

The Empire in Practice:

Russian Settlers, the Peoples of South Caucasia, and the Structures of Tsarist Governance

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The permanent settlement of Russians in South Caucasia, which began in earnest after 1830, did much to disrupt long-standing patterns of nomadic migration, especially in the eastern part of the region. In the mid-1830s, Molokan migrant families settled in the new villages of Topchi and Alty-Agach and “actively set to the construction of dwellings, started vegetable gardens near their homes and sowed fields (some more than 70 *desiatiny*) with millet (primarily), flax, oats, peas and hemp.”¹ Although the land that they had been given was defined as treasury land—and therefore “free” from the perspective of tsarist officials looking for locations to settle the incoming Russian migrants—local inhabitants previously had used it for farming and pasturing their flocks. Soon after the arrival of the sectarian settlers, nomads from the Shirvan and Kubin regions appeared and set themselves up on or near the lands designated for the Molokans. The Kubin nomads reportedly grazed their herds on Molokan meadows and trampled and devoured the settlers’ sown grain. Seeing the troubles caused by the neighboring nomads, Russian arrivals the following year refused to settle in these villages. The sectarians petitioned the region’s Chief Administrator G. V. Rosen, claiming that they had not received appropriate

¹ The discussion that follows is drawn from GMIR f. 2, op. 7, d. 597, 1835-40. See also SSC’SA f. 4, op. 2, d. 748, 1848-51; and f. 222, op. 1, d. 60, 1849, ll. 4-4ob.

protection from the local commandant, named Orlovskii, and demanded reimbursement for their losses.

There was deep disagreement among the various tsarist officials ordered to investigate and resolve the conflict over whom to blame for the hostility between the locals and the Alty-Agach and Topchi settlers. Some found fault with the nomads, who had “harmed the Molokans in all possible ways.” In contrast, when Rosen sent one of his administrators, a man named Petrusevich, to resolve the land disputes, the agent reported that the boundaries of the land designated for the Molokans had not been clearly demarcated. As a result, the Molokans, “being too lazy to clear their lands of blackthorns and shrubs,” seized possession of other strips of land that were not designated for them. Petrusevich ordered the return of the land the Molokans had grabbed, compensating the Molokans with an additional allotment of 1,000 *desiatiny*. However, Petrusevich did not blame the Molokans alone. “Over the course of three years already,” he reported, the nomads “provoked a fight over their fields and hayfields, using the latter without permission of the local administration.” As a result, Rosen decided that the only way to prevent further conflict was to establish permanent mediation between the settlers and the nomads. He stationed a Cossack captain in the Molokan villages every year during the time between the sprouting of the grain’s shoots until its harvest, for the purpose of defending the fields from the nomads’ herds. In addition, he made the local Muslim notables fully responsible for any future destruction of the Molokans’ crops.²

Tsarist governance of South Caucasia in the nineteenth century was made up of hundreds of thousands of such stories/incidents of state officials mediating local disputes among the many diverse ethnic, confessional, social, and geographic communities who came to occupy the region.

² GMIR f. 2, op. 7, d. 597, 1835-40, ll. 5-7.

Through aggregation and precedent, each of these little decisions developed—in tandem with certain general governing principles emanating from Tiflis and St. Petersburg—into the broad patterns of day-to-day imperial administration and the structures of tsarist population politics in this “borderland.” The result was a system of governance that was often relational: directed at the intersection of, or relations between, groups as much as towards any single group alone. The system was also frequently reactive—responding to the demands of subjects for mediation and mitigation. In this way, state officials were most frequently cast in the role of referee (as the multi-stage investigation and the eventual installment of a Cossack “peacekeeper” underscores in this opening example).

In this paper, I take as one example of this larger administrative pattern the interactions of Russian settlers (almost exclusively members of such religious non-conformist communities as Dukhobors, Molokans, and Subbotniks), Georgians, Armenians, Azeris, and the many other peoples of South Caucasia. This case study highlights the way in which there was generally no one set of guidelines (at any one time) that tsarist officials followed in governing the region, other than to ensure that land remained productive, that taxes were properly paid, and that social order and border security/loyalty were maintained. Indeed, the daily governance of the empire in Caucasia was a shifting, contingent, and often inconsistent system that grew up from the specific responses to particular cases. Fluctuating categorizations (on the part of individuals within the state apparatus and without) of ethnicity, confession, social status, usefulness, and perceived loyalty, on one hand, and of right and wrong, fairness, and justice and punishment, on the other hand, led to changing decisions on the part of the multiple referees over whom to favor in any given incident.

Significantly, if much of daily tsarist governance was defined by a relational, reactive, and referee approach, it was also characterized by absence of authority. For all of the time and effort that tsarist officials put in to mediate the relations of the people under their jurisdiction—and the local archives are filled with these exhaustively detailed arbitrations and investigations—the state was often not there at all. The heterogeneous population was left to its own devices to arbitrate its own disputes, often through violence. In this way, to study the topic of tsarist administration is, at times, to study a phantom. In part, this absence reflects the generally “under governed” reality of tsarist provincial life because of a lack of resources and personnel. The nonappearance of state power in the lives of South Caucasian subjects also reflects the fact that these groups-in-conflict did not always turn to the state for mediation. Without petitions from aggrieved parties, state officials tended not to be drawn into local affairs and disputes.

The Diversity of Officialdom

An extremely diverse group of people was cast in the role of mediator and arbiter of inter-communal relations in tsarist South Caucasia: Russians, Poles, Baltic Germans, Georgians, Armenians, Azeris, Imeretians, and Ossetians, to name but a few of the different communities who filled out the positions of authority from the local policemen, scribes, and clerks to the provincial governors and leading military officials.³ Notably, the sectarian settlers never took on these sorts of official positions of authority—an unspoken mutual agreement between tsarist power (that didn’t always trust them) and the sectarians themselves (who had little interest in

³ For comparison to other regions of Imperial Russia, see Stephen Velychenko, “Identities, Loyalties and Service in Imperial Russia: Who Administered the Borderlands?” *Russian Review*, 54, no. 2 (April, 1995): 188-208; and idem., “Empire Loyalism and Minority Nationalism in Great Britain and Imperial Russia, 1707 to 1914: Institutions, Law and Nationality in Scotland and Ukraine,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 39, no. 3 (July 1997): 413-441.

integrating themselves into officialdom and generally wanted to distance themselves from a state that they too did not trust).

The reliance on such a diverse group was the result of several factors. This sort of approach fit well within the larger tsarist social hierarchy, which privileged social status and (at times) religious affiliation over what we would today call ethnicity. At the same time, even if the leadership had wanted to, the tsarist government did not have sufficient trained cadres lying around St. Petersburg to govern the region directly and so they quite contentedly utilized the talent and man-power already available in the region. There was much benefit to this necessity since it allowed people who often best knew the locality to govern—although it also meant that the “law” that a local official might enforce reflected less the ideas and precedents so painstakingly compiled in the *PSZ*, for example, and more the variable patterns, legal traditions, and personal relations of local society.

This heterogeneous governing body posed little concern to Tiflis or St. Petersburg until late in the nineteenth century when the combination of growing Russian nationalism and emphasis on Russian-ness throughout the empire, and the sudden and unexpected Dukhobor anti-military, pacifist insurgency, combined to shift their thinking.⁴ Beginning in 1895, St. Petersburg officials believed that the Dukhobors had become frustrated with the state because local officials tended to be South Caucasians. As Durnovo himself argued, “the local police ... consisting mainly of non-Russians (Georgians and Armenians) do not enjoy the favor and trust of the purely Russian Dukhobor population.”⁵ As such, the state found scapegoats for the breakdown in authority in these Caucasian officials. From that point forward, the central administration strove to increase state supervision of the Dukhobors, assigning “specially chosen

⁴ On the Dukhobor movement, see Breyfogle, *Heretics and Colonizers*, chapters 6 and 7. More generally, see Baberowski, *Der Feind*, 70-77; Suny, *Looking Toward Ararat*; and Jersild, *Orientalism and Empire*, 126-144.

⁵ Woodsworth, *Russian Roots*, 18. Azeris should also be added to this list.

police . . . consisting of reliable Russian Orthodox people.”⁶ Some Russian officials working in Transcaucasia shared this view of the central administrators. For example, E. Taranovskii, a Deputy Chief of Police Operations in Tiflis province, saw the natives’ domination of positions of authority as a primary cause of the Dukhobors’ opposition to state power:

I have been in the Caucasus since 1878 and . . . with the exception of D’iachkov-Tarasov, the administration of Akhalkalaki district was comprised and is composed exclusively of indigenous peoples—Armenians, Imeretians, and Georgians—to whom the Dukhobors related and relate not especially trustingly. At the present time, a Muslim Warrant Officer of the police, Mustafa Palavandov, has been designated the state *starshina* in Dukhobor’e. Permit me to think that the Tiflis governor, Prince Shervashidze, knew little about the Dukhobors and his opinion of them was formed solely through reports from the bureaucrats of the Akhalkalaki administration.⁷

Although the “Russian” D’iachkov-Tarasov was in fact the greatest exploiter and abuser of the Dukhobors and the cause of much of their frustration with the tsarist state, tsarist officials nonetheless came to the opposite conclusion that officialdom in South Caucasia needed to be Russified.

Relational Governance and the Accidental Colonization of South Caucasia

On October 20, 1830, Tsar Nicholas I issued a decree that all religious sectarians (*sektanty*) who were classified as “especially pernicious” (including Dukhobors, Molokans, and Subbotniks) were to be relocated to Transcaucasia by either forcible exile (the minority) or

⁶ *Ibid.*, 79. Indeed, tsarist officials in St. Petersburg did what they could to take the Dukhobors out of the control of local jurisdictions—for instance, by preventing local courts from trying cases concerning the Dukhobors. CRCR 1896-04-23c, ll. 379-79ob.

⁷ CRCR 1895-09-20a, ll. 77ob-78. See also, GMIR f. 2, op. 7, d. 489, 1928, ll. 6-7; Woodcock and Avakumovic, *Doukhobors*, 102; and Woodsworth, *Russian Roots*, 60-61.

voluntary resettlement (the large majority).⁸ The legislation was a conscious state effort to utilize the Empire's periphery as a means to segregate sectarian Russians from Orthodox ones—to use communal isolation to resolve the perceived dilemmas of religious difference. From 1830 through the 1880s, tsarist policy promoted the relocation of dissenters almost to the exclusion of other Russians in an effort to eliminate what state and spiritual leaders saw as their heretical “infection” of Orthodox subjects. Tens of thousands of dissenters left for the southern frontier, sometimes by force but more often by choice in search of a better life. As late as the 1890s, these nonconformists comprised the overwhelming majority of ethnic Russians in Transcaucasia.⁹

The origins of the decision to segregate religious sectarians in South Caucasia are indicative of the relational approach to governance taken by tsarist leaders. On one hand, the policy-makers developed plans towards the sectarians by focusing on the intersection of Orthodox and sectarian Russians and the feared outcome to which contact between them might lead. On the other hand, they placed sectarians and the South Caucasian peoples into the same relational field well before they actually came to live in proximity. The decision to send Russian sectarians to South Caucasia was designed primarily to rid the central provinces of unwanted

⁸ *PSZ* (2), vol. 5:2 (1830), no. 4010, pp. 169-70. The decree can also be found in RGIA f. 379, op. 1, d. 1043, 1830-37, ll. 1-1ob and *SPChR* (1875), 104-6. Molokans and Dukhobors appeared in the historical record for the first time in the 18th century, and were subject to various forms of official persecution almost immediately. The names “Molokan” (usually translated as “Milk-drinkers” because they permitted dairy products during Lent) and “Dukhobor” (“Spirit-wrestlers”) were labels initially applied derisively to them by the Orthodox but that they later embraced. While Dukhobor and Molokan religious beliefs and practices were distinct in many ways, they shared certain commonalities: they opposed the institutional Orthodox Church, refuted the need for priests and hierarchies (or any other mediators in a relationship with God), and abjured Orthodox sacraments (most notably water baptism), icons, saints, relics, candles, and churches. They also shared certain communalist, anti-authoritarian/egalitarian, and pacifist viewpoints that grew out of these religious beliefs. Around the turn of the 20th century, many thousands of Dukhobors and Molokans (for different reasons) left Russia for, respectively, Canada and the United States, leaving others of their coreligionists behind and the spiritual community geographically divided. Subbotniks were Russians who adhered to some, if not all, of the tenets and laws of Judaism (as they interpreted them).

⁹ Polkovnik Andrievskii, *Voенно-географическое и статистическое описание Кавказского военного округа* (Tiflis, 1908), 71. See also *Svod statisticheskikh dannykh o naselenii Zakavkazskogo kraia, izvlechennykh iz posemeinykh spiskov 1886g* (Tiflis, 1893). On Orthodox settlement in the South Caucasus, see D. I. Ismail-Zade, *Russkoe krest'ianstvo v Zakavkaz'e: 30-e gody XIX-nachalo XX v.* (Moscow, 1982), esp. 94-283; and Firouzeh Mostashari, “Tsarist Colonial Policy, Economic Change, and the Making of the Azeri Nation: 1828-1905” (Ph.D. diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1995), 225-50.

religious communities—the colonial implications of such mass resettlement were at best an afterthought or secondary consideration. That said, the decision to direct the sectarians southward reflected an approach on the part of the central authorities in which confessional, cultural, and linguistic differences among the empire’s many peoples could be put to productive use for the central administration.

Secular and spiritual authorities in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries perceived the sectarians as dangerous opponents of Orthodoxy, autocracy, and serfdom. In an effort to offer a certain level of toleration to the religious nonconformists while simultaneously preventing the spread of their faiths, officials during the reign of Alexander I and Nicholas I developed a policy of “toleration through isolation,” that is, the sectarians should be tolerated, but only if they were physically separated out from Orthodox Russian society so as to prevent the spread of their religious ideas.¹⁰ Central officials began to think about segregating Russian sectarians to Caucasia (first North and then South) because they assumed that the cultural, linguistic, and religious differences with the local population would ensure no contact between them—and especially no spread of the undesired dissenting religious ideas. In addition, certain St. Petersburg administrators believed the Caucasian peoples to be inherently and dangerously violent (especially the “mountaineers”)—a characteristic that would confront the generally pacifist sectarians with some stark choices upon arrival in the region, and perhaps even kill off the unwanted nonconformists.¹¹

The Synod first proposed South Caucasia as the geographic location for the isolation of nonconformists: the South Caucasus. On September 15, 1825, the Synod argued—and Alexander

¹⁰ I discuss this process in greater depth in my *Heretics and Colonizers*, chapter one.

¹¹ It is interesting that tsarist officials would not countenance simply killing off the sectarians in the central provinces, there were some officials at least who were happy to entertain the idea that the “mountaineers” or “Muslims” would do it for them and rid the empire of the dissidents.

agreed—that Subbotnik leaders and assistants who were to be placed into military service should be sent to units in Georgia only, “on the assumption that they, not knowing the Georgian language, cannot spread their false teachings among the local inhabitants.” To further increase their isolation and inhibit any proselytizing, the decree also required that Subbotnik soldiers in Georgia were neither to be relieved from duty nor granted temporary leave to visit their original homes and families. The Synod argued that separating them from their native land and “cutting them off forever from their relatives and friends would produce in the followers of the sect a fear of remaining any longer in their apostasy.”¹²

When Dukhobors appeared in relatively large numbers among the Don Cossacks in the mid-1820s, central officials once again championed the idea of Caucasian segregation. The Ataman, Illovaiskii, proposed that those Don Cossacks discovered in the future adhering to the Dukhobor faith should be resettled on the Caucasian Military Line. There they would not be able to escape military service and “will be required . . . continually to serve with weapons in hand against the mountain predators [and] the Dukhobor heresy on the Don will not only weaken but will be completely destroyed. Meanwhile those infected by [the heresy] will perform real service, for which they are being lost forever under the existing arrangement.”¹³ Alexander I and the Committee of Ministers were amenable to Illovaiskii’s proposal, subject to consent and further information from the Caucasus. They saw the Caucasian option as a means to ensure that the Dukhobors, like all subjects, would fulfill their obligation of military service to the state and

¹² SPChR (1875), 80-81 and Varadinov, Istoriia, 275. The practice of sending dissenters to Georgia for military service had existed prior to 1825 (involving Skoptsy and Dukhobors), but it was not widespread. SPChR (1875), 44, 50-51, 67, 81.

¹³ Ibid.; PSZ (2), vol. 1 (1826), no. 126, p. 188; and GMIR f. 2, op. 7, d. 594, l. 3.

that exile to the Caucasian Line would act as a strong deterrent to other Cossacks who might have been thinking of converting.¹⁴

Extended discussion followed during which Ober-Egermeister Pashkov, chair of the Department of Laws of the State Council, supported the basic premise of this proposal as the best means to correct the moral evil that the Dukhobors represented, to subdue them by fostering obedience to state power and law, and to protect Orthodox people.¹⁵ He cited five reasons. First, finding themselves suddenly among hostile people, the Dukhobors would be required to defend themselves. In doing so, not only would they complete their service for the state, but, more important, they would “come themselves to understand the necessity and benefit of the institutions of government power and with full obedience to them will soon realize that no community can exist without a head and authorities.”¹⁶ Second, Dukhobor exile outside the Caucasian region would prevent any means for them to spread their “spirit of depravity,” which was deeply harmful to the “good health” of the Empire. Third, exile would serve as a “moral lesson” for those who might think of attaching themselves to the heresy. Fourth, the exile of the Dukhobors would not only separate “evil” subjects from “good” ones, it would also clear the central provinces of “unruly and audacious” sectarians and thereby permit obedient Orthodox subjects to “enjoy a peaceful tenure in the homes of their ancestors.” Finally, the Dukhobors would spare Orthodox subjects the risks inherent in settling in the forbidding Caucasian region. Pashkov concluded by refuting potential objections to his analysis. He noted that, as the Dukhobors were not known for great military feats, it could be argued that settling them so close to the wild mountain peoples so “skilled in the arts of war” would be tantamount to meaningless

¹⁴ RGIA f. 1284, op. 195-1825, d. 61, ll. 1ob-2 and *PSZ* (2), vol. 1 (1826), no. 126, p. 188-89. For an enlightening discussion of Cossack life on the Caucasian Line, see Thomas Barrett, *At the Edge of Empire: The Terek Cossacks and the North Caucasus Frontier, 1700-1860* (Boulder, 1999).

¹⁵ See *Heretics and Colonizers*, chapter one, for the full discussion.

¹⁶ RGIA f. 1284, op. 195-1825, d. 61, ll. 20ob-21.

mass slaughter. In response, he asserted that “necessity itself will be their teacher.” However, Pashkov added, somewhat heartlessly, “Is it not more useful to the government to occupy the border, which demands strict defense, with a group of people who by their spirit and rules are dangerous to the general good, than have such people support the interior of the state? The loss of evil-doers who are intransigent and unable to leave their anarchic heresy should not be considered a loss for the state.”¹⁷

While the Don Cossack Ataman repeatedly and desperately voiced his concern over the ongoing presence of Dukhobors in his fighting force, General I. F. Paskevich complicated the question of resettling the Don Dukhobors by bringing to the table a new proposal—one that earmarked not the Caucasian Line but South Caucasia as the location for sectarian resettlement.¹⁸ No matter what level of supervision and surveillance was imposed, he argued, settling the Don Dukhobors just outside the Caucasian Line would inevitably involve interaction between them and the Line Cossacks. Rather than resolving the Dukhobor problem, it would simply shift it from the Don region to the Caucasus, especially because the Dukhobors would find it relatively easy to spread their false teachings among the Caucasian Cossacks.

The danger of heretical contagion was augmented, Paskevich continued, because Russia’s southern border was unstable and likely to be pushed farther and farther south with every Russian military success. Under these conditions, Dukhobor settlements located just outside the boundary of the Caucasian region would soon find themselves in the middle of southward-moving Cossack villages and defense systems. The Dukhobors could be moved along with the movement of the frontier, but Paskevich did not endorse this option, finding it disruptive both for

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, I. 21ob.

¹⁸ RGIA f. 1284, op. 195-1825, d. 61 ll. 46-46ob and GMIR f. 2, op. 7, d. 596, ll. 70-72. On the frequent correspondence of the Don officials concerning the continued presence of Dukhobors in their ranks and the lengthy silence in response to these entreaties, see RGIA f. 1284, op. 195-1825, d. 61, ll. 74ob-77, 79-80ob, 82-84, 85-86, 102, 111-12 and RGIA f. 1284, op. 195-1828, d. 139.

the Dukhobors and for the regional administrators. Instead, Paskevich proposed that the Don Dukhobors be settled in Georgia or another Transcaucasian province. There the language and cultural barriers would deprive them of the opportunity to preach their “dogma.” At the same time, Paskevich also envisioned that the sectarians would serve as an important barrier to attack by “predators.”

The choice of the exact location in Transcaucasia for settlement was left to N. M. Sipiagin, the military governor in Tiflis, the tsarist administrative center in the Caucasus. While Paskevich had suggested that the Dukhobors be settled in Georgia, Sipiagin found this location undesirable because of the potential spread of the sectarian faiths among Orthodox peoples. Dialogue between Christian groups was inevitable, he believed, even between ones as culturally distinct as Georgians and Russian sectarians. So Sipiagin reported to Paskevich that he could find no better place for settlement of the Dukhobors than the lands of the former Talysh khanate in the southeastern part of Transcaucasia. As further justification for this proposal, Sipiagin added, prophetically, that the climate of Talysh would in all likelihood kill off many of the sectarians until they became accustomed to it.¹⁹

Paskevich made one final adjustment to Sipiagin’s proposal when he wrote to the Ministry of Internal Affairs about the arrangements for sectarian settlement. Rather than the Talysh khanate, as Sipiagin recommended, Paskevich now listed the destination as the Karabakh and Shirvan regions of the so-called Muslim Provinces. With the exception of Russian military personnel and administrators, there were no Orthodox subjects in the vicinity. Paskevich argued that it would be difficult for sectarians to enter into any kind of relationship with the various inhabitants of these regions because of cultural, linguistic, and religious differences. Moreover,

¹⁹ GMIR f. 2, op. 7, d. 596, ll. 73-74; and d. 594, l. 4.

the population density in the Karabakh province was less than four people per square kilometer and the mountains made travel difficult.²⁰

Through this somewhat convoluted bureaucratic process, in which the anticipated relations among Orthodox Russian peasants, Cossacks (both Don and Caucasian), various peoples from the Caucasus, and Russian sectarians were examined and debated, the process of sectarian colonization of South Caucasia was begun.

Notably, this relational approach to governance, and the perceived communal differences based on language, culture, religion, and heritage/blood among various groups in South Caucasia, continued to play an important role in defining the scope of activities that state policy permitted to sectarians in their new home. In debates in the 1830s and 1840s over whether the sectarian settlers could be permitted to register as inhabitants of Transcaucasian towns—a settlement location from which they had initially been barred—official characterizations of the cultural and linguistic boundaries between communities were of paramount importance. Baron Rosen argued that sectarians could be located in towns with Muslims and Armenians (but not Georgians) because of the cultural and linguistic chasms between them; more than a decade later Prince M. S. Vorontsov made a similar argument, adding Georgians to the approved list.²¹ A similar logic was at work in decisions to settle dissenters on lands belonging to Georgian nobles. Prince Vorontsov asserted that the settlement of sectarians so close to Georgian serfs “categorically cannot have any harmful consequences . . . because of the sharp differences in way of life, customs, and ideas that exist between Russian and Georgian peasants.”²² Such considerations were also at the forefront of Vorontsov’s decision to allow sectarians to work for

²⁰ GMIR f. 2, op. 7, d. 596, ll. 77-78.

²¹ RGIA f. 1263, op. 1, d. 791, 1832, ll. 287-98; RGIA f. 379, op. 1, d. 1043, ll. 72ob-73ob; AKAK vol. 8, doc. 34, p. 34; and GMIR f. 2, op. 7, d. 594, ll. 17-18. See also RGIA f. 1268, op. 2, d. 865, 1848-52, ll. 1-13; RGIA f. 1268, op. 6, d. 177, 1852; RGIA f. 381, op. 1, d. 23470, 1848, ll. 1-8; and GMIR f. 2, op. 8, d. 237, 1910, l. 71.

²² AKAK vol. 10, doc. 42, p. 47.

and hire Orthodox Georgians. Laws concerning the central provinces prohibited sectarians from employing or being employed by Russian Orthodox subjects in an effort to reduce contact between the groups. In South Caucasia, Vorontsov believed that no harmful results to Orthodox Christianity were likely because of the differences in language and “in the peculiarities of the moral and spiritual formation of each people.”²³ As one final example, in the wake of the late-nineteenth-century Dukhobor movement, tsarist officials embarked on a policy of banishing the leaders (and sometimes whole villages considered most intransigent) to live in Georgian and Azeri villages, usually by ones and twos, in an effort to punish and segregate the “rebels” from each other. There, Chief Administrator of the Caucasus, G. S. Golitsyn, believed, they would have the most difficulty in spreading their beliefs and opposition. This internal banishment would succeed, he argued—echoing official views of the early nineteenth century—because their “worldview is not receptive to the propaganda and demoralization of the Dukhobors’ false teachings.”²⁴

The Struggle for Land

If the officials had hoped to develop a policy that would restrict, or even prevent, interaction among sectarians and Caucasians, the actual associations that developed were quite different from how they were imagined in the mental mapping of distant St. Petersburg. The resettlement of tens of thousands of sectarians brought them into direct contact with a variety of different Caucasian communities and almost immediately placed the local representatives of the

²³ RGIA f. 381, op. 1, d. 23322, 1846; RGIA f. 1268, op. 2, d. 566, 1847-48.

²⁴ GARF f. 102, 3 d-vo, op. 1895, d. 1053, ch. 1, ll. 525-28, 555ob-60ob, 581ob; GMIR f. 2, op. 7, d. 489, 1928, l. 7; GMIR f. 2, op. 7, d. 510, n.d., ll. 1-9; ORRGB f. 369, k. 43, d. 1, 1950, ll. 820-24; Woodsworth, *Russian Roots*, 95; Donskov, “On the Doukhobors,” 258; and Tchertkoff, *Christian Martyrdom*, 83-84.

tsarist state into an ongoing and time-consuming role as mediators and referees for all manner of interactions.

The sectarians' settlement in Transcaucasia altered the region's human ecology and destabilized existing systems of landownership and usage. Bitter land conflicts resulted from the fact that nonconformists often settled on lands already in use by indigenous Transcaucasians. For natives relying on settled agriculture, this practice reduced the amount of land they could put under cultivation. For nomads, the Russians' settled lifestyle disrupted long-standing patterns of migration and pasturing. In both cases, Russian settlement caused suffering and aroused anger. In clashes over real estate, sectarians and natives took matters into their own hands in an effort to resolve what they felt were unfair situations. They occupied and used lands allotted to others, allowed their livestock to trample crops, and openly fought over access to land. Both settlers and Transcaucasians (especially Armenians) turned to state authorities as an arbiter, and on occasion tsarist officials intervened to resolve the differences. Local inhabitants objected particularly to the larger allotments of land that Russians received. As population pressures increased over the course of the nineteenth century, the flurry of appeals by Transcaucasians to remedy inequalities grew more frequent and ardent. At the same time, sectarians insisted in their own petitions that whatever the differences in the apportionment of land, even they did not have sufficient land to feed themselves adequately.²⁵

There has been disagreement, both among commentators at the time and also among scholars more recently, over the nature of Russian state policy regarding land distribution during colonization. Soviet historians in particular have discussed Russian settlement in Transcaucasia within strict exploiter/exploited parameters. G. A. Orudzhev, for example, points to "the flagrant

²⁵ For general discussions of land allotments, Russian colonization, and inter-ethnic conflict, see David Moon, "Peasant Migration and the Settlement of Russia's Frontiers, 1550-1897," *HJ* 40, no. 4 (1997): 882-86; and Sunderland, "Empire of Peasants," 182-83.

infringement of the land rights of native peasants. Tsarist colonizers, when settling Russian peasants in Azerbaijan, robbed land from the local inhabitants and with every act aroused clashes between the Azeri and Russian peasants.”²⁶

While there is no doubt that tsarist imperialists often embarked on aggressive land appropriations, the intentions of tsarist colonization policy involved a complex mixture of concern for and maltreatment of the Transcaucasian peoples. There was no consistent privileging of the settlers because they were still religious dissenters and pariahs even if they were ethnically Russian. Also, Russian imperialists in this case do not appear to have acted on the res nullius or terra nullius principles Europeans in other colonial settings used to justify appropriation of land. Although varying in their application from one imperial power to another, these legal concepts rationalized European denials of native property rights, arguing instead that lands that were not being employed productively, or could be exploited more efficiently, belonged to no one and were therefore open for the taking by the first person to put them to proper economic use.²⁷ Moreover, in many cases regional authorities were genuinely concerned about the economic welfare of the indigenous population and they did not automatically take land to give to the Russian settlers. Already in 1832, Baron G. V. Rosen voiced his apprehension that the settlement of sectarians in Transcaucasia would “constrain the indigenous inhabitants in regards to their

²⁶ G. A. Orudzhev, “Iz istorii obrazovaniia russkikh poselenii v Azerbaidzhane,” Izvestiia Akademii Nauk AzSSR: Istoriia, Filosofiia, Pravo, no. 2 (1969): 21. See also O. E. Tumanian, Ekonomicheskoe razvitie Armenii, 2 vols. (Erevan, 1954), 1:41-42; Dolzhenko, Khoziaistvennyi, 29-33; A. N. Iamskov, Environmental Conditions and Ethnocultural Traditions of Stockbreeding (the Russians in Azerbaijan in the 19th and early 20th Centuries) (Moscow, 1988), 5; A. I. Klibanov, History of Religious Sectarianism in Russia (1860s-1917), ed. Stephen Dunn, trans. Ethel Dunn (New York, 1982), 122; Stephen F. Jones, “Russian Imperial Administration and the Georgian Nobility: The Georgian Conspiracy of 1832,” SEER 65, no. 1 (1987): 65-66; and Firouzeh Mostashari, “Tsarist Colonial Policy, Economic Change, and the Making of the Azeri Nation: 1828-1905” (Ph.D. diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1995), 332-39.

²⁷ Anthony Pagden, Lords of all the World: Ideologies of Empire in Spain, Britain, and France, c. 1500-c. 1800 (New Haven, 1995), 73-86; and Patrick Wolfe, Settler Colonialism and the Transformation of Anthropology: The Politics and Poetics of an Ethnographic Event (London, 1999), 26-27.

nomadic encampments and pastures.”²⁸ In an 1843 report, state authorities made clear that if the sectarians were to be settled in Transcaucasia, then it was to be done on empty land without causing any “inhibition” or “restriction” of the native population.²⁹ Indeed, while discussing the absence of lands for Russian settlement in the late 1850s, Viceroy A. I. Bariatinskii asserted that “fairness demands designating free lands primarily to the native peasants, of whom a large number are suffering from an extreme insufficiency of land.”³⁰

Despite some degree of concern for the welfare of Transcaucasia’s indigenous peoples—one partly motivated by fear of disorder—officials frequently did put the interests of the sectarians first. They allotted more land per family to Russian settlers than was the regional norm, arguing that as newcomers they needed more help to survive, and this land often came from indigenous inhabitants.³¹ On some occasions, tsarist authorities did not realize that the native peoples had any claims to land allotted to settlers because of misunderstandings (and incompetence) in surveying the region. More often, however, the Russian dissenters were given land that had knowingly been taken from local inhabitants. Even if official policy endorsed the settlement of Russian peasants on land that officials considered unoccupied, there was not always a sufficient amount of such unused land to meet the needs of the settlers.³² In such cases, native land was confiscated, especially if local authorities believed the land was not being exploited in the ways they desired—preferring sedentary farming over nomadic pasturing. The indigenous population was moved elsewhere, usually without its consent and to its great anger,

²⁸ RGIA f. 1284, op. 196-1831, d. 136, l. 9ob. See also SSC’SA f. 4, op. 2, d. 748, 1848-51, ll. 13-13ob, *passim*.

²⁹ RGIA f. 932, op. 1, d. 83, l. 47. See also RGIA f. 1268, op. 9, d. 367a, 1857-58, l. 1ob; and I. V. Dolzhenko, “Pervye russkie pereselentsy v Armenii (30—50-e gody XIX v.),” *VMU Seriia IX Istorii*, no. 3 (1974): 58-59.

³⁰ *AKAK* vol. 12:1 (1893), doc. 18, p. 38; RGIA f. 1263, op. 1, d. 791, ll. 287-91ob; and SSC’SA, f. 240, op. 2, d. 188, 1858-59. See also RGIA f. 1268, op. 2, d. 772, 1848.

³¹ RGIA f. 381, op. 1, d. 23300, 1844, ll. 2-2ob.

³² Throughout the nineteenth century, officials debated furiously exactly how much occupied or unoccupied land there was in Transcaucasia, how to define habitable or inhabitable land, and how much land each type of people needed in order to survive.

and was awarded tax benefits and direct grants from the treasury's coffers in order to defray the relocation costs.³³ For instance, in order to provide what Russian officials believed to be sufficient amounts of land, Dukhobors in Akhalkalaki district were granted parcels from neighboring Armenian communities—but on the condition that it be done without harming or antagonizing the inhabitants of these villages.³⁴

All of these land redistribution practices caused hardships for the Caucasian peoples and engendered a sense of maltreatment. They also produced ongoing conflicts between locals and Russians concerning land quality, the establishment of land norms, and the distribution of meadows, watering holes, forests, and pastureland. Illegal use, or even seizure, of land and livestock was an almost daily occurrence.³⁵ Russian villagers of Sukhoi-Fontan in Erevan province regularly engaged in “skirmishes” with nomadic Azeris who encroached upon their lands and attempted to drive their livestock through the village's cultivated allotments. Indeed, when they went to their fields, they did so armed not only with the necessary agricultural tools but also “with guns in their hands,” which they used to attack the Azeris who, they believed, threatened to destroy their crops.³⁶

Similarly, the Dukhobor village of Rodionovka in Tiflis province complained that armed Muslims attacked them as they cultivated their allotted land, damaged their crops, and chased away their herds. In 1884, the villagers petitioned the authorities to request that people “of

³³ Dolzhenko, “Pervye,” 59; SSC'SA f. 240, op. 1, d. 1228, 1864; and Vartan Gregorian, “The Impact of Russia on the Armenians and Armenia,” in Russia and Asia: Essays on the Influence of Russia on the Asian Peoples, ed. Wayne Vucinich (Stanford, 1972), 183-84. On the importance of inadequate land exploitation as justification for land appropriations, compare Pagden, Lords, 76-86.

³⁴ AKAK vol. 10, doc. 98, p. 123. See also SSC'SA f. 244, op. 3, d. 100, 1869; and Dolzhenko, “Pervye,” 63.

³⁵ Dolzhenko, “Pervye,” 63.

³⁶ S. Kolosov, “Russkie sektanty v Erivanskoi gubernii,” PKEG na 1902 g. (Erevan, 1902): otd. IV, 151. See also SSC'SA f. 17, op. 1, d. 4042, 1899; f. 239, op. 1, d. 45, 1849-52, ll. 26-27; f. 222, op. 1, d. 60, 1849; f. 240, op. 1, d. 684, 1860-61; K. Gorskii, “Marazinskaia sel'skaia shkola,” Kavkaz, no. 130 (1871): 2. Such armed agriculture formed part of a larger pattern of Russian expansion into the steppe. See Michael Khodarkovsky, Russia's Steppe Frontier: The Making of a Colonial Empire, 1500-1800 (Bloomington, 2002), 8; Daniel Brower, Turkestan and the Fate of the Russian Empire (London, 2003), 126-51; and Sunderland, “Empire of Peasants,” 182-83.

another nationality and religion” who were more “conscientious” than the Muslims be settled next to them in order to end the struggle.³⁷ Furthermore, there were frequent conflicts between the Dukhobors of Gorelovka and Spasskoe in Tiflis province and their Armenian neighbors over access to allocated state lands. In 1864, the Dukhobors used force to expel shepherds from nearby Satkha who were pasturing their flocks on meadowland that the settlers claimed. Soon thereafter, the Armenians reasserted their rights to use these treasury lands and drove out the Dukhobors and their herds.³⁸

The reconstruction of land arrangements to make space for the colonists also produced an unrelenting flood of petitions and complaints to the administration. The grievances of local inhabitants centered on the larger land holdings of the Russian sectarians and their preferential taxation rates.³⁹ Georgians, Armenians, and Azeris were incensed that the settlers might receive as much as six times the land that they did—despite which the sectarians incessantly complained about insufficient land.⁴⁰ There were numerous petitions from Armenians living in the village of Makravank in Erevan province complaining to the administration about a land shortage. In 1866, they insisted that “the Molokan village Konstantinovka has so much land that they are not in a position to sow it all, and as a result they farm out their land to us for prices that are very profitable for them.”⁴¹ Other petitions decried any redistricting of land that reduced native access

³⁷ SSC'SA f. 17, op. 1, d. 1828, 1884, ll. 1-1ob; f. 240, op. 1, d. 1034, 1863; f. 239, op. 1, d. 45, 1849-52, ll. 11-11ob; f. 5, op. 1, d. 1454, 1870; and S. A. Inikova, “Vzaimootnosheniia i khoziaistvenno-kul'turnye kontakty kavkazskikh dukhobortsev s mestnym naseleniem,” in *Dukhobortsy i Molokane v Zakavkaz'e*, ed. V. I. Kozlov and A. P. Pavlenko (Moscow, 1992), 48.

³⁸ Inikova, “Vzaimootnosheniia,” 48; SSC'SA f. 244, op. 3, d. 42, 1863-70; and d. 100, 1869. Russian peasants frequently approached state officials in Erevan with complaints that neighboring Armenian villagers were illegally seizing their lands. See Dolzhenko, “Pervye,” 63; SSC'SA f. 4 op. 2, d. 410, 1846-47; and d. 748, 1848-51.

³⁹ In addition to the examples below, see SSC'SA f. 4, op. 2, d. 410, 1846-57; GARF f. 102, 5 d-vo, op. 1901, d. 509, l. 51ob; and Gregorian, “Impact of Russia,” 184.

⁴⁰ Gregorian, “Impact of Russia,” 184; SSC'SA f. 240, op. 1, d. 1428, 1865-67; f. 244, op. 3, d. 100, 1869; *AKAK* vol. 10, doc. 98, p. 123; N. A. Abelov, “Ekonomicheskii byt gosudarstvennykh krest'ian Elisavetpol'skogo uyezda, Elisavetpol'skoi gubernii,” in *MIEB*, vol. 7 (Tiflis, 1887), 14; and the articles in *MIEB* and *RTKE* in general.

⁴¹ Dolzhenko, “Pervye,” 64; Inikova, “Vzaimootnosheniia,” 47; and SSC'SA f. 244, op. 3, d. 42, 1863-70.

to agricultural terrain. In 1866, the inhabitants of the village of Nizhnaia Akhta requested the return of land that had been taken from them: “As a result of [Molokan] settlement, our agricultural land, which is fertile and close to the village, was cut off and given to them. We were left only with land that is rocky and far away in the Akhmagan Mountains.”⁴² In all these cases, tsarist administrators had to sort through the complexities and peculiarities of each new case in order to determine an outcome—and it was often the case that the beneficiaries varied depending on the personal inclinations of the official involved.

Russian colonization policies did not necessarily need to be aggressively exclusionary for indigenous inhabitants to feel imperial oppression, particularly as exaggerated stories of Russian intentions proliferated throughout the region. In one case in the late 1840s, rumors spread rapidly through Shemakha province that as many as 40,000 new Russians were coming to colonize the area—rather than the few hundred who were actually scheduled to arrive—and that these settlers were to be given not only the best pasturing land from Muslim nomadic communities but also even the very houses of urban and rural Azeris in the area. Confronted with the possibility of dispossession and Russian demographic invasion, many families petitioned for permission to emigrate to Persia or the Ottoman Empire.⁴³

Russian Settlers and Local Elites

The interactions over land between Russian settlers and Transcaucasians depended a great deal on the social status of the latter group. The settlement of sectarians on property belonging to local landowning elites—especially Georgians but also Armenians and Azeris—

⁴² Dolzhenko, “Pervye,” 63.

⁴³ SSC’SA f. 4, op. 2, d. 748, 1848-51.

produced interethnic relations quite different than when the natives were peasants or nomads.⁴⁴ For one thing, the practice of settling sectarians on estate lands violated tsarist law. Russian dissenters who relocated to Transcaucasia, whatever their original social designation in the interior provinces, were juridically considered state peasants upon their arrival on the frontier. Tsarist regulations required state peasants to live on state land and to pay taxes solely to the treasury. Nonetheless, beginning in 1841, Transcaucasian officials permitted some settlement of Russian sectarians on land belonging to local notables on an ad hoc basis, but only on so-called “uncultivated land,” so as not to aggravate the condition of those Georgian or Azeri serfs and bonded peasants who already lived on the estates. After multiple entreaties from regional administrators, in 1858 St. Petersburg agreed to a general policy of such settlement on noble lands.⁴⁵

Settling sectarians on the property of notables did not mean “enserfment” in a strict sense of the word, but the landowners gained many of the same benefits. The dissenters retained their official status as state peasants and entered into contracts with the landowners defining the rights and responsibilities of each side. Writing to the Caucasus Committee in 1857, Bariatinskii endorsed a region-wide policy of settlement on private lands as mutually profitable for settlers and owners both. He claimed that “in the future, this example can act as a good influence for the spread of mutual agreements and transactions between peasants and landowners, both in this region and in the internal provinces,” thereby holding up the case of Russian settlers and

⁴⁴ I discuss this theme in greater depth elsewhere. See my “Colonization by Contract: Russian Settlers, South Caucasian Elites, and the Dynamics of Nineteenth-Century Tsarist Imperialism,” in Extending the Borders of Russian History: Essays in Honor of Alfred J. Rieber, ed. Marsha Siefert (Budapest, 2003), 143-66.

⁴⁵ Breyfogle, “Colonization by Contract,” 144-52; RGIA f. 1268, op. 9, d. 367a, 1857-58; f. 381, op. 1, d. 23297, 1844-45; f. 384, op. 3, d. 1149, 1846-51; AKAK vol. 10, doc. 95, p. 118; and vol. 12:1 (1893), docs. 18 and 22, pp. 39-41, 49.

Transcaucasian nobles as a model for the rest of the Empire to follow.⁴⁶

The practice of settling sectarians on the lands of Transcaucasian notables had its origins in five factors. First, and perhaps most important, Russian colonists settled on private lands because the local gentry desired it. Representatives from such Georgian noble families as the Chavchavadzes, Dadianis, and Orbelianis approached the regional administration with proposals to settle sectarians on their lands.⁴⁷ They recognized the profits and benefits that could be derived from placing Russian peasants on their property, such as cultivating unused areas and increasing the rents they received. For their part, sectarian settlers were willing to settle on noble lands because they hoped to enhance their economic opportunities and escape unpromising locations. Third, as part of the tsarist policy of strengthening their control by increasing the number of ethnic Russians in the region, officials settled the incoming sectarians on the properties of the local elites in an effort to provide adequate land to support all the dissenters who wanted to relocate to Transcaucasia. Lacking sufficient treasury land while not wanting to appropriate land from the local peasants and nomads, tsarist officials—especially Viceroy Prince M. S. Vorontsov and Bariatinskii—turned to the unused land of notables.⁴⁸ Fourth, sectarians found themselves living on private lands because of changing tsarist policy toward local elites. In 1841, for instance, land belonging to Muslim elites in eastern Transcaucasia was confiscated as part of a state-sponsored “Russification” effort to weaken the elites and provide state-owned land for the Russian colonists to live on. In 1842, tsarist policy shifted away from this practice and the property was returned to the original owners, leaving recently settled Russians inhabiting lands

⁴⁶ RGIA f. 1268, op. 9, d. 367a, 1857-58, l. 4ob.

⁴⁷ RGIA f. 381, op. 1, d. 23297, 1844-45; RGIA f. 1268, op. 1, d. 866, 1845-46; AKAK vol. 10, docs. 95 and 97, pp. 118-23.

⁴⁸ AKAK vol. 10, docs. 42, 95, and 97, pp. 46-47, 118-23; and SPChR (1860), II:417-30.

belonging to Azeri notables.⁴⁹ Finally, sectarians found themselves on the property of indigenous landowners as a result of the inability of tsarist administrators to demarcate land boundaries in Transcaucasia. Dissenters settled on land that tsarist officials had initially labeled state-owned, designations that local landowners later disputed. For example, in 1843 Molokans in Aleksandropol district settled on land that administrators claimed as treasury property. However, the Orbeliani family soon challenged the state for ownership and after a protracted court battle regained possession in 1853.⁵⁰

The actual agreements negotiated between settlers and nobles varied dramatically from case to case in almost every respect: the settlers' dues and obligations, what the sectarians received in return, the type and duration of the contract, whether and how the contract might be amended or voided, and whether the settlers were allowed to move or travel from the lands. Despite their heterogeneity, the content of these accords indicates what each side hoped to receive from such arrangements. The evidence suggests that the nobles were most concerned to ensure a constant flow of lucrative rents without incurring any of the costs or frustrations of having to manage the settlers' communities directly. For their part, the sectarians wanted the best possible package of land and obligations, the freedom to move from lands when they wanted, the opportunity to take advantage of other economic opportunities (especially in the carting trade and milling), and the protection of the state from exploitation. Required to approve these contracts, state officials were not shy about intervening in the process. They changed conditions and wording in order to ensure that the deals were detailed and fair to all involved—in fact, they

⁴⁹ RGIA f. 1268, op. 15, d. 86, 1870, l. 1; and AKAK vol. 10, doc. 293, p. 287. For a discussion of the shifts of tsarist policy toward local elites more broadly, see Swietochowski, Russian Azerbaijan, 12-13; and L. H. Rhineland, "Russia's Imperial Policy: The Administration of the Caucasus in the First Half of the Nineteenth Century," CSP 17 (1975): 218-35.

⁵⁰ RGIA f. 1268, op. 9, d. 367a, 1857-58, ll. 9-9ob.

were very solicitous about defending the rights of the colonists.⁵¹

The Russian state-peasant settlers obtained a variety of benefits from the contracts. Most important, they were granted land on which to settle and work, certain rights to use nearby forests for wood, occasionally the use of any industrial enterprises already on the land (such as mills, taverns, or general stores), and frequently the protection of the landowner in the event that others tried to seize their allotted land. The contracts of certain settlers even included promises of relief from payment of dues in the initial years of settlement and of direct aid in the event of poor harvests. In addition, some colonists received the option of engaging in a variety of economic endeavors, including building and operating gristmills selling lumber, owning taverns and stores, mining coal and minerals, and fishing.⁵² In the case of an 1845 agreement with Prince David Dadiani, settlers received land that could serve a variety of purposes (from viticulture to grain growing, haymaking, and pasturage) but to a limit of ten desiatiny per adult male. In order to help the settlers in their first years of habitation, Dadiani offered to supply each family with a two bulls, two cows, two pigs, general provisions for the first two years, and an exemption from rents during the first year.⁵³

The specific advantages sought by the landowners varied widely. Rents paid in cash diverged in amount, sometimes calculated per household (anywhere from one to twenty-four rubles per year), sometimes as a lump sum from the community (from 200 to 330 rubles per year).⁵⁴ Many nobles required payment in kind, which might include wheat, barley, wood,

⁵¹ See, for example, SSC'SA f. 240, op. 1, d. 1709, 1867, ll. 7-7ob; op. 2, d. 317, 1858-63, l. 7; RGIA f. 381, op. 1, d. 23297, 1844-45, ll. 61-62, 135-42ob; f. 1268, op. 15, d. 86, 1870, l. 1ob; and f. 384, op. 3, d. 1149, 1846-51, ll. 94ob-95ob.

⁵² SSC'SA f. 240, op. 1, d. 1709, 1867, ll. 1-3; op. 2, d. 317, 1858-63, ll. 3-5ob; and RGIA f. 1268, op. 9, d. 367a, 1857-58, ll. 9-15ob.

⁵³ RGIA f. 381, op. 1, d. 23297, 1844-45, ll. 60ob, 139-39ob.

⁵⁴ RGIA f. 1268, op. 9, d. 367a, 1857-58, ll. 9-15ob; op. 15, d. 86, 1870, ll. 1ob-2; SSC'SA f. 240, op. 1, d. 1709, 1867, ll. 1ob-2, 7-9; op. 2, d. 317, 1858-63, ll. 3-4.

beeswax, and honey.⁵⁵ Other nobles preferred a combination of rents and service: for example, Talysh-bek Begliarov negotiated successfully for 10 percent of the total harvest, as well as two workdays annually per settler.⁵⁶ Contracts might include any number of other service obligations in addition to working the noble's land. Nina Ivanova Loris-Melikova requested an annual payment of eight silver rubles and two full carts of wood per household, the latter to be delivered directly to her house in Tiflis; she also retained the right to build herself a summer house in the Molokans' village.⁵⁷

Contracts also varied in form and duration, lasting from seven to thirty years. At the end of each contract, both sides had the opportunity to renegotiate on the same or different terms, or they could agree to go their separate ways. Whereas most pacts were written, prior to 1858 the agreements governing the sectarians living on the land of Princess Maria Orbeliani and Princes Ivan and Makarii Orbeliani were entirely verbal. In the case of Ivan and Makarii, the settlers found that the landowners' demands changed arbitrarily from year to year. In response to settler complaints concerning these unilateral alterations, Bariatinskii required that all agreements after 1858 exist in written form and be approved by the government.⁵⁸

Whatever the specific terms of the contracts binding sectarians and Transcaucasian landowners, many local elites strove to obtain the economic benefits of a servile economy without assuming the associated responsibilities. Georgian and Armenian nobles often required agents from the Ministry of State Domains to act as middlemen to avoid the potential

⁵⁵ *AKAK* vol. 10, doc. 293, p. 287; SSC'SA f. 240, op. 2, d. 317, 1858-63, ll. 3-3ob; and op. 1, d. 1709, 1867, ll. 1ob-2.

⁵⁶ *AKAK* vol. 10, docs. 97 and 293, pp. 120 and 287; and RGIA, f. 381, op. 1, d. 23297, 1844-45, ll. 139ob-40.

⁵⁷ SSC'SA f. 240, op. 2, d. 317, 1858-63, ll. 3-5. It was not uncommon for nobles and administrative elites to escape the summer heat of urban areas by renting houses in the sectarian mountain villages. Breyfogle, *Heretics and Colonizers*, chapter three; and SSC'SA f. 240, op. 1, d. 1709, 1867, l. 2ob.

⁵⁸ SSC'SA f. 240, op. 2, d. 317, 1858-63, ll. 1ob, 4ob; op. 1, d. 1709, ll. 1-6; RGIA, f. 381, op. 1, d. 23297, 1844-45, l. 142; f. 1268, op. 9, d. 367a, 1857-58, ll. 9-15ob; and op. 15, d. 86, 1870, l. 1ob.

complications of direct interaction with the settlers. For instance, the Orbeliani family in Erevan province required that “in enforcing the collection of these moneys, and in all other situations, the Princes Orbeliani should have no direct relations with the peasants.” As it did not want the nobility to have too much control over the state peasants, the government was all too happy to comply with this wish.⁵⁹

Both before and especially after the legislation of 1858, the practice of Russian state-peasant settlement on the lands of Caucasian nobles created both exciting opportunities and painful frustrations for settlers, nobles, and state officials alike. Their ongoing interactions tell a great deal about the lived experience of Russian colonialism in the South Caucasus.

Significantly, the documentary sources indicate that these relations were dominated by socio-economic tensions characteristic of tenant-landowner relations and were generally devoid of ethnic or confessional considerations.⁶⁰ Moreover, these peasant-noble contacts show how the tsarist state managed its multi-ethnic empire. Rather than the unmitigated champion of any one side, tsarist officials frequently found themselves in the role of mediator between the Russian peasants and the Caucasian nobles, charged with arbitrating the terms of the contracts when disputes arose and rights were violated.

The landowners generally embraced the opportunity to have Russian settlers work their lands even though some felt that sectarians did not always make the best tenants. In contrast, the sectarians themselves were ultimately almost universally dissatisfied by the economically

⁵⁹ RGIA f. 1268, op. 9, d. 367a, 1857-58, l. 11; and f. 381, op. 1, d. 23297, 1844-45, ll. 140-40ob. See also RGIA f. 1268, op. 15, d. 86, 1870, l. 1ob. Not all nobles tried so hard to keep the sects at arm’s length. There were cases where nobles were willing, even eager, to interact directly with the sectarians so that they might wield more thorough control. AKAK vol. 10, doc. 97, p. 120; and RGIA f. 381, op. 1, d. 23297, 1844-45, ll. 60-63.

⁶⁰ That social-status power hierarchies proved prominent in this case contrasts with the “ethnic-religious conflict” that Vartan Gregorian highlights as an important aspect of the relations between Armenian peasants and Azeri landowners. Gregorian, “The Impact of Russia,” 183.

“burdensome” nature of the contracts.⁶¹ In the late 1840s and early 1850s, Molokans in the villages of Novo-Saratovka and Vorontsovka in Tiflis province “feared enslavement from the Orbelianis and began to look for a new place to live that would be on state-owned land.”⁶² Many Vorontsovka villagers did depart for Elisavetpol district. Those who stayed behind remained disgruntled about their economic situation and repeatedly voiced their unhappiness to tsarist authorities. The Molokans found the payment of quitrent to be economically disadvantageous and were particularly frustrated by the economic “insecurity of their property situation” that resulted from “dependence” on a landowner who held the power to change the terms of their rental agreement.⁶³

The contracts that Transcaucasian landowners and the sectarians entered into governing land usage and remuneration belie any simple categorization of the power relationships between colonizer and colonized in Transcaucasia. They also underscored the relational, often reactive, and mediating role of tsarist policy and officialdom in governing the relations between these different communities. In this instance, socio-economic power structures overshadowed the ethnic hierarchies of colonial power systems, often to the detriment of the Russian peasant colonists. At the same time, the settlement of colonists as renters of noble lands presents two conflicting aspects of Russian imperialist policy. On one hand, especially after 1842 Russian policy in Transcaucasia tried to enlist the support of local elites in Russia’s empire-building project both by granting them privileges and ceasing to antagonize them.⁶⁴ On the other hand,

⁶¹ AKAK vol. 10, doc. 293, p. 287. Some settler communities did find their economic status rise. See Breyfogle, “Colonization by Contract,” 157.

⁶² I. E. Petrov, “Seleniia Novo-Saratovka i Novo-Ivanovka Elisavetpol’skogo uezda,” IKOIRGO 19 (1907-1908): otd. 1, 226. See also RGIA f. 1268, op. 9, d. 367a, 1857-58, ll. 13ob-14; AKAK vol. 10, doc. 98, p. 123; and Inikova, “Vzaimootnosheniia,” 45.

⁶³ As discussed in chapter four, state authorities intervened in this case in order to keep the sectarians in the village. See RGIA f. 1268, op. 14, d. 77, 1869-70; and I. Ia. Orekhov, “Ocherki iz zhizni zakavkazskikh sektatorov,” Kavkaz, no. 136 (June 17, 1878): 1.

⁶⁴ Ronald Grigor Suny, “Russian Rule and Caucasian Society in the First Half of the Nineteenth Century: The

tsarist authorities wanted to increase the presence of ethnic Russians in the region, because they considered Russians the most loyal subjects and because they wanted to reduce future reliance on non-Russians. When the drive to increase the number of Russians in the region required the state to settle Russian colonists on private land, one aspect of the Russian imperialist agenda overshadowed another. Since tsarist authorities considered the native elites to be of higher social standing than the Russian colonists—and, therefore, the recipients of certain prerogatives—the settlers entered into uneven relationships with indigenous notables. By settling the sectarians on landowner property under such contracts, tsarist officials placed the same Russian colonists they considered the advance guard of “Russification” in an economically subordinate position to Transcaucasian elites.

Negotiating Violence

Tsarist officials were also drawn in to arbitrate tensions between settlers and their Caucasian neighbors. However, in this case, imperial governance was most characterized by its absence, ultimately leaving their subjects to fight it out among themselves. The memoirs of sectarian settlers, as well as official documents and the writings of contemporary ethnographers and journalists, are filled with incidents of robbery, attack, murder, kidnapping, rape, and other forms of violent treatment perpetrated by indigenous Caucasians and Turkish “brigands” on the Russian colonists. Sectarians clearly distinguished among the region’s different native peoples, laying blame for the maltreatment primarily at the feet of the so-called “Tatars”—the blanket term for Azeris and other Muslims in South Caucasia—and other Muslim peoples from Persia

Georgian Nobility and the Armenian Bourgeoisie, 1801-1856,” *NP* 7, no. 1 (1979): 60; Anthony L. H. Rhineland, *Prince Michael Vorontsov: Viceroy to the Tsar* (Montreal and Kingston, 1990), 146-84; and Mostashari, “Tsarist Colonial Policy,” 332-402.

and the Ottoman Empire. In contrast, there is not a single mention in the sources of Georgians assaulting colonists despite their regular interaction with the Russian settlers. Armenians were considered “deft fleecers and exploiters of the simple Russian population” who at times turned to theft and violence to get their way. The Dukhobors of Slavianka in Elisavetpol province, for one, claimed that Armenians “never missed the opportunity to short-change and swindle” them.⁶⁵

The causes of what Russians perceived as Muslim violence have produced a variety of explanations. Russian officials and other contemporary commentators attributed acts of theft and violence to the Muslim mountain culture.⁶⁶ As one administrator expressed the prevailing interpretation, in Transcaucasia “the murder of humans has been carried out on the road of life since the dawn of time, and the land is soaked to the depths with human blood from many wars.”⁶⁷ In his October 1844 report on the conditions of the sectarians, a tsarist official named Gageimeister noted that “the theft of livestock is a common affair among the Tatars, but their stealing from each other comprises a system of collective responsibility. Russians are not accustomed to such a form of self-regulation and the state hardly wishes them to become used to such a manner of settling affairs.”⁶⁸ Archives contain hundreds of nineteenth-century police reports detailing acts of robbery and violence on the part of “Tatars”, indicating that the dissenters were by no means the sole targets of such crimes.⁶⁹ In that light, Russians generally understood Muslim acts of hostility toward the sectarians as the result of a primordial violence

⁶⁵ GARF f. 102, 3 d-vo, op. 1884, d. 88, ch. 2, ll. 9-9ob; V. V. Vereshchagin, Dukhobortsy i Molokane v Zakavkaz'e, Shiity v Karabakhe, Batchi i Oshumoedy v Srednei Azii, i Ober-Amergau v Gorakh Bavarii (Moscow, 1900), 21; SSC'SA f. 17, op. 1, d. 4042, 1899; and f. 240, op. 1, d. 1428, 1865-67.

⁶⁶ See I. Ia. Orekhov, “Ocherki iz zhizni zakavkazskikh sektorov.” Kavkaz, no. 135 (June 16, 1878): 2; GMIR f. 2, op. 7, d. 489, 1928, l. 1; and op. 8, d. 352, 1935, l. 12.

⁶⁷ GMIR f. 2, op. 7, d. 489, 1928, l. 1.

⁶⁸ RGIA f. 381, op. 1, d. 23300, 1844, l. 2ob.

⁶⁹ See, for example, RGIA f. 1268, op. 9, d. 100, 1857-58; d. 74, 1858; op. 10, d. 46, 1859; d. 62, 1860-61; d. 44, 1861; d. 46, 1862; d. 32, 1863; and d. 28, 1866. For comparison, see Moshe Gammer, Muslim Resistance to the Tsar: Shamil and the Conquest of Chechnia and Daghestan (London, 1994), 18-21; and Virginia Martin, “Barimta: Nomadic Custom, Imperial Crime,” in Russia's Orient, 249-70.

that would have existed with or without the sectarians' presence. Yet the appearance of the settlers in Transcaucasia unmistakably altered the form and intensity of the antagonism because it directly threatened the economic existence of settled farmers and especially nomads.

Moreover, in categorizing the Transcaucasian peoples in this manner, Russian sectarians were mirroring with remarkable clarity a discourse widespread in Russia about the Transcaucasian peoples. Georgians were considered a weak, feminine, lazy, non-threatening people; Armenians wily, commercial types and rootless traders—some Russians called them “Caucasian Jews”; and Muslims an uncivilized, naturally martial people.⁷⁰ With this in mind, there is some reason to doubt whether Muslims really were the sole source of violent attack—especially in the early years of settlement—as it is certainly possible that the accusations arose from Russian cultural expectations of Islamic aggression.

Whatever the origins of the violence and whoever the perpetrators, both sectarians and Russian officials believed that the violence originated from Azeris, Turks, Persians, and other Muslims, and that such people were inherently predisposed to armed robbery and warlike behavior. Colonists and administrators took action within the parameters of such assumptions. Despite their religious prohibitions, members of the sectarian communities at times embraced violent tactics as a deterrent, meeting hostility with even greater hostility. In so doing, they accommodated themselves to what they perceived as the prevailing form of interpersonal and inter-group relations.

⁷⁰ Susan Layton, *Russian Literature and Empire: Conquest of the Caucasus from Pushkin to Tolstoy* (Cambridge, 1994), esp. 175-212; Ronald Grigor Suny, *Looking Toward Ararat: Armenia in Modern History* (Bloomington, 1993), 31-51; Seymour Becker, “The Muslim East in Nineteenth-Century Russian Popular Historiography,” *CAS* 5, no. 3/4 (1986): esp. 32-33; Austin Lee Jersild, “From Savagery to Citizenship: Caucasian Mountaineers and Muslims in the Russian Empire,” in *Russia's Orient*, 101-14; Sunderland, “Empire of Peasants,” 185-90; and Gammer, *Muslim Resistance*, 25-26. However, as Susan Layton has pointed out, the meanings attributed by different Russians to the images of these peoples were not always uniform.” See her “Nineteenth-Century Russian Mythologies of Caucasian Savagery,” in *Russia's Orient*, 80-100.

Sectarians were no strangers to violence. In the central provinces, they regularly suffered the verbal and physical assaults of local officials, landlords, priests, and neighboring Orthodox villagers, and some nonconformists had been forced to serve in the military before resettlement. In addition, Molokans and Dukhobors routinely made distinctions among different kinds of violence and killing, accepting bloodshed as self-defense but not as aggression.⁷¹ However, the use of force they described the Muslims as perpetrating in the South Caucasus—bands on horseback attacking villages and taking hostages, highway brigandage, murder—represented something new and unfamiliar. The settlers attached different meanings to the violence in Transcaucasia, feeling initially overwhelmed and easily victimized by what they saw as an unfathomable culture of criminality.

The painter V. V. Vereshchagin, who visited Dukhobor and Molokan villages in the 1860s, quotes a Slavianka Dukhobor saying that Muslims “robbed you in broad daylight, seized you, tied your hands behind your back and held a knife to your throat, all the while others carried off your horses,” often killing Dukhobors in the process.⁷² Journalist I. Ia. Orekhov described how Molokans in Baku province had been settled “between half-wild indigenous people who are hostile and envious,” gangs of whom “would conduct open attacks on their settlements” and carry off children from the settler communities as hostages.⁷³ Sectarians also complained of similar treatment by Ottoman subjects who frequently rode across the porous border—too long, mountainous, and poorly guarded to act as any sort of obstacle—attacked and stole from farmers and shepherds in the fields, forayed into villages, and then crossed back to the safety of their own

⁷¹ Breyfogle, “Swords into Plowshares,” 449-65.

⁷² Vereshchagin, *Dukhobortsy i Molokane*, 21 and 4. See also I. E. Petrov, “Dukhobory Elisavetpol’skogo uezda,” *IKOIRGO* 18, no. 3 (1905-1906): 176; SSC’SA f. 240, op. 2, d. 233, 1853-61; and f. 17, op. 1, d. 1828, 1884.

⁷³ Orekhov, “Ocherki,” no. 135, 2. See also *Spirit and Life—Book of the Sun. Divine Discourses of the Preceptors and the Martyrs of the Word of God, the Faith of Jesus, and the Holy Spirit, of the Religion of the Spiritual Christian Molokan-Jumpers*, ed. Daniel H. Shubin, trans. John Volkov (n.p., 1983), 20.

country with as much booty as they could carry. These incursions often threatened to become international incidents, although ultimately there was little tsarist authorities could do other than petition the Turkish ambassador for justice, which they frequently did. A number of sectarians spent many years in Ottoman villages as captive servants.⁷⁴

The attacks and robberies depicted in the sources threatened everything from life and limb to material and psychological well-being. One Dukhobor story tells of the particularly gruesome demise of one of their brethren who, while returning from a trip to Tiflis, was hacked to death with an axe for his money and left in pieces by the roadside.⁷⁵ Similarly, one November night in 1856, two Molokans, Evstrat and Ivan Sherbakov from Shemakha (later Baku) province, were on their way home from Tiflis in their wagons when they were met on the road by five armed Azeris. Realizing that the bandits intended to rob them, the Molokans drove their horses forward at full speed. The Azeris made chase, firing their rifles and brandishing their sabers. In the melee, one Molokan horse was slashed by a sword and the other horse was struck by a bullet. The injured horses pulled up and the Molokans were forced to surrender to the robbers. And robbery was not confined to the roadways: bands of thieves often fearlessly entered sectarian villages, breaking into houses to steal property—often with the owners inside. When settlers went after bandits to retrieve property and captives, they frequently came face to face with armed Azeri villagers who repulsed their efforts and protected the thieves.⁷⁶

Rape was another, not uncommon, form of violence that sectarians confronted. In one incident, three Azeris reportedly intent on rape confronted some Dukhobor women coming home

⁷⁴ Of many examples, see SSC'SA f. 5, op. 1, d. 1454, 1870; f. 244, op. 3, d. 100, 1870; RGIA f. 1268, op. 3, d. 438, 1849; Vasilii A. Potapov, *V plenu u razboinikov: rasskaz* (n.p., 1936); and M. N-n, "Dukhobory v Dukhobor'e," *Obzor*, no. 159 (June 17, 1878): 3.

⁷⁵ ORRGB f. 369, k. 42, d. 2, 1950, l. 398.

⁷⁶ RGIA f. 1268, op. 9, d. 100, 1857-58, ll. 18, 86; SSC'SA f. 222, op. 1, d. 60, 1849; f. 239, op. 1, d. 45, 1849-52; and f. 240, op. 1, d. 1428, 1865-67.

from the fields. The women successfully fought back and, as they were not far from the settlers' village, the attackers took off through the fields where they encountered two other Dukhobor women. Isolated from their coreligionists, these Dukhobors were less fortunate and despite a struggle eventually succumbed to the attackers.⁷⁷

Theft and banditry caused the sectarians material losses and took a substantial psychological toll. In 1847 and 1848 alone, 58 horses and cattle were stolen from the villagers of Vorontsovka and Novo-Saratovka, as well as property with a total value of 1,573 rubles; the Ormashen commune reportedly suffered losses from robbery of up to 1,767 rubles.⁷⁸ In terms of the mental impact, Dukhobors described the terror in which they lived. "You head off somewhere and don't know whether [the "Tatars"] are waiting for you in back. And you arrive home, and not even necessarily from a long trip, and you say to yourself: Thank you God! Night is approaching quietly and there was no theft in the village. Everyone thanks God, and maybe tomorrow, somehow we will survive."⁷⁹ Indeed, Dukhobors were so concerned with attacks and robberies that they developed incantations (to be read three times while walking around the house) to protect their families and property, "and with these prayers the people saved themselves."⁸⁰

The initial response of the sectarians was to turn to the state for protection. On many occasions they petitioned the local and regional authorities with complaints of mistreatment by their new neighbors. However, the sectarians often found the response of state officials to be

⁷⁷ SSC'SA f. 222, op. 1, d. 60, 1849, ll. 5-5ob. See also GMIR f. 14, op. 3, d. 1962, 1902, ll. 13-14.

⁷⁸ Inikova, "Vzaimootnosheniia," 46; I. V. Dolzhenko, "Istoriia pereseleniia i osnovaniia russkikh selenii v Zakavkaz'e," in *Russkie starozhily Zakavkaz'ia: Molokane i Dukhobortsy*, ed. V. I. Kozlov (Moscow, 1995), 33; SSC'SA f. 222, op. 1, d. 60, 1849, l. 47; and f. 239, op. 1, d. 45, 1849-52, ll. 21-25ob, passim.

⁷⁹ Vereshchagin, *Dukhobortsy i Molokane*, 21. On fear of attack, see also Sergei Studzinskii, "U nashikh kavkazskikh raskol'nikov. (Ocherk)," *Slovo*, no. 1 (February 1878): 122-23; N-n, "Dukhobory," 3; and "Alty-Agach. (Ot nashogo korrespondenta)," *Kaspii*, no. 115 (June 1, 1894): 3.

⁸⁰ Quoted and translated in Svetlana Inikova, *Dukhobor Incantations Through the Centuries*, trans. and ed. Koozma Tarasoff (Ottawa, 1999), 76-80.

ineffectual and their stories relate their frustration with the authorities. After attacks or robberies, Molokan villagers from Alty-Agach frequently captured the thieves and presented them, along with an official accusation, to the police for punishment. Despite such initiative, the Molokans generally found that the police would set these “Tatar-thieves” free almost immediately, making their efforts irrelevant.⁸¹ Vereshchagin heard similar grievances from the Dukhobors about the state’s ineffectual approach. In the face of Azeri attacks, they lamented, there was nowhere to turn for justice, especially not the court system. As one Dukhobor related: “They pull you into court in the very middle of the work day. They summon you, and in the town they say to you that the thieves involved in your case have not been found—and you sign, brother, on this piece of paper to say that you are content—and there the affair comes to an end.”⁸²

There were three reasons for the failure to prosecute. First, representatives from various indigenous groups maintained a strong presence among tsarist officialdom in Transcaucasia, and they tended not to have any sympathy for the sectarian interlopers.⁸³ In the police report for Kars territory for 1883, the author vented his frustration about the selection of Armenian administrators in the region. He found them to be untrustworthy, given to nepotism and favoritism, and adherents to “that cult, which deliberately, consistently and finely develops an ill will, . . . one can even say hatred, towards all those who carry a Russian name and to Russian people in general.”⁸⁴ Second, some Russian authorities in the region initially did not want the sectarians to settle in Transcaucasia, so they often ordered local officials to do what they could to

⁸¹ GMIR f. 14, op. 3, d. 1962, 1902, l. 14. This is not to say that the sectarians received no state aid in tracking down thieves or attackers. See SSC’SA f. 222, op. 1, d. 60, 1849, ll. 47-58.

⁸² Vereshchagin, *Dukhobortsy i Molokane*, 21. See also SSC’SA f. 239, op. 1, d. 45, 1849-52, ll. 2ob, 13.

⁸³ N. D. [Nikolai Dingel’shtedt], “Pryguny (Materialy k istoriia obruseniiia Zakavkazskogo kraia)” *OZ*, no. 10 (1878): 381-83; Rhineland, *Prince Michael Vorontsov*, 169-84; and Swietochowski, *Russian Azerbaijan*, 10-17.

⁸⁴ GARF f. 102, 3 d-vo, op. 1884, d. 88, ch. 2, ll. 8ob-9ob.

eliminate the nonconformists.⁸⁵ Finally, and most important, the failure of state officials to secure the existence of Russian settlers in the region derived from their powerlessness to do so. Not only had there been little time after conquest to build Russian administrative structures in Transcaucasia, but the tsarist empire was also still many years from fully controlling the region even militarily, due both to internal opposition and the attacks of external forces from Turkey and Persia.⁸⁶

The response of the authorities to Dukhobor complaints of Muslim attack in 1847 reveals the problems facing tsarist officials in their efforts to control the region. In order to put an end to the banditry of both “neighboring and foreign” Muslims, from which the Dukhobors suffered “incessantly,” Vorontsov sent orders to establish a line of “permanent residential pickets” that would run from the town of Akhalkalaki to the Armenian village of Shestony. They were to be composed of inhabitants from local Muslim villages, since there was no one else available to perform the policing tasks. Ordered to secure the passage from Akhalkalaki to Aleksandropol, they were also entrusted with guaranteeing the safety of the Dukhobors from robbers and were required to take responsibility in case of attacks from Azeri co-villagers. Thus, state policy placed representatives of the very people the Dukhobors considered to be their attackers in positions responsible for their defense. However, the affair took an unexpected turn when, despite these direct orders, the local official from Akhalkalaki district recruited members of the Dukhobor community, rather than Azeris, for these crime-control efforts. The Dukhobors complained bitterly, and unsuccessfully, that they were being ordered to take up policing activities, since it contradicted their religious teachings and diverted them from economic

⁸⁵ In this regard, see chapter four as well as GMIR f. 2, op. 7, d. 597, 1835-40; and N. D., “Pryguny,” no. 10, 382.

⁸⁶ Jones, “Russian Imperial Administration,” 53-76; Swietochowski, Russian Azerbaijan, 9; Firouzeh Mostashari, “Tsarist Colonial Policy”; Baddeley, Russian Conquest; and Gammer, Muslim Resistance.

activities. Thus, the state's eventual response to Dukhobor complaints of attack was to assign them the task of their own defense.⁸⁷

In the face of constant attack and an unresponsive and/or impotent state, at least some Molokans and Dukhobors across Transcaucasia could see no other solution but to take matters into their own hands. Despite the tenets of their faiths, both of which forbade violence and killing, the settlers started to meet their attackers on their own violent terms. In so doing, they not only underwent a profound change in religiosity but also fulfilled the prediction that, once in the Caucasus, they would be forced to take up arms and defend themselves, their property, and their families. Discussing the need to compromise their ethical stance, the Dukhobor Petr Malov relates how his forebears' "immense farms and large number of livestock represented a constant temptation for the bellicose native population, and raids and robberies did not diminish but became more frequent. They found it necessary to protect their property and thus, little by little, the Dukhobors began to acquire their own weapons. On that soil, bloody dramas were often performed and even murders occurred on both sides."⁸⁸

The Dukhobors "ceased to forgive the Tatars for their insults" and began to fight back.⁸⁹ Dukhobor communities formed detachments of armed and uniformed "Cossacks" who defended their coreligionists and provided permanent bodyguards to Dukhobor leaders.⁹⁰ Soviet historian A. I. Klibanov describes the Dukhobors' militarization in the following terms: "Mounted Cossacks, armed with sabers, daggers and revolvers, under the command of local chiefs, existed in a number of Dukhobor villages, carried out military training and were subordinate to the

⁸⁷ AKAK vol. 10, docs. 98 and 100, pp. 123-24.

⁸⁸ Petr Malov, Dukhobortsy, ikh istoriia, zhizn' i bor'ba, vol. 1 (Thrums, BC, 1948), 25-26; SSC'SA f. 5, op. 1, d. 1454, 1870; f. 244, op. 3, d. 100, 1870; and RGIA f. 1268, op. 3, d. 438, 1849.

⁸⁹ Petrov, "Dukhobory," 176.

⁹⁰ B. N. Terletskii, "Sakta Dukhoborov," in Russkie sektanty, ikh uchenie, kult. i sposoby propagandy, ed. M. A. Kal'nev (Odessa, 1911), 10-11; and Aylmer Maude, A Peculiar People: the Doukhobors (New York, 1904), opposite 222.

overall command of ‘the sergeant-major.’”⁹¹ Moreover, Dukhobors began to try native suspects in their own courts rather than in state ones. In doing so, they ensured that the reprisals meted out to their persecutors would be as stern as their collective conscience would allow.⁹² The Dukhobors also began to fortify their farms in order to provide protection for their communities. Svetlana Inikova, an ethnographer and Dukhobor expert, notes that the construction of barns and sheds changed as a result of the violence that the Dukhobors encountered in Transcaucasia. On a visit to the Dukhobor communities in the 1980s, she observed that barns from the mid-nineteenth century were built with metal grates as a way of turning them into defense-ready fortresses.⁹³

Other sectarians told similar stories. When Molokans from Alty-Agach complained to Vorontsov about Muslim violence, he is said to have replied, “Is it really possible that you cannot cope with the Tatars yourselves?” In the wake of this rebuke, the Molokans began to take matters into their own hands. In memoirs, Molokans describe hunting down and castrating Azeris who they felt were guilty of “dishonoring” their women. They also relate how they would “shoot Tatars like hares” in cases of vandalism or when a Russian had been injured or murdered.⁹⁴ Similarly, Orekhov reported in the 1870s that “the most somber rumors about the settler-Molokans reign in the midst of the surrounding indigenous people. The Molokans, the natives say, burn thieves—their enemies—should they happen to fall into the Molokans’ hands. One hears such a variety of stories with the most unbelievable contents.” The indigenous population asserted that the Molokans resorted frequently to blood reprisals and savage punishments—in short, “the law of lynching.”⁹⁵ Another Russian journalist asserted in 1871 that

⁹¹ Klibanov, *History*, 122-23. See the photograph of Dukhobor Cossacks in Breyfogle, *Heretics and Colonizers*, 195.

⁹² Terletskii, “Sekta Dukhoborov,” 10-11.

⁹³ Inikova, “Vzaimootnosheniia,” 46.

⁹⁴ GMIR f. 14, op. 3, d. 1962, 1902, ll. 13-14.

⁹⁵ Orekhov, “Ocherki,” no. 135, 2.

the sectarians showed very little compassion toward those of other faiths: “Their toughness stands in sharp relief in the struggle for life and death with the neighboring Tatars. They do not even consider the latter to be people and they strive to exploit them in all possible ways.”⁹⁶

In their efforts to ensure their own security, the sectarians received a modicum of state support, something not offered to the local Caucasian populations (especially Azeris and other Muslims). The understaffed tsarist officials in the region not only granted permission to the sectarian settlements to arm themselves and form paramilitary bands for their own defense, but even helped them acquire weapons. On Vorontsov’s orders, small groups of armed guards were recruited from among the settlers in order to protect villagers from robbery, theft, and attack.⁹⁷ Officials found it inexpensive to support such militias, which ranged from three to ten people in size. They needed only to supply weapons, salaries being considered unnecessary because the recruits were on temporary assignment.⁹⁸ In 1854, local officials, unable to defend the Dukhobors in Elisavetpol district during the Crimean War, sold them 913 rifles from the Tiflis artillery garrison at reduced prices, loaned other guns without charge for long periods, and supplied the powder for free. Once tsarist officials had done this for the Dukhobors, other Russian settlers began to request weapons from the state under these terms, reflecting their ongoing distancing from their religious tenets of nonviolence.⁹⁹

Sectarian sources reveal little about how they reacted or gave meaning to these changes in their behavior and morals. The adoption of violent tactics represented such a direct challenge to their religious beliefs that they could hardly have come about without considerable debate. Yet contemporary sources give no indication of spiritual struggles or soul-searching within the

⁹⁶ K. G., “Obshchii vzgliad na vnutrenniuiu zhizn’ russkikh sektantov v zakavkazskom krae,” *Kavkaz*, no. 141 (1871): 2. See also GMIR f. K1, op. 8, d. 470, 1925, l. 9.

⁹⁷ RGIA f. 1268, op. 3, d. 438, 1849, ll. 1-1ob.

⁹⁸ *AKAK* vol. 10, doc. 100, p. 124.

⁹⁹ SSC’SA f. 16, op. 1, d. 10631, 1854-58; and Inikova, “Vzaimootnosheniia,” 46.

sectarian communities. Only in the last quarter of the nineteenth century does discussion of this question turn up in the sectarians' own writings—first with the appearance of the Baptists in Transcaucasia in the late 1870s, and then with the Dukhobor pacifist movement from 1894 to 1899.¹⁰⁰ For their part, sources from Georgians, Armenians, and Azeris reveal little specifically about their response to sectarian violence, other than a general frustration and animosity.

Sources do not make concrete distinctions between the Molokans and Dukhobors in terms of the frequency and forms of violence, and there are no references to the Subbotniks in discussions of settler violence. What is clear, however, is that in their use of force, Dukhobors and Molokans did not simply appropriate the local forms of violence, but rather shifted from nonviolence to violence within their own cultural framework. Instead of appropriating Azeri models, they reacted with structures of aggression more typical of Russian culture—a pattern not dissimilar to the violence between Europeans and native peoples in North America.¹⁰¹ They resorted to weapons whose design was originally Caucasian, in part because these were the weapons most readily available to them. Yet, in response to kidnapping, highway robbery or theft of livestock, for example, there is no indication that the settlers ever committed these specific crimes in retribution—a response that the Azeris may have expected within their cultural system.¹⁰² Although they described their actions as defensive and prompted only by the Azeri attacks, the sectarians generally reacted with extreme measures and frequently with greater violence than had been done to them. Descriptions of burning culprits alive, castrating rapists, hunting criminals and setting upon thieves in large numbers to inflict beatings all reflect an

¹⁰⁰ See Breyfogle, *Heretics and Colonizers*, chapters six and seven.

¹⁰¹ Thomas S. Abler, “Scalping, Torture, Cannibalism, and Rape: An Ethnohistorical Analysis of Conflicting Cultural Values in War,” *Anthropologica* 34 (1992): 3-20. I thank Robert Johnson for bringing this article to my attention.

¹⁰² For comparison, see Gammer, *Muslim Resistance*; Martin, “Barimta”; and Swietochowski, *Russian Azerbaijan*, 16-17.

approach to violence that was preemptive as much as retaliatory, hoping to ward off future mistreatment through the use of excessive force to spread fear. One cannot but notice the similarity of the justification of force presented by General Ermolov: “I desire that the terror of my name should guard our frontiers more potently than chains and fortresses, that my word should be for the natives a law more inevitable than death. Condescension in the eyes of Asiatics is a sign of weakness, and out of pure humanity I am inexorably severe. One execution saves hundreds of Russians from destruction, and thousands of Mussulmans from treason.”¹⁰³

The manner in which settlers applied violence was channeled by ethnic factors. Whereas the nonconformists took up arms against those natives who insulted, attacked, or robbed them, they took no similar actions toward Orthodox Russians who caused them injury in other ways. Writing at the beginning of the twentieth century, one Molokan author from Alty-Agach lamented that the Molokan community never considered imposing force on those Orthodox Russians who lived in their village and persecuted the Molokans for their faith. Rather than meet the Orthodox attacks with an eye for an eye, they succumbed meekly to the actions of Russian soldiers and priests who commandeered food and lodging, chased Molokan women, and aggressively prevented the Molokans from gathering for prayer services on the Sabbath.¹⁰⁴

Yet if the sectarians were driven by ethnic considerations in their violent treatment of indigenous Azeris and, on occasion, Armenians, they did not develop a specifically racial sense of difference, as can be seen in other contexts of European imperialism.¹⁰⁵ In particular, they did not articulate an ideology of racial domination based on theology, such as in the case of the Boer

¹⁰³ Quoted in Baddeley, *Russian Conquest*, 97.

¹⁰⁴ GMIR f. 14, op. 3, d. 1962, 1902, ll. 9-14.

¹⁰⁵ See for example, Dane Kennedy, *Islands of White: Settler Society and Culture in Kenya and Southern Rhodesia, 1890-1939* (Durham, 1987), 148-66; and Ann Laura Stoler and Frederick Cooper, “Between Metropole and Colony: Rethinking a Research Agenda,” in *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World*, ed. idem (Berkeley, 1997), 1-56.

settlers in South Africa. Boers justified their oppression of Africans and their belief that “eternal servitude was the divine calling of blacks” by referring to the biblical story of Ham—“a slave of slaves shall he be to his brothers” (Genesis 9:24). In general, Russian sectarians developed no such divinely inspired explanation to vindicate their treatment of Transcaucasia’s Muslims. The one partial exception was the Pryguny. On describing the thousand-year kingdom of God, their leader Maksim Rudometkin envisioned the Muslims as their eternal subordinates: “They themselves will be our servants and breadwinners forever and their wives will be the servants and wetnurses of our children, everywhere with bows to them to the earth.”¹⁰⁶

The sectarian adoption of violence had two primary consequences. First, the armed militias of sectarian villages came to take on important roles in the administration of the Transcaucasus. By protecting themselves, the sectarians provided an unofficial armed force that aided in implementing Russian law and maintaining peace and Russian sovereignty on the frontier. Second, the colonists’ use of force began to “tame” what the sectarians described as the “hideous” and “disgraceful” behavior of the Muslims.¹⁰⁷ Official sources indicate that over the course of the nineteenth century, the rate and degree of violence and theft toward sectarians dropped so much that the authorities no longer considered it to be a problem. Whereas official reports from the first thirty years of the Russian sectarian presence in Transcaucasia are filled with comments about the difficult relations between them and the natives, police reports from the 1880s mention hardly any conflict at all. For instance, the governor’s report for Elisavetpol province for 1878 and the political reviews of Baku province for 1884 and 1887 describe the

¹⁰⁶ Quoted and translated in Klibanov, *History*, 166. On the Boers, see John Comaroff, “Images of Empire, Contests of Conscience: Models of Colonial Domination in South Africa,” in *Tensions of Empire*, 180-81; and Andre Du Toit, “No Chosen People: The Myth of the Calvinist Origins of Afrikaner Nationalism and Racial Ideology,” *AHR* 88, no. 4 (1983): 920-52.

¹⁰⁷ GMIR f. 14, op. 3, d. 1962, 1902, ll. 13-14.

relations between sectarians and native peoples as “good,” “amicable,” and “peaceful,” with only rare misunderstandings.¹⁰⁸

The settlers became widely respected for their ability to defend themselves. Natives no longer saw them as potential victims and, in some cases, openly feared them. A contemporary analyst reported that “the local inhabitants . . . are frightened of [the Russians], because in cases of attack, the theft of livestock, etc., all the commune acts like one person, energetically pursuing and prosecuting the violator of property.”¹⁰⁹ Another Russian commentator added: “For the simple Tatar the word ‘urus,’ which they use to call any Russian, is united with a . . . respect and deference in their interactions with him, although the right to that respect was paid for dearly by [the sectarians] through struggle.”¹¹⁰

It bears noting that tsarist officials and Russian commentators also attributed the reduction in violence and theft to a very different source: to moral forces as well as aggressive measures. Reflecting their views of Russians as civilizing agents, they asserted that the cultural values and social practices of the nonviolent, antimilitarist sectarians—their “good morals”—began to influence those around them. Discussing the Russian sectarians in Erevan province, journalist S. Kolosov asserted that the sectarians’ “peaceful morals and the absence of the habit of carrying daggers or revolvers . . . have an effect on the spiritual way of life of the indigenous population, which sees that a Russian person behaves with confidence and trust towards other people, expects from them humane relations rather than attack, and looks upon the surrounding population not as enemies . . . but as upon his brothers. All of this deeply affected the morality of

¹⁰⁸ See RGIA f. 1268, op. 24, d. 231, 1879-80, l. 158; GARF f. 102, 3 d-vo, op. 1885, d. 59, ch. 37, l. 2; op. 1887, d. 9, ch. 36, l. 2; and “V ‘Russkom Kur’ere’,” *Kaspii* 2, no. 59 (May 30, 1882): 2.

¹⁰⁹ A. G. Dekonskii, “Ekonomicheskii byt gosudarstvennykh krest’ian v Shushinskoi i Dzhebrail’skoi uездakh, Elisavetpol’skoi gubernii,” *MIEB*, vol. 4: 1 (Tiflis, 1886), 232.

¹¹⁰ A. I. Masalkin, “Iz istorii zakavkazskikh sektantov. Ch. III, Sektanty, kak kolonizatory Zakavkaz’ia,” *Kavkaz*, no. 333 (December 16, 1893): 3.

the native peoples.”¹¹¹ Similar voices echoed throughout Transcaucasia, describing the restraining and peaceable influences of the sectarians on those around them and asserting that the settlers’ economic success instilled respect for the Russian settlers and their achievements.¹¹²

The belief of tsarist officials in the pacifying effect of the sectarians on their neighbors—whatever its cause—affected colonial policies in Transcaucasia. In 1848, a tsarist official proposed to construct a Molokan village at a specific location in Erevan province “for the prevention of plundering and robberies on the part of nomadic inhabitants.”¹¹³ Similarly, in the late 1880s, the governor of Baku came to the conclusion that the best means to confront the crime problem in Kubin district would be to settle Russians in the area. As such, he ordered the settlement of twenty Molokan families “as an experiment” into a part of the region that was particularly violent, and where Russian soldiers had engaged in pitched gun battles with the local “robbers.” The experiment was a “shining” success and crime rates in the region dropped dramatically.¹¹⁴

Although assaults and thefts were much reduced, they by no means disappeared altogether. Violence remained a central component of the relations between settlers and natives, although the quantity and the quality of the violence changed. From the 1860s into the twentieth century, there were periodic reports of neighboring Azeris stealing Russian livestock and conducting roadside killings and of Lezgins openly attacking Russian communities. Starting in

¹¹¹ Kolosov, “Russkie sektanty,” 152.

¹¹² Inikova, “Vzaimootnosheniia,” 49; “Iz Signakhskego uezda (kor. Kavkaza),” *Kavkaz*, no. 15 (February 1, 1877): 3; Masalkin “Kolonizatory,” no. 333, 3; I. Ia. Orekhov, “Ocherki iz zhizni zakavkazskikh sektatorov,” *Kavkaz*, no. 143 (June 25, 1878): 1; Kh. A. Vermishev, “Ekonomicheskii byt gosudarstvennykh krest’ian v Akhaltsikhskom i Akhalkalakskom uezdakh, Tiflisskoi gubernii,” in *MIEB*, vol. 3:2 (Tiflis, 1886), 42-43; A. N. Kuropatkin, *Soobrazheniia nachal’nika Zakaspiiskoi oblasti po voprosu o pereselenii v Zakaspiiskuiu oblast’ dukhoborov-postnikov* (n.p., n.d.), 15; and Petrov, “Seleniia,” 247.

¹¹³ Quoted in Tumanian, *Ekonomicheskoe razvitiie*, 1:41.

¹¹⁴ RGIA f. 560, op. 26, d. 86, 1984, ll. 70ob-71; and *Kaspii* 2, no. 59 (May 30, 1882): 2.

1905, there were reports of Armenians attacking Molokan communities.¹¹⁵ In particular, the sectarian villagers in Novo-Saratovka and Novo-Ivanovka in Elisavetpol province complained that their horticulture suffered at the hands of Azeri robbers. According to the contemporary commentator I. E. Petrov, nomads in the process of moving their herds through Transcaucasia often took advantage of the lack of serious supervision of the gardens to chop down trees and otherwise ruin the gardens of Molokans. It was also not uncommon for the local Azeris to unearth the trees and carry them to their own homes, where they would replant them in an effort to cultivate orchards as the Molokans had. The Molokans frequently caught these thieves and forcibly exacted payment of a few rubles for each tree. The practice of stealing trees was so common that there were middlemen who would sell the Azeris trees from the Molokans' orchards at prices well below what they would be forced to pay if they were caught stealing the trees.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁵ SSC'SA f. 17, op. 1, d. 4042, 1899; GARF f. 102, oo d-vo, op. 1907, d. 100, t. 1, ch. 2, ll. 131-32ob; T. B., "U beregov Kaspiia (iz putevykh zametok i vospominanii) Tri goda nazad. Ch. IX, V Malorussskoi kolonii," *Kavkaz*, no. 75 (April 4, 1881): 1; "Sel. Slavianka," *Kaspii* 14, no. 243 (November 11, 1894): 3; and "Selenie Semenovka," *Tiflisskii listok* 18, no. 158 (July 13, 1895): 1.

¹¹⁶ Petrov, "Seleniia," 241, 247. There is no mention of the ethnicity of the middlemen. On blurring distinctions between "crime" and "trade" in the North Caucasus, see Thomas Barrett, "Crossing Boundaries: The Trading Frontiers of the Terek Cossacks," in *Russia's Orient*, 227-48.