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Of Christianity, Enlightenment, and Colonialism: Russia in the North Caucasus, 1550-1800*

Good old Russia! So it really does belong to Europe. And I'd always thought that was just a mistake of the geographers. (ALEXANDER PUSHKIN [quoted from Susan Layton, *Russian Literature and Empire: Conquest of the Caucasus from Pushkin to Tolstoy* [Cambridge, 1994], p. 86)

The notion of the Russian colonial policies in the North Caucasus before the military conquest of the region in the 1820s may be greeted with reasonable skepticism. Indeed, Russia's imperial dimensions and its colonial experience have been slow to become the object of a focused and sustained reexamination and are yet to be integrated into the larger field of colonial studies. Issues concerning the early Russian empire traditionally have been subsumed in larger studies of Russian imperialism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries because of the paucity of earlier sources and the not always warranted assumption that the later centuries have greater relevance to the contemporary situation.¹

Russian expansion in the Caucasus and other southern and eastern regions is commonly believed to have proceeded before the nineteenth century in a haphazard, spontaneous, and uncontrolled fashion. I intend to demonstrate in this article that, while the motives and policies of colonization varied throughout this period, the Russian government's colonization of the region was both deliberate and consistent. There is also enough evidence to suggest that Russia's experience in the Caucasus was typical of its colonial enterprise in other regions along the southern and southeastern frontier, but further discussion of Russia's colonial model will have to await another occasion.²

From the beginning, Moscow's goals in the North Caucasus were primarily geopolitical. Having conquered Kazan and Astrakhan, the Russian tsar assumed the mantle of the ruler of the former Golden Horde's territories, and numerous local inhabitants from Siberia to the North Caucasus sent their representatives to seek trade and military alliances with Moscow. One such embassy arrived in 1557 from the Kabardinian Prince Temriuk, whose daughter would soon become Ivan IV's second wife. In a pattern that would change little throughout the centuries of Russia's relations with the native inhabitants, Ivan placed at Temriuk's disposal a Russian officer and a detachment of five hundred musketeers. This Russian detachment was meant to help Temriuk subdue his rivals in Kabarda and to protect him from both the Crimean khan and the shamkhal of Daghestan (the chief ruler of the Kumyks). Within a few years, Temriuk found his reliance on the Russian military indispensable and requested that a fort be built on the Terek River for his protection. Shortly thereafter, troops armed with cannons and muskets were dispatched from Astrakhan to found Fort Terk (Terki, Tersk gorodok).³

It was from this northeastern corner of the North Caucasus, which today comprises northern Daghestan, that Russia's incremental expansion into the area began in the 1560s. By 1800, much of the North Caucasus's plain was within Russian imperial borders, and a continuous chain of fortifications stretching from the Caspian to the Black Sea firmly separated the plains, overwhelmed by Russian settlers, from the foothills and mountains where the native inhabitants continued to reside.

In this article I shall discuss some aspects of the process by which the North Caucasus, a remote frontier area in the sixteenth century, was turned into a Russian imperial borderland by the late eighteenth century. In contrast to North America, where the indigenous population was "quickly subjugated, relocated and decimated,"⁴ the annexation of the North Caucasus was a long and arduous process. The lack of resources in Moscow, the inhospitable terrain of the barren steppes and rugged mountains, and the resistance of the local population, inspired by Muslim clergy and aided by the neighboring Islamic states, all conspired against a quick and successful conquest.

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Initially, it was the natives themselves, not their land, who were needed in the service of the Russian state. They were to become Russia's faithful subjects and were to be employed as irregular military along the turbulent southern frontier, which the government continued to fortify and settle. Because most of the land was a steppe used by the natives as seasonal pasture, it was easy to claim this land as vacant and to assert Russia's right to it. By the late eighteenth century the distribution and exploitation of the land and its natural resources would become increasingly important to the government's colonization project.

Russian colonization of the North Caucasus exhibited features typical of other colonial empires. In the initial stages of expansion, the Russian government had little choice but to rely on indirect rule in securing the political loyalty of the native peoples. However, the government's policies of paying off the native chiefs and manipulating local factions met with limited success. In the middle of the eighteenth century, the presence of the Russian military, the arrival of the colonists, and the natives' continued dependence on trade with Russia allowed for an increasingly direct rule over the annexed lands and subjugated peoples. In the 1790s the government set up a system of native and frontier courts in an attempt to introduce the Russian legal and administrative systems in the region.

The Russian colonial tool kit may not have been substantially different from the one used by the western colonial empires, but most of the time it was used for a different purpose. Unlike the European colonial projects in the Americas and Asia, which were predominantly driven by commercial interests, the Russian expansion in the Caucasus throughout the period was motivated primarily by the government's geopolitical concerns. Consider, for instance, the role of the large European trading companies, the Hudson Bay and the Dutch or British East India companies. The latter ruled India until 1858, when it finally ceded control of the country to the British Crown. The only comparable examples in Russian history occurred during two brief periods when charters were given to commercial enterprises, first to the merchant family of the Stroganovs to colonize Siberia in the 1560s and then to the Russian-American Company to rule Alaska from 1799 until 1867, the year it was sold to the United States. Russia's colonization of the North Caucasus was emphatically a government enterprise.

Russian expansion in the Caucasus usually evokes an image of the unstoppable march of the Russian army, punctuated by an occasional native uprising.⁵ It would be more helpful to consider the region of the North Caucasus as an arena of contest between three empires: Ottoman, Persian, and Russian. But such an approach is bound to relegate the native residents to the status of insignificant pawns in the imperial game of the grand masters, and thus to reduce the complexity of the colonization process.

As an alternative, in this article I propose to view the region as the place of an encounter between two different worlds: the native, fragmented world of numerous pagan and Muslim societies with rudimentary political organizations and economies based on subsistence herding and farming, on the one hand, and the world of the newcomers, the sovereign Russian state with its bureaucratic and military machine, driven to expansion by the geopolitical concerns, missionary aspirations, and civilizationary impulses of Enlightenment, on the other. How then was the Russian state able to appropriate the space, the time, and the terms of the contest?

DISTORTED MIRRORS

The story of Russian colonization is a story of distorted perceptions, mistranslations, and mutual misrepresentations. Both the Russian government and the native peoples proceeded with a set of false assumptions and consequently unrealistic expectations. Each side was engaged in constructing an image of

the other suited to its own purposes and reinforced by appropriate rhetorical devices. Thus the natives were first "unfaithful subjects" and later "ignoble savages" in need of baptism and civilization. Such was the Russian view. From the mountaintops of the Caucasus, the Russians were seen as yet another military power that could be used by one local chief against another. Only later, when the Russian military power proved to be overwhelming, were the Russians made into the "infidel Christians" who had to be resisted in the name of Islam.⁶

The protagonists of our story are the Russians, the Kumyks of northern Daghestan, and the Kabardinians. As late as 1784, the report submitted by the Russian Governor-General of the Caucasus, P. S. Potemkin, ended on this note: "And because the differences between the peoples of the Caucasus are insignificant, by submitting the description of the Kabardinian people, I am describing all other peoples of the North Caucasus."⁷ The differences did exist, however, and were even more significant precisely because they escaped the governor-general's attention.

The Kabardinians were a predominant group among the various subdivisions of the Adygs, the most powerful and numerous people in the North Caucasus, also known to their neighbors on all sides of the frontier as the Circassians. The Adygs populated almost the entire North Caucasus range from the Black to the Caspian Sea. Their language was unrelated to the TurkoMongol languages of their neighbors and belonged to a distinct AdygAbkhasian branch of the Caucasian language group. The territory of Kabarda, both the Lesser and Greater, was south of the Terek River and occupied most of the central and northeastern parts of the North Caucasus. To the southeast there were numerous clusters of village-societies whose inhabitants were later known as Chechens; to the south were Ingushs, Ossetians, and Balkars.

Tucked into the most northeastern corner of the Caucasus were the Kumyks, Turkic people of northern Daghestan. Their ruler, or shamkhal, had a residence in the town of Tarki together with his court and officials. The shamkhal was to be succeeded by an heir apparent, the krim-shamkhal. Long under Islamic influence, Tarki was also a residence of the sheikh-ul-Islam, the leader of the Muslim clergy among the Kumyks. The circumscribed power of the shamkhal notwithstanding, the Kumyk society exhibited a more complex and centralized political organization than those of other societies of the North Caucasus.

Other peoples of the region were organized into societies with highly fragmented political structures. Some, like the Kabardinians, were socially differentiated societies. Their nobles were divided into pshi, whom the Russians referred to as princes, and the uorki, the lesser nobility, whom the Russians called uzden. Princes were held in great esteem, but none was elected to a superior position to rule others. The use of the term uzden, which the Russians applied to the Kabardinians, was indicative of Moscow's initial ignorance of the newly encountered peoples. Uzden, a term of Turkic origin, was a title of nobility among the Kumyks and other Turkic peoples of the Caucasus (Karachays, Balkars) but not among Kabardinians or other Adygs, who carefully differentiated between various types of lesser nobles. For a long time Russian officials remained unaware of the fact that the social structure of the Kabardinians was far more complicated than they had assumed, and it was not until the 1820s that much finer gradations of the Kabardinian nobility found their way into the government's administrative language.⁸

The nobles lived off booty, tribute from the conquered neighboring peoples, and taxes paid by the peasants. While the nobles resided in fortified villages upland with their herds of sheep and horses, the free peasants lived and farmed in the fertile valleys and plains of the North Caucasus. These peasant settlements, or kabak, preserved a degree of independence as long as they paid taxes from their farming lands and fisheries to the nobles in exchange for protection.

Many other peoples of the region were organized into democratic societies or brotherhoods with no social differentiation. Consider the case of the Chechens, for example. Theirs were free societies, clusters of villages or clans united by kinship, territory, and a mutual oath; the elders decided common matters in the council, and the best warriors led men in raids and ambushes. The Russians learned the word 'Chechen,' like many other ethnonyms in the Caucasus, from the Kabardinians, to whom they were known as 'Shashan' or 'Chechen' (by the name of the village). The Kumyks called them 'Michik' or 'Mischik' (by the name of the river), and to the Georgians they were known as 'Kisty.' The Chechens called themselves Nakhchi, or "people." The Russian officials had difficulties imagining a people without a state and a single ruler. It was

almost a revelation to the Governor-General of the Caucasus, P.S. Potemkin, who observed in the late eighteenth century that "the peoples referred to as the Chechens and Kumyks do not comprise real nations (natsa) under such names, but every village has its own chief (vladelets) and is governed by its own laws."⁹

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Not surprisingly, political, social, and linguistic differences obscured mutual perceptions and images and, after decades of interaction, each side continued to have only a tenuous knowledge of the other. Betraying a profound misunderstanding of the centralized nature of the Russian state, the khan of Shemakha wrote to the governor of Astrakhan in 1653 and referred to him as *vladetel'*, a ruler whose status was similar to his own; and as late as 1717, the Daghestani shamkhal, Adil-Giray, in a letter to Peter I, referred to the Turk governor as "the Turk prince, who is a subject of your state."¹⁰

Translations were another common source of misunderstandings, as the natives often had only a vague idea of the contents of their written agreements. Peace treaties, like any other documents, were usually translated first into Tatar—a lingua franca in much of Asia—and then into a local language. The shortage of interpreters was a chronic problem, and the local governors complained often that "there were no interpreters to be sent to the shamkhal, Georgia, Circassians, and others and because of this there was great damage to the sovereign's cause."¹¹ Translations also suffered from incompetent interpreters, and even more often from deliberate efforts at misrepresentation and selective editing: for instance, the letters from the native chiefs, often addressed to the tsar as their equal, had always to be rendered in the form of a supplication to the Russian sovereign.

One example may illustrate how the task of translation, as daunting as it was philologically, was further handicapped by political and religious considerations. During the Russian embassy's visit to Georgia in 1596-99, it turned out that the Georgians could no longer read letters from Moscow, which were written in Russian, because the Georgian translator had died. The Georgians asked the Russian envoys to come to King Alexander's court and have the missives interpreted into Turkish, and the Georgians would then transcribe them in Georgian letters. The envoys replied that although their interpreters knew Turkish ("umeiut iazyku po turski"), they were illiterate, could not read in Russian or Turkish ("gramoty po ruski i po turski ne umeiut"), and therefore could not translate. Moreover, the envoys declared that "the letters contain many wise words from the divine scriptures, but the interpreters cannot translate them because these words are not used in the Turkish language." The Georgians continued to insist; but the Russians continued to refuse, saying that it had never been done before and that one could not translate properly through three languages. In the end the impatient Georgians suggested, "then do not read the divine words; read to us only what concerns the substance of the matter and the interpreters will interpret that into Turkish." On this they finally agreed.¹² Contrary to what the Russian envoys claimed in 1596, translations "through three languages" were the only way to communicate with the natives and were used routinely until the nineteenth century, when Russian authorities learned to rely on natives with a knowledge of the Russian language.

Often unaware of the contents of the documents they were expected to sign, the local nobles nonetheless had good incentives to comply with Russian demands. It was significant that such a procedure was often accompanied by generous payments and gifts. When the treasury was empty, the Russian government recognized the difficulty of making the native nobles affix their signatures without this expected distribution of gifts.¹³

Misnomers, misunderstandings, and misrepresentations were more than mere items of curiosity. Together they comprised a set of structural misconceptions which the Russians and the natives held of each other. Each side perceived the other through its own politico-cultural system and projected its own image on the other. Thus, the Russian government's policies in the region should be understood not simply as a set of instructions emanating from the capital but also as a function of the contested vocabularies and identities that the government would finally succeed in imposing on the people and the landscape of the region.

THE TSAR'S SUBJECTS OR ALLIES?

From the time of the very first encounter with the natives, the Russian officials insisted that the local chiefs swear allegiance and declare themselves the tsar's faithful subjects. In 1589, on orders from Moscow, the commander of the Terk fort informed the Kumyk shamkhal that the shamkhal should dispatch his envoys and petition to become the tsar's subject. When such envoys did not arrive, the Terk commander was instructed to warn the shamkhal that a large army was ready to be sent against him "because he did not seek our protection and stipend" (*nashego zhalovan' ia sebe ne poiskal*).¹⁴

The non-Christians' subservient status had to be formalized through a *shert* (a Turkic word derived from the Arabic *shart*, meaning a condition, a clause of a treaty), a document that listed a number of commitments on the part of the natives and that was prepared in advance and written in Russian. The local nobles had to submit their sons and relatives as hostages (*amanat*), affix their signatures to the document, and, if they were Muslims, swear an oath on the Quran—an act that, in Russian eyes, confirmed the natives' status as subjects of the tsar.¹⁵ Moscow's supremacy was not an issue open for negotiation, even with other Christian peoples, and when in 1588 the Georgian king Alexander suggested to the Russian envoys at his court that they too should swear allegiance on behalf of the tsar, his offer was rejected, and he had to declare himself unconditionally the tsar's servant (*kholop gosudarev*).¹⁶

However, the natives did not share such a view. They considered their relationship with Russia to be an alliance confirmed by a peace treaty with mutual obligations. They committed themselves not to attack the Russian frontier settlements and to help the Russians against their adversaries, but in return they expected Russia's military aid against their own rivals and secure access to their traditional pasturelands and hunting grounds. In 1589, when the Russians demanded that the Kabardinian chief, Alkas, submit hostages and pledge loyalty, his answer was, "I reached an old age, and hitherto people believed my word in everything, and I have never given hostages or taken the oath to anyone." After the Russians persisted, Alkas consulted with his *uzdens* and agreed to be at peace with Russia and to send his envoy to reside in the Terk fort on the conditions that Moscow would pay him an annuity, allow his people to hunt and fish along the rivers freely, transport them across the rivers, and help them against their adversaries. But insofar as the Russians were concerned, this agreement meant that Alkas had pledged allegiance to the tsar and had confirmed it by submitting a hostage, who would be kept in Terk. That such a different understanding of the nature of their relationship would soon lead to conflict was hardly surprising. Indeed, a few years later Alkas was accused of "violating his pledge to serve the sovereign."¹⁷ In 1714, when the government required a more realistic assessment of the political situation in the North Caucasus, a native of the Caucasus and an officer in the Russian army, Prince Alexander Bekovich-Cherkasskii, wrote to Peter I and stated unambiguously that "these peoples [the Kabardinians] were independent and submitted to no one."¹⁸

It was not that subservient relationships were unknown among the different peoples of the Caucasus. In the early nineteenth century, one of the first Kabardinian ethnographers, Shora Nogmov, described a precise hierarchy of various highlanders who were the subjects of the Kabardinians and had to pay them tribute of various kinds.¹⁹ But why would the Kabardinians consider themselves Russia's subjects if, in fact, it was the Russians who paid them an annuity and stipends—a kind of early modern foreign aid—and not the other way around? Prince Bekovich-Cherkasskii implied just that when he explained to Peter I the nature of the Kumyks' relations with Persia: "And there everyone is afraid of this people, and particularly the Persians, who in order to protect themselves give the Kumyk princes and shamkhal what they call a grant or a stipend [*zhalovane*]; but if one thinks about it, they pay them a tribute [*dan*], and every year the shah spends a great deal on the Kumyk rulers:"²⁰

Even when accepting a superior role for the Russian government, the natives understood this relationship in terms of their own society. Faced with military retribution in 1779, the nobles of the Greater Kabarda nonetheless refused to swear allegiance and declared that they had traditionally been under Russian protectorship as clients, guests, or allies (konak) but not as subjects. In the end, when the Russian troops marched into Kabarda, the Kabardinians had to sue for peace and swore an unconditional allegiance.²¹

It is hardly surprising that Russia's insistence on the political allegiance of natives, either by cajoling local elites or by a direct military threat, led to continuous disappointment. The natives were accused of "breaking their pledge to serve the sovereign"; promises of loyalty were again extracted and they were forced to sign new allegiances. But when, as often happened, Russian military assistance was not forthcoming, and the annuities and gifts were not delivered, the natives in turn accused the Russian authorities of violating the agreement. The cycle was repeated numerous times.

OF CHRISTIANITY

In the medieval politics of self-aggrandizement, adding the names of the subject lands and peoples to the full title of the tsar was a sufficient reason for Moscow's initial expansion. But far more important was Moscow's increasing insistence on its status as a Third Rome, Moscow's own version of *ne plus ultra*. Shortly after the fall of Byzantium to the Turks, the Russian tsar became the only sovereign monarch of an Orthodox Christian state, and in 1589, after much effort and diplomatic activity, Moscow finally succeeded in securing the consent of other Orthodox patriarchs to have the tsar appoint his own independent patriarch.²²

Since Russia's arrival in the region in the mid-sixteenth century, the North Caucasus had become a religious frontier. Religion separated the colonizers from the colonized, and the Christian identity of the Russian state became integral to its colonial endeavor. The only Christians who possessed a state-organized political entity and found themselves on the other side of the frontier were the Georgians. Surrounded by the Muslim peoples of the Caucasus and compelled to pay tributes intermittently to the Persians or the Ottomans, the Georgians often invoked an imagery of defiled Christianity to solicit Russian help. They appealed to Moscow to come and liberate them from the Turks, who captured much of their land, and from the shamkhal and his people, described as "the infidel dogs, who capture Christians at night and then convert them to Islam."²³

Christians were not alone in appealing to their mighty coreligionists for help and intervention. At the same time as the Georgians were requesting Russian help, the shamkhal of Daghestan, alarmed by the rapid Russian expansion in the region, wrote to the Ottoman sultan in 1589. He described how the Russians seized his river, built a fort, and prepared to send a large army against him. He warned that the Russians would take his land and convert his people to Christianity, and "then the cities that you took from Persia-Derbent, Shemakha, Shirvan, and Ganzha-will not be able to defend themselves; and the Russians will unite with the Persian shah and the Georgian king, and then they will march on Istanbul from here and the French and Spanish kings [will march in] from the other side and you, yourself, will not survive in Istanbul, and you will be captured and the Muslims will become Christians, and our faith will come to an end, if you do not intercede"²⁴

At a time when religion and state sovereignty were not and could not be clearly separated, the major powers in the region often laid claims to lands and peoples on the basis of their common religion. The Russian envoys were always prepared to argue for Russian sovereignty over western Georgia because it was a Christian country. They also heard similar arguments from the Ottomans, who insisted that the Circassians and the Kumyks were Muslims and therefore the subjects of the Ottoman empire.²⁵ In 1645, one of the chiefs of southern Daghestan, the utsm of Kaidag, rejecting Moscow's claim that two chiefs from northern Daghestan were Russian subjects, expressed his views unambiguously: "And you should know: Kazanalp and Burak are Muslims, and how can Muslims be the subjects [kholopi] of a Christian ruler? They are the subjects of our sovereign, the [Persian] shah."²⁶ Such uncompromising rhetoric was, of course, both self-serving and untrue. By the middle of the seventeenth century, many Muslims did in fact find themselves within the borders of the Russian state, and many Christians were subjects of the Ottoman empire.

The rhetorical power of such appeals notwithstanding, religious solidarity was often sacrificed to more immediate and pragmatic needs. Thus, the Georgians used their numerous laments about oppressed and suffering Christianity to seek Moscow's aid against the shamkhal, whose continuous raids devastated Georgian villages. But when military assistance was not forthcoming, the Georgians did not hesitate to collaborate with either the Persians or the Ottomans. Likewise, the Russians, after giving lofty assurances that Moscow was at the center of the grand Christian coalition of European powers against the Muslims and the Turks, showed a very pragmatic concern and insisted that the Georgians provide supplies for the Terk fort. At all times, both the Christians and Muslims used pilgrims as spies and issues of faith as a cover for political purposes.²⁷

Religious and political considerations caused constant clashes and often resisted reconciliation. During the Russian invasion of Daghestan in 1722, the Crimean khan wrote to the shamkhal, Adil Giray, "not to trust the words of the infidel Muscovites, but instead to rally all the Muslims against the infidels for the sake of Islam"²⁸ Sometimes religious solidarity mattered. In 1737, shortly after the Daghestani chief of Enderi swore allegiance to Russia, he was ordered to dispatch his troops for a military campaign in Russia's war against the Ottoman empire. His response was that it was not befitting him to help an infidel ruler (giaursk tsar) against a Muslim one.²⁹

The Russian, Ottoman, and Persian governments used religion for their geopolitical purposes. Ottoman agents were often reported to have arrived in the Caucasus with letters from the sultan urging the local population to rebel against the oppression of the Russians. The Russian government also sent its agents to the Christians residing under Ottoman or Persian rule to foment rebellion. In 1784 Russian agents were dispatched to the Armenians of Karabakh and Karadag "to convince them that they could use the imperial protection to get rid of the Persian yoke."³⁰

Yet most of the time other Muslims were further away than the Russians, and, in their unceasing internal wars, various chiefs of the region conspired to obtain "infidel" Russian help against their local Muslim rivals. The fact that Islamic identity alone was not sufficient to unite the peoples of the Caucasus became even more apparent in the 1780s during the first major uprising against the Russians led by Sheikh Mansur. During the uprising, one Muslim cleric wrote to the Russian authorities and volunteered to assassinate Mansur in return for a 2,000 ruble reward and having his name kept secret. Russian administrators judged the offer to be credible enough to give the cleric 500 rubles for a promised assassination. Others too refused to join the uprising: the Avars confirmed their loyalty to Russia, and the Kabardinians resolved to remain neutral.³¹

The Kabardinian nobles frequently needed Russian assistance against the devastating raids of their coreligionists from the Crimea and northwestern Caucasus. Reassuring the Russian administration that the Kabardinians had no choice but to be on good terms with Russia, Vasili Bakunin, an insightful and knowledgeable Russian official in the region, reported in 1748 that even though the Kabardinians shared the same religion with the Crimeans and the Kuban Nogays, they often suffered from the raids of the latter two and would never leave Kabarda and cross the Kuban River to become Crimean subjects.³²

One such story exemplified Crimean relations with Kabarda. On becoming a Crimean khan in 1708, Kaplan Giray demanded that three thousand Kabardinian slaves (esir) should be submitted to his court in order to mark his ascension to the throne. This was indeed an old custom in the region, which traditionally served as the largest supplier of slaves to the Crimeans and Ottomans. Referring to the increasingly volatile Crimean politics, the Kabardinians explained that in the past the khans used to change every fifteen or twenty years. Now the Crimeans changed khans almost every year, and it was impossible for the Kabardinians to provide so many slaves so often. They added that most Kabardinians had now accepted Islam, that they had schools and mosques in each village, and that their children studied there; therefore, "how can we send these youths as slaves, as if they were some infidels?" But the appeal to a Muslim sensibility did not help, and shortly the army of Kaplan Giray entered Kabarda. The Kabardinians promised to provide slaves, but then, tricking the Crimeans, they utterly destroyed the entire force. Kaplan Giray narrowly escaped captivity, took refuge among the Nogays, and never returned to the Crimea again.³³

Differences notwithstanding, in the minds of Russian officials the natives' religious identity continued to define their behavior and moral qualities. As early as the sixteenth century, Russian officials explained the natives' inability to keep an oath of allegiance by the fact that they were Muslim and therefore could not be trusted.³⁴ Two centuries later, in 1784, Governor-General P. S. Potemkin concluded that it was quite possible that the Kabardinians had become duplicitous after they converted to Islam, but that their perfidious nature could be explained by their poor understanding of Islam's tenets. Before this conversion to Islam, the governor continued, they were Christians, and if suitable priests were to be sent to preach among them, "undoubtedly they would soon shed the light of divine bliss among all the peoples scattered in the mountains."³⁵

P.S. Potemkin was not the first to introduce the idea of "rechristianization of the Caucasus." A visible testimony to Peter I's intentions was a newly founded fort in northern Daghestan which he chose to name the Holy Cross. The first attempt to evangelize among the natives of the region was made in 1744, when the government decided to send a mission to the Ossetians. Such a mission had to be kept secret, and the Senate instructed the Synod to send only Georgian priests, not Russian ones, and to give them no written instructions, thus avoiding any suspicion on the part of the Ottoman or Persian governments.³⁶ Four years later, an unsigned report about Kabarda prepared by the Office of Foreign Affairs, referring to the testimony of one of the Kabardinian nobles, maintained that the Kabardinians had always been Christian and that their origins could be found among the fifteenth-century Ukrainian Cossacks, who had come to settle in the Terek fort and its environs. At that time they were known as Circassians or Kabardinians and became Russian subjects, but they were later seized by the Crimeans and forced to convert to Islam. When they returned to the Terek River, they had already forgotten their language and their Christian faith. A similar memorandum, originating from the same office in the 1770s, went one step further, concluding that this was why the Ottomans claimed them as their subjects.³⁷ Despite the nonsensical nature of such reports, their implications for the policymakers in the Russian capital were obvious: the Russian government had grounds to dispute the Ottoman suzerainty over the Kabardinians and to legitimize its efforts to "rechristianize" them.

While some argued that conversion was justified because these peoples were Christians in the past, others suggested that Islam prevailed among them because they had been Christians only in name and, essentially, remained pagan. Both arguments, however, led to the same conclusion: that more active evangelization would bring them back to Christianity.³⁸ Yet despite the various plans for missionary work among the natives, these proposals remained mostly on paper and were left unrealized.

Instead of being rechristianized, the region was continuously "reislamized." A new wave of Islamic influence was brought to the region in the middle of the eighteenth century by the Nakshbandi dervishes of the mystical Sufi order. These mendicant Muslim preachers needed no missions, resources, or government support. Expelled from Persia, they brought their austere and uncompromising version of popular Islam to the mountainous villages, where they found a receptive audience. An anti-Russian and anti-Christian uprising of Sheikh Mansur in the 1780s was a direct result of the increasing influence of the Sufi order in the Caucasus.³⁹ Even though unsuccessful in pushing back the Russian "infidels," the uprising left an indelible mark on the memory of the peoples of the North Caucasus and was only the first in a series of uprisings declared by the Muslim clerics as ghazawat (the holy war) against the Russians. Inevitably, the continuous Russian expansion in the region drove the natives further into the arms of the local Muslim clergy and into the resistance under the green banner; of Islam.

OF ENLIGHTENMENT

In the second half of the eighteenth century, although still mostly concerned with political and military objectives, the government began to embark on a different course of action, now actively seeking to alter the way of life of the peoples of the North Caucasus. A 1778 report by the Office of Foreign Affairs, referring to the Kabardinians, stated explicitly that "until this time there was no need to pay close attention to their internal affairs, and our side had been satisfied merely by pursuit of their political or external loyalty."⁴⁰

What changed was more than just "Russia's needs." Since the mideighteenth century, Russian interests in the region had been served by a new, educated, and westernized elite of military officers and government administrators. Typical representatives of the Age of Reason, schooled in contemporary concepts of law, military tactics, and administration and confident of their innate superiority, they brought with them new ideas and new methods of governing.

From their vantage point, the natives with their "savage customs" and "completely corrupt morals" were "unreliable and perfidious people" (*nepostoianny i verolomny*) who could not be trusted because of "their fickle and crude nature" (*vetrennosti i grubosti*) and "their predatory way of life [*khishchnoe remeslo*], to which they are predisposed by their very nature and upbringing."⁴¹ These were not merely personal prejudices, but officially sanctioned views. The natives, not unlike other subjects of the empire, were seen and treated as children, a notion unmistakably confirmed by one of the official titles of the Caucasus' s governors in the late eighteenth century, "the guardian and patron of various non-Christians" (*opekun raznykh inovertsov*).⁴²

Of course, the children could grow up and achieve redemption by becoming the faithful subjects of the Russian empire and enjoying the benefits of civilization that the Russian officials claimed to embody. The natives were not yet romanticized as "innocent children of nature" or "noble savages," as the natives of the New World were or as the natives of the Russian empire would be in the nineteenth century.⁴³ First, like any children, they needed to be controlled, instructed, and ruled, and if they misbehaved they had to be admonished and punished.

To achieve these goals the Russian regional administrators relied on different policies, ranging from a classical "divide and rule" principle when "it was necessary to sow disputes" and "to encourage by any possible means squabbles between the Kabardinians" to a no less classical "unite and rule" when "it was in our interests to reconcile the warring factions of the Kabardinian nobles."⁴⁴ Russian military and civilian officials did not hesitate to use the neighboring Kalmyks and Cossacks against the Kabardinians or to plan their starvation by seizing their herds and destroying their grain: "thus they would be completely starved and impoverished and without their horses, and what could they do then?" the commander of Kizliar fortress asked rhetorically in his secret report to St. Petersburg in 1768.⁴⁵

One of the most comprehensive plans for colonial administration of the region was submitted by the Astrakhan governor, Petr Krechetnikov, in 1775. Like previous proposals, this one was based on the belief that "nothing can tame their barbarity better and make them more docile than their conversion to Christianity"; and "because many of these peoples are Muslim only in name, it will not be difficult to convert them, and through the contact with our people it will be possible to eradicate their language and their customs completely." A school was to be founded in the city of Astrakhan where the local nobles could send their children, and trade was to be encouraged so that the natives would get used to Russian merchandise and particularly to using money.⁴⁶

To convince the authorities in St. Petersburg to pursue a more active policy in the Caucasus, the governor described how the treasury would benefit from the exploration of the region' s natural resources and its fertile lands. Furthermore, the natives could supply cheap labor, and, because the concept of profit was unfamiliar to them, they could be paid very little or given shirts as compensation for their labor, as was customary among them. But to achieve this, the governor argued, the Russian authorities needed to create new settlements along the entire frontier line from Kizliar to Mozdok. There the natives should be settled among the Russian troops, who should comprise at least one-third of each settlement' s population. They should also be placed under Russian command and allowed to intermarry; as a result, "their way of life, customs, and language will wither away painlessly and easily, and they will become the full subjects of Her Imperial Majesty."⁴⁷

Similar proposals also emanated from the preceding Russian colonial administrations, but Krechetnikov' s plan was particularly detailed and direct. It visibly captured the religious, economic, political, and cultural differences between the two worlds—that of the empire builders, on the one hand, and that of the traditional communal societies of the region, on the other. The natives were to be the object of imperial policies and would have to change. They, too, could join the civilized realm and become true subjects of the empire by

abandoning their way of life and converting to Christianity. Profit must replace the honor system, industries must alter the traditional landscape, new crops must replace subsistence agriculture, the Russian language must replace the native tongue, and Muslims must become Christians.

At about the same time on another frontier, Benjamin Lincoln, the American negotiator with the Indians of the Great Lakes, also believed that the savages had to be civilized, that the Indians had no right to stand in the way of progress. Of course, neither Krechetnikov nor Lincoln was alone in these views; they were rather typical representatives of the Age of Enlightenment. The governments in both Catherinian Russia and Jeffersonian America had similar visions of native assimilation. But in capitalist America it was the rule of property and law that Thomas Jefferson believed would lead the Indians into the embrace of their new fellow Americans.⁴⁸ In imperial Russia, by contrast, the terms of inclusion were the natives' service to the state and the crown, their conversion to Christianity, and their complete acculturation. Yet in the late eighteenth century, both the Russian and the American visions remained mostly policy ideals. In America, it proved to be much easier to push the natives out of the way than to assimilate them. And in Russia, the government was continuously plagued by its own lack of resources to settle the region and to explore its natural wealth.

OF COLONIALISM

By the late eighteenth century, Russia reached an unquestionable military superiority in the region. A series of new forts, connected by 1800 into one continuous line of defense, secured the newly acquired territories. Now the residents of the forts and the settlers behind the line were safe from the unceasing raids of the native peoples, and the new military tactics of using irregular troops and field artillery allowed for successful offensive operations. Russia's growing presence in the region, its military superiority, and its increasing dominance in regional trade were all predictable consequences of Russian expansion. Less predictable and less well-known is the impact of Russian colonization on migration patterns and the landscape of the region.

When mentioning migration, one invariably thinks of the movement of settlers from Russia to the Caucasus.⁴⁹ Yet there was also another migration, which lay at the core of Russian colonial policies: a movement of the natives toward Russian forts and towns. From the mid-sixteenth century, the Kabardinian nobles, like many other non-Christians, frequently departed for Russiasome in search of refuge from rivals, others attracted by the generous rewards Moscow offered in exchange for military service. They were given titles to land and bestowed with military ranks and handsome cash annuities. They converted to Christianity, assumed Russian names, and intermarried with Russian noble families ⁵⁰

A century later, these nobles were joined by a host of others: lesser nobles fleeing justice or looking for better terms of military employment; peasants and slaves escaping onerous labor; and Georgians and Armenians who had been purchased by the natives from their neighbors, seeking freedom among fellow Christians. Repeated requests and demands to return the fugitive commoners, and threats of retribution if they were not returned, failed to move the administration, which in turn insisted that those fugitives who converted to Christianity could not be sent back. The Russian administration encouraged and rewarded such conversions, and many fugitives were listed as new converts, even though they had little idea of their new religion and continued to practice their old one.⁵¹

Enlarge 200%
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FIG.3

Enlarge 200%
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FIG. 4.

Enlarge 200%

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By the mid-eighteenth century, with the construction of Mozdok, a new fort a short distance away from some Kabardinian villages, the issue of the fugitives' return took on a different dimension. Despairing Kabardinian nobles complained that they could no longer exercise control over their people, who threatened to flee and convert to Christianity in Mozdok, Kizliar, or Astrakhan. Others complained that many had already left, and few people remained to perform any work. Such reports were confirmed by Kabardinians who spied for the Russians, as well as by Russian officers stationed in the region.⁵²

When some of the converts, disappointed in their new circumstances, fled back to Kabarda, the Russian authorities insisted that these fugitives be returned, and this time it was the Kabardinian nobles who refused such demands. But fleeing back to one's native village was neither easy nor common, and a report to the Office of Foreign Affairs in 1770 stated that the Kabardinians indeed suffered great damage from the loss of their people. The report explained that the Kabardinians usually paid about 100 rubles per captive, and that the loss of a thousand such captives would amount to a significant sum of money. The report suggested that Muslim fugitives should be handed back and that the Kabardinian nobles could be appeased if the government offered them compensation of 60-70 rubles for each Muslim who wished to convert and 50-60 rubles for each Christian fugitive.⁵³

Another, more urgent argument in favor of returning the fugitives from the Caucasus was presented in a secret report by a commander of the Kizliar fort. On the eve of the war with the Ottoman empire in 1768, he reported that the forts of Kizliar and Mozdok, as well as the Cossack towns along the frontier, were poorly fortified and had few troops. If the various local peoples were aided by the Crimeans, they could cause significant damage. His recommendation was not to accept the fugitive Muslim peasants, thus winning the loyalty of the Kabardinian nobles, who could then help the Russians to defend the frontier.⁵⁴

A temporary reprieve for the local nobles was achieved in 1771, when Catherine the Great personally wrote to the Kabardinian people, trying, as always, to reconcile the ideas she had learned from the books of the Western philosophes with the incongruous realities of the Russian empire. While she nobly declared that "there is no such law in the entire world to reject those who seek Christian faith," she then acceded to demands that the Kabardinian peasants should be returned "because they have no ways of comprehending Christianity and because you need them in the fields."⁵⁵

Russian policies of providing refuge for fugitives inadvertently led to a growing division between the Kabardinian nobles and the commoners. Exploiting that rift later became central to the administration's policies in the North Caucasus. By promoting social conflict within the native society the Russian government sought to weaken the nobles and thus to increase its leverage over the natives. For instance, one of the tasks of the Russian liaison officer residing among the Kabardinians was "to incite the commoners to be loyal to Russia;" and when in 1767 more than ten thousand Kabardinian peasants rebelled against the nobles and threatened to flee, the Russian major was sent to convince the rebels to leave their nobles and settle in the Russian territory.⁵⁶

At different times, immediate military and strategic considerations compelled the government to resort to a noninterference policy. Thus, in 1778, the Office of Foreign Affairs rejected as impractical the Astrakhan governor's suggestions to protect the Kabardinian commoners from the abuses of their nobles and to transfer and resettle them along the Siberian defense line. The office advised the governor that "it is outside the interests of this side to consider the nature of the commoners' relation to the nobles;" that this would constitute an interference with the Kabardinian right of ownership and that it would reinforce the suspicions of the Crimea and the Ottoman Porte. The instructions continued: "As for the fact that the commoners may

rebel and kill their own nobles, that is even for the better; then there will be fewer Kabardinian nobles, and it will happen by the hands of their people, so that this side could not be blamed.' 57

A few years later, when the Russian government was less concerned about the potential conflict with the Ottoman Porte and about keeping up the appearance of fair play, Prince G. A. Potemkin-Tavrichesk instructed the commander of the Russian troops in the Caucasus, General P. S. Potemkin, to reject any requests from the Kabardinian nobles for a return of their commoners, who fled to escape oppression. Leaving no doubt as to his views on the subject, he added, "I regard the separation of the commoners from the nobles as the best way to secure our frontier."58

By the 1780s, both the nobles and the commoners were compelled to appeal to the authorities to mediate their conflicts. In 1783, the Kabardinian nobles submitted a list of their grievances to the "Supreme Commander of the borderlands from the Dnepr River to the Volga," G. A. Potemkin. Most of the complaints were not new: the authorities did not keep their promises, favored Georgians and Armenians, seized their lands, and did not return their people. They asked to be allowed to graze their horses behind the Russian defense line. Then, in a simultaneous recognition of their own helplessness and the administration's influence, the nobles specifically requested that the Russians order a stop to feuding between the nobles and the commoners. The petition was signed by thirty-six nobles and thirty-eight uzdens, who offered loyalty if their conditions were fulfilled.

At the same time, the commoners dispatched deputies to deliver a petition of their own to the Russian authorities. The deputies explained that, though they were unfamiliar with the contents of the nobles' petition to the authorities, they feared that the nobles had been plotting against them. They requested protection from the abuses of their landlords, and they asked to be allowed to resettle and farm behind the Russian defense line "because we do not have enough farming land on this side." The petition was signed by thirty-two deputies, who promised on behalf of all the commoners to obey Russian orders without reservation.59

The Russian government could not continue to play off the nobles and the commoners against each other indefinitely. With the increasing Russian control of the region, the administration became directly involved in the natives' affairs and was eventually forced to take sides. In the 1790s the government decided that it would be expedient to rely on the native nobility in governing the region, and the nobles were chosen to become members of the recently organized local and frontier courts. Of course, some concessions had to be made, and the nobles finally were allowed to cross the Russian defense line to graze their horses. Caution was not abandoned, however: the nobles were required to be unarmed and in possession of a special pass (bilet) issued by the Russian military commander in the Caucasus.60

The settlement of the frontier closely mirrored Russia's policies in the region. Initially, the fugitives from the Caucasus had been dispersed among the Russian forts and Cossack settlements along the frontier. But the proximity of their new residences to their old villages proved too dangerous, as war parties organized by local nobles frequently raided the frontier settlements to regain their fugitives. Relying on its experience with the Kalmyk converts, the government decreed in 1750 that the converts had to be moved further from the Russian borders and settled alongside the Russians, so that they could learn farming and perform military service. Shortly, some were dispatched to join the Don and Volga Cossacks, and others were sent to become state peasants in the Tambov province. The Don and Volga regions proved to be too close to prevent the converts from fleeing, and other, more remote locations in the Orenburg province and Siberia were suggested.61

In 1762, with the frontier further secured, the government decided that the converts should play an important role in settling the region. In its report to the Empress Catherine II, the Senate suggested that in order to strengthen the region of Kizliar a new fort should be built to settle the newly converted Ossetians and Kabardinians. Such a fort was to have a church and a priest who could make journeys to the mountains to evangelize the peoples of the Caucasus. Furthermore, Georgians, Armenians, and other Christian peoples (lit. nations, natsiia) could be invited to found silk and other industries, and all these peoples should be allowed to settle separately and build their own churches. Catholics too were settled in Mozdok and given a government loan for construction of their church. Only Muslims were not allowed to settle there.62 The

imperial Russian frontier was conceived as a Christian one. Of course, reality was always different from the ideal, and a shortage of settlers and resources compelled the government not only to bring thousands of serfs and state peasants but also to encourage the settlement of the Muslim Tatars and Buddhist Kalmyks.

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The growing presence of Russian towns and forts, settlers and soldiers was also rapidly changing the traditional landscape of the region. The physical and ecological changes could not be separated easily from the government's military and political objectives. In 1768, General Potapov ordered the demolition of the dam on one of the Terek tributaries. The water, which was used by the Kumyks for the irrigation of their fields, was now diverted to surround the fort of Kizliar to provide for its better defense.⁶⁴ The construction of Mozdok in the early 1740s caused bitter complaints from the Kabardinians, who demanded that the fort be razed because "it is being built where we cut forest and graze our cattle. There is no need for this fort because there is no danger to us or Your Majesty."⁶⁵ But the government had a different opinion; it maintained that the fort was being built on land that did not belong to the Kabardinians.

With the construction of the defense lines, the natives found themselves dependent on the benevolence of the local authorities who now controlled access to their traditional pasturelands, forest groves, fisheries, and, of course, the new markets. General P. S. Potemkin, condemning the exploitation and the harsh living conditions of the Kabardinian peasants, believed that the nobles' complaints about being constrained and oppressed by the Russian defense lines were a mere excuse: "What they consider oppression is the fact that our army is serving as an impediment to their inhumanity."⁶⁶ One can only wonder whether the general held similar views on the plight of the Russian serfs.

The newly acquired lands did not remain vacant for long. Orders came to follow the example of the Novorossisk province and to distribute the lands behind the defense lines.⁶⁷ Some recommended that lands along the Terek River should be used for farming, planting vineyards, and producing silk.⁶⁸ Lands around Mozdok were distributed among the Cossacks, settlers from Russia, and the fugitives from the Caucasus.⁶⁹ In time, the transformation of the newly acquired lands was complete; they were turned from pasturelands in common possession of the natives into farmlands in the individual possession of the Russians. What had been a perilous frontier was turned into an imperial borderland. Colonization of the Caucasus was underway.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

In the two and a half centuries after the Muscovites first appeared in the North Caucasus around 1550, the region was slowly but inescapably altered. Vast steppes and plains, previously only sparsely populated by nomadic and seminomadic peoples, were now studded with numerous Russian forts, settlements, and towns, all connected into a single line of defense protecting the imperial borderlands. These Russian forts and towns were populated by both Russian settlers from the interior of the empire and non-Russian immigrants from the Caucasus. Some came of their own will, while others were exiled to these remote outposts of the empire. Most of the residents of these frontier settlements belonged to the Cossacks or regular military, some were traders and artisans, and a few were peasants. Their occupations could not be easily separated from their ethnic origins: Russians and Ukrainians predominated in the military, Georgians and Armenians in trade and crafts, and recent converts could either be enlisted in the military (Kabardinians, Kumyks, Nogays, et al.) or settled to farm the land (the Ossetians). Former pastures and grazing grounds were being turned into farmland; subsistence crops were being replaced by cash crops, silk plantations, and vineyards; and plans for mining and construction of factories were being studied. The local merchants' journeys to the Russian towns of Kizliar and Astrakhan became far more frequent than travels to their traditional trading centers in the cities of Georgia and Azerbaijan. Disparate local vernaculars could still be heard, but Russian was inevitably replacing Turkish as the new lingua franca of the region.

In contrast to colonial North America, there was little "middle ground" in the North Caucasus before the Russian military conquests of the early nineteenth century.⁷⁰ If the newcomers to the region found themselves under the spell of certain local influences (customs, types of clothing, and linguistic borrowings), the same could not be said for the native inhabitants. The natives, most of them Muslims, could not easily separate Islam from everyday life. In political, religious, social, and economic terms the

boundaries between the newcomers and the natives were clearly marked. One could remain outside Russian control and within one's own native society, whose dependence on Russia was manifested in little more than pledging allegiance to the emperor; or one could become a subject of the crown by settling within Russian borders, joining the military or becoming a state peasant, and converting to Christianity. Such were the terms of inclusion, and there was little ground in between.

Moscow's presence in the region was marked from the very beginning by the single concern of securing the political loyalty of the natives. In Russian political language this could be achieved through the natives' pledges of allegiance to their new Russian sovereign. But the government's official rhetoric of self aggrandizement, which portrayed the natives as the subjects of Moscow and a ritual idiom of pledging allegiance to the tsar, were at sharp odds with the reality. In fact, the natives' loyalty could be assured only through both symbolic and tangible systems of payments and rewards. Such an approach was intended to benefit the local nobility and to secure their cooperation and loyalty, but it had only limited success. To meet the local nobles' expectations, the Russians had to provide them with annuities, pay them rewards, deliver presents that were interpreted as an important measure of respect, and offer military aid against their local rivals. And when the Ottomans or the Persians offered more attractive "package deals," the local nobles were always ready to switch their "allegiances." Often Moscow was able neither to deliver on its promises and the natives' expectations nor to match the offers from the Ottoman and Persian governments. The loyalty of the natives remained elusive.

Russian expansion in the region was greatly facilitated by the unceasing rivalries and internecine wars among the local nobles. Many did not hesitate to invite the Russian military to build forts in their vicinity in order to promote their own interests. In time, however, these same nobles found their political freedom circumscribed, their lands taken away, and traditional justice denied. Some among the local nobles had no other choice than to continue their reluctant cooperation with the Russian authorities. Others, however, threw themselves with determination into an alliance with the Ottomans against the continuous Russian intrusion.

It was at this time that the government adopted a policy of driving a wedge between the nobles and the commoners, a socially conscious policy of "divide and rule" Rather than attempting to win over the nobles, the goal was to weaken them by depriving the nobles of their source of income and labor. The fact that this policy was relatively successful is apparent not only from several large revolts against the nobles but also from the numerous complaints by nobles asking the government to stop sowing discord between them and their people and to return fugitive commoners.

"The co-optation of the elites," a notion commonly used in colonial studies and considered to be at the core of Russian imperial policies, was only one part of the government strategy. No less significant was the co-optation of the commoners, as the authorities sought to induce native commoners to flee from their nobles and settle in Russia. That policy inevitably led to a growing social rift within the indigenous society. It thus appears that in the colonial context, the source of social conflict within the native society is often found in the outside agency-in this case, in the Russian government's deliberate policies. In the end, both policies, one of offering material incentives to the nobles and the other of co-opting the commoners, led to the same result-commoners and nobles alike grew more dependent on the Russian imperial authorities.

Strong incentives and generous rewards were offered to those who chose to cross the line of conflict and settle on the Russian side of the frontier. Some of them joined the military, others settled to farm the land, but all were expected to undergo a crucial rite of passage-conversion to Christianity. In the eyes of the government, such a conversion was more than a religious transformation. The government assumed that the converts would soon abandon their language and customs for the Russian ones. Conversion to Christianity was equated with assimilation; it was the only way for the natives eventually to become Russian.

Even though the government traditionally favored such an outcome, a policy of accepting and converting the natives meant antagonizing the local nobles and thus worked to subvert the very goal the government tried to achieve-peace and security in the region. The alternative was to placate the nobles and to win their cooperation by discouraging and returning the fugitives. But for the local authorities such a prospect

entailed forgoing a pool of cheap labor and of new military recruits, and for the government in the capital it meant forsaking prospective converts to Christianity.

Such tension was inherent in Russian policies in the region and could not be resolved easily. Throughout the seventeenth century the government tried to balance the two approaches by ignoring the nobles' complaints while appeasing them with gifts. In the eighteenth century, when the number of fugitives surged, government officials continued to explain the issue away without doing anything to change the situation. With the increased presence of the Russian military and a less vulnerable Russian frontier, both the central government and the local authorities were even less prepared to compromise on the issue. Only when the same Russian officials had come to the inescapable conclusion that a policy of "divide, convert, and rule" was driving the local nobles further into the arms of the Ottoman empire did the government reconsider the issue, and only then did Catherine II, in her decree, accede to the local nobles' demands to have their people returned to them. Even then, the words and the actions of the regional Russian commanders did not always remain congruous with the Empress' s decree.

Despite the seemingly obvious conclusion that the stability of the frontier could have been better achieved through the co-optation of the nobles, the government preferred to resolve the issue in favor of accepting and converting the newcomers. The issue was a pertinent one throughout the period, but in the eighteenth century it was conceptualized and couched in terms of the Enlightenment. Russia, the government officials believed, was destined to bring the natives the light of Christianity and Civilization, two notions they considered to be inseparable. Christianity and Enlightenment were both a convenient explanation for the Russian policies in the Caucasus and a perfect justification for the region' s colonization.

In the end, the North Caucasus was transformed into a religious frontier where Islam confronted Christianity. This contiguous, extended, and lasting frontier with the world of Islam was perhaps the most distinct feature of Russia' s colonial experience, which set it apart from that of the European colonial powers before the nineteenth century. From the New World to South Africa, the Europeans encountered numerous polytheists who were easily pushed aside by the settlers. Only in parts of Asia, most notably in India, did the British confront a deeply entrenched and well-organized religion, Islam. But neither the British private entrepreneurs nor the government had any intention of settling India with British colonists.⁷¹ Russia, on the contrary, seemed to combine both features-to have an extensive frontier with Islam and to bring Christian settlers into predominantly Muslim areas, thus directly injecting a religious factor into the colonial conflict.

There was, of course, one other place where Christian Europe encountered the Islamic world along a contiguous religious frontier. But the dynamics of this frontier, which the Austro-Hungarian empire shared for centuries with the Ottomans, were distinctly different from the southern frontier of Russia. The Habsburgs, like the Spanish crown before them, were engaged in a sort of "reconquista," reconquering traditionally Christian lands from Muslim occupation. The Russians too-without any legitimacy, however-often used the same argument to justify their conquests in the Muslim lands.

In time, the North Caucasus, a longtime frontier region on the periphery of the Persian, Ottoman, and Russian empires, was to become a borderland of the latter. Unlike the Persians, who only occasionally sent expeditionary forces into the region to assert their short-lived supremacy, and unlike the Ottomans, whose sporadic military campaigns intended no more than ensuring a flow of taxes and slaves to Istanbul, the Russian government systematically colonized the region, stationing troops in the numerous forts, dispatching bureaucrats, merchants, and priests to the newly built towns, and encouraging the newcomers to settle and farm the land. Yet the government policy linking the process of the region' s colonization with Christianity only pushed the natives further to embrace Islam. At the same time as the Russian government was winning the battle over the region' s landscape, it was losing the battle over the region' s people. The natives would learn to rally under the banners of Islam, which became both the means and the goal of resistance. The lines of future conflicts were clearly drawn.

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of the Woodrow Wilson Center in Washington, D.C., and the Davies Center for Eurasian Studies at Harvard University for their helpful questions and comments.

1 Among the most influential articles on the subject are Marc Raeff, "Patterns of Russian Imperial Policy toward the Nationalities," in *Soviet Nationality Problems*, ed. Edward Allworth (New York, 1971), pp. 22-42, and a particularly insightful essay by S. Frederick Starr, "Tsarist Government: The Imperial Dimension," in *Soviet Nationality Policies and Practices*, ed. Jeremy R. Azrael (New York, 1978), pp. 3-38. More recent works are by Andreas Kappeler, ed., *Russland als Vielvolkerreich. Entstehung, Geschichte, Zerfall* (Munich, 1992); and Daniel R. Brower and Edward J. Lazzerini, eds., *Russia's Orient: Imperial Borderlands and Peoples, 1700-1917* (Bloomington, Ind., 1997).

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2 This preliminary conclusion is based on my own manuscript, "From Frontier to Empire: A History of Russia's Southern Frontier, 1480-1780s."

3 *Kabardino-russkie otnosheniia v 16-18 vv. Dokumenty i materialy*, 2 vols. (Moscow, 1957), 1:5-13. Local rulers and chiefs frequently asked to have a fort built for their protection.

4 Bernard Cohen contrasts the British experience in North America and India, *Colonialism and Its Forms of Knowledge: The British in India* (Princeton, N.J., 1996), p. 57.

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5 For a detailed account of the political history of the North Caucasus in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, see E. N. Kusheva, "Politika russkogo gosudarstva na Sev

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ernom Kavkaze v 1552-1572 gg.," *Istoricheskie zapiski* 34 (1950): 236-87, and *Narody Severnogo Kavkaza ikh sviazi s Rossiei, vtoroia polovina 16v.-30-e gody 17 veka* (Moscow, 1963); and N. A. Smirnov, *Politika Ross na Kavkaze v 16-19 vekakh* (Moscow, 1958). Some highly tendentious local histories appeared throughout the 1950s and 1960s, when Soviet historiography was given the tasks both of producing separate histories of the peoples of the USSR and of justifying their historical connections to Russia; see, for instance, *Istoriia Kabardy* (Moscow, 1957); *Istoriia Dagestana* (Moscow, 1967); and *Ocherki istorii Karachaevo-Cherkess (Stavropol' , 1967)*, vol. 1. The most recent *Istoriia narodov Severnogo Kavkaza s drevneishikh vremen do kontsa 18 v.* (Moscow, 1988) is far better than the preceding products of Soviet historiography, but it stops short in its attempt to shake off the ideological baggage of the past. In contrast to the historians, the Soviet ethnographers produced far more interesting and sophisticated studies of the region; see M. O. Kosven, *Etnografa i istoriia Kavkaza* (Moscow, 1961); V. K. Gardanov, *Obshcheshennyi stroi advgskikh narodov* (Moscow, 1967); and N. G. Volkova, *Etnichesk sostav Severnogo Kavkaza v 18-nachale 20 veka* (Moscow, 1974). Several historical monographs in Turkish are not very different from their Russian counterparts in their equally biased presentation of the region's history from an anti-Russian and pro-Turkish point of view; see M. Fahrettin Kirzioglu, *Osmanlilarin Kafkas-elleri' ni fethi (1451-1590)* (Ankara, 1976), and Cemal Gokce, *Kajkasya ve Osmanli Imperatorlugu' nun Kafkasya siyaseti* (Istanbul, 1979). In western historiography, the history of the North Caucasus before the nineteenth century remains virtually unknown. Two recent exceptions are Ch. Lemerrier-Quelquejay, "La structure sociale, politique et religieuse du Caucase du nord au 16 siecle," *Cahiers du Monde Russe et Sovietique* 25, nos. 2-3 (1984): 125-48; for the English version of the same article, see Lemerrier-Quelquejay's "Cooptation of the Elites of Kabarda and Daghestan in the Sixteenth Century," in *The North Caucasus Barrier*, ed. Marie Bennigsen Broxup (London, 1992), pp. 18-44; and Thomas M. Barrett, "Lines of Uncertainty: The Frontiers of the North Caucasus." *Slavic Review* 54, no. 3 (1995): 578-601.

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6 There is a substantial literature on colonialism as a cultural enterprise. See among others Nicholas Dirks, ed., *Colonialism and Culture* (Ann Arbor, Mich., 1992); Patricia Seed, "Colonial and Postcolonial Discourse," in *Latin American Research Review* 26, no. 3 (1991): 181-200; Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution: Christianity, Colonialism and Consciousness in South Africa* (Chicago, 1991), vol. 1; Yuri Slezkine, *Arctic Mirrors: Russia and the Small Peoples of the North* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1994), and "Naturalists versus Nations: Eighteenth Century Russian Scholars Confront Ethnic Diversity," in Brower and Lazzerini, eds., pp. 27-57 (n. 1 above); Michael Khodarkovsky, "Ignoble

Savages and Unfaithful Subjects' : Constructing Non-Christian Identities in Early Modern Russia," in Brower and Lazzerini, eds., pp. 9-26.
7 Kabardino-russkie otnosheniia, 2:364, no. 256 (see n. 3).

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8 V. K. Karganov, *Obshestvennyi stroi Adygskiikh narodov* (Moscow, 1967), pp. 180-81. Incidentally, the term *uzden* is found in Codex Cumanicus as early as the fourteenth century (Max Vasmer, *Russisches Etymologisches Wörterbuch*, 3 vols. [Heidelberg, 1958], 3:177). The original social terms were either turkified or russified in contemporary Russian translations and often were rendered incorrectly (G. M.-P. Orazayev, "Tiurkoiazychnye dokumenty iz arkhiva Kizliarskogo komendanta-istochnik po sotsial'no ekonomicheskoi istorii narodov Severnogo Kavkaza," *Istochnikovedenie i tekstologa Blizhnego i Srednego Vostoka* [Moscow, 1984], p. 182).

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9 Kabardino-russkie otnosheniia, 2:364, no. 256. The first report in Russian of the various Chechen clans was made in 1587, when Russian envoys on the way to Georgia passed through the highlands and mentioned the Michkiz, Indili, and Shubut clans (*Snoshena Ross s Kavkazom. Materialy izvlechenyie iz Moskovskogo Ministersh,a Inostrannykh del, 1578-1613*, comp. S. J. Belokurov [Moscow, 1889], no. 4, p. 33). The word Chechen as an ethnonym is first encountered in 1708 (*Polnoe sobranie zakonov Rossiiskoi imperii. Sobranie pervoe* [hereafter cited as PS], 45 vols. [St. Petersburg, 1830], 4:421) and is found on a Russian map of 1719 (*Kabardino-russkie otnosheniia*, 1:289). Also see U. Iaudaev, "Chechenskoeplemia," *Sbornik sveden o kavkazskikh gortsakh*, no. 6 (1872), p. 3.
Russko-dagestanskii otnosheniia 17-pervoi poloviny 18 vv. Dokumenty, i materialy (Makhachkala, 1958), no. 37, p. 191; no. 97, p. 226. "Snoshena Ross s Kavkazom, no. 10, p. 77. In 1719, the Office of Foreign Affairs replied to a complaint from the governor of Astrakhan, Artem Volynsk, that it had no translators to send to Astrakhan and the governor should use whomever he could find. See *Rossiiskii Gosudarshennyi Arkhiv Drevnikh Aktov* (hereafter cited as RGADA), *Kabardin.skie, cherkasskie i drugie dela, fond 115, 1719g, no. 3, ll. 4 ob., 10.*

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12 *Snoshena Ross s Kavkazom*, no. 19, pp. 297-99. ' 3 *Kabardinøusskie otnosheniia* 1:264, no. 165.

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4 *Snoshena Ross s Kavkazom*, no. 10, p. 79; no. 12, p. 112. 15 For more on the issue, see Michael Khodarkovsky, "From Frontier to Empire: The Concept of the Frontier in Russia, 16th-18th Centuries," *Russian History* 19 (1992): 115-28.
16 *Snoshena Ross s Kavkazom*, no. 4, pp. 40-41.

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" *Ibid.*, no. 11, pp. 142-43, no. 19, pp. 305. Cf. other cases when the Kabardinian "hostages" were supposed to reside in Terk with their own people no longer than several years and were expected to join Russian military campaigns in return for generous rewards and payments (*ibid.*, no. 5, pp. 43-53).
18 *Russko-dagestanskii otnosheniia 17-pervoi poloviny 18 vv.*, no. 96, p. 224. 19 Ingush, Nazrans, Karabulaks, and Tagaur Ossetians paid one of the Kabardinian nobles one silver ruble annually from each household. The noble who received the tribute was obliged to protect these households, and for this purpose he sent them one guard for whom they provided fully. Digor people, who lived in the plains and in the mountains, paid one sheep per household, and they also received one guard for their protection. Balkars did not pay any tribute, but they paid the same penalties as the Kabardinians if they stole Kabardinian horses. Chechens and Uruspiev Ossetians belonged to the Atazhukin clan, and no one could interfere in their affairs. The noble of this clan could impose on them tribute as he pleased, and they could not refuse to pay it. Khulams and BezengiOssetians took turns paying one sheep per household annually. Karachai-Ossetians were Kabardinian subjects from the old days and were not divided between the individual nobles. All of them paid three hundred sheep annually to the eldest noble, and each household also submitted a measure of wheat and a large jar of cow' s butter. The nobles could send to the Karachai and demand whatever they wanted. If someone resisted they could place the household under arrest by putting a stone in the doorway, and no one could cross the threshold until the noble removed it; if they crossed, they had to

pay a penalty. Six clans of the Abazins were divided between three Kabardinian noble clans and paid tribute and fines similar to the Ingush and others (Sh. B. Nogmov, *Istoriia Adygeiskogo naroda* [Nal' chik, 1958], art. 26, no. 27, p. 187; also see *Kabardino-russkie otnosheniia*, 2:141, no. III).

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20 *Russko-dagestanskii otnosheniia 17-pervoi poloviny 18 vu*, no. 96, p. 225. 2 *Akty sobrannye Kavkazskoiu Arkheograficheskoiu komissiei*, vols. 1-12 (Tiflis, 1866-83), 1:91. For more on the notion of kunak, see V. K. Gardanov, *Obschestvennyi stroi adygsikh narodov*, pp. 289-326 (n. 5 above).

22 Of course, the same event looked somewhat different when the Russian envoys described it to the Georgian king a year later. In the envoys' version, the Konstantinople patriarch Jeremiah arrived in Moscow with a specific mission to announce that he and three other patriarchs from Alexandria, Jerusalem, and Antioch agreed to implore the tsar to appoint his own pope in Russia, who would replace the pope in the heretical Latin Rome, and to pray that God help the tsar in liberating the Christians and conquering the Muslims. Consistent with Moscow's self-image of unmatched supremacy and the necessity of an unlimited exaltation of the tsar, the latter could only act benevolently upon others' humble petitions. Like the natives of the Caucasus, whose status had to be de

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scribed only in terms of a subject's service to the sovereign, the Orthodox patriarchs could only be expected to beseech the supreme ruler, the Russian tsar. The rhetoric and the reality did not match, but while the church records outside of official Russia preserved the real turn of events, the story of the natives, who kept no written records, was drowned in the official Muscovite rhetoric (*Snosheniia Ross s Kavkazom*, no. 12, p. 208).

23 *Snosheniia Ross s Kavkazom*, no. 6, pp. 53-62. A similar appeal was issued by the Armenian bishop Martin asking for protection of the Armenians in Derbent, who claimed to have been forced to convert to Islam (Tsentral'nyi gosudarstvennyi voennoistoricheskii arkhiv (hereafter cited as VIA) E VUA, no.18472,1.3). Both Georgians and Armenians continued to look to Russia for protection; see Ronald Grigor Suny, *The Making of the Georgian Nation* (Bloomington, Ind., 1988), pp. 56-59, as well as *Looking toward Ararat: Armenia in Modern History* (Bloomington, Ind.,1993), pp. 31-36.

24 *Snosheniia Ross s Kavkazom*, no. 12, p. 203. More than a hundred years later in 1696, after the Russian conquest of Azov, the most significant Ottoman fortress in the region, the shamkhal issued an appeal to the sultan. He asked for Ottoman troops, cannons, and munitions in order to dislodge the Russians from their newly built fort at Tatartrp on the Terek River in Kabarda. The sultan dispatched a force, but it was far smaller than requested. Unable to reach Kabarda, this force was then stationed at the recently built Ottoman fort of Achu in the estuary of the Kuban River (Silahtar Mehmet Aga Findiklili,

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Nusretname, ed. Ismet Parmaksizoglu, 2 vols. [Istanbul, 1962-66], 1:323-24). In the 1750s, unable to count on the sultan, the shamkhal appealed for protection to both the Persians and the Russians at the same time (P. G. Butkov, *Materialy dia novoi istorii Kavkaza, s 1722po 1803 god* [St. Petersburg,1869],1:254). In the 1770s and 1780s, facing the Russo-Georgian alliance, the rulers of Daghestan and Azerbaijan again appealed to Istanbul for help (BashE,akanlikArshivi, Istanbul, *Hatti Humayun Tasnifi*, nos. 73, 94; *Osmanli Devleti ile Azerbaycan Turk HanliklariArasindaki Minasabetlere dair Arshiv Belgeleri*, vol. 1 [1578-1914], [Ankara,1992], pp. 62-93).

25 *Kabardino-russkie otnosheniia*, 1:14-15, no. 6; 1:23-25, no. 12; *Snosheniia Ross s Kavkazom*, no. 33, p. 572.

26 *Russko-dagestanskii otnosheniia 17-pervoi poloviny 18 vv.*, no. 79, p.174. 27 *Snosheniia Ross s Kavkazom*, no. 4, pp. 26-27, 37. In 1775, a Russian official in Astrakhan suggested that, under the pretext of faith and reconstruction of the destroyed churches, the Russian government should begin settling the town of Tatartip, a strategic

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place close to Georgia, which would allow better control of Kabarda (*Kabardino-russkie otnosheniia*, 2:314, no. 220).

28 Russko-dagestanskii otnosheniia 17-pervoi poloviny 18 vv., no. 131, pp. 261-62. 29 RGADA Senat E 248, op. 113, d. 1257, l. 14 ob. 30 VIA ES2, op. 1, d. 350, pt. 4; d. 72, pt. 1, l. 1. II Ibid., d. 72, pt. 1, l. 197, 203 ob.

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32 Kabardino-russkie otnosheniia, 2:161, no. 119.

33 Findiklili, Nusretname, 2:247. Despite this victory, the Kabardinians were forced to resume the payments of slave tribute shortly thereafter. In 1755, they again refused to provide slaves to the Crimea (Tsentral'nyi derzhavnyi istorichnyi arkhiv Ukrainy v misti Kvi, E 59, op. 1, d. 2,668, l. 6). 34 Snoshena Ross s Kavkazom, no. 20, p. 305. 33 Kabardino-russkie otnosheniia, 2:360, 362, no. 256.

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36 Polnoe sobranie postanovlen i rasposiazhen po vedomstvu pravoslavnogo ispovedana Rossiiskoi imperii, vol. 2 (1744-45): 123-28, no. 651; 310-13, no. 805.

37 Kabardino-russkie otnosheniia, 2:147-48, no. 116; 2:318, no. 221. Moscow's earliest and even more nonsensical claim to the North Caucasus is found in the 1554 instructions to the Muscovite envoys departing for Poland. When asked why Moscow claimed the Circassians as its subjects, they were to reply that the Circassians were fugitives from Riazan, and therefore Moscow's old subjects (S. M. Solov'ev, Istoriia Ross s drevneishikh vremen [Moscow, 1960], 3:515). In 1594 Tsar Fedor wrote to the Ottoman sultan and explained that the new Russian forts in the Caucasus had been built because "from eternity the Kabardinian princes, the Circassian princes of the Highlands, and the shamkhal were our subjects in the Riazan region and then they fled from Riazan and settled in the mountains; then the Circassians and the Kabardinians petitioned our father, the tsar Ivan, to submit to him, and became his subjects" (Kabardino-russkie otnosheniia, 1:71, no. 43).

38 B. E Pfaf, "Materialy po istorii osetin;" Sbornik sveden o kavkazskikh gortsakh (1871), 5:95.

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39 For more on the Nakshbandi order, which originated in the region of Bukhara in Central Asia in the fourteenth century and became one of the most influential orders of the Sufi Islam, see "Nakshbandiyya" in The Encyclopaedia of Islam, new ed., ed. C. E. Bosworth et al. (Leiden, 1992), 7:933-39. On the Mansur uprising, see A. Bennigsen, "Un mouvement populaire au Caucase au XVIII siecle. La 'Guerre Sainte' du sheikh Mansur (1785-1791), page mal connue et controversee des relations russo-turques," in Cahiers du Monde Russe et Sovietique 5, no. 2 (1964): 159-205. 40 Kabardino-russkie otnosheniia, 2:329, no. 227.

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41 Ibid., 2:324, no. 225, no. 256, pp. 359-63. In 1768 the Kabardinian nobles complained that the Kizliar commander Major-General N. A. Potapov did not come to meet with them in Mozdok and wrote to them that "it is below his dignity to speak to such people as we are" (ibid., nos. 199-200, pp. 276-77). 42 VIA F.52, op. 1, d. 264, l. 32; d. 286, pt. 3, l. 2, et al. 43 Cf. a discussion of the issue in Slezkine, Arctic Mirrors, pp. 74-75, 387-90 (n. 7 above).

4 Kabardino-russA-ie otnosheniia, 2:295, 297, no. 212, 2:330, no. 227. 45 Ibid., 2:282-84, no. 202.

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46 Ibid., 2:312, 316, no. 220. Conversion of the Indians in late eighteenth-century North America was also presented in terms of "taming the wild." See Richard White, The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650-1815 (Cambridge, 1991), p. 506.

4 Kabardino-russkie otnosheniia, 2:313-15, no. 220. For a brief description of the military settlements, see John P. LeDonne, Ruling Russia: Politics and Absolutism in the Age of Absolutism, 1762-1796 (Princeton, N.J., 1984), pp. 294-97.

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48 White, The Middle Ground, pp. 470, 473-74.

49 M. K. Liubavsk, Obzor istorii russkoi kolonizats s drevneishikh vremen i do dvadtsatogo veka, ed. A. Ia. Degtiarev (Moscow, 1996), pp. 392-427. This publication is based on the author's manuscript completed in the 1930s.

So Perhaps the most famous case was that of the Prince Cherkasskii dynasty, which for many decades faithfully served Russian interests in the region (Kabardino-russkie otnosheniia, 1:73-75, no. 46; 2:221-22, no. 165).

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5' Russkaiagestanskii otnosheniia 17-pervoi poloviny 18 vv., no. 80, p. 177; no. 84, p. 180; Kabardino-russkie otnosheniia, 2:23, no. 23; 2:115, no. 94; Michael Khodarkovsky, "Not by Word Alone: Missionary Policies and Religious Conversion in Early Modern Russia," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 38, no. 2 (1996): 267-93.

52 Kabardino-russkie otnosheniia, 2:122-24, nos. 98-99; 2:167-68, no. 124; 2:298, no. 212.

53 Ibid., 2:236, no.175; 2:298-99, no. 212.

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9 Ibid., 2:282-84, no. 202. ss Ibid., 2:302, no. 213.

1 Ibid., 2:269-73, nos.194-95; 2:298, no. 212. 5 Ibid., 2:331, no. 227; 2:321, no. 223.

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58 VIA F 52, op. 1, d. 286, pt. 3,11. 8-10; Kabardino-russkie otnosheniia, 2:355, no. 251.

59 VIA E 52, op. 1, d. 286, pt. 3,11. 20-25; Arkhiv vneshnei politiki Rossiiskoi imperii (hereafter cited as AVPRI), Kabardinskii dela, E 115, op. 4, d. 2. 6 VIA E52, op. 1, d. 567,1.42;AVPRIIngushskie dela, E 114, op. 1.

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6' Kabardinorusskie otnosheniia, 2:168-69, no. 125. 62 RGADA Senat. E 248, on 113, d. 1257,11. 1, 19, 20;AVPRIKizliarskie i Mozdokskie dela, E 118, op. 1, d. 1; Kabardino-russkie otnosheniia, 2:218-19, no. 164.

63 PSZ 22, no. 16,194, pp. 388-92; N. Pal' mov, *Etiudy po istorii privolzhskikh kalmykov 17 i 18 veka*, 5 pts. (Astrakhan, 1926-32), pt. 5, p. 6. 6 I. A. Gol' denshtedt, *Geograficheskoe i statisticheskoe opisanie Gruz i Kavkaza* (St. Petersburg, 1809), p. 4.

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65 Kabardino-russkie otnosheniia, 2:123, no. 99. 66 Ibid., 2:361, no. 256. 67 Ibid., 2:355, no. 251. ss Ibid., 2:257-59, no. 189.

69 Ibid., 2:255-56, no. 188; *Don i Stepnoe Predkavkaz e, IS-pervaia polovina 19 v. Zaselienie i khoziaistvo* (Rostov na Donu, 1977), p. 61.

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7o The thesis of the "middle ground" was developed by Richard White, in his book *The Middle Ground* (see n. 46 above), and applied to the North Caucasus by Thomas Barrett, "Lines of Uncertainty: The Frontiers of the North Caucasus," pp. 589-601 (see n. 5 above).

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" Patrick Wolfe draws attention to an important distinction between a settler colony (Australia) and a nonsettler one (India) in "History and Imperialism: A Century of Theory, from Marx to Postcolonialism," *American Historical Review* 102, no. 2 (1997): 418-19.

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