

**Political Paradigm and Official Historiography: Debates Around Abkhazia
(1950s)**

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Abstract

Abkhazia enjoyed a high degree of autonomy in Georgian SSR. The official Georgian historiography (Marxist-Leninist textbooks) considered Abkhazians as foreign tribes, populated in Western Georgia, which consolidated in the 8th century and afterward, in the 10th century joined the united Georgian Kingdom. In the 1950s, Pavle Ingorokva, a literary scholar, questioned the official narrative and criticized Georgian historians for considering Abkhazians as non-Georgian tribes. According to him, medieval Abkhazians were Georgians, while modern Abkhazians were newcomers in Abkhazia. Debates regarding Ingorokva's claim appeared only in the post-Stalin era, which gives us reason to conclude that the new theory of Abkhazian ethnogenesis was initiated by the Stalinist state.

Many works have been written about the Communist past of Abkhazia, but little is known about the theory of Pavle Ingorokva on Abkhazian ethnogenesis and its link to the Soviet nationalities policy. Ingorokva's work, which brought forth a new idea regarding the origins of Abkhazians, is often discussed without historical context, and none of the already existing works clearly demonstrate those preconditions, that preceded Ingorokva's theory and state attempts to change the official historical narrative regarding Abkhazia. As it turns out, the Soviet Union allowed the existence of those unofficial historical narratives that did not oppose the state's policy. The aim of this work is to explain the objectives of changing the official historical narrative regarding Abkhazia and the link between the Soviet nationalities policy and Soviet-Georgian historiography.

Based on the analysis of primary and secondary sources, this thesis concludes that Ingorokva's theory was the legitimate basis for justifying the Soviet nationalities policy (the 1930s and 1940s) in Abkhazia. In the post-Stalin period, the Soviet nationalities policy was

changed and the theory lost the state's support, however, some of Ingorokva's considerations appeared in the history textbook of 1958.

This work critically reviews primary sources and incorporates them with secondary sources to build a relevant picture of the narrative battles and the preconditions of the debate, that took place in the 1950s regarding Abkhazia. Thus this work is a significant contribution to the study of historical roots of Georgian –Abkhazian conflict and paves the way to further research on this subject.

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Note on the Archives

This work relies on the materials from the Communist Party Archive of Georgia and from the Archive of the National Science Academy of Georgia. The archival materials are organized as follows:

Fond= Fund

Opis= Register

Delo= Affair

List = Sheet

Introduction

Abkhazia is located in the western part of Georgia. In the 8th century, the region was populated by Abkhazian and Georgian tribes, which then turned into the kingdom of Abkhazia before merging with the united Georgian Kingdom in the 10th century. Whether Abkhazian tribes were of Georgian origin or not is still a matter of debate. First Marxist-Leninist History textbooks of the 1940s identified Abkhazians (Abasgs, Apsils, Missimians) as foreign tribes, who followed Georgian politics and assimilated in the Georgian cultural space. In 1950, Georgian literary scholar Pavle Ingorokva presented an alternative theory, which questioned the official narrative. The debate I am going to discuss in this thesis is linked with the theory of Pavle Ingorokva about Abkhazian ethnogenesis and territorial affiliation of medieval Abkhazia which was first published in 1950 as an article - “*Kingdom of Abkhazia*” and then as a book - “*Giorgi Merchule*” in 1954. Even nowadays, during the Georgian-Abkhazian dialogue, Ingorokva’s claim that medieval Abkhazians were Georgians is one of the most principal issues, which often confuses Georgians and gives reasons to Abkhazians for complaining about their discrimination by Georgians during the Soviet period.

According to Stephen Johns, in multiethnic societies, several national histories can be found, brought forth by different narrators, academicians, anonymous people or even officials and “the Soviet experience in Georgia and other republics suggest that ruling circles in the USSR, in their attempt to propagate an official history, have conceded to and been influenced by demands from below. But at the same time, as propagators of iconoclastic and Universalist ideologies, they have come into conflict with national traditions and memories”.¹ Thus, in

¹Johns, Stephen. *Old Ghost and New Chains: Ethnicity and Memory in the Gorgian Republic*. Watson, Rubie S. *Memory, History and Opposition – Under State Socialism*. School of American research, Santa Fe and New Mexico, 1994, p. 151;

addition to official historiography, several unofficial narratives existed in the Soviet Union, and the connection between official and unofficial narratives was regulated by the State.

As Georgian case demonstrates, both ethnic groups - Abkhazians and Georgians had different historical memories, but they came into conflict with one another when an unofficial historical thesis, Ingorokva's theory regarding the medieval Abkhazians, attempted to change the official narrative written in the Marxist history textbook of 1946. However, there are three factors that deserve attention. Firstly, history in the service of the Soviet politics was never objective and always possessed features of the Soviet nationalities policy. That is why in order to understand the attempts to change the official narrative in the 1950s, one should look at the changes that took place during the previous decades. Secondly, the attempt should be connected to the initiative of the Soviet state, because during the late Stalinism period, the literary scholar would not be able to freely publish a historical article. Finally, Ingorokva's theory existed alongside the official historical narrative taught in schools and this co-existence lasted until the de-Stalinization.

The Soviet leaders criticized the Tsarist regime, however, they learned some lessons from the nationalities policy of the Russian Empire - such as manipulation of territorial disputes and encouragement of different types of particularism, based on language, culture or ethnicity. Abkhazians' strive for separation emerged after Imperialist politics transferred Abkhazian language to the Russian script, replaced the Georgian language by the Russian language in Abkhazia, and encouraged the emergence of scholarly works on Abkhazia's history, which claimed that Abkhazia was not part of Georgia.

Thus, the Leninist slogan about self-determination was attractive for Abkhazians and gave them the right to demand their autonomy. After the February Revolution, Abkhazian

Bolsheviks demanded self-determination and joined the “Union of the Mountaineer Peoples’ of the Caucasus”, but later they negotiated with Tbilisi and stayed in the Georgian Democratic Republic on an autonomous basis. After the Sovietization, Abkhazians were granted the status of the Soviet Socialist Republic and with the special union treaty, they joined the Transcaucasian Federation in 1922. From 1923, after adopting the concept of “korenizatsia” (indigenization) in the Soviet nationalities policy, Soviet Government supported Abkhazians’ right to territory, language, party membership, and culture. However, from the 1930s, following the changes in the Soviet nationalities policy, Abkhazians found their territorial status diminished and party cadres replaced by Georgians. In some parts of the autonomy, Abkhazians were registered as Georgians, while from the 1940s, Abkhazian language disappeared from schools, several toponyms were changed and new Georgian settlements emerged in Abkhazian villages. The favor shown to Georgians by the Soviet regime was viewed from the Abkhazian side as an attack on Abkhazian nationalism. As modern Abkhazian historians demonstrate, the Soviet nationalities policy in Abkhazia from the 1930s was perceived by Abkhazians as an attempt by Georgian “nationalists”, Stalin and Beria, to assimilate Abkhazians with Georgians and create a “cozy Georgian Empire”. Abkhazians ignored the fact that nationalities policy in Georgia was part of the broader nationalities policy of the Soviet Union and not a specific effort by the state to favor Georgians. Also, they failed to recognize that neither Stalin nor Beria was Georgian nationalist and they never openly admitted their affinity towards Georgia.

In February 1947, the members of Abkhazian intelligentsia claimed that the Leninist-Stalinist nationalities policy in Abkhazia had been distorted. In the late 1940s, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CC CPSU) received letters about the violation of Abkhazian and Ossetian national and cultural rights in their respective autonomous regions.

Mainly, these letters referred to the reorganization of schools for minorities, replacement of Ossetian and Abkhazian languages by the Georgian language and adoption of Georgian script for Abkhazian language. In 1947, after analyzing the school reorganization and language policy in Abkhazia, Communist party officials refused to admit there was a problem. In the late 1940s, new letters regarding the same issue were sent to the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, which were never discussed.

Following the changes in the Soviet nationalities policy in Abkhazia, Pavle Ingorokva published an article in the journal “Mnatobi”, entitled as “*The Kingdom of Abkhazia*” (1950), in which he made historical (and one can also say - nationalist) claims on the territory. Based on the hagiographic chronicle of the 10th century Georgian writer Giorgi Merchule,² Ingorokva declared that Abkhazians were Georgian tribes, like Karts, Mingrelians, and Svans. In 1954, the scholar published a book “Giorgi Merchule”, in which he repeated his claim and went even further by saying that in the 10th century, Abkhazia was a synonym for Georgia, Georgian kings were called kings of Abkhazia and medieval Abkhazians were Georgians, while the modern Abkhazians were newcomers, who arrived in Abkhazia only during the 17th century. In order to find out what was the purpose of these claims, it is important to define when did Ingorokva start writing his work.

In the letter addressed to the Science Academy of Georgia, Ingorokva mentioned that he had been working on “*Giorgi Merchule*” for 7 years.³ The book was published in 1954, which means that he started writing his work in 1947 when the first open protest by Abkhazian intelligentsia occurred in Abkhazia. However, Ingorokva was not the only scholar who started writing on the medieval history of his homeland in the 1940s. The editors of the Soviet

² Georgian Literary scholars considered “Giorgi Merchule” as a name and a surname of a 10th century Georgian writer, however Ingorokva explored that “Merchule” was an institute of theologians;

³ Fund 1, Register 1532, Affair 126, Sheets 1-31, 1955, p. 10;

journals were concerned with the emergence of “bourgeois nationalism”⁴ caused by the propaganda of war, which encouraged national and military traditions of the non-Russian population. It also should be mentioned that unlike the theory of “three Brotherly people” which claimed the kinship between Ukrainians, and Russians,⁵ Ingorokva’s theory did not support the myth of the common origin of Georgians and Abkhazians as Ingorokva declared modern Abkhazians as the newcomers on Georgia’s land. In addition, Ingorokva did not support oppose classes and nor social formations and unlike the works of Central Asian historians, who were accused of “bourgeois nationalism” after the war.⁶ Ingorokva’s theory was never discussed by the Party officials or scholars until the de-Stalinization. These facts show that the claims, made regarding the theory of Abkhazian ethnogenesis, was initiated by the State. The theory could give a historical legitimacy for justification of the changes in the Soviet nationalities policy in Abkhazia, as it aimed to prove that modern Abkhazians were not descendants of the old Abkhazian tribes. Based on the Soviet primordialist understanding of ethnicity, this claim tried to explain why Abkhazians were deprived of those rights that were given to them during the korenizatsia policy.

In 1955, Georgian academician Giorgi Akhvlediani supported Ingorokva’s arguments in the magazine “Zaria Vostoka” and gave a positive feedback to Ingorokva’s findings. In addition, Ingorokva gained followers among Georgians, while Abkhazian intelligentsia protested against the new theory. Thus, in 1956, by the order of Communist Party of Georgian SSR, the Ivane Javakhishvili Institute of History, Archeology, and Ethnography of the Science Academy of Georgia arranged a public discussion in the journal “Mnatobi”. In this discussion, two sides were identified – Ingorokva’s adversaries and advocates. Some linguists

⁴Tillet, Lowell. *The Great Friendship: Soviet Historians of the Non-Russian Nationalities*. The University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, 1969, p. 98;

⁵ Ibid: p. 87

⁶ Ibid: p. 116;

and historians expressed their positions regarding Ingorokva's work in the journal "Mnatobi", while others refrained from showing their opinions, though they were following the discussion closely. Abkhazians were not content with the outcome of the debate and sent a letter of complaint to Nikita Khrushchev. As a result, in 1957 communist party of Georgia arranged a meeting and discussed the debate. During the party session, Georgian scholars who supported Ingorokva were criticized, while the members of the Communist Party and staff of journal "Mnatobi", who were responsible for arranging the discussion, were reprimanded. Despite the fact that Ingorokva's work was officially condemned, some ideas from "Giorgi Merchule" emerged in the history textbook of 1958.

The Abkhazian response to Ingorokva's theory appeared in 1959 when a book by Abkhazian historian Zurab Anchabadze (Chachba) was published in Sokhumi, entitled "*From the History of Medieval Abkhazia (VI-XVII centuries)*". In this work, the author openly discussed the ideas of Pavle Ingorokva and raised his own arguments to prove Ingorokva's theory wrong. Despite the fact that many Abkhazian and Georgian scientists tried to study the history of Abkhazia from the 1930s, Anchabadze noted in the introductory part of his book that his work was the first scientific attempt to create a valuable historical work on the subject. Anchabadze's claim was bolstered by the fact that he critically reviewed the existing literature on Abkhazian history, incorporated them with primary sources of Georgian and foreign chronicles (Armenian, Persian, Greek, Russian) and wrote a complete work based on Marxist-Leninist principles.

The later discussions on Ingorokva's theory, in the works of the Georgian and Abkhazian historians, had shown that varying attitudes had been formed towards the emergence of a new historical idea regarding the Abkhazian ethnogenesis. Georgian historian Zurab Papaskiri in his book "*Studies in History of Present Day Abkhazia 1917-1993*" discussed Abkhazian

reaction to Ingorokva's theory and the debate in the journal "Mnatobi". According to Papaskiri, "Ingorokva's theory had not appeared out of nowhere, it was a response to rough falsification of the history of Georgian and Abkhazian peoples, which started in 1907 by the N. Voronov and the nationalist-separatist regime of Nestor Lakoba in the 1920s, which was successfully continued by Semion Basaria, Semion Ashkhatsava, Konstantine Kudriacev, and others".⁷ Georgian historian Levan Izoria, in his dissertation "*Abkhazian Separatist Movement (1945-1993)*" shared a similar opinion, that Ingorokva's theory was a response to the earlier works on Abkhazian history.⁸ The other Georgian scholar, Grigori Lezhava in the work "*Between Georgia and Russia: Historical Roots and Contemporary Factors of Georgian-Abkhazian conflict XIX-XX*", connected "*Giorgi Merchule*" to Ingorokva's previous works on the historical borders of Georgia and Caucasian countries, and identified Ingorokva as a nationalist, who tried to protect territorial integrity of his homeland before and after the Sovietization.⁹ A similar opinion is found in the work "*Abkhazia in the Soviet Time*" by Abkhazian historian Igor Marikhuba, who discussed Ingorokva's theory as an individual work of a Georgian nationalist scholar, but unlike Lezhava, Marikhuba claimed that it was written for Georgian nationalists – Stalin and Beria.¹⁰ Abkhazian historian Teimuraz Achughba in the work "*Ethnic History of Abkhazia*" called Ingorokva "an apologist of the Georgian mini-Empire" and discussed his theory in connection with the nationalities policy of "Georgian

⁷Papaskiri, Zurab. *Studies in History of Present-Day Abkhazia, 1917-1993*. Tbilisi State University Press, Tbilisi, 2007, p. 160;

⁸Izoria, Levan. *Doctoral Dissertation -Abkhazian Separatist Movement (1945-1993)*. St. Andrew the First Called Georgian University of the Patriarchate Georgia, Tbilisi, 2015, p. 46;

⁹Lezhava, Grigori. *Mejdu Gruziei I Rossiei, Istoricheskie Kornia I Sovremennie Faktori Abkhazo-Gruzinskogo Konflikta (XIX-XX)*. Rossiiskaia Akademiia Nauk, Moskva, 1997, p. 160;

¹⁰Marikhuba, Igor. *Abkhazia v Sovetskuyu Epokhu. Abkhazskie Pisma 1947-1989. Sbor Dokumentov. Tom.1.*, Respublika Apsni, Sukhumi, 1994, p. 160;

national-chauvinists”, which aimed to “deprive Abkhazians of their historical memory” and “prove that Abkhazians never had their own history”.¹¹

As it can be seen from the literature review, none of these interpretations draw the whole picture - why did Ingorokva’s theory emerge in the 1950s? Firstly, if “Giorgi Merchule” was a response to the earlier works on Abkhazian history, as Papaskiri and Izoria claim, then how can we explain the chronological gap? Secondly, if “*Giorgi Merchule*” was written only for the nationalist purposes as Lezhava claimed, then how can we explain the silence of censorship? Thirdly, if Ingorokva’s work supported the “National-Chauvinist” goals as Marikhuba and Achughba claim, then it appears, that both Stalin and Beria were Georgian nationalists, which is nonsense. Ingorokva’s theory cannot be considered as an individual work, written for the nationalist aspirations, nor should it be discussed in the prism of the nationalities policy launched by the “Georgian national-chauvinists”, but in the prism of the Soviet nationalities policy from 1923-1953.

I do not intend to prove or oppose Ingorokva’s considerations or express position about Abkhazian origin or Georgian-Abkhazian kinship. The aim of this work is to present the debates that emerged in the 1950s around Abkhazia, analyze the preconditions of these debates, which are linked with the Soviet nationalities policy and history writing, and review Georgian and Abkhazian reactions towards the new theory on Abkhazian ethnogenesis. In the framework of the thesis, the Soviet nationalities policy is considered as a political paradigm from 1923 to 1953 until the 1960s, while the Soviet history textbooks of 1940s and 1958 are considered as narratives of official historiography. The thesis will answer the following questions: How did the new theory fit the political paradigm of the Soviet nationalities

¹¹Achugba, Teimuraz. Ethnic History of Abkhazians: XIX-XX Centuries, Ethno - political and Migration Aspects. Science Academy of Abkhazia, Sokhumi, 2010, p. 246;

policy? Why did Ingorokva's theory emerge in the 1950s? What was the response of Georgian and Abkhazian historians to Ingorokva's work?

When it comes to primary sources, this thesis relies on materials from the Communist Party Archive of Georgia and from the Archive of the National Science Academy of Georgia, two volumes of the Soviet Journal "Mnatobi" (N12/1956, N2/1957), Soviet magazine "Zaria Vostoka" (N161/1955), Abkhazian Communist Party reports (downloaded from the Abkhazian electronic library – apsnyteka.org). The secondary sources are the books by Georgian, Abkhazian and Western and non-Western scholars on the Soviet nationalities policy and history-writing in the Soviet Union and in Georgia.

The thesis is divided into three chapters. The first chapter entitled as "nationalities policy in Georgia" will demonstrate Russian Empire's treatment of Abkhazians, which led to the emergence of Abkhazian autonomy after the February Revolution and the general aspects of the Soviet nationalities policy in Abkhazia. The chapter serves as a chronological and factual frame for explaining the preconditions of the debate over Abkhazia. The second chapter "History-writing in the Soviet Union", will provide the context of how historical narratives were used for political and ideological purposes and will demonstrate the official and unofficial historical narratives regarding Abkhazia and Abkhazians. The third chapter will show the reaction of Georgian and Abkhazian scholars and party officials towards Ingorokva's theory and will analyze several scholarly works that followed it.

Chapter 1

Nationalities Policy in Georgia

1.1. Before Soviet Rule

The Soviet nationalities policy had more in common with the Russian Imperial politics, such as- centralization of power and manipulation with territorial and lingual disputes. However, the Soviet officials never liked to admit it and even, estranged themselves from the Tsarist regime. As Oxford historian Alexander Morisson noted, there was a “territorial continuity” between the Russian empire and the Soviet state, as the Bolshevik leaders avoided fragmentation of the imperial lands and attracted former colonies by propagating Socialist goals. The territories of the Empire contained a lot of people with different ethnicities, some of which were considered as “backward”, like Central Asian people, or as “Savages” like Muslims from the Caucasus. Despite the fact, Russians considered themselves as carriers of a superior culture, they called colonial people “Nash” (ours)¹² and even Russian officials who were assigned to administer Imperial territories “saw themselves as Europeans on a civilizing Mission”.¹³

The Russian “mission” in Georgia led to the urbanization reforms, the emergence of educational institutions such as primary schools and gymnasiums and the establishment of newspapers in the Russian language (in some cases, with Georgian translation).¹⁴ However,

¹²Morison, Alexander. *The Russian Empire and the Soviet Union: Too Soon to Talk of Echoes?*. In Berni Sebe, Gabriele Maas, and Calipso Nicolaidis, “Echoes of Empire”. I. B Tauris, London and New York, 2015, p. 158;

¹³Ibid: p. 160;

¹⁴Chikovani, Nino. *The epoch of Nationalism and the Actualization of Identity Problems: the General Regularities and Local Peculiarities*. In Nino Chikovani, Irakli Chkaidze, Ivane Tsereteli, David Matsaberdize,

the Georgian language, which was the main marker of being Georgian, was restricted and teaching process in primary schools, in cities and villages, was held in the Russian language. Georgian nationalists were concerned with the fact that “School was losing its national face”.¹⁵ In addition, Russia supported the separatist tendencies among the Georgian sub-ethnic groups like Svans, Mingrelians, and Abkhazians. In the 1860s, the Russian general and linguist Baron Peter von Uslar created a script for Abkhazian language by using the Russian alphabet.¹⁶ By the end of the 19th century, the Russian language replaced the Georgian language in the church and state administration, while before that Abkhazian noblemen signed official letters by using Georgian script and Georgian was a literary language of the region.¹⁷

In addition, Uslar created a script for Svan and Mingrelian languages at the end of 19th century, after which Russian officials persuaded Mingrelians that they were not Georgians. During the imperial census Mingrelians and Svans were identified as separate groups and in some cases, they were registered as Abkhazians. For example, Samurzakano's (modern Gali region)¹⁸ Mingrelian population who spoke Georgian and Abkhazian languages were declared as Abkhazians. In addition, in 1872 Emperor Alexander II established the special rules (pravila), which prohibited Western Georgians' migration to Abkhazia. In this period the number of Abkhazians diminished as, during the Russo-Turkish war, the deportation of Abkhazians to Turkey occurred. Parallel to the Abkhazian deportations, Russians were

and Ketevan Kakitashvili's book "Identity Narratives in Georgia. at the beginning of Multiethnic Georgian State – 1860-1918. TSU Press, Tbilisi 2014, Pp. 24, 28;

¹⁵Pkhaladze, Tamar. Georgian Church and Language Issue in the second half of 19th century. Dissertation, Tbilisi State university, 2004, p.14;

¹⁶Khashba, A.K. Academic N. Ia Marr. O Iazike i Istorii Abkhazov. Academia Nauk SSR, Gruzinskii Filial, Sukhumi, 1936, p.9;

¹⁷Papaskiri, Zurab. Studies in History of the Present-Day Abkhazia, from Ancient Times till 1917. Tbilisi State University Press, 2003, Pp. 125, 228;

¹⁸Samurzakano was formed as an separate territorial unit under the Empire from 1840;

encouraged to settle in Abkhazia, and even Russian landlords were offered a certain amount of money and lands instead.¹⁹

At the beginning of the 20th century, a new propaganda was initiated by the Russian scholars, who argued that Abkhazia was not a historical part of Georgia. This claim appeared after the separation of Sokhumi district from Georgian administrative unit -Gubernia and its entrance to the Caucasian administration of Russia, while by the First World War the empire discussed the creation of separate Gubernia in Abkhazia.²⁰ As a result of Empire's political activities, before the revolution, Abkhazians had already strived for separation from Georgia, which was confirmed by the fact that Abkhazian Bolsheviks were attracted by the Leninist motto about the self-determination and demanded independence.

After the Petrograd events, on November 8, 1917, Abkhazians formed "People's Council of Abkhazia" (Abkhazskii Narodnii Sovet),²¹ which announced the entrance into the "Union of the Mountaineer Peoples of the Caucasus". The members of the council declared: "Abkhazian people believe that the brother mountaineers from the North Caucasus and Dagestan will help when Abkhazians start protecting their rights".²² However, a civil war started in the North Caucasus and Abkhazians started negotiations with the National Council of Georgia. On February 9, 1918, both sides agreed that Abkhazia would stay in Georgia with the status of Autonomy.²³ Georgia was not independent yet and the agreement had no real political power, however, after regaining Georgia's independence in 1918, Abkhazia maintained the status of autonomy. In spring 1919 new People's Council of Abkhazia sent the "Act of Abkhazian Autonomy" to the Georgian government, which officially declared Abkhazia as an

¹⁹Ibid: p. 211;

²⁰ Ibid: p. 241;

²¹Papaskiri: p. 5;

²²Ibid: p. 6;

²³Ibid: p. 10;

autonomous region in Georgia and defined the relationship between the central power and its territorial unit. The Georgian side agreed with the Act.²⁴ In addition, Georgia had territorial disputes with its neighbors – Armenia and Azerbaijan over Batumi and Kars, left by Turkey based on Armistice of Mudros in 1918. Besides this, Armenia had claims on the southern regions of Georgia (Borchalo, Akhalkalaki),²⁵ while Azerbaijan had claims on Eastern region (Zakatala).²⁶

Georgian Bolsheviks used internal and external problems the Georgian Democratic Republic was facing and used the political situation to advance their goals. On January 2, 1921, Bolshevik Revolutionary Sergo Orjonikidze, with Russian Bolshevik Sergei Kirov sent a letter to the Central Committee of the Communist Party: “Without our intervention Sovietization is impossible. We should openly assault Georgia. We have an opportunity to start our movement in Abkhazia, Adjara, and Borchalo.”²⁷ On February 15, Russian Army entered Georgia. The next day Revolutionary Committee proclaimed Georgia as the Soviet Socialist Republic. In March, Georgian Menshevik government left Georgia and sought refuge in France.²⁸ The short period of Georgia’s independence had ended.

Russian empire successfully used “divide and rule” principle to keep control over the population and territories. Language policy, on the one hand, was directed towards the Russification of the non-Russian nationalities, and on the other hand, was linked to the territorial issues. With the creation of alphabets for Mingrelian, Svan and Abkhazian languages, Russian Empire encouraged particularism among these people and encouraged

²⁴The Georgian Society in Russia. Problems of Abkhazia. Moscow, 1996, p. 6;

²⁵Hille, Charlotte. State Building and Conflict Resolution in the Caucasus. Brill, Leiden and Boston, 2010, p. 84, 85;

²⁶Ibid: p. 91;

²⁷Toidze, Levan. K Voprosu o Politicheskom Statuse Abkhazii. Samshoblo, Tbilisi, 1996, p. 6;

²⁸Hille: Pp. 98, 99;

their separation from Georgians, and even Georgian sub-ethnic groups were registered as other ethnicities. From the second half of the 19th century, the migration of Georgians to Abkhazia was prohibited and at the beginning of the 20th century scholarly works on Abkhazia's history appeared, which claimed that culturally and historically Abkhazia was not connected to Georgia. All these measures provoked Abkhazians to declare self-determination and independence.

1.2. After Soviet Rule

There are different theories about the Soviet nationalities policy in the modern scholarship, referring to disputable concepts such as nation and national rights, but what they have in common is the idea that the nationalities policy was thought to eliminate the political form of nationalism among the Soviet citizens of different ethnicity and nationality and it was based on ethnic and federal division of territories. Bolsheviks acquired the lessons from the former empires and were aware of possible challenges arising from national movements in the past and therefore used nationalism to advance their socialist goals. The study of the Soviet nationalities policy is very crucial to understand - firstly, how the Soviet nations were treated by the central government; secondly, how they were identified and classified; finally, what territorial and cultural rights they had in different periods of time. In the following subchapters, I will discuss the general aspects of Soviet nationalities policy and its implementation in Georgia, in order to draw a clear picture how Abkhazians benefited from the Soviet nationalities policy in the 1920s and early 1930s and how their rights had changed after the centralization took place in Soviet Georgia.

Beginning

All Soviet countries are equals, among equals!

(Boris Shinkhuba, Abkhazian poet)²⁹

Soviet nationalities policy was built on the confronting ideologies of the 19th century, such as socialism and nationalism. Socialism was understood in connection with horizontal ties of social classes beyond the national borders, while nationalism was based on vertical bonds to the common identities. Marxist-Leninists succeeded in advancing their socialist goals by using the nationalist movements.³⁰ In 1917, the Bolsheviks had no coherent plan in the nationalities policy, only a slogan about self-determination. Before the revolution, this slogan was used to mobilize ethnic groups towards the revolution and later, in the 1920s, its primary goal was to help overcome “Great Russian chauvinism”. Lenin and Stalin won the disputes against the Internationalists Piatkov and Bukharin and self-determination became the main principle of the new revolutionary government. Lenin made a distinction between an “offensive” (Russian) and a “defensive”(local nationalism) forms of nationalism, while Stalin was even “concrete” and often attacked the local nationalisms. For example, Stalin claimed that Georgian nationalism discriminated Ossetian and Abkhazian minorities populating Georgian state.³¹

Ethnicity played a crucial role in the division of the Soviet territories and borderlines were drawn according to the ethnic sympathies of the Soviet population.³² The understanding of ethnicity was based on the ethnographic primordialism, which had long roots in the tradition

²⁹Pritsker, L. M. *Sovetskaia Abkhazia v Daxax*. Sukhumi, 1981, p. 3;

³⁰Lapidus, W. Gail. *Ethnonationalism and Political Stability in the USSR*. Final Report to National Council for Soviet and East European Research. University of California, Berkley 1984, pp. 6-7;

³¹Martin, Terry. *The Affirmative Action Empire*. Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union 1923-1939. Cornell University Press, Ithaca and London, 2001, pp. 2, 3, 7, 8;

³² Slezkine, Yuri. *The USSR as a Communal Apartment, or how a Socialist State Promoted Ethnic Particularism*. *Slavic Review* , Vol. 53, N.2 (Summer 1994)Pp. 414-452; here Pp. 416, 417, 427;

of Russian social science. Its adherents saw ethnicity as an objective category with inherent features.³³ Soviet people were classified according to the following categories: *narody* (peoples), *narodnosti* (small people or underdeveloped), *natsional'nosti* (nationalities), *natsii* (nation) and *plemena* (tribes), and were divided into backward and civilized groups.³⁴ According to the classification given by Martin, it can be concluded that Georgians were classified as advanced people and grouped with the Western nationalities, alongside Russians, Ukrainians, Armenians, Jews, and Germans, while minorities (except the above-mentioned) populating the Georgian state, including Abkhazians and Ossetians, were considered as culturally backward.³⁵

By 1922, Georgia, Azerbaijan and Armenia were united in the Transcaucasian Federation, with their independent administrative and parliamentary bodies. Stalin explained that for Caucasians, the federal structure was a recipe for overcoming the historical hatred they had expressed towards each other in the past and for promoting peace in the future.³⁶ However, the real motive behind bringing these three nations together was that the Federation's structure reduced the chances for further secession, as only the Transcaucasian Federal Republic had the right to self-determination.³⁷ The territorial arrangement inside the Georgian state took the following shape: three autonomies were formed in the territory of Georgia and Abkhazia was declared as the Soviet Socialist Republic in 1921, while Adjara got the status of

³³ Tishkov, Valery. *Ethnicity, Nationalism and Conflict In and After the Soviet Union*. Sage Publication, London & New Delhi, 1997, Pp.1, 7;

³⁴ Slezkine: p. 427;

³⁵ Martin: p. 23

³⁶ Hazard, N. John. *Codification of Soviet Nationalities Policies*, in Huttenbach, Henry R.'s *Soviet Nationality Policies. Ruling Ethnic Groups in the USSR*. Mansell, London 1990, p.51;

³⁷ Kaiser, Robert J. *The Geography of Nationalism in Russia and the USSR*. Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, 1994, p.109;

an autonomous republic in the same year and a year later South Ossetia (Tskhinvali Region) was granted the status of an autonomous oblast.³⁸

In 1923, Soviet leadership adopted a special policy towards the question of nationality and became committed to supporting four national forms – territories, languages, elites and cultures.³⁹ The first planned step to carry out the new nationalities policy was *Korenizatsiia* (indigenization or nativization policy). According to Stephen Johns, it was “an attempt to integrate nationalities into a new multi-national state by taking into consideration specific national and cultural aspirations.” In addition, by the recruitment of natives, Soviet Union solved the problem of a personnel shortage and gave legitimacy to the party in different areas of the Soviet Union.⁴⁰ The aim of this long process with unclear boundaries was to eradicate cultural backwardness among Soviet citizens.

For overcoming “backwardness” in Abkhazia several initiatives were launched. Even some (Mingrelians) Georgians identified themselves as Abkhazians during the *Korenizatsiia*, because of some privileges granted to backward nations, such as moving to the leadership position. From 1923 to 1926, the proportion of Abkhazians in the Communist Party of Abkhazian SSR increased from 10% to 24.5 %, ⁴¹ while by 1929 this figure reached 32%.⁴² The “victory of cultural revolution” transformed Abkhazia’s cultural life. During the *Korenizatsiia* several Abkhazian cultural and educational institutions were established. Periodicals and Books were being issued in Abkhazian language, Abkhazian art and

³⁸Johns, Stephen. *The Establishment of Soviet Power in Transcaucasia: The Case of Georgia 1921-1928*. Soviet Studies, Vol. 40, N4. (OCT. 1988), pp. 616-639, here. P. 617;

³⁹Martin: Pp. 23, 151;

⁴⁰Johns: p. 616;

⁴¹Ibid: p. 617;

⁴²Saparov, Arsene. *From Conflict to Autonomy in the Caucasus*. Routledge, London and New York, 2015, p. 151;

Literature began flourishing. In Soviet Abkhazia, the local intelligentsia had emerged.⁴³ In 1927, Association of Proletariat Writers of Abkhazia was founded, which was later renamed as the Writer's Union.⁴⁴ In 1928 the Latin alphabet for Abkhazian language was created.⁴⁵ In addition, several scientific institutions were established - in 1925, the Chair of the Abkhazian Language and Literature was founded, which studied ethnographic and folk materials, different aspects of Abkhazian language and the development of methodology of its teaching.⁴⁶ In 1931, the Research Institute of Regional Studies (kraevedenie) was established, which during the world war joined the Science Academy of Georgia.⁴⁷ In 1930, musical schools and theatrical studios were founded in Sokhumi, and in 1933, Symphony Orchestra was created and several cinema installations were organized. By 1934, there were 15 secondary schools functioning in Abkhazia -5 Georgian, 4 Russian, 3 Abkhazian, 1 Greek and 1 Armenian and 70 basic secondary schools (nachal'niesrednieshkoli) – 25 Georgian, 15 Armenian, 11 Abkhazian, 10 Greek, 7 Russian and 2 mixed.⁴⁸

As the aforementioned examples demonstrate, Abkhazians benefited from the Soviet nationalities policy. First of all, they legitimized their national rights on territory, while from 1923, Soviet officials started eradicating Abkhazians' „backwardness“, in order to equalize the local people with the „civilized“ Georgians. Like many other ethnic groups, Abkhazians' cultural rights were encouraged. Soviet state equipped them with scientific institutions, and Abkhazian people were promoted to senior positions in the party. Abkhazian language was

⁴³ Sagaria, Badjur, Kuprava Arvelodi. Stanovlenie Abkhazskoi Socialisticheskoi Natsii. In “Abkhazkomu Institutu 50 Let.” Metsniereba, Tbilisi, 1985, P. 50;

⁴⁴ Saparov: 150

⁴⁵ Getsadze, I.O. The Abkhazskii Iazik, In “Mldopismennie Iaziki Narodov SSSR”. Izdatel'stvo Akademii Nauk SSSR, Moskva i Leningrad, 1959, p. 233;

⁴⁶ Dzidzaria, Giorgi. Abkhazskomu Institutu 50 Let. Akademia Nauk Gruzinskoi SSR, Tbilisi, Metsniereba, 1985, p. 17;

⁴⁷ Ibid: p. 19

⁴⁸ Materiali k Otchotu Pravitelstvo ASSR Abkhazii. VII Cezd'u of Sovietov, Sokhumi, 1935, Pp. 34, 35;

transferred to the Latin alphabet and Abkhazian newspapers were published. However, as SehryYekelchyk puts it: “in the 1920s, the USSR was state of equal nationalities and unequal classes, by the late 1930s it had become a state of equal classes and unequal nationalities”.⁴⁹ This was true for Abkhazia as well.

Changes in the Soviet Nationalities Policy

The ambiguous character of Korenizatsiia had unexpected consequences. Instead of disarming nationalism among the Soviet republics, it supported the emergence of nationalist elite. Some people misinterpreted the aim of the new nationalities policy.⁵⁰ In 1934 Stalin started to eliminate national institutions and “the executive committees of several areas, Autonomous Republics and Regions dissolved their sections, commissions, or respective institutions designed to serve the interests of national minorities”.⁵¹ Despite the fact that other signs of centralization emerged in favor of Russification, Korenizatsiia was never rejected and “at least sociocultural sector continued to the eve of World War II.”⁵²

In 1936 Stalin removed the Presidium of the Council of Nationalities that was in charge of promoting Korenizatsiia and defending the rights of the minorities. According to Svante Cornell, it was a step towards centralization. Stalin did not touch the status of autonomies, but in some cases, the power of autonomy was changed. In addition, new nationalities policy promoted new elites and changes occurred in the party system. The old Soviet elite, most of which were nationalists, was the target of the great purges. For example, in Chechen-Ingushetia, 2% of the total population became victims of repressions, in Ukraine only three

⁴⁹Yekelchyk, Sehry. *Stalin’s Empire of Memory*. University of Toronto Press, Toronto, Buffalo, London, 2004, p. 4;

⁵⁰Martin: p. 151;

⁵¹Simon, Gerhard. *Nationalism and Policy toward the Nationalities in the Soviet Union: from Totalitarian Dictatorship, to Post-Stalinist Society*. Westview press, Boulder, San-Francisco, Oxford. 1991, p. 143;

⁵²Kaiser: p.125;

persons from 102 members and candidate members of the Central Committee survived.⁵³ However, as examples show, not only party cadres were the victims of the Stalinist repressions, but the members of intelligentsia and opposition groups.

Following the Korenizatsiia policy, significant changes occurred in Georgia. On the 11th of February, in 1931, the 6th Congress of the Soviets of Abkhazia discussed the incorporation of Abkhazia into Soviet Georgia as the Autonomous Republic. On February 19th, the 6th Congress of the Soviets of Georgia passed the resolution on Abkhazia's integration to Georgia as autonomy.⁵⁴ On the same day, Abkhazian peasants gathered in the village Duripsh and demanded meetings with the Abkhazian party authorities. The Abkhazian officials proclaimed that the peasants protested against the collectivization reforms in Abkhazia and they demanded to be allowed to migrate to Turkey.⁵⁵ However, modern Georgian and Abkhazian historians question this issue and consider that Abkhazian peasants protested against the diminishing status of Abkhazia,⁵⁶ which seems like a logical explanation, as the village was compactly settled by Abkhazian peasants and besides this, protests did not emerge in those areas of Abkhazia, that were populated by multiethnic groups.

After changing the status of Abkhazia, demographic changes took place in the region, which was connected to two factors - registering Abkhazians as Georgians and settling Georgians in Abkhazia. Based on Abkhazian historian Igor Marikhuba, in 1935-1939, Abkhazians in

⁵³Cornell, Svante. *Autonomy and Conflict: Ethnoterritoriality and Separatism in the South Caucasus – Cases in Georgia*. PhD dissertation, Uppsala University, 2002, p. 80;

⁵⁴Lakoba, Stanislav. *History: 1917-1989*. In George Hewitt's "The Abkhazians". St. Martin's Press, New York, 1998, p. 94;

⁵⁵Arvelod, Kuprava. *Materiali po Istorii Abkhazii Sovetskogo Perioda*. Akademia Nauk Abkhazii, Abkhazkii Institut Gumanitarnikh Isledovani D. I Gulia, Sukhumi, 2012, p. 357;

⁵⁶Papaskiri: 119

Gali,⁵⁷ Svans, Mingrelians, and Adjarians were registered as Georgians. Marikhuba connected all these processes to the Soviet “convergence and merger” (sblijebie I slianie) policy and claimed that Stalin attempted to assimilate Abkhazians with Georgians in order to create a “cozy Georgian Empire”.⁵⁸ First of all, Georgia was not the only republic where the assimilation with a small ethnic group (Abkhazians) took place. Russian anthropologist Valeri Tishkov, based on the Soviet census of 1926 and 1939, demonstrated that assimilation with the small ethnic groups took place in other Soviet areas as well. For example, Soviet census in 1926 counted 190 ethnic identities that were “displaying varying sorts of particularism, from locality to clan affiliation”, while the census of 1939 showed that by that time, the number of ethnic groups had diminished to 99. Before the census, Stalin declared that “about 60 nations, national groups and narodnosti comprise the multinational Soviet State.”⁵⁹ Secondly, it should be mentioned that the identity of those Abkhazians who were registered as Georgians is not clear as they spoke both Georgian and Abkhazian languages. Moreover, in the 19th century, the local population belonged to the Georgian sub-ethnic group and they were proclaimed as Abkhazians by the Russian Empire.

The second reason which led to demographic changes was related to the settling of Georgian peasants in Abkhazia from 1937. This process took official form after the CC CPSU and Council of People’s Commissar adopted a decree on the creation of the migration department (pereselencheskoye upravlenie) on 27th May, 1939. The department was responsible for arranging new settlements in the Soviet Union. As Officials claimed, for cultivating undeveloped lands and for strengthening the local economy, it was necessary to settle new

⁵⁷Marikhuba mentioned that Abkhazians who were registered as Georgians belonged to the bilingual group. They spoke Abkhazian and Mingrelian (Georgian dialect) languages;

⁵⁸Marikhuba: p. 57;

⁵⁹Ibid: p. 31;

workforce in Abkhazia.⁶⁰ During the second five year plan, Beria launched an initiative to settle Russians, Armenians, and Georgians in Abkhazia.⁶¹ However, Abkhazian historians always emphasized that only Georgians were settled in Abkhazian villages. None of them spoke about Russians or Armenians. There is no data, which would show- whether there were other ethnic groups among the new migrants, or not.

Other changes occurred on the level of the state organization. By 1936, the Transcaucasian Federation was dissolved and the constituent republics were given status equal to the other Soviet Socialist Republics.⁶² From that period, a signal of the “Great Purges” in Georgia could already be seen. The chairman of the Central executive committee of Abkhazia Nestor Lakoba died in suspicious circumstances. He was well acquainted with Stalin and Beria and estranged from the latter one because of his initiative to settle Mingrelians, Armenians, and Russians in Abkhazia during the second five-year plan in 1933-1937. In late 1936, Lakoba went to Tbilisi, to visit Beria. A few days later, he died in obscure circumstances, while the cause of his death was officially given as a heart attack. There were rumors that he was poisoned by Beria. In 1936, the former Cheka official A.S Agrba was sent to Abkhazia as a first Secretary of the party. It opened “door” for the new purges in the autonomy.⁶³

Abkhazian historian Teimuraz Achughba, based on the information from the Prosecutor’s office of Abkhazia, declared that in 1937-1938 the overall number of victims in the purges reached more than 2 000 people in Abkhazia.⁶⁴ However, the exact number of murdered people among the ethnic Abkhazians is not mentioned by the author. During the Great Purges,

⁶⁰Sagaria, Badjur. Achugba, Teimuraz. Pachulia, Vianor. Abkhazia: Dokumenti Svidetelstvuiut, 1937-1953. Alashara, Sukhumi, 1992, p. 6;

⁶¹Knight, Amy. Beria Stalin’s first Lieutenant. Princeton University Press, Princeton New Jersey, 1993, p. 72;

⁶²Kaiser: p.53;

⁶³Knight: Pp. 70-72;

⁶⁴Achugba, Teimuraz. Ethnic History of Abkhazians. XIX-XX Centuries. Ethno-political and Migration Aspects. Science Academy of Abkhazia, Sukhumi, 2010, p. 12;

Soviet officials executed members of the Georgian Party (Budu Mdivani, Mikheil Okudjava, MalakiaToroshelidze, Simon Chikhladze and others) and intellectuals, some of which could not cope with living in fear of death every day and committed suicide.⁶⁵ The list of people, who were subject to repressions by the direct order of Stalin and his close associates amounts to 38 679 for the Soviet Union and among them, 3 485 were from Georgia.⁶⁶ However, apart from the central authority, the power was also located at the local level, in the hands of local authorities. In case of Georgia, this authority was Lavrenti Beria and so-called “Troika” (a group of three persons), which sent the list of people for execution to the People’s Commissar of Internal Affairs of the USSR Nikolai Yezhov for approval. Troika could not exceed the maximum number of victims without the order from the center, however, it had right to move a person from one category to another (for example, instead of sending someone to exile, it could impose a death sentence and vice versa). The exact number of victims in Georgia is not known, however, according to the present data more than 10 000 people were exiled or executed.⁶⁷

After the purges, new initiatives were launched in the language policy. From 1938, Abkhazian language was to be written with Georgian script.⁶⁸ According to Georgian historian ZurabPapaskiri, from 1936 to 1941, all languages of the “small nations” were transferred to the Russian alphabet or to the language of the republic they lived in. As Georgia had its own script, Abkhazian language, as well as South Ossetian language, were to be written with the Georgian script, while the North Ossetians adopted the Cyrillic alphabet.⁶⁹

⁶⁵Avalishvili, Levan. The “Great Terror” of 1937-1938 in Georgia: Between the two Reports of Lavrenti Beria. *Caucasus Analytical Digest*, N22, December 1/ 2010, p. 3;

⁶⁶ Ibid: p. 4;

⁶⁷ Ibid: p. 5;

⁶⁸ Getsadze: p. 233;

⁶⁹ Papaskiri: Pp. 134, 135;

The other changes occurred regarding the school system. In 1938 the CPSU Central Committee passed a resolution on the reorganization of Soviet schools. Based on the resolution, some Districts (raioni) and rural Councils (Selsoviets) had to be abolished and reorganization of schools was to commence. One of the reasons for school reorganization was the discovery of some “hostile elements”, located in the Narkompross structures and Autonomous Republics, who used national schools (German, Polish, Finn, Latish, Greek and etc..) for influencing Soviet children and preventing them to get closer to Soviet culture and Science and obtain higher education.⁷⁰ However, school reform took place in Abkhazia several years later.

As the subchapter demonstrates, the Korenizatsiia policy was not openly rejected by the state but some changes occurred in the Soviet nationalities policy - first of all, the official institutions which promoted the policy in the earlier period were dissolved. Secondly, in several cases, the status of autonomies had changed and the number of ethnic groups became less. Finally, the small nations, which did not have their own script, were transferred to the Russian alphabet. The similar picture can be seen in Abkhazia, which was transformed from the SSR into the ASSR and joined Georgia. In the Gali region, Abkhazians were registered as Georgians, while Abkhazian language was to be written with Georgian script. In addition, following the changes in the Soviet nationalities policy, the previous party members were removed. Among victims were not only former officials but the prominent members of the intelligentsia and former opponents of Stalin. In Abkhazia, as well as in other parts of the Soviet Union, the purges annihilated a large number of people and the exact number of the victims is not known. The sources show, that by the second half of the 1930s, Soviet officials already saw the need to transform the old political system and change the course of the

⁷⁰Lezhava: p. 112;

nationalities policy, as the socialist state was flourishing and class inequality had disappeared. The new line was directed towards centralization of power and “anti-Korenizatsiia” tendencies.

World War II and late Stalinism

Future belongs to no one, but to the camp of democracy and socialism!

This is confirmed by the wise rule of the leader of all progressive humanity

And the builder of peace in the world, Comrade Stalin!

(Big round of applause)⁷¹

During the Second World War, the aim of the Soviet nationalities policy was to mobilize the population for the war and revive patriotic feelings. Two tendencies appeared in the process - on the one hand “the emphasis was placed on military cooperation between Russians and non-Russians”.⁷² For strengthening patriotic feelings, the great deeds of Russian heroes (such as – Aleksandr Nevskii, Dmitri Donskoy, Kuzma Minin, Dmitrii Pozharskii, Aleksandr Suvorov and Mikhail Kutuzov, Ivane the IV and Peter the Great⁷³ - whom Stalin called “our ancestors”) were popularized. On the other hand, Soviet leadership did not only bring back Russian heroes from graves but heroes of other Soviet nations as well. Thus, it emphasized that Soviet patriotism was based not on a “narrow” nationalism, but on internationalism.⁷⁴

During the Second World War and the Late-Stalinism era, there were several lines in the Soviet nationalities policy about Georgia. For ideological mobilization of the people, great ancestors from the past were popularized and the friendship between Russians and Georgians was emphasized. For the development of economic activities, Georgians were settled in the

⁷¹Mgeladze Akaki. Otchot Abkhazskogo Oblastnogo Komiteta, KP Gruzii, Na XIX Oblastnoi Konferentsii, Abkhazskoi Organizatsii KP Gruzii. Obzkhazskoe Gosudarstvennoe Izdatel'stvo, Sukhumi 1952, p. 7;

⁷²Tillet: 59

⁷³Ibid: 63

⁷⁴Collias, Karen A. Making Soviet Citizens: Patriotic and Internationalist Education in the Formation of a Soviet State Identity, in Henry R.'s Soviet Nationality Policies. Ruling Ethnic Groups in the USSR. Mansell, London 1990, p. 83;

undeveloped lands of Abkhazia during the 1940s, while in the years 1945-1946 reorganization of minorities' schools took place.

The list of Georgian heroes appeared in the brochure of 1943, entitled "The task of Soviet Intelligentsia during the Great Patriotic War". The brochure was published by the Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Council of Abkhazian ASSR, Mikheil Delba. The author discussed contemporary politics in the Soviet Union, Hitler's plan and the historical figures of Soviet Ukraine, Belorussia, Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan. The list of Georgian heroes started with Stalin: "Georgian people gave the world the greatest genius who has ever lived and the leader (vojd) of the Soviet nations – Ioseb Visarionovich Stalin" – claimed Delba and praised Georgian culture, which according to his words was born in antiquity, when the ancestors of Hitler's followers (Gitlerovtsi), "were walking on the Rhine fields, hungry as wolves". From the "Georgian Pantheon" were chosen – king David the builder, Queen Tamar, Philosopher Ioane Petritsi, medieval writer Shota Rustaveli, and military commanders such as Giorgi Saakadze, Erekle II, and Petre Bagrationi. Besides this, Delba did not forget to mention those Georgian commanders, officers, and soldiers who heroically died alongside their Russian friends during the French invasion of Russia in 1812. After discussing the "Great ancestors", the author mentioned Abkhazia, as a country which had its own "glory in the past and present".⁷⁵ The brochure united heroes from the selected, non-Russian Republics. They represented the ancestors of the whole Soviet people.

Parallel to the military activities, building new Georgian settlements in Abkhazia continued. Based on Abkhazian historian Giorgi Dzizaria, the goal of the Georgian chauvinists was to

⁷⁵Delba, Mikheil. *Zadachi Sovetskoi Intelligentsii v Dni Otechestvennoi Voini*. Sokhumi, Izdanie Abizga, 1943, p. 29;

occupy the lands of Abkhazia.⁷⁶ Information regarding the migrants is not organized well enough to count how many Georgians settled down in Abkhazia between 1937-1953, however, Dzidzaria claimed that Georgian “newcomers” came from more than 20 districts (raion) and 100 villages (celo) and represented more than 700 family surnames (famili).⁷⁷ Other Abkhazian historians – Badjur Sagaria, Teimuraz Achugba, and Valiko Pachulia shared the similar opinion, but could not specify the exact number of Georgians who migrated to Abkhazia. Their claim, that between 1939 -1959 Georgian population in Abkhazia increased by 66 000 people and mostly because of the new settlers⁷⁸ is illogical and does not count the number of new settlers, nor gives us any other information. It’s not surprising, that demographic picture changed and if we suppose more Georgians were settled in Abkhazia, than Armenians and Russians, it would mean that the number of Georgians there would increase, in relation to other nationalities, however, of this there is no proof, and it is impossible to confirm whether Stalin and Beria were “inspired” by the national sentiments and wanted to “nationalize” Abkhazian territory.

In addition, Dzidzaria found cause and effect relationship between the two events: the exile of Germans, Turks, Tatars, Greeks, Lazs and Dashnak Armenians from Abkhazia to the Central Asia and Siberia in 1940s and settling Georgians in Abkhazia, based on the argument that the houses of deported people, were given to Georgians.⁷⁹ The link seems artificial because the deportation was not a new phenomenon in the Soviet practice and aforementioned people weren’t the only ones targeted for deportations. For example, in 1941 the Volga Germans were deported, in 1943 Karachai people and Kalmyks shared the same fate, in 1944

⁷⁶Dzidzaria: Pp. 198, 199;

⁷⁷Dzidzaria: p. 213;

⁷⁸Sagaria, Achugba, Pachulia: p. 11;

⁷⁹Dzidzaria: Pp. 228, 230;

Chechens, Ingush, Balkars and Crimean Tatars were exiled as “collaborators” with Nazi Germany and as “traitors”.⁸⁰ In addition, the Soviet leaders did not favor Georgian prisoners of war. Lot of Georgians, who were transferred to the Soviet Union by the allied forces in the 1940s, were also exiled, some were sent to Asylum, some were shot and very few continued living a normal life.⁸¹ Thus, it is clear that deportations of the aforementioned people from Abkhazia were not connected to some kind of master plan carried out by the Soviet Union, to change the demographic picture of Abkhazia in favor of Georgians, but their goal was to remove Germans, Turks, Tatars, Greeks, Lazs and Dashnak Armenians from Abkhazia, as after the war the selected groups were considered as “unreliable elements”.

Another striking issue after the World war II was the reorganization of Abkhazian schools and changing the teaching process into the Georgian language. The resolution regarding the reorganization of Soviet schools was passed in the previous decade, but the process was carried out in Abkhazia only in 1945-1946. The reason for reorganizing Abkhazian schools was explained by the Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Council of Abkhazian ASSR in the magazine “Apsni Kapsh”. The Chairman wrote: “We should Bolshevically (po-Bolshevitskii) confess, that the system which exists in Abkhazian schools, has hindered the cultural development of Abkhazian nation. {...} The program was not composed well enough. Learning in three languages (Abkhazian, Russian, Georgian) was difficult for schoolchildren”.⁸²

Among other issues, the closure of Abkhazian schools was protested by Abkhazian historian Giorgi Dzidzaria and Philologists –Bagrat Shinkuba and Konstantin Shakril in 1947. The letter was sent to the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Russia and directly to

⁸⁰Cornell: p. 81;

⁸¹Rayfield: p. 361;

⁸²Marikhuba: p. 82;

Secretary Alexei Kuznetsov. The authors wrote: “The Soviet Government, the Lenin’s and Stalin’s party saved the Abkhazian nation from physical destruction, for which it was predestined in the cursed (proklatii) old regime. {...} However, in recent times, unfortunately, the situation has changed and it principally contradicts and distorts the nationalities policy of our Bolshevik party and of the Soviet Union”.⁸³The authors informed the Central Committee of the Communist Party that Abkhazian schools were clandestinely reorganized in 1945-1946 and teaching in Abkhazian language had become illegal, while prior to that, schoolchildren, until 5th grade used to get an education in Abkhazian language and later in the Russian language. They claimed that after the reform, the Georgian language had become dominant in Abkhazian schools.⁸⁴Besides this, the authors discussed reducing publications and preventing broadcast in Abkhazian language, replacing Abkhazian toponyms by Georgian forms (for example Eshera – Zemo Esheri, Ushelie Bzibta – Bzipis Khevi and etc.), disappearing Abkhazian manuscripts from the state-owned buildings, oppressing Abkhazian culture, removing Abkhazian employees from the state structure.⁸⁵Based on the authors, the leading positions of Abkhazian ASSR were assigned to Georgians, who were sent from different areas of Georgia to replace Abkhazians. Following this, they spoke about the settlement of a large number of Georgians in Abkhazian districts (raioni).⁸⁶At the end of the letter, the authors declared: “From 1940, the combination of the words “Abkhazian Nation” has disappeared. Abkhazians are no longer called the nation”.⁸⁷It should be mentioned that Abkhazia was not the only autonomous region complaining about the Soviet nationalities policy in the 1940s, but South Ossetia, as well. The Central Committee of CPSU received unsigned letters from

⁸³Marikhuba: p. 81;

⁸⁴Marikhuba: p. 82;

⁸⁵Marikhuba: P. 84;

⁸⁶Marikhuba: p. 85

⁸⁷Marikhuba: P.86;

the South Ossetia Autonomous Oblast, which claimed that the Leninist-Stalinist nationality policy had been distorted and the Ossetian language was being eradicated from the school system.⁸⁸

After receiving the letter, the ideological secretary of the Central Committee of the CP of Georgian SSR, Petre Sharia was assigned to study the situation in Abkhazia. Approximately, three weeks later, Sharia prepared a report, which did not confirm the distortion of nationalities policy in Abkhazia. The Bureau of CC CP of Georgian SSR concluded that the facts “were subjectively chosen by Dzidzaria, Shinkuba, and Shakril to smear the name of Abkhazian Communist Party”.⁸⁹ After studying archival materials in depth, Lezhava concluded that the problems of Abkhazian schools did not end in 1947. Two years later, the philologist and member of Science Academy of RSFR ,Georgii Serdiuchenko, sent a letter to the Secretary of the CC CPSU Mikhail Suslov regarding the distortion of Stalin’s nationalities policy in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, though based on the party’s decision the letter was removed from the agenda and similar letters were not taken into consideration until Stalin’s death.⁹⁰

As the above-mentioned materials demonstrate, the Soviet nationalities policy in the 1940s was far from the ideology of Korenizatsiia and even carried some “anti-Korenizatsiia” tendencies. The general focus was led to the ideological mobilization of people and deportations of “unreliable elements”. However, the specific changes in nationalities policy occurred at the local level. Reorganization of schools for minorities, replacing languages of minorities by Georgian, and settling Georgians in Abkhazia took place during that period. The members of Abkhazian intelligentsia protested aforementioned changes in 1947. The authors

⁸⁸Lezhava: p. 101;

⁸⁹Lezhava: p. 121;

⁹⁰Lezhava: p. 130;

of these letters claimed that they wanted to inform the CC CPSU members regarding the distortion of nationalities policy in Abkhazia. After the revision of nationalities policy in Abkhazia, the members denied the existence of problems, and the Soviet government did not bother to discuss the letters regarding the distortion nationalities policy in Georgian autonomies.

Chapter 2

History Writing in Soviet Style

2.1. The Emergence of Official Historical Narrative

Great Stalin tells us: Let's study the history of homeland well, let's love it!⁹¹

From the 1930s the old-school historians were not favored by the Soviet state, therefore many Soviet scholars had to rewrite their works in order to retain their working position and status. A historian was obliged to make a compromise in favor of the Communist party. This meant abandoning the “bourgeois historiography” and accepting the Marxist-Leninist canon, which combined dialectical approach and materialistic interpretations of historical narratives.⁹² Marx believed that social status determined human consciousness and historical changes was determined by the class struggle, between the opposite groups, for example – Bourgeoisie and Proletariat.⁹³ Lenin applied Marxism and developed the theory even further. According to historian Marin Pundeff, Leninism was Marxism, but in the era of “imperialism and proletarian revolution”.⁹⁴ The Soviet Union according to Stalin was a fatherland of Proletariat thus the first task of historiography was to show the social and economic premises of opposite societal groups as a determinant of historical development, which ended with the Revolution of the Proletariat.

According to Arup Banerji, significant changes in the Soviet historiography emerged in 1931. Another scholar, George Enteen shared the similar position. However, Banerji linked the

⁹¹ Janashia, Simon. Javakhishvili, Ivane. Berdzenishvili, Niko. Khachapuridze, Giorgi. History of Georgia from the antiquity until the modern time. State publishing house of pedagogical sector, Tbilisi, 1940, p. 5;

⁹²Pundeff, Marin. History in the U.S.S.R. Chandler Publishing Company, San Francisco, California, 1967, p. 113

⁹³Pundeff : p. 50, 52;

⁹⁴ Pundeff:74

changes to the confrontation between young Bolshevik historian Slunskii and Stalin,⁹⁵ while Enteen connected it to the downfall of Pokrovski's school and beginning of the "Leninist stage", which was characterized by the emergence of a new historical school.⁹⁶ Based on the first version, Stalin's suspicion towards historians was raised after young Bolshevik historian Slutskii published an article in the journal "Proletarskaia Revolutsia" and critically evaluated Bolshevik's attitudes towards the second international and discussed the political views of Kautsky, Luxemburg, and Lenin. In 1931, in the same journal, Stalin published an article "Some Questions Concerning the History of Bolshevism", in which he criticized Slutskii's considerations, and questioned historian's ability to evaluate political events. After Stalin's remarks, The Society of Marxist historians sent representatives to Moscow and to the Republics for studying all existing historical literature. They also were ordered to make reports. The final decision was that all scholars, connected to the historical science, had to be connected to the party. The revision of the historical works led to the removal of old-school historians from their working positions.⁹⁷ According to Enteen, at the beginning of the 1930s, Pokrovskii was attacked twice - firstly he was criticized for the "risky assertions" and exaggerations made in his work "History of the Revolutionary Movement". The later attack was due to the "schematism", and anti-Marxist interpretation of history.⁹⁸ Criticism towards Pokrovski's school meant that the legacy of old historians was questioned and the party started to expel the old professionals from the scientific institutions. However, "some of them were brought back into the historical profession, but only to work as Marxist or, at least to

⁹⁵ Banerji, Arup. *Writing History in the Soviet Union, Making the Past Work*. Social Science Press, New Delhi, 2008, Pp. 52-55;

⁹⁶ Enteen, M. George. *The Soviet Scholar-Bureaucrat. M.N Pokrovskii and the Society of Marxist Historians*. The Pennsylvania State University Press, University Park and London, 1978, p. 188;

⁹⁷ Banerji: p. 56;

⁹⁸ Enteen: Pp. 188, 190

embellish their works with citations of the masters”.⁹⁹ This was the beginning of the new era in Soviet historiography, which the Soviet historian A. Lomakin called a “Leninist stage”.¹⁰⁰

In addition, the new propaganda demanded from historians to revive the sense of “Soviet patriotism”- love to the fatherland, sense of membership in the Soviet society and from 1934 History teachers were told to speak about the “particular proletariat, about the causes and consequences of particular revolutions”,¹⁰¹ which made people feel that they were the composite elements of the great Soviet family. The “Soviet patriotism” aimed to cross the national lines and revive the affection towards the multi-national Soviet state.¹⁰²

The necessity of rewriting past raised the school textbook’s issue. In 1934, regarding the history textbooks, Stalin declared that they lacked facts, events, names, incorrectly covered various formations and these manuals “were good for nothing” (*nekuda ne goditsia*).¹⁰³ In 1936, the rector of the Tbilisi State University, Karlo Oragvelidze responded to Stalin’s remarks on writing history textbooks in the Soviet Union and discussed the Georgian case specifically. Oragvelidze concluded that serious obstacles in studying Georgia’s history were the lack of sources and cadres, mainly that historical chronicles were not being published, literature with historical monographs was poor, foreign sources referring to Georgia’s history had not been collected, and few students had the desire to study Georgia’s past.¹⁰⁴ Besides this, Oragvelidze criticized Georgian Bolshevik Philipe Makaharadze who had previously declared that there was nothing important to study in Georgia’s history except the bloody events and battles. Oragvelidze replied: “The subject of historical study existed and exist, but

⁹⁹Enteen: p. 189;

¹⁰⁰Enteen: 194;

¹⁰¹Brandenberger, David. *National Bolshevism, Stalinist Mass Culture and the Formation of Modern Russian Identity 1931-1956*. Harvard University Press, Cambridge and London, 2002, Pp. 28, 30;

¹⁰²Tillet: p.50;

¹⁰³Banerji: p. 58;

¹⁰⁴Oragvelidze, Karlo. *On the Issues of History of Georgia*. Tbilisi State University Press, Tbilisi, 1936, p. 6;

unfortunately, there are no historians who would want to cope with the task of studying it”.

¹⁰⁵ This sharp answer was addressed not only to Philippe Makharadze, but to Georgian historians, and mainly, to Ivane Javakhishvili.

Javakhishvili is as a founder of Georgian historical master narrative, the authoritative and subtle study of Georgia's past, which presented key figures and actors of national history, selected and interpreted historical events and facts. The Georgian historical master narrative was formed at the beginning of the 20th century and during the communist period then was changed according to Marxist-Leninist canon, but the main approach has always been maintained.¹⁰⁶ In addition, Javakhishvili was one of the founders of the first University in Georgia, which currently wears his name.

Communist Party was aware of the fact that Javakhishvili enjoyed respect and high reputation among the Georgian scholars and students. However, he was forced to resign from the rector's position in 1926 but continued working as a professor of history. Later, in 1931, Javakhishvili was accused of being a bourgeois historian and left the State University by the order of the People's Commissar of Education of Georgian SSR. For some time, he was unemployed and lived in difficult conditions until he was appointed as a museum consultant. The Communist Party returned Javakhishvili back to the University in 1933.¹⁰⁷

In 1936, Oragvelidze and other scholars organized an attack on Javakhishvili's works and publicly condemned him. As historians recollect, this year was especially hard in the State

¹⁰⁵ Oragvelidze: p. 4,5;

¹⁰⁶ Master narrative is a dominant narrative, subtle and authoritative text about the past, that demonstrates key figures and actors of national history and distinguishes “inn” group from “out” group. See: Chikovani, Nino. The De-Sovietisation and Nationalisation of History in Post-Soviet Georgia, in Oksana Karpenko's and Jana Javakhishvili's “Myth and Conflicts in the South Caucasus: Instrumentalisation of Historical Narratives”. International Alert, vol.1, 2013, Pp. 73-74;

¹⁰⁷ Metreveli, Roin. Way to Eternity. In, Nana Khazaradze's and Ketevan Akhobadze's “Ivane Javakhishvili 140”. Georgian National Academy of Science, The Committee of Georgian Historians, Tbilisi, 2017, p. 11;

University, as professors began denouncing each other, which sometimes cost each other's lives. However, despite the accusations and condemnations, Javakhishvili maintained his position. In Georgian scientific circles new rumors were spread, that a Georgian Historian Alexandre Svanidze (who was Stalin's brother in law) acted as a protégée of Javakhishvili and ensured his safety.¹⁰⁸ However, Javakhishvili's scientific rehabilitation was connected to other important circumstances. The Georgian master narrative which had been formed during the previous decades would hardly fit the Marxist-Leninist scheme, thus young Marxist historians could not cope with such difficult undertake to rewrite Georgia's history according to Marxist-Leninist canon. In addition, professional historians were the disciples of the "Bourgeois historians" and influenced by the "Bourgeois historiography". Who could write a new history? The aforementioned factors played a significant role in returning Javakhishvili back to the University. Javakhsivhili was entrusted to rewrite Georgia's history according to the new approach.

Soviet historiography was a highly politicized subject and it had not only educational but also ideological character, as historians' way of describing events and facts formed the worldview of the Soviet citizens. Stalin's critical remarks on history writing led to the revision of the existing historical literature and removal of the old professionals, who were accused of supporting bourgeois nationalism. The Marxist Leninist canon became dominant in the historical science and all scholars, who were returned back to their positions, were obliged to adhere to the new canon. At the end of the 1940s, new history textbooks appeared in the republics, which can be considered as state-approved official historical narratives of the past. In Georgian case, the official Soviet historical narrative was formed by Ivane Javakhsihvili,

¹⁰⁸Metreveli: p. 12;

who was a victim of repressions at the beginning of the 1930s, but later was rehabilitated to work on the history of Georgia.

2.2. Abkhazians and Abkhazia in the Marxist Textbooks of 1940, 1943, 1946

In 1939, Ivane Javakhishvili started working on writing a short history of Georgia, mainly on the period from antiquity including the 19th century, alongside his disciples Niko Berdzenishvili and Simon Janashia, while their colleague Giorgi Khachapuridze wrote a part of the book about the modern period. As a result, in 1940, the Pedagogical Sector of the State Publishing House issued a book “*History of Georgia*”. The text was rewritten and republished in 1943. It ended with the history of 19th-century Georgia and therefore, Khachapuridze’s name disappeared from the list of authors. By that time, Ivane Javakhishvili was already deceased and his part was rewritten by Simon Janashia.¹⁰⁹ In 1946, the textbook was rewritten and republished again, with “small structural changes” that applied to the golden age.¹¹⁰

In the textbooks, Abkhazians are considered as the foreign tribes, who populated Western Georgia in the medieval period. From 4th to 6th century, all Georgian and Abkhazian tribes subordinated to the Georgian kingdom Lazica (in Georgian sources called “Egrisi”). However, from the 6th century Lazica started losing influence and in the 8th century one of the former vassals of Lazica, Abasgian tribe united all Georgian and Abkhazian tribes into one kingdom and called it Abkhazia. In the 10th century, Abkhazia became part of united Georgia. The roots of Abkhazian tribes, where they of Georgian origin or not, is contested.

¹⁰⁹ Javakhishvili, Ivane. Berdzenishvili, Niko. Janashia, Simon. History of Georgia, from Antiquity to 19th century. Georgian SSR State Publishing House, Tbilisi 1943, p. 1,2;

¹¹⁰ Berdzenishvili, Niko. Javakhishvili, Ivane. Janashia, Simon. History of Georgia from Antiquity until the 19th century. Georgian SSR State Publishing House, Tbilisi, 1946, p. 4;

Both Abkhazian and Georgian historians by using old Greek, Armenian, Persian and other sources provide controversial arguments to prove the relevance of their considerations and sometimes it is hard to understand, which side is right and which is not. In the Soviet history textbooks of 1940, 1943 and 1946 Abkhazians are considered as the foreign tribes, which were united in the Georgian state in 10th century.

I aim to construct the official narrative about Abkhazia and Abkhazians in the Soviet textbooks on the history of Georgia. By discussing PavleIngorokva's research on medieval Abkhazia from 6th to 17th centuries, I will analyze the following issues - Abkhazian tribes, Abkhazian kingdom, unification of Georgia, dissolution of Georgia into the principalities, 16th and 17th century Abkhazia. Small changes can be observed in the history textbooks of 1940, 1943, 1946 regarding Abkhazia, however, the main narrative is left unchanged.

In the textbooks, three Abkhazian tribes are mentioned – Abazgs, Apsils, and Missimians, who subordinated to the Laz king. However, in the 6th century, Abasgs separated themselves from Lazica and became the vassals of the Byzantine Empire.¹¹¹ This political action can be perceived as Abasgia becoming similar to Lazica, as Lazs were themselves the vassals of Byzantium. What language these tribes spoke is unknown to the readers. After the spreading of Christianity in the 6th century, the Greek language took a dominant position and later, it was replaced by the Georgian language. Based on the authors, in the 8th-10th centuries Georgian was a language of state and church administration, civil relation, and literacy in Tao-Klarjeti, Kakheti, Kartli, and Abkhazia.¹¹² As the textbooks describe, in the 8th century, Leon II from the Abasgian tribe, conquered Georgian kingdoms Lazica and Argveti, declared

¹¹¹ See: 1940 - pp. 80, 84; 1943 - pp. 106, 110; 1946 - pp. 120, 124;

¹¹² See: 1940- pp. 91, 113; 1943 –pp. 118, 1946 – 132, 158;

himself as a king and called his kingdom Abkhazia.¹¹³ The 1940 textbook ends the story here, while the 1943 and 1946 textbooks state: “As the rulers belonged to the Abkhazian dynasty, the kingdom was called a kingdom of Abkhazians, however, in 9th and 10th centuries significant changes did not occur in the composition of the population, the majorities still were the Georgian tribes – Karts, Mingrelians, and Svans”.¹¹⁴

Based on the textbooks, from the 9th century, two kingdoms were fighting for the unification of Georgia– Tao-Klarjeti and Abkhazia. However, Tao-Klarjeti’s ruler David III Kuropalates used his connections first with the Byzantine Empire and then with Karli’s feudal lord IoaneMarushisze and made his adopted son Bagrat IV as a king of Georgia. By 978, the process of Georgia’s unification had ended¹¹⁵and Abkhazia became part of unified Georgian Kingdom. The state decline started in the 13th century and as textbooks mention, by the 15th century, two principalities - Kakheti and Samtskhe did not subordinate to the King of Georgia. A strive for separation existed in Western Georgia, which was calledSabedianoand included three principalities –Abkhazia, Samegrelo, and Guria. However, the ruler of Sabediano recognized the authority of the king of Georgia.¹¹⁶As it can be seen from the textbooks, in the 15th century, Abkhazia was still part of Georgia and was included in the borders of the Western part. Authors shortly describe the 16th-century Abkhazia in connection with Ottoman invasion. According to the 1940 manual, Ottomans were trying to use Adyghe and other Abkhazian-Circassian tribes to occupy “Georgia’s Abkhazia”,¹¹⁷while the manuals

¹¹³ See: 1940 – p. 103; 1943 – p. 134; 1946 –p. 147

¹¹⁴ See: 1943: idem ; 1946 –idem;

¹¹⁵ See: 1940 – p.113; 1943 – p.145; 1946 – p.158;

¹¹⁶ See: 1940 – Pp. 271, 272; 1943 – Pp. 260, 261; 1946 – Pp. 294, 295;

¹¹⁷ See: 1940 – p. 299;

of 1943 and 1946 mention only Abkhazia.¹¹⁸ There is no clarification of about the meaning of “Georgia’s Abkhazia”. Did the authors suppose the existence of other Abkhazia outside Georgia?

Based on the textbooks, in the 17th century, Western Georgia experienced a downfall. Slave trade flourished in Abkhazia and in other Western regions, which resulted in demographic changes. Local population left their homes and went to the Eastern principalities.¹¹⁹ Textbook did not say a word about the ethnic changes.

As it can be seen from the textbooks, Abkhazian tribes are considered- Abazgs, Apsils, and Missimians. In the 8th century, these tribes were consolidated under the kingdom of Abkhazia, which was formed as a result of Leon II’s conquest of Lazika and Argveti. The Georgian language took a dominant position in Abkhazia as soon as the Kingdom of Abkhazia was formed and Abkhazians shared a common religion with Georgians. Textbooks demonstrate that linguistic and religious unification preceded the political unification of Georgia. From the 13th century, Georgia started dissolving into several principalities and in the 15th century, Abkhazia was still a part of Georgia, while in 16th and 17th centuries it is not clear who ruled Abkhazia.

2.3. Pavle Ingorokva’s Theory

Several years ago, a famous Georgian writer Guram Asatiani, in his Essay “Aleksandrieli”, wrote: “Our descendants will forgive many weaknesses, but it’s hard to believe that anyone would understand, by what measures and fatal misunderstandings did it happen that there was a highly respectful citadel of Georgian science (Science Academy) in XX century Georgia and among the noble circles, the place (for Ingorokva) could not be found for so long”.

¹¹⁸ See: 1943 – p. 280; 1946 –p. 314;

¹¹⁹ See: 1940 – p. 340 ; 1943 – p. 322; 1946 – p. 356;

¹²⁰ Asatiani emphasized that Georgian society had not been able to appreciate Pavle Ingorokva's figure and his talent as he was not given a chance to participate in the elections conducted by the Science Academy of Georgia in 1955. Though, despite Asatiani's pessimistic tone, one can argue that Literary scholar, Pavle Ingorokva (1893 -1983) was highly respected by the Georgian intelligentsia and his biographer Rostom Chkheidze wrote that his persona inspired some of the most famous Soviet Georgian writers to create literary characters. For example, Ingorokva's prototype can be found in Vasil Barnov's tale - "Arkeologiuri Nashti" (Archeological Remains, 1923), Konstantine Gamsakhurdia's novel - "Beladi" (Chieftain, 1940), Otar Chkheidze's novel - "Tskhratskaro" (Nine Water, 1984) and Aleksandre Kutateli's novel- "Pirispir" (Face to Face, 1989). Ingorokva's character was imagined as a romantic hero, who had patriotic feelings and worried about the fate of his homeland. ¹²¹ Despite the fact that these writings drew Ingorokva's personality in a positive light, his biography and what connection he had with the Communist party has not been explored nor even questioned in Georgia.

Based on his autobiography, Ingorokva was born on November 1, 1893, in a family of peasants, in the Western part of Georgia, Photi. Ingorokva graduated from secondary school in Vladikavkaz and in 1912 continued studying at the faculty of History and Philology at the St. Petersburg University. In 1915, during the third-year of his studies, Ingorokva's health had worsened due to tuberculosis and he returned to Georgia. From this period, he started a collaboration with the historical-ethnographic scientific society in Tbilisi. In 1923-1925, the scholar worked as an editor of the Journals of Writer's Union of Georgia "Kavkasioni" and "AkhaliKavkasioni" (Caucasus Mountain, New Caucasus Mountain). In 1925, Ingorokva,

¹²⁰ Asatiani, Guram. Volume 3. Soulmates, The Modern Portraits, Great Expectations. Neostudio, Tbilisi, 2002, p. 253;

¹²¹ Chkheidze, Rostom. Two Dates – Personality and the Book. Our Writers, Tbilisi, 2015, p. 126;

with the help of Niko Nikoladze, a former member of the Constituent Assembly of Democratic Republic of Georgia, established a publishing house “Georgian Book”. In 1929, Ingorokva founded the Center of Manuscripts under the Georgian State Museum, and during 1934-1936 was working at the Institute of Language, Literature, and Art of the Tbilisi State University, in 1937 was one of the organizers of the Rustaveli jubilee in the Soviet Union.¹²²

Ingorokva’s first article regarding Abkhazian ethnogenesis, appeared in the journal “Mnatobi” in 1950, which was part of the series of articles under the common name “Giorgi Merchule”. The title originated from the name of 10th-century Georgian writer called Giorgi Merchule. Ingorokva used his hagiographic work, which contained geographical and historical descriptions, as a primary source and analyzed political situation in the medieval Georgian regions - Kartli, Meskheta, and Abkhazia. In the article “Kingdom of Abkhazia” (VI-IX centuries) the author made a historical claim: " Abkhazians themselves were Georgians as they belonged to the Georgian ethnic group as well as the rest of the Georgian tribes of the western Georgia - Karts, Mingrelians, and Svans."¹²³In his article, Ingorokva made two main considerations: Abkhazians were Georgians because they spoke the Georgian language¹²⁴ and Abkhazians were Georgians because they followed Georgian politics.¹²⁵

It is not surprising that in 1950, the articles had no official replies, though it does not mean that unofficial replies were not made. In a book “Some Issues from the History of Georgia” published in 1966, historian Niko Berdzenishvili added a letter, written in October 1950. Based on the letter, Berdzenishvili was asked by the Director of Abkhazian Scientific Research Institute, comrade P. Ratiani, to express his opinion regarding Abkhazians and 18th-

¹²² Fund 1, Register 1532, Affair 126, Sheet 1-31. 1955 , Pp. 9, 10;

¹²³Ingorokva, Pavle. The Kingdom of Abkhazia. Journal Mnatobi N4, The Union of Soviet Writers of Georgia, Tbilisi, 1950, p. 104;

¹²⁴Ibid: p. 122;

¹²⁵ Ibid: p. 121;

century Abkhazian ruler Kelaish Ahmed Beg Shervashidze. For unknown reasons, the letter was not published. Berdzenishvili postponed the study of this subject for the future and replied that he had no time. However, in the letter he indicated that the identification of Abkhazian language was a task of linguists, studying their rule of life was a task of ethnographers, while the origin of Abkhazian nation was to be studied by historians.¹²⁶ Berdzenishvili briefly wrote that in the scientific historical literature, the origins of contemporary Abkhazians had not been studied yet, but for him, as a historian, the language was not the only determinant of ethnicity. According to Berdzenishvili, scholars did not have confirmation that the tribes which lived in Abkhazia were farther from Iber-Lazs, then, for example, Svans and Meskhs. For Berdzenishvili, it was not as important which tribes where the direct ancestors of contemporary Abkhazians, as the identity of those tribes, whose cultural and political collaboration founded the ground for modern day Abkhazia. He also added: “Centuries old organic and intensive cultural-historical unity with Abkhazians weakened in the late feudal period, due to the difficult historical events and hardship. Ottoman conquerors contributed to this by building one of the strongholds in Jikhet-Abkhazia in order to annex Georgia{..} 19th century was also a tough period - Tsarist agent-colonizers did not favor the emergence of Georgian nation, and national unity of Georgia did not fit the colonizer’s goals, therefore Tsarists did not spare the efforts to dissolve Georgia. All these resulted in such confusion that even nowadays we need to prove that Abkhazians, Meskhetians, Lazs, Kobuletiens, and Ingilos are Georgians.”¹²⁷ As it can be seen from the letter, Berdzenishvili neither agreed, nor opposed the idea of tribal kinship between Georgians and Abkhazians, but said that culturally and historically Abkhazians had the same function as other Georgian tribes. At the end of the letter, Berdzenishvili blamed Ottomans and Russian

¹²⁶Berdzenishvili, Niko. *Some Issues from the History of Georgia. Part III. Science*, Tbilisi, 1966, p. 277;

¹²⁷Berdzenishvili: p. 281;

Tsarist regime in the separation Abkhazians and Georgians and clearly indicated that Abkhazians were the part of the Georgian nation.

In the same year, as Berdzenishvili wrote the letter, Abkhazian linguist Dimitri Gulia published a small work “On my Book – History of Abkhazia”, which can be linked to Berdzenishvili’s letter for the following reasons: in the book, Gulia analyzed the history of medieval Abkhazia and Abkhazians and discussed the figure of Kelaish Beg Shervashidze,¹²⁸ the same topics which Berdenishvili was asked to write about by the Abkhazian Research Institute. In addition, Gulia rejected his considerations, made approximately three decades ago, in the book “History of Abkhazia” (1925). Then Gulia wrote: “Abkhazians and their ancestors are Heniochs (Iniochs), which were the same as Colchians, who came from Abyssinia, Egypt.” Based on Greek, Abkhazian and Circassian legends and Greek historical sources, Gulia argued that Heniochs were dissolved into small tribes.¹²⁹ One of these tribes - Lazs, with the help of the Byzantine Empire occupied the eastern Black Sea coast and subjugated other tribes. However, later they were replaced by Abasgs (Abkhazians) and from the 10th century, this territory was united with Georgia.¹³⁰ In addition, Gulia claimed that religion was always a good instrument for spreading nationalist ideas and different people used it for subordinating Abkhazia.¹³¹ Following this, Gulia distinguished the Byzantine, Georgian and Turk epochs in Abkhazia’s history,¹³² which was a clear indication that other nations wanted to subjugate Abkhazia by using religion. Gulia’s narrative was very ambitious, as it declared Colchis and other Georgian tribes including Lazs and Svans as Abkhazians and besides this, academically accused Georgians in Abkhazia’s cultural assimilation.

¹²⁸Gulia, Dimitri. O Moei Knige “IstoriaAbkhazii”. Izdatelstvo Abkhazskoi ASSR, Sukhumi, 1951, Pp. 17, 18;

¹²⁹Gulia, Dimitri. IstoriaAbkhazii. IzdanieNarkomprosa CCR Abkhazii. Tiflis, 1925, p. 37;

¹³⁰Ibid: p. 51;

¹³¹Ibid: p. 140;

¹³²Ibid: p. 143;

In 1951 Gulia apologized for his mistakes and anti-Marxist attitudes towards history, repeated the narrative of 1946 textbooks regarding Abkhazian tribes, politics of Leon II and unification of Georgia¹³³ with citations, and then declared that “Abkhazia was an organic part of Georgia, with a full meaning of this word, in its diverse cultural-historical life”.¹³⁴ Gulia’s apology would have seemed strange for the Soviet historians if Ingorokva’s article on Abkhazian kingdom had not been published yet. However, by 1951 it was already clear, that historical narrative had a connection with the Soviet nationalities policy. Zhdanov’s campaign forced historians to rewrite their works. The nationalist aspiration was revived after the propaganda of military traditions and “national pride”. Thus, historians were forced to create the image of an enemy and write about the friendship among the people who lived in the Soviet Union.¹³⁵ Ingorokva was not the only scholar who wrote on the subject of the ancient history of his country. For example, a similar narrative appeared in Soviet Ukraine, which declared Ukrainians, Belarusians, and Russians connected by the common “cradle” and kinship.¹³⁶ However, this “Russocentric” theory emphasized the continuity between the old tribes and new nations, while Ingorokva’s theory cut the connection between Abkhazian tribes and Abkhazian nation. The silence of censorship gives us a reason to conclude that it was written with the State initiative. However, after Stalin’s death, the nationalities policy changed and Ingorokva’s theory lost its meaning for the new government.

In 1954, Ingorokva published a book - “Giorgi Merchule”, where the scholar widened his theory. According to the author, in the 8th century, western Georgia was called Abkhazia and from the 10th century onward, the name “Abkhazia” was used for Georgia. Even the kings of

¹³³Gulia , 1951, Pp. 13,14,15;

¹³⁴Gulia, 1951: p. 16;

¹³⁵Tillet: Pp. 85, 85;

¹³⁶ Yekelchuk, p. 75;

Georgia were called "kings of Abkhazia".¹³⁷ Ingorokva considered that Abkhazian tribes - Abasgs, Apsils, and Missimians were formed after the mixture Meskhs, Colchis and Svans,¹³⁸ and they subordinated to Lazica kingdom, however, Justinian attempted to separate Abkhazian tribes from Lazica in the 6th century. As a result of Justinian's attempt, Abasgs gained independence from Laz king. Ingorokva claimed that even after that, Abasg people were always part of Lazica and they spoke the Georgian language.¹³⁹ Ingorokova rejected the opinion of the Georgian historians about the Abkhazian origin and criticized the text from history textbook of 1946, which spoke of the creation of the Kingdom of Abkhazia: "According to the information provided by the history textbook, in the 9th and 10th centuries, the majority of tribes that inhabited Western Georgia were the Georgian tribes – Karts, Mingrelins, and Svans. Based on the textbook's conclusion, a partial change had occurred, that was the settlement of non-Georgian Abkhazians in the Georgian territory and expansion of the Abkhazian lands".¹⁴⁰ Ingorokva repeated that in the medieval period, Western Georgia was populated by the Georgian tribes and kingdom of Abkhazia was truly Georgian with its origin, therefore any claim regarding the ethnic changes in the Abkhazian kingdom was a lie.

Besides this, Ingorokva reinterpreted king Leon II's conquest of Lazica as "liberation from the Byzantine domination" and explained that in the old Georgian language the term "Daipkra" (occupied) and "gaantavisupla" (liberated) were synonyms. Following this, Ingorokva raised the striking questions: "Why did Abkhazian kings follow Georgian politics and why did they support replacing the Greek language by the Georgian language if they

¹³⁷Ingorokva, Pavle. Giorgi Merchule: 10th Century Georgian Writer. A sketch from the history of the Georgian literature, culture and State. Tbilisi, Soviet Writer, 1954, p. 114;

¹³⁸Ibid: Pp. 140, 142, 173;

¹³⁹Ibid: P. 194;

¹⁴⁰Ibid: P. 116;

weren't Georgians?"¹⁴¹ In addition, Ingorokva presented the study of 136 toponyms in Abkhazia (mostly dated before the 17th century) and considered that all the toponyms (name of rivers, fortresses, cities, villages..) had Georgian origin. All these arguments were used by Ingorokva to conclude, that medieval Abkhazians were Georgian tribes. This led to new questions - who were the modern Abkhazians who spoke their own language? Did they have their own culture? Traditions? Historical memory? Ingorokva mentioned that ethnic changes in Western Georgia occurred in the 17th century and promised the reader to talk about this topic briefly in the following chapters, however, there is nothing about this issue in the book.

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Based on the whole chapter, "Kingdom of Abkhazia", Ingorokva made three main considerations: firstly – Abkhazians were Georgians, because they followed Georgian politics; Secondly – Abkhazians were Georgians, because they spoke Georgian language; Thirdly- Abkhazians were Georgians, because Georgian kings were called kings of Abkhazia and during the middle ages Abkhazia became the synonym for Georgia.

There were controversial attitudes among Georgians and Abkhazians regarding "Giorgi Merchule". Rostom Chkheidze wrote that the book caused "unusual excitement and hype" among Georgians and "glory and praise of the book were heard on every supra (table) and toast for Ingorokva had become the essential part of the ritual".¹⁴³ The unofficial discussions regarding "Giorgi Merchule" can be found in private letters. For example, on August 27, 1955, writer Levan Gotua wrote to the philosopher Zurab Mikeladze, who was imprisoned at that time: "Here are new and peculiar discussions regarding "Giorgi Merchule". Some people (Armenians, Abkhazians) did not like the book so much that they didn't hesitate from

¹⁴¹Ibid: p. 117;

¹⁴² Ibid: p. 132;

¹⁴³Chkheidze, Rostom. The Fate of Pavle Ingorokva. Kvari, Tbilisi, 1994, p. 293;

underhand attacks against it, both here and in Moscow.”¹⁴⁴ On September 6 of the same year, Georgian writer Konstantine Gamsakhurdia wrote to Ingorokva: “Now, I am reading your “Giorgi Merchule”. God give you delight. I am enjoying it more and more. Let me and you, be the “chauvinists”, and followers of Ilia’s deeds. We will deal with this “insult” somehow”.¹⁴⁵ Several years after it was published, “Giorgi Merchule” reached the Georgian émigrés. Literary scholar Aleqsandre Manvelishvili called Ingorokva “scientist rider”, who protected the homeland of ancestors. While the Georgian writer Grigol Robakidze called “Giorgi Merchule” - “a great victory”.¹⁴⁶

Abkhazian historian and politician, Igor Marikhuba, recollected how Abkhazians reacted to the appearance of “Giorgi Merchule”: “It was during Khrushchev’s time. A book by historian (philologist) Ingorokva emerged, which claimed that Abkhazians appeared in Abkhazia only 300 years ago. I remember how people scuffled (vzburlila) in Abkhazia. Does it seem as though ordinary people have something to do with the fantasies of some historians?”. Afterward, Marikhuba claimed that “Giorgi Merchule” was a continuation of “Berievshina” and Stalinist repressions in Abkhazia.¹⁴⁷ In addition, Abkhazian scholars, party members and some part of the population in Abkhazia believed that Georgian “nationalists” were going to deport Abkhazians from Abkhazia¹⁴⁸ and “Giorgi Merchule” was a preparatory stage for the new policy. Abkhazians were partially right, as “Giorgi Merchule” had a connection with the nationalities policy in Abkhazia, but first of all it was carried out by the Soviet officials, not by the Georgian nationalists, secondly Abkhazians did not guess the real motive of the

¹⁴⁴ Ibid: p. 297;

¹⁴⁵ Ibid :p. 294;

¹⁴⁶ Ibid: Pp. 293, 294;

¹⁴⁷ Marikhuba: p. 52;

¹⁴⁸ Chkheidze: p. 298;

Ingorokva's theory. The state did aim to justify the anti-korenizatsia tendencies, but there is not any documented proof that they were planning the deportation of Abkhazians.

It can be said, that Georgians were proud of the greatness of their country, centuries-old history, and discovering the historical "truth", while Abkhazians connected Ingorokva's theory to the "Georgian nationalism" and imagined Soviet nationalities policy in Abkhazia, as the politics launched by the "Georgian nationalists" Beria and Stalin. Unfortunately, the fact that, both Officials were of Georgian origin played a crucial role in Abkhazian's perception of Soviet nationalities policy. They perceived every step taken by the Soviet Government as Georgian aggression towards Abkhazians and ignored the fact that every decision made by the Soviet leaders was not addressed to someone directly, but it was a part of the general politics.

It's not surprising that the review written in 1955 by Georgian Academician Giorgi Akhvlediani in the magazine "Zaria Vostoka" would have irritated the Abkhazians. Akhvlediani found Ingorokva's book "exciting" and "valuable" work and shared the author's position regarding the liberation of Lazica by King Leon II, the origin of Abkhazian dynasty and Georgian origin of the Abkhazian toponyms. Giorgi Akhvlediani cited the following sentence: "Western Georgia was formed not by the foreign tribes, but by the Georgian tribes, among which were Abkhazians" and wrote: "Ingorokva's opinion is confirmed by historical arguments and it's impossible to resist to it".¹⁴⁹

Communist Party paid attention to Ingorokva's work after professor Giorgi Akhvlediani supported Ingorokva's idea about origins of Abkhazians. The Department of Science and Education of the Communist Party of Georgia demanded the review of the work of Ingorokva from the Ivane Javakhishvili Institute of History, Archeology, and Ethnology of the Academy

¹⁴⁹Akhvlediani, Giorgi. The Valuable Work on the History of Georgian Culture. Zaria Vostoka, July 9, N161, p.3;

of Science of Georgia. The latter one arranged the debate in the Soviet Georgian journal “Mnatobi”.¹⁵⁰ The protocol of the session done on September 8, 1955, of the Bureau CC CP Georgian SSR is seen as the official reaction towards Ingorokva’s theory. Party members called Professor Akhvlediani’s opinions “hasty conclusions”, and accused him of the “excitement” for the book “Giorgi Merchule”. The editor of the magazine was reprimanded for allowing Akhvlediani to publish a review, and the official party member stated: “the editorial board of the magazine “Zaria Vostoka” made a mistake, it did not wait for the assessments by the scientific community regarding the relevance and factual argumentation of difficult problems raised by Ingorokva, especially regarding the Abkhazian ethnogenesis, and gave opportunity to publish a review to the person who is not a specialist in the aforementioned issue. “Zaria Vostoka” handled the situation as if the central committee of the Communist Party of Georgia support Ingorokva’s theory”.¹⁵¹ The last sentence was a clear indication that in the post-Stalin period, Ingorokva’s theory had no official support from the Soviet state.

In the same year, four famous Georgian academicians, poets –Galaktion Tabidze, Ioseb Grishashvili, Giorgi Leonidze and writer Konstantine Gamsakhurdia launched Pavle Ingorokva’s candidacy for membership in the election that would be held in the Science Academy of Georgia in 1955. Besides the initiators, 10 famous writers supported this initiative during the meeting of the Writer’s Union. In the letter of the statement, the initiators referred to some of Ingorokva’s works and among them “Giorgi Merchule”. They wrote: “In this great work number of key issues are discussed, especially from the historical past of Georgia – the ethnic composition of Abkhazia, nature, and character of Abkhazian kingdom, the story of the southern provinces of Georgia and etc. In a number of issues, discussed here

¹⁵⁰Izoria: p. 41;

¹⁵¹Fund 14, Register 30, Affair 118, Sheet 1-7, 1955, p. 7;

by Pavle Ingorokva, he gives us a guideline for correcting some common misconceptions. This work is a new step in the development of the Georgian historiography”.¹⁵² The statement shows that Ingorokva enjoyed respect and recognition from many Georgian intellectuals. However, his candidacy was rejected and based on the materials saved in the archive of the Georgian National Academy of Science, Ingorokva’s name in the official list of candidates of 1955 is not mentioned. The literary scholar received refusal even before the election.

2.4. Late Debates

After Stalin’s death, significant changes occurred in the Soviet political system. The first idea of de-Stalinization was seen in Lavrenti Beria’s plans. As his son, Sergo Beria recalled, Lavrenti composed a team for rewriting the history of the USSR and of the Party. He wanted to de-Stalinize the past and intended to describe the debates between the various groups over the Soviet system.¹⁵³ Moreover, Beria initiated the changes in the Soviet nationalities policy. First of all, he aimed to give the free choice to the republics in administration and decision making and to give the floor to the non-Russian nationalities for expressing their national and cultural identities.¹⁵⁴ Beria started implementation of his plans in Western Ukraine and Lithuania in 1953, but after his arrest, these initiatives failed.¹⁵⁵ Khrushchev’s nationalities policy was more “liberal” than of Stalin’s, as he returned those people that were exiled in the previous years, decentralized economic decision-making and kept neutral attitude towards nationalist agendas of the republics, but banned other “anti-Soviet” activities. For example,

¹⁵²Fund 1, Register 1532, Affair 126, Sheet 1-31, 1955, p. 28;

¹⁵³Beria, Sergo. *Beria Inside Stalin’s Kremlin*. Gerald Duckworth & Co. Ltd. London, 2001, p. 255;

¹⁵⁴Knight: Pp. 188, 189, 190;

¹⁵⁵Smith, Jeremy. *Leadership and Nationalism in the Soviet Republics, 1951-1959*, in Jeremy Smith’s and Melani Ilic’s “Khrushchev in the Kremlin, Policy and Government in the Soviet Union, 1953-1964”. Routledge, London and New York, p. 80;

the demonstration that took place in 1956 in Georgia, as a response to the de-Stalinization, was forcefully dissolved.¹⁵⁶

During the Khrushchev era, Abkhazian officials started talking about the mistakes made by the nationalities policy in Abkhazia, in the past two decades. The first who “confessed” his involvement in the distortion of the “Leninist-Stalinist nationalities policy” was Mikheil Delba. On October 1, 1953, Delba wrote a letter in The Abkhazian Obkom of the Communist Party of Georgia and admitted his mistakes. First of all, he explained that in the book “On the study of Abkhazian language and history” (1951, *K voprosu izucheniya iazyka I istorii Abkhazov*) he wrote regarding Abkhazians that they were not an independent ethnic unity – which was a mistake. Delba confessed his involvement into the reorganization of Abkhazian schools and adoption of Georgian script for Abkhazian language. The letter ended with the following words: “I deeply realize the mistakes I have made and I will do my best to correct them”.¹⁵⁷

The letters of complaints were sent to the CC CP of Georgia. On October 23, 1954, in the session of the Bureau CC CP of Georgian SSR was discussed the situation of the Chairman of the Council of Minister of the Abkhazian ASSR, Mikheil Labaxua, which demanded the revision of the mistakes made in the nationalities policy, in Abkhazia. During the session was mentioned that several measures were conducted for improving the mistakes, such as – Abkhazian schools were restored and supplying Abkhazian teachers with the textbooks was started, Abkhazian language was transferred to Cyrillic script, Abkhazian branch in the Sokhumi Pedagogical Institute was opened, the party started promoting Abkhazian cadres to the leadership position and Abkhazian representation in the state organs of Abkhazia had

¹⁵⁶Ibid: Pp. 81, 82;

¹⁵⁷Marikhuba: Pp. 96, 97;

significantly raised.¹⁵⁸ Though it was said, that creation of the textbooks of Abkhazian language and literature was still a problem and hindered the normal functioning of Abkhazian schools. In addition, the members of Georgian Communist Party emphasized the weakening of ideological and political propaganda, which caused problems in the upbringing of workers based on internationalist principles and which supported the revitalization of the “nationalist elements” in Abkhazia.¹⁵⁹

From 1956 the number of the letters of complaints, regarding the distortion of the Soviet nationalities policy in Abkhazia, had raised. Literary Scholar Dimitri Gulia¹⁶⁰, Abkhazian historians Badjur Sagaria and Grigorii Lezhava,¹⁶¹ Chairman of Abkhazian Obkom of CP Georgian SSR Ivan Tarba¹⁶² and other representatives of Abkhazian intelligentsia and party cadres claimed that Soviet nationalities policy in Abkhazia was intentionally distorted. Special attention deserves the speech of the head of the Department of Propaganda and agitation of Abkhazian Obcom, Aslan Otirba, on the Congress of the CP of Abkhazian ASSR in 1956. Otirba criticized Georgian linguist Giorgi Akhvlediani for supporting Ingorokva’s theory and then, Georgian historians, who worked on the creation of the program for the future History textbook (1958). Based on Otirba the program shared “illicit fantasies” of Pavle Ingorokva, for example in the program there was nothing said about the ethnicity of the Abkhazian nation until the 17th century.¹⁶³

The members of Abkhazian intelligentsia demanded the prohibition of “Giorgi Merchule”. The Department of Science and Education of the Communist Party of Georgia requested the

¹⁵⁸Fund 14, Register 28, Affair 226, Sheet 1-4, 1954, p. 2;

¹⁵⁹Ibid: p. 3;

¹⁶⁰Marikhuba: p. 111;

¹⁶¹Marikhuba: p. 115;

¹⁶²Marikhuba: p. 135;

¹⁶³Marikhuba: p. 125;

revision of the book ¹⁶⁴from the Institute of History, Archeology, and Ethnography of the Academy of Science of the Georgian SSR. As a response, the Institute presented the written account, based on the scientific assessments by historians Meri Imnadze, Marika Lortkipanidze and Niko Berdzenishvili, which read as follows: “Pavle Ingorokva’s merit in the scientific study of the issue is undoubtedly honorable. By touching this issue and by correcting some provisions, the author has made great progress in the study of this problem in Georgian historiography”. ¹⁶⁵ The public discussion was arranged in the journal “Mnatobi”. ¹⁶⁶ In December 1956, the journal published two critiques of Pavle Ingorokva, written by Niko Berzenishvili and Ketevan Lomtadze. In February 1957, “Mnatobi” published three responsive articles by the Georgian scientists – historian Simon Khaukhchishvili, linguist Davit Kobidze and linguist Giorgi Akhvlediani who supported Ingorokva’s assumptions.

In the article entitled “On Pavle Ingorokva’s Work -Giorgi Merchule”, Georgian historian Niko Berdzenishvili positively evaluated only the second part of the book and considered that Ingorokva made an important work due to discovering the Institute of Merchule and Georgian psalms, but he changed his tone when reviewed the first part of the book. Berdzenishvili wrote: “Comrade Ingorokva makes an independent scientific research which does not have any connection with the work of Giorgi Merchule {...} and which is connected to the modern

¹⁶⁴ Izoria: p. 42;

¹⁶⁵ Chkheidze : p. 300;

¹⁶⁶ It was a monthly literary-artistic and public-political journal, subordinated to the Soviet Union Writers of Georgia, was publishing in Tbilisi, in Georgian language. In 1869-1872 years, the journal was issued by the representatives of utopian socialism “Khalkhosnebi” (Narodniki). In 1924 the Bolsheviks restored the journal, which before 1927 was published by the Political Education Department of the People’s Commissariat of Education, while after 1927 the State Publishing House was issuing the journal (See the electronic catalogue of the National Parliamentary Library of Georgia: <http://dspace.nplg.gov.ge/handle/1234/28410>, <http://dspace.nplg.gov.ge/handle/1234/7535>);

events”.¹⁶⁷ According to Berdzenishvili, Ingorokva analyzed only selected issues and missed important facts from the history of Abkhazia. At the end, he concluded: “If Ingorokva’s theory is true, then it would appear that the Mingrelians, Svans, Dvals and other Caucasian tribes are Georgian tribes, who spoke the Georgian language”.¹⁶⁸

Linguist Ketevan Lomtadze in her critic “Some Issues about Abkhazian Identity” analyzed several toponyms (Kodori, Bziphi, Sochi, Likhni, and others) selected from Ingorokva’s work and contrasted her view with Ingorokva’s considerations regarding the origin of these toponyms. In addition, she argued that Ingorokva omitted important facts from the historical chronicles which she assessed as “unforgivable”. In addition, Lomtadze criticized Ingorokva’s opinion about the origin of Abkhazians. She argued: “There is no doubt that many geographical names in the territory of Abkhazia have Georgian origin {...} but it does not give us any right to conclude that there were no Abkhazians or Abkhazian names. Abkhazia is part of Western Georgia and Georgian tribes had a history of peaceful coexistence with Abkhazians.¹⁶⁹ {...} Ingorokva’s conclusion that modern Abkhazians arrived in Abkhazia in the 17th century has no scientific basis.”¹⁷⁰ At the end of the article, Lomtadze declared that Georgians and Abkhazians had a common history, that was related to their oldest common origin.

Linguist Giorgi Akvlediani, who in 1955 wrote a review about “Giorgi Merchule”, responded to Ketevan Lomtadze’s critique. Akhvlediani thought that Ingorokva’s theory had a solid foundation, based on the argument that Ingorokva had analyzed 136 toponyms, 109 of which

¹⁶⁷ Berdzenishvili, Niko. On Pavle Ingorokva’s Work “Giorgi Merchule”. Journal Mnatobi N12, The Union of Soviet Writers of Georgia, Tbilisi, 1956, p. 125;

¹⁶⁸ Ibid: Pp. 128, 129;

¹⁶⁹ Lomtadze, Ketevan. Some Issues about Abkhazian Identity (On Pavle Ingorokva’s Work “Giorgi Merchule”). Journal Mnatobi, N12. The Union of Soviet Writers of Georgia, Tbilisi, 1956, p. 138;

¹⁷⁰ Ibid: p. 139;

were dated before the 17th century. For Akhvlediani, the study of toponyms was a good way of understanding the ethnonym of the certain populated area.¹⁷¹ According to Akhvlediani, professor Lomtadze had chosen only a small number of etymologized names discussed by Pavle Ingorokva and based her critique, on the analysis of those selected toponyms. He criticized Lomtadze: “In her not-so-large review, Professor Ketevan Lomtadze mentions the emergence of Abkhazians in Abkhazia in 17th century six times. If Pavle Ingorokva had really said this, it would still have not been necessary to repeat it so many times. However, Ingorokva’s assumption has been misinterpreted by Professor Lomtadze“.¹⁷²

Historian Simon Kaukhchishvili found Ingorokva’s theory excellent and considered it a “priceless work” for Georgian Historiography. He believed that Ingorokva had strong arguments which could challenge and destroy old historical narratives, for example when Abkhazian King Leon II occupied Lazeti in the 8th century - in this sentence, the word “occupied” (daipkra) had a different meaning in old Georgian language. Surprisingly, its equivalent was the word - “liberated” (gaantavisupla).¹⁷³ Kaukhchishvili claimed: “It does not need a great deal of intelligence to feel the enlightened thoughts that come from Georgian, Greek, and other sources and which are derived from the lifetime work of Pavle Ingorokva. The Georgian statehood was created and strengthened by the common effort of the Georgian tribes, which they have been protecting for centuries and have brought to us”.¹⁷⁴

The third supporter of Ingorokva’s theory was Davit Kobidze, a scholar of Oriental studies. According to him, Ingorokva had been studying the work of Giorgi Merchule for decades. In

¹⁷¹Akhvlediani, Giorgi. For Some Issues on the Toponym of Abkhazia. Journal Mnatobi N2. The Union of Soviet Writers of Georgia, Tbilisi, 1957, p. 107;

¹⁷²Ibid: p. 114;

¹⁷³ Khaukhchishvili, Simon. On “Giorgi Merchule”. Journal Mnatobi N2. The Union of Soviet Writers of Georgia, 1957, p. 121;

¹⁷⁴ Ibid: p.116

addition to this, Ingorokva had analyzed a large number of materials in Armenian, Greco – Roman and European sources, which is a priceless effort. Kobidze had analyzed Persian sources and found supportive arguments: “Persian sources refer to Abkhazia as Georgia, but the Persians had other words as synonyms to Georgia - Gurz, Gorz; Kurz, Kourz; Gurja, Gorge; Kurch, korch; etc. Moreover, Eastern geographers call the Black Sea - the Sea of Georgians”.¹⁷⁵

Two important factors give us reason to conclude that Berdzenishvili was obliged to write the critique -first of all, Berdzenishvili shared some of Ingorokva’s considerations regarding the medieval Abkhazia, which will be seen in the history textbook of 1958. Secondly, Mingrelians and Svans, who were considered as Georgian tribes in the Marxist textbooks, Berdzenishvili mentioned as non-Georgian tribes in the article. However, the introductory part of the critic demonstrates that the scholar tried to balance his criticism by emphasizing the positive aspects of Ingorokva’s work. Unlike Berdzenishvili, professor Lomtatidze was strict and even rude. She attacked Ingorokva’s assumptions, which according to her “lacked scientific basis”¹⁷⁶ and did not mention any positive aspect from the work. From Akhvlediani’s review, we can see that he did not change his attitude towards Ingorokva’s theory after 1955 and even expressed personal sympathy towards the literary scholar, as he replied to Lomtatidze’s critique and protected Ingorokva’s work. Kaukhchishvili’s article shows that he was fascinated by “Giorgi Merchule” and totally agreed with Ingorokva, while David Kobidze tried to express a professional but not a personal attitude towards the author and found the supportive arguments.

¹⁷⁵Kobidze, Davit. The meaning of “Abkhaz” according to Persian sources. *Journal Mnatobi* N2. The Union of Soviet Writers of Georgia 1957; p. 128;

¹⁷⁶Lomtatidze: p. 139;

In the April of 1957, the representatives of Abkhazian Supreme Council and Intelligentsia sent a letter of complaint to Nikita Khrushchev, the First Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. Abkhazians wrote that Georgian intellectuals were using Ingorokva's theory to ignite Nationalism among Georgians, which could pose danger to the Abkhaz Nation. To solve the problem, they demanded independence from Georgia.¹⁷⁷ On April 12, 1957, The Bureau of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Georgia discussed the debates in the journal "Mnatobi" and decreed: "The Central Committee of the Communist Party of Georgia considers that the discussion, present on the pages of the Journal "Mnatobi", regarding Pavle Ingorokva's book "Giorgi Merchule", took a wrong course. Instead of analyzing the whole work from different sides, the discussions have been concentrated only on that part of the book which mistakenly highlights the historical past of the Abkhazian nation. {...} Editorial board, in the second edition of 1957, instead of correcting the mistakes, published the articles of G. Akhvlediani, S. khaukhchishvili, and D. Kobidze, which justify Ingorokva's misconceptions towards the Abkhazian nation".¹⁷⁸

Afterward, the editor of the journal "Mnatobi", Simon Chikovani, the head of the Unit of Culture, School and Science of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Georgia, Mikheil Kveselava and Central Committee Secretary in the field of ideology, Davit Mchedlishvili were reprimanded. In order to improve the situation, Communist Party made several decisions. Plans were made to restore the old toponyms of the settlements, build a radio station, open teachers training institute and etc¹⁷⁹ Subsequently, the protests fizzled out for a while.

¹⁷⁷Izoria: p. 43;

¹⁷⁸Fund 14, Register 32, Affair 49, Sheet 1-13, 1957, p. 11;

¹⁷⁹Izoria: p. 44;

After Stalin's death, the Soviet nationalities policy had changed and the old party members confessed their involvement in the "distortion" of the Leninist-Stalinist agenda. It was clear that every event that had taken place in Abkhazia was in accordance with Stalin's orders but until the de-Stalinization, only Beria and his close associates were accused in the anti-korenizatsyia activities that took place in Abkhazia. Khrushchev, allowed the Soviet people to express their complaints towards the old regime and Abkhazians started raising voice for protecting their rights, from which they had been deprived of by the Stalinist state. The first open attack on Ingorokva's theory emerged in 1955 after Georgian linguist Giorgi Akhvlediani supported the new theory on Abkhazian ethnogenesis. The Communist party showed its position, that Ingorokva's theory had no support from the state. The debate that ensued later demonstrated that Ingorokva had followers among Georgians and some of his considerations were shared by the Georgian historians. On the other hand, the theory served as an impetus for Abkhazian historians to develop their own historiography.

Chapter 3

Responses to Ingorokva's theory

3.1. Textbook of 1958

The tension between the historical memories of the Georgians and Abkhazians was seen after the emergence of Ingorokva's theory. Prior to that, one dominant narrative, told in the Marxist history textbooks was perceived by Georgians and Abkhazians as the official version of Abkhazia's past. Ingorokva's theory attempted to replace the official narrative and it led to the narrative battle in the late 1950s. Abkhazian complaints were strengthened after publishing history textbook in 1958, which shared some of Ingorokva's considerations.

In 1958, "*The History of Georgia from antiquity until the end of 19th century*" was published. From the old authors of the textbooks of the 1940s, only Niko Berdzenishvili joined the new team, which was composed of prominent Soviet Georgian historians - Prokophi Ratiani, Giorgi Melikishvili, Shota Meskhia, Varlam Dondua and Mamia Dumbadze. The authors were employed by the Ivane Javakhishvili Institute of History, Archeology, and Ethnography and as it will be seen in the following subchapter, they shared some of the notions from the book "Giorgi Merchule".

The textbook mentioned that the territory of Imer-Mingrelia was called Lazica (Egrisi) and Laz kings were vassals of the Eastern Roman Empire.¹⁸⁰ Later, the authors mentioned that Justinian spread Christianity in Abasgia,¹⁸¹ which was located in the northern mountain corners of Egrisi. In addition to the Abasg people, the textbook named Missimians, who lived

¹⁸⁰Berdzenishvili, Niko. Dondua Valeri. Dumbadze, Mamia. Melikishvili Giorgi, Meskhia Shota. History of Georgia from antiquity until the end of 19th century. State Publishing house "Soviet Georgia". Tbilisi, 1958, Pp. 97,98;

¹⁸¹Ibid: p. 100;

at the borders of Egrisi.¹⁸² According to the authors of this textbook, Egrisi and Abkhazia were separated territories in the 8th century. It is evident from the fact that Justinian separated Abkhazian principality from its border in order to weaken Egrisi. However, the authors called these separated territories one name - “Egris-Abkhazia”, which was ruled by the Abkhazian king Leon II at the end of the 8th century.¹⁸³ Leon II managed to expel Byzantines from Egris-Abkhazia, declaring himself a king in the process and made Kutaisi capital of his kingdom. This is what the authors said about the aftermath of these events: “This significant act did not result in the restoration of Lazica and nor the establishment of Abkhazian kingdom, despite the fact that the country was called “The Kingdom of Abkhazians”, based on the name of the ruling dynasty. By that time the melding of the local population had gone too far and the Georgian language had tightened its grip over the whole region, which confirms that this new feudal kingdom was a truly Georgian kingdom. The king Leon and his descendants embraced Georgian cultural policies. These “kings of Abkhazia” supported replacing the Greek language with the Georgian language in state and church administration, at the same time Abkhazian kings actively participated in the unification of Georgia.”¹⁸⁴

Despite the fact that in the 9th century, Abkhazian kings were rivals to Tao-Klarjeti rulers, the Georgian language was the language of state and church administration, as well as civil relations in Kartli, Tao-Klarketi, Kakheti, Hereti, and Abkhazia.¹⁸⁵ And in the 10th century, David III Kuropalates, the ruler of Tao-Klarjeti, used the alliance with the Byzantine Empire and the landlord of Kartli- Ioane Marushisdze, and gave the throne of Kartli to his adopted

¹⁸²Ibid: p. 103;

¹⁸³ Ibid: p. 123;

¹⁸⁴ Ibid: p. 124;

¹⁸⁵ Ibid: p. 133;

son Bagrat in 975 and then the throne of Abkhazia in 978. This was the first time Georgia had been unified.¹⁸⁶

The authors addressed people's migration from the Northern Caucasus to Georgia. According to them, the Mongols of the Golden Horde conquered the region of Northern Caucasus which pushed the local tribes-Circassian-Abkhazs, Alans and others to the South. They assimilated with South Caucasian tribes- such as Abkhazians and Dvals. In some cases, this process was relatively calm and slow, while in other cases it was rapid and painful. For example, Ossetians annexed the lands of Kartli and the tension occurred between local population and newcomers.¹⁸⁷

In the 15th century, Kakheti and Samtskhe did not subordinate to Bagrat VI. The other principality, called Sabediano, tried to secede. It included Abkhazia, Samegrelo, Guria, and cities in the black Sea –Sokhumi, Poti, Tsikhidziri, and Batumi. However, Bediani, ruler of Sabediano eventually recognized Bagrat's authority as a king.¹⁸⁸

In the 16th century Abkhazian feudal lords headed by Shervashidze family started separation from Samegrelo (the former Sabediano) and by the 17th century they had already formed a separate kingdom.¹⁸⁹ Ottomans started bribing the local feudal lords, supported slave trade and Islamization, and tried to destroy the local tangible and intangible culture by eradicating the local customs. Ottomans attempted to collaborate with Abkhazians by using these methods and achieved some success, however according to the authors of the textbook, Abkhazian people never leaned towards Ottoman conquerors and they fought with Georgian

¹⁸⁶ Ibid: Pp. 131, 132, 133;

¹⁸⁷ Ibid: p. 245;

¹⁸⁸ Ibid: p. 263;

¹⁸⁹ Ibid: p. 271;

people against their common enemy. Therefore, the Ottomans were not able to eradicate Christianity and Georgian language from Abkhazia.¹⁹⁰

Several changes in the textbook of 1958, regarding the Abasgia's separation from Lazika and Leon II's policies and ethnic composition of Abkhazia in the medieval period, directly reflect some of Pavle Ingorokva's assumptions expressed in his book - "*Giorgi Merchule*". In order to see what changes were made by the authors, I will compare the textbook published in 1946, which gives a historical narrative before Ingorokva's theory, to the textbook published in 1958, which describes a historical narrative after Ingorokva's theory.

As mentioned above, according to the textbook published in 1958, prior to the 6th century, two tribes are named at the borders of Egrisi – Abasgs and Missimians, however, there is no mention of the ethnic origin of these tribes. According to the authors of the same textbook, Justinian wanted to weaken Lazika and separated Abasgia from its borders in the 6th century. Despite the fact, that Abasgs from this period conducted independent political actions, later these two kingdoms had one name - "Egris-Abkhazia". The textbook repeats Ingorokva's opinion that Abasgs were excluded from Lazika, because of Justinian's influence but they had always had a tight connection with Lazika. Ingorokva's assumptions can also be seen in the part of the textbook, where authors speak about Leon II's political actions. Ingorokva explained that in the old Georgian, the word "conquest" (dapkroba) meant "liberation" (gantavisufleba), therefore unlike the 1946 textbook, which mentioned that Abkhazian king Leon II conquered Lazika, the new textbook interpreted this event as "liberation" from the Byzantine Empire.

¹⁹⁰Ibid: p. 306;

The textbook of 1958 emphasized that new political formation, founded by Leon II was a “truly Georgian” kingdom, inhabited by a mixed population, which spoke the Georgian language. This conclusion is close to Ingorokva’s opinion, who also considered Abkhazian kingdom as truly Georgian, however, Ingorokva openly talked about the Georgian origin of Abkhazian dynasty, while the textbook of 1958 lacks this argument. The textbook of 1946 considered Leon II’s kingdom as Abkhazian kingdom, which followed the Georgian politics but there was no mention of the mixture of populations. The authors of the 1946 textbook emphasized only the fact that the majority of the population of the new kingdom was Georgian.

The textbook of 1946 did not say anything about migrations in the 13th century, while the textbook of 1958 described the migration of Circassian-Abkhazian, Ossetian and other tribes to Georgia and called this process “downpour of mountaineers” (*mtielebis chamotsola*). The textbook emphasized that this process had gone painfully in some areas, while in others slowly and calmly. Afterward, it discusses the migration of Ossetians to Kartli, which had harmful consequences but does not talk about Abkhazia. It is worth mentioning, that this idea refers to ethnic changes, due to the people’s migration from the Northern Caucasus, however, it stands far from Ingorokva’s consideration that ethnic changes in Abkhazia appeared in the 17th century, while the textbook links the ethnic changes to an earlier period.

In the end, it should be noted, that the textbook of 1958, unlike the previous textbook, gives the example of the “friendship of the people”, while discussing the Ottoman invasion of Abkhazia in the 16th century. Based on the 1946 textbook, Ottomans used Abkhazians and other tribes to occupy Abkhazia, while the 1958 textbooks emphasized that despite the attempts of the enemy, Abkhazians and Georgians fought together heroically to expel the Ottomans. In addition, both textbooks mentioned that in the 17th century Western Georgia

experienced hardships, due to the flourishing slave trade, which forced the local population to migrate to Eastern provinces. This process led to the demographic changes, the population in Western Georgia diminished. However, none of the textbooks talk about ethnic changes.

As it can be seen from the comparison of these two textbooks, Ingorokva's theory influenced the Georgian historiography and official narrative changed. The new narrative shared some of the Ingorokva's considerations (separation of Abasgois from Lazika, the liberation of Lazika in the 8th century, characteristics of Abkhazian kingdom) and developed new notions, regarding the ethnic changes in Abkhazia. In addition, the narrative of the new textbook avoided calling Abasgs and Missimians the Abkhazian tribes, but did not call them Georgian tribes either and attempted to connect Lazika to Abasgia, and even after the separation called them "Egris-Abkhazia". Supposedly, the authors aimed to draw the Western kingdoms as one whole, and they interpreted the merging of Lazika and Abkhazia as a formation of Western Georgian kingdom, which later took part in the unification of Georgia. In this way, they got closer to Ingorokva's opinion that Abkhazia was not an independent kingdom, which followed Georgian politics, but a Georgian kingdom. However, the new authors more accurately claimed that the population of Western Georgia were mixed and thus, avoided to classify the rulers of the new Abkhazian dynasty, whether they were Georgians or Abkhazians.

3.2. Abkhazian Response

Abkhazian scholarship was at least as motivated to study the Abkhazian history as Georgian. On the 50th Jubilee of Dimitri Gulia Abkhazian Institute of Language, Literature, and History, a historian Arvelod Kuprava mentioned that due to the lack of professional historians, Abkhazian intellectuals (Gulia, Ashkhatsava, Kudriatsev, Basaria and others) attempted to

write the Abkhazian history to fill the scientific gap in the field.¹⁹¹ However, in 1931 after the emergence of the Institute of Regional Studies (kraevedenie) of Abkhazian Autonomous Republic¹⁹², the planned and organized effort to study the history of Abkhazia began. There were attempts to rewrite the “Bourgeois” history in Marxist-Leninist canon during this period. However, these attempts were successful only by the end of the 1930s. Among the first successful examples of writing Abkhazian history in a new canon, Kurpava named Simon Janashia, who dealt with the old period of Abkhazian history, Giorgi Shervashidze and Davit Chkhotua, who wrote on the cultural and political matters of the XIX-XX century Abkhazia. During the war, the Institute was limited (agranichena) in the research matters and was mainly focused on collecting materials. After the war, the number of actors engaged in the study of Abkhazian history increased. Among the new actors were - Sokhumi Pedagogical Institute, the State Museum of Abkhazia and the Abkhazian Central State Archive. Kuprava also mentioned that After the World War II, Georgian historians from The Institute of History, Archeology, and Ethnography of the Georgian SSR, started studying the “specific issues of Abkhazian history” and played an active role in the development of the field.¹⁹³ Among others, Kuprava assessed the monograph of Abkhazian historian, Zurab Anchabadze, “*From the History of Medieval Abkhazia*” (1959), as “the first fundamental work, which by using of a variety of sources, convincingly argues about the Abkhazian autochthonic origin”.¹⁹⁴

The book by Zurab Anchabadze was published in Sukhumi after the debate on “*Giorgi Merchule*” and can be considered as an Abkhazian response to Ingorokva’s theory for three reasons. First of all, it covers the same period from VI to XVII centuries. Secondly, it dealt

¹⁹¹Kuprava, Arvelod. Problemi Izucheniia Obkhazskoi Istorii v 50 Let. V brochure “Obkhazskomu Institutu 50 Let.” Akademia Nauk Gruzinskoi SSR, Tbilisi, Metsniereba 1985, p. 33;

¹⁹² In 1931 the Chair of Language and Literature was united with the Abkhazian Scientific Society and was remodeled into the Institute of Regional Studies (Kraevedenie);

¹⁹³Kuprava: p. 35;

¹⁹⁴Kuprava, Arvelodi: p. 36;

with the same issue as Ingorokva's work. In the introduction, Anchabadze said: "In the book, the main focus is on the following important issues from the history of medieval Abkhazia – the ethnic development of Abkhazian nation and its relationship with the Georgian nation. Other issues raised in the book are covered according to their connection with the research"¹⁹⁵. Thirdly, the author openly replied to Ingorokva's opinions and brought up controversial arguments regarding Abkhazian origin in this book.

Based on Anchabadze, the ancestor tribes of Abkhazian nation – Abasgs, Apsils, Missimians, and Sanigs subordinated to Lazika kingdom, but each one did so differently. For example, Apsil tribe bordered Lazika and they had a tighter connection to the Laz kings than other tribes. Also, the Apsilian territory connected Lazika to the North Caucasian tribes and it had a strategic importance.¹⁹⁶ Abasgs had their own self-government and large autonomy inside Lazika, however, from the 6th century they separated from Lazika and with the help of the Byzantine Empire started to conduct independent politics.¹⁹⁷ Missimians as Apsils were the vassals of Laz king, however, they had the right to secede in case their interests did not fit. As for Sanigs, they were not vassals to neither Byzantium nor Lazika, however the fact that Laz bishops assigned the Christian priests among Sanigs, hints at some form of subordination.¹⁹⁸

The Unification of Abkhazia started by the Abasg tribe. Based on an unknown Armenian geographer, Anchabadze supposed that in this period Apsilian lands were merged into the borders of the Abazgian territory, but these tribes were not one "narodnost" yet. The new formation took the name from the ruling circle that came from Abasg tribe and was called

¹⁹⁵ Anchabadze, Zurab. *From the History of Medieval Abkhazia*. The Abkhazian state publishing, Sokhumi, 1959, p. 3;

¹⁹⁶ Ibid: p. 30;

¹⁹⁷ Ibid: p. 32;

¹⁹⁸ Ibid: p. 33;

“Abkhazia”.¹⁹⁹ By the end of the 8th century, Abasgs, Apsils, Sanigs, and Missimians were united in the new kingdom. Anchabadze considered that from this period all these tribes composed one Abkhazian narodnost and in historical chronicles, none of them are mentioned with their previous names, but they are called “Abkhazians”.²⁰⁰ Anchabadze agreed with Ingorokva on the fact, that the first king of Abkhazian kingdom Leon II, liberated Abkhazia and Lazika from the Byzantine Domination.²⁰¹ To further clarify his position, Anchabadze later added, that supposedly there were some feudal lords who resisted unification of Lazika with Abkhazia, but the scarcity of sources make it hard to prove this point.²⁰²

According to Anchabadze, before the unification of Georgia, the Abkhazian church was connected to the Eastern Georgian church, which supported the Georgian language to replace the Greek in Abkhazia in the 10th century. However, the Georgian language had been spread even before that, because of the migration of Karts (Eastern Georgian tribe) to western regions, during the Arab invasions.²⁰³ Anchabadze commented on Merchule’s phrase “Kartli is called all lands, where all prayers and psalms are said in Georgian” and argued that here the term “Kartli” is used to emphasize the significance of religious unification, but it does not exclude the ethnic individuality of Abkhazians, Dvals, Ossetians or others. He considered that in cultural and religious fields, Abkhazians held the Georgian course.²⁰⁴ In order to emphasize the autochthonic character of Abkhazians in the black sea coast, Anchabadze discussed the connection between Abkhazians and Abazas, who populated in the Northern Caucasus and were considered similar to Abkhazians. Anchabadze argued that Abazas and Abkhazians

¹⁹⁹ Ibid: p. 66;

²⁰⁰ Ibid: p. 69;

²⁰¹ Ibid: p. 96;

²⁰² Ibid: p. 101;

²⁰³ Ibid: Pp. 149, 151;

²⁰⁴ Ibid: p. 152;

composed one *narodnost* (linguistically and culturally connected) however in medieval period Abazas migrated to the Northern Caucasus and settled there.²⁰⁵

Anchabadze criticized Ingorokva, because of his assumption that only ethnically homogeneous tribes could create a common state. Anchabadze replied: “In contrast to his previous opinions, regarding Abkhazian nationality, in which he correctly identified the ancestors of modern Abkhazian nation, in this work (Giorgi Merchule) Ingorokva radically changed his view and tried to prove that those Abkhazians, who played an active role in the history of Abkhazian kingdom and multinational Georgian state, were not direct ancestors of the modern Abkhazians, but “pure Georgian tribes”.²⁰⁶ Anchabadze claimed that similar theory existed before Ingorokva and its author was a “Bourgeois” historian Davit Bakradze. However, Bakradze, unlike Ingorokva, believed that the medieval Abkhazians and modern Abkhazians were the same people and came from the Northern Caucasus and Ingorokva argued that the medieval Abkhazians were Georgians, while modern Abkhazians are the “mountaineers” from the North.²⁰⁷

Anchabadze claimed that the unified Abkhazian kingdom was not homogenous. It not only included Lazika and Abkhazia, Svaneti and all parts of Western Georgia until the Likhi Range but also the part of Kartli – Argveti, populated by Karts. After the Arab invasion, Karts started migrating to Abkhazia, which was a safer place to live. It served as an argument to prove, that even before the formation of Abkhazian kingdom, it was populated by the different ethnic groups, and among the Georgians, the autochthonic people of Western Georgia (*korennixobitatelei*) were only Svans and Lazs.²⁰⁸ Abkhazian kings were involved in the

²⁰⁵ Ibid: p. 205;

²⁰⁶ Ibid: p. 219;

²⁰⁷ Ibid: p. 221;

²⁰⁸ Ibid: p. 106;

struggle of Georgia's unification and their rivals were rulers of Tao-Klarjeti.²⁰⁹ However, unlike Georgian sources, Anchabadze made emphasis on Kartli's feudal Ioane Marushidze, who chose David III Kuropaletes as his ally and Bagrat III as the future king. Anchabadze claimed that Georgia's unification ended after Bagrat got the thrones of Abkhazia, Kartli, and Tao-Klarjeti in 1008²¹⁰ and the kings of Unified Georgia, according to Armenian, Byzantine and other sources, were called kings of Abkhazia,²¹¹ However, the term Abkhazia was used with a narrow meaning while the term Abkhaz, for determining the ethnic group.²¹² Based on Anchabadze, the dissolution of the Georgian state started from the 13th century and in the 15th century, the Western principalities formally recognized the authority of king Bagrat.²¹³ However, the Mingrelian princes took the dominant position and even attempted to unite Western Georgia. The ruler of Odishi, Levan II Dadiani got closer to this goal, but in the end, he failed and in the 17th century, Abkhazia was formed as a separate principality, ruled by Shervashidze dynasty.²¹⁴

Anchabadze's book demonstrates that the author rejected Ingorokva's three main considerations regarding Abkhazian origin. First of all, Anchabadze clarified that Abkhazian kingdom was formed by the initiative of Abkhazian tribe- Abasgs, who after the 6th century was separated from Lazika. The Abkhazian king Leon II followed Georgian politics, as in that period Abkhazia and Georgia had tight cultural and political connection. Secondly, the Georgian language was widely spoken in Abkhazia, due to the arrival of the Eastern Georgian tribe, after the Arab invasion in VII century. Thirdly, the author clarified that the term "Abkhazia" maintained its previous meaning, even after Georgian kings were called the kings

²⁰⁹ Ibid: p. 124;

²¹⁰ Ibid: p. 169;

²¹¹ Ibid: Pp. 172, 174;

²¹² Ibid: p. 176;

²¹³ Ibid: p. 238, 240;

²¹⁴ Ibid: Pp. 258, 266;

of “Abkhazia”, and in its narrow meaning, the term still was used to determine the kingdom of Abkhazia. In addition, Anchabadze responded to the Georgian historians who were the authors of the 1958 history textbook, while clarified the connection between the North Caucasian tribe Abaza and Abkhazians. In contrast to the Georgian historians, Anchabadze argued that Abazas were the same Abkhazians who migrated from the South to the North Caucasus.

Conclusion

Revision of Soviet Past causes some misunderstandings and leads to ambiguous conclusions from different scholars. However, no one would disagree with the fact that the Soviet Union used a similar principle that was used by the Russian Empire –divide and rule- to control large territory and population. However, Bolsheviks were clever than their predecessors and their propaganda was successful in its attempt to use the nationalist movements in favor of Socialist welfare. At first stage, Soviet leaders acknowledged the right of Soviet nations on territory, language, culture and party membership. In order to avoid an undesired territorial fragmentation, they allowed local populations to draw boundaries based on ethnic sympathies. However, after instilling bolshevism in the Soviet republics, territorial and cultural fragmentation was replaced by the centralization. Following the new policy, the new concept of Soviet patriotism emerged, which crossed the nationalist boundaries. However, not all people were ready to accept these changes in the Soviet nationalities policy.

“Anti-Korenizatsia” trends in the Soviet politics appeared from the second half of the 1930s when the centralization took place. The Soviet government started reducing the number of ethnic identities, which was encouraged in the previous decade. It was not an attack on a particular nation, but one of the several agendas in the Soviet nationalities policy. Accumulation of Abkhazian grievances started from the 1930s after the abolition of the Abkhazian SSR and attaching it to the Georgian ASSR on an autonomous basis. From the second half of the 1930s in accordance with the changes in the Soviet nationalities policy, centralization took place in Georgia and in some cases it was accompanied by the assimilatory measures, for example, registering Abkhazians as Georgians. The assimilation of people was inherited from the Imperialist tradition and those Abkhazians, who were registered as Georgians, had a double identity, as they belonged to the Georgian sub-ethnic group in the

19th century before Russian Empire proclaimed them as Abkhazians. In addition, the deportation of Germans, Turks, Tatars, Greeks, Lazs and Dashnak Armenians from Abkhazia to Central Asia and Siberia in the 1940s was linked to settling Georgians in Abkhazia, despite the fact that these events had different goals.

In the 1940s, an open protest was expressed regarding the economic and school reforms, which resulted from the emergence of new Georgian settlements in Abkhazia and replacement of Abkhazian language by the Georgian language. The first letters of complaints appeared in this period. The authors of these letters claimed that they wanted to inform the CC CPSU members regarding the distortion of nationalities policy in Abkhazia. Closure of Abkhazian schools in 1945-1946, is often interpreted by the Abkhazian historians as a discrimination of Abkhazians by the Georgian nationalists. However, reorganization of schools and settling other ethnic groups in Abkhazia was not a unique phenomenon that took place only in Georgia, it was a part of wider reforms and again, part of the Soviet nationalities policy. It should also be mentioned, that Abkhazians never protested against the growth of Russian population in Abkhazia.

Following these events, Ingorokva's theory about Abkhazian ethnogenesis disappeared, which clearly showed the connection between the Soviet politics and history-writing. Historians, after the 1930s, started writing their works in Marxist-Leninist way, and willingly, or unwillingly were in service of the Communist Party. History reflected reality, or more correctly Stalin's reality, who, according to Banerji was the greatest historian. There was an agreement on certain issues, for example, that a narrative should have revealed economic formations and class struggle, however, historians were not limited to writing about the heroic deeds of great ancestors. The first attempt to write national histories in Marxist-Leninist canon began from the 1930s, which according to Enteen was called the "Leninist stage". In

this period the national institutions started forming in Abkhazia, which continued studying the Abkhazian history, but due to the lack of materials, they faced difficulties. As the reports show, in the mid-1930s, Abkhazian schools did not teach the history of Abkhazia or the history of Georgia. The first Marxist history textbook appeared in 1940, which was revised in 1943 and later, in 1946. In these textbooks, the official narrative regarding Georgian-Abkhazian relations was formed. Abkhazians were considered as foreign tribes, who formed the independent kingdom in the 8th century and in 10th century merged into the borders of united Georgia. Due to the fact, that the narrative was written by the influential and professional historians, its relevance was not questioned until 1950, when an alternative theory appeared. Literary Scholar, Pavle Ingorokva criticized Georgian historians for considering Abkhazians as the foreign tribe and argued that Abkhazians were Georgians, like Kart, Mingrelians or Svans. After publishing this article, it became clear that unofficial narrative was trying to replace the dominant narrative and the silence of censorship was a signal for Abkhazians that this narrative was favored by the State. It is noteworthy that Ingorokva started writing his work from 1947 when the protest had already begun in Abkhazia and this theory was connected to the Soviet nationalities policy.

Ingorokva's theory was written after the Second World War when new historical narratives of the friendship among the citizens of Soviet citizens in the non-Russian areas emerged. As history was a strong educational and ideological tool, historians were forced to rewrite their works based on new demands in the "Zhdanovshchina". Soviet state aimed to eradicate "bourgeois nationalism" which appeared in the war period as a result of Soviet propaganda. Besides this, historians were obliged to emphasize the existence of foreign enemies. The image of an enemy bounded the Soviet people together. In addition, new theories regarding the common origin emerged. For example, Ukrainian scholars declared that Ukrainians,

Belarusians, and Russians had a common “cradle” and were connected to Russians by kinship. However, this Russocentric theory, unlike Ingorokva’s theory, was written in a Marxist-Leninist style and besides this, it did not cut the connection for example, between medieval Ukrainians and modern Ukrainians.

As the sources show, Ingorokva’s theory was not written for binding Abkhazians and Georgians with common ties of friendship or kinship. It served as a justification for the Soviet nationalities policy in Abkhazia in the 1940s. If Abkhazians arrived in Abkhazia only in the 17th century, then based on the Stalinist principle, they were not considered as “korennoi” (native, indigenous) population of Abkhazia and depriving them of the rights that were given to them during the Korenizatsiia would be a logical continuation of the Soviet nationalities policy in Abkhazia. It is hard to say what would be the future of Abkhazia, or what further steps were planned, however, one thing can be said, that what happened in Abkhazia was a part of the Soviet nationalities policy and Abkhazian complaints as if Georgians attacked Abkhazian nationalism, to occupy Abkhazia is as ridiculous, as an assumption that Stalin wanted to create the cozy Georgian Empire.

The battle between official and unofficial histories ended in the 1950s. Ingorokva’s theory changed the course of the official narrative in the history of Georgia, as the textbook of 1958 shared some opinions from the new conviction on Abkhazian ethnogenesis. In addition, Ingorokva’s theory provoked new research among Abkhazians and in 1959 a monumental work appeared, that answered this new theory and formed the basis for the master narrative of the history of Abkhazia.

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