

## Northern Caucasus Literatures – 20th Century

**Contents** (Poetry – Drama – Fiction – Essay – Autobiography)

### POETRY

The 20<sup>th</sup> century witnessed the waning years of tsarist rule, which were among the most productive in literary terms, and the beginning of a new, Soviet period, which inaugurated a radical shift in the modes, languages, and genres of literary production. This shift however did not entail the cessation of writing in Arabic or in vernacular languages that use the Arabic *ajami* script. Daghestani Arabist Saidov regards 1905 as a turning point, which “opened a new period in the Arabian-language literature in Daghestan.” According to Saidov, this period was marked by a deeper and more extensive acquaintance with the Arabic-language writings of Muslims throughout the Russian empire, such as in Tatarstan, as well as with modern Muslim writers, such as Rashid Rida and Muhammad Abduh in Egypt.

#### *Alphabets and Scripts*

Soviet poetry in the Caucasus, like all branches of literary production, was overwhelmingly shaped by the Soviet experience as well as by government-driven ideologies that limited the scope of what could and could not be written. Soviet sources often stress that many of the literatures of the Caucasus only acquired written form following their incorporation into the Soviet Union; this prevalent assumption is in most cases wrong. The narrative that identifies the Soviet period with a wholesale turn to literary production in Russian ignores the substantial literature written in Arabic (*ajami*) script throughout this century.

Alongside the cultural shifts necessitated by the Bolshevik Revolution, the dominant script for vernacular literatures shifted dramatically over the course of a few decades. Until 1928, Avar was written in the Arabic *ajami* script and occasionally in the Cyrillic alphabet created for it by P.K. Uslar in 1861. At that point, the Soviet state decided that Avar, like many languages of the Caucasus and Central Asia, should be written in the Latin script. This phase only lasted for a decade, however, at which point, in 1938, Soviet leaders decided to shift the alphabet again, to Cyrillic. The same complex story could be told for nearly all the languages of the North Caucasus.

#### *Soviet Multilingualism*

Major Avar poets include Zagid Gadjievich Gajiev (1898-1971), who was also a translator and dramatist, bilingual (Russian-Avar) poet Faza Gamzatovna Alieva (1932-2016), whose husband Musa Abdulaevich Magomedov (1926-1997), was also a well-known poet, Mahmud from Kabab-Rosso (c. 1870—1919), and Gamzat Tsadasa (1877-1951), the father of Rasul Gamzatov (1923-2003), who was regarded as Daghestan’s national poet for much of his professional life. Other outstanding Soviet-era poets of the northern Caucasus include in Chechen, Magomet Mamakaev (1910–1973) and Raisa Akhmatova (1928-1992) and Hasan Israilov (1910-1944), leader of the Chechen resistance against the Soviet Union from 1940-1944, Effendi Kapiiev (1909-1944) in Lak, Suleiman Stalsky (1869-1937) in Lezghi, and Yakov Khozjiev (1916 –1938) in Ossetian. The Ossetian author and journalist Dzakho Gatuev played an important role in cultivating North Caucasus poetry through his anthology *The Poetry of Caucasus Mountaineers (Poeziia gortsev Kavkaza, 1934)*. These authors developed new idioms and ways of writing within their respective literatures while also remaining attentive to the literary traditions within which they worked.

Whereas Bakikhanov may be seen as the paradigmatic multilingual author of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Caucasus, Hasan al-Alqadari (1834-1910) can be regarded as the paradigmatic multilingual author of the Caucasus in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Like his predecessor, al-Alqadari worked in three languages: Azeri, Arabic, Persian. Whereas the polymath Abbas Qoli Aqa Bakikhanov (discussed below) wrote his masterpiece, *Heavenly Garden*, in Persian, al-Alqadari wrote masterpieces in both Azeri Turkic and Arabic. Al-

Alqadari's Turkic masterpiece is, *Vestiges of Daghestan*, is a priceless historical source that also includes the author's poetic compositions. For the purposes of understanding his contribution to the poetry of the Northern Caucasus, al-Alqadari's *Poetry of the Thankful One (Diwan al-Mamnun)* is the key text. It was composed in Arabic and published in Temir Khan Shura in 1912 by the well-known publishing house of Mohammad Mirza Mavraev, which contributed greatly to the growth and development of Daghestani literary culture in indigenous Daghestani languages in the *ajami* Arabic script as well as in Arabic.

The outstanding poet of Chechen literary modernity is Magomet Mamakaev (1910-1973). Born in the Chechen village Achkoi-Martan to a peasant family, Mamakaev was educated at the Communist University of the Toilers of the East. Among his major poems are and the epic poem "Bloody mountains" (1928), "Conversation with mother" (1934), and "Morning over Argun" (1958). Before Mamakaev began transforming Chechen literature, Abkhaz poet and playwright Samson Kuagu-ipa Chanba (1886–1937) was making his mark on Abkhaz literature. Chanba's book-length poem, *Daughter of the Mountains*, appeared in 1919; his work as a playwright is discussed elsewhere in this study guide. Mention should also be made of Abuzar Aidamirov (1929–2005), who, although primarily a novelist, composed in verse the Chechen national anthem.

#### Further Reading:

Kemper, Michael. "Daghestani Shaykhs and Scholars in Russian Exile: Networks of Sufism, Fatwas and Poetry," *Daghestan and the World of Islam*, eds. Moshe Gammer and David J. Wasserstein. *Annales Academiae Scientiarum Fennicae*, 2006. 95-107.

Rebecca Ruth Gould, "Topographies of Anticolonialism: The Ecopoetical Sublime in the Caucasus from Tolstoy to Mamakaev," *Comparative Literature Studies* 50.1 (2013): 87-107.

Dzakho Gatuev, *Poeziia gortsev Kavkaza: sbornik* (Moscow: Gosliizdat, 1934).

M. S. Saidov, "The Daghestan Arabic literature of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries," *Papers Presented by the USSR Delegation, XXV Congress of Orientalists* (Moscow: Oriental Literature Publishing House, 1960), 1-13, esp. p. 12 (cited above).

#### Discussion Question:

How did the Soviet state respond to writing in native languages?

## DRAMA & THE PERFORMING ARTS

Of the major genres and media discussed in this study guide, drama was among the last to develop in the North Caucasus. For most of the history of North Caucasus literature, drama in the modern sense of the term—involving indoor theatres, professional actors, and rehearsals—is a 20<sup>th</sup> century invention, although precedents for this art, such as the polemical debate in the 17<sup>th</sup> century Daghestani *Treatise on Djinn*, have been discussed in the previous articles for this study guide.

### *Chechen Drama*

Aslanbek Sheripov's brother Nazarbek Sheripov (1883-1920), who published under the Chechen name Nazar-Bek Gatten-Kalinsky, was Chechnya's first playwright and director, Nazarbek Sheripov played a leading role in the formation of Chechen dramaturgy. Beginning in 1905, he directed his own troupe of actors in the performance of the first Chechen-language plays. In 1912, he produced and directed his two best-known plays: *The Bear* and *At a Party* (*Синкьерамехь*). Both works are concerned with Chechnya's premodern past.

During the late 1920s and early 1930s Said Baduev (1904-1943), often regarded as the founder of modern Chechen literature, composed a number of plays that were to prove influential on Chechen dramaturgy. The most famous of these is *Not Every Mullah has a Bayram* (1930). Other significant plays by Baduev include *Red Fortress*, on World War II, *The Marriage of Tsaeba*, about speculators, *Golden Lake*, and *Political Department*.

Comic theatre is also an important genre in north Caucasus dramaturgy. In this domain, among the Chechens, Abdul Khamid Khamidovich Khamidov reigns supreme. Khamidov began his literary career as a translator of the classics of Russian and foreign theater into Chechen, including Molière's *The Bourgeois Gentleman* (1939) and Shakespeare's *Othello* (1940). During World War II, Khamidov was employed by the Chechen-Ingush State Drama Theater as actor and director. In 1943, he was awarded the title of Honored Artist of the Chechen-Ingush ASSR.

Like all Chechen and Ingush residing in the Checheno-Ingush Republic, Khamidov was deported to Central Asia in 1944. He first ended up in the Jambul Region of Kazakhstan, where he became the artistic director of the Palace of Culture of the sugar factory where he worked. He moved soon after to Kyrgyzstan, where he worked as a literary consultant and journalist on theatrical topics. In 1957, he returned with the rest of the Chechen and Ingush people to Chechnya, where he reestablished the Chechen-Ingush State Song and Dance Ensemble. He served as chairman of the Writers' Union of the Chechen-Ingush ASSR from 1959-1961.

Khamidov's best known play is *The Fall of Bozh-Ali* (1965), a comedy about the failed attempts of the protagonist Bozh-Ali to find a bride. The premiere of this play is widely regarded as among the most successful ever in the history of Chechen dramaturgy, and has subsequently been staged at the Chechen State Drama Theater on a yearly basis. *The Fall of Bozh-Ali* has been translated into many languages of the Caucasus, including the Daghestani languages Kumyk and Lak, Ossetian, Kabardian, and world literatures such as Turkish and Arabic. It has also been staged around the world, including in Bashkortostan (Tatarstan), Turkey, Jordan, and Syria.

In war-torn Chechnya, theatres were bombed and literary production in the realm of drama came to a halt. Chechen plays composed before the war include Arbi Usmanov's "The Mystery of the Cave" and Musa Akhmadov "The Adventures of Chervig." As throughout the North Caucasus, European and Russian classics such as Gogol, Schiller, Moliere were regularly performed.

### *Abkhaz Drama*

Samson Kuagu-ipa Chanba (1886–1937)'s *Amkhadzyr* (1920), is the first play written in the Abkhaz language. In 1937 Chanba was arrested and subsequently shot during the Stalinist purge that affected so many of the best writers of the Caucasus. Later, Denis Kirshalovich Chachkhalia's drama *The Lonely Alder's Ford* appeared on the Abkhaz stage.

### *On the Global Stage*

By the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, with many north Caucasus writers and playwrights living abroad and in the diaspora, North Caucasus drama acquired an international profile. In 2000, the three-act operatic musical *The Resurrection of Satanay* by Jordanian Circassian playwright M. I. Quandour was performed at the Kabardino-Balkarian State Musical Theatre. The musical was based on the poem

“Satanay” by the composer’s wife, Lyuba Balagova. The poem rehearses the entire history of the Circassian people, chronicling their migrations over the course of the previous two centuries. Mythic in scope as well as historical in orientation, the poem includes such figures as Waschhemaxwe from the Nart sagas. This we come full circle, with contemporary North Caucasus drama giving new life to its rich oral traditions from times past.

#### Further reading:

Magomed Mamkaev, “Певец народной думы,” *Грозненский рабочий* (4 September 1964).

Said Bauev, *Красная крепость* (1933).

#### Discussion Questions:

How did North Caucasus from the Soviet period and after shape their indigenous traditions to modern dramatic practice?

### FICTION, LEGENDS, MYTHS

#### *Major Novels*

The 20<sup>th</sup> century witnessed innovation in North Caucasus literatures in many domains, but the innovations in the domain of the novel were truly without precedent. Novels were not written by north Caucasus authors until the 20<sup>th</sup> century. When writers did start working in this genre, they were conscious of doing something that had never been done before in their respective languages. Three outstanding novels are worth mentioning at the outset: Magomet Mamakaev’s *Zelamkha* (1968, Russian translation 1981), named after the famous *abrek* Zelimkhan Gushmazukaev, Bagrat Shinkuba’s *The Last of the Departed* (1974. Trans. 1986), first written in Abkhaz and later translated into Russian, Idris Bazorkin *From the Darkness of Ages* (1968), first written in Ingush and later translated into Russian. The latter is a remarkable bildungsroman of the life and time of Kaloi—not coincidentally named after a mythical Nart who is born from a rock (see the above article on Legends in the Ancient Literature of the Northern Caucasus)—who is born in the tsarist era and witnesses the radical changes that swept through Ingushetia during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. By setting his story in the pre-Soviet period, Bazorkin was able to deal with a number of themes that would have been more difficult to write about had the story been set in the Soviet period, including sexual temptation, unconsummated desire, the tension between love and marriage, and the unjust expectations that parents project onto their children. Dzakh Gataev’s documentary realistic narrative *Zelimkhan* (1929), could also be included in this context, although there is a case to be made for reading this “documentary tale” as an example of documentary prose, as discussed above.

#### *Chechen Fiction*

To this list should be added Abuzar Aidamirov’s Chechen-language trilogy: *Long Nights*, *A Lightning in Mountains*, and *A Tempest*, the first volume of which was published in Chechen in 1972, with a Russian translation appearing in 1996 and an Arabic translation appearing in 1998. These novels achieved great popularity among everyday Chechen readers and are regarded as the first major sequence of historical novels in the Chechen language. They were however preceded by an even lengthier sequence of historical novels: the Chechen-language *Years of Fire* (*Alun Sherash*, published in four volumes from 1957-1964), by Khalid Oshaev (1898-1977). Oshaev was also a short story writer, whose works include “The Death of the Vendetta,” as well as a number of works about Chechen folklore, as well as plays. Aidamirov is also the author of the national anthem of the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria, as Chechnya was called following its temporary succession from Russia (1991-2000). Aidamirov’s first short story was published in 1957, which was also the year when the Soviet state rehabilitated the Chechen and Ingush people from the accusations of betrayal that has been leveled against them by Stalin’s regime and due to which they had been collectively deported to Central Asia.

#### *Circassian Fiction*

In the northwest Caucasus, which by and large was spared the trauma of forced deportation, Tembot Kerashev (1902-1988) picked up on where his predecessor Kalambii had left off: with the theme of the noble bandit (*abrek*), which was the subject of his novella "Abrek" (1957, Russian translation 1959). While "Abrek" was first composed in Circassian, other fiction, such as *The Daughter of the Shapsugs* (1951), was originally composed by Kerashev in Russian.

### *Russian Fiction*

As in the tsarist era, Russian authors during the Soviet period continued to be obsessed and inspired by the peoples of the North Caucasus and to engage with their literary outputs. Among the works of Russian authors set in the North Caucasus which deal with the Chechen deportation are Semyon Lipkin's *Dekada* (1983, French translation in 1990) and Anatoly Pristavkin's (*Nochevala Tuchka Zolotaia*, 1981), made into a film in 1989. Alongside these Russian authors whose fiction drew inspiration from the Caucasus, some North Caucasus writers, such as Fazil Iskander (1929-2016) of Abkhazia, choose to write exclusively in Russian, and thereby reached a wider audience.

### Further Reading:

Idris Bazorkin, "Evening Prayers," trans. Rebecca Ruth Gould in *The Russia Reader: Culture, History, Politics*, eds. Bruce Grant and Adele Barker (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 293-302.

Idris Bazorkin, "Light of the Ancestors," trans. Rebecca Ruth Gould *Washington Square* 27 (2010): 152-167.

Steffi Chotiwari-Jünger, *Die Literaturen der Völker Kaukasiens. Neue Übersetzungen und deutschsprachige Bibliographie* (Wiesbaden: Reichert-Verlag, 2003).

Rebecca Ruth Gould, "Enchanting Literary Modernity: Idris Bazorkin's Postcolonial Soviet Pastoral," *Modern Language Review* 15(2): 405-428.

Rebecca Ruth Gould. *Writers and Rebels: The Literature of Insurgency in the Caucasus* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2016).

Semyon Lipkin, *L'histoire d'Alim Safarov, écrivain russe du Caucase* (La Tour-d'Aigues: Editions de l'Aube, 2008). French translation of *Dekada*.

Bagrat Shinkuba, *The Last of the Departed*, translated by Paula Garb (Moscow: Raduga Publishers, 1974).

### Discussion Question:

What are the key novels written by North Caucasus writers during the Soviet period? What makes these works significant?

### ESSAY : DOCUMENTARY PROSE

#### *New Journals*

The 20<sup>th</sup> century saw the continued development of literary production in many literary genres and media across the Caucasus, including in historiography, literary criticism, and various shorter forms of essayistic writing. As in the preceding century, many prominent 20<sup>th</sup> century northern Caucasus poets were also critics, and their writings helped to create a sense of a literary tradition in their respective literatures. Early Soviet magazines such as the monthly *Revolution and the Mountaineer* (*Gorets i revoliutsiia*), which was published from 1928 to the 1930s in Rostov-on-the-Don, provided a venue for such writings. The multilingual *Daghestan collection* (*Dagestanskii sbornik = Recueil du Daghestan*, 1927) was another journal that brought together voices from across the literatures of the North Caucasus to craft a new Daghestani literature suited for revolutionary politics.

As in the preceding century, Arabic continued to be the main language of literary production for Daghestan writers several decades into the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Among the most vivid expressions of the vitality

of Arabic in serial publications was the journal *Elucidation of Truth* (*Bayan al-haqai'q*), which was published in twelve issues from 1925 to 1928. It circulated to between a thousand and a thousand and a half subscribers and the editor-in-chief was the same Abusufyan Akaev, who had co-founded the Mavraev publishing house (his biography is disused in the preceding article). The journal's stated aim was to "explain the merits of Islam, reveal the truth, cleansing the *shari'a* of negative innovations and conjectures, and enlighten the minds of scientists and students." In short, *Elucidation of Truth* was a reformist project, part of the same movement that encompassed the activities of 'Ali al-Ghumuqi (1878–1943) and Abu Sufian al-Ghazanishi (1872-1931), who studied at al-Azhar, the renowned university of Islamic learning in Cairo, and used what they learned while abroad to develop a modernist Islam for Daghestani Muslims. Like these reformists, who regularly contributed to the journal, *Elucidation of Truth* was concerned with much more than religion as such: among the topics covered in the pages of the journal were education, Sufism, literature (especially poetry), geography, and recent developments in the sciences. Alongside regular contributions from Daghestanis, *Elucidation of Truth* also published the contemporary writings of Muslims reformists around the world, including Muhammad Abduh and Rashid Rida.

### *Social Criticism*

20<sup>th</sup> century North Caucasus literature was dominated by journalists who made their living as writers of fictional as well as nonfictional prose. Among the most important of these figures was the Ossetian writer Dzakho Gatuev (1892-1938), who wrote a series of journalist articles based on his travels throughout the northern Caucasus, and the Chechen writer Ibragim-Bek Sarakaev (1883—1934), who published widely on the traditions and folklore of the Chechen people. Born in Vedeno, in the historical heart of Chechen resistance to Russian rule, Sarakaev wrote a number of works documenting the sociological conditions under which his fellow Chechens lived, such as *On the Slums of the Chechen Republic* (*Po trushchobam Chechni*, 1913). He also wrote historical works such as *The Chechen Republic and Capture of Shamil* (*Chechnia i plenie Shamilia*, 1914). Sarakaev served in the government of the Mountaineer Republic that formed immediately after the collapse of Russian imperial rule in the Caucasus, on December 21, 1917. He died a natural death at the age of fifty-one.

### *Ethnography*

The Chechen author Magomet Mamakaev, who has been mentioned elsewhere in this study guide as the preeminent 20<sup>th</sup> century poet and fiction writer, is also the author of the important scholarly nonfiction study in Russian: *The Chechen clan (taip) in the period of its development* (*Chechenskii taip (rod) v period razlozheniia*, 1962). This was among the first works on the traditional Chechen social structure to deploy modern methods of scholarship, and it represents an advance over the work of Laudaev (mentioned in the previous article).

### *Polemic*

Another area in which nonfiction prose flourished was in the domain of polemic, such as those authored by Aslanbek Sheripov (1897-1919), many of whose writings originated as political speeches. Decades after his death, these speeches were collected into a book in Russian (1961) and subsequently translated into Chechen (1977). Like his brother Mairbek, Aslanbek was an influential political activist. While Mairbek was to mobilize Chechens against the Soviet regime during the 1941-1942 uprising, however, Aslanbek made his name as a pro-Soviet revolutionary. Magomed Mamakaev wrote a novel with him as its hero, entitled *Murid of the Revolution* (*Miurid revolutsii*, 1963).

Alongside the revolutionaries who were glorified by the state, North Caucasus writers celebrated local heroes, such as Imam Shamil and the noble bandit Zelimkhan Gushmazukaev (d. 1914), who dedicated their lives to fighting Russian colonial rule. These symbols of local resistance became the protagonists for numerous novels and poems, as well as films, in Chechen, Russian, and Daghestan languages. Many of these narratives merged with fiction, but many also remained grounded in history, and are best regarded as examples of journalistic prose. One such example is Ossetian writer Dzakho Gatuev's Russian-language work *Zelimkhan*, a tale (*Zelimkhan, povest*, 1929). Framed as a "tale," this work has a strong documentary dimension that gives it the qualities of nonfiction, and Gatuev's journalistic sensibility is amply in evidence throughout this work. Although in Russian, Gatuev exhibits his linguistic virtuosity by incorporating non-Russian lexicons from the languages of the Caucasus, as well as Arabic citations from the Quran.

### *Scripts and Alphabets*

Meanwhile, in nearby Ingushetia, the Ingush writer and polymath Zaurbek Kurazovich Malsagov (1894-1935) was ambitiously laying the foundation for a new Ingush alphabet using the Latin script. Malsagov was also founder of the newspaper *Serdalo*, which was published in Ingush using his Latin alphabet. Published from 1923 to the present with a break from 1944-1957 following the deportation of the Ingush to Central Asia, *Serdalo* is currently the main newspaper for the Republic of Ingushetia, and is published in both Ingush and Russian.

Meanwhile in Abkhazia, the writers Dmitry Gulia and Konstantin Machavariani set to work developing a new alphabet for the Abkhaz language using the Roman script. Gulia and Machavariani consulted two earlier Abkhaz alphabets, by Uslar and Bartholomei, respectively, which were based on the Cyrillic script. Yet, in keeping with the spirit of the age, which had witnessed the end of Russian imperial rule and the beginnings of a cosmopolitan early Soviet ethos, they were determined to create a script for their language using the Roman script.

### Further Reading:

Dzakho Gatuev, *Зелимхан, повесть* (Rostov-on-the-Don, 1929).

Magomed A. Mamaev, *Chechenskii taip (rod) v period razlozheniia* (Groznyi: Knizhnoe izd-vo, 2009).

Амир Рамазанович Наврузов, "Байан ал-хакаик - журнал ученых арабистов Дагестана первой трети XX века," *Исламоведение: научно-теоретический журнал. Всероссийский научно-теоретический журнал* 3.9 (2011): 82–93.

Aslanbek Sheripov, *Stat'i i rechi: sbornik* (Grozny: Checheno-Ingushskoe izdatel'sko-poligraficheskoe ob"edinenie "Kniga", 1990).

### Discussion Question:

What role did serial publications play in the circulation of new ideas across the North Caucasus?

### LIFE-WRITING (INCLUDING TRAVEL WRITING)

#### *Repression of Arabic*

The persistence of Arabic and Arabic-script writing well into the Soviet period in the case of Daghestan meant that the 20<sup>th</sup> century witnessed significant continuities with earlier life-writing traditions. Ali al-Ghumuqi (Ali Kaiaev)'s *Biographies of the Scholars of Daghestan (Terâcim-i ulemâ-yı Dagistan)* is a case in point; composed during the Soviet era, the work provides an overview of Daghestani scholarly activity for nearly a millennium, from the scholars of Derbent during the 11<sup>th</sup> century to the scholars of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Al-Ghumuqi also produced an incomplete biographical dictionary in Arabic which he was working on during the 1930s, arguably the most repressive decade of the Soviet period, when writing in Arabic was actively discouraged. Many of the most important autobiographical and biographical writings of North Caucasus peoples during the 20<sup>th</sup> century could not be published during their authors' lifetimes. Many also remain unpublished to this day. One important autobiography which has not been published to date is Abu Sofyan Akaev's Arabic-language autobiography, which is held in the Institute of Manuscripts of Azerbaijan's Academy of Sciences, along with several other of Akaev's as-yet-unpublished manuscripts.

As with 19<sup>th</sup> century literary production, the most common genre where autobiographical writing is found is within biographical literature, known alternatively as *tabaqat* in Arabic and *tazkira* in Persian. Just as Bakikhanov's *Heavenly Garden* incorporated autobiographical materials at the end of the work, so does Hasan al-Alqadari's *Vestiges of Daghestan* incorporate a personal account of the author's trials and tribulations at the end of a work that is mostly devoted to recounting the history of Daghestan. The biographical tradition in Arabic persisted in Daghestan well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century. One of the last known major works, that is a direct continuation of al-Alqadari's work in Azeri and Bakikhanov's work in Persian,

is Nadhir al-Durgili's *Stroll through the Minds in the Generations of Daghestani Scholars (Nuzhat al-adhhan fi tarajim `ulama` Daghistan)*.

### *Chechen Life-Writing*

In Chechnya, life-writing took a quite different turn from its path in Daghestan, linguistically, thematically, and in terms of genre. Memoirs figured prominently in the literary output of Chechens, perhaps as a result of the persecutions they experienced and the need for documenting in detail these repressions and human rights violations. Abdurahman Avtorkhanov (1908-1997) was a Chechen historian and intellectual whose autobiography, simply titled *Memoirs (Memuary, 1983)*, was composed in Russian like many of the works of life-writing by Chechens, and published after the author had been living in Germany for many years. Avtorkhanov's work is valuable for its insights into the inner workings of Soviet power, as well as for his account of the experiences of Chechens under Soviet rule.

The first part of Avtorkhanov's book, which precedes the autobiography proper, is entitled "From the biography of my people" and consists of two parts: an account of the Caucasus War of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, including the Imamate of Imam Shamil, and "Caucasus banditry," including the story of the noble bandit (*abrek*) Zelimkhan. This prefatory material reveals the close intertwinement between the authorial self and collective consciousness in Chechen life-writing. Avtorkhanov then proceeds to interweave his own story into the background of historical events: escaping from home, his school years, his years in Moscow, the beginnings of Soviet rule, a memoir of the Soviet revolutionary Bukharin, whom he calls a "utopian," and Stalin, whom he calls a "realist," his publications in the Soviet newspaper *Pravda*, reflections on Marxism, his personal encounter with an *abrek*, his arrest in 1937 under the charge that he had become "an enemy of the people," and his fortuitously timed migration from Grozny to Berlin in 1943, immediately after his release from prison.

Had Avtorkhanov remained in Grozny instead of leaving the Soviet Union forever, he would have been deported to Central Asia along with the rest of his fellow Chechens. Avtorkhanov was arrested by the Gestapo after crossing enemy lines, and adopted Germany as his home country. It was in Germany that Avtorkhanov completed his PhD and became a professor of Russian history, writing many significant works on Soviet politics and history over the course of his long career. In 1951, Avtorkhanov co-founded Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty with US funding. He died in Munich a year after the end of the First Chechen War in 1996.

### *Forced Deportations of the 1940s*

The trauma of the forced deportations of the 1940s that affected seven North Caucasus peoples—Chechens, Ingush, Kalmyks, Balkars, Karachays, Meskhetian Turks, and the Crimean Tatars—became a focus of many autobiographies and memoirs composed by North Caucasus peoples during the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. One of the most remarkable of these works is the memoir *Life in an Instant and in Conflict (Zhizn' vo mgle i bor'be, 1996)*, subtitled, "On the tragedy of the repressed peoples," by the Chechen linguist Yunus Desheriev. Desheriev memorably tells the tragic story of the fate of the Chechen people during the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, both as a social phenomenon and through his own personal experience. He describes the secret life he led in Moscow, where he concealed his Chechen identity in order to avoid deportation to Central Asia. Notwithstanding all the difficulties he faced, Desheriev continued his studies in Moscow after the deportation of his people. He managed to "pass" as Russian, and kept a low profile so that his Chechen identity would not be brought to the attention of the authorities. Had that happened, he would likely have faced deportation and even execution. During these difficult days, Desheriev managed to complete his studies and embark on a scholarly career, specializing in linguistics, and becoming the foremost scholar of the Chechen language at a time when the language itself was either repressed or discouraged by Soviet policy.

Desheriev was exceptional in many respects: he is one of the very few Chechens who managed to evade the genocidal actions of the Soviet regime, and avoid deportation, even though he was not permitted to live a normal life. Yet his story reveals a common theme, shared by millions of deported peoples. As Desheriev documents in his book, from 1944-1953, the regime tried to eradicate every trace of the Chechen people from their homeland. Chechens were only permitted to return to their homeland in 1953, when Khrushchev declared them "rehabilitated," although without issuing an apology for their forced displacement and the dispossession of their homes. The path to recovery was far from complete, however, and Desheriev chronicles the legacy of Soviet policy as well. His work is at once a moving example of Chechen life-writing and a work of critical analysis, composed by one of the most renowned



Chechen scholars of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Reading this work in the aftermath of the post-Soviet Chechen wars—one of which had ended the year the book was published, while the second war would begin three years later, in 1999—adds yet another layer, reminding the reader that Desheriev's chronicle of the persecution of his people attests to a pattern that recurs throughout modern Chechen history.

#### *Post-Soviet Wars*

The breakup of the Soviet Union led to violence in many regions of the former Soviet Union. But nowhere was the violence more intense, Russian attacks more brutal, or the casualties as high, as in Chechnya, a region that under the Soviet Union comprised the largest part of the Chechen-Ingush Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic. The First Chechen War began as a campaign for independence from the newly formed Russian Federation in 1994 and ended with Chechen defeat in 1996. A Second Chechen War dragged on for ten years, from 1999-2009, after Chechnya was declared an independent state for the second time. As with any war in which international powers are implicated, journalists from around the world flocked to the scenes of war crimes and bombings, producing their own memoirs, documentaries, and extensive photojournalism.

While the books produced by these journalists sold well in western markets, the writings of Chechens who suffered most from the war were by and large ignored. One Chechen literary masterpiece that gained some attention in Europe is *Scratches on shards* (*Tsarapiny na oskolkakh*, 2002), translated into French as *To Survive in Chechnya* (*Survivre en Tchétchénie*, 2006) by Chechen writer Sultan Saidalievich Iashurkaev (1942-2018), who published this work under the pseudonym Yunus Sheshil. Iashurkaev was born and educated in the Chechen town of Kharachoi, which is also the birthplace of the famed *abrek* Zelimkhan, who became a symbol of Chechen anticolonial resistance, and a protagonist of North Caucasus fiction, during the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Iashurkaev received his university degree from the Chechen-Ingush Pedagogical Institute (which had become a state university by the time he graduated in 1974). He began his writing career as a poet and participated in Prometei, the organization of young Chechen writers founded in 1975, and named after Prometheus, the mythical stealer of fire from Zeus. After receiving his university degree, Iashurkaev moved to Moscow to study law at Moscow State University. He then taught law and subsequently became an investigator for the Supreme Council of the Chechen-Ingush Republic. All this time, Iashurkaev was busy writing stories and novellas in Chechen and Russian. It was not until the publication of *Scratches on shards*, however, in the middle of the Second Chechen War, that Iashurkaev became known to the broader Russian reading public. Iashurkaev began drafting these memoirs, which are written in an experimental mode, in the form of a diary, and bear the subtitle "essay chronicle," in 1995. An excerpt from the memoirs appeared in the prominent Russian literary *Friendship of Peoples* (*Drezhba Narodov*) in 2010. Chechen memoirs of the war were also written in the languages of the growing Chechen diaspora, including English. One such example is Khassan Baiev's *The Oath: A Surgeon Under Fire* (2003).

#### Further Reading:

Nadhir al-Durgili, *Uslada umov v biografiakh dagestanskikh uchenykh: dagestanskije uchenye X-XX vv. i ikh sochineniia* (*Nuzhat al-adhhan fi tarajim `ulama` Daghistan*), edited by A. R. Shikhsaidov, Michael Kemper, and Alfrid Bustanov (Moscow: Izdate'skii dom Mardzhani, 2012).

Ali al-Ghumuqi (Ali Kaiaev), *Terâcim-i ulemâ-yı Dağıstan: Dağıstan bilginleri biyografileri*, eds. Tûbâ Işinsu Durmuş and Hasan Orazayev (Ankara: Grafiker Yayınları, 2012).

Abdurahman Genazovich Avtorkhanov, *Memuary* (Frankfurt/Main: Possev-Verlag, 1983).

Khassan Baiev's *The Oath: A Surgeon Under Fire*, with Ruth and Nicholas Daniloff (Walker, 2003). Revised edition: Baiev, *Grief of My Heart: Memoirs of a Chechen Surgeon*, with Ruth and Nicholas Daniloff (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2009).

Iu. D. Desheriev, *Zhizn' vo mgle i bor'be: o tragedii repressirovannykh narodov* (Moscow: Paleia, 1996).

Rebecca Ruth Gould, "Leaving the House of Memory: Post-Soviet Traces of Deportation Memory," *Mosaic, A Journal for the Interdisciplinary Study of Literature* 45(2): 149-164.

Sultan Saidalievich Iashurkaev (Yunus Sheshil), *Tsarapiny na oskolkakh: khronika-ésse* (Moscow: Graal', 2002).

---. *Survivre en Tchétchénie* trans. Marianne Gourg (Paris: Gallimard, 2006). French translation of *Tsarapiny na oskolkakh*.

Discussion Question:

How did the post-Soviet wars impact the production of life writing in the North Caucasus, especially Chechnya?