

**THE OTHERS OF THE OTHERS:  
The Chechens and the Chechen-Russian Conflict in the Post-Soviet Textbooks in  
Ukraine and Azerbaijan**

Abstract

*The Chechens and the wars between them and Russian authorities are understood as ‘others of others’ in the post-Soviet states like Ukraine and Azerbaijan, so as Russia is seen as a significant ‘other’ both in Kyiv and in Baku. The depiction of the Chechen issue (Tsarist colonization, Stalinist repressions and two wars in the 1990s) is going to become more detailed in the Ukrainian and Azerbaijani World History textbooks. The emancipation of the Ukrainian and Azerbaijani history writing and the strained relations between Russia and the former USSR-Republics are the main reasons for that.*

The research on the different perceptions of the neighbouring nations in their historical narrative was one of the mainstreams in the western schoolbook studies for a long time. Therefore nationalism studies concentrates on the analysis of the evolution of the “we” and “others” notions during the nation-building processes,<sup>1</sup> the historiography tried to focus on the depiction of the “historical rivals” in the national history and in the national historiography as well. A sample for that may be the mutual perception and imagination of their own and “others” past in the French and German textbooks, but also in Polish textbooks on history. In the last decades several publications on Croatian<sup>2</sup> and Serbian<sup>3</sup>, Polish<sup>4</sup> and Ukrainian<sup>5</sup>, but also on Armenian and Azerbaijani<sup>6</sup> cases have emerged. The aim of this contribution is to analyse the depiction of the “others of the others”. The Chechen wars, the conflict between

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<sup>1</sup> See, Robert H. Wiebe: *Who We Are: A History of Popular Nationalism*, Princeton University Press 2001.

<sup>2</sup> See, Alex J. Bellamy: *The formation of Croatian national identity. A centuries-old dream?*, Manchester University Press 2004, p. 137-171.

<sup>3</sup> See, Keith Crawford : *Culture Wars: Serbian History Textbooks and the Construction of National Identity*, in: <http://centres.exeter.ac.uk/historyresource/journal6/Crawfordrev.doc> (07.07.2009).

<sup>4</sup> There is a huge number of scholar publications on Polish textbooks. Egr. Matthias Arens: *Neue polnische Geschichtsschulbücher*, in: *Grenzen und Grenzräume in der deutschen und polnischen Geschichte*. - (2000) , p. 279-283.

<sup>5</sup> For an interesting overview about the image of Poles and Poland in the Ukrainian secondary school textbooks on history, see Natalya Yakovenko: *Paralel'nyj svit. Doslidzhennya z istorii uyavlen' ta idej v Ukraini XVI-XVII st.*, Kyiv: Krytyka 2002.

<sup>6</sup> See, Vladimir Rouvinski, „History Speaks Our Language!” A Comparative Study of Historical Narratives in Soviet and Post-Soviet School Textbooks in the Caucasus, in: *Internationale Schulbuchforschung* 3 (2007): 235-257. The contributions of Mikayel Zolyan, Tigran Zakaryan, Sergey Rummyantsev and others in the special issue on the textbooks in the Caucasus and Central Asia of *International Textbook Research* 4 (2008).

the Chechen population and the Russian authorities, the revolt of the periphery and its resistance against the centre in Moscow were the main challenges, with which post-Soviet Russia was confronted. Once a mighty power, it was involved in two bloody wars with a small nation in the Caucasus. Without doubt, the Chechens are the “others” for modern Russian nationalism. So, how is this conflict seen and depicted in the textbooks of the nations, which see Russia as the “others” in the framework of their own nation- and state-building processes?

The Ukrainian and Azerbaijani textbooks are chosen as case-studies. Both societies have experienced a similar development in the twentieth century: a short-lived independence (1917-1920) combined with Soviet Communism. The so called “Soviet period” of their past is seen both in Kyiv and in Baku as a period of Soviet occupation.<sup>7</sup> Since the last years of perestroika both republics conducted the policy of de-russification of the language and writing of history. The Ukraine and Azerbaijan sympathised with the Chechen rebels during the wars in the 1990s and 2000s. Kyiv and Baku unofficially gave asylum to thousands of Chechen refugees but did not dare to accept the Chechen independence de-facto. Last but not least, neither Ukrainians nor Azerbaijanis have any sort of ethnic or religious affinities with the Chechens who speak a Caucasian language and are Sunni Muslims with a strong Wahhabite tradition.

The Chechen-Russian conflict is understood in this article as a two-century long confrontation between Russians and Chechens, which began with the Tsarist colonization of the Northern Caucasus in the nineteenth century and lasted until the last two Chechen-Russian wars after 1991.<sup>8</sup> The depiction of the Stalinist deportations of Chechens in 1940s in the Ukrainian and Azerbaijani textbooks will be analysed as well.

### **Tsarist colonization of the Chechens**

Nine pages of the Ukrainian textbook *Vsesvitnja istorija* are devoted to the foreign and colonial policy of the Russian Empire in the second half of the nineteenth century. Two of them are about the colonial policy towards the Central Asia and the Caucasus. “Until the

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<sup>7</sup> A Museum of Soviet Occupation was opened in Kyiv recently.

<sup>8</sup> See, Hans Krech: *Der russische Krieg in Tschetschenien (1994 - 1996)*. Ein Handbuch, Berlin: Köster 1997 and Emil Souleimanov: *An endless war. The Russian-Chechen War in perspective*, Frankfurt-a.-M.: Peter Lang 2007.

middle of 60s the Russian Empire ‘solved’ [vyrišila] the problem of the Caucasus.”<sup>9</sup> The authors<sup>10</sup> point out that the territories like Chechnya [*ukr.* Čečnja] and Dagestan turned to the barrier after Russia occupied Transcaucasian Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia. The struggle of Imam Shamil against Russian expansion is particularly underlined as well as his military and statesman talents: “he did not only beat down the Russian troops but also created his own empire.”<sup>11</sup> The Azerbaijani textbooks of history enlighten the national past of the Northern Caucasus but also of Tatars and Bashkirs separately from the history of Russia. The World History textbook (called *Yeni tarix*, New Times) for the ninth class issued in 2005 devotes three pages to the reaction of the Caucasian peoples during the expansion of the Tsarist regime in the Caucasus. In contrast to the Ukrainian textbook, the Azerbaijani one demonstrates the annexation of Georgia by Russia in 1801 and the results of the Russian-Turkish war from 1828-29 in a more detailed way. “General Yermolov founded the fortress of Grozny in 1817 and the Russian troops tried to penetrate into Chechnya [*Azeri:* Çeçenistan] and Dagestan.”<sup>12</sup> The Azerbaijani textbook gives information not only about Shamil, but also about Gazi Mohammed and Hamzat, two other resistance activists in the Northern Caucasus.<sup>13</sup>

### **Stalinist deportations of the Chechens**

The Ukrainian textbook of World History writes on the new wave of Stalinist repressions “against entire peoples. For example in 1944, the Chechens, Ingushs, Crimean Tatars [...] were deported to Siberia and Central Asia.”<sup>14</sup> In a paragraph on Khrushchev’s liberalization (*ukr.* vidlyha) it is to read that the Chechens like Ingushs, Balkars etc. were among the rehabilitated peoples according to the decree of 1957.<sup>15</sup> In a separate chapter on the “Turkish and Caucasian peoples during the War”, the Azerbaijani Modern History textbook (*Azeri:* Ən Yeni tarix) postulates that 650,000 Chechens, Ingushs and Balkars were deported into the

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<sup>9</sup> S. V. Bilonožko, I. M. Biryul’ov, O. R. Davletov, V. G. Kosmina, L. O. Nesterenko, F. G. Turčenko: *Vsesvitnja istorija. Novi časy. Pidručnik dlja 9-go klasu zahalnoosvitnich navčal’nykh zakladiv*, Kyiv: Heneza 2006, P. 161.

<sup>10</sup> The author of this paragraph is Serhij Volodymyrovyč Bilonožko from the Zaporiz’je University.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>12</sup> T. T. Vəliyev, R. C. Süleymanov, N. C. Mehdiyeva, Q. Ə. Əliyev, M. B. Fətəliyev, R. O. Qurbanov, Ə. Ə. Qocayev, M. Ö. Vəliyev, A. Ə. Hüseynov: *Yeni tarix. Ümumtəhsil məktəblərinin 10-cu sinfi üçün dərslik*. 3. Aufl., Baku: Çarşıoğlu 2005, P. 48.

<sup>13</sup> The author of this paragraph is an Azerbaijani historian Qabil Ə. Əliyev. Qabil Əliyev (born in 1956 in Füzuli/Azerbaijan) is an assistant at the Chair of the Turkish and Caucasian History at the Baku State University.

<sup>14</sup> S. V. Vidnjanskyj: *Vsesvitnja istorija. Novitnja istorija. Navčal’nyj posibnyk dlja 11 klasu zahal’noosvitnich navčal’nykh zakladiv*, 2. edition. Kyiv: Diez-Produkt 2005, P. 100.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 193.

eastern regions of the USSR at the end of February, 1944.<sup>16</sup> The abolition of the Chechen-Ingush autonomous republic by the Soviets in the same year is mentioned as well.

### **The Chechen-Russian Wars in 1990s**

The Ukrainian World History textbooks for the eleventh class deliver very broad information on the political processes in the Soviet Union during Perestroika and after its collapse in 1991. Particular attention is devoted to the political, economic and cultural transformation in Russia. In this context, the authors of the World History of 1939-2004 textbook, Ya. Berdyčevs'kyj, T. Ladyčenko and I. Ščupak depict the „First Chechen War [Perša čečens'ka vijna] (1994-1996)“ in the chapter about the development and evolution of Russian statehood (1991-2004).<sup>17</sup> Explaining the reasons for the war the authors write: „The Chechens did not forget their forceful annexation [nasylnyc'koe pri'ednannja] to Russia in the nineteenth century, the Stalinist deportations in the years of the war.“<sup>18</sup> Afterwards, the warfare during the Chechen-Russian military confrontation in 1994-1996 is depicted. Regarding the Chechen rebels, the authors use the term “separatists” [separatysty] and stress the immense number of victims among the Chechen civil population during the intervention by Russian troops in Grozny in 1994. The Chechen term “Ichkeria”, a name of the self-proclaimed Chechen state is mentioned as well. The treaty signed by Aslan Maskhadov and Boris Yeltsin is a chronological end to the chapter on the First Chechen-Russian war. A photo of Grozny, destroyed by war, is seen in the same paragraph with a subtitle beneath: “Grozny. People still lived here recently” [Groznyj: tut šče nedavno žyly ljudy].<sup>19</sup> In a subchapter on the presidency of Vladimir Putin, the authors of the textbook dedicate half of the page to the second Chechen war. They use the term “Chechen guerrillas” [bojovyky], for those who invaded the neighbouring Dagestan in 1999. The term *jihad* as a “holy war against the ‘unbelievers’”<sup>20</sup> is introduced in this context to depict the intentions of the Chechens. The explosions of numerous buildings in Moscow and in other Russian cities are mentioned, but the version, that the Chechens recount is clearly doubted. The amendments to the Chechen constitution in

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<sup>16</sup> İsaq Məmmədov, Seyfəddin Qəndilov, Tahir Qaffarov, Sevdə Süleymanova, Əkbər Qocayev, Murad Vəliyev: Ən Yeni Tarix. Ümumtəhsil məktəblərinin 11-ci sinfi üçün dərslik, 2. Aufl., Baku: Çayıoğlu 2005, P.64.

<sup>17</sup> Ja. M. Berdyčevs'kyj, T. V. Ladyčenko, I. Ja. Ščupak: Vsesvitnja istorija. 11 klas. 1939-2004. Pidručnyk dlja 11 klasu zahal'noosvitnich navčal'nych zakladiv, Zaporiz'je: Prem'er 2004, p. 177-178.

<sup>18</sup> Ibidem, p. 178.

<sup>19</sup> The same photo also seen in the Russian version of the Ukrainian textbook on history, which was published also by the Prem'er in Zaporizje in 2004. (Ja. M. Berdičevskij, T. V. Ladyčenko, I. Ja. Ščupak: Vsemirnaja istorija. 11 klass. 1939-2004. Učebnik dlja 11 klassa obščebrazovatel'nych učebnyh zavedenij, Zaporoz'je: Premjer 2004, p. 187).

<sup>20</sup> Ibidem, p. 180.

2003 and the election of Ahmet Kadyrov to the President of Chechnya are the chronological conclusion of the narrative about the second Chechen war.

The Azerbaijani textbook of Modern History *Ən yeni tarix* is less informative than the Ukrainian one, although the period it covers is longer. The narrative begins with the end of World War I and ends with the period 2000-2001. Only a half of the page is devoted to “Modern Russia” [Müasir Rusiya]. About the Chechen conflicts in the 1990s one may read: “The Chechen self-proclamation of independence and secession from the Russian Federation was presented as ‘mutiny and terror’. It was a reason for a bloody war, which was accompanied by the immense losses and elimination of the Chechen people [çeçen xalqının məhv edilməsi]”. The second Chechen war is not mentioned. The author of this chapter of the textbook, İsaq Məmmədov<sup>21</sup> wrote that “definite stability emerged in Russia after Putin was elected a President in May of 2000.”<sup>22</sup>

Chechens, the Chechen question, and their wars with Russia are included into the Ukrainian and Azerbaijani versions of the World History textbooks. While the Ukrainian textbook delivers detailed information on the warfare of the 1990s and on the main persons involved into Chechen politics (Maskhadov, Dudaev etc.), the Azerbaijani textbook narrative about this issue is much shorter than the Ukrainian one. Simultaneously, the Azerbaijani textbooks exclude the history of the Northern Caucasus (and of Central Asia) from Russian history. The Chechens are herewith a part of the narrative about the Caucasus. Concerning the wars in the 1990s, the Azeri textbooks go further than the Ukrainian one and write not only about the persecutions of the peaceful population in Chechnya but about the elimination of the Chechen people.

## Main Trends

The modern national textbooks in Ukraine and in Azerbaijan look back on two decades of their existence. Having undergone a process of emancipation from the traditional principles of the Soviet historiography (concentration on the classes, East-West contest etc.), the writing of textbooks in both countries was influenced by the political reality within them. After 1991,

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<sup>21</sup> İsaq Məmmədov (born in 1925 in Qubadlı/ Azerbaijan) is an Azerbaijani historian with the specialization in the contemporary history. For more information about him, see Bahodir Sidikov, „Zwischen Bourdieu und postkolonialer Theorie: Zur Analyse postsowjetischer Schulbücher für das Fach Geschichte (am Beispiel Aserbajdschans)“, in: Mardan Aghayev and Ruslana Suleymanova, Hg., *Jahrbuch Aserbajdschanforschung 2008. Beiträge aus Politik, Wirtschaft, Geschichte und Literatur*, Berlin: Dr. Köster, 2008, 222–247, p. 230f.

<sup>22</sup> İsaq Məmmədov, Seyfəddin Qəndilov, Tahir Qaffarov, Sevda Süleymanova, Əkbər Qocayev, Murad Vəliyev: *Ən Yeni Tarix. Ümumtəhsil məktəblərinin 11-ci sinfi üçün dərslik*, 2. Aufl., Baku: Çarşıoğlu 2005, P.77.

the writing of history textbooks in Ukraine and Azerbaijan tried to take a chance and to challenge the Russian-speaking part of their population. As a part of the nation-building process, Kyiv and Baku “nationalized” the World History textbooks semantically, linguistically and ideologically. Ukrainian and Azeri historians refused to do so with terms like the “Great Motherland War”. The Ukrainian textbook *Vsesvitnja Istorija* (1999) by the authors O. Hisem, A. Ol’biševskyj and V. Ščerbina which depicted the end of eighteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries had a large number of citations in Russian, although the book was issued in Ukrainian.<sup>23</sup> But many samples from the historical documents were presented in “original” form, in the Russian version. The change due to “nationalization” is evident by the analysis of the textbooks issued in the last few years. The Azerbaijani textbooks also had not use the citations in foreign languages before; here the nationalization concerned the geographic names.<sup>24</sup> The history writings of both countries compete with the Russian historiography. Kyiv and Baku seem to aspire to become separate historiography schools. As the Ukrainians and Azeris have their own perception of the outside world, they are interested in the development of their “own” World History.

The Ukrainians stress European history and show themselves in the context of Polish-West European and Lithuanian traditions and cultural circles. The Azeris underline the affinities to the Turkic speaking world and the region of the Caucasus. The history textbooks of the both countries are based on the history writing about the outside world and of Russia within it. One analyses the Russian history as an imperial one and narrates about Russia’s ‘others’. The others of the others are of paramount importance; they are part of the *Schicksalsgemeinschaft*, the post-Soviet community of destinies.

The depiction of the Chechen issue will be more detailed in the Ukrainian and Azerbaijani textbooks in future. A permanent emancipation of the Ukrainian and Azeri historians is one reason for that. Another reason is the deterioration of the relations between Moscow and Kyiv and Baku as well. This deterioration contributes to a more critical analysis of Russia’s past and present.

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<sup>23</sup> O. Hisem, A. Ol’biševskyj, V. Ščerbina: *Vsesvitnja istorija*. Nova istorija (kinec’ 18 – počatok 20 st.). 9 klas, Kyiv: Litera 1999.

<sup>24</sup> See, Zaur Gasimov, „Legionen, Öl und Politik: Der Zweite Weltkrieg in den Lehrbüchern für die Geschichte Aserbajdschans nach 1991“, in: *Internationale Schulbuchforschung* 30 (2008) p. 825-839.

## Secondary Literature

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## Textbooks

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