TITLE: OF CHRISTIANITY, ENLIGHTENMENT AND COLONIALISM: RUSSIA IN THE NORTH CAUCASUS BEFORE THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

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This is the first of three background papers, condensed in Council Report *From Frontier to Empire: Russia's Southern Frontier and Formation of the Empire, 16th - 18th Centuries*, distributed in print copy on October 21, 1997.
When Russians arrived in the North Caucasus in the late 1560s they did not find a region populated by peoples who spoke different languages, worshipped different Gods, and whose societies varied greatly in degree of economic and social organization. It was not because the differences were not there, but because the new-comers were not looking for them. Nowhere in the written heritage of official Muscovy does one find the slightest attention to the different mores and customs of the natives. Only in the mid-eighteenth century were some proto-ethnographic attempts to describe the natives made, if only to lament their savage state, and thus explicitly or implicitly to extol the virtues of the civilization brought by the Russians. As late as 1784, the report submitted by the Russian governor-general of the Caucasus, P. S. Potemkin ended on such a note: “And because the differences between the peoples of the Caucasus are insignificant, by submitting the description of the Kabardinian people, I am describing all other peoples of the North Caucasus.”

Rather, Moscow’s goals in the North Caucasus were first and foremost geopolitical. Having conquered Kazan and Astrakhan, the Russian tsar assumed the mantle of the ruler of the former Golden Horde, and numerous local inhabitants from Siberia to the North Caucasus sent their

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representatives to seek trade and military alliance with Moscow. One such embassy from the Kabardinian Prince, Temriuk, whose daughter was soon to become Ivan IV's second wife, arrived in 1557. In a pattern, which would remain unchanged throughout the centuries of Russia's relations with the native inhabitants, Ivan placed at Temriuk's disposal a Russian officer and a detachment of 500 musketeers. This Russian detachment helped Temriuk to subdue his rivals in Kabarda and was meant to protect him from both the Crimean khan and the shamkhal of Dagestan (the chief ruler of the Kumyks). Within a few years, Temriuk found the reliance on the Russian military indispensable and requested that a fort be built on the Terek river for his protection. Shortly thereafter, the troops armed with cannons and muskets were dispatched from Astrakhan to found fort Terk (Terki, Terskii gorodok).

It was from this north-eastern corner of the North Caucasus, what today comprises northern Dagestan, that Russia's incremental expansion into the area began in the 1560s. By 1800 much of the North Caucasus' plain, overwhelmed by the settlers, was found within the Russian imperial borders, while a continuous chain of fortifications stretching from the Caspian to the Black sea firmly separated the plains from the foothills and the mountains where the native inhabitants continued to reside.

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2Kabardino-russkie otnosheniia, vol. 1, pp. 5-13. The requests from the local nobles and princes to have a fort built for their protection were frequent and were addressed to the major powers in the region—the Ottomans, the Russians, and the Persians. For example, in 1697, the shamkhal wrote to Istanbul asking to build a fort and to protect him from the Russians, see Silahdar Findikli Mehmet Aga, Nusretname, ed. by Ismet Parmaksizoglu (Istanbul: Milli Egitim Basimevi, 1962), vol. 1, pp. 323-4. In 1725, a similar request came from the Georgian prince, who asked the Russians to build a fort for his protection, see Dokumenty po vzaimootnosheniiam Gruzii s Severnym Kavkazom v 18 v., ed. V. N. Gamrekli, (Tbilisi, AN GSSR, 1968), no. 6, p. 107. Occasionally, the shamkhal appealed for protection to both the Persians and the Russians at the same time, see below in this article and P. G. Butkov, Materiały dla nowoi istorii Kavkaza, s 1722 po 1803 god (St. Petersburg, 1869), vol. 1, p. 254.

3For a detailed account of the political history of the North Caucasus in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries see E. N. Kusheva, "Politika russkogo gosudarstva na Severnom Kavkaze v 1552-1572gg., in Istoričeskie zapiski 34 (1950): 236-87; Ibid., Narody Severnogo Kavkaza i ikh sviazii s Rossiei, vtorota polovina 16v.—30-e gody 17 veka (Moscow: Izd-vo AN SSSR, 1963). Some highly tendentious local histories appeared throughout the 1950s and...
The fact that it took consecutive Russian governments so long--nearly two and half centuries--to assert a relative control of the North Caucasus, I find of far greater interest than the Russian expansion per se. In this essay I shall discuss some aspects of the process by which the North Caucasus, a frontier area and a traditional arena of contest between the three empires, Ottoman, Persian, and Russian was turned into a Russian imperial borderland. For this purpose I suggest that the region of the North Caucasus should be examined not only as an area of Russian expansion, which traditionally evokes an image of the unstoppable march of the Russian army punctuated by the occasional native uprisings, but also as a place of the encounter of two different worlds. The native one, a fragmented world of numerous pagan and Muslim societies with rudimentary political organizations and economies based on subsistence herding and farming, and the one of the new-comers, the sovereign Russian state with its bureaucratic and military machine driven to expansion intermittently by the geopolitical concerns, political theology of Orthodoxy, and later by the ideas of Enlightenment. In the end, the Russian

1960s, when the Soviet historiography was given a task to both produce separate histories of the peoples of the USSR and to justify their historical connections to Russia, see, for instance, Istoriia Kabardy (Moscow: Izd-vo AN SSSR, 1957), Istoriia Dagestana (Moscow: Izd-vo vostochnoi literatury, 1967), and Ocherki istorii Karachaevo-Cherkessii, vol. 1 (Stavropol: Knizhnoe izd-vo, 1967). The most recent Istoriia narodov Severnogo Kavkaza s drevneishikh vremen do kontsa 18 v. (Moscow: Nauka, 1988) is far better that the proceeding products of the Soviet historiography, but it stops half way in its attempt to shake off the ideological baggage of the past. In contrast to historians, the Soviet ethnographers produced far more intresting and sophisticated studies of the region, see M. O. Kosven, Etnografiia i istoria Kavkaza (Moscow: Izd-vo vostochnoi literatury, 1961), V. K. Gardanov, Obschestvennyi stroi adygsikh narodov (Moscow: Nauka, 1967), and N. G. Volkova, Etnicheskii sostav Severnogo Kavkaza v 18-nachale 20 veka (Moscow: Nauka, 1974). Several historical monographs in Turkish are not very different from their Russian counterparts in their equal ideological biases and in presenting the history of the region from anti-Russian and pro-Turkish point of view, see M. Fahrettin Kirzioglu, Osmanlilarin Kafkas-elleri'nin fetihi (1451-1590) (Ankara: Sevinc Matbaasi, 1976) and Cemal Gökce, Kafkasya ve Osmanlı Imperatorluğu nun Kafkasya siyaseti (İstanbul: Has-Kutulmus Matbaasi, 1979). In western historiography, the history of the North Caucasus before the nineteenth century remains virtually unknown (one of the few exceptions is Ch. Lemercier-Quelquejay, "La structure sociale, politique et religieuse du Caucase du nord au 16 siecle" in Cahiers du Monde Russe et Sovietique 25, nos. 2-3 (1984): 125-48; for the English version of the same article, see her "Cooption of the Elites of Kabarda and Daghestan in the Sixteenth Century" in The North Caucasus Barrier [London: Hurst & Co., 1992], pp. 18-44).
state would be able to appropriate the space, the time, and the terms of the contest, but not until long after the initial encounter.

**Distorted Mirrors**

The protagonists of our story are the Russians, the Kumyks of northern Dagestan and the Kabardinians. It was these two peoples that Russians encountered first, and it was through their eyes that the Russians perceived other peoples of the region. Consider the case of the Chechens, for instance. Like most other ethnonyms in the Caucasus, the Russians learned the word "Chechen" from the Kabardinians, who used it for a specific cluster of neighboring villages. (The Chechens did not refer to themselves as such until quite recently). The Russian government, then, began to apply the term to a much larger group of the highlanders, thus assuming a more aggregate and cohesive identity than this people possessed at the time. Only in the late eighteenth century the governor-general of the Caucasus, P. S. Potemkin observed that “the peoples referred to as the Chechens and Kumyks do not comprise real nations (natsiia) under such names, but every village has its own chief (vladelets) and is governed by its own laws.”

In another example, the Russians used the word uzden to denote the members of the lesser nobility among all the peoples of the region. Yet, the

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"For the first time the Russians came upon the various Chechen clans in 1587, when the Russian envoys on the way to Georgia passed through the highlands and mentioned Michkiz, Indili, and Shubut (Snosheniiia Rossiis s Kavkazom. Materialy izvlechennye iz Moskovskogo Ministerstva Inostrannykh del, 1578-1613, comp. by S. L. Belokurov [Moscow: Univ. Tip., 1889], no. 4, p. 33). First mentioned in 1708 in PSZ vol. 4, p. 421 cf. Chechen--self designation Nakhchi--"people"; Kumyks called them Michik or Mischik (the name of the river); Kabardinians--Shashan =Chechen (the name of the village). (Georgians called them --kisty--from Brokhaus), U. Iaudaev, "Chechenaokoe plemia," in Sbornik svedenii o kavказskikh gortsakh, vol. 6 (1872), 3. Chechens are indicated on the map of 1719 (Kabardino-russkie otnosheniia, vol. 1, p. 289); Kabardino-russkie otnosheniia, vol. 2, no. 256, p. 364."
term, which the Russians learned from the Kumyks, was used only among the Turkic-speaking peoples of the Caucasus the Kumyks, the Balkars and the Karachays. Others, and particularly the Kabardinians never used such a term, but instead carefully differentiated between various types of lesser nobles. For a long time Russian officials remained unaware of the fact that the social structure of the Kabardinians was far more complicated than they had assumed, and it was not until the 1820s that a much finer gradation of the Kabardinian nobility found its way into the government’s administrative language.⁵

Not surprisingly, political, social and linguistic differences obscured perceptions and images of each other, and after decades of interaction, both sides continued to have only a tenuous knowledge of the other. Betraying a profound misunderstanding of the centralized nature of the Russian state, the khan of Shemakha wrote to the governor of Astrakhan in 1653 and referred to him as "vladetel,' that is a ruler similar in status to his own, and as late as 1717, the Dagestani shamkhal, Adil-Giray in a letter to Peter I referred to the Terk governor as "the Terk prince, who is a subject of your state."⁶

Misnomers, misunderstandings, and misrepresentations were more than items of mere curiosity. Altogether they comprised a set of structural misconceptions which the Russians and the natives held of each other. Each side perceived the other through its own politico-cultural system, and projected its own image upon the other. Thus, the Russian government’s policies in the region should be understood not simply as a set of instructions emanating from the capital, but also as a function of the contested vocabularies and identities,

⁵The term uzden is already found in Codex Qumanicus as early as the twelfth century (Vasmer ). V. K. Karganov, Obshchestvennyi stroi Adygskikh narodov (Moscow: Nauka, 1967), 180-81.

which the government would finally succeed in imposing upon the people and the landscape of the region.

**Political Status**

From the time of the very first encounter with the natives, the Russian officials insisted that the local chiefs swear allegiance and declare themselves the star's faithful subjects. In 1589, on orders from Moscow the commander of the Terk fort informed the Kumyk shamkhal that he should dispatch his envoys to Terk and petition to become the tsar's subject. When such envoys did not arrive, the Terk commander was instructed to warn the shamkhal that a large army was ready to be sent against him "because he did not seek our favor and our stipend" ("nashego zhalovan'ia sebe ne poiskal").

The non-Christians' subservient status had to be formalized through a *shert* (a Turkic word derived from the Arabic "shart" meaning a condition, a clause of a treaty), a document which listed a number of commitments on the part of the natives and which was prepared in advance and written in Russian. The local nobles had to submit their sons and relatives as hostages ("amanat"), affix their signatures to the document and, if they were Muslims, swear an oath on the Quran--an act, which, in the Russian eyes, confirmed the natives' status as the subjects of the tsar. Moscow's supreme status was not an issue open for negotiation, even if it involved Christian peoples, and when, in 1588, the Georgian king, Alexander, suggested to the Russian envoys at his court that they too should swear allegiance on behalf of the tsar, his offer was

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7 *Snosheniia Rossii s Kavkazom*, no. 10, p. 79; no. 12, p. 112.
8 For more on the issue, see Michael Khodarkovsky, "From Frontier to Empire: The Concept of the Frontier in Russia, 16-18th Centuries," in *Russian History* 6
rejected, and he had to declare himself unconditionally the tsar's servant ("kholop gosudarev").

Such a view was not shared by the natives. They considered their relationship with Russia to be an alliance confirmed by a peace treaty with mutual obligations. They committed themselves not to attack the Russian frontier settlements and to help the Russians against the adversaries, but in return they expected Russia's military aid against their own rivals and secure access to their traditional pasture lands and hunting grounds. When, in 1589, the Russians demanded that the Kabardinian chief, Alkas, submit hostages and pledge loyalty, his answer was: "I reached an old age, and hitherto people believed my word in everything, and I have never given hostages or taken the oath to anyone." After Russians continued to insist, Alkas consulted with his uzdens and agreed to be in peace with Russia and to send his envoy to reside in Terk fort on conditions that Moscow would pay Alkas an annuity, allow his people to hunt and fish along the rivers freely, transport them across the rivers, and help them against their adversaries. But so far as the Russians were concerned, this agreement meant Alkas' oath of allegiance to the tsar confirmed by his submitting of a hostage. That such different understanding of the nature of their relationship would soon lead to a conflict was hardly surprising. Indeed, a few years later Alkas was accused of "violating his pledge to serve the sovereign." In 1714, when the government required a more realistic assessment of the political situation in the North Caucasus, a native of the Caucasus and an officer in the Russian army, Prince Alexander

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9 Snosheniia Rossii s Kavkazom, no. 4, pp. 40-41.
10 Snosheniia Rossii s Kavkazom, no. 11, pp. 142-3, no. 19, pp. 305. Cf. other cases when the Kabardinian "hostages" were supposed to reside in Terk with their own people no longer than several years and join Russian military campaigns in return for generous rewards and payments (Ibid., no. 5, pp. 43-53).
Bekovich-Cherkasskii wrote to Peter I and stated unambiguously that "these peoples were independent and submitted to no one."¹¹

While Russian authorities saw a shert, as an expression of an unconditional loyalty to the tsar, the natives interpreted it as one of the many peace treaties they had concluded with their neighbors. In 1645, the Kumyk shamkhal, Surkai explained to the insistent Russian envoys that he would like to have a peace treaty with Russia ("to give shert" in Russian parlance), but that he also needed to sign a peace treaty with the Persian shah, Abbas. Perhaps, as an indication of the terms he would like to see in a peace treaty with Russia, he explained that he used to receive from the Safavid shahs an annuity of 200 tuman (tuman is a Persian unit of money), a tribute from several villages in Persia, and Persian troops for military assistance.¹² Five years later Surkai submitted a list of grievances to the Astrakhan governor and made clear his view of his agreement with Russian authorities: "there was a shert between us, and Terk commanders violated this shert, and the shert stated that we should not keep the Muscovites (moskovskie russkie liudi) against their will, and you should not accept and keep our servants."¹³

It was not that subservient relationships were unknown between the different peoples of the Caucasus. In the early nineteenth century, one of the first Kabardinian ethnographers, Shora Nogmîov, described a precise hierarchy of various highlanders who were the subjects of the Kabardinians and had to pay them a tribute of various kind.¹⁴ But why would the Kabardinians

¹¹Russko-dagestanskie otnoshenia 17-pervoi poloviny 18 vv., no. 96, p. 224.
¹³Russko-dagestanskie otnoshenia 17-pervoi poloviny 18 vv., no. 84, p. 180.
¹⁴Various mountain peoples subject of Kab nobles and who pay tribute (dan) as follows: Ingush, Nazrans, Karabulaks, and Tagaur Ossetians pay annually from each household to the noble one silver ruble, and the noble who receives it is obliged to protect them and sends them one person for this purpose whom they fully provide. Dîgor people who live in the plains and in the mountains pay one sheep per household and laos receive a person for their protection. Balkars do not pay any tribute but pay the same penalties as Kab if they steal Kab horses.
consider themselves Russia's subjects if, in fact, it was the Russians who paid them annuity and stipends--a kind of early modern foreign aid--not the other way around? Prince Bekovich-Cherkasskii implied just that, when he explained to Peter I the nature of Kumyks relations with Persia: "And there everyone is afraid of this people, and particularly the Persians, who in order to protect themselves give the Kumyk princes and shamkhal, what they call, a grant or a stipend ("zhalovan'e"), but if one thinks about it, they pay them a tribute ("dan'"), and every year the shah spends a great deal on the Kumyk rulers." 15

Even when accepting a superior role of the Russian government, the natives understood this relationship in terms of their own society. Faced with military retribution in 1779, the nobles of the Greater Kabarda, nonetheless, refused to swear allegiance and declared that they had traditionally been under Russian protectorship as guests or allies ("konaks"), but not subjects. In the end, when the Russian troops marched into Kabarda, the Kabardinians had to sue for peace and swore an unconditional allegiance. 16

Translations were another common sources of misunderstandings, as the natives often had a vague idea of the contents of their written agreements. Peace treaties, as any other document, were usually translated first into

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6 clans of the Abazins are divided between three Kabardinian noble clans and pay tribute like the Ingush and others (Sh. B. Nogmov, Istoriia Adygeiskogo naroda (Nal'chik, Kab-Balkan izdov, 1958), art. 26, no. 27, p. 187; also see Kabardino-russkie otnoshenia, vol. 2, no. 111, p. 141).

9Russko-dagestanskie otnoshenia 17-pervoi poloviny 18 vv., no. 96, p. 225.

10Akty sobranne Kavkasskou Arkheografcheskoj komissiej, vols. 1-12 (Tiflis, 1866-1883), 1: 91. For more on the notion of kunak, see V. K. Gardanov, Obshchestvennyi stroi adygskikh narodov, pp. 289-326.
Tatar--a lingua franca in much of Asia--and then into a local language. The shortage of interpreters was a chronic problem, and the local governors complained often that "there were no interpreters to be sent to the shamkhal, Georgia, Circassians and others and because of this there was a great damage to the sovereign's cause." Translations also suffered from incompetent interpreters, and even more often from deliberate attempts of misrepresentation and selective editing, so as, for instance, the letters from the natives had always to be rendered in a form of a supplication to the Russian sovereign.

One example may illustrate how the task of translation, as daunting as it was philologically, was further handicapped by political and religious considerations. During the Russian embassy's visit to Georgia in 1596-99, it turned out that the Georgians could no longer read letters from Moscow, which were written in Russian, because the Georgian translator had died. The Georgians asked the Russian envoys to come to tsar Alexander's court and have the missives interpreted into Turkish, and the Georgians would then transcribe them in Georgian letters. The envoys replied that although their interpreters knew Turkish ("umeiut iazyku po turski"), they were illiterate, could not read in Russian or Turkish ("gramoty po russki i po turski ne umeiut"), and therefore they could not translate. Moreover, the envoys declared that "the letters contain many wise words from the divine scriptures, but the interpreters can not translate them because these words are not used in Turkish language." The Georgians continued to insist; the Russians continued to refuse saying that it had never been done before, and one could not

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17 Snosheniia Rossii s Kavkazom, no. 10, p. 77. In response to one such complaint from the governor of Astrakhan, Artemii Volynskii, in 1719, the Office of the Foreign Affairs replied that it did not have translators to be sent to Astrakhan, and the governor should use whoever he could find (Rossiiskii Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Drevnikh Aktov [hereafter cited as RGADA] Kabardinskie, cherkasskie i drugie dela. Fond 115, 1719g, no. 3, ll. 4 ob., 10).
translate properly through three languages. In the end the impatient
Georgians suggested: “then do not read the divine words, read to us only what
concerns the substance of the matter and the interpreters will interpret that
into Turkish.” On this they finally agreed. 18 Contrary to what the Russian
envoys claimed in 1596, translations “through three languages” were the only
way to communicate with the natives and were used routinely until the
nineteenth century when the Russian authorities learned to rely on the natives
with a knowledge of the Russian language.

Often unaware of the contents of the documents they were expected to
sign, the local nobles, nonetheless, had good incentives to comply with the
Russian demands. It was significant that such a procedure was often
accompanied by a payment of annuity and by generous gifts, mostly woolens
and clothing. When the treasury was empty, the Russian government
recognized the difficulty of making the native nobles affix their signatures
without an expected distribution of gifts. 19

It is hardly surprising that Russia’s insistence on political allegiance of
natives either by cajoling local elites or by a direct military threat led to a
continuous disappointment. The natives were accused of “breaking their
pledge to serve the sovereign;” promises of loyalty were again extracted and
they were forced to sign new allegiances. But when, as it happened often,
Russian military assistance was not forthcoming, the annuities and gifts were
not delivered, and the fugitives were not returned, the natives in turn accused
the Russian authorities in violating the agreement. The cycle was repeated
numerous times.

Of Christianity

In the medieval politics of self-aggrandizement adding the names of the subject lands and peoples to the full title of the tsar was a significant reason for Moscow's initial expansion. But even more important was Moscow's increasing insistence on being a Third Rome, its own version of non plus ultra. Shortly after the fall of Byzantium to the Turks, the Russian tsar became the only sovereign monarch of an Orthodox Christian state. In 1589, after much effort and diplomatic activity, Moscow finally succeeded in securing the consent of other Orthodox patriarchs to have the tsar appoint his own independent patriarch.20

Since Russia's arrival in the region in the mid-sixteenth century, the North Caucasus became a religious frontier. Religion separated the colonizers from the colonized, and the Christian identity of the Russian state integral to its colonial endeavor. The only Christians who possessed a state-organized political entity and found themselves on the other side of the frontier were the Georgians. Surrounded by the Muslim peoples of the Caucasus, compelled to pay tributes intermittently to the Persians or the Ottomans, the Georgians often invoked an imagery of defiled Christianity to solicit Russian help. They

20Of course, the same event looked somewhat different, when the Russian envoys described it to the Georgian king a year later. In the envoys' version, the Konstaninople patriarch Jeremiah arrived in Moscow with the specific mission to announce that he and three other patriarchs from Alexandria, Jerusalem, and Antioch agreed to implore the tsar to appoint his own Pope in Russia, who would replace the Pope in the heretical Latin Rome, and to prey that God helps the tsar in liberating the Christians and conquering the Muslims. Consistent with Moscow's self-image of unmatched supremacy and the necessity of an unlimited exaltation of the tsar, the latter could only benevolently act upon others' humble petitions. Like the natives of the Caucasus, whose status had to be described only in terms of a subject's service to the sovereign, the Orthodox patriarchs could only be expected to beseech the supreme ruler, the Russian tsar. The rhetoric and the reality did not match, but while the church records outside of official Russia preserved the real turns of event, the story of the natives' who kept no written records, was drowned in the official Muscovite rhetoric (Snosheniia Rossii s Kavkazom, no. 12, p. 208).
appealed to Moscow to come and liberate them from the Turks, who captured much of their land and from the shamkhal and his people, these "infidels dogs, who capture Christians at night and then convert them to Islam."21

Christians were not alone in appealing to their mighty coreligionists for help and intervention. At the same time as the Georgians requested Russian help, the shamkhal of Dagestan, alarmed by the rapid Russian expansion in the region, wrote to the Ottoman sultan. He described how the Russians seized his river, built there a fort, and prepared to send against him a large army. He warned that the Russians would take his land and convert his people to Christianity, and "then the cities that you took from Persia--Derbent, Shemakha, Shirvan, and Gianzha will not be able to defend themselves; and the Russians will unite with the Persian shah and the Georgian king, and then they would march on Istanbul from here and the French and Spanish kings from the other side and you, yourself, will not survive in Istanbul, and you will be captured and the Muslims will become Christians, and our faith will come to an end, if you do no intercede."22

At the time when religion and state sovereignty were not and could not be clearly separated, the major powers in the region often laid claims to lands and peoples on the basis of the common religion. The Russian envoys were always prepared to argue the Russian sovereignty over western Georgia because it was a Christian country. They also heard similar arguments from the Ottomans, who insisted that the Circassians and the Kumiys were Muslims, and therefore the subjects of the Ottoman empire.23 In 1645, one of

21Snosheniia Rossii s Kavkazom, no. 6, p. 53-62. A similar appeal was issued by the Armenian bishop Martin asking for protections of the Armenians of Derbent, who claimed to have been forced to convert to Islam (Tsentralk'nyj gosudarstvennyj voenno-istoricheskii arkhiv, F. VUA, no. 18472, l. 3).
22Snosheniia Rossii s Kavkazom, no. 12, p. 203.
the chiefs of southern Dagestan, the utsmii of Kaidag, rejecting Moscow's claim that two chiefs of Enderi, a town in northern Dagestan, were Russian subjects, expressed his views unambiguously: "And you should know: Kazanalp and Burak are Muslims, and how can the Muslims be the subjects (kholopi) of a Christian ruler? They are the subjects of our sovereign, the [Persian] shah." Such uncompromising rhetoric was, of course, both self-serving and untrue.

By the middle of the seventeenth century many Muslims did in fact find themselves within the borders of the Russian state, and many Christians were the subjects of the Ottoman empire.

The rhetorical power of such appeals notwithstanding, religious solidarity was often sacrificed to more immediate and pragmatic needs. Thus, the Georgians, after their numerous laments about oppressed and suffering Christianity sought Moscow's aid against the shamkhal, whose continuous raids devastated Georgian villages. When military assistance was not forthcoming, the Georgians did not hesitate to collaborate either with the Persians or the Ottomans. Likewise, the Russians, after giving assurances that Moscow was at the center of the grand Christian coalition of European powers against the Muslims and the Turks, insisted that the Georgians provide supplies for the fort Terk. Both, the Christians and the Muslims used pilgrims as spies and the issues of faith as a cover for political purposes.

Religious and political considerations clashed constantly often resisting reconciliation. During the Russian invasion of Dagestan in 1722, the Crimean khan wrote to the shamkhal, Adil Giray, "not to trust the words of the infidel Muscovites, but instead rally all the Muslims against the infidels for the sake...

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25 Snosheniia Rossii s Kavkazom, no. 4, pp. 26-27, 37. In 1775, a Russian official in Astrakhan suggested that under the pretext of faith and reconstruction of the destroyed churches, the Russian government should begin settling the town of Tatartup, a strategic place close to Georgia which would allow a better control of Kabarda (Kabardino-russkie otnosheniia, vol. 2, no. 220, p. 314).
of Islam." But most of the time other Muslims were further away than the Russians, and in their unceasing internal wars various chiefs of Dagestan conspired to obtain "infidel" Russian help against the local Muslim rivals. Likewise, the Kabardinian nobles frequently asked for Russian assistance against the devastating raids of their coreligionist from the Crimea and northwestern Caucasus. Reassuring Russian administration that the Kabardinians had no choice but to be on good terms with Russia, an insightful and knowledgeable Russian official in the region, Vasilii Bakunin reported in 1748 that even though the Kabardinians shared with the Crimeans and the Kuban Nogays the same religion, they often suffered from the raids of the latter two and would never leave Kabarda and cross the Kuban river to become the Crimean subjects.

Yet, in the minds of Russian officials, it often was natives' religious identity that defined their behavior and moral qualities. As early as the sixteenth century, Russian officials explained the natives' inability to keep an oath of allegiance by the fact that they were Muslim and therefore could not be trusted. Two centuries later, in 1784, the governor-general of the Caucasus P. S. Potemkin concluded that it was quite possible that the Kabardinians had become duplicitous after they converted to Islam, but their poor understanding of Islam's tenets explained their perfidious nature. Before conversion to Islam, the governor continued, they were Christians, and if suitable priests were to be sent to preach among them, "undoubtedly, they would soon shed the light of divine bliss among all the peoples scattered in the mountains."

P. S. Potemkin was not the first one to introduce an idea of "re-christianization of the Caucasus." The first attempt to evangelize among the

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28 Snosheniia Rossii s Kavkazom, no. 20, p. 305.
natives of the region was made in 1744, when the government decided to send a
mission to the Ossetians. Such a mission had to be kept secret, and the
Senate instructed the Synod to send only Georgian priests, not Russian ones,
and to give them no written instructions, thus avoiding any suspicion on the
part of the Ottoman or Persian governments.\textsuperscript{30} Four years later, an unsigned
report about Kabarda prepared by the Office of the Foreign Affairs referring to
the testimony of one of the Kabardinian nobles, maintained that the
Kabardinians had always been Christian, that their origins could be found
among the fifteenth century Ukrainian Cossacks, who had come to settle in
Terk fort and its environs. At that time they were known as Circassians or
Kabardinians, became Russian subjects, but were later seized by the
Crimeans and forced to convert to Islam. When they returned to the Terek
river, they had already forgot their language and their Christian faith. A
similar memorandum, originating from the same Office in the 1770s went one
step further concluding that this was why the Ottomans claimed them as their
subjects.\textsuperscript{31} Despite the nonsensical nature of such reports, their implications
for the policy makers in the Russian capital were obvious: the Russian
government had grounds to dispute the Ottoman suzerainty over the
Kabardinians and to legitimize its efforts to "re-christianize" them.

While some argued that conversion was justified because these peoples
were Christians in the past, others suggested that Islam prevailed among
them because they had been Christians only in name and, essentially,
remained pagan. Both arguments, however, led to the same conclusion: that more active evangelization would bring them back to Christianity. Yet, despite, the various plans for missionary work among the natives, these proposals remained mostly committed to paper, unfulfilled and unrealized. A more serious, but in the end, equally unsuccessful effort of evangelization, would have to wait until the 1860s.

Of Enlightenment

In the second half of the eighteenth century, although still mostly concerned with the political and military objectives, the government began to embark on a different course of action, now actively seeking to alter the way of life of the peoples of the North Caucasus. A 1778 report by the Office of the Foreign Affairs referring to the Kabardinians stated explicitly that “until this time there was no need to pay close attention to their internal affairs, and our side had been satisfied merely by pursuit of their political or external loyalty.”

What changed was more than just Russia's needs. Since the mid-eighteenth century Russian interests in the region were served by a new, educated and westernized elite of military officers and government administrators. Typical representatives of the Age of Reason, schooled in contemporary concepts of law, military tactics and administration, confident of their innate superiority, they brought with them new ideas and new methods of governing.

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32 B. F. Pfaf, "Materialy po istorii osetin" v. 5, p. 95 in Sbornik svedenii o kavkazskikh gortsakh, (Tiflis, 1871).
From their vantage point, the natives with their "savage customs" and "completely corrupt morals" were "perfidious and unreliable people (nepostoianny i verolomny)," who could not be trusted because of "their flickery and crude nature" (vetrennosti i grubosti) and "their predatory way of life (khishchnoe remeslo) to which they are predisposed by their very nature and upbringing." The natives could achieve redemption only by becoming the faithful subjects of the Russian empire and enjoying the benefits of civilization which the Russian officials claimed to embody.

These new representatives of Enlightenment did not hesitate to apply the policies of "divide and rule" when "it was necessary to sow disputes" and "to encourage by any possible means squabbles between the Kabardinians," or when "it was in our interests to reconcile the warring factions of the Kabardinian nobles." Neither did they hesitate to use the neighboring Kalmyks and the Cossacks against the Kabardinians or to plan their starvation by seizing their herds and destroying their grain, "so they will be completely starved and impoverished and without their horses, and what could they do then?" asked rhetorically the commander of Kizliar fortress in his secret report to St. Petersburg in 1768.

One of the most comprehensive plans for colonial administration of the region was submitted by the Astrakhan governor Petr Krechetnikov in 1775. Like previous proposals, this one too was based on the belief "nothing can tame their barbarity better and make them more docile than their conversion to Christianity," and "because many of these peoples are Muslim only in name, it will not be difficult to convert them, and through the contact with our people it

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34Kabardino-russkie otnoshenia, vol. 2, no. 225, p. 324; no. 256, p. 359-63. In 1768 the Kabardinian nobles complained that the Kizliar commander Major-General N. A. Potapov did not come to meet with them in Mozdok and wrote to them that "it was below his dignity to speak to such people as we are." (Ibid., nos. 199-200, p. 276-77).
would be possible to have their language and their customs eradicated complete." A school should be founded in the city of Astrakhan where the local nobles could send their children, and trade should be encouraged so that the natives get used to Russian merchandise and particularly to using money.37

To convince the authorities in St. Petersburg to pursue a more active policy in the Caucasus, the governor described how the treasury would benefit from the exploration of the region's natural resources and its fertile lands. Furthermore, the natives could supply cheap labor, and because the concept of profit was unfamiliar to them they could be paid very little or be given shirts as a compensation for their labor, as it was customary among them. But to achieve this, the governor argued, the Russian authorities needed to create new settlements along the entire frontier line from Kizliar to Mozdok. There the natives should be settled among the Russian troops, which should comprise at least one third of its population, put under the Russian command, and allowed to intermarry; "this way their way of life, customs, and language will wither away painlessly and easily, and they will become the full subjects of Her Imperial Majesty."38

Similar proposals also emanated from the preceding Russian colonial administrations, but Krechetnikov's plan was particularly detailed and direct. It visibly captured the religious, economic, political and cultural differences between the two different worlds, one of the empire builders and the other of the traditional communal societies of the region. The natives were to be the object of the imperial policies and had to be changed. They too could join the civilized realm and become the true subjects of the empire by abandoning their

way of life and converting to Christianity. Profit would replace the honor system, industries would alter a traditional landscape, new crops would replace subsistence agriculture, Russian language would substitute the native tongue, and the Muslims would become Christians.

About the same time, on another frontier, the American negotiator with the Indians of the Great Lakes, Benjamin Lincoln, also believed that the savages had to be civilized, that the Indians had no right to stand in the way of progress. Of course, neither Krechetnikov nor Lincoln were alone in their views; they were rather typical representatives of their governments in the Age of Enlightenment. The governments in both the Catherinian Russia and the Jeffersonian America pursued the same policies of the natives' assimilation. But in the capitalist America the terms of the Indians' inclusion were the rule of property and laws, which, Thomas Jefferson believed, would lead the Indians into the embrace of the fellow Americans.\(^\text{39}\) In monarchical Russia, by contrast, the terms of the inclusion were the natives' service to the state and the crown, their complete acculturation, and conversion to Christianity.

Yet, in the late eighteenth century, these remained mostly policy ideals rather than actual policies. The Russian government lacked the resources to settle the region and to explore its natural wealth expediently. Neither could the government boast of much success in evangelizing the peoples of the North Caucasus, as the continuous Russian expansion in the region had the opposite effect, driving the natives into the arms of the local Muslim clergy and to the resistance under the green banners of Islam.

\(^{39}\text{Richard White, The Middle Ground, pp. 470, 473-74.}\)
Not accidentally, of course, the new policies toward the natives came about, when the Russian military reached an unquestionable military superiority in the region. A series of new forts connected by 1800 in one continuous defense line secured the newly acquired territories. Now, the residents of the forts and the settlers behind the line were safe against the unceasing raids, and the new military tactics of using irregular troops and field artillery allowed for successful offensive operations.

No less important was an expansion of trade in the area, as the local nobles became increasingly accustomed to prized Russian goods. The burgeoning demand for trade led to a growing burden on the local peasants, who complained about the increased taxation and limitations on their traditional freedom of movement imposed by their noble lords. Below I would like to discuss two specific issues intimately connected with Russia's growing military and commercial presence in the area, and which, I believe, were at the core of Russian colonization: changes in migration patterns and in the landscape.

I do not mean here the migration of the settlers from Russia to the region; instead I am referring to the less known movement of the natives toward the Russian towns. From the mid-sixteenth century, the Kabardinian nobles, like many other non-Christians, departed for Russia frequently: some in search of refuge from the rivals, others attracted by the generous rewards Moscow offered in exchange for their military service. They were given titles to land, ranks of the Russian military officers, and handsome cash annuities. They converted to Christianity, assumed Russian names and intermarried with Russian noble families.40

40Perhaps the most famous case was that of the Princes Cherkasskii dynasty, which for
A century later the nobles were joined by the host of others: lesser nobles fleeing justice or looking for better terms of military employment; peasants and slaves escaping onerous labor; and Georgians and Armenians purchased by the natives from their neighbors, seeking freedom among fellow Christians. Repeated requests and demands to return the fugitive commoners, and threats of retribution, if they were not returned, failed to move the administration, which in its turn insisted that those fugitives who converted to Christianity could not be sent back. The Russian administration encouraged and rewarded such conversions, and many fugitives were listed as new converts, even though they had little idea of their new religion and continued to practice their old one.\textsuperscript{41}

By the mid-eighteenth century with the construction of Mozdok, a new fort a short distance away from some Kabardinian villages, the issue of the fugitives’ return took on a different dimension. Despaired Kabardinian nobles complained that they could no longer exercise control over their people, who threatened to flee and convert to Christianity in Mozdok, Kizliar, or Astrakhan. Others complained that many had already left them, and they had no people left to perform any work. Such reports were indeed confirmed by the Kabardinians who spied for the Russians and by the Russian officers stationed in the region.\textsuperscript{42}


\textsuperscript{42}Kabardino-russkie otnosheniia, vol. 2, no. 165, pp. 221-2; vol. 1, no. 46, pp. 73-75; vol. 2, no. 46, pp. 73-75; vol. 2, no. 165, pp. 221-2.

When some of the converts, disappointed in their new circumstances, fled back to Kabarda, the Russian authorities insisted that these fugitives be returned, and this time it was the Kabardinian nobles who refused such demands. But fleeing back to one's native village was neither easy, nor sufficiently common, and the report to the Foreign Affairs Office in 1770 stated that Kabardinians indeed suffered great damage from the loss of their people. The report explained that Kabardinians usually paid about 100 rubles per captive, and a loss of one thousand such captives would amount to a significant sum of money. The report suggested that the Muslim fugitives should be handed back and that the Kabardinian nobles could be appeased, if the government offered them a compensation of 60-70 rubles for each of those Muslims who wish to convert and 50-60 rubles for each Christian fugitive.43

Another and a more urgent argument in favor of returning the fugitives from the Caucasus was presented in a secret report by a commander of the Kizliar fort. He reported that on the eve of the war with the Ottoman empire in 1768, the forts of Kizliar and Mozdok as well as the Cossack towns along the frontier were poorly fortified and had few troops. If the various local peoples were aided by the Crimeans, they could cause significant damage. His recommendation was not to accept the fugitive Muslim peasants, thus winning the loyalty of the Kabardinian nobles, who could then help the Russians to defend the frontier.44

A temporary reprieve for the local nobles was achieved in 1771 when Catherine the Great personally wrote to the Kabardinian people trying, as always, to reconcile her ideas learned from the books of the Western philosophes with the incongruous realities of the Russian empire. While she

43*Kabardino-russkie otnoshenia*, vol. 2, no. 175, p. 236; no. 212, p. 298-99.  
nobly declared that “there is no such law in the entire world to reject those who seek Christian faith,” she then conceded to the demands that the Kabardinian peasants should be returned “because they have no ways of comprehending Christianity and because you need them in the fields.”

Russian policies of providing refuge for fugitives inadvertently led to the growing division between the Kabardiniannobles and the commoners. Exploiting such a rift, later became central to the administration's policies in the North Caucasus. By promoting a social conflict within the native society the Russian government sought to weaken the nobles and thus to increase its leverage over the natives. For instance, one of the tasks of the Russian liaison officer residing among the Kabardinians was "to incite the commoners to be loyal to Russia," and when in 1767 more than ten thousand Kabardinian peasants rebelled against the nobles and threatened to flee, the Russian major was sent to convince the rebels to leave their nobles and settle in the Russian territory.

At different times, the immediate military and strategic consideration compelled the government to resort to a non-interference policy. Thus, in 1778, the Office of Foreign Affairs rejected as impractical the Astrakhan governor's suggestions to protect the Kabardinian commoners from the abuses of their nobles and to transfer and resettle them along the Siberian defense line. The Office advised the governor that “it is outside the interests of this side to consider what the nature of the commoners relations to the nobles is,” that this would constitute an interference with the Kabardinian right of ownership, and would reinforce suspicions of the Crimea and the Ottoman Porte. The instructions continued: “As for the fact, that the commoners may rebel and kill

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their own nobles, that is even for the better; then there will be fewer Kabardinian nobles, and it will happen by the hands of their people, so that this side could not be blamed.47

A few years later, when the Russian government was less concerned about the potential conflict with the Ottoman Porte and keeping up the appearances of fair play, Prince G. A. Potemkin-Tavricheskii instructed the commander of the Russian troops in the Caucasus, General P. S. Potemkin, to accept the fugitives from among the poor people, who fled to escape the oppression. Expressing his views on the issue in no uncertain terms, he continued: “I regard the separation of the commoners from the nobles the best way to secure our frontier.”48

The settlement of the frontier closely mirrored Russia’s policies in the region. Initially, the fugitives from the Caucasus had been dispersed among the Russian forts and Cossack settlements along the frontier. But the proximity of their new residences to their old villages proved too dangerous, as the war parties organized by the local nobles frequently raided the frontier settlements in order to return their fugitives. Relying on its experience with the Kalmyk converts, the government decreed that the converts had to be moved further from the Russian borders and settled together with the Russians, so that they could learn farming and perform military service. Shortly, some were dispatched to join the Don and Volga Cossacks, others were enlisted as the state peasant in Tambov province. Even the Don and Volga proved to be too close to prevent the converts from fleeing and other, more remote locations of the Orenburg province and the Siberia were suggested.49

Later, when the frontier was sufficiently secured, the government decided that the converts should play an important role in settling the region. In its report to the empress, Catherine II, the Senate suggested that in order to strengthen the region of Kizliar, a new fort should be built to settle the newly converted Ossetians and Kabardinians. Such a fort was to have a church and a priest, who could make trips to the mountains to evangelize other peoples of the Caucasus. Furthermore, Georgians, Armenians and other Christian nations (natsiia) could be invited to found silk and other industries and each of these nations should be allowed to settle separately and build their own churches. Only Muslims should not be allowed to settle here. 50 The imperial Russian frontier had to be a Christian one.

The growing presence of Russian towns and forts, settlers and soldiers was also rapidly changing the traditional landscape of the region. The physical and ecological changes could not be easily separated from the government’s military and political objectives. Thus, in 1768 General Potapov ordered the demolition of the dam on one of the Terek tributaries. The water, which was used by the Kumyks for the irrigation of their fields, now was diverted to surround the fort of Kizliar, so as to provide for its better defense. 51 The construction of Mozdok in the early 1740s caused bitter complaints from the Kabardinians, who demanded that the fort be raised because “it is being built where we cut forest and graze our cattle. There is no need for this fort because there is no danger to us or Your Majesty.” 52 But the government had a different opinion; it maintained that the fort was being built on the land which did not belong to the Kabardinians.

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51 I. A. Gol’denshtedt, Geograficheskoe i statisticheskoe opisanie Gruzii i Kavkaza (St. Pbs Imp. AN, 1809), p. 4.
With the construction of the defense lines, the natives found themselves dependent on the benevolence of the local authorities who now controlled access to their traditional pasture lands, forest groves, fisheries, and of course, the new markets. General P. S. Potemkin, condemning the exploitation and the harsh conditions of the Kabardinian peasants, believed that the nobles' complaints about being constrained and oppressed by the Russian defense line was a mere excuse: “what they consider oppression is the fact that our army is serving as an impediment to their inhumanity.”\textsuperscript{53} One can only wonder whether the General held similar views on the plight of the Russian serfs?

The newly acquired lands did not remain vacant for too long. The orders came to follow the example of the Novorossiisk province and to distribute the lands behind the defense line.\textsuperscript{54} Some recommended that lands along the Terek river should be used for farming, planting vineyards and producing silk.\textsuperscript{55} Lands around Mozdok were distributed among the Cossacks, settlers from Russia, and the fugitives from the Caucasus.\textsuperscript{56} In time, the transformation of the newly acquired lands was complete: they were turned from the pasture lands in common possession of the natives into the farming lands in the individual possession of the Russians. What had been a perilous frontier was turned into an imperial borderland. Colonization of the Caucasus was under way.

Concluding Remarks

Throughout the two and a half centuries since the Muscovites first appeared in the North Caucasus, the region has been slowly but inescapably

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\textsuperscript{53} Kabardino-russkie otnosheniia, vol. 2, no. 256, p. 361. \\
\textsuperscript{54} Kabardino-russkie otnosheniia, vol. 2, no. 251, p. 355. \\
\textsuperscript{55} Kabardino-russkie otnosheniia, vol. 2, no. 189, p. 257-9. \\
\textsuperscript{56} Kabardino-russkie otnosheniia, vol. 2, no. 188, p. 255-6.
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altered. Vast steppes and plains previously sparsely populated by nomadic and semi-nomadic peoples were now studded with numerous Russian forts, settlements and towns, all connected into a single fortification line protecting the imperial borderlands. These Russian forts and towns were populated by both, the Russian settlers from the interior of the empire and the non-Russian immigrants from the Caucasus. Some came of their own will, others were exiled to the remote outposts of the empire. Most of the residents of these frontier settlements belonged to the Cossacks or regular military, some were traders and artisans, few were peasants. Their occupation could not be easily separated from their ethnic origins: Russians and Ukrainians predominated in the military, the Georgians and Armenians in trade and crafts, while recent converts could either be enlisted in the military (Kabardinians, Kumyks, Nogays, et. al.) or settled to farm the land (the Ossetians). Former pastures and grazing grounds were turning into the farm lands, subsistence crops were being replaced by cash crops, silk plantations and vineyards, and the plans for mining and the construction of factories were being studied. The local merchants' itineraries to the Russian towns of Kizliar and Astrakhan became far more frequent than to their traditional trading centers in the cities of Georgia and Azerbaijan. Disparate local vernaculars could still be heard, but Russian was inevitably replacing Turkish, as a new lingua franca of the region.

The North Caucasus was being transformed as a result of the Russian government's deliberate policies. Unlike the European colonial enterprises in the Americas, Asia and Africa which were predominantly driven by the commercial interests, the Russian expansion in the Caucasus throughout the period was and remained motivated by geopolitical and military considerations. When, in the late eighteenth century, some Russian officials planned for tapping the region's economic potential, they phrased their discourse in terms
of the benefits to the state of Her Imperial Majesty, and even then the commercial concerns remained far less important than the political ones. The colonization of the North Caucasus was first and foremost a government enterprise.

Moscow's presence in the region was marked from the very beginning by a single concern of securing the political loyalty of the natives. In Russian political language this could be done through the natives' pledges of allegiance to their new Russian sovereign. But the government's official rhetoric of self-aggrandizement, which portrayed the natives as the subjects of Moscow, and a ritual idiom of pledging allegiance to the tsar, persistently refused to recognize that reality was different from the one construed by Russian political language. In fact, the natives' loyalty could be assured only through both, symbolic and tangible system of payments and rewards. Such an approach meant to benefit the local nobility and to secure their cooperation and loyalty, but it had only a limited success. To meet the local nobles' expectations, the Russians had to provide them with annuities, to pay rewards, to deliver plentiful presents which were interpreted as an important measure of respect, and to offer military aid against their local rivals. And when the Ottomans or the Persians offered more attractive "package deals," the local nobles were always ready to switch their "allegiances." Often Moscow was able neither to deliver on its promises and the natives' expectation, nor to match the offers from the Ottoman and Persian governments. The loyalty of the natives remained elusive.

Russian expansion in the region was greatly facilitated by the unceasing rivalries and internecine wars among the local nobles. Many did not hesitate to invite the Russian presence, to have the forts built in the vicinity, and to rely on Russian military in promoting their own interests. In time, however, these
same nobles found their political freedom circumscribed, their lands taken away, and the traditional justice denied. Some among the local nobles had no other choice than to continue their reluctant cooperation with the Russian authorities. Others, however, threw themselves with determination into an alliance with the Ottomans against the continuous Russian intrusion.

It was at this time, in the middle of the eighteenth century, that the government adopted a policy of driving a wedge between the nobles and the commoners, a socially conscious policy of "divide and rule." Rather than attempting to win over the nobles, such a policy meant to weaken them by depriving the nobles of the source of their income and labor. The fact that this policy was relatively successful is apparent not only from several large revolts against the nobles, but also from the numerous nobles' complaints asking the government to stop sowing the discord between them and their people and to return their fugitive commoners.

"The co-optation of the elites," a phrase so commonly used in the colonial studies, does not go too far in describing Russian policies in the Caucasus in the eighteenth century. If anything, it was the co-optation of the commoners, not the elites, as the authorities sought to induce the native commoners to flee from their nobles and settle in Russia. Neither do the origins of the class struggle in the colonial context appear to be found solely in a clear-cut conflict over the means of production. In the end, both policies, one of offering the material incentives and another of co-optation of the commoners led to the same result—the commoner and the noble alike were growing more dependent on the Russian imperial authorities.

Strong incentives and generous rewards were offered to those who chose to cross the lines of conflict and to settle on the Russian side of the frontier. Some of them joined the military, others settled to farm the land, but all were
expected to undergo a crucial rite of passage--conversion to Christianity. In the eyes of the government, such a conversion was more than a religious transformation. The government assumed that the converts would soon abandon their language and customs for the Russian ones. Conversion to Christianity was equated with assimilation; it was the only way for the natives eventually to become Russian.

Even though the government traditionally favored such an outcome, a policy of accepting and converting the natives meant antagonizing the local nobles, and thus worked to subvert the very goal the government tried to achieve, peace and security in the region. The alternative was to placate the nobles and to win their cooperation by discouraging and returning the fugitives. But such a prospect, for the local authorities entailed forgoing a pool of cheap labor and of new military recruits, and for the government in the capital it meant forsaking the prospective converts to Christianity.

Such tension was inherent in Russian policies in the region and could not be easily resolved. Throughout the seventeenth century the government tried to balance the two approaches by ignoring the nobles complaints, while appeasing them with gifts and presents. In the eighteenth century, when the numbers of the fugitives surged, the government officials continued to explain the issue away without doing anything to change the situation. With the increased presence of the Russian military and less vulnerable Russian frontier, both, the central government and the local authorities were even less prepared to compromise on the issue. Only when the same Russian officials had come to an inescapable conclusion that a policy of "divide, convert, and rule" was driving the local nobles further into the arms of the Ottoman empire, did the government reconsider the issue and Catherine II, in her decree, conceded to the local nobles' demands to have their people returned to them.
Even then, the words and the actions of the regional Russian commanders did not always remain congruous with the Empress' decree.

Despite the seemingly obvious conclusion that the stability of the frontier could have been better achieved through the co-optation of the nobles, the government preferred to resolve the issue in favor of accepting and converting the new comers. The issue was a pertinent one throughout the time, but in the eighteenth century it was conceptualized and coached in terms of Enlightenment. The Russian government was destined to bring the natives the light of Christianity and Civilization, two notions inseparable in the minds of the government officials. Christianity and Enlightenment were both, a convenient explanation for the Russian policies in the Caucasus and a perfect justification for the region's colonization.

In the end, the North Caucasus, for a long time a frontier region on the periphery of the Persian, the Ottoman, and the Russian empires, was to become a borderland of the latter. Unlike the Persians, who only occasionally sent expeditionary forces into the region to assert their short-lived supremacy and unlike the Ottomans, whose sporadic military campaigns intended no more than ensuring a flow of taxes and slaves to Istanbul, the Russian government undertook a systematic colonization of the region by stationing troops in the numerous forts, dispatching bureaucrats, merchants, and priests to the newly built towns, and encouraging the new-comers to settle and farm the land. Yet, the government policy of linking the process of the region's colonization with Christianity only pushed the natives to further embrace Islam. At the same time as the Russian government was winning a battle over the region's landscape, it was losing it over the region's peoples. The natives would learn to rally under the banners of Islam, which became both the means and the goal of resistance. The lines of the future conflicts were clearly drawn.