Prämierte Arbeiten

"If there is no cry of the soul, dragging everyone along is difficult"

Forms of authority and boundary work of chechen diaspora organizations in austria

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HEFT 13

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Inhalt

Executive Summary

This study explores the organizational landscape of the Chechen diaspora in Austria, focusing on how diaspora leaders gain recognition as authorities and how they navigate social and symbolic boundaries within their community and with the host society. The research expands Weber's ideal types of authority by highlighting the complex interplay of knowledge, status, and legitimacy that shapes leaders' authority. By examining the Chechen leaders' command of epistemic capital and their ability to adapt to new systems of meaning, the study reveals how leaders accumulate different forms of authority.

The legitimacy of Chechen leaders is rooted in the system of meaning within their community. Women leaders gain legitimacy through their adherence to traditional Chechen practices, regardless of a strong religious orientation. Leaders who can adapt to new systems of meaning in the host community and validate new knowledge also become legitimate authorities. The traditional type of authority, influenced by the Chechen custom of respecting elders and the teip system, intersects with substantive-rational authority through the experiences of leaders who lived in the late Soviet Union. These leaders often act as mediators between the Austrian bureaucracy and the informal networks of the Chechen community, enhancing their legitimacy and authority in the diaspora.

Since authority in organizational contexts is dispersed, authority in terms of *power-over* is prominent when working with young people, while authority in other cases lies in empowering others (*power-to* function). The study reveals that despite being perceived as fragmented by Chechen leaders, the diaspora remains connected through the creation of diasporic organizations, which serve as platforms for maintaining a sense of belonging and outward legitimacy.

The research underscores the coevolutionary relationship between organizational fields and boundaries, demonstrating that diasporic organizations actively engage with external boundaries. Chechen leaders modify symbolic boundaries rather than substantially altering them, using strategies such as expansion, blurring, and contraction. Gender dynamics play a certain role in the community, with women leaders engaging in both emancipatory activism and occasionally reinforcing the gender division by targeting female representatives of the Chechen community. The impact of traumatic events, such as war, can accelerate boundary strategies and shift the form of authority towards a more charismatic one, which can determine a significant change in symbolic boundaries.

However, it is important to note that the study's findings are limited to a spe-

cific cohort of Chechen leaders in Austria who are more active in the diaspora. A more comprehensive understanding would require including apolitical and conservative actors within the Chechen community.

1. Dispersed diaspora: understanding Chechen communities in Austria

In late March 2022, the Lentos Art Museum in Linz gathered around 200 people – Chechens and Austrians, Russians, and Germans, speaking different languages but united under one roof. During the event, a group of young Chechens presented their stories and visual narratives which involved warm memories and longing for (imagined) home, the childhood recollections of two Chechen wars, and intergenerational trauma of the 1944 deportation. The audience consisted of activists, artists, parents of young participants and Chechens who came from different cities of Austria and Europe. The event was the culmination of a nine-month art project *Stimm*Raum*, organized with the help of *Soziale Initiative* and *Integrationsstelle Oberösterreich*.

With 35,000 people (Gauquelin 2022), Austria is the first country hosting Chechens in Europe in proportion to its population. As such, the number of visitors at Lentos does not seem that significant. One of the reasons for it is that the Chechen community in Austria is far from one homogenous entity; even active diaspora members do not always participate in the same activities. This diverse landscape has been partly determined by the immigration waves from Chechnya that began during the second war in Chechnya and continue to this day due to human rights violations, political as well as economic reasons. At the same time, the dynamics of Chechen social life, forms of organization and everyday interaction in the diaspora are explained not only by the contextual dimension of immigration, which is linked to relations between the homeland and the population abroad, but also by the interaction between the host country and the immigrants and, finally, by the cultural aspects of Chechen life.

The "homeland–diaspora" nexus has significant implications for the activities of Chechen actors in the diaspora. Since 2007, the leader of Chechnya, Ramzan Kadyrov, began to establish ties and, more importantly, to exercise control over the Chechen diaspora in Europe (Milashina 2019). For more than a decade, Kadyrov has steadily tried to eliminate all forms of opposition

and dissent not only within Chechnya but also outside, including journalists, human rights defenders, and active members of the Chechen diaspora in Europe. Despite increasing control over the diaspora, members of Chechen communities in Europe have been mobilizing to create organizations with competing agendas.

First, in many European cities, especially where Chechen communities are most numerous, e.g., France, Germany, Belgium, and Austria, there are associations with an explicitly political focus. Almost all of them are representations of the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria, a government-in-exile, which operates mainly in Europe and has its constitution, governmental structure, and even symbolic passports. In Austria, Ichkerians are represented by *Kulturverein Ichkeria* which is mostly involved in the organization of demonstrations, protests, and cooperation with other diasporas in the country. Second, some organizations have goals other than political. For example, the above-mentioned event in Linz had a purely cultural objective, while also promoting integration with the preservation of Chechen identity and traditions. This is just one example of dozens of existing organizations in Austria that take the form of initiatives, projects, and clubs. There are also religious associations – mosques and praying rooms, which continue to play a special role in immigration.

The described organizations, which I characterize as diaspora organizati-

ons (DOs), have horizontal structures, but at the same time the prominent role of one or sometimes two leaders. The possibilities of both external and internal interaction and exchange between organizations and their leaders in Austrian cities are not evident to the outsider. These considerations raise further questions as to why Chechens in Austria recognize organizational leaders as authorities and if the creation of organizations by such leaders is a logical outcome of working on behalf of the community. A related issue is the matter of existing or imagined social ties in diaspora communities, which are in constant interaction with the position of diaspora community leaders. This concerns the types and varieties of boundary work strategies Chechen leaders implement in their activities and how they affect the Chechen community(-ies). All these questions touch upon the matter of agency and structure, which is not understood in terms of a strict dualism but as two phenomena that are to be studied together and complement each other.

I intend to theoretically analyze formal and informal leaders of Chechen organizations in Austria by utilizing the (post-)Weberian concept of authority, as it embraces the questions of the leadership grounds, the leaders' functions, and roles in communities. Moreover, few studies addressed the issue of authority in more fluid and fragmented contexts as in immigrant communities (Bourgoin, Bencherki, and Faraj 2020). The theorization of forms of authority in

civil society or the 'third' sector remains a rather unexplored area in social sciences, as it does not fit into the "classic" approach to authority, which considers political leaders, professionals, or religious authorities (e.g., Cheong 2017), and does not fully correspond to the "managerial" lens, either (e.g., Casey 2004).

2. The state of research and theoretical grounds

2.1 Diaspora studies and Chechens in Austria

Numerous scholars have addressed the topic of diaspora community mobilization, accentuating various issues: diaspora engagement in conflict and post-conflict societies (Koinova 2018; Moss 2020), identity mobilization (Brinkerhoff 2009), political mobilization in host countries (Godwin 2018) or diaspora mobilization for development (Craven 2021). Most of these authors use the definition of diaspora mobilization coined by Koinova (2016, 501), namely "individual and collective actions of identity-based social entrepreneurs who organize and encourage migrants to behave in a concerted way to make homeland-oriented claims, bring about a political objective, or contribute to a cause."

Although different Chechen communities across Europe are not necessarily maintain actual and frequent transnational social relationship or participate in organized activities, some features of their "diasporality" can be noted. These are self-imagination of a dispersed community (Sökefeld 2006), home orientation (Brubaker 2005) as well as "the ability to address the collective interests of members of the social collectivity through a developed internal organizational framework" (Adamson and Madeleine Demetriou 2007). As Koinova (2014, 1046) rightly noted "since diasporas are not monolithic, but often include competing groups, I use 'diaspora' for social collectivities and 'diaspora entrepreneur' for individual and institutional activists who make claims on behalf of their original homelands."

The Chechen diaspora in Europe is a recent phenomenon. However, over the past two decades, scholars have addressed issues of identity construction among diasporic Chechens (Ilyasov 2017, 2021), integration of Chechens in host-societies (Janda 2003; Molodikova 2015; Molodikova 2019), the legal factors, namely the interaction of Shariah, Adat and positive law in Chechen com-

munities (Sagaipova and Wilhelmsen 2021) and gender aspects in everyday life of diasporic Chechens (Procházková 2002; Szczepanikova 2012). In the Austrian context, much of the research on Chechen migrants and their descendants has been conducted through the lens of "integration," emphasizing "failed integration," criminal inclinations and Islamism, as well as traumatic post-war experiences (Preitler 2004). Concurrently, interest in the everyday life of the young second generation of Chechens in Austrian cities has been intensifying (Trojer 2014; Lauß 2016).

Academic trends have largely coincided with the public discourse on Chechens in Austria. Given that one of the media subjects is the religious radicalization of Chechens, the Austrian context as an external categorization should be more comprehensively considered by scholars in their analysis of the social and cultural practices of Chechens in the diaspora. Host countries undoubtedly have a significant impact on strategies for reconstructing Islam, religious belonging, and shifting religious identities among immigrants and inside their communities, as has been convincingly demonstrated in the studies on Chechens in other countries. (Łukasiewicz 2011). For example, gendered analysis of Chechen refugee women in Austria, Poland and Germany shows how intergenerational differences in socialization processes (in pre-war Chechnya and war-torn Chechnya) affect how women see opportunity structures in receiving countries in terms of choosing educa-

tion and career paths, religious modesty, or possibilities of combining both (Szczepanikova 2012).

2.2 Diaspora organizations

At the core of the study of diaspora organizations (DOs) are the mechanisms that create such organizations. These can be driven either by the official politics of the homeland or by bottom-up community mobilization. For a long time, researchers have focused on the former– official diaspora institutions as well as activation of diasporic identities through formal policies and discourses – to the detriment of studying more fluid and diffuse forms of diaspora governance (Yabanci 2021, 18). As DOs can lobby politicians, challenge, or change policies and institutions, through means like remittances, in both settlement and sending countries, they collectively constitute "diasporic civic space." This space is circumscribed by the political, legal, and juridical systems of countries of settlement and origin; hence, it is not always pro-democratic (Yabanci 2021, 5).

From the perspective of cultural studies, diaspora organizations "represent the ability to transform largely virtual imagined communities into more tangible communities of practice, as they gather participants around shared activities (e.g., celebrations, commemorations, festivals, manifestations) or shared places (e.g., community centers)" (Van Gorp and Smets 2015). They also help migrants adapt to their new societies,

serve their cultural, social, and religious needs, construct identities, and assist integration. Schrover and Vermeulen pointed out three sets of factors that stimulate the formation and development of ethnic organizations, formal and informal: (1) the migration process; (2) the opportunity structures in the host society and (3) the characteristics of the immigrant community (demographic and socioeconomic profile of the immigrant community, religion, age, education, and political affiliation) (Schrover and Vermeulen 2005). These are important aspects to be considered in conjuncture, if we want to recognize the processes of change and continuity of/in both large and small associations.

The organizational activism of stateless diasporas is a rather underdeveloped topic in the literature. The primary focus is on activities of two stateless diaspora groups: Kurds from Turkey and Tamils from Sri Lanka (Baser and Swain 2010; Sezgin 2020), although there are also occasional studies focusing on other diasporas. The theoretical relevance of comparing stateless and state-affiliated diasporas was highlighted by Scheffer (2003), who also argued that stateless diasporas focus more on solving their problems in the homeland, by transferring such resources as combatants, weapons, military equipment, and money. However, leaving the military dimension aside, stateless diasporas, and especially their diaspora organizations, can experience difficulties while conducting their activities in host-countries. Lacking official state representations, embassies and mere recognition by international community, DOs are less organized and struggle to defend their interests. Chechen diaspora organizations are exemplary in this regard, as many members of the community strive for the independence of the Chechen Republic; they fled the wars and persecutions, and still are considered Russian citizens.

Despite some progress in the last decade, most research on diaspora organizations in Europe has so far been rather haphazard and insufficiently theorized. What is particularly deficient, and this has been pointed out by few scholars, is an approach to DOs through organizational sociology and its toolbox. In her research on Muslim migrant organizations in Europe, Zeynep Sezgin (2020) turns to the sociology of organisations, among other theoretical perspectives, and operates with notions of legitimacy, organizational ideology and leadership that are important in analyzing organizational activities and structures.

2.3 Theorization of authority: legitimacy, knowledge, and status

Among Weber's most influential and yet most controversial concepts are the ones of legitimacy and legitimate domination. Their importance is determined by the fact that they entail the study of power relations and their origins in society (Beetham 1991). Weber argues that "the most common

form of legitimacy is a belief in legality: conformity with formally correct statutes that have been established in the usual manner" (Weber 2019, 116). These statues regulate how individuals or organizations attain positions of authority. Weber explains mechanisms by which statutes are established through the centrality of social action, but he does not go further in clarifying the difference between norms and social meanings. Instead, he directs his focus on four ideal-typical principles on which a system's legitimacy may be based. In my work, I intend to analyze legitimacy from the sociological point of view, namely actions and beliefs of social actors, and, following Guzmán's (2015) interpretation of Weber, engage with the concept of doxa to examine the possibilities of doxic legitimacy in the context of immigration.

In organizational literature, legitimacy analysis pays attention to how organizations (mid-level institutions) establish the right and ability to operate and attract resources and support. The so-called organizational legitimacy theory accentuates processes of collaboration, support or recognition within the framework of established power configurations (Gnes and Vermeulen 2019, 223). I consider Gnes and Vermeulen's (2019) conceptualization of organizational legitimacy the most relevant for my analysis of Chechen organizations (*Vereine*), as it allows to reflect on local organizational contexts. The scholars identify two broad directions in approaching organizational

legitimacy: (1) "externalist" approach which emphasizes representation and accountability of organizations as well as their claim-making capabilities in order to secure support and establish power vis-à-vis external context (e.g., state); (2) neo-institutionalism approach, which is not directly linked to power but perceive organizations as relatively autonomous agents which are able to both reproduce and contest existing structures. Although Gnes and Vermeulen point out that "organizations are not simply social facts ... but rather are sites of everyday normative negotiation and discussion among individuals" (2019, 243), they mostly disregard the factor of authority and its role in mediating external and internal contexts in organizational setting.

According to Weber, authority (*Herrschaft)* must establish a belief in legitimacy, and the nature of the claim to legitimacy is divided into *three ideal types* of legitimate rule or authority, established on rational, traditional, and charismatic grounds. Analogous to legitimacy, authority can be theorized empirically, using sociological theory (Weber 2019; Lukes 1987); or normatively, using political theory (Arendt 2006; Friedman 1990). The justification of authority exists on two levels corresponding to the sociological-normative division: (1) *epistemically,* as authority should be reasonable within a certain system of meaning, and (2) *discursively*, as authority should be articulable within political theory judgment (Haugaard 2018, 116). The tension between

the two can theoretically lead to sociologically legitimate, but normatively illegitimate authority.[1]

In my work, I follow the synthesis of sociological and normative definitions of authority along the four-dimensional scheme of power suggested by Haugaard (2018). His main argument builds upon the simultaneous consideration of the *power-to* and *power-over* concepts. The former is the capacity for action constitutive of agency, while the latter is the property of delivering *power-to* to other actors (Haugaard 2018, 113). This approach to authority seems to be comprehensive enough for considering various power-rela-

tions in social interactions, including organizational settings. It also takes into consideration the relational aspect of authority, as to be an authority, one should be recognized and treated as such by other actors. Moreover, as Ala-suutari (2018, 4) convincingly shows, we should think of authority not through its hierarchical position that allows one to give commands but rather cumulatively: "by building, utilizing and combining different types of authority, actors aim to accumulate their influence on others." The following framework reflects my understanding of authority and how I intend to conceptualize authority and its types in relation to Chechen diasporic organizational leaders.

Figure 1. The triangle of authority

Legitimacy

knowledge   status/position

epistemic capital = authority

(secular) substantive authority

(religious) substantive authority

(secular) charismatic authority

(religious) charismatic authority

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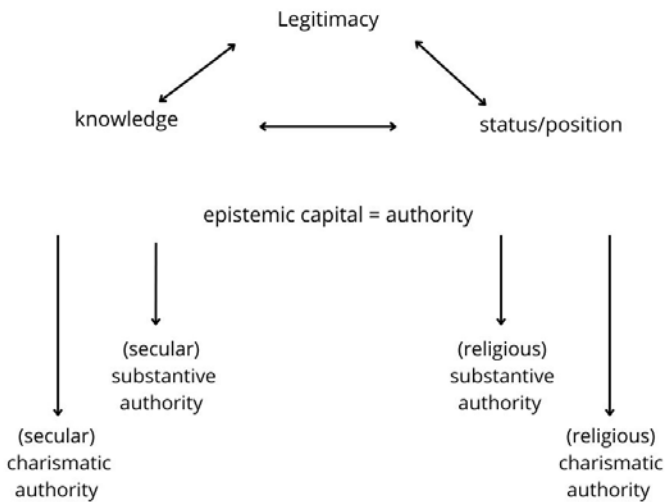
1   Earlier, Richard Friedman explained this distinction by referring to authority in the *de facto* and *de jure* sense, respectively.

The triangle of legitimacy, knowledge, and status reflects the fundamental principles on which any type of authority is built. Legitimacy reflects the properties that an authority ascribes to oneself based on existing respected principles (context of meaning). Besides, the concept in this framework corresponds to the "neo-Weberian" typology of legitimacy which pays attention to *doxic* and *blurred* principles of legitimation. The position or status of an actor carries the meaning of the dispositions and capital that determine the locus of the actor in a particular context. In this sense, status or position is not a matter of acquisition but rather disposition. The notion of knowledge is an integral component of any type of authority, and different kinds of knowledge production, specialization and knowledge validation can in their turn determine the type of authority. In my framework, I distinguish between knowledge and status. According to Mannheim, the knowledge available to observers in the social-historical sphere is necessarily linked to their social status, cultural background, group interests, and so on (Mulkav 2015, 16). My interpretation of this argument is strictly sociological. When it comes to authority, we should think about knowledge in terms of a dialectic relationship between structure and agency. Knowledge is both a part of one's disposition and a process of accumulation/acquisition. Yet one must keep the external context in mind to address the question of how knowledge of "authority" is available to the people who endow the actor with authority. To put it simply, knowledge is also a form of recognition of one's status in a social context.[2]

Scholars have long tried to theorize a fourth ideal type that would correspond to one of the Weberian four bases of legitimacy for a social order: the value-rational faith. Guzmán encompasses all the attempts to give a notion to "anomalous cases" which did not fit into Weber's type of formal-rational authority (professional, ideological etc.) into one ideal type: substantive-rational authority. In his analysis, there are two variations of a missing type: a) legitimacy based on the belief that an authority is a correct mediator between abstract ultimate values and concrete practical norms and (b) and legitimacy based on the belief that an authority is a correct mediator between ultimate goals and concrete means (Guzmán 2018, 80). For my study, I apply this type as ideal, looking at how secular and religious authorities of Chechen communities in Austria could correspond to this type. Moreover, I utilize another ideal type based on charismatic grounds, that is "devotion to the excep-

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2   In these conceptualizations, I follow Alasuutari's (2018) broad account on authority which is understood as epistemic capital. In his analysis, importance is given to the strategies by which actors aim to influence others. Alasuutari argues that forms of authority are accumulated into generalized epistemic capital attached to actors, texts, and principles. However, to analyze the intersection, combination, and transformation of different forms of authority, that is, the "gray areas" between the ideal types of authority, it is still necessary to disentangle these conventional types for analytical purposes.

tional sanctity, heroism or exemplary character of an individual person, and of the normative patterns or order revealed or ordained by him" (Weber 2019, 374).

2.4 Symbolic and social boundaries within the prism of organizational sociology

The significance of bringing the concepts of social and symbolic boundaries into present research is determined by the following considerations, (1) they allow us to capture both relationality of social interaction and strategical manipulations over communities' boundaries (Grodal 2018); (2) conceptualizing boundaries can bridge the personal and the collective, the internal and the external, namely to give meaning to comprehensive social processes and dynamics of change; (3) in the analysis of immigrant and diaspora communities, symbolic and social boundaries not only define the relationship strategies between host countries and immigrants, but also address the question of how symbolic and social boundaries are transported from one national context to another.

In my research, I use the definitions of symbolic and social boundaries coined by Michèle Lamont and Virág Molnár. They postulate that symbolic boundaries are "conceptual distinctions made by social actors to categorize objects, people, practices and even time and space," while social boundaries are "objectified forms of social differences manifested in unequal access to and

unequal distribution of resources and social opportunities" (Lamont and Molnár, 2002, 168). Only when symbolic boundaries are agreed upon, they can be translated into social boundaries.

Of theoretical interest to me is the question of how authorities mediate symbolic and social boundaries, while in practical terms I am investigating specific mechanisms for dealing with boundaries among Chechens in Austria. Therefore, I incorporate Wimmer's (2008) taxonomy of boundary-making strategies. While this framework was developed to tackle different types of ethnic groups in various setting, I argue that it can be advanced to essentially any form of conceptual categorization. Following Wimmer, I will operate with the scheme of strategies, which may be employed by an actor, individual, community or institution, to change the topography of boundaries: (1) fusion, an expansion of existing boundaries, and (2) fission, adding new and contracting previous boundaries. Moreover, there are strategies which aim at modification of boundary meanings and their implication: (3) transvaluation, transforming hierarchies and ranks by the means of normative reversion or establishing moral and political equality; (4) positional moves, individual and collective status change through re-positioning and boundary crossing and (5) blurring, de-emphasis of ethnic, national, or racial affiliation and emphasize of other divisions (Wimmer 2008, 1031-1046).

Since community leaders do not always exist and operate autonomously, but

through creating, leading, and managing DOs that also include projects and initiatives, one should have a closer look at the particularities of organizational activity in boundary related processes. Scholars have conceived of organizations as social structures, embedded in broader institutional environments, created by individuals to support the collaborative pursuit of specified goals (Scott 2014). Such individuals, or organizational entrepreneurs, are actors who pursue their objectives by founding a new enterprise – a new organization, but within an existing institutional mold. Specifically, field-level institutional entrepreneurs adapt, create, or transform institutional frameworks of rules, norms, and/or belief systems either working within an existing organizational field or creating frameworks for the construction of a new one (Scott, 117). Since the definition of the field is complex and varies across disciplines, I draw on the one adopted by Lawrence and Zietsma (2010, 191): "fields are co-evolutionary systems in which *boundaries and practices* exist in a recursive relationship significantly affected by the heterogeneous boundary work and practice work of *interested actors*."

This conceptualization is important for this study as it reflects on the interplay of boundaries and practices as well as the position of individuals in shaping the fields' boundaries over time, that is an understudied element in organizational analysis (Grodal 2018, 784-785). Practices are defined here as shared routines or recognized forms of activity which do not belong to one individual. They must be recognized by the group and conform to social expectations. Practices maintain group boundaries and boundaries limit sets of legitimate practices. In respect to Chechen organizations in immigration, the questions are which actions of the *interested actors* – in this case the leaders of the organizations – become practices or rely on them, how contextual social and symbolic boundaries allow or limit these practices, and whether the leaders and organizations could be disentangled, namely the ability of diaspora organizations persist when leaders leave.

3. Methods

In collecting empirical data to understand issues of leadership and boundary formation, the simultaneous use of multiple methods is warranted. I conducted eight semi-structured interviews with leaders of diaspora organizations and Chechen entrepreneurs in Austria, as well as two expert interviews with individuals interacting with the Chechen diaspora within the academic or journalistic sphere. An interview guide in Russian and English was used during

the interviews. It included a general biographical block, a contextual block about the Chechen diaspora in Austria, personal experiences of interaction with it, as well as topic-specific blocks such as organizational activities, infrastructure, gender, and religion. All interviews except one were conducted in Russian, the quotes used in this thesis were translated by me with the idea of keeping the structure and phrases as close to the authentic as possible. For the reasons of confidentiality, the names of respondents are not used in this thesis, the consent forms were also provided to the respondents.

A great emphasis in my fieldwork was placed on ethnography, since (1) the physical positions of leaders are as important for understanding their symbolic positioning, and (2) the construction of symbolic boundaries can be observed in practice by employing the famous "wait and listen" technique (Fox and Miller-Idriss 2008). The ethnographic work was conducted in person since early February 2022, which allowed me to earn the trust of some community members for follow-up interviews, talk informally to many members of the Chechen diaspora as well as identify key leaders without dwelling on snowball sampling through one gatekeeper. The analysis of individuals' social media, as well as of Chechen diaspora organizations, allowed me to identify non-obvious respondents and areas of associational activity. Finally, I approach all my data using interpretive analysis (Pugh 2013).

4. From ideal types to multifaceted forms: theorizing authority in the Chechen diaspora

Authority is a relational and analytical concept which is closely tied to the ones of power and legitimacy. It is also related to the notion of leadership but does not mean the same thing The latter is more of a social fact, mostly hierarchical, whereas authority is rather a dispersed attribution linked to a specific system of meanings, shared between agent(s) and principal(s) (Benoit-Barné and Cooren 2009, 12-13). First, there is a methodological problem of disentangling these concepts for sociological analysis, which was my aim in the previous sections. Second, the types designated above are nothing but ideal, hence my task is to critically engage with them on the empirical level by employing interpretive analysis to the materials I collected. Ultimately,

the goal is to examine action and activities of Chechen authorities which lead to practices and relate to boundary-making which will be discussed further.

First, I focus on forms of authority in Chechen diaspora communities. In comparison to the pure types, forms can illustrate the complexity of authority. Second, after discussing the so-called sources of authority, I will proceed to the examination of exercise as well as everyday practices of authorities. By looking at the way daily interactions unfold, we may avoid reducing authority to any of its components and identify processes that cut across organizational forms and roles (Bourgoin, Bencherki and Faraj 2020, 8). To further conceptualize forms, I will use Guzmán's (2018) three-dimensional scheme which takes into consideration the fourth ideal type.

Chechen elderly people preserve and pass on in different forms the traditions and customs, e.g., the ones embodied in the (unwritten) codes of the customary law *adat*, ranging from blood-feuds to the respect of older people. The preservation is especially crucial for individuals in immigration. Thus, the traditional nature of authority – "an everyday belief in the sanctity of long-established traditions and the legitimacy of those whose authority derives from these traditions" (Weber 2019, 342) – should be considered as one of the possible sources of Chechen diasporic leadership. The respect of elder persons and their decisions is one of the main features of Chechen society, both in Chechen republic and abroad (Lieven 1998; Molodikova 2015). These people are not necessarily males, although the notable patriarchal structure carries a certain weight and consequence – an elderly woman can also be highly respected in the community. This is influenced not only by the supposedly longer life expectancy among women, but also by the consequences of the last two Russo-Chechen Wars, when men went off to war and women were left to manage their daily lives. Chechen big family unites relatives of small families into the clans or *teips*, where the elderly of one's own clan are the most respected in their decision-making (Molodikova 2015, 122). The clan structure is less visible in immigration, but still retains its importance if extended families or distant relatives settle in a particular area. One of my respondents jokingly observed that more Chechen families live in one region of Austria than in the region of Chechnya from which they left or fled.[3]

If we proceed from the standpoint that Chechens in immigration become leaders when they acquire *power-over* and not just *power-to*, then the Weberian question of the sources of authority and grounds of legitimacy takes on an interesting dimension. Biographies of

3   Interview, 29.04.2022.

Chechen community leaders in various Austrian cities show that before they fled to Austria – in this case between 2002 and 2005 – at least half of them had not held any leadership positions. The trajectories of reaching positions in which a Chechen is considered as a leader, both within his community and outside it, share several common features that allow one to characterize this leadership as substantive-rational authority. These are factors that emanate from dissatisfaction with community life, namely lack of cohesion, loss of traditions, de-politicization as well as personal incentives, deportations of Chechens and general opportunity structures. To give an example: one Chechen, who was a semi-professional athlete back in Russia, got the opportunity to open his own sports club for children and youth after talking to an acquaintance who introduced the idea to him and after he was able to find a place for training. Factors of his own professionalism, trust within the fledgling diaspora and opportunities in Austrian context (sponsorship, allocated space, equipment) defined his positioning fifteen years ago. It corresponds to what is called a legitimate domination based on instrumental-rational grounds when subjects see the authority as a good rational interpreter of the concrete means to realize their interests or a common good. There are undoubtedly other examples of authority in the Chechen diaspora where substantive

rationality is expressed strongly. For example, leaders of political organizations, organizers of events and activities, can be interpreted in a similar way.

According to Guzmán (2018), "what matters to the person accepting professional authority, which is a rationalized version of educated charisma, is the professional's capacity to realize a goal or value on rational grounds – for example, heal an illness using science." Returning to the example of the Chechen athlete, his authority was determined not only by rational grounds but also by his personal charismatic qualities. Thus, when the internal administrative structure of a sports club proved unfeasible, and the four people who should have held the posts of director, deputy director, treasurer and secretary resigned, the athlete took on all the functions alone. In the following years, he managed to coach around two hundred children in a small town in Austria with a minimum contribution from their parents of fifty euros a year.

In many cases, charisma is a second source of authority. The most prominent example in my case is that of the so-called "informal" imam in one Austrian town. Having never been religiously educated as an imam but having the credibility and reputation of a literate man in the diaspora, the imam discovered his oratorical skills and desire as well as his ability to influence

people through his sermons.[4] Since the mosque opening in 2011, it has had two imams: the aforementioned imam works with youth and the community, while the second imam leads prayers, conducts marriages and undertakes funerals. In the case of both religious and secular leaders, charisma is vividly manifested in the narration of Chechen parables and anecdotes, as well as in non-verbal gestures. Another element characteristic of both types of charismatic leadership is passion, which is often formulated as "inner zeal":

> I am embarrassed to stand at a demonstration with men here and ask them to leave all their grievances behind. We are still being oppressed, *Kadyrovtsy* are kidnapping us, threatening our relatives, we are also on "bird's rights"[5] here, we must integrate. Many people have been living here for twenty years, how long can you keep on living in factions? Come to Austrian rallies, it is no shame to shout to stop the deportation, it is no shame to defend a Kurdish boy who is being deported, or an Afghan family. We should all be in solidarity. We would come out for Ukraine, but we will not come out for others, it should not be like this. We inform people this way, but there is a lot of work and not enough of us... And I do not know about others, but if you do

not do it with your soul, it is useless. If you have the zeal, but if you do not have the "yes, let's do something" inside yourself, that is if there is no cry of the soul, dragging everyone along is difficult.[6]

This excerpt from my interview with an activist, who is a female representative of an organization at the European level, is instructive for numerous reasons. First, the last two sentences point to distinctive charismatic qualities without which it is impossible to wield authority in a sense of *power-over*. These qualities are developed and function in a purely relational way – belief in and passion for one's purpose, on the one hand, gives recognition from society, and, vice versa, society's recognition of your inner zeal stimulates it. Second, the interviewee brings up the issue of the gender dimension when taking up a leadership position, whereas the activist's account itself does not often reveal the specific position of a woman leader in the community in Austria. In this case, not only was the woman uncomfortable addressing men about their behavior, but also the activist changed her personal pronoun to the plural when talking about a common goal. Third, there is a hint at the internal division within the Chechen community, which lacks solidarity both with each other and with other diasporic as well as ethnic groups.

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4   Interview, 29.04.2022.
5   This is a direct translation of the idiom used in Russian, which means that one does not have a strong social position, rights or security. It would correspond to 'be in a precarious situation' in English.
6   Interview, 29.03.2022.

5. Three branches of authority: intersection and transfers between authorities' structures

From an organizational perspective, of relevance is the embodiment of authority and how it is enacted and present in the everyday interactions. It is the next step of the analysis, how the forms of authority in terms of the activation of epistemic knowledge an of individuals works in practice. I argue that there are two trends when we look at Chechen diasporic leaders: (1) exchange and intersection between authorities' functions; (2) creation of organizations with horizontal structures.

The intersection of leadership functions in Chechen communities in Austria is a very complex phenomenon. On the one hand, diaspora exists in the country only for about twenty years and still at its early stages of organizational development. Thus, some people can take up multiple roles if it is necessary. On the other hand, mutual help to members of diaspora and particularly extended family, friends, friends of friends are one of the attributes and characteristics of life in Chechen communities.

The story of the so-called "separation of powers" is exemplary. In the early 2000s, when Chechen organizational work was in its infancy, all the activities were carried out in a mosque in Vienna's 20th district. According to my interviewee, disagreements began to arise among the Chechen organizers, as many events were taking place in one place, so it was decided to divide responsibilities and venues. Thus, "three branches of power" emerged: the religious branch at one of the mosques, the political branch at *Kulturverein Ichkeria* and the cultural branch at the *Rat der Tschetschenen und Inguschen* (Council). All these branches' leaders still work closely together, but no longer in the same place. However, the functional line between leaders is still blurred due to the lack of people carrying out a specific role in the community, as described above.

For example, during the month of Ramadan many Chechen families invite both religious community leaders, imams or mullahs, and the secular ones to *iftar*, the fast-breaking evening meal of Muslims in Ramadan. As there are not enough people to respond to all invitations, *iftar* can be organized in one of the organization's sites to avoid separation. Or another example: leaders with a rather political orientation also perform cultural functions in the community. The 'peace tripartite agreement' document for Chechen families used by one Chechen orga-

nization reflects the authority not of the organization itself, but of its leader, to whom family members come after quarrels or scandals. Moreover, such agreements indicate how authority is actually distributed among community members. Benoit-Barné and Cooren (2009) argue that authority does not reside *in* an agent or *in* a leader but appears in a combination of both. The processes of such agreements illustrate this argument, as families entrust their marriage to a leader, who becomes one through trust, and the document, as the medium, authorizes the relationship.

Trust and family ties are essential in understanding the distribution of authority in daily interactions of the young diaspora. The same example of settling family relationships (disputes, arranging marriages) is mentioned most often. If a leader is approached for help, he or she may turn to another community leader to help resolve the situation. However, it does not mean that the more functions you carry out, the more of an authority you immediately become. I would argue that by engaging with different forms of authority and crossing spheres of their functions, you gain more legitimacy which only then can affect other parts of authority triangle (see Figure 1) and be transformed into epistemic capital.

Even though the authority can be distributed, and a leader may transfer his skills between different settings, it is necessary to come to grips with the configuration of complementary and competing authorities that characterize those settings (Woods 2016, 159). The system of meanings come to play a decisive role. The example of a Chechen activist who is most involved in cultural organizational activities, works closely with Austrian non-profit organizations, municipal departments (MAs) and other authorities, shows that engaging in the wider 'cultural branch' provides both acknowledgement and a certain distance from the narrower aims pursued by other actors in the Chechen community. For example, this activist is invited to participate in events hosted by such organizations as the Chechen Council or the student organization *Vereinigung Waynachischer Hochschüler Österreichs Serlo*. Cultural framework allows to maintain identity and traditions as well as to gather and unite people while avoiding a touchy subject of politics. But this is also the reason for the lack of closer collaboration due to the competing meanings of main goals, leading to a perceived fragmentation of the diaspora.

6. Organizational structures of the Chechen diaspora

[The] *Verein* is for conducting events because I am a representative, but what can I do without an organization? I need it to organize activities, events ... *they* always ask what organization you are from, regardless of whether I am its president, a representative or someone else.[7]

The words of a Chechen community leader reflect the requirements of what has been referred to as they – the Austrian state. In principle, all the Chechen associations, except Chechen owned supermarkets and some projects, are registered as *Vereine*. Conducting recognized organizational activity with the possibilities of financial or any other support from the state, requires registering an association and complying with the articles of the Associations Act of 2002. The Act specifies the conditions for establishing an organization as a legal entity. This is a classic example of conceptualizing NGO legitimacy by emphasizing the justifiability of NGO political and social action (Gnes and Vermeulen 2019, 224). In the third paragraph, the Act mentions the statute in which "the organs of the association and their tasks, in particular a clear and comprehensive statement of who runs the association's business and who represents the association externally" should be provided.[8] The paragraph, in its turn, legitimizes leaders and their positions in an organization.

At the same time, the legitimization of Chechen organizations exists not only at the normative level. Community leaders are engaged in the creation of an association not only to be legitimate in the eyes of the state and the public, facilitating access to certain benefits, it is also a matter of uniting people by giving them a sense of solidarity and by maintaining memories of home. This is to a certain extent consistent with the second strand of NGO legitimacy rooted in institutionalism and neo-institutionalism, though I would argue that the capacity to adapt, reformulate and even potentially challenge external expectations is less feasible for stigmatized diaspora communities.[9] In any case, these two legitimation processes, "externalist," and "neo-institutional" are present in Chechen organizations (Ashforth and Barrie Gibbs 1990).

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7   Interview, 29.03.2022.
8   Vereinsgesetz 2002, (BGBl I Nr. 66/2002). https://www.bmi.gv.at/609/gesetzestexte.aspx.
9   Hence, it is closer to a strict neo-institutional view of legitimacy as formulated by Paul DiMaggio and Walter W. Powell.

Most of the active and visible Chechen DOs were created in the last decade which again suggests that the diaspora is still at an early stage of development and that the number of organizations and initiatives is likely to grow.[10] In all types of Chechen associations, there are several characteristics to be highlighted. The idea of homeland is evident, since among the main objectives all the organizations and leaders share are the preservation of Chechen culture. It can be manifested through a poster with a landscape of Chechnya, Chechen food and more intangibly through daily interactions of diaspora members. In addition, there is a spatial aspect to the presence of organizations given the Chechen population and the existence of an established "Chechen infrastructure," as seen in the example of one of Vienna's districts, but this aspect is far from decisive.

As for the emergence of organizations, there can be both internal and external motivations. They are linked but expressed differently in leaders' narratives. One of my interlocuters directly connected the foundation of the mosque[11] in one of Austrian cities to the events happening externally, namely the outbreak of war in Syria and the recruitment of Chechen men.[12] Another Chechen activist living in Austria recounted that "at the end of 2012, after the deportation of one of our compatriots, I had my first experience with social activities and I plunged myself into them, even though it was out of despair. Already after this incident we decided that we needed to defend ourselves. The idea was inspired by a German-born human rights activist. At the beginning of 2013 we already registered the organization *Vindex - Protection and Asylum*. Apart from Chechens, people from the local population also joined this organization" (Chechen Assembly 2020). Some years later, the same activist was involved in the creation of another cultural organization in the Western Austria, which was also the consequence of the events of 2015.

Some organizations do not have or were deprived of premises, which were most often provided by magistrates. As language courses are an essential activity inherent to all type of organizations, e.g., there are Arabic lessons for women in mosques, Chechen or English lessons for children and adults in cultural as well as political centers, such classes inevitably require space.

> At the moment, it's a little difficult to attract people, I can't offer anything because we don't have the room. When we have our own office, it will be easier for us. There used to be a lot

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10   However, the formation of an organization is not a logical consequence of leadership activity. It is possible to maneuver between different organizations and projects, which was described by the example of one activist above.
11   The Chechen mosques are also registered as *Vereine*. Religious associations may, but not necessarily should, be registered additionally in Vienna through IGGÖ - Islamische Glaubensgemeinschaft Österreich.
12   Interview, 29.04.2022.

of people, because we would say you could come here, give the address, and every Saturday we would have classes from two to six o'clock. Girls could cook, others could have English class, draw cartoons, play with other kids, or embroider and sew. There were also Afghans on our floor.[13]

Despite the small number of such associations, projects, clubs and including stores, as well as few people affiliating themselves with them,[14] organizational leaders are very much heard of in Chechen communities in Austria. While being associated with particular people, Chechen diaspora organizations contribute to the symbolic construction of the Chechen group and its interests through the transformation of the I-leader into a we-community. At moments of crisis in the community, journalists and public figures turn to the leaders of vocal organizations for their expertise, as they require normative organizational rather than leadership legitimacy. I will explain this boundary construction between Chechen communities and people acting on behalf of Austria in the next section.

7. Mediating boundaries, fighting dominant discourses? Boundary strategies of Chechen organizational leaders

In this section, I will analyze the interactional category of boundary making processes by examining the role and position of Chechen leaders in the diaspora. Such actors will pursue different strategies of boundary making, depending on their position in the hierarchies of power and the structure of their networks, as Wimmer (2008, 990) points out. I further suggest that these strategies may vary according to the forms of authority in Chechen communities.

The fact that many Chechens had already had experience with external categorization during their 'internal migration' in Soviet Union is contextual-

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13   Interview, 29.03.2022.
14   This is due to a reluctance to be associated with any political stances, as many refugees and migrants are aware of the repression against regime critics even abroad.

ly important. Since most of my respondents had lived in Chechnya before the collapse of the USSR, traveled, and stayed outside Chechnya before the wars (and several even experienced their early life in deportation to Central Asia in the beginning of 1950s), their first encounters with symbolic and social boundaries had already emerged and been recognized as such.

Generally, for all the leaders of Chechen communities, the existence of symbolic and social boundaries is a social fact which is not denied by anyone and is reproduced in the narratives about Austrian society. The Austrian system is *perceived* as one that encourages Chechens to learn the German language, build mosques and establish cultural centres. Thus, one of my respondents compared Austrian democracy to Shariah law in the principle of its work.[15] Situationally, this example corresponds to the transvaluative type of boundary work, namely establishing moral and political equality. The *Statistisches Jahrbuch* "Migrant and Integration" of 2021 generally confirms narratives of my interlocutors. The report indicates that immigrants from Afghanistan, Syria or Chechnya were on average 57% "completely" and 42% "rather" in agreement with the Austrian way of life. Only very few showed a negative attitude. People with a Chechen migration background were 4% "rather" or "not at all" in agreement with the Austrian way

of life (Klimont et al. 2021, 104). Even more, among persons from Chechnya, 94% of the respondents said that they felt completely or rather at home in Austria (Klimont et al. 2021, 17).

Conversely, some Chechen leaders mention difficulties with the Austrian bureaucracy and specifically with the long-established social boundary – citizenship. Austria has the most difficult and restrictive citizenship process in the EU, and the Austrian Citizenship Act (1985) does not recognize dual citizenship and enforces the principle of *jus sanguinis* in granting citizenship, that is, a child can only acquire citizenship if one of the parents is an Austrian citizen (Baubo̎ck, and C̦ınar 2001). For the Chechen community, where inter-ethnic marriages are still the dominant form of marriage (Sipos 2019), this issue is highly problematic. If children of Chechens born in Austria want to become citizens, their only option is naturalization, and they must (apart from a shortened residence period) essentially meet the same strict criteria as apply to migrants, as they are considered 'foreigners'. This social boundary is mediated by Chechen leaders through work with young people, including those who have been placed in juvenile prisons, as well as through language courses and promotion of education. There are some Chechen women, who work for Austrian NGOs and assist Chechen women with bureaucratic

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15   Interview, 29.04.2022.

issues. This boundary work relates to the *power-over* function as well as substantive-rational type of authority, such leaders wield. Emphasizing the possibilities of boundary crossing, they employ a strategy of positional move which can subsequently affect symbolic boundaries.

For refugees who have resided in Austria for more than five years, the condition for naturalization is having a permanent job and a steady income. Since 2009, the Austrian citizenship law stipulates a higher income requirement, where regular expenses – such as rent, alimony or mortgages – must be deducted before an assessment of the income level, leading de facto to a higher threshold (Stern and Valchars 2013). For some Chechens, unofficial work is their main and sometimes the only possible source of income, which makes it impossible to obtain citizenship and leaves them with a status of a permanent resident (Höller 2018). For example, in the case of one of the leaders, an athlete, absence of citizenship hindered him from going to tournaments. The bureaucratic complexities and settling of Chechens in low-paid jobs due to low access to the high-paying labor market in turn reproduces the importance of informal ties in Chechen communities, where leaders are the bridges. However, such structural inequalities can be perceived as intrinsic and can lead to deemphasizing response even among Chechen leaders who would priorities the younger generation in their boundary work.

Blurring strategy is witnessed in the entrepreneurial activities of Chechens in Austria. Shop names and signs which either framed as Eastern European or sometimes Russian, deemphasize ethnic or national affiliation by emphasizing a cosmopolitan aspect of the place. Through this strategic work, the entrepreneurs expose their (rather invisible) rational type of authority and mobilize the interaction of both the Chechen and broadly Eastern European diasporas. Similarly, the student organization operates with a blurring strategy by accentuating Chechens and Ingush as students, but it is evident that compared to the inclusive stores, these types of organizations are exclusive in essence.

The expansion of symbolic boundaries can be seen in the discourse on the *Vainakh* people, i.e., Chechens and Ingush together. In doing so, Chechen actors appeal to a shared history and customs. At the organizational level, expansion together with blurring can be applied when talking about the number of people in a DO. For instance, one leader mentions that everyone knows about the organization he works at, but some people only come when they really need to. "The organization opens its doors for everyone." Since such discourses are frequently exaggerative, they are important both internally and externally in demonstrating the solidarity and inclusivity of *the* community.

Contraction, on the other hand, occurs when actors face negative symbolic

boundaries concerning deportations, assassinations or criminality. Chechen immigrants in this case utilize fission – splitting the existing category of "Chechens" into several parts. Thus, they employ the notion of *kadyrovtsy* to distance themselves from the supporters of the current regime in Chech-

nya, or some other categories like "brainwashed" or "non-pure" Chechens. The strategy of contraction is not always coherent and strict, especially when it comes to the former category. The internal ambiguities can arise when a Chechen talks about his relatives and friends to people "from the outside."

8. Conclusion

Weber's conceptualization of types of authority proves to be a useful analytical tool in approaching leaders in fragmented contexts. As noted from the theoretical perspective, the three classical types of authority often leave out empirical examples of authority emanating from rational-value sources, which can be understood as substantive-rational pure type. The pure types became the foundation for considering complex forms of authority in the Chechen community. Since authority has been conceptualized through the knowledge-status-legitimacy schema, which is expressed in the actor's (leader's) command of epistemic capital, these three elements were examined together to understand why Chechens perceive leaders as authorities.

In all cases, the leaders' legitimacy rests on the system of meaning. Chechen leaders accumulate epistemic capital which then can be seen in various forms of authority. For example, wo-

men retain the traditionalism (language, practices) necessary to legitimize their activities as Chechens in the community, and it does not necessarily have to have a strong religious orientation. Moreover, when confronted with new systems of meaning in host communities, those who can adapt the most and understand the 'rules of the game,' that is, validate the new knowledge (Ala-suutari 2018), also become legitimate authorities.

The Chechen custom of respecting elders and their experience as well as the *teip* system determines the presence of a traditional type of authority among leaders, regardless of their gender. This type of authority intersects with the substantive-rational through the biographies of many leaders who lived in the late Soviet Union. What becomes important here is an easier adaptation to systems of meaning, which many Chechens internalized through the exposure to the bureaucratized USSR as

well as the post-Soviet independence years. Chechen leaders often become mediators between the Austrian bureaucracy in the system of informal networks of the Chechen community, which increases their legitimacy and influences their authority in the diaspora. Context turns out to be important for gaining leadership position, but not necessarily authority, who may not depend on leadership.

Authority in its traditional sense – following the commands of another person, corresponding to *power-over* – is most prominent when it comes to working and interacting with young people. In all other cases, authority lies in *power-to*. As it has been shown, authority in organizational contexts is dispersed. The forms and intersections of authority have improved an understanding of how a fragmented diaspora, which is indeed perceived to be fragmented by the Chechen leaders, nevertheless remains connected. The creation of even minor diasporic organizations is a strategic decision to remain outwardly legitimate, to hold events and lessons, maintaining a sense of diaspora for those who want to be involved.

Since theoretically organizational fields are coevolutionary systems in which boundaries and practices exist in a recursive relationship, the very existence of diasporic organizations confirms the constant work with boundaries determined externally. Initially, I associated the various boundary strategies of Chechen leaders with the modification of existing symbolic boundaries rather than with their substantial alteration. However, the analysis shows that Chechen leaders who wield both traditional and charismatic authority, are more involved in the formation of symbolic boundaries within and across communities through the expansion strategy. In comparison, substantive-rational types of authority are organizationally based, and such leaders frequently interact with the Austrian authorities by employing the strategies of *blurring* and *contraction*. Since women leaders often organize events targeting Chechen women, the community can be conceived of as one engaged both in emancipatory activism and one where the gender gap continues to be reinforced. This gender dimension is yet to be considered longitudinally. Finally, traumatic events, such as war, can accelerate and change boundary strategies toward expansion and the form of authority toward a more charismatic one.

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