
Reviewed by Norihiro Naganawa

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*Writers and Rebels* is an astonishing book mediating between spheres that scholars have otherwise explored separately. First of all, Rebecca Gould tackles the heteroglossia of Caucasus literatures written in Chechen, Arabic, Georgian, and Russian from the late tsarist to the Soviet period, and thereby extracts a common formative aesthetics: transgressive sanctity. Born in the vacuum of authority after the end of the leadership of Imam Shamil, who had resisted the Russian invasion from 1834 to 1859, transgressive sanctity is a process through which violence against the state is aestheticized and aesthetics is endowed with the capacity to generate violence. Gould compares proses and poems of insurgency across Chechnya, Ossetia, Daghestan, Georgia, and Russia and looks for parallels, juxtapositions, and convergences rather than for direct influences. In so doing she forcefully illustrates that the Caucasian authors and readers—she also includes Azerbaijan in the epilogue—have shared the ethics and aesthetics of transgressive sanctity in order to engage with colonial violence.

Secondly, Gould proposes literary anthropology as a method, which enables her to bridge established literary studies of Russian representations of the Caucasus and burgeoning historical enquiries into legal pluralism comprising *sharia*, customary laws (*adat*), and *zakon*, that is, the colonial legal system. She privileges neither literary canon nor state agency and reveals the role of the literary imagination as an arbiter of political change. Gould argues that historical explanations focusing on cause and effect are problematically blind to violence as it is lived, and contends that literary texts expose the rawness of violence as an aesthetic experience. Whereas Michael Kemper has elucidated that Shamil’s sovereignty was based on an equilibrium between *sharia* and Sufi networks,[1] Gould demonstrates that transgressive sanctity acquired authority following the decay of the local structures that Shamil’s power relied on and their replacement by colonial governmentality. Thus, she meticulously analyzes the ways in which transgressive sanctity embodied by multilingual literatures intervened in *sharia* and *adat* and vindicated the violation of the coercively imposed *zakon*.

Thirdly, Gould’s book is marked not only by the spatial coverage of both North and South Caucasus but also by the broad temporal scope encompassing the tsarist, Soviet, and post-Soviet periods. It begins with the sanctification of an anti-colonial Chechen bandit (*abrek*) in Soviet literature and then moves to address the Daghestani Arabic historiography about the 1877 rebellion, the largest revolt following Shamil’s surrender. Then it places Georgia’s engagement with anti-
Writing literature of transgressive sanctity in the 1920 and the 1930s, both Gatuev and Tabidze were compelled to recognize at the cost of their own lives resemblances between tsarist imperialism and the Soviet regime of purges. Only with the collapse of the Soviet Union and the revival of violence in Chechnya did transgressive sanctity reemerge as a building principle of everyday life. Aizan Gazueva’s revenge for the killing of her brothers and husband in 2001—Chechnya’s first female suicide bombing—epitomizes the degeneration of the abrek-outlaw of Soviet memory into the shahidka (female martyr) who is socialized to sacrifice her life for the collective good. The sacralization of transgression inevitably intensifies the cycle of violence.

Rebecca Gould brings to the fore the unsubdued agency of colonial subjects through her literary anthropology. By so doing she powerfully challenges a conventional narrative in the recent historiography of Russia’s empire, highlighting the non-Russians’ acculturation and accommodation to the imperial rule tolerant of difference. Prevalent among not only Russian, European, and American, but also local scholars from former imperial territories, this type of narrative is based on archival materials documenting onerous but still open interactions between the state and its subjects. How could historians listen to those who stayed away from such channels of interactions? Gould forces historians to test her concept of transgressive sanctity in other localities and contexts. One might be quickly reminded of the Ferghana Valley, which saw the Andijan uprising in 1898, the 1916 revolt, the anti-Soviet Basmachi rebels, and post-Soviet Islamist insurgents, such as the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan. While Muslim anticolonial insurgency has been discussed in juridical terms of dar al-Islam (abode of Islam) or dar al-harb (abode of war), Gould’s transgressive sanctity is not narrowly confined to Islam, but likely to be applicable to other case studies, for example to the Polish-Lithuanian borderlands. At the same time, Gould’s treatment of colonial violence at the intersections of Chechen, Daghestani, Russian, and Ossetian literatures. Finally, it conducts an ethnography of post-Soviet wartime Chechnya in order to capture a shift in the location of transgressive sanctity from literary texts to mass media images. Furthermore, Gould tells the whole Caucasian story in global terms, thanks to her sophisticated but esoteric engagement with Walter Benjamin’s critique on violence as well as with the field of subaltern studies, and particularly with the work of Ranajit Guha on dominance and hegemony.

In the aftermath of Shamil’s surrender, the tension between indigenous law and the law of the colonial state generated an aesthetics of transgressive sanctity among Chechens. It was Soviet-era historical novels authored by Ossetian writer Dzakho Gatuev and Chechen poet Magomed Mamakaev that transformed Zelimkhan (Zelamkha in Chechen) Gushmazukaev (1872-1913) from a social outcast according to the precolonial adat into a sanctified epic hero of anticolonial insurgency. Chechen idioms of insurgency played a formative role in Daghestani narratives of the 1877 rebellion, as Daghestani authors emulated or explicitly rejected them depending on their distance from the Russian administration. While Ali Qadi al-Salti recognized Chechen Alibek Hajji’s exceptional spirituality and his miraculous powers, Muhammad Tahir al-Qarakhi was ambivalent toward both the Russian authorities and Daghestani Muhammad Hajji’s militancy. In contrast to Abd al-Rahman al-Ghazighumuqi and Hasan al-Alqadari, who treated the rebellion as an act of futility and fitna (civil war), Najm al-Din al-Hutsi aestheticized transgression, claiming himself as Shamil’s successor but glorifying Shamil’s nemesis, Hajji Murad. Shamil and Hajji Murad also shaped Georgian Titans Tabidze’s poems, which revealed the complicity of nineteenth-century Georgian Romantic writers such as Grigol Orbeliani, with Russian colonialism and thereby attempted to redeem—“wash away” in Tabidze’s words—the treachery of the previous generation.
the literature of insurgency could be nuanced and complicated in the light of processes such as acculturation and accommodation. It goes without saying that colonial experience is plural. Writers' artistic production of anticolonial subjectivities, readers' reception of their works, and local memories of empire are by no means congruent or seamlessly continual. To be sure, Gould painstakingly analyzes the significantly ambiguous attitudes of Daghestani authors with respect to the 1877 rebellion, and Titsian Tabidze's impeachment of the acculturated elites' collaboration with Russian rule. But one could wonder how local peoples have compromised with and navigated divided loyalties inside their societies. It was the Daghestani Hajji Agha who cut off Hajji Murad's head (p. 245); it was a Daghestani general, Gaidar Gadzhiev, who became an object of Aizan Gazueva's revenge (p. 205). Daghestani historians have recently addressed the military role of Turkic peoples, such as the K.umyks, in the incorporation of the northeast of Caucasus into Russia. How is transgressive sanctity possible in Ramzan Kadyrov's Chechnya? These being said, Rebecca Gould has made an unprecedented contribution to introducing colonial subjects' robust imagination of resistance to the study of empire in general and Russia's variety in particular.

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