

**FOSTERED PRIMORDIALISM:
THE IDENTITY AND ANCESTRY OF
THE NORTH CAUCASIAN TURKS
IN THE SOVIET AND POST-SOVIET MILIEU**

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INTRODUCTION

This paper focuses on the crucial issue in the continuing disagreement between modernists and traditionalists as to whether it is correct to emphasize the “invention of tradition” and social engineering in respect to nationalism, or whether one has to pay more attention to the cultural background of the emerging nationalist discourse. I will restrict my discussion to questions concerning the politics of the past, the contribution of which to the development of nationalism is difficult to overstate:¹ Why is it that the most remote past and ethnic roots are mostly appreciated by many ethnic nationalists? What was there at the very beginning which makes them dig so tirelessly into the past? Why do some views of the past seem to be more persuasive than others, and under what conditions? Is it possible to appropriate the past of an alien community? Why do people apply to the past at all, particularly if a historical continuity has been broken? While discussing all these issues, I will test the well-known theories of Ernest Gellner,² Eric Hobsbawm³ and Benedict Anderson⁴ on

1 Philip Kohl, Clare Fawcett, eds., *Nationalism, Politics and the Practice of Archaeology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); Philip L. Kohl, “Nationalism and Archaeology: On the Constructions of Nations and the Reconstructions of the Remote Past,” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 27 (1998), pp. 223-246; Margarita Diaz-Andreu, Timothy C. Champion, eds., *Nationalism and Archaeology in Europe* (London: UCL Press, 1996); John Atkinson, Iain Banks, Jerry O’Sullivan, eds., *Nationalism and Archaeology* (Glasgow: Cruithne Press, 1996).

2 Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983).

the “invented traditions” and “imagined communities” as well as the ideas of their indefatigable opponent Anthony Smith, who argues that modern nations could not emerge “without the heritage of pre-modern ethnic ties (memories, myths, traditions, rituals, symbols, artifacts, etc.).”⁵ Since the myths of ethnic ancestry and descent form the basis of Anthony Smith’s approach,⁶ I will also focus on this issue. I will discuss the regional past; namely, how and under what particular social and political conditions the North Caucasian Turkic-speaking intellectuals were searching for their ethnic origins and constructed their ethnic past in the Soviet and post-Soviet periods, particular the influence of the pendulum-like fluctuations of the politics of both the central and regional authorities. Under intense political pressure, the local historians had to construct the local past with references to the dominant historiography regardless of whether they accepted it or not. This is, of course, by no means a unique case; one can frequently observe this development in both colonial and post-colonial situations.

The Northern Caucasus is well-known for its high linguistic and cultural diversity. There are several distinct linguistic groups in the North-Western and Central Northern Caucasus. The Adyghe peoples (Adygeians, Cherkess, Kabardians) live in the North-Western part of the Northern Caucasus and make up a branch of the indigenous North Caucasian family of languages, which also comprises the Nakh-Daghestani branch located in the South-Eastern part of the Northern Caucasus. The Ossetians who occupy the central part of the Northern Caucasus are

3 Eric Hobsbawm, “Introduction: inventing traditions,” in E. Hobsbawm, T. Ranger, eds., *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), pp. 1-14.

4 Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991).

5 Anthony D. Smith, “The Nation: Invented, Imagined, Reconstructed?” *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 20: 3 (1991), p. 365.

6 Anthony D. Smith, “National Identity and Myths of Ethnic Descent,” *Research in Social Movements, Conflict and Change* 7 (1984), pp. 95-130; idem, “The Myth of the ‘Modern Nation’ and the Myths of Nations,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 11: 1 (1988), pp. 1-26.

Iranian-speakers. The Balkars and Karachay people are Turkic-speakers, and live in the highlands of the North-Western Caucasus. The Karachay people are the dominant indigenous population of the Karachay-Cherkess Republic where they live side by side with the Russians, Cherkess and the Abaza people. By contrast, the Balkars make up a minority in the Kabardino-Balkar Republic where the Kabardians dominate.

1. POLITICAL AUTONOMY AND INDIGENOUS STATUS

A dissolution of the Mountain Autonomous Republic of 1921-1924 brought about critical changes on the map of the Northern Caucasus.⁷ The Republic was replaced by several local autonomies, and the establishment of their precise territorial boundaries was placed on the agenda. Traditionally, the highlanders occupied themselves with transhumance pastoralism and used seasonal pastures owned by their neighbors. Therefore, it was virtually impossible to delimit any ethnic territories there, and their “true borders” were consistently brought into question by people from both sides. Nevertheless, the new ethnically based autonomies had to be defined in territorial terms, and the precise location of the “historical ethnic territories” became a hot issue.⁸ Whereas, in former days, land disputes involved local communities or individual land-owners and were solved in a traditional way, the establishment of ethnically based administrative units and the nationalization of all the land by the Soviet state made those disputes a major political issue; to resolve them one had to appeal to the highest authorities and to refer to the state legislation that was still being developed. This made the conflicts more destructive, and in the early 1920s borderland disputes frequently turned from local quarrels into bloody eth-

⁷ Jane Ormrod, “The North Caucasus: Confederation in Conflict,” in Ian A. Bremmer, Ray Taras, eds., *New States, New Politics: Building the Post-Soviet Nations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 97.

⁸ N.F. Bugai, D.Kh. Mekulov, *Narody i vlast’*: “sotsialisticheskii eksperiment” (20-e gody) (Maikop: Meoty, 1994), p. 116.

nic clashes with human casualties. The Soviet government had to intervene to relax growing tensions.⁹

Therefore, legitimizing the new North Caucasian autonomies became an urgent issue, necessitating reference to cultural and historical perspectives. People had to develop an “historical self-awareness” based on the myths of their ancestors. Many institutes for education and public enlightenment were established in order to develop and promote local histories. In 1927, the North Caucasian Regional Mountain Research Institute was founded in Rostov-on-Don, which, by that time, had become the main political-administrative center in the Northern Caucasus. A well-known North Caucasian political activist, the Karachay-born Umar Aliev, was appointed a director of the Institute. He became one of the first Soviet specialists in North Caucasian history. In his view, the Turkic-speaking Karachay and Balkar people arrived in their present homelands by the following route. He knew that the gorges of the Central Northern Caucasus were occupied by the Iranian-speaking Alans long before the Turks. The Alans were the ancestors of the Ossetians and had developed a very rich architectural tradition including magnificent Christian churches. Many centuries ago the Alans occupied extensive areas of the North Caucasian lowlands and foothills but, later on, were pushed into the highlands by both the Turkic-speaking nomads and, especially, the Mongols. Formerly, certain Alan groups lived in the Upper Kuban’ river valley, but, in Aliev’s view, the area was entirely deserted by the time of the arrival of the early Karachay. He did not know when or from where the Karachay arrived; rather, he relied on the Karachay legend about their movement from the Crimea and related this event to the Crimean Tatars’ raids in the 16th-17th centuries.

Aliev believed that the Kabardians, Svans, Kumyks, Armenians and some other ethnic groups could also have played a part in the formation of the Karachay people. He was not em-

⁹ Ibid., pp. 121-137, 301-317; A.Kh. Daudov, *Gorskaiia ASSR (1921-1924 gg.). Ocherki sotsial’no-ekonomicheskoi istorii* (St. Petersburg: Izdatel’stvo Sankt-Peterburgskogo Universiteta, 1997), pp. 69, 160, 174.

barrassed by the notion of the Karachay being of mixed origin, but viewed this as a special merit; indeed, he said that mixed blood is healthy – that is why the Karachay were among the most fecund people in the North Caucasus. It is worth noting that Aliev viewed the Karachay and Balkars as one and the same ethnic community rather than two closely related groups.¹⁰

Another historian, the first Karachay Marxist, Islam Tambiev, placed special emphasis on the mixed origins of the Karachay people. He argued that they were formed from the Turkic newcomers (Khazars, Kypchaks, and the like) together with some other groups, both native and non-native. Yet, a critical contribution was made by the Turks, and Tambiev presented the Karachay and Balkars as “Turkified Yaphetids.”¹¹

The idea of the Karachay mixed ancestry was originally articulated by the academic N.Ia. Marr in 1920. While calling them the “Mountain Turks,” he emphasized their “Yaphetic origins” and wrote of the “Turkic-speaking Ossetian-Karachay.”¹² In the 1930s, when the concept of the mixed origins of various people was appreciated as an important basis for Soviet internationalism, Marr’s idea was warmly welcomed. Whereas, in the former days, the Balkars had been represented by the Ossetian intellectuals as the “Mountain Tatars” who did a lot of harm to their ancestors,¹³ the Soviet Ossetian scholar G. Kokiev generously included the Balkar and Karachay ancestors into the Alan tribal alliance and maintained that they were already established in the Northern Caucasus by the 9th to 10th centuries.¹⁴

In those days, the future distinguished Ossetian linguist V. I. Abaev emphasized both intensive cultural interactions, espe-

10 U.Zh. Aliev, *Karachai (Karachaevskaia avtonomnaia oblast’): istoriko-etnologicheskii i kul’turno-ekonomicheskii ocherk* (Rostov-na-Donu: Krainatsizdat i Sevkavkniga, 1927), pp. 34-45.

11 I. Tambiev, “Zametki po istorii Balkarii,” *Revoliutsiia i gorets* 1-2 (1933), pp. 58-69.

12 N.Ia. Marr, *Plemennoi sostav naseleniia Kavkaza* (Petrograd: Rossiiskaia Akademiia Nauk, 1920), p. 26.

13 A.N. Kodzaev, *Drevnie osetiny i Osetiia* (Vladikavkaz, 1903), p. 57.

14 G.A. Kokiev, “K voprosu o proiskhozhdenii i vremeni rasseleniia balkartsev i karachaevtsev na nyneshnei territorii,” *Sotsialisticheskaia Kabardino-Balkariia* (January 28-30, 1941).

cially the critical role of the local “Yaphetic” biological and cultural sub-stratum which made a basis for the formation of the Balkars and Karachay, on the one hand, and the Ossetians, on the other.¹⁵ Thus, in the 1930s, the Soviet scholars did their best to discover the local roots of the Balkars and Karachay and to prove their close relations with the Ossetians. This was aimed at demonstrating the early foundations of the Soviet peoples’ friendship based on a common ancestry.

2. BEING DEPRIVED OF BOTH HOMELAND AND THE PAST

The tragic events of fall 1943 – spring 1944, when the Balkars and Karachay found themselves among the persecuted peoples of the North Caucasus, caused an about-face in attitudes. These people were now stigmatized as bandits and traitors and were deported far away from their homelands. Their autonomous units were disbanded, partitioned and granted to the neighboring republics and regions. The former Karachay Autonomous District was assimilated into the lands of the Stavropol’ Province and Georgia. Certain former Balkar areas were turned over to Northern Ossetia and Georgia. Moreover, to erase all memory of the Balkars and Karachay, the decision was made to change local place names.¹⁶

The disappearance of the Balkar and Karachay autonomies from the political map of the USSR was followed by their disappearance from the historical publications as well. All memory of them and their titled peoples was intentionally eliminated. From the end of the 1930s on, Soviet scholars had undertaken preparations for the writing of the first general history of Kabardino-Balkaria. The Second World War delayed these plans, and

15 V.I. Abaev, “Obshchie elementy v iazyke osetin, balkartsev i karachaevtsev,” *Iazyk i myshlenie* 1 (Leningrad: Akademiia Nauk SSSR, 1933), pp. 71-89.

16 D.V. Shabaev, *Pravda o vyselenii balkartsev* (Nal’chik: El’brus, 1994), pp. 6, 60-66; N.F. Bugai, A.M. Gonov, *Kavkaz: narody v eshelonakh* (Moskva: Insan, 1998), pp. 127-128, 197-198, 208-209; I.M. Shamanov, B.A. Tambieva, L.O. Abrekova, *Nakazany po natsional’nomu priznaku* (Cherkessk: KChF MOSU, 1990), pp. 17-18.

the deportation of the Balkars and Karachay led to their cancellation. Scholars only returned to the study of Balkaria and Karachay in 1958-1959.

Between 1944 and 1957, scholars had to keep silent about the deported peoples; even their names were taboo. Yet, certain researchers went even further and gave them unfavorable coverage. Some authors maintained that the Balkar and Karachay ancestors (they were once again called the “Mountain Tatars”) arrived in the Northern Caucasus as late as the 16th-17th centuries, forced out the previous inhabitants and occupied their lands. In 1953, the Chair of the Department of Archaeology of the Kabardian Research Institute, the first Kabardian archaeologist P. G. Akritas, argued that the Turkic-speaking newcomers arrived in the highlands of the Central North Caucasus as a result of the intrigues of the Ottoman Empire. He maintained that the Ottoman agents had stirred up internal strife between the Circassian princes and used the subsequent weakening of their authority to resettle many Tatar families from the Crimea. Thus, the Balkars and Karachay became “Tatars,” and their resettlement became the outcome of the aggressive “Turkish policy” aimed at the Caucasian peoples and the Russians.¹⁷ In the 1950s, the accusation that the Balkar and Karachay ancestors had close ties with the Ottoman Empire and the Crimean Khanate sounded both insulting and unsafe because it alluded to the anti-Soviet aspirations of the Balkar nationalists to establish independent Turkic states in the Crimea and in the Caucasus under Nazi protection at the time of the Second World War.

In 1949, a well-known Leningrad ethnographer L. I. Lavrov gave a talk at the Conference on the Caucasian ethnography held by the Institute of History in Tbilisi, Georgia. He claimed that, in the past, the Georgian territory had not been restricted to Transcaucasia. He argued that, in earlier days, the Svans (one of the Georgian tribes) lived in the Upper Kuban’ river valley and in the Baksan gorge where the Turks arrived only at the turn of the 18th century. Nevertheless, he agreed that the Turks may have

17 P.G. Akritas, “Drevneishee nazvanie gory Beshtau,” *Sbornik po istorii Kabardy* 3 (Nal’chik, 1954), pp. 210-214.

already occupied the neighboring Cherek gorge by the 14th-15th centuries.¹⁸

At the same time, the Georgian geographer G. Zardalishvili made a concerted effort to discover the early Svan place names in the Karachay territory that had been granted to Georgia. He argued that the area in question had been long influenced by the Svans as they regularly collected taxes from both the Karachay and Kabardians who used pastures along the Teberda river and in the Upper Kuban' river valley. He concluded that the contemporary Klukhory area (the former Karachay territory) "was in former days within the ethnogeographical boundaries of Georgia."¹⁹

All the aforementioned arguments had evident political connotations associated with the transfer of the former Balkar and Karachay territories to the neighboring republics. Nowadays, the Balkar and Karachay authors do believe that the aspirations of Beria and Stalin to extend the Georgian boundaries northwards was one of the main reasons for the deportation of the North Caucasian peoples. This assumption was confirmed by Nikita S. Khrushchev at the meeting with the Karachay delegation in July 1956.²⁰

The arguments in question not only presented the Balkars and the Karachay as late arrivals, but mobilized history to legitimate the transfer of land to those whose ancestors might have lived there in earlier periods. Moreover, the Tatar identity im-

18 L.I. Lavrov, "Rasselenie svanov na Severnom Kavkaze do 19 veka," *Kratkie soobshcheniia Instituta etnografii* 10 (1950), p. 82.

19 G. Zardalishvili, "K ustanovleniiu nekotorykh geograficheskikh naimenovaniy Klukhorskogo raiona," *Izvestiia Vsesoiuznogo geograficheskogo obshchestva* 84: 3 (1952), pp. 310-312.

20 I.I. Aliev et al., eds., *Karachaevtsy. Vyselenie i vozvrashchenie* (Cherkessk: PUL, 1993), pp. 14-15; Shabaev, *Pravda o vyselenii balkartsev*, pp. 60-64, 240; R.S. Tebuev, "Deportatsiia karachaevtsev: prichiny i posledstviia," in R.S. Tebuev, ed., *Deportatsiia karachaevtsev: dokumenty rasskazyvaiut* (Cherkessk: Karachaevo-Cherkesskii institut gumanitarnykh issledovaniy pri pravitel'stve KChR, 1997), pp. 25-31; Shamanov, Tambieva, Abrekova, *Nakazany po natsional'nomu priznaku*, pp. 28, 90; A.D. Koichuev, *Karachaevskaia Avtonomnaia Oblast' v gody Velikoi Otechestvennoi voiny* (Rostov-na-Donu: Izdatel'stvo Rostovskogo Gosudarstvennogo Pedagogicheskogo Instituta, 1998), p. 449.

posed on both the Balkars and Karachay by some scholars tended to associate them with both the negative images of the Ottoman Empire and the Crimean Khanate, which had caused so much harm to Russia for centuries, and of the Crimean Tatars who were also exiled, yet, in contrast to the North Caucasians, were denied rehabilitation in 1956-1957. This explains why the identification of the Balkars and Karachay with Tatar descendants and the “Turkish tribes”²¹ brought about no negative political outcome in the 1930s, but did after 1944. It is also the reason why, after 1957, Balkar and Karachay scholars did their best to find more appropriate ancestors for their own ethnic groups. They were evidently irritated with views that related their origins to the Tatar-Turkish intrigues and dated their arrival in the North Caucasus at a relatively late period. They were upset with Lavrov’s usage of the term “Turkic-speaking tribes” instead of “Balkars.” For them, it was an obvious assault on their identity, and an attempt to erase them from the list of Soviet peoples.²² Indeed, this was in accord with the fact that, at the time of their exile, official documents avoided referring to the Balkars as “the people.”²³

3. THE QUEST FOR A NEW GENEALOGY

In 1956-1957, the Balkars and Karachay were rehabilitated. They were permitted to return to the Northern Caucasus, and their autonomies were restored to a certain extent.²⁴ From that time onwards, they did their best, first, to isolate themselves from the Crimean Tatars; second, to discover prestigious and, if possible, autochthonous ancestors in the Northern Caucasus; and third, to provide those ancestors with the Turkic language. Aware

21 N.P. Tul’chinskii, “Piat’ gorskikh obshchestv Kabardy,” *Terskii sbornik* 5 (1903), p. 164; V.P. Pozhidaev, *Gortsy Severnogo Kavkaza* (Moskva, Leningrad: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel’stvo, 1926), p. 11; A. Ladyzhenskii, “Kabardintsy i balkartsy,” *Vestnik znaniia* 8 (1937), p. 38.

22 S. Babaev, Shabaev, “Za marksistsko-leninskoe osveshchenie istorii balkarskogo naroda,” *Kabardino-Balkarskaia pravda* (April 5, 1959), p. 3; D.V. Shabaev, *Pravda o vyselenii balkartsev*, pp. 236-240.

23 Ibid., p. 286.

24 Ibid., pp. 277-284; Bugai, Gonov, *Kavkaz*, pp. 286-303.

of the complexity of the problem, the Balkar and Karachay scholars began with the first two points. In 1957, a Karachay linguist and historian, a director of the Karachaevo-Cherkess Pedagogical Institute, Kh. O. Laipanov, who had taken part in the Karachay studies prior to the Second World War, published a book on Karachay and Balkar history. He agreed that the Upper Kuban' river valley was occupied by the Ossetian ancestors in the early medieval period. He had no doubts that in those days the lands of Karachay and Balkaria made up a part of the Ossetian language realm and that the Karachay and Balkar ancestors were greatly influenced by that fact. He emphasized close cultural and linguistic relationships between them and the Ossetian ancestors and came to the conclusion that all these groups were formed "within the Alan-Yass tribal alliance." Thus, he said, they had lived there from pre-Mongol times, making the Karachay and Balkars "indigenous inhabitants of both the Kuban' river basin and the Upper Terek river valley."²⁵ To reconcile the Iranian language of the Ossetians with the Turkic languages of the Karachay and Balkars, Laipanov referred to Marr's idea of the heterogeneous composition of the contemporary peoples: he did not know when the Turkic-speaking ancestors of the Karachay and Balkars arrived in the Northern Caucasus, but he listed the Khazars, the Bulgars, the Kypchaks and even "what remained of Timur's army" among them.²⁶

Laipanov's concept was evidently inconsistent and could hardly satisfy the Karachay and Balkars who, after all the recent heavy losses and hardship, were anxious to have authentic Turkic-speaking ancestors whose cultural distinctions separated them from all the neighboring ethnic groups, especially the Ossetians. Nevertheless, while he depicted the Turkic-speaking ancestors as the dominant agent in the Karachay and Balkar ethnogenesis, they were still newcomers and could not claim indigenous status. The problem with those ancestors who origi-

25 Kh.O. Laipanov, *K istorii karachaevtsev i balkartsev* (Cherkessk: Karachaevo-Cherkesskoe knizhnoe izdatel'stvo, 1957), pp. 15-16, 49-51.

26 Ibid., pp. 9-11, 18-20, 23-24.

nated from the “Alan-Yass tribal alliance” was that they were suspiciously close to the “Turkified Ossetians” and could not meet the demands of the Karachay and Balkars. It is worth noting that both linguistic and ethnographic studies pointed to a very strong Alan sub-stratum in the Karachay and Balkar ethnogenesis.²⁷ These facts were constantly pointed to by the Ossetian researchers. Yet, the Turkic-speaking authors could not share this view because they did not want to be treated as Ossetian “younger brothers,” and they made great efforts to push the Turkic-speaking tradition in the Northern Caucasus back as far as possible. This trend manifested itself at the conference on the Balkar and Karachay origins held in Nal’chik on June 22-26, 1959.

The conference was organized through the initiative of the Kabardino-Balkaria Research Institute for the simple reason that a recently published volume “History of Kabarda” (1957) had become out of date immediately after the rehabilitation of the Karachay and Balkars. One had to re-write it entirely, and the local scholars were ordered to prepare a general “History of Kabardino-Balkaria” in two volumes. Yet, before that, one had to clarify the problem of the Karachay and Balkar origins.

A great many participants at the conference agreed that the Iranian-speaking Alans and the Turkic-speaking Bulgars and Kypchaks made major contributions to the formation of the Balkars and Karachay. Yet, the relative contributions of the various groups and the date of the Turkification of the North Caucasian indigenes remained a point of controversy. The “free-value” scholars from elsewhere demonstrated an aspiration to recognize all the main agents of the ethnogenetic process and

27 Abaev, “Obshchie elementy...”; idem, *Osetinskii iazyk i folklor* (Moskva, Leningrad: Akademia Nauk SSSR, 1949), pp. 45-47, 249, 271-290; idem, “Ob alanskom substrate v balkaro-karachaevskom iazyke,” in I.V. Treskov, ed., *O proiskhozhdenii balkartsev i karachaevtsev* (Nal’chik: Kabardino-Balkarskoe knizhnoe izdatel’stvo, 1960), pp. 127-134; B.A. Kaloiev, “Osetino-balkarskie etnograficheskie paralleli,” *Sovetskaiia etnografiia* 3 (1972), pp. 20-30; L.I. Lavrov, “Karachai i Balkariia do 30-kh godov 19 veka,” in V.K. Gardanov, ed., *Kavkazskii etnograficheskii sbornik* 4 (Moskva: Nauka, 1969), pp. 68-70.

were unwilling to privilege any of them. On their side, the Karachay and Balkar researchers and intellectuals manifested a different trend. First, although they recognized that their own ethnic groups were formed on a heterogeneous basis, they insisted that the Turkic-speaking tribes made up their core. Second, they did their best to push the Turkic arrival in the Northern Caucasus as far back as the early middle ages, and in this regard the early medieval Bulgars looked more promising than the Kypchaks who arrived much later. Third, they did not fail to incorporate the indigenous North Caucasian ancestors of the pre-Turkic times; indeed, those ancestors provided the only ground on which to claim an aboriginal status in absolute terms. Interestingly, despite all the differences in their approaches, the conference participants respected the Karachay and Balkar desires and, in their final resolution, called the “Black Bulgars” (one of the early medieval Bulgar tribes) the major Turkic-speaking agent in the Karachay and Balkar ethnogenesis.²⁸ This resolution played an important positive role in the provision of the Karachay and Balkars with indigenous ancestors; it emphasized that, despite the complexity of the ethnogenetic process which, in different periods, included different ethnic elements, the formation of the Karachay and Balkars took place within the Northern Caucasus. Since then, this approach has been picked up by many local scholars and still survives to this day.

At the same time, a more radical hypothesis was put forward at the conference. Its author, the Karachay-born philologist U.B. Aliev, argued that the Karachay and Balkar ancestors were not only Alans in their origins but also Turkic-speakers from the very beginning. To overcome the linguistic problems arising from his assumption, Aliev suggested the following solution: if the Alans were ethnically homogeneous, one could identify the Karachay and Balkar ancestors with the entire Alan community; if, in reverse, they were heterogeneous, then one had to identify the Karachay and Balkar ancestors with the lead-

28 “Reshenie sessii,” in Treskov, ed., *O proiskhozhdenii balkartsev i karachaevtsev*, pp. 310-311.

ing Alan tribe which granted its name to the entire Alan tribal alliance.²⁹ He recognized that, after the Turkic-speaking people arrived in the highlands, they mixed there with the earlier inhabitants. But his interpretation of this process was different from the Ossetian one; for him, the main ethnogenetic agent was the numerically small Turkic-speaking group which was assimilated into the indigenes, rather than the natives who shifted to the Turkic language.³⁰ In the early 1960s, Aliev and his followers published their hypothesis in the Karachay-language daily thus making it accessible to the general public.³¹

Obviously, this hypothesis was developed with certain political aims. First, while stressing a locally based formation of the Karachay and Balkar people, it strove to convert them into indigenes in order to legitimate their claim to political sovereignty. Second, while pointing to their cultural and linguistic distinctions and isolating them from the neighboring ethnic groups, it built up historical and cultural grounds for this claim. Third, while providing their ancestors with a primordial Turkic speech, it helped to reject all the possible territorial claims of the neighboring aliens (a memory of the disbanding and partition of their own autonomies in 1944-1956 was still alive among the Karachay and Balkars). Fourth, the aspiration to isolate themselves from other Turkic peoples was rooted in the fear of accu-

29 U.B. Aliev, "Vystuplenie," in I.V. Treskov, ed., *O proiskhozhdenii balkartsev i karachayevtsev*, p. 250.

30 Ibid., pp. 244-245.

31 U.B. Aliev, K.T. Laipanov, M.A. Khabichev, A.D. Bauchiev, "Alanla, Alania?" *Leninni bairag* 'y 79 (April 20, 1963); Sh.Kh. Akbaev, "Alanla, Alania?" *Leninni bairag* 'y 80 (April 21, 1963). For a criticism see V.A. Kuznetsov, "Arkheologiya i proiskhozhdenie karachayevtsev i balkartsev," *Leninni bairag* 'y 121 (1963); idem, "Alany i tiurki v verkhoviiakh Kubani," in G.Kh. Mambetov, I.M. Chechenov, eds., *Arkheologo-etnograficheskii sbornik 1* (Nal'chik: El'brus, 1974), pp. 77-85; V.A. Kuznetsov, I.M. Chechenov, *Istoriia i natsional'noe samosoznanie* (Vladikavkaz: Severo-Osetinskii Institut gumanitarnykh i sotsial'nykh issledovaniy, 2000), p. 93; E.P. Alekseeva, "Pamiatniki meotskoi i sarmato-alanskoi kul'tury Karachaevo-Cherkessii," *Trudy Karachaevo-Cherkesskogo Nauchno-Issledovatel'skogo Instituta Istorii, Iazyka i Literatury 5: Seria istoricheskaya* (Stavropol': Stavropol'skoe knizhnoe izdatel'stvo, 1966), pp. 240-247.

sations of pan-Turkism,³² which was still treated by the Soviet ideologists as a grave threat to Soviet unity, especially because it was by no means dead in Turkey, and Soviet scholars were obliged to combat it.

All these ideas were shared by many Karachay and Balkar scholars from the very late 1950s onwards. They were closely related to the collective memory of deportation and served as an ideological response to the enormous injustice inflicted by the Stalinist regime. Yet, in the collaboratively produced volumes which were especially strictly censored by the authorities, all these ideas were represented in a more moderate form than in individual publications. Moreover, in the 1960s and 1970s, a practice was introduced by which all the major projects in the early history and prehistory of Kabardino-Balkaria and Karachaevo-Cherkessia, especially those concerning the Karachay and Balkar origins, were to be carried out by non-native (usually ethnic Russian) scholars.

One of the main ideas inherent in the ethnogenetic schemes developed by the Balkar and Karachay specialists after 1957 was the attempt to push their ancestors' arrival in the North Caucasus as far back into the past as possible to support claims of their indigenous origins. This by no means went unnoticed by the Russian scholars who, from time to time, spoke against the trend to extreme autochthonism.³³ This struggle was doomed to failure for the simple reason that the peculiar political-administrative structure of the USSR itself made the titular ethnic groups (nationalities) demonstrate their real or fictive indigenous origins. A double identity was not appreciated, especially for titular nationalities. Since, but for rare exceptions, an ethnicity was

32 Alexandre Bennigsen, Marie Broxup, *The Islamic Threat to the Soviet State* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1983), pp. 26-54, 77-87.

33 For example, see E.I. Krupnov, *O chem govoriat pamiatniki material'noi kul'tury Checheno-Ingushskoi ASSR* (Groznyi: Checheno-Ingushskoe knizhnoe izdatel'stvo, 1961), p. 44; Lavrov, "Karachay i Balkariia...", p. 67; V.A. Kuznetsov, "K istorii arkheologicheskogo izucheniia Kabardino-Balkarii," in I.M. Chechenov, ed., *Arkheologiya i voprosy drevnei istorii Kabardino-Balkarii* (Nal'chik: Kabardino-Balkarskii Institut Istarii, Filologii i Ekonomiki, 1980), p. 153.

officially treated as linguistically-based, one had to search for an unbroken linguistic continuity between the ancestors and the descendants. Hence, the aspiration of the Karachay and Balkar scholars, as well as individual amateur authors, to provide the Alans with a Turkic language – the respective articles were highly welcomed by both the local and the Azerbaijani mass media.³⁴

To a certain extent the Turkic revisionism served to advance science. It encouraged scholars to pay more attention to the Turkic traces in the early history of the Northern Caucasus, and the discoveries did not keep them waiting. From 1960 onwards, North Caucasian archaeologists began to bring to light Turkic runic inscriptions undoubtedly related to early medieval Bulgar activity and dated somewhere between the 8th and 10th centuries. It became obvious that at that time both the Iranian-speaking Alans and the Turkic-speaking Bulgars lived side by side in the Upper Kuban' river valley. They established close intercultural contacts; yet, they developed their own writing systems based on runes among the Bulgars, and the Greek alphabet among the Alans.³⁵ Thus, due to the archaeological studies one could trace the process of the Turkification of the Alans earlier pointed to by V. I. Abaev; it became possible to locate it both in time (very late 1st – very early 2nd Millennium) and space (between the Upper Laba and Upper Baksan rivers; i.e., in Western Alania).

4. A "GUILT COMPLEX" AND THE "TURKIC-SPEAKING ALANS"

In the meantime, in the 1970s and early 1980s, the Stavropol' Province authorities continued to foster the idea of the "sin of the Karachay people" based on faked documents forged by the KGB. These ideas, supported by the leading Soviet ideologist M.A. Suslov, were articulated at regional Communist Party

³⁴ For more on Azeri revisionism see Victor A. Shnirelman, *The Value of the Past: Myths, Identity and Politics in Transcaucasia* (Osaka: National Museum of Ethnology, 2001), pp. 127-138.

³⁵ V.A. Kuznetsov, "Nadpisi Khumarinskogo gorodishcha," *Sovietskaia arkheologiia* 1 (1963), pp. 298-305; idem, "Alany i tiurki," pp. 89-93.

Meetings and disseminated by the local mass media. Most of the Karachay intellectuals took this as an obvious state-sponsored attempt to justify the Karachay deportation in 1943. Moreover, the Karachay people suffered from various forms of discrimination from the 1960s to 1980s. Their access to prestigious positions on administrative boards and in the Communist Party headquarters was severely restricted; they had difficulties gaining employment in the police service; their enrollment into the Communist Party was low; they were permanently shadowed by the police; and their aspirations to return to where they lived before exile met with permanent resistance from the authorities. By contrast, non-native functionaries, who were unaware of local conditions and had no experience in dealing with local people, were often appointed to key administrative positions. During the period of deportation, many Karachay lands were deserted, and the local pastoral economy was in a decline. Nevertheless, the Karachay were allocated no substantial funds to restore their former economic infrastructure. More often than not, they did not receive permission to rebuild their old villages and met with administrative restrictions for the development of traditional crafts, especially wool weaving. Finally, until the very late 1980s, the Karachay had no access to the full version of the Act of January 9, 1957, under which they were rehabilitated.³⁶ One could hear similar complaints from the Balkars who experienced similar pressures.³⁷

The inhospitable environment made the Karachay and Balkars especially sensitive towards statements that their ancestors arrived in the Northern Caucasus relatively late in history.³⁸ That is why it seemed so important to the Karachay and Balkar scholars to assert the autochthonous status of their remote ancestors, and the idea of the primordial Turkic-speaking

36 Aliev et al., eds., *Karachaevtsy*, pp. 31-42; Ormrod, "The North Caucasus," p. 112.

37 I.L. Babich, ed., *Etnopoliticheskaia situatsiia v Kabardino-Balkarii 2* (Moskva: TsIMO IAE, 1994), pp. 296-300; "Ot redaktsii," *Balkarskii Forum*, Spetsvypusk (January, 1997); Ormrod, "The North Caucasus," p. 110.

38 Aliev et al., eds., *Karachaevtsy*, p. 30.

Alans never died. The Karachay and Balkars were upset with both the dated term “the Tatarized Ossetians” used by the pre-revolutionary authors, and the Soviet scholars’ attempts to represent their ancestors as indigenes who shifted to some Turkic language. All of that reminded them of the bitter years of deportation, and they made great efforts to expunge the unpleasant image. They could not help but be indignant at these attempts to erase them from history, and complained that the Soviet historians were not only disinterested in their history but, sometimes, “intentionally distorted” (whether really or putatively) their past in the 1940s-1950s and even later.³⁹

Therefore, over the decades, the Balkar and Karachay scholars, following U. B. Aliev, ascribed a Turkic language to the Alans or, at least, the most powerful tribe of the Alan alliance, suggesting that their descendants, the Balkars and Karachay, had been continuously loyal to their mother tongue. They pointed to their own very archaic lexicon not found in other Turkic languages as well as to the fact that their neighbors still called them the “Alani” (Megrelians) or “Assy” (Ossetians).⁴⁰ This approach,

39 I.M. Miziev, *Srednevekovye bashni i sklepy Balkarii i Karachaia (13-18 vv.)* (Nal’chik: El’brus, 1970), p. 8; idem, *Istoriia riadom* (Nal’chik: El’brus, 1990), pp. 135-136; K.T. Laipanov, I.M. Miziev, *O proiskhozhdenii tiurkskikh narodov* (Cherkessk: PUL, 1993), pp. 4-7, 13.

40 For example, see K.T. Laipanov “O tiurkskom elemente v etnogeneze osetin,” in Kh.S. Cherdzhiev, ed., *Proiskhozhdenie osetinskogo naroda* (Ordzhonikidze: Severo-Osetinskoe knizhnoe izdatel’stvo, 1967), pp. 207-214; idem, “Ob alanskom proiskhozhdenii karachaevo-balkartsev,” *Karachaevo-Balkarskii mir* 7 (August 1995); A.Zh. Budaev, “Skifobalkarskie leksicheskie skhozhdeniia,” *Vestnik Kabardino-Balkarskogo Nauchno-Issledovatel’skogo Instituta* 2 (Nal’chik, 1970); Kh.-M.I. Khadzhiyev, *Ocherki kabardino-balkarskoi leksikologii* (Cherkessk: Stavropol’skoe knizhnoe izdatel’stvo, 1970), pp. 6-14; M.A. Khabichev, *Vzaimovliianie iazykov narodov Zapadnogo Kavkaza* (Cherkessk: Stavropol’skoe knizhnoe izdatel’stvo, 1980), pp. 147-148; idem, “Slovoobrazovatel’nyi i etimologicheskii analiz nekotorykh karachaevskikh etnonimov,” in Khabichev, ed., *Aktual’nye problemy karachaevo-balkarskogo i nogaiskogo iazykov* (Stavropol’: SGPI, 1981), pp. 31-50; idem, *K gidronimike Karachaia i Balkarii* (Nal’chik: El’brus, 1982), p. 16; A.M. Bairamkulov, “Alano-asskie etnicheskie nazvaniia, familii i imena,” in M.A. Khabichev, ed., *Aktual’nye problemy...*, pp. 76-87; idem,

which was shared by certain Karachay and Balkar philologists, historians and archaeologists, might be called a moderate revisionism. Its proponents argued that the Alans were a heterogeneous tribal alliance which comprised both Turkic- and the Iranian-speaking groups. Thus, the Turkic-speaking ancestors of the Karachay and Balkars appeared on the North Caucasian historical scene in the Alan period; i.e., long before the Kypchaks arrived.

The revisionist concept brought about a re-interpretation of the Karachay legend of the arrival of the Karachay ancestor, the hero Karcha, to the Northern Caucasus from the Crimea. The Karachay writer M. Batchaev presented Karcha as a descendant of those Alans who were captured and forcibly resettled to the Crimea after they have been defeated by the Mongols. He imaginatively depicted Karcha as though the hero was suffering from nostalgia, and his movement to the Northern Caucasus was represented as a long-desired return to the homeland which had nothing to do with any intrigues of the Crimean Khans.⁴¹

5. POST-SOVIET ETHNOPOLITICS AND CONFLICTS

Beginning in the late 1980s, the Karachay and Balkar views of ethnogenesis became more radical and more ethnocentric. There were two reasons for this – one internal and the other external. First, the local scholars enjoyed more freedom and felt less-obliged towards the federal center, and Moscow and

K istorii alanskoi onomastiki i toponimiki (Cherkessk: Karachaevo-Cherkesskoe respublikanskoe knizhnoe izdatel'stvo, 1995); S.Ia. Baichorov, "Terminy 'karachai' i 'as' v karachaevo-balkarskoi etnonimii," in A.K. Shagirov, ed., *Aktual'nye voprosy leksiki i grammatiki iazykov narodov Karachaevo-Cherkessii* (Cherkessk: Karachaevo-Cherkesskii Nauchno-Issledovatel'skii Institut Istorii, Filologii i Ekonomiki, 1987), pp. 46-57; idem, "K etnogenezu karachaevo-balkarskogo naroda po dannym iazyka i epigrafiki," in I.Kh. Akhmatov, ed., *Problemy istorii karachaevo-balkarskogo i nogaiskogo iazykov* (Cherkessk: Karachaevo-Cherkesskii Nauchno-Issledovatel'skii Institut Istorii, Filologii i Ekonomiki, 1989), pp. 6-8.

41 M. Batchaev, Ia.L. Stefaneeva, *Gory i narty: kavkazskie legendy* (Stavropol': Stavropol'skoe knizhnoe izdatel'stvo, 1969), pp. 83-95.

Leningrad scholarship lost respect. Second, people realized their own political interests in the results of the rapid and deep socio-political transformations, and the republics witnessed a struggle for power between various ethnocratic elites. Tensions between the Balkar minority and the Kabardian majority increased in Kabardino-Balkaria, and the relationship between the Karachay majority and the Cherkess minority deteriorated in Karachaevo-Cherkessia. The legitimization of political claims with reference to the remote past became a hot issue, and a beneficial ancestry was in great demand. Besides the aforementioned lines of confrontation, an old symbolic struggle with the Ossetians for the Alan heritage was also part of the agenda.

According to the local specialists, under a land shortage, the key element of the contemporary politics of ethnicity in the Northern Caucasus is the idea of clear boundaries between ethnic territories, and a territorial basis for identity is highly exaggerated.⁴² This is an outcome of the Soviet nationality policy which established close relationships between ethnicity and administrative territorial units. Indeed, there were but blurred boundaries between the Kabardians and Balkars in the pre-Soviet days when they maintained a symbiotic relationship. The Balkar herdsmen descended the hills with their herds and used the Kabardian-owned pastures, and the Kabardians could bring their horses high into the Balkar highlands.⁴³ It is worth noting that such symbiotic relationships were fairly common with traditional farmers and pastoralists who basically shared local natural resources. Their joint exploitation of those resources was regulated by custom, and occasional conflicts were resolved in a traditional way through negotiations between local lords. Any attempts to establish clear demarcation of ethnic territories un-

42 A.Kh. Borov, Kh.M. Dumanov, V.Kh. Kazharov, *Sovremennaiia gosudarstvennost' Kabardino-Balkarii: istoki, puti stanovleniia, problemy* (Nal'chik: El'-Fa, 1999), p. 72.

43 I.M. Miziev, "Istoriia karachaevo-balkarskogo naroda s drevneishikh vremen do prisoedineniia k Rossii," *As-Alan* 1 (1998), pp. 73-75; T.Kh. Kумыков, I.M. Miziev, eds., *Istoriia Kabardino-Balkarii. Uchebnoe posobie dlia srednei shkoly* (Nal'chik: El'brus, 1995), pp. 108-109.

der these conditions would bring about destructive ethnic conflicts.

In the 1990s, both Kabardino-Balkaria and Karachaevo-Cherkessia were threatened with this sort of conflict. Being aware of their minority status and with clear memories of state-sponsored injustice, the Balkar nationalists were very suspicious of liberal democracy and expected nothing but further restriction of their political rights. The Balkar ethno-national movement “Tere” identified the political rehabilitation of the Balkar people with the establishment of a territorially based Balkar autonomy within the boundaries of Balkaria as had existed before March 1944; i.e., before the deportation.⁴⁴ The Kabardians took the Balkar territorial project as a step towards Balkar political sovereignty and, hence, an inadmissible shrinkage of their own territory. Thus, the separation of Balkaria as an autonomous republic would inevitably entail a painful territorial dispute which, for more than 150 years, had spoiled relationships between the ethnic groups. The wealthiest pastoralists in the Northern Caucasus, the Balkar highlanders, were greatly interested in the seasonal spring and fall pastures that were situated at the lower altitudes, and they rented them from the Kabardians and Svans.⁴⁵ An attempt to make a clear demarcation between the Balkar and Kabardian territories failed in 1863,⁴⁶ and the Balkar highlanders kept resettling along the lower slopes of the hills. In the 1920s, this downward movement was justified and protected by the Soviet authorities’ provoking enmity from the Kabardians.⁴⁷ A forcible deportation of the Balkars in 1944 ag-

44 Babich, ed., *Etnopoliticheskaia situatsiia...*, p. 176; A. Atabiev, “O pravde i o granitsakh,” in I.L. Babich, ed., *Etnopoliticheskaia situatsiia...*, p. 197.

45 Tul’chinskii, “Piat’ gorskikh obshchestv...,” pp. 181, 185-186; M.K. Abaev, *Balkaria. Istoricheskii ocherk* (Nal’chik: El’brus, 1992), pp. 25, 35-36.

46 Ch.E. Kardanov, *Iz istorii territorial’nykh otnoshenii Kabardy i Balkarii* (Nal’chik: El’-Fa, 1993), pp. 8-11.

47 I.L. Babich, “Sootnoshenie politicheskoi, religioznoi i etnicheskoi identichnosti v kabardino-balkarskom obshchestve,” in M. Olcott, A. Malashenko, eds., *Faktor etnokontsefessional’noi samobytnosti v postsovetском obshchestve* (Moskva: Carnegie Center, 1998), pp. 148-149.

gravated the situation and made it especially complex. Indeed, after their return in 1957, many Balkars settled down outside their traditional highland territory, and many mixed Kabardian-Balkar communities came into being.

Until recently, all of this brought about no difficulties; the Kabardians and Balkars lived in peace and friendship, and many intermarriages were contracted. Yet, after the Balkar nationalists demanded the establishment of the Republic of Balkaria in December 1991, the situation changed drastically. Although the Balkar leaders made the assurance that “there were no territorial claims against each other between the Balkars and Kabardians,”⁴⁸ territorial disputes became inevitable, and both sides took up uncompromising positions.⁴⁹ Opponents called for respect for “historic boundaries” between Kabarda and Balkaria. Yet, since there were no well-established territorial boundaries and any such boundaries varied according to historic period, it was unclear as to which particular boundary should be treated as the “historic” one. At the same time, it is much easier for the Kabardians than for the Balkars to advocate their claims. Because of their territorial expansion in the 14th to the 16th centuries, the Kabardians became a dominant power in the Northern Caucasus before the region was annexed by the Russian Empire. In general, the period of their dominance is well-illuminated by historical documents, and this makes the Balkar aspirations to ground their own claims in reference to historical sources hopeless.

To confirm their claims, the Kabardians referred to the Demarcation Act elaborated by a special State Committee in 1863.⁵⁰ This document was of great importance to them because, first, its implementation could help them to regain extensive lands which they had lost over the last hundred years or so, and, second, it served as a highly reliable legal document during a period, post-perestroika, when all Soviet legal acts were rapidly losing their credibility.

48 “Komu meshaet respublika Balkariia,” *Balkarskii Forum* 10 (December 1991), p. 1.

49 Kardanov, *Iz istorii territorial'nykh...*, p. 25.

50 Iu.A. Kalmykov, *Povoroty sud'by* (Moskva: Spark, 1996), p. 67.

Meanwhile, by the mid-1990s, the Republican authorities had consolidated their power and refused to fulfil their promises of early 1992, including the establishment of a Balkar Republic. Balkar political movements and organizations, which continued to claim political sovereignty, were accused of extremism and dissolved in November 1996. With respect to the territorial rehabilitation of the Balkars, only two of the four pre-1944 regions were restored. All of this was met with dissatisfaction and frustration by the Balkar elite, and they felt that they had lost their share of power as Kabardino-Balkaria became a “real Kabarda” where all positions of power were secured for Kabardians.⁵¹

The political process in Karachaevo-Cherkessia was no less dramatic. The Karachay national movement held an Extraordinary Congress of the Karachay people in July 1991 and declared a restoration of the sovereign Republic of Karachay within the 1943 borders. This resulted in a chain reaction of similar claims by various other ethnic groups, and the republic was on the verge of grave ethnic conflicts threatening disastrous consequences.

6. TURKIFICATION OF THE EARLY PAST

As part of this wave of critical political transformations, a radical wing of the revisionist school manifested itself in the late 1980s and 1990s. It was encouraged by the aspirations of Karachay and Balkar intellectuals to impose an “Alan” identity upon their ethnic groups in the hope that this might promote their unity. Whereas the moderate revisionists were satisfied with the division of the Alans into Iranian-speaking and Turkic-speaking groups, the radical revisionists did their best to cleanse the early history of both the Northern Caucasus and the Eurasian steppes of Iranian-speakers and Indo-Europeans in general. The Balkar archaeologist from Nal’chik, Igor M. Miziev (1940-1997), made the most critical contribution to this development. At an academic conference in Ordzhonikidze (modern

51 R.S. Jappuev, *A lecture in the Carnegie Center* (July 13, 1999, Moscow) [Author’s archive].

Vladikavkaz) in 1971, he had tried to advocate the idea of the popularity of the Turkic language among some of the Alans,⁵² but was met with a bitter response from one of the major Soviet specialist.⁵³ Miziev was by no means embarrassed by that, and began to develop his own revisionist approach.

He started with a sharp criticism of the theory which identified the population of the East European steppe belt of the Bronze and Early Iron Age with Indo-Iranian and Iranian linguistic groups. While rejecting this view shared by most of the Soviet archaeologists, he accused it of imperialism, Eurocentrism and an intentional downgrading of the Asian and, in particular, Turkic peoples' historical achievements as it isolated them from early cultures and civilizations built by their ancestors.⁵⁴ Even before he had conducted any special studies, Miziev already believed in the extremely deep prehistoric roots of both the Turkic language and culture, and he made a tremendous effort to confirm this belief.

He identified the Sumerians with the Turks and ascribed to the latter the development of a great many Bronze and Iron Age cultures from the North Caucasian Maikop culture of the 3rd Millennium B. C. to the Altaic Pazyryk culture of the 1st Millennium B. C. In this way, all the Scythians, Sarmatians and Alans turned out to be Turks. In Miziev's view, even the earliest "Kurgan culture" of the Chalcolithic and Early Bronze Age was built up by the Turkic-speakers: "The earliest history of the proto-Turkic and proto-Altaic tribes began with the appearance

52 Miziev, "Vystuplenie," in V.A. Kuznetsov, ed., *Materialy po arkheologii i drevnei istorii Severnoi Osetii* 3 (Ordzhonikidze: Severo-Osetinskii Nauchno-Issledovatel'skii Institut, 1975), pp. 95-96, 107.

53 I.G. Aliev, "Vystuplenie," in Kuznetsov, ed., *Materialy po arkheologii...*, pp. 106-107. For that see Kuznetsov, Chechenov, *Istoriia i natsional'noe samosoznanie*, p. 94.

54 I.M. Miziev, *Istoriia riadom*, pp. 51, 124; idem, *Ocherki istorii i kul'tury Balkarii i Karachaia 13-18 vv.: vazhneishie etnogeneticheskie aspekty. V pomoshch uchiteliu-istoriku, kraevedu, studentu i uchashchiesia molodezhi* (Nal'chik: Nart, 1991), pp. 82-83, 87-89; idem, *Istoriia Balkarii i Karachaia s drevneishikh vremen do pokhodov Timura* (Nal'chik: El'-Fa, 1996), pp. 130-153; Laipanov, Miziev, *O proiskhozhdenii tiurkskikh narodov*, pp. 3-6.

of the Kurgan culture with all its distinctive features. From that time on, we can say that their economy, culture and language enjoyed their full shape.”⁵⁵ He located the Turkic homeland between the Volga and Ural rivers,⁵⁶ from where the Turks spread throughout the steppe zone, and then moved to Western Asia via Transcaucasia.⁵⁷ Thus, although Miziev avoided identifying the Turks with the indigenous population of Western Asia, he argued that they arrived there rather early (in the 3rd Millennium B.C.) and undoubtedly before the Indo-Iranians.⁵⁸

In the days of the Soviet Union, views like these would have been accused of pan-Turkism aimed at the building of an independent Turkic state and, thus, hostile to Soviet power. Yet, for Miziev and other like-minded people, the message was different. This was an articulation of a long-growing protest against a negative image of the Turks as barbarian nomads and destroyers, which was promoted both in imperial Russia and the USSR.⁵⁹ This was also an attempt to enhance their past virtue and glory through an appropriation of the Golden Age of the related communities, which was by no means a unique strategy.⁶⁰

Miziev emphasized that, from the prehistoric past, the Turks greatly influenced human evolution and made a valuable contribution to the development of world civilization. He was especially stuck with the idea that the Turks had established the earliest state; he was no less fascinated with the emergence of new Turkic states from the ruins of the USSR and was upset that not all Turkic ethnic groups enjoyed their own states.⁶¹ All of this

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 28.

⁵⁶ I.M. Miziev, *Istoriia riadom*, p. 42; Laipanov, Miziev, *O proiskhozhdenii tiurkskikh narodov*, pp. 14-15, 17 ff.; M.Ch. Zhurtubaev, “Putiami predkov,” *Balkarskii Forum* 10 (1991), p. 4.

⁵⁷ Miziev, *Istoriia riadom*, pp. 19-31; Laipanov, Miziev, *O proiskhozhdenii tiurkskikh narodov*, pp. 42-43.

⁵⁸ Miziev, *Istoriia riadom*, pp. 43-46.

⁵⁹ Laipanov, Miziev, *O proiskhozhdenii tiurkskikh narodov*, p. 116; I. Akhmatov, A. Koichuev, K. Laipanov, “Novyi vzgliad na problemy etnogeneza tatarskogo naroda,” *Tatarstan* 6 (1997), p. 74.

⁶⁰ Anthony D. Smith, “The ‘Golden Age’ and National Renewal,” in Geoffrey Hosking, George Schopflin, eds., *Myths and Nationhood* (London: Hurst and Company, 1997), pp. 53-54.

⁶¹ Laipanov, Miziev, *O proiskhozhdenii tiurkskikh narodov*, pp. 8-9.

reasoning demonstrates the true source of Miziev's irritation with the Indo-European theory; in his view, it was a justification of the perpetuation of "Russian expansion." In response, he did his best to debunk this approach with a symbolic Turkic expansion.

In Miziev's view, the Turks were "one of the earliest ethnic groups on the Earth," and the builders of the earliest civilizations of the Old World. He argued that the ethnic name "Turk" came into being "no later than in the Neolithic period."⁶² It is due to Turkic creative energy that humans were enriched with major cultural achievements; in particular, all the Sumerian achievements were ascribed to them. Miziev taught us that the early Turks greatly and positively influenced early medieval Europe. He was especially stubborn with respect to the Hun invasion, which he celebrated as a progressive one: if the Huns destroyed anything at all, that were "reactionary social systems," and they brought "advanced cultural achievements" to Europe.⁶³

At the same time, Miziev shared certain Eurasian ideas, in particular, those of the "ethnic relations" between the Turks and Slavs.⁶⁴ He did not fail to consider the Caucasus as well. He maintained that the Karachay and Balkars were the direct descendants of the Scythians, who developed the famous Nart Sagas, which were later borrowed from them by other North Caucasian peoples.⁶⁵ Miziev also argued that the "Turkic-speaking Caucasians" formed five thousand years ago when, he said, they lived in the Upper Baksan river valley, in the area of Shalushki and in the Nal'chik territory. In his view, they formed the basis for the further development of the Karachay and Balkars.⁶⁶ Yet,

62 Ibid., p. 114; Miziev, *Istoriia Balkarii i Karachaia*.

63 Laipanov, Miziev, *O proiskhozhdenii tiurkskikh narodov*, pp. 91-92. Also see U.Z. Bairamukov, *Kladez' narodnoi pamiati* (Cherkessk: Karachaevo-Cherkesskoe knizhnoe izdatel'stvo, 1993).

64 Laipanov, Miziev, *O proiskhozhdenii tiurkskikh narodov*, pp. 116-117.

65 Ibid., pp. 61-66; I.M. Miziev, "V plenu ugasshei teorii (o knige Kh.Kh. Bidzhieva 'Tiurki Severnogo Kavkaza')," *Kabardino-Balkarskaia pravda* (May 5, 1994), p. 3.

66 I.M. Miziev, "Izvrashchat' istoriiu amoral'no," *Kabardino-Balkarskaia pravda* (November 14, 1992), p. 6; idem, *Istoriia Balkarii i Karachaia*, p. 206; Laipanov, Miziev, *O proiskhozhdenii tiurkskikh narodov*, pp. 39-42.

this did not stop him from dating the formation of the “Karachay-Balkar ethnic group” at between the 8th and 10th centuries, and he believed that the Alans, Bulgars, Khazars and some indigenous Caucasian highlanders (obviously, those “Turkic-speaking ones”) took part in its development.⁶⁷ The relationship between this “ethnic group” and the Alans, the only inhabitants of the Central Caucasus at that time, are still to be discovered. True, one no longer meets with this “ethnic group” in Miziev’s books, which are now occupied mostly by “Turkic Alans” who successfully build up cities and enjoy their original writing.⁶⁸ Thus, in Miziev’s theory, the Turks turned to be but the earliest Caucasian inhabitants, and their descendants, the Karachay and Balkars, demonstrated a “pure Turkic physical and ethno-cultural type;” they had formed a highly integrated community (narodnost’) by the time of the Alan state, developed the runic writing system and, hence, were the sole builders and heirs of the Alan state.

In the 1990s, the radical revisionist view of the great Turkic prehistory, in general, and of the Karachay-Balkar past, in particular, was shared by several well-known Karachay and Balkar scholars, including a rector of the Karachay-Cherkess State Pedagogical Institute, A. D. Koichuev, a specialist in Soviet history. With his support, they held a symposium on the “Ethnogenesis of the Karachay and Balkars” in Karachaevesk in October 1994, which aimed at a revision of the conclusions of the Nal’chik conference of 1959. Turkic-born scholars from various North Caucasian republics as well as Tatarstan took part in this event. Being based on Miziev’s scheme, they advocated the localization of the Turkic homeland between the Volga and Ural rivers, identified the Pit-grave and Maikop cultures of the Early Bronze Age with the proto-Turks, represented the Sumerians as their daughter branch, and supported the idea of Turkic-speaking Scythians and Alans. Thus, the Kypchak theory of the Balkar-Karachay origins was radically revised, although the Kypchaks were still recognized as a minor component in their formation. One of the main conclusions of the symposium was the identifi-

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 97.

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 113.

cation of the Upper Kuban' river valley with the primordial Karachay lands as if they had been occupied by the Karachay ancestors for millennia.⁶⁹ The identification of the Karachay-Balkar ancestors with the Turkic Alans was appreciated most of all. Interestingly, while developing this approach, the Karachay and Balkar scholars found allies among the Tatar Bulgarists.⁷⁰

In the fall of 1994, the North Ossetian Republic added the title of "Alania" to its name. In response, there were protests in Karachay and Balkaria where they took it as an encroachment upon their own historical heritage.⁷¹ Indeed, the Balkar ethno-nationalists justify their aspiration for political autonomy through reference to the belief that they are "the descendants of the Scythians-Alans, the legitimate cultural heirs of the three states – Scythia, Azov Bulgaria and Alania."⁷²

7. PRIMORDIALISM AT THE SERVICE OF INSTRUMENTALISM

All the aforementioned data demonstrates the close relationship between historiographic discourse and the current political environment in the Northern Caucasus. To legitimate their political claims, both the Kabardians and Balkars manifest an aspiration to develop an image of indigenous ancestors who might have lived in the Northern Caucasus from prehistoric times. Both sides place their hopes on archaeology and historical linguistics, both of which provide appropriate data for ethnocentric myths of the ancestors. The Kabardians push their ethnic roots back to the Maikop archaeological culture of the 3rd Millennium B.C. and are also proud of their kinship with the con-

69 *Etnogenez karachaevtsev i balkartsev* (Karachaeusk, 1997); Akhmatov, Koichuev, Laipanov, "Novyi vzgliad na problemy..."; Koichuev, *Karachaevskaia Avtonomnaia Oblast'*, pp. 12-16.

70 For them see Victor A. Shnirelman, *Who Gets the Past? Competition for Ancestors Among Non-Russian Intellectuals in Russia* (Washington, D.C., Baltimore: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), pp. 40-45.

71 A.M. Bairamkulov, *Karachaev-Balkarskomu narodu – 2,000 let* (Cherkessk: AVERS, 1996), p. 355; idem, *Pravda ob alanakh* (Stavropol': Stavropol'skaia kraevaia tipografiia, 1999), pp. 51, 54-55.

72 Zhurtubaev, "Putiami predkov," p. 8.

temporaneous Hatti of Asia Minor. They appreciate the relations with the Central Caucasian “Koban’ archaeological culture” of the Late Bronze Age as well.⁷³ Yet, they especially value what they view as genetic ties with the Classical Meots who lived in the North-Western Caucasus in the 1st Millennium B.C. This myth of ancestors is important for the Kabardians for two reasons: first, the early Adyghe are depicted as the major political power in the region from very long ago, and, second, they occupied a large territory between the mouth of the Azov Sea and the Black Sea in the North-West and the Upper Kuban’ river in the South-East at least a thousand years ago.⁷⁴ In the 1990s, this view of the remote past manifested itself in the programmatic documents of the Kabardian ethno-nationalist movement and was articulated by the Kabardian political leaders who emphasized that the Kabardians were by no means aliens to the territory of contemporary Kabarda to which they had arrived in the late medieval period. Indeed, according to this view, it was there they met the Adyghe kinsmen who had lived in the Nal’chik area from at least the Bronze Age. In this view, the Adyghe (Circassian) territory embraced all the lands “between the Caucasian Black Sea coast and the Kumyk steppes,” both in the Bronze Age and in the late medieval period until the Russian expansion.⁷⁵

All those ambitious claims meet a strong response from the Balkar nationalists who dreamt of their own sovereign republic and had conducted an endless dispute over land with the Kabardians. The Balkar political and intellectual leaders exploited the following tactics. Whereas in the Soviet days they used to

73 Kумыков, Мизиев, eds., *Istoriia Kabardino-Balkarii*, pp. 11-21.

74 Ibid., p. 46.

75 A.K. Guchev, “Problemy i zadachi kabardinskogo naroda na sovremennom etape,” in Babich, ed., *Etnopoliticheskaia situatsiia...*, p. 17; “O rezul’tatakh raboty Komissii Kongressa Kabardinskogo naroda po opredeleniiu etnicheskoi granitsy mezhdu Kabardoi i Balkariei,” *Kabardino-Balkarskaia pravda* (July 4, 1992), p. 2; V.N. Sokurov, “Iz istorii kabardino-balkarskikh otnoshenii: fakty oprovergaiut kontseptsii,” in Babich, ed., *Etnopoliticheskaia situatsiia...*, p. 36; Babich, ed., *Etnopoliticheskaia situatsiia*, pp. 49-50, 117.

isolate themselves from the Karachay people as a different ethnic group, nowadays, facing a growing Adyghe consolidation, they began to employ such terms as the “Karachay-Balkar people (ethnic group)” and to point to their ethnic unity. Moreover, the Balkars and Karachay deliberately took part in the pan-Turkic movement in the hope of support from other Turkic groups.⁷⁶ The Balkars maintain that the traditional Balkar communities have never constituted a part of Kabarda;⁷⁷ on the contrary, they formed a distinct federation and had joined Russia of their own will independently of Kabarda.⁷⁸

Certain Karachay leaders went even further and maintained that, from the pre-Mongol period, a large Karachay state had stretched between the Terek and Laba rivers and from the Caucasian Ridge to the Stavropol’ heights. They argued that it had maintained its independence even after the Timur invasion and devastation at the end of the 14th century. In their view, Karachay was illegally annexed by Russia in 1828, and even after that it managed to maintain certain political institutions.⁷⁹

These, however unorthodox, views of history legitimated the Balkar and Karachay claims for the restoration of their “national states.” At the same time, in the view of the Balkar authors, the Kabardians only moved to the Central Caucasus between the 15th and 16th centuries and arrived in the Baksan river basin only at the end of the 17th century.⁸⁰ Evidently this

⁷⁶ Ibid., pp. 222-225.

⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 232.

⁷⁸ Zhurtubaev, “Putiami predkov”; “Ob itogakh raboty Komissii Natsional’nogo Soveta Balkarskogo naroda po administrativno-territorial’nomu ustroistvu po voprosam opredeleniia etnicheskoi territorii i etnicheskikh granits Balkarii,” *Kabardino-Balkarskaia pravda* (July 15, 1992), p. 3; Babich, ed., *Etnopoliticheskaia situatsiia...*, pp. 244, 257, 278.

⁷⁹ K.T. Laipanov, Iu. Kostinskii, “Bessrochnyi miting Karachaia,” *Rossiiskaia gazeta* (March 5, 1992), p. 3; N. Khasanov, *K’archa. Yomurleni takhsasy* (Cherkessk, 1994).

⁸⁰ Zhurtubaev, “Putiami predkov,” p. 7; A.M. Bairamkulov, *Karachaevobalkarskomu narodu – 2,000 let*, pp. 258-262; idem, *I aziatskie, i evropeiskie alany byli predkami karachaevtsev i balkartsev* (Stavropol’:

concept paints the Kabardians as newcomers who are unable to put forward any serious political or territorial claims.

The Balkar and Karachay intellectual leaders are well-aware of the integrative power of the uniform inclusive ethnonym “Adyghe (Circassians),” which is deliberately imposed upon all their own kinsmen (the Kabardians, Cherkess and Adygheians) by the contemporary Adyghe ethno-nationalists. While dreaming of the same effect, the Balkar and Karachay intellectuals place their hopes on the name “Alans.” As we already know, Miziev was among those who made a large contribution to the development of “Alan self-awareness” through calling the Karachay and Balkars the “ethnic heirs of the Turkic-speaking Alans and Assy.”⁸¹ Nowadays, the Karachay and Balkars do believe that the “history of the Alan state is our national heritage.”⁸² In the 1990s, the aspiration of the Karachay and Balkars to change their self-designation into “Alan” began to grow, and their cultural associations, various organizations and newspapers began to appropriate this name for themselves.

The stubborn Balkar attempts to relate themselves to the Alans are aimed at two goals – first, to demonstrate that their ancestors lived in the Northern Caucasus from the very early days and, thus, to prove their indigenous status, and, second, to point to their own continuous state tradition. In their view, both ideas might serve as strong arguments to support their claim for the establishment of the Republic of Balkaria as it was declared at both Congresses of the Balkar people in November 1991 and November 1996. It is no accident that the advocates of the early medieval Turkic-speaking Alan state localize it in the territory occupied by contemporary Kabardino-Balkaria and Karachay-Cherkessia, and do their best to extend its chronological frame.

Stavropol'skaia kraevaia tipografiia, 1998), p. 142; Miziev, *Istoriia karachaevo-balkarskogo naroda*, p. 73.

81 Laipanov, Miziev, *O proiskhozhdenii tiurkskikh narodov*, p. 106.

82 B. Laipanov, “Islam v istorii i samosoznanii karachaevskogo naroda,” in M.N. Guboglo, ed., *Islam i etnicheskaia mobilizatsiia: natsional'nye dvizheniia v tiurkskom mire* (Moskva: TsIMO, 1998), p. 146.

One advocate maintains that the Alan state developed without break over 800 years or so.⁸³

It is clear that the Ossetians, who persistently claim their own Alan descent, prove to be serious competitors in the struggle for prestigious ancestors. To put Ossetians in their place and to put their possible territorial and political claims into question, the Karachay and Balkar authors maintain that the Iranian-speaking Ossetians were resettled to the Caucasus from the south by the Iranian Shah and that they occupied their contemporary lands from rather late in history, may be, from around the beginning of the 15th century.⁸⁴ According to this view, the Turks lived there before the Ossetians. A more exotic approach was developed by Zhurtubaev. He agrees with certain Ossetian scholars who strive to trace the Ossetian roots from the Bronze Age Koban' archaeological culture. Yet, in contrast to the Ossetians, he argues that the Ossetians inherited their Iranian language solely from the "Koban' ancestors" rather than from the "Turkic-speaking Alans."⁸⁵

In any case, the primordialist approach to the remote past and ancient ancestors is deliberately used by the Balkar and Karachay intellectual leaders to mobilize their peoples to achieve obvious political gains. This view provides historical arguments for the Balkar and Karachay territorial claims while depicting the Kabardians as late newcomers who illegally occupied the "former Balkar lands." In fact, the historical development was quite a reverse – from the late 19th century the Balkars had extended their territories at the expense of the Kabardian lands being backed by, first, the Russian and, then, the Soviet authorities.⁸⁶ Moreover, the pan-Turkic connotations of the Great

83 A.M. Bairamkulov, *K istorii alanskoi onomastiki i toponimiki* (Cherkessk: Karachaevo-Cherkesskoe respublikanskoe knizhnoe izdatel'stvo, 1995), p. 9.

84 Baichorov, "Terminy 'karachai' i 'as'...", pp. 54-57; Bairamukov, *Kladez' narodnoi pamiati*, pp. 116-117; K.T. Laipanov, "Ob alanskom proiskhozhdenii."

85 Zhurtubaev, "Putiami predkov," p. 6.

86 Kh. Dumanov, "Pravda o granitsakh. Iz etnicheskoi istorii Kabardy i Balkarii 19 – nachala 20 vv.," *Kabardino-Balkarskaia pravda* (December 10, 1991), p. 3; Babich, "Sootnoshenie," pp. 145-150.

Turkic prehistory aim to encourage pan-Turkic solidarity, which serves an important political and cultural resource for minor Turkic groups. The ethnogenetic myths now taught in the Karachay-Cherkessia and Kabardino-Balkaria schools perfectly correspond to the programmatic documents of the local ethno-nationalist movements.

Thus, the Balkar and Karachay views of themselves and of their ancestors changed several times over the Soviet and post-Soviet periods. At first, they had no problems with the late arrival of their ancestors to the Northern Caucasus. Emphasis was not so much placed on the date of the Balkar and Karachay peoples' formation as on their heterogeneous composition, as though the latter manifested the friendship and brotherhood of the Soviet peoples reinforced by ties of kinship. Special merit was granted to the participation of the Caucasian natives in the Balkar and Karachay ethnogenesis, which naturally made the Balkars and Karachay the indigenous people of the Northern Caucasus. At the same time, the Turkic language was appreciated as their main characteristic. Therefore, this view of the ethnic past paid special merit to the Turkic-speaking ancestors and argued that the Turks played an active part in the ethnogenetic process; i.e., they imposed their native language upon the local inhabitants rather than the latter deliberately shifting to the Turkic language. Thus, regardless of the ethnic components that constituted their community, the Balkars and Karachay turned out to be the bearers of their own primordial language and believed in their inclusive ethnic unity. This is the meaning that they attached to the term "Turkified Yaphetids" in the 1930s.

After 1957, their view of ancestors changed radically. Deportation and partition of the former Balkar and Karachay lands razed to the ground all illusions of Soviet internationalism and peoples' friendship. Since then, the Balkars and Karachay have been unwilling to have anything to do with either the neighboring Caucasian peoples, or with the Crimean Tatars and the Turkish people. They did not forgive the former's encroachment upon their territory, and relations with the latter were persecuted by the Soviet authorities who were still struggling against pan-Turkism. Thus, the Balkars and Karachay needed unique

ancestors who had developed in their own distinctive way. They had to arrive in the Northern Caucasus rather early to provide the Balkars and Karachay with a first-settlers argument to support their claim to territorial ownership. Besides, they had to be involved in early state building to provide their descendants with a political argument to justify their struggle against discrimination. Finally, they had to be Turkic-speakers, but in a way that nobody could accuse the Balkars and Karachay of a pan-Turkic stance. Hence, their language had to manifest very early roots and demonstrate authentic archaic features. The Alans proved to be the only suitable candidate who met almost all these criteria. Their only disadvantage was their Iranian language, and, therefore, over the last few decades the Balkar and Karachay scholars and amateur authors have done their best to convert the Alans into a Turkic-speaking people. At the same time, by contrast to the previous period, the Balkars and Karachay deliberately restricted themselves to an exclusive identity and emphasized the originality of their own cultures.

A third period of reinterpretation of their own identity began from the late 1980s, and a whole range of arguments were developed in the 1990s. An inclusive identity was once again in vogue, allowing the Balkars and Karachay to view themselves as an organic ethnic body. Such a unity demands a uniform self-designation, and certain national leaders do their best to impose the name of the Alans upon both peoples. This development is promoted by an influential group of Balkar and Karachay scholars who argue that the Alans were Turkic-speaking people from the very beginning. Moreover, in their presentations, the “Turkic-speaking Alans” prove to be albeit the main but by no means the only participant in the pan-Turkic drama which is identified with the Great Turkic past. Participation in this past, first, provides the Balkars and Karachay with an enormous continuity in time and their remote ancestors with a heroic image, second, it introduces them into the family of the early civilized peoples who enjoyed their own early states (the Turkic Khanates) and writing systems (Turkic runes), and, third, it stimulates sympathy and support from the Turkic world. Hence, the strong attraction of a dual identity among the Balkars and Karachay nowadays:



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at one level they identify themselves with the Karachay-Balkars
(or Alans), and at another level – with the Turks.

