interpret its costs, even the highest of them, as meaningful sacrifices" (2003: 225).

My interviews conducted in Dagestan reveal a similar pattern, with important nuances. The Dagestan neo-patrimonial state, its corruption level, and the repression put forward by security forces followed what Wood observed in her research. Salafism, as a new political culture, also seeks to propose an alternative to the actual political system which helps ordinary citizens to overcome the collective action dilemma. At the same time, the risk tolerance of individuals and the choice to participate instead of free-riding is not static throughout a military conflict. Wood explains that risk assessment evolves according to the early success of insurgent groups (2003: 238-239). The changing environment and situation,

the socio-political context, as well as the impact of the network and the peers, have a dynamic effect on how individuals take decisions in relation to violence in civil war.

By studying the “process model of involvement in terrorism and political violence, identifying issues relating to ‘how’ people become involved may be more valuable than attempting to arrive at answers ‘why’ people become involved” (Horgan 2005: 89). In this case “process refers to a sequence of events, involving steps or operations that are usually ordered and/or interdependent” (Taylor and Horgan, 2006: 586). The concept of pathway mirrors Wiktorowicz’s suggestion that “rather than assuming a universal process of joining, it seems more fruitful to create models according to “movement families”, where dynamics are likely to follow similar patterns” (2005: 17). This way we shift the research focus from psychological profile and personalities to pathways. A report of the European Commission came to the same conclusion: “the concept of static profiles appears incapable of explaining the considerable variety of individual actors involved” (2008: 12).

In the next section, I will first review certain types of pathways by using well-known insurgents in Dagestan as case studies. Contrary to the interview with Rustam, these stories are mostly based on secondary sources. These sources are often extracted from biographies obtained on insurgent websites, academic articles or through personal interviews with journalists and local people. They should not be taken for granted but instead used as landmarks and illustrations to understand the complex nature of the participation into the insurgency. I will then try to demonstrate that understanding violent participation through pathways allows us to reflect about the concept of the Chechen spill-over and the development of Salafism as causal factors in the regional upsurge of violence.

Pathways in Dagestan

This research has argued that the Chechen spillover and the development of radical Islam are central elements to explain the upsurge of violence in the region. However, I also insisted on the need to understand these two major explanations in relationship to local dynamics. By looking at trajectories from insurgents in Dagestan, I will now seek to document how and when these factors play a crucial role in the process of joining an insurgent group in Dagestan.

The case of Rasul Makasharipov is particularly interesting as it follows a similar pathway or trajectory observed previously in the case of Rustam. Makasharipov was known to be Shamil Basayev's Avar interpreter and a very close collaborator. However, when the Russian government offered the first amnesty in the summer of 2000 following the battle of Grozny and the Chechen lowlands, Makasharipov accepted to leave the insurgency and return to Dagestan. He spent almost a year in a filtration camp and in prison too. He was sentenced to more than six years of prison but amnestied after one (Hahn, 2007: 118). After prison, he remained under surveillance from the security apparatus, as was the case for Rustam. According to Saidov, Makasharipov was harassed by security services and his relatives were regularly abducted as he was suspected to still be a threat to the Dagestani security (2012: 188). Makasharipov rejoined the insurgency and led a terrorist group in order to avenge humiliation at the hand of local policemen.

Rappani Khalilov, another important member of the Dagestan insurgency, had an ordinary life before joining the insurgency. He was a border guard and later a baker. He apparently had a drinking problem, but his life changed when he came in contact with

Khattab.¹²⁹ Khalilov entered the Chechen insurgency after he married the sister of Khattab's Dagestani wife. He moved to Karamakhi and subsequently participated in his brother-in-law's training camp. Following the defeat of the Chechen invasion of Dagestan, he returned to Chechnya and formed a battalion of around 100 fighters that would later become the first wave of insurgents in Dagestan. Khalilov's engagement in violence was mainly driven by his social network which also made him experience a process of Salafisation. Khalilov never sought to stop fighting the Russian forces, contrary to Makasharipov or Rustam. Another veteran of the Chechen wars who followed a similar trajectory like Khalilov is Ilgar Mollachiev aka Emir Madzhid. Mollachiev trained in Khattab's camp and, just like Rustam, was part of Aslan Maskhadov's personal guards. He decided to return to Dagestan in 2005 in order to spread the insurgency across the Chechen border.¹³⁰

Some veterans of the Chechen wars came back to Dagestan in order to spread jihad and insurgency against the Russians, in other cases they fought several years in Chechnya during the Second Chechen War and finally returned to Dagestan. The case of Emir Daud illustrates this pathway as he fought along Basayev's side until his death in 2006. After Basayev's death, the Dagestani field commander came back to Makhachkala in order to pursue his struggle against the Russian government. This time, Daud stayed in Chechnya based on his personal network, and only its disruption forced him to review his insurgent career. For him, the choice to engage in insurgent activity in Dagestan was more circumstantial than ideological or personal. The structure of opportunity in Chechnya was probably closed as Basayev's death forced the insurgency into a restructuration process.

¹²⁹ Artyom Vernidoub "Warlord follows his brother-in-law-to the grave" *Gazeta.ru*, 21 May 2003, available at <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/chechnya-sl/message/31384>

¹³⁰ "Political and rebel leadership changes in Dagestan," Kavkaz center 20 October 2007 available at <http://www.kavkazcenter.com/eng/content/2007/10/20/8982.shtml>

These four trajectories demonstrate the impact of the Chechen spillover on the Dagestan insurgency. Although a small number of Dagestanis were trained in Serzhen-Yurt and came back to their native republic to spread the jihad and fight against the Russian forces, the vast majority of young individuals followed a different process of radicalisation. One has to be careful not to translate our knowledge about the radicalisation of important terrorists and insurgent leaders as an ideal-type of pathway in violence in Dagestan. Indeed, this mistake is reproduced over and over in the literature, especially among the tenants of the spillover theory.

A second central argument against the Chechen spillover as the key causal factor to explain the upsurge of violence is the trend that that one could observe following the death of insurgent leaders like Khalilov and Makasharipov. Indeed, the level of insurgent and criminal violence in Dagestan has been systematically increasing since 2002, and even following the death of most of the first generation of insurgents who trained and participated in the Chechen wars; this is contrary to Ingushetia and Kabardino-Balkaria in 2010 and 2011. In order to explain the sustained aspect of insurgent violence, one can identify eight more pathways or trajectories leading people into the Dagestani insurgency.

Magomedali Vagabov followed what one can identify as the *Islamic scholar pathway*, as he started studying Islam at very young age. He later travelled abroad to study Islam, mainly in Arab countries, but also reportedly spent time in Pakistan in 1994.¹³¹ According to Radio Free Europe, he came back in 1997 in Dagestan in order to open a radical mosque.¹³² He also trained in Serzhen-Yurt in 1997, and participated in the violent

¹³¹ “Марко Шахбанов, Губден как предчувствие...” Chernovik, 12 October 2007, available at <http://www.chernovik.net/print.php?new=3444>

¹³² “The Shadowy Life Of Magomedali Vagabov” Radio Free Europe, 21 May 2010, available at http://www.rferl.org/content/The_Shadowy_Life_Of_Magomedali_Vagabov/2133907.html

clashes between Salafis and police forces in Karamakhi and Buinaksk in 1998. His pathway toward the insurgency in Dagestan follows certain similarities to Khalilov's. However, he was not involved in the Khattab and Basayev's invasion or in the Second Chechen War. As an Islamic scholar, he was advised not to be involved in military warfare. Just like Makasharipov, Vagabov finally accepted the amnesty offered by the Dagestani government in 2001. There is an unverified rumour that Vagabov would have then left to Afghanistan. In any case, Vagabov came back later in 2003 or 2004 and took a loyalty oath to Makasharipov and Khalilov. He was then in charge of establishing a new insurgent branch in Gubden where he became known for its participation in the insurgency. He was also appointed supreme Judge of the Sharia tribunal (Kadi) of the Caucasus Emirate after Astemirov's death in 2010.

Vagabov could be seen as one of the leading figures of the first generational change in Dagestan insurgency. More Islamic scholars and highly educated people started to join the insurgency after 2004. Vagabov was thus at the same time the product of the Chechen spillover and the development of radical Islam in Dagestan. The *pious Muslim pathway* is another trajectory followed by people in Dagestan. This pathway is probably best illustrated by the case of Yasin Rasulov aka Makhach Rasulov in Dagestan.

Rasulov can be seen as a radical Islamist, although his views about Islam were not in line with Dagestani Salafists, such as Baggaudin Kebedov (Kurbanov, 2010). He insisted on the historical roots of Salafism in Dagestan and tried to link this form of Islam with traditions in the republic. He published a locally famous analysis of Islam in Dagestan — “Jihad in the North Caucasus” — on Kavkaz Center, the propaganda website of the Caucasus Emirate. His views about Islam were highly respected in Muslim circles and he was involved in many Islamic media in the republic (Smirnov, 2007). Rasulov was a graduate student in philosophy at Dagestan State University (DGU). According to people I interviewed and who knew him

personally, he was known to be a very educated young individual. He was apparently fluent in Arabic and in French. He was also a freelance writer for the Dagestani newspaper *Novoe delo* and a member of the Presidium of the Union of Muslim Journalists of Russia. Before joining the insurgency, he had also published an analysis in the Dagestani weekly newspaper *Chernovik* entitled “Mirror of Caucasian Fate.”¹³³ This article openly decried the repressive practices put forward against radical Islamists. Repression was for Rasulov a direct attack against Islam and Dagestani traditions. Sageman calls this phenomenon a form of “vicarious humiliation” (2008: 73). It usually triggers a feeling of moral disengagement toward the society and, subsequently, a cognitive opening toward a new ideology or environment. Participation into the insurgency is seen as a way to transform the system and establish a new social and religious order.

Rasulov’s trajectory toward the insurgency is thus not linked to blocked mobility or unemployment. Instead, he had an enviable social situation and was well-educated. For him, however, the repression against fellow Muslims represented a triggering factor. Even though it is difficult to establish whether Rasulov was targeted directly or not by physical abuse, through his statement one can witness the importance of religious repression. The personal case of Rasulov follows closely the analysis of the European Commission’s Expert Group on Violent Radicalisation:

“charismatic persons motivated by idealism and a strong sense of justice. Jihadism or other varieties of political violence are embraced through an intellectual process where the need to take action gradually becomes a political or religious duty. These individuals are often resourceful, educated, well integrated and are sometimes even considered as role models in their communities” (2008: 12).

¹³³ Ясин Расулов, “Зеркало кавказской судьбы Chernovik” 10 September 2004, available at <http://www.chernovik.net/news/61/REPUBLIC/2005/01/06/3907>

Nevertheless, in many cases, religious repression pushes people directly into the insurgency. As we saw in chapter 7, this repression could be pervasive and sustained on a daily basis or could be more acute and involve torture. The thresholds people can sustain are very personal and also depend on other structural factors such as the social and family situation.

In the case of Abuzagir Mantayev, although he was highly educated in the field of Islam and completed a doctoral degree in political science at Moscow University about Wahhabism, he never became a prominent preacher and ideologist as Rasulov. It would be problematic to assume that only religious and educated people fill the rank of the Dagestani insurgency. Although, they are usually more prominent in the movement, being at the front line of exposure driving the recruitment and Islamic propaganda, while foot soldiers come from a more heterogeneous background. Many individuals engage in the insurgency when ethno-religious profiling and repression became unbearable in their ordinary life. Continuous controls, interrogations, arrests and physical abuse drive these people into a sort of dilemma between a growing repression and marginalisation or the choice of joining a fraternity based on Islam. *Insurgency as a social community* becomes a way to transcend social and personal problems. Emil Souleimanov explains that:

“Many Dagestanis have joined the insurgency in protest of the societal sins, be it corruption, erosion of traditional values, inability to realize themselves professionally or in search for a better, Islamic, future for their homeland. Most importantly, membership in Jihadist groups (jamaats) has helped individual combatants to overcome ethnic, sectarian and clan-based loyalties, forging an unprecedented sense of social solidarity based on religion. Thus, the ideologization of resistance has evolved side by side with the politicization of violence” (2010).

The insurgency could also be seen as the only way for an individual *to take revenge for the wrongs* committed against him and his family. Vendetta is probably the most important factor that drives individuals toward the insurgency. Often the insurgency itself will force the individual to appear in a propaganda video in order to force him to remain

loyal to the movement and to block his way back to civilian life. Insurgency is thus seen as a cost and benefit analysis with the individual placing vendetta as the primary factor over his own life. This pathway is very similar to the one described with the Makasharipov story, without the previous participation in Chechen training camps or insurgency. It is also worth noting that revenge is extremely important for male insurgents, contrary to what is usually claimed in the literature about suicide bombing (Jacques and Taylor, 2008).

Andrew Silke explains the power of vengeance as an emotion and how individuals are ready to sacrifice and suffer in order to achieve revenge. “The persons seeking vengeance will often compromise his or her own integrity, social standing, and personal safety for the sake of revenge” (Cota-Mckinley, Woody, and Bell, 2001: 343, cited in Silke, 2003:40). An important aspect of the feeling of vengeance is that perceived wrong or inequity does not have to be experienced first-hand to trigger individuals to engage in violence. Vengeance is an important factor leading to violent engagement, but it also represents a theoretical puzzle. One of the major problems is to explain why only a few individuals will evolve toward violence to avenge harms against them. Indeed, personal grievances could evolve in non-violent protests against the state. In the case of violent engagement, personal grievances can change into political grievances (group) or simply into personal revenge. Research in psychology also suggests that men display a more positive attitude toward vengeance than women.

Scholars have claimed that extensive repression by governmental forces usually lead ordinary individuals to seek protection by engaging into the insurgency (Goodwin, 2001). I argue that more factors are at a play in the case of Dagestan. Wood reaches similar conclusions in her study of El Salvador (2003: 87-120). This study, just like Wood’s, challenges the assumption that indiscriminate violence is always counterproductive because

of the collective action dilemma. Jason Lyall reaches a similar conclusion about the case of Chechnya (2010). Thinking about participation in violence in terms of pathways of mobilization helps in avoiding overarching generalisations about the effect of repression. In fact, the dichotomy between discriminate and indiscriminate violence used in the literature about counter-insurgency and civil war is unreliable in depicting the process leading to insurgent participation.

A common pathway that reinforces this claim is usually referred to in the literature as *misfits* (Nesser, 2005). Government elites often claim that the insurgency is filled with criminals that hide from justice in the mountains. This claim is grossly overrated, although one cannot deny that this pattern exists and a certain number of criminals are involved in the insurgency. As insurgents rarely brag about their criminal past on propaganda websites or when prominent field commanders are killed, it is quite difficult to identify insurgents that followed this pathway.¹³⁴ It can still be postulated that misfits engage in insurgent violence in order to deal with personal problems. This is what the European Commission reported on misfits:

“they tend to be school drop-outs and unemployed. The family background is particularly problematic: broken families, parental substance abuse, the use of violence as a means of discipline and communication within the family, family members killed in war or other traumatic experiences. They are action-oriented, aggressive and have a high readiness for violence” (2008: 13)

Zaur Akavov is as a prime example of this trajectory. At a very early age, probably when he was in his late teens or early twenties, Akavov joined Khattab’s training camp. He then participated in the Chechen invasion of Dagestan and was subsequently sent back to spread the insurgency in Makhachkala. After being arrested in 2002, Akavov’s lawyer presented

¹³⁴ Doku Umarov most probably engaged in the Chechen insurgency in order to hide from justice after committing a crime on Russian territory.

him as a semi-literate boy who was not at all a religious fanatic. According to the lawyer, he “probably became an insurgent because of unfulfilled ambitions.”¹³⁵ Akavov was finally sentenced to life in prison.

One cannot rule out that individuals like Akavov engage in violence uniquely for the thrill or for gaining a certain status amongst their peers. Wood calls this pathway toward the insurgency *pleasure in agency* (2003: 234). According to her, this pattern or pathway hinges on “the positive affect associated with self-determination, autonomy, self-esteem, efficacy, and pride that come from the successful assertion of intention” (2003: 235). In our case study, this pathway touches people that engage in the insurgency in order to redraw social boundaries based on perceived injustice.

This pleasure could also be driven by the search for high emotions or thrill during violent activities. Research in criminology finds that marginalized young males are more prone to engage in violence and risk-taking for the thrill (Wilson and Daly, 1985, quoted in McCauley and Moskaleiko, 2011: 62). By looking at evolutionary psychology, and at the correlation between testosterone level and status seeking, McCauley and Moskaleiko explain that young males, especially with lower socio-economic status and lower education, are more prone to use violence in order to gain and achieve status. Perceived structure of opportunity plays a fundamental role in the process toward violent engagement. “Higher impulsivity, higher confidence, greater attraction to risk-taking, and needs for status can all work to give life as a terrorist a certain appeal for some young males” (Silke, 2003: 36).

A young Canadian citizen, William Plotkinov, born in Russia, was killed in a special operation in Dagestan in July 2012. Although Kavkaz Center claimed that the young man

¹³⁵ Dmitry Balbuov, “Terrorists Going on Trial, The Moscow News” No 46, 29 November 2002, available at <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/chechnya-sl/message/27975>

joined for religious reasons, the Russian government insisted on thrill-seeking in order to explain the engagement of a Westernized young individual in the insurgency.¹³⁶ It is often risky to explain ex-post facto the causes of engagement of a young person. Here, I use the example of William Plotnikov strictly to depict this pathway and not to ascertain the truth of the case.

When young people are *disenchanted* about the state of employment or social mobility in the republic, the insurgency can become an opportunity for them to sustain their family or gain a substantial amount of money. Contrary to what the tenants of the new wars paradigm claim (Kaldor, 1999), the majority of insurgents in Dagestan do not follow this trajectory. This pathway is closely linked to the one described by Wood, yet with a more utilitarian angle. Usually, an opportunistic insurgent will be mainly involved in supplying the insurgency or providing intelligence and will slowly take part in violent activities. It follows what Horgan describes as an incremental involvement in terrorist activities (2005). Individuals that follow this trajectory will mainly fill the rank of foot soldiers and will rarely be involved in a leadership or ideological role. Although they are part of a “religious” insurgency, they mainly encounter Salafist ideology when they enter the insurgent movement.

One last pathway is closely related to what Petter Nesser calls *the drifter* (2005). For some individuals, joining an insurgent group is the result of peer pressure and close kinship links; this pathway follows extensive literature about violence. Peer pressure and peer influence play a major role, as shown by Sageman about terrorists in Europe (2004), Lee

¹³⁶ For the insurgent version see: “Mujahid, boxer from Canada, William Plotnikov, killed in mountains of Dagestan” Kavkaz Center, 16 July 2012, available at <http://www.kavkazcenter.com/eng/content/2012/07/16/16472.shtml>. For the event itself see: Stewart Bell “Canadian killed by Russian forces during anti-terrorism operation: reports” National Post, 16 July 2012 available at <http://news.nationalpost.com/2012/07/16/william-plotnikov/>

Ann Fujii about the Rwandan genocide (2009a) or Christopher Browning in the case of Jewish and Polish massacres in Poland during the Second World War (1992). As much as grievances and triggering factors are important in pushing people toward an insurgent group, opportunity is as important, if not more. We saw in previous chapters that the social structure in Dagestani, Ingush and Chechen villages support the process of mobilization. Indeed, jamaats and teips are local networks of trust where social capital can act as a powerful mobilization tool. In this social situation, individuals can easily access the insurgency as it is structured along kinship links.

As Mia Bloom underlines in the case of Chechen women (2011: 236), engagement in an insurgent group is also a way to acquire a form of communal respect (Speckard and Akhmedova, 2006a; 2006b). Participation is once again based on the personal gain of the individual joining, a gain linked to self-esteem. “For some youths the experience of belonging to a group and being accepted by peers or leaders is of primary value, sometimes overruling most other considerations” (European Commission, 2008: 12). This pathway usually does not imply that the individual has extremist or radical religious views. Ideology becomes an important factor later, after they join an insurgent group.

Ibragimkhalil Daudov aka Emir Salikh, a resident of the village of Gubden in the Karabudakhkent district, joined the insurgency with his three sons and his wife shortly after returning from Stavropol krai where he lived for several years. Daudov was also an Afghan veteran and was a rather old militant as he joined when he was at least 40 years old. His wife, Zavzhat Daudova, died in Moscow in what the FSB claimed to be an unintentional explosion linked to a terrorist cell in Moscow in December 2009. One can also observe a similar pathway for Jannet Abdurakhmanova, one of the two suicide bombers who detonated her explosive belt in the Moscow metro in 2010. Jannet was apparently the wife of Umalat

Magomedov, who was the leader of the Dagestani insurgency before being killed in December 2009. These pathways highlight the complex nature of engagement in an insurgent group in Dagestan.

In her study about El Salvador, Wood explains that participation and support for the insurgency was driven by three factors first: the particular value given by insurgents to their participation, defiance, including the feeling of revenge, and pleasure in agency (2003: 232-237). Wood explains that these factors are contingent to contextual factors: “Insurgent collective action was *path-dependent*: where it emerged depended on the paths of both violence and activism in the local area” (Wood, 2003: 237). She identifies two contingent factors “past patterns of local state violence and proximity to insurgent forces” (2003: 232-237). These two factors were necessary conditions to launch or reinforce the three reasons to participate in the insurgency. These conclusions follow what Mohammed Hafez claims about Muslims’ participation in violence. He writes that the reasons were “an ill-fated combination of institutional exclusion, on the one hand, and on the other, reactive and indiscriminate repression that threaten the organizational resources and personal lives of Islamists” (2003: 21-22).

The case study of Dagestan and the pathways identified earlier confirm the importance of repression, vendetta and blocked mobility as crucial factors in explaining the participation in the insurgency in the republic. These factors also parallel James Fearon and David Laitin’s conclusions about state weakness and violent repression as the main causes of the outset of civil wars (2003). In the early 2000s, religious repression and human rights abuses produced grievances amongst the local population. In Dagestan, however, individuals did not join the insurgency en masse, contrary to what the Fearon and Laitin assumption would predict. Most of the insurgents had some sort of training or experience in Chechnya.

Their threshold to sustain abuse from security forces was thus lowered. The bulk of the insurgency in Dagestan was thus the result of the spillover of the Chechen wars triggered by abuse. When the insurgency grew stronger, before the death of Makasharipov and Khalilov in the mid-2000s, joining an insurgent group became a valid option for ordinary people. At that moment, people like Rasulov and Vagabov saw the insurgent movement as a last resort against religious repression and ethno-religious profiling. They rapidly filled the role of charismatic leaders based on their religious knowledge, their personality, and their eloquence. A generational change inside the Dagestani insurgency revolved around these charismatic individuals. The Dagestani veterans of the Chechen wars created the structure, the basis, and established the strength of the insurgency in the republic. They were, however, gradually replaced by a younger generation mainly driven by educated young people, which inspired ordinary people to join insurgent groups.

One can observe three different waves of insurgents in Dagestan. These waves follow very similarly those identified by Sageman in his book about al-Qaeda (2008). The first wave consists of the insurgents that fought and trained in Chechnya and were identified as the old guard. The second wave is mainly centered on educated young individuals that were attracted to the insurgent movement in response to state repression. The last wave, which completed the generational change, is centered on young people with no religious background. The drifter, misfit, pleasure in agency, social community and disenchanting pathways particularly characterize this new generation. Their indoctrination and the role of Islam usually follow their adherence to an insurgent group. The role of friendship and kinship is central to their gradual engagement in violence. For these young people, the first generation (first and second wave) serves as an example of courage and dedication.

Table 1: Understanding Insurgent Participation in Dagestan: Generations of Fighters

	First Generation: Dagestani Fighters in Chechnya	Inter-Generation	Second Generation: Ordinary Dagestanis
Approximate Age Category	Mid-Twenties	Mid-Twenties	Late Teenager-Early Twenties
Generation	Soviet	Late Soviet	Post-Soviet
Level of Religiosity	Average	High	Low
Insurgent Experience and Training	High	Low	Average
Socio-economical Background	Poor and Uneducated	High Education and Social Status	Poor, Limited Social Mobility and Uneducated
Triggering Factors	Religious and Thrill Seeking	Religious Repression (Islamic Solidarity)	Personal Repression, Revenge, Blocked Mobility
Sustaining Factors	Opportunity and Network	The Importance of Islam	Socialization and Indoctrination
Objectives Joining the Dagestan Insurgency	Spreading the Insurgency across the Region/ Opportunistic	Protect and Serve Islam	Finding a new community Protection and Social Solidarity
Role in the Insurgency	Field Commanders-Technical Experts	Charismatic Leaders	Foot-Soldiers

Jeremy Weinstein argues that rebel leaders “draw on two types of endowments: economic endowments (...) and social endowments” (2007: 7). For him, the key to explaining participation should be sought on the incentives offered by insurgent groups. Whether potential recruits are high-commitment individuals seen as investors or low-commitment individuals seen as consumers, both are looking to maximize gains for their

participation. This theoretical reflection makes sense in civil war where the rebels have the chance to challenge the incumbents' monopoly of power. In the case of the North Caucasus, participation is a high-cost and high-risk activity that will most probably not provide material gains to its participants. According to Weinstein, the insurgency should thus rely on "ethnic, religious, or ideological ties" (2007:9) in order to recruit participants. The insurgency in Dagestan seems to follow this tendency. The role of religion and kinship, however, are not the causal factor of violence but simply a facilitator following crucial triggering factors.

According to Wiktorowicz, the reason why these individuals decide to engage in such high-risk and high-cost activities during a longer period is usually found in the process of socialization (2005: 6). This process starts with a "cognitive opening that shakes certitude in previously accepted beliefs. Individuals must be willing to expose themselves to new ways of thinking and worldviews, and cognitive opening helps facilitate possible receptivity" (Wiktorowicz, 2005: 5). Many factors can lead to this cognitive opening. In the case of Dagestan, many of these factors were previously identified, namely, religious repression, police abuse, ethno-religious profiling, humiliation, socioeconomic conditions and the corruption level in the republic. Islamic and insurgent groups offer these individuals a new sense of community and provide an answer to social problems. One should not overemphasize the role of ideology in the process of joining an insurgent movement in Dagestan. Despite what Wiktorowicz observes in the Islamic movement in Western countries, people who join an Islamic movement rarely do so because they trust the credentials of the ideological leaders about Islam (2005: 208). In the case of the Caucasus Emirate, Dokku Umarov could not be identified as a credible Islamic theologian as his religious background was mainly inexistent before the proclamation of the Emirate. In this case, the credentials

operate at the local level where the peers, friends, or family members lead new possible recruits.

With an ideological and military opportunity to challenge the system, these individuals engage in the insurgent movement. They disengage morally from society and start to identify themselves with local Islamic jamaats or insurgent groups. The development of self-sacrifice in favour of the group develops through the process of socialisation and isolation. The group and its ideology establish a new system of values for this generation of fighters; it is a “gradual process of incremental involvement” (Horgan, 2005:82). The process of exposition and indoctrination takes a certain amount of time where the individuals can collaborate into the insurgency but not directly participate in violence. Petersen argues that individuals evolve toward a full participation in an insurgent group: from political neutrality, to unarmed and unorganized opposition against the regime, direct support of or participation in locally based armed organization, and full participation in a guerilla unit or rebel army (2001: 8-9). For Petersen, the involvement into the insurgency is mainly driven by triggering and sustaining mechanisms (2001: 13-15). This research has mainly focused on the first part of the puzzle trying to identify pathways toward insurgency participation. However, it did not analyse the sustaining factors of participation into the insurgency, such as socialization.

Our knowledge and understanding of the processes inside insurgent groups in Dagestan and in the North Caucasus are rather limited. My fieldwork experience and interviews did not produce tangible results about these dynamics. As it was presented earlier, the reasons why an individual is seeking to join an insurgent group can be drastically different than the reasons why he chooses to sustain his participation in the same group. The study of mass murder has particularly emphasized these differences. Explaining why an

individual kills for the first time is important; however, understanding long-term participation in mass killing is usually the key in explaining this mass murder.¹³⁷ In the case of the North Caucasus and its insurgent groups, the problem is less about sustaining the participation than explaining the trajectory toward the first step in the group. The role of Salafist ideology seems to play a crucial role by slowly replacing the importance of triggering factors; this latter assumption necessitates further research. In the conclusion, I will propose a theoretical reflection that will seek to unite the various findings in this dissertation and possible future avenues of research about group dynamics in the NorthCaucasus.

¹³⁷ See Lee Ann Fujii about Rwanda (2009a) and Christopher Browning about the Holocaust in Poland (1992).

Conclusion: How to Integrate these Empirical Conclusions in a Theoretical Reflection about Civil War

In the last chapters, this research has sought to reflect on the mechanisms and processes that favoured the upsurge of violence in the North Caucasus since the end of the counterterrorist operation in Chechnya in 2009. It first started by looking at two structural processes that are widely identified in the literature: the spillover of the Chechen wars and the development of radical Islam and Salafism in the region. This research argues that while these factors are important and crucial in explaining the upsurge of violence, they nonetheless depict an inaccurate picture of the region. In fact, the effect of the development of radical Islam and of the spillover varies greatly between republics. In order to open the black box of the violence, the North Caucasus, Dagestan, Ingushetia, and Kabardino-Balkaria were studied independently to identify similarities and differences that explain why the level of violence vary across the region. Four other processes were identified to account for the development of insurgent violence: violence as collective responsibility, violence as an illegal criminal venture, violence as capital, and violence as political and religious dialogue. At the same time, these processes do not affect individuals the same way. By using my personal experience in the region and identifying the different pathways of main Dagestani insurgents, this research affirms the need to approach these structural and local factors through a socio-psychological angle. The importance of ideology varies inside a conflict and between individuals. The first generation of fighters, who fought in the Chechen wars and later came back in Dagestan, Ingushetia, and Kabardino-Balkaria, were influenced

by Salafism but their Islamic faith evolved in Chechen training camps. When they later returned to their respective republics, they followed different trajectories mostly influenced by elements of local context, such as governmental repression and corruption.

A theoretical reflection about the upsurge of violence in the region should be able to analyse how major structural factors impact the local context and how these two elements affect individual choices. By explaining how individuals decide to join an insurgent movement and engage in violence, this research changes the focus toward the micro and individual aspects. This kind of approach does not aim to explain the intensity and the localisation of violence but to reflect on the processes leading individuals toward violent participation. This framework will build on the various levels of analysis discussed in the previous chapters. One of the challenges in the study of civil war and violence is to be able to explain and theorize how factors, such as ideology and identity, can have an impact on ordinary people and especially how this impact shifts during the conflict.

It is important to underline that this theoretical reflection seeks to explain where the empirical contribution of this research can foster questions about the importance of micro-mechanisms and processes in the study of civil war. I do not have the pretention to challenge the ontological and theoretical assumptions about civil war.

9.1 How to Study Violent Engagement in an Insurgency or in a Civil War?

In his stellar contribution about violence in civil war, Kalyvas emphasises the central role played by control and denunciation. In order to theorize his formal model, he proposes to disaggregate the dynamics of violence in civil war into three levels of analysis (macro, meso, micro) (2006). A similar suggestion is made in the terrorism scholarship. Marc Sageman pleads for a middle-range analysis focusing on “processes of interaction in context:

radicalization, mobilization, [and] motivation” (2008: 24). This theoretical reflection also engages with these three levels by focusing on the structural level and by looking into violent configurations and the interactions between three groups of actors (state, insurgent, and criminal), the dynamics of violence inside and between groups (meso), and the individual processes that lead individuals to gradually radicalise and to engage in violence. This disaggregation of levels of analysis does not directly follow Kalyvas’ model as it proposes to focus on the mechanisms, dynamics, and processes at work to explain how individuals engage in violence and why they choose not to disengage. Focusing on individuals and their choices marks an important difference between studies on civil war studying group strategies and how they affect the decision of foot-soldiers and civilians. The empirical findings of this research suggest that the study of violence in civil war also needs to engage in the eclectic nature of individual participation. At the same time, explaining violent participation through a uniquely individual approach often disregards important contextual and situational variables.

In order to situate this empirical and potential theoretical contribution, I take Kalyvas’ book as a referent object, as this research shares the main objectives of his work. Indeed, Kalyvas seeks to present civil war as an endogenous process where “collective and individual preferences, strategies, values, and identities are continuously shaped and reshaped” (2006: 389). He also proposes to take seriously the role of individuals in civil war as a possible locus of agency. These two objectives are also the core of this research. Because Kalyvas’ theoretical contribution remains the most complete theoretical analysis of violence in civil war, the next section will demonstrate how taking the concept of radicalisation and pathways to violent engagement deepens our knowledge about this topic.

A Master-Narrative to Set a Configuration of Violence

Kalyvas argues that “civil war can be analyzed as a process that transforms the political actors’ quest for victory and power, and the local or individual actors’ quest for personal and local advantage into a joint process of violence” (2006: 365). He uses the concept of alliance to link elites’ narratives and to ground dynamics at the local levels. He describes this relationship as “a transaction between supra-local and local actors, whereby the former supply the latter with external muscle, thus allowing them to win decisive local advantage; in exchange, supra-local actors recruit and motivate supporters at the local level” (2006: 365). This analysis of civil war presupposes coordination between the master-cleavage and how local actors use it on a daily basis. In this case, it presupposes that local actors are generally driven by material incentives, as elites use ideology or identity as way to achieve their political goals. Kalyvas seeks to integrate the concept of private and political violence as one joint process to explain the locus of agency (2006: 376-377). Although, this theoretical model of civil war permits to depict a generally accurate picture of the dynamics and the level of violence in civil wars, it also neglects the eclectic impact of ideology on local groups and individuals. The relationship between the private and the political, the collective and the individual, is often extremely blurry in the field. By analysing in more detail the role of ideology and the socio-political context at different level of analysis, this theoretical reflection seeks to narrow our understanding of participation in insurgent groups in civil war.

Jacques Sémelin explains how massacres and mass murders should be seen as a long mental process where ideology and the construction of the *other* play a crucial role in acting out (2005). The French author addresses the power of the imaginary in order to explain how ordinary people engage in mass killings. Ideology has the power to establish new standards

or schemes to (re)interpret a concrete political and social context. In the case of ethnic conflict and mass violence, many authors have argued how ideology was used to produce hatred and violence through the power of the imaginary (Chrétien 1995; Prunier 1995). However, there is a thin line between imaginary, illusion and the fact that individuals choose to engage in violence based on these narratives. With participation in mass murder during civil wars, anxiety and fear are often underlined as the emotions that are exacerbated through ideology and the power of the imaginary (Sémelin, 2005).¹³⁸

Approaching civil war and not just mass murder as a long mental process at the individual level helps us to tackle the problem of the role of ideology in violent engagement. The challenge is to theorize how and when an ideological “illusion” becomes real enough to push or pull individuals toward violence. We saw that the imaginary of Salafist ideology in Dagestan, and more generally in the North Caucasus, often come after important triggering factors or traumas in the life of ordinary people. These individuals were not brainwashed or fooled by radical preachers, but they found in this ideology an answer to their personal or social problems. The problem with macro-level analyses is that they usually focus on reified and unitary views of actors in civil wars by assuming that identity and its impacts remain static throughout the conflict. In this narrow view of civil war, studying ideology is to presume that people will react similarly to propaganda and the power of the imaginary. However, even in societies where indoctrination and ideology played a central role, such as in Nazi Germany, the power of ideology does not reach everybody the same way.¹³⁹

Master-narratives (ideologies or identities) and central cleavages in a civil war set the stage for actors to perform their identity or to use the conflict as an opportunity. It establishes

¹³⁸ About the link between emotions and violence, see Petersen (2002).

¹³⁹ See Browning about the 101st battalion and his discussion of the importance ideology (1992). See also Scott Straus about the Rwandan genocide (2006).

the limits and the borders of a civil war and its main actors. It also dictates how individuals can and often should perceive their identity and act in order to survive. Indeed, if the civil war is configured around a religious cleavage, like in the case of the North Caucasus, religious faith directly affects the life and security of ordinary people.

We saw earlier that Kalyvas understands the relationship between the local and structural as an alliance between political entrepreneurs and local actors. Similarly, Charles Tilly emphasizes the importance in taking seriously how political entrepreneurs and violent specialists often pursue their own agenda inside a conflict (2003: 173). At the same time, even if the literature about nationalism, ethnic conflicts and grievances has for a long time accepted the constructed nature of identity, the actors in the field will often value identity as real and authentic. Identities will thus have an impact on their mindset and the decision making process. The master-narrative of a conflict is thus central in understanding its micro-dynamics. The problem in many of the current accounts of violence in civil war is the emphasis on the top-down process, linking elites' choices to ordinary peoples' decisions. The assumption of identity hardening in ethnic conflict or identity-based civil war (Kaufman, 1996) is problematic since it postulates a common reaction to insecurity and fear from any individuals involved in a civil war.

To approach the tension between private and political violence is to challenge the very nature of reified groups in civil war. It is critical to focus on the micro-dynamics of cooperation and competition between incumbents and insurgents and also on the intra-community violence at the meso-level. Several authors highlight this aspect by pointing out that ethnic cooperation (Fearon and Laitin, 1996), ethnic defection (Kalyvas, 2008b) and intra-ethnic violence (Christia, 2008) expose a more complex and nuanced picture of the importance of intra-communal dynamics during civil war. Fujii explains that “treating (...)

groups as unitary actors leads to privileging conflicts between (...) groups over within groups or outside the ethnic group construct altogether” (2009a: 10). The role of ethnography and bottom-up analysis in the study of civil wars as emphasized in this research becomes central to understand how these central narratives and ideologies reach people, how they interpret them, how they integrate their mindset, and how they affect their behaviours in their daily life. For Kalyvas, “Personal relationships, individual political and religious preferences, and rural perceptions of honor and obligations frequently play an autonomous role [in civil war]” (2006: 370).

We saw in the previous chapters that the development of Salafism has become a common ideology amongst the insurgents in Dagestan and in the North Caucasus. This ideology is established on clear objectives, such as the establishment of an Islamic Emirate in the Caucasus and a precise enemy, the Russian forces and its local representatives (Souleimanov, 2010). At the same time, treating an insurgent group as cohesive and unified organization neglects the eclectic nature of the individuals and sub-groups that compose it.

At the local and regional levels, Muslims in the North Caucasus are by no means united behind a single ideology, even if the insurgency is based on Islamic ideological roots. The different local groups adopt different strategies in regards to moderate Muslims. Indeed, based on minor differences about their interpretations of their faith and religious practices, it was shown that sectarian violence is extremely brutal between traditionalists and Salafists in Dagestan and Kabardino-Balkaria. At the same time, Chechnya and Ingushetia did not witness such sectarian violence. The master-cleavage of the conflict set a large playing field for various political and criminal actors. These actors interpret the cleavage in order to promote their own self-interests. The master-cleavage of the conflict might be salient for

some actors (in this case the Salafists), instrumental for others (criminal groups in Kaspiisk) or creates improbable alliances (Kadyrov and the Russian forces).

Aurélié Campana and I suggest the concepts of field of political violence and configuration of violent actors (Campana and Ratelle, 2010) in order to depict the simultaneous competition and collaboration in civil wars between government, insurgents and criminal actors. All of these actors interact to achieve opportunistic and political gains without respecting the specific borders between each group. Straus talks about a “space of opportunity” for violence created by specific events or processes that produce a moment of instability and fear (2006). Thereby, three major fluid sub-fields are always present in a configuration of civil war: the incumbent, the insurgent and the criminal sub-fields. Each sub-field is composed of more or less heterogeneous actors who possess conflicting motivations and interests. Contrary to the grand narrative describing civil war as a dichotomy opposing two ideologies, the borders between these sub-fields are extremely porous, and actors often switch their identities in order to achieve their goals. “Social identities morph. People switch sides. Labels change” (King, 2004: 452). One can thus observe important intra-ethnic violence or collaboration between certain insurgent groups and state security agencies depending on the configuration and the context of civil war. Criminality, opportunity, and greed are often factors that explain the collaboration between incumbents and insurgents.

In chapter 5, I showed that the conversion of capital plays a crucial role in the development of violence in the North Caucasus. Governmental actors get more and more involved in illegal activities, such as racketeering, the shadow economy and even cooperation with insurgent forces. The link between criminal and insurgent groups has also been demonstrated, especially in the case of the Islamic tax and the abduction business. The

porous borders between insurgents and incumbents have been in evidence during the Chechenization process which transformed insurgents into security actors in Chechnya following the launch of the Second Chechen War.

Therefore, the emphasis on greed and cupidity, and also the typology of new wars being mainly driven by economic rationales, could be seen as opportunities provided by the configuration of violence. Indeed, state actors and insurgent groups usually establish their power and control over populations based on their military capacity and on their position of dominance in a certain political and social context. This dominance could also be established through the concept of social capital. The involvement of state actors in extortion in detentions or at checkpoints and shadow economy in civil war is widely documented. Conflicts become an occasion to hoard and loot often at the detriment of the large entity social actors claim to represent (Tilly, 2003). Tilly explains that opportunism is often linked with boundaries activation as violent specialists used the cleavage of a conflict to justify their actions.

In this research, the two best examples of this dynamic could be seen in the use of counterterrorist regimes in order to extract resources from people. The study of ethno-religious profiling in chapter 7 has sought to argue that although security operations are legitimate, they are also the occasion to extract money and gain capital in the name of security. For insurgents, the Islamic tax became the umbrella concept to extract resources from government elites, businessmen, and establish a protection racket all over Dagestan, as well as in other republics. We also saw how the level of informal activities linked directly or indirectly to criminal action affects the pattern of participation in insurgency groups. Moreover, we argued that particular pathways toward insurgency are produced by contingent factors such as lawlessness of security forces, repression, and the possibilities to gain social

status or resources through participation. Therefore, an important link exists between the dynamics of the sub-fields identified previously and the choice made by individuals to join an insurgent movement.

At the same time, certain groups or individuals, as the case of Yasin Rasulov and his insurgent group, strictly interpret the conflict along its main cleavage. For Rasulov, as we saw in the last chapter, engaging in an insurgent movement is the last resort to protect fellow Muslims and promote a purer form of Islam. One cannot postulate, as Kalyvas does, that local actors are uniquely driven by an occasion to promote personal interests. Indeed, we saw that many participants, such as the drifters or people joining the insurgency for the thrill or as a way of living, slowly internalize this central cleavage. They openly choose to fight and die for the master-cleavage of the civil war.

Kalyvas claims that “local participation is compatible with all sorts of motives, ranging from the most ideological to the most opportunistic” (2006: 279). However, his model seeking to link political violence at the supra-local elites and private violence at the local level neglects the diverse pathways and interests at the individual level in a civil war. This research has argued that one way to remedy the structural tendency behind Kalyvas’ model is to look into the micro-dynamics of engagement and the individual pathways toward insurgent groups. Indeed, reflecting about participation is particularly crucial where it is seen as a high-risk activity and only a few individual choose to join insurgent groups. Contrary to the cases of open-warfare civil war (Rwanda, Bosnia), ordinary people have a relative choice to try and remain neutral or bystanders in the North Caucasus. However, this choice is far from being guaranteed throughout a conflict as the concept of collective responsibility has demonstrated. Participating in an insurgent movement still represents a high-risk activity and choice that have to be put into an ideological (radical Islam) and socio-political context

(Chechen insurgency). Many studies have focused on the processes of recruitment put forward by insurgent groups and took for granted the behaviours of possible recruits (Weinstein, 2007). These studies usually focus on insurgent groups as rational actors and approach individual participants as mainly driven by the possibility to make personal gains. As we saw, this type of model falls short in explaining the eclectic nature of engagement in Dagestan.

In Kalyvas' model, his meso-level analysis seeks to revisit the relationship between political leaders and identity-based groups or, in other words, to problematize the assumption of unlimited support from the population to their respective leaders. In the same vein, he understands the micro-level of analysis in the study of intra-community dynamics. He argues that communities (often ethnic or religious groups) are seen as unitary and monolithic groups to which ideologies and leaders have to win, capture or persuade (2006 10-11). These elements were already discussed previously through the concept of field or configuration of political violence. I propose to go further into the disaggregation of the dynamics of violence in civil war.

I suggest approaching the micro-level of analysis differently based on the empirical discussion about the pathways followed by Dagestani insurgents. Although Kalyvas' theoretical framework integrates three level of analysis, it is mainly driven by a structural perspective. Indeed, the behaviour and the choices made by ordinary citizens are driven by the level of control exerted by the two sides during the civil war. If it enables us to accurately theorize the strategies put forward by the different factions and sub-groups during a civil war, it also reifies the processes and mechanisms at the individual levels. This ontological stance is mainly derived from the choice to propose a formal model that seeks to explain the variation of violence in civil war. It is a trade-off between the clarity and universality of his

models versus the eclectic and diffuse nature of violence in civil war. An important epistemological and ontological tension remains in the scholarship about the micro-dynamics of violence between the particular and the general. This research, by choosing to rely on political ethnography as its main methodological approach, seeks to present the particular aspect of violence by focusing on the individuals in their local context (socio-political and ideological). By critically addressing the recurrent structural explanation of the upsurge of violence in the region, such as the role of radical Islam and the spillover of the Chechen wars, I argued that these two phenomena affect local conflict in a myriad of ways.

The next step is now to elaborate a research design that would allow us to identify the pathways inside an insurgent group in Dagestan and the North Caucasus. The corollary of this research will also focus on a growing body of research in terrorism studies, and the factors and trajectories of disengagement and deradicalisation for insurgents (Horgan, 2009; Bjorgo and Horgan, 2009). The case of Rustam demonstrates that it is possible to conduct interviews in order to theorize this aspect of the micro-processes of violence at the individual level. Another avenue of future research is to seek to establish a comparative study program between various republics inside the North Caucasus. In chapter 5, I was able to identify various processes that are common between Kabardino-Balkaria, Ingushetia, and Dagestan in order to explain the upsurge of violence at the regional level. However, because of logistical limitations, I chose to limit the study of the pathways of engagement to the republic of Dagestan. Similar work can be done in Kabardino-Balkaria and Ingushetia in order to refine our understanding of the upsurge of violence in the North Caucasus.

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Appendix

This annex presents the template of the questionnaire used during formal interviews across the North Caucasus. The questions could vary depending of the dynamics of the interview and the willingness of the interviewee to discuss particular topic.

Interview Questions:

How would you explain the upsurge of violence in the North Caucasus?

How do you see the situation between traditional Islam and Wahhabism in the region?

Can you explain to me why people especially young people turn to Islam and Wahhabism?

Can you explain to me why people especially young people turn to insurgent groups?

How do you explain why educated young people, like Yasin Rasulov, engage in an insurgent group?

According to you, what should be the role of Islam in society?

Do you think an Islamic party should be created in order to represent Muslims in the political realm?

What are the solutions you would put forward in order to stop the violence in the region?

Can you assess your personal situation in the republic/region?

This table shows the number of interviews conducted in each republic. They are presented according to the socio-cultural status of the interviewees.

Socio-cultural Categories	Dagestan	Chechnya	Kabardino-Balkaria	Others
Ministers and Deputies	4	1	0	0
Civil Servants	5	0	0	0
Journalists	3	2	1	0
Human Rights Workers	2	0	0	0
Academics	4	0	4	0
(Ex)fighters	1	2	4	0
Religious Elites	1	0	0	0
Security personnel	3	1	0	0
Ordinary People				
Young People (17-25)	39	1	2	0
Adults (25-50)	20	4	4	7
Elders (50 and more)	3	0	0	2
Total	85	11	15	9

Interviews conducted	120
Percentage of women interviewed	15,83%
Formal interviews conducted	55
Informal interviews conducted	65