

Familiar Strangers: The Georgian Diaspora in the Soviet Union

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Abstract

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The experience of the Georgian diaspora in the Soviet Union is a story of the paradoxes of Soviet empire. On the one hand, the arrival of the Red Army in Tbilisi in 1921 brought Georgia's brief period of independence to an abrupt end. On the other hand, membership in the newly-constituted Soviet Union opened up new opportunities for Georgians and other ethnic minority groups. Such opportunities were seized upon most effectively by an internal Georgian diaspora within the Soviet Union, a small but highly mobile and visible community. The Georgians, who traveled to Moscow from the periphery of the Soviet empire, could be seen at the center of Soviet life at every stage of Soviet history. Georgians headed the state that built socialism, provided the food and entertainment when Soviet citizens desired new forms of consumption and leisure, dominated the burgeoning second economy, and were among the first to seek an exit from the Soviet Union amidst the rising nationalism that accompanied its demise. By examining the aspects of Soviet life where Georgian prominence was greatest, the dissertation explores the broad sweep of Soviet history from the perspective of this dynamic ethnic minority.

The dissertation begins by introducing the concept of internal diasporas in Soviet history and outlining the unique roles played by the Georgians. Subsequent chapters explore the rise of Georgians in the Soviet political elite, the dissemination of Georgian food and drink through institutionalized Georgian social networks, the unique forms of ethnic entertainment created by Georgian cultural entrepreneurs, and the vital role played by Georgian traders in the second economy of the Soviet Union. The final chapter looks at how Georgian ambitions, bred in the Soviet context, led the republic's intelligentsia to eventually seek an exit from the Soviet Union, and an epilogue takes the story of the Georgian diaspora up to the present day.

While scholars in the past have focused on the periphery as a way of challenging theories of revolution and society based on the Soviet empire's Russian core, this project looks at how a multiethnic center was created by groups from the periphery, and how lines between center and periphery, as well as those between colonizer and colonized, were particularly blurred in the Soviet context. Unlike earlier studies of nationality, the dissertation looks not at a particular group in a specific territory in isolation from all others, but rather examines the interplay of diverse ethnic groups across geographic

boundaries. It also brings into focus social and cultural factors previously neglected in the study of nationality and empire, including entertainment, everyday life, and material culture. Finally, the Georgian case challenges our understanding of the concept of diaspora. Rooted Soviet cosmopolitans, members of the Georgian diaspora maintained and capitalized on their connection to a specific territory and culture even as they traveled beyond the borders of their native republic.

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Dedication

For Keeli and Sabina

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Chapter 1

The Georgians in the Soviet Empire of Diasporas

If any photograph captured the high point of Soviet history, it was the image of two Soviet soldiers raising the Red Flag over the Reichstag on May 2, 1945. The photograph signaled the defeat of German fascism after a long and costly war and portended a new era of international relations redefined by the Soviet Union's emergence as a global superpower. The image, appearing in Soviet newspapers and soon reprinted in school textbooks, was referred to by the names of the two soldiers who appeared in it: Egorov and Kantaria. The choice of these two characters for this now famous photograph is an intriguing one.¹ While the selection of the Russian Mikhail Egorov, who represented the largest nation in the Soviet Union, made sense, why was Meliton Kantaria, an ethnic Georgian, chosen to stand alongside him at the Soviet Union's moment of glory?

Georgia was a small country located far from the Soviet capital, beyond the snow-peaked mountains of the Caucasus range. The Georgians were just one of over one hundred officially classified Soviet nationalities; numbering just under four million, they made up less than two percent of the overall Soviet population.² Historically they were Orthodox Christians, but for most of their history they had been more closely linked with the Ottoman and Persian empires than with Russia. Their language was completely unrelated to Russian, and written in a unique alphabet indecipherable to most Soviet citizens. At first glance, the choice of a Georgian soldier to represent the Soviet Union might seem odd.

Of course, Soviet citizens knew that the Great Leader was a Georgian, born Ioseb Dzhughashvili before he became Joseph Stalin.³ Furthermore, Lavrentii Beria, a key figure in the war effort as head of the People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs (NKVD) and a leading member of the State Defense Committee (GKO), was also a Georgian.⁴ Although the desire to represent Georgian prominence in the Soviet political elite cannot be discounted, there was another factor at play here. The choice of a Georgian reflected the need of the Soviet empire to put forward a face that represented its multiethnic nature. As an identifiable ethnic, as a non-Slav, but also as a representative of a culture with a semi-European, Orthodox Christian heritage, the enthusiastic Georgian soldier blended recognizable otherness and exotic similarity in a way familiar to most Soviet citizens. The image became iconic because the right people were in the picture.

¹ The choice of the two soldiers was no accident. In fact, even though the Russian Mikhail Egorov and the Georgian Meliton Kantaria were officially recognized as being the first to raise the Soviet flag in the image—and became famous throughout the Soviet Union as military heroes—there is evidence that they were likely not the first to do so, but were credited afterwards as a result of political directives. See Valerii Iaremenko, "Kto podniat znamia nad Reikhstagom? Geroicheskaia istoriia i propagandistskii mif," *Polit.ru*, May 6, 2005, accessed August 26, 2010, <http://www.polit.ru/analytics/2005/05/06/banner.html>.

² According to the 1989 Soviet census, which represented the apex of Georgia's population size in the Soviet period. Cited in CIS Committee for Statistics, *The Statistical Handbook of Social and Economic Indicators for the Former Soviet Union* (New York: Norman Ross Publishing, 1996), 39.

³ Stalin's Georgian origins were well-known and had their own politics of representation, as will be discussed in Chapter 2.

⁴ For a study of Beria's life and career, see Amy Knight, *Beria: Stalin's First Lieutenant* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993).

Yet it was not only at this historical juncture that a non-Russian in general, and a Georgian in particular, appeared at the forefront of Soviet life.

If one looks at whatever mattered most at any given time in Soviet history, one finds the Georgians. This was the case not only because the Soviet empire needed Georgians in order to put forward the right face, but because of Georgians' unique skill in anticipating and taking advantage of Soviet needs. Stalin was just one of a group of Georgian revolutionaries who came to power in the early years of Soviet rule and directed the development of the new state. After the socialist state was constructed, Soviet citizens sought new opportunities for leisure and consumption, and found them at the Georgian restaurant, where they adopted the distinctive rituals of the Georgian table. During Khrushchev's "Thaw," Georgian cultural entrepreneurs embodied the era's spirit of spontaneity as popular though recognizably ethnic entertainers specializing in song, dance, and theater. As official life grew stagnant under Brezhnev, Georgians thrived in the burgeoning second economy. Finally, with the advent of Gorbachev's reforms, it was a Georgian film, *Repentance*, that explored the furthest limits of allowable expression, calling into question the very legitimacy of Soviet power.

The Georgians were familiar strangers in Soviet society. They moved beyond their native republic to gain widespread prominence in Moscow, yet remained a distinctive national community. They were a diaspora defined by ethnic difference, yet one internal to the Soviet Union. The Georgians employed strangeness in ways that met the demands of the Soviet state and society, but they did so largely for their own benefit. They succeeded because their culture was in fact distinctive, because their networks intersected in productive ways with the Soviet bureaucracy, and because their homeland was firmly within Soviet borders, able to provide a steady supply of ideologically sanctioned cultural and material resources. As familiar strangers, they were uniquely positioned to contribute to the peculiar brand of domestic internationalism fostered by the Soviet state. The Georgians had a unique set of skills and a cultivated mythology that fit those skills. The Soviet authorities used, promoted, and sometimes resented Georgian success, while Georgians capitalized on it, negotiating between imperial prominence and local self-assertion.

Too often limited by a restrictive definition of nationality, or by an understanding of the Soviet empire that privileges either the center *or* the periphery, historians have noticed but rarely commented on the leading role of the Georgian diaspora in Soviet life. Stalin's Georgian origins have been no mystery, and the prominence of Georgian entertainers no secret, but the two have not been considered as related phenomena springing from a common source.⁵ In Russia, many a researcher's failing spirits (including my own) have been revived by a Georgian meal, but how it came to be that Moscow has so many Georgian restaurants, and why the "Russian" style of toasting is essentially Georgian in form, has never been suitably explained. Similarly, anecdotes about Georgian success in the Soviet second economy are well known, but their basis and import in reality has received little scholarly attention.⁶ Again and again, Georgians living beyond the borders of their native republic appear prominently in the archival

⁵ For example, Stalin's Georgian origins are considered in Alfred J. Rieber, "Stalin, Man of the Borderlands," *The American Historical Review* 106: 5 (December 2001): 1651-1691.

⁶ A notable exception is the work of Gerald Mars and Yochanan Altman. See their article, "The Cultural Bases of Soviet Georgia's Second Economy," *Soviet Studies* 35 (1983): 546-560.

record and in the secondary literature, but they have not been studied as a group, and one remarkably illustrative of the larger trends of Soviet history.

This dissertation is an effort to tell two stories at once: the first is the story of the remarkable success achieved by the Georgian diaspora in Moscow based on their skillful use of culture, networks, and the resources of their native republic; the second is the story of the Soviet multiethnic state they inhabited and the changes it went through over its seventy-year history. The particulars of the Georgian case provide grounds for a more general reexamination of Soviet nationality, a broader reimagining of Soviet empire, and an elaboration of the state-sponsored framework of Soviet domestic internationalism that allowed the Georgian diaspora to achieve such prominence.

Soviet Nationalities Beyond National Republics

Internal diasporas like the Georgians offer a new perspective on nationality in the Soviet Union. In the past, scholars have emphasized the way the Soviet state linked nationalities to their titular republics by language, cultural institutions, and the process of local cadre promotion known as *korenizatsiia*. Yet the extent to which the Soviet Union also offered opportunities for mobility beyond the internal borders of the national republics has largely been ignored. By enabling the internal migration of diverse populations but upholding a system in which national identity was based on descent and recorded in official documents, the Soviet Union engendered internal diasporas: groups which saw themselves and were seen as residing outside their titular homeland. The distinct identities of internal diaspora groups were preserved over time, yet members of these diasporas remained citizens of a larger multiethnic state.

This dissertation the first study to introduce the concept of internal diaspora to describe nationalities in the Soviet Union living beyond their titular republics.⁷ In so doing, it departs from most Russian and Soviet historiography, which has only employed the concept of diaspora in two ways: to describe groups without homelands, or with homelands beyond Soviet borders; and in reference to the émigrés and refugees who fled Russia and the Soviet Union in several waves over the course of the twentieth century.⁸ Internal diasporas in the Soviet Union differed from these more typical diasporas in several important ways. Internal diasporas left their homelands and crossed republic-level borders while remaining in one state; as a result, they could move back and forth with

⁷ By broadening the idea of diaspora, it diverges from the narrower definition of diaspora offered by William Safran in “Diasporas in Modern Societies: Myths of Homeland and Return,” *Diaspora* 1:1 (Spring 1991): 83-99. For a critical discussion of the growing use of the term “diaspora,” see Rogers Brubaker, “The ‘diaspora’ diaspora,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 28:1 (January 2005): 1-19. While the concept of internal diaspora has not previously been applied to the Soviet Union, it has been discussed in the context of the Byzantine Empire. See Hélène Ahrweiler and Angeliki E. Laiou, eds., *Studies on the Internal Diaspora of the Byzantine Empire* (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 1998).

⁸ Studies of groups without homelands, or with homelands beyond Soviet borders, did in fact look at nationality beyond territory in the USSR. Here, the study of Jews in the Soviet Union suggests the critical roles played by small, dispersed ethnic minority groups. See, for example, Yuri Slezkine, *The Jewish Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004); and Jeffrey Veidlinger, *The Moscow State Yiddish Theater: Jewish Culture on the Soviet Stage* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000). For examples of the second trend, see Robert Chadwell Williams, *Culture in Exile: Russian Emigres in Germany, 1881-1941* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1972); and Larissa Remennick, *Russian Jews on Three Continents* (New Brunswick: Transaction, 2007).

ease between homeland and host society. On the other hand, while their ethnic distinctiveness was officially promoted, they were generally prohibited from organizing politically as diasporas beyond the borders of their native republics. Lacking official representation as communities beyond their homelands, they were not classified by Soviet bureaucrats as diasporas, and only obliquely noted in census records as nationalities residing outside their respective titular republics. However, the presence of these outsider communities was felt in every aspect of Soviet life, from the marketplace, to the theatrical stage, to the restaurant menu.

The concept of internal diaspora does not restrict our understanding of nationality to a set territory or a strictly political program of nationalism. The past emphasis on nationalities and nationalism within national republics is perhaps understandable, since it was around the time of the collapse of the Soviet Union into fifteen independent national republics that historians discovered the importance of non-Russian populations. New histories were written for the emergent post-Soviet nations; at the same time, nationalism and the nation-state were the subjects of widespread scholarly attention.⁹ The case of Georgia is illustrative. When Ronald Grigor Suny, a pioneer in the study of Soviet nationalities, first published his work on the history of Georgia, *The Making of the Georgian Nation*, in 1988, there had been no comprehensive monograph in the English language historiography on Georgia since the publication of David Marshall Lang's *A Modern History of Soviet Georgia* in 1962.¹⁰ Like most other works on Soviet nationalities from this period, Suny's study of the Georgian nation focused on its development within the territory later defined by the Georgian state and emphasized, above all, the importance of nationalism as the primary expression of nationality.

As nationality was similarly examined in a variety of national contexts, scholars reached an important new understanding of the Soviet state as a maker, rather than a breaker, of nations.¹¹ Yuri Slezkine argued that instead of being incompatible with Marxism, nationality was promoted and nations made by the Soviet state as way of ushering the Soviet peoples toward socialism by appealing to them in their native

⁹ Two of the most influential works in this regard were: Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London and New York: Verso, 1983); and Ernest Gellner's *Nations and Nationalism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983). Both were both published in the same year and stimulated much scholarly debate in the 1990s.

¹⁰ Ronald Grigory Suny, *The Making of the Georgian Nation* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1988); David Marshall Lang, *A Modern History of Soviet Georgia* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1962). Reflecting the rapidly evolving field of nationalities studies, Suny's work on Georgia was republished in a significantly revised second edition in 1994; the latter edition demonstrated a new understanding of the nation as a discourse articulated by national intellectuals as much as it was a construction produced by social forces. The revisions are discussed by Suny in the preface to the second edition: *The Making of the Georgian Nation*, 2nd ed. (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994), ix-xii. All subsequent citations refer to the latter edition.

¹¹ A reference to Robert Conquest's *Stalin: Breaker of Nations* (New York: Viking, 1991). Notably, much of the earlier work done on Soviet nationalities was by scholars like Conquest and Richard Pipes, both of whom evinced a strident anti-communist stance in their writings and portrayed Soviet nationalities policy as a cynical effort to paint over national oppression with propaganda. Tellingly, in his 1963 review of David Marshall Lang's *A Modern History of Soviet Georgia*, Pipes criticized Lang for praising the Russian and Soviet "contributions to Georgian national development." See Pipes' critique in *Russian Review* 22: 1 (January 1963): 89-90.

languages.¹² Increasingly, scholars began to describe this state as a peculiar type of empire, a centralizing polity that nevertheless promoted non-Russian nations in earnest. Terry Martin considered the administration of what he termed the “affirmative action empire,” mainly from the perspective of policymakers in Moscow.¹³ Drawing on the theories of Benedict Anderson, Francine Hirsch examined how ethnographic knowledge was employed by the state to organize and rule the Soviet “empire of nations.”¹⁴ These works reflected a broader historiographical fascination with empire that had its parallels in the study of Russia’s imperial past, where scholars attempted to place the tsarist empire in the context of European colonial empires.¹⁵ Framing the history of nationalities in a broader imperial context, it seemed, was a way of moving away from separate historical accounts written for each nationality, a welcome departure from what Benjamin Nathans criticized as the “one people after another approach.”¹⁶

While describing the Soviet Union as an empire provided a useful framework for comparison with other multiethnic states and offered a way of fitting together diverse national histories, for the most part nationality remained narrowly defined and limited to the confines of a national territory, at least when there was one to be found within Soviet borders. Yet nationality in the Soviet Union transcended territory and was not merely an administrative category. As the Georgian case demonstrates, the peoples and cultures of the national republics traveled beyond the internal national borders of the Soviet republics, and nationality and multiethnicity were mobilized for cultural, economic, as well as political purposes, both by the state, and by the nationalities themselves.

The Soviet Union as an Empire of Diasporas

The leading role played by the Georgians and other internal diasporas suggests that we should conceptualize the Soviet Union not only as an empire of separate nations, but as an empire of diasporas, where politics, culture, and economics were constituted by the mixing of a diverse group of mobile specialists and their national cultures. If empire is typically understood to mean an expansionist state ruled from the center that exerts hierarchical authority over an ethnically defined periphery, then the Soviet Union, as an empire of diasporas, was a state where the periphery may have been ethnically defined, but the national core was ambiguous and poorly articulated.¹⁷ Understanding the Soviet empire as an empire of diasporas moves beyond the typical divide between center and

¹² Yuri Slezkine, “The USSR as a Communal Apartment, or How a Socialist State Promoted Ethnic Particularism,” *Slavic Review* 53: 2 (Summer 1994): 414-452.

¹³ Terry Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923-1939* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2001).

¹⁴ Francine Hirsch, *Empire of Nations: Ethnographic Knowledge and the Making of the Soviet Union* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2005).

¹⁵ See, for example, Daniel R. Brower and Edward J. Lazzerini, eds., *Russia’s Orient: Imperial Borderlands and Peoples, 1700-1917* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1997).

¹⁶ Benjamin Nathans, *Beyond the Pale: The Jewish Encounter with Late Imperial Russia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 15.

¹⁷ The literature on empire and whether or not the Soviet Union was one is voluminous and still growing. For a general overview, from which I in part draw my definition, see Jane Burbank and Frederick Cooper, *Empires in World History: Power and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010). For a more cautious approach to the question of the Soviet Union as empire, see Mark R. Beissinger, “Soviet Empire as ‘Family Resemblance,’” *Slavic Review* 65: 2 (Summer 2006): 294-303.

periphery, blurring the lines between colonizer and colonized, and placing the Soviet Union in a broader Eurasian framework.

As an empire of diasporas, the Soviet Union was not simply a Russian empire. While Russian was the Soviet Union's default language and Russians gained a representational prominence after World War II, Russians were neither the most prosperous, nor the most educated, nor most successful group in the USSR.¹⁸ While there were more Russians than other nationalities, Russians still made up only 50 percent of the Soviet Union's overall population.¹⁹ The Russian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic (RSFSR) lacked the trappings of statehood accorded the other republics. It was the only Soviet republic to lack its own Communist Party and its own Academy of Sciences, and as a federation it was composed of a patchwork of regional and ethno-territorial units inhabited by groups as diverse as Tatars, Chechens, and Finns.

The heart of the Soviet empire was Moscow, an imperial rather than a national capital. In the Soviet period, the Russian city was reinvented as a self-consciously multiethnic metropolis. Its streets were marked with the names and heroes of the non-Russian socialist republics, and a Georgian visitor could find the familiar in a visit to Moscow's historic Georgian Square, or a drive along the capital's Rustaveli Street.²⁰ The city played host to countless political gatherings, cultural events, youth festivals, and academic conferences that gathered together diasporas from the national republics. Moscow's own political elite was multiethnic and composed of upwardly-mobile cadres from the periphery, its culinary tastes favored a multiethnic smorgasbord of national cuisines, its cultural life celebrated the art, music, and theater of the national republics, and its marketplaces featured their goods, often sold by conspicuously non-Russian traders. Political, cultural, and economic life in the Soviet metropole were thus constructed out of a mixture of national cultures drawn from the Soviet periphery. The Kremlin and Red Square evoked the city's Russian past, but Moscow stood for many things; Russia, certainly, in its various historical incarnations, but also the peoples and places of a diverse empire.

The Soviet Union, as an empire without a clear national core, had much in common with past empires of Eurasia. These were not maritime empires, like the vast British overseas empire, but land empires, where borders were not so easily defined geographically, and the separation between center and periphery, and colonizer and colonized, more difficult to establish. As the leading historian of imperial Russia, V. O.

¹⁸ Living standards were higher in the Baltic states, and arguably higher in Georgia as well, than they were in most of Russia. For a discussion of data on telling quality of life indicators in the Baltic states, see Michael Bradshaw, Phil Hanson, and Denis Shaw, "Economic Restructuring" in *The Baltic States: The National Self-Determination of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania*, ed. Graham Smith (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994), 158-180. While Georgian prosperity rested in part on a thriving second economy, it is worth noting that in 1970 the size of the average Georgian savings account was almost twice that of the Soviet average. *Narodnoe khoziastvo SSSR 1922-1972: Iubileinyi statisticheskii ezhegodnik* (Moscow, 1972), 515, cited in Suny, *Making of the Georgian Nation*, 304. Finally, education levels were generally higher for groups like Jews, Georgians, and Armenians than they were for ethnic Russians, according to statistics presented in Tsentral'noe statisticheskoe upravlenie pri Sovete Ministrov SSSR, *Vysshee obrazovanie v SSSR: statisticheskii sbornik* (Moscow: Gosstatizdat TsSU SSSR, 1961).

¹⁹ *The Statistical Handbook of Social and Economic Indicators for the Former Soviet Union*, 39.

²⁰ While the former was linked to a centuries-old Georgian settlement in Moscow, the latter was renamed in the Soviet period. For a discussion of the history of Georgians in Moscow, see V. Tatishvili, *Gruziny v Moskve: istoricheskii ocherk (1653-1722)* (Tbilisi: Zaria Vostoka, 1959).

Kliuchevskii, noted, colonization may have been “the basic fact of Russian history,” yet the history of Russia was that of “a country that colonizes itself.”²¹ The Soviet Union was in many ways similar to the Russian Empire that preceded it, and not only because both shared roughly the same borders. Both were expressly multiethnic states with a universalizing ideology, rather than a nation, at their center. The Russian Empire, which some proclaimed as the “Third Rome,” accorded a privileged place to Orthodox Christianity and sometimes promoted Russification, but also accommodated religious and ethnic diversity and was ruled by a transnational dynastic elite.²²

Similarly, the other leading multiethnic state of Eurasia, the Ottoman Empire, was predominantly Turkish but espoused a universal Islamic identity and granted protection and reached a range of special deals with diverse populations living in the sultan’s domain.²³ As was the case with Russians in the Russian Empire, Turks in the Ottoman Empire were in a sense the core nationality, yet they had no trappings of national statehood. Both Russians and Turks were predominantly rural and in many cases underrepresented in key areas of imperial life, including commerce and imperial administration. Instead of displaying the dominance of a core nationality, Eurasian empires featured a range of ethnically distinct imperial specialists. The Ottoman Empire had its Armenian and Greek commercial elites, and its imperial bureaucracy and military were staffed by descendants of slaves taken from the Balkans and the Caucasus.²⁴ Ruling over a large Russian peasant population, the Russian Empire relied on its Old Believer and Tatar merchant networks, Baltic German bureaucrats and scientists, Georgian generals, and Jewish industrial barons.²⁵

²¹ Kliuchevskii as quoted in Willard Sunderland, *Taming the Wild Field: Colonization and Empire on the Russian Steppe* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004), 209.

²² On the history of the idea of Russia as the “Third Rome,” see Judith E. Kalb, *Russia’s Rome: Imperial Visions, Messianic Dreams, 1890-1940* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2008), 3-33; on the complexities of Russification, see Theodore R. Weeks, *Nation and State in Late Imperial Russia: Nationalism and Russification on the Western Frontier, 1863-1914* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1996); on the empire’s accommodation of Islam and confessional diversity, see Robert D. Crews, *For Prophet and Tsar: Islam and Empire in Russia and Central Asia* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006); and on the Romanov dynasty and the ambiguities of their national identity in an age of nationalism, see Richard S. Wortman, *Scenarios of Power: Myth and Ceremony in Russian Monarchy. Vol. 2: From Alexander to the Abdication of Nicholas II* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).

²³ On the Ottoman Empire’s incorporation of diverse groups as it expanded, see Heath W. Lowry, *The Nature of the Early Ottoman State* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003); on the empire’s strategic flexibility, see Karen Barkey, *Bandits and Bureaucrats: The Ottoman Route to State Centralization* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994); and on the emphasis of a more Islamic ideology in the late Ottoman empire, see Selim Deringil, *The Well-Protected Domains: Ideology and the Legitimation of Power in the Ottoman Empire, 1876-1909* (New York: I. B. Tauris, 1998).

²⁴ On Armenians merchants in the Ottoman Empire and their precarious position by the late nineteenth century, see Ronald Grigor Suny, *Looking Toward Ararat: Armenia in Modern History* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1993), 94-115; on Christian Orthodox merchants, see Traian Stoianovich, “The Conquering Balkan Orthodox Merchant,” *Journal of Economic History* 20: 2 (June 1960): 234-313; and on the Ottoman *kul* system’s use of slaves in the bureaucracy and army, see Metin Ibrahim Kunt, “Ethnic-Regional (*Cins*) Solidarity in the Seventeenth-Century Ottoman Establishment,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 5: 3 (June 1974): 233-239.

²⁵ For a study that emphasizes the multiethnic nature of the Russian empire and the diverse national origins of its specialists, see Andreas Kappeler, *The Russian Empire: A Multiethnic History*, trans. Alfred Clayton (Harlow: Longman, 2001). On the critical roles played by Baltic Germans, among others, see John A.

The Soviet Union was therefore an empire of the type long dominant in Eurasia, a diverse multiethnic state driven by a supranational ideology, with internal diasporas specializing in key imperial functions. This Eurasian imperial tradition stretched back as far as Rome, where the dividing line was not national, but instead ran between those incorporated as citizens and those who remained barbarians.²⁶ Like the Roman Empire, the Ottoman Empire, the Russian Empire, and, to a lesser extent, the French Empire, the Soviet Union offered a vision of civilization based not on national exclusivity but instead on a universal ideology that welcomed converts.²⁷ If the Soviet Union can be said to have had a *mission civilisatrice*, it was not about turning Uzbeks into Russians, but rather about making both better communists. This mission was applied with equal zeal to Russian peasants and the pastoral nomads of Central Asia.²⁸ Moreover, this mission was not simply led by Russians from Moscow; it was embraced by radical communists of diverse ethnic backgrounds. In the Soviet Union, internal diasporas like the Georgians were not simply compradors or imperial intermediaries; they were the very builders of empire.

Moreover, while the empire of diasporas was ruled from Moscow, it was not, contrary to what many historians have argued, merely constructed by the center.²⁹ While policies and institutions in Moscow created a framework for interactions, the circumstances of nationalities in the Soviet Union were often made by the nationalities themselves. The Soviet Union was formed as a federative state following the absorption of Ukraine, Belarus, and the countries of the South Caucasus, all of which experienced brief periods of independence following the collapse of the Russian Empire.³⁰ Although the Soviet Union was a highly centralized federation and every republic was accorded the same types of national forms, the degree to which nations were granted cultural autonomy varied, based on demography and the perceived need to accommodate local elites. In republics with large Russian populations, like the Kazakh SSR, Russian and the local language were accorded equal status, while in republics with a more numerically dominant titular nationality, like the Georgian SSR, the local language retained primacy.³¹ In addition, the treatment of local elites initially depended on the way republics were incorporated into the Soviet Union. After the Red Army's invasion of

Armstrong, "Mobilized Diaspora in Tsarist Russia: The Case of the Baltic Germans," in *Soviet Nationality Policies and Practices*, ed. Jeremy R. Azrael (New York: Prager, 1978), 63–104.

²⁶ It also hearkened back to the Byzantine Empire, Rome's successor. Hélène Ahrweiler and Angeliki E. Laiou, eds., *Studies on the Internal Diaspora of the Byzantine Empire*.

²⁷ For the argument that the French took their civilizing mission seriously, see Alice Conklin, "Colonialism and Human Rights, A Contradiction in Terms? The Case of France and West Africa, 1895-1914," *American Historical Review* 103: 2 (April 1998): 419-442.

²⁸ Although policy directives calling for collectivization in Central Asia were more easily perceived as an instance of imperialism than they were in central Russia. See Adrienne Lynn Edgar, *Tribal Nation: The Making of Soviet Turkmenistan* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004).

²⁹ While Martin balances his study of central directives with an examination of local administrators in Ukraine, his *Affirmative Action Empire* ultimately portrays regional officials simply adapting to orders issued by the center. Similarly, while Hirsch's *Empire of Nations* emphasizes the role played by tsarist-era ethnographers in the new Soviet state, she privileges ethnographic knowledge as conceived by those in the center.

³⁰ On the formation of the Soviet Union, see Jeremy Smith, *The Bolsheviks and the National Question, 1917-23* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999).

³¹ On the Kazakh SSR, see Martha Brill Olcott, *The Kazakhs* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1987).

Georgia, for example, Lenin stressed the need for a conciliatory approach.³² Although Stalin ultimately pursued a ruthless policy of political centralization in his homeland, Georgian national expression in the Soviet period was promoted by Georgian institutions that were established in the imperial period and had developed their cultural repertoire long before the Soviet state came into existence. The culture of the Soviet Union was supposed to be “national in form, socialist in content,” but national form shaped content and was based on national cultures that often preceded the Soviet state.

The structure of the Soviet state itself also merits further examination. Although the Soviet Union was ruled by a party-state monopoly, the state’s bureaucracy created opportunities for embedded networks of ethnic specialists. The divide between center and periphery is further complicated if we view Soviet history from the perspective of these networks. While core and periphery are often understood in geographic terms, in network terms, individuals and groups can be located on the geographic periphery but can make up the core of a network if they are closely integrated into central institutions and structures.³³ Seemingly peripheral groups, like internal diasporas, become central if one looks at the structure of political institutions or traces networks of cultural and economic exchange.

Soviet policies themselves promoted the integration of internal diasporas into these networks. The economic and political infrastructure of the Soviet Union made possible new forms of travel, exchange, career promotion, and migration for nationalities from the geographic periphery. While the relationship between Moscow and the republics was hierarchical, the ties between them were bidirectional and encouraged the mutual exchange of information, goods, and people.³⁴ Internal diasporas linked the geographic periphery with the center and set themselves up as the middlemen for all that flowed between. While it is common to speak of the colonization of the periphery by the center, the Soviet empire allowed numerous opportunities for representatives of the periphery to effectively colonize institutions, both in the national republics and in the multiethnic center.

Describing the Soviet Union as an empire of diasporas is therefore a means of complicating typical divisions between center and periphery, and colonizer and colonized. It also brings into view the diversity of the Soviet multiethnic state in a way that the story of nationalities is not simply one of their suffering under Russian domination.³⁵ The story of the Georgian diaspora is, above all, a story of success, along

³² Jeremy Smith, “The Georgian Affair of 1922: Policy Failure, Personality Clash or Power Struggle?” *Europe-Asia Studies* 50: 3 (May 1998): 519-544.

³³ On the study of centrality from the perspective of social network analysis, see Ronald S. Burt, *Toward a Structural Theory of Action: Network Models of Social Structure, Perception, and Action* (New York: Academic Press, 1982); and Phillip Bonacich, “Power and Centrality: A Family of Measures,” *American Journal of Sociology* 92: 5 (March 1987): 1170-1182.

³⁴ Although ties in the Soviet empire, as in the Ottoman Empire, were not as strong between periphery and periphery. For a study of the Ottoman Empire that considers network analysis, see Karen Barkey, *Empire of Difference: The Ottomans in Comparative Perspective* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

³⁵ While imperial oppression was sometimes a factor, a large portion of the recent literature on nationalities reflects the interests of local nationalists seeking to construct national mythologies based on suffering. This is particularly true among some of the more recent historiographical work on modern Georgia written by Georgian historians. See, for example, Vakhtang Guruli, “1770-1921: The Russian Occupation,” *The*

with the tensions that success generated.

Domestic Internationalism: The Georgians Among the Soviet Union's Internal Diasporas

While the Bolsheviks initially hoped to lead an international revolution, they eventually settled on building socialism in one country, and, along with it, nurtured a domestic internationalism that celebrated internal diversity within Soviet borders and created opportunities for internal ethnic specialists like the Georgians. The Georgians were just one of many internal diasporas in the Soviet Union, but they were exceptional in that they blended familiarity and strangeness in unique and successful ways. Their ethnic distinctiveness, whether it was celebrated or reviled, was well known to all Soviet citizens.

The Georgians' emergence as such a crucial diaspora was in many ways surprising. Typically, ethnic specialists arise from groups that have long lived in diaspora, such as the Jews, Armenians, and Gypsies, or from sojourning groups that do not form lasting relationships with members of the host society but instead emphasize group solidarity.³⁶ The historians Yuri Slezkine and Philip D. Curtin, along with a number of anthropologists, including Sharon Bohn Gmelch, have examined the commonalities of groups that seize upon specialized niches ranging from trade to entertainment, with Slezkine classifying them as “mercurians,” Curtin as “professional boundary crossers,” and Gmelch describing them as “groups that don't want in.”³⁷ The Georgians, however, did “want in”; indeed, they eagerly sought out ways to participate in the Soviet empire, and, like Jews and Armenians, they sought out specialized niches based on portable skills. Yet, in contrast to Jews and Armenians, the Georgians were not heirs to a long diaspora tradition. Instead, they were transformed from agriculturalists into urban specialists excelling at things like entrepreneurship and entertainment, similar in many ways to the Italians in the United States or the Lebanese in Latin America.³⁸ However, the mobilization of the Georgian diaspora importantly occurred in the context of one state.³⁹

Archival Bulletin 3 (October 2008): 91-100. The article effectively characterizes the main thrust of modern Georgian history as that of oppression by Russian conquerors.

³⁶ For a discussion of the bonds among diaspora and sojourning groups, see Edna Bonacich, “A Theory of Middleman Minorities,” *American Sociological Review* 38:5 (October 1973): 583-94.

³⁷ See Slezkine, *The Jewish Century*, especially pages 4-39; Philip D. Curtin, *Cross-Cultural Trade in World History* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984); and Sharon Bohn Gmelch, “Groups That Don't Want In: Gypsies and Other Artisan, Trader, and Entertainer Minorities,” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 15 (1986): 307-330.

³⁸ For a study that discusses the relative success of Italian Americans in business, entertainment, and professional fields, based in part on cultural characteristics imported from Italy, see Salvatore Primeggia and Joseph A. Varacalli, “Community and Identity in Italian American Life” in *The Review of Italian American Studies*, eds. Frank M. Sorrentino and Jerome Kruse (Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2000), 245-280; for a work that includes a discussion of Lebanese emigration to Latin America (and its resulting effect on life in Lebanon), see Akram Fouad Khater, *Inventing Home: Emigration, Gender, and the Middle Class in Lebanon* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).

³⁹ On “mobilized” diasporas of ethnic specialists versus “proletarian” diasporas of unskilled labor migrants, see John A. Armstrong, “Mobilized and Proletarian Diasporas,” *The American Political Science Review* 70: 2 (June 1976): 393-408.

Members of a diaspora domestic to the Soviet Union, Georgians comfortably combined the familiar and the strange. While many Jews excelled as Soviets by embracing the universal in Russian and Soviet culture, the Georgians skillfully emphasized and performed the particular, but did so in a universally understandable way.⁴⁰ While the Jewish embrace of universalism at the expense of ethnic distinctiveness opened them up to charges of “rootless cosmopolitanism,” the Georgians were both cosmopolitan in their imperial aspirations and rooted in their native republic.⁴¹ The fact that their homeland was located within the territory of the Soviet Union became an increasingly critical distinction, since the closure of Soviet borders and deepening xenophobia meant the loyalty of those with homelands abroad, like the Germans, Greeks, or the Jews after 1948, was suspect.⁴²

Soviet policies and infrastructure made possible numerous population movements from the countryside to the city, as well as from the periphery to the center. Yet not every internal migrant in the Soviet Union was a member of an internal diaspora, since not every nationality preserved a sense of difference over time as well as the Georgians. The domestic nature of Soviet internationalism encouraged homogeneity as well as heterogeneity, and while some groups endured as communities of strangers, others blended together. Differences among Slavic nationalities, who, like the Georgians, also came from a predominantly agricultural context, were expressed by a closely related set of songs, symbols, and languages that were distinctive, yet mutually intelligible. Perhaps as a result of this cultural closeness, separate Slavic national identities were not always maintained beyond the borders of their titular republics; by the 1937 census, many Ukrainians and Belorussians residing in the RSFSR who previously claimed ethnic distinctiveness came to identify themselves as Russians.⁴³

Like the aura of exoticism that marked internal diasporas from Central Asia, Georgian strangeness endured; however, it manifested itself in forms familiar to the larger host society. Georgian culture, though non-Slavic, was still seen as representative of a highly-cultivated European civilization; its literary high culture was embodied by the twelfth-century Georgian poet Shota Rustaveli, and its links to the classical world ran deeper than those of Russia itself.⁴⁴ Importantly, Georgia, like Russia, was an historically Orthodox Christian nation; in fact, the founding of Georgia’s national church predated

⁴⁰ For a discussion of the Jewish pursuit of universalism in the Soviet context, see Slezkine, *The Jewish Century*.

⁴¹ For a discussion of the idea of rootless cosmopolitanism and Soviet cosmopolitanism, see Caroline Humphrey, “Cosmopolitanism and *kosmopolitizm* in the political life of Soviet citizens,” *Focaal* 44 (Winter 2004): 138-152. The concept of rooted cosmopolitanism has been examined beyond the Soviet context as part of an argument for the combination of international diversity and universal humanist values. See Anthony Appiah, *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World Of Strangers* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2006).

⁴² For a discussion of the Stalinist deportation of Germans, Greeks, and others, see Norman M. Naimark, *Stalin’s Genocides* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010).

⁴³ Terry Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire*, 404. Martin argues that this development was the result of state pressure and Russification policies; however, because of cultural similarity Ukrainians and Belorussians were more easily Russified than Germans, Koreans, or Chechens.

⁴⁴ For a somewhat dated but comprehensive study of the history of Georgia before Russian conquest, see W. E. D. Allen, *A History of the Georgian People from the Beginning down to the Russian Conquest in the Nineteenth Century* (London: K. Paul, Trench, Trubner and Co. , 1932).

Russia's by several centuries.⁴⁵ Unlike the culture of internal diasporas from Central Asia, who were not only non-Slavic, but also non-European, predominantly Muslim, and often pastoral, Georgian otherness seemed to offer a sophisticated counterpoint to Russian national forms. This was the logical outcome of the fact that modern Georgian culture drew its inspiration from an ancient sedentary civilization, was developed in intimate contact with imperial Russian high culture, and was transformed by the education of several generations of Georgian intellectuals in Russian universities.⁴⁶ Even before the Soviet promotion of Georgian culture, it had been nurtured for decades by imperial institutions like Tbilisi's opera house, established in the middle of the nineteenth century.⁴⁷

In the sense that Georgian difference was seen as stemming from a relatively advanced European civilization, one might expect the Georgians to be similar to internal diasporas from the Baltic states. However, cultural entrepreneurs from the Baltic republics joined the cultural projects of the Soviet state later and often without the same enthusiasm. Georgian artists and intellectuals took part in the revolution from the outset, and, at least until late in the Soviet period, typically understood the path toward political, cultural, and intellectual modernity as running through Russia. The native intelligentsias of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, because of history, geography, and a lengthy period of independence in the interwar years, yearned to participate directly in European artistic and intellectual culture without Russian mediation. While Baltic distinctiveness was sometimes simply not on offer for imperial use, Georgian artistry was matched with a Soviet state ready to fund it, regardless of the cost.⁴⁸

Ethnic difference among internal Soviet diasporas endured not only because of actual cultural differences and varying degrees of state support, but also because it overlapped with occupational specializations. Ethnic specialization, or the concentration of certain ethnic groups in specific fields, aided in the persistence of ethnicity by matching national identity with social function.⁴⁹ While the Soviet Union was meant to be a classless society, social position and overrepresentation in key facets of Soviet life gave a class coloring to nationality. The importance of substitution in Russian and Soviet history has been stressed by economists like Alexander Gerschenkron, who argued that the Russian state substituted for private industry, and by political scientists like Ken Jowitt, who claimed that the Soviet political system substituted Leninist neo-traditionalism for capitalist modernity.⁵⁰ It should be added that nationality in some sense

⁴⁵ Orthodox Christianity was made the official religion of the eastern Georgian kingdom of Iberia in 326 and the Georgian church became autocephalous in the fifth century. The Russian Orthodox Church traces its origin to the conversion of Prince Vladimir I of Kiev several centuries later, in 988. For more background, see John Binns, *An Introduction to the Christian Orthodox Churches* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

⁴⁶ Processes described by Suny in *The Making of the Georgian Nation*.

⁴⁷ Austin Jersild and Neli Melkadze, "The Dilemmas of Enlightenment in the Eastern Borderlands: The Theater and Library in Tbilisi," *Kritika* 3: 1 (2002): 27-49.

⁴⁸ My views on Baltic distinctiveness have been informed by conversations with David Ilmar Beecher.

⁴⁹ For a related argument on occupational specialization among Italian Americans contributing to the persistence of a distinctive ethnic identity, see Daniel J. Monti, Jr., "Some Sort of Americans: The Working and Reworking of Italian American Ethnicity in the United States" in *The Review of Italian American Studies*, 89-102.

⁵⁰ Alexander Gerschenkron, "Economic Backwardness in Historical Perspective," in *Economic Backwardness in Historical Perspective*, ed. Alexander Gerschenkron (Cambridge: Harvard University

substituted for class in ordering Soviet society, and that the goods and cultures of domestic nationalities served as replacements for their foreign, bourgeois counterparts. Internal diasporas from the Soviet periphery occupied the place once held by tsarist bureaucrats in running the state, Georgian food replaced French food as the cuisine of sophistication, and Soviet internal diversity was substituted for foreign internationalism on stage and screen.

The Georgians were far from the largest internal diaspora in the Soviet Union, but their overrepresentation in important political, cultural, and economic roles gave them a prominence far beyond their numerically small population. While the Georgian population in Moscow and other important Soviet cities grew over the course of the twentieth century, it lagged behind that of other Soviet nationalities. The 1989 census, which reflected their largest population size in the Soviet period, registered only 19,608 Georgians in the Soviet capital. By contrast, there were 252,670 Ukrainians, 174,728 Jews, 73,005 Belarussians, 43,989 Armenians, and 20,727 Azeris then living in Moscow.⁵¹ Granted, tabulating official registration in Moscow was only one way of counting internal diasporas that were highly mobile and able to establish political connections, attend conferences, perform on tour, and trade in markets in the Soviet capital without taking up permanent residence there.⁵² In addition to occupational specialization in such visible roles, the Georgian presence was so noticeable because Georgian ethnic difference was performed loudly and colorfully, and was manifest in both official representations and unofficial ones, including an entire subgenre of Soviet humor that emphasized Georgian difference as a way of commenting on broader conditions in Soviet society.⁵³

Indeed, Soviet domestic internationalism had its unofficial as well as its official forms, and the two were often closely related in the way that internal diasporas were perceived and in turn promoted themselves among the broader population. The “friendship of the peoples” (*druzhba narodov*) was perhaps the most familiar paradigm of official Soviet domestic internationalism, represented in countless monuments, including the fountain at the Exhibition of Economic Achievements (VDNKh) in Moscow, which featured statues of each of the main Soviet nationalities, each with its own individual features. VDNKh was divided into pavilions for each constituent republic, with their respective national goods and examples of national costume and culture. National distinctiveness was officially defined by what each nationality contributed to the larger Union.

Outside the VDNKh, the formation of stock characters based on stereotypes of ethnic traits intersected with the officially-sanctioned emphasis on national difference. Each nation not only had its own official national dress, dance, language, and food, it also had its own tacitly understood characteristics and personality traits, both positive and

Press, 1966), 5-31; Ken Jowitt, “Soviet Neotraditionalism: The Political Corruption of a Leninist Regime,” *Europe-Asia Studies* 35: 3 (1983): 275-297.

⁵¹ Rabochii arkhiv Goskostata Rossii, Tablitsa 9s, “Raspredelenie naseleniia po natsional’nosti i rodnomu iazyku,” cited online in *Demoskop*, accessed March 11, 2011, http://demoscope.ru/weekly/ssp/rus_nac_89.php?reg=18.

⁵² In addition, official registration in Moscow in the Soviet period was often hard to come by, so the census data did not include nationalities unofficially residing in the Soviet capital.

⁵³ On this variety of Soviet humor, see Emil A. Draitser, *Taking Penguins to the Movies: Ethnic Humor in Russia* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1998).

negative.⁵⁴ Popular ethnography was based on a collection of stereotypes that often reflected, however distortedly, the realities of cultural difference among diverse nationalities and the respective political, economic, and cultural niches found by these nationalities as they arrived in the Soviet capital.⁵⁵ Unofficial but widely disseminated anecdotes often intersected with official representations. The fact that Georgians were officially celebrated as flamboyant entertainers made it relatively easy to imagine them as gregarious tricksters and speculators who brought their distinctive style of performance to the marketplace. Official and unofficial representations also informed popular understanding of what constituted typical and atypical specializations for an ethnic group. Soviet citizens traded jokes about clever Jews and Armenians, taciturn Baltics, naïve but crafty Georgians, and benighted Chukchi. Unexpected roles were as important as expected ones: just as one might be surprised to encounter an Estonian toastmaster, one might not anticipate meeting a Georgian janitor.

While the exoticized representation of the “Other” has been identified as a linchpin of imperialism, perceived ethnic difference could also be employed as a form of reputational capital by nationalities themselves.⁵⁶ The Georgians cultivated and manipulated the Soviet mythology of ethnic difference, engaging in autoethnography and skilled acts of self-representation within the context of official and unofficial Soviet domestic internationalism. Among the Soviet Union’s internal diasporas, no group was better at performing otherness, and at doing so for their own benefit.

The Georgian Diaspora in the Soviet Union

The following chapters examine how the Georgian diaspora employed otherness in ways both familiar and strange at different stages in Soviet history. While the chapters are chronologically and thematically diverse, and focus on different groups within a larger Georgian diaspora, they all rely on common explanatory factors to account for Georgian success in politics, culture, economics, and intellectual life. The chapters illustrate how Georgian prominence rested on the unique qualities of Georgian culture, which in turn informed and shaped personal and institutional diaspora networks outside of Georgia. The dissertation traces the way that these networks expanded and prospered by laying claim to physical as well as symbolic resources in a homeland that lay within Soviet borders. Finally, the dissertation shows how the Georgian diaspora built on its past successes, and explores the way that their achievements in the Soviet period were the outcome of a longer-term historical trajectory that stretched back to the imperial period and continued until 1991.

Georgia's distinctive culture gave members of the diaspora an exceptional ability to employ their familiarity and strangeness in convincing displays of otherness. While all identities, national and otherwise, are, in a sense, performative, Georgian culture

⁵⁴ The importance of “psychological make-up” in the articulation of national difference was emphasized by Stalin himself. I. V. Stalin, *Marksizm i natsional’nyi vopros* (Moscow: Politizdat, 1950), 51.

⁵⁵ Here, I must agree with Yuri Slezkine that representations, even in an imperial setting, are not simply determined by the “gross political fact” of domination, but do bear some correspondence to real cultural difference. See Slezkine, *Arctic Mirrors: Russia and the Small Peoples of the North* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994).

⁵⁶ The linkage between exoticized representation and imperialism was first definitively argued by Edward W. Said in *Orientalism* (New York: Random House, 1979), and elaborated by him in *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Random House, 1993).

accorded a special place to public performance. In Georgian society, social bonds were affirmed openly and often, personal loyalty prized above, and often intertwined with, institutional affiliation, and social status unstable and based on a constant game of showmanship.⁵⁷ Georgian performance was not only explicitly visible, it was also expressly lyrical. It centered around rituals of singing and toasting, and prestige was accorded to those who could compete for status while carrying one part of a polyphonic tune or offering a tasteful and appropriate toast around the table. The culture of oration that celebrated the Georgian *tamada* (toastmaster) also engendered skillful politicians, just as the pervasive Georgian emphasis on lyricism helped create an artistic milieu based around skilled self-representation.

The Soviet period was not the first time that local Georgian cultural practices were articulated in a broader imperial context. In the territories that came to comprise modern Georgia, cultural distinctiveness endured even as Georgian elites demonstrated flexibility in integrating with foreign imperial structures. Absorption into the Ottoman and Persian empires led to the conversion of leading Georgian noble families to Islam; at the same time, these families remained ethnically distinctive among the Ottoman and Persian service elite, and stayed connected to political events in their homeland.⁵⁸ Under Russian imperial rule, the formerly Persianized Georgian elite of Tbilisi eagerly joined the Russian court and dressed in the latest European fashion at balls and operas organized by Russian administrators.⁵⁹ At the same time, Russian rule stimulated the development of nationalism in the nineteenth century and led to the creation of new national forms to emphasize Georgian distinctiveness. Yet Georgian nationalism generally meant cultural autonomy within the Russian Empire rather than political sovereignty, at least until Georgia was effectively abandoned by Russia in the tumult of 1917.⁶⁰ In the Soviet period, the Georgian diaspora similarly articulated difference while embracing a broader imperial mission. Their flexibility and adaptability were tactics of survival for a population who had lived for centuries among diverse empires, and their ability to identify important niches of specialization allowed them to pursue imperial participation on their own terms. While they could not change the imperial landscape they inhabited, they could choose the terms of their engagement with it.

The fact that Georgian culture had long existed in an imperial context made it particularly useful in the Soviet Union. Personalized networks, openly affirmed in established rituals and encoded with an elaborate set of obligations, allowed Georgians to effectively to serve local loyalties and the Soviet state at the same time. These networks intersected with Soviet institutions, ensuring the effective dissemination of information and the the cultivation of strong patronage ties. As it had for centuries under imperial

⁵⁷ Gerald Mars and Yochanan Altman, "The Cultural Bases of Soviet Georgia's Second Economy," 546-60. Note that while Mars and Altman focus on explicitly male "showmanship," Georgian women also embodied a distinctive style of public performance as entertainers in the Soviet period.

⁵⁸ For a study of Georgians and other Caucasians in Ottoman imperial service, see Erik R. Scott, "Ottoman Imperial Identities Between Istanbul and the Caucasus" *Journal of Associated Graduates in Near Eastern Studies* 12: 2 (Spring 2007): 3-29.

⁵⁹ On the culture and habits of the Georgian elite under Persian rule and in the first years of Russian rule, see David Marshall Lang, *The Last Years of the Georgian Monarchy, 1658-1832* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1957).

⁶⁰ Stephen Jones, *Socialism in Georgian Colors: The European Road to Social-Democracy, 1883-1917* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005), 260-262.

rule, the Georgian effort to preserve a sense of national distinctiveness centered less around formal political organization than it did on the maintenance of cultural practices among a dispersed population, especially the use of the Georgian language. With its own distinct alphabet, Georgian was in some ways a sacred language, linked to the Georgian Christian Orthodox tradition, and famously praised by the tenth-century Georgian monk Ioane Zosime, who, as an expatriate in Sinai fleeing the Arab conquest of Georgia, wrote that "every secret is buried in this [the Georgian] language."⁶¹ A language with a high culture literature as well as a language associated with folk culture, it was also indeed a good language for "burying secrets." Unlike many other languages in the Soviet Union, it was virtually unintelligible to outsiders when spoken and its alphabet was indecipherable when written. It functioned as an effective code language among members of the diaspora, reinforcing a sense of belonging by including Georgians who were in on the conversation, while excluding—sometimes purposefully—others who lay outside the community.

Yet although they preserved their national culture, members of the Georgian diaspora were comfortable switching between the language of their homeland and the imperial tongue. While the Georgians, according to the 1959 census, were the least likely nationality in the Soviet Union to consider Russian as their native language, members of the diaspora embraced Russian as a means of universal communication without neglecting Georgian as a language of particularized exchange.⁶² The Georgian diaspora was able to present their otherness in an intelligible manner because they were fluent in the culture of the host society as well as in their native culture.

In the Soviet period, even more so than in the past, the Georgian diaspora capitalized on having a homeland within the confines of a larger empire. For political figures, the homeland provided a power base for broader ambitions and offered a steady supply of loyal cadres to serve those already in Moscow. For culinary specialists, Georgia supplied recipes and ingredients otherwise unavailable for the Soviet palate. For cultural entrepreneurs, the Georgian republic was home to institutions that specialized in the performance of national culture for a Soviet-wide audience. For Georgian traders, the homeland provided marketable goods like fruit, flowers, wine, tea, and tobacco. Yet the resources of the Georgian republic were not simply human, institutional, and physical; they were also highly symbolic, in that their distinctiveness was widely known, officially celebrated, and emphasized by a diaspora that profited from otherness.

Compared with other imperial settings, the Soviet context made Georgian difference especially significant. First, the Soviet state, more so than other empires, explicitly affirmed its multiethnic character. Second, the relatively closed nature of the Soviet Union not only meant that national cultural diversity had to be domestic in nature; it also meant that a diverse range of economic goods had to be sought within Soviet borders. As a result, Georgians benefitted as much from the internal economic diversification that gave them dominance in key sectors of the Soviet economy as they

⁶¹ Translated in Donald Rayfield. *The Literature of Georgia: A History* (Surrey (UK): Curzon Press, 2000), 19-20.

⁶² According to the census, only 1.3 percent of Georgians in the Soviet Union (including those within and outside the Georgian republic) considered Russian as their native language, compared with 8.3 percent of Armenians, 12.2 percent of Ukrainians, 15.3 percent of Belarussians, and 76.4 percent of Jews. A. A. Isupov, *Natsional'nyi sostav naseleniia SSSR (po itogam perepisi 1959 g.)* (Moscow: Statistika, 1961), 34.

did from the domestic internationalism that provided a broader audience for those adept at emphasizing ideologically sanctioned national distinctiveness.

The story of the Georgian diaspora is not only one of imperial continuity, but also of radical change. Late imperial Georgia was a place of fervent socialist politics, rapid economic modernization, rural unrest, and, at the same time, cultural renaissance.⁶³ It was inhabited by rebellious seminarians, an emergent working class, peasants striving for educational opportunities, and disenchanting nobles. It was at the center of political debates over the proper course of socialist revolution in a multiethnic context, as well of artistic and cultural experimentation among poets, playwrights, and musicians interested in combining national, imperial, and European forms, or surmounting them altogether.

In the Soviet period, this remarkable ferment from the Caucasus reached and transformed the Soviet capital. Political figures, artists, entrepreneurs, and intellectuals from Georgia may not have always seen each other as members of a common diaspora, but all sprang from this shared context. A migration of Georgian people, culture, goods, and ideas that had begun in the imperial period gathered steam as the Soviet Union evolved. In some cases, past Soviet successes generated future ones. The prominence of Georgian political figures, for example, meant high-placed institutional patrons for Georgian song and dance ensembles, restaurants, sports teams, and economic enterprises. The relatively privileged position of these institutions allowed them to grow and develop in ways that helped them outlast Georgian political success and endure until the end of the Soviet period. In a pattern typical to many empires, success led to success, before ultimately turning into discontent.

While the chapters that follow proceed chronologically, they should be understood as episodic, rather than comprehensive, focusing on the leading role played by Georgians in whatever aspect of life mattered most at a given period in Soviet history. In each case, they link the story of Georgian success to the evolution of the Soviet state and the development of new demands in Soviet society. To better understand the ways that Georgian success rested on a combination of familiarity and strangeness, the study seeks, wherever possible, to place the Georgians in the context of the Soviet Union's other diasporas.

The second chapter, *Georgian Revolutionaries Between the Caucasus and the Kremlin*, looks at how the Russian Revolution was made mainly by non-Russians, and encompassed a series of national revolutions. It argues that revolutionary ferment was greatest among groups for whom class revolution and national revolution coincided, and describes how Jews, Poles, and Georgians welcomed the revolution with exceptional enthusiasm. Among those groups now at the helm of Soviet power, the presence of Georgians was particularly striking. By examining letters, diaries, and memoirs, this chapter looks at the “Caucasus group,” of which Joseph Stalin was the leading member. It explores what held this group together, how they saw themselves, and how they were seen by others in ways both familiar and strange. In so doing, it considers what made Georgian political networks different and in some ways more effective than those of other groups competing for power in the Soviet Union. Finally, it looks at the relationship

⁶³ For an illustrative study of the way that political revolution and cultural renaissance can coincide, see Kenneth B. Moss, *Jewish Renaissance in the Russian Revolution* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009).

between Georgian political dominance and the dissemination of Georgian culture at the Union-wide level.

The third chapter, *Edible Ethnicity: How Georgian Cuisine Conquered the Soviet Table*, continues this examination, looking at Stalin as a veritable *tamada*-in-chief who conducted business around banquet tables in the Kremlin laden with Georgian food and drink. The chapter follows the dissemination of Georgian dishes and wines, accompanied by distinct dining and drinking rituals, from the upper echelons of Soviet power to the broader elite thanks to restaurants like the Aragvi, located in central Moscow, run by a group of Georgians, and supplied directly with food and drink by the Georgian republic's Ministry of Trade. It shows how following World War II, and even more so after a renewed focus on the quality of life and the Soviet consumer in the late 1950s, Georgian dining traditions percolated downward into Soviet society thanks to the efforts of Georgian networks within the government system of *Obshchestvennoe pitanie* (Public Food Service). Though a careful reading of memoirs, government documents, and the journal of the Public Food Service, this chapter tells the story of the creation of a multiethnic Soviet diet, and explains how it was that of all the diverse cuisines in the Soviet Union's multiethnic kitchen, Georgian food and drink went farthest in conquering the Soviet table.

The fourth chapter, *Dances of Difference: Georgian Entertainers on the Soviet Stage*, looks at the post-Stalinist redefinition of the Georgian republic's artistic traditions. Freed from Stalinist constraints but benefiting from several decades of institutional development, Georgian performers seized upon new opportunities for cultural entrepreneurship created by Khrushchev's Thaw. Their native republic, steeped in distinct artistic practices that predated Soviet rule and sheltered from the censors in Moscow, provided an ideal base for their cultural endeavors, but the Moscow stage became their true home. As recognizable ethnics, Georgians were desired not only by domestic audiences, but were also sent abroad as representatives of the Soviet ideal of multiethnic harmony. This chapter combines the approaches of social and cultural history, using biographical materials to paint a generational portrait of Georgian entertainers in the postwar period, while examining how Georgians mastered self-representation through performative displays of nationality.

The fifth chapter, *Ethnic Entrepreneurs in the Imperial Marketplace: Georgians and the Soviet Union's Second Economy*, looks at the vital role played by the Georgians in the informal economy of the Soviet Union during the rule of Leonid Brezhnev. At a time of official economic stagnation, Soviet citizens increasingly depended on personal networks and turned to the burgeoning second economy to obtain rare and sometimes vital goods and services. Within the second economy, the Georgian diaspora was a numerically small but dominant group, ubiquitous in markets throughout the Soviet Union. They provided the goods necessary for the continued functioning of the Soviet economy, but had an uneasy relationship with the Soviet state. Their economic clout was matched and sometimes exceeded by a representational prominence that made the Georgian trader a fixture of contemporary Soviet literature and jokes. Based on Russian and Georgian-language archival research and interviews, including materials from the files of the Georgian KGB, this chapter seeks to explain the unique role played by Georgian ethnic entrepreneurs in the "imperial marketplace" of the Soviet Union.

The sixth chapter, *The Georgian Intelligentsia and the Limits of Soviet Empire*, explores how Georgian success bred discontent with the limits that Soviet rule placed on Georgian professional advancement, economic pursuits, and cultural expression. Perhaps of all Soviet cinematic traditions, Georgian film best portrayed the stifling effects of Brezhnev-era *zastoi* (stagnation) on intellectual life, pushing the limits of artistic expression with tragicomic and ironic cultural critique before moving toward an outright condemnation of the Soviet system by the mid-1980s. Georgian films reflected the cosmopolitan aspirations of the Georgian intelligentsia, appealing to universal themes and shared intellectual concerns in a Georgian accent. While preceding chapters consider skillful performances of Georgian otherness, this chapter examines the Georgian intelligentsia's mastery of the universal language of Soviet high culture and their emergent critique of the limitations of Soviet empire. Although they were nurtured by the Soviet state, the ambitions of Georgia's sizable intelligentsia eventually created a forceful movement for independence.

The epilogue, *The End of the Empire of Diasporas*, argues that despite the Georgian embrace of independence in 1991, the Georgian diaspora succeeded not despite, but because of the relatively closed, internally diverse nature of the Soviet empire. For a time, the Soviet empire seemed to offer the ideal forum for this rooted diaspora with cosmopolitan aspirations. With the demise of the Soviet empire, the Georgians faced new dilemmas as they were transformed from an internal Soviet group into a transnational population. Taking the story of the Georgian diaspora up to the present day, the epilogue describes how the legacy of the Georgian diaspora's Soviet experience continues to shape the politics, culture, and economics of nationality in contemporary Eurasia.

Chapter 2

Georgian Revolutionaries Between the Caucasus and the Kremlin

Life and Loyalty in the Revolutionary Underground

On September 29, 1913, the Georgian Bolshevik Grigorii “Sergo” Ordzhonikidze wrote to his brother from the confines of the Schlüsselburg prison, an island fortress in St. Petersburg.¹ Ordzhonikidze had been imprisoned the previous year, caught up in a wave of arrests of revolutionaries in the Russian Empire’s capital. This was not the first time that Ordzhonikidze sat inside the walls of a tsarist prison. At twenty-nine, Ordzhonikidze, or “Comrade Sergo,” as he was known among his fellow radicals, was already a veteran revolutionary. Born to an impoverished noble family in a small village in western Georgia in 1886, he joined the Bolshevik wing of the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party (RSDLP) at seventeen, while studying to be a doctor’s assistant (*fel’dsher*) in Tbilisi.² In Georgia’s largest city, he joined up with an especially radical Bolshevik circle. He found a mentor in Simon “Kamo” Ter-Petrosian, who would later gain fame throughout the Caucasus for orchestrating a daring bank robbery in the center of Tbilisi, an effort to raise funds for the Bolsheviks that Lenin himself applauded.³

Under Kamo’s influence, young Ordzhonikidze traded his nascent medical career for the dangers and passions of the radical socialist underground. He would spend the next fourteen years in and out of prison, agitating for revolution abroad and at home under a series of false passports. He was arrested for gun-running along the Black Sea coast in 1905 and for helping organize a May Day parade in Baku in 1907. In a Baku prison, he befriended a friend of Kamo’s from Gori, Ioseb “Soso” Dzhughashvili, the man the world would later know as Joseph Stalin. The revolutionary path took Ordzhonikidze far beyond his native Caucasus region. Exiled to Siberia in 1909, he made a daring escape, ending up in Persia, where for a brief period he served as an important link between Persian revolutionaries and a far-flung network of Bolshevik radicals, including Lenin’s wife, Nadezhda Krupskaya, who was then in Paris.⁴

Ordzhonikidze was a shining example of a young non-Russian from the empire’s periphery who now rose through the ranks of the party’s center, combining an ideological commitment to socialism with the willingness to carry out the dangerous work of fomenting revolution. He personified all of the qualities Lenin was looking for in his effort to recruit non-Russians to the radical cause. Ordzhonikidze was invited to attend the Prague conference of the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party in 1912, where the Bolsheviks decisively split from the Mensheviks and formed their own party organization. At the conference, Lenin spoke at length about the need for the diverse

¹ The letter, along with Ordzhonikidze’s prison diary, is preserved at RGASPI (Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History), f. 85, op. 3, d. 68, ll. 1-4.

² According to Ordzhonikidze’s party autobiography, RGASPI, f. 124, op. 1, d. 1426, ll. 5-6.

³ Oleg V. Khlevniuk, *In Stalin’s Shadow: The Career of “Sergo” Ordzhonikidze*, ed. Donald J. Raileigh, trans. David J. Nordlander (Armonk and London: M. E. Sharpe, 1995), 10.

⁴ RGASPI, f. 124, op. 1, d. 1426, ll. 5-6.

ethnic groups of the Russian Empire to join together in revolutionary struggle.⁵ While Lenin criticized the failure of the Jewish *Bund* and the Polish and Latvian Social Democrats to coordinate their efforts with the party's central authorities, he looked more favorably on the Georgian Bolsheviks. Although the Georgian revolutionary movement sprang from a distinctive cultural milieu, Georgian radicals, both Mensheviks and Bolsheviks, were remarkably well integrated into the broader struggle for socialism across the Russian Empire.

At the conference, Ordzhonikidze was appointed to the party's Central Committee, and shortly after sent to Petersburg to organize the Central Committee's Russian bureau. It was only a matter of months before he was arrested again and held in the Schlüsselburg prison, where he now sat, composing a letter to his brother. Ordzhonikidze's prison correspondence reveals radical networks that ran within families, as well as among tight-knit groups of Georgian revolutionaries. For revolutionaries operating underground, the risk of arrest meant that loyalty was prized and the danger of betrayal always present.⁶ For these reasons, ideological commitment was wedded to a sense of symbolic—and sometimes genetic—fraternity among the predominantly male socialists of the Caucasus, a region where idealized male friendship was celebrated in poetry and practices of adoptive kinship were deep-rooted.⁷ In this case, Sergo Ordzhonikidze could rely on his older brother Papulia, who was also active in the revolutionary movement. Sergo was concerned about his own deteriorating health in prison, and feared that his condition would only worsen with his impending transfer to Iakutiia, in eastern Siberia. He asked his brother to appeal for help from Nikolai "Karlo" Chkheidze, a prominent figure among the Georgian Mensheviks and a representative to the State Duma. He inserted a brief Georgian-language note for Chkheidze, pleading for assistance from a fellow Georgian. Despite the factional difference that separated Ordzhonikidze from Chkheidze, the networks of Georgian Bolsheviks and Mensheviks were often intertwined, since they shared roots in the burgeoning Georgian intelligentsia.

Ordzhonikidze's hope of avoiding exile was not to be realized. As the First World War engulfed Europe, he remained locked in the Schlüsselburg prison, and in 1915 he was sent to Iakutiia. He used his time in prison, however, to prepare himself for the revolution through careful study. A glance at his prison diary reveals the voracious reading habits of someone who sought to expand his education far beyond that which he had received as a doctor's assistant in Georgia. His notes reveal his interest in Russian history, the French Revolution, and, of course, in Marx and Engels. Like many other Georgians, he was interested in what the revolution would mean for the Empire's non-

⁵ Lenin expressed this sentiment clearly in his resolution, "Ob otsutstvii delegatov ot natsional'nykh tsentrov na obshchepartiinoi konferentsii." V. I. Lenin, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii* (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo politicheskoi literatury, 1961), 21: 134-135.

⁶ The risk of betrayal was especially present in this case. In prison, Ordzhonikidze also appealed for help from Roman Malinovskii, a high-ranking Bolshevik who would soon be exposed as a tsarist double agent. See Robert Service, *Stalin: A Biography* (London: Pan Books, 2005), 108.

⁷ In *The Literature of Georgia: A History* (Surrey (UK): Curzon Press, 2000), 77, Donald Rayfield writes that the poetry of Georgia's Rustaveli "puts male friendship and courtly love on the same plane." Ronald Grigor Suny explores the theme of Caucasian male friendship further in his forthcoming manuscript on the young Stalin. For a comparative study of practices of fictive and adoptive kinship, see Peter Parkes, "Milk kinship in Southeast Europe. Alternative social structures and foster relations in the Caucasus and the Balkans," *Social Anthropology* 12: 3: 341-358.

Russian nationalities. As befitted a future manager of the Soviet economy, he studied the details of meat, milk, and grain production in Russia. Yet, he also consumed the heroic tales of Jack London, the romantic poetry of Lord Byron, Dostoevsky's novels, and the masterpieces of Georgian literature.⁸ Ordzhonikidze's prison diary recorded the cosmopolitan intellectual and cultural currents that swept him and so many other Georgians into the revolutionary movement.

A Revolution of Outsiders

The revolution in Russia was made by outsiders like Ordzhonikidze: impoverished aristocrats, provincial intellectuals, and ethnic minorities from across the vast Eurasian empire. Revolutionary fervor was often greatest among groups for whom class revolution and national revolution coincided, and the so-called Russian Revolution in fact encompassed a series of national revolutions.⁹ Jews, Latvians, Poles and Georgians all joined the socialist cause with exceptional enthusiasm.¹⁰ As the revolution was institutionalized, members of ethnic diasporas were overrepresented in very visible positions of power throughout the new Soviet state.¹¹ Historians have devoted considerable attention to the special role played by Jews in the early Soviet Communist Party, and chronicled the rise of the Latvian Riflemen as Lenin's Praetorian Guard.¹² However, in power few groups so visibly affirmed their membership in an ethnic diaspora—through appearance, shared rituals, and linguistic ties—as did the Georgians. Their revolution had both rural roots and empire-wide aspirations. Georgian radicals arose from the distinctive social and cultural ferment of late imperial Georgia, yet were closely integrated into the multiethnic struggle for revolution across the Caucasus, as well as being key figures in the central leadership of both Mensheviks and Bolsheviks. Their aspirations were as much a product of the opportunities for mobility and cultural exchange made possible by Georgia's unique place within the Russian Empire as they were driven by social and national grievances against tsarist authority.

⁸ RGASPI, f. 85, op. 3, d. 68, ll. 1-4.

⁹ On the close relationship between class and national revolution in the Caucasus, see the groundbreaking work of Ronald Grigor Suny, *The Baku Commune, 1917-1918: Class and Nationality in the Russian Revolution* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972). Suny offers a comparative view of this subject in *The Revenge of the Past: Nationalism, Revolution, and the Collapse of the Soviet Union* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993).

¹⁰ Among the relatively more voluminous literature on Jews, Poles, and Latvians in the socialist movement, see: Henry Jack Tobias, *The Jewish Bund in Russia from its Origins to 1905* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1972); Joshua D. Zimmerman, *Poles, Jews, and the Politics of Nationality: The Bund and the Polish Socialist Party in Late Tsarist Russia, 1892-1914* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2004); and Andrew Ezergailis, *The 1917 Revolution in Latvia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1974).

¹¹ The results of the 1927 Party Census were revealing. While one might expect the largest republics to have had the most representation, contrary to population figures, there were more Jews than Belarussians, and among the top ten most represented nationalities, Armenians, Georgians, Latvians, and Poles figured prominently (despite the small size of the Armenian and Georgian republics and the fact that the last two groups, along with the Jews, lacked a homeland within Soviet borders). *Statisticheskii otdel TsK VKP(b), Vsesoiuznaia partiinaia perepis' 1927 goda* (Moscow, 1927), 7: 6-7.

¹² On the Jews, see O. V. Budnitskii, *Evrei i russkaia revoliutsiia: materialy i isledovaniia* (Moscow and Jerusalem: Gesharim, 1999) and Yuri Slezkine, *The Jewish Century* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2004). On the Latvian Riflemen, see Geoffrey Swain, "The Disillusioning of the Revolution's Praetorian Guard: The Latvian Riflemen, Summer – Autumn 1918," *Europe-Asia Studies* 51: 4 (June 1999): 667-686.

The rapid rise of Georgians throughout the various branches of the revolutionary movement was stunning. Georgian Mensheviks initially headed the Petrograd Soviet and rose to key positions in the Provisional Government, while Georgian Bolsheviks accompanied Lenin back to Russia on his sealed train and helped him seize power in the Russian capital. After October 1917, Georgian Mensheviks established an independent social democracy in their native country, while Georgian Bolsheviks ultimately led the Red Army's invasion of Georgia in 1921 and were critical to establishing Soviet power throughout the Caucasus. The revolution pitted Georgian against Georgian, yet from the turmoil of the Civil War a core group of Georgian Bolsheviks emerged, assuming leadership positions in Moscow and leading the way forward during the Great Transformation. They ascended together with Stalin in the 1920s, sharing his cultural background and ideological dedication; these, together with Caucasian bonds of loyalty and friendship, made them highly effective foot soldiers in the revolutionary underground. These same qualities proved well-suited to their eventual careers as managers of a Soviet state in which the personal was political and politics itself was personalized.¹³ The revolution they helped make brought the periphery to the heart of a reconstituted Eurasian empire.

Ordzhonikidze's career illustrates the remarkable ascendance of Georgians in the revolutionary movement and their place at the helm of the early Soviet state. Locked in prison in 1913, he scarcely could have imagined that in 1917, four years later, he would help launch the Bolshevik takeover in Petrograd, that he would lead the violent struggle during the ensuing Civil War as commissar for Ukraine, and that in 1921, eight years later, he would return to Georgia at the front of the invading Red Army. He became Stalin's most trusted deputy, a member of the Politburo by 1926 and the first Commissar of Heavy Industry in 1932. He was an energetic manager at the center of the effort to build socialism. Nevertheless, Ordzhonikidze's meteoric rise was made possible by attributes and skills he possessed even in 1913. A product of a Georgian revolution within the Russian revolution, he was well-prepared to administer a multiethnic state, and skillfully relied on an intimate circle of trusted friends—many of them fellow Georgians—to accomplish his goals. He owed much to his personal connection to Stalin in particular, yet he also served as patron to upwardly mobile party cadres, often handpicked from his native Georgia. The success of Ordzhonikidze and other Georgians lent a Caucasian coloring to Soviet political life in the 1930s. And yet, by the decade's end, Ordzhonikidze would commit suicide, his trusted cadres would be shot or imprisoned, and many of Stalin's other Georgian comrades-in-arms would be swept up in the purges that decimated the ranks of the Old Bolsheviks, shattering the lives of those who had made revolution.

There has been an abundance of literature on Stalin and his circle, in which the Great Leader has been presented as a despotic tyrant, a master of bureaucratic politics, a committed Bolshevik, a *khoziain* (manager) of the economy, and also a man from the borderlands who emerged out of a specific Georgian context.¹⁴ Similarly, there has been

¹³ For one of the most recent studies of the personalization of politics in the Soviet Union, see the J. Arch Getty and Oleg V. Naumov, *Yezhov: The Rise of Stalin's 'Iron Fist'* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2008).

¹⁴ To cite several examples in a vast body of popular and scholarly literature, see Robert Conquest, *Stalin: Breaker of Nations* (New York: Viking, 1991) on Stalin as a despotic tyrant; Isaac Deutscher, *Stalin: A*

much written about the importance of informal ties, patronage, *blat*, and personal networks in the Soviet state, although the literature on ethnic networks tends to focus on the late Soviet period.¹⁵ Ethnic networks were in fact critical in the late imperial and early Soviet period, and were a pathway for young Georgian Bolsheviks to advance their careers and achieve high-ranking positions in the Soviet state. These networks emerged from the revolutionary underground and the Civil War to occupy a central place in the early Soviet state. They were composed of highly literate and mobile specialists who filled the state's bureaucracy and were the ideal representatives of a new, consciously multiethnic political order, linking center with periphery. This chapter will place Stalin in the context of his network, and also look beyond him to a tightly bound group of revolutionaries held together by shared history, revolutionary beliefs, and fluency in a common culture.

Following the story of a generation of Georgian revolutionaries from the late nineteenth century to the 1930s, this chapter traces their dramatic journey from the Caucasus to the Kremlin. It begins by situating Georgian radicals in the historical and cultural context of late imperial Georgia. It then tracks Georgian revolutionary networks as they expanded, first beyond Georgia as the vanguard of a multiethnic political movement in the Caucasus, and finally reaching the imperial center at the start of the Bolshevik Revolution. The chapter will show how Georgian Bolsheviks disdained the traditions of their homeland and oversaw the violent Sovietization of Georgia, yet remained bound by distinctly Caucasian practices of friendship and mutual obligation. Their close personal bonds became a critical political asset as these revolutionaries from the periphery helped build the early Soviet state. Ultimately, however, these bonds would be tested as the balance shifted from horizontal friendship circles of Old Bolsheviks to the vertical imposition of power by the late 1930s.

The Georgian Intelligentsia in the Russian Empire

Late imperial Georgia was an incubator for radicals across the socialist spectrum. Among the diverse and often divided Georgian socialist movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, Georgian Bolsheviks represented a distinct strand that went the furthest in uniting local grievances with the desire for empire-wide transformation. Although they sought destruction of the old order in their native land, the rooted revolutionary cosmopolitanism that they espoused had its origins in the intellectual world of the nineteenth-century Georgian intelligentsia.

Political Biography (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966) on Stalin as a representative and master of the new Soviet bureaucracy; Robert Service, *Stalin: A Biography* (London: Pan Books, 2005) on Stalin as a committed Marxist; Iurii Mukhin, *Stalin: khoziain Sovetskogo Soiuza* (Moscow: Algoritm, 2008) on Stalin as a modernizer and economic manager; and Alfred J. Rieber, "Stalin: Man of the Borderlands," *American Historical Review* 106: 5 (December 2001): 1651-1691.

¹⁵ Gerald Easter's *Reconstructing the State: Personal Networks and Elite Identity in Soviet Russia* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000) is an insightful work but does not thoroughly examine ethnic networks. John P. Willerton's *Patronage and Politics in the USSR* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992) considers ethnic networks but focuses on the Brezhnev period. Though limited in scope to regional developments, a valuable exception is Charles H. Fairbanks, Jr. "Clientelism and Higher Politics in Georgia, 1949-1953," in *Transcaucasia: Nationalism, and Social Change*, ed. Ronald Grigor Suny (Ann Arbor: Michigan Slavic Publications, 1983), 339-368.

Since Russia's annexation of the eastern Georgian kingdom of Kartli-Kakheti in 1801 and the subsequent consolidation of Russian power in the western Georgian principalities of Guria and Mingrelia and the kingdom of Imereti, Georgians had occupied a unique position among the diverse peoples of the empire. Russian rule eroded Georgia's political autonomy but created new opportunities for Georgia's sizable nobility, which made up at least five percent of the population.¹⁶ Orthodox Christians in a predominantly Muslim region, the Georgians had lost their own kingdom but became an imperial service elite; subjects of the tsar, but also the tsar's agents as the ethnographers and generals who mapped and led the expansion of the Russian Empire throughout the Caucasus.¹⁷ From the outset, they capitalized on their newfound position as members of a growing empire and as cultural brokers in a diverse region.

A Georgian elite that had just decades earlier been oriented toward the Persian court shifted its gaze northward to Russia, and through Russia to the world of the European high culture. By the middle of the nineteenth century, Tbilisi had a library and a European-style theater that performed plays in Russian as well as original productions in Georgian.¹⁸ A new generation of Georgians traveled to Russia in pursuit of knowledge and professional advancement. As students in St. Petersburg in the 1860s, they found themselves at the center of an empire undergoing rapid social transformation in the wake of the emancipation of the serfs. In the exuberant words of one Georgian student, St. Petersburg was the "heart of a new movement" (*ochag novogo dvizheniia*), the place where all of Russia's "intelligence and talent" was gathered.¹⁹ While pursuing their degrees, students wandered the city's "vast, clean, and well-paved streets" and encountered the ideas of Nikolai Chernyshevskii and Dmitrii Pisarev by conversing with these Russian radicals firsthand.²⁰

The nascent Georgian intelligentsia united imperial aspirations with local concerns. Niko Nikoladze, the son of a privileged Georgian family from the provincial capital of Kutaisi, recalled that even as Georgian students socialized with Chernyshevskii in the Russian capital, they lived and studied apart in their own *zemliachestvo* (informal regional association). While they participated fully in Russian intellectual life, *zemliachestvo* members also debated the situation in their native Georgia among

¹⁶ Among them, a member of Georgia's former ruling family, Petre Bagrationi, distinguished himself soon after as a Russian general and died while leading a heroic offensive in the Battle of Borodino in 1812. In 1827, Georgian nobles were declared equal in rank and privilege to Russian nobles. The exact size of Georgia's nobility, with its own intricate categories of rank, is difficult to measure. Ronald Suny puts the number at five percent, while other scholars of Georgian history put the number closer to ten percent, if one includes all categories of nobility. See Ronald Grigor Suny, *The Making of the Georgian Nation* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994), 65-68.

¹⁷ For details on the Georgians' role in aiding Russian expansion in the North Caucasus, see Austin Jersild, *Orientalism and Empire: North Caucasus Mountain Peoples and the Georgian Frontier, 1845-1917* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill – Queen's University Press, 2002).

¹⁸ Austin Jersild and Neli Melkadze, "The Dilemmas of Enlightenment in the Eastern Borderlands: The Theater and Library in Tbilisi" *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 3:1 (2002), 27-49. The Georgian capital was officially known as Tiflis in the Imperial period; the city's name changed to the Georgian-derived Tbilisi in the Soviet period. In the interest of clarity and consistency, I will refer to the city as Tbilisi throughout.

¹⁹ Iakov Mansvetashvili, *Vospominaniia* (Tbilisi: Literatura da khelovneba, 1967), 26.

²⁰ Mansvetashvili, *Vospominaniia*, 25-26.

themselves and performed Georgian plays and folk dances for the other students.²¹ Those who returned to their native land became some of Georgian society's fiercest critics, known in Georgian as the *tergdaleulni* because they had figuratively drunk from the river Terek that separated Russia from Georgia. Comfortable crossing borders and moving between a cosmopolitan and a native context, the Georgian intelligentsia believed that the path toward European modernity ran through Russia, but remained committed to the transformation of their native Georgia.

Educating Georgian Socialists

In the nineteenth century, the drive for learning spread from the noble elite to broader sections of Georgian society, making Georgians among the most educated populations in the Russian Empire.²² As it did among the Empire's Jewish population, education transformed Georgian society and challenged traditional social relations, stirring the particularities of nationalist sentiment and the aspirations of upwardly-mobile professionals, as well as driving the search for universal solutions to local problems.²³ Educational opportunities in Georgia were now available for impoverished nobles and persons of mixed social rank (*raznochintsy*), as well as the children of priests, peasants, and craftsmen. By the late nineteenth century, the conflict between a rapidly growing intellectual class and a reactionary educational policy transformed tsarist schools of higher learning into ideal centers for the recruitment and training of radicals.²⁴ The frustrated aspirations of the new intellectual class led many to socialism and its promise of a radical egalitarianism. This phenomenon could be observed throughout Russia, but in the non-Russian regions of the empire, the suppression of local languages and the close involvement of the central authorities in the administration of local educational institutions spurred further radicalism and placed the "national question" at the forefront of the socialist platform. Socialist ideas grew to be especially popular among nobles from the impoverished estates of western Georgia, a rural society strikingly altered by the advance of international capitalism and the establishment of empire-wide markets for goods.²⁵

Many destitute nobles pursued their education not in St. Petersburg and Moscow, but in provincial universities, trade schools, and seminaries. Sergo Ordzhonikidze left his village in western Georgia to study medicine in Tbilisi, just as the future Bolshevik Tengiz Zhgenti left his nearby western Georgian village to study at Tbilisi's Teaching

²¹ *Iz perepiski N. A. Nikoladze s russkimi i zarubezhnymi literaturno-obshchestvennymi deiatel'iami* (Tbilisi: Izd-vo Tbilisskogo universiteta, 1980), 29.

²² Andreas Kappeler, *The Russian Empire: A Multiethnic History* (Harlow: Longman, 2001), 374. Interestingly, Kappeler also notes that among Christian Orthodox ethnic groups, the literacy gap between men and women was not as great among Georgians as it was among Russians and Ukrainians. Kappeler, 311-312.

²³ For more on the linkages between nationalism and socialism, see Jonathan Frankel, *Prophecy and Politics: Socialism, Nationalism, and the Russian Jews* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981). For details on the intellectual and cultural aspirations of Russia's Jewish intelligentsia, see Kenneth B. Moss, *Jewish Renaissance in the Russian Revolution* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009).

²⁴ For a classic study of this process, see Daniel R. Brower, *Training the Nihilists: Education and Radicalism in Tsarist Russia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1975).

²⁵ The economic and social transformation of rural Georgia is discussed at length in Suny, *The Making of the Georgian Nation*, 96-112, 144-164.

Institute.²⁶ Both came from families so impoverished as to be virtually indistinguishable from the surrounding peasantry save in name and, most likely, a deep sense of shame over their declining position in noble society. In Tbilisi, they found themselves in the administrative center of Russian rule over the Caucasus and in an economically dynamic, multiethnic regional capital. Yet, they likely could not help but notice that in Georgia's largest city, Russians occupied the highest posts of regional administration and the bourgeoisie was overwhelmingly Armenian.²⁷ As a result, many young Georgian students came to believe that socialism would entail national liberation from the intertwined forces of imperial rule and economic exploitation.

Students rallied against teachers, and exchanged allegiance to their parents for fraternal bonds with one another. Radical student groups sprang up throughout Georgia, even outside Tbilisi. The Kutaisi Gymnasium had a thriving secret reading circle (*tsre*, after the Russian *kruzhok*) where students read and discussed radical literature that was smuggled into the country or printed by a growing number of underground presses in Georgia. By the early twentieth century, the regional school even had its own Georgian-language socialist periodical that students printed themselves on an illegal press.²⁸ Shalva Eliava, Mamia Orakhelashvili, Nikolai Kiknadze, and Il'ia Mamulia, all future Bolshevik party leaders, participated actively in the gymnasium's clandestine reading circle. The Kutaisi Gymnasium's student files reveal that school authorities were concerned about these students. Orakhelashvili was reprimanded for several outbursts against his instructors, while Eliava, it was noted, was a "sickly" student who did well in his classes but had a noted tendency to "lie." Still, the authorities did not suspect the extent to which they were already involved in a socialist movement of secret cells and underground meetings that ran throughout the Caucasus.²⁹ Orakhelashvili and Eliava graduated, versed in the arts of concealment and drawn together in friendship and ideological dedication through their participation in illicit political activity.

There was perhaps no greater center of Georgian radicalism, however, than the Orthodox seminaries in Kutaisi and Tbilisi. Throughout the Russian Empire, the clerical estate was in turmoil and radicalism was especially widespread among clergymen's sons.³⁰ Georgian seminaries were further radicalized by the policy of Russification, as Russian authorities continued to restrict the autonomy of the Georgian Orthodox Church, discouraged distinctive Georgian church rituals, restricted the use of the Georgian language, and painted over ancient church frescoes in a country whose Orthodox traditions preceded Russia's by more than six centuries.³¹ Seminarians resented the

²⁶ "Zhgenti, Tengiz Gigoevich" RGASPI, f. 124, op. 1, d. 661, ll. 4-9.

²⁷ Suny, *The Making of the Georgian Nation*, 91-93.

²⁸ "Shalva Eliava (*piradi pondi*)" III Section of the Archive Administration of the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MoIA) of Georgia, f. 8, op. 2, d. 66, ll. 1-5.

²⁹ "Shalva Eliava (*piradi pondi*)" III Section of the Archive Administration of the MoIA of Georgia, f. 8, op. 3, d. 748, ll. 1-5.

³⁰ For an illuminating group portrait of the *popovichi* (clergymen's sons), see Laurie Manchester, *Holy Fathers, Secular Sons: Clergy, Intelligentsia, and the Modern Self in Revolutionary Russia* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2008).

³¹ The Georgian kingdom of Kartli-Iberia was only the second state to adopt Christianity as its official religion (after nearby Armenia) in the year 330, whereas Prince Vladimir of Kiev made Orthodox Christianity the religion of his subjects in 988. The Georgian Orthodox Church was autocephalous until Georgia's incorporation into the Russian Empire. Its history is discussed in David Marshall Lang, *A Modern History of Soviet Georgia* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1962).

restrictions on Georgia's religious expression, even as radical ideas they encountered amidst a harsh institutional culture of rigid hierarchy and corporal discipline converted many into non-believers. The future Georgian Bolshevik leader Filipp Makharadze, characterized the Tbilisi seminary he attended as a "kingdom of scholasticism, lying, and hypocrisy." He wrote: "Before admission to the seminary I was a gentle and obedient student, a model for the seminary fathers... Few would believe that only one year later I would become, first of all, an outspoken opponent of those who kept strict order in the seminary, and, secondly, an atheist."³² In 1890, in coordination with Noe Zhordania, another seminarian from Guria and the future leader of the Georgian Mensheviks, Makharadze led a student strike in protest of the bland and inadequate food served to students. Other student protests against the seminary's rigid code of discipline ran more violent: in 1884, Silva Dzhibladze, the future Menshevik, physically assaulted the rector, and two years later, a seminarian from Gori stabbed the rector to death.³³ Seminarians banded together as brothers in the revolt against their Church fathers.³⁴

In the wake of these protests, Ioseb Dzhughashvili, another seminarian from Gori, arrived to study in Tbilisi in 1894. Only one year later, influenced by the intellectual ferment that infused student life in the seminary, the sixteen-year-old student composed and published a poem in Georgian that spoke of national liberation, albeit through the pursuit of education:

Flower, oh my Georgia!
Let peace reign in my native land!
And may you, friends, make renowned
Our Motherland by study!³⁵

The poem reflected a growing Georgian nationalist sentiment, though one linked to more universal concerns. Like other groups in the Russian Empire, Georgians resented the restrictions that tsarist authorities placed on the use of their native language in schools, publications, and literary works; unlike many other national groups, however, Georgians continued to embrace Russian as a universal language of learning alongside their native Georgian. The Georgian intelligentsia, which had arisen at the intersection of local and imperial culture, sought mastery of both. Many, like the young Dzhughashvili, eventually became enamored of socialism as a way of eliding local and imperial grievances. By the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, activists from the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party began forging contacts with Dzhughashvili and other rebellious seminarians. In Tbilisi, reading circles brought seminarians together with technical students and skilled workers like Avel' Enukidze, the son of a peasant family from western Georgia and a future Bolshevik party figure.³⁶ Seminarians from rural Georgia who were expelled for

³² "Makharadze, Filipp Iseevich" RGASPI, f. 124, op. 1, d. 1234, ll. 4-24.

³³ Robert Service, *Stalin: A Biography*, 36.

³⁴ Manchester writes of the substitution of "revered fathers" for "older brothers" in *Holy Fathers, Secular Sons*, 141.

³⁵ The poems of the teenage Stalin were celebrated by Tbilisi's intelligentsia and published in the Georgian-language *Iveria* 23 (1895). Translated in Robert Service, *Stalin: A Biography*, 39.

³⁶ "Enukidze, Avel' Safronovich" RGASPI, f. 124, op. 1, d. 639, ll. 3-6.

revolutionary activity, like Mikha Tskhakaia, another future Bolshevik leader, remained active figures in Tbilisi's radical underground.³⁷

Risking expulsion, imprisonment, and exile, fraternal bonds of friendship were forged among fellow students and seminarians in their struggle against political injustice and economic inequality. Their circles were bound together by Caucasian standards of friendship, but also reinforced by new intellectual currents. Their socialism was about "leveling" old hierarchies, and this ideological proclivity was reflected in the lateral ties they established with one another even as they rebelled against parental, educational, and tsarist authority.³⁸ The leaders of Menshevism and Bolshevism in Georgia, and ultimately, the leaders of the Soviet Union, arose from these densely-networked radical circles on the empire's periphery.

Radicalism Reaches the Georgian Countryside

Georgian radicals no longer fit into the world they left behind when they went to school. They were seminarians who were not going to be priests, nobles in name only, frustrated white-collar professionals, and the upwardly mobile children of peasants. They found ignorance in their native villages and economic exploitation in the emergent industrial sites that dotted the Caucasian landscape by the late nineteenth century.³⁹ Traveling throughout Georgia and the Caucasus, they distributed banned literature and agitated among workers and peasants. Even as they made inroads among workers and published their articles in the Georgian socialist journal *Kvali* (*The Footprint*), now run by Zhordania, or the even more radical *Brdzola* (*The Struggle*), led by Dzhughashvili's close friend, Lado Ketskhoveli, this mobile group of agitators and publicists sought—with varying degrees of success—to bring about the transformation of rural Georgian society.

Radicalism made substantial inroads into rural families as Georgian students returned home. Shalva Eliava may have succeeded in concealing his political activities from his teachers at the Kutaisi Gymnasium, but he was subsequently expelled from St. Petersburg's law academy for open participation in student strikes in 1903. After his expulsion, he returned home to seek change in rural western Georgia. Eliava's relative, Putsu Dgebuadze, recalled an interesting episode that occurred shortly after Eliava's return home from the Russian capital to his small Georgian village. The young socialist started making eloquent speeches to the local peasants, who, according to Dgebuadze, took to calling him the "limping committee" (*kochli komiteti*). The term referred to Eliava's leg, hurt in a childhood injury, but also may have been a mild form of mockery at the political terminology employed by the ambitious St. Petersburg law student in his

³⁷ The same was true of future Bolshevik Malakia Toroshelidze. See his party autobiography, RGASPI, f. 124, op. 1, d. 1941, ll. 4-8.

³⁸ For a discussion of the "leveling" tendency within the Russian Revolution—as well as within most other modern revolutions, see Richard Stites, *Revolutionary Dreams: Utopian Vision and Experimental Life in the Russian Revolution* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 126-130.

³⁹ For socialists in the region, international capital was not simply a theoretical concept, but rather a very real phenomenon experienced firsthand. Major international financial and industrial groups, including the Nobel brothers, Royal Dutch Shell, and British oil firms, led the development of Baku's oil fields. By 1900, a railway and pipeline linked Baku to Tbilisi, and from there ran to the Black Sea port of Batumi. In Batumi itself, a massive oil refinery was controlled by the Rothschild family. See Daniel Yergin, *The Prize: The Epic Quest for Oil, Money and Power* (New York: Touchstone, 1992), 57-63, 132-33.

speeches.⁴⁰ His mother had long resisted peasant demands for greater use of her land. After calling the whole village together for a meeting, Eliava posted a proclamation on a nearby tree, unilaterally announcing that the peasants could harvest his mother's cornfield according to the divisions he marked. Eliava's socialism, as well as that of other Georgian radicals, was in part a rebellion against parental authority.

Work in the party's underground cells required absolute loyalty, and ideological ties were often reinforced by family and village affinities among rebellious young Georgians. Eliava's siblings also joined the socialist cause, which they would ultimately make great sacrifices for. His sister Maro died in 1907 while engaged in underground political work; his sister Shushana was expelled from class for revolutionary connections; and his brother Niko joined Shalva in the Bolshevik party, only to be executed alongside him in 1937.⁴¹ Many other Georgian families joined the party in a similar manner: Avel' Ehlukidze, who operated underground presses throughout the region, joined the movement along with his brother and cousin; Sergo Ordzhonikidze's two brothers, as well as his young nephew, Georgii Gvakharia, followed the future Bolshevik leader into the party ranks; and the brothers Shalva and Mikheil Okudzhava joined the revolutionary movement in close succession while studying at the Kutaisi Gymnasium.⁴² Rather than serving as a deterrent, imprisonment by the tsarist authorities further radicalized Georgian families. After Ivan "Vano" Sturua, an older Bolshevik who had recommended young Ioseb Dzhughashvili for party membership, was imprisoned for revolutionary activity in Tbilisi's Metekhi Castle, his brothers, Georgii and Vasilii, both villagers who worked on the railroad, joined the socialist movement.⁴³

Rural life in Georgia had some unusual features compared to the rest of the empire that made the region especially fertile ground for the socialist movement. Georgia's relatively high literacy rate meant that more peasants could read the revolutionary literature turned out by underground presses in the Caucasus. The relatively small size of Georgia, combined with the densely-networked nature of the Georgian extended family, meant that information traveled quickly and developments in urban areas reached villages with great speed.⁴⁴ In addition, the social distance between peasants and minor rural nobles was often less noticeable than in Russia, facilitating the development of revolutionary networks.⁴⁵ Finally, rural Georgians were more likely to have had exposure to the multiethnic life of regional towns, many of which had substantial Armenian, Jewish, Russian, Greek, and Muslim populations. These factors combined to infuse peasant unrest with new intellectual currents and broader imperial concerns.⁴⁶

⁴⁰ III Section of the Archive Administration of the MoIA, f. 8, op. 2, d. 66, ll. 3-4.

⁴¹ III Section of the Archive Administration of the MoIA, f. 8, op. 2, d. 66, l. 1.

⁴² According to their party autobiographies. RGASPI, f. 124, op. 1, d. 639, 640, 641, 1098.

⁴³ "Sturua, Georgii Fedorovich" RGASPI, f. 124, op. 1, d. 1874, ll. 5-16.

⁴⁴ For a more contemporary work with fascinating implications for historical study, see Tamara Dragadze, *Rural Families in Soviet Georgia: A Case Study in Racha Province* (London and New York: Routledge, 1988). In addition to extended family networks, with many specific terms to describe the various relationships between extended family members, fictive kinship was also common among rural Georgians.

⁴⁵ Suny, *The Making of the Georgian Nation*, 67-78.

⁴⁶ Also significant was the region's nature as a sometimes violent borderlands, a phenomenon discussed in Alfred J. Rieber, "Stalin: Man of the Borderlands."

Nowhere was this truer than in the western Georgian region of Guria, which saw a major uprising in the early twentieth century and produced numerous future revolutionaries. In 1903, tsarist authorities lost control of the region as Gurians ignored the official courts, carried out public works projects on their own, and shunned their appointed governor. By early 1905 peasant leaders proclaimed the establishment of the "Gurian Republic," run by village committees and defended by armed peasant detachments.⁴⁷ Developments in Guria captured the attention of socialists everywhere, and served as a springboard that launched Georgian socialists to national prominence. While the Italian journalist Luigi Villari, who traveled to the region in 1905, commented on the high literacy rates and political sophistication of Guria's villagers, Russian radical Alexandra Kollontai praised Gurian women for taking an active part in village tribunals. She noted that the region's female peasants "defended their rights with particular vigor," and praised Gurian women for adopting "resolutions demanding political equality with men." Young Ioseb Dzhughashvili watched developments in the region with close interest; years later, as Joseph Stalin, he was overheard at a Kremlin reception explaining the inherently political nature of the Gurian peasant: "All Gurians are involved in politics. There, no one lacks a party affiliation [*bespartiinykh net*], and everyone is literate. All of them read and write, and everyone reads the newspaper... When you get two Gurians together, they'll inevitably start a discussion about Marx's *Kapital*."⁴⁸

The events in Guria attracted the involvement of radical Georgian students and young revolutionaries, some with roots in the region, others inspired by what the Gurian case could offer for the broader transformation of Georgian peasants into social democrats. In an article published anonymously, the young Georgian writer Mikheil Dzhavakhishvili wrote in a Tbilisi newspaper in May 1905 that "peasants from all of Georgia will follow in the wake of Guria's peasant movement—Imereti, Mingrelia, Svaneti, Racha, Karalini, Kakheti, and even those highlanders from the eternally isolated [*vechno zapertymi*] mountains of Georgia."⁴⁹ Especially eager to participate in the movement were young Georgians from Guria who had been educated in urban centers and now sought to position themselves as the movement's theorists. Guria native Noe Zhordania, the former student of the Tbilisi seminary, chronicled the uprising in the socialist press and made the case for a specific approach to socialism suited to Georgian rural realities. Filipp Makharadze, Zhordania's classmate at the seminary, took up work on the Gurian-Mingrelian committee of the Bolshevik wing of the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party, and translated Lenin's writings on agrarian issues for dissemination among Guria's peasantry, hoping to win their support for a broader socialist project.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ Stephen F. Jones, "Marxism and Peasant Revolution in the Russian Empire: the Case of the Gurian Republic," *The Slavonic and East European Review* 67:3 (July 1989): 403-434.

⁴⁸ Akakii Mgeladze, *Stalin kakim ia ego znal* (Tbilisi, 2001), 22-23. As with many of Stalin's comments, there were darker undertones to his joking remark. The visiting party worker who overheard the comment was from Ozurgeti, and had just been asked by Stalin—in Georgian—if he was a Gurian, a politically loaded question by the 1930s, as the Soviets had erased the name of the region from maps and eliminated Gurian as an ethnic census category. As Stalin's visitor likely knew, though the region had indeed attracted the attention of socialists throughout the empire and generated cadres for both wings of the party, Guria became a bastion of Georgian Menshevism in the wake of 1905.

⁴⁹ Mikhail Dzhavakhishvili, *Sobranie sochinenii v piati tomakh* (Tbilisi: Merani, 1975), 5: 60.

⁵⁰ RGASPI, f. 124, op. 1, d. 1234, ll. 4-24.

The short-lived Gurian Republic revealed the spectacular advances of the socialist movement in a rapidly changing Georgian countryside. It came more than a decade before the self-proclaimed Iskolats Republic in Latvia, in which organizers similarly fused socialist ideology with nationalist rhetoric in a rebellion of the local—and largely rural—Latvian population.⁵¹ The Gurian rebellion, however, was more closely linked to a broader intellectual movement, one that included radicalized, literate peasants and outside theorists, as well as socialists from both the Menshevik and the Bolshevik factions.

The rebellion, and its eventual suppression by Cossack troops sent in from Russia in early 1906, drove scores of Gurians into the ranks of both wings of the RSDLP.⁵² Mensheviks and Bolsheviks alike sought to articulate their own proletarian visions for Georgia's peasant society. During the rebellion, Mensheviks outmaneuvered their Bolshevik counterparts and forged closer links with the peasantry by promoting an explicitly Georgian vision of revolution.⁵³ After 1905, these same Georgian Mensheviks joined the Duma while their Bolshevik opponents boycotted participation in the institutions of the tsarist regime. Georgian Bolsheviks sought an immediate end to autocracy and a more radical transformation of Georgian society. They increasingly sought allies among alienated workers in multiethnic urban areas throughout the Caucasus, where, according to them, developments more closely fit the contours of socialist theory.

Nevertheless, unlike the radicals who joined the Jewish *Bund*, the nationalist Armenian *Dashnaktsutiun* or the Polish Socialist Party (*Polska Partia Socjalistyczna*), Georgian socialists, Mensheviks and Bolsheviks alike, still remained factional members of an empire-wide, multiethnic organization, the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party.⁵⁴ If a century earlier Georgian nobles had entered the Russian ranks as an imperial service elite, now Georgian revolutionaries across the political spectrum aspired to be part of another empire-wide movement.

Georgian Revolutionaries Beyond Georgia

By 1907, the Bolsheviks were effectively shut out of Georgia by tsarist repression and Menshevik political advances. Some left Georgia, many to pursue party work in Baku. In the words of Bolshevik Filipp Makharadze, Baku was the "bastion [*oplot*] of Bolshevism for all the Caucasus," because "nowhere else could one find such a strong proletariat."⁵⁵ In Baku, Georgian Bolsheviks found a growing working class that was multiethnic, yet in some cases divided by ethnic strife, as was evident in the clashes

⁵¹ The Black Hundreds were violent and extreme Russian nationalists, the German Barons were the region's aristocracy, who owned much of the land. Daina Bleiere, *History of Latvia: The Twentieth Century* (Riga: Jumava, 2006), 90.

⁵² The preponderance of western Georgians in general and Gurians in particular is evident from a perusal of the autobiographical files of the All-Union Society of Old Bolsheviks, RGASPI, f. 124, op. 1.

⁵³ As Stephen Jones succinctly refers to it, "socialism in Georgian colors." See his *Socialism in Georgian Colors: The European Road to Social Democracy, 1883-1917* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005).

⁵⁴ For more on Poles and Jews, see Joshua D. Zimmerman, *Poles, Jews, and the Politics of Nationality: The Bund and the Polish Socialist Party in Late Tsarist Russia, 1892-1914*. For Armenians, see Ronald Grigor Suny, *Looking Toward Ararat: Armenia in Modern History* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1993).

⁵⁵ RGASPI, f. 124, op. 1, d. 1234, ll. 4-24.

between the city's Muslim and Armenian populations in 1905.⁵⁶ Removed from their own native context, Georgian Bolsheviks in Baku began to dream of a truly international revolution as the only comprehensive solution to the empire's social and ethnic grievances. They cast themselves as leaders of an effort to launch a multiethnic, Caucasus-wide revolution, and rose to high-ranking positions in the Bolshevik party's central organs as experts in carrying out agitation among an ethnically and linguistically diverse population.

Georgian Bolsheviks proved able to negotiate ethnic difference with remarkable skill. While the dominance of Armenian merchants caused tension in rural Georgia, outside their native land Georgian Bolsheviks found common cause with those Armenians who forsook the nationalist *Dashnaktsutiun* for participation in an international Bolshevik movement.⁵⁷ In some cases, they found allies among Armenians who had come to Baku from Georgia, like Stepan Shaumian, who was born to an Armenian merchant family in Tbilisi but joined the international revolutionary movement after studying in St. Petersburg, Riga, and Berlin.⁵⁸ Similarly, Prokofii "Alesha" Dzhaparidze, one of the leaders of the Georgian Bolsheviks in Baku, found a close comrade in an Armenian woman from his native Kutaisi, who later became his wife.⁵⁹ The Georgians also built ties with the somewhat smaller number of Muslims in the movement, including Nariman Narimanov, who was born in Tbilisi and educated there at the Teacher's Institute before traveling to Baku for work. As outsiders in Baku, Georgian Bolsheviks could work as mediators between Armenian and Muslim workers and revolutionaries. Fluent in Russian, Georgian radicals also established contacts with Baku's Russian workers, as well as with a number of Russian revolutionaries who resided in the city.

Avel' Enukidze was among the first of the Georgian radicals to arrive in Baku, where he first went in 1898 to work as an assistant engine machinist for the railroad. He soon came into contact with a group of Russian revolutionaries from Moscow.⁶⁰ Enukidze helped build the RSDLP's organization in Baku with the help of fellow Georgian Lado Ketskhoveli and established an underground printing press that disseminated revolutionary literature in a variety of languages. He forged links with the party's central committee as a specialist in spreading the message of revolution, and was eventually brought to St. Petersburg by the party to run an underground press in 1903. Enukidze's early work in Baku launched his party career; he later recalled this pivotal period in his 1930 memoir, *Bol'shevistskie nelegal'nye tipografii* (*The Illegal Bolshevik Press*).⁶¹

Enukidze's cousin, Trifon "Simon" Enukidze followed a similar path. Arriving to work as a mechanic in Baku in 1900, he joined his cousin in setting up and operating the

⁵⁶ Tadeusz Swietochowski, *Russian Azerbaijan, 1905-1920: The Shaping of a National Identity in a Muslim Community* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 38-46. The city's Muslim population was dominated by Azeri speakers, but also included Lezgins, Persians, and Volga Tatars.

⁵⁷ Tadeusz Swietochowski, *Russian Azerbaijan, 1905-1920*, 39.

⁵⁸ On Shaumian and other Armenians in the Bolshevik party, see Razmik Panossian, *The Armenians: From Kings And Priests to Merchants And Commissars* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006).

⁵⁹ According to biographical materials compiled by their daughter, Elena Dzhaparidze. RGAE (Russian State Archive of the Economy), f. 332, op. 4, d. 58, ll. 3-5.

⁶⁰ RGASPI, f. 124, op. 1, d. 639, ll. 3-4.

⁶¹ A. Enukidze, *Bol'shevistskie nelegal'nye tipografii* (Moscow: Molodaia gvardiia, 1930).

underground printing press. In 1905, the party requested that Simon travel to Moscow to help establish a secret press closer to the party's center. Housed in central Moscow in a shop with a sign outside that read "Kalandadze: Trader in Fruits from the Caucasus," Simon Eukidze worked with Russian, Armenian, and Georgian conspirators to print the radical newspaper *Rabochii (Worker)* on a concealed press in the shop's hidden cellar. The plan was hatched by Simon Eukidze himself, who registered the shop in the name of a Georgian porter residing in Moscow. The shop's fruit displays concealed a major operation that supplied and distributed revolutionary literature, one carried out within close distance of one of the city's main police headquarters and the nearby Butyrskii prison.⁶² Georgii Sturua, another participant in the operation, recalled how Simon Eukidze coordinated the publication with the party's Central Committee through regular meetings held at the Moscow apartment of the socialist author Maxim Gorky.⁶³ The press operated until 1907, when the party moved it elsewhere. However, both Georgii Sturua and Simon Eukidze had been effectively transported to the center of party life through their work as publicists in Baku. Afterwards, Sturua traveled abroad and worked for the party in Moscow and Petersburg, while Simon Eukidze was dispatched to Petersburg to study and organize a bomb-making operation, his mechanical skills put to new use.⁶⁴

The work of Georgian Bolsheviks in multiethnic Baku attracted the attention of party leaders. In Geneva, Lenin took note of Georgian Bolshevik Malakia Toroshelidze, who worked for the party in Batumi and Baku, and who traveled to Geneva. Toroshelidze returned to the Swiss city three years later, accompanied by Sergo Ordzhonikidze.⁶⁵ A few years later, in 1906, Lenin would meet Ioseb Dzhughashvili. After leading protests in Baku during the 1905 Revolution, Dzhughashvili was elected to represent the Caucasus at a party conference in Finland in early 1906, where he met Lenin for the first time.

Although he went by "Koba," a nickname inspired by a classic of Georgian literature, Dzhughashvili was now a committed internationalist. He moved his wife, Ekaterine Svanidze, and his young son, Yakov, from Tbilisi to Baku.⁶⁶ He began to correspond and publish more frequently in Russian, and even studied Esperanto in hope of mastering a truly international language.⁶⁷ After attending a party congress in London in May 1907, he returned again to Baku. Describing the London meeting in the underground newspaper *Bakinskii Proletarii (The Baku Proletarian)*, he claimed that the Bolsheviks represented the interests of laborers, a vanguard linked to industrial development in central Russia, while the Mensheviks who now dominated Georgia did so only because of the "backward and petty bourgeois" nature of his native land.⁶⁸

Georgian Bolsheviks were also carried far beyond their homeland by the tsarist criminal justice system. All the Georgian Bolsheviks who would lead the revolution spent time in prison, exile, and emigration. Yet, tsarist persecution strengthened the bonds that

⁶² "Eukidze, Trifon Teimurazovich" RGASPI, f. 124, op. 1, d. 641, l. 4. The shop, along with its underground printing press, has been preserved as a state museum since 1924 and remains open to the public.

⁶³ RGASPI, f. 124, op. 1, d. 1874, ll. 5-16.

⁶⁴ RGASPI, f. 124, op. 1, d. 641, ll. 4-5.

⁶⁵ "Toroshelidze, Malakii Georgievich" RGASPI, f. 124, op. 1, d. 1941, ll. 4-8.

⁶⁶ His Georgian wife succumbed to tuberculosis shortly after the move, making Dzhughashvili a widower until his marriage to the young Nadezhda Allilueva in 1919. Service, *Stalin*, 70.

⁶⁷ Service, *Stalin*, 78.

⁶⁸ I. V. Stalin, *Sochineniia* 2: 46-77, cited in Isaac Deutscher, *Stalin: A Political Biography*, 91.

united Georgian revolutionaries. Imprisonment and exile outside the Caucasus were also a second Russian education for many. Condemned to exile in small villages and provincial towns in southern Russia and Siberia, many now encountered Russian life firsthand.

Sergo Ordzhonikidze was but one Bolshevik exiled to the far reaches of the empire. Avel' Enukidze was arrested in 1911 and exiled, first to southern Russia, and finally to Yeniseisk, a region near the Chinese frontier, following a second arrest.⁶⁹ Simon Enukidze was arrested in 1912, one year after his cousin, and exiled beyond the Caucasus for three years.⁷⁰ While punishment scattered this group of Georgians, they were able to correspond with each other in exile and in prison, relying on ethnic, family, and party networks to exchange information.⁷¹ In addition to strengthening bonds among Georgian revolutionaries, prison brought Bolsheviks from across the empire together. Galaktion Vashadze, a former student of the Kutaisi seminary, was arrested for carrying out Bolshevik party work in the Georgian mining town of Chiatura. In Siberian exile, he encountered Russian revolutionaries from Moscow and St. Petersburg who impressed him greatly.⁷² Spending years in the far-flung corners of Russia, Georgian socialists also established personal relationships with Russians. In Yakutiia, Ordzhonikidze met his Russian wife, Zinaida Pavlutsskaia. Dzhughashvili was exiled to the frozen expanses of Kureika, a settlement close to the Arctic Circle. In later years, he recalled fondly his daily exchanges with the villagers, both Russians and ethnic Kets. For a time, Dzhughashvili shared a room with Iakov Sverdlov, the former editor of the Bolshevik newspaper *Pravda* and a future Bolshevik leader.⁷³

Other Georgians sought to escape the police by going into emigration. Mikha Tskhakaia, one of the group's older members, was imprisoned in 1906 after helping organize the Baku Soviet. Making it to London for the Fifth Party Congress in 1907, he remained in Europe, living in Switzerland in close proximity to Lenin from 1907 to 1917. While abroad, he recommended many of his Georgian comrades personally to Lenin, and published radical articles in Russian and Georgian under a series of pseudonyms for distribution across the Russian Empire.⁷⁴ Lenin was greatly impressed by the multilingual work of Tskhakaia and other Georgian publicists, and wrote in an article published in 1913: "The work of the Social Democrats in the Caucasus should be an example for us all."⁷⁵

The Georgian Revolution within the Russian Revolution

The bonds among Georgian revolutionaries, and their skill in representing a multiethnic movement, had proved to be valuable assets in the revolutionary underground. When the revolution arrived suddenly in February 1917 following Tsar

⁶⁹ RGASPI, f. 124, op. 1, d. 639, ll. 5-6.

⁷⁰ RGASPI, f. 124, op. 1, d. 641, ll. 4-5.

⁷¹ As Ordzhonikidze's correspondence, discussed at the beginning of this chapter, demonstrates. RGASPI, f. 85, op. 3, d. 68.

⁷² Vashadze, Galaktion Sachinovich" RGASPI, f. 124, op. 1, d. 328, ll. 15-27.

⁷³ Sverdlov admitted that Dzhughashvili was a "good chap," but complained that the Georgian was too much of an "individualist in daily life," while he himself preferred tidiness and order. L. Trotsky, *Stalin*, 171, cited in Deutscher, *Stalin*, 124.

⁷⁴ "Tskhakaia, Mikhail Grigor'evich" RGASPI, f. 124, op. 1, d. 2074, ll. 3-4.

⁷⁵ V. I. Lenin, "Sovremennaia Rossiia i rabochee dvizheniia" *Sochineniia* 19: 30-31.

Nicholas II's unexpected abdication, Georgian revolutionaries returned from exile, prison, and emigration, hastening to implement their socialist vision in St. Petersburg and in their native Georgia. They appeared at the center of Russian political life, prominent among both Mensheviks and Bolsheviks.

In Siberian exile, the Menshevik Irakli Tsereteli received news of the government's collapse through his network of Georgian associates. Almost immediately, he was summoned by Gerasim Makharadze, another Georgian member of the Second Duma living in exile, and the two traveled to Irkutsk together.⁷⁶ By March, Tsereteli had reached the Russian capital, and soon accepted a post in the Provisional Government, first as Minister of Posts and Telegraphs, later as Minister of the Interior in Alexander Kerensky's cabinet. A Russian newspaper article from the period wryly noted that Tsereteli was the first minister in Russia's history to report to his position from prison.⁷⁷ However, he was far from the only Georgian on the new political landscape. At the Menshevik Congress of the RSDLP in 1917, the party's Caucasus organization, the majority of whom were Georgian, made up one-fifth of the mandated delegates.⁷⁸ In the words of Noe Zhordania, Russian Social Democracy had a "Georgian face."⁷⁹

As Georgian Mensheviks joined the Provisional Government, Georgian Bolsheviks began to organize in Petrograd. Mikha Tskhakaia returned from emigration with Lenin in the sealed train, accompanied by Davit Suliashvili, a former seminarian from Tbilisi who had lived in exile among the Bolsheviks in Switzerland.⁸⁰ As they massed in the Russian capital, they sensed the excitement of revolutionary change. Galaktion Vashadze, returning from exile in Siberia, recalled the "grandiose" expressions of "enthusiasm and happiness" he encountered at the time of his release, accompanied by singing, dancing, and feasting.⁸¹ Avel' Enukidze, pressed into military service in 1916, happened to arrive with his Siberian division in Petrograd on the day of the tsar's abdication, on his way to the front. He remained in the capital, carrying out revolutionary work along with his cousin, Simon Enukidze, who had promoted the socialist cause among the workers of the Siemens factory in Petrograd since 1914.⁸² Wherever the revolution found them, Georgian Bolsheviks began to organize immediately. Sergo Ordzhonikidze first served as a member of the Executive Committee of the local Soviet in Yakutiia, where he had been in exile, before becoming a member of the Petrograd Soviet in July 1917, shortly after his arrival.⁸³ Fellow Georgian revolutionary Shalva Eliava assumed a leadership position in Vologda, where he had been under police supervision.⁸⁴

⁷⁶ I. G. Tsereteli, *Vospominaniia o fevral'skoi revoliutsii* (Paris: Mouton, 1963), 15.

⁷⁷ *Rabochaia gazeta* 50 (May 7, 1917), archived by Tsereteli himself and preserved in the "Boris I. Nicolaevsky Collection," Hoover Institution Archives, Box 37.

⁷⁸ Stephen F. Jones, *Socialism in Georgian Colors*, 286.

⁷⁹ Zhordania, *Moia Zhizn'*, trans. Inna Zhordania (Stanford: Hoover Institution on War, Revolution and Peace, 1968), 49.

⁸⁰ RGASPI, f. 124, op. 1, d. 2074, ll. 1-2.

⁸¹ RGASPI, f. 124, op. 1, d. 328, l. 25.

⁸² RGASPI, f. 124, op. 1, d. 639, l. 3-6; RGASPI, f. 124, op. 1, d. 641, ll. 4-5.

⁸³ RGASPI, f. 124, op. 1, d. 1426, ll. 5-6.

⁸⁴ "Eliava, Shalva Zurabovich," *Bol'shaia sovetskaia entsiklopediia*, ed. A. M. Prokhorov, et al. (Moscow: Sovetskaia entsiklopediia, 1970-1981).

While Georgian Mensheviks dominated the official political scene in early 1917, the Bolshevik seizure of power in October forced them out of their positions in the Russian government. Many returned to their native Georgia, where on May 26, 1918, amidst the chaos of the revolution and the ongoing First World War, they proclaimed an independent Democratic Republic of Georgia.⁸⁵ Although they had lost control of an empire-wide movement, the Mensheviks attracted the attention of intellectuals throughout Europe by implementing an alternative experiment in social democracy in Georgia, a gradualist approach that contrasted with the radical revolution being carried out by the Bolsheviks in Russia. The prominent German Marxist Karl Kautsky visited the Democratic Republic of Georgia in 1920, and praised the advances made by Mensheviks in "little Georgia." Impressed by the Georgian Mensheviks' conciliatory approach to implementing socialism in a predominantly agrarian society, he wrote that Russia would "only be able to prosper when it is animated by the spirit that inspired Georgia."⁸⁶

Bolshevik theorists thought otherwise. In a 1922 publication, Leon Trotsky derided Georgian Mensheviks for their "southern sensitivity and flexibility" (*vpechatlitel'nost' i prisposobliaemost'*).⁸⁷ He sarcastically noted how these passionate orators had seamlessly shifted from internationalist aspirations to nationalist rhetoric, which he saw as a way of clinging to power in their native Georgia.⁸⁸ Many Georgian Bolsheviks shared Trotsky's sentiment, and defined their ideological steadfastness in juxtaposition to the Mensheviks' purported flexibility. In a novel published shortly after the demise of Menshevik Georgia, the author Mikheil Dzhavakhishvili satirized the alleged opportunism of some Georgian social democrats. His novel's eponymous hero, Kvachi Kvachantiradze, was a "circus acrobat" of rhetoric, a showy dilettante of revolution, and a "living barometer" who had a keen sense of social change, and accordingly shifted his self-presentation to his own advantage.⁸⁹ Such tendencies were viewed with disgust by Ioseb Dzhughashvili. His first nickname, Koba, had been inspired by a steadfast highlander from Georgian fiction; his second nickname, Stalin (from the Russian word for "steel"), proclaimed him unbending where his fellow countrymen were weak. Coming out of the multiethnic Caucasus, Stalin was appointed Commissar of Nationalities, tasked with addressing the "national question" in the multiethnic empire inherited by the Bolsheviks, including in his native Georgia.⁹⁰

A Bolshevik Homecoming

In February 1921, Georgian Bolsheviks returned to their homeland alongside the invading Russian Red Army. They not only established Soviet power in Georgia but led the violent transformation of the entire Caucasus region. Lenin had been reluctant to authorize the military occupation of Georgia, but had little say over the actions on the

⁸⁵ Suny, *The Making of the Georgian Nation*, 192.

⁸⁶ Karl Kautsky, *Georgia: A Social Democratic Peasant Republic*, trans. H. J. Stenning (London, 1921).

⁸⁷ L. Trotskii, *Mezhdú imperializmom i revoliutsiei: osnovnye voprosy revoliutsii na chastnom primere Gruzii* (Moscow: Gos. izdatel'stvo, 1922), 83.

⁸⁸ Although it also reflected the more nationalist and gradualist approach taken by Georgian Mensheviks since 1905.

⁸⁹ Mikheil Dzhavakhishvili, *Kvachi Kvachantiradze*, trans. Aleksandr Ebanoidze (Moscow: Ostozh'e, 1999), 14-21.

⁹⁰ For a study of Stalin in this position, see Stephen Blank, *The Sorcerer as Apprentice: Stalin as Commissar of Nationalities, 1917-1924* (Westport: Greenwood, 1994).

ground of Sergo Ordzhonikidze and other members of the Revolutionary Military Council of the Caucasus.⁹¹ Despite a telegram sent by Lenin to Ordzhonikidze shortly after the Georgian invasion calling for a “special policy of concessions toward the Georgian intelligentsia and small traders” rather than a blind application of the “Russian pattern” of War Communism, and advising an “acceptable compromise for a bloc with Zhordania and similar Georgian Mensheviks,” Georgian Bolsheviks were ruthless in ushering in their vision of a socialist Georgia. Even those Georgians who did not accompany the Red Army into their native land took a personal interest in events there. Filipp Makharadze, who now headed the newly established Georgian Revolutionary Committee, received constant direction and advice from the Georgian Bolsheviks Avel’ Ehlukidze and Alesha Svanidze in Moscow.⁹² Stalin personally monitored Makharadze’s efforts to combat Menshevik propaganda among the Georgian population, taking Makharadze to task for inadequately responding to charges that Georgian Bolsheviks were simply “agents of Moscow.”⁹³

The battle for the future of Soviet Georgia reached a decisive phase during the Georgian Affair of 1922. Ordzhonikidze, as head of the Caucasian Bureau of the Russian Communist Party (*Kavbiuro*), sought to integrate Georgia into the Soviet Union as part of a politically and economically unified Transcaucasus Federation that would also include neighboring Armenia and Azerbaijan. Again, Lenin urged caution, but Ordzhonikidze forged ahead with the support of Stalin, purging Georgian officials who did not support his position. Among the tightly-networked community of Georgian Bolsheviks, these new political divisions were taken personally.⁹⁴ The matter became a full-fledged controversy when Ordzhonikidze publicly slapped another Georgian Bolshevik who opposed his plans. Those Georgians who had long lived beyond the confines of Georgia, like Stalin, Ordzhonikidze, and Ehlukidze, sought complete integration of their native republic into a centralized Soviet state, leading Lenin to accuse these non-Russians of “Great Russian chauvinism.”⁹⁵ However, it is perhaps more accurate to say that this group of Georgian Bolsheviks, rather than being chauvinists, were especially committed to the radical, rapid, and uncompromising transformation of their native land into a socialist society.

In particular, Georgian Bolshevik leaders had little patience for the habits and customs of rural Georgia. Although they sought to swell the party ranks by recruiting Georgian peasants as part of the “Lenin Enrollment,” the Georgian Bolsheviks had difficulty winning support in the Georgian countryside. In 1924, they faced a major armed rebellion in western Georgia, which they only suppressed by resorting to violent reprisals.⁹⁶ As Chairman of the Council of People’s Commissars in Georgia in the wake of the revolt, Shalva Eliava led the effort to remake rural Georgian society, attacking

⁹¹ Suny, *Making of the Georgian Nation*, 207-210.

⁹² “Perepiska ChK i Gruz. GPU s TsK KP(b) Gruzii, 1921-1930” III Section of the Archive Administration of the MoIA, f. 14, op. 1, d. 36, l. 3.

⁹³ “Nelegal’naia broshura gruzinskikh men’shevikov ‘Politika Moskvyy i agenty Moskvyy v Gruzii,’ 1922” RGASPI, f. 298, op. 1, d. 137, ll. 7-8.

⁹⁴ Jeremy Smith, “The Georgian Affair of 1922: Policy Failure, Personality Clash or Power Struggle?” *Europe-Asia Studies* 50:3 (May 1998): 519-544.

⁹⁵ Suny, *The Making of the Georgian Nation*, 217.

⁹⁶ Stephen Jones, “The Establishment of Soviet Power in Transcaucasia: The Case of Georgia, 1921-1928,” *Soviet Studies* 40:4 (October 1988): 616-639.

longstanding hierarchies and patterns of personalized ties. In a meeting of the Georgian Central Committee held on June 5, 1925, Eliava railed against the feudal nature of rural Georgian society, and warned that a new feudal mentality might reemerge, even under Soviet rule. He stated:

Georgia is a feudal country, built on feudal principles. Soviet power has of course destroyed the basis of feudalism here, yet a new sort of feudal aristocracy—if one might describe it as such—has emerged, especially in the countryside, of people who do not consider themselves accountable to anyone and for anything.⁹⁷

Elsewhere, Eliava criticized Georgian culture itself, railing against the pervasive establishment of “personal fiefdoms” within Soviet institutions, and complaining that the anarchic tendency of every Georgian to consider himself “his own boss” extended “throughout society.”⁹⁸ According to his own daughter’s account, as Stalin rose to power, he too “could not stand the displays of feudal loyalty and honor [*feodal'nykh pochestei*]” he was accorded when he visited his native land.⁹⁹ Nevertheless, Stalin surrounded himself in Moscow with loyal comrades from the Caucasus. As much as they spoke critically about Georgian culture, he and Eliava were veterans of a revolutionary movement in the Caucasus that was infused with Georgian cultural practices of friendship, patronage, and mutual obligation. The cultural connection alone was not sufficient to establish solidarity among all Georgians, but proved to be a powerful adhesive among Georgian Bolsheviks when combined with ideological devotion.

Even as the coming of Soviet power pitted Georgian against Georgian, old bonds were affirmed and new ones forged in the violence of the Civil War and the Sovietization of the Caucasus. Georgian networks were extended as Ordzhonikidze, serving as the Bolshevik Commissar of Ukraine, South Russia, and the North Caucasus, battled for Soviet power far from his native Georgia, alongside fellow Georgian Bolshevik Tengiz Zhgenti.¹⁰⁰ New links were formed with younger Bolsheviks from across the Caucasus, like Nestor Lakoba, a young Abkhaz socialist, born in 1893, who joined the party shortly after his graduation from the Tbilisi seminary in 1911.¹⁰¹ Another younger Bolshevik to join the group was Anastas Mikoian, two years younger than Lakoba, who was radicalized while studying at the Armenian Theological Seminary in Tbilisi and helped Ordzhonikidze sneak into occupied Baku during the Civil War.¹⁰² In Georgia, Bolsheviks cultivated a small but enthusiastic core of dedicated followers, including the energetic young Vissarion “Beso” Lominadze, who, having worked for the Bolsheviks in Petersburg and Baku, became the Secretary of the Georgian Communist Party in 1922 at twenty-five.¹⁰³

⁹⁷ “Stenograficheskii otchet soveshchaniia o revoliutsionnoi zakonnosti, 1925” III Section of the Archive Administration of the MoIA, f. 14, op. 2, d. 439, l. 14.

⁹⁸ III Section of the Archive Administration of the MoIA, f. 14, op. 2, d. 439, l. 16.

⁹⁹ Svetlana Allilueva, *Dvadtsat' pisem k drugu* (New York: Harper and Row, 1967), 63.

¹⁰⁰ On Ordzhonikidze’s efforts in the Civil War, see Khlevniuk, *In Stalin’s Shadow*, 12-14. On Zhgenti’s role in Ukraine, see RGASPI, f. 124, op. 1, d. 661, ll. 4-9.

¹⁰¹ “Lakoba, Nestor Apollonovich” RGASPI, f. 124, op. 1, d. 1059, l. 2.

¹⁰² A. I. Mikoian, *Tak bylo: razmyshleniia o minuvshem* (Moscow: Vagrius, 1999), 130-131.

¹⁰³ V. A. Torchinov and A. M. Leoniuk, *Vokrug Stalina: istoriko-biograficheskii spravochnik* (Saint Petersburg: SPbGU, 2000), 301-303.

These young figures were less familiar with the underground existence that older Bolsheviks had endured for years, but instead came of age amidst the bloodshed of the Civil War. Party reports praised their energy and organizational capacity, though they were relied upon not only as managers, but also as soldiers and executioners. Lominadze oversaw the arrest of the thousands of Georgians who resisted Soviet power in 1924, and in part for his role in putting down the revolt, twenty-five year old Lavrentii Beria, who just a few years earlier had been a student at the Baku Polytechnical Institute, was appointed as head of the OGPU for the entire Transcaucasus Federation.¹⁰⁴ Their skills proved well-suited to the realities of the new Soviet state. As Stalin ascended to the highest levels of Soviet power, he was followed and supported by a core group of loyalists from the Caucasus. The Georgian revolution traveled with him to Moscow.

The Caucasus Comes to the Kremlin

By the early 1930s, many in the party referred to Stalin and those around him as a “Caucasian group.”¹⁰⁵ The group included fellow Georgians like Sergo Ordzhonikidze, now the Commissar of Heavy Industry, and Avel’ Enukidze, the Secretary of the Presidium of the Central Executive Committee, but also the ethnic Armenian Anastas Mikoian and the Russian Sergei Kirov, considered an honorary “Caucasian” because of his longtime party work in Azerbaijan.¹⁰⁶ Just a decade after the violence of the Civil War and the turmoil of establishing Soviet power in the Caucasus, this group of revolutionaries had emerged from the mountainous periphery of the former Russian Empire to lead the Soviet Union. All except Kirov spoke accented Russian, and most spoke Georgian. They affirmed old bonds by socializing with one another, vacationing together, and, as will be discussed in more detail in the following chapter, sharing Georgian food and wine at a nearly endless succession of Kremlin feasts. Membership in the “Caucasian group” required fluency in the region’s culture and came with the privilege of intimate access to Stalin.

Personal networks were as vital to survival and success in the turbulent world of the Soviet state as they had been in the revolutionary underground. In the early Soviet Union, institutions mattered less than personal and ideological loyalties and the outcome of factional battles.¹⁰⁷ The correspondence of top Bolsheviks reveals that networks of trusted associates were essential for obtaining resources, building political support, and advancing one’s career. Not all political networks were ethnic in nature. Factions were held together by bonds forged in prison and exile, by Civil War ties, and by regional affiliation. These factions, however, were smaller and more fluid, and group membership lacked an enduring cultural and linguistic dimension. In a world of personalized politics, networks created in the Caucasus, bound by shared experience and cultural norms, proved especially resilient.

¹⁰⁴ Amy Knight, *Beria: Stalin’s First Lieutenant* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 14-38.

¹⁰⁵ In his memoirs, Khrushchev stated that “among the party activists it was often said that there was a ‘Caucasian group’ [*kavkazskaia grupp*] in power.” N. S. Khrushchev, *Vospominaniia: vremia, liudi, vlast’* (Moskva: Moskovskie novosti, 1999), 1: 72.

¹⁰⁶ Contemporaries, including Anastas Mikoian, recalled that Kirov understood and respected Caucasian patterns of friendship, kinship, and feasting. See Mikoian, *Tak bylo*, 510.

¹⁰⁷ Although some would argue that institutions may have come to matter more in late Stalinism. See Yoram Gorzki, “Ordinary Stalinism: The Council of Ministers and the Soviet Neopatrimonial State, 1946-1953,” *Journal of Modern History* 74:4 (December 2002): 699-736.

Among the members of the Caucasian group, the Georgians were the most visible. However, the Georgians were certainly not the only ethnic group overrepresented in the new Soviet state. Jews had also risen rapidly to positions of power, but did so in pursuit of internationalist goals beyond Judaism.¹⁰⁸ While most Jews left the trappings of their parents' culture behind, the Georgians celebrated and affirmed their ethnicity in visible ways through rituals that affirmed Caucasian kinship. Georgian networks moved between the Caucasus and the Kremlin, from periphery to center and back, and linked the two inextricably together.

As Commissar of Heavy Industry in the 1930s, Sergo Ordzhonikidze relied on Caucasian networks in his massive effort to industrialize the Soviet Union. In fact, Ordzhonikidze's methods of industrial organization revealed that some of the same "feudal" tendencies that Georgian Bolsheviks decried in their native country—namely, a tendency to establish "personal fiefdoms" based on patronage, were practiced at the highest levels of Soviet power. Patronage was a widespread tendency in the Soviet Union, but Georgian-style patronage was more effective and more adaptable because clients and patrons shared a common set of cultural expectations, and every client served as a potential patron to those further below. In Georgian culture the principles of friendship and reciprocity could be more elaborate and extensive, and more openly appealed to.¹⁰⁹

Ordzhonikidze rose to power as Stalin's trusted lieutenant. A loyal client, he supported Stalin in his disputes with political opponents Grigorii Zinoviev and Lev Kamenev in the 1920s. He was called up by Stalin from Tbilisi to Moscow in 1926, and placed in charge of the party's Central Control Commission, which played an important role in expelling and arresting members of the "Trotskyite-Zinovievist Opposition."¹¹⁰ As head of the Central Control Commission, Ordzhonikidze gained a reputation for ruthless effectiveness, and was praised as a talented Soviet manager (*khoziastvennik*). By the early 1930s, the Central Control Commission declined in administrative importance since major opposition to Stalin had been eliminated in the party.¹¹¹ In 1932, Ordzhonikidze was removed from his old position and placed in charge of the newly created Commissariat of Heavy Industry (NKTP). The Commissariat was now of prime importance, as Stalin was poised to launch the Second Five-Year Plan, a blueprint for economic development that emphasized heavy industry as the means to transform rural Russia into a modern socialist power.

As the boss of a newly created and strategically vital agency, Ordzhonikidze enjoyed a great deal of autonomy. He owed his position to Stalin, but oversaw economic development by relying on his own personal network, whom he promoted through the

¹⁰⁸ Writing about Jews in the Bolshevik movement, Yuri Slezkine states: "no other ethnic group was as keen on abandoning its language, rituals, and traditional areas of settlement." Slezkine, *The Jewish Century*, 247.

¹⁰⁹ Gerald Mars and Yochanan Altman, "The Cultural Bases of Soviet Georgia's Second Economy," *Soviet Studies* 35:4 (October 1983), 546-560.

¹¹⁰ Khlevniuk, *In Stalin's Shadow*, 25.

¹¹¹ E. A. Rees, *State Control in Soviet Russia: The Rise and the Fall of the Workers' and Peasants' Inspectorate, 1920-1934* (London, 1987).

ranks of the NKTP.¹¹² Ordzhonikidze's management style was frenetic and confrontational, and he had a reputation for having a quick temper, which some contemporaries ascribed to his being Georgian.¹¹³ At the same time, he was an ideal patron, demonstrating fierce loyalty to the personnel he supervised, defending them on numerous occasions against dangerous political charges, and in some cases protecting them from Stalin himself.¹¹⁴

As befitted a member of an emergent diaspora in Soviet politics, Ordzhonikidze's leadership of the NKTP demanded a high level of geographical mobility. Archival records show that he not only constantly shifted a core group of personnel to positions around the country, but also carried out the affairs of the NKTP wherever he traveled, hastily dispatching instructions and orders by telegraph. Whether inspecting an industrial plant or on vacation in the Caucasus, he ran the Commissariat by telephone and post, and often from a train car.¹¹⁵ The Commissar, his Commissariat, and his trusted cadres were constantly in motion. It was imperative that Ordzhonikidze appear routinely at construction sites and factories throughout the Soviet Union, both to ensure that work was completed in the absence of other accountability mechanisms, and to generate favorable coverage of the Soviet industrial effort for the pages of *Pravda* and *Izvestiia*.¹¹⁶

The personnel Ordzhonikidze relied upon in his effort to oversee Soviet industrial development were not exclusively Georgian. Industrialization created a strong demand for specialists. While the "bourgeois specialists" relied upon in the 1920s were no longer available, preference was given to ambitious Bolsheviks with technical training and managerial skills. This new stratum of talented Party managers was one in which literate, mobile ethnic groups were overrepresented.¹¹⁷ Among those ethnic groups who achieved prominence during the Soviet industrialization drive, the Georgians were best suited to establish a close relationship with Ordzhonikidze by appealing to old bonds and a common culture. Nowhere do the mechanisms that these ethnic specialists drew on to establish themselves stand out as clearly as in the patron-client relationships that were established in the NKTP.

¹¹² On Ordzhonikidze as the leading *khoziastvennik* of Soviet industry, see Paul R. Gregory, *The Political Economy of Stalinism: Evidence from the Soviet Secret Archives* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 153-182.

¹¹³ Trotsky noted: "Ordzhonikidze, who was decidedly gifted with forcefulness, courage, and firmness of character, was essentially a man of little culture, irascible and utterly incapable of self-control." L. D. Trotsky, *Stalin* (London, 1947), 348, cited in Jeremy Smith, "The Georgian Affair of 1922," 521. In the aftermath of the "Georgian Affair," Ordzhonikidze himself commented: "What can I do? I'm a hot-tempered man—maybe when I turn fifty I'll mellow a bit, but in the meantime I can't do anything about it." Khlevniuk, *In Stalin's Shadow*, 20. For this same character trait, Stalin's daughter, Svetlana Allilueva, described Ordzhonikidze as a "true Georgian." See Allilueva, *Dvadsat' pisem k drugu*, 132.

¹¹⁴ In particular, he supported Beso Lominadze against charges of deviation from the party line during the "Syrtsov-Lominadze Affair." See R. W. Davies, "The Syrtsov-Lominadze Affair," *Soviet Studies* 33 (1981): 29-50.

¹¹⁵ "Telegrammy NKTP, 1934" RGAE, f. 6884, op. 1, d. 1, ll. 1-43.

¹¹⁶ Ordzhonikidze's working papers show that he helped orchestrate press coverage of major industrial efforts in collaboration with his own personnel and officials in Moscow. See his correspondence on media coverage in "Perepiska G. K. Ordzhonikidze" RGAE, f. 6884, op. 1, d. 6, ll. 1-161.

¹¹⁷ While the Soviet Union was officially a classless society, these technocrats arguably made up a "neo-soslovie" category with special tasks and privileges. Terry Martin, "Modernizing or neo-traditionalism? Ascribed nationality and Soviet primordialism," in *Stalinism: New Directions*, ed. Sheila Fitzpatrick (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), 348-367.

Even before Ordzhonikidze assumed his position as Commissar of NKTP, many old Georgian comrades sought out his assistance, and he likely gained a reputation as a helpful patron. Shalva Eliava was an example of a Georgian Bolshevik who successfully appealed to Ordzhonikidze for political support. Their paths had diverged in the mid-1920s, when Ordzhonikidze pursued his career in Moscow and Eliava remained in Georgia. Eliava's prospects hit a low point in 1931, when he was sent by the party to supervise an economic project in Kazakhstan. He took issue with the posting, finding it a waste of his energy and skills. Matters took a turn for the worse when his wife fell ill and was unable to receive proper medical care in Kazakhstan. Finding himself in a desperate position, Eliava decided to write to Ordzhonikidze for help.

In a letter dated March 11, 1931, Eliava informed his old comrade and now potential patron that he had been sent to work in Kazakhstan on a matter which he “could not understand and even now can understand only poorly.” He appealed to his “dear Sergo” as a friend and protector: “I appeal to you as a person who has always played an intimate role in my fate. I am sure that you will not consider it awkward to consider my request, though it be made from afar and in writing.” The paragraphs that followed can be seen as a typical example of “speaking Bolshevik.”¹¹⁸ Writing in Russian, Eliava expressed his dedication to the Party and his willingness to accept criticism for any past failings in his service to the state. However, in the final paragraph of the letter, Eliava switched to Georgian and wrote in a strikingly different tone. At this point, Russian was the official language of correspondence among state employees at the Union-wide level, and both Eliava and Ordzhonikidze wrote and spoke fluent Russian. Here, Eliava engaged in “code-switching,” appealing to his patron in Georgian as a way to affirm a joint identity, and along with it a shared sense of ethnic solidarity and mutual obligation.¹¹⁹

After describing in detail the state of his affairs in Kazakhstan, Eliava wrote in Georgian: “Such are the state of things, my dear Sergo. If you have not forgotten me and can offer me help—good. If not, what can I say! Be healthy, and let happen what will happen to me.” He closed by sending his regards to Ordzhonikidze's wife Zinaida, and noted that his own wife sent her regards too, though she was “seriously ill” and confined to “lying down in her train compartment.”¹²⁰ Ordzhonikidze was not able to resist this appeal as a patron who could offer help, and as a fellow Georgian. Based on Ordzhonikidze's notes in the margins, we can see that he forwarded the letter immediately to Stalin. Later that year, Eliava was appointed Deputy Commissar of Foreign Trade of the Soviet Union. In Eliava's case, a shared background and a mutually intelligible appeal in Georgian were essential for his transfer to the center. Although Soviet leaders were committed to socialist ideology and well-versed in “speaking Bolshevik,” the language they expressed themselves in very much mattered. Georgian, like other languages and other “national forms” more generally, was a semiotic system that appealed to a set of emotions and expectations familiar to the speaker and his

¹¹⁸ A concept elaborated by Stephen Kotkin in *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as Civilization* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1997), 198-237.

¹¹⁹ For detailed and up-to-date discussion of this phenomenon, see Barbara E. Bullock and Almeida Jacqueline Toribio, eds., *The Cambridge Handbook of Linguistic Code Switching* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

¹²⁰ Zapiska G. K. Ordzhonikidze” RGASPI, f. 85, op. 28, d. 55, ll. 1-3.

audience.¹²¹ As a “code language,” Georgian was ideal: as a non-Indo-European language with its own alphabet, it was virtually unintelligible to outsiders; moreover, as an official Soviet language and one with its own well-established high culture credentials, it could be used without suspicion or shame, not only in correspondence, but also in side conversations held among Georgian Bolsheviks at official events.¹²²

Now that Ordzhonikidze headed a new ministry with vast powers, even more Georgians sought his patronage, many of them newly educated and eager for work within the Soviet state. Most of these Georgian specialists were trained in Moscow, though some were sent abroad to study the latest methods of industrial organization. Returning from Germany in 1932, A. Cheishvili, a Georgian engineer, asked for Ordzhonikidze’s support in a letter. He recalled that his delegation had once met Ordzhonikidze at a railway station in the North Caucasus town of Gudermes. Now back in Moscow, he appealed to “Comrade Sergo” for advice on how he could further his “career in the international workers’ movement.”¹²³ Among aspiring Georgians, Ordzhonikidze was well known as a high-ranking but accessible party figure. When the young Grigorii Mamatsashvili, who left Georgia to study engineering in Moscow in the late 1920s, strove to make connections in the Soviet capital, he called upon Ordzhonikidze, whose wife arranged a Kremlin pass (*propusk*) for the Georgian student, allowing him to make the acquaintance of top Soviet officials.¹²⁴

Ordzhonikidze also met the cultural and familial obligations of a Georgian patron.¹²⁵ His support was likely critical for securing a position for his younger brother Papulia with the Transcaucasian Railway. He thus helped the same brother whom he had turned to for assistance while a prisoner in 1913.¹²⁶ His correspondence suggests that he intervened directly to support the appointment of his nephew, Georgii Gvakharia, to direct the massive Makeevskii Metalworks in eastern Ukraine’s heavily industrial Donbass region.¹²⁷ He also extended support to the children of his old comrades, like Elena Dzhaparidze, daughter of Prokofii “Alesha” Dzhaparidze, a Georgian Bolshevik from Baku who had been among the city’s 26 Commissars executed by British forces during the Civil War. Elena Dzhaparidze trained as an engineer and was posted to Magnitogorsk, a massive new industrial city near the Ural Mountains and the center of

¹²¹ A point compellingly made by Jeffrey Veidlinger in his study of the Moscow State Yiddish Theater. Writing of the futility of the Bolshevik effort to separate national form from socialist content, and, in semiotic terms, “signifier” from the “signified,” Veidlinger states: “National forms are not translucent veils behind which any character can hide; they are more like the masks of the commedia dell’arte, with recognized personalities that evoke common expectations among the audience, irrespective of the function they are purported to perform.” See his book, *The Moscow State Yiddish Theater* (Bloomington and Indianapolis, 2000), 3.

¹²² In contrast, the correspondence of top Jewish Bolsheviks reveals no trace of Yiddish or Yiddishisms. Despite the Jewish cultural revival around the time of the Revolution described in Kenneth B. Moss, *Jewish Renaissance in the Russian Revolution*, most leading Jewish Bolsheviks saw Russian as the ideal medium for literary and spoken expression. Yuri Slezkine writes of the Jewish “mastery of the national high culture and an eager conversion to the Pushkin faith” in *The Jewish Century*, 127.

¹²³ “Pis’mo nauchnogo rabotnika A. Cheishvili na imia Sergo Ordzhonikidze” RGASPI, f. 85, op. 29, d. 759, ll. 1-2.

¹²⁴ “G. A. Mamatsashvili, ‘Skloka (byl)’” RGAE, f. 631, op. 1, d. 14, ll. 12-13.

¹²⁵ Mars and Altman, “The Cultural Bases of Soviet Georgia’s Second Economy,” 546-560.

¹²⁶ Amy Knight, *Beria*, 49-50.

¹²⁷ “Pis’ma nachal’nika GUMP A. Gurevicha na imia Sergo Ordzhonikidze” RGASPI, f. 85, op. 28, d. 70.

Soviet steel production.¹²⁸ She frequently corresponded with Ordzhonikidze about working conditions in Magnitogorsk, and met with him when he visited the steel mill, likely providing him with valuable information on the factory's day-to-day operations. Dzhaparidze's unpublished recollections of Ordzhonikidze reveal how personal, political, and professional relationships were closely intertwined. Dzhaparidze recalled that when she arrived in Moscow for a party congress, she had only to phone Sergo Ordzhonikidze's wife, Zinaida. The instant Zinaida heard Dzhaparidze's voice on the line, she invited the young Georgian engineer over for dinner and welcomed her into the Ordzhonikidzes' home.¹²⁹ Standards of Georgian hospitality informed Ordzhonikidze's paternalistic relationship with the daughter of his fallen comrade.¹³⁰

As a good patron, Ordzhonikidze rewarded the loyalty of his more valued associates, even risking his own career to defend them against political accusations. His deputy in the NKTP was Georgii Piatakov, whose standing in the party had been tarnished by an open disagreement he once had with Lenin. Although Piatakov was from Kiev, not the Caucasus, he sought to establish a personal bond with Ordzhonikidze. He did so in a manner that perhaps attempted to emulate Caucasian patterns of patronage. In a letter to Ordzhonikidze, Piatakov wrote: "It is because you are not only a boss and *senior* comrade, but also a man whom I have always regarded with the deepest love and respect, that your leadership was, and is, for me not only the formal tutelage of a superior, but also the leadership of a comrade whom I personally respect deeply."¹³¹ Believing him to be a competent and effective manager, Ordzhonikidze stood by Piatakov, despite the latter's damaged political reputation.

A few years earlier, Ordzhonikidze had extended himself politically to help Beso Lominadze. An ambitious young Georgian promoted from party secretary in Tbilisi to the Comintern in Moscow in the late 1920s, Lominadze had been accused of "left deviationism" by Stalin himself for opposing the party's position on the Chinese Revolution. Ordzhonikidze reportedly concealed from Stalin correspondence written by Lominadze that would have incriminated the young Georgian radical.¹³² In 1934, Lominadze, now party secretary of the industrial city of Magnitogorsk, once again appealed to Ordzhonikidze for support after coming into conflict with the head of the Magnitogorsk Metallurgical Combine, Avraamii Zaveniagin. Lominadze wrote to "Comrade Sergo" using the informal second person and declared his opponents to be "idiots" and "fools." Emphasizing that his situation arose from an overabundance of loyalty to Ordzhonikidze, he wrote that his associates "cruelly punished (*zhestoko nakazali*) people for not carrying out your orders, and did so correctly. Now all know the value (*tse na*) of Ordzhonikidze's directives." Aware of Lominadze's link to Ordzhonikidze, Zaveniagin sought to clear his name. Using the formal form of address, he wrote to the head of the NKTP: "I know you have good relations with Lominadze and, obviously, with Comrade Stalin. Therefore, it is all the more unpleasant for me to raise these questions with you. However, it would be worse to bury this matter and thus

¹²⁸ A thoroughly Soviet city, Magnitogorsk is the subject of Stephen Kotkin's *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as Civilization*.

¹²⁹ "Vospominaniia E. A. Dzhaparidze, 1980" RGAE, f. 332, op. 4, d. 56, ll. 59-64.

¹³⁰ For a discussion of Georgian hospitality, see Mary Ellen Chatwin, *Socio-Cultural Transformation and Foodways in the Republic of Georgia* (Columbia: Nova Science Publishers, 1997).

¹³¹ RGASPI, f. 85, op. 1/s, d. 136, cited and translated in Khlevniuk, *In Stalin's Shadow*, 93.

¹³² Khlevniuk, *In Stalin's Shadow*, 34.

destroy (*pogubit'*) our entire enterprise."¹³³ Called into the fray between two clients, one of them Georgian, Ordzhonikidze pressured both to resolve their differences while drafting a Politburo resolution that protected them from party discipline, though Lominadze had by now attracted the scrutiny of Stalin, who ordered the NKVD to begin investigating him and his associates in Magnitogorsk.¹³⁴

Political leaders at all levels brought their own networks of trusted cadres with them as they rose to high-ranking positions. As head of the NTKP, Ordzhonikidze promoted his own personnel to positions throughout the Soviet Union while staying in constant communication with his old Georgian comrades in Tbilisi.¹³⁵ Even Lominadze, Ordzhonikidze's client, had his own *khvost* (literally, "tail") of associates who followed him to Magnitogorsk.¹³⁶

As the leader of the Soviet Union, Stalin was the supreme patron. He ruled by balancing and playing political factions off one another. But as a Georgian Bolshevik, Stalin was more than simply a "machine politician."¹³⁷ His relations with other members of the Caucasian group were structured by a shared cultural framework. Among the group, patronage relations were more flexible and less hierarchical. In part, these distinctions were due to shared revolutionary experiences in the Caucasus. Sergo Ordzhonikidze corresponded with Stalin using the informal form of address and peppered his Russian-language letters to Stalin concerning official matters with Georgian phrases, greetings, and personal appeals.¹³⁸ Stalin's old ally, Avel' Enukidze, known around the Kremlin as "Uncle Avel'," also addressed the Soviet leader in familiar terms and occasionally in Georgian, reflecting a decades-long friendship and the democratic spirit of the Georgian revolutionary underground.¹³⁹ While shared personal history and seniority helped determine the tenor of patronage relations, the social distance between patron and client was closer for Georgians, perhaps a feature of Georgian culture.¹⁴⁰ Beso Lominadze carried out a prolonged exchange of letters directly with Stalin. Although Lominadze, Stalin's junior by almost twenty years, addressed the Soviet leader in polite terms, he wrote with surprising directness. In 1928, Lominadze wrote Stalin to bluntly complain about being posted to rural Russia, stating: "I am completely unfamiliar with the Russian countryside (I have never been there in my life), and with the lifestyle (*byt*) and living conditions of the Russian peasantry."¹⁴¹ While such frank comments may have been characteristic of Lominadze's brash personality, it is also possible that he hoped Stalin would be sympathetic to his views on the Russian countryside as a fellow outsider in a foreign host society.

¹³³ "Proekt postanovleniia TsK VKP(b) o Magnitogorskom metallurgicheskom kombinat, 1934" RGASPI, f. 85, op. 1/s, d. 162, l. 33.

¹³⁴ Khlevniuk, *In Stalin's Shadow*, 74-75.

¹³⁵ See, for example, his detailed correspondence with Mamia Orakhelashvili, the Secretary of the Transcaucasus Regional Committee, in 1932. RGASPI, f. 85, op. 29, d. 472.

¹³⁶ A fact observed by Elena Dzhaparidze when she arrived in the industrial city. RGAE, f. 332, op. 4, d. 56, ll. 66-72.

¹³⁷ As he is described in Yoram Gorlizki and Oleg Khlevniuk, *Stalin and the Soviet Ruling Circle, 1945-1953* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).

¹³⁸ Based on a careful reading of Ordzhonikidze's correspondence with Stalin. RGASPI, f. 558, op. 1, d. 777-779.

¹³⁹ "Perepiska Stalina, I. V. s Enukidze, A. S., 1924-1935" RGASPI, f. 558, op. 11, d. 728.

¹⁴⁰ Mars and Altman, "The Cultural Bases of Soviet Georgia's Second Economy."

¹⁴¹ "Perepiska Stalina, I. V. s Lominadze, V. V., 1926-1934" RGASPI, f. 558, op. 11, d. 758, ll. 157-158.

Stalin's patronage was also sought by Georgians outside the party. He received frequent appeals from a host of childhood friends and family members. Although he seldom traveled to Georgia, he occasionally wrote to his old friends in Gori, and in one case wired them money when they were in need.¹⁴² He was contacted by classmates, people who had assisted him in the revolutionary underground, and one childhood friend in particular, who asked that Stalin send a plane so he could see the "Kremlin and the other sites of Moscow" before dying.¹⁴³ Those writing to the seemingly omnipotent Soviet leader believed that their every wish might be granted.¹⁴⁴ Stalin also received more pointed requests for meetings in Moscow and financial assistance from family members in Georgia. One cousin, Efimiia Gveseliani, proved remarkably persistent in contacting him, sending Stalin numerous letters over the course of several years and at one point asking him to support her son's efforts to receive an education abroad. Her correspondence indicates that Stalin actually met with her twice, in 1941 and 1946. When Stalin was unable to see her during a visit to Moscow in 1947, she brashly appealed to his sense of family obligation by writing in Georgian: "I know that I am bothering you...but you must forgive me for just wanting to see you. Fulfill this, my heart's only desire. I am thinking of returning to Tbilisi, please do not let me leave without seeing you."¹⁴⁵ It is unclear whether Stalin met with her on this occasion, though it is apparent that the "meetings" were filled with thinly veiled requests for additional assistance.

Interestingly, some of Stalin's most intimate family obligations, including those to his mother, were not handled by the Soviet leader himself. Until her death by suicide in 1932, Stalin's second wife, Nadezhda Allilueva, often wrote to Stalin's mother on his behalf using Georgian greetings, reporting that her "Soso" was healthy but very busy with the affairs of state.¹⁴⁶ After his wife's death, Stalin brought Alexander Egnatashvili, a childhood friend from Gori, to Moscow to look after his affairs. Part of Egnatashvili's responsibilities included supplying Stalin's mother with meat and other scarce foods through NKVD channels. Egnatashvili also took it upon himself to update Stalin's mother on the leader's health, writing to her approvingly that "Soso" had "put on some weight" and he had not seen Stalin so healthy in years.¹⁴⁷ Egnatashvili personally distributed special rations to other members of Stalin's family, including the persistent Efimiia Gveseliani.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴² RGASPI, f. 558, op. 1, d. 5978, 5080, cited in Montefiore, *Young Stalin*, 316.

¹⁴³ "Pis'ma na gruzinskom iazyke na imia Stalina, 1926-1952" RGASPI, f. 558, op. 11, d. 722, ll. 128-130.

¹⁴⁴ Letters from Georgians made up only a fraction of the many messages Stalin and other top officials received from Soviet citizens. For more on these letters, see Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism: Ordinary Life in Extraordinary Times: Soviet Russia in the 1930s* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 175-178. Wishes, however, were occasionally granted to old Georgian associates. We know from official commentary on the letter that Stalin had in fact held a personal meeting with the same childhood friend who requested to be flown to Moscow. He was a former classmate from the Gori seminary. "Pis'ma na gruzinskom iazyke na imia Stalina, 1926-1952" RGASPI, f. 558, op. 11, d. 722, ll. 128-130.

¹⁴⁵ RGASPI, f. 558, op. 11, d. 722, l. 105.

¹⁴⁶ "Materialy o Dzhughashvili, E. G., 1922-1937" RGASPI, f. 558, op. 11, d. 1549, l. 7.

¹⁴⁷ RGASPI, f. 558, op. 11, d. 1549. In Tbilisi, Beria personally attended on Stalin's mother. Stalin himself was notably absent from her funeral in 1937. Montefiore, *Stalin: The Court of the Red Tsar* (London: Phoenix, 2004), 186-188, 226.

¹⁴⁸ In 1946, she complained that delivery of her special provision by Egnatashvili had been disrupted. RGASPI, f. 558, op. 11, d. 722, l. 89.

Political relationships among the group of Caucasians now in power were reaffirmed by shared social rituals. In Stalin's Kremlin, political affairs were conducted around tables laden with Georgian food and drink and governed by Georgia's traditions of toasting. Having risen to high positions in Moscow, revolutionaries from the Caucasus brought their eating habits and their distinct practices of feasting and hospitality with them. Participation in communal feasts and other social rituals renewed old bonds and proved vital to the political advancement of younger party members.

Until her suicide in 1932, Stalin's second wife, Nadezhda Allilueva, played the role of hostess at these social gatherings in the Kremlin. Although from a Russian family, she had grown up in a Georgian cultural environment, her father a metalworker and party activist in Tbilisi. She was particularly close with Avel' Enukidze, whom she had known since childhood as her godfather. Khrushchev remembered her warm hospitality with fondness, noting that she always greeted visitors with food and kind concern. Allilueva played a vital role in forging social networks among the Soviet elite; Khrushchev credited Allilueva, who studied with him at the Industrial Academy in Moscow, for introducing him to Stalin.¹⁴⁹

Elaborate feasts begun in Moscow continued along Abkhazia's Black Sea coast at Kholodnaia Rechka, Stalin's dacha complex. A solid stone structure perched on a cliff near the resort town of Gagra, Kholodnaia Rechka was where Stalin held huge dinners, participated in hunting expeditions, and tended the orange trees specially planted on the grounds for him.¹⁵⁰ While Stalin rarely returned to his native Gori or even Tbilisi, he recreated the atmosphere of a Caucasian gentry estate at Kholodnaia Rechka. Dining and vacationing with Stalin at Kholodnaia Rechka gave Caucasian Bolsheviks political access that was unobtainable for regional party officials elsewhere in the Soviet Union. In Abkhazia, Stalin was especially close with Nestor Lakoba, another former student of the Tbilisi seminary and, in the 1930s, the Communist party chief of the autonomous republic. At dinners held at Kholodnaia Rechka, the Soviet leader would defer to Lakoba, allowing the Abkhaz native to serve as *tamada* (toastmaster) for their Georgian-style feasts. Eager young party members in Georgia sought introductions to Stalin and his circle while the leaders vacationed. On the grounds of his dacha, Stalin was first introduced to the youthful and energetic Lavrentii Beria, a meeting arranged by Lakoba.¹⁵¹

The social and political networks which linked Georgian party leaders in Moscow with party officials in Georgia were bidirectional; patrons in Moscow helped advance the careers of clients in Georgia, and clients in Georgia offered favors in return as part of a reciprocal arrangement. As Deputy Commissar of Foreign Trade, Eliava forged a close relationship with Nestor Lakoba in Abkhazia. In a letter to Lakoba dated November 16, 1931, Eliava noted his obligation to Lakoba in advance and offered Lakoba his support in foreign trade matters. He graciously invited Lakoba to come to visit him in Moscow. In return, Eliava asked Lakoba to personally host the Minister of Trade and Industry of Mongolia in Abkhazia, saying that the Minister was a "needed person" who should be shown the "maximum attention" and provided with the best accommodations.¹⁵²

¹⁴⁹ Khrushchev, *Vospominaniia*, 1:48-51.

¹⁵⁰ For more on the significance of Stalin's feasts, see the subsequent chapter.

¹⁵¹ Simon Sebag Montefiore, *Stalin: The Court of the Red Tsar*, 78-79.

¹⁵² "Nestor Lakoba Papers, 1922-1936," Hoover Institution Archives, Box 1.

Wherever they found themselves, Bolsheviks from the Caucasus articulated a shared group identity. Shortly after Ordzhonikidze was promoted from Tbilisi to Moscow in 1926, he wrote to Lakoba, his comrade in the Caucasus, telling him: “drink and shoot as much as you like, the TsKK [The Central Control Commission, which Ordzhonikidze headed] is now in our hands.” In the same letter, he also informed Lakoba that Viacheslav Molotov, a close ally of Stalin, would be coming to Abkhazia, and that he should be looked after. Ordzhonikidze closed his letter by inviting Lakoba and his family to visit him at his new home in Moscow.¹⁵³

The Russian and Georgian-language correspondence of members of the “Caucasus group” shows they gathered together frequently for birthdays, celebrations, and cultural events. Avel’ Enukidze composed a very personal letter to Stalin on the Soviet leader’s fiftieth birthday, celebrated in the Kremlin on December 21, 1929. While Enukidze acknowledged Stalin’s importance to the international socialist movement, he devoted a great deal of attention to his own decades-long friendship with “Soso.”¹⁵⁴ When Enukidze’s own birthday came, his old comrades Shalva Eliava, Sergo and Zinaida Ordzhonikidze, and Galaktion Vashadze, along with Kliment Voroshilov, wrote a spirited birthday greeting to him on Shalva Eliava’s letterhead.¹⁵⁵ The same group of Georgians attended performances together when Tbilisi’s Rustaveli Theater came to Moscow.¹⁵⁶

The Caucasian revolutionaries' children grew up together in close proximity to the Kremlin. Alexander Egnatashvili's daughter recalled many hours spent playing with Stalin's children, with whom she formed lasting friendships. Her family spoke mainly Russian at home, because Egnatashvili's wife was not Georgian, but in other ways they kept a "Georgian house" and ate mainly Georgian food.¹⁵⁷ Children of the Caucasian group grew up as members of a privileged multiethnic elite, but one with a strong regional flavor. Bulat Okudzhava was born on Moscow's Arbat to a Georgian father and an Armenian mother, both fervent revolutionaries who had come to study in the Soviet capital. His father, Shalva Okudzhava, later returned to Tbilisi before being posted to Nizhnyi Tagil to supervise a train car construction facility operating under the auspices of Ordzhonikidze's Commissariat of Heavy Industry. When she arrived with her husband Lavrentii in Moscow in the late 1930s, Nina Beria evinced a more overt sense of ethnic solidarity, hoping that her son, Sergo, would marry a Georgian girl, and even finding a fiancée for him from a "good family."¹⁵⁸ Growing up among the children of the new Soviet elite, he ended up marrying the granddaughter of Maxim Gorky. Although members of ethnic diasporas whose Caucasian cultural ties were visibly affirmed, the children of Georgian revolutionaries eventually noticed that their parents spoke strongly-accented Russian, while they spoke like native Muscovites. After studying in Moscow and working in Magnitogorsk, Elena Dzhaparidze remarked that Stalin's accent seemed stronger to her when she finally heard him speak at the Seventeenth Party Congress in

¹⁵³ “Nestor Lakoba Papers, 1922-1936,” Hoover Institution Archives, Box 1, Item 26.

¹⁵⁴ “Perepiska Enukidze, A. S. i Stalina, I. V.” Stalin responded to Enukidze’s letter by offering warm words of gratitude. RGASPI, f. 667, op. 1, d. 16, ll. 1-8.

¹⁵⁵ “Perepiska Enukidze, A. S. s partiinymi deiateliami” RGASPI, f. 667, op. 1, d. 17, l. 119.

¹⁵⁶ “Pis’ma na imia A. S. Enukidze, 1920-1935” RGASPI, f. 667, op. 1, d. 19, ll. 128-129.

¹⁵⁷ Eteri and Tinatin Egnatashvili. Interview by author. Moscow, Russia, March 23, 2008.

¹⁵⁸ Sergo Beria, *Beria, My Father: Inside Stalin’s Kremlin* (London: Duckworth, 2001), 191.

1934, perhaps a result of the educational opportunities made available to her and other young Georgians after the revolution.¹⁵⁹

Stalin and the Politics of Georgian Representation

Stalin's audible Georgian accent and the presence of so many Georgians in visible positions of power made the representation of Soviet power a politically sensitive subject. After all, the revolution had brought noticeable ethnic outsiders to power. One unofficial anti-Bolshevik poster compared the Georgian Bolsheviks to Jews in top political positions. On one side of a river, the poster showed a Jewish group led by Trotsky, Kamenev, and Zinoviev, and on the other side a Georgian group featuring Stalin, Ordzhonikidze, and Erukidze. Below the image, an inscription read: "And the Slavs fell into dispute about who was to rule in Old Russia."¹⁶⁰ Representations of influential Jewish cliques and cabals were not new in Russia; the fabricated *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* was, after all, a Russian imperial document. While representations of Jews centered on accusations of concealed identity and hidden conspiracies, the Georgian Bolsheviks stood out more visibly because of their accents, their appearance, and their distinct cultural rituals, all of which were celebrated in the Soviet context.¹⁶¹ In contrast to most Jewish Bolsheviks, for whom the revolution was about embracing universalism and casting aside old national traditions, Georgian Bolsheviks remained committed to Georgian culture.¹⁶² They represented its most cosmopolitan wing, yet they were still the product of a Georgian revolution with distinctly national contours. Also, unlike for Jews, Georgian political prominence was not altogether new, as they had been visibly present as nobles and generals in the old imperial court. Georgian identity could now be openly affirmed even more than before, especially since Moscow was officially depicted as an international capital of revolution, rather than a Russian city. At this stage, the presence of these desired ethnic outsiders was cast as a sign of socialist internationalism, rather than an affront to Russian identity.

All Soviet citizens were taught that Stalin was Georgian. General knowledge of other Caucasian ethnic groups likely varied. When Soviets spoke of Georgians in power, it is possible that they also counted Armenians, Abkhaz, and other Caucasian Bolsheviks among them, using "Georgian" as an overarching ethnic category.¹⁶³ Although Stalin

¹⁵⁹ RGAE, f. 332, op. 4, d. 56, ll. 66-72.

¹⁶⁰ K. Simonov, *Glazami cheloveka moego pokoleniia*, 37, cited in Service, *Stalin*, 324. The poster alluded to an ancient dispute among Slavic tribes that eventually led to the invitation of the foreign Varangians to rule over them. The poster revealed that factional battles between Trotsky and Stalin may have been understood as an interethnic contest between Jews and Georgians, though among Stalin's closest supporters were Lazar Kaganovich and other influential Soviet Jews.

¹⁶¹ Jeffrey Veidlinger writes that by the late 1930s, "many Yiddish schools, courts, newspapers, and other institutions" were closed, part of a campaign against national minorities not rooted in national republics, one that would intensify after the Second World War. See Veidlinger, *The Moscow State Yiddish Theater: Jewish Culture on the Soviet Stage*, 7.

¹⁶² While Georgian Bolsheviks affirmed their cultural origins and, as will be discussed, promoted Georgian high culture, Jewish Revolutionaries, in the words of Yuri Slezkine, revolted against a Jewish life that they scorned as "babbling, clannish, bad-smelling, pointlessly intricate, lifelessly rational, relentlessly acquisitive, and devoid of color." Slezkine, *The Jewish Century*, 137.

¹⁶³ The Georgians were also familiar to Soviet citizens as a result of their appearance in Russian Imperial Literature. See Susan Layton, "Eros and Empire in Russian Literature About Georgia," *Slavic Review* 51: 2 (Summer 1992): 195-213.

himself rarely visited Georgia, the republic was celebrated throughout the Soviet Union as Stalin's homeland. The Georgian pavilion at Moscow's All-Union Agricultural Exhibition (VSKhV), opened in 1939, greeted visitors with a sign reading: "Georgia—homeland of the Great Stalin, flowering under the sun of the Stalin Constitution."¹⁶⁴ Official images of the multiethnic Soviet population showed a harmonious and diverse group of national representatives walking and working together, though the exceptional prominence of Georgians and the leading role of one Georgian in particular was occasionally acknowledged in official propaganda. It was no coincidence that the iconic image of Soviet victory in the Second World War depicted a Georgian and a Russian raising the Soviet flag together over the German Reichstag.¹⁶⁵

For some Georgians, having their co-ethnic at the helm of the Soviet Union imbued the cult of Stalin with national and personal meaning. Citizens across the Soviet Union wrote letters of appeal to Stalin and other top Soviet leaders, but Georgian letter writers often cast their pleas in ethnic terms. When F. Kalandadze traveled to Moscow from Tbilisi, he sought Enukidze's help on an important matter, likely relating to his health. While apologizing for being a nuisance, he felt that if he did not "bother Ordzhonikidze, Stalin, or Enukidze" – all fellow Georgians – "nothing would come of things."¹⁶⁶ Others appealed to Stalin directly in Georgian, or sought assistance on the basis of distant family relationships and old acquaintances.¹⁶⁷

As a Georgian Bolshevik at the head of the Soviet Union, Stalin had to steer between a system built on personalized patronage and the interests of state-building, as well as between politically expedient and potentially damaging displays of Georgian culture. While Stalin continued to correspond closely with his comrades from the Caucasus, in November 1925 he drafted a memo that took aim at the constant use of non-Russian languages within the Central Executive Committee, then led by Enukidze. Stalin noted with concern that in daily committee affairs, "there often circulated all manner of notes in the languages of national minorities... without any accompanying translation into Russian." Stalin declared that committee business needed to be carried out in Russian, or at least translated into Russian for the official record. Letters written to Enukidze from Georgian Old Bolsheviks showed some discomfort over this change in language policy. Some lower-ranking party members were already dismayed that as the Soviet bureaucracy took shape, they could no longer meet with Enukidze directly but had to go through his secretary. One Old Bolshevik begrudgingly wrote a note to Enukidze and Stalin in Russian, but explained that he was only doing so "because someone might unseal and inspect the letter and thus delay its delivery."¹⁶⁸ Stalin and many of his Georgian associates continued to write in Georgian in their personal correspondence, which though unofficial was nevertheless critical to the functioning of the Soviet state. While Georgian Bolsheviks relied on their native language to affirm common bonds, Stalin recognized the need for a unified state language and sought to avoid the

¹⁶⁴ *Pavil'on Gruzinskaia SSR: Putevoditel'* (Moscow: Sel'khozgiz, 1939).

¹⁶⁵ See the discussion of this issue in Chapter 1.

¹⁶⁶ "Lichniaia perepiska Sekretariata Prezidiuma TsIK Soiuz SSSR, 1934" GARF (State Archive of the Russian Federation), f. R-3316, op. 27, d. 756, l. 79.

¹⁶⁷ RGASPI, f. 558, op. 11, d. 721.

¹⁶⁸ Lichniaia perepiska Sekretariata Prezidiuma TsIK Soiuz SSSR, 1934" GARF, f. R-3316, op. 27, d. 754; GARF f. R-3316, op. 27, d. 755, l. 175.

appearance of full-scale ethnicization of official state business.¹⁶⁹ The move represented a first step in transforming a set of personalized patronage networks into a bureaucratic state apparatus, an effort that would accelerate rapidly in the 1930s.

While Stalin listed “Georgian” as his nationality in government documents and Georgia was officially celebrated as the leader’s homeland, the Soviet leader carefully managed his public image and restricted publications on his Georgian youth. When novelist Evgenii Fedorov’s fictionalized account of Stalin’s childhood was nearly published by a Leningrad printing press in 1940 without his knowledge, Stalin was outraged. Fedorov’s *Kartalinskaia povest’ (A Kartvelian Tale)* depicted young Soso Dzhughashvili as a precocious boy growing up in a loving Georgian family, though one strained by his father’s treatment at the Adelkhanov shoe factory. The novel set its characters against a background of stock images of the picturesque Georgian countryside, and sprinkled its dialogue with Georgian expressions, songs, and the inevitable toast. Although the novel revealed Stalin’s Georgian identity, it made clear that there were “good” Georgians and “bad” Georgians. In the novel, young Soso railed against Georgian Mensheviks like Irakli Tsereteli and Noe Zhordania, who thought that “all Georgians” were “brothers;” the astute child observed that the capitalists who ran the Adelkhanov shoe factory were no brothers to him or his family. Stalin’s notes on the manuscript show that he read Fedorov’s novel carefully, even correcting the name of his former teacher at the Tbilisi seminary.¹⁷⁰

Stalin, as it turned out, was not amused by Fedorov’s unsanctioned attempt at a Georgian-themed biography, nor did he approve of efforts by the same Leningrad publisher, P. N. Pospelov, to translate a similar biography by Georgian author Konstantine Gamsakhurdia into Russian. Gamsakhurdia’s *Childhood of the Leader* had been published in Georgian in 1939 in honor of Stalin’s sixtieth birthday, and was an important source of inspiration for Fedorov.¹⁷¹ In a hastily written note sent in September 1940 to Andrei Zhdanov, Stalin’s trusted deputy on cultural matters, the Soviet leader angrily stated:

Comrade Pospelov has acted stupidly and improperly [*neprilichno*], ordering the printing of Fedorov’s book without my approval (and guidance). Fedorov’s book should be liquidated as the work of a literary hack [*kak khalturnuiu*] and Pospelov punished [*Pospelovu dat’ nadraine*].¹⁷²

In a second note, Stalin asked that the translation of Gamsakhurdia’s biographical work into Russian be banned.¹⁷³ While it may have been expedient to emphasize Stalin’s ethnicity for a Georgian audience, he grew increasingly wary of stressing the fact too

¹⁶⁹ “Perepiska Stalina, I. V. s Enukidze, A. S., 1925” RGASPI, f. 558, op. 11, d. 728, ll. 13-14.

¹⁷⁰ A copy of the manuscript, with Stalin’s comments, is preserved in the archives. RGASPI, f. 558, op. 11, d. 730, ll. 44-186. It was nearly printed in mass production by the Leningrad publisher Khudozhestvennaia literatura.

¹⁷¹ Gamsakhurdia had earlier been arrested and imprisoned in connection with the 1924 uprising in Georgia against Soviet power. His biography of Stalin may have been an effort to seek the Soviet authorities’ good graces, allowing him to continue writing fictional works set in medieval Georgia, like his 1939 novel *The Right Hand of the Grand Master (didostatvis marjvena)*, which painted a complicated picture of the relationship between artists and political leaders.

¹⁷² RGASPI, f. 558, op. 11, d. 730, l. 187.

¹⁷³ RGASPI, f. 558, op. 11, d. 730, l. 190.

strongly before the broader Soviet public, particularly as he began to endorse limited expressions of Russian nationalism on the eve of the Second World War.¹⁷⁴

Even as Stalin monitored depictions of his Caucasian upbringing, he also oversaw the production of Georgian cultural works of Soviet-wide significance. The leader spent considerable time editing Konstantin Bal'mont's translation of Shota Rustaveli's medieval Georgian epic, *The Knight in the Panther's Skin*, for Soviet publication.¹⁷⁵ The work was central to Georgian national mythology, and became even more so after Rustaveli was placed in the pantheon of Soviet high culture with Stalin's endorsement, the bard of the Georgian language as Pushkin was for Russian. According to Stalin's daughter, Rustaveli was also the only poet the Great Leader enjoyed reading.¹⁷⁶ The Georgian bard's epic poem celebrated warriors bound together in oaths of eternal friendship, "brothers more close than two friends, friends more dear than two brothers."¹⁷⁷ Not only was the poem a demonstrable achievement of Georgian high culture, it also likely had personal resonance among a group of Bolsheviks from the Caucasus held together by longstanding ties.

Stalin was also closely involved in the development of Soviet cinema, and took particular interest in Georgian films that reached a Soviet audience. Between 1938 and 1940, he helped handpick a screenplay for Georgian director Mikheil Chiaureli's film, *Georgii Saakadze*.¹⁷⁸ Although the film celebrated the importance of political unity in the face of external enemies, a critical theme on the eve of the Second World War, its eponymous hero, a figure from seventeenth-century Georgian history, had particular resonance for Stalin and other Georgian Bolsheviks. A Georgian military leader, Saakadze converted to Islam and served with distinction in the Persian court of Shah Abbas, eventually assisting the Shah in leading the Persian military's invasion of Georgia. Once he returned to the soil of his native land, however, Saakadze changed course and set about uniting the feuding Georgian principalities, managing to drive the Persians—temporarily—from Georgia. Saakadze personally led the resistance against his former master, Shah Abbas, despite the fact that Saakadze's son, Paata, remained in the Persian court and was eventually put to death for his father's rebellion. Stalin's notes suggest that he appreciated the film because it showed Georgia to be a land too divided to rule itself, and underlined the need for a strong central government to defend against external powers.¹⁷⁹ In this sense, Georgia, as a divided country in need of a strong leader, could stand as a symbol for the entire Soviet Union. However, the complex historical figure of Georgii Saakadze had a deeper meaning for Stalin, who, like Saakadze, had directed the invasion of his native country in service to a larger entity. The comparison was not unambiguous. As a Georgian leader of the Soviet Union, Stalin could be cast as a military strategist who united a divided people, like Georgii Saakadze, or a powerful centralizer who extended imperial rule over diverse nations, like Shah Abbas. Stalin once even asked Beria, "Do you think I am like the Shah?" In private conversations with his wife, Beria

¹⁷⁴ For more on this subject, see David Brandenberger, *National Bolshevism: Stalinist Mass Culture and the Formation of Modern Russian National Identity, 1931-1956* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002).

¹⁷⁵ Boris Ilizarov, *Tainaia zhizn' Stalina: po materialam ego biblioteki i arkhiva k istoriosofii stalinizma* (Moscow: Veche, 2003), 246.

¹⁷⁶ Svetlana Allilueva, *Only One Year*, trans. Paul Chavchavadze (New York: Harper and Row, 1969), 389.

¹⁷⁷ Shota Rustaveli, *The Knight in the Panthers Skin*, trans. Venera Urushadze (Tbilisi: Sabchota Sakartvelo, 1986), 139.

¹⁷⁸ "Zapiski Stalina, I. V. o stsenerii 'Georgii Saakadze,' 1938-1940" RGASPI, f. 558, op. 11, d. 159.

¹⁷⁹ Ilizarov, *Tainaia zhizn' Stalina*, 249-253.

had reportedly stated that Stalin might very well "seize the son of one of his circle, have him beheaded, and send the head to the young man's father," as Shah Abbas had done to Georgi Saakadze.¹⁸⁰

The Death of a Political Generation

The Great Purges that swept the Soviet Union from 1936 to 1938 were presaged by earlier ideological battles and past uses of terror, but their sudden arrival after the triumphant adoption of the 1936 "Stalin" Constitution caught most party members off guard.¹⁸¹ The purges signified the replacement of lateral, often personalized ties among comrades with a more anonymous, vertically-organized bureaucracy composed of replaceable officials. Decades-long friendships and alliances were destroyed as some of the Soviet Union's most prominent Old Bolsheviks were charged with conspiracy, espionage, and treason. The Great Purges decimated the ranks of those who had launched the Bolshevik project, while new cadres emerged as the revolution consumed its children. Stalin, however, remained, guiding the purges and emerging from them even stronger. A committed revolutionary, he was perhaps prepared to go the farthest in casting aside the old bonds of family, friendship, and ethnic affinity in the interest of state-building.

The purges were in part an attack on entrenched Soviet patronage networks. Stalin, as has been shown, had participated in these networks in his rise to power. He understood that they were necessary to accomplish state goals, and given the initially low capacity of the Soviet state outside the center, it made sense to rely on trusted, skilled people to obtain resources and operate more or less autonomously, as had been the practice in the revolutionary underground.¹⁸² But by the late 1930s, it had become clear that a short-term solution to low state capacity had become a long-term impediment to the construction of a bureaucratic state apparatus. The diaspora of Georgian revolutionaries that helped build socialism had outlived its usefulness, and was disposed of. This was part of a larger effort to formalize the Soviet bureaucracy while strengthening Stalin's position, eliminating personalities, rivals and all other brakes on state power.¹⁸³

Because of the particularly close cultural, familial, and ethnic links among the Caucasian group, the purges hit this community with exceptional force. Avel' Enukidze, one of the group's older members, was among the first to fall. "Uncle Avel" came under scrutiny for his lavish lifestyle, easygoing character, and relatively tolerant ideological outlook, the same traits that made him such a popular figure in the social life of the Soviet elite. The first accusations against him did not concern his administrative work but instead his treatment of the shared history of the Caucasian group. Enukidze's account of the first Bolshevik underground printing presses in the Caucasus, issued in 1930, was

¹⁸⁰ Sergo Beria, *Beria, My Father*, 283-285.

¹⁸¹ There is a vast literature on the Great Purges. For some works representative of the varying interpretations, see: Robert Conquest, *The Great Terror: A Reassessment* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990); J. Arch Getty and Oleg Naumov, *The Road to Terror: Stalin and the Self-Destruction of the Bolsheviks, 1932-1939* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999); and Igal Halfin, *Terror in My Soul: Communist Autobiographies on Trial* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003).

¹⁸² Gerald Easter convincingly describes the use of personal ties to "reconnect the center to the regions" and the resulting tensions between patronage and state-building in *Reconstructing the State: Personal Networks and Elite Identity in Soviet Russia*.

¹⁸³ Easter goes so far as to describe Stalin's goal as the construction of a "bureaucratic absolutist state." See his *Reconstructing the State: Personal Networks and Elite Identity in Soviet Russia*, 16.

republished in 1934.¹⁸⁴ While Stalin had apparently overlooked the book's initial publication, he eventually came to see it as a challenge to his image as the Soviet Union's leading Bolshevik. Enukidze had arrived in Baku to set up the party organization before Stalin began working in the city and he was, in a sense, Stalin's revolutionary senior because he had collaborated closely with Stalin's late mentor, Lado Ketskhoveli. As a Georgian, Stalin was personally concerned with representations of his Caucasian past; as undisputed leader of the Soviet Union, Stalin now demanded recognition as the unrivalled frontrunner of the Caucasian group. Stalin covered page after page of Enukidze's manuscript with critical comments and incredulous exclamation points.¹⁸⁵ The criticism of Enukidze from other quarters soon followed, although with the exception of Stalin, Georgian Bolsheviks refrained from overt criticism. On January 6, 1935, Lev Mekhlis, the editor of *Pravda*, issued a detailed denunciation of Enukidze's account, accusing the Old Bolshevik, who chronicled the close ties among Georgian socialists before the party split, of "liberalism" in his treatment of Georgian Mensheviks.¹⁸⁶

That same year, with Stalin's tacit approval, Nikolai Yezhov, soon to be head of the NKVD, led an investigation that charged Enukidze with the careless supervision of his employees in the Kremlin service administration, several of whom now stood accused of participating in a "terrorist group" allegedly linked to Sergei Kirov's mysterious assassination.¹⁸⁷ After frantically trying to defend himself and personally pleading with Stalin, Enukidze was expelled from the party on charges of political abuse and private immorality. Significantly, Enukidze proved unwilling to prostrate himself before the party and admit his guilt in the fantastic plot he was accused of taking part of. There is evidence that Stalin initially wavered in taking the drastic step of expelling an old member of the party, though he ultimately approved Enukidze's arrest and his eventual execution on dubious charges of espionage in 1937.¹⁸⁸ Enukidze's cousin, Simon, who once operated the Bolshevik underground press in Moscow, was executed a few months later. The downfall of Avel' Enukidze, whose life and career was intertwined with the leader's family, was a personal matter for Stalin; after all, Enukidze was the godfather of Stalin's second wife and employed the sister of Stalin's first wife, Maro Svanidze, as his personal secretary. Only a few years before, in September 1933, Stalin had written to Enukidze in exceptionally tender and familiar terms:

What is keeping you in Moscow? Come to Sochi, bathe in the sea and give your heart a rest. Tell Kalinin [the Chairman of the Executive Committee, and Enukidze's superior] that he is committing a crime if he does not let you take a vacation, if only for a few weeks. You could live with me at the dacha, where—after Svetlana's [Stalin's daughter's] departure I am sitting all alone, like an owl.¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁴ A. Enukidze, *Bolshevistskie nelegal'nye tipografii* (Moscow: Molodaia gvardiia, 1934).

¹⁸⁵ RGASPI, f. 558, op. 11, d. 728, ll. 66-107.

¹⁸⁶ RGASPI, f. 558, op. 11, d. 728, ll. 108-113. The accusations against Enukidze foreshadowed those used against other Bolshevik leaders from the Caucasus, including Aghasi Khanchian, the leader of Soviet Armenia from 1930 until his arrest and execution in 1936.

¹⁸⁷ For a carefully researched account of these events, see Getty, *Yezhov*, 156-178.

¹⁸⁸ Getty, *Yezhov*, 164-165.

¹⁸⁹ RGASPI, f. 558, op. 11, d. 728, l. 40.

Enukidze's fall from grace was a stunning turn of events that sent shockwaves throughout the Caucasian group.

Political repressions now began to encroach on Sergo Ordzhonikidze, another longtime Stalin ally. In January 1935, Ordzhonikidze's political client in Magnitogorsk, Beso Lominadze, committed suicide in the vain hope of sparing his family from political persecution. A devout believer in socialism to the end, he left a note for his patron, writing: "I die fully believing in the victory of our cause."¹⁹⁰ In 1936, Ordzhonikidze's trusted deputy at NTKP, Georgii Piatakov, was arrested on charges of belonging to a secret Trotskyite cell engaged in industrial sabotage. Ordzhonikidze likely recognized that the many challenges faced by heavy industry were not the result of "wrecking," but nevertheless was unable to intervene to save his longtime associate, who was tried and executed. In October 1936, around the time of the celebration of his fiftieth birthday, Ordzhonikidze learned that his brother Papulia had been arrested in Georgia. Evidence suggests that Stalin also began to look disapprovingly at the eulogistic publications on Ordzhonikidze's revolutionary career that appeared in honor of the Commissar's birthday.¹⁹¹ Ordzhonikidze could do nothing as some of his oldest colleagues and associates from Georgia were arrested. On February 18, 1937, the day before a Central Committee plenum at which Ordzhonikidze had been asked to deliver a speech on "sabotage" in heavy industry, the Commissar of Heavy Industry shot himself in his apartment.¹⁹² According to the account of a contemporary, hours before his suicide, Ordzhonikidze exchanged heated insults in Georgian with Stalin on the telephone, irate that his apartment had been searched by the NKVD and adamantly refusing to be intimidated.¹⁹³ On February 19, 1937, Soviet newspapers solemnly announced that "Comrade Sergo" had tragically died of a sudden heart attack.

After the death of their patron, Ordzhonikidze's clients and comrades were quickly consumed by the purges. Ordzhonikidze's brothers were arrested and executed, as was his nephew, Georgii Gvakharia. His wife, Zinaida, was sentenced to ten years in prison. Shalva Eliava, whom Ordzhonikidze had helped promote to the Ministry of Foreign Trade and later, the Ministry of Light Industry, was arrested and executed in December 1937. Mamia Orakhelashvili, who had worked with Ordzhonikidze to orchestrate the Red Army's invasion of Georgia and once served as deputy chairman of the Soviet Council of People's Commissars, was executed the same month. Shalva Okudzhava was arrested in Nizhnyi Tagil, near the massive industrial site he supervised, and shot; Okudzhava's wife was sent to the Gulag.¹⁹⁴ Their son, Bulat Okudzhava, the future Soviet poet and bard, was raised in Tbilisi by relatives. A generation of Georgian Bolsheviks who grew up together in the fraternity of late imperial Russia's revolutionary underground, including Malakia Toroshelidze, Galaktion Vashadze, Tengiz Zhgenti, and Shamshe Lezhava, perished in 1937 and 1938. Entire families were destroyed as relatives and spouses were arrested and children separated from their parents.

Few remained of Stalin's original comrades from the Caucasus. Of the most prominent Georgian Bolsheviks, only the aging Mikha Tskhakaia and Filipp Makharadze

¹⁹⁰ Khlevniuk, *In Stalin's Shadow*, 76-77.

¹⁹¹ Khlevniuk, *In Stalin's Shadow*, 105-110.

¹⁹² Knight, *Beria*, 74-75.

¹⁹³ Dubinskii-Mukhadze, *Ordzhonikidze*, 6, cited in Khlevniuk, *In Stalin's Shadow*, 148.

¹⁹⁴ "Kolleksiia vospominanii starykh bol'shevikov, 1957-1958" GARF, f. R-9503, op. 1, d. 43, ll. 1-3.

survived, both largely retired from Soviet political life. Anastas Mikoian, Stalin's junior by nearly two decades and one of the younger Old Bolsheviks, continued to join Stalin for the sumptuous feasts held by the Soviet leader. However, unlike the spontaneous celebrations of the early 1930s, an atmosphere of fear and paranoia characterized these dinners. Bolsheviks now fully subordinate to Stalin were terrified of crossing the Great Leader, while Stalin was suspicious of his food being poisoned.¹⁹⁵

Lavrentii Beria was a new figure at these banquets, having been called up to Moscow in 1938 to head the NKVD. In the Soviet capital, well-founded rumors spread concerning the leading role played by Beria in arresting and executing scores of prominent Georgian Old Bolsheviks.¹⁹⁶ Even as he helped bring down the original Caucasian group, Beria actively sought to forge a culturally and politically intimate relationship with Stalin. While based in Tbilisi, Beria had collaborated closely with Stalin to write a history of the Bolshevik party in Transcaucasia that cast aside the "falsehoods" of Enukidze's account and gave Stalin the leading role.¹⁹⁷ Second to Stalin, Beria now posed as the authoritative expert on the history of the Bolshevik movement in the Caucasus, even though he wrote of events that occurred before his birth in 1899.

According to the memoirs of Nikita Khrushchev, who blamed Beria for the worst excesses of Stalinism, the Georgian NKVD chief now sought to further ingratiate himself by serving as a Georgian *tamada* for Stalin's feasts. Khrushchev recalled:

When no one wanted to drink and Beria saw that Stalin had a need for a drink, Beria immediately organized a round of toasts; he would think up all sorts of pretexts and act as ringleader... People were literally becoming drunkards, and the more a person became a drunkard, the more pleasure Stalin got from it.¹⁹⁸

Beria reportedly surrounded Stalin with Georgian waiters and waitresses around the table and Georgian servants at home. According to Khrushchev, even Stalin grew suspicious of all of the Georgians among his staff. At a dinner, he suddenly asked: "Why are there so many Georgians around; where have they come from?" Beria replied that "these are people who are loyal to you." To which Stalin angrily responded, "What are you saying? That Georgians are loyal and Russians are not?" The next day, dinner was served by an all-Russian staff, and at least for a while, the Georgian servants were hidden from view.¹⁹⁹ Nevertheless, Beria's rise demonstrated that knowledge of Georgian culture, and expertise in the party's roots in the Caucasus, could still be an asset in serving Stalin. As long as Stalin was in power, politics remained personalized. The Great Leader's efforts to construct a bureaucratic state were ultimately undermined by a system that gave him absolute authority and opened up specialized opportunities for those around him.

¹⁹⁵ Mikoian, *Tak bylo*, 353.

¹⁹⁶ Knight, *Beria*, 74-75.

¹⁹⁷ Archival records show that Stalin and Beria corresponded frequently on the details of this publication. "Kniga Beriia, L. P. 'K voprosu ob istorii bol'shevistskikh organizatsii v Zakavkaz'e'" RGASPI, f. 558, op. 11, d. 704, 705.

¹⁹⁸ Khrushchev, *Vospominaniia*, 1:86. Translated by George Shriver in *Memoirs of Nikita Khrushchev*, ed. Sergei Khrushchev (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2004), 1: 80.

¹⁹⁹ Khrushchev, 2:58-59, 2: 179. Stalin moved more forcefully against Beria's networks during the Mingrelian Affair. See Charles H. Fairbanks, "Clientelism and Higher Politics in Georgia, 1949-1953," *Transcaucasia: Nationalism and Social Change*, ed. Ronald Grigor Suny (Ann Arbor: Michigan Slavic Publications, 1984), 339-368.

Although lateral circles of friends around Stalin had been eliminated, close-knit ethnic networks proved tenacious in an uncertain and often arbitrary political environment. Like the Georgian Bolsheviks before him, Beria brought his closest associates from the Caucasus with him when he was promoted to Moscow. One deputy, Stepan Mamulov, an Armenian from Tbilisi, was appointed to administer the Gulag system. Another Tbilisi Armenian, Bogdan Kobulov, later helped organize NKVD-orchestrated ethnic deportations in Crimea and the North Caucasus. Operating under Beria's direction, Vladimir Dekanozov (Dekanozishvili) carried out purges in the Red Army and in 1940 supervised the forcible incorporation of Lithuania into the Soviet Union.²⁰⁰ Beria's associates from Georgia were promoted to leading posts across the Soviet Union. Among them: Sergei Goglidze, who became the head of the Leningrad NKVD, Lavrentii Tsanava, appointed to lead the NKVD in Belarus, Grigorii Karanadze, in charge of the NKVD in Crimea, Aleksei Sadzhaia, heading the NKVD in Uzbekistan, Mikhail Gvishiani, running the secret police in the Russian Far East, and Amaiak Kobulov, Bogdan Kobulov's brother, in charge of the NKVD in Ukraine.²⁰¹ A generation of Caucasian Old Bolsheviks had perished, but under Beria a new one rose to take its place. Leading the secretive NKVD in posts across the Soviet Union, Beria's group was not as visible but was no less influential in administering the Soviet state.

Beria might have succeeded Stalin as leader of the Soviet Union, had it not been for the coordinated resistance of other Politburo members.²⁰² Shortly after Stalin's death in 1953, Beria and his closest associates were hastily tried and executed by a group of Bolsheviks fearful of their own safety, the Soviet Union's last episode of violence among party members. After Stalin and Beria, there would be no more Georgians in top political positions until the appointment of Eduard Shevardnadze as Minister of Foreign Affairs in 1985.²⁰³ The death of Stalin and Beria signalled the end of Georgian political prominence and the rise of a new, postwar elite that had grown up in the Soviet Union, one that was predominantly Russian. Yet even as the state Stalin ruled began to look more like a Russian Empire, the culture of the Soviet Union was imbued in ever more inventive ways by networks of Georgian culinary specialists and cultural entrepreneurs. Even if shared ethnic identity did not always determine allegiance, had fluid borders, and its own politics of representation, ethnic networks remained important, a "survival" of the pre-revolutionary age that never withered away.

²⁰⁰ One group of Georgian names typically ends in "shvili" (child of). While most Georgians kept their original names, Dekanozov was the Russified form of Dekanozishvili.

²⁰¹ The list is provided by Knight, *Beria*, 91. Other Georgian associates of Beria are listed in the comprehensive work of Iu. N. Afanas'ev et al, *Istoriia stalinskogo gulaga* (Moscow: Rosspen, 2004-2005).

²⁰² Knight, *Beria*, 176-200.

²⁰³ Georgian First Party Secretary Vasilii Mzhavanadze, an ally of Khrushchev, was a Politburo member from 1957 to 1972, but was hardly a nationally recognized leader of the caliber of those who came before him.

Chapter 3

Edible Ethnicity: How Georgian Cuisine Conquered the Soviet Table

A Toast to the Russian People

It is little surprise that one of Joseph Stalin's most famous speeches was given in the form of a toast. On May 24, 1945, the leaders of the victorious Red Army were received in Kremlin's expansive Georgievskii Hall and seated at heavily-laden tables beneath sparkling chandeliers, flanked by columns adorned with allegorical depictions of Russian military greatness.¹ Thirty-one toasts were drunk that evening, but the last was the most memorable. Stalin stood up from his chair in the center of the main table and asked permission to say the final toast, drawing frenzied applause from the assembled officers and the other members of the Soviet government in attendance. Raising his glass, he began predictably: "As the representative of our Soviet government I would like to propose a toast to our Soviet people." Then, unexpectedly, he added: "and, in the first place, the Russian people." The assembled crowd began to wildly cheer "hurrah!"

In an intimate tone both confessional and authoritative, speaking in his recognizably Georgian-accented Russian, Stalin began to lavish praise on the Russians above all others:

I drink in the first place to the health of the Russian people because it is the most outstanding nation [*naibolee vydaishcheisia natsii*] of all the nations forming the Soviet Union.

I propose a toast to the health of the Russian people because it has earned in this war universal recognition [*obshchee priznanie*] as the leading force [*rukovodiashchei sily*] of the Soviet Union among all the peoples of our country.

I propose a toast to the health of the Russian people not only because it is the leading people, but also because it possesses a clear mind, a staunch character, and patience [*iasnyi um, stoikii kharakter i terpenie*].

Stalin thanked the Russian people for their unfailing "trust" (*doverie*) and drank to their health, amidst wild applause that, according to the transcript of the event, "did not soon die out."² The toast was reprinted the next day on the front page of the newspaper *Pravda* for all Soviet citizens to read.³ Before long, it was ubiquitously cited in official

¹ An iconic image of the gathering was created by painter M. I. Khmel'ko in his *Torzhestvennyi priem v chest' predstavitelei komandovaniia Krasnoi Armii i VoЕННО-Morskogo Flota, uchastvovavshikh v Velikoi Otechestvennoi voine*.

² Stalin himself made several minor changes to the transcript before it was published. For the transcript and his corrections, see V. A. Nevezhin, *Zastol'nye rechi Stalina* (Moscow: AIRO-XX, 2003), 470-472, based on Nevezhin's archival work with RGASPI, f. 558, op. 11, d. 1098.

³ "Vystuplenie tovarishcha I. V. Stalina na prieme v kremle v chest' komanduiushchikh voiskami krasnoi armii," *Pravda*, May 25, 1945, 1.

Soviet publications of the period.⁴ Its assertion of Russian primacy drew the attention of the Soviet public and has earned it a central place in historiography charting the rise of state-sponsored Russian nationalism. In analyzing the toast's content, historians have pointed out its explicit promotion of Russian primacy, the shocking admission that mistakes had been made by the Soviet government, and the potentially threatening implication that those responsible for such errors, or those nations unable to match Russian standards, might be subject to persecution.⁵

While historians have combed the speech's content for meaning, they have generally neglected its form. The form of a toast allowed Stalin to combine confessional candor with the spirit of jubilation required for the occasion. As a Georgian, Stalin was likely seen by the guests as a natural speechmaker and *tamada*, a Georgian word that first appeared in the Soviet dictionary for literary Russian in 1940 and soon became the preferred term throughout Soviet Union to describe a consummate toastmaster.⁶ Importantly, only a non-Russian could give a toast to the Russian people. Spoken by a Russian, the toast would violate the norms of Soviet internationalism and the rules of ritual; it would seem dangerously chauvinistic to single out one's own people for praise and self-congratulatory to raise a glass to oneself. The toast instead was given to the Russian people by an admirer whose life had long been intertwined with Russia.

Stalin ruled the Soviet Union as he governed the table; as *tamada*-in chief, he was an authoritarian speechmaker, an observer of human character and its potential weaknesses, and the king of a court who demanded affection and kept those of whom he was suspicious close at hand.⁷ As Stalin toasted the Russian people and the Georgian practice of having a *tamada* lead festivities became a Soviet institution, it was increasingly likely that the Soviet table was laden with Georgian cheese pies (*khachapuri*) and spicy Georgian soup (*kharcho*), accompanied by Georgian wines and the Georgian mineral water Borjomi.

Over one century ago, the German sociologist Georg Simmel outlined “the immeasurable sociological significance of the meal,” noting that “of all the things that people have in common, the most common is that they must eat and drink.”⁸ Sociologists, and more recently historians, have since turned their attention to what this most quotidian aspect of everyday life can tell us about social structure, cultural exchange, and political authority.⁹ Research has revealed how British imperialism was in part driven by a taste

⁴ David Brandenberger, *National Bolshevism: Stalinist Mass Culture and the Formation of Modern Russian National Identity, 1931-1956* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), 130-132.

⁵ Brandenberger, *National Bolshevism*, 130-132, and Erik van Ree, *The Political Thought of Joseph Stalin: A Study in Twentieth-Century Revolutionary Patriotism* (London and New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003), 194-199.

⁶ They term likely arose in common Russian parlance a bit earlier, though the word is almost entirely absent from tsarist-era publications. D. N. Ushakov and B. M. Volin, eds., *Tolkovyii slovar' russkogo iazyka* (Moscow: Sovetskaia entsiklopediia, 1940), 650.

⁷ As *tamada*, Stalin drew on the distinctive traditions of Georgian toasting and dining. See Mary Ellen Chatwin, *Socio-Cultural Transformation and Foodways in the Republic of Georgia* (Cammack: Nova Science Publishers, 1997).

⁸ David Frisby and Mike Featherstone, eds., *Simmel on Culture: Selected Writings* (London, Thousand Oaks, New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1997), 130.

⁹ Particularly influential have been Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process: Sociogenetic and Psychogenetic Investigations*, eds. Eric Dunning, Johan Goudsblom, and Stephen Mennell, trans. Edmund Jephcott

for tea and sugar, and how imperial conquest brought the flavors of distant lands into the English home.¹⁰ In twentieth-century Europe, Carol Helstosky has examined the politics and ideology of food in an authoritarian context with her study of state food policy and popular consumption practices in Fascist Italy.¹¹ Yet when it comes to the Soviet Union, historians are only beginning to analyze the production and consumption of food and drink in a socialist state, and have yet to examine what this vital aspect of material culture can tell us about the Soviet Union as an empire.¹²

The study of food and drink in the Soviet context yields a new perspective on the nature of the Soviet Union as a self-consciously multiethnic state of Eurasia. As in Mussolini's Italy, the state sought to reach into the home and transform the everyday habits of its citizens through food and drink. However, while the Fascists emphasized an austere diet to engender lean and healthy bodies, the new Soviet diet offered a taste of a bountiful socialist future, served in a multiplicity of national forms.¹³

When it came to food and drink, the Stalinist prescription of "national in form, socialist in content" meant creating a cuisine that was ideologically appropriate and domestic to the USSR. The Soviet state played an exceptional role in explicitly promoting the development of a new, multiethnic cuisine based on ingredients and recipes that could be found within Soviet borders. Ethnographic knowledge was invited into the kitchen, and the new Soviet diet included Russian cabbage soup, Ukrainian *borshch*, Uzbek *plov*, melons from Central Asia, and oranges from the Caucasus. Vodka remained Russia's national beverage, but Soviet consumers could drink Georgian wine, Armenian cognac, and eventually liqueurs from Tallinn and Riga. Ethnicity became edible, and Sovietness something one could consume around the table.

There was supposedly a place reserved at the Soviet table for the cuisine of each nationality. However, national cuisines varied, and the ideological connotations and intrinsic versatility of Georgian food proved to be to its advantage. In a manner that recalled the diffusion of norms of personal conduct central to Norbert Elias' "civilizing process" yet involved a much greater degree of state promotion, Georgian food and drink were introduced in Stalin's court, before percolating downward to the elite restaurant, the worker's cafeteria, and the private kitchen.¹⁴ The consumption of Georgian food and

(Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 2000); and Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1984).

¹⁰ For the former argument, see Sidney W. Mintz, *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History* (New York, 1985). For the latter, see Troy Bickham, "Eating the Empire: Intersections of Food, Cookery and Imperialism in Eighteenth-Century Britain," *Past and Present* 198 (2008): 71-109.

¹¹ Carol Helstosky, *Garlic and Oil: Politics and Food in Italy* (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2004). Although her book covers more than a century, her study of food and drink under Mussolini seems the most fascinating area of comparison with the Soviet Union.

¹² An important first step in understanding the cultural and political significance of food and drink in the Soviet context has been made by Jukka Gronow, *Caviar with Champagne: Common Luxury and the Ideals of the Good Life in Stalin's Russia* (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2003).

¹³ One of the original proponents of the "Mediterranean diet," Mussolini and his ideologues promoted the development of a healthy domestic cuisine as part of the state's campaign for autarky. Carol Helstosky, *Garlic and Oil: Politics and Food in Italy*, 4.

¹⁴ Elias describes the diffusion of norms of etiquette from Europe's royal courts to upwardly mobile groups outside the court, driven by competition for royal favor and, eventually, the effort to win broader social prestige. For a summary, see Elias, *The Civilizing Process: Sociogenetic and Psychogenetic Investigations*, 257-362

drink became a practice of social distinction for upwardly mobile Soviets in part because Georgian dishes were known to be favored by Stalin himself, and because in partaking of a non-Russian cuisine, Soviet diners endorsed the state's policy of a "friendship of the peoples" (*druzhba narodov*).¹⁵ However, as Georgia's rich culinary culture was adopted by citizens across the Soviet Union, they used it for their own purposes. Even after the campaign of de-Stalinization that followed the Soviet leader's death, this important component of Stalinist culture remained and was reshaped as it was popularized for the masses.

Georgian food and drink proved remarkably adaptable, yet their "national form" shaped Soviet consumption practices. Soviet planners did not create Georgian dishes from scratch, nor the rituals of the Georgian table that accompanied them as they were popularized. Indeed, Georgian food and drink had long defined Georgian culture, and were the focus of rituals and practices that predated and outlasted Stalin.¹⁶ Georgian feasts were lavish and highly-ritualized affairs, obligatory festivals of consumption used to mark birthdays and funerals, to celebrate reunions, and to establish and demonstratively affirm social ties and business partnerships.¹⁷ The quality and quantity of food and wine at a Georgian feast reflected the honor of the host, and Georgian tables groaned under a dazzling variety of dishes that were endlessly replenished. The feast (*supra*) was led by the *tamada*, who was more than an average toastmaster; he (at a Georgian table, the *tamada* was always a man) was an orator, a mediator and peacemaker among guests, and a demonstrative host.¹⁸ A good *tamada* skilled in the arts of *tamadoba* (leading a table in toasting) needed to sense and direct the moods and desires of his guests, from jubilation to nostalgia, yet also had to maintain self-control in the face of copious amounts of wine drunk down in one shot from a glass, a drinking horn (*qantsi*), or a large vessel. Dining in Georgia was a highly regimented affair in which the number and nature of toasts were known by all, and gender roles, as well as the respective roles of host and guest, were carefully inscribed. As a sophisticated cuisine whose ethnic distinctiveness was now emphasized by the state, Georgian food and drink were believed to be best enjoyed in tandem with elaborate Georgian toasting rituals, and soon Russians were not only consuming the food of the periphery, but also toasting one another in the Georgian manner.

The state's promotion and subsequent popularization of Georgian cuisine required ethnic specialists, opening up new opportunities for Georgian chefs, restaurateurs, and

¹⁵ Bourdieu writes of the correlation of food consumption practices and class aspirations in *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, 176-200.

¹⁶ An oft-cited Georgian creation myth holds that when God divided the world among the nations, the Georgians were absent, carried away in their own feasting and drinking. When God reproached the Georgians for their absence, they explained that they had been busy celebrating God in lavish toasts for having created such a miraculous world. Charmed, God gave them Georgia, a land until then reserved for God alone. Darra Goldstein, *The Georgian Feast: The Vibrant Culture and Savory Food of the Republic of Georgia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), xiii-xiv.

¹⁷ Mary Ellen Chatwin, "Tamadoba: Drinking Social Cohesion at the Georgian Table," in *Drinking: Anthropological Approaches*, eds. Igor de Garine and Valerie de Garine (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2001), 181-190.

¹⁸ The *tamada* would either be the host or a person chosen by the host. Men not only led the toasting but also the polyphonic singing that accompanied a Georgian feast. See Nino Tsitsishvili, "A Man Can Sing and Play Better than a Woman": Singing and Patriarchy at the Georgian *Supra* Feast," *Ethnomusicology* 50: 3 (1996): 452-493.

culinary experts in cities throughout the Soviet Union. Thus, a study of the dissemination of Georgian food and drink offers a new perspective on the specialized niches sought by the Georgian diaspora and the ways that Georgian culture spread beyond the internal borders of the Georgian socialist republic. Georgian specialists skillfully connected state promotion with popular taste, capitalizing on the official endorsement of Georgian cuisine while finding new ways to meet public demand.

While the previous chapter examined the salience of ethnic networks in the construction of the early Soviet state, this chapter will explore how the multiethnic fabric of Soviet society manifested itself in the realm of material culture and everyday life around the dinner table. Drawing on a diverse set of sources, including correspondence, memoirs, interviews, cookbooks, menus, songs, images, and films, as well as discussions among Soviet officials responsible for food policy and supply, the chapter will examine the movement of goods and people and the mixing of national cultures in the Soviet Union over the *longue durée* from a culinary perspective. It will follow the diffusion of Georgian cuisine from its adoption in Stalin's Kremlin to its celebration in the elite restaurant, popularization in the cafeteria, and adoption in the Soviet home, and explain how it was that of all the diverse cuisines in the Soviet Union's multiethnic kitchen, Georgian food and drink went farthest in conquering the Soviet table.

Georgian Cuisine and the Rise of Soviet Fine Dining

The development of fine dining in the Soviet Union had its roots in the mid-1930s, when a new Soviet middle-class of managers, bureaucrats, NKVD officers, engineers, and privileged workers began to develop an appetite for a more sophisticated cuisine.¹⁹ Culinary opportunities were just one of the novel forms of consumption created as the state sought to develop appropriate material rewards for its loyal cadres.²⁰ Production lines were constructed to produce new Soviet suits and dresses, along with Soviet perfume, luxury cars, sofas, and lampshades. In 1934, the Eliseev Store, Moscow's lavish pre-revolutionary food emporium, re-opened as Grocery Store No. 1, offering 38 kinds of sausage, three kinds of cheese, 200 kinds of candies and pastries, 50 kinds of bread, meat behind refrigerated glass and live fish in tanks.²¹ The material benefits enjoyed by the elite and accompanying depictions of material abundance were

¹⁹ Many observers have remarked on the emergence of a Soviet middle class that emerged in the 1930s. Trotsky described them disparagingly as "bureaucrats" in *The Revolution Betrayed*, trans. Max Eastman (Mineola: Dover Publications, 2004). Milovan Djilas famously called them a "new class," in *The New Class. An Analysis of the Communist System* (New York: Praeger, 1957). Among their ranks were the *vydvizhentsy*, the professionals of working-class background whom Sheila Fitzpatrick argued were ultimately the main stakeholders of the revolution. Fitzpatrick discusses the place of the *vydvizhentsy* in the new Soviet middle class explicitly in her introduction to *The Cultural Front: Power and Culture in Revolutionary Russia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992), 1-15.

²⁰ This process was described by Vera Dunham as a "big deal" conducted between the Soviet state and its elite, an exchange of material benefits for loyal service. Dunham notes this process as taking place in the immediate postwar period, but in fact Sheila Fitzpatrick and others have more recently traced the systematic expansion of consumer opportunities for privileged Soviet elites to the mid-1930s. See Vera S. Dunham, *In Stalin's Time: Middleclass Values in Soviet Fiction* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1976) and Sheila Fitzpatrick, "'Middle-class Values' and Soviet Life in the 1930s," in *Soviet Society and Culture: Essays in Honor of Vera S. Dunham*, eds. Terry L. Thompson and Richard Sheldon (Boulder and London: Westview Press, 1988), 20-38.

²¹ Sheila Fitzpatrick, "'Middle-class Values' and Soviet Life in the 1930s," 25.

held to represent the imminent promise of socialism for all Soviet citizens, and embodied Stalin's oft-repeated public claim of the era: "life has become better, life has become more joyous."²²

The new Soviet consumer society was driven both by the aspirations of the *arriviste* Soviet elite and the state's effort to cultivate an ideologically correct sense of *kulturnost'* (cultured behavior).²³ The newfound popularity of Georgian cuisine was thus linked to the creation of a "Soviet kitsch" consumer culture based on the mass production of cheaper copies of foreign luxury goods on the one hand, and the state's elevation of the national traditions of the Soviet peoples to the realm of high culture on the other.²⁴ As a replacement for European fine dining, Georgian food was a substitute for the French fare previously served in tsarist Russia's finest restaurants.²⁵ Just as the new Soviet "champagne" was produced with grapes grown in southern Russia and Armenian "cognac" replaced its French counterpart, so too did Georgian cuisine represent a patriotic and readily available alternative. Unlike other substitutes for pre-revolutionary luxuries, however, Georgian food was not a second-rate replica but instead the genuine article, an established culinary tradition with a repertoire of dishes that showcased the celebrated richness of Georgia's national culture.

The bold and subtle flavors of Georgian cuisine conveyed the Mediterranean sensibilities of republic's warm climate and allowed it to fill a vacuum created by the disappearance of French cuisine. Along with the elaborate rituals of the Georgian table, Georgian dining appealed to the Soviet palate with a range of exquisite tastes: roasted, grilled, and stewed meats, complex seasonings composed of coriander, saffron, and other rare spices, and subtle sauces combining sweet and savory flavors with the taste of pomegranates, walnuts, and tangy plums. Pre-revolutionary Tbilisi had been full of restaurants and taverns (*dukhany*) that brought the diverse flavors of Georgia's regions together in an urban context and matched tasty food with vintage wines and brandy, lending Georgian cuisine a sense of culinary sophistication that appealed to the new Soviet middle class.

Such flavors were not altogether unfamiliar to the Russian palate. According to historian Louise McReynolds, by the end of the nineteenth century, all major Russian cities "had at least one dining spot named for somewhere in the Caucasus or Central Asia."²⁶ The arrival of the cuisines of the Caucasus and Central Asia in Imperial Russian cities had its parallels in the movement of food, tastes, and eating habits from the colony

²² In 1936, Anastas Mikoian made explicit the beginnings of a corresponding shift in the state's view of alcohol, noting that "life has become more joyous, which means it is permitted to drink, though only in a way that does not cause the loss of one's intellect or damage one's health" (*vypit' mozhno, no vypit' tak, chtoby rassudka ne teriat' ne vo vred zdorov'iu*). Cited in the 1953 edition of a major Soviet cookbook, *Kniga o vkusnoi i zdorovoi pishche* (Moscow: Pishchepromizdat, 1953), 79.

²³ Fitzpatrick, "Middle-class Values," 35. For a discussion of the link between consumer goods and *kulturnost'*, see Jukka Gronow's fascinating study, *Caviar with Champagne: Common Luxury and the Ideals of the Good Life in Stalin's Russia*.

²⁴ For a description of the first process, see Gronow, *Caviar with Champagne*; for the second, see Terry Martin, "Modernization or Neo-Traditionalism? Ascribed Nationality and Soviet Primordialism," in *Stalinism: New Directions*, ed. Sheila Fitzpatrick (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), 348-367.

²⁵ For an excellent description of late imperial restaurant culture, see Louise McReynolds, *Russia at Play: Leisure Activities at the End of the Tsarist Era* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2003), 196-210.

²⁶ Louise McReynolds, *Russia at Play*, 204.

to the metropole elsewhere in Europe, imperial Britain's curry houses being just one example.²⁷ Novel dishes and spices from distant imperial territories brought imperial concerns into the house and allowed those in the center to tour and taste the empire without leaving their comforts of home. The Soviet Union, however, required its own variety of imperial cuisine, national in form and socialist in content, which is to say, ideologically appropriate and domestic to the USSR.

From an ideological standpoint, Soviet planners consciously promoted national diversity in the new Soviet diet as another dimension of the state's policy of a "friendship of the peoples." Unlike in other imperial settings, where the food of the periphery was meant to merely embellish the core diet of the center, the new Soviet cuisine was to be based entirely on the meeting and mixing of national cuisines on equal terms, an idealized reflection of the federal structure of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. In its introduction, a major Soviet cookbook did not single out one national cuisine but instead lavished praise equally on Russian *zakuski* (appetizers), Ukrainian *borshch*, and Uzbek *plov*.²⁸ However, compared with other Soviet national cuisines, Georgian food and drink had several important features that gave them a privileged place in the new Soviet diet. Beyond the range of flavors it offered, Georgian cuisine was ideologically sanctioned because it was known to be favored by Stalin himself. Also, the iconography of the heavily-laden Georgian table, celebrated by pre-revolutionary Georgian artists like Niko Pirosmiani, fit perfectly with the new emphasis on socialist abundance.²⁹ With its dishes pushed up against one another, offering eaters a range of choices and courses served simultaneously, and drinking horns filled to the brim with Georgian wine, the Georgian table was a stunning cornucopia that embodied the socialist realist dream of imminent utopia.

The dissemination of a sophisticated national cuisine created new opportunities for Georgian culinary specialists beyond the borders of their native republic, who were better established in Moscow than culinary specialists from the other national republics. The tastes Georgian chefs offered were more familiar; *shashlyk*, the grilled meat from the Caucasus, for example, had appeared on Russian menus in the nineteenth century, following Russia's expansion into the mountainous region, and Georgian meat stew (*chakhokhbili*) was already in wide circulation in the early years of Soviet power.³⁰ Furthermore, a number of Georgian chefs had extensive experience working in pre-revolutionary restaurants, or serving food along Imperial Russia's railway networks.³¹

The Soviet context, however, opened up a new infrastructure for the dissemination of Georgian cooking. Of primary importance was the establishment in

²⁷ See Troy Bickham, "Eating the Empire: Intersections of Food, Cookery and Imperialism in Eighteenth-Century Britain."

²⁸ The voluminous 1956 *Kulinariia*, recently reprinted. See *Kulinariia: superkniga dlia gurmanov* (Moscow: Voskresenie, 1996), 32.

²⁹ Modern Georgia's most famous painter, Niko Pirosmiani (1862-1918) created iconic images of the Georgian table, some of them actually commissioned as signboards for Tbilisi's taverns and restaurants.

³⁰ Halina Rothstein and Robert A. Rothstein, "The Beginnings of Soviet Culinary Arts," in *Food in Russian History and Culture*, eds. Musya Glants and Joyce Toomre (Bloomington: Indiana University Press), 177-194, esp. 189.

³¹ According to Georgian ethnographer Vakhtang Chikovani, seasonal and long-term migration by residents of western Georgia's Racha region working as bakers and cooks along Russia's railway system was fairly common by the late Imperial period. Personal communication to author.

1931 of *Obshchepit* (*Obshchestvennoe pitanie*), the state-sponsored Public Food Service, which performed the dual function of responding to popular demand while cultivating public taste and dining etiquette.³² The state controlled the production and distribution of food, and recipes and dishes adopted after careful deliberation by *Obshchepit* in Moscow immediately appeared in cafeterias and dining establishments everywhere from Tallinn to Tashkent. In its formative years, *Obshchepit* was presided over by Anastas Mikoian, an ethnic Armenian educated in Tbilisi, and its activities were supervised closely by Stalin himself. Other Georgians soon earned prominent places in the food service institution, helping first to bring the cuisine of the periphery to the Soviet capital, then to transmit Georgian culinary practices outward from the center.³³ *Obshchepit's* food supply networks laid the groundwork for a second, related development, the cultivation of supply chains that linked restaurants and cafes across the Soviet Union to Georgian suppliers of the spices, cheeses, wines, and mineral waters needed to cook and serve Georgian food and drink.

The provision of Georgian cuisine met a growing demand in Soviet society, and was made possible by the Georgian diaspora's leading role in Soviet restaurants, cafes, and within the state bureaucracy that oversaw food production. Georgians throughout the Soviet Union spread the distinctive culinary traditions of their homeland through social and professional networks, and carved out a niche for themselves as bearers of specialized knowledge about Georgian cooking. All paths led back to the Georgian homeland, which played a vital role, first as supplier, and later as a destination for Soviet culinary tourists.

Providing For Stalin's Table

The Soviet adoption of Georgian feasting practices first began in the halls of the Kremlin, around Stalin's own table. Meals with Stalin were coveted opportunities for political access, and also dangerous occasions fraught with competitive drinking and toasts filled with threatening insinuation. Those close to Stalin might have done well to heed the warning of Lenin, who, when speaking of the Georgian revolutionary, allegedly stated: "that cook will concoct nothing but peppery dishes."³⁴ While the taste and range of Georgian cooking were likely appealing on their own, the desire to please Stalin made Georgian food and drink necessary components of any elite gathering. During his long rule, supply chains were established to provide Georgian food and drink for the Kremlin table, administered by Georgian culinary specialists selected by Stalin himself.

³² In this sense, *Obshchepit* took on the task of "civilizing" Soviet appetites, a process which, according to Stephen Mennell, occurred over the course of centuries in France and England. See his *All Manners of Food: Eating and Taste in England and France From the Middle Ages to the Present* (New York: Blackwell, 1985). Mennell's approach is based on Norbert Elias' concept of a civilizing "process," set forth in *The Civilizing Process*.

³³ The Soviet Union was nothing if not centralized in Moscow. Not only were Moscow-based institutions in charge of Union-wide supply chains, the Soviet capital itself was a showcase for new consumer goods that later made their way to other Soviet cities. Statistics show that while Moscow's population was only 2 percent of the Soviet total, it received 15 to 20 percent of the urban share of consumer goods. Elena Osokina, *Our Daily Bread: Socialist Distribution and the Art of Survival in Stalin's Russia, 1927-1941*, ed. Kate Transchel (Armonk and London: M. E. Sharpe, 2001), 77.

³⁴ Lenin as quoted by Leon Trotsky in "On Lenin's Testament" *New Internationalist*, July 1934.

Distinctive practices of consumption helped define the “Caucasus” group that accompanied Stalin in his rise to power.³⁵ Appointed to high positions in Moscow, revolutionaries from the Caucasus brought their eating habits and their regional traditions of feasting and hospitality with them. While dominated by Georgians, the group was not purely ethnic in character, but instead defined by a shared familiarity with the culture of the Caucasus. Its unofficial members included Georgians like Sergo Ordzhonikidze, the Commissar of Heavy Industry, and Avel Enukidze, the Secretary of the Presidium of the Central Executive Committee, but also the ethnic Armenian Anastas Mikoian, and the Russian Sergei Kirov, considered an honorary member because of his longtime party work in Azerbaijan. Based in the Kremlin in the early 1930s, Avel Enukidze would stop by Stalin’s office with baskets full of Georgian wines and tangerines, prompting spontaneous feasting celebrations at which Georgian songs were sung until dawn.³⁶ Group members bonded over stories of their revolutionary careers in the Caucasus shared around the table. For Stalin and his revolutionary companions, food and drink were more than sustenance; they vital components for intimate rituals expressing loyalty and affirming political and personal relationships.

Beginning in the early 1930s, a vast infrastructure of feasting was set up, stretching from Moscow to Georgia’s Black Sea coast, to provide for the appetites of these top Soviet officials. Stalin’s dacha complex at Kholodnaia Rechka, in Georgia’s autonomous republic of Abkhazia, was constructed in the early part of the decade as a base for hunting expeditions and subsequent Georgian-style feasts. The provision of supplies for Stalin’s dacha was a matter of state concern that brought leading state officials into the business of supplying foodstuffs. Helping supervise construction work at Stalin’s dacha from Tbilisi, Georgi Sturua, the Deputy Commissar of Justice of the Transcaucasus Federation, personally saw to it that 50 orange trees were planted around the dacha.³⁷ Stalin loved to cultivate his own oranges and lemons, and helped promote the development of citrus production in the Caucasus, placing Mikoian in charge of distribution in the hopes that the region’s fruits could be sold throughout the Soviet Union.³⁸ Delegations from the Caucasus region’s party leadership visiting the dacha brought gifts of food and wine, since vacationing with Stalin could make a young party activist’s career. It was on vacation along the Black Sea that Stalin was first introduced to the youthful and energetic Lavrentii Beria, a meeting arranged by Nestor Lakoba, the Communist Party chief of Abkhazia, who performed the crucial role of overseeing the autonomous republic’s resort network.³⁹ Photographs taken of Stalin at his Black Sea dacha show him seated at a dining table, working amidst stacks of files against a lush

³⁵ In his memoirs, Khrushchev stated that “among the party activists it was often said that there was a ‘Caucasus group’ [*kavkazskaia grupp*a] in power.” N. S. Khrushchev, *Vospominaniia: vremia, liudi, vlast’* (Moskva: Moskovskie novosti, 1999), 1: 72.

³⁶ Miklos Kun, *Stalin: An Unknown Portrait* (Budapest and New York: Central European University Press, 2003), 288-289.

³⁷ Letter from Georgi Sturua to Nestor Lakoba, undated. Hoover Institution Archives, “Nestor Lakoba Papers,” Box 1, Item 43.

³⁸ “Perepiska Stalina, I. V. s Mikoianom, A. I.” RGASPI, f. 558, op. 11, d. 765, ll. 75-76. Mikoian reported directly to Stalin on developments in citrus production and distribution in the mid-1930s.

³⁹ Simon Sebag Montefiore, *Stalin: The Court of the Red Tsar* (London: Phoenix, 2004), 78-79.

background of subtropical vegetation.⁴⁰ For Stalin and others in positions of leadership, work and leisure, dining and the affairs of state, were fused together.

Stalin's patronage helped spur the development of Georgian food and drink networks that linked specialized Georgian producers to elite political circles in Moscow. Stalin loved the wines of his native Georgia, particularly the semi-sweet Kindzmarauli. In such matters, the Great Leader was more than a connoisseur; in 1936 Stalin's personal intervention had been crucial in launching the production of Soviet champagne.⁴¹ With Stalin's tacit approval, the Georgian Ministry of Food Production developed a Moscow branch of the Georgian Union of Wine Producers (*Promyshlennoe ob'edinenie vinodel'cheskoi promyshlennosti*) that shipped grapes from Georgia for wine and cognac production to meet the needs of the Soviet capital. A variety of wines and spirits were supplied directly to the Kremlin, including Stalin's beloved Kindzmarauli, along with cases of the Georgian mineral water Borjomi, the Georgian cheese Sulguni, and the distinctive Georgian herbs and spices necessary for preparing Georgian dishes in Moscow.⁴²

A number of Georgians from Stalin's hometown of Gori arrived in Moscow to oversee food production for the Georgian feasts held in the Kremlin and at Stalin's dacha, all of them hand-picked by the Soviet leader for their combination of personal loyalty and expertise in Georgian cuisine. The first to arrive was Aleksandr Egnatashvili, Stalin's boyhood friend and a former owner of a chain of restaurants in Baku and Tbilisi. In 1934, Egnatashvili was appointed as an officer in the NKVD (People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs) and made deputy chief of Stalin's personal security service in charge of household affairs.⁴³ Under Egnatashvili's supervision, a facility was constructed at Zarech'e, outside Moscow, to supply the Kremlin's tables directly. This production base included a turkey farm to raise fowl for the Georgian dish *satsivi* and a greenhouse full of vegetables and herbs needed to cook Georgian food. Zarech'e also had its own wine cellar, run by Pavle Rusishvili, a friend of Egnatashvili's who had known Stalin as a schoolboy and for a time operated a restaurant in Georgia. Like Egnatashvili, Rusishvili was promoted to the post of officer in the NKVD and tasked with the shipment of wines and food supplies from Georgia. He also supervised provision of meat for the Kremlin, sometimes even arranging the shipment of choice mutton directly from Georgia for the preparation of *shashlyk*. To help him run the operation, Egnatashvili brought in two more friends from Gori, one to help Rusishvili with wine shipments and another to assist with production.⁴⁴

The services provided by these Georgian culinary specialists proved central to the dining rituals of Soviet top officials, and gave them unprecedented access to Stalin. The appointment of Egnatashvili and Rusishvili, two former restaurateurs from Georgia, to top positions in the NKVD dismayed Nikita Khrushchev. In his memoirs, Khrushchev was particularly critical of the ascendance of Egnatashvili, who rose through the ranks as Stalin's food supplier and was eventually promoted to lieutenant general during the war.

⁴⁰ Untitled Photo Album, Hoover Institution Archives, "Nestor Lakoba Papers," Box 3.

⁴¹ On the origins of Soviet champagne, see Jukka Gronow, *Caviar with Champagne*, 17-30.

⁴² Kandid Charkviani, *gandili da naazrevi, 1906-1994* (Tbilisi: Merani, 2004), 410.

⁴³ Vladimir Loginov, *Teni Stalina* (Moscow: Sovremennik, 2000), 23-27. The details of Aleksandr Egnatashvili's personal history were obtained in an interview with Eteri Egnatashvili, his daughter, and Tinatin Egnatashvili, his great niece. Interview by author. Moscow, Russia, March 23, 2008.

⁴⁴ Eteri and Tinatin Egnatashvili. Interview by author.

Emphasizing the righteousness of his own path as a revolutionary, Khrushchev expressed dismay that Egnatashvili, a former Georgian "tavern owner" (*dukhanshchik*) now sat with him at the same table and addressed him as an equal.⁴⁵ While Egnatashvili's rapid professional advancement was remarkable, it was not entirely unusual that he and Rusishvili attained positions within the NKVD. Because state trade—of which food distribution was an important part—was both critical on a practical level and viewed with ideological suspicion as a source of potential corruption, the NKVD played a leading role in supervising trade operations, especially in the Soviet capital.⁴⁶ The NKVD may also have been so intimately involved in culinary practices because Stalin's fear of being poisoned made food supply a matter of state security. Even as he was promoted within the NKVD, Egnatashvili earned the dubious nickname of "the rabbit" (*krolik*), since Stalin also forced him to serve as a personal food taster.⁴⁷

Stalin played host at elite gatherings around the table, pronouncing his food preferences and dictating his choices to those around him. In his memoirs, Mikoian recalled that Stalin loved to think up and then specially order dishes of his own creation for those around him. The Soviet leader created a dish that combined eggplants, tomatoes, potatoes, black pepper, bay leaf, and pieces of lamb, which he adorned with cilantro and named "Aragvi," after the famous Georgian river. Although undoubtedly forced to try Stalin's concoction, Mikoian admitted that this Georgian-inspired dish was actually quite tasty.⁴⁸ Stalin's dinners were punctuated with Georgian-style toasts, and sometimes concluded with Georgian songs and dances.⁴⁹

Dining with Stalin was vital for political access, but required participation in Caucasian rites of the table. As someone from the Caucasus, Mikoian was not as disoriented by Georgian-style feasts in the Kremlin as were others from outside the region. The Armenian revolutionary was not surprised that Beria ate fresh greens with his hands, as was customary in Georgia, and though appalled with the level of alcohol consumption, was not concerned by Stalin's admission that his father had taught him to drink as a child by dipping his finger into a glass of wine and having him suck on his finger. Khrushchev, unfamiliar with the Caucasus and its traditions of viticulture, was disgusted by Beria's table manners and thought that the father's giving wine to his young boy had led to Stalin's heavy drinking later in life.⁵⁰ Khrushchev would later note with additional disapproval that Beria had promoted a large number of additional Georgian cooks, waiters, and servants to top positions in the Kremlin's food service to facilitate these dinners.⁵¹ However, Khrushchev and the rest of Stalin's inner circle did their best to imitate the Georgian-style practices of dining and toasting when dining with the Great Leader, and in some cases introduced them into their own homes.

⁴⁵ Khrushchev, *Vospominaniia*, 2: 55-56.

⁴⁶ As state trade networks expanded in the 1930s, the authorities carefully monitored and attempted to respond to public discontent with shortages, long lines, and speculation. Elena Osokina, *Our Daily Bread: Socialist Distribution and the Art of Survival in Stalin's Russia, 1927-1941*, 184-188.

⁴⁷ Simon Sebag Montefiore, *Young Stalin* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2007), 317-319.

⁴⁸ A. I. Mikoian, *Tak bylo: razmyshleniia o minuvshem*, ed. S. A. Mikoian (Moscow: Vagrius, 1999), 353-354.

⁴⁹ Mikoian, *Tak bylo*, 353.

⁵⁰ Khrushchev, *Vospominaniia*, 2: 118.

⁵¹ Khrushchev, *Vospominaniia*, 2: 57.

Foreign visitors traveling to Moscow were shocked at how central these endless feasts had become to the operation of the Soviet state. The Yugoslav Communist Milovan Djilas described elaborate dinners lasting six or more hours, from late in the evening to four or five in the morning. Recalling the experience, he wrote:

One ate and drank slowly, during a rambling conversation which ranged from stories and anecdotes to the most serious political and even philosophical subjects. Unofficially and in actual fact a significant part of Soviet policy was shaped at these dinners.⁵²

According to Djilas, Stalin was a consummate toastmaster at these feasts. The Soviet leader used toasts to flatter, cajole, and chide, as well as to express personal nostalgia and address political issues. A rift with the Yugoslav party was temporarily mended when Djilas agreed to drink to the Red Army, though as a Georgian Stalin found it problematic that Djilas drank this toast with beer.⁵³ Molotov told Djilas of how Stalin's toast to secret agents at a wartime dinner with Winston Churchill had been a subtle jab at the British leader, who in Stalin's view had lost the battle at Gallipoli because he lacked sufficient information.⁵⁴ Under Stalin, toasting became a form of speechmaking adopted by the broader Soviet elite. Elaborate toasts incorporating political themes were made even at intimate family gatherings held at the dachas of Soviet party leaders. Svetlana Allilueva, Stalin's daughter, recalled how Kliment Voroshilov used to stand up at small dinners with her, his wife and his family and make long, formal toasts, and remembered Nikolai Shvernik, the Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet, doing the same.⁵⁵ Such toasting continued after Stalin's death.

Stalin's support helped launch Georgian culinary practices into the broader Soviet cultural atmosphere, and lent a distinctly Georgian flavor to the Soviet kitchen. Increasingly, Georgian food and drink gained a prominent place in Moscow's restaurants, in specialty stores, and on the pages of Soviet cookbooks. Unaware of some of the excesses of Stalin's table, most Soviets were excited by the appearance of new opportunities for consumption.

Dining Out in the Soviet Capital

In a Soviet-era joke, two Georgians walk out of the Aragvi, the Soviet Union's most famous Georgian restaurant, located in the very center of Moscow. Noticing the monumental statue outside the restaurant's entrance, one turns to the other and says: "*Genatsvale*, who is that handsome and impressive man sitting on the horse?"⁵⁶ The other replies: "Do you really not know? That's Yuri Dolgorukii, the founder of Moscow!" In response, the first Georgian exclaims: "What a remarkable man! He built a lovely city

⁵² Djilas, *Conversations with Stalin*, trans. Michael B. Petrovich (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1962), 75-77.

⁵³ Djilas, *Conversations*, 111. Georgians consider beer to be unsuitable for toasting, whereas toasting with wine and spirits is acceptable. In Georgia, one might make a toast with beer only as a display of sarcasm.

⁵⁴ Djilas, *Conversations*, 115.

⁵⁵ Svetlana Allilueva, *Tol'ko odin god* (New York: Harper and Row, 1969), 348-349.

⁵⁶ *Genatsvale*, a Georgian term of endearment, literally translates as "I will take your place," indicating that the speaker is prepared to accept any misfortune that might befall his or her friend. In Russian jokes about Georgians, *genatsvale* became a recognizably Georgian stock term best translated as "buddy."

around our restaurant.”⁵⁷ Georgians’ Soviet-era reputation for self-aggrandizement aside, the restaurant Aragvi, first opened in 1940, in fact predated the famous statue of Dolgorukii by fourteen years. During the Stalinist refashioning of the Soviet capital in the late 1930s, a prime, two-story location was found for the restaurant along Gorky Street, Moscow’s main thoroughfare.⁵⁸ The restaurant answered new demands for the socialist “good life” by serving up a distinctly Georgian vision of plenty, offering a taste of the dining practices of Stalin’s Kremlin to the broader Soviet elite. After the Second World War and especially during the “Thaw” years, it became a focal point in efforts to develop an expanded system of restaurants in the Soviet capital.

While the entrance to the restaurant was nondescript, those Soviets with the necessary connections passed through its doors to enter a lavish and exotic reproduction of Georgia, rendered in socialist realist style. Gigantic frescoes depicting the southern republic’s agricultural abundance, the rugged Caucasus mountains, and the rituals of the Georgian table adorned the walls. The restaurant was composed of two main halls, an “Eastern Hall” decorated with Georgian national motifs, and a “Marble Hall” popular for official ceremonies. Guests were entertained by a roving band of Georgian musicians and, on special occasions, a Georgian dance ensemble.⁵⁹ A stylized balcony ran along the second level of the Marble Hall, with a view over the tables below. Large groups of up to 250 people could gather in the restaurant at one time.⁶⁰ The Aragvi was both a place for the Soviet elite to dine out and an ideal location for private meetings. While the main level was open and those dining along the Marble Hall’s balcony could observe the customers below, the top level had a number of tables located in hidden recesses and several private rooms, including one frequented by Lavrentii Beria.⁶¹

The restaurant itself was an extension of the sumptuous Georgian banquets held at the Kremlin and at Stalin’s dachas. The Aragvi’s director, Longinoz Stazhadze, a native of the Georgian region of Racha, had previously cooked for Stalin.⁶² Like others responsible for Stalin’s food supply, Stazhadze was screened and then promoted through the ranks of the NKVD, eventually reaching the rank of colonel.⁶³ Given these connections, diners seated in the main halls enjoying their meals might have wondered which members of the

⁵⁷ From a version of the Soviet-era joke reprinted in a retrospective article on the statue of Moscow’s founder. Bogdan Stepovoi, “Iurii Dolgorukii vybral svobodu,” *Izvestiia*, September 7, 2007.

⁵⁸ Today, Gorky Street has reverted to its pre-revolutionary name, Tverskaia Street. The restaurant was constructed on the ground and second floors of what had earlier been the luxurious Hotel Dresden, located a short walk from the Kremlin. For more on the Stalinist reconstruction of the Soviet capital, see Timothy J. Colton, *Moscow: Governing the Socialist Metropolis* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995).

⁵⁹ Such occasions included events like celebration of Lenin’s one-hundredth birthday. “Plan osnovnykh tvorcheskikh meropriatii Moskontserta, programmy, repertuar, muzykal’nykh ansamblei v period podgotovki k 100-letiiu so dnia rozhdeniia Lenina, 1969-70.” Central Archive of Literature and Art of Moscow (TsALIM), f. 429, op. 1, d. 1323, l. 50.

⁶⁰ N. S. Kiknadze, *Iz opytai moei raboty v restorane “Aragvi”* (Moscow: Gostorgizdat, 1951), 2.

⁶¹ The history of the private rooms was recounted by Viacheslav Vladimirovich Galustian, who in 2006 oversaw the reconstruction of the restaurant. Interview by author. Moscow, Russia, July 26, 2006. In a Caucasian twist, in the early twenty-first century, Moscow’s most famous Georgian restaurant had come under the management of a group of Armenians from Baku.

⁶² Darra Goldstein, *The Georgian Feast: The Vibrant Culture and Savory Food of the Republic of Georgia*, 10-11.

⁶³ According to an interview with Natela Muntikov-Chachibaia, who grew up among an elite circle of Georgian political figures in Moscow. See “Besedy s Nateloi Muntikovoi,” accessed March 4, 2010, http://www.slavic-europe.eu/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=130&Itemid=1.

Soviet leadership were then gathered in the private rooms or observed them unseen from the balcony above. When it opened, there were only a handful of restaurants operating in the capital, and the Aragvi was one of the few places the Soviet elite could enjoy the fruits of their labor for the party, while articulating their new social position through the cultivation of appropriately sophisticated tastes. With Stalin's blessing, the Aragvi was also one of the only restaurants in Moscow to stay open during World War II.⁶⁴

Like Stalin's table, the Aragvi was supplied with goods directly imported from Georgia, shipped through Georgian networks. Not only was the Aragvi run by a Georgian, it was also placed under the direct control of Georgia's Ministry of Trade and supplied with wine, cheese, meat, vegetables, mineral water, and herbs and spices shipped specially from Georgia.⁶⁵ The restaurant was effectively a representative branch of Georgia's trade ministry in the Soviet capital, and a showcase used to market Georgia's agricultural abundance to the Soviet public. In its first years, it was run almost exclusively by Georgians. Stazhadze, the restaurant's director, was assisted by Vladimir Dzhishkariani, a native of western Georgia who served as his deputy.⁶⁶ To staff the restaurant, a team of chefs was transplanted from Georgia. The head chef, Nikolai Kiknadze, originally from a small village in western Georgia, had made his career working in restaurants in Kutaisi and Tbilisi before coming to Moscow to work at the "Evropa" (Europe) restaurant.⁶⁷ Leaving the Evropa to cook the food of his native Georgia at the Aragvi, he became the driving force in the culinary development of the restaurant and, as will be seen, a leading figure in the dissemination of Georgian cuisine through the state-run system of *Obshchepit*. It is interesting to note that Stazhadze, Dzhishkariani, and Kiknadze were all steeped in the dining traditions of rural Georgia. Born in the 1890s, all three men had come of age before the Revolution and had likely worked in the restaurants and cafes of the NEP era, if not those of the tsarist age, gaining experience in both Georgian and European-style cooking. All took up permanent residence in the Soviet capital.⁶⁸

The Aragvi led the way in the rapid development of the Soviet Union's restaurant culture after the Second World War. A number of other republics followed Georgia's example in Moscow; the Armenian SSR opened the Ararat, the Azerbaijani SSR the Baku, and the Uzbekistani SSR the Uzbekistan restaurant. "National restaurants" marked Moscow as the center of a growing postwar Soviet empire. Not only could one sample almost all the foods of the Soviet republics without leaving the city, now diners could

⁶⁴ This section draws on an interview with Shamil Khadzhimuratovich Umertaev, who worked at the Aragvi from 1961 to 1996, eventually serving as Deputy Chef. Umertaev trained with Kiknadze. Interview by author. Moscow, Russia, June 30, 2008. For a discussion of the availability of food during World War II, when bread and other basic items were rationed, see William Moskoff, *The Bread of Affliction: The Food Supply in the USSR During World War II* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

⁶⁵ "Stenogramma sobraniia partiino-khoziastvennogo aktiva ob itogakh raboty tresta v 1959 g., 11 fevralia 1960." Central Archive of the City of Moscow (TsAGM), f. 224, op. 1, d. 147, ll. 23-26.

⁶⁶ Materialy o rabote Vsesoiuznogo soveshaniia po obshchepitu, 1957." RGAE, f. 7971, op. 5, d. 448, ll. 40-41.

⁶⁷ For basic autobiographical information on Kiknadze and other members of the Aragvi's staff, see "Materialy o rabote Vsesoiuznogo soveshchaniia po obshchepitu, 1957." RGAE, f. 7971, op. 5, d. 447, ll. 39-54. A profile of Kiknadze's career is given in M. Pol'skii, "Vospitanie v trude," *Obshchestvennoe pitanie* 4 (1963): 11-14.

⁶⁸ RGAE, f. 7971, op. 4, d. 448, ll. 40-41.

virtually tour the Soviet bloc nations at the Berlin, the Budapest, and the Bucharest restaurants.⁶⁹ These national restaurants provided visitors with recognizably ethnic forms of entertainment; as they dined, “national ensembles” played, waiters dressed in “national costume” served them, and they were surrounded by elaborate decorations evoking “national themes.” The proliferation of national restaurants also established Moscow as an imperial capital in another way. Not only did these restaurants serve to reproduce each republic in miniature for residents of the Soviet metropolis, they were also crucial to establishing Moscow as an international destination for foreign visitors in the ensuing “Thaw” years, when the state rushed to construct showcases of Soviet achievement for tourists arriving for events like the Sixth World Festival of Youth and Students, held in Moscow in 1957.⁷⁰

National restaurants, operated by republic-level ministries of trade, existed alongside a growing network of restaurants operated by a confusing array of agencies. The enormous “Ukraina” (Ukraine) restaurant, located in the Stalinist “wedding cake” hotel of the same name on the Moscow river, was under the direction of the Moscow City Committee’s Trade Department. The vast “Praga” (Prague), which employed 830 people, was a pre-revolutionary establishment that was renovated and reopened under the Ministry of Trade of the USSR in 1955.⁷¹ To centralize control of this complicated patchwork of competing jurisdictions, a unified “trust” of the capital’s restaurants, the *Trest moskovskikh restoranov*, or *Mosrestorantrest*, was strengthened. First established in 1945 and initially tasked with supervising 20 restaurants, *Mosrestorantrest* gained control of the capital’s restaurants by the late 1950s.⁷² In late 1959, the restaurant Aragvi was finally separated from the Ministry of Trade of Georgia and placed under the control of *Mosrestorantrest*, which now supervised over 70 restaurants in Moscow.⁷³

Mosrestorantrest focused its efforts on overseeing the supply, expenses, and operation of the city’s growing restaurant network, with important implications for the Aragvi’s future. The Georgian restaurant’s transfer to *Mosrestorantrest* meant increased central control and a major shift in internal leadership, removing the restaurant’s links to Stalin’s Kremlin and weakening its connection with Georgia. Stazhadze, the director who held a rank in the Ministry of Internal Affairs and had once been Stalin’s personal chef, was first demoted and finally arrested on charges of corruption, as was his deputy, Dzhishkariani.⁷⁴ Nikolaev, the new ethnic Russian director, brought up the issue of

⁶⁹ *Obshchestvennoe pitanie v Moskve*, 27-29; “Moskovskaia Palanga,” *Obshchestvennoe pitanie* 11 (1968): 22.

⁷⁰ At the 1957 gathering of employees in the *Obshchepit* system, A. I. Smirnov, the Deputy Minister of Trade, stated that with “more and more foreign guests arriving to acquaint themselves with the life and lifestyle of the Soviet people” it was crucial that restaurants meet the needs of foreign tastes and act in accordance with the “rules of etiquette,” since “foreign tourists’ first impressions of our country arise from the culture of service they experience in hotels, restaurants, and buffets.” “Stenogramma vsesoiuznogo soveshaniia po obshchepitu, 1957 g.” RGAE, f. 7971, op. 5, d. 443, l. 41.

⁷¹ “Materialy o provedenii smotra-konkursa za vysokuiu kul’uru proizvodstva na predpriiatiakh tresta za 1959 g.” TsAGM, f. 224, op. 1, d. 136, ll. 105-169.

⁷² Nikolai Zav’ialov, *Istoriia obshchestvennogo pitaniia Moskvy* (Moscow: PIR, 2006), 58.

⁷³ “Stenogramma sobraniia partiino-khoziastvennogo aktiva ob itogakh raboty tresta v 1959 g., 11 fevralia 1960.” TsAGM, f. 224, op. 1, d. 147, ll. 23-26. On the number of restaurants in the Soviet capital, see *Obshchestvennoe pitanie v Moskve (kratkie spravochnik)* (Moscow: Moskovskii rabochii, 1962), 21.

⁷⁴ The precise nature of the charges is unclear. One account indicates that Stazhadze may have been implicated in habitually accepting bribes in exchange for entrance to the popular restaurant. However, the

closing the restaurant's private rooms, previously the haunt of Beria and others from Stalin's inner circle, though they ultimately remained open.⁷⁵ The restaurant's links with the Georgian Ministry of Trade were severed, as the Union-wide direction of wine production launched a major audit of the Georgian union of wine producers and its Moscow branch, finding numerous instances of improper oversight and technical violations.⁷⁶ As a crucial specialist in Georgian cuisine, however, Nikolai Kiknadze, the restaurant's head chef, held on to his position.

While the restaurant's past associations with Stalin's Kremlin became a liability in the Khrushchev years, the Aragvi remained exceptionally popular, even among the growing constellation of restaurants now open in the Soviet capital. Its success was in large part due to the lasting influence of head chef Kiknadze, who perfected a host of new Georgian dishes to meet the rising public demand for dining out. While Nikolaev and a string of subsequent Russian directors managed the restaurant's relationship with *Mosrestorantrest*, Kiknadze remained the heart of the operation. He was best known for his trademark chicken *tabaka*, a dish in which a young chicken was flattened and then fried under a heavy weight. Adapting the recipe to Russian tastes, Kiknadze spared the hot pepper used in his native western Georgia, and more often than not served the fried dish with *tkemali*, a Georgian sour plum sauce, rather than the more traditional Georgian garlic sauce, *niortskali*.⁷⁷ According to Nikolaev, by early 1960, the restaurant was serving up to 800 portions of the chicken dish per day.⁷⁸ In the words of Kiknadze, the city of Moscow was "basically fed" on chicken *tabaka*.⁷⁹ There were other popular items as well; one Soviet journalist could barely contain his delight when he described the more than thirty different dishes available at the Aragvi, writing: "And who doesn't know with what pleasure Muscovites eat its famous *shashlyk* or its chicken *satsivi*, its skewered sturgeon or its Sulguni cheese?"⁸⁰ Each day, long lines formed outside the restaurant before guests were seated for lunch and dinner.⁸¹ By 1962, the restaurant was averaging a turnover of almost two million rubles per year.⁸² Out of a side store, the restaurant sold semi-prepared (*polufabrikat*) *shashlyk* for anxious would-be customers who could not get a seat to take home.⁸³

arrests, coming when they did, were likely part of an effort to remove the Stalin-era leadership of the restaurant and re-establish central control. The case is mentioned in the *National Review*, whose editors mourned the departure of the managers of the fine restaurant, where one could "forget the dreariness of so much of Russia in the sound of Caucasian orchestras." See *National Review* 7: 15 (July 25, 1959): 7.

⁷⁵ "Stenogramma sobraniia partiino-khoziastvennogo aktiva ob itogakh raboty tresta v 1959 g., 11 fevralia 1960." TsAGM, f. 224, op. 1, d. 147, ll. 23-26.

⁷⁶ "Materialy o proverke raboty s kadrami Gruzshampankombinata, 1955." RGAE, f. 8546, op. 1, d. 1244, ll. 45-112.

⁷⁷ Kiknadze shares his recipe in the journal *Obshchestvennoe pitanie* 2 (1961), 28. For a Georgian-style preparation, see Goldtsein, *The Georgian Feast*, 102-103.

⁷⁸ "Stenogramma sobraniia partiino-khoziastvennogo aktiva ob itogakh raboty tresta v 1959 g., 11 fevralia 1960." TsAGM, f. 224, op. 1, d. 147, ll. 23-26.

⁷⁹ "Sotni kushanii na liubom vkuse," *Obshchestvennoe pitanie* 1 (1957), 56.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Shamil Khadzhimuratovich Umertaev. Interview by author.

⁸² "Materialy po itogam sotsialisticheskogo sorevnovaniia." TsAGM, f. 453, op. 1, d. 1632, ll. 145-162.

⁸³ "Materialy po predstavleniiu kollektiva restorana 'Aragvi' na premirovanie po itogam vsesoiuznogo sotssorevnovaniia za 4 kv. 1962 g." TsAGM, f. 224, op. 1, d. 245, ll. 1-7.

At the Aragvi, Kiknadze helped train an entire generation of Russian chefs to prepare Georgian food.⁸⁴ Following his retirement in the early 1960s, these chefs took over for him. However, despite the transfer of the restaurant to the control of *Mosrestorantrest* and the transfer of knowledge from Kiknadze to his Russian disciples, the restaurant's fate remained connected to Georgia. For some items, the restaurant could now rely on facilities outside Moscow that supplied meat and vegetables, and a special factory outside Riazan' that made Sulguni cheese for them. The Aragvi still depended, however, on a steady supply of Georgian wine, mineral water, and spices shipped through Georgian supply networks.⁸⁵ Georgian specialists and Georgian supplies were similarly required at other newly-opened Georgian restaurants, which sought to mimic the Aragvi's success and based the preparation and presentation of their dishes on the models established by the Aragvi.⁸⁶ Georgian chefs were brought in to develop Leningrad's "Kavkazskii" (The Caucasian) and Moscow's "Kura," which, like the Aragvi, was named after a river in Georgia.⁸⁷ Some of the Aragvi's signature dishes, like chicken *tabaka* and the spicy Georgian soup *kharcho*, also migrated to the menus of other, non-Georgian restaurants in the capital, due to their popularity. While not every restaurant in Moscow had a Georgian chef, Georgian dishes required special supplies; without connections to Georgian producers, lamented the director of the restaurant "Sovetskii" (The Soviet), their *kharcho*, prepared without cilantro and *tkemali* from Georgia, was at best a "parody" of the genuine article.⁸⁸

Georgian wine and mineral water were among the most popular beverages produced in the Soviet Union, and were seen as necessary components of any Georgian restaurant meal. While the Soviets had initially discouraged alcohol, Georgian wine was now openly praised at the highest levels of power. Speaking at a 1960 meeting in Tbilisi, Khrushchev proclaimed: "wine is an adornment [*ukrashenie*] of the table and we need to produce more of it, though it should be drunk, of course, in moderation."⁸⁹ Wine bottles from the southern republic were decorated with lavish images of the abundant Georgian countryside and a stylized script suggestive of the distinct Georgian alphabet, a reminder that a connection to the Georgian land marked Georgian cuisine as authentic. Muscovites went to the Aragvi to be transplanted to an exotic and warm place evocative of Georgia. Even if behind the scenes more and more of the chefs were Russian, the resident folk ensemble (*natsional'nyi orkestr*) that mingled with guests was composed of Georgians. For special events such as the Youth Festival and the 1980 Olympics, the restaurant brought in special teams of Georgian chefs, carrying with them the spices, herbs, and equipment needed to prepare Georgian dishes.⁹⁰ At Moscow's Olympics, Georgian chefs

⁸⁴ Umurtaev, an ethnic Tatar from Moscow, was among them. On Kiknadze's influence, see Tat'iana Tess, "Vopitanie vkusa," *Obshchestvennoe pitanie* 1 (1958): 16-21.

⁸⁵ Shamil Khadzhimuratovich Umertaev. Interview by author.

⁸⁶ *Obshchestvennoe pitanie v Moskve*, 21, 28-29.

⁸⁷ E. Vladimirov, "Den' v 'Kavkazskom.'" *Obshchestvennoe pitanie*, 11 (1958): 32-34.

⁸⁸ "Stenogramma sobraniia aktiva tresta ot 31 ianvaria 1967 g." TsAGM, f. 224, op. 1, d. 277, ll. 44-45.

⁸⁹ Cited by B. Anisimov, "Kak pravil'no podbirat' vina k bliudam," *Obshchestvennoe pitanie* 7 (1961): 44-46.

⁹⁰ "Materialy po obsluzhivaniiu pitaniem uchastnikov 6 Vsemirnogo festivalia molodezhi i studentov." RGAE, f. 7971, op. 5, d. 460, l. 88.

even set up a temporary branch of the Aragvi outside the stadium at Luzhniki and catered events at Moscow's press center and the Kremlin.⁹¹

As their Soviet hosts were quick to notice, foreign visitors gravitated toward the Aragvi, and seemed genuinely impressed with Georgian cuisine. Dining at the Aragvi in 1947, John Steinbeck wrote that the “dry Georgian wines were delicious” and “the food was the same as in Georgia – for our taste, the best in Russia.”⁹² The restaurant was profiled in a 1950 article in *Time* magazine entitled “Russia: Where to Dine.” The article's author noted that among Moscow's ethnic restaurants, the Aragvi was still the best, and the others, like the Baku, the Ararat, and the Uzbekistan, were but “imitators” of “Communist Moscow's original luxury restaurant, the Aragvi.”⁹³ International visitors' appreciation of Georgian food registered with Soviet officials. Nikolai Kiknadze was chosen to represent the Soviet Union at the 1958 Brussels World's Fair (Expo 58), a grand stage for the competition in living standards between the capitalist and socialist camps. Brought in to head the team sent from the “Rossiia” (Russia) restaurant, Kiknadze's array of Soviet food, presented with a Georgian accent, won his team a grand prize.⁹⁴ Georgian food became a staple of the Soviet fare served to foreign guests, and an edible reminder of the Soviet policies of tolerance and friendship among the “peoples” that made up the Union.

Born in the Stalinist era, and a model for other restaurants in the 1950s, the Aragvi remained popular until the end of the Soviet period. Its diverse clientele reflected the changing composition of the Soviet elite. It was frequented by artists and bureaucrats, athletes and underground entrepreneurs, international guests and Soviet secret agents. Sometimes there was overlap among these diverse groups. Svetlana Allilueva recalled her brother Vasily socializing there with “shady types” from Georgia, the “trainers and athletes, soccer players and various disreputable Georgians” that surrounded Stalin's son after the leader's death.⁹⁵ Its halls welcomed cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin, who, when visiting the Aragvi in 1962, noted in the restaurant's comment book that he was “truly thankful to the collective of the restaurant for their attention, cultured service [*kul'turnoe obsluzhivanie*], and a fine dinner.”⁹⁶ The restaurant not only remained popular among the Soviet security services—perhaps a legacy of Beria's patronage—it also became a “cult spot” (*kul'tove mesto*) and a favorite hang-out among actors from the Moscow Art Theater (MKhAT). The actor and bard Vladimir Vysotskii, according to the restaurant's former Deputy Chef, was a near “permanent” fixture among guests at the restaurant.⁹⁷ Vysotskii, like other members of the Soviet intelligentsia, was enamored of the festive atmosphere and traditions of toasting that he found around the Georgian table, recalled fondly in his poem “Teper' ia budu sokhnut' ot toski” (“Now I Will Wither Away from

⁹¹ Shamil Khadzhimuratovich Umertaev. Interview by author.

⁹² John Steinbeck, *A Russian Journal* (New York: Penguin Books, 1948), 45, 208-209.

⁹³ “Russia: Where to Dine,” *Time*, June 12, 1950, accessed March 4, 2010, <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,812656,00.html>.

⁹⁴ M. Pol'skii, “Vospitanie v trude,” *Obshchestvennoe pitanie* 4 (1963): 11-14.

⁹⁵ Svetlana Allilueva, *Dvadsat' pisem k drugu* (New York: Harper and Row, 1967), 200-203. Translation from English language version, Allilueva, *Twenty Letters to a Friend*, trans. Priscilla Johnson McMillan (New York: Harper and Row, 1967), 217-221.

⁹⁶ TsAGM, f. 453, op. 1, d. 1632, ll. 160-162.

⁹⁷ Shamil Khadzhimuratovich Umertaev. Interview by author.

Longing”).⁹⁸ It was little surprise that the restaurant was chosen as the location for a 1979 party given by the Association of American Publishers and attended by leading Soviet intellectuals and dissidents including Andrei Sakharov, Vasily Aksenov, Vladimir Voinovich and Raisa Orlova.⁹⁹

Despite its Stalinist past, the restaurant’s unmatched luxury, the privacy afforded by its dark corners and separate rooms, its popularity among the Soviet Union’s artistic elite, and its vibrant, celebratory Georgian atmosphere lent it a bohemian feel that seemed vaguely un-Soviet. It was a place where generals rubbed shoulders with artists and, in the Brezhnev era, the “black marketeers” who now gathered in the restaurant’s back rooms.¹⁰⁰ Virtually alone in a culinary scene defined by bland tastes in cold, institutional settings, the exceptional development of Georgian cuisine gave it a rich set of practices and symbols that could be imbued with new meanings.¹⁰¹

The restaurant also played a central role in changing Soviet rituals.¹⁰² Wedding receptions were increasingly held out at restaurants, and the restaurant Aragvi, with its choice of ceremonial hall or private rooms, its famous food, and its celebratory atmosphere, was among the most coveted places to have a reception. The restaurant offered specialized menus and buffets for wedding parties, and Georgian dishes—and a *tamada*—became staples at wedding parties held in other restaurants as well, including non-Georgian ones like the “Tsentral’nyi” (Central), which offered Georgian wines, shashlyk *po-kavkazskii* (Caucasus-style), and chicken *tabaka*.¹⁰³ The Aragvi was also a popular destination for another kind of postwar ritual: the veterans’ reunion. A group of decorated World War II veterans who visited the restaurant in 1962 thanked the staff for their “attention” and the “friendly” service that made the group feel “at home” and “allowed them to relax and remember years past” as they dined together.¹⁰⁴

The halls of the Aragvi, however, were not open to all Soviet citizens. Not only were dinners there expensive, the restaurant was so popular that, according to its former Deputy Chef, “it was almost impossible to get a table around the holidays unless you

⁹⁸ The poem, later set to music, was written in 1969. Vladimir Vysotskii, *Sochineniia v dvukh tomakh: pesni*, ed. A. E. Krylov (Ekaterinburg: Krok-tsentr, 1995), 231. The Soviet bard Bulat Okudzhava, who was born to parents from the Caucasus and spent his formative years in Tbilisi, also evoked Georgian imagery, including that of the feast, in his “Gruzinskaia pesnia,” written in 1967. Okudzhava, *Chaepitit na Arbate: stikhi raznykh let* (Moscow: Korona-print, 1998), 230.

⁹⁹ “Refugees: Free at Last,” *Time*, September 28, 1981, accessed March 4, 2010, <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,953131-1,00.html>.

¹⁰⁰ According to a witness who frequented the restaurant during this period, these “black marketeers” disappeared after Andropov came to power. See Seweryn Bialer, *The Soviet Paradox: External Expansion, Internal Decline* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1986), 90.

¹⁰¹ Semioticians describe a fluid relationship between a sign and what it signifies. Bourdieu would add that the relative exclusivity of the Georgian dining experience endowed it with special prestige that could be interpreted differently by different consumers. Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, 176.

¹⁰² The leadership of *Obshchepit* welcomed a role for the restaurant in the personal rituals of the Soviet public. At a 1956 meeting of *Obshchepit* workers, a report was submitted praising the growing number of “family events, anniversary dates... and holidays” celebrated in Soviet restaurants. “Materialy o rabote Vsesoiuznogo soveshaniia po obshchepitu, 1956 g.” RGAE, f. 7971, op. 5, d. 444, ll. 179-186.

¹⁰³ “Materialy po obsluzhivaniiu predpriiatiami obshchepita svadebnykh vecherov za 1960 g.” TsAGM, f. 453, op. 1, d. 1223, ll. 1-26.

¹⁰⁴ According to remarks made by the group in the restaurant’s comment book. See TsAGM, f. 224, op. 1, d. 245, l. 3.

knew someone [*znakomye*] or could rely on connections [*blat*].”¹⁰⁵ Moscow’s network of restaurants may have grown dramatically in the postwar period, but still lagged behind popular demand in a city of millions. The Aragvi provided the dinners once served only at the Kremlin to the Soviet elite, but remained out of reach for most. Nonetheless, thanks in part to the efforts of its head chef, Nikolai Kiknadze, the Aragvi became the inspiration for the mass popularization of Georgian food through the *Obshchepit* system.

Georgian Meals for the Masses

With quality of life becoming an important arena of Cold War competition, the Soviet state needed to demonstrate that it could keep up with the capitalist West in terms of making new opportunities for consumption available to the masses, not just the elite.¹⁰⁶ With its system of workers’ cafeterias and food stores, *Obshchepit*, the state-run food service, had succeeded only at the most elemental level of providing for basic nutritional needs, and even then the institution was characterized by shortages, poor service, and the dull repetition of dishes. In the postwar period, and even more so after Stalin’s death, state officials turned to Georgian cuisine, with its established repertoire of dishes and developed supply chains, in their effort to elevate everyday eating into an art form. The niche first created for Georgian culinary specialists in the 1930s was significantly expanded, as *Obshchepit* officials sought to cater the cuisine of the Soviet elite to the broader public.

Gathering for its first major postwar meetings in 1948 and 1949, the workers and managers of *Obshchepit*, now upgraded from a section (*otdel*) to a department (*upravlenie*) within the Ministry of Trade, considered the best way forward. The system’s operation had been disrupted by the war and in the immediate postwar years millions of Soviet citizens were plagued by famine. *Obshchepit*’s system of cafeterias had fallen on hard times; there were chronic shortages of food supplies and production, and in an era of perpetual overfulfillment of quotas, *Obshchepit* only completed 90 percent of the state’s plan for food production in 1948.¹⁰⁷ The number of cafeterias was declining precipitously, as were the number of people eating at *Obshchepit* institutions. There were other challenges as well. Those who ate at *Obshchepit* cafeterias complained of rude service, repetitive selection, and bland flavors. Stale slices of bread, served "floating in a pool of water on a wet dish," could no longer meet the demands of the Soviet consumer.¹⁰⁸

Obshchepit’s original government directive, approved by the Central Committee in 1931, mandated guidelines for improving sanitation, labor discipline, and supply chains; little was said about taste or the enjoyment of food. Despite the immediate challenges of the postwar period, *Obshchepit*’s managers now emphasized customer service, variety, beauty, and flavor. A proposal drafted by the organization at a 1948 meeting optimistically proclaimed:

¹⁰⁵ Shamil Khadzhimuratovich Umertaev. Interview by author.

¹⁰⁶ For a survey of these new postwar trends, see Elena Zubkova, *Russia After the War: Hopes, Illusions, and Disappointments, 1945-1957*, ed. and trans. Hugh Ragsdale (London and New York: M. E. Sharpe, 1998).

¹⁰⁷ “Materialy po uluchsheniiu raboty predpriatii obshchepita, 1948-1949.” RGAE, f. 7971, op. 5, d. 411, ll. 111-120.

¹⁰⁸ From a customer complaint. See RGAE, f. 7971, op. 5, d. 411, ll. 126-133.

In the postwar period, when our country has begun to restore the damage done by the war to the economy and realize the Stalinist five-year plans, the role and meaning of the public food service has not lessened, but instead has grown in importance. Rising public demand for better service and an improved cafeteria culture, a superior quality of taste and an expansion of the assortment of affordable, tasty, and nutritious dishes.¹⁰⁹

The 1948 and 1949 conferences sent a clear message throughout *Obshchepit*'s system of cafeterias: steps were to be taken to address the public's demand for a new type of dining experience.

It was unclear, however, just how these lofty goals would be met. In the late Stalinist period, mandated minimum assortments of dishes, improved pay rates, and calls for better worker training and self-criticism (*samokritika*) by managers were supposed to improve variety, service, and presentation. Complaint and comment books were to be posted in each establishment, so that chefs and managers could respond to customer demand. In the Khrushchev era, a new emphasis was placed on technology, learning from international experience, and developing "progressive" approaches to food service.¹¹⁰ The popular demand for a new dining experience, however, forced planners to look beyond rational methods and production figures and think about flavor, atmosphere, and the unique contributions that the Soviet Union could make in terms of taste. A renewed emphasis on national cuisine in the worker's cafeteria offered an ideal solution; as elsewhere, it was a practical way to increase assortment and accommodate popular tastes while instilling an appreciation for the "friendship of the peoples" among the population. Preparing to address the 1957 conference of *Obshchepit* workers and managers, the Deputy Minister of Trade wrote: "Soviet cuisine is unusually rich and diverse. A vast array of world-famous dishes are in its arsenal, including Russian appetizers and *pirogi*, Ukrainian *borshch*, Georgian *shashlyk*, Azeri bread, Uzbek pilaf and many other national dishes." Addressing those assembled for the meeting, he called on them to "exalt the accomplishments of Soviet cuisine!"¹¹¹

Georgian food was ideally positioned to be the national cuisine of choice among *Obshchepit*'s offerings. Not only was it the favorite of the Soviet elite who dined at the Aragvi; it was also indisputably Soviet; while the mass promotion of Chinese food was for a time considered, the strategy of promoting the cuisine of nations outside the Soviet Union but inside the communist camp proved to be risky after the Sino-Soviet split.¹¹² Accorded a special role on account of their specialized knowledge, Georgian chefs and food service professionals worked within the *Obshchepit* system to promote their vision of Georgian cuisine for the masses, and Georgia, as before, served as a production base.

¹⁰⁹ RGAE, f. 7971, op. 5, d. 411, l. 498.

¹¹⁰ Based on my reading of the journal *Obshchestvennoe pitanie* from the period.

¹¹¹ "Materialy o rabote Vsesoiuznogo soveshaniia po obshchepitu, 1957 g." RGAE, f. 7971, op. 5, d. 452, l. 87. The Deputy Minister's mention of the specific dishes each republic was famous for followed the formula given in a major Soviet cookbook of the period, *Kulinariia*, which assigned praise to Russian appetizers and *pirogi*, Ukrainian *borshch*, Uzbek *plov*, Georgian *shashlyk*, Armenian stuffed-grape leaves (*tolma*), Azeri lamb stew (*piti*), and "many other sublime national dishes and appetizers of all the peoples of our country." See *Kulinariia: superkniga dlia gurmanov*, 32.

¹¹² For a discussion of the relative merits of Chinese cuisine among *Obshchepit* workers, see "Materialy o rabote Vsesoiuznogo soveshaniia po obshchepitu, 1957." RGAE, f. 7971, op. 5, d. 454, ll. 125-126.

As with other Soviet institutions that operated with a top-down approach, the dishes and culinary approaches adopted at *Obshchepit* meetings in Moscow were soon replicated throughout the Soviet Union.

Firm believers in scientific progress, *Obshchepit's* planners relied on "modern, advanced technology" and the techniques of mass production to develop Georgian food as a popular cuisine.¹¹³ They began with *shashlyk*, a dish from the Caucasus that was already widely embraced by the public.¹¹⁴ *Obshchepit's* leaders sought to make the grilled meat available everywhere. A 1949 order of the Ministry of Trade mandated *shashlyk* as a recommended component of the "assortment minimum" available to diners at railway stations.¹¹⁵ Affordable dining establishments specializing in *shashlyk*, known as *shashlychnye*, were opened across the Soviet Union, believed to be a good source of nutrition for hungry workers and a convenient way to feed the public through mass-produced foods. While there had been *shashlychnye* within *Obshchepit's* network since the 1930s, their number was expanded greatly under Khrushchev thanks to explicit directives adopted at the Twentieth Party Congress on "measures to improve the work of public food service enterprises," dictating that the number of specialized eateries like *shashlychnye* be increased.¹¹⁶ Soon, almost every neighborhood in Moscow had its own *shashlychnaia na uglu* (*shashlyk* stand on the corner).¹¹⁷ Some of these, like the one profiled in a 1963 issue of *Obshchestvennoe pitanie*, *Obshchepit's* journal, also offered a range of Georgian dishes to accompany the grilled meat, including *lobio*, an increasingly popular Georgian bean dish that was easy to mass produce and the spicy soup *kharcho*.¹¹⁸ Thanks to changes in the production process, *shashlyk* was also now readily available as a semi-prepared product (*polufabrikat*) ready for grilling, part of an effort to extend the reach of *Obshchepit* into the home.¹¹⁹

The Aragvi's famous chicken *tabaka* similarly went from the halls of the elite dining establishment to the neighborhood cafe, worker's cafeteria, and home dining table. Kiknadze himself revealed the secrets of the Aragvi's most famous dish in the pages of *Obshchepit's* journal in early 1961.¹²⁰ The technology necessary for mass production soon followed. A few issues later, a device was unveiled in the pages of the journal that would allow this dish, "one of the favorites of restaurant customers," to be prepared at

¹¹³ The importance of technology and industrial production techniques is discussed in the introduction to the Soviet cookbook, *Kniga o vkusnoi i zdorovoi pishche* (Moscow: Pishchepromizdat, 1952). Earlier editions of the guide had been published in 1939 and 1945, but the 1952 publication was the first postwar revision with an increased emphasis on the application of science and technology to cooking and eating.

¹¹⁴ This non-Russian term (Turkic in origin) for grilled meat appeared in the first Soviet cookbooks without accompanying translation, indicating that it was likely already familiar to Soviet diners. *Shashlyk* became both a popular restaurant dish and a central element of Soviet Russian outdoor picnics, at least when meat could be obtained to prepare it.

¹¹⁵ "Materialy po organizatsii trgovli, 1949-1951." RGAE, f. 7971, op. 5, d. 415, ll. 310-311.

¹¹⁶ Thus, at the same event where Khrushchev denounced the ills of Stalinism in his "secret speech," the food of Stalin's native Georgia was given a considerable boost. See "Materialy o rabote Vsesoiuznogo soveshaniia po obshchepitu, 1956." RGAE, f. 7971, op. 5, d. 445, ll. 9-10.

¹¹⁷ The *shashlychnaia* truly became a widespread Soviet institution, popular both for its food and because—in the absence of bars—it was often possible and relatively affordable to have a drink there.

¹¹⁸ Although cilantro was still in scarce supply, *kharcho* could now be made with prepared spice mixtures or sauces that were increasingly mass produced in Georgia.

¹¹⁹ "Protokkol Vsesoiuznogo soveshaniia nachal'nikov upravlenii, otdelov obshchepita." RGAE, f. 195, op. 1, d. 374, ll. 117-118.

¹²⁰ N. Kiknadze, "Tak gotoviat bliudo 'tsypliata-tabaka,'" *Obshchestvennoe pitanie* 2 (1961): 28.

more modest dining establishments, cooked not individually, as at the Aragvi, but in batches, and seasoned more quickly with a specially-designed "aromatizer" (*aromatizator*).¹²¹ Two years later, a Moscow factory began making simple pans with presses that could produce one to four portions of chicken *tabaka* in the average cafeteria or at home.¹²² The promise of the socialist "good life" meant that everyone would soon dine like the Soviet elite.

As had been the case at the Aragvi restaurant, the production of Georgian food required supplies that could only be provided by Georgia. The *Obshchepit* system was plagued by shortages of basic goods grown widely in Russia, even potatoes.¹²³ In order to mass produce Georgian food, they needed to develop supply chains to bring Georgian goods to Soviet-wide markets. Georgia's production base was already developed—its food enterprises were part of a larger network through which Georgia supplied the Soviet Union with 95 percent of its tea, most of its tobacco, and its most popular wines and mineral water.¹²⁴ As the *Obshchepit* management struggled to bring fresh ingredients to local enterprises and spoke in concerned tones over the lack of vitamins in workers' diets due to shortages of fruits and vegetables, they found a practical solution: the mass production of Georgian sauces that evoked the taste of the southern republic but could easily be shipped and stored. The most popular was *tkemali*, the tart Georgian plum sauce used to accompany *shashlyk* and chicken *tabaka*. The sauce was first discussed at length during a 1950 meeting of the *Obshchepit* leadership. In response to the Deputy Minister of Trade's suggestion that "shortages of herbs and spices could be overcome by more widely producing a variety of sauces," Nikolai Kiknadze, attending the meeting as a representative of the Aragvi restaurant, suggested the Georgian plum sauce.¹²⁵ By the early 1960s, *tkemali* was widely available at *shashlychnye* and at stores for home use; by the latter part of that decade, it was joined by the spicy tomato-based *satsibeli* and the fragrant Georgian walnut sauce used for *satsivi*.¹²⁶ These sauces, with foreign-sounding Georgian names, entered common use. Georgian producers in turn carved out an enviable niche for themselves, producing new condiments for the Soviet table.

The construction of a multiethnic dining culture was based on the integration of diverse culinary traditions drawn from across the Soviet Union. While ethnic culinary specialists were seen as bearers of special knowledge, they were required to pass their expertise on to the broader public. As one author profiling Kiknadze's role in promoting Georgian cuisine wrote in the *Obshchestvennoe pitanie* journal:

Soviet culinary workers affirm the rule that cuisine in our country never was and never will be a secretive [*zamknutoi*], isolated part of national culture. We can only welcome mutual cultural penetration [*proniknovenie*] and mutual sharing,

¹²¹ "Zharovnaia i aromatizator dlia tsypliat-tabaka," *Obshchestvennoe pitanie* 12 (1961): 38.

¹²² "Zharovnia s pressom," *Obshchestvennoe pitanie* 12 (1963): 57.

¹²³ "Materialy o rabote Vsesoiuznogo soveshaniia po obshchepitu, 1957." RGAE, f. 7971, op. 5, d. 450, ll. 45-53, 69-73.

¹²⁴ TsSU (Tsentral'noe statisticheskoe upravlenie) SSSR, *Narodnoe khoziastvo SSSR, 1972* (Moscow: Statistika, 1973), 350-352.

¹²⁵ "Materialy k Vsesoiuznomu soveshaniu rabotnikov obshchepita, 1950 g." RGAE, f. 7971, op. 5, d. 419, ll. 98, 120-121.

¹²⁶ "Sousy kholodnye," *Obshchestvennoe pitanie* 7 (1967): 32-33.

and the leading experts of national cuisine certainly should not keep their recipes a ‘mystery,’ passing them along like secrets only to the select few.¹²⁷

Nikolai Kiknadze had instructed his non-Georgian employees in the ways of Georgian cuisine. He had been an active participant at *Obshchepit* meetings, and had showcased Georgian cooking abroad at international expositions.¹²⁸ However, it was with his publications that he reached a mass audience and made his most profound impact on Soviet cooking.

In his first major publication, an instructional book published in 1950, Kiknadze explained at length how the Aragvi's industrial kitchen was organized into separate stations for making sauces and flavoring soups. These stations eventually became standard features in all Soviet dining establishments, and the Aragvi's kitchen in effect became the blueprint for industrial kitchens across the Soviet Union.¹²⁹ Sauces in particular helped make possible the widespread popularization of Georgian cuisine, and Kiknadze was at the forefront of efforts to introduce Georgian sauces and show how they could be used in cooking. In 1954, he co-authored a book that discussed how Georgian seasonings could be used in large-scale dining enterprises.¹³⁰ In a 1956 manual, he established what would become the standard recipes for the Georgian sauces and spice mixtures that were soon staples of Soviet cooking.¹³¹

It was Kiknadze's contributions to major Soviet cookbooks, however, that brought his recipes into the ordinary Soviet kitchen. Georgian recipes submitted by Kiknadze figured prominently in the 1956 edition of the Soviet *Kulinariia*, perhaps the most ambitious effort to capture the ethnic diversity of the new Soviet diet, and often referred to as *Stalinskaia Kulinariia* because it was prepared in the late Stalinist period, though published shortly after.¹³² The encyclopedic cookbook was divided into sections, the main section, representing the bulk of the book, listing the volume's main recipes, while a separate section, much smaller, showcased recipes for “national dishes,” organized by country. In terms of national dishes, there were more recipes for Georgian dishes than for any other republic.¹³³ Revealing the growing centrality of Georgian cuisine, however, was the fact that many of these dishes were also listed in the main section, most under their original Georgian name.¹³⁴

¹²⁷ Tat'iana Tess, “Vospitanie vkusa,” *Obshchestvennoe pitanie* 1 (1958): 16-21.

¹²⁸ N. Kiknadze, “Uchit' i vospityvat'” *Obshchestvennoe pitanie* 3 (1957): 1-3; M. Pol'skii, “Vospitanie v trude,” *Obshchestvennoe pitanie* 4 (1963): 11-14.

¹²⁹ N. S. Kiknadze, *Iz opyta moei raboty v restorane “Aragvi”* (Moscow: Gostorgizdat, 1951). A subsequent article published almost two decades after attests to the widespread adoption of Kiknadze's stations: “Oktiabr'skie stranitsy, 1951-1955” *Obshchestvennoe pitanie* 8 (1967): 6-7.

¹³⁰ N. S. Kiknadze and G. M. Kirillova, *Spetsi i pripravy v predpriatiakh obshchestvennogo pitaniia* (Moscow: Gostorgizdat, 1954).

¹³¹ V. M. Anufriev, N. S. Kiknadze, G. M. Kirillova, *Sousy, spetsii* (Moscow: Gostorgizdat, 1956).

¹³² The book closely reflected the tense political climate in which it was edited. Its introduction defended the culinary arts, claiming they were not “bourgeois” but important for enjoyment and nourishment, and defended individual taste and the acquirement of new tastes. See *Kulinariia*, 1-6.

¹³³ There were a total of 43 Georgian recipes in the “national dishes” section. Armenia was second in terms of national dishes, with 29 recipes. The foreground of the “national dishes” cover page featured a photograph of *shashlyk*.

¹³⁴ Of the 43 Georgian recipes, ten were cross-listed and also included in the main section.

The cookbook was a showcase of plenty in which Georgian products were given a special place. In the volume's illustrations, Georgian products were displayed prominently on the Soviet table, including Georgian wine and cheeses, Borjomi mineral water, sauces, tea, and tangerines, indicating their availability or at least desirability at the mass level. The cookbook also contained a section on wine, wherein the wines of Georgia received special mention among the Soviet wines available to consumers, the white wines for their "light" and "soft" bouquet, tea-like aroma, and the red wines for their rich aroma and "brilliantly expressed" bouquet.¹³⁵ The cookbook recommended that these wines be consumed with Georgian food for the optimal culinary experience.

The cookbook showed Georgian cuisine to be synonymous with abundance. A depiction of a Georgian table had five bottles of wine for six place settings, bountiful *shashlyki* with skewers stretching off the plate, two bottles of Borjomi, long loaves of Georgian bread, and a gigantic centerpiece with fresh vegetables spilling over in cornucopia-like fashion.¹³⁶ Despite the cookbook's plea for moderation in the consumption of alcohol, each setting was assigned four separate glasses for various wines and liquors (as well as mineral water) to be consumed throughout the course of the meal. The cookbook became a fixture in Soviet dining establishments and private kitchens, promoting Georgian cuisine to the masses and widely disseminating Kiknadze's recipes.

Kiknadze also contributed recipes to another major Soviet cookbook, *Kniga o vkusnoi i zdorovoi pishche*, first published in its expanded postwar format in 1952 and revised and reprinted in 1953, 1961, and 1965. While the *Kulinariia* was geared more toward professional chefs, *Kniga o vkusnoi i zdorovoi pishche* was expressly written for the "female homemaker" (*domashnaia khoziaka*) as an instructional manual on how to prepare "tasty and healthy food for the family" using a "diverse and rich assortment" of ingredients.¹³⁷ The cookbook was a gendered project of bringing the "expertise" of predominantly male culinary specialists into the female-run kitchen, but it also encouraged female homemakers to take the lead in spreading Soviet culinary trends in their own homes. Alongside traditional Russian dishes like cabbage soup, beef cutlets, and mushrooms in sour cream, the modern Soviet housewife might also introduce her family to *chanakhi*, the fragrant Georgian lamb stew, the Georgian bean dish, *lobio*, served with crushed walnuts, or, for the less adventurous, a Georgian version of the Russian stew *solianka*, called *solianka po-gruzinskii* and marked as ethnically distinct by the inclusion of red wine and garlic.¹³⁸ Perhaps reflecting the growing demand for fine ethnic dining in the home, the number of Georgian recipes included in the collection nearly doubled between the 1953 and 1965 publications of *Kniga o zdorovoi i vkusnoi pishche*.¹³⁹

Kiknadze was far from the only Georgian in *Obshchepit's* institutional networks touting the benefits of Georgian dishes. Many others held high positions in the organization, and knowledge of cooking was an easily transportable skill for Georgian

¹³⁵ *Kulinariia*, 793-794.

¹³⁶ *Kulinariia*, 968.

¹³⁷ "Note from the publisher" in *Kniga o vkusnoi i zdorovoi pishche*, 1952. Reprinted in 1953 and 1961 editions.

¹³⁸ Just a few of the Russian and Georgian recipes listed in *Kniga o vkusnoi i zdorovoi pishche*, 1953, 1961, and 1965 editions.

¹³⁹ Based upon a reading of the tables of contents of the 1953 and 1965 editions of *Kniga o zdorovoi i vkusnoi pishche*, the number of recognizably Georgian dishes increased from eleven to eighteen.

migrants throughout the Soviet Union as demand for Georgian cuisine increased. In 1956 alone, Georgians could be found heading the Tashkent restaurant trust and a number of Moscow's most prominent dining establishments, including the newly-opened Cafe *Druzhba* (friendship) on Kuznetskii Most.¹⁴⁰ The following year, an ethnic Armenian from Tbilisi directed *Mosrestorantrest*, and the Ministry of Trade's food production laboratory, which spearheaded the development of semi-prepared goods, was led by a Georgian from Kutaisi.¹⁴¹ A number of Georgian chefs continued the pre-revolutionary pattern of work among the network of restaurants along Russia's railways, and in some cases progressed from work at regional train depots to jobs in Moscow's restaurants.¹⁴² In the Soviet capital itself, the head of the trust of railway restaurants and buffets was Georgian.¹⁴³ *Obshchepit* sponsored exchanges that brought Georgian chefs to cities in the other Soviet republics to train their counterparts in the ways of Georgian cooking. One such exchange brought a team of Georgian chefs to Kiev's cafeterias to help the Ukrainian city's eateries prepare for their celebratory "days of Georgian cooking." As a result of the exchange, Georgian-style *shashlyk*, the stew *chakhokhbili*, and cheese-filled *khachapuri* were introduced to Kiev's cafeteria menus.¹⁴⁴

The results of the postwar culinary revolution within *Obshchepit* were mixed. Flavor, style, and national color were injected into the cafeteria menu, though chronic shortages remained and cafeteria renditions of Georgian dishes were often a far cry from the images of Georgian cuisine that appeared in Soviet cookbooks. However, even though restaurants, *shashlychnye*, and cafeterias experienced shortages and often produced goods below the standards promised at *Obshchepit* meetings and on the pages of its journal, Soviet society had been exposed to and had developed a taste for Georgian food.¹⁴⁵ Soviets sought out ways to fulfill their appetite for Georgian cooking beyond the cafeteria, and welcomed the traditions of the Georgian table into their homes.

At Home Around the Georgian Table

Moscow's *shashlychnye* were often too crowded to be true places of leisure, and the worker's cafeteria afforded little opportunity to relax, as employees sometimes had as little as 15 minutes to eat.¹⁴⁶ Restaurants like the Aragvi were expensive and inaccessible to many. For most Soviets, the best way to enjoy the exotic flavors of Georgian cooking and the intimate rituals of the Georgian table were to bring them inside their own homes. Outside official eating establishments, the unique culture of Georgian dining was

¹⁴⁰ RGAE, f. 7971, op. 5, d. 444, ll. 22-138. Georgians in particular helped run the growing network of *shashlychnye*. For an example, see R. Bikke, "Master vostochnykh bliud," *Obshchestvennoe pitanie* 8 (1963): 44-46.

¹⁴¹ "Materialy o rabote Vsesoiuznogo soveshaniia po obshchepitu, 1957 g." RGAE, f. 7971, op. 5, d. 447, ll. 39-54, 250.

¹⁴² R. Bikke, "Master vostochnykh bliud," 44.

¹⁴³ M. Khubelashvili, "Podmoskov'e obkom KPSS obsuzhdaet vopros ob uluchshenii obsluzhivaniia..." *Obshchestvennoe pitanie* 6 (1968): 21-22.

¹⁴⁴ M. Finkel', "V stolovykh Kieva – gruzinskie bliuda," *Obshchestvennoe pitanie* 10 (1967): 45.

¹⁴⁵ For discussions of *Obshchepit*'s continuing problems, see the transcript of a 1966 meeting: "Stenogramma soveshaniia zamestitelei ministrov torgovli soiuznykh respublik, rukovodiashchikh rabotnikov Tsentrsoiuza po voprosu o meropriatiakh po vypolneniiu plana tovarooborota obshchepita za 1966 g." RGAE, f. 465, op. 1, d. 203, ll. 1-120.

¹⁴⁶ "Stenogramma Vsesoiuznogo soveshaniia aktiva rabotnikov obshchestvennogo pitaniia, 25-27 avgusta 1955 g." RGAE, f. 7971, op. 5, d. 430, ll. 150-163.

disseminated through contact with the Georgian diaspora, Soviet popular culture, and tourist trips to Georgia itself. Georgian food came to take on personal meaning for Soviets who now prepared and served it for themselves, accompanied by mass-produced Georgian wines and sauces—and distinct rituals. Georgian food retained its ethnic markers as an exotic food of celebration, one to be ideally consumed in tandem with toasts made by a *tamada*. Georgia’s culture of hosting, which held the guest to be a near-sacred figure, and its custom of heartfelt speechmaking around the table, proved well-suited for the Soviet Union, a place where the most intimate moments were those shared by friends who gathered in one another’s apartments and sat cramped around a kitchen table, telling stories, making toasts, and marking important occasions with food and drink.

Some Soviets learned of the traditions of the Georgian table through direct contact with the Georgian diaspora. Georgian students studying in Moscow brought recipes and food from Georgia, which they shared with their Russian classmates. The culinary reputation of Georgia often preceded them; one Georgian who studied at a prestigious medical institute in the Soviet capital recalled that her Russian classmates would routinely ask her to prepare Georgian food for group events, and noted that if there was a male Georgian student at a social gathering, he would almost always serve as *tamada*.¹⁴⁷ As the concept of the *tamada* spread beyond Georgia, best friends and army buddies might be chosen to serve as toastmasters for private wedding receptions and birthdays.¹⁴⁸ However, Georgians were known as the best masters of ceremony and the Georgian toastmaster remained the ideal for all who aspired to be *tamada*. In his memoirs, the Soviet poet Evgenii Dolmatovskii praised a non-Georgian companion, writing that with his engaging stories and eloquent toasts he conducted himself around the table like a real “Georgian *tamada*.”¹⁴⁹ Dolmatovskii and others in Moscow’s literary and artistic communities would likely have experienced Georgian-style toasting firsthand at the numerous cultural events and conferences that brought Georgian intellectuals and artists to Moscow, fetes which often culminated in long, celebratory banquets.¹⁵⁰

Through the medium of popular culture, Georgian directors, actors, musicians, and entertainers spread the images and songs of the Georgian table. Such themes were in turn taken up by non-Georgian Soviet artists, many of whom were drawn in by the increasingly bohemian atmosphere at the Aragvi restaurant and the “cult” following that it gained among the intelligentsia in the 1960s and 1970s.¹⁵¹ Artistic representations ranged from the quasi-ethnographic portrayals of Georgian village feasts in Otar Ioseliani’s 1966 production *Falling Leaves* (*Listopad* in its Russian release, *georgobis tve* in the original Georgian) to Leonid Gaidai’s popular *Prisoner of the Caucasus, or Shurik’s New Adventures* (*Kavkazskaia plennitsa, ili Novye prikliucheniia Shurika*), released in 1967, with its humorous renditions of Georgian toasting as a regional

¹⁴⁷ Interview with “Tsitsia” (last name withheld). Moscow, Russia, July 17, 2006.

¹⁴⁸ Dale Pesmen, *Russia and Soul: An Exploration* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000), 172. Based on ethnographic research Pesmen conducted in the early 1990s in Omsk, Russia.

¹⁴⁹ Evgenii Dolmatovskii, *Bylo: zapiski poeta* (Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel’, 1975), 403.

¹⁵⁰ At one such event, the stenographer recorded an array of toasts by Georgian participants—and toasts given in response by the Russian hosts. See “Stenogrammy vstrechi chlenov Vserossiiskogo teatral’nogo obshchestva s artistami teatra Rustaveli, 1936.” Russian State Archive of Literature and Art (RGALI), f. 962, op. 21, d. 35, ll. 16-28.

¹⁵¹ Shamil Khadzhimuratovich Umertaev. Interview by author

obsession. While Ioseliani's black-and-white film was warmly received by the Soviet intelligentsia as a work of cinematic artistry that captured a mood of sweet melancholy with its naïve and authentic protagonist, Gaidai's film, with its whimsical take on Georgian dining rituals, reached a larger audience. Scenes of the Georgian table also appeared frequently in the films of Moscow-based Georgian director Georgi Danelia, whose 1969 film, *Don't Grieve (Ne goriui)* culminated in a huge banquet thrown for a dying man. The banquet was itself an inversion of the Georgian ritual of toasting the deceased; in the film, the dying man asked for these toasts to be made while he was still alive so that he could hear them. The film was full of images of Georgian tables laden with food, of lengthy toasts made with wine drunk from horns, and of even longer dinners punctuated by Georgian song and dance.

Danelia's film helped make Vakhtang Kikabidze, the actor and musician who served as *tamada* in a pivotal banquet scene, into a Soviet star. Kikabidze in turn helped popularize the institution of *tamadoba* (toasting) with his song "Pei do dna" ("Bottoms up"), which was as much a drinking song as it was a set of instructions for Soviet listeners on the Georgian way of toasting. According to the song, the role of the *tamada* was dictated by the "ancient code" (*drevnii zakon*) of the Caucasus. At the table, one needed to do as he said and drink "bottoms up." In his song, Kikabidze followed the sequence of toasts at the Georgian table: for meeting, for the embrace of friends, for the host, his home and his family, for beautiful women, for the departed and for the health of the living, for the motherland (generic *rodina* and not for Georgia specifically, which might have been privately toasted by Georgians in Tbilisi and elsewhere), for peace and for happiness among the world's nations. The song recast the Georgian toasting tradition as one that did not need to be specific to Georgia (in fact, Georgia was not mentioned in the song), and thus was well-suited for popular consumption. Even those Soviets who had never met a Georgian came to know the traditions of the Georgian table through popular films, music, and the performances of Georgia's cultural diaspora of touring singers, dancers, and musicians.

The spread of Georgian cuisine derived not only from what Georgians in the diaspora brought from their native homeland, but what Soviet tourists took back from visits to the southern republic. Georgia's subtropical coastline, warm climate, and distinctive culture made it one of the Soviet Union's most popular tourist destinations.¹⁵² The development of Georgia's tourist infrastructure in the postwar period made it possible for ordinary Soviets to get a taste of the Georgian "good life" and retrace the adventures of Alexander Pushkin and Mikhail Lermontov in this purportedly exotic land.¹⁵³ In Soviet tourist literature, Georgia was advertised as a place for restorative relaxation and adventure, an abundant land of plenty available to all who traveled there.¹⁵⁴ For the same reasons, Georgia was also a culinary destination. Arriving in Tbilisi, one of the first things Soviet tourists would see was the massive aluminum statue

¹⁵² For a comparative look at the development of internal Soviet tourism, see Anne E. Gorsuch, "'There's No Place Like Home': Soviet Tourism in Late Stalinism," *Slavic Review* 62: 4 (Winter 2003): 760-785.

¹⁵³ Soviet readers would likely have been familiar with Pushkin's descriptions of his travels in Georgia in his *Journey to Arzrum*, and would certainly have read Lermontov's *A Hero of Our Time*, set in a romanticized Caucasus. The significance of both authors to the Russian imperial vision of the region is discussed by Susan Layton in *Russian Literature and Empire: Conquest of the Caucasus from Pushkin to Tolstoy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

¹⁵⁴ See, for example, David Chiburidanidze, "50 Years of Georgia," *Travel in the USSR* 2: 21 (1971): 19-21.

of “Mother Georgia” looming over the city.¹⁵⁵ The statue held a goblet of wine in one hand to welcome friends, and a sword in the other to stave off foes. The statue simultaneously evoked Georgia’s warrior culture and its tradition of hospitality, a tendency celebrated in Soviet tourist magazines claiming that “since time immemorial the Georgian’s greatest pleasure” had been “to welcome people into his home.” Hospitality meant food, served at large banquets for tourists who were simultaneously entertained by Georgian singers and dancers. Soviet tourists lucky enough to catch the wine harvest festival in Kakheti, eastern Georgia’s wine country, had the chance to sit at a table chaired by a Georgian *tamada*.

A vast system of resorts and restaurants welcomed Soviet tourists to Georgia. These dining establishments operated under the Union-wide system of *Obshchepit*, but enjoyed a great deal of local autonomy. At *Obshchepit* meetings in Moscow, Georgian representatives regularly asked for special dispensations to serve the tourists that came to Georgia “from all corners of the Soviet Union” and pushed against restrictions that limited where wine could be sold.¹⁵⁶ The number of enterprises in Georgia’s system of *Obshchepit* exceeded that of other republics of its size, and plans for expansion in the late 1950s and early 1960s put the quantity of new establishments behind only Russia and Ukraine.¹⁵⁷ In addition, Georgia’s finest dining establishments evinced a sense of quality and luxury that could rarely be found outside Moscow or Leningrad. In 1965, the journal *Obshchestvennoe pitanie* ran a special issue devoted exclusively to Georgia, featuring profiles of its seaside resorts, tourist restaurants, and the elegant cafes that dotted Rustaveli Avenue, Tbilisi’s main street.¹⁵⁸ The journal’s writers claimed that the city’s finest restaurants could compete “with the best of those in Europe.”¹⁵⁹

Luring visitors away from the cold climate and drab realities that characterized life for most Soviet citizens, Georgia was portrayed as a land of marvels. An article in *Obshchestvennoe pitanie* profiled Margo Aptsiauri and Omar Lebanidze, employees of a cafeteria by day and traditional Georgian folk dancers at Tbilisi’s House of Culture by night.¹⁶⁰ In addition to dancing cafeteria workers, Georgia also was home to a singing group of centenarians in Abkhazia, audible promoters of the renowned health benefits of a Georgian diet.¹⁶¹ It was little wonder that Soviet tourists wanted to bring Georgia’s culinary culture home with them. Tbilisi’s massive restaurant Aragvi provided visitors with a brochure proclaiming that “hospitality” was “the first rule for Georgians.” The brochure went on to provide customers with the recipes of three of the restaurant’s most

¹⁵⁵ The space-age statue of “Mother Georgia” was constructed in 1958 for the celebration of the 1500th anniversary of Tbilisi’s founding.

¹⁵⁶ See “Stenogramma soveshaniia rabotnikov obshchepita Ministerstv torgovli soiuzykh respublik.” RGAE, f. 7971, op. 5, d. 472, l. 123. In the words of the Georgian Deputy Minister of Trade, who spoke at a 1958 meeting: “Georgia, as you know, is a grape-growing region. We have a lot of wine. Why do you forbid the population to drink it? Here, beer or tea are drunk, while in Georgia we drink wine! Is that really so bad?”

¹⁵⁷ “Materialy o rabote Vsesoiuznogo soveshaniia po obshchepitu, 1957.” RGAE, f. 7971, op. 5, d. 453, l. 155.

¹⁵⁸ “Rasskazyvaem o Gruzii,” *Obshchestvennoe pitanie* 6 (1965), 1-36.

¹⁵⁹ M. Dement’eva, “Trud i krasota: Gruzinskie vpechatleniia,” *Obshchestvennoe pitanie* 7 (1965), 15-16.

¹⁶⁰ A. Imerilishvili, “I trud i pesnia,” *Obshchestvennoe pitanie* 6 (1965): 28-29.

¹⁶¹ The health benefits of a Georgian diet were famous outside the Soviet Union as well, celebrated in a 1977 Dannon commercial aired in the United States that attributed Georgians’ long life expectancy to their consumption of yogurt.

popular dishes, including its chicken *tabaka*.¹⁶² Other Soviet visitors might pick up recipes from personal contact with Georgians. Growing up in a Russian Jewish family, Ol'ga Grinkrug noted that her mother's two "signature dishes" (*firmennye bliuda*) were her Georgian *khachapuri* and her *chakhokhbili*, brought back to Moscow following a trip to Tbilisi.¹⁶³

Beyond the tourist itinerary, Georgia's domestic dining culture was not always seen in a uniformly positive light. Visitors who lingered in Georgia sometimes encountered things around the Georgian table that seemed strange or even offensive to Soviet sensibilities. The range of emotion expressed by the *tamada* might be attractive to some, off-putting to others. In the words of a Bulgarian visitor, "the kind of little speeches he [the Georgian *tamada*] gave before these grown men with moustaches were of the type which we save for children and pretty girls."¹⁶⁴ Visitors used to the more relaxed style of Russian toasting might have been confused by the rigid rules which governed behavior at the Georgian table: only the *tamada* could make toasts, wine was never to be sipped, only drunk with toasts, and toasts had to be made—and glasses clinked in a set order. Just as the *tamada*'s role in Georgia was fixed, so too were gender roles around the table; men often feasted while women served, and it was unheard of for women to make a toast.¹⁶⁵ Finally, while the state celebrated abundance and promoted Georgia as a culinary destination, there was a fine line between celebration and ideologically-suspect gluttony. Soviet authorities in Georgia frequently criticized the vast amount of money spent on Georgian weddings as a "harmful tradition," and lampooned the conspicuous consumption of copious amounts of food and drink at the Georgian *supra* as an undesirable cultural trait.¹⁶⁶ While the republic's dining traditions provided a rich repertoire for Georgian culinary specialists working in Soviet cities, they could sometimes appear jarring when experienced in their local context.

From Nikolai Kiknadze's native western Georgian countryside to the center of Moscow, and from Stalin's dinner table to the private Soviet kitchen, Georgian food changed in transit. Chicken *tabaka* lost some of its spice, and foods like turkey *satsivi*, traditionally served at Georgian New Year's celebrations, were taken out of cultural context and became dishes for everyday consumption.¹⁶⁷ Georgian dining rituals also changed. While having a *tamada* lead celebrations became a Soviet-wide practice, the rules of the table were different outside Georgia. The order and nature of the toasts became a matter of personal interpretation. The tendency of a Russian *tamada* hosting a wedding celebration to introduce games and events into the festivities would have upset a Georgian's sense of decorum. After the staff of the capital's Aragvi restaurant became

¹⁶² *Restoran Aragvi* (Tbilisi: Ministerstvo trgovli GSSR).

¹⁶³ Ol'ga Grinkrug, "O khitakh gruzinskoi kukhni," *Bol'shoi gorod* 20: 192 (November 6, 2007), accessed March 4, 2010, <http://www.bg.ru/article/7072/>.

¹⁶⁴ Vasil Tsnonev, *Nedelia* no. 533, cited in *Travel in the USSR* 2: 21 (1971): 20.

¹⁶⁵ For a more detailed discussion of gender roles around the Georgian table, see Tsitsishvili, "A Man Can Sing and Play Better than a Woman": Singing and Patriarchy at the Georgian *Supra* Feast," 452-493.

¹⁶⁶ On the struggle against "harmful traditions," see discussions of Georgia's Central Committee in 1979, III Section of the Archive Administration of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia, f. 14, op. 117, d. 337, ll. 104-110. For details of state-sponsored portrayals of the *supra*, see Manning, "Socialist supras and drinking democratically: changing images of the Georgian feast and Georgian society from Socialism to Post-socialism," (Unpublished manuscript, Trent University, 2003).

¹⁶⁷ With Soviet cooks often substituting ordinary chicken for scarce turkey.

almost entirely Russian, many in the city's Georgian diaspora continued to turn to the dining establishment as a place to celebrate and entertain visiting friends but sought satisfaction of their craving for true Georgian-style cooking elsewhere.¹⁶⁸ Although the dissemination of Georgian cuisine was linked to the Georgian diaspora, the connection between the two was never fixed. Once it was promoted by the state and spread by members of the diaspora, the diffusion of Georgia's culinary culture took on a life of its own, reaching beyond a limited group of people with specialized knowledge and into the homes of Soviet citizens, who used it for their own ends.

Yet opportunities remained for ethnic Georgian culinary specialists, who continued to serve as experts and interpreters of Georgian cuisine for the Soviet public. For a distant republic represented by a small diaspora, Georgia made a remarkable contribution to the creation of a diverse Soviet cuisine that met the needs of the Soviet state, the desires of the Soviet public, and reflected the nature of the Soviet Union as a multiethnic empire. Viewing the spread of Georgian dining practices over the *longue durée* also reveals striking continuities in Soviet material culture that spanned political changes. The connotations of Georgian cuisine may have shifted over time, but its significance never faltered as it was welcomed into the Kremlin under Stalin, developed as an elite form of fine dining amidst a return to luxury in the 1930s, and popularized for the masses in the postwar years. As it spread, the culture of the Georgian table proved remarkably malleable, yet its "national form" remained distinctly recognizable. The song of Soviet entertainer Vakhtang Kikabidze seemed a far cry from the toast given by Stalin, yet both employed a spirit of candor that arose from the same tradition of Georgian *tamadoba*. Through the form of the toast, the provision of ingredients from the Georgian republic, and the efforts of Georgian culinary specialists, the everyday habits of millions of Soviet citizens were indelibly altered.

¹⁶⁸ Interview with "Tsitsia" (last name withheld). Interview by author.

Chapter 4

Dances of Difference: Georgian Entertainers on the Soviet Stage

The Georgian dancers entered from both sides of the stage of Moscow's Tchaikovsky Concert Hall to the sound of a rapid drumbeat. Each male dancer, dressed in a black *chokha* (Caucasian warrior's cloak) and armed with a *kinzhal* (dagger), was paired with a female dancer in a sparkling white dress, her head crowned by a silk veil, and her face framed by two long dark braids of hair. The men and women formed lines of motion across the stage in black and white, first parallel, then spiraling, the men marching forward with one arm held close, the other outstretched, the women spinning, angling their wrists, and seemingly floating across the stage, their feet concealed by their long dresses.

Suddenly, the lines of male and female dancers formed a ring. As one of the male dancers entered the circle, the accompanying music, previously jubilant, became hypnotic, with the musicians repeating a melancholy and focused refrain of drum and *duduk* (Caucasian woodwind instrument). Dancing on the tips of his toes, the man advanced across the stage, shuffling his feet in coordination with the drum, while keeping his upper body motionless and his face perfectly composed. Finally drawing near to one of the female dancers, the man gave a bow, inviting her to dance. She gracefully set herself into motion, floating in circles around the stage, with upright posture but downcast eyes, her hand gestures evocative of Persian courtliness. They drew closer together, the man following her as she floated by him, and then moved forward in complete synchrony, though without once touching one another.¹

This performance of Georgia's national dance ensemble, held on March 21, 1958, marked the opening day of the grandiose *Dekada* (Festival) of Georgian Art and Literature in the Soviet capital.² Soviet ideologists held national costume and national dance to be emblematic of national character, and in few performances was ethnicity performed so vividly as in this paired partner dance, whose name, *kartuli*, simply meant "Georgian."³ In the words of Georgian choreographer Davit Dzhavriashvili, the *kartuli* was a "dancing novel" (*tanets-roman*), a competitive display of the Georgian virtues of "beauty, ingenuity [*nakhodchivost'*] and agility [*lovkost'*]." ⁴ Soviet critics characterized the repertoire of these Georgian dancers as "sunny," "bright" and "heartfelt," a performance that evoked the warmth of the Georgian homeland and "brought joy" to the hearts of Muscovites. Referring to acclaimed features of the Georgian national character, the authors stated that the dancers "captivated viewers with their heated, unrestrained temperament and sunny brilliance [*sverkanie*]." ⁵

¹ This description of the dance is based upon footage of the Sukhishvili Georgian National Dance Company, which retains the choreography developed by its founders and employed in this performance. *Georgian National Dance Company* (Tbilisi: Sukhishvili LTD, 2008).

² *Dekada gruzinskogo isskustva i literatury v Moskve: Sbornik materialov* (Moscow, 1958), 626-627.

³ In the Georgian language, *kartuli* means "Georgian." In the dance ensemble's program, the Georgian term was transliterated into Russian.

⁴ D. Dzhavriashvili, *Gruzinskie narodnye tantsy* (1958), cited in Avtandil Tataradze, *Piat gruzinskikh tantsev* (Tbilisi: Khelovneba, 1981), 5.

⁵ G. Lebanidze and A. Nikolaev, "Krasochny prazdnik vesny i druzhby," *Pravda*, April 2, 1958, 1.

The warm displays on the stage and the heartfelt reaction among Soviet audiences reflected the accompanying “Thaw” (*Otтеpel’*) in Soviet politics, which had stimulated the development of a vibrant post-Stalinist Soviet popular culture.⁶ On stage and screen, the Thaw entailed a new style of Soviet performance. Whereas late Stalinist artistic life had been carefully scripted to adhere to rigid ideological formulas, the Thaw years celebrated improvisation and openness in emergent forms of media like television.⁷ While labor productivity was still accorded the highest official honors, independent artistic creativity now garnered increased prestige and state support. Soviet artistic forms did not fundamentally change, but they were innovated by a youthful generation of postwar Soviet artists. The celebrated “beauty, ingenuity, and agility” of the lively Georgian dancers on the Moscow stage perfectly embodied the spirit of the Thaw years.

The Thaw also created new opportunities for cultural entrepreneurship at home and abroad. Ethnic song and dance ensembles, fostered by the Soviet state, were more frequently granted the privilege of foreign travel and sought out international audiences. The fact that popular culture had become an arena of Cold War competition made international representation a critical component of Soviet foreign policy, but travel abroad also allowed Soviet entertainers to participate in a more global artistic community. As international influence increased, performers transformed Soviet *estrada* (“small stage,” or popular music) into an innovative artistic medium that combined folk motifs with more contemporary sounds like electric guitars and rock and roll beats.⁸ Soviet soccer, another form of popular entertainment, also developed rapidly in the post-Stalinist period. Soviet citizens closely followed the “beautiful game” as their team competed in its first World Cup in 1958. The team sport was itself praised as a form of competitive dance, especially as played by the Georgian stars who led the Soviet team.

Georgia’s cultural entrepreneurs took full advantage of the cultural opening created by the Thaw. While Soviet ideology continued to stress an egalitarian “friendship of the peoples” (*druzhba narodov*), which mandated that Soviet culture be expressly multiethnic, a cultural diaspora of Georgian musicians, singers, actors, dancers, and soccer stars gave the southern republic a disproportionate role in the production of Soviet culture at home and abroad.⁹ In 1959-1960, culture producers based in Georgia and touring the Soviet Union held by far the largest number of concerts in proportion to

⁶ The term came from Ilya Ehrenburg’s eponymous 1954 novel, *Otтеpel’: povest’* (Moscow, 1954). For an overview of the concept, see Stephen V. Bittner, *The Many Lives of Khrushchev’s Thaw: Experience and Memory in Moscow’s Arbat* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008), 1-13. For a study of the consequences of the thaw in the realm of Soviet music, see Peter J. Schmelz, *Such Freedom, If Only Musical: Unofficial Soviet Music during the Thaw* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

⁷ These very themes emerge in Christine Evans’ discussion of Soviet television. See Evans, “From Truth to Time: Soviet Central Television, 1957-1985” (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Berkeley, 2010).

⁸ The term *estrada*, which entered Russian from Spanish through the French, literally meant “small stage” and included a broad range of popular entertainment apart from the “big stage” of classical performance. Soviet *estrada* had its roots in a diverse range of artistic forms, from the circus to urban theater, and from outdoor folk festivals to nightclub cabaret. *Estrada* was a dynamic medium that incorporated popular genres of jazz and rock, among other musical styles. Stites, *Russian Popular Culture: Entertainment and Society Since 1990* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 16-22.

⁹ Drawing on James Clifford’s concept of “traveling cultures,” sociologist Robin Cohen introduces the category of “cultural diasporas” in his *Global Diasporas: An Introduction* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1997), 127-154. I use the term to refer specifically the itinerant diaspora of Georgian cultural entrepreneurs, who created an ethnically distinctive and mobile culture of entertainment.

Georgia's small population, and the third largest total number of concerts among all Soviet republics, behind only Russia and Ukraine.¹⁰ By the decade's end, Georgian *estrada* performers played more concerts in Russia than any other national group, and twice as many concerts as groups from Ukraine and Belarus combined.¹¹ The influence of Georgians extended beyond cultural organizations based in the southern republic; taking advantage of the Soviet Union's system of artistic exchange and cultural circulation, Georgians became visible in every corner of the Soviet Union.

In the Thaw years and afterward, Georgian culture proved to be a highly marketable commodity. As in other realms of Soviet life, ethnic difference could be an asset. Like Georgian food, the culture of Georgian performance was bold and subtle, ethnically distinct yet regarded as sophisticated. Much as Georgian restaurateurs were skilled at catering to broader Soviet tastes, a familiarity with Russian culture allowed Georgian performers to skillfully play on the expectations of a wider Soviet audience. Just as the strength of Georgian cuisine lay in its versatility, so too did Georgian performance remain artistically vital because it was adaptable and conveyed a wide range of emotions, from the joyous exuberance of the Thaw to the nostalgic sentimentalism of the era of *zastoi* (stagnation). The repertoire of Georgian performance was present in all spheres of Soviet life, from the marketplace, where the accented Georgian trader sold scarce goods and flamboyantly affirmed business partnerships, to the feast table, where a *tamada* was called for as master of ceremonies. Georgian artists were able to draw on these accessible images, sounds, and even tastes of the Georgian homeland to claim privilege as interpreters of a vibrant native culture.

For these cultural entrepreneurs, the Georgian homeland functioned as both a sanctuary from the Soviet censors in Moscow and a source of cultural capital. Georgia's artists benefitted from Tbilisi's well-developed cultural institutions, which had their origins in the pre-revolutionary period, were developed in the Stalinist era, and were reinvigorated in the Thaw years and afterward as vital centers of cultural production. Fluent in Russian as well as Georgian culture, Georgian entertainers were at home on the Soviet stage, and could convincingly represent the Soviet Union abroad. They played a leading role in forging an enduring Soviet artistic culture that appealed to Soviet citizens of every nationality, outlasted the Thaw, and colored Soviet life until the collapse of the Soviet state.

Internationalism in One Country: The Foundations of the Georgian Cultural Repertoire

Before the international outreach of the Cold War period, Soviet culture had been developed as a multiethnic world unto itself. While the triumphant *Internationale* served as the anthem of the Soviet Union in its early days, the shift from worldwide revolution to the development of "socialism in one country" entailed the creation of a domestic Soviet internationalism. Beginning in the 1930s, cultural elites in all of the Soviet republics were enlisted by the Stalinist state to produce ideologically palatable showcases of national culture celebrating the "friendship of the peoples." National themes were introduced to popular literature, music, film, and painting; folkloric operas, symphonies,

¹⁰ RGALI, f. 3162, op. 1, d. 26, l. 3.

¹¹ Georgian *estrada* groups played 316 concerts in Russia in 1969, more than Belarus (199 concerts), Lithuania (164), Ukraine (98), Armenia (74) and others. RGALI, f. 3170, op. 1, d. 23, ll. 1-57.

and ballets became standards of the new Soviet artistic canon. In the words of cultural historian Richard Stites, “virtually all of Soviet mass culture became ‘folklorized.’”¹² Georgia’s national culture received a boost from the Soviet state, as cultural institutions in the southern republic were invigorated and an institutional framework was established for artistic exchange between the periphery and the center.

The new Soviet culture was supposed to be “national in form, socialist in content.” However, national forms were culturally embedded artifacts that reflected the unique cultural logic of their native context; thus, form often shaped content. The forms of Soviet Georgian culture had their roots in the distinctive practices of Georgian everyday life, and had been cultivated by the cosmopolitan artistic community of pre-revolutionary Tbilisi. Soviet Georgian dramatic ensembles, dance troupes, and orchestras were established on the basis of imperial theaters, amateur ethnographic song and dance companies, and a musical conservatory in Tbilisi that was closely linked to the artistic life of Moscow and St. Petersburg. More fundamentally, everyday life in Georgia was itself imbued with a lyrical style of expansive performance. The anthropologists Mars and Altman claimed that Georgian men were “perpetually ‘on show,’” competing with one another for status in lavish displays of consumption and hospitality.¹³ Given the emphasis on folkloric form in the Soviet period, Georgian theatricality became further institutionalized as Georgian theater, and the Georgian musicality that accompanied the consumption of food and drink was honed as a distinctive style of music. Unlike the realm of the second economy observed by Mars and Altman, and unlike other areas of Soviet life in which the Georgian diaspora was visible, such as politics, the field of arts and entertainment accorded a prominent place to Georgian women.¹⁴ In part, this trend reflected overall Soviet patterns of gender distribution, which saw more women involved in cultural production than in political life; it also drew on a longstanding Georgian culture of female entertainment on the theatrical stage and in the music hall.¹⁵ Drawing on their distinctive culture, Georgian artists developed an ethnically informed and universally recognizable style of performance.

Georgian culture also benefitted from high-ranking institutional patrons in the early Soviet state. Stalin and other leading Georgian political figures played a particularly hands-on role in directing cultural production in their homeland. Stalin expressed praise for Georgian folk ensembles and operas, and kept close tabs on the development of

¹² Richard Stites, *Russian Popular Culture: Entertainment and Society since 1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 72.

¹³ Gerald Mars and Yochanan Altman, “The Cultural Bases of Soviet Georgia’s Second Economy,” *Soviet Studies* 35 (1983), 548-549.

¹⁴ Soviet cultural production was itself dominated for many years by Ekaterina Furtseva, who sponsored artists she liked and damaged the careers of those she did not, arguably turning the Soviet Ministry of Culture into a “woman’s kingdom” against the backdrop of a male-dominated Soviet state. See Laurence Senelick, “‘A Woman’s Kingdom’: Minister of Culture Furtseva and Censorship in the Post-Stalinist Russian Theatre,” *New Theatre Quarterly* 26 (2010): 16-24.

¹⁵ Female Georgian singers were prominent on the imperial and Soviet stage alike. In the imperial period, Georgian singer Keto Dzhaparidze was famous throughout Russia. In the early Soviet period, the Georgian woman, Tamara Tsereteli, was praised as “the most talented performer of gypsy songs,” another exoticized artistic medium. On stage, she dressed in gypsy costume, and her dark hair and complexion helped her “pass” as a convincing Gypsy. David MacFayden, *Songs for Fat People: Affect, Emotion, and Celebrity in the Russian Popular Song, 1900-1955* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2002), 29-32.

Georgian films, in some cases offering specific critique on screenplays.¹⁶ Keenly aware of Stalin's tastes, Lavrentii Beria closely monitored preparations for the first *Dekada* of Georgian culture, held in Moscow in January 1937.¹⁷ Other Georgian political figures served as patrons to specific groups of artists. Avel' Enukidze, the Secretary of the Presidium of the Central Executive Committee, helped organize a series of performances by Tbilisi's Rustaveli State Theater in Moscow in 1930, and could be seen in official press photographs walking arm-in-arm with the Georgian theater's director, Sandro Akhmeteli.¹⁸ Thanks in part to such efforts, Georgian culture became a centerpiece in the construction of the new, multiethnic Soviet culture.

Inspired by the performance of Rustaveli's Georgian actors on their first tour of Moscow in 1930, a Russian theater critic summarized the cultural ideal of the new socialist state when he wrote: "the representatives of the national republics are no longer our 'guests,' but instead stand together with us as masters [*khoziaevami*] of our country, where old words like 'center' and 'periphery' [*okraina*] have become obsolete [*ustareli*]."¹⁹ This emphasis on national diversity and collapsing the distance between center and periphery in Soviet culture outlasted Stalinism, and guaranteed a permanent place for ethnic outsiders on the Soviet stage. The cultures of nationalities residing solidly within Soviet borders had pride of place in Soviet artistic representation. While Gypsy music was risqué because of its associations with the lavish restaurant entertainment of the late imperial period and Jewish culture was viewed warily after the creation of a Jewish homeland outside the Soviet Union, Georgian cultural achievements remained dramatically distinct and unquestionably patriotic in the minds of Soviet ideologists.

In the years after Stalin's death, there was a further proliferation of national festivals, *druzhba* (friendship) holidays, and performances by artists from the national republics in outdoor parks and on factory floors.²⁰ While Moscow was considered the "city of the leading masters of the stage" in the words of one Georgian artist, similar festivals were held throughout the Soviet Union, part of a constant process of artistic exchange and cultural circulation among a diverse population.²¹ Taking advantage of the state's program of promoting multiethnic entertainment, ethnic ensembles crisscrossed the Soviet Union: dancers from Azerbaijan toured the Russian Far East, choirs from Belarus played in Tashkent, and symphonies based on Armenian folk melodies were broadcast over the airwaves. Leading actors, choreographers, and composers from the national republics often studied in Moscow and sometimes took up residence in the Soviet capital. The Soviet Union's multiethnic culture was produced by traveling cultural diasporas whose prominence and mobility were ensured by the Soviet state.

¹⁶ See Chapter 2 for details.

¹⁷ RGALI, f. 962, op. 21, d. 35, ll. 29-30.

¹⁸ Among the many press clippings collected by Rustaveli Theater actor Akaki Khorava. Central Archive of the Contemporary History of Georgia, Department of Literature and Art, f. 212, op. 1, d. 58. For more on the tour, see *Gastrol'naia poezdka 1-go gosteatra Gruzii imeni Rustaveli* (Tiflis: Gos. Izd-vo SSRG, 1930).

¹⁹ Russian-language press clipping collected by actor Akaki Khorava. Georgian Archive of Art and Literature, f. 212, op. 1, d. 58.

²⁰ For example, the "Days of culture and art of Soviet Georgia in Moscow" held in 1967. "Prekrasnaia kul'tura sovet'skoi Gruzii," *Vechernii Tbilisi*, June 14, 1967.

²¹ Moscow's importance was commented on by Georgian theater director Robert Sturua, speaking at a festival of Georgian culture in the Soviet capital in 1982. *Dni Gruzii v Mosvke* (Tbilisi: Khelovneba, 1982).

Georgian cultural entrepreneurs not only benefitted from distinctive traditions of performance and continuing state patronage; they also had the advantage of being linked to a homeland whose place was already well-established in the Soviet imagination. Georgia was famous as an exotic land of adventure romanticized in the writings of Alexander Pushkin and Mikhail Lermontov, and the performances of the Georgian entertainers tapped a deep reservoir of popular ethnographic knowledge, much of it drawn from Russian literature.²² In fictional accounts and in official displays of Soviet culture, Georgian men were celebrated as warriors and skilled horsemen (*dzhigity*). Georgia's national dance ensemble accordingly played on this theme, with dances showing men engaged in spirited battle as masters of acrobatic display, and another dance, actually called "Dzhigity," dedicated to their famed skill in Caucasian horse-riding.²³ Drawing on a literary trope that extended back to Lermontov but was further popularized in pre-revolutionary Russian kopeck novels, Georgian women were represented as ethereal princesses, a depiction evoked by their costumes and their graceful way of floating across the stage.²⁴

Georgian culture continued to be vibrant throughout the Soviet period because its range of forms meant that it could be presented as both unquestionably authentic in its pedigree and unmistakably modern in its relevance. Igor Stravinsky wrote that Georgian polyphonic singing was a "tradition of musical performance with its roots in ancient times," which could nevertheless contribute more to the musical world than "any achievement in contemporary music."²⁵ Echoing Stravinsky's praise, Georgian dances could be promoted simultaneously as a manifestation of ancient traditions and an achievement of Soviet culture. As an informational brochure for a touring song and dance ensemble from Georgia proclaimed: "they have come from far-off Colchis, the land of Medea and the Golden Fleece, from present-day Soviet Georgia. They have come here to show us their thousand-year-old national traditions."²⁶ Unlike other Soviet national dance ensembles, Georgian dance troupes depicted elaborate sub-national, regional variations in

²² See Susan Layton, *Russian Literature and Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994) and Harsha Ram, *The Imperial Sublime: A Russian Poetics of Empire* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2003).

²³ The "Dzhigity" dance was from a 1968 performance. RGALI, f. 3162, op. 1, d. 769, ll. 6-7. The traditions of Georgian *dzhigitovka* were celebrated in the Soviet publication, *Gruzinskie konnye igry*, by Kapiton Nachkebiia (Tbilisi: Sabchota Sakartvelo, 1964).

²⁴ In his poem "Tamara," Lermontov created an alluring image of an enchanting but dangerous Georgian princess. The name may have been a nod to Queen Tamar, who ruled during Georgia's "golden age" in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Il'ia Il'f and Evgenii Petrov allude to Lermontov's poem and to the ghost of "tsaritsa Tamara" as their protagonists cross Georgia's Darial Pass in their satirical novel, *Dvenadtsat' stul'ev* (Moscow: Izd-vo khudozhestvennoi literatury, 1959), first published in 1928. The trope of the aristocratic Georgian woman appeared in popular fiction as well. In the early twentieth-century kopeck novel, "Satan's Cliff," the Russian protagonist found success in the Caucasus and ended up marrying a Georgian princess. The serial is discussed by Jeffrey Brooks in the context of late imperial national identity in *When Russia Learned to Read: Literacy and Popular Literature, 1861-1917* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), 214-245.

²⁵ Igor Stravinsky, *Sovetskaia muzyka* 12 (1966), cited in promotional booklet for the Rustavi Ensemble, Central Archive of the Contemporary History of Georgia, Department of Literature and Art, f. 44, op. 3, d. 24.

²⁶ The statement paraphrased a favorable review given by a French critic. Brochure from the Rustavi Ensemble from the 1980s. Central Archive of the Contemporary History of Georgia, Department of Literature and Art, f. 44, op. 3, d. 24.

their repertoire, each with their own distinctive colorings. The idiom of Georgian performance was intricately developed and easily transported throughout the Soviet Union by an itinerant diaspora of Georgian cultural entrepreneurs; it proved readily adaptable to changing Soviet needs.

Choreographing Georgia's National Character

In Soviet song and dance ensembles, Georgian ethnicity was developed as a performative art form, and Georgian national character made visible as a recognizable set of bodily movements and gestures. This process fit an established Soviet cultural mythology, which held dance to be the most intimate expression of national spirit. In the words of Igor Moiseev, the founder and director of the State Ensemble of Folk Dancing of the USSR:

The soul of a people is revealed in dance, as well as in song... In dance one can see a people's character and temperament, their relationship to the surrounding world, their spiritual and material culture. Every people creates their own distinctive [*samobytnoe*] art of the dance. Among every people there is an intrinsic language of dance, an original form of expression, mannerism, movement [*plastika*], coordination.

To demonstrate his claim, Moiseev turned to Georgian dance as a well-known counterpoint to Russian dance, stating: "the way that Russian dances differ from Georgian ones... is understandable to all people regardless of their nationality or racial background."²⁷ Inundated by state-sponsored displays of ethnic distinctiveness, most Soviets could probably distinguish between Russian and Ukrainian folk songs and dances. However, while Russian and Ukrainian folk traditions were understood to be close cousins, springing from a common Slavic culture, Georgian song and dance was seen as embodying a profoundly different style, one arising from more foreign origins. Georgia's song and dance ensembles specialized in performing this exoticized ethnicity for a Soviet audience, conveyed as the colorful product of an ancient culture rooted in a distant Georgian homeland.

In fact, Soviet Georgian dance ensembles were a result of the interplay between folkish Georgian and cosmopolitan Russian high culture in the late imperial period. Georgia had long been distinguished by its unique practices of polyphonic singing, common in folk songs and sanctified in choral arrangements for Georgian Orthodox services, as well as its colorful and energetic folk dances. The late nineteenth century saw a flowering of interest in all things Georgian among intellectuals in Tbilisi and Kutaisi, including these distinctive songs and dances. The rediscovery and reinvention of native culture was part of a trend of growing national self-consciousness that could be found throughout the Russian Empire.²⁸ More than most other nationally-minded intellectuals, however, the Georgian nobility had privileged access not only to native inspiration, but also to the Russian court and, by extension, Russian imperial high culture. This stood in contrast to Ukrainians, whose nobility was Russian, or those from the Baltic region,

²⁷ Igor Moiseev, "Dusha naroda v tantse," *Vechernii Tbilisi*, June 12, 1967.

²⁸ As well as in Eastern Europe more generally, a process evocative of Ernest Gellner's discussion of the age of nationalism as an age of the creation of national high cultures. See Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983).

where the nobility was largely German, to say nothing of the Muslim populations of the Caucasus and Central Asia, who scarcely participated in the cultural life of the Russian court. Chapter 2 revealed the exceptional integration of the Georgian intelligentsia into Russian imperial intellectual life; the same privileged position in the imperial system and continued distinction as group apart were critical factors when it came to arts and culture. Where Georgian nobles first went in the middle of the nineteenth century, upwardly mobile professionals followed in the late imperial period, studying at Russian conservatories, performing on the Russian stage, and partaking in the cultural life of St. Petersburg.²⁹ This trend carried over into the Soviet period, when many Soviet Georgian cultural producers could trace their pedigree back to an ancestor in the Russian court.³⁰ Georgian cultural producers mastered the vocabulary of a distinct national culture and the grammar of imperial high culture, a rare combination that allowed them to successfully develop Georgian performance as a strange yet familiar spectacle.

The idiom of Georgian performance was produced between the centers of Russian imperial cultural production and the mountains and villages of Georgia. After studying at the Moscow Conservatory, the Georgian composer Zakaria Paliashvili developed a keen interest in the folk songs of his native land. In 1903, he toured the mountains of the remote Georgian region of Svaneti, collecting rare folk songs. Combining ethnographic authority with knowledge of the musical forms of Russian imperial high culture, Paliashvili composed choral and orchestral works based on Georgian folk melodies.³¹ The culmination of his efforts was the Georgian opera, *Abesalom da Eteri* (*Abesalom and Eteri*), a dramatic story of tragic love performed in traditional Georgian costume and incorporating many of the Georgian folk dances that would later find their way to the Soviet stage, including the *kartuli*.

Iliko Sukhishvili and Nino Ramishvili, the founders of the Georgian dance ensemble that astonished Moscow audiences with dances like the *kartuli* during the 1958 *Dekada*, built on the imperial legacy of Georgian performance. Like those who came before him, Sukhishvili was fully fluent in both Georgian and Russian culture.³² Born in 1907, he trained as a dancer and choreographer with Moscow's Bolshoi Theater from 1931 to 1936 before returning to his native Georgia to serve as a stage director for the Tbilisi Opera's production of *Keto da Kote* (*Keto and Kote*). In some ways the counterpart to Paliashvili's tragic *Abesalom da Eteri*, *Keto da Kote* was a comic opera composed by Victor Dolidze. Based on Avksenti Tsagareli's nineteenth-century novel *Khanuma*, the opera offered light social satire and lavishly depicted a pre-revolutionary Tbilisi populated by bankrupt but proud nobles, wealthy merchants, mischievous

²⁹ With the advent of Soviet power, some left to find success abroad, while others remained to become popular Soviet artists. The case of the Balanchine/Balanchivadze brothers is interesting to note. George Balanchine, born Giorgi Balanchivadze to a Georgian father and a Russian mother in St. Petersburg, graduated from the Imperial Ballet and subsequently fled to Paris in 1924, eventually reaching America, where he revolutionized choreography and helped found the New York City Ballet. His brother, Andria Balanchivadze, remained in the Soviet Union and became a well-known Georgian composer.

³⁰ According to ethnographer Sergei Arutiunov, many members of Georgia's Soviet-era creative intelligentsia had aristocratic ancestors, a trend attributable to the fact that Georgia's nobility made up over ten percent of the overall pre-revolutionary population and was almost universally literate. Interview by author. Moscow, Russia, February 19, 2008.

³¹ Gulbat Toradze, *Kompozitory Gruzii* (Tbilisi: Khelovneba, 1973), 169-174.

³² This description of Sukhishvili's life and career is based in part on his Georgian language memoir, *mogonebebi* (Tbilisi, 2008),

matchmakers, and merry *kintoebi* (market traders). The opera, which skillfully matched Georgian folk culture with the cosmopolitan sensibilities of the Georgian intelligentsia, was celebrated for its renditions of the songs and dances of the Georgian table, bazaar, and matrimonial fete. It was choreographed by Sukhishvili, fresh from his residence at the Bolshoi Theater, with sets designed by Lado Gudiashvili, a painter who had resided in Paris from 1919 to 1926 in close contact with leading members of the artistic avant-garde.³³ The production was directed by Evgenii Mikeladze, who had trained at the Leningrad State Conservatory before becoming a leading figure in the Georgian artistic world. Mikeladze's production of *Keto da Kote* survived his own death in the Great Purges, and the opera remained popular, enjoying a revival in the 1970s when it was restaged in Russian at Leningrad's Bolshoi Academic Theater by Tbilisi native Georgii Tovstonogov, himself the son of a Russian nobleman and a Georgian classical singer.³⁴

Sukhishvili and his wife, the Georgian dancer Nino Ramishvili, were not only sophisticated interpreters of a distinctive ethnic culture, they were also effective cultural entrepreneurs skilled at operating in the Soviet political context. On June 12, 1945, following a decree by the Central Committee of the Georgian Communist Party, a directive of the Artistic Committee of the Georgian Council of Ministers established the basis for what would become one of the leading folk dance ensembles in the Soviet Union. According to the directive, a group of "40 dancers" was to be created under the auspices of the Georgian State Philharmonic, with Sukhishvili appointed as the ensemble's leader.³⁵ The order made Sukhishvili and Ramishvili's group among the largest folk ensembles in the Soviet Union, and it was one of the first permanent folk collectives to be established and granted institutional affiliation. Berezka, the famous Russian folk dance troupe, was not established until 1948.³⁶

Operating under the auspices of the Georgian State Philharmonic, Sukhishvili and Ramishvili's ensemble took advantage of the state's vast institutional infrastructure that supported officially-sanctioned forms of multiethnic entertainment, and the pair's enthusiastic cultural entrepreneurship was met with strong state sponsorship, especially at the republic level. In addition to being a well-known dancer who had trained at the Bolshoi, Sukhishvili was a Party member, and as early as 1946 he wrote directly to Kandid Charkviani, Georgia's Communist Party chief, to request additional tour dates for his ensemble, a private train car for their tour, and permission to have two of his top dancers excused from service in the Red Army.³⁷ Only one year after its establishment, the ensemble received invitations to perform in Moscow, Leningrad, Riga, Tallinn, and elsewhere. In asking permission from the Georgian Communist Party to accept these invitations, Sukhishvili did not hesitate to appeal to the national pride of Party members,

³³ In Paris, Gudiashvili associated with the Russian modernists Natalia Goncharova, and Mikhail Larionov, as well as the Italian painter Amadeo Modigliani.

³⁴ Tovstonogov's reworking drew first and foremost on Tsagareli's original novel, *Khanuma*, and thus bore the title of the book. Tovstonogov was born in Tbilisi in 1915. He lived in Georgia until 1946, before leaving to find success on the Russian stage. Anatoly Smeliansky, *The Russian theatre after Stalin*, trans. Patrick Miles (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), xxxv, 13-15.

³⁵ Central Archive of the Contemporary History of Georgia, Department of Literature and Art, f. 2, op. 3, d. 27, l. 229.

³⁶ Nadezhda Nadezhkina, "S beregov kury." *Vechernaia Moskva*, February 24, 1967.

³⁷ III Section of the Archive Administration of the Georgian MoIA, f. 14, op. 20, d. 177, l. 27.

writing that it was “absolutely necessary... to more widely show Georgian dance to our country’s population.”

Sukhishvili and Ramishvili built on the artistic idiom created by an earlier generation of Georgian artists. The ensemble’s performances evoked both the nineteenth-century revival of Georgian folk music, as well as Sukhishvili’s tenure with the Bolshoi Theater in the 1930s, evident in his emphasis on balletic coordination in the ensemble’s rendering of Georgian dances.³⁸ Costumes for the Georgian ensemble were designed by another Georgian with a deep understanding of the sensibilities of Russian high culture, Simon “Soliko” Virsaladze, who simultaneously worked as the lead designer for Leningrad’s Kirov Opera and Ballet.

Under their direction, Georgia's national dance ensemble conveyed an elaborate and exoticized Caucasian ethnography through movement and costume. In addition to the paired *kartuli* dance, the group's repertoire also included the *khevsuruli*, a dance of Georgian highlanders, part of the choreographed "Khevsuretian suite," in which a fight among men in a mountainous village was broken up by a woman throwing her headdress among the warriors, though not before much acrobatic clashing of daggers by the group's male dancers. Other dances conveyed the urbanity of pre-revolutionary Tbilisi, with the *karachokheli* dance depicting the city's black-clothed *kintoebi* (market traders) engaged in spirited displays of cunning and jest, punctuated by toasting and carousing. Each dance featured different costumes designed by Virsaladze, capturing Georgia's regional diversity, from the colorful clothing of the inhabitants of Adjara, on Georgia's Black Sea coast, to the long cloaks and furry hats of Georgia's highland shepherds in the north.

The ensemble became a mainstay of official Soviet ceremonies, entertaining delegates to the twentieth, twenty-second, and twenty-fourth congresses of the Soviet Communist Party. Along with memorable performances at the Bolshoi in Moscow and La Scala in Milan, the troupe took part in ideologically appropriate Soviet celebrations, and by 1971 performed between 20 to 30 concerts each year at collective farms, between 10 to 20 concerts at vaunted construction sites, and 20 to 30 concerts in Soviet “industrial regions.”³⁹ Dancers were regularly asked to sit in on seminars discussing the latest reports of Communist Party leaders. However, while a prominent Soviet institution, the ensemble was maintained as a private dynasty of the Sukhishvili-Ramishvili family. Their twelve-year old son, Tengiz Sukhishvili, joined the ensemble in 1953; he would later go on to lead the dancers after his parents’ retirement, joined by his wife and, eventually, his own children.⁴⁰

The success of Sukhishvili and Ramishvili’s dance troupe inspired imitators. Singing and dancing ensembles arose at the regional level in Georgia, with smaller ensembles gaining Soviet-wide prominence. In 1968, Anzor Erkomaishvili, a Georgian composer, collaborated with Revaz Mochiladze, the Head of the Department of Culture of the Executive Committee of the Rustavi Soviet of People’s Deputies, to establish a song and dance ensemble in the industrial city of Rustavi, outside of Tbilisi.⁴¹ Like

³⁸ RGALI, f. 648, op. 1, d. 3111, ll. 1-14.

³⁹ Central Archive of the Contemporary History of Georgia, Department of Literature and Art, f. 80, op. 1, d. 1020.

⁴⁰ Central Archive of the Contemporary History of Georgia, Department of Literature and Art, f. 80, op. 1, d. 1020.

⁴¹ Central Archive of the Contemporary History of Georgia, Department of Literature and Art, f. 44, op. 3, d. 24.

Sukhishvili and Ramishvili's ensemble, the Rustavi troupe drew on pre-revolutionary musical traditions. Erkomaishvili came from a long line of musicians, claiming that his ancestors had been musicians for six generations before him. Among his relatives were pre-revolutionary intellectuals who collected and performed the folk songs of rural Georgia.⁴² Erkomaishvili himself sought to bring together the traditions of the Georgian countryside, the world of formal music, and the rigors of ethnography. He had close ties to Tbilisi's classical music community, since in 1961 he had established another Georgian singing group, Gordela, under the auspices of the Georgian Philharmonic. In addition to being a composer, he was a professor who specialized in ethnomusicology, lending his renditions of Georgian folk songs a certifiable authenticity. Beginning with performances in Georgia, Erkomaishvili's group found success touring the Soviet Union. By 1976, less than ten years after their founding, the group performed their repertoire of song and dance at the Kremlin Palace. Their lead soloist, Hamlet Goniashvili, eventually became the most famous singer of traditional Georgian songs in the Soviet Union.⁴³

The culture of Georgian entertainment was present in almost every facet of Soviet life. Georgian traditional singing was broadcast across the Soviet Union on Soviet-wide radio programs. An integral part of a Soviet-wide exchange of national culture, Georgian ensembles played in every Soviet republic, while the Georgian SSR welcomed national song and dance troupes from across the Soviet Union to its stages and concert halls.⁴⁴ Georgian performers even found their way to non-traditional venues. In 1970, for the one-hundredth anniversary of Lenin's birth, Georgian dance ensembles entertained workers and soldiers at factories and military installations in Moscow.⁴⁵

Georgian performers were not only a mainstay of the Soviet artistic community, but represented the multiethnic face of the Soviet Union abroad as singing and dancing diplomats of Soviet cultural policy. Beginning in the Thaw years, "friendship" festivals were held in the Soviet bloc countries of Eastern Europe. The achievements of Soviet culture were showcased in Western Europe and the United States, and promoted as part of the Soviet model for national development in Asia, Africa, and Latin America.⁴⁶ In Eastern Europe, Georgian performers were used to propagate Soviet claims that national culture flourished under centralized socialist rule, and in the developing world they belied criticism that Soviet expansion was simply another form of European imperialism.

With these goals in mind, Soviet musical directors gathered in November 1960 to discuss the reorganization and strengthening of Goskontsert, a centralized concert agency, to "enhance and expand cultural cooperation between the USSR and foreign countries...and show the peoples of these countries the achievements of Soviet culture, multiethnic [*mnogonatsional'noi*] in form, socialist in content."⁴⁷ Party organs were enlisted to help promote the works of Soviet, rather than pre-revolutionary artists and

⁴² Central Archive of the Contemporary History of Georgia, Department of Literature and Art, f. 44, op. 3, d. 24. For more on his family's history, see Erkomaishvili's Georgian-language memoirs, *khma utsnauri* (Tbilisi: Sakartvelo, 1999).

⁴³ Central Archive of the Contemporary History of Georgia, Department of Literature and Art, f. 44, op. 5, d. 16, 72.

⁴⁴ RGALI, f. 3170, op. 1, d. 102, ll. 1-53.

⁴⁵ TsALIM, f. 429, op. 1, d. 1323, l. 14.

⁴⁶ RGALI, f. 3162, op. 1, d. 297, ll. 1-72.

⁴⁷ RGALI, f. 3162, op. 1, d. 33, l. 1.

musicians, and Goskontsert was instructed to cooperate closely with the Ministry of Culture to improve the quality of concert promotion outside the Soviet Union.⁴⁸

As identifiable ethnics who represented the diverse cultural crossroads of the Caucasus, Georgian performers were well-suited to meet the demands of multiethnic Soviet representation. They could represent generic non-Russian ethnic diversity at international events and festivals, while also engaging in more targeted cultural diplomacy. Drawing on connections between the Caucasus and the Middle East, Soviet cultural policymakers sent Armenian song and dance ensembles to perform in Lebanon, where there was a sizable Armenian diaspora, and Azeri groups to Iran, where Azeris were the largest national minority group.⁴⁹ Georgian groups appealed not only to closely related ethnic populations like the Laz along Turkey's Black Sea coast, but also excelled at offering an ethnographic performance that spanned the Caucasus. In Turkey, they sang songs in Laz (a language closely related to Georgian), but also in Abkhaz and Circassian, appealing to diaspora populations in Turkey.⁵⁰ While they were wary of Soviet diaspora populations that did not have homelands within the Soviet Union, Soviet officials nevertheless employed touring entertainers to appeal to the sympathies of diasporas abroad.

In 1977 the Georgian folk song "Chakrulo" was among the pieces of music selected to be included in the 1977 Voyager space probe, the purpose of which was to broadcast information about human civilization to other intelligent life forms in the universe.⁵¹ While they could be seen throughout the world and even heard in space, Georgian singers and dancers continued to enjoy a solid institutional basis in their native republic. As ambassadors of Georgian and Soviet culture at home and abroad, members of song and dance ensembles were given centrally-located apartments, and furnished with impressive rehearsal space in Tbilisi. The Georgian republic provided an enviable base for Georgia's cultural diaspora, and continued to be a source of inspiration and authenticity for performers specializing in ethnic distinctiveness.

The Beautiful Game: The Artistry of Georgian Soccer

Just as dance was held to be representative of national character, so too was soccer.⁵² As Soviet soccer became a more professionalized industry in the postwar period, Georgian soccer players epitomized a distinctly ethnic style of play, one that built on the same qualities of "beauty, ingenuity, and agility" in movement that were celebrated in Georgian dance. Georgian soccer and Georgian dance shared a common mythology, one that both athletic promoters and choreographers could capitalize on. An official fan guide to the Dinamo Tbilisi soccer team contained sketches of star Georgian players singing while engaged in acrobatic leaps toward the ball, and depicted Avtandil

⁴⁸ RGALI, f. 3162, op. 1, d. 33, ll. 2-8.

⁴⁹ RGALI, f. 3162, op. 1, d. 1471, ll. 1-50.

⁵⁰ RGALI, f. 3162, op. 1, d. 755, ll. 16-21, d. 1675, l. 11.

⁵¹ D. Toradze, "Iarkoe muzykal'noe proizvedenie" *Vechernii Tbilisi*, October 26, 1976.

⁵² It was not only in the Soviet Union that soccer playing was believed to be indicative of national character and temperament. As soccer became a truly global sport in the second half of the twentieth century, northern European players were seen as calm and steadfast, southern Europeans as "emotional," South Americans as "fiery," and Africans as "magical and irrational." H. O'Donnell, "Mapping the Mythical: geopolitics of national sporting stereotypes," *Discourse in Society* 5: 3 (1994): 345-80, cited in Giulianotti, *Football: A Sociology of the Global Game* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 1999), 139-140.

Gogoberidze, the team's striker, performing the *kartuli* dance with his hands while balancing on the ball.⁵³ The association of Georgian soccer with Georgian dance worked both ways; for the 1958 *Dekada* of Georgian culture in Moscow, Sukhishvili and Ramishvili's dance ensemble introduced a new number whose playful choreography included passes made between dancers of a ball, evoking the "beautiful game."⁵⁴

In the Soviet Union, every soccer team had its own fan base, which reflected and reinforced social and ethnic divisions. Separate communities formed around Moscow's strong club teams, the largest rivalry being between Dinamo Moscow, patronized by the secret police and state functionaries, and Spartak Moscow, supported by trade unions and large segments of Moscow's working class.⁵⁵ Successful club teams in the national republics, the most prominent being Dinamo Kiev and Dinamo Tbilisi, in effect became national teams supported by large segments of the Ukrainian and Georgian populations.

While club teams throughout the Soviet Union earned praise for skill and effectiveness when victorious, only the Georgians were known to represent a distinctly ethnic style of play. The Moscow teams were cheered for winning or castigated for losing. Dinamo Kiev's style of play was closely linked to Russia; there were many Russians on the team and their trainer for many years was from Moscow. Similarly, Dinamo Minsk, though less successful than Dinamo Kiev, was difficult to distinguish from a Russian club team; many players who failed to make the Moscow teams went to play in Minsk. Ararat Yerevan and Neftianik Baku occasionally upset the Moscow-based teams, but their success was attributed to skill and training, not to the way they played. Only the Georgians offered a visible alternative to the standard style of play present throughout the Soviet Union.

Like Georgian dance, Georgian soccer had deep roots in the imperial period. Around the same time that English mill owners had introduced soccer to Moscow in the late nineteenth century, English industrialists and workers brought soccer to Georgia via the Black Sea port of Poti.⁵⁶ Soccer took hold in Georgia before the Soviets came to power, and a national style was in evidence even before the official establishment of Dinamo Tbilisi. As early as the 1920s, Georgian soccer players were called "Flying Uruguayans," a reference both to Uruguay's dominance in the soccer world, and to a recognized "southern" style of play that valued artistry over athletic discipline, and improvised attacks over coordinated effort.⁵⁷

In the Stalinist era, Georgian soccer was, like other aspects of Georgian culture, closely monitored and sometimes sponsored by top Georgian Bolsheviks. A leading role was played by Lavrentii Beria, who oversaw the growth of Georgian sports teams as

⁵³ N. Dumbadze, M. Karchava, Z. Bolkvadze, and G. Pirtskhalava, *'Dinamo' Tbilisi* (Tbilisi, Soiuz zhurnal'istov Gruzii, 1960).

⁵⁴ *Dekada Gruzinskogo iskusstva i literatury v Moskve*, 247. Perhaps more than in other organized team sports, beauty is considered an important criterion when judging a soccer team. The term "beautiful game" entered international parlance with Brazil's victory in the 1958 World Cup, an approximation of the Portuguese *jogo bonito* ("beautiful play"). Richard Giulianotti, *Football: A Sociology of the Global Game*, 26. Interestingly, for many Soviet commentators, the Georgian style of play evoked the "beautiful game" as played by successful South American teams.

⁵⁵ This rivalry is discussed in greater detail in Robert Edelman, "A Small Way of Saying 'No': Moscow Working Men, Spartak Soccer, and the Communist Party, 1900-1945," *American Historical Review* 107: 5 (December 2002): 1441-1474.

⁵⁶ Aksel' Vartanian. Interview with author. Moscow, Russia. July 19, 2006.

⁵⁷ Robert Edelman. Personal communication to author. February 17, 2005.

carefully as he had supervised preparations for the 1937 *Dekada*. Throughout the Soviet Union, the sports club Dinamo had been linked to the NKVD since its founding at the initiative of Feliks Dzerzhinskii.⁵⁸ As Georgia's leading *chekist*, Beria played an important role in promoting Dinamo Tbilisi's early development. The Georgian team, which played its first games in 1936, considered Beria its "first honorary member."⁵⁹ Sometimes, NKVD supporters weighed in forcefully to support their team. The semi-final game between Spartak Moscow and Dinamo Tbilisi for the 1939 Soviet Cup, which Spartak Moscow handily won, was declared invalid and a rematch ordered. According to Spartak player Nikoali Starostin, this decision was made at the "very highest, and no longer athletic" levels of power, possibly at the behest of Lavrentii Beria, who continued to serve as the president of the Dinamo sports club even after being promoted to head the NKVD in Moscow.⁶⁰

Political patrons aside, soccer had become an integral part of everyday life in Georgia. Aksel' Vartanian, a leading Soviet sports commentator from Tbilisi, recalled that soccer was played in every apartment yard when he was growing up in the 1940s. Georgia's relatively warm climate allowed young Georgians to play year-round. All the boys in Vartanian's neighborhood dreamed of becoming soccer stars and enjoying all the privileges that the Soviet state accorded soccer players, including access to private clubs and resorts, salary bonuses, and higher-quality food.⁶¹ Growing up in Sokhumi, Nikita Simonian recalled being inspired by watching Georgian soccer star Avtandil Gogoberidze play for the local Dinamo team.⁶² His father, a traditional Armenian man who had fled the Ottoman Empire, perpetually asked his son when he would "finally give up this no-good game [*khuliganskuu igru*]" for a more traditional profession. However, his father relented when he traveled to Moscow to watch his son play. After visiting his son's apartment and seeing the thousands of fans who came to watch his son in action, Nikita Simonian's father proudly reported to friends in Sokhumi how "respected his son was in Moscow."⁶³ A game played in Georgian apartment yards became a pathway to unparalleled professional success and prestige.

According to Nikolai Starostin, one of the founder's of Spartak Moscow, the showy style of play that emerged in these sunny and noisy apartment yards in the Soviet south marked Georgian players for the rest of their careers, even if they left their native republic to play for other teams. Referring to Georgian goalkeeper Anzor Kavazashvili, who played only three seasons in Georgia before becoming a leading member of Moscow's Torpedo and Spartak teams, Starostin wrote:

For the past eight years Kavazashvili has lived in Moscow, but his manner of play immediately reveals him to be a southerner (*vydaet v nem iuzhanina*). He cannot and does not want to wait for the other team to make a mistake. Instead, he reacts like a seismograph to any potential scoring situation at the goal, trying to nip the slightest danger in the bud [*v zarodyshe pogasit' maleishchuiu opasnost'*].⁶⁴

⁵⁸ According to a report of the Dinamo sports club from 1979. TsAGM, f. 1067, op. 1, d. 566, l. 136.

⁵⁹ III Section of the Archive Administration of the Georgian Ministry of Internal Affairs (MoIA), f. 14, op. 8, d. 172. Beria played soccer as part of an amateur division of the sports club.

⁶⁰ N. P. Starostin, *Zvezdy bol'shogo futbola* (Moscow: Fizkul'tura i sport, 1969), 68-74.

⁶¹ Aksel' Vartanian. Interview with author.

⁶² Nikita Simonian, *Futbol – tol'ko li igra?* (Moscow: Molodaia gvardiia, 1989), 19-26.

⁶³ Simonian, 21, 30.

⁶⁴ N. P. Starostin, *Zvezdy bol'shogo futbola* (Moscow: Fizkul'tura i sport, 1969), 90-92.

Like Georgia's other cultural entrepreneurs engaged in autoethnographic representation, Georgian soccer stars celebrated their uniqueness, embracing the performance of Georgian ethnicity on the soccer field. Avtandil Gogoberidze, one of Dinamo Tbilisi's leading players in the 1940s and 1950s, described the Georgian style of play as passionate and balletic, an athletic form of art. "Inspiration," wrote Gogoberidze, was needed "not only by poets and artists, but by everyone." In his view, "anyone who wants to achieve anything must approach it with love and creativity." The Georgian game of soccer was thus not only about "strength" and "masculinity" but also "creativity." Gogoberidze attributed the success of Dinamo Tbilisi to the players' "love of improvisation."⁶⁵

The Georgian style of play was not only distinctive; it was also effective, giving Georgian players Soviet-wide prominence. When the Soviet Union made its World Cup debut in 1958, one-fifth of the players on the roster were Georgians from Dinamo Tbilisi, a disproportionate representation that would continue through the rest of the Soviet period. The first time the Soviet team was captained by a player unaffiliated with a Moscow-based club would be in 1972, when Dinamo Tbilisi's defender Murtaz Khurtsilava took the helm; the second time was in 1980, when the position was assumed by his teammate from Tbilisi, Aleksandre Chivadze.

After Stalin and Beria's deaths, the team had benefitted from efforts to promote Soviet success in international sporting competitions. After the Soviet team suffered an embarrassing loss to England in the 1958 World Cup, Granatkin, the head of GosSport, the state's sports committee, called for a restructuring (*perestroika*) of Soviet soccer at an annual meeting of sports directors, reflecting the new political tone of the Thaw years. Among the measures Granatkin recommended were increasing the prestige of participating on the Soviet national team, improving players' living conditions, encouraging open debate about the performance of Soviet club teams in sporting journals, and developing soccer as a sport with a "mass character" across the Soviet Union, so that top competitions in the Soviet Union would not simply be among Moscow-based club teams.⁶⁶ The success of Dinamo Tbilisi was held up as a positive example by those attending the conference; it was recalled that the entire Soviet Union watched in 1946 when Dinamo Tbilisi faced Spartak Moscow in the Soviet Cup, and the Georgian striker Slava Metreveli was praised as the best offensive player on an otherwise sluggish 1958 Soviet team.⁶⁷

While the team's success was promoted as a triumph of Soviet athleticism, Dinamo Tbilisi constantly sought greater autonomy from the central sport authorities. At a 1970 meeting of the Football Federation of the USSR, Tsomaia, the representative from the Georgian SSR, spoke out against a proposal to centralize the way that intra-republic competitions were organized, a move that would have weakened the internal structure of Dinamo Tbilisi. He stated: "Perhaps what is best for Armenia is to do things one way, and in Belarus, another way. We have established our own traditions." Rather than requiring Georgia to follow a Soviet-wide system, he suggested instead that the Soviets adopt the Georgian model: "Maybe we can carry things out the way we do in our

⁶⁵ Avtandil Gogoberidze, *S miachom s trideviat' zemel'* (Tbilisi: Soiuz zhurnalistov Gruzii, 1965), 57-58.

⁶⁶ GARF, R-7576, op. 30, d. 124, ll. 1-40.

⁶⁷ GARF, R-7576, op. 30, d. 124, l. 28.

republic. Many of our soccer players play for Soviet youth teams and for the all-Soviet team." Irritated by Tsomaia's boasting, Granatkin, the chairman, exclaimed: "because you have no winter!" However, later in the meeting Granatkin conceded that the federation "needed to consider local capacities and interests."⁶⁸ At the 1971 meeting the following year, another representative from Georgia requested that the republic's sports committee have more of a say in the selection of players for the all-Soviet team, saying that the Football Federation of the USSR had the right to "recommend" players, but to "make demands of the sports committee of a sovereign republic with its own constitution—this is simply unfair and offensive." Placing the interests of Dinamo Tbilisi over those of the Soviet-wide team, the representative was concerned that the Soviet-wide team consistently insisted on calling up five players from Dinamo Tbilisi without the consent of Georgian authorities.⁶⁹

Made in a Soviet context, such Georgian demands ran the risk of being labeled examples of nationalism. In fact, although Georgian players were beloved for their achievements on the Soviet team, the success of Dinamo Tbilisi against opponents from larger Soviet republics was sometimes cause for popular resentment outside Georgia. Drawing deeply on popular imaginings of Georgian national character, but also on careful observation of the distinctive Georgian style of play, Georgian players were praised as energetic and explosive in their attacks and skillful and daring in their defense, but criticized for favoring emotional intensity over consistent discipline, and individual performance over teamwork and organization.⁷⁰ Similar criticism was sometimes applied to their fans as well. At a 1971 meeting of the Football Federation of the USSR, the Georgian representative spoke out against what he saw as a crude depiction of Dinamo Tbilisi supporters as "overly expansive and emotional" in the newspaper *Sovetskii sport* (*Soviet Sport*), and dismissed criticism that the behavior of these fans gave Dinamo Tbilisi an unfair advantage when they played at home.⁷¹ Perhaps as a result of the rivalry between Dinamo Tbilisi and Moscow club teams, players on Lokomotiv Moscow were asked to attend lectures on "Soviet Georgia in the Brotherly Family of Peoples of the USSR" as part of their required academic program.⁷² Soviet authorities struggled to ensure that competition among Soviet clubs remained fraternal, and that overall allegiance lay with the all-Soviet team.

Dinamo Tbilisi's outstanding success, however, was difficult for even its fiercest critics to deny. The Georgian squad won the Soviet top league twice, in 1964 and 1978, and the Soviet Cup in 1976 and 1979. Since the first tournament in 1936, they had been regular fixtures in the Soviet championship, coming in second five times, and third a record thirteen times.⁷³ According to accounts of the team's 1979 Soviet Cup victory in the Soviet press, Tbilisi succeeded because of the "beautiful combinations" its members were able to compose together.⁷⁴ In 1981, Dinamo Tbilisi scored the biggest victory in

⁶⁸ GARF, R-7576, op. 31, d. 660, ll. 25-51.

⁶⁹ GARF, R-7576, op. 31, d. 1013, l. 94.

⁷⁰ Aksel' Vartanian. Interview with author.

⁷¹ GARF, R-7576, op. 31, d. 1013, l. 96. The Georgian representative, Sikharulidze, was particularly critical of an article that appeared in *Sovetskii sport* on December 13, 1970.

⁷² GARF, f. R-7576, op. 13, d. 76, l. 57.

⁷³ Official website of Dinamo Tbilisi, accessed April 28, 2011, <http://www.fedinamo.ge/index.php?lang=en&act=page&id=60>.

⁷⁴ V. Vinokurov, "Chempionat" *Sovetskii Sport*, August 9, 1979, 1.

the club's history, defeating Carl Zeiss Jena to win the European Cup Winners' Cup. While Soviet authorities claimed the victory as evidence of the achievements of Soviet culture, when they arrived home in Georgia, Dinamo Tbilisi's players were carried off the plane in the arms of supporters and cheered as national heroes.

Just as Georgian artists benefitted from institutional support and patronage in Georgia, so too was success in Georgian soccer built on a strong institutional basis in Tbilisi, where Georgian players had their own facilities, training methods, and a fiercely loyal fan base. Most remained affiliated with Dinamo Tbilisi, only taking temporary leave to play for the Soviet national team at major competitions. Some Georgian players were, however, drawn by the allure of playing in the Soviet capital on a more permanent basis. Despite rules limiting transfers of players among Soviet clubs, the successful Moscow teams drew talent from across the Soviet Union, a trend that increased in the later Soviet period.⁷⁵ At a 1973 meeting of the Football Federation, Nikolai Starostin lamented the fact that while in the late 1950s Moscow's teams were almost entirely made up of Muscovites, by the 1970s, "only 3 or 4 Muscovites" played in a match between Moscow club teams, the rest being "guests."⁷⁶ Some of these "guests" were in fact Georgians. Anzor Kavazashvili, for example, tended goal for Starostin's own Spartak Moscow. Another Georgian star was Slava Metreveli, who played six years for Torpedo Moscow from 1956 to 1962. His ethnic style was even apparent in his team's coaching report, which praised him as "a player with an attacking style, aggressive, brave, ingenious [*izobretatel'nyi*], agile, and playing well with his head."

Just as for other Georgian entertainers, success in the Soviet Union allowed Georgian soccer players to make international connections. As non-Russians, Georgians were called upon to serve as cultural ambassadors to the post-colonial world, especially in Latin America, a region with an affinity for a similarly "southern" style of play. In exhibition matches, they were greeted with cheers in Brazil and Argentina.⁷⁷ In 1961, Avtandil Gogoberidze was sent to Cuba along with other representatives of Dinamo Tbilisi to meet with Fidel Castro; photos show the visiting Georgians posing with Castro after dressing him in a traditional Georgian hat.⁷⁸

Like Georgian singers and dancers, Georgian soccer stars possessed unique skills and assets, and a unique mythology that fit those skills and assets, according to which the Georgian was not just a born artist, he was an artiste whose expressiveness carried over into everything he did. Mikhail Meskhi, a Georgian star on the Soviet national team, was recalled by a Russian friend and teammate as "soccer's Shota Rustaveli," inviting

⁷⁵ The rules of the Football Federation of the USSR made it difficult for players to change teams. Trades, or "transfers" as they were referred to in Soviet parlance, were only allowed "in exceptional cases in the interests of developing the sporting talent of soccer players and the creation of highly-qualified soccer teams." Furthermore, players were expected to play a minimum of three years for a team, players punished for disciplinary violations could not request a transfer, players classified as "masters" (*mastera*) could not be transferred more than three times, and all transfers needed to be made "in accordance with the principles of Soviet morals and ethics." These rules were explicitly laid out in a 1969 meeting. GARF, f. R-7576, op. 31, d. 296, ll. 99-100.

⁷⁶ GARF, f. R-7576, op. 31, d. 1836, l. 48.

⁷⁷ Valentin Bubukin, "Gody letiat bystree miachei," *Sportivnaia zhizn' Rossii* 8 (2005).

⁷⁸ Gogoberidze, 142.

comparisons with the lyricism of Georgia's national poet.⁷⁹ Georgian success on the soccer field seemed part of an innate Georgian artistry.

Electrifying Soviet Folklorism: Multiethnic Soviet Estrada

In the Thaw years and afterwards, Georgian movement and song met popular and foreign culture in the realm of Soviet *estrada*. Although folkloric song and dance ensembles received the blessing of the state as solidly Soviet producers of culture, Party ideologists were less sure of how to treat jazz, rock, and the popular Gypsy songs of pre-revolutionary Russia. In the wake of the Thaw, which increased Soviet exposure to new forms of popular music, ethnic entertainers borrowed the Western sounds of jazz and rock and merged them with national themes. In so doing, they helped create an innovative form of multiethnic musical entertainment that proved ideologically palatable and popular with Soviet audiences in the 1960s and 1970s.

As in other realms of Soviet culture, the prominence of ethnic outsiders in Russian popular entertainment was not new, but the phenomenon was enshrined and given an institutional basis by the same Soviet ideologists who emphasized indigenous forms of Soviet culture in other musical genres. Pre-revolutionary Russia had its Gypsy choirs, which performed enchanting displays of ethnic difference before an audience of tsarist officers, noblemen, and merchants.⁸⁰ In the imperial period, foreigners brought jazz to Russian cities, and were prominent in the Russian circus, with its troupe of exotic showmen, acrobats, gymnasts, horsemen, and performers.⁸¹ Gypsy romances, jazz, and the circus survived the cultural revolution, but were domesticated and incorporated into a folklorized Soviet *estrada*. The Soviet Jewish jazzman, Leonid Utesov, helped carve out a place for Soviet jazz by claiming that it was not a foreign import but had instead been born in the Jewish milieu of Odessa, a form of urban folk music native to the Soviet Union.⁸²

In the 1960s, when rock and roll emerged as a new and controversial musical style and became a frequent subject of discussion among Soviet concert agencies, the genre was initially eschewed before Soviet ideologists again reached for the "ethnic solution." Soviet concert planners were forced to concede that the genre had already "entered the everyday lives" (*voshla v byt*) of Soviet citizens.⁸³ Since banning the musical style was impossible, rock needed to be made Soviet, which meant it needed to be infused with Soviet folkloric sensibilities. As the head of Goskontsert, the central state concert agency, proclaimed at a meeting of concert organizers in 1966: "our *estrada* must have its own identity [*svoe sobstvennoe litso*], one that might counter the influence of

⁷⁹ Valentin Bubukin, "Gody letiat bystree miachei," *Sportivnaia zhizn' Rossii* 8 (2005).

⁸⁰ See Erik R. Scott, "The Nineteenth-Century Gypsy Choir and the Performance of Otherness" (Berkeley Program in Eurasian and Eastern European Studies (BPS) Working Paper, Fall 2008). In the late imperial and early Soviet period, Georgian singers like Keto Dzhaparidze and Tamara Tsereteli were praised as convincing Gypsy performers, with their accented Russian and dark hair.

⁸¹ See Miriam Neirick, "When Pigs Could Fly: A History of the Circus in the Soviet Union" (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Berkeley, 2007).

⁸² S. Frederick Starr considers Utesov's boast to have been "tongue-in-cheek," but nevertheless aimed at "deflating" Soviet state pressure against jazz. Starr, *Red and Hot: The Fate of Jazz in the Soviet Union* (New York: Limelight Editions, 1985), 144-145.

⁸³ RGALI, f. 3162, op. 1, d. 297, l. 47.

Western artistic tendencies in the arts of *estrada* in our [socialist] countries.”⁸⁴ Accordingly, popular musical forms like rock were ethnicized and folklorized, the readiest means of lending them a distinctly Soviet identity.

Historians of Soviet culture have typically drawn a distinction between a vibrant, creative, and internationalist artistic culture during the Thaw period and a stifled, repetitive, and insular cultural life during the Brezhnev era of *zastoi*.⁸⁵ However, such a neat dichotomy ignores a latter period characterized by witty and ironic films, a burgeoning and fluid second economy, and a thriving culture of popular music.⁸⁶ Rather than growing stagnant after the Thaw, the world of Soviet *estrada* benefitted from the logistical decentralization and benign neglect of the Brezhnev era.⁸⁷ While the Thaw saw increased exposure to foreign musical styles, it was also an era of assertive cultural policy. Khrushchev made pronouncements on which forms of art and music he did and did not approve of, publicly complaining in 1963, “When I hear jazz, it’s as if I had gas on the stomach.”⁸⁸ Even in the early years of the Thaw, efforts were made to extend state control over the haphazard Soviet concert circuit, theoretically centralizing the production of *estrada* under the auspices of Gosestrada and increasing state capacity to influence musical output. Brezhnev, by contrast, was less likely to weigh in with his own musical preferences, and a relative laxity in exercising central controls allowed for the emergence of new institutional patrons for musical ensembles, including factories and institutions of higher education.

Soviet concertgoers now flocked to performances by Azeri jazz musicians like Vagif Mustafazadeh and Rafik Babaev, often accompanied by Azeri crooners such as Rashid Beibutov and Muslim Magomaev, who combined the modal scales of the Azeri musical style of *mugham* with the rhythm and instrumentation of jazz. Others, particularly the younger generation who came of age in the late 1960s and 1970s, closely followed the Belorussian folk rock group Pesniary, who performed in colorful polyester outfits that evoked the national costume of Belarus. Official and unofficial progressive rock bands from Estonia gained cult followings performing in Estonian and Russian.⁸⁹

⁸⁴ RGALI, f. 3162, op. 1, d. 298, l. 17.

⁸⁵ Richard Stites typically divides between Khrushchev’s “spring” from 1953 to 1964 and the “Brezhnev culture wars” from 1964 to 1984 in *Russian Popular Culture*. Katerina Clark similarly observes that Khrushchev’s ouster in October 1964 “marked the end of cultural liberalization” in *The Soviet Novel: History as Ritual* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2000), 234.

⁸⁶ In *The Soviet Novel*, Clark’s focus, like that of many cultural historians studying the period, is on literature. Nancy Condee argues that “literature constituted the primary cultural field within which the party leadership most publicly engaged the liberal intelligentsia” during the Thaw. Such a focus can be justified, given the fact that the term “Thaw” was itself taken from a novel. However, when one takes the Thaw as a more general metaphor for cultural liberalization and looks at film, music, and visual art, new chronologies are needed, a point made by Peter Schmelz in *Such Freedom, If Only Musical*. See Condee, “Cultural Codes of the Thaw,” in *Nikita Khrushchev*, eds. William Taubman, Sergei Khrushchev, and Abbott Gleason (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2000), 138-159.

⁸⁷ In this sense, it might be likened to the expansion of the Soviet second economy in the “little deal” made around the same period, a comparison made by Peter Schmelz in his discussion of an unofficial concert subculture. See Schmelz, *Such Freedom, If Only Musical*, 14-21. Schmelz complicates the typical dichotomy by arguing that the musical “thaw” began in the 1950s and extended into the 1970s.

⁸⁸ Starr, 270. As examples, Starr cites the Petrozavodsk’s jazz club, which was supported by the Omega Tractor Factory, and the Jazz Studio in Moscow, sponsored by the Physical-Technical Institute.

⁸⁹ Including Apel’sin, Karavan, Radar, Rock-Hotel, and Ruya. These bands are discussed by Artemy Troitsky, *Back in the USSR: The True Story of Rock in Russia* (London and New York: Omnibus Press,

Not only were many popular musical entertainers not Russian, but some of the most artistically innovative rock and jazz concert festivals were held not under the watchful gaze of the censors in Moscow or Leningrad, but instead in cities on the periphery, including Baku, Riga, Tallinn, Yerevan, and Tbilisi. Provincial centers offered more flexibility, and this was particularly true in the capitals of Soviet national republics, where artists had only to contend with republic-level concert agencies.⁹⁰ National republics also had their own distinct schools of music, some more developed than those in Russia. For example, in the 1920s and 1930s, independent Estonia was home to one of the first homegrown jazz bands in Europe; after the Soviet incorporation of the Baltic states, Estonian musicians came to dominate the world of Soviet jazz.⁹¹ The same was true in socialist Central European countries like Hungary, where artists drew on the traditions of Budapest's interwar nightclubs and theaters to become leading *estrada* performers in the Soviet Union.⁹²

Georgia also had its own distinct musical traditions, as well as a host of artists fully fluent in both the folk culture of their republic and the changing tastes of the Soviet capital. Thanks to this cultural bilingualism, Georgians dominated the world of *estrada* in all its forms, from ballads and pre-revolutionary romances (*romansy*), to jazz, Georgian folk rock, and psychedelic rock operas. Not only were the Georgians talented performers who drew creatively on the existing idiom of ethnic entertainment, but they proved adept at walking what cultural officials described as the "fine line" of ideological acceptability, ensuring Georgians a prominent place on the Soviet stage, and allowing them to reach a wide audience through radio and television broadcasts and record sales.⁹³

By the late 1960s, the resources of the Georgian Philharmonic supported a growing number of "Vocal-Instrumental Ensembles" (VIAs), a Soviet response to the rock band format. While they represented the state effort to co-opt the more threatening aspects of rock music, Vocal-Instrumental Ensembles were genuinely popular and were equally influenced by Western music, folk traditions, and the work of established Soviet composers.⁹⁴ Their leading members became officially-sanctioned stars, visible in movies

1987). Troitsky wrote that "Estonia gave Soviet rock as many talented musicians as Moscow and Leningrad together," *Back in the USSR*, 76.

⁹⁰ In contrast, artists in Moscow had to contend with the competing institutional agendas of Roskontsert and Moskontsert, which repeatedly came into conflict over the organization of concerts, the charging of commissions, and payments to artists. See, for example, TsALIM, f. 429, op. 1, d. 2169, ll. 1-4.

⁹¹ Starr, 229-230.

⁹² When the Georgian *estrada* group Iveria toured Hungary in 1972 and 1973, the leader of the group triumphantly reported that they had been warmly received by the Hungarian audiences, the toughest of critics because in "in Hungary the best performers of the *estrada* genre regularly perform." RGALI, f. 3162, op. 1, d. 1410, ll. 56-59.

⁹³ In the words of an article praised by Soviet cultural officials, "in *estrada* there exists a very fine [*tonkaia*], but nevertheless quite clear [*chetkaia*] artistic line, which even the most popular artist risks crossing." The article was published in Astrakhan's *Volga* newspaper, 15 September 1965, and quoted in an official meeting of musical directors. RGALI, f. 3162, op. 1, d. 297, l. 16.

⁹⁴ Aficionados of underground Soviet rock scoffed at much of the production of Soviet VIAs, seeing them as co-opted, politically sanctioned, and sentimental. However, Soviet rock critic Artemy Troitsky admitted that the albums of Stas Namin's *Tsvety* produced by Melodia were the "first Soviet rock records" and "their sound and the natural quality of the vocals differed from all the VIA product coming off the conveyor." Artemy Troitsky, *Back in the USSR*, 32-33. A similar bias is sometimes present in the work of scholars who focus exclusively on the significance of rock, ignoring the admitted *kitsch* but unquestionable popularity of

and Soviet television specials. They helped fabricate a new Soviet culture of entertainment that was both artistically progressive and nostalgically indebted to Soviet folk culture.⁹⁵

Orera, Georgia's best known *estrada* group, was also the first Vocal-Instrumental Ensemble registered in the Soviet Union. The group was informally organized in 1958, the same year that Georgia's song and dance ensemble captured the Moscow stage as part of the *Dekada* of Georgian culture. Its founders were a group of young students from Tbilisi's Institute of Foreign Languages: Robert Bardzimashvili, the ensemble's leader, who studied French at the Institute, Teimuraz Davitaia, a language student who earlier had considered a career in Georgian dance, and another classmate, Zurab Iashvili. Shortly after, Vakhtang Kikabidze, yet another student from the Institute of Foreign Languages, joined the ensemble, as did Nani Bregvadze, who had received more formal training as a pianist and vocalist at the Tbilisi Conservatory. Bardzimashvili came up with the group's name, a nonsensical expression of joy that formed the chorus to many Georgian folk songs. In its first years, Bardzimashvili led the group, singing and playing keyboard and guitar. Davitaia accompanied him on guitar, while Iashvili played keyboard and harmonica. Kikabidze played drums, but eventually became one of the group's lead singers. Nani Bregvadze, the group's only female member, performed with the group on slower numbers, singing jazz and folk songs, as well as classic *romansy*, as the group accompanied her.⁹⁶

Orera began as an effort to entertain fellow students with renditions of the songs of Western performers like Louis Armstrong, whose records were impossible to find in the Soviet Union.⁹⁷ Soon, they expanded their repertoire to include classic Georgian folk songs infused with jazz sensibilities, as well as songs in the languages they studied at the Institute, including French, Italian, and English. What started as an informal group was officially registered as a Vocal-Instrumental Ensemble under the auspices of the Georgian State Philharmonic in 1961. From these modest beginnings, the ensemble became one of the most popular groups on the Soviet concert circuit; their success helped launch the careers of Kikabidze and Bregvadze, who went on to become Soviet celebrities.

Orera's repertoire reflected the diverse musical influences of its members, the cosmopolitan musical heritage of Tbilisi, and the demands of Soviet audiences. Kikabidze grew up in a cramped apartment in Tbilisi's historic and close-knit Mtatsminda neighborhood, located on the slopes of a hill overlooking the city. Although his mother was a scion of the Georgian Bagrationi dynasty, she lived quietly and he was raised in relative poverty, his father having died in the Second World War. Like many other Georgians of his generation, Kikabidze regularly gathered with his friends in the entryway of their building, where they took turns playing a guitar and imitating the rock and jazz songs that one of them was able to pick up at home with a receiver that could catch broadcasts of the Voice of America.⁹⁸ In addition to rock and jazz, Kikabidze grew

many Soviet *estrada* acts. See, for example, Sabrina Petra Ramet, ed., *Rocking the State: Rock Music and Politics in Eastern Europe and Russia* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1994).

⁹⁵ Folkish nostalgia was another characteristic of Brezhnev-era Soviet culture, evident in a variety of artistic forms, from sentimental songs to "village prose." Stites, *Russian Popular Culture*, 148-164.

⁹⁶ From the ensemble's website, accessed April 22, 2010, <http://www.orera.reclama.ru/history.htm>.

⁹⁷ Vakhtang Kikabidze. Interview with author. Tbilisi, Georgia. November 26, 2008.

⁹⁸ Vakhtang Kikabidze. Interview with author.

up singing the traditional songs of the Georgian table, the urban folk songs of Tbilisi, and the popular wartime ballads of Soviet singers like Mark Bernes, Leonid Utesov, and Klavdiia Shulzhenko.

Nani Bregvadze, a childhood friend of Kikabidze who grew up in the same neighborhood, had similarly diverse musical influences. Her mother, Olga Mikeladze, was an amateur pianist descended from a Georgian noble family, and her maternal grandmother and aunt were both professional singers. While Kikabidze drank deeply of Tbilisi's musical street culture of guitars, organ grinders, and drinking songs, Bregvadze was trained at the piano from an early age, performing Gypsy songs and Russian *romansy* for guests at her family's home, which, with its ornate pre-revolutionary furniture, had the air of an aristocratic salon. Coached by her grandmother and her aunt, the young Bregvadze would studiously wrap herself in a shawl and perform songs for visitors.⁹⁹ All members of Orera grew up singing in Russian as well as Georgian, many coming from prominent Georgian families in which the high culture of imperial Russia was still cherished. Their fluency in multiple languages and diverse musical styles made them ideally suited to the Soviet stage, and eventually allowed them to become ideal musical ambassadors of the Soviet Union abroad.

Drawing on the traditions of Soviet *estrada* and the idiom of Soviet Georgian folk performance, Orera's concerts were a combination of polyglot musical virtuosity and flamboyant showmanship. The group's male members, though dressed in colorful and modish Soviet jackets and ties, occasionally broke into traditional Georgian dances on stage. The appeal of their performance lay in their musical abilities, as well as their talent in offering a staged show, often with the help of backup singers, dancers, a piano player, and a saxophonist.¹⁰⁰ The group alternated jazz and rock songs with Georgian polyphonic *a capella* singing, occasionally slowing the pace with ballads sung by Nani Bregvadze, who dressed in sequin gowns evocative of the jazz age.¹⁰¹

A look at Orera's concert programs from the late 1960s reveals a lively mixture of songs and styles. As one of their first songs, they often performed the upbeat "U devushek nashikh" ("Our Girls"). The composition was written by Georgii Tsabadze, an acclaimed Georgian songwriter affiliated with the Georgian Philharmonic, whose light, lyrical style was beloved by Georgian audiences and who later reached a wider Soviet public with songs written for films, including a popular musical, *Melodii Versiiskogo kvartala* (*Melodies of the Vera Quarter*), set in old Tbilisi. "U devushek nashikh" was a sweet and tender song about women whose hearts were true and whose beauty was unsurpassed. More original was the song's arrangement; set to a cheerful, swinging beat, most of the song's verses were in Georgian, while the song's title and a final verse were in Russian. Such musical arrangements made jazz-inspired renditions of Georgian music accessible to a wider audience.¹⁰² Other songs common in the group's repertoire drew more heavily on Georgian folk traditions. The Georgian-language "Adandali," described in the program as a set of musical "pictures of old Tbilisi," was a composition based on

⁹⁹ Nani Bregvadze. Interview with author. Tbilisi, Georgia. November 5, 2008.

¹⁰⁰ RGALI, f. 3162, d. 1411, ll. 1-13.

¹⁰¹ This description comes from a performance of the band in the 1970 film, *orera, sruli svlit* (*Orera, Full Speed Ahead*).

¹⁰² Based on a concert program at RGALI, f. 3162, op. 1, d. 755, ll. 16-18. The description of the song is based on a recording made by Orera in 1967, part of the collection *VIA Orera* (Melodia, 2008).

the urban folk songs of Tbilisi's streets.¹⁰³ In the ensemble's rendition, traditional Georgian drumming was matched with the more contemporary sound of a trumpet, and a jazz organ imitated the hand-turned organs popular in pre-revolutionary Tbilisi. Performing the number, each male member of Orera took turns singing, clapping their hands, and performing brief dances evocative of the *kintoebi*, the mischievous market traders and street entertainers of old Tbilisi. After these energetic dances, which often had the audience clapping along, the piece concluded with intricate *a capella* harmonizing.¹⁰⁴ Other songs drew on a similar sense of folkish nostalgia, but one that was not always Georgian. The group's rendering of Grigorii Ponamarenko and Gennadii Kolesnikov's whistful "Topolia" ("Poplars") evoked an overtly Slavic sentimentality for a village love symbolized by a lone poplar tree. Orera's musicians played the song on two guitars, while all of the group's members harmonized the tune's plaintive refrains.¹⁰⁵

Often, the group's finale would be Revaz Lagidze's "Tbiliso," listed in Russian on the program as "A Song about Tbilisi."¹⁰⁶ A love song addressed to the Georgian capital, it was probably the second most well-known Georgian tune in the Soviet Union after Stalin's beloved "Suliko." The lyrics of the song exemplified the exotification of Georgia, describing the Georgian capital as the "land of sun and roses." Drawing on imagery familiar to Soviet citizens, the sun stood for warmth and brightness, the rose for romance, passion, and possibly seduction. The lyrics described a Georgian's passion for his native capital, exclaiming: "Tbiliso... without you I live without my heart." Most Soviets found the lyrics of the song convincing when sung by Bregvadze, who took the lead as the group's male members harmonized and offered light instrumental accompaniment.¹⁰⁷

The group gained widespread popularity with their multilingual singing and fusion of rock, jazz, and folk. By the late 1960s, they toured the Soviet Union almost endlessly, performing frequently in Moscow and playing a total of 30 concerts in Leningrad in less than a month.¹⁰⁸ In 1967, the group received the honor of representing the Soviet Union at an international musical contest held in connection with the Expo 67 World's Fair in Montreal, an important arena of cultural and scientific competition between the socialist and capitalist camps.¹⁰⁹ Like Georgia's national song and dance ensembles, they were convincing ethnographers of Georgian culture and ideal ambassadors of the multiethnic Soviet Union on the international stage. Their strength lay in the flexibility of their repertoire. When performing in eastern bloc countries like Bulgaria, they represented a more Westward-leaning face of the Soviet Union with songs of international friendship sung in French; when they performed in Turkey in 1968, they sang folk songs in the languages of Turkey's Abkhaz and Circassian minorities, as well as popular songs in Turkish.¹¹⁰

¹⁰³ RGALI, f. 3162, op. 1, d. 1411, l. 10.

¹⁰⁴ From a performance of the band in the 1970 film, *orera, sruli svlit*.

¹⁰⁵ Based on recording from 1967, *VIA Orera* (Melodia, 2008).

¹⁰⁶ RGALI, f. 3162, op. 1, d. 529, l. 7.

¹⁰⁷ Based on 1973 recording, *VIA Orera* (Melodia, 2008).

¹⁰⁸ RGALI, f. 3164, op. 1, d. 617, l. 52. The group played 30 concerts between November 25 and December 18, 1970, giving a sense of the high level of public demand and the rigors of the ensemble's tour schedule.

¹⁰⁹ According to the group's website, accessed April 28, 2011, <http://www.orera.reclama.ru/history.htm>.

¹¹⁰ RGALI, f. 3162, op. 1, d. 529, l. 7, 755, l. 16.

While Orera's members were drawn to new musical influences reaching the Soviet Union, they benefitted from adopting an approach that meshed well with the official Soviet culture of multiethnic entertainment. Their success spawned a number of imitators, including the ensemble Iveria, which tended more toward rock than jazz, but followed Orera in finding inspiration in Georgia's folk traditions.¹¹¹ Orera's repertoire reflected the aesthetic sensibilities of state-sponsored festivals and celebrations, which mixed high culture and folk culture, and Georgian songs with the folk songs of other Soviet nationalities.¹¹²

Emphasizing the high culture aspects of Orera's performance, singer Nani Bregvadze translated her success with the ensemble into enduring fame. Since she was the ensemble's only female member and typically performed solo works with the group's backing, it was a relatively simple transition for her to launch a separate career in the 1970s. Although unmistakably Georgian, she was best known not for her renditions of Georgian folk songs but as a singer of Russian *romansy*, a genre that earlier had been dominated by Russian Gypsy performers.¹¹³ Together with Georgian pianist Medea Gongliashvili, Bregvadze toured the Soviet Union and became a favorite of Soviet audiences. Her performances were attended by Brezhnev himself, who reportedly loved this highly emotive musical genre.¹¹⁴ In addition to her captivating voice, part of Bregvadze's appeal lay in her air of aristocratic elegance, allowing her to convincingly convey the melancholy sentiment of the late imperial Russian high culture. Such appeal was evinced by official programs for her concerts, such as the one printed for a 1970 performance in Moscow, which emphasized the feminine and noble bearing of Gongliashvili and Bregvadze. In a sepia-toned photograph, Gongliashvili was shown seated at an ornate Baroque style piano, an oriental carpet and parquet floor in the background, while Bregvadze struck an even more luxurious pose, resting her elbow on the top of the piano, her head on her hand, and casting an enchanting gaze as her long dress reached down to the floor. The photographs suggested a certain forbidden intimacy, as if the two were playing a private concert for the listener alone. The back cover featured a close-up shot of Nani Bregvadze, shown from the waist up wearing a necklace and pearl earrings, with a look of worldliness and enchantment on her face.¹¹⁵

Bregvadze's repertoire included both Georgian and Russian songs, but the fact that her audience was predominantly Russian was in the front of her mind as she planned her concerts. She noted: "In Russia, you could not sing only in Georgian. As a Georgian, you could sing three or four songs in Georgian, which people found pleasant to hear, but they wanted something to listen to." She recalled how at first the musical authorities were not interested in her *romansy*, seeing them as vestiges of aristocratic life, but there was such a demand for them that they eventually became a bigger part of her repertoire.¹¹⁶ By the late 1970s and early 1980s, she played dozens of concerts in Moscow each year, and

¹¹¹ Iveria pushed the genre of Soviet multiethnic performance even further with their somewhat psychedelic rock opera, *Svad'ba soek*, televised for Soviet viewers in 1984.

¹¹² The ensemble sang songs in Abkhaz, the language of one of Georgia's ethnic minorities, among other languages. RGALI, f. 3162, op. 1, d. 755, l. 16.

¹¹³ Nani Bregvadze. Interview by author.

¹¹⁴ According to an interview with Bregvadze available online, accessed April 28, 2011, <http://www.tvr.khv.ru/number/2005/14/arh.html>.

¹¹⁵ Program archived in RGALI, f. 3055, op. 1, d. 563, ll. 1-2.

¹¹⁶ Nani Bregvadze. Interview with author.

took up periodic residence at the Hotel Moskva near the Kremlin.¹¹⁷ She often longed for Tbilisi, which she considered her true home, but found Moscow and Leningrad to be a "window onto everything." Although she often socialized with the Georgian musicians and singers in residence at Moscow's Bolshoi Theater, who reminded her of the cultural differences between Georgia and Russia, she was startled by the celebrity status she was accorded in Russia. According to her, even the most well-known female artists in Georgia would never be approached by strangers on the street, but in Russia "men and women greeted you and came up to you when they recognized you" and in Moscow devoted fans began waiting for her at her hotel after her concerts. Bregvadze found more subtle appreciation among the Russian intelligentsia, whose members saw her as an authentically original performer whose work was officially sanctioned, yet remained artistically innovative and linked to a Georgian aristocratic pedigree.

While Bregvadze's career trajectory reflected her classical training and the more restrained culture of Georgian female entertainment, Orera's Vakhtang Kikabidze placed more emphasis on the exuberant culture of the Georgian feast, while maintaining the cosmopolitan sensibilities appropriate for an heir to a Georgian aristocratic line. His songs compelling combined both, and presented them with a trademark gap-toothed smile and charismatic style of crooning that made him a recognizable star of Soviet film and television. On both the large and the small screen, Kikabidze was a noticeably ethnic yet sophisticated master of diverse musical genres. One television special, from the late 1960s, showed Kikabidze and the other members of Orera performing a jazzed-up version of a musically complex Gurian folk song near the banks of the Moscow river atop Lenin Hills.¹¹⁸ The Georgian-produced televised film, *Orera, sruli svlit* (*Orera, Full Speed Ahead*), widely broadcast in 1970, showed Kikabidze and the rest of the group touring the world, performing songs in Georgian, Russian, French, Italian, Spanish, and English.

Given a lead role in the 1969 production of *Don't Grieve* (*Ne goriui*), directed by the Moscow-based Georgian director, Georgii Danelia, Kikabidze sang, danced, and toasted, all the while proving himself as a convincing actor.¹¹⁹ In 1977, Kikabidze again joined Danelia for the tragicomic *Mimino*. In the film, Kikabidze played the hapless but honorable Georgian pilot Valentin Mizandari, who leaves his native Georgia to seek success in Moscow, only to fall into a series of misadventures. Mizandari was an example of a Caucasian naif, an archetype which had a decades-long history in film representations of inhabitants of the Caucasus.¹²⁰ Danelia, who was born in Georgia but grew up and received his education in Moscow, added a twist, placing his naif in the Soviet capital and using him to comment on Russian as well as Georgian life. Given

¹¹⁷ TsALIM, f. 429, op. 1, d. 3223, ll. 6-8, 38, 67.

¹¹⁸ Gurian folk songs are distinguished by their remarkably complex polyphonic structure, which can sound almost discordant to a first-time listener.

¹¹⁹ See Chapter 3 for a further discussion of the film and its significance.

¹²⁰ Bruce Grant traces the naif archetype from the 1941 film *Svinarka i pastukh* (*Swineherd and Shepherd*), through the 1964 Georgian-Russian film *Otets Soldata*, and up to the 1994 Azeri-language film *Hem ziyaret, hem ticaret* (*A Little Pilgrimage, a Little Trade*). See Grant, *The Captive and the Gift: Cultural Histories of Sovereignty in Russia and the Caucasus* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2009), 137-143. While Grant emphasizes that the representation reveals the Caucasian as an unschooled man-child in the eyes of Russian audiences, Danelia uses his Mizandari to comment wryly on both Georgian and Russian life.

Danelia's family background—his aunt was Veriko Andzhaparidze, a famous Georgian actress, and his mother worked for years at Mosfil'm—he was equally well-versed in the traditions of Russian film as he was in Georgian film.¹²¹ Danelia wrote the part of Mizandari with Kikabidze in mind, and together the two drew on their knowledge of Georgia and their fluency in Russian culture to produce a film that convincingly depicted a character caught between his native village in the mountains of eastern Georgia and the frenetic life of the Soviet capital.¹²² As the film was developed, it was altered to better reflect the realities of life in Georgia and Russia as both of them knew it. Initially, the film was to be a musical comedy that would showcase Kikabidze's singing skills.¹²³ However, at a recording session, Kikabidze noted the unrealistic nature of a scene in which the hero, Mizandari, was supposed to sing aloud as he walked through the forest: a Georgian highlander like Mizandari would be more reserved. Based upon Kikabidze's ethnographic observation, the character was made more restrained, though he sang and danced with appropriate ethnic spirit when called upon to do so, including during a banquet scene at a Moscow hotel.¹²⁴

The movie was eventually transformed from a musical to a comedy whose lyricism lay in its accented and witty dialogue. Nevertheless, the song that accompanied the film's opening credits, "Chito gvrito," ("Little Turtle Dove"), added to the film's popularity. The song's lyrics were written by Petre Gruzinskii, a Georgian poet and, like Kikabidze, a scion of Georgia's Bagrationi dynasty. It was set to folkish, orchestrated music composed by the Soviet Georgian musician Gia Kancheli. Kikabidze would go on to perform the song at events like the televised Soviet New Year's special in 1981, his Georgian expansiveness matched by his aristocratic bearing, and the song's catchy melody paired with lyrics evocative of Georgia's poetic and literary heritage.¹²⁵ Before performing, Kikabidze would explain the song's connection to his homeland for the Soviet studio audience, who could not understand its Georgian lyrics. It was a song of personal nostalgia for a Georgian childhood presented to and shared with the Soviet public. The song's structure made it especially well-suited to Russian audiences; after Kikabidze sang each Georgian-language verse, Russian speakers could easily sing along to a repetitive refrain based on the words "chito gvrito, chito margalito" ("little turtle dove, little pearl").

However, the film *Mimino* not only offered the well-known commodity of Georgian performance, but reflected Russian as well as Georgian everyday life, offering wry commentary on both in a way that captured the ironic sentiment, as well as the melancholy nostalgia, of the era of *zastoi*. Mizandari's naivete was paired with a rigid code of honor that was both noble in comparison with the behavior of many of those

¹²¹ A fact clear as early as his first film, *Ia shagaiu po Moskve* (1964), which captured the youthful spirit of Moscow life during the Thaw, and evident in subsequent films like 1979's *Osenii marafon* (*Autumnal Marathon*), made without a trace of a Georgian accent, least of all by its lead actor, Oleg Basilashvili (the son of a Georgian father and a Russian mother), who spoke flawless Russian in portraying a Russian Soviet *intelligent* caught in a midlife crisis.

¹²² Danelia recounts the story of his partnership with Kikabidze in the director's memoir, *Tostuemyi p'et do dna* (Moscow: Eksmo, 2006), 217-218.

¹²³ According to the film's production notes, RGALI, f. 2944, op. 4, d. 3892, ll. 1-3.

¹²⁴ Daneliia, *Tostuemyi p'et do dna* (Moscow: Eksmo, 2006), 217-218.

¹²⁵ Performance available online, accessed August 16, 2010, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4rlxdkFwrho>.

around him, yet misunderstood and reflective of the sometimes crushing patriarchal life of his native mountain village in Georgia. The modernity and internationalism of Moscow was shown as colorful and alluring, yet also frenetic and anonymous when compared with the provincial backwardness and human charm of the Georgian regional capital of Telavi, where the film's action began. According to the notes of the film's editor, *Mimino* showed that "every person needs to have his own place on this earth."¹²⁶ Eventually, Mizandari realized that his home was in Georgia, despite the occasional attentions of an attractive Russian flight attendant and the prestigious prospect of piloting Soviet jets to Berlin. However, the film resonated with Soviet audiences because they could recognize both Russia and Georgia in the film. It offered a loving portrayal of a charming but haphazard Georgia, employing and playing with existing representations, while providing ironic commentary on life in the Soviet capital.

Georgian Entertainers Beyond Georgia

Although celebrated as identifiably ethnic, Georgian cultural production in Soviet Union was always a hybrid mixture created out of Georgian traditions, Soviet institutions, and Russian audience expectations. The repertoire of Georgian performers was culturally versatile and explicitly multilingual, giving them unfettered access to the Soviet stage. In the Thaw years and afterward, such artistic pursuits were accorded the highest official prestige, and increasingly aroused popular interest more than political matters. Even as Soviet citizens increasingly sought truth in artistic endeavors, culture became a primary arena of Cold War competition, and the Soviet Union redoubled efforts to cast itself as an artistic superpower and an empire of cultural achievement. Every Soviet citizen was expected to be "cultured," being cultured meant appreciating the arts, and much Soviet art was produced by the empire's itinerant diasporas of ethnic entertainers.

Even if Georgian entertainers did not reside permanently outside Georgia, they were everywhere visible and audible as an itinerant cultural diaspora. While Soviet cultural officials supported institutions to promote Georgian culture, Georgian cultural entrepreneurs took advantage of the Soviet artistic infrastructure to gain access to the highest temples of Russian culture: Leningrad and Moscow's theaters, opera houses, and concert halls. Unlike most Jewish intellectuals, another group of ethnic outsiders who, along with the Georgians, became successors to the traditions of the pre-revolutionary Russian intelligentsia, Georgian artists preserved the language of their parents while gaining fluency in Russian culture.¹²⁷ Unlike Estonians, who excelled as jazz musicians but whose own ethnic expression in the Soviet context was muted if not altogether silent, Georgian entertainers loudly performed audible and vibrantly colorful songs and dances of ethnic expressiveness.¹²⁸ Doing so, they created and capitalized on a recognizably Georgian idiom of ethnic performance, since beyond the internal borders of their

¹²⁶ RGASPI, f. 2944, op. 4, d. 4092, l. 3.

¹²⁷ Writing of the post-revolutionary generation of young Soviet Jews in Moscow's prestigious Institute of History, Philosophy, and Literature (IFLI), Slezkine writes: "these boys and girls were the unself-conscious children of Jewish immigrants living the life of the Russian intelligentsia—*being* the Russian intelligentsia. They were not concerned about where their parents had come from because they knew themselves to be the descendants of the Russian intelligentsia." Slezkine, *Jewish Century*, 233-234.

¹²⁸ My view of the Estonians is derived from ongoing research by David Ilmar Beecher and his conference paper, "Generation of Strangers in Soviet Tartu" (paper presented at the American Association for the Advancement of Slavic Studies National Convention, Boston, MA, November 12-15, 2009).

southern republic ethnic entertainment was an officially sanctioned path to professional success.

Indeed, outside of Georgia, there was only one official institution representing the Georgian diaspora: a Moscow-based Georgian song and dance ensemble and school. In 1955, Revaz Dzhaniashvili, a Georgian graduate of the Moscow Electro-Technical Institute, was asked by the Komsomol to help a number of soldiers prepare for an anniversary concert. Among the soldiers were many men from the Caucasus, who, like Dzhaniashvili, had been raised on Georgian song and dance. Two years later, Dzhaniashvili helped establish Kolkhida, a permanent Georgian dance ensemble, along with Iveria, a Georgian children's dance collective, in Moscow.¹²⁹ Even at the height of the Thaw, institutional representation for an internal diaspora like the Georgians was permitted only when it was strictly cultural in nature.

While Dzhaniashvili advertised his efforts as a means to promote "internationalism" and "Russian-Georgian friendship," his dance troupe allowed members of the Georgian diaspora to preserve a cultural link to their homeland, and gave them a framework through which to pass Georgian practices of music and dance on to their children. The group's costumes were made in Tbilisi, and their dance studio in Moscow featured a library for students dedicated to the history and culture of Georgia.¹³⁰ Group members traveled to Georgia frequently to train with Georgian dancers and to perform before Georgian audiences.¹³¹ The dance group became a fixture in Moscow's cultural landscape, and by 1982 had performed over 1200 concerts, made 33 televised appearances, and received more than 200 awards.¹³² When a visiting delegation of Georgian artists visited Moscow that same year, they were surprised by the performance of the children's Iveria dance collective, whose members were apparently so convincing in their renditions of Georgian dances that they could have been mistaken for children from the Georgian cities of "Chiatura or Gori, Telavi or Zugdidi." These young Muscovites evinced an intimate connection to the Georgian homeland. In the words of visiting Georgian theater director Robert Sturua, who witnessed a concert of the Kolkhida and Iveria ensembles in Moscow:

Here, thousands of kilometers from our republic, these children are enthusiastically studying Georgian dance. But what is most important is that they wonderfully feel the spirit of these dances [*dukh etikh tantsev*]. And this is impossible without knowledge of Georgia, without the love for our land, which is taught to the children by the artistic director of the ensemble, R. Dzhaniashvili.¹³³

However, what surprised Sturua most of all was the fact that some of the ensemble's dancers were not even of Georgian ancestry. Georgian culture was widely celebrated in the Soviet context, and Muscovites of a variety of ethnic backgrounds had by now joined the ensemble, drawn by an enthusiasm for Georgian song and dance. While recognizably ethnic, Georgian culture had become an integral part of Soviet

¹²⁹ Official website of the Kolkhida ensemble, accessed August 16, 2010, <http://tbilisi-trip.narod.ru/Kolxida.html>.

¹³⁰ *Dni Gruzii v Moskve* (Tbilisi: Khelovneba, 1982).

¹³¹ V. Gulashvili, "'Kolkhida' rozhdena v Moskve," *Vechernii Tbilisi*, March 9, 1968, 3.

¹³² *Dni Gruzii v Moskve*.

¹³³ *Dni Gruzii v Moskve*.

culture. Russian children in Moscow could now learn to dance Georgian dances and sing Georgian songs. With unfettered access to the Soviet stage, Georgia's cultural diaspora projected an influence far beyond their native republic and on a level that belied their relatively small numbers. Just as only one Georgian *tamada* was needed to transform a Soviet dinner gathering into a Georgian-style feast, so too was one Georgian artistic director sufficient to stage convincingly Georgian productions, even with a mainly Russian ensemble.

Chapter 5

Ethnic Entrepreneurs in the Imperial Marketplace: Georgians and the Soviet Union's Second Economy

Social Networks, the Soviet State, and a Murder in Georgia

On October 22, 1968, the body of a young man was found washed up along the banks of the Tsenis Tskhali River near the town of Abasha, in western Georgia's Tskhakaia region. Dressed in a dark suit and white silk shirt, his legs and arms bound together and weighed down with a heavy metal tractor part, the victim could not readily be identified. The local authorities were immediately notified, and the corpse was taken to the morgue for a forensic examination. Investigators soon found further evidence detailing the victim's violent end: two of his teeth were missing and bruising on his neck attested to likely strangulation. No form of identification could be located on the victim, and because his face was swollen and disfigured, the forensic examiners could only state that he was "an unknown man, approximately 30-35 years of age."¹ After an exhaustive search, investigators from the Tskhakaia region's Prosecutor's Office (*Raiprokuratura*) managed to recover only one scrap of potential evidence from the top pocket of the victim's jacket: a small paper receipt for gasoline which, according to the stamp on it, had been issued in Volgograd, a Russian city almost five hundred miles away.

A few weeks later, Shota Dzhvebenava was recovering from the November holidays at the lavish Sandunovsky Baths in central Moscow. Originally from western Georgia, Dzhvebenava lived a charmed life in the Soviet capital as a currency speculator and dealer in illicit goods.² Operating in dollars and gold coins, he frequented the finest restaurants, taking friends from Georgia and his female companion, a dancer from the Berezka Russian folk dance ensemble, to dine at Seventh Heaven, the revolving restaurant located atop Moscow's Ostankino tower. Although far from his homeland, Dzhvebenava stayed in close contact with friends and family from western Georgia, playing host when they visited Moscow, helping them obtain scarce luxury goods in the capital, and regularly exchanging personal and professional information of mutual interest and benefit. Dzhvebenava also enjoyed close ties with Moscow's Georgian community, a fluid group whose members were engaged in a variety of professions, from illicit business to artistic and technical endeavors, and who resided in the capital on a permanent or long-term basis. Though the Georgian community was varied and

¹ Materials on the case were collected in a detailed report by the Georgian branch of the KGB, whose archives—unlike those of the KGB in Russia—are now declassified. On the discovery of the body, see the II Section of the Archive Administration of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia (MoIA), f. 6, d. 29174-74: t. 1, ll. 8-9.

² There is little in the way of biographical information on Shota Mikhailovich Dzhvebenava in the archival record. A man of the same exact name is mentioned in the satirical Soviet publication *Krokodil* after having assaulted another Soviet citizen on Pushkin Square in Moscow. A 1965 issue of this publication gives his age as 30 and his profession as a musician with the Sukhumi Philharmonic; while his listed occupation is not implausible (underground entrepreneurs often maintained the appearance of official employment in a variety of guises), it cannot be established whether this man is in fact the same Dzhvebenava questioned by the authorities. If so, he may have been a known quantity to them. See M. Grigor'ev, "Khuligan pod mikroskopom," *Krokodil* 5 (1965).

composed of different social circles, nearly all its members were tightly networked and frequently shared information about other Georgians as well as about strategies of survival in the Soviet metropolis. In particular, those from western Georgia stayed in close contact, bound in part by a distinctive culture and a unique dialect of Georgian.³

On that day at the Sandunovsky Baths, Dzhvebenava met Khuta Tkebadze, a fellow native of western Georgia who worked in Moscow as an engineer.⁴ Sitting down with Dzhvebenava in the ornate steam room, the engineer Tkebadze passed along the latest rumors picked up during his recent visit home to Georgia. He reported that a corpse had been discovered on the shores of a river near Dzhvebenava's hometown. He told his friend that after an exhaustive investigation the authorities had finally identified the body as that of Roman Churgulia, another native of western Georgia, who had left to study in Volgograd, and since his graduation had worked as a driver for a consumer goods factory in Russia. Tkebadze indicated that the likely suspect was Aleksandr Bedia, the head of the Georgian Ministry of Internal Affairs's police force in the Tskhakaia region. Bedia apparently blamed the young Churgulia for the death of his own son in a fight in Volgograd a few months earlier, and many in the Tskhakaia region remembered how Bedia's bereaved wife had called for vengeance at her son's funeral. Rumors of the circumstances of Churgulia's murder soon circulated widely among Moscow's Georgian community, including gruesome claims that the victim's hair had been pulled out by Bedia's wife prior to his death.⁵

While these detailed accounts of the homicide reached Moscow, Soviet law enforcement authorities operating in both Russia and Georgia were closing in on the perpetrators. They established that the suspect, Bedia, had come to Volgograd with his associates, asked Churgulia to take a ride with him, and then brought the young man back to western Georgia, where Bedia and the others strangled him, weighed him down, and dumped his body in the river. Detailed information on Bedia's erratic behavior around the time of the murder was provided by Otar Tsanava, the head of the Tskhakaia region's KGB (Committee for State Security), whose offices were housed in the same complex as the local Ministry of Internal Affairs headquarters where Bedia worked.⁶ As Tsanava

³ Many residents of western Georgia are Mingrelians, considered by the Soviets as a separate nationality until 1930, when they were grouped together with the Georgians for census purposes. It is of course a matter of some controversy whether Mingrelian constitutes a separate language closely related to Georgian, or a dialect of Georgian. Both Georgian and Mingrelian are members of the Kartvelian language group specific to the Caucasus. After 1938, publications in Mingrelian were all but banned, and by the time of the events described in this chapter Mingrelian would have been considered by most an informal dialect spoken at home and among acquaintances. Mingrelians can also be distinguished—most of the time—by their surnames, which generally end in *-ia* or *-ava*, instead of the eastern Georgian *-adze* (“son of”) or *-shvili* (“child of”). Perhaps the most famous Mingrelian was the Soviet spymaster Lavrentii Beria, who was at one point accused by Stalin (Dzhugashvili), an eastern Georgian, of giving preferential treatment to Mingrelians in the “Mingrelian Affair” of 1951-1952. See Ronald Grigor Suny, *The Making of the Georgian Nation* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994), 287-288.

⁴ II Section of the Archive Administration of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia (MoIA), f. 6, d. 29174-74, t. 15, ll. 109-130.

⁵ II Section of the Archive Administration of the MoIA, f. 6, d. 29174-74, t. 15, ll. 124-125.

⁶ According to Tsanava's testimony in the II Section of the Archive Administration of the MoIA, f. 6, d. 29174-74, t. 16, l. 71. The Ministry of Internal Affairs and the KGB were separate institutions, the former tasked primarily with the often banal details of ensuring domestic order, the latter concerned with state security, ideological subversion, and domestic and international espionage. As evident in this case, the

pursued the investigation of Bedia in western Georgia, the Volgograd branch of the Ministry of Internal Affairs tried a number of different approaches to discover the identity of Bedia's accomplices, including ethnic profiling, combing passenger manifests and hotel guest lists "with the goal of identifying all persons of Georgian nationality" (*litsa gruzinskoi natsional'nosti*) who were present in their city around the time of Churgulia's murder.⁷ Law enforcement officials questioned a number of Georgians living in Volgograd, including many who had come to study in the city's institutes in the early to middle 1960s and one of Churgulia's classmates from an evening course he was taking at the Institute of Soviet Trade.⁸

Reports and interrogation transcripts by law enforcement officials paint a comprehensive picture of Volgograd's Georgian community, a loose group bound together by common origins and family acquaintances in western Georgia, joint celebrations, and expectations of mutual assistance. Group members, mostly men, usually spent their time with other Georgians, but in some cases intermarried or cohabitated with Russian women they had met since arriving in Volgograd. The group included stellar medical students, but the well-liked, less scholarly Churgulia was also among them. The others had helped him get around the cumbersome official registration process in Volgograd so that he could find employment in the city. Before his death, he apparently supplemented his income by illicitly selling wine from Georgia and goods from the factory where he worked at the city's market.⁹ Like Dzhvebenava and his associates in Moscow, Georgians in Volgograd maintained close ties with their homeland and regularly shared news and gossip about events there.

The investigation had hardly begun before it was compromised. In Moscow, Dzhvebenava maintained contact with Bedia and other Georgian members of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Tskhakaia region, who often visited him there. They seldom hesitated to use the resources available to them as law enforcement agents to assist friends and associates. In one such case, they had tipped off Dzhvebenava that the Moscow police were on his trail for currency speculation, and in another allegedly forged a special passport that allowed a Georgian acquaintance involved in the underground economy to live in any Russian city he chose.¹⁰ In fact, Bedia's abuse of his official post went much further. It later was discovered that he had helped cover up past wrongdoing by his associates, dealt in illegal firearms and unregistered vehicles, paid a hefty bribe to have his son admitted to medical school in Volgograd, and received assistance from his friends in the Georgian Ministry of Internal Affairs in abducting and killing Roman Churgulia, whom he blamed for his son's death. It is little wonder that Bedia's colleague in the neighboring KGB suspected Bedia's involvement when Churgulia's body was identified. Bedia, however, soon learned of this too and directed an associate to steal and destroy classified materials relating to his investigation from the safe of the local KGB office in Georgia. Bedia's associate gained access to the safe after learning that Tsanova,

physical infrastructure of western Georgia and its distance from the center generated ambiguity regarding the divisions between the two institutions.

⁷ II Section of the Archive Administration of the MoIA, f. 6, d. 29174-74, t. 2, ll. 75-76.

⁸ II Section of the Archive Administration of the MoIA, f. 6, d. 29174-74, t. 11, l. 110.

⁹ II Section of the Archive Administration of the MoIA, f. 6, d. 29174-74, t. 11, l. 112.

¹⁰ II Section of the Archive Administration of the MoIA, f. 6, d. 29174-74, t. 15, ll. 113, 126.

the region's KGB chief, often left his office door open and the key to the safe in the pocket of his overcoat, which he hung in the corner of the room.¹¹

When the theft of classified documents from its offices was discovered, the KGB brought the full arsenal of its resources to bear on the investigation. KGB officials from the agency's headquarters in Moscow became involved, as did republic-level KGB agents in Tbilisi, serving to counterbalance the sway that Bedia had over local law enforcement in western Georgia. By stealing highly secret documents, Bedia had violated the state's sacrosanct information regime. His actions, combined with the physical infrastructure of law enforcement in his hometown in western Georgia, blurred important administrative distinctions between a police force meant to keep law and order and the KGB, designed to ensure state security by preserving a centralized and vertical command structure which integrated and subjugated the region to Moscow. Bedia and his associates were arrested, one by one, and charged with an array of crimes, including the murder of Churgulia. Dzhvebenava, who had been notified that the authorities were looking for him, fled Moscow for his native town of Gegechkori, in western Georgia, but was called in for questioning soon after his return to Moscow in mid-1969.¹² It is unclear whether he was charged with a crime; his questioners seemed more interested in his knowledge of Bedia's activities, and may have been willing to overlook his involvement in illicit trade in exchange for information on the murder, and especially the theft of the KGB documents and the leaking of state secrets by Bedia and his associates.

KGB agents painstakingly compiled a twenty-volume classified report on the events, collecting evidence, transcribing interrogations, and laying out their case against those implicated. The pages of the report reveal that in an era of "developed socialism," Georgian social networks were sometimes more effective than the state when it came to sharing information and gaining access to scarce resources. Underground entrepreneurs among the Georgian diaspora maintained close links to their native Georgia, where personal ties with local officials and a general atmosphere of tolerance of illicit economic activity created opportunities for mutual profit. Their networks were loosely and flexibly organized along regional, social, and familial lines, and shared information and resources for mutual benefit. It was not entirely by coincidence that Dzhvebenava learned of the details of Churgulia's murder at a bathhouse in Moscow before this information became available to state investigators.

As a tightly-networked and entrepreneurial minority with access to scarce goods in their homeland, the Georgian diaspora was well positioned to capitalize on the new economic opportunities of the Soviet Union's postwar period. The fruits of Georgian success, however, were bittersweet. While their familiarity with and understanding of the Soviet economy and of Russian society helped Georgians benefit from a period of limited economic liberalization, their economic gains brought unwanted attention from the state.

The Georgian Diaspora and Brezhnev's "Little Deal"

On the surface, the rule of Leonid Brezhnev (1964-1982) was a time of stalling economic growth rates. The era is most commonly known as one of stagnation (*zastoi*). However, official economic figures conceal the growth of a flourishing "second

¹¹ II Section of the Archive Administration of the MoIA, f. 6, d. 29174-74, t. 17, ll. 47-55.

¹² II Section of the Archive Administration of the MoIA, f. 6, d. 29174-74, t. 15, l. 126.

economy” which sprang out of and in some cases supported the official one.¹³ The state viewed the second economy with distrust, but eventually came to see it as a necessity. Vera Dunham suggested the concept of a “Big Deal” to account for the state’s accommodation of the material tastes of a new Soviet middle class of technocrats and skilled workers under Stalin. The economist James R. Millar has argued that the burgeoning second economy under Brezhnev was made possible by a “Little Deal” struck between the leadership and the Soviet Union’s urban population.¹⁴ The “Little Deal” implied the tolerance of petty private economic activities, both legal and illegal, as a means of providing consumer goods for an expanding and increasingly skilled Soviet population without enacting any major institutional reform.¹⁵ While the “Big Deal” meant large-scale structural adjustments and value shifts which reflected the aspirations of the nascent Soviet bourgeoisie, the “Little Deal” entailed the tolerance of economic exchange at the micro-level.¹⁶ “Developed socialism,” as Brezhnev often called it, could also be described as “acquisitive socialism,” and what one could acquire depended not only on access to growing urban markets, but also to kinship and “friendship reciprocity networks” through which scarce goods were distributed.¹⁷ The opportunities created by the “Little Deal” were by no means evenly distributed.

Few groups were as well-positioned to take advantage of the economic opening of the “Little Deal” as were the Georgians. At a time when social networks mattered more than ever, the networks of the Georgian diaspora proved easily adaptable to economic exchange in the shadowy world of the second economy. Georgians were an exclusive community bound by a distinct language that was unintelligible to outsiders; at the same time, most Georgians spoke fluent Russian and a large number, including Bedia’s son and the victim, Churgulia, studied in Russian universities.¹⁸ They were, like Dzhvebenava, comfortable operating in a Russian environment, yet tied in to networks that linked them to the Georgian homeland. These networks were strengthened by shared and enforceable norms of reciprocity, acceptable behavior, and codes of honor.¹⁹ Such attributes were essential for entrepreneurs in the second economy who made deals outside the law and relied on informal agreements rather than written contracts.

For Georgians, economic activity was as much about performance as it was about profit. Georgian culture celebrated the importance of risk taking, but the Georgian

¹³ The term “second economy” was coined by economist Gregory Grossman in his classic article “The Second Economy of the USSR,” *Problems of Communism* 25: 5 (1977): 25-40. Grossman uses the term to refer to economic activity conducted for private gain that was either illegal or technically legal but “ideologically alien” to the Soviet system.

¹⁴ James R. Millar, “The Little Deal: Brezhnev’s Contribution to Acquisitive Socialism,” *Slavic Review* 44: 4 (Winter 1985): 694-706.

¹⁵ Vera S. Dunham, *In Stalin’s Time. Middleclass Values in Soviet Fiction* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1976).

¹⁶ Millar, “The Little Deal,” 694-697.

¹⁷ The term “acquisitive socialism” is Millar’s. See “The Little Deal,” 697.

¹⁸ Perhaps more than in any other Soviet republic, Russian was a secondary language in Georgia while Georgian was the primary language of official and private life. Moscow’s plans to have Russian considered an official language on par with Georgian were scrapped after widespread popular protests against the measure in 1978. See Suny, *Making of the Georgian Nation*, 309. Nevertheless, most Georgians, especially the well-educated and the ambitious, spoke fluent Russian.

¹⁹ Gerald Mars and Yochanan Altman, “The Cultural Bases of Soviet Georgia’s Second Economy,” *Soviet Studies* 35 (1983): 546-60.

entrepreneurial ethic was far from the spirit of Max Weber's vision of capitalism: money was made to be spent in lavish displays that improved one's standing in a social network.²⁰ The need to overtly demonstrate one's value to a network made these informal social groupings highly dynamic, with all members vying to outdo one another and build up their own prestige as potential patrons. For example, the Moscow entrepreneur Dzhvebenava's capacity to wine and dine his visitors from Georgia and regale them with scarce goods allowed him to extend his influence in his network.²¹ The prosaic details of economic exchange were ritualized as an affirmation of friendship and social obligation around the table. The performative aspect of Georgian economic activity proved well-suited for operating in the Russian context as a more demonstrative and stylized version of the Russian practice of exchanging favors with friends and associates (*blat*).²²

Entrepreneurs in the Georgian diaspora benefited from links with regional officials and managers in Georgia. For someone like Aleksandr Bedia, personal obligations to his social and familial network were of greater importance than official responsibilities. He used his official position to assist Dzhvebenava in his illicit economic activity, and marshaled state resources to avenge the death of his son. In his case, as with other Georgians active in the second economy, personal interests and professional capacity were fused.²³ During the "Little Deal," the use of official positions for private benefit took place in Georgia on an unprecedented scale, particularly under the rule of First Secretary Vasily Mzhavanadze, eventually ousted for the corrupt practices and increasingly ostentatious displays of wealth by his inner circle in 1972. The unique political economy of the Soviet Union assured the Georgians continued access to rare and valuable agricultural goods, and the refusal of the Brezhnev regime to adjust prices or expand foreign trade kept the supply of these goods scarce and ensured near monopolies for the Georgians on the production of such goods within the borders of the Soviet Union.

Because most activity in the second economy was illegal, and a large amount of this activity was tolerated in the Brezhnev era, the archival record of the involvement of Georgian entrepreneurs in the second economy is incomplete. Economic activity was investigated only when the operation of Georgian networks exceeded the limits of the unspoken terms of the "Little Deal." Thus, archival documents tell the historian as much about the limits of the "Little Deal" as they do about the social networks of Georgian entrepreneurs. The most obvious constraint on economic activity pointed out by Millar is that of scale: petty trade was "winked at by the regime" while larger operations were

²⁰ Mars and Altman describe the Georgians as "gambling entrepreneurs concerned to spend and display" in "The Cultural Bases of Soviet Georgia's Second Economy," 555. The reference is of course to Weber's *The Protestant Ethic and the "Spirit" of Capitalism*, trans. Peter R. Baehr and Gordon C. Wells (New York: Penguin Books, 2002).

²¹ According to anthropologist Paul Manning, conspicuous consumption was particularly valued around the Georgian table, though this very phenomenon was lampooned in the official Soviet Georgian press as an undesirable cultural trait. See Manning, "Socialist supras and drinking democratically: changing images of the Georgian feast and Georgian society from Socialism to Post-socialism," (Unpublished manuscript, Trent University, 2003).

²² *Blat* became especially important with the growth of the second economy in the Brezhnev era. For an enlightening study of the practice, see Alena D. Ledeneva, *Russia's Economy of Favours: Blat, Networking, and Informal Exchange* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

²³ Mars and Altman speak of a "fusion of work life and private life" among Georgian networks in "The Cultural Bases of Soviet Georgia's Second Economy," 555.

targeted.²⁴ But there were also undoubtedly social constraints. Participants in the second economy were expected to abide by notions of fairness and a rough Soviet egalitarianism; economic success was to be modestly enjoyed and the privileges of the few concealed. Georgians, for whom the execution of elaborate and risky schemes and conspicuous displays of wealth brought prestige, saw things differently.

The Temptations of Georgia's Socialist Paradise

The prominence of Georgian traders in the second economy is difficult to divorce from the unique role played by Georgia within the peculiar political economy of the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union represented an autarchic economic system, and within it, Georgia possessed near monopolies on the production of highly-desired goods, including tea, tobacco, and citrus fruits, and gained widespread fame as a producer of wine and mineral water. These goods were inextricably linked in the minds of Soviet citizens with images of a sunny Georgia. Exotic and coveted, Georgian goods were synonymous with abundance and were central to socialist dreams of the “good life.” Long before the “Little Deal,” Georgia’s products were marketed and effectively “branded” by the socialist state, meaning that the resources later available to Georgian entrepreneurs had symbolic as well as economic value.

Building socialism in one country had meant developing the Soviet Union as a unified economic system that could operate in virtual isolation from the international economy. Within that closed system, Georgia was developed as a socialist paradise of exotic agriculture. The region south of the Caucasus mountains, of which Georgia formed the heartland, with its warm, inland territories and subtropical coastline, was viewed as an ideal location for the development of the state’s tea, tobacco, citrus, and wine production. The Soviet Union’s location in northern Eurasia left few other options open.

From the beginning, central planners could not simply extract these goods from the region as they might from a subjugated colony; out of necessity, they collaborated with local Georgian experts and industrial managers. One early concern was finding a replacement for the 72,000 tons of tea that pre-Revolutionary Russia imported for the widely-embraced ritual of *chaepitie* (tea-drinking).²⁵ The state-planning commission, Gosplan, was forced to give leeway to Georgian tea producers to do what was necessary to produce these goods. Gosplan even suggested that in order to obtain the raw materials they needed, Georgian tea producers be allowed to enter into agreements with tea producers in China and India, and to trade on the London Market.²⁶

During the tumultuous years of the First Five-Year Plan (1928-1932), planners in Moscow mandated the rapid expansion of the production of tea, citrus fruits, and bay leaves in Georgia. The development of the coastal areas of western Georgia, with its unique subtropical climate, required trained specialists. In 1930, the All-Union Institute of Tea and Subtropical Agriculture was established in the western Georgian city of Makharadze, with affiliates along Georgia’s Black Sea coast. A vast botanical garden in coastal Batumi was expanded in 1925 to become one of the Soviet Union's largest, and a

²⁴ Millar, “The Little Deal,” 698.

²⁵ Ministerstvo Sel'skogo Khoziastvo Gruzinskoi SSR, *Gruziia—osnovnaia baza subtropicheskogo khoziastva SSSR* (Tbilisi: Sabchota Sakartvelo, 1971), 3.

²⁶ RGAE, f. 4372, op. 15, d. 377, l. 36.

center for research on subtropical agriculture.²⁷ Georgian experts participated in the professional lives of these new institutions from the very beginning, and in time came to dominate them, as the heads of the local affiliates were often nominated by local Georgian party committees.²⁸

Recording his memoirs in the late 1960s, ousted Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev lavished praise on the Georgian land, stating: "This part of the Soviet Union is a paradise, with citrus trees growing year round." Yet he warned that Georgia's mythical abundance could also be a curse, noting that "there are many temptations in Georgia for speculators: the climate is warm, there are many vineyards and many other human delights." Speaking of the prominence of Georgian traders in the second economy, he explained the trend in geographic rather than cultural terms, admitting: "If people of some other nationality lived there, the same weaknesses would have been true of that nationality...if Russians lived in Georgia, they would do the same thing."²⁹

Despite Khrushchev's argument for the primacy of geography, Georgia itself was never viewed as a blank slate by central planners, but instead as a land imbued with a certain culture which "naturalized" the path of economic development pursued by Moscow. There was a belief among those who set economic policy in the center that local traditions and linkages to the land gave Georgians an advantage when it came to cultivating exotic and highly-desired agricultural goods. In 1924 representatives from Gosplan traveling to the region noted that nearly every household made wine, and that for inhabitants of the Caucasus "the culture of the grape, not to mention its existence in this region for thousands of years" meant that wine production had a "special meaning" for the local population.³⁰ While Uzbekistan had its cotton monoculture and Siberia had its oil and gas concerns, Georgian goods could not simply be harvested or extracted, but had to be grown and processed. This socialist paradise of viticulture and subtropical agriculture was envisioned by planners in Moscow but operated by Georgians.

The importance of Georgia's exotic goods increased in the postwar period. Soviet citizens who had made wartime sacrifices felt entitled to compensation.³¹ Many now expected the Soviet state to provide the same opportunities for consumption and leisure that were available in Western Europe and the United States. The regime's ability to provide luxury goods became essential both for its legitimacy at home and for its international prestige abroad. As a result, Georgia became ever more vital as a provider of rare goods. It would eventually produce 95 percent of the tea and 90 percent of the citrus fruits grown in the Soviet Union, along with the socialist state's most popular

²⁷ *Gruziia—osnovnaia baza subtropicheskogo khoziastvo SSSR*, 14.

²⁸ RGAE, f. 7486, op. 40, d. 3316, ll. 1-193.

²⁹ N. S. Khrushchev, *Vospominaniia: vremia, liudi, vlast'* (Moskva: Moskovskie novosti, 1999), 2: 59. Translated by George Shriver in Sergei Khrushchev, ed. *Memoirs of Nikita Khrushchev. Volume 2: Reformer* (Providence: Brown University, 2006), 63.

³⁰ RGAE, f. 4372, op. 15, d. 377, l. 17.

³¹ In Elena Zubkova's *Russia After the War: Hopes, Illusions, and Disappointments, 1945-1957*, the author describes popular conceptions of what peacetime life would be like: "Life as holiday, life as fairy tale: with the help of this image a special conception of postwar life was formed—without contradictions, without pressure—a tendency stimulated in reality by one factor, hope." See *Russia After the War*, trans. and ed. Hugh Ragsdale (London and New York: M. E. Sharpe, 1998), 34.

wines.³² Dominance in the production of these Soviet "cash crops" gave Georgians an enviable niche in Soviet agriculture.

Economic figures attest to Georgia's rapid postwar development. Government purchases of Georgian grapes increased from a pre-war level of 36 tons in 1940 to 245 tons by 1965.³³ Similarly, purchases of citrus fruits nearly doubled from their 1940 level of 23.3 tons to an average of 41.7 tons per year by the late 1960s.³⁴ During the same period, purchases of sorted tea leaves from Georgia increased more than four-fold, from 51.3 tons in 1940 to an average of 231 tons per year by the late 1960s.³⁵ The production of goods processed in Georgia also increased, with wine production more than doubling, from 1.7 million deciliters in 1940 to 4.2 million deciliters in 1965, and the production of mineral water rising five-fold, from around 12 million liters in 1940 to nearly 63 million liters in 1965. The land devoted to the production of Georgia's specialized agricultural products drastically expanded as Georgia solidified its dominance in wine production and maintained its near monopolies on the production of citrus fruits, tea, and tobacco.³⁶ Production of these goods in turn defined Georgia's agricultural economy. By the early 1960s, 28 percent of Georgia's overall agricultural production was devoted to tea, 22 percent to grapes, 19 percent to tea, and a small but significant 3 percent to tobacco.³⁷

While Georgian entrepreneurs in the 1960s and 1970s would find innovative and sometimes illegal ways to bring their goods to consumers, distribution networks connected production in Georgia with markets in Russian cities even before the Brezhnev era. Under Stalin, a Georgian procured meat, fruits, vegetables, wine, and spices directly from Georgia for banquets at the Kremlin or at dacha gatherings.³⁸ The famous Georgian restaurant, Aragvi, located in central Moscow, operated under the auspices of the Georgian Ministry of Trade until the late 1950s, with its wine, mineral water, spices, and cheese shipped directly from facilities in Georgia.³⁹ Georgian agricultural collectives provided bay leaves and other spices directly to Moscow's restaurant organization, the *Trest moskovskikh restoranov*.⁴⁰ In order to make these goods more widely available to Russian consumers, Georgians operated production facilities in Russia, including a wine factory in Moscow run by Samtrest, a Georgian union of wine producers (*Promyshlennoe ob'edinenie vinodel'cheskoi promyshlennosti*) under the auspices of the Georgian

³² TsSU (Tsentral'noe statisticheskoe upravlenie) SSSR, *Narodnoe khoziastvo SSSR, 1972* (Moscow: Statistika, 1973), 350-352.

³³ TsSU Gruzinskoi SSR, *Narodnoe khoziastvo Gruzinskoi SSR za 60 let* (Tbilisi: Sabchota Sakartvelo, 1980), 245.

³⁴ TsSU Gruzinskoi SSR, *Gruzii v tsifrakh* (Tbilisi: Sabchota Sakartvelo, 1985), 60.

³⁵ TsSU Gruzinskoi SSR, *Gruzii v tsifrakh* (Tbilisi: Sabchota Sakartvelo, 1985), 60.

³⁶ TsSU Gruzinskoi SSR, *Gruzii v tsifrakh* (Tbilisi: Sabchota Sakartvelo, 1969), 7

³⁷ TsSU Gruzinskoi SSR, *Gruzii v tsifrakh* (Tbilisi: Sabchota Sakartvelo, 1965), 37

³⁸ In his memoirs, Khrushchev wrote of the appearance at the Kremlin of "some sort of old friend who had been at school with Stalin. This so-called general was in charge of supplies. He brought in the wine, the mutton, and the other products consumed in the Kremlin." Khrushchev, *Vospominaniia*, 2: 55, translated in *Memoirs of Nikita Khrushchev: Volume 2*, 59. The man was Pavel Rusishvili from Stalin's hometown of Gori. Georgian banquets at the Kremlin are described in vivid detail in the Georgian-language memoirs of Kandid Charkviani, the First Secretary of Georgia's Communist Party from 1938-1952. See his *gancdili da naazrevi, 1906-1994* (Tbilisi: Merani, 2004), 376-379.

³⁹ After two decades of operation by the Georgian Ministry of Trade, the Aragvi was transferred to Moscow's restaurant organization in the fourth quarter of 1959, part of an effort to consolidate the Soviet capital's restaurants under one umbrella organization. TsAGM, f. 224, op. 1, d. 147.

⁴⁰ TsAGM f. 224, op. 1, d. 277, ll. 45.

Ministry of Food Production, which produced tens of thousands of bottles of wine and cognac from grapes purchased from Georgia's state farms.⁴¹

The temptation to seek personal profit through these official trade networks was always present, although excesses were for a time kept in check by strict Stalinist discipline. Nevertheless, even under Stalin, the management of Samtrest came under fire for theft and embezzlement. At a 1949 meeting of the management of the Glavvino, the Soviet organization in charge of wine production, the head legal advisor (*glavnyi iuriskonsul't*) of the Ministry of Food Production detailed the large-scale disappearance of grapes and alcohol products, seemingly lost in transit on their way to Samtrest's factories in Moscow and Leningrad, with more still lost when the finished products were shipped out from these factories.⁴² There is no evidence that any punitive measures were taken to address the matter. More criticism of Samtrest's Georgian directors arose in the years immediately following Stalin's death; in 1955, the leadership of Samtrest was dismissed, accused of enriching themselves through the theft of state property, making themselves "millionaires" and fashioning themselves as "serious businessmen" (*krupnye del'tsy*).⁴³ With the advent of the "Little Deal," however, open discussions of wrongdoing practically disappeared from the archival record. Georgian private traders could now more fully capitalize on the existing economic infrastructure, which linked Georgian state and collective farms with facilities and distribution channels in Russian cities.

Even those Soviets who had never traveled to Georgia or met a Georgian were familiar with celebrated Georgian goods. They could be found prominently displayed in the Georgian Pavilion at the All-Union Exhibition of the Achievements of the Soviet Economy (VDNKh) in Moscow, a miniature version of Soviet Georgia's subtropical paradise transported to the Soviet Union's northerly capital. The pavilion was distinguished by a palatial, 18-meter-tall façade decorated with Georgian motifs, held up by a row of columns, and flanked by palm trees. Following Khrushchev's de-Stalinization campaign, signs celebrating Georgia as the homeland of Stalin ("Georgia—homeland of the Great Stalin, flowering under the sun of the Stalin Constitution") had been removed, but exhibits on Georgia's exotic goods were expanded.⁴⁴ Entering the pavilion, behind the glass walls that paneled its stone façade, visitors could see tea plants, orange and lemon trees, grapes growing on the vine, unique palm trees, and bamboo stands.⁴⁵ Displays educated visitors about the delights of Georgian wines with foreign-sounding names like Rkatsiteli, Mtsvane and Tsolikauri, not to mention the Kvanchkara and Kindzmarauli known to have been favored by Stalin and counted among the most sought after wines by Soviet consumers. An exhibit, developed by the Georgians who headed the Soviet Union's wine production organization, Glavvino, described the process of making red table wine from Kakheti, identified as "the most popular wine in the Soviet Union."⁴⁶

⁴¹ RGAE, f. 8546, op. 1, d. 623, ll. 1-32.

⁴² RGAE, f. 8546, op. 1, d. 547, ll. 49-50.

⁴³ RGAE, f. 8546, op. 1, d. 1244, ll. 1-11.

⁴⁴ For a sense of the changes made to the pavilion, first opened in 1939, after Khrushchev's de-Stalinization campaign, one need only compare the 1939 guide to the exhibition with that issued in 1959. See *Pavil'on Gruzinskaia SSR: Putevoditel'* (Moscow: Sel'khozgiz, 1939) and *Vystavka Dostizhenii Narodnogo Khoziastva SSSR: Putevoditel'* (Moscow: Gos. Naučno-tekhnikeskii Izd-vo Mashino stroitel'noi literatury, 1959), 44-47.

⁴⁵ *Vystavka Dostizhenii Narodnogo Khoziastva SSSR: Putevoditel'*, 44.

⁴⁶ According to plans for the exhibition submitted by Glavvino. See RGAE, f. 8546, op. 1, d. 923, l. 36.

Although the pavilions of all the other republics highlighted agricultural abundance (even when there was less natural abundance to be found), there was something mythical about Georgia's natural wealth, a sentiment reinforced by a mural near the entrance depicting "Fiery Colchis" (*Plamennaia Kolkhida*), a reminder to visitors that Soviet Georgia had once been the land of the Golden Fleece sought by Jason and his Argonauts in Greek myth. According to an exhibit guide, those viewing the mural could marvel at its visual effect while at the same time taking note of the "sweet smell" of "rare fruits and flowers" coming from inside.⁴⁷

The exhibit was peopled with real-live Georgians, who frequently appeared at special events and at the ceremonial "Days of the Georgian SSR" organized at VDNKh nearly every year.⁴⁸ At the Sixth World Festival of Youth and Students, which drew tens of thousands of visitors to Moscow in 1957, representatives of Georgia served wine to guests outside of their pavilion and distributed cigarettes marked with the date and location of the event and made with Georgian tobacco from the most recent harvest.⁴⁹ VDNKh was a centerpiece in the efforts of organizers to "transform Moscow into a city of celebration" (*prevratit' Moskvu v gorod prazdnika*).⁵⁰ Georgian dancers took part in the celebration, dancing not only their traditional "national dances" but also newer dances devoted to economic production, including the horticulturally-inspired "Dance of the Flower Children." Elsewhere, visitors might enjoy the exotic "Dance of Silk" and "Dance of Cotton," or the more worldly "Dance of Taxi Drivers"; everywhere, economic activity became a performance of economic abundance and symbolic attributes.⁵¹ As it was at VDNKh, so it was on the Soviet stage: Georgians performed a role as providers of rare and often illicitly-obtained goods, profiting from the symbolic value of Georgian goods recognized and celebrated in official Soviet culture.

Away from the halls of VDNKh, the Soviet Union continued to suffer severe shortages of the goods most desired by Soviet citizens, despite Georgia's increase in postwar production. Even meat and vegetables could sometimes only be obtained with great effort, to say nothing of consumer goods like clothing and furniture. In particular, flowers—another good which Georgia specialized in—proved hard to come by, especially in the winter months.⁵² A report delivered at an all-Union meeting of the Soviet Ministry of Agriculture in 1966 noted with shame that, due to shortfalls in Soviet production of flowers, Moscow was forced in the preceding year to import cut flowers from abroad in exchange for hard currency (*invaliduta*), and that the government spent a

⁴⁷ According to a 1954 guide available online at the official website of the exhibition: "Pavil'on Gruzinskoi SSR," accessed April 28, 2011, http://www.bcx.ru/pavils/descriptions/018_54.htm.

⁴⁸ *Gruzinskaia Sovetskaia Sotsialisticheskaia Respublika na VDNKh SSSR* (Moscow: VDNKh SSSR, 1972), 19.

⁴⁹ Described in the plans for the festival. RGASPI, f. M-3, op. 15, d. 95, l. 53.

⁵⁰ RGASPI, f. M-3, op. 15, d. 95, l. 7.

⁵¹ RGASPI, f. M-3, op. 15, d. 95, ll. 49-57. The merging of Georgian folk dance with the contemporary themes of Soviet labor was perfected by the National Dance Ensemble of Georgia, whose renowned choreographers, Iiko Sukhishvili and Nino Ramishvili, later developed a dance cycle dedicated to the "Harvest Celebration" (*Prazdnik urozhaia*), with three parts: "The Gathering (*sbor*) of the Tea," "The Gathering of the Citrus," and "The Gathering of the Grapes." Discussed in various press clippings collected in the Central Archive of the Contemporary History of Georgia, Department of Literature and Art, f. 80, op. 1, d. 301.

⁵² Exact production figures for flowers are hard to come by, as they were seldom listed separately in economic statistics, but instead considered as a branch of horticulture (*sadovodstvo*).

significant amount of hard currency on the purchase of flower bulbs.⁵³ Another report to the Ministry, submitted on behalf of collective and state farms in Georgia nearly a decade later, noted that the production of citrus fruits "was still far from meeting the demands of the population for this valued product."⁵⁴

Even prior to Brezhnev's "Little Deal," changes had been made to encourage small-scale trading in the Soviet Union as a way of addressing such shortages.⁵⁵ Shortly before Stalin's death, Moscow's markets were renovated and made more inviting to authorized traders from collective farms, with new comforts like rest houses and hotels for those traveling long distances and spending the night in the Soviet capital.⁵⁶ After Stalin's death, the authorities grew more permissive of the individual sale of flowers and encouraged citrus production as a means of providing vitamin C to urban populations starved of needed nutrients for most of the winter.⁵⁷ Georgians soon appeared as prominent traders in these goods at markets throughout the Soviet Union. The development of air travel networks meant that the flight from Tbilisi to Moscow was under three hours long and affordable to most Soviet citizens; arriving in the Soviet capital, Georgians could draw on the pre-existing distribution networks of official Georgian entrepreneurs and enterprises.

The sudden appearance of Georgians at Russian markets led to interactions less scripted than those experienced by visitors to VDNKh. By the late 1960s, Khrushchev noted that his guards complained that there were Georgians "everywhere...And they're profiteering and speculating [*spekuliruiut*] everywhere they go."⁵⁸ Encounters did not always live up to the expectations Russians had of Georgia and Georgians. The Russian writer, Viktor Astaf'ev, described in a travelogue his meeting with a trader, who despite his nationality he did not consider "a true Georgian" on the grounds of the trader's bad behavior. The trader, Astaf'ev wrote, was like so many Georgians one now encountered, sticking out "like a sore thumb, turning up in all the Russian town markets, up to Murmansk and Norilsk, scornfully robbing trusting Northerners blind." While urban residents may have earlier encountered Georgians—real or imaginary, they had never met any like these, who were, in Astaf'ev's words, "greedy, illiterate" and "without restraint."⁵⁹

Georgians at the Margins of Soviet Empire

A joke (*anekdot*) likely dating to the Brezhnev era told that the loudspeaker at the Tbilisi rail station announced trains "leaving Tbilisi for the USSR."⁶⁰ For Soviet tourists

⁵³ RGAE, f. 7486, op. 35, d. 60, ll. 282-283.

⁵⁴ RGAE, f. 7486, op. 40, d. 3316, l. 181.

⁵⁵ Julie Hessler provides a history of Soviet trade during the first decades of Soviet power in *A Social History of Soviet Trade: Trade Policy, Retail Practices, and Consumption* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004).

⁵⁶ According to plans from the Market Administration (*Upravlenie rynkami*) of Moscow in 1952. See TsAGM, f. R-46, op. 1, d. 125, ll. 1-86.

⁵⁷ Emil A. Draitser, *Taking Penguins to the Movies: Ethnic Humor in Russia* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1998), 36-37.

⁵⁸ Khrushchev, *Vospominaniia*, 2: 59, translated by Shriver in *Memoirs of Nikita Krushchev. Volume 2: Reformer* (Providence: Brown University, 2006), 63.

⁵⁹ V. P. Astaf'ev, *Lovia peskarei v Gruzii in Sobranie sochinenii v piatnadsati tomakh*, Tom 9 (Krasnoarsk: Ofset, 1997), translated by Draitser in *Taking Penguins to the Movies*, 37.

⁶⁰ Draitser, 41-42.

who visited the tropical paradise, Georgia's appeal lay in the fact that travelers there felt as if they had moved outside of Soviet everyday life while remaining within the state borders of the Soviet Union. They encountered signs and documents in Georgian, abundant agricultural goods that could only be obtained with great difficulty in the north, higher living standards, and a colorful urban life in Tbilisi. Even those Russians residing permanently in Georgia sometimes felt as if they were guests in a foreign country, rather than citizens in a Soviet republic. Different rules seemed to govern social interactions, gender norms, and professional habits. While the economic practices of the Georgian diaspora might have seemed charmingly different when encountered in Moscow, Russians were sometimes shocked by the cultural gap they experienced when they traveled to Georgia itself.

While bribes and *blat* networks were becoming commonplace in Brezhnev's Soviet Union, jokes about corruption in Georgia emphasized that it was practiced openly and in accordance with formalized yet unwritten rules. One joke featured a hapless Russian visitor, who was traveling along the Georgian military highway when his car was stopped by a Georgian traffic policeman. The Russian was asked to write a statement explaining why he was driving so fast in the "Georgian language," which was of course was foreign to him. After a moment, he handed the policeman several rubles, to which the policeman responded "And you were saying that you don't know Georgian. You have already written half of your explanatory note!"⁶¹

Beyond the exotic, the foreignness of Georgia could be troubling. Some Russians living in Tbilisi expressed shock that they were not treated with the proper deference—or worse, that they were second class citizens—in a Soviet country they held to be their own. As the Soviet literature on the "friendship of the peoples" stressed, they viewed themselves as Georgia's historical protectors.⁶² The leading role of Russians among all other Soviet nations was especially emphasized after victory in the Great Patriotic War.⁶³ Yet in the postwar period, Georgia became ethnically more Georgian, stemming in part from the migration of Russians out of Georgia.⁶⁴ The leadership of Georgia was also overwhelmingly Georgian, a trend reinforced by Moscow's preference to rule through local elites in the Khrushchev and Brezhnev eras. By 1970, Georgians made up 76 percent of their republic's Communist Party, higher even than the percentage of ethnic

⁶¹ V. V. Kulikov, ed, *Anekdoty ot...i do...* (St. Petersburg: Kristall, 1998), 476-477.

⁶² For a study of the influence of Soviet ideology on the historiography of the Caucasus, see Lowell Tillet, *The Great Friendship: Soviet Historians on the Non-Russian Nationalities* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1969).

⁶³ The increasing emphasis on Russian primacy has been traced back as far as the mid-1930s by Nicholas S. Timasheff in his landmark work *The Great Retreat: The Growth and Decline of Communism in Russia* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1946). Timasheff's analysis is echoed in Terry Martin's *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923-1939* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2001), in which 1938 marks the end of the full-fledged "Affirmative Action Empire." Whatever the origin, Russia's leading role was made explicit by the mobilization of Russian nationalism during the Great Patriotic War and sealed by Stalin's "Toast to the Russian People" following Soviet victory. The significance of the form and content of this toast is discussed in Chapter 3.

⁶⁴ The outmigration of Russians was part of a South Caucasus-wide trend toward ethnic homogenization in the southern republics. See Brian D. Silver, "Population Redistribution and the Ethnic Balance in Transcaucasia." In *Transcaucasia: Nationalism and Social Change*, ed. Ronald Grigor Suny (Ann Arbor: Michigan Slavic Publications), 373-395

Georgians in the republic.⁶⁵ These features became grounds for complaint, especially given widespread perceptions that the Georgian state itself was highly personalized and its resources controlled by Georgians through informal networks.

Other ethnic minority groups in the republic, particularly Armenians, joined Russians in complaining of Georgian dominance. In a letter sent to the Party's Central Committee in 1956, and addressed directly to Defense Minister Zhukov, G. V. Sukhiasov, an ethnic Armenian military officer living in Tbilisi, complained of Georgian discrimination. What bothered him most of all was that Georgians seemed to occupy all leadership and management positions in the republic, while Armenians and Russians could only aspire to work for their Georgian superiors. In a situation of inverted hierarchy, which he found "difficult to believe," the "majority of workers" were Russians and Armenians, while the "directors, Party Secretaries, Regional Secretaries, and all the other authorities" were "all Georgian."⁶⁶ He noted that it was impossible to find an "enterprise, industry, or educational institution where the director or boss was not Georgian." What was worse, Georgians were able to skirt regulations by appealing to a leadership that was "their own" (*svoe*), and gravest of all, held themselves to be inherently better than representatives of other ethnic groups:

And many of these leading Georgian comrades truly believe that they are better, smarter, and more talented than comrades of other nationalities, and that this gives them alone the right to lead [*komandovat*], especially in Georgia, where their people are of a superior type [*liudi pervogo sorta*], and everyone else nothing better than second-class.⁶⁷

Similar letters protested anti-Russian discrimination and the "lack of respect" with which Georgian men treated Russian women.⁶⁸ It was not only Russians living in Tbilisi who found their sense of hierarchy upset; tourists who left their cramped apartments in Russia to vacation at resorts along the Black Sea coast of Abkhazia saw seaside cliffs dotted with massive two and three-story private homes built—legally and illegally—on the proceeds of the sale of citrus, tea, tobacco, and wine to Russian markets.⁶⁹

While state supervision of collective farms—especially of the private plots developed by farmers—was everywhere problematic, Georgian collective farms operated

⁶⁵ *Kommunisticheskaia partiia Gruzii v tsifrakh (1921-1970 gg.) (Sbornik statisticheskikh materialov)* (Tbilisi, 1971), 176, 265, cited in Suny, *Making of the Georgian Nation*, 314.

⁶⁶ Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv noveishei istorii—RGANI (Russian State Archive of Contemporary History), f. 5, op. 31, d. 60, ll. 79-85.

⁶⁷ RGANI, f. 5, op. 31, d. 60, ll. 79-85.

⁶⁸ For examples, see RGANI, f. 5, op. 31, d. 60, ll. 93-94. See also the complaints of a Russian factory worker in Tbilisi from the same period, angry that Georgians often "insult" (*obizhaiut*) Russian women on the streets of Tbilisi, in part because they are a "hot-blooded people" (*narod goriachii*), Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Rossiiskoi Federatsii—GARF, f. R-7523, op. 107, d. 185, ll. 6-7.

⁶⁹ Abkhazia was an autonomous republic located in the Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic. Though they bore the name of the region, ethnic Abkhaz were a minority in the autonomous republic, with Georgians making up the largest ethnic group there. For a press expose of these lavish homes, see "Spekulianty...kurortnym solntse," *Pravda*, August 3, 1963. The fact that local authorities often turned a blind eye to such excesses was discussed in a report of the Georgian Central Committee in 1964; see III Section of the Archive Administration of the MoIA, f. 14, op. 39, d. 265, ll. 61-87.

beyond the pale of what was acceptable even during the period of the "Little Deal."⁷⁰ Well aware that they could obtain better prices on the open market than from the state, which sought to purchase agricultural goods in bulk, Georgian agricultural goods were increasingly produced on private plots and sold by individual Georgian traders. According to reports submitted to the Soviet Union's Ministry of Agriculture, by the mid-1970s, 40 percent of Georgia's grapes were grown on private plots. The same reports noted that the quality of tea and tobacco purchased by the state was in marked decline, perhaps because the choicest tea and tobacco were sold by individual traders.⁷¹

Anomalous statistical reports received from Georgia alarmed Moscow's central planners. In 1965, a report noted that in the preceding year 25.7 percent of Georgia's able-bodied population was not involved in industrial and agriculture production for state enterprises, but instead in what the state considered "domestic and private ancillary economic activity" (*v domashnem i lichnom podsobnom khoziaistve*), a level much higher than the Soviet average of 17.2 percent.⁷² Tellingly, from 1960 to 1971, Georgia's national income grew at the third lowest rate in the USSR, while in 1970 the size of the average Georgian savings account was almost twice that of the Soviet average.⁷³

Traveling to Georgia's collective farms, authorities found greater cause for concern. Speculators lurked around collective farms, buying goods from farmers to sell in Russian markets. A 1962 report on the situation in Abkhazia submitted to the Central Committee of the Communist Party noted that there were over 2000 people on collective farms in the region who did not take part in "socially useful labor."⁷⁴ While authorities warned of "harmful elements" on and around collective farms, they grew worried that the farmers themselves were behaving badly. A 1976 report submitted to Georgia's Communist Party called attention to the use of unauthorized laborers on collective farms in Abkhazia; while those who were supposed to farm pursued private profit, others were paid to farm in their place.⁷⁵ To avoid the intrusion of the central authorities, Caucasian traditions of wining and dining guests were employed to turn leaders visiting Georgia's Black Sea coast into political patrons. A report submitted to the Central Committee of the Communist Party in 1959 noted that in Abkhazia in particular:

The organization of various banquets and the regaling [*ugoshchenii*] of leading workers is widespread in the republic, so much that it promotes conditions of complacency [*blagodushie*], unscrupulousness [*bezprintsipnost'*] in work, furthermore, every effort is made to explain such generosity in terms of Abkhaz customs, though all of the banquets and regaling is paid for through the funds of the state collective farms, or collected from others by the organizers of these banquets.⁷⁶

⁷⁰ On poor state control of collective farms in general, and on Georgia's farms in particular, see Grossman, "The Second Economy of the USSR," 25-28.

⁷¹ RGAE, f. 7486, op. 40, d. 3316, ll. 118-122.

⁷² RGAE, f. 4372, op. 66, d. 185, ll. 5-6.

⁷³ *Narodnoe khoziasstvo SSSR 1922-1972: Iubileinyi statisticheskii ezhegodnik* (Moscow, 1972), 515; cited in Suny, *Making of the Georgian Nation*, 304.

⁷⁴ RGANI, f. 5, op. 31, d. 222, ll. 68-69.

⁷⁵ III Section of the Archive Administration of the MoIA, f. 14, op. 52, d. 720.

⁷⁶ RGANI, f. 5, op. 31, d. 124, l. 79.

Traditional hospitality thus had an instrumental effect in securing local control.⁷⁷ According to one Georgian with ties to the Soviet construction industry, some of the lavish new homes constructed along Abkhazia's Black Sea coast belonged to top Soviet officials and enterprise directors. The properties were secured and their new inhabitants feted by local officials and entrepreneurs seeking patronage and protection from the politically connected in Moscow.⁷⁸

The same conditions of lax control which made Georgia a base for illicit trade in agricultural goods also made it fertile soil for underground entrepreneurs of all varieties. Public tolerance of underground entrepreneurs in Georgia was high. According to those who lived through the late Soviet period, by the 1960s many Georgians did not view the theft of state resources as a serious crime, as long as one conformed to informal norms of obligation and respectability.⁷⁹ This was part of a larger trend; contemporaries in Russia and elsewhere noted that tolerance of stealing from the state was on the rise throughout the Soviet Union.⁸⁰ Yet nowhere else in the Soviet Union were elaborate schemes of stealing and diverting state resources tolerated and indeed celebrated as they were among Soviet Georgians. Rumors of audacious economic schemes and displays of wealth brought prestige and helped Georgian entrepreneurs build their social networks by acting as patrons to friends and relatives. They also attracted the scrutiny of the Soviet state.

Georgian Entrepreneurs In and Out of the Archival Record

In a manuscript written in Moscow but later published in emigration, Konstantin Simis, a senior member of the Institute of Soviet Legislation in the 1970s, wrote of the Soviet Union as a "huge superpower" in which the "rights and duties of its citizens...are defined not by a constitution or any other written laws but by a whole body of unwritten laws, which, although not published anywhere, are perfectly well known to all Soviet citizens and are obeyed by them."⁸¹ The terms of the "Little Deal" were struck in this spirit, as an unspoken agreement among the state, private traders, and the Soviet Union's urban population. As long as private trade occurred within acceptable limits, the state was silent and the archival record, as a consequence, mute. State concern was aroused and governmental documents generated only when the boundaries of acceptable behavior were overstepped. These boundaries were defined and patrolled by selective enforcement of existing Soviet legislation. The authoritarian Soviet state sought thus to tame informal networks of exchange when they grew too large in scale and scope, when they undermined central control or crossed international borders, or when entrepreneurs openly displayed their wealth or behaved in ways that overtly flouted Soviet ideology.

The case with which this chapter began is an illustrative example. The Bedia files reveal how the KGB got involved when a case spread beyond the confines of one republic, especially when Bedia's theft of sensitive documents undermined the centralized

⁷⁷ It is safe to say that Abkhaz standards of hospitality and traditions of wining and dining guests closely resembled those customary among Georgians and other groups in the Caucasus region.

⁷⁸ "Shalva" (respondent wished to remain anonymous). Interview by author. Tbilisi, Georgia, November 4, 2008.

⁷⁹ "Dato" (respondent wished to remain anonymous). Interview by author. Tbilisi, Georgia, November 4, 2008.

⁸⁰ Attitudes and practices of Soviet corruption are described by Steven K. Staats in "Corruption in the Soviet System," *Problems of Communism* 21 (1972): 40-47.

⁸¹ Konstantin Simis, *USSR: The Corrupt Society* (New York: Simon and Shuster, 1982), 23-24.

system of control established by the KGB, and disrupted the operation of the panoptic agency, which was meant to observe Soviet citizens without itself being seen.⁸² It took the appearance of a body on the banks of a river to bring a Georgian social network engaged in illicit activity to light, and a violation of the KGB's information regime by a corrupt law enforcement agent to draw the state's vast capacity for surveillance and prosecution into the investigation. Investigators recorded details of illegal residencies, false passports, and the private lives of Georgian speculators in Moscow almost as an afterthought in their drive to punish Aleksandr Bedia. Additional charges may have been a way of encouraging the confessions of Bedia's accomplices, perhaps a method used in tandem with the KGB's technique of gathering testimony from a variety of individuals and then using inconsistencies among the various testimonies to charge suspects with providing false information to the authorities.⁸³ Accordingly, there is no record in the report of the speculator Dzhvebenava being charged or prosecuted for his economic crimes; he was only threatened with the charge of providing false or incomplete testimony to prompt him to divulge information about Bedia's violent crime and his role in the theft of materials from a KGB safe.⁸⁴

The KGB intervened with even greater urgency when traders in the Soviet second economy crossed international borders. A series of reports compiled by the Georgian branch of the KGB after a series of raids in 1972 and 1974 shed light on efforts to crack down on the international smuggling rings operated by Georgian sailors, which brought contraband goods into the country for sale in Soviet markets. Such goods included gold coins and other foreign currency, tea sets, women's scarves "of a foreign make," Japanese handkerchiefs, and Wrigley's chewing gum.⁸⁵ As the cases attest, Georgian sailors would often bring back a few items of clothing purchased abroad as favors for friends, relatives and associates.⁸⁶ However, the KGB was concerned with more organized smuggling rings that operated on a larger scale. Having received inside information, they intercepted several major shipments of contraband goods arriving in the Georgian port of Poti, on the Black Sea. The goods had been purchased by Georgian sailors visiting foreign ports, in one case in collusion with the Bulgarian crew of another ship. After arresting and interrogating those sailors involved in smuggling the goods across Soviet borders, the KGB interrogated them for details on the smuggling ring's reach within Georgia.

In the most elaborate case, the KGB identified a circle of people with little or no permanent employment but a mysteriously steady supply of gold coins. Among them was Abram Elishakashvili, a Georgian Jew from western Georgia whose last official job had

⁸² "Panopticism" was considered by Michel Foucault to be one of the main principles of the modern penal state. See his *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), 195-228.

⁸³ Withholding or providing false evidence or testimony were violations of articles 182 and 181 of the criminal code of the Russian SFSR, respectively. This policing technique was certainly not unique to the KGB, or to law enforcement agents in the Soviet Union alone, though it was used repeatedly in interrogations in the Bedia case. See for example the interrogation of Dzhvegenava, II Section of the Archive Administration of the MoIA, f. 6, d. 29174-74, t. 15, ll. 109-114.

⁸⁴ Based on reading of entire case; interrogations of Dzhvebenava appear in the II Section of the Archive Administration of the MoIA, f. 6, d. 29174-74, t. 15.

⁸⁵ Items listed in several cases. See II Section of the Archive Administration of the MoIA, f. 6, d. 29150-72 (1971-1972); f. 6, d. 29156-72 (1972); f. 6, d. 29150-72 (1972); and f. 6, d. 29195-75 (1974).

⁸⁶ For example, one sailor brings back a dress purchased in Gibraltar for an associate who promised him cognac in return. See II Section of the Archive Administration of the MoIA, f. 6, d. 29156-72, l. 28.

been as chief (*master*) of "ice cream production" at a restaurant located in the Samtredia train station, in western Georgia.⁸⁷ In more recent years, Elishakahsvili, in the words of one witness, "could always be seen at the Poti bazaar," where he dealt as a buyer and seller of contraband goods. "Abrashka," as Elishakashvili was known in the market, paid thousands of rubles to the sailors, requesting that they bring back gold coins and consumer goods. He then kept the coins and traded the goods through his associates, who sold them to tourists at a resort in Yalta, or had them distributed by "local Gypsy women" in Kutaisi. He was assisted by several other people from his native village, all Georgian Jews, though their network included non-Jews as well. All spoke Georgian as their native language.⁸⁸ One had worked with Elishakashvili in the railways' official trade network in the 1950s, where they began their involvement in contraband trade. Some of Elishakashvili's associates involved in the operation had since left for Israel, and there were indications that Elishakashvili planned to emigrate as well. Perhaps he wanted the gold coins so that he could have a readily convertible form of currency upon leaving the country, assuming he could smuggle them out.⁸⁹

It is difficult to tell why this case was prosecuted when it was; the case gives no indication of the nature or source of the tip that alerted the authorities to the arrival of contraband goods. Elishakashvili may have been subject to greater scrutiny because of his ties to members of the Georgian Jewish community who had recently emigrated. Alternately, the case may have been part of a larger crackdown on illicit economic activity, which accompanied the ouster of Georgian First Secretary Mzhavanadze that same year. Whatever the reason, this case and others show that the KGB's resources were rapidly mobilized when traders crossed international borders, bringing contraband goods into the Soviet Union, or, as Elishakashvili may have hoped to do with his gold coins, smuggling them out again. The state's borders were to be as inviolable as its information regime. As part of a series of reprisals against the smugglers, the head of the investigative unit of the Georgian KGB suggested that all sailors needed to be more carefully screened by the state prior to foreign travel, and that those abroad limited to only 12 hours off the ship at a time, and only during the day.⁹⁰

Negative press attention and the protests of Soviet Russian agencies and enterprises also spurred Georgian authorities to take action against traders in the second economy. On May 16, 1967, the Council of Ministers of the Georgian republic discussed the illicit sale of flowers by Georgians in Moscow's markets. The report of Georgia's Council of Ministers was prepared upon the special request of First Secretary Mzhavanadze, and came in response to numerous complaints of the Moscow City Soviet, letters published in central and local Russian newspapers, and protests of the Moscow-based state flower company, Tsvety.⁹¹ According to the report, since the Moscow City Soviet started allowing flower cultivators to sell flowers directly on the streets of

⁸⁷ II Section of the Archive Administration of the MoIA, f. 6, d. 29150-72, t. 3, l. 2.

⁸⁸ Georgian Jews belong to a community that has lived in Georgia for more than two millennia. Members of this community speak Georgian as their native language, have Georgianized surnames, and share many cultural traditions with their Georgian neighbors. For a detailed study by two Georgian ethnographers, see Zak'aria Chichinadze and Vakhtang Chikovani, *k'art'veli ebralebi sak'art'veloshi* (Tbilisi: Mecniereba, 1990).

⁸⁹ II Section of the Archive Administration of the MoIA, f. 6, d. 29150-72, t. 4, l. 47.

⁹⁰ II Section of the Archive Administration of the MoIA, f. 6, d. 29195-75, t. 2, ll. 180-183.

⁹¹ III Section of the Archive Administration of the MoIA, f. 14, op. 42, d. 318, ll. 10-12.

Moscow, Georgians had begun to dominate the flower market, selling flowers at high prices. These Georgians were not themselves flower cultivators, but were people “without a specific occupation” who transported “large batches of flowers” on numerous back and forth flights between Tbilisi and Moscow. In order to avoid growing public discontent with the sale of flowers at three to four times the price set by the government, the Georgian entrepreneurs were reportedly “employing local citizens” to sell their goods for them in Moscow. In addition, the Moscow flower company lodged a complaint indicating that the illegal sale of so many flowers from Georgia meant that their enterprise had not received the 800,000 flowers it had ordered from Georgia in November and December 1966. The issue continued into the following year: in the first four months of 1967, Georgia neglected to ship 1,000,000 flowers agreed upon in the Moscow flower company’s official contract with the Central Union of Consumer Cooperatives of Georgia (*c’ek’avshiri*).⁹²

In this case, the archival record can be supplemented by observations of everyday life in contemporary Soviet literature. In his novel, *Ostanovite samolet—ia slezu!*, published in West Germany in 1977, Russian Jewish émigré author Efraim Sevela discussed the business of Georgian flower selling when describing the activity of Vakhtang, a Georgian character:

In the Caucasus, where it is summery even in the winter, the price of one flower is at most a kopeck, in Moscow the price is at least a ruble. The profit is one hundredfold. The flight from Tbilisi to Moscow and back is 60 rubles. Vakhtang could pack and press 40,000 flowers into two suitcases. That’s 40,000 rubles. Firm. Expenses: tickets on each end, a hundred or so on girls and restaurants. Well, maybe a couple hundred more for the police and inspectors so that they mind their own business. Everything else: profit.⁹³

It was unimaginable for Soviet citizens to attend parties, celebrations, and be hosted by friends without bearing flowers, and there were very few places in the Soviet Union with the right climate to produce enough flowers to meet Soviet demand. The archival record confirms that flower selling was a large-scale enterprise in the second economy and drew the scrutiny of republic-level authorities in Georgia, although Georgian leaders ultimately refrained from harsh reprisals to combat illicit economic activity. Instead, the Georgian Council of Ministers directed the Central Union of Consumer Cooperatives of Georgia to look into the possibility of opening an official store in Moscow to sell flowers grown in Georgia directly to consumers.⁹⁴

Flower selling was not the only example of how officials turned a blind eye to blossoming economic activity. Under the supervision of First Secretary Mzhavanadze, underground entrepreneurs became especially prominent in Georgian society, building new homes, throwing lavish parties, and even engaging in neighborhood philanthropy.⁹⁵ Some entrepreneurs ran unofficial workshops, where they used state resources to produce

⁹² III Section of the Archive Administration of the MoIA, f. 14, op. 42, d. 318, ll. 10-11.

⁹³ Efraim Sevela, *Ostanovite samolet—ia slezu!* (Munich: Esamtherstellung: F. Zeuner Buch und Offsetdruck, 1977), 22-23.

⁹⁴ III Section of the Archive Administration of the MoIA, f. 14, op. 42, d. 318, l. 12.

⁹⁵ “Shalva” (respondent wished to remain anonymous). Interview by author. Tbilisi, Georgia, November 4, 2008.

cheap consumer goods.⁹⁶ These figures, known as “businessmen” or *del'tsy* (*sak'mosanebi* in Georgian), enriched themselves not only through the sale of key Georgian products, but by identifying and producing less glamorous "niche goods" of the kind that middlemen minorities typically specialize in.⁹⁷ The *del'tsy* were often officially employed as mid-level managers in factories. In reality, they had the run of the factory's operation, bankrolling unauthorized production in consumer goods, which they then distributed for sale throughout the Soviet Union.

The most famous *delets* of the period was Otar Lazishvili. By the late 1960s, Lazishvili presided over an entire production and distribution network, reportedly earning millions of rubles by selling cheap—and illicit—consumer goods throughout the Soviet Union. In Georgia, he ran facilities which produced unauthorized goods made from state-supplied materials, while in Russia his associates distributed his products and made sure bribes were paid to the relevant law enforcement officials.⁹⁸ According to the newspaper *Trud*, which reported on his activities following his arrest several years later, Lazishvili frequently traveled to Moscow, where he would "lay tables for a thousand rubles" whenever his beloved Dinamo Tbilisi soccer team won a game.⁹⁹ The scale of Lazishvili's operation was such that it could not easily be concealed. He had little to worry about in Tbilisi, where officials, including First Secretary Mzhavanadze looked the other way. Lazishvili reportedly gave several gifts to Mzhavanadze's wife, Victoria, who was so well-known for the lavish parties she threw for friends and the “salons” she held with leading cultural and intellectual figures in Georgia that some in Tbilisi jokingly referred to the period of flourishing illicit wealth and official corruption as a Georgian “Victorian Era.”¹⁰⁰ Lazishvili's downfall coincided with the dismissal of Mzhavanadze from his post in 1972 and the rise of Eduard Shevardnadze, who as head of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia led an anti-corruption drive against many Georgian "ruble millionaires" with ties to Mzhavanadze.¹⁰¹

In a confidential report from 1971, Shevardnadze noted the progress he was making in uncovering Lazishvili's underground workshops.¹⁰² Written in a tone guaranteed to please his superiors in Moscow who wanted to reign in Georgia's second economy, Shevardnadze again and again stressed the harmful effect of underground production not only on Georgia, but on the "economic basis of the Soviet government" as a whole. In particular, he targeted factory directors and the *del'tsy* who organized and financed unauthorized production.

⁹⁶ For a fascinating discussion of Georgian underground entrepreneurs and the criminal world of the 1970s, see Fedor Razzakov, *Bandity semidesiatykh, 1970-1979* (Moscow: Eksmo, 2008).

⁹⁷ The term “businessman” in the Soviet context was of course an unofficial one, since private business was banned. The term was, however, used in spoken language and occasionally appears in archival documents when entrepreneurs are accused of large-scale economic crime; Bonacich, “A Theory of Middleman Minorities,” *American Sociological Review* 38:5 (October 1973): 583-94.

⁹⁸ Lazishvili's activities are discussed in Razzakov, *Bandity semidesiatykh, 1970-1979*.

⁹⁹ Cited by the journalist Hedrick Smith, who traveled to Georgia around this time. See Smith, *The Russians* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1976), 128.

¹⁰⁰ She was also sometimes called Queen Tamar, after Georgia's famous medieval queen. William A. Clark, *Crime and Punishment in Soviet Officialdom: Combating Corruption in the Political Elite, 1965-1990* (Armonk: M. E. Sharpe, 1993), 153-155.

¹⁰¹ Smith, *The Russians*, 129-130.

¹⁰² III Section of the Archive Administration of the MoIA, f. 14, op. 45, d. 457, ll. 9-14.

Lazishvili was involved in the illicit production of a host of desirable consumer goods, ranging from turtleneck sweaters and raincoats to beach slippers. Shevardnadze's report targeted perhaps the most prosaic item in Lazishvili's line, easily transportable nylon net bags of various colors. His investigation discovered that Lazishvili in at least one instance had used 460 kilograms of state-owned nylon material to produce 30,000 bags worth 57,000 rubles.¹⁰³ Because the bags were produced with diverted state resources and sold at affordable prices through Lazishvili's trade network, they surely earned the underground entrepreneur a handsome profit.

The banality of this particular item speaks to the peculiarities of the Soviet second economy. The nylon bags were so highly desired because the scarcity of official goods required Soviet citizens to always have a bag on hand in case goods suddenly became available. As Shevardnadze noted in his report, there were theoretically at least 12 workshops in Georgia with the technical capacity to produce this item. Yet the same command economy that caused shortages and long lines could not produce the consumer solution identified by Lazishvili,

As an underground entrepreneur with political connections, Lazishvili had lived a comfortable life spent between Tbilisi and Moscow, and on the Black Sea coast of Abkhazia. He was a Party member and, although he had not finished university, he was officially registered as the associate laboratory director of a major synthetic materials factory.¹⁰⁴ As Shevardnadze's investigation broadened, Lazishvili decided to flee to Moscow, where he reportedly hoped to seek out the protection of Roman Rudenko, the Prosecutor General of the Soviet Union. The KGB, then led by Yuri Andropov, allegedly arrested Lazishvili in Rudenko's outer office; as in the Bedia case which opened this chapter, the KGB intervened and prevailed in a potential contest with another Soviet law enforcement institution.¹⁰⁵ Ultimately, though, the Georgian entrepreneur may have benefited from his connections in the upper echelons of Soviet power.¹⁰⁶ While he was tried and his case made an example in the Soviet press, he escaped the recommended capital punishment and was instead sentenced to 15 years, part of it spent in a medical clinic. The larger implications of the affair were hushed up. Mzhavanadze was quietly removed from the post of Georgian First Secretary, and just as quietly retired as a member of the Politburo. There is no trace of his missteps in the archival record. According to the minutes of a meeting of the Central Committee, the ousted Georgian leader was "relieved of his duties" in the Politburo and placed on a pension due to his "advanced age"; the decision on this "organizational question" was reached unanimously and without mention of his abuses of power, though Brezhnev's silence at the meeting on Mzhavanadze's long period of service to the Party might have been a way of condemning the Georgian Party Secretary with faint praise.¹⁰⁷ None of Lazishvili's associates in Moscow were touched, and the presence of *del'tsy* operating out of Georgia continued to be an issue even after Shevardnadze became First Secretary at the end of 1972. Still, they restrained their activities, and especially their displays of wealth.

¹⁰³ III Section of the Archive Administration of the MoIA, f. 14, op. 45, d. 457, l. 10.

¹⁰⁴ III Section of the Archive Administration of the MoIA, f. 14, op. 45, d. 457, l. 10.

¹⁰⁵ This account of Lazishvili's arrest is given in Clark, *Crime and Punishment in Soviet Officialdom*, 155.

¹⁰⁶ Lazishvili's connections with Soviet officials are discussed in Konstantin Simis, *USSR: The Corrupt Society*, 166-168.

¹⁰⁷ RGANI, f. 2, op. 3, d. 280, l. 62.

Just as the archival record is quiet on the grounds for Mzhavanadze's dismissal, it also provides scant details on the scope of Georgia's second economy, which persisted under Shevardnadze. Crackdowns seemed to occur only when periodic resolutions on the "fight against speculation and the theft of socialist property" were adopted by Georgia's Communist Party and Council of Ministers, or passed down from the center.¹⁰⁸ In response to such resolutions, there were occasional bursts of law enforcement activity, a way of demonstrating that targets were being met and goals fulfilled. Incentives for illicit trading and unauthorized production remained, and despite Shevardnadze's effort to shape public opinion through press reports and television specials on the cost of corruption, Georgian society remained tolerant of economic crime, as the Ministry of Internal Affairs itself noted.¹⁰⁹ Even the mighty Soviet state could not police all of Georgian society, nor was there necessarily the political will to do so. The second economy continued to grow. Reports on periodic law enforcement operations give some sense of the massive scale of Georgia's illicit trade networks in this period, though one can only guess at the extent of illicit economic activity that escaped the attention of the authorities.

A 1980 report detailed large, seemingly well-organized groups of illicit traders and producers involved in smuggling counterfeit Georgian fruit wine to Perm oblast in central Russia.¹¹⁰ According to the report, there were at least five groups of eleven to nineteen members involved in producing, shipping, and selling the counterfeit wine. Regrettably the report gives few biographical details on those involved, but they presumably had connections to managers in the official economy in order to get the materials to produce the wine, and apparently managed to enrich themselves in the process. They reportedly accumulated a "serious amount" of money by producing the wine from goods stolen "on an especially large scale." The authorities apparently only became aware of the operation when several people in Perm oblast fell sick and eventually died after consuming the falsified product. Despite an official crackdown, the report noted that while several people involved in the operation were in custody, others had not yet been brought to justice and even one of those in custody somehow managed to escape temporarily.

Another operation against illicit trading in Georgian agricultural goods was launched in 1982.¹¹¹ The reports generated by this operation indicate continued growth in the scale of illicit Georgian trade networks. The broad scope of the law enforcement operation may have reflected the rise of Yuri Andropov, who after years of heading the KGB succeeded Brezhnev as General Secretary in late 1982. Acting at the direction of

¹⁰⁸ Archival records of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Georgia show that such resolutions were adopted about every five years, with resolutions passed in 1963, 1968, 1974, and 1979. See III Section of the Archive Administration of the MoIA, f. 14, op. 39, 44, 49, and 119. Other resolutions passed in 1972 and 1982 accompanied changes in power.

¹⁰⁹ The use of press reports and television specials to change social attitudes was discussed in a report submitted to the Central Committee of the Georgian Communist Party in 1977. See III Section of the Archive Administration of the MoIA, f. 14, op. 52, d. 720. State concern over permissive social attitudes toward corruption and the widespread failure of Georgians to report economic crimes dated back at least to the mid-1960s, when these trends were first mentioned in an official report. See III Section of the Archive Administration of the MoIA, f. 14, op. 39, d. 409, ll. 132-149.

¹¹⁰ III Section of the Archive Administration of the MoIA, f. 14, op. 119, d. 1142, ll. 1-14.

¹¹¹ III Section of the Archive Administration of the MoIA, f. 14, op. 123, d. 361, ll. 64-68.

the Central Committee, which expressed deepening concern with the theft of agricultural and consumer goods, the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Soviet Union and Georgia's republic-level branch cooperated in an effort to target wrongdoing at "all stages of agricultural production." A series of raids, this time launched by authorities throughout the Soviet Union, arrested Georgian "speculators" operating at collective farm markets in Moscow, Dnepropetrovsk, Riga, Lvov, and other major Soviet cities. An anti-smuggling operation led to the arrest of 50 Georgian "speculators" in Leningrad alone, where they were attempting to sell 35 tons of agricultural goods worth 44,000 rubles. In total, the anti-smuggling operation led to the seizure of more than 10,000 tons of agricultural goods worth more than 400,000 rubles, all of them intended for sale in the second economy. As a result of the operation, the number of cases of smuggling brought before the courts in the first eight months of 1982 was up 10 percent from the previous year. Following Brezhnev's death in November 1982, Andropov launched a broad effort to combat corruption at all levels, severely restricting if not entirely revoking the terms of the "Little Deal."

According to a companion report prepared by the Georgian Central Committee and marked "secret," Georgia still had much distance to cover in eradicating trading in the second economy.¹¹² The report estimated that in the past year those whom it called "lovers of easy profit" attempted to trade 300 tons of citrus, fruits and vegetables from Georgia, including 120 tons at various markets throughout the Soviet Union. The report called for renewed vigilance against those "parasites" who fed off the "healthy body of society." It warned of new tendencies that did not bode well for the anti-corruption drive, including the increasingly open manner in which underground entrepreneurs operated, a factor the report's author attributed to dangerous levels of public tolerance of second economic activity.

The report's Georgian author indicated that the struggle against speculation was imperative to protect Georgia's reputation. He noted that "an uncompromising struggle against speculators involved in transporting agricultural goods beyond the borders of Georgia will boost the reputation of our republic in the country at large, will restore her good name." He went on to describe the fight against speculators as "a matter of honor for all citizens of Soviet Georgia."

A glimpse beyond the archival record is necessary to understand the author's preoccupation with restoring Georgia's "good name." Georgian success in the second economy and the tendency of Georgian entrepreneurs to engage in showy displays of wealth gave them a representational prominence that matched and sometimes exceeded their actual economic clout. Georgian traders became a fixture of contemporary Soviet jokes (*anekdoty*). In some of these jokes, Georgians came to stand in for all ethnically distinct traders from the Caucasus in Soviet markets, whether they were in reality Georgians, Armenians, or Azeris. Thanks to centuries of cultural exchange between Russia and Georgia, and given the prominence of the Georgian diaspora in Soviet politics and culture, the script of presumed Georgian behavior in such jokes was more fully developed than it was for other ethnic groups.¹¹³ For a joke to be effective, for example, it

¹¹² Filed in the same *delo*: III Section of the Archive Administration of the MoIA, f. 14, op. 123, d. 361, l. 103.

¹¹³ Draitser describes how "Georgian" was a catch-all phrase for all of these groups, though he notes that by the 1980s jokes about Georgians began to be replaced with more general jokes about "moustached

had to be told in a believable Georgian accent, a speech pattern familiar to all Soviets thanks in part to the well-known speeches of Stalin broadcast to the public during his rule. It might be argued that ethnic jokes tell us as much about those who tell them as they do about the ethnic group at the butt of the joke.¹¹⁴ Nevertheless, jokes told about Georgians reflected, however distortedly, real cultural differences between Russians and Georgians.¹¹⁵

The anecdotal preoccupation of Georgians with honor and conspicuous consumption in jokes seems an exaggeration of attributes essential to the functioning of Georgian networks. In one joke, a Georgian residing in Russia buys a subcompact *Zaporozhets* car, the cheapest automobile then made in the Soviet Union, only to find it stolen the next morning. The next day, he buys the same car again (incidentally avoiding the waiting lists that most Soviets would have to contend with), leaving a note on the dashboard addressed to prospective thieves asking that he be allowed to “drive about a bit” (*daite khot’ nemnogo pokatat’sia*). The next day, he awakes to find a luxurious *Volga* sedan outside his home, with a note reading: “drive about, friend, but don’t bring shame to our nation” (*kataisia, daragoi [sic] no ne pozor’ natsiiu*).¹¹⁶ In a related joke, a Georgian student writes home to Georgia, telling his parents that studies are going well but he feels “awkward” because “All [his] Russian friends come to school by bus, and [he] is the only one coming in his own car.” To which his parents answer: “Sonny [*synok*], why should you stand out from the others? Be like everyone else. Go ahead and buy yourself a bus.”¹¹⁷ The wealth of Georgian entrepreneurs, it was held, was displayed in fabulous performances of consumption and spending that were unthinkable—if not impossible—for those outside a Georgian network.

Other jokes linked open displays of Georgian wealth with the widespread practice of bribery in Georgia. Universities in Georgia, it was alleged, were notoriously corrupt; one joke has a young Georgian buying his way into the musical conservatory, though he is unable to identify a single note in his entrance exam.¹¹⁸ In another joke, the exam “tickets” used to indicate question assignments for oral examinations are reportedly “sold out.”¹¹⁹ In Georgian society, where economic exchange was ritualized and affluence an asset, making payments in exchange for access to higher education might not have been seen as such a flagrant violation of law and morality. To refer to two documented cases discussed above, Bedia himself paid a bribe to have his son admitted to an institution of

southerners” or “persons of Caucasian nationality.” See Draitser, 37. Perhaps the later shift reflected the development of a more generalized prejudice that accompanied growing ethnic tension in the North and South Caucasus.

¹¹⁴ Such an argument is put forward by Christie Davies in his article, “Ethnic Jokes, Moral Values and Social Boundaries,” *British Journal of Sociology* 33: 3 (September 1982): 383-403.

¹¹⁵ In his study of the representation of the traditionally hunter-gatherer peoples of northern Eurasia, Yuri Slezkine suggests that the way these groups were depicted reflected an actual gap between the nomadic and sedentary ways of life. See Slezkine, *Arctic Mirrors: Russia and the Small Peoples of the North* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1994), 390.

¹¹⁶ A. I. Ural’skii, ed. *Anekdoty. Gruzii—strana millionerov* (Moscow: Svetlana, 1996), 4. Ural’skii’s collection is dedicated exclusively to jokes about Georgians.

¹¹⁷ Translated in Draitser, 44, from L. A. Barskii, *Eto prosto smeshno ili zerkalo krivogo korolevstva* (Moscow: Kh. G. S., 1994), 191-192. For variations, see Iosif Raskin, *Entsiklopediia khuliganstvuiushchego ortodoksa* (St. Petersburg: Ekho, 1995), 160-161, and Ural’skii, 29.

¹¹⁸ Ural’skii, 18; see also Raskin, 161, cited in Draitser, 44.

¹¹⁹ Ural’skii, 17.

higher education in Volgograd, and the Georgian sailors caught smuggling goods into the Soviet Union pleaded with their captors that they did so only to finance their children's education.¹²⁰

Combined with a careful reading of the archival record, jokes provide the texture and everyday details of how Georgian success was perceived in the Soviet Union. In the jokes, Georgian economic clout was often exaggerated and the full context of Georgian culture misunderstood. But perceptions of Georgian economic activity were not entirely uninformed, nor can they be discounted as the product of an imperial imagination alone. The jokes' silences reveal almost as much as their embellished accounts of Georgian wealth. Georgian women, for example, were almost entirely missing from Soviet jokes. Their absence reflected real patterns of migration; although there were Georgian women in the diaspora and Georgian women performed essential functions in a Georgian network, it was far more common for Georgian men to travel far from their homeland to work and study, or to bring Georgian agricultural goods to market.¹²¹

Jokes that poked fun at the Georgian preoccupation with honor and the ostentatious wealth of Georgian entrepreneurs were seen as disgraceful by officials in Georgia concerned with corruption, as well as by some segments of Georgian society that did not wish to be associated with these practices. Eduard Shevardnadze reportedly lamented at a closed Party meeting in the 1970s that: "Once the Georgians were known throughout the world as a nation of warriors and poets; now they are known as swindlers."¹²² In Georgian culture, wealth was only a means for gaining prestige; economic success itself did not automatically denote honor in the Georgian context. Some members of Tbilisi's intelligentsia tolerated illicit economic activity but limited their contact with underground entrepreneurs. Neighborhood loyalties meant that university professors might continue to greet entrepreneurs who lived on their street, but would be embarrassed to have shadowy traders appear at their house for dinner in "polite company."¹²³ In addition, Georgian culture celebrated risk taking and the ability to provide for those in one's network, but gave less esteem to the everyday details of trading. Accordingly, well-established Georgian entrepreneurs sometimes employed other ethnic groups to sell their goods in Soviet markets.¹²⁴

In Georgia, moral character was still of primary importance, especially among thieves. One could be honest, it was believed, while breaking the law. The alleged Georgian criminal authority Dzhaba Ioseliani was supposedly the inspiration for

¹²⁰ One of the Georgian sailors involved in smuggling luxury goods into the Soviet Union pleaded with interrogators that his actions were guided by a father's concern for his children's education: "Wanting to give the children a higher education, I did what I could to provide them with material support." II Section of the Archive Administration of the MoIA, f. 6, d. 29195-75, t. 1, ll. 95-98. A ring organized by a Georgian in Moscow which accepted bribes ranging from \$1600 to \$18,870 from eager Georgian parents hoping to have their children enter the capital's top medical and technical institutes was described in an article published in the US magazine *Time*, entitled "Getting Ahead in Moscow," August 17, 1962. An additional reason that Georgians may have had to resort to bribes was that they were required to take entrance exams for top Soviet universities in Russian, not Georgian.

¹²¹ Mars and Altman, 57.

¹²² Quoted in Konstantin Simis, *USSR: The Corrupt Society*, 53.

¹²³ "Shalva" (surname withheld by author). Interview by author. Tbilisi, Georgia, November 4, 2008.

¹²⁴ Curiously, while many Georgians considered the ability to provide for others in their network as essential to social prestige, some viewed market trading as a "low" occupation. "Tsitsia" (surname withheld by author). Interview by author. Moscow, Russia, July 17, 2006.

Georgian novelist Nodar Dumabdze's character Limona Devdariani in the prison novel *White Flags*. In the novel, Devdariani is described as morally honest "thief-in-law" (*vor v zakone*).¹²⁵ It is widely held that by the Brezhnev era Georgians were over-represented among Soviet "thieves-in-law," crime bosses whose networks stretched across the Soviet Union.¹²⁶ Ioseliani's refusal to cooperate with authorities, his wild risk taking, and his loyalty to friends in Georgia gained him respect, even among Georgia's intelligentsia. After serving time in Russia for manslaughter and a series of thefts at Moscow's Main Department Store (GUM), he was allowed to return to Georgia thanks to an appeal submitted by that country's leading cultural figures. Ioseliani's career is a rather literal example of the performative repertoire of Georgian entrepreneurs. Leaving his Russian prison for Tbilisi, he would go on to become a professor at the Georgian Institute of Theater Arts, writing a doctoral dissertation entitled *The Comic Masks of Georgian Theater*. At the same time, he reportedly persuaded the Soviet Union's "thieves-in-law" to play a more active role in the official economy.¹²⁷

Georgian Entrepreneurs and the Tensions of Empire

Hedrick Smith, a *New York Times* reporter traveling in the Soviet Union in the mid-1970s, told of the following joke popular among Russians during the time of his visit:

A little Georgian...was on an Aeroflot airliner bound for Moscow when a hijacker broke into the cockpit, brandished a pistol and demanded that the plane go to London. The pilot changed course and soon a second hijacker, with two guns, burst in and ordered the pilot to head for Paris. Another change of course. Finally, the wiry little olive-skinned Georgian entered with a bomb and declared, "Take this plane to Moscow or I'll blow it up." The pilot agreed, and changed course a third time. When they landed in Moscow, the first two hijackers were carted off to jail and the little Georgian was congratulated by a high-level delegation.

"Tell us, Comrade," said one slightly incredulous dignitary, "Why did you divert the plane from Paris back to Moscow?"

¹²⁵ Nodar Dumbadze, *Belye flagy: roman* (Tbilisi: Merani, 1974).

¹²⁶ The "thieves-in-law" emerged as criminal leaders in the Soviet Gulag no later than the 1930s. Their development is chronicled in Federico Varese, "The Society of the Vory-v-Zakone, 1930s-1950s," *Cahiers du Monde Russe* (1998): 515-538. According to law enforcement estimates, in the late Soviet period Georgians made up 30 to 50 percent of all "thieves-in-law." See listing of known "thieves-in-law" in Georgii Podlesskikh and Andrei Tereshenok, *Vory v zakone: brosov k vlasti* (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1994) and listing of known Georgian "thieves-in-law" in G. Glonti, G. Lobzhanidze, *Vory v zakone: professional'naia prestupnost' v Gruzii* (Tbilisi: Poligraf, 2004), 191-206. Allegations that Georgians continue to control Moscow's underworld are routinely made in the contemporary Russian press, a notion occasionally endorsed by top Russian officials. See Steven Lee Myers, "Russia Deports Georgians and Increases Pressures on Businesses and Students," *The New York Times*, October 7, 2006, accessed April 27, 2011, <http://www.nytimes.com/2006/10/07/world/europe/07moscow.html>.

¹²⁷ He was transferred to a Georgian prison following an appeal by the stage and film actors Sergo Zakariadze and Medea Dzhaparidze, both People's Artists of the USSR. After his release, he completed his studies, wrote his dissertation, and published several works of fiction and theater criticism. In 1982, he reportedly presided over a Union-wide meeting of "thieves-in-law" in Tbilisi, convincing criminal leaders to abandon their traditional scorn for participation in the official economy. This contradictory individual and alleged leader of the criminal underworld went on to become the leader of the *Mkhedrioni* paramilitary band and a major figure in Georgian politics in the 1990s. See G. Glonti, G. Lobzhanidze, *Vory v zakone: professional'naia prestupnost' v Gruzii*, 79-84.

What was I going to do with 5,000 carnations in Paris?” the Georgian replied.¹²⁸

The joke alluded to several important dimensions of Georgian illicit trading in the Soviet period. First, the trading occurred in a closed society, one which citizens may have wanted to leave but could not, and one whose command economy created strange incentives for moneymaking based on the sale of prosaic goods like carnations. Second, because of Georgian involvement in illicit trading, Moscow was for such entrepreneurs a city of opportunity, not the capital of a repressive state. Third, and perhaps not immediately evident in the joke, high-ranking officials often turned a blind eye to illicit Georgian economic activity. Despite his intent to illegally sell flowers, the Georgian ends up being congratulated by the authorities, while the other two hijackers are sent to prison.

Because of Georgia's unique position within the political economy of the Soviet Union, numerous opportunities were indeed created for entrepreneurs to trade desired Georgian goods throughout the Soviet Union. Unlike other so-called middlemen minorities, such as Jews and Armenians, Georgian entrepreneurs often retained a connection to the land where many of their goods were grown, and this link was vital for their ability to bring these desired products to Russian markets.¹²⁹ The ties between the official and unofficial Georgian economy—much like the links between Georgian private entrepreneurs and state officials—were close if not altogether indistinguishable. Flowers grown on a state farm might be illegally sold in Moscow, wine produced in a Georgian factory might be illicitly traded in Siberia, citrus fruits grown for a collective farm might unexpectedly brighten a winter market in Leningrad.

The “Little Deal” opened up new opportunities for Georgia’s traders and underground entrepreneurs. But the “deal” itself was a constant process of negotiation, and the fact that its terms were unspoken served to lessen but not eliminate inherent ideological and political tensions. Entrepreneurs whose operations grew too large, too flashy, or threatened central control were prosecuted, but exactly where the limits of acceptability lay was always subject to question. Central control was weaker the further one moved from the center, especially so in Georgia under the rule of Party Secretary Vasily Mzhavanadze, where ethnic and linguistic difference, an entrepreneurial propensity for risk taking, and economic exchange through social networks for a time combined to create a corner of the Soviet Union which seemed distinctly un-Soviet. It was not, as contemporaries joked, the Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic, but instead the “FRG,” the “Federal Republic of Georgia,” where living standards and liberties were greater and opportunities more abundant than in the center.¹³⁰

The goods and services provided by the Georgians were desired, and often required, by Soviet citizens. But in a Soviet empire based upon the centralized rule of Moscow and the leading role of the Russian people, the success of these southerners and the independent streak of their homeland strained the imperial order. The efforts of Soviet

¹²⁸ Hedrick Smith, *The Russians*, 126-127.

¹²⁹ Bonacich, “A Theory of Middleman Minorities,” 583-94; see also Yuri Slezkine, *The Jewish Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004) for a stimulating discussion of market-oriented “Mercurians” and their relationship to agriculturally-oriented “Apollonians.”

¹³⁰ The term is, of course, a play on the Soviet bloc’s capitalist nemesis, the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG); see Draitser, 42.

central planners to establish Georgia as a supplier of subtropical goods resulted in creeping local control over these products and the virtual colonization of Russian markets by Georgian traders who dealt them through legal and illegal channels. The Georgians, it was held, lived like kings in Georgia and princes in Moscow, their economic success coming at the heels of several decades during which the Soviet Union had been led by the Stalin, the most famous representative of the Georgian nation.

The Georgians were certainly not alone in taking part in the burgeoning second economy. During the “Little Deal,” millions of Soviet citizens relied on personal connections to obtain scarce goods and services, bartered, and bribed to get what they needed or desired. Using public property for personal gain and relying on personal relationships rather than official ones—in other words, corruption—was part and parcel of the Soviet system under Brezhnev, from the lowest-level bureaucrat or plant manager to the leader’s own son-in-law.¹³¹ It seemed to many at the time, though, that smaller, ethnically distinct groups with the ability to construct effective social and economic networks were better at operating in this system than were those who made up the majority, leaving the Russians as supposed second-class citizens in their own country.¹³² In half-jest, some in Soviet Russia rhetorically asked: “Can a Georgian purchase a *Volga*?” (a Soviet luxury automobile, and also the main river running through the Russian heartland). And then answered: “He can. But what does he need so much water for?”¹³³ “Mother Russia” herself, it was implied, was being bought up by outsiders. As traders who profited off the material and symbolic wealth of their native republic only to make inroads into Russian economy and society, Georgian traders could at time seem like an affront to the Soviet system. Yet the success of the Georgians was made possible by the system’s own peculiar features: a northerly geographic position, a closed economy, an emphasis on ethnicity, and an opening for a unique diaspora held together by ties of family, friendship, and homeland.

¹³¹ Brezhnev’s son-in-law, Yuri Churbanov, acting in collusion with republic-level ministers in the Uzbek SSR, enriched himself and others by selling thousands of tons of Uzbek cotton to the state that were never in fact produced. He was prosecuted following the death of Brezhnev as part of Yuri Andropov’s campaign to restore order and discipline in the Party. See William A. Clark, *Crime and Punishment in Soviet Officialdom: Combating Corruption in the Political Elite, 1965-1990*, 185-187.

¹³² Constructing effective social networks that can be used to facilitate economic change is a common feature of what are known as “trade diasporas.” Unlike more traditionally referenced trade diasporas like Jews and Armenians, the Georgians were distinct in that they acquired this specialized role for the first time in the Soviet period. For a comparative view, see Philip D. Curtin, *Cross-Cultural Trade in World History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984).

¹³³ Translated in Draitser, 54; for a variation, see Ural’skii, 11.

Chapter 6

The Georgian Intelligentsia and the Limits of Soviet Empire

Dreams of Flying

The wedding party was made up of painters, actors, artists, and doctors, the children of Georgia's leading intellectual families. After a long night of celebration in a Tbilisi restaurant, the group made its way to the airport on the morning of November 18, 1983. They boarded Aeroflot flight 6833, one of the many flights operating daily between Georgia and Russia. The bride, Tinatin Petriashvili, an undergraduate student at Tbilisi's Fine Arts Academy, and the groom, Germane "Gega" Kobakhidze, a successful young film actor, had informed family members that they would spend their honeymoon among the canals and theaters of Leningrad, accompanied by their close friends, painters Davit Mikaberidze and Gia Tabidze, as well as the young art student Soso Tsereteli, Tinatin's classmate at the Fine Arts Academy. The brothers Kakha and Paata Iverieli, both doctors educated in Moscow, boarded the plane with the group to see them off.

What appeared to be an innocent escapade was in fact a desperate and ultimately tragic attempt to take flight beyond Soviet borders. The wedding party's plan to hijack and divert the plane abroad was doomed almost from the start.¹ They were, after all, a group of artists and intellectuals who represented the relatively privileged bohemian subculture of the Georgian intellectual elite. Their plot to escape the Soviet Union had been hatched at gatherings in centrally-located apartments, where they decorated the walls with painted images of the American flag and listened to the Rolling Stones and Led Zeppelin. Photos taken of the group in the weeks and months before show them walking the streets of downtown Tbilisi dressed in American blue jeans, smoking foreign cigarettes given to them by friends and relatives with official connections abroad. Looking back on the hijacking incident, many members of the Georgian intelligentsia would see the group's ill-fated effort to flee the Soviet Union as evocative of Eldar Shengelaia and Revaz Gabriadze's 1973 film *The Eccentrics (sherekilebi)*, a fantastical tale of an idealistic young man and an elderly mathematician who dream of freedom while locked in an underground cell, plotting an improbable escape in a whimsical flying machine.

Their plan, however unrealistic, was to wait until the plane took off, then demand that the flight change course and land in Turkey, where they hoped to find sanctuary at an American military base. Although they had smuggled small pistols and a couple of hand-grenades onto the plane, they were unprepared when they encountered armed resistance upon entering the pilot's cabin. The painter Gia Tabidze was killed almost immediately, while the brothers Kakha and Paata Iverieli were wounded. An ensuing firefight resulted in the deaths of several crew members and passengers caught in the crossfire. Instead of acceding to the hijackers' demands, the pilot launched into a tight spiral above Tbilisi, eventually bringing the plane back to the runway. Davit Mikaberidze committed suicide as it became clear that the group's desperate attempt had failed. A Soviet special forces

¹ This account of the hijacking attempt and the subsequent convictions is based upon official documents gathered by the Archive Administration of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia and catalogued online, accessed October 15, 2010, http://archive.security.gov.ge/jinsebis_taoba.php.

unit sent specially from Moscow stormed the aircraft, riddling the cabin with bullets and seizing the surviving members of the errant wedding party.

The event, and the resulting death sentences handed down for most of the hijackers, shocked the Georgian intelligentsia. Following a brief investigation, Gega Kobakhidze, the Iverieli brothers, and Teimuraz Chikhladze, a former film actor who called himself “Father Tevdore” and was accused of being the group’s spiritual mentor, were executed in a field outside the Georgian capital. Although the executions were carried out in secret, the news spread quickly among Tbilisi’s closely-knit intellectual and artistic community. An effort by Vazha Iverieli, a prominent Georgian physicist, to intervene on behalf of his sons came to nothing, despite the fact that he personally knew Georgian First Secretary Eduard Shevardnadze. Gega Kobakhidze’s close friendship with Irakli Charkviani, the grandson of Kandid Charkviani, the longtime Party chief of Georgia, similarly failed to prevent execution. At Georgia’s vaunted national film studio, the production of Tengiz Abuladze’s new film, *Repentance (monanieba)*, was temporarily halted; the ideologically risqué film was further scrutinized for its association with Kobakhidze, the young groom and lead hijacker, who had been slated to play the despondent grandson of the tyrannical dictator Varlam Aravidze in the movie. Almost two decades later, the decision to execute the hijackers remained a point of contention between the intelligentsia and Shevardnadze, who would later become president of an independent Georgia. In 2001, Georgian writer Davit Turashvili wrote a play based on the event, titled *Jeans Generation (jinsebis taoba)*, a critical study of frustrated intellectual aspirations in the late Soviet period.²

Like the Soviet Russian intelligentsia described by historian Vladislav Zubok, the Soviet Georgian intelligentsia was a loose coalition of intellectuals who espoused an eclectic set of ideological beliefs. They engaged in a diverse set of tactics in their relationship with the Soviet state, which supported, but also restricted, their artistic and intellectual pursuits. The hijackers were a rare case of intellectuals taking public action. In fact, most of the Georgian intelligentsia in the late Soviet period were not outspoken in their criticism of the state and the shortcomings of society; instead, the majority sought sheltered “oases” where they could pursue their intellectual interests, or expressed their criticism obliquely as “semi-dissidents” frustrated with the system but unwilling to lose their professional positions.³ Georgian discontent with the limitations of success in the Soviet empire did not come fully into the open until *perestroika*, when it raised important implications for the future of the Soviet Union.

That frustration among the Georgian intelligentsia ran so high may seem paradoxical, given the remarkable prominence that Georgians had achieved at each stage of Soviet history. As the preceding chapters have demonstrated, Georgians were avid members of the revolutionary movement and took active part in constructing the Soviet state; around the table and on stage they produced the culture that defined Soviet life; and in the marketplace they provided desired goods and services, both licit and illicit. If Georgians were so skilled at employing their social networks to capitalize on the culture,

² Turashvili later developed the play into a novel, which he published in 2008. See Turashvili, *jinsebis taoba* (Tbilisi: Bakur Sulakauri, 2008).

³ Vladislav Zubok, *Zhivago’s Children: The Last Russian Intelligentsia* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 2009). Zubok emphasizes the fact that most of the intelligentsia throughout the Soviet Union either found oases or occupied the liminal category of being semi-dissidents. Zubok, 322-323.

reputation, and unique geographic position of their native republic, why would the children of privileged Georgians seek to escape the Soviet Union?

While the last chapter looked at the era of “stagnation” (*zastoi*) from the perspective of the second economy, this chapter looks at the same period—and its aftermath—from the perspective of the intelligentsia. The late Soviet period was not only a time of economic and social change below the surface of a sluggish official economy; it was also an era of restive intellectual life set against a backdrop of repetitive political slogans and a bureaucratic political culture.⁴ The Soviet Union had transformed a rural, largely illiterate society into one of the world’s most educated populations, but the gains of the Soviet intelligentsia seemed to heighten their frustration with the party officials who ruled the Soviet Union and made the final decisions when it came to intellectual matters. As artists achieved new levels of high culture virtuosity and technical specialists sought to expand the frontiers of Soviet science, they found their success soured by restrictions on creative expression, research, and international travel. The party’s claim to a monopoly on truth had eroded with the end of Stalinism; after the Thaw, the gap between party officials and intellectuals widened even further. Emboldened scientists drew newfound authority from their expertise, and alienated intellectuals turned away from political life to find morality in art, film, and literature.

Among the Soviet Union’s internal diasporas, national intelligentsias grew increasingly self-conscious and dissatisfied with the level of autonomy allowed them by the state. By training highly-educated national cadres, the Soviet empire produced its intellectual opponents. The Soviet state endowed each republic with its own opera house and printing press, endorsed a pantheon of national artistic figures, and sponsored national film studios. Classical musicians, scientists, and film directors from the republics were invited to study in Moscow and circulated throughout the Soviet Union thanks to an infrastructure of intellectual exchange sponsored by the state. While the Georgians excelled at the skillful manipulation of national forms in the production of sanctioned forms of ethnic Soviet entertainment, Georgia’s national intelligentsia also achieved mastery of the pan-Soviet language of high culture and, thus emboldened, began to engage in a critique of the limitations of Soviet empire, expressed in both particular and universal terms.

Members of the Georgian intelligentsia went beyond the performance of Georgianness, yet openly appealed to longstanding national traditions to claim a privileged position in Soviet artistic and intellectual life. Georgian high culture had a broader resonance than the cultures of other nationalities because it was known to possess a well-established pedigree, springing from institutions that often preceded the Soviet state. Georgian classical music and theater had developed under the auspices of Russian imperial culture, and, as a result, their forms were familiar to Russian intellectuals. At the same time, Georgians were more comfortable than Russians in appealing to the national. As uneasy representatives of the Soviet empire’s ambiguous national core, members of the Russian intelligentsia were divided into “left-liberals” espousing universal values and “Russian patriots” who sought to rekindle a connection to the Russian land, turning for

⁴ For a compelling study of the late Soviet Union as a seemingly unchanging system of public discourse that nevertheless produced diverse and sometimes unpredictable meanings, see Alexei Yurchak, *Everything was Forever, Until it was No More: The Last Soviet Generation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006).

inspiration to the Russian village and Russian Orthodoxy.⁵ When it came to late Soviet intellectual life, the Georgians were once again the Soviet empire's familiar strangers. They did not have to choose between anti-nationalist universalism and a sense of national authenticity; instead, they had access a high culture that was both cosmopolitan in its humanist aspirations and rooted in its connection to Georgian history. Theirs was a mode of intellectual expression that could speak for a diverse empire, whether to celebrate cultural achievement or to criticize the Soviet Union's failings.

This chapter will examine the Georgian intelligentsia as group moving from virtuosic mastery of high culture to skepticism of a Soviet system that celebrated cultural achievement yet stifled intellectual expression. It will focus primarily on the two areas of Soviet cultural life in which Georgians were most prominent, classical music and film, using these fields to illuminate broader intellectual trends. Perhaps of all the areas of Soviet creative life, music and film offered the best opportunities for those seeking both artistic prominence and intellectual freedom.⁶ Musical conservatories and film studios were small but noticeable niches that gave Georgian artists entry into a cosmopolitan culture of international creative exchange. Georgian classical musicians rose to the highest positions in Moscow's Bolshoi Theater, while Georgian film expressed the larger concerns of the Soviet intelligentsia, grounding poignant critique in a national setting. Taking the study of Georgian intellectual life from the era of *zastoi* to the last years of Soviet power, this chapter will reveal how the private critique and irony of the age of stagnation eventually shifted to the outspoken criticism of the era of *perestroika*.

Beyond the Ethnic Repertoire: High Culture Virtuosity

During the era of stagnation, artists and intellectuals achieved new levels of high culture virtuosity in officially-sanctioned forms of art and knowledge. Although the state restricted overtly political expression, it continued to nurture cultural and intellectual achievement, especially in classical music and applied science, and tolerated oases of intellectual creativity in areas not directly related to political life. While wary of dissident intellectuals, the state upheld cultural development and scientific progress as ideals for all Soviet citizens. The state's ideological stance in this regard was shared by many members of the Soviet intelligentsia, who claimed a leading role as bearers of knowledge and culture. High culture virtuosity had its limits, in that its canon was largely classical and fixed in scope to specific artistic works and established fields of knowledge. Within these limits, Soviet intellectuals attained new heights of sophistication in existing forms and found private spaces of creativity, the logical endpoints of a system whose outward surface was unchanging.

For Georgians, high culture virtuosity was a path that led beyond the explicitly Georgian cultural repertoire. While national cultures were celebrated in the Soviet Union, high culture was cherished as the pinnacle of human achievement. Moreover, although Russian contributions were particularly celebrated in the Soviet context, high culture was seen as a truly transnational phenomenon. The Soviet high culture canon—one largely

⁵ The terms are from Zubok, *Zhivago's Children*, 226-258.

⁶ See Peter J. Schmelz, *Such Freedom, If Only Musical: Unofficial Soviet Music during the Thaw* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2009); on similar developments in cinema, see Josephine Woll, *Real Images: Soviet Cinema and the Thaw* (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2000).

inherited from the imperial period—including Bach and Mozart as well as the Russian Tchaikovsky, Shakespeare and Goethe as well as Pushkin. It celebrated the concept of genius in all its manifestations, from art to science. The state may not have succeeded in creating a multiethnic Soviet people (*Sovetskii narod*), but it did nurture a cosmopolitan imperial culture that the intelligentsias of all Soviet republics held sacred. This cosmopolitan culture flourished most of all in multiethnic Moscow and Leningrad, but also thrived in institutes, universities, and conservatories outside the center, in places like the Siberian intellectual city of Akademgorodok, built outside Novosibirsk in 1957, the University of Tartu in Estonia, and, as will be discussed, the Tbilisi Conservatory.⁷ The first was a Soviet-era creation, the latter two built on pre-revolutionary intellectual and artistic foundations.

Even as Soviet political life came to be dominated by ethnic Russians in the post-Stalinist era, the upwardly-mobile children of non-Russian Soviet professionals found a sense of imperial belonging through participation in high culture. Fluency in Russian was required for entry into this vaunted realm, although minority ethnic groups like the Jews, Armenians, and Georgians, who earlier had succeeded in politics and now were prominent among white-collar professions, were overrepresented in Soviet high culture.⁸ While Jews and Armenians built on a diasporic history of pursuing specialized professions—including those in the cultural sphere—by employing portable skills, the Georgians represented a distinctive blend of cosmopolitan yearning and upwardly-mobile aspirations, matched with a sense of belonging within the European cultural tradition on their own terms.⁹

Georgian prominence in Soviet high culture had a long historical trajectory. While never casting aside Georgian cultural traditions, the Georgian intelligentsia was comfortable participating in European artistic and intellectual life through the medium of Russian culture, a process begun in the nineteenth century and one that remained well-suited to the Soviet context, where world literature was discussed in Russian translation and much higher-education instruction carried out in the Russian language. In many ways, the Soviet cosmopolitan world of high culture possessed a sense of continuity with the imperial court culture of pre-revolutionary Russia. Unlike other national groups seeking entry to the temples of Soviet high culture—most notably Soviet Jews—Georgian intellectuals could claim symbolic—and sometimes actual—descent from the Georgian aristocratic poets and musicians who participated actively in nineteenth-century Russian imperial intellectual life.¹⁰ They could also claim status as representatives of an

⁷ On the salience of the University of Tartu, see the forthcoming dissertation by David Ilmar Beecher, “Tartu University and its Languages: The Soviet Union’s Ivory Tower of Babel in the Baltic, 1944-1991” (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Berkeley, forthcoming).

⁸ On the professional success and high culture aspirations of Armenians living in Moscow in the late Soviet period, see Iu. V. Arutiunian, “Armiane-moskvichi. Sotsial’nyi portret po materialam etnosotsiologicheskogo isledovaniia,” *Sovetskaia etnografiia* 2 (1991): 3-16. Among the interesting measures of Armenian success noted by Arutiunian: Armenians Muscovites were twice as likely to have a piano in their home as ethnic Russian residents of the capital.

⁹ On transportable occupations, see Edna Bonacich, “A Theory of Middlemen Minorities,” *American Sociological Review* 38: 5 (October 1973): 583-594.

¹⁰ In *The Jewish Century*, Yuri Slezkine discusses the Soviet Jewish embrace of the high culture canon. While Soviet Jewish children were raised on Shakespeare, Goethe, Pushkin, Chekhov, Turgenev, and others, unlike Georgians they laid little claim to high cultural production grounded in a national territory,

ancient cultural lineage that was famed not for an oral folk tale, such as the Armenian *Daredevils of Sassoun (Sasna Dzerer)*, but for Shota Rustaveli's *Knight in the Panther's Skin (vepkhistqaosani)*, an authored twelfth-century Georgian poetic epic, which, according to Soviet scholars, prefigured Dante.¹¹ While Georgian culture had been nurtured by the Soviet state along with other Soviet national cultures, it was not seen as a Soviet-era fabrication, but instead a vital tradition with ancient roots and a justifiable claim to a place in the European high culture canon.

The growing prominence of Georgians in Soviet artistic and intellectual life, a trend most apparent in the sphere of classical music, but also noticeable in science and medicine, was further propelled by prior Georgian successes in Soviet politics, economics, and ethnic cultural production. The children of party officials and entrepreneurs were raised in an atmosphere that emphasized the attainment of cultural sophistication to match their parents' political and economic success. Accordingly, they were sent to musical conservatories, art institutes, and leading Soviet universities. Stalin's daughter took up work as a literary translator, while Beria's son pursued a career as a physicist. The son of the Georgian Old Bolshevik Vano Sturua became a painter and his grandson, Robert Sturua, gained fame as a theater director known for his productions of Shakespeare. Bulat Okudzhava, the son of a Georgian father and an Armenian mother, both fervent communists, traded the triumphant choruses of his parents' generation for reflective poems set to music, played solo on an acoustic guitar. Party bosses and enterprise managers in Tbilisi now considered it the "highest prestige" to have their daughters teach piano classes at the Tbilisi State Conservatory, regardless of their musical talents, and used every connection to get them a job there.¹² In the Georgian capital, the funding provided by Moscow to develop Georgian theaters and film studios as models of national cultural achievement created sophisticated centers of cultural production, whose directors sought out diverse artistic influences and produced works for a broader Soviet audience.

Even as Georgian political prominence waned after the Second World War and the subsequent demise of Stalin and his circle of Caucasian intimates, Georgians sought out new ways to take advantage of the Soviet Union's educational and cultural infrastructure. By 1961, residents of the Georgian SSR had the highest per capita levels of higher education degrees of any Soviet republic and the highest republic-level rates of advanced education among both men and women in the USSR, at almost twice the national Soviet average.¹³ In actual numbers, Georgians only came in behind the much more numerous Russian and Ukrainian populations when it came to the highest number of Soviets representing a titular republic with doctoral (both *doktor nauk* and *kandidat nauk*) degrees, as well the greatest number of practicing medical doctors with higher

later exposing them to charges of "rootless cosmopolitanism." See Slezkine, *The Jewish Century*, 238-242, 308-313.

¹¹ In Beso Zhgenti's introduction to the 1950 edition of Rustaveli's work, the poem was even claimed to be the first "humanistic" work of the medieval world, given its emphasis on love, human emotion, and the idea of justice and freedom from slavery. Shota Rustaveli, *Vitiaz' v tigrovoi shkure*, trans. N. Zabolotskii, introduction by Beso Zhgenti (Moscow and Leningrad: Detgiz, 1950), 9.

¹² According to a conductor long affiliated with the Tbilisi State Conservatory. Interview by author. Tbilisi, September 19, 2008.

¹³ TsSU SSSR, *Vysshee obrazovanie v SSSR: statisticheskii sbornik* (Moscow: Gosstatizdat TsSU SSSR, 1961), 30-31.

education degrees.¹⁴ Remarkably, the number of physicians in Georgia tripled in the period between 1941 and 1959.¹⁵ Soviet Komsomol records show that Georgians had decent success in Union-wide competitions for the opportunity to study in Russia, and noted the tendency of some students from the Caucasus to apply for study in Siberian institutes, where the competition was less fierce, before transferring to a more prestigious higher education institution in Moscow or Leningrad.¹⁶ Many who studied in Moscow sought to remain there upon graduation, forging a life in the Soviet capital not defined by any sense of performative ethnicity, but rather by specialized expertise in medicine, mathematics, architecture, literature, philosophy, and music.

By the 1960s and 1970s, the Georgians were not only overrepresented among Soviet white-collar professionals in general, but had moved to the forefront of a number of visible fields requiring a high level of training. Georgian surgeons occupied some of the leading positions in Moscow's hospitals, among them the cardiologist Leo Bokeria, who arrived in Moscow in 1965 to study at the Moscow State Medical University and by 1977 was a leading member of the Academy of Medical Sciences of the USSR and the Deputy Director of the Soviet Union's leading cardiovascular research center.¹⁷ Other specialists, like Shota Tavartkiladze, who entered the Moscow Architecture Institute in 1949, oversaw the development and construction of the Soviet capital's new avenues and apartment buildings in the 1960s.¹⁸ In the realm of applied mathematics, Viktor Gelovani, who received his doctorate in 1971 from the Moscow Physics-Technical Institute, headed a cutting-edge research center devoted to complex systems analysis under the Soviet Academy of Sciences from 1976 onward.¹⁹ In philosophy, Merab Mamardashvili, who graduated from Moscow State University in 1954, developed a unique and internationally recognized approach to neo-Kantian thought.

The social origins of Georgian professionals in Moscow differed, though they were far less likely than their Russian counterparts to be the children of workers. According to Komsomol records, among Georgians accepted into Russian institutes of higher education in 1969, a greater proportion of them were the children of public servants (*sluzhashii*)—a mixed social category that included state and party officials—than those of any other republic, and Georgian students were half as likely as Russian students to hail from strictly proletarian families of workers.²⁰ Many Georgian students translated their parents' success in party work, wartime service, and politics into professional opportunity. The parents of the architect Shota Tavartkiladze were revolutionaries, and his father had headed one of Tbilisi's leading publishing houses until he was arrested during the purges of 1937.²¹ The philosopher Merab Mamardashvili spent part of his childhood in central Ukraine, where his father was stationed for military

¹⁴ *Vysshee obrazovanie v SSSR*, 60-61, 210-211. Note that only nationalities representing titular national republics were counted for this survey, so Soviet Jews were noticeably excluded.

¹⁵ TsSU Gruzinskoi SSR, *Gruzinskaia SSR v tsifrah* (Tbilisi: Statistika, 1965), 75.

¹⁶ RGASPI, f. M-1, op. 39, d. 208, l. 18; RGASPI, f. M-1, op. 46, d. 199, l. 53.

¹⁷ N. L. Chavchanidze and K. V. Vashakidze, *Gruziny v Rossii: biograficheskie ocherki* (Saransk: Krasnyi oktiabr', 2000), 1: 39-43. As of 2010, Bokeria remains Russia's leading heart surgeon and heads the prestigious Bakulev Scientific Center for Cardiovascular Surgery in Moscow.

¹⁸ Rusudan Khantadze-Andronikashvili, *Nashi zemliaki v Moskve* (Tbilisi: Sakartvelo, 1990), 179-182.

¹⁹ Chavchanidze and Vashakidze, *Gruziny v Rossii*, 30-33.

²⁰ RGASPI, f. M-1, op. 39, d. 208, l. 20.

²¹ Rusudan Khantadze-Andronikashvili, *Nashi zemliaki v Moskve*, 179-180.

service at the start of the Second World War. Archil Gelovani, the father of the mathematician Viktor Gelovani, supervised construction of wartime defenses along the Black Sea, and eventually attained the high-ranking post of Chief Marshal of Engineering Troops of the USSR for his efforts in overseeing the construction of numerous Soviet military installations during the Cold War.²²

Many of these members of the Georgian intelligentsia had spent a good deal of their childhoods outside of Georgia, and were well-versed in dealing with colleagues from a variety of ethnic backgrounds. Oriented toward knowledge rather than national origin, they took active part in the multiethnic student friendship circles that arose in leading Soviet educational institutions during the Thaw. It was in a dorm room discussion among friends in the mid-1950s, for instance, that the philosophy student Merab Mamardashvili encountered a young student couple, Mikhail and Raisa Gorbachev.²³ Most were more concerned with professional discussions than political affairs, although some would eventually find fault with state practices and seek a return to the moral mission that, after all, was at the heart of the Soviet intelligentsia's worldview. In 1970, Georgian Valerii Chalidze joined fellow physicist Andrei Sakharov as one of the founding members of the Moscow Human Rights Committee. During *perestroika*, the philosopher Mamardashvili would also emerge as a leading critic of the Soviet regime.

Mastering the Classical Canon

Although Georgians achieved success in a variety of fields requiring technical mastery and engagement with a cosmopolitan intellectual culture, their particular prominence in the realm of classical music perhaps best illustrates the reasons and implications of their achievements. While taking advantage of a Soviet-wide system of artistic exchange, the Georgian artists who sang Puccini's opera *Tosca* at the Bolshoi Theater and performed the orchestral works of Beethoven at the Moscow Conservatory traveled cultural pathways between Georgia and Russia that had been established in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century and were only reinforced by Soviet institutional infrastructure.

The Tbilisi Conservatory traced its origins to 1902, when the Tiflis Division of the Imperial Russian Musical Society was established and staffed by Georgian musicians educated in Russia—many of them of noble origin—as well as by notable Russian musicians who took up periodic residence in Georgia. The Conservatory was officially opened in May 1917, and incorporated into the Soviet system following the Red Army's arrival in Tbilisi. Manana Andriadze, a musicologist and graduate of Tbilisi's Central Musical School and the Tbilisi Conservatory, recalled that the centralization of the Soviet system only served to further link Tbilisi to musical institutions in central Russia. The Tbilisi Conservatory's lesson plan was based on a "common program" coordinated in Moscow, for which they received schoolbooks, course guidelines, and instructions.²⁴

To students at the Tbilisi Conservatory in the Soviet period, Moscow was the leading destination for Soviet-wide concerts, festivals, and musical competitions, as well as the point of entry onto the world stage. According to Andriadze, "everyone had high

²² Chavchanidze and Vashakidze, *Gruziny v Rossii*, 30-33.

²³ Zubok, *Zhivago's Children*, 51.

²⁴ Manana Andriadze. Interview by author. Tbilisi, Georgia. October 27, 2008. Dr. Andriadze is currently the Vice-Rector of the Tbilisi Conservatory.

hopes of reaching Moscow.”²⁵ For Georgians who traveled to study with famous instructors affiliated with the Moscow Conservatory or to take up more permanent artistic residence, the Soviet capital offered both professional excitement and occasional frustration. In Moscow, musicians found themselves in the middle of a “tumult of creative activity.” Although some Georgian musicians found a place for themselves in Moscow, others returned to Tbilisi exhausted and disillusioned. Andriadze contrasted the frenetic pace of life in Moscow, a metropolis that “ran like a machine,” where one rushed about afraid to “lose a second,” with Tbilisi, “an eastern place with a more relaxed atmosphere.” However, she noted that the relatively “strict Russian regime” of practice and performance in Moscow produced “good results.”

It is important to note that this “Russian regime” was by no means ethnically Russian. When the Georgian virtuoso pianist Eliso Virsaladze trained at the Moscow Conservatory in the 1950s, her teachers were Genrikh Neigauz and Iakov Zak; the first was the son of a German musical teacher who had moved to Russia in the nineteenth century to teach classical music to the children from Russian noble families, the second was an accomplished Soviet Jewish pianist born in Odessa and educated in Moscow.²⁶ In the Soviet capital, Georgians took part in a particular Russian-Soviet brand of imperial universalism with especially deep roots at a musical conservatory whose origins lay in the multiethnic court culture of the nineteenth century. The Moscow Conservatory, after all, had been founded in 1866 not by an ethnic Russian, but by Nikolai Rubinshtein, the son of a Jewish industrialist, with support from an organization run by Anton Rubinshtein, Nikolai’s brother, and sponsored by the Grand Duchess Elena Pavlovna, the German-born aunt of Tsar Alexander II.²⁷

Although the Soviet state promoted a standardized system of musical education, the techniques of instruction were seen as highly-personalized, built around the particular “school” represented by an instructor and his or her own educational pedigree in musical genealogies that stretched back generations. At Soviet conservatories, personal relationships overlapped with institutional affiliations, and both promoted artistic exchange between musical communities in Russia and Tbilisi. The wave of accomplished Georgian vocalists and pianists who arrived in Moscow in the 1950s, for instance, built on personal connections established with Russian musicians during the Second World War. Evacuated from Leningrad and Moscow during the war, composers like Sergei Prokofiev and Dmitrii Shostakovich found refuge at the Tbilisi Conservatory, where they built lasting relationships with Georgian pedagogues and their students.²⁸

Artistic exchange between Russia and Georgia was bidirectional, and just as Moscow held the promise of a larger stage for Georgian performers, so too did Tbilisi possess its own unique appeal for Russian musicians. Restive members of the Russian intelligentsia might think of choosing to live there rather than in Moscow or Leningrad as

²⁵ Manana Andriadze. Interview by author.

²⁶ Neigauz recounts his personal history in *Vospominaniia Neigauza*, trans. E. R. Rikhter (Moscow: Klassika-XXI, 2007). For a collection of articles and biographical materials on Iakov Zak, see I. I. Zak, *Stat’i, materialy, vospominaniia*, ed. M. G. Sokolov (Moscow: Sovetskii kompozitor, 1980).

²⁷ For details on the Moscow Conservatory’s history, see N. A. Mironov, *Moskovskaia konservatoriia. Istoki* (Moscow: Moskovskaia gos. konservatoriia im. P. I. Chaikovskogo, 1995).

²⁸ Manana Andriadze. Interview by author.

a form of “internal emigration.”²⁹ Lev Markiz, the former concertmaster of the Moscow Chamber Orchestra, recalled:

For a large number of Russian intellectuals (including musicians), living in Georgia, having contact with its local cultural elite, as well as having exposure to the more specific aspects of local life, with its festive atmosphere [*prazdnichnoi atmosferoi*], the unbelievable hospitality of Georgians, the country’s magnificent natural beauty, the traditions of the table, all of this was a genuine respite from the stresses of Soviet life [*podlinnym otdokhnoveniem ot stressov sovetskoi deistvitel’nosti*].³⁰

Traveling to Tbilisi in the Soviet period, Markiz encountered a large number of talented Georgian musicians, particularly vocalists and pianists. He attributed Georgian vocal success to the country’s native musical culture, in which “an ear for music was honed from early childhood.” He also noted, however, that Georgian pianists indeed benefited from links to the “Russian system” of musical education. Most either studied in Russian musical schools or with Georgian instructors who had spent time in Russia, making them in effect the “‘children’ or ‘grandchildren’ of Russian professors” at conservatories in Moscow and Leningrad. According to Markiz, ties between Russian and Georgian musical communities ran so deep as to make them inseparable; instead, he claimed that Georgian classical musicians represented a fused “Russian-Georgian school.”³¹

Georgian musicians learned to flawlessly perform the standard Soviet repertoire of European classical music, and those who successfully launched careers in Moscow became leading members of Russian ensembles and represented the Russian Federation on Soviet-wide tours. Georgian pianist Eliso Virsaladze took third prize at the 1962 Tchaikovsky Competition in Moscow, and eventually became a professor at the Moscow Conservatory, her alma mater. In 1968, she was highlighted as a “winner of international competitions” among the artists representing the Russian Federation. Similarly, the violinist Marine Iashvili, the daughter of a professor at the Tbilisi Conservatory, left to study at the Moscow Conservatory in 1957. Eventually joining the ranks of Moskontsert, the Moscow concert agency, she regularly performed as part of the “Moscow Stars” festival in the Soviet capital.³² By 1979, there were two Georgian pianists playing for the Moscow State Philharmonic, along with two Georgian violinists.³³

Georgian vocalists became especially prominent at Moscow’s storied Bolshoi Theater. In 1973 and 1974, four out of fifteen guest artists performing with the Bolshoi’s opera company were Georgians. They took leading roles in the Bolshoi’s productions of Russian operas as well as of international classics.³⁴ Makvala Kasrashvili, a Georgian soprano, became a regular member of the opera troupe, and was cast as Tat’iana, the epitome of Russian feminine virtue, for the Bolshoi’s international production of Tchaikovsky’s *Evgenii Onegin* at New York’s Metropolitan Opera in 1979. Sponsored by

²⁹ A term described by anthropologist Alexei Yurchak as a “state of being inside and outside at the same time.” See Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation*, 132.

³⁰ Lev Markiz. Interview by author. September 19, 2008. Tbilisi, Georgia. Markiz ultimately emigrated to the Netherlands in 1981.

³¹ Lev Markiz. Interview by author.

³² RGALI, f. 3170, op. 2, d. 208, l. 11.

³³ RGALI, f. 3170, op. 3, d. 39, ll. 63-173.

³⁴ RGALI, f. 3170, op. 2, d. 162, ll. 1-42.

the Georgian Ministry of Culture, Georgian performers took up residence not only in Moscow, but in cities throughout the Soviet Union for periods of time ranging from days to months. In 1973 and 1974, Georgian guest performers starred in operas produced by Leningrad's Kirov Theater, and joined opera houses in the Russian cities of Novosibirsk, Sverdlovsk, Perm, Cheliabinsk, as well as the national operas of Belarus, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Moldova, Tajikistan, and Armenia.³⁵ Some even traveled abroad, like the singer Medea Amiranishvili, who was accepted for a one-year residence at Milan's La Scala in 1963.³⁶ The travels of Georgian artists were part of a larger system of Soviet artistic circulation, within which special, bi-directional ties existed between Georgian and Russian ensembles.

Georgians became prominent as high culture virtuosos because they sought participation in a universal imperial culture and were successful in doing so because of the strength and peculiar history of Georgian cultural institutions like the Tbilisi Conservatory, the multicultural fluency and cosmopolitan sensibilities of the Georgian diaspora, and the ability of this group to build personal relationships while taking advantage of an established Soviet infrastructure of artistic and intellectual exchange. Georgian musicians transcended the confines of specifically Georgian performance, pursuing creative expression within the more universal, if rigidly delineated, world of classical music. As long as they adhered to the established canon, virtuosos gained opportunities for artistic achievement, domestic and international prestige, and even enjoyed the occasional opportunity to travel abroad.

From the Classical Canon to Cinematic Critique

High culture virtuosity and achievement in the specialized fields of Soviet science provided an escape from some of the restrictions of late Soviet intellectual life. However, Soviet artists and scientists were not simply intellectuals; they were self-consciously members of the intelligentsia, a category that entailed a moral mission to uplift society as well as the pursuit of excellence in high culture. Seeking to move beyond the confines of the classical canon and to assert themselves creatively, members of the intelligentsia sought creative independence by mastering oblique forms of criticism, often couched in irony, folklore, or semi-concealed references. The intellectual culture of *zastoi* was defined not by high culture virtuosity alone, but also by anecdotes that mocked official life and by artists who expertly skirted the limits of allowable expression.

With the exception of music, cinema was perhaps the freest and most internationally-oriented of the arts in this period. In contrast to classical music, however, Soviet cinema was a modern medium created by revolutionaries and iconoclasts like Sergei Eisenstein. As such, its canon was potentially destabilizing; its masterpieces were honored by Soviet filmmakers, but also provided a rich language for social critique and an inspiration for artistic innovation.³⁷ During the Thaw, Soviet moviemakers engaged in renewed social commentary and established contact with an international community of artists at international film festivals. Although the end of the 1950s saw greater

³⁵ RGALI, f. 3170, op. 2, d. 162, ll. 1-42.

³⁶ Central Archive of the Contemporary History of Georgia, Department of Literature and Art, f. 55, op. 1, d. 511, l. 11.

³⁷ For a study of early Soviet cinema and its relationship to state and society, see Peter Kenez, *Cinema and Soviet Society, 1917-1953* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

restrictions placed on Soviet film directors, the influences of the Thaw made an impression on subsequent generations of Soviet filmmakers, who continued to enter their films in competitions in Cannes and Venice in the 1960s and 1970s. These filmmakers had a complicated relationship with the Soviet state; even while they pushed the limits of allowable expression, they received official funding and were allowed to travel abroad, since international recognition of the successes of Soviet cinema was believed to be of important propaganda value.³⁸

As it did in other areas of cultural production, the Soviet state promoted the development of cinema in the national republics while sponsoring a system of artistic exchange and education that centered in Moscow. Just as in other realms of high culture, Georgian directors succeeded because of a background and approach that allowed them to move between local assertion and pan-Soviet concerns without abandoning either. They benefitted from an education in Moscow and a long tradition of fluency in Russian high culture, while drawing on a distinctly Georgian creative language and enjoying the opportunity to pursue it with relative freedom in Georgia's own film studio. In the multiethnic world of Soviet cinema, Georgian films were considered the most intellectually provocative and held as the truest representations of the melancholy spirit and ironic stance of the era of *zastoi*. Intellectuals in Moscow and Leningrad anxiously awaited the release of each new film by the leading directors of the Georgian Film Studio (*kartuli pilmi*, better known as *Gruziia fil'm* in Russian). Typically dubbed in wide release for Russian speakers, the Georgian origin of these films was unmistakable in their use of recognizably Georgian actors and Georgian settings. Yet these films went beyond the mere performance of Georgian nationality. Products of a cosmopolitan Georgian intelligentsia, they appealed to universal themes and pan-Soviet intellectual concerns, from the amoral irony of *zastoi* to the high moralism of *perestroika*, and did so in a Georgian accent. The prominence of Georgian directors would eventually place a Georgian film, *Repentance*, at the forefront of public debate over the troubled past and unclear future of the Soviet empire.

Georgian film had its roots in a distinct set of national theatrical traditions, yet, like Georgian classical music, the history of Georgian theater itself was interwoven with the leading cultural institutions of Russia. Established in 1845, the troupe of Tbilisi's first European-style theater was supplemented by seven actors imported from the imperial theaters of St. Petersburg, and one from Moscow. Georgian dramatists began staging works in the Georgian language relatively early, while continuing to send the nation's most promising actors to study in Russia.³⁹ Like Georgia's classical musicians, Georgian actors and directors in the Soviet period were heirs to a hybrid culture of imperial artistic exchange with its origins in tsarist Russia.⁴⁰

³⁸ For an insider's account of Soviet cinema during the Brezhnev era, see Valery S. Golovskoy with John Rimberg, *Behind the Soviet Screen: The Motion-Picture Industry in the U.S.S.R., 1972-1982* (Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1986).

³⁹ Austin Jersild and Neli Melkadze, "The Dilemmas of Enlightenment in the Eastern Borderlands: The Theater and Library in Tbilisi" *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 3:1 (2002): 27-49. On the travel of Georgian actors to Russia to study, see the Central Archive of the Contemporary History of Georgia, Department of Literature and Art, f. 2, op. 2, d. 229. This trend continued into the early Soviet period, when a number of leading Georgian actors studied in Moscow under Stanislavskii.

⁴⁰ In the Soviet theater, this tradition of hybridity was best represented by Tbilisi native Georgii Tovstonogov, who headed Leningrad's Bolshoi Dramatic Theater from 1956 until his retirement in 1989.

Among the national film schools of the Soviet Union, Georgian film was particularly respected because it emerged in the early 1920s, whereas film studios in the Kyrgyz SSR, for instance, were not established until 1942 and did not begin making films for wide-release until the late 1950s. Links with Russia were carried into the Soviet period, as early Georgian film was strongly influenced by the Moscow Art Theater, where the first generation of Georgian directors studied.⁴¹ Subsequent generations of Georgian film directors studied at the All-Union State Institute of Cinematography (VGIK) in Moscow, where they worked under leading Soviet directors. Familiarity with both Georgian and Russian culture allowed the Moscow-based film director Georgii Danelia to create a quintessentially Georgian personality study in *Mimino*, while also permitting him to direct the melancholy 1979 film *Autumnal Marathon (Osenii marafon)*, set in Leningrad without a single Georgian character. The cosmopolitan aspirations of Georgian directors led them to produce films commenting on the broader Soviet *Zeitgeist*; indeed, the film that perhaps best epitomized the Thaw was the 1958 production *The Cranes are Flying (Letiat zhuravli)* by Moscow-based Georgian director Mikhail Kalatozov (Kalatozishvili).⁴² In some cases, Georgian directors even attained influential posts in pan-Soviet cinematic production. In addition to directing films, Kalatozov occupied a leading position at Mosfil'm and for a time served as Deputy Minister of Cinematography of the Soviet Union.⁴³

While the directors Kalatozov and Danelia worked primarily in Moscow, most Georgian filmmakers took advantage of the relative freedom afforded to them by the Georgian Film Studio in their native republic. Producing films there for a Soviet-wide audience, they managed to participate in Soviet intellectual life while remaining in Georgia. Their styles were unmistakably Georgian but also diverse, ranging from the Pirosmeni-style naivism of Eldar and Giorgi Shengelaia to the high-culture worship of Tengiz Abuladze. Pursuing their respective artistic visions, they came up against the limits of Soviet creative expression and engaged in a variety of tactics to reduce the influence that Goskino (*Gosudarstvennyi komitet po kinematografii SSSR*), the central state film committee, had over film production. The relative independence of the Georgian studio was promoted and touted by the central authorities as an example of a flourishing multiethnic Soviet culture, yet the assertiveness of the studio's directors presented a dilemma for the state that was indicative of the broader tensions of the late Soviet empire. Taking those directors best known outside Georgia as illustrative

The theater director, informally known by the Georgian nickname "Goga," was the son of a Russian nobleman and a Georgian singer who had studied at the St. Petersburg Conservatory before the revolution. Tovstonogov was praised by Anatoly Semiliansky, the Associate Head of the Moscow Art Theatre, as a great "synthesist." See Smeliansky, *The Russian Theatre After Stalin*, trans. Patrick Miles (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 47-49, 127-141.

⁴¹ I. I. Ratiani, *U istokov gruzinskogo kino: vzaimosviaz' literatury, teatra i kino v kul'ture Gruzii* (Moscow: Rossiiskii institut kul'turologii, 2003). Among these directors were Aleksandr Tsuntsava, Ivan Perestiani, and the ethnic Armenian Amo Bek-Nazarov.

⁴² In addition to its highly personal portrayal of life during the Second World War, the film also marked renewed engagement with the international film world, winning the top prize at the Cannes festival in 1958.

⁴³ A position which he managed to keep during the turbulent period from 1946 to 1948. After the Stalinist period, Kalatozov directed a stunning series of films that were artistically innovative and involved close collaboration with foreign artists, including *Ia Kuba (I am Cuba)* in 1964 and *Krasnaia palatka (The Red Tent)* in 1969. F. I. Betaneli, *Gruziny v Rossii (istoriograficheskoe esse)* (Tbilisi and Volgograd, 1996), 38-39.

examples, this chapter will focus on the personal and professional histories of Eldar and Giorgi Shengelaia, Otar Ioseliani, and Tengiz Abuladze.

Playing the System: The Shengelaia Brothers and the Tactics of Avoiding Artistic Compromise

Like many other Georgian filmmakers, the brothers Eldar and Giorgi Shengelaia grew up in a prominent intelligentsia family with long-established ties to the stage and screen.⁴⁴ Their father, Nikolai Shengelaia, was an iconoclastic Georgian poet who became a leading film director in Tbilisi. Their mother, Nato Vachnadze, had been born in Warsaw in 1904 to a Georgian nobleman and a Polish mother, and became a famous Soviet film actress in the 1930s. Nikolai Shengelaia and Nato Vachnadze lived in Georgia, but traveled frequently to Moscow to attend film festivals and collaborate with their Russian colleagues. Their first son, Eldar, was born in Tbilisi in 1933; their second son, Giorgi, was born in Moscow in 1937, while his parents were attending a film event in the Soviet capital.⁴⁵ Their home in Tbilisi, where Giorgi and Eldar grew up, was a gathering place for artists and intellectuals from across the Soviet Union. They regularly hosted luminaries like the poet Vladimir Mayakovsky, the playwright Sergei Tret'iakov, and the critic Viktor Shklovskii.⁴⁶ Eldar Shengelaia recalled a childhood spent amidst endless "artistic evenings, events, museum openings, and musical concerts" attended by his parents.⁴⁷ Their father died fairly young, suffering from a heart attack in 1943, and in 1953 their mother died in a plane crash while flying from Moscow to Tbilisi. According to Giorgi Shengelaia, both sons felt a desire to carry on the work of their parents, although Eldar Shengelaia noted that their mother had actually tried to discourage her older son's interest in film, believing that it had become a professionally risky career path due to Stalin's imposition of strict cultural controls in the postwar period.⁴⁸

Undaunted, Eldar Shengelaia arrived in Moscow in 1952 to study at the All-Union State Institute of Cinematography (VGIK). Following Stalin's death the next year, he found himself in the heart of emerging debates about artistic expression that were central to the Thaw. Filmmakers were freed from the rigid constraints of the late Stalinist era, and, in Eldar Shengelaia's words, the curriculum at the film institute shifted from an "ideological program" to a "system of instruction that emphasized artistic achievement." By the latter half of the 1950s, he and his contemporaries felt that they were witnesses to a larger movement, one that "was not a revolution, but still a shift in the direction of freedom of expression."⁴⁹ As was true of the Thaw more generally, developments in Soviet cinema entailed both a rekindling of the Soviet revolutionary spirit of the 1920s and an opening to new international influences. At VGIK, students studied with an earlier generation of Soviet directors who had revolutionized film in the 1920s, including Alexander Dovzhenko, who lived in Moscow but was hailed as a forerunner of Soviet

⁴⁴ Another brief look at Danelia and Kalatozov reveals further examples of this trend: Georgii Danelia's mother, Meri Anzhaparidze, worked at Mosfil'm, and his aunt, Veriko Anzhaparidze, was a famous Soviet actress; Mikhail Kalatozov's son, Georgii Kalatozishvili, and grandson, Mikhail Kalatozishvili, went on to become well-known Soviet directors.

⁴⁵ Giorgi Shengelaia. Interview by author. Tbilisi, Georgia. December 15, 2008.

⁴⁶ Nugzar Amashukeli, *Georgii Shengelaia: tvorcheskii portret* (Moscow: Soiuzinformkino, 1987), 3-4.

⁴⁷ Eldar Shengelaia. Interview by author. Tbilisi, Georgia. December 10, 2008.

⁴⁸ Giorgi Shengelaia. Interview by author; Eldar Shengelaia. Interview by author.

⁴⁹ Eldar Shengelaia. Interview by author.

national cinema for his series of movies devoted to the history and culture of his native Ukraine.⁵⁰ At the same time, the institute's film library now granted students access to the classics of international cinema and the latest films from France, Germany, and Italy.⁵¹ VGIK's students saw themselves not only as filmmakers, but as engaged intellectual participants of the Thaw; outside the institute, they attended poetry readings at Moscow's universities and theatrical productions at the newly-established Sovremennik Theater.⁵² According to Giorgi Shengelaia, who, following his brother, arrived in 1959 to study at VGIK, the Georgian students at the relatively small institute all knew each other, but their peer group was not limited by nationality; instead, it included future Russian directors like Andrei Tarkovskii and Andrei Konchalovskii.⁵³

After graduating from VGIK, both Shengelaia brothers returned to Tbilisi, where they took up work as directors for the Georgian Film Studio. Although national cinema would become a sanctuary for creative expression as the Thaw waned, Georgian film had benefitted from years of patronage from the Stalin-era onward. In addition to well-financed production studios, Georgia offered filmmakers access to the actors and designers of Tbilisi's Rustaveli Theater. For both the Shengelaia brothers, Georgia was also a source of inspiration. They grew up in an atmosphere that stressed the cosmopolitan contributions of Georgian culture and, reinforced by an education at VGIK that emphasized the merits of artistic excellence over commercial compromise, they sought to address themes of universal importance in a Georgian setting. In a sense, this approach echoed the Stalinist prescription that Soviet culture be "national in form, socialist in content"; in the case of the Shengelaia brothers, however, their interests did not concern explicitly socialist issues, but consciously appealed to the ideals of heroism, truth, and beauty celebrated by the Soviet intelligentsia at the time.⁵⁴

By the mid-1960s, the relative freedom of the Thaw years had given way to greater restrictions. However, both Shengelaia brothers learned to operate within the confines of a more closed system, each in their own way. Eldar Shengelaia developed a close partnership with Rezo Gabriadze, a Tbilisi writer, theater director, sculptor, and artist. The two worked together on the 1968 film, *An Unusual Exhibition* (*arachveulebrivi gamopena*), which revealed Gabriadze's penchant for tragicomedy, or what Giorgi Danelia termed "tearful comedy" (*pechal'naia komediia*), paired with Eldar Shengelaia's interest in the ironies and absurdities of everyday life. In his interview, Shengelaia stressed that the use of humor was not simply a convention with its own traditions in Georgian theater (which it was); humor also offered "the possibility to speak about one thing, and comment on another, as in a parable."⁵⁵ *An Unusual Exhibition* depicted a talented young sculptor in a small Georgian village who was forced to resort to carving grotesque tombstones for money in order to support his family after his wife gave birth to twins. Although full of humorous situations, the film was an attack on artistic compromise that was all the more pointed because it was set in the contemporary Soviet

⁵⁰ For a study of Dovzhenko, his films, and his at times uneasy relationship to the Soviet state, see Vance Kepley, Jr., *In the Service of the State: The Cinema of Alexander Dovzhenko* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1986).

⁵¹ Giorgi Shengelaia. Interview by author.

⁵² Eldar Shengelaia. Interview by author.

⁵³ Giorgi Shengelaia. Interview by author.

⁵⁴ Giorgi Shengelaia. Interview by author; Eldar Shengelaia. Interview by author.

⁵⁵ Eldar Shengelaia. Interview by author.

Union. Early viewings of the completed film drew the scrutiny of the Georgian Ministry of Culture, which supervised the film studios, and, eventually of Goskino in Moscow. According to Eldar Shengelaia, “the form of the film saved me... humor made it ultimately seem unserious to the editors.”⁵⁶ Shengelaia avoided official rebuke, but Goskino still demanded that cuts be made to the film to remove ideologically troublesome scenes. Taking advantage of chronically poor coordination between the center and the national film studios, Shengelaia returned to Moscow with an edited copy of his original film, submitted for wide release. Unbeknownst to Goskino, he preserved the uncut film’s negative in Tbilisi, where it was screened on a limited basis at film clubs.⁵⁷

Giorgi Shengelaia’s first film to garner widespread attention, *Pirosmani*, was completed the following year, in 1969. In contrast to his brother, Giorgi Shengelaia used the genre of tragedy, rather than comedy, to touch upon the same theme of artistic integrity. Unlike the hero of *An Unusual Exhibition*, the Georgian artist Niko Pirosmani was depicted in the film as an artist who endured poverty, the hypocrisy of his high-society patrons, and public ridicule in heroic, if naive, pursuit of his artistic vision. Although Giorgi Shengelaia’s social criticism was cushioned by the fact that it was set in pre-revolutionary Tbilisi, his use of long shots of Pirosmani’s paintings in a manner reminiscent of Andrei Tarkovskii’s *Andrei Rublev*, and his decision to open the film with a moralistic passage from the New Testament, ensured that his movie would not be popular with a broader audience, nor would it see wide release. Ultimately, Goskino decided not to cut the film, but to limit its viewership by making only a handful of copies available for screening in the Soviet Union. *Pirosmani*, however, garnered critical acclaim at several international film festivals and at the Kinoteatr Povtornogo Fil'ma (The Cinema of Second-Run Film) in central Moscow, a small movie theater with a cult-like following among Moscow’s intelligentsia. Clamoring to attend these limited screenings, Russian intellectuals gathered to view and discuss Shengelaia’s portrayal of an artist with an unflappable sense of personal dignity and aesthetic integrity.⁵⁸ As a Caucasian naïf, the figure of Pirosmani was not only an historical personage, but also a well-established character type in Georgian theater. At the same time, the dilemmas that Pirosmani faced as an artist were recognizable for the broader Brezhnev-era intelligentsia, whose members had to constantly negotiate between artistic and personal integrity on the one hand and professional success on the other.⁵⁹

Life as a Georgian filmmaker at this time presented a series of paradoxes that were typical of intellectual life during *zastoi*. Because the Soviet state sought to publicize its support for multiethnic culture abroad and lay claim to artistic innovation, Georgian directors like the Shengelaia brothers received ample state funding to produce films that few in the Soviet Union would see. They were encouraged to pursue the development of a uniquely expressive creative medium in Georgia for international export, but were deprived of a larger domestic audience, even if Soviet intellectuals gathered to attend limited screenings of each successive Georgian film. Wryly summing up the situation, Eldar Shengelaia commented: “bureaucrats controlled the number of prints made, where

⁵⁶ Eldar Shengelaia. Interview by author.

⁵⁷ Eldar Shengelaia. Interview by author.

⁵⁸ Giorgi Shengelaia. Interview by author.

⁵⁹ The figure of the Caucasian naïf is discussed at greater length in Chapter 4.

the film would be shown, and whether it would be sent abroad. But...they gave us money.”⁶⁰

Increasingly aware of the peculiar dynamics of the system, in time both Shengelaia brothers found ways to reach a broader Soviet audience without excessively compromising their artistic vision. In 1973, Giorgi Shengelaia released the popular *Melodies of the Vera Quarter* (*veris ubnis melodiebi*), a lively musical comedy starring the Georgian singer and actor Vakhtang Kikabidze and the actress Sofiko Chiaureli, then Shengelaia’s wife. The film was a loving ode to the culture of Tbilisi’s old neighborhoods, but also evoked the familiar repertoire of Georgian song and dance performance, helping it gain success among a broader audience. Shengelaia saw the film as a “genre piece” that allowed him to pursue his limited distribution “auteur films” (*avtorskie fil'my*). He regarded the musical as a “compromise,” but one of “artistic quality that was done according to [his] own tastes.”⁶¹

His brother, Eldar Shengelaia, managed to evade the censors by retreating further into folkloric settings and whimsical comedies. Again teaming up with writer Rezo Gabriadze, Shengelaia’s 1973 film *The Eccentrics* made it into wide release and was savored by the Soviet intelligentsia in general and the Georgian intelligentsia in particular for the forceful statements it made, veiled in humor, on the plight of intellectuals in the Brezhnev era. As discussed in the beginning of this chapter, it was this film that remained foremost in the minds of contemporary observers during the 1983 hijacking attempt. In contrast to their 1968 film, *An Unusual Exhibition*, Shengelaia and Gabriadze decided to set *The Eccentrics* in pre-revolutionary Georgia. Thus, the plight of the story’s main characters, an idealistic young man and an eccentric old mathematician unfairly locked in prison, could be blamed on the tsarist authorities. The petty cruelty, incompetence, and officiousness of the military officers who ran the prison clearly evoked intellectuals’ frustration with the Soviet bureaucracy, but could be cast as an attack on imperial-era oppression. The film was filled with joyful, folkloric singing and moments of comedy bordering on slapstick humor, but buried beneath the surface were poignant phrases that became rote expressions among the Georgian intelligentsia. In the film, as the young man and the mathematician plot their escape from the underground cell by devising an elaborate flying contraption through sketches and equations on the cell walls, a guard intervenes and wipes the walls clean with a rag. In response to the temporary destruction of his carefully laid plans, the mathematician taps himself on the head and shouts, “you cannot erase them from here!” The phrase evoked Mikhail Bulgakov’s aphorism that “manuscripts do not burn,” a sentiment cherished by the Soviet intelligentsia in the age of *samizdat*. Rather than ending on a tragic note, the film offered a glimpse of freedom. The pair’s fantastical flying machine actually worked, and as the two prisoners rose far above their captors, a Georgian landscape of hills, rivers, and ancient churches could be seen stretching out in all directions on the horizon. The dreams of the “eccentrics” were ultimately justified.

The film’s production notes reveal that *The Eccentrics* was sufficiently couched in folklore, history, and comedic situations to avoid serious scrutiny. The notes also reveal that Eldar Shengelaia and Rezo Gabriadze had grown skilled at framing their projects in terms that resonated with Soviet officials. Adopting the same language used in

⁶⁰ Eldar Shengelaia. Interview by author.

⁶¹ Giorgi Shengelaia. Interview by author.

official discourse to describe the triumph of the Revolution and the recent achievements of Soviet cosmonauts, the film's description, first presented to Goskino on May 19, 1971, described it as a "fable" of "man's first attempt to reach for the skies, to overcome the "gravitational pull" of popular consciousness, to break free from the old rules of life held for centuries."⁶² Thus, it was presented as a critique of the imperial period and a testament to the new consciousness wrought by the Revolution. The film's production was a back-and-forth process for Shengelaia and Gabriadze, who were required to meet regularly with the leadership of the Georgian Film Studio and occasionally with Goskino. The meeting minutes of the Georgian Film Studio reveal little discussion and a series of "rubber-stamp" approvals of the film's development; those of Goskino show greater skepticism as the movie's production went on. One Goskino official expressed the view that a "social emphasis" ought to be placed on conflicts between the "'positive' and 'negative' characters." While the official praised the actions of the film's heroes as "a popular protest against the world of shopkeepers and oppressors," the scenes involving a doctor, a supposed man of science, and the strange cast of characters kept in his insane asylum, offered a more ambiguous social message. Some of these scenes were presumably cut, but the scheming doctor remained, along with the film's basic structure. The film was approved for production and assistance even rendered by aircraft of the Transcaucasian Military Division for filming of the flying scenes. In April 1974, the film was dubbed in Russian and released widely throughout the Soviet Union.⁶³

In addition to mastering bureaucratic strategies to pursue their creative vision, Georgian filmmakers like the Shengelaia brothers' boosted their influence by integrating into powerful creative networks. Building on his family connections and his own reputation in Georgia's artistic community, Eldar Shengelaia became Chair of the Georgian Filmmakers Union in 1976. He also pursued a political career, joining the Communist Party and serving in the Georgian SSR's Supreme Soviet from 1980 to 1985. His political service may have allowed Eldar Shengelaia to continue making the movies he wanted to make, including his 1983 film *Blue Mountains, or An Unbelievable Story* (*tsisperi mtebi anu dauzherebeli ambavi*), a humorous critique of professional mediocrity and bureaucratic ineptitude at a Soviet publishing house.⁶⁴

Giorgi Shengelaia, the director of *Pirosmani*, eschewed such participation in Soviet political life, but his family's connections and his marriage to Sofiko Chiaureli gave him a high standing in Tbilisi society. Both Shengelaia and Chiaureli were the children of prominent Georgian cultural figures: her father was Mikheil Chiaureli, one of Stalin's favorite filmmakers and the director of *Giorgi Saakadze* and *The Fall of Berlin*, as well as a prominent professor at VGIK in the post-Stalinist period; her mother was the famous Georgian actress, Veriko Andzhaparidze; and her cousin was the Moscow director Georgii Danelia. Party membership helped, but, on the basis of their prominent positions in networks of influence, celebrated members of the Georgian intelligentsia were sometimes begrudgingly accommodated by the state in the late Soviet period. Their power outside the artistic realm was limited, but in the tight-knit world of Georgian cinema, friendships and personal relationships could sometimes be counted on for assistance. Indeed, the personal intervention of the celebrated Georgian actor Dodo

⁶² RGALI, f. 2944, op. 4, d. 2286, ll. 1-16.

⁶³ RGALI, f. 2944, op. 4, d. 2286, ll. 54-70.

⁶⁴ RGALI, f. 2944, op. 4, d. 6609, ll. 1-2.

Abashidze allowed the Tbilisi filmmaker Sergei Paradzhanov, repeatedly attacked for artistic subversion and arrested on charges of homosexuality, to finally return to film in the 1980s.⁶⁵

Ignoring the System: Otar Ioseliani and Amoral Irony

The Georgian director Otar Ioseliani studied with the Shengelaia brothers at VGIK. Born in Tbilisi in 1934, he gravitated first toward classical music, studying violin at the prestigious musical school in the Georgian capital. Instead of going on to the Tbilisi Conservatory, he instead left for Moscow in 1953, where he began to study mathematics and astronomy at Moscow State University. Like the Shengelaia brothers, he came from a fairly prominent family, in which high culture was cherished and cosmopolitan imperial traditions were well preserved. His father had been an officer in the tsarist army, and later worked as a railway engineer until he was swept up in the purges of the 1930s. His mother, who raised Otar on her own after his father's arrest, came from an aristocratic family and had studied at a tsarist-era institute for noble girls, where she gained fluency in French as well as Russian. Finding himself in Moscow during the Thaw, Otar Ioseliani drifted toward film as the most innovative medium of cosmopolitan intellectual expression in the Soviet Union. In 1955, he enrolled at VGIK, where he too studied with Alexander Dovzhenko and Mikhail Chiaureli. Ioseliani later recalled that he, the son of a tsarist officer and a noblewoman, gained entry to the Soviet film institute with little prior experience partially because of his nationality; during the Thaw, the Soviet Ministry of Culture made a renewed push to develop national cinema, and encouraged the recruitment of Caucasian, Central Asian, and Ukrainian students to VGIK.⁶⁶ The move further benefitted Georgians, who had already achieved notable success in Soviet cinema.

According to Ioseliani, his professors at VGIK found his early work to be evocative of the Georgian cinematic tradition in its commitment to ethnographic particularism in setting and artistic universalism in theme.⁶⁷ Ioseliani's influences were certainly diverse; an early artistic manifesto that the young director wrote for himself, but never published, cited Shakespeare, Cervantes, Moliere, and Tolstoy, as well as the French director Jacques Tati—who, incidentally, was also of Russian aristocratic background.⁶⁸ Elsewhere, he stated that the “heights of cinema” were exemplified by Vittorio De Sica's neorealist *Miracle in Milan*, released in 1951, as well as by the Georgian director Nikolai Shengelaia's quasi-ethnographic 1928 film *Eliso*.⁶⁹ From the beginning, Ioseliani made few compromises in his film projects: one showed a series of flowers and meadows crushed by Soviet bulldozers, another depicted with gritty detail daily life in a Soviet Georgian foundry. Both were declared unsuitable for academic

⁶⁵ Released from prison, Paradzhanov returned to Tbilisi but was barred from directing films on his own. Dodo Abashidze, vouching for him and offering to serve as his co-director, helped him to return to film with the 1984 film *ambavi suramis tsikhitsa* (*Legend of Surami Fortress*). M. M. Chernenko, *Sergei Paradzhanov: tvorcheskii portret* (Moscow: Soiuzinformkino, 1989).

⁶⁶ Discussed in an interview with Ioseliani in the documentary film, *Moi drug, Otar Ioseliani* (Moscow, 2008).

⁶⁷ *Moi drug, Otar Ioseliani* (Moscow, 2008).

⁶⁸ Otar Ioseliani, “Proshchanie s nevinnyim remeslom komedianta,” written in 1962 and printed in *Kinotsenarii 2-3* (2007): 10-17.

⁶⁹ Andrei Plakhov, “*Enfant terrible* ukhodiashchei porody,” *Kinotsenarii 2-3* (2007): 231.

credit as Ioseliani sought to graduate from VGIK in the early 1960s, a time when the Thaw in Soviet cinema was coming to a close. Finding the first in a series of patrons in the Soviet filmmaker Grigorii Chukhrai, who had won the Lenin Prize for his 1959 film *Ballad of a Soldier*, Ioseliani was finally able to graduate from the film institute based on a letter of recommendation written and signed by Chukhrai.⁷⁰

Like the Shengelaia brothers, Ioseliani returned to Georgia to pursue his film career. There, he found a thriving film studio partially shielded from the scrutiny of Goskino by a series of powerful national studio chiefs. The first studio director Ioseliani worked under, Misha Kveselava, gave repeated assurances to the young director, telling him, “as long as I am alive, you should pursue your work.” The second, Tengiz Gordeladze, was remembered by Ioseliani as “a principled Bolshevik,” who told Ioseliani: “it is your job to make films, so I will not impede.”⁷¹ Both studio chiefs sought to maximize the autonomy of the Georgian Film Studio, the first because of a commitment to artistic excellence, the second because he took seriously the Soviet effort to foster the development of national culture. According to Ioseliani, Moscow tolerated the Georgian Film Studio’s independent streak because Goskino ultimately controlled distribution and could limit the number of copies made of a film or refuse to dub the film into Russian for wide distribution.⁷²

Ioseliani’s first major film, *Falling Leaves (giorgobistve)*, was completed in 1966, and caused a sensation far beyond the Georgian republic. The film’s protagonist, Niko, was an awkward and naïve young man who worked at a Georgian wine factory. Niko’s hapless pursuit of a female co-worker led only to failure and disillusionment, and his brief rebellion against the low standards of production at the winery was erratic and unexpected. In contrast to the humorous, Aesopian critique of Eldar Shengelaia or the dramatized morality of Giorgi Shengelaia’s films, Ioseliani’s *Falling Leaves* had no clear moral and no unambiguously positive heroes. Official reviewers from Goskino praised young Niko’s “honesty” and “directness” in taking a stand against the release of substandard wine from the factory, but found the hero’s positive qualities to be offset by his “solitary and strange” nature.⁷³ In their discussions, Goskino’s reviewers were divided over the film’s merits, but appear to eventually have been swayed by the argument of one critic, Arnshtan, that Georgian directors accurately conveyed the complexities of “their own environment.”⁷⁴ Ioseliani could thus claim privilege on the basis of Soviet cultural diversity. Meanwhile, he commanded the full support of the Georgian Film Studio, whose reviewers claimed that Ioseliani’s film marked a new level of “high professionalism,” and importantly depicted the winemaking “for which Georgia is world-famous, but never before has been made the subject of a movie.”⁷⁵ Ioseliani not only received permission to proceed with the film, but also was granted several extensions and enjoyed control over choosing actors and filming locations.⁷⁶

After the film’s release, Ioseliani was hailed as an *auteur*, the creator of a characteristic style that was evocative of Italian Neorealism in its preference for black

⁷⁰ *Moi drug, Otar Ioseliani*.

⁷¹ *Moi drug, Otar Ioseliani*.

⁷² *Moi drug, Otar Ioseliani*.

⁷³ RGALI, f. 2944, op. 4, d. 710, ll. 6-14.

⁷⁴ RGALI, f. 2944, op. 4, d. 710, ll. 8-14.

⁷⁵ RGALI, f. 2944, op. 4, d. 710, l. 23.

⁷⁶ RGALI, f. 2944, op. 4, d. 710, l. 29.

and white and the use of non-professional actors, yet unmistakably Georgian in its detailed depictions of wine harvests in the Georgian countryside and winemaking in a Georgian town. The film was probably tolerated by Goskino because it was seen as artistically suitable for international release; indeed, the film was entered by the Soviets in the 1968 Cannes Film Festival, where it won a top prize.⁷⁷ In Moscow, Ioseliani became something of a celebrity; when he visited the city, he hosted gatherings of leading Russian and visiting French artists and intellectuals at an acquaintance's apartment across from the Bolshoi Theater.⁷⁸ The French film critic Bernard Eisenschitz recalled meeting Ioseliani at one of these gatherings in the late 1960s, and remembered the Georgian director lamenting the fact that Soviet moviemakers were increasingly “forced to choose between two paths: the path of Bondarchuk or the path of Danelia.”⁷⁹ Neither choice was appealing. The first, Sergei Bondarchuk, made epic dramas for wide release; the second, the Moscow Georgian director Georgii Danelia, produced mildly ironic “comedies of manners” (*bytovaia komediia*). Ioseliani instead sought to focus on the profound in everyday life. His response to Soviet restrictions was not to produce a veiled anti-Soviet film, but rather to make a movie ignoring the tenets of Soviet ideology altogether. While not explicitly anti-Soviet, the failings of his protagonists and his refusal to posit a clear moral made his productions seem somehow un-Soviet.

These tendencies were carried forward in his next film, *Once Lived a Song-Thrush* (*iqo shashvi mgalobeli*), released in 1971. The film's protagonist was a young Georgian musician who lived with his mother in Tbilisi. He had a spontaneous approach to life, wandering about town, meeting women, spending time with friends, and enjoying a carefree existence. While musically talented, he could not write the first notes of the song he was trying to compose, though he always managed to show up at exactly the right moment to play his part for the orchestra. Once again, Goskino's editors strove in vain to understand the film's message and its social significance. They found the film's hero too attractive and sympathetic to serve as a warning to viewers of the moral hazards of wasting time and energy, and worried that his seemingly random death at the film's end in a car accident would leave the audience confused. Although Goskino's editors praised Ioseliani as an original *auteur* for his cinematic style, they informed him in January 1970 that “an author's attitude toward the protagonist ought to be expressed precisely and unequivocally [*nedvusmyslenno*].”⁸⁰ Furthermore, Ioseliani was advised to “rethink the film's ending,” since the viewer might understand the protagonist's death as “purely coincidental,” thus muddling the film's “social and moral problematic.”⁸¹

In an explanatory note that Ioseliani sent to the Moscow editors in March 1970, the Georgian director claimed in response that his was “a film about creative work in our society,” reassuring them that “we want to demonstrate the necessity for every Soviet person to focus all energy and talent on making a contribution to the common cause.”⁸² Although resisting artistic compromise, Ioseliani was thus willing to frame his efforts in language that echoed official Soviet rhetoric. The film went back and forth repeatedly

⁷⁷ “Otar Ioseliani” *Kinotsenarii* 2-3 (2007): 367.

⁷⁸ Bernar Eizenshits, “Zhizneradostnyi pessimist Otari Ioseliani,” *Kinotsenarii* 2-3 (2007): 3.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ RGALI, f. 2944, op. 4, d. 1677, ll. 6-15.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁸² Central Archive of the Contemporary History of Georgia, Department of Literature and Art, f. 52, op. 2, d. 291, ll. 24-26.

between Tbilisi and Moscow, and Ioseliani eventually agreed to cut several scenes out of concern for the film's growing length, though these edits did little to address the underlying criticisms of Goskino officials. Apparently, the gestures made by Ioseliani to appease his critics worked in his favor, as did the international acclaim the Georgian director received for his previous film, a factor cited in letters of support written by the leadership of Georgia's film studio.⁸³ Ioseliani's new movie was dubbed in Russian and widely released, quickly gaining the status of a "cult film" among the Soviet intelligentsia. The Russian film historian Andrei Plakhov recalled a contemporary review that praised Ioseliani for creating a film in which "the flow of life foamed like Borjomi in a glass," in which there was "the aftertaste of bitterness, the wisdom of genius, and an unmistakable 'French taste.'" ⁸⁴ Like the mineral water Borjomi, Ioseliani's films were produced in the Caucasus and shipped to Moscow, unmistakably Georgian but celebrated for evoking Gallic sensibilities.

Ioseliani's final Soviet film, *Pastorale (pastorali)*, was completed in 1975 but never saw wide release. The film depicted the brief stay of a group of musicians from Tbilisi in a western Georgian village. The film not only lacked a positive hero and moral, it also had no main character, no clear plot, and large portions of the dialogue were spoken not in Georgian, but in Mingrelian, a regional dialect barely intelligible to most Georgian speakers. The film's production notes show confusion over how to classify the film; it was alternately referred to as an "artistic film" or a "comedy."⁸⁵ Again, Ioseliani received support from the Georgian Film Studio, whose editorial chief described it as "study of the moral, social problems of the contemporary Georgian countryside."⁸⁶ Yet Goskino's editors immediately found problems with Ioseliani's quasi-ethnographic depiction of everyday struggles, corruption, and drunkenness in the countryside. Ioseliani's refusal to heed these concerns led to more problems. M. G. Maruchkova, one of Goskino's editors, took a special trip to Tbilisi to check on the film's development, and found that Moscow's concerns had still not been addressed, despite assurances from the directors of the Georgian studio. She found instances of "lengthy procrastination in carrying out the requests" of Goskino, and implied that the new Georgian studio director, Rezo Chkheidze, was partially to blame since she had sent him a letter outlining her concerns several months before, but to no effect.⁸⁷ Ultimately, the film was only approved for release within Georgia. Even a final request by Ioseliani to change the title of the film from *Summer in the Village* to *Pastorale* was not granted by Goskino in Moscow. However, the Georgian Film Studio began referring to the film by its new name, with the old name in parentheses.⁸⁸ Only three copies of the film were made, and few ultimately saw it outside Georgia. The Soviet photographer Iurii Rost, a close friend of Ioseliani, recalled the despair of the Georgian director after the Tbilisi screening of *Pastorale*. Ioseliani felt that continuing to make films was pointless if they could not be

⁸³ Central Archive of the Contemporary History of Georgia, Department of Literature and Art, f. 52, op. 2, d. 291, ll. 13-21.

⁸⁴ Andrei Plakhov, "Enfant terrible ukhodiashchei porody," *Kinotsenarii* 2-3 (2007): 226.

⁸⁵ RGALI, f. 2944, op. 4, d. 3661, ll. 1-40.

⁸⁶ RGALI, f. 2944, op. 4, d. 3471, ll. 4-5.

⁸⁷ RGALI, f. 2944, op. 4, d. 3471, ll. 33-34.

⁸⁸ RGALI, f. 2944, op. 4, d. 3471, ll. 40-60.

shown outside Georgia. He eventually was allowed to emigrate to France to pursue his work.⁸⁹

Cinematic *auteurs* in a literal sense, Georgian directors aspired to control the authorship of their art, a difficult task in a state where public discourse was tightly scripted. Some, like Eldar Shengelaia, shrouded their statements in humor and absurdity. Others, like Giorgii Shengelaia, alternated between serious *avtorskie fil'my* and ideologically palatable genre pieces. Otar Ioseliani, by contrast, found the Soviet intelligentsia's pursuit of a moral mission tainted by its association with the Soviet state. His films instead expressed an aversion to the intellectual compromises of *zastoi* by trading sanctimonious moralizing for amoral irony. Yet even Ioseliani employed canny tactics to cope with institutions that funded his work, yet could potentially limit his audience.

The institutions that these directors navigated were hardly monolithic: Goskino's critics often presented opposing views, and the Georgian Film Studio typically lobbied on behalf of its directors. Relatively frank discussion took place in the closed meetings of Goskino, and Ioseliani and other directors found that some bureaucrats were more "enlightened" than others.⁹⁰ In fact, although Georgian directors frequently came up against restrictions, they arguably enjoyed greater freedom than the Russian directors who worked for Mosfil'm; Giorgi Shengelaia, for one, felt that he had an easier time getting around the censor than the Russian director Andrei Tarkovskii.⁹¹ Yet the limitations that Georgian directors encountered resonated because they echoed the larger constraints of the Georgian diaspora in the late Soviet period. Georgian success was based on an increasingly unsteady combination of state promotion and Georgian participation. During *zastoi*, the Georgia's intelligentsia was forced to balance their desire for imperial prominence with their quest for intellectual and cultural autonomy. By the late Soviet period, Georgian intellectuals sought to move beyond the official niches that enabled, but ultimately limited, their achievements. Georgian high culture virtuosos had found oases of artistic freedom, and Georgian directors had found ways to skirt the system by lightly mocking it, gaming it, or ignoring it altogether. With the release of Tengiz Abuladze's iconoclastic *Repentance*, the failings of the Soviet system would be addressed directly, and the intelligentsia urged to return in earnest to its original moral mission.

Glasnost' and Tengiz Abuladze's Repentance

When the film *Repentance* opened for unrestricted screenings in Moscow in early 1987, the Soviet critic Tatiana Khlopiankina triumphantly declared: "The release of *Repentance* is one of those big events that certify that the order of our life is happily and inevitably changing." Describing the film's significance, she wrote: "It is indeed a work

⁸⁹ Iurii Rost, "Otar Ioseliani," *Kinotsenarii* 2-3 (2007): 237.

⁹⁰ In an interview, Ioseliani thanked Raisa Zuseva, a member of Goskino's editorial board, for offering him useful advice to ease his films through the Goskino review process. Otar Ioseliani, "Otar Ioseliani," *Kinotsenarii* 2-3 (2007): 363. The role of "enlightened bureaucrats" in Russian history was identified by William Bruce Lincoln, who identified a group of realist, but reform-minded, state officials within the conservative administration of tsar Nicholas I. See Lincoln, "Russia's 'Enlightened' Bureaucrats and the Problem of State Reform, 1848-1856," *Cahiers du Monde russe et soviétique* 12: 4 (October – December 1971): 410-421.

⁹¹ Giorgi Shengelaia. Interview by author.

of art. But first of all it is a fact of our current social life.”⁹² Indeed, the film’s bold denunciation of the Stalinist legacy and its call for frank discussion—and repentance—of past Soviet sins captured the sentiment of an era defined by Gorbachev’s program of *glasnost*’ (openness). However, the film was launched and developed in the final years of *zastoi*, and its roots stretched back several decades, firmly planted in the decades-long development of post-Stalinist Georgian film. *Repentance* was conveniently ready for release at a time when Gorbachev called for open debate. It was no coincidence, however, that it was a Georgian film that pushed the limits of allowable expression the furthest, and offered a critique of Stalinism that resonated as much in the Great Leader’s homeland as it did in the Soviet capital.

According to director Tengiz Abuladze, *Repentance* was the third part of a film trilogy begun in 1967 with his black-and-white film *The Prayer (vedreba)*, and continued with his 1977 film *The Tree of Dreams (natvris khe)*.⁹³ Like *Repentance*, these first two films were set in Georgia but were concerned with larger issues of moral obligation. The first film, drawing on the work of Georgian poet Vazha Pshavela, focused on the struggle of a Georgian highlander trapped between his personal faith in God and village customs requiring him to take vengeance against his enemies. The second film was based on the work of another Georgian writer, Giorgi Leonidze, and explored the inroads made by revolutionary movements in a traditional Georgian village. In these films, Abuladze created a lush picture of Georgia’s past, while not neglecting the fact that his nation’s history was, in his own words, full of “blood, vengeance, and sacrifice.”⁹⁴

Like the Shengelaia brothers and Otar Ioseliani, Tengiz Abuladze was a graduate of VGIK and skilled at operating within the confines of the Soviet cinematic world. Born in 1924, he was a close friend of Rezo Chkheidze, the head of the Georgian Film Studio in the latter half of the 1970s and the 1980s; the two had known each other since collaborating on Abuladze’s first major film, *Magdana’s Donkey (magdanas lurja)*, in 1955. Like the works of other Georgian directors, Abuladze’s films were entered into international competitions, and the first two films of his “trilogy” encountered little resistance from Goskino; in fact, they were praised as “social commentaries” on the superstitions and social ills of Georgia’s pre-revolutionary past.⁹⁵ There was little in either film to indicate Abuladze’s views on the Soviet system, and he appears to have been treated as an ideologically loyal filmmaker, accepted into the ranks of the Communist Party in 1978, and hailed as a People’s Artist of the USSR in 1980.

It might have seemed unlikely that a few years later Abuladze would produce an iconoclastic film that led many to ultimately condemn Soviet power. Yet his generation, the Soviet *shestidesiatniki* (the people of the sixties), who first came of age during the Thaw, remained committed to reforming the Soviet Union and believed a frank discussion of the past was essential for overcoming the excesses of Stalinism.⁹⁶ Abuladze was a decade older than the Shengelaia brothers and Otar Ioseliani, and he belonged to a

⁹² Tatiana Khlopliankina, “On the Road that Leads to the Truth,” in *Russian Critics on the Cinema of Glasnost*, eds. Michael Brashinsky and Andrew Horton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 51. Khlopliankina’s article was originally published in *Moskovskaia Pravda*, February 4, 1987.

⁹³ For a discussion of Abuladze’s earlier work, see L. G. Dularidze, *Tengiz Abuladze: portret rezhissera* (Moscow: Soiuzinformkino, 1983).

⁹⁴ Josephine Woll and Denise J. Youngblood, *Repentance* (London and New York, 2001), 100.

⁹⁵ RGALI, f. 2944, op. 4, d. 3466, l. 7.

⁹⁶ On the *shestidesiatniki* and those who came after them, see Zubok, *Zhivago’s Children*, 162-163, 360.

more idealistic peer group who aspired to sincerity and eschewed irony. He had graduated from VGIK in 1953, the year of Stalin's death, and made his first films during the height of the Thaw. By the time the disillusionment of the Brezhnev era—especially pronounced after the 1968 Prague Spring and the repressions that followed—had set in, he was in his mid-40s. Like Gorbachev, his criticism of the Soviet past was rooted not in a desire to overthrow the system, but rather in a sense of optimism that the system could be changed by laying bare its flaws. Combined with this idealism, he sought to revitalize Georgian culture, though this “cultural nationalism,” if it can be characterized as such, was not wedded to a program of political independence.⁹⁷

Eduard Shevardnadze, the Communist Party chief of Georgia, had become a powerful patron and protector of Abuladze by the early 1980s. Although an unlikely pair, the two had several things in common. They were only three years apart in age, and both were, in a sense, outsiders in the Georgian capital. Shevardnadze, the son of a poor teacher from a western Georgian village, viewed the cosmopolitan Tbilisi intelligentsia with suspicion; Abuladze was accepted as a member of the intelligentsia but, having come to Tbilisi from modest beginnings in the provincial city of Kutaisi, was thought to lack the sophistication possessed by representatives of Tbilisi's more prominent families.⁹⁸ Both were beneficiaries of Soviet upward mobility, though each had his own reasons to be critical of the Soviet Union's Stalinist past. Abuladze, while studying at VGIK in the final years of Stalin's rule, had witnessed the suppression of leading Soviet actors and directors. Shevardnadze, on the other hand, had personal experience with the Stalinist terror: his father was arrested and his father-in-law executed during the Great Purges. Shevardnadze was also a shrewd politician who likely realized that he needed a degree of support from Georgia's powerful intelligentsia, both before the hijacking incident of 1983 and, especially, in its aftermath. He thus cast himself as a patron of the arts, helping Ioseliani emigrate in 1982, and giving Abuladze the political cover he needed to make his next movie.⁹⁹

Abuladze had begun working on the script for *Repentance* in 1981 and finished writing in 1982, the year of Brezhnev's death. With the support of Rezo Chkheidze, Abuladze's friend and the director of the Georgian Film Studio, Abuladze began filming the first scenes in 1983, although filming was quickly halted after the arrest of actor Gega Kobakhidze for his role in the hijacking plot. Renewing support for the film became a way for Shevardnadze to demonstrate to the Georgian intelligentsia that he continued to protect the relative intellectual freedom they cherished, even if he would not tolerate acts of resistance like the hijacking attempt. Seizing upon a bureaucratic loophole, Shevardnadze suggested to Abuladze that he develop *Repentance* not as a film but as a television special. According to Abuladze, Georgian television had a three-hour daily slot reserved for local broadcasting that was generally free from the scrutiny of Gosteleradio,

⁹⁷ Woll and Youngblood write that Abuladze was “unquestionably a Georgian cultural nationalist” in *Repentance*, 103. However, the term should be used with caution, since national cultural expression was encouraged by the Soviet state, while nationalism was not. Julie Christensen offers a careful reading of the film's Georgian themes, but perhaps overstates Abuladze's “nationalism” in her article published around the time of Georgian independence, “Tengiz Abuladze and the Georgian Nationalist Cause,” *Slavic Review* 50: 1 (Spring 1991): 163-175.

⁹⁸ Giorgi Shengelaia. Interview by author.

⁹⁹ Andrei Plakhov, “*Enfant terrible* ukhodiashchei porody,” *Kinotsenarii* 2-3 (2007): 226.

the central television and radio agency in Moscow.¹⁰⁰ Thus, with little supervision from the center, Abuladze completed work on the film in December 1984, just a few months before Gorbachev was elected General Secretary. The film remained shelved until late 1986, when Shevardnadze, now the Soviet Minister of Foreign Affairs, again helped by encouraging its release. The film first appeared in limited screenings packed by intellectuals at Moscow's Writers' Union club, the House of Cinema, and the Artists' Union. When it was widely released the following year, the dissident historian Roy Medvedev called it "the most important event in Soviet cultural life in at least a decade."¹⁰¹ In Moscow alone, 1.8 million viewers saw the film in the first four months of its public release.¹⁰²

Repentance successfully anticipated the searching moral tone of *glasnost*, though the way it shrouded some of its most iconoclastic statements in dream sequences and symbols was evocative of the Georgian cinematic art of *zastoi*. The film, as critics have pointed out, was essentially a "story within a story within a story," complete with long flashbacks and dream sequences.¹⁰³ The plot centered on the tyranny of a fictional dictator, Varlam Aravidze, the crimes committed during his reign, and his repeated burial and disinterment by one of the victims of his terror. In the film, elements of the surreal, and the phantasmagorical, comingled with the everyday. Stalin was not mentioned by name—Aravidze literally meant "no one" in Georgian—but he did not have to be. Aravidze's mannerisms and mood swings were evocative of Stalin, and his appearance reminiscent of Beria. Beneath its layer of fantasy, the film offered the Soviet public a vivid rendering of Stalinist terror, and of intellectual soul-searching, that had earlier been confined to private conversations.

The film confronted the dilemmas of the Soviet intelligentsia directly. While they spoke in Georgian and inhabited a Georgian setting, the film's characters carried on frank conversations of pan-Soviet significance about the role of the artist, the significance of religion, and the dangers of compromise and silence. The film celebrated the high culture aspirations of the Soviet intelligentsia, while hinting at a deeper cultural philistinism within their ranks. The film juxtaposed the cultural polish of the dictator, Varlam Aravidze, with the true cultural commitment of the suffering artist, Sandro Barateli. Implicating the Soviet intelligentsia in its historically close relationship to the state, the film alluded to the two as relatives tracing their descent to a common forefather. In the film, the two come into conflict over the fate of an ancient Georgian church that has been turned into a "Temple of Einstein" devoted to the worship of modern science. Aravidze, who sings Italian arias and recites Shakespeare in an overly showy display of his cosmopolitan sophistication, champions culture in the name of progress and truth so long as it is "useful." Barateli instead seeks to protect the deeper, "life-giving roots" of culture, as embodied by the church, a cultural monument he considers on par with the works of "Rustaveli, Dante, and Bach." The conflict between the two is carried on by their children. Abel Aravidze is content to remain silent about his father's crimes, comfortably playing a Beethoven sonata in his large house, surrounded by French posters and other trappings of high culture. Ketiv Barateli, on the other hand, is the idealized intellectual,

¹⁰⁰ Woll and Youngblood, *Repentance*, 90.

¹⁰¹ Woll and Youngblood, *Repentance*, 91.

¹⁰² RGALI, f. 2916, op. 4, d. 555, ll. 30-31.

¹⁰³ Woll and Youngblood, *Repentance*, 6.

effortlessly sophisticated, while also personifying the “moral heroism” praised by her father. In confronting the authorities, she gives voice to the victims of Varlam’s terror, risking her life to expose the leader’s corpse, and speaking out despite the threat of punishment.

Repentance was a Georgian film, but it achieved broader resonance among the Soviet intelligentsia because it was not only about Georgia. A product of the Georgian intelligentsia’s simultaneous pursuit of national distinctiveness and imperial prominence, it was exotic in its Georgian mythical setting, but pan-Soviet in its characters and themes. Despite their Georgian origins, Stalin and Beria were tyrants who belonged to the entire Soviet Union. The film’s generational and Christian metaphors could be recognized by Russians as their own, whether or not Russian intellectuals agreed with them. Importantly, as a Georgian asserting national cultural autonomy and universalism at the same time, Abuladze was more comfortable exhorting intellectuals to return to Christianity than a large and influential elite in Russia, the “left-liberals,” who worried that liberalism and Orthodoxy were incompatible.

Even though it succeeded as a pan-Soviet film, the call to return to religion in *Repentance* presaged a sense among the Georgian intelligentsia that Soviet imperial prominence had compromised and limited Georgia’s national culture. While Soviet patronage had fostered prominent cultural institutions in Georgia, the artists and intellectuals who staffed them had begun to perceive Soviet rule as culturally degrading. Georgian intellectuals grew increasingly self-conscious, aware that their cultural achievements were valued by the state inasmuch as they were politically useful. They grew tired of the condescension of being treated as a “younger brother” in the “fraternal union of the Soviet peoples”; they began to romanticize Georgian culture’s pre-Soviet heritage and lamented the need to dilute Georgian culture to cater to a predominantly Russian audience; and they rallied around their ancient language and religious traditions in staking claim to a deeper cultural legacy. Georgian film began to address these sentiments, alluding to them in passing before engaging them directly in *Repentance*. In Otar Ioseliani’s 1966 film *Falling Leaves*, the spoiled wine is offered to visiting Russian tourists, who drink it with enthusiasm; the implication was that the demanding pace of Soviet planning and the undistinguishing tastes of the Russian palate were ruining the integrity of one of Georgia’s most famous products. Although it was not widely released, Irakli Kvirikadze’s 1981 film *The Swimmer (motsurave)*, chronicled the progressive degradation of three generations in a Georgian family, from the proud and traditional grandfather of the pre-revolutionary period, to the energetic but compliant son of the Stalinist era, to the obese and morose grandson of the early 1980s, who spends his days cheerlessly leading groups of drunken Russian tourists around Georgia.

Repentance was a scathing criticism not only of Stalin, but of Georgian intellectuals for whom culture was only a polish, the arts an avenue for professional achievement, and who spoke, like Varlam Aravidze, interspersing their Georgian with Russian words and phrases. It was a call to repent for their complicity in the Stalinist past, and to affirm Georgia’s true cultural heritage, as represented by a Georgian Christian Orthodox tradition that predated Russia’s by several centuries. In the film’s poignant final scene, the character played by the legendary Georgian actress Veriko Andzhaparidze, when told that the street named after Varlam Aravidze does not lead to a church, asks: “What good is a road if it doesn’t lead you to a church?” As *perestroika*

allowed new forms of political expression, the line became widely-cited by the Georgian intelligentsia amidst debates over Georgia's future and the nation's place in the Soviet Union.¹⁰⁴

Outside the cinema, the intelligentsia's interest in revitalizing Georgian culture had begun to take on explicitly political connotations. In the early 1970s, Zviad Gamasakhurdia, a professor of literature at Tbilisi State University and the son of a famous Georgian writer, formed a group to protect "Georgian architectural monuments," especially churches. Although limited in influence, Gamsakhurdia's group was at the forefront of a dissident Georgian intellectual movement that saw any form of Soviet power as a threat to Georgian culture.¹⁰⁵ *Glasnost'* brought the critical views of these Georgian dissidents into the open. However, like Abuladze, most Georgian intellectuals initially believed that national revival might be achieved within a democratic Soviet Union. *Repentance* was not a truly anti-Soviet film, since most intellectuals believed that exposing the sins of the past was the only way to move the Soviet system forward, and the Georgian intelligentsia in particular believed that national autonomy and religious expression would be compatible with the political reform of the Soviet Union.

Indeed, the film won numerous prizes as Gorbachev and other Soviet leaders sought to re-enlist the support of the intelligentsia in reforming the Soviet state. When the film and television section of the committee to award the Lenin Prize met in January 1988, there was broad consensus that *Repentance* deserved the award. In the new political atmosphere of *glasnost'* and *perestroika*, Abuladze was praised by one committee member for his bravery in pursuing a project that anticipated Gorbachev's reforms.¹⁰⁶ As the committee met, there was clearly no other film that was so much in the forefront of the minds of the Soviet public. It was a box office success, a politically relevant film, and an artistic achievement that had garnered critical praise. According to one committee member: "Even judged by the old standards, even if *Repentance* were not such sensation of our time and had not risen up into some kind of general wave of social repentance, it would still be a beautiful film."¹⁰⁷

Political changes at the top had altered the context of Georgian intellectual expression, and Abuladze's risky engagement with the Stalinist period was now squarely in line with Gorbachev's policies. After the film was awarded the prestigious Lenin Prize, Eduard Shevardnadze, now one of Gorbachev's closest allies, wrote to congratulate Abuladze in April 1988. Shevardnadze framed the movie as an intrinsic part of the political program of *perestroika*. He stated: "Your film *Repentance* was the one of the earliest examples of the beginning of *perestroika*, when many people were afraid to even believe that our course might not be reversed.... We should remember now that the path to *Repentance* from *The Plea* and *The Tree of Dreams* was not simple or easy. It did not necessarily hold the promise of prizes and was not guaranteed a favorable outcome." In a

¹⁰⁴ Some in Georgia also saw Andzhaparidze's line as an apology for the past abuses of religion in numerous Soviet Georgian films, some of which she had been personally involved with. She had first gained fame for her role in pro-Soviet films like Nikolai Shengelaia's 1933 *Twenty-Six Commissars*, and her husband, Mikhail Chiaureli, was a favorite filmmaker of Stalin and the director of the 1931 anti-religious film *Out of the Way! (khabarda!)* Woll and Youngblood identify other allusions to Chiaureli's 1931 film in *Repentance*, 103.

¹⁰⁵ Ronald Grigor Suny, *The Making of the Georgian Nation*, 308-309.

¹⁰⁶ RGALI, f. 2916, op. 4, d. 547, l. 3.

¹⁰⁷ RGALI, f. 2916, op. 4, d. 547, ll. 49-50.

remarkable turn of phrase, Shevardnadze closed the letter by adopting the rhetoric of an increasingly assertive Georgian intelligentsia:

Today, when the bravery of honest talent is recognized according to its merits, I think about what a wonderful thing it is...to express the people's yearning for truth and justice, to answer the expectations of society, and to give people hope in the victory of good over evil. Of course, this would be impossible without a sense of spiritual continuity with our great ancestors and the living root of our connection with our native soil.¹⁰⁸

Shevardnadze's approving allusion to religion—"a sense of spiritual continuity with our great ancestors"—and to nearly nationalistic pride in the Georgian homeland—"the living root of our connection with our native soil" was a striking reminder of how much the political terrain had shifted.

In early 1989, it appeared that the Georgian intelligentsia was on the cusp of a cultural renaissance that would revitalize their nation and remake the Soviet Union for the better. Soviet leaders like Shevardnadze seemed to support their goals. Artists were allowed forms of intellectual and creative expression that had been forbidden for decades, and permitted to forge new connections internationally. While less than six years earlier, a desperate group of Georgian artists and intellectuals, alienated from Soviet power, had made a desperate attempt to seek freedom outside the Soviet Union, the intelligentsia now stood at the very helm of the Soviet state. On March 26, 1989, the Soviet Union held a competitive election to choose delegates for the Congress of People's Deputies.¹⁰⁹ Among the representatives from Georgia were Tengiz Abuladze, fellow film director Eldar Shengelaia, and the Georgian violin virtuoso Liana Isakadze; each represented the cosmopolitan Georgian intelligentsia in the fields where it had gained the greatest prominence, music and film. In May 1989, they would convene in Moscow to help determine the future course of the Soviet Union. By the time they finally met, however, a series of violent confrontations had intervened to irrevocably change the tenor of the debate. The national intelligentsias fostered by the Soviet state would give rise to the nationalist opponents of Soviet empire, and the Soviet Union's cosmopolitan intellectuals would be committed universalists deprived of a constituency.

¹⁰⁸ Central Archive of the Contemporary History of Georgia, Department of Literature and Art, f. 307, op. 1, d. 87, l. 2.

¹⁰⁹ For a comprehensive collection of documents on the Congress of People's Deputies of the USSR, see *S'ezd narodnykh deputatov SSSR: dokumenty i materialy* (Moscow: APN, 1989).

Epilogue

The End of the Empire of Diasporas

The Soviet empire's endurance was based on a constant balancing of the promotion of nationality and its curtailment. On the one hand, the Soviet state sought to root titular ethnic groups in their national republics, where national languages and cultures were promoted and national cadres given preferential treatment. On the other hand, political power was highly centralized, and the republics and their respective nationalities were vigorously integrated into a larger economic and cultural infrastructure with its heart in the Soviet capital. Accordingly, historians have typically viewed the Soviet empire in one of two ways: from the perspective of the national republics, or from the center. However, this study has focused on a mobile group that both transcended the national periphery and reshaped the center. The story of the Georgians underscores the need to rethink these binary categories and instead reconceptualize the Soviet Union as an empire of diasporas.

As part of its imperial balancing act, the Soviet system enabled the development of numerous internal diasporas like the Georgians, but also obscured their presence by preventing their official categorization as diaspora communities. According to the Soviet Union's nationalities policy, third-generation Muscovites of Georgian ancestry were marked as Georgians in their passports, but were barred from establishing any formal political, economic, or civic group based on their ethnic distinctiveness.¹ While formal diaspora organizations were largely prohibited, the ease of moving from the nationally-defined republics to Moscow (and back), the enduring distinctiveness of Soviet ethnic groups, and the ways in which national cultural difference was promoted by the Soviet state, made informal, internal diaspora identities a fixture of Soviet life. The Georgians were a paradigmatic example, the most visible internal diaspora group because they appeared at each stage of Soviet history and did so explicitly as Georgians.

The Soviet Union was an empire constructed, in large part, by its diasporas. In Soviet politics, national cadres were promoted from the republics to the center, and ethnic networks colored Soviet political life and informed enduring systems of patronage. In Soviet culture, the state nurtured a peculiar brand of domestic internationalism that promoted national form and stimulated the circulation of cultural entrepreneurs. When it came to the economy, the Soviets established a relatively autarkic system that, like the Soviet diet, made do with domestically available ingredients drawn from the national republics. Because the Soviets relied on domestic production, they stressed internal economic diversification, which overlapped in interesting ways with internal national diversity in culture. As the case of the Georgians demonstrates, Soviet rule did not simply mean imprinting a Russian identity on the periphery; instead, it entailed the construction of a multiethnic center based on the contributions of a diverse array of domestic nationalities.

¹ After the 1920s, internal diasporas were generally prohibited from creating representative institutions in Russia until the late 1980s. For a comparative view of Moscow's diasporas and their history, see Ia. I. Zdorovets, *Diaspory: Predstavitel'stva natsional'nostei v Moskve i ikh deiatel'nost'* (Moscow: Tsentri politicheskoi informatsii, 2003).

In politics, culture, and economics, the Georgian diaspora succeeded not despite, but because of the relatively closed, internally diverse nature of the Soviet empire. Their rootedness in a Soviet republic meant a steady supply of reliable clients for political patrons, fresh staples for the new Soviet diet, ethnically distinct entertainers for the Soviet stage, as well as licit and illicit economic goods and services for Moscow's burgeoning marketplaces. For a time, the Soviet empire seemed to offer the ideal forum for this rooted diaspora with cosmopolitan aspirations. Moscow offered Georgian Bolsheviks the opportunity to join (and lead) an international movement, provided a vast stage for entertainers, a thriving market for entrepreneurs, and a receptive audience for the intellectual contributions of the Georgian intelligentsia.

The Georgians were exceptionally skilled at drawing on the particulars of their cultural repertoire to express the universal in terms appropriate to the Soviet context. Yet the Georgian diaspora's success in performing both strangeness and universality rested on their remaining familiar but ethnically distinct strangers. In many cases, ethnic difference was an advantage: an avenue for non-Russian political advancement in an avowedly anti-imperialist empire, and a form of cultural capital for restaurateurs, entertainers, and even economic entrepreneurs trafficking in the rare and the exotic. However, as with the achievements of past diasporas that found success in service to a larger empire, such as the Armenian commercial elite in the Ottoman Empire or the Baltic Germans in the Russian Empire, Georgian prominence was at times seen as threatening.²

Particularly after World War II, Georgian political success was a potential source of tension and was handled delicately even by Stalin himself. Following Stalin's death, mass demonstrations shook Tbilisi in 1956 after Khrushchev's denunciation of Stalinism in his secret speech. Soviet authorities in Moscow grew concerned that nationalist tendencies, particularly among the Soviet Georgian elite, had been emboldened by the prominent but now threatened role of Georgians in the Bolshevik party.³ Georgian economic success also generated tension. At times it was viewed with envy, as evident in Soviet anecdotes that centered on the higher living standards enjoyed by Georgians. Finally, Georgian cultural and intellectual success gave rise to an increasingly self-conscious Georgian intelligentsia who shared the frustrations and grievances of other Soviet intellectuals, but could cast them in ethnic terms. Georgian success galvanized the intelligentsia's efforts to seek greater autonomy and, eventually, independence.

The demise of the Soviet Union was caused by a combination of ideological contradictions, individual decisions, and long-term structural factors, as well as the unforeseen impact of contingent events.⁴ However, a leading role in its dissolution was

² On the precarious position of Armenians in the late Ottoman years, see Ronald Grigor Suny, *Looking Toward Ararat: Armenia in Modern History* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1993), 94-115; on the Baltic Germans, see John A. Armstrong, "Mobilized Diaspora in Tsarist Russia: The Case of the Baltic Germans" in *Soviet Nationality Policies and Practices*, ed. Jeremy R. Azrael (New York: Prager, 1978), 63-104.

³ Timothy Blauvelt, "Status Shift and Ethnic Mobilisation in the March 1956 Events in Georgia," *Europe-Asia Studies* 61: 4 (June 2009): 651-668.

⁴ There is a fairly abundant literature on the Soviet collapse, most of it written by political scientists. For a critical take on this literature and an account of the end of the Soviet Union written by an historian, see Stephen Kotkin, *Armageddon Averted: The Soviet Collapse, 1970-2000* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).

undoubtedly played by internal diasporas, who contributed to the unmaking of the Soviet empire even as they had once taken part in its making. Nationalism, which meant the open articulation of ethnic grievances and the explicit politicization of ethnic difference, helped split the national republics from the center. It also threatened to tear apart the complicated fabric of national peoples, cultures, and products that defined Soviet life. The Georgian skill in performing otherness, now in a dramatically different political context where sovereignty rested on national difference, eventually placed a vocal segment of the Georgian intelligentsia at the forefront of efforts to secede from the Soviet Union. However, the end of the Soviet empire, which transformed the Georgians from an internal Soviet diaspora into a newly transnational population, undermined the very basis of past Georgian success.

Georgian Independence and the End of the Soviet Georgian Intelligentsia

While they harbored increasingly critical views of the Soviet system and pursued a greater degree of local self-assertion during *perestroika*, few Georgian intellectuals initially called for the outright dissolution of the Soviet Union. The intellectual climate in Georgia, as well as among Georgians in the diaspora, changed radically after April 9, 1989, the day that Soviet troops violently broke up a peaceful demonstration in Tbilisi. Nineteen people, most of them women, were killed as predominantly Russian Soviet soldiers used sharpened shovels and toxic gas to force a crowd off the Georgian capital's main thoroughfare. Video taken on that day revealed disturbing incidents of young women beaten to death, ambulances blocked by soldiers from assisting the victims, and a young Georgian man attempting to hold back a Soviet tank, wielding only a stick.

These images were distributed widely, and *glasnost*' allowed for open discussion of the events of April 9 in the Georgian press. The public debates that followed crystallized anti-Soviet attitudes among the Georgian intelligentsia and empowered its most radical wing, a previously small fringe who called for independence. In the view of one observer of Georgian politics, the demonstration's violent suppression recast Soviet power as that of a foreign occupying force; as Soviet authority was delegitimized, Georgian independence came to be seen not only as desirable but "natural."⁵

Emboldened by past successes and resentful of Moscow's brutal use of force, the Georgian intelligentsia quickly passed from dissidence to fierce opposition. The Georgian republic's Writers' Union, originally organized as a forum for developing ideologically sound national intellectual cadres, became a haven for nationalist sentiment. The entire Soviet past, laid bare by *perestroika*, was now subject to debate. The central authorities' crackdown on the demonstration came to be interpreted as the latest in a long series of national grievances that stretched back to the beginning of the Soviet period. In June 1989, the Writers' Union issued a demand to the republic's Supreme Soviet, calling upon delegates to officially recognize the fact that Georgia had been invaded and illegally annexed by the Red Army on February 25, 1921.⁶ The implication was that the resulting decades of Soviet rule had been a period of occupation, and that Georgian independence meant the restoration of the "natural" order of things—most of all, a reassertion of the most naturalized form of government, the nation-state. The Soviet Union, an avowedly

⁵ Ghia Nodia, "Georgia's Identity Crisis," *Journal of Democracy* 6: 1 (January 1995): 104-116.

⁶ Ronald Suny, *The Making of the Georgian Nation*, 323.

anti-imperialist, self-consciously multiethnic state, was now openly criticized as a Russian empire on the streets of Tbilisi.

Georgia's nationalist intellectuals called themselves the *meotkhe dasi* (fourth generation), claiming symbolic descent from Georgia's nineteenth-century intelligentsia. At the helm of the movement for independence was Zviad Gamaskhurdia, a translator who wrote monographs on Shakespeare and the son of a famous Soviet Georgian writer. At his side was Merab Kostava, a graduate of the Tbilisi Conservatory. Although trained by the Soviet system in the arts of high culture, both came to see Soviet cosmopolitanism as another form of imperialism, and eventually rejected the hybridity of Soviet culture in favor of a supposedly untainted Georgian cultural heritage with its roots in the pre-Soviet past.

As nationalists garnered popular support in Georgia, the seeming triumph of the more cosmopolitan members of the Soviet intelligentsia in Moscow, which came with the election of delegates like Andrei Sakharov to the Congress of People's Deputies, was marred by infighting and a growing sense of irrelevance. At the first meeting of the Congress, one delegate disrupted the proceedings by calling for a moment of silence for the victims of April 9.⁷ Even Tengiz Abuladze, who initially hoped to transform the Soviet Union into a democracy, now used nationalist language. In one speech, he decried the "annexation of independent Georgia" in 1921, though he importantly noted that this "crime" was in fact perpetrated by two Georgians, Stalin and Ordzhonikidze.⁸

More extreme Georgian nationalists insisted that threats to Georgian statehood came primarily from Russia. Movements for greater autonomy in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, two ethnically defined regions within the Georgian republic where Georgians lived alongside titular nationalities, were regarded by Gamsakhurdia as nothing more than "provocations" engineered by Moscow to undermine Georgia's territorial integrity.⁹ Although Soviet authorities did regard the prospect of an independent Georgia with reservation, Gamsakhurdia and other members of Georgia's nationalist leadership sometimes seemed to confuse cause and effect. With nationalists consolidating their control in Tbilisi, local elites in Abkhazia and South Ossetia had little choice but to petition Moscow for assistance, faced with a Georgian nationalist movement that spoke ominously of non-Georgians as *stumrebi* (guests) in the Georgian republic.¹⁰ The plans of Abkhaz nationalists were of course complicated by the fact that there were far more Georgians than ethnic Abkhaz living in the autonomous region of Abkhazia. These Georgians became, in a sense, an internal diaspora living within their own national republic; in a matter of years, most would be forced out of Abkhazia, part of a larger process of ethnic cleansing that swept the Caucasus following Soviet collapse.

Unrest in Abkhazia and South Ossetia provoked a rift between the cosmopolitan branch of the Soviet Russian intelligentsia, which had typically viewed Georgian complaints against "Russian chauvinism" with sympathy, and many Georgian intellectuals, who now seemed to be advancing their own brand of national exclusivity. In

⁷ Suny, *The Making of the Georgian Nation*, 322.

⁸ Central Archive of the Contemporary History of Georgia, Department of Literature and Art, f. 307, op. 1, d. 85, ll. 1-5.

⁹ Vicken Cheterian, *War and Peace in the Caucasus: Russia's Troubled Frontier* (London: Hurst, 2008), 176-177.

¹⁰ Suny, *The Making of the Georgian Nation*, 325.

an article published in *Ogonek* in late 1989, Andrei Sakharov infuriated Georgians by calling the Georgian republic, with its Abkhaz and Ossetian autonomous regions, a “miniature empire” (*malaia imperiia*). Sakharov’s article led many in the Georgian intelligentsia to feel that Russian intellectuals were no longer their fellow travelers when it came to Georgian independence. In a published response to Sakharov, D. L. Muskhelishvili, a member of the Georgian Academy of Sciences, wrote that he considered it “unfortunate” that such a “respected academic” as Sakharov would criticize Georgia for “ethnic problems he knows only poorly.” Blaming Russia for fomenting ethnic discord in Georgia, Muskhelishvili invoked the victims of the April 9 demonstrations, stating: “we ourselves did not kill our women and children with shovels and suffocate them with gases...it was not we who attacked, but we who were attacked.”¹¹

Rifts occurred within the Georgian intelligentsia as well. The philosopher Merab Mamardashvili, who had spent most of his career at Moscow State University but returned to Georgia in the 1980s, criticized Gamsakhurdia and his cohort for considering Georgian cultural and political independence as an end in itself rather than a means for advancing universal values. In an article, Mamardashvili criticized those he called “Georgian chauvinists” and staked out his own vision for an independent Georgia, writing: “my struggle is not for the Georgian language, since [that struggle] is already won, my struggle is for what will be said in the Georgian language.”¹² Gamsakhurdia, on the other hand, upheld a messianic vision for Georgian culture and believed that the triumph of the particular was vital to the pursuit of the universal. The Georgian nationalist leader was convinced that his nation was endowed with a special historical role, one no less than that Marx had once envisioned for the proletariat. Although he had first taken part in politics as a human rights activist in the wake of the 1975 Helsinki Accords and had long maintained close ties with Russian dissidents, Gamsakhurdia now eschewed broader humanist goals, cast aspersions on Russia, and held up Georgia’s particular mission as essential for the future of humanity.¹³ In a lecture entitled “The Spiritual Mission of Georgia,” delivered to a large crowd in the Tbilisi Philharmonic on May 2, 1990, Gamsakhurdia ignored the numerous contributions made by Georgians to Russian and Soviet culture. Instead, he linked the Georgian people to the most important developments in Western civilization more broadly, from the achievements of the ancient Greeks to the spread of Christianity, for which Georgians had been and were destined to remain the “chief bearers of spirituality.”¹⁴

Even as the delegates in the Congress of People’s Deputies continued to debate the fate of the Soviet Union in Moscow, their efforts were undermined by events outside the center. In March 1990, the local Supreme Soviet unilaterally declared Georgia to be a sovereign republic; in November 1990, Gamsakhurdia was chosen to head the Soviet. Perhaps sensing an enormous shift in local attitudes, even the head of the Georgian

¹¹ D. L. Muskhelishvili, “Gruziiā – ‘malaia imperiia’?!” in *Gruziiā – ‘malaia imperia’?!*, ed. G. S. Gachechiladze (Tbilisi: Sarangi, 1990), 3-18.

¹² Merab Mamardashvili, “Veriu v zdravyi smysl,” accessed November 17, 2010, <http://www.iriston.ru/ru/yugooset/1101322999.php>.

¹³ Mariam Parsadanashvili, “The Georgian Dissident Movement: The Case of Zviad Gamsakhurdia and Merab Kostava,” *The Archival Bulletin* 4 (January 2009): 34-36.

¹⁴ Zviad Gamsakhurdia, “sakartvelos sulieri missia,” accessed November 17, 2010, <http://www.amsi.ge/istoria/zg/missia.html>.

Communist Party, Givi Gumbaridze, now proclaimed that the main goal of the party was to “restore” Georgian independence.¹⁵ As the Soviet Union unraveled, the Georgian diaspora was torn between a desire for rootedness and a fading vision of Soviet cosmopolitanism.

For Georgians living in Moscow, events in their native republic, paired with the lifting of restrictions in the Soviet capital, dramatically altered diaspora life. In the aftermath of April 9, Georgians in Moscow began to organize politically; later that year, they formed an official society based around an historically Georgian church near the city’s center. As in the film *Repentance*, the rekindling of an “authentic,” non-Soviet Georgian culture meant the revival of Georgian Orthodox Christianity. Through the church-based society, Georgians in Moscow now had access to a special library, concerts, exhibits, and clubs, as well as a formal network of assistance catering to recent migrants.¹⁶ As other Georgian diaspora organizations were established, what was previously an informal diaspora based upon personal ties and cultural affinity became an officially recognized group with numerous, and sometimes competing, representative institutions.

Taking advantage of the relaxation of state controls, many living in the Soviet capital sought new ways to express their national identity and pass it on to their children. Members of Moscow’s Georgian diaspora were at the forefront of such efforts. In 1989, Georgians in Moscow founded a specialized Georgian-language school; according to its director, it was the first national school in Moscow where children were given a complete education in a national, non-Russian language. The school started with a handful of students, but by 2006 had close to 600 pupils and was one of several Georgian schools in Moscow.¹⁷

Yet for some Georgians in Moscow, the collapse of the Soviet Union left them critical of political processes in both Georgia and Russia. The Georgian author Aleksandr Ebanoidze, a longtime resident of Moscow, experienced a sense of alienation from events in independent Georgia even as he felt compelled to defend his homeland from critics. On the one hand, he wrote in defense of Georgia’s territorial integrity in 1991, arguing that describing Georgia as a “miniature empire” and carving it up into multiple independent states was as absurd as separating the streets named for historic Georgian settlements in Moscow, Malaia and Bol’shaia Gruzinskaia, from the rest of the Soviet capital.¹⁸ Ebanoidze, who was the editor of the journal *Druzhiba narodov* (*Friendship of the Peoples*), spoke in favor of interethnic harmony, but reaffirmed his support for an “indivisible” Georgian homeland. On the other hand, Ebanoidze felt deeply disturbed by the course of political events in Georgia following independence. In an article published shortly after the end of the Soviet Union, he bemoaned the decimation of Georgia’s Soviet-era intelligentsia.¹⁹ As Gamsakhurdia consolidated power, some left because of opposition to his policies, others due to deteriorating conditions caused by the country’s

¹⁵ Suny, *The Making of the Georgian Nation*, 323.

¹⁶ Teimuraz Sturua. Interview by author. Moscow, Russia. July 20, 2006.

¹⁷ Anna Kereselidze. Interview by author. Moscow, Russia. July 28, 2006.

¹⁸ Aleksandr Ebanoidze, “Perekoshennye paralleli,” *Moskovskie novosti*, April 14, 1991, in *Trudnoe usilie vozrozhdeniia: iz opyta Gruzii v minuvshem desiatiletii (1989 – 1999 gg.)*, ed. Aleksandr Ebanoidze (Moscow: Kliuch, 1999), 4-7.

¹⁹ Aleksandr Ebanoidze, “Monolog tbilistsa vdali ot rodiny,” *Nezavisimaia gazeta*, January 18, 1992, in *Trudnoe usilie vozrozhdenie*, 7-13.

rapid descent into civil war. Ebanoidze lamented the departure of the theater director Robert Sturua, who now staged many of his productions outside the former Soviet Union, as well as the violinist Liana Isakadze, who left to play in Germany. Even more troubling to Ebanoidze was the fact that notable Georgian intellectuals, including several of Georgia's leading filmmakers, had joined the opposition and, as a result, were under constant pressure from the new regime. Among them were the directors Tengiz Abuladze and the brothers Eldar and Giorgi Shengelaia.

Ebanoidze was particularly troubled by the language that Gamsakhurdia and his companions now used to describe the most cosmopolitan members of the Soviet Georgian intelligentsia. He noted the overt contempt in Gamsakhurdia's denunciation of "the so-called intelligentsia, people's artists and heroes of socialist labor – opportunists and sycophants in service to the communist regime." Ebanoidze feared that as the situation in Georgia worsened, these intellectuals were at risk of being labeled "betrayers of the motherland" and "agents of the Kremlin." Comparing Gamsakhurdia's actual behavior to that of the fictional tyrant in Tengiz Abuladze's *Repentance*, he wrote: "Georgia has twice gone through a catharsis: first in art, now in life." As Ebanoidze wrote from Moscow, it was unclear what would remain of the Georgian diaspora's cosmopolitan heritage when the catharsis of independence was over.

The New Georgian Diaspora and the Future of Past Georgian Success

The Georgians were just one of many diasporas dramatically transformed by the collapse of the Soviet Union.²⁰ Groups with homelands beyond Soviet borders could now freely emigrate. Many Soviet Jews departed for Israel or claimed refugee status in the United States; the descendants of ethnic Germans who had settled in Russia hundreds of years earlier, some of whom spoke no German whatsoever, were welcomed as German citizens.²¹ Ethnic groups deported by Stalin, including the Koreans and the Meskhetian Turks, remained scattered throughout Central Asia.²² The Chechens, who had been deported but organized their own return following Stalin's death, seized control of their autonomous republic and soon sought independence from Russia.²³ Violent ethnic cleansing reordered the complex ethnic terrain of the Caucasus, as the Armenian population claimed independence in Azeri-controlled Nagorno-Karabagh, even as thousands of Armenians were violently forced out of the Azeri capital of Baku.²⁴ One of

²⁰ For an overview of the political implications of this transformation, see Charles King, ed. *Nations Abroad: Diaspora Politics and International Relations in the Former Soviet Union* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1998). For a study of diaspora and post-Soviet trends in migration, see Cynthia J. Buckley, Blair A. Ruble, and Erin Trough Hofmann, eds. *Migration, Homeland, and Belonging in Eurasia* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008).

²¹ On Jewish emigration, see Noah Lewin-Epstein, Yaacov Ro'i, and Paul Ritterband, eds. *Russian Jews on Three Continents: Migration and Resettlement* (New York: Frank Cass, 1997); for an in-depth study of Soviet German emigration to Germany and Canada, see Hans Werner, *Imagined Homes: Soviet German Immigrants in Two Cities* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2007).

²² Tom Trier, Andrei Khanzhin, *The Meskhetian Turks at a Crossroads: Integration, Repatriation, or Resettlement?* (London, 2007).

²³ Anatol Lieven, *Chechnya: Tombstone of Russian Power* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1998), 321-323.

²⁴ For a balanced account of the ongoing conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan, see Thomas de Waal, *Black Garden: Armenia and Azerbaijan through Peace and War* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2003).

the largest transnational diaspora populations created by Soviet collapse were the Russians, stranded by the end of empire in Central Asia and the Baltic states, and comprising a substantial portion of the population of independent Ukraine.²⁵

Among the former Soviet Union's newly transnational diasporas, the Georgians remained prominent. The post-Soviet Georgian diaspora was larger than ever, free to organize as a distinctive national community, no longer confined to the Soviet Union, and able to determine the content as well as the form of its cultural and intellectual output. Yet rather than being a story of heightened success, the experience of the post-Soviet Georgian diaspora has raised troubling questions for a community once defined by its imperial prominence. The collapse of the Soviet empire left these performers of otherness stranded in another country, deprived of a stage and an audience.

Although Georgians migrated to Moscow in record numbers after 1991, Soviet-era specializations were no longer available to the same extent, and did not offer the same level of prestige they once had.²⁶ Certainly, Georgian political prominence, which waned after the death of Stalin, was an impossibility following the separation of Russia and Georgia into two independent states. While the Georgian-born Iosif Ordzhonikidze (no relation to the Bolshevik Sergo Ordzhonikidze), who served as Vice Mayor of Moscow from 2003 to 2007, was a notable exception, the loyalty of Georgians, especially those who declined to become Russian citizens, could be called into question. As a transnational population, the Georgian diaspora living in Russia became a politically charged community of contention between the Russian and Georgian states. In February 2008, the Georgian government launched the State Ministry of Diaspora Issues to coordinate ties with Georgians living abroad.²⁷ The Georgian government cast itself as a defender of the rights of Georgians living beyond the nation's borders, and sued Russia in the European Court of Human Rights over the hasty deportation of several hundred Georgians from Russia amid heightened tensions between the two countries in 2006.²⁸ Meanwhile, key figures in the Georgian diaspora aligned themselves more closely with the Russian leadership and became outspoken opponents of Georgian president Mikheil Saakashvili. Following the war between Russia and Georgia in 2008, Mikhail Khubutia, president of the Union of Georgians in Russia, publicly asked Russians not to hold all Georgians responsible for the "lies" and "criminal methods" of Saakashvili's government.²⁹ For both the Russian and the Georgian states, members of the Georgian diaspora in Russia were seen alternately as allies, or as potential traitors. Either way, their ambiguous status all but precluded their extensive participation in Russian politics.

²⁵ See Vladimir Shlapentokh, Munir Sendich, and Emil Payin, eds. *The New Russian Diaspora: Russian Minorities in the Former Soviet Republics* (New York: M. E. Sharpe, 1994).

²⁶ While numerically smaller than Tajik, Uzbek, Azeri, or Armenian diaspora populations in the capital, the size of the Georgian diaspora in Moscow burgeoned following the collapse of the Soviet Union. Population figures for these groups are provided in Ia. I. Zdorovets, *Diaspory: Predstavitel'stva natsional'nostei v Moskve i ikh deiatel'nost'*.

²⁷ The various activities of the ministry are detailed on its website, accessed March 17, 2011, <http://www.diaspora.gov.ge>.

²⁸ Georgii Dvali and Vladimir Solov'ev, "Rossiia i Gruziiia vstretilis' v sude," *Kommersant*, February 1, 2011, accessed March 28, 2011, <http://www.kommersant.ru/Doc/1577320/Print>.

²⁹ Mikhail Khubutia, "Ne sudite o gruzinakh po Saakashvili," *Rossiiskaia gazeta*, September 9, 2008, accessed November 17, 2010, <http://www.rg.ru/2008/09/09/hubutia.html>.

The multiethnic material culture forged in the Soviet period proved more resistant to change, preserving a niche for Georgian culinary specialists. Much as curry remained a staple of the British diet long after the demise of the British Raj, *khachapuri* and *lobio* were still available at most Russian supermarkets. Although they now had many more culinary options, Muscovites continued to flock to the capital's Georgian restaurants, a number of them opened by more recent Georgian migrants. Most of these establishments employed the same symbols of Georgian abundance and hospitality first promoted in the Soviet period. However, while Georgian dishes could still be obtained at Russian restaurants or prepared in the home thanks to spice packets and sauces made in Russia, goods originating from Georgia became more difficult to obtain. In what was widely seen as a punitive political action, in spring 2006 Russia instituted a ban on Georgian wine and mineral water, depriving Georgian entrepreneurs of their ability to deliver two of Georgia's best-known products to Russian markets.³⁰

Limited opportunities remained for Georgian cultural entrepreneurs, although the common popular culture created and shared by Georgian and Russian entertainers after World War II was increasingly the domain of nostalgic older generations in both countries. Against the backdrop of political conflict, many Georgian artists who long resided in Moscow returned home or chose to perform for eager émigré audiences in the United States and Israel instead. As Vakhtang Kikabidze noted in a recent song that caused an uproar among the Russian intelligentsia, despite a long career performing before Russian audiences, Russians "disappointed" him with their apathy at Georgia's plight during the August 2008 war.³¹ Thus, even among Russians and Georgians old enough to remember the culture of the Thaw, nostalgia slowly gave way to disillusionment.

It also seemed unlikely that forms of Georgian ethnic entertainment developed within the Soviet context would ever garner the same level of success on the world stage. While Georgia was one of the first Soviet republics to pull out of the Soviet Soccer Federation in 1990, Georgian soccer has struggled ever since, deprived of Soviet levels of funding and faced with increased international competition. Similar patterns held true for Georgian cultural institutions, which faced budget cuts and, although enjoying limited success abroad, failed to gain the same cultural cachet they had enjoyed in the Soviet Union. While performances of Georgia's song and dance ensembles attracted sizable crowds in Europe and the United States, their resonance was lacking among audiences largely unacquainted with Georgian culture. Moreover, international audiences had access to a panoply of "world music" and ethnic entertainment, not simply those sanctioned and promoted within the "Friendship of the Peoples" paradigm.

Within Russia, Georgian economic entrepreneurs retained a prominence that perhaps had a greater basis in representation than it did in reality. The demise of the Soviet empire damaged the economic linkages among the republics and ended the monopolies Georgia enjoyed on the provision of goods both licit and illicit. However,

³⁰ Nick Paton Walsh, "First Wine, Now Russia Bans Georgia's Water," *The Guardian* (UK), May 6, 2006, accessed April 30, 2011, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2006/may/06/russia.nickpatonwalsh>.

³¹ Chloe Arnold, "Beloved Georgian Singer's Sad Song Hits Wrong Note in Russia," *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, accessed November 17, 2010, http://www.rferl.org/content/Georgian_Singers_Sad_Song_Only_Making_Russians_See_Red/1503373.html.

even though the Georgian pavilion was removed from the economic and cultural exhibit formerly known as VDNKh and replaced with stalls selling cheap consumer goods imported from China, Georgia remained dependent on revenue generated in Russia. Among Georgians working in Russia in the post-Soviet period, a handful were among the most successful “Russian” oligarchs, some were important figures in the criminal world, but most were skilled and unskilled laborers engaged in prosaic occupations who supported their families in Georgia through remittances.³² Nevertheless, stereotypes of Georgian profiteers held sway in the Russian imagination. Mixed feelings about Georgian economic success at times fused with more general Russian anxiety surrounding “peoples of Caucasian nationality.” Along with terrorism, inflation and economic suffering were occasionally blamed on Caucasian “mafias” that allegedly controlled Russian markets. Among Caucasian ethnic groups, the Georgians sometimes made a politically expedient target. Thus, in October 2006, following the spy row between Russia and Georgia, authorities in Moscow began targeting Georgian-operated businesses amidst news reports of a rampant “Georgian mafia” in the Russian capital.³³

There were still a few oases of high culture that remained for cosmopolitan Georgian artists and intellectuals within the former Soviet Union. While Georgian film struggled in the absence of state support and the disappearance of a broad viewership, international productions, sometimes involving Georgian artists residing in Europe, produced the occasional movie evocative of Georgia’s cosmopolitan cultural heritage.³⁴ Georgia’s classical musicians and singers continued to be prominent figures in Moscow’s Bolshoi Theater.³⁵ The Tbilisi Conservatory, which financially struggled for several years following Georgian independence, managed to preserve itself as a vital cultural institution that maintained ties with Russian and European musical schools.

Yet these oases of cosmopolitanism were noticeable precisely because they contrasted with the broader contours of the post-imperial landscape. As a transnational population split between Russia and Georgia, it was much more difficult for Georgians to remain rooted in their native republic while participating in a shared cosmopolitan culture. Political divisions effectively forced the choice between rooted Georgianness in Tbilisi and rootless cosmopolitanism in Moscow. While Russia in some sense cast itself as the successor to the Soviet Union, it was far from an empire of diasporas. Although a multiethnic federation, it was more Russian, and had less funding and little political need to promote non-Russian nationalities and their cultures. Even success on the Russian stage lacked some of the appeal it once had, since Moscow was no longer the political and cultural capital of an international socialist movement, but simply the largest city in Russia.

³² Remittances made up a crucial portion of Georgia’s GDP, and according to one study, remittances from Russia composed 66 percent of all remittances sent to Georgia. Sheila Siar, ed. *Migration in Georgia: A Country Profile 2008* (Geneva: International Organization for Migration, 2008), 11.

³³ Steven Lee Myers, “Russia Departs Georgians and Increases Pressures on Businesses and Students,” *The New York Times*, October 7, 2006.

³⁴ For example, the French, Belgian, and Georgian production *Since Otar Left*, released in 2003 and in part an homage to Georgian director Otar Ioseliani, now residing in Paris, and the fading intellectual life of his native Tbilisi.

³⁵ Among them leading soprano Makvala Kasrashvili, tenor Badri Maisuradze, and principal dancer Nikolai Tsiskaridze. Their biographies are provided on the website of the Bolshoi Theater, accessed November 17, 2010, <http://www.bolshoi.ru/ru>.

The paradigm of domestic internationalism, which created such vital opportunities for internal diasporas, collapsed along with the Soviet Union, leaving no clear alternative for Soviet ethnic specialists. Domestic internationalism had entailed the search for substitutes for foreign cadres, culture, goods, and products. However, with the demise of the Soviet Union, few Soviet citizens desired domestically produced imitations when they could consume the real thing. Concert halls, restaurants, and stores in Russian cities now offered American rock bands, French cuisine, and Italian luxury goods. Those formerly internal, now transnational diasporas that remained in Moscow could capitalize on imperial nostalgia and the remnants of a shared Soviet material culture. Yet, at best, groups like the Georgians could only hope to be a diaspora of moderately successful but largely stranded, and often impoverished, people. While they may have succeeded within the sheltered auspices of Soviet domestic internationalism, with the collapse of the Soviet empire the Georgians went from being prominent imperial specialists to less remarkable provincial specialists seeking elusive prestige on a more competitive world stage.

The irony of the end of the empire of diasporas is that the Georgians, who were arguably more successful than other groups in the Soviet Union, have since emphasized otherness to define themselves as separate from the Soviet past. An important moment in this regard was the opening of Tbilisi's Museum of Soviet Occupation in 2006, an institution dedicated to telling the story of the Soviet Union as one of ethnically exclusive suffering on the part of the Georgians. Meanwhile, a large number of Russians, living in a poorly-defined national core now deprived of a larger empire, remained proud of Soviet accomplishments and viewed the demise of the Soviet Union as a negative development.³⁶ Emphasizing ethnic distinctiveness, if only to articulate grievances, was one way for Georgians to contend with the complicated legacy of the Soviet empire. However, this view of the past ignored the many Georgian ethnic specialists who flourished within the boundaries of Soviet rule in a way they could not before and have yet to do since. The waning prominence of the Georgian diaspora has only served to highlight the dynamics of their vibrant success in Soviet times.

³⁶ According to a December 2005 poll by the Russian Public Opinion Research Center, 66 percent of Russians regretted the collapse of the Soviet Union. See the Center's report, "Ostalos' tol'ko sozhalenie," accessed April 7, 2011, <http://wciom.com/archives/thematic-archive/info-material/single/2167.html>.

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