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Trends. Chechnya as Projective Container

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Many political observers of the war in Chechnya are coming down hard on the side of the Chechens and against the Russians. Russia--we are told--is doing everything possible to prevent the self-determination and independence of a freedom-loving people. The "everything possible" is said to include indiscriminate aerial bombing and artillery shelling of civilians.

There are problems with these perspectives. First, there are many "Chechens." Some are motivated by idiosyncratically conceived, fundamentalist Islamic motives to create a theocratic way of life in Chechnya and elsewhere--e.g., Dagestan. This way of life seems to promise little in the way of self-determination and independence for many people, save for the freedom to be other-determined and dependent. In addition, some other "Chechens" are representatives of whatever formal government seems to exist (pro forma or de facto) in Chechnya and are hard-pressed to claim they represent the interests of many others. Other "Chechens" are motivated by the will to engage in enrichment--e.g., via kidnapping--with freedom from impediment. Still other "Chechens" are attempting to be only reactively involved to all sides of the war and otherwise uninvolved. Still others are not even Chechen in any racial or ethnic sense but merely seeking the freedom to wage religious war, wreak havoc, and/or act out.

A second problem is that Chechnya is a formally constituted part of Russia. Certainly, this constitution has not always been the case. But the same can be said for portions of any geographical location worldwide in relation to how it is politically constituted. Russia's attempt to keep Chechnya within the Russian Federation--if intrinsically evil or wrong--may suggest that the attributers of such evil and wrong should be attributees as well.

Third, the "everything possible" approach to Chechnya is anything but--given Russia's military arsenal. As to its arbitrary nature, the approach is not arbitrary but bears significant intentions--some of which admittedly violate human rights even by wartime standards. Russian claims that the approach but emulates the North Atlantic Treaty Organization's recent efforts in Serbia and Montenegro are somewhat off the mark--but not totally.

It would be epistemologically untenable to insist that opponents of Russian policy towards Chechnya are unconsciously taking noxious elements from within their own selves and placing them within the object of Russia--the essence of projection. Or that opponents of Russia are only idealizing the Chechens. Although some such mechanisms may be partially at work, so, too, are more conscious variants of distortion, miscalculation, misjudgment, and outright intellectual dishonesty--all in the service of the self. (See Alford, C.F. (1993). Greek tragedy, confusion, and Melanie Klein: Or is there an Oresteia complex? *American Imago*, 50, 1-27; Astor, J. (1998). Some Jungian and Freudian perspectives on the Oedipus myth and beyond. *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 79, 697-712; Funkhouser, G.R. (1991). Cross-cultural similarities and differences in stereotypes of good and evil: A pilot study. *Journal of Social Psychology*, 131, 859-874; Nickerson, R.S. (1999). How we know--and sometimes misjudge--what others know: Imputing one's own knowledge to others. *Psychological Bulletin*, 125, 737-759; Safire, W. (January 6, 2000). Rhymes with Rasputin. *The New York Times*, p. A23.) (Keywords: Chechnya, Russia, War.)