

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

PayPal

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_sbct-01.php

Uncivil Wars: ‘Suicide Bomber Identity’ as a Product of Russo-Chechen Conflict

FRANCINE BANNER

We are fighting very cruel people – beasts in the guise of human beings who do not and do not want to understand in what time and world they live. Our response must be equal to the threat they present. (Russian president Vladimir Putin, of Chechen militants (Hanuska, 2005)).

[I]t is not Chechens who author the conflict, it is the conflict that produces Chechens. (Valeri Tishkov, 1992 Russian federal minister of nationalities (2004, p. 49))

Introduction

Since 2000, Chechen militants have been identified as having been involved in approximately 30 events that have been labelled terrorist acts by the Russian Federation, causing the deaths of more than 1200 citizens. More than two-thirds of these have involved suicide bombing, called the ‘most politically destabilizing’ form of terrorism both because of the number of individuals killed and because of the dramatic effect of the perpetrator’s self-immolation (Pape, 2005, p. 9; Atran, 2004, p. 67).¹ Although Chechen attacks bear the hallmarks of other suicide operations – use of so-called ‘bomb belts’, multiple casualties at a time, rhetoric of death in the name of both territorial sovereignty and of Allah – bombings by Chechen militants may be distinguished from other suicide attacks in two significant ways. Attacks by Chechen militants are among the most deadly, killing on average twice as many individuals per incident than other global events of suicide bombing (Abdullaev, 2005). And nearly 70 per cent of identified suicide bombers from Chechnya have been female (Reuter, 2004, p. 5), with at least 40 women having attempted to engage in bombing attacks during the past five years. Because of the gender of its most deadly members, the campaign by Chechnya’s *Al Ansar al Mujahideen* has been identified as potentially signalling a change in the attitude of fundamentalist Islamic organisations regarding involvement of women in suicide bombing (Bloom, 2005, p. 144).

This article uses the theory of ‘contingent conjunctures’, coined by Ananda Abeysekara, in order to explore how it is that the persona of the suicide bomber – and, in Chechnya, this is to say the female suicide bomber – has come to such prominence

in this particular time and place. Rather than identity being conceived of as a static construction, Abeysekara argues, what does and does not emerge as a plausible identity at a given historical moment arises within the context of narrative debates in which specific persons, practices and discourses converge to make centrally visible particular authoritative knowledges about what can and cannot constitute the self (Abeysekara, 2002, p. 3, n. 10; see also Foucault, 1969). Concepts such as religion and tradition, in this view, are not unchanging referents but are 'embodied arguments', which means that standards for what constitutes their meanings are established in relation to rival and competing claims both locally and from without (Abeysekara, 2002, p. 24).

Utilising this framework, I argue in this article that Chechen history may best be viewed as series of 'moments' in which collective identity has been afforded opportunities to undergo significant shifts rather than as a monolithic construction that is resurrected in times of external threat. I also hypothesise why it is that these historical moments may have effected and affected identity transformation in the ways they have. Specifically, this article focuses on how religious, gendered and nationalist identities have come to be (re)constituted in the Chechen Republic in the context of longstanding conflict so that it has become routine for women to engage in homicidal acts of self-destruction in the name of religion and nationalism. The article further argues that the recent surge of Islamism in the republic, rather than a manifestation of external Wahhabist influences, instead might be seen as the culmination of a long *localised* history in which Islam has functioned as the primary catalyst for mobilisation of the population and the keystone of preservation of language, culture and clan ties in the region. Similarly, the article posits that the employment of women's bodies in the biopolitical act of suicide bombing, rather than being solely a phenomenon brought on by the advent of globalisation and postsoviet democratisation, should be viewed in the context of a time and space in which women's bodies have customarily been inscribed with the horrors of war, and of a region in which, more often than not, women's bodies have served as political battlegrounds and have deliberately been deployed in order to increase fecundity in times of hardship, to provide military assistance to male rebels during violent uprisings, to engage in rituals of collective mourning and to give birth to sons for sacrifice in times of war.

To date, the academic literature has largely ignored Chechnya as a point of origin of suicide bombing; however, given the number and character of militant actions, it is a key location for study. On a moral level, Chechnya represents a region in longstanding crisis that is an object of deliberate ignorance by the West. The Chechen people, their language and their resources have been seriously harmed in what the Center for Strategic and International Studies has deemed the 'worst human rights disaster of our time' (Center, 2004). Damage done to the Chechen capital has been described as 'worse than anything unleashed on ... Beirut or Sarajevo' (Gidley, 2005). At different points in the conflict up to half of the population has lived in refugee camps outside the region. Despite the Russian government's rhetoric regarding 'normalisation' of the region, with buildings being repainted and schools reopened, disappearances in the region persist, with human rights activists estimating that at least 20 killings or kidnappings occur each week (Liss, 2006). What is more, in March 2006 Ramzan Kadyrov, former leader of a pro-Kremlin paramilitary force identified by Human Rights Watch as having been the primary perpetrators of disappearances in the republic, was sworn in as the new Chechen premier (Finn, 2006).

On the level of strategic significance, it is also a mistake to ignore the Chechen conflict. Women suicide bombers, while fewer in number than their male counterparts

on a global basis, are becoming increasingly common. We recently observed the Jordanian government make the calculation that anti-Al Qaeda sentiment would best be fomented by the nationwide presentation of a confession of a failed female bomber still enveloped by her suicide belt (CNN, 2005). In Uzbekistan, after a series of suicide attacks by women, the media coined the category of the 'affluent female bomber', asking what had become of the country to make daughters from the 'best families' blow themselves up in support of Islamic Jihad (Ali, 2005). In October 2005 the first Pakistani female bomber, or *fidayee*, blew herself up in front of a military caravan in Kashmir,² and in November a Belgian woman died attempting to explode herself on behalf of Al Qaeda in Iraq. To overlook Chechnya is to miss a valuable opportunity to explore not only why suicide bombing may be viewed as a valuable tactical technique by politically violent organisations but also, and perhaps more importantly, why it may be that certain subaltern³ groups have seized upon this historical moment as one that is ripe for the use of women as human bombs.

Although the majority of recent scholars, including Pape, Stern and Juergensmeyer, have sought to attribute recent terrorist activities to overarching global factors such as reaction to democratisation or mass reinvigoration of traditional values resulting in cosmic *jihad*, it is becoming clear that globalisation in fact has not presaged a decline in 'primordial loyalties' based inherently in local geographic and political struggles (Tambiah, 1996, p. 3). Individualised conflicts continue, whether categorised as ethnonationalist war, class struggle, caste issues, racial crises, or 'holy war' (Tambiah, 1996, p. 3). In the postsoviet context nearly 100 years of ethnic engineering by the central government has served to shape senses of national identity that are not easily subdued (Lapidus, 1998, p. 15). Given the persistence of local conflict in this supposedly global age, it is clear that scholars must take note not only of the broad sociopolitical and economic forces that may drive people to engage in political violence, but also of those endemic factors that conjoin to create an environment in which suicide bombing becomes seen as not only a viable, but a preferred, method of attempting to effect social change.

Even a cursory examination of the history of the Chechen Republic exposes myriad factors that have contributed to the formation and transfiguration of group identity. To name but a few, Chechen identity may be tribal, Soviet (class-based), religious, ethnic, nationalist, gendered, rural or urban. 'To assume that national affiliation is the single most salient identity of the Soviet citizen is to ignore the degree to which national identities overlap with other social identities and the degree to which their salience varies . . . with specific situations' (Lapidus, 1984, p. 560). Nationalist identity may ebb or flow depending upon actions by those in power, such as emphasising overcoming a colonialist past or conquering an overt threat to territorial sovereignty in order to unify a population (Philp and Mercer, 2002, p. 1599). Unquestionably, a twenty-first-century Chechen identity is also one shaped in conflict. As scholars have observed, in aftermath, or postconflict, situations such as those that have occurred with some frequency in the modern Chechen Republic, new spaces marked by altered rules of behaviour are not infrequently opened up in which myriad identities may be negotiated. For example, as women and men are drawn into war, the relations between them shift. Although changes wrought in war may not continue in times of peace, in conflict

[w]omen become soldiers, labourers for the war effort, national political actors, refugees, survivors of violence, assuming roles previously reserved for men. It is in these role changes, as war draws ordinary women and men

into fighting, that opportunities emerge to form new social relationships and identities, including those of gender. (Meintjes, 2001, p. 64; see also Enloe, 2000)

The visibility of each of these varied aspects of identity is dependent upon which discourses are authorised and which, in turn, are suppressed, at varying points in time. Valeri Tishkov, a former Russian minister of nationalities, observes that times of war promote the reinvigoration of a 'collective narrative' fostered by the embellishment of historic citations, arguing that since the USSR began disintegrating in the late 1980s

local ideologues have been fundamentally amending the historical myth of the Chechens and, in the process, current Chechen identity. In this construction of new Chechen identity, two rival trends can be observed. One includes as many historic communities as possible in the Chechen entity in order to widen its geographic span and deepen its cultural legacy. The other, born out of competition for resources and power, focuses on narrower group boundaries based on locality and 'clan' ties. (Tishkov, 2004, p. 50)

Although Chechen scholars have taken umbrage at Tishkov's assessment of Chechen identity as having been constructed solely as a phenomenon of recent anti-Russian sentiment (see for example Gould, 2005), Tishkov is correct in noting that in order to examine how identities such as that of the Chechen suicide bomber – and integral in this, the female suicide bomber – are forged, one must acknowledge that nationality, ethnicity, religious observance, gender, are historically produced and socially constructed within particular areas and distinct moments in which certain rituals are enacted and certain rhetorics are preferred over others (Abeysekara, 2002, p. 175). One must also acknowledge that it is in the midst of local social upheaval that historical myths are regularly not only recalled but also altered and amended.

In light of this, rather than identifying, as other recent scholars have done, broad factors such as globalisation, democratisation or fundamentalist resurgence as root causes of global suicide terrorism, I argue that what has been missing in scholarship to date, and what is needed in order fully to explore why suicide bombing appears to have emerged in certain geographical areas as an unexpected side effect of the millennium, is study of conflicts within their specific historical and geographical contexts, beginning with the study of the location that has arguably launched the most deadly suicide attacks, the Chechen Republic.

I argue, too, that in addition to recognising the malleability of identity, we must acknowledge that suicide bombing is an activity that emerges out of the collective. Despite the fact that detonation is, ultimately, the work of one individual, suicide bombing, like all acts of terrorism, is an act of political violence that is undertaken on behalf of a society as a whole. Pape describes suicide bombing in Durkheim's terms as an act of 'altruistic suicide', sacrificing one's life for the perceived good of the community (Pape, 2005, p. 22; see also Hoffman, 1998, p. 43). In contrast to being ostracised, poverty stricken or misfits, 'most suicide attackers are psychologically normal, have better than average economic prospects for their futures, and are deeply integrated into social networks and attached to their national communities' (Pape, 2005, p. 22). Although much research regarding suicide bombing seeks to attribute involvement to individual psychological factors – brainwashing, feelings of inadequacy, sexual frustration – it is vital to realise that the identity of the suicide

bomber, just as a nationalist, religious or ethnic identity, is one that is formed within and by a society as a whole.

Identity is not always negotiable. It is only at certain moments, visible in hindsight, that different aspects of collective personality are permitted, perhaps encouraged, to emerge. This does not mean that identity will in fact shift, but that there is a moment at which space is opened up for previous conceptions to be challenged and altered. In this vein, the first section of this paper outlines the history of Chechen conflict, much, although not all, of which has arisen in juxtaposition to the Soviet state. Applying Abeysekara's theory of identity as a product of contingent conjunctures, the second section goes on to identify four historical moments at which I believe there have arisen opportunities for Chechen identity to be discursively reconstituted, and explores some of the factors that may have authorised certain aspects of identity to be disputed or shifted at those moments. Within the space of each of these four moments, I also present two case studies that explore in further depth how identity has been shaped and transfigured in two specific contexts: religion and gender. In the conclusion I argue that although the emergence of the identity of the female suicide bomber is a radical, indeed a tragic, phenomenon, when one examines closely how Chechen identity has been shaped by events and discourse across key historical moments in the not so distant past, it is perhaps not a wholly surprising one.⁴

'This Land is Called Chechnya': History and Historical Memory in Russo-Chechen Imagination⁵

'Onto a bank the wicked Chechen crawls, sharpening his dagger as he goes ...'
(Lermontov's Cossack lullaby sung to Russian children from the 1800s to the present day (Meier, 2003, p. 87, citing Lermontov, 1840))

In modern times the Chechen Republic has experienced two brutal wars against the Russian state. The first, from 1994 to 1996, is estimated to have claimed 100,000 lives – at least a tenth of the population – and the second, which began in 1999, has resulted in a refugee population of between 300,000 and 400,000 and remains ongoing. Politkovskaya (2003, p. 8) refers to these wars as 'terribly overdetermined. That is, there are too many factors, each of which should suffice to cause [them]: historical legacies, imperial geopolitics, political instability, oil, Islam, organized crime, and now, atop of all, Al Qaeda'.

The current Russo-Chechen war has been categorised as a nineteenth-century conflict that is still going strong in the twenty-first century (Weir, 2004). Chechnya – a Russian republic about the size of New Jersey that lies 1000 miles south of Moscow between the Black and Caspian Seas – has consistently been mythologised in Russian history as exhibiting stalwart resistance to central authority (Rotar', 2002, p. 89). In the 1700s Peter the Great conquered the coastline of the Caspian Sea, but allegedly elected not to move further inland out of reverence for Chechen warriors (Jaimoukha, 2005, p. 37; Weir, 2004). Chechens are often characterised by their sense of honour, their glorification of weapons and their affection for 'blood vendettas' (Williams, 2000, p. 102).⁶ In 1858 Alexandre Dumas observed that 'A Chechen ... may literally be in rags, but his sword, dagger and gun are of the finest quality' (Meier, 2003, p. 61).

The image of the violent Chechen has been fostered by the fact that the Chechens are notorious hostage-takers, as initially chronicled by Tolstoy in a short story, *Prisoner of the Caucasus*. This reputation has been exploited by Chechen militants themselves, who in 2002 at the Dubrovka Theatre and in 2004 in Beslan, as well as

during incursions into nearby Russian territories, have managed to pull off the largest hostage events of the twentieth century. Today, with a 70 per cent unemployment rate, along with illegal oil and arms trade the foremost 'industry' in Chechnya is kidnapping for profit (Meier, 2005, p. 85; Meier, 2003, p. 113). The consistent linking of the historical image of the merciless Chechen warrior with that of the modern Chechen terrorist in the media and scholarly articles, as well as the exploitation of this connection by Chechen rebels themselves, has led to a common image of Chechens as 'congenital rebels' (Weir, 2004), which Lapidus (1998, p. 31) characterises as a form of 'ethnic scapegoating'. What was once perceived as hostage-taking by noble warriors has devolved into what many scholars, especially Russian scholars, deem an organic culture of criminals and thieves.

Also fostering the image of Chechnya as lacking in civil society is the fact that Chechen culture is characterised by tribal differences and inter-klan competition. Associational ties among Chechen citizens comprise three ethnic groups and have extensive regional and tribal allegiances (*teipy*) stemming from a commonality of clan and territory that date back approximately 6000 years. It is estimated that, despite the decimation of the Chechen population, between 150 and 180 *teipy* exist today (Walker, 1998, p. 11). Muslim customary law, or *adat*, continues to have vitality in Chechnya and, as will be discussed later, often competes with religious laws for precedence. For example, in smaller villages, although the practice is technically illegal, a number of men continue to observe the tradition of 'stealing' their chosen brides (Vazayeva and Uzakhova, 2003; Gall and DeWaal, 1998, p. 23). In 2006 a proposal was made by the Russian-backed Chechen prime minister to reinstitute practices of polygamy in the republic as a solution to the significantly skewed male-to-female ratio in the republic wrought by repeated Russo-Chechen wars (Parfitt, 2006).

A not uncommon image of Chechen fighters is that of a 'bone' that has been lodged in the 'Kremlin's throat' (Weir, 2004). The Chechen poet Ismail Kerimov counters that the Chechen people, rather, comprise a 'heart swollen with woe stuck in the throat of one who says remember' (Gould, 2005). Chechens have a collective memory of continued oppression at the hands of the Russian state (Williams, 2000, p. 101). In the late 1700s the Russian Empire under Catherine the Great entered the region, a key stop on the road to Persia and India. In 1785 Catherine ordered troops to storm the home of Sheikh Mansur, a devout follower of Sufism, who folklore notes was told by God to lead a *ghazavat* (holy war) on the Russians (Jaimoukha, 2005, p. 40; Meier, 2003, p. 121). Six hundred Russians were killed in the resulting ambush, setting off a struggle for liberation that continued until 1917. Throughout this period, *abreki* or 'noble bandits' repeatedly attacked Russian settlers in the region, earning a Robin Hood-like image in the Chechen imagination (Rotar', 2002, p. 109; Nekrich, 1978, p. 187). Although a 2004 book by a Russian anthropologist argues that this image of the noble bandit was deliberately invoked by Chechen government leaders in the 1990s in order to create a collective anti-Russian identity, Nekrich observed in 1978 that the image of *abreki* remained very much alive in the public imagination, which suggests that not much manoeuvring would have been necessary for political leaders to resurrect this image in the Chechen imagination just 15 years later.⁷

In 1818 General Yermolov, viceroy of the Caucasus, on a mission to 'subdue the south' built the first Russian fortress in the region, calling it Grozny, 'Fort Terrifying' (Meier, 2003, p. 89; Politkovskaya, 2003, p. 12).⁸ Locals were drafted to pay taxes, build roads and generally support the empire. In response, Chechen men, women and children all attempted to burn down the fortress, leading Russians to raze numerous

villages in retaliation (Williams, 2000, p. 123). Sufi preachers were at the forefront of coordinating this anti-Russian struggle (Politkovskaya, 2003, pp. 12–13), and while the Chechens ultimately surrendered, by 1830 Sufi preacher Imam Shamil began to coordinate the building of an independent Islamic Chechen state, a project that continued throughout the early 1900s.⁹

In 1917, with the revolution, the Chechen autonomous republic was created, and this led to the formation of ethnic schools, publishing houses and universities (Politkovskaya, 2003, p. 14). Ultimately the Soviet city of Grozny became home to one of the USSR's largest petroleum refineries and a centre of education and culture for the Caucasus (Meier, 2003, p. 91). However, the tensions among clan cultures, Islam and the state that had begun during the 1800s continued during the Soviet period. During the late 1920s and into the 1930s, a time in which 490 collective farms were established in the republic, Chechens engaged in multiple protests over collectivisation (Nekrich, 1978, p. 46). From 1931 to 1933 nearly 70 local acts of terrorism were reported, described in government documents as 'moral terror' inflicted by Muslims on Soviet settlers (Nekrich, 1978, p. 51).¹⁰

In 1944 an event took place that most if not all Chechens would deem the most significant event in their collective history, at least until the start of the modern Russo-Chechen wars. In February 1944, on the Soviet holiday known as Red Army Day, 100,000 Soviet soldiers entered villages, summoning residents to town squares (Meier, 2003, p. 78; Williams, 2000, p. 123). The troops had in fact occupied the republic, and at Stalin's behest the entire Chechen population – between 400,000 and 800,000 citizens – was deported to Siberia and Central Asia for a period of 10 to 13 years. It has been estimated that more than 100,000 Chechens died during this time, many during the three-week journey to the steppe, which began with Soviet soldiers marshalling citizens into sealed railcars where they were piled on top of one another in a method of transport referred to by the military as 'compression of the cargo' (Gall and DeWaal, 1998, p. 61; see also Williams, 2000, p. 110; Weir, 2004).¹¹ Although no one reason has emerged for the deportation, for the Soviet state it clearly served both as a punitive measure against the rebellious Chechens and as a strategic measure to create a 'more reliable' border population resistant to invasion (Nekrich, 1978, p. 104). The impact of the deportation on Chechens, and the circumstances in exile, will be discussed in further depth later in this paper; however, it is notable that in *The Gulag Archipelago*, his novel about years of internment in the steppe, Solzhenitsyn observes: '[o]nly one nation refused to accept the psychology of submission. . . . [N]o Chechen ever tried to be of service or to please the authorities' (Williams, 2000, p. 114).¹²

Although it was declared that the deportation would be permanent, in the late 1950s, in an effort to bring a sense of normality to the Soviet state after Stalinist rule, in what is known colloquially as 'the thaw' Nikita Khrushchev restored the Chechen-Ingush Republic. Apart from attempting to return the population in stages so as not to wreak demographic havoc, the state made no effort to ease reintegration and little effort to provide economic compensation to those who had been deported. Chechens returned to find villages renamed, family homes occupied by Russian settlers, and few employment opportunities (Nekrich, 1978, p. 60). As will be discussed below, rioting occurred as Russian settlers attempted to adapt to the influx of restored Chechen peoples.

Lapidus (1984, p. 559) identifies the period between the return after deportation and the fall of the Iron Curtain as one marked by a resurgence of nationalism in both the non-Russian and Russian nationalities of USSR that posed a growing threat to the

long-term stability of the Soviet system. In a 1984 article she identified as a concern 'growing ties of affinity and loyalty with regions outside Soviet borders, especially the Muslim East', which she categorises as 'likely to become unmanageable', noting that

the prospect of reduced social mobility in the decades ahead is especially conducive to increased ethnic tensions as the competition for educational and professional advancement sharpens. Differential birthrates are producing a rapidly growing cohort of young people in the Muslim regions of the USSR who will confront a... well-entrenched cohort of their Slavic counterparts. (Lapidus, 1984, p. 574)

Issues Lapidus identifies as 'catalysts' for ethnonationalist tensions in the USSR in the 1980s, each of which were present in the Chechen Republic, include the 'awkward balance' between centralised economic power and political control and the encouraged assertion of ethnic group interests; the fact that the deportation was ultimately denounced but never rectified; and uncertainty as to how to handle demographic and linguistic policies at the state level (Lapidus, 1984, pp. 566–68).¹³ The final concern was especially significant in Chechnya, which has consistently exhibited the highest native language retention rate of any Soviet republic (Jaimoukha, 2005, p. 194). Throughout the Soviet period Russian remained the official language in non-Russian republics, and upward mobility depended upon Russian language skills. However, Russians were not required to learn the languages of the republics in which they worked, a discrepancy which led Lapidus in 1984 to identify language as 'the single most sensitive catalyst of national protest' (Lapidus, 1984, p. 572).¹⁴ In the period after deportation the fact that 'antisoviet propaganda' was broadcast by radio stations in the Chechen language was identified by the state as 'exert[ing] a harmful influence on believers, incit[ing] fanaticism, and attempt[ing] to preserve... obsolete traditions and morals' (Tishkov, 2004, p. 43).

In addition to linguistic tensions, the Soviet apparatus fostered competition for scarce resources among ethnic groups, as benefits were meted out to republics on the basis of population size. In the Soviet state demographic trends were not treated as an organic development (Lapidus, 1984, p. 571). Because of state affirmative action policies, which allocated greater resources, political representation and employment opportunities to those nationalities with high birthrates, peoples such as the Chechens were encouraged to view 'demographic vitality' as a source of pride (Lapidus, 1984, pp. 566–68). In turn, those republics with low birthrates complained, leading the government to consider implementing nationwide ethnically differentiated policies regarding birthrates to stem interethnic competition (Lapidus, 1984, pp. 566–68).

Given the dissent lingering in the republic throughout the 1970s and 1980s and the collective memory of deportation, it is not surprising that after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 Chechnya joined other postsoviet states in declaring itself independent of the Russian Federation. At that time, the population engaged in what has been called a 'classical revolution', with crowds storming the palaces (Politkovskaya, 2003, p. 4). However, although the republic was independent in name, its leaders failed to establish a political infrastructure independent of Russia, which led to power failures, rampant poverty and widespread unemployment (Gall and DeWaal, 1998). As will be discussed below, the immediate postsoviet period was marked by widespread governmental corruption, and an active arms trade developed

as Chechens purchased weapons sold by Moscow officials in bulk in the effort at post-Cold War disarmament (Rotar', 2002, p. 109).

Ultimately, Russian president Boris Yel'tsin rejected the republic's vote for sovereignty and in 1994 Russian troops entered Chechnya ostensibly to put an end to the independence movement. Galina Starovoitova, an adviser to Yel'tsin at the time, has characterised this first Russo-Chechen war as attempting to accomplish three goals: diversion of the Russian public from long-term economic reforms by waging a 'small, victorious war'; providing the military with a balm to soothe the 'embarrassing loss' in Afghanistan; and protecting economic interests in the pipeline route to the Caspian Sea, which flows directly through the Chechen Republic (Meier, 2005, p. 5; Starovoitova, 1995). None of these objectives was accomplished. The Russian attack on Grozny on New Year's Eve 1994 was 'one of the worst humiliations in Russian military history', a battle in which rebel forces managed to kill nearly 2000 Russian soldiers (Gall and DeWaal, 1998, pp. 15–16, 19). More than 100,000 Chechens were killed in the 20-month war that has been labelled 'misconceived, ill-planned and ultimately catastrophic' (DeWaal, 2003; Meier, 2003, p. 91).

It is toward the conclusion of the first Russo-Chechen war in June 1995 that it can be argued that the first recent Chechen terrorist event took place. Twenty-five Chechen men and three women led by Shamil' Basayev – later famed for training female suicide bombers – took over a hospital in the Russian outpost of Budennovsk, taking 1200 people hostage in what was at that time the largest hostage situation in the twentieth century (Gall and DeWaal, 1998, pp. 257–59).¹⁵ In early 1996 the rebels surpassed themselves, taking even more hostages in Dagestan (Gall and DeWaal, 1998, pp. 302–4). Then, on the eve of Yel'tsin's reelection as president in 1996, Chechen rebels retook Grozny from Russian forces, making it apparent that the only way for Russia to 'win' the war would be to destroy the city. Yel'tsin elected to stop short of annihilation, and a ceasefire agreement was signed, rendering Chechnya a semiautonomous state.

In the period between 1996 and 1999 the Chechen Republic made uneasy attempts at self-governance, but this was all but impossible in a republic that had been ravaged by war, had no infrastructure, and was flooded with weapons from postsoviet Russia.¹⁶ In 1999 instability in the region prompted the Russian government to launch a second war against the Chechen Republic. Wary of a repeat of the humiliation of Russian soldiers at the hands of Chechen rebels, the Russians presaged this war by a carpet-bombing attack on the city of Grozny, with the order that men would not be sent in until 'everything [was] leveled' (Williams, 2000, p. 109). In a 102-day siege, an estimated 300,000 refugees fled the region and at least 20,000 people were trapped in the city underground (Williams, 2000, p. 109). A Russian government report from 1999 observed that Chechen settlements in the mountains 'did not have economic or other value and must be *completely liquidated*' (Williams, 2000, p. 109, emphasis added).

Out of this destruction emerged Shamil' Basayev, who through militant actions had succeeded in persuading Russia to engage in a peace agreement and whose name is a direct reference to his independence-seeking precursor, Imam Shamil, who sought to establish an Islamic state in the 1800s. In 1999 Basayev and his colleague, a Saudi-born mercenary named Khattab¹⁷ who had come to the region after fighting the Soviet troops in Afghanistan, opened up a new front, seizing villages in Dagestan, and again rhetorically claiming the desire to establish an Islamic state (Kramer, 2004, p. 6). Since 1999, actions by Chechen militants as well as those by the Russian military have devastated the region.

Fragmented Reality: Ruptures and Identity Shifts in Chechen Historical Experience

Resistances may be interpreted as fluid processes whose emergence and dissolution cannot be fixed as points in time. (Philp and Mercer, 2002, p. 1589, citing Routledge, 1995, p. 480)

The Chechen case offers a unique view into how historical experience may be mobilised as a resource in the construction of contemporary identity, although, as may be apparent from the previous historical summary, *who* are the agents of such mobilisation and *how* such mobilisation occurs may not be as readily identifiable as scholars have thought (Lapidus, 1998, p. 8). It is unquestionable that collective trauma, dating back to the 1700s, has been invoked (or perhaps inscribed) as a key formative experience for many Chechens. It is clear that there are numerous periods, or moments, during which it can be argued that Chechen identity has been constituted through collective suffering or, alternatively, collective engagement in struggle. Primarily, although not exclusively, this identity has been navigated in juxtaposition with the Russian or Soviet state. In this vein, I have identified four key moments to be discussed in further depth in relation to emergent collective identities in the republic: (1) the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution and advent of the Soviet state; (2) the Second World War, the deportation of the Chechen populace, and ill-executed reintegration; (3) the fall of the Iron Curtain, Chechen demand for sovereignty, and the first modern Russo-Chechen war; and (4) the second Russo-Chechen war and concomitant rise of nihilistic activities on both sides of the conflict.

At each of these moments, I argue, what it means to be Chechen has been an object of competing narratives – not only those fostered by the Russian state versus those offered by independence-seeking rebels, but also various competing discourses offered by internal leaders such as imams and other discourses formed by other factors such as geographic location, level of education, gender and degree of religious observance. It is these latter two aspects of Chechen identity that seem most clearly to have emerged as objects of debate during the period of the second Russo-Chechen war, and it is these identities, combined with a nationalist identity, that appear most centrally in the persona of the Chechen woman suicide bomber. By examining in depth each of the four historical moments mentioned above, focusing on factors that may have served to form Chechen religious and gender identity during those moments, I seek to explore some of the conditions that have made it possible for these two key aspects of identity to rise to prominence in what I argue is the newly emergent suicide bomber persona.

The Bolshevik Revolution and the Soviet State: Ethnic Engineering and Cautious Modernisation

The Russians don't want our land our oil or our mountains. They want us to die out. (Interview with Chechen Representative of the organisation *Medecins du Monde* (Meier, 2003, p. 84))

The advent of the Soviet state affected Chechens in several significant ways. First, although it cannot be denied that the Chechen people suffered at the hands of the Soviet government, russification also brought advantages. Grozny became the centre of 'the most economically viable region in the North Caucasus' (DeWaal, 2003, p. 11) – the site of the region's largest oil refinery and the locus of the region's historical archives. Ethnic manoeuvring by the Soviet state led to the establishment of

affirmative action programmes that set quotas encouraging the advancement of ethnic minorities, especially those with high birthrates such as Chechens, within governmental offices and in the armed services.¹⁸ Although the vast majority – 70 per cent – of Chechens remained in rural clans largely unaffected by these changes, an elite class of Chechens was fostered that gained access to numerous educational and economic opportunities in the 'indigenised' Soviet system (Tishkov, 2004, p. 21). Ironically, Chechen government leaders who sought independence for the republic in the 1990s were products of this system, as have been many suicide bombers.

While it positively impacted on certain elite individuals, the ethnic engineering masterminded by the Soviet state was a tricky endeavour. Chechen was identified as one of over 100 distinct nationalities in the USSR, a development of 'tactical nation-states' that encouraged the emergence of systems of regional elites and competition for resources among ethnic groups (Lapidus, 1998, p. 8; Lapidus, 1984, p. 555). The state was inconsistent in treatment of these ethnonationalist groups. On the one hand, Soviet writings maintained that the government had 'solved' the 'problem' of ethnic self-assertion through the socialist system of political equality (Lapidus, 1984, p. 557).¹⁹ On the other hand, affirmative action programmes encouraged and exacerbated ethnic divisions (Lapidus, 1998, p. 8; 1984, p. 556). With the return of peoples after deportation it was discovered that 'national identity was a more enduring and less malleable social phenomenon than was initially assumed' (Lapidus, 1984, p. 558).

The concept of contingent conjunctures is helpful in addressing some of the questions that arise regarding the development of Soviet identity in the Chechen Republic. National identity – like other identities – is not uniform but varies in intensity among different groups and over time and from one situation to another (Lapidus, 1984, p. 562); or, to state the same point differently, 'the politicisation of ethnicity is not a unilinear and automatically unfolding process, but the function of specific catalysts in the sociopolitical environment without which ethnonationalism would remain a latent or relatively marginal force' (Lapidus, 1984, p. 565). After 1917 policies were initiated that preferred class as a dividing factor over religious or tribal identity. In step with this development, we see Chechens gradually becoming Soviet citizens, engaging in collective farming or, alternatively, reaping the benefits afforded them as elites in a growing, profitable industrial centre in the Caucasus. As a population, the fecundity of the Chechen people grants the republic increased economic benefits that are shared across the republic.

But the overarching monolith of the Soviet state also fostered dissent. In the 1920s and 1930s underground groups led by local mullahs came together to resist collectivisation. The same policies of affirmative action that granted advancement to some local elites denied advancement to others and intensified competition among clans for limited resources. The rhetoric of affirmative action in which the state engaged at once sought to promote equality and to exaggerate ethnic and class distinctions. Russian language was promoted as the lingua franca of economic progress, and russification clashed with maintenance of tribal and religious identity. All these factors made identity, especially religious and gendered aspects of identity, an ever-shifting terrain in the Soviet era.

Sovietisation and the Growth of Underground Religion

The treasonous mullahs have enticed us with false promises, And have taken us to our doom. (Aidamirov, A Brother's Testament (pro-Soviet dirge) (Jaimoukha, 2005, p. 212))

Religion is not purely a matter of belief and worship; it has social and political resonances and communitarian associations (Tambiah, 1996, p. 22). This idea of religion as a part of culture was embraced by the Soviet state, which designated specific groups as national groups based primarily on religious beliefs, substituting Islam as a marker for ethnicity (Center, 2004; Rotar', 2002, p. 90). Prior to the Russian revolution a Chechen had multiple identities – Sufi Muslim, North Caucasian, Chechen language speaker, member of a *teip*, mountain or urban dweller, member of a village (Rotar', 2002, p. 103). These did not disappear after the revolution. Rather, added after 1917 were additional affiliations: member of a 'class' and Soviet citizen.

Although the existence of an external Muslim identity was to some degree undermined in the Soviet state – Chechen women did not all wear the veil, and urban women worked and benefited from affirmative action policies, smoking and drinking were common, and intermarriage among ethnic groups was encouraged – identification with Islam played an important role in the preservation of clan identity in Chechnya during the Soviet period (Center, 2004; Lapidus, 1998, p. 9). In the period of collectivisation there were 2675 mosques and 140 religious schools in the region, financially supporting 850 mullahs (Nekrich, 1978, p. 54). As will be discussed later on, religious vitality continued during deportation, with mullahs succeeding in converting numerous other nationalities to Sufism during that period (Jaimoukha, 2005, p. 59).

Although the mosques were destroyed when the population was exiled – a literal and symbolic event that will be discussed below – after Chechens returned to the republic in the 1950s the practice of Islam continued to be strong, framed by local mullahs as a struggle against russification as it had been during the deportation (Nekrich, 1978, p. 162). The Muslim clergy has been described during the 1960s and 1970s as building a 'shadow state' within a state, engaging in bride stealing, holding secret courts (*khel*) and encouraging blood revenge (Williams, 2000, p. 115). A 1978 book noted somewhat presciently that 'religious groups have "modernized" their activity and use the "latest technology" to illegally broadcast material with religious content' (Nekrich, 1978, p. 162). The 1980s were characterised both by competition in the workplace fostered by growing Muslim populations in the Caucasus and an increase in ties between local regions and the Middle East. In other words, despite an ostensible ban on organised religion, the prosecution of many practitioners, and attempts to decimate evidence of religiosity in the form of the destruction of graveyards and mosques, Islam was consistently drawn upon by local leaders in order to mobilise and unify the population. It can also be argued that it is during this time, rather than in the later period of alleged influx of Wahhabist influences in the 1990s, that what may have begun as a 'religion of rebellion', in which Islamic doctrines were promoted within an insular group aligned in response to the ideological hegemony disseminated by the Soviet state, grew into a 'religion of revolution', opposed to the right of the Soviet state to dictate any and all normative values and eager to seek support for its cause outside engineered national and ethnic borders (see for example Lincoln, 2003, pp. 85–86).

Chechen Citizens/Soviet Women: The Myth of Equality

In the view of young women in the Russian Federation now, the very language of equality remains too poisoned to be used. (Brintlinger and Conn, 2001, p. 97)

In 1933 Stalin remarked that 'women [had] long since advanced from the ranks of the backward to the ranks of the forward' (Stalin, 1933), a declaration that presaged years of women engaging in employment in the USSR on a level that was, at least superficially, equal to that of their male counterparts. While an in-depth review of Soviet affirmative action policies and their effects on gender is beyond the scope of this paper, such policies did indeed facilitate women's entrance into positions of high levels of occupational prestige within the Soviet state. However, as a result of perestroika in the late 1980s women were deprived of the employment protection of the Supreme Soviet and, with the advent of a competitive job market, became subject to increased discrimination in the workplace (Brintlinger and Conn, 2001, pp. 97–98). The end of socialism also signalled the end of the right to maternity leave, access to abortion, and quotas for equal participation for women in the political sphere (Salecl, 2002; Brintlinger and Conn, 2001, p. 94). Exacerbating this situation is the fact that, in the Russian Republic, the void created by the Soviet government in regard to sex education and sexual freedom was filled by, on the one hand, 'a proliferation of pornography' and, on the other hand, 'manuals sponsored by the Orthodox Church' (Brintlinger and Conn, 2001, p. 98). Given this dichotomy, Russian women not uncommonly began to elect either to become stay-at-home wives, to cast their fortunes abroad as mail-order brides, or to engage in some aspect of the lucrative sex trade created by the Federation's abrupt entrance into the capitalist market.

At least until the wars, Chechen women, especially those living in urban areas such as Grozny, faced issues similar to those faced by women in Moscow regarding the influences wrought by rapid 'democratisation' in Russia. Since the 1950s Chechen villagers have increasingly sought work in big cities (Gall and DeWaal, 1998, pp. 35–36). In the years of Chechen independence from late 1991 through 1994 the city of Grozny bore resemblance to a small St Petersburg, with prefabricated houses springing up in newly formed suburbs, the nouveaux riches driving black Mercedes, and the women wearing short skirts (Gall and DeWaal, 1998, pp. 36, 103). Grozny became known as a 'free economic zone', in which gun traders sold Kalashnikovs alongside perfume and electronic goods (Gall and DeWaal, 1998, p. 124). Although Chechnya was excluded from the Russian central banking system in 1993, the republic's borders remained open, allowing the black market economy to flourish (Gall and DeWaal, 1998, pp. 125–26).

In other ways, however, the Chechen Republic remained antithetical to Russia. As noted earlier, the majority of Chechens live in rural areas. '[The rural Chechens] lifestyle remained practically unchanged during the years of Soviet rule' and many 'recalled Soviet times as the best days of their lives' (Rotar, 2002, pp. 97–98). Adherence to traditional *adats* such as those advocating bride kidnapping and polygamy exposed a vast disconnection between traditional, rural practices and the changes brought by 'modern' western-style feminism.²⁰ In 1997 the introduction of strict sharia law into the region imposed even greater pressures on young Chechen women as they attempted to sort out their identities in postsoviet times. Suddenly veiling was imposed in place of the short skirts formerly worn by city dwellers and, as a result of newly enacted laws mandating segregation, women were relegated to the backs of buses. The intersection of rapidly changing gender expectations and religious values, in the context of sorting out national and tribal identities, makes life all the more complicated for Chechen women as they engage in the reflexive project of understanding their role as females, as Russian citizens and as Chechen nationalists. This project has become even more complex as the region has increasingly been

decimated by war and women have correspondingly developed militarised identities (see for example Enloe, 2000).

Deportation and the Development of an Identity of Resistance

The deportation was not history. It informed the daily conversation in Chechnya. (Meier, 2003, p. 126)

The ethnocide conducted by the Soviet government in the 1940s and 1950s has been a primary catalyst for the militarisation of Chechen society in the postsoviet context and has served to entrench a sense of national identity (Williams, 2000, p. 102; Gall and DeWaal, 1998, p. 74; Politkovskaya, 2003, p. 16). It is the reason why, for Chechens, massacre is viewed as 'a very real possibility' (Williams, 2000, p. 117). Tishkov observes that Chechen attitudes toward the deportation may be divided into two distinct periods: before and after the liberalisation of the late 1980s. 'During the Soviet period, people kept quiet, as if the tragedy were some sort of collective stigma for which they had to pay', while later the deportation evolved through national commemoration into an event that 'amounted to genocide' (Tishkov, 2004, p. 26).²¹ He categorises the resurgence of the deportation in collective memory in the 1990s as an 'ideological argument . . . mobilized by political leaders', noting that

The Chechens were not the only victims of Stalin's repression, but only for them did this trauma of the past become one of the main motives for an armed conflict. . . . Other republics . . . have the same social problems, as do many countries of the world, but they do not inevitably lead to armed conflict. . . . [M]ost of this is artificially exaggerated by enthusiasts of ethnographic or militaristic romanticism. (Tishkov, 2004, p. xii)

Jaimoukha (2005, p. 60) observes somewhat differently that the deportation wrought a 'subdued and disoriented people' who, after a harrowing experience in exile, faced stigmatisation that continues today.²² Meier (2003, p. 43) observes that the Russians have made no attempt at a *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, a German term for the process of coming to terms with the past. In addition, as a practical matter, the years spent in exile affected the Chechen population in two extremely significant ways that will be discussed in greater depth in this article: deportation served to entrench religious observance more firmly as a strategy for resistance to Soviet authority, and deportation saw the population utilising increased birthrates as a deliberate strategy to preserve a collective national identity in the face of potential extinction.

For the Chechen people, it is not only what happened to them during the period of 1944 to 1957 that frames their collective identity, but what was lost during that period. As part of exile, new settlers occupied Chechen homes and renamed streets and villages, more than 2500 mosques were burned, many with elderly individuals inside, Chechen works of literature were destroyed and graveyards were ploughed over in what Chechens considered a 'supreme act of sacrilege' (Williams, 2000, p. 112). Nekrich (1978, p. 146) observes that of all the people being reintroduced to their homelands after deportation the 'greatest difficulties arose in connection with the repatriation of the Chechens and Ingush, not only because of their large numbers, but also as a result of their irrepressible determination to reoccupy their ancestral homes'. As nearly 400,000 Chechens returned to the republic in the late 1950s they became notorious for the stench they created, as they insisted on carrying those that had died

on the steppe back in railway trucks in order to bury them in ancestral gravesites which were 'meticulously restored' after the return (Williams, 2000, p. 114; Jaimoukha, 2005, p. 134).

The repatriation is a time when we might view Chechen identity as a field open for discursive construction – in which the contingent factors that contribute to identity formation are to some degree exposed. Chechens returned to a completely altered topography. Khrushchev's thaw opened the possibility for ethnonationalist resurgence, and the deportation itself served to solidify a sense of collective memory and solidarity. At this key point in Chechen history, we can see identity being reinvigorated, reinvented and newly mythologised on a completely altered geographical terrain. The hills – the mythological source of the Chechen *teipy* – remained, but the villages, the road signs, the written history that shaped the republic were lost.²³

As noted above, in addition to entering a culture that had become marked by religious, linguistic and ethnic difference, Chechens returned into a system that offered only small grants for rebuilding, no attempt at arranging employment and no provision for housing the myriad individuals flooding the republic. In 1959 school attendance by Chechens was nearly unheard of; only 403 of 14,150 of those with a high school education in the republic were Chechen (Lapidus, 1984, p. 156). In 1958 a Russian soldier and an Ingush man asked the same girl to dance. An altercation ensued in which the soldier was killed. What should have been a lovers' spat developed into what has been described as 'one of the worst racial clashes in the Soviet Union since the end of [the Second World War]' (Nekrich, 1978, p. 152). In a role reversal that cuts against the Chechen stereotype as merciless bandits, Chechens are described in news accounts as having exhibited 'restraint' as 10,000 people, all Russian, carried the soldier's coffin through the streets, engaging in massive looting and killing a number of civilians (Nekrich, 1978, p. 152). Meanwhile Russian settlers in the region formed a group calling itself the 'people's defence committee' in order to protest against the influx of Chechens who were attempting to reclaim jobs from Russians in the republic. A leaflet circulated at the time urged: 'Comrades, brothers, Russian people! Follow the examples of the peoples of Jordan and Iraq. Rise up and fight for the Russian cause! Demand the expulsion of the Chechens and Ingush!' (Nekrich, 1978, p. 154).

In post-deportation Chechnya, 'interethnic tension manifested itself in forms that were rare elsewhere in the USSR; group clashes were frequently accompanied by murders. According to KGB data on the Checheno-Ingush Republic, in 1965 alone, there were sixteen group clashes and a total of 185 severe bodily injuries' (Tishkov, 2004, p. 43). Soviet security sources attributed much of the violence to the combination of Islam and nationalism, observing that

nationalistic and other harmful phenomena arise out of religious and clan memories... Individual authorities, taking advantage of the dogma of Islam, preach hatred toward 'unbelievers', prophesy the destruction of Soviet power, exert a harmful influence on believers, incite fanaticism, and attempt to preserve and support obsolete traditions and morals. (Tishkov, 2004, p. 43)

During the 1960s it was not uncommon for Russians to wear red ribbons in the street so that state pogromists would not mistake them for Chechens (Nekrich, 1978, p. 153).

A well-known Chechen saying is 'Nothing is forgotten, nothing will be forgotten' (Williams, 2000, p. 106), but what exactly it is that is recalled is, again, a matter of which and whose discourse regarding identity is being privileged at a particular historical moment. In the period during and after deportation we see a people exhibit 'collective restraint' as they attempt to gain purchase on grounds that have been shifted beneath them; however, in other manifestations, the people are labelled as exhibiting 'fanaticism' incited by those 'taking advantage' of religious dogma. The Chechen people hauled the bodies of their dead back to villages of origin, but the graveyards had been ploughed over by the Soviet army. The landscape of historical memory was called into question, and public outlets for constructing that memory were foreclosed in the Soviet context. At the same time, the deportation served to strengthen a nationalist resolve, fostered, as historically had been the case, by religious leaders. The deportation also provided a sense of moral legitimacy for the Chechen struggle. In the late 1980s, as the Soviet state grew more fragmented, and economic and political survival more threatened, both the mythic image and visceral reality of the deportation were relied upon by leaders to construct an increasingly unified Chechen identity.

Tambiah (1996, p. 27) observes that perhaps one of the most vital occurrences in any refugee population is the development of an 'anthropology of displacement'. Populations seek to reconstruct the theodicy of suffering in mytho-historical terms (Tambiah, 1996, p. 27). In 1995, during the first Russo-Chechen war, one of the first acts of the incipient semiautonomous Chechen state was to erect a monument in Grozny (Williams, 2000, p. 102). At its centre was an open Quran, in stone, out of which rose a fist holding a sword. Its inscription read, in Chechen, 'We will not weep, we will not weaken, we will not forget' (Williams, 2000, p. 102). One of the first acts of the Russian soldiers upon invading the city was to destroy the monument. One of the first acts by the Chechens when the soldiers were expelled was to rebuild it (Williams, 2000, p. 102).

Religious Vitality in Exile

And what, after all, could the deported peoples turn to if not religion? There were no newspapers, no books, no movies in the native language. (Nekrich, 1978, p. 155)

At deportation, the actions of the Soviet state seem to have been calculated to alter permanently the Chechen identity on a religious, linguistic and nationalist basis. Mosques were burned, gravesites razed, works of literature destroyed, streets and villages resettled and renamed. However, rather than negating the sense of a unified Chechen identity, deportation appears to have had the opposite effect, primarily as result of the strong commingling of Islam and resistance in the republic. During exile, unsurprisingly, literacy rates in the population plummeted and people engaged in hard labour. However, Sufi Islam is described as gaining more prominence, as it provided a means of both maintaining collective identity and resisting authority (Nekrich, 1978, p. 112). Nekrich categorises the period of deportation as having strengthened 'underground Islam', led by the same leaders who had battled the Russian Empire and collectivisation in the 1920s and 1930s. On the day of deportation, Islam already served as a mobilising force of protest, as villagers wrapped green scarves around their heads and attacked troops with toy guns (Rotar', 2002).

As discussed above, the Chechen population returned to find no public outlets for commemorating the deportation and no compensation (Nekrich, 1978, p. 106). They were faced with rioting Soviet settlers and the threat of pogroms. One thing that

remained strong, however, was the practice of Sufi Islam. Although no mosques were permitted to be rebuilt in the republic until 1978 (and in Grozny until 1988) services were held in railway carriages (Lieven, 1998, p. 24). It appears that Islam served as a key force in the post-deportation period in two particular ways: it kept people in the republic – during the Soviet period, the Chechens maintained an extremely high concentration of members of the titular nationality within the population – and it served as a means of maintaining the vibrancy of the native language. As mentioned, the Chechen Republic consistently exhibits the highest rate of language retention of any non-Russian Soviet republic.²⁴ And because religion extended beyond Russian borders, it also provided a unifying force for Chechens with non-Russian Islamic states that would prove integral to later struggles for independence.

Deportation and the Continuing Politicisation of Gender

If you think you are the greatest sufferer in the world ask my daughter ... how many twins she has borne and thrown away. (Achebe, 1994, p. 135)

Chechen history is one in which women's bodies have consistently been political objects. In the *teip* context, women have been commoditised as objects of political exchange in an elaborate intertribal marital system. Divorce is frowned upon (Jaimoukha, 2005, p. 131), and polygamy is seriously considered as a solution to demographic problems. In the Soviet system, childbirth was rewarded with economic benefits for the region, and additional employment opportunities for those who comprised ethnic elites, tying birthrates to economic advancement on a tangible level.

The clan and Soviet systems in different ways each engaged women's bodies as objects of economic gain and of symbolic exchange; however, the deportation set a new standard for the use of women's bodies as, in essence, weapons of war. In most populations at times of stress, such as deportation, the birthrate falls. However, as discussed above, in the case of the Chechen deportation the birthrate remained high, which many view as having been a deliberate strategy of resistance to Soviet central authority and a response to the perceived threat of genocide (Jaimoukha, 2005, p. 14).²⁵

Today, high birthrates have been identified by international NGOs as hallmarks of discrimination against women, as they affect both women's health and the percentage of women in the labour force (Caprioli, 2005). However, it is overly simplistic to attribute high rates of reproduction during deportation simply to victimisation of women. Scheper-Hughes (2001, p. 355) notes that

we have become all too comfortable in the view that women are embedded in ways of being that make them receptive to peacekeeping. But the experience of mothering under conditions of oppression, scarcity and political disruption can instruct and allow women to surrender their sons and husbands to war and violence ... [creating a] maternal ethos of acceptable death.

In other words, women have not only themselves engaged in war, but in the context of ongoing struggles such as that between Chechnya and Russia have deliberately offered up countless generations of sons to conflict. On the one hand, the reverence of the Chechen people for maintaining the vitality of their population, and women's deliberate engagement of their bodies in this continued vitality, make it all the more surprising that Chechen militants would adopt a strategy of offering up women of

childbearing age as suicide bombers. On the other hand, it should be considered that women's engagement in suicide bombing may be a not unnatural extension of the visceral offering up of women's bodies in repeated pregnancies during the deportation, what Jaimoukha (2005, p. 130) has categorised as 'procreation as self-defense in the face of possible liquidation'.

The First Russo-Chechen War, Russia's 'Bloodless Blitzkrieg'

In Maurilia, the traveler is invited to visit the city and, at the same time, to examine some old post cards that show how it used to be: the same identical square with . . . a bandstand in the place of the overpass, two young ladies with parasols in place of the munitions factory. If the traveler does not wish to disappoint the inhabitants, he must praise the postcard city and prefer it to the present one. . . . Beware of saying to them that sometimes different cities can follow one another on the same site and under the same name, born and dying without knowing one another. (Calvino, 1972, p. 30)

By the late 1980s the Cold War was at its conclusion, and the rhetoric of perestroika had fostered multiple assertions of national sovereignty among the republics of the USSR (Lapidus, 1998, p. 5). Following hard upon this discourse of openness, Boris Yel'tsin, elected in 1990, encouraged local elites to undertake increased autonomy over decision-making in local populations, that is, to 'take all the sovereignty [they could] swallow' (Lapidus, 1998, p. 12). In Chechnya a national movement formed under Dzhokhar Dudayev, a former Soviet military officer who spent his youth in exile during the deportation, and who after his return to the republic benefited from affirmative action policies to rise to a prominent post in the Soviet military. Chechnya effected de facto secession from the USSR in 1991.

Despite the declaration of independence, there was no provision made for local governance within the republic independent of the Soviet bureaucracy. In fact, the whole of Russia suffered from the fact that there was no civil society ready to step into the void created by the end of the USSR and shape ongoing policy (Lapidus, 1984, p. 14). Within Chechnya political weakness, intra-elite conflict, limited institutional development, lack of leadership experience, lack of economic resources, regional cleavages and tensions among rival clans drove the political apparatus (Lapidus, 1984, p. 15). Exacerbating the situation was the fact that massive quantities of Russian weapons were transferred into the Chechen Republic because Grozny contained an international airport that was a point of departure for unregulated flights (Lapidus, 1984, p. 15). In a similar vein, as Soviet officials and politicians witnessed their careers taking a nosedive they turned in large numbers to Chechens, with whom they actively traded in weapons and oil as well as engaging in enterprises involving drugs and money laundering.²⁶ The Russian leadership exploited political cleavages in Chechnya in order to challenge the Dudayev government. Rumours grew that Dudayev planned to build an anti-Russian state blocking Russia's access to the Caspian Sea (Lapidus, 1984, p. 15). Western governments were apprised of Russia's intention to take military action against the republic, but did not discourage it.

In December 1994 the Russian army marched on Grozny for what was predicted to be a 'small but victorious war' (Lapidus, 1998, p. 20). Rather than quietly enduring the influx of Russian forces, Chechen citizens – including women and children – took to the streets to block the invasion, causing numerous Russian officers to resign (Lapidus, 1998, p. 20). Half of the army's tanks were destroyed or seized, and

the Chechen government paraded captured Russian officers on live television (Williams, 2000, p. 123). The 'small' war continued for two years; a salient feature was indiscriminate bombing campaigns. Although there were approximately 100,000 casualties, primarily civilians, and 400,000 refugees, the war was waged primarily on a mere 40-by-70-mile patch of land (Lapidus, 1998, p. 26; Politkovskaya, 2003, p. 8). Polls taken at the time show that 50 per cent of the Russian public considered the state's policy toward Chechnya to be 'totally mistaken' (Lapidus, 1998, p. 26).

In the period between January 1995 and August 1996 guerrilla warfare against Russian troops increased, leading to the army's conception of 'virtually the entire civilian population of Chechnya' as combatants (Lapidus, 1998, p. 26). The purpose of Russia's mission became 'quixotic – to prove Chechnya is part of Russia its citizens [were] being treated as the enemy' (Lapidus, 1998, p. 26). Militants began to use acts such as hostage-taking to force the Russian government into negotiations and were successful at producing a series of ceasefires and, ultimately, a more substantial peace agreement that would last through 1999.

This first Russo-Chechen war, ironically begun as part of an effort by the Russian government to solidify rapidly fragmenting Russian national identity in the face of a common Chechen enemy, actually succeeded in further solidifying the national identity of the enemy they sought to defeat. Prior to 1994, the Dudayev government was plagued by inter-*teip* conflicts (Walker, 1998, p. 13). The Russian government initially tried to capitalise on this division and to use the war as a mechanism to oust Dudayev; however, as the war continued, it shifted to a war against the people rather than their government (Lapidus, 1998, p. 26). The Chechen people increasingly supported Dudayev's government, which now, rather than representing the rule of a mountain clan, was linked to the defence of the homeland.²⁷ As Tambiah (1996, p. 21) has noted of countries decolonised after the Second World War, at certain historical moments ethnic affiliation may override other social cleavages to become the major identity for sociopolitical action. Primordial claims and 'mytho-historical legacies' are engaged such that collectivities in a certain sociopolitical space engage in a process of pseudo-speciation in which they come to see themselves as being separate social kinds (Tambiah, 1996, pp. 21 – 22). Religion and language are key factors in this mobilisation of ethnic identity.

Tambiah (1996, p. 193) asks 'Why do riots move to civil war?' One might ask, also, how does a war against a state become a war against a people, or, in other words, how is the identity of the civilian shifted into the identity of the combatant? One answer is that, in warfare against the state, massive relocations of people take place, resulting in marginalisation and isolation of large parts of the population. Armed resistance groups, which were once the minority, become defenders of collectivity (Tambiah, 1996, p. 193). Indeed, we see these effects in connection with the first Russo-Chechen war. As people were increasingly treated as enemies of the Russian state, the goal of independence, at first perceived to be the goal of a non-representative government, began to shape the identity of the population. This was facilitated by the fact that the republic has no standing army – it is militant groups that fight the war on behalf of the people. Arendt (1969, p. 79) notes that there are instances in which violence can serve to dramatise grievances and bring to them public attention, observing, citing O'Brien, that 'sometimes violence is the only way of ensuring a hearing for moderation'. As governmental pleas for negotiations have fallen on deaf ears, but 'terrorist' actions have succeeded in effecting ceasefire agreements, the moral justification for waging guerrilla war has been amplified.

Religion of Rebellion into Religion of Revolution

Russian forces in Chechnya often began their attacks by using the minaret on village mosques as targets. (Williams, 2000, p. 127)

Despite the continuing vitality of 'underground Islam', during the revolution of 1991 it was Soviet-educated leaders – military pilots, journalists, businessmen – who formed the new Chechen republic (Politkovskaya, 2003, p. 17). Ironically, the leader of the political independence movement, Dudayev, was a general who had led the bomber wing of the Soviet air force against the mujaheddin in Afghanistan and spoke poor Chechen (Walker, 1998, p. 13; Rotar', 2002, p. 98). In the early 1990s the government drafted a constitution that provided for the establishment of a secular democratic state, including provisions for freedom of religion and expression (Walker, 1998, p. 13). The constitution was allegedly sent to various western governments along with requests for support for independence from Russia. A speech by Dudayev at the time encouraged continued privatisation of religion, noting that 'The roots of Islam have been seriously undermined by the communists and it is going to take years to reestablish them. . . . So let us establish order according to the Quran in our souls – and according to a Constitution in everyday life' (Rotar', 2002, p. 98; see also Lieven, 1998, p. 363). As mentioned earlier, no western nation responded positively to the Chechen government's request for support for independence.²⁸ As a result, the government sought support from Islamic nations, Dudayev remarking that Chechnya was forced to 'take the way of Islam, although we were ill prepared to adopt Islamic values' (Rotar', 2002, p. 99).²⁹

Lincoln (2003, p. 82) observes that in situations in which ideological hegemony is being advanced by a controlling state, defensive communities not infrequently come to exist in opposition to the ideologies being disseminated by those in power. The primary characteristic of these non-state groups, what Lincoln (2003, p. 83) deems 'religions of resistance', is opposition to the religion of the status quo. He notes that, under certain conditions, the potential exists to change these religions of resistance, formed primarily to provide an alternative to the *religious* values being disseminated by the state – Islam versus atheism, Islam versus Orthodoxy – into what he calls 'religions of revolution', groups that, rather than existing primarily in juxtaposition to the religion of the status quo, instead are opposed to the 'dominant social fraction' as a whole – fundamentalism versus modernity, *adat* versus New World Order (Lincoln, 2003, p. 83). The factors that Lincoln argues serve to transform resistant religions into revolutionary religions each came into full force in the Chechen Republic during the immediate postsoviet period: (1) economic, political, and military situations worsened within the region; (2) new theories of political legitimacy based both in mythical legacies and in modern western constitutional principles came to be articulated within the nascent Chechen government; and (3) technological changes wrought by globalisation, the economic need of the new state, and the influx of jihadists to Afghanistan facilitated the involvement of new constituencies in the Chechen struggle (Lincoln, 2003, p. 86).

After the Russian invasion in 1994 Islam made a public resurgence in the republic; what had been an 'underground' Islam during the Soviet period revealed itself or, in Casanova's terms, became 'deprivatized' (Herbert, 2003, p. 56). Just as villagers resisting the deportation had greeted soldiers in green scarves and headbands, Chechen guerrilla fighters begin to wear green armbands, taking inspiration from the successful Afghan mujaheddin. The Center for Strategic and International Studies

observes that it was Afghanistan that 'led Chechens to appreciate their identity as Muslims' (Center, 2004). As Basayev led raids on neighbouring territories that were successful in bringing Russian officials to the bargaining table, he began increasingly to invoke images of his ancestor Imam Shamil, from the nineteenth century, seeking to attract jihadists from abroad to rally around the Chechen cause. Fighters began to live as more observant Muslims; and, in opposition, just as they had destroyed gravesites of Chechen murids at deportation, Russian soldiers engaged in psychological warfare, locating toilet facilities at Chechen cemeteries, for example.

After the Russian forces withdrew from the republic in 1996 the situation in the region deteriorated further. There remained multiple divisions among clans that had been subsumed, but not obliterated, in the name of the nationalist struggle against Russia. As a result of the influx of weapons into the region, citizens were heavily armed and, because of high unemployment, engaged in criminal activity, including kidnappings. In 1997, after Dudayev's assassination by Russian forces, Aslan Maskhadov, the first official president of the semiautonomous republic and former Soviet army colonel who also had fought the mujaheddin in Afghanistan, introduced strict sharia law as perhaps the only way to restore law and order in the republic. Sharia law was also a nod to Islamic rebel fighters whose 'terrorist' actions during the war had secured the ceasefire.

Although sharia law was not widely accepted by citizens of the republic – for example, medicinal spirit sales rose dramatically when alcohol sales ceased – the introduction of Islamic law did have practical effects. Local businessmen began to engage in public mosque-building projects in joint displays of wealth and community attachment (Lieven, 1998, p. 24). Arabic became mandatory in the few schools in existence, public buildings were segregated, sex scenes were banned from films, and a criminal code was adopted in the republic identical to that in the strict Islamist state of Sudan, including the introduction of televised executions (Rotar', 2002, p. 104; Walker, 1998). What was once a region in which an occasional underground militancy was fostered by the private, clan-based practice of sufism was being transformed into a maximalist theocracy in which Islam was becoming a collective, public, political tool of revolution. In order to explain this distinct change in the nature of Islamic practice in the republic, Russia began to emphasise the influence of Wahhabis³⁰ in Chechen political activities (Walker, 1998). However, most scholars note that external Islamic influences in the region were very likely less extensive than Russia has claimed (Walker, 1998; Center, 2004). As Lincoln might argue (Lincoln, 2003), these scholars note that sharia law was instituted in the republic not so much to oppose the New World Order as to be an instrumental measure to foster law and order while garnering financial support for independence from Muslim nations. As will be discussed, this debate over 'Arab' influences in the region continues to have salience today.

Bodily Inscriptions: the Effects of War on Chechen Women

The goddess Artemis begged of her father, King Zeus, a bow and arrows, a short tunic and an island of her own free from interference. She didn't want to get married, didn't want to have children. She wanted to hunt. . . . Then Orion came. . . . He wandered into Artemis' camp one day, scattering her dogs . . . he suggested they take a short stroll by the sea's edge. Artemis didn't want to but she was frightened. . . . [Orion] was a mighty hunter. . . . He didn't want her to talk, he knew about her already, he'd been looking for her. . . . But Artemis did talk. She talked about the land she loved and its daily changes. This was where

she wanted to stay... Orion raped Artemis and fell asleep. She thought about that time for years... Her revenge was swift and simple. She killed him with a scorpion... Artemis lying beside dead Orion sees her past changed with a single act... She is not who she thought she was. (Winterson, 1989, pp. 150–51)

We'll be back when only skirts are left in this place. (Anne Nivat quoting a comment made by a Russian officer to his wife on a Grozny street corner (Nivat, 2003, p. 200))

One significant result of the first Russo-Chechen war, and of the rise of the sex trade in the postsoviet Russian Federation, was women's increased employment as prostitutes in the service of Russian soldiers (Politkovskaya, 2003, p. 44; see also Meier, 2005, p. 25). At the same time, when soldiers blocked off the city of Grozny with an extensive series of checkpoints, women were the only individuals allowed into the town square, and thus became the primary weapon sellers (Nivat, 2001). With the rise of strict sharia law in the postwar period, it is clear that a schism was created between women's roles as sex workers and weapons sellers, on the one hand, and women's identity as 'good' Muslim wives and mothers on the other.

At the same time, the first Russo-Chechen war was characterised by the transition – at least in the eyes of the Russian military – of all Chechen civilians into combatants. A military attorney noted that 'A Chechen girl can play with dolls by day and be a sniper, a sapper or a radio-operator by night' (Zarakhovich, 2001). Militarisation has been defined as 'the process whereby military values, ideology and patterns of behavior undergird the structural, ideological and behavioral patterns of the state with a powerful impact on civil society' (Tambiah, 2005, p. 244, citing Chenoy, 2002, pp. 4–5). During the first war and its aftermath, both women in the cities, whose livelihoods had been taken away by the war, and women in the villages, who were accused of harbouring militants, increasingly adopted militarised identities, that is to say identities increasingly shaped in and by war.

The Second Russo-Chechen War and the Emergence of the Suicide Bomber Identity

As you have seen...most of the suicide attacks were carried out by women... These women, particularly the wives of the mujaheddin... do not accept being humiliated and living under occupation. (Abu al-Walid, Chechen rebel commander, December 2003 (Pape, 2005, p. 31))

She was just a Chechen. (Russian interviewee regarding Kheda Kungayeva, an 18-year-old Chechen girl raped and murdered by a Russian colonel on the night of a party celebrating the birth of his daughter (Zarakhovich, 2001))³¹

In this, the final moment of identity shift that will be discussed in this paper, I will not distinguish between case studies in gender and religious identity, because, as will become clear, with the advent of the second Russo-Chechen war the spheres of Chechen national identity, gender identity and religious identity largely become confluent.

The 1994–96 war left the Chechen Republic in ruins, with large parts of the territory having been destroyed by Russian soldiers and no reconstruction assistance offered (Kramer, 2004, p. 6). It was discovered that a document dated 1 December

1994 leaked by Russian sources after the war contained instructions for the 'mass evacuation' of the republic (Lapidus, 1998, p. 17). A Russian air force officer observes of the initial Russo-Chechen war that 'they sent the army to Chechnya "to rub [the people] out"' (Zarakhovich, 2001).

One scholar characterises the period between the two wars as 'marred by warlordism, rampant criminality, hostage-takings, chaotic violence, grisly attacks on foreign aid workers, [and] general lawlessness' (Kramer, 2004, p. 6). In the late 1990s strict sharia law was established in the republic as a desperate measure to effect control. Some political scientists characterise the government as being 'under attack' from 'radical elements', including Saudi extremists (Kramer, 2004, p. 6); others simply see the rapidly declining situation in the republic as a result of lack of employment, loss of industry, and lack of funds for rebuilding efforts. In opposition to the Maskhadov government, rebels began to stage incursions into Dagestan in order to impose rule according to sharia law, including a 1999 attack that killed 300 people. Highlighting once again conflicting viewpoints as to whether the Chechen conflict is better attributed to external or endemic factors, Shamil' Basayev has described the conflict leading up to the 1999 war as *local* clashes between the government guard and military clan divisions in which thousands were engaged on each side (Rotar', 2002, p. 106). A Russian scholar describes the attacks rather as a 'challenge' supported by global jihadist groups:

For three years, the destruction of the state and society in Chechnya proceeded apace. The militarization of the population, its ideological preparation in the spirit of Islam, the theft of the republic's resources, robbery, and murder, all fueled hatred and prepared the way for a new war, this time with the help of international terrorist forces. (Tishkov, 2004, p. 57)

Fuelled by sentiment against international terrorist influences and anger at the number of Russian soldiers who had died in Chechnya, the second war, as noted above, had a markedly different character from the first. In order to avoid guerrilla attacks that might humiliate Russian troops storming the region, Grozny was razed prior to the soldiers' entrance. Libraries housing linguistic resources and relics were deliberately destroyed in acts of 'culturecide' (Williams, 2000, p. 126). Official reports state that from August 1999 to December 2000 more than 4700 Russian servicemen were killed and 15,500 wounded in Chechnya. Unofficial estimates are three times higher (Kramer, 2004, p. 10). From the start, Russian troops suffered from extremely low morale, and drug and alcohol problems were rampant (Kramer, 2004, pp. 15–16). Throughout the war the weapons trade continued to thrive, with a bribery system having developed pursuant to which rebels bought their way through checkpoints in order to launch attacks on soldiers' comrades (Kramer, 2004, p. 18). Both Chechen and Russian forces are alleged to have been involved in disappearances in the region, with Russian soldiers implicated in at least one-third of kidnapping incidents (Gidley, 2005). The war has been characterised on both sides by mine warfare, with Chechens disguising grenades in cigarette packets, soda cans and telephones (Kramer, 2004, pp. 27–29).

Since the beginning of the second war, and especially since the attacks on the United States on 11 September 2001, the Russian state has sought to portray Chechnya as a key location in the war on terror.³² The result of this is that western governments have been able repeatedly to refuse to engage with political actors in Chechnya on the

grounds that Russia will not negotiate with terrorists (Center, 2004). It cannot be denied that there are several features of the current Chechen rebel movement that have enabled the Russian government to play up Wahhabi links to the Chechen struggle. Tambiah observes that the main ingredients of religious fundamentalism in the modern era include selective emphasis on certain precepts taken from a more complex canonical corpus, an exclusionary, separatist attitude, a fusion of faith with sociopolitical interests, the linking of salvation with nationality, an emphasis on separation from the 'corrosive' influence of modernity, and charismatic leadership; all these are present in the Chechen movement (Tambiah, 1996, p. 140).

In 1999 the first suicide bombing attack took place when a female Chechen militant drove a truck bomb into a Russian military installation. This attack led to at least 30 others, many of which involved attackers wearing bomb vests and explosive devices similar to those used by the Tamil Tigers and the Palestinian *al-Aqsa* Martyrs Brigade, hinting that at least some Chechen militants may have been trained by other politically violent organisations (Kramer, 2004, p. 50). Before undertaking the hostage incident at the Dubrovka Theatre, Chechen rebels sent a pre-recorded video to *Al Jazeera* showing female captors wearing Islamic chadors in front of a banner inscribed with a slogan borrowed from Osama bin Laden: 'We yearn for death more than you yearn for life' (Kramer, 2004, p. 56).³³

When placed in local historical perspective, however, the attacks launched by Chechen rebels today seem as though, rather than being hallmarks of the global organisation of Al Qaeda, they could just as readily be understood as a postcolonial extension of the attacks launched by Imam Shamil against the Russian Empire in the 1800s, or the attacks promoted by mullahs on Russian settlers during collectivisation. Rebel attacks often coincide with important dates in Russian history or are timed to occur during significant political events. The 1995 raid on the Russian hospital that prompted the conclusion of the first Russo-Chechen war occurred on the anniversary of the Russian victory over the Nazis in the Second World War. Eight years later the pro-Russian Chechen president Kadyrov was killed on that same anniversary day, which in Chechnya is a national day of mourning for the deportation. In the summer of 2003 this same holiday was marked by a series of attacks in which Chechen women detonated suicide bombs at numerous Russian military installations across the region and launched a bomb attack at a Moscow rock festival (Reuter, 2004, p. 12).³⁴

Although it is estimated that at least 400–500 foreign jihadists have fought alongside Chechens at various points, Chechen rebels themselves and the Chechen government downplay the emphasis on the alleged presence of Wahhabis in the region, instead emphasising the localised, nationalistic nature of their struggle against Russia (Reuter, 2004, p. 4; Center, 2004; Politikovskaya, 2003). The Center for Strategic and International Studies characterises the Chechen conflict as a 'home-grown problem': militants espouse Islamic rhetoric but present purely political demands (Center, 2004). Only one incident carried out by Chechen rebels – a hijacking of an airliner – has occurred outside the Russian Federation (Kramer, 2004, p. 56). Rebels themselves disclaim a general Arabic presence, the truth of which seems to be borne out by the facts that the majority of captured and killed fighters have been Chechens and that the arms used are all Russian: Kalashnikovs purchased on the black market from Russians themselves (Meier, 2003, p. 128).³⁵

The involvement of women in Chechen suicide attacks also lends credence to the idea that the Chechen struggle may be distinguished from militant actions by groups such as Al Qaeda and Islamic Jihad. While women were earlier involved in suicide attacks in Sri Lanka and Lebanon, those struggles were characterised by most

participants as secular in nature. By 1999, however, Chechen militants were overtly acting in the name of Islam. Meier (2003, p. 100) notes that 'The tactic of turning your body into a bomb may have come from the Middle East, but the Chechens made a significant advancement on the technique. Long before Palestinian women and girls joined the bombers' ranks, Chechen women had done so.'

'Rage is not an automatic reaction to misery. Only where there is reason to suspect that conditions could be changed and are not does rage arise' (Arendt, 1969, p. 63). Das (1997, p. 70) similarly describes rage as the 'human response... in reaction to sense of loss when language seems to fail'. As rebel attacks have continued to escalate against military and civilian targets and troop morale has continued to decline, human rights abuses by the Russian military against civilians in Chechnya have increased dramatically in the form of 'torture, rape, forced disappearances, mass arrest operations, kidnapping, and summary executions' (Politkovskaya, 2003, p. 9). The American Committee for Peace in Chechnya notes that at the millennium religious fundamentalism and Russian cleansing operations were both new phenomena, the latter 'underappreciated as a motive for suicide bombing' (Reuter, 2004, p. 2). Despite its popular ascendancy among other politically violent groups in the 1990s, suicide terrorism was conspicuously absent from the Russian Federation until almost nine months after the beginning of the second Russo-Chechen war, which began with the razing of the city of Grozny and the annihilation of nearly all Chechen cultural resources and continued with border searches, forced disappearances and rapes becoming commonplace in the region (Reuter, 2004, p. 2).

Between the start of the second war and today there have been more than 30 'successful' suicide attacks, most involving women, and nearly 30 additional women have made attempts to blow themselves up, for example appearing in hostage situations in bomb belts. As noted above, although the level of religious observance of the individuals involved in perpetrating these attacks is disputed, many of the actors do employ religious rhetoric. Gender and religious identity, not much discussed during the Soviet period, have come to the fore in the persona of the Chechen suicide bomber.

Scholarly works focusing on women's engagement in suicide bombing frequently focus on two types of rationale. The first is tactical. Women, the argument goes, are less likely to arouse suspicion at checkpoints, in airports or in shopping centres, and are thus more effective actors for terror organisations (Cunningham, 2003, p. 172). A less frequently discussed but equally viable tactical rationale relates to the proposition offered by Juergensmeyer and Hoffman, originating with Jenkins, that 'terrorism is theater' (Juergensmeyer, 2003; see also Hoffman, 1998, p. 34). The involvement of women as actors may be argued to draw more attention to terror attacks and therefore to garner more support for previously unacknowledged causes.³⁶

In the West as well as in the Russian media Chechen female suicide bombers are often called 'black widows', a name coined by the media (some hypothesise the FSB) that is sexualised and mercenary and probably has racist origins (it ostensibly refers to the appearance of women in chadors, but is likely to originate in the idea of the 'black Arab'). The term 'black widow' has become a codeword for the Chechen rebel, and just as the image of the Chechen as warlord served to incite fear among Russian invaders in the 1800s, 'black widow' serves to mythologise the deadliness of the Chechens in the modern public imagination, simultaneously lessening support for the Chechen struggle by equating Chechens with violence and increasing the 'effectiveness' of Chechen rebel actions in inspiring fear in the populations targeted by their attacks. In a content analysis of western media coverage of the 2004 Beslan school incident

more than half of the 100 articles I reviewed made reference to the fact that ‘black widows’ took part in the hostage crisis; these articles had such titles as ‘Black widows and bombs: hell of school hostages’ (*The Scotsman*, 8 September 2004) and ‘The black widows: women at heart of the terror cells’ (Groskop, 2004). The *Financial Times* (2 September 2004) went so far as to label the presence of black widows a ‘hallmark’ of the Chechen struggle. This theme of women as the linchpin of Chechen violence arises not only in the context of myriad media references to the black widows but also in the context of rumours that frequently circulate in the Russian Federation regarding recruitment of disgruntled women from other republics into the rebel movement as guerrilla fighters. In 1999, for example, the Russian newspapers *Pravda* and *Segodnya* published a series of articles claiming that three female snipers who had competed as world-class biathletes for Ukraine and the Baltic states were discovered by the Russian army fighting in Dagestan as mercenaries (Gordon, 2000). Soldiers were allegedly alerted to the presence of the markswomen, nicknamed ‘the white tights’, because one of them, who was pretending to be a refugee, held a baby that she spoke to in a ‘non-motherly’ way (Gordon, 2000). The women were reputedly claimed to be especially skilled at aiming ‘below the belt’ (Gordon, 2000). Although the *New York Times* was able to discover only one soldier who claimed actually to have seen the supposedly blonde, leggy rebels, every Russian soldier interviewed by the newspaper swore to their existence (Gordon, 2000; Lieven, 1998, pp. 50–51).

Perhaps the most frequently cited rationale offered for women’s engagement in suicide bombing seeks not to explain the organisation’s tactical motives in employing female bombers but the psychological factors that might explain women’s own desire for self-immolation, an approach criticised by Pape (2005, p. 16) as constituting a ‘psychological autopsy’. While studies that have focused primarily on male bombers have hypothesised that acts of suicide bombing are a phenomenon of a ‘disenchanted middle class’ who have suffered frustration with their lives in the context of regime change, demographic change or occupation (Atran, 2004, p. 8; see also Pape, 2005), it is often argued that in women the desire to commit acts of terrorism is a result of emotional problems, brainwashing or stress stemming not from life within a militarised society but from personal factors such as infertility, lack of educational opportunity or divorce (see for example Figchel, 2003, p. 3; Myers, 2004; Victor, 2003, p. 7). A recent symposium on ‘she bombers’ featured a round-table discussion with a female adviser to Israel’s Council for National Security along with several academics and journalists. It began:

We know, *of course*, that the phenomenon of the She-Bomber is interconnected with a pathological misogynist culture in which young women are *coerced and forced* into suicide bombing through all kinds of violent and horrifying ways. Wafa Idris,³⁷ for instance, couldn’t bear children and her husband divorced her. Discarded and shunned in a culture that sees a divorced woman who cannot bear children as worthless, she became the obvious target of exploitation for terrorist groups. (Glazov, 2005, emphasis added)

Idris, like Baruch Goldstein, the Israeli doctor who opened fire on Muslims praying at the Tomb of the Patriarchs in Hebron in 1994, had been a medical professional who was deeply involved in the ongoing violence within her community, working for years in Palestinian ambulance forces, a job which by all accounts she loved (Juergensmeyer, 2003, p. 51; Victor, 2002, pp. 50–51). While Goldstein was

condemned in Israel as a terrorist and a criminal, his actions precipitated little investigation into his personal life, other than to say he had become deeply entrenched in the anti-Arab cause. After Idris' violent action, however, her personal sexual history was laid bare, with countless newspapers commenting on her divorce and inability to bear children.

While I am not arguing by any means that these hypotheses attributing women's engagement in suicide bombing to psychological factors are incorrect, I will venture to say that they are incomplete. First, they largely relegate women's engagement in conflict to the aesthetic realm, noting that, whereas men may engage in terrorism for rational reasons based in altruism, women engage in suicide bombing as a result of 'emotional' problems caused by lack of marital opportunities, infidelity or general frailty. In characterising women's actions as born of personal shame rather than altruistic, these theories rob women of their ability to function as deliberate actors seeking to effect political change and deprive women as a group of their ability to engage in acts on behalf of the collective, as their male counterparts are argued to have done. Meintjes (2001, p. 6) notes that many feminists exhibit ambivalence towards women militants because the latter are often used in the cause of patriarchal nationalist projects rather than acting on their own; however, removing the conception of women's autonomy in situations of conflict and denying that men and women may desire to take active roles in such conflict undermines the position of women who may have sought to advance their situation within the context of war.³⁸

In addition, most rationales for women's engagement in suicide bombing tend to overlook local factors that may lead women in a certain community and at a certain historical moment to devote their bodies to a political cause. The Chechen symbol is the 'she wolf', identified by one scholar as 'sacrific[ing] itself for the pack' (Glazov, 2005). Glazov goes on to explain that the logical extension of this metaphor is that

For a female suicide bomber *who doesn't feel very good about herself*, religious beliefs, national anthems and other cultural ideologies become a way of organizing the mind by means of...fantasies. The ideologies coupled with external events such as the Russian mistreatment of the Chechens... can...be invoked to explain her desperate conviction. (Glazov, 2005, emphasis added)

I argue that, rather than categorising suicide bombing as an act of a woman who 'doesn't feel very good about herself', making bombing an act born solely of personal tragedy, it may be more useful to examine the female suicide bomber as one who is over-concerned about the feelings of her community, just as researchers have argued of male bombers. Bloom describes female engagement in suicide bombing as 'the transformation of revolutionary womb into exploding one', an apt observation in the Chechen context (Bloom, 2005, p. 143). As demonstrated in the historical overview above, women have consistently been involved viscerally in the struggle against the Russian government, from burning down the fortress established by General Yermolov at Grozny in the 1800s, to protesting against deportation, to throwing their bodies in front of tanks at the 1994 Russian invasion, to becoming rebel fighters and arms sellers in the late 1990s and participating in early militant actions as nurses and caregivers.³⁹

A review of attacks by Chechen rebels over the course of the past decade indeed demonstrates that women's roles have shifted from those of ancillary caregivers to those of active participants. During the rebels' 1995 seizure of the hospital in Budennovsk women provided assistance as nurses (Gall and DeWaal, 1998, p. 263).

At the Dubrovka Theatre in 2002 witnesses reported that the acts of the hostage-takers were delineated along gender lines: men intimidated while women, although rigged with bomb belts, passed out medical supplies (Groskop, 2004). In 2004, in Beslan, all offers of medical supplies were rejected. Less than a month previously, women were found to be responsible for the deaths of over 100 citizens, having launched suicide attacks on two airliners and in a Moscow subway station. Nonetheless, aside from rapid spurts of sensationalist coverage, the media have repeatedly described the conditions women endure but have generally ignored their roles as actors in conflict (Bop, 2001, p. 19). As a result, the image that persists is of women as victims, an image that Card (1996) argues is harmful to women in the long run because it is in part women's status as objects to be protected by men that renders them targets of rape when this is used as a weapon to shame societies during war. 'No woman lives in the single dimension of her sex' (Meintjes *et al.*, 2001, p. 13). 'Although it is true that women are almost never the initiators of conflicts, are never the leaders of conflicts, and are rarely at the negotiation table, they have participated in all wars as actors' (Bop, 2001, p. 20).

Women's bodies in particular have long been the 'slate' on which collective suffering has been inscribed. One of the signatures of violence in India at Partition – as in many war-ravaged areas – was the abduction and rape of women (Das, 1997, p. 85). In India the appropriation of women's bodies was accompanied at times by the literal inscription of nationalist slogans on women's bodies before they were returned to their husbands (Das, 1997, p. 85). Mass rapes similarly are not uncommon in Chechnya, and Chechen women have described taping grenades to their waists – an act eerily reminiscent of the actions of suicide bombers – in order to annihilate themselves rather than become victims of rape (Meier, 2005, p. 70). Women's bodies have also traditionally been a focal point in mourning ceremonies, in which women have been assigned the role of 'witnessing' death, even acting in some societies as paid mourners. In traditional Chechen society women were key participants in death rituals, sitting with the body for a week, uttering lamentations and striking themselves on their faces (Jaimoukha, 2005, p. 132). Early mourning rituals used to provide for widows cutting off an ear at their husbands' deaths, then a topknot of hair (Jaimoukha, 2005, p. 132). A not uncommon Chechen name is Aset, derived from Isis, Egyptian goddess of the dead and funeral rites (Meier, 2005, p. 70). It is natural in such cases for grief to be articulated through the body, with women beating themselves, screaming and ripping their clothes (Das, 1997, pp. 79–80). Das (1997, p. xiii) attributes to societies that have experienced longstanding wars an 'incommunicability of pain', observing that pain isolates sufferers and strips them of cultural resources, especially the resource of language. Mourning, then, becomes a non-spontaneous ritual act that is 'about expressing the anguish of a community visited by death'. In other words, mourning has not been an irrational activity, but the deliberate engagement of one body expressing the grief of the collective (Ramphele, 1997, p. 105). Through women's engagement in visceral acts of mourning a mimesis is established between body and language that serves to render loss communicable (Das, 1997, p. 81).

Ramphele notes that the engagement of women's bodies as a metaphor for suffering has occurred in recent times in cases of 'political widowhood' such as those experienced by women in the aftermath of the Apartheid struggle in South Africa. She observes that the female body does not usually represent heroism; however, the political widow challenges gender boundaries by 'becom[ing] the embodiment of social memory of struggle and of the brutality of the state' (Ramphele, 1997, p. 110). Because women are so often viewed as the custodians of national culture, rape has

been used as a weapon to 'undermine national, political and cultural solidarity' (Card, 1996, p. 8). However, the mirror-image of this is that women's status as objects and catalysts of national mourning has enabled women, in cases of 'political widowhood', to serve as catalysts of political mobilisation (Ramphele, 1997, pp. 120–21).

In this respect, the nickname for Chechen female rebels, 'black widows', seems hauntingly apt. While they are not carrying the mantle of engagement in a governmental capacity, many of the women who have participated in bombing in the Russian Federation have been wives or sisters of slain fighters who are, in the context of the Chechen cause, political widows. While the media not infrequently attribute these women's actions to vengeance, Pape (2005, pp. 58–59) observes that suicide terrorism is not simply about seeking revenge for those who have died. Rather, it stems from 'excessive integration' of individuals in society (Pape, 2005, p. 164). Just as mourning is often not a private act but one in which women's bodies play a role within the public sphere, so too may it be possible to view suicide bombing – even bombing undertaken after the death of a male relative – as an act undertaken for the perceived collective good. As Kleinman notes, in societies that have experienced social violence one cannot draw a sharp line between the individual and the collective – social engagement and emotional conditions are inseparable (Kleinman *et al.*, 1997, p. 5).⁴⁰

In the time since the days of ancient mourning rituals where women uttered lamentations, for Chechens it has come to be viewed as an act of weakness to display pain in public; 'sorrow is explained away as a minor version of some greater grief' (Jaimoukha, 2005, pp. 133–34). The closeting of mourning began in the days of Imam Shamil, who condemned paid mourners as an unnecessary expense in light of the battles that needed to be fought against the Russian state; and although populations continue to display ritualistic reverence for the bodies of the dead, public expression of grief continued to be frowned upon throughout the shameful, criminalised period of the deportation and its aftermath (Jaimoukha, 2005, p. 134).

In vivid contrast, Chechen women's bodies have long been visible objects of political, economic and social engagement. They have been commoditised as brides in the *teip* system and objectified within the Soviet state, as increasing the birthrate was used both to advance within the system and to resist it. They have been mothers of sons, prostitutes for Russian soldiers, and victims of rape as a strategy and as an unfortunate consequence of war. They have taken hostages and thrown themselves in front of tanks. For centuries, they have mourned the dead. And it is possible that, as suicide bombers, they are now giving voice to a collective mourning long silenced.

Conclusion

Death, whether faced in actual dying or in the inner awareness of one's own mortality, is perhaps the most antipolitical experience there is. We leave our fellow man – foundation of all politics. But faced collectively, death changes its countenance; now nothing seems more likely to intensify our vitality than its proximity. Our own death is accompanied by the potential immortality of the group we belong to. (Arendt, 1969, p. 67)

In the course of everyday life, men dominate the public domain in terms of control over speech, but in the case of death they become mute. (Das, 1997, p. 81)

Identity is constructed in opposition to difference, and strengthens itself via that juxtaposition. In twenty-first-century Chechnya identity is constructed within the context of, and first and foremost against, the Russian state. The first Russo-Chechen war was one in which all civilians were transformed into combatants. The second war is one in which moderate voices of resistance have been silenced.⁴¹ Chechen identity is not constituted only by rebels' actions, but by the state's response to those actions in the form of continued military presence in the region, forced disappearances and emphasis on categorising Chechnya as the 'epicentre' of the global war on terror. In other words, political violence is formed not only by militant participants and leaders, but also in relation to the targets they seek to challenge.

On the Russian front, what was initially war waged with bayonets, then Kalashnikovs, has devolved into a campaign of carpet bombing in which human soldiers are sent in last. Nonetheless, more than 18,000 Russian troops are estimated to have been killed in the conflict (Gidley, 2005). State documents have been discovered outlining plans for repeated mass evacuation of the Chechen people. Russian forces have destroyed the archive of the Chechen Republic, including 90,000 Chechen works of literature (Williams, 2000, p. 126). The population has been rendered illiterate. Legitimate employment opportunities do not exist (Meier, 2003, p. 130).

Tishkov (2004, p. 17) notes that 'historical and ethnic factors were not the basis for [the Chechen conflict]. . . . [H]istory cannot serve as an argument for today's political events and decisions. Rather, [the conflict has] contemporary actors who deal with contemporary problems and objectives'. In its search for a 'lost ideal', he argues, Chechen society has consistently engaged in 'eclectic borrowing' of foreign models: 'the resistance copied the texts of the Lithuanian and Estonian People's Fronts . . . ; emulated the activities and symbols of armed combatants in other Islamic . . . regions of the world; and, finally, drew upon Sudan's harsh Shari'a Code in establishing a similar rule' (Tishkov, 2004, p. 15). History is simply not the cause of conflict.

I agree with this assessment, that history should be used as a tool for understanding the formation of identity and not seen as the 'cause' of such formation. However, rather than seeing it as a practice of 'eclectic borrowing', I argue that one might view the reinvigoration of Islamic and nationalist myth in Chechen history – from the invocation by Shamil' Basayev of the image of Imam Shamil, to the invigoration of the nineteenth-century rhetoric of hostage-taking in connection with modern terror events, to the employment of women's bodies in acts of visceral antistate protest – as having occurred at certain historical moments in which identity, and specifically religious and gender identity, have consciously or unconsciously been rendered objects of debate in the public sphere. While various aspects of identity have come to prominence at various times in Chechen history, the current Chechen identity has emerged as one marred by collective suffering and engaged in a national project of mourning. It is out of and on behalf of this localised social experience of suffering that the identity of the female suicide bomber has emerged.

Notes

- 1 From 1980 to 2001 suicide attacks are estimated to have accounted for 3 per cent of terrorist incidents but to have caused half the total casualties attributed to terrorism (Zedalis, 2004).
- 2 Kashmir, as a region, bears resemblance to Chechnya in that both areas have a soldier to civilian ratio of approximately 1 to 7, and both regions have experienced recent, violent

transformations from Sufism to what has been characterised as 'political Islam' (Manchanda, 2001, p. 104).

- 3 I use the term 'subaltern groups' in the Gramscian sense to imply groups which perceive themselves to be excluded from a meaningful role in a regime of power.
- 4 A key element lacking herein is a discussion of those global issues that have very likely contributed to the emergence of the Chechen female suicide bomber. The exposure received by suicide bombing movements by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam and other groups and the successes that such groups have accomplished, for example, are likely to have influenced the choice of Chechen militants to engage in certain actions. These global influences are important; however, a discussion of them is beyond the scope of this article.
- 5 'This land is called Chechnya./All homes are ruined there./There beats front-line thunder./There is hell everywhere.' Excerpt from a poem by Khizar Akhmadov on the subject of the Russo-Chechen wars (Jaimoukha, 2005, pp. 215–16).
- 6 A report from the Edinburgh Missionary Society for 1817, which had outposts in Asian Russia, observed 'The Tschechens are among the most troublesome, thievish, and desperate enemies with whom the Russians have to encounter on the Lines; and . . . every attempt to reduce them fails of success' (Tishkov, 2004, p. 18, citing the report, p. 45).
- 7 A person acknowledged in Chechen society to have been the last *abrek* – Khasukhi Magomadov – is recorded as having escaped Russian forces in the 1940s and as having launched guerrilla attacks from the hills until 1979 (Jaimoukha, 2005, p. 147).
- 8 Grozny was renamed Dzhokhar after independence in the 1990s.
- 9 The time of arrival of Sufism in Chechnya is debated, with Walker (1998) noting that the religion arrived in the region in the eighteenth century, and others dating Islamic practices in the region back to as early as the eighth century.
- 10 Despite the fomenting of anti-governmental sentiment, Nekrich (1978, p. 51) emphasises that in Chechnya collectivisation undermined but did not destroy old ways of life. Under the *teip* system, although some mountain peoples privately owned farms, land tenure was primarily based on common clan ownership. Although the imposition of collectivisation sought to eliminate the clan system of inheritance, in actuality underground bodies ran everything so that the *teip* system would be maintained and the best lands would remain in the hands of individuals.
- 11 An estimated 40,000 freight cars were used in the effort to deport the Caucasus and Crimean populations, all removed from use transporting goods to Russian soldiers at the front (Nekrich, 1978, p. 88). The elderly were transported to railway stations in lend-lease Studebakers provided by the United States (Williams, 2000, p. 110; Nekrich, 1978, pp. 58–59).
- 12 The deportation, which resembled the ethnic cleansing of Jews by Nazi forces, was carried out as a military operation, and awards of military honour were given to soldiers who participated. Some reports state that the expulsion was facilitated by the fact that the Soviet command had already been forced to withdraw large Red Army groups from the front lines to combat bandits waging anticollectivisation battles in the mountains (Nekrich, 1978, p. 54). Historians note that by the 1940s some mountainous regions of the republic had come under the control of rebel factions, who allegedly proclaimed that they would treat German troops with traditional Chechen hospitality as long as the Nazis agreed to recognise the independence of the republic from Russian rule (Rotar', 2002). This dovetails with the conception of Chechens as historically having provided refuge for groups of peoples which would otherwise have been conquered (Politkovskaya, 2003, p. 10). Others point out that in fact German forces never reached the Chechen Republic, although the Caucasus region was a key part of Hitler's plan to supply oil to Germany (Nekrich, 1978, p. 38). During the early 1940s there were two rival groups of Chechen émigrés living outside the USSR who formed companies to assist with this scheme (Nekrich, 1978, p. 38). One group, led by Said Shamil', the grandson of the famous Imam Shamil who battled the Russian Empire the 1830s, sought to collaborate with the Nazis to exchange oil for an independent Caucasus (Nekrich, 1978, p. 38). The Germans were allegedly impressed with the lineage of Shamil' and considered his

offer; however, the programme was rejected as too independent. Even so, it is notable that German policy toward the Caucasus was, at least rhetorically, more 'liberatory' than that toward most other regions, reflecting a strategy of seeking to win the region over rather than conquering its peoples (Nekrich, 1978, p. 39). Freedom of worship, independent economic development and self-government were espoused as goals, with one proposed slogan reading 'Long live the free Caucasians in alliance with and under the protection of the Great German Empire of Adolph Hitler' (Nekrich, 1978, p. 38).

- 13 These factors are not dissimilar to the four key problems to which Tambiah attributes ethnonationalist riots: disputes over language; creation of a class of educated young people with few employment opportunities; rapid demographic change; and challenges to the viability of the secular state by religious groups (Tambiah, 1996, p. 19).
- 14 The Chechen language, at 4–6000 years old, is one of the oldest languages on earth, pre-dating Islam in the republic by many centuries (Walker, 1998, p. 11).
- 15 This incident, and other terrorist events launched by militants, have been condemned by the official Chechen government (Gall and DeWaal, 1998, p. 259).
- 16 Chechnya's instability is reflected by the transience of its political leaders. Dzhokhar Dudayev, a former Soviet army officer lauded for leading the Chechens to independence in the first war, was assassinated by the Russian government in 1996. Zelimkhan Yandarbiyev, who took Dudayev's place but failed to win the popular vote, was killed by a car bomb in 2000. In 1997 Aslan Maskhadov became the first president after independence. He was replaced by pro-Russian president Akhmad Kadyrov in 2003 and assassinated by the Russian government in 2005. Kadyrov himself was killed by Chechen militants in 2004. Alu Alkhanov, the current, Russian-backed president, is heavily guarded at all times.
- 17 Khattab was later assassinated by the Russian FSB via the somewhat romantic method of the 'poisoned letter'.
- 18 Jaimoukha (2005, p. 60) notes that although affirmative action did benefit Chechen citizens, as a consequence of the accusation of treason at the time of the deportation, until the 1980s Chechens were excluded from high security posts, and a ceiling was thus imposed on Chechen economic advancement.
- 19 Emphasis on the ideal of the totalitarian government is a relic of the Stalin era in which the government formulated the idea of the 'flowering and rapprochement of nations'. This idea is reflected in 1960s communist party journals, one of which states: 'The rapprochement of nations and their international unity should not be viewed as merger. *The elimination of all national differences is a long process, and it is possible only after the complete victory and consolidation of communism in the entire world*' (Lapidus, 1984, pp. 562–63, citing 'Torzhestvo leninskoi natsional'noi politiki', *Kommunist*, 13, 1969, p. 10 (emphasis added)).
- 20 This dichotomy is evident in one newspaper interview with a teenage girl who discusses being torn between settling into life as a recently kidnapped bride ('[W]ho knows if I'll be able to find another decent boy? There aren't that many left around here') and pursuing a career as a journalist (Dlugy, 2003).
- 21 Tishkov's phrasing that it became as though the deportation 'amounted to genocide' appears to imply that the deportation, during which at least 100,000 died, was not in fact a genocidal act. Card (1996, p. 7) notes, however, that 'genocide can be committed both through mass murder and by decimating social and cultural bonds', each of which seems to have occurred in the Chechen case.
- 22 For example, Liza Umarova, a Chechen singer living in Moscow, was recently attacked by three Russian men who observed 'We don't want you Negroes living around here anymore' (Mydans, 2005).
- 23 In the Russian newspapers of 1944 there was not a single word about the deportation (Nekrich, 1978, p. 87).
- 24 The Soviet press during this time reported numerous trials of Sufi adherents (Williams, 2000, p. 115).

- 25 We should note, however, the contrasting view of the Russian scholar Tishkov, who observes that one can draw from the high birthrate in exile – 150,000 children born to a population of 400,000 over a period of 13 years – simply the fact that the Chechen population was young and thus was bound to be sexually active (Tishkov, 2004, p. 29).
- 26 In a similar way to that in which the FLN and its successful struggle for Algerian independence informed terrorist campaigns in the 1980s, the Afghan mujaheddin and their humiliation of the Soviet army in the late 1980s provided an inspirational model to Chechen militants and visceral support in the form of individuals such as Khattab, who came to Afghanistan to fight the Soviet occupiers and moved to Chechnya after the defeat of the Russian army. The Afghan war, and thus the model for the current Chechen militant movement, was funded largely as part of CIA covert operations, which provided approximately \$2 billion in weapons, satellite technology and funds to Afghan rebels from 1984 to 1988, all of which was matched dollar for dollar by Saudi Arabia in the largest covert action programme since the Second World War (Coll, 1992).
- 27 Increased support for the Dudayev government also may have been fostered by Dudayev himself, who seems to have behaved rather moderately given the Russian invasion. Prior to 1994 the Dudayev leadership made appeals to the United Nations, the United States and a number of other western countries highlighting the escalating Russian military force and asking that those entities put pressure on Russia to engage in negotiations, although it is disputed whether these went through appropriate formal channels (Lapidus, 1998, p. 27). During the war the Chechen government continued to seek out and preserve economic links to Russia, keeping the borders open and not introducing its own currency as other secessionist republics had done. However, it was only after acts of terrorism engaged in by militants that actual peace negotiations took place.
- 28 The republic's increasing reliance on Islamic nations for support was furthered by the fact that most western nations appeared to have a basic misunderstanding of the conflict in Chechnya. For example, United States President Bill Clinton has been heavily criticised for comparing the 1994 Russo-Chechen war to the US Civil War on the grounds that both wars stemmed from a desire to keep nations together (Gall and DeWaal, 1998, p. 316). In response to the question whether the United States should be more critical of the war in Chechnya, Clinton noted: 'I would remind you that we once had a civil war in our country in which we lost on a per capita basis far more people than we have lost in any of the wars of the twentieth century over the proposition that Abraham Lincoln gave his life for – that no state had the right to withdraw from our union' (Harris, 1996).
- 29 Although in the brief period of independence from 1991 to 1994 Islam was adopted in name in the republic, sharia law was not widely observed. For example, alcohol was served widely, even during Ramadan, and Dudayev is noted as having made a speech in which he called for Muslims to pray four – not the required five – times per day (Rotar', 2002, p. 99). Tishkov observes that during perestroika Chechens had not collectively identified themselves as 'Islamic peoples' (Tishkov, 2004, p. 54). However, as the West declined to support the Chechen independence project, the government did begin to disseminate hyperbolic messages that increasingly combined Islam and nationalism, for example, making claims that Islam originated in Chechnya, and that Noah's Ark came to rest on Chechen mountains (Rotar', 2002, p. 104).
- 30 Wahhabis, strictly speaking, are those who practise the version of Islam established by the Saudi ruling family in 1744 and advocate a return to the 'original teachings' of the Quran (Walker, 1998); however, in Russia the term is often used as a catch-all phrase for Islamists, fundamentalist Muslims and the like.
- 31 Kungayeva was a high school pupil and, the colonel believed, a sniper who had wounded 15 Russian soldiers the week before. Russian citizens greeted the officer at his trial with red carnations, calling for the 'purge' of the Chechen people. Upon insistence by human rights groups, he received a ten-year prison sentence. Soldiers who assisted him in disposing of the body were pardoned.

- 32 In a 2004 article Vladimir Putin labelled Chechnya the 'epicentre of the war on terror' (*The Daily Telegraph*, 2 September).
- 33 Rotar' (2002, p. 109) notes that during the period after the first war a rapid shift to fundamentalism was facilitated as a result of the ruined economy, in which the main sources of income were trading in hostages and pillaging neighbouring Russian territories, fear of civil war, closure of nearly all schools in the republic, and the fact that the Taliban was the only government abroad to recognise an independent Chechen state. On a personal level, fighters themselves began to accept the rhetoric of the establishment of a global Islamist state. One rebel listed the ultimate aim of the Chechen war as the 'liberation of Jerusalem' (Rotar', 2002, p. 109). Another noted that '[The CIA and Zionists] have hijacked our fight for freedom in a global geostrategic fight for our oil' (Meier, 2003, p. 126).
- 34 In 2004 the Beslan incident, an explosion on a subway and the downing of two airliners occurred during this same holiday period, and also during the week Russia was holding elections in Chechnya to fill the spot vacated by the previous president, who had been assassinated by Russian forces. In May 2005 concern about Chechen attacks on the anniversary of the end of the Second World War and the Chechen deportation led Russian forces to conduct raids in Chechnya during which three suspected female suicide bombers were killed in the space of 24 hours (Venyavsky, 2005).
- 35 Despite nations such as Iran allegedly having offered financial support to the Chechen government in the early and mid-1990s and perhaps having facilitated the entrance of jihadist fighters into the Caucasus region (see, generally, McLean, 2005; Walker, 1998), Islamic nations have not condemned Russian actions in Chechnya. In contrast to the situation in the Palestinian territories, where at various times Islamic governments as well as internal organisations such as Hamas have granted financial rewards to suicide bombers, there does not appear to be any such system of financial reward in Chechnya. What is more, few suicide bombers appear to have come from fundamentalist backgrounds (Reuter, 2004, p. 4).
- 36 Bloom offers the perspective that using women in terrorist attacks enables groups that perceive themselves to have been excluded from the power regime to send the message that 'insurgents are all around you' (Bloom, 2005, p. 144).
- 37 Wafa Idris was the first Palestinian *shahida*, a term coined from the Palestinian term for a male martyr, *shahid*, and allegedly first used by Yasser Arafat in 2002 during a speech encouraging women to engage in jihad in the Palestinian territories (Victor, 2002, pp. 19–20).
- 38 In a recent experiment Israeli university students were asked to draw their bodies in periods of war and peace. Uniformly, and regardless of gender, the body drawn in war was different from the normal body, as the dialectic between the individual and society became altered by the advent of conflict (Weiss, 1997, p. 813). The 'peace' body was drawn alone, with fully defined individual features. Bodies in war were drawn as passive, with individual features uniformly not evident, and were presented as surrounded by others – in the midst of televisions or radios (Weiss, 1997, pp. 823–24). These drawings of the body at times of conflict and in its aftermath are one demonstration that the body – the visceral manifestation of identity – is not static. Bodies at war, male and female, are formed within the collective.
- 39 Tishkov (2004, p. 64) notes that the result of women's blockade of military barracks during the first Russo-Chechen war was the assembly of an 'enormous military arsenal' that 'radically changed the internal dynamics of the republic'.
- 40 There are indications that the acts of female suicide bombers are indeed viewed by supporters as narratives which may help to explain the social movements arising out of occupation. Of the actions of Wafa Idris, known as the first Palestinian *shahida*, an Egyptian weekly observed that '[She] did not sit in the coffee shops of rage to which our intellectuals are addicted, becoming procurers, and the writers who sell themselves for a shekel or a dollar. She did not go out to demonstrations... She did not sign petitions aimed at the international community. All she did was don a belt of explosives and talk to Israel, America, and the world in the only language they understand' (MEMRI, 2002, citing Al Ma'ati, 2002). Other columnists similarly called Idris a 'girl, courageous in deeds, not words' (MEMRI, 2002, citing Sadeq, 2002) who now 'shouts with all her strength' from Paradise

(MEMRI, 2002 citing Abu-Fatuh, 2002). The rhetoric used in the various articles in praise of Idris, as well as the reaction of Russian victims to the rhetoric used by their Chechen captors, indicate that as they engage in acts of violence female suicide bombers can potentially be seen as rendering their bodies vehicles of speech on behalf of the group.

- 41 The Union Committee of Soldiers' Mothers (www.ucsmr.ru/english), a Russian political party founded in 1989 to assist individuals in the Russian military with issues of illegal conscription and hazing, has been active in attempting to engage in peace talks with Chechens and to organise marches in the name of awareness of human rights abuses. Its attempts have been met with criticism as 'immoral' and 'outlandish' by the Russian government (Jamestown Foundation, 2005). However, since it has engaged in talks with Chechen militants the latter have agreed to return Russian soldiers' bodies home – but only if they are delivered into the care of their mothers.

References

- Abdullaev, N. (2005) 'Women to the forefront in Chechen terrorism: the increasing use of Chechen female suicide bombers has dramatically changed the rules of the game in the North Caucasus', *ISN Security Watch*, <http://www.isn.ethz.ch/news/sw/details.cfm?ID=9781%20> (accessed 30 December 2005).
- Abeyssekara, A. (2002) *Colors of the Robe: Religion, Identity, and Difference* (Columbia, University of South Carolina Press).
- Abu-Fatuh, A. (2002) *Al-Wafd* (Egypt), 7 February, as cited in *Al-Quds Al-Arabi* (London), 8 February.
- Achebe, C. (1994) *Things Fall Apart* (New York, Anchor Books).
- Ali, F. (2005) 'Muslim female fighters: an emerging trend', *Inside Terrorism* (Jamestown Foundation), 3, 21 (3 November).
- Al Ma'ati, A. A. (2002), *Al-Arabi* (Egypt), 3 February, as cited in *Al-Quds Al-Arabi* (London), 4 February.
- Arendt, H. (1969) *On Violence* (New York, Harcourt).
- Atran, S. (2004) 'Mishandling suicide terrorism', *The Washington Quarterly*, 27, 3, pp. 67–90.
- Baran, Z. (2000) 'The Caucasus: ten years after independence', *The Washington Quarterly*, 25, 1, pp. 221–34.
- BBC News (2005) 'Belgian "suicide bomber" is named', December, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/4488642.stm>
- Bloom, M. (2005) *Dying To Kill: the Allure of Suicide Terror* (New York, Columbia University Press).
- Bop, C. (2001) 'Women in conflicts: their gains and their losses', in Meintjes *et al.* (eds.), 2001, pp. 19–34.
- Brintlinger, A. and Conn, S. (2001) 'Russian women: living in history's shadow', *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 2, 3 (June), pp. 94–102.
- Calvino, I. (1972) *Invisible Cities* (trans. William Weaver) (New York, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich).
- Caprioli, M. (2005) 'Primed for violence: the role of gender inequality in predicting internal conflict', *International Studies Quarterly*, 49, 2, pp. 161–78.
- Card, C. (1996) 'Rape as a weapon of war', *Hypatia*, 11, 4, pp. 5–18.
- Center (2004) Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), *Islam and the Caucasus: a look at Chechnya*, transcript of a panel co-hosted by CSIS, Russia and Eurasia Program and Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 10 May, Washington, DC, <http://www.csis.org/ruseura/wot/040510.pdf> (accessed 31 March 2006).
- Chenoy, A. (2002) *Militarism and Women in South Asia* (Delhi, Kali for Women).
- CNN (2005) 'Jordan "failed bomber" confesses on TV', Cable News Network, 14 November, <http://www.cnn.com/2005/WORLD/meast/11/13/jordan.blasts>
- Coll, S. (1992) 'Anatomy of a victory: CIA's covert Afghan war', part 1 of 2, *Washington Post*, 19 July, pp. 1, 24.

- Cunningham, K. (2003) 'Cross-regional trends in female terrorism', *Conflict and Terrorism*, 26, 3, pp. 171–96.
- Cunningham, K. (2005) 'Women, political violence, and democratization', in W. Crotty (ed.), *Democratic Development & Political Terrorism* (Boston, Northeastern University Press), pp. 73–90.
- Das, V. (1997) 'Language and body: transactions in the construction of pain', in A. Kleinman, V. Das and M. Lock (eds.), *Social Suffering* (Berkeley, University of California Press), pp. 67–91.
- DeWaal, T. (2003) 'The Chechen conflict and the outside world', *Crimes of War Project Magazine, Chechnya: the World Looks Away*, 18 April, pp. 10–13.
- Dlugy, Y. (2003) 'A tale of a kidnapped Chechen bride', *Agence France Presse*, 23 October.
- Enloe, C. (2000) *Maneuvers: the International Politics of Militarizing Women's Lives* (Berkeley, University of California Press).
- Felgenhauer, P. (2003) 'The Russian army in Chechnya', *Crimes of War Project Magazine, Chechnya: the World Looks Away*, 18 April, pp. 6–9.
- Fighe, Y. (2003) *Palestinian Islamic Jihad and Female Suicide Bombers* (Research paper, Institute for Counterterrorism, 6 October), <http://www.ict.org/articele/articledet.cfm?articleid=499>
- Finn, P. (2006) 'Leader of pro-Kremlin militia is new Chechen premier: Ramzan Kadyrov, 29, a former rebel, has been accused of major human rights violations', *Washington Post Foreign Service*, 5 March, sec. A, p. 15.
- Foucault, M. (1969) *The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language* (trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith) (New York, Pantheon Books).
- Foucault, M. (1976) *The History of Sexuality, Volume I: an Introduction* (trans. Robert Hurley) (New York, Vintage Books Inc.).
- Gall, C. and DeWaal, T. (1998) *Chechnya: Calamity in the Caucasus* (New York, New York University Press).
- Ganor, B. (2000) *Suicide Terrorism: an Overview* (Research paper, Institute for Counterterrorism, 15 February), <http://www.ict.org/articele/articledet.cfm?articleid=128>
- Gidley, R. (2005) 'Crisis profile: death and displacement in Chechnya', *Reuters: AlertNet*, 8 November, <http://www.alertnet.org/thefacts/reliefresources/111997274494.htm> (accessed 18 January 2006).
- Glazov, J. (2005) 'Symposium: the she bomber', *Front Page Magazine*, 9 September, <http://www.frontpagemag.com/articles/ReadArticle.asp?ID=19432>
- Gordon, M. R. (2000) 'The grunts of Grozny', *The New York Times*, 27 February, sec. 6, p. 44, col. 1.
- Gould, R. (2005) 'Chechens through the Russian prism: Russia's leading Chechnya expert has produced a landmark work – but it is a landmark that also shows that Chechens and Russians still cannot hear each other' (book review), reprinted in *The Chechen Times*, 18 February.
- Greene, S. (2004) *Open Wound: Chechnya 1994 to 2003* (London, Trolley).
- Groskop, V. (2004) 'The Beslan atrocity: the black widows: women at heart of the terror cells: Moscow theatre siege survivors say female terrorists out for revenge were most chilling of their captors', *The Observer*, 5 September, p. 4.
- Haddad, S. (2004) 'A comparative study of Lebanese and Palestinian perceptions of suicide bombings: the role of militant Islam and socio-economic status', *International Journal of Comparative Sociology*, 45, 5, pp. 337–63.
- Hanuska, K. E. (2005) 'Putin, Dutch PM spar over rights in Chechnya', *The Moscow Times*, 3 November, p. 1; available at <http://www.themoscowtimes.com/stories/2005/11/03/003.html> (accessed 27 March 2006).
- Harris, J. F. (1996) 'Clinton, Yeltsin gloss over Chechen war', *The Washington Post*, 22 April, sec. A, p. 1.
- Herbert, D. (2004) *Religion and Civil Society: Rethinking Religion in the Contemporary World* (Burlington, VT, Ashgate).

- Hoffman, B. (1998) *Inside Terrorism* (New York, Columbia University Press).
- Jaimoukha, A. (2005) *The Chechens: a Handbook* (London, Routledge).
- Jamestown Foundation (2005) *Chechnya Weekly* 6, 9 (3 March), http://www.jamestown.org/publications_details.php?volume_id=409&&issue_id=3249 (accessed 30 March 2006).
- Juergensmeyer, M. (2002) *Terror in the Mind of God: the Global Rise of Religious Violence* (Berkeley, University of California Press).
- Kleinman, A., Das, V. and Lock, M. (eds.) (1997) *Social Suffering* (Berkeley, University of California Press).
- Kramer, M. (2004) 'The perils of counterinsurgency: Russia's war in Chechnya', *International Security*, 29, 3, pp. 5–62.
- Kreuger, A. and Malecková, J. (2004) 'Seeking the roots of terror', *Chronicle of Higher Education*, 6 June, <http://chronicle.com/free/v49/i39/39b01001.htm>
- Kullberg, A. (2003) 'The background of the Chechen independence movement VI: from the Dubrovka Theatre to "black widows"', *The Eurasian Politician*, 6 October, http://www.cc.jyu.fi/-aphamala/pe/2003/tsets_6.htm
- Lapidus, G. W. (1984) 'Ethnonationalism and political stability: the Soviet case', *World Politics*, 36, 4 (July), pp. 555–80.
- Lapidus, G. W. (1991) 'The structural context of Soviet ethno-nationalism', *Theory and Society*, 20, 5 (October), special issue on ethnic conflict in the Soviet Union, pp. 702–9.
- Lapidus, G. W. (1998) 'Contested sovereignty: the tragedy of Chechnya', *International Security*, 23, 1 (Summer), pp. 5–49.
- Lermontov, M. (1840) 'Kazach'ya kolybel'naya pesnya', reprinted in M. Wachtel (ed.), *The Cambridge Introduction to Russian Poetry* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2004), p. 58.
- Lieven, A. (1998) *Chechnya: Tombstone of Russian Power* (New Haven, Yale University Press).
- Lincoln, B. (2003) *Holy Terrors: Thinking about Religion after September 11* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press).
- Liss, A. (2006) 'Dark shadows in "normal" Chechnya', BBC News, 27 February, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/4757274.stm> (accessed 15 March 2006).
- Manchanda, R. (2001) 'Ambivalent gains in South Asian conflicts', in Meintjes *et al.* (eds.), 2001, pp. 99–121.
- McLean, R. T. (2005) 'Chechen jihad', *FrontPageMagazine.com*, 7 December, <http://www.frontpagemag.com/Articles/Printable.asp?ID=20377> (accessed 16 March 2006).
- Meier, A. (2003) *Black Earth: a Journey through Russia after the Fall* (New York, W. W. Norton).
- Meier, A. (2005) *Chechnya: to the Heart of a Conflict* (New York, W. W. Norton).
- Meintjes, S. (2001) 'War and post-war shifts in gender relations', in Meintjes *et al.* (eds.), 2001, pp. 63–77.
- Meintjes, S., Pillay, A. and Turshen, M. (eds.) (2001) *The Aftermath: Women in Post-Conflict Transformation* (London, Zed Books).
- MEMRI (2002) 'Wafa Idris: the celebration of the first female Palestinian suicide bomber – part III', *The Middle Eastern Media Research Institute (MEMRI), Inquiry and Analysis Series*, 85, 14 February, available at <http://memri.org/bin/articles.cgi?Page=archives&Area=ia&ID=A8502> (accessed 28 March 2006).
- Mydans, S. (2005) 'In Moscow a songwriter channels her despair and longing into Chechen anthems', *The New York Times*, 22 November, sec. E, col. 1, p. 3.
- Myers, S. L. (2004) 'From dismal Chechnya, women turn to bombs', *The New York Times*, 10 September, sec. A, col. 2, p. 1.
- Nekrich, A. M. (1978) *The Punished Peoples* (trans. George Saunders) (New York, W. W. Norton).
- Nivat, A. (2001) *Chienne de Guerre* (New York, PublicAffairs).
- Nivat, A. (2003) 'Brutality and indifference: the Russian army in Chechnya', *Crimes of War Project Magazine, Chechnya: the World Looks Away*, 18 April, pp. 18–19.

- Pape, R. A. (2005) *Dying to Win: the Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism* (New York, Random House).
- Parfitt, T. (2006) 'Chechen leader backs polygamy', *The Guardian*, 14 January, p. 18.
- Philp, J. and Mercer, D. (2002) 'Politicised pagodas and veiled resistance: contested urban space in Burma', *Urban Studies*, 39, 9, pp. 1587–610.
- Politkovskaya, A. (2001) *A Dirty War: a Russian Reporter in Chechnya* (ed. and trans. John Crowfoot) (London, Harvill).
- Politkovskaya, A. (2003) *A Small Corner of Hell: Dispatches from Chechnya by Anna Politkovskaya* (trans. Alexander Burry and Tatiana Tulchinsky) (Chicago, University of Chicago Press).
- Ramphel, M. (1997) 'Political widowhood in South Africa: the embodiment of ambiguity', in Kleinman *et al.* (eds.), 1997, pp. 99–118.
- Reuter, J. (2004) *Chechnya's Suicide Bombers: Desperate, Devout, or Deceived* report by the American Committee for Peace in Chechnya (renamed the American Committee for Peace in the Caucasus), 16 September, available at <http://www.peaceinchechnya.org/reports/SuicideReport/SuicideReport.pdf> (accessed 27 March 2006).
- Rotar', I. (2002) 'Under the green banner: Islamic radicals in Russia and the Former Soviet Union', *Religion, State and Society*, 30, 2, pp. 89–153.
- Routledge, P. (1995) 'Embodying spirits of resistance', *Environment and Planning*, 13, pp. 471–98.
- Sadeq, S. (2002) *Al-Wafd* (Egypt), 3 February, as cited in *Al-Quds Al-Arabi* (London), 4 February.
- Salecl, R. (2002) 'Why is a woman a symptom of rights?', *Women's Studies Journal* (Belgrade), available at Women's/Gender Studies Association of Countries in Transition, <http://www.zenskestudie.edu.yu/wgsact/e-library/e-lib0026.html> (accessed 38 March 2006).
- Scheper-Hughes, N. (2001) 'Maternal thinking and the politics of war', *Peace Review*, 8, 3 (26 September), pp. 353–59.
- Stalin, J. (1933) 'Speech at joint all-Union conference of collective farm shock workers', in *Women and Communism* (London, Lawrence & Wishart, 1950), available at <http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/stalin/works/subject/women/jaucf.htm> (accessed 28 March 2006).
- Starovoitova, G. (1995) 'Democracy in Russia after Chechnya', *Bulletin*, 5, 4 (19) (4 May), New School for Social Research East and Central Europe Program, <http://www.newschool.edu/centers/ecep/ninet.htm> (accessed 28 March 2006).
- Stern, J. (2003) *Terror in the Name of God: why Religious Militants Kill* (New York, HarperCollins).
- Tambiah, S. J. (1996) *Leveling Crowds: Ethnonationalist Conflict and Collective Violence in South Asia* (Berkeley, University of California Press).
- Tambiah, Y. (2005) 'Turncoat bodies: sexuality and sex work under militarisation in Sri Lanka', *Gender and Society*, 19, 2, April, pp. 243–61.
- Tishkov, V. (2004) *Chechnya: Life in a War-Torn Society* (Los Angeles, University of California Press).
- Vazayeva, A. and Uzakhova, Kh. (2003) 'Chechen bride snatching on the rise', *Human Rights Violations in Chechnya*, 4 July, <http://www.hrv.net/news6-03/10c-7-2003.htm> (accessed 5 January 2005).
- Venyavsky, S. (2005) 'Security forces kill suspected militants, including suicide bombers, in southern Russia', *Associated Press*, 15 May.
- Victor, B. (2003) *Army of Roses: inside the World of Palestinian Women Suicide Bombers* (New York, Rodale).
- Walker, E. W. (1998) 'Islam in Chechnya' (speech delivered at a Berkeley-Stanford Conference, University of California, Berkeley, 13 March), reprinted in *Berkeley Program in Soviet and Post-Soviet Studies Caucasus Newsletter*, pp. 10–15.
- Weir, F. (2004) 'The bloodiest chapter: a recent spate of Chechen terrorist attacks sends a centuries old conflict spiraling out of control', *Frontline*, 11 October.

- Weiss, M. (1997) 'War bodies, hedonist bodies: dialectics of the collective and the individual in Israeli society', *American Ethnologist*, 24, 4 (November), pp. 813–32.
- Williams, B. G. (2000) 'Commemorating "the Deportation" in post-Soviet Chechnya: the role of memorialization and collective memory in the 1994–1996 and 1999–2000 Russo-Chechen wars', *History and Memory*, 12, 1, pp. 101–34.
- Winterson, J. (1989) *Sexing the Cherry* (New York, Vintage International).
- Zarakhovich, Yu. (2001) 'Who's on trial? What the trial of a Russian colonel for the murder of a Chechen girl says about the state of Russia', *Time Magazine, Europe*, 3 April.
- Zedalis, D. D. (2004) 'Female suicide bombers', *Carlisle Papers in Security Studies*, June, Strategic Studies Institute, US War College, <http://www.carlisle.army.mil/ssi/Pubs/Pubresult.cfm?pubid=408> (accessed 20 March 2006).