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Jean-François Ratelle & Emil Aslan Souleimanov

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# Retaliation in Rebellion: The Missing Link to Explaining Insurgent Violence in Dagestan<sup>1</sup>

JEAN-FRANÇOIS RATELLE

The Institute for European, Russian & Eurasian Studies, The George Washington University, Washington, DC, USA

EMIL ASLAN SOULEIMANOV

Institute of Political Science, Faculty of Social Sciences, Charles University, Prague, Czech Republic

*This article posits that the remnants of archaic sociocultural norms, particularly the honour-imposed custom of retaliation, play a crucial role in the process of insurgent engagement in Russia's autonomous republic of Dagestan. Through a series of interviews with former insurgents, this study outlines two retaliation-centred mechanisms: "individual retaliation" and "spiritual retaliation" in order to explain the microcosm of motives behind insurgent activity in Dagestan. In doing so, this study problematizes the role of Salafi/Jihadist ideology as the main impetus for insurgent violence. Reversing the traditional causal link between violence and religion, this study also demonstrates that the development of Jihadist ideology is a by-product of insurgent mobilization rather than its cause.*

**Keywords** civil war, Dagestan, insurgency, North Caucasus, retaliation, Russia

In recent months, Dagestan has periodically resurfaced in the media as an alleged source of terrorist threat to Russia and the West. From the Boston bombings and Tamerlan Tsarnaev's connections to Dagestan to the most recent claims that the Sochi Olympics might have been targeted by Dagestani Jihadists, the mounting insurgency in Dagestan has been labelled as a new front in the global Jihadist movement along with Syria, Afghanistan, and Mali. Nevertheless, insurgency is not a new phenomenon in the mountainous region nestled between the Caucasus and the Caspian Sea.

Violence has gripped the North Caucasus since the early 1990s, becoming a post-Soviet hallmark of the area. Armed conflict in this restless corner of Russia first broke out in 1994 when the Russian Army invaded Chechnya, a breakaway territory that had declared its formal independence from Moscow three years prior. Since

Both authors contributed equally to this article.

Jean-François Ratelle is affiliated with The Institute for European, Russian & Eurasian Studies at The George Washington University. Emil Aslan Souleimanov is affiliated with the Institute of Political Science, Faculty of Social Sciences at Charles University.

Address correspondence to Jean-François Ratelle, The Institute for European, Russian & Eurasian Studies, The George Washington University, 1957 E. St., N.W., Elliott School of International Affairs, Washington, DC 20052, USA. E-mail: [ratelle@gwu.edu](mailto:ratelle@gwu.edu)

then, what started as a separatist movement with heavily ethno-nationalist overtones has gradually shifted to a religiously-motivated resistance. Geographically, the epicentre of violence has since gradually shifted away from Chechnya to other neighbouring autonomous republics, seizing ground in Ingushetia, Kabardino-Balkaria, and particularly in Dagestan.<sup>2</sup> Dagestan, a multi-ethnic autonomous republic of three million inhabitants, has become the hotbed of insurgent violence in the region, effectively replacing the weakened insurgency in Chechnya, where the Moscow-imposed “counter-terrorist operation” was officially terminated in 2009. In recent years, Dagestani insurgents have grown potent enough not only to massively target law enforcement, state officials, and pro-regime clergy within the republic, but also to carry out highly lethal terrorist attacks in other parts of Russia.

Several researchers have attributed North Caucasian fighters’ fierce resistance to their religious fervour,<sup>3</sup> placing emphasis on the (global) Jihadist movement and its historical roots in the region. Nevertheless, while focusing on the religious goals and motives of North Caucasian insurgents in general, and Dagestani insurgents in particular, this depiction has largely failed to fully explain the internal causes and dynamics of the local resistance movement. Macro-level explanations concentrating on ideological influences have stopped short of addressing the individual choices and dilemmas of insurgents in the North Caucasus, including Dagestan. In reality, Salafism and its militant form, widely referred to as Jihadism, have been a relatively recent ideological development in the North Caucasus resistance movement—dating back to the early 2000s. Salafism can therefore not account for the history of massive anti-Russian insurgencies in the region dating back to the late 18th century, nor can it explain the continuing growth of individual participation in the Dagestani insurgency.

This article challenges the prevailing mono-causal approach to explaining violence in the North Caucasus as a purely Islamic insurgency and a part of the global Jihadist movement.<sup>4</sup> By applying micro-level insight into the ongoing civil war in Dagestan, we assert that the concept of retaliation rooted in the remnants of archaic forms of social organization, such as the concepts of honour and honour-based retaliation stemming from the eroding custom of “blood feud,” enables us to better understand the inflow of new recruits into the ranks of the local insurgency. This article does not argue that retaliation is the only motivation for young people to join the insurgency. As this study illustrates, particular root causes of violent engagement are often intertwined, forming an overarching motivational underpinning that is highly complex and multi-layered. Individual retaliation often serves as both a *leitmotiv* for violence resulting from a variety of wrongs perpetrated against an individual, as well as an ultimate end goal *per se*. This article therefore identifies two basic retaliation-centred mechanisms: “individual retaliation” and “spiritual retaliation.” In so doing, we argue that retaliation is one of the key incentives for violent insurgency that remains under-researched in the existing scholarship on the North Caucasus, as well as in theoretical scholarship on civil war and insurgency in general.

To accomplish this, we first explain the concept of retaliation as a key incentive for violent engagement in Dagestan and then examine the scholarship on violent engagement in this republic. The third section sheds light on the data and methods used in the present research. The fourth section goes on to explore the socioeconomic situation in Dagestan and the rise of Salafism (and Jihadism) as ideological alternatives to the corruption inherent in existing government entities.<sup>5</sup> Finally, the two retaliation-based mechanisms of violent insurgency in Dagestan are explored in detail.

## Understanding Retaliation

This study applies the concept of retaliation in a way that both differs from, and correlates with, the narrower concept of “blood revenge,” or, relatedly, “blood feud.”<sup>6</sup> Interwoven terms, “blood revenge” and retaliation are embedded in patriarchal behavioural norms, evolving around the notions of male courage, masculinity, and warrior ethos. More importantly, both terms are rooted in the concept of honour mandated by local tradition and reinforced by public opinion as “washed away” when violated. Causes of “blood offence” have historically included murder, injury leading to death, rape, or serious verbal insult. Additionally, in the predominantly classless Dagestani society comprised of “free men” vying for prestige and social status, acts of social injustice or (bad) governance of either local or alien origin imposed on individual Dagestanis have historically been considered humiliating. As such, they have provoked defiance or, if necessitated by circumstances, retaliation for the sake of restoring one’s honour, both individual and collective. With the concept of honour applied so broadly, retaliation has been interpreted as a highlander’s profound moral obligation. Its application has therefore exceeded the domain of individual offence and vengeance, engendering considerable social ramifications.

In all of these instances, the custom of “blood revenge” requires retaliation that may be carried out by either the individual directly “offended,” or his male relatives against either the direct culprit of the offence or the culprit’s male relatives on the patrilineal side. On the contrary, retaliation is usually aimed at the direct culprit of offense, not his or her relatives, and is carried out directly by an “offended” individual. In certain cases (for instance, when an offended individual is a woman or is incapable of retaliating for himself or herself because of a variety of reasons, for instance, injury or imprisonment), an “offended” male relative may also retaliate against the direct culprit.<sup>7</sup>

The custom of “blood revenge” in its genuine form has largely eroded in Dagestani society due to the complex processes of urbanization and modernization that have gained momentum in the republic since the middle of the last century. This evolution has been conditioned by the gradual decline of the social role of Dagestani clans (*tukhums*) that have been increasingly replaced by nuclear families. Recent years have seen a gradual separation of an individual from the domain of family or clan-based group identity. In today’s Dagestan, an individual is usually perceived individually rather than through clan identity, while familial identity still remains commonplace.

Contrarily to neighbouring Chechnya and Ingushetia, where clan identity has retained its importance in the lives of ordinary people, the decline of clans in Dagestan has resulted in the altered status of retaliation in Dagestani public opinion. Although the concept of male honour and the resulting need to safeguard it has persisted, targeting an individual’s relatives is commonly considered a socially unacceptable practice. Nevertheless, even in contemporary Dagestani society, the process of retaliation—widely referred to in the former “blood revenge”-based vocabulary as “blood-taking”—is often conceived of as the only way for a male to restore his honour and dignity after an act of offence. Accordingly, individual retaliation has remained predominant in Dagestan in such a way that the direct culprit of a “blood offence,” and not his relatives, is to be held responsible for the wrongdoing.

### Theorizing Violent Engagement: Retaliation and Collective Action Dilemma

In order to explain individual participation in high-risk activities such as rebellion, insurgency, and civil war, scholarship has focused on the “collective action dilemma.”<sup>8</sup> As Lichbach explains, insurgency is seen as a high-risk activity whereby individuals bear the majority of the risks (death and imprisonment), whereas the potential rewards are seen as a public good (overthrowing the government, access to power for the insurgents). According to this Rationalist strand of literature, individuals will choose to rebel if the potential benefits of joining (economic incentives) outweigh the costs of participation in rebellion (costly sanctions). In other words, rebels are usually utility-maximizing individuals using rebellion to achieve economic gain. An important subset of the literature is associated with Neo-Classical economic theories and has focused mostly on what is now referred to as “the greed aspect” of violence.<sup>9</sup> These purely economic models nevertheless fail to explain the growing participation in insurgent groups in Dagestan, an enormously risky and rather economically disadvantageous behaviour.

In order to further the understanding of violent engagement apart from a purely Rationalist approach, scholars have focused on selective incentives to explain why ordinary people would join insurgent movements without potential economic benefits.<sup>10</sup> Several factors have been identified as reducing the collective action dilemma and the risk analysis of individuals, including pre-existing social networks,<sup>11</sup> social ties,<sup>12</sup> level of repression,<sup>13</sup> and faith.<sup>14</sup> These incentives usually act as a way of reducing the perception of risk in the cost-benefit analysis put forward by individuals in a conflict. In the case of Dagestan, Jihadism has often been taken for granted as the main incentive for the development of an Islamic rebellion since the end of the 1990s.<sup>15</sup>

Research on the insurgency in the North Caucasus has followed this trend by focusing on the development of the Caucasus Emirate and its alleged association with al-Qaeda to explain the growing, voluntary, and recurrent participation in the insurgency. According to this approach, the collective action dilemma is overcome by fighters based on faith-induced commitment and the will to establish an Islamic theocracy.<sup>16</sup> In other words, even with the current state of the insurgency in Dagestan and the rather improbable establishment of a Sharia-based state, individuals are still willing to risk their lives to fight against governmental forces.

Based on our empirical material, we argue that Islam and spirituality play an important role in the process of violent engagement; however, we challenge the idea that Jihadist ideology is the main impetus in Dagestan. Jihadism might offer a reasonable explanation of the conflict for external observers, but it does not explain why a substantial number of individuals decide to take on the vital risks of joining the insurgency, an extremely risky endeavour, without being devout Salafists. The problem with collective action theory as a stand-alone approach is that it gives a valid explanation as to why so many individuals did *not* join a rebellion, but it does not provide an in-depth explanation for those who did.<sup>17</sup> As noted by Kalyvas and Kocher, theories on violent mobilization should focus on the general participants in the insurgency and not only on the “first comers” with strong ideological motivations.<sup>18</sup> Furthermore, our understanding of violent engagement in an insurgency should not be limited to a dichotomy between participation and non-participation.<sup>19</sup> In other words, one should also refrain from pinpointing a single motivation for insurgent activity.

In order to challenge the monocausal approach, we contextualize the process of violent engagement using interviews with fighters in Dagestan. By focusing on elements of traditional culture in Dagestan, we argue that a new overarching theoretical concept, retaliation, helps to bridge the three previously identified theoretical approaches understood as selective incentives: socioeconomic grievances, religion, and repression. We argue that retaliation acts as an effective source of social mobilization that accounts for a gradual inflow of new recruits into the insurgency, and simultaneously represents a select number of under-theorized incentives in the study of violent engagement.

## **Data and Methods**

To demonstrate the importance of retaliation in the study of violent engagement, this study utilizes methods pertinent to ethnographic research for a variety of reasons. Firstly, the renewed interest in micro-level analysis of violent conflict, particularly internal irregular war, has gone hand in hand with the rediscovery of ethnographic research techniques<sup>20</sup> that seek to penetrate the surface of violent conflict with its intrinsic complexity and contextual richness. Against this backdrop, ethnographic techniques are indispensable when examining the motivations of participants in violent conflict. Secondly, ethnographic techniques are utilized due to the lack of primary data on the motivations for violent participation in the North Caucasus in general and in Dagestan in particular. Indeed, no study to date, either scholarly or journalistic, has sought to explain the motivations of individual insurgents for joining resistance groups in the North Caucasus. Likewise, given the clandestine nature of the topic and the security concerns of both the researchers and the interviewees, there are no databases or public sources providing confessions of current or former insurgents and their relatives and close friends that could have been utilized in the research.

Empirical material was gathered from Dagestan and from among Dagestani communities in Russia, Turkey, and various European cities from 2004 to 2013. A series of repeated semi-structured interviews was first conducted with current fighters (1), former fighters (13), relatives of current (1) and former (10) fighters, as well as their close friends (1), and dozens of ordinary Dagestanis, all in various settings. Security officials from the Dagestani Ministry of Interior (5), Federal Security Service (1), Dagestani ministers (3), and several public servants in Makhachkala were also interviewed. In all interviews, interviewees are referred to by their first name only for safety reasons. Over the course of nearly a decade, the authors have remained in direct personal contact with the interviewees and are therefore able to verify their identities.

More specifically, the ethnographic techniques utilized are greatly enhanced by direct observation, as we have conducted frequent visits to Dagestan as well as to the neighbouring areas of the North Caucasus, Moscow, Istanbul, and various European cities to meet interviewees in person to gain first-hand insight into the sociocultural context of the research topic. Altogether, we have spent over five months in Dagestan in an effort to comprehend the daily life of the local population and the importance of their milieu when exploring the patterns of insurgent activity. While in Dagestan, we conducted numerous interviews with ordinary people, which helped us to obtain different perspectives on the social roles of retaliation as a driving force behind violent engagement. Extensive fieldwork has also enabled us to

overcome a common methodological limitation in the study of insurgent behaviour in civil war, as our observations and interviews represent an important aggregation of primary data for a single republic and a common pool of fighters. Additionally, our empirical material has helped us to comprehend the sociopsychological processes of violent participation by focusing on the daily lives of ordinary Dagestanis and the nuances of Dagestan's socioeconomic situation.

Finally, as the two authors' ethnographic fieldwork has been conducted largely independently of each other and without any links between the pools of interviewees or facilitating networks, the resulting randomization substantially reduces potential bias in the research. Nevertheless, we acknowledge the impossibility of fully negating potential bias, as our interview samples remain small and relate to an ongoing conflict with potential security issues for the interviewees and researchers. This sample of interviews with insurgents, however, remains the largest sample available in the current literature helping to contextualize the current patterns of violent participation in Dagestan.

### **Understanding the Landscape: Dagestan's Socioeconomic and Political Situation**

The current socioeconomic situation in the North Caucasus is extremely precarious, with observers agreeing that it serves as a breeding ground for social tensions in the region.<sup>21</sup> The North Caucasus is among Russia's poorest regions in terms of unemployment rates and the levels of Gross Regional Products (GRP). Once a significant industrial hub, Dagestan is now ranked 70th on the list of Russia's federal subjects by GRP per capita. According to official sources, 35 percent of Dagestanis are "economically inactive," meaning that more than a third of the republic's population does not participate in Dagestan's economic life.<sup>22</sup> While official sources place the level of unemployment in Dagestan at around 12 percent, which is nearly three times higher than the federal average, independent estimates suggest a rate of about one-third of the local population.<sup>23</sup> Unemployment reaches absolute numbers among youth and in the isolated mountainous areas of Central Dagestan, making highlanders the most vulnerable population in socioeconomic terms. Demographic growth in Dagestan, however, has been at around 20 persons per 1,000 persons per year, ranking it among Russia's three fastest-growing populations, after Chechnya and Ingushetia.<sup>24</sup>

Currently, up to 70–80 percent of Dagestan's budget is subsidized by the federal centre.<sup>25</sup> Moscow's episodic efforts to boost economic growth in Dagestan have nevertheless mostly ended in vain due to the high levels of corruption among both federal and local authorities. Interestingly, corruption has grown so strong that even public offices are being sold in Dagestan, with around half a million dollars required for an individual to be appointed as a government minister.<sup>26</sup> Russia's current prime minister, Dmitry Medvedev, has described the appalling scope of corruption in Dagestan as "monstrous."<sup>27</sup>

Widespread corruption coupled with federal and local authorities' inability to combat it has further strengthened the commonly held belief among ordinary Dagestanis that Moscow's fundamental goal is to maintain the loyalty of the local clan-styled elites. Indeed, according to many Dagestanis, federal transfers are used to strengthen patronage networks and to feed corruption rather than to address the pressing needs of ordinary people. In fact, because local authorities are largely

unelected and rather appointed directly by Moscow, they are said to be more interested in using federal transfers to suppress any potential political opposition rather than tackling the republic's grim socioeconomic problems.<sup>28</sup> Since the late 1990s, under the pretext of combating "Wahhabism" and other extremist religious ideologies, Dagestani elites have consistently liquidated the majority of the secular political opposition, leaving the republic without a political alternative with the potential to peacefully challenge the unpopular regime.<sup>29</sup>

Against the backdrop of the current lack of secular political alternatives, many Dagestanis have gradually turned to Salafism as one of the few alternative forms of "good governance" in an effort to channel grievances against the local regime. In fact, Salafi ideology has appealed to some ordinary Dagestanis as a panacea against their socioeconomic problems, as it advocates the establishment of an Islamic theocracy anchored on the promise of prosperity, purity, and social justice. Salafism has rapidly gained popularity among certain segments of Dagestani society as masses of Dagestanis became disillusioned by the corrupt policies of local political elites. Salafi ideology has particularly been on the rise amongst younger Dagestanis. According to a recent survey, around one-fifth of Dagestani youth consider themselves to be moderate Salafis, with 12 percent openly approving the violent methods adopted by local insurgents.<sup>30</sup>

Police impunity has been yet another source of popular discontent with Dagestani elites. Since the failed incursion into Dagestan from Chechnya by a united Chechen-Dagestani Jihadist army in August 1999, the (alleged) members of the local Salafi community have become the targets of a massive crackdown. Since then, for many undereducated, underpaid, and corrupt local policemen facing impunity, capturing people for ransom has provided them with a solid source of income. Deep religiosity has been considered especially suspicious by the authorities, who have carried out massive raids against real and alleged "Wahhabists" and their sympathizers.<sup>31</sup> Consequently, thousands of Dagestanis have been accused of religiously-motivated terrorism, taken into custody by local authorities, and subjected to vicious interrogations. Such interrogations routinely involve beatings, torture, intimidation, and even rape.<sup>32</sup> In an attempt to acquire necessary confessions, members of both federal and local law enforcement agencies have not hesitated to blackmail and physically attack family members of real or alleged Salafis, including their female relatives. When authorities have lacked enough evidence to convict alleged or real Salafis, these individuals have still been incarcerated and eventually set free following a few months or years of torture and humiliation.<sup>33</sup> According to a reputable Dagestani lawyer, only 5 to 10 percent of those convicted on allegations of participation in or support of terrorist groups are founded, while the remaining allegations are fabricated by authorities.<sup>34</sup> Some have never made peace with what was done to them during their prison terms, thus perpetuating the cycle of retaliation.

### **Violent Participation in Dagestan: Two Retaliation-Centred Mechanisms**

With very few exceptions, the interviewees did not identify a single motive for joining the ranks of Jihadist *jamaats* in Dagestan. All of the former fighters interviewed indicated a combination of motives, an outcome that is consistent with the findings of existing scholarship.<sup>35</sup> When asked about the most recurring motives for insurgent participation, our interviewees identified several factors, such as the erosion of moral values, police impunity, and rampant corruption. All of these motives corroborate

the previous narrative about young people joining the insurgency as a way to protest against corruption, socioeconomic challenges, and nepotism; however, the most important factor mentioned by former fighters and their relatives has been the incessant need to avenge the wrongs committed against them by police forces. Many interviewees expressed a strong feeling of shame brought about by police abuse and insisted on the importance of violence in order to cleanse their honour.

Violent participation in Dagestan is thus a complex phenomenon combining socioeconomic problems, the growing role of Islam in the republic, and the abusive behaviour of security forces. Based on these three factors and our empirical material, we identify two basic retaliation-centred mechanisms that explain violent engagement in Dagestan: “individual retaliation” and “spiritual retaliation.” At the same time, we argue that an intermediary mechanism that functions as an enabler is crucial in order to reinforce the process of retaliation at the individual and spiritual level. In other words, it is necessary to create a “cognitive opening” for individual and “spiritual retaliation,” but by itself rarely results in pushing individuals into rebellion. The other two retaliation-centred mechanisms act as the main causal factors leading to violent engagement. To demonstrate this process, we will first discuss the role of “cognitive opening” for retaliation followed by a discussion of the two retaliation-centred mechanisms, and finally we explain how they differ by focusing on disengagement.

### **Social Injustice as a “Cognitive Opening” for Retaliation**

Retaliation is generally the product of a personal “cognitive opening” by which individuals develop a visceral aversion to the current socioeconomic situation and political elites in Dagestan. This aversion is rarely sufficient to push people into insurgent groups and violence; however, it reinforces the resentment and hatred toward political structures in Dagestan and creates a receptive environment for retaliation-centred mechanisms.

Individuals, mostly young people 18–35 years old, witness their own limited social mobility and employment opportunities compared to the previous generation that grew up during Soviet times. This inability to realize themselves professionally or build a better future makes them very critical of the current state of affairs in Dagestan. Gadjimurad, a young Salafist living in Makhachkala, summarizes this situation as follows:

It’s not that I don’t want to find a job and build a family. Look at me, I have a Master’s degree and I’m working on my Ph.D. However, I know very well that these diplomas will not bring me anything, as I don’t know any influential politicians or anyone in the administration. . . . It’s not America here, diplomas are worth nothing without contacts. My relatives are from the villages and are not influential in Makhachkala. . . . I would like to complete my military service, but the federal centre is not drafting Dagestanis, and I don’t have money to buy my draft or my military ticket [*voenni bileť*]. All I have is my faith, Islam, and God, and that they cannot take from me. What other options do you think I have in the future except . . .<sup>36</sup>

We repeatedly encountered this narrative throughout our fieldwork, as it was often repeated by young individuals who had migrated from highlands rural villages

to urban centres (Makhachkala, Kaspiysk, Derbent). For highlanders, the importance given to merits, traditions, and honours make them particularly prompt to challenge corrupt practices and unfairness in the Dagestani society. They perceive the current negative situation in the republic as self-reproducing, whereby the same small class of corrupt elites will always control resources, money, and the job market. These grievances are very rarely sufficient to trigger violence on a larger scale in Dagestan; however, they are necessary to create a “cognitive opening” for retaliation against political elites and law enforcement agencies. For the majority of people engaging in violence, there is a synergic process between the “cognitive opening” to retaliation and the two main relation-centred mechanisms. As Magomed explains,

Not only do they [corrupt elites and *siloviki*, members of law enforcement agencies] not let us feed our family as they monopolize federal transfers and give jobs to their friends and relatives, they also harass us to extract bribes and money. If we don't pay, we can disappear or get beaten up for no reason. What kind of justice do you think it is...<sup>37</sup>

A number of interviewees have addressed the current policies of local elites—widely labelled as *bespredel* (lawlessness beyond any limits)—by referencing an alleged alien occupation similar to previous bloody repression exhibited by the Dagestani nobility of the 17th and 18th centuries to subjugate “free men,” as well as the violent Russian colonial conquest of the 19th century. According to a former fighter,

Even the Germans didn't do to the ordinary people on occupied land [during the Second World War] what our politicians are doing to us now.... I've never heard of the fascists killing, raping, or robbing without a reason, which is what the politicians and *siloviki* are doing, and nobody is held responsible for that. It's just normal in Dagestan.<sup>38</sup>

Others have repeatedly asserted that this might be the mere continuation of Russia's old-time policy of “destroying Dagestan and Dagestanis” (in others' vocabulary “Muslims”), referring to the fact that none of the controversial activities of Makhachkala authorities would have been made possible without Moscow's approval or command.<sup>39</sup> From a somewhat different angle, another interviewee has pointed to the fact that, “as Dagestani *khans* and *nutsals* [kings and princes] had once been trying to break the backbone of Dagestanis as highlanders, trying to remake them into slaves, authorities [*vlasti*] are trying to eradicate our spirit as a free people, of people with honour... They know what they're doing.”<sup>40</sup>

Over the last two decades, Dagestanis have developed a profound bitterness towards the system. These individuals have become much more critical of what is described as the erosion of moral values observed in Makhachkala, the gradual loss of traditional values, and the growing disconnect between elites and the pillars of Islam. They voice more openly their grievances against corruption and nepotism in the republic, often decrying the role played by *siloviki*, businessmen, and politicians. Many interviewees have reasserted the moral obligation of ordinary Dagestanis to face this social injustice and “attempts to enslave us” with arms in hand “as generations of our forefathers did”—a salient moral obligation which, according to age-old Dagestani customs, renders a highlander the right to retaliate against a corrupt and violent regime and its law enforcement. Retaliation thus

features as a legitimate response to the excessive and essentially illegitimate use of force by *siloviki* and the “anti-people policies” of the local authorities.

### Individual Retaliation for Individual Humiliation

Over the course of our interviews and contact with insurgents and their relatives, one dominant narrative emerged when participants were asked to identify the most important causal factor motivating individuals to join the insurgency: individual retaliation for individual humiliation. The majority of respondents indicated that they seek retribution against the brutality of police forces. This topic often provoked feelings of disdain and hatred, with individuals directly acknowledging the need to avenge honour and shame through retaliation, in keeping with traditional Dagestani customs. An excerpt from an interview with the brother of a former insurgent exemplifies this intense resentment towards police forces when he states, “no one in Dagestan is hated as much as cops,” and points out the ignorance, corruption, and low morality of *siloviki*. “All they [*siloviki*] want is to make money on the sufferings of ordinary Dagestanis, as they often abduct innocent youth on the grounds of their alleged support for the insurgents, or just if they are in a bad mood that day.”<sup>41</sup>

This narrative was echoed by the majority of interviewees, regardless of their social status, (ir)religiosity, or opinion regarding the insurgent movement. Several respondents noted that one’s Islamic appearance or ostentatious observance of religion, such as regularly attending mosques or having a “Wahhabi beard,” is often considered suspicious by police officers. While conducting field research in Dagestan, one of the authors was regularly stopped, searched, and harassed by security forces in Makhachkala based on the simple fact that he had a “Wahhabi beard.”<sup>42</sup> Police forces in Dagestan exhibit surprisingly aggressive behaviour based on what they consider to be “insurgent” (larger build and calluses on hands) and “Salafi” (long beard) characteristics. This type of religious harassment could be considered the first in a series of abusive treatments leading to eventual imprisonment and torture of those perceived as potential insurgents. While interviewing young Salafists at the mosque in Makhachkala, many of them reported that, “we are harassed by the security forces on a regular basis because we attend the [Kotrova] mosque, or simply because of how we look. I know many brothers who disappeared and were tortured because of that.”<sup>43</sup>

Irrespective of whether these interviewees speak from their personal experience or not,<sup>44</sup> they have all described incidents of brutal torture, including being routinely beaten and sustaining serious injuries, in a powerful and graphic manner that often focused on the humiliation sustained by the detainees. Interviewees have described these places of “temporal detainment” [*kamery predvaritelnogo zaklucheniya*] as “hell,” along with a gruesome depiction of the traumatic experience of torture, in line with what is regularly documented by human rights agencies in Dagestan.<sup>45</sup> Rustam, a village-based Dagestani who participated in various insurgent groups in the early 2000s, told us that, “prison was a horrible experience; I don’t want or feel able to talk about the humiliation and abuse I sustained there. I understand why people choose to join Jihad after that. I didn’t in order to protect my family from falling victims to the same abuse.”<sup>46</sup> Numerous government officials privately admitted that they understand why people sought retaliation,<sup>47</sup> going so far as to acknowledge how fortunate they are not to be exposed to the same kind of police brutality, and confessing that they would react in the same manner if a similar situation were to befall them or their family.<sup>48</sup>

As previously mentioned, the trauma provoked by physical violence is reinforced by the critical importance of honour in Dagestani traditions. As reputation and honour are the core elements of Dagestani identity, “offended” individuals emphasized that retaliation was the only way to erase the shame sustained by them, their family, and their relatives. Interviewees repeatedly stressed that since “you cannot bring these bastards [*sukiny deti*] to justice, the only option remaining is to beat the shit out of them yourself.”<sup>49</sup> In this context, the idea of humiliation is seen as being directly in opposition to the concept of honour and personal duty, ultimately creating a powerful dichotomy reinforcing the potential for self-sacrifice. As one interviewee explained, “[honour is the] only value that is worth dying for. . . . In certain situations, you can’t help but recapture the values of traditional blood-feud.”<sup>50</sup> Retaliation is therefore considered to be the only possible way out for “those with dignity” to “make peace with themselves.”<sup>51</sup>

Individual retaliation is not the result of the extensive role of religious figures; it is rather the product of intertwining feelings of shame produced by abusive treatment and the importance of honour and masculinity in Dagestani culture. Psychological research explains that an individual “seeking vengeance will often compromise his or her own integrity, social standing, and personal safety for the sake of revenge.”<sup>52</sup> If individual retaliation is framed in terms of theories of violent engagement, the traumatic experience coupled with Dagestani traditions act as the main incentive to overcome the collective action dilemma, leading to insurgent violence for the majority of interviewees.

### **Retaliation for Spiritual Humiliation Against Social Decadence**

Remarkably, (former) fighters have linked retaliation to a larger sense of collective and social duty toward Islam and Dagestani traditions. Throughout the interviews, reference to Islam and Jihad as motivating factors towards violence has been done in a rather ambiguous way. Fighters have spoken of Islam in connection with elements of pan-Dagestani cultural nationalism such as customary law and the local “highlander ethos,” failing to distinguish between cultural nationalism and Salafism.<sup>53</sup> Certain interviewees have suggested that rather than being an independent incentive, Islam is perceived as an integral part of the local tradition, an ideological umbrella for “old-time values,” and an equivalent for social conservatism.

This social conservatism has been described by fighters with concepts such as “spoiled morals” and social decadence, regrouping a plethora of social behaviours, which includes, *inter alia*, homosexuality, frivolous behaviour of unwed women, a lack of proper respect for the elderly, consumption of alcohol and drugs, “Godlessness,” the disrespectful and ill-mannered behaviour of Dagestanis, and disrespect toward Islam.<sup>54</sup> Most of the interviewees have addressed Salafism and Dagestani traditions as if they were one in the same.

From these conflicting narratives of nationalism and religion, we identify a second retaliation-centred mechanism based on spiritual humiliation. This mechanism unfolds against “spoiled morals,” and differs from a simple pattern of religious radicalization associated with Jihadist ideology. In fact, we did not observe what is depicted as the Caucasus Emirate narrative in academic literature focusing on Salafi-Jihadi discourse over the course of our fieldwork.<sup>55</sup>

On the contrary, the humiliation provoked by social decadence is not limited to a small fringe of Jihadists; it rather extends to a growing spectrum of the local

population and mixes elements of nationalism and Islamism. “Spiritual retaliation” is thus understood as a collective process whereby government officials, police forces, and the pro-regime clergy are seen as bearing the responsibility for social decadence and are seen as the enemies of Islam and Dagestan in the eyes of the “offended” individuals. Rather than provoking disdain and disapproval toward one’s ill-behaviours as observed in many conservative societies, Dagestani highlanders perceive themselves as the last vanguard in preserving traditional values in Dagestan. In response to these offenses, many fighters have interpreted it as their ultimate duty to defend Dagestani traditions and Islam against this social decadence. Interviewees have insisted on their duty to use any available means including violence (retaliation) in order to protect Dagestani highlander culture against decadence and humiliation.

Marc Sageman calls this phenomenon a form of “vicarious humiliation,” whereby individuals feel compelled to join Jihad as a form of collective struggle.<sup>56</sup> The sense of humiliation and shame is broader than the simple retaliation for wrongs perpetrated against one individual during detention. “Spiritual retaliation” is the result of profound resentment against Dagestani society and its elites. It usually triggers a feeling of moral disengagement from the society and subsequently creates a cognitive opening for a new ideology to enter or to join a new environment. As the European Commission’s Expert Group on Violent Radicalisation underlines, vicarious humiliation is usually common in “charismatic persons motivated by idealism and a strong sense of justice. Jihadism or other varieties of political violence are embraced through an intellectual process where the need to take action gradually becomes a political or religious duty.”<sup>57</sup>

For retaliation-seeking individuals driven by this mechanism, the only way to purify society and establish the basic tenets of Islamic law in Dagestan is through violence. The erosion of traditional Dagestani society and Islam represents the “ultimate societal sin,” which can only be avenged by means of Jihad. Jihad has been conceptualized by our interviewees in terms of an armed struggle against the current situation—a resolute challenge to today’s evils and a legitimate means to “punish” corrupt *siloviki* and to bring the behaviour of ill-mannered youth in line with “our sacred mountainous values.”<sup>58</sup>

As these individuals were not victimized by policemen, they usually seek retaliation against a larger spectrum of actors ranging from political and religious elites to *siloviki*. In Dagestan, government elites, *siloviki*, and businessmen are often associated with the corruption of Dagestani and Islamic values as well as being the main advocates for the anti-Salafist campaign. They are seen as decadent and depraved based on their assault on Dagestani traditions, impunity for their crimes, and the way they frame the struggle against Islam to maintain their power.

A commonly decried situation that drew particularly negative reactions from the majority of our interviewees was the fact that police officers, local oligarchs, and high-ranking bureaucrats, as well as their sons, repeatedly commit crimes with impunity all across Dagestan. The brother of an insurgent told us that the “brazen-faced kids of almighty bosses [*vsemogushchikh nachal'nikov*] are the worst in Dagestan.”<sup>59</sup> Many of our interviewees focused on the infamous incident of a 14-year-old school girl from Khasavyurt who was raped by a group of teenagers for three full days in 2010. Since the rapists happened to be the sons and nephews of highly ranked local “bosses” and the girl was coming from a poor social background and lacking (influential) male relatives who could have backed her, the case was suspended by local authorities until it was publicized, prompting federal

authorities to step in.<sup>60</sup> Zelimkhan, a former insurgent, added: “if you’re someone’s son, then you can do whatever you want—beat someone to death, drive over, even rape someone—you can be sure that your daddy or uncle will get you out of trouble . . . and no police would ever dare to interfere.”<sup>61</sup>

Although “spoiled morals” are mostly seen as a problem associated with oligarchs, politicians, state elites, and *siloviki*, it also extends to the behaviour of ordinary people living in urban centres. According to our interviewees, these societal sins are found particularly in “spoiled Makhachkala” and other urban areas with questionable reputations and which exhibit the most provocative and ill-bred behaviour.<sup>62</sup> While conducting interviews in rural and remote villages in Dagestan, we encountered a very common narrative decrying how urban dwellers and the younger generation of Dagestanis have been corrupted by Russian values and their “spoiled morals” imported into Dagestan. Magomed, a 23-year-old Salafī, regularly complained to us in Makhachkala about the fact that he was disgusted by how Dagestanis behave nowadays. He insisted on the importance of restoring old Dagestani traditions, particularly with regards to the way women dress and act, proclaiming,<sup>63</sup> “I would rather die rather than see my wife wearing western clothing and disrespecting Dagestani traditions. . . . Insurgents are simply defending our values and traditions.”<sup>64</sup> These values have been highlighted by almost all interviewees following the traditional concept of highlander’s honour [*gorskaya chest*], which dictates a certain set of values, usually gender and age-based, ranging from dress code to conduct. Enver, 30, describes this gender-related line of argument as particularly powerful in Dagestan’s patriarchal society:

Modesty and restraint have abandoned highlander females [*goryanki*]. Look at the way they dress and behave themselves; is this worthy of a highlander, a Dagestani, a Muslim? Some of the guys, particularly those “city boys,” dress like homosexuals—all those tight pants, long hair. . . . It would be funny if it wasn’t so sad.<sup>65</sup>

Suleyman, 23, points out the fact that, “driving a fast car, pretending to be something, the obsession with fashion and style [*pokazukha*] . . . this has all replaced the old values [*starie ponatiya*] that constituted what it meant to be a true Dagestani.”<sup>66</sup> Magomed, a former insurgent, adds:

The highlanders have been losing their age-old values. . . . Previously, our forefathers readily sacrificed their lives for the sake of honour—a given word meant something. . . . Now, look at what we look like—our males have become addicted to alcohol and drugs, our females drink and smoke, some of them hang out in discos overnight and do God knows what kind of things. . . . There is no respect for elderly people anymore. All that Dagestanis should do is care about the dignity and values that we have inherited from our ancestors. Once we stick to our age-old values [*adat*, including blood revenge, Islam, and sharia], we’ll have peace and order as back in the past, and there will be no bad people [women with spoiled morals, drunkards, drug addicts, homosexuals] in Dagestan.<sup>67</sup>

Although the two retaliation-centred mechanisms share similar patterns, such as a common hatred of corrupt political elites, a profound disdain for the *siloviki* and

their lack of transparency as well as the overall “spoiled morals” in Dagestani society, “spiritual humiliation” differs from “individual retaliation” as it involves a deeper rejection of the entire political system and a significant segment of the local population. “Offended” individuals are thus more prone to seek a new way of life through violence and to fully integrate themselves in insurgent groups.

When individuals avenge in the name of “spiritual retaliation,” the likelihood of leaning towards “Jihadization” is much higher than for individuals seeking personal retaliation. When asked about the motivation of their comrades-in-arms choosing to remain in the ranks of *jamaats*, former fighters have pointed to the fact that either “they still have something to do” or have opted for “the path of Jihad,”<sup>68</sup> thereby distinguishing explicitly between two forms of motivation: personal retaliation on the one hand, and “spiritual retaliation” on the other. We observed that younger as well as more educated individuals often choose the “path of Jihad” because they do not have important social ties or family duties, do not foresee a bright future in Dagestan’s corrupt society, are usually more idealistic, and are more prone to risk-taking behaviour.

Though perhaps not as common as “individual retaliation,” individuals driven by “spiritual retaliation” represent the resilient core of insurgent groups in Dagestan. On the contrary, fighters driven by “individual retaliation” are more prone to disengage from insurgent groups and instead follow in the path of “blood-taking.”

### **The Act of “Blood-taking”: Understanding Retaliation Mechanisms Through Disengagement**

When asked about the reasons that made them leave the insurgency, the vast majority of former fighters, after some hesitation, pointed out that, “I did what I had to do.” For example, Akhmed, 32, admitted that the majority of the fighters he knew had left Jihadist *jamaats* after the act of “blood-taking,” that is, a one-time retaliation followed by a return to normal life. He affirmed that, “if you have other priorities than to just run in the mountains for your lifetime, if you want to settle down and get a family and kids and not lose contact with your parents and loved ones, but you still have honour and dignity, you’ll just take revenge and go home.”<sup>69</sup> The recurrence of the concept of “blood-taking” in the majority of former fighters’ narrative leads us to believe that “individual retaliation” remains the most prevalent explanation for violent engagement in Dagestan. Those personally victimized are on average much more likely to retaliate against those who had tortured or beaten them, as the former will consider the issue more personally. The personal nature of retaliation also favours a process of rapid demobilization, when possible.

We also observed that certain social groups, such as elderly males and individuals who have families or jobs, are less likely to remain in insurgent units; they rather tend to leave the country for security reasons. Rustam, an ex-insurgent living in Dagestan, told us, “I left the insurgency in order to protect my family. I even opted to spend time in jail. It was the only solution to save my family from the lawlessness of *siloviki*.”<sup>70</sup> In other words, socioeconomic factors also play a role in an individual’s behaviour after achieving retaliation. For individuals with a good situation in life (family, property, and employment), retaliation is most often a one-time event and does not involve cooperation with established insurgent groups. After achieving retaliation, these individuals usually return to ordinary life, ensuring their security by paying bribes or relying on personal networks.

Based on our observations and our interviews, disenfranchised individuals seeking “individual retaliation” tend not to be religious zealots; however, they turn to Islamic insurgent groups, as they remain the best way to retaliate against police forces. As former insurgent fighters and members of law enforcement<sup>71</sup> have explained to us:

When you’ve got to take revenge, particularly when you’re young and don’t have much money or experience at it, the only way possible is to turn to somebody for help and assistance. In these situations, you’d make your way to an insurgent leader asking him for weapons, explosives, and money to do your job.<sup>72</sup>

Upon completing their retaliation, these disenfranchised individuals often have nowhere to escape to, or a normal life to return to. They usually return to Islamic insurgent groups to ensure their protection against retaliation and police forces. Apart from carrying out retaliation in a secretive way or leaving Dagestan for security reasons, very few other options for disengagement exist in the republic. The Commission for Adaptation, launched by Magomedshah Magomedov in 2010, never delivered a concrete path to return to normal life in Dagestan, and the program was subsequently abolished by Ramazan Abdulatipov.<sup>73</sup> Throughout the duration of our fieldwork in Dagestan, the Commission was criticized by the majority of the population, including participating members, for its inability to help ordinary people leave insurgent groups.<sup>74</sup>

Retaliation opens the door for these individuals inside the insurgency and, most importantly, to Jihadism. Although their initial motivations are usually personal and apolitical and have nothing to do with religious issues, the repressive social context in Dagestan fosters a new process of Islamic radicalization inside Jihadist *jamaats* for these individuals. They are incrementally indoctrinated under the effects of peer pressure from new comrades-in-arms and Jihadist leaders. Over time, they tend to rethink the *leitmotiv* that drew them into the insurgency. As they live secluded from society and under constant threat, they often adopt a Jihadist ideology in order to make sense of their new insurgent life. As a result, individuals’ religious fervour is mostly the product of their participation in violence as victims as well as insurgents, reversing the traditional causal link between violence and religion.

## **Conclusion**

This article demonstrated how the remnants of archaic social customs understood through the theoretical concept of retaliation play a crucial role in the violent insurgency in Dagestan. In so doing, we presented two basic retaliation-centred mechanisms to explain violent engagement in Dagestan: “individual retaliation” and “spiritual retaliation.” Based on these two theoretical mechanisms and our fieldwork, we conclude that the majority of new insurgents first join insurgent groups in order to retaliate against the *siloviki* and to avenge the shame of torture and abuse committed against them in custody. An individual’s need for retaliation is usually galvanized by negative perceptions of the socioeconomic situation in Dagestan, and triggered by the local understanding of honour in Dagestani traditions based on warrior ethos and masculinity. Retaliation is seen as a one-time act seeking to avenge humiliation from police abuse and to restore one’s honour.

We have observed that the majority of people who disengaged from insurgent groups are those who joined for “individual retaliation” and have a family, job, and other social opportunities. For them, retaliation is a one-time act (“blood-taking”) intended to “cleanse” their honour and go back to ordinary life. For the majority of individuals seeking “individual retaliation” without socioeconomic opportunities, participation in insurgent violence begins for very personal and non-religious reasons. At the same time, they do not have the opportunity to return to ordinary life as easily as people with social ties in the government or a good socioeconomic situation. They instead return to a Jihadist *jamaat* to seek protection and are often exposed to Jihadist ideology, thus incrementally adopting this ideology as their participation in the movement evolves.

In that situation, based on our empirical material and contrary to literature based on collective action, religion seems to act as a sustaining factor rather than a triggering mechanism. Jihadist ideology and retaliation are thus closely related in composing the main pathway towards and through violence for ordinary Dagestanis. Even when retaliation is framed along a more politico-religious nature, fighters rarely make a distinction between Islamic and Dagestani traditions, and instead merge both into what we label as the highlander ethos and social conservatism, rather than simple religious grievances. Violence is seen as a way to purify their society and to re-establish old Islamic and Dagestani traditions against political elites and *siloviki* seen as responsible for social decadence. Our findings challenge the current narrative focusing on the religious sectarian nature of insurgent violence in Dagestan. Rather than focusing on Islam as the main factor triggering violence in the North Caucasus, one should further investigate the role of social conservatism and traditions.

## Notes

1. Research on this article was carried out in the framework of the research design entitled Sciences on Society, Politics, and Media, Charles University in Prague, Czech University (P17) as well as the support of the *Fonds Québécois de la Recherche sur la Société et la Culture* (FQRSC).

2. John O’Loughlin, Edward C. Holland, and Frank D. W. Witmer, “The Changing Geography of Violence in Russia’s North Caucasus, 1999–2011: Regional Trends and Local Dynamics in Dagestan, Ingushetia, and Kabardino-Balkaria,” *Eurasian Geography and Economics* 52, no. 5 (2011): 596–630.

3. Gordon M. Hahn, *Russia’s Islamic Threat* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007); Sergey Markedonov, *Radical Islam in the North Caucasus: Evolving Threats, Challenges, and Prospects* (Washington, DC: CSIS, 2010); Robert W. Schaefer, *The Insurgency in Chechnya and the North Caucasus: From Gazavat to Jihad* (Santa Barbara: Praeger Security International, 2010); Lorenzo Vidino, “How Chechnya Became a Breeding Ground for Terror,” *Middle East Quarterly* 12, no. 3 (2005): 57–66.

4. Many studies have underlined this limitation by insisting on economic and social causes of violence. At the same time, these authors did put forward an overarching model trying to bridge economic, religious, and ethno-national causes of violence in the region. See for example, Hahn (see note 3 above), Theodore P. Gerber, and Sarah Mendelson, “Security Through Sociology: The North Caucasus and the Global Counterinsurgency Paradigm,” *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 32 no. 9 (2009): 831–851; and Andrew C. Kuchins, Matthew Malarkey, Sergei Markedonov, *The North Caucasus: Russia’s Volatile Frontier* (Washington, DC: CSIS, 2011).

5. For this research, “Salafism” is understood as a Sunni Islamic ideological trend based on a strict and orthodox interpretation of the Koran and the Sunna advocating the return to the early practices of Islam. “Jihadism” is understood as a militant and violent ideology supporting the idea of a revolutionary struggle against infidel (*kafir*) regimes and apostates (*munafik*) in order to establish an Islamic caliphate strictly governed by Shariah law.

6. “Blood revenge” is an integral part of the custom of “blood feud,” engraved in the sociocultural tradition of the Northeast Caucasus. The difference rests in the fact that while “blood revenge” is a single *act* of retaliation, “blood feud” is a *process* involving a series of successive retaliations.

7. For more on the socio-anthropological background of the custom of “blood revenge” and the concept of retaliation, see Christopher Boehm, *Blood Revenge: The Enactment and Management of Conflict in Montenegro and Other Tribal Societies* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1986).

8. Mancur Olson, *The Logic of Collective Action: Public Goods and the Theory of Groups, Second Printing with New Preface and Appendix*, Revised edition (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1965); Mark Irving Lichbach, *The Rebel's Dilemma* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995).

9. David Keen, *The Economic Functions of Violence in Civil Wars* (Oxford; New York: Routledge, 1998); Paul Collier and Anke Hoefler, “Greed and Grievance in Civil War,” *Oxford Economic Papers* 56, no. 4 (2004): 563–595.

10. Samuel L. Popkin, *The Rational Peasant: The Political Economy of Rural Society in Vietnam* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979).

11. James C. Scott, *The Moral Economy of the Peasant: Rebellion and Subsistence in Southeast Asia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977).

12. Elisabeth Jean Wood, *Insurgent Collective Action and Civil War in El Salvador* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Roger D. Petersen, *Resistance and Rebellion: Lessons from Eastern Europe* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

13. Jeff Goodwin, *No Other Way Out: States and Revolutionary Movements, 1945–1991* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

14. Quintan Wiktorowicz, *Radical Islam Rising: Muslim Extremism in The West* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005).

15. Hahn, *Russia's Islamic Threat* (see note 3 above).

16. For a thorough narrative about the role of Jihadism in the conflict, see *Ibid*.

17. Wood, *Insurgent Collective Action and Civil War in El Salvador* (see note 12 above), 13.

18. Stathis N. Kalyvas and Matthew Adam Kocher, “How ‘Free’ Is Free Riding in Civil Wars?: Violence, Insurgency, and the Collective Action Problem,” *World Politics* 59, no. 2 (2007): 177–216.

19. Petersen, *Resistance and Rebellion* (see note 12 above), 8.

20. Wood, *Insurgent Collective Action and Civil War in El Salvador* (see note 12 above); Stathis N. Kalyvas, *The Logic of Violence in Civil War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Jeremy M. Weinstein, *Inside Rebellion: The Politics of Insurgent Violence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

21. International Crisis Group, *Russia's Dagestan. Conflict Causes*, Europe Report No. 192, June 3, 2008, [http://www.crisisgroup.org/~media/Files/europe/192\\_russia\\_s\\_dagestan\\_conflict\\_causes.pdf](http://www.crisisgroup.org/~media/Files/europe/192_russia_s_dagestan_conflict_causes.pdf); Kuchins et al., *The North Caucasus* (see note 4 above).

22. “*Horošo rastem. vysokaja roždaemost' v Dagestane sočetaetsja s vysokim izdiveniem*,” *Novoe Vremya*, 2012, <http://gazeta-nv.info/content/view/9518/216/>.

23. Mark Kramer, *Prospects for Islamic Radicalism and Violent Extremism in the North Caucasus and Central Asia*, Ponars Eurasia Memo, No. 28, August 2008, <http://dialogueeurope.org/uploads/File/resources/Aug%202008%20article%20on%20Islamic%20extremism%20in%20North%20Caucasus%20and%20Cen.pdf>, 3.

24. “*Estestvennoe dviženie naselenija v razreze sub'ektov rossijskoj federacii za janvar-dekabr 2012 goda*,” Federal'naya Slujba Gosudarstvennoi statistiki, 2012, [http://www.gks.ru/free\\_doc/2012/demo/edn12-12.htm](http://www.gks.ru/free_doc/2012/demo/edn12-12.htm).

25. International Crisis Group, *The North Caucasus: The Challenges of Integration (III), Governance, Elections, Rule of Law*, Europe Report No. 226, September 6, 2013, <http://www.crisisgroup.org/~media/Files/europe/caucasus/226-the-north-caucasus-the-challenges-of-integration-iii-governance-elections-rule-of-law.pdf>, 7.

26. Hahn, *Russia's Islamic Threat* (see note 3 above), 103.

27. Anna Nemtsova, “Tighter Crackdown in Dagestan Fuels Local Misery,” 2013, [http://rbth.co.uk/society/2013/07/31/tighter\\_crackdown\\_in\\_dagestan\\_fuels\\_local\\_misery\\_28517.html](http://rbth.co.uk/society/2013/07/31/tighter_crackdown_in_dagestan_fuels_local_misery_28517.html).

28. Authors' interviews with ordinary Dagestanis in Makhachkala, September 2009 and November 2010.

29. Robert Bruce Ware and Enver Kisriev, *Dagestan: Russian Hegemony and Islamic Resistance in the North Caucasus* (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 2009).

30. Jamestown Foundation, "Support for Salafists Among Dagestani Youth Reaches Record Level," December 14, 2011, *Eurasia Daily Monitor* 8, no. 227, [http://www.jamestown.org/single/?tx\\_ttnews%5Btt\\_news%5D=38780&no\\_cache=1#.VOFtFvnF\\_5I](http://www.jamestown.org/single/?tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=38780&no_cache=1#.VOFtFvnF_5I).

31. The rhetoric of an all-out war against "Wahhabists" has enabled local law enforcement to wage a war against real or alleged members of Salafi congregations.

32. Tanya Lokshina, "Dagestan – Russia's New Hot Spot," November 2010, [http://www.civilrightsdefenders.org/old\\_site/downloads/Dagestan\\_Russias\\_New\\_Hot\\_Spot1.pdf](http://www.civilrightsdefenders.org/old_site/downloads/Dagestan_Russias_New_Hot_Spot1.pdf).

33. Authors' interview with Sapiyat Magomadova, a reputable Dagestani lawyer, in Prague, March 13, 2014.

34. *Ibid.*

35. Marc Sageman. *Understanding Terror Networks* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004).

36. Interview with Gadjimurad, 24, a young Salafist, Makhachkala, Fall 2010 and Spring 2011.

37. Interview with an insurgent's relative in southern Dagestan in Spring 2011.

38. Interview with Sultan, 35, a former fighter, in Istanbul, December 2010.

39. Interviews with ordinary Dagestanis in Moscow, December 2008 and September 2009.

40. Interview with Bashar, 29, in Moscow, September 2009.

41. Interview with a relative (brother) of a former insurgent carried out in September 2009 in Moscow.

42. Jean-François Ratelle, "Radical Islam and the Chechen War Spillover: A Political Ethnographic Reassessment of the Upsurge of Violence in the North Caucasus since 2009," (PhD diss., unpublished manuscript, University of Ottawa, 2013).

43. Interview with several Salafists, usually between 20 and 25 years old in Makhachkala in May 2011.

44. When we asked our interviewees about torture and abuse committed under custody, the vast majority of former fighters hesitated to explicitly admit that they were speaking of their own personal experiences. They usually pretended to be speaking about someone else's experience. These depictions and testimonies lead both of authors independently to conclude that former fighters usually talk about their own experience by projecting it onto former comrades. In our independent fieldwork and interviews, this discursive process was recurrent in the majority of social settings and contexts (European and Dagestani interviews), as Dagestani males value their honour and admitting openly to being severely beaten or even raped would irreparably stain their social status.

45. Interview with members of human rights organizations carried out in Makhachkala in November 2010.

46. Interview with Rustam, 35, a former insurgent, carried out in May 2011 in southern Dagestan.

47. Interviews in 2010 and 2011 with Dagestani governmental officials in Makhachkala, Dagestan.

48. Interviews in 2010 and 2011 with MVD members as well as Dagestani governmental officials in Makhachkala, Dagestan.

49. Interview with a relative (brother) of a former insurgent, carried out in December 2008 in Moscow.

50. Interview with Magomed, 30, a former insurgent, carried out in December 2010 in Istanbul, Turkey.

51. Interviews with ordinary Dagestanis in Makhachkala and Moscow, carried out in the period 2005–2009.

52. Amy L. Cota-McKinley, William Douglas Woody, and Paul A. Bell, "Vengeance: Effects of Gender, Age, and Religious Background," *Aggressive Behavior* 27, no. 5 (2001): 343–350.

53. Albeit Dagestan is a predominantly mountainous republic inhabited by majority highlanders, its northern (steppe) and eastern (coastal lowlands) areas have historically been

populated by Turcophone peoples, Noghai and Kumyk, respectively. Noghais form a clear minority in Dagestan's main urban areas, where insurgency has gained momentum recently. They are also underrepresented in insurgent groups centered in Central Dagestan and the coastal cities, as well. Instead, Noghais have tended to establish their own—ethnically homogenous—insurgent groups, such as the Noghai jamaat, which a decade ago encompassed Noghai-populated areas of Dagestan and the neighboring Stavropol province. Albeit no representative statistics exist on the matter, Kumyks appear to be underrepresented in insurgent groups, dominated and led by Avars, Dargins, and members of other “mountainous peoples.”

54. Remarkably, during the seven decades of Soviet rule, Dagestan underwent complex processes of urbanisation, modernisation, and secularisation. Among other things, this engendered female emancipation, as well as acquisition of “bad habits” in the form of increased use of alcohol, narrowing of the gap between age groups, and gradual erosion of local customs, etc. Nonetheless, the decline of the Soviet Union kickstarted a renewed interest in ethnic tradition. Since the late 1980s, this has led to a gradual re-Islamicisation of Dagestani society, and an increasingly negative stance of many Dagestanis towards what many have considered “spoiled morals.” See, for instance, Vladimir Bobrovnikov, “The Islamic Revival and the National Question in Post-Soviet Dagestan,” *Religion, State and Society* 24, nos. 3–4 (1996): 233–238; El'mir Kuliyeu, “Islamskaya traditsiya na Kavkaze: mezhdru traditsionalizmom, reformizmom i sekularizmom,” *Kavkaz i globalizatsiya* 3, no. 2 (2008): 128–141.

55. Hahn, *Russia's Islamic Threat* (see note 3 above).

56. Marc Sageman, *Leaderless Jihad: Terror Networks in the Twenty-First Century* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 73.

57. European Commission's Expert Group on Violent Radicalisation, *Radicalisation Processes Leading to Acts of Terrorism* (2008), [http://www.clingendael.nl/publications/2008/20080500\\_cscp\\_report\\_vries.pdf](http://www.clingendael.nl/publications/2008/20080500_cscp_report_vries.pdf).

58. Interviews with ordinary Dagestanis carried out in Makhachkala and Moscow in the period 2005–2009.

59. Interview with Suleyman, 23, a relative (brother) of a former insurgent carried out in December 2008 in Moscow, Russia. Several Salafis in Avar villages offered us similar narratives about the ill-mannered and decadent youth in Dagestan in October 2010. The Salafis belonged to various generations (Soviet educated, Perestroika, and post-Soviet).

60. Timur Aliyev, “V Dagestane rastet količestvo ubijstv iz-za vnebračnyh svjazej,” 2013, <http://www.rg.ru/2013/02/27/dagestan.html>.

61. Interview with Zelimkhan, 36, a former insurgent, carried out in December 2010 in Istanbul.

62. Interviews with ordinary Dagestanis carried out in Makhachkala and Moscow in the period of 2005–2011. Interviews with former fighters in Dagestan and Moscow.

63. Interview with Magomed, an ordinary Salafi, in Makhachkala in October 2010.

64. Ibid.

65. Interview with a relative (cousin) of a former insurgent carried out in Istanbul, Turkey, in December 2010.

66. Interview with a relative (brother) of a former insurgent carried out in Moscow, Russia, in September 2009.

67. Interview with a 26-year-old former insurgent carried out in Moscow, Russia, in December 2010.

68. Interviews with Islam, 27, a current insurgent fighter, and Ramazan, 26, his close friend, carried out in Istanbul, Turkey, in December 2010.

69. Interview with Akhmed, 32, a former insurgent, carried out in Tbilisi in September 2010.

70. Interview with Rustam, 35, a former insurgent, carried out in May 2011 in southern Dagestan.

71. Interview with MVD members in November 2010 in Makhachkala, Dagestan.

72. Interview with Akhmed, 32, a former insurgent, carried out in September 2010 in Tbilisi.

73. Ekaterina Sokirianskaia, “Sowing Rebellion in Dagestan,” August 26, 2013, <http://www.crisisgroupblogs.org/across-eurasia/2013/08/26/sowing-rebellion-in-dagestan/>

74. Interviews in Dagestan in October 2010 and May 2011. See also, “V Dagestane obvinenie i zašita obžalovali prigovor po delu sdavšihsja pod garantii komissii po adaptacii,” Kavkazskii Uzel, 2014, <http://dagestan.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/244111/>; and Emil A. Souleimanov and Huseyn Aliyev, *The Individual Disengagement of Avengers, Nationalists, and Jihadists: Why Ex-Militants Choose to Abandon Violence in the North Caucasus* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).