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Analyzing the Georgian Opinion of the Soviet Annexation of Georgia

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ANALYZING THE GEORGIAN OPINION OF THE SOVIET ANNEXATION OF GEORGIA

by

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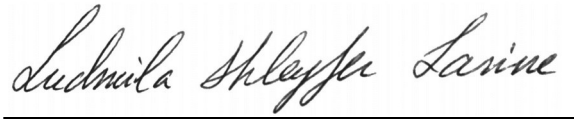

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Table of Contents

Abstract

In this thesis, I have examined the Sovietization of Georgia in the 1920s and analyzed how Georgians perceived Sovietization. Specifically, this thesis explores different opinions on Sovietization through the lens of Georgian nationalists, Georgian cultural literary icons, and the average Georgian. Further, this thesis addresses the interplay of time and Georgian nationalism in understanding Sovietization. The thesis examines how different groups of Georgians related their understanding of Georgian identity to the Soviet understanding of Georgian culture and demonstrates how the disconnect between Soviet and Georgian identity manifests as disapproval of Sovietization and the Soviet Union as a whole as time progresses.

Chapter 1 examines how General Kvinitadze and a commission from the *Presduma* of the Georgian SSR viewed Sovietization, arguing that both opposed Sovietization because they believed that it violated Georgia's cultural and legal rights. Chapter 2 explores how Georgian cultural literary icons, Vladimir Mayakovsky and Galaktion Tabidze, responded to Sovietization, arguing that both initially saw Sovietization as a positive change for Georgia because it allowed Georgia to have more autonomy. As time progressed, Tabidze started to believe the Sovietization interfered with Georgia's identity as he directly experienced the Great Terror and saw that the Soviet Union repressed non-Soviet ideas. Chapter 3 examines how proletarian poets viewed Sovietization, in an attempt to gauge how the average Georgian perceived Sovietization. This chapter argues that these poets saw Sovietization as a positive change for Georgia because Sovietization would create a better future and it would allow Georgians to continue to have pride in their country.

Introduction

Georgian-Russian relations remain an important part of the international discourse surrounding the post-Soviet space. Nearly 30 years have passed since the Soviet Union complexly dissolved; however, Russia continues to "protect" the republics of the former-Soviet Union and exert its influence in the region. In Georgia specifically, Russia maintains "peacekeeping" troops in South Ossetia and Abkhazia, two contested regions in Georgia. In August 2008, a short war broke out between the separatists in South Ossetia and Abkhazia who were aided by the Russian against the Georgians. As Russia's military actions went beyond the contested regions, it is difficult to suggest that Russia's actions were purely defensive. The war ended in a ceasefire on 12 August, although the fighting continued. By 11 August, Russian forces had advanced into western Georgia and taken captured several Georgian cities. In addition, Russian forces bombed a military base and the airport outside of Tbilisi.[1] Russia's actions in 2008 fueled Georgian animosity, which can be seen today through phrases such as "20% of my country is occupied by Russia," "Russia is occupant," or phrases that directly attack Putin. This anti-Russian sentiment can be seen on the streets of Georgian cities both as a protest against Russia and the "pro-Russian" Georgian government. Additionally, it means that there is a section of the population who refuse to speak Russian as they believe that Russia was, and continues to be, an occupant.

In June 2019, Georgian animosity toward Russia came to a head after Sergei Gavrilov addressed the Interparliamentary Assembly on Orthodoxy in Russian from the head of the Georgian parliament's chair. Protests erupted after this meeting because Georgians viewed

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[1] Asmus, *A Little War That Shook the World*, 165-188.

Gavrilov as anti-Georgian as he had recently voted in favor of Abkhazian independence. During the first couple of days, the people called for the resignation of several government officials responsible for inviting Gavrilov. The people believed these Georgian officials represented Russian interests rather than Georgian interests. The feelings of the Georgian in 2008 and 2019 add relevance to the discussion about how the Georgians felt in the 1920s as they demonstrate that Russia still has an active interest in exerting its influence in the region. Further, some of the fundamental characteristics of these events are similar in that in both instances Russia had no legal claim to Georgia but nonetheless attempted to exert an influence over Georgia.

While Sovietization was not the beginning of Georgian-Russian relations, it can be seen as a distinct turning point because Georgia was promised a greater degree of autonomy than under tsardom but it never received it.[2] When the Bolsheviks took over Russia after the October Revolution in 1917, Georgia refused to recognize the Bolshevik government as legitimate and declared independence in 1918. In 1920, the Russian Civil War reached Georgia and the Red Army invaded. The Red Army aimed to reclaim Georgia as part of what would become the Soviet Union. The Soviets established a pro-Soviet local government in Tbilisi, the capital of Georgia. In 1922, after losing to the Soviets, the newly formed Democratic Republic of Georgia was forced to join the Soviet Union as part of the Transcaucasian Socialist Federative Soviet Republic. While technically Georgia and Russia held the same status of Socialist Soviet Republics, Russia continued to dominate over the other republics of the Soviet Union.

[2] The "Treaty of Georgievsk" in 1783 made the Kingdom of Georgia a protectorate of the Russian Empire. In 1801, the Russian Empire annexed the Kingdom of Georgia.

Before the Soviet Union, "Many Georgian intellectuals took part in the making of the Georgian nationalism narrative and tried to clarify the essence of *Georgianness*."[3] During the era of the Soviet Union, non-Russian nationalism was deemed a bourgeoise concept and thus looked down upon.[4] Even after the break up of the Soviet Union, their narrative remained dominant. The history written during the era of the Soviet Union relied heavily on pro-Soviet motivations and largely discredited any opinion on the matter that was not objectively pro-Soviet Union. Presently, Georgian historians are working to fill in the lack of information on Georgian nationalism during the era of the Soviet Union.[5] My research expands the narrative of how Georgians perceived Sovietization while it occurred and takes a wider approach than just looking at Georgians. While I do address the changes to Georgian nationalism, my focus is on how groups of people, including nationalists, writers, and the average citizens, viewed Sovietization.

The historical narrative from the Soviet Union views the invasion of Georgia during the Civil War as an act of triumph. This narrative highlights what the Georgians gained; they became part of a future world power which would eventually provide them an electrified and industrialized country. However, it does not showcase how the Georgians were stripped of their homeland as they knew it and their cultural values. In addition, the Soviet narrative highlights the largely imagined, friendly history between the two countries in an effort to showcase the longstanding positive relationship between Russia and Georgia. One such example of the imagined friendship is the Georgian-Russian Friendship monument, built on the military road created as a result of the treaty of Georgievsk. Built in 1983, this monument celebrates the 200th

[3] Chkhartishvili, "Georgian Nationalism and the Idea of Georgian Nation," 192.
[4] Chkhartishvili, "Georgian Nationalism and the Idea of Georgian Nation," 192.
[5] Chkhartishvili, "Georgian Nationalism and the Idea of Georgian Nation," 192.

anniversary of the Treaty of Georgievsk and the continuing friendship of Soviet Russia and Soviet Georgia. The text on the monument, written in Russian and Georgian, is a quote from the poet Shota Rustaveli that reads: "A faithful friend will help a friend, he's not afraid of trouble. He will give a heart for a heart, and love will be his guiding star."[6] While Rustaveli did not write the text about Russian-Georgian relations as he lived in the 13th century, Soviet Russia used the text to demonstrate its commitment to protecting Georgia. On the other hand, the post-Soviet Georgian government emphasizes the oppressive nature of the Soviet Union on Georgia in an attempt to distinguish Georgia from Russia. The Hall of Soviet Occupation, part of the Georgian National Museum, was established on 26 May 2006 (Georgian Independence Day) as a display of the current Georgian government's disapproval of the Soviet Union actions in Georgia. The museum highlights the atrocities committed by the Soviet government in an attempt to show that Georgia was the victim.

While both Russia and Georgia have used the Sovietization of Georgia to characterize Russian-Georgian relations, the Sovietization of Georgia remains a fairly underdeveloped topic within the scholarship on the history of Georgia. In many ways this is unsurprising due to the fact that Georgia was under Soviet control for approximately 70 years and that:

> the Georgian historiography of the Soviet period labelled nationalism as the 'false bourgeois ideology'. As subject of academic inquiries it was ignored. In result of the practice there had emerged a palpable gap in the study of Georgian nationalism… After the break-up of the Soviet Union, some of the Georgian scholars (including [Marim Chkhartishvili]) devoted their scientific works to this problem; however, the gap still exists and in the representation of the history of the Georgian nation many crucial events and details are missing.[7]

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[6] "Другу верный друг поможет, не страшит его беда. Сердце он отдаст за сердце, а любовь — в пути звезда."

[7] Chkhartishvili, "Georgian Nationalism and the Idea of Georgian Nation," 192.

This thesis aims to help fill in the gap in research on Georgian history during the era of the Soviet Union by demonstrating how Georgians initially viewed Sovietization and how Sovietization impacted notions of Georgian identity.

This thesis analyzes the role of Georgian nationalism in the understanding of the aftermath of the Russian Revolution, the Civil War and the resulting Russian invasion of the newly independent state of Georgia in 1921. It investigates the extent to which Georgian nationalism was intertwined with the opposition to Sovietization in 1921. Utilizing writings from politically engaged Georgians, who lived both in the regions of modern Georgia and Russia during the time, I argue that the Georgian working class, including writers, in Georgia tended to have a more favorable initial opinion of the new Soviet regime as the Bolshevik regime promised to improve the conditions of the working class. In addition, I argue that writers who considered themselves to be Georgian but did not live in Georgia during the onset of Sovietization initially saw Sovietization as, more or less, a positive change. However, as time progressed and Georgia had not improved as the Bolsheviks implied it would have, these writers became suspicious of Sovietization and eventually rejected it. Further, I argue that Georgian nationalists viewed Sovietization negatively from the beginning as they saw it as an overextension of Russian influence in the region. In addition, I analyze the complexity of the relationship of Georgian nationalism to communism and whether the introduction of a communist government gave way to a distinct form of Georgian nationalism, rather than eliminating it.

Chapter one focuses on the political opinions of Georgians regarding the Russian invasion in 1921 because the greatest objection to Sovietization was related to issues surrounding independence. Georgia had gained independence as a result of the treaty of Brest-Litovsk in

March 1918. Later in 1918, when Germany surrendered, the treaty was abolished, giving Russia legal claim to Georgia. This chapter utilizes *Moi vospominaniia v gody nezavisimosti Gruzii: 1917-1921* by Giorgi Kvinitadze (1874-1970) and *Okkupatsiia i fakticheskaia anneksiia Gruzii: o politicheskoi i pravovoi otsenke narusheniia dogovora mezhdu Gruziey i Sovetskoi Rossiei ot 7 maya 1920 goda: dokumenty i materialy* led by A. N. Surguladzde and A. D. Aleksidze, one of the few historians of the Soviet era who wrote about Georgian opinion on Soviet annexation.[8] The first of these texts provides an invaluable account of what happened in meetings and on the front from someone who was deeply committed to the Georgian cause. Kvinitadze was a "model warrior and a fervent patriot," having served both on the front and in administrative roles during the Russo-Japanese War and World War I for Russia and Georgia during the Soviet annexation.[9] The latter presents an opinion of Sovietization that is, arguably, more objective than a memoir. Since the commission's report was published in the late 1980s, it provides insight into how time impacted the understanding of Sovietization. Together, these two books illustrate the Georgian nationalist perspective, which believed that Sovietization was detrimental to Georgia as Russia overstepped its legal right to the region and limited Georgia's right to its own country.

Chapter two examines how two famous Georgian poets, Vladimir Mayakovsky (1893-1930) and Galaktyon Tabidze (1892-1959), initially viewed the revolution as positive as they saw it as a way for Georgia to advance. As Bolshevik rule progressed, Tabidze became disillusioned with the new regime because of his experience with the Great Terror in the 1930s. Tabidze was exiled to Siberia during the Great Terror. There he went on to write poetry about the

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[8] Translated Title: *Occupation and Factual Annexation of Georgia: A Political and Legal Assessment of a Treaty Violation Between Georgia and Soviet Russia of 7 May 1920: Documents and Materials.*

[9] Translated Title: *My Memories in the Years of Georgian Independence: 1917-1921.*
"Giorgi Kvinitadze," 100 Years of Georgia's First Democratic Republic.

Georgian struggle under communism. While he survived the Great Terror, he was admitted to a mental institution in Tbilisi, Georgia where he spent the rest of his life. In both Russia and Georgia, poetry is a large part of the culture; poets are highly regarded and provide an important lens on culture in general. In these countries, literature also plays a substantial role in political discourse which makes their works an invaluable historical source.

Chapter three discusses the opinions of Georgian authors who lived in Georgia during the revolution and provides a general representation of the average Georgian population. This chapter considers the following poets: Alexander Abasheli (1884-1954), Giorgi Kuchishvili (1887-1946), Alio Mirtskhulava (1903-1971) and, Sandro Shanshiashvili (1888-1979). Abasheli was a Georgian nationalist who originally supported overthrowing the tsar in 1905 but opposed the revolutions in 1917 after he realized the new regime would not allow Georgian independence. His poetry explores how Georgian national identity relates to its neighbors (for example, Armenia and Azerbaijan) as opposed to Moscow.[10] Additionally, he wrote the Regional Anthem of the Georgian SSR in 1944, which meant that the themes of his work were accepted by the government.[11] Kuchishvili was a popular proletarian writer from a peasant family which makes his work useful in understanding how the proletarians viewed the new Soviet Georgia. Much like the majority of peasants, he fully embraced the Socialist revolution. He intertwined Georgian folklore with revolutionary ideas in his works to better relate to the average Georgian.[12] Folklore played a major role in traditional Georgian culture, so his work shows how traditional culture was impacted by Sovietization. Mirtskhulava was the founder of Georgia Komsomol

[10] "Aleksandr Abasheli," LiveLib.
[11] "Aleksandr Abasheli," LiveLib.
[12] "Kuchishvili," *Slovari, entsiklopedii i spravochniki.*

Poetry, so his works reflect Soviet patriotism and the collapse of the tsarist regime. He was the secretary of the Communist Party in Georgia from 1937-1939 and he represents people that directly engaged with the communist party in Georgia.[13] Shanshiashvili, like many educated individuals, saw the fall of tsardom as a chance for Georgian independence. Before the revolution in 1905, he participated in anti-tsar revolutionary movements which landed him in prison. Following the revolution in 1917, he joined the Georgian National Democratic Party and advocated for independence.[14] The writers in this chapter reveal that there is not one working-class view toward Sovietization but, in general, the average Georgian viewed Sovietization as a positive change because they saw Sovietization as an opportunity for Georgia to advance and that Sovietization did not conflict with Georgian culture and identity.

[13] "Mirtskhulava Alio Andreevich." *Slovari, entsiklopedii i spravochniki*.
[14] Vieli, "Anzor (Anzori)," Kunsthalle Zurich.

Chapter 1:

The Georgian Nationalist Perspective of the Sovietization of Georgia

Introduction

This chapter analyzes the opinions of the Georgian nationalists, those who were in favor of Georgian independence, in order to understand their core objections to the Sovietization of Georgia. They commonly referred to the time as the Soviet occupation, emphasizing the fact that the Soviets were an unwelcome influence. At the core of the opposition movement in Georgia in the 1910s-1920s were the nationalists, who believed in an independent, yet socialist, Georgia. Born out of a similar revolutionary desire that swept Russia in the 19th century as well as their own national awakening, the Georgian nationalists saw the fall of the Russian Empire as an opportunity to return to being a completely sovereign nation. After Georgia was integrated into the Soviet Union, the desire for independence continued. Using primary sources written in the 1920s and 1980s, this chapter explores several reasons for the objection to the Sovietization of Georgia and evaluates the role of the passage of time in understanding the objections to the occupation. I argue that both in the 1920s and in the 1980s the Georgian nationalists opposed Sovietization due to the cultural differences between Russia and Georgia, the Georgian desire for an independent state, and the legal violations committed by Russia before and during the Soviet occupation.

The first section of this chapter will use the memoirs of General G. I. Kvinitadze, written in 1922, in order to document the events just after they happened. He believed that “for historians it is undoubtably desirable and interesting to know the characteristics of individuals who rule over the people as well as the tendencies and methods used for interactions and

leadership."[15] Kvinitadze (1874-1970) served as an officer in the Russian Army during the Russo-Japanese War and World War I. In 1917, he returned to Georgia to establish a regular army and fought against the Bolsheviks until the Soviet annexation of Georgia in 1921.[16] As a whole, his memoirs provide an intimate account of the Georgian desire for independence and their struggle against the Bolsheviks. The second section of this chapter will use the published findings from the Commission on the Matter of Political and Legal Assessment of a Treaty Violation Between Georgia and Soviet Russia of 7 May 1920 (*Komissiia po voprocam politisheskoi i pravovoi otsenke narusheniia dogovora mezhdu Gruziei i Sovetskoi Rossei ot 7 maia 1920 goda*), led by A. D. Aleksidze and A. N. Surguladze. The Commission was created in 1989 by the *Presduma* of the High Council of the Georgian SSR. The Georgian government justified this commission based on the current situation in the Soviet Union: "the irreversible process of *perestroika*, democratization, and *glasnost* affirms new socio-political thinking and necessitates rethinking historical processes and events."[17]

Despite being separated by approximately 70 years, both of these sources present a similar account of how Sovietization was fundamentally incompatible with Georgia's aspirations of independence. They both aim to provide a more accurate account of events than the official Soviet interpretation of the occupation, stating they are objective explanations of what happened. The earlier account illustrates an intimate retelling of the events as they unfolded and acknowledges some of the internal failures of the Georgian military to defend against the

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[15] "Для историков, несомненно, желательно и интересно знать характеристику как лиц, правящих народом, так и тенденции, и применяемые способы взаимоотношений и управления."
Kvinitadze, *Moi vospominaniia*, 464.

[16] "Giorgi Kvinitadze," 100 Years of Georgia's First Democratic Republic.

[17] "Необратимый процесс перестройки, демократизации и гласности утверждает новое общественно-политическое мышление, обусловливает необходимость переосмысления исторических процессов и событий."
Menteshashvili and Surguladze, eds., *Okkupatsiia i fakticheskaia anneksiia Gruzii*, 3.

Bolsheviks while the later account is structured around objective violations committed by Soviet Russia. This change in approach is most directly the result of *glasnost* and *perestroika*, which gave the commission access to materials previously held by the Soviet government. Additionally, since the onset of the Soviet occupation was a distant memory, the commission needed to craft a compelling argument so it would not be dismissed. The former account ultimately leaves the audience to make its own assessment, while the latter demonstrates how Sovietization was unlawful, leaving little room for a counter-argument.

The 1920s

The Georgians viewed their cultural values as distinct from Russian traditions. As such, these differences were used in the 1920s as the primary objections to the Soviet occupation because it appealed to the Georgian people. At this time, the Georgian government not only had to defend again Soviet Russia, but also had to convince the average person that the new government, the Democratic Republic of Georgia (1918-1921), presented a better option than joining Soviet Russia. In addition, due to the end of WWI and the world wide fear of Soviet Russia, it believed it could convince the world powers to protect Georgia's independence by limiting Russia's influence on the region. This is evident in that Georgia appealed to both the Paris Peace Conference and the League of Nations. The commission argued that by claiming the legal right to the land known as Georgia, Russia was destroying another culture through assimilation as Russian culture was not synonymous with Georgian culture. Around the time of the Soviet occupation, Georgia's cultural distinction was one of the primary arguments as it strongly conveyed the idea that Georgia held an identity that was independent from Russia. This

argument was critical as Georgia had been under Russian control since 1801.[18] As such, the people were accustomed to living under Russian rule. This meant the new Georgian government would have to show that Soviet Russia threatened the Georgian way of life in a way that Imperial Russia did not.

In his memoirs, Kvinitadze argued that the Georgian cultural and national awakening was the starting point for the Georgian desire to maintain cultural independence, which occurred in the latter half of the 19th century.[19] This awakening was partially born from the fear of complete integration into the Russian Empire and the loss of Georgian culture. In the 1920s, he wrote, "There seemed to be no salvation. But the love of the homeland and its nationality saved it [Georgia] from final destruction."[20] During the 19th century, the Georgians had been able to preserve their cultural identity as long as it did not conflict with Russian culture even while legally being a part of the Russian Empire. For example, they maintained their religious practice of Orthodoxy. Georgia is one of the oldest Orthodox empires, dating back to the 4th century.[21] The East Slavs adopted the practice in the 10th century and the Russian Empire became one of the stronger protectors of Orthodoxy. Since 1783, Russia regularly provided military aid to Georgia in the name of defending Orthodoxy from Georgia's Muslim neighbors.[22] In theory, the "Supreme Manifesto of 1801" granted Georgia autonomy. However, in practice, it only allowed autonomy insofar as it did not conflict with Russian culture. Where Georgian and Russian culture differed Russia forced its culture in an attempt to increase its influence. For example, the official

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[18] See, "2. Vysochaishii manifest 12-go sentiabria 1801 g.," 43-45.
[19] Kvinitadze, *Moi vospominaniia*, 11.
[20] "Казалось, не было спасения. Но любовь к родине , к своей народности спасли ее от окончательной гибели."
Kvinitadze, *Moi vospominaniia*, 11
[21] Menteshashvili and Surguladze, eds., *Okkupatsiia i faktícheskaia anneksiia Gruzii*, 4.
[22] "Treaty of Georgievsk, 1783."

language of the courts and government offices in Georgia was Russian after 1801.[23] This forced Georgians to learn Russian in order to take part in official matters. By the turn of the 20th century, knowing Russian was prioritized over learning Georgian so much so that educated individuals in the city frequently lacked command of the Georgian language.[24]

In the 1920s, the opposition to Sovietization drew on the desire to return to a distinct Georgian culture, while maintaining certain tenets of the newer socialist ideals, as it primarily appealed to the Georgian intellectuals who had been oppressed by the Russian Empire. The new Georgian government recognized the current situation was an opportunity for independence as the Russian Empire collapsed in 1917 and the Georgians assumed the world powers would assist in establishing a new and independent Georgia given that they feared the rise of Soviet Russia. During this time, similar progressive movements had occurred in Georgia as in Russia. Kvinitadze argued that Russian revolutionary ideals had infected a great number of Georgian youth with Russian socialism: "A new intelligentsia was born. This was our youth, mainly educated in Russian schools and universities."[25] Russian imperialism in the 19th century had restructured Georgian politics and made them more in line with the politics of Russia proper. Despite this, Georgia's national awakening was growing and the Georgians continued to push for their own independence. The national awakening in Georgia should not be mistaken as a complete desire to return to the past. Rather, the national awakening sought to blend traditional

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[23] "3. Petitsiia gruzinskogo naroda 2-i mirnoi konferentsii v Gaage v 1907 g.," 48.

[24] In the villages, however, people continued to use the Georgian language. Similar arguments to these were used in the 1980s to demonstrate Georgia's cultural uniqueness.
Kvinitadze, *Moi vospominaniia*, 18, 54.

[25] "Народилась новая интеллигенция. Это была наша молодежь, получившая образование главным образом в русских школах и университетах."
Kvinitadze, *Moi vospominaniia*, 11.

Georgian culture with democratic socialism. Most importantly, however, they wanted complete autonomy from Russia.

The new Georgian government used Georgia's previous status as an independent nation in order to demonstrate that Soviet influence interfered with Georgia's previously established right to self-govern. For the majority of its history, Georgia had been an independent nation, leading it to object to the Soviet occupation in the 1920s. While this argument primarily came to fruition in hindsight, it is not completely absent from Kvinitadze's objections in the 1920s. This reason likely did not hold a significant amount of weight in his argument, as Georgia was annexed by Russia directly before he wrote his memoirs. As such, Georgia lacked the standing to demand a right to self-govern while it was actively controlled by another county. He mentions Georgia had a tradition of independence, citing its independence until the annexation by Russia in 1801.[26] After the fall of the Russian Empire, Georgians believed it should return to its previous status as an independent nation as the Russian Empire ceased to exist.[27]

In the 1920s, the objections to the Soviet occupation focused on Georgia's aspirations of political independence. Kvinitadze argued that the previous attempts by Russia to conquer Georgia did not crush its desire for independence, but rather these attempts encouraged a great awakening within the people. Despite a noticeable attempt to infiltrate Georgian society, "the dream of Georgia's political independence never died among the people."[28] While mostly grounded in his personal understanding, this assessment demonstrated that the military strongly opposed Soviet influence. The nationalists believed that when the Russian Empire fell, Georgia

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[26] See, "2. Vysochaishii manifest 12-go sentiabria 1801 g.," 43-45.
[27] Kvinitadze, *Moi vospominaniia*, 38.
[28] "Мечта о политической независимости Грузии никогда не умерла в народе." Kvinitadze, *Moi vospominaniia*, 11.

was freed and had the right to govern itself. As such, Soviet Russia's claim to Georgia over-stepped the affairs of an independent country.

In a final effort to delegitimize the Soviet occupation, Kvinitadze argued that Russia committed several violations in order to conquer Georgia. These sections of his memoirs seem more subjective than the rest of his memoir. In these sections, he appears to make himself the clear hero of the story, and the other officers are portrayed as less intelligent and, at times, foolish. His argument centered around the fact that the Soviet Army had attacked the capital, Tiflis (Tbilisi), without declaring war. As this attack went against the norms of war it was an illegitimate victory. Simultaneously, he made himself out to be the sole general who approved of the temporarily successful military endeavors that prevented Soviet Russia from taking Georgia at this juncture in the war.

He illustrated the challenge of Georgian mobilization and implied he was the only officer who was capable of preparing the Georgian Army to attack the Red Army. By April 1920, the Georgian Army was aware that the Red Army could attack from the north, by several mountain passes, or from the east through Soviet-controlled Azerbaijan.[29] In preparation, the Georgian Army began the challenging process of mobilizing:

> For our mobilization, our battalions should have been deployed into 3 battalion regiments. The mobilization plan was very heavy and demanded a lot of time. To me it was clear that we do not have time to mobilize and that our enemy [the Red Army], who had been mobilized for a long time, had time to cross the border before we had time to concentrate; that is why I needed to create an action plan, thanks to which I could have

[29] Kvinitadze, *Moi vospominaniia*, 167.

> managed to stop the enemy until [our] army finished mobilization and concentrating. The situation was extremely difficult.[30]

His account demonstrated that the Georgian Army was poorly prepared for battle, let alone for a surprise attack. When the Red Army attacked the capital without notice, the Georgian Army stood little chance at beating them. At best, it could hold the Red Army off in an attempt to gain more time to fully mobilize.

The Red Army attacked the military academy in Tiflis without warning during the 1 May holiday.[31] By demonstrating that Russia did not follow the rules of war, he attempted to negate the Red Army's victory. Additionally, it made the fact that the Georgian Army forced a temporary retreat all that more impressive. His account shifted the focus from Georgia's military failures to the Red Army's inability to follow the rules of engagement. In his mind, it no longer mattered that realistically the Georgian Army never stood a chance against the Red Army; it only mattered that Russia did not follow the rules of engagement.[32] Throughout his memoirs, he interjects his largely unfounded reasons how Russia cheated and argued that if Russia had played by the rules, there would have been a different outcome.

Besides justifying a fairly inevitable defeat, this shift in focus drew attention to previously ignored facts and aimed to create a more complete picture regarding how the events unfolded. In doing so, Kvinitadze allowed other people to see how Russia treated its neighbors. It

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[30] "По нашей мобилизация наши батальоны должны былы развернуться в 3 батальонные полка. План мобилизации был очень грузный и требовал много времени. Для меня ясно было, что мы не успеем мобилизоваться и что противник, давно мобилизованный, успеет перейти границу раньше, чем мы успеем сосредоточиться; поэтому мне надо было составить план действий, благодаря которому мне удалось бы задержать противника, пока армия закончит мобилизацию и сосредоточиться. Обстановка была чрезвычайно сложная."
Kvinitadze, *Moi vospominaniia*, 167.

[31] Kvinitadze, *Moi vospominaniia*, 172.
According his the account, if it was not the 1st, it was the early hours of the 2nd.

[32] Kvinitadze, *Moi vospominaniia*, 352.

is not entirely clear what Kvinitadze's motivations were for describing this battle in-depth as he was in no position to demand that Russia give Georgia back its independence. In reading his memoirs, it is clear that following the Soviet occupation he was bitter and resentful toward the Soviet Union. He, like many Georgian officers, had had his country stripped from him and felt forced into exile. Some grievances with the Red Army appear to be more the result of a personal grudge against Soviet Russia rather than an actual infraction committed by the Red Army. For example, Kvinitadze helped to create the military academy and lived there during the time of the attack. As such, he likely felt personally attacked by the Red Army which led him to decide that this attack was worth recounting in detail.

In addition, he recounted an instance in which several Georgian officers disagreed with each other. Once again, Kvinitadze portrayed himself as the hero and placed the blame on the other officers. While disagreements between Kvinitadze and the rest of the officers were not uncommon, this argument is particularly telling about their relationship. In his memoirs, he retold the part of the disagreement between him and General Gegechkori:

> Gegechkori, probably, felt my fair rebuke, lost his temper and began to scream, saying that he as the deputy Prime Minister declared, demanded his statement be recorded in the minutes and considered my behavior unacceptable. He screamed this while walking into the office. I stood up, approached him and calmly said, 'what are you screaming for?' He immediately calmed down and answered in a low, barely audible, voice, 'I am not yelling.' 'Yes, use that volume,' I remarked. Then, having calmed down, he asked me if I, during my last trip, received my last steam train unhindered. I answered, yes. 'So, see,' he said, 'there was no friction or loss of time because I gave an order in advance that you

> would always be given a steam train at your request, while they would only inform me upon the execution [of the order].[33]

While Kvinitadze admitted these remarks had nothing to do with the conclusion of the argument, he included them nonetheless.[34] The fact that this section is the only part of the disagreement he recounts as a conversation rather than a summary speaks to his overall demeanor towards other officers. It seems that he included this story as a way of showing that he was a far superior and more level-headed officer than the others. In showing that he was one of the best, if not the best, officers, he aimed to increase his credibility. He had fought tirelessly during the Soviet occupation and could not find fault within his own actions. He explained the fact that he was correct and thus the officers who did not listen to him were responsible for Georgia's defeat. Upon closer analysis, these remarks do the opposite; he seems moderately egotistical and unwilling to accept criticism. Kvinitadze does not seem to be particularly friendly and is at times disrespectful towards the other officers. After losing this argument, and calling the situation too hostile, he once again resigned from the military.[35] According to Kvinitadze, the other officers then accused him of creating unnecessary problems. Yet, the officers invited him

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[33] "Гегечкори, вероятно, почувствовал мой справедливый упрек, вышел из себя и стал кричать, говоря, что он, как замещающий Председателя Правительства, заявляет, требует занесения в протокол своего заявления и считает мое поведение недопустимым. Он это кричал, ходя по кабинету. Я встал, подошел к нему и спокойно сказал: 'Чего вы кричите'. Он сразу успокоился и ответил уже сильно упавшим голосом едва слышно: 'Я не кричу'. 'Вот так и говорите', - заметил я. Затем, успокоившись, он спросил меня, получил ли я в последнюю свою поездку паровоз беспрепятственно. Я ответил, что да. 'Вот видите', - сказал он 'никакого трения и потери времени не было, ибо мной было отдано распоряжение заранее, чтобы вам всегда подавали по вашему требованию паровоз, а мне лишь докладывали по исполнении'".
Kvinitadze, *Moi vospominaniia*, 233-234.

[34] Kvinitadze, *Moi vospominaniia*, 234.

[35] Kvinitadze, *Moi vospominaniia*, 234.
He resigned from the military several times during the war against Soviet Russia, typically after the other officers decided against his plans.

back to lead the army.[36] In some ways, the tone of this section suggests that Kvinitadze felt betrayed by his country and other officers after Georgia fell to the Red Army.

It does not appear that his goal in writing his memoirs was to fully condemn Russia. Rather, he tried to present an alternative account, which he believed was more accurate than Soviet or foreign ones.[37] While he allowed the facts to speak for themselves in the majority of his memoir, he simultaneously suggested that "bitterness can and must slip, for nothing can be more agonizing than to have the ability to accomplish something, but not to be given the opportunity. It is impossible to calmly watch the homeland's misery, when deeply convinced that this could have not been; it is hard to keep from reproaching inadequacy or unwillingness when it was possible to spare the people the horror that they were living through."[38] Kvinitadze's account also, very briefly, demonstrated that the Georgian government also played a role in the defeat. He argued the government lacked an overarching military strategy and thus Georgia never stood a chance against Russia.[39] It is somewhat perplexing that he also criticized the Georgian government and suggested it did not do enough to prevent the Soviet occupation. In doing so, he showed Georgia was internally unstable and could not defend itself. This fact would likely not encourage the world powers to support Georgian independence as Georgia would need continuous protection from Russia and other invaders. While he criticized Georgian leadership,

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[36] Kvinitadze, *Moi vospominaniia*, 234, 235.

[37] Kvinitadze, *Moi vospominaniia*, 5.

[38] Горечь может и должна проскальзывать, ибо ничего не может быть мучительнее, как уметь сделать, но когда не дают возможности сделать. Нельзя хладнокровно наблюдать за страданием родины, когда глубоко уверен, что этого могло и не быть; трудно воздержаться, чтобы не бросить упрека неумению или нежеланию, когда можно было избавить народ от того ужаса, который он сейчас переживает.
Kvinitadze, *Moi vospominaniia*, 17.

[39] Kvinitadze, *Moi vospominaniia*, 358.

his criticism seemed to be more the result of trying to rationalize how Georgia lost and identifying any reason they may have been a contributing factor.

Kvinitadze's alternative interpretation would allow other countries to judge for themselves and hopefully impose their will against Russia and force Russia to recognize Georgia as an independent nation. To some degree, he likely played on post-WWI tensions and the world-wide fear of communism as a way to gain international support for Georgian independence. However, he falsely assumed that the western powers had the ability to oppose Soviet Russia and demand it relinquish its land claims in the Caucasus region. While Kvinitadze raised several valid points as to why Georgia had the right to be independent from Russia, his claims were met with deaf ears and Georgia remained "occupied" until the collapse of the Soviet Union.

In the 1920s, Kvinitadze focused on the cultural uniqueness of Georgia and its strength despite years of being oppressed by the Russian Empire. He demonstrated that Russia committed several violations and left it to the audience to condemn Russia for its actions during Sovietization. While this choice makes his argument weaker than if he would have directly condemned Russia, he was likely unable to do so. Due to censorship in Soviet Russia/the Soviet Union, it is unlikely that he would have had access to information beyond his experience that showed that Russia did something wrong during the war with Georgia and the resulting occupation. For this reason, Kvinitadze's argument in the 1920s was more grounded in cultural understanding and his personal knowledge of infractions committed by Soviet Russia. Censorship also partially accounts for the lack of a decisive conclusion in the 1920s. To some degree, Kvinitadze seemed resentful toward his fellow officers as well as Soviet Russia. At times he seems to prioritize criticizing the other Georgian officers for disagreeing with him rather than

demonstrating why Georgia deserved to maintain its independence and how Russia illegally impeded in Georgian Independence.

The 1980s

The commission in the 1980s used similar arguments as Kvinitadze did in the 1920s. However, the commission more clearly demonstrated the effects of Sovietization on Georgian culture. This is likely due to the fact that by the late 1980s, Georgia had been under Soviet rule for approximately 70 years, making it possible to clearly identify the changes to Georgian culture. In addition, due to the inevitable collapse of the Soviet Union, the commission had unprecedented access to documents concerning Russian and Georgian relations and the ability to publish findings that showed that Russia committed legal infractions during the Soviet occupation. The commission's motivation for compiling this report was likely directly related to the situation of the Soviet Union in 1989 as the Soviet Union was in the process of collapsing. It is likely that the commission believed that if it showed that Georgia was occupied by Soviet Russia and forced to join the Soviet Union and continued to be abused, that Georgia would receive its independence after the fall of the Soviet Union.

Given that the commission lacked personal accounts of the occupation, it relied on treaties signed by Russia and Georgia in order to demonstrate that Soviet Russia had gone beyond any previous agreement between Georgia and the Russian Empire and thus had committed an act of war. In order to ground its claims, it started with the "Treaty of Georgievsk." Signed in 1783, the two entered into a treaty of friendship. The commission started with this treaty as it is commonly cited as the beginning of formal Russian-Georgian relations. The commission used it to establish objective grounds that Russia had a history of wanting to

conquer Georgia. Additionally, it illustrated the fact that Georgia had endured Russian aggression and remained independent for approximately 150 years before Russia conquered it during the Soviet occupation in 1921.

In 1783, Russia and Georgia signed the "Treaty of Georgievsk," a protectorate agreement in which Russia agreed to defend Georgia against its Muslim neighbors. This agreement reaffirmed Russia's role in protecting the Georgian Kingdom and made Russia its sole protector.[40] Article 6 of the treaty established the fact that Georgia is an independent entity, leaving "the power for internal administration, law and order, and the collection of taxes [under the] complete will and use of His Serene Highness the Tsar (Tsar Irakli II Teimurazovich), forbidding [Her Majesty's] (Tsarina Catherine II) Military and Civil Authorities to intervene in any [domestic laws or commands]."[41] In the 1980s, the commission argued the fact that while this treaty maintained Georgia's right to self-govern domestically, the treaty limited Georgia's role internationally. In hindsight, the commission viewed this treaty as the start of Russia's attempt to claim Georgia as it undermined Georgia's international status.[42] Given Georgia's situation in the 1780s, it is difficult to see how this treaty was much more than an attempt to reaffirm Russia's commitment to protecting Georgia and Russia's religious interests as it still allowed Georgia a great deal of internal autonomy. Georgia had struggled to defend itself against its Muslim neighbors. The introduction of Russian military power in Georgia would only occur in the event that Georgia was attacked and could not defend itself. The treaty stated that Tsar Irakli II Teimurazovich requested an agreement and "[Her] Most-Gracious [Majesty] (Tsarina

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[40] "Treaty of Georgievsk, 1783."
[41] "Treaty of Georgievsk, 1783."
Bracketed phrases in original, parenthetical phrases are my clarifications.
[42] Menteshashvili and Surguladze, eds., *Okkupatsiia i faktícheskaia anneksiia Gruzii*, 5.

Catherine II) consented to prepare and conclude a treaty of friendship with the aforementioned Most Serene Tsar (Tsar Irakli II Teimurazovich)."[43] The treaty itself granted Georgia internal autonomy and only limited its relations with neighboring countries as they posed a threat to Orthodoxy by requiring Georgia to request permission from Russia before it engaged with other countries.[44] While the treaty did indicate some Russian interest in the region, its interest was primarily based on defending a religious ally. The treaty required Georgia to follow Russian foreign policy.[45] In practice, this meant not engaging with Turkey and Iran, its Muslim neighbors. Since it granted Georgia complete internal autonomy, the treaty itself is not a strong indicator that Russia was interested in conquering Georgia as claimed in the evaluation by the commission in the 1980s.

While the "Treaty of Georgievsk" was the first modern agreement between the Russian Empire and the Georgian Kingdom, it seemed like a weak place for the commission to establish the argument that Russia had a territorial interest in Georgia because Georgia requested help and willingly signed the treaty. Georgia requested Russia's protection and it was a mutual agreement. Moreover, the commission failed to mention how Russia violated the treaty in 1795 when it failed to defend Georgia against Iran.[46] While this addition would have shown Russia had a history of breaking treaties, it still would have not proven that Russia had an active interest, in the late 18th century, in Georgia.

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[43] "Treaty of Georgievsk, 1783."
Bracketed phrases in original, parenthetical phrases are my clarifications.
[44] "Treaty of Georgievsk, 1783."
[45] "Treaty Of Georgievsk Signed 230 Years Ago - Eastern Georgia Becomes A Protectorate Of Russia," Presidential Library.
[46] Gahrton, *Georgia: Pawn in the New Great Game*, 36.

The commission used additional agreements between Russia and Georgia that were signed in the 19th century to further illustrate the fact that Russia had previously established intent to conquer Georgia and that the Soviet occupation was the complete and foreseeable manifestation of this policy. These assertions, however, are more grounded than the claims of Russian imperialism regarding the "Treaty of Georgievsk." The commission focused on the "Supreme Manifesto of 1801," as it made Georgia a subject of the Russian Empire. In 1801, Tsar Alexander I of Russia signed The "Supreme Manifesto of 1801," which annexed Georgia and incorporated it into the Russian Empire. In principle "Supreme Manifesto of 1801" took the "Treaty of Georgievsk" one step further in terms of protecting Georgia from the surrounding Muslim countries. In exchange for protection, Georgia lost its complete autonomy. The manifesto allowed Georgia to maintain its governmental structure, except Tsar Alexander I of Russia would be its tsar. Georgian subjects were afforded their previous rights as well as the rights of Russian subjects.[47] In theory, the manifesto allowed Georgia's relative autonomy as Georgia was still allowed to maintain its own government. In practice, however, Russia used this manifesto as a way to undermine Georgian domestic power and install a pro-Russian government. The commission used this fact to demonstrate that since 1801 Russia had had an active interest in conquering Georgia. Specifically, the commission cited the fact that only one position in the local legal system in Georgia, a Georgian translator, was not held by a Russian. In 1907, Georgia appealed to the 2nd World Conference to demonstrate that Russia overstepped the protectorate agreement as official discourse in Georgia was conducted in Russian. It was, therefore, unintelligible to the workers and peasants.[48] In many ways, this structure mirrored that

[47] "2. Vysochaishii manifest 12-go sentiabria 1801 g.," 44-45.
[48] "3. Petitsiia gruzinskogo naroda 2-i mirnoi konferentsii v Gaage v 1907 g.," 48.

of a colonial relationship in that Russia imposed its government structure with little regard for what has previously been there.

The commission used Russia's aggressive tactics of writing and breaking several agreements with Georgia in order to demonstrate that Russian had a propensity to break agreements so it could gain control in the region. The commission aimed to destroy Russia's creditability and cast the Soviet Union as a country with little regard for international law. The commission focused on the annexation of Georgia in 1801 as Russia clearly violated its terms. Furthermore, it argued that since Georgia did not sign this agreement it was, therefore, an act of imperialism and could not be considered a "good neighbor" agreement as Russia had suggested.[49] In referencing this treaty, the commission established that Russia had a previous interest in ruling Georgia. It used this fact to illustrate that the Soviet occupation was a continuation of extending Russian influence in the region. It furthered this argument by demonstrating that the Bolshevik leaders were aware of and encouraged the Red Army's action in Georgia, specifically citing I. Stalin, L. Trotsky, G. Ordzhonikidze, F. Makharadze, and B. Lominadze.[50] The commission went so far as to state that Stalin not only knew that the Red Army was mobilized in Georgia, but he told General Girgol "Sergo" Ordzhonikidze that it may be necessary to use military force. "On 28 January 1921 I. V. Stalin informed G. K. Ordzhonikidze: 'The Central Committee decided to conduct preparatory work on the assumption that military intervention and occupation of Georgia might be necessary.'"[51] In using this

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[49] Menteshashvili and Surguladze, eds., *Okkupatsiia i fakticheskaia anneksiia Gruzii*, 5.

[50] See, Menteshashvili and Surguladze, eds., *Okkupatsiia i fakticheskaia anneksiia Gruzii*, 23-34.

[51] "28 Января 1921 И. В. Сталин сообщил Г. К. Орджоникидзе: 'Цека принял решение вести подготовительную работу в предположении, что может понадобиться военное вмешательство и оккупация Грузии.'"

Menteshashvili and Surguladze, eds., *Okkupatsiia i fakticheskaia anneksiia Gruzii*, 16.

argument the commission showed that Russia intended to take complete control of Georgia and was prepared to use military force until it was accomplished. It also formally established Georgia as the victim and Russia as the perpetrator and argued that Russia was, without question, interested in claiming Georgia as its own.

Furthermore, the commission pointed out that Russia had recognized Georgia's independence by 1920 which continued to demonstrate that Russia had knowingly overstepped its legal rights. On 7 May 1920, Russia and Georgia signed a treaty that formalized the relationship between the two.[52] The agreement stated that Russia would not interfere in Georgian domestic affairs or with the new Georgian government.[53] Despite this agreement, the Red Army attacked Tiflis in early May 1920 but failed to maintain control over Georgia. By 1921, "the treaty from 7 May 1920 was more or less violated by both sides. This [violation], however, did not give either side the right or reason for starting a war."[54] The commission's argument demonstrated that Russia did not have the right to attack Georgia and that in attacking Georgia Russia had violated international laws. The commission further illustrated that despite the fact that Russia had promised a degree of autonomy as part of the Soviet Union, Russia failed to provide it.[55] The commission's argument reduced the Soviet Union's credibility and demonstrated a propensity for violating its word as well as international law. In doing so, the commission aimed to show the world powers that the Soviets intended to occupy Georgia and had done so since 1922. However, the commission failed to recognize that nothing could be done

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[52] Menteshashvili and Surguladze, eds., *Okkupatsiia i fakticheskaia anneksiia Gruzii*, 11.

[53] Menteshashvili and Surguladze, eds., *Okkupatsiia i fakticheskaia anneksiia Gruzii*, 11-12.
"7. Dogovor mezhdy Gruziei i Rossiei ot 7 maia 1920 goda," 75, 79.

[54] "Договор от 7 мая 1920 года в большей или меньшей степени нарушался обеими сторонами. Это, однако, не давало ни одной стороне ни права, ни повода для начапа (*sic*) войны."
Menteshashvili and Surguladze, eds., *Okkupatsiia i fakticheskaia anneksiia Gruzii*, 15.

[55] Menteshashvili and Surguladze, eds., *Okkupatsiia i fakticheskaia anneksiia Gruzii*, 25.

in order to address its grievances. While the world powers still feared communism, they were reluctant to act as severing the Soviet Union would unquestionably cause economic and social instability in the region. Further, the world powers lacked the ability to break up the Soviet Union.

Additionally, the commission used the concept of a national awakening as a way to demonstrate Georgia's right to independence based on the fact Georgia was culturally different from Russia and therefore Soviet Russia did not have the right to attack Georgia in 1921. Georgia's argument was grounded in the idea that Georgia had developed its own cultural norms and thus was not merely an extension of the Russian Empire. Georgian delegates at the Paris Peace Conference in 1919 had argued for Georgian independence on the basis that their country was a highly cultured society and that they had maintained their traditions for centuries.[56] In addition, the delegates appealed to the League of Nations, stating that "it is very distinctive in terms of ethnicity, having its own language and its own old culture, owning a certain territory rich in means and covering 100,000 square kilometers [38,610 square miles] with a population of approximately 3 million, the Georgian people have not only shown their will to be independent but also their desire to become and remain independent."[57] In drawing on Georgia's history of independence, the commission further pushed the idea that the Soviet occupation was unjust and had deprived Georgia of its own culture. Due to the decline of the Soviet Union, the commission in the 1980s suggested it had the opportunity to objectively characterize Soviet politics in the

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[56] "5. Doklad, predstavlennyi delegasiei Gruzii parizhskoi mirnoi konferensii 14 marta 1919g. (Politicheskie trebovaniia. Granitsy)," 54.

[57] "Очень самобытный с точки зрения этнической, имея свой собственный язык и свою старую культуру, владея определенной территорией, богатой средствами и простираясь на 100.00 кв. км с населением в 3 миллиона приблизительно, грузинский народ не только проявил свою волю быть независимым, но также и свою способность стать и оставаться независимым."

"6. Pis'mo N. S. Chkheidze ispolnitel'nomu i sobraniiu Ligi Natsii ot 21 maia 1919g.," 71.

1920s.[58] In doing so, they characterized Russia similar to an imperial power who desired to claim Georgia and would stop at nothing to do so.

Due to the decline of the Soviet Union and Gorbachev's reforms, including *glasnost* and *perestroika*, the commission had not only access to potentially incriminating evidence but also the ability to openly criticize the Soviet Union. While the commission failed to change anything, it highlighted the fact that in the late 1980s the Soviet Union was falling apart as it was no longer able to conceal documents and control the historical narrative. Fundamentally, the commission's report challenged the legality of Soviet Russia's actions in Georgia. It indirectly opposed any positive changes that occurred in Georgia as a result of Sovietization on the grounds that Soviet Russia/the Soviet Union had no right to be there in the first place. Beyond that, the commission solidified approximately 70 years of animosity between the Russian SFSR and the Georgian SSR and approximately 140 years of a quasi-colonial relationship between the Russian Empire and the Georgian Kingdom.

Based on its findings, the commission in the 1980s found that the attack on Georgia should be considered an annexation.[59] In some respects, this commission was self-fulfilling in that it was designed to examine in what ways Russia violated the treaty of 7 May 1920 and demonstrate how Georgia was the victim of Russian/Soviet aggression. However, as the commission's report does not introduce information that cannot, to some degree, be corroborated in either Kvinitadze's argument from the 1920s or official documents, there is little reason to suggest that bias played a major role in determining the outcome. In other words, their arguments seem rooted in facts and do not employ many of unfounded statements. It essentially comes

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[58] Menteshashvili and Surguladze, eds., *Okkupatsiia i faktícheskaia anneksiia Gruzii*, 3, 22.
[59] Menteshashvili and Surguladze, eds., *Okkupatsiia i faktícheskaia anneksiia Gruzii*, 26.

down to the central idea that Russia knowingly committed a series of treaty violations in an attempt to bring Georgia under Russian/Soviet control.

The commission in the 1980s presented a more objective claim, centering itself around the treaty violation of 7 May 1920. It used violations of previous agreements between Russia and Georgia from 1783 and 1801 as a way to further illustrate that Russia held a previous desire to integrate Georgia into Russia. In order to demonstrate the uniqueness of Georgian culture, it relied on legal appeals to the United Nations and the League of Nations. In part due to the nature of the commission, it condemned Russia for its action and left little ground to suggest that Russia had not violated international norms or laws during the war and the Soviet occupation of Georgia in the 1920s. The decline, and inevitable collapse, of the Soviet Union allowed the commission to present a direct attack against Soviet Russia. For the same reason, the commission had unprecedented access to materials that would allow it to create a strong, objective demonstration of the fact that the Soviet Union overstepped its legal right with the Soviet occupation in 1922.

Chapter 2:

Cultural Icons' Perspective of the Sovietization of Georgia

Introduction

This chapter analyzes the poetry of two of the most well known 20th-century poets in Georgia in order to understand how cultural icons viewed Sovietization. The literary tradition of Georgia and Russia is such that poets, as well as writers in general, are well respected. Frequently, people know passages and poems by heart. Both poets used in this chapter were widely read in Georgia around the time of Sovietization. Using poetry from Vladimir Mayakovsky and Galaktion Tabidze, this chapter examines how these two poets related to Sovietization. I argue that while these two poets initially saw Sovietization as a mostly positive change for Georgia, Tabidze later began to detest the application of Soviet ideology. Mayakovsky saw Sovietization as a positive change for Georgia because it allowed Georgia to achieve freedom and true independence by shifting the focus of the government to the people and improving agriculture in the rural regions of Georgia. Tabidze was initially less optimistic than Mayakovsky; however, he still viewed Sovietization as a positive change for Georgia as Sovietization promised to improve the conditions in Georgia. After Sovietization created more uncertainty than it solved, he began to object to it because he believed that Sovietization hindered the rights of Georgians.

The first section of the chapter explores how Mayakovsky viewed the Sovietization of Georgia as a positive change because he believed that Georgia was oppressed as an independent state and as a protectorate of the Russian Empire. Mayakovsky (1893-1930) was born in Baghdadi, Georgia (renamed Mayakovsky) to Russian parents. After the death of his father in

1906, his family moved to Moscow. During the October Revolution, he lived in St. Petersburg. Despite his political activism, he was never a member of the Communist Party. While he was ethnically Russian, he considered himself to be a Georgian as he was born and grew up in Georgia.[60] In *I Myself*, he recounted, "Would run up the highest. Hills lowered to north. In the north a gap in the hills. There, I envisioned, was Russia. Had intense longing to go there."[61] In some respects, Mayakovsky's poetry demonstrated his complex struggles with the world around him. The second section of this chapter argues the Tabidze initially viewed Sovietization as a mostly positive change for Georgia as he believed that it offered the Georgians an opportunity to advance. However, as Sovietization progressed, he began to see Sovietization in a more negative light because he believed that the Soviet government encroached on Georgia's autonomy. Tabidze (1892-1959) was born in Chqvishi, Georgia. He witnessed the October Revolution in St. Petersburg. The events of the revolution had a profound influence on his poetry.[62] While his works are not often overtly political, they capture the moods of the time. Tabidze was exiled to Siberia during the Great Terror and went on to write poetry that described the Georgian struggle under Communism. While he survived the Great Terror, he was admitted to a mental institution in Tbilisi, Georgia where he spent the rest of his life.[63] His works depicted a progressively darker and more hopeless outlook on the role of Communism in Georgia as time progressed.

Despite living through 30 years more of the Soviet Union than Mayakovsky, Tabidze's poetry also shows a struggle in terms of adapting to the new Soviet government. The two poets grew dissatisfied with the Soviet regime. While Mayakovsky's poetry directly attacked the

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[60] Mayakovsky, *I Myself*, 76, 78.
[61] Mayakovsky, *I Myself*, 76.
[62] Urushadze, "Biographies and notes" in *Anthology of Georgian Poetry*, 216.
[63] "Galaktion Tabidze Bio," My Poetic Side.

Soviet bureaucracy, Tabidze's critiques are more subtle. Perhaps, this may relate to their personalities more than anything else as Mayakovsky has been described in the following way: "everything about him was larger than life: his voice, his manners, his arrogance, his appetites, his gifts. He wrote poetry as though he was hammering rivets into sheet iron, and he conducted his life as though he had a thousand lives to spare."[64] On the other hand, Tabidze is remembered more for his flowing poetic style and contributions to the Georgian literary tradition.[65]

Mayakovsky

Despite being ethnically Russian, Mayakovsky is often considered by Georgians to be one of their own. Further, he considered himself to be Georgian, specifically a Soviet Georgian.[66] As such, Mayakovsky's poetry reflects an appreciation of Georgian culture and history as well as how Sovietization initially offered Georgia an opportunity to advance beyond what it had been as an independent nation and as a part of the Russian Empire. Mayakovsky's works are different from a memoir in that he is not limited to depicting events and his reactions to them. In this section, I argue that Mayakovsky initially believed that Sovietization would improve conditions in Georgia because he believed that the Georgian Empire was not a successful government and that the Soviet government would allow Georgia to become a more prosperous nation. Mayakovsky argued that the Georgians suffered while Georgia was an independent empire to demonstrate that, contrary to historical accounts, the Georgian Empire was not that successful because it was continuously attacked by other imperial powers and eventually forced to be a protectorate of the Russian Empire. As such, Mayakovsky viewed integration in the Soviet

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[64] Payne, "Introduction," in *The Complete Plays of the Vladimir Mayakovsky*, 2.
[65] Kiziria, "Introduction," in *Georgian Poetry*, 4.
[66] Mayakovsky, "*Vladikavkaz - Tiflis,*" 1-6,

Union as an end to this abuse. As a republic in the Soviet Union, Georgia was now on equal status with Russia and also had Russia's military backing, which would act as a deterrent from Georgia's southern neighbors.

Interestingly, Mayakovsky asserted that the Soviet Union was not an imperial power despite the fact that Soviet Russia's actions in Georgia had been viewed by the Georgian government as an act of imperialism; Mayakovsky believed that the Soviet Union would allow Georgia to be freer. The Bolsheviks stated that they would be willing to use force if necessary to enact Sovietization.[67] This assertion suggested that the Bolsheviks were not completely opposed to using imperialist methods to create the Soviet Union. As Mayakovsky was both culturally Georgian and Russian, he held a unique position in that he was able to criticize Georgia's treatment of its own history. In addition, his in-group status with respect to Georgia allowed him to suggest that Georgia was better off as a part of the Soviet Union than as an independent country without being simply dismissed as being pro-Soviet.

In 1924, three years after Georgia became part of the Soviet Union, Mayakovsky argued that only Bolshevism could lead to a free Georgia because he saw Sovietization as the end to the Russian Empire's oppression and Georgia's less than successful attempt at self-governing. Perhaps he was correct, as the Democratic Republic of Georgia (1918-1921) had failed to last more than four years and failed to defend Georgia against the Red Army. Once it was clear that the Democratic Republic of Georgia could not survive, the government was left with a choice between joining the White government or the Bolshevik government. If Georgia had sided with the Whites, it would have nearly guaranteed that Georgia would remain at a similar status as it

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[67] Kotkin, *Stalin*, 395.
Menteshashvili and Surguladze, eds., *Okkupatsiia i faktícheskaia anneksiia Gruzii*, 16.

was in Imperial Russia due to the fact that the Whites wanted to recreate the Russian Empire. Siding with the Bolsheviks, who were unclear in their imperial desires, allowed Georgia to continue to entertain the possibility of independence. While the Soviet Union did not grant Georgia complete independence, it allowed Georgia to be a Soviet Socialist Republic which, theoretically, gave Georgia the same political status as Russia. While neither solution completely addressed the Georgian desire for independence, joining the Soviet Union allowed Georgia to be closer to being fully independent than it had previously been under tsardom.

In the poem "*Vladikavkaz - Tiflis*," Mayakovsky argued that the Georgian interpretation of history was false. Mayakovsky believed that this type of history did not address the fact that none of these rulers had any long-term success. The speaker of "*Vladikavkaz - Tiflis*" suggests that Sovietization would outperform the work of any of the Georgian heroes:

> History is
> a gifted liar,
> all it does is mutter
> that there were
> pretty little tsars and princes:
> Iraklis,
> Ninas,
> Davids.[68]

In implying the failures of these Georgian heroes, Mayakovsky argued that Sovietization was a better form of government because it would outperform their work. The names Irakli, Nina, and David appear multiple times as significant figures in Georgia. While it is ambiguous which

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[68] История —
врун даровитый,
бубнит лишь,
что были
царьки да князьки:
Ираклии,
Нины,
Давиды.
Mayakovsky, "*Vladikavkaz - Tiflis*," 42-49.

figure Mayakovsky is referring to specifically, he is likely referring to the most notable ones. Irakli II is best known for signing the Treaty of Georgievsk with the Russian Empire in 1783. While this treaty protected Georgia from its neighbors, it sacrificed some of Georgia's autonomy.[69] St. Nina (frequently St. Nino) is credited with Christianizing Georgia in the 4th century.[70] David the Builder ruled during the 11th and 12th centuries and unified the Georgian Kingdom from Dagestan to the Black Sea. In addition, he expelled the Turks from Tiflis and established it at the capital.[71]

At first glance, it seems that Mayakovsky attempted to minimize the impacts of these rulers on Georgian history. However, he is not simply demonstrating the insignificance of these Georgian rulers. Rather, he used their long term failures to suggest that the Soviet Union would be a better ruler than Georgia had had in the past. As this poem was written in 1924, the impacts of Sovietization had not fully taken hold. In some ways, Mayakovsky appeared to be overly critical of these rulers as they were successful in their own right. He suggests that Georgia's history had focused on the government's interests and not the interests of the people. Mayakovsky's oversimplification of Georgia's history alludes to the idea that the Soviet Union would outperform these rulers and allow Georgia to be far more prosperous than it had previously been. His criticism allowed him to address what he considered real Georgian history and then argued that Communism was better than Georgia's true past.

Further, Mayakovsky questions the Georgians' pride in these mythologized rulers because he did not believe that they represented Georgia's "real" history. Indeed, it does seem odd that

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[69] "European Kingdoms: Eastern Europe," The History Files.
[70] "Saint Nino (Nina), Equal of the Apostles, Enlightener of Georgia," Orthodox Church in America.
[71] "European Kingdoms: Eastern Europe," The History Files.

Georgians would celebrate rulers who did not create lasting change. Additionally, these rulers may have protected the Georgian state but they failed to prioritize the needs of the people. For example, while Irakli II persevered the Georgian state he sacrificed the rights of the Georgian people in 1783. David the Builder's unification efforts were toppled by the Mongols in 1223. Mayakovsky believed that Communism was better for the people than the Georgian Empire (and Russian Empire) because Communism would create lasting change that would first and foremost protect the interests of the Georgian people.

Mayakovsky argued that Georgia was oppressed throughout history as he considered that the majority of the policies of Georgia's rulers had a negative impact on the people. He further argued that the Bolshevik government represented an end to the abuse and give Georgia more autonomy than it previously had:

> While I
> daily
> again and
> again remember
> all the bruises
> from the whips
> of all Alikhanovs.
> And further
> our history
> is gloomy.[72]

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[72] а я
ежедневно
и наново
опять вспоминаю
все синяки
от плёток
всех Алихановых.
И дальше
история наша
хмура.
Mayakovsky, "*Vladikavkaz - Tiflis*," 109-118.

In recounting the abuses against Georgia, Mayakovsky argued that Georgia's history was one of great loss because it was often beaten up by other countries. "Alikhanovs" is a reference to Maksud Alikhanov. He was a Russian officer from Dagestan who was the governor of Tiflis.[73] Indeed, Mayakovsky is largely correct. Georgia lost its autonomy by 1801 as it needed help defending against its Muslim neighbors. Georgia was an Orthodox country surrounded by Muslim countries. As such, it found itself in the midst of religious skirmishes. In addition, it was located between the Ottoman Empire and the Russian Empire which meant that is was in the crossroads of imperial aggression. Further, Mayakovsky argued that Georgia had not been a very successful country without Russian assistance. In 1783, in an attempt to prevent aggression from the Muslim Ottoman Empire and its other neighbors, Georgia signed a friendship agreement with the Russian Empire.[74] This agreement would later contribute to Georgia's integration into the Russian Empire in 1801 and became a protectorate of the Russian Empire. He suggested that joining the Soviet Union would end Georgia's gloomy history because it would create a new, more positive, history for Georgia. For the most part, Mayakovsky's assertion was a highly optimistic outlook on Sovietization as it ignored the Bolshevik use of force in order to enact their policies. Yes, Sovietization allowed the Georgian people to be more prosperous than they had been under the Russian Empire. However, accepting Sovietization ended Georgia's ability to be an independent state as it initially wanted to be and ultimately did not provide the kind of independence that Georgia was seeking.

Further, in the poem "*Tamara i demon*" ("Tamara and the Demon"), also written in 1924, Mayakovsky argued that Georgia was better off under Soviet control than as an independent

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[73] Matrynov, "Hero of the Caucasus, Maksud Alikhanov - 2," Vestnik Kavkaza.
[74] See, "Treaty of Georgievsk, 1783."

country as it had been too weak as an independent country to defend itself. Mayakovsky further argued that there was a disconnect between Georgia's own perception of its beauty and the reality of Georgia because he believed that Georgia's rural regions should be used for agricultural purposes. While he was, at times, critical of Georgia, he demonstrated respect for Georgia and its culture. In addition, since he was culturally Georgian he was able to criticize Georgia without being immediately being considered in favor of Soviet imperialism.

In the poem "*Tamara i demon*," Mayakovsky argued that Sovietization was a positive change for Georgia because he believed that Georgia's natural beauty would be more useful as agricultural land:

> From the omnibus
> waddling
> I got off,
> spitting
> into the Terek from the shore,
> I poked it
> in the foam
> with a stick.
> What good is it?
> Complete collapse![75]

Here Mayakovsky debunks the poetic myths of romanticism that emphasized Georgia's exotic, although useless, beauty. He suggests that Georgia was incomplete without Soviet power, which would allow Georgia to make more productive use of its natural resources. In many ways,

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[75] Из омнибуса
вразвалку
сошел,
поплевывал
в Терек с берега,
совал ему
в пену
палку.
Чего же хорошего?
Полный развал!
Mayakovsky, "*Tamara i demon*,"6-15.

Mayakovsky's assertions are correct in that Georgia was still an underdeveloped and economically backward country in 1924.[76] Unlike a typical Georgian nationalist, Mayakovsky was not primarily concerned with the national integrity of Georgia. He concerned himself more with the well-being of the Georgian people because he grew up in rural Georgia and experienced how the Georgian government under the Russian Empire failed to improve the lives of the majority of its subjects. Georgia, like the Russian Empire, lacked the ability to industrialize and create a stronger and more modern economy. Moreover, despite orders from the Soviet government to shift towards collectivization, Georgia's agricultural practices in the countryside remained largely unchanged until 1928-1929.[77] In part due to the Soviet Georgian government's unwillingness to adapt to new Soviet practices, Georgia continued to suffer economically.

It is unsurprising that the Georgian government was unwilling to accept Sovietization as the Georgian government believed that Soviet Russia had no right to claim Georgia. Even after Georgia was integrated into the Soviet Union, the local Georgian government continued to be reluctant to carry out Soviet policies. (It is worth noting this reluctance was not uncommon among new Soviet Republics.)[78]

Mayakovsky argued that Georgia was better off as a part of the Soviet Union as he demonstrated his displeasure with the Georgian government's lack of action with respect to Georgia's natural resources:

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[76] Kotkin, *Stalin*, 566.
[77] Suny, *The Making of the Georgian Nation*, 240-241.
[78] Suny, *The Making of the Georgian Nation*, 240.

And for free
the mountain gives up very little:
just water
but try drinking it![79]

With these lines, Mayakovsky implies that his opposition toward Georgia's use of natural recourses in the countryside was shared by the majority of the population because the majority of Georgia's economy was still based in agriculture. As such, the people's livelihood was directly tied to how the land was used. Mayakovsky's assertion is overly optimistic because it is unlikely that the population had more than an abstract concept of how Sovietization would change Georgian society on the ground in 1924. However, it would be incorrect to simply write off Mayakovsky's assertion as pro-Soviet. While the majority of the population did not have a definite understanding of the policies of Sovietization, they could see their impacts. As such, as Sovietization progressed and policies were carried out, the people began to see and feel how the Soviet policies improved Georgia's economic situation.[80]

Mayakovsky was largely correct that the Soviet Union offered Georgia the opportunity to industrialize. The Soviet Union, theoretically, gave Georgia equal status as Russia and allowed Georgia more autonomy than it had had under the Russian Empire. However, Mayakovsky also argued that his position on the Soviet Union was not popular with how he envisioned the Georgian government. While it does not appear that Mayakovsky's position on the Sovietization

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[79] А даром
немного дарит гора:
лишь воду —
поди,
попей-ка!
Mayakovsky, "*Tamara i demon*," 84-88.
[80] Suny, *The Making of the Georgian Nation*, 236.

of Georgian had a significant impact on his legacy, he demonstrated that being in favor of Sovietization did not make him inherently anti-Georgian.

Further, Mayakovsky believed that it was necessary to show that previous Georgian rulers did not object to Sovietization because these rulers were deeply intertwined with Georgia's cultural identity. While Sovietization upset Tsaritsa Tamara, he argued that Tamara could be pacified. Mayakovsky argued the necessity of this change to Communism because, prior to the Soviet Union, Georgia was a weak country and the Bolsheviks aimed to create a stronger Georgia. Further, he disarms Tsaritsa Tamara and shows that Sovietization did not dishonor Georgia's past:

> And I
> in my own way…
> (well, you know how yourself)
> offer her my arm…
> with pleasantries…
> —Dear madam![81]

The speaker angers Tsaritsa Tamara by pointing out the unused natural resources in Georgia. "[She] is furious, / hand on her dagger."[82] In the poem, Tsaritsa Tamara views the speaker's opinion as a threat to Georgian identity, which reflects the idea that Sovietization changed the countryside as its unimproved fertile land was used for agricultural purposes. While this did, in fact, change the countryside, it was likely a necessary change in order for Georgia to improve its economy.

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[81] Но я ей
по-своему,
вы ж знаете как -
по ручку…
любезно…
- Сударыня!
Mayakovsky, "*Tamara i demon*," 93-98.

[82] Взъярилась царица, / к кинжалу рука.
Mayakovsky, "*Tamara i demon*," 89-90.

Tabidze

Tabidze is perhaps the most famous Georgian 20th century poet. While his works are frequently not overtly political, they reflect the political situation and the emotions associated with it. His works often encompass the themes of isolation and nightmarish premonitions.[83] In this section, I argue that while Tabidze fully never embraced the communist revolution, he became even more skeptical of the benefits it provided for Georgia as time progressed, eventually rejecting Soviet ideals. During the Great Terror he and his wife, Olga Okujava, were exiled to Siberia.[84] In addition, his cousin, Titsian Tabidze, was executed during the Great Terror in 1937.[85] His experience with the brutality and censorship towards writers changed his skepticism to complete rejection as he saw just how inconsistent the Soviet government was in the 1930s. Further, he saw that the Soviet Union did not value the freedom of expression.

In the poem "*K svobode*" ("To Freedom"), written in 1918, Tabidze draws parallels between the execution of Robespierre and the situation of Georgia. Robespierre is best remembered for his role in the Reign of Terror following the French Revolution, during which he ordered the execution of many who opposed the revolution. Robespierre is likely an allusion to the Bolsheviks as the Bolsheviks aimed to conquer Georgia and remove people who objected to their policies. In 1918, Georgia had not started to lose the war with Soviet Russia and as such, Georgia still believed it was capable of remaining an independent country.

By arguing that the gods did not fully agree with executing Robespierre, Tabidze does not seem to support the Georgians attacking the Bolsheviks. While the execution of Robespierre

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[83] Rayfield, *The Literature of* Georgia, 285.
[84] Olga Okujava died in 1944 while in exile.
"Galaktion Tabidze Bio," My Poetic Side.
[85] "Galaktion Tabidze Bio," My Poetic Side.

takes place, the Chimera watches from the "old frieze."[86] Tabidze states that "the Chimera smiled with a crooked smile" as Robespierre was punished.[87] That is to say, the Chimera did not fully agree with the people's decision to execute Robespierre. Additionally, Tabidze implies that acting on desires rather than logic was not uncommon for the people as he characterizes the Chimera in a relaxed state while watching the execution.[88] Tabidze further illustrates the idea that the gods and the Georgian people did not have the same view on the introduction of Sovietization by stating that "The accumulation of living moving people / again craved justice fiercely."[89] In general terms, Tabidze argued that people were foolish because they wanted what they believe is justice regardless if it makes sense in the long-term. The people craved instant gratification while the gods based their actions on the larger picture. Indeed, as Georgia had been protected by the Russian Empire in some form since 1783, it likely would have made more sense to remain under the safety and protection of Soviet Russia. Instead, the people wanted "justice." That is, they wanted independence from Russia and the ability to self-govern. While Tabidze is critical of the Bolsheviks because he implied they are like Robespierre, he is also critical of the Georgian people. As the poem was written in 1918, during the time of the Democratic Republic of Georgia, it likely served as a warning to the Georgian people. The newly independent Georgia was unpopular and the government was incompetent.[90] Tabidze likely feared that the new government would make a rash decision in an effort to gain popular support in the short-term but

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[86] "на фризе"
Tabidze, "*K svobode*," 15.
[87] "Улыбкой кривой улыбнулась Химера."
Tabidze, "*K svobode*," 2.
[88] Tabidze, "*K svobode*," 14.
[89] "скопленье живого подвижного люда / опять справедливости жаждало люто."
Tabidze, "*K svobode*," 9-10.
[90] Kotkin, *Stalin*, 396.

would be disastrous in the long-term. Further, the poem demonstrated that Tabidze did not fully object to Soviet ideals as he does not suggest to remove the Bolsheviks from Georgia.

Within two years, Tabidze's uncertainty with respect to the relationship between Georgia and Soviet Russia increased because of Soviet aggression in neighboring countries. By 1920, Georgia was in the process of losing the war with Soviet Russia. By April 1920, the Red Army had captured Baku, Azerbaijan and installed a Soviet government. By the end of 1920, the Red Army had conquered Armenia and created a Soviet government.[91] This meant that Georgia was surrounded by Soviet forces in the north as well as the east. As such, the Georgian government grew increasingly concerned that they could not withstand a Soviet attack. Ultimately, the new government was correct as they were conquered by the Red Army by mid-1921. In the poem "The Wind Blows," he uses the idea of wind to show Georgia's uncertainty in 1920. Tabidze began and ended the poem with the lines "The wind blows, the wind blows, the wind blows" which suggests that Georgia was in a period of change.[92] Indeed, Georgia was rapidly changing during this time. It went from being a part of the Russian Empire to an independent republic to nearly conquered by Soviet Russia in the span of three years.

Tabidze believed that the war between Soviet Russia and Armenia and Azerbaijan severely impacted Georgia because it signified that the Georgians were in the process of having their country ripped from them by the Bolsheviks. In order to do so, he described the impact of the wind on the tree. He states, "on the wind the leaves fly high… / and the trees bend low as they do."[93] The leaves are taken from the trees by the wind. Like trees, the Georgians were

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[91] Suny, *The Making of the Georgian Nation*, 205-206.
[92] Tabidze, "The Wind Blows," 1, 10.
[93] Tabidze, "The Wind Blows," 2-3.

forced into submission as the winds transformed the world. The next line states: "where are you, where are you, where are you?"[94] This line suggests that Tabidze believed that Soviet Georgia lost a part of itself as a result of the war with Soviet Russia. By 1920, Soviet Russia had signed and then violated a treaty with Georgia that recognized Georgia as an independent country.[95] As such, while the Soviets were not necessarily actively attacking Georgia, they presented a threat to Georgian autonomy as Russia did not respect Georgia's territorial rights.

The idea of confusion and the loss of someone intensifies in Georgia's history of this period. In 1918, the Democratic Republic of Georgia was formed after the October Revolution. The new government found itself in the midst of the Russian Civil War. By 1920, the Red Army was winning the Civil War and was looking to incorporate the Caucus region into its empire.[96]

With the lines "Sky is far and thought goes gray," Tabidze alludes to the fact that the uncertainty became overwhelming because of Soviet Russia's presence in neighboring countries.[97] Indeed, the Red Army created more uncertainty when it conquered Georgia in 1921. Despite the fact that the Georgian people knew that they would likely be under the control of the Soviet Union, they did not know what the relationship would be specifically. Georgia was promised more freedom than it had when it was part of the Russian Empire, but it was not clear what this actually meant. In many ways, Tabidze's gloomy depiction of the situation is in line with how Georgians experienced 1920. By 1920, Georgia was a war-torn country. In other words, its already weakened economy was further strained and the country itself had been destroyed by war. Some of Tabidze's poetry written in 1921-1924 that depicted the impacts of

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[94] Tabidze, "The Wind Blows," 4.
[95] Menteshashvili and Surguladze, eds., *Okkupatsiia i fakticheskaia anneksiia Gruzii*, 15. See, "7. Dogovor mezhdy Gruziei i Rossiei ot 7 maia 1920 goda."
[96] Goltz, "The Paradox of Living in Paradise: Georgia's Descent into Chaos," 13.
[97] Tabidze, "The Wind Blows," 9.

the Soviet invasion were destroyed by the Bolsheviks.[98] His censored poetry attempted to convey the human experience in a way that would still be published in the Soviet Union. While most of his work from this period that survived is not overtly apolitical, he did not always shy away from anti-Soviet politics in his writing. For example, in 1928, he referred to Stalin as Legion (Satan).[99]

However, Tabidze did not necessarily believe that Sovietization inherently would destroy the Georgian identity because he thought Georgian culture was stronger than any outside force. With the lines "will I find you and bind you - oh no! / though your face is wherever I go," he suggested that while it may be impossible to capture Georgian identity, it would remain all around them.[100] In the poem, it appears that the speaker is chasing the leaves. In the context of Sovietization, this would suggest that despite the fact that the Bolsheviks tried to strip the Georgians of their culture, their culture would still exist even if they could not claim it as their own. The Bolsheviks were unable to strip the Georgians of their culture. Instead, the Bolsheviks funded Georgian culture.[101] "The paradox is that the Soviet regime, through the spread of literary, 'nativization' (that is, Georgianization) of administrative and cultural institutions, and sponsorship of Georgian art, language and learning, in many ways promoted Georgian identity."[102] In some ways, the support of Georgian culture was also self-serving for the Bolsheviks as it pacified the Georgians enough so that they did not rebel. Further, the Bolsheviks, indirectly, reduced the uniqueness of Georgian culture. That is, Georgian culture continued to be seen throughout Georgia but the Georgians could no longer claim it as their own.

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[98] "Georgian 'King of Poets' Galaktion Tabidze," Georgian Journal.
[99] Bakradze, Lipman, Gudkov, "Georgia and Stalin," 48.
[100] Tabidze, "The Wind Blows," 6-7.
[101] Suny, *The Making of a Georgian Nation*, 236.
[102] Gahrton, *Georgia*, 41.

In 1920, it seemed that while Tabidze was cautious of Sovietization, he did not oppose Sovietization because he understood the potential benefits of Communism. Since he was in St. Petersburg during the October Revolution and saw how the Bolsheviks promised to change Russia, it is likely that he was aware of how Communism promised to improve society. As the Bolsheviks promised to create similar policies in Georgia, it is likely he thought that Sovietization would be beneficial. He did not believe it was a guaranteed threat to Georgian culture, but he was cognizant that it could be a threat. The poem "The Wind Blows" demonstrated Tabidze's cautious optimism about Sovietization. Approximately 20 years later, Tabidze argued that Georgian culture was central to Georgia because he saw how the Soviet Union repressed non-Soviet ideas. At the same time, his poems became darker and he questioned the benefits of Sovietization for Georgia. In the poem "*K rodine*" ("To The Homeland"), written in 1938, Tabidze expresses his love of his country, Georgia, and his uncertainty about Georgia's future because he believed that Georgia and the Soviet Union did not share the same goals.

Tabidze believed that Georgia needed a rebirth of its culture and identity as a part of the Soviet Union as he saw how the Soviet Union how changed Georgian culture. This stark contrast from his earlier poems is likely the result of his experience with the Great Terror. He and his wife were exiled to Siberia and his cousin was executed.[103] As such, he began to become disillusioned with the Soviet government and saw that it did not create a better Georgia as the Bolsheviks had promised. He began the poem, "*K rodine*," with the lines, "Homeland! The day is coming and getting closer. / Homeland, revive my heart."[104] These lines suggest that Tabidze wanted to feel

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[103] "Galaktion Tabidze Bio," My Poetic Side.
[104] "Родина! День наступает и близится. / Родина, сердце мое оживи."
Tabidze, "*K rodine*," 1-2.

strongly about Georgia again. By 1938, Georgia was an established republic in the Soviet Union which meant that its identity had been incorporated into the greater Soviet identity.

Tabidze pushed for Georgian culture within the Soviet Union because he did not see the recreation of Georgian culture and the Soviet Union as mutually exclusive. Neither did the Bolsheviks in the 1920s, as they encouraged learning the Georgian language and creating Georgian art. However, in the 1930s, the Soviet Union tightened its grip on individual republics. For example, the Soviet Union closed all religious schools and reduced the power of Georgia's government.[105] In doing so, the Soviet Union reduced Georgia's ability to be culturally distinct. It is, therefore, not surprising that Tabidze appealed to his homeland's identity and expressed his belief in his culture: "You see, my love shines, rises."[106]

He continues his declaration of love for Georgia with the lines, "I wrap your wounds in fog / I hug your tough ground."[107] Much like the opening line of the poem, these lines affirm his loyalty to his country. In addition, these lines suggest that Tabidze believed that, on some level, Georgia joining the Soviet Union harmed Georgia. Indeed, Sovietization came as the result of Georgia losing a war and the Bolsheviks used violence in order to enforce Sovietization. In doing so, the Bolsheviks unquestionably caused "wounds." Further, while the Soviet Union initially promised Georgia that is would be able to keep its culture, it retracted that idea after Stalin came to power, which did not allow Georgia to rebuild what it had lost.

Tabidze did not believe that Georgia's suffering was permanent because his description of Georgia was not completely hopeless. Tabidze ended the poem with an indirect call to action. In

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[105] Suny, *The Making of the Georgian Nation*, 244.
[106] "Видишь - любовь моя светится - высится."
Tabidze, "*K rodine*," 3.
[107] "Раны твои я туманом окутаю, / Жесткую землю твою обману."
Tabidze, "*K rodine*," 11-12.

other words, he called on Georgians to protect their culture so that it did not die out. Tabidze concludes the poem with the lines:

> I simply don't know which
> Songs of mine, golden wheats,
> with a heavy rustle, I will come to drop tomorrow,
> or will I keep the silence, like memory.[108]

With these lines, he implies that the fate of Georgia's culture was largely uncertain. While he does not suggest that the Soviet Union will destroy Georgian culture, he does suggest that the Georgians need to protect their culture. In principle, his assessment is valid as Georgian culture outlived the Soviet Union. However, it is more than likely that not all of Georgian culture survived the Soviet Union. For example, while Georgian Orthodoxy was revived after the Soviet Union, by the late-1930s it was severely weakened. In addition, scholars have argued that the Soviet Union limited the talents of Georgian artists as their works had to be in line with Soviet ideology.[109]

Further, he argued that Georgia's future was still uncertain in 1938 because Georgia's role in the Soviet Union was still unclear. While it had been promised to be on an equal status with Russia, this promise had not come to fruition. On paper, they were both Socialist Soviet Republics. In practice, however, Russia was the dominant republic. In addition, as the Soviet Union invested in Georgian culture, the Soviet Union had some degree of control over Georgian culture. In addition, the Soviet Union was experiencing the Great Terror. As this was a period of show trials, prison sentences, and executions based on perceived opposition to the Communist

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[108] Только не ведаю, завтра какие
Песни - колосья мои золотые -
С шелестом тяжким приду уронить -
Или молчание - как память - хранить.
Tabidze, "*K rodine*," 13-16.
[109] Kutschuchidse, "Georgian Poetry of the Soviet Period," 468.

Party, it created fear. In many ways, the people did not know what actions or opinions were against the Communist Party or if they would be accused of being anti-Communist. As such, during this time, the Georgians grew increasingly uncertain about their own as well as their country's position in the Soviet Union.

Tabidze also argued that Georgian culture was unique as he knew that Georgians took great pride in their cultural uniqueness. He demonstrated that Georgia had followed the right path: "But you grasp the meaning of sound, / Faithfully following your own song."[110] Indeed, Georgia was closer to being an independent country under the Soviet Union than it had previously been as a protectorate of the Russian Empire. However, it is challenging to suggest Georgia "followed its own path," as it joined the Soviet Union as a result of losing a war with Soviet Russia. Although Georgia did follow its own path with the Democratic Republic of Georgia, it is hard to suggest that those four years qualify as creating a unique path as this government was ultimately not successful. However, his words likely appealed to Georgians as they gave them something to strive towards as he argues that they were reclaiming something they had lost.

While Tabidze's poems generally depicted a gloomy, and at times hopeless, outlook on society, his poems were not completely negative towards Sovietization. In his earlier works, such as "*K svobode*," he displayed mild optimism for Sovietization and that the Georgian people were naive for thinking that Sovietization would destroy Georgia by comparing Georgia's present situation with the execution of Robespierre. As time progressed, he became increasingly cautious of Sovietization although he did not seem to fully oppose it. However, by 1938, he saw

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[110] "Но постигаешь значение звука, / Верно ступая за песней своей."
Tabidze, "*K rodine*," 7-8.

Sovietization and the Soviet Union as a threat to Georgian culture. Critics such as Benito Bauchidze have characterized Tabidze "as a representative of the bourgeois-decadent literary trend," demonstrating that his fundamental understanding of Georgia was, to some extent, individualistic and therefore in opposition to Soviet ideology.[111] As such, he began to reject Soviet ideals as they contradicted with his deeply held beliefs about what it meant to be Georgian.

[111] Kutschuchidse, "Georgian Poetry of the Soviet Period," 470.

Chapter 3:

Average Georgian Perspective of the Sovietization of Georgia

Introduction

This chapter analyzes how several Georgian poets addressed the changes that Sovietization and Communism brought to Georgia to understand how the average Georgian likely perceived the changes caused by Sovietization. While a poet is not an "average citizen," the poets is this chapter were main-stream Soviet poets, meaning that their work was accepted by the Soviet Union. They are not a complete representation of Georgian poets of the period as many poets were censored due to their poetry's themes. For example, the theme of anti-colonialism was repressed by the Stalinist regime.[112] While the poets in this chapter are inherently not a complete representation of the "average citizen," these poems are a reflection of themes and ideas that were accepted and propagated in Georgia by the Soviet Union. As such, these poems provide insight into the ideology that Georgians were exposed to and how Georgians might have understood the impacts of Sovietization. Even prior to the Soviet Union, literature played a central role in Georgian culture. Since the 10th century, Georgia's literary tradition has used the themes of nationalism and pride in order to create a common identity and unify its people.[113] As such, literature provides a way to understand how Georgians viewed their country in relation to itself and other countries. In the 19th century, after Georgia was annexed by the Russian Empire, poets such as Alexander Chavchavadze used poetry to fight "against oppression and tyranny, attacking kinds and rapacious feudal lords who hold nothing dear but

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[112] Gould, "The Georgian Poetics of Insurgency," 176.
[113] Kvesselava, "Introduction" in *Anthology of Georgian Poetry*, xiii-xv.

their own selfish interests."[114] As Georgia's poetic tradition was no stranger to politics, in the 20th century, mainstream Georgian poetry shifted with the socialist revolution and began to incorporate the themes of Communism. Specifically, poetry often captured the social and economic issues that were the result of the "growing conflict between labour and capital" and how Communism proposed to solve these problems.[115] Using poetry from several 20th-century Georgian poets, I demonstrate that poets were predominantly concerned about Georgia's economic improvement and cultural prosperity. Poetry was well-read throughout Georgia during the 20th-century. As such, it was a commentary on how the people related to Georgian life. Poets in the 20th-century were concerned with economics as the situation was dire. Georgia's economy suffered as a result of being a part of the Russian Empire. In part, to differentiate the Soviet Union from the Russian Empire, poets focused on how Sovietization would improve the economic situation in Georgia. I argue that key poets viewed Sovietization as a positive change for Georgia because they believed that Sovietization would lead to a "brighter future," Sovietization allowed Georgians to continue to have pride in their country, and that Sovietization was not fundamentally incompatible with traditional Georgian values.

Using the following poets from different political and social backgrounds, I demonstrate that these ideas were not unique to one social group and can be seen as a representative sample of how the average Georgian viewed Sovietization. Alexander Abasheli (1884-1954) was a Georgian nationalist. Despite his initial objections to Sovietization, he eventually supported it by the mid-1920s. This shift in thought possibly demonstrated that he viewed Sovietization in a more positive light after it was clear that Sovietization protected Georgian interests as it reduced

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[114] Kvesselava, "Introduction" in *Anthology of Georgian Poetry*, xv.
[115] Kvesselava, "Introduction" in *Anthology of Georgian Poetry*, xviii.

conflicts between Georgia and its neighbors. It is also possible that he changed his opinion due to the fact that the Soviet Union censored literature that was not in line with Soviet ideology. Prior to joining the Soviet Union, Georgia regularly was attacked by its neighbors as they did not share the same religious interests. The integration into the Soviet Union prevented Turkey from attacking as Turkey feared the Soviet army. Azerbaijan was also part of the Soviet Union so Georgia and Azerbaijan shared the same underlying goal of Communism despite practicing different religions. In addition, Abasheli helped write the Regional Anthem of the Georgian SSR in 1944, which further reinforced his belief that being a part of the Soviet Union was a benefit for Georgia.[116] While his early works showcased Sovietization in a gloomy manner, his later works explored the benefits of Georgia's newly found friendly relations with its neighbors. Giorgi Kuchishvili (1887-1946) grew up in a peasant family in the region of Kakheti and moved to Tbilisi. Like many peasants, he saw Sovietization as a way to advance both socially and economically since it allowed the peasants to work for themselves and gave them more autonomy.[117] His poetry often played on Georgian folklore which made it accessible to the average Georgian as it incorporated familiar themes and structures.[118] Additionally, his works were also part of the oral tradition of poetry during the Soviet Union. This meant that some of his work published prior to the Sovietization of Georgia remained a part of Georgian culture without being subject to Soviet censorship. Alio Mirtskhulava (1903-1971) was the secretary of the Communist Party in Georgia from 1937-1939. In addition, he was the founder of Georgian Komsomol Poetry.[119] One Soviet critic stated, "he has deeply reflected his generation's

[116] "Aleksandr Abasheli," Live Lib.
[117] Urushadze, "Biographies and notes" in *Anthology of Georgian Poetry*, 214.
[118] "Kuchishvili," *Slovari, entsiklopedii i spravochniki*.
[119] "Mirtskhulava Alio Andreevich." *Slovari, entsiklopedii i spravochniki*.

optimistic outlook on life, its lofty ideals, the pathos of strife and creative labour, the optimism of the Soviet people, [and] their belief in the righteousness and invincibility of their cause."[120] While possibly overstated, this analysis suggests that he was most concerned with Georgia's economic and social well being. Sandro Shanshiashvili (1888-1979) supported the potential overthrow of the tsar in 1905 and saw it as an opportunity for Georgian independence. He began to reject Soviet ideals in 1917 after realizing that Georgia would not gain its independence. Shanshiashvili later joined the Georgian Nation Democratic Party and continued to advocate for independence.[121] His poetry primarily depicted the impacts of Sovietization on the people, which showed he was primarily concerned with the social and economic impacts of Sovietization.

"Brighter Future Under Communism"

These poets tended to focus on Georgia's dark situation in the late 1910s - early 1920s and how Sovietization would improve the situation because Georgia was in a state of near economic collapse by this time and fundamentally Sovietization promised to solve Georgia's economic problems. While some poets highlighted the gloom of pre-Sovietization and the challenges to reach a "brighter future" under Communism, others focused on how the future under Communism would be better. Those who focused on the past tended to be more suspect of Sovietization than those who focused on the future. Further, poems that were written after Sovietization started to display a more optimistic opinion. By the time the Soviets conquered Georgia in 1921, Georgia's economy had nearly collapsed due to World War I and the short-lived independence movement and the resulting war with Soviet Russia. These conflicts, in conjunction with Georgia's economic backwardness (as a result of being a predominantly

[120] Urushadze, "Biographies and notes" in *Anthology of Georgian Poetry*, 219.
[121] Vieli, "Anzor (Anzori)," Kunsthalle Zurich.

agrarian society at the turn of the 20th century), left Georgia in a similar, if not worse situation than Russia in 1917 when the Bolsheviks took over. In keeping with Communist ideology, these poets argued that Communism would solve Georgia's economic and social problems and thus create a brighter future for Georgia.

Shanshiashvili argued that the socialist revolution would eventually be a positive impact on the average Georgian because it would eventually create prosperity. He depicted the three phases of the socialist revolution: Georgia's bleak pre-revolutionary past, the present transition to socialism, and the glorious post-revolutionary future, which showed the difficulty of the transition process for Georgia. Further, he acknowledged that Georgia had suffered at the hand of the Russian Empire and would briefly suffer under the Bolsheviks during the transition period of Sovietization. After the failure of the 1905 revolution, the Georgian people began to object to tsardom as they saw their situation as hopeless under the Russian Empire. While the 1917 revolutions occurred in St. Petersburg, the people experienced similar problems that caused the revolutions in Georgia. For example, there were food shortages and people were moving back to the villages from the city.[122]

In the poem, "A Mother's Only Son With Lenin," written in 1927, Shanshiashvili argued that the Georgian people were currently suffering as Georgia was on the tail end of immense social change and economical upheaval. While Sovietization had begun to take hold, its impacts were not yet far-reaching. As such, Shanshiashvili mirrored the current situation. He began the poem "A Mother's Only Son With Lenin" with a dark description of the past: "the night is cold… the wind blows loud."[123] In describing the present as dim and gloomy he demonstrated the need

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[122] Suny, *The Making of the Georgian Nation*, 225.
[123] Shanshiashvili, "A Mother's Only Son With Lenin," 1.

for change. In his depiction, nature dominates over the people. It is possible to align nature's domination with the Russian Empire's. In both instances, the Georgians were forced into submission and were at the mercy of their ruler. Shanshiashvili continued to paint a bleak picture of the early years of Sovietization by describing a scene in which "A woman sits before the hearth / The tears have dried in her closed eyes."[124] Shanshiashvili used a woman stricken by sorrow and grief in order to represent the Georgian people's strife. Just as she, the woman, longed for the safe return of her son, the Georgians longed for their own internal peace and the end of their suffering.

In the lines, "Who fights for liberty and rights, / Whose courage like his country's flag / Expands brighter in its height," Shanshiashvili argued that Sovietization would improve conditions in Georgia because it allowed Georgia more autonomy than it had under tsardom.[125] He used the largely Bolshevik notion that Georgia had wanted Soviet rule to demonstrate that Sovietization was a positive change. While his statement is ultimately true, in that Georgia became a part of the Soviet Union, it is likely that Sovietization was not Georgia's first choice as a basis for government after the fall of tsardom in 1917. Much like the Russian people, the Georgian people suffered at the hands of the Russian Empire. By the 20th century, the two countries lagged behind the rest of the world both socially and economically. After the overthrow of the tsarist government, the Bolsheviks argued that Communism, as opposed to an iteration of tsardom which was promised by the Whites, was the best solution for Georgia. Initially, the Georgian government did not completely approve of the Soviet government as they wanted independence. After independence was no longer a viable option, they were more accepting of

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[124] Shanshiashvili, "A Mother's Only Son With Lenin," 5-6.
[125] Shanshiashvili, "A Mother's Only Son With Lenin," 39-41.

the Bolsheviks than the Whites, though it was not entirely clear what Communism would mean for Georgia with respect to autonomy. Whereas it was clear that the Whites wanted to essentially recreate the same Russian-Georgian relationship as tsardom. In hindsight, however, Communism was the best option for Georgia as it was unable to self-govern and the other option guaranteed them virtually no autonomy. Shanshiashvili ended the poem with a repetition of the first line, "The night is cold… the wind blows loud…" which reinforced his belief that Sovietization would improve Georgia's situation. He further emphasized the fact that the current situation was dreary and that the socialist revolution was the path to a better future.

While Shanshiashvili believed that Georgia would suffer during the initial stages of Sovietization, he did not demonstrate opposition to Sovietization because he viewed Sovietization as a positive change. It is likely that these poets focused on the future rather than the present as they needed to, on some level, convince the people that Soviet Russia was not another imperial power. But rather, Soviet Russia would allow Georgia to improve its own economic and social situation. As Shanshiashvili focused on the current situation and acknowledged the difficulty of Sovietization, he believed that Sovietization was worth the sacrifices as it would improve Georgia's social and economic conditions. Conversely, other poets paid more attention to the benefits of Sovietization rather than the gloominess of the situation in the 1920s.

Mirtskhulava argued that Sovietization improved Georgian society rather than destroying it because he equated Georgia's economic and social stability with the success of society. It appears that Mirtskhulava believed that after years of fighting wars, Georgia could now become a peaceful nation. Indeed, the existence of the Soviet Union prevented Georgia's neighbors from

attacking. While Georgia itself was not capable of launching a full-scale defensive war with its neighbors, the same cannot be said about Soviet Russia. It is also worth noting that this kind of protective relationship was not new under the Soviet Union; rather, it had existed in different forms since 1783 with the Treaty of Georgievsk. As such, it was previously established that Russian presence in the region was enough to prevent minor skirmishes between them. With the line: "I spent my days in endless wars,"[126] he demonstrates that Georgia regularly fought with, or faced the threat of war, with its neighbors prior to its integration into the Soviet Union. While integration into the Soviet Union halted international conflicts, the Bolsheviks used force to enact their ideology. Therefore, it is hard to suggest the joining the Soviet Union created completely peaceful relations for Georgia. It is interesting to note that Mirtskhulava does not directly suggest that Georgia is too weak to stand on its own. While he would not necessarily be factually incorrect if he claimed that Georgia was too weak, he would likely turn the people away from his message as he would be taking a shot at Georgian pride. Moreover, he emphasized a more peaceful Georgia that was the direct result of Soviet influence.

Mirtskhulava believed that joining the Soviet Union made a positive impact on Georgia because the Sovietization of Georgia created new opportunities. It is likely that he saw Communism, as opposed to the ideas offered by other revolutionary parties, as the new ideal solution as the Social Democrats in Georgia had failed to improve Georgia. During the Democratic Republic of Georgia, Georgian revolutionary groups had failed to work together and create a stronger Georgian government. Sovietization, and joining the Soviet Union, offered Georgia an opportunity for stability as well as increased autonomy. In using the word "Spring,"

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[126] Mirtskhulava, "Georgia," 5.

Mirtskhulava argued that joining the Soviet Union had a positive outcome as "spring" is often used as a symbol for rebirth and hope.[127] For him joining the Soviet Union meant the end of a dark time filled with the threat of war and the opportunity for peaceful coexistence with its neighbors. His use of the word "light" contrasted the previously dark, pre-Soviet Georgia and drew attention to Georgia's brighter future under Communism.[128] Additionally, it further showed his belief that joining the Soviet Union allowed Georgia to have less tense relations with its neighbors.

Abasheli argued that the transition to Communism would lead to a brighter future in his poem "The Torch of Wisdom" because he believed it would allow Georgia to advance beyond what it had been as a part of the Russian Empire. Despite not always fully agreeing with Communist ideals, he viewed Communism as the end of the dark period between the revolutions of 1905 and 1917 as the fall of tsardom in 1917 created an opportunity for Georgia to advance. He began by juxtaposing the transition to the new way of life with "The lurking shadows of the night" which suggests that Communism has brought a new, better, way of life. However, the use of the word "lurking" suggested that the dark past is still not that far behind.[129] In addition, as time progressed, he began to accept Communism and Georgia's integration into the Soviet Union. By the 1940s, Abasheli was a prominent pro-Soviet writer and was asked to help write the Regional Anthem of the Georgian SSR, which demonstrated that he accepted Communism in Georgia. It is unclear if he truly accepted the notions of Communism or if he simply understood that his life was contingent on accepting Communism.

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[127] Mirtskhulava, "Georgia," 8.
[128] Mirtskhulava, "Georgia," 8.
[129] Abasheli, "The Torch of Wisdom," 2.

Abasheli's poem focused on how the revolution positively impacted Georgian society because he believed that Sovietization created economic and social improvement. The socialist revolution, theoretically at least, would remove social classes and allow the people to produce for the betterment of their society rather than for the upper class as was the case in pre-revolutionary Georgia. Additionally, the Bolsheviks implied that Communism meant electrification and industrialization which would help to further repair the economic difficulties associated with being a predominately agrarian society in the 20th century. While integration into the Soviet Union did not immediately destroy the class system, it nationalized the land and created a new tax system, which drastically improved Georgia's economic situation.[130] The average economic output in 1921 was one-sixth of what it had been in 1914. Due to robust harvests and the New Economic Policy, the economic situation drastically improved by 1923.[131] Abasheli highlighted the fact that although the majority of people still owned no land and were taxed, their situation was improving.[132] The lines, "There life is glorious and new / And honest toil brings but delight.," showed that he propagated for the revolution as a harbinger of new hope and opportunity to Georgia.[133] Abasheli believed that the revolution is a positive change for the Georgian people as they would now directly benefit from their labor.

In addition, Abasheli argued that Sovietization improved the Georgian economic and social situation as it granted Georgia more autonomy than it had as a protectorate of the Russian Empire. Due to the fact that Abasheli experienced a notable change in his outlook on the Soviet Union, it is unsurprising that this poem, "The Torch of Wisdom," as a whole displayed a rosy

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[130] Suny, *The Making of the Georgian Nation*, 225.
[131] Kotkin, *Stalin*, 405-406, 449.
[132] Suny, *The Making of the Georgian Nation*, 225.
[133] Abasheli, "The Torch of Wisdom," 3-4.

outlook on the new Soviet way of life and ignored the suffering that was required to achieve Communism. This poem fell in line with Communist ideology as it portrayed Communism as the bright end to a dark past. In focusing on the bright future rather than the dark past, he emphasized the changes that Communism brought as opposed to showing how terrible life was under Tsarist Russia. His message was forward-looking and gave the people something to strive for, rather than merely suggesting the past was oppressive. The collapse of the Russian Empire annulled the "Supreme Manifesto of 1801" and the Georgian government argued that they should be granted independence. While Georgia's plea for independence was short-lived and ultimately unsuccessful, the relationship between Georgia and Russia was substantially changed since Georgia was no longer a protectorate of the Russian Empire. Instead, they were both Soviet Socialist Republics, nominally holding a similar status in the Soviet Union. That being said, the Bolsheviks used violence in order to enforce the policies of Sovietization.

Abasheli continued to elaborate on how he envisioned the new post-revolutionary Georgia. He described the new Georgia as a place "Where hope inspires the new-born soul, / And cheerful songs resound on high."[134] From these lines, it is evident that he believed that the Sovietization of Georgia would bring great social change that would ultimately improve the situation of the peasants. These lines of the poem are particularly telling in terms of his ideological transition. In the early 1920s, Abasheli belonged to the Academic Group of Georgian poets. In general, this group of poets opposed Soviet policies.[135] In the 1930s, the Soviet authorities began censoring and removing non-Communist literature. While Ilia Kutschuchidse argued that "such programmatic eliminations of course destroyed the individual character and

[134] Abasheli, "The Torch of Wisdom," 5-6.
[135] Kutschuchidse, "Georgian Poetry of the Soviet Period," 467.

creativeness of such gifted and lyrical poets and writers such as Alexander Abasheli," Abasheli continued to write and went on to write the Regional Anthem of Georgia.[136]

As a whole, these poems mirrored Soviet ideology in that they showed that Sovietization created a "better future" for the Georgian people because Sovietization allowed Georgia to advance socially and economically. In addition, the new Soviet government had to prove it was not merely another Russian Empire and that it was actually interested in improving Georgian life. The works described in the section suggest that Georgians believed that Sovietization would improve Georgia. In some ways, the Soviet Union was successful in changing Georgia for the better as Georgia became more stable economically and was able to improve social conditions for the majority of Georgians.

Georgian Pride

As the country of Georgia has never been a mono-ethnic empire, the Georgian governments relied heavily on their national pride as a means of creating a unified identity and a legitimate claim to their land. In the 20th century, the Bolsheviks recognized that if they wanted to "peacefully" regain control of Georgia, they would have to prove that Communism would respect Georgian pride. In order to accomplish this, they supported learning the Georgian language and creating Georgian art.[137] In some ways, the early Soviet Union not only allowed Georgian culture to exist, but it also encouraged the creation of Georgian culture. The poems in this section demonstrate that Georgian pride was fundamental to the Georgians and that the Soviet Union was willing to let Georgia continue to be proud of their country. This willingness contributed to improving the social situation in Georgia.

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[136] Kutschuchidse, "Georgian Poetry of the Soviet Period," 468.
[137] Suny, *The Making of the Georgian Nation*, 236.

In the poem "A Mother's Only Son With Lenin," Shanshiashvili argued that the initial Georgian suffering during Sovietization was not in vain because Georgia would improve beyond what it had been under the Russian Empire. He further implied that some Georgians would have to die for the advancement of Georgia. In the Soviet example, Shanshiashvili is mostly correct as the Bolsheviks learned that violence was an effective way to create a new government. As such, they needed to convince the Georgian people that dying for the cause was not inherently problematic. In focusing on the concept of a mother's grief for a son lost in battle, he exemplified just how strong Georgian pride for their new future was. With the lines, "It was with Lenin at his side / That he had trampled down the foe," he stated that the son had died in the service of his country, Soviet Georgia. "He fought as only he can fight / Who fights for liberty and right, / Whose courage like his country's flag / Expands the brighter in its height."[138] With these lines, Shanshiashvili characterized the son as a hero. As such, his death was not in vain but rather he would be forever remembered as a Soviet hero.

Shanshiashvili further alludes to Soviet ideology in suggesting that sacrifice was necessary for the improvement of Georgia. The use of the words "rising sun" suggests that the poem ends on a hopeful note which implies that the son's death was not in vain. The son died bravely in battle fighting for Communism. Since he fought on the "correct side" he would be remembered as a Soviet hero. In the final stanza, the woman's dream ends and the poem returns to reality with the line, "henceforth the mother sits and waits…"[139] The line acknowledges that

[138] Shanshiashvili, "A Mother's Only Son With Lenin," 36-40.
[139] Shanshiashvili, "A Mother's Only Son With Lenin," 46.

the middle stanzas were the mother's dream and "Thus through long weary nights she waits, … / Through tears she sees the rising sun."[140]

Again, Shanshiashvili mirrored the Soviet propaganda that Georgians could be proud of their new country despite their current suffering. He showed Georgians that, despite their suffering, the socialist revolution would eventually bring a better future. Additionally, Shanshiashvili did not characterize the revolution as an event not without losses, but rather he argued that families should take pride in the fact their sons died bravely in the fight for a better future, rather than mourn the fact that they died. In making a grieving mother the main character of the poem, Shanshiashvili placed Georgian suffering at the forefront of the poem.

Other poets such as Kuchishvili argued that Georgia would maintain some level of social stability because the changes brought by a new government would not fundamentally change deeply held Georgian pride. While the Soviet Union did not officially allow any religion to be practiced, it did not destroy many of the Georgian sacred spaces. Yes, the Sovietization of Georgia changed the role of religion; however, at least initially, it did not directly threaten the existence of sacred spaces within Georgia. Kuchishvili's poem is also slightly critical of religion, which likely accounts for why it was allowed in the Soviet Union. The phrase "lures the eye" serves two purposes. On one hand, it foreshadowed the monk's downfall. On the other hand, it is a subtle gesture that the secular world drew people away from the church. In some ways, it is interesting the poem continued to exist in Georgian culture as the Soviet Union was an atheist county as the poem focused on a religious topic. However, its existence in the Soviet Union demonstrated that on some level the government of the Soviet Union was willing to forgo some

[140] Shanshiashvili, "A Mother's Only Son With Lenin," 54-55.

of its deeply held beliefs in the interest of allowing countries to maintain their own identity. Despite the that fact the poem "The Bridge of Chain" was written in 1916, it remained popular during the Soviet Union and was often heard on the streets.[141] Kuchishvili demonstrated social stability in Georgia despite an uncertain future with his depiction of the Jvari Monastery. He highlighted both the Jvari Monastery's spiritual and physical significance: "Its beauty charms the heart and soul, / Its beauty lures the eye."[142] He notes that Georgians felt a strong sense of pride in their religion.

Other poets such as Mirtskhulava and Abasheli argued that Communism could be seen as nonthreatening because Sovietization respected Georgian pride. Given that Georgia was in a transitional period, it is not surprising that they explicitly referenced Georgia's identity. As the memory of independence was still fresh, Mirtskhulava likely aimed to show that Georgia's unique identity still existed under Communism and would continue to exist as a more stable concept under Communism. As their poems were written after the onset of Sovietization, they demonstrated the fact that the Soviet Union did allow Georgians to maintain pride in their uniqueness. Mirtskhulava's opening line of the poem "Georgia," "I gave the sons of Georgia birth," characterizes the speaker as an abstract representation of pre-Soviet Georgian society.[143] The speaker of the poem neither seems to be living nor dead, but rather he seems to be the personification of what it means to be Georgian. He continued this idea with the lines: "I've moulded all their days and led / Them with a strong and tender hand."[144] In doing so, he

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[141] Ilona Dzneladze, Facebook Message to the author, 6 March 2020.
[142] Kuchishvili, "The Bridge of Chain," 19-20.
[143] Mirtskhulava, "Georgia," 1.
[144] Mirtskhulava, "Georgia," 3-4.

continued to suggest that Georgians understood what being Georgian meant and knew how to redefine it as a republic of the Soviet Union.

Mirtskhulava further argued that Sovietization was a positive change for Georgia because it improved Georgian social stability. As the Georgians generally take pride in their unique identity, it was critical to demonstrate that the Soviet Union did not intend to be a replacement for their identity. Instead, the Soviet Union would protect their identity. On one hand, this theme made his poem relatable to the average Georgian as they could understand his poem. They experienced the changes to Georgian identity, which were caused by Sovietization. On the other hand, it served an ideological purpose as it set up the alignment between Georgian pride and Communism. He further emphasized Georgian pride in the line: "Inspired my sons to bravely fight."[145] In referring to Georgian pride here, he established that joining the Soviet Union was not incompatible with honoring Georgia. This idea would allow the people to accept the Soviet Union without dishonoring their Georgian past.

Moreover, Abasheli suggested that Sovietization improved the social situation in Georgia by using Georgian pride as a central theme of the Regional Anthem. It is not surprising that Abasheli referenced Georgia's unique history in their anthem. Presumably, if the people viewed the anthem favorably they would have a more favorable outlook on the Soviet Union as it showed the Soviet Union respects Georgia's individuality. The Regional Anthem mirrors the themes of the National Anthem of the Soviet Union, detailing the great triumphs of Communism over the oppressor. The final couplet of each stanza of the Regional Anthem, "Blossom, our beautiful country, / Exult our Georgian land" further emphasizes the importance of Georgia to

[145] Mirtskhulava, "Georgia," 6.

the Soviet Union.[146] In referring to Georgia as a "beautiful country" Abasheli appealed to Georgian pride. Georgia's ancient history is robust and includes a creation myth in which God gave the Georgians the land he had reserved for himself.[147] While these ideas are not particularly unique to Georgia, the Georgians take pride in their ancient history.

The first edition of the anthem highlighted the fact that Georgia "gave the world great Stalin, / Who destroyed the slavery of nations."[148] Abasheli argued that Georgians should take pride in knowing that Stalin came from Georgia because he was instrumental in the creation of the Soviet Union and was a protector of Soviet social stability. Since the first edition of the Regional Anthem was written in 1944, it should come as no surprise that Stalin was considered a hero. It is also unsurprising that Stalin is absent from the second edition, which was published after his death. While it is true Stalin did play a role in Bolshevik politics, his early decisions were frequently criticized by Lenin. For example, in September 1922 Stalin proposed a plan to create several autonomous republics. His plan was approved by the *Orgburo* and likely would have been approved by the *Politburo*.[149] However, after Stalin met with Lenin, "Lenin wrote to Kamenev, rejecting Stalin's theses and in its place offering a fresh proposal. Instead of various Soviet republics entering the RSFSR [Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic] on the basis of broad autonomy, a wholly new political formation - the federation that would eventually become the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics - was to be formed by the six Soviet republics entering on an equal basis."[150]

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[146] "Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic Anthem (Original version) [საქართველოს სსრ სახელმწიფო ჰიმნი] (English translation)," Lyrics Translate.

[147] Gahrton, *Georgia: Pawn in the New Great Game*, 34.

[148] "Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic Anthem (Original version) [საქართველოს სსრ სახელმწიფო ჰიმნი] (English translation)," Lyrics Translate, 3-4.

[149] Suny, *The Making of the Georgian Nation*, 215.

[150] Lenin, *Polnoe sobranie* sochineniia, vol. 45, 211-213, found in, Suny, *The Making of the Georgian Nation*, 215.

In fact, Stalin's plan did not guarantee Georgia nearly the autonomy that Lenin's plan did. Under Stalin's plan, Georgia would have joined as a lesser power, whereas under Lenin's plan, what actually occurred, Georgia entered the Soviet Union as an equal power to Russia. In other words, Abasheli took some artistic liberty in suggesting that Stalin was the hero of Georgia. But, crafting Stalin as a flawless hero in the 1940s should not come as a surprise. During Stalin's reign, particularly after the Great Terror in the late 1930s, Soviet citizens were careful about portraying Stalin as anything less than a hero to avoid a prison sentence or possible execution. Additionally, making Stalin a hero attempted to convince the Georgian people that they had someone looking out for their interests in the Soviet government in Moscow. It is questionable that this tactic worked as some Georgians continued to object to the Soviet Union.

These poets used Georgian pride to show that Sovietization would still allow Georgians to have pride in their own country and identity because they believed that Sovietization would ultimately improve the social situation in Georgia. Georgian pride continued to be an important aspect of Georgian life throughout the Soviet Union. These poems argued that the Soviet Union was not interested in destroying Georgia's unique identity. Rather, the Bolsheviks were interested in adapting Georgian pride into something that could be considered pro-Soviet Union.

Protection of Georgian Traditional Values

Works from the period tended to express how Communism was not inherently incompatible with Georgian values because it allowed the Georgians to practice their traditions. The Bolsheviks had to find a way to create Communism in Georgia without causing a severe disruption to the Georgian way of life in order to prevent an uprising. In focusing on a religious poem first written in 1916, I argue that the Bolsheviks were willing to allow the Georgians to

retain their culture in an effort to improve the social situation even when it fundamentally contradicted Soviet ideology because it would pacify the Georgians. In addition, works written during the Soviet Union tried to show that previous generations of Georgians approved of Communism, demonstrating that the Soviets believed Sovietization was a positive change for Georgia that would not upset Georgian culture as it would create a more stable social situation than had previously existed under the Russian Empire.

Kuchishvili argued that a change in government would allow Georgia to maintain its traditions as Georgia's traditions are inseparable from the people. Further, completely removing religion from Georgian culture would have likely worsened the social conditions in Georgia as religion played such a key role in Georgian life prior to the Soviet Union. While the Soviets insisted on the end of practicing religion they did not see a reason to destroy the buildings in Georgia. Rather, they tried to superficially integrate Georgia's religion into their ideology to ease the transition to Communism: that the buildings remained even if religion was prohibited. Kuchishvili begins the poem with a question to the reader: "Have you seen that ancient abbey, / That Abbey of the Cross, / Whose belfry's founded and caressed / By soft ethereal mists?"[151] In doing so, he asked the reader to recall a well-known place that was central to Georgian identity. As such, the poem suggests that the monastery will outlive any changes, implying that Georgia's social situation will not be disrupted by a new revolutionary government.

Further, since the poem can be understood in a secular light, it is not completely surprising that Bolsheviks allowed it to exist. As the poem recounted a story of a monk crossing the bridge of chain from the church to the city of Mtskheta, it can be used to explain how not to

[151] Kuchishvili, "The Bridge of Chain," 1-4.

behave in society. In using a universal idea such as a temptation story, Kuchishvili made the poem easily applicable to multiple governmental structures. In other words, while this was not written for a Soviet audience, it is still applicable in Soviet Society. While attempting to cross over the Aragvi river, the monk encountered a maiden bathing in the river. As he crossed the river the bridge shook. "The monk with excess longing gazed, / The Holy Father grave… / The chain bridge spanned, and the monks and chain / All vanished in the wave."[152] In a secular context, this can be understood as the monk longed for more than he was entitled to and was punished for his actions. In addition, the fact that the Bolsheviks allowed this poem to play a role in Georgian society indirectly demonstrated that Communism did not have to be viewed as a negative change. Despite the fact that organized religion was in opposition to Communism, the Bolsheviks recognized the importance of religion to the Georgians. By allowing some elements of religion the Bolsheviks could hopefully ease the transition to Communism. Additionally, Kuchishvili's poem showed the importance of religion for the average Georgian. He applied ideas central to Georgian life and ultimately came to the conclusion that Georgian culture was stronger than any new government.

Kuchishvili believed that the monastery was no longer as relevant as the church played a less significant role in the government as time progressed. It is likely Kuchishvili included this line to show nostalgia for the past as this monastery was part of the Georgian Empire's golden age. It was not until 1783 that Georgia had lost influence in the region and required Russian assistance to defend itself against its neighbors. With the lines: "The abbey stands as proudly as / It stood in former days," he asserted that despite the shift in Georgia's status, the church

[152] Kuchishvili, "The Bridge of Chain," 69-73.

remained untouched.[153] As this position was commonly heard in the streets of Soviet Georgia, it is more than likely that the Soviet Union did not want to outrightly destroy Georgian religious culture as they knew this would cause a revolt they were incapable of controlling.[154] The majority of Georgians would likely recognize this place as the Jvari Monastery as it is a place with particular significance to Georgian Orthodoxy. Kuchishvili began with such a central piece of Georgia's religious history to emphasize the changes to religion that would likely occur under a new government. As this poem was written in 1916, he is hypothesizing about the changes to religion that might occur under a new government. While the Bolsheviks had not taken over Georgia, it was on the brink of a massive change. Kuchishvili later referred to the monastery as "A symbol of the by-gone past," further suggesting that the monastery was not as important now as it had been in the past.[155]

In showing that Sovietization allowed them to engage with their religious history the Bolsheviks demonstrated they were accepting of Georgia's unique identity. To this day, the Jvari Monastery holds spiritual significance for the majority of Georgians as it houses the cross of St. Nino. St. Nino converted Georgia to Christianity.[156] It also holds physical significance as it is located across the river from Mtskheta, the original Georgian capital. As such, it is a place of great pride for the Georgians. Kuchishvili ended the poem with the lines: "Yet, in the heart of every Georgian / This legend e'er will lie which further demonstrated that religion was a fundamental aspect of Georgian culture."[157] In other words, while religion as a public concept may have been repressed by the Bolsheviks, the Bolsheviks could not destroy the fundamental

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[153] Kuchishvili, "The Bridge of Chain," 11-12.
[154] Ilona Dzneladze, Facebook Message to the author, 6 March 2020.
[155] Kuchishvili, "The Bridge of Chain," 9.
[156] "Jvari Monastery," My Geo.
[157] Kuchishvili, "The Bridge of Chain," 81-82.

aspects of religion in Georgia. He believed that Georgia's social prosperity was tied to the existence of their religion because of the closeness of the two until Georgia joined the Soviet Union. In many ways, he was correct as religion remains to this day a fundamental part of Georgian culture. The poem ended on a brighter, more hopeful note than it began. He implied that Georgians should remember their religion history regardless of what happened to society. During the Soviet Union, Georgians still repeated this legend on the streets, which further suggested the Georgians saw the protection of their values as being part of their social prosperity.[158]

Poems written during the Soviet Union took a less religious approach and one more focused on Soviet ideology to show that Sovietization did not contradict Georgian values. In the poem "Georgia," Mirtskhulava argued that Sovietization was a positive change for Georgia as it did not destroy traditional Georgian values. Rather, he argued that Sovietization saved Georgian values for all eternity. He implied that the introduction of Soviet power was not only compatible with traditional Georgian values but it improved the Georgian social situation. In some ways, the Bolsheviks did not completely destroy Georgian culture as they protected and funded Georgian culture. However, Georgian culture became part of the Soviet Union culture in the process. The frequent repetition of this idea suggested that he felt the need to draw people's attention to this belief. While the beginning of the poem is in the past tense, the middle of the poem shifts to the present tense, suggesting that the poem now takes place in the period where Georgia was part of the Soviet Union. This shift in time allows the speaker to reflect on how Sovietization impacted Georgian society, ultimately showing how Sovietization and Georgian values can exist in

[158] Ilona Dzneladze, Facebook Message to the author, 6 March 2020.

harmony. In the lines: “But now I bask in happiness / In everlasting spring and light,” he speaker approves of the transition to Communism.[159]

Georgians, at least partially, viewed Communism in contradiction with their previously held beliefs as it was fundamentally different from previous governments. Mirtskhulava argued that Sovietization was a welcome change as he believed that the Georgian ancestors would approve of Sovietization. He argued that since the Georgian ancestors saw it as a positive social change, then so should the Georgian people. Mirtskhulava argued that the new people would continue to protect the sun just as the previous people had. It would seem that once again Mirtskhulava emphasized the idea that the new way of life would not fundamentally change how the people would interact with the world around them, and thus the ancestors would not object to it. Mirtskhulava furthered the idea that Soviet influence would be ultimately approved by the Georgian ancestors and thus positive in the lines: “The hero from the lightning shapes / A sword that gives the sun its flame.”[160] He identifies the new person as a “hero” which references the “sons of Georgia” in the second line.

In the final two lines, Mirtskhulava stated that the hero’s sword “cleaves through immortality / And brings me to internal fame!” and he argued that the hero’s actions caused Georgia’s past to not necessarily live as it had under previous governments, but that it would be immortalized within the Georgian people.[161] This meant that Mirtskhulava believed that it was acceptable to stop practicing the old Georgian traditions if the people maintain them as

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[159] Mirtskhulava, “Georgia,” 7-8.
[160] Mirtskhulava, “Georgia,” 9-10.
[161] Mirtskhulava, “Georgia,” 11-12.

memories. Again, he returned to the idea that the old Georgian and new Soviet ideas were not polar opposites.

These poems showed that Sovietization was not fundamentally incompatible with Georgian traditional values. The poem “The Bridge of Chain,” written in 1916, stressed the significance of religion to Georgian life and how it would withstand any new government. The poem was then used by the Bolsheviks to show that the Soviet Union respected Georgian culture as they allowed aspects of Georgian culture to exist despite the fact that these aspects were fundamentally opposite to Soviet ideology. Later poems showed how the previous generations of Georgians would approve of Soviet society. In doing so, the poems propagated that Sovietization and Georgian values could coexist with Soviet ideology and that, in some ways, Sovietization strengthened Georgia’s social situation rather than fundamentally destroying it.

Conclusion

My research examined how several groups of people perceived Sovietization, arguing that during the initial years of Sovietization, some groups of Georgian people, primarily people not connected to the government of the Democratic Republic of Georgia, saw it as a way to advance. Unsurprisingly, those close to the old government saw Sovietization as an encroachment on Georgian rights and, therefore, opposed it. In the 1930s, Sovietization was still viewed as mostly positive by the official government narrative. Despite the official narrative, people who had negative experiences with Soviet policies began to see Sovietization as an infringement on Georgia's rights as an independent republic of the Soviet Union. Further, my research relied solely on primary source material written by Georgians under Soviet rule and officially sanctioned poets. In doing so, my research aimed to analyze how Georgians who were subject to Soviet rule were impacted rather than how the Soviet government believed the Georgians experienced Sovietization.

In chapter 1, I examined how Georgian nationalists, specifically General Kvinitadze and a commission in the 1980s led by the *Presduma* of the High Council of the Georgian SSR, viewed Sovietization. Both of these accounts of Sovietization opposed it because they viewed Sovietization as an encroachment on legal as well as cultural grounds. Kvinitadze's argument was more grounded in his personal loyalty to Georgia and his understanding of Georgian culture. While he demonstrated that Soviet Russia committed several violations of agreements between Russia and Georgia as well as international law, he left it to the reader to condemn Russia for its actions. In addition, he criticized the Georgian army for its own shortcomings which further suggests that he was personally affected by Sovietization. The commission in the 1980s, on the

other hand, took a firm stance on Sovietization, arguing that Soviet Russia broke a treaty from 1920 and, therefore, had no right to Georgia. Further, it used appeals to the United Nations and the League of Nations to demonstrate that Georgia was a unique culture and that Russia's actions in the 1920s were an act of imperialism. Given that the Soviet Union was on the brink of collapse, the commission had unparalleled access to materials and the freedom to be able to make a strong claim against Sovietization. Both arguments by those close to the Georgian government demonstrated that the Georgian government saw Sovietization as an overextension of Soviet Russia's power.

In chapter 2, I analyzed how two Georgian cultural literary icons of the 20th-century, Vladimir Mayakovsky and Galaktion Tabidze, viewed Sovietization. Both poets initially viewed Sovietization as a mostly positive change. In 1924, Mayakovsky viewed Sovietization as a positive change for Georgia. He saw Sovietization as the only way for Georgia to leave its oppressed state. Tabidze, on the other hand, grew suspect of Sovietization because of his experiences in the Great Terror. As such, he viewed Sovietization as contrary to Georgia's goals. These two poets demonstrated that while Sovietization may have been a mostly positive change for the Georgian people, Sovietization did not happen the way that the original Bolsheviks implied.

In chapter 3, I explored how several Georgian poets related to Sovietization. For the most part, these poets saw Sovietization as a positive change for Georgia because they believed that communism created a "brighter future," it allowed Georgians to maintain Georgian pride, and it protected Georgian traditional values. These poets illustrated the fact that the general sentiment in Georgia following Sovietization was that communism would end peasant suffering and allow

them to live a more prosperous life. Further, they highlighted the fact that communism and Georgia's cultural identity were not mutually exclusive and that, in some respects, communism promoted Georgia's own identity. These Soviet poets demonstrated that the average Georgian was frequently exposed to poetry that depicted Sovietization as a mostly positive change as the poetry often referred to the fact that Georgia had more autonomy under the Soviet Union than they did as a protectorate of the Russian Empire.

While the Sovietization of Georgia in the 1920s and Russia's continued interest in the post-Soviet space is not necessarily a direct link as there are many outside variables, the two events demonstrate that Russia had, and continues to have, an interest in being the dominant power in the region. The Sovietization of Georgia is a minor part of the history of the Soviet Union; however, it is critical to understanding Russian-Georgian relations in the present day because Russia has remained an aggressor in the post-Soviet space. In many ways, the Sovietization of Georgia can be seen as one of the first attempts at Soviet imperialism. Other Soviet attempts at imperialism include the occupation of Poland (1939) and the occupation of Finland (1939-1940). Unlike with Finland and Poland, Georgia was not used as a buffer against Germany during the interwar period. Rather, the Soviets believed that Georgia belonged to them as it had been a subject of the Russian Empire. At the time, there was little military benefit to reclaiming Georgia as a part of the Soviet Union.

The legacy of the Sovietization of Georgia can still be seen in the current relationship between Russia and Georgia as Russia still attempts to exert influence over the region. Two notable 21st-century examples are the Russo-Georgian War of 2008 and the protests over Russian MP Sergey Gavrilov's visit to Georgia in the summer of 2019. In addition, the slogans

"20% of my country is occupied by Russia" and "Russia is occupant" are constant reminders that Georgia is still not completely free from Russian rule.

Since the breakup of the Soviet Union in 1991, Russia has maintained "peacekeeping forces" in the contested regions of Georgia, Abkhazia and South Ossetia, because the Russian government believes that Georgia does not respect the autonomy of these regions.[162] The Georgian government has argued that the presence of Russian troops in these regions is evidence that Russia retains an interest in controlling Georgia. While this idea was true in the 1920s, it is far more complicated in the present. Russia has little interest in conquering Georgia and reclaiming it as part of their empire. Rather, Russia is more interested in preventing Georgia from joining the European Union. Today, Russia's more aggressive actions in the post-Soviet space often come under the criticism of the European Union and the United States. As neither Russia, the European Union, nor the United States is interested in creating a global conflict over Georgia, all parties are reluctant to take actions that would likely trigger larger scale conflicts, which further discourages Russia from conquering Georgia.

The Russian government's action in Georgia in 2008 suggests that Russia was more interested in causing a disruption and preventing Georgia from being able to join the European Union than reclaiming Georgia as its own because Russia acted in what it considered a defensive manner. That being said, Russia did not actively attempt to protect Georgia's territorial right to the land. While the Russian government ignored the territorial integrity of Georgia in the ceasefire agreement, the Russian government also did not take the opportunity to capture Tbilisi,

[162] In the Soviet Union, Abkhazia was an Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republics and South Ossetia was an Autonomous Oblast which meant while they were part of the Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic, they had more autonomy than other regions within Georgia.

Georgia's capital, as it had done in the 1920s. Further, scholars such as Ronald Asmus argued that the 2008 war was only superficially the result of Georgian, Abkhazian, and South Ossetian tensions. Instead, the war was primarily the result of Georgia wanting to end the quasi-colonial relationship with Russia.[163] Georgia saw the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 as an opportunity to sever ties with Russia, historically its colonial oppressor, and join the western democracies. Russia, fearing western powers, maintained troops in Georgia and created increased conflicts within the contested regions of Georgia in an attempt to prevent western power from wanting to accept Georgia.

While Russia's influence over Georgia does not directly threaten Georgia's autonomy, Russia is still an active threat in the region because it threatens the autonomy of other countries of the post-Soviet space. In the 21st century, Russia remains the main aggressor in the post-Soviet space, meaning that Russia attempts to exert an influence in not just Georgia but other former Soviet Republics, such as Ukraine. In 2014, Russia annexed the Crimean Peninsula in an effort to protect what it considered its own people. Putin rejects the notion that it was an annexation and believed that Russia's actions were merely protecting Crimea's right to self-determination.[164] In 2014, as a result of the annexation of Crimea, separatists in parts of the Donetsk Oblast and Luhansk Oblast declared independence from Ukraine. While Russia claims to be the protector of the Crimean Peninsula and the contested regions in Georgia, the two are not completely synonymous situations. Nonetheless, Russia's actions accomplish the same goal: cause enough disruption in order to prevent other countries in the post-Soviet space countries

[163] Asmus, *A Little War That Shook the World*, 216.
[164] Putin, "Address by President of the Russian Federation,"

from entering the European Union. In Crimea, Russia is protecting ethnic Russians who Russia believes want to be part of Russia. In Georgia, Russia is protecting Abkhazia and South Ossetia, regions of non-ethnic Russians who want their own independence. (Historically, Russia, and the Soviet Union, recognized the right of these people to be autonomous.) As such, unlike Crimea, the Russian government has little interest in integrating Abkhazia and South Ossetia into Russia. Regardless, Russia's interest in being the dominant country in the region threatens Georgia and Ukraine's right to autonomy as it does not fully recognize the sovereignty and the territorial claims of Georgia and Ukraine. Instead, Russia is more interested in protecting the rights of groups of people that they believe are theirs.

In the 21st century, Georgia is trying to break with its history of Russian and Soviet occupation and join western democracies as Georgia still views Russia as a dangerous force in the region. In the post-Soviet world, Georgia frequently looks toward international organizations such as the United Nations for assistance with Russia. During the 2008 war, Georgia expected the world powers to condemn Russia for its actions. However, the world powers were reluctant to harshly condemn Russia for fear of creating larger problems within the world. In an effort to further distance itself from Russia, in 2011 the president of Georgia, Mikheil Saakashvili, expressed an interest in joining the European Union. He cited the fact that connections with the United States, the United Nations, and NATO have helped Georgia distinguish itself from Russia.[165] Georgia has also expressed an interest in joining NATO as a member. (Currently, they are a Partnership for Peace country.) Georgia believes that joining NATO as a member will create more of a deterrent against Russian aggression. The Georgians frequently suggest that

[165] "Saakashvili: Georgia 'should never leave path' of EU integration," EURACTIV.

Sovietization is the root cause of this aggression. In turn, a better understanding of the impacts of the Sovietization on the Georgian people allows other countries to make better-informed decisions about international policy regarding Russian and Georgian relations.

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