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## SOME OBSERVATIONS ON THE CAUCASUS By Johan Galtung\*

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Contrary to what has been said by some I do not find the situation in the Caucasus that unique. In a world with about 200 countries and 2,000 nations, but only 20 nation-states, the Caucasus is not the only place where the nations inside states do not appear neatly, side by side, in geographical space, but as nations dwelling inside nations dwelling inside nations, in a Matrioshka/Chinese boxes manner. This pattern is particularly frequent in mountainous regions with complex topographies, from the Himalayas to the Pyrenees, facilitating the survival of pockets within pockets. This calls for innovative approaches, like twisting the famous Mobius strip so that a line can be drawn from A to B without crossing the edge.

The concrete consequence is that any process of self-determination not only happens in parallel but at a series of levels: a nation (Georgia) separates from a "super-nation" (the USSR) and is confronted with a "sub-nation" (Abkhazia) in its midst, which in turn may be confronted with "sub-sub nations" etc. in waiting. There will be first order self-determination (e.g., for Croatia), then comes the second order self-determination (e.g., for the Serbs in Kraina), then the third order self-determination (e.g., for the Croatian minority inside the Serbian minority inside Croatia).

There is nothing unique in the combination of local, state and regional conflicts. The "super-nation" (USSR, Yugoslavia) may have offered protection to the sub-nation which a newly independent state, fueled by pent-up nationalism, is not willing to offer. The region may then appeal to their former protectors. The matrioshka structure invites cooperation between super-nations and sub-nations given that they have a common enemy.

There is nothing unique in Georgia either in the combination of cultural/historical factors, elite power struggles, or outside intervention. The situations in the Caucasus and in Yugoslavia are quite similar. Russian interventionism in its «sphere of interest» is not unique either. Big powers tend to see intervention as a right and duty. The USA has so far intervened militarily almost 100 times in Latin America, once even annexing half of Mexico. The behaviour of Russia towards Belarus or of the US towards Canada can be characterised as relatively decent; the behaviour of czarist and Bolshevik Russia towards the Caucasus however, is to the contrary, atrocious, just as the behaviour of the US - both under Democrat and Republican presidents ) was towards Central and South America. There is even a coupling between the two, demonstrated by the Bush-Gorbachev 1989 meeting in Malta and by the interventions of the US in Panama and of the Soviet Union in Baku right afterwards. As the Africans say: when elephants fight the grass suffers; when elephants make love it is also the grass that suffers. The Russian market is considerably more attractive to the USA than any national Caucasian market.

There is nothing unique in the combination of political, military, economic and cultural factors in the Caucasus. Most inter-state or inter-nation conflicts contain all four elements. There is never any isolated "clash of civilizations". The Caucasus, or some parts of the Caucasus, may become more attractive to the US through oil or investment incentives. Reading Latin American history may serve as a warning against too much hope for secure US investments in the region, and reading Middle East history argues against a narrow, myopic focus on oil and pipelines. When an empire like the USSR disintegrates, and in addition privatizes, many assets are up for grabs: do they belong to Russia, Georgia or Abkhazia? It is tempting to "let the weapons decide". But the consequence is that each war will invite another war to obtain a new "decision".

I have to warn against any reductionism in explaining the conflict. First, most human conflicts are very complex in terms of the number of parties and the number of goals they pursue, making reductionism empirically and theoretically misleading. Second, it is pragmatically wrong: by simplifying the conflict it becomes even more intractable, producing and reproducing polarized single-enemy images. Instead of getting rid of the problem one will try to get rid of the enemy. If one thinks in this way, wars will proliferate.

It is fruitless to suggest that all conflicts are due to decisions made in Moscow/Russia. Such decisions certainly play a major role. But removing the

Russians from the scene does not remove conflicts between Georgians and Abkhazians over such important issues as language and education, or between Azerbaijan and Armenia over territory in Nagorno-Karabakh. In short, we must be willing to consider the conflicts in Caucasia in their full complexity, including the involvement of other major foreign powers such as Turkey and Iran. For that reason, the journalistic habit of naming a conflict after the place where the violence occurred should not be followed. The term "Abkhazian conflict" is at best a short version for the "Abkhazia-Georgia-Russia" conflict, which again may be a short version for the "conflict over and in the Caucasus, enacted in Abkhazia". The point is that both the best basis for a diagnosis and the therapy has to be found in the complexity of the conflict situation.

Let us now move from these more structural considerations to considerations on the "cultural mentality", and more particularly on three cultural traits that seem to pose considerable obstacles for any Caucasian peace process. They are: the warrior mentality, the "chief" mentality and the victim mentality. There are, of course, other traits like the classical five of so many "traditional" societies: hospitality, generosity, courage, honor and dignity. Shota Rustaveli's beautiful "The Knight in the Panther's Skin" is one unforgettable presentation of these themes. However, the three traits I have mentioned merit attention.

### **The warrior mentality**

The man on horseback is a frequently found statue in Caucasia; textbooks abound in references to the warrior hero. There are several archetypal ideas in this mentality, by no means limited to the Caucasus region, that merit attention.

First, a low threshold for violent action. Violence, being a professional pursuit, is seen as natural and normal, deplorable for the victims but something to be expected like plagues, storms, lightning, earthquakes. Those things just happen. The courageous warrior exposes himself to the risk of being killed. A frequent argument heard against Russians was that they were sitting safely in their tanks shooting at civilians. True or false, this is the type of violence ruled out by warrior ethics and constitutes another reason for anti-Russian sentiment.

Second, conflicts are about winning, not about solving. Transforming a conflict into a duel or a battle makes this true by definition. With no strong alternative conflictual concepts around, behaviour aiming at winning, i.e., imposing one's own goals at the expense of the other parties, will flourish.

Third, negotiations are also about winning and not about solving. If this applies to the battle, so also the table becomes a verbal battle-field. The problem is how to mobilize arguments, e.g., backed up by international law, to outsmart, or undermine the other side.

## **The Chief/Sheik Mentality**

The warrior tradition distributes access to violence (among other males at least) more evenly than the aristocratic tradition; the chief/sheikh tradition does the opposite where access to power is concerned. Decisions about war and peace, about foreign policy, are taken by those high up; there is nothing one can, or should, do about it. Civil society may exist, may discuss and may even propose, but the chief disposes. An election appoints a new chief; between elections he rules exactly the way sheikhs/chiefs used to. And the people submit, although they quickly start looking forward to the next election if he does not deliver concrete results. What is new about democracy is not the way the chief rules but that his rule has a time limit. When time is up, and that is the second point, a peaceful transition to a new chief, rather than a violent successor struggle, is in the democratic repertory. These are no small gains, but the chief mentality remains.

## **The Victim Mentality**

There has been enormous suffering, even genocide, at the hands of others. Each group will demand undivided attention and focus on its trauma, including how to deal with the evil-doer. Each group is, however, unwilling to grant this attention to others. Hence a dialogue easily takes the form of parallel monologues: nobody listens but each participant articulates his grievances. This bunker mentality, which may be explained psychologically, is the perfect recipe for the preservation of the status quo. Any new idea will either be left uncommented upon or will be pushed aside, not necessarily because the idea is bad but because it does not put the opponents' own concerns in the centre of the discussion. It is this combination of incompatible cognitive and emotional maps that matters.

The three mentalities favour the acceptance of a "big chief". All that big chiefs have to do is to promise that all these concerns will be attended to, including the punishing of all the evil-doers. This is a good strategy for gaining support through the politics of clientelism. In doing so, the big chief will prepare the ground for his opposite number in the other state/nation with mirror cognitive maps. The two will produce and reproduce each other and similar "leaders" all over the place. The dialectics of this process is self-perpetuating and frightening.

The three mental characteristics lead to the search for an intervening patron and big power. The triple mentality makes the political work relatively easy for any big power that comes around. If it is the only power operating in the region, it is presumably in a position to impose a settlement. The oxymoron "military solution" is often used in this context. The great power is certainly a chief. Leaving decisions to it is to its benefit and is nourished by the "chief mentality" of the smaller state. The big power can punish the evildoer and emerge salient and valiant. Ultimately the big power may go too far, is unmasked, and some

clients start looking around for a new chief, equally willing to declare that this new power is the natural centre, the *primus inter pares*, and that it will offer the protection so badly needed by the client country. And so the carousel continues rotating. To be governed by such assumptions is sometimes referred to as 'realpolitik', but it is actually "idealist" in the sense of abstracting from reality. Generally speaking, women are less infected than men by these syndromes. Women have certainly been victims. But they are less convinced by the warrior mentality and the chief mentality. They are less obliged to be true believers in such ideas. Being less infected, women are also more free to formulate alternative ideas.

But how to start; how could Georgia begin a de-escalation process? Georgia has to come to grips with its multi-national reality. Any effort to impose Georgian language or historiography on Abkhazians, Ajarans, Ossetians and others will be resented as much as any Russian effort to do the same with Georgians. The Swiss approach to language is interesting: people are taught all three (four) languages, but if they end up with a good active knowledge of their own and some passive knowledge of the other languages, they may all understand each other when they speak their own language, for instance in parliament. Would federalism be a good solution for Georgia? Perhaps there is something to the old Chinese saying, "In strength there is weakness and in weakness strength"?

The key to conflict transformation by peaceful means in the Caucasus lies in cooperation, based on democracy and human rights. With three states and about 28 nations in the region, any part is too weak to survive alone in the modern world. Together they may complement each other economically and culturally and stand up politically against the pressure from the outside. Particularly useful for the present purpose have been proposals put forward by the three women. Naira Gelashvili calls for a Common Caucasian House for all Caucasian people and a Caucasian civil society; Ludmila Haroutunian advocates a Caucasian Confederation with six members (Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan and then Abkhazia, Ossetia and Nagorno-Karabakh); Arzu Abdullaeva urges policies of dual citizenship.

The basic philosophy is to derive strength from internal cooperation, but not the type of strength that may be perceived as threatening to anybody else. Outside (great) powers are invited in as observers if they so want, but not as decision-makers, not even as mediators. Friendly, transparent, non-provocative, and also equitable among outside (great) powers, yet determined and autonomous, that would be the basic mentality that would make Caucasian cooperation a success.

### **Cooperation in the Caucasus: Some Observations**

The basic concern of Cooperation in the Caucasus is security, and the basic approach would be through practical cooperation and dialogue. Hence, a Conference/Organization for Security and Cooperation in the Caucasus

(C/OsCC), possibly on a pan-Caucasian basis, with a permanent Security Council and under the auspices of the OSCE, might be a first step. Caucasians would be masters in their own house. Minorities that feel uneasy within a given state should be invited to raise their concerns at the Caucasian level, with other Caucasians serving as mediators. A Caucasian Parliament would sooner or later have to follow, raising such questions as whether the members should be appointed by their state parliaments or elected by popular vote (the two stages in the history of the European Parliament).

A useful model is probably the Nordic Council because the 9 units that are members are of different kinds: five independent countries (Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Finland and Iceland), one semi-independent (Greenland), two island groups that are parts of Denmark (Faroe Islands) and Finland (Åland Islands, Swedish-speaking, neutralized) and one nation straddling the three countries of Norway, Sweden and Finland (the Sami). Although far from the Caucasian complexity, the formula is non-conventional. However, having a voice does not mean having a vote. Another model for a Caucasian Parliament might have two houses, one for the states and one for the nations of the Caucasus.

The latter might be for articulation of concerns, or for decision-making, with a particular institutional mechanism (as in the US Congress) in case of disagreement between the two houses.

A special concern of a Caucasian Parliament might be to look into the possibilities of dual citizenship -- one for the state in which a person lives and one for the state of the nation with which he identifies. Special attention would be paid to the problems of double voting, military service and taxation. This type of cooperation could start without prejudging the outcome later on, such as a Council for Cooperation, a Common Market, a Community, a Confederation or even a Federation.

### **A Beginning: a Zone of Peace in the Middle of the Caucasus**

The three South Caucasian countries, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, are fortunate to have a three-countries point - ěKrasnyi Most%, (Red Bridge) - an area that is sparsely populated and with neither mountains nor lakes. The Nordic countries might wish they had such a point in an advantageous geographical location (in fact, only Denmark and Sweden come close, the three-countries point for Norway-Sweden-Finland is in very difficult terrain). If each country could make available some square kilometers for a zone of cooperation, development and peace around this point (while remaining the owners of their part) Caucasian cooperation may move from declarations to reality even quickly.

Culturally, the zone could be the site of major cultural festivals, and not only for youth, combining music and singing with dialogues (say, in groups of ten

persons) producing concrete ideas for cooperation, development and peace, giving prizes for the best ideas, handing them over to politicians as a gift from the people - all of this in search of UNESCO's goal: Peace Culture. Permanent exhibitions and ecumenical dialogues might also be considered.

Economically, the zone could accommodate a regional airport with good highway connections to the three capitals (thereby also connecting them with each other). International airlines that would not call on the three countries singly might be attracted by a regional facility (in the future a joint caucasian airline might also be attractive). An economic zone for joint enterprises, particularly in the export sector following Japanese models, would be important.

The zone would be demilitarized or at least devoid of any offensive capability. Training here for peace missions by a Caucasian Peacekeeping Force might be worth considering. Politically, this might be a neutral ground on which to place Caucasian institutions for functional cooperation in such fields as environment or security (eg. a Conference/Organization for Security and Cooperation in Caucasus, C/OSSC, affiliated with the OSCE; or a Caucasian Security Council in general). Should the region declare itself a community, or even a confederation, then this would be the logical site for a Caucasian Assembly, whether it is with one house (for countries) or two houses (an additional house for nationalities). The outside world could be invited in as observers. The four great powers could verify that there is nothing in this concept directed against them. For the North Caucasus the three-countries point has however no symbolic value; cooperation with that region within a Pan-Caucasian formula might find other venues more appropriate. Concreteness is a friend but it may also become an enemy. The value of a zone of peace is as a source of inspiration, a first place to practice some ideas.

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## Notes:

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