

Review of Kathryn Cozort's MA thesis

The author has chosen an extremely complex task - to explore the impact of the prevailing patterns of social organization in Chechnya on the scope and nature of violence in Chechnya, a volatile republic of the North Caucasus in Russia's southwestern frontier. I appreciate the author's boldness to run into such an issue encompassing a wide range of features that have been instrumental in stirring up the conflict – and keeping it alive – for decades; features, which remain largely unknown for the mainstream Western audience but whose scrutinization is essential for anyone who is willing to explore the conflict in its core without just bending on the surface. And even though this socio-anthropological attitude to reveal the essence (and politicization) of violence in the North Caucasus has already been picked up by some of the students of the region including myself, author's effort should still be praised with regard to the fact that this is a rather dissident view of the conflict whose analyses have been dominated by the prevailing set of cliches including those of "Islamic terrorism", "the wild Caucasus", etc.

I consider the study basically successful as it followed the line of argumentation pointing at the politicization of violence due to the persisting scheme of social mobilization. That said, some parts of the research (and author's claims) might be problematized to some degree. For instance, it is a methodologically extremely hard task to show the process in its making based on some particular stories since families who are involved in blood feud and/or rise up to fight the Russian or pro-Moscow Chechen authorities do so without need of publicity. Some parts of the text contain highly problematic simplifications such as "Chechnya is Chechnya is a unique place on earth not only because of its geopolitical location, but also because of the distinctive culture that has persisted among the people for centuries, especially in the highland of the republic", p. 76. Well, what makes Chechnya a truly unique place on earth in terms of its geopolitical standing? Is it really as unique as the author claims? I suspect that. As for the persisting pattern of social organization including the custom of blood feud, etc., Chechnya is not that much unique, either, as there are other parts in the world except for the North Caucasus where this custom is still being practiced – let's take the example of Kosovo/North Albania, Afghanistan's Pashto areas, or Turkey's Kurdish areas, Yemen, some other Arabic societies, etc.

Yet all in all, one could say that the actual findings are based on an empirically strong evidence. The author has periodically consulted her work with the supervisor; in terms of stylistic, language and structure I am fine with the work, as well. I am not completely happy with the quotation norm used by the author, though.

To sum up, I suggest that an A or a B mark is given to the author depending on her performance during the thesis defense.

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