



# UNDER THE SECURITY GAZE:

HISTORY, POLITICS AND RELIGION IN THE PANKISI GORGE





**Under the Security Gaze:  
History, Religion and Politics  
in the Pankisi Gorge**

Tbilisi, 2018

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## Introduction

### Temirlan<sup>1</sup>

It is right before daybreak on December 26. Village Duisi in Pankisi Gorge is wrapped in darkness. Nineteen-year-old Temirlan is laying in his bed. He does not know anything yet. It has been one month since anti-terrorist special operation orchestrated on Gabriel Salosi Avenue in Tbilisi.<sup>2</sup> State Security Service of Georgia declares that individuals detained and liquidated during the special operation planned to attack diplomatic missions in Georgia and Turkey. They also maintain that Georgian citizens assisted the group members in traveling on the Turkish territory, and entering Georgia. Anti-Terrorist Service of the State Security considers Temirlan Machalikashvili as one of the accomplices of the group. Neither Temirlan nor his family know anything about this. They do not know anything since Temirlan has not yet been accused or detained for questioning. An armed special operation is being planned. Why is Temirlan not detained for questioning?

On that particular day, Temirlan spent his time helping his father in family farming. His father had cut bean poles in the fields and asked Temirlan to carry them down. When he was finished with family chores, he went to the Mosque as usual to perform night prayers (*namaz*). Afterwards he had dinner with his family and went to his room. Everybody went to sleep.

At noon, on December 26, the State Security Service holds a special briefing. The Georgian public is informed that

“five Georgian citizens - four of them in Pankisi villages and one in Tbilisi, have been detained as a result of special operations held by the Counterterrorism Department of the State Security Service on the morning of December 26 in Tbilisi and Akhmeta Municipality”.<sup>3</sup>

Among those detained is Temirlan Machalikashvili. It is announced during the briefing that he has been injured. Temirlan's parents remember the following: at around 4 in the morning they heard gunshots and their door being broken into. They immediately went outside. The backyard and the porch were filled by special forces. They did not allow the parents to move.

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1 The information about Temirlan Machalikashvili was constructed based on conversations with Machalikashvili family members organized by Human Rights Education and Monitoring Center.

2 On November 21-22, Anti-Terrorist Department of State Security Service of Georgia conducted an anti-terrorist operation on Gabriel Salosi Avenue in Tbilisi. In the framework of the operation, individuals suspected of planning a terrorist act were arrested, and some of them liquidated.

3 ალადაშვილი, გიორგი. „სპეცოპერაცია პანკისსა და თბილისში“. რადიო თავისუფლება, 26 დეკემბერი, 2017. Accessed August 23, 2018. <https://www.radiotavisupleba.ge/a/spetsoperatsia-pankissa-da-tbilisshi/28939197.html>.

Temirlan's father, Malkhaz, became more anxious when the State Security Service forces did not allow him to enter his son's room. He asked whether Temirlan had been hurt and was informed that they were conducting a search. Only after three hours was he allowed to enter the room. Temirlan's bed was covered in blood, on it was his blood-stained cell phone, and under the bed a puddle of blood. He was told that Temirlan tried to resist, so they had to shoot; he was assured that Temirlan was only injured in the shoulder. Malkhaz calmed down a little bit: he would survive a shoulder wound. He asked nevertheless how Temirlan could have resisted when he was in bed. They pointed to a grenade in the corner of the room. Malkhaz remembers that unlike the bed and the phone, the grenade did not even have a drop of blood on it. Also, he thought, Temirlan's sister was sleeping in the next room, and his parents were right underneath his bedroom. Was he planning to blow everybody up? That seemed nonsensical. The headboard of Temirlan's double bed carried the marks of gunshots. Father would later remember that Temirlan was a tall boy, he would sleep leaning on the headboard.

On January 10, 2018, two weeks after the special operation, Temirlan Machalikashvili passed away in the hospital from severe head wounds. Did he ever comprehend what was happening when armed special forces entered his room?

In our contemporary post-September 11 world, terms terrorism and terrorist often are denominators that carry a comprehensive meaning. They seem to perform a triple function: they could be simultaneously understood as the cause, diagnosis and objective. In other words, when you read the story of Temirlan Machalikashvili, were you troubled by the following questions? Indeed, the Machalikashvili family faced a tragedy, but how do we know that Temirlan did not assist those detained and liquidated during the November 21-22 anti-terrorist special operation on Gabriel Salosi Avenue? Maybe he really had a grenade which he intended to detonate? If so, how else could the Special Security Service respond? After all, he was a believing and practicing Muslim living in the Pankisi Gorge. Of course, at a glance, some of these questions might seem logical. Whether Temirlan Machalikashvili actually assisted the individuals accused of terrorism is a matter that needs to be entrusted to the investigation, and an academic inquiry cannot answer these questions. However, despite the logic behind these questions, they are backed by presumptions that on the one hand, legitimate the taking of Temirlan's life - if he in fact assisted the terrorists, or if he actually had a grenade. And on the other hand, become the subject of its legitimization - Temirlan Machalikashvili as a Salafist, practitioner, and a believing Muslim. Hence, the denominator *terrorist* can become the source for legitimating state violence, which delineates the following factors from the very outset: the cause - Islam, diagnosis - terrorism, and goal - elimination. This approach discredits further critical questions from the very outset. Namely, questions like: What exactly are we referring to when we talk about terrorism? Does this term carry a general meaning? Why is Islam, and specifically Salafism, equated with terrorism?



It needs to be noted from the very beginning that formulating questions in this manner implies that our research interests do not correspond to dominant ideas represented in media and general public. These preconceptions often represent terrorism as an event, and terrorists as the enactors of such events, as irrational elements with no social logic. For this reason, the above mentioned questions address the meaning of terrorism. Simultaneously, critical questions regarding the essence of terrorism are directly related to how the Pankisi Gorge is being conceptualized both locally and globally. “Dormant volcano”<sup>4</sup>, “black oasis”<sup>5</sup>, “terrorist paradise”<sup>6</sup> - these are some of the alarming metaphors which scholars and journalists employ to describe the Pankisi Gorge. This hegemonic paradigm, which largely impacts how our knowledge about the Pankisi Gorge is being formed, is being represented as a universal, neutral and objective understanding. In other words, the dominant epistemic perspective, which disregards the experience, interests and views of the locals, is being wrapped in the cloak of neutrality. The following study prioritizes epistemic justice and aims to analyze global and local factors that have rendered the Pankisi Gorge as the “danger zone”, as well as the Georgian state policies towards the Pankisi Gorge. In addition, it seeks to give voice to Pankisi inhabitants for whom the crumbling of the mentioned hegemonic worldview carries an existential meaning.

## Historical Background

Northern Caucasus of the nineteenth century witnessed prolonged wars of conquest with Russia. Owing to its important trade routes and geopolitical situation, the Caucasus was a significant strategic region. Unlike Northern Caucasus, Southern Caucasus was subjected by Russia more rapidly.<sup>7</sup> One of the strategies of Russia’s colonial expansion was to bribe the ruling class of the conquered population, which proved to be difficult in Vainakh-populated North Caucasus since the latter did not recognize feudal hierarchies. At the same time, anti-colonial resistance of North Caucasians flourished on social and religious factors. For instance, in the nineteenth century, Sheikh Mansur declared *ghazavat* – holy war against Russia. In the nineteenth century, on the other hand, it was Imam Shamil who commenced anti-colonial war against Russia (1834-1859).

4 კეკელიძე, თამარ. *პანკისი პრესის ფურცლებზე*. თბილისი: კავკასიის ხალხთა საერთაშორისო სამეცნიერო-კვლევითი ინსტიტუტი, 2007. p.38.

5 *Ibid*, p.42.

6 Walsh, Nick P. “Al-Qaeda Men Handed to US, Says Georgia.” *The Guardian*. October 23, 2002. Accessed July 20, 2018. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2002/oct/23/alqaida.terrorism>.

7 ჰალბახი, უგე. „რუსეთი ჩრდილოეთ და სამხრეთ კავკასიაში: „ახლო საზღვარგარეთსა და „შიდა საზღვარგარეთს“ შორის“. *საზღვრებს მიღმა: კონფლიქტები და თანამშრომლობა სამხრეთ კავკასიაში*. პაინრიპ ბიოლის ფონდის სამხრეთ კავკასიის რეგიონული ბიურო, 2017.

Madina Tlostanova, who analyzes Russia's colonial policy in Central Asia and the Caucasus, describes nineteenth century Russian empire as the double-faced Janus: on the one hand, it was itself a "point of orientation" for the West, and on the other hand, it represented the Caucasus and Central Asia as the "orient".<sup>8</sup> The West never considered Russia as part of its civilized sphere<sup>9</sup>, while for Russia the Caucasus is where it met with Asia and proved its own "Europeanness". Throughout history, Russian discourse represented Chechen inhabitants of the North Caucasus "Asian barbarians" who only understood the language of violence.<sup>10</sup>

Like Russia, Georgia, in its strive towards imaginary Europe, has been constructing its "Europeanness" through the production of non-European "other", and building its self-image in opposition to that in order to establish itself in the hierarchical system of the imperial logic.<sup>11</sup> However, it only manages to *mimic*, or to imitate, since real material benefits and authority accompanying such hierarchization and orientalization are only available to those actors who create the hierarchy in the first place. Georgia's orientalization of the Pankisi Gorge, as will be revealed in the first chapter of this research, enabled its establishment on the international political map.

Like North Caucasian Chechens and Ingushetians, Kists living in the Pankisi Gorge are Vainakhs and speak the Vainakh language. Georgians and Vainakhs had a close political, economic and cultural relationship.<sup>12</sup> In the first half of the nineteenth century, a group of Vainakhs settled in the Pankisi Gorge with the permission of the local government. The Pankisi Gorge was deserted in the eighteenth century, and remained uninhabited until the Vainakh settlement.

Pankisi Kists often traveled to and from Chechnya throughout the twentieth century for visits or work. Starting from the 1970s Kist migration to Chechnya and Ingushetia surged but they retained their permanent residence in Pankisi. In the 1990s Kist migration to Chechnya in search of employment became ubiquitous. Kists also held seasonal jobs in Chechnya and Ingushetia, materially supporting their families in Pankisi with their salaries.<sup>13</sup> However, the start of Chechen-Russian War in November 1994 transformed Kist lives.<sup>14</sup> There have

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8 Tlostanova, Madina. *Gender Epistemologies and Eurasian Borderlands*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010. p. 64.

9 Tlostanova, Madina. "Between the Russian/Soviet Dependencies, Neoliberal Delusions, Dewesternizing Options, and Decolonial Drives." *Cultural Dynamics* 27 (2015): 267-283.

10 Derlugian, Georgi. "Whose Truth?" In *A Small Corner of Hell: Dispatches from Chechnya*, by Anna Politkovskaya. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2003. p. 22

11 Bhabha, Homi. "Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse." In *The Location of Culture*, by Bhabha, Homi, 121-131. New York: Routledge, 1994.

12 მარგოშვილი, ლეილა. *პანკისელი ქისტების წეს-ჩვეულებები და თანამედროვეობა*. თბილისი: მეცნიერება, 1985.

13 მამისიშვილი, ხვთისო. *პანკისი: წარსული და თანამედროვეობა*. თბილისი: თბილისის უნივერსიტეტის გამომცემლობა, 2008.

14 Tsulaia, Ia. "To be Kist: Between Georgian and Chechen." In *Changing Identities: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia*, edited by Viktor Voronkov, Sophia Kutsishvili and John Horan, 126-147. Tbilisi: Heinrich Boll Stiftung South Caucasus, 2011.

been many instances of shared political conditions between Pankisi Kists and Chechens. Throughout history, political and social processes in Chechnya were often reflected in the lives of Kists and became part of their historical memory.

On February 23 1944 Soviet government accused Chechens and Ingushetians of collaborating with Germans during the Second World War, and relocated 387 229 Chechens and 91 250 Ingushetians to Central Asian steppes on train carts designated for cattle.<sup>15</sup> According to researcher Khvtiso Mamisimedishvili, Pankisi Kists spent two months expecting to be expelled from their lands, but they escaped deportation. However, Kists who were in Chechnya on February 23, and Kists who had been relocated to the Pankisi Gorge from mountainous Chechnya in the 30s, fell victim to deportations.<sup>16</sup> Nevertheless, those Vainakhs whose last names ended with Georgian “-shvili” or “-dze” were later allowed to return to their homeland. Vainakh battalions who rebelled after the deportations of Chechens and Ingushetians sought shelter in the Caucasus mountains, and engaged in armed confrontations with the Soviet militia. The state labeled them as “bandit groups”.<sup>17</sup> Georgian mountain residents supported the rebelling Vainakhs unbeknownst to the state, which in the opinion of Mamisimedishvili, became one of the reasons for mass relocation of Khevsurs to the flatlands.<sup>18</sup>

Half a century later, North Caucasian Vainakhs found themselves in the epicenter of political developments once again. Dzhokhar Dudayev, former general of Soviet aviation, became the leader of national liberation movement. In 1991, Chechnya’s United National Congress declared independence. On December 11 1994, Russian army entered Chechnya, marking the beginning of the first Chechen-Russian War. Russian military forces killed more than 100 peaceful Chechens in the village of Samashki in 1995. Dzhokhar Dudayev was killed by Russians in April 1996. After his death, Yandarbiyev became the acting president, and he was also killed by security services in 2004 in Doha. Chechen armed forces pressured the Russian government to sign a peace agreement, and in 1996 Russia pulled out its military units from Chechnya. Around 100 000 individuals were killed and 240 000 wounded in the first war.<sup>19</sup> Since Pankisi Kists also participated in the war, their victory enhanced their sense of ethnic and religious belonging, rendering this event an indispensable part of Kist memory.

15 Williams, Brian G. *Inferno in Chechnya: The Russian-Chechen Wars, the Al-Qaeda Myth, and the Boston Marathon Bombings*. University Press of New England, 2015.

16 მამისიმედიშვილი, ხვთისო. *პანკისი: წარსული და თანამედროვეობა*. თბილისი: თბილისის უნივერსიტეტის გამომცემლობა, 2008.

17 *Ibid*, p. 257.

18 One of the groups, “Hidris”, was active between 1944 and 1953. The rebels sought shelter in the Pankisi Gorge during wintertime; some of them were arrested, and others reconciled by the Ministry of Internal Affairs.

19 Youngs, Tim. “The Conflict in Chechnya.” *House of Commons Library Research Paper*. February 7, 2000.

## Methodological Framework

The initial purpose of this research was to understand why fighters traveled from the Pankisi Gorge to Middle East. After closely studying the relevant literature, we discovered that large part of academic works and political documents interpret political expression and actions of Pankisi residents in the hegemonic framework of security, disregarding opinions of the subjects, political context and historical circumstances. It should also be noted that giving voice to Pankisi residents does not automatically ensure that their voices are being understood. For a dominant framework, opinions generated outside of its borders are nothing but a collection of syllables, or a voice without magnitude. Hence, epistemic injustice experienced by Pankisi residents can be observed, on the one hand, in constant distrust of their opinion, and on the other hand, in the marginalization of their political expression and interpretation, which reveals hermeneutic injustice. Accordingly, talking about ongoing political processes in the Pankisi Gorge demands constant “deconstructive intervention”<sup>20</sup> in the dominant framework. “Deconstructive intervention” is a term employed by philosopher Jacques Derrida, which implies that critical reflection on borders and their meaning allows for the transformation of law and order behind deeply held views. Deconstruction searches for traces that have been methodologically expelled and eradicated by sterile totalities. However, simultaneously, this very search is made possible by the traces left by these totalities. Deconstruction identifies these traces and uses them to give voice to what does not correspond to or fit into the dominant order of inclusiveness and exclusiveness. Deconstructive interventions succeed in detotalizing sterile totalities by juxtaposing them against their own differences.<sup>21</sup>

However, Derrida’s “deconstructive intervention” did not turn out to be sufficient for reflecting on the main focus of the study and its process since this methodological frame is limited to the level of discourse. This does not allow the incorporation of already modified study objectives. The word “reflection” carries an important meaning in this context and hence, requires some clarification. Broadly speaking, each social-anthropological study requires that the scholar does not only reflect on the subject of study, but also on oneself.<sup>22</sup> The latter does not imply self-reflection in the traditional ethnographic sense when the ethnographer/sociologist/anthropologist needs to consider her research position, its role and relationship with the research subject, and then distance herself from the subject and objectify herself (if such objectivity is even possible in a sociological or anthropological study). Instead, we

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20 Derrida, Jacques: *Autoimmunity: Real and Symbolic Suicides. Dialogue with Jacques Derrida*. In: Giovanna Borradori (Ed.), *Philosophy in a Time of Terror. Dialogues with Jürgen Habermas and Jacques Derrida*, 85-136. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2003.

21 *Ibid.*, p. 147.

22 Bourdieu, Pierre. “Participant Objectivation.” *The Journal of Royal Anthropological Institute*, 9 (2003): 281-294.

are talking about self-reflection beyond what Pierre Bourdieu calls “positivist repression”<sup>23</sup> of sociological and anthropological study itself. For Bourdieu, science cannot be reduced to simple description and analysis of pre-given meanings that public actors employ for constructing reality. Science should also comprise those social functions within which these constructions are produced and which, in turn, produce social actors. In other words, that which requires self-reflection/objectivity, for Bourdieu, is not the process of studying “a foreign world” by an anthropologist, but rather the social world in which the anthropologist herself, and anthropology at large with its research subjects, are positioned.<sup>24</sup> It is this type of self-reflection that helped us reconsider our vision and goals during the research process.

In this way, in addition to deconstruction and critical analysis of globalized concepts and political projects, it became important, on the one hand, to study historically different equation and power relations of the Pankisi Gorge, and on the other hand, to learn about the views that Pankisi residents hold on relevant political processes and approaches that have impacted their lives. Hence, qualitative interviews turned out to be a crucial yet not the only component for studying the research matter. The discontent voiced by Pankisi respondents during the fieldwork in regards to dominant approaches within the normative framework did not only represent local grievances but also reflected global debates on such issues as movement of fighters to Syria and “radicalization”. Ideological and methodological limitations of initial study goals – finding out why fighters leave for Syria, became evident during the research process, which we will discuss in detail in Chapter 4.

At the same time, since the state does not only eliminate violence but also generates it, we decided to analyze state policy in Pankisi to better study the political context. However, main players in the political context and knowledge generation are not only state actors, but also representatives of the civic sector. Hence, when researching state policy we also interviewed the latter. When searching for hegemonic traces of the “security” discourse in the Pankisi Gorge, we focused our attention on a decisive event in modern history, namely the Pankisi Crisis. Reconstruction of the “Pankisi Crisis” and its analysis in the context of international power dynamics offers an opportunity to determine historically specific meaning of globalized concepts and labels.

The above can be summarized in the following manner: the goal and methodological frame of this study, to put it in the words of anthropologist Saba Mahmood, is not simply to historically and discursively study concepts, or “objectively” describe human thought and behavior in given society, but rather to juxtapose practices and defining concepts of one specific way

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<sup>23</sup> *Ibid*, p.282.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid*, p.283.

of life against another, dominant way of being. This, in turn, enables us to ask critical and different questions, to distance ourselves from the center, and through that, to reconsider the familiar normative frame that we perceive as the only frame for evaluating our own or others' lives.<sup>25</sup>

## Research Goals and Objectives

The **goal** of this study is to analyze the formation of the Pankisi Gorge as the political epicenter in the context of historical circumstances, power configurations and dominant discourses.

In order to achieve this goal, the **objectives** of the study are: 1) to determine local and global circumstances and interests that contributed to labeling the Pankisi Gorge as “a threat”; 2) to analyze the religious landscape of Pankisi; 3) to critically examine terms “terrorism”, “radicalism”, and “violent extremism”, and critically overview the political significance of counter programs; 4) to discuss state and civil society policies in the Pankisi Gorge; 5) to identify and voice the opinions of Pankisi residents regarding the above described issues.

## Research Methods

Two types of methods were used in the study: secondary research and qualitative interviews. Throughout the secondary research period we analyzed various materials, including general theoretical literature about Islam and its various branches, scientific literature about the Pankisi Gorge, both in the humanities and social sciences. We also examined political documents and studies on radicalization, terrorism, and violent extremism. Since we were interested in historical-genealogical investigation of how the Pankisi Gorge came to be labeled as a “threat” and “a danger zone”, in addition to historical works, we also sifted through and examined various media files. In short, we created a body of data, which is crucial for studying deconstruction and discourse.<sup>26</sup> This theoretical body of knowledge enabled us, on the one hand, to establish an appropriate theoretical frame for the study, which would shed light on both local and global factors that determined the labeling of the Pankisi Gorge as “dangerous”. On the other hand, deconstruction of various concepts employed in studies on terrorism, radicalization, and extremism allowed us to reveal not only common method-

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25 Mahmood, Saba: *Religious Difference in a Secular Age. A Minority Report*. Princeton University Press: Princeton and Oxford, 2016. pp.23-24.

26 Keller, Reiner: *Wissenssoziologische Diskursanalyse. Grundlegung eines Forschungsprogramms*. VS Verlag: Wiesbaden, 2011 (3. Auflage).

ological flaws, but also to determine hierarchization and political implications behind even those concepts that are usually neutrally represented.

As we noted in the discussion of the methodological frame, discursive deconstruction and genealogical pursuit was not our only goal. In order to position the voice and lifestyle of Pankisi residents against the dominant ideological framework and hence, attempt to reconsider the normative framework itself, we conducted 39 qualitative one-on-one interviews. From these, 5 were held with the representatives of civic sector who work on the Pankisi Gorge, while the remaining 34 interviews involved Pankisi residents. The method of selection was the following: since Pankisi Gorge was the target of the study, we conducted the majority of qualitative interviews with Pankisi residents. Since we were interested in their opinions regarding such matters as violent and non-violent state policies, religious situation in Pankisi and what motivates fighters to travel to the East, we tried to capture the heterogeneity of Pankisi population in the interviews. Hence, we held qualitative interviews with the representatives of elders' unions, traditional Islam, Salafi scholars, various Salafi groups, non-governmental organizations operating in the Gorge, and those residents who work in the education sector.

For the qualitative interviews we developed semi-structured thematically focused guidelines, which were in turn determined by our study goals: on the one hand, it was our goal to conduct open and understanding (sociologically speaking) interviews common to qualitative studies. However, on the other hand, these interviews were not of biographical or narrative nature since our study already had a thematic core. Hence, semi-structured interviews designed to prompt the respondents to talk about issues relevant for the study, proved to be the most suitable approach. After the interviewing phase, we analyzed the collected data, transcribed the material, and made all respondents anonymous. We ascribed them consecutive numbers for the sake of anonymity (i.e. Respondent #1, Respondent #2, etc.).

We employed thematic codification for analyzing the semi-structured interviews with Pankisi respondents. However, as already noted, qualitative interviews were central yet not the only component of the study. Since we were interested in their disposition towards the above-described normative frame, the post-analysis stage involved correlating relevant issues revealed through the thematic codes in the interviews with the examined studies. After such analysis, we finally identified main thematic categories in the interviews, which are represented in the following chapters along with the theoretical frame. In Chapter 5, which discusses the movement of fighters to the Middle East, we employed thematic categories to represent the outcomes of the interviews.

As noted, second part of the interviews was held with non-local respondents working in the civic sector. This and similar qualitative interviews with experts can be divided in two types: informational interviews and interviews aimed at analyzing knowledge production.<sup>27</sup> However, it is also possible to focus on a combination of the two types during analysis.<sup>28</sup> Interviews with experts had two goals: on the one hand, we wanted to collect and systematically organize expert evaluations of the state policy; on the other hand, we wanted to analyze Pankisi-related knowledge generated by the experts themselves. The significance of expert interviews lies in the fact that representatives of non-governmental organizations and the civic sector are important actors in the formation of public opinion on Pankisi, and in the creation of social, political and cultural infrastructure in the Gorge.

Expert interviews were also based on semi-structured interview guidelines. We selected 5 experts who are representatives of media and non-governmental organizations working in Pankisi. Taking into account research ethics and anonymity of the respondents, after deciphering the interviews we made the identities of all experts anonymous and assigned them numbers between 1 and 5 (Expert interview #1, and so on). For analyzing expert interviews we utilized thematic coding. Using minimal comparison of thematic codes (in order to consolidate the findings), we inducted thematic categories.<sup>29</sup> It is under these thematic categories that we present the outcomes of expert interviews in Chapter 5.

It must also be noted that, based on the study goals, it was important for us to conduct interviews with the representatives of state institutions. However, we were unable to receive approval from the relevant institutions before the end of the study.<sup>30</sup> Hence, for analyzing state policy we utilized publicly accessible documents, such as State Security Service reports, various relevant legal acts, strategies of the Office of the State Minister of Georgia for Reconciliation and Civic Equality, and publicly accessible reports.

## Study Structure

The following study consists of five chapters. Based on the above described goals and methodological frame (i.e. on the one hand, genealogical investigation of how the Pankisi Gorge came to be labeled as a “threat” or “a danger zone”, and on the other hand, attempt to position the lifestyle of Pankisi residents against the dominant ideological framework), readers

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27 Bogner, Alexander, Beate Litting und Wolfgang Menz: *Interviews mit Experten. Eine praxisorientierte Einführung*. Springer VS: Wiesbaden, 2014. p. 23.

28 *Ibid*, p.22.

29 *Ibid*, p.36.

30 See more in Chapter 5, Subchapter 5.2.



can imagine these five chapters as five fragments of a large picture. The study authors can be described as “archaeologists” who are trying to “excavate” and “organize” these fragments. At first glance, these “fragments” might seem unrelated. For instance, you could ask why we started the Chapter 1 with a historical discussion of the “Pankisi Crisis”, while the next one focuses on the deconstruction of such terms as “old and new terrorism”. However, a perceptive eye will not fail to notice what unites these “fragments”: focusing of the security gaze on the Pankisi Gorge is not only an outcome of local and regional politics, but directly related to the global security system and its transformation. In addition to the transformations in the security system, we also had to observe changes specific to the Gorge. Hence, one of the main chapters of the study – Chapter 3, analyses religious transformations in the Pankisi Gorge: how was the contemporary religious landscape of Pankisi formed? What is it like? Is it right to imagine it as a homogenous entity? What does the picture look like from local and foreign perspectives? And most importantly, what factors determine the labeling of religious heterogeneity of Pankisi residents into “dangerous” and “harmless” Islam? These are the main research questions posed in Chapter 3. At the same time, it is impossible to answer these questions – especially the last question regarding “dangerous” and “harmless” Islam, by only looking at local transformations in the religious picture of Pankisi. Hence, Chapter 4 returns to the discussion of global politics and such globalized concepts as “radicalization” and “violent extremism”, and programs and research models tackling with these. In this chapter, we systematize non-violent approaches in the global security system while simultaneously emphasizing their problematic nature by pointing out their role in the conceptualization of the Pankisi Gorge as “a danger zone”. At the same time, we advance approaches that would enable researchers and the state in developing alternative strategies. Chapter 5 moves the gaze away from the Pankisi Gorge and turns it at the state, and outside experts: what are the government’s forceful and non-violent approaches to the Pankisi Gorge and how do they function? These are the two main questions employed to analyze the Government approaches. When presenting the analysis of expert interviews, we describe and systematize expert evaluations of the government strategies, while at the same time analyzing their own perspectives regarding the movement of fighters outside of Pankisi. The main question at the end of the chapter inquires about the views of Pankisi residents on the movement of fighters to the Middle East between 2013-2015, and how they explain the phenomenon. It should not be assumed that the authors consider local or expert perspectives as determining factors. Such conclusion would not only be a methodological mistake on the authors’ part, but also a repetition of the same processes that have allowed the labeling of Pankisi residents and the Pankisi Gorge as “a danger zone”, “black oasis” or “terrorist haven”. In the conclusion we summarize the main findings of the five chapters and with this, we offer the reader a unified picture of all “fragments”.

## Chapter 1:

# Pankisi Crisis and Political Circumstances

Wars, and political and economic processes of the 1990s' Georgia and North Caucasus largely determined the lives of Pankisi residents, and turned the Gorge into the epicenter of tension. It is during this period that the Gorge was marked as the “black hole” of the security system, and became a target of international anti-terrorist policy. In the following chapter we discuss **how the discursive formation of the Pankisi Gorge as “dangerous” is connected to local, regional and international political processes and interests.** With this goal in mind, this chapter takes a closer look at two major themes: the “Pankisi Crisis” as a determining factor in the local context, and Georgian state politics to Pankisi during this period (1999-2002), which developed against the background of the Chechen-Russian War and post-September 11 international political processes.

## 1.1. From Chechen-Russian War to Anti-Terrorist Campaign

The second Chechen-Russian War started in September 1999. The 1997-elected President of Ichkeria, Aslan Maskhadov incited disunited Chechen field marshals to join forces against Russia. The Russian military was offering local elders a deal: if they expelled the rebels, their villages would survive bombing<sup>31</sup> In the beginning of December 1999 Russian forces disseminated warning pamphlets in Grozny and demanded that residents leave the city until December 11. In the case of disobedience, they would be declared terrorists and bandits, and dealt with physical violence.<sup>32</sup>

According to international human rights law, conflicting entities need to distinguish between civil society and militants, civil and military targets, and only launch attacks on militants and military targets. Such fundamental principles as “differentiation”, “military need” and “proportionality” were abused during the Chechen-Russian War. Among the war crimes in Chechnya, we come across mass killings of local population in the villages of Samashki, Alkhan-Yurt, and Novye Aldi. According to a Russian human rights organization, around 3000 to 5000 individuals disappeared between 1999

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31 Youngs, Tim. *The Conflict in Chechnya*. House of Commons Library Research Paper. February 7, 2000. p.16.

32 *Ibid*, p.17.

and 2005,<sup>33</sup> and local public office holders confirm the existence of 49 mass graves in Chechnya.<sup>34</sup>

In addition to Chechen militants, peaceful citizens also became targets of the Russian military. According to 1999 statement by Russia, all Chechen males between the ages of 10 and 60 were subject to arrest and search.<sup>35</sup> The Russian military transported the detainees to “filtration camps” where they were subjected to questioning, torture (among others, with electric shock), and humiliation for the sole purpose of extorting information about the rebels.<sup>36</sup> Human Rights Watch also reported the use of abovementioned methods by Russian military forces and pro-Russian Chechen soldiers.<sup>37</sup> Both men and women were detained in the “filtration camps”, which Politkovskaya describes as mobile concentration camps.<sup>38</sup> In exchange for the release of detained peaceful citizens or military figures, either dead or alive, military forces demanded ransoms.<sup>39</sup> Looting, robbing, corruption, abductions and exploitation of natural resources by the Russian military became part of everyday life in Chechnya.<sup>40</sup> In Politkovskaya’s words “tortures became a norm, and executions without due process of law a routine exercise”.<sup>41</sup> Amnesty International also confirms Russian military’s human rights abuses in Chechnya.<sup>42</sup>

The official Russian narrative turned the resistance of Chechen fighters into terrorism, and represented the disproportional reaction from Russia, as well as war crimes, as counter-terrorist operations.<sup>43</sup> Russian Minister of Foreign affairs at the time, Igor Ivanov, stated that the war in Chechnya was against international terrorism rather than the Chechen people.<sup>44</sup>

33 Gilligan, Emma. *Terror in Chechnya: Russia and the Tragedy of Civilians in War*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010. p.17.

34 *Ibid*.

35 Youngs, Tim. *The Conflict in Chechnya*. House of Commons Library Research Paper. February 7, 2000. p. 19.

36 Politkovskaya, Anna. *A Small Corner of Hell: Dispatches from Chechnya*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2003. p.58.

37 Human Rights Watch. *Worse Than a War: „Disappearances“ in Chechnya – A Crime Against Humanity*. 2005. Accessed May 15, 2018. <https://www.hrw.org/legacy/background/eca/chechnya0305/chechnya0305.pdf>.

38 Politkovskaya, Anna. *A Small Corner of Hell: Dispatches from Chechnya*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2003. p. 58.

39 *Ibid*, p. 59.

40 Gilligan, Emma. *Terror in Chechnya: Russia and the Tragedy of Civilians in War*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010. p.21.

41 Politkovskaya, Anna. *A Small Corner of Hell: Dispatches from Chechnya*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2003. p.37.

42 Amnesty International. Amnesty International Statement on the Situation of Chechen Asylum-Seekers. 2004. Accessed May 15, 2018. <https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/96000/eur460102004en.pdf>.

43 Pokalova, Elena. *Chechnya’s Terrorist Network: The Evolution of Terrorism in Russia’s North Caucasus*. Santa Barbara: PRAEGER, 2015. p.122.

44 Gilligan, Emma. *Terror in Chechnya: Russia and the Tragedy of Civilians in War*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010. p.20.

However, during his January 1 2000 visit to Chechnya, President of Russia, Vladimir Putin announced that in addition to elimination of terrorists, the objective of the military operation was to restore Russia's territorial integrity.<sup>45</sup> September 11 attacks turned out to be decisive in making Russia's official stance hegemonic, enabling it to proclaim Chechen freedom fighters as the "emissaries of Al Qaeda", and warranting its military intervention in the North Caucasus as a "counter-terrorist operation".<sup>46</sup>

Of course, global tensions that developed during the Cold War in the Near East and Afghanistan, as well as the outcomes of interventionism, contributed to religious articulation of Mujahedeen and Chechen opposition in the Russian-Chechen War. However, by representing Chechen resistance as part of the international terrorist network agenda, the Russian side ignored local political situation, history of anti-colonial conflicts and traumatized collective memory of Chechen people.<sup>47</sup> Hence, at the end of the twentieth century, Chechen resistance carried marks of the past opposition. Russia arrested suspects of rebellion, "cleansed" populated areas to search for fighters, and collectively punished locals both in the 1990s, and the nineteenth century.<sup>48</sup> After conquering the people of North Caucasian valley in the nineteenth century, Russia decided to impose taxes on local population and confiscated their harvest. Russia's attempt to disarm the residents of Caucasian mountainous areas turned out to be decisive in sparking a holy war under the leadership of Imam Shamil. Later, on February 23 1944, the Soviet government deported Vainakhs to Asia in train carts intended for cattle. Therefore, we need to search for the causes of late-twentieth century Chechen resistance primarily in the tragic historical past, political context and collective memory.<sup>49</sup> However, it is notable that scholars such as Elena Pokalova, who reduce the Chechen-Russian war to anti-terrorist campaign, discursively package the Russian interventionist politics in the North Caucasus, and the 40-year long local resistance, as Russia's "integration" of the North Caucasus.<sup>50</sup>

Russia justified violence against peaceful citizens of Chechnya through the need for war<sup>51</sup>, and explained Chechen acts of violence as irrational "terrorism". This is despite the fact that

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45 Youngs, Tim. *The Conflict in Chechnya*. House of Commons Library Research Paper. February 7, 2000. p.18.

46 Pokalova, Elena. *Chechnya's Terrorist Network: The Evolution of Terrorism in Russia's North Caucasus*. Santa Barbara: PRAEGER, 2015. p. xi.

47 Williams, Brian G. *Inferno in Chechnya: The Russian-Chechen Wars, the Al-Qaeda Myth, and the Boston Marathon Bombings*. University Press of New England, 2015.

48 *Ibid.*

49 *Ibid.*, p.48.

50 Pokalova, Elena. *Chechnya's Terrorist Network: The Evolution of Terrorism in Russia's North Caucasus*. Santa Barbara: PRAEGER, 2015. p.1.

51 Gilligan, Emma. *Terror in Chechnya: Russia and the Tragedy of Civilians in War*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010. p.19.

during the First Chechnya War only one segment of the fighters resorted to radical action on a few occasions: 1) the first so-called terrorist act was executed on November 9 1991 in response to Boris Yeltsin's decision to establish military presence in Chechnya; 2) the second act was on June 14 1995 in response to Yeltsin's decision to respond to Chechen demands for independence via military intervention. Here, the Chechen fighters' strategy was to abduct individuals, and in exchange for their release, to demand the commencement of peace talks after Russian forces left the territory of Chechnya; 3) the third, 1991 1996 terrorist act, in the opinion of Elena Pokalova, enabled Chechen fighters to reach Khasavyurt Peace Agreement with Russia.<sup>52</sup> In fact, Chechen fighters were trying to terminate a High Intensity Conflict (i.e. war) via a Low Intensity Conflict. Against the background of Russia's disproportionate use of force, and denial of Chechnya's right to self-determination, Chechen rebels did not have a wide variety of options available for resistance. Lawfulness of military actions is a matter of interpretation – here, the nature of action is less relevant than what prompted the subject to commit those actions. However, it is also a matter of power who determines such needs and whose decisions are qualified as lawful.<sup>53</sup> As Talal Asad explains, when differentiating military actions it is not violence or military needs, but rather their civilizational status that is considered important.<sup>54</sup> It is through these means that Russia's so-called “anti-terrorist” operation aimed at fighting the tactics of abduction was itself benefitting from the same terrorist tactics. Reducing Chechen resistance to religious causes, and portraying fighters as religious fanatics, facilitated de-legitimation of resistance, especially considering the disregard for political-historical context. Religious tag transformed the resistance to a “pre-modern” occurrence when violence motivated by secular politics was represented as rational and just<sup>55</sup>. Hence, the main problem was not violence, but rather the “civility” of motivations.

Historically, religion played a unifying and consolidating political function among North Caucasians. Dzhokhar Dudayev, former general of Soviet aviation and fighter for a secular state, waged Jihad against Russia, which symbolized a war for justice. Politkovskaya notes that Jihad in Chechnya stood for a “deadly war against Russia.”<sup>56</sup> However, neither articulation of discontent via Islam, nor unification were new for North Caucasians. For example, religious leader Imam Shamil, who founded the Caucasian Imamate, led an anti-imperialist warfare in the nineteenth century, which lasted for several decades.

52 Pokalova, Elena. *Chechnya's Terrorist Network: The Evolution of Terrorism in Russia's North Caucasus*. Santa Barbara: PRAEGER, 2015. p. x.

53 Asad, Talal. *On Suicide Bombing*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2007. pp. 21-22.

54 *Ibid*, p.38.

55 *Ibid*, p.45

56 Politkovskaya, Anna. *A Small Corner of Hell: Dispatches from Chechnya*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2003. p.38.

Reducing Chechen resistance to religious motivations also disregards heterogeneity of Chechen fighters and politicians. We can identify three separate groups among them:<sup>57</sup> 1. The Secular Wing, which uses human rights arguments for explaining and expressing its resistance, and works for the establishment of an international tribunal. 2. The Religious Wing, which resorts to religion for enhancing resistance. 3. Revenge-seekers who joined the fight upon death, abduction, torture and/or disappearance of their relatives or friends. The latter group started thinking about war only after “anti-terrorist operations” launched by Russia. Akhmed Zakayev, President Maskhadov’s ambassador to Europe, declared in 2001: “how could anyone be surprised that our youth – brother, whose sister was raped, son, whose father was tortured to death – are joining the ranks of forlorn revenge-seekers?”<sup>58</sup>

Russia sought for the causes of Chechen rebellion in exterior forces, namely in the so-called radical Islam and foreign zealots. Despite the fact that in the 1990s various external interest groups operated in Chechnya, and criminality was also not uncommon, this was a political problem that Russia decided to solve via military intervention. Dissociation of Chechen rebellion from anti-imperialist struggles and its reduction to irrational jihad conceptualized the fighters as ahistorical subjects whose motivation stemmed more from abstract ideas of the Early Middle Ages than specific crimes and denigration experienced in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries at the hands of imperial powers. This is especially notable since state-committed crimes are never interpreted as politically illogical.

In the 1990s Russia engaged in the dehumanization of Chechens, representing them as “members of the dark world”, “bandits” and “terrorists”.<sup>59</sup> Such orientalization serves to hierarchize human life, which in turn enables “legitimate” use of force on subjects whose life is deemed less valuable, for the sake of instituting order and reinforcing power. Human life has a different value on the market of death.<sup>60</sup> Some humans (“barbarian”) are less valuable than others (“civilized”) and accordingly, violation of their right and use of force against them is less unsettling.<sup>61,62</sup>

As such, the hegemonic narrative represents heterogeneous group of Chechen fighters, and the Chechen nation at large, as a terrorist threat. The perspective of ostracized populations

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<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, p.190.

<sup>58</sup> Gilligan, Emma. *Terror in Chechnya: Russia and the Tragedy of Civilians in War*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010. p.28.

<sup>59</sup> Gilligan, Emma. *Terror in Chechnya: Russia and the Tragedy of Civilians in War*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010. p.28.

<sup>60</sup> Asad, Talal. *On Suicide Bombing*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2007. p.94.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, p.33.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, p.94.

is erased from the discourse produced by victorious powers. As already noted, September 11 2001 proved to be decisive in granting hegemony to the Russian official version. Vladimir Putin was one of the first to get in touch with President Bush, suggesting that Russia had been struggling against international terrorism for a long time and hence, equating the situation in Chechnya with international terrorism.<sup>63</sup>

Prior to September 11, a large section of the international political body was critically disposed towards the Chechen-Russian War. To list a few cases: 1. In January 2000, the UN General Secretary, Kofi Annan accused Russia of disproportionate use of force, and stated that in the name of war on terrorism Russia turned the whole Chechen population into a target.<sup>64</sup> Prior to Kofi Annan's 2001 visit to Moscow, Human Rights Watch shed light on the existence of mass graves of peaceful citizens in Chechnya, yet Annan did not address the issue. Anna Politkovskaya claimed that Russia entered into an agreement with international unions and organizations in order to cover up the problem of Chechnya.<sup>65</sup> 2. A shared statement made by the EU and the US on December 17 1999 suggested that Russian military tactics posed danger to innocent population and created a humanitarian crisis. 3. Russia blocked the discussion of the Chechen issue at the UN Security Council. 4. British Foreign Minister declared on December 1999 that they understood Russia's "legitimate concern about terrorism", but fighting it by attacking the whole population of Chechnya was puzzling.<sup>66</sup> 5. China supported Russia's engagement in Chechnya.

Post-September 11 "anti-terrorist" mood turned out to be convenient for Russia to gain the opportunity to deal with Chechen fighters, their family members and sympathizers, via any legal or illegal means. Proclaimed as criminals, Chechen fighters lost their right to be qualified as refugees.<sup>67</sup> This also meant that "criminals" would not be eligible to take advantage of their rights offered by the Convention, and Russia could demand their return. However, even in the context of anti-terrorist war, an individual's physical immunity cannot be fully restricted.<sup>68</sup> In July 2002, Vladimir Putin's "counter-terrorist" arsenal acquired a new law on extrem-

63 Pokalova, Elena. *Chechnya's Terrorist Network: The Evolution of Terrorism in Russia's North Caucasus*. Santa Barbara: PRAEGER, 2015. p.122.

64 Youngs, Tim. *The Conflict in Chechnya*. House of Commons Library Research Paper. February 7, 2000. p.21.

65 Politkovskaya, Anna. *A Small Corner of Hell: Dispatches from Chechnya*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2003. p.194.

66 Youngs, Tim. *The Conflict in Chechnya*. House of Commons Library Research Paper. February 7, 2000. p.22.

67 ადამიანის უფლებათა ცენტრი. დუმილი კლავს: ჩეჩენ ლტოლვილთა უფლებების შელახვა საქართველოში. 2006. [http://www.humanrights.ge/files/chechen\\_report\\_Geo.pdf](http://www.humanrights.ge/files/chechen_report_Geo.pdf). p.11.

68 ადამიანის უფლებათა ევროპული სასამართლო. „ბაისუევი და ანზოროვი საქართველოს წინააღმდეგ“. საჩივარი 39804/04. სტრასბურგი, 2013. <http://www.supremecourt.ge/files/upload-file/pdf/baiusebidaanzorovi.pdf>. p.256.



ism aimed at silencing any views that went against the official discourse.<sup>69</sup> Any support of Chechen resistance could now be qualified as encouragement of anti-terrorist activities. This law helped the Kremlin to hegemonize its narrative of the North Caucasian conflict. It is at this stage of clashing national interests that the Pankisi Gorge came into focus.

## 1.2. Pankisi Crisis and Georgian Government Approaches: Prior to September 11

With the commencement of the Second Chechen War, part of the displaced individuals sought refuge in the Pankisi Gorge. This group included (1) Chechens, and (2) Pankisi Kists who had acquired permanent residence in Chechnya, or stayed in the country as labor migrants. It needs to be noted that the majority of Kists who had moved to Chechnya had not sold their property in Pankisi, which turned out to be a favorable factor as they returned. Chechen refugees who were left without homes were given shelter by the Pankisi population, and distributed amongst the families.<sup>70</sup> In addition, international funds and organizations like the UN, International Red Cross, Red Crescent and Islamic humanitarian movement “Al-Haramain”<sup>71</sup> also started assisting the displaced persons in Pankisi. However, Chechens believed that large chunk of the humanitarian assistance was in the hands of criminal groupings, which became the bone of contention between Kists and Chechens.<sup>72</sup>

In 2001, newspaper “Akhali Versia” (“New Version”) accused the so-called “Wahhabis” of selling humanitarian and financial assistance received from abroad, and buying weapons with the proceeds.<sup>73</sup> However, researchers who worked in Pankisi between 2000 and 2001 note in their work, “Ethnic Aspects of the Security Strategy”, that public attitude towards “Wahhabis” was not uniform. Part of the Kists and Chechen refugees were positively disposed towards them since, according to them, the Jamaat evenhandedly distributed humanitarian assistance. As stated by the study, “people are satisfied that everybody is getting their

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69 Pokalova, Elena. *Chechnya's Terrorist Network: The Evolution of Terrorism in Russia's North Caucasus*. Santa Barbara: PRAEGER, 2015. p.121.

70 ჩიქოვანი, გულდამ. „დასახლების სტრუქტურული ცვლილებები, კონფლიქტური სიტუაციები და მათი დარეგულირების ტრადიციული მექანიზმები“. *უსაფრთხოების სტრატეგიის ეთნიკური ასპექტები (პანკისის კრიზისი)*, რედ. ლია მელიქიშვილი. თბილისი: მშვიდობის, დემოკრატიისა და განვითარების კავკასიური ინსტიტუტი, 2002. p.118.

71 Russia proclaimed Islamic humanitarian services as terrorist organizations, which resulted in “Al-Haramain”, operating in Pankisi since 1999, closing its hospitals and canteens in 2000 and terminating its activities in Georgia. Later, in 2004, the United States also accused “Al-Haramain” of supporting terrorism, and the UN Security Council included the founder of the organization on the Interpol Wanted Persons’ list. However, the court recognized him as innocent in 2014.

72 კეკელიძე, თამარ. *პანკისი პრესის ფურცლებზე*. თბილისი: კავკასიის ხალხთა საერთაშორისო სამეცნიერო-კვლევითი ინსტიტუტი, 2007. p.121.

73 *Ibid*, p.72



share. They are providing material help for the families of war victims; they provide wood for the refugee families.”<sup>74</sup> Moreover, a female Chechen refugee was reported saying: “we requested that all humanitarian assistance – Red Cross, UN, Maskhadov Foundation, is entrusted to the Wahhabis so that they distribute it since we know that they will do it with honor.”<sup>75</sup> In 1997 the so-called “Wahhabis” created Jamaat in Pankisi. In her work, “Problems of Religious Re-orientation in a Polyethnic Society”, Lia Khutsishvili suggests that members of the Jamaat

“Distribute everything objectively. Assistance arrives once per month. They supply the refugees with sugar, flower, oil, potatoes and butter. They even presented one sheep to each family for the Islamic holidays. During wintertime, they hire workforce to chop wood in the forest and ration it out for each family. They also supply kindergartens, hospitals and schools with wood... When a refugee passes away, the Jamaat organizes a burial with its own resources. Locals wanted to distribute the humanitarian assistance themselves, but the refugees chose the Jamaat, trusting that they share everything impartially.”<sup>76</sup>

In the 1990s, war in Georgia and economic collapse fed off one another. This period witnessed no-control zones, organized crime, corruption and thriving criminal groups who also permeated the ruling political elites.<sup>77</sup> It should also be noted that Georgian economy of this time was ruled by opportunistic ex-nomenclature and criminals. Historian Stephen Jones identifies three broad categories of criminal activity in the first decade of independent Georgia: 1) crime syndicates engaged in squandering state resources and involved in contraband with state officials and foreign partners; 2) crime unions engaged in racketeering, killings and other criminal activities; 3) “ethnically based groups” involved in abductions and drug trade in conflict areas.<sup>78</sup> For instance, representatives of International Red Cross were abducted in August 2000 in the Pankisi Gorge and released afterwards. The state never prosecuted the culprits. Similarly, Spanish businessmen were abducted in November 2000 and released only a year later, on December 17, 2001. It should also be noted that ethnic com-

74 შუბითიძე, ვერა. „უსაფრთხოება და ეთნიკური კულტურის ადაპტაციის უნარი ახალ სოციალურ-კულტურულ გარემოსთან“. *უსაფრთხოების სტრატეგიის ეთნიკური ასპექტები (პანკისის კრიზისი)*, რედ. ლია მელიქიშვილი. თბილისი: მშვიდობის, დემოკრატიისა და განვითარების კავკასიური ინსტიტუტი, 2002.

75 Ibid, pp. 94-95.

76 ხუციშვილი, ლია. „რელიგიური რეორიენტაციის პრობლემები პოლიტიკურ სამოგადოებაში“. *უსაფრთხოების სტრატეგიის ეთნიკური ასპექტები (პანკისის კრიზისი)*, რედ. ლია მელიქიშვილი. თბილისი: მშვიდობის, დემოკრატიისა და განვითარების კავკასიური ინსტიტუტი, 2002. p. 167.

77 ჯონსი, სტივენ. *საქართველო: პოლიტიკური ისტორია დამოუკიდებლობის გამოცხადების შემდეგ*. თბილისი: სოციალურ მეცნიერებათა ცენტრი, 2013. p.363.

78 Ibid, p.366

position of active criminal groups in the Pankisi Gorge was varied.<sup>79</sup> In their statements, the released businessmen talked about the heterogeneity of Pankisi criminal groupings, identifying Kists, Georgians, Azerbaijanis and Chechens amongst them.<sup>80</sup>

High level of criminality in the 1990s Georgian economy was dictated by specific factors: proximity with borders, easy accessibility to international markets and distance from the center. Consequently, transnational criminal groups took advantage of the geographical location and no-control areas in Adjara<sup>81</sup>, Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Pankisi, and turned these regions into drug transit zones from Central Asia.<sup>82</sup>

It is in this context that criminal activities and drug trade in the Pankisi Gorge of 1999 and 2000 should be discussed. These factors often provoked conflicts with ethnic Georgians living in neighboring villages. However, as Ketevan Khutsishvili writes in her work, “Caucasus from Geopolitical Perspective”, “common interests of Kist and Georgian populations in Pankisi were overpowered by common interests of Kist and Georgian criminals. The Gorge turned into a transit zone for drugs and illegal traffic”.<sup>83</sup>

Before September 11, the state chose disengagement politics in Pankisi. The disengagement of Shevardnadze’s government, which was equally lenient towards criminals and “boeviks” in the Pankisi Gorge, contributed to homogenous representation of these groups by media and experts. Scholarly sources from the 2000s do not distinguish clearly between militants, Mujahedeen, “wahhabis” and criminals. Initially, Georgian government planned to sort out its relationship with “boeviks” on its own terms and “purposefully refrained from taking any radical measures”.<sup>84</sup> The government’s position prior to 2001 reveals its desire to “resolve the problem with its own resources”.<sup>85</sup> Simultaneously, experts interpreted the presence of Chechen “boeviks” in the Pankisi Gorge as a threat inasmuch as it could become the cause

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79 Kurtsikidze, Shorena and Vakhtang Chikvani. “Georgia’s Pankisi Gorge: An Ethnographic Survey.” *Berkeley Program in Soviet and Post-Soviet Studies: Working Paper Series*, 2002. Accessed November 20, 2017. <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/64d7v9hj>. p.37.

80 მამისიმედიშვილი, ხვთისო. *პანკისი: წარსული და თანამედროვეობა*. თბილისი: თბილისის უნივერსიტეტის გამომცემლობა, 2008. p.297.

81 For example, Adjarian economy functioned through fictional organizations (i.e. Ltd. Basri), which were involved in drug trafficking and sometimes established monopoly over illegal trade.

82 ჯონსი, სტივენ. *საქართველო: პოლიტიკური ისტორია დამოუკიდებლობის გამოცხადების შემდეგ*. თბილისი: სოციალურ მეცნიერებათა ცენტრი, 2013. p.365.

83 ხუციშვილი, ქეთევან. „კავკასია გეოპოლიტიკური თვალსაზრისით (სუბიექტები, ინტერესები)“. *უსაფრთხოების სტრატეგიის ეთნიკური ასპექტები (პანკისის კრიზისი)*, რედ. ლია მელიქიშვილი. თბილისი: მშვიდობის, დემოკრატიისა და განვითარების კავკასიური ინსტიტუტი, 2002. p.38.

84 კეკელიძე, თამარ. *პანკისი პრესის ფურცლებზე*. თბილისი: კავკასიის ხალხთა საერთაშორისო სამეცნიერო-კვლევითი ინსტიტუტი, 2007. p.16.

85 *Ibid*, p.17.

for Russia creating serious problems for Georgia.<sup>86</sup> Until September 11 2001, some representatives of the government denied the existence of “boeviks” in the Pankisi Gorge, suggesting only the presence of criminal groups. However, the government did not do much to eliminate the criminal situation, which first and foremost posed a threat to the residents of Pankisi.

Since the state failed to take care of the criminal situation, it created favorable environment for translating the circumstances into political terms, and transforming war on criminals into war on “terrorists”. A representative<sup>87</sup> of the public sector was reported saying in 2001 that Pankisi situation required criminal rather than political attention.<sup>88</sup> According to an article published in July 2001, “the government itself gave green light to a business [illegal business] established by several private individuals, and facilitated the inception of strictly organized and systematic criminal businesses from various individual unlawful acts.”<sup>89</sup> Expert Mamuka Areshidze also notes in an interview published in July 2001 that the situation in Pankisi “is a logical outcome of processes – unfitting relationship between the government and local population that have been ongoing for many years.”<sup>90</sup>

There was neither a plan nor any police initiative aimed at eradicating criminal activities in the Gorge. In Nodar Natadze’s opinion, processes in the Pankisi Gorge were allowed to flow freely.<sup>91</sup> It was only in 2001 that President Eduard Shevardnadze started discussions to develop a plan in order to identify criminal groups.<sup>92</sup> In July 2001, the President called on the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Ministry of Defense to solve the committed crimes, punish the culprits and bolster war on drugs.<sup>93</sup> The governor of Akhmeta and law-enforcing organs did not see the need for special operation in the Pankisi Gorge, and believed that local police action was enough to fight criminal groups.<sup>94</sup>

In response to the challenges facing Pankisi residents, the government first withdrew police sub-department from Duisi (a village in the Pankisi Gorge), which happened under the su-

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86 *Ibid*, pp.14; 17-18.

87 Head of Border Defense Department, V. Chkheidze.

88 ვეკელიძე, თამარ. *პანკისი პრესის ფურცლებზე*. თბილისი: კავკასიის ხალხთა საერთაშორისო სამეცნიერო-კვლევითი ინსტიტუტი, 2007. p.19.

89 *Ibid*, p.30.

90 *Ibid*, p.31.

91 ვეკელიძე, თამარ. *პანკისი პრესის ფურცლებზე*. თბილისი: კავკასიის ხალხთა საერთაშორისო სამეცნიერო-კვლევითი ინსტიტუტი, 2007. p.24.

92 *Ibid*, p.22.

93 *Ibid*, p. 25.

94 *Ibid*, p. 23.

pervision of the regional administration; then it positioned its military by the Pankisi border and made the decision to set up checkpoints<sup>95</sup>, which isolated Pankisi population, leaving them at the mercy of criminal groups. More importantly, these actions rendered Pankisi residents a “threat” that rest of Georgia’s population had to be protected from with the help of checkpoints. Accordingly, instead of regulating the situation, state disengagement politics completely separated Pankisi from the rest of the country. This is the period when in addition to criminality, Pankisi also faced decreased humanitarian assistance, leaving Chechen refugees without basic nourishment.<sup>96</sup> As such, criminal activities threatened the wellbeing of local population. For example, in response to the abduction of International Red Cross employees in 2000, the UN terminated humanitarian assistance to Chechen refugees in Pankisi until the release of hostages.<sup>97</sup> According to an article published in July 2001, the government proved to be “politically incapable of retaining the trust of well-disposed Kists.”<sup>98</sup> Pankisi residents blamed the dire circumstances on “Russian special services, Georgian police force and certain representatives of the state.”<sup>99</sup> Moreover, media articles discussed possible collaboration between police forces at the checkpoints and the criminal world.<sup>100101</sup>

Georgia became a transit zone for drug traffic during the Pankisi crisis.<sup>102</sup> Lack of material, technical and human resources at border checkpoints indicated vulnerability of borders and inefficiency of customs control, which made Georgia especially susceptible to becoming a transit country for drugs. Besides technical difficulties, inefficient engagement of law enforcement can also be considered a cause for the presence of drugs in the Pankisi Gorge.<sup>103</sup> According to locals, criminality in the Gorge stemmed from the immunity of “drug businessmen”. Moreover, Pankisi population often witnessed drug commerce.<sup>104</sup> Simultaneously, Georgia’s geo-political location made it an attractive country for drug traffic. In the words of Gigi Targamadze, member of Anticorruption Council, “the country used 300 million dollars’ worth of heroine in one year. As for transit, we are dealing with much larger sums – billions.”<sup>105</sup> It would have been impossible to organize and implement illegal activities of this scale without state involvement.

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95 Ibid, p. 25.

96 Ibid, p. 25.

97 Ibid, p. 86.

98 Ibid, p. 29.

99 Ibid, p.32.

100 Ibid, p.37.

101 Ibid, p.40.

102 Ibid, p.54.

103 Ibid, p.55.

104 Ibid, p.56.

105 კეკელიძე, თამარ. *პანკისი პრესის ფურცლებზე*. თბილისი: კავკასიის ხალხთა საერთაშორისო სამეცნიერო-კვლევითი ინსტიტუტი, 2007. p.62.

Neglected by the state, Pankisi population started fighting criminality and establishing order with its own resources: a temporary people's army was created; in accordance with Pankisi residents, a local group was put in charge of patrolling entrance to Duisi;<sup>106</sup> following a decision of elders, an armed youth battalion was established.<sup>107</sup> In addition to these, several public meetings were held: 1) after the abduction of International Red Cross employees, a meeting was held in Duisi on August 15 2000 where local population noted that "they will not tolerate criminal activities". They decided to develop a document that would determine obligations of the state and Pankisi residents.<sup>108</sup> 2) Kists met on December 12 2000 in Jokolo, and on December 12 in Duisi, where they demanded identification and punishment of abductors. It is notable that they anonymously provided written information on involved criminals in order to assist the law enforcement. According to an article in "Dilis Gazeti" ["Morning Newspaper"], the police disapproved of these actions, which in turn caused the Kists to accuse them of shielding the criminals.<sup>109</sup> 3) a public meeting was held in the village of Omalo on July 20 2001 where it was decided that the residents, led by their elders, would try to eradicate criminality via traditional methods.<sup>110</sup>

Until 2001, Georgian government avoided labeling "boeviks" as terrorists. Shevardnadze divided them into two separate categories: 1) first group included Chechen militants and Pankisi Kist returnees. Since they were Georgian citizens, "if they [had] committed any crimes, they [needed to] be counseled rather than scolded."<sup>111</sup> 2) second group consisted of ethnically Chechen "boeviks", many of whom were in Georgia for medical treatment. Shevardnadze planned to gradually send them back to Russia. Author of an article published in 2001 believes that handing the refugees over to Russia during new punitive operations was comparable to sacrificing them, an inexcusable act for "a government of a civilized country".<sup>112</sup> In short, unlike media and experts, the Georgian government sometimes distinguished between criminal groups and "boeviks", and even identified two groups among the latter.<sup>113</sup> However, when it came down to its relationship with these groups, the state resorted to disengagement politics and ignored local demands to deal with criminality.

106 ჩიქოვანი, გულდამ. „დასახლების სტრუქტურული ცვლილებები, კონფლიქტური სიტუაციები და მათი დარეგულირების ტრადიციული მექანიზმები". *უსაფრთხოების სტრატეგიის ეთნიკური ასპექტები (პანკისის კრიზისი)*, რედ. ლია მელიქიშვილი. თბილისი: მშვიდობის, დემოკრატიისა და განვითარების კავკასიური ინსტიტუტი, 2002. p.136.

107 *Ibid*, p.137.

108 კეველიძე, თამარ. *პანკისი პრესის ფურცლებზე*. თბილისი: კავკასიის ხალხთა საერთაშორისო სამეცნიერო-კვლევითი ინსტიტუტი, 2007. p.86.

109 *Ibid*, p.90.

110 *Ibid*, p.33.

111 *Ibid*, p.15.

112 *Ibid*, p.30.

113 *Ibid*, p.19.

### 1.3. Pankisi Crises and Impact of Global Politics on the Formation of Georgian Government Approaches: After September 11

What happened in post-September 11 period, and how did the state politics towards the Pankisi Gorge change? After September 11, Russia was successful in equating its military engagement with Chechen freedom fighters with the international counter-terrorist operation.<sup>114</sup> Simultaneously, the Russian side became more persistent in demanding joint supervision of the Pankisi Gorge.<sup>115</sup> If before 2001, due to its geo-political interests, the United States Homeland Department critically responded to Russia's demands to proclaim Pankisi as a "sanctuary for criminals" and carry out intervention,<sup>116</sup> after September 11 its position changed and it became an interested party along with Russia. Starting from September 11, Pankisi surfaced on the world security map and became part of global politics. As such, it became an epicenter for conflicting and matching geopolitical interests of the global powers.

Russia did not wait long after 9/11 and sent a note to Georgia on September 18 demanding termination of its "support for terrorism", extradition of 13 individuals arrested by the Georgian border patrol and invalidation of Ichkerian representation in Georgia.<sup>117</sup> Georgia, having denied the presence of "boeviks" in the country until September 2001, started to be more understanding towards the "problem of terrorism and Russia's especially sensitive disposition towards it."<sup>118</sup><sup>119</sup> The Georgian side declared its readiness to meet its international obligations and extradite those responsible for crimes.

Russian media declared that it was time for the United States to take a second look at its "old friend", and instead of heroes in "the fight for national liberation" to see the separatists as "followers of Bin Laden".<sup>120</sup> Russia was less successful in equating Georgia with international terrorism, which was clearly an outcome of Georgia's geopolitical situation and its political direction. Georgia avoided the label of a "terrorist country" since this designation was against the interests of its partner countries. However, the Pankisi Gorge became what Georgia had to concede, and where global and regional interests intersected with each oth-

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114 Williams, Brian G. *Shattering the al-Qaeda-Chechen Myth*. April 23, 2013. Accessed May 10, 2018. <https://jamestown.org/program/shattering-the-al-qaeda-chechen-myth/>

115 კეკელიძე, თამარ. *პანკისი პრესის ფურცლებზე*. თბილისი: კავკასიის ხალხთა საერთაშორისო სამეცნიერო-კვლევითი ინსტიტუტი, 2007. p.45.

116 *Ibid*, p.126.

117 *Ibid*, p.134.

118 *Ibid*, p.135.

119 *Ibid*.

120 *Ibid*, p.137.

er.<sup>121</sup> Ethno-religious stigmatization of Pankisi was the price that Georgia had to pay in order to avoid the label of a “terrorist” country. In the opinion of Stephen Jones, contemporary Georgian historiography created a Muslim “other” and defined Georgia in opposition to it. Georgian historians represented Georgia as a “Christian barrier” against the Islamic East.<sup>122</sup> **It was through the labeling of the Pankisi Gorge as the Muslim “other”, and as directly opposed to Georgia, that the country defined its role on international political arena.**

On November 27 2001, Russian planes and helicopters attacked populated areas in Pankisi, and the surrounding territories, five times within four hours.<sup>123</sup> The bombings took place primarily in the vicinity of Tbatani. According to the President of International Gas Corporation of Georgia, Giorgi Chanturia, “the Pankisi bombings were aimed at obstructing the construction of the gas pipeline.”<sup>124</sup> On February 1-3 2002, Russia accused Georgia of “protecting terrorists”, and the West of double-standard politics, at an international tribunal organized in Munich for the 38<sup>th</sup> International Security Conference.<sup>125</sup> In response, the United States started discussions and planning to buttress its military role in the region and assist Georgia in solving the “problem of terrorism”. According to a 2002 article in *The Guardian* Russia felt “marginalized” since despite its persistent attempts, it was not given the opportunity to conduct bombings of Chechen militants in Pankisi.<sup>126</sup> At this point, Pankisi also turned into a playground for conflicting interests of Russia and the United States.<sup>127</sup>

In 2002, the United States started Georgia Train and Equip Program with the goal of reorganizing the country’s military. The program entailed training of 1200 soldiers<sup>128</sup>, and equipping them with 64 million dollars’ worth of light weapons, transportation and communication technology.<sup>129</sup> The first stage of the military preparation was dedicated to studying

121 სუბელიანი, სოზარ. „გასული კვირის ყველაზე ხმაურიან თემად დევნილთა ყრილობა და ამ ყრილობაზე“. რადიო თავისუფლება. 17 თებერვალი, 2002. Accessed April 5, 2018. <https://www.radiotavisupleba.ge/a/1518909.html>.

122 ჯონსი, სტივენ. *საქართველო: პოლიტიკური ისტორია დამოუკიდებლობის გამოცხადების შემდეგ*. თბილისი: სოციალურ მეცნიერებათა ცენტრი, 2013. p. 355.

123 მამისიმედიშვილი, ხეთისო. *პანკისი: წარსული და თანამედროვეობა*. თბილისი: თბილისის უნივერსიტეტის გამომცემლობა, 2008. p. 302.

124 კეველიძე, თამარ. *პანკისი პრესის ფურცლებზე*. თბილისი: კავკასიის ხალხთა საერთაშორისო სამეცნიერო-კვლევითი ინსტიტუტი, 2007. p. 44.

125 *Ibid*, p.147.

126 Traynor, Ian. “Russia Angry at US War Plan for Georgia.” *The Guardian*. February 22, 2002. Accessed April 5, 2018. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2002/feb/22/usa.chechnya>.

127 ხუციშვილი, ქეთევან. „კავკასია გეოპოლიტიკური თვალსაზრისით (სუბიექტები, ინტერესები)“. *უსაფრთხოების სტრატეგიის ეთნიკური ასპექტები (პანკისის კრიზისი)*, რედ. ლია მელიქიშვილი. თბილისი: მშვიდობის, დემოკრატიისა და განვითარების კავკასიური ინსტიტუტი, 2002. p. 39.

128 1600 soldiers according to a different source: <https://www.radiotavisupleba.ge/a/1523045.html>

129 მელიქიშვილი, ლია. *უსაფრთხოების სტრატეგიის ეთნიკური ასპექტები (პანკისის კრიზისი)*. თბილისი: მშვიდობის, დემოკრატიისა და განვითარების კავკასიური ინსტიტუტი, 2002. p.8.



the situation in the region, the second stage included command and staff course, and the third stage – training of army subdivisions. In addition, a 20-member group of American instructors visited Georgia on April 30 2002 in order to conduct trainings for counter-terrorist operations.<sup>130</sup> Meanwhile, Russia resumed the bombing of the Pankisi Gorge in August 2002 – 8 helicopters dropped cluster bombs on bordering territories.<sup>131</sup> Soon after, at the end of August 2002, the third phase of Train and Equip Program commenced. On September 11, Eduard Shevardnadze named the training firing range in memory of the victims.<sup>132</sup> Command and staff course “Kakheti 2002” also started at the end of August in the vicinity of the Pankisi Gorge. US Senators John McCain and Fred Thompson, along with the Deputy Supreme Allied Commander of NATO in Europe, visited Georgia around the same period.

If Georgia acknowledged the “threat of terrorism” in the Pankisi Gorge, then it would agree to implementing the special operation, otherwise there was a risk that global powers would become involved without Georgia’s authorization.<sup>133</sup> The state was unable to deny the “threat of terrorism” in the Pankisi Gorge, yet it did try to be cautious by differentiating between criminals and “boeviks” on the one hand, and “boeviks” and terrorists on the other; at times, it also steered clear of referring to “boeviks” as “terrorists”.<sup>134</sup>

At the end of August 2002, Georgian government launched anti-criminal and anti-terrorist operations in the Pankisi Gorge. The first operation ended on September 6, 2002 with the arrest of 41 suspects.<sup>135</sup> Among those arrested were Georgians, Kists, Chechens and Arabs, which in demonstrates that unlawfulness in the Pankisi Gorge is more a matter of criminality committed by various ethnic groups than a religiously motivated phenomenon. Among the material evidence collected from the suspects were “firearms, fake passports and Wahhabi literature.”<sup>136</sup> However, it is unclear what criteria and knowledge the special forces utilized in order to identify the “Wahhabi literature”.

During this period, media also provided active coverage of causal relationship between

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130 Ibid.

131 კეკელიძე, თამარ. *პანკისი პრესის ფურცლებზე*. თბილისი: კავკასიის ხალხთა საერთაშორისო სამეცნიერო-კვლევითი ინსტიტუტი, 2007. p.48.

132 ლიკლიკაძე, კობა. „ამერიკული ‘წვრთნისა და აღჭურვის’ პროგრამა და შევარდნაძის სიურპრიზი“. *რადიო თავისუფლება*. 29 აგვისტო, 2002. Accessed March 10, 2018. <https://www.radiotavisupleba.ge/a/1523045.html>

133 მამისიმედიშვილი, ხვთისო. *პანკისი: წარსული და თანამედროვეობა*. თბილისი: თბილისის უნივერსიტეტის გამომცემლობა, 2008. p.305.

134 კეკელიძე, თამარ. *პანკისი პრესის ფურცლებზე*. თბილისი: კავკასიის ხალხთა საერთაშორისო სამეცნიერო-კვლევითი ინსტიტუტი, 2007. p.50.

135 Ibid, p.51.

136 Ibid.



“Wahhabism” and criminality.<sup>137138</sup> Some researchers even went so far as to search for the causes of abductions in ethnic markers. In order to prove the rationality of this argument, one of the authors pointed to the term “lei” in Vainakh language, which denotes a slave, and can be defined as “an abducted, displaced individual who, because of having nobody to ransom her, spent her whole life serving her owner.”<sup>139</sup> This ethnic essentialization of hostage-taking, of course, cannot stand the test of historical critique since nineteenth century Tsarist Russia actively employed the tactic of hostage-taking, especially targeted against prominent families, in order to subjugate local populations in the Caucasus.<sup>140</sup>

The methodology employed for identifying belonging, relationship and classification of groups active in the Pankisi Gorge remains ambiguous, non-nuanced and understudied. The Georgian state declares that anti-criminal and anti-terrorist special operations are being conducted in Pankisi. According to various sources, arrested criminals belong to various ethnic groups, including Georgians, Kists, Azerbaijanis and Chechens.<sup>141</sup> For instance, an ethnically Georgian Shota Chichiashvili was put on trial for the abduction of Spanish businessmen. Hence, it is unclear why possible criminal groups, Mujahedeen, the so-called Wahhabis and “boeviks”, are being construed as the same thing.

For the media, solution to the Pankisi crisis lies in the return of Chechen refugees back to Chechnya.<sup>142</sup> According to the Governor of Akhmeta Municipality, Pavle Tsadzikidze, it is delusional to expect improvements in the criminal situation after the return of refugees since the majority of crimes are being committed by Georgian citizens. A former representative of the Chechen diaspora in Georgia, Khizri Aldamov also believes that repatriation of refugees is not a safe option for them. However, he is also aware that “Georgia is experiencing serious pressure from Russia.”<sup>143</sup> Pankisi residents, including Georgians, Ossetians and Kists, describe Chechen refugees in a positive light and point out their deferent behavior.<sup>144</sup> In the

137 *Ibid*, p.65.

138 *Ibid*, p.64.

139 მელიქიშვილი, ლია. *უსაფრთხოების სტრატეგიის ეთნიკური ასპექტები (პანკისის კრიზისი)*. თბილისი: მშვიდობის, დემოკრატიისა და განვითარების კავკასიური ინსტიტუტი, 2002. p. 85.

140 Politkovskaya, Anna. *A Small Corner of Hell: Dispatches from Chechnya*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2003. p.22.

141 კეკელიძე, თამარ. *პანკისი პრესის ფურცლებზე*. თბილისი: კავკასიის ხალხთა საერთაშორისო სამეცნიერო-კვლევითი ინსტიტუტი, 2007. p.50.

142 *Ibid*, p.114.

143 *Ibid*, pp. 114-115.

144 ჩიქოვანი, გულდამ. „დასახლების სტრუქტურული ცვლილებები, კონფლიქტური სიტუაციები და მათი დარეგულირების ტრადიციული მექანიზმები“. *უსაფრთხოების სტრატეგიის ეთნიკური ასპექტები (პანკისის კრიზისი)*, რედ. ლია მელიქიშვილი. თბილისი: მშვიდობის, დემოკრატიისა და განვითარების კავკასიური ინსტიტუტი, 2002. p.119.

years 2000 and 2001, every Georgian and Ossetian respondent denied Chechen participation in criminality during their conversations with ethnologists and emphasized the fact that “Kist and Georgian criminals were collaborating with the law-enforcement.”<sup>145</sup> For a long time, Pankisi residents encouraged the state to solve the issue of criminality in the Gorge, however, the state would not even get involved on the level of the police, and even ordered the removal of a police sub-division from the region. Since September 11 2001, it was only through anti-terrorist special operations that the state reminded the residents of its existence.

When in September 2002 Georgia refused to hand over Chechens to Russia, Russian President Vladimir Putin accused the country of sheltering non-political criminals. At the same time, ongoing confrontations between the Russian military and Chechen militants on the territory of Ingushetia in 2002, gave Russia an excuse to pose demands on Georgia. On October 7-8 2002, in Chisinau, Presidents of Georgia and Russia agreed to: 1) joint patrolling of the Chechen segment of Russian-Georgian border; 2) extradition of Chechen militants detained in Georgia; 3) enhanced communication between intelligence services; 4) appointment of coordinators in the fight against terrorism.<sup>146</sup>

Third phase of the anti-terrorist operations in the Pankisi Gorge was planned to start three days before the Presidents of Russia and Georgia met, on March 3, 2003. Experts believed that “the anti-terrorist operation that was launched in Pankisi three days before the Presidents met face to face would prevent the President of Russia from making harsh statements and from diverting attention from the main issues to the Pankisi problem.”<sup>147</sup>

Anybody whose extradition the Russian government demanded was under threat. For example, the border-patrol arrested thirteen Chechens for illegal border crossing in 2002 and handed some of them to Russia. Two of them, Islam Kashiev and Temur Baimurzaev, appealed to the Georgian Supreme Court and on February 6 2004, one and a half years after being held in detention, the court found them not guilty. However, two days after the court decision Kashiev and Baimurzaev disappeared, and it turned out they were arrested at the Larsi customs in an attempt to enter Russia. Chechen Refugee Association in Georgia expressed their doubt that two individuals who were wanted in Russia would cross the border

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145 ჩიქოვანი, გულდამ. „დასახლების სტრუქტურული ცვლილებები, კონფლიქტური სიტუაციები და მათი დარეგულირების ტრადიციული მექანიზმები“. *უსაფრთხოების სტრატეგიის ეთნიკური ასპექტები (პანკისის კრიზისი)*, რედ. ლია მელიქიშვილი. თბილისი: მშვიდობის, დემოკრატიისა და განვითარების კავკასიური ინსტიტუტი, 2002. p. 139.

146 მელიქიშვილი, ლია. *უსაფრთხოების სტრატეგიის ეთნიკური ასპექტები (პანკისის კრიზისი)*. თბილისი: მშვიდობის, დემოკრატიისა და განვითარების კავკასიური ინსტიტუტი, 2002. p. 9.

147 ჩიქოვანი, თამარ. „ქართული პრესის ყურადღების ცენტრში კვლავ პანკისის ხეობა მოექცა: კვირის ბოლოს“. *რადიო თავისუფლება*. 1 მარტი, 2003. Accessed December 5, 2017. <https://www.radiotavisupleba.ge/a/1526854.html>.

via the customs, and presumed that they were secretly extradited. Despite the fact that the Supreme Court found them innocent, President of Georgia stated: “according to my information, they are indeed militants.”<sup>148</sup>

Between 1999 and 2006 there were numerous reports of abuse of Chechen refugees’ rights and this is when acquisition of refugee status should not have been restricted “based on race, religion or country of origin.”<sup>149</sup> Human Rights Centre reported that Georgian government discriminated against individuals seeking refugee status if they came from Chechen and Kist ethnic background. The government also created issues for persons of Chechen origin on the border: they were denied refugee status and expelled from the country; they were detained for non-religious migration without being offered the legal option to seek asylum; when seeking asylum, they were denied the right to enter Georgia due to their ethnic background.<sup>150</sup>

After the conflict, Chechen refugees were afraid to go back to Russia and considered themselves to be an instrument in the ongoing negotiations between Georgia and Russia.<sup>151</sup> Their fear was not unfounded since in the light of the circumstances in Chechnya, they were facing the threat of torture, other nonhuman or humiliating treatment, or punishment without due process of law.<sup>152</sup> According to the Convention against Torture, “no State Party shall expel, return or extradite a person to another State where there are substantial grounds for believing that he would be in danger of being subjected to torture.”<sup>153</sup>

The so-called anti-criminal and anti-terrorist operations in the Pankisi Gorge were conducted with serious human rights abuses for the residents, and especially the refugees. The Georgian law enforcement employed physical force to deal with the refugees during the so-called “criminal purging” operations. They severely beat fourteen Chechen women, twelve of whom had to be taken to the Akhmeta Hospital. According to Human Rights Centre, four of them were diagnosed with brain concussions. One of the women was pregnant. According to the women’s statements, the law enforcement representatives ordered them to their knees and then beat them with rifle stocks.<sup>154</sup> As stated by Human Rights Watch, US-supported anti-terrorist operations in Georgia were primarily implemented in the Pankisi Gorge where

148 ადამიანის უფლებათა ცენტრი. *დუმბილი კლავს: ჩეჩენ ლტოლვილთა უფლებების შელახვა საქართველოში*. 2006. Accessed December 5, 2017. [http://www.humanrights.ge/files/chechen\\_report\\_Geo.pdf](http://www.humanrights.ge/files/chechen_report_Geo.pdf). p.12.

149 *Ibid*, p.7.

150 *Ibid*, pp.7-8.

151 *Ibid*, p. 5.

152 *Ibid*, p. 10.

153 *Ibid*.

154 *Ibid*, p. 14.

the Georgian state was engaged in serious human rights abuses, including mass searches, arrests, “disappearances” and violation of due process.<sup>155</sup>

In conclusion, local political and economic processes on the one hand – characterized by no-control zones, organized crime, corruption and strong criminal groups, and international developments on the other - the Chechen-Russian War, tensions between global powers, and September 11 2001 terrorist attacks, marked the Pankisi Gorge on the global security map and confronted it with various challenges.

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<sup>155</sup> Human Rights Watch. In the Name of Counter-Terrorism: Human Rights Abuses Worldwide. March 25, 2003. Accessed December 5, 2017. <https://www.hrw.org/report/2003/03/25/name-counter-terrorism-human-rights-abuses-worldwide/human-rights-watch-briefing>.

## Chapter 2:

### Transformations of Security System:

### What Do We Know and Not Know about *Terrorism*?

Despite local and regional specifics of the Pankisi Gorge, and the state policies discussed in the second chapter (see Chapter I), the labeling of the Gorge as a “dangerous” zone on the one hand, and history of Temirlan Machalikashvili and related issues, on the other (see Introduction), cannot be considered an accidental occurrence or a one-time error. The inclusion of the Pankisi Gorge on the global security map, among other things, is closely linked to the formation of the global security system in the aftermath of September 11, 2001. Hence, we need to start our discussion with the question already outlined in the introduction, namely “what are we referring to when we talk about terrorism?”

In the aftermath of September 11, terror attacks in the US, war on terror and related policies experienced (and continues to experience) a transformation. After the tragedy of September 11, during the administration of President Bush, the primary means of countering terrorism was via violent engagement. Between 2001 and 2003, even talking about the causes of terrorism was difficult. According to the Director of International Centre for the Study of Radicalization (ICSR), Peter Neumann, in post-September 11 era even talking about fundamental causes of terrorism became difficult since, as many experts and commentators have argued, this task turned into and an attempt to justify the killings of innocent citizens.<sup>156</sup> The declaration of “war on terror” and military interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq generated detrimental effects not only in the two countries, but also resulted in continuous surveillance and blacklisting of millions of citizens of “Western” countries who identify as Muslims.<sup>157</sup> In 2004-2005 increasing critique of military intervention contributed to the search for new strategies for fighting terrorism and understanding its fundamental causes.

This period also marks the introduction of *new terrorism* as a new scholarly term, which first and foremost designates *religious terrorism*. A new wave of research in terrorism begins, numerous studies and publications appear. Simultaneously, both on theoretical, and inter- and intra-state level new terms and strategic programs appear, such as dealing with deradi-

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<sup>156</sup> Peter R. Neumann, in M. Sedgwick. “The Concept of Radicalization as a Source of Confusion”, *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 22, 4 (2010): 479-494, DOI: 10.1080/09546553.2010.491009. p.480.

<sup>157</sup> Beydoun, Khaled A., *American Islamophobia: Understanding the Roots and Rise of Fear*. Oakland, California: University of California Press, 2018; Kundnani, Arun. *Muslims Are Coming! Islamophobia, Extremism, and the Domestic War on Terror*. London and New York: Verso, 2014.

calization, radicalism and extremism, and others. Today, these strategies can be divided into two main, non-military initiatives: Countering Violent Extremism [CVE] and Preventing Violent Extremism [PVE].<sup>158</sup>

However, different recommendations, and ensuing initiatives and programs implemented by the state and devised by experts and researchers to fight terrorism and radicalization, did not result in entirely positive outcomes. Moreover, often these programs are linked to the violation of civic and human rights and freedoms, as well as to rapidly increasing Islamophobia.<sup>159</sup>

## 2.1. “War on Terror”, Islamophobia and the New Epistemology

When discussing research on terrorism, radicalization and extremism in the existing literature on terrorism, scholars often differentiate between “old” and “new terrorism”. The term “old terrorism” refers to groups and events that we come across up until the 1990s. For example, the German Red Army Faction, also known as the Baader-Meinhof Group, linked to several terrorist acts in the 1970s Germany. Despite this distinction, scholars do not agree on a combination of factors that distinguish the two. However, these factors usually revolve around such categories as motivation, goals, means and forms of organization.<sup>160</sup> “Old terrorism” involves rational calculation of political goals and tactical means, aimed against a specific social group or political ideology. “Old terrorism” chose a symbolic objective for attacks, and the so-called conventional violence as the primary means for terrorist acts (i.e. explosives or firearms). Hence, the number of victims remained limited. The prime structure of “old terrorism” was hierarchical.<sup>161</sup> Alternatively, “new terrorism” is essentially linked to religious motives, that is, with other-worldly goals, and hence, it is perceived as not subject to negotiations. At the same time, compared to “old terrorism”, “new terrorism” is also believed to employ a wider range of forms of violence and its implementation. Due to these reasons, the number of its victims is far greater, forms of attack and violence more unconventional (for instance, use of chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear substances, and firearms), and organizational structure mainly transnational.<sup>162</sup>

As Hegemann and Kahl note in their edited volume, *Terrorismus und Terrorismusbekämpfung*–

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158 See more in-depth discussion of these initiatives in Chapter 4.

159 Ibid.

160 Hegemann, Hendrik und Martin Kahl. *Terrorismus und Terrorismusbekämpfung*. Eine Einführung. Wiesbaden: Springer VS, 2018. pp. 48-49.

161 Ibid.

162 Ibid., pp.49-50.

*fung*, despite attempts to identify characteristics that differentiate “new” and “old” terrorisms, critics emphasize issues associated with the newly defined traits of “new terrorism”. In addition to the fact that historically, religiously motivated violence can be ascribed to many groups, groups whose primary motivation was not religious but rather social also had universal goals - rather than local or particular, such as world revolution. Furthermore, paying no heed to political factors for religiously motivated groups would mean having oversimplified and unrealistic perception of the issue. Indubitably, terrorist organizations such as Al Qaeda or the Islamic State employ terrorism and violence to achieve specific political goals. For example, to delegitimize United States in the Arab world, to engage in armed conflict with other religious groups, nation-states or even terrorist groupings. Moreover, despite the transnational nature of these terrorist organizations, attributing them hierarchical structure would also be irrelevant.<sup>163</sup> In regards to the weapons utilized in terrorist acts, and the number of victims, both Hegemann and Kahl note that apart from the use of different types of weapons, including explosives and firearms, the number of victims as a distinguishing factor between “old” and “new” terrorisms is not without its complications. On the one hand, Hegemann and Kahl refer to the Global Terrorism Index, according to which the number of victims of terrorism increased from under 5000 before 2000 to 32.765 in 2014, and relatively decreased to 29.376 in 2015.<sup>164</sup> In 2016, the number of victims dropped to 25,673, 13% less than in 2015.<sup>165</sup> At the same time, as Hegemann and Kahl duly note, the number of victims in various nation-states is not equally distributed, with certain countries taking the lead. **In 2015, the highest number of deaths caused by terrorist acts was registered in Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria, Nigeria and Pakistan, 72% of the global indicator.**<sup>166</sup> **As per 2017 Global Terrorism Index, the above listed countries were again in the top five countries with the highest number of deaths caused by terrorist attacks, which accounts for three fourths of all such deaths around the world.**<sup>167</sup> On the other hand, despite the increase in the number of deaths caused by terrorism since 2000, three factors need to be emphasized. Firstly, death index is the highest in countries like Iraq, Afghanistan and Syria, especially in the post-2000 period. This suggests that armed interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq, and civil war in Syria, largely determined the increase in violent acts in these countries.<sup>168</sup> Secondly, when relying on

163 Ibid., 51-52. In his work, *ISIS: A History*, Fawaz A. Gerges, Professor of International Relations and Contemporary Middle East Studies at the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE), describes in detail hierarchical nature of the Islamic State, and its confrontation with both other religious groups and terrorist organizations like Al Qaeda. See: Gerges, Fawaz A. *ISIS. A History*. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2016.

164 Hegemann und Kahl, *Terrorismus*, p.53.

165 Global Terrorism Index Report 2017, p.16.

166 Hegemann und Kahl, *Terrorismus*, p.53.

167 Global Terrorism Index Report 2017, p.16.

168 Hegemann und Kahl, *Terrorismus*, pp. 53-55.

statistical databases, such as the Global Terrorism Index, such circumstances often complicate the identification of exact reasons of death - whether they were actually caused by war or terrorism, since these databases cannot differentiate between various causes.<sup>169</sup> For example, as specified in the 2017 Global Terrorism Index report, Georgia is on the 77th place among the 130 countries affected by terrorism. In the twelve-member group of Russia and Eurasian countries, Georgia held the third place for years, and moved to the sixth place in accordance with the 2016 census. Based on the Global Terrorism Index, between 2002 and 2016 97 terrorist acts were executed in Georgia, killing 38 people in total.<sup>170</sup> Evidently, both the 77th place and 97 terrorist attacks (Georgia is listed among the localities where 2016 terrorist attacks of the Islamic State took place)<sup>171</sup> is a notably high and unusual indicator. If we inquire about specific attacks listed in the report, then we would have to resort to the Global Terrorism Database, which the Global Terrorism Index report is based on.<sup>172</sup> Information on Georgia starts to appear in the Global Terrorism Database from 1991. The list includes events related to Georgia's first president, Zviad Gamsakhurdia, the attack on President Shevardnadze, specific events from the civil war, conflicts with Abkhazia and South Ossetia, the 2008 August War, physical assault on a member of the United National Movement in 2015, as well as the 2016 bomb attack in Sukhumi, Abkhazia, which was not claimed by any terrorist group, but according to a short reference in the database, is linked to the Islamic State, and others.<sup>173</sup> No attack in Georgia has been religiously motivated (here, it is harder to identify specific characteristics that make an event a terrorist act). It is undeniable that if it is hard to distinguish deaths caused by attacks, violent acts, wars or other political factors from deaths caused by terrorist attacks, such distinctions would be even harder to draw in countries like Iraq, Afghanistan or Syria where conflicts appear on a wider scale and hence, the number of victims is higher. Thirdly, in Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria, Nigeria and Pakistan, deaths caused by terrorism or war are less frequently covered by media compared to, for example, Western European countries. As a result, in general public we find the perception that terrorist organizations are especially targeting Western countries where the number of deaths increases annually.<sup>174</sup> Hegemann and Kahl argue that the number of terrorism-related deaths in Europe was higher in the 1980s than today, primarily due to conflicts and violence in the Basque Country and North Ireland.<sup>175</sup>

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169 Ibid., pp.54-55.

170 Global Terrorism Index Report 2017, p.48.

171 Ibid., p.73.

172 Ibid., p.2.

173 Global Terrorism Database. Accessed April 15, 2018. <https://www.start.umd.edu/gtd/about/>.

174 Hegemann und Kahl, *Terrorismus*, p.53.

175 Ibid., p.55.



Nonetheless, more than the disagreement surrounding these indicators, it is important to describe how “new terrorism” is being connected to the so-called religious, and more specifically “Islamic”, terrorism. Despite the fact that “new terrorism” appears in scholarly literature in the 1990s<sup>176</sup>, the term became more broadly established as a result of September 11 attacks. Since these events, the term is often directly associated with religious, namely Islamic terrorism. One of the mentioned denominators of “new terrorism” - its non-national and other-worldly objectives, can be found in the speech of the US President, George Bush where he equates the September 11 tragedy with “absolute evil”.<sup>177</sup> The labeling of “new terrorism” as “absolute evil” is not accidental and constitutes a significant part of post-September 11 planning and implementation of strategies to fight terrorism. As noted by Kundnani, this is because post-September 11 public discourse was limited to ideas on terrorism that did not look for other explanations for these acts beyond evil motivations of the terrorists, debilitating the incentive to seek other reasons.<sup>178</sup> During this period, one of the leading scholars on terrorism, Walter Laqueur, and his thesis distinguishing political forms of “new” and “old” terrorisms, became especially prevalent.<sup>179</sup> Laqueur differentiates between “old terrorism”, inspired by nationalism, communism and fascism, and “new terrorism” motivated by the “Islamic-fundamentalism”, which is built on fanaticism.<sup>180</sup> If fanaticism and/or absolute evil form the basis of “new terrorism”, then the only way to fight this evil - which, in the words of George Bush, challenges the so-called civilized, American, “our way of living”<sup>181</sup>, is to wage a ruthless war against it. This juxtaposition of terrorism and war, questions on how to differentiate the meanings of violence generated by the two, inquiry into post-September 11 fixation on terrorism when discussing different forms of violence, and the meaning of such fixation, represent the focal point of anthropologist Talal Asad’s work, *On Suicide Bombing*.<sup>182</sup> Talal Asad takes Alain Badiou’s remark as the starting point to identify disparity between two forms of violence generated by war and terrorism, namely the question why organized violence against terrorism is labeled as war. Asad agrees with Badiou that in the past, especially in the colonial context, when

176 Ibid., p.48.

177 On the day of the September 11 tragedy, President Bush addressed the American citizens in the following way: “Good evening. Today, our fellow citizens, our way of life, our very freedom came under attack in a series of deliberate and deadly terrorist acts. The victims were in airplanes, or in their offices; secretaries, businessmen and women, military and federal workers; moms and dads, friends and neighbors. Thousands of lives were suddenly ended by evil, despicable acts of terror.” In the September 11 speech, President Bush mentioned the word “evil” three more times. Second time he said that the American nation had seen evil, the worst aspect of human nature, on that particular day; third time when he informed the public that the search for those who committed this act of evil had started, and lastly, at the end of the speech, when he read an excerpt from Psalm 23: “Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil, for You are with me.” Source: *Selected Speeches of President George W. Bush*; Accessed May 01. 2018. [https://georgew-bushwhitehouse.archives.gov/infocus/bushrecord/documents/Selected\\_Speeches\\_George\\_W\\_Bush.pdf](https://georgew-bushwhitehouse.archives.gov/infocus/bushrecord/documents/Selected_Speeches_George_W_Bush.pdf).

178 Kundnani, *The Muslims are coming!*; Talal, Asad. *On Suicide Bombing*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2007. pp. 7-8.

179 Kundnani, *The Muslims are coming!*, p.83.

180 Ibid.

181 Bush, *Address to the nation*.

182 Asad. *On Suicide Bombing*.

states reacted to terrorism, this reaction was described not as war, but as police intervention. For example, action against Baader-Meinhof Group, Irish Republican Army (IRA), and Basque ETA were described as “police acts” or “security measures”. Badiou notes that the use of the term “war” by the United States indicates its attempt to legitimate violent actions.<sup>183</sup> However, Asad considers that the emphasis on the term “war” is not enough since September 11 since the expression “war on terrorism” is being employed in opposition to terrorism, and accordingly, a distinction is being made between the two forms of violence. As noted above, the so-called “new” or “transnational” terrorism is linked to religion, namely Islam. According to Asad, since Islam is often described as a totalitarian religious tradition rivaling democracy, its form of violence is perceived as irrational.<sup>184</sup> Subsequently, religion becomes the most popular explanation for September 11 attacks with its dominant concepts conceived as the foundation of terrorism. **Islam turns into a fanatic opposition to modernism and hence, according to popular opinion, unless the Islamic world is radically reformed, contemporary world will always be threatened by terrorism.**<sup>185</sup> For Asad, conceptualization of religion and Islam as irrational is interesting inasmuch as such argumentation allows him to explore historical intersection of Christianity and Islam, theological implications of Jihad, and the selectiveness typical for historical narratives, especially what is being selected in the process of such narration. Not only does the focus on irrational and non-modern Islam as the foundation of terrorism disregard a chain of geopolitical interests, ignoring such moments from the historical narrative simplifies political interests of global hegemonic powers by boiling them down to arguments about civility and rationality.<sup>186</sup> For Asad, the main difference between terrorist acts or terrorists, and military forces is not violence or the risk they pose to ordinary way of being, but rather their civilizing status. Hence, the defining factor here is not a clash of civilizations (conflict between two incompatible set of values), but rather war between “the civilized” and “the uncivilized.”<sup>187</sup> As such, Asad believes that discourse on terror re-defines the realm of violence, which in turn allows direct intervention in rules and conventions of everyday life, and their regulation in relation to terror.<sup>188</sup> Consequently, for him, it is crucial to identify colonial substructure of such conflicts in today’s world where countries and societies are closely interconnected. Thus, discussions about the need for reforming the Islamic civilization, which as Asad argues, certainly requires reforms as clearly demanded by its own citizens, should involve talks about the necessity of reforms in Europe and the United States. It is fruitless to talk about reforms in one without re-considering approaches, institutions and policies in the other.<sup>189</sup>

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183 Ibid., p.8.

184 Ibid.

185 Ibid., pp.8-9.

186 Ibid., p.13.

187 Ibid., pp.37-38.

188 Ibid., p.28.

189 Ibid., p.14.

Like Talal Asad, Jacques Derrida is of the opinion that when discussing contemporary acts of terror, it is of utmost importance to simultaneously consider Western politics and practice, as well as international institutions and international law, since it becomes more and more difficult to clearly distinguish war and terrorism in the post-September 11 world. Consequently, both on the level of nation states and the United Nations, we encounter the problem of identifying a single and generally accepted definition, which in turn allows opportunistic use of the term. For Derrida, it is important to implement a deconstructive intervention in the very narrow definition of terrorism employed in the contemporary world, and circulated in the dominant public discourse, which is primarily determined by the techno-economic power of modern media.<sup>190</sup> In order to go beyond this narrow definition, Derrida not only emphasizes the complexities of differentiating between war and terrorism, but also the necessity of discussing state terror.<sup>191</sup>

Despite the fact that there are dozens of definitions of terrorism in academic literature, there is no accepted single definition of the term on intra- and inter-state level. For instance, in a study on extremism in different African countries conducted by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the authors explain that there is no accepted universal definition of terrorism.<sup>192</sup> Politically speaking, the absence of a general definition points to the difficulties of agreeing when the use of violence is legitimate: against who, by whom and for what reason. At the same time, the authors suggest that terrorist acts are represented as single instances of a larger-scale strategy (whether military or geopolitical).<sup>193</sup>

One thing is clear from the above discussion: lack of a universal definition of terrorism on the UN level on the one hand, and various definitions of terrorism on national levels on the other,<sup>194</sup> suggest that the issue of definition is not only linked to the difficulties of de-

190 Derrida, Jacques: *Autoimmunity: Real and Symbolic Suicides. Dialogue with Jacques Derrida*. In: Giovanna Borradori (Ed.), *Philosophy in a Time of Terror. Dialogues with Jürgen Habermas and Jacques Derrida*, 85-136. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2003. p.103.

191 Ibid., p.108.

192 Ibid., p.107.

193 UNDP. *Journey to Extremism in Africa: Drivers, Incentives and the Tipping Point for Recruitment. 09 September 2017. Accessed July 12, 2018. <http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/librarypage/democratic-governance/journey-to-extremism.html>*. Although there is no universally accepted legal definition used by the UN, the 1994 49/60 resolution of the UN General Assembly, which addressed the elimination of international terrorism, describes terrorism as “criminal acts intended or calculated to provoke state of terror in the general public” (Ibid., p. 19).

194 In 2002 the EU activated a framework decision on fighting terrorism, which does not directly define terrorism, but rather describes it as a combination of the following two elements of a terrorist attack: 1) objective elements (killing, physical injury, hostage taking, extortion, attacks, threatening to commit any of the acts listed), and 2) subjective elements (acts committed to terrorize citizens, destabilization or destruction of state or international structures, obstructing the implementation of state activities). See: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=LEGISSUM:l33168>.

This 2002 framework decision was replaced by the 2017 directive issued by the European Parliament and the European Council. The directive defined terrorist attacks and issues related to their organization, financing and international activities. See: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/en/TXT/?uri=CELEX:32017L0541>.

cision-making, but also, as Arun Kundnani explains, **each use of the term “terrorism” is essentially a political act in and of itself.**<sup>195</sup> As such, the definition of terrorism is never uniform or universal since this would imply directing the accusatory powers of the term against all forms of violence, which (as Talal Asad shows) does not hierarchize or prioritize different forms of violence.<sup>196</sup>

If problematic of differentiation between “old” and “new” terrorism, as well as manifestation of the hegemonic politics inherent in the concept of terrorism, are evident from the above discussion, we will need to answer one more question, namely “is there anything new in “new terrorism”? The 2017 UNDP report attempts to answer a similar question.<sup>197</sup> The document summarizes main characteristics of violent-extremist groups (the document prioritizes the term “violent extremism” rather than “terrorism”). Noting that violent extremism is not a new phenomenon and is not exclusively connected to radical religious faith, the document differentiates between four developments: 1) globalization of violent extremism, which first and foremost implies global networks and recruitment forms of violent extremist groups; 2) utilization of modern technologies, especially social networks, for the purpose of recruiting; 3) high level of unpredictability of violent extremist attacks determined by random selection of targets; and 4) unprecedented availability of weapons of mass destruction.<sup>198</sup>

By problematizing the term “new terrorism” we do not eliminate the possibility of the emergence of new global, violent-extremist groups or organizations, or change of tactics. Instead, in addition to considering the characteristics listed by the UNDP, **our goal is to expand our focus from exclusively outward characteristics to hierarchies and political meanings intrinsic in the term, and as such, the need for its constant deconstruction.** At the same time, when discussing terrorism, fighting terrorism and war, we should not ignore two important questions examined by Talal Asad and Arun Kundnani. According to Asad, new elements in the “war on terror” are “the fact that a new epistemological object can be constructed through a war on terror”.<sup>199</sup> For Kundnani, on the other hand, “war on terror” and the ensuing detrimental losses in Afghanistan, Iraq, Yemen and other countries - fed on racial dehumanization of Muslim victims. “A social body”, Kundnani explains, “dependent on imperialist violence must discover an ideology that can disavow that dependency if it is

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195 Kundnani, *The Muslims are coming!*, p.18.

196 Ibid.

197 UNDP. Preventing Violent Extremism through Promoting Inclusive Development, Tolerance and Respect for Diversity. A development response to addressing radicalization and violent extremism, 14 February 2017. Accessed November 02, 2018. <http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/librarypage/democratic-governance/conflict-prevention/discussion-paper---preventing-violent-extremism-through-inclusiv.html>.

198 Ibid., p.12.

199 Asad, *On Suicide Bombing*, p.29.

to maintain legitimacy”.<sup>200</sup> Many forms of racism in modern era have performed this role, however, as Kundnani notes, today it is Islamophobia that is prioritized. He considers racialization of Muslimhood largely similar to anti-Semitism. Nonetheless, for him, labeling Islamophobia as structural racism does not imply pronouncing all criticism of the Islamic faith as racist. Yet observation and acknowledgement of structural similarities between Islamophobia and anti-Semitism entails countering those social and political processes, which allow the expression of anti-Islamic sentiments in public spaces through violent attacks and institutionalization of violence in state structures. A good example of this is Muslim profiling, violation of their civil rights, and so on.<sup>201</sup>

We also must note that today “war on terrorism” and military interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq are no longer deemed as effective in international politics and greater part of scientific literature. Instead, starting from 2004, both in scholarly and political domains we can observe pursuit of new strategies for eradicating and defeating terrorism. Yet, often, as explained by Asad, construction of new epistemological objects is linked to the search and implementation of these new strategies.

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200 Kundnani, *The Muslims are coming!*, pp. 11-12.

201 Ibid.

## Chapter 3:

# Religion, Politics and *Mimicry* in the Pankisi Gorge

The religious landscape of contemporary Pankisi was formed as a result of complex historical, political and social processes. This study examines religion as a historical outcome of discursive processes, which does not have a universal definition since its building blocks are historically specific.<sup>202</sup> The hegemonic paradigm disregards local epistemology and the imbalance of power. Hence, the given study seeks to shatter this hegemonic monologue and to introduce the perspectives of Pankisi residents into the dialogue.

When describing the religious landscape of the Pankisi Gorge, researchers distinguish between the followers of Salafism and traditional Islam. At the same time, they interchangeably use such terms as Salafism and Wahhabism on the one hand, and traditional and Sufi Islam, on the other. How was the contemporary religious landscape of Pankisi formed and what are the appropriate terms to describe local religiosity? The Pankisi crisis proved to be the key historical moment, which determined the dominant interpretation and evaluation of the local beliefs and lifestyle. Wahhabism became the term employed by media and experts to describe political and social processes in Pankisi.<sup>203</sup> However, **is Wahhabism a suitable term to describe the new form of piety in Pankisi? To what extent is it a universal signifier? Is the religious landscape of Pankisi dichotomous? What does the construction<sup>204</sup> of a new epistemological object in Pankisi entail?**

In the first and second chapters we discussed the geo-political circumstances that enabled global powers, and namely Russia, to generate the image of a “Wahhabist” from the North Caucasus and among Pankisi devotees, and to label this heterogeneous group of freedom fighters (during the Russia-Chechnya War) as terrorists. We also partially addressed the causes that allowed this narrative to become acceptable for the Georgian political society. In the following chapter, we continue to discuss the factors that enabled the examination of Pankisi Kists via categories and classifications developed by the imperial actors.

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202 Asad, Talal. “The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam.” *Qui Parle* 17 (2009): 1-30.

203 კეკელიძე, თამარ. *პანკისი პრესის ფურცლებზე*. თბილისი: კავკასიის ხალხთა საერთაშორისო სამეცნიერო-კვლევითი ინსტიტუტი, 2007. pp. 64-65.

204 Asad, Talal. *On Suicide Bombing*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2007. p. 29. For a more detailed discussion of Asad’s “new epistemological object” see Chapter 3.

### 3.1. Religious Transformation in the Pankisi Gorge

First of all, it is important to analyze the historical, social and political significance of Islam for Pankisi Kists. The Russian colonial policy in the nineteenth century employed diverse strategies of subordination, one of them aimed at the dissemination of Christianity among the North Caucasians. The Christianization and Enlightenment attempts in the Pankisi Gorge need to be discussed in this context. A Kist public figure Mate Albutashvili (1863-1953) who himself was a Christian priest, describes how the Russian government forcefully baptized indigenous Muslim Kists in Jokolo<sup>205</sup>, and how some Kists fled to the forest to avoid baptism. However, in the official documents, the agents of the Russian government listed the fugitives as Christians.<sup>206</sup> Moreover, unlike the Pankisi Kists, fragmented populations of Kists in other parts of Georgia accepted Christianity and their descendants assimilated into Georgian population.<sup>207</sup> Hence, for the Pankisi Kists, acceptance of Christianity implied the risk of being assimilated into Georgian population, and submission to Russian imperial interests. Unlike Christianity, Islam, which towards the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries primarily spread by way of North Caucasian Muslim preachers, did not involve the same imperialist or assimilationist risks for the Pankisi Kists. On the contrary, it became a means of retaining self-sufficiency<sup>208</sup> and implied disobedience of Russian imperialist interests. Between 1898 and 1902, local Muslims built the first mosque in the Pankisi Gorge with their own funds in the village of Duisi. Local Christians and the Russian imperial government were against the construction; for a long time, the latter refused to grant the permission to build the mosque.<sup>209210</sup>

In the beginning of the twentieth century, two Sufi orders – Qadiriyya and Naqshbandiyya, were most widespread in Pankisi.<sup>211</sup> Later on, during the first decades of the Soviet Union,

205 One of the villages in the Pankisi Gorge inhabited by Kists.

206 ალბუთაშვილი, მათე. *პანკისის ხეობა: ისტორიულ-ეთნოგრაფიული და გეოგრაფიული აღწერა*. თბილისი, 2005, pp. 216-217.

207 მარგოშვილი, ლეილა. *პანკისელი ქისტების წეს-ჩვეულებები და თანამედროვეობა*. თბილისი: მეცნიერება, 1985. p.7.

208 ზვიადაძე, სოფო. *ისლამი, პოლიტიკა და იდენტობა პანკისში*. თბილისი: შვედოლის, დემოკრატიის და განვითარების კავკასიური ინსტიტუტი, 2016. Accessed November 20, 2017. <http://www.cipdd.org/upload/files/pankisi-web.pdf>. p.7.

209 Sanikidze, George. "Islamic Resurgence in the Modern Caucasian Region: "Global" and "Local" Islam in the Pankisi Gorge." In *Regional and Transregional Dynamism in Central Eurasia: Empires, Islam and Politics*, edited by Tomohiko Yuama, 263-282. Sapporo: Hokkaido University Press, 2007.

210 Kurtsikidze, Shorena and Vakhtang Chikovani. "Georgia's Pankisi Gorge: An Ethnographic Survey." *Berkeley Program in Soviet and Post-Soviet Studies: Working Paper Series*, 2002. Accessed November 20, 2017. <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/64d7v9hj>.

211 The Middle Eastern Baha-ud-Din Naqshband Bukhari (1318-1389) is considered as the founder of the Naqshbandiyya order. This orientation of Sufi Islam was introduced in Pankisi by an Azerbaijani preacher, Isa Efendi, who visited the gorge in 1909. The formation of Qadiriyya order in the North Caucasus is connected with the name of Kunta-haji. In Pankisi, the Qadiriyya order was introduced in the second half of the nineteenth century.

the labeling of Islam as “religious fanaticism” and “harmful practice”, and the attempt to depict it as “anti-social”, were notable aspects of the Orientalist framework, which was accompanied by formation of the new secular subject.<sup>212</sup> During this period, the Soviet government forcefully resettled many Sufi spiritual figures, and closed down mosques. As a result, the Islam distinctive to Pankisi became drained of its theological depth. It was typical for Soviet scholarship to divide Islam into “official”, i.e. harmless, and “unofficial”, i.e. harmful practices.<sup>213</sup> The “official” Islam was represented by state controlled, institutionalized Muslim division, and the “informal” religion beyond its perimeter was considered a “negative phenomenon”.<sup>214</sup> Historian Giorgi Sanikidze suggests that the “informal”, i.e. “parallel” Islam played a significant role in the revival of Islam among the Kists.<sup>215</sup> Sanikidze argues that “parallel” Islam was represented by unregistered and “wandering” spiritual figures who performed religious rituals (weddings, burials) and held prayers at “informal” houses of prayer. In these circumstances, the Duisi mosque was re-opened in Pankisi in 1969.<sup>216</sup> Although followers of Sufi orders had only retained ritual memory, the re-modeled Sufi orders (*tariqas*) are known as the “traditional Islam” today.

As a result of complex historical, political and social processes, new form of piety known as Salafism proliferated in the 1990s Pankisi. Based on the interviews and secondary sources analyzed in the framework of this study, we can single out several factors that contributed to the spread of Salafism: 1. The emergence of Islamic charity organizations and Islamic scholars, who provided humanitarian assistance during the Chechen-Russian conflict; 2. Religious affiliation of the *mujahids* who arrived with the purpose of assisting the Chechens; 3. Russia’s encouragement of conflicts amongst the Chechens, and its designation of Sufi Islam as “harmless,” and Salafism as “harmful.” Russia proclaimed the former as its accomplice<sup>217</sup>, and the latter as terrorists, fashioning them into the image of an enemy. This factor conferred Salafi Islam with additional political meaning in the fight against Russia; 4. Religious belonging of Chechen refugees in the Pankisi Gorge; 5. The new opportunity for Pankisi youth to thoroughly study Arabic and Islamic theology in the Middle East and North African coun-

212 მარგოშვილი, ლეილა. *პანკისელი ქისტების წეს-ჩვეულებები და თანამედროვეობა*. თბილისი: მეცნიერება, 1985, p.55.

213 McBrien, Julie. *The Fruit of Devotion: Islam and Modernity in Kyrgyzstan*. 2008, Accessed, November 6, 2017 <https://d-nb.info/1024975843/34>.

214 Schoeberlein, J. “Heroes of Theory: Central Asian Islam in Post-War Soviet Ethnography.” In *Exploring the Edge of Empire: Soviet Era Anthropology in the Caucasus and Central Asia*, edited by Florian Muhlfried and Sergey Sokolovsky. Zurich: Lit Verlag, 2011. pp.61-62.

215 Sanikidze, George. “Islamic Resurgence in the Modern Caucasian Region: “Global” and “Local” Islam in the Pankisi Gorge.” In *Regional and Transregional Dynamism in Central Eurasia: Empires, Islam and Politics*, edited by Tomohiko Yuama, 263-282. Sapporo: Hokkaido University Press, 2007. p.273.

216 *Ibid.*

217 ხანგოშვილი, ხასო. „რელიგია და ტერორიზმი“. *საღვთო წიგნები: ბიბლია, სახარება, ყურანი*. თბილისი: მერიდიანი, 2014. p.695.



tries (Lebanon, Syria, Saudi Arabia, Egypt); 6. Insufficient level of theological knowledge amongst the spiritual figures of traditional Islam, which re-directed the attention of believers towards the religious avant-garde of Salafism.<sup>218</sup>

## 3.2. Religion Under the Dominant Gaze

Researchers, experts and journalists introduced the term “Wahhabism” to designate the new form of piety that spread in the Pankisi Gorge in the late 1990s.<sup>219</sup> They discuss Islamic fundamentalism, radicalism, Wahhabism and terrorism without much nuance, as self-explanatory terms.<sup>220</sup> What prejudged meanings do these terms carry? What does the term “Wahhabism” imply? For example, according to scholar Khvtiso Mamisimedashvili, Wahhabism stands for a “radical Islamic movement”, criminally engaged “organized group”, religion of those who “fight against the North Caucasian Muslims’ way of life”, and whose followers “accuse every Muslim who does not share their view of godlessness”.<sup>221</sup> In printed media, the first information about the existence of “Wahhabism” appeared on November 27 1998. The article represents “Wahhabism” as an ideology utilized by one faction of Ichkeria leaders to propagate Nokhchi<sup>223</sup> ideas.<sup>224</sup>

From the very beginning, the new piety of Pankisi residents was interpreted as a sign of “danger” by scholars and journalists.<sup>225</sup> As Lia Khutsishvili notes, Wahhabism is a code “that implies new danger from Islam.”<sup>226</sup> In the opinion of anthropologist Ketevan Khutsishvili, young people who travel to Middle Eastern countries for education are being trained as

218 For example, a teacher from Jokolo commented on this last factor that followers of traditional Islam did not have answers to the inquisitive questions of the youth. However, the Middle Eastern educated Salafis “could answer all questions” (Interview with Respondent 19, 17/09/2017).

219 მამისიმედიშვილი, ხვთისო. *პანკისი: წარსული და თანამედროვეობა*. თბილისი: თბილისის უნივერსიტეტის გამომცემლობა, 2008. p. 286.

220 მისიაია, ვახტანგ. *თანამედროვე ისლამის როლი მსოფლიო გეოპოლიტიკაში*. Accessed May 20, 2018. <https://bit.ly/2LBubKz>.

221 Sanikidze, George. “Islamic Resurgence in the Modern Caucasian Region: “Global” and “Local” Islam in the Pankisi Gorge.” In *Regional and Transregional Dynamism in Central Eurasia: Empires, Islam and Politics*, edited by Tomohiko Yuama, 263-282. Sapporo: Hokkaido University Press, 2007.

222 მამისიმედიშვილი, ხვთისო. *პანკისი: წარსული და თანამედროვეობა*. თბილისი: თბილისის უნივერსიტეტის გამომცემლობა, 2008. p. 286.

223 Nokchi is the original name of the inhabitants of Chechnya.

224 კეველიძე, თამარ. *პანკისი პრესის ფურცლებზე*. თბილისი: კავკასიის ხალხთა საერთაშორისო სამეცნიერო-კვლევითი ინსტიტუტი, 2007. p.64.

225 კაკაბაძე, გიორგი. „ვაჰაბიზმის საფრთხეები საქართველოსთვის“. *რადიო თავისუფლება*. მაისი 2, 2002.

226 ხუციშვილი, ლია. „რელიგიური რეორიენტაციის პრობლემები პოლიტიკურ სამოგადოებაში“. *უსაფრთხოების სტრატეგიის ეთნიკური ასპექტები (პანკისის კრიზისი)*, რედ. ლია მელიქიშვილი. თბილისი: მშვიდობის, დემოკრატიისა და განვითარების კავკასიური ინსტიტუტი, 2002. p.165.

“Wahhabists”, and they represent a “threat” upon their return to homeland.<sup>227</sup> Historian Lia Melikishvili sees the growing religiosity of Pankisi residents as a sign of orientation towards the Islamic world, and negation of Georgian values.<sup>228</sup> Scholar Vakhtang Maisaia considers “Wahhabism” a form of Islamic fundamentalism, which is simultaneously linked to terrorism and Al-Qaeda.<sup>229</sup> According to historian, Giorgi Sanikidze, the term “Wahhabism” is used to describe political Islam and extremist Islamic movements.<sup>230</sup> The recent research on the Muslims in Pankisi tacitly draws same conclusions.<sup>231,232</sup> Hence, in Georgian media and scholarship, “Wahhabism” (1) denotes an aggregate of pre-determined views and generalizations; (2) is a term attributed to local residents without adequate research into their religious experience, context or specificities; (3) represents a misconception of the movements’ main characteristics. For example, we read in Chikovani’s work that “in order to purge Islam, its [”Wahhabism’s”] supporters reject *bid’ah* and Sunni *madhhabs* <sup>233</sup>, pilgrimage to Mecca, cults of saints, and so on.<sup>234</sup> This description clearly illustrates that, on the one hand, renditions of Wahhabism found in foreign sources are being applied to local piety, and, on the other hand, that these renditions are flawed in and of themselves. For example, “Wahhabism” does not prohibit pilgrimage to Mecca, and the statement about *madhhabs* is also faulty since we find a mixed approach to the matter amongst the Salafis.<sup>235</sup> (4) Based on “Wahhabism” and “traditional Islam”, scholars have created “harmless” and “harmful” categories of Islam, which enables the branding of disagreements between pious and less pious generations as a matter of state security.

227 ხუციშვილი, ქეთევან. „კავკასია გეოპოლიტიკური თვალსაზრისით (სუბიექტები, ინტერესები)“. *უსაფრთხოების სტრატეგიის ეთნიკური ასპექტები (პანკისის კრიზისი)*, რედ. ლია მელიქიშვილი. თბილისი: მშვიდობის, დემოკრატიისა და განვითარების კავკასიური ინსტიტუტი, 2002. p.23.

228 მელიქიშვილი, ლია. *უსაფრთხოების სტრატეგიის ეთნიკური ასპექტები (პანკისის კრიზისი)*. თბილისი: მშვიდობის, დემოკრატიისა და განვითარების კავკასიური ინსტიტუტი, 2002. p.6.

229 მაისაია, ვახტანგ. *თანამედროვე ისლამის როლი მსოფლიო გეოპოლიტიკაში*. Accessed May 20, 2018. <https://bit.ly/2LBubKz>.

230 Sanikidze, George. “Islamic Resurgence in the Modern Caucasian Region: “Global” and “Local” Islam in the Pankisi Gorge.” In *Regional and Transregional Dynamism in Central Eurasia: Empires, Islam and Politics*, edited by Tomohiko Yuama, 263-282. Sapporo: Hokkaido University Press, 2007. p.274.

231 გოგუაძე, გიორგი და სერგი კაპანაძე. *დაეში და საქართველოს წინაშე არსებული გამოწვევები*. საქართველოს რეფორმების ასოციაცია (GRASS), 2015. Accessed September 10, 2017. <http://grass.org.ge/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/daesh-da-skхва-gamotsvevi.pdf>.

232 გობრონიძე, გიორგი. *ისლამის რადიკალიზაციის პრობლემა, სახელმწიფოს პოლიტიკა და რეგიონული თანამშრომლობის პერსპექტივები – ხედვა საქართველოდან*. თბილისი: კავკასიური სახლი, 2017. Accessed March 20, 2018. <http://regional-dialogue.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/mar-GE.pdf>.

233 Islamic school of thought.

234 ჩიქოვანი, გულდამ. „დასახლების სტრუქტურული ცვლილებები, კონფლიქტური სიტუაციები და მათი დარეგულირების ტრადიციული მექანიზმები“. *უსაფრთხოების სტრატეგიის ეთნიკური ასპექტები (პანკისის კრიზისი)*, რედ. ლია მელიქიშვილი. თბილისი: მშვიდობის, დემოკრატიისა და განვითარების კავკასიური ინსტიტუტი, 2002. p.121.

235 Bin Ali, Mohamed. *The Roots of Religious Extremism: Understanding the Salafi Doctrine of Al-Wala’ wal Bara’*. London: Imperial College Press, 2016.

It needs to be noted here that a faction of scholars does not agree with the above-mentioned evaluation of new piety in Pankisi. For example, based on ethnographic work in Pankisi, Dobrosława Wiktor-Mach concluded that the bisection of Pankisi Islam into traditional and Salafi categories is misleading due to several reasons: 1. These categories consider each group as a homogenous entity when even in traditional Islam we can find various *tariqas* (Sufi orders) and practices, just like there are various approaches and groups in Salafi Islam.<sup>236</sup> 2. Such dichotomous classification ignores the historical context and the dynamics of Islam's development in the region. Throughout history, the role of religion was central to Chechen opposition: if in the nineteenth century anti-imperial opposition was interlaced with Sufism, in the 1990s it became associated with the Global Islamic movements. 3. The dichotomous classification disregards hybrid groups that consider themselves as followers of Sunni Islam, but do not directly associate themselves with any group. One more scholar, who also conducted ethnographic research the Pankisi Gorge, Rebecca Gould, notes that the use of the term "Wahhabism" to designate the new piety does not imply difference, disruption or specificity between Wahhabi and Salafi movements on the one hand, and Salafism and present-day Pankisi Islam, on the other.<sup>237</sup>

### 3.3. Varieties of Salafism and the Power of Naming

Scholars who label the new form of piety popularized in the Pankisi Gorge as "Wahhabism" boil Islam down to an essentialist caricature. Such discourse reveals the power centers and interests behind its reproduction. In the "Anatomy of the Salafi Movement", Quintan Wiktorowicz notes that "Wahhabism" is a term employed by the opponents of Salafism in order to portray them as the followers of Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab and accordingly, to emphasize the influence of foreign interests on them.<sup>238</sup> Similarly, Conor Prasad states that "the term is commonly used in post-Soviet countries to refer to any pious Muslim."<sup>239</sup> **This label is especially widespread in countries where Salafis represent a minority in the Muslim community. Salafism is a broader concept than Wahhabism.**<sup>240</sup> Dobrosława Wiktor-Mach, who conducted an ethnographic study in Pankisi, notes that the terms "Wahhabism" and "Salafism" are employed in the Russian anti-Chechen discourse as synonyms of "extremism" and "terrorism".<sup>241</sup> Pankisi Salafis

236 Wiktor-Mach, Dobrosława. "Competing Islamic Traditions in the Caucasus." *Caucasian Review of International Affairs* 3 (2009): 63-69.

237 Gould, Rebecca. "Secularism and Belief in Georgia's Pankisi Gorge." *Journal of Islamic Studies* 22 (2011): 339-373.

238 Wiktorowicz, Quintan. "Anatomy of the Salafi Movement." *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 29 (2006): 207-239.

239 Prasad, Conor. *Georgia's Muslim Community: A Self-Fulfilling Prophecy?* ECMI Working Paper, 2017. Accessed September 15, 2017. [https://www.ecmi.de/uploads/tx\\_lfpubdb/Working\\_Paper\\_58\\_En.pdf](https://www.ecmi.de/uploads/tx_lfpubdb/Working_Paper_58_En.pdf).

240 Bin Ali, Mohamed. *The Roots of Religious Extremism: Understanding the Salafi Doctrine of Al-Wala' wal Bara'*. London: Imperial College Press, 2016. p.21.

241 Wiktor-Mach, Dobrosława. "Competing Islamic Traditions in the Caucasus." *Caucasian Review of International Affairs* 3 (2009): 63-69.

**also consider that “Wahhabi” is a term constructed by their enemies that carries preconceived negative meaning:** “a Wahhabi is associated with terrorism”, this is how a new Pankisi devotee defined his own perception of the term, adding that “a Wahhabi is believed to be a monster, wrong-doer, murderer, thief and robber.”<sup>242</sup>

Islamic scholars (*ulama*) in Pankisi say that they consider themselves simply as followers of Sunni Islam. In the opinion of a former *imam*, “enemies” want to label them to delineate the “wrong” Islam and put it in opposition with the “right” Islam.<sup>243</sup> One of the Salafis, notes that he has not even read a book by Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab and does not understand why he should be considered a Wahhabi.<sup>244</sup> Another Pankisi Salafi points to his unsuccessful attempts at self-definition: “we are always shouting that we are not Wahhabis, [...], we are Muslims, people, Muslims.”<sup>245</sup>

The desired terms for the Salafis themselves are *ahlus sunnah wal jammah* (أهل السنة والجماعة) and *ahl al-hadith* (أهل الحديث). **However, Pankisi Salafis who have been labeled as oriental (Eastern) have been robbed of their right to self-definition.** *Orient* is an object, which they describe, discuss and define. It is this very act of being robbed of one’s voice that the Palestinian scholar of postcolonialism, Edward Said, considers an indicator of Islam’s orientalization.<sup>246</sup> The problem of orientalism is not only its distortion of reality, but also the fact that it becomes the producer of reality. De-orientalization of reality and anti-orientalist approach to Islam first and foremost mean the rejection of an essentialist approach.<sup>247</sup>

Heterogeneity and puritanical approach are typical characteristics of Salafism.<sup>248</sup> Although Salafi groups differ in their strategies and policy, they have a similar approach to religious jurisprudence. They are also united by *aqida*, their religious belief, and *tawhid*, the oneness of God. Salafis reject *tawassuf*, or worship of important religious figures.<sup>249</sup> **Scholarly classifications, which are based on key distinctions between various Salafi groups, demonstrate the heterogeneity of Salafism.** For example, an expert on Islamic movements, Quintan Wiktorowicz distinguishes between three Salafi groups:<sup>250</sup>

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242 Interview, Respondent N 8, 30/10/2017.

243 Interview, Respondent N 3, 16/09/2017.

244 Interview, Respondent N1, 14/09/2017.

245 Interview, Respondent N2, 14/09/2017.

246 Said, Edward. *Orientalism*. New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2001.

247 Sayyid, Bobby, S. *The Fundamental Fear: Eurocentrism and the Emergence of Islamism*. London: Zed Books, 1997.

248 Wiktorowicz, Quintan. “Anatomy of the Salafi Movement.” *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 29 (2006): 207-239.

249 Abdel-Haleem, Tariq in Bin Ali, Mohamed. *The Roots of Religious Extremism: Understanding the Salafi Doctrine of Al-Wala’ wal Bara’*. London: Imperial College Press, 2016.

250 Wiktorowicz, Quintan. “Anatomy of the Salafi Movement.” *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 29 (2006): 207-239.

1. **Purists:** believe in the spread of knowledge and non-violent methods of awareness raising. Purists believe that unless religious teachings are purified, political action cannot ensure justice. Various paths of devotion are: a) *da'wa*: propagation; b) *tazkiyya*: purification; c) *tarbiya*: path of religious education, spiritual training and discipline. Purists oppose the labeling of Salafism as a movement (*harakat*) since this term carries a puritanical meaning. Their mission is to protect Islam from corrupting influences and non-Islamic values. Globally speaking, Purists often stand apart from geopolitical contexts and reality, which subjects them to criticism from other Muslims.<sup>251</sup>

2. **Political Salafis:** consider it important to translate their religious principles into the realm of politics. They believe that governance based on religious principles can ensure the formation of a just society and implementation of fair politics. 3. **Jihadists:** deem it impossible to transform the existing conditions without militarist or revolutionary means.

Thus, various Salafi movements have a different interpretation of global affairs and political strategies. Much like Wiktorowicz, scholar of Islamic movements, Omayma Abdel Latiff, categorizes Salafis into three main groups:

1. Scientific Salafism (*al-salafiyyah al-ilmiyyah*): geared towards studying the Qur'an and Islamic jurisprudence.

2. Activist Salafism (*al-salafiyyah al-harakiyyah*): politically and socially active Salafis. Latiff also incorporates Reformist Salafis (*al-salafiyyah al-islahiyyah*) into this group.

3. Jihadists (*al-salafiyyah al-jihadiyyah*): group that is unified around jihad.<sup>252</sup>

For the given study, it is also crucial to mention the opinion of Islamic scholars regarding the heterogeneity of Salafism. As a scholar of Islamic jurisprudence, Muhammad Bin Ali explains, a Canada-based Egyptian scholar, Tariq Abdel Haleem divides contemporary Salafis into eight groups.<sup>253</sup>

251 For example, one Purist scholar even opposed Palestinian Intifada in 2002. According to scholar Muhammad Nasir al-Din al-Albani, after Israel's occupation of Palestinian territories, Palestinians no longer lived in dar al-islam (the domain of Islam) and hence, his fatwa called for the migration of Palestinians to other Muslim countries.

252 Abdel Latiff, Omayma (2009). "Trends in Salafism." In Bin Ali, Mohamed. *The Roots of Religious Extremism: Understanding the Salafi Doctrine of Al-Wala' wal Bara'*. London: Imperial College Press, 2016.

253 Abdel Haleem, Tariq, "The Counterfeit Salafis: Deviation of the Counterfeit Salafis from the Methodology of Ahlul Sunnah Wal-Jama'ah." In Bin ali, Mohamed. *The Roots of Religious Extremism: Understanding the Salafi Doctrine of Al-Wala' wal Bara'*. London: Imperial College Press, 2016. p.54.

1. Establishment Salafis: official scholars appointed by the Saudi government who are members of Senior Ulama (*Hay'at kibar al-Ulama*) and other official committees.
2. Madkhali or Jami Salafis: Salafis who follow the teachings of the Yemeni Sheikh Rabi Al-Madkhali and the Ethiopian Sheikh Muhammad Aban Ibn Ali Jami.
3. Albani Salafis: Salafis who follow the teachings of Muhammad Nasir al-Din Al-Albani. Albani, Madkhali and Establishment Salafis are *purists* and focus on faith and education.
4. Academic Salfis: Salafis who use rational methods and are more politicized.
5. Ikhwan Salafis: political Salafis whose prominent representative is the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood (*Ikhwan al-Muslimin*).
6. Sururi Salafis: follow a hybrid ideology of the ideas of Sayyid Qutb and al-Wahhabi.
7. Qutubi Salafis: follow the teachings of Sayyid Qutb.
8. Global Jihadis: for example, Al-Qaeda.<sup>254</sup>

The heterogeneity of Salafi groups is not limited to the above listed categories. Consequently, it is problematic to reduce the new piety of Pankisi residents to one of the most discriminatory labels of the Salafi spectrum – “Wahhabism”. Especially if we consider that this term has been attributed to Salafis by their opponents. As for equating Salafism, terrorism and fundamentalism, this type of generalization is discriminatory and unscientific since it is based on the preconceived idea that Salafism and fundamentalism are dangerous. According to professor of political science, Mahmood Mamdani, using the term “fundamentalism” disregards movements forged in radically different historical and political contexts. Mamdani argues that it is historically inaccurate to equate not only fundamentalism and terrorism, but also political Islam and terrorism.<sup>255</sup> Under the umbrella of political Islam, Mamdani distinguishes between reformist and radical wings. The radical wing includes society-centered and state-centered movements. Society-centered movements are committed to a strategy of social change by increased popular participation in politics and non-violent methods; in contrast, state-centered movements see the state rather than society as the true subject of historical change, but even state-centered Islamist political movements cannot be equated with terrorism. For instance, administration of the Pakistani President, Muhammad Zia-ul-Haq

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<sup>254</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>255</sup> Mamdani, Mahmood. *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim: America, the Cold War, and the Roots of Terror*. New York: Three Leaves Press, 2004. Kindle edition.

(1978-1988) is an illustration of state-centered political Islam, which was authoritarian but not terrorist. In this complex configuration, direct association of Pankisi Muslims' religious affiliation with "radicalization" does not only demonize them, but also renders them an object of state surveillance because of the vague excuse that they express their religiosity with devotional practice.

### 3.4. On Being a Newly Pious Muslim in Pankisi

When discussing religion, and specifically Salafism, in the Pankisi Gorge, opinions of the Salafis themselves are often disregarded since they are pre-labeled as "dangerous Muslims" based on allegedly obvious reality. Hence, epistemic advantage is being ascribed to the reproduction of the privileged dominant perspective. How do the new pious Muslims reflect on their belief and role in the Pankisi Gorge? Is the religious landscape of Pankisi dichotomous? What do they mean when they talk about "radical" piety?

Since 1990s, ongoing religious transformations in the Pankisi Gorge were associated not only with the Chechen independence movement, but also with the transformation of the "self" as revealed through the rethinking of lifestyle, social expression, and relation to objects and god. Islam emerged as a guarantee of finding the key to transforming local subjectivity.<sup>256</sup> The new piety offered Kists a distinct opportunity and experience of returning to spirituality. The new subject was forced to establish itself amidst the confrontation with internal and external factors. Based on the changes in the intensity, content and tactics of the confrontation, we can distinguish several waves of Salafism: the first wave (1997-2007), the second wave (2007-2017), and the third wave (2018). The latter needs to be discussed separately due to contrasting developments. The first wave of Salafism contains crude attempts at building a niche, short-term appointment of *imams*, and the involvement of foreign Islamic scholars. The second wave can be characterized by stable appointment of *imams* (only two imams for the period of ten years), and the involvement of local Islamic scholars in religious education. The 2018 wave marks civil involvement of the *jamaat*, signs of consolidation, and "self"-oriented spirituality.

Confrontations that emerged during the first wave of Salafism were primarily triggered by the political circumstances discussed in the first chapter, and fueled by the hegemonic discourse. At the same time, however, qualitative interviews have revealed other notable factors: 1. The new devotees initially became acquainted with religion primarily via foreigners. Ac-

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<sup>256</sup> Behrooz, Ghamari-Tabrizi. *Foucault in Iran: Islamic Revolution after the Enlightenment*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016. p.65.



cordingly, since foreign scholars were not closely familiar with the local context, they could not account for the specifics of indigenous social order. The new devotees also showed more resolution when distancing themselves from the rituals of “traditional Islam”, and critiquing its practices. 2. At the same time, local devotees themselves did not have adequate knowledge and education. A respondent from Duisi notes: “they had less knowledge in the past. Hence, the less knowledge you have, the more mistakes you make”.<sup>257</sup> 3. In late 1990s Salafis were a minority amongst the Pankisi Muslims. First, they attended the “traditional Islamic” mosques, but one day they were banned from praying there, which strained the relationship between the two groups. Today, even Salafi scholars themselves acknowledge that the pugnacious demeanor specific to the First Wave was a mistake. However, they consider it wrong to evaluate their current activities through the lens of their past experience. For example, an Islamic scholar remembers how at one of the meetings he encouraged the elders to re-consider their attitudes towards them: “this picture needs to change in your eyes, we need to appreciate the scholars who preach correctly.”<sup>258</sup>

In the interviews, a group of Pankisi residents who critique Salafism distinguish between the initial or **first wave Salafism** from the newer, or **second wave Salafism**. Among the newer Salafis, they set “Dawla” Salafis apart from the others. For example, one of the elders considers it wrong to ascribe the label of “radicals” to local Salafis in general and explains that he uses this term to refer to only “Dawla” Salafis: “I don’t use it in regards to all Salafis since that would be wrong. As I noted, there are progressively thinking young people amongst them.”<sup>259</sup> At the same time, sometimes the critics of Salafism come into opposition with their own evaluation by essentializing Salafis at large and approaching them as a homogeneous group in their criticism. The second wave Salafis can be divided into at least two groups: **newly pious Salafis** and **followers of “Dawla” Islam**, that is, supporters of the Islamic State who, according to the respondents, only make up a marginal minority of the Salafis. As for the **newly pious Salafis**, in turn, has a heterogeneous constitution. For instance, we find distinct approaches to such issues as: 1) *Maddhabs*: according to local Muslim scholars, Pankisi Salafis recognize all four *Maddhabs*.<sup>260</sup> At the same time, some follow the Shafi’i Maddhab, and some follow the Hanbali Maddhab; 2) Attitudes towards the ongoing affairs: for instance, during 2018 protests against the construction of hydroelectric stations, the so-called interest group revealed a distinct attitude; 3) Relationship with social groups: the interviews reveal disagreements that in some cases have led to conflicts among Salafis on the one hand (primarily the interest groups), and among local non-governmental organizations and represen-

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257 Interview, Respondent N 10, 1/11/2017.

258 Interview, Respondent N 7, 11/10/2017.

259 Interview, Respondent N 18, 2/11/2017.

260 Interview, Respondent N 9, 31/10/2017.



tatives of the Council of Elders, on the other hand. As one of the respondents notes, these are “artificial disagreements”.<sup>261</sup> Currently, the newly pious Salafis have a critical, yet tolerant and cordial relationship with the followers of traditional Islam. For example, an interview with one of the Salafi scholars shows that his approach is based on the consideration of historical circumstances:

“We realize that this stage, in which the Sufis, our elders, lived, was a very hard period. It was impossible to received education, so they followed whatever rituals they retained in practice. So, we tell them directly – do this, you are unbelievers. We explain that they should avoid these problematic rituals”.<sup>262</sup>

According to a Salafi youth, the level of tolerance is also determined by the age group, which the followers of “traditional Islam” represent:

“Since they are older, we should be thankful for whatever they have preserved, and since we can’t change it, let them be and do whatever they want and consider right. That is the attitude today”.<sup>263</sup>

As for “Dawla” Muslims, they believe it is important to differentiate themselves from “non-believers”. The former are also referred to as *takfirists*, which denotes a Muslim who accuses another Muslim of apostasy. A scholar from the newly pious Salafis considers accusations of *kafir* or “disbelief” a dangerous, and hence objectionable, issue.<sup>264</sup> He adds that Pankisi has not yet witnessed a case of somebody being accused of *kafir*. On the contrary, there are precedents of collaboration; for instance, the Council of Elders often approaches Salafi scholars for advice.<sup>265</sup> **Based on this, we can conclude that peculiarities of the Kist society in Pankisi encourage the synthesis of the new piety with local experience.**

As interviews reveal, the criticism of the Salafis primarily revolves around “radicalization”. This, as the respondents suggest, is noticeable in the alleged disregard for customs, their Arabization, as well as changes in their lifestyle and appearance, which in turn is held accountable for disintegration. Respondents who criticize disregard for customs, Arabization and disintegration, mostly refer to overlooking traditions, vanishing of the host-guest rela-

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<sup>261</sup> Interview, Respondent N 8, 30/10/2017.

<sup>262</sup> Interview, Respondent N 9, 31/10/2017.

<sup>263</sup> Interview, Respondent N 13, 3/11/2017.

<sup>264</sup> Interview, Respondent N 9, 31/10/2017.

<sup>265</sup> Interview, Respondent N 9, 31/10/2017.

<sup>266</sup> Interview, Respondent N 18, 2/11/2017.

tionship, refusal to dance or sing, and outward expressions of religiosity. On account of their puritan lifestyle, the new devotees reject practices that are incompatible with their religion. At the same time, as the Salafi respondents explain, they are retaining all Kist customs, which are in agreement with the Qur'an and the Hadith. For example, marriage between relatives, which is a sign of "Arabization", is not accepted among the Salafis. Such marriages are prohibited not only within one family, but also within one clan (*teip*). A young respondent from Duisi notes:

"I definitely don't agree that Arabization is taking place because today we also have special respect for elders, hospitality [...]. On the contrary, the *ulama* [scholars] also encourage us not to lose and retain the courtesies that we had. That's also emphasized; so, in fact, whatever is in agreement with the Qur'an and the Hadith is being retained, and I'm sure we will not lose our identity".<sup>267</sup>

For Pankisi Kists, meticulously performed religious practice became, on the one hand, a measure of their integration and the reason for their orientalization, and on the other hand, a criterion for labeling them as "harmful" or "harmless" Muslims. What do non-Salafis mean when they talk about the integration of Pankisi residents and Kist identity? The non-Salafi group comprises a wide range of respondents from traditional Islam, members of the Council of Elders, and employees of various non-governmental and public educational institutions. The main yardsticks for the integration of non-Salafi respondents and definition of Kist identity are cultural-folk attributes (such as singing and dancing) and social organization. What do the Salafis mean when they talk about integration? Integration of Salafi respondents refers to mutually respectful relationship with ethnic Georgians, and rules out factors unacceptable for either group. For example, alcoholic beverages make up the core of the Georgian and non-Salafi host-guest culture. A Salafi scholar emphasizes the value of non-assimilationist integration:

"Our integration into Georgian people or culture is not related to music or feasting. Too bad if it is only related to music and feasting. [...] We are not allowed to drink, it is among the great sins. We are obliged to say that it is prohibited, it is our duty and those who want to participate in feasting, or dance and sing, it is their choice and we have not stopped it to this day".<sup>268</sup>

As for the argument of alienation, non-Salafis name the Salafi spiritual life and cultural differences as its main cause, while Salafi respondents pay more heed to historical and political

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267 Interview, Respondent N 13, 3/11/2017.

268 Interview, Respondent N 9, 31/10/2017.

circumstances. For example, (1) one of the respondents accounts for the alienation during the Soviet period through close ties and the practice of shared agriculture, (2) and in the 1990s, he names state policy as the primary reason for such alienation – separating the two groups with block posts during the Pankisi crisis.<sup>269</sup>

Avoidance of dancing and singing became a significant differentiating cultural marker for placing the Salafis on the orientalist map. For one of the employees of a local non-governmental organization, a religious subject is a backward subject since they “are not allowed to have fun, to sing or dance, to attend concerts, listen to the radio, watch a concert or something on TV. Such radicals do not take part in these kinds of events.”<sup>270</sup> It is this cultural aspect of religious subjectivity that became the focus in the fight against “radicalization”. For instance, civil and political avant-garde confronts the religiosity of the new devotees, which is prejudged as “radicalization”, through the popularization of singing and dance. We can discern this attitude in the following excerpt from an interview: if we did not encourage singing and dancing, we would “only hear the sound of prayers” in the Pankisi Gorge.<sup>271</sup> According to a follower of “traditional Islam”, by rejecting traditional dance and singing, Salafis are turning down the essence of their Vainakh: “for me personally, it is impossible to imagine a Vainakh man without singing and dancing.”<sup>272</sup> A Salafi scholar believes that “Kist customs are not built only on singing and dancing and it will not necessarily be a loss if these customs remain without the latter.”<sup>273</sup>

Outward signs of religious devotion, such as facial hair, tunic or headdress are also important differentiating cultural markers, which designates Salafis as “dangerous” agents. As early as 2004, the President of Georgia, Mikheil Saakashvili employed these outward markers to outline “danger”, and wage a war against the new devotees designated as “bearded Wahhabi elements”.<sup>274</sup> Today, many respondents note that it is enough to change one’s physical appearance and start going to a mosque to be labeled a “Wahhabi”.<sup>275</sup> A young respondent from Omalo observed that “if a person becomes a believer – bam, he becomes a believers and he’s immediately called a Wahhabi.”<sup>276</sup> Another young respondent from Duisi explained that “more secular ‘types’ who do not read the Qur’an and do not follow religious laws and

269 Interview, Respondent N 10, 1/11/2017.

270 Interview, Respondent N 23, 1/11/2017.

271 Interview, Respondent N 20, 20/10/2017.

272 Interview, Respondent N 30, 31/10/2017.

273 Interview, Respondent N 9, 31/10/2017.

274 საქართველოს პრეზიდენტის მიხეილ სააკაშვილის გამოსვლა საქართველოს უშიშროების სამინისტროში. 24 საათი. თებერვალი 19, 2004.

275 Interview, Respondent N 31, 5/3/2018; Interview, Respondent N 32, 5/3/2018.

276 Interview, Respondent N 32, 5/03/2018.

regulations, are considered as ‘traditionalists.’”<sup>277</sup> He adds that unlike the Salafis, followers of traditional Islam try not to stand out from the rest of the country’s population and “look at [them] the same way as non-Muslims do.”<sup>278</sup>

The “non-Muslim gaze”<sup>279</sup> is an appropriated hegemonic gaze. Behind the “non-Muslim gaze” adopted by Pankisi Muslims towards the new devotees is the acknowledgement of normative subjectivity and an attempt to prove their own “harmlessness” in its face. Outward religious markers distance the new devotees from the hegemonic ideal and turn them into non-normative subjects, which in turn renders them unruly and hence, “dangerous”.

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277 Interview, Respondent N 5, 15/09/2017.

278 Interview, Respondent N 5, 15/09/2017.

279 Interview, Respondent N 5, 15/09/2017.

## Chapter 4:

# In the Shadow of Global Security:

## Words and their Power

Beginning from 2004-2005, the post-September 11 popular perception that terrorism is an absolute evil, the causes of which cannot and should not be examined because of the amorality of such endeavor (see Chapter 2), started to lose its legitimacy.<sup>280</sup> Chaos and protest that followed the interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq, as well as terrorist acts in Madrid and London (especially the “emergence” of domestic terrorists), forced different states to search for new approaches beyond detention and physical elimination. This also meant doing away with the taboos surrounding the search for the causes of terrorism. It is during this period that the term *radicalization* became the means of researching the processes that produced terrorists, and the way to create an analytical basis for new preventive strategies.<sup>281</sup> However, as already noted (see Chapter 2), these new interventions did not only fail to produce patently positive outcomes, models built on the term *radicalization* even produced perceptions that divide individuals identifying as Muslims into “dangerous” and “harmless”, “non-civilized” and “civilized” categories. In the previous chapter of this study (Chapter 3) we already saw how such segregation of humans is materialized in the context of the Pankisi Gorge. However, this chapter will cover the following questions: Why is the term radicalization problematic? How is it connected to the concept of terrorism? How do terrorism and related terms – radicalization, violent extremism and religious ideology contribute to the segregation of humans based on their lifestyle? Broadly speaking, what do we mean by radicalization? Whose radicalization? According to which criteria? What are the starting and end points? Sometimes, words that we use to describe people’s lifestyles seem obvious and harmless, but they can reveal controversies and become less apparent when we ask the simplest questions related to their meaning. For example, how can the same word – radical/radicalism/radicalization simultaneously carry two meanings - positive and negative, desirable and threatening, depending on who they label? How is it possible that we can discern hierarchy within the two, seemingly mutually exclusive meanings, with one taking precedence over the other? For instance, in the following sentence, “we need radical political and social changes”, “radical political and social changes” carry a positive, desired meaning if the sentence is uttered by a “legitimate” group, let us say by “white”, “secular” individuals who ardently fight

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280 Kundnani, Arun. “Radicalisation: the journey of a concept,” *Race & Class*, 54,2 (2012): 3–25. doi: 10.1177/0306396812454984 <http://rac.sagepub.com>. p.4.

281 Ibid., p.4.

for the rights of women and sexual minorities. However, if the same sentence is uttered by a “hijab-wearing” woman or a “bearded” Muslim man, “radical” acquires a negative and scary meaning. It is because of this reason that we try to critically analyze such terms and research methods as radicalization and individual, phase models of radicalization, violent extremism, and PVE and CVE programs geared against violent extremism.

## 4.1. From Violence to Disciplining. Radicalization, Violent Extremism and New Research Models

Searching for the causes of terrorism, analyzing radicalization or violent extremism, prevention and countering of violent extremism – these are all terms that became established in 2004-2005 both in scholarly literature on terrorism, and in the international security lingo. Together, these terms could be referred to as the search for alternative approaches to military intervention, which fall into a wider framework of countering terrorism.

In turn, the term *Counter-Terrorism* implies both military operations, and legal and political framework documents aimed at controlling, eliminating and identifying terrorist acts. Over the past decade the agenda of countering terrorism has transformed into a broader strategic approach that encompasses non-military attempts to eliminate violent extremist groups, to impede the expansion of their activities, and environments that enable the flourishing of violent extremism.<sup>282</sup> These non-military attempts to fight violent extremism are known by two names: Preventing Violent Extremism (PVE) and Countering Violent Extremism (CVE). There is no exact definition of these two initiatives since both could include methods of strategic communication, media, education and community activities, and so on. However, the UNDP report attempts to distinguish between the two initiatives in the following manner: CVE is focused “on countering the activities of existing violent extremists”, and PVE focuses “on preventing the further spread of violent extremism”.<sup>283</sup> However, in practice, existing initiatives frequently address both aspects.

Although inter- and intra-state preventive and non-military approaches are a notable and positive development in the broader spectrum of methods for fighting and countering terrorism, as we already noted, preventive models based on radicalization often fail to produce positive outcomes, and even become the source of discrimination for individuals and social communities.

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282 UNDP. Journey to Extremism in Africa: Drivers, Incentives and the Tipping Point for Recruitment. 09 September 2017. Accessed July 12, 2019. p.19. <http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/librarypage/democratic-governance/journey-to-extremism.html>.

283 Ibid.

For instance, in his article “Radicalisation, De-Radicalisation, Counter-Radicalisation: A Conceptual Discussion and Literature Review”, researcher on terrorism and the Director of Terrorism Research Initiative, Alex P. Schmid talks about problematic aspects of de-radicalization, prevention and fighting of violent extremism, and frequent abuse of power by state security forces. Schmid emphasizes not only the lack of precise terminology, but also the inaccuracy of the existing research and evaluation of already implemented programs.<sup>284</sup> As he suggests, the concept of radicalization is often politicized, obscure and one-sided (only non-state actors, and never the state, are believed to be at the risk of radicalization), used without clearly defined criteria, and from the outset, directly linked to terrorism as its final and allegedly inevitable outcome. Hence, the configuration where radicalization is broadened and applied to either individuals or political activism of entire movements is especially problematic, particularly in societies where democratic regimes block social development.<sup>285</sup>

Similarly, the 2017 UNDP report on the prevention of violent extremism suggests that despite the value of national and international security measures against violent extremism, the means and methods employed by different security institutions to respond to potential violence could prove to be counter effective and contribute to the stigmatization of a given group.<sup>286</sup>

In the 2017 Human Rights Watch World Report, Letta Tayler writes that despite the state responsibility to protect citizens from harm, **many national laws and security measures are ambiguous and redundant. Instead of ensuring safety, they create the risk of basic human rights violations and alienation of the minorities.**<sup>287</sup> At the same time, Tayler maintains that we need to welcome preventive initiatives against violent extremism as a significant addition to other, military-based, methods of fighting terrorism, on the condition that their implementation is imbued with special attention and respect to human rights. However, Tayler also notes that, N2178 UN Resolution, for example, defined prevention of radicalization as the key element of fighting violent extremism without specifying that radical behavior should include notions of violence and intentional harm. Without such specification, this approach generates a full spectrum of restrictions, including the right to peaceful assembly and the right to expression, which also includes academic and religious freedoms.<sup>288</sup>

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284 Schmid, Alex, P.: Radicalisation, De-Radicalisation, Counter-Radicalisation: A Conceptual Discussion and Literature Review. ICTT: The Hague, 2013.

285 Ibid., p.19.

286 UNDP. Preventing Violent Extremism through Promoting Inclusive Development, Tolerance and Respect for Diversity. A development response to addressing radicalization and violent extremism, 14 February 2017. Accessed November 2, 2018. p.27. <http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/librarypage/democratic-governance/conflict-prevention/discussion-paper---preventing-violent-extremism-through-inclusiv.html>.

287 Tayler, Letta. “How New Global Counterterrorism Measures Jeopardize Rights,” In *Human Right Watch Worldreport*, 2017, p. 27. Accessed April 3, 2018. [https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/world\\_report\\_download/wr2017-web.pdf](https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/world_report_download/wr2017-web.pdf).

288 Ibid., p.35.

Besides, although it is true that popularization of the term radicalization enabled the search and analysis of the causes of terrorism, its adaptation to PVE and CVE models produced negative outcomes. As Mark Sedgwick writes:

“The concept of radicalization emphasizes the individual and, to some extent, the ideology and the group, and significantly de-emphasizes the wider circumstances—the “root causes” that it became so difficult to talk about after 9/11, and that are still often not brought into analyses. So long as the circumstances that produce Islamist radicals’ declared grievances are not taken into account, it is inevitable that the Islamist radical will often appear as a “rebel without a cause.”<sup>289</sup>

According to Kundnani, on the other hand, instead of developing a thorough analysis and handing the outcomes over to the state, various analytical departments in the research on terrorism started to model processes that only study individual motivations and accordingly, render certain individuals pre-disposed to supporting the extremist ideology characteristic to violent terrorism. **In Kundnani’s opinion, when studying the root causes of radicalization, such individual models of radicalization focus on individual psychological and theological causes and disregard both causal geopolitical factors and local socio-political factors.**<sup>290</sup>

In an analytical article on the existing literature and strategies of radicalization, Kundnani identifies three main dispositions within such literature and strategies: 1. Cultural-psychological disposition; 2. Radicalization as a theological process; and 3. Radicalization as a theological-psychological process.<sup>291</sup> The primary problem with these models is, on the one hand, the use of the term radicalization as a discriminatory label, especially in regards to Muslims, and calling for their de-politicization. On the other hand, such models enable different state agencies **to engage in the surveillance of individual citizens on prior, ambiguous grounds only because they are critically predisposed towards the foreign policy of a given nation-state and/or express their religious identity via different markers: facial hair, clothing, religious devotion, and so on.**<sup>292</sup>

The 2017 UNDP report, which studies possible causes of radicalization that could potentially turn into violent extremism, does not examine radicalization itself as neces-

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289 Sedgwick, Mark. M. Sedgwick. “The Concept of Radicalization as a Source of Confusion”, *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 22, 4 (2010): 479-494, DOI: 10.1080/09546553.2010.491009. p.480.

290 Kundnani, *Radicalisation*, 2012. pp.5-6.

291 Ibid.

292 Kundnani, Arun. *Muslims Are Coming! Islamophobia, Extremism, and the Domestic War on Terror*. London and New York: Verso, 2014.



sarily a problem and notes that **throughout history and up to today, there have been numerous examples of radical movements that heralded positive outcomes.** Among them, civil rights and political equality movement, various human rights movements, and so on.<sup>293</sup> Although many scholars of terrorism believe that there are three stages in identifying the causes of terrorism – individual motivation and belief system, strategies of terrorist organizations, and broader social and political context – post-September 11 studies on the process of radicalization routinely ignore the second and third stages.<sup>294</sup> At the same time, as Kundnani and Hayes note in their 2018 report on global policies for countering violent extremism, despite numerous studies that attempt to determine the correlation between individually held “extremist-religious ideologies” (however the latter is defined) and political violence, and financial resources invested in them, empirical data **does not exist to corroborate the thesis that extremist ideology causes terrorism.**<sup>295</sup> Kundnani and Hayes also note that due to these circumstances, many leading scholars of terrorism, such as Mark Sageman and John Horgan, who developed their own models of religious radicalization, are already critically disposed towards such models. Mark Sageman, a leading scholar and one of the main advocates of the religious radicalization model in the 2000s, distanced himself from his previous focus on religious ideology as the primary factor contributing to terrorism. In 2013 he made a statement that different states need to stop using the term *radicalization* since such thing does not exist. Some young individuals have radical views, but the majority of them will change their attitudes over time. Hence, states should not overplay their reaction as this would create more problems.<sup>296</sup> Horgan, who is the Director of International Center for the Study of Terrorism at Penn State, also suggests that **the idea that radicalization causes terrorism, is the biggest myth in the contemporary study of terrorism. The vast majority of humans who have radical views never engage in violent acts. Moreover, more and more evidence exists that individuals engaged in terrorist acts do not always have radical dispositions.**<sup>297</sup>

Here we can list a summary of the critical attributes characteristic to individual psychological-theological programs aimed at preventing and countering violent extremism. Avoiding these problematic attributes is critical not only for planning and implementing academic or non-governmental studies, but also for introducing programs aimed at preventing and

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293 UNDP, Preventing Violent Extremism, p.17.

294 Ibid.

295 Kundnani, Arun and Ben Heyes: *The globalisation of Countering Violent Extremism policies. Undermining human rights, instrumentalising civil society.* Amsterdam: Transnational Institute, 06 March, 2018, p. 21. Accessed November 02, 2018. <https://www.tni.org/en/publication/the-globalisation-of-countering-violent-extremism-policies>.

296 Mark Sageman. In Kundnani and Hayes, p.14 (See previous footnote).

297 Ibid. John Horgan In Kundnani and Hayes.

countering violent extremism, which could turn into terrorism, so that these programs and accompanying research methods do not violate basic human rights and correspond to the rule of law.<sup>298</sup> These problematic attributes are:

- Special emphasis on individual, religio-ideological aspects when searching for the causes of terrorism, and ignoring global socio-political aspects;
- Special focus on Islam and Muslim population;
- Lack of a clear definition of such terms as terrorism, radicalization, and violent extremism; focus on the so-called “new terrorism”;
- Lack of methodologically sound, empirical data, which would validate the hypothesis advanced by individual models that there is correlation between individual radicalization, religious ideology, violent extremism and terrorism;
- Equating radicalization, violent extremism and terrorism;
- Conceptualizing radicalization as an absolute and non-relative concept;
- Constructing a dichotomous image of the so-called “harmless” and “dangerous/radical” Muslims, and separating the two;
- Focus on religion and religious ideology as the alleged causes of terrorism;
- Utilizing PVE and CVE initiatives and programs for gathering information on individual citizens (mostly citizens who identify as Muslims), and appropriation of these initiatives by various state security services, which often results in the violation civil rights, and discrimination of individual citizens and communities.

## 4.2. Noteworthy Examples of PVE Models, Studies and Recommendations

Despite the continuous prominence of individual psychological-theological models in research on terrorism, in the past years, models that focus on extremism and religious ideology have become subject of criticism. These models are critiqued not only by such famous

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<sup>298</sup> Ibid., p.40.

scholars of terrorism as Sageman, Horgan or Kundnani, but also by newer studies, namely the UNDP Journey to Extremism in Africa, UNDP Preventing Violent Extremism through Inclusive Development, Tolerance and Respect for Diversity, CVE model presented in the Georgetown University Security Studies Review, and so on.

These scholars and studies try to go beyond the individual-psychological models of radicalization, theses focused on religion and religious ideology, and develop new models aimed at general prevention that also include socio-political structural causes. Instead of centering on the term radicalization, this new literature also tries to establish the following concept - *violent extremism that leads to terrorism*.<sup>299</sup>

In addition to researchers and research models, inter-state organizations, such as the UN, also talk about critical aspects of countering and preventing violent extremism. For example, according to the UN Secretary-General Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism, the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy consists of four main pillars: 1. Tackling conditions conducive to terrorism; 2. Preventing and combating terrorism; 3. Building countries' capacity to combat terrorism and to strengthen the role of the United Nations system in that regard; and 4. Ensuring respect for human rights for all and the rule of law while countering terrorism. However, within the past decade special attention was given to the implementation of Pillar Two when Pillars One and Four were being ignored. According to the Secretary-General Action Plan, we need to give special consideration to preventive measures and their correspondence with Pillars One and Four.<sup>300</sup> The focus on Pillars One and Four implies considering **preventive models and initiatives that have a more holistic approach and emphasize not the individual, phase model, but rather consider the interrelation between micro, macro and mezzo factors when searching for the causes of violent extremism and terrorism**.

In their article "Islamist Radicalisation: A Root Cause Model", Veldhuis and Staun analyze the flaws of individual, phase models.<sup>301</sup> According to the authors, the main problem behind the phase models lies in two key aspects, methodological and substantive shortcomings: the main methodological shortcoming is "selection of the dependent variable". Specifically, phase models select such cases for the dependent variable, which acquire a particular value

299 Although, as pointed out by various authors, there is no exact definition of the term "violent extremism", we consider that specific term as – "violent extremism that leads to terrorism" is more neutral compared to the less precise and broader terms, such as radicalization and violent extremism.

300 UN General Assembly: *Plan of action to prevent violent extremism. Report of the Secretary-General*. 2015, p.3. Accessed November 01, 2018. <http://www.undp.org/content/dam/norway/undp-ogc/documents/SG%20PVE%20plan%20of%20action.pdf>.

301 Veldhuis, Tinka and Jorgen Staun. *Islamist Radicalisation: A Root Cause Model*. The Hague: Netherlands Institute of International Relations Clingendael, October 2009.

for the dependent variable. To prove the validity of the phase model they select cases of “successful” radicalization, which allow the research to observe similar processes and finally, identify a general principle.<sup>302</sup> However, as Valdhuis and Staun add,

“just as it is impossible to explain the outbreak of revolutions by studying only revolutions, or to explain why books become bestsellers by examining only bestsellers, it is impossible to explain radicalization only by cases of radicalization. Phase models, however, do exactly this.”<sup>303</sup>

At the same time, adoption of such methods by state security and surveillance services, **could lead to presumptions that individual citizens are at any given - let us say at the beginning phase of radicalization and they become objects of surveillance with the assumption that one will automatically move from one phase of radicalization to another**.”<sup>304</sup>

The second shortcoming, according to the authors, is the following: phase models run the risk of “statistical discrimination” to apply general traits of radicalization to cases that do not fit these models. As such, people who appear to be in the beginning phase of radicalization are considered to carry high risk of moving to the last phase of radicalization, i.e. joining a terrorist organization or committing a terrorist act. On the other hand, by ascribing such general characteristics to innocent individuals based on their race, religious belonging and general way of living, renders them at the risk of radicalization.<sup>305</sup>

According to Veldhuis and Staun, unlike the phase model of radicalization, the main advantage of the root cause model is that it enables positive policies. The authors suggest that instead of limiting human behavior (which the phase model of radicalization focuses on), policies should aim at changing structural factors and circumstances. Simultaneously, restrictive policies are often belated as they are oriented towards eradicating serious crimes. Hence, **according to the root cause model, attention needs to be paid to improving structural circumstances on a macro level in order to create a social environment**, which will prevent the spread of violent extremism and contribute to constructive interactions between groups.<sup>306</sup> At the same time, this model emphasizes that the goal of policy makers is to create environment where individuals identifying as Muslims do not feel discriminated if they dress in their traditional religious garb, wear facial hair or outwardly show their devotion.<sup>307</sup>

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302 Ibid., p.17.

303 Ibid.

304 Ibid., p.18.

305 Ibid.

306 Ibid., p.66.

307 Ibid., p.67.

In this sense, notable examples are **the UN Conceptual Framework** on the prevention and countering of violent extremism, and their study on violent extremism in different African countries. Unlike the existing models that discuss the importance of studying root causes of violent extremism, yet dedicate minimal attention to them and focus on individual behavior, the UNDP starts its discussion of violent extremism by emphasizing structural factors:

“The root causes of violent extremism are complex, multifaceted and intertwined, and relate to the structural environment in which radicalization and possibly violent extremism can start to take hold. Violent extremism is the product of historical, political, economic and social circumstances, including the impact of regional and global power politics. Growing horizontal inequalities are one of the consistently cited drivers of violent extremism. Critically, unemployment or poverty alone is not the only push factor inciting violence and extremism: perceptions of injustice, human rights violations, social-political exclusion, widespread corruption or sustained mistreatment of certain groups, are also considered important push factors. When all these horizontal inequalities come together for a particular group, radical movements and violence are more likely to erupt.”<sup>308</sup>

At the same time, the UNDP Conceptual Framework does not focus on religiously inspired extremism and does not consider that exclusive attention to religious extremism disregards and muddles the seriousness of the risks posed by different violent extremist groups.<sup>309</sup> Consequently, the framework identifies eight drivers that can determine radical behavior and engender violent-extremist actions. These drivers are:

1. The role and impact of global politics;
2. Economic exclusion and limited opportunities for upward mobility;
3. Political exclusion and shrinking civic space;
4. Inequality, injustice, corruption and the violation of human rights;
5. Disenchantment with socio-economic and political systems;
6. Rejection of growing diversity in society;
7. Weak state capacity and falling security;
8. A changing global culture and banalization of violence in media and entertainment.<sup>310</sup>

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308 UNDP, Preventing Violent Extremism, p.10.

309 Ibid., p.17.

310 Ibid.

However, in addition to structural drivers, the conceptual framework also talks about the individual process of transitioning from radicalization to extremism:

“People get pulled into radical and violent movements through socialization processes that are usually facilitated by personal, emotional and psychological factors: alienation, search for identity and dignity, revenge because of loss of a family member, previous mistreatment or imprisonment, the breakdown of communication between authority figures and youth, and through virtual communities on social media.”<sup>311</sup>

According to the UNDP Conceptual Framework, although violent extremism is a security problem, **a hard-line approach, inspired by security measures, creates a bigger risk of further inflaming violent extremism.**<sup>312</sup> For this reason, the UNDP considers that sustainability and fruitfulness of PVE requires an inclusive development approach. The latter, in turn, should be based on tolerance, political and economic strength, and fighting inequality. Consequently, the UNDP recognizes eleven building blocks of PVE strategies:

- Facilitating a rule of law, and compatibility between PVE and human rights-based approach;
- Strengthening the fight against corruption (in countries where the problem exists);
- Replacing violence for groups at risk and providing socio-economic alternatives;
- Enhancing participation in decision-making and broadening civic space at national and local levels;
- Strengthening local governments to enable them to provide better services and ensure security;
- Supporting internal, local intermediaries to popularize dialogue with alienated groups and re-integrating former extremists;
- Promoting gender equality and women’s empowerment;
- Inclusion of youth in building social cohesion;

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<sup>311</sup> Ibid., p.23.

<sup>312</sup> Ibid., p.25.

- Collaborating with faith-based organizations and religious leaders to counter the attempts of violent extremists at abusing religion;
- Working with the media to promote human rights and tolerance; and
- Promoting respect for human rights and diversity, and a culture of global citizenship in schools and universities.<sup>313</sup>

The UNDP Conceptual Framework is notable not only for its multi-layered and holistic approach, but also because it is based on the study conducted in different countries of Africa aimed at researching the causes of violent extremism. This study is especially valuable due to several reasons. First of all, it takes into account the methodological drawbacks characteristic to violent extremism and radicalization research. In addition to conducting a comparative analysis, the authors have a multi-method approach as they analyze macro, mezzo and micro factors. Several features of the study deserve a special mention: starting from the assumption that no model has the capacity to determine in advance why a specific individual would use violence, irrespective of the specific circumstances characteristic to the individual, her predispositions, relationships or affinity for certain views, the main goal of the study was to identify those structural circumstances that contribute to the spread of violence and violent extremism.<sup>314</sup> For this reason, the study pays particular attention to those small groups of individuals who, although they face similar challenges as others, have made the choice to join violent extremist groups. Accordingly, instead of only focusing on radicalization, the UNDP study centers on **recruitment**. In addition, the study is built on 718 individuals organized in three general groups: the first group, consisting of 495 individuals, joined violent extremist groups voluntarily; the second group, consisting of 78 individual, were recruited forcefully; and the third, control group, consisting of 145 individual, did not have any affiliation with a violent extremist group.<sup>315</sup> The presence of both recruited individuals and the control group is a special advantage of this program since it prevents the building of unrealistic individual models and at the same time, makes the study outcomes on macro, micro and mezzo factors more realistic.

The study made the following important discoveries, among them the observation that access to education and consequently, literacy from the childhood period is one of the decisive factors in the process of recruitment in violent extremist groups.<sup>316</sup> The study also showed that there is a correlation between religiously motivated recruitment and the individuals'

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313 Ibid., p.27.

314 UNDP. *Journey to Extremism*, p.17.

315 Ibid., p.18.

316 Ibid., p.4.

religious knowledge. Despite the fact that 51% of the respondents named religion as their reason for membership, 57% also acknowledged that they only had a limited knowledge or no knowledge of religious texts. At the same time, the study showed that more than average years of religious education were preventive rather than contributing factors in the process of recruitment. **Hence, the authors believe that the data controverts Islamophobic rhetoric and shows the importance of religious education and better knowledge of religion in the initiatives aimed at preventing violent extremism.**<sup>317</sup>

The study also showed the importance of economic factors in the process of recruitment and revealed that multi-layered poverty and unemployment are also factors contributing to membership in violent extremist groups.<sup>318</sup>

Besides, the study outcomes show that dissatisfaction and lack of trust towards local governments are significant indicators for those individuals who were recruited by violent extremist groups. Also, great importance is given to such factors as dissatisfaction with security actors and politicians, lack of trust in democratic institutions and disbelief that they can bring any significant changes.<sup>319</sup>

However, the most noteworthy outcome of the study is the identification of the so-called “tipping point” in the process of recruitment. Namely, what impels an individual to join a violent extremist group when others, who find themselves in similar circumstances, do not join such groups. According to the research conducted in several African countries, for 71% of the respondents in addition to the above-mentioned factors, decisive influences are “state actions” such as the “killing of a family member or a friend”, or “detainment of a family member of a friend”. Hence, the study authors conclude that actions of individual state security actors that are not consistent with the protection of human rights, could become important facilitators in the process of recruitment.<sup>320</sup>

Based on these major findings of the study, the authors conclude that despite the fact that, considering the context of several African countries, military and hard-line actions are very important components in fighting terrorism, especially when handling groups like Boko Haram and Al-Shabaab, the question of how these actions are implemented and how they affect local population are decisive for long-term success.<sup>321</sup> This reasoning stems from data that shows **how counterpro-**

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317 Ibid., p.5.

318 Ibid.

319 Ibid.

320 Ibid.

321 Ibid., p.87.



**ductive security-oriented state measures can be when they are not handled with special care, and in accordance with human rights principles and the rule of law. Such hard-line measures engender widely held distrust for the police, military forces and state security services, which as the study has shown, is the critical factor when joining violent extremist groups.<sup>322</sup>**

Hence, based on the outcomes, the study emphasizes the importance of general development approach and the need for its integration in CVE and PVE initiatives. At the same time, when introducing general development programs, or integrated PVE initiatives and policies, it is crucial to ask critical questions that ensure their consistency with human rights, including the core principles of equality under the law, accountability before the law, and fairness in the protection and vindication of rights.<sup>323</sup> These questions are:

- Do the planned initiatives and policy stigmatize whole population groups as collectively responsible for the actions of individuals?
- Do the planned initiatives and policy associate religious practices, behaviors and beliefs with violent extremism, and therefore, lead to formal or informal censorship and restriction?
- Do the planned initiatives and policy associate particular political beliefs and ideologies with a risk of violent extremism, and therefore restrict them through political censorship and social engineering?
- Are the developed initiatives and the political framework based on an objective, proportionate and unbiased assessment of political violence in given territory? Do they consider all relevant social, political and cultural factors?
- Have the initiatives and policy been planned and implemented democratically? Have appropriate mechanisms been developed to review planned and implemented initiatives and policy; namely to ensure that the developed policy is necessary, proportionate, legitimate and effective?
- Does the policy correspond to rights-based approaches?
- Does the CVE policy authorize law-enforcement organs to conduct surveillance on individual citizens, and to use hard-line action?<sup>324</sup>

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322 Ibid.

323 Kundnani and Heyes, *The globalisation of Countering Violent Extremism policies*, p.40.

324 Ibid., pp.40-41.

## Chapter 5:

# Politics Seen from Margins: Government Approaches, Expert Analysis and the Locals

This last chapter of the study considers the following issues in the given order: 1) forceful and non-violent approaches of the state in the Pankisi Gorge with a special focus on the years between 2012 and 2017; 2) summary of interview outcomes conducted with experts and representatives of non-governmental organizations regarding forceful and non-violent state approaches; 3) Pankisi residents' evaluation of security measures, and their perspectives regarding the movement of fighters to the Middle East.

### 5.1. 2003-2018 Government Approaches to the Pankisi Gorge

In the years between 2003 and 2018, three distinct periods can be identified in the Georgian Government approaches in the Pankisi Gorge: 2003-2008, 2008-2012, and 2012-2018. Therefore, before analyzing the last period, we will shortly summarize the main features of the three periods.

(1) 2003-2008: Saakashvili's government continues the approach chosen in response to the 2002 Pankisi Crisis (see Chapter 1), and against the backdrop of international anti-terrorist campaign, it attempts to institutionalize its relationship with the US and Europe. At the same time, during his meeting with Vladimir Putin in 2004, President Mikheil Saakashvili promised him to collaborate in the fight against Chechen militants.<sup>325</sup> A few days after his Moscow visit, Mikheil Saakashvili made a statement in the Ministry of Defense that he would take harsh measures if armed individuals would attempt to cross over to Georgia from the North Caucasus.<sup>326</sup> Disappearance of Chechen refugees raised suspicions among Pankisi residents about their secret extradition to Russia. In 2004, a protest was held in the village of Duisi to support those Chechens who had disappeared.<sup>327</sup>

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325 Peuch, Jean-Christophe. "Georgia: Saakashvili Sees in 'Wahabbism' A Threat to Secularism." Radio Free Europe. February 18, 2004. Accessed May 15, 2018. <https://www.rferl.org/a/1051586.html>.

326 საქართველოს პრეზიდენტის მიხედვით სააკაშვილის გამოსვლა საქართველოს უშიშროების სამინისტროში. 24 საათი. თებერვალი 19, 2004.

327 Peuch, Jean-Christophe. "Georgia: Saakashvili Sees in 'Wahabbism' A Threat to Secularism." Radio Free Europe. February 18, 2004. Accessed May 15, 2018. <https://www.rferl.org/a/1051586.html>.

Mikheil Saakashvili's government drew strict divisive lines in the Pankisi Gorge between "dangerous" and "harmless" Muslims, and declared the so-called "Wahhabism" a malady, and an "anti-Georgian" and "hostile" ideology.<sup>328</sup> He designated the newly pious, who follow a strict religious practice, as "bearded Wahhabi elements" and started a strict and uncompromising war against them.<sup>329</sup> It was in the peripheries of the Pankisi Gorge that Saakashvili's government claimed its monopoly over violence in 2005, a move that Paul Manning has labeled a "pilot experiment"<sup>330</sup>. In July 2005, armed forces trained by anti-terrorist program became involved in a community conflict in Duisi, setting a house on fire and killing two people. A Pankisi resident remembers that "the armed forces did not even attempt to enter the house by breaking in, or to arrest people through other methods."<sup>331</sup>

(2) 2008-2012: Mikheil Saakashvili's government changed its approach towards the Pankisi Gorge. Following the August 2008 War, a new stage started in the relationship between Georgia and the North Caucasus characterized by a practical approach based on recognizing Russia and the North Caucasus as separate entities and adopting distinct policies in relation to them.<sup>332</sup> The government presented its new policy in the North Caucasus as part of its national security strategy, and incorporated the matter under the umbrella of "the Georgian State concept on Relations with the Peoples of the North Caucasus".<sup>333</sup> The goal of this policy was to deepen relationship between Georgia and the peoples of the North Caucasus, and to disseminate Georgia's soft power in the region. In response to 2008-2012 political strategy, Georgia established a visa-free regime with North Caucasian population, recognized the Circassian genocide, created a special program for North Caucasian students to receive education in Georgia, and funded the first Caucasian, Russian-language TV channel.

The Georgian State concept on Relations with the Peoples of the North Caucasus, approved by the government in July 2012, embraced provision of education for North Caucasian students in Georgia, and deepening of interpersonal relationships via economic, cultural and social support. At the same time, the Georgian government intended to assist North Caucasians in the protection of their rights and the establishment of historical justice.<sup>334</sup>

328 საქართველოს პრეზიდენტის მიხეილ სააკაშვილის გამოსვლა საქართველოს უშიშროების სამინისტროში. 24 საათი. თებერვალი 19, 2004.

329 *Ibid.*

330 Manning, Paul. "Folklore and Terror in Georgia's 'Notorious' Pankisi Gorge." *Explorations in Anthropology* 9 (2009): 18-27.

331 Interview. Respondent N 2, 14/09/2017.

332 კახიშვილი, ლევან. საქართველო, რუსეთი და ჩრდილოეთ კავკასია: ოპტიმალური პოლიტიკის ძიებაში. კავკასიური სახლი, 2015. Accessed April 5, 2018. <http://caucasianhouse.ge/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/brief-print.pdf>.

333 *Ibid.*

334 საქართველოს პარლამენტის დადგენილება. ჩრდილოეთ კავკასიის ხალხებთან ურთიერთობის საქართველოს სახელმწიფო კონცეფცია. 2002. Accessed April 5, 2018. <https://matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/1698588>.

As for the Pankisi Gorge specifically, the Georgian state continues to divide Kists into “dangerous” and “harmless” Muslims, yet this time, it chooses collaboration strategy with the “dangerous” Muslims. A representative of the Council of Elders notes that “the principle was the following – the Pankisi Gorge was ruled by Wahhabis, we [the National Movement] rule the Wahhabis.”<sup>335</sup> However, the Lapanquri special operation conducted on August 28-29 2012 changed the attitude of Pankisi residents, namely of the Salafis, towards the government. Consequently, as noted by several respondents, the majority of Pankisi voters voted for the Georgian Dream in the 2012 elections.<sup>336</sup> According to the official version of the story, the special operation followed the abduction of five young people from the Lapanquri forest. The Ministry of Defense claimed that the armed group crossed the Georgian border from the North Caucasus and took the individuals hostage. According to the Public Defender’s statement, the official version does not correspond to reality.<sup>337</sup> The ombudsman created a public commission on October 22 2013, which aimed at investigating human rights abuses by the special operation. In 2014, the Public Defender appealed to the parliament to set up a temporary investigative commission, but the parliament refused and details of the Lapanquri special operation remain undisclosed to public.

(3) 2012-2018: compared to the previous government, the Georgian Dream had a different policy in the Pankisi Gorge and the North Caucasus. Starting from 2012, state policy in the North Caucasus became subsumed under Georgia’s relationship with Russia, and it can be broadly assessed as “the policy of no policy”<sup>338</sup>. The Georgian government extended the no-visa regime to all citizens of Russia, terminated funding to the Caucasus TV channel and North Caucasian students. Similar to its predecessor, the Georgian Dream government divided Pankisi residents into “dangerous” and “harmless” Muslims, but chose to set up a dialogue with the “harmless” Muslims, i.e. with the followers of traditional Islam, specifically the Council of Elders. The sustained bisection of Pankisi residents into two categories and prioritization of one of the groups resulted in the erosion of elders’ authority in the region. Study interviews identified the following reasons for this development: 1) Unconditional obedience and loyalty to the state policy even when it went against the collective interests. The most recent illustration of this approach is the 2018 mobilization of Pankisi residents against the construction of hydroelectric stations wherein the Council of Elders and Salafi

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335 Interview. Respondent N 18, 2/11/2017.

336 ცესკო. არჩევნები 2012. <http://results2012.cec.gov.ge/major18.html>

337 ალადაშვილი, გიორგი. „ორი წელი ლაფანკურის სპეცოპერაციიდან“. *რადიო თავისუფლება*. 27 აგვისტო 2014. Accessed August 15, 2018. <https://www.radiotavisupleba.ge/a/ori-tseli-lapankuris-spetsoperatsiidan/26553115.html>.

338 კახიშვილი, ლევან. საქართველო, რუსეთი და ჩრდილოეთ კავკასია: ოპტიმალური პოლიტიკის ძიებაში. კავკასიური სახლი, 2015. Accessed April 5, 2018. <http://caucasianhouse.ge/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/brief-print.pdf>.

minority refrained from taking a clear stance; 2) Election and composition of the Council of Elders. The Council of Elders was registered in 2004 as the successor of Mekh-Khel (state justice). The Council is comprised of 35 rank and file members, and 10 board members. A fraction of young respondents is suspicious of the Council's legitimacy since it is a registered organization rather than an elected Mekh-Khel; 3) The labeling of Salafis as "enemies" by the Council of Elders diminishes their authority since this puts them in opposition with the majority of Pankisi youth.<sup>339</sup> As noted by one of the residents:

"When Salafism is most prominent in the Pankisi Gorge percentage wise, and you attempt to make it a target, and always find its weak spots to attack. [...] You are trying to oppress them in the face of entire Georgia, and lead an information war against them, it is impossible for the Council to be a strong institution in this society."<sup>340</sup>

Despite the above-described approaches characteristic to each period, the central direction of the policy remains the same. Starting from the 1990s, the Pankisi Gorge has been labeled as a "black hole", and since 2003 the Gorge residents are classified into "dangerous" and "harmless" Muslims based on their religious belonging. Specific violent and non-violent approaches prominent in the Georgian Dream government will be discussed in the following subchapters.

## 5.2. Georgia's Forceful Approach: Legal and Critical Overview

In order to achieve an in-depth understanding of state security and general development strategy, vision and programs, we approached such institutions as State Security Service (SSSG) and Ministry of Reconciliation and Integration. However, we were unable to receive an authorization to conduct interviews with these state institutions (we did not receive an official refusal, however we also did not get an authorization before the study was finished). Although certain representatives of these institutions agreed to meet with us, they did not allow us to record the conversations or use the collected material for the study. Needless to say, such prudence in regards to interviewing reveals the state's unwillingness to share information, make it publicly available, or to assist scholarly research. Considering these circumstances, the following subchapter, dedicated to violent state approaches, consists of two parts – legal and illegal.

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339 According to the Yearbook of Muslims in Europe (2014. Vol6), 60-80% of Pankisi youth is Salafi.

340 Interview. Respondent N 28, 4/11/2017.

### 5.2.1. Georgian State Security: Unlimited Mandate and Scope

Georgia's security services existed in various institutional forms until they were separated from the Ministry of Internal Affairs in 2015, and started to function as a separate institution. This change received positive feedback from many human rights organizations.<sup>341</sup> Despite the importance of separating security and policing systems, several factors contribute to unlimited concentration of power and high risks of human rights abuses in State Security Services: wide mandate, duplicate and conflicting competences, weak judicial control over operational activities, limited parliamentary control over the institution's activities and frail guarantees of transparency.

Constitutional guarantees of SSSG's independence and political neutrality are low, and it offers simple and unbalanced levers for the appointment and removal of ruling political party.

According to the Law of Georgia on "State Security Service of Georgia", SSSG is the system of special-purpose institutions of executive branch directly subordinated to the Government of Georgia, which ensures state security within its scope of competence.<sup>342</sup> SSSG's competences are conflicting and incompatible, and beyond its analytical and operational work, it has investigative and judicial functions. The institution has a secret intelligence system under poor judicial supervision and the position of a security officer, the so-called ODR, which grants them unjustified control over autonomous institutions.

In addition to crimes related to terrorism, state, territorial and economic security, the institution's investigative reach extends to crimes related to corruption and violation of human equality. According to the Law on "State Security Service of Georgia", one of the main functions of SSSG is to prevent (conduct preventive measures), identify, eliminate and investigate crimes under its investigative field. The Service continuously analyzes the mentioned crimes, related threats, risks and challenges.

The civic sector has criticized the granting of investigative function to SSSG<sup>343</sup>, suggesting that such function is incompatible with analytical-counter intelligence activities of the Ser-

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341 კოალიცია დამოუკიდებელი და გამჭვირვალე მართლმსაჯულებისთვის. განცხადება. 29 მაისი, 2015. Accessed September 20, 2018. <https://emc.org.ge/ka/products/koalitsia-shinagan-sakmeta-saministros-reformis-protess-ekhmaureba>.

342 Law of Georgia on "State Security Service of Georgia" (Article 5).

343 კოალიცია დამოუკიდებელი და გამჭვირვალე მართლმსაჯულებისთვის. „კოალიცია შიგანგან საქმეთა სამინისტროს რეფორმების პროცესს ეხმაურება“, Accessed September 12, 2018. [http://coalition.ge/files/comments\\_on\\_the\\_ministry\\_of\\_internal\\_affairs\\_reform\\_concept\\_25092015\\_ge.pdf](http://coalition.ge/files/comments_on_the_ministry_of_internal_affairs_reform_concept_25092015_ge.pdf).

vice, and results in the accumulation of power<sup>344</sup>, which could potentially be abused. Granting investigative functions to the SSSG also conflicts with international standards. In order to avoid high risk of abusing authority and duplication of traditional police responsibilities, such powers as investigation of criminal activities, detention and arrest, should be exclusively assigned to other law enforcement organs.<sup>345</sup> We find a similar approach in the best UN practices wherein analytical and intelligence functions are deemed incompatible with investigative authority.<sup>346</sup>

Human rights organizations are especially critical of subsuming crimes related to corruption and violation of human equality under SSSG's investigative authority.<sup>347</sup> Inclusion of corruption-related crimes in the mandate of SSSG goes beyond its action goals (except those cases when a corruption-related crime is a matter of security) and it creates risks of unjustified control over a public service (it should be noted that the majority of crimes investigated by SSSG are corruption-related<sup>348</sup>). Incorporation of crimes considered under Articles 142 (Violation of human equality) and 142(1) (Racial discrimination) into the investigative authority of SSSG is a clear example of viewing issues of equality, and first and foremost, issues related to religious and ethnic minorities, as well as migrants and foreigners, in the context of the security paradigm. The mentioned mandate enables SSSG to monitor and control religious and ethnic groups.<sup>349</sup>

In addition to its investigative competence, SSSG also has the right to implement preventive measures for carrying out crime investigation or other its other functions.<sup>350</sup> From the perspective of implementing preventive powers, it is problematic that specific cases are not covered by the leg-

344 ადამიანის უფლებების სწავლებისა და მონიტორინგის ცენტრი (EMC), საერთაშორისო გამჭვირვალობა-საქართველო (TI). *უსაფრთხოების სამსახურის რეფორმა საქართველოში*. თბილისი, 2018, p.27.

345 PACE Recommendation 1402, გაიდლაინი B3., ციტირებულია: „უსაფრთხოების სამსახურის რეფორმა საქართველოში“, ადამიანის უფლებების სწავლებისა და მონიტორინგის ცენტრი (EMC), საერთაშორისო გამჭვირვალობა-საქართველო (TI), თბილისი, 2018, p.28.

346 United Nations Human Rights Council, Fourteenth Session, “Compilation of Good Practices on Legal and Institutional Frameworks.” May 17, 2010. Accessed September 29, 2018. <https://fas.org/irp/eprint/unhrc.pdf>

347 ადამიანის უფლებების სწავლებისა და მონიტორინგის ცენტრი (EMC) და საერთაშორისო გამჭვირვალობა-საქართველო (TI). *უსაფრთხოების სამსახურის რეფორმა საქართველოში*. თბილისი, 2018, pp. 27-30.

348 ადამიანის უფლებების სწავლებისა და მონიტორინგის ცენტრი (EMC), საერთაშორისო გამჭვირვალობა-საქართველო (TI). *უსაფრთხოების სამსახურის რეფორმა საქართველოში*. თბილისი, 2018, p.29.

349 *Ibid*, p.28.

350 Namely, in accordance with Article 13 of the law, if there are reasonable grounds to believe that state security may be at risk, the Service shall take the following preventive measures within its scope of authority: a) questioning a person; b) identifying a person; c) summoning a person; d) carrying out frisk and examination of a person; e) carrying out special frisk and examination of a person; f) ordering to leave a place and prohibiting entrance to a certain territory. At the same time, in accordance with Section 2 of the same article, in addition to the preventive measures determined by paragraph 1 of the article, the Service may carry out other preventive measures without interfering with fundamental rights and freedoms of a person.

isolation when SSSG acquires the competence to implement preventive measures. Namely, the law makes a general and ambiguous reference to the concept of *having reasonable grounds to believe there is a threat*. As determined by Article 13, Section 3 of the law, “reasonable ground to believe” refers to “a fact and/or information that would be sufficient for an impartial observer to draw conclusions in view of circumstances”, while “threat” refers to “a condition when there are reasonable grounds to believe that in the case of an unhindered course of expected developments there is a high probability that the property item, to be protected by the Service, would be damaged”. On the account of these abstract definitions, there is a general condition for the implementation of preventive measures and it is associated with abstract threats. In the case of poor prosecution and judicial control over the use of preventive measures this could contribute to the abuse of power and unfounded intervention in the rights of citizens. It should be noted that in addition to the measures directly taken into account (questioning a person, identifying a person, summoning a person, carrying out frisk and examination of a person, carrying out special frisk and examination of a person, ordering to leave a place and prohibiting entrance to a certain territory), the law also grants SSSG the right to carry out other preventive measures, which do not violate human rights and freedoms. The mentioned document is also general and ambiguous, and involves high risk of arbitrary limitations on human rights and private life.

Special divisions of SSSG are authorized to use special means of surveillance, among them physical violence, special measures and firearms. It is notable that in many democratic systems security services do not have the authority to use violence, and they are responsible for handing over the analytical information they collect to law enforcement organs.<sup>351</sup>

Special attention needs to be paid to the problem of SSSG’s extensive authority during the implementation of counter-terrorist operations. Head of the Crisis Management Unit, who is also the head of SSSG, has the power to determine the location, time and discontinuance of a counter-terrorist operation.<sup>352</sup> In this process, the Agency does not fall under parliamen-

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351 ადამიანის უფლებების სწავლებისა და მონიტორინგის ცენტრი (EMC) და საერთაშორისო გამჭვირვალობა საქართველო (TI). *უსაფრთხოების სამსახურის რეფორმა საქართველოში*. თბილისი, 2018. p.33.

352 According to December 4 2014 #662 Government Resolution “On the Organization of Activities and Approval of Activity Code of Crisis Management Unit”, with the purpose of managing crisis situations generated by terrorist activities, the government is creating a unit led by the Head of the State Security Service who supervises all individuals involved in counter-terrorist operations. The unit implements: a) identification, evaluation and analysis of the existing situation, threats and challenges caused by terrorist activities; b) development of an operation plan; c) creation of a group for participation in counterterrorist operations, and direct supervision of their work during and after operations. Within its competence, participation in the liquidation or amelioration of losses incurred as a result of terrorist acts; d) organization of forces for counterterrorist operations; allocation, preparation and utilization of special equipment based on pre-developed plans; e) implementation of appropriate strategies and tactics for organizing negotiations with terrorists; f) determination of specific legal regime zones during counterterrorist efforts (security and counterterrorist operation zones); g) as sanctioned by the Head of the Unit, notification of the Georgian government, State Security and Crisis Management Council, Georgian parliament, diplomatic missions of foreign countries and/or other entities of the progress, scale and outcomes of counterterrorist operations. Citizens are informed about terrorist acts via mass media and other resources available to the public.



tary control and its responsibilities are limited to informing the state about the starting time of counter-terrorist operations.

A significant problem in the functioning of SSSG is almost absolute secrecy of its activities, which renders it a non-transparent service and hence, creates the risk of arbitrary use of power. The SSSG consists of thirteen structural divisions<sup>353</sup>. From these, only seven make their provisions available to public, while provisions of Information-Analytical, Counterintelligence, and State Security Divisions, Special Operations Department and Counterterrorism Center are designated as state secrets<sup>354</sup>. According to September 24 2015 Resolution 507 (Appendix 2) of the Georgian government on the adoption of the Law on State Secrets, and normative acts on the activation of the Law on State Secrets, State Secrets contain information on plans, organization, material and technical maintenance measures, forms, methods and outcomes, implementation of specific events, as well as information on funding specifying programs within the domains of intelligence, national security, law enforcement, counterintelligence, operational-search activities and secret investigation; also information on those individuals who, with the guarantee of confidentiality, collaborate or used to collaborate with relevant Georgian institutions in charge of these activities. Based the mentioned norms, what follows is a description of specific activities considered as State Secret, which reveals that almost all activities within the authority of SSSG, including normative acts regulating these activities, represents a State Secret, which makes it impossible to research or evaluate them from the perspective of human rights.

Needless to say, certain information is restricted by law in the interest of protecting national security. Although there is no exhaustive list of such information, it is generally considered that secret information could include information collected by surveillance services in regards to national security, information on the production, capacity and use of weapons and other military systems, information on defense plans, operations and capacity – for as long as this information can be utilized for security purposes.<sup>355</sup> Consequently, secrecy of information collection by security services, and methods of collection should happen according to specific criteria established by the law, and documents related to SSSG activities should not be automatically classified as secret. Nevertheless, in certain circumstances we witness

353 Administration, Counterterrorism Center, Anti-Corruption Agency, Counterintelligence Division, State Security Division, Information-Analytical Division, Operative-Technical Division, Division for Operative Measures, Economic Division, Special Operations Department, Facilities Protection Division, Main Division Human Resources, General Inspection.

354 უსაფრთხოების სახელმწიფო სამსახური. დებულებები. Accessed September 15, 2018 <https://ssg.gov.ge/page/info/normative-acts>.

355 Tshwane Principles, Part II, Principle 9, ციტირებულია: „უსაფრთხოების სამსახურის რეფორმა საქართველოში“, ადამიანის უფლებების სწავლებისა და მონიტორინგის ცენტრი (EMC), საერთაშორისო გამჭვირვალობა-საქართველო (TI), თბილისი, 2018. p. 107.

unfounded classification of specific cases as secret. For instance, the legal rationale employed by SSSG to classify provisions of certain divisions as secret is unclear, when in practice these provisions should only include structural and functional information.<sup>356</sup> A similar problem emerges in individual criminal cases on terrorist activities, where as already noted, case lawyers point to automatic secrecy of cases despite the fact that these cases might not include top secret information.

Thus, SSSG is an unrestricted institution with a wide mandate, which creates a high risk of human rights abuses. In these circumstances, when SSSG actively and intensively works in the Pankisi Gorge, criticism of the institution's broad competence, low parliamentary control and low transparency, mutate into more serious forms of control and human rights abuses.

### 5.2.2. Fighting and Countering Violent Extremism: Critical Overview

As noted in previous sub-chapters, one of the main priorities of SSSG is fighting terrorism. Despite this, the Service does not have a policy document or strategy for fighting violent terrorism, which makes it difficult to evaluate state vision and approaches.

It should be noted from the beginning, that the goal of this sub-chapter is not to evaluate the efficiency of state policy on fighting terrorism and violent terrorism, but rather to identify SSSG's paradigmatic flaws.

Based on SSSG activity reports, **ongoing affairs in the Middle East and terrorist organizations like the Islamic State, Al-Qaeda and Taliban, represent a threat. This state of affairs also has an impact on Georgia. Although Georgia does not face a high risk of terrorist attacks, there are challenges.**<sup>357</sup> SSSG lists the movement of Georgian citizens to Syria and Iraq as one of such challenges. For instance, according to 2015 report, in 2015 up to 50 Georgian citizens had traveled to these countries for "terrorist purposes".<sup>358</sup>

According to 2015-2017 reports, SSSG implemented various measures to fight terrorism. These reports reveal the following cluster of objectives: 1) Reacting, preventing and eliminating any terrorist activity; 2) Diminishing risks of terrorism; 3) Protecting the state, its interests and citizens from all forms of terrorist activity. The main measures implemented by SSSG in its fight against terrorism during 2015-2017 reporting period

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356 *Ibid*, p.101.

357 სახელმწიფო უსაფრთხოების სამსახური. ტერორიზმთან ბრძოლა. Accessed October 29, 2018. <https://ssg.gov.ge/page/counter-terrorism>.

358 სახელმწიფო უსაფრთხოების სამსახურის ანგარიში 2015. Accessed October 29, 2018. <https://ssg.gov.ge/page/info/reports>.

were aimed towards these objectives. Some of these measures include: detention of Aiup Borchashvili, representative of the Islamic State, and his associates in 2015; “prevention of the use of internet for the purpose of disseminating radical ideology”<sup>359</sup> in 2015-2017; reinforcement of border control in order to prevent travel to and from the country for terrorist activities; travel ban for certain individuals; uncovering and eliminating cases involving the funding of terrorism; improving readiness to respond to a terrorist threat; introduction of ID systems for state strategic objects and risk analysis; international collaboration to share information; planning of joint activities within and outside of Georgia, and others.

For the purposes of this study, it is especially symptomatic and interesting to observe the use of specific terms and approaches in the mentioned reports. First and foremost, the ambiguity of employed terminology should be emphasized, including such terms as “Islamic ideology”, “radical ideology”, “radical messages”, “radicalized citizens”, “extremist messages”, and “extremist ideas”. For example, we read in 2015 report that “the Islamic State acquired a certain number of supporters in several Georgian regions. The propagators of *Islamic ideology* are trying to use *low level of awareness* among certain social groups to their own advantage”.<sup>360</sup> Similarly, 2016 report states that “control of individuals and organizations propagating *radical ideology* is being actively implemented”.<sup>361</sup> Among other things, we read in 2017 report:

“Georgia found itself against important, and in certain cases critical, challenges in 2017. There were attempts to finance terrorism, support of *extremist and terrorist ideas* and cases of *radicalization of individual citizens* of Georgia.”<sup>362</sup>

The mentioned terms are not defined in the current legislation, international treaties or agreements, or policy documents, which makes it hard to determine the exact meaning and context behind their use. In the framework of the study, we submitted an official request to SSSG to provide information on this – what is the legal basis for using these terms, and according to what criteria (including legal criteria) are specific factual circumstances subsumed under these terms. We received the following response:

359 სახელმწიფო უსაფრთხოების სამსახურის 2015-2017 წლების ანგარიშები. Accessed October 29, 2018. <https://ssg.gov.ge/page/info/reports>.

360 სახელმწიფო უსაფრთხოების სამსახურის ანგარიში 2015. Accessed October 29, 2018. <https://ssg.gov.ge/page/info/reports>, emphasis by the authors.

361 სახელმწიფო უსაფრთხოების სამსახურის ანგარიში 2016. Accessed October 29, 2018. <https://ssg.gov.ge/page/info/reports>, emphasis by the authors.

362 სახელმწიფო უსაფრთხოების სამსახურის ანგარიში 2017. Accessed October 29, 2018. <https://ssg.gov.ge/page/info/reports>, emphasis by the authors.

“The terms listed in the letter, which are used in SSSG reports, correspond to universally known definitions. Based on the analysis of international terminology, similar terms are employed by in the reports of various foreign law-enforcement services and international organizations. The UN, OSCE, European Council, European Commission, international organizations and researchers use similar definitions and terms in reports and analytical documents. Accordingly, their utilization in analytical or financial reports does not require development of additional criteria in order to legitimate their use; similarly, legislative definitions are also not needed.”<sup>363</sup>

As the official response demonstrates, SSSG considers that terms “radicalization”, “extremism”, “radical ideology” and so on, have universally acknowledged definitions used both by various international structures and organizations, and individual national law-enforcement services and scholars. However, as Chapter 4 shows, terms such as “radicalization” and “violent extremist” carry various meanings, yet it would be very hard to identify their universally acknowledged definitions; more so, these terms do not correspond to specific, generally accepted criteria. Hence, SSSG’s position that these terms are universally known, used by many scholars and there is no need to develop additional criteria when using them is a problematic approach and contains high risks of arbitrariness.

This state of affairs demands the question: do these terms have a universal definition and specific criteria in such inter-state structures as the UN, OSCE, European Council and European Commission?

**UN:** General Secretary of the UN notes in the Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism: “violent extremism is a diverse phenomenon, *without clear definition*. It is neither new nor exclusive to any region, nationality or system of belief.”<sup>364</sup> The General Secretary also notes that “like terrorism” (see Chapter 2), definition of “violent extremism” is “the prerogative of Member States and must be consistent with their obligations under international law, in particular international human rights law.”<sup>365</sup>

**OSCE:** in an OSCE report on Countering Violent Extremism and Radicalization that leads to terrorism, we read that we have not yet reached a consensus on the definition of “terrorism” and “violent extremism”. “Violent extremism” is a relatively new term, which attempts

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363 SSSG Response to Human Rights Education and Monitoring Center (EMC) (04.06.2018, N SSSG 3 18 00081828).

364 UN General Assembly: *Plan of action to prevent violent extremism. Report of the Secretary-General*. 2015, p.1. Accessed November 1, 2018 <http://www.undp.org/content/dam/norway/undp-ogc/documents/SG%20PVE%20plan%20of%20action.pdf>.

365 *Ibid*. See detailed overview of General Secretary’s comments on “radicalization”, and related problematic issues in Chapter 4.

to incorporate broader forms of extremism and violence.<sup>366</sup> The OSCE report connects radicalization to extremism (latter being defined separately) and notes that radicalization does not have a single, unique drive; it is complex and multifaceted, yet it is possible to separate certain factors.<sup>367</sup>

**European Council:** in 2006 the European Council defined radicalization as “the phenomenon of people embracing opinions, views and ideas, which could lead to acts of terrorism”.<sup>368</sup>

**European Parliament:** the European Parliament defines “radicalization” as a phenomenon when humans adopt intolerant opinions, views and ideas, which could lead to violent extremism.<sup>369</sup>

Hence, despite the fact that the above listed institutions employ such terms as “violent extremism” and “radicalization”, these terms are neither self-explanatory, nor based on any specific criteria. In fact, these institutions criticize the use of such terms because of their ambiguity and possible risk of human rights abuses.

The use of these terms is problematic not only because of their ambiguity. The problem lies in the fact that their use in absolute terms<sup>370</sup>, as if they were self-evident concepts, enables the state, and specifically SSSG, to constantly increase control over its citizens under the pretext of security. Realistic possibility of increased control and use of violent measures can be observe not only in the ambiguous use of terms in SSSG reports, but also in the study interviews where Pankisi respondents note that they are often held at the border because of their religious identity, and are possibly under special and discriminatory control. In addition, the residents point out the problem of intensive control established by SSSG and the police in the Pankisi Gorge, which is aimed towards limiting their civic activism.

At the same time, in 2017 SSSG report, the above-cited quote about special challenges faced by Georgia in 2017 due to the support of extremist and terrorist ideas, and radicalization of individual citizens, is followed by a remark addressing November 21-22 2017 anti-terrorist

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366 Neumann, Peter. R., *Countering Violent Extremism and Radicalisation that leads to terrorism: Ideas, Recommendations, and Good Practices from OSCE Region. Austria: OSCE*, 2017. p. 19.

367 Ibid., p. 21.

368 Schmid, Alex, P., *Radicalisation, De-Radicalisation, Counter-Radicalisation: A Conceptual Discussion and Literature Review*. The Hague: ICTT, 2013. p. 12.

369 Kundnani, Arun and Ben Heyes: *The globalisation of Countering Violent Extremism policies. Undermining human rights, instrumentalising civil society*. Amsterdam: Transnational Institute, 06 March, 2018, p. 21. Accessed October 30, 2018 <https://www.tni.org/en/publication/the-globalisation-of-countering-violent-extremism-policies>.

370 See the discussion on absolute and relative use of the terms “radicalization” and “extremism” and related issues in Chapter 4.

special operation conducted in Tbilisi. The following affirmative statement accompanies the remark:

“Later, other individuals associated with Chataev’s terrorist group were identified. Special operations were conducted in Tbilisi and Akhmeta region on December 26 2017 with the goal of detaining mentioned individuals. Five individuals were detained. One of them passed away later due to the injuries received as a result of the special operation.”<sup>371</sup>

Among other things, this remark in SSSG report addresses the case of Temirlan Machalikashvili. In addition to the fact that such affirmative statement infringes on the presumption<sup>372</sup> of Temirlan Machalikashvili’s innocence, pre-given and undefined terms - “support of extremist and terrorist ideas” and “facts of radicalization”, politically and ideologically package encroachment on the life of Termilan Machalikashvili, and suggest that the “fact of radicalization” could determined based on objective criteria developed in advance.

In 2015-2017 reports, ambiguous use of the terms “radicalization” and “extremism”, and their direct association with terrorism, corresponds to the point discussed in Chapter 4. Namely, that connecting radicalization, extremism and terrorism results in the violation of individual and communal rights, and discrimination based on religion or other identity markers. As noted by the General Secretary of the UN General Assembly, association of extremism with violence and terrorism contains the risk of excessive application of counter-terrorist methods, among them against actions that should not be qualified as terrorist acts.<sup>373</sup>

### **5.3. Non-Violent Government Approaches: State Strategy for Civic Equality and Integration**

Non-violent approaches of the state in the Pankisi Gorge are generally linked to the integration of minorities and civic equality policy, the latter being defined and coordinated by the State Minister in the matters of reconciliation and civic equality. These approaches are determined in 2015-20120 State Strategy for Civic Equality and Integration<sup>374</sup> adopted by the

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371 სახელმწიფო უსაფრთხოების სამსახურის ანგარიში 2017. Accessed October 29, 2018. <https://ssg.gov.ge/page/info/reports>.

372 შდრ. ადამიანის უფლებების სწავლებისა და მონიტორინგის ცენტრი. „EMC-იმ თემირლან მაჩალიკაშვილის მშობლების სახელით სუს-ის წინააღმდეგ თბილისის საქალაქო სასამართლოში სარჩელი შეიტანა“. 20 აპრილი, 2018. Accessed October 30, 2018.

373 UN General Assembly. Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism. Report of the Secretary-General. 2015. p. 2.

374 სამოქალაქო თანასწორობისა და ინტეგრაციის სახელმწიფო სტრატეგია და 2015-2020 წ. საქმეთმედო გეგმა. Accessed October 30, 2018. <http://smr.gov.ge/FileList.aspx?ID=34>

Georgian government in August 2015. We read in the introduction to the strategy document:

“Democracy strengthening and development is one of the main goals of both the Georgian society and the Government of Georgia, and to achieve this it is necessary to provide equality between individuals. Protection of ethnic minority rights and promotion of a society that is based on the principles of diversity and pluralism largely determines a country’s democracy degree and development.”<sup>375</sup>

The strategy document sets four strategic objectives:

- “Representatives of ethnic minorities participate equally and fully in the civic and political life;
- Equal social and economic conditions and opportunities are created for ethnic minority representatives;
- Representatives of ethnic minorities have access to high quality education at all levels and the level of the state language knowledge is improved;
- Culture of ethnic minorities is preserved and tolerant environment is encouraged.”<sup>376</sup>

The strategy document views the issue of ethnic integration from the perspective of human rights and equality, and the document does not have any significant conceptual flaws. However, the main challenge is to focus on the actual needs outlined in the government’s annual action plans based on these strategic objectives. Annual action plan performance reports reveal that the government’s approach is results-oriented and does not adequately measure the scale of social changes.

According to 2015-2017 reports, the fourth objective – preservation of culture among ethnic minorities, was most prominent in the Pankisi Gorge (among others, it was important for the local population to introduce Chechen language as an elective in schools). Even though cultural events are important for preserving cultural independence, as qualitative interviews conducted in the Pankisi Gorge have shown, special focus on such events and activities compared does not correspond to the worries and actual needs of the local population. Instead of full political, social and cultural inclusion, ethnic minority integration policy often boils down to eroticization of non-dominant groups, which prevents these groups from acting as political subjects.

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<sup>375</sup> *Ibid*, p.1.

<sup>376</sup> *Ibid*, p.5.

In the study interviews, several respondents noted that activities implemented in the Gorge do not correspond to social needs and proper evaluation of economic resources in the region, and are not geared towards changing the system. One of the respondents explained that state and non-governmental projects, such as promotion of small-scale enterprise, only offers one-time assistance to individual entities and does not ensure eradication of poverty and unemployment.<sup>377</sup> He adds that “such grants are being handed out one to three times per year. They don’t play an important role, and close after some time”. Because of that he believes that Pankisi needs “large-scale projects.”<sup>378</sup> Even a representative of a non-governmental organization recognized that “small mini projects do not have an impact.”<sup>379</sup> As for infrastructural projects, respondents note that locals are not being involved and employed in the implementation of projects. One of the elders said that “when a company wins, it brings its own people. They might only employ two or three people.”<sup>380</sup> As early as 2000 and 20001, Pankisi residents requested long-term employment opportunities for resolving the social and economic crisis in the Gorge. In their opinion, economic development could be achieved with the help of juice and wool factories, artisanship and collection points.<sup>381</sup> Due to these social circumstances, Pankisi residents depart from Georgia at high rates.<sup>382</sup>

Among the needs of the Pankisi Gorge, respondents collectively distinguish the issue of unemployment and they discuss the issue of education in relation to the latter. Employment of young university graduates remains a serious problem. As noted by one of the teachers, “many promising young individuals in the Gorge graduated with excellence but are unable to achieve self-realization.”<sup>383</sup> She adds that some high school graduates do not even apply to universities, knowing that they will be unable to sustain themselves financially in the city.<sup>384</sup> Inability to receive university education, in turn, affects the motivation of youth and is one of the factors in increasing dropout rates. For example, as observed by a Duisi school teacher, this issue is especially acute for pupils who live on the outskirts: she had six students from village Tsinubani in her class, but four of them dropped out of school after the ninth grade.<sup>385</sup>

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377 Interview. Respondent N 9, 31/10/2017.

378 Interview. Respondent N 9, 31/10/2017.

379 Interview. Respondent N 24, 2/11/2017.

380 Interview. Respondent N 18, 2/11/2017.

381 შუბითიძე, ვერა. „უსაფრთხოება და ეთნიკური კულტურის ადაპტაციის უნარი ახალ სოციალურ-კულტურულ გარემოსთან“. *უსაფრთხოების სტრატეგიის ეთნიკური ასპექტები (პანკისის კრიზისი)*, რედ. ლია მელიქიშვილი. თბილისი: შშვიდობის, დემოკრატიისა და განვითარების კავკასიური ინსტიტუტი, 2002. p. 95.

382 სიხარულიძე, არჩილ და სხვა. *ისლამი საქართველოში: პოლიტიკა და ინტეგრაცია*. თბილისი: კავკასიური სახლი, 2016. p.19.

383 Interview. Respondent N 34, 5/2/2018.

384 Interview. Respondent N 34, 5/2/2018.

385 Interview. Respondent N 34, 5/2/2018.



Unlike centrally located villages in the Pankisi Gorge, where in addition to public education, non-governmental organization KRDF also provides lessons free of charge, in the peripheral village of Tsinubani, the school is unable to provide an adequate learning environment for the students because of the lack of basic infrastructure. Tsinubani Primary School has six grades, and after that students have to continue their education in the village of Duisi. However, due to the condition of Duisi-Tsinubani road, students are unable to travel in severe winter conditions.

As the interviews show, Pankisi Kists often refrain from direct resistance, which limits their involvement and isolates them from the political domain. There are several reasons for such political restraint:

1) The residents do not believe that their civic involvement will have any impact. Kist respondents expressed their dissatisfaction at being discriminated by special services when crossing Georgian border. They voiced discontent at a protest held in the village of Duisi, but as one of the respondents notes, “there is no point in holding protests. [...] We had a demonstration, but there were no consequences.”<sup>386</sup>

2) The loyalty of Kists towards the state is determined by their caution as an ethnic and religious minority not to disconcert the dominant ethnic group. As guests, they are often content with the minimum advantages they are offered by the state since instead of asserting their rights, they are obliged to live in the mode of self-protection. A Kist elder expressed his pragmatic attitude towards the state policy in the following manner:

“Us, Kists, know only one thing, that there is only very few of us in Georgia. [...] We can’t change the political winds, we know that well. First of all, we will only harm our own people if we make a mistake. Secondly, for more than 200 years we have linked our fate to the fate of Georgian people, we live in Georgia and wherever the Georgian majority stands, that’s where we also stand. [...] We look at the ongoing political life with a pragmatic eye and try to be involved in this process in such a way that **no harm is caused to our people and our region.**”<sup>387</sup>

Against the backdrop of limited positive liberty, Kist respondents are content with negative liberties as well. As noted by one of them, “it is just important that we are not being discriminated and oppressed, and we won’t be asking for too much from the government.”<sup>388</sup> Never-

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386 Interview. Respondent N4, 16/09/2017.

387 Interview. Respondent N 18, 2/11/2017.

388 Interview. Respondent N 3, 16/09/2017.

theless, in the beginning of 2018, part of the Kist population protested against their “guest” status and appealed to the government as political subjects and rightful citizens who decided to change the “political winds”. They first demanded answers from the government regarding the infringement on Temirlan Machalikashvili’s life, and from the spring of 2018 they began protesting against the construction of hydroelectric stations. According to Kist activists, in response, the authorities questioned active Pankisi residents.<sup>389</sup> This demonstrates that the state attempted to remind Kists of their “guest” status due to their vulnerable position on the state security map, hence, assigning them a place within invisible apolitical borders.

3) Any social or political resistance by Kists is discussed from the security angle and hence, carries the risk of being interpreted as an “anti-state” action. This, in turn, prevents them from freely expressing their discontent or resistance like ethnic Georgians. As one of the young respondents explained,

“Even if we move just one finger, it can mean an explosion. [...] If an ordinary Georgian does something, he will be released with a 100 Lari fine, but if that happens here – if an ethnic representative does the same, it will be a huge problem. He will be summoned in the administration, summoned somewhere else, he will be in the news, and so on.”<sup>390</sup>

4) Being a target of violent and punitive state policy determines Kist isolation from civic involvement. Accustomed to “punitive” operations, locals are careful not to lose the minimum that they have if they show resistance. One of the respondents laments that fearing punishment, his neighbors refrain from resistance: “they say that they will no longer receive assistance, will lose their jobs, or will be set up. So, everybody is quiet.”<sup>391</sup>

## 5.4. Expert Opinions on the Pankisi Gorge, State Strategy and Movement from Pankisi to Iraq and Syria

In addition to the State Security Service and State Ministry for Reconciliation and Civic Equality, non-governmental organizations and representatives of civic sector (collectively referred to as “experts”) are significant actors in the formation of general public opinion on the Pankisi Gorge, and creation of political and cultural infrastructure. Hence, as described

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389 ნულაია, გვანცა. „პანკისში საპროტესტო აქციები – მიაღიკავშილის საჭმე და ჰესები“. *რეზონანსი*. 20 ივლისი, 2018. Accessed September 20, 2018. [http://www.resonancedaily.com/index.php?id\\_rub=2&id\\_artc=52359](http://www.resonancedaily.com/index.php?id_rub=2&id_artc=52359)

390 Interview. Respondent N 15, 3/11/2017.

391 Interview. Respondent N 35, 5/3/2017.

in the methodological section of this study, interviews with experts represent a combination of informational interviews and interviews aimed at analyzing knowledge production. That is, on the one hand, we wanted to systematize expert visions, information and evaluations, and on the other hand, we wanted to critically analyze the knowledge produced by them. We can identify three main thematic blocks in the expert interviews: 1) evaluation of violent approaches of the state; 2) evaluation of non-violent approaches of the state; and 3) expert perspective regarding the movement to the Middle East. These three thematic blocks are further divided into thematic categories derived from the interviews through the method of induction: 1) violent approaches of the state: between “campaigning” and “having no strategy”; 2) non-violent approaches of the state: aimlessness of non-violent goals; 3) expert perspectives on the movement to the Middle East: “ideology, heroes and money”.

### *1) Between state “campaigning” and “having no strategy”:*

“The state does not have a strategy. Its strategy is reactive and is aimed at identifying and detaining terrorists. This is the main problem”<sup>392</sup>, “This is a campaign strategy. It [the state] cannot have a campaign approach, it is necessary to have a differentiated approach”<sup>393</sup>, - this is how expert interviews evaluate violent state approaches in the Pankisi Gorge.

Experts identify various issues when discussing state approaches to the Pankisi Gorge, including the strategy of the United National Movement, and its comparison with the Georgian Dream approach, the 1990s Pankisi Crisis and President Shevardnadze’s period, and others. However, they give special attention to the Law on Combating Terrorism, namely changes introduced in the criminal code on the movement to foreign countries for terrorism and military support.

Experts critically evaluate the law due to the following factors: first of all, they believe that starting from around 2015 there is no more movement from the Pankisi Gorge to the East.<sup>394</sup> Reasons for this change are the following: 1) Weakening of the “Islamic State”<sup>395</sup>; 2) Arrest of the main recruiter of the “Islamic State” in Georgia<sup>396</sup>; and 3) Shattered “illusions” that going to Syria challenges Bashar al-Assad’s regime, and hence, Russia.<sup>397</sup>

It is because of its incompatibility with existing reality that experts are critically disposed to the changes introduced within the Law. As explained by one of the respondents:

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392 Expert Interview N 2, 22/09/2017.

393 Expert Interview N 1, 22/09/2017.

394 Expert Interview N 1, N 2, N 3, N 4, N 5.

395 Expert Interview N 2, 22/09/2017, N 3, 19/10/2017.

396 Expert Interview N3, 19/10/2017.

397 Expert Interview N1, 22/09/2017.

“The Law was reasonable when it was passed because there was a problem of active movement. Moreover, for some time, until the summer of 2015, ISIS had military victories and naturally, many want to be on its side when it wins, right? What’s better than being on the side of winners?! This law was passed when they saw that many people were leaving and the numbers can grow further [...], the numbers could grow further. Hence, that was prevention, so that you would know that if you went there, you could not come back. Now this ISIS is over, this ideology was defeated and now many countries, including Tajikistan for example, started implementing programs that if you left, you are able to come back and go through a rehabilitation program, and return to life if you want.”<sup>398</sup>

Inflexibility of the Law in terms of differentiation and return is one of the causes for the experts’ skepticism in regards to the introduced changes. “The government chooses not to tackle with additional problems”<sup>399</sup> – explains one of the experts who believes that is the main reason why changes introduced in the 2013 law remain in effect – “according to the law, when you return, you have to go to jail for nine years. Hence, the policy is that ‘don’t come back, die there and you’ll be buried somewhere, and that will be it’”<sup>400</sup>. However, in case of return, the same experts think that the law is problematic in regards to the burden of proof, that is, determining one’s membership in a terrorist organization.<sup>401</sup>

Other experts also talk about the lack of differentiation among those who leave. “Unfortunately, arm-twisting is our only policy – of the special services”<sup>402</sup> – states one of the experts who also considers that the state should show some flexibility. That is, instead of working for quick results by arresting the returnees, the state should have a long-term vision on how to counteract the recruits’ vulnerability.<sup>403</sup> Expert #1 specifies the significance of differentiated approach and considers that it is important that individuals, or at least their families, who left to fight against Assad’s regime rather than to join terrorist organizations, should be allowed to return.<sup>404</sup>

## ***2) Aimlessness of the state’s non-violent goals:***

If expert evaluations of violent approaches can be unified under the category of “lack of competence and strategic approach on behalf of the state”, their evaluation of non-violent ap-

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398 Expert Interview N3, 19/10/2017.

399 *Ibid.*

400 *Ibid.*

401 As Expert N 3 notes in an interview, “that law has another issue of ‘How do you prove it?’, ‘What are you proving?’”

402 Expert Interview N 2, 22/09/2017.

403 *Ibid.*

404 Expert Interview N 1, 22/09/2017.

proaches are unified under the category of “aimlessness of the state’s non-violent goals”. The most obvious illustration of this is the following quote by one of the experts: “in summary, it seems like the state is giving you something, but in reality it is not giving you anything.”<sup>405</sup>

When evaluating non-violent approaches and goals of the state, experts start with a skeptical approach to its violent approaches. As we have seen in the evaluation of violent approaches, experts believe that the state does not have a long-term strategy and the existent one is oriented towards “arm twisting”, and is not differentiated. Consequently, when talking about long-term strategies, experts have non-violent approaches in mind, which in turn contain two directions: 1) prevention – focused on ideology; and 2) prevention – focused on improving economic and social situation. We should also mention some inconsistencies found in the interviews. We saw that respondents believe that movement from Pankisi and recruitment of individual citizens by terrorist organizations is no longer happening today. However, as we will see below, it is unclear why they continue to talk about prevention in the context of security. However, first we will summarize their evaluation and vision of non-violent approaches.

When discussing non-violent approaches, experts mention programs and initiatives implemented by the State Ministry for Reconciliation and Civic Equality in the context of ethnic integration policy. Expert disposition towards these initiatives is neither positive nor negative since, as we saw in the quote above, those experts who talk about non-violent approaches in detail, believe that these initiatives do not generate changes: “the Ministry of Sport organizes some games sometimes, attended by CSO or USAID at times. It is completely out of context”<sup>406</sup>. Expert #3, for example, does not consider these initiatives as “a preventive mechanism for not becoming a terrorist”<sup>407</sup>, and hence, he/she favors prevention measures focused on “ideology”:

“We need positive role models. For example, if a person does not see hope, we need to find a young man, even a Wahhabi, who started university in Tbilisi, then was accepted for an Erasmus program and went somewhere. If we do not have similar models, we need to create them. The second thing is to work with groups. We need to have different messages for elders, young people, women, Wahhabis and Imams. So, when you go to a meeting and all of them are gathered together, we cannot talk to them in the same way.”<sup>408</sup>

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<sup>405</sup> Expert Interview N 4, 17/10/2017.

<sup>406</sup> Expert Interview N 2, 22/09/2017.

<sup>407</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>408</sup> *Ibid.*

In the experts' opinion, these messages should be developed through a complex approach and with the help of preventive models that include psychologists and sociologists who would work with young people. However, when asked how exactly one can work on prevention, Expert #2 responded that it is a "million dollar question"<sup>409</sup>, and he/she does not have an answer to it. Despite this, the above quote reveals the expert's preference for stage-by-stage, individual psychological model of "radicalization" and therefore, representation of the entire Pankisi population as potentially "threatening". In response to the question whether current programs result in further isolation of individuals, Expert #2 thinks that it is important to know what your target is and act accordingly:

"The most important thing is not to separate fundamentalism from Wahhabism. However you engage these individuals, they will reflect on it the next day, look into the Qur'an, listen to underground prayers, and will return to the same views. We don't have much choice there. In short, this is what we need to do: we should eradicate fundamentalism, show its bad side today, what caused it and what are its social outcomes."<sup>410</sup>

Although it remains unclear what Expert #2 means by eradicating "Wahhabi fundamentalism", "looking into the Qur'an", or how these are connected to "countering violent extremism", the respondent nevertheless believes that direct state intervention in the religious matters of Pankisi is not right since such involvement falls into the classical model of how the state should not behave. Such involvement, in the expert's opinion, transformed the Council of Elders into a non-governmental organization, resulting in its loss of leverage in the community.<sup>411</sup> In the opinion of Experts #1 and #3, intervention in internal religious matters is not right: "when you are in a disagreement where you don't have enough authority to act as a mediator, isn't it better not to intervene?! Leave both sides alone, why should you be the one to negotiate their business?!"<sup>412</sup>

Another important question for experts, when evaluating non-violent state approaches, relates to economic and social issues. They assess some state-implemented (as well as non-governmental) local programs, such as "Produce in Georgia", positively, but at the same time, they think that such programs are not sufficient. For instance, Expert #4 explains:

"For example, they taught women to drive cars. You tell me, where are they supposed to drive cars? You need to have a car in the first place, right? They taught them accounting courses, but where can you work here after a three-week accounting course in Pankisi [...]. That "Produce in Georgia" is really good but it requires co-funding."<sup>413</sup>

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409 *Ibid.*

410 *Ibid.*

411 Expert Interview N2, 22/09/2017.

412 Expert Interview N 3, 19/10/2017.

413 Expert Interview N 4, 17/10/2017.

Experts talk about various programs or trainings that either require continuous co-funding, or are completely removed from social and economic reality in the Pankisi Gorge:<sup>414</sup>

“Generally speaking, protectionism is horrible in economy but if businesses could be encouraged to allocate one free spot for a person from the Pankisi Gorge. Because there are many; when you leave the Pankisi Gorge there is “Badagoni” and big companies that could easily employ 20 people today or tomorrow. I can’t tell a business to look at its plans and employ somebody, but if you explain to them that this is a matter of national interest, and give them, let’s say, a 2% discount on the land, it could be possible. It depends how creative you are, how much you want it and if you have a vision.”<sup>415</sup>

Expert opinions on what the state should do in the Pankisi Gorge in the framework of its non-violent approach can be summarized as following:

1. Education-oriented activities, including the following measures:

- Establishment of religious schools or universities where Pankisi Muslims can receive education;
- Creation of literature – of historical and ethnographic content – so that Kists have information on their own history and origins;
- Assistance in receiving education: financing education, mobility and accommodation;
- Facilitating the learning of Georgian language;
- Retraining school teachers.

2. Employment oriented activities:

- Negotiation with large companies in the region and employment of local residents;
- Inclusion and employment of local residents in the existing infrastructural projects.

3. Improvement of economic and social conditions:

- Supporting livelihood and small-scale agriculture;
- Improvement of the existing employment programs in Pankisi so that for the programs that require funding, the state could assist Pankisi residents to receive co-funding;
- Opening local enterprises.

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<sup>414</sup> Expert Interviews N 2, N 4.

<sup>415</sup> Expert Interview N 2, 22/09/2017.

4. Prevention of recruitment by terrorist organizations and movement outside of Pankisi:

- Working specifically with young people, and creating prototypes of young people that would prevent recruitment by terrorist organizations;
- Creation of differentiated messages for various religious, gender and age groups.

Although experts outline several important solutions for improving social and economic conditions in the Pankisi Gorge, they see their initiatives not in terms of overall development of the Gorge, but rather in the context of security. Such approach implies demarcation of the entire Pankisi population as a “threat”. This is especially evident when experts talk about their visions of social and economic development by using such preconceptions as “tying them down to their place”, “they will get employed and not go anywhere”, and so on. An illustration of similar preconceptions can be found in other quotes as well: “You would need some systematic forms probably to tie them down, starting from livelihood, or some small enterprise”<sup>416</sup>; “They should be employed and they will not go anywhere, and they will not think to go to war or somewhere else, they’d be fine, wouldn’t they?!”<sup>417</sup> “Just fund them. I swear, it’s nothing else, they won’t remember either Kadyrov, or Syria, or Al-Qaeda, or Pareulidzes, and nobody at all. It is that simple”<sup>418</sup>.

***3) Expert perspectives on the movement to the Middle East: “ideology, heroes and money”:***

Expert perspectives on the movement from the Pankisi Gorge to the Middle East can be divided into two categories: 1. Expert perspective on the causes of the movement; and 2) Expert perspective on the process of recruitment.

When discussing the causes of the movement, each expert considers Pankisi’s Tarkhan Batirashvili (known in the “Islamic State” as Abu Omar al-Shishani), and his popularization by the media as the main factor. One of the experts said: “I think that Batirashvili factor played a huge role – romanticization, and then the media writing about it”<sup>419</sup>. However, not every expert is neutral when speaking about Batirashvili’s role; we also come across considerable exaggeration and a clear orientalist gaze in some interviews. For instance, this is how Expert #3 describes Batirashvili’s role: “Meanwhile [Batirashvili] became a hero in Pankisi. Firstly because he was the most famous person from Pankisi and *what else did they want*, they saw that it is cool.”<sup>420</sup> According to other experts, Batirashvili’s impact on the movement can be

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<sup>416</sup> Expert Interview N2, 22/09/2017.

<sup>417</sup> Expert Interview N4, 17/10/2017.

<sup>418</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>419</sup> Expert Interview N5, 27/10/2017.

<sup>420</sup> Expert Interview N3, 19/10/2017.



explained by his recognition not “as a terrorist, but rather as a freedom-fighter”<sup>421</sup>. Since, according to one of the experts “*they* have values that *we* sometimes cannot understand”<sup>422</sup>, Batirashvili became a model of success and heroism due to the absence of other opportunities in the Pankisi Gorge.<sup>423</sup>

The second cause of the movement, according to the experts, is propaganda, ideological and religious motivation. Experts have an ambiguous and general understanding of the latter: “It is my duty, as a Muslim Jihad. What does Jihad mean for a Muslim? Jihad is a starting point [...]. This is what the messages mainly contain. My brothers and sisters are dying, and I also need to be there”.<sup>424</sup> When addressing ISIS’ propaganda, which indeed has strong mechanisms of propaganda and recruitment, some experts offer discriminative definitions and when generalizing the definition, they ascribe the label of “terrorist” to the entire Pankisi population:

“By the way, there is a good video where a speaker from the Islamic State, he is standing with one deaf and one one-legged boy behind him, and he says that see, even persons with disabilities come to Jihad and you, who watches this video, are healthy, and you don’t have the right to sit at home. Such things would not affect *you and me* because *we have different values*, we have different interests, we grew up in a different environment. But when you *revolve around the Qur’an* and this Qur’an has been interpreted by a sixteenth-seventeenth century Wahhabi, and has nothing to do with the Qur’an... These things have a huge impact.”<sup>425</sup>

When talking about propaganda, experts also distinguish such factors as desire for adventures<sup>426</sup>, the Caliphate’s promise of “the American dream”, and hopes of acquiring money and influence.<sup>427</sup> Experts identify the Chechen-Russian War and resistance to Russia in Syria as the third significant factor; and economic and social factors, such as self-realization and employment, as the fourth factor.<sup>428</sup>

In regards to the instruments of recruitment, experts mention the role of social networks and associated programs. However, they believe that local persons of influence have a direct

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421 Expert Interview N2, 22/09/2017.

422 *Ibid.*

423 Expert Interview N4, 17/10/2017.

424 *Ibid.*

425 Expert Interview N2, 22/09/2017.

426 Expert Interview N3, 19/10/2017.

427 Expert Interview N4, 17/10/2017.

428 Expert Interview N1, N2, N3, N4, N5.

impact on the process of recruitment.<sup>429</sup> The religion is also mentioned as one of the causes of the movement, but experts' opinions about the latter are quite superficial. Despite their critical assessment of some state strategies – as explained above, some experts note that the state should not distinguish between the existing religious groups in Pankisi and give one of them priority over another, in the interviews they go against their own assessment by essentializing the religious groups:

“It is impossible to be a Wahhabi but also be a fundamentalist – “a moderate” type. It does not exist, it is impossible to be a strong follower of Wahhabism and not sympathize with the standing that the Wahhabis have today. It is the same as saying that in Jacobin era, Jacobins in Italy did not support Jacobins in France, it is the same story. That is because that's their life motto – that's the whole idea, that the only truth is the love of god and you should follow god. Everything else – music, arts, fun and games, and such things do not exist for them.”<sup>430</sup>

With the exception of one respondent, all experts referred to Salafi groups as Wahhabis, associated them with radicalization and terrorism, and delineated the Pankisi Gorge a source of threat: “Pankisi has been a threat during all governments”<sup>431</sup>, Expert #4 explained. Expert #2 told us that he/she does not establish any relationship with the “Wahhabis” on purpose since there is no point in receiving information from them as “they will not say that the Islamic State is good, but when they go behind the curtain, I am 100% sure they don't mean what they say”.<sup>432</sup> All experts in the study, except one, essentialize the Salafi group and call them fundamentalists, and Wahhabis; they also equate fundamentalism and terrorism, and use such terms as radicalization without further interpretation.

To summarize the main findings of interviews with experts: 1) Experts critically assess violent approaches of the state in the Pankisi Gorge, especially changes introduced in the criminal code on the movement to foreign countries for terrorism and military support. Experts believe that changes introduced in the code are out of context and incompatible to existing reality; 2) Experts believe that non-violent approaches of the state are not sufficient, are results-oriented and incompatible with the actual needs in Pankisi population; 3) Experts consider role models, ideology/propaganda, religious, economic and social factors as the main causes of the movement to the Middle East.

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429 Expert Interviews N2, 22/09/2017, N3, 19/10/2017.

430 Expert Interview N2, 22/09/2017.

431 Expert Interview N4, 17/10/2017.

432 Expert Interview N2, 22/09/2017.

In addition, the majority of expert interviews reveal an orientalist and discriminative approach towards the Pankisi Gorge, essentialization of Pankisi residents, especially Salafis, their labeling as “Wahhabis” and association with radicalism and terrorism. The categorization of Pankisi residents as inferior and untrustworthy individuals is discriminative, creates and reproduces stereotypes, and accordingly, goes against all those important points that should be taken into account according to the recommendations outlined by the UN General Secretary, UNDP Report and other important experts (see in detail in Chapter 4) when discussing or researching extremism or radicalization.

## 5.5. Pankisi Kist Perspectives on the Movement of Fighters to Syria

The number of fighters who left for Syria and Iraq from Georgia since 2012 oscillates between 50 and 200.<sup>433</sup> This number also includes those fighters who traveled to Syria while living abroad. Local and international studies search for the causes of the fighters’ movement to the Middle East on individual-psychological and theological levels, and disregard such root causes as socio-political context, geopolitics and historical circumstances (See Chapter 4). It should be taken into consideration that studies conducted in Georgia on the so-called “causes of radicalization” base their findings on interviews with Pankisi residents who have no direct connection to the movement of fighters.<sup>434</sup> A methodologically sound study, on the other hand, should at least involve the recruits. Otherwise, talking about the causes for the movement of fighters to the Middle East is non-empirical. Such flawed methodological approach leads to judging the entire Pankisi population as potential “extremists”, and hence, to the assessment of their lifestyle and views based on such ambiguous criteria of radicalization as criticism of global interventionism, dissatisfaction with state policy, strong religious practice, and so on. Assessment of radicalization based on these points, in turn, leads to the censorship of certain political views, and political instrumentalization and stigmatization of Muslim lifestyle. On the other hand, it disregards the fact that radicalization, as outlined in 2017 UNDP Report, is not necessarily a precondition for the use of violence.<sup>435</sup>

433 Clifford, Bennett. “Georgian Foreign Fighter Deaths in Syria and Iraq: What Can They Tell Us About Foreign Fighter Mobilization and Recruitment?,” *Caucasus Survey* (2017): 1-19.

434 მაგალითად, გოგუაძე, გიორგი და სერგი კაპანაძე. *დაეში და საქართველოს წინაშე არსებული გამოწვევები*. საქართველოს რეფორმების ასოციაცია (GRASS), 2015. Accessed September 10, 2017. <http://grass.org.ge/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/daesh-da-skhva-gamotsvevi.pdf>.

435 United Nations Development Programme. *Journey to Extremism in Africa: Drivers, Incentives and the Tipping Point for Recruitment*. 2017. Accessed June 12, 2018. <http://journey-to-extremism.undp.org/en>.

The analysis offered in this chapter is based on qualitative interviews with Pankisi residents on the causes for the movement of fighters. It must be noted that the respondents' perspectives are heterogeneous and encompass both dominant explanations, and local experiences and alternative perceptions beyond the hegemonic interpretative frame.

Traveling of fighters to Syria is a global phenomenon triggered by various local circumstances. We will base our classification of Pankisi residents' perspectives regarding the issue on a holistic approach, which focuses on macro, mezzo, and micro factors, and their interrelationship.<sup>436 437</sup> A typology offered by James Khalil and Martine Zeuthen also outlines complex factors, including (1) structural causes, (2) enabling factors that transform structural causes into motivation, and (3) individual motivation.<sup>438</sup> Although the mentioned authors belong to theoretical frame, contexts and political project that we critically discussed in this chapter, their multi-layered paradigm for the classification of causes is interesting as an analytical instrument, which allows for a nuanced picture for the classification of local perspectives.

Pankisi residents emphasized *injustice* as a significant factor in the movement of fighters to the Middle East, which according to the employed classification, belongs to **structural causes**, revealed on the level of global, regional and local politics.

(1) When discussing **Global Injustice**, respondents single out colonial past, interventionist politics of global powers in the Middle East and Afghanistan, abuse of Muslim rights, restriction of Islam's executive freedom in non-Muslim countries, and persecution of opposition by Bashar Al-Assad's regime. One of the respondents identifies political-economic interests behind the actions of global powers and considers that "giant countries" should not decide the fate of other nations.<sup>439</sup> Another respondent notes that the use of radical methods of resistance is determined by the hopeless situation of those individuals who face injustice.<sup>440</sup> It should be taken into account that we find similar logic in the work of anti-colonial thinker, Franz Fanon, who also connected the use of violent methods by the oppressed to imperial violence and structural injustice.<sup>441</sup>

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436 United Nations Development Programme. *Journey to Extremism in Africa: Drivers, Incentives and the Tipping Point for Recruitment*. 2017. Accessed June 12, 2018. <http://journey-to-extremism.undp.org/en>.

437 Veldhuis, Tinka and Jorgen Staun. *Islamist Radicalisation: A Root Cause Model*. The Hague: Netherlands Institute of International Relations, 2009. Accessed April 5, 2018. [https://www.diis.dk/files/media/publications/import/islamist\\_radicalisation.veldhuis\\_and\\_staun.pdf](https://www.diis.dk/files/media/publications/import/islamist_radicalisation.veldhuis_and_staun.pdf).

438 Khalil, James and Martine Zeuthen. *Countering Violent Extremism and Risk Reduction: A Guide to Programme Design and Evaluation*. Royal United Services Institute for Defence and Security Studies, 2016. Accessed April 5, 2018. [https://rusi.org/sites/default/files/20160608\\_cve\\_and\\_rr.combined.online4.pdf](https://rusi.org/sites/default/files/20160608_cve_and_rr.combined.online4.pdf)

439 Interview. Respondent N10, 1/11/2017.

440 Interview. Respondent N9, 31/10/2017.

441 Fanon, Frantz. *The Wretched of the Earth*. Penguin Classics, 2001.

As the reason for traveling to Syria, part of the respondents discuss Bashar Al-Assad's politics in the framework of global injustice, and the desire to help those who are oppressed by the political regime. For instance, one of the respondents explains that "they [fighters] went there to demolish Assad's regime so that people would have a choice to live.... normally and not under tyranny, and in an authoritarian regime."<sup>442</sup>

(2) When discussing **Regional Injustice**, respondents place special emphasis on the Chechen-Russian conflict. Chapter 1 (See Subchapter 1.1.) examines war crimes committed by Russia against peaceful citizens of Chechnya. In the Chechen-Russian War, a large section of Chechen fighters was made up of revenge-seekers who joined the war after abduction, torture or killing of their family and friends.<sup>443</sup> It is notable that according to a UNDP study, one of the key factors in violent resistance is the arrest or "killing of a family member or a friend" by the state.<sup>444</sup> It is also important that part of the fighters who went to Syria had fought in the Chechen-Russian War and directly experienced the outcomes of the conflict. One of the respondents explained that traumatic experience<sup>445</sup> of the Chechen-Russian War and Russia as a "common enemy" contributed to compassion towards anti-Assad Syrians: "I have heard many saying 'What is the difference between opposing Russia from Chechnya or Syria. I would have to fight the same enemy here as well'"<sup>446</sup>

Furthermore, the First Chechen-Russian War, which Pankisi Kists also took part in, became a critical part of the historical memory of Kist fighters and young people. Consequently, according to one of the respondents, further attempts to enter into opposition with Russia represent refusal to cope with defeat and desire to re-experience the euphoria of war.<sup>447</sup>

(3) When discussing **Local Injustice**, respondents emphasize state policy towards Pankisi, namely special operations conducted by the state during the past two decades. A school teacher from Jokhola remembers that after fatally wounding Temirlan Machalikashvili, Pankisi population was once again facing injustice that makes resistance futile and leaves an individual hopeless:

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<sup>442</sup> Interview. Respondent N 2, 14/09/2017.

<sup>443</sup> Politkovskaya, Anna. *A Small Corner of Hell: Dispatches from Chechnya*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2003.

<sup>444</sup> United Nations Development Programme. *Journey to Extremism in Africa: Drivers, Incentives and the Tipping Point for Recruitment*. 2017. Accessed June 12, 2018. <http://journey-to-extremism.undp.org/en>

<sup>445</sup> Cecire, Michael. "Same Sides of Different Coins: Contrasting militant activisms between Georgian fighters in Syria and Ukraine." *Caucasus Survey* 3 (2016): 282-295.

<sup>446</sup> Interview. Respondent N19, 17/09/2017.

<sup>447</sup> Interview. Respondent N5, 15/09/2017.

“When I was telling the boys about it the next day, I don’t even know... I did not want to see how all of them were sitting with their heads down. I more or less have an idea about what was going on in their hearts. Because when they come face to face with... some injustice, **huge injustice**... you realize why they become... you become hopeless and you have nothing left.”<sup>448</sup>

When analyzing Pankisi residents’ perspectives on the movement to the Middle East, we identified issues that according to the employed classification belong to **enabling factors**: for instance, (1) **social media**, which became the means of spreading videos depicting the oppression of Syrians; (2) **ethics**, which became relevant in the context of Assad’s persecution of the opposition and its aftermath, and which summoned the believers to offer assistance; 3) **social capital**, meaning that social group determines the mobilization of fighters. A study conducted by Bennet Clifford, which is based on Pankisi residents who died in Syria, also supports this argument;<sup>449</sup> 4) **past experience of warfare**, which is especially relevant for the first wave of fighters who went to Syria since they also fought in Chechnya; 4) **unemployment and socio-economic context**, which creates an unstable environment that makes it easier to make a decision. The UNDP study also demonstrates that economic factors have a decisive impact since recruitment allows individuals to voice their concerns and translate their limited economic potential in political terms.<sup>450</sup> At the same time, however, some of our respondents denied the relevance of material motivation. For instance, one of the respondents argued that “when you go to Syria, you basically agree to die”<sup>451</sup> and hence, material factors do not provide sufficient motivation for self-sacrifice, “what money should they pay you for you to die.”<sup>452</sup> Hence, for the purposes of analysis, it is crucial to consider a multi-layered paradigm for classifying causes, which would make the seemingly mutually exclusive findings logical. According to our classification, the respondents’ perspectives on socio-economic context belong to **enabling factors** and perspectives on narrower material interests - to the category of individual motivation.

Pankisi respondents’ perspectives on the movement to the Middle East also address such **individual motivations** as: (1) **compassion**, solidarity and “having a heart”; (2) **personal characteristics**: courage, audacity, sense of justice; (3) **role models** found in successful Pankisi fighters. As such, part of respondents believe that in addition to courage, it was sincere

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448 Interview. Respondent N36, 5/03/2018.

449 Clifford, Bennett. “Georgian Foreign Fighter Deaths in Syria and Iraq: What Can They Tell Us About Foreign Fighter Mobilization and Recruitment?,” *Caucasus Survey* (2017): 1-19.

450 United Nations Development Programme. *Journey to Extremism in Africa: Drivers, Incentives and the Tipping Point for Recruitment*. 2017. Accessed June 12, 2018. <http://journey-to-extremism.undp.org/en>

451 Interview. Respondent N 10, 1/11/2017.

452 Interview. Respondent N 10, 1/11/2017.

compassion and sense of solidarity with the oppressed that contributed to the decision of Kist fighters to travel:

“He said they are killing them, eight and nine month old children... He would show me photos in his phone, saying look, this is how they slaughter them and how can you not react to that. A Muslim person, who **has a heart**, you can’t ignore such a thing.”<sup>453</sup>

By referring to “having a heart”<sup>454</sup>, “having human feelings”<sup>455</sup>, “developing solidarity when seeing people shouting after they have been bombed”<sup>456</sup>, part of the respondents try to emphasize humane aspects of the fighters, and hence desperately seek to challenge their and Pankisi’s generalized dehumanization, and their representation as “monsters”.

When contextualizing Pankisi fighters’ movement to Syria, respondents indicate that the majority of fighters traveled to Syria before 2015. This, according to one of the respondents, was a period when the international political elite also disapproved of Bashar Al-Assad’s crimes and supported Syrian opposition.<sup>457</sup> Respondents talked in detail about the negative impact of outside factors in the Syrian war. The fighters found themselves in a complex reality in Syria. One Pankisi respondent, who was studying in Damascus at the start of the war, explains that initially Syrian opposition had the power to defeat Assad. However, arrival of fighters from outside prevented successful resistance by the Syrian opposition since foreign fighters were motivated by personal interests and/or were influenced by superpowers and other interested countries.

“When outside fighters arrived, of course, not everybody goes there to help Syria and do good. Representatives of special forces from various countries arrive, other nations also have their own interests.”<sup>458</sup>

Pankisi fighters’ social circles largely determined which opposition group they joined. Initially, ordinary fighters did not have information about the heterogeneity of Syrian opposition forces and their politics. They mainly joined groups led by famous Pankisi field commanders, or where they had acquaintances. They had to start paying attention to their group belonging only after the creation of the Islamic State, which sparked discord. One respon-

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<sup>453</sup> Interview. Respondent N 25, 3/11/2017.

<sup>454</sup> Interview. Respondent N 14, 3/11/2017.

<sup>455</sup> Interview. Respondent N 15, 3/11/2017.

<sup>456</sup> Interview. Respondent N 7, 11/10/2017.

<sup>457</sup> Interview. Respondent N2, 14/09/2017.

<sup>458</sup> Interview. Respondent N9, 31/10/2017.

dent explains: “Those who went, went to the famous individuals and did not know if it was the right group, with the right goals. That is, everybody wanted to help those people.”<sup>459</sup>

Part of the respondents claim that groups that the fighters joined initially were not terrorist groups. Over time, new groups emerged on the horizon and many of them were later included in the list of “terrorist organizations”. For example, Junud al-Sham, which was founded in 2012 and where a famous Pankisi field commander, Murad Margoshvili (Muslim al Shishani) is fighting, was incorporated in the list of terrorist organizations only in 2014. According to the assessment of one of the respondents: “This was opposition, this was an ordinary [...] fighter for freedom, against Assad’s regime and only later became a terrorist organization and of course, it was in somebody’s interests for that to happen.”<sup>460</sup>

In Syria, Pankisi fighters were affiliated with the following groups: Ajnad al-Kavkaz, Jaish al-Muhajireen wal-Ansar (JMA), Imam Kavkaz, Jabhat al-Nusra, Janud al-Sham, Jaish al-Ussrah and ISIS.<sup>461</sup> Among important Syrian opposition groups, Syrian Independence Army, Ahrar al-Sham and Tahrir al-Sham, are notable. It is worth noting that despite their membership in various groups, Pankisi fighters in Syria are primarily associated with the Islamic State. After their arrival in Syria, many reconsidered their position and decided to return. One respondent tells us that “those who go there notice that their views about this war are detached from reality.”<sup>462</sup> However, starting from 2015, when changes were introduced in the law on terrorism, fighters have been prohibited from crossing the border back to Georgia. As for international experience regarding the return of fighters, we can identify repressive (arrest, stripping of citizenship, and home arrest) and non-repressive methods (rehabilitation, reintegration). When analyzing the fighters’ return, just like when talking about their movement, we need to consider state policy, socio-economic circumstances, geopolitical strategy and local perspectives.

Several factors need to be considered in regards to fighters who traveled to the Middle East: (1) part of the fighters were already immigrants in other foreign countries; (2) part of the fighters had participated in the Chechen-Russian War; (3) groups that the fighters joined were not initially listed among terrorist organizations, and even had international support; (4) it is incorrect to think of Pankisi fighters in Syria only in relation to the Islamic State since they were affiliated with various groups. It would be methodologically unsound and flawed

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459 Interview. Respondent N9, 31/10/2017.

460 Interview. Respondent N7, 11/10/2017.

461 Clifford, Bennett. “Georgian Foreign Fighter Deaths in Syria and Iraq: What Can They Tell Us About Foreign Fighter Mobilization and Recruitment?” *Caucasus Survey* (2017): 1-19.

462 Interview. Respondent N19, 17/09/2017.



to talk about the causes of the movement based on interviews with Pankisi residents since such approach conceptualizes the entire population of the region as potential “terrorists”. “Radicalization” of their views and lifestyle is assessed via such ambiguous criteria as criticism of global interventionism and strong religious practice. This, in turn, points to censoring of specific political views, and political instrumentalization and stigmatization of their lifestyle. Since empirical justice and deconstruction of hegemonic paradigm in regards to the Pankisi Gorge were important for our study, this sub-chapter presented Pankisi residents’ perspectives on the movement of fighters. These perspectives are heterogeneous, and encompass dominant explanations and views based on local experiences and worldview beyond the hegemonic interpretative frame. In order to analyze the data, we used multi-layered classification paradigm, according to which, residents listed global, regional and local interventionist policy, security approaches and historical experience as root causes. Pankisi residents talked about circumstances that belong to enabling factors and individual motivations. In sum, we determined that when talking about the causes of the movement, unlike experts and researchers, part of the Pankisi respondents do not forget historical circumstances and past experiences, or disregard global political processes. When discussing the role of enabling factors and individual motives, their narratives carry traces of past and global politics.

## Epilogue

The primary promise of our study was to demonstrate epistemic injustice, and through that, to dismantle the dominant frame that forces us to continuously scrutinize Pankisi with suspicion. Even when there is no suspicion, in the best case, we push the region out of our gaze to give ourselves to forgetfulness. Yet it has been months, from the spring of 2018 until today, that Temirlan's father, Malkhaz Machalikashvili, along with another fighter for justice - father of David Saralidze, Zaza Saralidze<sup>463</sup>, remains within our eyesight on a daily basis. Demonstrations organized by these grieving parents continuously "disturb" the political center from the very heart of the city. The political machine was quick to respond to this "disturbance" through the dehumanization of Machalikashvili and Saralidze, yet through distinct methods. If Zaza Saralidze was labeled as an emotionally unstable and unruly citizen<sup>464</sup> - he was detained for several days in an attempt to shake public empathy towards him, Malkhaz Machalikashvili, akin to his son, was designated as a potential facilitator of terrorism, and summoned to the prosecutor's office on several occasions.<sup>465</sup> Moreover, the Machalikashvili family has been demanding investigation in response to inhuman and degrading treatment at the hands of SSSG special operation agents during the December 26 operation. Despite expert evidence presented to the prosecutor's office, demonstrating the suffering of Machalikashvili family, the office has not yet authorized an investigation. The investigation of the main criminal case tackling Temirlan Machalikashvili's death during the December 26 special operation also continues with numerous issues. For instance, primary evidence for the case was gathered in collaboration with SSSG, which also destroyed and damaged other conclusive evidence, Temirlan's parents are still waiting to receive rights of a victim's representative, and the prosecutor's office does not grant Machalikashvili's lawyer access to secret files. In June 2018, Malkhaz Machalikashvili also talked about being an object of possible

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463 A high school student, David Saralidze, was killed on December 1, 2017. A fight between two groups of students ended in the death of two young boys, David Saralidze being one of them. David's father, Zaza Saralidze criticizes the investigation surrounding his son's death, and disputes its fundamental flaws. According to Saralidze's family, the investigation has not identified possible culprits in the interest of protecting these individuals from legal repercussions due to their affiliation with high-ranking state officials. This has also been confirmed by the temporary investigative commission working on the case. Mass demonstrations organized by Zaza Saralidze resulted in the resignation of Georgia's chief prosecutor. Investigation of the matter continues, however, until today, possible culprits have not been identified and charges have not been brought against them. Zaza Saralidze and Malkhaz Machalikashvili continue to protest on Rustaveli Avenue.

464 Since the spring of 2018, Zaza Saralidze has been holding protests rain or shine yet law-enforcement representatives do not allow him and Malkhaz Machalikashvili to raise tents. According to non-governmental organizations, by imposing such restrictions, the Ministry of Internal Affairs violates the nation's constitution. Zaza Saralidze was detained on October 26 and charged with an assault on a police officer. This happened right after the Ministry of Internal Affairs once again removed the demonstrators' tents, causing a confrontation between Saralidze and the Ministry's representatives. See, ვარადაშვილი, მარიამ. „ზაზა სარალიძე თბილისში დააკავეს, თუმცა რუსთავეში გაასამართლებენ“. ნეტგაზეთი. 29 ოქტომბერი, 2018. Accessed September 4, 2018. <http://netgazeti.ge/news/315446/>.

465 ადამიანის უფლებების სწავლებისა და მონიტორინგის ცენტრი. „EMC მალხაზ მაჩალიკაშვილის დაკითხვების პროცესს აფასებს“. 30 აგვისტო, 2018. Accessed November 4, 2018. <https://emc.org.ka/products/emc-malkhaz-machalikashvilis-dakitkhvebis-protsess-afasebs>,

surveillance by state institutions, which prompted him to appeal to a Personal Data Protection Inspector.<sup>466</sup> The state has not responded to any of these concerns.

In the words of Arun Kundnani, intensive state control and surveillance targeting not only Malkhaz Machalikashvili, but also the whole Pankisi Gorge (as demonstrated by this study), is comparable to classical approaches of totalitarianism. Use of caution when talking about politics, lack of trust towards anybody, arbitrary use of state authority- these are only a few examples of “democratic totalitarianism”.<sup>467</sup> As Kundnani notes, societies that ostracize certain members and restrict their participation in political processes, face the risk of being left with empty, technocratic spaces devoid of the potential for political action.<sup>468</sup> Yet there is an alternative epitomized by the unconditional solidarity of Malkhaz Machalikashvili and Zaza Saralidze towards each other. Despite social pressure and numerous violations of their rights by the state they stand together on Rustaveli Avenue, outside of the former parliament building, and they are not planning to go anywhere.

In addition to solidarity built on civic compassion, there is also a knowledge-based alternative aimed at rethinking the existing approaches and creating a future policy. It is this solidarity that we sought to demonstrate with this study, focusing on the following questions:

What determined the labeling of the Pankisi Gorge as a “threat” on the global security map? How did it emerge at the center of global and local politics? How are the local religious landscape of the Pankisi Gorge and its transformations related to the global security system? Finding answers to these questions is *only* possible in the context of special political and historical trajectory that the Pankisi Gorge was “assigned by fate”.

Contemporary global security system is a product of the imperial past, the Cold War and consequent security politics. Many authors have studied the politics of global powers and their allies in the Middle East and Afghanistan.<sup>469</sup> Hence, it was important for our study to show the different picture we find on the “periphery”, and to explore how the local context, generated by different historical trajectories and regional circumstances, reflects these international processes. We will not be able to start talking about the Pankisi Gorge beyond the

466 ადამიანის უფლებების სწავლებისა და მონიტორინგის ცენტრი. „EMC მალხაზ მაჩალიკაშვილის მიმართ თვალთვალისა და კონტროლის ფაქტებზე პერსონალური მონაცემების დაცვის ინსპექტორის მიმართავს“. 07 ივნისი, 2018. Accessed November 4, 2018. <https://emc.org.ge/ka/products/emc-malkhaz-machalikashvilis-mimart-tvaltvalisa-da-kontrolis-faktebe-personaluri-monatsemebis-datsvis-inspektors-mimartavs>.

467 Kundnani, Arun. *Muslims Are Coming! Islamophobia, Extremism, and the Domestic War on Terror*. London and New York: Verso, 2014. p. 198,200.

468 *Ibid*, p. 201.

469 See, for example: Talal Asad (2007), Mahmood Mamdani (2004), Fawez A. Gerges (2016).

security angle until we evaluate the specifics of interconnection between the local and the global, and their influence on Pankisi Kists. For this, it is crucial to, on the one hand, critically analyze the key global security concepts and the dominant analytical framework, and on the other hand, to study Pankisi's immediate past, including such crucial points as the Pankisi crisis, religious transformations within the local community and state policy.

The Pankisi Crisis took place against the backdrop of the Chechen-Russian War, economic collapse and intersection of global interests. Obscuring these circumstances made it possible to accuse the local population and label it as a "threat". In reality, during the Pankisi Crisis, many community members took it upon themselves to implement some of the responsibilities disregarded by the state. The government, which failed to properly respond to criminal situation in the Gorge since September 11 2001, reminded the residents of its existence through anti-terrorist special operations. Thus, Pankisi population became the "other" against which post-Soviet Georgia defined its role on the international arena.

September 11 2001 turned out to be decisive for the Pankisi Gorge in as much as it rendered the Chechen-Russian War an "anti-terrorist campaign", and resulted in the intersection of international interests, and globalization of unrestrained security politics, which in turn determined Georgian state politics towards the Pankisi Gorge. International security approaches in this period (2001-2005) were primarily forceful, which required epistemic justification in terms of "new" and "old" terrorism. Such production of knowledge, in turn, dictated the switching of focus from violent interventions, war and geopolitical interests, to the creation of knowledge that would define terrorism in simplistic terms as an outcome of "irrationality" and "fanaticism". This process facilitated hierarchization of human life through the label of "terrorism", which in turn enabled "legitimate" violence over the less valuable lives.

Today, non-violent approaches such as countering and prevention of "radicalization" and "violent extremism", are leading global security strategies that are often represented as universal and patently objective. This approach ignores distinct structural constitution of countries with developing and developed economies, and historical experiences of local populations. As the UNDP study shows, this generates the risk of alienation for local population and consequently, could prove counter productive. Models of radicalization are based on a dichotomous picture of "harmless" and "dangerous" Muslims, and become the source of discrimination for various social groups and individuals. Although such violent approaches have not yet been implemented in Georgia on the state level, rise in the number of similar studies in non-governmental sector and expert interviews conducted in the framework of this particular study, point to their likelihood in the future. Hence, we should be aware from the start that these approaches are especially risky since we have already witness dichoto-

mous representation of the existing Muslim population and practices aimed at disciplining them.

Global security politics also carries a disciplinary function and aims at promulgating normative subjectivity viewed from the “non-Muslim” perspective, which becomes the basis for labeling Muslims as “dangerous” or “harmless”. Until each Muslim proves her “harmlessness” by striving towards hegemonic characteristics, she will be labeled as a “dangerous” Muslim. Interpretation of signs of religiosity as an expression of “radicalization” serves to discipline the “unruly” subjects and push them into a dominant pattern.

Policies based on the dominant gaze and dominant epistemologies strip the locals of their right to self-definition. They define their belief as “Wahhabism”, a label forced by the opponents, and disregard local voices, and context and heterogeneity of Salafism, which is a broader category than Wahhabism.

Georgian state politics towards the Pankisi Gorge between the years 2003 and 2018 can be divided into three stages, characterized by constant alternation between violent and non-violent approaches: on the one hand, uncompromising campaign against the Pankisi population designated as “dangerous” under the veil of the anti-terrorist campaign, and on the other hand, their reduction to cultural-folkloric signifiers. Both approaches engage in orientalization and create the basis for pushing the Pankisi residents out of the political field in order to translate local social and political resistance in terms of security. This leaves the population within apolitical boundaries and hence, restricts their civic and political subjectivity. According to Pankisi residents themselves, the only resolution to these circumstances is their formal involvement in politics and take notice of their civic resistance.

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