

Applying *Argumentum ad Rossicum* to Explain Processes Underway in the Caucasus

I see the influence of the Polish ethnopolitical myth, or rather that part of it concerning the image of Russia as an “historical enemy”, in the use of *argumentum ad Rossicum* and its variations in explaining various phenomena and processes in the Caucasus. I adopt the concept of *argumentum ad Rossicum* directly from Godwin’s law, also known as *reductio ad Hitlerum* or *argumentum ad Hitlerum*. It states: “As an online discussion grows longer, the probability of a comparison involving Nazis or Hitler approaches 1”, and was jokingly formulated by American lawyer and writer Mike Godwin. He observed that in English-language online discussions, arguments such as “that’s what Hitler did” or “just like the Nazis” are often used to discredit someone’s views, regardless of the subject of their argument. Memes substantively unrelated to the discussion, but which trigger certain feelings in the audience – in this case negative ones – are also used. Godwin gave the example of pro-life movement activists in the United States proclaiming that abortion is worse than Nazi death camps (Godwin 1994). In such argumentation, characteristics of *argumentum ad auditorem*, in which the discussant does not address the substance of the issue but addresses the audience and populistically appeals to the audience’s inclinations and beliefs, show themselves. The aim is to replace factual argumentation to clarify an issue with memes that affect the emotions of the perceiver and evoke certain associations in him.

As the role of the “historical enemy” in the Polish ethnopolitical myth relates primarily to Russia, it is mainly with this country that the arguments I link to Godwin’s Law are associated. These take various forms, but four are most common: *argumentum ad Stalinum*, *argumentum ad Putinum*, *argumentum ad Rossicum*, and *argumentum ad bolsevicum/communismum*. Thus, while American opponents of abortion refer to Hitler to discredit it, Polish opponents refer to Stalin (Dunin 2016).

In contemporary Polish politics, *argumentum ad Rossicum* is one of the more common ploys used to discredit the views of a rival by both the ruling camp and the opposition. Both sides accuse each other of being “Russian agents” or of pursuing Russian interests. The Polish political scene is naturally also host to references to the other “historical enemy”: Germany. This is most often used by members of the Law and Justice party to discredit the actions of Donald Tusk,

against whom a perception is cultivated wherein he acts to the detriment of Poland and to Germany's benefit. In turn, the accusation of being a "Russian agent" is used against political opponents by practically all parties.

In the case of the Caucasus and Russian activity in the region, the method of employing *argumentum ad Hitlerum* Polish authors use more rarely, in addition to the far more frequent phenomenon of *argumentum ad Stalinum/Putinum*. As for the first of these eristic tricks, it appears in the context of Russian activities in Chechnya in the late 1990s, which are juxtaposed with Adolf Hitler's policies and German concentration camps (e. g.: Grochmalski 2005: 54; Kurczab-Redlich 2005: 8; Lisiewicz 2005). This is intended to foster in the reader the notion that the Russians dealt with the Chechens in the same way that the Germans dealt with the Jews during the Second World War. It also happened that one Polish scholar considered the proposal to recognise the independence of Abkhazia as an analogy to actions vis-à-vis Czechoslovakia on the eve of the Munich Conference in 1938 (Potocki 2009: 33).

Occasionally, arguments of the *argumentum ad Hitlerum* type occur simultaneously alongside *argumentum ad Stalinum* and its variations. For example, members of the Free Caucasus Committee issued a statement in February 2000, linked to the 56th anniversary of the deportation of the Chechens, which read that "Even the manner of this new 'strong man' Vladimir Putin is reminiscent of the old methods practised by Joseph Stalin and Adolf Hitler" (Komitet "Wolny Kaukaz" 2000). Among the most prominent scholars who chose to make similar juxtapositions was Paweł Wieczorkiewicz, regarded in Poland as a top expert on the history of the USSR and Russia. During an interview concerning the 2008 Georgian-Ossetian-Russian war, he stated that the Russian forces were continuing the work of the Red Army, and that Putin was Stalin's illegitimate grandson. These associations "were obvious" to the scholar, given Europe's same predicament as the one it was in 1938 (the interview took place in 2008 and Wieczorkiewicz's words referred to that time). He failed then, in his view, even though the Poles recognised the danger and proposed a preventive war to the French in 1933. Wieczorkiewicz went on to claim:

Today too, we Poles, due to our historical experiences, recognise the danger. It is difficult, however, to speak of European unity in the light of Italy's or Germany's pro-Russian stance. History does not only teach fools. Unfortunately, most European politicians are fools who do not look to the future and cannot look to the past. [...] What the Russians are doing with South Ossetia is as if the Germans, instead of organising the Gliwice provocation, had announced in 1939 that the people of Silesia wanted to join the Reich. [...] Paper treaties are no security guarantee for

Poland. In 1939, we also had “hard guarantees” from France and England, and how did that end? In 1939, no one wanted to die for Danzig. And in 2010 – I would rather not be a negative prophet – perhaps no one will want to die for Białystok. (Zychowicz 2008)

Paweł Wieczorkiewicz’s statement is a case in point of national myth construction. He constructs an ahistorical, timeless schema related to the Russian threat. Its essential component is also Poles’ possession of unique knowledge, inaccessible to others, which they acquired through “historical experience”. It is with this knowledge that they aim to save Europe, thus reinforcing the motif of: Poland – a bulwark shielding the West from “Eastern barbarism”. At the same time, however, Poland is ignored by European politicians who are “fools” – probably because they have not acquired the same “knowledge” that the Poles have.

The use of *argumentum ad Rossicum* or *argumentum ad bolsevicum* is characteristic of authors who, on the one hand, have insufficient knowledge of the phenomena occurring in the Caucasus and, on the other, present a committed attitude. Consequently, they reduce the processes taking place – which are primarily negative in the perception of such authors – to “Russia’s actions”, which cannot actually explain anything. For example, using *argumentum ad Rossicum* or *argumentum ad bolsevicum/communismum* in the context of the Azerbaijani-Armenian conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh and pointing out that Soviet/Russian policy was to blame for its outbreak does not require any specialised knowledge. It is much more difficult to analyse the formation of nationalism among Armenians and Azerbaijanis emerging at the end of the 19th century, the economic situation in the region, and other factors still that led to ethnic conflict between these groups. Analysing this requires thorough knowledge, grounded in years of source-material research. All this arduous work becomes replaced by a single banal argument: that the conflict was just a consequence of Russian policy.

The reduction of the Azerbaijani-Armenian conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh to Russian interference is found in both journalistic (Kuleba 1998: 35; idem 2002: 217; Brzeziecki/Nocuń 2016: 116) and academic works (Baziur 2016: 188). In such cases, no substantive argumentation is conducted, or it is unconvincing. The work of one of Poland’s better-known historians writing on the Caucasus, Jerzy Rohoziński, may serve as one example. In his view, the Armenian-Muslim conflict in the Transcaucasus of 1905–1906 was inspired by tsarist secret services and constituted a provocation organised by the tsarist administration. The historian pointed out that admittedly “There are many question marks surrounding all of this, but one thing is beyond doubt: the authorities were behind the riots” (Rohoziński 2014: 935). The use of an oxymoron of sorts is

thus used: while the author sees “many question marks”, at the same time maintaining a conviction that Russian authorities were behind the riots. The aim of such Russian actions is claimed to have been to “channel the people’s anger so as to decimate the ‘uncertain and revolutionary element’” at a time when a wave of strikes was sweeping Baku. According to the historian, with this, the authorities aimed to turn the revolutionary turmoil into an ethnic riot. In this way then, he claims, Russia’s rulers were trying to solve the Armenian problem, for which they themselves were responsible (here, Rohoziński most likely had in mind the management of Armenian settlement across the South Caucasus, though he did not specify this), by the hands of the local Muslims (Rohoziński 2010: 237–238; idem 2014: 916–917).

According to Rohoziński, the early 20th century saw no economic conflict between Muslims and Armenians in the eastern part of Transcaucasia. Instead, the fighting that broke out was a consequence of a plan devised by the Russian authorities, including Mikhail Nakashidze, Baku’s governor, who travelled around and incited Muslims against the Armenians (Rohoziński 2014: 938).

Taking the Muslim side unequivocally, Rohoziński prioritised underscoring Armenian violence against Muslims, writing that in the second half of 1906 there was systematic aggression by Armenians against other ethnic groups in the Elizavetpol Governorate, or that Armenian attacks on Muslims in the Governorate took place with the authorities’ consent. Such statements support notions that killings committed by Armenians against Muslims were Russian provocation, thus the logical consequence of such a view of the matter is that any killings committed by Muslims ought to be classified as merely self-defence. Rohoziński also employed such terms as “Armenian terrorism” and “Armenian mafia” in relation to the early 20th century (Rohoziński 2014: 941–943). Characteristically, he did not apply similar pejorative epithets regarding organised violence to Muslims, which is explainable by his taking of a position that they represented agents solely defending themselves.

Rohoziński’s anti-Armenian attitude, which, I believe, is determined by his anti-Russian views, is clearly visible in his descriptions of killings committed against Armenians in the Ottoman Empire. According to the historian, “pogrom-minded Armenian units from the onset were also responsible for the tragic wave of violence that swept through Anatolia and affected the Armenian population”. He did not specify which “waves of violence” he had in mind, but he probably meant the massacre of Armenians carried out between 1915–1917, during which, according to various estimates, between 1 and 2 million people were exterminated within Ottoman territory (Forsythe 2009: 98). It therefore follows that, in the author’s view, the Armenians are themselves to be blamed for the genocide committed against them.

One would think that to confirm the thesis that the Armenian-Muslim conflict of 1905–1906 was a Russian provocation, the historian should have sought evidence in the archives of Baku, Tbilisi, albeit St. Petersburg or Moscow, but he chose not to do so. He laid out his claims without backing them with source evidence, occasionally citing materials from later years. This is evident, for example, in his assertion that there were no fanatical Muslims in Transcaucasia in the early 20th century, or that if there were, these were provocateurs of the Tsarist Okhrana or Armenian nationalists. To back one claim, Rohoziński cited a document from 1914, i.e. written nine years after the events, in which a Tsarist official pointed out that the programme of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation, adopted in 1913, indicated it would send its people posing as pan-Islamic emissaries to set Muslims against Russia and trigger an uprising. This, in turn, was to lead to repression by Russia and the breaking up of the Muslim community (Rohoziński 2014: 930).

The means of persuasion used by Rohoziński also includes insinuation. He suggested, for example, that the murders of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire in the early 20th century also represented Russian inspirations. When discussing the spread of news in the Transcaucasus of Kurdish attacks against Armenians, the historian used the rhetorical construction: “perhaps it was meant to spread” (Rohoziński 2014: 607), clearly suggesting to the reader that the Russian authorities wanted such news publicised to inflame Armenian-Muslim conflict. Elsewhere, he stated that “the involvement of the authorities seems almost certain” in the riots that took place in Baku during the autumn of 1905 (Rohoziński 2014: 933). This construction was employed by Rohoziński because he likely did not know how to or was unable to bring to bear other arguments supporting his views.

One distinctive feature of Rohoziński’s work is his reduction of the 1905–1906 conflict to a Russian provocation and complete disregard for the complex cultural, economic, or social issues. In doing so, he chose to adopt a biblical-phenomenological stance. Consequently, the reader, in the absence of evidence and testimony, must accept “on faith” the theses of a historian presenting a committed attitude instead of that of an observer, characteristic of academic research.

A thoroughly different approach from Rohoziński’s to explaining the Armenian-Muslim conflict of the early 20th century was laid out by German historian Jörg Baberowski. Drawing on documents from Russian archives, he comprehensively analysed the causes behind the emergence of Armenian-Muslim antagonism in Transcaucasia. However, he avoided reducing this to “Russian provocation”, rather looking for its roots in the deteriorating situation of Muslims in the region caused by industrialisation, which was progressing at

pace in the second half of the 19th century. Particularly unfavourable conditions came about for them precisely in rapidly developing Baku, where pogroms subsequently took place. In explaining the causes of the Armenian-Muslim conflict, Baberowski emphasised such issues as 1) The declining percentage of Muslims in Baku – in 1843, 91% of the city's population was Muslim, while in 1903, Turkic-speaking Muslims accounted for 30%; this process was linked to mass arrivals of economic migrants, mainly Russians and Armenians. 2) The atomisation of Bakuvian society – representatives of different ethnic groups lived in closed communities. 3) The Muslim community disproportionately under-shared in the profits derived from oil production, the main driver of the city's development. 4) The lack of Muslim influence outside the economic sphere, e.g. Baberowski noted that in 1905, out of 258 teachers in Baku, no more than 10 were Muslims. 5) The local Muslim population, in the process of competition, lost contact with the economically developing and urbanised Armenian immigrant community. According to the historian, it was in Baku, as in no other city in Russia, that migrants succeeded in comprehensively undermining the economic and political positions of the local population, an essential ground for future armed conflict. 6) Differences in Armenian and Muslim education – the Armenian community had its own network of schools and had also succeeded in secularising education and making it independent of clerical influence as early as the 1870s. On the other hand, having analysed the schooling available to Muslims, the historian concluded that many of them abandoned their careers and did not pursue an education. He saw the reasons for this, among others, in the peculiarities of local Shiite conservatism, which inhibited the development of secular education. Baberowski noted that a Muslim choosing to pursue an education and a career had to reject the traditional values held by most members of his religious group. As a result, Muslims in 1905 in Bakuvian grammar schools accounted for 6.7% of pupils in female schools and 0.5% in male schools, while Armenians accounted for 43.6% and 37% respectively. 7) The removal of communities from city governance – according to an 1892 tsarist decree, a maximum of 20% of city deputies could be non-Christians. This document, given the context of its creation, was anti-Jewish in intent – in the Caucasus it had a negative impact on Muslims. Consequently, Muslims had an ever-diminishing influence on Baku's power structures, which went to migrants. 8) The rise of Turkic self-consciousness and nationalism. 9) The situation of Muslim workers, the sanitary conditions at their places of work and residence, as well as Muslims' involvement (or rather lack thereof) in the struggle for the protection of workers' rights and social security for Muslim workers. 10) In explaining the causes of the outbreak of armed struggles between Armenians and Muslims in the early 20th century,

Baberowski also conducted an analysis of the conflicts between Muslim and Armenian workers at individual industrial plants (see Baberowski 2004: 307–352). Rohoziński, on the other hand, puts the matter much more simply: the Armenian-Muslim conflict with was a Russian provocation. This positioning of the matter by the Polish historian, however, does not really explain anything, and is at its core reasoning through ideology.

Rohoziński also regarded the Azerbaijani-Armenian conflict of the late 20th century as provocations orchestrated by Moscow decision-makers, with the pogroms in Sumgait as “most likely” organised by the KGB (Rohoziński 2010: 246). On what he based this “probability”, he never cared to explain.

Another historian, Jerzy Targalski, claimed in turn that, Colonel Alikram Hummatov announced the establishment of the Talysh-Mugan Republic in Lankaran in August 1993 at Moscow’s behest (Darski 1998: 134). As is often the case with the use of *argumentum ad Rossicum*, he presented no evidence to support his view, with the reader being expected to accept it relying solely on faith in the author’s good word. Targalski belongs to a group of Polish authors who present this matter as if Hummatov were a separatist seeking to detach the lands inhabited by the Talysh from Azerbaijan, on “Moscow’s orders” at that. It is difficult to agree with such a construction. Hummatov, appearing on Talysh TV on 21 June 1993, announced the creation of the Talysh-Mughan Autonomous Republic within Azerbaijan. At the same time, he did not mention anything about breaking away from the rest of the country.

According to Azerbaijani political scientist Rasim Musabekov, Hummatov’s speech should not be qualified as separatist – neither he nor his supporters called for separation from Azerbaijan. Moreover, no conflicts between Azerbaijanis and Talysh were recorded in the areas that temporarily fell out from the control of the government in Baku. According to this researcher, the most likely explanation is that the declaration of autonomy was intended as a political and ideological screen for an attempted power grab by a group of military officers seeking to rely on local clans, similar to what Surat Huseynov organised in Ganja in May 1993, albeit on a smaller scale and with more modest aims (Musabekov 2011). This thesis sounds more convincing, in my view, than referencing “Russia’s actions”. I thus accept Rasim Musabekov’s explanation as plausible based on currently available sources. In contrast, evidence of Russian involvement in the whole enterprise has not been provided by Targalski, making it difficult to comment. This historian’s approach to the whole issue can be explained by his ideological stance, similarly to his attitude towards the Ossetian-Ingush conflict. Here, too, the researcher concluded that the armed clashes between Ossetians and Ingush at the end of 1992 were a provocation by the Russian authorities. The reason was said to be the search for a pretext

to send federal troops into North Ossetia in connection with the situation in Chechnya. The historian argued that the conflict ended with the murder of several thousand Ingush, with some 70,000 being forced to emigrate, done in accordance with the will of the initiators (by implication, the Russian authorities) (Darski 1998: 127). Thus, instead of addressing the history of the Prigorodny region (with which the conflict was largely linked), the development of an Ingush movement that demanded its incorporation into Ingushetia (or, more precisely, the then Chechen-Ingush ASSR), or the unresolved land disputes between Ossetians and Ingush that had been going on since 1944 (that is, since the Ossetians had taken over the homes and land of those Ingush deported to Kazakhstan), Targalski reduced everything to "Russian provocation". One would also have to inquire whether it was necessary for the Russian authorities to provoke an armed conflict between the Ossetians and the Ingush to have a pretext to send troops into North Ossetia. Were there any obstacles to this before the conflict? After all, Mozdok since Soviet times been home to one of the country's largest military airbases, while Vladikavkaz serves as a major gathering point for various military units. In presenting this case, Targalski also failed to provide any methodology for counting the several thousand victims from the Ingush side. This is an essential matter, given that per official data, 105 Ossetians and 407 Ingush were killed in the clashes (Kuštavkina). Furthermore, the claim of 70,000 expelled Ingush seems greatly exaggerated. According to the 1989 census, North Ossetia was inhabited by some 33,000 Ingush (*Vsesoyuznaya perepis' naseleniya 1989 goda*), and not everyone left the republic as a result of the conflict.

Targalski has also employed *argumentum ad Rossicum* to explain other processes taking place in the South Caucasus, such as an intervention by the KGB explaining the seizure of power in Georgia by Zviad Gamsakhurdia, whom the KGB was said to have supported (Darski 1998: 138). I, however, am unable to uncover any arguments supporting this thesis, while Targalski did not cite any. I once again attribute his stance to the influence of the Polish ethnopolitical myth, the consequence of which was another adoption of a biblical-phenomenological stance by the author. It is difficult to substantiate why the KGB would have helped a Georgian independence activist take power in Georgia. After all, it was Gamsakhurdia who organised anti-Soviet demonstrations in the USSR's final years, was one of the authors of the referendum on Georgian independence, and, once president, blocked Georgia's entry into the Commonwealth of Independent States.

Argumentum ad Rossicum is also used as an explication for many other issues in the Caucasus, above all those concerning ethnic and border disputes. An example is again the opinion of Targalski that it is Russia that stimulates

the Lezgin problem in Azerbaijan, when in fact the Lezgins in that country enjoy cultural autonomy gained as early as 1993, and currently (the article being published in 1998) possess schools with Lezgin as the language of instruction in grades 1–10 along with private radio and television stations (Darski 1998: 125). Here, again, instead of trying to clarify the given issue and cite evidence to support his opinion, Targalski revealed his thesis without presenting any argumentation. Moreover, he presented selective information in such a way as to testify to the good situation of the Lezgins in Azerbaijan. However, there was no Lezgin TV in Azerbaijan in the 1990s. The first such station, Murad TV, only appeared in 2004, and was shut down by the authorities after a few months of operation. It should also be noted that there are not and never have been schools in Azerbaijan with Lezgin language instruction in any grade.

I consider it inappropriate to explain away all manner of problems related to the preservation of the culture and language of the Lezgins, or even Dagestanis more broadly, with “Russian intervention”. In my opinion, Russia prioritises relations with Azerbaijan over assistance to ethnic minorities. One example is the issue of delimitation and demarcation of the Russian-Azerbaijani border. As a result of this, the Russian authorities decided to hand over two villages, inhabited by its citizens of Lezgin origin, to Azerbaijan.¹ In this context, analyses comparing Russia’s policy of securing the “rights and security” of ethnic Russians, e.g. in the context of the annexation of Crimea and the start of a full-scale war against Ukraine in February 2022, to the policy of securing the “rights and security” of Russian citizens who are not ethnic Russians (such as the Dagestani population), would be interesting. Analogous procedures are also employed within Polish journalism, e.g. in constructing the notion that Russia supports Armenian separatists in Javakheti (Winiecki 2008: 50). No analysis or evidence of possible Armenian separatism in Georgia or evidence of Russian involvement therein is presented. While the contentious issues of Armenian-Georgian relations are fairly well known, evidence for “Armenian separatism” supposedly existing in Javakheti is not known to me, much less evidence of Russia’s involvement there.

The characteristic and camouflaged *argumentum ad bolsevicum*, one variation of *argumentum ad Rossicum*, is used in the context of border demarcation within the Caucasus. It was used, for example, by Wojciech Górecki, one of the best-known Polish analysts on the region, who wrote that it was the Bolsheviks who divided the Circassians into three republics: Adygea, Kabardino-Balkaria,

1 Referring to villages Xrax-Uba and Yr’yan-Uba.

and Karachay-Cherkessia, so that in the place of a single strong nation, three miniscule ones would develop (Górecki 2014: 72). In his book, he stated:

The internal borders, now often becoming state borders, cut some nations in half, separated others from their historic provinces, and united others with an eternal enemy within the same republic. The creator of the division of the Caucasus was Stalin, who was himself a Caucasian and knew how to drive a wedge between the mountaineers in order to rule them more easily. (Górecki 2013: 49)

In an article on Chechnya, written during the period of the First Chechen-Russian War, he stated that “the borders inside the USSR, drawn mechanically, dated back to Stalin’s time. If the world has condemned Stalin, then why does it respect his borders?” (Górecki 1995: 8). Here, the author’s argumentation ran as follows: the borders within the USSR were formed “under Stalin” – Stalin had been condemned – the borders drawn inside the USSR ought to be condemned. This is thus an example of using non-substantive argumentation to justify one’s arguments precisely with *argumentum ad bolsevicum*, here employed by the author to criticise how borders run in the Caucasus. This treatment is, in fact, quite common in Polish publications. For example, another authors, in an attempt to prove that Soviet policy was unfavourable towards Georgia, stated that it was the authorities who made significant changes to her borders and detached the Zaqatala District from Georgia, which they then annexed to the Azerbaijani SSR (Sanecka-Tyczyńska 2013: 296). For the authors of the work *Konflikty na Kaukazie* (Conflicts in the Caucasus), on the other hand, the separation of Ossetia into northern and southern parts is an example of “despotic actions of the communists with no regard for national composition” (Bańbor et al. 1997: 158). The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict too was claimed to stem from the border between Armenia and Azerbaijan drawn by the Soviet authorities after the October Revolution (Modrzejewska-Leśniewska 2000: 482–483). In the opinion of Mirosław Kuleba, Stalin, by dividing the autonomous republics in Russia, skilfully created a dozen potential flashpoints. This was to also apply to Georgia, where, according to the author, Abkhazia and South Ossetia served this purpose (Kuleba 2007: 77). Barbara Patlewicz, in turn, believed that the Bolsheviks supported small nations “in order to break down Muslim unity” (Patlewicz 2016: 9). For Piotr Grochmalski and Michał Domański, however, this unification of Caucasian peoples was already a punishment of sorts and attempt to antagonise them, a sign for which they took the creation of the Chechen-Ingush ASSR (Domański 2014: 319; Grochmalski 1999: 69; idem 2012: 279). Thus, it is evident that both “separating” and “unifying” the nations of

the Caucasus are portrayed as Bolshevik foul play, whose hidden aim was to antagonise these peoples.

Similarly to Barbara Patlewicz, that the source of contemporary conflicts is the “artificial ‘creation’ of nations, demarcation of borders detached from reality” by the Bolsheviks was maintained by Maciej Falkowski. In his view, this was precisely how most of the “Dagestani nations”, came into being, not having existed prior to the 1917 revolution. This researcher maintained that earlier, the locals felt themselves to be Muslims and Dagestanis, while the concept of nation in the 19th-century European sense of the word was unknown to them. It was only based on ethnographic and linguistic studies of that time that the Soviet authorities “created” the Avars, Dargins, Laks, and Lezgins, exploiting the linguistic differences that did exist but had nothing to do with ethnic divisions. In Falkowski’s opinion, the theory of Dagestan’s “14 titular nations” introduced by the Communists was then instilled for so long by means of propaganda and the educational system into the inhabitants of the republic that, in their conception, it eventually became an objective truth. The researcher concluded that later, based on these national divisions established several decades earlier, national movements were created (due to Falkowski’s use of the non-personal form of the verb “created”, the reader has no way of deducing who the author thought was doing the creating of these “national movements” – communists, state authorities, civic movements, or individual social activists?) in the 1990s, with the help of which many significant figures on the contemporary political scene were generated. For Falkowski, one example of effective Soviet manipulation of nationality issues was also the creation of the ethnonym “Vainakh” in the 1920s to jointly describe Chechens and Ingush (Falkowski 2010: 44–45).

Maciej Falkowski’s claims raise numerous doubts and provoke a series of questions. What research methods did the author use to investigate who the inhabitants of Dagestan “felt” themselves to be before 1917? Moreover, by what means did he manage to establish this “artificiality” of divisions in relation to the Nakh-Dagestani peoples, and how do these differ from “natural” ones? Can these criteria of “artificiality” also be applied to other linguistic-ethnic groups? It should be noted that there is no “titular nation” in Dagestan (let alone the 14 that Falkowski writes about). An order adopted by the Dagestan State Council on 18 October 2000, i.e. after the collapse of communism in Russia, does enumerate Dagestan’s indigenous peoples. Per this document, they are: Avars, Aghuls, Azerbaijanis, Tsakhurs, Aukh-Chechens,² Dargins, Kumyks, Laks,

2 The Aukhs (endonym: akkxij) inhabit the Novolaksky, Khasavyurtovsky, Babayurtovsky, and Kazbekovsky districts of Dagestan. Some regard themselves as an ethnographic subgroup of the Chechens, others as a people separate from them.

Lezgins, Tats, Tabasarans, Nogais, Rutuls, and Russians (Postanovlenie 2000). This decision was taken because of the adoption by the Duma in 1999 of the law “On guarantees of the rights of indigenous small peoples of the Russian Federation”. With it, the individual entities of the federation were obliged to submit a list of indigenous peoples in order to add them to the Joint Census of Indigenous Small-Scale Peoples of the Russian Federation. In contrast, the Constitution of Dagestan, adopted in 2003, no longer mentions the names of indigenous peoples or their languages. Article 11 only states that: “The state languages of the Republic of Dagestan are Russian and the languages of the peoples of Dagestan” (*Konstituciya Respubliki Dagestan*).

Thus, Maciej Falkowski created an image of communists who, for unknown reasons (the author did not provide any argumentation), decided to divide the previously “unified” inhabitants of Dagestan, at the same time, in an equally “artificial” way, trying to bring about the unification of Ingush and Chechens (interpretable from the author’s claims that the term “Vainakh” was created because of Bolshevik manipulation). Moreover, the researcher did not undertake a substantive analysis of the processes that led to the strengthening of ethnic self-consciousness among the various peoples living in Dagestan and reduced his entire explanation to the application of *argumentum ad bolsevicum*. Like Maciej Falkowski, Jerzy Szukalski also concluded that bringing about the creation of a common Ingush-Chechen entity “was a deliberate political move by the Kremlin to create national antagonisms, as it actually placed one nation in a subordinate role” (Szukalski 2015: 98) Stanisław Ciesielski, on the other hand, argued that the Bolsheviks used the experience of the colonial policy of antagonising conquered peoples when drawing borders, and continued it in the pursuit of their own interests. This policy was to be expressed in the creation of separate autonomous regions, implementing formally the principles of individual ethnic groups’ self-government (Ciesielski 2003: 130).

To my mind, one of the main problems concerning the authors who denigrate the borders existing inside the Soviet Union is that I have not come across any work in which they propose an alternative delineation that would be “fair”, and substantively argue it. In such a case, it would be possible to compare them with the “political” and “unjust” borders drawn by the Soviet authorities. Otherwise, this whole enterprise boils down solely to a negation of Tsarist/Soviet/Russian actions, that is, of the “historical enemy” whose image has been shaped by the influence of the Polish ethnopolitical myth.

I believe that the use of *argumentum ad bolsevicum* in border-related matters is intended to conceal a lack of knowledge of the processes described. For example, a knowledge of the history of Transcaucasia would not allow one to reduce the question of Zaqatala District’s belonging down to a simple decision

by the Bolsheviks to detach it from Georgia (the Georgian SSR) and transfer it to Azerbaijan (Azerbaijani SSR). After the Bolshevik Revolution and the Russian Empire's collapse, Zaqatala District was claimed by the independent states of the Mountainous Republic (now Dagestan), the Democratic Republic of Georgia, and the Democratic Republic of Azerbaijan. Meeting in mid-1918, the Zaqatala People's Council decided to join the region to Azerbaijan. The rejection of incorporation into Georgia was justified by religious barriers (most of the population in the region was Muslim – 92%, Orthodox Georgians constituted 3% (Adres-kalendar' 1919: 125), while Dagestan was viewed unfavourably due to the high mountains separating it and preventing efficient communication. In turn, the council members, in justifying the decision to join Azerbaijan, pointed out that in terms of culture, economy, way of life, religion, also industry and language, this state was most like in Zaqatala District (Xapizov/Galbacev 2016: 151–152). Once Soviet power was established throughout Transcaucasia, this state of affairs was accepted by the central Bolshevik authorities. Similarly, reducing the inclusion of Nagorno-Karabakh into Azerbaijan to a “political decision by the Bolsheviks” ignores a string of issues, such as the traditional economic ties linking the region to the lowlands to the east, which were stronger than those with the area occupied by Armenia, and the ethnic composition of lands surrounding Nagorno-Karabakh with a decidedly predominantly Muslim (Turkic and Kurdish) population. That the Bolsheviks were not the only ones who thought it best to give the region to Azerbaijan is evidenced, among others, by William Thomas, commander of British troops in Transcaucasia after the end of the First World War, who recognised the jurisdiction of the Baku government over this area.

In order to explain the course of borders in the Transcaucasus, both in Soviet and modern times, it is important to emphasise that, to a large extent, borders correspond to the administrative boundaries from the Tsarist period. This is well-illustrated, for example, by the Russian-Azerbaijani border. Both the northern borders of the Democratic Republic of Azerbaijan and the Azerbaijan SSR with Russia were based on the northern borders of Zaqatala District, Elizavetpol Governorate, and Baku Governorate, which were in turn established in 1860 in connection with the creation of Dagestan Oblast. During the Soviet period, they saw minor adjustments, which were mainly related to tweaking the local economy. This occurred when the high-mountain fields and pastures located in one republic were more easily accessible to the workers of the kolkhozes located in another. After 1991, the administrative borders from the Tsarist period became the basis for the demarcation of the borders between Azerbaijan and Russia.

An issue more complicated than borders in the South Caucasus is the question of the borders of the North Caucasus republics currently belonging to the Russian Federation. As far as the creation of Adyghea, Kabardino-Balkaria, and Karachay-Cherkessia is concerned, the view that this took place due to the Bolsheviks' desire to break the Adyghe into three small groups is, in my view, a reductionist explanation based on the negative perception of the Bolsheviks by Polish society. This narrative creates an image of exceptionally "strong" Adyghe, who, for reasons unknown (as no author has explained this), were to be feared by the Bolsheviks. A census carried out in 1926 showed that in the USSR, which had a population of over 140 million, there were around 200,000 Adyghe, that is, 0.15% of the country's population (*Vsesoyuznaya perepis' naseleleniya 1926 goda*). This raises the question whether, indeed, and if so, why, the Bolsheviks were so afraid of such a small group that they decided to break it up further into the said "three nations"? It is worth noting that at the same time, the Ukrainian SSR was inhabited by some 21 million Ukrainians. When the borders of the USSR were being established, memories were fresh of the existence of the anti-Bolshevik West Ukrainian People's Republic and the Ukrainian People's Republic, which functioned until 1919 and 1920 respectively and posed a far greater threat to the Bolsheviks than the anti-Bolshevik movement among the Adyghe. If "dismemberment" of a given nation was to be the main motive for the Bolsheviks' border demarcations, the Ukrainians and, for example, the Georgians, among whom Menshevik sympathies were strong, should have been the first to be affected. Concerning the latter, past events (Georgia's fragmentation) or ethnolinguistic differences between the various Kartvelian peoples would have served an adequate propagandistic basis to justify a need to partition the Georgians. Moreover, linguistic and cultural differences between the eastern and western Ukrainian SSRs could have easily been used by the Bolsheviks to motivate the need to create, for example, two Ukrainian republics.

It should be emphasised that until the conquest of the North Caucasus by Russia, many of the peoples settled there lived in free societies scattered among the mountain valleys. Although some were close to each other in language and culture, they did not form any integrated whole. It was in 19th-century Russia that the rationale for the creation of ethno-territorial units emerged under the conditions of tsarist authorities introducing administrative divisions in mountain districts corresponding to ethnic areas. According to historian Aslan Tsutsiyev, this accelerated integration processes for some peoples, such as between the Irons and Digors, who found themselves in a single administrative unit, while cementing the separateness of others – like the Chechens

and Ingush, as the latter changed administrative affiliation several times (Cuciev 1998: 37–38). However, it was only after the October Revolution that local ethnicities were given political status. Viktor Shnirelman, who addressed the issue of the Bolsheviks' delimitation of administrative boundaries between different North Caucasian units, noted that initially Soviet authorities did not aim to create any ethnic autonomies. The Communists thought that it was more appropriate to have one large administrative unit in the North Caucasus, under full control of the centre, able to ensure the security of the state's southern borders (Šnirel'man 2006: 22). It seems reasonable, therefore, to argue that if the Bolsheviks had indeed feared the 200,000-strong Adyghe, they would not have “split” them into “three nations”, nor would they have created any autonomous unit in which the Adyghe ethnicity was the titular one.

Following the establishment of Soviet power in the North Caucasus in 1920, the idea of creating a single Mountain Republic arose within Stalin's clique, made a reality at the Extraordinary Assembly of the Terek Nations held in Vladikavkaz in autumn. The point of the proposed project was, firstly, to involve the mountaineers themselves in the management of their affairs in place of Russian officials, and, secondly, to permanently separate them from the Cossacks so as to avoid endless conflicts between them, primarily over land. It was also decided to maintain the *sharia*- and *adat*-based legal system within the republic (Šnirel'man 2006: 26). I find the interpretation presented by Shnirelman convincing. At the same time, I consider unjustified the claim presented by Polish historians that if in 1918 Stalin stated: “[...] the demarcation of people in a given oblast should take place not based on national characteristics, but based on class [...]”, what he actually meant was that newly created Caucasian autonomies could not be governed by local peoples (Grochmalski 1999: 67). I view this as a serious over-interpretation, not supported by research material, but instead intended to create the idea that the Bolsheviks were already by 1918 planning to pursue a nationality policy towards the Caucasus mirroring Tsarist officials.

The Mountain Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic was established on 20 January 1921 at the Mountain Organisational Congress, with its administrative centre in Vladikavkaz and recognised by the All-Russian Central Executive Committee (hereafter the VtSiK – Vserossijskij Tsentralny Iсполnitelny Komitet). It consisted of districts formed on an ethnic basis, such as Kabardian or Chechen. Dagestan at this time was declared an Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic, stemming from its extremely complex ethnic composition. The Dagestan ASSR proved to be a stable creation; it survived until 1991, when its name was changed to the Republic of Dagestan.

The fate of the Mountain ASSR, which proved to be an unstable entity, was a different story. Viktor Shnirelman advocated the thesis, to which I also

subscribe, that one reason for this was that some 60% of its administrative apparatus consisted of Russian officials who did not know nor cared to understand local historical and cultural conditions. Resultantly, the central administration did not enjoy authority within the individual districts, where power was held by the local population. Moreover, chauvinism and discrimination against mountaineers was commonplace in the larger cities of the Caucasus, where all important decisions were made by Russian officials. This was what led the authorities of the various districts to plan to break away from the republic. The second reason for the Mountain ASSR's disintegration were land issues under conditions of endemic famine, exacerbated by a policy of mass resettlement of former nomads – cattle breeders. The Soviet authorities abolished private ownership of land and nationalised it. Belonging to the Mountain ASSR thus proved beneficial primarily to those groups in whose favour the land was allocated. In contrast, those who had held this land before felt disadvantaged (Šnirel'man 2006: 27).

Viktor Shnirelman pointed out that in Western European literature the consensus was that the disintegration of the Mountain ASSR was linked to the Soviet authorities' desire to break up the unity of the Caucasian peoples, as well as to curb Pan-Islamic and Pan-Turkic tendencies. This was said to be done by fragmenting larger national groups or by uniting peoples belonging to different language families under a single autonomy. At the same time, he noted that authors promoting such theses rely primarily on the opinions of North Caucasian emigrants who found themselves in Europe after the establishment of Soviet rule in the Caucasus. The latter were particularly interested in creating an image of unity between local peoples in the face of the totalitarian power they believed Russia embodied. Such a framing of the issue lacks serious merit. For Shnirelman, no more explanatory are the claims, originating in Soviet times, emphasising the ethnic diversity that supposedly requiring the mountaineers' separation so as to bring them into the fold of the Soviet system. Thus, the main reason for the creation of the separate autonomies was, on the one hand, the land issue and, on the other, the dissatisfaction of individual constituent units with the Mountain ASSR's authorities, which were dominated by Russian officials (Šnirel'man 2006: 29). I accept these explanations as credible and consider them a response to the considerations of Iwona Kaliszewska, who deemed it difficult to ascertain why the Mountain ASSR disintegrated and concluded that the issue should be considered either in the context of a "divide and rule" policy or a desire to put into practice a "great reform project" aimed at creating an empire of free nations (Kaliszewska 2016: 91).

Shnirelman's research indicated that the authorities of Kabarda (Kabardian District), led by Betal Kalmykov (chairman of the local Revolutionary Committee), were the most adamant in seceding from the Mountain ASSR.

Furthermore, they were dissatisfied with the republic's authorities' policy of land distribution, which deprived Kabardians of their traditional holdings in the region. For this reason, as early as May 1921, Kabarda announced its desire to leave the Mountain ASSR. Disregarding protestations by the republic's authorities, Kabarda found support in Stalin, who believed that with the establishment of Soviet power in Transcaucasia, the existence of a single republic in the North Caucasus had become unnecessary. The support received from the People's Commissariat for Nationalities resulted in the establishment of the Kabardian Autonomous Oblast in September 1921 by order of the VTsIK. With Kabarda's exit from the republic, it made no sense for Balkaria, which was economically intricately linked to the former, to remain within it. This was well-understood inside Kabarda, spurring talks around unification from the outset. Consequently, the Kabardino-Balkarian autonomy was established in 1922 (Šnirel'man 2006: 29).

The Karachay authorities announced their desire to leave the Mountain ASSR in May 1921. By autumn, Cherkessia, then part of the Kuban-Black Sea district, too began demanding secession. Congresses of the Karachays, Circassians, Nogais, and Abazins took place throughout October and November, calling for the reunification of Karachay and Cherkessia. The issue was taken up by the Council of the People's Commissariat for Nationalities at the beginning of January 1922, which formulated a proposal that the Karachay-Cherkess Autonomous Oblast should be created alongside the Kabardino-Balkarian Autonomous Oblast. The latter was established by order of the VTsIK a few days later. Šnirelman pointed out that power struggles between the titular ethnicities lasted throughout. Due to a lack of compromise and mutual resentment, in the spring of 1926 the Karachay-Cherkess Autonomous Oblast was disbanded; in its place were formed the Karachay Autonomous Oblast, the Cherkess National District, while some areas were incorporated into Armavir District of North Caucasus Krai.

Viktor Šnirelman explained the greater stability of Kabardino-Balkaria compared to Karachay-Cherkessia partly by economic and partly by ethnic issues. Firstly, the Balkars, who lived in the high mountain gorges, could not engage in their traditional cattle grazing without access to pastures belonging to Kabardians and Nogais located on the plains, and so were somewhat economically dependent on them. The Karachays also rented grazing land from the Circassians, but were not as strongly dependent on them as the Balkars were on the Kabardians. Secondly, the Kabardians were clearly dominant in Kabardino-Balkaria in demographic terms, while the proportions between Turkic and Adyghe peoples in Karachay-Cherkessia were more balanced. For this reason, the power struggle among ethnic leaders was much greater in the latter case than in the former (Šnirel'man 2006: 30).

The question of creating a separate autonomous region out of Chechnya was put forward in the autumn of 1922 and considered positively by the VTsIK. At the same time, as Viktor Shnirelman noted, all administrative offices were concentrated in Grozny, though the city itself with its petrochemical infrastructure formed a separate administrative unit. Thus, by December 1922, only the Vladikavkaz, Nazran and Sunzha Cossack districts remained within the Mountain ASSR. This meant that among the republic's Caucasian population, only Ossetians and Ingush were left, between whom existed an insoluble problem of land distribution. It is apparent that for a time the Soviet authorities sought to preserve the republic for this reason, fearing that its division into Ingush and Ossetian parts would exacerbate these agrarian disputes. Despite this fact, the republic ultimately fell apart in 1924 (Šnirel'man 2006: 30).

Shnirelman observed that with the Mountain ASSR's disintegration, the issue of setting borders between the emerging political-administrative units appeared. Representatives of the various peoples sought to establish "historical settlement boundaries of individual ethnicities". However, due to the ethnic mixing and local economic relations, in which a considerable role was played by the grazing of cattle and sheep on seasonal pastures, the demarcation of clear boundaries proved impossible, and their "correctness" was constantly questioned by one of the national groups. As this researcher underlined, an important change occurred where previously (before the creation of ethno-territorial units) when land conflicts concerned individual communities or landowners and could be resolved through traditional mechanisms, they now touched upon the interests of considerable political autonomies, with the central state administration gradually taking on the role of arbiter. Thus, local conflicts moved to a new, previously unknown level. This made them particularly acute; the border disputes so common in the North Caucasus's history began transforming from localised conflicts into interethnic/inter-republic ones. In Shnirelman's view, one report by the VTsIK commission, which dealt with the North Ossetia-Ingushetia border issue in 1924, was symptomatic. It read:

In their border disputes, the leaders of the workers of Ingushetia and Ossetia do not start from notions of simple administrative separation of their *oblasts*, convenience of administration, or the Soviet structure, but process their dispute as one concerning political boundaries between their nations. This is evidenced by the repeated references of these comrades to historical documents and monuments of bygone eras. (Šnirel'man 2006: 31)

Viktor Shnirelman also stressed that these mountainous *oblasts*, which suffered from land shortages in the past, had significantly increased their acreage at the expense of Cossack territories. He cited Ingushetia as one example, which in the 1920s expanded the area of her agricultural land by some 100,000 hectares that had been cultivated before the establishment of Soviet rule by Cossacks. The national Communists at the head of individual units at the time thus had no reason to push back against the central authorities (Šnirel'man 2006: 31).

In the second half of the 1920s, however, a policy of centralisation emerged inside the USSR, prompted by the view that the presence of various small autonomies was an anachronism and that Soviet officials ought to merge them into larger units. Here, too, manifested the diverse and often conflicting interests of the various ethnicities in the North Caucasus, overlapping with the political intentions of decision-makers in Moscow. Added to this was the Soviet system's gradual evolution, which was becoming increasingly oppressive, even towards party activists. This is well-illustrated by the case of Irdis Zyazikov, first secretary of the Communist Party Committee of the Ingush Autonomous Region, who stood firm against the incorporation of Vladikavkaz into North Ossetia. This led to his removal from politics, arrest, and execution sentence. Following these events, the obduracy of the Ingush Regional Committee categorically weakened, and Vladikavkaz was joined to North Ossetia. Consequently, plans for the reunification of Ingushetia and Chechnya, which had previously been blocked by Zyazikov, among others, resurfaced. This was influenced, among other things, by the previously mentioned lack of urbanization within Ingushetia.³

The establishment of politico-administrative borders in the North Caucasus was thus a multifaceted issue in which quite a few different interests, both ethnic and political, clashed. Among Polish authors, this issue is often reduced to a Bolshevik desire to carve up local peoples. To this end, a non-substantive *argumentum ad bolsevicum* is employed, possessing no explanatory power. Instead, it boils down to criticising “bad” and “unjust” borders because they were established by the Bolsheviks for political reasons. These “political reasons” remain unaddressed, as I do not believe that the claim that the Bolsheviks were guided by a principle of “divide and rule” or sought to turn the local peoples against

3 According to the 1939 census, the largest town within Ingushetia was Nazran, which had a population of just under 3,000, of whom approximately 30% (i.e. 800 people) were Ingush.

each other explains anything. What was to be the purpose of such antagonisation? What was the purpose of division? Did these peoples previously have any sense of community? How did they themselves view this division? How was it that the divisions made by the Bolsheviks, if in fact “artificial”, were accepted by the region’s peoples, whose representatives populated, after all, the regional power structures? In the above narrative, all these questions remain unanswered.