

MYTHS AND CONFLICT IN THE SOUTH CAUCASUS

VOLUME 1

Instrumentalisation of
Historical Narratives

truth education history narrative
caucasus generation
interpretation neighbours ethnic
memory **stereotypes**
statehood
conflicts enemy culture
discourse facts territories heroes
manipulation textbook post-soviet
nations difference **myths**
identity ideology peoples aspirations



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Myths and Conflict in the South Caucasus

VOLUME 1

Instrumentalisation of Historical Narratives

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Acronyms

APFP	Azerbaijan Popular Front Party
APC	Abkhaz People's Council
NOASSR	North Ossetian Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic
NCG	National Council of Georgia
OSCE	Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
RSFSR	Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic
SOAO	South Ossetian Autonomous Oblast'
SOGK	United Mountain Peoples of the Caucasus
SSR	Soviet Socialist Republic
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
ZDFR	Transcaucasian Democratic Federal Republic

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¹ Available at <http://www.international-alert.org/es/node/4529>.

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Myths and Conflicts in the South Caucasus

PREFACE

‘A myth is a special system of communication, a meta-language (super-language, language about language) which conveys a message which is a set of significations that create a covert ideological discourse; on the one hand, the Myth attempts to change reality so that it conforms with the values of the myth-maker’s consciousness; on the other hand, it attempts to conceal its ideological nature and is perceived by the perceiver as going without saying, the natural order of things.

Myth is not a survival of an archaic consciousness but an enormous component of modern culture which is realised through advertising, the mass media, the cinema and other narratives.’ – Roland Barthes¹

This publication presents the results of research that attempts to shed some light on the ways in which myths and dominant narratives associated with the conflicts in the South Caucasus are constructed and transmitted in the region. A particular focus of interest was how myths associated with the conflicts are subject to domestic political manipulation, how “enemy images” are created, and how this in turn serves to strengthen the resilience of those conflicts to resolution. The image of the “enemy” is one of the most pernicious cancers gnawing away at societies in conflict. This image is utilised by the various political groups who construct images of “internal enemy” as a means of social control. Such measures restrict the space available for reflection and critical thinking about socio-political processes, as well as hindering the free exchange of opinions and pragmatic decision making.

This research attempted to raise questions regarding taboo topics on which there has been historical public consensus, thus preventing such topics from being studied or reinterpreted. The initiative therefore required a certain amount of civic courage from the researchers. We would therefore like to express our gratitude to all of the South Caucasian researchers and partners who were involved in the process and to praise them for their commitment and courage.

Research objectives and challenges

The research project set itself two relatively ambitious aims. Primarily, we set about creating a process whereby representatives of civil society from all sides of the conflicts in the South Caucasus were brought together and encouraged to engage in a joint

¹ R. Barthes (1994). ‘Myth Today’, i.e. *Collected works: Semiotics. Poetics*. Progress Universe: Moscow. pp. 72-130.

methodological reflection on the impact of taboo topics on their respective societies. In doing so, we wanted to shift the focus often found in such “cross-conflict” initiatives from a critical evaluation of “the other side” to a critical interpretation of the opinions, societal images and associated attitudes that prevail within the researchers’ own societies. Despite the extremely delicate and sensitive nature of the task, to some extent the process was “conflict-sensitised” by including researchers from all conflict regions without exception. This created the opportunity for them to reflect synchronously. It ensured the necessary balance for the research: rather than interpreting their referent society unilaterally, representatives from each side were involved in a coordinated process. Researchers from Abkhazia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Nagorny Karabakh and South Ossetia (predominantly young sociologists, political scientists and journalists) worked together. Researchers from Russia (as an interested party in the South Caucasus region) were also involved. Thus, the project created a common platform for simultaneous critical rethinking of the role played by myths associated with the conflicts in the participants’ respective societies. This in turn provided an opportunity for the exchange of information, ideas and comparative analysis. More importantly, it helped to identify universal processes at play in each of the South Caucasian societies which often mirror one another across the conflict divides.

A secondary objective of the research project was to produce a high-quality product in the form of research papers that would provide food for thought for the respective societies.

The process turned out to be far more complex in reality than could have been expected at the design stage. In particular, we faced two challenges:

- The need to identify young researchers from the South Caucasus, despite the lack of any established research traditions, particularly in terms of conducting qualitative research. In practice, our response to this challenge was to add a capacity building component for less experienced colleagues, who received support from more experienced researchers;
- The need to find the correct tone when presenting the research results, in order to encourage readers to stop and think, reflect, distance themselves from the myths prevalent in their society and develop their own informed position. The risk was that the wrong tone could potentially have the opposite effect, causing irritation, negative emotions and resistance. This would merely have reinforced deep-rooted clichés and stereotypes.

We hope that we managed to find the right response to these challenges.

Research content

The research project examined three means or mechanisms through which myths are created and disseminated: through history textbooks; through political discourse; and through the media, including the blogosphere.

In this volume, we present the research on history textbooks. This research is a comparative analysis of how the process of “sovietisation” of the Caucasus (the period from the October 1917 revolution up to the approval of the new USSR Constitution in 1936) is portrayed in textbooks from the Soviet and post-Soviet periods. Here, the authors worked to a standard rubric and methodology based on a discourse analysis of the textbooks in use in their respective societies. In addition to the research pieces on the representation of “sovietisation”, we also include a joint piece by two authors on the reinterpretation of narratives related to the Nagorny Karabakh conflict in Armenian and Azerbaijani history textbooks.

The results show that the new (post-Soviet) textbooks are based on the same ideological paradigm as the Soviet textbooks. They use the same language and nationalist discriminatory discourse, ruling out any understanding of history as a narrative. They provide what are in fact Soviet essentialist patterns of understanding historical and contemporary realities. “Friendship of the peoples” has given way to revised national histories hostile to the “other”. These are offered as “truths” to be memorised by children, embedding the enemy images deep into the psyche of the nation. The gulf that exists between the essentialist discourse dominant in the region and contemporary post-modern thinking suggests that the new generation is being brought up infected by the very myths that, as the political module in our research shows, often lead to stagnation of our societies, leaving them stuck in a valueless dead-end.

In another volume, we present the research on political discourse. This block looks at how “enemy images” are utilised in the domestic politics of the South Caucasus as they enter their third decade of protracted conflict. The studies in this block do not follow a common methodology but were proposed by the authors themselves: some are more sociological research pieces, using the method of discourse analysis; others are based on a political analysis. Whatever the approach or methodology employed, all articles without exception show clearly and unambiguously how the societal myths of post-conflict societies – such as “enemy images”, “victimhood” and the search for a “saviour” – are used to manipulate public opinion. In doing so, these myths contribute to the stagnation of domestic politics and hold back democratic processes.

The third research block – on the media – combined a study of mainstream journalist ethics with the prevalence of enemy images in the burgeoning blogosphere. The study of journalist ethics highlighted how the line between objectivity and patriotism is often

hard to draw in times of conflict. The importance of developing a “home-grown” code of ethics was highlighted, in order to enable journalists to navigate their ethical dilemmas and avoid being manipulated by politically manufactured disinformation. The study of the blogosphere, which is mainly dominated by the younger generation, revealed the worrying extent to which the narratives and negative stereotypes propagated through mainstream politics, education and the media are absorbed and further disseminated by the younger generation. It was felt that while the previous generations had the “experience of the other” before the conflicts of the early 1990s, a whole generation has grown up now without this experience.

Despite the pessimistic picture suggested by our conclusions, we believe that this publication still provides some grounds for optimism. Firstly, if our societies are to recover, we must first make the right “diagnosis” and identify the real (as opposed to mythologised) problems. We can confidently state that this task has been fulfilled in this round of research. We see it as an achievement that this research has broached such taboo topics. A further achievement, in our view, is that these topics have been published and will be presented for consideration by a wider circle of readers. It is our hope that this book will provide readers with food for thought and encourage them to reinterpret outmoded clichés and stereotypes. We also hope that the knowledge contained in this collection will help future generations of the Caucasus region to overcome essentialism. This would in turn help Caucasian societies to identify alternative ways of interpreting socio-political processes in such a way as to make more positive interaction in the region possible.

We would like to thank all participants and project managers without exception for their sincere and dedicated collaboration, and we hope that readers will enjoy reading the research results.

The editors

SECTION 1

(De-)Sovietising and Nationalising
History in the South Caucasus

INTRODUCTION

Results of a Comparative Analysis of School Textbooks

Oksana Karpenko

Context

Following the collapse of the USSR multiple (“territorial” and “inter-ethnic”), conflicts emerged, some of which subsequently became armed conflicts which remain unresolved to this day. These include, in particular, the Georgian-South Ossetian, Georgian-Abkhaz and Armenian-Azerbaijani conflicts. This study focuses on “memory wars”,¹ one of the dimensions of these conflicts.

In this kind of “war”, present day conflicts are interpreted as restoring a justice which was suppressed in the past.² “Objective historical evidence” is used to ascribe motives, aspirations and actions which are radically opposed to one’s own interests, to one’s opponents (“separatists”, “occupiers”, etc.). In an atmosphere of mutual distrust, the sides see the conflict as a zero-sum game (‘if we don’t beat them they will beat us’). Any constructive way out of the conflicts is blocked, and any resolution based on compromise is seen by one participant as more beneficial to the opponent and as an intrinsic (and completely irretrievable) loss.

We argue in this study that the *shared* “past” – more precisely the common approach to representing the past prior to the collapse of the USSR – of these previously “fraternal peoples” played a significant role, paradoxically, in forming the apparently insurmountable barriers to settling the conflicts we see today.³ Despite (more or less) radical revisions, the Soviet discourse of nation-building has not only retained its influence but has even formed the basis of post-Soviet identity politics. Current models of national identity have been constructed out of the *wreckage* of the “Socialist nations”, on obsolete drawings dating from the previous regime. In particular, none of the present day “inter-ethnic” conflicts could be sustained without employing the argument that there has been an essential link (“since antiquity”) between a particular “people” (*narod* perceived as an ethno-cultural unit) and a certain territory to justify territorial claims or counter argument, which reject such a link being used, to attempt to demonstrate that an opponent’s claims are groundless.

1 This phrase is not intended to be used as an analytical tool but is rather a metaphor indicating the urgent and uncompromising nature of the symbolic struggle over the right to own “historical truth”. One possible approach to the study of “wars” of this kind has been proposed by Viktor Shnirelman in his book *Memory wars: Myths, identity and politics in the Transcaucasus* (V. Shnirelman [2003]. *Voiny pamiati: mify, identichnost’ i politika na Zakavkaze* [Memory wars: Myths, identity and politics in the Transcaucasus]. IKTs Akademkniga: Moscow).

2 As even a cursory examination shows, the legitimization of collective violence generally draws on patriotic slogans: “we” are not attacking or claiming “foreign possessions”; “we” are defending what “belongs to us by right” (historical lands, cultural heritage, etc.). Each side claims to be in possession of “objective and irrefutable historical facts” which prove that the opponent’s claims and actions are illegitimate, and articulates its own actions in terms of restoring/defending “historical justice”.

3 All states included in our analysis were incorporated into the USSR with the status either of “republics of the USSR” (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia and Russia) or autonomies within republics (Abkhazia and South Ossetia were respectively an autonomous republic and an autonomous oblast’ within the Georgian SSR; the Nagorny Karabakh Autonomous Republic formed part of the Azerbaijani SSR). History textbooks of the republics were compiled under the strict control of the Ministry of Education of the USSR. Their contents had to be in line with the pan-Soviet historical narrative.

The overall aim of this collective project, the findings of which are presented in the various articles in this collection, is to identify the patterns through which the discourses of school history textbooks have been formed across different historical periods (the 1980s and 2000s) and in different (national) contexts (Abkhazia, Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia, Russia, South Ossetia and the USSR) in order to understand the discursive mechanisms of reproducing “memory wars” (or “conflict memory”). We focus mainly on the practices of normalisation of one’s own assessment of a particular historical event as “fair” or “objective”, and the *essentialisation* of the social groups engaged in the conflict as a necessary (although insufficient) condition for such normalisation. We undertook this research in an attempt to understand how the attitudes (contained in the normalised models of identification and offered to pupils) could serve to block constructive dialogue between hostile sides and/or promote mutual distrust and hostility.

Project participants from Abkhazia (Inar Gitsba), Armenia (Tigran Matosyan), Azerbaijan (Sevil Huseinova), Georgia (Despine Koiava and Nino Chikovani), Russia (Oksana Karpenko) and South Ossetia (Madina Beteeva) were set ambitious tasks. The intended outcome was a set of texts describing two aspects: the departure from the “Soviet” experience of writing and the “management” of history in state schools:

- Firstly, we were interested in the departure from “Soviet” norms and standards in terms of the policy of teaching of history in schools (changes to curricula, the standard content of textbooks, changes in the agents and procedures employed to monitor the content of the teaching of history, etc.). Our intention here was to track the transformation of history policy (in terms of the publication of school textbooks) in the countries studied. We assumed that, despite their shared Soviet past, a distinct constellation of challenges, agents and ideas had formed within each country, which channelled post-Soviet policy on history in a certain direction;
- Secondly, we wanted to understand what distinguishes the “Soviet” (“internationalist”) historical narrative from its present day (“national”) counterparts. By concentrating on the critical analysis of school history textbooks, we intended to track what had been rejected and what had been inherited from “Soviet” historical accounts. We were interested, amongst other things, in answering the questions: What do contemporary narratives provide which is conceptually new? What discursive resources from the Soviet narrative have been deployed in the construction of new national identities? What changes have there been to the normalised system of distinguishing “our people” from “foreigners” and “friends” from “enemies” in the textbooks?

The project was divided into two parts based on these research questions. For the first part, participants gathered material and analysed public debates on the teaching of history in state schools, official documents regulating the form and content of this discipline (including textbooks), etc. As well as textual analysis, each participant conducted expert

interviews with specialists previously and/or currently working in this field (authors of textbooks, staff from ministries and government agencies, educationalists and teachers).

For the second part of the project, the researchers had to conduct a critical analysis of the texts of the textbooks. The analysis was based on the final Soviet and current school history textbooks, and focused on representations of the territorial and cultural construct of the Soviet nations after the October 1917 revolution up to the approval of the new Constitution of the USSR in 1936. Our hypothesis was that, by studying how the processes of Sovietisation and the creation/dismantling of independent states were described, we would be able to identify the main changes in educational discourse and the similarities and differences between Soviet and post-Soviet constructions of “national independence”, and to find an answer to the question of why ethno nationalist slogans attracted mass public support at the end of the 1980s (and continue to do so).

Time constraints and differences between the methodologies preferred by the various project participants meant we were unable to complete the plan in full. Many of the joint conclusions presented in this article are therefore of a tentative nature. Moreover, the articles do not reflect all of the extensive material gathered by the project participants. (Each author was offered the opportunity to choose a subject which interested him/her.) However, this does not reduce the value of the research conducted.

Textbooks as an instrument for legitimising “our” version of events

the emergence of the independent states in the post-Soviet space was accompanied by a transformation of previous Soviet (institutionalised and objectified) models of identification with “one’s own people/society” and by the gradual stabilisation of new models. Practices of collective memory are at the centre of national identity. Classes in patriotic/national history (the history of “our country/people”) in state schools are a crucial institution to master skills in using “historical facts” in the processes of identifying “one’s own” and “somebody else’s” people, and of (de-)legitimising various political decisions, including those regarding justice and the possibility of resorting to collective violence. As pupils absorb the logic behind historical accounts and the rhetorical devices through which “enemies” are exposed and “heroes” glorified, and acquire skills in establishing cause and effect linkages, etc., they learn how to *identify* “friends” and “enemies” and the *right way* to respond to “threats to national interests”.

Clearly, textbooks cannot be viewed as the only and/or the most effective instrument for shaping the historical consciousness of young people.⁴ However, textbooks continue

⁴ Sources of historical knowledge might include family histories, films, television talk shows, and a range of internet resources and computer games which make use of historical subjects, speeches given by activists at political rallies, etc.

to be the most widespread type of state-controlled socialising texts.⁵ As a result, we are entitled to view their contents as an embodiment of the state’s identity politics.

In Viktor Shnirelman’s view, the axiomatic notion that people study history in order to understand the present and predict the future requires a radical rethink.⁶ History as a school discipline is far more aimed at inculcating pupils’ attitudes to the present day than by presenting them with “objective and reliable” information about the past. Representations of past events, historical actors, etc., are co-opted to educate “patriots of the Mother/Fatherland” and/or produce “critically minded people”.

Stated objectives for history teaching in schools in many post-Soviet countries are characterised by an eclectic mix of “patriotic education” and the “development of critical thinking”. Statutory (normative) documents, which regulate the form and content of this discipline, require the nurturing of “patriots of the Mother/Fatherland” whilst concurrently swelling the ranks of “critically minded people”. It is impossible, in my view, to satisfy both these demands simultaneously. The statutory requirement “to love one’s Motherland and one’s people” certainly does not require citizens to reflect critically on or dispute the legitimacy of the actions of a state which requires them to discharge their “patriotic duty”. The problem is that, even in post-Soviet countries (such as Georgia) where patriotic education is not articulated as the overriding objective of history teaching in schools, the representation of any events reflecting current (territorial) conflicts amounts to a justification of the actions of the authorities and a demonstration of the baseless and unjust nature of the opponent’s claims.

In all the cases studied, the emergence of independent statehood in the early 1990s was associated with the “de-ideologisation of history”, a rejection of the Soviet (“Marxist-Leninist”) tradition through which historical processes were perceived and articulated. (There are many examples of this rejection in the textbooks.⁷) One form of de-ideologisation has been the nationalisation of history in various forms, where the fundamental Soviet era message has been maintained (that the population should be

5 M. A. Apple & L.K. Christian-Smith (eds) [1991]. *The Politics of the Textbook*. Routledge: New York; M. A. Apple (2004). *Ideology and Curriculum*. 3rd ed. Routledge: New York; S. Lässig (2009). ‘Textbooks and Beyond: Educational Media in Context(s)’, *Journal of Educational Media, Memory, and Society*. Vol. 1, Issue 1.

6 ‘In fact people construct the past, firstly within the context of their own socio-political activity and the interests connected with it, and secondly to present interpretations of the past which promote their plans for the future. Appealing to a distant past, a distinctive historical path and the closely related concept of national character also allows current politicians and officials to sidestep accusations that they lack the power or skills to rectify the current state of affairs or even that they are abusing their power. After all it is easier to cite the “national spirit” and the implacable “laws of history” than to acknowledge one’s own failings’ (V. Shnirelman (2000). ‘Tsennost’ proshlogo: Etnotsentristskie istoricheskie mify, identichnost’ i etnopolitika [Valuing the past: ethnocentrist historical myths, identity and ethnic policy]’ in A. Malashenko & M. B. Olcott (eds) [2000]. *Real’nost’ etnicheskikh mifov [The reality of ethnic myths]*. Gendal’f: Moscow, p.13.).

7 The shift in emphasis from the class struggle to the national liberation struggle, the sudden disappearance of quotations from classic Marxist-Leninist texts, or references to resolutions of Communist Party sessions, etc.

brought up to respect the prevailing authorities and reject its “enemies”⁸) along with the main storyline (the emergence of one’s own people as a distinctive cultural and political actor). At the same time, however, the meaning given to the notion of “independence” has been radically redefined.

In the process of constructing new nation states, it is a priority to rally society around new (“national”) foundations and to encourage its members to take an active part in the nation-building process.⁹ History is rewritten based on the notions of political expediency and textbooks are used as one of the key tools of history policy.¹⁰ The notion that history textbooks are a tool for moulding loyal citizens with a “positive national identity” and sharing the aims, ideals, values of “their own people” has not been challenged in any of the countries of the South Caucasus.

The attainment of *actual* (rather than “sham”) independence required a root-and-branch rethinking of the bases of national identity. The fact that the new states were engaged in armed conflicts rendered it an even more urgent task to mould citizens prepared (if necessary) to defend the attributes of national independence such as “historic lands”, “national language”, “territorial integrity”, etc., “with a weapon in their hands”. Against this backdrop, professional standards may well fall by the wayside when making historical judgements on “controversial” topics. Like any other public statement on the nature and resolution of current conflicts, the content of school textbooks is assessed in terms of loyalty “to the interests of one’s own people”. The selection of topics, subjects, persons and interpretations of events for inclusion in textbooks and sometimes even the logical argument and framing of the historical narrative are subordinated to the task of legitimising the positions of the relevant state authorities in the current conflict.¹¹

In Sevil Huseinova’s view, the representation of the period during which Soviet authority emerged and the Azerbaijani SSR was formed (and the post-Soviet version of the history of Azerbaijan in general) is orientated in support of the contemporary Nagorny Karabakh conflict. Modern textbooks have supplanted the Soviet ideologue of “friendship between peoples” with the concept of “centuries of Armenian-Azerbaijani enmity”. The authors exploit any opportunity to emphasise the negative role of “Armenians” in

8 A construct left over from the Soviet era which permits state authorities to present themselves exclusively as expressing and defending “the interests of the people”, with the right to identify its “enemies” and combat them.

9 V. Shnirelman (2010). “Patrioticheskoe vospitanie”: etnicheskie konfliktiy shkol'nye uchebniki istorii [“Patriotic education”: ethnic conflicts and school history textbooks]. Available at http://scepsis.ru/library/id_2710.html.

10 Historical policy represents a set of practices by which ruling political forces use the administrative and financial resources of the state in an attempt to impose a certain interpretation of historical events (A. Miller [2012]. ‘Istoricheskaja politika v Vostochnoi Yevrope nachala XXI v. [Historical policy in Eastern Europe in the early 21st century]’, *Istoricheskaja politika v XXI veke: Sbornik stat'ei [Historical policy in the 21st century: collected articles]*, pp.7-32).

11 It is clear that any textbook must inevitably be selective and present (in one way or another) a simplified version of history (S. Lässig (2009). *Op. cit.*, p.1). How else, in fact, can “the history of a country/people since antiquity to the present day” be accommodated within a limited number of pages? The question facing the authors as they prepare to write the textbook is not whether the text should reflect all or just some of the events, figures, or interpretations known to historians. The question they are forced to address is which procedure they should adopt when making their selection and what grounds there are for this selection.

the events of the history of Azerbaijan since “time immemorial”, recasting the recent Nagorny Karabakh war as the culmination of conflict and a final battle to resolve the question of “either us or them”.

The textbook authors’ rewriting of the history of Sovietisation as the “(Soviet) occupation” of Azerbaijan hints at the active role of “Armenian Bolsheviks” and “*Dashnaks*” (assisted, according to this narrative, by the “Bolsheviks”) in establishing Soviet power in Azerbaijan and also at the senior appointments given to “Armenians” in the state and party hierarchies of Soviet Azerbaijan, among others. The policy and practice of “friendship between peoples” is now viewed as a fiction designed to obscure its “true aim”, i.e. depriving “the Azerbaijanis” of their national identity by distancing them “from their national origins”. One instance of this policy provided is the suppression of information about the anti-Muslim *pogroms* (organised by Armenian nationalists in Baku and its environs in March 1918) during the Sovietisation period.¹²

Tigran Matosyan, in his study of Armenian textbooks, believes that interpretations of Sovietisation processes and the Nagorny Karabakh conflict changed during the 1990s in line with changes in the position of the country’s political leadership. Whereas the first post-Soviet textbook (1994) viewed the emergence of Soviet authority in terms of an “occupation”, in the second (2008), a shift occurs towards a more positive assessment of the Sovietisation process and the incorporation of Armenia into the USSR. Matosyan proposes two possible explanations for this: it may be connected with Russia’s increasing political and economic influence in Armenia in recent decades and/or a result of the recognition in public discourse and academic circles (particularly against the current background of socio-economic instability) of the achievements of Soviet Armenia.

As far as representations of the Nagorny Karabakh conflict in textbooks are concerned, these mirror Armenian-Azerbaijani relations across the different periods in a number of ways. The first textbook (1994) was written during the active phase of the armed conflict and presents a relatively intransigent and rigid view. The second (2008) was written during the period of “neither war nor peace” and proposes a more balanced position. Both textbooks place the blame for the conflict on the Bolshevik administration which betrayed the “interests of the Armenian people” and the inhabitants of Nagorny Karabakh by handing over, without justification (by Stalin’s personal decision), “historic lands of the Armenians” to Azerbaijan. The implication is that there is a need to restore “historical justice” and grant the population of Nagorny Karabakh the right to *real* self-determination.

The Georgian administration’s focus on defending the country’s territorial integrity has meant that forming “a unified multi-ethnic Georgian state” and protecting it against “foreign occupiers” has become the main thread of the Georgian historical narrative.

¹² As well as continuing to suppress the facts of the Armenian *pogroms*, which took place while the Turkish nationalists were establishing their authority in Baku (in September 1918).

Modern, post-Soviet history textbooks define the “occupier”, from the start of the 19th century, as in turn the Russian Empire, Bolshevik/Soviet Russia and modern Russia. Georgia’s “incorporation into Russia” in the 19th century and the establishment of Soviet authority in the early 1920s are both associated with the loss of Georgian independence. Present day conflicts are viewed in terms of Georgian-Russian opposition.¹³ As Nino Chikovani demonstrates, the formation of the Abkhaz Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic as part of the Georgian SSR and the South Ossetian Autonomous Oblast’ (1922) are interpreted in the same terms. The decisions by the Soviet authorities to grant the Abkhaz and Ossetians the right to (territorial) self-determination are de-legitimised by their association with the actions of “colonisers/occupiers”.

The authors of Georgian textbooks written after 2005 emphasise the multi-ethnic nature of Georgian society and view “Georgians”, “Ossetians”, “Abkhaz” and other ethnicities as components of a single “Georgian people”,¹⁴ stressing continuity (in terms of guarantees that minority rights will be protected) between the Constitutions of the Democratic Republic of Georgia (1918-1921) and present day Georgia. However, as Chikovani points out, the textbooks assign differing statuses to “Abkhaz” and “Ossetians”. Abkhazia’s secession is presented as an act aimed at satisfying Russia’s imperial ambitions which runs counter to the true interests of “the Abkhaz people” (as “Georgia is the only homeland of the Abkhaz”). Meanwhile, the “Ossetians” are presented as a “national minority”, a group which migrated from the North Caucasus centuries ago and was welcomed by Georgian society. This group is presented as being entitled to cultural, although not territorial, autonomy. The Georgian history textbooks view the granting of territorial autonomy to the “South Ossetians” in 1921 as a time-bomb planted by the Bolsheviks which then exploded much later.

In the analysis of contemporary South Ossetian textbooks by Madina Beteeva and Oksana Karpenko, we argue that considerable attention is paid to the forming of the concept of a “single Ossetian people” divided between two states: Russia supposedly lent support to the “Ossetians” in terms of forming an independent state on the territory of Georgia or of “unification” as part of Russia; Georgia was unwilling to recognise that right. The process by which South Ossetian autonomy emerged in the 1920s is also rewritten from the perspective of the present day conflict (between Russia and Georgia).

13 In this regard, the most recent post-Soviet textbooks differ from the first, which portrayed the armed protests by the Abkhaz and Ossetians in 1918-1921 as a struggle against “the lawful authorities in Georgia” (the Democratic Republic of Georgia) which facilitated the occupation of Georgia by the Bolsheviks.

14 In Nino Chikovani’s view, this reflects a shift in emphasis from ethnic nationalism to civic nationalism, as manifested in the concept of the “multinational Georgian nation” in political discourse. Generally, in her view, post-2005 textbooks are a demonstration of the attempt to provide an impartial description of Georgian history and to portray a multinational and multi-denominational Georgia formed over centuries through the efforts of all the peoples populating it (N. Chikovani (2008). ‘The Problem of a Common Past in Multiethnic Societies [The Case of Georgian History Textbooks]’, *Internationale Schulbuchforschung*, Vol. 30, Issue 4, pp.797-810).

The central plot line in this historical narrative extends from the formation of a “single Ossetian people” to its division (during the creation of Ossetian autonomies within the Russian Federation and the Georgian SSR) and the “eternal dream” of reunification. The emergence of Soviet authority in the region is associated on the one hand with the realisation of the right of “the Ossetian people” to self-determination (in the form of separate state entities) and, on the other hand, with the victory of the “Georgian Bolshevik nationalists” who prevented “the Ossetians” from exercising this right to the full (i.e. preventing the formation of a *unified* state on “historic Ossetian lands”). The Georgian administration (the Georgian Democratic Republic, the Georgian SSR and present day Georgia) is viewed as the main impediment to the realisation of the “centuries-old dream” of independence. The present day territorial conflict is ethnicised and rooted in the pre-Soviet past.

In the Abkhaz case study conducted by Inar Gitsba, the independent statehood attained by Abkhazia (following the victory of Soviet authority and the crushing defeat of the Georgian Democratic Republic) and its subsequent loss (with its incorporation into the Georgian SSR) is a central pillar of the argument supporting Abkhazia’s contemporary claims for the formation of an independent state. The central *motif* articulated throughout this historical account is one of the parallel, mutually-independent development of the “Georgian” and “Abkhaz” peoples. Abkhazia is portrayed as a political player on equal terms with Georgia, which liberated itself from “Georgian occupation” when Soviet authority was established, only to lose its independence when it was incorporated into the Georgian SSR.

The authors of the Abkhaz textbook draw on various documents (agreements and treaties concluded at various times by the “Abkhaz”) in an attempt to demonstrate that there are no grounds for the notion of Abkhazia (prior to its incorporation into the GSSR in 1921) as a part of or having “autonomy” within Georgia. The decision to establish the Abkhaz Soviet Socialist Republic (on 26th March 1921) is presented as “well founded” and approved by the authorities of Soviet Georgia and Abkhazia; this is then contrasted with the Decree approved by the Caucasus Bureau of the Central Committee on 16th November 1921, which states that the existence of an economically and political independent Abkhazia was unviable and that it would be incorporated into Georgia “on the basis of a treaty”. This decision is associated with Stalin’s active opposition to the idea of Abkhaz independence *per se* and is seen as the “Georgian” administration’s first step towards the gradual abolition of Abkhaz independence. This reference to the interest of the “Georgian Bolsheviks” and “Stalin personally” (who, as the authors note, was “Georgian by nationality”) in abolishing Abkhazia’s independence is designed on the one hand to help discredit the decision and, on the other hand, to ethnicise the conflict and link it to a conflict of interests between the “Georgian” and “Abkhaz” peoples.

The Russian case study (conducted by Oksana Karpenko) plays a specific role in this project. The analysis focused on the questions: How are the conflicts in the Caucasus and Russia's role in them presented in the history textbooks used by schoolchildren in Russia in the Soviet period and today? How has the way regions/territories/republics/states are represented changed in school textbooks (of the USSR/Russia)? What explanation can be provided for the ease with which populations in post-Soviet states have resorted (in the late 1980s) and continue to resort to ethno-nationalist slogans? To answer these questions, the study conducted a comparative analysis of Soviet and post-Soviet articulations of the acts of "incorporations of peoples into Russia", which posited a number of different models of the relations between "Russia" and the "outlying ethnic areas": "a prison of the peoples" versus "friendship between peoples". Two historical subjects were selected for analysis: "the incorporation of the Transcaucasus and the North Caucasus into Russia in the first half of the 19th century" and the formation of the ("Trans-Caucasian") socialist republics and the USSR.

The conclusion reached during the research was that both Soviet and contemporary textbooks on Russian history contain a *colonial discourse*, and use different methods to create an image of "the Other" (i.e. "the Caucasus" and "Transcaucasia") which is then used to justify the need to reproduce relations of dominance/submission. The "outlying ethnic areas" are populated by "backward peoples" in need of Russia's tutelage.

It is debatable whether the USSR (in any period of its existence) carried on the traditions of the Russian empire, but it is clear that Russian school textbooks neither make an attempt to critically interpret the experience of "appropriating the outlying ethnic areas" nor reject the paternalistic view of Russia's "neighbours". The Russian and Soviet presence on the territories of what are now independent states is seen as benefiting the peoples populating them. Contemporary textbooks tend to involve a more active articulation of the idea that Russia fulfilled a donor relationship with the other republics of the USSR. This tends to prevent objections voiced by its "neighbours" from being interpreted as "just" or having any foundation. The suggestion is that, in any dispute over who had to sacrifice their interests the most, who contributed more than others to the communal "pot" and who suffered the most from the Soviet regime, Russia would top the list.

"Independence": Between the *friendship* and *enmity* of peoples

The researchers emphasised that the ethnocentrism of post-Soviet educational discourses and the practices of identification with "one's own people" lie at the heart of post-Soviet

“memory wars”.¹⁵ The replacement of the “formative” approach with an (ethnocentric) emphasis on civilisation is associated with modern racism, which blocks any way out of “inter-ethnic” conflicts.¹⁶ On the other hand, doubt is cast over traditional interpretations of the Soviet political regime as anti-nationalistic and/or anti-national.¹⁷ Present day conflicts are found to be rooted in the Soviet nationalities policy, which consistently combined references to the resolute struggle against “(bourgeois) nationalism” with the promulgation of an (ethno-)nationalist interpretation of the “Socialist nations”.

The notions of “the people” identified in contemporary textbooks from the different countries differ little from the notions which prevail in the Soviet textbooks of the 1970s and 1980s. They view “the peoples” (in essentialist terms) as autonomous historical actors with their own interests, which they aspire to put into practice. The individual, perceived as a “representative of his/her people”, is given the role of loving and protecting it (“patriotism”).

“Educating patriots” (both in the Soviet and contemporary Azerbaijani, Russian and other textbooks) implies the reproduction of an *all-encompassing* picture of the present, in which a linear, teleological construct of the past is normalised (whether the model is one in which political entities succeed one another in line with the laws of history, the “ethnogenesis of the people” or the emergence of “civilisations”). This reduces historical thinking to skills in stringing together the links in the cause and effect chain to discover ‘how a people managed to overcome its numerous conquering enemies whilst retaining its national existence [and] how it managed to arrive at its happy present state’.¹⁸ This type of history is primarily aimed at moulding “defenders of the Motherland” through

15 V. Shnirelman (2003). *Op.cit.*; O. Karpenko (2008). ‘Obuchenie “natsional’nym” razlichiiam: “narod” v shkol’nykh uchebnikakh obshchestvovedeniia [Teaching ‘national’ differences: ‘the people’ in school social science textbooks]’ in V. Voronkov, O. Karpenko & A. Osipova (eds) (2008). *Rasizm v iazykeobrazovanii [Racism in the language of education]*. Aletea: Saint Petersburg, pp. 5-23; O. Karpenko (2010). ‘Teaching “national” differences: *narod* in Russian school textbooks’ in M. Rivkin-Fish & E. Trubina (eds) (2010). *Paradoxes of Diversity in the Contemporary World: Discussions of “Culture” and “Tolerance” after the Soviet Union*. Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars: Washington DC, pp.193-217; V. Rouvinski (2007). ‘“History Speaks Our Language!” A Comparative Study of Historical Narratives in Soviet and Post-Soviet School Textbooks in the Caucasus’, *Internationale Schulbuchforschung*, 3, Vol. 29, pp.235-258; N. Chikovani (2008). *Op. cit.*; S. Rumyantsev (2008). ‘“Ethnic Territories” Presentations Practices in the Historical Textbooks in Post-Soviet Azerbaijan and Georgia’, *Internationale Schulbuchforschung*, Vol. 30, Issue 4, pp.811-824. Some authors see ethnocentrism as an integral feature of histories created by “nation states” (“national history”). Gennadii Bordiugov summarises the decades of disputes over the connotations given to the term “national history” in the AIRO-XXI project: ‘in particular it was agreed that the term “national history”, in the sociological sense of the term, refers to a system of knowledge engendered by a national school of historiography (i.e. one belonging to a specific country) which demonstrates ethnocentrism to varying degrees through reference to inescapable facts of cultural and historical development’ (G. Bordiugov (2009). ‘Natsional’nye istorii: Tendentsiia poslednego desiatiletia [National histories: Trends over the last decade]’ in F. Bomsdorf & G. Bordiugov (eds) (2009). *Natsional’nye istorii na postsovetском prostranstve –II [National histories in the post-Soviet space, vol. II]*, Friedrich Naumann Foundation, AIRO-XXI: Moscow, p. 9).

16 See, in particular, V. Voronkov, O. Karpenko & A. Osipova (eds) (2008). *Op. cit.*

17 T. Martin (2011). *Imperiiia “polozhitel’noideiatel’nosti”. Natsii i natsionalizm v SSSR, 1923-1939 [The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and nationalism in the USSR, 1923-1939]*. ROSSPEN: Moscow; S. Rumyantsev (2011). ‘Sovetskaia natsional’naia politika v Zakavkaz’e: Konstruirovaniie natsional’nykh granits, istorii i kul’tur [Constructing national borders, histories and cultures]’, *Neprikosovennyyi zapas*, 4 (78), pp.47-65.

18 V. Guchua & Sh. Meskhia (1984). *The History of Georgia. Textbook for Years 7-10. 3rd edition*. Ganatleba: Tbilisi, p.4.

the use of “foreign conquering enemies”, who systematically encroach on “our national existence”, as well as the use of the rhetoric of “pride in one’s people”, which not only maintained this existence but raised it to new heights. This model of historical narrative is employed in Soviet and most contemporary textbooks. The fundamental changes identified in contemporary textbooks were related to notions of what the term “our people” (*narod*) stands for, what constitutes its “interests” and the conditions under which its “independence” can be recognised, *what* it should be proud of, etc.

In summary, the collision of these narratives did not alter the *national form* of the Soviet historical narrative, rather its (Socialist) *content* was purged and replaced by a national one. We refer to this process in this study as the “nationalising” of the historical narrative. This process is based on a new understanding of the “interests of the people”, which proceeds directly from the reinterpretation of the country’s experience of its incorporation into the USSR and is formed from discussions of (and arguments over) Soviet era notions of the extent to which life in the Soviet Union met “the interests of [the respective] people”, as well as the extent to which the life “of the Soviet peoples” was “friendly”. Whilst the Soviet version associates “freedom of [any] people” with liberation from “exploiters”, the establishment of “Soviet authority” and the transformation of “the people” into a “Socialist nation”, the contemporary versions conceptualise each “people” as suffering as a result of Soviet authority to varying degrees. This experience of suffering is used in constructing contemporary national histories.

“Friendship between peoples”

The chief function of history teaching in the USSR in the 1980s was structured around *convincing* pupils of the “historical inevitability and patterns of development and progressiveness’ of the society/state in which they lived.¹⁹ The Soviet version of history was based on the notion of class antagonism which divided “the people” (“the toiling masses”) and “exploiters”, and linked the “(working) peoples” with ties of “class” solidarity. Conflicts and enmity between “peoples” are attributed to scheming class enemies (“exploiters”, “imperialists” and their “accomplices”), who systematically divide “peoples” and instigate quarrels between them in attempts to prevent them from uniting in a just struggle against the oppressors and from building a new society. The reason given for the success of these provocations is not that there are profound differences in (ethnic) culture and/or interests of peoples but that they (the peoples) are too immature (“backward”) to realise their objectively common (internationalist) interest (in building socialism/communism). The argument is that the disappearance of the “exploiters”

¹⁹ For example: “[C]larifications for pupils benefiting the historical inevitability and logical nature of the maturing of the Socialist Revolution is the main learning aim in the first section [on the period of imperialism] of this textbook’ (I. B. Berkhin & I. A. Fedosov (1982). *Istoriia SSSR [The History of the USSR]. Year 9 textbook. Seventh edition. Prosveshchenie: Moscow, p.4).*

automatically dispenses with the question of “social” and “national oppression”. There can be no legitimate reasons for “national enmity” in Socialist societies and the contradictions which existed previously (“under Tsarism”) are automatically resolved with the transition of power and ownership to “the people”. In her analysis of the discursive image of Baku in the Soviet history of Azerbaijan, Sevil Huseinova shows how it is transformed into a symbol of the ability of the Soviet authorities to enable the “transformation” of (pre-Soviet) “national antagonism” into “national fraternity”.

The study has led us to the conclusion that the concept of “friendship between peoples” and Soviet “internationalist education” represented a normative division of the population of the USSR into “peoples”, each ascribed their own specific cultural features (“their own fate”/“national culture”) and the political “right to self-determination up to and including secession”; on the other hand, the “friendship between peoples” also presented us with a model of the subordination of the status of “peoples” at the USSR and also national administrative entity level. Talk of the “genuine friendship” of “the Soviet nations” is a tool used to assert the hegemony enjoyed by one particular nation (“titular people”) on a certain territory. The “Russian people” and the “Russian proletariat” occupy a specific position in this context. It is given this leading role, not so much in terms of “its own republic” (RSFSR) but across the entire USSR. Its capacity to reflect the interests of “all peoples living in the USSR” is explained by the greater political consciousness of “the Russian proletariat”.

As the articles published here show, despite multiple references in Soviet textbooks to the “equality of peoples” and the “multinationalism” of the population of the USSR and the republics, the range of ethnic categories actually used is relatively narrow. As a rule, one “titular people” (“the Russians” in the history of the USSR, “the Georgians” in the history of Georgia, “the Armenians” in the history of Armenia, etc.) is assigned the right and capacity to reflect the interests of all others “living together [with it]” in a “multinational republic/country”.

There were no resources within Soviet educational discourse which would allow “conflicts” between “the Socialist nations” to be discussed or the actions of the superior authority to be contested. Talk of “conflicts between nationalities” and failure to meet the interests of the various peoples within the USSR only becomes possible with the disintegration of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union’s monopoly on power and the recasting of the USSR as a large-scale Soviet-manufactured experiment, full of blunders and various forms of manipulation of the interests of peoples. The absence of conflict in Soviet discourse is explained by the existence of (repressive and ideological) mechanisms to block them. Following the demise of the USSR, people in a number of different regions began to talk of the conflicts engendered by the Soviet nationality policy (the resettlement of peoples, arbitrary drawing up of territorial borders, granting of status, etc.).

Contemporary Azerbaijani textbooks can be seen as an example of a more radical rejection of the notion and practice of “friendship between peoples”. The idea of “centuries of Armenian-Azerbaijani enmity” forms the backbone of the historical narrative. The present day conflict is explained not by concrete socio-political and economic conditions, and/or the interests of the elites in post-Soviet society at the USSR and republic level, but by the clash between two “peoples”, which has existed “since time immemorial”. Sevil Huseinova emphasises that the Soviet version of the history of Azerbaijan involved suppressing facts regarding Armenian/Muslim *pogroms*, etc., as well as de-ethnicising descriptions of such events to the maximum extent possible.²⁰ The post-Soviet version continues the practice of suppression, but changes the repertoire of “inconvenient” facts. Conflicts are now ethnicised to the maximum extent possible and are represented as the inevitable outcome of contact between members of two “historically hostile” groups. Everything done by the Soviet government (“the colonial administration”)²¹ is seen as constantly infringing on the interests of the “titular people”; the behaviour of the “Armenians” (the “Armenian Bolsheviks”) is presented as driven solely by ethnic, “anti-Azerbaijani” motives.

Unlike the radically ethnicised approach to the representation of “the enemy” in Azerbaijani textbooks, Armenian textbooks present constructs which have much more to do with the political and international context of [historical] events. In the case of the Nagorny Karabakh conflict, the role of the opponent is occupied not by “the Azerbaijani people” but the government of Azerbaijan. Instead of “historical enmity” and articulations of “the inevitability of ethnic conflict”, the authors consider topics connected with *realpolitik* and behind-the-scenes intrigue (in particular, agreements between Soviet Russia and Kemalist Turkey) which caused the rights of the Armenian people to be infringed.

In societies where the idea of “a multi-ethnic and multi-denominational nation” is central to the contemporary official construct of national identity (as in the case of Georgia and Russia), there is no doubt as to the value of a stance based on “friendship between peoples” (“ethnic tolerance”).²² Indeed, “friendly attitudes towards all the peoples populating our country” is presented as a tradition deeply rooted in the experience of the “titular/state-forming nation” of these countries. This stance prevents the construction of an image of “the enemy” based on its radical ethnicisation (as in the case of Azerbaijan). The ethnic diversity of society is emphasised and applauded. Priority is given to maintaining the state’s “territorial integrity”. Accusations of “separatism”, or support for it from outside, form the basis of the construct of “the enemy”.

20 The conflicts were conceptualised in class terms and did not call into question the “friendship between peoples”, which consisted of proletariats and peasants.

21 The repression of the Soviet era is seen in terms of ethnic resistance in particular.

22 However, according to the version in contemporary Russian textbooks, the cement binding and keeping the “Socialist nations” in the USSR was the structural characteristics and organisational principles of “the new type of Party” rather than any immanent “friendship” inherent in their mutual relations.

In post-Soviet Georgian textbooks, the Georgian-Abkhaz and Georgian-Ossetian conflicts are viewed in terms of Georgia-Russia opposition. The Georgian side blames Russia for the continuation of the conflict, whilst Russia blames Georgia.

“The right of nations to self-determination, including full secession”

the fact that the Soviet historical narrative itself was not devoid of nationalist content is of fundamental importance to understand the nature of the conflicts which arose following the dismantling of the USSR. Nationalism (as a political principle) was in some ways an integral part of or “made to serve” Socialist content and when [the ideological] basis [of Socialism] was destroyed, it acquired significance in its own right, becoming a means adopted by the masses in “the just struggle for independence” and the production of (its) “enemies”. The policy governing history followed in all the countries analysed exploits this “legacy” (consciously or unconsciously), preventing (and at times blocking) the application of new approaches to research and the teaching of history.

The USSR narrative prevented the term “nationalism” being used to describe the realities of Soviet society,²³ whilst normalising the political principle that political and cultural units should essentially be congruent.²⁴ (Soviet textbooks stated that the USSR fully embodied this political principle and that *a natural basis* had been created for “friendship between peoples”.) Meanwhile, any discussion of conflicts that could implement (or fail to implement) this principle in practice was expressly excluded from this narrative.

Soviet pupils were socialised with the notion that “the people” had inalienable rights to develop “their own culture” on “their own territory”. However, it was impossible to question the extent to which the Soviet administration’s actions complied with its declared principle, the basis on which territorial borders were actually demarcated, or how the legitimate claimants to particular territories were established, etc., without the risk of being accused of undermining Soviet authority. For that matter, questions of this sort would never even have occurred to most Soviet people. It was virtually impossible for textbooks to include any articulation of gaps between (propaganda) rhetoric and real practice, despite these being obvious to anyone whose interests were directly affected by a specific decision.

In the aftermath of the Communist Party’s loss of its monopoly over the legitimate use of force and the production of “truth”, it was these demands – to grant nations the

23 This term could only be given a positive connotation in the context of “the just struggle by colonial peoples for independence”.

24 Gellner states that the requirement to comply with this principle [that political and national units should be congruent] is essentially nationalist [E. Gellner (1991). *Natsii i natsionalizm [Nations and nationalism]*. Progress: Moscow, p.23].

real right to self-determination – that the public picked up on and which later became a symbol of “democratisation”. The textbooks had omitted to mention other collective rights which might just as well have become rallying cries at the republic level. The lesson that the right of nations to self-determination was the sole principle of a just structuring of society had been learned so well by the Soviet people that the flouting of this principle became the primary grievance against the USSR and the “Bolsheviks/Communists”. In this sense, public support for the national elites’ demands for secession from the USSR was an unforeseen consequence of the mass reproduction of the notion of the legitimacy of these demands through the education system.

We found the notion of restoring the independence lost in the 1920s to be present in all studied contemporary textbooks. However, assessments of the part played by the Soviet authorities in this process differ. In the case of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia, “Sovietisation” is seen as reversing an independence previously attained (in 1918) and establishing a “regime of occupation”; however, in South Ossetia and Abkhazia the establishment of independent statehood is attributed to decisions by the government of the USSR. In the cases of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, the present day opponent (Georgia) figures as an actor which gradually eroded independence granted by “Soviet Russia” (at the hands of its “representatives” and under a variety of pretexts).

Conclusion

It was outside the scope of this research to change existing approaches to the teaching of history in the countries studied, although we did try to identify arguments which demonstrate the need for such change. We talk of the dangers of reproducing ethnocentric interpretations of the history of political communities, but we are not so naive as to ignore the fact that these interpretations are a convenient tool for manipulation and political rallying which few politicians would reject.²⁵ We should remember that most people in post-Soviet societies would at best regard any query of the *objective* existence of boundaries between *ethnic groups* as a challenge to “the natural order” and at worst as a “grist to the enemy’s mill”. Notions of a civic nation or constitutional patriotism and, indeed, the idea of human rights or tolerance (distinct from “friendship between peoples”) remain undeveloped, marginal and, for some, even “alien to our political culture”.²⁶

Hardly anyone (even within the professional communities of social researchers) queries the axiomatic nature of the assumptions underlying public certainty over the *essentialist*

25 In those rare cases where they dare to do so, this seldom involves any understanding of the wider implications of the rejection.

26 One example could be the statements of the Russian Orthodox Church on the “Western understanding of human rights”.

nature of ethnic borders or patriotic sentiments, or subjects them to any form of critical examination.²⁷ Even fewer people are aware of the part played by the language we use when speaking of social differences in stabilising some and excluding other ways of interpreting events/relations (including “inter-ethnic conflicts”). Although the selection of historical facts/personages/interpretations presented by the textbooks from the different historical periods is the subject of constant review, the (essentialist) language remains a relatively unreflected “historical legacy” which constantly drags us back into the past.

Through our research we tried to understand whether there might be any possibility of resolving territorial conflicts (i.e. Armenian-Azerbaijani, Georgian-Abkhaz, Georgian-South Ossetian conflicts) through compromise while the existing model of interpretation of historical events prevails. Our conclusion is that the conflicts are irresolvable under the prevailing system of logic used to form national histories. The part played by modern educational discourse, despite its rejection of many aspects of Soviet ideology and language, in keeping the link between the ethno-cultural and political dimensions of nationhood intact, forms an important basis for the reproduction of modern conflicts and means that most countries of the former USSR will continue on their path towards ethno-nationalism rather than building political (civic) nations.

Schools persist in reproducing the notion that the populations of countries (republics) are divided into “peoples”, one of which is dominant (the “state-forming people”). As in the language used by the Soviets, “peoples” are ascribed collective (cultural and political) rights; however, the former mechanisms used by the Soviets to “resolve” conflicts (suppressing and manipulating facts, repressing conflict parties, etc.) have been fully rejected. Disputes between “peoples” over what is actually “theirs by right” (lands held since time immemorial, cultural legacy, national heroes, etc.) are transformed into a zero-sum game: if one side wins, the other feels that it has lost and demands revenge.

Our analysis of the case studies reveals a number of ways in which history has been nationalised since the demise of the USSR. At the heart of some of these (in particular in the case of Azerbaijan) is the forming of an “historical enemy”; in others (such as Russia), there is no enemy but instead the normalisation of a paternalistic model of international relations in which Russia (“the Russian people”) is assigned the role of universal benefactor, for which all others (peoples) are expected to feel grateful.

27 ‘Ascribed “ethnicity” (i.e. that defined by the authorities and not by the individual’s own consciousness) was internalised by people and was gradually transformed from an external identifier to a component of (self-) identification. This led to a feature [...] of political thinking one might term methodological ethnocentrism – a view of society as a conglomeration of *ethnoi* (“peoples”). This mentality is shared widely today both by the public and a significant proportion of the intellectual and political elites. It is difficult for a former “homo Sovieticus” to imagine that his (or her) nationality is not in some way innate’ [V. Malakhov (2007). “‘Natsional’naia politika” kak fenomen politicheskoi rechi [The ‘nationality policy’ as a phenomenon of political discourse]’, *Ponaekhali tut...Ocherki o natsionalizme, rasizme i kultur’nom pluralizme* [Swamped by immigrants...essays on nationalism, racism and cultural pluralism], p.50].

In our opinion, the process of resolving current regional conflicts needs to be accompanied by a review of school curricula on national history. New approaches are needed to the way in which conflicts in the region are described and interpreted. This involves not simply rejecting the “Soviet experience” but also taking on board the experience accumulated within the European tradition of resolving contradictions through political and civic education, as well as history.

CHAPTER 1

Baku in the First Half of the 20th Century: The Space of “Friendship between Peoples” and Inter-ethnic Conflicts

Sevil Huseinova

Introduction

The first third of the twentieth century saw a number of attempts to create nation states in the Transcaucasus. In 1918-1921 the issue of demarcation of national territories was raised by members of local nationalist movements.¹ At that time the Transcaucasus was divided into three republics, the Azerbaijani Democratic Republic, the Democratic Republic of Armenia and the Georgian Democratic Republic.² However, the borders of these republics were not fixed until the 11th Red Army marched into the region and Soviet authority was established. It took a further two decades of Soviet rule before the borders between the three Transcaucasian states took on their modern form.

Following their incorporation into the USSR (in 1922), each of the republics, like the other territories with similar status within the Soviet Union, underwent the Soviet cultural revolution. The purpose of this revolution was to construct a Soviet culture which was “national in form and socialist in content”. In the view of the American Sovietologist Terry Martin, ‘the Bolsheviks attempted to fuse the nationalists’ demand for national territory, culture, language, and elites with the socialists’ demand for an economically and politically unitary state’.³ This was the context behind the creation of the original concept of “nation building”, which allowed the nationalist principle (one territory – one culture) to be simultaneously affirmed and rejected.

The introduction of mass primary and later secondary education (including in the national languages) was a key component of the Soviet cultural revolution. A huge and costly education machine was developed in the USSR which enabled the universal distribution of secular “high culture”.⁴ Mass education required standard curricula to be devised for different subjects, including history of the homeland (USSR and national).

1 In Azerbaijan these were mainly intellectuals grouped around the *Musavat* [Equality] party.

2 Until the late 18th and early 19th century, the whole region was divided into a number of Muslim *khanates* and some Christian Georgian kingdoms under the tutelage of the Persian Empire. The Russian Empire extended its power to the Transcaucasus in the first third of the 19th century. For more details on the process by which national borders were formed, refer to S. Rumyantsev [2010]. ‘Natsionalizm i konstruirovaniye kart «istoricheskikh territoriy»: obucheniye natsional'nim istoriyam v stranakh Yuzhnogo Kavkaza [Nationalism and the mapping of “historical territories”: the teaching of national histories in the countries of the South Caucasus]’, *Ab Imperio* No. 1, pp.415-461.

3 ‘The Soviet Union was not a federation, and it was certainly not a nation-state. Its distinctive feature was the systematic support of national forms: territory, culture, language and elites. Of course, these were hardly novel choices. National forms are the primary domestic concerns of most newly formed nation-states. [...] Soviet policy was original in that it supported the national forms of minorities, rather than majorities. It decisively rejected the model of the nation-state and replaced it with a plurality of nation-like republics’ [T. Martin (2001). *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923-1939*. Cornell University Press: Ithaca & London, p.13]. In Terry Martin’s view, ‘we might call the Bolsheviks internationalist nationalists, or better yet, affirmative action nationalists’ (*Ibid.*, p.13).

4 E. Gellner (1994). *Usloviia svobody. Grazhdanskoe obshchestvo I ego istoricheskie soperniki* [Conditions of freedom. Civil Society and its Rivals]. Moscow School of Political Studies: Moscow, p.126.

In Azerbaijan, the process of writing its own textbooks on the history of Azerbaijan had already started in the first years of Sovietisation,⁵ but the first textbook *The History of Azerbaijan* did not appear until 1960.⁶ It was based on a three-volume work on the history of Azerbaijan prepared at the Historical Institute of the Azerbaijan Academy of Science.⁷ The entire history of Azerbaijan was fitted into a single book, from the Palaeolithic to post-war reconstruction. The last version of the textbook was published in the 1970s and consisted of two books. The course was designed for use over four years (Year 7 to Year 10). The syllabuses for each school year were devised at different periods and even in its final form, which was used right up to the collapse of the USSR, the textbook only covered up to the late 1970s. This textbook went through a number of editions. The editions analysed in this study are those published in 1986 (the fifth edition for Year 9 and the third edition for Year 10), combined within one textbook.⁸

The logic of the historical narrative in the Soviet textbooks was subordinated to the state ideology (Marxism-Leninism). This ideology required historians to provide an account not only of the progressive development of the socialist homeland but also to show what sort of “vestiges” had been overcome on its path. “Ethnic divisions” were one such “vestige”. In the official (and only possible) version, the victory of Soviet authority and the formation of the Soviet Union had marked an end both to “national oppression” and “inter-ethnic conflicts”.

The underlying model in the Soviet version of history was that of “friendship between peoples”, in which the Soviet political space was presented as free of all conflict. The various conflicts which did exist between “the Soviet peoples” (regional elites, populations of border territories or territories placed under the administration of this or that republic, etc.) were in practice excluded from the historical narrative. When describing conflicts between “peoples” which occurred prior to the creation of the USSR, the authors of the textbooks (and academic historians) avoided any details, emphasising their class nature and asserting that, despite “the provocations of the Tsarist authorities and bourgeois nationalists”, they were unable to “sow discord between peoples”.⁹

5 ‘... in the 1920s the first comprehensive works on the history of Azerbaijan were published in our republic. These include the work by M. Veliev (Bakharty) *Azerbaijan* [a study of its physical geography and economy, *author*], published in 1921 in Baku. [...] Of great significance was the publication of the first *The History of Azerbaijan* in the Azeri language by Rashid Ismailov’ (İsmayilov, Rəşid, *Azərbaycan tarixi*, Bakı: 1923, S.H.) [E. B. Alibekova (2009). *Voprosy drevnei istorii Azerbaidzhana v rossiiskoi istoriografii XIX - nachala XX vv* [Questions of the ancient history of Azerbaijan in Russian historiography of the 19th-early 20th centuries]. Təhsil: Baku, p. 66]. Before the outbreak of the Second World War, staff at the Azerbaijani office of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR issued a number of trial mock-ups of textbooks on the history of Azerbaijan for secondary schools but none of them was approved.

6 A. Sumbatzade, Z. Ibragimov & I. Guseinov (1960). *Istoriia Azerbaidzhana. Uchebnoe posobie dlia srednei shkoly* [The History of Azerbaijan. Textbook for secondary schools]. Azerbaijan State Publishers of School and Paedagogical Literature: Baku.

7 I. Guseynov, Z. Ibragimov, A. Guliev, E. Tokarzhvskii, M. Sharifli & M. Efenfiev (eds) (1958). *Istoriia Azerbaidzha v 3 tomakh* [The History of Azerbaijan in 3 volumes]. Academy of Sciences of the Azerbaijan SSR: Baku.

8 A. Guliev, E. Mamedov & K. Ragimov (1986). *Istoriia Azerbaidzhana. Uchebnik dlia 9-10 klassov obshcheobrazovatel'noi shkoly* [The History of Azerbaijan. Textbook for Years 9-10 in general education schools]. Maarif: Baku.

9 *Ibid.*, pp.79-81.

With the rejection of the USSR's dominant ideology, post-Soviet historians were faced with the need to devise different approaches to accounts of "inter-ethnic conflicts". Work was already underway on new versions of textbooks on history and social science for secondary schools by the first half of the 1990s. The 2002 textbook is used in this study as representative of the contemporary reading of events during the period of Sovietisation.¹⁰

A tradition was formed within Azerbaijani historiography from the late 1980s onwards, which in many ways serves the current conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan (the Nagorny Karabakh conflict). The impression is given that the meaning of events occurring today should be looked for not in contemporary (class, etc.) inequalities but in the historical past. As a result, conflicts between "peoples", which occurred in very different socio-political contexts and at very different periods, are fused into a single narrative by historians. The search for the "historical roots" of contemporary conflicts is predicated solely on the need to prove that one's own cause is just and to dismiss the opponent's claims as baseless. According to this historicist approach,¹¹ the conflict between the Armenians and Azerbaijanis has existed "since time immemorial" and has been a continuous fixture (sometimes "flaring up", sometimes "dying down") until its inevitable culmination in the last Nagorny Karabakh war. In this version of national history, the periods of peaceful co-existence between the neighbouring countries are deliberately ignored and it is impossible to represent or discuss them.

A comparative analysis of the texts of Soviet and contemporary school textbooks describing the events around the emergence of Soviet authority in Azerbaijan is of considerable help in illuminating the aims, content and methods of interpreting "inter-ethnic conflicts". A comparison of the two versions of national history for pupils enables us to gain a better understanding of the nature of historical knowledge in schools and the distinctive details of each historical period. It also helps us to progress towards finding an answer to the question of why certain contemporary conflicts are intractable. The questions I am interested in are how the plot in the textbook is defined, and how myths of "eternal enmity" or "indissoluble friendship" are constructed discursively. The analysis includes a more detailed examination of the way in which the history of Sovietisation in Azerbaijan has been rewritten at different periods.

The analysis centres on the representation in the textbooks of the events of 1918-1920 in the city of Baku. This subject was selected, since even a cursory reading reveals a serious transformation in the discursive images of Baku used in history textbooks from different

10 T. Gafarov, I. Mamedov et al (2002). *Istoriia Azerbaidzhana dlia 11 klassa obshcheobrazovatel'noi shkoly* [History of Azerbaijan for Year 11 in general education schools]. Chashyoglu: Baku. This is the textbook currently used in schools in Azerbaijan.

11 'Historicism [...] is the conviction that the present can be understood from the past. It is the belief that the key to the meaning of events that are occurring today lies in history. What is happening now is seen as the unfolding of pre-existing trends' (V. Malakhov (2005). *Natsionalizm kak politicheskaya ideologiya* [Nationalism as a political ideology]. KDU: Moscow, p.53).

periods. Analysing these transformations allows us to grasp the conceptual changes to the ways in which “historical facts” are constructed and employed.

There have been a number of comments by researchers on the detailed relations between nationalities in Baku. As the German historian Jörg Baberowski notes, at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries Baku was ‘a laboratory of aggressive xenophobia’.¹² In the winter of 1905, there were serious clashes between Armenians and Azerbaijanis, which began in Baku and then spread across the entire territory of modern Azerbaijan and Armenia, eventually on a scale that made researchers into the events of 1905-1908 designate the period as “the first Armenian-Azerbaijani war”.¹³

In the 1920s, i.e. in the first decade of Sovietisation, Baku remained a city characterised by high levels of crime and ethnic clashes.¹⁴ However, in the same period it also acquired the status of a city that was ‘an outpost of socialism in the East’.¹⁵ Maintaining its extremely ethnically diverse population into the Soviet period, Baku gradually acquired a reputation as a city that fully embodied the notion of international friendship between peoples.¹⁶

The situation changed abruptly in the second half of the 1980s with the start of the Nagorny Karabakh conflict and the gradual collapse of the USSR. Armenian *pogroms* took place in January 1990, coinciding with mass protests by the supporters of the Azerbaijan Popular Front (APFP). Soviet troops were subsequently deployed to Baku and brutally suppressed the protests of the APFP. In total at least two hundred residents of the city perished, hundreds were wounded, and there were tens of thousands of refugees; the city’s symbolic reputation as one in which “peoples lived in indissoluble friendship” lay in tatters. These events and their interpretation helped to re-ignite the clashes of the early 20th century. In post-Soviet Azerbaijan, a central role has been assigned to the *pogroms* suffered by Muslims/Azerbaijanis. These include, for example, the *pogroms* that occurred in March 1918, which were given the status of “genocide of

12 In the late 19th to early 20th centuries, Baku was divided into ethnic districts: Muslim (Azerbaijani), Armenian and the administrative centre – the Russian district (A. Altstadt-Mirhadi [1986]. ‘Baku: Transformation of a Muslim Town’, in M. Hamm (ed) [1986]. *The City in Late Imperial Russia*. Indiana University Press: Bloomington, p.303). The mass emigration into the city in the early 20th century of Russians, Armenians, Jews and Georgians, etc., meant that the local Muslim Turks, the “indigenous inhabitants”, were suddenly in the minority and felt encroached upon (J. Baberowski [2010]. *The enemy is everywhere: Stalinism in the Caucasus*. Rosspen: Moscow, p.323-324).

13 T. Swietochowski [1985]. Russian Azerbaijan, 1905-1920. *The Shaping of National Identity in a Muslim Community*. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, pp.37-83; T. Swietochowski [1995]. *Russia and Azerbaijan: A Borderland in Transition*. Columbia University Press: New York, pp.37-42; A. Altstadt [1992]. *The Azerbaijani Turks: Power and Identity under Russian Rule*. Hoover Institution Press: Stanford, California, pp.27-49, 89-107.

14 J. Baberowski [2010]. *Op. Cit.*, pp.356-381.

15 L. Bretanitskii [1970]. *Baku*. Iskusstvo: Leningrad-Moscow, pp.117-118.

16 In the 1950s the ethnic composition of the city was the subject of constant debate at meetings of the rulers of the Azerbaijani SSR. For example, in his speech at the 8th Plenum of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Azerbaijan in June 1959, the Secretary of the Azerbaijani Central Committee Bairamov said that: ‘If Baku was a city in which up to 90-95 percent or even 80 percent were Azerbaijanis and 5-6 percent other nationalities, then perhaps, to some extent, it would be possible at a stretch to justify discussions about transferring institutions to the Azeri language. But as we know according to the latest census, Azerbaijanis currently make up just 38 percent, and 62 percent are members of other nationalities’ (D. Hasanly [2009]. *Khrushchevskaya “otpepel” i natsional’nyi vopros v Azerbaïdzhane [Khrushchev’s “thaw” and the nationality question in Azerbaijan], [1954-1959]*. Flinta: Moscow, p.559).

the Azerbaijani people”. The account of *pogroms* suffered by the Armenian residents of Baku (in September 1918) have entirely disappeared from the historical narrative.

This trend is also reflected in school textbooks. In Soviet historical discourse, Baku was transformed during the Sovietisation period from an oil rush capital, notorious for high levels of crime and inter-ethnic clashes, into a city which was exemplary in its Soviet internationalism and “friendship between peoples”. In the post-Soviet narrative, the oil boom (in the late 19th and early 20th centuries) is a period of huge achievements – Baku is transformed into the centre of the struggle for national independence. Here, “friendship between peoples” is replaced by a detailed description of the atrocities of the inter-ethnic clashes. I go into more detail below on the distinctive features of how Baku has been constructed within the Soviet and contemporary versions of national history.

Soviet authority: the authority of the internationalist bolsheviks

In the last Soviet textbook on the history of Azerbaijan, the events of the period from October 1917 to July 1918 are designated as “the struggle for Soviet authority in Azerbaijan”. The authors state that

‘In the “Declaration of the Rights of the Peoples of Russia”, the appeal “To all Muslim workers of Russia and the East” published in November 1917, the Soviet government proclaimed the equality and sovereignty of all peoples, their right to self-determination up to and including secession and the formation of independent states and called for a voluntary and honourable union of peoples.’¹⁷

The victory of the October revolution and the passing of these documents are seen as events defining how the situation in Baku developed:

‘The news of the victory of the Great October socialist revolution was received with enormous joy by the Baku proletariat. On 31st October the Baku Soviet adopted a resolution proposed by the Bolsheviks proclaiming Soviet authority in Baku. And on 2nd November the Baku Soviet approved a programme for the practical transfer of authority to the Soviets.’¹⁸

Clichés from Soviet discourse (such as the “enormous joy” felt by the entire “proletariat” or “people”, etc.) are used to tag significant (“fateful”) events precisely and to match the “positive”/ “our” heroes (“the Bolsheviks”, “the Baku Soviet”, etc.) to the “negative” (for example, “the *Musavatists*”, who did not feel the “universal joy”).

17 A. Guliev, E. Mamedov & K. Ragimov (1986). *Op. Cit.*, p.77.

18 *Ibid.*, p.77.

As with any historical narrative, what is important is not only the set of facts but also the way in which they are presented by the authors. For example, the statement that ‘Proletarian Baku was the first city in the Transcaucasus over which the red banner of Soviet authority was unfurled’,¹⁹ creates an image of the city as the centre of the revolutionary movement in the region. Similarly, the authors legitimise the authority of the Bolsheviks by referring to its recognition by “the proletarians” (‘From the very first days of the socialist revolution, the Baku proletariat backed Soviet authority in Azerbaijan and throughout the Transcaucasus’²⁰), avoiding a description of the growing tension in the city that spilled over into an armed struggle for power.²¹

In terms of Soviet discourse and Marxist-Leninist ideology, the emergence of the “Baku proletariat” as “backing Soviet authority” is inevitable. “The proletariat” simply has to back “the Bolsheviks”. The idealisation of “the working class” and its transformation into the avant-garde of the struggle for a bright future means it is simply impossible that its members could be involved in inter-ethnic clashes. The actions of the workers, in the textbook version, obey the logic of the strengthening of internationalist, class solidarity in the struggle against the exploiters.

‘When the Baku Soviet issued its call-up, hundreds of Baku workers enlisted with the Red Guard and the Red Army. Within a short time the international Soviet regiment, the military patrol of the Baku Bolshevik Committee, a number of artillery batteries and a cavalry unit had been set up in Baku. [...] The revolutionary youth took an active part in the struggle to reinforce the positions of the Soviet authorities in Baku. On 13th January 1917 the “*Internationalist Union of Young Workers of the City of Baku and its districts*” was formed by progressive youth.’²²

The workers, as representatives of “the progressive class”, are invariably presented to us as internationalists. The collective idealised image of the Baku workers is positioned by the authors as superior to inter-ethnic conflict. Those conflicts which did quickly flare up in the city are described as “the March battles in Baku”. In the authors’ version, these “battles” were attacks by “bourgeois nationalists” (“*Musavatists*”) against the legitimate Soviet authorities, who were backed by “the majority of residents – the Baku internationalist class of proletarians”.

‘On 30th March 1918 the *Musavatists* launched an anti-Soviet uprising in Baku. [...] To manage the struggle against the *Musavatist* counter-revolution, the Bolsheviks created the *Committee of Revolutionary Defence of the City of Baku and its Districts*.

19 *Ibid.*, p.77.

20 *Ibid.*, p.77.

21 Out of all the larger cities of the Transcaucasus, in 1917-18 the Bolsheviks were only able to come to power and retain it briefly in Baku. Before they could gain complete power, they had to enter into an armed struggle with members of the local nationalist movement.

22 *Ibid.*, p.77.

During those days of March in which the fates of Soviet authority were being decided in Baku, the Baku workers of all nationalities – Azerbaijanis, Russians, Armenians and others – fought valiantly shoulder to shoulder against the counter-revolution. [...] After three days of sustained battle, the Soviet troops utterly overwhelmed the Musavatist insurgents. This shining victory gave the Baku Soviet full authority over the city and destroyed all the plans of the Transcaucasian counter-revolutionaries.²³

Here we see the bourgeois nationalist *Musavatists* launching an “insurgency” against the legitimate Soviet authorities, and the Bolsheviks opposing them, headed by “Baku workers of all nationalities”, who organise “the defence of the city” and gain a “shining victory”. The rhetorical construction “shining victory” in Soviet historical discourse implies the engagement in the struggle (“shoulder to shoulder”, “hand in hand”, etc.) of workers who must by definition be of “all nationalities”.²⁴

Adding “shine” to the victory allows the number and strength of the “insurgents” and “provocateurs” conquered in the battles to be multiplied. In particular, “the Armenian bourgeois nationalist *Dashnaks*” are added to the “*Musavatist* counter-revolution”, who ‘attempting to turn the class battles into inter-ethnic clashes, began to rob and kill the Azerbaijani population’,²⁵ but meet ‘resistance to [their] provocations’ from ‘the Soviet troops’.²⁶

Curiously, the violent actions (“robbing and murdering”) of “*the Armenian* bourgeois nationalist *Dashnaks*” against the “*Azerbaijani* population” can no longer be described in terms of “class battles” and have become “inter-ethnic clashes”. The addition of “*Dashnaks*” to the discourse helped to re-focus attention away from *class* antagonism within “the Azerbaijani population” onto its *ethnic* homogeneity.

These minor engagements, which are such a characteristic of the Soviet historical narrative, might be seen as tending to encourage an ethnic reading of the conflicts, if people of “different nationalities” are engaged in them.

There is no single answer to the question of whether (in the textbook version) the “*Musavatists*” and “*Dashnaks*” are united by class solidarity (as bourgeoisie and exploiters) or divided by antagonistic national or ethnic interests. As we saw earlier, they

23 *Ibid.*, p.80.

24 It is suggestive that the list of ethnic categories used in comments on the composition of the group of “Baku [or any other] workers of various nationalities” is always brief and left open (reference is only made to three ethnic categories “and others”).

25 ‘With the active assistance of representatives of England, France and the USA, on 15th November the Georgian Mensheviks, the *Musavatists* and *Dashnaks* formed the Transcaucasus Commissariat in Tiflis, which immediately waged a bitter struggle against Soviet Russia, and the revolutionary workers, peasants and soldiers of the Transcaucasus. At the bidding of the Transcaucasus Commissariat, *Musavatist* gangs inflicted savage reprisals on the revolutionary-minded Russian soldiers returning from the Turkish front near Shamkhor station’ (*Ibid.*, p.80).

26 *Ibid.*, p.80.

are presented as quite distinct from the “Azerbaijani population” (the “*Dashnaks*” are guided not only by class but also ethnic interests). On the other hand, by entering into coalitions between themselves and with other (including foreign) enemies of the workers, the “bourgeois nationalists [of various nationalities]” lead a joint ‘bitter struggle against Soviet Russia, the revolutionary workers, peasants and soldiers of the Transcaucasus’.²⁷ Moreover, the textbook reveals cases in which the “*Musavatists*” are directly opposed to the “Azerbaijani people”. One of these is associated with the overthrow of Soviet authority (in September 1918) when ‘with the assistance of Turkish bayonets, the most evil enemies of the Azerbaijani people, the *Musavatists*, came to power in Azerbaijan. The *Musavatist* government was a puppet of the Turkish occupiers’.²⁸ Here the standard Soviet term for stigmatising an opponent is used (becoming a “puppet” in the hands of foreigners).

There is no mention of the fact that the fall of Soviet authority was accompanied by large-scale *pogroms* (now Armenian) and, unlike the actions of the “*Dashnaks*”, those of the “*Musavatists*” continue to be interpreted in terms of “class battles” and are not defined as “inter-ethnic clashes”. The very absence of any mention of the *pogroms* allows actions by “bourgeois nationalists” of different nationalities to be judged differently: the “*Dashnaks*” are presented as guided by ethnic motives as well as class in their relations with the “Azerbaijani population”, whilst the “*Musavatists*” are guided only by class interests.

The fall of Soviet Baku (in September 1918) also symbolises the defeat of the internationalism within it, which is associated exclusively with Bolshevik rule. Only the Soviet authorities are capable of securing “accord between nationalities” within the city and more widely in the Transcaucasus.²⁹

As already discussed, in the Soviet version of history, participation by members of the working class in “inter-ethnic conflicts” can only be the result of force or provocation by enemies (“bourgeois nationalists” and “imperialists”). Relations between “working peoples” are routinely said to be friendly, with “friendship between peoples” described as repayment of the ‘international debt’³⁰ to the principal lender, which, in the relations

27 *Ibid.*, p.79.

28 *Ibid.*, p.93.

29 Another indication of this was the calls for “the fraternal uniting of peoples” voiced in the years of “counter-revolutionary reaction”. The authors of the textbook put the date of the text calling for the workers conference held by the Bolsheviks as the start of June 1919 in Baku: ‘Comrade workers!... The Baku revolutionary proletariat is hand in hand with the Azerbaijani working people, which has already started out on the path of independent struggle for its national and social liberation, is gathering forces to purge its country of the predatory gangs of imperialists and *Denikinists* and their lackeys the Azerbaijani khans and beks. [...] Today the Workers Conference, the entire Baku proletariat with no distinction as to nationalities, again affirms its iron will and unflinching resolve to fight against reaction’ (A. Guliev, E. Mamedov & K. Ragimov [1986]. *Op. Cit.*, p. 104).

30 ‘The nationalisation of oil production and the concern of the government of Soviet Russia inspired the Baku workers in their selfless struggle for oil. As a result of their heroic labours, oil output for June was 1.6 times that of May. In spring and summer, around 1.3 million tonnes of oil and oil derivatives were sent to Soviet Russia. The Baku proletariat thereby discharged their internationalist debt to the workers of Soviet Russia, provided enormous assistance to the Red Army in its heroic fight with the enemies of the socialist revolution’ (*Ibid.*, p.85).

between “Socialist peoples”, is the “Russian proletariat” and “Russian revolutionaries”, etc. The authors regularly point out the decisive role played by “the Russians” by making various nationalist heroes speak words of acknowledgement and gratitude. The “Bolshevik Nariman Narimanov” speaks on behalf of “the Azerbaijani proletariat” when, rejoicing at the establishment of Soviet authority in Baku, he says: ‘Today the Russian revolution has opened a great new, beautiful page in world history. [...] Today the Russian revolutionaries, uniting with revolutionaries from the entire world, have secured the peace of which we have long dreamed.’³¹

The “significant backwardness” of “Azerbaijan and other republics of the Caucasus” compared with “Soviet Russia” in the first years of Soviet rule is described as ‘inherited from the times of Tsarism, the rule of the landowners and the bourgeoisie’.³² The uniting of the Soviet peoples of the Transcaucasus into “a single fraternal family”, initially at regional level (through the creation of the Transcaucasus Federation) and then within the USSR,³³ is viewed as essential for the successful building of socialism and overcoming their “economic and cultural backwardness”:

‘The tasks of building socialism and the vital interest of the Soviet peoples required that they be unified into a single fraternal family. Soon after the victory of Soviet authority in the Transcaucasus, a movement began, aimed at the unification of the Azerbaijani, Georgian and Armenian Soviet republics. This unification was of enormous significance in reviving the national economy of these republics and the transition to socialism, in strengthening the friendship between the peoples of the region and also in protecting it against the attacks of Western imperialists.’³⁴

Once again it is the workers of Baku, brought up on “the glorious traditions of proletarian internationalism” (i.e. the traditions of putting an end to strife between nationalities), who are at the forefront of the struggle for the unification of the Transcaucasian republics into a “single fraternal family”. From extracts from the speeches of local senior Party official Musabekov, pupils discover that:

‘The first task facing the Soviet authorities of the Transcaucasus was to eliminate national strife...The Transcaucasian Soviet authorities discharged this task with honour. On 10th December we were witnesses to the 1st Transcaucasian Session of Soviets where the Azerbaijani worker, the Armenian worker and the Georgian worker merged in fraternal

31 *Ibid.*, p. 82.

32 *Ibid.*, p.117. The textbook quotes “the famous letter to the communists of the Caucasus dated 14th April 1921” in which ‘Lenin advised them always to take into consideration the specific conditions of their republics, to achieve the consolidation of the authority of the Soviets, bolster friendship between the peoples of the region, develop its economy, and put natural riches to the service of the people’.

33 ‘The Azerbaijan SSR was incorporated into the Union of the SSR as part of the Transcaucasian Federation along with its fraternal Georgian SSR and Armenian SSR’ (*Ibid.*, p.126).

34 *Ibid.*, p.124.

embrace at a single session and established the first foundation of fraternal union and solidarity in the Caucasus. The ultimate goal of the Azerbaijani proletariat is unification with the great Russian proletariat, with whose assistance he obtained liberation from the capitalist yoke...’ (From a speech at the 1st session of the Soviets of the USSR, 30th December 1922).³⁵

As a result of all this Soviet construction, Baku is already being presented in the speeches of prominent Bolsheviks as an example of international friendship and peace in the 1920s. The city of Baku is presented as a testing ground for the new policy of establishing friendship and fraternity between peoples. Such fraternity can only exist if the workers are in power. Baku is an example precisely because it had been a city of “national antagonisms” which had now been successfully overcome. The 1986 textbook contains a quotation from a speech by Kirov in 1925:

‘Here in Azerbaijan, the happiest city in our Soviet Union in a national sense is Baku. There is no other city with such a multiplicity of nationalities and in which the workers of different nationalities live as such a friendly, united family. If this can be done here, if we have been able to hammer out this national antagonism with the workbench and factory machinery so that it is reborn as national fraternity, then we can do this across the whole of Azerbaijan...’ (From a report of the Central Committee of the Azerbaijan Communist Party (Bolshevik) to the 7th session of the Azerbaijan Communist Party (Bolshevik), December 1925).³⁶

Soviet ideology required examples for others to emulate. Baku became an example of the “fraternal unity and solidarity” of the peoples, a “friendly, united family of workers of different nationalities”, etc. The strength of the Soviet authorities was confirmed by the transformation of previous “antagonistic” relations into relations of “true” solidarity and “unity”. Baku symbolises the ability of the Soviet authorities to enable a “rebirth” of “*national* antagonism” into “*national* fraternity”.

So far, we have learned that the Soviet version of conflict resolution, as reflected in the textbook *The History of Azerbaijan*, is based on combining “the invention of classes”³⁷ with the normalisation of the “architectonic illusion”.³⁸ On the one hand, the attention

35 *Ibid.*, p.130.

36 *Ibid.*, p.130.

37 In Sheila Fitzpatrick’s view it is possible to talk of the Bolsheviks’ invention of classes (or classes re-invented by the Bolsheviks). This class vision of society played a key role in Bolshevik policy in the 1920s and 1930s. (S. Fitzpatrick [2005]. *Tear off the Masks! Identity and Imposture in Twentieth-Century Russia*. Princeton University Press: Princeton and Oxford, pp.32-40.)

38 R. Brubaker defines “the architectonic illusion” as ‘the belief that the right “grand architecture”, the right territorial and institutional framework, can satisfy nationalist demands, quench nationalist passions and thereby resolve national conflicts. Most conceptions of grand architecture draw attention to the alleged right of national self-determination or the related “principle of nationality”...Against this, I want to argue that nationalist conflicts are in principle, by their very nature, irresolvable, and that the search for an overall “architectural” resolution of national conflicts is misguided’ (R. Brubaker [2000]. ‘Myths and misconceptions in the study of nationalism’, *Ab Imperio* No.1, p.152).

of academics is focused on class antagonism which is *naturally* overcome in the process of the building of socialism; on the other hand, the notion is formed by the significance of the self-determination of “the people” on the basis of its national territory. The attainment by “the people” of their own statehood (i.e. the forming of the Soviet national republics) is viewed as an important factor in overcoming backwardness, etc.

On the other hand, these same generations saw the frameworks being formed for the development of “new nationalism”.³⁹ In the view of Rogers Brubaker, which I would support, ethnicity was a very important characteristic and the keystone of the system for defining the nationality of each citizen of the USSR.

‘The Soviet institutions of territorial nationhood and personal nationality comprised a pervasive system of social classification, an organising “principle of vision and division” of the social world, a standardised scheme of social accounting, an interpretative frame for public discussion, a dense organisational grid, a set of boundary-markers, a legitimate form for public and private identities.’⁴⁰

During the Soviet era, the view that ethnicity was a key characteristic of every human being that defined his nationality (“ethnic nationality”), handed down from generation to generation by biological inheritance, gained wide currency.

In the Soviet version of history, Baku occupies a special position as an example of the Soviet nationality policy working effectively both for Azerbaijan and for the USSR as a whole. This is where an optimal solution is found to apparently intractable problems, with the antagonism that had divided the peoples within it before the establishment of Soviet authority not only disappearing, but being reforged into “fraternity” within just five years of the existence of the Soviet regime. It is therefore a little odd that so little attention is paid to the conflicts (1918-1920) preceding the establishment of Soviet

39 Ronald Suny describes the situation in Soviet Armenia, where, in his opinion, a “new nationalism” spread in the 1960s-1970s (R. Suny [1997]. ‘Soviet Armenia’, in R. Hovannisian [ed] [1997]. *The Armenian People from Ancient to Modern Times*, St. Martin’s Press: New York, pp.374-378). He uses the term “new nationalism” to describe the 1965 events in Yerevan, when the improvement in official relations between the USSR and Turkey was met with mass protests by the city’s population (including its youth). ‘It emerged that nationalism, based on territorial claims on neighbouring Turkey, far from fading out in the years of Soviet rule, had simply taken on new forms and become a more mass phenomenon. The claims voiced during this mass campaign of disobedience also met with sympathy from the local authorities’.

In my view, it was the Soviet nationality policy (territorialisation, indigenisation, the cultural revolution) that fanned the spread of such “new nationalism”. The new generation of Soviet citizens essentially grew up on notions of the nation as an ancient shared cultural and biological inheritance conferring exclusive rights to its “historic territories”, a collective self-consciousness, etc. It was in the years of the USSR that, for the first time in the entire history of local communities, such notions had been fostered on a mass basis through schools, the media, the policy of the indigenisation of cultural and administrative elites, etc. It was during the years of Soviet authority that notions that no human exists, or can exist, outside the “ethnos” or nation became commonplace and shared by the mass of the population. These notions became an inalienable part of self-identification, also of the Transcaucasus communities. I emphasise that its mass nature is the key characteristic of this “new nationalism”. The 1965 events in Yerevan were the first public instance of this “new nationalism”. In my view, similar processes, albeit in less intensive forms, were also occurring in neighbouring Soviet Azerbaijan.

40 R. Brubaker [2000]. *Nationalism Reframed: Nationhood and the National Question in the New Europe*. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, p.31.

authority. One might think that an “ideologically true” description of these events might have sharpened and deepened the positive image of the Bolshevik internationalists, putting an end to strife between nationalities. In fact, however, the authors tend to gloss over the conflicts. It would appear that by the first half of the 1980s, there was no perceived, pressing need for a description of the conflicts which took place, or that they were viewed as a “stain” on the biography of Baku, the outpost of internationalism and an example to be imitated.

The post-soviet version: the national liberation movement and conflicts

The post-Soviet textbook, which broke with the traditional Soviet historical account in many ways, had a completely different interpretation of the events of 1918-1920. The main assumption underlying judgements of the events around Sovietisation is that the Bolsheviks were continuing the Russian imperial tradition. For example, the authors argue that:

“The “Declaration of the Rights of the Peoples of Russia” and the “Appeal to the Muslim Workers of Russia and the East” issued by the Bolsheviks were essentially propaganda. The Bolsheviks wanted to restore the Russian colonial system in a new form.”⁴¹

The judgements of the actions of the “*Musavatists*” and the “Bolsheviks” are now reversed: in the new system of reference, the former are heroes and the latter enemies. The negative image of the “Bolsheviks” is reinforced by constant references to the alliance between the “Baku Bolsheviks” and the “*Dashnaks*” (“Armenian nationalists”).

“In late 1917 and early 1918 Baku was transformed into a centre of Bolshevik/*Dashnak* groupings. Anti-Azerbaijani forces assembled here from all over the South Caucasus. Shaumyan, appointed by Lenin in late 1917 as Commissar Extraordinary for the South Caucasus, arrived in Baku. The Military Revolutionary Committee, which had been created under the leadership of the Armenian Korganov at the 2nd Regional Congress of the Caucasus Army in Tiflis, was also transferred there. 6,000 Russian and 8,000 Armenian soldiers who had returned from the Near East and Caucasus fronts after the Erzindzhan armistice were also concentrated in Baku. Seeing the growing influence of the “*Musavat*” party in Azerbaijan, the Bolshevik centre and the local Bolshevik/*Dashnak* forces under its command declared Baku the arena for “the struggle of the revolution against the counter-revolution” in the South Caucasus. The Red Army was at the disposal of

41 T. Gafarov, I. Mamedov et al (2002). *Istoriia Azerbaidzhana dlia 11 klassa obshcheobrazovatel'noi shkoly* [The History of Azerbaijan for Year 11 in general education schools], Chashyoglu: Baku, p.6.

the Baku Soviet, which was dominated by the group of Bolshevik/*Dashnaks*. This force consisted of 20,000 troops, formed mainly of Armenians.⁴²

In contrast to the Soviet version, in which the opposition between “revolutionary” versus “counter-revolutionary” forces is described in terms of the class struggle (the “Bolsheviks” expressing the interests “of workers of different nationalities” versus the exploiters – “*Dashnaks*” and “*Musavatists*”), the post-Soviet version involves a predominantly ethnic interpretation: the “Bolsheviks” enter into a coalition with the “Armenians/*Dashnaks*” and “Russians” against “the Azerbaijani people” and the “*Musavatists*”. Agents who in the Soviet version were described as ideological opponents (“the Bolsheviks” vs “*Dashnaks*”) are merged, transformed into “Bolshevi-*Dashnak* groups” conducting a joint “anti-Azerbaijani policy”. Just as in the Soviet version of history, the local “Bolsheviks” could not be associated with “exploitation”, in the post-Soviet version it is impossible for them to be (“honest”) “Azerbaijanis”.

In the contemporary version, Soviet internationalism is viewed as a fiction designed to conceal the hostile attitude of the “Bolsheviks” (mainly “Russians” and “Armenians”) to “the Azerbaijanis”. Ethnic otherness (“non-Azerbaijani”) is so laden with hostile connotations that no further supporting argument is required. In this context, “the March battles in Baku” are transformed into “reprisals against the Muslims/Azerbaijanis”:

‘Brigades of Armenian Bolshevik/*Dashnaks* in different parts of Baku started to hold rallies and gatherings against the Azerbaijanis. [...] Early in the morning of 31st March, columns of Bolshevik-*Dashnaks* attacked the Kirpichkhana and Mammedli districts and others where Azerbaijanis lived. They started shooting at these districts from the air and sea, using aeroplanes and artillery from navy ships. The Armenians had convinced the Russian sailors that the Azerbaijanis were killing Russians in the fortress inside Icheri-shekher. The sailors sent their representative and once they realised this was a provocation they ceased fire. [...] The Armenian chauvinists inflicted reprisals on the civilian Muslim population. The residents of the Azerbaijani districts were hacked to pieces with swords.’⁴³

In contrast to the Soviet version, in which scant detail is given about the March *pogroms*, in the contemporary version the authors give a detailed description of the motives of those engaged in these actions, justifying some and laying the blame on others. The principle blame for the “reprisals on the civilian Muslim population” is placed on “Armenians” (“Armenian chauvinists”, “Armenian Bolshevik-*Dashnaks*”); “Russian sailors” are described as involuntary helpers, deceived by “the Armenians”. “The Russians” or “the Bolsheviks” as such (when not connected to “the Armenians” and “the *Dashnaks*”) are not seen as “enemies”. The violence they demonstrate against “the Azerbaijanis” is

42 *Ibid.*, p.9.

43 *Ibid.*, p.12.

generally explained by the fact that they are influenced by “the Armenians”, are victims of Armenian provocations, etc.

The Bolshevik Nariman Narimanov, whom we have already come across in the Soviet textbook, is presented in a new light. The pupil now discovers from an extract from their notes cited in the textbook that:

‘[T]he *Dashnaks* said: “We do not recognise someone as a Bolshevik [if he is a Turkic Muslim], it is enough that he is a Muslim.” They kill whoever they want to, destroy their houses, turn them into ruins. They show no mercy, not only to men but also pregnant women.’⁴⁴

Statistics are used to augment the discursive image of a pregnant woman perishing at the hands of “the *Dashnaks*”: ‘As a result of the March genocide, in Baku alone over 12,000 people were killed’;⁴⁵ In Baku *guberniia* the genocide of the Muslims (the Azerbaijanis) continued until mid-1918. Over this period over 20,000 Azerbaijanis were killed.⁴⁶

The authors’ repeated identification of “Muslims” with “Azerbaijanis” (“the genocide of the Muslims (Azerbaijanis)”) suggests that they view the cause of the hostility of “the Armenians” towards “the Azerbaijanis” as rooted not only in ethnic, but also in religious differences. The textbook clearly associates “the Azerbaijanis” with “Muslims” and “the Armenians” with “Christians”,⁴⁷ allowing the events of 1918-1920 to be interpreted in terms of religious opposition. Generally, ethno-cultural and religious characteristics, and not party membership, are now used to characterise the sides in the conflict. In section three, which is revealingly entitled “The creation of the Bolshevik-*Dashnak* regime in Baku and its anti-Azerbaijan policy”, we read:

‘Pro-*Dashnak* Armenian Bolsheviks took control of the Council of Peoples’ Commissars. [...] This led to one of the then leaders of the Armenian Republic, Khatsov, referring to the Baku Council of Peoples’ Commissars, headed by Shaumyan, as “the Armenian Soviet government”. The fact that there were just three Azerbaijanis in this government [...] showed that it had virtually no grounding in the nation.’⁴⁸

The authors are concerned throughout (unlike the Soviet version of the textbook) to report on the statistics showing the national composition of governmental bodies or

44 *Ibid.*, p.13.

45 *Ibid.*, p.14.

46 *Ibid.*, p.16.

47 ‘The arrival in Baku on 17th August of the English general Desterville [sic] greatly cheered the Armenians. However, the small size of the English military units [just 1,000 men] was a source of dissatisfaction for the Christian population of the city’ (*Ibid.*, p.29).

48 *Ibid.*, p.19.

military units. In the context of the reiterated articulation of the opposition “(Bolshevik) Armenians”/“the Azerbaijanis”, the fact that “the Azerbaijani” Baku Council of Peoples’ Commissars is headed by “the Armenian” Shaumyan is proof that the Soviet regime established in the city and the policies it carries out “must” be “anti-Azerbaijani”. Thus Baku’s internationalism becomes a factor hindering the national liberation movement.⁴⁹

The Armenian *pogroms* that occurred in Baku after the Ottoman troops gained control of the city, overthrew the Baku Council of Peoples’ Commissars and formed a *Musavatist* government are not mentioned in the contemporary textbook, as in the Soviet textbook. Overall, the appearance of the Turkish army in Baku is judged in positive terms. The textbook gives an account of the appeal of the units of the Turkish army approaching Baku, ‘demanding that the city be surrendered without a battle, in return for a guarantee that the rights of all citizens would be secured irrespective of their nationality or creed’.⁵⁰ Thus “the Turks” and not “the Bolsheviks” are presented as guarantors of peace between the different nationalities, but not of the future “fraternity of peoples” with which the authors are no longer concerned.

Like the “Bolsheviks”, “the *Musavatists*” did not hold on to power for long. The fall of the Azerbaijani Democratic Republic, which they had attempted to establish in the period 1918-1920, was determined in April 1920 once the 11th Red Army marched in. In the contemporary textbooks the 11th Army is transformed from “the liberator of the Azerbaijani people” (as in the Soviet texts) into “the occupier” (“the Soviet occupation troops”). The success of the “Soviet occupiers is explained by ‘the subversive activities of a “fifth column”, represented by the Azerbaijani Bolsheviks and the use of the services of a group led by Mikoyan (Musabekov, Dzhabiev and others) by the 11th Red Army who had a good knowledge of the Turkish language, customs and local conditions’.⁵¹

The political preferences of the authors, who are now clearly on the side of the “*Musavatists*”, lead them to focus on a group of “Bolshevik Azerbaijanis”, whose collusion with “Armenian Bolsheviks” makes them especially culpable. Whereas Soviet discourse refers to the multi-national nature of the Bolshevik party as proof of its progressive, internationalist nature, here it is used to convey the aim of the “Bolsheviks” to destroy any “grounding in the nation”, which the authors find reprehensible. The “fifth column” which assists “the occupiers” turns out once again to be “Russians” and “Armenians”:

49 ‘One of the most harmful anti-Azerbaijani proposals of the Bolshevik/*Dashnak* administration which had found a “plum position” for itself in the Baku Soviet, was the drive to separate Baku from Azerbaijan. Kirov, Mirzoyan, Serebrovsky asserted that Baku was not a Turkic but an internationalist proletariat city and thus had to be incorporated into Russia’ (*Ibid.*, p. 116).

50 *Ibid.*, p.30.

51 *Ibid.*, p.75.

‘...in a series of towns and villages the local population, consisting mainly of Russians and Armenians, went over to the side of the occupiers.’⁵²

...the local population of foreign nationals, particularly Armenians and Russians, openly assisted the opposite side. A significant part in the suppression of the uprisings in Gyandzh and Garabag was played by the hypocritical Armenians.’⁵³

In this context, it no longer appears odd that the new (Soviet) authorities established in April 1920 are described as relying mainly on “Russians” and “Armenians” and always leaving “the Azerbaijani Bolsheviks” in secondary roles:

‘...the senior institutions of power – the Temporary Revolutionary Committee and the Council of Peoples’ Commissars, created after the April coup, were formed mainly of representatives of Azerbaijani nationality.’⁵⁴

However:

‘...[in reality] the republic was ruled by the ACP (B) [Azerbaijani Communist Party (Bolshevik)], which was an inalienable component of the RCP (B) [Russian Communist Party]. The ACP(B) and the Baku party organisation, the core of which consisted of non-Azerbaijanis and mainly of Russians and Armenians, played a leading role in the socio-political life of the republic, conducted the colonial policy of Soviet Russia in Azerbaijan.’⁵⁵

“The Baku party organisation” is seen in the contemporary version of the textbook as a body that represents an ethnos rather than a class. Its core (and the foundation of the other institutions of power) must be composed of “the titular nation”. Any failure to comply with this rule is interpreted as a phenomenon of “Soviet Russia’s colonial policy” or intrigues by other “enemies”. The argument that the activities of the Azerbaijan Communist Party (Bolshevik) and the Russian Communist Party (Bolshevik) have an “anti-Azerbaijani” purpose is bolstered by quotations from speeches by communists occupying leading positions in the central bodies of the party. For example, one of these (Lominadze), ‘In his speech at the 2nd Congress of the Azerbaijan Communist Party (Bolshevik) (October 1920) [...] said blatantly that there are dozens, perhaps hundreds, of our comrades who say that “you cannot trust a Muslim, he may be a good communist, but he is a Muslim and at heart he is a Muslim”’.⁵⁶ Thus the position of “Azerbaijanis” and “Muslims” (including “communists”) during the Soviet era is described as one of constant humiliation.

52 *Ibid.*, p.107.

53 *Ibid.*, p.128.

54 *Ibid.*, p.106.

55 *Ibid.*, p. 106-107.

56 *Ibid.*, p.115.

In the contemporary textbooks the image of Baku as an example of “friendship between peoples” is no longer in the foreground. Baku is now the capital of Azerbaijan. As such, the presence in the city of “Armenians”, “Georgians” and “Russians” becomes a potential or real threat to the country’s unity. The actions of communists who are “Armenians” and “Russians” are judged to have an anti-Muslim agenda. The repressions of the Soviet period against “the Muslim intelligentsia and bourgeoisie” should, it is proposed, be viewed in terms of ethnic and not class opposition.⁵⁷

The unification of the South Caucasus within the Transcaucasus Federation is now taken as proof of the overall “anti-Azerbaijani” leanings of the Soviet regime. This decision is now part of the “colonisation” plan:

‘Under the banner of state and political unification the ground was actually being prepared for the restriction of the republic’s independence. [...] The creation of the South Caucasus Federation caused great damage to the interests of Azerbaijan, since all its assets above and below ground, in particular oil, were now also at the disposal of the other Transcaucasian republics. The restoration of the economy and the intensive development of Georgia and Armenia over the lifetime of the Transcaucasian Socialist Federal Soviet Republic (TSFSR) were achieved at the cost of the economic potential of Azerbaijan.’⁵⁸

What is described in Soviet discourse as the fulfilment of “internationalist duty” (and a source of pride) is now interpreted as the redistribution of resources to circumvent or damage the interests of the donors. The Soviet discourse of internationalism and “fraternal assistance” to the “Soviet peoples” is superseded by an anti-colonial discourse in which the previous regime “embezzled” Azerbaijan’s riches.

Everything done by the Soviet government is seen as evidence of its constant attacks on the interests of the “titular people”. ‘Under the pretext that there were not enough national professionals [it sends from Russia] members of other nationalities, particularly Russians, Armenians and Jews to leading posts in the republic [...]’;⁵⁹ under the pretext ‘that there was a shortage of qualified worker professionals and officials amongst the Azerbaijanis [it organises “a flood of labour” from other regions, which] leads to an increase in unemployment amongst the Azerbaijanis and also to a radical change in the national composition of the population of Azerbaijan and Baku in particular’.⁶⁰ Furthermore, ‘Due to efforts by the Armenians who occupied leading posts in the republic (Mirzoyan and others), in the 1920s and 30s a special district

57 ‘This grouping of the ACP [B], headed by the group of Georgians and Armenians, decided to decapitate the Azerbaijani people. It can be said that only the Muslim intelligentsia and the bourgeoisie were arrested and shot’ (*Ibid.*, p.120).

58 *Ibid.*, pp.140-141.

59 *Ibid.*, p.147.

60 *Ibid.*, p.147.

was allocated for Armenians in Baku, called “Ermanikand”. In this district fine multi-storey houses were built and then settled by the Armenian newcomers’.⁶¹

Baku is again ascribed the central role of an exemplary city. But now it exemplifies the destructive actions of the colonial, “ethnically alien” republican administration. This administration, it is implied, sees the city as a testing ground for a refined Russification policy. According to this version, the people became ‘indifferent to the national traditions and spiritual values of the Azerbaijani people, there were daily protests against them and mixed marriages became the norm, leading to the distancing of the Azerbaijanis from their national origins’.⁶²

In this version of current anti-colonial discourse in post-Soviet Azerbaijan, Baku becomes the site of a loss of “national identity”, broken from “its national origins”. The internationalism prevailing in the city is seen as symbolic of this loss. Baku is no longer a city exemplifying “friendship between peoples”. It is now the site of a clash of interests between colonisers (and their “accomplices”) and the colonised. The latter’s weakness is explained by their lack of real power and the fact that the authorities deliberately ensure they have no chance of obtaining it.

“The Azerbaijanis”/“the Azerbaijani people” are at the centre of the contemporary historical account. All the main positive images are associated with the heroes of the national liberation movement. Rigid boundaries are defined between “Azerbaijanis” and “non-Azerbaijanis” (“Armenians”, “Georgians”, “Jews”, “Russians”). These groups are presented as homogenous, with mutually exclusive interests, but also capable of uniting in the struggle for access to resources which belong by right to “the Azerbaijanis”. The articulation of the internal heterogeneous nature of ethnic groups and the international class solidarity of the workers familiar in Soviet discourse is superseded by a discourse of ethno-nationalist unity. The essentialism of class theory gives way to nationalist essentialism. Inter-ethnic conflict replaces friendship/fraternity of peoples (or the majority of the people, the workers and peasants) as the norm.

The contemporary historical account is determined by a combination of ethno-nationalist and anti-colonial discourses. No serious practical consideration is given to civil society discourse in the textbook. Only “the Azerbaijanis” (or “the Turks” – “blood brothers”) are assigned the legitimate right to rule the republic and the ability to be “patriots of Azerbaijan”. This is seen as the explanation for the ousting of Azerbaijanis from official bodies in the 1920s. The “Russians”, “Armenians” and “Jews” who replaced “Azerbaijanis” in leading posts during the Soviet period are ascribed the role of a “colonial administration”. They control the republic, strip it of its independence and initiate a process of embezzlement of its natural resources.

61 *Ibid.*, p.147.

62 *Ibid.*, pp.147-148.

Conclusions

The type of historical narrative with which this article deals is denoted by Marc Ferro as “institutional history”. This is history ‘which holds sway because it speaks for, or justifies, a policy, ideology or regime’.⁶³ As in the USSR, today pupils are also presented with just one “correct” version of history approved by the Ministry of Education. Thus, in both versions, the account of the history of nation building is reduced to a minimum and we are confronted with a single, officially-permitted interpretation of events. Whilst the Soviet interpretation reduces conflicts and their resolution to the class struggle, the post-Soviet version concentrates on ethnicising the image of the wily “historical enemy”.

A comparative analysis of Soviet and post-Soviet textbook narratives allows us to study two fundamentally differing versions of the national history of Azerbaijan. The contrast between these versions is manifested both in the “plot” and in the interpretation of the events selected for description in the textbooks. The differences are defined by the specific features, aims and content of the different nation-building projects (Soviet and post-Soviet).

In the Soviet version, “peoples”, consisting of workers and peasants, are always keen to enter into friendship with one another, but the “bourgeois nationalists” (who are essentially deprived of the right to belong to “their peoples”) try to sow discord between “peoples”. In the post-Soviet version, the different peoples figure as either fraternal and friendly (for example the Azerbaijanis and the Turks) or immutably hostile (the Azerbaijanis versus Armenians). This enmity and/or friendship is invariably reified or explained in objective terms: we become friends because we are “blood brothers” or share the same creed; we become enemies because we are of “different blood” and different creeds. In other words, the class approach has simply been replaced by the ethno-nationalist discourse.

In the Soviet and post-Soviet versions of national history, we are confronted with the phenomenon of “forgetting” or “historical misconceptions” without which, as Ernest Renan thought, the creation of a national community would be impossible.⁶⁴ In both cases very specific things are “forgotten” and “remembered”. In my view, it is reasonable to say that the Soviet historical constructs were aimed at overcoming existing conflicts. By suppressing facts and/or details and applying a class interpretation of the events of the bloody Armenian-Azerbaijani clashes of 1918-1920, the Soviet ideologues, as it were, “removed” conflict. In the Soviet version, conflicts were resolved once the process of the institutionalisation of the national republics was completed (the demarcation of territories, etc.) and class inequalities overcome.

63 M. Ferro (1992). *Comment on raconte l'histoire aux enfants [How the Past is Taught to Children]*. Vysshaya Shkola: Moscow, p.306.

64 E. Renan (1902). ‘Chto takoe natsiia? [What is a nation?]’, *Works in 12 volumes*, Vol. 6. Kiev, p.92.

Faced with the collapse of the USSR, the Soviet version of the resolution of conflicts, based on ‘the invention of the classes’⁶⁵ and ‘the architectonic illusion’,⁶⁶ was no longer effective. However, this does not diminish the fact that no serious conflicts occurred over a number of Soviet generations. On the other hand, over the same number of generations, the frameworks, in which the “new nationalism” developed, were also formed.⁶⁷ The Soviet authorities, with their focus on “friendship between peoples”, had introduced the institutionalised notion that nationality was a compulsory biological characteristic of each human being. In this way, the same authorities created the conditions for the spread of mass ethno-nationalism as the USSR collapsed.

The conditions for the emergence of this mass nationalism were universal secondary and mass higher education, as a result of which every Soviet citizen had absorbed essentialist notions of nationhood. The Soviet authorities fostered “national cultures” and linked them with “national territories”. They also fostered the notion that it was the peoples and representatives of different nationalities who entered into amicable relations, but not the ordinary people, for whom their ethnicity was a purely private matter. The civic aspect of “Soviet nationalism” – the construction of a single Soviet community, involving the ultimate overcoming of ethno-nationalist notions – applied in theory only. In practice, ethnic identities and boundaries between groups were constantly reinforced, despite the trends towards Russification established from the late 1930s onwards. Thus, a model that was intended to achieve the decisive resolution of inter-ethnic conflicts (and, arguably, succeeded in this for some time) contributed to their re-emergence later at an entirely new, more widespread level. At the time of the collapse of the USSR, national movements rapidly became mass movements beyond the wildest dreams of the nationalists of the pre-Soviet period.

In the post-Soviet period, a long list of professional historians (one more outcome of the Soviet nationality policy) constructed a new version of national history relatively swiftly. The new interpretation of Armenian-Azerbaijani relations gave a central role to conflicts; the periods of peaceful co-existence began to be described as an exception to the rule or simply suppressed. This essentialises the contemporary Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict, which is represented as having lasted “for centuries” and thus as “natural” and “inevitable”.

Recommendations

We should perhaps ask ourselves the question of which version of national history (interpretation of events or ethno-historical myths) is more likely to help us resolve conflicts peacefully. In my view, the product of the post-Soviet version of history, with

⁶⁵ S. Fitzpatrick (2005). *Op. Cit.*, pp.32-40.

⁶⁶ R. Brubaker (2000). *Op. Cit.*, p.152.

⁶⁷ R. Suny (1997). *Op. Cit.*, pp.374-378.

its underlying myth of “eternal enmity” can only lead to an escalation of conflict. The Soviet version appears more attractive by comparison, but is based on a rejection of any serious consideration or interpretation of events that do not fit the framed discourse of “friendship between peoples” and cannot be seen as leading to any real conflict resolution. Moreover, the myth of “friendship between peoples” can only be sustained by the brutal suppression of dissent that is characteristic of authoritarian regimes, but unacceptable in democratic societies.

What is needed are a new version and new approaches to the representation of history. I believe that the very conceptual basis of school history curricula needs to be revised. What is needed is a re-examination of the teleological (historicist) approach which encourages the interpretation of contemporary conflicts as historically inevitable and eternal. Fortunately we do not have to reinvent the wheel – there is a great deal of experience from which we can borrow. The experience of historians from Germany and Poland provides good examples.⁶⁸

Events associated with conflicts should not be suppressed as they were in the days of the USSR. They should be debated. However, this debate will only be possible once we have rejected the essentialisation of conflicts and the practice of constructing myths about “historical enemies”. The tendency to view conflict as a zero-sum game for “us” or “them” needs to be reversed. Pupils should be presented with various alternative interpretations of events. Reductive versions of the historical account should also be avoided and conditions created in which pupils can develop a critical perception of clichés and stereotypes reproduced in textbooks. They should be given the right (particularly in senior years) to become acquainted with all the known facts, particularly those connected to key events of history. Writers of textbooks and teachers should not take on the role of censors who select facts and choose how they are interpreted.

Some of the educative process needs to be based around open discussion and/or debates (seminars). The rigid framework where the teacher teaches and the pupil answers questions needs to be rejected. The fundamental purpose of these debates/seminars would be to work towards a clearer understanding of the characteristics of historical knowledge and the methods used to obtain it. These seminars, which could be in an interactive format fully involving both teacher and pupils, should foster the experience of understanding that historical facts do not exist without interpretation. Multiple interpretations are in fact a key feature of historical knowledge.

A fundamental review is needed of the history syllabus and the predominant focus on political events needs to end. The syllabus should include all possible information about the history of people’s day-to-day lives. I am also convinced that oral history needs to be developed as a discipline. This could be included in practical exercises as well as debates

⁶⁸ For more details, please refer to L. Veselý (ed) (2008). *Contemporary History Textbooks in the South Caucasus*. Association for International Affairs: Prague, pp.89-142.

and seminars. Pupils could obtain real-life experience of collecting materials through oral histories and analysing/interpreting them.

Finally, in my view, it is crucial that we stop viewing “our” conflicts as unique when it comes to writing new textbooks. The conflicts in the South Caucasus are not unique. They are a reflection of the political principle of nationalism which, according to Ernest Gellner, primarily ‘holds that the political and the national units should be congruent’.⁶⁹ This principle pays little attention to human rights, which are discursively substituted by the rights of an imagined collective (“the nation”). A rejection of this principle in the historical narrative might express itself in the diversification of (the currently predominant idea) of centuries-old opposition and the uncompromising struggle of everyone against everyone else for territorial independence. We should remember that this struggle, which certainly took place, also contained the aspiration of creating dignified living conditions for the citizens of the future independent state. We must therefore reject notions of the state as an end in itself and return to the notion of the state as a means of organising the lives of the people living in it, in accordance with human and civic rights.

⁶⁹ E. Gellner (1983). *Nations and Nationalism*. Cornell University Press: Ithaca & New York, p.1.

CHAPTER 2

“Inventing Traditions”:

The Theme of Sovietisation in History
Textbooks of Soviet and Post-Soviet Armenia

Tigran Matosyan

Introduction

This article examines the production process of history textbooks in post-Soviet Armenia. It also demonstrates – through a textual analysis of Soviet and post-Soviet textbooks – transformations in the historical narrative of Armenia’s Sovietisation. More specifically, it concludes that, since independence, production of history textbooks and their contents have been authorised by the government of Armenia, and that the new ideological criteria defining the contents of textbooks fit into the general trend of “de-ideologisation” and “re-ideologisation” (or “nationalisation”) observed across the whole post-Soviet space. Furthermore, the article views the production of history textbooks and nationalisation of history as an “invented tradition”,¹ which, on the one hand, partially reproduces Soviet practices of textbook production (both in terms of its centralised nature and interpretation of certain topics) and, on the other hand, serves the general purpose of legitimising newly-created political institutions and their policies. Self-determination of Nagorny Karabakh, for example, is one of the objectives of these newly-formed institutions, and this objective has had to be reflected in textbooks. Unlike the Soviet textbooks, which were written in the spirit of internationalism and therefore devoid of discussions on ethnic and territorial conflicts, their post-Soviet counterparts have introduced new subtopics on territorial disputes over Soviet Armenia, presenting narratives of the transfer of Armenian territories to Azerbaijan and Turkey as a result of unjust resolutions and treaties.

The first section of the article presents an overview of how the state-centred system of textbook production in Armenia developed. It also describes the simultaneous process of the formation of ideological guidelines under which the new history was supposed to be written. It then proceeds to demonstrate changes in the historical narrative itself through a comparative analysis of the period of “Sovietisation” in three (one Soviet and two post-Soviet) history textbooks.

New history textbooks: the system of authorisation

Although this article does not discuss the authorisation system for Soviet textbooks on Armenian history,² it seems self-evident – from the general context of the over-centralised system of education management in the USSR – that monopoly over the production of textbooks in Soviet Armenia belonged to the Soviet government. As the title page of the final (published in 1987) Soviet textbook on Armenian history states, it was approved by the Ministry of Education of the Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic. The principle of over-centralisation also held true for the ideological framework: Armenian history

1 E. Hobsbawm (1983). ‘Introduction: Inventing Traditions’ in E. Hobsbawm & T. Ranger (eds) (1983). *The Invention of Tradition*. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge pp.1-14.

2 The reason for this limitation is the paucity of information about the process, in terms of availability of both documents and personnel to interview. Unfortunately, by the time the current research started, the editor-in-chief and all of the three authors of the last Soviet textbook had long since passed away.

textbooks had to follow the general line of “Bolshevik axioms” (especially regarding the interpretation of events in the 20th century). These axioms were institutionalised following Stalin’s 1931 article entitled *On Certain Issues of the History of Bolshevism*.³

In 1993-1994 the first post-Soviet school textbooks, including those on the history of the Armenian people, were published in Armenia. It might be assumed that the fledgling processes of decentralisation in different spheres of life in Armenia also affected the production of history textbooks. However, closer analysis suggests that, from the early 1990s until today, the process has been consolidated in the hands of the government. The government has also acquired direct authority over the contents of textbooks.

In a 6th March 1992 directive of the Board of the Ministry of Education, the Institute of Pedagogical Research (under the same Ministry) was assigned the task of conceptually writing new textbooks and teaching plans for all humanities subjects.⁴ In a June 1993 interview in the periodical *Dprutyun [Schooling]*, the official mouthpiece of the Ministry of Education, the Director of the Institute stated that eight temporary research groups, headed by prominent scholars, were created to accomplish the task. As a result, in the course of one year, 48 new textbooks and 9 teaching handbooks were approved by the Ministry of Education and sent for printing.⁵

In the course of 1993, a research group in charge of writing Armenian history textbooks, led by Vladimir Barkhudaryan, then a Corresponding Member of the Academy of Sciences of Armenia, completed two textbooks, one for the 5-6th and one for the 7-8th years. Barkhudaryan provided interesting details (in an interview within this research project) on the importance attributed by the then leaders of the country to the new history textbooks. In particular, shortly after independence, he was approached by the Chairman of the Supreme Council (National Assembly) of Armenia and told that there was ‘a dire necessity to write objective history textbooks for schools’.⁶ Thereafter, once the draft of the history textbook had been prepared, Barkhudaryan was called for a meeting with President Levon Ter-Petrosyan, himself a specialist in History and Oriental Studies. The President had read the draft and gave his approval for publishing with a list of written comments for the textbook.

Following the production of the first textbooks, the authority of the government over their production and contents began to assume a more institutionalised character. Despite some decentralisation in publishing procedures, it was the government who had the final say regarding who should publish and what should be published. Since 1998 the

3 Iu. Chernikova (2010). ‘Kak pivalis’ uchebniki istorii pri Staline [How textbooks were written under Stalin]. Available in Russian at <http://urokiistorii.ru/learning/manual/2010/16/kak-pivalis-uchebniki-istorii-pri-staline>.

4 S. Arsenyan. ‘National Schools Need Textbooks with National Contents. The Schools Are Waiting’, *Dprutyun*, 11th-17th June 1993, p.4. This large article was devoted specifically to the state of progress of the production of new textbooks, and contained interviews with scholars and state officials in charge of writing and publishing those textbooks.

5 *Ibid.*

6 Interview with Vladimir Barkhudaryan, 15th June 2011.

Ministry of Education and Science has selected textbooks on the basis of a competition among non-government publishing houses. The houses have to form their teams of textbook authors and assume all publishing responsibilities.⁷ Today the selection takes place through a contest organised by one of the Ministry agencies called “The Circulating Foundation of Textbooks”.⁸

The general policy on textbooks authorisation is also outlined in the “Law on Public Education of the Republic of Armenia” adopted on 10th July 2009. The Law contains four articles, some parts of which are directly related to the process of evaluation and application of textbooks in the schools, reinstating the authority of the government over their production and contents.⁹

New conceptual guidelines

The nearly axiomatic assumption that the teaching of history in state schools cannot exist outside of a certain political paradigm makes one reflect on the ideology adopted by the newly-created Republics as a basis for revising history after the collapse of the Soviet Union. So far, one of the main arguments of scholars engaged in studying textbooks refers to simultaneous processes of de-ideologisation, re-ideologisation, or outright nationalisation of histories in the countries of the post-Soviet space. As the authors of one study state, “[p]articularly in the newly-created nation-states, following the break-up of the Soviet Bloc, we see the re-emergence of outright nation-centred narratives”.¹⁰ The fact that history in the republics of the former Soviet Union has been nationalised or “decolonised” is also argued in a recent study of post-Soviet textbooks conducted in the Russian Federation.¹¹

De-ideologisation and re-ideologisation of histories in the post-Soviet space may be also interpreted using Hobsbawm’s concept of “invented traditions”.¹² More specifically, the nationalisation of Armenian history, as a new tradition, has fulfilled the overlapping functions of legitimising institutions (and their aspirations) formed after independence and inculcating “beliefs, value systems, and conventions of behaviour”.¹³ In the new or

7 Armenian Educational Portal (2009a). ‘Competition of Textbooks in line with New Mechanisms’. Available in Russian at www.armedu.am/arm/official.php?sec=news&id=2094.

8 Armenian Educational Portal (2009b). ‘Seven Textbooks to Senior School’. Available in Russian at [http://www.armedu.am/arm/official.php?sec=\\$p=4&id=1308](http://www.armedu.am/arm/official.php?sec=$p=4&id=1308).

9 *Ibid.*

10 Y. N. Soysal & H. Schissler (2005). ‘Teaching beyond the National Narrative’ in H. Schissler and Y. N. Soysal (eds) (2005). *The Nation, Europe, and the World. Textbooks and Curricula in Transition*. Berghahn Books: New York, Oxford, p.6.

11 A.A. Danilov & A.V. Filippov (eds) (2009). *Osveshchenie obshchei istorii rossii i narodov postsovietskikh stran v shkol'nykh uchebnikakh istorii nezavisimyykh gosudarstv [The illumination of the general history of Russia and the peoples of post-Soviet countries in school history textbooks in the independent states]*. Moscow, p.13.

12 E. Hobsbawm (1983). *Op. Cit.*; V. E. Bonnell (1999). *Iconography of Power: Soviet Political Posters under Lenin and Stalin*. University of California Press: Berkeley, Los Angeles, London. Using Hobsbawm’s concept of “invented traditions”, Bonnell demonstrates the process of legitimisation of Soviet political institutions via visual propaganda of Bolsheviks in the first decades of their power (*Ibid.*, pp.1-19).

13 *Ibid.*, p.9.

re-ideologised version of Armenian history one can also find what Hobsbawm calls “repetitions” from the old tradition. This can mostly be seen in the tendency to combine the so-called “civilisational” and “formational” approaches of interpreting history,¹⁴ or in more positive representations of Soviet history in more recent textbooks.

A closer look at the textbook production process suggests that the nationalisation of Armenian history textbooks has been gradual, in line with other general nationalisation processes in the country. As Barkhudaryan (editor-in-chief of the first post-Soviet textbook) stated in the interview, lack of ideological guidelines was one of the main challenges that the authors of the first textbook had to face.¹⁵ The following criticism, articulated by an official of the Ministry of Education in the early nineties, echoes Barkhudaryan’s statement:

‘Teachers of history should approach both old and new textbooks carefully, with application of pedagogical reasoning, as the old textbooks are constrained within the framework of Marxism, whereas the new ones are almost deprived of any conceptual grounds and principles.’¹⁶

This implies that the formation of “nation-centred” history in textbooks took place within a general context of the nationalisation of history in academia and in other spheres of public discourse in post-Soviet Armenia.

Today, unlike in the early nineties, ideological guidelines for both writing history textbooks and teaching history in schools are defined in the “subject criteria and plan” introduced by the state into secondary education curricula in Armenia in 2004. Prior to this, authors and teachers had been guided by “subject plans” which structurally defined the contents of the subject but did not include detailed ideological guidelines.¹⁷

In particular, the “subject criteria and plan” document specifies what the primary goals of teaching history in middle and senior schools should be.¹⁸ The document also sets out the guidelines along which teachers can choose topics for their classes. Aram Nazaryan, author of the most recent (2009) criteria and plan for the subject of Armenian history,¹⁹

14 The first approach views world history as a multitude of locally developing histories that represent various cultures, whereas the second approach is based on Marx and Engels’ idea of society passing through five consecutive socio-economic formations: primitive communal, slaveholding, feudal, capitalist and communist.

15 Interview with Vladimir Barkhudaryan.

16 A. Ghukasyan. ‘Teaching History in the Current Educational Year’, *Dprutyun*, 2nd-8th December 1993, p. 3.

17 Interview with Aram Nazaryan (13th June 2011), author of 2009-published *Criteria and Plan for the Subject “The History of the Armenian People” for Senior Public Schools*.

18 Once the Armenian Law on Public Education designated a three-stage (basic, middle and senior) school system for secondary education, teaching “The History of the Armenian People” was organised in line with new realities. A circular approach was adopted, which supposed that history had to be taught in its entirety in middle school and then revisited in senior school in a more detailed way.

19 A. Nazaryan (ed) [2009]. *Criteria and Plan for the Subject “The History of the Armenian People” for Senior Public Schools*. Centre for Educational Programmes, Ministry of Education and Science: Yerevan.

stated that the document specified three main priorities derived from previous and current historical developments in the life of the Armenian people, as well as their future aspirations.²⁰

The first priority refers to the history of Armenian statehood: ‘The axis of criteria contents of the subject...is the history of Armenian statehood as, at the present civilisational stage, empowerment and development of national statehood is of importance to us.’²¹ The second emphasis, according to the author, is placed on Armenian culture, the study of which is deemed very important in the era of cultural globalisation.²² Finally, the third priority is the history of the national liberation struggle of the Armenian people against “foreign oppressors”.²³

The “subject criteria and plan” document also stresses the importance of history teachers, viewing them as the main representatives of state ideology. The document states that teachers should adopt a *modus operandi* and worldview which correspond to the national interests of Armenia; they should also discard the “abundant” ideological burden of the Soviet epoch.²⁴

The theme of sovietisation in soviet and post-soviet textbooks

This part of the article compares three textbooks on Armenian history (a Soviet textbook published in 1987, and two post-Soviet textbooks, one published in 1994 and the other in 2008) to understand how transformations in political ideology have brought about changes in the official historical narrative reflected in textbooks for public schools. More specifically, five subtopics under the general theme of the “Sovietisation of Armenia” were chosen for comparison: the May 1920 Bolshevik revolt in Armenia; the international situation of the First Republic; the fall and Sovietisation of the Republic; the formation of the USSR; territorial issues of Soviet Armenia with neighbours.

Analysis of these subtopics suggests that concurrent processes of de-ideologisation and nationalisation of history mainly occur through the following mechanisms of discourse production: reinterpretation of the causes and results of key historical events; re-evaluation of actors in historical change; the introduction and omission of specific topics.

20 Interview with Aram Nazaryan.

21 A. Nazaryan (ed) (2009). *Op. Cit.*, p.8.

22 ‘From ancient times Armenia has been known as a cradle of civilisation. Armenia has been the location where the relationships, interactions and inter-influence between European and Asian civilisations have taken place. The Armenian people have created, preserved, and developed a unique culture due to which the Armenians have long existed through millennia and reached the current stage of human history’ (*Ibid.*, p.8).

23 ‘One of the typical features of Armenian history is the age-old struggle for maintaining or restoring independence and freedom, therefore this feature lies at the basis of the third direction of the contents of the subject’ (*Ibid.*, p.8).

24 *Ibid.*

The general objective of the Soviet textbook is to legitimise the establishment of Soviet authority and emphasise its historical necessity as a result of the struggle of the working class against the bourgeois authorities of the Republic of Armenia, as well as the positive influence of the October Socialist Revolution in Russia. The effects of Sovietisation for the Armenian people are presented in particularly positive tones.

Conversely, the post-Soviet textbooks argue that Sovietisation of Armenia was externally imposed and did not enjoy popular domestic support. The new narrative of Sovietisation fits into the argument of the nationalisation or legitimisation of newly acquired independence. In other words, by refuting the “Bolshevik axioms”, the new textbooks bridge the histories of the First and Third Republics and implicitly support the idea that aspirations for independence and national statehood have always been inherent to the Armenian people, and that the fall of the First Republic was not a consequence of internal incapacities but rather the interference of external uncontrollable factors.

Another sign of ideological change in post-Soviet textbooks revolves around the role of “historical agents”. For example, the “working class” loses its place as “an engine of historical change”, and actors representing Armenian statehood, e.g. the authorities of the First Republic, acquire agency. International relations stop being categorised in terms of the Marxist-Leninist dichotomy of socialist and imperialist worlds.

The idea of internationalism and good fraternal relations with neighbouring peoples is lost, and the theme of ethnic borders and territorial disputes appears in the new textbooks within the broader context of the national liberation struggle of the Armenian people. In addition, the break-up of the Soviet Union made it possible for textbooks to present critical evaluations of the role of Soviet Russia in the loss of the Armenian territories to Turkey and Azerbaijan.

It should be also noted that there are slight differences between the two post-Soviet textbooks, especially with respect to assessments of political transformations. The 2008 textbook, for example, contains far fewer negative evaluations of Armenia’s Sovietisation and its incorporation into the USSR; besides, the histories of the Armenian Republic before and after Sovietisation are presented in a more syncretic way compared with the 1994 textbook.

The May 1920 Bolshevik revolt

The May 1920 Bolshevik revolt has been considered by both Soviet and post-Soviet history textbooks as an important precursor of the subsequent Sovietisation of Armenia in the autumn of the same year. The most salient ideological differences of interpretation

of the event refer to the causes and effects of the revolt. Whilst the Soviet textbook presents the event as something inevitable and conditioned by the aspiration of the working class to overthrow the *Dashnak* (short for the “Armenian Revolutionary Federation” Party) government, post-Soviet textbooks maintain that the revolt did not enjoy the support of the population and that its organisers were heavily relying on external military intervention.

Acknowledging the role of organisational flaws (mostly defensive tactics, a lack of coordination of efforts between workers and peasants, the assistance of the “Anglo-American imperialists” to the *Dashnak* government, etc.) which contributed to the suppression of the revolt, the Soviet textbook holds that the event had an overall positive effect in laying the foundations for the Sovietisation of Armenia. Conversely, the post-Soviet textbooks evaluate the consequences of the event in a negative light, arguing that the revolt undermined the stability of the Republic and eventually led to the loss of statehood. The following three excerpts from the Soviet and two post-Soviet textbooks respectively highlight this ideological difference:

‘The heroic May revolt is a glorious page in the history of revolutionary movements in Armenia: it was a powerful nationwide movement which delivered a serious blow to the power of the *Dashnaks*. The May revolt became a big lesson for the Communist Party and the working masses of Armenia. They underwent through an education of political maturity which played a huge role in achieving future victory.’²⁵

‘The May revolt was doomed to failure as it was weak, unorganised and dispersed. There were no preconditions in Armenia for the revolt to succeed... It only weakened the domestic situation of the country, harming the interests of the Republic of Armenia.’²⁶

‘The main reason for its failure was the fact that the rebelling Bolsheviks did not receive sufficient support from the population...The revolt proceeded in an unorganised and dispersed way, without one single centre of leadership... Although the May revolt was suppressed, it undermined the position of the government and weakened the capacities of the Armenian army.’²⁷

Notably, the Soviet textbook, unlike the post-Soviet ones, occasionally uses emotional language and even derogatory clichés in its description of the events and parties in the conflict. For example, while the May revolt is presented as a “heroic struggle” or a “fit of

25 H.A. Avetisyan (ed) (1987). *The History of the Armenian People (1900-1987). Textbook for the 9-10th Grades of Secondary School. Third Edition.* Luys: Yerevan, p.84.

26 V.B. Barkhudaryan (ed) (1994). *The History of the Armenian People. Textbook for the 7-8th Grades of Secondary School.* Luys: Yerevan, p.248.

27 V. Barkhudaryan (ed) (2008). *The History of the Armenian People (Modern Period). Textbook for the 9th Grade of General Secondary School.* Macmillan-Armenia: Yerevan, p.21.

revolution”, the actions of the government are qualified as “reactionary” and “brutal”; the government itself is called “terrified *Dashnaks*” or “*Dashnak-Mauserists*”.^{28 29}

The international situation of the First Republic

The international situation of Armenia, or more precisely, its relations with Turkey, Azerbaijan, Russia and the *Entente* states right before Sovietisation, is another topic presented by Soviet and post-Soviet textbooks in different ways. Unlike the Soviet textbook, which attributes the international problems of the Republic to the “short-sightedness” of the *Dashnak* government and the ill-intentioned attitudes of the *Entente* states, the post-Soviet textbooks portray Armenian statehood as a victim of conspiracy between Kemalist Turkey and Bolshevik Russia. In the Soviet textbook, Russia is presented as an actor unselfishly protecting Armenia; however, the new textbooks portray Russia as a power pursuing its own interests, which at times contradict the interests of the Armenian people. Additionally, the new textbooks introduce the topic of territorial disputes between Armenia and Azerbaijan as an obstacle to relations between Armenia and Russia.

More specifically, according to the Soviet textbook, Armenia was in a deplorable international situation in 1920. On the one hand, the Republic was in the “claws of the *Entente* imperialists”, who were trying to turn the Transcaucasus into a springboard for anti-Soviet attacks. On the other hand, “Turkish thugs”, inspired by the same *Entente* powers, were getting ready to invade eastern Armenia and conclude the programme of the total destruction of the Armenian people.³⁰ It was the government of Soviet Russia which made efforts to establish diplomatic relations with Armenia and save it from imminent catastrophe. However, the *Dashnak* government gave preference to “the hypocritical promises of Western imperialists”, turned down the proposals of Soviet Russia, and ‘led the Armenian people to the edge of the precipice’.³¹ Even during the Turkish invasion and massacres in the autumn of 1920, when it was apparent that the *Entente* allies were not going to help Armenia, the *Dashnak* government refused to accept the assistance of Soviet Russia; a short-sighted policy which, according to the textbook, led to the signing of an “enslaving” and “treacherous” peace agreement with Turkey on 2nd December 1920.³²

28 Literally means a person owning a “Mauser” pistol or rifle. In Soviet times the term was used for *Dashnak* militiamen with a derogatory connotation. Today it has assumed a wider application to signify a person (usually a representative of the army, police, or a paramilitary group) who, abusing his position, resorts to unlawful use of arms in civic life.

29 H.A. Avetisyan (ed) [1987]. *Op. Cit.*, pp.76-85.

30 *Ibid.*, p.86.

31 *Ibid.*, p.87.

32 *Ibid.*, p.88.

The first post-Soviet textbook gives a different explanation, attributing the reasons for diplomatic and military failures of the Republic to external factors. In particular, it states that when it became apparent the Bolsheviks were set to win the civil war in Russia, the government of Armenia made efforts to negotiate with Soviet Russia. A special delegation was sent to Moscow in May 1920, however no agreement was signed; one of the reasons for this was the interference of Soviet Azerbaijan regarding the disputed territories of Nagorny Karabakh, Nakhichevan and Zangezur. Although an intermediary agreement was reached between Armenia and Russia on 10th August in Tiflis (Armenia agreed to temporary occupation of the aforementioned regions by Russian troops), the subsequent negotiations in Yerevan in September were unsuccessful due to disagreement on the part of Azerbaijan over territorial issues.³³

Regarding the Turkish invasion of Armenia, the textbook implies that it was realised with the approval of Soviet Russia. More specifically, the latter had allied with Kemalist Turkey to fight against imperialists and accelerate the process of the world socialist revolution. To establish a link between Russia and Turkey, the obstacle of Armenia had to be overcome. Armenia was presented as an agent of British imperialism which posed serious threats to the allies. There was even a “demonic” document adopted in September 1920 in Baku, according to which the invasion of Armenia had to be carried out by Turkey, followed by the interference of Soviet Russia in the capacity of a saviour for Armenia.³⁴ The textbook concludes that, at the end of the Armenian-Turkish war, when the *Dashnak* government was finally disillusioned with the *Entente* states, it decided to reach a truce and accept the assistance of Russia.³⁵

The textbook of 2008, following the general line of its first post-Soviet counterpart, nevertheless includes some changes with regard to certain aspects of Armenia’s international relations. For example, it states that the failure to sign the May 1920 agreement between Armenia and Soviet Russia should be attributed to the lack of will on the part of both parties. While Russia conditioned the signing with territorial concessions of Armenia to Turkey and Azerbaijan, the government of Armenia, on the other hand, ‘still cherished hopes with the “allies” of the West’.³⁶ Besides, the implication of Soviet Russia’s approval of Turkish aggression against Armenia in the autumn of 1920 in the second post-Soviet textbook is made more subtle. In particular, the textbook states that Soviet Russia followed the policy of “non-interference”,³⁷ and that it was buying time in its negotiations with Armenia until its total capitulation in the war with Turkey, in order to accomplish Armenia’s peaceful Sovietisation.³⁸

33 V.B. Barkhudaryan (ed) [1994]. *Op. Cit.*, pp.265-67.

34 *Ibid.*, pp.268-69.

35 *Ibid.*, p.270.

36 V. Barkhudaryan (ed) [2008]. *Op. Cit.*, p.34.

37 *Ibid.*, p.36.

38 *Ibid.*, p.38.

The fall and Sovietisation of the Republic

The main ideological differences of the interpretation of this topic in Soviet and post-Soviet textbooks revolve around the reasons and effects of Sovietisation. If the Soviet textbook presents this fact as conditioned by inevitable processes taking place in the country, the post-Soviet textbooks view it as a result of interference of external forces, namely Kemalist Turkey and Bolshevik Russia. The Soviet textbook views the Sovietisation of Armenia as the beginning of a new era of “national independence” and “statehood”, while the post-Soviet textbooks place their emphasis on the fact that independent Armenian statehood fell. However, there is a slight shift of emphasis in the 2008 textbook towards a more optimistic interpretation of Armenia’s Sovietisation.

The Soviet textbook presents the Sovietisation of Armenia as inevitable and preconditioned by a new wave of revolutionary movements in the Republic in the autumn of 1920: economic collapse, a food crisis, and the imminent danger of physical destruction incited hatred among the working class towards the *Dashnak* rulers and strengthened belief in the necessity of establishing Soviet authority in the country. The struggle against the *Dashnak* government, under the guidance of the Communist Party of Armenia, reached its culmination in November when “revolutionary demonstrations” became widespread among workers, peasants and army soldiers. On 29th November the Military-Revolutionary Committee of Armenia, accompanied by several detachments of the Red Army, entered Ijevan (a settlement in northeastern Armenia) from Azerbaijan and published a declaration addressed to the working people of Armenia, stating that the *Dashnak* government had been toppled and that Soviet authority had been established in Armenia. On 2nd December the *Dashnak* government was obliged to sign an agreement in Yerevan with Soviet Russia, after which it resigned from power.³⁹ The textbook concludes:

‘That was the victorious march of the October revolution in Armenia. By that great historical act Armenia and the Armenian people obtained statehood and national independence, dreams about which had been cherished for centuries. The Armenian people took the path of social and national revival; a new era, the era of Communism, began in its history.’⁴⁰

When giving its interpretation of the reasons for the Sovietisation of Armenia, the first post-Soviet textbook places its emphasis on external factors. In particular, it states that the Turkish invasion was the most suitable moment for Soviet Russia to interfere in the affairs of Armenia and to accomplish its project of Sovietisation. The textbook implies that the actions of the Military-Revolutionary Committee of Armenia were groundless because, in reality, no revolt of workers and peasants had taken place, on behalf of

39 H.A. Avetisyan (ed) (1987). *Op. Cit.*, pp.90-93.

40 *Ibid.*, p.94.

whom, as it was stated in the Declaration of 29th November, Armenia was proclaimed a Soviet Socialist Republic (SSR).⁴¹

Unlike the Soviet textbook, which emphasised 29th November as the start of a new Soviet era, thereby picturing the Bolsheviks as primary agents of Sovietisation and imposers of their will on the *Dashnak* government, the first post-Soviet textbook moved the date of Sovietisation to 2nd December. On this day, an agreement was signed between the *Dashnak* government and Soviet Russia, implying that the Sovietisation of Armenia was the voluntary and conscious decision of the *Dashnak* government.⁴²

It is interesting that, at the end of the subchapter devoted to the fall of the First Republic, the textbook reflects on the possibilities of saving statehood. Admitting some mistakes made by the government in its foreign policy, the authors of the textbook present a vindicating conclusion:

‘One is challenged with the question of whether or not there was an alternative to the loss of the state. The answer could be unambiguous; under the conditions of the Bolshevik-Kemalist alliance...the future existence of the Republic of Armenia was not possible...Sovietisation of the country was inevitable.’⁴³

The 2008 textbook presents the story of the Sovietisation of Armenia in an analogous way similar to the 1994 textbook, although with weaker emphasis on the argument of the absence of widespread support for the Bolsheviks. It only states that, after the 29th November Declaration, ‘[T]he Armenian army did not resist Russian troops, and the Armenian people accepted Soviet authority with silent consent’.⁴⁴ The textbook presents a more optimistic conclusion of Armenia’s Sovietisation. Whilst the first post-Soviet textbook equated Sovietisation to the loss of statehood, the 2008 edition emphasised its continuity, stating that ‘Soviet Armenia became the legal successor to the First Republic of Armenia’.⁴⁵

It should be also noted that the chapter on the Sovietisation of Armenia in the first post-Soviet textbook touches, in passing, on the theme of territorial disputes between Armenia and Azerbaijan:

‘On account of Armenia’s Sovietisation, the government of Soviet Azerbaijan took a decision on 30th November to cease territorial disputes with Armenia. It made a statement acknowledging Nagorny Karabakh, Zangezur and Nakhichevan as part of Armenia. Subsequently, however, Azerbaijan retreated from its decision.’⁴⁶

41 V.B. Barkhudaryan (ed). [1994]. *Op. Cit.*, p.273.

42 *Ibid.*, pp.273-74.

43 *Ibid.*, p.275.

44 V. Barkhudaryan (ed) [2008]. *Op. Cit.*, p.38.

45 *Ibid.*, p.39.

46 V.B. Barkhudaryan (ed) [1994]. *Op. Cit.*, p.273.

One can assume that, apart from implying unreliability of Azerbaijan due to its renouncement of a previous decision, this passage undermines the Soviet idea of internationalism and underscores the prevalence of national interests over ideological solidarity.

The formation of the USSR

The formation of the USSR, with Armenia as part of it, is another theme over which the assessments of Soviet and post-Soviet textbooks differ. While the Soviet textbook emphasises the voluntary nature of incorporation into the USSR and characterises its formation as an important condition for realising the national aspirations of the Armenian people, along with the other peoples of the socialist international union, the post-Soviet textbooks view Armenia's inclusion in the USSR as yet another step towards losing its national sovereignty. In contrast to the idea of internationalism, the post-Soviet textbooks hold that the national question was suppressed rather than solved in the Soviet Union. Similar to the analogy of Armenia's Sovietisation, the 2008 textbook, compared with that of 1994, in this case also contains more positive assessments of the effects of Armenia's incorporation into the USSR.

According to the Soviet textbook, after the establishment of Soviet authority in each of the Transcaucasus Republics (Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia), the Communist Party felt the necessity to create a strong political and military alliance between them to boost national economies and strengthen the friendship of peoples, as well as fight domestic and foreign enemies.⁴⁷ After serious preparatory work among the working class in each of the Republics and the neutralisation of the opposition (the so-called 'national deviators'⁴⁸) in Georgia, on 12th March 1922 'a military-political and economic alliance of the three republics was created on a totally voluntary basis'.⁴⁹ The Federal Union of the Soviet Socialist Republics of the Transcaucasus (FUSSRT), which in December of the same year was reorganised into the Soviet Federal Socialist Republic of the Transcaucasus (SFSRT), opened a new page in the centuries-old history of the peoples of the Transcaucasus.⁵⁰

The Soviet textbook presents the formation of the Soviet Union on 30th December 1922 in a strongly positive light, calling it a 'new and more brilliant victory of Lenin's national policy conducted by the Communist Party'. It calls the USSR 'the first multinational

47 H.A. Avetisyan (ed) (1987). *Op. Cit.*, pp.109-10.

48 A term used in Bolshevik propaganda for top party figures in Soviet republics who, against the intentions of Moscow, would demonstrate independence in pursuing policies of national character.

49 *Ibid.*, p.110.

50 *Ibid.*

socialist state in the world, led by the great leader of peoples, Vladimir Il’ich Lenin’. As for the importance of Armenia’s inclusion in the USSR, the textbook concludes as follows: ‘By becoming part of the Transcaucasus Federation and, through the latter, also part of the USSR, Soviet Armenia obtained large opportunities to further develop its national economy and spiritual culture.’⁵¹

The attitude of the first post-Soviet textbook towards the formation of the aforementioned political entities does not contain the same exultant tones of the Soviet textbook. In particular, the 1994 textbook finds that the formation of the Transcaucasus Federation and the USSR changed the status of the Armenian SSR in essential ways: before the formation of the USSR, Soviet Armenia was a more or less an independent state; after it Armenia’s sovereignty became *pro forma*.⁵²

In addition, the textbook finds that the Soviet Union failed to resolve the national question: ‘The USSR... became a monolithic and centralised state under the dictatorship of the Communist Party elite. National disagreements and the voice of discontent of the peoples remained choked in that despotic state.’⁵³ It was because of this and other reasons that the USSR survived for only 70 years, according to the authors.⁵⁴

The 2008 textbook follows this general line of narrative, albeit with a more positive evaluation of Armenia’s inclusion in the USSR. In particular, despite the fact it states that the formation of the Soviet Union weakened the sovereignty of Soviet Armenia and did not contribute to the resolution of the national question, unlike the 1994 textbook it does not use negative terms such as “despotic state” or “dictatorship” to describe the the USSR and the Communist Party.⁵⁵ The authors conclude the subchapter on the formation of the Soviet Union with a positive assessment: ‘Armenia realised great achievements as part of the USSR and Armenia’s defence became durable.’⁵⁶

To understand the reasons for this shift in the second post-Soviet textbook towards a less negative assessment of the Soviet Union and Bolshevik Russia (in the case of its alliance with Kemalist Turkey), as well as towards more positive representations of Armenia’s inclusion in the Soviet Union, two preliminary assumptions can be offered for further investigation. Firstly, this shift, or “repetition” in the new tradition, can be accounted for by the constantly growing political and economic influence of the Russian Federation in Armenia over the past decade. Secondly, this shift may be conditioned by the processes

51 *Ibid.*, p.111.

52 V.B. Barkhudaryan (ed) (1994). *Op. Cit.*, p.286.

53 *Ibid.*, p.286.

54 *Ibid.*, p.286.

55 V. Barkhudaryan (ed) (2008). *Op. Cit.*, pp.44-45.

56 *Ibid.*, p.45.

of re-evaluation and recognition in public discourse and academia (and especially in the face of socio-economic instability) of the achievements of Soviet Armenia.⁵⁷

Territorial issues of Soviet Armenia with its neighbours

Whilst the topic of Soviet Armenia's territorial disputes with its neighbours is almost non-existent in the Soviet textbook, in the 1994 and 2008 textbooks individual chapters entitled "The Issue of the Borders of Soviet Armenia" and "The Territorial Problems of Soviet Armenia (1921)" devote much attention to the discussion of territorial conflicts between Armenia with Turkey, Azerbaijan and Georgia.

It should be noted that the general de-ideologisation and re-ideologisation of history, particularly history textbooks, took place within a broader context of Armenian-Azerbaijani and Armenian-Turkish relations. For example, whereas the first history textbooks were written during the violent phase of the Nagorny Karabakh conflict, the subsequent ones were produced in an atmosphere of "no war, no peace" between Armenia and Azerbaijan. In addition, since 1993, relations with another neighbour, Turkey, have been growing tense mainly on account of the Nagorny Karabakh conflict and the issue of the recognition of the Armenian Genocide in 1915. These realities left an impact on the new textbooks, which were used for legitimisation of urgent national aspirations, e.g. liberation and self-determination of Nagorny Karabakh, or international recognition of the Armenian Genocide. It seems natural, then, that the new textbooks had to introduce chapters on territorial issues, especially on the international agreements which led to the loss of territories. Furthermore, it goes without saying that in a situation of a real conflict, the Soviet idea of internationalism or once favourable representations of the Azerbaijani people did not find their way into the new textbooks. For example, in the subtopic devoted to the May 1920 Bolshevik revolt, the Soviet textbook refers to Azerbaijanis as a 'fraternal people'.⁵⁸ The new textbooks do not contain emotionally positive representations of Russians ('the fraternal Russian people'⁵⁹ or 'great Russian people'⁶⁰) either.

57 A clear example of public promotion of the achievements of Soviet Armenia (in contrast to the situation in which Armenia found and finds itself before and after the Communist era) was the rhetoric of the Communist Party of Armenia during the pre-election campaign of the Armenian Parliamentary elections in 2007. Another example is an interview with Levon Ter-Petrosyan in the newspaper *Moscow News* in June 2011, in which, along with the negative aspects of the Soviet Union, the first President of Armenia pointed out important accomplishments of national character achieved by Soviet Armenia. He also spoke about the loss of social character which the country suffered after the collapse of the Soviet Union (I. Sukhov. 'Byshnie prezidynty voobshche ne dolzhny vmeshivat'sia v politiku [Former presidents should not interfere in politics]', *Moskovskie novosti*, 23rd June 2011. Available in Russian at http://mn.ru/newspaper_zoom/20110623/302712754.html).

58 H.A. Avetisyan [ed] (1987). *Op. Cit.*, p.78.

59 *Ibid.*, p.90.

60 *Ibid.*, p.94.

As it could be expected, both post-Soviet textbooks present the treaties of Moscow (16th March 1921)⁶¹ and Kars (13th October 1921)⁶² in a negative light, stating that, while the former (between Soviet Russia and Kemalist Turkey) yielded Armenian territories in disregard of the interests of Armenian people,⁶³ the latter (which replicated the Moscow agreement) between Turkey and the Transcaucasus Republics, was imposed upon Soviet Armenia against her will.⁶⁴ The second post-Soviet textbook, for example, states that ‘Russia granted the Armenian lands to Turkey and justified it with the interests of the world revolution’.⁶⁵ In a different passage we read: ‘As a result of the Kars agreement, Armenia was forced to accept and recognise the loss of its own territories.’⁶⁶

In the sections devoted to Nagorny Karabakh, the authors of the textbooks hold that the transfer of Nagorny Karabakh to Azerbaijan, resulting from the decision of the Caucasian Bureau of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Russia in July 1921, was taken against the logic of national issues and produced the acute discontent of the local Armenian population.

Both textbooks state that, on 4th July 1921, the plenary session of the Caucasian Bureau took the decision to unite Nagorny Karabakh with Armenia. The first post-Soviet textbook states: ‘Finally a just and legitimate decision had been taken on Nagorny Karabakh, population of which was 95 percent Armenian; this population wanted to be with Armenia, with their mother people.’⁶⁷ However, this fomented protest on the part of the Azerbaijani government, and on 5th July a new decision was adopted as a result of that protest and the interference of Joseph Stalin. The post-Soviet textbooks note: ‘Thus, the solution of the Karabakh issue was substantiated only by economic factors in disregard of national ones.’⁶⁸

Both textbooks present concluding remarks which substantiate the current aspirations of Karabakh Armenians with the historical injustice committed seven decades before. For example, in the first post-Soviet textbook we read:

61 The Treaty of Moscow (also referred to as the Treaty of Brotherhood) was signed between Kemalist Turkey (the Grand National Assembly of Turkey) and Bolshevik Russia. Under the treaty, the two governments, among other things, defined Turkey’s borders with Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia.

62 The Treaty of Kars was a successor treaty to the Treaty of Moscow. Signed between the Grand National Assembly of Turkey on the one hand, and representatives of the Socialist Soviet Republics of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia on the other, it established today’s borders of the South Caucasus states with Turkey.

63 V.B. Barkhudaryan (ed) (1994). *Op. Cit.*, p.291; V. Barkhudaryan (ed) (2008). *Op. Cit.*, p.50.

64 V.B. Barkhudaryan (ed) (1994). *Op. Cit.*, p.290; V. Barkhudaryan (ed) (2008). *Op. Cit.*, pp.48-49.

65 V. Barkhudaryan (ed) (2008). *Op. Cit.*, p.49.

66 *Ibid.*, p.50.

67 V.B. Barkhudaryan (ed) (1994). *Op. Cit.*, p.295.

68 V.B. Barkhudaryan (ed) (1994). *Op. Cit.*, p.296; V. Barkhudaryan (ed) (2008). *Op. Cit.*, p.53.

‘...The population of Karabakh continued its struggle to unite with Armenia. Its voice of protest was not silenced even during the years of Stalinist repression. Today the people of Karabakh had to take to arms to defend their rights against the military oppression of Azerbaijan.’⁶⁹

After coming to quite a similar conclusion, the second textbook also adds that ‘it was after the “solution” of territorial issues that the clear delineation of state borders became possible. Only Armenian-Georgian and Georgian-Azerbaijani agreements were signed’.⁷⁰

These chapters also give an account of incorporation of two regions, Lori and Zangezur (in northern and southern Armenia respectively), into the territory of Soviet Armenia. It should be noted that, in the case of Zangezur, the post-Soviet textbooks, unlike the Soviet one, give the credit for the inclusion of the region in Soviet Armenia not to the Red Army but to organisational, military and diplomatic talents of General Garegin Njdeh, reflected in the defence of the region.⁷¹

Conclusion

The break-up of the Soviet Union marked the beginning of an era of official revision of Soviet history textbooks in Armenia. The newly-revised historical narratives underwent concurrent processes of de-ideologisation and re-ideologisation (nationalisation), serving the objective of legitimising the aspirations of Armenia’s status as an independent state. One of important factors which contributed to the emergence of a nation-centred history – where national statehood, national culture, and the national liberation struggle were defined as the axis of the new history – has been the monopoly of the state over the production process and content of textbooks.

Comparison of the theme of Armenia’s Sovietisation across the three textbooks has demonstrated that the de-ideologisation and re-ideologisation of history took place in the reinterpretation of the causes and effects of key historical events, the re-evaluation of agents of historical change, and the introduction of specific topics of national character. The themes of ethnic borders, territorial disputes with neighbours, and international agreements appeared in the new textbooks in particular, undoubtedly bearing reflections of current strained Armenian-Azerbaijani and Armenian-Turkish relations.

69 V.B. Barkhudaryan (ed) (1994). *Op. Cit.*, p.296.

70 V. Barkhudaryan (ed) (2008). *Op. Cit.*, p.53.

71 V.B. Barkhudaryan (ed) (1994). *Op. Cit.*, pp.292-94; V. Barkhudaryan (ed) (2008). *Op. Cit.*, pp.51-52.

The comparison of the two post-Soviet textbooks revealed slight differences with respect to the assessments of political transformations. In particular, the 2008 textbook contained fewer negative and more optimistic evaluations of Armenia’s Sovietisation and its incorporation into the USSR, presenting the history of Armenia before and after Sovietisation in a more syncretic way. This shift can be explained within broader contextual changes of a socio-political nature which have been taking place in Armenia since independence.

CHAPTER 3

The De-Sovietisation and Nationalisation of History in Post-Soviet Georgia

Nino Chikovani

Introduction

According to Marc Ferro's famous comment, our notion of ourselves and our people, as well as the image of other peoples, highly depends on how we were taught history in our childhood. What satisfied our first curiosity and evoked our first emotions remains indelible.¹ It comes as no surprise that school history curricula and textbooks on this subject are seen as one of the most important tools for shaping historical consciousness and national identity.

Textbooks help to form pupils' perception of their own nation, its role in history, their vision of others, particularly 'neighbours'.² Textbooks reflect the values and stereotypes which prevail in a society. Their analysis allows us to reconstruct and comprehend the dominant ideology of a society. Alongside the media and other social institutions, textbooks are important agents in the dissemination and legitimisation of the prevalent ideology.³ The practice of selection of the information for the textbooks, which a society believes should be handed on to the young generation, has a political dimension:⁴ history textbooks reflect "the contemporary past" which is connected to dominant social and political needs;⁵ different historical facts are used by politicians to legitimise present-day aims and aspirations.

History textbooks are created within concrete master narratives through which people make sense of the past and their identity.⁶ Being legitimised and institutionalised, they provide a narrative framework for national history writing, providing us with the repertoire of events and interpretations for dissemination, setting a "shared past". In this way, master narratives are one of the most important instruments for national mobilisation.

The Georgian historical master narrative was formed by the beginning of the 20th century (during the period of the formation of Georgian nationalism) as an alternative to the Russian imperial discourse. As a result, in Georgia, as in other imperial spaces, differences were particularly stressed:⁷ the Georgian nation was perceived *vis-a-vis* the

1 M. Ferro (1992). *Comment on raconte l'histoire aux enfants [How the Past is Taught to Children]*. Vysshiaia Shkola: Moscow, p.8.

2 D. Stojanovic (2001). 'History textbooks and Creation of National Identity', in C. Koulouri (ed) (2001). *Teaching the History of Southeastern Europe*. Petros Th. Ballidis & Co.: Thessaloniki, p.28.

3 C. Koulouri (ed) (2002). *Clio in the Balkans. The Politics of History Education*. Petros Th. Ballidis & Co.: Thessaloniki, p.34.

4 H. Schliessler (1987). 'Perceptions of the Other and the Discovery of the Self. What Pupils are supposed to Learn About Each other's History', in V.R. Berghahn & H. Schliessler (eds) (1987). *Perceptions of History. International Textbook Research on Britain, Germany and the United States*. Berg, p.27.

5 D.A. Porat (2001). 'Contemporary past: history textbooks as sites of national memory', in A. Dickinson, P. Gordon & P. Lee (eds) (2001). *International Review of History Teaching. Vol. 3. Raising Standards in History Education*. Woburn Press, p.49.

6 A master narrative is defined as 'a dominant narrative as expressed in key texts, which are widely received as being particularly subtle, masterful and authoritative. ... They provide us with the exact and bright cases of the perception and interpretation of the past, demonstrating who are the central figures and actors of national history, who are "we" and who are "others", who are perceived as enemies' (S. Berger (2009). 'The Comparative History of National Historiographies in Europe: Some Methodological Reflections and Preliminary Results', in S. Carvalho & F. Gemenne (eds) (2009). *Nations and their Histories. Constructions and Representations*. Palgrave Macmillan: New York, p.33).

7 *ibid.*, p. 30.

“internal” and “external” *others*. Opposition to internal *others* was used to highlight differences between Georgians and other ethnic groups residing in Georgia. Opposition to external *others* was intended to enable the political consolidation of Georgian society. As Stephen Jones notes: ‘[T]he Georgians referred to their distant past to support claims of priority over the Russian colonisers.’⁸

The works of Ivane Javakhishvili, the most outstanding figure among the founders of Georgian professional historiography, laid the basis for the historical master narrative which, running through the Soviet period and undergoing slight changes (in terms of the dominance of Marxist-Leninist methodology), has maintained its legitimacy to this day.⁹

The Soviet tradition of history teaching: Basic principles

In the Soviet Union, history was considered one of the most important instruments for the formation of common Soviet identity and was highly ideologised. The main and only accepted discourse of the study and teaching of history was Marxism-Leninism, with its characteristic emphasis on class struggle and ascending social-economic formations.

The historical narrative reflected in the school textbooks of the 1980s had been formed since the 1930s. The common Soviet canon of history writing had been formed over decades, integral to which was the immutable ideology of the “historically inevitable” rapprochement of socialist nations and diminution of differences between them. The canon was applied both to the description of the development of the entire Soviet society as well as to the history of each people.

The history of the USSR was paid special attention in the Soviet schools. School textbooks on this subject were written in Moscow and translated into the languages of the “titular nations”. They referred to the shared past of all Soviet peoples. “History of the Soviet Union” started with the ancient past, with the rapprochement of the peoples reaching the stage of “brotherhood” after the creation of the USSR and continuing to the modern period. Despite declarations regarding the equality of all peoples, attention in the history of the USSR was clearly focused on the history of Russia and the Russian people. Information on the history of the other republics and peoples was minimal. As Velychenko notes, ‘[T]he “History of the USSR [...] constituted an ordered story of events in time and space which was coherent, sometimes intricate and not necessarily mendacious [...] It sought to legitimise and foster a supranational Soviet state identity, while simultaneously restricting the collective memory and identity of each constituent

8 S. Jones (1994). ‘Old Ghosts and New Chains. Ethnicity and memory in the Georgian Republic’, in R.S. Watson [ed] (1994). *Memory, History and Opposition under State Socialism*. School of American Research Press: Sante Fe, p.158.

9 I. Javakhishvili (1979-1998). *Sochineniia v 12-ti tomakh [Works in 12 volumes]*. Tbilisi State University: Tbilisi.

nationality to the ethnographical and geographical'.¹⁰ Studying and teaching history of the titular nations of the republics of the USSR was not forbidden but even encouraged in some cases if placed in the general framework of the common Soviet history.¹¹ Alternative versions were practically excluded.

In the Soviet period the history of Georgia was taught using textbooks approved by the Ministry of Education of the USSR. The book used for this subject in Georgian schools from the second half of the 1960s (around 250 pages) contained the entire programme from 7th to 10th grades.¹² The share of the history of the Soviet Union in the programme was so large that there were only a few teaching hours left for the history of Georgia.

In the Soviet period the practice of writing the history of Georgia according to the canon which had been formed even in the pre-Soviet period was maintained; however, now the narrative of a “hard and heroic past” was re-adjusted according to the Marxist-Leninist methodological framework. History was divided into the periods “before” and “after” the October Socialist Revolution. In the Soviet version the burdens and suffering of the people ended with the establishment of Soviet rule and the creation of the USSR. In accordance with the new vision of the role of the individual in history and the need to emphasise class struggle, the gallery of national heroes was updated and filled with new personages who emerged from *the people*. Whereas in pre-Soviet history the “defenders of independence of the motherland fighting against the foreign invaders”, regardless of their ethnic and class origin, were portrayed as heroes; the hero of Soviet history was a “fighter for the happiness of working people”.

The names of most historical personalities (kings, rulers, outstanding military leaders, cultural figures, etc.) appear across the different versions (pre-Soviet, Soviet, post-Soviet) of the Georgian history textbooks; however, the attitude towards concrete heroes as well as towards facts and events changed according to the ideological requirements of the time. For example, in the 1968 Soviet textbook the activities of Il'ia Chavchavadze were placed in the context of the Russian revolutionary democratic movement. It was emphasised that he (like the other leaders of the struggle for national liberation in the 1860s) was brought up on the ideas of Belinsky, Herzen and Chernyshevsky;

10 S. Velychenko (1994). 'National History and the "History of USSR": the Persistence and Impact of Categories', in D. Schwartz (ed) (1994). *Nationalism and history. The politics of Nation Building in post-Soviet Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia*. University of Toronto, p.13.

11 For example, in the late 1930s the Georgian historians S. Janashia and N. Berdzenishvili were commissioned to prepare a textbook on the history of Georgia. At the first stage, the curriculum and synopsis of the history of Georgia from ancient times to the 13th century were developed (the materials were published in draft form). Later on, *The History of Georgia from Ancient Times to the End of the 10th Century* was prepared (in Russian), to be included in the main publications - *The History of the Peoples of the USSR* and *The History of the Culture of the Peoples of the USSR* (which were never published). The textbook on the history of Georgia for secondary schools was first published in 1943 (the authors of which were N. Berdzenishvili, Iv. Javakhishvili and S. Janashia). In 1946, the Russian version of this textbook was awarded the Stalin Prize [Academy of Sciences of the Georgian SSR (1949). *Simon Janashia. Member of the Academy of Sciences. 1900-1947*. Tbilisi, pp.23-24].

12 V. Guchua & Sh. Meskhia (1968). *History of Georgia. Textbook for the 7th-10th grades*. Ganatleba: Tbilisi.

his programme of national liberation was closely linked with the social programme aimed at freeing society from social oppression. The “impracticable and utopian” nature of the ideas of Il’ia Chavchavadze and his peers was noted, since ‘instead of class struggle and revolution, they supported the idea of social reconciliation’.¹³ In the post-Soviet versions, the *national liberation* aspect of the programme is stressed, which is certainly not considered to be utopian. Particular emphasis is placed on the significance of the actions of Il’ia Chavchavadze ‘for the future of the country and the Georgian people’.¹⁴

Analysis of the Soviet history textbooks highlights some characteristics of the Georgian historical master narrative:

- The narrative of historical processes, events and individuals is evaluative in nature. Everything that fits in the Marxist-Leninist scheme of socio-economic formations and class struggle is given a positive evaluation. All that contradicts this scheme is declared as “deviation from the normal” (“historically inevitable”) path of development and should be overcome. For example, in the Soviet version the period of existence of the independent (“bourgeois”) Georgian Democratic Republic (1918-1921) was assessed as a temporary aberration from the “natural” path of development of the Georgian people. The Republic of 1918-1921 is portrayed as an obstacle for the liberation of the Georgian people from Tsarist rule and other oppressors generated by the national bourgeoisie and the Mensheviks. This obstacle should be overcome for the fulfillment of the common aim of all peoples of the former Russian Empire. It was achieved by the imposition of Soviet rule with the help of the Red Army, which ‘assisted the working people of Georgia... in liberation from the bourgeois-feudal nationalistic government’.¹⁵ In this context, the legitimacy of the actions of Soviet Russia which sent its military divisions to a neighbouring country is unquestionable.
- The binary opposition of “good/true” (corresponding to “the real interests of the people”) and “bad/false” (opposing these interests) leads to a simplified vision of historical reality as well as the language used in the narrative. Oversimplified narration was gradually developed into clichés, appearing in textbooks from year to year. For example, ‘The salvo of the cruiser “Aurora” marked the beginning of a new era in the history of humanity’; ‘The October Revolution brought the country on the broad path of building of socialism; this was a deadly shot for the capitalist world’; ‘Scared counter-revolutionaries have masked the real essence of revolution from the working masses of the people’; ‘The flame of revolution was ignited in the

13 *Ibid.*, pp.206-207.

14 M. Vachnadze & V. Guruli (2002). *History of Georgia. 11th grade textbook*. Artanudzhi: Tbilisi; M. Vachnadze, V. Guruli & M. Bakhtadze (1999). *History of Georgia. 10th grade textbook*. Tbilisi; G. Anchabadze, G. Gamkrelidze, M. Surguladze & D. Shvelidze (2008). *Istoriia Gruzii [The History of Georgia]. 9th grade textbook*. Logos Press: Tbilisi; N. Akhmeteli (2009). *Istoriia Gruzii [The History of Georgia]. 9th grade textbook*. Diogene: Tbilisi; N. Akhmeteli & D. Lortkipanidze (2008). *Istoriia Gruzii [The History of Georgia]. 10th grade textbook*. Diogene: Tbilisi; Z. Kiknadze, L. Pataridze, M. Surguladze & T. Uzunashvili (2006a). *History 10th grade textbook*. Logos Press: Tbilisi.

15 N. Berdzenishvili (ed) (1962). *History of Georgia. Vol. 2. Textbook*. Sabchota Sakartvelo: Tbilisi, p.358.

whole Transcaucasus’; ‘A bloc of bourgeois-nationalist parties and property-owning classes was formed which was inspired and supported by the Western imperialists’; ‘The Soviets realised vital needs of the working classes’, etc.¹⁶ These clichés were aimed at blocking critical reflection, forging simplified, authoritarian thinking and excluding questions about different kinds and directions of development.

- Taboo topics have been deliberately excluded from the historical narrative. Various aspects of the history of the Georgian Democratic Republic (1918-1921), the history of the Georgian church, the anti-Soviet protests and repressions of the Soviet times and some other themes which did not correspond to the Soviet scheme were not reflected either in the textbooks or in other “places of memory” (to use Pierre Nora’s term¹⁷). The memory politics of the state was aimed at their removal.

The Soviet historical narrative was as contradictory as the Soviet nationality policy.¹⁸ The Marxist framework of history writing was combined with the propagation of national characteristics.¹⁹ The Soviet textbook of the *History of Georgia* (and the similar textbooks in the other republics of the USSR) promoted the idea of the universal historical canons (expressed in the formational approach), on the one hand, and illustrated these canons through the history of the “titular nation”, on the other hand. Actually, the Soviet textbooks had presented a history of ethnic Georgians.

In the Soviet versions of national histories, the model of the history of the USSR was reproduced on a reduced scale. The history of the USSR mainly represented the history of Russia with the insignificant mixture of the other people’s histories (which were aimed at illustrating general points). In their turn, the histories of the union republics were focused on the history of the “titular nation”; they referred only briefly to the autonomous republics and/or ethnic minorities residing on the territories of the union republics.

As in the history of the USSR, the facts and events from the history of the union republics were aimed at illustrating the scope of the revolutionary movement, the scale of the building of socialism, etc. The autonomous republics within Georgia appear in the texts devoted to the revolutionary struggle of the working people of Georgia, and issues of

16 *Ibid.*, p.358.

17 P. Nora (1989 r.). ‘Between Memory and History: Les lieux de mémoire’, in *Representations*, 26, Spring, p. 7-24.

18 As Aleksei Miller notes, ‘The soviet nationality policy was based on two deeply contradictory principles: the imposition of the Russian language and Soviet culture combined with the system of fixed national belonging of individuals that blocked the possibility of full assimilation’ [A. Miller (2008). *The Romanov Empire and Nationalism. Essays in the Methodology of Historical Research*. CEU Press: Budapest, New York, p.61]. All the Soviet peoples were declared as equal, but in practice they were divided into the hierarchical categories (“nation”, “nationality”, “people”, “national group”). The category to which a concrete group was assigned determined the administrative-territorial status received by this group, along with the corresponding set of rights and obligations. A “nation” was given the right to form “its own” republic within the USSR and become the “titular nation” within it; a “nationality” was given the right to form “its own” autonomous republic or oblast’ incorporated within a union republic of the USSR; “peoples” could form “their own” autonomous *okrug* – the smaller administrative unit. There were no precise criteria for assigning a group to a particular category or any clear criteria for implementing territorial borders within the USSR.

19 S. Berger (2009). *Op. Cit.*, p.31.

social and economic history and culture: ‘In March 1918, the flame of the uprising spread to South Ossetia’,²⁰ ‘On 4th March (1921), Soviet rule was established in Abkhazia, on 5th March – in South Ossetia’,²¹ etc.

Given the state monopoly on the production of “truth” and full control of the public language, there were no barriers to the spread of the official all-Union narrative and its republican versions, which were further supported by other “places of memory”, such as state museums, memorials, festivals, public holidays and symbols, etc. However, according to Stephen Jones, the Soviet state contributed to the strengthening of counter-narratives by providing the vehicles for their propagation, such as national literatures, folklore societies, and ethnographical museums.²² The growth of national self-consciousness and the growth of a nation’s natural interest in its historical roots were indirectly promoted by Soviet policies.²³

When “a new future requires a different past” – The post-Soviet period

It is widely known that, in authoritarian societies, the national based group solidarity and national identity, being under threat, gets a new impulse of revival: ‘[T]he emotional potential of national history in these societies remains relatively high.’²⁴ The processes of the disintegration of the USSR activated this potential. The revival of national consciousness in the period of *perestroika* was accompanied by growing interest towards the unknown (suppressed) facts of the national history. According to Bernard Lewis, a new future required a different past.

The reinterpretation of history is a characteristic feature of all societies in transition. The past is turned to for the answers to current challenges. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the deconstruction and re-consideration of history started in Georgia as well as in the whole post-Soviet space. Filling in the “white spots” of history and the re-creation of the “true history” became the main task for historians. In this context, de-ideologisation was an important goal for Georgian historiography. First of all, methodological obstacles should be overcome and replaced by methodological pluralism. However, it did not turn out to be an easy task. The traditional mono-methodological approach made the task of the historian easier as it equipped him/her with the sole possible discourse of interpretation, which is why it was not abandoned enthusiastically. As a result, instead of the de-ideologisation, the Soviet ideology was replaced by the unqualified or para-

20 V. Guchua & Sh. Meskhia (1968). *Op. Cit.*, p.247.

21 *Ibid.*, p.254.

22 S. Jones (1994). *Op. Cit.*, pp.149-150.

23 S. Jones (1992). ‘Georgia: the Long Battle for Independence’ in M. Rezun (ed) (1992). *Nationalism and the Breakup of an Empire: Russia and its Periphery*. Praeger Press: Westport, p.73.

24 S. Velychenko (1994). *Op. Cit.*, p.17.

patriotic narrative.²⁵ A shift from one *correct* history (evaluated from the aspect of the class struggle) to another *true* one (interpreted from the perspective of the Georgian people) took place.²⁶ Following the usual logic, “historical truth” was embodied in “the only correct” positivist version in which the role of the principal actor in history – the “international working class” – was replaced by “the Georgian people”.

Some changes could be observed through the comparison of the historiographical texts of the 1990s²⁷ with the eight-volume edition of the *Essays on the History of Georgia* (published in the 1970s):²⁸ (i) quotations from the classics of Marxism-Leninism, which used to be mandatory for historical studies in the Soviet era disappeared; (ii) substantial changes have been made to sections dealing with the history of the 19th and 20th centuries; (iii) taboo topics (the anti-Soviet protests of the 1920s, the repressions of the 1930s, etc.) have been actualised and presented with an impressive amount of documentary materials; (iv) a new emphasis appeared in the interpretation of facts and events. In the *Essays*, the hostile political environment and the constant threat of physical annihilation of the Georgian people was stressed. Russia was considered as a reliable coreligionist ally; the voluntary unification with Russia enabled Georgia to rid itself of existing troubles. Georgia becoming a part of “the family of Soviet peoples” was evaluated similarly. In the 1990s, the risk of losing national identity came into focus. Russia and its successor, the Soviet state, are transformed into the colonisers, representing a serious threat for the Georgian people and Georgian culture.

The new history of Georgia was created not only by academicians, but also through the public speeches of the leaders of the national movement, in journalistic articles on the “white spots of history”, in literary works describing past events, etc. For example, the name of one of the leaders of the anti-Soviet uprising of 1924, Kaikhosro Cholokashvili, appeared for the first time and was continuously recalled at rallies by the end of the 1980s, his portraits appearing alongside the national flag of the Georgian Democratic Republic. At that time, his name was known to few people, but Cholokashvili’s popularity increased from day to day, and soon he became one of the leading figures of the pantheon of national heroes presented in school history textbooks.

25 O. Reisner (1998). ‘What Can and Should We Learn from Georgian History? Observations of Someone who was Trained in the Western Tradition of Science’, in *Internationale Schulbuchforschung [International Textbook Research]*, 20, p.414.

26 I. Gundare (2007). ‘The Teaching of History in Georgia. With Special Focus on the Armenian and Azeri Minorities and Their Representation in Georgian History Textbooks’, in Cimera (2007). *History Teaching in Georgia: Representation of Minorities in Georgian History Textbooks*. Cimera: Geneva, p.24.

27 For example, see A. Bendianishvili (1999). *History of Georgia, 1801-1921*. Ganatleba: Tbilisi; I. Antelava (ed) (1996). *Istoriia Gruzii s drevnikh vremen do nashikh dnei [The history of Georgia from ancient times to the present day]*. Tbilisi; L. Sanikidze (1994). *Glimpse on the History of Georgia*. Samshoblo: Tbilisi; R. Grdzeldidze (1995). *History of the political parties of Georgia*. Tbilisi State University: Tbilisi.

28 G. Melikishvili (ed) (1970-1980). *Ocherki istorii Gruzii, v 8-mi tomakh [Essays on the history of Georgia in 8 vols]*. Sabchota Sakartvelo: Tbilisi.

From the mid-1980s, the history of Georgia became an independent subject with a clearly defined content and its own place in the wider curriculum of secondary and higher educational institutions; it was allocated separate teaching hours. However, up to 1991, it continued to be taught in parallel with the history of the USSR and the Soviet version of the world history. After gaining independence, some new textbooks were created, in which the spirit of positivist historiography was maintained; they were overloaded with facts and heroic rhetoric. The authors – university professors in history – created complex texts which were full of names and facts and did not stimulate the interest of pupils.²⁹ First and foremost, this holds true for the history of the 19th and 20th centuries. Enthusiasm for facts may be explained by several reasons: on the one hand, this was determined by the tradition of a positivist (including the Soviet) historiography and complexity (and in some cases rejection) of mastering new theories and methodological approaches; on the other hand, the authors strove to recount all forgotten heroes and forbidden facts, therefore recovering “historical truth”. The names of the political parties and their leaders at the beginning of the 20th century, detailed history of the first independent republic, of the anti-Soviet protests in the 1920s and the repressions of the 1930s, as well as other facts and names appeared in the texts. Some of these names “returned” to the textbooks,³⁰ others were mentioned for the first time.³¹

The process of reinterpretation of the past and the search for new approaches to the study of history were accompanied by the bloody conflicts which erupted in Georgia immediately after the collapse of the Soviet Union. It is widely known that different interpretations of history often serve as a basis for the rise, maintenance and aggravating of conflict situations. A “war of historians” frequently accompanies and sometimes even precedes armed conflicts. Motives, aspirations and actions of the opposing sides are narrated differently by the conflicting parties. Pretending to possess the “true history”, they blame their opponent for falsification and distortion of the facts, which is quite often based on myths, stereotypes and prejudices. Old grievances and misunderstandings are recalled from memory; debates on the “more ancient”, “autochthonous” and “state-forming” population of a certain territory are activated. New images of the past, directed at “recalling” enmity and distrust, are used for mass mobilisation by various political actors. The experience of peaceful co-existence is overshadowed by the conflicting memories.

It could be supposed that in the early 1990s, ethnocentrism and ethno-nationalism served as a kind of strategy for adaptation to the new reality. Many titular nations (Georgians among them) made this ideological choice.³² Re-interpretation of relations with the Abkhaz

29 I. Gundare (2007). *Op. Cit.*, p.31.

30 For example, the names of Noe Zhordania and the members of the Constituent Assembly and government of the Georgian Democratic Republic, or the names of the leaders of the Bolshevik Party (Budu Mdivani, Mikheil Kakhiani, Mamia Orakhelashvili, etc.) condemned as “national deviationists”, etc.

31 For example, Kaikhosro Cholokashvili and his comrade-in-arms General Georgii Mazniasvili, the Catholicos Patriarch Ambrosi Khelaia, etc.

32 R.G. Suny (2000). ‘Provisional Stabilities: The Politics of Identities in Post-Soviet Eurasia’, in *International Security*, XXIV, 3, p.159.

and Ossetians in 1918-1921 appeared in the textbooks of the history of Georgia.³³ If in the textbooks of the Soviet period all peoples were fighting against “the bourgeois-nationalistic government” which brutally suppressed their legitimate aspirations for freedom,³⁴ in the first and second generations of the post-Soviet textbooks the Abkhaz and Ossetians were struggling against the legitimate regime of Georgia, thereby paving the way to the Red Army, as well as to the sovietisation and occupation of Georgia.³⁵

In the struggle for independence, the idea of the special rights of the “autochthonous population” used to be the basis for different kinds of political manipulation. A portion of political parties started to refer to “non-Georgians” as the “guests on our land”. Representatives of national minorities were no less radical, posing their claims on “the existence of their historical lands” on the territory of Georgia. The version of history created by the titular nation (the Georgians) was opposed by the versions of the other ethnic groups living in Georgia. This resulted in mutual blame for the falsification of “historical truth”.

A range of features common to the narratives of societies in transition became characteristic of the first post-Soviet generation of Georgian historical narratives and textbooks:³⁶

- *An essentialist vision of national identity*, according to which it could be defined based on a clear, stable, authentic set of markers which do not alter over time.³⁷ Territory

33 Categories denoting ethnic minorities residing on the territory of Georgia are rarely mentioned while describing developments of earlier times.

34 “The dominance of the Mensheviks led the country’s industry, agriculture and culture to disaster. Meanwhile, Soviet Russia emerged as a winner of the civil war. On 29th November, Soviet rule was established in Armenia. [...] Menshevik Georgia was surrounded by the Soviet republics. This made it easier for the working people of Georgia to struggle for the establishment of Soviet rule. The revolution had ripened... The Central Committee of the Communist Party (Bolshevik) of Georgia passed a decree declaring an armed uprising. The uprising began on the night of 11th February 1921 [...] On 16th February, the Revolutionary Committee was created. It appealed for help to Soviet Russia which immediately sent divisions of the Red Army to assist the working class of Georgia. On 25th February 1921, the insurgents and divisions of the Red Army entered Tbilisi. Soviet rule was established... On 4th March, Soviet rule was established in Abkhazia, on 5th March in South Ossetia, on 18th March in Ajaria” (V. Guchua & Sh. Meskhia (1968). *Op. Cit.*, pp.253-254).

35 The chapters covering the history of the Georgian Democratic Republic contain the subsection “The struggle for Georgia’s territorial integrity” (Lomashvili (1992); M. Vachnadze & V. Guruli (2000). *The History of Georgia (19th and 20th centuries)*. 9th grade textbook. Artanudzhi: Tbilisi). The lessons under this subsection provide an account of the assistance to ‘Abkhaz and Ossetian separatists’ by Russia and Turkey. In particular, ‘[T]he Abkhaz separatists made use of the hardship of the country and intensified their struggle for separation from Georgia... In October 1918, with the support of the Russian volunteer army, an attempt of coup took place in Abkhazia, the purpose of which was the separation of Abkhazia from Georgia’ (*Ibid.*, p.67). ‘The movement of the Ossetian separatists became particularly active in 1920 when the Russian Red Army moved to the borders of the Caucasus. Russia began to implement its plans for hegemony in the Caucasus. In January 1920, the Caucasus Committee of the Communist Party of Russia called on the region’s workers to rise up in order to establish the Soviet rule... On 6 May, the Revolutionary Committee of South Ossetia, directed by the Caucasus Committee, declared the incorporation of South Ossetia into Russia, thus violating the territorial integrity of Georgia. This step had been agreed with the political leadership of the Soviet Russia’ (*Ibid.*, p.68).

36 Various versions of such narratives are described in the works of: S. Koren (2002). ‘Yugoslavia: a Look in the Broken Mirror. Who is the ‘Other’?’ in C. Koulouri (ed) (2002). *Op. Cit.*, pp.193-202; C. Koulouri (2001). *Introduction. The Tyranny of History. Teaching the History of Southeastern Europe* in C. Koulouri (ed) (2001). *Op. Cit.*, pp.15-25; C. Koulouri (ed) (2002). *Op. Cit.*; D. Stojanovic (2001). *Op. Cit.*; K. Woodward (ed) (1997). *Identity and Difference*. Sage Publications: New York.

37 K. Woodward (ed) (1997). *Identity and Difference*. Sage Publications: New York, p.11.

- “the fatherland” (the notion of its borders and the history of its settlement which nourished the idea of autochthonous population), religion (Orthodox Christianity), and the Georgian language were supposed to be such markers of Georgian identity. The concept of “tolerance” was interpreted in an essentialist way as well; it was considered an eternal national trait of Georgians; it guaranteed peaceful life and safety for various ethnic groups residing on the territory of Georgia. In this context, the notion of “ungratefulness” was set regarding the ethnic minorities who started to express grievances against the Georgians during the post-Soviet conflicts.
- *Ethnocentric version of national history, the principle of ethnic and historical territory and the priority of the rights of the “autochthonous” population.* After the collapse of the USSR, various peoples started to “compete” for antiquity. In search of “(national) roots” more ancient than others’, they started to “discover” them in historical periods when neither “nations” nor “ethnic groups” (in the modern sense of the word) existed. The territorial localisation of these “roots” led to debates over primordial rights to concrete territories, and the interpretation of geographical names and ethnonyms. The answers to the questions raised in this context could be connected to political and administrative decisions which violated the interests of opponents. Are *Abazgs* and *Apsihls* the ancestors of Georgians or Abkhaz? Are the Abkhaz ethnic Georgians who populated the territory of western Georgia since ancient times, or are they the descendants of the *Apsua* tribes who came down from the mountains? If the latter is the case, their claims on “our (Georgian) lands” are unfounded.
 - *An exclusivist historical narrative where there was no place left for ‘others’*³⁸ made it difficult to identify the role of ethnic minorities in national history and contributed to their marginalisation. This became a serious problem for multi-ethnic and multi-religious Georgia. It took some time to realise that it was not appropriate to cling dogmatically to the master narrative created at the beginning of the 20th century, as its authors had to cope with radically different problems. At that time Georgia was not an independent state, but a part of the Russian Empire, trying to legitimise its right to independence. The justification of the antiquity and originality of Georgian history implied the rejection of the positive (or neutral) role of the Russian colonisers as well as the presence of different ethnic groups on the territory of Georgia. At that time, this narrative was aimed at the promotion of national consolidation both horizontally (all parts of eastern and western Georgia) and vertically (all strata of Georgian society). However, this approach, along with other factors, posed serious problems to the formation of a democratic, multi-ethnic, unified state at the end of the 20th century.
 - *Clear politisation of the narrative.* The Georgian and Abkhaz versions of history, which reflect the contemporary problems faced by the two societies, could serve as an example of politically biased history. In the case of Abkhazia, history became

38 C. Koulouri [ed] (2001). *Op. Cit.*, p.22.

the basis for the legitimisation of the idea of a state, independent from Georgia. In the case of Georgia, it served the legitimisation of the idea of a single, multinational Georgian state. The Georgian version stresses that “Georgia is the only homeland of the Abkhaz”; it accepts the cultural and ethnic distinctiveness of the Abkhaz people and their organic inclusion in the general Georgian historical process. The Abkhaz version claims that Georgians and their ancestors appeared on the territory of western Georgia later than the ancestors of the Abkhaz; consequently, there is no basis for Georgians to consider the territory of contemporary Abkhazia as “their own”. From these conflicting perspectives, mutually exclusive interpretations of the facts and events are created.³⁹

The experience of the conflicts of the 1990s led gradually to a realisation of how the history of Georgia should be taught and how various ethnic groups should be placed in the history of the country. In the late 1990s, reforms in the sphere of education began. In 1997, the first Law on Education in independent Georgia was adopted and the National Educational Standard in the History of Georgia and in World History was elaborated, which defined the principles and goals of history teaching.

The authors of the Standard stressed the strong influence of state ideology on the concept of history teaching in the Soviet period when history was used as a means of legitimisation of the Soviet regime.⁴⁰ They tried to elaborate an approach which would correspond to the political orientation of post-Soviet Georgia. The Standard declared the creation of a model of history education which was in accordance with the complete democratisation of the country and had to contribute to the development of pupils’ political, cultural and religious tolerance.⁴¹ The concept of history teaching should have been in compliance with the international standards; “pluralistic-alternative teaching of history” was stressed, which was impossible during the Soviet period. The authors noted that the aim of history teaching is not only to gain knowledge of historical facts, but to develop independent, critical thinking, and the ability to navigate the different interpretations of historical facts.⁴²

However, some of the principles declared in the introduction of the Standard were not reflected in its content. It continued to be oriented towards the mastering of enormous factual material given in a positivist tradition. According to the Standard, the only aim of presenting alternative perspectives was to achieve the *historical truth*: ‘There might be different views on one and the same historical fact but only one of them is true’.⁴³

39 K. Kakitelashvili (2010). ‘Reconstruction of the Past in Abkhaz and Georgian History Textbooks’, in *Multifaced Clío: History Wars in the Post-Soviet Space*, Braunschweig, pp.75-98.

40 Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Georgia (1997). *National education standards on the history of Georgia*. Tbilisi, p.5.

41 *Ibid.*, p.5.

42 *Ibid.*, p.5.

43 *Ibid.*, p.31.

Such an approach could not contribute to the development of independent and critical thinking. The way historical facts were presented created an impression of national history as “destiny”, a legendary story about the past of which one could be proud. Consequently, the implementation of the Standard of 1997 did not end up in essential changes to the mode of teaching or content of the textbooks. The textbooks were written by the same authors as those before 1997. The formational approach was substituted by an eclectic mixture of historical materialism, the theory of local civilisations, elements of the *Annales* school and other theoretical visions which were poorly understood by the authors. All in all, hardly any differences could be found between the first and second generations of the post-Soviet history textbooks.

In 2004, the “National Aims of General Education” were elaborated in Georgia. These declared that the aim of general education was to create favourable conditions for the formation of a free individual bearing national and universal human values and to nurture a civic consciousness based on liberal and democratic values. Great attention was paid to the development of skills of mutual respect, mutual understanding and mutual comprehension: “[S]chools should nurture respect for human rights and dignity which pupils would use for the defence of their own and other’s identity.”⁴⁴

In April 2005, a new law on education was adopted which defined the aims of state policy in this sphere: promotion of conditions for shaping a free individual with universal human values, nurturing civic consciousness and respect for cultural differences.⁴⁵ Among other objectives, it envisaged the standardisation across the country of teaching of Georgian language, history and geography, as well as other social sciences.⁴⁶ All these disciplines were bounded by a common logic and content, with special attention given to the teaching of the state language – Georgian. New curricula were developed and new textbooks were created in these subjects.⁴⁷

Beginning from 2005, textbooks created in accordance with the National Standard should be submitted to the Centre for National Curricula⁴⁸ for approval. Several textbooks may be approved for one and the same grade. One of the approved textbooks must be translated into the other languages of instruction (defined in the law): Azeri, Armenian and Russian. Schools are entitled to select a textbook from the list of those approved by the Centre.

44 Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Georgia (2004). *National Goals of Education*. Tbilisi.

45 Republic of Georgia (2005). *Georgian Law on General Education*. Tbilisi.

46 Prior to this, in the regions where a high concentration of national minorities live (Kvemo Kartli and Samtskhe-Javakheti), history and geography had been studied using textbooks written in the ethnic homelands (Azerbaijan and Armenia). The Georgian language had not been taught at all.

47 Over the next few years, attempts were made to integrate history, geography and civic education into a single subject to be taught in the 7th and 8th grades, as well as to integrate the history of Georgia into the world history. Experience had shown this unification to be artificial, mechanical and unproductive; the Ministry of Education and Science rejected the idea. Currently, the subjects are taught separately.

48 Since 2011 it has been called the “National Centre for the Development of the Quality of Education”.

In the 2010-2011 academic year, a new history curriculum for 2011-2016 was developed and new assessment criteria for textbooks were approved. Textbooks which were not approved by the Centre could now be used as supplementary or additional material if they help to achieve the aims set out in the National Curriculum.⁴⁹ The main principles of the methodology of history teaching are oriented towards ‘the presentation of materials from different points of view. This contributes to the formation of the critical thinking and adds to overcoming the auto and hetero-stereotypes. School should support diversity through taking into account the interests of pupils as well as raising the respect towards religious, linguistic and ethnic differences’.⁵⁰

From ethnic to civic nationalism: Achievements and problems

After 2005, some important changes were introduced to the content of the school textbooks. The new textbooks portray Georgia as a multi-ethnic and multireligious country, which has been formed by the people residing there throughout the centuries. As different from the pre-reform textbooks which were mainly concentrated on ethnic identity, a shift to civic consciousness is presented in the new textbooks. They represent history not as a narrative of the past which is set once and for all, rather as a science based on interpretation, with particular disciplinary procedures and methods. The documentary materials offered to the pupils allow them to compare different viewpoints; this contributes to the formation of a comparative vision of history. The regional as well as international context is more or less thoroughly presented. The authors are trying to maintain a neutral tone while describing the history of Georgia.

In the textbooks, particular attention is paid to the ethnic minorities of contemporary Georgia. There is a separate section “National Minorities in Georgia” in the textbook for the 8th grade;⁵¹ apart from the ethnographic descriptions of various groups, a map entitled “The National Composition of the Population of Georgia” is introduced;⁵² Article 129 of the first Constitution of Georgia is mentioned, which guaranteed the rights of national minorities. In the text below it is stated that similar guarantees of the protection of the rights of all citizens are provided under the 2005 Constitution of Georgia.⁵³ In the textbook for the 9th grade a quote from the Act of Independence of 26th May 1918 is provided, which refers to ‘the people of Georgia’ (not ‘the Georgian

49 The objectives of teaching social sciences are defined as follows: a) To impart knowledge of history and geography to pupils; along with mastering information, it is aimed at developing general and specific skills, as well as high moral values; b) To assist pupils in the perception of the world and identification of the place of Georgia in global processes; c) To contribute to raising patriots and citizens with a high level of responsibility (Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Georgia [2008]. *National Curriculum for General Education Schools. 2008-2009 academic year*. Tbilisi, p.21).

50 *Ibid.*, p.35.

51 N. Elizbarashvili et al (2007). *History and geography of Georgia and the world. Civic education. 8th grade textbook*. Sakartvelos matsne: Tbilisi.

52 *Ibid.*, p.149.

53 *Ibid.*, p.150.

people’).⁵⁴ All this reflects the shift from ethnic to civic nationalism, which was reflected through the concept of the “multi-ethnic Georgian nation” in the political discourse.

In the textbook for the 12th grade, Article 129 of the first Constitution is presented in some detail; it states that ‘the infringement of the free socio-economic and cultural development of any national minority in Georgia is forbidden’.⁵⁵ The textbook also quotes the Appeal of the Supreme Council of Georgia to the peoples of the world of 1991: ‘We do not intend to compete with any state or with any national group living in Georgia... The protection of human rights, the rights of citizens and national minorities should be guaranteed in Georgia.’⁵⁶

It is widely known that a shared past plays an important role in the formation of a sense of belonging to a single state (civic/state nationalism). As was already mentioned, in the pre-reform textbooks ethnic minorities were rarely referred to, in order to present the multinational nature of the country and tolerance of the titular nation towards the “guests”. In the post-reform textbooks, some progress can be observed: much more space is dedicated to the texts reflecting the ethnic, religious and cultural diversity of Georgia and the Caucasus – although the common fate and contribution of different ethnic groups to the history of Georgia could have been better portrayed.

The third generation textbooks (published after 2005) describe the participation of the representatives of different ethnic groups in important events in the country’s history: for example, the participation of the Borchalo Muslims, the mullah Zamana, Vali-Ali-Emin Ogly and Kadym in the plot against the Russian regime in 1832; the heroism of Azeri *Khutia from Borchalo* in the battle of Aspindza in 1770.⁵⁷ However, reference to these facts does not change the entire picture. The information offered confirms the *presence* of various ethnic groups on the territory of Georgia, rather than reflecting them *through* the common history. It could be argued that national minorities are not presented in the textbooks as an integrated part of society. The provided material does not create the sense of involvement/participation in the history of the Georgian state for the pupils from different ethnic minorities. A group of researchers note that the appearance in textbooks of particular facts, events and names which are significant for a specific ethnic group could actually add to the marginalisation of that group.⁵⁸ Consequently, the procedure of inclusion of ethnic minorities in the historical narrative should be thoroughly thought through. The textbooks should

54 N. Akhmeteli (2009). *Op. Cit.*, p.116.

55 N. Akhmeteli & N. Murgulia (2008). *The history of Georgia and the world: 12th grade textbook*. Diogene: Tbilisi, p.90.

56 *Ibid.*, p.90.

57 The pride in the heroism of the ancestors who fought side by side with the Georgians against the foreign invaders came up in the interviews with the representatives of minorities (in our case – Azeris) during the implementation of the project “Cities – centres of intercultural dialogue in the South Caucasus”, implemented with the support of UNESCO by the Chair in Intercultural Dialogue at Ivane Javakishvili Tbilisi State University in 2008.

58 R. Stradling (2003). *Multiperspectivity in history teaching: a guide for teachers*. Council of Europe, p.10.

reflect a history, the creators of which are not “hosts” and “guests” but fellow citizens united by a common past, common values and a common future.

In terms of overcoming conflicting memories, the problem is better comprehended in regards to the “neighbours”⁵⁹ rather than Abkhazia and South Ossetia (which are perceived as parts of Georgia). This could be explained by the the difficult experience of the conflicts in the recent past. The representation of Georgian-Abkhaz and Georgian-Ossetian relations bear the imprint of conflicting memories and “history wars” as well as the collective trauma experienced by the opponents.⁶⁰

In the textbooks of the history of Georgia, Ossetians are presented as a national minority, a group which migrated from the North Caucasus centuries ago and was welcomed by Georgian society: ‘In the 10th-13th centuries, Ossetians had close relations with the Georgian Kingdom. In the 13th-14th centuries, they were hounded by the Mongols in the North Caucasus and migrated to Georgia. In the 17th-18th centuries, there was a mass influx of Ossetians to Georgia, where they were given shelter in Georgian villages. The Georgian feudals invited them as a cheap labour force in their domains ... [In the 20th century] Ossetians, like all nationalities living in Georgia, were provided with wide opportunity for developing their cultural life and native language through the national theatre, university and schools.’⁶¹

In contrast to the Ossetians, the Abkhaz are not defined as a “national minority”. One of the chapters of the 8th grade textbook entitled “The Multinational Caucasus” states that: ‘Abkhaz reside in the South Caucasus, in the northwest part of Georgia. Apart from Georgians, Georgia is a homeland of the Abkhaz as well. Abkhaz call themselves “apsua” and the country is named “Apsny”. Approximately 94,000 Abkhaz live in Georgia. A small number of this people live in Turkey where they were deported in the second half of the 19th century under the order of the Russian emperor.’⁶² Another textbook specifies that: ‘On the territory of western Georgia there live the Abkhaz; in ancient times they were settled only in the extreme northwest part (up to Anakopia). Their language is of northwest Caucasian (Abaz-Adygheyan) origin. Modern Abkhaz were formed as a result of the mixture of the peoples of the northwest Caucasus – Circassians, Abaz, Adygheyan – with the Georgian population. In terms of religion, the

59 Russia is an exception: tensions in Georgian-Russian relations profoundly affected the transformation of its image in the post-Soviet period; after the August war of 2008, the image of Russia as the enemy of Georgia was supported by various “places of memory”.

60 It is known that collective trauma reinforces the unity of a group through the shared experience and makes the present extremely dependent on the past, images of which are constantly revived in memory. Acknowledging trauma and its destructive consequences is essential if it is to be overcome (P. Sztompka [2004]. *The Trauma of Social Change: A case of Post Communist Societies*. University of California Press: Berkley; N. J. Smelser [2004]. *Psychological Trauma and Cultural Trauma*. University of California Press: Berkley; J. C. Alexander [2004]. *Toward a Theory of Cultural Trauma*. University of California Press: Berkley).

61 N. Elizbarashvili et al [2007]. *Op. Cit.*, p.151.

62 *Ibid.*, p.122.

Abkhaz are pagans, although the Abkhaz of Bzyb Gorge were influenced by Islam and those of Abzhu – by Christianity. Over the centuries, the Abkhaz made their contribution to the formation of Georgian culture.’⁶³

The examples quoted below demonstrate the different approaches to the construction of Georgian-Abkhaz relations in the Georgian and Abkhaz textbooks. The introductory sentence of the Abkhaz textbook states: ‘Abkhazia (in the Abkhaz language “Apsny”) is a country the indigenous population of which are the Abkhaz’;⁶⁴ ‘As for the ancient Kartvelian tribes – even before the beginning of the 1st century BC [they] lived in the northeast areas of Asia Minor; later on these tribes moved to the ecological niche of Colchida.’⁶⁵ [At the beginning of the New Era] ‘the ethno-political boundary between the ancient Abkhaz and the ancient Kartvelian tribes (Lazs) ran along the river Ingur. The same boundary existed in the 7th and early 8th centuries, prior to the formation of the Abkhaz kingdom.’⁶⁶

It is visible that the Georgian narrative points to the difference between Georgians and Abkhaz, on the one hand, while on the other hand, it stresses the inclusion of the Abkhaz in wider Georgian processes. In the Abkhaz textbook, the Georgians are represented as the primary “other” in opposition to which the Abkhaz identity is formed.

Contemporary history textbooks written by academicians from Georgia and Abkhazia are vivid examples of counter-history and of confrontational interpretations of facts and events.⁶⁷ In the next part of the paper, we shall discuss the examples of conflicting accounts of some historical topics: 1) The creation and decline of a united Georgian state (according to the Georgian version) and the Kingdom of the Abkhaz and Georgians (according to the Abkhaz version) in the 10th-11th centuries; 2) The imposition of the Russian colonial power; 3) The period of existence of the Georgian Democratic Republic in 1918-1921.

Georgian and Abkhaz textbooks demonstrate different attitudes towards the issue of the creation of a united state in the 10th-11th centuries. This distinction is expressed in the very name of the state: the United Georgian state (*The History of Georgia*) versus the Kingdom of the Abkhaz and Georgians (*The History of Abkhazia*). In the Georgian textbooks, the period of existence of this state is perceived as a time of prosperity and its history is provided in detail. In the Abkhaz textbook, this period is considered insignificant, thus it is described superficially. In the Georgian version, the central role in

63 V. Neidze et al (2007). *History/Geography of Georgia and the world. 8th grade textbook*. Logos Press: Tbilisi, p.47.

64 O. Bgazhba & S. Lakoba (2006). *Istoriia Abkhazii s drevnikh vremen do nashikh dnei [The history of Abkhazia from ancient times to the present day]. 10-11th grades textbook*. Ministry of Education of the Republic of Abkhazia: Sukhum, p.3.

65 *Ibid.*, pp.6-7.

66 *Ibid.*, p.8.

67 For the detailed comparative analysis of the key periods and events reflected in the Georgian and Abkhaz history textbooks, see the article of K. Kakitelashvili [Kakitelashvili (2010). *Op. Cit.*].

the process of unification is played by the Georgian feudal David Kurapatat (Bagrationi).⁶⁸ In the Abkhaz version, the creation of the Kingdom of the Abkhaz and Georgians is seen as a result of the expansion of Abkhaz towards the east. The central role in this process is ascribed to the daughter of the Abkhaz King, Gurandukht, who was the mother of the first king of the united state – Bagrat: ‘The active eastern policy of the Abkhaz kingdom led to the incorporation of the larger part of the western and central Transcaucasus. This process culminated in the creation of the Kingdom of the Abkhaz and Georgians [...] Gurandukht, the daughter of the famous Abkhaz King Georgi II, [...] an intelligent and strong-willed woman, under the initiative of the Abkhaz court and loyal feudals, became the first ruler of Kartli. Later on, she played an important role in the creation of the Kingdom of Abkhaz and Georgians.’⁶⁹

According to the Georgian textbook, with the fall of the united Georgian state in the 15th century, a period of decline began. In the Abkhaz textbook, the same period is assessed as a time of relatively independent existence for the Abkhaz kingdom.⁷⁰

According to *The History of Abkhazia*, the Georgians played a detrimental role in the establishment of Russian colonial rule in Abkhazia. The initiator of the abolition of the Abkhaz principality was the Megrelian princess, the “energetic and power-seeking” Nino Dadiani:⁷¹ ‘Nino Dadiani, in supporting the Tsarist authorities, was pursuing not the Russian interests rather her own personal motivations, fully understanding the strategic and commercial importance of Abkhazia [...] The “Pleading points” of Seferbei regarding Abkhazia’s vassal status under Russia [...] were written in the Georgian language in Megrelia, under the guidance of Nino Dadiani and her confessor, the archpriest Ioseliani.’⁷² According to this version of history, the Georgians made a good use of the results of the Tsarist policy – “Abkhazia without the Abkhaz”: ‘The Georgian-Megrelians, who played the role of Cossacks at that time, were found in a privileged position due to fighting together with the Tsarist Russia against the Caucasian peoples including the Abkhazs [...] It can be stated without any doubt that the gains of the Russian military victory in Abkhazia [...] were fully exploited by the dependent Georgia.’⁷³ One might conclude that, during the period of Russian dominance, the Abkhaz suffered more from Georgians than from the Russian colonisers: ‘In the late [18]60s and early [18]70s, prominent representatives of the [Georgian] intelligentsia called on their people to take over the Abkhaz lands deserted as a result of *Muhajir* policy [...] In this period, an imperial consciousness started

68 ‘When the strife deepened in the Abkhaz Kingdom, David Kurapatat...proclaimed the prince Bagrat as the ruler of Kartli. In 978, with the consent and support of David, the Abkhaz feudals crowned Bagrat in Kutaisi’ (G. Anchabadze, G. Gamkrelidze, M. Surguladze & D. Shvelidze [2008]. *Op. Cit.*, p.158).

69 O. Bgaghba & S. Lakoba [2006]. *Op. Cit.*, p.157.

70 *Ibid.*, p.175.

71 In fact, the queen was called Ekaterina – the name given to her in the textbook is incorrect.

72 *Ibid.*, p.217.

73 *Ibid.*, p.263.

to form in Georgia, inculcated in the idea of their uniqueness and special role in the Caucasus [...] The Georgian clergy imposed the Georgian liturgy⁷⁴ and the Georgian language on the Abkhaz population; which they did not understand, and many Abkhaz family names were registered in the Georgian style by Megrelian priests.⁷⁵ The impression is created that Georgia conducted an independent (anti-Abkhaz) policy, separately from Russia.

The authors of the Georgian textbooks state that the abolition of the Abkhaz kingdom by the Tsarist government was not a part of any special plan elaborated for Abkhazia: ‘Abkhazia shared the same fate as the other Georgian kingdoms and principalities.’⁷⁶ Abkhazia is presented as a part of the wider Georgian space experiencing the same oppression from the side of the common enemy (the Russian empire) as the other parts of Georgia. In the Abkhaz version of history, Georgia is seen as the principal (hostile) “other”, while in the Georgian version this role is ascribed to Russia/the USSR.

The period of 1917-1921 is assessed in the textbooks of both sides as a period of the establishment and loss of independent statehood. In the Abkhaz textbook, Georgia is presented as the principal opponent, occupant of independent Abkhazia. One of the chapters in this textbook is entitled “Abkhazia is not Georgia”; it contains a detailed description of ‘the occupation of Abkhazia by the troops of the Georgian government’.⁷⁷ In the Georgian textbook, reference is made to the struggle against Bolshevik Russia and General Denikin for the territorial integrity of Georgia. This period is discussed in the prism of the Georgian-Russian conflict and not in the context of Georgian-Abkhaz relations.⁷⁸ The establishment of Soviet rule is seen as a continuation of the Russian colonial policy.

The Abkhaz textbook assesses the policy of the Georgian government in 1918-1921 as ‘chauvinist’.⁷⁹ The Georgian authors draw on the guarantees provided by the government of the Georgian Democratic Republic to the ethnic/national minorities residing on its territory: ‘The government of Georgia paid special attention to the protection of the rights of ethnic minorities.’⁸⁰

In the Georgian textbook, the establishment of Soviet rule is associated with the loss of independence by Georgia. In the Abkhaz textbook, the same event is linked with the “liberation from Georgian occupation and the restoration of the independence of Abkhazia”. However, the Abkhaz version stresses that a short period of real independence was followed

74 It should be noted that in 1811, the Russian Empire abolished the autocephaly of the Georgian church; from this time, the service was conducted in Russian.

75 *Ibid.*, p.264.

76 G. Anchabadze, G. Gamkrelidze, M. Surguladze & D. Shvelidze [2008]. *Op. Cit.*, p.305.

77 O. Bgazhba & S. Lakoba [2006]. *Op. Cit.*, pp.307-317.

78 G. Anchabadze, G. Gamkrelidze, M. Surguladze & D. Shvelidze [2008]. *Op. Cit.*, p.383.

79 O. Bgazhba & S. Lakoba [2006]. *Op. Cit.*, p.336.

80 G. Anchabadze, G. Gamkrelidze, M. Surguladze & D. Shvelidze [2008]. *Op. Cit.*, p.386.

by the Georgian occupation; just as previously Georgia exploited Russian colonial rule to oppress the Abkhaz, now it made use of the Soviet regime for the same purpose.

Both the Abkhaz and Georgian textbooks consider that Abkhaz-Georgian contradictions in the Soviet period were not of an ethnic character; both of them put the blame on the government for the deterioration of the situation; however, while in the Abkhaz version they blame the “Georgian government”, in the Georgian version they blame the “communist regime”, without any ethnic connotation.⁸¹

Conclusion

After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the process of re-consideration of the past has started in Georgia, as well as in the whole post-socialist space. This has been reflected in the master narrative as well as in the history textbooks which were based on that narrative. Several stages can be identified in the process of the elaboration of new approaches to the history writing in Georgia. In the early 1990s, in the context of the struggle for independence and the phase of ethno-nationalism, history became clearly ethnocentric. It was stamped with the conflicts of the early 1990s, which were preceded and accompanied by the “wars of memory and histories”. The experience of these conflicts pushed historians, politicians and educators to think about the need to develop new approaches to the teaching of history in a multinational, multicultural and multi-religious country. However, the textbooks of the second generation (published after the Law on Education and the National Educational Standard of 1997) failed to achieve the goal of a paradigm shift in teaching. Significant progress in terms of overcoming conflicting memory, establishing a multi-perspective approach, and reflecting the participation of various ethnic groups in the history of Georgia was made in the textbooks created on the basis of the new Law on General Education (2005). There, emphasis was made on the formation of civic consciousness; history was presented as a science based on interpretation; the way in which material is provided helped the formation of a comparative vision of history.

In the 2012-2013 academic year, new history textbooks approved by the National Centre for the Development of the Quality of Education were introduced to the 7th-12th grades of secondary schools. Experience accumulated over the past years suggests that the fourth generation of the post-Soviet textbooks would contribute to the formation of civic identity and the peaceful development of a multinational state.

81 O. Bgazhba & S. Lakoba (2006). *Op. Cit.*, pp.356-358; G. Anchabadze, G. Gamkrelidze, M. Surguladze & D. Shvelidze (2008). *Op. Cit.*, p.447.

CHAPTER 4

Problems of Teaching 20th Century South Ossetian History in Schools

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Introduction

Historical discourse plays a prominent role both in nation-building processes and in contemporary conflicts in the South Caucasus. The search for “historical roots” and reliance on examples of “heroic struggle” to develop a “national idea” and for self-affirmation within the global community is seen by some as the “natural and logical aspiration” of nation states.¹ This article focuses on how these aspirations are manifested in the management of history education in schools, particularly in school textbooks on history.

School textbooks (both Soviet and post-Soviet) are generally required to function as an instrument for conveying “objective and reliable knowledge”.² In the 1980s the authors of *The History of Georgia* chose the words of the famous Georgian historian Ivan Javakhishvili as an epigraph to their introduction: ‘The people need to know the history of the past life of their society...They must, of course, know reliable, truthful history free from exaggerations and falsehoods!’³ In 2008 Eduard Kokoity, President of South Ossetia, referring to the need to draft a textbook on the history of South Ossetia in the Georgian language, voiced concern that the ‘Georgian population of South Ossetia... [should] have the opportunity to study history objectively’.⁴ According to *Kavkazsky uzel*, Kokoity believes that currently ‘children living on territory formerly belonging to Georgia are presented with a history which says that “Russia is the occupier” and this is not right’.⁵ History teaching in schools is seen as an instrument for forming “the correct image” of both Russia and Georgia. This is, in turn, connected to the claim of an “objective” approach to the interpretation of what has happened and is indeed happening in contemporary South Ossetia.

For us as researchers it is clear that different versions (all making claims to objectivity) of the same individual event, different judgements as to the motives and actions of a specific historical figure, etc., can exist, not just at different historical periods but also in parallel. State sponsorship of one version as “correct” and “reliable” is the result of a symbolic

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- 1 D.A. Alimova (2009). ‘Sostoianie istoricheskoi nauki i uchebnikov istorii v Uzbekistane: protivostoianie idei ili boleznii rosta? [The status of historical science and history textbooks in Uzbekistan: resistance to an idea or growing pains?]’. Available in Russian at http://www.amudarya.net/fileadmin/_amudarya/bs/da.pdf.
 - 2 In the research community this point of view has been subjected to a fundamental revision over the last 10-15 years. See C. Kolouri (ed) (2002). *Clio in the Balkans. The Politics of History Education*. Center for Democracy and Reconciliation in Southeast Europe. Petros Th. Ballidis & Co.:Thessaloniki; C. Kolouri (ed) (2001) *Teaching the History of Southeastern Europe*. Petros Th. Ballidis & Co.: Thessaloniki; H. Schissler (1987). ‘Perceptions of the Other and Discovery of the Self. What Pupils are Supposed to Learn about Each Other’s Past’, in V.R. Berhahn & H. Schissler (eds) (1988). *Perceptions of History. International Textbook Research on Britain, Germany and the United States*. Berg Pub Ltd, pp.26-37; D. Porat (2001). ‘A Contemporary Past: History Textbooks as Sites of National Memory’, in A. Dickinson, P. Gordon & P. Lee (eds) (2001). *International Review of History Teaching. Vol. 3. Raising Standards in History Education*. Woburn Press.
 - 3 V. Guchua & Sh. Meskhia (1987). *Istoria Gruzii [The history of Georgia]. Textbook for Years 7-10*. Tbilisi: Ganatleba, p.3.
 - 4 ‘V RluO razrabotaiut uchebnik po istori na gruzinskom iazyke [In RSO a textbook in the Georgian language is being developed]’, *Informatsionnoe agenstvo Res*, 28th November 2011. Available in Russian at <http://cominf.org/node/1166478777>.
 - 5 ‘Prezydni luzhnoi Osetii prosit Rossiui pomoch’ izdat’ uchebnik istorii na gruzinskom iazyke [The President of South Ossetia asks Russia for help to publish a history textbook in Georgian]’, *Kavkazski uzel*, 21st June 2009. Available in Russian at <http://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/155676>.

struggle in which politicians, academics and textbook authors play an important role. State schools are an important institution of socialisation. School curricula and textbooks provide a range of knowledge, the replication of which plays an important role in the forming of the individual and collective world view of a country's inhabitants. At the same time, it is important to bear in mind that the range of knowledge approved by the state will always depend on a number of political, ideological, administrative and other considerations. This article examines various aspects of the formation of two canons of historical narrative: Soviet and post-Soviet (or contemporary). In our view a comparative analysis of these canons will lead us to a better understanding as to what kind of considerations govern the content of history education in schools.

During our analysis we focused on the accounts of the processes of Sovietisation and the formation of the Ossetian autonomies incorporated within the republics of the USSR in Soviet and contemporary history textbooks (the South Ossetian Autonomous Oblast' within the Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic (SSR) and the North Ossetian Autonomous Socialist Republic within the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (RSFSR)). The article also examines as a separate subject the period of the Georgian Democratic Republic (1918-1921). A number of questions were posed for the analysis. What reasons are given for the need and legitimacy of creating the Ossetian autonomies in the 1920s in Soviet and contemporary textbooks? How do they describe relations between a republic of the USSR and an autonomy incorporated within it? How and to what extent is the transition from the Soviet discourse of "friendship between peoples" to the prevailing description of conflicts and opposition between the peoples reflected in the textbooks on the history of Ossetia?

In many respects, the interpretation of the formation of the Ossetian autonomies and their relations with Russia and/or Georgia determines the assessment of the contemporary Georgian-Ossetian conflict. The Georgian and Ossetian sides differ fundamentally in their assessments of the period of Sovietisation, the creation of the South Ossetian autonomy, the role and significance of the Georgian Democratic Republic, etc. To explain just how crucial an analysis of these subjects is for an understanding of the Georgian-Ossetian conflict, we will provide an overview of the political context in the following section.

From the South Ossetian Autonomous Oblast' to the Republic of South Ossetia

When the USSR collapsed, the Republic of South Ossetia had the status of an autonomous oblast' (SOAO) incorporated within the Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic (GSSR),⁶ and bordering the North Ossetian Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (NOASSR)

⁶ The South Ossetian Autonomous Oblast' (SOAO) was formed by a decree of the Pan-Georgian Central Executive Committee of Soviets and the Soviet of People's Commissars of the Georgian SSR of 22nd April 1922.

incorporated within the RSFSR.⁷ On 10th November 1989 the Council of National Deputies of the SOAO resolved at an emergency session to elevate the oblast' to the status of an autonomous republic and requested the Supreme Soviet of the Georgian SSR to approve this.⁸ The reason given for the need for this change in status was the deputies' concern over the potential consequences of the processes of nation building within Georgia and the republic's plans to leave the USSR. In their view, its previous administrative status did not guarantee the SOAO due legal protection required in this new context.⁹

The Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the Georgian SSR rejected the request and in June 1990 all legal acts of the Georgian SSR and treaties concluded after February 1921 were declared unlawful.¹⁰ This included the decree establishing the SOAO in 1922. This event was now viewed by the Georgian side as an act committed 'against the will of the indigenous Georgian population and detrimental to Georgia's interests'.¹¹ The deputies of the Supreme Soviet of the Georgian SSR believed that 'the Ossetian people has its own statehood in the territory of the USSR' and 'there is no need for a second one on the territory of Georgia'.¹² They also stated that 'only a small proportion of the Ossetians living in Georgia live on the territory of South Ossetia'.¹³

In response to the abolition of the SOAO, a proclamation was issued in Tskhinval in September 1990 that the SOAO had been transformed into the South Ossetian Soviet Democratic Republic.¹⁴ This was followed by the proclaiming of the independent Republic of South Ossetia in December 1991. On 29th May 1992 a session of the Supreme Soviet passed the "Act of Independence of the Republic of South Ossetia".¹⁵ This stated that the Act should be viewed as a declaration of independence made under duress and taken in a situation of 'deadly peril hanging over the Republic of South Ossetia due to criminal acts that have brought its people and culture to the brink of extinction through

7 The North Ossetian Autonomous Oblast' was formed on 7th July 1924 out of the Ossetian National *okrug* of the abolished Mountain Autonomous SSR.

8 The Resolution of the emergency 12th Session of the Council of People's Deputies of SOAO, twentieth round, on the elevation of the status of SOAO/South Ossetia – with Russia forever! (V.S. Chizevski (ed) (2004). *The historical and legal grounds for the incorporation of the Republic of South Ossetia into Russia. Collected documents and materials.* Institut Natsional'noy Strategi Reform: Moscow, p.24.)

9 F. Margieva (ed) (1989). *Memorandum on negotiations with the Republic of Georgia approved at the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the Republic of South Ossetia.* Department of Collection of Manuscripts of the North Ossetian Institute of Social and Humanities Research: A.G. Inventory 1, d. 26, p.263.

10 The Decree of the Supreme Soviet of the Georgian SSR supplementing the Decree of the Supreme Soviet of the Georgian SSR of 9th March 1990 on guarantees of the protection of the state sovereignty of Georgia (M.A. Volkhonski, V.A. Zakharov & N. Iu. Silaev (eds) (2008). *Konflikty v Abkhazii i Yuzhnoi Osetii: dokumenty 1989-2004 [Conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia: documents 1989-2004].* Moscow, pp.26-27).

11 Law of the Republic of Georgia abolishing the South Ossetian Autonomous Oblast'/South Ossetia – with Russia forever! (V.S. Chizevski (2004). *Op. Cit.*, pp.51-52.)

12 *Ibid.* p.3.

13 *Ibid.* p.4.

14 *Sovetskaiia Osetia*, 22nd September 1990, No. 180.

15 Proclamation of the independence of the Republic of South Ossetia (M.A. Volkhonski, V.A. Zakharov & N. Iu. Silaev (eds) (2008). *Op. Cit.*, p.210).

the genocide of the Ossetians, committed by the atrocious and perfidious Republic of Georgia during the process of the collapse of the USSR in 1989-1992'.¹⁶ The Council of National Deputies of the SOAO viewed Georgia's refusal to recognise the new status of South Ossetia as an attempt by the government of Georgia 'to deport [the Ossetians] outside the Georgian borders'.¹⁷ On the Georgian side the declaration of independence was seen as an act 'of separatism and usurpation of state authority'.¹⁸ The disputes over the legitimacy of the declaration of independence of South Ossetia continue today and include armed resistance. To date, the Republic of South Ossetia has been recognised by six states.¹⁹

Both sides in the Georgian-Ossetian conflict, which is generally viewed as starting in 1989, cite various historical arguments and reinterpret the experience of being part of the USSR to prove their points. Some authors place the blame for the ensuing conflict on "Georgian intellectuals and politicians" who 'view the Ossetians as "guests" on Georgian soil' and see South Ossetian autonomy as a threat to the integrity of Georgia.²⁰ Others argue that 'the Ossetians have had rights to the lands they occupy since time immemorial' and accuse the administration of the Georgian SSR of 'neglecting the socio-economic development of the SOAO'.²¹ Their opponents counter this by stating that the territory of South Ossetia has been 'Georgian land since time immemorial'.²² We examine in the next section how the role and content of school textbooks is interpreted in this context.

From *The History of Georgia* to *The History of (South) Ossetia*

Up until 1990 in all schools of the South Ossetian Autonomous Oblast' without exception, the history of Georgia was taught using the textbook *The History of Georgia* by Victor Guchua and Shota Meskhia.²³ The history of South Ossetia did not exist as a stand-alone subject in the curriculum, although, as Luidvig Chibirov points out, the oblast' department of national education of the South Ossetian Autonomous Oblast' had plans to introduce such a course and publish a textbook from the early 1980s onwards.²⁴ The writing of the textbook was entrusted to a team of historians headed by Yuri Gagloity.

¹⁶ *Ibid.* p.1.

¹⁷ Declaration of independence of the Republic of South Ossetia (M. A. Volkhonski, V. A. Zakharov & N. Iu. Silaev (eds) [2008]. *Op. Cit.*, p.203).

¹⁸ '...separatist forces in the South Ossetian Autonomous Oblast' are attempting to usurp state authority, [...] to wrest from Georgia an historical, inalienable part of it against the wishes of the indigenous Georgian population living in that region and to the detriment of the interests of all Georgia' (V.S. Chizevski [2004]. *Op. Cit.*, pp.51-52).

¹⁹ The Russian Federation, Nicaragua, Venezuela, Nauru, Vanuatu and Tuvalu.

²⁰ V.A. Zakharov & A.G. Areshev [2008]. *Priznanie nezavisimosti luzhnoi Osetii i Abkhazii [The recognition of the independence of South Ossetia and Abkhazia]*. Moscow, p.84.

²¹ Z.N. Vaneev, V. D. Tskhovrebov, P.V. Doguzov, Yu. S. Gagloity, L.A. Chibirov et al.

²² M. Lordkipanidze, D. Gvasaliya, M. Gaprindashvili et al.

²³ V. Guchua & Sh. Meskhiya [1987]. *Op. Cit.* The textbook was approved by the Ministry of Education of the GSSR. Impression: 30,000 copies. Translated into Russian by I. Lolua & K. Lomashvili.

²⁴ L.A. Chibirov [2004]. *O vremeni, o ljudiakh, o sebe [On time, people, myself]*. Vladikavkaz, p.46.

Although the book was repeatedly scheduled for publication by the Ossetian publishing house “Iryston” over a number of years,²⁵ the textbook never appeared.²⁶

In the second half of the 1980s a collective of authors, consisting of the history scholars, Drs Chibirov, Togoshvili, Dzhioev and Pukhaev, was tasked with writing a textbook *The History of the South Ossetians*. By 1989 the textbook had been approved for publication and a first edition of 15,000 copies was published in 1990. It was only distributed to the schools of South Ossetia in 1992.

A key impetus for discussion regarding writing a textbook entitled *The History of South Ossetia* in the 1980s and 1990s was almost certainly the new wave of the “regional studies” movement, which aimed to promote a lively interest in the history of “one’s native region”.²⁷ In this context, gaining knowledge of the history of “one’s native region and people” is seen as an essential component of Soviet patriotic education. The definition of “patriotism” presented by the authors of the textbook *The History of the South Ossetians* accordingly links knowing “the history of one’s people” with an understanding of “the history of the whole of our country”:

‘It is impossible to be a patriot if you do not know the history of your own people. Knowing the history of your native region helps you to gain a deeper understanding and interpretation of the whole of our country; indeed, it is well known that love for one’s Motherland is fostered by one’s attitude to one’s native region. This is why the introduction of the history of Ossetia as a special subject for pupils of general education schools in the autonomous oblast’ met with such an enthusiastic response.’²⁸

As we will show below, the 1990 textbook remained entirely “Soviet”. All the “thorny issues” which, in the words of one of the authors of the textbook, were present in the version of the textbook submitted for approval, were smoothed out as the text progressed through the various offices of the Ministry of Education of the Georgian SSR. In particular, according to Chibirov, no new materials on the 1918 Georgian Democratic Republic and the formation of the Ossetian autonomies in the 1920s made it into the final version of the textbook on the 20th century.²⁹

The History of the South Ossetians sparked a public debate. A number of sections from it (“The Origins of the Ossetian People”, “The Scythians and the Sarmatians”, “Alania

25 *Iuzhnaia Osetia*, 4th June 1992, No. 44.

26 According to Gagloity this was ‘a result of lack of time’. There were also, presumably, other reasons for the delay [administrative or ideological].

27 B. Gladarev, O. Karpenko, Zh. Tsinman & E. Chikadze (2004). *Kraevedenie i grazhdanskoe obshchestvo: Sotsiologicheskie nabliudeniia* [Regional studies and civil society: sociological observations] Zvezda: St Petersburg, pp.9-104.

28 L.A. Chibirov, G.D. Togoshvili, M.K. Dzhioev & K.P. Pukhaev (1990). *Istoria iuznikh osetin* [History of the South Ossetians]. Tskhinval, p.3.

29 Interview with Liudvig Chibirov, Vladikavkaz, 19th November 2012.

in the 10th-12th centuries”) were published for wider discussion in the newspaper *Vestnik Iuzhoi Osetii*.³⁰ In the early 1990s many pupils and their parents were surprised to discover that the people to which they belonged had its own history “deeply rooted in antiquity”.

The textbook was fully approved by a wide circle of academics in South and North Ossetia,³¹ as well as school teachers.³² Chibirov states that there were simultaneously many objections to the textbook from both the Georgian and Ossetian sides. Supporters of rising Georgian nationalism, who were demanding independence (from the USSR) for Georgia and needed to promote the idea of the integrity of “the Georgian people”, dismissed the need for the textbook,³³ which they saw as dangerous as it “would contribute to separatism”. Their reviews of the book stated that ‘there is no South Ossetian people, there are only the Ossetians of Georgia’;³⁴ ‘the Ossetians are so few in number that they cannot be called a people’;³⁵ there was no South Ossetia on the territory of Georgia in the 19th century;³⁶ no one ‘used the term “South Ossetians” before the 17th-19th centuries or the term “South Ossetia” until the formation of autonomy in 1922’;³⁷ etc. From this perspective, they presented a mass of critical points on place names³⁸ and expressions used, such as “joint protests by the Georgian and Ossetian peoples”, were perceived as ‘an insult to the national dignity of the Georgians’.³⁹ Chibirov summarises the objections of the “Georgian side” as follows:

‘[A]ll the reviewers’ statements analysed are made to promote one basic message: there is no South Ossetia, there is no southern branch of the Ossetian people; there are merely Ossetian settlers on Georgian soil. Denial of the historical past and national self-consciousness of the Ossetians, a contemptuous and condescending attitude towards the Ossetians – this is the fundamental thrust of the reviews by the Georgian side.’⁴⁰

30 *Vestnik Iuzhnoi Osetii*, 1991, Nos. 43, 45; 1992. Nos. 17, 19.

31 F. Gutnov (1992). *Istoria Iuznikh Osetin [History of the South Ossetians]*. Rastdzinad, 5th edition; R. Kulumbegov (1992). *Istoria Iuznikh Osetin [History of the South Ossetians]*. Vestnik Iuzhnoi Osetii, 7th edition; G. Tedety (1992). *Dony kaefaei aermi kaesag khuyzdaer u [A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush]*. Khurzaerin, 28th edition.

32 L. I. Dzhioyeva, T. S. Pliev & U. M. Nartikoev (1992). *Spasibo za uchebnik [Thank you for the textbook]*. Vestnik Iuzhnoi Osetii, 15th edition.

33 For example, Professor Gaprindashvili exclaims in his review of the manuscript of the textbook in 1989: ‘...who on earth thought up the idea of writing a textbook history of the South Ossetians and why is it needed?’ (The review is stored in the personal archive of L. A. Chibirov).

34 *Ibid.*

35 *Ibid.*

36 Review of Professor V. Oniani of the manuscript of the textbook ‘History of the South Ossetians’ in 1988. (From the personal archive of L. A. Chibirov).

37 Review of Professor Dzh. Gvasalia of the manuscript of the textbook ‘History of the South Ossetians’ in 1989. (From the personal archive of L. A. Chibirov).

38 *Ibid.*

39 *Ibid.*

40 L. A. Chibirov (2004). *Op. Cit.*, p.46.

On the Ossetian side, the team of authors was roundly condemned for only providing a scant description of ‘the three-year struggle against the Democratic Republic of Georgia’,⁴¹ failing to provide much detail on the ethnic origins of the South Ossetians,⁴² failing to include in the textbook a section on the dialects of the Ossetian language, etc.⁴³ The author of one of these reviews ascribes the failings of the textbook to ‘a servile attempt by the authors to fit in with contemporary Georgian historiography’.⁴⁴ Another critic of the textbook (Dzitssoity) argues that ‘instead of an objective portrayal of Ossetian-Georgian political and military relations, we encounter references in the textbook “to the joint struggle of the Georgian and Ossetian peoples with foreign enslavers”. This has given rise to a situation where some of our own historians have provided invaluable assistance to Georgian propaganda’.⁴⁵ At a time when the notion of the “South Ossetians” as a people possessing their own rights and interests distinct from those of “the Georgians” is being established, any reference to the commonality of interests and actions of the two peoples in the past is seen as ideological sabotage. Critics on both the “Georgian” and “Ossetian” sides view the reference to joint (“Ossetian-Georgian”) actions as an insult and/or serving the interests of the enemy.⁴⁶ We will return to this discussion later in our analysis of the textbook *The History of the South Ossetians*.

At present, subjects in all schools in South Ossetia are taught in Russian;⁴⁷ pupils study for 11 years. Teaching is based on the federal list of textbooks of the Russian Federation.⁴⁸ Based on a discussion of this list, experts on teaching methods at the Republican Institute of Professional Development of Educators (IPKRO) has developed a list of textbooks recommended for schools in South Ossetia. This reliance on Russian models in South Ossetia’s general education system means that schools teach “Russian History” alongside the “History of Ossetia”. Pupils in South Ossetia study Russian

41 Kh-M. Dzutstsati (1992). *Ne iasno’ ili’ ne sovsem iasno’* [‘It is not clear’ or ‘it is not quite clear’]. Iuzhnaia Osetia, 42nd edition.

42 *Ibid.*

43 *Ibid.*

44 Iu. Dzitssoity (1992). *Ob uchebnike po istorii iuzhnikh osetin* [On the textbook of the history of the South Ossetians]. Iuzhnaia Osetia, 43rd edition.

45 *Ibid.*

46 For more details on the round-about publication of the textbook, see the book: L.A. Chibirov (2004). *Op. Cit.*; L. Chibirov, M. Dzhoiev & K. Pukhaev (1992). *Retsenziya ili prigovor?* [Review or verdict?]. Iuzhnaia Osetia. 44th edition.

47 The Ossetian language is studied as a subject in school and exercises are also conducted in it in the subject “Ossetian literature”. According to information obtained from an informal discussion with a specialist from the Education Agency of RSO, textbooks and methodological guides are currently being produced in the Ossetian language.

48 The current constitutional basis for the Republic is the Constitution of the Republic of South Ossetia, adopted in the referendum of 8th April 2001. However, the republic continues to abide in many respects by Russian laws [some of which have been retained from the time of the USSR], guided by Russian legislation and proceeding by analogy. [Decree of the Supreme Soviet of the Republic of South Ossetia of 29th January 1992 ‘On the application by analogy of the laws of Russia on the territory of the Republic of South Ossetia’.] This situation also affects the entire educational sphere RSO, particularly history teaching. According to unofficial data obtained from one of the specialists of the Education Agency of RSO, despite the problems this raises, to date the Republic clandestinely receives [and issues to school leavers] Russian-style certificates and diplomas of middle, middle-special and higher education. As the interviewee states, ‘these documents require marks to be indicated for the standard Russian compulsory subjects of general education. This in turn required the introduction of subjects which are studied in Russian schools into the curriculum of middle, middle-special and higher institutions. These documents enable our children to be admitted to higher education institutions in the Russian Federation.’ [Interview with RSO Educational Agency Specialist, Tskhinval, 2012.]

History from Years 6 to 11 (on the concentric system using Russian textbooks),⁴⁹ the History of Ossetia for three years in state schools (Years 9 to 11) and one year (Year 9) in private schools.⁵⁰

Research in the summer of 2011 into documentary standards defining the current aims, objectives and standards for teaching the history of Ossetia was unfruitful. Officials at the South Ossetian Education Authority stated that the Republic does not have its own textbooks, state education standards or legislation designed to regulate the content of this school subject.⁵¹ During interviews school teachers explained that they are obliged to decide themselves on how and what to teach.⁵² According to teachers, during lessons on the “History of Ossetia from Antiquity to the End of the 19th Century” they frequently use the textbook *The History of Ossetia: from Antiquity to the 20th Century* (2000 & 2005 editions),⁵³ which was written for schools in the Republic of North Ossetia-Alania. When working on the history of South Ossetia in the 20th century, the teachers use the textbook *The History of the South Ossetians* (1990 edition).⁵⁴ Some teachers who were surveyed in the new 2011-2012 school year said that they had used the textbook *The History of the Ossetians: The 20th century* written by Kuchiev and recently published in the Republic of North Ossetia-Alania for an account of the events of the history of South Ossetia in the 20th century.⁵⁵ In this textbook, which is aimed at senior pupils in general schools, the layout of the chapters and sections of the book is designed so that materials on North Ossetia alternate with materials on South Ossetia. In this textbook the chapter headings are not divided into the “North and South branches of the Ossetian people”, although there is a discussion within the text itself on the differences in the economic and cultural development of the two regions.

49 Preference is given to textbooks of authorial teams: A. A. Danilov & L. G. Kosulina (2009). *Istoria Rossii. S drevneishikh vremen do kontsa XVI veka [History of Russia since antiquity to the late 16th century]. Year 6. 9th edition.* Moscow; A. A. Danilov & L. G. Kosulina (2009). *Istoria Rossii. XVI – XVI veka [History of Russia. 17th-18th century]. Year 7. 9th edition.* Moscow; A. A. Danilov & L. G. Kosulina (2009). *Istoria Rossii. XIX vek [History of Russia. 19th century]. Year 8. 10th edition.* Moscow; A. A. Danilov, L. G. Kosulina & A. V. Pyzhikov (2003). *Istoria Rossii. XX vek – nachalo XXI veka [History of Russia. 20th century – early 21st century]. Year 9.* Moscow; A. A. Danilov, L. G. Kosulina & M. Iu. Brandt (2007). *Rossia i mir [Russia and the World]. Year 10.* Moscow; O. V. Volobuev, V. A. Klokov & M/ V. Ponomarev (2006). *Rossia i mir [Russia and the World]. Year 10.* Moscow.

50 An oral examination serves as a form of certification in Year 11, but as part of the examination on the “Russia and the World” curriculum.

51 Interview with principal specialist at the Agency for General Education of the Republic of South Ossetia, Gagloeva, Tskhinval, 2012.

52 The authorities of RSO have recently expressed concern over the current situation. The leading academic at the South Ossetian Vaneev Scientific Research Institute said that he had received a proposal from the President and Government of RSO to act as head of work on the writing of such a textbook in the Ossetian and Russian languages. However, the work had only just begun and it was too early to talk of any results and methodological recommendations. Interview with Professor of the History of South Ossetian State University, Yuri Galgoity, Tskhinval, 2012.

53 M. M. Bliev & R. S. Bzarov (2000 [first edition]; 2005 [second edition]). *Istoria Osetii: s drevneishikh vremen do kontsa XIX veka [History of Ossetia: since antiquity to the late 19th century].* Vladikavkaz, p.351.

54 L. A. Chibirov, G. D. Togoshvili, M. K. Dzhoiev & K. P. Pukhaev (1990). *Op. Cit.*

55 V. D. Kuchiev (2011). *Istoria Osetii. XX vek [History of Ossetia. The 20th century].* Vladikavkaz, p.255.

Linkages between the international and national in Soviet textbooks

In this section we compare the two textbooks written in accordance with Soviet canons: *The History of Georgia* (1987)⁵⁶ and *The History of the South Ossetians* (1990).⁵⁷ Both textbooks present the history of “the peoples” (the “Georgian” and the “southern branch of the Ossetian” peoples) from “primitive society” up to 1979 and 1990 respectively.⁵⁸ As we discover from the introduction to the 1990 Ossetian textbook, it is designed to be used in parallel with the textbook *The History of Georgia*.⁵⁹ In the introduction the authors state that they have ‘rejected the customary account of history, the suppression of many facts’ and thrown ‘new light on many phenomena from the history of Soviet South Ossetia’.⁶⁰ This makes the two textbooks a particularly attractive subject for analysis. What, then, does the textbook offer that is “new” and not “customary” (in comparison with *The History of Georgia*)? Does it provide a fundamentally new view of “historical facts” or simply replace/supplement the list of these facts? How can the Soviet historical narrative operate on different historical scales? What is retained and what is replaced in the rules of the writing of Soviet history when we move from the level of the Socialist republic (and the “Georgian people”) to the level of an autonomous oblast’ (and “South Ossetians”) incorporated within it? What changes have been made to the contents, given this shift? What are acceptable procedures for localising history?

A conventional trope in the writing of Soviet history is the reference to the international nature of Soviet society. This downplays the importance of ethnicity in favour of class and ideology. The use of ethnic labels when describing “others” is extremely rare in both textbooks. Instead, the narrative is full of references to “one’s own people” (the “Georgian” people in *The History of Georgia*; the “Ossetian” people in *The History of the South Ossetians*). At the same time the two textbooks present us with different versions of the description of the multinational composition of the population and “friendship between the peoples”. The introduction to *The History of Georgia* states:

‘Georgia is a multinational republic. Abkhaz, Ossetians, Russians, Azerbaijanis, Armenians live and work here together with the Georgians, striving for a better

56 V. Guchua & Sh. Meskhiya (1987). *Op. Cit.*

57 L. A. Chibirov, G. D. Togoshvili, M. K. Dzhoiev & K. P. Pukhaev (1990). *Op. Cit.*

58 The size of the textbooks: 328 pages (*The History of Georgia*) and 239 pages (*The History of the South Ossetians*). The second textbook devotes almost twice as much attention (pages) to the period in which we are interested (9 percent versus 17 percent in *The History of the South Ossetians*). They use different ways of dividing Soviet history into periods. *The History of Georgia* assigns a separate chapter to the periods 1917-1921 (10 pages) and 1921-1937 (20 pages). *The History of the South Ossetians* proposes the division of 1917-1921 (16 pages) and 1921-1941 (22 pages).

59 ‘[I]n the schools of South Ossetia the complete course on the history of Georgia is studied and the book is not intended to provide a detailed account of matters relating to the socio-economic and cultural development of Kartalinia [i.e. Georgia proper], in relation to which the southern branch of the Ossetian people was formed.’ (*Ibid.*, p.3).

60 *Ibid.*, p.4.

future. [...] In their work and battle together the foundations were laid for their rapprochement which in the period of Soviet authority grew into genuine friendship.’⁶¹

The “Ossetians” (and other “non-Georgians”) appear in this textbook in a list of “peoples living together with the Georgians” in “the multinational republic of Georgia” and in a relationship of “genuine friendship”. The “Georgian people” in this context apparently stands for “the interests of all peoples populating Georgia”, dispensing with the need to articulate specific details on the situation of other peoples (“living together [with them]”). The textbook neither contains a separate chapter, section or even a paragraph on the “South Ossetians”, nor, for that matter, on the other peoples who have lived in the republic. In particular, there is only one instance in which a word with the root “Ossetian” is used before page 250 of the textbook;⁶² later references are only made in a list of the flashpoints for peasant uprisings or the locations of miscellaneous events connected with the revolution, etc.⁶³ In the description of events during the period of the Georgian Democratic Republic, the only reference in *The History of Georgia* to “South Ossetia” (and other regions of Georgia) occurs in a list of places ‘of the greatest protest’ against ‘the Mensheviks and [English] occupiers’.⁶⁴ In the section “The struggle against the Menshevik government and foreign occupiers: The victory of Soviet authority in Georgia”,⁶⁵ “South Ossetia” is referred to as one of the places on Georgian territory where Soviet authority was established.⁶⁶ Tskhinval, Znaur and Java districts are referred to as territories in which “peasant uprisings” occurred ‘in Georgia in 1917-1920’,⁶⁷ etc. The authors work on the assumption that “workers of various nationalities” were pursuing common aims (the overthrow of the exploiters, the building of socialism, etc.) and selected the same means to achieve these (rallies, strikes, uprisings, etc.). In this context repeatedly listing ethnic categories is superfluous.

The Ossetian textbook (1990) makes no direct reference to the fact that “South Ossetia is a multinational autonomous oblast’. However, “the friendship and unity of the

61 V. Guchua & Sh. Meskhiya [1987]. *Op. Cit.*, p.3.

62 ‘Tamar soon married the Ossetian Tsarevitch, a descendant of the Bagratians – David Soslan...’ (*Ibid.*, p.76).

63 In the later Soviet and post-Soviet period the absence of “Ossetians” in the textbooks is seen as the “suppression of the history of the Ossetian people” and becomes one of the arguments in the struggle for independence after the downfall of the USSR.

64 ‘The largest protests took place in Gori, Dusheti, Sinakhi, Ozurgeti, Zugdidi and Senaki *uezds* in South Ossetia and Abkhazia’ (*Ibid.*, p.208).

65 Guchua, Meskhia (1979). *Istoria Gruzii [The History of Georgia]. Textbook for Years 7-9*. Tbilisi, pp. 249-256.

66 ‘On 25th February 1921 the insurgents and units of the Red Army entered Tbilisi. The Soviet authorities had won. [...] In March the flames of the uprising spread to South Ossetia. The insurgents seized the city of Tskhinvali and established Soviet authority there. [...] On 4th March the Soviet authorities were victorious in Abkhazia, on 5th March in South Ossetia and on 18th March in Ajaria.’ (*Ibid.*, pp.209-210.) However, at the end of the section, the date given for the establishment of Soviet authority in Georgia is 25th February 1921 (‘Thus on 25th February 1921 the workers of Georgia under the leadership of the Communist Party with the assistance of Soviet Russia overthrew the dominance of the landowners and capitalists and established Soviet authority’ (*Ibid.*, p.255)), which is the date of the victory of the insurgents in the future capital of the Georgian SSR.

67 The textbook provides a map of “the peasant uprising in Georgia 1917-1920 and the victory of the Soviet authorities”, indicating, amongst other things, the flashpoints of the uprisings on the territory of South Ossetia (*Ibid.*, p.251).

Georgian and Ossetian peoples” is a recurrent theme in topics relating to Sovietisation, which are of central importance in this study. In their account of the formation of the SOAO incorporated within the Georgian SSR, the authors bring to pupils’ attention a Resolution by the general assembly of the inhabitants of Tskhinval on 1st January 1922, which is judged to be a step towards ‘the elimination of national antagonism imposed [...] by princes and Mensheviks’, and ‘the close unity of the toilers of Georgia and South Ossetia’.⁶⁸ The textbook’s narrative states that in the uprisings against the “Georgian Mensheviks” ‘the peasants of the Ossetian villages of Tedelet, Dzhilabet, Khakhet and Sinagur fought side by side with Georgian peasants’.⁶⁹ Here the insurgents’ motives are presented as proceeding not from their nationality as such but their unifying (“irrespective of their nationality”) willingness ‘to die with honour for an idea, for the cause of the workers and peasants’.⁷⁰ According to the textbook version, even enemies of Soviet authority acknowledged the international nature of the peasant uprisings of 1917-1918 where ‘in one camp there were revolutionary insurgents with no distinction of nationality, in another, units of the People’s Guard’.⁷¹

However, there are differences between the two textbooks. These can be most clearly traced in the sections devoted to the cultural development of the peoples. The authors of the Ossetian textbook focus on “issues of the socio-economic and cultural development of the southern branch of the Ossetian people” which is seen as possessing its own separate “cultural and historical fate”, distinct from “the fate of the neighbouring [Georgian] people”. As the authors write in the introduction:

‘[S]chools in South Ossetia study the complete course on Georgian history and this book is not intended to provide a detailed account of matters relating to the socio-economic and cultural development of Kartalinia (i.e. Georgia proper), in relation

68 ‘The Decree of the Central Soviet Authorities and the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Georgia granting South Ossetia the legal status of an autonomous oblast’ with Tskhinvali as its centre is to be welcomed. We, the citizens of Tskhinvali, convinced that such decisions by the centre will enable the worker elements of Ossetia, which is currently torn apart, to restore its economy which was destroyed by the Mensheviks. Moreover, by uniting into one common family around Tskhinvali, we, the workers of Tskhinvali and South Ossetia, shall more rapidly eliminate the national antagonist imposed here by princes and Mensheviks. Fraternal solidarity shall be a pledge of the strengthening of Soviet Authority. Long live the close union of the workers of Georgia and South Ossetia!’ (L. A. Chibirov, G. D. Togoshvili, M. K. Dzhoiev & K. P. Pukhaev [1990]. *Op. Cit.*, pp.166-167.)

69 *Ibid.*, p.148.

70 ‘The government’s demand to surrender weapons, horses, hay and fodder for military units and send the young people to the Menshevik Guard was rejected by the peasants who stated that they would prefer to die in an unequal fight’ (*Ibid.*, p.148). Extract from the appeal quoted in the textbook of the “Union of Revolutionary Peasants” of South Ossetia to the Menshevik Guardists, 16th March 1918: ‘Guardists! We look on the Guard as our brothers since the majority come from the workers and peasants. But you have joined ranks with our inveterate enemies – the princes, the nobles and their spawn the Mensheviks...We know that we shall die from your treacherous bullets and our households will grieve, but we also know that we will die with honour for an idea, the cause of the workers and peasants. Remember that this letter is an outpouring of two hundred thousand Georgian and Ossetian peasant souls’ (*Ibid.*, pp.150-151).

71 ‘The peasant uprisings of 1917-1918 were outstanding evidence of the fraternal solidarity between the Georgian and Ossetian peasants. As the leader of the Menshevik party Zhordania acknowledged, the civil war in South Ossetia took place ‘between the Guard on the one hand and the Ossetians and Georgians on the other’. All these speeches place the revolutionary insurgents in one camp with no distinction by nationality and the units of the People’s Guard in the other (*Ibid.*, p.148).

to which the southern branch of the Ossetian people was formed. However, the relevant sections of the textbook reflect the distinct features and interaction of the cultural and historical fates of the two neighbouring peoples.⁷²

By contrast with the Georgian textbook, the Ossetian proposes a division into “Kartalinia” (Georgia *proper*) and its other territories. “Georgia proper” is viewed as the place of residence of the “Georgian people”, whilst South Ossetia is viewed as the site where “the southern branch of the Ossetian people was formed”. The metaphor of neighbours is used here to indicate the existence of a territorial border between the “peoples”, their “homes” and their “fates”. In Georgian textbooks territorial borders between “the peoples” are also present, of course, but these are not borders between “the Ossetian”, “the Abkhaz” and other “peoples of Georgia”, and are only between “the Georgian people” and the “Armenian”, “Azerbaijani”, etc. peoples (those comparable in status to the Georgians).

That said, both textbooks can be called “Soviet” in the sense that their account of national history is couched in terms of the pan-Soviet history of “the workers’ victorious struggle for liberation”. The aim of the textbook, in the authors’ words, is to ‘introduce the younger generation to the history of the Georgian people’s labour and centuries of struggle for a better future...’.⁷³ The name of the actor in the “centuries of struggle” is adjusted according to which people’s history is described: in *The History of Georgia* it is the “Georgian people” and in *The History of South Ossetia* it is the “Ossetian people”. When judging the importance of transformations in all spheres, the authors of the Ossetian textbook conclude that ‘the fraternal assistance of the workers of the Russian Federation, Georgia and other Soviet republics allowed South Ossetia to create an industrial base, implement collectivisation, and attain palpable successes in the building of culture’.⁷⁴

The role of the enemy (during the period of Sovietisation) in both textbooks is played by political opponents – “Mensheviks”. Articulations of the notion of enemy may employ ethnic categories but these are largely devoid of meaning. The operative word in the phrase “Georgian Mensheviks” is “Menshevik”; the epithet “Georgian” appears to refer not to any specific (ethno-)cultural characteristic but merely to their geographical location, i.e. these are Mensheviks operating in Georgia.⁷⁵

72 *Ibid.*, p.3.

73 V. Guchua & Sh. Meskhia (1979). *Op. Cit.*, p.4.

74 *Ibid.*, p.182.

75 Today this phrase can be read quite differently. The use of the qualifier “Georgian” may be seen as a reference to the “pro-Georgian” (ethno-centric) nature of “the Menshevik government” and as grounds for assessing the damage caused by this government to the “Ossetian” [or any other] people.

The Georgian Democratic Republic

In *The History of Georgia* the formation of the Transcaucasus Government (14th November 1917),⁷⁶ which was then transformed on 10th (23rd) February 1918 into the Transcaucasus *Seim*⁷⁷ and later (in May 1918) the Georgian Democratic Republic, is seen as ‘a temporary victory for the counter-revolution’.⁷⁸ The government and republic are, perforce, “counter-revolutionary” as “(Georgian) Mensheviks” play a leading role in them. Whereas in the description of events prior to October 1917 the main accusation against the Mensheviks is that they are acting in alliance with the bourgeoisie and delaying the further development of the revolution,⁷⁹ later on the main accusation is that they are collaborating with all kinds of “occupiers” who are ravaging and oppressing “the people”.

‘On 22nd April 1918, egged on by the German occupiers, the *Seim* proclaimed the “independence” of Transcaucasus from Russia. On 26th May 1918 the *Seim* collapsed. The Mensheviks proclaimed Georgia an “independent democratic republic”. On 4th June 1918 Menshevik Georgia concluded a peace treaty with Turkey ceding Ajaria, Akhalkalaki district and part of Akhaltsikhi district. German troops were soon brought into Georgia at the invitation of the Mensheviks. Consequently, the proclamation by the Mensheviks of an “independent democratic republic” turned out to be a blatant deception. It was in fact an occupation. It was ‘a union of German bayonets with the Menshevik government against the Bolshevik workers and peasants’ (Lenin).’⁸⁰

The authors do not recognise the formation of the Georgian Democratic Republic as a legitimate act responding to the needs of “the people” (“the Bolshevik workers and peasants”). They argue that “the Menshevik government”, from the moment of its inception, conducted a ‘policy against the interests of the people’,⁸¹ put the population in the power of “German occupiers”, provoked and then in the summer of 1918 ‘with the forces of its [military] guard and with the help of the German troops’ suppressed the rising revolutionary movement.⁸² According to the textbook, following their defeat in

76 ‘After the victory of the October Revolution the Georgian Mensheviks decided to convene an independent government from representatives of all the local parties and thereby break away Georgia and the Transcaucasus from Soviet Russia. On 14th November 1917 the Transcaucasus government was formed, adopting the name of the Transcaucasus Commissariat. The government was headed by the Georgian Mensheviks. [...] At the bidding of the representative of American imperialism the Commissariat established links with counter-revolutionary generals acting against Soviet Russia in the North Caucasus’ (V. Guchua & Sh. Meskhia (1987). *Op. Cit.*, pp.202-203).

77 ‘The Transcaucasus counter-revolutionary bloc, in an attempt to lend its government, even if only externally, the appearance of an elected body, decided to create the Transcaucasus *Seim*. The inauguration day of the *Seim*, 10th (23rd) February was marked by the Georgian Mensheviks by shooting Tiflis workers at a multi-nationality rally in Aleksandrovski sad’ (*Ibid.*, p.203).

78 *Ibid.*, p.203.

79 ‘The Mensheviks, who dominated the Soviets of workers, peasants and soldiers’ deputies, acted in complete concert with the bourgeoisie and took every opportunity to hold up the further development of the revolution’ (*Ibid.*, p.239).

80 *Ibid.*, p.205.

81 *Ibid.*

82 ‘The German occupiers invited by the Mensheviks viewed Georgia as their own colony. The German troops robbed and oppressed the population, levied taxes, took their cattle and provisions. The situation of the working class increasingly deteriorated. [...] a new rise in the revolutionary movement began’ (*Ibid.*, 207).

the First World War, ‘the Germans were forced to leave Georgia’⁸³ and “the Georgian Mensheviks” invited new “occupiers”:

‘The Georgian Mensheviks, after losing support following the departure of the Germans, requested England to move troops into Georgia in order to “guard against Bolshevism”. Consequently, the Mensheviks sold the “independence” of Georgia, this time to English imperialists.’⁸⁴

The implication that the “Mensheviks” were constantly in need of “support” is designed to communicate the idea that their government was weak and lacking in legitimacy. Trading in the motherland turns out to be the principal sin of the “Georgian Mensheviks” and is the main argument used to demonstrate that their policies were “against the interests of the people”.

Those assisting the “Mensheviks” are described exclusively as “occupying troops” (Germans, the English, etc.) who ‘take over the towns and villages of Georgia. Their arbitrary rule and crude violence caused revulsion and hatred among the population’.⁸⁵ However, before the beginning of 1920, all protests against “the Mensheviks and the occupiers” ‘were viciously suppressed’.⁸⁶ The “victory of Soviet authority” only becomes possible with the signing of “a peace treaty between the Mensheviks and Soviet Russia” against a background of “a raging economic crisis in spring 1920 in Georgia” (‘[M]enshevik rule had spelled disaster for Georgia’s industry, agriculture and culture’⁸⁷). The disastrousness of the situation in Georgia is contrasted with accounts of the victories of Soviet Russia.⁸⁸

The only action by “the Communist Party of Georgia” referred to in the textbook (apart from its decision to launch the armed uprising and create a Revolutionary Committee to oversee it), but one which entirely decided the outcome of the matter, is ‘the request [by the Revolutionary Committee] for assistance made to the government of Soviet Russia, which immediately sent the Red Army to the aid of the insurgents. On 25th February 1921 the insurgents and units of the Red Army entered Tbilisi. Soviet authority was established’.⁸⁹ We observe a similar approach in other Soviet textbooks. An essential element in the description of “the victory of Soviet authority in the Transcaucasus” is the reference to a request by the Revolutionary Committee for military assistance from

83 *Ibid.* p. 207.

84 *Ibid.* p. 207.

85 *Ibid.*, pp.207-208.

86 *Ibid.*, pp.208-209.

87 *Ibid.*, p.209.

88 ‘By this time Soviet Russia had ended the civil war victoriously. On 29th November the Soviet authorities had been victorious in Armenia’ (*Ibid.*, p.209). A few paragraphs earlier the authors stated that ‘on 28th April the Soviet authorities had been victorious in Azerbaijan’ (*Ibid.*, p.209).

89 *Ibid.*, p.209.

Soviet Russia and its (positive) response to this request by bringing in the 11th Red Army. There is no questioning of the legitimacy of such actions by Russia. Nor is this legitimacy affected by the reference to the fact that (at the moment the Red Army was brought in) a peace treaty existed between the two states (Menshevik Georgia and Soviet Russia). Soviet Russia's movement of troops on to Georgian territory is legitimated by reference to the fact that 'the Menshevik government [systematically] violated the terms of the treaty concluded with Soviet Russia'.⁹⁰ Thus Russia's violation (not revoking) of the treaty is perceived as an entirely natural and legitimate action.

Chapter 6 of *The History of the South Ossetians* ("The struggle of the workers of South Ossetia for Soviet authority") demonstrates the same attitude as the Georgian textbook to the legitimacy of the "Menshevik government".⁹¹ The "Menshevik government" is viewed as the principal source of the problems and is subject to the indignation of "the peoples of South Ossetia". As in the Georgian textbook, the opposing sides are designated as "the poor", "the revolutionary peasantry", etc. on the one hand, and "Mensheviks" and "oppressors" on the other. However, unlike the Georgian textbook, the Ossetian textbook uses the collective term "Guardists" much more frequently to identify the "opponents of the revolution" and "the oppressors of the population of South Ossetia"; a more detailed description of the geography of the actions of the "Guardists" is provided (in particular, these actions are linked to various regions in South Ossetia), and instances of organised resistance against them by "Ossetian workers" are reported.

As in the Georgian textbooks, "the poor", "the peasants" and "the workers" are sometimes given ethnic labels in the Ossetian textbooks, but here again this has little obvious significance other than the desire to portray the revolutionary movement as based on the masses and comprising "all peoples" and all territories. The use of phrases such as "the South Ossetian poor" or "the South Ossetian revolutionary masses" in an excerpt from a telegram from the Revolutionary Committee of South Ossetia to Lenin in February 1921 quoted in the textbook,⁹² refers to the geographical location of the sender ("oppressed and without rights") rather than to any special (ethno-cultural) characteristics. There are no significant differences between the telegrams cited in the textbooks (or various documents written by "the South Ossetian [and any other] poor/workers"). Some present day Ossetian and Russian historians, political scientists and

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.209.

⁹¹ In the section "Documents and Materials" an extract is cited [F]rom the appeal of the party "Chermen" (early June 1920): 'The South Ossetians, oppressed, starving and unclothed, have risen up. They are seeking the truth, a human right. The Menshevik government has been holding them in its unbearable grips for three years. It has not given them land or human rights. They no longer have the strength to be patient. The people of Ruk and Vanel have revolted. Our great duty is to help them, to rise up alongside them at this their moment of difficulty...' [L. A. Chibirov, G. D. Togoshvili, M. K. Dzhiyev & K. P. Pukhaev (1990). *Op. Cit.*, p. 158].

⁹² 'The South Ossetian poor welcome you, great leader, protector of the oppressed and without rights. The South Ossetian revolutionary masses have waged three years of war with the Mensheviks...South Ossetia has been devastated, burned to the ground, the revolutionary peasantry has been forced to flee to the Terek...At this moment, when Georgia is in the grip of the glow of red fire, the South Ossetian poor once again raise the banner of uprising against the oppressors and believes deeply that no one will stop it from arranging its life as it sees it and not at another's bidding' [*Ibid.*, p.160].

politicians judge that the events of 1920-1921 were ‘the first genocide of the Ossetian people’,⁹³ but the 1990 edition of the textbook *The History of the Ossetian People* does not distinguish between supporters and opponents of Soviet authority in ethno-cultural terms.⁹⁴ As the scale of the historical narrative shifts (in our case moving from the republican level (Georgia) to the level of autonomous oblast’ (Ossetia)) some details emerge which were previously missing in *The History of Georgia*, but these changes are not fundamental in nature. The “South Ossetian workers” (along with workers of other nationalities) are seen as acting out of (class-related) motives and holding (Bolshevik) ideological preferences.

The downplaying of any “kinship” between South and North Ossetia is further evidence of the preference for a class interpretation of historical facts in the Soviet textbooks. In the Soviet textbooks these two regions are viewed as adjacent territories with different political regimes in 1918-1920: “North Ossetia” is part of “Soviet Russia”; “South Ossetia” is part of “Menshevik Georgia”. In *The History of the South Ossetians* North Ossetia is a sanctuary to which people move from South Ossetia in order to escape persecution by “the Guardists”;⁹⁵ it is where the forces are mobilised for future resistance,⁹⁶ which ultimately determined the outcome and led to ‘the decisive establishment of Soviet authority in South Ossetia on 5th March 1921’.⁹⁷

Current popular debates over the unification of South and North Ossetia would have been impossible in the context of the Soviet historical narrative, which might have admitted the incorporation of South Ossetia into Soviet Russia (i.e. becoming “Soviet”), but not the unification of Ossetia. In *The History of Ossetia*, published in 2011,⁹⁸ the approach to this question changes fundamentally, as “the independence of the Ossetian people” is associated with the unification of South and North Ossetia.

93 M. M. Bliev (2006). *Iuzhnaia Osetia v kolliziakh Rossiisko-gruzinskikh otnoshenii* [South Ossetia in collision with Russian-Georgian relations]. Moscow; V. A. Zakharov & A. G. Areshev (2008). *Op. Cit.*; V. D. Dzidzoyev & K. G. Dzugayev (2007). *Iuzhnaia Osetia v retrospektive gruzino-osetinskikh otnoshenii* [South Ossetia in the retrospective of Georgian-Ossetian relations]. Tskhinval; R. S. Bzarov (2009). *Genotsid osetin: 1920 god* [The genocide of the Ossetians: 1920]. Tskhinval; V. I. Margiev & S. M. Kesayev (2009). *Gosudarstvennost’ Iuzhoi Osetii: Proshloe, nastoiashchee, budushchee* [The statehood of South Ossetia: past, present, future]. Vladikavkaz.

94 ‘The proclamation of Soviet authority caused fury amongst the opponents of the revolution. The Menshevik press was unstinting in the means it used to denigrate the actions of the revolutionary fighters of South Ossetia. In view of the clear supremacy of the enemy’s strength, the rebels withdrew, battling in the hills. The Guardists burned settlements, robbed and killed the inhabitants...Over 20,000 people, including women and children, went to North Ossetia to escape from persecution... During the withdrawal more than 5,000 people were killed or perished on the journey, 25 large settlements were burned down, 23,600 livestock animals were rustled’ [L. A. Chibirov, G. D. Togoshvili, M. K. Dzhihov & K. P. Pukhaev (1990). *Op. Cit.*, p.55].

95 ‘...over 20,000 people, including women and children, went to North Ossetia to escape persecution’ (*Ibid.*, p.155).

96 ‘...a combined rebel division was created out of the South Ossetian refugees in North Ossetia under the command of Sergei Gagloev. Once they had completed the arduous journey through the snowed-up passes of the Central Caucasus, the rebels launched an attack to the south which ended with the decisive establishment of Soviet authority in South Ossetia on 5th March 1921’ (*Ibid.*, p.157).

97 *Ibid.*, p.157.

98 V. D. Kuchiev (2011). *Op. Cit.*

The South Ossetian Autonomous Oblast'

The Georgian textbook does not cover the process of the formation of the South Ossetian Autonomous Oblast' directly: the only reference to disagreements within the Communist Party of Georgia over nation building and the assignment of autonomy to the different territories of the republic is the statement that:

'A group of nationalist-minded persons formed within the Communist Party of Georgia in 1921. This group opposed the creation of a Transcaucasus Federation and supported nationalism. It rejected the right to autonomy of Ajaria, Abkhazia and South Ossetia, thereby actually sliding back towards great power chauvinism...'⁹⁹

Priority in the Soviet version of history appears to be given to articulations of external and internal "enemies", particularly those who "slide back towards chauvinism". The history of the formation of the republics and autonomies is irrelevant.

In the *History of the South Ossetians* the portrayal of autonomous entities is entirely different. It describes the process in great detail based on the concept of "nations' right to self-determination". The authors draw particular attention to the fact that at its first session the Revolutionary Committee of Georgia conferred on "the fraternal peoples of Ajaria, Abkhazia and Ossetia" the right 'to determine their own fate'.¹⁰⁰ This policy is presented as part of "Lenin's nationality policy".¹⁰¹ At the same time, however, pupils may also draw another conclusion from their reading of the textbook: that South Ossetia was given autonomy as a sign of gratitude for its support in the struggle with the enemies of the revolution. An extract from the newspaper *Pravda Gruzii* cited in the textbook states: 'The Decree on the formation of the South Ossetian Autonomous Oblast' is the sole and best guarantee of the economic revival and political development of the heroic South Ossetian people, the truest defender of Soviet authority.'¹⁰² The formation of autonomy is the starting point of "a new life", emphasised on several occasions by the fact that the "workers of South Ossetia"¹⁰³ are obtaining all these benefits from the Soviet authorities which have conferred on them the right to create their own autonomy for the first time in history.

99 L. A. Chibirov, G. D. Togoshvili, M. K. Dzhiyev & K. P. Pukhaev (1990). *Op. Cit.*, p.157.

100 *Ibid.*, p.163.

101 *Ibid.*

102 *Ibid.*, p.164.

103 *Ibid.*

The contemporary textbook: from “solidarity of the workers” to “the brotherhood of the Ossetian people”

The textbook *The History of the Ossetians: The 20th Century*,¹⁰⁴ published in 2011 in the Republic of North Ossetia-Alania, presents a different historical narrative when compared to Soviet textbooks. It moves from a logic centred around class differences/solidarities to a logic which emphasises the “specific (ethno-)national aspects” of people’s interests and actions. In particular, the new textbook identifies some “Party and Soviet workers of Georgia” as “nationalists”, who give priority to defending the interests of “the Georgian people” and negotiate with the USSR authorities over “territories that had been Ossetian since time immemorial”:

‘South Ossetia had to overcome serious obstacles on the path to its autonomy. The group of nationalist-minded Party and Soviet workers headed by Mdivani objected to the notion of South Ossetian autonomy. However, they were of course unable to prevent the formation of Ossetian autonomy under the Soviet system. In return for their grudging agreement to “Ossetian autonomy”, the Georgian authorities demanded that some territories that had been Ossetian since time immemorial be transferred to Georgia (in 1922 the Kobi and Guda gorges were placed under the jurisdiction of the Georgian authorities). Therefore, South Ossetia paid for its autonomy with some of its territory. For the first time in its history since the downfall of the mediaeval Alan state, the Ossetian people had obtained their own statehood in the form of an autonomous republic (North Ossetia) and an autonomous oblast’ (South Ossetia)...’¹⁰⁵

Whereas the Soviet textbook interprets the autonomy of South Ossetia as a gesture of gratitude by the Soviet authorities for the loyalty and faithfulness shown by the Ossetian people, the contemporary textbook interprets it as the *natural* result of the “Soviet system” which ostensibly guaranteed the right to self-determination to all nations. The fact that not all “lands that had been Ossetian since time immemorial” were included in the autonomy is explained by the author as a result of opposition by “nationalist-minded [pro-Georgian] Party and Soviet workers” to the realisation of the Ossetian people’s right to self-determination. Today, this injustice (committed under pressure from “the Georgian authorities”) in relation to “territories that had been Ossetian since time immemorial” is energetically evoked, particularly in election campaign speeches and manifestos by certain candidates for the RSO presidency.

The textbook attempts to construct an image of a single and ancient Ossetian people and the “centuries-old dream” of the reunification of “the South and North branches” as reflected in the following passage: ‘The North Ossetian Autonomous Republic was

104 V. D. Kuchiev (2011). *Op. Cit.*, p.255

105 *Ibid.*, p.141.

incorporated into the RSFSR at the wish of its people; **South Ossetia was re-incorporated against the wishes of the people** into Georgia'¹⁰⁶ (emphasis in original). “The Ossetian people” is united in its desire for incorporation into Russia. The responsibility for “dividing” it is ascribed to “Georgian nationalists” and “the (Soviet) Georgian administration”. The implication is that this was the aim of a deliberate policy by “the Georgian authorities”. They forced the South Ossetians to adopt the Georgian alphabet, depriving them of a common language (with the North Ossetians):

‘... this led to an extremely absurd situation: North Ossetia adopted the Latin script whilst South Ossetia adopted the Georgian script. Two alphabets for the same language! This drove a wedge between North and South Ossetia: the North Ossetians were no longer able to read a single line of what their brothers over the mountain range published, since the Northerners did not know the Georgian language.’¹⁰⁷

A shared system of notation is presented as contributing to the unity of a people. There is no attempt to evaluate the proposition that the action of the authorities in Georgia might well have been guided by the same notion, i.e. that all inhabitants of Georgia should be united by a single (Georgian) script. The emphasis on the cultural (and linguistic) unity of the politically-divided Ossetian people (living in different states), which is absent in the Soviet textbooks, enables the Ossetian language (destroyed in the Soviet period, but previously shared) to become the ideological focus of movements for independence and national rebirth.

The idea is expressed in present day public debates that these and similar actions were aimed at the complete assimilation of the Ossetians, with the Georgians to the south and with the Russians to the north, in order to increase the authorities’ control over the region at the USSR and republic level. Commentators recall events during the Stalin era when this language policy was sharply rejected by the population. Those involved in these protests (such as Vaneyev, Dzhioev, Bekoev, Gabuev and others) were accused of “Ossetian nationalism”, tried and sentenced to 25 years’ imprisonment.¹⁰⁸

106 *Ibid.*, p.141. The question of unification arises in a number of different contexts. When describing the work of the 11th Congress of the Ossetian People, which took place from late 1919 to early 1920, the author of the textbook lists the agenda items: allocation of Ossetian parishes within North and South Ossetia, the creation of an independent Ossetian diocese, and the unification of North and South Ossetia (*Ibid.*, pp.131-132).

107 *Ibid.*, p.185.

108 OSinform (2010). ‘Vladimir Vaneev: “KOGDA IA VERNUS” ...[O kul’turnom genotside] Chast’ 1 [Vladimir Vaneev: “WHEN I RETURN” ...[On cultural genocide] Part 1]’. Available in Russian at <http://osinform.ru/18908-vladimir-vaneev-kogda-ya-vernus-o-kulturnom.html>; M. Dedyakov (2012). ‘“Rastdzinad”. Khrushchev i vopros ob’edinenia Osetii [“Rastdzinad”. Khrushchev and the question of the unification of Ossetia]’. Available in Russian at <http://magas-dedyakov.livejournal.com/82672.html>. ‘Vaneev, Vladimir’. Available in Russian at [bitly http://bit.ly/VfomEm](http://bit.ly/VfomEm).

The Georgian Democratic Republic

The author of *The History of the Ossetians: The 20th Century* (2011) focuses on the March uprising of 1918 in South Ossetia as a key event in the nation's history. In his version the revolutionary movement in South Ossetia was no longer simply about 'social class but also national liberation'.¹⁰⁹ The main oppressors of the nation (following the victory of the Soviet authorities in Russia) were now "Georgian princes" and "Menshevik Georgia"; the principal defender and ally for "the Ossetian people" was the RSFSR:

'...the movement developed under the banner of liberation from the domination of Georgian princes and the incorporation of South Ossetia into the Russian Federal Soviet Republic. South Ossetia achieved the victory of Soviet authority through five armed uprisings which were viciously suppressed by the troops of Menshevik Georgia.'¹¹⁰

Central to the account of the national liberation movement is the conflict between "(the Ossetian) people" and "representatives of the Menshevik government of Georgia", which:

'...in March 1918 sent troops into South Ossetia with orders to disarm the armed units of the South Ossetian insurgents. The members of this punitive expedition dealt harshly with the peasants. They occupied the settlement of Kornis and demanded that the ringleaders be named and handed over; if not they threatened to shoot 40 inhabitants who were being held hostage. Armed peasants from neighbouring settlements rushed to the aid of the insurgents. They surrounded the punitive unit and demanded that they free the hostages and leave the village. When they refused to meet these demands the insurgents inflicted a crushing defeat on the Georgian "Guardists".'¹¹¹

The "Georgian Guardists" are opposed, not to "the workers of South Ossetia" (as in the Soviet textbook) but to "South Ossetian insurgents" protecting their right to unite with "the North Ossetians" in the RSFSR.

The use of the phrase "punitive units" is intended to allude to atrocities committed by "the Georgian authorities". A statement quoted in the textbook by one of the leaders of the Georgian Bolsheviks, Filipp Makharadze, supports the implication that atrocities were actually committed during the "bloody events of 1920": 'the brutalised People's Guardists, under the instructions of the government of Zhordania and Ramishvili, perpetrated atrocities very seldom seen in history.'¹¹² At the same time the authorities of

109 V. D. Kuchiev [2011]. *Op. Cit.*, p.90.

110 *Ibid.*, pp.90-91.

111 *Ibid.*, p.90.

112 *Ibid.*, p.136.

the RSFSR are also portrayed as the defenders of the interests of the population of South Ossetia. The textbook goes into the events of 1920 in some detail, citing an extract from the official note signed by the People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs of the RSFSR and USSR, Georgi Chicherin:

‘We have learned with alarm that Georgian troops have been sent into South Ossetia, where a Soviet republic has been proclaimed, in order to annihilate that republic. We insist, if this is true, that the troops be withdrawn from Ossetia, and believe that Ossetia must have the authority that it wishes for itself. Georgian intervention in Ossetian matters would be an utterly unwarranted intervention in another [country’s] affairs.’¹¹³

The modern (2011) textbook, when describing the events of the 20th century, emphasises facts and events relating to Georgian-Ossetian resistance. The territorial conflict is ethnicised and, according to the new version of the textbook, it existed throughout the entire 20th century. The “Ossetians” are viewed as a “people” divided between two states: a friendly Russia (“the North Ossetians”) and a Georgia that wishes to suppress its interests (“the South Ossetians”). The topic of “the unification of the Ossetians” (“a shared historical destiny”) dominates this historical narrative. A key *leitmotif* is the articulation of the unity of the Ossetian people. Various theories are discussed as to its origin and the shared history of its northern and southern “branches”. This issue is central to campaign manifestos of candidates for the post of President of South Ossetia.¹¹⁴ There appears to be a consensus within present day South Ossetian society on the need for the unification of the two Ossetias. It is only the precise form of unification which remains disputed: incorporation into Russia,¹¹⁵ or into an independent Ossetian state. Neither of these versions, in our opinion, can be part of any scenario for a realistic settlement of the Georgian-Ossetian conflict.

Conclusion

The fundamental issue in the Georgian-Ossetian conflict is the dispute over which people (“the Georgian” or “the Ossetian”) possesses the legitimate right to the territory of the former South Ossetian Autonomous Oblast’. The sides cite mutually exclusive “historical evidence” designed to demonstrate the eligibility of their own claims and the unfounded

113 *Ibid.*, p.136.

114 The elections for the post of President of the Republic of South Ossetia which took place on 13th November 2011. The results of the second round (27th November 2011) were overturned by a Resolution of the Supreme Court of the republic. The date for the new elections was 25th March 2012.

115 After the collapse of the USSR in December 1991, the administration of South Ossetia held a referendum in January 1992 on leaving Georgia and being incorporated into Russia. An important role in this decision was played by the idea of the unification of the Ossetian people; the territories on which it resides, as a result of the collapse of the USSR, were incorporated within different states. In the referendum, the overwhelming majority of those who took part supported leaving Georgia and incorporation into Russia.

nature of their opponent's claims. This dispute is a zero-sum game,¹¹⁶ in which one side can only win at the expense of the other. The professionalism of historical judgements is no longer an absolute priority. Any public statement is judged in terms of loyalty "to the interests of one's own [Ossetian or Georgian] people". Each side's own (independent) statehood is viewed as one of the most important attributes of the (modern) "nation"; its defence is seen as the most important "national interest". It is therefore no accident that one of the key issues in the debate is that of the legitimacy of the founding of the South Ossetian Autonomous Oblast' as an independent administrative unit in 1922.

Our comparative analysis of Soviet textbooks (*The History of Georgia* (1987) and *The History of the South Ossetians* (1990)) has shown how the Soviet historical narrative operated when the scale of the narrative shifted. Like the other Soviet textbooks, the Ossetian textbook (1992) reproduces the model of history that is "national in form, and socialist in content". The use of ethnic categories, ethnic labels, etc., does not refer to special "ethnic interests",¹¹⁷ but is intended to communicate the role of a certain Soviet people (in our case the South Ossetians) in the building of socialist society. Without proposing any new theoretical or methodological justification, the textbook authors refer to the South Ossetians as independent actors in the political process. The "Ossetian people" are portrayed as a player which is weaker than the others ("a fellow combatant and assistant to Russian and Georgian revolutionaries"), but one whose historical role as actor (with its own experience of struggle, (local) victories, the Pantheon of heroes, etc.) is attested through the process of public articulation.

A distinctive feature of the current situation is that South Ossetia does not publish its own textbooks of national history: Russian textbooks are used in its schools. The description of the history of the formation of the two Ossetian autonomies (one incorporated within the Georgian SSR, one within the RSFSR) shifts the emphasis from a shared (with "the Georgian people") class interest (in liberation from the exploiters and the creation of a socialist state) to the formation of the statehood of the Ossetian people. The modern textbook emphasises facts and events associated with Georgian-Ossetian resistance. The territorial conflict is ethnicised and, in the new version, it has existed throughout the entire 20th century. The actors in the political process (in particular, the rulers of the Georgian SSR) are viewed as representatives of a specific ("Georgian") nation, defending its interests and intending to weaken its opponents. The present day opposition is rooted in the Soviet past, which lends the actions of the present day South Ossetian authorities greater legitimacy.

116 This metaphor refers to a situation in which gamblers are playing between themselves (not in a casino) and the winner collects the stakes of the other players. In our case the disputed stake is the legitimate right to form statehood on a certain territory.

117 All Soviet peoples, the argument goes, are the bearers of class interests focused on a struggle with various types of "exploiters".

CHAPTER 5

The De-Sovietisation and Nationalisation of History in Abkhaz Textbooks

Inar Gitsba

Introduction

The collapse of the Soviet Union and its consequences for education in the post-Soviet space of the newly independent states created new political and social realities. The mono-centric system of government and decision making based on communist ideology ceased to exist. The process of secession took place against the background of a struggle between the centre and nationalist-minded elites in the republics.¹ The newly formed states were faced with the task of creating their own models of state governance covering all aspects of life within their societies, based on local cultural and ideological values.

The collapse of the Soviet Union was accompanied by a multitude of armed conflicts, one of which was the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict. However, as Natella Akaba remarks, '[I]t is customary to view the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict in the context of the collapse of the USSR. Although this epoch-making event was undoubtedly a powerful catalyst in the escalation of this conflict and its transition into armed violence, we cannot ignore the fact that there were already serious Abkhaz-Georgian disputes and inter-ethnic tensions when the USSR appeared to be an impregnable stronghold'.²

Even during the Soviet era, there were fundamental differences in the ways that Abkhaz and Georgian historians interpreted particular events in their academic (and pseudo-academic) historiographical studies of the ethno-political processes in Abkhazia and Georgian-Abkhaz relations in the 20th century. In 1977 members of the Abkhaz cultural intelligentsia sent a series of letters to the senior administration of the Communist Party of the USSR, drawing attention, amongst other things, to 'the process of the Georgianisation of Abkhaz history' by Georgian academics.³ The authors of one famous letter, "One hundred and thirty" drew the attention of the senior Party administration of the USSR to various tricks used by Georgian academics, who 'artificially substitute[d] facts'⁴ which were inconvenient for Georgian historiography and dressed up their actions with 'formalistic kowtowing to Marxist-Leninist theory'.⁵ The letter's authors believed that their Georgian opponents were manipulating the idea of friendship between the peoples:

1 As Viktor Shnirelman argues, 'the politicisation of ethnicity by the Bolsheviks in the 1920s and their creation of a hierarchical ethno-political administrative structure meant that ethno-nationalism became a recurring factor in domestic policy at all levels' (V. A. Shnirelman [2003]. *Voiny pamyati. Mify, identichnost' i politika na Kavkaze* [Wars of Memory. Myths, identity and politics in the Caucasus]. IKTs 'Akademkniga': Moscow, p.11).

2 N. Akaba & I. Khintba [2011]. *Transformatsiia gruzino-abkhazskogo konflikta: pereosmislenie paradigmy* [The transformation of the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict: reinterpreting paradigms]. Sukhum, p.6.

3 Abkhaz letter of 1977, "One hundred and thirty": To the Presidium of the Eighth Session of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, to the General Secretary of the the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, comrade Brezhnev, to Members and Candidates for membership of the Politburo of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the RSFSR, comrade Yasnov (I. G. Marykhuba [1994]. *Abkhazia v sovetskuu epokhu; Abkhazskiy pis'ma (1947-1989): Sb. dokumentov, T.1* [Abkhazia during the Soviet era; Abkhaz letters (1947-1989): Collected documents, Vol. 1]. Et'-fa: Akua [Sukhum], p.167).

4 *Ibid.*, p.167.

5 *Ibid.*, p.167.

‘...if references in the sources to “Abkhaz” are understood as referring to “Georgians”, then this is presented as contributing to friendship between the Abkhaz and Georgia peoples (?!). However, if references to “Abkhaz” are taken as referring to the Abkhaz themselves, then, the argument goes, this prevents friendship between these two peoples.’⁶

The authors of this letter were similarly alarmed at the ‘current contents of the school curricula for the history of Georgia in secondary and higher education’.⁷ According to the letter: ‘[A]ll of them without exception are written (inevitably) in the spirit of Georgian historiography, in which historical Abkhazia is no more than an ethnographical corner of Georgia.’⁸ In another letter, members of the academic staff at the Abkhaz State Museum inform the Department of Science of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union of ‘the emergence of nationalism, the erosion of ideological education, incitement of chauvinist sentiment in the Georgian population with regard to other peoples, the refusal to recognise the role and contributions of other peoples of the Georgian SSR to the historical fate of the country, [and] the outright falsification of history’.⁹ The letter’s authors tell the Central Committee that ‘young people in education, students and school children, have been educated for decades using textbooks which unceasingly emphasise the role of Georgians in history, and are filled with nationalist self-congratulation, etc.’.¹⁰

The Soviet administration’s response to these letters was to issue the Decree of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Georgia, dated 25th April 1978,¹¹ and the Decree of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and the Council of Ministers of the USSR, dated 1st June 1978.¹² The Decree of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Georgia acknowledged ‘serious mistakes in the publications of materials associated with historiography and problems of patriotic and international

6 *Ibid.*, p.168.

7 *Ibid.*, p.169.

8 *Ibid.*, p.169.

9 Bans on academic research on Abkhaz studies, ‘Voprosy etnokul’turnoy istorii abkhazov [Questions of the ethno-cultural history of the Abkhaz]: To the department of science of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, to the First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Georgia, comrade Shevardnadze, to the First Secretary of the Abkhaz Regional Committee of the Communist Party of Georgia comrade Khintba [I. G. Marykhuba (1994). *Op. Cit.*, p.191].

10 *Ibid.*

11 Shevardnadze’s Party opposes the Decree of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Georgia: ‘O merakh po dal’neishemu razvitiyu ekonomiki i kul’tury Abkhazskoi ASSR, usileniiu organizatorskoi i ideino-vospitatel’noi raboty sredi trudiaschikh avtonomnoy respublikii’ [On measures on the further development of the economy and culture of the Abkhaz SSR, the successful strengthening of organisational and ideological-educational work with the workers of the autonomous republic] [I. G. Marykhuba (1994). *Op. Cit.*, p.279].

12 ‘Ot knuta k pryianiku’ Moskvyy-Abkhazii. [‘From the stick to the carrot’ of Moscow-Abkhazia]. Decree of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and the Council of Ministers of the USSR. ‘O dal’neyshem razvitiyu ekonomiki i kul’tury Abkhazskoy ASSR’ No. 424 [On the future development of the economy and culture of the Abkhaz SSR, No. 424] [I. G. Marykhuba (1994). *Op. Cit.*, p.275].

education'.¹³ The blame for these mistakes was placed on the Party's regional committee and sections of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Georgia, who were accused of exercising inadequate control over print and publications.¹⁴ Responsibility for rectifying the mistakes of the office of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Georgia was assigned to its department of propaganda and agitation, science and educational institutions, which had to 'step up its control over publications relating to the history of Georgia and Abkhazia'.¹⁵

The aim of this article is to identify differences between the approaches to the teaching of history in Soviet and contemporary schools, and also between the contents of textbooks covering the history of Abkhazia at different periods. The study focused on the representations in school textbooks of the processes of the formation of the USSR, the Sovietisation of Abkhazia, how its territorial borders were assigned and its change in status. Most of the conclusions presented in the article were made on the basis of an analysis of three textbooks covering Abkhaz history: the last Soviet textbook;¹⁶ the first post-Soviet textbook;¹⁷ and the present day textbook.¹⁸ Excerpts describing the events of 1917-1938 were selected for analysis. In addition, a number of interviews were conducted with the authors of the textbooks and education experts who had been directly involved in drafting and editing of the Abkhaz history textbooks. During the interviews we were interested in: how the transition unfolded from the Soviet to the post-Soviet versions of history; who initiated these processes and when; what were the problems articulated regarding the Soviet version of the history of Abkhazia; and what did the experts think is the basis for the versions presented to present day pupils? Some results of the analysis of these data are presented below.

The context of the transition from the Soviet to the present day textbook on Abkhaz history

There was visible tension in Abkhazia in late 1988 and early 1989, particularly over the "ethnic" division of the Abkhaz State University (into a Georgian and non-Georgian sector) and the creation of a branch of Tbilisi State University in Sukhum in the offices within the Georgian sector. This caused widespread protests and sharply increased

13 Shevardnadze's Party opposes the Decree of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Georgia: 'O merakh po dal'neishemu razvitiu ekonomiki i kul'tury Abkhazskoi ASSR, usileniu organizatorskoi i ideino-vospitatel'noi raboty sredi trudiashchikh avtonomnoy respubliki' [On measures on the further development of the economy and culture of the Abkhaz SSR, the successful strengthening of organisational and ideological-educational work with the workers of the autonomous republic] (I. G. Marykhuba [1994]. *Op. Cit.*, pp.281-282).

14 *Ibid.*, pp.281-282.

15 *Ibid.*, p.284.

16 V. Guchua & Sh. Meskhia [1987]. *Istoriia Gruzii [The history of Georgia]. Textbook for Years 7-10.* Ganatleba: Tbilisi.

17 S. Z. Lakoba [ed] (1993). *Istoriia Abkhazii [The history of Abkhazia]. Textbook.* Atashara: Gudauta.

18 I. Kuakvaskir (2010). *Istoriia Abkhazii [s drevnikh vremen do nashikh dnei] [The History of Abkhazia [from antiquity to the present day]]. Textbook for Years 5-9.* Ministry of Education: Sukhum.

tension in Georgian-Abkhaz relations in the autonomous republic. It became clear that the Abkhaz public had a number of complaints over the policies of the republic's authorities. These were related to the preservation of Abkhaz culture and toponyms, access to senior political office, the right to a dominant share in local economic resources, the ability to obtain education in the native language (Abkhaz), among others. Concerns which had emerged in the Abkhaz academic sphere over the portrayal of the history of Abkhazia and the Abkhaz people by their Georgian colleagues erupted into open academic warfare.

One of the catalysts in the escalation of the historians' polemics involved theories advanced by Georgian academics, which their Abkhaz colleagues saw as unscientific and lacking any basis in fact. These were, in particular, theories which presented the Abkhaz as not appearing on the territory of Abkhazia until the 17th century (e.g. Melikishvili's theory of Georgian feudalism, "Ibero-Caucasian studies", and the theories of Ingorokva and Lordkipanidze).¹⁹ A section of the Georgian intelligentsia supported the concept of "dual indigeneity" which proposed the existence of two ethnic blocs in Colchis: the ancestors of the Georgians (Kartvelians) and the ancestors of the Abkhaz (Adygheyans). This assumed that the latter appeared in Colchis in the first centuries AD, and this area had previously been inhabited by Kartvelians alone.²⁰ Abkhaz historians dismissed these theories as baseless and cited data from studies that provided evidence that the Abkhaz are the country's indigenous population.

Another cause for confrontation was the impossibility of publishing an Abkhaz textbook on Abkhaz history, as well as the harsh censorship to which textbooks were subjected. During the Soviet era, Abkhaz history was not taught as a separate discipline, but was instead part of the "history of Georgia" course.

As one of the experts recounted in an interview,

'during the Soviet era there was absolutely no question of teaching our native history. The Georgian political regime and the whole education system, *per se*, prevented this. It was impossible to raise the question of teaching the history [of Abkhazia] in higher education until the events of 1977-1978.²¹ Then the first higher education

19 I. G. Marykhuba (1993). *Ob abkhazakh i Abkhazii: Istoricheskaja spravka [On the Abkhaz and Abkhazia: a historical note]*. Sukhum; I. G. Marykhuba (1994). *Op. Cit.*, pp.40-53.

20 G. A. Melikishvili & O. D. Lordkipanidze (1989). *Ocherki istorii Gruzii [Essays on Georgian history]*. Metsniereba: Tbilisi, pp.188-335.

21 This is a reference to letters from the Abkhaz cultural intelligentsia to the senior Party administration of the USSR and the Decrees issued in response by the Soviet administration which refer particularly to the approval by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and the Council of Ministers of the USSR of a proposal by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Georgia and the Abkhaz Regional Committee of the Party on the organisation of the State University in Sukhum, on the task assigned to the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the Georgian SSR and the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the Abkhaz ASSR to resolve all disputes on the toponyms of the Abkhaz ASSR and also on the gradual resolution of the issue of the organisation of television broadcasts in Abkhaz and other languages.

institution textbooks began to be written; these were of course subject to severe censorship. What was written was sent to Tbilisi for approval. We did not study the history of Abkhazia in school. Even Georgian history only started to be taught after those events in the late seventies. There had been an idea that this course on Georgian history would have a section covering the history of Abkhazia, but I honestly cannot remember that we did this. It was only after the [1992-1993] war, even during the war, that a working group was set up in Gudauta to create a curriculum for teaching the history of Abkhazia in schools. Now it is taught in all schools.²²

It was clear from our interviews with Abkhaz experts that they had had no disagreements over the need to create their own textbook on Abkhaz history. They were all critical of the actions of the Georgian Soviet political administration, which used every means possible to obstruct and severely censor any academic articles arguing that the Abkhaz were the indigenous people who settled on the territory of Abkhazia in ancient times and had lived on it since time immemorial. Practically all interviewees felt that the promotion of theories denying this fact was an important contributory factor in the later kindling of conflict.

‘The academics were constantly issuing polemical articles. The Georgian academics wrote that the Abkhaz were immigrants to Abkhaz territory and that the Georgians were the indigenous people of this land. The Abkhaz academics, of course, cited their own arguments and presented their own documentary evidence and logic. After the war, when the question of writing a textbook arose, we realised that our own historical methodology was outdated. Soviet ideology, but also Georgian historiography, had their effects on Soviet-era historical schools. Overall, our entire historiography, all our books, materials, including bibliographical materials were all materials published in the fifties, seventies and eighties. All history was constructed on the basis of “monism in history”, the class approach and the Marxist-Leninist approach; historical events were examined based on class contradictions and Marxist-Leninist theory...naturally our [post-soviet] textbooks will act as a counterbalance to Georgian textbooks since we have diametrically opposing interpretations of historical events. Our textbooks are based on the principle that, for the moment, we merely show, unfortunately, the development of the historical process as it were in terms of the political aspects of history.’²³

This view was also shared by another interviewee:

‘Naturally, history is highly ideologised. This is psychologically inevitable given that there was a ban on the history of our own country for a long time – its very existence

²² Interview with I. Kuakuaskir, Sukhum, 24/10/2011.

²³ Interview with I. Kuakuaskir, Sukhum, 24/10/2011.

was disputed, with Georgian academics telling us that we had no history, and we are now demonstrating to them that the opposite is in fact true.²⁴

What emerges from the interviews is that there had long since been a mature understanding of the need to write a textbook on Abkhaz history and the Abkhaz people. The conflict that had been developing since the end of 1988 between Georgian and Abkhaz historians spilled over into heated discussions at conferences of the peoples of the Caucasus, at the founding of the Confederation of Mountain Peoples and the publication of the Abkhaz newspaper *Aidgylara*. An open (provocative) letter was then published by Zviad Gamsakhurdia “to the Georgians of northwest Georgia” (i.e. those living on the territory of Abkhazia), in which the author gave instructions on how one should behave in relation to the Abkhaz and called on his supporters ‘to fight the *apsua* separatists with all their might’.²⁵ The opposition that emerged was expressed in debates over the contents of an Abkhaz history textbook and acted as a stimulus to starting work on writing it.

A first attempt at publishing a separate textbook on Abkhaz history was a book edited by Anchabadze, Dzidzariya and Kuprava, published in 1986.²⁶ In the words of one interviewee, history professor Stanislav Lakoba: ‘...perhaps the only good thing about the publication of that textbook was that it was called *The History of Abkhazia*. In the course of the preparation of this textbook, the authors were summoned on more than one occasion to the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Georgia to consult with Party officials on the contents of the textbook’.²⁷ As is clear from the interviewee’s words, conceptually the contents of the textbook were Georgia-centric and involved many compromises. In the chapters devoted to the most controversial issues, those related to teaching of the events of the early medieval period, the version presented was based on suppression and over-simplifications.

As one of the authors of the first post-war textbook on the *History of Abkhazia* said,²⁸

‘we started work on the first Abkhaz textbook on Abkhaz history virtually in a state of war (the first blood was shed on 15th-16th July 1989). The work was conducted with the Abkhaz Research Institute (ABNII), of which Vladislav Ardzinba was director at the time.’²⁹ An historiographical database was created from a selection

24 Interview with D. Pilia, Sukhum, 25/10/2011.

25 V. A. Shnirelman (2003). *Op. Cit.*, pp.399-403.

26 Z. V. Anchabadze, G. A. Dzidzaria & A. E. Kuprava (1986). *Istoria Abkhazii [The history of Abkhazia]*. Atashara: Abkhaz State University.

27 Interview with Stanislav Lakoba, Sukhum, 28/10/2011.

28 S.Z. Lakoba (1993). *Op. Cit.*

29 V. Ardzinba in 1992 was Chair of the Abkhaz State Committee for Defence, and led the national liberation movement of the Abkhaz people. Between 1994-2004 he was president of Abkhazia. The authorial team consisted of historians, archaeologists, ethnographers, folklore specialists, literature and art critics who worked on various sections covering the history and culture of Abkhazia.

of documents and studies providing evidence that the Abkhaz were a single people formed in the early Middle Ages on the territory of Abkhazia. This evidence base also included some materials from Georgian periodicals from the 1890s. Work had already begun on the textbook in December 1990 while the USSR was still in existence. By that time there was no longer any political or scientific censorship by Georgia. Those involved in the writing of the textbook were Ardzinba, Voronov, Lakoba, Bgazhba, Chirikba, Katsia and other Abkhaz academics. The textbook was based on new materials presenting a different interpretation [refuting the theories of Georgian historians] of the Abkhaz Kingdom, the Christian conversion of Abkhazia, and description of the [Abkhaz] architecture of the Byzantine Church. Documents were [introduced] covering the Georgian colonisation of Abkhazia in the 19th century and exonerating the Abkhaz.^{30 31}

The authors proposed their own version of the processes of Sovietisation and collectivisation, which were presented as relatively peaceful. The process of Abkhazia's incorporation into Russia was described on the basis of the new documents. The textbook was designed for use in schools and institutes of higher education in Abkhazia and was printed (in Russian) before the start of the Georgian-Abkhaz war, although the original edition was mislaid or destroyed in occupied Sukhum during the war. (There were a small number of copies left in archives and libraries.) In 1993 the decision was taken to republish the textbook and a new edition was printed in the same year in Gudauta.

After the 1992-1993 Georgian-Abkhaz war the education system in Abkhazia underwent significant changes. The main innovation was the creation of an Abkhaz national school system and the introduction of the compulsory study of the Abkhaz language. The use of Abkhaz as the language of instruction and an education based on Abkhaz national culture were seen as material signs that these were “genuinely national schools”. It was assumed that such schools would contribute to the development of new generations of bearers of ethno-cultural traditions of the people, based on their full mastering of their native language.

The fact that the study of the Abkhaz language played a key role in the new schools was also reflected in the “Concept on National Education of the Republic of Abkhazia” approved by the Ministry of Education in 1996. The Concept emphasises on more than one occasion that ‘the study of the Abkhaz language as the state language

30 ‘An increase in nationalist-colonialist oppression led in 1877 to renewed outrage in Abkhazia. These movements were closely linked to the events of the 1877-1878 Russo-Turkish War. The Abkhaz population's support for Turkey led to political repressions even more severe than in 1866. For participating in this insurrection almost all the Abkhaz population of Gudauta and Kodor districts was pronounced “guilty”. The Abkhaz, with the exclusion of some members of the higher social classes, were forbidden to settle near the shore, to reside in Sukhum and the deserted “villages” of Gudauta, Ochamchir’ (*Ibid.*, pp.201-202) ... ‘In December 1906 a proposal to “exonerate” the Abkhaz people was supported by the Chair of the Council of Ministers of Tsarist Russia, the Minister for Internal Affairs Stolypin, and on 27th April 1907 Nikolai II revoked the Tsar's command of 31st May 1880. A month later General Pavlov and Weidenbaum, after solemn prayers in the Lykhni church, proclaimed the lifting of “guilt” from the Abkhaz population’ (*Ibid.*, p. 227).

31 Interview with S. Lakoba, Sukhum, 28/10/2011.

shall be compulsory in all educational establishments regardless of the language of instruction, departmental affiliation or administrative/legal form.³² ... At the present stage of development of education there must be a transition to the Abkhaz language of instruction in all professional education programmes'.³³ The emphasis placed on the need to study the national language and to study school subjects in that language is explicable in terms of the discrimination against the Abkhaz language throughout the existence of the Abkhaz Autonomous Republic within the Georgian SSR. At that time the Abkhaz language was “banned” from the school education system.

The textbook *The History of Georgia*

The fourth edition of the Soviet textbook on Georgian history, which we examine within this study, was approved by the Ministry of Education of the Georgian SSR and published in 1987 (in Russian).³⁴ Its interpretation of historical events and processes is based on a recognition of the importance of Marxist-Leninist principles in the building of socialism and approaches to the study of history.

The textbook begins with a description of primitive communal forms of society in Georgia and goes on to examine the historical development of the Georgian people, which it links with the territory of Soviet Georgia. Ritualistic phrases about the “multinational” population of Georgia and the “genuine friendship” of the peoples inhabiting it abound,³⁵ with occasional references to ethnic categories designed to indicate the presence of these peoples in Georgia’s history. The textbook tells us of traces of human habitation from the pre-tribal era and the Neolithic era in many corners of the country, noting in particular, amongst others, the village of “Kveda Iashtskhva” (near Sukhum), Kistriki (in the environs of Gudauta)³⁶ – territories of modern Abkhazia. The textbook does not provide (or provides extremely scant) information on how tribes (apart from “Georgian” ones) settled the relevant area at that time:

‘Georgian tribes and tribal unions had strong links with the cultured peoples of the Ancient East. The Georgian tribes’ immediate neighbours to the south were the Hattians, Mitannians and Urartians who formed powerful states in the Ancient East. After the fall of the state of Urartu the Armenians became neighbours of the Georgian tribes to the south, and various Caucasian tribes to the north.’³⁷

32 Ministry of Education of the Republic of Abkhazia (1996). *Concept on National Education of the Republic of Abkhazia, Sukhum*.

33 *Ibid.*

34 V. Guchua & Sh. Meskhia (1987). *Op. Cit.*

35 ‘Georgia is a multinational republic. Abkhaz, Ossetians, Russians, Azerbaijanis, Armenians live and work here together with the Georgians, striving for a better future. In their work and battle together the foundations were laid for their rapprochement which in the period of Soviet authority grew into genuine friendship’ (*Ibid.*, p.3).

36 *Ibid.*, p.6.

37 *Ibid.*, p.10.

The only reference to the ancient Abkhaz is found in a description of the consequences of the collapse of the ancient Empire of Colchis:

‘In the 1st and 2nd centuries the Laz, Apsil, Abasg and other fiefdoms came into being out of the ruins of the ancient Empire of Colchis, of which the Laz became particularly strong.’³⁸

Abkhaz textbooks published later affirm that Abkhaz tribes (Apsil, Abasg, Sanig, Misiman, etc.) were the Georgian tribes’ northern neighbours.

The section covering the period of Sovietisation in *The History of Georgia* (1987) consists of a description of the preparation and implementation of the Great October Socialist Revolution, the struggles of the Soviet authorities against the “Menshevik government in Georgia” and the “foreign occupiers”, the victories and establishment of Soviet authority in Georgia and the restoration of the national economy, etc. We discover references to the special role of Georgians in the process of establishing and strengthening Soviet authority; other peoples are viewed as their “assistants”. The foreword to the textbook states: ‘Abkhaz, Ossetians, Russians, Azerbaijanis, Armenians live and work here together with the Georgians, striving for a better future.’³⁹

References to “friendship between peoples”, which is presented as a result of the effective implementation of the Leninist principles of nationalities policy, are combined with the suppression of the facts of inter-ethnic conflict and tensions between the peoples populating the USSR, and Georgia in particular, and dissatisfaction with the policy of building a unified, homogenous Georgian nation. The objections to the textbook are the same as those that the authors of the “One hundred and thirty” letter levelled against the Georgian government at the end of the 1970s: “Georgia-centrism”, the refusal to recognise the other peoples populating Georgia as historical actors in their own right, etc.

The first ‘*History of Abkhazia*’ textbook

Ancient history

In the *History of Abkhazia* textbook, published in 1993,⁴⁰ pupils’ first encounter with Abkhaz history begins with a description of the “ethnic origins of the ancient Abkhaz tribes” which are ascribed to the Stone Age; the Abkhaz language and its close links with the languages of the Western Caucasus; the primitive communal society and proto-class entities on the territory of Abkhazia.

38 *Ibid.*, p.25.

39 *Ibid.*, p.3.

40 S.Z. Lakoba (1993). *Op. Cit.*

The foreword to this work, written by a collective of authors, notes that it ‘covers significant chronological frameworks and contains a number of radical reassessments of the historical past based on documentary materials. The history of the Abkhaz people – the indigenous population of Abkhazia – is viewed not in isolation but in close interaction with other peoples and political and cultural centres of the ancient and medieval worlds. Due attention in the textbook is paid to the tragic stages of the history of the 19th and 20th centuries’.⁴¹ Talk of “genuine friendship” is replaced by a reference to the ‘many difficult problems of political events in Abkhazia at different stages in its rich history’.⁴² The textbook’s authors describe the Soviet era as a ‘period of the complex, tragic and complete failure of the Soviet social experiment’.⁴³ For example, according to the textbook, ‘[T]he experience of nation state building in the USSR showed that acts such as the abolition of Abkhazia’s treaty-based federation with Georgia, etc., caused enormous damage to the strengthening of friendship between the peoples accorded majority and minority status’.⁴⁴

In their account of the origins of the Abkhaz people, the authors refer to Ancient Greek and also Ancient Roman written sources which mention ‘the Ancient Abkhaz tribes populating Abkhazia – the Apsil, Abazg, Sanig, Misimam, etc.’⁴⁵ Citing Marr of the Academy of Sciences, they write that the ‘transformation of the ancient names “Abazg”, “Abazgia” into “Abkhaz”, “Abkhazia” occurred due to reasons connected with the Western Kartvelian (Megrelian) language. The terms entered the Georgian language in this modified form and, through it, the other languages of the world.’⁴⁶

As evidence of the antiquity of the Abkhaz people and their indigenous presence on the territory of modern Abkhazia, references are made to archaeological artefacts in which the authors ‘trace influences from Phrygia and the adjoining areas of northeastern Anatolia. The daggers, helmets, badges and belts provide clear evidence of the impact of Urartian culture, as do the pectorals of Iran, [and] the fibulas of the Greek islands via Asia Minor’.⁴⁷ They contend that all these artefacts provide evidence of the antiquity of the Abkhaz, that the ancient Abkhaz tribes were in independent (and entirely unmediated by ancient Georgian tribes) communication with the ancient civilisations of the East and had multilateral ties with their neighbours.

The early Soviet period

Turning now to the period of Sovietisation and the building of the Abkhaz Autonomous Republic within the Georgian SSR, this is divided into two periods in the 1993

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p.3.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p.3.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p.3.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p.339.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p.5.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p.35.

Abkhaz textbook. Section III, chapter 6 describes the events of 1917-1921 and section IV, chapter 1 the events of 1921-1941.

Chapter 6 reveals events previously uncovered in the Soviet era textbooks, such as the founding of the local office of the Provisional Government in Abkhazia and the Committee of Public Safety chaired by the Abkhaz prince Shervashidze (Chachba) following a meeting of members of the population of the Sukhum *okrug* on 10th March 1917, along with the militia (police) headed by Tatashem Marshaniya. On 20th October of the same year a delegation of the Abkhaz people headed by the chairman of the Provisional Government and the Committee of Public Safety in Abkhazia took part in the signing of the “Union Treaty” founding the Southeastern Union of Cossack troops, the Caucasus Mountain People and the free peoples of the steppes.⁴⁸ Under this Treaty, the United Government of the Southeastern Union started work from 16th November in Ekaterinodar.

The textbook goes on to relate how on 28th November 1917 the United Government passed a “Declaration” in which it was noted:

‘Recognising the democratic federal republic as the optimum form of state organisation of Russia, the Southeastern Union will adhere in its practical activities to behaviour that is characteristic of supporters of a federal form of government. Guaranteeing its members full independence with respect to their internal life, the Union undertakes to collaborate with them with all the means at the Union’s disposal on preparing their internal structure as independent states of the future Russian Democratic Federal Republic.’⁴⁹

The textbook continues to relate how the Association of United Mountain Peoples of the Caucasus (SOGK), which was founded in May 1917 at the 1st Mountain Congress, also joined the Southeastern Union. In November of the same year the SOGK formed the Mountain Republic, the government of which also included a representative from Abkhazia. As the textbook states, one of the principal tasks for these bodies was to prepare a congress of representatives of the whole Abkhaz people. At a general congress held on 8th November 1917 the Abkhaz People’s Council was formed, the local executive body of the Association of Mountain Peoples. This Council passed the Declaration and Constitution of the Abkhaz People’s Council, which emphasised the self-determination of the Abkhaz people. The Congress’s Declaration noted in particular:

48 This Union consisted of: The Cossack troops of the Don, Kuban, Ter, Astrakhan, Urals; the mountain peoples of the North Caucasus, Dagestan, Sukhum *okrug* (representatives of the above bodies of the Provisional Government in Abkhazia and the Committee of Public Safety) and Zakatalsky *okrug* as well as the free steppe peoples of the Astrakhan and Stavropol *gubernii*.

49 S.Z. Lakoba [1993]. *Op. Cit.*, p. 281.

‘In the current emergency period, when much is being razed to the ground and much is being created anew, when living conditions are changing radically for all of Russia and consequently of Abkhazia, each people must carefully ensure that its rights and interests do not suffer from these trials and are not forgotten as Russia is restructured on a new basis. The Abkhaz people are convinced that its brothers – the mountain peoples of the North Caucasus and Dagestan – will support it in the event that it defends its rights. One of the next important tasks for the Abkhaz People’s Council is to work on the self-determination of the Abkhaz people.’⁵⁰

The authors’ intention in including these events in the textbook on Abkhaz history is not merely to acquaint pupils with the processes within Abkhaz society associated with the building of their own statehood. What the authors are attempting here is to justify the emergence of Abkhaz statehood in terms that are independent of the events taking place simultaneously in Georgia. This strategy of identifying Abkhaz executive bodies as players in the political scene which are independent of and equal to Georgia goes further than this. In a reference to bilateral Georgian-Abkhaz relations based on legally binding mutual treaties between equal partners, the authors describe the links between the Abkhaz People’s Council (APC) and the National Council of Georgia (NCG):

‘The APC was created before the National Council of Georgia (NCG) and had organisational links with the Association of United Mountain Peoples of the Caucasus. However, the atrocities associated with the civil war in the North Caucasus weakened these links. It was in these difficult circumstances that the first contacts were made between the APC and the National Council of Georgia. At a meeting in Tiflis on 9th February 1918 the Abkhaz delegation headed by Prince Aleksandr Shervashidze aimed to have “simply good neighbourly relations with Georgia as an equal neighbour”. The representative of the National Council of Georgia, Chkhenkeli, attempted at a meeting with Shervashidze to raise the question of Abkhazia’s leaving the Association of Mountain Peoples of the Caucasus. On the very same day an agreement was concluded between the APC and the NCG “on the question of establishing relations between Georgia and Abkhazia”. The agreement included the following three clauses:

1. That a unified and indivisible Abkhazia be restored along the borders from the river Ingur to the river Mzymta, incorporating Abkhazia itself and Samurzakan’ or what is the present day Sukhum *okrug*.
2. The form of the future political structure of the unified Abkhazia must be developed in accordance with the principle of national self-determination at a democratically convened Constituent Assembly of Abkhazia.

3. In the event that Abkhazia and Georgia wish to conclude political treaties with other national states, they undertake between themselves to hold preliminary talks on this between themselves.⁵¹

The pupils can draw the conclusion from this that Georgian-Abkhaz relations were based at that time on equal rights and that the assertions by certain Georgian historians alleging that ‘Abkhazia was offered wide-ranging autonomy as part of Georgia at that time’ are unfounded.⁵² On the one hand, the document cited does not contain a single word about autonomy; on the other, on 9th February 1918 Georgia had not yet been proclaimed an independent republic and was incorporated together with Armenia and Azerbaijan within the Transcaucasus Democratic Federal Republic. Abkhazia itself continued to be part of the Association of Mountain Peoples of the Caucasus. Therefore, there could be no question in the agreement of Georgia offering to Abkhazia *wide-ranging autonomy*. The authors emphasise that the agreement was intended to establish relations based on equal rights between Abkhazia and Georgia as two states independent of each other.

The textbook refers to the events of the Batumi Peace Conference (11th-26th May 1918), the minutes of the first session of which show ‘that the question of the North Caucasus Republic (“the Mountain Republic”) was discussed. On the same day the independence of the republic and its secession from Soviet Russia were proclaimed. The North Caucasus Republic consisted of Dagestan, Chechnya-Ingushetia, Ossetia, Karachaevo-Balkaria, Kabarda, Abkhazia and Adygheia. Just 15 days later the Transcaucasus Federation collapsed and Georgia was proclaimed a democratic republic...’.⁵³

The collapse of the Transcaucasus Democratic Federal Republic (ZDFR – formed on 9th April 1918) and the formation of the independent Georgian, Armenian, Azerbaijani Democratic Republics are described as the result of pressure exerted by Turkey and Germany.⁵⁴ In contrast to the Soviet textbook on the history of Georgia (1987), where the formation of the Georgian Democratic Republic is presented as ‘a deception practised on the Georgian people’ and the occupation of Georgia by foreign troops,⁵⁵ in the Abkhaz

51 *Ibid.*, p.285.

52 *Ibid.*

53 *Ibid.*, p.289.

54 Quoting the textbook: ‘The Turkish delegation in agreement with its ally Germany demanded the immediate abolition of the Transcaucasus Federation...on 26th May 1918 the Turkish delegation issued an ultimatum on the immediate abolition of the ZDFR (Islamic Azerbaijan was aligned with Turkey and Christian Armenia and Georgia with Germany). The Federation collapsed on the same day and on 26th May 1918 the Georgian Democratic Republic, on 27th May the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic, and on the 28th the Armenian Democratic Republic were formed. On the day on which the Georgian Republic was formed a Declaration of Independence was approved (on 26th May 1918) which did not define the borders of Georgia’ (*Ibid.*, p.289).

55 ‘Rejecting the conditions of the Brest Peace [Treaty], the Transcaucasus *Seym* [the representative body of the ZDFR] entered into separate negotiations with Turkey. The negotiations did not produce any results. The Turks resumed their attack and seized the Karsk and Batumi *okrug* and entered Georgia. On 22nd April 1918, incited by the German occupiers the *Seym* proclaimed the “independence” of Transcaucasus from Russia, and on 26th May 1918 the *Seym* collapsed. The Mensheviks proclaimed Georgia an “independent democratic republic” [V. Guchua & Sh. Meskhia (1987). *Op. Cit.*, p.205]. The authors of this textbook go on, citing Lenin, to indicate that the proclamation by the Mensheviks of an “independent democratic republic” turned out to be a blatant deception. In fact this was an occupation. It was “a union of German bayonets with the Menshevik government against the Bolshevik workers and peasants” (*Ibid.*).

textbook (1993) the ‘proclamation of Georgian independence is essential since this is the only way the country can be saved from invasion by Turkey, with German help’.⁵⁶

Listing all these events could be seen as an attempt to demonstrate that at the moment that the Proclamation of Georgian Independence was issued, Abkhazia was outside Georgia’s territorial borders and legal jurisdiction. The authors of the textbook see the form and nature of the governmental agreements concluded in 1918 between the countries attending the Batumi Conference as evidence that Abkhazia existed independently of Georgia and that the Georgian administration of the day was in no doubt as to the historical right of the Abkhaz people to an Abkhazia running between the Mzymta and Ingur rivers.

An important place in the textbook is given to the description of the part played by the Abkhaz people in the struggle to establish Soviet authority in Abkhazia and to establish links with the RSFSR and ‘personally with Lenin, his fellow combatants, as well as the administration of the Sochi Soviet’,⁵⁷ whilst the suppression of Soviet authority in Abkhazia (in May 1918) is described as the establishment of a military dictatorship by Georgian Mensheviks who were against the establishment of Soviet power in Abkhazia and aimed at merging Abkhazia with Georgia:

‘Soviet authority, which was in place for more than 40 days in Sukhum (from 8th April to 17th May 1918) was overturned...After the suppression of the Bolshevik attack in Sukhum in May 1918, the Georgian Mensheviks recalled the Abkhaz People’s Council and decided to revive it with a new membership and under new influence from Georgia, not the Mountain people, with the ultimate aim of merging Abkhazia with Georgia.’⁵⁸

The topic of lost statehood is central to the argument used to justify the present day right to independent existence.

The present day *History of Abkhazia* textbook

The *History of Abkhazia* textbook published in 2010,⁵⁹ like the first post-Soviet textbook (1993), covers the history of Abkhazia from antiquity to today. Its account begins with a description of the life of primitive people on the territory of Abkhazia, the identification of the Abkhaz as one of the most ancient inhabitants of the Caucasus, a description of

56 S. Z. Lakoba (1993). *Op. Cit.*, p.292.

57 *Ibid.*, pp.286-287. In the Soviet textbook on the history of Georgia the relevant events are described in just one sentence: ‘The uprising was also victorious in Abkhazia, where the Soviet authorities held out for 40 days’ (V. Guchua & Sh. Meskhia (1987). *Op. Cit.*, p. 204).

58 S. Z. Lakoba (1993). *Op. Cit.*, pp.287-289.

59 I. Kuakuaskir (2010). *Op. Cit.*

their beliefs, and the Abkhaz language as part of the Abkhaz-Adyghe linguistic grouping, etc. In addition to the topics covered in the 1993 textbook, the textbook also covers contemporary political events, including the 1992-1993 war.

According to the textbook, after the eventual victory of the Soviet authorities in Abkhazia in March 1921,⁶⁰ and following negotiations between representatives of the Abkhaz and Georgian authorities, the decision was made to form an independent SSR of Abkhazia. The authors cite “complex relations between nationalities” in the region as one factor in the political accommodations made:

‘The new [Soviet] authorities had inherited a ruined economy and complex relations between nationalities. The nationality question was particularly acute and the authorities immediately set about resolving it. Based on the “Declaration of the Rights of the Peoples of Russia”, it was decided on 26th March 1921 at an extended session of the Organising Bureau of the All-Russian Communist Party (Bolshevik) and the Revolutionary Committee to proclaim Abkhazia as a Soviet Socialist Republic. By agreement between Ordzhonikidze and Eshba, on 28th March a meeting was held in Batumi of the workers of the Caucasus Bureau of the Central Committee attended by Ordzhonikidze, Kavtaradze, Eshba [and] Lakoba among others. The meeting approved the decision of the Abkhaz administration to form an independent Abkhaz SSR. On 21st May 1921 the Georgian Revolutionary Committee signed a declaration “On the independence of the Socialist Soviet Republic of Abkhazia”.’⁶¹

The change in the status of what had been a state entity following the proclamation of the Abkhaz SSR is ascribed to Stalin’s vigorous refusal to countenance the idea of an independent Abkhazia. The transition to autonomy within the Georgian SSR is described as the Georgian administration’s first step on the way to the gradual abolition of Abkhazia’s independence, and Stalin (“a Georgian by nationality”) turns out to have a personal interest in this process:

‘...Abkhazia’s independence was soon under threat. At Stalin’s instigation a behind-the-scenes campaign for its abolition was initiated. A meeting of the Plenum of the Caucasus Bureau of the Central Committee on 5th July 1921 (attended by Stalin and members of the Caucasus Bureau) considered the situation in Abkhazia. The Plenum decreed: “that Party work be undertaken towards unifying Abkhazia and Georgia in the form of an autonomous republic incorporated within the Georgian SSR.”

60 As described in the textbook: ‘At the start of 1921 the Caucasus Bureau of the Bolsheviks began preparations for an armed uprising in Abkhazia. The Temporary *Okrug* Committee of the Party and the Temporary Revolutionary Committee were created consisting of Eshba, Lakoba [and] Akirtava. An Abkhaz insurgent unit under the command of Akirtava together with units of the Red Army attacked Menshevik Georgia on the border with Russia on the river Psou. Soviet authority was established in Gagra on 22nd February and in Gudauta on 26th February. On 4th March 1921 the Red Army and the insurgent units liberated Sukhum. On 6th March 1921 Soviet authority was established in Ochamchira, in Gal on the 8th. By 10th March 1921 Soviet authority was established in the whole of Abkhazia’ (*Ibid.*, p.206).

61 *Ibid.*, p.206.

Thus the fate of Abkhazia's independence was sealed...Abkhazia attempted to conclude a treaty with Russia but all its attempts were blocked by Stalin, who did not even want to hear of an independent Abkhazia...on 16th November 1921 the Caucasus Bureau of the Central Committee passed a Decree stating that the existence of an economically and political independent Abkhazia was not viable and that it would be incorporated into Georgia on the basis of a treaty.⁶²

According to the version in the textbook, the treaty of 16th November 1921 referred in legal terms to the instituting of a federation on the basis of the unification of two republics with equal rights (Abkhazia and Georgia) and not the incorporation of one into the other. As the textbook states, the first clause of the union treaty signed on 16th December 1921 refers to the contracting parties as 'The Socialist Soviet Republic of Georgia and the Socialist Soviet Republic of Abkhazia'.⁶³ In addition, the author draws attention to 'Abkhazia's special position within the ZSFSR,⁶⁴ the Union of the SSR and also even within the Georgian SSR [which] was enshrined in the country's Constitution. Article 5 defined Abkhazia as a sovereign state which exercises its own state authority over its territory, independently of any other authority'.⁶⁵

The final abolition of Abkhaz independence is associated with the Decree of 11th February 1931, which the author portrays as the outcome of a systematic set of actions undertaken by the Georgian government and Stalin personally: '[A]s a consequence of the preceding processes, on 11th February 1931 the 6th Congress of the Soviets of Abkhazia approved a decree transforming the [treaty-based] Abkhaz SSR into an autonomous republic. Thus, at the instigation of Stalin and his entourage, the fate of the treaty of 16th December 1921 was decided.'⁶⁶

Whereas the process of the transformation of the Socialist Soviet Republic of Abkhazia into an autonomous republic within the Georgian SSR is viewed in *The History of Georgia* (1987) in terms of the successful building of socialism which required 'the rooting out of enmity and distrust between peoples, the securing and strengthening of mutual understanding and friendship between them',⁶⁷ in the 1993 edition of the Abkhaz textbook this is given a fundamentally different interpretation: 'the experience of nation state building in the USSR showed that acts, such as the abolition of Abkhazia's

62 *Ibid.*, pp.207-208.

63 'The Socialist Soviet Republic of Georgia and the Socialist Soviet Republic of Abkhazia enter into a military, political and economic and financial union' (*Ibid.*, p.211).

64 ZSFSR – Azerbaijan, Armenia and Georgia were united to form the Transcaucasian [Zakavkazskaya] Socialist Federal Soviet Republic.

65 *Ibid.*, pp.208-209.

66 *Ibid.*, p.210.

67 'The successful building of socialism required the rooting out of enmity and distrust between peoples, the securing and strengthening of mutual understanding and friendship between them. In order to implement these tasks in accordance with Lenin's nationality policy the Abkhaz and Ajarian Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republics and the South Ossetian Autonomous Oblast' were created' [V. Guchua & Sh. Meskhia [1987]. *Op. Cit.*, p. 212].

federation by treaty with Georgia, etc., caused enormous damage to the strengthening of friendship between the peoples accorded majority and minority status.’⁶⁸

According to the authors the first protests of the Abkhaz people, unhappy with the policy of the Soviet authorities, surfaced in the 1930s. They state that the incorporation of the Abkhaz SSR into the Georgian SSR and the implementation of forced collectivisation led to a storm of protest manifested in “nationwide gatherings of Abkhaz” ‘expressing their distrust of the nation state policy of the Soviet authorities, aimed at impinging on the rights of the Abkhaz people’.⁶⁹

The textbook redefines the role of “national distinctiveness” in Soviet society. Soviet notions that the rights of all peoples were fully protected within the USSR are replaced by a belief that nationality was a significant factor in the unequal allocation of resources and opportunities. In particular, the repression of the 1930s is seen as ethnically motivated:

‘The repressions by Stalin and Beria in Abkhazia were carried out on the basis of nationality...the rights of the Abkhaz people were flouted in the most blatant manner. Georgianisation was stepped up. In 1938 ‘it was impossible to find a single Abkhaz’ in any of Abkhazia’s institutions: “All posts from the most senior to the most junior were occupied by people from outside” ...Teaching of children in Abkhaz schools was changed from the Abkhaz to Georgian language, and Abkhaz texts were changed to the Georgian script. The First Secretary of the Abkhaz Regional Committee of the Communist Party of Georgia, Mgeladze, stated categorically: “There is no such language as Abkhaz. Abkhaz speak a debased form of the Georgian language and vigorous efforts are now being taken to remedy this”.’⁷⁰

And further:

‘From 1937 to 1953 tens of thousands of Georgians were resettled from Georgia’s internal districts into Abkhazia, significantly increasing their percentage of the population (6 percent in 1886; 24 percent in 1897; 30 percent in 1939; 40 percent in 1959). The mass resettlements pursued one aim – the assimilation of the indigenous population – the Abkhaz – within a Georgian ethno-cultural environment.’⁷¹

It is, therefore, clear that one of the key ideas propounded by the author of this textbook, in relation to the period described, is to present pupils with information about the difficult stages of the Abkhaz people’s struggle to maintain their distinctive ethnos and culture, and the efforts of the Georgian republican administration aimed at impinging on their rights.

68 S. Z. Lakoba (1993). *Op. Cit.*, p.339.

69 *Ibid.*

70 *Ibid.*, pp.213-214.

71 *Ibid.*, p.215.

Conclusion

As Zvyagelskaia notes, ‘ethnicity can also be used to mobilise people where the binary opposition “us” and “them” is perceived as mutually exclusive, as “their” attempts to wipe out “our” cultural distinctiveness by pushing the ethnos to the brink of extinction and absorption within the dominant ethnic grouping (or the one that claims to be dominant)’.⁷² Viewing the contents of the Abkhaz textbooks in this context, we can say that the account of the historical events of the period selected is constructed on the basis of an opposition between the interests of the republican administration of the Georgian SSR and the interests of the Abkhaz people.

The justice of the principles of the Soviet nationality policy (for example the rights of the nations to self-determination) is not questioned. The fact that these principles were not realised in relation to the Abkhaz people is blamed on the administration of the Georgian SSR and on Josef Stalin personally, whose actions in relation to Abkhazia are described as the actions of a “Georgian” hostile to the Abkhaz. The refusal by the presentday Georgian administration to recognise Abkhazia’s independence is judged to be a continuation of the Soviet line of “abolishing Abkhazia’s independence”.

The aim of the Abkhaz textbooks is to form the notion in the minds of the up-and-coming generation that both the Soviet and presentday administration of Georgia bear the guilt for the armed conflict that began during the dismantling of the USSR. Despite viewing the emergence (resurrection) of its own independent statehood from the ruins of the USSR as justified, the Georgian administration refused to accord the same right to Abkhazia. By emphasising the fact that Abkhazia (briefly) was a republic within the USSR with equal status to Georgia, the authors are demonstrating that Abkhazia has a right to its own statehood which is equal to Georgia’s today.

72 I. Zvyagelskaia (2008). *Spetsifika etnopoliticheskikh konfliktov i podkhodi k ikh ureguirovaniyu* [Specific aspects of ethnic conflicts and approaches to resolving them]. Navona: Moscow, p.25.

CHAPTER 6

“Prison of the Peoples” and “Friendship of Peoples” in Soviet and Post-Soviet History Textbooks of the USSR/Russia

Oksana Karpenko

Introduction

Controversy has raged since the mid-1990s over the content of Russian history textbooks, the most widespread and widely read (compulsory) source of knowledge of historical events and the public’s perception of them.¹ Today, discussions about their content operate within a context of wider debate around the figure of Joseph Stalin and the phenomenon of “Stalinist modernisation”, the USSR’s responsibility for the outbreak of the Second World War and reassessments of the USSR’s victory, accusations that the Soviet regime “occupied” the territories of the former Soviet republics, assessments of the contemporary political regime in Russia, and so on.

Researchers studying reforms in the teaching of history subdivide them into various periods,² but all agree that the 1980s and 1990s represented a period in which the state lost control over the school history curriculum, which it only regained in the 2000s. Commentators and participants of the reforms may be divided provisionally into two camps, each with their own view of developments in the 2000s: “statists” and “liberals”.³

The “Kreder Case” in 1997 was the first time an accusation of promoting a “liberal interpretation of 20th century history” was successfully used to discredit an opponent.⁴

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- 1 The 1990s saw a sharp rise in interest in school history textbooks and the teaching of history in secondary schools as a whole, in the number of academic publications analysing school textbooks, and in academic conferences dealing directly with the problems of teaching history, etc. See: V. K. Batsyn (1997). *O reforme istoricheskogo i obshchestvovedcheskogo obrazovaniia v sovremennoi rossiiskoi shkole. Prepodavanie istorii v shkole [On the reform of history and social science education in the modern Russian school. The teaching of history in schools]*. No. 8; R. Maier (2000). *Sily demokratizatsii v Rossii. Prepodavanie istorii i podgotovka shkol'nykh uchebnikov. Rossiia i Germaniia. Na puti k antitotalitarnomu soglasiu [Forces of democratisation in Russia. The teaching of history and the preparation of school textbooks. Russia and Germany. Towards anti-totalitarian consensus]*. Moscow; F. Bomsdorf & G. Bordiugov (eds) (2002). *Obrazy Rossii and stran Baltii v uchebnikakh istorii [Images of Russia and the Baltic countries in history textbooks]*. Moscow; K. Aimermakher & G. Bordiugov (eds) (2002). *Istoriki chitaiut uchebniki istorii. Traditsionnye i novye kontseptsii uchebnoi literatury [Historians read history textbooks. Traditional and new concepts of school texts]*. AIRO-XX: Moscow; N. Dedkov (2002). ‘Problema uchebnika istorii [The history textbook problem]’ in G. Bordiugov (ed) (2002). *Istoricheskie issledovaniia v Rossii – 2. Sem' let spustia [Historical research in Russia – 2. Seven years on]*. AIRO-XX: Moscow.
 - 2 In their 2006 article, Viazemskii and Strelova identify five stages in the development of school history education in the modern Russian Federation: 1988-1992, 1992-1996, 1996-1999, 2000-2004 and 2004-present day [E. Viazemskii & O. Iu. Strelova (2006). ‘Osnovnye etapy i vedushchie tendentsii razvitiia shkol'nogo istoricheskogo obrazovaniia v Rossii’ [The main stages and leading trends in school history education in Russia], *Pervoe sentiabria*]. Their periodisation is based on the development of the regulatory framework for history education (drafting of legislation, norms and standards and their approval, etc.). Sveshnikov identifies four stages: late 1980s-mid-1990s, mid-1990s-early 2000s, 2001-2007 and 2007-present day [A. Sveshnikov (2004). ‘Bor'ba vokrug shkol'nykh uchebnikov istorii v postsovetskoi Rossii: osnovnye tendentsii i rezul'taty [The struggle around school history textbooks in post-Soviet Russia: main trends and outcomes]’, *Neprikosnovennyi zapas* No. 4 (36). Available in Russian at <http://magazines.russ.ru/nz/2004/4/sv10.html>]. Sveshnikov’s periodisation is based on various events connected with the gradual return of the Russian state to history education and the return of “state ideology” to this discipline.
 - 3 This division is undoubtedly an over-simplification of the situation, which does not reflect the full complexity of the positions presented by opponents. By “statist” I refer here to a systemic view that broadly supports the trend in the 2000s towards the normalisation (and hegemony) of a “patriotic” view of history in schools; “liberals” are critical of this trend.
 - 4 The “Kreder Case” was the first public scandal over a history textbook which erupted in 1997 when the Duma of Voronezh oblast’ “refused to recommend” (thus *de facto* banned) history teachers from using Aleksandr Kreder’s textbook in class. The Duma deputies ‘did not like the excessively “liberal approach” to the portrayal of the history of the 20th century, evidence of which they saw for example in the fact that the Soviet Union was shown as guilty to a significant extent for the outbreak of the Second World War’ [R. Maier (2000). *Op. Cit.*]. They were angered by the fact that the textbook was published with the financial support of the Soros Foundation (*ibid.*).

In the ensuing debate, Kreder, the author of the history textbook,⁵ was accused of “propagating anti-state ideology” and the phrase “liberal interpretation” became shorthand for this (“hostile”) ideology.⁶ This led to the “blacklisting” of the author’s company and his textbook, which had previously gone through three editions (1995, 1996, 1997) and had been given an official seal of approval (“Recommended by the Main Board of the Development of General and Middle Education of the Ministry of Education of the Russian Federation”). A similar fate befell a textbook written by Dolutskii, *A History of the Fatherland. The 20th century* in 2003.⁷ This textbook, which was first published in 1993 (and went through six editions), had the Ministry’s seal of approval removed at an emergency session of the history section of the Expert Advisory Board.⁸ The session was convened following criticism of the textbook by the Education Minister, Vladimir Filippov, at a Russian Ministry of Education panel (on 25th November 2003). The author of the textbook was accused of “liberalism”, evidence of which was detected in the questions the author set pupils on the nature of the political regime that has existed in Russia in the 2000s.⁹ Various news agencies quote Vladimir Putin (at that time the President of the Russian Federation) approving the ban on the textbook:

“Contemporary textbooks for schools and colleges must not become a platform for a new political and ideological battle”, the Russian president said during a conversation with history pupils at the Russian State Library. “The facts of history must be set out in these textbooks, they must nurture a feeling of pride in one’s history and one’s country”, Putin emphasised. He recalled that he had recently had a meeting with veterans where they had again raised the question of history textbooks.¹⁰

5 A. A. Kreder (1997) *Noveishaia istoriia, XX v.: Ucheb. Dlia osnovnoi shk. [Recent history, 20th century: textbook for middle schools: [in 2 parts] 3rd edition, revised and expanded]*. Centre of Humanities: Moscow.

6 There was a lively debate on the situation in the *Rossiiskaia gazeta* newspaper (in the 12.11.1997 edition in particular) where representatives of the ministry, the textbook’s author and representatives of public opinion took part in the debate. Critics of the textbook, in particular Yuriy Polyakov (who had trained as an historian), spoke of a ‘paradoxical’ situation ‘where the state through its policy on school textbooks is funding and promoting an anti-state ideology’ (Iu. Polyakov. ‘History lesson’, *Rossiiskaia gazeta*, 12th November 1997). Father Andrey Kurayev stated in the same vein: ‘It is a matter for learned academics to dispute over whose conception of Russian history is the most correct, but a state school does not have the right to educate children based on anti-state and anti-national ideas’ (A. Kuraev. ‘History lesson’, *Rossiiskaia gazeta*, 12th November 1997) [For more details see A. Sveshnikov (2004). *Op. Cit.*].

7 I. I. Dolutskii (2002). *Otechestvennaia istoriia [History of the Fatherland]. 20th century. Textbook for Years 10-11 in general education institutions. Part 2*. Mnemozina: Moscow.

8 The state had the last word in the “debates” between the state and the authors of the textbooks in both cases (*Ibid.*, A. A. Kreder (1997). *Op. Cit.*). After their seal of approval was revoked, the textbooks and the “guilty” authors have not been reinstated.

9 In the words of Dolutskii, when commenting on the Minister’s actions on a live broadcast on the radio station *Ekho Moskv*, the main thing that had angered the Minister was one exercise in which the pupil was asked to compare two statements and identify which of the authors’ statements was correct. These were a quotation from the well-known journalist Iurii Burtin, who wrote that a coup d’état had taken place in Russia, resulting in the establishment of a regime based on the personal authority of Putin – an authoritarian dictatorship; and a statement from a modern politician, the leader of the *labloko* party, Grigorii Iavlinskii, who proposed that by 2001 Russia would have already become a police state. Later in the textbook the pupil is given a task to work on his own, to either refute or support the points of view expressed.

10 Article ‘Putin: “Textbooks should not become a platform for political struggle”, Pravda.ru, 27th November 2003. Available at <http://www.pravda.ru/news/politics/27-11-2003/13300-0/>. Also see Svetlana Kirillova, “Politikorrektura. Sumeet li Rossiiskaja akademiia nauk pomoch’ Ministerstvu obrazovaniia v ekspertize uchebnikov istorii? [Politikorrektura. Can the Russian Academy of Sciences assist the Ministry of Education in the examination of the history books?]’. Available at <http://ps.1september.ru/article.php?ID=200401301>.

Putin’s statement included a call for the hegemony (to borrow Gramsci’s term) of a patriotic state ideology, linked with a normative demand that “pride in one’s history and one’s country” be felt and nurtured. In this context, the call to dispense with one more “platform for a new political and ideological battle” effectively means ruling out any critical examination or discussion of history due to “patriotic” concerns. Instead, it is proposed that pupils *must* simply assimilate it. The appeal to veterans’ views is a gambit commonly used to justify action taken by the Russian administration to control the national memory. This group’s views are seen as having greater weight and value than the view of the many (“liberally”-orientated) historians, who state that authoritarian practices of managing the history curriculum are unacceptable and call for the establishment of a process of dialogue in the classroom around a variety of competing points of view.

Since the early 2000s the demand to “rethink the Russian historical process from a patriotic state position”, the rejection of “the ideology of liberalism”, which is “destructive to the national consciousness”, has increasingly received state backing. The first textbook written from this perspective was the “notorious” *New History of Russia 1945-2006: Teachers’ Book* by Filippov.¹¹ In 2007 it was subjected to intense scrutiny and criticism from the public, which did not support the “patriotic” shift in the teaching of history. However, this failed to prevent the book from being promoted or state funding from being provided to devise and publish a set of “new generation”¹² textbooks edited by Filippov. It is the only set of teaching methods advertised on the website of the publisher “Prosveshchenie” and recommended by the Ministry of Education of the Russian Federation as “the new word” in the teaching of history in Russia.¹³

Banning textbooks (withdrawing the official seal of approval, removing them from school libraries, etc.), as in the cases of Kreder and Dolutskii, and the state’s active financial and administrative support for Filippov’s textbook (through Ministry communications and guidance on teaching methods) are evidence of a growing tendency for the state (represented by individual officials, state bodies or committees created by them, etc.) to ‘tinker with history’,¹⁴ and to intervene in the contents of textbooks to restore their function of providing a patriotic education

11 A. V. Filippov (ed) [2007]. *Istoriia Rossii, 1945-2006 Kniga dlia uchitel'ia* [Russian history, 1945-2006. Teacher’s book]. Prosveshchenie: Moscow. Since then the book has gone through three editions.

12 A. A. Danilov et al (eds) [2008]. *Istoriia Rossii, 1945-2008* [Russian history, 1945-2008]. Year 11: Textbook for pupils of general education institutions: Including insert. 2nd edition. Prosveshchenie: Moscow. (There is a teacher’s book and methodological guide for this textbook.) The same authors later published: A. A. Danilov et al (eds) [2008]. *Istoriia Rossii, 1900-1945* [Russian history, 1900-1945]. Year 11: Textbook for pupils of general education institutions. Prosveshchenie: Moscow. (There is a teacher’s book and practical exercise book for this textbook.)

13 On 19th February 2008 a circular on teaching methods was sent out to this effect [Prosveshchenie [2008]. ‘Metodicheskoe pis'mo ob osobennostiakh izucheniia noveishei istorii Rossii i ocshchestvoznaniia [Methodical letter about the features of modern Russian history and social sciences]’ Available in Russian at http://history.standart.edu.ru/info.aspx?ob_no=16969.

14 M. Zubov. ‘Kavkazu napishut novuiu istoriiu [A new history will be written for the Caucasus]’, Osetia-Kvaisa, 14th February 2011. Available in Russian at <http://osetia.kvaisa.ru/ibrannoie/izbrannye-publikacii/kavkazu-napishut-novuyu-istoriyu/>.

In many respects, the new state-sponsored patriotism in Russia repeats Soviet clichés about the guiding (“state-forming”) role played by “the Russian people” (*Russkii narod*).¹⁵ The notion of “Russians” is currently a contested one,¹⁶ but even opponents generally agree with the argument that “Russians” have a “tradition of tolerance” and tend to blame “inter-ethnic conflicts” on “others” (“ethnic/illegal migrants”), “emigrants from the southern regions”, “the authorities which pander to them”, etc.). At the same time, the rhetoric of paternalism (“we (the Russians) have always helped everyone”, “we have welcomed everyone into our own home and have helped to build others’ homes”) is combined with accusations that the recipients of this help and “guests” are ungrateful.

In the 2000s public officials in Russia (“legal successors to the USSR”¹⁷) increasingly perceived any charges levelled against the Soviet regime as charges against themselves, as an attack on the status and reputation of Russia (and “the Russians”) as a “peacemaker” and “liberator of peoples”. For them, portraying the process of Sovietisation as a “Soviet occupation” is a ‘falsification of history which damages Russia’s interests’.¹⁸

In the 2000s the differences between assessments of the establishment of Soviet authority over the territories of the former Soviet republics and/or acts of “nationalists” fighting against the Soviet authorities (the “forest brethren” in the Baltic, the “Benderovtsy” in Ukraine [Ukrainian nationalist troops of Stepan Bender], etc.) become a factor in international politics,¹⁹ leading, in practice, to controls being introduced over the contents of history textbooks in Russia and CIS countries.

15 For more details see in particular: O. Karpenko (2007). “‘Suverennaia demokratiia’ dlia vnutrennego i naruzhnogo primeneniia [‘Sovereign democracy’ for internal and external use]”, *Neprikosnovennyi zapas*, No. 1 (51), pp.134-152.

16 Rival parties use different combinations of ethno-cultural and statist readings of this notion.

17 *Zakony Rossii* (1992). *Resolution of the Council of the Heads of States-Participants of the Commonwealth of Independent States dated 20.03.92 on the legal succession in relation to agreements of mutual interest, state property, state archives, debts and assets of the former Union of the SSR*. Moscow. Available in Russian at http://lawrussia.ru/texts/legal_185/doc185a655x748.htm. This agreement made no specific reference to the use of symbols, but today the state symbols used by Russia reuse Soviet symbols (in particular the music of the national anthem).

18 In May 2009 (in the run-up to the 65th anniversary of the (WWII) Victory) the Russian President, Dmitrii Medvedev, established a “Committee to counter” this “falsification” and appointed as its head a senior civil servant – the head of the Presidential Administration – thereby raising the struggle for “correct history” to the rank of state policy. It was proposed that the “Committee to counter attempts to falsify history to the detriment of Russia’s interests” would summarise and analyse information on the falsification of historical facts “aimed at diminishing the international prestige” of Russia and would draft a strategy for countering the attempts at falsification. Some academics openly opposed the creation of this committee, saying that it could be used to combat dissent and lead to the emasculation of professional debates. In their view the right to establish conventional views on matters of “historical fact” and what constitutes their “correct interpretation” cannot be assigned to a closed group developing “objective” criteria and issuing official charges against those who do not meet these criteria. Just some of the authors writing on this subject are: N. Kuposov (2010). ‘Memorial’nyi zakon i istoricheskaia politika v sovremennoi Rossii [The law on historical memory and history policy in modern Russia]. *Ab Imperio* #2; I. de Kegel (2009). ‘Na puti k “predskazuemomu” proshlomu? Kommentarii k sozdaniiu Komissii po protivodeistviu popitkam fal’sifikatsii istorii v Rossii [Towards a „predictable” past? Comments on the creation of the Commission to Counter Attempts to Falsify History in Russia]’, *Ab Imperio* #3.

19 One example is the events around the “Bronze Soldier” (a memorial in the centre of the capital of Estonia), the dismantling of which on the night of the 26th-27th April 2007 led to mass disturbances in Tallinn and other towns in Estonia, and led to a number of actions by the Russian authorities.

For example, in an attempt to exonerate “Russians” from accusations levelled against them by their former “fraternal peoples” [*bratskie narody*], a number of research projects were launched to analyse the content of post-Soviet textbooks on the nation’s history published in the newly independent states after the collapse of the USSR. One of these studies,²⁰ which analysed 187 school history textbooks and teaching guides from 12 countries of the former Soviet Union – Azerbaijan, Armenia, Belarus, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Moldova, Uzbekistan, Ukraine and Estonia, – and summarised the data from public opinion surveys (‘to allow an assessment to be made of public images of the past in each country’²¹) came to the conclusion that:

‘[...] with the exception of Belarus and (to a lesser extent) Armenia, all these countries have gone down the route of teaching the up-and-coming generation a nationalist interpretation of history, in which Russia and the Russians are often portrayed as the “sworn enemy”.’²²

This is seen as a problem that needs to be resolved through the intervention of the Russian state, since:

‘[I]f current trends continue, within 15 to 20 years the events of the 20th century will be well and truly forgotten by the population. The public image of Russia among the peoples of the former USSR will be that of an evil empire which destroyed, crushed and exploited them for centuries.’²³

These studies fail to question the extent to which historical issues connected with Russia’s colonial past, the formation of the USSR and the establishment of “friendship of peoples” [*druzhiba narodov*] are adequately and critically presented in Russian textbooks. What I personally would like to understand is how the presence of Russia (“the Russians”) in the Caucasus is portrayed in Soviet and contemporary textbooks. How do they portray the conflicts in the Caucasus and Russia’s role in them? How do Soviet and Russian textbooks address “colonialism”, “national liberation movements”, “empire”, etc.? Can Russian textbooks be seen as presenting an alternative to a “nationalist interpretation of history”?

To answer these and other questions a comparative analysis was conducted of Soviet (*The History of the USSR*) and contemporary (*The History of Russia*) articulations of the acts of “incorporation of the peoples of the Transcaucasus/Caucasus into Russia/the USSR”, which

20 The results of one of these are set out in a report by A. A. Danilov & A. V. Filippov (eds) (2009). *Osveshsheniie obshchei istorii Rossii i narodov postsovetских stran v shkol'nikh uchebnikakh istorii novikh nezavisimikh stran* [Portrayal of the common history of Russia and the peoples of the post-Soviet countries in school history textbooks of the newly independent states]. Moscow. Available in Russian at http://www.bookshunt.ru/b44929_osveshenie_obshej_istorii_rossii_i_narodov_postsovetских_stran_v_shkolnih_uchebnikah_istorii_novih_nezavisimih_gosudarstv.

21 *Ibid.*, p.5.

22 *Ibid.*, p.16.

23 *Ibid.*, p.12.

identified a number of different models of the relations between them: “a prison of the peoples” (“Tsarist Russia”) and “friendship of peoples” (USSR). I selected three historical subjects for analysis: “the incorporation of the Transcaucasus and the North Caucasus into Russia in the first half of the 19th century”; “the victory of the Soviet authorities in the Transcaucasus”; the formation of the (“(Trans-)Caucasian”) socialist republics and their incorporation into the USSR. The subject of the incorporation of the Transcaucasus and the North Caucasus into Russia in the first half of the 19th century is only examined in the Russian case study. I believe that a comparison of the representations of “incorporation into Russia in the first half of the 19th century” and “joining the USSR” will allow us to attain a better and more detailed understanding of Soviet and contemporary attitudes to “colonialism” and “empire”. The other subjects are examined through various case studies (Abkhazia, Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia, Russia and South Ossetia).

In the 1970s and 1980s the history of the USSR was taught over six years (Year 5 to Year 10) using a linear system (each topic being studied once). Pupils studied the subject of “the incorporation of the Transcaucasus and the North Caucasus into Russia in the first half of the 19th century” at the start of Year 8, before going on to study the subject of “the establishment of Soviet authority in the Transcaucasus” and “the formation of the USSR” in Year 9. Today, the Russian history syllabus is based on the “concentric circles” system. In Years 10-11 pupils revise all the materials studied over the previous four years (Years 6-9). Today the subject of “the incorporation of the Transcaucasus and the North Caucasus into Russia in the first half of the 19th century” is studied twice (in Years 8 and 10), as are materials on “the establishment of Soviet authority in the Transcaucasus” and “the formation of the USSR” (in Years 9 and 11). The main source materials for this study were the Soviet Year 8 textbook, *The History of the USSR*,²⁴ and the contemporary Year 10 textbook, *Russia and the World*;²⁵ the subjects “the establishment of Soviet authority in the Transcaucasus” and “the formation of the USSR” are examined using the Year 9 textbook, *The History of the USSR*,²⁶ and the Year 11 textbook, *Russia and the World*.²⁷

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- 24 I. A. Fedosov (1982). *Istoriia SSSR [The History of the USSR] Year 8 textbook. Approved by the Ministry of Education of the USSR*. Prosveshchenie: Moscow.
- 25 O. V. Volobuev, et al (2004a). *Rossiia i mir s drevneishikh vremen do kontsa XIX veka [Russia and the world since antiquity to the late 19th century]. Textbook for Year 10 in general education institutions. 4th edition*. Vedit-print: Moscow. Other textbooks were also used: N. V. Zagladin (2005). *Vsemirnaia istoriia. Istoriia Rossii i mir s drevneishikh vremen do kontsa XIX veka [World history. History of Russia and the world since antiquity to the late 19th century]. Year 10 textbook. 5th edition*. 000 “TID ‘RUSSKOYE SLOVO – RS’”: Moscow; A. Levandovskii (2009). *Istoriia Rossii XVIII-XIX vekov [History of Russia, 18th-19th centuries]. Year 10: Textbook for general education institutions. 5th edition*. Prosveshchenie: Moscow; A. N. Sakharov & A. N. Bokhanov (2011a). *Istoriia Rossii. XVIII-XIX veka [History of Russia. 18th-19th century]. 9th edition*. 000 “TID ‘RUSSKOYE SLOVO – RS’”: Moscow (but in this text they play a relatively ancillary role).
- 26 I. B. Berkhin & I. A. Fedosov (1982). *Istoriia SSSR [History of the USSR]. Year 9 textbook. Approved by the Ministry of Education of the USSR. Seventh edition*. Prosveshchenie: Moscow.
- 27 O. V. Volobuev et al (2004b). *Rossiia i mir XX veka [Russia and the world, 20th century]. Textbook for Year 11 in general education institutions. 3rd edition*. Vedit-print: Moscow; N. V. Zagladin et al (2004). *Istoriia otechestva XX-nachalo XXI veka [History of the fatherland, 20th century to beginning of the 21st century]. Textbook for Year 11 in middle general education institutions. 2nd edition*. 000 “TID ‘RUSSKOYE SLOVO – RS’”: Moscow; A. A. Levandovskii & Iu. A. Shchetinov (2004). *Istoriia Rossii XX-nachalo XXI veka [History of Russia, 20th century to beginning of the 21st century]. Textbook for Year 11 in general education institutions. 8th edition*. Prosveshchenie: Moscow; N. Sakharov & A. N. Bokhanov (2011b). *Istoriia Rossii. XVIII-XIX veka [History of Russia. 18th-19th century]. Part 2: Textbook for Year 10 in general education institutions. 9th edition*. 000 “TID ‘RUSSKOYE SLOVO – RS’”: Moscow.

Soviet textbooks: from “prison of the peoples” to ‘international solidarity of all socialist nations and peoples, their indissoluble union, fraternal amity, cooperation’²⁸

The teaching study guide on the history of the USSR²⁹ and Year 9 history textbooks published in 1979³⁰ and 1982³¹ place the phrase “prison of the peoples” [*tiur'ma narodov*] in inverted commas, quoting Lenin as the source: ‘Tsarism ensured that landowners and the bourgeoisie were able to carry out the unbridled pillaging of the Russian people and the peoples of outlying ethnic areas. Ruling the country despotically with the help of the police and gendarmerie, the Tsarist militarists turned Russia into a “prison of the peoples”.’³² As long as Lenin (and Marxism-Leninism) remained the supreme undisputed authority,³³ the existence of the “prison” (before the socialist revolution) could not be questioned as an “objective” historical fact.

The “prison” is founded on the notion of a class antagonism which divides “the peoples” [*narody*] and “the exploiters”. Included in the latter (and thus symbolically excluding the “people”/narod³⁴) are “the Tsarist bureaucracy (the enormous apparatus of civil servants)”, “the police, gendarmerie and militarists”, “the (Tsarist) government”, “the (national) bourgeoisie”, “the *khans*, *beks* and community leaders”, “the highland and feudal nobility”, “the Muslim clergy”, “members of the “bourgeois nationalists” and all other parties (besides the “Bolshevik” party), etc.

The formation of the USSR is seen as marking a complete break with the everyday principles and practices uniting “peoples” under “Tsarism”. The USSR is opposed to “empire” and is viewed as “a union of peoples” united by common interests and free from the “oppression” of other “peoples” or “the state authorities”. The power relations connecting “peoples” and “the ruling class” are presented as being entirely redefined in the USSR, based on socialist principles.

28 I. B. Berkhin & I. A. Fedosov (1982). *Op. Cit.*, p.41.

29 O. V. Volobuey & G. V. Klokova (1979). *Metodika prepodavaniia istorii SSSR [Methodology for teaching the history of the USSR]. (Years 8-9). A teacher's guide.* Prosveshchenie: Moscow, p.383.

30 I. B. Berkhin & I. A. Fedosov (1974). *Istoriia SSSR [History of the USSR]. Year 9 textbook. 1st edition.* Prosveshchenie: Moscow.

31 I. B. Berkhin & I. A. Fedosov (1982). *Op. Cit.*

32 *Ibid.*, p.20.

33 Lenin, his ideas, proposals and actions are presented in exclusively superlative terms in Soviet textbooks: ‘The Congress issued the correct, Leninist assessment of the revolution that had begun in Russia, namely that it was a bourgeois-democratic revolution’ (*Ibid.*, p.49). ‘Lenin made the only correct and wise proposal’ (*Ibid.*, p.274), etc.

34 About the specific use of the category “narod” [people] in Russian textbooks, see O. Karpenko (2010). ‘Teaching “national” differences: “narod” in Russian school textbooks’, in M. Rivkin-Fish & E. Trubina (eds) *Paradoxes of Diversity in the Contemporary World: Discussions of ‘Culture’ and ‘Tolerance’ after the Soviet Union.* Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars: Washington DC. pp. 193-217.

“Colonialism”, “the National Question” and “the National Liberation Movement of Oppressed Non-Russian Peoples”

Strikingly, the Soviet historical narrative (in 1970s and 1980s versions) admits and even presupposes that in the 19th century many “(non-Russian) peoples” entered the “prison” entirely voluntarily, with a feeling of profound satisfaction and sincere joy.³⁵ The Year 8 textbook on the history of the USSR,³⁶ when describing a “major historical event in the first third of the 19th century” (“the incorporation of the Transcaucasus into Russia”), states that: “[I]n fact, all the Transcaucasus peoples were incorporated into Russia voluntarily”;³⁷ ‘The incorporation of the Transcaucasus into Russia was of great progressive significance for the Georgians, Armenians, Azerbaijanis and other peoples’,³⁸ etc.

The justification for viewing the “incorporation” as “progressive” is that “it opened up broad prospects for Georgian culture to develop through communication with Russian culture”, enabled ‘Armenian-Russian friendship’,³⁹ etc. “Russia” is described as providing “refuge” to ‘[P]olitical actors who presented themselves as representatives of the culture of these peoples’,⁴⁰ helping them in their struggle with ‘interventionists’,⁴¹ etc.

Whilst emphasising “the objectively progressive significance of the incorporation into Russia for the peoples populating these territories”, the authors consistently stipulate that:

[H]owever, at the same time these people began to be subjected to colonial exploitation. Russia was a “prison of the peoples” and it was essential for the autocratic regime to be destroyed before not just the Russian people, but also all other peoples in the country, could be liberated.⁴²

This begs the questions of what means are used to play down the negative significance of “colonial exploitation” and play up its “objectively progressive significance”.

The textbook employs a number of rhetorical devices which allow the actions of the (Russian) colonisers to be justified directly or indirectly and/or the “peoples of the Transcaucasus” to be portrayed as being in need of patronage:

35 For example, ‘The liberation of Armenia by Russian troops brought joy to Armenians around the world. Armenians wrote from as far away as India: ‘Armenia is resurrected...The sun of life has risen over the country of Mount Ararat... And our nation owes this to the philanthropic nation of Moscow, among which we will always be able to live in safety and protection’ (I. A. Fedosov (1982). *Op. Cit.*, p.75).

36 *Ibid.*

37 *Ibid.*, p.75.

38 *Ibid.*, pp.76-77.

39 *Ibid.*, p.76.

40 *Ibid.*, p.74.

41 ‘The rulers of Georgia and the Armenian and Azerbaijani khanates received military assistance from Russia on more than one occasion for the struggle against the Turkish and Iranian enslavers’ (*Ibid.*, p.74).

42 O. V. Volobuey & G. V. Klokov (1979). *Op. Cit.*, 7.

- a) a polarised presentation of “Russia” and its rivals for power over the relevant territory: “Russia”, “the Russian people” “save the population of Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan” from “ruin and annihilation” at the hands of ‘Turkish and Iranian invaders’.⁴³ A hierarchy of countries competing for the relevant territory is introduced, headed by Russia as the ‘most advanced country’.⁴⁴ This allows the “colonial oppression” it practises to be classed as a benefit;
- b) the use of phrases such as “despite the oppression...life improved” presents “colonial oppression” as an insignificant factor in the lives of communities;⁴⁵
- c) references to the “fact” that “the Russian people” are *just as much* the victim of “Tsarist oppression and the arbitrary rule of Tsarist officialdom” as “the peoples of the Transcaucasus” allow the authors to gloss over the detailed policy and practices of “colonial oppression”;
- d) Russian colonialism is further legitimised by citing the views of “the *best representatives* of the Georgian, Armenia and Azerbaijani peoples”, who ‘welcomed incorporation into Russia’,⁴⁶ and/or by presenting Russia’s geopolitical interests which *forced* “the Russian state” ‘to establish itself in the Caucasus’,⁴⁷ etc.

As the study shows, assessments vary according to the adjective used to characterise the entity which “incorporated the Caucasus/Transcaucasus at the start of the 19th century” (“Tsarist” or “Russian”). Where “arbitrary rule, violence, crushing of national culture” is the object, the subject is always “(Russian) *Tsarism*”, “*Tsarist* officials”, “*Tsarist* troops”. Conversely, the “saviour of the Armenian people” or the entity which “could not refuse help to the peoples of the Transcaucasus” or enabled the development of “culture and economy” is “the *Russian* people” [*russkii narod*], “Russia”, “the *Russian* army” [*russkaia armia*].

43 This is expressed particularly clearly in topics comparing the actions of “Russia” on the “incorporation” of new territories and the “policy of land-grabs” of other states (for example Turkey, Iran): ‘The frequent military raids on the Transcaucasus by Turkish and Iranian invaders were accompanied by devastation of the country, destruction and killing of the population. [...] In 1795 the Shah of Iran carried out yet another raid on the Transcaucasus. [...] The peoples of the Transcaucasus were threatened with physical annihilation. Only Russia and the Russian people could help them. The Russian state could not permit the lands of the Transcaucasus to be seized by Iran and Turkey since this would threaten Russia’s southern borders. Its establishment in the Transcaucasus was also dictated by the need to strengthen Russia’s position in the Black Sea basin, in the Middle and Far East’ (I. A. Fedosov (1982). *Op. Cit.*, p.73).

44 ‘Russia was a more advanced country than Iran and Turkey and its culture had a beneficial impact on the peoples of the Transcaucasus’ (I. A. Fedosov (1982). *Op. Cit.*, p.76).

45 ‘Despite Tsarist oppression and the arbitrary actions of Tsarist officials from which the Russian people also suffered, the living conditions of the peoples of the Transcaucasus improved significantly’ (*Ibid.*, p.76). ‘Despite Tsarist oppression, the Russian people and the other peoples of Russia achieved huge successes in science, literature and art’ (*Ibid.*, p.89).

46 ‘The best representatives of Georgian, Armenian, Azerbaijani peoples welcomed incorporation into Russia. The Georgian poet Baratashvili in his long poem *Georgia’s Fate* sees Georgia’s incorporation into Russia as historically inevitable and progressive since it opened up broad prospects for the development of Georgian culture in communication with Russian culture. Khachatour Abovyan, the author of the novel *The Wounds of Armenia*, saw Russia as the saviour of the Armenian people and was an impassioned advocate of Armenian-Russian friendship. The greatest Azerbaijani writer and philosopher of the 19th century Akhundov wrote: ‘As a result of the Russian state’s patronage we have been rid of [...] the unending attacks and raids by the rapacious hordes and have finally achieved peace’ (*Ibid.*, pp.76-77).

47 ‘The peoples of the Transcaucasus were threatened with physical annihilation. Only Russia and the Russian people could help them. The Russian state could not permit the lands of the Transcaucasus to be seized by Iran and Turkey since this would threaten Russia’s southern borders. Its establishment in the Transcaucasus was also dictated by the need to strengthen Russia’s position in the Black Sea basin, in the Middle and Far East’ (*Ibid.*, p.73).

This separation between “Russian” and “Tsarist” may be seen as a discursive resource that permits the “class enemy” (“Tsarist troops/officials”, etc.) to be criticised whilst simultaneously (re-)producing the benign significance of the presence of “the Russian people” [*russkii narod*] on “foreign” territories.⁴⁸ There are also some examples of the same resource being exploited in the textbooks used in the republics. The narrative in the textbook *The History of the Armenian People*, in its chapter on “Tsarist colonial policy [in the 1830s and 1840s]”, states: ‘[T]he Tsarist colonial policy was alien to the Russian people and this itself led to solidarity between the oppressed peoples and strengthened fraternal bonds’.⁴⁹ This tradition of exonerating “the people” operates to legitimise the existing authorities which present themselves as expressing “the true interests of the people”. By rhetorically separating “Tsarism” from “the Russians” [*russkie*], the Soviet textbook consolidates the just cause of the Soviet authorities, with “the Russian proletariat” as its vanguard. By separating “the Russian people” from “the Bolsheviks”, the contemporary history textbook consolidates the historical continuity and legitimacy of the contemporary Russian authorities.

Whilst the paragraph on “the incorporation of the *Transcaucasus*” presents this as being achieved at some cost, despite being “voluntary”, the next paragraph in the same textbook (on “the incorporation of the *North Caucasus*”) reveals the “cruelty” of the “Tsarist colonial policy” that “embittered the local population”.⁵⁰ (This reference to acts of violence does not, incidentally, prevent the outcome of colonial policy from being given a positive assessment.) As in the case of “the peoples of the Transcaucasus” [*narodi Zakavkazia*], the ‘[I]ncorporation of the peoples of the North Caucasus into Russia was of positive significance for them. The rapprochement between the highland peoples and the Russian people allowed their culture and economy to develop. This sped up the historical development of these peoples significantly’.⁵¹

Soviet ideology imposes a rather tortuous notion of the national liberation struggle. It combines the *progressive* impact of colonialisation on “the historical development of the peoples” (associated with “the rapprochement [of the population of the appropriated territories] with the Russian people”) with a negative assessment of the processes connected with it, such as ‘the oppression exerted on [the peoples/*narodi*] by Tsarism’.⁵²

48 Whilst the earlier Soviet version of class history (the Pokrovskii school) associated “Russianness” with “exploiters”, “great power chauvinism” and other “survivals from the past”, in the context of the appeal to patriotism in the late 1930s, “Russians” (including “the Russian army”) were translated into the avant-garde of progressiveness and incapable of doing anything wrong. The tendency to provide “fraternal assistance to other peoples” becomes an inalienable (essential) quality of “the Russian people” and “Russia”. Violence towards the population of “outlying ethnic areas” is associated with “foreign invaders/occupiers”, “Tsarist officials” and other “exploiters”.

49 V. A. Parsamyan (ed) (1988). *Istoriia armianskogo naroda [The History of the Armenian people]. Year 7-8 textbook*. Luys: Yerevan, p.143.

50 ‘Tsarism during the conquest of the Caucasus implemented a harsh colonial policy. Military expeditions were accompanied by the robbing of the population, the destruction of entire *auls* (settlements), and resettlement of the highland peoples to unfertile lands.’ He goes on to talk about Shamil: ‘an intelligent, brave man but a harsh and merciless one’. (I. A. Fedosov (1982). *Op. Cit.*, p.78).

51 *Ibid.*, p.79.

52 *Ibid.*, p.79.

In this context, “stubborn resistance” and “the violent struggle of the highland peoples of Dagestan, Chechnya and Adygheia with Tsarist troops” are described both as a *just* “movement [...] against colonial oppression” and as a movement which did not meet the *true interests* of “the peoples of the Caucasus”. Questions naturally arise as to what basis there is for the notion that the struggle of “the people” for liberation is *just*, and if it is, how that struggle can be deprived of legitimacy.

The underlying notion in the concept of a *just* struggle of “the peoples” is that they have a common “destiny” and the “right to decide their fate themselves”. Thus, the struggle can be deprived of legitimacy if “the highland tribes and ethnic groups” enter into a coalition with various “exploiters” and “reactionary forces”:

‘The highland tribes and nationalities [*narodnosti*] were fighting for the right to decide their fate themselves. However, the highland nobles and the Muslim clergy used this struggle in their own interests, introducing reactionary features into the movement – religious fanaticism and hatred of all non-Muslims. Betraying the people’s interests, they entered into an arrangement with the Sultanate of Turkey and were prepared to subject themselves to it.’⁵³

The reason given for the effectiveness of the actions of “the highland nobles and the Muslim clergy” is the *backwardness* of “the highland people”. Since they are “in the early stage of the development of feudal relations” and are ‘strongly influenced by kinship and tribal relations’,⁵⁴ the “highland peoples” are incapable of identifying the “profit interests of the nobility”. The latter exploit this by rechannelling the energy behind the protest into a “holy war” against “the infidels” (non-Muslims) until they are completely extirpated’;⁵⁵ ‘use the authority of the clan and tribal leaders, inciting their peoples against the Russian people’;⁵⁶ “Muridism” becomes a symbol of everything “reactionary and militaristic”.⁵⁷ In this context the “struggle against colonial oppression” is *reactionary*; violence in relation to “the highland peoples” [*gortsy*] is normalised and associated with *progress*.

53 *Ibid.*

54 ‘The ethnic groups populating the highland regions of Dagestan, Chechnia and Adygheia were going through a period of development of feudal relations at that time. The peasants were becoming feudal dependants of their *khans, beks* and leaders. However, kinship and tribal relations were even stronger. The backwardness of social relations within these ethnic groups was shown by the low level of development of their forces of production and the primitive nature of their arable farming. However, these were proud, freedom-loving peoples who were not willing to enter into servitude to their feudal lords. Nor were they willing to submit to the Tsarist officials whose authority meant arbitrary rule, violence, suppression of the national culture and local customs’ (*Ibid.*, p.77).

55 *Ibid.*

56 *Ibid.*

57 ‘[Their] main dogma consisted of a call to a “holy war” (*ghazavat*) against the “infidel” until they were completely annihilated. The Murids – the adherents of this branch of Islam – were obliged to see war against the infidel as the over-riding task of their life’ (*Ibid.*, p.77). ‘Muridism, which preached implacable hatred of the “infidel” and obedience to the spiritual authorities, was a convenient means of class oppression and incitement to national divisions. For this reason Muridism was approved by the feudal heads of the highland peoples who made it into the banner for the entire movement. The Iranian and Turkish rulers, with the English bourgeoisie behind their backs, used the highland peoples’ religious fanaticism and directed their struggle against Russia. Their aim was to prevent Russia from establishing itself fully in the Caucasus’ (*Ibid.*, p.78).

To articulate this dual assessment of the struggle by “the peoples” for freedom, phrases are used, such as: “X were fighting for the right to decide their fate themselves. *However*, Y used the struggle for their own interests”. The first part of the sentence expresses approval of the struggle against colonial dependence, the second replaces this approval with its opposite, making “the people” the unwitting instrument in the hands of “the feudal elite”, “the Iranian and Turkish rulers”, etc. For this device to be an effective weapon for criticising an opponent, relations between X and Y must be those of antagonists, since only then can a weak player (X) be viewed as an “unwitting instrument” in the hands of a strong player (Y). (This is the discursive trait used in the textbooks to discredit the class and political opponents of ‘the Bolsheviks’.⁵⁸)

This results, on the one hand, in the (re-)production of the notion that there are *essential* boundaries between “peoples” (each has “its own destiny”), who have a *natural* “right to decide their fate themselves”. On the other hand there is the normalisation of the notion that “peoples” can only properly exercise this right once they have achieved a certain level of development by entering into a coalition with “progressive forces”. In the Soviet version, the “struggle of the people against colonial oppression” is only recognised as progressive if it is headed by the “national proletariat” acting in support of the ‘idea of proletarian internationalism, i.e. [the idea] of uniting the workers of all nationalities in a joint struggle for their liberation’,⁵⁹ and recognising the ‘authority of the Russian proletariat and its leading role in the liberation movement’.⁶⁰ (Other) “peoples” influenced by anyone other than the “proletariat internationalists” (such as those influenced by the “national bourgeoisie”, the “bourgeois nationalists”, etc.) are deprived of this right.

58 For example, ‘[The] liberals, the congress noted, are striving to subject the masses to their influence and use the revolution for their own ends’ [I. B. Berkhin & I. A. Fedosov (1982). *Op. Cit.*, p.49]; ‘The nationalists strove to subject the struggle of the peoples against the Tsarist colonial policy to their own class, bourgeois interests. By speaking out against the union of the local proletariat with the Russian working class, the bourgeoisie was establishing unlimited dominance over the toilers of its own nationality’ (*Ibid.*, p.20).

59 *Ibid.*, p.27.

60 ‘By Autumn 1905 the national liberation movement had been significantly strengthened. It went by democratic slogans: doing away with oppression of the nationalities, the free development of national culture, school education in native languages. The national liberation struggle was particularly active in regions where capitalist relations were developed and a proletariat had formed, in Poland, Finland, the Baltic states, Ukraine and the Caucasus. This was explained by the fact that *the national proletariat was at the vanguard of the struggle*, as it was interested in bringing about the complete victory of the revolution. In their joint struggle against autocracy, the international solidarity of the workers was strengthened, and the *authority of the Russian proletariat and its guiding role in the liberation movement grew*’ (*Ibid.*, p.61, emphasis added). ‘In Autumn 1917 the national liberation movement was significantly strengthened in the national regions of Russia. The colonial, crudely violent policy of the Temporary Government of the bourgeoisie towards the non-Russian peoples of the country has borne its fruit, Lenin wrote in Autumn 1917. The broad mass of the population of the oppressed nations was becoming increasingly estranged from the bourgeoisie which had betrayed the cause of the liberation of the enslaved peoples and was increasingly rallying round the proletariat. The struggle of the oppressed nations for liberation from their oppressors was widening. In Autumn workers and peasants in all the national oblast’s followed the example of the Russian proletariat and the poor peasants, redoubling the struggle against the Russian and local bourgeoisie and landowners’ (*Ibid.*, p.155).

The USSR – the break with “Tsarism”: the formation of “the Socialist Nations” and the resolution of the “Nationality Question”

In the Soviet textbook, “internationalism” is, on the one hand, associated with recognition of the “guiding role of the Russian proletariat in the liberation struggle” and, on the other hand, in agreement with Lenin’s “National Programme” (programme to solve the nationality question, approved at the second Congress of the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party (RSDRP) in 1903). Its central principle is articulated as “the right of nations to self-determination up to and including full secession” [*pravo natsii na samoopredelenie vplot’ do otdelenia*] and it is clarified that “[T]his means that they have the right to decide their fate themselves”.⁶¹ It is important to stipulate here that the “right of nations to self-determination” is based on an essentialist notion that “nations”/peoples [*narodi*] have a “destiny”, a “culture”, and are able to exercise this right themselves. The notion underlying the logic of self-determination is that collective rights take priority and that nations’ “own territory” is provided as a guarantee that they will comply with them. The assumption is that “the people” (*narod*, defined in ethnic terms) can only develop unfettered inside “their own state”. Stateless modes of existence of “the people” are seen as evidence that the community has not yet reached the requisite level of maturity.

Lenin’s “National Programme” is described as hegemonic, reflecting the “interests of all peoples incorporated within Russia”: ‘It educated the workers in the spirit of proletariat internationalism [and] enabled the friendship of the toilers in their joint struggle against Tsarism to be strengthened.’⁶² Other claimants to the right to represent ‘the interests of the people’ are symbolically excluded. Those who refuse to consent to (the “correct Leninist”) party line⁶³ are viewed as “inculcating nationalism” and “inciting enmity between the peoples”.⁶⁴ It is explicitly stated that “peoples” can only become “friends” if there are no people within them who do not share the values of “internationalism”.

On the whole, the Soviet version links “peoples” with “fraternal bonds”, and ascribes them the role of acting in solidarity and “promoting friendship”. All the negative effects of “colonial policy” and instances of “national enmity”, “*pogroms*” and “nationalism” are associated exclusively with provocations by groups of “exploiters” hostile to “the

61 *Ibid.*, pp.31-32.

62 *Ibid.*, pp.31-32.

63 At the same time “Leninist theoretical principles”, “the Leninist concept of historical development”, etc., remained *hegemonic* and at different historical periods are infused with substantively different content. The 1982 textbook for the history of the USSR, for example, ascribes to Lenin’ the principle of the possibility of the victory of the proletarian revolution and socialism in a single country’ (*Ibid.*, p.4). What was in fact Stalin’s idea is given legitimacy by being ascribed to “Lenin” (the supreme authority).

64 This charge was laid in particular against the ‘opportunist Jewish worker’s union, the *Bund*’ (*Ibid.*, pp.29-30), whose view (counter to the “Leninist” view) on the “nationality question” is described as leading to the ‘disunity of the workers from different nationalities, sowing nationalism and inciting enmity between peoples’ (*Ibid.*, p.31).

people”, whom they regularly “poison” or use ‘for their own class, bourgeois interests’.⁶⁵ In particular, ‘[B]ourgeois nationalists ruined the Transcaucasus, incited enmity between peoples, poisoned the Georgians against the Armenians, the Armenians against the Azerbaijanis, etc.’⁶⁶ “Nationalism”, against which a constant struggle is waged in the Soviet tradition, is deprived of any essential meaning and is used instead as a catch-all notion for persons and judgements which do not fit the particular party line.

The central principle of Soviet “national policy” is ‘the right of the peoples of Russia to free self-determination up to and including secession and the formation of an autonomous state’.⁶⁷ The “self-determination of the people” depends directly on how it defines “its territory” and how it constitutes its own statehood. However, it also has a cultural dimension. Whilst the “colonial/national oppression of Tsarism” is associated with ‘arbitrary rule, violence, crushing of national culture and local customs’,⁶⁸ the “national liberation movement” is associated with ‘democratic slogans: doing away with oppression of nationalities, free development of national culture, and teaching in the native language in schools’;⁶⁹ “socialism” is associated with the “blossoming of national cultures” and “the removal of *de facto* inequality between [the peoples]” which ‘led to the creation of lasting friendship and fraternity between the peoples of the USSR’.⁷⁰ The crucial distinction between it and the “bourgeois”, and the guarantee of the “fraternity” of “socialist nations”, is the fact that ‘the leading force [...] is the working class and its Communist Party’.⁷¹ Generally, anything that fails to meet the demands of this “leading force” cannot be assessed positively.

65 ‘Tsarism toyed in every way possible with the mountain leadership, bribed local feudal lords with money, rank, medals and employed them. However, the mountain nobility was not prepared to share its power; it wanted to despoil its own people without restriction and dreamed of the Caucasus seceding from Russia. Exploiting the authority of the clan leaders, the mountain feudal lords poisoned their peoples against the Russian people’ (*Ibid.*, p.77); ‘...the government created a reactionary monarchical organisation to fight the revolutionary movement (the “Union of the Russian People”, etc.), provoked pogroms against the Jews and incited national hatred between the peoples’ (*Ibid.*, p.57); ‘... Tsarism incited national hatred. In Baku the police and local nationalists provoked a bloodbath between Armenians and Azerbaijanis’ (*Ibid.*, p.46).

66 *Ibid.*, p.242.

67 ‘The Soviet state immediately announced an end to the national oppression suffered by the non-Russian peoples for centuries and established political equality of the peoples. It was, of course, impossible to end the inequalities that in fact existed at the time between the peoples at the level of economic and cultural development immediately. This took a considerable time. The task was completed successfully in subsequent years’ (*Ibid.*, p.190).

68 *Ibid.*, p.77.

69 *Ibid.*, p.61.

70 ‘The bourgeois nations that had already been in existence prior to the victory of the Great October revolution – the Russian, Ukrainian, Belorussian and others – were transformed into socialist nations whose leading force is the working class and its Communist Party. Many ethnic groups such as the Turkmens, Tajiks, Kyrgyz and others which had not achieved nationhood before the October revolution became socialist nations. Various tribes and ethnic groups formed socialist-type nationalities. Relations between peoples also changed. The abolition of the exploiting classes, which had incited national hatred, the economic and cultural rise of all Soviet republics and, the removal of *de facto* inequality between them, led to the creation of the lasting friendship and brotherhood of the peoples of the USSR. Soviet socialist society, freed from class and national contradictions, was united by the indissoluble unity of interests. The basis was laid for a new social and international community – the Soviet people’ (*Ibid.*, p. 364).

71 *Ibid.*, p.363.

Attaining statehood is viewed as a pledge that the new nation will put the “democratic slogans” of the past into practice. The proclamation of the principle of nationalism (Gellner’s congruence of cultural and political units⁷²) is viewed as providing the main stimulus for the “oppressed peoples” to join in the struggle against the “autocracy” on the side of the “Bolsheviks” and to support the “Soviet Government”.⁷³ On the other hand, the practical result of this political principle is seen as the elimination of “hostility and alienation between peoples” and laying the foundation for the ‘voluntary and honest union of the peoples of Russia’.⁷⁴

The “right to self-determination” is declared to be a universal, natural right of “peoples”, but not all attempts to make use of it are viewed as legitimate. “Bourgeois governments” which are not under the control of the Soviet authorities, in particular those formed in Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia after the October 1917 revolution, are described as:

‘...counter-revolutionary “governments”,⁷⁵ placed in power by bourgeois nationalist parties: Georgian Mensheviks, Armenian *Dashnaks* and Azerbaijani *Musavatists*, in the service of foreign imperialists.’⁷⁶

The enemies of “the Soviet authorities” and “the people” are divided into internal “bourgeois nationalists” and external “foreign imperialists”. The association with “bourgeois” and “foreign” is a widely used way of stigmatising opponents. “Bourgeois nationalists” are deprived of their legitimate right to form national states by a process involving: a) labelling them as “oppressors” (linked with “foreign imperialists”) against whom the (Azerbaijani, Armenian, Georgian) “peoples” are waging a “stubborn struggle”; b) associating their activities with “the ruin of the Transcaucasus”, “inciting enmity between the peoples”, “poisoning the Georgians against the Armenians, the Armenians against the Azerbaijanis”,⁷⁷ etc.

72 E. Gellner (1983). *Nations and Nationalism*. Blackwell: Oxford.

73 The authors of the textbook include a quotation from the Soviet Government’s appeal “To all Muslim workers in Russia and the East”: “From now on your beliefs and customs, your national and cultural institutions are pronounced free and inviolable. Arrange your national life freely and unhindered. You have this right. Know that your rights, like those of all the peoples of Russia, are protected with the full might of the revolution and its bodies, the Soviets of Workers’, Soldiers’ and Peasants’ Deputies. Support this revolution and its authorised Government” (*Ibid.*, p.190).

74 “The ending of the oppression of the nationalities that existed in Tsarist Russia, of the hostility and alienation between the peoples was one of the urgent tasks before the Soviet state which, by its nature, was profoundly international and was interested in the unity and solidarity of the peoples and not in dividing them. [...] The first document approved by the Second All-Russian Congress of the Soviets had already stated that the Soviet authorities “will guarantee to all nations populating Russia the genuine right to self-determination” [...] A crucial act of the Soviet state on the nationality question was its “Declaration of the Rights of the Peoples of Russia”, published on 2nd November 1917. [...] in this declaration the Soviet government pronounced an end to the old shameful policy of inequality and the poisoning of the peoples against one another and its replacement with a policy of a voluntary and honest union of the peoples of Russia” (*Ibid.*, p.189).

75 Inverted commas used ironically to signify “so-called governments” and “governments with no justified claim to such status”.

76 *Ibid.*, p.242.

77 *Ibid.*, p. 243.

The “victory of Soviet authority in the Transcaucasus” is described in standardised terms: “under the leadership of the Bolsheviks” armed insurrections break out in Azerbaijan, Armenia and Georgia, which lead (eventually) to the overthrow of the “counter-revolutionary governments” (the “*Musavatist* government” in Azerbaijan, the “dictatorship of the *Dashnaks*” in Armenia and the “dictatorship of the Mensheviks” in Georgia); Revolutionary Committees are formed which “turn to the RSFSR for support”, which they are given in the form of the “11th Army”; for example, ‘...help was immediately provided. On 28th April units of the 11th Army entered Baku and helped the insurgents to secure victory,’ etc.⁷⁸ The victory of “the Soviet authorities” is described as fully meeting the “interests of the peoples”. The Soviet Army is ascribed the role of an assistant which does not resolve anything itself, simply providing support to insurgents when needed.

It is proposed that ‘as a result of the victory of the socialist revolution and the consistent implementation of Lenin’s nationality policy” all “peoples” availed themselves of the right presented to them to form their “own states”⁷⁹ (“independent Soviet Republics”⁸⁰) out of a strong desire to be united in statehood’.⁸¹ The “peoples” and “republics” are seen as actors who take actions and political decisions:

‘From the outset the Soviet *republics established* close political, economic and cultural ties between themselves, providing *mutual assistance* in building their new lives generally, defending their territory and their independence. During the civil war [...] *they combined* armed forces and material resources in the joint struggle against their enemies. This was one of the most important reasons for the victory of the Soviet people in the war.⁸² With the transition to peacetime construction the Soviet *republics started to arrange* economic ties between each other and *help each other* to restore the national economy. *The greatest help was provided by the Russian Federation as the largest and economically most developed republic, despite the*

78 ‘The units of the 11th Army that had arrived from Azerbaijan helped to secure the victory of the people once and for all and establish Soviet authority in Armenia’; ‘The 11th Army was sent to Georgia as directed by Lenin. On 25th February insurgent detachments and units of the Red Army entered Tiflis (Tbilisi). On the same day the Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic was proclaimed’ (*Ibid.*, p.243).

79 ‘The peoples of Ukraine, Belorussia, the Transcaucasus (Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia) and Central Asia (Bukhara, Khiva) obtained statehood and formed independent Soviet republics. Many peoples within the RSFSR were given autonomous status and formed autonomous republics and oblast’s. The Turkestan, Bashkir, Tatar, Kyrgyz (Kazakh), Dagestan and Mountain Republics were formed as autonomous republics along with a number of autonomous oblast’s. “We gave all the non-Russian nationalities their own republics or autonomous oblast’s”, said Lenin” (*Ibid.*, p.249).

80 ‘When the civil war was over there were six independent Soviet socialist republics on the territory of the former Russian empire: The Russian Federal, Ukrainian, Belorussian, Azerbaijani, Armenian and Georgian republics’ (*Ibid.*, p.268).

81 ‘[Prior to the formation of the USSR] relations between the republics were governed by agreements which covered not only mutual defence but also economic cooperation. However, as the building of the economy and culture progressed there was an increasing perceived need for closer links between all Soviet republics. They became increasingly convinced of the need for unified statehood’ (*Ibid.*, p.268).

82 The cliché which emerged following World War Two was transferred and used to represent processes associated with the formation of the USSR.

*enormous difficulties it itself was facing.*⁸³ [...] Economic ties expanded increasingly [...] In summer 1992 all Soviet socialist republics raised the question of a closer union. As a result the Central Committee of the Communist Party set up a special commission to determine the best way to resolve this issue [emphasis added].⁸⁴

The Soviet historical narrative proposes that the “prison of the peoples” was destroyed during the socialist revolution and a new union (RSFSR, USSR) arose on the basis of the voluntary and free “expression of the will of the peoples” who had a pragmatic interest in a union. The “peoples” who had previously been denied a voice (or were befuddled by bourgeois propaganda) are now actors, “expressing their will”. Russia’s role is fixed as that of principal donor providing the “greatest assistance” to all other members of the Union.

The transformation of “peoples” and “republics” into political actors allows the role of political, economic and other elites in the process by which the states are formed (unified, demarcated) to be obscured. The hegemony of the “(Soviet) state” is shown by the fact that the “republics” are presented in terms of “the self-determination of the peoples” [*samoopredelenie narodov*], expressing the “interests of the [relevant] people”. The “Communist Party” is here presented as “assisting” them to find a “logical way [i.e. one in the interests of all peoples] to resolve the issue” and not pursuing any specific political or administrative goals (such as securing control over the republics and their elites):

‘[Soviet authority], by its very nature, profoundly international, unites rather than divides the workers of different nationalities, and is based on friendship of peoples.’⁸⁵

‘In contrast to capitalist ownership, which disunites people, causes enmity and wars between peoples, public socialist ownership unites peoples.’⁸⁶

Presenting the peoples as acting autonomously to achieve their own interests helps to legitimise the existing authorities. The ideological requirement to “adopt friendly relations” is transformed into the “natural need of the peoples”. In the USSR, “peoples” cannot avoid “adopting friendly relations” since all those who previously “disunited” them have been symbolically (and physically) excluded from society. If any conflict were to be discovered, it could only be conflict between “the people” and the “enemy

83 The “RSFSR” plays the same role as that played by the “Russian people” in ethnic classification and “the proletariat/working class” in classification by class. One “republic” must be identified as the “most developed”, as with other types of actors. “Developed status” is associated with the capacity to assist others, even if this does not promote one’s own interests. “The greatest help was provided by the Russian Federation as the largest and economically most developed republic although it had experienced huge difficulties itself. For example, in 1921-1922 some textile factories, typographical and lithographical works were moved from Soviet Russia to the Transcaucasian republics. Assistance from the RSFSR helped to build the Baku-Tbilisi oil pipeline, a hydro-electric plant was built near Tbilisi, etc. The Russian Federation also provided much assistance to other republics’ (*Ibid.*, p.268).

84 *Ibid.*, p.268.

85 *Ibid.*, p.269.

86 *Ibid.*

of the people” [*vrag naroda*]. Here the “enemy” is automatically excluded from all “socialist nations” and is associated with “international imperialism”, etc. This strips all negative connotations from “the people” [*narod*], which becomes an idealised object of veneration; the demand to “love one’s people” and to “serve its interests” cannot be associated with antipathy or hostility to other “peoples”.

In the USSR there are no “inter-ethnic” or territorial conflicts, nor can there be. All political decisions are logical and effective. For example, the creation of the Transcaucasian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (in 1922) is explained as the need felt by “the republics” to unite to “work together on building their economy and culture” and ‘overcome national divisions and strengthen friendship between the peoples of the Transcaucasus’.⁸⁷ Its abolition and division into three union republics (in 1936) is associated with ‘the fulfilment of this historical mission’.⁸⁸

‘The formation of the USSR was an event of universal historical significance. There are several multinational states known to history. Generally these arose out of the conquest and enslavement by one more powerful state of other weak states and they were consequently the arena for an intense national struggle. For the first time in history a multinational state was created on the basis of a voluntary union of peoples with equal rights, a state free of national inequality and oppression. The formation of the USSR strengthened the friendship and brotherhood of the peoples of the country, and was one of the decisive factors which ensured favourable conditions for the building of socialism, the improvement of the economy and culture of all Soviet republics, a radical improvement in living conditions of the workers, strengthening of defensive capabilities, and the international positions of the multinational Soviet Socialist State.’⁸⁹

There are references in the Soviet historical narrative to “multinationalism”, but these are mainly rhetorical. Multiple references in the Soviet textbooks to the “multinationalism” of the population of the USSR and the “equal rights of the peoples” and “republics” sit awkwardly with the very restricted range of ethnic categories used. The discussion about “genuine friendship” of the “Soviet nations” is in fact a tool used to legitimise the hegemony enjoyed by one particular nation. In the republics’ textbooks this may be the “titular nations” (the “Armenians” in Armenia, the “Georgians” in Georgia, etc.). The “Russian people” (the “Russian proletariat”) occupies a specific position in this set. It is given a leading role, not so much in terms of having “its own republic” but across the entire USSR, with the same weight as “all the other peoples combined”.

87 ‘In 1922 Azerbaijan, Armenia and Georgia were united to form the Transcaucasian Socialist Federal Soviet Republic (TSFSR). This was intended to make it easier for the republics to implement the building of the economy and culture more successfully and also to enable it to overcome nationalist divisions and strengthen friendship between the peoples of the Transcaucasus’ (*Ibid.*, p.268).

88 ‘The Transcaucasian Federation was abolished since it had fulfilled its historical mission: it had ensured the economic and cultural flowering of the republics incorporated within it, it had strengthened friendship between the peoples populating it. The Azerbaijan, Georgian and Armenian SSR, which had been incorporated in the Transcaucasian Federation up to 1936, were incorporated directly into the USSR as Union republics’ (*Ibid.*, p.374).

89 *Ibid.*, pp.271-272.

Whilst the ‘nations’ right to self-determination up to and including full secession⁹⁰ is placed at the centre of the “truly revolutionary programme to resolve the nationality question”, constant references are made in descriptions of the period following the formation of the USSR to the ‘right retained by every union republic to withdraw freely from the USSR’.⁹¹ However, withdrawal is almost inconceivable in practice, given that any articulation of doubts that the USSR fully satisfies the interests of all the peoples can be dismissed as nothing but the intrigues of hostile forces.

Pupils are brought up to believe that territorial “self-determination of the people” is an inalienable feature of “democracy”, the central principle of a just societal order. The destruction of the Communist Party’s monopoly on the production of truth, the questioning of whether the “nations’ rights to self-determination up to and including secession” were actually observed in the USSR, transforms the demand for this right to be implemented into a symbol of “democratisation”.

Contemporary textbooks: from “Empire” to the “USSR”: various “forms of existence of a multinational state”

Contemporary textbooks play down the antagonism that previously linked the “Russian empire” and the “USSR”. The different political regimes (the Russian Empire, USSR) are beginning to be viewed as different “forms of existence of a Russian multinational state”. Emphasis is laid on the unique nature of Russia’s experience of building a “multinational state” (the peaceful nature of the incorporation of territory in particular). Russian and Soviet experience is contrasted with “Western” experience and is intended as an example of the humane resolution of the complex problems facing multicultural societies.

The contemporary version of Russian history rejects the idea of a class divide within “peoples”. “The Russians” and “Tsarism” are no longer separated in an attempt to legitimise colonial policy (as in Soviet textbooks). “Tsarism” (or “autocracy”) can no longer be presented as an antagonist of “the Russian people and other peoples of Russia”. “The Emperor” ceases to be simply a channel for the “interests of the exploiter classes”, becoming instead ‘the principal unifying link of the multinational Russian empire’.⁹² The role of the “national bourgeoisie” is transformed and is now ‘generally at the spearhead of the struggle

90 ‘The bourgeoisie was placated with insignificant handouts from the Tsarist regime and went over to it, helping to crush the worker and peasant movement. The parties of the petty bourgeoisie acted as accomplices to the bourgeoisie on the nationality question. Only the Bolsheviks genuinely advocated a revolutionary programme to resolve the nationality question, insisting on the right of the nations to self-determination, including full secession’ (*Ibid.*, p. 62).

91 ‘The Constitution [1936] stipulated that the USSR is a Union state formed on the basis of the voluntary union of Soviet socialist republics possessing equal rights. [...] Each Union republic retained the right to withdraw freely from the USSR’ (*Ibid.*, p.374).

92 ‘The main link holding the multinational Russian empire together was the fact that all its residents were subjects of the sovereign emperor’ (N. V. Zagladin (2005). *Op.Cit.*, p.367).

for change'.⁹³ As part of the abandonment of the break between the “Russian people” and “the Tsarist authorities”, in some textbooks the struggle of the “[oppressed] peoples” with “the Russian authorities” is called ‘the ‘anti-Russian movement in the Caucasus’.⁹⁴ We examine below the way in which the colonial policy and practices of the Russian Empire in the 19th century are described in this context.

A ‘Prison of the Peoples’?

The authors of the modern Year 10 Russian history textbooks analysed here⁹⁵ tend to adopt a critical attitude to Lenin’s argument of “a prison of the peoples”. They argue that ‘the concept of the Russian Empire as a “prison of the peoples” is nothing more than a historical myth’;⁹⁶ others view this “well-known argument” as an extreme or over-simplified assessment,⁹⁷ or simply the name given to a generally accepted practice ‘that was also widespread in other countries at the time’.⁹⁸

“Russia” is described as a “multinational empire”,⁹⁹ which, by contrast with the “Western European powers” which built “their colonial empires by grabbing overseas territories”, “*extended* its own borders”. The actions of “Russia” are described in terms of “appropriating”, “expanding frontiers”, ‘incorporating territories’,¹⁰⁰ ‘changing the ethnic map of the Russian Empire’,¹⁰¹ etc.

93 O. V. Volobuev et al (2004b). *Op. Cit.*, p.10.

94 A. Levandovskii (2009). *Op. Cit.*, pp.158-159. The same author writes that ‘Russia’s successes in foreign policy [during the reign of Nikolai I] brought about a rapprochement of the leading European powers around anti-Russian positions’ (*Ibid.*, p.160).

95 O. V. Volobuev et al (2004a). *Op. Cit.*; N. V. Zagladin (2005). *Op. Cit.*; A. Levandovskii (2009). *Op. Cit.*; A. N. Sakharov & A. N. Bokhanov (2011a). *Op. Cit.*

96 The phrase “historical myth” is used by them to indicate the *falsity* of the negative interpretation and assessment of events that, taken together, come under the general topic “the expansion of Russian territory”. All events that come under this topic are seen as steps towards the creation of a “multi-ethnic and multi-denominational country”. For example, ‘One of the distinctive features of Russia was the fact that it had constituted a multi-ethnic and multi-denominational country for centuries. Those living in Russia included Orthodox Christians, Catholics, Protestants, Muslims, Jews and Buddhists, as well as adherents of pagan creeds. The Russian Empire tended to distinguish its citizens by religion rather than nationality... Religious and ethnic restrictions existed in Russia as in other countries at that time. However, the concept of the Russian Empire as a “prison of the peoples” is nothing more than a historical myth’ (O. V. Volobuev et al (2004a). *Op. Cit.*, p.384).

97 N. V. Zagladin (2005). *Op. Cit.*, pp.367-368.

98 O. V. Volobuev et al (2004a). *Op. Cit.*, p.384.

99 N. V. Zagladin (2005). *Op. Cit.*, p.363.

100 The different “huge territories populated by peoples with different languages, religions and cultures” are described as “joining” Russia, being “incorporated” into it, etc. In Zagladin’s textbook it states: ‘...in the 14th century the Kazan and Astrakhan khanates were *incorporated* into Russia, the Nogai Horde and Bashkiria *recognised its authority* [...] The Russian started to *appropriate* the Volga and Trans-Ural lands, the North Caucasus’...’ at the start of the 17th century [...] *the expansion of the borders* slowed down, although the *settlement* of Siberia [...] continued’...’ after the Napoleonic wars ended, in line with the decision of the Congress of Vienna in 1815, *Russia incorporated* a large amount of territory, mainly Poland and Warsaw’...’ Sweden [...] ceded to Russia Ingria, the territory that is now Estonia, Latvia, Finland’...’ In 1739 it [Russia] *incorporated once and for all* Azov and Zaporozh’e. [...] As a result of the wars with Turkey, Iran, the Caucasus War with the highland peoples [...] Chechnya, Adygheia, Gorny Dagestan, Svania, Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan (in other words, the North Caucasus and the Transcaucasus) as well as Bessarabia were *incorporated into* the Russian empire’ (*Ibid.*, pp.64-66).

101 *Ibid.*, p.363.

The authors’ approval of Russia’s (colonising) actions is revealed particularly clearly against the background of the rhetoric of “colonial *expansion* and *seizures*” carried out by “Western European countries”, one example of which is: ‘[A]s Russia *increased its penetration* into Central Asia, England *repeated its attempts to conquer Afghanistan*.’¹⁰² The same actions (the seizure of new territories and the conquest of the population) are described in different terms depending on who is carrying them out: Russia “penetrates” and “incorporates”, whilst England and others “conquer”.

If the coloniser is a “European country”, its actions are described as a disaster for the ‘peoples of the colonies’.¹⁰³ If, however, it is Russia, it is merely “extending its own borders” or ‘being transformed into a multinational state’.¹⁰⁴ It is argued that developing an empire in this way allows *special* relations between the conquerors and the conquered peoples to be formed: ‘[C]onflicts between peoples of the metropolises and the conquered territories were domestic rather than international problems for Russia.’¹⁰⁵

The possession of “*overseas colonies*” is viewed quite differently from the “appropriation” of territories “*directly adjoining* the main territory of the empire”. The first is associated with “violence and suppression” and is classed as “colonialism”, whilst the second is associated with ‘protecting vitally important interests’¹⁰⁶ and ‘responsibility for the fate of the peoples living [on the territories of these interests]’.¹⁰⁷ Whilst the “peoples” conquered by “Western colonial powers” were in a “disastrous” position, “incorporation into the Russian Empire” is generally portrayed as their “salvation”:

‘[F]or many peoples with belligerent and hostile neighbours (Turkey and Iran for the Georgians and Armenians, the Dzhungar for the Kazakhs), incorporation in the Russian Empire was their salvation given the conditions that existed at the time. It helped them to retain their national culture and traditions and protect themselves from being assimilated by force (absorbed by a more powerful people). The members of their ruling elite became part of the imperial elite.’¹⁰⁸

102 *Ibid.*, p.356.

103 ‘The conquests were a disaster for the peoples of the colonies. They were accompanied by destruction, looting of their indigenous lands, caused starvation and epidemics that led to the deaths of many people’ (*Ibid.*, p.359). ‘The poorest, uneducated sections of the population, guided by their religious leaders and parts of the local feudal nobility, tried to resist or recover their independence. They were the first to bear the brunt of the colonisers’ attacks but their resistance was in most cases unsuccessful. Calls for the restoration of traditional lifestyles and the expulsion of the Europeans were mercilessly suppressed’ (*Ibid.*, p.359).

104 ‘Questions and tasks: 1. List the ways in which the Russian Empire changed into a multinational state. [...]’ (*Ibid.*, p.370).

105 *Ibid.*, p.370.

106 ‘Russia had no overseas colonies like England or France. The lands incorporated in the 19th century [Poland, Finland, Central Asia] directly adjoined the Empire’s core territory. The principal foreign policy objective for the Tsarist government was to ensure strategic security on the Empire’s borders. However, this objective was not limited to defence, it included the problem of establishing control over parts of the world that were recognised as of vital importance for Russia’ (O. V. Volobuev et al (2004b). *Op. Cit.*, p.35).

107 For example, ‘Russia has long considered the Balkans as lying within its sphere of interests and felt responsible for the fate of the Orthodox peoples living there’ (*Ibid.*, p.38).

108 N. V. Zagladin (2005). *Op.Cit.*, p.368.

‘The peoples who populated the Russian Empire *did not entirely enjoy the same rights*. The autocracy *restricted the rights* of peoples who displayed resistance. These inequalities and restrictions generated resistance and encouraged calls for independence, and with immigration became a cause of tension in inter-ethnic relations that played a significant part in the demise of the empire (emphasis added).’¹⁰⁹

The subject of the “incorporation of the Caucasus in the early 19th century” is not covered in all contemporary textbooks.¹¹⁰ The textbook by Volobuev et al¹¹¹ combines the “incorporation of the Caucasus in the early 19th century”¹¹² with other topics (“the incorporation of Kazakhstan and Central Asia”, the “Settlement of Siberia and the Far East” and a summary of “Empire building”) into one section: “Russia - a multinational empire”.¹¹³

Features distinguishing (Soviet/post-Soviet) articulations of this topic worth mentioning are that Volobuev and others’ textbooks contain far more references to various treaties;¹¹⁴ there is no thematisation of class conflict and equating of “the people” with “the workers” which is so characteristic of the Soviet narrative. This means that the linguistic resource which permits a dual assessment of the Russian presence (in the Caucasus in particular) disappears; the author/pupil is no longer positioned as siding with the “workers”;¹¹⁵ the phrase “colonialist policy” is not used but replaced by the rhetoric of “incorporation [of...] into Russia”, etc. Despite the differences in the detailed descriptions of the process of “the incorporation of the Transcaucasus”, it is still presented in a neutral or positive

109 *Ibid.*, p.370.

110 In Zagladin’s textbook, in particular, it is restricted to one assertion: ‘As a result of the wars with Turkey, Iran, the Caucasus War with the highland peoples [...] Chechnya, Adygheya, Gorny Dagestan, Svanetia, Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan (in other words, the North Caucasus and the Transcaucasus) as well as Bessarabia were incorporated into the Russian empire’ (*Ibid.*, pp.64-66).

111 This textbook is the one used as the main source of material in this section.

112 O. V. Volobuev, et al (2004a). *Op. Cit.*, pp.340-344.

113 *Ibid.*, pp.339-354 (in conjunction with the table “The ethnic composition of the population in Russia at the end of the 19th century”).

114 ‘The incorporation of the Transcaucasus began with the signing in 1783 of the Treaty of Georgievsk which established a Russian protectorate over the East Georgian empire of Kartli-Kakheti’ (*Ibid.*, p.340). ‘The Treaty of Bucharest recognised Russia’s rights to Georgia. In 1813 the Gulistan Peace Treaty was concluded, by which Iran ceded Dagestan, northern Azerbaijan and eastern Georgia to Russia’ (*Ibid.*, p.340). ‘In 1828 Iran, which had been defeated in the war, ceded the khanates of Yerevan (eastern Armenia) and Nakhichevan to Russia under the Treaty of Turkmenchai. This peace treaty put an end to the wars between Russia and Iran. In the same year war began with Turkey, resulting in the peace treaty of Adrianopolis which granted Russia the Black Sea coast of the Caucasus from the mouth of the river Kuban to Poti, the oblast’ of Akhhaltsikh (lands of southern Georgia) and the Danube delta’ (*Ibid.*, pp.340-341).

115 The aim of “the Russian authorities” ‘to establish good relations with the local nobility’ (*Ibid.*, p.341) is described in neutral terms. ‘Around 30,000 Georgian landowners were ennobled or granted royal titles. In Georgia and Azerbaijan all lands owned by the local landowners before the incorporation into Russia were declared their unconditional and hereditary property and the peasants living on them were declared their serfs. The lands of the members of the local nobility who were hostile to Russia were confiscated and transferred to the state treasury. The Armenian church was granted permanent title to its land along with the peasants living on it. As a result of these measures the majority of the members of the Transcaucasian nobility became faithful servants of imperial Russia’ (*Ibid.*, p.341).

light:¹¹⁶ ‘The victories of the Russian troops rid the peoples of the Transcaucasus of the destructive aids by Iranian and Turkish troops’;¹¹⁷ ‘As a result of the incorporation of the Transcaucasus into the Russian Empire, internal strife ceased and the population was protected from external attacks. Favourable conditions were created for the development of the economy, the maintenance and development of Armenian, Azerbaijani and Georgian culture’,¹¹⁸ etc.

There is no questioning of whether (in the early 19th century) the “peoples of the Transcaucasus”, “Armenians”, “Georgians”, “Azerbaijanis” and the corresponding (“Armenian, Azerbaijani, Georgian”) “national cultures” actually existed. Incorporation into the Russian Empire (and later the USSR) allowed them to “develop”. The absence of any articulation of the differences that existed (and continue to exist) within the communities that are today referred to as “Armenians”, “Azerbaijanis” and “Georgians” allows them to be conceptualised as homogenous in cultural and political terms. The “peoples of the North Caucasus” are treated rather differently. They appear in the chapter “The Caucasus War”, which starts with the following passages:

‘The peoples of the North Caucasus spoke around fifty languages.¹¹⁹ Most of these belonged to the North Caucasian family of languages which itself comprised three groups: Abkhaz-Adygheian (Abkhaz, Adyghe, Circassians, Kabardinians), Nakh (Chechens, Ingush) and Dagestani (Avar, Dargin, Lek, Lesgin, etc.). Turkic-speaking peoples also lived here (Nogai, Balkar, Karachaev, Kumyk). All the indigenous peoples of the Caucasus (with the exception of the Iranian-speaking Ossetians, most of whom were Russian Orthodox) were Muslims.

By contrast with the peoples of the Transcaucasus, who had cultural and state traditions rooted in antiquity, for the highland peoples of the North Caucasus the process of state formation was just beginning and in the remote, less accessible regions, a tribal culture prevailed. Thus, for example, in Dagestan, there were up to 10 different state entities and over 60 “free societies”. Independent “free societies” prevailed in Chechnia and Ingushetia. The peoples of the Caucasus suffered from intertribal strife.¹²⁰

116 ‘The incorporation of the Transcaucasus began with the signing in 1783 of the Treaty of Georgievsk which established a Russian protectorate over the East Georgian empire of Kartli-Kakheti. Russia became the patron of eastern Georgia and undertook to defend it in time of war. However, this did not save the Georgian lands from destructive raids from neighbouring Iran. By 1810, as a result of support from the local population, Georgia and northern Azerbaijan were already under the control of Russian troops’ (*Ibid.*, p.340). Just why Russian “patronage” and its “undertaking to defend” “did not save the Georgian lands from destructive raids from neighbouring Iran” is left unanswered.

117 *Ibid.*, p.341.

118 *Ibid.*, p.341.

119 There is no discussion of the linguistic differences between “Armenians”, “Azerbaijanis” and “Georgians” of the 19th century.

120 *Ibid.*, pp.341-342.

In line with traditional Soviet practice, the author distinguishes two territories (the “Transcaucasus” and the “North Caucasus”¹²¹) and two types of “peoples” (“the peoples of the Transcaucasus” and “the peoples of the North Caucasus”), assigning to these “peoples” different stages of development and emphasising the economic backwardness of “the peoples of the North Caucasus”. In what may be seen as a departure from tradition, he provides a more detailed articulation of the absence (or weakness) of the “cultural and state traditions” and “unifying forces” (linguistic, political and cultural diversity) of these peoples against a background of their *universal* adherence to Islam. The use of the category “tribe” allows the *backwardness* of the “highland peoples” to be emphasised once again.¹²²

As becomes clear from the text, Islam is viewed as *unifying* the “highland peoples” but only in terms of the fight against ‘the Russian administration, the military command and the Cossacks’.¹²³ For the authors of other textbooks, the principal reason for the “resistance” of the “peoples populating the highland regions of the Caucasus” is their unwillingness to abandon ‘their customary lifestyle in which raids on surrounding territories played a key part’,¹²⁴ as well as their adherence to “Islam” and the mass spread of “Muridism”.¹²⁵

The cultural and political diversity of “the peoples of the North Caucasus” is associated with “backwardness”. The “highland peoples” [*gortsi*] are also ascribed a tradition of carrying out ‘systematic raids, not only in the Transcaucasus but also on the foothills

121 The categories “southern Caucasus” and “eastern/western Caucasus” were not encountered.

122 Russian pupils are required to assimilate the idea from the “Social Science” course that a “tribe” is the lowest stage of development of an “ethnos” and is furthest away from its “highest stage” – a “nation” O. Karpenko [2008]. *Obuchenie “natsional'nym” razlichiam: “narod” v shkol'nykh uchebnikakh obschestvovedeniia // Racizm v jazyke obrazovanija / Voronkov V., Karpenko O., Osipov A., СПб: Aliteia, 2008. S. 5-23; O. Karpenko [2010]. ‘Teaching “national” differences: “narod” in Russian school textbooks’, in M. Rivkin-Fish & E. Trubina (eds) *Paradoxes of Diversity in the Contemporary World: Discussions of ‘Culture’ and ‘Tolerance’ after the Soviet Union*. Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars: Washington DC. pp. 193-217.*

123 ‘The constant conflicts in the North Caucasus between the Russian administration, the military command and the Cossacks on the one hand and the *de facto* independent highland tribes on the other, spilled over into the large-scale Caucasus War. The highland peoples waged this war under the banner of a *ghazavat* (a holy war against infidels). It was led by the *imam* – the spiritual head of the North Caucasian Muslims. [...] The third imam became a celebrated leader of the highland peoples. This was Shamil, who for 25 years, until 1859, was the head of the “*Imam state*” which was formed on the territory of highland Dagestan and Chechnia’ [O. V. Volobuev et al (2004a). *Op. Cit.*, p.343].

124 ‘The start of the Caucasus War. Muridism. Things were rather different in the North Caucasus, which stood between Transcaucasia and Russia, preventing them from being unified. At the start of the 19th century the Russian authorities were still able to sign a treaty with the Ossetians and Ingush incorporating them into Russia. However, most of the peoples populating the highland regions of the Caucasus were defiant: as Muslims, the highlanders were not willing to submit to “infidels”. In addition, subjection to Russia inevitably involved abandoning their customary practices of raids on the surrounding territories. The highlanders were dangerous opponents, warlike, tightly-knit tribes, unquestioningly loyal to their leaders with all the common features of a tribal community’ [A. Levandovskii (2009). *Op. Cit.*, p.158].

125 ‘...from the end of the 20s the struggle in the North Caucasus entered a new stage: Muridism spread increasingly throughout a number of highland peoples (mainly in Chechnia and Dagestan). The adherents of this movement, the *Murids*, were required to observe strict *sharia* law [the rules prescribed by Islam]. The punishments for violating *sharia* law were very serious. At this time the *Murids* became warriors who unquestioningly obeyed their leaders and spiritual teachers, under whose leadership they had to wage a merciless war against the “infidels”. Muridism united the elemental, fragmented anti-Russian movement in the Caucasus, transforming it into a force to be reckoned with’ (*Ibid.*, pp.158-159).

and plains of the North Caucasus, where the economy was being developed under Russia’s influence’.¹²⁶ This practice is explained by the scarcity of land needed for pasture (the ‘principal occupation in the highland areas’¹²⁷); the “primitive” nature of arable farming;¹²⁸ the tradition of slave trading, cattle raiding,¹²⁹ etc. In this context any policy and practice of “Russia” in the North Caucasus, which are presented as ‘clashing with the interests of those organising and participating in these raids’,¹³⁰ is seen as entirely legitimate and justified. Finally, the normalisation and legitimisation of Russian policy in the North Caucasus is further helped by a presentation of the geopolitical situation in which “Russia” is *required* to fight “independent highland tribes” which were ‘threatening Russian supremacy in the Caucasus’.¹³¹

The “struggle for independence” and the resolution of the “nationality question” in the USSR

In Soviet textbooks the phrase “national liberation struggle” is given an almost exclusively positive meaning. All negative consequences of “national self-determination” are ascribed to “bourgeois nationalists”. In the contemporary version, the “national liberation struggle” is associated with “putting the slogan of the struggle for the creation of national states into practice” and is labelled “nationalism”.

“Nationalism” is presented constructively as “the striving [of the people] for freedom, democracy and economic prosperity”, as well as destructively as “anti-European protests” by the peoples as they liberate themselves, a “rise in national intolerance and enmity”, and oppression by ‘the peoples who created their independent states, of [their

126 O. V. Volobuev et al (2004a). *Op. Cit.*, p.342.

127 ‘There was little arable land in the highland regions and Russia managed to hold on to the land in the plains. Overcrowding in the pastoral lands (the highlanders overwintered their cattle in the foothills and the plains) caused difficulties in relations between the tribes, the nobility, the communities and the Tsarist administration, as well as the Cossacks’ (*Ibid.*, p.342).

128 *Ibid.*

129 ‘For centuries, slaves had been sent by the North Caucasus to the markets of the Middle East. Capturing prisoners, cattle and property was an integral part of the life of the highland peoples’ (*Ibid.*, p.342).

130 *Ibid.*, p.342.

131 ‘The political situation changed substantially following the incorporation of the Transcaucasus into Russia. The lands belonging to the highland tribes were surrounded on all sides by lands that were now part of the Russian Empire. The independent highland tribes, always ready for armed attacks, were a threat to Russia’s dominion in the Caucasus. They posed a danger to the settled farming communities in the Transcaucasus and the Russian *oblast*’s. The Muslim highlanders were influenced particularly by Turkey, which could potentially use them in its fight against Russia. In an attempt to consolidate its ownership of the newly incorporated lands, the Tsarist administration and the military command began to advance deep into the highland regions, building roads and fortresses as they did so. The highlanders in turn attacked the fortresses and military units’ (*Ibid.*, pp.342-343).

own] national minorities'.¹³² This would appear to be a projection of views of events associated with the disintegration of the USSR onto the events of the Sovietisation period.

In some contemporary textbooks Russia (the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic) is described as the only donor to fund the “consistent implementation [in the USSR] of the policy of the rapprochement of nations”: ‘the smoothing of inequalities in the socio-economic and cultural development of the Soviet republics [was achieved] through the channelling of resources from the RSFSR and within it from the Greater Russian oblast’s to the autonomous entities.’¹³³ If accepted non-critically, this could give rise to objections such as: “we built everything for you but you do not respect us”.

The textbook under analysis talks of the formation, following the February 1917 revolution,¹³⁴ of a “number of national governments,” including three from the “Transcaucasus”, ‘headed by the representatives of local socialist parties opposed to the Bolsheviks’.¹³⁵ Their refusal to cooperate with the “Bolsheviks” is no longer seen as “against the people”, and the “establishment” of “worker-peasant governments” on the territories of former “outlying ethnic areas” (after the overthrow of the “national governments”) is described as resulting from the ‘use of military force [by the Bolsheviks]’.¹³⁶ The authors’ disapproval of the practices by which Soviet authority was established in the “outlying ethnic areas” is clear from their use of inverted commas.¹³⁷ These are used to de-legitimise the Soviet “worker-peasant governments” which emerged in the “outlying ethnic areas”.

As in the Soviet textbooks, the “incorporation of the Soviet republics” into the Union (in 1922) is seen as following a “logical pattern”; however, the “logical pattern” discerned here is entirely different. The incorporation is logical since it fits the model of hierarchical relations within the party perfectly:

132 ‘The beginning of the 20th century was marked by a rise in national feeling of the peoples within the multi-ethnic empire [...] For these peoples, the rhetoric around the creation of national states was a symbol of their aspirations for freedom, democracy and economic prosperity. At the same time, however, nationalism had a destructive side. The liberation movement in the eastern countries often took on the form of anti-European protests. Nationalism and racism were an integral part of the misanthropic ideologies which emerged in the West in the 20th century and which led to violence and war’ (O. V. Volobuev, et al (2004b). *Op. Cit.*, p.12). ‘In the post-war [World War I] world the national movement gained ground. The age of empires in Europe and Asia was over and independent national states were arising from out of their ruins. [...] There was a reverse side to the process of the rise in the national movement. It led to a rise in national intolerance and enmity. Once the peoples had created their own independent states they often began to oppress national minorities themselves. This happened, for example, with Ukrainians and Belorussians in Poland, and with Hungarians in Romania and Germans in Czechoslovakia’ (*Ibid.*, pp.86-87).

133 A. A. Levandovskii & Iu. A. Shchetinov (2004). *Op. Cit.*, p.185.

134 When the “inhabitants” of the “outlying ethnic areas” were given the opportunity to ‘make a choice between incorporation within a unified state, some form of autonomy, or obtaining state sovereignty’ (O. V. Volobuev, et al (2004b). *Op. Cit.*, p.76).

135 *Ibid.*, p.78.

136 *Ibid.*, p.78.

137 Inverted commas are now placed around the “worker-peasant governments”. This is the device used in Soviet textbooks when referring to “bourgeois governments” of this historical period.

‘The [B]olshevik regime was constituted on a one-party basis. Sections from one party – the “All-Union Communist Party (Bolshevik)” administered the former outlying ethnic areas. The party was built on the basis of harsh discipline and strict top-down obedience. Relations between Soviet republics were remodelled on exactly the same basis. Essentially the union of the states reflected the Party organisation. In this sense the plan for “autonomisation” proposed by the People’s Commissar for Nationality Issues, Stalin, was even in some respects more “honest” than Lenin’s idea of full equal rights for the republics as set out in the Treaty and Declaration of the Creation of the USSR. After all, the state, although formally a “federal” one, was in fact a unitary state in which the entities within the union had no sovereign rights.’¹³⁸

The reference to Stalin’s greater “honesty” is a fairly widely-used device for articulating dispute within the party on the issue,¹³⁹ and suggests that Lenin and Stalin were in complete agreement on the question of constructing it based on the Party model. There is no discussion of the reasons as to why the majority of members of the Congress, at which the relevant resolution was adopted, voted in favour of “Lenin’s” option. The impression is thus raised in the pupil’s mind that the “Bolsheviks” were unanimous in their desire to construct the Union based on the model of a single party; the only remaining question was who was prepared to express this “honestly”.¹⁴⁰

The incorporation also forms a “logical pattern” since ‘[T]he Union state united peoples who had been connected by a *common historical fate* for centuries’.¹⁴¹

‘Their past was full of heroic deeds in joint battles with the enemy. The economic ties and cultural traditions of the peoples were closely intertwined. History provided them with one more chance to continue constructing a common homeland.’¹⁴²

138 *Ibid.*, p.80. For another version of the same idea: ‘Right from the start, the sovereign republics were created as part of a wider political union, which was inevitably given the monolithic nature of the Soviet state system and the concentration of power in the hands of a single Bolshevik party (the communist parties of the republics originally joined the All-Russian Communist Party (Bolshevik) as oblast’-level organisations)’ (A. A. Levandovskii & Iu. A. Shchetinov (2004). *Op. Cit.*, p.182).

139 This question is discussed in some of the textbooks I have examined (in varying degrees of detail). For example, ‘[I]n September 1922 a committee of the Central Committee of the All-Russian Communist Party (Bolshevik), attended by Stalin, drafted a so-called “autonomisation plan”: whereby the Soviet republics would be incorporated into the RSFSR as autonomies. Stalin, not without reason, justified this by referring to the sham, formal nature of the independence of the national republics which had been pronounced at a time when in the heat of the Civil War “it had been necessary to demonstrate Moscow’s liberalism on the nationality question”. Now, however, he thought there was no longer any need for this political subterfuge. The idea of “autonomisation” was approved with varying degrees of reservation by almost all the Communist leaders of the Soviet republics. Only the members of the Central Committee of the Georgian Communist Party rejected it unanimously. [...] This argument was supported by Lenin who dismissed the “autonomisation” project as a political error that was inappropriate, even in peacetime. [...] The Central Committee of the All-Russian Communist Party (Bolshevik) spoke in favour of [Lenin’s] proposal’ (*Ibid.*, p.183).

140 This comment may be of interest in the context of the current debate within Russia on how “Stalin” should be portrayed in school textbooks.

141 O. V. Volobuev et al (2004b). *Op. Cit.*, p.80.

142 *Ibid.*

The USSR is thus criticised as a “Bolshevik” plan based on the Party structure, but is at the same time presented as a “common homeland” for the “peoples” within it. (The metaphor of a “common homeland” provides the USSR as a state project with unambiguously positive connotations.) This duality in the assessment of the USSR arises from the intersection of disapproval of (certain) means used by the *Bolsheviks* to construct a “common homeland” (i.e. the repression of some peoples, etc.) and overall approval of the end result. Today, the Soviet “policy of the rapprochement of nations” is condemned chiefly for its (failed) attempt to deal with and overcome the “essential characteristics of nations”:

‘The main outcome of the consistent policy of rapprochement of nations was to smooth out inequalities in the socio-economic and cultural development of the Soviet republics [...] There were also some signs of the internationalisation of certain parties in Soviet society, including an increase in the number of mixed marriages.

‘And yet, on the whole, the nations stubbornly refused to “integrate” or relinquish their independence, the traditions and customs handed down by their ancestors. On the contrary, as the economic and cultural situation of the Union and the autonomous republics improved, the national self-awareness of the indigenous peoples populating them and their aspirations for their own national statehood and sovereignty to be established also grew. This could only lead to increasing conflict with formal federalism. Over the years, the crack in the foundations of the USSR which dated back to its creation was not contained and in fact widened.’¹⁴³

According to the version in contemporary textbooks, the structural features and organisational principles of “the new type of Party” were the cement binding and keeping the “Socialist nations” in the Union, rather than any genuine desire of the “peoples” to live as part of the “Soviet family”. Soviet federalism is seen as a fiction that retained its influence until the Communist Party was no longer capable of stopping “the crack in the foundation of the USSR” from widening. At the same time, the “actual” establishment of “national statehood and sovereignty” is associated with the implementation of the right of “the indigenous people”. The “crack” is identified as resulting from the fact that the implementation of this right in the USSR was a sham. This argument does not take into consideration the fact that the very term “indigenous peoples” is a cultural and political construct of the Soviet nationality policy. Positing an equivalence between “national statehood and sovereignty” and the implementation of the right of “the indigenous people” creates a basis for legitimising an ethnocentric model of state organisation and ethnonationalism as state ideology.

¹⁴³ A. A. Levandovskii & Iu. A. Shchetinov (2004). *Op. Cit.*, p.185.

Conclusion

The above analysis has, at its centre, the term “(our) people” which appears in both Soviet and contemporary textbooks on national history. The analysis identified some continuity in the practical use of the term: both the Soviet and contemporary narratives portray “peoples” in essentialist terms, as independent historical actors with their own distinct cultures, destinies, interests and rights. The inalienable right of “peoples” to an independent existence and the legitimacy of “peoples” struggle for “freedom” is not questioned in either case. At the same time, there is a material difference in the meanings with which the notion of “the people” is suffused (its “interests”, “freedom” and “independence”).

The Soviet approach is based on the notion of a class antagonism which divides “peoples” (“the toiling “masses”) and “exploiters”, and class solidarity which links “peoples” through ties of “brotherhood”. Conflicts and enmity between “peoples” are associated exclusively with intrigues by the “exploiters” and their “accomplices”, who strive to prevent “peoples” from uniting in a just struggle against the class enemy, systematically divide them, and instigate quarrels between them. The reason given for the success of these provocations is not that there are profound differences in the culture and/or interests of the peoples, but that they (“*narodi*”) are incapable of identifying their *objectively* common interest (in building socialism/communism). The argument is that victory in the struggle against the “exploiters” and in the building of “socialist nations” automatically dispenses with the question of “national divisions” and “national oppression”, and signifies that the people have achieved freedom and independence.

In the post-Soviet version the “freedom of the people” is no longer defined in terms of the implementation of internationalist class interest or associated with the “brotherhood of the peoples”. The principal “interest of the people” is now its need to maintain and defend (from external attacks) its territory, cultural and historical legacy.

Whereas Soviet textbooks explain “national enmity” through the presence of “the exploiting classes” in society interested in its (re)production, in contemporary textbooks this enmity is portrayed as immanent in all relations between “peoples”. Whereas the Soviet version portrays “peoples” as linked by the “ties of friendship”, the contemporary version emphasises the tendency of “the people” to exclude “aliens”.

In contemporary textbooks the struggle of “peoples” for “liberation” from colonial oppression is just but is also associated with violence (“the rise in national intolerance and enmity”). It can be argued that this dual assessment of the “struggle for national independence” helps to legitimise a certain vision of the collapse of the USSR. On the one hand, the collapse appears to be a natural result of the Soviet national policy which proclaimed but, according to this argument, never implemented the “right of the nations

to self-determination up to and including secession”. (There is no attempt to dispute the justice of this claim and its implementation is viewed as redressing an injustice.) On the other hand, “we” (“the Russians”) are victims of the “nationalism” of “the peoples” which “are building new nation states”.

One can dispute whether the USSR (at any period of its existence) carried on the traditions of the Russian empire; however, it is clear that Russian school textbooks make no attempt to critically interpret the experience of “appropriating the outlying ethnic areas” or abandon the paternalistic view of Russia’s “neighbours”. The Russian and Soviet presence on the territories of what are now independent states is seen as benefiting the peoples populating them. Contemporary textbooks tend to emphasise the notion of Russia as a donor in relation to the other republics in the Union. This tends to prevent objections voiced by its “neighbours” from being interpreted as “just” or having any basis. The suggestion is clear that in any dispute over who suffered the most from the Soviet regime, Russia will always come out on top.

SECTION 2

The Conflicts and Historical Narratives

CHAPTER 7

Armenia and Azerbaijan: The Nagorny Karabakh Conflict and the Reinterpretation of Narratives in History Textbooks

Philip Gamaghelyan and Sergey Rumyantsev

Introduction

In 1991 the Soviet Union collapsed and Armenia and Azerbaijan, two Soviet Socialist Republics for the past 70 years, acquired independence. The Soviet territorial dispute between the two neighbours over the territory of the predominantly Armenian-populated Nagorny Karabakh Autonomous Oblast' of Soviet Azerbaijan transformed into a war between two now sovereign nations that took an estimated 30,000 lives and resulted in the displacement of over one million persons. A ceasefire agreement mediated by Russia in 1994 brought an end to the active cycle of violence, but no political settlement. Since then, negotiations between the Azerbaijani and Armenian presidents have been underway, currently led by the OSCE Minsk group under the co-chairmanship of the US, Russia and France, although they have not succeeded in bringing the sides any closer to an agreement.

In the 1990s, the intractability of the conflict was often blamed on the competing interests of superpowers.¹ In particular, Russia has been portrayed as having an interest in the protraction of the conflict.² Following the August 2008 war over South Ossetia, the then newly-elected Russian president, Dmitrii Medvedev, signalled the new and positive role Russia was willing to play in the region, investing significant time and political capital in trying to resolve the Nagorny Karabakh conflict. Between 2008 and 2011, the US, Russia, France and the EU, all key international players, were on the same page trying to resolve this conflict. The presidents of the three mediating countries, Obama, Medvedev and Sarkozy, got personally involved on a number of occasions, issuing joint statements encouraging the sides to come to a settlement. The Russian president, with the support of the other co-chair countries, hosted 10 meetings between the Armenian and Azerbaijani presidents over this period, trying to personally mediate the conflict. These concerted efforts by the international community resulted in nothing but failure, exposing that the conflict, at its core, is intractable not because of geopolitical games but because the sides themselves are not ready to compromise.

As the Nagorny Karabakh peace process enters the third decade of post-ceasefire stalemate, the parties are drifting further apart, increasingly engaged in an arms race, breaching the ceasefire agreement through frequent skirmishes and sniper killings along the line of contact, and resorting to belligerent rhetoric. The ongoing low-intensity conflict is not limited to a military build-up: the media and the education systems have been effectively turned into propaganda machines and are actively engaged in ideological “war mongering”, carving out a narrative of eternal enmity, creating a positive image of the “self” and dehumanising “the other”.

1 C. Crocker, F.O. Hampson & P. Aall (2004). *Taming Intractable Conflicts: Mediation in Hard Cases*. USIP Press: Washington DC.

2 P. Gamaghelyan (2005). *Intractability of the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict: A Myth or a Reality?* Peace and Conflict Monitor, University for Peace: Costa Rica. Available at http://www.monitor.ucepeace.org/archive.cfm?id_article=285.

The transition of the conflict into a state of permanence may be viewed as its major feature in the post-1994 period. This has been caused by the reluctance of the main conflict parties to accept mutual concessions and compromises, and also by the quick spread of revanchist sentiments. Despite statements by the presidents of the two countries about their will for a peaceful settlement, the constant growth of military budgets and increased attention on developing the armies amid a multitude of unresolved economic and social problems can also be interpreted as actual preparation for another war. The situation in the field of historical research may be interpreted in the same way, as well as the teaching of national history in Azerbaijan and Armenia, considering that the discursive image of the “enemy” occupies a key role in the historical narrative.

In the early 1990s, almost immediately after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the development of new educational narratives on national history began in Azerbaijan and Armenia. The historical narrative developed under the USSR was, to a considerable extent, used as a basis for the new national narratives. The further back into history the narratives went, the greater the degree to which the revision of the narratives was determined only by a change in intonation during the description of events; images of heroes, various political figures or artists, which had been constructed by specialists during the Soviet period, were barely affected.

To a considerable extent, it was mainly historical events relating to the 19th and 20th centuries which were revised, from the arrival of the Russian Empire in the Caucasus, to the brief period of nation-building in 1918-20 and to the establishment of the Soviet political regime. The conflict over the control of Nagorny Karabakh during the collapse of the Soviet Union caused a collective image of the “historical enemy” to be constructed. In Azerbaijani history textbooks, alongside their Armenian counterparts, this image (myth) also includes Russians and Iranians (Persians). In Armenian textbooks, this “enemy image” was projected onto Turks and Azerbaijanis, who were often conflated into one identity.

As in the Soviet version, the narratives developed in the post-Soviet period give considerable space to political history, which is presented as a chain of wars, uprisings and unions “for” or “against”. The compilers of the textbooks retrospectively interpreted numerous conflicts and wars of the 19th and 20th centuries, based on the context of the Karabakh conflict which was contemporary for the authors (1988-94). In Azerbaijani textbooks, Azerbaijan’s role in these conflicts and wars is to a considerable extent defined also through describing the country as part of the “single Turkic world” (the post-Soviet version of pan-Turkism). Among the allied states/nations which are commonly described as “fraternal”, the central position is given to its regional neighbour, Turkey. In Armenian textbooks, on the contrary, Armenians are portrayed as a unique ethno-national and religious identity, defined by its struggle for survival against various “others” and in the most recent past the “others” are Turks and Azerbaijanis. Certain “Christian” powers, particularly Russia, are often described as allies, even if unreliable.

This article focuses on how the history of the Nagorny Karabakh conflict, the 1991-1994 war period and the post-war period is presented in contemporary textbooks, focusing in particular on the narrative and plot created in the process and its influence on relations between the two societies, on the continuation of the conflict, and on the prospects of its resolution. The political process of rewriting Soviet era historical texts and creating contemporary history textbooks for secondary schools in Armenia and Azerbaijan has been studied by other authors in this volume, Sevil Huseinova and Tigran Matosyan.

History, memory and conflict

Individuals witness first hand only a minuscule part of “history”. The rest of what we “know” about history is what has been transmitted to us through generations with the help of history textbooks, oral narratives, commemorative ceremonies and other means. Even when it comes to recent events, they are transmitted through media, second-hand oral stories, gossip and the internet. Considering the bias prevalent in media or the internet and the tendency of stories to get distorted as they are passed from person to person or from one source to another, even contemporary events rarely reach individuals in their pure form. If we are rarely able to agree on “fact” when it comes to contemporary events, then, taking into account the political motivation which is part of writing, re-writing and approval of history books and textbooks, it becomes clear that history textbooks constitute a politically-motivated interpretation of the past rather than narration of events as they actually happened.³

The term “history” in Armenia and Azerbaijan is typically understood in a positivist way, as a precise science. The task of history is seen as that of uncovering the “facts” and establishing the “truth”. The present day narration of history is often equated with the events as they actually happened. However, as Ricoeur and many others have pointed out, “history” has little to do with science and a lot to do with narrating a story and effectively creating a plot. To be historical, ‘an event must be more than a singular occurrence: it must be defined in terms of its contribution to the development of a plot’.⁴

This is not to say that history has no factual basis. The factual evidence behind “historical” events might be quite sound. However, out of the plethora of documents and competing interpretations, historians select the evidence that best fits their narrative, leaving out and effectively “silencing” other voices, condemning them to be “forgotten” or to be interpreted from a particular viewpoint.

3 P. Gamaghelyan (2011). ‘Lessons of “History”’. Available at: <http://thenotblackandwhite.wordpress.com/2011/03/10/>.

4 P. Ricoeur (1981). ‘The Narrative Function’, *Hermeneutics & the Human Sciences*. Cambridge University Press, p.277.

This brings us to another important general characteristic of national historical narratives, specifically those in history textbooks. While intuitively history appears to be chronological, starting from earlier times and ending in the present, we insist that it is, in effect, “written backwards”, lining up events in a way which explain and justify present day “national interests”. Events which do not fit into this storyline are omitted or interpreted in a way to fit the “story”. It would come as no surprise, then, if we were to insist that textbooks be periodically rewritten, not only in order to add recent events. As the “plot” in textbooks changes from time to time, the events represented in the textbooks are also added, removed or reinterpreted – and these changes are not accidental. The historical narrative, the national “plot”, is created with an aim to explain the present day context of society, to justify present day politics and, in cases of ethnic conflicts, to dehumanise the “other” and contribute to ethnic mobilisation. The events of the past, therefore, are chosen, interpreted and sequenced in a way to create a “national narrative” that would serve the aforementioned aims. This is done sometimes as an explicit political order with the clear aim of constructing historical memory, as in the case of totalitarian states, and in other cases subconsciously by national historians who have internalised the national narrative and contribute to its reproduction.

The paradox of the situation is that “history” becomes essentially ahistorical: it is a story that projects the present into the past in a way which explains and justifies our present day interests. Furthermore, this same “present projected into the past” history is used to draw on “lessons of the past” and create plans for the future.

The uncritical acceptance of history, as narrated by textbooks as a “truth”, and its confusion with the past as it actually happened is extremely dangerous in conflict situations for a number of reasons: it leads to uncritical acceptance of a “story” of self-victimhood and the dehumanised nature of the “other” as a “natural” state of affairs, making resolution and reconciliation unthinkable and the conflict virtually intractable; it leads to endless fights about the historical “truth” and denial of the validity of the other side’s story and, by extension, of their very identity; “historical” claims lead to a perception of self-righteousness and a denial of the basic rights of the other group; the stories of victimisation and glory justify the past and potential future violence against the other group.

Cultivating a critical approach to what “history” is and what it represents becomes, therefore, central for sustainable conflict resolution in protracted intra-group conflicts. We do not, however, deny groups their need to define their collective identity in relation to the past, as it is a basic function of making sense of a reality and forming a group identity. Yet defining oneself in relation to the past does not have to happen uncritically. History can and should be understood as a narrative, as an interpretation of the past conveyed to us in a way different than it was conveyed to other groups due to the environment in which we live, the identity choices we make and the agents of information transmission that we use

and accept as valid. The information we possess is extremely limited and limiting, no matter how objective we try to be. While our “knowledge” of the past is necessary for us to make sense of who we are, it has little to do with the past as it actually happened. The solution to this dilemma of history, we suggest, is not in trying hard to uncover the “truth” and develop an objective history, but instead in accepting that the capacity of humanity in uncovering historical “truths” is extremely limited.

It is important to recognise that these limitations are not unique to the Caucasus and are in fact the norm. Among others, Cobb, in her study of narrative, extensively discusses the concept of “origin myths”: stories which justify violence in the present and in the future as they preserve and embellish the story of the origin of violence, which is never seen as the function of the storyteller, the narrator, but always a result of the acts of the “other”. Origin myths, therefore, externalise responsibility for violence and at the same time call for violence towards the other as a response to victimisation.⁵

Contemporary social science literature on critical discourse analysis, narratives and collective memory studies the influence of “history” on “us versus them” identity constructs, on the reproduction of the enemy image, and on the justification of violence, and provides a variety of theoretical frameworks and practical tools to redress these destructive approaches, develop inclusive identities that do not depend on chosen traumas, and do not glorify violence. The developments in historiography led to the transformation of the approach to history education in many European societies following the Second World War, leading to French-German reconciliation and, after the end of the Cold War, to German-Czech and other processes. Today, in the Caucasus, we do not have to re-invent the wheel; we need to learn from the abundance of literature on the topic and from the experience of European states in breaking out of the cycle of reproduction of narratives that contribute to mutual dehumanisation and violence.

Examples of selective approaches and picking events from history to fit a present day national story can be found in abundance when examining Armenian and Azerbaijani historical narratives in general, particularly in history textbooks.

One example of such an approach is data on demographic changes in the region. Each side showcases and publicises census data which validate its claim, while ignoring complementary census data which do not fit that side’s “plot”. For example, Armenians focus on census data which show the Armenian population of Nakhichevan to be around 40 percent in the early 20th century; it then shrinks to 10.8 percent by 1926, 1.4 percent by 1979, and virtually zero by the end of the century.⁶ This demographic data serves as a centrepiece for the argument that Armenians are indigenous to the

5 S. Cobb (2004). ‘Fostering Coexistence in Identity-Based Conflicts: Towards a Narrative Approach’, in A. Chayes & M. Minow (eds) (2004). *Imagine Coexistence*. Jossey Bass: San Francisco, pp.294-310.

6 V. Barkhudaryan (ed) (2008). *Armenian History, 9th Grade*. Macmillan: Yerevan, p.51.

area and, if currently absent from any particular area in the region, it is because of discrimination and/or worse treatment by Turks and Azerbaijanis in territories under the latter's political control. The continuation of the argument supported by this data is that since Azerbaijan has a consistent policy of ethnic cleansing against Armenians, it would do the same in Nagorny Karabakh should it be politically subordinated to Azerbaijan.

The Azerbaijani narrative has the mirror story of present day Armenia, specifically regarding Zangezur. The population is quoted as being predominantly Azerbaijani in the early 20th century, gradually ethnically cleansed by the Armenians with support of Soviets, and then ethnically cleansed after independence, bringing the Azerbaijani population of present day Armenia to virtually zero. It serves a similar aim to the Armenian version, showing that it is actually Azerbaijanis (and their predecessors) who are indigenous to the area. In this case, Armenians are not locals and have come from the west and south to occupy Azerbaijani lands. Similar to the Armenian story, the second mirror argument advanced with the help of this data is that Armenians have been continuously moving east, first to Irevan (Yerevan in Armenian), then Zangezur and now Karabakh and surrounding territories, cleansing Azerbaijanis on their way with the intention to continue their movement east at the expense of Azerbaijanis.

The paradox of the situation is that Azerbaijani history does not explicitly deny Armenian presence in Nakhichevan and the Armenians' later disappearance; Armenian history also does not deny Azerbaijani (in the pre-Soviet period referred as Tatars) presence in the territory of present day Armenia and the Azerbaijanis' later disappearance. However, only one of these two complementary sets of demographic data fits each side's respective plot; therefore, only one becomes part of the narrative, while the other is ignored, forgotten or explained away as inconsequential.

To show how critical such manipulations are for sustaining the conflict, it is enough to point out that selective use of demographic data is not limited to Zangezur and Nakhichevan. Similar techniques are applied to "fitting" the demographics of Karabakh into each side's respective plot. The Azerbaijani narrative conveniently takes the era of Persian domination of the Karabakh region up to the 17-18th centuries as a starting point, when Armenians were a minority, to show that the later majority status of Armenians in Karabakh were a result of ethnic cleansing of Muslims by Russians and Armenians. Mirroring this claim, the Armenian "demographic" argument related to Karabakh takes the late years of the Russian empire and the early Soviet years as a starting point, when Armenians comprised 95 percent of the population of Nagorny Karabakh and argue that the demographic changes during the Soviet era, when the Armenian population was reduced to 75 percent by 1988, were proof of Azerbaijani discriminatory policies.⁷ Historians of both sides conveniently avoid discussions of periods when and where

⁷ *Ibid.*, p.53.

demographic changes favoured “their” side, contributing to the uncritical perception of one’s own group as a perpetual victim, and creating an image of the “other” as a hostile and perpetually discriminatory group.

Such selective “fact finding” and plot construction is not just limited to demographic data. The year 1918 is remembered by both societies as a year of massacre of their side by the other. According to Humay Guliyeva who studied these narratives:⁸

‘...Blood was spilt again in 1918... [The] Dashnak party cooperated with the Bolsheviks, opposed separation from Russia and “identified counterrevolution, as did the Bolsheviks, with... Muslim federalists” (Suny, 1972, p.204). As the tensions escalated, the Bolsheviks decided to use artillery shelling against Azerbaijani quarters, which caused immediate capitulation and the unconditional recognition of Baku Soviet’s power. After Azerbaijani representatives accepted the terms, the Dashnaks took to looting, burning, and killing in the Muslim section of the city. By Shahumian’s estimate more than 9,000 were killed during two days. “The Armenian soldiers became more brutal as resistance subsided and for a day and a half, they looted, killed and burned” (*Ibid.*, p.224). ...In spring 1918, Karabakh and Nakhichevan became scenes of atrocities between the advancing Ottoman Army of Islam under Nuri Pasha’s leadership and Armenian General Zoravar Andranik. In September the Army of Islam took Baku and the Azerbaijani population avenged [the] March days. According to a special commission formed by [the] Armenian National Commission, about 9,000 Armenians were massacred (Cornell, 2000, p.58)....’⁹

As we can see from this account, 1918 was a year when both 9,000 Azerbaijanis and 9,000 Armenians were massacred. Unsurprisingly, however, the story of the Armenian massacre is part of the Armenian narrative, while the massacres of Azerbaijanis are typically dismissed as “Azerbaijani propaganda”. The Azerbaijani narrative, in turn, officially commemorates the Azerbaijani massacre as “genocide” and omits the massacre of Armenians.¹⁰

8 H. Guliyeva (2010). Karabakh: ‘A Long and Winding Road to Distant and Difficult Peace’, *Caucasus Edition*. Available at <http://caucasusedition.net/analysis/karabakh-a-long-and-winding-road-to-distant-and-difficult-peace-2/>.

9 See also T. Swietochowski (2004). *Russian Azerbaijan, 1905-1920. The Shaping of National Identity in a Muslim Community*. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, pp.115-119, 139; A. Altstadt (1992). *The Azerbaijani Turks: Power and Identity under Russian Rule*. Hoover Institution Press: Stanford, California, p.85-87, 92-93.

10 The official “Decree” signed by the former Azerbaijani President, Heydar Aliiev, in 1998 starts with the statement: ‘The achievement of independence by the Republic of Azerbaijan has made it possible to reconstruct an objective picture of the historical past of our people. Truths that were kept secret for long years and that were suppressed and banned are coming to light, and the reality behind facts that were once falsified is being revealed. The genocide that was repeatedly carried out against the Azerbaijani people, and which for a long time was not the subject of a proper political or legal assessment, is one of those unrevealed pages of history’ (H. Aliiev (1998). *Decree of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan on the Genocide of the Azerbaijani people*. Baku. Available at <http://www.human.gov.az/?sehife=etrafli&sid=MtMyMjMzMTA4MTMyNjE1Mw==&dil=en>).

Armenian history textbooks

The first year of history teaching begins in the 5th grade in Armenian schools. The 5th grade textbook traces the formation of the Armenian identity back to the 2nd millennium B.C. and the development of Armenian statehood to the 18th century B.C.¹¹ The textbook then proceeds to describe the glorious days of the Armenian state under Tigran the Great in 95-55 B.C., when Armenia is portrayed as a superpower.¹² This is followed by the adoption of Christianity as the official religion in Armenia in 301 A.D. The 5th grade textbook ends with the story of how the Persian Empire and later the Arabian Caliphate invaded Armenia and the Armenians' "struggle for freedom" against them.¹³

This first and formative year of studying history in schools is relevant to Nagorny Karabakh because it sets the stage for the storyline that leads to the present day conflict. It already contains the basis for a number of clichés and stereotypes which are currently evoked when discussing the conflict and outlining a self-righteous position vis-à-vis Azerbaijanis. The first cliché supported by the 5th grade textbook is that Armenians are an ancient nation which has inhabited the region for millennia. The absence of Azerbaijanis or their predecessors from the textbook covering this ancient period is interpreted as "proof" that they are latecomers or invaders, leading to the conclusion that they do not have a legitimate right to exist in the region. The emphasis on the early adoption of Christianity also serves a few aims: firstly, to delineate Armenians from Azerbaijanis and other non-Christians in proximity, thus serving as a key pillar in the "us versus them" approach to group identity. The second is a claim of belonging to the "Christian club", which is often equated with "civilisation", understood positively, and interpreted as a "higher" form of social and religious organisation when compared with Islam. Finally the equation of the terms "Christianity" and "civilisation", coupled with the emphasis on Armenia being the "first Christian nation", contributes to the self-perception of Armenians as a group which made an early contribution to "civilisation".

The story of a glorious Armenian Empire, followed by the occupation and heroic struggle for national liberation against "others," typically Muslims, then becomes the main plot, or "origin myth" of Armenian history textbooks. This story can be traced from the 5th grade through the 6th, 7th, 8th and 9th grade history textbooks, culminating in the 10th grade textbook's description of the war with Azerbaijan over Nagorny Karabakh in the late 20th century. This "origin myth", which links various wars into one story of perpetual heroism and victimisation, then creates a powerful image of a freedom-loving Armenia always on the defensive against a constantly invading, discriminatory, alien and cruel enemy.

11 V. Barkhudaryan (ed) (2005). *Armenian History. 5th Grade*. Luys: Yerevan, pp.19-36.

12 *Ibid.*, pp.44-52.

13 *Ibid.*, p.96.

As the analysis of the entire historical narrative presented by Armenian textbooks is not the aim of this paper, the 6th, 7th and 8th grade textbooks will not be analysed here in detail – we will only point out that, consistent with the theory outlined above, they include two parallel storylines. First is the story of constant victimisation and occupation by various, typically Muslim, “others”, starting from the Arabs, then Seljuk Turks, Mongols, Persians and eventually Turks. The second story is that of a glorious, heroic fight against these “others” and periods of independence or self-rule. In addition to political history, the textbooks also have major sections devoted to economic development and culture.

Interestingly, while the enemies change from century to century, they are often described through similar adjectives and other qualifiers, such as cruel, bloodthirsty, full of desire to destroy Armenia and the Armenian identity. They then gradually condense into a cumulative image of an amorphous, cruel and foreign “other”, against which Armenians are trying to survive. This cumulative image is then applied to every following “other”, including Azerbaijanis during the latest war over Nagorny Karabakh.

Story of the Nagorny Karabakh conflict in Armenian history textbooks

The story of the conflict between Armenians and Azerbaijanis over Karabakh is described primarily in the 9th grade textbook.¹⁴ This textbook discusses the history of the entire 20th century, not only the Karabakh conflict. In this article, however, we will focus only on the pages which discuss the Karabakh conflict and the events which, according to the textbook, led to it.

This textbook places the conflict in a context of centuries-long occupation, the division of Armenia by various empires, and the struggle for survival. The Karabakh conflict “story” in the book revolves around Armenia trying to protect its land and Azerbaijan trying to conquer it and cleanse it of Armenians through violence and the political support of external powers. The central discourse of the textbook is focused on portraying Armenians as peaceful; any violent behaviour directed at controlling any territories in the Caucasus is an action of self-defence. Azerbaijanis are portrayed as aggressive; behaviours directed at controlling the same territories are portrayed as acts of aggression.

‘Azerbaijan was trying to conquer Karabakh (Artsakh), Zangezour (Syunik), Sharur-Nakhichevan and other territories... The government of the Armenian Republic tried to resolve the disputes it had with Azerbaijan by peaceful means. But these

14 V. Barkhudaryan (ed) (2005). *Op. Cit.*

negotiations yielded no results... Thereafter, Armenia did everything it could to defend the righteous cause of Artsakh Armenians, considering that Karabakh was an integral part of United and Independent Armenian Republic...¹⁵

In an illustration of selective interpretations of data, the periods of Armenian control over these territories and the presence of a substantial Armenian population are treated as evidence that the territories were Armenian; at the same time the periods of Azerbaijani control over the territories and the presence of a substantial Azerbaijani (Tatar) population are treated as evidence of Azerbaijani aggression, imperialist policies of the major powers and/or evidence of ethnic cleansing/discrimination against Armenians. According to the textbook, during the 20th century, as a result of British, Turkish and later Stalin's support, Armenians lost Nakhichevan to Azerbaijan, which was followed by gradual ethnic cleansing of Armenians from that territory, leaving virtually no Armenian there by the end of the century. It is suggested that Karabakh is then destined for a similar fate: during the short period of independence of Armenia in 1918-1920, Armenians had to fight a war for Karabakh against Azerbaijan that was supported by England, Turkey and later Soviet Russia, until eventually the territory was arbitrarily assigned to Soviet Azerbaijan by the Soviets through Stalin's personal intervention after the "Sovietisation" of the Caucasus.

'...on 4th July [1921] a decision was made about acknowledging Nagorny Karabakh as an integral part of Armenia. Finally a just and lawful decision was made regarding Nagorny Karabakh, the population of which was 95 percent Armenian... Yet the next day, on 5th July that decision was changed and Nagorny Karabakh was left in Azerbaijan. It was explained by the economic links that it had with Azerbaijan. This turnaround was apparently linked to the intervention of Josef Stalin...'¹⁶

According to the book, despite all the following attempts by the Azerbaijani Soviet Socialist Republic to cleanse Karabakh of its Armenian population, the Armenians there retained a free spirit, petitioned Moscow to transfer the territory to Soviet Armenia and continued their peaceful struggle up until the last days of the Soviet Union. It was not until Azerbaijan, during the collapse of the USSR, attempted to solve the conflict by force that Armenians had to rise in self-defence and liberate Karabakh from Azerbaijan.

This textbook represents a good example of how the "plot" predetermines the presentation of history. Not only are events "chosen" in a way to fit the plot, they are also interpreted or worded in a way which fits it, even at the expense of internal contradictions. For example, in the section covering the relations of the First Armenian Republic of 1918-1920 with its neighbours, it reads, referring to 1918 (emphasis added):

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp.25-26.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p.53.

‘Three neighbouring states had claims regarding the Armenian territories... Azerbaijan was aspiring to *conquer* Karabakh (Artsakh), Zangezur (Syunik), Sharur-Nakhichevan and other territories. England, Turkey and, starting from spring 1920, also Soviet Russia were assisting Azerbaijan.’¹⁷

According to this passage, in 1918, Azerbaijan has been trying to conquer Karabakh. However, a few lines later it reads:

‘In November 1918 the English assisted in preventing Andranik’s detachment to *advance* toward Shushi and Artsakh.’¹⁸

These few lines on the same page of the textbook contain an apparent contradiction: if, according to the textbook, Andranik, an Armenian general, had to advance on Karabakh (Artsakh), then the territory should have been already controlled by Azerbaijan – Azerbaijan could not then be “aspiring to conquer”, but instead would have to be “aspiring to hold on to” or “aspiring not to relinquish” Karabakh. However, writing that Azerbaijan was trying to “hold on to” or “not to relinquish” Karabakh does not fit the plot of the book; therefore, the term “aspiring to conquer” is used. Paradoxically, this apparent contradiction does not seem at all contradictory when reading the textbook as it fits well into the plot where Azerbaijan is expected to “aspire to conquer”.

This pattern fits well with the image of the “other” (in this case Azerbaijanis) and the “self” discussed previously. The Armenians, including during the latest stage of the armed conflict in the late 1980s and early 1990s, are described as inclined to ‘resolving conflicts by peaceful means’:¹⁹

‘[in 1988] Armenians of Karabakh stood up to protect their dignity... and started a struggle through constitutional means.’²⁰

This phrase “constitutional means” is repeated while discussing the beginning of the war:

‘In two years [between 1988 and 1990] Armenian people... never used means other than constitutional...’²¹

If and when Armenians resort to armed struggle it is only because of the aggression on behalf of the “other” and in the name of self-defence and freedom. Referring to the war

17 *Ibid.*, p.25.

18 *Ibid.*, p.25.

19 *Ibid.*, p.26.

20 *Ibid.*, p.111.

21 *Ibid.*, p.119.

of the early 1900s, the sub-section titled *The onset of war from the side of Azerbaijan* starts with the words: ‘in January-February 1990, the Azerbaijanis started an armed assault along the entire Armenian border. The Armenian civilian militia group defended heroically...’²²

The Armenian fighters in the text are described as “*azatamartik*” [freedom fighters]²³ and “*qajordi*” [heroes].²⁴ Their actions are described as “*ink’napashtpanut’yun*” [self-defence] and “*azatagram*” [liberation].²⁵ Unlike Armenians, Azerbaijanis and their allies when taking up arms are described as committing massacres and other atrocities:

‘the terrible massacre of Armenians of Shushi in March 1920...forced Karabakh to join Azerbaijan...the Tatars of Nakhichevan [Azerbaijanis] cleansed the region from Armenians through destruction and mugging...part of the Nakhichevani Armenian population was massacred.’²⁶

Azerbaijani fighters during the late 20th century Karabakh war are described as “*hrosakaxumb*” [bands] and “*zavt’ichner*” [invaders], who resorted to “*vayragut’yun*” [vandalism] and “*br’nagaght*” [ethnic cleansing].²⁷

Talking about 1988 the textbook states:

‘at the time when *peaceful demonstrations* (emphasis added by the authors) were held in Armenia and Karabakh...not far from the Azerbaijani capital Baku, in an industrial city called Sumgait [Azerbaijanis] resorted to a *wild massacre* of Armenians... By organising these *historically unprecedented massacres* in Sumgait, the Azerbaijani government intended to create awe and panic among the Karabakh Armenian population who would then be *ethnically cleansed*.’²⁸

The story of Sumgait is then continuously recited, using varying epithets which contribute to the building of a dehumanised image of Azerbaijanis. In addition to “wild massacre”, the event is also described as “*vayragut’yun*” [vandalism], “*kotorac*” [massacre]²⁹ and “*votwragorc’ut’yun*” [crime].³⁰ The opposition of adjectives and rhetorical devices used to describe Armenians and Azerbaijanis is particularly striking when describing similar events. Talking about the ethnic cleansing of Armenians from Azerbaijan during the

22 *Ibid.*, p.120.

23 *Ibid.*, p.156.

24 *Ibid.*, p.157.

25 *Ibid.*, p.167.

26 *Ibid.*, p.26.

27 *Ibid.*, p.121.

28 *Ibid.*, p.113.

29 *Ibid.*, p.114.

30 *Ibid.*, p.115.

conflict, the textbook suggests that Armenians were subject to “*t’alan*” [robberies], “*br’nut’yun*” [violence] and “*zangvac’ayin artaqsum*” [mass deportation].³¹ On the same page, referring to the parallel ethnic cleansing of Azerbaijanis from Armenia, the textbook calls it “*artagagt*” [out-migration] and attaches other neutral characteristics to this process, suggesting that, unlike what was happening in Azerbaijan, Armenians created ‘acceptable conditions for the *out-migration* (emphasis added by the authors) of Azerbaijanis from Armenia’.³²

Armenian textbooks: Teaching methodology

Not only the content but also the approach to teaching is contributing to the development of a dogmatic, nationalistic approach to history. Critical thinking and questioning are actively discouraged. The textbook material is presented as the absolute “truth” to be memorised and recited. Indications of this are the “questions and exercises” sections at the end of each chapter. Rather than testing students’ understanding of the material or critical thinking abilities, their main aim is to test that the students have memorised the events presented in the section.

Some of the questions in the “questions and exercises” sections directly contribute to the development of negative images of the “other” by asking suggestive questions which are rhetorical in nature. For example, one of the questions in the section devoted to the Karabakh movement in the late 1980s asks: ‘When and why were the Armenians massacred in Sumgait?’ Who were the organisers of the tragedy? What is your assessment of the Sumgait tragedy?’³³

The questions are phrased in a critical way, but are suggestive. As the book does not discuss Azerbaijanis in any context other than trying to discriminate against, ethnically cleanse and massacre Armenians, the implied answer is that that Armenians were massacred by Azerbaijanis based on their ethnic origin. The assessment of these questions then points towards qualifying such actions as being in the nature or the policy of Azerbaijanis and Azerbaijan. Thus, while the textbook itself does not directly refer to Azerbaijanis as “naturally” predisposed towards massacres, the questions help students to “complete” the picture.

The questions following the section which describes how the Soviet Union handled the conflict have similar aims of dehumanising Azerbaijanis. One of the questions asks: ‘The Central Committee of the Communist Party tried to characterise the Karabakh question as a socio-economic one. Try to prove that this qualification of the conflict by

31 *Ibid.*, p.116.

32 *Ibid.*, p.116.

33 *Ibid.*, p. 114.

the Central Committee was not correct.³⁴ This question effectively pushes the student to qualify the conflict as primordial and ethnic.

Another question asks: ‘Can one equate the “artaqsum” [deportation] of Armenians from Azerbaijan and the “artaqsum” [out-migration] of Azerbaijanis from Armenia?’³⁵ Needless to say, the phrasing of the question itself contains the answer: obviously “deportation” or forced migration sounds much worse than “out-migration”, which implies voluntary migration. The textbook never discusses why the ethnic cleansing of Azerbaijanis from Armenia is called “out-migration” and why it is “better” than the “deportation” of Armenians from Azerbaijan. Rather, it only requires the students to memorise these “facts” and repeat that it is simply the case.

Azerbaijani history textbooks

As in Armenia, the first year of history teaching begins in the 5th grade in Azerbaijani schools. It is described as “History of the Homeland” and not “Azerbaijan” – the contents of the textbook can be described as extremely emotional, particularly (and perhaps unsurprisingly) texts describing confrontations and oppositions with “others”. The motif of self-sacrifice for the welfare of the homeland is one of the central themes of the textbook; for example, in the section “Those living for the Homeland add to its glory”, only a small part is dedicated to artists – it is instead dominated by accounts of warrior heroes such as Babek, Kerogli and Shah Ismail Hatai, the leaders of the revolt against the Arab Caliphate and Ottoman Empire. Significant parts of texts are dedicated to patriotic education; for example, events in *Dada Gorgud*³⁶ are interpreted exactly in this spirit of continuous heroic opposition to “others”. *Dada Gorgud* is not an exception; other legendary events and epics are similarly interpreted. Through these textbooks, the world is constructed and divided into hostile civilisations.³⁷

The image of “others” is finally shaped in the 7th and 8th grade textbooks as a version of a “conspiracy theory”, i.e. “the conspiracy” against the Azerbaijani people, “Azerbaijani statehood” and “Turk-Muslim unity”, a conspiracy which has existed for hundreds of years. The narrative of “others” conspiring against the Azerbaijani people is continued until the end of the 11th grade (the end of the course).

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p.118.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p.116.

³⁶ An epic book of stories of the legendary hero Dada Gorgud – considered to be the principal repository of ethnic identity, history, customs and the value systems of Azeris (and other Turkic peoples) throughout history.

³⁷ S. Rumyantsev (2005). ‘Heroic Epic and Constructing the Image of a Historic Enemy’, *Ab Imperio* # 2. Kazan, p.466.

Azerbaijani history: Authorities, historians and constructing a narrative about continuous and all-out conflict

The special role and place of historical narrative in the post-Soviet ideology of Azerbaijani nationalism are defined by several factors: firstly, the new interpretation of the events of the 19th–20th centuries implies some sort of rejection of the Soviet version of history and the construction of a new version, which can be viewed as more in line with post-Soviet nationalising nationalism.³⁸ Secondly, in the context of the Karabakh conflict, the new version of the historical narrative is called upon to dehumanise the “enemy” to the greatest possible extent and also to facilitate a successful mobilisation of the population in the event of hostilities.

One can assert that the leaders of the country and well-known political figures of different levels do not personally play a role in enhancing the status of national history as a component part of the ideology which serves not only the Karabakh conflict, but also the policy of mobilising nationalism in post-Soviet Azerbaijan. However, among the leaders of the nationalists who created and led the People’s Front of Azerbaijan Party (PFAP) in 1988, and who at different times held prominent posts in the government, very many were historians or “scholars of Middle Eastern studies” philologists who did a lot to form the ideological background against which the re-interpretation of history was carried out. Thus, for example, the second Azerbaijani president, Abulfaz Elçibay (1992–93), was an Arabist philologist who promoted the need to develop a new version of history within the context of ideas of pan-Turkism and “the image of the historical enemy”. The former secretary of the Communist Party of the Azerbaijani SSR, Heydar Aliyev, who returned to power, this time as president (1993–2003), was a historian by education. It is his words that accompany, as an epigraph, history textbooks for secondary schools and stress the special significance of precisely this course:

‘When receiving national education in school, every representative of the young generation in independent Azerbaijan must study well the history of his people, nation, starting from ancient times to present day. If he does not study it, he cannot become a true citizen. If he does not study it, he will not be able to value his nation. If he does not study it, he will not be able to take proper pride in his belonging to his nation.’³⁹

38 ‘Nationalising nationalisms involve claims made in the name of a “core nation” or nationality, defined in ethnocultural terms, and sharply distinguished from the citizenry as a whole.’ For a more detailed account see: R. Brubaker (1996). *Nationalism Reframed: Nationhood and the National Question in the New Europe*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 4–5.

39 T. Valiyev (ed) (2004). *History of Azerbaijan. Textbook for the 10th grade secondary school*. Chashyoglu: Baku; S. Gandilov & I. Mamedov (eds) (2002). *History of Azerbaijan. Textbook for the 11th grade secondary school*. Chashyoglu: Baku.

For his part, Ilham Aliyev, the incumbent president of Azerbaijan, is a candidate of historical sciences. There are also many historians among prominent representatives of the opposition. For example, Etibar Mammadov (former leader of the Milli Istiqlal Party of Azerbaijan), who came second in terms of votes in the 1998 presidential election, is a candidate of historical sciences. Isa Qambar, the permanent leader of the most well-known and influential opposition party of Azerbaijani nationalists, *Musavat* [Equality], is also a candidate of historical sciences (a student of Abulfaz Elcibay) and, according to the official version, he came second in the 2003 presidential election. This list could easily be continued.

The current political regime almost completely controls access to the dissemination of the new (post-Soviet) version of Azerbaijan's history. Only one version of textbooks, which have been approved by the country's Education Ministry, can be used at secondary schools. Only specialists who are loyal (publicly at least) to the political regime are authorised to prepare the texts for those textbooks (including those for universities). School teachers are not involved in the preparation of these textbooks. Almost all compilers of textbooks are doctors and professors of the research institutes of the Academy of Sciences, Baku State University or Pedagogical University.

History courses (both for secondary schools and universities) do not suppose in principle the formation of a thinking person, a person who is disposed to hold a discussion, and, possibly, to have doubts. Therefore, not only are there no alternative textbooks for secondary schools, but textbooks developed in the post-Soviet period also do not offer any alternative material. The authors construct a single version of national history within the context of which all events receive only the official interpretation, which is considered to be the only true one. The authority of the master narrative is endorsed by professionals – doctors of sciences, professors and academicians (officially nominated). The compilers of the new narrative are quite often not only given scientific titles; for example, Professor Yaqub Mahmudlu is one of the leaders of a group of historians who are implementing a project to reconstruct national history and create new textbooks for schools – Professor Mahmudlu is not only the director of the History Institute of the National Academy of Sciences of Azerbaijan (NASA) but also a member of parliament (*Milli Majlis*).

Mass media also promote the new version of the historical master narrative to the greatest degree possible. Practically all of the most popular newspapers (*Zerkalo*, *Ekho*, *Musavat*, *Azadliq*, etc.) have a section dedicated to the history of the country and the nation. A number of documentaries dedicated to different conflicts of the 19th–20th centuries have been filmed in the post-Soviet period, which have become topical in the context of the latest Karabakh conflict. The year 2009 was marked by the completion of a new large-scale project which was supported by the ruling political regime – the filming of a feature film, *Cavad Khan*. The film is about events of early 1804, when the Ganja Khan

(Ganja is the second largest city in Azerbaijan) heroically dies while defending the city. The film was created on the basis of a work written by a doctor of philological sciences, pan-Turkist writer and poet, Sabir Rustamxanli, who also wrote the script. Rustamxanli heads a right-wing nationalist populist party called the Civil Solidarity Party. Since 1990 he has been a member of parliament and in the 2000s he also became a co-chairman of the World Azerbaijani Congress (WAC). In his opinion, this is a film about a national hero who tried to resist the seizure and division of Azerbaijan by the Russian Empire. The movie took about two years to film, and featured up to 10,000 military servicemen, 130 actors, and used computer graphics for the first time in Azerbaijani cinematography, arguably the largest project in its history.

Cavad Khan of Ganja, a vassal to the Persian shah, became the central figure of the resistance against the Russian Empire and the Armenians who supported its policies (and who are quite often described as the “fifth column”) in the post-Soviet historical narrative. The authors of the new historical narrative often place the origins of the current conflict in the first half of the 19th century, when the territory of present day Azerbaijan was incorporated into the Russian Empire. Despite its resistance, Ganja was overrun, and Cavad Khan, who fought heroically, was killed, while:

‘...the brutal Russian soldiers killed all of the unarmed population of Ganca. Also killed were Ganca people who hid in mosques. In one of the city’s mosques there were about 500 people. The Armenians told the Russian soldiers that there were Lezgis among those. The word “Lezgi”, which infuriates Russians, sentenced to death the people who were in the mosque. All of them were killed.’⁴⁰

The authors of the textbook put forward the notion that this is how Ganja, which is currently believed to be the cultural and historical capital of Azerbaijan, lost its independence. This development was followed by the conquest of the whole of the country:

‘As a result of the Treaty of Gulistan [peace treaty between the Russian Empire and Persia in 1813], our Motherland and people were divided by Russia and Iran. After the Treaty of Gulistan, in order to strengthen their position, the Russians started resettling here Armenians from Iran and the Ottoman state... Both Gulistan and Turkmanchay [meaning the Treaty of Turkmanchay between the Russian Empire and Persia in 1828] put an end to the existence of mighty Azerbaijan! They split it into parts, divided it into regions, and disunited the people of Azerbaijan.’⁴¹

This description of events dates the origins of the current Karabakh conflict back to the beginning of the 19th century. As a result, Armenian-Azerbaijani enmity acquires

40 Y. Mahmudlu et al (2003). *Otechestvo. Uchebnik dla Patogo Klassa [Fatherland. Textbook for the 5th Grade]*. Chashyoglu: Baku, p. 137.

41 *Ibid.*, p.145.

features of a confrontation which has persisted through the centuries; therefore, the current conflict is described as “inevitable”. The central component of the “historical enemy” is that Armenians achieve “success” with invariable support from the Russians.

‘In order to create a “reliable Christian state”, they [the Russians] started to resettle Armenians from all over the world to the lands of our Motherland north of the Aras – *in Karabakh, Goycha, Zangazur, Iravan, Naxcivan...* [regions of present day Azerbaijan and Armenia]. First, they created an Armenian region, and then also an Armenian state in the lands of West Azerbaijan where Oguz horsemen once showed their daring on horseback.’⁴²

Therefore, in the context of the Karabakh conflict, narratives about the borders of “historical territories” have also been revised. If, in the years of the Soviet Union, Azerbaijani historians laid claims to part of the territory of present day Iran,⁴³ then now, a large part of present day Armenia is also indicated as “West Azerbaijan”. In the post-Soviet version, historians insist that the territory of present day Armenia is an important part of the area of the aboriginal habitation and of thousands of years of ethnogenesis of Azerbaijanis.

The historical narratives give special place to the events of the period of the ADR (Azerbaijani Democratic Republic of 1918-20). The tragic events which took place in Baku in March 1918 acquired particular topicality. At the time, the main participants in the fight for power over Azerbaijan’s capital were *Musavatists* (Turkic nationalists) and Bolsheviks who acted in an alliance with Armenian nationalists (Dashnaks). During the fight *pogroms* took place and there were massacres of Turks/Muslims, in which several thousands of people were killed.⁴⁴ The official version of these events was reflected in a decree by President Heydar Aliyev on 26th March 1998, which declared 31st March the day of genocide of Azerbaijanis. The history textbook for the first year of history studies in secondary school (5th grade) shapes the story about the March 1918 events around a conversation among 10 to 15 Azerbaijanis. One of them exclaims:

‘How can you tolerate Armenian detachments moving around the city and doing what they want? The Armenian government disarms you in your own land and prepares to annihilate all the people. What can you call this? ...This is genocide. If the government is consciously annihilating the people who live in their own territory, this is called genocide. They want to exterminate our people.’⁴⁵

42 *Ibid.*, p.12.

43 T. Swietochowski (1995). *Russia and Azerbaijan: A Borderland in Transition*. Columbia University Press: New York; B. Shaffer (2002). *Borders and Brethren: Iran and the Challenge of Azerbaijani Identity*. The MIT Press: Harvard.

44 T. Swietochowski (1995). *Op. Cit.*, pp.135-139; A. Altstadt (1992). *Op.Cit.*, pp.41-49.

45 T. Vatiyev (ed) (2004). *History of Azerbaijan. Textbook for the 10th grade secondary school*. Chashyoglu: Baku, pp.201-202.

This topic re-emerges in the 11th grade textbook, which has a whole section about the March events, entitled “Genocide of Azerbaijanis in March 1918”. The narrative is filled with new details, yet is, on the whole, a reproduction of the same discursive image of enemy:

‘As a result of the March genocide, over 12,000 people were killed in Baku alone. The atrocities committed by the Bolshevik-Dashnak units also spread beyond Baku. They continued to exterminate Azerbaijanis in the Kubinskiy, Salyanskiy and Lenkoranskiy *uyezds*. From 3rd to 16th April, the Dashnak groups led by Lalayan and Amirov committed bloody deeds against the civilian population of Samaxi... In Baku province, the genocide of Muslims [Azerbaijanis] continued to mid-1918. During this period, over 20,000 Azerbaijanis were killed.’⁴⁶

The story is supplemented with the full text of the *Decree of the President of the Azerbaijani Republic “On the genocide of Azerbaijanis”*.⁴⁷ The decree represents official discourse and is reproduced in the overwhelming majority of historical texts dedicated to a singular interpretation of the events of the Armenian-Azerbaijani confrontation. This attempt at using the victim stance reappears in the description of the tragic events of the current Karabakh conflict:

‘At 21:00 hours on 25th February [1992], Armenian armed groups, together with the Russian 366th mechanised regiment...attacked [the town of] Xocali... A total of 613 people were killed in the Xocali massacre, 487 were injured, 1,275 were taken captive, six whole families were killed and the town was burned. Many women, children and elderly people who managed to leave the town on the snowy frosty night were intercepted and killed by the Armenian fascists. The cruel enemy even mutilated the corpses.’⁴⁸

The tragic events in the town of Khojali have now also received the status of genocide in Azerbaijan. As a result, the line of the all-out and at least two-century-long confrontation with the invariably cruel and insidious “historical enemy” is used in depictions of the current unfinished conflict. Both events (March 1918 and the Khojali tragedy), alongside many other events of the confrontation, merge into a form of a single focus of enmity in the context of which the idea of continuous, century-long genocide of Azerbaijanis has been constructed. At the same time, the enmity discourse is constructed not only through referring to the “facts” of confrontations and wars, but also the constant use of banal rhetorical clichés. In this way, the authors of the textbooks resort to clichés, such as “insidious foreigners”, “traitors”, “they swallowed blood”, “fresh massacre”, “the lost sweetness of freedom”, etc.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p.13.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, pp.17-18.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p.315.

Azerbaijan history textbooks: “Incomplete sovereignty” and the future of the image of the “historical enemy”

The fight against the “Armenian fascists”, who are invariably supported by Moscow, is described as the most important component part of the fight for independence. The occupation of part of the territory of the Azerbaijani Republic, which has been recognised by the international community, is a reason for the domination of a discourse which can be labelled “incomplete sovereignty”. On the one hand, Azerbaijan is a successful and independent state. On the other hand, Azerbaijan can only become completely independent after regaining control over all of its territory. At the same time, the “incomplete sovereignty” discourse, which is constructed by historians, goes beyond the description of the Karabakh conflict.

“Historical territory” is thought of within borders far wider than the current ones. The reason for the loss of most of the “historical lands” is seen to be a result of the colonising policy of the Russian Empire (which created Armenia), and also of the Persian Empire and its successor Iran, which controls Iranian (“Southern”) Azerbaijan. The possibility of the incorporation of these territories into the Azerbaijani Republic does not seem very likely in the current situation. Thus, the theory being constructed about the need for a full restoration of independence within “fair borders” supposes that the discursive image of enemy which has divided “our historical motherland” may persist for some time.

Recommendations

Education, especially history education, plays an important role in the formation process of the future generations of young people in every society. In Armenia and Azerbaijan, as in other societies engaged in conflict, the historical narratives taught in schools are often biased, uncritical and contribute to the development of deep hostility towards the “other” from a very young and impressionable age. Schools are vital social institutions and when they uphold certain historical narratives, this often reflects upon and reinforces the divisions within and between societies.⁴⁹ Therefore, history education is a significant factor to consider when promoting peace and reconciliation in conflict societies.

Based on the above analysis of textbooks, we recommend re-examining the images of the “others” described within them. The images or concepts of “others” in history textbooks can often be characterised as rather aggressive, dividing the world strictly between “our own” and “alien”. Similar hermeneutic models noticeably diverge from the policy of integration into the unified European space declared by the political regimes in Azerbaijan

⁴⁹ E.A. Cole & J. Barsalou (2006), *Unite or Divide? The Challenges of Teaching History in Societies Emerging from Violent Conflict*. USIP Special Report, US Institute of Peace: Washington DC. Available at: <http://www.usip.org/publications/unite-or-divide-challenges-teaching-history-societies-emerging-violent-conflict>

and Armenia, which, apparently, should be accompanied by the processes of regional integration. Unfortunately, at the moment, the textbooks remain orientated towards forming fixed perceptions about a world divided by virtually impenetrable borders. The images of “others” create a discourse of permanent conflict. The textbooks are designed to raise a generation prepared for military confrontation, rather than developing citizens ready to contribute to the peaceful development of their societies and the resolution of conflict.

Subsequently, the future peaceful coexistence of the two societies requires a drastic revision of textbooks. This revision must require lifting the monopoly on the development and use of textbooks, which are written by small groups of historians employed by state institutions. A support programme should also be developed for different groups of experts (including representatives of non-governmental organisations and independent academics), which could compile a series of alternative texts on national histories. The Board of Experts on school textbook selection should also comprise representatives of both state institutions and civil society. The existing monopoly on the use of one textbook approved by Ministries of Education should be abolished and teachers granted the right to choose from among alternative narratives which would have undergone expert evaluation.

Conclusion

In one of his articles, Rogers Brubaker has designated the spirit of a “seething cauldron view” as a “bleakly pessimistic” approach to eastern European nationalism, which creates ‘an overdrawn, if not downright caricatural contrast’ between the nationalisms of western and eastern Europe.⁵⁰ Of course, Brubaker does not deny that ‘the violence in the region – in the former Yugoslavia, in Transcaucasia and the North Caucasus, in parts of Soviet Central Asia – has indeed been appalling. But [the] undifferentiated image of the region as a hotbed of ubiquitous, explosive, violent or at least potentially violent ethnic and national conflict is quite misleading’.⁵¹

The authors of the article argue that peaceful inter-ethnic cooperation, mutual aid in conflict situations and peaceful neighbourly relations used to be a habitual norm in relations between Azerbaijanis and Armenians. These peaceful relations were more continuous and frequent than conflicts. Moreover, the conflict between the two societies is a relatively recent phenomenon. The Karabakh war of 1991-1994 caused almost the total isolation of Armenian and Azerbaijani societies from one another, which for a long time had co-existed in the common space of the South Caucasus. However, the historians

50 R. Brubaker (1998). ‘Myth and Misconceptions in the Study of Nationalism’, in J-A. Hall (ed) (1998). *The state of the nation: Ernest Gellner and the theory of nationalism*. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, pp. 272-306.

51 *Ibid.*, p.281.

in both republics avoid representing the periods of peaceful neighbourly relations and prefer to concentrate their attention on war and conflict. This is part of the positivist tradition employed to justify the present day position of one's side, using a historical narrative which mostly contains the description of political events (including wars and conflicts), while ignoring everyday relationships. This kind of historical narrative concentrates mostly on macro-level events and not micro-level relationships. Thus, in the context of this approach, we see only some special events which fit the dominant discourse and which do not observe everyday life. However, if we pay more attention to micro-level history, we then see that Azerbaijani-Armenian relationships are and have been more complicated and not only limited to conflict.

The powerful historical narratives which reduce the compound picture of diverse everyday inter-ethnic contacts and relations to only war and conflict have already been formed in Armenia and Azerbaijan. The overwhelming majority of these narratives are focused only on the description and study of causes and consequences of massacres, inter-ethnic armed conflicts and deportations. As a result, the ideology of total and constant confrontation has been constructed from the perspective of the most recent and still unsolved Karabakh conflict.

The description of relations between the two sides in textbooks are limited to the periods of acute and bloody Armenian-Azerbaijani clashes, which occurred in 1905-1906 and in 1918-1920. The current Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict (1988-present) is then traced back to having roots in the beginning of the 20th century. 'The old Azeri-Armenian conflict, hidden for almost seventy years of soviet rule, erupted again with a fury during February 1988, when the Armenian SSR formally raised its claims to Nagorny Karabakh.'⁵² Thus, from this point of view, the most recent conflict is represented as inevitable.⁵³

In light of the discourse created by the textbooks, a phrase by the French researcher Fransua sounds prophetic: 'Choosing a way to perpetuate the past, the nation simultaneously chooses its own future....'⁵⁴ The future that the current textbooks are preparing for generations of Azerbaijani and Armenian students is a state of a permanent, irresolvable conflict and rivalry.

52 T. Swietochowski (1995). *Op. Cit.*, p.194.

53 The Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict in this way should be considered within the context of an overall turn in conflict studies in the 1990s, not only following the collapse of the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia. As Brubaker and Laitin remark, in the 1990s '[t]he bloody dissolution of Yugoslavia, intermittently violent ethnonational conflicts on the southern periphery of the former Soviet Union, the ghastly butchery in Rwanda, and Hindu-Muslim riots in parts of India, among other dispiriting events, have focused renewed public attention in recent years on ethnic and nationalist violence as a striking symptom of the "new world disorder"' [R. Brubaker & D. Laitin (1998). 'Ethnic and Nationalist Violence', *Annual Review of Sociology*, Vol. 24, pp.423-24]. Brubaker and Laitin also refer to this with regard to the conflicts in the South Caucasus.

54 E. Fransua (2004). "'Mesta Pamati" po-Nemetski: Kak Pisat' ix Istoriyu ["Places of Memory" in German: How to Write their History]', *Ab Imperio* # 1. Kazan, p.33.

This publication attempts to shed some light on the ways in which myths and dominant narratives associated with the conflicts in the South Caucasus are constructed, transmitted and used in the region. A region-wide research project examined three main modern mechanisms through which myths are created and disseminated: through history textbooks; through political discourse; and through the media, including the blogosphere. A particular focus of interest was how myths associated with the conflicts are subject to domestic political manipulation, how “enemy images” are created, and how these in turn serve to strengthen the resilience of those conflicts to resolution.

In this volume, we present a comparative analysis of history textbooks in use across the region from the late Soviet and post-Soviet periods. The results show that the post-Soviet textbooks are based on the same ideological paradigm as the Soviet textbooks, using the same nationalist discriminatory discourse. The Soviet concept of “Friendship of the peoples” has given way to revised national histories hostile to the “other” which are offered as “truths” to be memorised by children, embedding enemy images deep into the psyche of the nation.

One of the conclusions is that the conflicts are irresolvable under the prevailing system of history teaching. History teaching in the post-Soviet period supports the political objective of constructing new nationalist identities and justifying one version of events around the current day conflicts, closing down the space available for reflection and critical thinking. As long as the education process fails to encourage alternative interpretations of history, Caucasian societies will continue to face a future of perpetual conflict and rivalry.

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