The Localized Geopolitics of Displacement and Return in Eastern Prigorodnyy Rayon, North Ossetia

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Abstract: Three noted political geographers examine the geopolitical entanglements of the republic of North Ossetia in Russia's North Caucasus, where the country's first violent post-Soviet conflict occurred. The dynamic history of administrative border changes in the region is reviewed against the backdrop of population movements (most dramatically Stalin's 1944 deportation of the Ingush people) and shifting federal-local alliances. The primary focus is on the unresolved territorial dispute in Prigorodnyy Rayon, affected strongly by population displacement from Georgia in the early 1990s. After reviewing the causes of this dispute, which flared into open warfare in late October 1992, the paper examines two of its outcomes: the localized geopolitics of displacement and return on the ground in Prigorodnyy, and the impact of North Ossetia's geopolitical entanglements in general on ethnic attitudes. Results of a public opinion survey ($N = 2000$) in the North Caucasus conducted by the authors revealed high levels of ethnic pride among Ossetians and a generally positive attitude toward relations with other nationalities. Duly noted is the August 2008 confrontation involving Russia and Georgia over neighboring South Ossetia, which generated a new flow of refugees. *Journal of Economic Literature*, Classification Numbers: H10, I31, O18, P30. 5 figures, 1 table, 43 references. Key words: North Ossetia, Russia, South Ossetia, Ingushetia, Chechnya, Georgia, Prigorodnyy, internally displaced persons, deportations, returns process, inter-ethnic relations, territorial claims, Beslan tragedy, ethnic cleansing, *nomenklatura*, radical Islamists.

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Nagorno-Karabakh, located between Armenia and Azerbaijan, was the first violent territorial conflict to erupt as the Soviet Union experienced its death throes. It is a less well known fact that the first post-Soviet violent conflict to flare up on the territory of the Russian Federation was not in Chechnya. Rather, the hostilities that began on October 30, 1992 and continued six days thereafter until November 5 involved a historic territorial dispute between the Russian republics of North Ossetia and (the newly [re]constituted) Ingushetia, previously the western part of the Checheno-Ingush Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic. The locus of the conflict was the territory east and south of the city of Vladikavkaz, the capital of North Ossetia, a portion of the large Prigorodnyy ("suburban" in Russian) Rayon that wrapped around the city, encompassing its surrounding suburbs (see Fig. 1 on p. 641). The rayon is comprised of a series of towns and villages that have been the object of historical contestation since at least the 18th century. Although the active phase of the 1992 conflict lasted only a few days, it had severe political and humanitarian consequences (Memorial, 1994). Nearly 600 people lost their lives, and at least 30,000[2] (the majority of the Ingush population of North Ossetia) were forced to leave their homes in violence quickly dubbed "ethnic cleansing" by the international media (e.g., Ethnic Cleansing, 1992). Over 3,000 houses, overwhelmingly those of Ingush families residing in the region, were destroyed, most after the fighting had ended (Sokirianskaia, 2004). The process of managing the competing territorial claims and of regulating the legacy of displacement and the possibility of return continues to this day.

North Ossetia–Alaniya (to use its current official name) is a republic with many geopolitical entanglements. Its geopolitical life is still profoundly shaped by the violent upheavals of the early 1990s, firstly in neighboring Georgia to the south and then in Prigorodnyy, which are in turn conditioned by the legacies of the 1944 Stalinist deportations and territorial machinations that characterized the early years of Bolshevik rule in the Caucasus. Overshadowed by the Chechen conflict, the Ossetian–Ingush dispute over Prigorodnyy—a predominantly Cossack–Ingush clash in the early decades of the 20th century—remains a source of potential violence in the region. The disputed territory is an uneven post-war landscape characterized by partially destroyed and partly rebuilt Ingush-Ossetian settlements and incomplete Ingush return sites accessible to local traffic through guarded roadblocks, as well as Ossetian towns that bear no visible marks of war. The North Ossetian–Ingushetia border is closely monitored and controlled at checkpoints by Russian military and local police forces and often closed, resembling an international border more than an internal boundary between republics of the Russian Federation. A palimpsest of Caucasian history, Prigorodnyy is an evolving space where reconciliation between Ossetians and Ingush communities remains an ideal thwarted by entrenched antagonistic nationalisms and the impunity enjoyed by those who committed serious crimes in 1992 (Laber and Denber, 1996).

North Ossetia's two other geopolitical entanglements have also made occasional international news over the past decades. The terrorist attack at Beslan in September 2004 was the most graphic spillover of violence associated with the Russian Federation's war against radical Islamic fighters and separatists in the neighboring republics of Chechnya and Ingushetia.

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[2]As we shall document, there is considerable dispute over the number of Ingush forcefully displaced by the fighting. Human Rights Watch (Laber and Denber, 1996, p. 2) has cited an estimated figure of 34,500 to 64,000 Ingush residing in Prigorodnyy and other parts of North Ossetia, most of whom it says were displaced. The *Economist* (Ethnic Cleansing, 1992) has cited a figure of 50,000 displaced Ingush. There are no accurate figures, principally because there are no precise statistics on how many Ingush were living illegally without residency permits in Prigorodnyy Rayon and elsewhere in North Ossetia. Ossetian sources tend to cite 30,000 as the number of those displaced, whereas Ingush sources tend to cite double that number.

Guerrilla ambushes of Russian federal forces, their local allies, and ordinary civilians have fueled a counter-insurgency war characterized by controversial anti-terrorist measures and ethnic reprisals.[3] And most recently, the Russian Federation's military response to Georgian actions in South Ossetia was launched through the Roki tunnel (see Fig. 1 on p. 641), as South Ossetian refugees once again fled to North Ossetia for sanctuary.[4]

The North Ossetian republic faces an array of unresolved challenges: poor economic prospects, multiple problems concerning displaced persons, and abiding security concerns. All are connected to the three unresolved territorial disputes that enmesh North Ossetia in the larger Caucasus: the competing territorial claims to the eastern Prigordnyy Rayon, the Georgian–South Ossetian conflict, and the Russian struggle with Islamic militancy in Chechnya and neighboring republics. This article is an overview of the Ossetian–Ingush conflict and the beginnings of an account of its localized geopolitical dynamics of displacement and return. Because the issues involving displaced persons emanating from the 1992 Prigorodnyy fighting are intricately connected with the disposition of Ossetian refugees from Georgia who arrived in North Ossetia at about the same time, we also examine some key contemporary data on this related conflict. The first section of the paper explains the short war in Prigorodnyy in 1992 by reference to its historical antecedents and long-standing competing territorial claims in the context of an expansionist Russian (and later Soviet) state with its own local geopolitical interests that have varied over time. In part two, we then connect the variable level of Ingush returns to the rayon with the nature of pre-war ethnic relations and to federal and republic policies, as well as to the actions of the government of Ingushetia; this section also presents some recent data on refugees from Georgia. In the final section, we examine another outcome of the conflict, which, however, is not visible on the ground or in the data of the refugee agencies and the census counts. This outcome concerns the "border in the mind" in an ethnically divided society that often emanates from civil strife; the legacy of suspicion, hostility, and unwillingness to compromise on post-war political arrangements; and the "othering" of members of different ethnicities. Unfortunately, due to ongoing high levels of violence in Ingushetia, we were only able to obtain inter-ethnic attitudinal data for Ossetians, so that we can only present the beliefs of one of the two protagonists in the Prigorodnyy conflict.

ORIGINS AND CAUSES OF THE 1992 PRIGORODNYY WAR

Rich arable land has always been an object of contestation in the Caucasus (King, 2008). The land surrounding the meandering Terek River in the North Caucasus has offered one such prize for the various tribal groups (*teip*), kinship networks, and communities that have migrated across the region with the vagaries of power structures and state systems. The spearhead of the Tsarist Empire in the region from the 18th century were the multiethnic frontiersmen who became the distinctive community known as Terek River Cossacks, literally the "henchmen" or servants of the state (Barrett, 1999). They established fortified settlements (*stanitsy*) upon land they seized from local Caucasian communities, building villages and towns upon sites remembered today as "originally" Ingush or

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[3]Competition among organized criminal gangs has also spawned violence and, according to Taymuraz Kasayev, Minister of Nationality Affairs of North Ossetia, 80 percent of all violent acts in the republic have had at least some religious motivation (authors' interview, Vladikavkaz, July 30, 2007).

[4]In the early 1990s, an estimated 80,000 Ossetians escaped ethnic violence and instability in Georgia and South Ossetia by moving to North Ossetia, many not to return. See the accompanying article in this issue by Ó Tuathail (2008).

Ossetian.[5] Organized in the late 18th century as a defensive string of forts, villages, and observation towers, the Caucasian military line became a zone of cultural mixing and fluid relationships of power and violence as the Tsarist military expanded farther into the mountains in the 19th century. Cossacks resettled along the line and affected not only local communities but the environment of the region as well, with their wood-felling and agricultural pursuits. Alternating between strategies based on military offensives and local diplomacy, the Tsarist Empire built lines of communication and, in time, a central artery of transportation and control, the Trans-Caucasian Georgian Military Highway (Jersild, 2002).

As one of many communities negotiating the expansion of an empire into their home regions, the small Ossetian population differentiated itself from neighboring Caucasian peoples by conversion to the Russian Orthodox Church.[6] Bound into the growing power of the Tsarist state and the Georgian Military Highway, in 1774 some Ossetian elders joined the Russian Empire, an act later mythologized and lavishly commemorated in the memorial public space of Vladikavkaz.[7] This city's establishment between 1784 and 1787—the name Vladikavkaz (or "Power over the Caucasus") conveys its controlling role—bound the Ossetians, Ingush, Cossacks, and other small neighboring Caucasian peoples into the imperial structures of the Russian Empire.

Vladikavkaz grew into the most important city in the North Caucasus and became the center of the Tsarist effort to crush the resistance of the mountain peoples to the east. Expeditionary raids involving some Ossetian and Cossack troops during the Caucasian wars of the early 19th century eventually subdued the surrounding lands and mountainous territories, especially after the surrender of the rebel leader, Imam Shamil, in 1859. Between 1859 and 1865, Ingush communities to the south and east of the city were forcibly relocated farther northeastward to the Nazran' valley, as Cossacks ruthlessly established the Sunzha line, a

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[5]The North Caucasus region has many pre-historic and early modern archeological sites. With the creation of national consciousness among the various groups in the region by the Soviet state, these sites became foundational monuments for their self-recognition as a "people" and their codification qua "invention" of national myths and traditions. The group that became the Ingush were early inhabitants of the Caucasus, living in the mountainous south of current Ingushetia until moving to the lesser Kabardinian plains of the Sunzha and Terek valleys in the 17th and 18th centuries. Vladikavkaz was established as a Russian fortress during the years 1784–1787 in closer vicinity to the village of Zaur, itself settled in the 1740–1750s. The "ethnic possession" of Vladikavkaz is contested in Ingush and Ossetian versions of history. In the Ossetian language, Vladikavkaz is know as "Dazaug's settlement." Other important sites for the Ingush national tradition in Prigorodnyy Rayon are the villages of Velikiy Angushty (renamed/replaced in 1859 by Stanitsa Tarskaya), Malyy Angushty (renamed in 1863 Tarskiy Khutor —and in Soviet times as Oktyabrs'koye), and Akhki-Yurt (later Stanitsa Sunzhenskaya and now Sunzha and Komgaron) (Conflict Research Centre, 1997). "Ingushetia" means the land where the residents of "Angushty" (Ingushi) live. For Ingush national memory, therefore, Prigorodnyy is an original homeland, the land that names them. The Tsarist census of 1867 classified only 24,400 people as Ingush. By 1897 that number had risen to 46,200, and by 1917 had reached 57,500 (Blandy, 2006, p. 2).

[6]The Ossetians comprised three distinct groups associated with different regions and dialectics: the Digors in the northwest under the influence of Kabardin overlords; a Tuallag group (also called Kurdartsy after the Kudar ravine in South Ossetia, where many of them live) from the south Caucasus was shaped by Georgian influences; and a northeastern group, the Ironi, were partly under Kabardin influence until the 1760s and 1770s. All subgroups came under Russian influence in the period 1774–1781. Their adoption of Orthodox Christianity is often described as a re-conversion, because the Alans are held to have originally converted to Byzantine Christianity in 910 A.D. The majority of Ossetians today are Orthodox Christians, with minorities among Digors and the Ironi being Sunni Moslems. The numbers classified as Ossetian in the North Caucasus in the early Russian and Soviet censuses are as follows: 52,000 (1867), 96,500 (1897), 144,500 (1917) and 174,700 (1939). For background, see Wixman (1988, pp. 151–152) and Blandy (1997).

[7]See the cover photo to the print edition of this issue of *Eurasian Geography and Economics.*

string of *stanitsy* built to function as a military shield to protect the roads to Georgia (Blandy, 1997). The Russian Revolution and subsequent civil war early in the 20th century brought great strife to the region, with the Bolshevik Red Army forming an alliance with Chechen and Ingush fighters as well as with left-wing Ossetians against those Ossetian and Cossack fighters who sided with the regime and later supported General Denikin and the White Army. It was not until March 1920 that Vladikavkaz finally fell to the Red Army. One of the legacies of this alliance is the dispute over the territory of Prigorodnyy.

The causes of the 1992 Prigorodnyy war can be classified in three ways: firstly, the long-term accumulation of historical factors that literally created the territorial grounds for conflict; secondly, the conjuncture of circumstances during the early 1990s that saw central Soviet state power enter a period of crisis and numerous local actors and officials make bids to accumulate power for themselves and create unassailable "facts on the ground" to serve their interests (Derluguian, 2005); and thirdly, the series of immediate and proximate causes of the conflict triggering a rampage of murder, ethnic cleansing, looting, and the destruction of ethnically identified property. We examine each of these in turn. The conflicting nationalist claims to the Prigorodnyy territory are matched with contemporary developments in Table 1.

Historical Causes

When the Prigorodnyy war of 1992 first erupted, the radical nationalist regime of Dzhokar Dudayev in Chechnya cited Russian President Boris Yel'tsin's introduction of a state of emergency in North Ossetia as another confirmation of the duplicity of the policies of the Russian leadership and the colonial nature of the Federal treaty (Ingush Rally, 1992). The populist charge was a self-serving one, but it nevertheless pointed to the unavoidable structural feature of geopolitics in the Caucasus: the long-standing decisive imperial power of the Russian center in the region and the vulnerability of its different peoples to the vicissitudes of power struggles and policy shifts at the center of the Kremlin. The Prigorodnyy dispute is a legacy of this in three concrete ways. First, it grew out of the machinations of the Bolshevik regime and Red Army as they struggled to establish control over the Caucasus during the Russian Civil War. Forging an alliance of convenience with the largely mountain-based Vainakh[8] tribal leaders in the area, the bulwarks of White Russian support in the North Caucasus—traditional military-minded Cossacks and Ossetians—were defeated. The prominent Georgian Bolshevik, one of Lenin's early comrades, and colleague of Stalin, Sergo Ordzhonikidze, allegedly promised the Prigorodnyy region to Ingush fighters in return for their support (Laber and Denber, 1996, p. 5).[9] These fighters broke the back of Cossack power along the Terek, with many communities violently uprooted and driven northward. Prigorodnyy was then (re)claimed by Ingush fighters who (re)established their own life world in its villages and towns. The new order in the Caucasus was formalized by the declaration in November 1920 and the official establishment in April 1921 of a Gorskaya

[8]"Vainakh" means "our people" and was the name used by the tribes that later became classified on linguistic grounds as Ingush and Chechen. Both languages share common linguistic origins as North Caucasian Nakh languages, and are mutually comprehensible (e.g., see Wixman, 1988, pp. 140–141).

[9]This assertion is contested. Ordzhonikidze supposedly committed suicide in 1937 but was most likely murdered at the behest of Stalin. Vladikavkaz was re-named Ordzhonikidze from 1931 to 1944, and again from 1954 to 1990, before reverting to its original name.

Table 1. Key Events and Varying Interpretations of the Ingush–Ossetian Conflict, 1919–1992

Date	Event	Nationalist Ingush interpretation	Nationalist Ossetian interpretation
1918–1920	Decossackification policy; Ingush fighters expel Cossack and other communities in Prigorodnyy	Through our own actions we have been able to re-establish our control over our historic lands.	Through ethnic cleansing and violence the Ingush came to occupy Prigorodnyy
January 1921	Autonomous Mountain Soviet Republic established		
1924	Autonomous regions of North Ossetia and Ingushetia created with Vladikavkaz an independent administrative unit shared by both		
1933	City of Vladikavkaz becomes part of the North Ossetian Autonomous Oblast	"The city of Vladikavkaz, the administrative and cultural center, was taken away and handed over to the Ossetians"[a] (by Stalin who was an ethnic Ossetian, which is why he supported them)	Vladikavkaz belongs to Ossetians exclusively
1934	Creation of Checheno-Ingush Autonomous Region (1934) and later Republic (1936)	"We were stripped of our state"[a]	The homeland of the Ingush belongs to the east of Prigorodnyy, with the Chechens
February 1944	Forced deportation of Ingush and Chechen peoples	"Our homeland was taken away from us and handed over to North Ossetia"[a]	Stalin awarded Prigorodnyy to the patriotic Ossetians and we moved there and with our sweat and labor made it our home. The Ingush were rightfully punished by the Soviet state for their treacherous behavior during the patriotic war
November 1956–January 1957	Decrees allowing the return of deported peoples	"Half of our homeland was not given back to us, and it was left as a present to the especially privileged Ossetians that has two forms of state, North Ossetia and South Ossetia, while Ingushetia has none"[a]	"Not only the time of our residence but also the ashes of our predecessors give us more rights to this land than the Ingush people have"[b]
1957–1992	Return of Ingush to Prigorodnyy	We suffered legal restrictions on migration and overt discrimination in employment and education as well as regular intimidation at the hands of Ossetians	Ingush returned unlawfully and live illegally in Prigorodnyy. They intimidate, pay bribes, and live well
October 1991 and April 1992	RSFSR law on the rehabilitation of victims of political violence envisages "the restoration of territorial integrity"; RSFSR law on the rehabilitation of deported peoples	This law finally allows the full territorial restoration of the territory of Checheno-Ingushetia including Prigorodnyy and Vladikavkaz.	Lawful restoration is only possible when it does not infringe on other peoples' rights.
June 1992	Russian Federation Law creates a separate Ingush Republic, but without specified borders. An immediate moratorium on all border changes is passed	The new Ingushetia's borders can only be those of 1924. "An Ingush state cannot be built without its foundation: our people's native lands"[a]	Ingushetia's borders can only be those established in 1957
October–November 1992	War and expulsion of the Ingush population from Prigorodnyy	We were objects of genocide for merely trying to have Russian law enforced	Ingush in North Ossetia are "a snake cherished in the Ossetian bosom"[c]

[a]Citations from a March 17, 1992 letter by Ingush rayon and Prigorodnyy leaders to the Russian President, the Supreme Soviet Chairman, and the People's Deputies of the Russian Federation (Tishkov, 1997, pp. 14–16).
[b]From a letter by Adamon Tsadis cited in Tishkov, 1997, pp. 14–15.
[c]North Ossetian President Galazov, cited in Tishkov, 1997, p. 23.

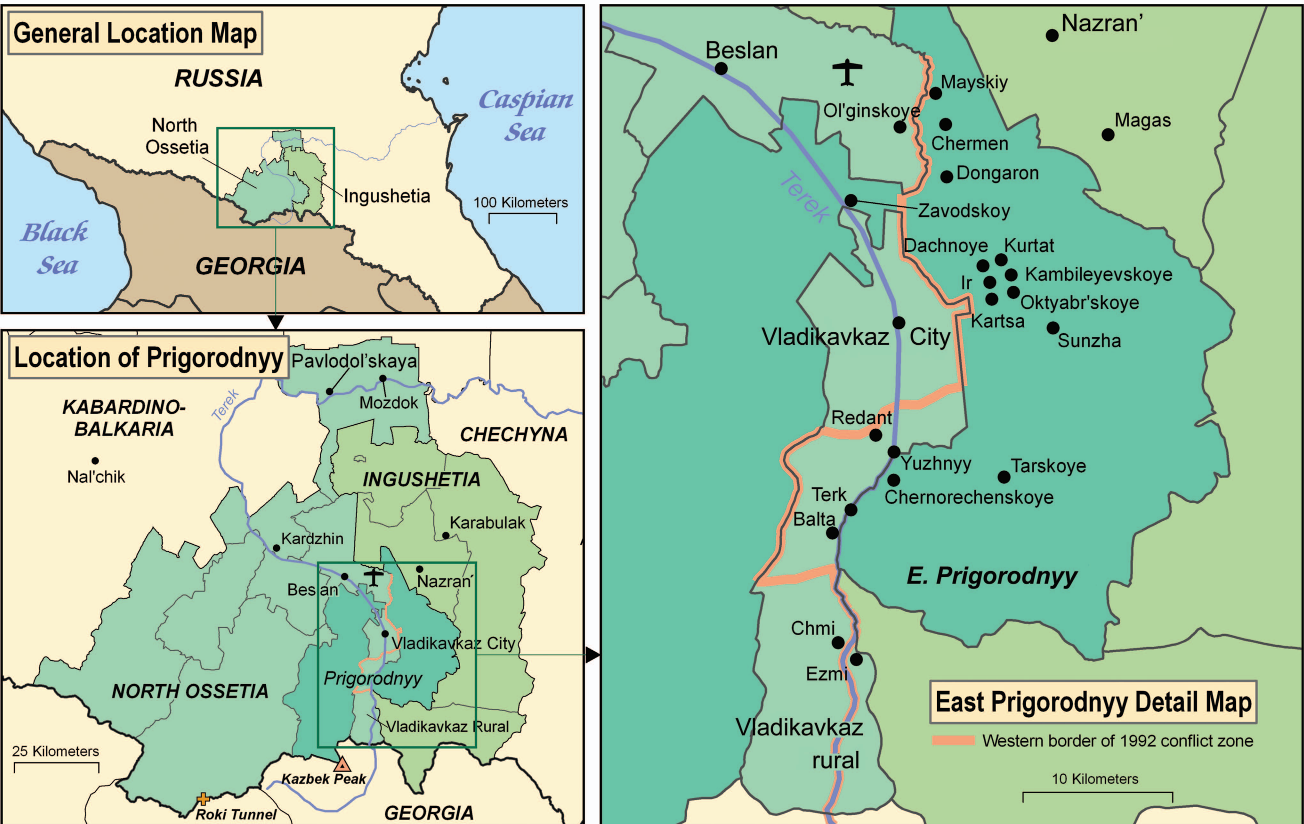

Fig. 1. Locational map of Prigorodnyy Rayon in its regional, republic, and local settings. Places identified on the map are mentioned in the text. The approximate line marking the zone of territory disputed by the Ossetians and Ingush is derived from Tsutsiev (2005, p. 95).

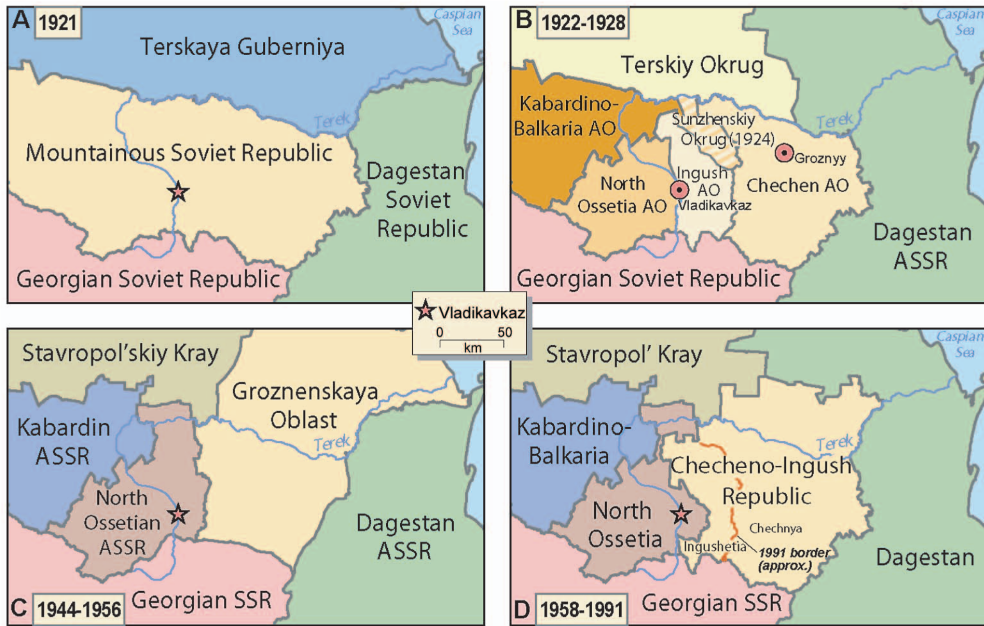

Fig. 2. Evolution of political boundaries in the North Caucasus, 1921–1991. The maps are adapted from those in Tsutsiev (2005). Abbreviations: AO = Autonomous Okrug; ASSR = Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic; SSR = Soviet Socialist Republic. Vladikavkaz city and Groznyy city (incorporated into the Chechen AO in 1929) are shown as separate administrative units on the 1922–1928 map.

(Mountainous) Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic with its capital in Vladikavkaz (Fig. 2A).

As the Bolsheviks slowly extended their control over the region, they began to create a more elaborate ethnoterritorial order in place of the Gorskaya ASSR. In 1921, an Ingush Okrug was established that encompassed Prigorodnyy. In 1922, a Chechen Okrug separated from the Gorskaya ASSR, months after the Kabardin, Balkar, and Karachay autonomous okrugs were established. The Kremlin's local alliance structures evolved as first, many Vainakh leaders proved unruly and rebellious, and second, the Ossetian leadership accommodated itself to power and launched Ossetians on a path that would see them become the "most Sovietized of Caucasian peoples" (Birch, 1995). Their service to the Soviet state down the years is commemorated in a memorial public graveyard of Ossetian military heroes in contemporary Vladikavkaz, located just beside the gates of the garrison base of the 58th Army division (Fig. 3).

The second key historical factor shaping the Prigorodnyy conflict was the tilt in the 1930s of the Soviet state toward the Ossetians and away from the Ingush, within the context of an effort to contain the rebellious Vainakh peoples into one territorial unit. This expressed itself in a series of actions that changed the territorial order in the region. In 1933, the Kremlin leadership decided that the city of Ordzhonikidze (Vladikavkaz) was to serve as the capital of North Ossetia exclusively, thus depriving Ingushetia's elite of their cultural and intellectual capital. In the following year (1934), Stalin combined the autonomous okrug of

Fig. 3. Graves of military heroes, Memorial Park, Vladikavkaz. Photograph by Gearóid Ó Tuathail, August 2008.

Ingushetia and that of Chechnya into an amalgamated Checheno-Ingush Autonomous Okrug. A year later, the entity's status was raised to an autonomous Soviet socialist republic (ASSR). None of this challenged the Ingush majority position in Prigorodnyy or its status as part of Ingushetia. Nevertheless, the loss of Vladikavkaz began a campaign among Ingush leaders to have the city restored as their cultural and political capital.

The third significant moment of supreme Kremlin power was the most consequential: the deportations of six Caucasian peoples on Stalin's orders in 1944. The motivations for this drastic and brutal act were mixed, but were grounded in a longstanding desire within the Kremlin to fully control and dominate the seemingly turbulent peoples of the North Caucasus. Chechen and Ingush communities were rounded up on Red Army Day, February 23, 1944, and deported *en masse* to Central Asia. An estimated 83,000 Ingush were exiled, of whom 32,100 were from Prigorodnyy and 2,300 from Ordzhonikidze/Vladikavkaz. Claims that almost half of these people died during their trek and immediately afterwards are common (Blandy, 1997).

The mass deportation heralded a radical re-drawing of the political geography and ethnoterritorial order in the region. The Republic of Checheno-Ingushetia was abolished and removed from the political map, its territory initially and partially divided between North Ossetia to the west, Dagestan to the east, Georgia to the south, and Stavropol' Kray in the north. The central part of Checheno-Ingushetia became Groznenskiy (Groznyy) Okrug, but soon the eastern part of Stavropol' Kray itself was added to this okrug and a new Groznenskaya Oblast was established. North Ossetia was allocated not only Prigorodnyy but also lands to the north in an isthmus-like linkage to Mozdok (Fig. 2C). To consolidate this act of violent geopolitical engineering, the Stalinist state established an *orgnabor*—an organized

movement of mostly peasant workers to (usually) industrial enterprises for a fixed period of time—that brought an estimated 26,000 South Ossetians from Georgia into the region to fill the jobs, houses, and settlements emptied of the deportees. Ethnic Russians and Ossetians from Kazbegi in Georgia were also attracted to live in the region. By the late 1940s, these groups had established themselves in the Prigorodnyy district, living in former Ingush homes and working in collective farms and factories in the rich agricultural region. Prigorodnyy was now transformed into a territory with an Ossetian population majority.

With Stalin's death, Khrushchev and the Communist Party moved to broaden the level of popular legitimacy claimed by the regime by acknowledging Stalin's crimes and attempting to undo some of their consequences. On June 16, 1956, the Soviet authorities passed a decree "On the Lifting of Special Restrictions on Settlement of Chechens, the Ingush, and Karachays, Evicted during Great Patriotic War," which simply allowed these deported groups to return to their previous homelands. Other deported groups had their restrictions lifted by other decrees, but there was no official "rehabilitation." On January 9, 1957, the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR enacted a law restoring the Checheno-Ingush ASSR as part of the Russian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic (RSFSR). However, the ASSR "restored" by this law did not have the same borders as the one abolished 12 years earlier. Significantly for the Ingush, the eastern parts of Prigorodnyy Rayon remained part of North Ossetia, as did the narrow strip of land connecting North Ossetia to the Mozdok district (Fig. 2D). The prospect of removing the Ossetians who had moved into this region and accommodating the return of the Ingush was too daunting. In fact, between 1956 and 1959, a further 22,000 South Ossetians were resettled in the area (Blandy, 1997). The potential for violence was all too apparent after Stalin's death when the first Ingush re-appeared in the region.[10] Violent clashes first erupted in 1956, and in 1958 there was a three-day pogrom by Russian settlers against returning Ingush and Chechens. Officially, the Ingush were compensated for the loss of Prigorodnyy with the allocation of more extensive lands to the north, taken from Stavropol' Kray. But the "new lands" were rather far from the Ingushetian heartland and it can be surmised that the inclusion of the Cossack *stanitsy* north of the Terek was not due to the Prigorodnyy problem but rather was motivated to create a kind of ethnic balance between Chechens and Russians in the re-established Checheno-Ingush ASSR. The ostensible rationale for their inclusion was that they were more closely connected to Groznyy than to Stavropol'.

Predictably, the compensation plan did not work, for "restoration" and "return" for the Ingush communities trekking back from exile meant restoration of the pre-1944 ethnoterritorial order and return to all parts of their symbolic and spiritual homeland. Residency permits were strictly controlled in an effort to limit the Ingush influx. Some Ingush attempted to buy back their old family homes while others became enmeshed in tense standoffs. Yet others, availing of financial support, built new settlements in different parts of their home villages and towns, fulfilling the often-expressed desire to be "next to the graves of our ancestors." In the village of Chermen in the north of Prigorodnyy, for example, Ossetians remained in the center while Ingush returned and built neighborhoods to the north and south of the town. But

[10]North Ossetia retains a fondness for Stalin (as exemplified in the roadside mural shown in Fig. 4). Unlike in nearly all other parts of the former Soviet Union, busts and images of Stalin can still be found across the republic. Ossetians see Stalin as their benefactor, and claim that his father was Ossetian. The Stalin iconography is connected to the nationalist Ossetian claim to Prigorodnyy. Ironically, the association with Stalin calls the legitimacy of the claims of ownership into question in the eyes of many beyond the region.

Fig. 4. Roadside mural commemorating Josef Stalin near Tsei, North Ossetia. Photograph by Gearóid Ó Tuathail, August 2008.

there were also economic motivations, as Prigorodnyy was a relatively prosperous region and over time, returning Ingush were able to find jobs in the area's enterprises.

What developed in the subsequent decades was an uneven geography of return and reconciliation, with some villages and communities returning to Ingush majorities whereas others evolved into distinct mono-ethnic neighborhoods within a single town. Socially, culturally, and economically, there were constant sources of tension and friction over houses, crime, and jobs. A "local-settler racism" that positioned the Ingush and Chechens at the bottom of a civilizational hierarchy was widespread; deported peoples had only marginal educational opportunities and were easily stereotyped as "uneducated" and "uncivilized" (Derluguian, 2005, p. 245). A Human Rights Watch (Laber and Denber, 1996) report suggests that Ingush in North Ossetia experienced economic discrimination. Residency permits were strictly limited. Local Ossetians, for their part, complained that Ingush spoke of Ossetians as merely "guests"' in certain Prigorodnyy communities, even though most younger Ossetians knew no other place as home. Employment in the high-skill military industrial plants of Vladikavkaz tended to be dominated by Russians, with Ossetians enjoying some access and Ingush somewhat less. In the informal economy, the Ingush were much more prominent, especially in the markets of Vladikavkaz. Casual and seasonal laborers traveled from Ingushetia and Chechnya to many parts of the Soviet Union. The presence of Russians and other nationalities sometimes mediated Ingush-Ossetian tensions, but everyday life in the region was characterized by division and sectarianism (ibid.).

The last Soviet census of 1989 recorded 18,000 Ingush in Prigorodnyy Rayon, but it is estimated that twice that number actually lived there (Tishkov, 1997, p. 3). Another source estimated that only 31,000 Ingush resided in North Ossetia on the eve of the 1992 war (Birch,

1995, p. 63). In 1970, 1972–1973, and 1980, Ingush activists demonstrated in support of their claim to Prigorodnyy against the North Ossetian authorities (Blandy, 1997). But it was demonstrations by Ossetians that became violent in 1981, a series of ethnicized murders in Vladikavkaz triggering a generalized protest against the existing North Ossetian leadership and "one of the worst civil disturbances in the USSR since World War II" (Birch, 1995, p. 54). Ostensibly the violence was directed against local authorities who were blamed by protestors for a "pro-Ingush" settlement policy in North Ossetia and inefficiency in "fighting criminal activity." But the protest was more complex and motivated partly by intra-Ossetian frustrations. The Digor Ossetian, Bilar Kabaloyev, dominated North Ossetia for years and Digors tended to acquire disproportionately prominent positions in the society, producing anger among a majority of Ironi Ossetians. The violent events led to Kaboloyev's replacement by an ethnic Russian, Vladimir Odintsov, from outside the region. The new leadership adopted special measures to promote Ingush social advancement—such as affirmative action quotas in higher educational and in political and economic offices—but this further angered and alienated many Ossetians. Only after Odinstov's arrival did Ingush become heads of collective farms in the Prigorodnyy villages of Chermen, Tarskoye, Mayskiy, and Kurtat (Laber and Denber, 1996, p. 7).

Structural and Conjunctural Factors

The uneasy peace that prevailed in Prigorodnyy during 1957–1991 was challenged by the deepening economic crises of the Soviet state and Mikhail Gorbachev's attempt to reform a system that was collapsing under the weight of its own contradictions. As is well known, Gorbachev's reform agenda precipitated a system transition and split within the Communist *nomenklatura* among, generally, "reformers," bureaucratic conservatives, and "defectors" (liberal populists like Boris Yel'tsin and illiberal populists like Djokar Dudayev in Chechnya). The dislocations of *perestroyka*, the turmoil of *glasnost*', and uncertainties of democratization created a period of political incapacity at the center of the state, which, in turn, created political opportunities in ethnic republics for consequential local agency. In the context of this upheaval, the Caucasus had certain structural features that made it more inclined to a tumultuous transition.

First, the region was not as industrialized as other parts of the Soviet Union and its economic system left it with greater levels of unemployment than other regions. Derluguian (2005, pp. 150–154) has used the term "sub-proletariat" to describe that segment of the (post)-Soviet class structure that does not obtain its household income from regularized wages and employment. The major structural condition of this class was de-ruralization, the loss of village life, and an awkward and uneven absorption into an urban and semi-urbanized lifestyle through informal-sector networks and shadow economies. Sub-proletarians are thus former peasants and former proletarians forced into unemployment by economic restructuring. Impoverished areas like Ingushetia and Chechnya relied on seasonal migrations for employment (mostly in agriculture) and income. A large segment of the population also made a living through contraband trade and other criminal enterprise. When this faltered in 1991, unemployment levels became exceedingly high, leaving available cohorts of young men for enlistment in nationalist crusades that offered the potential of rewards both symbolic (potential hero status) as well as material (theft and looting) (Tishkov, 1997, p. 5; Derluguian, 2005, pp. 217, 249). Even the more prosperous North Ossetia, with prestigious industrial factories in Vladikavkaz, began to falter as the Soviet military-industrial complex retrenched.

Second, the region's history was an interlocking network of nationalist grievances available for mobilization by an aspiring and stifled cultural élite keen to dislodge the Moscow-anointed provincial *nomenklatura*. The attempt to have an open accounting of that history launched a series of declarations, resolutions, and laws that raised expectations among historically repressed peoples as well as anxiety among those living in disputed territories. On November 14, 1989, the USSR Supreme Soviet issued a declaration acknowledging that those people violently resettled by Stalin suffered from illegal and criminal actions. A little over a year later, the RSFSR Congress of Peoples Deputies passed a declaration concerning the victims of political repression that noted the importance of "working out and adopting legal acts concerning rehabilitation and the full restoration of rights of repressed peoples and citizens of the RSFSR" (Blandy, 2006, Appendix 1, Table 6). A few months later, on April 26, 1991, a Law on the Rehabilitation of Repressed Peoples was enacted. Article 3 of this law raised expectations about "the restoration of territorial integrity" in a form that existed prior to deportation. It also called for the payment of compensation to the victims for their losses by the state. Article 6 went further and envisioned "the realization of lawful and organized measures on the restoration of former borders." A further law on October 18, 1991 on the rehabilitation of victims of political repression deepened the uncertainty surrounding the existing ethno-political order.

The April law was perceived by Ingush leaders as a legal basis for the re-establishment of the pre-1944 Ingushetia. However, the law lacked legal mechanisms specifying how "the restoration of territorial integrity" could be achieved without violating the rights of other groups inhabiting the territory (also part of the law), or how boundaries between republics could be changed if there was no agreement between both sides.[11] Dzidzoyev (2004, 146) has stated that the law was the product of a bargain between a group of Chechen-Ingush deputies and Boris Yeltsin's team over their support for his candidacy when he ran for Chairman of the RSFSR Supreme Soviet. Amidst rising uncertainty and weakening central control, the provincial *nomenklatura* in the North Caucasus faced a "return of history" that was deeply destabilizing to governance as usual.

These structural conditions created a conjuncture in Prigorodnyy by 1992 that was radicalized by surrounding events and their cascading impacts. First, turmoil in neighboring Georgia saw the emergence of nationalist militias who unleashed bouts of ethnic cleansing that caused Ossetians to flee the country and flood into North Ossetia. Meanwhile, Ossetian militias fought to secure South Ossetia's autonomous status.[12] Thousands fled Georgia beginning in November 1989, and in response to further bouts of violence between January 1991 and June 1992 (Zürcher, 2007). Estimates of refugees from that country totaled anywhere between 60,000 and 100,000 people;[13] the 1989 census recorded 65,000 Ossetians living in South Ossetia and a further 98,000 Ossetians living in other parts of Georgia. The influx was a massive imposition on the relatively small population of North Ossetia (632,428

[11]The April 1991 law was referred to the Russian Constitutional Court to clarify its territorial clauses. The latter body's decision of August 1, 2005 stated that "the regulations of the law for the territorial rehabilitation of repressed people . . . must not be interpreted as giving the possibility of solution of questions of changing boundaries among subjects of Russian Federation by an unilateral procedure," namely without the agreement of both parties and in violation of the acting Constitution of Russia. For the text of the decision see http://www.rg.ru/2005/12/20/a91928.html.

[12]See the accompanying the article by Ó Tuathail (2008) in this issue.

[13]Tishkov (1997, p. 8) used an estimate of 60,000–70,000, whereas Birch (1995, p. 50) cited *Moskovskiye Novosti* and a figure of 100,000 or more.

in 1989, of whom 335,000 or 53 percent were Ossetian). North Ossetia's Minister of Nationalities remembered it as a "massive shock," claiming somewhat dramatically that "we got one-sixth of our population in a few days."[14] Housing and social service infrastructure in the republic was overwhelmed. Thousands of refugees spilled into Vladikavkaz and Prigorodnyy, bringing with them powerful resentments. Most Ossetian refugees were farmers and could only acquire part-time work or employment in the informal sector at the time, though they are now well integrated into North Ossetian society.[15]

Second, the emergence of Djokar Dudayev in Chechnya in the fall of 1991 created a demonstration effect for Prigorodnyy (Lieven, 1999). Dudayev pursued a policy of declaring Chechnya's independence from the Russian Federation, and his actions encouraged the Ingush to separate from what was still formally the Checheno-Ingush republic to seek a separate and territorially restored homeland of their own in Ingushetia (including Prigorodnyy), with Vladikavkaz as its capital, but remaining within the Russian Federation.[16] A Congress of the Ingush People on March 27, 1991 issued just such a proclamation.

Third, in making this proclamation, the Ingush were encouraged by their relations with Boris Yel'tsin. A few days earlier, on March 24, 1991, Yel'tsin, campaigning for election as Russian president, had addressed a rally in Nazran' that had been in session since March 12 and was demanding restoration of the autonomous status lost by Ingushetia in 1934 and the return of all territory lost in 1944. Yel'tsin offered help in restoring Ingush autonomy and suggested that territorial disputes between the Checheno-Ingush republic and North Ossetia should be tackled through negotiations, involving the Russian parliament (BBC Summary of World Broadcasts, 1991). Yel'tsin personally appeared more open to the Ingush, as victims of Stalin, than to the more conservative North Ossetian leadership (to whom he had promised economic assistance a day earlier on the campaign trail), and he supported the April 1991 Law on Rehabilitation that raised Ingush expectations. Ingushetia subsequently voted overwhelmingly for Yel'tsin in the Presidential election, whereas North Ossetia mostly voted for the losing Communist candidate, Nikolay Ryzhkov.

On November 30, 1991, the Ingush population of Checheno-Ingushetia conducted a referendum on whether to declare an independent Ingushetia.[17] The wording of the referendum was explicit: "Are you in favor of establishment of an Ingush Republic within the RSFSR, recovery of the illegally seized Ingush lands, and location of the capital in Vladikavkaz?" (cited in Tishkov, 1997, p. 17). Of the roughly 100,000 voters, 92.4 percent were in favor. Established Ingush leaders in Moscow and Groznyy were under pressure from local government leaders pushing this agenda (Tsutsiev, 1998; Derluguian, 2005, p. 248). A group of rayon-level leaders from Ingushetia and Prigorodnyy drafted a collective letter to the Russian President, the Supreme Soviet Chairman, and the People's Deputies of the Russian Federation on March 17, 1992, outlining Ingush grievances and demanding the return of their "historic homeland" and Vladikavkaz as their administrative and cultural center.[18] According to

[14]Interview with Taymuraz Kasayev, Vladikavkaz, July 30, 2007.

[15]Interview with Minister of Nationality Affairs of North Ossetia, Taymuraz Kasayev, Vladikavkaz, July 30, 2007.

[16]The position of the Ingush within the Checheno-Ingush ASSR was always marginal to power, so many were happy to make this break and claim their own republic. Where the border line would be between the two entities was not clear, because Groznyy preserved its control over those parts of the Sunzha district that were majority-Chechen (Tishkov, 1997, p. 46).

[17]A portion of the Ingush population of North Ossetia also participated in the referendum, while visiting Nazran' and other parts of Checheno-Ingushetia.

[18]See Table 1 for a chronology of key events and claims.

Derluguian (2005, 250), a political party *Niishko* (Justice), with an armed movement made up of former prisoners, positioned itself as the instrument of this agenda. As one might expect, the open articulation of these revanchist visions in Ingushetia provoked an organized counter-mobilization on the part of Ossetian nationalists and brought Prigorodnyy to the edge of violence.

Immediate Factors

When the 1992 war erupted, each side accused the other of "well-planned" actions, although the evidence for these accusations is murky and controversial. Some accounts implicate the North Ossetian authorities, while charging that the media at the time were overwhelmingly biased in favor of Ossetians. The *Economist*'s (Ethnic Cleansing, 1992, p. 56) correspondent on the scene, for example, noted: "If you read the newspaper accounts—all of which, however, quote Ossetian or Russian sources—you get a picture of Ingush aggression, Ossetian self-defence, and Russian troops arriving to separate the two sides. That story does not fit the visible facts." Similarly, Galina Starovoitova, a presidential advisor on nationality issues to Yel'tsin at the time, complained that "there's quite a lot of bias both on the part of the media and on the part of the armed forces sent to the region by the central government. On the central radio, for example, we constantly hear about Ingush commandos and Ingush gangs, although there are unofficial armed detachments on both sides" (cited in Terekhov, 1992). Because of her critical questioning, Starovoitova was dismissed from her position by the end of the year (and later assassinated in November 1998).

Using some thinly sourced allegations based on the subsequent work of investigative journalists, another ethnographer and Minister of Nationality Affairs at the time, Valery Tishkov (1997, pp. 23–24) discussed the contention that there were a series of North Ossetian Internal Affairs meetings in August 1992 supposedly devoted to plans for an "ethnic purge." The claim is that "a provocation by force" was planned by the North Ossetian leadership as far back as February 1992 (Tishkov, 1997, p. 26). The claim cannot be proven definitively but, whether true or not, the subsequent violence does not appear to have been fully and directly under the control of federal or North Ossetian authorities. As Tishkov (1997, p. 16) himself conceded, "the mobilization of group members initiated by leaders can acquire an independent . . . logic . . . [that] can be difficult for its initiators to control."

Whatever the murky backstage role of local leaders, the key actors were not "group members" but military formations—those directly in the employ of North Ossetia and various non-state militias less subject to control but often sponsored by and connected to state institutions and personnel. The North Ossetian government established a so-called National Guard and, when the fighting began in earnest, dispersed weapons to "volunteers" to "defend the nation" against "enemies outside and within." South Ossetian militias were also active. The South Ossetian "prime minister" Oleg Teziyev, a Soviet army Afghan war veteran who had led the defense of South Ossetia against Georgian militias, also sent a militia to Prigorodnyy once the fighting began there. Most armed Ingush irregulars were associated with clan (*teip*) structures and, to a lesser extent, religious brotherhoods. The fighting in Prigorodnyy thus pitted a range of North Ossetian and Russian forces—police officers from the North Ossetian Ministry of Internal Affairs, members of the Ossetian National Guard, North and South Ossetian militias, and federal OMON special police—against these irregular Ingush militias.

The paroxysm of violence that finally engulfed Prigorodnyy Rayon came after a deepening spiral of violence to which both sides contributed. Ethnic tensions in Prigorodnyy, as

noted by Human Rights Watch, intensified with the influx of Georgian Ossetians from November 1989 (a reminder to the Ingush of the population transfers after their deportation in 1944). Everyday humiliations and ethnic tensions accumulated, as did anxiety about status change and collapsing state authority. A climate of impunity developed as the rate of murders, assaults, robberies, and bandit attacks rose and went largely unsolved because of weak law enforcement (Laber and Denber, 1996, p. 14). Criminal acts and lawlessness thus came to be viewed in ethnic terms by locals. In April 1991, a state of emergency was declared in Prigorodnyy after a dispute over a house in the village of Kurtat got out of control. A dispute later in the month left several dead in Troitskoye.

Exacerbating the accumulating tensions on the ground was a law, introduced by Yel'tsin to the Supreme Soviet on June 5, 1992 and passed without discussion in an almost unanimous vote, to separate the Chechen and Ingush republics within the Russian Federation. Significantly, the law did not specify the territorial borders of Ingushetia, leaving the entire question of implementation to the work of parliamentary and presidential delegates, in coordination with the interdepartmental commission for the implementation of the Law on Rehabilitation, and in cooperation with local officials. Fearful that the law would trigger a violent crisis, a moratorium on border changes for three years was declared by presidential decree on July 3, 1992. Ingush leaders jockeyed for appointment as head of the interim administration as the republic descended into a state of anarchy.[19] With central power incoherent and weak, and local elites playing nationalist games, there would be no local cooperation on finding agreeable borders. Instead, initiative fell to those in favor of violent measures to "solve" the Prigorodnyy conflict.

The death on October 20, 1992 of an Ingush schoolgirl in the village of Yuzhnyy after being struck by an armored personnel carrier is generally cited as the incident that exploded the Prigorodnyy tinderbox. Ossetian authorities claim the death was a tragic accident. Whatever the case, it was interpreted as an ethnic outrage by local Ingush and generated a riot in which several Ingush died in clashes with Ossetian authorities. A few days later on October 24, a meeting of "all Ingush *rayony* and rural Soviets" held in Nazran', Ingushetia ordered that Ingush localities in North Ossetia be put under control of Ingush armed groups. Barricades were erected outside Ingush towns and neighborhoods in Prigorodnyy "implementing" this decision the same day. Ingush leaders in Yuzhnyy decided to establish their own interim administration in the town, while so-called "self-defense volunteers" (Ingush irregular forces) moved into the region. An Ossetian militiaman and two Ingush brothers were killed in skirmishes that triggered escalating violent clashes between both sides. Fighting broke out in the villages of Kurtat, Dachnoye, Oktyabr'skoye, and Kambileyevskoye between Ingush and Ossetian armed irregulars on the evening of October 30.

On October 31, Ingush forces attacked an Ossetian militia in Chermen and a federal interior ministry (MVD) post. One Ossetian living in the town remembers the scene as confused and frightening for all locals. The Ossetian population—roughly 3,000–4,000 people—was neither well armed nor expecting violence. Initially, Ossetian households were not attacked but searched for weapons by Ingush militia who, on occasion, killed those who resisted. As the hostilities intensified elsewhere, the Ingush militia began taking Ossetian males as hostages. Almost all of the Ossetians were either taken hostage or escaped to a nearby Ossetian village, Olginskoye, by November 2. One Ossetian (the informant) managed to walk nervously across an open stretch to the village. Those who followed were not so lucky; a

[19]For an account, see Tishkov (1997, pp. 18–22).

number later died on the same road between the settlements. Overall, approximately 40 Ossetians were killed in Chermen, mostly civilians, some in accidental shootouts. Fighting was limited because few Ossetians had arms and there was no outside help—a fact later resented deeply by the residents who had believed the North Ossetian government's promise to protect them as well as reassurances that they did not need any arms of their own.[20] The town was held by Ingush fighters until November 4, during which time its Ossetian homes were extensively destroyed and looted.

The barricades—spatial challenges to territorial sovereignty—and the militia movements from Ingushetia drew a strong military response from the North Ossetian and federal authorities. High-ranking representatives from Moscow visited Vladikavkaz on October 31 and endorsed the view that North Ossetia was being "invaded" and subjected to "Ingush aggression." Federal military officials, under some local duress, sanctioned the supply of small arms, ammunition, and some tanks to the North Ossetian authorities.[21] The fighting soon spiraled out of control, creating conditions facilitating the commission of war crimes. Ingush militias attacked and looted Ossetian houses, while the array of Ossetian and Russian forces engaged and drove out the Ingush militia, and then the Ingush population as a whole. Hostage-taking was rife. The Russian army facilitated the deportation of Ingush civilians to Nazran' and other territories outside of North Ossetia, a humanitarian action that undoubtedly saved lives. Yet the action was sullied by the fact that other parts of the Russian state and its Ossetian allies were driving the violent expulsion. Like the office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in Bosnia-Herzegovina, which had descended into war that April, they became the transportation service for what was becoming ethnic expulsion. The suppression of firefights did not bring the restoration of law and order but rather the beginning of looting, which was then followed by the deliberate destruction of residential property. As in Bosnia-Herzegovina, the vast majority of houses were destroyed after the fighting had ended. This was the critical failure of the federal authorities and their relations with local North Ossetian officials. Human Rights Watch (Laber and Denber, 1996, p. 30) has underscored the federal culpability, writing that "it seems clear from available evidence that once fighting broke out, the Russian government failed in its obligations to protect human life and property in the Prigorodnyi region of North Ossetia in spite of public claims that it had control over the situation." Nearly 3,000 Ingush homes were destroyed in predominantly Ingush settlements like Dachnoye, Kartsa, and Kurtat as well as mixed towns like Chermen, Tarskoye, and the city of Vladikavkaz.[22] The Human Rights Watch report, building on earlier work by the Russian human rights group *Memorial*, documented some of the violations in these places. Besides pointing the finger at the role of federal forces, it also emphasized that South Ossetian militias "played a significant role in the wanton destruction of Ingush homes after open hostilities ended on November 5, 1992" (Laber and Denber, 1996, p. 34).

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[20]Interview with Valery Dzutsev, Washington, DC, October 7, 2008. Human Rights Watch (Laber and Denber, 1996, p. 17) observed that Ossetians suffered more in Chermen than in any other place where fighting broke out in October 1992.

[21]Ossetians took the wife and daughter of General Skobelev, Chief of Staff of the Army Corp, hostage during this time to ensure that the Russian army was compliant (Tishkov, 1997, p. 27). Tishkov supports the contention that some military security figures within the Yel'tsin administration sanctioned the Ossetian action as part of a larger strategy to entrap Dudayev in an extended conflict and topple his regime. "More and more, I tend to the opinion that the final tragic stage of the conflict became possible in conditions (where) Russia's top leadership (pardoned) an ethnic purge (in exchange) for a chance to use the situation to regain control over Chechnya" (ibid., 1997, p. 28; modified translation).

[22]See Figure 5B for the geographic distribution of "domicide" (the destruction of homes).

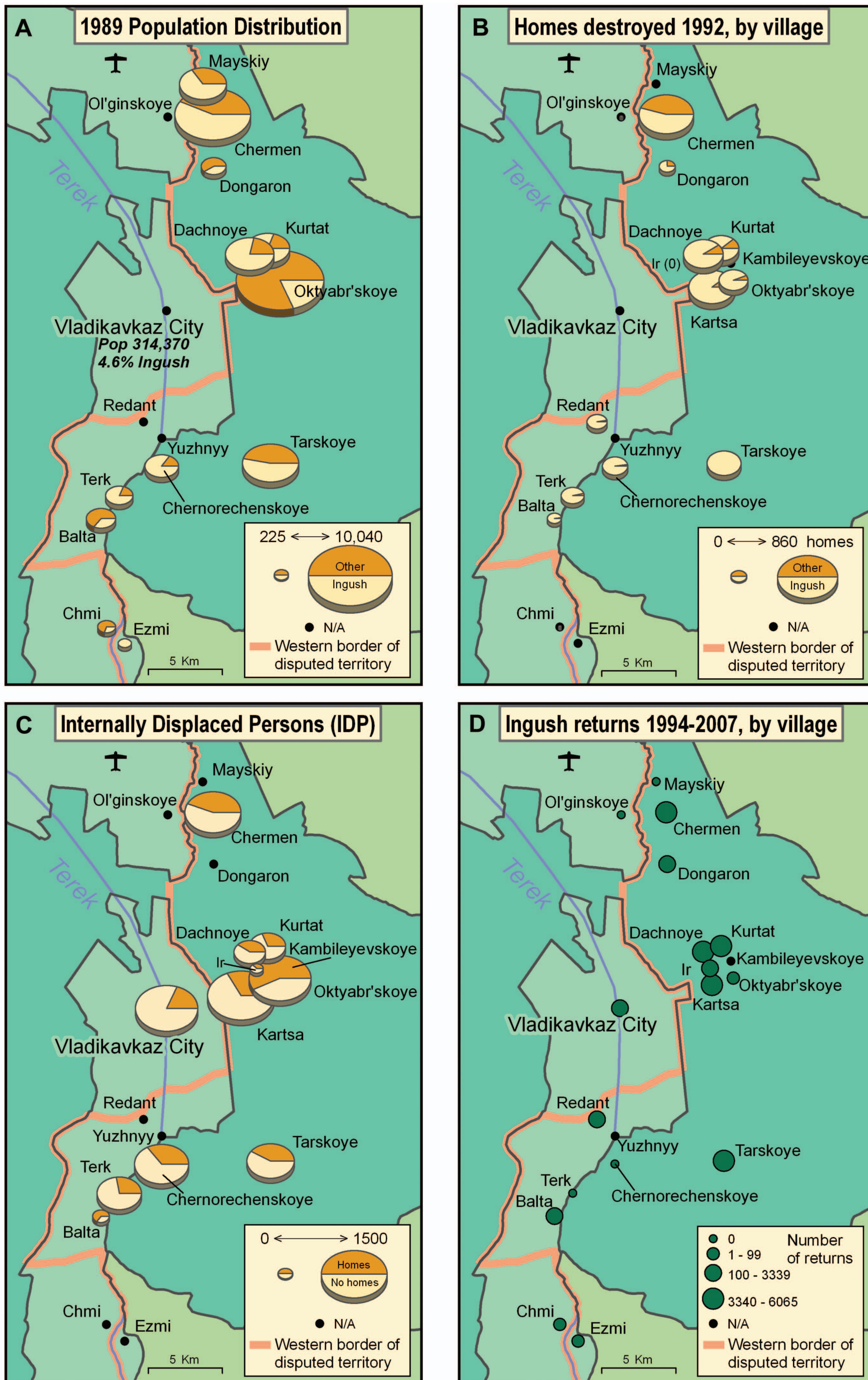

Fig. 5. Dynamics of population changes, war effects, and refugees in Prigorodnyy Rayon, 1989–2007. The maps display only those villages for which relevant data are available. Data for these maps were derived from *Activities* (1998, pp. 75–76) and *Information and Analysis Compendium* (2001, p. 67).

By the end of 1992, the ethno-demographic geography of North Ossetia had changed dramatically. According to Aleksandr Badov, Associate Professor of Geography at Vladikavkaz State University, up to 40 percent of the population of the North Ossetian republic changed (i.e., turned over) that year, first due to an intensified wave of Ossetian in-migration from Georgia (which had already begun in 1989) and then with a wave of forced Ingush out-migration from Prigorodnyy and Vladikavkaz.[23] North Ossetia was more ethnically homogeneous, but this did not mean it was more stable as a result. In fact, it was now actively entangled in two conflict regions, and would soon become involved in a third farther to the east in Chechnya.

THE LOCALIZED GEOPOLITICS OF RETURN

The Ossetian–Ingush war over Prigorodnyy did not end like the Bosnian conflict with an agreed peace accord and an annex guaranteeing the return of displaced persons. No war criminals were identified and brought to the dock. Instead, the Russian government took over administration of the conflict region and began a series of initiatives to foster conditions that would allow displaced Ingush to return to their homes. The bureaucracy charged with addressing the conflict has evolved considerably over the years. The initial governance structure was called the "Transitional Administration in the Territories of the Republic of North Ossetia and in the Ingush Republic." This entity existed from November 1992 until February 1995, at which time it was reorganized as the "Temporary State Committee of the Russian Federation to Eliminate the Consequences of Ossetian–Ingush Conflict of October–November 1992." The latter body persisted from February 1995 until September 1996, and was replaced by an appointed "Representative of the Russian Federation in the Republic of North Ossetia-Alania and the Republic of Ingushetia" (from September 1996 until September 2000). This post was subsequently renamed the "Special Representative of the President of the Russian Federation on the Settlement of the Ossetian–Ingush Conflict" (September 2000–October 2004). In November 2004, federal responsibilities for accounting and resettlement of internally displaced persons (IDPs) were transferred to the Russian Federal Migration Service (FMS), now under the jurisdiction of the Russian Federation Ministry of the Interior. As this evolution indicates, the Prigorodnyy problem assumed the characteristics of a "frozen conflict." The reconciliation process has been exceedingly slow and has faced multiple impediments, beginning with a basic dispute over how many people were actually displaced by the fighting. In this section, we provide a brief overview of this faltering reconciliation process and the obstacles that have kept the Prigorodnyy conflict still largely unresolved.

How Many Were Displaced?

The different estimates of the number of Ingush internally displaced persons (IDPs) from the zone of Ossetian–Ingush conflict depend on the varying estimates of the number of Ingush residing in North Ossetia prior to 1992. These in turn are connected to the magnitude of the so-called *nepropisannyy* (unregistered) Ingush—i.e., those who lived in the territory of the republic but who did not have a residence permit— estimated at about 8,000–9,000 persons. Using these figures, the number of Ingush in North Ossetia as a whole in 1992 was

[23]Interview with the authors, Vladikavkaz, July 31, 2007; see also Badov and Makoyev (1998).

42,000–44,000. North Ossetian sources from 1992–1993 give the number of the Ingush forced out in 1992 as 27,500–32,800, but Ingush sources counter with estimates of 65,000-70,000 refugees (Tishkov, 1995, p. 163). Populations of major settlements from the 1989 census are shown in Figure 5A, although the inconsistency of even the census population counts must be acknowledged. In 1993–1995, the newly established "Federal Office for Regulating the Ossetian–Ingush conflict"[24] registered 40,953 Ingush IDPs, of whom, 31,224 persons (5,151 families) were confirmed as recipients of federal entitlements for the restoration of destroyed dwellings or the building/purchase of a new house on the territory of North Ossetia (*Information and Analysis Compendium*, 2001, p. 67). The same survey counted 600 similarly qualified Ossetian and Russian families. Figure 5C illustrates their distribution in the eastern part of Prigorodnyy Rayon.

Differences in the estimates of the number of IDPs, made by the Federal Migration Service and the State Committee for the Forced Migrants of the Republic of Ingushetia, reflect their respective definitions of "forced migrant." For the FMS, once an individual case is resolved, the person no longer has IDP status. IDPs no longer receiving assistance are thus not counted, and there is no tracking to determine whether former IDPs have returned to their previous residences. Conversely, the State Committee for the Forced Migrants of Ingushetia uses the criterion of forced migrants' wish to return to their places of residence prior to the 1992 conflict. If the IDP purchased a house outside North Ossetia or even in a place other than the previous location, he/she will continue to be treated as an IDP by Ingush officials.

The Governance of the Return Process

It was only in the spring of 1993 that North Ossetian and Ingush leaders were able to negotiate an agreement to address the problem of the displaced from Prigorodnyy. The March 1993 Kislovodsk Agreement stipulated that only those with a valid residency permit in Prigorodnyy Rayon on October 31, 1992 and those who did not take part in the conflict would be allowed to return (Laber and Denber, 1996, p. 38). Ostensibly, there were many reasons for optimism regarding the prospect of a successful returns process. North Ossetia and Ingushetia are part of the same sovereign state and their peoples are fellow Russian citizens. The political and legal field was a unified one that augured well for enabling federal, regional, and local authorities to achieve success despite active ethnic hostility and distrust. Yet, the initial presidential mandate (Decree No. 2131 of December 13, 1993) ordering the return of displaced Ingush to four villages was mostly ignored on the ground. A subsequent agreement at Beslan on June 26, 1994 between the leadership of the two republics presented specifics on return sites and a procedure for the returns process. However, it too was largely ignored. It was only with the special decision No. 274 of the Russian Federation Government on March 6, 1998 "On State Aid to the Citizens of the Russian Federation, Who were Deprived of their Dwellings as a Result of the Osstian–Ingush Conflict of October–November 1992" that serious moves were made to help Ingush IDPs return to their previous residences in North Ossetia.

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[24]The newly created office was allocated the functions of (a) organizing and financing the restoration of the social infrastructure and dwellings in the zone of conflict, and (b) preparing the conditions for, and organizing, the process of the return of the forced migrants to their permanent residences. All activities were to be conducted in cooperation with the respective bodies of the republics of North Ossetia and Ingushetia; in theory, the new federal office was to carry out political functions fairly, including supporting a dialogue between the sides and achieving acceptable solutions for the most pressing problems of post-conflict building.

Taking into account that about 7,000–8,000 Ingush did not leave their villages in Prigorodnyy Rayon during the 1992 conflict, a return of about 20,000 people (Memorial, 2006) would produce an estimated 31,000 Ingush in Prigorodnyy, after a correction for natural increase. Data in the 2002 Russian census for Ingush indicate that about 21,400 (a number equivalent to about half of the Ingush IDPs) resided outside of Ingushetia. For the 2002–2008 period, an additional 5,032 IDPs of Ingush nationality obtained assistance for return. Relying on proportions of their actual return noted above, it can be estimated that about half of this number actually returned to the territory of North Ossetia, making 24,000–25,000 Ingush in the republic in 2007.

Figure 5D shows returns by village in Prigorodnyy Rayon. Interestingly, a substantial portion of the IDPs who received assistance in North Ossetia did not return to their villages. Thus, more than 5,500 Ingush IDPs from Kartsa received aid for their return, but according to 2002 Russian census data, no more than 2,600 Ingush permanently resided in Kartsa at that time, roughly a decade after the end of armed conflict. Overall, at the beginning of 2002, a total of 19,951 IDPs of Ingush nationality were counted as returning to North Ossetia but the 2002 census shows only 21,442 Ingush in the republic.

Obstacles to Return in Prigorodnyy

The problems in returning Ingush IDPs to North Ossetia are connected not only with the destruction of dwellings and social infrastructure, but also by the many remaining legacies of the 1992 war (Laber and Denber, 1996, pp. 39–42). For more than 15 years, the process of normalizing inter-ethnic relations and return of Ingush to North Ossetia has been impeded by the influence of two predominant negative factors: (a) the maintenance of the provocative issue of the "ethnic possession of Prigorodnyy Rayon" at the top of the agenda of Ossetian–Ingush relations; and (b) the criminal-terrorist echo from the ongoing crisis in the Chechen republic. The most graphic example of the latter was the Beslan tragedy of September 2004. The Human Rights center *Memorial* (2007) has noted "the cynical use of [the Beslan] tragedy to stop the return of Ingush into North Ossetia." It blames the media, which allegedly "supported … the myth of the Beslan connection to the (state of) Ossetian–Ingush relations." The problem is much more fundamental, however, because it is a societal reproduction involving Ossetian and Ingush traditional attitudes of "imputing collective guilt." The role of media rather is secondary.[25] To these uncertain ethnic relations must be added the long-term consequences of the 1991–1992 Ossetian–Georgian war in South Ossetia, prompting an Ossetian exodus from Georgia proper in 1990–1992 that has added significantly to the refugee/IDP burden on North Ossetia.

The situation in the Ossetian–Ingush region continues to be very vulnerable to criminal incidents, especially from terrorist acts that frequently are viewed in ethnic terms and, therefore, have unavoidable negative consequences for inter-ethnic relations. The strong decrease in the number of Ingush returns in 2002–2003 was correlated not only with the fact that most Ingush returnees had already returned to the "unproblematic" populated areas, but also with the first court trials of those accused of terrorist acts in the street markets of Vladikavkaz in March 1999 and November 2001 as well as other high-profile crimes committed during the summer of 2003. During that summer, terrorist activity increased, taking the form of the

[25]However, the local media were influential in a positive way, helping to promote the efforts of the authorities and civil organizations to prevent a pogrom as a likely retribution for the Beslan terrorist attack.

diffusion of war from Chechnya to adjacent regions and, simultaneously, its guerrilla-like development after the defeat of the rebels by the federal forces and their local Kadyrov allies in Chechnya (Kramer, 2005; O'Loughlin and Witmer, 2008). One new feature of this extension of Chechen guerrilla activity was the active use of Ingushetia and the mobilization of armed groups in that republic for terrorist actions, both in Ingushetia (mainly against the local and federal law enforcement agencies and servicemen) and in adjacent North Ossetia (mainly against civilians). The Beslan school hostage-taking and killings (September 2004) was the culmination of this activity, and the residents of North Ossetia paid close attention to the ethnic composition of the band of terrorists and the region of its formation (Ó Tuathail, 2009). Although responsibility for the Beslan terror was divided among the different actors, a growing mass phobia in North Ossetia about the Ingush complicated the process of return for the remaining Ingush IDPs. One dramatic consequence of the attack was a reported sharp rise in Ossetian births in the two years after September 2004, interpreted by a North Ossetian official as an ethnically based retort to the killing of Ossetian children in the school.[26] However, it is difficult to separate out this possible effect from the rise in the national birth rate as a result of the bulge of the birth cohort of the early 1980s coming into their prime years of reproduction.

With respect to the political background surrounding the return of Ingush IDPs to North Ossetia, the conflict between the two administrative-territorial "solutions" (federal and local) to the Prigorodnyy problem persists. The submission of claims from Ingush officials regarding revision of the status of Prigorodnyy Rayon generates uncertainty by focusing on the long-standing Ingush national claim to the rayon, and strengthens the perception that the return of Ingush inhabitants can become a "social base for the substantiation of these territorial requirements."[27] The returns process depends on the normalization of social inter-ethnic relations and perceptions and the creation of a favorable climate in the "problematic" villages.

A clear position from the federal authorities regarding the rayon's administrative-territorial status, including dismantling of the notion that the territory should be solely the property of one ethnicity and reaffirming the legitimacy of the return of IDPs to the zone of the former conflict, is necessary to resolve the Prigorodnyy problem. On February 8, 2006, in Rostov-na-Donu, under the supervision of Dmitry Kozak (the plenipotentiary for the Southern Federal District), the Presidents of Ingushetia and North Ossetia signed an agreement "On Procedures for Regulation of the Consequences of the Ossetian–Ingush Conflict, October–November 1992." According to this document, the return of the forced migrants to Prigorodnyy Rayon should have been completed prior to the end of 2006. At this time, President Putin granted new organizational and financial resources to address egregious instances of the internally displaced problem.[28]

These proposed solutions have produced different reactions. The report of an international organization noted:

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[26]Interview with Taymuraz Kasayev, Vladikavkaz, July 30, 2007.

[27]See, the decision taken by the Popular Assembly of the Republic of Ingushetia on June 15, 2006 (No. 242), in which the delegates asked the Russian Government to support "the adoption of the resolution on providing public assistance to citizens wishing to relocate to a new location in connection with the transfer of the Prigorodnyy district and other areas under the jurisdiction of the Republic of Ingushetia, illegally transferred in 1944 to North Ossetia, including compensation for housing, household and other buildings, cost of transport assets, and relocation of family members, etc."

[28]The Mayskiy IDP camp, described as "living in a railway siding" and seen as scandalous by Blandy (2005, p. 7), has been dismantled and the refugees re-settled to the nearby village of Novyy. Refugees residing in Mayskiy lived under very poor, unregulated conditions (Ryazanov, 2003).

> In 2006, the Russian Federation and southern administrative divisions focused close attention on the problems of the IDPs from the Prigorodnyy *rayon* and wanted clear results in their resolution: the intensification of the return of people to North Ossetia both to the places of previous residence and to new settlements. Some of the inhabitants of Mayskiy have agreed to move to a new place, and international agencies were included in the matter of aid to the IDPs from North Ossetia. (Deng, 2003)[29]

General prospects for the solution of the problem of the IDPs must be based on the fact that their return and reintegration must cease to have political ramifications (convey an advantage to one side or the other), and a regime of routine individual assistance must be established. Without the creation of sustainable political-legal prospects and ongoing conciliatory work at the village level, the simple physical return of IDPs can increase the risks of inter-ethnic conflict as a result of a random everyday quarrel or a criminal incident. These risks require a more substantial presence of law enforcement agencies in the zones with high numbers of former IDPs and reduction of the level of alienation from the returns process by the current population.

Categories of Ingush IDPs and Classification of the Return Villages

According to official FMS data for January 2008, the number of IDPs from both sides who have returned to their villages in the zone of conflict is between 15,500 and 16,000 persons. IDPs that want to return and have received aid to do so but are not living in their home communities constitute 10,767 persons according to official statistics. The FMS counted 8,479 IDPs from North Ossetia who lived in Ingushetia in September 2005 and updated this to 7,000–8,000 in January 2008. The authorities in Ingushetia, however, estimate that between 19,000 and 20,000 Ingush forced migrants live in their republic.

FMS documents identify three categories of villages in Prigorodnyy Rayon that are distinguished by the ratio of returned IDPs and the assessment of the "problematic nature" of the process. In effect, it is a typology of the variable localized geopolitics of the return process. The first category of settlements are "problematic" populated areas, where the return of Ingush IDPs remains at a low level and encounters active opposition from former Ossetian neighbors who accuse members of local Ingush families of participating in the 1992 military actions. These settlements tend to be areas of contested space, where Ossetian houses are in close proximity to Ingush homes. The second category is "unproblematic villages," where returnees meet no obstacles and returns occur without incident. These spaces can be mono-ethnic settlements, so returns are not likely to be visibly provocative and contested.[30] The third type of geopolitical environment consists of "partly problematic points,"where there are efforts to revive resettlement and return to neighborhoods largely or partly destroyed in 1992, areas empty and unpopulated since. Return to these areas requires considerable funding and is potentially provocative depending on local dynamics. The Moscow-based Human Rights Center *Memorial* (2007) has documented the

[29]According to Ostrovsky (2008, p. 15), 18,000 Ingush are still unable to return to Prigorodnyy and that the official explanation is that "their neighbours are not prepared to live next to them."

[30]However, the city of Vladikavkaz, for example, is now defined as "unproblematic," even though the majority of its Ingush population either sold their apartments or currently do not live in them. Consequently, "unproblematic" can also signify a space where return is no longer an issue because it is not conceivable.

hostilities that are still evident as the return process continues, although their figure of 60,000 Ingush IDPs is highly questionable.

The localized geopolitics of the "problematic" settlements is accounted for by several factors. One is the nature of the post-conflict settling, with fewer problems being foreseen in the return of Ingush to those villages where Ingush dominated before—Kartsa, the northern part of Chermen, Kurtat, and Dachnoye—and where no opposition developed among the non-Ingush inhabitants (see Fig. 1 for locations).[31] Correspondingly, more problems occurred in those villages where the population was mixed or had an Ossetian majority. Even before the 1992 conflict, neighborhood segregation had been increasing inside these villages, as Ossetian and Russian populations in predominantly Ingush blocks or villages opted to sell their houses.

A second factor is the local microclimate of inter-ethnic relations and the intensity of the armed violence in 1992, which continue to shape the localized geopolitics of return to this day. Differences in local microclimates were apparent even in the early post-conflict period and depended on how key rural families, local authorities, and even individual activists from the Ingush and Ossetian communities expressed positions on the returns process. The contrasting situations in several villages illustrate this factor clearly. In Dongaron, local elders and heads of influential families worked successfully to maintain stable Ossetian–Ingush relations. By contrast, the localized geopolitics in the villages of Chermen, Yuzhnyy, and Oktyabr'skoye descended into conflict and these areas saw fierce fighting. Tarskoye's situation is unusual. Although there is no documentation concerning the nature of the specific inter-communal climate in the village prior to the conflict, no armed clashes occurred in 1992. Nonetheless, the Ingush part of the village was later burned to the ground. Apparently, Tarskoye was dragged into the war when Ingush armed groups were pushed out from Yuzhnyy and partially withdrew to this village, thus enmeshing it in the surrounding violence.

An additional factor that has caused difficulties for the return of the IDPs was the establishment of new boundaries for the water-protection zone of Vladikavkaz (*Vodookhrannaya zona Vladikavkaza*), which expanded to include the villages of Terk, Chernorechenskoye, and part of Balta (see Fig. 1 for locations). Although the expansion plan was developed in the 1970s and 1980s, its implementation in the post-conflict period was considered by local Ingush as a stratagem to prevent return to their villages. The federal authorities accepted the validity of the establishment of the new boundaries of the water-protection zone of Vladikavkaz and as a result, villages there were closed for re-settlement, including the return of the IDP population. Remaining Ossetian inhabitants were moved, and the Ingush IDPs were offered settlement in other populated areas of North Ossetia. However, the majority of the Ingush continue to insist on another revision of the boundaries of the water-protection zone and their return to these villages whence they fled in 1992.

Ossetian Refugees from Georgia in North Ossetia

Another complicating factor in overcoming the consequences of the 1992 conflict in Prigorodnyy Rayon are the outcomes of another conflict in South Ossetia, a breakaway province of Georgia. IDPs and refugees from South Ossetia and elsewhere in Georgia who left

[31]In Kartsa and Chermen, a large part of the Ingush population remained in their homes during and after the events of 1992.

during and after the Ossetian–Georgian conflict of 1990–1992 settled in many North Ossetian villages of Prigorodnyy Rayon. Because very few Ossetian in-migrants took Georgian citizenship (they retained Soviet passports), they received Russian citizenship and, accordingly, were not accorded refugee status. Some Ossetian refugees from Georgia live with relatives, some in several places in the densely populated center of Vladikavkaz, and some in unapproved accommodation. Some of these families were placed in villages that suffered as a result of the Ossetian–Ingush conflict, including those occupying houses that once belonged to Ingush IDPs, thus creating additional difficulties in the return process of the latter group (Memorial, 2006).

The data, sparse as they are, indicate that about 12,000 South Ossetians left for the territory of Russia during 1991–1992, most of whom have remained permanently in North Ossetia and have obtained Russian citizenship. The in-migration into North Ossetia of ethnic Ossetians from other regions of Georgia (outside of South Ossetia) has had even more severe social and demographic consequences. As noted earlier, the lowest estimates are that 60,000 refugees left these regions in 1990–1992 and moved to the territory of Russia, mainly to North Ossetia (e.g., see Ostrovsky, 2008, p. 15).

Data from 1995–2007, separately counted in the Russian and North Ossetian republic budgets and the programs of international humanitarian organizations, indicate that 4,923 refugee families (17,970 people in total from Georgia) received assistance. The majority of Ossetian refugees from Georgia in the 1990s had already made their own successful efforts to integrate into Russia and received Russian citizenship, and thus they are removed from the category of recipient of any state aid.[32] An insignificant number of refugees (80 families in all) from South Ossetia and other regions of Georgia found it possible to return during 1997–2004 to their previous communities with the support of the UNHCR.[33]

The recent attempts at a military solution to the South Ossetian problem, during August 2004 and frequently during 2006–2008, and the new phase of political confrontation between the sides in the conflict, have (temporarily) halted the return of Ossetian forced migrants to South Ossetia and Georgia; in fact, they generated a new wave of refugees in August 2008 after renewal of war. Among the 1990s wave of Ossetian forced migrants now living in Russia, UNHCR internal surveys indicate that 90 percent want to integrate into North Ossetia and not return to Georgia.[34] Aid agencies calculate that 12,210 people (of the approximately 17,700 Georgian Ossetians in North Ossetia) need improved housing conditions, and they can be helped within the framework of the federal special-purpose program *Zhilishche* ("Dwelling"). However, in 2006–2007 only three IDP families were assisted through this program.

The volumes of resources directed for assistance to the two categories of forced migrants—Ingush from Prigorodnyy and Ossetians from Georgia—are quite different. In 2007, only 1.2 million rubles were set aside for housing assistance for Ossetian refugees, and as a result, just 2 of 792 applicant families were helped. Against the backdrop of increased federal attention to the problem of return and assistance of Ingush IDPs, the relative lack of attention to the fate of Ossetian forced migrants creates additional political difficulties for the North Ossetian government. The different level of state assistance to the two categories actually reflects different levels of responsibility, albeit involving the Russian state in both cases.

[32]Many of them had not even applied for this aid.

[33]Data from the Office of Internal Policy of the Administration of North Ossetia, Vladikavkaz.

[34]Interview by the authors with UNHCR staff, Vladikavkaz, August 1, 2007.

In the Ingush case, the situation and compensation to citizens emanates from an intra-Russian conflict, whereas the issue involving the Ossetian refugees from Georgia revolves around the fate of victims of Georgian nation-state building and is thus formally external for Russia. The bottom line is a clear divide among displaced persons in North Ossetia: as UNHCR officials affirmed to us, it is much better to be an Ingush displaced person returning to Prigorodnyy than an Ossetian refugee from Georgia in North Ossetia in terms of available resources and state aid. This material difference produces inevitable tensions when both communities are living in close proximity to each other, and serves to reproduce competitive ethnicized interpretations of migration status rather than shared common suffering.

ATTITUDES IN NORTH OSSETIA: IDENTITY, INTER-ETHNIC RELATIONS, AND WAR EXPERIENCES

Designed within a larger study of war outcomes in the North Caucasus of Russia and in Bosnia-Herzegovina, the authors conducted a public opinion survey in North Ossetia in December 2005 as part of a broader 2000-person survey on the North Caucasus region about inter-ethnic relations and the outcomes of wars in the region. Like the other survey points, those in North Ossetia were selected on the basis of a geographically stratified design, and the adults surveyed were chosen through a random route procedure of dwellings with door-step interviews. Interviewers from the Levada Center–Moscow conducted the surveys.[35] The main emphasis in the questions was the comparative level of inter-ethnic reconciliation and interaction in the wake of extended civil wars in the two regions in the 1990s, while retaining a focus on the regional and local differences in these outcomes.

In North Ossetia, 198 surveys were completed, of which 130 were by Ossetians and the remainder by a mix of ethnicities, among which Russians dominated. The 2002 Russian census data for the republic showed that Ossetians constituted a majority of the population (62.7 percent) with Russians at 23.2 percent the only other sizeable group.[36] Six sample points (cities and rural *rayony*) were selected in the republic and proportionately sampled. The capital, Vladikavkaz, with 90 surveys, Beslan (21), Sunzha (31), and Zavodskoy (21) in Prigorodnyy Rayon; Pavlodolskaya (18) in Mozdokskiy Rayon; and Kardzhin in Kirovskiy Rayon with 17 surveys comprised the North Ossetian sample. The interviewers remarked on the interest and cooperation of the North Ossetian respondents—71 percent of the ethnic Ossetians in the sample were "pleased and friendly" during the administration of the questionnaire, compared to 41 percent of Muslims (non-Ossetians)[37] and 40 percent of Russians in the North Caucasus survey as a whole.

In our attempt to understand the attitudes of Ossetians toward the effects of the multiple conflicts in their republic and in adjoining regions in Georgia and Chechnya/Ingushetia, we present the results of questions that measure their: (a) social-psychological and economic profiles; (b) inter-ethnic perceptions and ethnic identity; and (c) perspectives on the Caucasian conflicts. For purposes of comparison, we will contrast the views of the 130 Ossetians (all Ossetians in the North Caucasus sample are from North Ossetia) with those of

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[35]More details on the survey design are available from Bakke et al. (2008).

[36]Ingush (3 percent) and Armenians (2.4 percent) constituted the next largest among a wide variety of ethnic populations.

[37]Based on post-survey evaluation by the interviewers. Throughout the analysis of the survey responses, "Muslim respondent" refers to those who lived outside North Ossetia in the other ethnic republics and Stavropol' Kray.

945 Muslims and 871 Russians from the broader North Caucasian sample. We recognize that the Muslim and Russian samples are quite diverse, the Russians by location[38] and the Muslims by location and by nationality.[39] Previous research using this survey has shown a fair degree of consistency among these Muslim sub-samples, especially on key questions like the possible creation of separate ethnic homelands (O'Loughlin and Ó Tuathail, 2008).

Quality of Life and Ossetian Self-Evaluation of their Status

Like other ethnic republics of the North Caucasus, North Ossetia ranks near the bottom of the subjects of the Russian Federation in income levels. In 2006, average per capita monthly income in North Ossetia was $182, compared to the Russian average of $276, but even this low number still made North Ossetia the richest of the ethnic republics in the North Caucasus, just ahead of the figure ($178) for adjoining Stavropol' Kray, populated predominantly by ethnic Russians (The North Caucasus, 2006).[40] Similar to other North Caucasian republics, North Ossetia relies heavily on federal subsidies, in this case for 59.2 percent of its budget, which ranks it 14th overall of the 88 subjects in the federal state. However, this is the second-lowest ratio (behind Adygeya) in the North Caucasus regions (*Rossiya v tsifrakh*, 2006, pp. 40–47).[41] This subsidy corresponds closely to the republic's ranking on gross domestic product per capita (ibid.), 73rd of 88 subjects (35,885 rubles compared to the Russian average of 102,005 rubles). Unlike almost all of the other ethnic republics in the region with rapidly increasing populations, North Ossetia (together with Adegeya) is experiencing a natural population decrease—the 2004 figures were 11.1 births and 12.6 deaths per 1000 population (The North Caucasus, 2006).

While Ossetians are known for their relatively high educational levels and standard of living compared to their Caucasian neighbors, respondents in our sample voiced a distinct personal concern for present and future economic standing. Twenty-eight percent of our sample said that they did "not have enough money for food" compared to 10 percent of Russians and 6 percent of Muslims, and a further 49 percent of Ossetians indicated that they "only had enough money for food." Effectively then, two-thirds of Ossetians judge themselves to be poor or very poor, double the rate of their Muslim neighbors, despite the indication from objective statistical indicators that they are better-off. Part of the answer is that the official figures for the North Caucasus region are notoriously unreliable due to underreporting and falsification of production, income, and retail numbers. By the estimate of the Minister of Economics, Zaur Kuchiyev, the shadow sector accounts for 40–50 percent of the economy.[42] Barter, informal exchanges, unregulated and untaxed activities, and smuggling all contribute to a higher standard of living than is evident in the official figures, and is visible in the possession of expensive consumer goods throughout the region (Vendina et al., 2007). As a result of the income decline in North Ossetia caused by the dissolution of the Soviet

[38]Those Russians surveyed resided predominantly in Stavropol' Kray, but there were also significant numbers in Dagestan, Karachayevo-Cherkessia, Kabardino-Balkaria, and North Ossetia.

[39]The main Muslim groups represented in the sample are Avars, Dargins, Kumyks, Lezgins, and Laks (all predominantly from Dagestan), as well as Karachays and Kabards.

[40]These numbers do not include the sizeable incomes typically derived from the shadow economy in the North Caucasus (Zubarevitch, 2007).

[41]In contrast, in Soviet times, North Ossetia was a net contributor to the federal budget (interview with Zaur Kuchiyev, Minister of Economics of North Ossetia, Vladikavkaz, August 1, 2007).

[42]Interview, Vladikavkaz, August 1, 2007.

economic structures, by 1996 over 50 percent of young people aged 18–30 wished to leave the republic.[43]

Economic worries and the poor prospects for employment dominate the concerns of young men in the republics of the North Caucasus, with violence and terrorism ranked significantly behind (Mendelson and Gerber, 2006). In our sample, when asked to choose among five "serious dangers facing the peoples of the North Caucasus," Ossetians strongly opted for the "lack of economic development" option at 68 percent,[44] far in excess of their ratios for "terrorist actions" (16 percent), crime (1 percent), "increased separatism" (2 percent), and "political corruption" (13 percent). It is therefore not surprising that, when asked about their "state of mind recently," over half (55 percent) of the Ossetian sample chose the option "tense and irritable."[45] The combination of deep economic uncertainties, especially about the future, and the unresolved conflicts in the region undoubtedly contribute to this high level of stress and anxiety.

Yet, when asked if they had the opportunity to move to another rayon or community in the republic, almost half (48 percent) of Ossetians said "definitely not" and a further 22 percent chose "not likely," a level of immobility that is higher than for Muslims or Russians. In a small republic, presumably, a change of residence is unlikely to increase one's economic prospects and would possibly disrupt the social networks and ethnic niches, including economic ones, that have been developed over an extended time.

Sense of Identity and Ethnic Pride

Ossetians exhibit strong levels of ethnic pride and identity. On a five-point scale of pride in their ethnic group (ranging from "a lot" to "none at all"), 88 percent of Ossetians chose the top category, compared to only 46 percent of Russians and 63 percent of Muslims. In fact, of all the individual ethnic groups surveyed in both the North Caucasus and Bosnia-Herzegovina, Ossetians possessed the strongest sense of ethnic pride. Further, the sense of pride appears to be growing and solidifying; when asked to compare their current sense of being a member of the ethnic group compared to their feelings in 1990, just before the implosion of the Soviet Union, one-third of the Ossetian sample expressed greater attachment to their group (53 percent felt about the same level of attachment). Another important indicator of the sense of in-group solidarity is support for nationality-based parties. One-third of Ossetians believed that "only nationality-based parties will ensure the interests of the people," while another third were neutral on this question.[46] Less than 20 percent of both Russians and Muslims agreed with the nationality-based party model for the realization of group interests.

As a minority in the region and having been involved recently in two ethnic-based conflicts, it is understandable that Ossetians would be more inclined to think of a group-based strategy for asserting their interests, because their specific interests would tend to be overwhelmed in majoritarian politics. Further evidence of this concern is the low ratio (32 percent) of Ossetians who believed that each group should be guaranteed seats in proportion to their population. During the late Soviet period (1982–1988), Ossetians were subject to a quota system when the Soviet authorities adopted an affirmative action policy for the Ingush

[43]Interview with Taymuraz Kasayev, Vladikavkaz, July 30, 2007.

[44]The corresponding figures for Russians and Muslims in the survey were 42 and 50 percent, respectively.

[45]The corresponding ratios for Russians and Muslims were 38 and 32 percent, respectively.

[46]About one in five respondents could not give an answer.

in North Ossetia, and the uncertain outcome of this option for them is further reflected in the 33 percent of Ossetians who could not give an answer to the question. Muslim respondents overwhelmingly supported the notion of proportional representation (66 percent), whereas Russians were split on the options.

Although they express a strong identity and solidarity, Ossetians are well disposed to build cross-ethnic friendships and relations, and reject an exclusively ethnic identity when asked about their citizenship and sense of belonging. Almost three-quarters of Ossetians (72 percent) would like more friends among people of different ethnicities, similar to the 75 percent ratio for Muslims and dramatically different than the low value of 37 percent for ethnic Russians. The high ratio of urban residents in (presumably more ethnically mixed) urban environments among the Ossetian respondents could account for this difference. The survey, however, did not ask specifically which groups would be acceptable for friendships, and it is possible that the Ossetians had only Russians in mind. Similarly, Muslim respondents may have only considered other Muslim groups as suitable for friendship networks.

Part of the explanation for the higher level of inter-ethnic tolerance among Ossetians might be found in responses to the questions about civic and ethnic identity. Ossetians, more than the other groups, opted for a mixed identity—a civic Russian citizenship together with an ethnic Ossetian one. The simple question on identity—"do you primarily consider yourself…" with the options "member of my ethnic group," "Russian citizen," "Russian citizen and a member of my ethnic group," "resident of my rayon or oblast," "resident of my town," "Soviet citizen," or "other"—elicited dramatically different responses for the three groups under consideration here. Exclusive membership of the ethnic group was chosen by 22 percent of Muslims and 12 percent of Russians, but only 7 percent of Ossetians. A majority of Russians (55 percent) chose "Russian citizen" as their identity, as did a slight plurality of both Muslims at 34 percent and Ossetians at 42 percent. The groups differed most significantly in the third option, "Russian citizen and member of my ethnic group," with only 7 percent of ethnic Russians choosing it, compared to 21 percent of Muslims and 41 percent of Ossetians. In effect, Ossetians split almost evenly between the exclusively civic option ("Russian citizen") and the mixed civic-ethnic option ("Russian citizen and member of my ethnic group"). As the brief political geographic history of the republic presented above indicates, Ossetians stand out in the North Caucasus for their consistent allegiance to the Russian state, and their continued close association has colored their behavior in the multi-party conflicts with their Ingush and Georgian neighbors. While retaining a strong sense of ethnic solidarity, they also adhere strongly to their Russian civic identity, well in excess of both their Muslim and ethnic Russian neighbors.

As we have explained, focus on the unresolved territorial conflict in Prigorodnyy Rayon requires consideration of Ossetians on both sides of the Great Caucasus Range. In this respect, our survey is very helpful in elaborating the complexities of attitudes that recognize the lack of easy solutions and that take the checkered history of territorial control into account. Almost one in five ethnic Ossetian respondents moved to the republic from another Soviet republic (presumably Georgia) since the end of the Soviet Union in 1991. These migrants are both South Ossetians and ethnic Ossetians from other regions of Georgia who left for North Ossetia at about the time of the 1991–1992 war. Unfortunately, the size of the migrant subsample is not sufficiently large for statistical examination of differences with sedentary Ossetians; however, other subsample comparisons (e.g., urban and rural [village] respondents) are significant and we point out some of these differences here.

Consistent with their favorable attitudes toward members of other ethnic groups, Ossetians reject political options that separate the North Caucasian population into

nationality blocs. Various theoretical options were proposed by the survey as methods to improve ethnic relations in the region. Among these was the statement, "if all ethnicities had their own territory and other ethnicities left," a definitive measure of support for the creation of separatist homelands. Although this option overall had little support across almost all nationalities, it was particularly disdained by the Ossetians, with support of only 1.5 percent, and might have been read as an oblique reference to Ingush control of Prigorodnyy. Although higher, Russians at 17 percent and Muslims at 13 percent also showed weak support for the option, much less than the comparative figure of over 50 percent in Bosnia-Herzegovina (O'Loughlin and Ó Tuathail, 2009).

These ratios are strongly and perhaps causally related to the responses to the question on whether the "civil rights of some nations are under threat." While Ossetians responded negatively with 94 percent disagreement with the proposition, the corresponding figures for Russians (58 percent disagreement) and Muslims (76 percent disagreement) suggest a negative correlation between belief in separatism and concern for the civil rights of certain groups, confirmed by a significant Goodman-Kruskal gamma coefficient of -.11. Presumably those worried about the civil rights of some groups reflect concerns about their own ethnic group and see the creation of a separate territory as a way to protect the group's interests. Also, given the salience of the relations between Ossetians and Ingush in the aftermath of the Beslan killings (just over a year before our survey), Ossetian respondents might have rejected this proposition because it could be interpreted as referring to the relative status of Ingush in the republic.

War Experiences and Post-War Attitudes

Ossetians have been more affected than the other two groups by the conflicts in the Caucasus region since 1991. Three questions specifically asked about war experiences and the adaptations made to cope with the varied conflicts that have affected the region's residents. Exactly one-quarter of the Ossetian respondents answered that they had been forced to move (23 percent once and 2 percent more than once) due to regional conflicts, a much higher ratio than the 7 percent of Muslims and 11 percent of Russians who had to move. Because of the large ratio of Ossetians from Georgia (South Ossetia and other regions) in the sample, this forced migration figure is not surprising. But the ongoing conflicts in the North Caucasus, even before the recent war in South Ossetia–Georgia, are still affecting Ossetians more than the others. In answering the question "Have violence and danger in the North Caucasus significantly changed your everyday life?," 65 percent of Ossetians answered affirmatively, compared to 53 percent of Muslims and 48 percent of Russians. Of course, if one were to question other specific minorities (e.g., Ingush) living at the center of current violence, one would find ratios that are as high as or higher than the Ossetian one. But the high proportion (two-thirds of Ossetians) indicates that even a republic that has not been the location of sustained violence since 1992[47] has seen its population forced to adjust their daily activities due to their proximity to sites of violence.

[47]There have been isolated serious terrorist incidents since that time. Fifty-eight people were killed in March 1999 and over 100 injured when a bomb hidden under a market stall exploded in Vladikavkaz. Twelve people died in a similar explosion a year later. In both cases, the presumed perpetrators—from neighboring Ingushetia—were apprehended, tried, and sentenced. Since 2005, 19 Ingush have been kidnapped near the central market in Vladikavkaz. Most recently, on November 6, 2008, a suicide bombing in Vladikavkaz killed 12 people and injured dozens near this market. And in late November the mayor of the city was shot dead by a sniper as he stepped into his vehicle.

One of the most emotional questions for Ossetians in the survey involved the causes of the school hostage-taking and mass killings in Beslan. Numerous options were presented to the respondents, because many explanations for the attack have been promulgated by federal and local officials, as well as pundits, rebel spokespersons, commissions of inquiry, and ethnic activists. Because there has not yet been a satisfactory account of the preparations for the attack and the sequence of events that led to the dénouement on the afternoon of September 3, 2004, it is not surprising that the "don't know" answer for this question was the highest of all in the survey. The "don't know" ratio was highest for Ossetians at 13 percent but was also significant for Muslims and Russians, both at 8 percent. Few respondents of any group attributed the attack to the "struggle of Chechens for independence" although the link was clearly made by Shamil Basayev, the Chechen rebel leader at the time of the Beslan attack. Instead, three explanations received most support across the three ethnicities. A plurality of both Muslims (25 percent) and Ossetians (37 percent) attributed the attack to "international terrorism," an explanation that follows the Kremlin line of President Putin and also recognizes the mixed ethnicities of the attackers.[48] The second most popular option, selected by 22 percent of Ossetians and Muslims and by 24 percent of Russians, has a conspiratorial ring: "the intention of Russia's enemies that Ossetian and Ingush peoples should fight, to prolong interethnic conflicts in the North Caucasus." Somewhat behind these two is the third most common explanation for all three groups at 13 percent each; it attributes blame for the Beslan killings to radical Islamism because of "the tendency of the radical supporters of Islam to build Islamic states in the North Caucasus." While an organized crime explanation gets some support from Muslims (12 percent) and Russians (16 percent), it hardly receives any credence from Ossetians (3 percent). Similarly, all groups do not blame "rough Russian policies" for provoking the attack on the Beslan school (Muslims 7 percent, Ossetians 4 percent, and Russians 4 percent). Thus, of the eight possible explanations for the horror of Beslan, more than half of Ossetians blame either international terrorism or the "enemies of Russia" who want to see continued Ingush–Ossetian conflict. Either way, the attribution is vague and ill-focused and does not target any particular ethnic group. Local Ossetians have no confidence in the federal inquiry into the events at the school, especially its violent ending, but place more trust in their local parliamentary inquiry.[49]

In the immediate aftermath of the Beslan atrocity, fear of revenge against Ingush in the republic was voiced by federal and local officials, but few acts of violence materialized. Stanislav Kasayev, chair of the North Ossetian parliamentary inquiry into the Beslan killings, believes that the major effort by local authorities to prevent revenge killings in its aftermath were successful by emphasizing the theme of "Don't blame our neighbors, the Ingush."[50] But Ossetians were more assertive than the other subsamples in their opinion that the Russian government should respond vigorously "with more persecution" to terrorist attacks. Their figure of 80 percent contrasts with the lower figures of 71 percent of Russians and 65 percent of Muslims. As the site of multiple terrorist bombings and attacks, including Beslan, many Ossetians have also experienced two other violent conflicts, in Georgia and in Prigorodnyy Rayon. As a result, a very large proportion of Ossetian respondents (88 percent) indicated that they or a close family member had witnessed a violent ethnic incident that resulted in death or injury. Because the survey took place just over a year after the attack on the Beslan

[48]Twenty-one percent of Russians chose this explanation.

[49]For more contextualization of the Beslan school responses and analysis of the local reactions to the killings, see Ó Tuathail (2009).

[50]Authors' interviews in Vladikavkaz, Russia, August 1, 2007.

school, which was seen by thousands of locals, it is possible that this event contributes heavily to this high ratio, far in excess of the ratios for Muslims (18 percent) and Russians (21 percent). On this question, a significant difference emerged between the urban (93 percent) and rural (78 percent) subsamples of Ossetians. Some of the villages in the sample are relatively remote from Beslan, which lies only 25 km from Vladikavkaz, the home of most urban respondents in our survey.

The survey responses are helpful in understanding the dynamics of the conflicts in the republic of North Ossetia and paint a generally optimistic picture for the future of ethnic relations. Ossetians do not display overt hostility to other ethnic groups; instead, they voice hopes for a future of better inter-ethnic interactions and want to have more friends from different ethnic groups. Although more heavily affected by the violence in the region, Ossetians are against separation of ethnicities into separate territories while supporting a stricter crackdown by Russian forces on terrorists.

CONCLUSIONS

In August 2008, the unsettled nature of long-standing territorial disputes in the Caucasus became international news with the short war between Russian and South Ossetian forces (on one side) and the Georgian army (on the other), over the control of the separatist South Ossetian territory. The flight of refugees from the war zone, Ossetians across the Caucasus to North Ossetia and about 24,000 Georgians from their villages in South Ossetia (Barry, 2008), echoed earlier forced displacements in the region. About 30,000 Ossetians fled north at the outbreak of hostilities but only 1000 remained in North Ossetia two months later (RIA Novosti, 2008). Unlike the earlier exodus in 1992, far fewer South Ossetians have elected to remain in the Russian Federation. The August 2008 war did not resolve the international legal status of South Ossetia, but it offered it a greater sense of protected autonomy with a political endorsement from Moscow and more robust Russian military protection. It also certified the close economic and political connections between North and South Ossetia through the Roki Tunnel, thus boosting social and family networks, and marked the effective incorporation of South Ossetia into Russia's economic and political space.

North Ossetia is a particular case among North Caucasian republics, not only because of its trans-Caucasian ties to fellow Ossetians, but also by virtue of its historical, cultural, and institutional distinctiveness in the region of neighboring Muslim federal republics. Although territorial disputes among nationalities in Dagestan also emanate from Stalin's deportations, their importance and potential for conflict generation are much smaller than Prigorodnyy, where ethnic claims are aligned with the authority of republican governments. The Prigorodnyy dispute remains frozen in a political sense, though the facts on the ground change as the populations of the villages change. However, as the aftermath of the Beslan killings showed, local authorities must be ever vigilant to prevent the memories and legacies of the 1992 war from reviving the conflict.

A perspective from outside the region can easily interpret the Ossetian/Russian versus Georgian war of 2008 through geopolitical, even Cold War, lenses. Georgia's ties to the West and the resurgence of Russian power can easily mislead commentators to ignore the events of 1992, characterized by ethnic cleansings both north and south of the Caucasus range. The localized geopolitics of the territorial disputes after the demise of the Soviet Union were not seen in Cold War terms at the time (1992), and for those most affected (refugees and IDPs) global geopolitics is a distant echo. Interpreting local conflicts as being fundamentally about relations between great powers, both neighboring and distant, can be destabilizing and can

lead to a return of the kind of proxy wars of great powers that marked the Second Cold War, 1980–1985. A localized geopolitical perspective is needed.

Our examination of the returns process in Prigorodnyy and the attitudes of North Ossetians reveals both positive and negative war outcomes. There has been some gradual accommodation of Ingush refugees in certain Prigorodnyy villages (although not in all) and a marked assimilation of refugees from South Ossetia and elsewhere in Georgia and North Ossetia. On the whole, Ossetians recognize the dangers of "ethnic politics" and remain concerned about the threat of religious or ethnic radicalism. The negative outcome is that relations between Ossetians and Ingush remain tense in some villages, with a corresponding low rate of Ingush return. The Prigorodnyy dispute is not resolved and it is likely to remain an open wound in the region for some time to come.

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