

## Map 18

### 1886–1890: An Ethnolinguistic Map of the Caucasus

In the 1890s a range of problems associated with national identity began to dominate Caucasian political discourse. In all areas of life, social antagonisms began to take on an ethnic expression. Not only did the imperial administrators become obsessed with ethnodemographic (tribal, national) balance, but local elites increasingly cast ideas of social liberation and popular representation in specifically ethnic terms. The first vague plans for autonomy in Transcaucasia were emerging, and debates were erupting about the boundaries of “historical territories.” Yet in spite of various historical and ideological approaches to determining territories, the existing network of administrative divisions continued to be used: any ideas about past or future borders inevitably became entangled with the existing administrative map and the need to “correct” it or, in some cases, ensure its permanence.

Map 18 shows how difficult it was in the Caucasus of the nineteenth century to draw territorial borders along ethnic lines without provoking rivalries among local groups throughout the region. Ethnically homogeneous areas existed side by side with interspersed or multi-ethnic enclaves. Not only provinces (oblasts and gubernias) but most of the districts of which they were constituted (okrugs and uezds)—not to mention the cities—were multi-ethnic. But at the same time, the majority of the Caucasus’ individual rural settlements (as opposed to cities) maintained near-total ethnic homogeneity (the imperial statistical service generally had an easy task determining the tribal identification of communities). Thus the ethnoterritorial structure of the Caucasus countryside was characterized not by a mixed population but rather by a mosaic of local ethnic communities.

The complex ethnic structure of administrative units in which “native” inhabitants predominated was promoted by the imperial authorities and in some cases was entirely attributable to their efforts. The heterogeneous composition of the region reduced the threat that it might fragment into separate national areas. The rapid economic development of the Caucasus

in 1880–1890 also heightened the ethnic mosaic effect in many parts of the region, strengthening the “imperial,” heterogeneous, “not ethnically affiliated” nature of these territories. At the same time, given the backdrop of social problems, these factors—economic development and the growing complexity of the ethnic structure of key regional centers—also encouraged a growing demand for collective national rights and privileges, determined on a historical and ideological basis.

To some extent the imperial policy of ethnic selectivity that was aimed at establishing a certain tribal balance had also been carried out before the period of Russification. Underlying the openness of Russia’s upper classes to members of local elites and the empire’s seeming indifference to the ethnic origin of its loyal subjects was a keen awareness of tribal composition (both of administrative offices and the general population). The combining of ethnic groups in staffing and settlement policy and the attention to ethnicity as an organizing principle meant that this factor became increasingly significant in administrative policy, even among the region’s ethnic, tribal elites themselves. Imperial policy was never designed to ignore ethnicity. On the contrary, it played different roles in this policy, which incorporated both blindness to tribal differences and rigid selectivity based on those differences. Such ethnic selectivity helped achieve various local objectives, such as “diluting” politically vulnerable native territories with loyal populations and maintaining a certain level of dominance and homogeneity in primarily Russian areas. In Kuban and Terek Provinces the aim was to maintain not ethnic dominance but the dominance of the Cossacks: non-Cossack Russians also encountered serious difficulties when they tried to settle in Host territories.

Imperial policy and economic growth were factors in the Caucasus’ overall ethnic makeup and the development of the region’s overall internal integrity. At the same time, ethnic interspersal along with agrarian overpopulation and the far from resolved contradictions in the system of land distribution posed a serious threat to the empire’s designs for the region. Such a

threat was present, in particular, in Terek Province, where interspersed groups were given different per-capita land allotments. In heated inter-group conflict the tsarist government strove to support, first and foremost, the status of the Cossacks, the empire’s key social and military bulwark. Forced to accept a significant non-Host Russian population in Cossack districts, in the 1890s the provincial administration resorted to discriminatory measures that limited the number of highlanders allowed to migrate (for employment or settlement) to cities and Host lands. In particular, in 1893 a ban was instituted prohibiting highlanders who were not employed in government service from settling in Grozny and the Russian settlements (slobodas) of Vozdvizhenskaya, Vedeno, and Shatoi. Severe restrictions on freedom of movement for the mountain populations of this province helped preserve the relative ethnic homogeneity of Cossack districts and, to some extent, the highlanders’ districts.

Beginning in the 1860s in Russia, and especially in the Caucasus, the sorts of ethnographic and statistical descriptions of governed territories typical for colonial empires in the second half of the nineteenth century became increasingly common. In the Caucasus the standardizing and sorting-out function of such descriptions continued a long-established tradition of military reconnaissance of the region’s tribes and terrain. In peacetime the objective of this descriptive work was dictated by fiscal considerations and the need to collect various taxes and payments. Along with the tribal identity of groups and locales official forms of various sorts included the standard bureaucratic identification and enumeration of individual households and subjects. A picture of the population detailing social status, property, ethnicity, and religion was used in calculating specific types of payments levied on each group. The payments to which groups were subject varied greatly: Cossacks did not pay taxes but had significant military obligations, such as providing their own weapons, horses, and equipment; Muslims paid a special tax in place of the performance of military duties; peasants paid a household tax that was assessed on the basis of the property