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"The Motivations of Foreign Fighters: The Case of the Chechen Diaspora in Ukraine"

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'Ní bhíonn an rath ach mar a mbíonn an smacht.'

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Introduction

Foreign fighters are a curious phenomenon. When faced with their prevalence in war zones, it is common to question what provokes foreign nationals to fight for a country or cause that is not their own. What motivates them to enter into a conflict they are not explicitly involved in? Although their motivations are worthy of inquiry, the case of foreign fighters is a question in its own right, who are they and why have they come? For the purpose of this dissertation the NATO definition will be used:

"The term 'foreign fighters' describes nationals of one state who – for whatever variety of reasons and motives – travel abroad to take part in a conflict in another state without the promise of financial reward." (NATO, 2017)

Not to be confused with the term foreign terrorist fighters (FTF) described by the UNSC as:

"individuals who travel to a State other than their States of residence or nationality for the purpose of the perpetration, planning, or preparation of, or participation in, terrorist acts or the providing or receiving of terrorist training, including in connection with armed conflict" (ICCT, 2023)

The terms foreign fighters and foreign terrorist fighters are often used interchangeably which leads to confusion when describing their existence in

various conflicts. In the interest of clarity, this dissertation will discuss foreign fighters outside the realm of terrorism, with a particular focus on the Chechen diaspora, who have existed in Ukraine since the annexation of Crimea in 2014, and have been fighting alongside Ukrainian forces in the war in Ukraine since February 2022 (Kvakhadze, 2022, pg.7). This is a pivotal time for understanding why the Chechen diaspora left Chechnya and what is motivating them to take up arms against Russia once more, albeit in Ukraine. Analysing the motivations of Chechen foreign fighters in their current arena and comparing these with the foreign fighter motivations throughout history will provide valuable insight into the evolution of foreign fighter motivations and the different peculiarities needed to fully grasp this phenomenon and the unique case of the Chechen diaspora. To ascertain the complexities surrounding foreign fighter motivations, this research will be an analysis from their existence in the Texas Revolution in 1835 up to the present day, 2023, identifying what has changed, what has remained and what separates these motivations from the realm of terrorism. An important factor to consider in the case of Chechen foreign fighters in Ukraine is the existence of Chechen customary laws or 'Adats', for this dissertation the definition from Ozdamirova Laura Musatovna, Senior Lecturer at the Chechen State University in Grozny, will be used:

"Customary laws are a system of rules of conduct based on unwritten customs, which are not established by public authorities, but developed over a long time in a certain social environment and acquired legal significance as a

result of the recognition of their role in legal regulation by the state" (Ozdamirova, 2016, pg.76)

The case of the Chechen western diaspora acting as foreign fighters requires special consideration regarding the history of their departure from Chechnya, the situational reasons for leaving alongside their moral and customary obligations for mobilisation. Outlined in the Literature Review for this paper will be the existing literature on foreign fighter motivations, their instances throughout history as both an overview and starting point for reflection on this research gap, also to be included is comprehensive analysis of the Chechen custom of Blood Revenge and its relation to violent mobilisation. Using a mix of secondary source analysis on the abovementioned and primary source analysis in the form of governmental reports, situational updates on the war in Ukraine and content analysis will allow for a comprehensive view of this phenomenon and bring it to centre stage in the international arena as its prevalence grows. Utilising both English and Russian sources presents different perspectives and ensures equity when discussing such important topics.

The research puzzle for this dissertation is straightforward. When discussing this topic, similarities arise between foreign fighters, foreign terrorist fighters and mercenaries, oftentimes the former two are used interchangeably due to the existence of ideology or declarations of jihad, as a motivation for mobilisation. However, the intention of this dissertation is to outline the various motivations,

separate to that of foreign terrorist fighters, that empowers someone to fight for a cause that is not their own, in a country that is not their own. These motivations can vary from aligning yourself with a particular cause and wanting to provide support to simply desiring being in the midst of a conflict. Grievances, ambition and ideology all play important roles in motivating foreign fighters to mobilise though there is one particular group of people that stand out in this conversation, the Chechen western diaspora. Media outlets covering the war in Ukraine are quick to announce the actions of the Kadyrovtsy, or Ramzan Kadyrov, the head of Chechnya's, battalion which are a part of the Russian National Guard and are fighting for Russia, and to describe them as a brutal, fear-invoking force (Mustaffa, 2022).

However, there are other Chechen battalions in Ukraine which are not aligned with Moscow or Kadyrov whose goal is to eliminate Russia as an aggressor. The battalions of the Chechen western diaspora and their association with historical examples of foreign fighter motivations alongside the unique motivator of blood revenge or blood feud will be discussed in this dissertation to illustrate that a multifaceted approach is required when considering foreign fighters and their motivations. Understanding these motivations will determine to a great extent what could happen next and whether the Chechen foreign fighters will be satisfied with the outcome of this conflict. While out of the scope of this dissertation, the clear determination of motivations will provide a

foundation for further research into the possible implications for the Chechen foreign fighters of the outcome to this conflict in Ukraine.

To facilitate this understanding the following research question, along with three objectives, will be analysed:

1. “What is the motivation for Chechen foreign fighters to fight against Russia in the war in Ukraine?”

A) What were the main pull factors for joining this conflict in particular?

B) Are Chechen customary laws or ‘Adats’ a driving factor for mobilisation and if so, should researchers put more emphasis on blood revenge (Ch’ir) when discussing Chechen foreign fighters?

C) What level of influence does the practice of blood revenge (Ch’ir) still hold in the diaspora’s society today?

2. Literature review

The literature chosen for this review is varied in terms of the research methods used, whether it is from a historical perspective or remaining in the present day, there can be differences in content. With a topic such as the motivations of foreign fighters and especially using a case study of the Chechen western diaspora, it is challenging to find information pertaining to the aim of this dissertation. It is currently an under researched subject, though the literature chosen in this review individually offer valuable insight into certain aspects of this phenomenon. The varying research methods used by the authors allows for renewed perspectives on the subject as the research method for this dissertation is limited to secondary research. Without the ability to conduct interviews on the case study of the Chechen western diaspora fighting in Ukraine, it is beneficial to be able to consolidate beliefs and hypotheses using literature where interviews have been conducted. Literature which took a historical approach to the foreign fighter phenomenon along with the motivations at that time have provided detailed information on what to expect from modern foreign fighter motivations. In understanding the specifics of the Chechen western diaspora case, literature surrounding the experiences of the diaspora in different countries and in-depth research on the topic of blood revenge have played an important role in bolstering the arguments made in this dissertation.

"The Composition and Challenges of Foreign Fighters in Ukraine", published by the Scandinavian Journal of Military Studies, written by Naman Karl-Thomas Habtom.

This is an example of a contemporary academic source that follows the participation of Foreign Fighters in the War in Ukraine, taking into consideration the wider spectrum of volunteers. Understandably, Habtom experienced similar challenges as this dissertation due to the unpredictable and covert nature of this war and its reporting, in particular the operations of foreign fighters. Despite the admitted reliance on primarily 'media reports' (Habtom, 2022), Habtom provides a reasonable scope with which to analyse the differences in motivations between the Chechen western diaspora foreign fighters and that of Western volunteers. One of the main arguments in the work of Habtom is that foreign fighters are being used as tools of propaganda with the hope that their home countries, upon seeing their activities in the defence of Ukraine, will on a lesser note, garner support for the Ukrainian cause or, ideally, intervene in the war (Habtom, 2022). This propaganda machine is largely targeting that of NATO member states and members of the European Union, creating the viewpoint that the Russian invasion is that of an invasion on European values and ideals (Habtom, 2022). This viewpoint was defended by Volodymyr Zelenskyy's statement that this was, "the beginning of a war against Europe, against European structures"(Habtom, 2022).

Habtom's second notable point is in relation to the recruitment process of foreign fighters itself, "The Ukrainian effort is notable in that it is a real-time response rather than a structural element of its armed forces scaled up in time of war"(Habtom, 2022). This statement was used to highlight the difference between the foreign fighters in both the Spanish Civil War and the Syrian Civil War and the War in Ukraine. In the Spanish Civil War, Habtom states that the foreign fighters, rather the 'blackshirts', had existed in the Iberian Peninsula far prior to the onset of the Civil War and therefore were not sought out or encouraged to travel to the country (Habtom, 2022). In regard to the Syrian Civil War, Habtom mentions the foreign fighters received were part of an organised support measure from foreign Shia militias (Habtom, 2022). Both of these instances were used to highlight the lack of independent volunteers, instead using "pre-existing military or paramilitary units with their own intact command structure"(Habtom, 2022). The case of foreign fighters in Ukraine, according to Habtom, is that of a "real time response" with the possibility of integrating foreign fighters into existing military command structures (Habtom, 2022). Habtom does mention the existence of Chechen foreign fighters as independent battalions, separate to that of other foreign fighters which rely on assimilation into the Ukrainian International Legion (UIL)(Habtom, 2022).

The third point by Habtom for consideration is the question of motivation. Habtom argues that foreign fighters are not as motivated as Ukrainian citizens and that foreign fighters are more likely to retreat (Habtom, 2022). This is

supported by reports that many Western volunteers had left Ukraine within two weeks to one month after arrival, taking their propaganda tools with them. Habtom accompanies this argument with the help of a quote from Sun Tzu's 'The Art of War', "When you surround an army, leave an outlet free. Do not press a desperate foe too hard."(Habtom, 2022). Habtom has reimagined this quote to fit the narrative that those not carrying a Ukrainian passport are predisposed to withdraw from the fight, leaving Ukrainian fighters surrounded.

The last point of Habtom's for the purpose of this dissertation, is the reinventing of the term 'foreign fighter' itself. "Following 9/11, the notion of being a "foreign fighter" has been intimately associated with jihadi terrorists and other such groups"(Habtom, 2022). In a desire to branch away from this notion, volunteer fighters in Ukraine are seeking to reclaim the term foreign fighter as one of good intention. Despite the separation from jihadism in Ukraine, Habtom argues that regardless of the objective " those that do remain will become involved in atrocities themselves" (Habtom, 2022), possibly leading to security and governmental concerns upon their return to their home countries.

The above mentioned four arguments, introduce four points of interest for this dissertation. Firstly, Habtom states that foreign fighters are tools of propaganda to ignite support from their home countries and to bolster the idea that the war is a fight to uphold European values (Habtom, 2022). The work of Habtom does not specifically mention any foreign fighter battalions, rather choosing an

overarching view, though for the purpose of this dissertation Habtom's insights will be applied to the Chechen western diaspora. It is important to remember with the Chechen western diaspora, this is not necessarily a fight to strengthen European principles, while they may agree with that, it is largely the same fight against Russia that they have experienced in past conflicts, just the battlefield has changed. In terms of their usage as propaganda machines, it is true to say that their presence in Ukraine has garnered the attention of the international media but whether this has made any impact on Chechnya or the Chechen people's attitude towards the war is largely unknown.

Secondly, as seen in the work by Egle E. Murauskaite, Chechen western diaspora fighters are mainly in independent battalions, this is in agreement with Habtom, though there are instances such as the 'battle chasers' category which has seen Chechen fighters in the ranks alongside the Aidar battalion in Eastern Ukraine (Murauskaite, 2020, pg.7). The question surrounding foreign fighters ability to assimilate into Ukrainian regiments overlooks this aspect, along with the fact that Chechen foreign fighters have largely been in Ukraine since the annexation of Crimea in 2014 (Kvakhadze, 2022, pg.7). Their existence since 2014 also demonstrates that, in a similar fashion as the blackshirts in the Spanish Civil War, Chechen foreign fighters were not regiments formed as a "real time response"(Habtom, 2022) and therefore were not sought out for the purposes of the War in Ukraine.

The third point of interest being the question of motivation and that foreign fighters are not as motivated as the Ukrainians which leads to abandonment of the war (Habtom, 2022). Comparing the two, Ukrainian soldiers and Chechen foreign fighters, in terms of motivation to defeat Russia is a challenging task and largely indemonstrable, though it should still be recognised that for different reasons, both view Russia as the enemy and are prepared to follow through on that repeatedly. In this instance and for the purposes of this dissertation, a different Sun Tzu quote may be more appropriate, “If you know your enemy and know yourself, you need not fear the result of a hundred battles”(Tzu, 2009, pg.11), and this is especially true in the case of Ukraine and the Chechen western diaspora.

Finally, Habtom mentions the desire for foreign fighters in Ukraine to reinvent and reinterpret the term ‘foreign fighter’ to represent something positive in comparison to its usage in relation to terrorist or insurgent groups. Though it would appear that regardless of this desire, Habtom stated that remaining as a foreign fighter will eventually lead to crime and violence (Habtom, 2022). Reimagining the term ‘foreign fighter’ in the War in Ukraine would seem to be the ideal arena given the international support for Ukraine and the appreciation for those fighting, regardless of nationality. It is not possible to say as of now, whether foreign fighters will turn to further violence in the post-Ukraine War world, be that as it may, it can be assumed that the Chechen western diaspora will continue to wage war with Russia, “"We will fight till that time when we

destroy that empire of evil totally."(Waghorn, 2022) This further emphasises the need to clearly understand the motivations of the Chechen foreign fighters as their satisfaction with the outcome is likely to be the key determinant of future actions.

"Foreign Fighters in Ukraine: Assessing Potential Risks" for the Vilnius Institute for Policy Analysis, written by Egle E. Murauskaite.

This article by Murauskaite focuses on the risks of radicalisation and gateways to terrorist activities observed in foreign fighters in Ukraine from the period starting in 2014 to two years prior to the war in Ukraine of 2022 (Murauskaite, 2020, pg.1). This article encompasses a wide range of foreign fighters from both sides of the conflict and is largely interview and case study based. As seen in the Habtom article, Murauskaite also acknowledges the limitations in scope and reliability of data when discussing the secretive nature of foreign fighter activities (Murauskaite, 2020, pg.2). Murauskaite clearly defines what is considered a foreign fighter for the purposes of her article stating that it is useful to group them by "self-identified key underlying sentiments bringing them to the battle" and then further categorising them by "ideologies and nations" (Murauskaite, 2020, pg.5). The categorisations made by Murauskaite are, of course, used to emphasise particular risk categories, though she has not limited herself to a 'one size fits all'. The four categories used are as follows: "(1)

veterans with historical grievances, (2) disillusioned ideologues, (3) armed opposition, and (4) battle chasers."(Murauskaite, 2020, pg.6)

According to Murauskaite, the Chechen Western Diaspora falls into two of these categories, 1. Veterans with historical grievances and to a lesser extent 4. Battle chasers (Murauskaite, 2020, pgs.7,12). Within the first category Murauskaite provides extensive detail on which battalions Chechens are found in. Giving the example of the Dzhokhar Dudayev battalion, whose current commander is Adam Osmayev (Query and Farrell, 2022), Murauskaite describes this battalion as being:

"led by prominent veteran of both Chechen wars, and mostly consists of men who have also fought in one or both of those wars. They had been scattered in the West in exile, and have come to Ukraine explicitly to continue this fight against Russia" (Murauskaite, 2020, pg.7)

By comparison, the Sheikh Mansur battalion is described as "Chechen Muslims who claim to have come to avenge Imperial Russia's 18th century conquests of their lands." (Murauskaite, 2020, pg.7)

Murauskaite clarifies that their existence in Ukraine is not limited to the independent Chechen battalions, many are indeed found in other regiments with the example of the Aidar battalion in Eastern Ukraine being mentioned, "they come driven by an oft-repeated sentiment of refusing to "bend over for Putin"".(Murauskaite, 2020, pg.7)

In the ‘battle chasers’ category, we are limited to knowledge of one above mentioned battalion:

“[...]in addition to experienced Western fighters and adventurous youth, some of the men of the Chechen Sheikh Mansur battalion, discussed above, can also be classified as battle chasers. These few are supporters of the Islamic State, and have fought in its ranks in Syria and/or Iraq”. (Murauskaite, 2020, pg.13)

Murauskaite states that the majority of foreign fighters arrived in Ukraine in 2015 and her research into typology-based risk factors includes this timeframe, therefore it is not limited to solely the war in Ukraine in the present day (Murauskaite, 2020, pg.4). What is most notable is the difficulty faced by returning foreign fighters in terms of reintegration in their home countries. This failure of assimilation has been seen to lead returning foreign fighters into lives of crime and violence. In countries where extremist Islam is witnessed, returning foreign fighters are more likely to become radicalised upon their return. Regarding the typology profiles Murauskaite has created for the Chechen fighters in Ukraine, she states:

“The available data indicates that the veterans seem to activate for battle only where the “nemesis” is present[...]they do not seem to have a record for involvement with politically radical or other terrorist groups”. (Murauskaite, 2020,pg.22)

This work by Murauskaite is useful in that there is separation between the various types of foreign fighters that are in Ukraine, this highlights the varying motivations and backgrounds and offers up new perspectives on why individuals become foreign fighters. Considering the different battalions in which Chechen foreign fighters are found, it is important to acknowledge that not everyone is there for the same reasons, even though it may seem easier to group Chechen foreign fighters into the same motivation of grievances or 'battle-chasers'(Murauskaite, 2020, pg.13). For this dissertation it is necessary to continually restate the reality that it is not the entire Chechen western diaspora fighting in Ukraine that could list blood revenge as a motivator.

Murauskaite mentions the challenge faced by the prospect of reintegrating foreign fighters back into their home countries (Murauskaite, 2020, pgs.22,23) and while this is definitely the case for certain countries, in respect to the Chechen diaspora it would seem improbable that reintegration into Chechnya is possible given the current leadership and condemnation of their actions against Russia. Some media outlets have reported that the overall goal of Chechen foreign fighters is to reclaim Chechnya from Russia though it cannot be said whether this opinion is shared or just the aim of a few (Dettmer, 2023). The question is also raised surrounding whether reintegration will lead to an increase in crime and violence which is a sentiment echoed in the work by Naman Karl-Thomas Habtom (Habtom, 2022). The violent mobilisation of Chechens during the Second Chechen War, which would lead in part to the formation of the

Chechen western diaspora, resulted in the diaspora's continued fighting against Russia and could be predicted to continue well past the end of the War in Ukraine. As a result of this hypothesis, while they may not be enacting violence in Chechnya, it could lead to further violence against Russia in a different arena, motivation and outcome dependent.

Murauskaite further discusses the risk of extremism among returning foreign fighters and did not list Chechen foreign fighters as an at risk group for this, which would support the claim that the title of 'foreign fighter' is being reclaimed from 'foreign terrorist fighter'. (Murauskaite, 2020, pg.22)

'Foreign Fighters in History' by Maria Galperin Donnelly with Thomas M. Sanderson and Zack Fellman.

'Foreign Fighters in History' written by Maria Galperin Donnelly for the CSIS (Centre for Strategic and International Studies) is a combined study with assistance from TNT (Transnational Threats Project), a CSIS funded project which "conducts extensive fieldwork overseas, compiles and analyzes data sets, and utilizes satellite imagery and other types of qualitative and quantitative analysis" on the movements of terrorist organisations and irregular operations (CSIS, 2020). Galperin Donnelly explains that "foreign volunteers intensify the conflicts to which they travel, and can destabilize the countries to which they travel next" (Galperin Donnelly, Sanderson and Fellman, 2017, pg.III). Galperin

Donnelly uses three main case studies, namely Afghanistan, Bosnia and Chechnya, describing them as "conflict-induced humanitarian crises" which have incited jihad (Galperin Donnelly, Sanderson and Fellman, 2017, pg.1):

"Each conflict was considered a defensive war on behalf of a local Muslim population, which enabled international supporters (both donors and fighters) to frame participation in the conflict as a religious duty"(Galperin Donnelly, Sanderson and Fellman, 2017, pg.2).

This study is primarily a foreign terrorist fighter project. Galperin Donnelly gives background to the three conflicts and examines how the training and fighting experience they received in these countries influenced their evolution towards becoming mujahideen, namely in Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria following the September 2001 attacks. It was during the Afghan-Soviet War in the 80s, referred to as an "anti-Soviet jihad"(Galperin Donnelly, Sanderson and Fellman, 2017, pg.1) by Galperin Donnelly, which saw the first high levels of foreign fighters and it was the networks created during this war that led to foreign fighter involvement in Bosnia and Chechnya (Galperin Donnelly, Sanderson and Fellman, 2017, pg.2). The networks themselves were also "critical to shaping" the wars in Iraq and Syria (Galperin Donnelly, Sanderson and Fellman, 2017, pg.2). The war in Bosnia in 1992 saw the introduction of distribution through social media which enhanced the cause and encouraged recruitment while the First Chechen War was deemed the first example of "jihad through the media" (Galperin Donnelly, Sanderson and Fellman, 2017, pg.2). In relation to the wars

in Afghanistan in 2001, Iraq in 2003 and Syria in 2011, trends from past conflicts kept emerging and networks kept regrouping to continue the war effort in different arenas. These networks that were created contained foreign terrorist fighters with considerable combat experience and were eager to mobilise when given the opportunity. “Fighters with prior experience, networks with other jihadi-salafis, and access to funds pulled a local conflict onto the global stage.”(Galperin Donnelly, Sanderson and Fellman, 2017, pg.15). Galperin Donnelly also discusses the establishment of a Caliphate under the Islamic State, which at its peak saw the recruitment of forty thousand foreign terrorist fighters which eventually waned in 2016 due to the loss of image and status (Galperin Donnelly, Sanderson and Fellman, 2017, pg.24).

It is interesting to see the perspective of foreign fighters going to Chechnya, Galperin Donnelly states that:

“The First Chechen War drew between 200 – 300 fighters who remained present in Chechnya as hostilities waned. During the Second Chechen War the number of foreign fighters rose to 700 before sharply dropping.” (Galperin Donnelly, Sanderson and Fellman, 2017, pg.11).

The influence of foreign fighters in Chechnya played an important role in shifting the war from primarily nationalist to a holy war due to Sheikh Fathi and Emir Khattab who facilitated the travel and training of foreign fighters (Galperin Donnelly, Sanderson and Fellman, 2017, pg.10). It also played a role in future events in Chechnya as stated by Galperin Donnelly:

"This new sense of religious identity among Chechens following the end of the first war in 1996 later played a role in shaping the political structure of the de facto independent republic." (Galperin Donnelly, Sanderson and Fellman, 2017, pg.12)

The description of the First Chechen War as that of the first "jihad through the media" (Galperin Donnelly, Sanderson and Fellman, 2017, pg.2) reinforces the importance of social media in establishing networks and recruitment which is seen in part on the social network, Telegram, on which you can follow the activities of Chechen battalions in Ukraine. Considering that a large number of Chechen foreign fighters have remained in Ukraine since 2014, the importance of established networks resonates now that those fighters have created such an impact in the War in Ukraine.

'Foreign Fighters in History' does not provide a definition for what they constitute as a 'foreign fighter', only that they "intensify the conflict" (Galperin Donnelly, Sanderson and Fellman, 2017, pg.III), although it becomes clear that this paper is referring to foreign fighters who act on jihad with mention to foreign terrorist fighters in the Islamic State. The problem lies in the reference to the Islamic State and the forty thousand 'foreign fighters' who joined their ranks. As seen in Habtom, an attempt is being made to reinvent the term 'foreign fighter' and to create a term of good intention (Habtom, 2022). This attempt is then largely erased when used in conjunction with a terrorist organisation such as the Islamic State. This highlights the importance of distinction when discussing the two phenomena to remove the assumption that all foreign fighters

enact acts of terrorism. Despite the need for clarification, 'Foreign Fighters in History' provides legitimacy to the importance of foreign fighters in certain conflicts, of which several will be analysed as historical examples for this dissertation.

Crimes of the Century: The Deportation of Chechens of 1944 and the War of 1994 by Dimaeva Fatima Vahkaevna, Complex Scientific Research Institute by Russian Academy of Science

Dimaeva details the turbulent history of Chechnya from the Stalinist regime up until the First Chechen War with particular interest placed on the 1944 deportation. It is a highly in-depth piece which highlights the continued violence Chechens and other ethnic groups were subjected to by Russia, along with the lack of recognition from the international community. The international community response is an interesting topic considering the US support for Boris Yeltsin in his campaign against Chechnya and the later disclosure of information regarding the 1944 deportation which revealed numerous abuses. Much of the source material used by Dimaeva is official USSR state data, either reports from the Ministry of the Interior or Government Decrees which further demonstrates how flagrant these abuses were (Dimaeva, 2015, pg.94). There are slight inconsistencies between sources in relation to survivor and victim figures, though in a case such as this, given the time and difficult nature of finding exact

numbers, it is to be expected. Dimaeva sets the tone for this article by using a quote from Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's 'Gulag Archipelago' which describes how this deportation was first of its kind and how, despite years of colonialism and conquests, no conqueror has ever formed the idea that those indigenous to a region should ever be separated from it (Dimaeva, 2015, pg.92).

"Historians can correct us, but our average human memory did not keep, either from the 19th, or from the 18th, or from the 17th century, evidence of mass forcible transfer of peoples. There were colonial conquests on oceanic islands, in Africa, Asia, in Turkestan, the victors gained power over the indigenous population, but somehow it did not occur to the undeveloped heads of the colonialists to separate this population from its ancestral land, from its great-grandfather houses"(Dimaeva, 2015, pg.92)

Dimaeva details the events leading up to and including the 23rd of February 1944 and gives mention to two situations of particular interest, the poisoning of food and the burning down of a village (Dimaeva, 2015, pg.93). Dimaeva provides a harrowing insight into the horrors that unfolded during Operation Lentil with not only deaths but also moral and cultural losses. The forced deportation was not the only crime committed against the Chechen people, patients at a regional hospital in Urus-Martan were buried alive, people were drowned at Lake Kezenoy-Am and "on February 27, 1944, 700 residents of the high-mountainous Chechen village of Khaibakh were burned alive by special units of the security services from Moscow" (Dimaeva, 2015, pg.93). Discussed

at an international conference in Krakow, Poland in 1995 was the witnessed poisoning with arsenic and hexogen of food given to the Chechen people in the form of 'humanitarian aid' during the years of the deportation, aptly called "food surprises" (Dimaeva, 2015, pg.93). Dimaeva estimates that between 60-65% of the Chechen population were lost during these years and according to official USSR state data "In total, by 1956, out of 520,301 Chechens and Ingush, 239,670 survived, and the losses amounted to 280,631 people" (Dimaeva, 2015, pg.94). These reprehensible acts against the Chechen people went largely disregarded by the international community with the United States even going as far as to demand access to Chechnya for the mass media, which effectively turned the abuses suffered in Chechnya into a petting zoo for the world to gape at (Dimaeva, 2015, pg.93). Dimaeva when discussing the First Chechen War compares it to that of the 1944 deportation, though instead of being exiled they were killed (Dimaeva, 2015, pg.94).

This is an incredibly emotive piece which is backed up by official USSR state data from the time which sadly reinforces the horrors experienced in Chechnya. In order to form an understanding of the causes of grievances among the Chechen diaspora it is necessary to reflect on such events as Operation Lentil which went largely ignored worldwide. Forced exile and human rights abuses have long remained ingrained in the memories of Chechens in the form of intergenerational trauma. Forced exile was also witnessed in the Second Chechen War which led largely to the formation of the Chechen foreign fighters

in Ukraine and combined with the events of 1944, there is room for the belief that this trauma is motivating their actions against Russia. The work by Dimaeva highlights the grievances upon which blood revenge can be declared and is crucial to the explanation of the history behind these grievances.

'Foreign Fighters under International Law and Beyond' written by Prof Andrea de Guttry and edited by Dr Francesca Capone and Dr Christophe Paulussen for Springer. Part 1- Foreign Fighters: A Multidisciplinary Overview of New Challenges for an Old Phenomenon, Chapters 2-5.

Professor de Guttry defines foreign fighters as:

"'individuals, driven mainly by ideology, religion and/or kinship, who leave their country of origin or their country of habitual residence to join a party engaged in an armed conflict" though this is not limited "to those who join a non-State armed group[...], but it will include also the foreigners fighting on the side of a government" (de Guttry, Capone and Paulussen, 2016, pg.1)

Part 1 of Professor de Guttry's book provides historical perspective on the activities of foreign fighters in the 18th, 19th and 20th century using empirical

evidence to add to the "currently understudied body of literature" (de Guttry, Capone and Paulussen, 2016, pg.63) while also using interviews conducted with those who have acted as foreign fighters or considered joining conflicts as foreign fighters. Chapters 2-5 were chosen for review as they discuss the involvement of foreign fighters in international conflicts from historical to post-modern conflicts, how foreign fighters affect international relations theory and most importantly for this dissertation, the motivations for travel.

Professor de Guttry begins by providing examples of foreign fighter involvement in the American Revolution of 1765 yet acknowledges that in academic literature, foreign fighter involvement in the Spanish Civil War in 1936 "is generally remembered as the first case of foreign fighters' presence" (de Guttry, Capone and Paulussen, 2016, pg.39). Many of the foreign fighters involved in the Spanish Civil War who represented the anti-fascist side, using their experience from this conflict, could be assumed to have joined the ranks as volunteers in World War II (de Guttry, Capone and Paulussen, 2016, pg.41). In keeping with this trend of involvement, Professor de Guttry also states that following "Nazi victory over several European countries, many defeated troops set up guerrilla units or escaped to friendly countries to form military units to keep fighting against Germany within the Allied army" of which Polish and Czech foreign volunteers were the largest demographic (de Guttry, Capone and Paulussen, 2016, pg.42). Part 1 also discusses the challenge with developing a straightforward definition of foreign fighters and lists the Soviet-Afghan War as

being a definitive moment in forming their public perception (de Guttry, Capone and Paulussen, 2016, pg.43). What has brought foreign fighters into the consideration of international relations theory was when the Islamic State declared a Caliphate in 2014, making up a considerable portion of their organisation being foreign fighters from across the world. Notoriety and distribution of terrorist activities on the internet and on social networks, propelled the activities of foreign fighters into the public eye. This notoriety has led to the creation of the term Foreign Terrorist Fighter as differentiation became more important as the frequency of conflicts increased.

"[...]Although they are clearly perceived as a distinct category of people by local communities, to the eye of international observers foreign fighters have long constituted an intermediate actor category lost between local rebels, on the one hand, and international terrorists, on the other."(de Guttry, Capone and Paulussen, 2016, pg.52)

Professor de Guttry noted the challenge of defining foreign fighters and combined now with the increase in foreign terrorist fighters, who are undoubtedly more infamous than the previous, that challenge has only grown (de Guttry, Capone and Paulussen, 2016, g.50). According to Professor de Guttry in respect to international relations theory and considering as a group foreign fighters are not "a prominent aspect of modern-day warfare" (de Guttry, Capone and Paulussen, 2016, pg.56), it would appear that foreign terrorist fighters are more likely to be considered within international relations theory as

terrorism is perceived as an increasingly greater threat. What is interesting to note is throughout Part 1 of 'Foreign Fighters under International Law and Beyond', both foreign fighters and foreign terrorist fighters are inherently linked to this combined idea of community and sense of belonging (de Guttry, Capone and Paulussen, 2016, pg.54). De Guttry remarks "The foreign fighters phenomenon stems from the junction between globalised communications/transportation technology and violent dynamics that give birth to specific transnational identity communities" (de Guttry, Capone and Paulussen, 2016, pg.54). From this it can be deduced that becoming a foreign fighter is less to do with relating to the ideology of a conflict and more to do with the practical elements such as travelling there automatically linking people together in this community. From a group of five interviewees, three commonly occurring motivations were:

(1) outrage at what is alleged to be happening in the country where the conflict is taking place and empathy with the people being affected;

(2) adherence to the ideology of the group an individual wishes to join and

(3) a search for identity and belonging

With "foreign policy grievances, national policy, intergenerational conflict, and peer pressure" running parallel to the initial three motivations (de Guttry, Capone and Paulussen, 2016, pg.65). The five interviewees consisted of three former foreign fighters who had travelled abroad to participate in a conflict, one individual who had travelled overseas to learn about the conflict and provide

support, one individual who had considered travelling abroad to participate in a conflict and a family member of a former foreign fighter (de Guttry, Capone and Paulussen, 2016, pg.65). What has become apparent through reading this work is that in order to convince people to volunteer in a conflict, Professor de Guttry believes an emotional 'hook' is of the utmost importance (de Guttry, Capone and Paulussen, 2016, pg.66). Appealing to the emotive response from witnessing a perceived offence or crime against a community, state or minority group, and provoking the desire to stop the conflict, social networks and the internet have provided the ideal outlet for enticing foreign fighters. Professor de Guttry also acknowledged the importance of "a rough adherence to, or at least a lack of antagonism towards, the guiding philosophy of that group" (de Guttry, Capone and Paulussen, 2016, pg.68), stating that while some foreign fighters join primarily due to a staunch belief of an ideology, others, through the course of participating in the conflict, grow to accept an ideology. The third primary motivation being 'a search for identity and belonging' and this has led to the belief that there is an "[...] inherently human nature of foreign fighter travel." (de Guttry, Capone and Paulussen, 2016, pg.64). Throughout this section, two rudimentary aspirations are discussed, the first being a search to fill a missing part in your life and find a sense of purpose, and secondly is the belief that you have found your identity and belonging and need to "consolidate" it (de Guttry, Capone and Paulussen, 2016, pg.71). Addressing each of these motivations in tandem is the only way to dissuade and discourage a person from travelling

overseas to join a conflict as it is a combination of all of these motivations that cause the final push to mobilise.

The historical examples used in Professor de Gattry's work provided some evidence that foreign fighters' activities, despite the length of time they have existed, are still a curious phenomenon. When researching this dissertation, the importance of distinction between foreign fighter and foreign terrorist fighter became apparent as both actions and motivations differ considerably. This work by Professor de Gattry was one of the first instances where a distinction was made between them and placed them in their own category (de Guttry, Capone and Paulussen, 2016, pgs.2,3). It was noted that foreign fighters are not an important feature of the warfare we witness in the present day whereas foreign terrorist fighters would be the opposite, terrorist organisations such as Islamic State have benefited considerably from foreign recruits and have mastered recruitment methods such as social networking in order to appeal to those vulnerable to radicalisation (de Guttry, Capone and Paulussen, 2016, pg.74). That is not to say that foreign fighters have not been recruited via social media but foreign terrorist fighters usually have a strict adherence to the ideology of a group which acts as a pull factor, with social media being a tool for assisting that further adherence.

It was also noted that there is a large human element to what motivates foreign fighters to join a conflict and that is by appealing to the empathetic side of

people who have a desire to change the wrongs of the world (de Guttry, Capone and Paulussen, 2016, pg.64). Professor de Gattry makes an interesting point in that if you address the above-mentioned motivations at the same time rather than opting to fix one or the other, you're far likelier to discourage someone from becoming a foreign fighter (de Guttry, Capone and Paulussen, 2016, pg.75). The question this raises though, is how can you address someone's emotive response to a conflict or atrocity and how can you prevent them from acting on that response? Professor deGuttry's contention falls when the motivation is blood revenge as it is far more than an emotive response. Along the same lines, if someone has an emotive response and that motivates them to participate in a conflict in an attempt to bring it to a close, if that is compared to Habtom's view that foreign fighters are not as motivated as those from the country of the conflict itself (Habtom, 2022), at what point does the emotive response end?

'Foreign Fighters under International Law and Beyond' for the purpose of this thesis is helpful to understand that there are other underlying motivations that could be at play even if blood revenge is the main motivator for some. This work is refreshing in that it does not limit foreign fighters to that of foreign terrorist fighters and that distinction is important in the Chechen case considering their involvement in Syria and Iraq. Their involvement in Ukraine and the separate involvement in Syria and Iraq, appeals to two different parts of Chechen identity, the retaliatory side that encompasses Adats and the Chechen Muslim identity. This work lists a search for identity as a motivator which is compelling

when you consider the numerous ways in which the Chechens have lost their identity, such as the 1944 deportation, and it can easily be considered a grave offence to have your sense of identity and belonging taken from you. The conversation around foreign fighter motivations in Professor de Gattry's work provides a useful space and background to discuss grievances such as blood revenge as a motivator and how it can work in tandem with a search for identity and outrage for what is happening.

'Blood Revenge and Violent Mobilization: Evidence from the Chechen Wars' written by Emil Aslan Souleimanov and Huseyn Aliyev

'Blood Revenge and Violent Mobilization: Evidence from the Chechen Wars' uses thirty-eight interviews "conducted from 2007-2013 with former Chechen insurgents and witnesses in Chechnya's two wars"(Souleimanov and Aliyev, 2015, pg.168) and provides in-depth analysis on blood revenge and retaliation in Chechnya and examines its use in different countries such as Yemen, Iraq and Somalia (Souleimanov and Aliyev, 2015, pg.159). This work also explains the clan or 'teip' structure that is present in Chechnya and the interviews provide insight into the opinions on Chechen independence and reasons or provocations for blood revenge. As the title would suggest its main goal is to highlight that the custom of blood revenge has gone underestimated by states and organisations as an important motivator for violent mobilisation (Souleimanov and Aliyev, 2015, pg.180). Blood revenge itself is defined initially as "the desire

to kill an offender or his (usually patrilineally delineated) male relatives in retaliation to a grave offense committed against oneself or one's relatives"(Souleimanov and Aliyev, 2015, pg.159) and as the conditions and idiosyncrasies are explained, a broader definition is provided to include non-blood related. It is also explained as an "apolitical, grievance driven cause of violent mobilisation in irregular wars" (Souleimanov and Aliyev, 2015, pg.159). Blood feud is distinct in that it is a custom of " retaliatory cycles of violence" which "may endure for generations" (Souleimanov and Aliyev, 2015, pg.160).

Within the Chechen community, three phenomena have remained steadfast regardless of the political situation, those being: "clan identity, the concept of honor and the custom of blood revenge" (Souleimanov and Aliyev, 2015, pg.169). Despite a person's political viewpoint, whether that be pro-Chechen independence or a desire to remain as part of Russia, social organisation and customs trump these beliefs and is fundamental to the character of Chechen people. This work details the importance of equivalence which has led to blood revenge and blood feud, and the ability to act on either, remaining integral to the notion of honour that is withstanding in a clan (Souleimanov and Aliyev, 2015, pg.161). To deny the act of retaliating against a perpetrator would be to dishonour yourself and your family and would result in ostracization (Souleimanov and Aliyev, 2015, pgs.161,170). To not avenge the wrongs committed against yourself or your family is seen as a "sign of weakness or cowardice" (Souleimanov and Aliyev, 2015, pg.170). This work emphasises the

importance of blood revenge to uphold the tenets of their community and in the case of inability to identify the perpetrator themselves, the custom of blood revenge still maintains its roots and the avenger can identify those closest to the perpetrator as means for retribution (Souleimanov and Aliyev, 2015, pg.160). As stated by Souleimanov and Aliyev, the targets for blood revenge are usually male blood relatives but they have illustrated that instances exist where avengers have sought out entire Russian units that are based nearest to their village in the event of a Russian soldier committing an offence against a Chechen (Souleimanov and Aliyev, 2015, pgs.173,175).

Souleimanov and Aliyev "categorize blood revenge as an underexplored type of grievance" (Souleimanov and Aliyev, 2015, pg.168) and considering it can result in violent mobilisation despite a person's own political views, highlights the necessity to research this phenomenon and have states and organisations aware of the potential safety concerns in every country that practices blood revenge.

This work demonstrates that blood revenge is not isolated to Chechnya, it has existed in some form across countries throughout history which should emphasise a need for further examination by states and organisations into the security threat posed by it (Souleimanov and Aliyev, 2015, pgs.158, 180). Honour and identity play important roles among the Chechen community and this does not change regardless of whether you are a part of the diaspora or have remained in Chechnya. An individual's identity can become influenced by other

factors and other cultures but at the same time, ethnically they are unchanged. The integral beliefs of honour would still be largely upheld in the diaspora community and in turn so would certain customs and Adats, such as the custom of blood revenge. Considering many of the Chechen western diaspora have historical grievances and a push factor for leaving Chechnya was Russia's actions in the Chechen Wars, an element of forced exile is seen which is akin to that of the 1944 deportation. Many of the Chechen western diaspora would have lost family members by Russian hands and to avenge these deaths is an innate requirement to uphold their honour. As mentioned by Souleimanov and Aliyev, while identifying the perpetrators and holding them accountable is the main goal, in the event it is impossible to do so, often the target for the avenger is whatever is closely related to them (Souleimanov and Aliyev, 2015, pg.175). This can mean Russian units which are nearest to where the offence took place, though in the instance of the Chechen western diaspora, there is the probability that in order to avenge multiple offences committed by Russia, they can target them as a whole.

Between the 1944 deportation and both Chechen Wars, grave offence has been committed against Chechnya by Russia and can be seen as worthy of avenging. This work adds credibility to the hypothesis that Chechen foreign fighters have been motivated to mobilise in Ukraine to avenge the grave offences committed against Chechnya through enacting the custom of blood revenge. The evidence provided from the interviews conducted for this work, instils just how

fundamental the notion of honour is in Chechen society and that it is innate to the Chechen soul, which would not change despite being a part of the diaspora.

'The Chechen Post-War Diaspora in Norway and their Visions of Legal Models' written by Maryam Sugaipova and Julie Wilhelmsen for the Caucasus Survey.

Sugaipova and Wilhelmsen discuss the Chechen diaspora in relation to their existence in Norway and the experience they have had with the legal system as compared to that of their home country of Chechnya. Using mixed methods, interviews and surveys with both Chechens living in Chechnya and members of the Chechen diaspora living in Norway, Sugaipova and Wilhemsen used the concept of "identity school" within legal consciousness and legal pluralism to bolster their research (Sugaipova and Wilhelmsen, 2021, pg.2). "The Identity school views legal consciousness as an ongoing process of constructing the self in relation to law and legal rights" (Chua and Engel, 2023) while legal pluralism is "generally defined as a situation in which two or more legal systems coexist in the same social field."(Merry, 1988)

Sugaipova and Wilhelmsen set out first to define the meaning of diaspora to highlight the differences between a diaspora community and an immigrant community:

"[...]diasporas maintain and nurture "important allegiances and practical connections to a homeland", they also tend to demonstrate and exercise

resistance to assimilation in the host society"(Sugaipova and Wilhelmsen, 2021, pg.3)

This is then taken a step further with the introduction of a definition for conflict-generated diaspora:

"[...]a diaspora exhibiting a strong sense of emotional attachment to the homeland, driven by collective grievances and joint experiences of violent, forced separation from their homeland"(Sugaipova and Wilhelmsen, 2021, pg.4)

When discussing the Chechen diaspora, the authors note that the largest influx to Europe arrived after the second Chechen War and although numbers are not exact, there was an estimated arrival of "at least 200,000" (Sugaipova and Wilhelmsen, 2021, pg.3). Legal plurality is witnessed in Chechnya with the presence of Adats and Sharia law alongside Russian law whereas Norway operates with only one legal system, as a result the authors posited the notion that the Chechen experience with this new legal system has "shaped the legal consciousness of the Chechen diaspora" (Sugaipova and Wilhelmsen, 2021, pg.7). Sugaipova and Wilhelmsen, having conducted interviews in both Norway and Grozny, alongside surveys from both communities, examine the evolution of legal consciousness in the diaspora. While Chechens living in Grozny were more likely to prefer a mix of Adat and Sharia law, the diaspora living in Norway appeared to be deviating from this in favour of Norwegian law (Sugaipova and Wilhelmsen, 2021, pgs.8,9). One question that stood out in reference to the custom of blood revenge was that of solving conflict among

Chechens in Norway and while traditional Adats do still play a role, it is all conducted “in accordance with Norwegian law.”(Sugaipova and Wilhelmsen, 2021, pg.13). However, this may be aspirational and research of this kind needs to be rigorously evaluated and repeated.

This literature is only based on the Chechen diaspora in Norway, yet it may give insight into how the diaspora’s adherence to adats and sharia law develops once they leave Chechnya. In relation to the Chechen diaspora in Ukraine, the definition of conflict-generated diaspora is what resonates the most, in particular the collective grievances given the turbulent history of Chechnya (Sugaipova and Wilhelmsen, 2021, pg.4). The use of interviews and surveys in both Norway and Grozny provides useful comparison, though further explanation is required into the reason behind the diaspora’s shift to adhering to one legal system rather than legal pluralism as they experienced in Chechnya. Movla Osmayev and Mansour Osmayev referenced a lack of belief in the government (Osmayev and Osmayev, 2017), therefore they imply that the Chechen diaspora hold the Norwegian legal system to a higher regard and are willing to deviate from customary practices. In relation to this thesis and using this legal framework as a basis, it will be helpful to analyse if the Chechen diaspora in Ukraine are following the same trajectory and that shift away from customary laws could entirely disprove that customs are an important motivator for becoming a foreign fighter if they are in fact, moving away from that legal system.

'The History of Blood Revenge in Chechnya' by Movla Osmayev and Mansour Osmayev, Chechen State University.

The authors provide an in-depth view of what constitutes blood revenge, the various nuances for how it is declared, to the reasons behind the decision to declare it and alternatives. The custom of Blood Revenge is not isolated to the Chechen community, it is practiced all over the world in different forms and has existed for centuries.

"Blood feud among the Chechens […] served as an institution through which crimes were prevented and relations between the warring parties were regulated" (Osmayev and Osmayev, 2017)

According to the authors, blood revenge in its form as a way to regulate and control crime in Chechnya, also serves an important yet, not often mentioned, alternative to enacting revenge, forgiveness (Osmayev and Osmayev, 2017). To forgive the perpetrator of an offence is considered to be dignified (Osmayev and Osmayev, 2017). The authors also posit their own definition of blood revenge:

"Ch'ir - (blood feud) is almost always the revenge of a Chechen on a Chechen, equal to an equal, carried out in compliance with a whole code of unwritten rules. Usually it is declared for murder, but there are other reasons - most often it is a serious insult." (Osmayev and Osmayev, 2017)

In addition to describing the Chechen clan structure, the authors give a detailed look at how exactly blood revenge is declared and who is entitled to enact it. The authors outline how the elders from a clan will hold a trial and they are the

deciding factor when it comes to attributing blame on a perpetrator (Osmayev and Osmayev, 2017). The accused has the opportunity alongside respected individuals in their clan to swear on the Quran to prove their innocence and this will prevent blood revenge, if believed (Osmayev and Osmayev, 2017). Once blood revenge has been declared to the accused, if they decide to go into hiding, their relatives are then at risk which can lead to blood revenge lasting for generations (Osmayev and Osmayev, 2017). The authors construe that the custom of blood revenge as a means of punishment for a crime, is enough to deter would-be criminals and is associated with a safer community as a result. (Osmayev and Osmayev, 2017)

The authors also note exceptions to the custom, such as accidental murders which can be avenged through the payment of a ransom from the perpetrator to the family of the victim declaring the situation resolved (Osmayev and Osmayev, 2017). This shows that most often, blood revenge is declared when there is reason to believe that the perpetrator intended on committing the grave offence, whether that be verbal humiliation, murder or rape (Osmayev and Osmayev, 2017). The survival of blood revenge as a custom is intrinsically linked to the lack of belief in the government to effectively punish perpetrators. (Osmayev and Osmayev, 2017)

This work by Movla Osmayev and Mansour Osmayev was helpful for understanding this highly complex custom and the various features that it

contains. It reiterates the generational quality of blood revenge and how it is practiced across the world which was also discussed in 'Blood Revenge and Violent Mobilization: Evidence from the Chechen Wars'. It also links back to the work from Maryam Sugaipova and Julie Wilhelmsen and the existence of legal pluralism in this community. In the interest of this dissertation, it was most notable that blood revenge can be seen as a means of regulating crime and its continued practice is associated with distrust in the government to adequately punish criminals (Osmayev and Osmayev, 2017). Given the different nuances that encompass blood revenge, the possibility to forgive or offer ransom, this work illustrates how grave an offence must be to warrant blood revenge. In the case of Chechen foreign fighters enacting blood revenge, this work reinforces the severity of the crimes that have been committed against Chechens to warrant their position as foreign fighters against Russia. This dissertation will further add to the generational and long lasting elements of blood revenge as witnessed by the motivations of the Chechen Western Diaspora in Ukraine.

Blood Revenge in Civil War: Proof of Concept written by Emil Aslan Souleimanov, David S. Siroky and Roberto Colombo

Blood Revenge in Civil War: Proof of Concept is centred around understanding the position of blood revenge within Civil Wars and what effect it has on those conflicts. The authors acknowledge that it is a mistake to disregard the custom

of blood revenge in the analysis of Civil War and go on to explain that the rate at which Civil Wars occur in areas which practice blood revenge is very high (Souleimanov, Siroky and Colombo, 2022, pg.101). Civil Wars which take place in these areas are shown to be more violent and brutal and are "almost four times more likely to end up in a stalemate." (Souleimanov, Siroky and Colombo, 2022, pg.101). The authors further explain the true nature of blood revenge and what it entails, which is mainly as a deterrent of violence and means of regulating crime within communities (Souleimanov, Siroky and Colombo, 2022, pg.102).

What was of particular interest in terms of this dissertation was the section on target selection in a Civil War setting. The authors highlight the shift from the traditional nature of blood revenge due to the difficulty of locating a perpetrator of an offence if that perpetrator is an "armed actor" (Souleimanov, Siroky and Colombo, 2022, pg.118). The separation from the traditional is seen when avengers who are unable to identify the direct perpetrator choose "to enlarge the pool of suitable targets to include individuals unrelated to the culprit and his family, including military or insurgent units, garrisons, and (sub)ethnic or (sub)religious groups." (Souleimanov, Siroky and Colombo, 2022, pg.119). This enlargement though is still subject to preference, in that the avengers usually choose someone closely related to the perpetrator instead of the assumption that anyone on the opposing side becomes a target (Souleimanov, Siroky and Colombo, 2022, pg.119). This is not without its drawbacks as the

enlargement “often leads to the escalation and politicization of violence, a process that puts entire (sub)ethnic or (sub)religious communities at risk.”(Souleimanov, Siroky and Colombo, 2022, pg.120). The authors also mention comments from a PKK, Kurdistan Workers’ Party, supporter which further highlights the drawbacks of the non-traditional route when the ability to narrow down the identity of the perpetrator is impossible and is then evolved to create an enemy of the body the perpetrator is representing, “the selected target is often the unfortunate victim of a blood revenge performed on the responsible institution” (Souleimanov, Siroky and Colombo, 2022, pg.120).

This source is key to understanding the shifts that can occur within communities that practice blood revenge in the event of conflicts, in this instance in Civil Wars. It forms a helpful foundation upon which to build the argument that target selection can change to designate actors of the state as victims of avengers. In the case of this dissertation, the targets of the Chechen western diaspora’s blood revenge are representatives of the Russian state rather than direct perpetrators. This dissertation will build upon the work of these authors by showing that blood revenge also exists within interstate wars.

Concluding Remarks

The literature chosen for this review demonstrates the multifaceted nature that encompasses the foreign fighter phenomenon of the Chechen western diaspora

and allows for a comprehensive analysis of the situation in Ukraine. Taking into perspective the historical cases of foreign fighters in various conflicts illustrates the complexity of their existence in Ukraine and how the motivations have evolved. Research to date implies that at the root of all foreign fighter intervention is the innate human desire to help those that need it and it is this emotive response that is so prevalent in the literature chosen. Building on the research conducted by Habtom and Murauskaite on foreign fighters in Ukraine, their activities and motivations, this dissertation will focus on the Chechen foreign fighters and their unique background and motivations. To do that justice, understanding the nuances of the motivations was facilitated through the research conducted by Emil Aslan Souleimanov and Huseyn Aliyev, Movla Osmayev and Mansour Osmayev, Fatima Vahkaevna Dimaeva, Maryam Sugaipova and Julie Wilhelmsen. Considering that this topic is currently understudied, the replicability of this research is of the utmost importance and following the same method of research would play a key role in this.

3. Methodology

The topic of Foreign Fighters is not a new research area and some progress has been made in terms of analysing their activities and motivations from a historical perspective. Though in the case of Chechen Foreign Fighters the majority of the research has been heavily influenced by their presence as mujahideen and is therefore focused on the ideology driven motivation to enter conflict zones. The war in Ukraine is contemporary and unpredictable, pairing this with the largely covert actions of foreign fighters and this becomes a daunting task in terms of research. This dissertation was reliant on qualitative analysis of secondary sources written in both English and Russian to provide a wider scope and legitimacy. Credibility was of the utmost importance given the fact that the war in Ukraine is still ongoing and having this research remain up to date was facilitated through secondary sources. News articles and media reports from leading broadcasters such as the BBC, The Guardian and The New York Times to name a few while also referring to Russian media outlets such as The Caucasian Knot, Meduza and The Moscow Times and the Kyiv Independent for a Ukrainian perspective. Considering news reporting from many sides of the conflict has ensured the circumvention of research bias. Research bias was crucial to consider as this dissertation is only using the war in Ukraine as a case study for the actions of one group and is not an analysis of the war itself.

There is one research question for this dissertation which is supported by three objectives:

2. “What is the motivation for Chechen foreign fighters to fight against Russia in the war in Ukraine?”

D) What were the main pull factors for joining this conflict in particular?

E) Are Chechen customary laws or ‘Adats’ a driving factor for mobilisation and if so, should researchers put more emphasis on blood revenge (Ch’ir) when discussing Chechen foreign fighters?

F) What level of influence does the practice of blood revenge (Ch’ir) still hold in the diaspora’s society today?

Secondary source material will allow for a thorough analysis of each of these objectives alongside the research question by enabling a multi-faceted approach to each of these components and providing the opportunity to examine source material from various disciplines. The literature and source material used for this dissertation were chosen by purposive sampling (Alchemer, 2021) with specific parameters relating to distinct historical examples, dependent on foreign fighters rather than foreign terrorist fighters and within the time frame of the 18th Century to present day. This time frame was chosen due to the validity of the source material and the usage of the term foreign fighter to ensure that no presumptions were made in relation to foreign fighter activity prior to the 18th Century. This time frame provides more sources to analyse the dynamics of conflicts – foreign fighters have existed for a long time but the further back you go, there are increased limitations in the survivability of

sources, therefore motivations or first person accounts could not be comprehensively analysed. In regard to the historical examples chosen, this dissertation acknowledged five conflicts of varied cause and typology to highlight the variety of circumstances foreign fighters have presented themselves. The usage of both Russian and English sources also provided the opportunity for snowball sampling due to hidden information uncovered when researching unique topics (Simkus, 2023). The combination of purposive and snowball sampling techniques allowed for increased scope in an area that is currently under researched. Text sources were the sole material used due to the potential biases shown in the limited video and audio resources which were largely primary sources and entirely broached from the perspective of one group.

Limitations were to be expected with this research as the availability of relevant data is low and the standalone topic of Chechen foreign fighters is relatively under researched. Therefore, having Chechen foreign fighters as a case study within a wider field of research opens up the opportunity to emphasise a different side to this already curious phenomenon of foreign fighters. The ideal research method for this topic would of course be first-hand accounts from foreign fighters in the form of interviews, though for this dissertation, timing was a restrictive factor which has in part led to the altering of this research plan to consider Chechen motivations alongside historical examples. Historical perspective is beneficial for observing the differences from the typical

motivations behind mobilisation that have been witnessed through past conflicts and avoiding generalisation when specific groups require a different thought process (Lawrence, 1984). Taking into consideration that the ideal research method for this topic would be interviews with Chechen foreign fighters, interviews conducted by the media were still applied to bolster the arguments made in this dissertation and while those interviews were not entirely focused on the topic of their motivations, they still provided valuable insight with which to apply to further research.

By examining the source material for this dissertation, a research gap became evident. When discussing the Chechen community, including diasporic, and to a lesser extent, the wider foreign fighter community, the assumption exists that they are foreign terrorist fighters. That aspect, for the purpose of this dissertation, has been largely disregarded, creating instead a separation between the terrorist angle and the non-terrorist motivated mobilisation aspect. Therein lies the research gap, it is challenging to find solely foreign fighters based research in relation to the Chechen community and even more so in relation to the Western Chechen Diaspora. This dissertation aims to fill this gap by highlighting the multifaceted approach required to demonstrate where this diaspora belongs to in the realm of foreign fighters. While this dissertation is attempting to separate foreign fighters and foreign terrorist fighters into two distinct categories, there are still instances where literature pertaining to foreign terrorist fighters was considered in the approach for this research plan. By not

exclusively using literature on foreign fighters, this dissertation was able to comparatively analyse how these two phenomena are different and worthy of distinct categories. For this reason *'Foreign Fighters in History'* by Maria Galperin Donnelly with Thomas M. Sanderson and Zack Fellman was included as part of the literature review as it treads the line between confusing the two categories while simultaneously providing valuable information into the historical importance of foreign fighters in conflicts.

What is important to note is the ability to replicate and advance this work when further information becomes available, such as through interviews with Chechen foreign fighters in Ukraine, or additional instances of their position in conflict zones if that were to happen. This is not a standalone dissertation, rather it has benefited from a wide range of literature compiled by academics across different disciplines. Therefore, as more research is conducted, either through interviews or further in-depth analysis, the findings of this dissertation can be built upon and in turn will spark further developments in the understanding of motivations behind foreign fighters. Further research into this topic will also need to consider potential research bias within the source material chosen for analysis as that has been one of the more challenging aspects of this dissertation, in part due to the contemporary nature of the subject matter.

Secondary source analysis forms the backbone of this research and has bolstered the ideas pertaining to the motivations hypothesised in this dissertation.

Acknowledging the limitations for the research in this thesis, using source material in both English and Russian provided a broader scope within this topic and compensated for gaps in literature which was to be expected in such a contemporary topic. Utilising secondary sources from both languages provided diversity in terms of information and perspectives. Diversity of information was especially beneficial when discussing the custom of blood revenge and taking advantage of source material written by Chechen academics, such as *'The History of Blood Revenge in Chechnya'* by Movla Osmayev and Mansour Osmayev, facilitated a comprehensive knowledge of the topic. By having access to a wider range of sources there is an increased ability to verify the information presented with more rigour, further enhancing the credibility of this thesis. Diversity of perspectives helped to shape this thesis to consider different academic approaches to a topic of this size, in particular when writing about sensitive subjects such as the 1944 deportation as seen in *'Crimes of the Century: The Deportation of Chechens of 1944 and the War of 1994'* by Dimaeva Fatima Vahkaevna. Taking into consideration how various academics approached the different phenomena and historical cases provided confidence in designing the style of this dissertation.

In terms of reflexivity, the research conducted was analysed from a social sciences and arts and humanities background which was further facilitated using source material in two languages. This background was beneficial in terms of accurate examination of social phenomena and its relation to international

security while also appreciating the importance of cultural norms. Ethical assessment of the data was avoided to solely focus on how the data presented itself to the research question and objectives.

4. Historical Background

Introduction

This section is dedicated to the historical examples of foreign fighters and analysing their motivations. This analysis will be conducted chronologically, starting with The Texas Revolution of 1835 and finishing with the Syrian Civil War. There will also be explanations provided of foreign fighter motivations in the war in Ukraine that excludes the Chechen Western Diaspora. This section, while providing brief background information on the separate conflicts throughout history, will highlight similarities and differences between the reported motivations. This will be beneficial in examining whether a distinction exists between historical motivations and present day Chechen diaspora motivations. There will also be mention of motivations that are more commonly associated with foreign terrorist fighters, though it raises an interesting comparison that accents that foreign fighters should be considered as a separate category.

The Texas Revolution 1835-36

The Texas Revolution of 1835 was the fight for independence of the state of Texas or Coahuila y Tejas as it was known at the time, from Mexico (Riggs, 2019). Texas at this time had seen an influx in American settlers during the

Spanish rule which encouraged American families to relocate to drive prosperity in the region (Riggs, 2019; Barker and Pohl, 1952). Parallel to the encouragement of American settlers in Texas by the Spanish, Mexico, which had recently become an independent republic, was faced with tyrannical leadership in several provinces, apart from Texas (Barker and Pohl, 1952). On the back of repressive laws implemented by the newly instated government and a separatist movement to give Texas autonomy from Mexico, there was an influx in government-opposing Mexicans and American immigrants eager to develop the state of Texas (Riggs, 2019). This American interest rang alarm bells for Antonio Lopez de Santa Anna, the leader of several governments within Mexico and the looming fate of a US-led state of Texas forced his hand in 1834 when he began "dissolving state legislatures, disarming state militias, and abolishing the Constitution of 1824"(Riggs, 2019). Shown by the separatist movement growing in Texas, a show of force by Santa Anna would never have been dutifully submitted to and instead sparked a series of conflicts spanning from October of 1835 to the eventual independence of Texas in April, 1836 (Riggs, 2019).

What is important to note is that Texas or Coahuila y Tejas was seeking its own independence from Mexico with no immediate desire to dissolve their autonomy to the United States (Gibson, 2016). Naturally, there were ulterior motives for the American assistance in this revolution, though this was not a conflict of their own creation, that is almost entirely due to the authoritarian regimes coming

into practice in the newly independent Mexico (Malet, 2013). With the large force of the Mexican army pursuing them, the Texian government sought help from America and sent representatives to promote their cause to possible volunteer fighters, thus founding “Friends of Texas", an organisation designed to “raise funds, disseminate messaging, and recruit combatants”(Malet, 2013). There was a large financial backing behind this with the promise of land for those willing to fight and for the purposes of this paper, it may seem that the line between foreign fighter and mercenary is being blurred due to this clear financial incentive (Malet, 2013). However, there was more to the framing of this recruitment than merely the promise of land, they also promoted the idea that the Mexicans were rejecting ideologies held in the West, threatening to tear Texas away from the beliefs held by a large portion of their population, that being American immigrants who settled in Texas after the Spanish-US border shifted (Malet, 2013).

American Civil War 1861-65

The American Civil War which lasted between 1861 and 1865 was a conflict between the Union and the Confederacy, or the free states of the North and the slave owning states of the South (McPherson, 2008). The conflict had two main questions to answer:

“whether the United States was to be a dissolvable confederation of sovereign states or an indivisible nation with a sovereign national government;

and whether this nation, born of a declaration that all men were created with an equal right to liberty, would continue to exist as the largest slaveholding country in the world."(McPherson, 2008)

Abraham Lincoln became the 16th president of the United States in 1861 (Freidel and Sidey, 2017) and pledged to eradicate slavery in the Union (McPherson, 2008). This led to seven states seceding and forming the Confederacy. The fall of Fort Sumter, South Carolina, in April 1861 to the Confederacy saw four more states reject the Union for the Confederacy and the outbreak of the Civil War (McPherson, 2008). There were many significant battles including Antietam in Maryland, Shiloh in Tennessee, Fredericksburg in Virginia and perhaps the most widely known, Gettysburg in Pennsylvania where Abraham Lincoln delivered the famous Gettysburg Address (McPherson, 2008). Both sides of the conflict had very little military experience and were ill prepared for the coming onslaught, with over 600 thousand deaths and many more casualties (American Battlefield Trust, 2018). The American Civil War ended when the Union captured the president of the Confederacy, Jefferson Davis, in May, 1865 (McPherson, 2008). This conflict has had a huge, lasting impact on the United States with the creation of a:

"single political entity of the United States, [...]freedom for more than four million enslaved Americans, [...] a more powerful and centralized federal government"(National Park Service, 2015)

The American Civil War was primarily fought by American-born soldiers and volunteers and foreign fighters were limited to the immigrant population that had come to America from mainly Ireland, Poland and Germany.

The Irish immigrant involvement in the American Civil War consisted of several regiments including the Corcoran Legion which grew to five regiments as the war progressed, the Irish Brigade and the Irish 23rd Illinois (Welch, 2006). The leaders of these regiments were mainly members of the Fenian Brotherhood, an Irish nationalist organisation based in Ireland and in America (Welch, 2006). This organisation had one common goal and that was Irish independence from the British Empire (Welch, 2006). The Irish immigrant population were not held in high esteem in America and were viewed as uneducated criminals, therefore their involvement in the Civil War was unexpected (Welch, 2006). The Irish regiments fought on the side of the Union, having fled the devastation of the Irish Famine, an expected motivation was a growing fondness for their new home and the hope that participation in the conflict could better their future economically (Welch, 2006). The Irish population were also subject to religious prejudice in America with a large anti-Catholic sentiment during the time of the mass arrival of Irish immigrants between 1845 and 1853 (Welch, 2006). This gave rise to another motivation, that being restoring honour to the Irish people and coining the term, “the Fighting Irish” (Welch, 2006). Another motivation being linked to Irish

nationalism and the belief that military experience would aid a future conflict against the British (Welch, 2006).

The largest ethnic population in the American Civil War were from Germany, though they did not participate in outright German regiments like the Irish population, with the exception of one entirely German unit called 'Company K' (Cleveland Memory, 2023). They were mainly based in Cleveland, Ohio and fought for the side of the Union (Cleveland Memory, 2023). Many came with military experience which they believed set them apart from the average American regiments (Cade, 2020, pg.69). While many were motivated financially, it is worth noting another motivation, that being ideologically (Cade, 2020, pg.73). Much of the German immigrant population arrived in America following the German Revolution of 1848 which was a fight against the existing social and political order and aristocracy of the time (Cade, 2020, pg.73). This led to many native Germans fighting in the American Civil War as a way to revolt against aristocracy once more, only this time they viewed slave owners as the representative aristocracy (Cade, 2020, pg.73). Ending this aristocracy would eventually lead to the betterment of their new homeland.

The idea of homeland is seen in two distinct forms, the Irish immigrant population seeking the independence of the country they left and the German immigrant population seeking the betterment of the country they now call home. This presents an interesting parallel when discussing the motivations of the

Chechen diaspora as foreign fighters which will be examined in the Analysis section of this dissertation.

Spanish Civil War 1936-39

Moving into the 20th century, in 1936 Spain was faced with unrest in the form of a coup d'etat led by Nationalist General, Francisco Franco, against the Republican president, Manuel Azaña (Don Quijote, 2019). Despite this being an internal power dispute, the international arena at the time took interest in both sides of this struggle, including the Soviet Union and much of Europe (Malet, 2013). This foreign interest influenced foreign action with foreign fighters acting on behalf of the nationalists and the republicans (Malet, 2013). The Spanish Government represented the Republican side of this conflict and were joined by the Soviet Union while the Nationalist side was made up of largely the upper echelons of Spanish society and army rebels and supported by Fascist Germany and Fascist Italy (Don Quijote, 2019). As seen in the Texas Revolution, foreign fighters aligned themselves with particular viewpoints represented by either the nationalist or republican side (Malet, 2013). It has to be noted, there was an element of reimbursement in some instances for these foreign fighters, though, as was the case with the Texas Revolution and the promises of land, not everyone was interested in these gratuities and many who were interested, never received them (Malet, 2013).

There was a clear element of fear attributed to the recruitment process for foreign volunteers to the Spanish Civil War and it was largely centred around the International Brigade who received the largest number of foreign volunteers, many of whom were encouraged to sacrifice their lives for the cause (Malet, 2013). The International Brigade was the name given to the anti-fascist volunteers and was spearheaded by Josip Broz (who went to become the leader of Yugoslavia under the name Josip Tito) who facilitated the transport of tens of thousands of foreign volunteers to Spain (Malet, 2013). The International Brigade did not suffer from lack of recruits, rather they were afforded the opportunity to become selective due to the high numbers of anti-fascists wanting to wage war against the Nationalists (Malet, 2013). However, this influx was short lived as 1937 saw the banning of recruitment and by 1938 foreign volunteers were removed from the conflict (Malet, 2013). The participation of foreign fighters in the Spanish Civil War was motivated almost entirely by ideology, though some did have a financial incentive. The majority were staunch anti-fascists absorbed by the fear of expansion of fascism to their home countries and the perpetuation of martyrdom as a noble method to remove fascism.

Afghan-Soviet War 1979-89

Afghanistan at the time of the Soviet invasion operated under a monarchy and was made up of several ethnic groups and tribes who upheld their own customs

and traditions which weakened the monarchy's ability to govern over them (Hughes, 2008, pg.327). The Pashtun tribe of Afghanistan was split from the Pashtuns in Northern Pakistan by the 'Durand Line' which was a border instated by the British Empire in 1893, this led to years of contention (Hughes, 2008, pg.328; Schons, 2022). The desire to reclaim the Pashtun inhabited area of Northern Pakistan, coupled with Pakistan's growing relations with the United States, the Afghan monarchy sought closer ties with the USSR and this led to the installation of pro-Soviet policy in Afghanistan (Hughes, 2008, pg.328). 1973 saw the abolishment of the monarchy by King Zahir Shah's cousin, Mohammed Daoud, who established himself as president until an eventual coup d'etat which brought the PDPA (People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan) to power and the declaration of the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan (DRA)(Hughes, 2008, pg.328).

The PDPA was separated into two groups, the Parcham, which enjoyed support from the middle to upper class portion of society and the Khalq, which had more support from the tribes of Afghanistan (Hughes, 2008, pg.329). The Parcham group was more in line with Soviet policy though there were high levels of cooperation between the two groups of the PDPA and a communist government was installed (Hughes, 2008, pg.329). Eventually, tensions arose between the two groups and the Khalq group held the most influence while the Parcham group became marginalised (Hughes, 2008, pg.329). The Khalq president, Hafizullah Amin was facing opposition within Afghanistan suffering because

of the intra-conflict of the PDPA party (Hughes, 2008, pg.329). It was clear that the PDPA were losing control and there was a lot of instability within the government and the USSR intervened in 1979, installing a new Parcham leader to maintain a pro-Communist government and regain stability across Afghanistan (Hughes, 2008, pgs.332, 333). The establishment of a Parcham dominated government and removal of the Khalq influence by means of assassination of their president, subsequently removed the support from the tribal community for the PDPA (Hughes, 2008, pg.345). Soviet intervention did not have the desired effect and the instability of the country entered the world stage with mujahideen fighters, backed by the United States, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan, tired of the communist regime in their country launched a conflict with the Afghan army (Westad, 1989, pg.286). This resulted in mass civilian casualties and displacement which further bolstered the international support for the mujahideen resulting in the gradual removal of troops by Mikhail Gorbachev in 1986 with the final troops leaving in 1989 (Reuveny and Prakash, 1999, pgs.698-700).

Between 1982 and 1992, there were an estimated thirty five thousand foreign fighters who had been convinced by Pakistan to join the jihad in Afghanistan (El Guendouzi, 2022). The foreign fighters were mainly Muslim and were motivated by ideology and anti-communist beliefs (El Guendouzi, 2022). They were heavily supported internationally and by the end of the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan, many were demoralised by the attempted overthrow of Muslim

identity that they further mobilised, with some joining the ranks of Al-Qaeda (El Guendouzi, 2022). This case further reinforces the reality that 'jihad' is not a solely terrorist concept and can be declared without resulting in terrorist activities.

Syrian Civil War 2011 to Present Day

Accusations of corruption and authoritarian ruling were being launched at Syrian president Bashar Al-Assad and years of high unemployment and little regard for the middle to lower classes led to a political uprising in 2011 (Al Jazeera, 2023; Laub, 2023). Three cities in Syria, Aleppo, Damascus and Deraa broke out in protest against Bashar Al-Assad demanding a change in government (Al Jazeera, 2023; Laub, 2023). These protests, although they started peacefully, were met by violence from the government which led to further unrest and the country descended into a full-scale conflict (Laub, 2023). Defectors from the Syrian Army established the FSA or Free State Army and several rebel groups emerged, all with the shared aim of overthrowing the regime and removing Bashar Al-Assad as president (Laub, 2023). The now Civil War attracted the attention of many international actors with Russia and Iran backing the Syrian government and the United States and Turkey supporting the Syrian opposition (BBC, 2022b). In the midst of the chaos ensuing, the terrorist organisation, the Islamic State (ISIS) surfaced from the remains of the Syrian branch of Al Qaeda, Jabhat al-Nusra, which enjoyed

success in the Syrian conflict (BBC, 2022b; Galperin Donnelly, Sanderson and Fellman, 2017, pg.22; Laub, 2023).

The Islamic State amassed an immense amount of international attention due to the capturing of cities, the wanton destruction of historical sites and the distribution of various abuses and violence over social media. This culminated in the establishment of the Caliphate in 2014 and much of the international support for either the Syrian government or the Syrian opposition, shifted towards the fight against extremism (Galperin Donnelly, Sanderson and Fellman, 2017, pg.23; Laub, 2023). The Syrian government positioned themselves as an important actor in the fight against terrorism though their focus remained on combating the opposition, who were oftentimes described as 'terrorists' themselves (BBC, 2022b; Laub, 2023). The opposing forces, while remaining focused on overthrowing Bashar Al-Assad, fragmented to also focus on combating ISIS and the rise of extremism (Center for Preventive Action, 2022). After years of mass civilian deaths and casualties, high levels of displacement and following the collapse of the Caliphate in 2019 (Al Jazeera, 2023), the Syrian government reclaimed much of the captured cities, though fighting continued between the regime and the opposition including their international supporters on either side(Laub, 2023). A ceasefire was agreed upon in 2020 between Ankara and Moscow though occasional clashes still occur (Laub, 2023).

The Syrian Civil War is one of the most notable cases of foreign fighters and was well broadcasted worldwide in terms of foreign volunteers and the threat they pose. Thousands of foreign fighters, mainly from Arab countries with fewer coming from European countries, flocked to Syria to participate in the Civil War and enjoy the idealised Muslim life that social media had shown for the Caliphate (Galperin Donnelly, Sanderson and Fellman, 2017, pgs.21, 25). The foreign fighters in this instance are foreign terrorist fighters and their travel to Syria was largely motivated by ideology, desire for status and for the purpose of establishing networks.

Concluding Remarks

These are five examples of conflicts throughout history with varied causes and different conflict strategies that have enticed foreign fighters to join their respective conflicts. As seen in much of the literature surrounding foreign fighter motivations, there are innate human qualities that are associated with an individual's desire to participate in a conflict and the reasonings and rewards are intrinsically linked to what has or is currently happening in a person's life. The more historical examples of the Texas Revolution, the American Civil War and to a lesser extent the Spanish Civil War, featured a motivation of financial incentive (Malet, 2013; Welch, 2006). In particular, the American Civil War had a large immigrant population that participated in the conflict and in the case of the Irish and German immigrant populations, they had primarily arrived in

the country following famine and conflict in their home countries (Welch, 2006; Cleveland Memory, 2023). Whether it be famine or conflict, there was an economic incentive attached to that initial relocation and participation in the civil war was believed to aid a change in status which would have provided additional opportunities to reestablish themselves financially (Welch, 2006). This change of status was of interest to the Irish population who were viewed very negatively by the American population and were not afforded the same opportunities as others (Welch, 2006). In the case of the Texas Revolution, there was the promise of land and projected through the recruitment of foreign fighters by the 'Friends of Texas' was this idea of reclaiming Texas from the Mexicans who were rejecting Western ideals (Malet, 2013). This idea of reclaiming Texas gave the impression that once they had presumably 'won' this conflict, that Texas would be reimagined into a hub of Western ideals and it would be the perfect time to be granted land there, thus becoming a fantastic motivator.

Another motivation observed in the historical examples is the desire to gain military experience for their own goals, which was mainly evident in the American Civil War (Welch, 2006) and the Syrian Civil War (Galperin Donnelly, Sanderson and Fellman, 2017). In the American Civil War, the Irish regiments were primarily under the charge of members of the 'Fenian Brotherhood' who had long-lasting ambitions to gain independence for Ireland (Welch, 2006). The American Civil War provided the ideal conditions to learn

and gain experience of combat and military strategies that those looking to gain independence could take back to launch a successful attack against the British (Welch, 2006). In the Syrian Civil War, there was a large influx of foreign terrorist fighters who went to join the ranks of the Islamic State and as is the case with terrorist organisations, a necessary component is shared ideology (Galperin Donnelly, Sanderson and Fellman, 2017, pgs.23,24). For those who share this ideology, the Syrian Civil War and the success of the Islamic State in capturing cities and declaring a Caliphate, created the optimal environment for establishing networks and bolstering ideologies (Galperin Donnelly, Sanderson and Fellman, 2017, pg.26). The ability to create a community of people who share the same beliefs and maintain a Caliphate was a huge motivator for foreign terrorist fighters in the Syrian Civil War.

Following along the same lines of shared beliefs, another motivation was adherence and preservation of ideology and was witnessed in each of these cases. There was the preservation of Western ideals in the Texas Revolution (Malet, 2013), the abolishment of slavery and removal of aristocracy in the American Civil War (Cade, 2020, pg.73), either the rejection of fascism or rejection of communism in the Spanish Civil War (Malet, 2013), the separation from communism in the Soviet-Afghan War (El-Guendouzi, 2022) and the rejection of authoritarian regimes in the Syrian Civil War (Galperin Donnelly, Sanderson and Fellman, 2017).

In the American Civil War, the German immigrant fighters had mainly come to America following the German Revolution of 1848 which was a rejection of Prussian aristocracy (Cade, 2020, pg.73). Following the loss of the fight against aristocracy and the arrival of Germans to America, the onslaught of the Civil War posed a new portrayal of aristocracy, the Confederacy, which was looking to retain slavery (Cade, 2020, pg.73). This historical experience with fighting a symbol of aristocracy carried over into their participation in the American Civil War and was a primary motivator for the German fighters.

These various motivations, whether it be historical experience with similar issues or shared beliefs are crucial for understanding the different incentives that lead to foreign fighters entering conflicts. They highlight the diverse reasonings and when used in conjunction with the Chechen Western Diaspora, it reveals similarities with historical cases but also shows a forgotten aspect of cultural codes.

5. The Custom of Blood Revenge and the History of Russian-Chechen Relations

To understand the idiosyncrasies exclusive to the Western Chechen Diaspora, this chapter will give an overview on the background of Russo-Chechen conflicts from the time of the Stalinist regime to the Chechen Wars. This section will also take into consideration the more unique aspect of the Chechen community and will give insight into the practice of blood revenge, also known as ‘Ch’ir’ in the Chechen language, an Adat or Chechen customary law.

Blood Revenge

To define blood revenge, the Souleimanov definition will be used:

"Blood revenge typically refers to a more specific, context-bound form of revenge - that is, the desire to kill an offender or his (usually patrilineally delineated) male relatives in retaliation for a grave offense committed against oneself or one's relatives”.(Souleimanov and Aliyev, 2015, pg.159)

Blood feud being “a cycle of subsequent blood revenges"”(Souleimanov and Aliyev, 2015, pg.160). What quantifies a ‘grave insult’ are usually those which have caused serious harm or death to a person, either male or female, though it also encompasses grave verbal insults which can target males, females, and ancestors.

The custom of blood revenge is not a Muslim custom and has pre-existed in the Caucasus, and around the world, long before Islam was adopted as the main religion. It dates back to the ancestors of today's Chechens, known as Vainakhs, and was one of the unwritten laws that they relied upon to maintain order in their community and "served as an institution through which crimes were prevented and relations between warring parties were regulated"(Osmayev and Osmayev, 2017).

"The blood feud of the Chechens is not a relic of the Middle Ages, as European liberals mistakenly imagine. It is the only and most effective tool for deterring aggression and recklessness, which nullified even the theoretical possibility of deliberate murder," (Caucasian Knot, 2022)

The most common reason for blood revenge to be declared is murder though it can also be declared depending on the gravity of an offence, such as rape or serious humiliation. Given that Chechen society is largely separated into clans or 'teips', and most cases of blood revenge that are declared are between Chechens, both parties to the offence are brought before the elders of that teip and a trial is conducted (Osmayev and Osmayev, 2017). If the perpetrator is deemed guilty by the elders, then blood revenge is declared and comes into force, however that is not the only result from a trial (Osmayev and Osmayev, 2017). If the perpetrator declares their innocence and has elders from their family swear alongside them over the Quran, if this is believed then the situation is dissolved (Osmayev and Osmayev, 2017). In the case of involuntary manslaughter, blood revenge is not declared though ransom is often paid to the

family of the victim, or in the event that while it was an accidental murder, if the perpetrator was inebriated in some way, then blood revenge can still be declared (Osmayev and Osmayev, 2017). Forgiveness remains an option in all cases and is seen as the height of nobility from both a religious point of view and from the perspective of honour (Osmayev and Osmayev, 2017). Blood revenge can only be avenged by relatives of the victim, the only occasion where a woman can avenge is if there are no men in her family, if it is avenged by a friend then it is considered murder and tried under law (Osmayev and Osmayev, 2017). When avenging an offence, would-be avengers target either the perpetrator themselves or male relatives of the perpetrator, ideally on the father's side of the family (Souleimanov and Aliyev, 2015, pg.159). In the case that the would-be avengers cannot identify the perpetrator or his male relatives then, while the hunt for the offender still continues, the avengers can target the narrowest group that is closely associated with the perpetrator (Souleimanov and Aliyev, 2015, pg.175).

There are three main principles associated with blood revenge, 1. The notion of equivalence (Souleimanov and Aliyev, 2015, pg.161) 2. The notion of reciprocity (Souleimanov and Aliyev, 2015, pg.161) and 3. The notion of honour (Souleimanov and Aliyev, 2015, pg.160). Regarding the notion of equivalence, blood revenge allows for "eye for an eye", an offence was committed by the perpetrator against the victim allowing for the victim's family to claim the life of the perpetrator or one of his relatives (Souleimanov and Aliyev, 2015, pg.161). The punishment for the offence being equal to that of the

offence itself. Blood Feud is then caused by the reciprocal nature of blood revenge, once blood revenge has been carried out, the original perpetrators family can then enact revenge on the original family of the victim as they have now become the offended party (Souleimanov and Aliyev, 2015, pg.160). This leads to blood feud which can last for generations with the original offence committed being long forgotten.

Blood revenge and blood feud are intrinsically grounded in the notion of honour. There is a sense of belonging in Chechen society due to the teip structure and an offence committed against one member leads to dishonour for the whole teip which results in the need to avenge this loss of honour (Souleimanov and Aliyev, 2015, pg.161). Failure to avenge an offence would bring a lack of honour to their teip, which is a huge incentive to participate in blood revenge due to how linked an individual's sense of self is, to the teip they belong to (Souleimanov and Aliyev, 2015, pg.161). The custom of blood revenge serves as an effective deterrent to crime in Chechen society as an individual's crime does not end with them, it passes on to their relatives (Osmayev and Osmayev, 2017). This means that if the perpetrator of a crime has blood revenge declared against them and flees, his relatives are also targets and would be held responsible for his crimes (Osmayev and Osmayev, 2017).

Under the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation, blood feud is governed by Article 105 of Section VII. Crimes Against the Person (Osmayev and Osmayev, 2017) and an individual if found guilty can be sentenced to a prison term of 8 to

20 years if the murder is “committed by reason of national, racial, or religious hatred, or enmity or blood feud;” with more severe punishment being “by deprivation of liberty for life, or by death penalty”(IMoLIN, 2004). Attempts to regulate blood feud were also introduced in the Soviet era:

“in 1931, an amendment was adopted to the USSR's Criminal Code, according to which blood feud killings were qualified as "state crimes", under Article 58, point 8, with application of the capital punishment – execution by killing 15; and later, Article 231 of the Criminal Code was adopted, which punished with up to two years in prison for refusal to reconcile”(Caucasian Knot, 2017).

In the period following the First Chechen War, then president of Ichkeria, Aslan Maskhadov, attempted to introduce a court based on Sharia law which “suggested replacing the blood feud with "taleon" – "kisas" in Islam – an equal retribution”(Caucasian Knot, 2017). The most recent attempt to govern blood feud came from Ramzan Kadyrov, the head of the Chechen Republic, when he introduced the Commission for National Reconciliation in 2010 which aimed to end all feuds between parties in Chechnya (Caucasian Knot, 2017). The commission was abolished in 2011 with an estimated 451 families, who were caught in blood feuds, reconciled (Caucasian Knot, 2017). What followed this commission was the establishing of another commission, the National Reconciliation Commission, on the 18th of October, 2011, which is governed by the SAM or Chechen Spiritual Administration of Muslims (Ivanov and

Charnyj, 2011). While 451 families were reconciled under the Kadyrov commission, it is widely accepted that it did not end all blood feuds in the republic as many Chechens had left the Caucasus forming the Chechen Western Diaspora, and that reasons for blood feud can still arise forming new instances of it (Ivanov and Charnyj, 2011). With the help of SAM or muftiate in Chechnya, a reported 1433 conflicts have been reconciled, though the custom itself, regardless of the numerous attempts, is proving difficult to eradicate completely (Ivanov and Charnyj, 2011). Given the mediation offered by the muftiate regarding the reconciliation of blood feuds, this shows the influence of Islam in the region as Islam completely rejects the custom of blood feud, though adherence to Adats is still prominent with some reporting these reconciliations as 'forced' (Ivanov and Charnyj, 2011).

Ultimately, the practice of blood revenge and blood feud in today's society remains as a deterrent for would-be perpetrators and adherence to its practice is reflective of the society's belief in the justice system to adequately protect and govern citizens if such a crime occurs. With the existence of the Chechen Western Diaspora and the elimination of their involvement in the commissions set up by either Kadyrov or the muftiate, there still remains unreconciled blood feuds within their society and to act upon these is their right by Adat law, forming a legitimate motivation for their existence as foreign fighters in Ukraine.

The Deportation of the Chechens and Ingush of 1944

The establishment of the Soviet Union in 1922 saw several changes to Chechnya, whether it be by name or by land area. The Soviet Union initially separated Chechnya from the mountain republic before becoming an autonomous region of its own in 1922 (Caucasian Knot, 2023a). 1924 saw the abolishment of the mountain republic into two autonomous regions, Ingushetia and North Ossetia with the North Ossetian city of Vladikavkaz becoming an autonomous city (Caucasian Knot, 2023a). In 1934, the autonomous regions of Chechnya and Ingushetia were joined, becoming the Chechen Ingush Autonomous Region which later became the Chechen Ingush Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (ChiASSR) in 1936 (Caucasian Knot, 2023a). Census reports from 1939 showed the majority of inhabitants of the ChiASSR were Chechens and the overall population was 697 thousand (Caucasian Knot, 2023a). During the continually changing status of Chechnya, it is important to note that even though the Soviet Union were in power, the majority of the power in Chechnya was held in their traditional teip structures (Caucasian Knot, 2023a). The multiple power structures in place and the rise of anti-Soviet beliefs led to a lack of trust from the Soviet Union towards the people of ChiASSR, ultimately leading to their disarming, halt on recruitment into local police and process of recruitment to the Red Army by exception only (Caucasian Knot, 2023a). Conscription during World War II brought fresh struggles to the relations between the ChiASSR and the Soviet Union with mass evasion of

conscription and desertion from the army leading to accusations surrounding Chechen involvement on the German side, either as soldiers or saboteurs (Caucasian Knot, 2023a).

The region was no stranger to anti-Soviet uprisings with rebel groups appearing in Chechnya between 1940-1944 with much of their actions taking place around the time of the German invasion into the Soviet Union (Caucasian Knot, 2023a). This rumoured alliance between the ChiASSR and Nazi Germany served as the main justifier for a mass deportation of the Chechens and the Ingush in 1944, which was named Operation Lentil (Caucasian Knot, 2023a; Shattuck, 2019, pg.92). Originally intended was the deportation of 500 thousand Chechen and Ingush people to the Altai Territory, Omsk Region, Krasnoyarsk Territory and Novosibirsk Region though this was then changed to the Kazakh and Kirghiz SSR's (Soviet Socialist Republics) (Caucasian Knot, 2023a). The logistics of the transportation were worked out to be provided by the People's Commissariat of Railways of the USSR and they were:

"[...]instructed to supply 350 covered wagons from January 23 to March 13, 1944, 400 wagons from February 24 to 28, and 100 wagons daily from March 4 to March 13. In total, 152 routes were formed with 100 cars each, and in general 14,200 cars and 1 thousand platforms." (Caucasian Knot, 2023a)

On the 29th of January, 1944, the leader of the NKVD or People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs, Lavrentiy Beria approved the order to deport the Chechens and Ingush from the Caucasus to Central Asia (Caucasian Knot, 2023a). Beria

along with other officers, operatives of the NKVD, Soviet Counterintelligence and the People's Commissariat for State Security arrived in Chechnya on the 20th of February for the beginning of operations for the deportation (Caucasian Knot, 2023a). The official beginning of the deportation was the 23rd of February, 1944, in the early hours of the morning when:

"Soldiers holding automatics appeared. The Chechens were held at gun point. In every village the decree of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet was read, announcing the total deportation of the Chechens and Ingush for treason and for collaboration with the enemy."(Shattuck, 2019, pg.93)

Sources differ on exact figures for the deportation, though by March 20th, an estimated 491,748 people arrived in the Kazakh and Kirghiz SSR's from Chechnya (Caucasian Knot, 2023a). This figure is estimated due to the mass death of Chechens and Ingush during transportation and even during the eviction process as head of the NKVD, Lavrentiy Beria "gave orders to eliminate any person that a soldier considered "untransportable."(Shattuck, 2019, pg.94). These executions based on age or level of infirmity were not the only examples of abuses committed by the Soviet forces with one particular occurrence mentioned repeatedly and that occurred in an aul (village) called Khaibakh (Dimaeva, 2015, pg.93). Bad weather conditions on the 23rd of February in the mountain aul of Khaibakh was delaying the deportation of its residents and Colonel Mikhail Gvishiani of the NKVD ordered the residents of the village, around 600-700 people, be rounded up and locked in a stable and

burned (Caucasian Knot, 2023a). Those who managed to escape the stable were then shot by the soldiers stationed outside. (Caucasian Knot, 2023a)

The massacre at Khaibakh illustrates how ruthless this deportation was and while this is an example of the brutality shown, thousands more would die on the way to being transported to Central Asia, on the trains themselves and then in the process of being relocated. The majority of the Chechen and Ingush who had been deported were sent to the Kazakh SSR and once they had been relocated, the process for their cultural removal began when "Stalin allowed for Georgia, Northern Ossetia, Dagestan, and Stavropol to absorb the Chechen-Ingush Autonomous Republic" and place names were changed from the original Chechen (Shattuck, 2019, pg.95). Sites of cultural significance were removed and the Chechen people were not allowed to speak their native language or participate in cultural activities in the Kazakh and Kirghiz SSR's (Shattuck, 2019, pg.95). The Chechen and Ingush people had been wiped from recent Russian memory and their towns and villages were given to new settlers (Shattuck, 2019, pg.95).

13 years later, on the 9th of January, 1957, under the leadership of Nikita Khrushchev, the Chechen and Ingush people were allowed to return to their once taken lands with much of the areas seized and Chechen and Ingush names restored (Caucasian Knot, 2009; Caucasian Knot, 2023a; Shattuck, 2019, pgs.114-116). Despite the mass casualties from the deportation, the Chechen

and Ingush people who had been resettled in the Kazakh and Kirghiz SSR's had endured and slowly began to make a return to their homeland.

The First Chechen War 1994

As the collapse of the USSR approached and in the race for leadership, Boris Yeltsin advocated for greater autonomy and self-determination of the republics of the USSR and the Chechen people responded to this encouragement and Yeltsin's popularity in the region was very high (Kipp, 2001, pg.52). In November of 1990, a conference was held in Grozny in which Chechen independence was declared and Dzhokhar Dudayev named as the leader of the 'newly independent' Chechnya, known as the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria (Kipp, 2001, pg.52). The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 and the succession of Boris Yeltsin as President resulted in a power struggle between the Kremlin and Dudayev's government as Moscow was weaker in the wake of the collapse and Grozny was rampant with crime (Kipp, 2001, pgs.52-53). This newly declared independence was threatening the territory of Russia and there was growing fear that if not dealt with, other Caucasus Republics could follow suit; it was beginning to be clear that Yeltsin's championing of autonomy was an election ploy (Kipp, 2001, pg.53). The Chechen Republic of Ichkeria under Dudayev, along with the high levels of crime and corruption, were further being seen as a threat due to the discarded Soviet arms in the region being distributed

by Dudayev's government (Kipp, 2001, pg.53). During this chaos ensuing in the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria, its threat to the territorial integrity of the Russian Federation and the distribution of arms, a number of measures were attempted by Yeltsin, including alliances with anti-Dudayev supporters and covert actions against the government (Kipp, 2001, pg.53). These failed attempts to stabilise the region were the main justifications for military intervention to reestablish Moscow's rule in 1994 and December of 1994 saw the Russian military advance on Grozny (Kipp, 2001, pg.54).

The Russian troops were wholly unprepared for this attack which allowed the Chechens, led by Colonel Aslan Maskhadov, to organise their defence of the city (Kipp, 2001, pg.54), however, within one month the Russian Federation had claimed Grozny and the Chechens withdrew to mount "a protracted partisan war in the countryside"(Kipp, 2001, pg.55). The fighting continued to follow the Chechen withdrawal and on June 14th, 1995, the Chechens, led by Shamil Basayev, attempted a hostile negotiation tactic when in the city of Budyonnovsk, Russia, they massed over one thousand hostages and gathered them into the hospital (Kotlyar and Wesolowsky, 2020). The Chechen militants, now armed with Russian hostages, listed demands of the Russian government:

"that Russian troops withdraw immediately from Chechnya, that President Boris N. Yeltsin begin talks with General Dudayev and that the rebels be permitted to meet with reporters."(Specter, 1995)

This crisis lasted for five days until Basayev was able to negotiate his safe return to Chechnya and in turn the release of hostages, although by the end of the five days 129 people had been killed and hundreds more injured (Kotlyar and Wesolowsky, 2020). The war in Chechnya was becoming a source of discontent for the Russian people and Yeltsin's popularity, ahead of the 1996 elections, was plummeting and something drastic was needed to prove that the situation in Chechnya was under control (Kipp, 2001, pg.56).

On April 21st, 1996, in a field 30 kilometres from Grozny, Dzhokar Dudayev was on a phone call to an intermediary for the Duma in Moscow believed to be organising negotiations, when the signal from his phone communicated his location to the Russian intelligence and they launched a guided missile which resulted in his death (Gray, 2003; IHH Humanitarian Relief Foundation, 2012). A ceasefire was arranged in the following months and Yeltsin was elected as president for his second term after securing an alliance with one of his runner-ups, General Aleksandr Lebed (Kipp, 2001, pg.56). Preparations by the Russian Federation were underway to renew the conflict in Chechnya, though this was spoiled by the Chechen attack on Grozny which led to a further ceasefire and eventual withdrawal of Russian troops in 1996 by means of the Khasavyurt accords (Kipp, 2001, pg.56; Asatiani, 2012) and the sequential Moscow Peace Treaty of 1997 (Asatiani, 2012). Although the fighting was 'over', Chechnya's desire for independence was still a threat to the territorial integrity of the Russian

Federation and with crime still rampant in the region, there remained no solution to the problem of Chechnya.

The Second Chechen War 1999

Islamic radical beliefs interrupted the ceasefire agreement and ended the five-year interlude period in 1999 when Chechen militants moved into Dagestan to ignite an Islamic insurgency (Caucasian Knot, 2019; Kipp, 2001, pg.48). In an effort to force the Chechens back into Chechnya, the Russian Federation reignited hostilities to contain the problem. Parallel to this were shifts in the government of the Russian Federation with Boris Yeltsin installing Vladimir Putin as the new Prime Minister who vowed to eliminate the Chechen problem once and for all (Kipp, 2001, pg,48). Bombings of apartment buildings in three separate Russian cities, Buynaksk, Volgodonsk and Moscow, were quickly attributed to the work of Chechen militants (Eggert, 2019) and the Chechen borders were blockaded on September 18th (Caucasian Knot, 2019). Air strikes on Grozny and neighbouring areas began five days later on September 23rd with ground military operations beginning on September 30th (Caucasian Knot, 2019). There were large developments made to the Russian military tactics since the First Chechen War and in December of 1999, the now levelled Grozny had been captured by the Russian Federation (Kipp, 2001, pg.48). The full scale military operation was ceased in April, 2000, with the newly installed President, Vladimir Putin, partially withdrawing troops on the 23rd of January, 2001, and

appointing Akhmat Kadyrov as the new head of Chechnya (Caucasian Knot, 2019).

Alongside the appointment of Kadyrov as the head of Chechnya “In March 2003, a constitutional referendum was held in Chechnya, and the new constitution guaranteed that the territory would remain part of the Russian Federation” (Kowal, 2023). Regardless of the apparent cessation of fighting, Chechen militants turned to guerrilla warfare and instigated terrorist attacks such as the hostage crisis at the Dubrovka Theatre in Moscow in 2002 (Lapenkova, 2022) and the attack on school number one in Beslan, North Ossetia in 2004 (BBC, 2017). The Moscow-appointed leadership of Akhmat Kadyrov came to an end on Victory Day in 2004 when Chechen militants launched a bomb attack on a stadium in Grozny, killing Kadyrov (NBC, 2004). Following in his father’s footsteps was Ramzan Kadyrov, who succeeded Akhmat Kadyrov and has remained as head of Chechnya since 2007 (Reuters, 2011).

The First and Second Chechen Wars were attempts by the Russian Federation to eliminate a problem and restore stability but they resulted in catastrophic levels of civilian casualties with an estimated 250,000 civilians killed in both wars, thousands more injured and homes and infrastructure destroyed (Al Jazeera, 2005).

Both wars saw unprecedented indiscriminate violence and have left a lasting memory in the minds of both Chechen and Russian people with each side of this conflict suffering from the orders of their government. As a result of these wars, an estimated 200,000 Chechens have emigrated internationally developing a heterogenous diaspora with generational grievances (Sugaipova and Wilhelmsen, 2021, pg.3). With the realities of the 1944 deportation in Chechen recent memory and the sheer loss of life attributed to the time period of 1944 to present day caused directly by one aggressor, the Russian Federation, there is no question as to who these grievances are aimed at, Russia. The leadership of Chechnya is backed by Moscow, though much of the diaspora are staunch supporters of the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria and in some instances, the Caucasus Emirate and they have established their lives elsewhere with the hope that someday they can reclaim their homeland (Chambers, 2023). Regardless of the Chechen leadership, there are veterans of both Chechen Wars and their descendants whose aim is to continue the fight to avenge the many years in their homeland that were seized by the Stalinist Regime, and to avenge the hundreds of thousands of their ancestors and community who lost their lives throughout their tumultuous history.

6. The War in Ukraine and the Involvement of the Chechen Western Diaspora

In purported response to NATO expansion in the East and reports of apparent "genocide" in the pro-Russian separatist regions of Eastern Ukraine, Donetsk and Luhansk, this led to the launch of a "special military operation" by Russian President Vladimir Putin on the 24th of February 2022 (United Nations, 2022). In the year since the beginning of the war in Ukraine, with the Russian President's priority being to "demilitarise" and "denazify" Ukraine (Masters, 2023), sanctions have been placed on Russian banks, corporations and specific individuals by the United States, the United Kingdom, the European Union and Canada (BBC, 2022a). On this date, the 30th of June, 2023, the war wages on with tens of thousands of people losing their lives and countless more injured, millions of Ukrainians sought refuge in Europe and an estimated six million Ukrainians have been left internally displaced (UNHCR, 2023).

In addition to the catastrophic loss of life and millions displaced as a result of the war, it has also wreaked havoc on the economy fuelling inflation and rising prices in the oil and food sectors (Jenkins, 2023). Infrastructure and essential services such as power grids and water supply have been damaged devastatingly with the estimated cost of rebuilding set by the World Bank in September 2022 at 349 billion dollars (The World Bank, 2022). In efforts to lessen the effects of the war in Ukraine, regulations were put in place by the European Union by the

end of 2022 diversifying the supply of commodities, crude oil and gas to Europe to quell the rise of prices (European Council, 2022). Ukraine has since been granted formal European Union candidacy through an accelerated process and the European Union has called on NATO to follow suit as “Ukraine is waging Europe’s war”(Erlanger, 2023). Heralded as the most severe conflict since World War II, it is hard to know the effect both European Union and NATO membership will have on Russia and what level of threat this will pose going forward (Masters, 2023).

At present there are over one thousand Chechen foreign fighters in Ukraine (Mikhalchenko, 2023), with four main battalions, the Dzhokar Dudayev Battalion, the Sheikh Mansur Battalion, the Separate Special Purpose Battalion or OBON (отдельный батальон особого назначения) and the Khamzat Gelayev Joint Task Detachment. There is a suspected fifth battalion which has remained covert and is a part of the Ukrainian Intelligence Service. The Dzhokar Dudayev Battalion is named after the first President of the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria and was a well-known fighter for Chechen independence before he was killed by a guided missile while using a satellite phone on April 21st, 1996 (IHH Humanitarian Relief Foundation, 2012). The battalion is made up of largely Chechen fighters though among their ranks are Crimean Tatars, Ukrainians and a few other nationalities (Chambers, 2023). They are mainly veterans of the Chechen wars who fled Chechnya when Ramzan Kadyrov came to power (Chambers, 2023). They were originally a volunteer battalion but their status

changed to becoming “an official member of Ukraine’s armed forces, as part of the International Legion of Territorial Defence of Ukraine”(Chambers, 2023). Their current standing as an official member has provided them with the opportunity to form a specialised unit in diversion and reconnaissance known as Adam group, named after the first man on Earth (Chambers, 2023).

The Sheikh Mansur battalion is made up primarily of Chechen Muslims and most are veterans of both Chechen wars (Kossov, 2023). The battalion “gets its name from a religious and military leader who sought to prevent Russian Empress Catherine the Great's imperial expansion into the Caucasus during the late 1700s”(Kossov, 2023). In a similar style as the other Chechen battalions, their fighters operate using code names in order to protect their families who are still living in Chechnya (Kossov, 2023). The battalion is a volunteer group which rely heavily on donations though there is collaboration in terms of coordinating activities between the Chechen battalions and the Ukrainian army (Kossov, 2023). The Sheikh Mansur battalion are the main victims of Russian propaganda against Chechen foreign fighters due to their Muslim identity, with many viewing the battalion as ‘barbaric’ and ‘radical’ (Boffey, 2023). The battalion has benefited from volunteer fighters from Syria including the leader of a Chechen militia in Idlib in Northern Syria, Abdul-Hakim al-Shishani (Chambers, 2023).

The other two battalions, the Separate Special Purpose Battalion and the Khamzat Gelayev Joint Task Detachment, remain largely covert but are both

official members of the International Legion of Territorial Defence of Ukraine and consist of veterans of both Chechen Wars (Doukaev, 2022). Due to the secretive nature of both battalions, there exists limited scope for research and to ensure validity of the sources they are only being mentioned by name and position.

In response to the Chechen involvement as foreign fighters in Ukraine an important step was taken on October 18th, 2022, when the Ukrainian Rada (Parliament) “recognized the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria as temporarily occupied by Russia” (Query and Farrell, 2022). Alongside this, President Volodymyr Zelenskyy released an anti-mobilisation message to the people of the North Caucasus, pleading with them to not join the ranks of the Russian military in Ukraine (Query and Farrell, 2022). According to Zelenskyy and many commanders in the Chechen battalions in Ukraine, President Putin is seeking the mobilisation of fighters in the North Caucasus as these are the poorer regions of Russia and will help to maintain the illusion in bigger cities that Russia are not reliant on conscription (Query and Farrell, 2022).

7. Analysis

There was one research question for this dissertation, that being “What is the motivation for Chechen foreign fighters to fight against Russia in the war in Ukraine?”. Combined with this research question were three main objectives relating to the location of the conflict, Adats as a motivation for mobilisation and whether more emphasis needs to be placed on blood revenge when discussing Chechen foreign fighters and whether blood revenge has an influence on the diaspora. Through the demonstrated research in this dissertation, we can identify the commonalities between authors' descriptions when discussing foreign fighters, whether in the present-day case of the war in Ukraine or historical perspective. There is no distinctive, all-encompassing definition in use today to fully describe what foreign fighters embody which leads to speculation and the perpetuation of, oftentimes, negative connotations.

When discussed in their participation in the war in Ukraine, foreign fighters are perceived as tools of propaganda (Habtom, 2022), whose purpose is to garner international support in the hopes of intervention. This is especially prevalent given that Ukraine is still, as of July 2023, in the process of gaining membership to the European Union and the possibility of NATO membership is at discussion level. Legions of international support have reaffirmed that the values of the European Union incorporate Ukraine. The countries of the EU have responded to Ukraine’s call for action through aid and housing for displaced persons,

financing for ammunition and military assistance and through the sanctioning and condemning of Russia and select Russian citizens (Erlanger, 2023; European Council, 2022). Without a doubt, this international support grows stronger when countries identify their own citizens among the ranks of the Ukrainian forces and it brings the, perceived, far off crisis to the doorsteps of the European Union.

The participation of Chechen foreign fighters fighting for Ukraine from the Chechen western diaspora also provides international recognition to the Chechen cause with growing intrigue as to the background of these battalions who are openly going up against a past foe. These Chechen foreign fighters fighting for Ukraine, as outlined above, are separate to that of the Chechens fighting as part of the Kadrovtsy which is the battalion belonging to Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov and are a part of the Russian National Guard Service and are fighting for Russia (Mustaffa, 2022). Rather than being a propaganda tool, the Chechen foreign fighters can be seen as actors of counterpropaganda. Social media apps such as Tiktok and Telegram have been the main way in which the international audience has seen Chechen fighters in Ukraine, and these fighters have usually been part of the Kadyrovtsy, the Chechen battalion fighting for Russia. Reports suggest that the Kadyrovtsy are among the most brutal of the Russian battalions and operate with chaotic violence to achieve the goals of Moscow-backed Chechen leader, Ramzan Kadyrov (Mirovalev, 2022; Mustaffa, 2022). The Chechen battalions of foreign fighters from the Chechen

Western Diaspora are usually engaged in reconnaissance or diversion tactics but still uphold the similar ‘strongman’ connotation that is so often attributed to the Kadyrovtsy (Mikhalchenko, 2023). The Chechen foreign fighters fighting for Ukraine are countering the idea that all Chechens are doing the bidding of the Russian government and some will not lay idle while Russia enacts violence against another.

Murauskaite further went on to place Chechen foreign fighters into two distinct categories, battle chasers and veterans with historical grievances (Murauskaite, 2020, pgs.7,12). These two categories acknowledge discrepancies in terms of prior military experience, whether it was in either Chechen war or as mujahideen in Syria and Iraq in support of the Islamic State. The main category still remains as veterans with historical grievances as battle chasers among the Chechen foreign fighters are few in number and are mainly present in one battalion, the Sheikh Mansur battalion (Murauskaite, 2020, pg.13). In the interviews conducted with Chechen foreign fighters in Ukraine, mainly the Sheikh Mansur battalion and Dzhokhar Dudayev battalion, reference is made to the numerous attempts made by Russia to eliminate the Chechen community and that the Chechen diaspora’s actions in Ukraine are reparations for prior violations (Askew, 2023; Boffey, 2023; Dettmer, 2023; Feng and Malofieieva, 2022; Fields, 2022; Mchedlishvili, 2022; Mikhalchenko, 2023; Query and Farrell, 2022; Reevell and Pereira, 2023; Waghorn, 2022). One particular interview conducted with a deputy commander of the Sheikh Mansur battalion mentioned

how “Wherever Russia wages war in the world [...] his battalion would follow to fight it. Their only purpose in life now is to take up arms against Russia — wherever that might be.”(Feng and Malofieieva, 2022).

It is important to note that the history of these complicated Russian-Chechen relations spans centuries rather than the decades outlined in this thesis and reference is made by members of the Sheikh Mansur battalion to the existence of a centuries old blood feud (Feng and Malofieieva, 2022). This is referring to the Tsarist advance into Chechnya in the 1700s when the Tsar’s army headed south and encountered a ‘barbaric, mountainous people’(Feng and Malofieieva, 2022). What becomes evident through researching the history of these relations is this mentality of ‘othering’ which has reigned for centuries. Throughout Chechnya’s history, their civilisation has lost their homeland to exile, has had use of their language punished, sites of cultural heritage destroyed and shame attached to their cultural and social identity. Not to mention the mass casualties suffered in the countless attempts to eliminate the Chechen people, herein lies extraordinary generational trauma.

Much of the recent research has determined that foreign fighters are an at-risk group of becoming radicalised and are guaranteed to commit atrocities once their tenure as foreign fighters in a conflict has concluded (Murauskaite, 2020,

pgs.14, 21; Habtom, 2022). There exists a struggle to assimilate upon returning to their home countries which leads to increased rates of crime and violence, particularly evident in countries with experience of radical Islam. There is also the belief that foreign fighters are not as loyal to a cause as those native to the conflict which can lead to mass desertion as has been seen with those who arrived in Ukraine in droves at the onset of the conflict (Habtom, 2022). While radicalisation may not be an issue, as stated by Murauskaite, the assimilation into society and loyalty to a cause are interesting points when discussing the Chechen foreign fighters (Murauskaite, 2020,pg.22). In relation to the post-conflict radicalisation described in Murauskaite's work, the participation of Chechen foreign fighters fighting for Ukraine can be deduced as a part of a continuum of grievance related mobilisation and when an outcome is agreed upon to end the war in Ukraine, that outcome may not be in favour of the Chechen motivations. It would not necessarily be radicalisation in its usual sense of committing acts of terrorism, though it could manifest itself in condoning further participation in conflicts.

These points can be examined in conjunction with the analysis of legal consciousness as outlined in the literature review of this dissertation. Sugaipova and Wilhemsen discuss the matter of legal pluralism within the Chechen diaspora and the main takeaway is, the Chechen community and teips have been bolstered by their adherence to Adats and to Sharia law and to omit that from daily life is hard to achieve. The 'if' factor within the research of Sugaipova and

Wilhelmsen is if location is the dependent aspect for whether the diaspora is more likely to observe laws outside of Adats and Sharia law. In regard to the Chechen foreign fighters in Ukraine, their loyalty to the cause is driven largely by past grievances, even predating that of the 1944 deportation discussed earlier, and if they are motivated to mobilise by these past grievances, the likelihood exists that Adats play an important role in their lives outside of Chechnya. A conclusion being that if, as a member of the Chechen western diaspora, you are seeking to avenge a past grievance, you are more likely to respond to an Adat rather than a local law. As a result, subsequent violence can be expected from these foreign fighters after the war in Ukraine until such a time exists that their grievances have been avenged. This adherence to Adats could mean, in the eventuality of an outcome to the war in Ukraine being agreed upon, regardless of the majority of Chechen foreign fighters being present in Ukraine since 2014 (Kvakhadze, 2022), this agreement could be largely disregarded in favour of what motivated them to join in the first place, blood revenge. If the grievances outlined by the Chechen battalions are not adequately resolved, a continuation of conflict can be expected, whether that be in Ukraine or whether the conflict will be taken back to Chechnya.

Given the turbulent history of Russian-Chechen relations, grievance-based mobilisation is of no surprise, though the framing of these grievances as straightforward acts of retaliation for centuries of conflict does not fully encompass the true phenomenon of Chechen foreign fighters. Described in this

thesis is a custom not unique to the Chechen people, instead existing among civilisations worldwide for time immemorial, albeit under different names such as ‘vendetta’ in Italy or ‘gjakmarrja’ in Albania (Graham, 2015), the custom remains largely the same. The research question that guided this thesis was “What is the motivation for Chechen foreign fighters to fight against Russia in the war in Ukraine?” and the answer to that is blood revenge. The conclusion of this motivation is based on various factors, most notably the interviews given by Chechen foreign fighters in Ukraine to the mass media and the comparison to historical motivations from past conflicts in which foreign fighter participation was recorded.

What we know from the historical examples is the innately human quality that spurs on mobilisation which manifests itself predominantly in adherence to ideology, based on an emotive response to a perceived wrong. This manifestation is also prevalent in the case of the war in Ukraine with foreign fighters from around the world joining the conflict largely due to the media perpetuation of an unprovoked attack on Ukrainian civilisation and European values. In interviews with Chechen foreign fighters in Ukraine and analyses of their existence, what is often bolstered is the replication of conflict and the notion that the war in Ukraine is akin to the wars in Chechnya. “They believe an imperialist Russia is acting in the same way it did in Chechnya in the 1990s as it is in Ukraine right now.”(Askew, 2023). The experience of fighting in the Chechen wars has given them a renewed opportunity to defend themselves

against Russian rule, though despite defending Ukraine, what is scarcely seen in these interviews are indications of adherence to ideology. It is common among members of the Sheikh Mansur battalion, their headquarters and uniform emblazoned with the flag of the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria , to speak of the war in Ukraine as a stepping stone to the liberation of Chechnya, "Our objective is to liberate Ukraine and after, to totally liberate Chechnya,"(Reevell and Pereira, 2023). This goal of liberation stems from centuries of desires for self-determination and vengeance for the years they spent fighting for it. Indeed, it can be said that they are fighting for Ukraine because they are Chechen and it is their generational right to avenge, this is concurred by a further statement from the Sheikh Mansur battalion, "If I had been born in America or Canada, I wouldn't come here to Ukraine. But because Russia took everything from me, I have to resist. Nothing else matters,"(Feng and Malofieieva, 2022).

Blood revenge in the case of Chechens is “grounded in the notion of equivalence”(Souleimanov and Aliyev, 2015, pg.161) and is an “apolitical, grievance driven cause of violent mobilisation in irregular wars”(Souleimanov and Aliyev, 2015, pg.159). Blood revenge as a motivator for mobilisation has already been seen in the Chechen wars and the ability to restore honour to your clan took precedence over political views (Souleimanov and Aliyev, 2015, pg.172). Its position as a motivation also highlighted different parameters when it came to targeting the perpetrator of an offence as outlined in *‘Blood Revenge in Civil War: Proof of Concept’* , of course bearing in mind that this is in the context of intrastate wars though for the purposes of this thesis it will be applied

to interstate wars. Within this text, as discussed in the literature review of this thesis, are two main points of consideration for the motivation of blood revenge in the war in Ukraine and it is entirely related to who the target becomes:

"[...]would-be avengers may decide, in accordance with the logic of revenge, to enlarge the pool of suitable targets to include individuals unrelated to the culprit and his family, including military or insurgent units, garrisons, and (sub)ethnic or (sub)religious groups."(Souleimanov, Siroky and Colombo, 2022, pg.119)

When the perpetrator of an offence is the state, anyone who is seen to represent the state becomes a legitimate target, "The victim becomes the symbolic vessel of a blood revenge performed against a larger community deemed responsible."(Souleimanov, Siroky and Colombo, 2022, pg.120).

As seen in the above discussion of the history of Russian-Chechen relations, there are many instances in the three periods mentioned which constitutes a grave offence, whether that be exiled from your homeland, cultural identity and sense of belonging revoked or mass casualties in the Chechen Wars. Isolating the direct perpetrator of the various grave offences committed is an impossible task but it can be deduced that the perpetrator was acting on orders from the state, legitimising the declaration of blood revenge against them (Souleimanov, Siroky and Colombo, 2022, pg.120). This is bending the rules of the traditional custom of blood revenge which is "the desire to kill an offender or his (usually patrilineally delineated) male relatives in retaliation for a grave offense

committed against oneself or one's relatives" (Souleimanov and Aliyev, 2015, pg.159), though it is not beyond the scope of this. As seen in the media interviews with Chechen foreign fighters, the desire to avenge the abuses the Chechen diaspora escaped from is of the utmost importance (Waghorn, 2022; Askew, 2023; Boffey, 2023; Dettmer, 2023; Doukaev, 2022; Feng and Malofieieva, 2022; Query and Farrell, 2022; Reevell and Pereira, 2023). This is in direct agreement with the notion that regardless of adherence to the belief of defending Ukraine from Russia, the Chechen western diaspora participating in the war in the Ukraine as foreign fighters, are doing so apolitically, based on past grievances and motivated by blood revenge.

The participation of Chechen foreign fighters fighting for Ukraine can be described as opportunistic, a conflict arose which provided a battlefield to avenge though it is what will happen next that needs to be considered. Prediction of an outcome to the war in Ukraine is beyond the scope of this dissertation, but the importance of understanding motivations and the motivation expectancy is crucial to the production of a grounded theory that would be beneficial for the comprehension and forecasting of future actions. If the motivation for the mobilisation of Chechen foreign fighters fighting for Ukraine is blood revenge, understanding that this motivation encompasses more than that of just a response to a grievance, will help future researchers develop cohesive reasonings for their participation in conflicts. Blood revenge as a foreign fighter motivation is not limited to the Chechen western diaspora. As it is a worldwide

occurrence, blood revenge could be a leading motivation in many scenarios and a thorough understanding of its intricacies will bolster our comprehension of what motivates foreign fighters and how they can be disengaged.

8. Conclusion

This dissertation set about to answer one research question and three main objectives:

3. "What is the motivation for Chechen foreign fighters to fight against Russia in the war in Ukraine?"

G) What were the main pull factors for joining this conflict in particular?

H) Are Chechen customary laws or 'Adats' a driving factor for mobilisation and if so, should researchers put more emphasis on blood revenge (Ch'ir) when discussing Chechen foreign fighters?

I) What level of influence does the practice of blood revenge (Ch'ir) still hold in the diaspora's society today?

The answer to the research question is suggested to be blood revenge through a systematic and multi-disciplinary analysis, firstly of the history of Russian-Chechen conflicts to identify the various grievances. This dissertation focused on three main periods of this history namely, the deportation of 1944 under the Stalinist regime, the First Chechen War of 1994-96 and the Second Chechen War of 1999-2009. Reference is made to prior historical conflicts through the interviews with Chechen foreign fighter battalions by the media, though the three periods chosen for this dissertation also highlight very serious grievances from recent memory. The chosen periods illustrate the basis for the grievances

acquired through the mass casualties suffered by the Chechen people alongside the loss of cultural identity which is integral to our human nature.

Secondly, historical conflicts in which foreign fighter participation was recorded were analysed to identify motivations to understand the transcendence of them. This analysis identified several motivations, namely financial incentive, desire for status, adherence to and preservation of ideology, desire to gain military experience for own goals, establishment of networks and prior experience with similar conflicts. The Chechen foreign fighters fighting for Ukraine could be found to share the historical motivations of a desire to gain military experience for their own goals and due to prior experience with similar conflicts. The five Chechen battalions in Ukraine all contain, to some extent, veterans of both Chechen Wars who have amassed a wealth of experience fighting Russia and there is mention in interviews conducted with members of the Sheikh Mansur battalion and the Dzhokhar Dudayev battalion of a desire to reclaim Ichkeria upon the elimination of Russia as a threat to Ukraine. However, neither of these shared motivations would appear to be the driving factor for their mobilisation in Ukraine.

Thirdly, a comprehensive analysis of the custom of blood revenge was conducted to detail what this custom entails while acknowledging that it is not unique to the Chechen culture and is instead found worldwide. This dissertation outlined its role as a deterrent for serious crimes and the various rules attributed

to its implementation along with the break from the traditional usage in situations of conflict. It is a response to a grave offence committed and its position as a motivator for mobilisation in the war in Ukraine is bolstered by the grievances outlined in the history of Russian-Chechen relations.

The objectives were answered using the same method as the research question and the main pull factors identified were the opportunistic nature of participation in the war in Ukraine as a means to avenge and act on their blood revenge. The research conducted also showed that researchers should put more emphasis on blood revenge as a motivator as it will aid the understanding of grievance-based mobilisation to include the importance of cultural customs in forming a motivation regardless of political or ideological beliefs. Considering that it is an internationally found custom, its presence as a motivator can likely be attributed to many conflicts and therefore should be acknowledged more in depth to develop strategies for disengagement. The third objective to discover the prevalence of blood revenge in the Chechen western diaspora was shown to be related to attitudes surrounding legal pluralism. Many of the interviews with Chechen foreign fighters fighting for Ukraine made reference to a desire to eliminate Russia as a threat and act on centuries old blood feud which leads to the conclusion that despite not living in the country of its original practice, blood revenge is still a means to avenge historical grievances within the diaspora community.

This dissertation has covered very sensitive grievances which may be perceived as meriting a declaration of blood revenge and when compared with historical motivations, holds no comparison in terms of strength of volition of those motivated by this custom. The reality that restoring one's honour and the honour of their clan holds more weight than adherence to ideology or political beliefs, strongly highlights that blood revenge should not be overlooked as a motivation for mobilisation in conflicts and to do so would be a grave oversight. Considering the prevalence of foreign fighters in today's society and the global ubiquity of blood revenge, efforts need to be made to further attribute this custom to a motivation in its own right and not placed under the bracket of, simply, grievances. Chechen foreign fighters fighting for Ukraine from the Chechen western diaspora have found a means to enact blood revenge against Russia and this goes without mention in academia. Without specialised interviews with these specific Chechen foreign fighters, the next step in their journey to avenge will go unknown and without the possibility of disengagement. Further research into both the phenomenon of foreign fighters as a distinct category from foreign terrorist fighters and into blood revenge as a motivation for mobilisation needs to be completed in order to have a better understanding of how their participation shapes a conflict and where to expect them next. "We lost our homeland. What more does a person have to lose? Our family or children are not important when we've lost our home, and the whole world was silent," (Feng and Malofieieva, 2022)

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