



Individual Advanced Research Opportunities Program

Research Report

The opinions, recommendations, and conclusions of the grantee are his/her own and do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of IREX or the US Department of State.

Please respond to the following questions, using the form below as a template. Research Report, along with your Final Report, is due within 30 days of the end of your grant. Please e-mail your Final and Research reports to iaro@irex.org.

1. Title of Research Proposal:

Original title: *Kavkaztsy: Islam and Empire in the Caucasus*

Revised project title: *Imperial Alchemy: Population Politics and Colonial Rhetoric in the Caucasus, 1828-1864*

2. Topic of Research

My dissertation looks at state-orchestrated mass population movements in the Caucasus as part of the administration's efforts to introduce a new cultural and economic order in the region. I argue that the Caucasus administration saw the various ethnic groups in the region as occupying various niches in this new order, and that they sought to create a heterogeneous population in which each nationality could contribute harmoniously to the larger project. This social alchemy predictably had more complicated effects than its practitioners expected, as local groups resisted the roles the administration assigned to them and policies of resettlement led to social and economic instability.

3. Relevance and Contribution to Field

Until recently, the historiography of the Caucasus has focused on national histories of what would become Georgia, Azerbaijan, and Armenia. However, the last decade has seen increased scholarly interest in the region as a site of Russian conquest and colonization, ranging from the causes of the long war against Russian domination led by the imam Shamil (1834-1859) to the region's symbolic importance for Russian Romantic

literature to the often unacknowledged social and economic ties that connected Russian and Muslim communities. Yet, the rich body of theoretical literature on West European colonialism has only begun to be examined in the Caucasian context. My research aims to contribute to the field by continuing this comparative approach to Western and Russian colonialism.

4. Approach and research methodology; list of research sites

My research was conducted in the National Library of Georgia and the Georgian Historical Archive. I drew on newspapers, almanacs, and other materials published by the Caucasus administration in the mid-nineteenth century, and on archival materials related to resettlement.

5. Research findings and preliminary conclusions

Conventional wisdom holds that Russian officials in the Caucasus used religion as the main marker of identity and that they consistently favored the growth of a Christian (often Russian) communities and sought to reduce the number of Muslims in the region. My research has shown this view to be false. First, administrators thought in terms of nationality, a concept that evoked a set of stereotypical cultural, economic, and religious practices, rather than religion as such. Second, while officials did seek to eradicate opposition to Russian rule, they did not seek to create a religiously or ethnically homogenous unit. They saw each nationality as suited to occupy a particular niche in the new system (Russians ruled the region, European investors raised the level of industry and imported European commodities, Georgians served as intermediaries between the administration and its subjects, Armenians facilitated trade with the Orient, Azeris and mountain tribes formed the labor force). Once these groups were in the right geographical settings, the Caucasus would benefit from the contributions of each.

6. Future research agendas

My next research project will continue to look at the east coast of the Black Sea. From the 1830s to 1860s, the Ottomans, British, and Russians all vied for dominance in the area, and their competition created fertile territory for local actors to pursue their own agendas. As in my current project, I am interested in religious identity, which in this context often became a gray area. Poles in Ottoman service presented themselves as Islamic authorities to foster revolt, while members of local ruling families (such as the Abkhaz Shervashidzes) presented themselves as Christians in dealing with the Russians but as Muslim to the Ottomans. All the while, Russians had nominal control of the region and sought to make it a productive part of the empire by stimulating trade and good relations with the local inhabitants. Throughout, I will focus on key actors and their understanding of events (Teofil Lapinski, a Pole in Ottoman service; Mikhail Shervashidze, the ruler of Abkhazia; V. Serebriakov, Russian commander of the Black Sea Cossacks; F. Tornau, Russian surveyor and later industrialist; James Bell, the British adventurer; and others).

A second project I am considering focuses on Alexei Petrovich Ermolov, the commander in chief of the Caucasus from 1816 to 1827 whose name has become

synonymous with brutality. While his military policy did call for ruthless treatment of groups that opposed him, he like later Russian rulers saw his military activity as intimately linked to his civic projects. His renown warrants more careful consideration than it has received, as it laid the foundation for how Russians approached ruling the region through 1917 and arguably beyond.

7. Policy recommendations

This project is a study of policies, and it is in that sphere that it generates the most concrete recommendations for future policy makers.

Population transfers today are most likely to come up in the context of displaced persons, and in that respect, Russian management of mass migrations failed in key respects. Its key weaknesses were a lack of adequate knowledge of the territories where the immigrants were to be situated; lack of administrators familiar with the languages of the immigrants; and shortages of appropriate supplies.

The Caucasus administration also assumed docility on the part of the immigrants and that these grateful subjects would automatically adhere to the models held out by the state. In short, it assumed its definition of social welfare would be understood and shared by its subjects, an assumption that quickly proved false. Greater dialogue between the two sides, more flexibility on both parts, and more knowledge of material conditions on the ground would have made the settlement more successful.

The long shared history of the many ethnic groups within each new state in the Caucasus and between those states should be emphasized. Adhering to unrealistic notions of national homogeneity would not facilitate harmony in the region.