Don't Trust, Don't Fear, Don't Beg

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Mistrust can lead to the desire to turn away from a world one does not trust. Even then, mistrust needs be understood as a mode of interaction with the world, a mode based on detachment. Practices of detachment – not in the sense of the cultivation of distinction for the purpose of gaining social prestige (see Bourdieu 1987) but as forms of self-sought isolation – have only recently been taken seriously in social anthropology (Candea et al. 2015: 2). The heritage of Émile Durkheim, who saw social relations everywhere, was too strong, as was the power of the 'fetish of connectivity' (Pedersen 2013). If everything within the social world is regarded as relational and relations as such are ascribed a positive value (Strathern 2014: 4), the attempt to distance oneself from things, people or places will be assessed as inherently irrational and potentially destructive. This 'dark side' of human behaviour remains understudied to this day.[1]

It is this 'dark side', then, that is at the centre of attention in this chapter. My focus is on a mode of mistrust oriented towards radical detachment, that is, the attempt to distance oneself from the environment as much as possible. Time and again, groups of people attempt to distance themselves from the world. The Jains in India, for example, renounce the world for religious reasons, and the most radical among them seek to detach themselves from the world by means of fasting until death (Laidlaw 2015). Other groups are spiritually or politically motivated and aim at a maximum of economic, social and cultural self-sufficiency in the form of a commune. As experiments with alternative ways of life from the 1968 movement have shown, such life forms in most cases have only limited endurance. This reaffirms the assumption of the anthropologist Victor

1 | Another reason for this gap is the crisis of the concept of culture, which has hit social anthropology in the last decades. Through the deconstruction of culture as a superordinate system of reference, the remaining 'relationships' as the former constituents of the social system have become the primary subject of investigation (see Strathern 2014).

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Turner (1998) that human communities can only remain in a state of liminality, that is, in extra-sociality, for a limited period of time.

Attempts to cut ties with the ancestral world usually result in a doubling of the world. The world 'out there' is radically distrusted and demarcated from one's own world, in which trust is placed, for instance in the family or the village. Some cultural anthropologists have argued that this division of the world – one that is familiar, another that is distrustful – is grounded in collective mentalities, for instance, the 'southern mentality' of the inhabitants of southern Europe. Edward Banfield (1958) coined the term 'amoral familiarism' for this alleged mentality, which he attributes to the villages of southern Italy. This essentialist model finds its reverberation in the often-read assertion that people retreat into their families if they no longer trust the state (e.g., Sedlenieks 2013). In addition to social or spatial proximity, such networks of trust (Tilly 2005), characterized by a fundamental mistrust of the environment, can be based on fictive kinship, such as brotherhoods. Examples of this can be found in religious sects like the Waldensians, motor clubs like the Hells Angels, or criminal associations like the mafia.

In the functioning of these networks of trust, another form of mistrust becomes clear, namely, the displacement of trust. But what about the relation between one's own world, characterized by trust (or a desire for it), and the distrusted outside world? Several such networks, like the Waldensians, seek to attract as little attention as possible and to operate in secret. Other groups, like the mafia, regard the outside world as a legitimate victim and go on the prowl for loot. Still other groups, mostly messianically motivated, devote themselves to fight the outer world and are willing to risk or even sacrifice their lives.

These people are the protagonists of the present chapter, which explores the most extreme form of what the sociologist Niklas Luhmann (2014: 1) refers to as 'defensive arrangements' resulting out of mistrust: a complete breach of the existing relations, the absolute displacement of trust and the defence of one's own world by all means. As a case in point, I will look at young men from the Caucasus who have broken with their former lives and joined the self-proclaimed Islamic State (IS) to fight in Syria or Iraq.[2] Chechen fighters are in especially high demand of the IS because of their combat experience acquired during the second war against the Russian Federation (1999-2009). They form their own

2 | Taking this case as a starting point, I am not interested in speculating on the motives of young men joining jihadist groups, as such speculations are difficult to back empirically and should thus be avoided (Assad 2007). I also do not treat 'the Jihadists' as a homogeneous group containing individuals primarily motivated by Islamic theology.

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troop contingents and provide military leaders such as Abu Omar al-Shishani (the 'Chechen', civic name Tarkhan Batirashvili), who died in 2016.[3]

For male jihadists, an essential element in their detachment from the everyday world comprises death, in a double sense. In the first sense, this concerns a fictitious death that takes place when pledging the oath of allegiance to the caliph of the IS, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. With this oath, the initiate not only rhetorically ends his former life, but practically transforms into an undead: no longer belonging to the world, but at the same time capable of action. Dogmatically, this is an empowering experience: life can no longer harm him, he no longer has anything to fear from the world (the worst has already happened) and he does not have to ask anymore, but can simply take.

In the second sense, death becomes very real during the suicide attack. Due to the high number of suicide attacks, the troops of the IS gain a military clout that is difficult to anticipate and calculate. According to the billionaire and philanthropist George Soros, jihadist groups such as IS and al-Qaeda have found the Achilles heel of Western societies: the fear of death.[4] In fact, the leadership of jihadist groups seems to be aware of the effects of this form of terror and aims at capitalising on its members' defiance of death. This is what the al-Qaeda spokesman Abu Dujana al-Afghani told the Western public after the bombings of Madrid in the spring of 2004: 'You love life and we love death.'[5] Death becomes something to be proud of; it is not by accident that many suicidal jihadists leave their passports at their crime spot as a kind of business card.[6]

Jihadists are not the first to proclaim a preference of death over life; Spanish fascists fighting the Spanish civil war, for example, were united by the slogan '*viva la muerte*' (long live death). This ideological overlap may not be arbitrary – it could indicate that the founders of IS did some research on totalitarian movements. Apparently, those who have declared their rejection of life are more inclined to commit deeds that seem to be beyond any sense of humanity. Caucasian IS recruits may refer to other, regionally popular role models of death-seekers cum fighters. One is the figure of the Abrek that emerged when

3 | In spite of his *nom de guerre*, Batirashvili did not hail from Chechnya, but from the Pankisi Valley in Georgia, mainly inhabited by descendants of the Chechens, the so-called Kist. They migrated from the Northern Caucasus to northeast Georgia during the nineteenth century. Batirashavili did not fight in the Chechen wars, but was an employee of the Georgian army from 2007 until 2010. Within this function, he was involved in the 2008 war between Georgia and the Russian Federation.

4 | See: http://www.welt.de/debatte/kommentare/article151343328/Nur-eine-offene-Gesellschaft-kann-den-IS-besiegen.html

5 | See: http://www.spiegel.de/politik/ausland/bekenner-video-ihr-liebt-das-leben-wir-lieben-den-tod-a-290529.html

6 | See: http://www.br.de/nachrichten/personaldokumente-is-100.html

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the Russian army subdued the Caucasus during the nineteenth century. An Abrek was, in the sense of Eric Hobsbawm (1972), a social bandit who took from the powerful but spared the weak, and who not only had no fear of death but also longed for it. The figure of the death-defying Abrek allowed for a revaluation of values: the military losses suffered in the Northern Caucasus could be transformed into a moral victory if defeat was no longer of concern. This moral superiority explains the popularity of the Abrek in the Caucasus even today (Gould 2016).

Another role model comprises the so-called thieves-in-law, many of whom are from the Caucasus (especially from Georgia). Established in the early Soviet prisons and labour camps, the members of this criminal caste rejected any form of cooperation with state institutions and officials, only considering their own, strictly regulated code of conduct as binding. Amongst them, too, the symbolism of death was widespread, as they took the prison as their home and grave at the same time. It is in the wider context of this group, that the motto cited in the title of this chapter originated: Don't Trust, Don't Fear, Don't Beg.[7] Also in their case, dependence on the outside world was meant to be resolved by means of being detached from it.

Caucasian jihadists must be well aware of these role models. Many Chechen children born in deportation were named after famous Abreks, e.g., the later President Zelimkhan Yandarbiyev after the renowned Abrek Zelimkhan. Some later-born 'Zelimkhans' are among the contemporary jihadi fighters (Ratelle and Souleimanov 2017: 585). During the 1990s, the First Chechen War (1994-96) further enhanced the popularity of these iconic figures. The insurgent Chechens, claiming full state sovereignty for their country, regarded their struggle as continuing resistance to Russian colonisation that started during the nineteenth century. This involved occasional reinterpretations of the figure of the Abrek. In this vein, the Chechen Interim President, Zelimkhan Yandarbiyev, claimed in an interview that '[e]ven the Abreks (...) fought in the name of God.'[8] The figure of the Abreks is also cherished by Caucasian thieves-in-law; one literary representation of the Georgian Akrek 'Data Tutashkhia' by Chabua Amirejibi (1985), for example, is a much read book in these circles (Kupatadze 2010: 73).

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7 | Russian: *Ne ver', ne boysya, ne prosi*. Sometimes this motto is translated as 'no trust, no fear, ask nothing,' for example in the title of the documentary by Peter Rippl (2012) on *Blatnjak* [criminal] songs and their performers. The Russian duo t.A.T.u performed the song '*Ne ver', ne boysya, ne prosi*' at the 2003 Eurovision Song Contest, finishing third. The expression entered Russian culture through Solzhenitsyn's book The Gulag Archipelago (2007 [1973]).

8 | Documentary 'The Smell of Paradise' (Mamon/Pilis 2005, Canada), see: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=quqF_STyHXc (7:55)

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As for the thieves-in-law, they enjoy great popularity among admirers of the jihadist movement in the Caucasus. For example, young Muslims from the Pankisi Valley often post on Facebook contributions from the world of the *blatnoy* (a Russian term that can roughly be translated as 'gangster') alongside posts from the haze of the IS.[9] The charisma of thieves-in-law and Abreks thus enters the imaginary realm of the jihadists. Discursively, the three types form up a fictive genealogy, with the Abrek being the predecessor of the thief-in-law, and the thief-in-law the predecessor of the jihadist. Thus, as unique as the struggle of the Caucasian jihadists is, it is also part of regionally specific semantic field. This field is further explored in the conclusion, with the aim to understand the premises of radical detachment based on profound mistrust towards the outside world in the cases of the jihadists, Abreks, and thieves-in-law.[10]

In order to allow for comparability, the following description of the world of the Abreks and the thieves-in-law will (1) elaborate the context of origin ('Whence does the mistrust derive?'), (2) describe the group ethos inherent to the mode of detachment from the outer world ('Where does the mistrust lead to?'), and (3) outline the kind of relation with the social environment ('How to live with the mistrustful other?').

Abreks

Context of Origin

The term 'Abrek' (Russ. *abrek*) derives from the Persian 'avara' meaning 'vagabond, thief' and has spread across the Caucasus through Turkic languages (Bobrovnikov 2008: 29). Abreks are the Caucasian variant of brigands, i.e., the social bandits in the sense of Eric Hobsbawm (1972): involved in theft, but for apparently righteous reasons. Behind the ideal of the (male-only) Abreks lies the theme of a rebellion against an oppressive order, in this case, against nineteenth-century Russian colonialism. Only for lack of an alternative does this rebellion take on the form of banditry – at least in the view of the Abrek's numerous admirers now and then.

Abreks were regarded as loners, even if they occasionally came together to form groups or joined anticolonial resistance fighters. What connects them

9 | However, this does not seem to be a peculiarity of post-Soviet societies, as many German jihadists have a criminal past, too.

10 | Suggesting that the discursive representations of Abreks, thieves-in-law and Caucasian jihadists overlap and form part of a semantic field in no way means that there is something like a coherent and distinct Caucasian culture of violence.

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with the self-image of the later thieves-in-law and the jihadists is the ideal of renunciation, a complete withdrawal from the secular world. An individual was considered an Abrek when he had moved away from existing social relations, was no longer bound by them and did not enter upon new binding relationships. Living outside the existing order, which was considered unjust, he created a gap to the structures that did not deserve trust.

In the pre-colonial Caucasus the Abreks were lawless people, residing far away from their homeland, which they had left due to a crime. The majority of them had committed this crime themselves and had to fear a vendetta or blood feud. Some, however, were family members of a victim, having retreated into the mountains in order to take revenge. In any case, an Abrek was a person without a home. This homelessness was either involuntary (if a criminal was cast out by the village community because it feared revenge) or self-chosen (if someone had fled or was devoted to taking revenge) (Gould 2007a: 278).

The Abreks's fame rose only with their transfiguration into resistance fighters against the Russian colonisation of the Caucasus during the nineteenth century. Any landowner, who did not wish to lose his privileges with regard to status and property, was forced to join the Russian colonial administration. He had to accept co-optation, to apply a present-day term. The underprivileged population was confronted with taxes, forced recruitment of labour and military service as well as with collective, often draconian punishment, whenever a member from their own ranks behaved in an insubordinate fashion.

In line with this attack on the existing social order, procedures such as the blood feud were declared illegal. Together with the Shari'a (and competing with it), the institution of blood feud constituted the most common principle of conflict management during this era. Moreover, village communities in the North Caucasus were no longer permitted to set up armed federations in order to further their interests (Bobrovnikov 2007: 253). These regulations depreciated key legal practices and social hierarchies within the region, affecting both the poor and the rich inhabitants of the Northern Caucasus.

In addition to various forms of voluntary and involuntary co-operation, these conditions of pressure generated passive and open resistance. One form of the latter comprised guerrilla warfare. Led by religious leaders such as Imam Shamil (1797-1871), armed federations successfully attacked the new masters in well-organized ways. In the course of the armed resistance against the Russian military invasion, the image of the Abreks acquired a new profile, as they preferred to target Russian garrisons and Cossack settlements during their raids.

The bandits transmutated into resistance fighters, and their retreat into the wilderness was interpreted as an act of resistance. Abreks where now seen as those who did not want to submit to the new legal status and, therefore, turned their backs on their homes, villages and clans. In the course of this re-evaluation of the Abrek phenomenon, the meaning of the term transformed. By the

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middle of the nineteenth century, 'Abrek' had become a term of respect describing avengers of the deprived and fighters against colonial rule: 'The powerful terrorized the peaceful population and the Abreks terrorized the powerful' (Aslanbek Sheripov cited in Gould 2007a: 40).

Ethos

With Imam Shamil's capture by Russian troops in 1859, the period of open military resistance against the Russian colonisation of the Northern Caucasus came to an end. In this context, the on-going resistance of the Abreks towards the Russian invaders was a lost cause. It was precisely the 'lost cause' factor, however, that rendered the Abrek braver and more powerful in the eyes of many Caucasians. In contemporary poems and narratives, the Abrek were seen to yearn for their own death without fear, struggling to the end without any hope of victory (Gould 2007a, 2007b, 2014).

In the final battle, which in local legends almost always follows a betrayal, the Abrek takes on a multitude of opponents and can nevertheless not be defeated. In the narrative 'Abrek Gekha' by Ahmat Avturinskii, recorded by Aslanbek Sheripov in 1916 and translated into English by Rebecca Gould in 2014 (Gould 2014: 216-19), the hero is hit by a large spray of bullets but still keeps on fighting, in classic zombie-like fashion. It is no wonder that, in the many narratives of this era, the Russians approached shot Abreks with extreme caution, always uncertain of whether the deceased was still alive.

The figure of the undead Abrek allowed for a revaluation of values: the military loss in the North Caucasus could become a moral victory if the loss did not matter. The Abrek slid out of the sacrificial role and became a saint because he had overcome his attachment to the world and his fear of death. This differentiated him from ordinary mortals, and especially from the Russian soldiers, who were seen as possessed by the will to control the world and, in the Abrek-stories from this era, were always afraid to loose their lives. The Abrek had left his life behind while still alive; this self-empowerment with a simultaneous loss of the self was considered superior to the power of the Russians.

This elevation of the Abrek was not of his own making. His actions spoke for themselves, his silence made him even more powerful. The ethos attributed to the Abrek by his fellow Caucasians expressed radical mistrust – a mistrust towards any form of mediation, dialogue or contact with the outside world, spilling into aversion and a contempt that was also a disdain for death. Anyone who still relied on making a living under the new conditions might be able to accommodate himself, but could never be a role model. The Abrek, in contrast, stood for a fundamental mistrust of the possibility to lead a right life amidst wrongs, as well as the consequent contempt for the value of life itself. This was clearly an idealisation – the formative stories of the Abrek are not literary works

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by chance. However, what we find here is a figure of radical mistrust with deep cultural roots and positive connotations, effective to the present day.

Relations with the Outside World

Although Abreks broke away from their habitual environment and sought the expanse, they could still count on support from local communities. As Russian archives indicate, Abreks would continue to be received as honorary guests *(kunak)* in Caucasian villages, and enjoy the protection of the host who, in the event of betrayal by a neighbour, would retreat into the wilderness together with the Abrek (Bobrovnikov 2007: 256). Thus, the separation was a unilateral act; the solidarity with the retreating person remained intact, maybe only arose (or intensified) through the act of the detachment. An Abrek would never steal from the people with whom he was related, he would never attack the villages located in his habitat, otherwise his reputation would be ruined.

In contrast, the colonialists from the north were attacked and robbed. In addition to civilian travellers, state ambassadors, and mounted military troops, Abreks preferred to raid Russian garrisons and Cossack settlements in order to seize spoils. The Cossacks were targeted, because they were treated as equal to the Russians or regarded as their military spearhead. Ossetian villages were also popular objectives, as Ossetians were viewed as henchmen of the Russian invaders.

The Abrek reputation as a popular hero and social bandit à la Hobsbawm (1972) was not based as much on the fact that he (like Robin Hood) took from the rich and gave to the poor, but that he took from the strong and spared the weak. This indicates a clear division of the world, and the mythical work of the Abrek aimed at keeping both worlds apart. However, there was also a middle world, that of the local population, which had been unable to resist the advance of the Russian colonists but nevertheless maintained its links with the free-riders. This middle-world was evidently respected by the Abreks.

Thieves-in-law

With the end of the Tsarist Empire, Abrek-hood also came to an end. Several Abreks joined the incoming rulers (aka the Soviets), transforming from being undead into supporters of the new order (thus ceasing to be Abreks). Others continued to resist, remained in the other world and fought the newly imposed order. Their struggle did not last long, however, as they were soon defeated. The last surviving Chechen Abrek, Khasukha Magomadov, hid for decades in the impassable border zones between Chechnya and Georgia. As one of the very few, he had been able to escape the deportation of all Chechens to Central Asia

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under Stalin in 1944, a deportation ending in the death of tens of thousands. At the invitation of his friends, the 71-year-old Magomadov secretly travelled to the plains in March 1976 in order to receive medical care. Betrayed to the Soviet rulers, he was apprehended and shot dead.

In the early days of the Soviet Union, a new type of honourable bandit emerged, who quickly took the Abrek's place, thus also contributing to the demise of the Abrek. This was the so-called 'thief-in-law' (Russ. *vor v zakone*), a character born in Stalin's forced labour camps.

Context of Origin

To the early Soviet ideologists, crime was justifiable in service of the socialist cause, such as in the struggle against feudal or capitalist exploitation, or the expropriation of the exploiters. The prevailing view was that, once the conditions for exploitation had ended, i.e., at the dawn of communist society, crime would disappear. An Abrek no longer would have any reason to remain an Abrek. Those who persisted would be isolated and re-educated.

Accordingly, the first Soviet prison camps were planned as re-education camps. In 1929, the writer Maxim Gorky hailed the 'accomplishments gained in "forging human material"' (Schlögel 2001). From the beginning, this 'forging' was carried out with utmost brutality. Shortly after the October Revolution, prisoners were detained en masse in labour camps that Lenin referred to as 'concentration camps' (Applebaum 2003: 47).[11] In addition to 'forging' a new human being, another priority was the economic exploitation of forced labour (Khlevniuk 2004: 27).

In the course of the 1920s, the Soviet Union was covered with a network of 'corrective labour camps' in which, in addition to criminals, political prisoners and so-called kulaks (large-scale farmers) were detained. This network stretched from the White Sea-Baltic Canal to the Pacific, from the Arctic Ocean to Central Asia. In the Kolyma region in the Far East alone, hundreds of camps existed in an area of 3.5 million square kilometres, equivalent to one-seventh of the USSR's territory and nine times the current size of Germany (Spray 2014: 83; Panikarov 2007: 267). This pan-Soviet camp system constituted a parallel world, which Solzhenitsyn (2007 [1973]) mapped in detail as the 'Gulag archipelago': an isolated world of penal colonies, in which the life of a human being was worth nothing. Countless prisoners died of hunger, forced labour and the harassment by camp leaders or fellow prisoners, to a large extent unnoticed by the outside world (Naimark 2007: 18-20).[12]

11 | Lenin was the first to use the term 'concentration camp' (Hosking 1992: 71).

12 | GULAG is an abbreviation of *Glavnoye upravleniye ispravitel'no-trudovykh lagerey i koloniy*, the 'Main Administration of Corrective Labour Camps and Labour Colonies.'

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The number of inmates sharply increased. In 1928, 300,000 prisoners were held captive; during the Great Purge or Great Terror of 1937-38 almost two million people were contained in the Gulags. By 1940, approximately eight million prisoners had passed through the camp system. The historian Ann Applebaum estimates the total number of those imprisoned in the Gulag system between 1929 and 1953 as 18 million. In addition, over ten million other Soviet citizens were employed in forced labour (Applebaum 2003: 615ff).

In the camp hierarchy, inmates condemned for criminal offenses ranked above the political prisoners, whom they could dispose of at will, unhindered by those in charge of the camp. Solzhenitsyn (2007 [1973]) describes in detail how 'criminals' mistreated the 'politicals.' Certain 'criminals' connived with the security guards who used them as an instrument in camp management, such as in providing 'special treatment' for the so-called '58s': political prisoners imprisoned according to paragraph 58 of the Soviet Criminal Code regarding counter-revolutionary activity. Another group of criminal inmates, however, refused to enter into any form of cooperation with state officials. This comprised the so-called 'thieves-in-law,' who lived according to their own rules and only acknowledged their own authorities. With their appearance and tattoos, they openly expressed their anti-establishment attitude and willingly accepted the harsh punishments meted out to those who violated these rules. The thieves-in-law formed their own universe within the world of the Gulags.

The thieves-in-law and their followers declared the Gulag archipelago to be their homeland. Thus the tattoo of a thief-in-law declared: 'Boss of the zone [camp, prison]. Everything for me – nothing from me. Here in the zone I am at home' (Baldaev 2003: 198). Another tattoo reads: 'I was born in prison, I will die in prison' (Plutser-Sarnov 2006: 45). In the realm of the camps, their code of conduct prohibited any cooperation with state organs. Anyone cooperating with camp officials or the police was brandished a bitch (Russ. *suka*). However, not all Gulag prisoners convicted of criminal offenses were prepared to submit to the canon of the thieves. Time and again, attempts were made to break the power of the thieves-in-law. Opposition to the thieves-in-law was supported by the camp officials, who simultaneously attempted to exploit thieves-in-law for the harassment of political prisoners (Shalikashvili 2009: 15ff).

When the Soviet Union was attacked by Germany in 1941, Stalin also recruited prisoners for the Great Patriotic War, which offered the Soviet war machine a considerable reserve comprising of an estimated 2.3 million (ibid. 12). In return for military service, they were promised a reduction of their sentence or even release from prison. For thieves-in-law, this was an unacceptable offer, as all cooperation with the state and participation in life was considered a sin. However, together with other criminals, some rebellious thieves-in-law accepted this offer.

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In the course of the war, no small number of the ex-gulag prisoners was detained inside German war prisons. After the defeat of the Third Reich, they returned to the Soviet Union where they were imprisoned again – on the basis of not having resisted the enemy until the bitter end.[13] Thus, after the war, the thieves-in-law and those outside the law met each other in the Soviet camps. The Gulag archipelago became the site of bitter conflicts between both groups, which was fought out with a hitherto unknown brutality. It ended in 1953 with the defeat of the thieves-in-law.

The state organs regarded this confrontation, referred to as the Bitch War, as an opportunity to break the dominance of the thieves-in-law and supported their opponents (the criminals or bitches, *suki*) with arms. The defeat of the thieves-in-law was so thorough that they ceased to exist as a criminal caste (Varese 1998). However, in the post-war Soviet Union, the reputation of the thieves-in-law was revitalized by resourceful brokers in violence and applied in order to sell protection – quite similar to the Italian mafia in its early days. Caucasians, especially from Georgia, were found at the forefront of this process of reinventing the thieves-in-law. Meanwhile, the thieves-in-law (nowadays often referred to as the 'Russian mafia'), are active on a transnational level, even if they no longer have much in common with the thieves-in-law from the Gulag labour camps.

Ethos

'Thieves-in-law' is the literal translation of the Russian *vory v zakone*. The law to whom the thieves confess is not the state law, but a distinct code of the criminals. This law is exclusively handed down verbally and has changed over time. The Georgian criminologist Moris Shalikashvili (2009: 35-43) introduces six versions of this law, forwarded by various authors at different times. However, certain principles appear in all variants and identify norms and taboos.[14]

A taboo rests on each form of cooperation with the state, social commitment, work, family, wealth and sedentary existence. The principle of the prohibition to work with state institutions and state officials begins with the precept of silence, i.e., the principle of refusing to provide any information to outsiders. However, it is likewise forbidden to deny you belong to the world of thieves. In labour camps and prisons, this taboo rests on cooperating with the camp or

13 | This concerned not only the former prisoners captured in Germany, but all Soviet soldiers who had fallen into the hands of the Germans, who were accused of treason.

14 | The following account is based on: Varese (1998), Slade (2013), Shalikashvili (2009), Humphrey (1999), Kupatadze (2010), Oleinik (2003), Lobjanidze and Ghlont'i (2004), Nordin and Glonti (2006) and Stephenson (2015).

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prison officials. It is particularly despicable to take up a gun in the name of the state – as a soldier, a militia officer or a policeman.

A thief-in-law does not regard himself as a political dissident, who rejects injustice for the sake of society. Similar to the world of the camp, the world of civilians is seen as foreign and thus as a legitimate target of raids. A thief should not join a federation, party, or organisation except that of his own. In addition, it is forbidden under all circumstances for a thief to do regular work. He has to exclusively earn a livelihood by means of criminal activities. Labour is equated with enslavement, whereas a thief-in-law regards himself as free.[15]

Similarly, a thief-in-law may not be married. If he takes on a sexual relationship with a woman, he has to share her with his thief colleagues. A thief has to dissolve his commitments to his biological family; after entering the world of thieves he no longer holds obligations towards them. Nevertheless, there are indications that the glorification of one's own mother is part of the code of honour, especially for Caucasian thieves-in-law (Nordin and Glonti 2006: 64). It is important to note, however, that the term 'mother' underwent a revaluation: by tattooing her portrait on the body of a thief-in-law, he proved his unconditional fidelity to the family of thieves. 'I will never forget my mother' as a tattoo is supposed to indicate his unbreakable solidarity with the world of thieves (Gurov cited in Varese 1998: 519).

A thief-in-law must reject material wealth; anything beyond the strictly necessary personal needs is to be deposited into the treasury of the thieves (Russ. *obchshak*) and thereby collectivized. Finally, at least during the first decades of the Soviet Union, a thief-in-law was forbidden to officially register himself, that is, to obtain the actually required confirmation of registration (Russ. *propiska*). Just like an Abrek, he should be homeless.

Overall, these taboos present the ideal of renunciation and of detaching oneself from the outside world. This detachment has to be complete and is propagated as a detachment from the world as a whole. By the assumption of the prison or the camp as 'home' and 'grave,' attested by numerous tattoos and sayings handed down (Plutser-Sarnov 2003: 39, 2006: 45), the thief-in-law seeks to turn from a living being to an undead. Through this revaluation of values, the former life suddenly comes to a standstill.[16] Not only that social obligations have lost their validity, it is now also completely irrelevant who you

15 | In this context, it is sometimes pointed out that the Russian verb 'to work' (*rabotat'*) is etymologically related to the noun for slave (*rab*).

16 | Even some prisoners who did not belong to the world of thieves had the experience of complete, boundless freedom in labour camps, such as the author Edward Limonov. His biographer Emmanuel Carrère (2012: 399) stated: 'Possibly the camp is hell, but solely through the power of his mind has he been able to make it a paradise.'

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were and what you had done before.[17] Initiation into the world of thieves is powerful enough to completely annihilate one's old life – just as initiations in very different contexts end the days of youth (van Gennep 1986 [1909], Turner 2005 [1969]). Whoever cares for life tries to avoid the world of thieves – also because the weak are tormented relentlessly. 'I wanted to live,' a young criminal in the documentary 'The Marc of Cain' gave as a reason for becoming a 'goat', i.e., to cooperate with the camp officials.[18]

In addition to these taboos on behaviour, there are further ascetic ideals, formulated in the form of behavioural norms, which can be summarized as follows. Self-control is a prerequisite for the control of others. In order to test the self-restraint of a thief, he can be exposed to extreme situations in which it is difficult to maintain one's command – for example, in an alcohol or drug-fuelled frenzy. A very strong concentration of tea (Russ. *chifir*) is used for these kinds of intoxicating rituals in prison. In addition to controlling his body, a thief-in-law should control his language, leaving excessive cursing to his stooges.

In addition, mastery of the thieves' cant is one of the requirements for a thief-in-law. Rudimentary, a special variant of this secret language of criminals *(fenya)* has existed in Russia from the sixteenth century on. It differs so strongly from Russian that it can almost be called a language of its own. Its vocabulary is estimated to comprise between 10,000 and 27,000 words (Shalikashvili 2009: 73). This secret language allows the thieves to conceal the true meaning of their internal communications.

Moreover, a thief-in-law has to master the game of cards. Playing cards is the most popular leisure activity in Soviet prisons. Through high stakes (in the extreme case, one's own body parts), a thief-in-law proves courage and carelessness. He proves that he does not care about anything, not even the integrity of his own body. Game debts must be settled at all costs. Luck in the game is considered a good omen. The colour system of the playing cards also serves to classify the world: black is the colour of the thieves, red is the colour of the others. Accordingly, prisons were divided into red (state-controlled) and black (controlled by the thieves-in-law). A thief-in-law should never wear red clothes (Danzig Baldayev cited in Shalikashvili 2009: 40).

A thief-in-law is obliged to recruit new thieves. Soviet prisons and labour camps provided an especially suitable environment for recruiting young thieves. An established thief-in-law was expected to charm other prisoners

17 | This may also be a motive for some jihadists, whose life before joining the jihad had been stained by crimes, drugs and violence, which completely looses relevancy after their complete surrender to the sacred struggle (according to dogma).

18 | The Marc of Cain', documentary by Alix Lambert (2001); see: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DJCAPInjEkc (28:30)

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and thus to enlist prospective applicants by playing on their mistrust towards 'the authorities' and publicising an alternative law hand tailored to the moral reasoning of criminals, or by emanating a romantic view of the criminal life by spreading stories or songs from the criminal underground.[19] As many prisoners were illiterate, storytelling and singing was a valued commodity in the camps. Once this courtship had been successful, the applicant became a candidate and was ordered to carry out petty crimes or cover up someone else's criminal offense. After a probationary period, the candidate could be raised to the rank of a thief-in-law. This change in status was carried out by means of an initiation, the so-called baptism.

In the world of thieves everybody had to stand by the other at all times. If the outside world could and should be deceived, the commandment of honesty and sincerity applied within the community. A demand for moderation in the exercise of violence was to be observed in contacts with the outside world. Even if violence was part of the daily practice of the thieves-in-law, indeed the basis of their activities, the excessive use of force was considered bad form. For this reason, certain thieves renounced firearms (or at least their utilisation) during raids. Of other thieves it was said they took heart medicines with them in order to be able to provide first aid if the victim suffered a cardiac arrest (Paul Erich Roth cited in Shalikashvili 2009: 29).[20]

Apart from the ideal of asceticism, expressed in the taboos, other religious-sectarian ideals become evident in the behavioural norms: self-control, moderation, and fraternity. In addition, there is the linguistic detachment from the outside world, the imperative of the secrecy of the rites, and the missionary dissemination of belief – traits of religious sects, too. These religious reminiscences are not accidental but fed by the detachment from an outside world regarded and experienced as genuinely unjust. The rejection of the profane world as unjust creates a link to the suffering of the crucified Christ. In this context, it is significant that the thieves-in-law hand down a legend, in which a thief stole a nail falling to the ground during the crucifixion of Jesus, which was thus deprived of its use. Observing this deed, Jesus blessed the thief (after Di Puppo and Dugladze 2004). Here the themes of 'thief' and 'believer' coincide. Viewed from an emic perspective, the code of the thieves-in-law is thus a deeply moral one.

19 | On thieves' songs, see Hufen (2010).

20 | This did not stop thieves-in-law, however, from maltreating women or inferior prisoners.

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Relations with the Outside World

Connected by the unconditional submission to their code of conduct, and following the model of a religious sect, the thieves-in-law represent a powerful elite of criminals to the outside world, and an egalitarian community to their inner world. Among the thieves-in-law, decisions are always made in consensus during meetings called *skhodkas*. As in the case of the early Christians, national affiliation does not play a decisive role for the thieves-in-law: their code transcends not only the family but also ethnic origins. All thieves-in-law had to be regarded as equal and must treat each other as equal. This is the difference between the thieves-in-law and the regionally bound Abreks or ethnically defined mafia groups such as the Chechen mafia, the Cosa Nostra in Sicily, or the Yakuza in Japan, where ethno-national affiliation is a major criterion for recruitment. Thieves-in-law are always men. Women can feel committed to the ideals of the world of thieves, but may never be ordained.

If the world of the thieves-in-law is egalitarian in itself, the system into which their world is integrated is hierarchical. In carrying out assignments up to assassinations, the thieves-in-law resort to henchmen, the so-called *shestyorki* (Russ.; Georg. *k'ai bichebi*), as they themselves do not dirty their hands. Wardens (Russ. *smotryashchie*; Georg. *makureblebi*), manage the economic resources and represent the interests and rules of the thieves-in-law.[21] People below these ranks and thus outside the 'law' may be robbed and abused at will. At the lower end of the prison hierarchy are the humiliated (Russ. *petukhi*, chicken), who are subjected to the thieves-in-law and their helpers without no protection at all; *petukhi* are not worthy of being looked at, and are in no case to be touched. Talking to these people could cause a thief-in-law to jeopardize his status. Certain *petukhi* were cut in the face with knives, tattooed with swastikas or words such as 'whore', 'chicken', 'rat', 'gay', 'Balt', 'blabbermouth', 'Little Jew', 'beast of burden', 'animal', 'scum', 'dick', 'demon', 'camel' or 'devil' (Baldaev 2006: 273).

The world of those who live 'in law' is thus clearly separated from the external world, which is considered lawless, even if it has the federal law on its side. In the thieves' philosophy, inhabitants of the outside world not only lack the 'real' law, but are seen a different species, devoid of the right to be considered human in the way only the *vory* are (Stephenson 2015: 183). The community of the thieves-in-law is separate, exclusive, detached. According to the British social anthropologist Caroline Humphrey (1999: 204) it must be regarded as a distinct culture, not as a network.

The thieves' world (Russ. *vorovskoy mir*; Georg. *kurduli samqaro*) is attested with attributes of purity by their members, whereas the outside world is con-

21 | For further information on the hierarchy of thieves in prisons and the outside world, see Shalikashvili 2009: 47-63.

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sidered 'dirty.' Accordingly, servants of the outside world, such as policemen or prison guards, are called 'rubbish' (Russ. *musor*). It is significant, however, that Stalin also designated his opponents as dirt, which had to be disposed of (Applebaum 2003: 35). The semantic reference system is identical, only the assignment varies. This also holds true for the oath sworn by the thieves-in-law, which, according to Kupatadze (2010: 58) started with a phrase similar to the oath sworn by a member of the Communist party. As in many other cases, the detachment of one's own collective identity takes place on the basis of concepts with which the other group distinguishes itself, too. Ideas of purity play an important role here: each group considers itself as pure and ascribes impurity to the other group (Douglas 1985). Friend and foe, world and counter-world, have more in common than is dear to them.

Conclusion

What similarities and differences can be traced in the contexts of origin, world views, and relations to the outside world of the Abreks, thieves-in-law, and Caucasian jihadists? What do these similarities and differences tell us about the specific forms of turning away from a world into which one was born but in which one has lost any kind of trust? What are the premises and restraints of radical detachment?

Both Abreks and thieves-in-law as well as jihadists have emerged in the context of radical social and political upheavals. In addition to new winners, these upheavals have produced countless losers. In the case of the Abreks, the Russian colonialism of the nineteenth century destroyed the existing social order, assassinating, expelling or subduing the inhabitants of the Caucasus. The thieves-in-law were products of Stalinism and its brutal camp system. The old oppressive tsarist order disappeared and a new, even more oppressive order prevailed. Perhaps this is one of the reasons why the thief-in-law replaced the figure of the Abrek as a model of 'criminal justice.' New eras brought with them new heroes of resistance. The Caucasian jihadists, in turn, emerged from the chaos resulting from the collapse of the Soviet Union – a chaos characterized by civil war, mass poverty, political repression and corruption. In any case, the legitimacy of the post-Soviet political order left much to be desired for a large part of the Caucasian population, and anyone who raised a weapon against this order could become a hero.

In this sense, Abreks stood for the individualistic ethos of breaking with the world and retreating into the wilderness. The Abrek was a loner, not a social human being, with his own ideas of right and wrong. His mythical power dwelt on a contempt for death, which led to a moral superiority over the Russian aggressors, who were held to hang on to life. The thieves-in-law, in contrast, fol-

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lowed a collectivist ethos. The law of their caste gave meaning to their lives and differentiated them from the outside world. This distinguishes the thieves-in-law (social men) from the Abreks (loners). By accepting the 'grave' of the prison as their home, the thieves-in-law transformed into undead, too; the world could no longer harm them.

With their oath of allegiance, the jihadists also become undead. From then on, dogma prescribes: others love life and we embrace death. This transformation to an undead is undertaken in the service of a doctrine of salvation, however, according to which this transformation contributes to victory. The jihadists thus also differ from the Abreks: if the latter invest in the loss, the failure, the downfall, the former invest in the victory, or at least the rise of Islam. The Abreks are on their own, the iihadists are part of a movement from which they draw their strength. What they both share is a radical break with prevailing norms and a conscious detachment from the outside world.

Breaking with the norms of the 'living', Abreks, thieves-in-law and jihadists enter into a space of liminality, where the old rules do not count and where new alliances are forged (Turner 1998). Experiencing liminality usually evokes feelings of euphoria; it also provokes a mindset that is best used for indoctrination (the ritual making of a new person). States of liminality are very fragile, however, and cannot usually be maintained for long. In the ritual process, they end with the reintegration of the initiate into society. In case reintegration is ruled out (for personal or dogmatic reasons), the unmaintainable state of liminality can only be terminated by death. No surprise, then, that the Abrek claims to seek death, the thief-in-law considers death the restoration of his natural state, and the jihadist loves death more than life. It almost seems as if radical mistrust triggering rigorous detachment fulfils itself in death (see Laidlaw 2015).

The relationship between the Abreks, thieves-in-law, and jihadists and the outside world is antagonistic. They all shift their trust from the outside world to their own world and strive for a hermetic demarcation. As in the case of trust, mistrust here leads to a reduction of complexity (see Luhmann 2014). The outside world is clearly bad, no ifs, no buts, one has no time to waste on details, the main concern is to avoid being dragged into it. The 'defensive measure' resulting out of mistrust (Luhmann 2014: 2) that we are confronted with here leads to a blatant simplification of the world, as well as to a noticeable simplification of the ways one can deal with it.

However, there are specifics. Although the Abrek also turns away from his relatives and neighbours, he remains closely related to them, and can fall back on them in order to hide from his pursuers. Only the external world, not linked to him by means of kinship or spatial proximity, comes with antagonistic connotations and may be raided. The code of the thief-in-law, in contrast, prescribes the termination of all existing social relations. The world 'out there' can – and should – be robbed, but not destroyed. Whoever represents the world

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'out there' is referred to as rubbish *(musor)*. A similar dualism was employed by members of the state authorities such as Stalin when referring to thieves. This mutually constitutive process is based on structural similarities and a shared recourse to notions of purity.[22] The (male Caucasian) jihadist not only breaks off contact with his environment and shifts his trust exclusively to his world of salvation. For him, the outside world may not only be robbed, it has to be destroyed. He seeks to bring the world to an end, and himself with it.

In the discursive elevation, not only jihadists, but also Abreks and thieves-in-law are undead. They have left the realm of the living while still alive. They have abandoned their families and households, abjured the laws valid for everybody else. Henceforth they no longer are accountable to the world. Death is always with them, has become a part of them. It is this charisma that makes jihadists, Abreks and thieves-in-law appear so powerful. The accompanying attitude towards the outside-world is well captured by a slogan handed down from the world of the Gulags which became a dogma for prisoners 'in the law' and is cited in the title of this chapter: 'Don't Trust, Don't Fear, Don't Beg.' 'Don't Trust' here means detaching oneself from one's environment, 'Don't Fear' indicates emotional disentanglement, and 'Don't Beg' relates to the re-evaluation of values: a free man rises from the status of a degraded petitioner by turning to the tools of mistrust and fearlessness. Mistrust, here, is seen as an emancipating power.

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22 | This, in turn, raises the question if practices of delineation are always relational, or whether a full separation from the world is at all possible (see Laidlaw 2015).

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