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Acknowledgments

This publication, with all its faults and remaining deficiencies, is solely my own responsibility.

<div align="right">
Cali, Colombia
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INTRODUCTION

> The fight was over. All was still.
> The bodies made a grisly hill.
> Blood trickled from them, steaming, smoking...
> "Just tell me, my kunak,
> What do they call this little river?"
> "They call it Valerik", he said,
> "Which means The River of the Dead.
> Those who named it are in Heaven..."
> Then someone else's voice I heard,
> "This day is for the war decisive".
> I caught the mountaineer's glance derisive.
> He grinned but did not say a word.
> And there I was; my heart so pained with pity.
> I thought: "Poor man, what are you after?
> The sky's so blue. The world so endless.
> And still you're fighting: Why, what for?!"
>
> M. Lermontov, *Valerik*

The lines from the poem *Valerik* that open this publication were written by the Russian poet Michael Lermontov in the year 1840, half of which he spent in the Caucasus before being shot to death in a duel just a year later. Sent to serve in the Russian imperial army fighting Caucasian highlanders, the poet had to participate in several harsh combats. Shocked by the cruelty of the war, he was also stunned by a long history of confrontation and bloodshed experienced by the peoples of the Caucasus. Sadly, today, more than a hundred and sixty years after Lermontov wrote *Valerik,* the Caucasus is again far from tranquility, and many scholars and practitioners are trying to answer the question asked in the last line of the Lermontov's poem. However, the aim of the present publication is not to provide an all-encompassing account for all the violent conflicts that are taking place in contemporary Caucasus. We will limit the scope of our examination to a particular aspect of the conflicts fought along ethnic fault-lines, namely, to the role of language in these conflicts.

Already many centuries ago, Arab geographers referred to the Caucasus as Jebel-ul-al-Sun – "the Mountain of Languages" (Gatagova 2000, 17). Contemporary linguists found more than forty distinct languages spoken here (Gluck 1993, iv., see also

Map 2). Hence, it must come as no surprise that in the Caucasian ethnic conflicts language is often one of the central issues to the opposition between ethnic groups, and it is natural to assume that the examination of language in relation to an ethnic conflict could lead us to a better understanding of the causes of the conflict and the reasons of endurance of ethnic hostilities. However, we need to clarify what exactly the subject of this research is.

This study is about language. And it is not about language. It is not a study about language to the extent that we are not focusing on the purely linguistic aspects of the issues discussed in this work. Indeed, in many cases of ethnic rivalries, references to language made by political opponents have little to do with linguistically adequate data. That is why the use of linguistic data in this volume is rather auxiliary to the study of politics conducted in the name of language, and that is why the primary subject of this study can be identified as language but language exploited as a political and not as a linguistic resource.

The political value of language originates in its flexible and malleable nature, which enables politicians to exploit language as an important political resource in the context of nation-building. At the same time, "languages are not only tools of nation-building but also means of political control" (Safran 2004a, 4). The symbolic use of language proved to be a particularly effective technique of political control in the Soviet Union, where language was considered to be the "primordialized" property of an ethnic group very closely linked to the historical part of the group (Rouvinski and Matsuo 2003, 112). This peculiar characteristic of the politically important link between language and history is a major factor in choosing the area and the methodology of the study of the role of language in ethnic conflicts: the Caucasus provides a sort of "natural laboratory".

For many people – not only in the Caucasus, but especially in the Caucasus, it is rich, glorious, and long history ascribed to one or another ethnic group that contribute to the feeling of a proud attachment to a certain community. And the Caucasus can be characterized as the area of an "extreme" historical awareness. Here, one can easily see

that ethnic rivalries are accompanied and often accelerated by ethnogenetic discourses on both sides. In addition, one of the main themes of these discourses is language and the origins of competing groups. Hence, we have to establish why language is given so important place in explaining the ethnogenesis of one or another ethnic group in the Caucasus and why such ethnogenetic discourses proliferate.

It is important to emphasize that despite of the fact that during the recent years there has been a steady flow of academic publications on the topics concerned with conflicts in the South Caucasus, which has been especially prone to inter-ethnic violence after the demise of the Soviet Union, there was no attempt at all to make a comprehensive examination of the role of language in any of the South Caucasian ethnic rivalries[1]. The Georgian-Abkhazian conflict is the subject of our in-depth examination in this volume but we also examine a number of other conflicts in the South Caucasus.

In our approach, we place the emphasis not on real (or factual) identity and the difference between two languages, but on the perception or interpretation of identity/difference between language varieties. That is because if one wants to better understand the role of language in an ethnic conflict, the aim of this researcher should be not to search for absolute truth ("What is the origin of the Abkhazian language"?) but to look at what kind of image Abkhazians and Georgians hold about the language ("What ideas about the origin of the Abkhazian language matter to people in Abkhazia and Georgia?"). That is why, in addition to the task of tracing the role of intellectuals in nationalist movements, an important place in the case description is devoted to the examination of the use of historical knowledge in nationalist discourses as reflected by mass media and the system of education.

Based on the above considerations, the main objectives of this study can be

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[1] Traditionally, this area of the Caucasus is called Transcaucasia, the term, which originates in the Russian word 'Закавказье'. However, in this publication, in order to denote the geographical area of the study, the 'South Caucasus' is used instead of Transcaucasia, following the contemporary practice in the Western political science and among the scholars of now independent South Caucasian nations.

defined as two-fold:

(1) to examine from a theoretical perspective what kind of role language plays in ethnic conflicts in the Caucasus

(2) to provide a comprehensive empirical illustration of the role of language in one of the Caucasian ethnic rivalry, namely, in the Georgian-Abkhazian conflict

Consequently, the volume is divided into two major parts: first, in which the theoretical assumptions and the background of ethnic conflicts in the Caucasus as regards the Soviet nationality policy are discussed, and second, embarking upon the examination of the Georgian-Abkhazian conflict as well as some other South Caucasian ethnic rivalries. This volume is organized in the following way:

Part I. Ethnic Enclosure: Language, Myths and Ethnic Groups in the Soviet Union

Chapter One, 'Language, Ethnic Conflict and Ethnic Enclosure', begins with initial theoretical interrogations in the field of ethnicity and politics. In this Chapter, important academic debates on the issue of language and ethnicity have been examined in order to highlight various approaches to explore language in relation to ethnic group and evaluate the applicability of the existing theories and concepts for reaching the objectives of this research. A particular attention is paid to the modernist approach to deal with language in the context of modernization and it is shown that a new theoretical framework is needed in order to explain the role of language in contemporary ethnic conflicts. In the next part of this chapter, the notion of ethnic enclosure is introduced, and it is argued that the approach to view ethnic rivalries as attempts at simultaneous inclusion and exclusion (that is, to conduct the policy of ethnic enclosure) can successfully account for the cases of ethnic conflicts in the Caucasus.

In *Chapter Two,* 'Language Policy and the Soviet Ethno-Territorial Division', we discuss the process that led to the foundation of the Soviet Union and the importance of ethnic identification in the system of administrative territorial division of the USSR. We describe the trends in the language policy conducted by the Soviet authorities and show the importance attached to the link between ethnic and linguistic identities for the

purposes of status struggle provoked by ethnic discrimination 'embedded' in the system of the Soviet ethno-territorial division.

In *Chapter Three*, 'Language and the Construction of Ethnogenetic Myths in the Soviet Union', several key components of the process of ethnogenetic myth formation in the USSR have been explored. The main objective of this Chapter is to show the actual process of creation, maintenance, and dissemination of myths of ethnogenesis that could be used in the process of ethnic enclosure. A particular attention is paid to the discussion of the role of intellectuals in this process and the place devoted to language in historiographic discourses produced by indigenous intellectuals. In addition, it is shown how the teaching of local histories in Soviet autonomies facilitated the spread of ethnocentric myths within a given ethnic groups.

Part II. The Policy of Ethnic Enclosure in the Caucasus

Chapter Four, 'The Formation of Abkhazian and Georgian Ethnogenetic Myths' starts with a review of the previous studies of the Georgian-Abkhazian conflict and provides an overview of linguistic patterns of the population in South Caucasus. Next, we turn to the examination of the legacy of the Russian colonial rule of Abkhazia in the 19th century and the changes of ethno-demographic composition of the region. The focus of attention in the examination of the period after the fall of the Russian monarchy is on the policy conducted in Abkhazia by the government of the Democratic Republic of Georgia (1918-1921) as concerns the issue of language and Abkhazian autonomy.

Chapter Five, "Language and Myths in Soviet Abkhazia (1921-1988)", is devoted to the examination of the mutual Georgian and Abkhazian attempts to conduct the policy of ethnic enclosure in Abkhazia during the period between 1921, the year of the declaration of the Abkhazian Soviet Socialist republic, and the end of the 1980s, when the ability of the central Soviet authorities to control the situation in the South Caucasus greatly weakened and the clash of policies of ethnic enclosure became particularly strong. In this Chapter, we examine the content of Georgian and Abkhazian historiographic discourses, in which language was a fundamental issue. Also, we discuss

an interesting phenomenon of "Abkhazian letters", a specific feature of the Soviet settings in Abkhazia and an important tool of the status struggle of Abkhazians.

Chapter Six, 'The Georgian-Abkhazian War and the Persistence of Myths', continues with the examination of the role and place of language in the conflict, when the conflict turned violent and during the period after the end of the open warfare between Georgia and Abkhazia. Whereas not much space is allocated to the description of military aspects of the 1992-1993 Georgian-Abkhazian war, enough attention is given to the examination of those actions of belligerent sides that can be explained by the impact of the policy of ethnic enclosure conducted during the Soviet period in Abkhazian history. We also describe the continuation of the attempts at ethnic enclosure of Abkhazia during the period that followed the ceasefire and discuss the role of language in other South Caucasian cases, in particularly in the Georgian-South Ossetian and the Armenian-Azerbaijani ethnic conflicts, in order to show similar patterns with the case of Abkhazia.

Conclusion summarizes the main findings presented in this volume and pointing out the most important academic contributions.

The following sources were consulted during the writing and editing of this volume:

Primary documents became one of the important sources for the empirical part of the work. At the same time, the situation with archive materials and unpublished primary documents deserves a special explanation. When the Georgian army was in control of the Abkhazian capital Akua (Sukhum), an order was issued to destroy the Abkhazian State Archives. On that day (23 October 1992), a great number of documents perished after the Archive's building was burned down. Many documents kept at the Archives of the Gulia Institute for the Abkhaz language, literature and history were also lost during the war. Nowadays, Abkhazian scholars at the Gulia Institute for Humanitarian Research of the Abkhazian Academy of Science are putting great efforts in order to preserve the remaining documents, but the availability of primary sources

during the visit to Abkhazia in August 2005 was very limited for understandable reasons. Many published primary documents have been used due to the above-mentioned scarcity of direct sources.

In addition to the work with primary documents, <u>interviews</u> were conducted in Sukhum as well as in London and Washington, D.C. The purpose of these interviews was not only to obtain factual information about events in Abkhazia in the past but also to learn about the existing activities to ease ethnic tensions in the South Caucasus in a long run, by improving school and university curricula and organizing meetings between historians along both sides of the barricade.

<u>School textbooks</u> is another key source for this study, because, for the Soviet period, the examination of the textbooks is often the only way of knowing the official version of history, endorsed by the authorities, and the revision of school textbooks played an important role in the processes that are subject of this research. Not least important is the fact that it is at school where most people gain a significant part of their knowledge of the remote past. Therefore, it was considered essential to examine the coverage of language issues in the Soviet and post-Soviet school history and geography textbooks, by selecting for analysis those textbooks, which are representative (say, by the number of copies published) for each period of the modern South Caucasian history. The methodological approach for a comparative study of textbooks was based, mainly, on recommendations given in Pingel (1999) and Seixas (2004) and included both qualitative and quantitative assessments of the textbooks. Some 20 textbooks from Georgia, Abkhazia, Ossetia, Armenia and Azerbaijan have been examined during a research trip to the Georg Eckert Institute for International Textbook Research in April and May, 2005.

<u>Newspapers and the Internet</u>, which are actively used as propaganda tools for "the creation of the demonized 'other' (O'Shaughnessy 2002, 218) turned out to be the other important source of data. The Soviet time newspapers (*Sovetskaya Abkhazia, Literaturnaya Abkhazia, Literaturnaya Gruzia, Zariya Vostoka, Pravda* and others) were examined at the Russian State Library, whereas the most recent issues of

Abkhazian newspapers were either obtained en situ or form the Internet. About two dozen issues of Abkhazian and other South Caucasian newspapers were available to the author in the digital format.

In addition to the use of the above-mentioned sources, in some parts, the author had to rely on the descriptions provided in <u>secondary sources</u>, especially, for the analysis of the historiographic discourses in Georgia and Abkhazia (Sagariya 1991; Marykhuba 1994; Shnirelman 2001, 2003 and others).

The conflicts examined in this volume are ongoing and the situation is changing everyday. The efforts were made to account for the most recent developments in the Caucasus. However, some omits seem to be unavoidable.

Part I

Ethnic Enclosure: Language, Myths and Ethnic Groups
in the Soviet Union

CHAPTER ONE
LANGUAGE, ETHNIC CONFLICT AND ETHNIC ENCLOSURE

> Questions of language are basically questions of power
> Noam Chomsky

In this Chapter, we will first clarify on the basis of the review of previous studies what is an ethnic group and what is the relationship of language with an ethnic group. We will provide a review of studies on South Caucasian ethnic conflicts later, when we begin to discuss the Caucasian issues. The primary objective of our discussion below is to highlight the importance of language for an ethnic group, particularly, in the processes of modernization. We will examine some of the modernist approaches to explain the function of language in the process of nation-building and show the need for a new theoretical framework, which can be applied to contemporary ethnic rivalries. Finally, we will introduce our own notion of ethnic enclosure, which we use in order to explain the role of language in ethnic rivalries in the Caucasus.

1.1. ETHNIC GROUP AND LANGUAGE

This study explores the situations of conflict between ethnic groups. Therefore, it seems to be pivotal to start with explanations of how terms ethnicity and ethnic group understood in this research. In recent years, "ethnicity" became a word, which is widely used everywhere, from the academic literature to the mass media. In Helmet Berking's words, "ethnicity is everywhere" (Berking 2003, 248). We can certainly find a dozen of good reasons why "ethnicity" occupies today the top of vocabulary used by so many people around the world, who often employ "ethnicity" as a euphemism for "race" or as a synonym for "nation" or "minority group". However, it is also true that even in the academic literature there is a lot of ambiguity, which surrounds the use of the term "ethnicity". At the same time, it seems that the main point of concern here is not so much in finding a common ground for the use of the term "ethnicity" *per se*, since in most of the applications ethnicity is rather similarly understood as the communal identity, which comprises some certain characteristics that link a particular group of people to each other. The core of disagreement is the question of what is included in, and excluded from that set of characteristics and for what reason, because there are long-existed differences in the basic understanding of ethnicity as a human phenomenon.

However, it is not an easy task to explain what ethnicity is. It is because there are deep contradictions that are embedded in the phenomenon of ethnicity itself. The useful summary of various approaches to explain ethnicity is given by Stephen May (2001, 27-51; see also Table 1.1).

Table 1.1 Dichotomies of Ethnicity
(adapted from May 2001, 28)

Primordial	Situational
Pre-modern	Modern
Intrinsic	Instrumental
Content	Boundaries
Objective	Subjective
Category	Group
Involuntary	Voluntary
Individual	Collective
Material	Symbolic
Minority	Majority

Let us here take up, for example, the opposition between primordialists and situationalists. Comparing primordialist and situationalist views of ethnicity, May points out that ethnicity is often viewed as a primordial given because every individual is born to an ethnic community which can be defined in terms of 'language, blood and soil". Yet, despite of the fact that cultural attributes are often associated with ethnic distinctiveness, they do not constitute a sufficient explanation for the phenomenon of ethnicity. While primordialist stand is that ethnicity is a fixed permanent category, in order to understand the way ethnic groups interact, it is necessary to provide a proper explanation of how and why differences in cultural attributes appear, persist or disappear during one or another period in history. Therefore, as situationalist approach assumes, cultural attributes of an ethnic group are not permanent and they are shaped in situations of social interactions with other ethnic group. If this is the case, then ethnic boundaries at any given point in time are largely the derivatives of social interactions between groups, and ethnicity is fluid and malleable category. However, ethnic groups usually view their 'cultural attributes' as primordial and it is language, which is often regarded as one of the most important permanent markers of ethnic identity.

Anthony Smith warns against taking only one approach into consideration. In his words, "by fixing attention mainly on the great dimensions and 'fault lines' of religion, customs, language and institutions, we run the risk of treating ethnicity as something primordial and fixed. [On the other hand], by concentrating solely on the attitudes and sentiments and political movements of specific *ethnie* or ethnic fragments, we risk [to view] ethnic phenomena as wholly dependent 'tool' or 'boundary markers'' of other social and economic forces" (Smith 1986, 211). It is to say that the choice between primordialist or situationalist accounts of ethnicity will hardly lead us to any plausible explanation why ethnicity today is of so much of importance as a matter of politics. The fact is, while the topic of ethnicity and politics certainly does not "suffer" from a lack of scholarly interest, if we try to step away from one or another case study in order to build a theoretical model, which can be applied to a variety of cases, we will soon discover that there is a paucity of options for generalization.

We believe that Smith's notion of *ethnie* may help to avoid many of theoretical blind alleys in primordialist and situationalist approaches to explain ethnicity. Smith argues that we have to view ethnicity not through the prism of fixed set of elements, repeatedly transmitted from one generation to another, but rather by thinking about ethnicity as of a shell that conditions the preservation of the "sense of continuity on the part of successive generations of a given cultural unit of population [with respect to] shared memories and to notions entertained by each generation about the collective destiny of that unit and its culture" (Smith 1991, 25). Smith designates these cultural units as *ethnie* and defines a number of elements as comprising the essential core of any ethnic group (see Table 1.2).

Smith also points out that "the core of ethnicity, as it has been transmitted in the historical record and as it shapes individual experience, resides in … quartet of myths, memories, values, and symbols" (Smith 1986, 15). In Smith's interpretations, a myth of common descent is a belief, which "provide[s] an overall framework of meaning for ethnic community [making sense of its experiences and defining its essence]", and in 'many ways [is] the sine qua non of ethnicity, the key elements of that complex of meaning, which underline the sense of ethnic ties and sentiments for the

participants' (Smith 1986, 24). Smith combines myths, memories, symbols and values into a "myth-symbol complex" and argues that, while at one or another moment of a research inquiry into an ethnic group, it can be important to study the issues of, say, class stratification, military power, political relations, or outside influence, if one wants to understand the fundamental nature of ethnicity, it is important to examine the forms and content of ethnie's myths-symbol complex, the mechanisms of its diffusion within the population in question as well as how these myths and symbols have been transmitted to the future generations[1].

Table 1.2 Ethnic Core
(adapted from Smith 1986, 109-110)

Common name
Shared Cultural Elements
Myths of Common Origins
Common Historical Memories
Sense of solidarity
Common 'historic' territory

Smith's explanation of ethnicity may not be ideal. However, it presents a compromise solution, and, as it will be shown further in this Chapter, it serves better than any other model for the purposes of a better understanding of the role language plays in conflict between ethnic groups, which is the major objective of this research. That is because, if to agree with James Fearon's assertion that the proper idea of an ethnic group is about the recognition by members and non-members of the ethnic distinction and anticipation of significant actions conditioned on it (Fearon 2003, 198), then Smith's clarification of ethnicity helps to explain what distinguishes one ethnic group from another.

In the academic literature, terms nation, nationality and ethnic group are often used interchangeably. Some argue, however, that ethnic group and nation are two separate although overlapping concepts (see, e.g. Kaufman 2001, 15). A nation can be defined as a socially mobilized group that wants political self-determination and not all

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[1] As we will discuss later, in the case of ethnic rivalries in the Caucasus, we can learn the content of myths-symbol complex through the examination of historical narratives of textbooks, academic publications and publications in mass media concerned with the issues of history of ethnic groups.

ethnic groups aspire to political autonomy. However, in the cases of ethnic rivalry in the South Caucasus, ethnic groups compete over the political dominance. Therefore, these rivalries involve ethnic nations and should be labeled as ethnonational conflicts, but we use the term 'ethnic group' for the sake of simplicity.

1.2. LANGUAGE AND MODERNIZATION

As argued by Smith, the rise of modern nations can be viewed as the process of adaptation of pre-modern *ethnie* to the challenges brought to it by the phenomenon of modernization, and in his model of *ethnie*, the ethnic roots of modern nations extend into the past. Smith describes the pre-modern cultural traditions and identities as the "permanent cultural attributes of memory, value, myths and symbols", which are continued to be shared by ethnic groups in modern era (Smith 1986, 16-18). These specific cultural attributes become significant markers of ethnic identity, and their purpose is to maintain boundaries between ethnic groups. As we discussed earlier, Smith's concept refers to the idea of shared group affinity and the sense of belonging based on a myth of collective ancestry and a notion of distinctiveness. The constructed nature of ethnicity is evinced in the process of differentiation of an ethnic group, in which in many cases language serves as one of the most important differentiating characteristics. Here, the role of language becomes central because "ethnic nationalists appeal to the customary and linguistic ties which they then set out to standardize and elaborate, elevating customs into rules and laws, and turning dialects (some of them) into languages" (Smith 1986, 137-138).

In discussing the links between language and ethnicity in the context of modernization, we must not ignore the arguments of Ernest Gellner. According to Gellner (1983), modernization signifies various social changes leading to the transformation of rural societies with traditional hierarchical structures, religions and customs into complex industrial and secular societies. As a result of this process, a new pattern of hierarchical and bureaucratic integration appears. In Gellner's interpretation, the adoption of nationalism as 'a political principle, which holds that the political and the national unit should be congruent' (Gellner 1983, 1) requires the transformation of a human community into a society that possesses the homogeneity of a *high* culture,

represented by a written language, replacing folk and *low* culture [2]. For Gellner, the acceptance of the principle that the political mastering towards homogeneity of culture is the precondition of inclusive political, economical and social citizenship "…is all… [that is necessary to] explain nationalism" (Gellner 1983, 29). As he further observes, 'whereas in the past the connection [between state and culture] was thin, fortuitous, varied, loose and often minimal … now it [becomes] unavoidable" (Gellner 1983, 38).

As regards the function of language in a modern society, the 'political mastering' is aimed at the creation of a bounded language community capable of sustaining an education system in a common written language because modern bureaucracy rely on the extensive use of paper chain of memos and circulars for the direct and effective administration of the state. The principle of 'one state, one culture' thus put into practice via education system, and, following Gellner's logic, the growth of nationalism is linked to the prior development of a high culture, which becomes a basis for the development of a linguistically homogenous society. That is because "when general social conditions make for standardized, homogenous, centrally sustained *high* cultures, pervading ethnic populations and not just elite minorities, a situation arises in which well-defined educationally sanctioned and unified cultures constitute very nearly the only kind of unity with which men willingly and often ardently identify. The cultures now seem to be the natural repositories of political legitimacy" (Gellner 1983, 55; emphasis added). In other words, according to Gellner, nationalism is flourishing because the spread of unified cultures (that is, written language) via education leads to the unification of cultural, and, consequently, linguistic identity.

In Gellner's explanations of the links between language and modernization, he points out the significance of the spread of common written language and, hence, the importance of education system for language dissemination. Similar ideas can be observed in Benedict Anderson's notion of 'imagined communities' (Anderson 1991). He situates the birth of modern nations in the period of industrialization and claims that

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[2] Incidentally, in the case of the Caucasus, the use of terms *high* and *low* in regard to *culture* creates an interesting game of words, since for the people of the highland communities low (altitude) culture (i.e. culture of the cities) actually represented a higher culture in comparison with their own (high mountains') customs and traditions. Of course, high and low are used in this volume in regard to *high* and *low* languages corresponding to high and low cultures of Gellner.

all modern national communities are 'imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion" (Anderson 1991, 6). Acknowledging that nation, nationality and nationalism have proved notoriously difficult to define, Anderson defines his 'point of departure' as the perception that 'nationality, or, as one might prefer to put it in view of that world's multiple significations, nation-ness, as well as nationalism, are cultural artifacts of a particular kind" (Anderson 1991, 4). Examining the historical content of the process leading to the growth of modern nations, he places emphasis on the development of print technologies and the rapid spread of literature and printed media in previously highly localized vernacular languages in the 15th and 16th century Europe. As a result, these vernacular languages gradually replaced Latin as the language most widely used in the domains of administration (Gellner's high culture) and the status of vernacular languages was elevated to that of 'languages-of-power'.

The development of national imagining through common written languages can be viewed as a step-by-step process: firstly, fields of exchange and communication are created; second, a new fixity[3] of language is ascertained; and thirdly, the vernacular dialects adopted as print-languages become languages-of-power (Anderson 1991, 44-45). The spread of print media enabled speakers of languages that could be characterized by the existence of linguistically very diverse dialects to distinguish each other as belonging to one and the same cultural (and hence language) group. In the process of national imagining, the importance of literacy and education is seen as crucial as in the Gellner's account of modernization: 'As literacy increased, it became easier to arouse popular support, with the masses discovering a new glory in the print elevation of languages they had humbly spoken all along" (Anderson 1991, 80). This is followed by the acceptance of these languages as official national languages promoted through the system of education and public administration.

For modernists, the adoption of the official national language chosen among the variety of language and dialects spoken by the population in the area in question is

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[3] Here, fixity means the ability of language not to change over time and space.

an essential prerequisite of modern nations. In other words, as a result of the process of modernization, ethnic and linguistic boundaries of an ethnic group should coincide. If the state is unable to achieve the goal, then the linguistically oppressed groups will often demand a redrawing of the boundaries of the state in question and the foundation of a new political entity, in which their own language will be the official one. Further on, when such a demand involves a conflict between different ethnic groups, it may lead to an ethnic conflict, i.e. such a conflict, in which "the warring parties in all the incidents have been differentiated largely along [linguistic] lines" (Szayna 2003, 145).

1.3. LANGUAGE IN ETHNIC CONFLICT

In our early discussion, we showed the importance of links between language and ethnicity, and the focal role of the spread of written languages via system of education and mass media. However, modernist accounts do not deal with the issue of ethnic relations. So, let us here focus on the role of language in ethnic interactions. Since our objective is to study ethnic rivalries, we limit our attention to the role of language in hostile ethnic relations, and below we proceed to examine how language is involved in a conflict between ethnic groups.

It is possible to distinguish several aspects of the way language functions in such a conflict. Perhaps, the most serious and conflictual role is that of official language. In modernists' accounts, the meaning of official national languages is equated to the languages used in education system and public administration. However, in many contemporary case studies, the term "official language" is often used inconsistently (Pool 1990, 254). That is because, a language can be elevated to official language status in order to avoid accusations in discrimination when other language or languages have been already awarded the status of official language. On the other hand, in various cases, governments have treated one particular language as a "privileged one" without declaring that language "official". That is why Jonathan Pool describes the policy of official language as a policy, which is aimed at all types of communications that are subject to governmental linguistic requirements and any of such requirements can be understood as an "officialization of a language" (Pool 1990, 256). The language placed

in a privileged position is not necessarily the language of the majority of population in the area in question.

Often, it is only the elite who can speak the language required in situations that yield power. Thus, if the language patterns of elite are distinct from that of the masses, the capacity to speak a particular language or write in that language at a significant degree is an important characteristic for differentiating elite and masses, and in such a case only those people, who can be awarded a high index of handling their ability to communicate in the official language, could be encountered among the elite.

One of the approaches to examine the use of the official language policy for the purposes of differentiating elites and masses is offered by Carol Myers-Scotton (1990). She directs her attention to the process of how groups of individuals come to occupy positions in power and how they maintain these positions through the control over language policy in the territory in question. By introducing the term 'elite closure', Myers-Scotton describes the strategy, which is aimed at preventing the challenge to established elites through the support of official language policies that "designate[s] a linguistic variety known largely only by the elite as necessary for participation in situations which yield power" (Myers-Scotton 1990, 25). The value of the concept of elite closure can be illustrated by numerous examples in many parts of the world, and, at some point, it may seems to be appropriate to apply the notion of elite closure for the examination of the role of language in the relations between ethnic groups in the South Caucasus during the early 20th century. In fact, during the period of 1918-1921, when the government of independent Georgia intended to restrict the use of languages other than Georgian in the official domains in Abkhazia, this measure can be evaluated as an attempt to introduce the policy of elite (or ethnic) closure in Abkhazia (see *Chapter Five*). However, a straight application of Myers-Scotton's concept to the cases of our study won't produce convincing results with regard to the identification of the role of language in these conflicts. There are several reasons for this.

First of all, in a multilingual and multiethnic state, ethnic leadership is facing a task, which is more complex than a simple implementation of the elite closure technique.

That is because, in addition to elite-masses relationships within their own ethnic group, elites in a multiethnic state have to take into account the presence of elite(s) belonging to other ethnic group(s) and to develop such a policy that would tackle the linguistic patters of their entire ethnic group. Moreover, in modern societies elites simply cannot ignore the language spoken by the rest (majority) of their own ethnic group because elites need support of the masses and there is no way to communicate with the masses other than in the language understood by the majority of population. The notion of elite closure, thus, can be referred to as the attempts to strengthen the elite's differentiation from the masses, and not as the policy of differentiation targeting the entire ethnic groups (while, of course, quite often elite represents one ethnic group and masses – the other, a typical situation in many African countries, which is the principal area of study for Myers-Scotton). However, if we are to keep interest in an ethnic conflict, we need to focus our attention at how language is employed in the relations between different ethnic groups.

So far, in the examination of the issue of official language, we discussed the case where language is used for the purpose of exclusion. However, as we shall see shortly, language is also exploited for the purpose of inclusion. One type of language conflicts in a multilingual state is a "nested conflict". According to Masatsugu Matsuo (1999, 88), a nested conflict is a two-tiered conflict, with each of the tires involving a conflict between two power-asymmetric groups. The model proposed by Matsuo (1999, 89) is based on the following settings. First, he assumes that there is a territorial political unit with one (or more) ethnolinguistic group or groups dominating the political unit, on the one hand, and one or more non-dominant subordinated groups within the territory in question, on the other hand. Secondly, it is presumed that a non-dominant group is allowed a certain degree of autonomy in some part of the territory within the political unit[4]. Thirdly, the model is expanded by the inclusion of another non-dominant minority group, which is politically subordinated to the first non-dominant group. Therefore, the model illustrates a conflict within a conflict, i.e. a case, where there is a group (which Matsuo calls "an intermediate group") that must fight on two fronts, i.e. in both the tiers, and which has to employ both strategies –

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[4] Often, granting the official status to language of non-dominant group is one of the attributes of autonomy.

differentiation and homogenization – *simultaneously*.

In the studies of language strategies, the strategy of homogenization is understood as an attempt of one group to linguistically assimilate the other group or groups and the strategy to maintain the linguistically different patterns of speech between groups means the strategy of differentiation (Matsuo 1999, 91-92). The group has to use language in order to differentiate them from a more powerful group, but at the same time the language must be used in such a way that it enables the intermediate group to adopt the policy of homogenization towards a weaker (in terms of political power), rival group (see Figure 1.1).

Figure 1.1 Nested Conflict
(source: adapted from Matsuo 1999, 90)

| Dominant group |
| Intermediate group |
| Subordinated group |

opposition/conflict

opposition/conflict

support/dependence
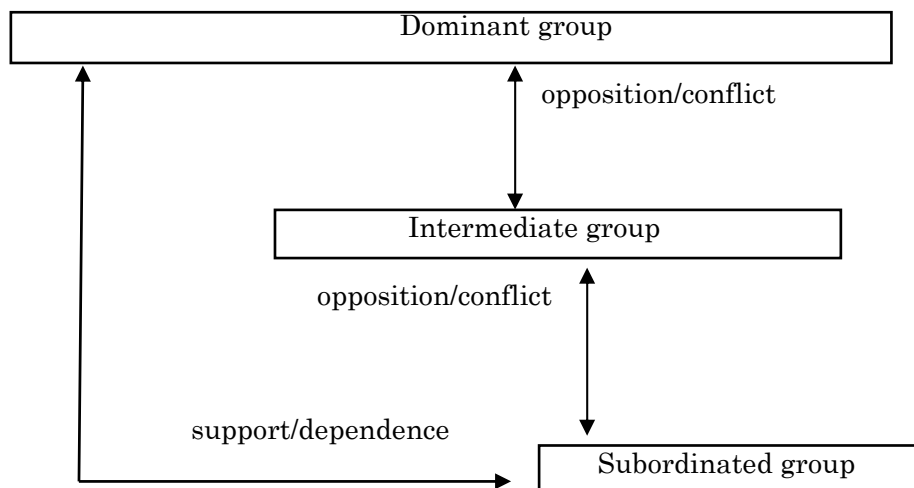
The approach adopted by Matsuo very appropriately shows the hierarchical, or the vertical, linguistic relationships between the "subordinated" ethnic groups. The notion of "nested conflict" can be applied to many cases of ethnonational conflicts in the Soviet Union, in which language can be considered as one of the most important factors causing conflicts, in order to better understand the character of linguistic opposition between ethnic groups. On the other hand, the examination of the Soviet language policy and of its changing trends towards indigenization and Russification (see *Chapter Three*) shows the contradictory trends in the official language policy implemented in the Soviet Union. Therefore, the role of language in the relations

between ethnic groups cannot be explained solely through the notion of 'nested conflicts' although the acknowledgement of a nested character of ethnic rivalries in the Caucasus should be regarded as a sine qua non for building our own model of ethnic enclosure later in this Chapter. Although the nested conflict model neatly captured some aspects of the Caucasian ethnic conflicts, the related concepts of homogenization and differentiation have more important theoretical significance.

When we admit the importance of language homogenization and differentiation, a different issue arises. In many cases, which involve languages spoken by ethnic groups, one group claims that its language should be regarded as a separate language but the rival ethnic group denies such a claim[5]. As argued by Matsuo, there is no handy objective criterion by which the separateness of a language can be determined (Matsuo 2005, 189). The starting point of Matsuo's discussion is the assumption that many languages can be compared as having a number of elements in common (see Figure 1.2). This represents the reality of the relation of the two "languages".

Figure 1.2 Basic Relationship of Two Languages
(source: Matsuo 2005, 191)

language B

common
elements
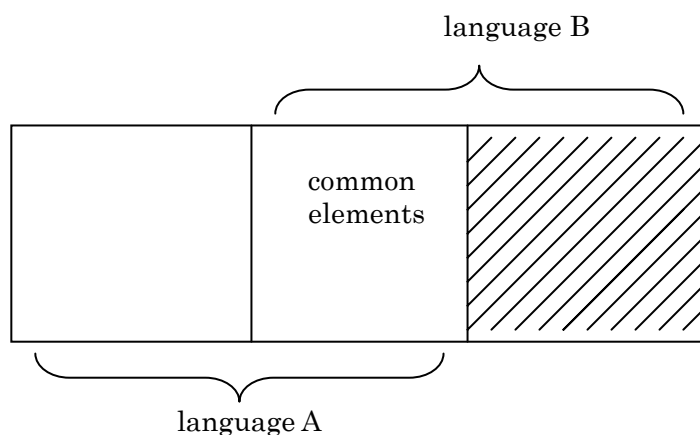
language A

However, the identification and differentiation of language is often made on non-linguistic, political grounds, and, thus, becomes primarily the matter of political perception (Matsuo 2005, 190-191).

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[5] The term language is used to acknowledge "a possible separate language", "what can be regarded as a separate language" or a "dialect". While "language variety" is a more precise term, "language" is used for simplicity's sake (Matsuo 2005, 190).

In the cases, when differentiation or identification of two languages is made mainly on the basis of perception rather than on some objective criteria, one of the languages may be perceived as having only a small part of common elements by that party to the conflict, which wishes to strengthen its separate identity through language B (Figure 1.3). However, the opposite party may claim that language spoken by their ethnic group and the language of its rivalry are two dialects of one common language A (Figure 1.4). In this way, identity and difference of language greatly depends upon perception. In fact, there is a great variety of patterns of this kind of perception and above-mentioned examples of differentiation and inclusion are not the only possible scenarios. As noted by Matsuo, 'even when … two languages (or dialects) seem far apart with very little in common, perceptual identification can still occur" (Matsuo 2005, 198). That is because "[l]anguages seem, by their very nature, to allow a wide variety of perception patterns concerning their identity and difference… [T]here is nothing objective in the nature of language which automatically determines the sameness or difference of two languages, as far as the languages in question are somehow related languages" (Matsuo 2005, 202).

Figure 1.3 Language Differentiation: Perception
(source: adapted from Matsuo 2005, 194)
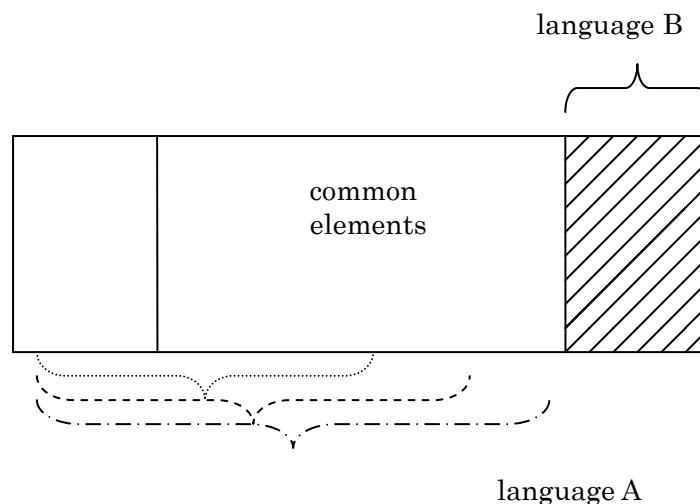
Figure 1.4   Language Identification: Perception
(adapted from Matsuo 2005, 201)

language B

common
elements
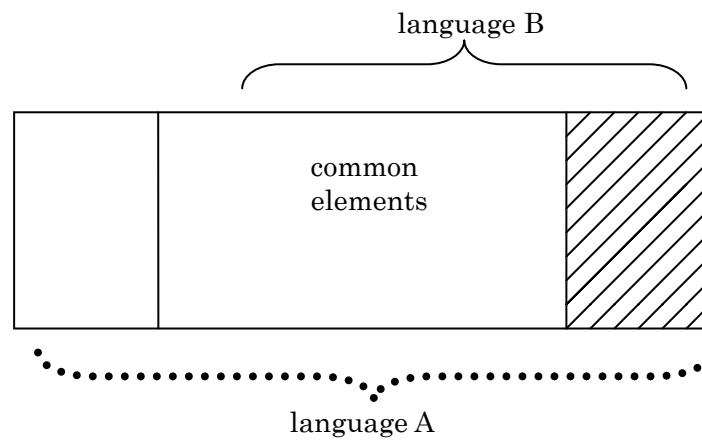
language A

The intrinsic property of language, namely, the absence of an objective criterion to differentiate or equate, is crucial to understand the role of language in ethnic conflict. As we will show in the following Chapters, perceptions of language differentiation or identification played a key role in the way language was exploited in the Georgian-Abkhazian conflict and in other ethnic rivalries in the Caucasus. This clearly casts doubts in the effectiveness of the approaches, which focus on the study of the actual linguistic patterns of the ethnic group in question, to explain the role of language in ethnic conflict. As the case of the Georgian-Abkhazian conflict will clearly show, while the issue of official language in Abkhazia was indeed an important one, during the most of the Soviet period the disputes between Abkhazians and Georgians over which language or languages should enjoy the status of official in Abkhazia was primarily related to the attempts to increase the symbolic value of Abkhaz or Georgian as part of the status struggle and less to the attempts to advance the practical use of either of the languages in the region since it was the Russian language, which ruled in the domains of the official business in Abkhazia and occupied dominant positions in Georgia as well, especially during the second part of the 20th century.

At the same time, in the case of not only the Georgian-Abkhazian ethnic rivalry but also in a number of other ethnic conflicts in the South Caucasus, language always conserved its power as a feature of differentiation of ethnic groups. Therefore, the modernist account, emphasizing the need to equate linguistic and ethnic boundaries, cannot explain why over and over again language continues to be a key feature of

contemporary ethnic conflicts. The model of *ethnie*, introduced by Smith, heavily relies on language as one of the key attributives of an *ethnie*, and, thus shows the importance of language in relation to ethnic group. However, Smith's approach can also be applied only to those cases, in which we consider reality of language alone and in which language is examined as a marker of real linguistic identity of ethnic group in question. Hence, there is a need for a new theoretical framework that can explain the role of language in those conflicts, when language is exploited based on the perception of language differentiation or identification.

1.4 ETHNIC ENCLOSURE

As we discuss in *Chapter Three*, in the case of an ethnic rivalry, the functioning of myth – as a belief held in common by a large group of people that gives events and actions a particular meaning – requires the use of symbols, which provides a shorthand reference to the myth in question[6]. According to Murray Edelman, who introduced the notion of symbols to the study of politics, people make political choices based on emotions, and almost every political action has a symbolic side. Symbols are crucial elements for the functioning of an ethnogenetic myth because "[e]very symbol stands for something other than itself, and it also evokes an attitude, a set of impressions, or a pattern of events associated through time, through space, through logic, or through imagination with symbol" (Edelman 1985, 6).

The examination of the case of the Georgian-Abkhazian rivalry in this volume will reveal active use of symbols that are linked through language to the Georgian and Abkhazian myths of ethnogenesis: references to ancient inscriptions and medieval manuscripts, illustrations in the textbooks, targeting of archives and memorials during the Georgian-Abkhazian 1992-1993 war are just a few of the examples. On the other hand, the exploitation of language by Georgian and Abkhazian ethnic leaders was not limited to the revoking of language-related *visual* symbols. That is because language was exploited in a more complex way in order to maximize the effectiveness of the use of myths and, thus, we have to touch upon a broader spectrum of issues concerned with

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[6] We discuss relations between language and myths in more detail in *Chapter Three*

the role language plays in the relations between ethnic groups.

As we will show later, in the case of the Georgian-Abkhazian ethnic conflict, one ethnic group (Abkhazians) had to resist the policy of homogenization attempted by the rival ethnic group (Georgians). Despite of the significant language shift of the majority of Abkhazians to Russian, they were still able to use the Abkhaz language as a political resource. In order to find the answer to the question why Abkhazians were able to exploit so successfully Abkhaz as a political resource in their opposition to Georgians, we have to make two assumptions. First, following the approach proposed by Matsuo and discussed earlier in this Chapter, we have to assume that the emphasis should be placed not on the discussion of the issue of identity and the differentiation between two languages as a factual linguistic issue, but on the description of how perceived identity or difference between language varieties is used for political purposes. Secondly, we have to view the process of the establishment of ethnic boundaries as a process of *simultaneous exclusion and inclusion*, or as the process of enclosure.

The use of the term "enclosure" is intended to generate associations with historical enclosure, because the enclosure of the 18th century presented a case of simultaneous exclusion and inclusion: in the process of enclosure, peasants were excluded from owning land, but at the same time the land was fenced in and secured for farming and sheep grazing, i.e. included. Similarly, ethnic enclosure is understood as an attempt at simultaneous exclusion and inclusion: there are ethnic groups who are expelled from the area in question, i.e. excluded, and there is a territory that becomes enclosed, or included.

The policy of ethnic enclosure is a deliberate attempt of the ethnic leadership to exclude rival ethnic group(s) from the disputed territory. At the same time, it is possible to identify two facets of ethnic enclosure: its material, or physical, and its symbolic, or verbal, aspects. Actually, in many ethnic conflicts, the actions of rival parties can be characterized as attempts at material enclosure aiming at the physical expulsion or forced assimilation of rival population. However, our particular interest in this publication is to the less explored symbolic phase of enclosure that may start well

before ethnic rivalry turns violent. The symbolic feature of ethnic enclosure can be understood as the process of X-ation of Y, where X and Y stand for rival ethnic groups. In other words, symbolic enclosure is an attempt to revoke distinct identity of the rival ethnic group in the territory in question, i.e. to exclude, but at the same time to encompass the population that may remain in the territory, i.e. to include. Obviously, it is much easier to attempt a symbolic ethnic enclosure rather than a physical one. In the case of the Soviet ethno-territorial division, the borders between autonomies were often set arbitrary by the Soviet authorities, and only few ethnic groups did in fact manage to expand their territorial boundaries in practice. However, as we will show later, all ethnic groups were trying to expand symbolically in space and in time. Bearing in mind these considerations, the model of ethnic enclosure can be described as follows:

Let us suppose that there are two ethnic groups sharing some common territory. A possible scenario is that the leadership of one of the ethnic groups faces the task of establishing, maintaining, or improving its position of power within the territory in question. These attempts meet the resistance of the competing ethnic leadership, whose power is threatened by the actions of its ethnic rival. In order to justify the ties to the territory in question, each side claims the first-settlers principle with respect to the territory in question by referring to some historical evidences. As a result, two rival versions of ethnogenesis emerge, each reflecting the distant past of *both* ethnic groups. These two versions are political myths, i.e. the credibility of historical proofs matter little. In an ethnic enclosure process, at a point in time, the myth gives the historical advantage to one ethnic group at the expense of the rival ethnic group and the latter is excluded from the area in question. Hence, the disputed territory becomes ethnically enclosed by only one ethnic group. Usually, during ethnic enclosure, each party attempts to justify current boundary by the perceived existence of much wider ethnic boundaries in the past.

In principle, in the process of ethnic enclosure there might be various cultural properties that are used by rival ethnic leaderships in order to justify the enclosure. However, most often it is language that is adopted as the weapon of verbal attack. That is because, in many cases, it is language that is most central to an ethnic group. As our

examination of the Abkhazian and Georgian historiography will show, for professional historians and historical linguists, it is extremely difficult to establish from a scientific point of view the true identification of the language spoken in the area in the distant past. However, if in a political discourse the focus is placed on the perceived identification of the language spoken by the people who lived in the disputed area in the remote past with the language currently ascribed to an ethnic group in question, then it becomes relatively easy to give life to such myths of the distant past that leave no doubt about their credibility in the minds of the majority of the ethnic group since in these myths the continued use of the language, or the language itself, becomes a 'primordial' property, i.e. a property unchanged throughout history. Moreover, it can be said that the historical memory of a social group involves a complex combination of meeting the needs of accurate representation and providing a usable past (Wretch 2002, 35-40). The perceived language identification or differentiation not only provides a perfect link between past and present, but is also turned into an emotionally-charged quick reference to myths used to justify ethnic boundaries in question. It can easily be used to strengthen the group's sense of solidarity without a significant number of people necessarily actually *speaking* the language.

As we discussed earlier, in an attempt of enclosure, the existence of an ethnic group in the territory in question is established at the expense of rival ethnic group(s). In so doing, if language particular to the ethnic group (or the continuous use of this language) is considered the primary evidence of the first-settlers status, ethnic groups seek linguistic proofs in further going back in history, earlier days of the past. Since in the distant past there is less factual evidence, ethnogenetic myths are built primarily upon the perception on language identification / differentiation. The group that attempts an enclosure (group A) refutes other's claims (that of group B) by temporary pushing group A's origin further back into the past. More importantly, trying to establish that group A's ancestors were living in the area claimed by group B, the ethnic borders allegedly existed in the past are expanded to include the territory claimed by group B. Hence, a symbolic enclosure is accomplished. Moreover, these attempts at symbolic enclosure are often mutual, as shown in Figure 1.5:

Figure 1.5 Stages of Ethnic Enclosure
(A = ethnogenetic myth of group A,
B= ethnogenetic myth of group B)

Stage 0: Before enclosure begins

Stage 1 of enclosure: Group A advances

Stage 2 of enclosure: Group B advances in
return to the enclosure by Group A

Stage n of enclosure: Group A advances again
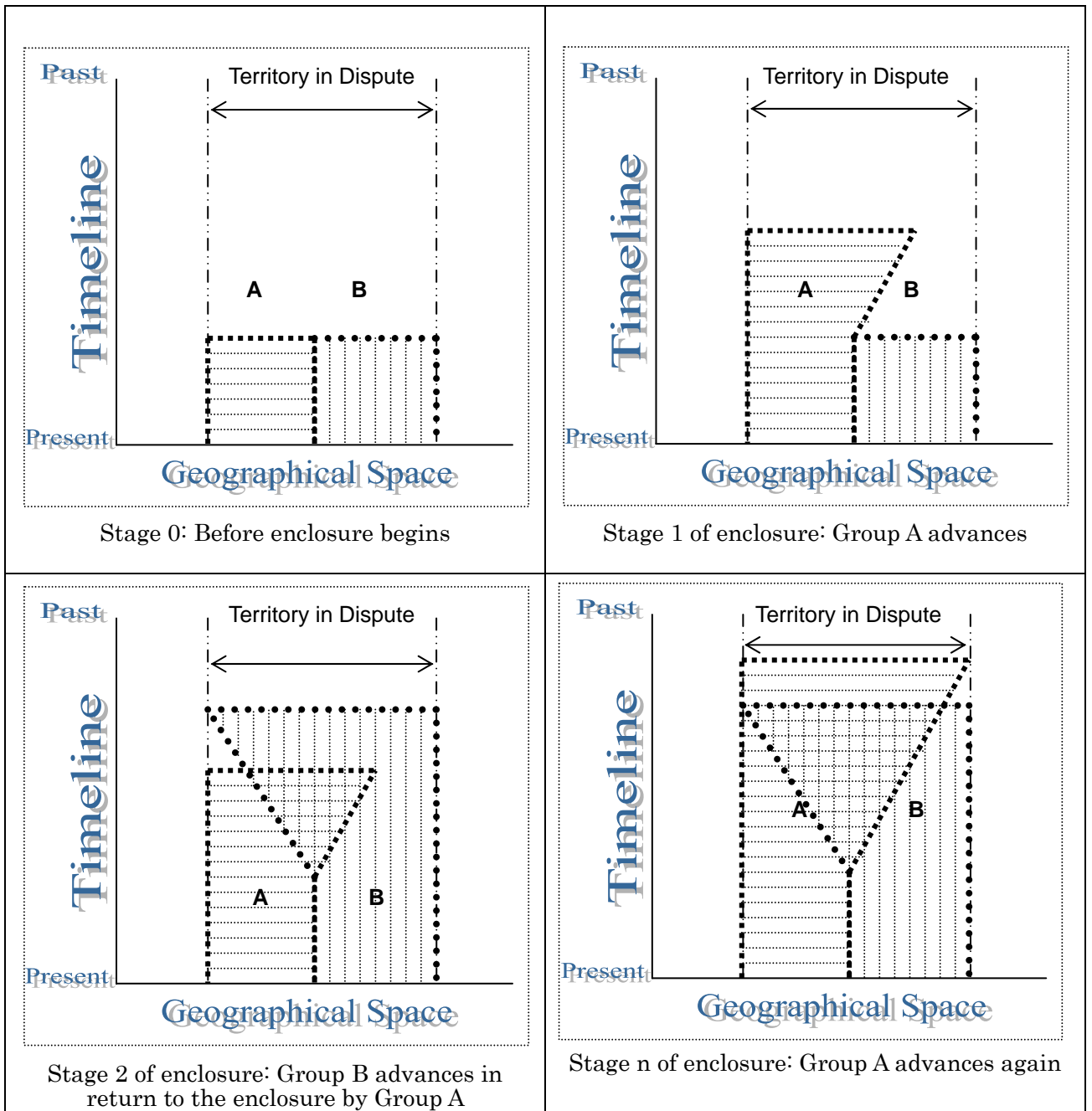
The symbolic aspect of ethnic enclosure is closely associated with the process of the formation and strengthening of a language-territory complex. Language-territory complex is viewed as a core of the symbolic ethnic enclosure, in which the perceived language identification or differentiation is used in order to justify the claims of ethnic groups over the territory in question, and can be defined as a particular way of collective remembering based on a strong correlation between the territorial boundaries of the ethnic group, its ascribed language and the historical past of the territory in question. The language-territory complex is characterized by its focus on the importance of historical events to the present, and reflects not only the acceptance of the historical-linguistic justification for the group's links to the disputed territory but also the rejection of similar claims made by a rival ethnic group. Thus, if historical awareness is to be understood not only as individual and collective understandings of the past, but also as the relationships between historical understandings and those of the present and the future (Seixas 2004, 45), then Abkhazian and Georgian ethnic groups can be characterized as possessing an extreme degree of historical awareness.

The existence of a strong language-territory complex should be seen as an important feature of the entire process of enclosure leading to the reinforcement of hostilities between ethnic groups. The process of formation and maintenance of language-territory complex can be seen as a cyclical one and we can describe it in the following way.

Once again, let us assume that we have two groups, A and B, sharing some common territory within a multiethnic and multilingual state. At a point in time, the political environment changes in such a way that group A may consider it is possible to challenge the claims made by group B. This changing political environment influences enormously the ethnic group's academic scholarship, since scholars then feel obliged to look for historico-linguistic evidences from the distant past so as to demonstrate the existence of ethnic links to the area in question, and reject the claims of the competing ethnic group. And – somehow not surprisingly – such evidences are always found.

As a next step, the appropriate version of the ethnic group's distant past, which contains references to the language ascribed to the ethnic group in modern times, is diffused to the population through the mass media and education system, leading to the

strengthening of a language-territory complex. In the Caucasus, the specifics of the Soviet political settings caused the process to take place simultaneously in both ethnic groups. It is also interesting to note that scholars of group A, in order to justify historical ties of their ethnic group to the area in question, often make references to the same historical events or proofs as scholars of group B. Basically, both the language-territory complex of group A and language-territory complex of group B are built upon references to one and the same historical pool. Often, the only difference is the interpretation and perception (see Figure 1.6, next page).

As we will show in *Chapter Three* , in a particular type of a nested conflict under the Soviet political settings, the status of an ethnic group and privileges accorded to it depend to a significant degree on the ability of the ethnic group to prove its historical ties to the area in question, along with the continuous use of its own distinct language. Therefore, a struggle for which version of history – that of group A or that of group B – is to be accepted as the official history begins. The division is very acute, since the version of group A rejects the arguments of group B and vice-versa. The success or failure of one group or another was often reflected in changes of language policy with respect to the language ascribed to the ethnic group in question and, of course, in changes in the content of textbooks and in the propaganda of the mass media. Again, it is important to remember that we are dealing here with collective memory, which is slow to change, and language, which is central to the individual's sense of place in the world. Therefore, it should come as no surprise that people were quite sensitive to changes in the official history and language policy, especially when official history justified the official language policy.

The following two Chapters will focus on the examination of some of the important aspects of the Soviet language policy and history writing, which in the specific settings of a nested competition among ethnic groups in the USSR facilitated the growth of possibilities for different perceptions of language and enabled ethnonational leaders in Soviet autonomies to exploit language ascribed to their respective ethnic groups as a vital political resource of ethnic enclosure.

Figure 1.6 Clash of Language-Territory Complexes
(adapted from Rouvinski and Matsuo 2003, 110)

Historical Evidence
(documentary, archaeological, linguistic, etc.)

loops

loops

Political
Environment

Political
Environment

Intellectuals

Intellectuals

Mass Media
Education

Mass Media
Education

New History
New Myth

New History
New Myth

Language –
Territory
COMPLEX

CLASH

Language –
Territory
COMPLEX
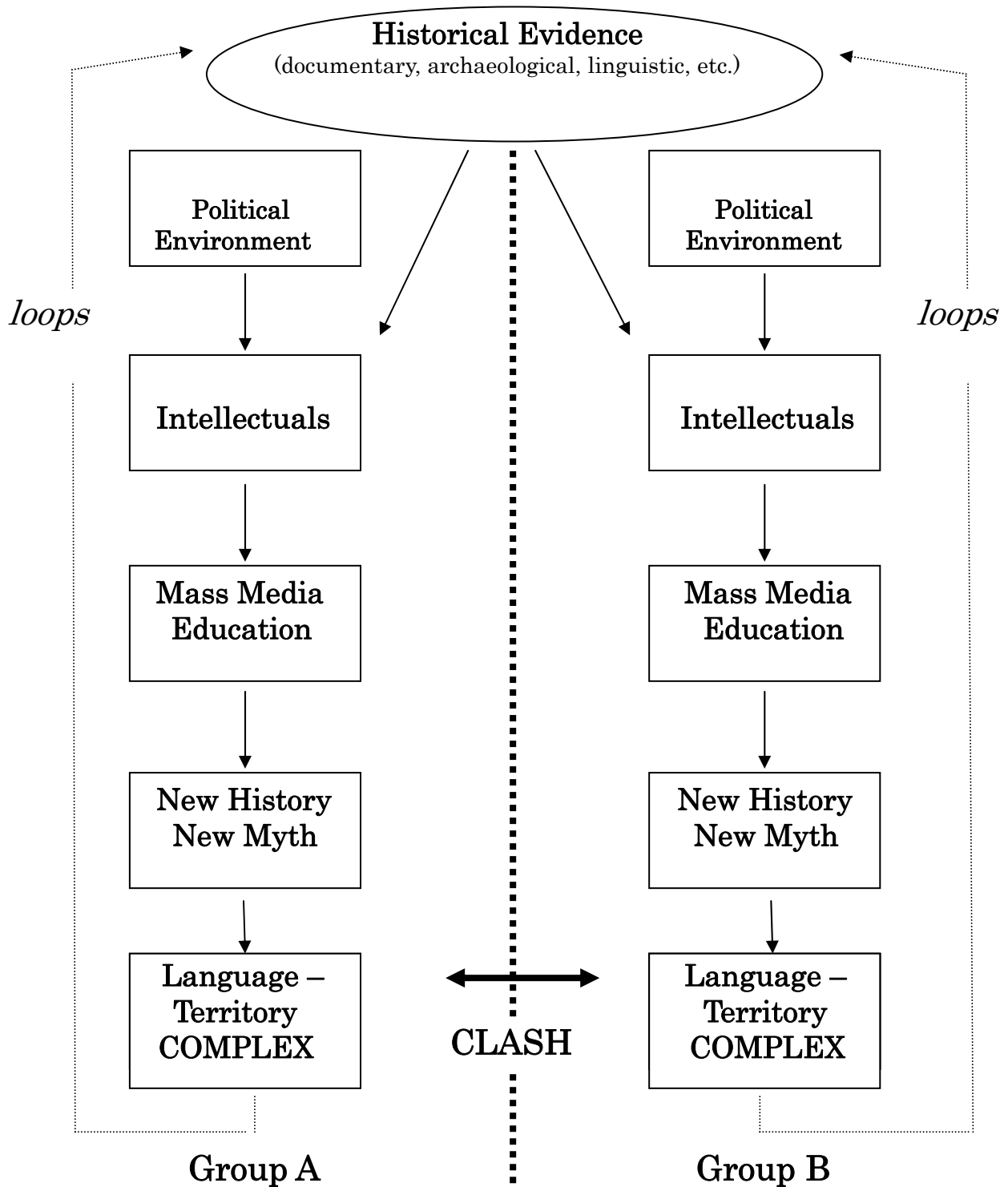
Group A

Group B

CHAPTER TWO
LANGUAGE POLICY AND THE SOVIET ADMINISTRATIVE TERRITORIAL DIVISION

> The tension between how ethnic groups viewed themselves, and how they were viewed by the State, is central to the study of language policy in the USSR
>
> Leonore Grenoble, *Language Policy in the Soviet Union*

The key objective of our examination in this Chapter is to review several important aspects of the development of the nationality policy conducted in the Soviet Union. The review will provide us with the background of the events which took place in the South Caucasus and which are the subject of our in depth case study.

2.1. THE SOVIET APPROACHES TO NATIONALITY POLICY

In the beginning of the 20th century, Russia was a vast colonial empire, which acquired its enormous size mostly by the means of a military conquest[1]. Under the pressure of the events in Europe as well as witnessing the demise of the Ottoman Empire, the Russian authorities in the colonized territories thought that they could maintain the rule only by force, but the oppressive policy of the Tsarist government began to provoke even a greater resistance and gave an additional impetus to the growth of ethnic consciousness everywhere in the non-Russian territories of the empire. It was about this time, when groups of indigenous intellectuals started to form first patriotic organizations and when the interest to study local histories and local languages intensified[2].

The 1905-1907 Revolution in Russia forced the Tsarist government to ease its pressure on the colonized territories[3]. However, this turned out to be a temporary relaxation, and the oppression regained its power during the period that preceded the

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[1] As we will see in *Chapter Four*, the Russian military advance played an important role in the processes of the changes of ethno-demographic situations in the provinces, particularly, in the Caucasus.

[2] One of the latest examples of a scholarly research on this topic is Balkelis (2005). Balkelis shows how the studies of the Lithuanian intelligentsia in the modern urban intellectual environment of Russia helped them to discover and form not only new social and political agendas but also to shape their collective identities. The process of 'discovering of national roots' was greatly reinforced by the social displacement and isolation as well as stimulated by the unwillingness of the Russian imperial administration to employ Lithuanians in their native provinces.

[3] The change of the policy of the colonial administration was particularly noticeable in the Caucasus

1917 February Revolution. The fall of the Russian monarchy was regarded in the non-Russian provinces of the Empire as an opportunity to build a new multiethnic state[4]. At the same time, the new Russian provisional government was not ready to resolve the issues concerned with the growth of nationalist aspirations in the country. Russia was still actively participating in the First World War, and the decision on the new form of the state structure was to be taken at a constituent assembly, which the provisional government promised to convene when the war would be over (Nahayalo and Swoboda 1990, 19-20). Meanwhile, the collapse of the Tsarist regime and the failure of the provisional government to efficiently govern the country led to the creation in non-Russian territories of the former empire of numerous local national councils, parliaments and self-declared autonomous national governments. All of them announced to represent the true interests of the local ethnic groups. In addition, local soviets had been created. The scale of real political influence of these soviets varied from one region to another but in many cases their activities duplicated or replaced that of the local branches of the central provisional government[5]. In the beginning of their existence, the local soviets were formed on a multi-party basis, but soon after they became dominated by the Bolsheviks. Therefore, when in October 1917, the provisional government became no more, Bolsheviks had enough support in many regions and, more importantly for our study, were able to address the masses of non-Russian population with their vision of the way the ethnic groups must be accommodated in new Russia.

In order to understand the Soviet nationality policy and their changes, here it is necessary to provide an overview of the views of the Bolsheviks leaders on the nationality policy. It is because the changes in the policy towards non-Russian territories and ethnic minorities reflected the change of the paradigm as a result of often very hot theoretical debates amongst the party leadership. In addition, many of the indigenous intellectuals in the Caucasus, who reached the highest administrative positions in the region after the control of Moscow over the region was established in the beginning of

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[4] See, e.g., how this aspirations were reflected in the Declaration of the South-Eastern Union (*Chapter Four*, pp.87-88)
[5] The Soviet-time historiographic sources refer to the period between February and October 1917 revolutions in Russia as "diarchy" (see, e.g., Lebedev 1987)

the 1920s or, sometimes, even before – during short-lived Soviets in 1917-1919, shared the ideas propagated by the Russian Socialist Democratic Labor Party (RSDLP).

The Bolsheviks theorists started to design their policy towards ethnic minorities in the Russian Empire long before actually taking power in Petrograd in 1917. At the same time, the views of the Bolsheviks leaders on the new territorial division of the former empire had being changing significantly during the first two decades after the revolution. The resolution of the first congress of RSDLP held in 1898 proclaimed the 'right of nations to self-determination', and few years later, in 1903, this principle became a part of the official Party's program. At the same time, the right to self-determination was understood by Vladimir Lenin quite differently from the interpretation of this principle by the political leaders in Europe of that time.

The core of the Bolsheviks' approach to the issue of self-determination was to advocate the unity of the *proletariat* of each nationality rather than that of peoples or nations: the core of the RSDLP program was based on the Marxist idea of class struggle. This position can be clarified by the following example. In his 'Theses on the National Question', Lenin emphasized that after the Russian monarchy will be brought down as a result of the armed struggle of the working class, the future of the territories, which constituted the Russian empire, must be decided in a referendum on secession (Lebedev 1987, 12). However, soon after, in another paper entitled 'The Socialist Revolution and the Right of Nations to Self-determination', the future leader of the Soviet Russia provided a more comprehensible account of his views. Lenin particularly underlined that self-determination must be understood as the right to a political separation from the oppressor nation and must not be confused with a demand for separation, fragmentation and the formation of smaller states. According to Lenin, "a demand for secession should be interpreted as an expression of struggle against all forms of national oppression" (cited in Nahaylo and Swoboda 1990, 14). As it is well known, Lenin was writing his theses in emigration and paid great deal of attention to the events that took place in Europe in the beginning of the 20th century (such as the secession of Norway from Sweden in 1905). The language issues were also the subject of his examination. Reportedly, Lenin was very interested in the form of multilingual organization of the

Swiss federation, and he often referred to the fact of the existence of three official languages in Switzerland as a possible solution to politically accommodate a great number of languages spoken in the Russian Empire. At the same time, Lenin assumed that although the Russian language may cease to be the only official language in Russia after the revolution, it will be, nevertheless, "naturally adopted by the population as the language most suitable for inter-ethnic communication, when national antipathies between Russians and oppressed nationalities disappear" (cited Nahaylo and Swoboda 1990, 15).

Obviously, the issue of how to treat non-Russian population was in the top of the Bolshevik's agenda right after they took power in October 1917. One of the first commissariats created by the new authorities was the people's commissariat for nationalities affairs[6]. On 18 November 1917, the Lenin's government published the 'Declaration of the Rights of the People's of Russia', in which new leaders emphasized that they will follow the policy of "voluntary and sincere alliance of the peoples of Russia" based on the following four major principles:

1). The equality and sovereignty of the peoples of Russia.
2). The right of the peoples of Russia to free self-determination including secession and formation of independent states.
3). The abolition of all national and national-religious privileges and restrictions of any kind
4). The free development of national minorities and ethnic groups populating the territory of Russia (*Istoriya Sovetskoi Konstitutsii …*, 1956, 9)

At the same time, Lenin made clear that his government would treat as genuine only those new regional governments, which would be led by the "representatives of the working class" (cited Nahaylo and Swoboda 1990, 21). The new Russian government was eager to assist non-Russians in fighting their local bourgeoisie since "only a socialist union of the working people of all countries can remove all grounds for national persecution and strife" (Nahayalo and Swoboda 1990, 24). This approach was successfully implemented by the Bolsheviks in Ukraine and Byelorussia, and, in the

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[6] The Bolsheviks liquidated the previous bureaucratic structure of the Russian state, and, instead created a new set of administrative bodies to implement their policies. The 'People's Commissariats' were established on 9 November 1917 at the 2nd Congress of Soviets. They were converted to Ministers only on 15 March 1946 (Shnirelman 2003, 260).

beginning of 1918, they were able to re-establish the control of Petrograd over a significant portion of the European part of the former Russian Empire[7]. In the 'Declaration of the Rights of the Working and Exploited People', adopted by the 3rd All-Russian Congress of Soviets on 12 January 1918, Russia was proclaimed a "republic of soviets of workers, soldiers and peasants' deputies" (*Istoriya Sovetskoi Konstitutsii …*, 1957, 11). All power, centrally and locally, was vested in these soviets. With regard to the issue of non-Russian people, the declaration explained that "the Russian Soviet Republic is established on the principle of a free union of free nations, as a federation of Soviet national republics", and the workers and peasants of each nation were given "the right to decide independently at their own meetings of soviets on the conditions of their participation in the federal government" (cited in Nahayalo and Swoboda, 1990, 21).

Meanwhile, on 3 March 1918, the Bolshevik delegation led by Leon Trotsky signed the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk with Germany, Austria-Hungary, Bulgaria, and Turkey (Central Powers), which permitted Russia to quit the First World War. However, according to the terms of the treaty, Russia was forced to give up most of its European territory (Proceedings of the Brest-Litovsk Peace Conference, Appendices: Russia-Germany, 1918). In these circumstances, the part of the above-mentioned declaration on the establishment of a federation of national republics lost its real meaning, and the 5th All-Russian Congress of Soviets on 10 July 1918 simply incorporated the text of the declaration into the first Soviet Russian Constitution, without providing any further details on the issue (*Istoriya Sovetskoi Konstitutsii…* 1957, 8).

Later that year, a conference of Bolsheviks organizations from the territories occupied by the Central Powers was organized in Moscow. The conference passed a resolution, which stated that "the right of nations to self-determination is now becoming not only Utopia but simply fiction since the class struggle between the proletariat and bourgeoisie splits all nations in a most implacable way" (cited in Nahayalo and Swoboda, 1990, 28). However, as soon as one month after the conference, the

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[7] With a notable exception of Finland, which declared its independence on 6 December 1917, recognized by the USSR by the Treaty of Tartu (1920).

November 1918 Revolution in Germany permitted the Bolsheviks Government to annul the Brest-Litovsk Treaty and the German withdrawal began. On the territories, freed from the German occupation, it was decided to establish buffer states under the authority of regional Bolsheviks' Soviets (*Istoriya Sovetskoi Konstitutsii*… 1957, 10). The creation of such nominally sovereign soviet republics began in the very end of 1918 and spread over the vast territory of the former Russian empire following the successes of the Red Army on the battlefields of the Russian Civil War in 1919-1920. The merely declarative character of the buffer republics' sovereignty have been noted by many scholars, who point out, e.g., on the nature of the directives sent by the Central government to the provinces (Nahayalo and Swoboda 1990, 29-31). At the same time, the ambiguity of the Bolsheviks' position can be explained, at least in part, by the hot debates within the party itself on the issue of a new administrative structure of Russia. While Lenin did modify his previous position and insisted that the recognition of the right of the entire nations to self-determination is vital for the achievement of the ultimate objectives of the communist revolution, his opponents argued that it is premature to open the doors for a referendum on "the will of the nation of the so-called entire population", i.e. to grant the voting rights to the 'ruling class' as well (cited in Nahayalo and Swoboda 1990, 27). The resolution of the 8th All-Russian Congress of Soviets was a compromise: "the right to state secession for colonial nations and those not having equal rights' had been acknowledged but the formation of a federative union of states of a Soviet type as one of the transitional forms on the way to complete unity" was declared the current strategy of the party (Nahayalo and Swoboda 1990, 28).

Thus far, the focus of Bolsheviks' attention was to re-instate the control over the European part of Russia. However, along with the support of soviets in Ukraine and Byelorussia, the Red Army had started its advance to Central Asia and the Caucasus. In *Chapter Four*, we will provide a comprehensive description of the related developments in the South Caucasus. Here, let it suffice to say that despite of a number of the formal declarations of 'self-determination', 'independence' and 'sovereignty' made by regional soviets in Central Asia and in the Caucasus, the central Russian government, regarded the Soviet republics as a de facto part of a centralized state[8].

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[8] The Soviet government was moved from Petrograd to Moscow during the critical phase of the civil

This stand could be clearly seen from the 'Theses to a report on the immediate tasks of the Party in the national question endorsed by the Central Committee of the Party'. The document was drafted by Joseph Stalin, then the People's Commissar of Nationalities. Before the 1917 October Revolution, Stalin's position with respect to the issue of self-determination was similar to that of Lenin. In 1913, Stalin wrote that nation "can organize its life as it sees it. It has the right to organize its life on the basis of autonomy. It has the right to enter into federal relations with other nations. It has the right to complete secession. Nations are sovereign and all nations are equal" (Stalin 1941, original 1913, 51). Some eight years later, in the 1921 theses, Stalin argued that examining the relations between Russia and the former provinces of the empire, one can observe the employment of various forms of federation: "ranging from federation based on Soviet autonomy… to federation based on treaty relations with independent Soviet republics… There are neither dominant nor subject nations, neither metropolises nor colonies, neither imperialism nor national oppression" (Stalin 1952, 42).

At the same time, it seems that the real situation was far from being so idyllic as it was described by Stalin: some delegates of the congress expressed their concerns that "the national question is [continuing to be] urgent; in Comrade Stalin's report … the [issue] has not been solved to the slightest extent" (cited in Nahayalo and Swoboda 1990, 48). That was because many republics started to complain against the Russian government taking decisions on its sole discretion without even consulting the authorities in the non-Russian republics. The growing discontent of indigenous leaders en situ forced the Central Committee of the party to prepare a new draft of the "resolution concerning the relations between R.S.F.S.R [the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic] and the independent republics". The document again was written by Stalin, who proposed to solve the problem by concluding a treaty between the Soviet republics and R.S.F.S.R. about the formal entry of the former into Russia.

What the Stalin's suggestion really meant was the change of the status of the 'independent' republics to that of autonomous republics of Russia. However, this

war in March 1918.

proposal was met with the opposition of a number of senior party members, first of all, Lenin, who suggested that it is important "not to destroy [the independence of the republics] but to create another new tier, a federation of republics possessing equal rights" (cited in Nahayalo and Swoboda 1990, 55). As the subsequent course of events showed, the resistance of regional leaders to hand over a considerable part of their authority to Moscow was quite significant. Yet, Stalin and his supporters at the party's Central Committee were ultimately able to overcome this opposition and on 27 December 1922, at the 10th Congress of Soviets of R.S.F.S.R., the representatives of non-Russian republics supported the initiative to create the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), which was legally arranged by signing a Union treaty three days later.

According to the first (1924) USSR Constitution, there were only four union republics (Russian, Ukrainian, Byelorussian and Transcaucasian), and only two of these republics had been denoted as federative: Russian and Transcaucasian. The latter included Azerbaijan, Georgia and Armenia (Chapter 2 of the treaty, Kukushkin and Chistyakov 1987, 264). The treaty specified that the higher state authority is now resides with the union government – the Central Executive Committee (CEC), which consisted of two branches: the Union Soviet and the Soviet of Nationalities. It is important to note that a separate clause of the Constitution acknowledged the specifics of the situation in the Caucasus and gave to autonomous republics of Adzharia, Abkhazia and autonomous regions of Yugo-Ossetia, Nagorny Karabakh and Nakhichevan the right to be represented in the Soviet of Nationalities in addition to the representatives of Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan (Kukushkin and Chistyakov 1987, 265). However, this was the only gesture to the Caucasian autonomies, and the Soviet constitution of 1924 – for the first time – legally established the unequal position of ethnic groups within the Soviet administrative territorial structure, i.e. the supremacy of the union republics authorities over the branches of executive and legislative power in the autonomous republics and regions. Thus, not all "nations" turned out to be equal with respect to the status they received in the new union: ethnic discrimination became embedded in the administrative territorial division of the Soviet Union.

The examination of the early period of the nationality politics conducted by the Bolshevik's government indicates a certain degree of ambiguity in the steps taken by the new leaders of Russia. This is, perhaps, one of the major reasons why, traditionally, the attention of scholars in the area of Russian and Soviet studies have been placed in the issues concerned with high politics, economic growth, and foreign policy of the young Soviet State. The inter-ethnic relations were traditionally considered by scholars secondary factors and not related to the principal driving forces of the political development in the Soviet Union. Usually, Sovietologists treated non-Russians just as objects of the political manipulation and central direction. In other words, the Soviet Union was seen as an example of a classic imperial arrangement between Russia and its subjects on the periphery of the newly re-established empire, and the advance of the Bolshevik's Red Army in the end of the 1910s and in the beginning of the 1920s into the former provinces of the Russian empire was univocally interpreted as a Russian military victory over authentic pro-independence aspirations of non-Russians. Following this approach, the wave of inter-ethnic violence that hit many parts of the Soviet Unions during the last years of the USSR existence, was readily interpreted as a resumption of some kind of pre-Soviet ethnic rivalries, which were simply "frozen" by the totalitarian Communist regime and started to ice out as the power of Moscow weaken in the conflict areas[9].

Another approach to explain the nature of the Soviet State was to apply the hegemonic modernization theory for the explanations of the socio-political dynamics in the USSR. The supporters of the modernization theory argued that the processes of industrialization and the development of modern science would eventually end up with the creation of a civic national identity in the USSR. Therefore, paying attention to the divisions on classes in the Soviet Union seemed to have more explanatory value than the evaluation of ethnic politics (Suny and Martin 2001, 5).

However, the approaches to view ethnic conflicts in the former Soviet Union as a renewal of previously unsolved inter-ethnic disputes or as the resistance to the

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[9] Many academic publications of the first part of the 1990s, which are dedicated to the issues of ethnic conflicts in the Caucasus and Central Asia, start with an assumption of the "frozen" conflicts (see, e.g. Derluguian 1995)

attempts to create an all-Soviet identity along the processes of modernization fail to explain some very important aspects of the conflicts[10]. After all, it is hard to agree that many of the 'apples of discord' of the ethnic conflicts in the former Soviet Union actually grew before the formation of the USSR. In fact, one of the major points of disagreement between ethnic leaderships was related to the status struggle between ethnic groups and this was, of course, the result of ethnic inequality embedded in the Soviet structure of administrative territorial division, which stimulated the rapid growth of ethnic consciousness.

Moreover, the Tsarist Russian Empire was a typical "service state" like the Habsburg, Ottoman, and the Prussian states, in which the service and the strength of attachment to the state entitled one to membership in the political community. The language of the Russian nobility for a long time was French, and important official positions were staffed by Germans, a large group that includes Empress Catherine the Great and the finance minister Sergey Witte, while the Romanov dynasty was intimately related by blood to the British royalty. Italian architects, Dutch painters, Cossack military units, Christened Tatar nobles, and the countless representatives of other ethnic groups could be found in the various branches of the Russian imperial administration. Not so much ethnic heritage as service and loyalty to the state ultimately determined inclusion and reward in the Tsarist Empire ruled by the Romanovs. In addition, although German-born Catherine the Great could become the Empress of Russia, surrounded by a French speaking aristocracy, the Orthodoxy was a prerequisite for high office, much like Islam and Catholicism were in Ottoman and Habsburg realms correspondently.[11] Therefore, it is possible to spot out the rise of politicized ethnic consciousness among

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[10] One could cast doubts that the Soviet leaders had ever seriously considered targeting the creation of an all-Soviet identity in order to downplay ethnic identities in the country. One exception is the widely mentioned Brezhnev's declaration at the 24th Party Congress in 1971 that the process of the creation of a unified Soviet people had been completed and it is possible to abolish the federative system and to replace it with a single state. However, Brezhnev's optimism was soon shattered and met serious opposition of non-Russian ethnic leadership (Nahanyalo and Swoboda 1990, 174-193). Brezhnev learned the lesson: proposals to dismantle the federative system were abandoned, and a policy of further drawing of nationalities together (*sblizhenie*) was pursued. In any case, it seems that 'Soviet' was never considered to become a true replacement for an ethnic identity in the USSR.

[11] "Some native elites were more favored than others, notably the Slavic nobilities of the West, the Baltic Germans, and the Georgian *aznauroba* (nobility). But after the integration of the Tatar nobility into the Russian *dvoryianstvo* (nobility) in the 16th century, only a few Muslim notables were able to retain their privileged status." (Suny 1993, 25)

non-Russians even before the fall of the Russian monarchy – the process which preceded and surely made a significant impact on the course of Soviet ethnic policies.

On the other hand, the construction and codification of almost two hundred of ethnic groups via census, the internal passport, and the ethnographic exhibits in the museums and public celebrations, cannot be attributed only to bottom-up pressures from society in this direction. It was the Soviet socialist state, which promoted ethnic particularism and fixed ethnic identities to individuals through their internal passports, autonomous ethnic territories, ethnically based affirmative action and other policies of *korenizatsiia* (indigenization) in the ethnic republics. The formulation of this policy was closely connected to the production of ethnographic knowledge by the Soviet Academy of Sciences, and the ideas that Soviet intellectuals held about ethnicity[12]. As one of the latest research on this subject showed, "the production of knowledge cannot be easily disentangled from the exercise of power in the Soviet Union—or in any other modern state. To be sure, the party-state was the locus of political power. But the party-state did not have a monopoly on knowledge; on the contrary, it depended to a significant degree on the information about the population that experts and local elites provided. By compiling critical ethnographic knowledge that shaped how the regime saw its lands and peoples, and by helping the regime generate official categories and lists, these experts and local elites participated in the formation of the Soviet Union (Hirsch 2005, 11)".

At the same time, there are certain difficulties in defining the concept of nationality: whether it should be called in Russian *narodnost'* or *natsional'nost'*. The term *natsional'nost* had been used in both the city census of 1920 and the partial census of 1923, and it was defined as a "population united in a nationally self-consciousness community" (Grenoble 2003, 39). For some ethnographers, both terms were more or less synonymous. However, other scientists, following the trends in the emerging Soviet ideology, suggested the need to distinguish two terms through the prism of the class evolution: *natsional'nost'* implying understanding of one's cultural and historical development and *narodnost'* did not. Still for others, natsional'nost' implied a more

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[12] We provide a more detailed analysis of the role of intellectuals in the Soviet Union in *Chapter Three*

highly evolved group of people. This had serious political ramifications, such that representatives from Ukraine emphasized that Ukrainians were a natsional'nost and this should be officially acknowledged. Similarly, Georgians lobbied to be considered a natsional'nost', arguing that they were already a 'developed nation'. The 1926 Census used the term "narodnost", with special instructions for Ukrainians, to specify natsional'nost' (narodnost') to underline that the two terms were used synonymously. Census takers in Transcaucasia were told to state "narodnost' (tribes, natsional'nost') and to record responses under the heading "narodnost'). The resulting confusing only helped fuel the debate over the so-called nationalities questions and further obfuscated governmental policies. (Grenoble 2003, 39-40).

Eventually, the Soviet ethnographers came up with a list of 194 *narodnost'* for the 1926 census (Hirsh 2005, 329). The act of conducting the census itself was also an assertion of power, since the census takers were strictly instructed not to accept any inappropriate answers, such as "Muslim", and ask further questions in order to ascribe an ethnic-national identity to each citizen (Hirsh 2005, 331) "Experts on Central Asia insisted that religion and clan were the key components of local identity in their region of focus, while experts on Siberia maintained that tribal identities remained most significant in their region" (Hirsh 2005, 111). Despite such objections, the alliance of ethnographers and Soviet authorities managed to breakdown Soviet citizenry to almost two hundred ethnic groups. As a political consequence of such 'scientific classification', Stalin arbitrarily divided Muslims in Central Asia into five ethnic republics, and the Muslims in the Volga basin were split primarily between Tatarstan and Bashkortostan, although elite and mass level identifications indicated that a larger Muslim and/or Turkic linguistic identity could reflect better people's primary political identity.

In Terry Martin's interpretation, the leaders of the Soviet Union successfully implemented the construction of an affirmative action empire, based on "a self-conscious strategy to avoid… the subjective perception of [non-Russian ethnic groups that they live in an empire] (Suny 2001a, 27). As we have described in the preceding part of this Chapter, Lenin's commitment to the idea of affirmative action for non-Russian groups – 'victims of the Russian imperialism' – played an important

political role in the making of the USSR, and the introduction of the *korenizatsiia* (nativization) principle can be regarded as the first example of an "affirmative action". Quotas for native cadres in the ethnic republics created a tremendous incentive for ethnic identification in pursuit of upward social mobility. At the same time, while social mobility *per se* was encouraged, it was strictly bounded by territory. Internal passports and the *propiska* (attachment) system froze ethnic populations to specific territories, amounting to a kind of "second serfdom." This prevented Moscow, Leningrad, and other major traditionally Russian cities from developing into genuinely multicultural, multiethnic urban centers like, say, London in Europe or New York in the USA. Non-Russian ethnicities were promoted within their autonomies but not at the all-union level[13]. The ethnic categories used for affirmative action have established the structure of ethnically-based fragmentation within the Soviet Union. And it was language, which served as a major marker of ethnic identification in the USSR

2.2. LANGUAGE POLICY AND ETHNIC IDENTIFICATION IN THE SOVIET UNION

One way to understand the complexity of ethnic policy in the USSR and the place devoted to language in the administrative territorial framework developed by the Soviet authorities is to examine the Soviet language policies. It is because the ethnic identification in the Soviet Union was strictly tied to the nominal language identification of an ethnic group in question. However, establishing the exact number of languages in the USSR was always an extremely difficult task since the boundaries between language and dialect were determined not only by linguistic considerations but (and often primarily) by political factors. Due to the fact that the Soviet authorities regarded language as a key attribute in establishing ethnic identity, the official recognition of the existence of language was, in turn, the official recognition of the existence of a distinct ethnic group[14]. Therefore, people felt obliged to declare the language ascribed to their ethnic group as their 'native language' (*rodnoi yazik*). As Leonore Grenoble explains,

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[13] As a result, e.g., until the last few years of Gorbachev, not a single member of the Politburo hailed from the traditionally Muslim ethnic groups, which constituted 17% of the Soviet population by 1989 (Hosking 1992, 524).

[14] Often, when the results of a new Soviet census were published, many linguists were surprised with a sudden shift of the number of speakers of one language or another (see, e.g., Grenoble 2003, 28-31).

for linguists, the key problem with the Soviet census' question about native language lies in the ambiguity of the term. The term "national language" could mean many things: for example, it could be interpreted as the language of childhood (regardless of fluency), it could refer to the language that the respondent knows most fluently; the language that is used most often in daily communication; or it could refer to ethnic or heritage language (Grenoble 2003, 28-31). The importance of the political link between language identity and ethnic identity was the reason why quite often the respondents identified as 'native' a language in which they were not fluent.

Another important aspect of the surveys' questionnaires with respect to the issue of 'native' language was that only languages assumed to be autochthonous to the Soviet territory were included in the survey's list of languages (Hirsch 2005, 110). Thus, a large group of ethnic Germans and Poles were excluded from being counted. The third point of concern of linguists is about the level of the proficiency of non-Russians in the Russian language. The estimates are based solely on the answers of respondents to the survey's questionnaire: in the Soviet Union, there were no language proficiency exams[15]. However, despite of the above-mentioned linguistic gaps in the data on actual language use, the Soviet survey data unmistakably indicates the political trends of language policies, which are of our foremost interest.

When the Bolsheviks came to power in October 1917, they inherited not simply a rapidly disintegrating multi-ethnic state but also the country in which more than a third part of the population was illiterate (Grenoble 2003, 46-47). After the end of the Russian Civil War, the Soviet government set a course on modernization and industrialization. The raising of the literacy level became one of the most urgent tasks. However, keeping in mind the vast diversity of languages and ethnic groups within the Soviet borders, the differences in cultures and lifestyles, decisions had to be made as to which languages were to become languages of instructions, which languages were to be developed and so on. As we have discussed earlier in this Chapter, Lenin believed that no single language should be given the status of a state language and all officially

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[15] Except for the entrance examination for the institutions of higher education in Russia but this was not included in the census data

recognized ethnic groups had to be guaranteed education in their native tongue[16]. Besides, during the first Soviet years, the promotion of the local languages was considered by the Bolsheviks the way to send an important message to non-Russian ethnic groups that the Bolshevik party represents a truly new order, and there will be no domination of a single culture (or ethnic group). That was a background, in which the famous slogan "Nationalist in form, socialist in content" was born:

> "Proletarian culture, which is socialist in content, assumes different forms and methods of expression among the various peoples that have been drawn into the work of socialist construction, depending on differences of language, customs, and so forth. Proletarian in content and national in form – such is the universal human culture toward which socialism is marching. Proletarian culture does not revoke national culture, but lends it content. National culture, on the other hand, does not revoke proletarian culture, but lends it form" (Stalin 1952, 30)

The importance of the place of language in this new Soviet "nationalist in form and socialist in content" culture, directly associated with the political status of ethnic group, can be clearly seen from another of Stalin's definitions, which became a standard notion of an ethnic group for decades to come in the USSR:

> "[A] nation is a historically evolved, stable community based upon the common possession of four principal attributes, namely: a common language, a common territory, a common economic life, and a common psychological make-up manifesting itself in common specific features of national culture" (Stalin 1952, 23-24).

The above quote is from Stalin's famous 1929 essay on 'The National Question and Leninism'. In addition to defining the major characteristics of a nation, Stalin discusses the evolution of 'national' languages, which he presents as a 3-stage process. According to Stalin, during the first phase, formerly oppressed nations and national languages would flourish with the abolition of that oppression. During the second phase, when the hegemony of the proletariat is established, a common language would begin to take shape. This common language will co-exist with individual languages. Later on, during the third phase, the individual languages will be united into a single language. The third stage would begin with the world hegemony of the proletariat, when "national differences will die away and make room for a world language, common to all nations" (Stalin 1950: 28-30). It seems that this work of Stalin was seriously influenced by the

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[16] Article 121 of the 1936 USSR Constitution (*Istoriya Sovetskoi Konstitutsii…*1957).

ideas of the linguistic theories of Nikolai Marr, who played a key role in the development of the Soviet language policy during the 1920s and who was closely cooperating with local scholars in Abkhazia (see *Chapter Four*, p.   and *Chapter Five*, p.102). That is why it is important here to provide a brief overview of the ideas propagated by Marr.

Nikolai Marr was born in Kutaisi in Georgia to a Scottish father and Georgian mother, and became interested in the origins of Georgian and other Caucasian languages at an early age. Marr received his higher education at the Department of Oriental Languages of the St. Petersburg University. While he had studied nearly all "Orient and Caucasian languages" taught at that time in the university, his early research focused on the description of the languages of the South Caucasus. At the same time, as Marr's biographers have noted with some surprise, he has not received any formal training in linguistics – most of his research was based on no more than self-education[17]. A cornerstone of the famous Marr's 'New Theory of Language' was to highlight linguistic genetic relationships, and his interest to the subject developed at the time when the linguistic methodology heavily relied on the methods of historical reconstruction, which Marr applied to explain the genetic relationships of the Caucasian languages[18]. Marr introduced his own term 'Japhetic'[19] in order to denote a common ancestor for the Caucasian and Semitic languages and to describe a new group of languages, which included a number of extinct languages of the Mediterranean basin and Asia, in addition to several living languages in the Pyrenees (the Basque language) and Pamir mountain range. The main assumptions of the 'new theory of language' were based more on free associations and Marr's creative imagination than on the linguistic facts (Grenoble 2003, 56). Marr formulates his "ethnogonia" theory (a part of his "New Linguistics" theories) based on the idea that all ethnic groups evolve in one uniform development and in close contact with each other so that they "naturally" integrate into a "uniform historical

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[17] The program Marr attended at St.Petersburg University focused on teaching languages, not linguistics as a field of science (Grenoble 2003, 54)

[18] Even in modern linguistics, there is no common view on the historical position of the Caucasian languages. The relationships of the North-west Caucasian and the Nakh-Daghestanian languages are controversial. The lack of genetic relationship between North Caucasian and South Caucasian (Kartvelian, represented by Georgian) is not disputed in the West but, as we show in Chapter Four, has been contested by many Georgian (and Soviet) linguists (Hewitt 1989, 123)

[19] Japheth is the name of one of the sons of Noah.

entity". According to Marr, language belongs to some sort of a social superstructure and reflects the cyclical changes of economic base. Therefore, as Marr argued, the process of industrialization in the Soviet State and the need to study Marxism-Leninism require the encouragement of the widest possible use of the Russian language (Slezkine 1996, 219).

Going back to the Stalin's essay on 'The National Question and Leninism', the author – notwithstanding the long-term overview of the development of a single proletarian language and paying tribute to Marr' theory – concluded his paper with describing a scheme to create an extensive network of schools with instruction in the indigenous languages and education of teachers as well as of various types of cultural institutions in the 'native' languages, for an immediate implementation[20]. On the other hand, only languages of those ethnic groups which could be regarded as 'nations' following the Stalin's definition can be granted the status of autonomy in the new Soviet framework. The problem was that not all groups of the former Russian Empire could prove that they had possessed all the necessary characteristics set out by Stalin. One of the most troubling issues was, of course, the issue of a common *native* language (or, often, of the absence of clear "evidences" of the existence of a language itself in its written form: published books, dictionaries, etc.). This caused many difficulties with the execution of the Stalin's proposal: not only there was a shortage of teachers and pedagogical material; often there were no literary forms of the native languages to begin with [21](Slezkine 1996, 218, Grenoble 2003, 31-33). By the middle of the 1920s, the Bolsheviks' theorists formulated a system of ranking all nationalists in the Soviet Union by four levels (see Table 2.1)

Table 2.1 Soviet Classification of Languages in 1926
(source: Smith 1998, 51-52)

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[20] Marr doctrine dominated Soviet linguistics until 1950, when Stalin renounced Marr's basic principle in *Pravda* in a published Q & A session "with young comrades" under the title '*Marxism and Problems of Linguistics*'. Stalin wrote that "N. Y. Marr introduced into linguistics incorrect and non-Marxist formula, regarding the "class character" of language, and got himself into a muddle and put linguistics into a muddle. Soviet linguistics cannot be advanced on the basis of an incorrect formula which is contrary to the whole course of the history of peoples and languages." (*Pravda*, June 10, 1950)

[21] It is estimated that at the time of the Bolshevik Revolution only thirteen languages on Russian territory had a literary norm, and only nineteen had any kind of written form at all (Grenoble 2003, 45)

Level A.	Small nationalities without scripts, which are generally bilingual, live in compact groups surrounded by larger nationalities, and are territorially scattered, will conduct all education and create all literature in the "language of federation"
Level B.	Small and medium-sized monolingual nationalities without scripts, which live as compact masses, are agricultural and not united territorially, will create primary schools, educational literature and mass political propaganda in the native language. Secondary schools, middle professional education and higher education will be conducted in the "language of federation"
Level C.	Medium or large-scaled monolingual nationalities, using a traditional script and having a proletariat, intelligentsia and bourgeoisie, which live in compact groups or are territorially united, will create primary, secondary and middle professional education, together with political-educational literature and other scholarly and educational literature, in the native language. The "language of the federation" will be introduced no later than in the third grade and is to continue into higher education.
Level D.	Economically and culturally developed nationalities that have traditional scripts and are territorially united, will create all education from primary schools to universities, and all literature (including technical texts) in the native language. The "language of the federation" will be introduced no later than in the third grade.

The categorization of languages according to the classification described above ultimately played its role in the fate of one or another language in the program to liquidate illiteracy in the Soviet Union. At the same time, as we mentioned earlier, the Bolsheviks' ideologists emphasized the importance of language for explaining the Communist idea to masses, and they worried about the identification of the 'language of federation' (Russian) with the image of the 'nation-oppressor' (Russia) amongst the 'oppressed nations' (Slezkine, 1996, 206). Thus, in addition to the goal of accomplishing the objectives of the literacy campaign, the importance was also placed at spreading out the communist ideas to masses in their mother tongues.

During the first two decades after the October 1917 revolution, in literacy

campaign[22], we can see contradictory trends in the language policy. The Soviet Union witnessed an explosion of new languages' recognition as well as of book publication in many of those newly recognized languages: by 1924, textbooks were printed in 25 languages and by 1934 they were printed in 104 different languages (Grenoble 2003, 47). Yet, there were many other points of concern for the newly established ethnic elites in the Soviet Union. That is because not only not all languages were considered to be 'equally important' as we saw from the above classification, but also because it was necessary to show the historical attachment of a particular language to the territory in question so as to fulfill the Stalin's requirements for a nation.

In January 1934, during the 17th all-Union Communist party congress, Stalin announced the ending of the *korenizatsiia* campaign. Soon after, on 13 March 1934, all major Soviet newspapers published an official decree, which made the study of the Russian language compulsory in schools of the Soviet Union (in non-Russian schools, in addition to the compulsory study of the local language). The decree specified details of the required levels of Russian for students who have completed certain grades, and mandated specific schedules for teaching Russian (Blitstein 2001, 258). As with many other aspects of the Soviet language policy, it is not easy to estimate the real impact of this decision on the change of the linguistic patterns of the population in various parts of the USSR[23].

However, there must be little doubt that despite of the decision on the introduction of the compulsory teaching of the Russian language, the focus of the Soviet language planning remained on the national languages. To complicate the matter, Stalin declared that a high level of centralization is necessary but such issues as "language questions" were to be left to the "genuine internal autonomy of the republics" (Slezkine, 1996, 211). As we will see in *Chapter Four* on the example of the Georgian language

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[22] The rate of illiterate population declined from 76 per cent in Tsarist Russia in 1897 to only 18 per cent in the Soviet Union in 1937 (Grenoble 2003, 47). The literacy campaign was also accompanied by a number of measures in the area of standardization: in some cases, the various dialects of language were mutually incomprehensible and even when a 'native' language program was put into action, the 'natives' had to learn essentially a foreign language. The extensive reforms included the change of the script for many languages and orthography (Crisp 1989, 23-41)

[23] E.g., in some autonomous republics of the Russian Federation, the numbers of hours allocated for teaching the Russian languages were actually reduced.

policy in Abkhazia, many titular ethnic groups did not hesitate to take advantage of the Stalin's "permit" and attempted to diminish the teaching of languages other than Russian and the titular language of a union republic (Slezkine 1996, 211). The non-titular languages would be commonly placed at lower levels in the hierarchy of languages in the Soviet Union based on the ABCD scheme outlined above and, correspondently, the level of their political prestige would be minimal. And because the identification of ethnic group by language was the key to define the political status of an ethnic group, as a result of this language hierarchy, to the moment of the adoption of the Soviet 1936 Constitution, only fifteen (out of more than 120 officially recognized) ethnic groups in the USSR were given the right to have the highest form of autonomy, i.e. were granted a supreme form of an ethnic unit, a union republic. Other ethnic groups had to settle for the lower forms in the hierarchy of the federal structure – autonomous republics and autonomous regions (see Figure 2.1). Also, there were others who were not granted any of such status at all. Moreover, the status of an ethnic group in this hierarchy was not permanent. The same ethnic group could be granted some significant rights at one time and be deprived of those same rights at another[24]. Thus, the administrative territorial structure was inseparably linked to the Soviet language policy and the fate of ethnic group to a large degree depended upon the political standing of its language.

An atrocious turn in the Soviet ethnic policies (echoed by the changes in the language policy toward ethnic groups in question) had occurred in the late 1930s, concurrent with the ideological offensive of Nazi Germany. Ethnic groups with 'external homelands', such as the Germans, Poles, Bulgarians, and Koreans, were deported en masse from their traditional territories in the borderlands to Central Asia and other remote locations (Suny 2001b, 69-71)[25]. Internal passports that indicated every individual citizen's ethnic background enabled the systematic application of this policy at a lightening speed. During the Second World War, a list of 'guilty peoples' alleged to have collaborated with the Germans, were exiled to Central Asia and Siberia,

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[24] As in the case of Abkhazia.
[25] Ironically, the Bolsheviks were not the first to apply the label of "guilty people": as we will see in Chapter Four, the Tsarist government labeled Abkhazians as guilty people for the period just short of half a century (see *Chapter Four*)

up to half of their population perishing in the weeks long train journey in deliberately over loaded cars[26]. The existence of a far-reaching system of control based on ethnic categorization made it possible for the Stalin's regime to deport all individuals of Chechen descent in one day, including the ones fighting the Nazis in the front, and this is just one of the numerous examples of the Soviet experience being truly remarkable in illuminating the devious potential of ethnic categories administered by the state.

Figure 2.1 Hierarchy of Autonomous Structures in the USSR

Control
Over Political Agenda
MAX

CENTER

UNION REPUBLIC

Autonomous Republic

KRAI

Autonomous Region

OBLAST'

Autonomous District

MIN

Ethnic Autonomies   *Territorial Division*
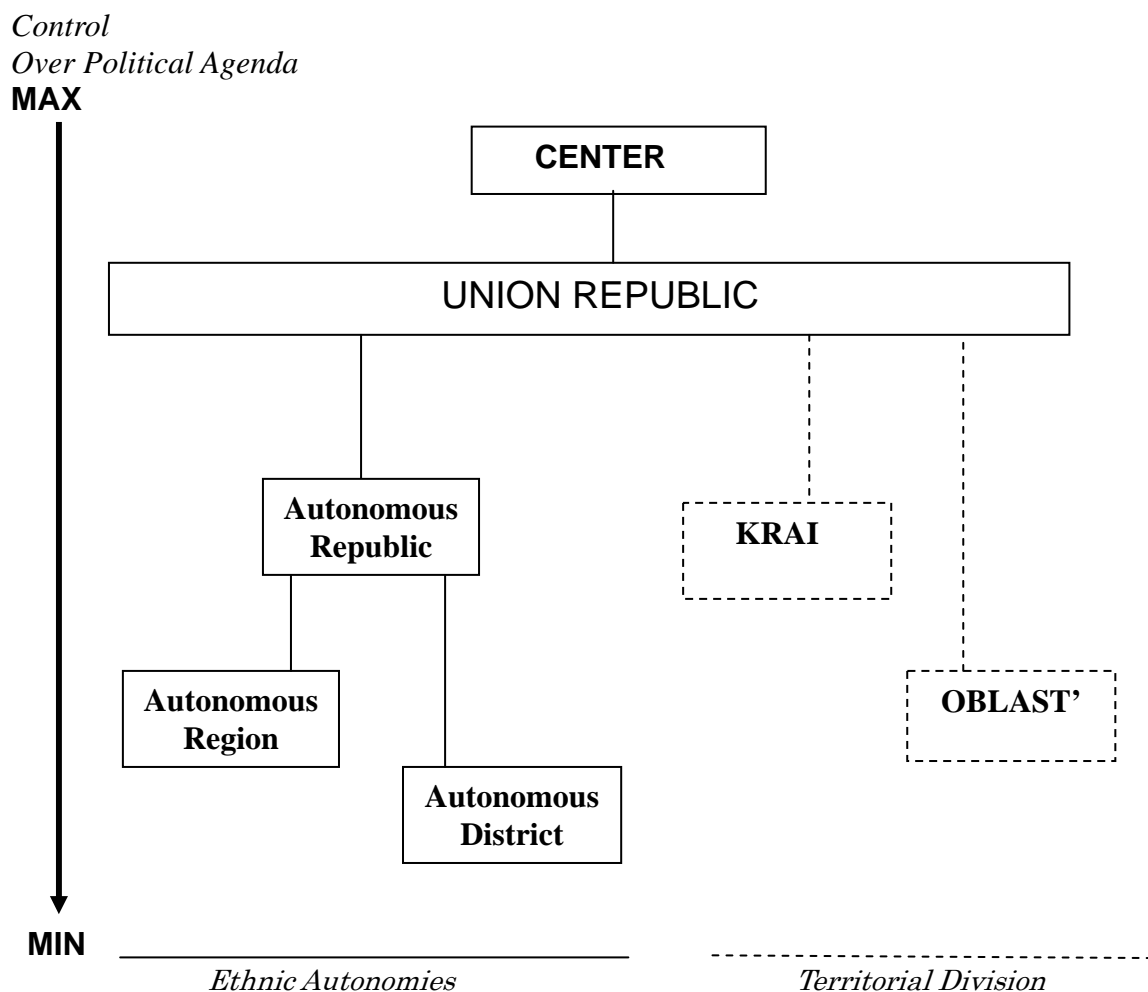
Next stage of the Soviet language policies began with the end of the Stalin's era, in the middle of the 1950s. During the period from 1953 to 1964, when Nikita Khrushchev was at the head of the Communist party and the Soviet State, there was a major shift towards establishing Russian as **the** language of the Soviet Union. After

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[26] Including most notably the Chechens, Crimean Tatars and Meshketian Turks.

renouncing the Stalin's policies in a secret speech during the 20th Congress of the party[27], Khrushchev's era (1953-1964)[28] can be characterized by the efforts of the Soviet authorities to introduce the vision of new Soviet people, who are united not only politically but also through the use of a common language. While the principle of bilingualism was officially supported during the Khrushchev's years, the primary objective was to promote Russian as a 'second national language'; the very need for any language other than Russian in the main domains of language use in the Soviet Union was questioned per se (Grenoble 2003, 57-58). For a better understanding of the background of the development of the language conflicts in the South Caucasus during this time, it is important to note that whereas under Lenin the official Soviet propaganda claimed that all languages in the Soviet Union were guaranteed equal rights, under Khrushchev the issue of the 'relative' value of languages was introduced into Soviet public discourses. This policy made officially acceptable to view some languages as less viable than others, and languages with a small number of speakers were declared on the edge of extinction and unsuitable for further development (Nahayalo and Swoboda 1990, 137-139; Grenoble 2003, 57-58). Thus, the indigenous scholars had to put enormous efforts in order to show that their languages "deserve to be further developed". As we will see in our examination of the Caucasian cases, this was of a particular importance for scholars in the Caucasus.

The changes in the language policies led to the educational reforms in 1958-59. From then on, the education in the mother tongue was no longer compulsory and the instruction of Russian increased at the expense of the local languages: the pressure was applied by the authorities to begin instruction in Russian from the earliest grades, and the local languages were replaced by Russian in many schools although the former – in most of the cases – remained at the school curriculum but this had more symbolic meaning than real practical implications. The shift to Russian was a noteworthy one. To the middle of the 1950s the instruction in local languages was offered for most

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[27] The content of a "secret" Khrushchev's report became very soon widely known in the Soviet Union.

[28] Soviets referred to the Khrushchev's period as "thaw" since a slightly higher degree of political freedom and liberalization was allowed by the regime in comparison with a harsh authoritarian rule of Stalin before the restrictions of the freedom of expression had been re-introduced by Leonid Brezhnev in the second part of the 1960s ("the stagnation").

languages with a written form at an elementary level, and for a smaller (but still significant) number of languages at a secondary level as well. The Khrushchev's educational reforms established a new type of schools in the USSR: non-Russian schools with Russian as the language of instruction, in which the indigenous language was treated as a secondary subject (Grenoble 2003, 106-108, 117; 155-156). Overall, with the exception of the titular languages of the union republics, the bulk of indigenous languages in the USSR became seriously threatened as they were no longer used in schools and the volume of publications in these languages was seriously cut back. It was about this time, when Russian – "the language of inter-ethnic communication" – became de-facto the only official language of the USSR and occupied a central position in education and government not only in R.S.F.S.R. but in many domains of the language use in non-Russian republics as well (Kreindler 1985, 357-361).

Under the rule of Leonid Brezhnev, the trend towards massive Russification further intensified. The efforts of the authorities to make Russian 'the second mother tongue' of the entire Soviet population were rewarded: by 1979, a total of 82 per cent of the population claimed some knowledge of Russian although there may be some doubts with respect to the real level of proficiency in Russian (Grenoble 2003, 21). With the exception of some titular languages of the non-Russian union republics such as Georgian, during the Brezhnev's period, there was a continuous raise of the volume of the instruction in the Russian language and the expansion of the domains of the use of Russian with a simultaneous decrease of the use of local languages. Noticeably, there was a change of phraseology in the text of the new 1977 Soviet Constitution in the part dedicated to the guarantees of the access to education in indigenous languages in the Soviet Union: while the 1936 Soviet Constitution guaranteed the *right* of Soviet citizens to have education in their native languages (*Istoriya Sovietskoi konstitutsii…*1957, 42), the Brezhnev version of the constitution declared just an *opportunity* for school instruction in [the] native languages (Article 45, Konstitutsiya (Osnovnoi Zakon) SSSR, 1978 in Kukushkin and Chitsyakov 1987, 64-65)!

Overall, during Brezhnev's years, the domains of Russian usage spread beyond schools and universities to include all levels of bureaucracy. The Russian language had

truly became the lingua franca of the USSR and was widely used by a large portion of non-Russian Soviet population, even in those cases, where the statistics showed the continuous use of the local languages. At the same time, despite of these changes in the language policies and, subsequently, in the linguistic patterns of the population, throughout Khrushchev's 'thaw' and Brezhnev's 'stagnation', the principles of the Soviet regime of ethnicity persisted in the form that it was constructed by Stalin. The proposals to reform the system of administrative territorial division of the USSR were always turned down (Nahayalo and Swoboda 1990, 174-176, 184-194).

When Michael Gorbachev took the post of the General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (C.P.S.U.) and soon after became the first (and the last) President of the USSR, the linguistic situation in the country was fundamentally different from the one which the Bolsheviks faced when they took power in 1917. Nominally remaining linguistically a very diverse state[29], the Soviet Union witnessed a large-scale language shift of many portions of the population to the Russian language (Grenoble 2003, 193-197). Under Gorbachev, the main principles of Soviet language and ethnic politics remained unchanged until the very end of the 1980s, when Moscow started to loose its control over the situation in the non-Russian territories of the USSR. The territorial dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 showed striking continuity with the Soviet past both in trying to preserve the internal borders established in the 1930s and the Soviet discourses of national sovereignty.

It is possible to draw several important conclusions based on our review of the language policies in the Soviet Union and its links to the administrative territorial division of the USSR. Firstly, in the Soviet Union language was the main criterion for "nationality", i.e. the (nominal) linguistic identification was equated to ethnic identity of the group in question. Secondly, having the official recognition of language meant having an official recognition of a distinct ethnic group as well (and, consequently, the right to an autonomous status and related privileges). Thirdly, the place of language in the Soviet linguistic hierarchy was very closely related to the status of the ethnic group, to which the language in question was 'ascribed'. The efforts of ethnic groups were

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[29]Officially, in 1989, there were about 150 languages spoken in the USSR (Grenoble 2003, 22-25)

directed at the maintenance of the image of the perceived continuity of the use of language by the members of the group. These were the settings, which provided the opportunity for ethnic leadership to conduct the policy ethnic enclosure. In the following Chapter, we will discuss how the Soviet language policy was linked to the formation, maintenance and changing of ethnic myths, which is another important aspect of the policy of ethnic enclosure.

CHAPTER THREE
LANGUAGE AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF ETHNOGENETIC MYTHS IN THE SOVIET UNION

> Using a Marxist approach for the examination of historical sources, the [Soviet] historical science establishes the only truth, which may correspond to none of the known sources
> Tamaz Natroshvili, *The Knight of the Truth*

The main objective of this Chapter is to show the actual process of creation, maintenance, and dissemination of ethnogenetic myths that could be used in the process of ethnic enclosure. We will place particular attention to the role of intellectuals in this process as well as examine how the teaching of local histories in Soviet autonomies facilitated the spread of ethnocentric myths

3.1. HISTORIANS AND THE PROCESS OF MYTHS FORMATION IN THE USSR

During the Soviet era, one of the most important means of preserving the privileged position of an ethnic group was to establish a separate and lasting identity of the group, and three criteria – territory (or homeland), statehood, and language/religion – were employed. Thus, the history of the ethnic groups, especially its ethnogenesis, became an important political issue, and the past acquired great political significance. For this purpose, the political leadership sometimes went so far as to order scholars to write a new history (meaning *rewriting* history) of the ethnic group. In this environment, historians felt under the enormous pressure and, often, a scholar's academic and secular future depended upon his or her efforts to establish the separate and continued identity of his or her own ethnic group (see, e.g., Shnirelman 2003, 20-22).

The role of intellectuals in nationalist movements and the use of scientific knowledge in nationalist discourses have been key subjects of research in academic literature on ethnicity and nationalism for quite a long time. However, we believe it is best to start our examination of the impact of the work of intellectuals on the ethnic and language policies in the Soviet Union in this Chapter with the discussion of theoretical framework proposed by Miroslav Hroch in his review of the contribution of intellectuals to the process of nationalist mobilization (Hroch 1985). That is because the methodological approach chosen by Hroch for 'a comparative analysis of the social

preconditions of national revival', namely, to make a 'comparison [of the growth of nationalist movements] on the basis of analogous historical situations' (Hroch 1985, 21) and to place emphasis on the identification of the common and distinctive features of the process seems to be in line with the objectives set out for our own research. Hroch considers a nation "large social group defined by a combination of various types of relations … a group with a given historical origin, of people who only gradually attained to national consciousness under the influence of objective circumstances" (Hroch 1985, 22) and he focuses on the examination of such criteria as quantitative growth of national activity, the social impact of the impulses emerging from national agitation, the forms of agitation and the ideas on which a national program is based, in order to clarify the role of nationalist movements in historical development of a nation. As we will see in the following Chapters, in the Caucasus – similarly to the cases described by Hroch – the process of 'national revival' of ethnic groups in the end of the 19th century and in the beginning of the 20th century was marked by the same characteristics of the developing of interest of local intellectuals to study indigenous languages, culture and history as Hroch identifies when he explains historical and political background of the spread of nationalist movements in Eastern Europe. Therefore, the concept of nationalist mobilization offered by Hroch is of particular relevance for the evaluation of the role intellectuals played in the construction of ethnogenetic myths in the South Caucasus.

There are several interesting findings in the Hroch's examination of nationalism. Firstly, Hroch shows that the specifics of the distribution of nationalist activities in 'smaller nations' (Hroch 1985, 163-174): it turned out that the areas of strong nationalist activities corresponded not so much to some existing administrative or language boundaries or the level of ethnic homogeneity but to the areas with a more developed educational network. Second, the largest group of patriots was composed by intellectuals. Third, the results obtained by Hroch showed that it is not so much the process of industrialization per se, which causes the emergence of nationalist movements, but it is a new character of the societal relations that has appeared along the process of industrialization. Fourth, Hroch focused his investigation at the 'revival of small nations in Europe'. He argues that there is an important distinction between the

dominant (or "large") and non-dominant ("small") nations.

According to Hroch, it is possible to differentiate three discrete stages ("phases") in the development of a nationalist commitment (see Table 3.1). During Phase A, there is only a small group of intellectuals who elaborate the notion of nation. Next, during Phase B, the patriotic networks grow and are used to spread out patriotic ideas by means of intensive agitation. Then, finally, during Phase C, a serious social mobilization begins (Hroch1985, 23-24). The patterns of the ethno-nationalist process in the South Caucasus, in particular that of Abkhazians and Ossetians, to a large extend corresponded to those Hroch described on the examples of Norwegians, Czechs, Finns, Estonians, Lithuanians, Flemings, Danes and Slovaks.

Table 3.1 Stages of the Growth of Nationalist Commitment
(adapted from Hroch 1985, 23-28)

Phase A	'The period of scholarly interest" (study of language, history and culture of ethnic group leads a small group of intellectuals to the elaboration of the notion of nation)
Phase B	"The period of patriotic agitation" (the patriotic networks grow and are used to spread out patriotic ideas by means of intensive agitation; a concept of nationalism is elaborated as a political program)
Phase C	"The rise of a mass national movement" (a significant national mobilization begins, the doctrine elaborated during Phase B is widely accepted by masses)

The main objective of Hroch's approach was to show how the character of nationalism is shaped by timing of each of the phases in relation to other social transformations, especially economic changes. For the purposes of our own research, however, the most important point of Hroch's explanation is that he demonstrates the historical rise of nationalism as an evolutionary process, in which intellectuals translate their scientific knowledge into a public discourses. During this process, the role of intellectuals is not limited by the task to evoke and reconstruct the ethnic group's past and to root it in a historic tradition. In other words, the work of intellectuals inevitably leads to the formation and strengthening of a myth of ethnogenesis, which can be understood as a set of beliefs held by an ethnic group about the historical development

of its distinctiveness from the other collectivities.

Myth is one of the key terms that can be found in contemporary academic literature dealing with the issues of nationalism and ethnicity. That is because even in those cases where the myth is an apparently irrational and false construction, the examination of the myth's content provides an opportunity for understanding the worldview of the group in question (Overing 1997, 1-5). The evaluation of myths can be, thus, central to the study of politics, and, following George Schopflin (1997, 22-27), it is possible to identify several key functions of ethnogenetic myths as regards the importance of myths in the political realms of an ethnic community. One of the most key functions of myths in political realm is that myths attribute special qualities to a social group, extends its distinctiveness and establishes certain boundaries based on a particular worldview of the group reflected by the myth. In relation to this, myth can be exploited as an instrument of an identity transfer.

In case a myth of assimilation is put into action by an ethnic group in a possession of a well-established myth of ethnogenesis, it may cause the abandonment of culture, language and myth-world of a 'myth-poor' ethnic community in exchange for a higher and more attractive values attributive to a 'superior' ethnic group. Further on, myths can be skillfully exploited by political leaders so as to provide an illusion of a community. This is especially important in those cases when the group is deemed to be a unified ethnic community but in reality there is a gap – either cultural, religious or linguistic – between segments of the population. That is because the key political function of a myth can be seen as its role in the dissemination of messages sent by the authorities much easier and enhancing the sense of solidarity among all members of the ethnic group in question. Of course, by the same token, myths can be used in order to make ethnic boundaries sharp and to exclude a part of the group from sharing the same ethnic heritage as the rest of its members. This may lead to the creation of the image of 'other' and, sometimes, result in the formation of a perception of the excluded part of the group as 'enemies'. Here, two questions inevitably come to the fore. How such myths are formed and what is the process in the course of which myths are selected and distributed?

Before attempting to answer the questions posed above, it is necessary to underline that, in addition to a diversity of functions of myths, myths also can be differentiated by the key ideas they imply. It is clear that, for instance, the way myths of rebirth and renewal have been formed and maintained must differ from the process involving the construction of myths of military valor. Thus, we will narrow down the task and limit our analysis by the production of myths of ethnogenesis because the appearance and dissemination of such myths can be successfully linked to the scheme proposed by Hroch and his explanations of the importance of the role of intellectuals in the growth of nationalist movement.

A myth of ethnogenesis always involves the discussion of the historical roots of the ethnic group in question, and – in order to be successfully sustained in modern times – ultimately requires the input of intellectuals, because it is intellectuals who supply necessary evidences to support the stand of ethnic group as regards its past. For Hroch, there were little difficulties in answering the question of who should be considered intellectuals for the purposes of the empirical illustration of his approach: an intellectual is anyone who lives off the intellectual labor, i.e. belongs to intelligentsia – the intermediate layer between the masses and elites (university's professors, writers, journalists, school teachers, local educational authorities, priests, etc.; Hroch 1985, 66). At the same time, as Bruno Coppieters correctly noted, when we examine the links between the work of intellectuals and the growth of a nationalist movement, it is pivotal not to underestimate the country-specific factors that shape the involvement of intellectuals in the process (Coppieters 2002, 15-20). Usually, it is presumed that scholars are taking responsibility for determining the nature and identity of one or another academic discipline, and the methods and objectives of scientific inquiry. On the other hand, in some situations, the authorities actively participate in the development of specific areas of scholarship. If this is the case, then intellectuals may not be the only actors who determine the development of their field of academic knowledge, for the priorities of research activities are often set by the political leadership. Still, scholars hold a 'near-monopoly over definitions of what constitutes scientific knowledge and how it is to be formulated. This situation gives [them] not only a privileged position of

authority, but also power. They regard themselves, and are perceived by others, as experts who possess a certain cultural capital which is sought out by political and social agents as well as by public at large' (Coppieters 2002, 21). Therefore, while the general public is normally aware only of simplified or popularized versions of social knowledge, scholars are closely involved in the process of formulating and interpreting the core ideas related to the past, present and the future of the group. This is how the results of the work conducted by scholars can make a significant impact on the political environment even when there is a high degree of the authorities' involvement in the process of academic research.

In the Soviet Union, following the Marxist-Leninist tradition, there was no clear distinction between humanities and social sciences, and, as we saw in *Chapter Two*, many fields of science such as ethnography and linguistics were highly politicized. Yet, the Soviet authorities regarded the exercising of the profession of historian as the only true scientific approach for understanding social change and the authorities set a very extensive agenda for historical research. Not surprisingly, when in the end of the 1980s – beginning of the 1990s, the examination of historiographic discourses in the Soviet Union became the focus of attention for many scholars of ethnicity and nationalism, it was perceived that historians should share responsibility with ethnic leaders for the strengthening of extreme ethnocentric views amongst their respective ethnic groups, and the following figurative comparison made by Erick Hobsbawm was often cited: "…historians are to nationalism what poppy growers in Pakistan are to heroin addicts: we supply the essential raw material for the market" (Hobsbawm 1992, 3).

In its essence, ethnocentric historical narratives produced by historians in Soviet autonomies differed little from similar versions constructed elsewhere since the versions of history of ethnic groups always represent a 'vision of ethnic fraternity of elites and masses through a historical drama', which evoke 'deeper meanings of collective destiny and community in the face of the dangerous fragmentation and alienation that modern industrialism and science unfold' (Smith 1986, 173). At the same time, the Soviet political environment was indeed conducive to the establishing of quite specific 'rules of the game' in the academic community of Soviet historians. According

to the political settings in the USSR, the institutional arrangements were designed in such a way that to ensure a high degree of closeness between historians and ethnic leadership. The Soviet authorities created an effective system of control over the production of history knowledge, which included strict censorship of the administration and local party committees. For example, before permission for printing could be obtained, any manuscript had to be approved at various levels of administrative control both within a research institution and within an editorial house as well. The manuscript was the subject of not so much academic scrutiny as the testing on the meeting the requirements set out by the political leadership. Moreover, the authorities not only exercised a high degree of control over the interpretation of the final results of historical research but also determined the general political and ideological principles that historians were expected to follow (Heer 1973, Heller and Nekrich 1986). Here, it is possible to see the correlates with the framework offered by Hroch: Soviet historians acted both as producers of scholarly knowledge (Phase A) and as those who actively propagated myths (Phase B) by "translat[ing] the idealized images of ethnic past into tactile realities, according to modern canons of knowledge" (Smith 1983, 180).

The link between the academic work on the issues of local history and the status struggle of ethnic groups was another specific characteristic of historical research conducted in Soviet autonomies, since historical knowledge was mobilized in order to justify the rights of the competing ethnic groups following the Soviet dogma. The latter – similarly to the case with the language policy examined in *Chapter Two* – required that any privileges in the Soviet Union could be granted only to the authentic ethnic groups that are autochthonous to the Soviet territory. Thus, history as a field of science was very closely linked to the processes that led to the maintenance of a high degree of ethnic awareness and, consequently, to the strengthening of ethnic identity of the population in the territory in question.

The importance of the work of historians in relations to the construction of myth can be easily explained by the fact that myths of ethnogenesis are never freely invented or imagined. Of course, the simplification of reality is a precondition for making the exposure of a significant part of ethnic group to the ethnogenetic myth

possible, and, consequently, to facilitate the process of ethno-nationalist mobilization. Even in those cases, where myths are actively exploited in order to enable a shift of identities or to create a new identity, they must have a link to the collective memory of the group in question, and purely invented or falsified versions rarely helped to reach the objectives of the political leaders (Shnirelman 2003, 13-14). The function of historiography is different. Historians are called upon as professionals who are capable of providing necessary historical argumentation enabling to shape the ethnic identity of a group in the required way. A peculiar feature of the work of indigenous historians in the Soviet Union in this respect was the requirement to construct such version of history of an ethnic group that would be deemed appropriate to fulfill the objectives of a political agenda set by the ethnic leadership in Soviet autonomies, namely, to maintain or upgrade the status of autonomy. This task was particularly difficult to achieve in those geographically adjacent territories, which before the establishment of the Soviet power, had been in long rivalry or enmity.

For indigenous historians in the Soviet Union, the efforts of ethnogenetic myth production usually would begin with the establishment of the historic ethnic boundaries, or homeland. In this process, earlier migratory theories would be replaced by autochthonous theories (Shnirelman 2003, 510-513). As it will become clear from our examination of the Caucasian cases, the scholars were trying their best in order to demonstrate "scientifically" that their own ethnic group was the earliest inhabitant, i.e. autochthonous to the territory in question. At the same time, the rival ethnic group or groups would be downgraded to the status of late comers or immigrants. However, when the use of the first-settlers principle alone was not enough, the scholars were trying to demonstrate that their distant ancestors had been more civilized and advanced than their rival neighbors: for example, that their ancestors were "the earliest civilized center of the humankind". The demonstration was based on the evidences of the formation of urbanized settlements and ancient states (usually in the form of a kingdom) by their own ethnic group, and, sometimes, linguistic assimilation of neighboring groups. As we will see from our examination of the historical narratives produced by historians in the South Caucasus, important sets of evidences or sources (especially when they were contradictory) were often completely ignored in these efforts. Moreover,

the scarcity of reliable evidences allowed very wide latitude of interpretation and speculation, and these images of the past did not necessarily correspond to all the historical evidences available.

As we showed in *Chapter Two*, the ethnic identity in the Soviet Union was the only permanent, unchangeable, criterion of identity and ethnic distinctiveness was established though language identification. In addition, in order to be identified as an authentic ethnic group, and, therefore, acquire the right for privileges associated with this, a group in question was supposed to maintain their original 'native language'. That is why, except Russians, all ethnic groups had to struggle for conservation and survival of their ascribed 'native language'. Those who failed to prove the uniqueness of their language usually would face a lower status. At the same time, all ethnic groups had to demonstrate that they had continued to use their distinct language from the very beginning of the existence as an ethnic group. For this reason, the ethnic groups (and especially their historians) had to try their best to search in the distant past for the evidences of the continuity of their ascribed language in a particular territory. If a specific language has continued to be used from very early times, the continued use of the language or the language itself became a primordial property, i.e. a property unchanged throughout history. An ethnic group aspiring to a higher status in the Soviet Union had to be able to claim that it had continued to use their own language from centuries past, ideally from the time of their origin. In this way, the issue of ethnogenesis was inseparably intertwined with the issue of language. In other words, a successful combination of the postulate of the continuous use of language with the first-settlers principle was required. In sum, ethnic groups had to show both the current maintenance and the historical continued use of their native language.

It is possible to recognize a strong correlation between language and myth, which is not necessarily adequate from a linguistic perspective, especially, in those cases when the group had experienced a language shift but remained its loyalty to the myth maintained before the shift had occurred. Vivian Law (1998, 167) proposed to characterize such beliefs as language myths understood as widely held views about the origins, history and qualities of a language. Further on, language myths can be divided

into two major sub-groups: language-extrinsic myths – those, which emphasize the extrinsic features such as the origin and destiny of a language, and language-intrinsic myths – those, that focus on the intrinsic features such as purity, elegance, and lexical resources. Law argues that many of the myths arise repeatedly in different language communities and are often redeployed with the express intention of demonstrating the superiority of language of one group over language or languages of the other groups. Indeed, scholars are normally the major contributors to the formation and maintenance of language myths and it is possible to spot out a number of manifestations of the importance attached to language myths in the political realms in many cases of ethnic rivalries in the Soviet Union (see, e.g., Shnirelman 2003, 513-515).

However, indigenous scholars in Soviet autonomies faced a task more difficult than a simple glorifying of the language ascribed to their ethnic group. While language myths certainly constituted a significant part of the world-view of ethnic groups, in the construct of a wider ethnogenetic myth language played an extraordinarily multifaceted role, not lastly because language had to be accommodated within a broader historical framework and with respect to the myth (or myths) held by rival ethnic group or groups. Therefore, when upgrading or maintenance of the ethnic group's status was needed, it was not a single language myth but a set of historical versions, from which an appropriate one was selected and led to the formation of a new myth of the distant past. This new myth confirmed originality (continuity of use) of the language in question and showed its links to a particular geographic area. Then, the language was ascribed to the ethnic group in question, whose autochthonous status was confirmed through language (see Figure 3.1). It is important to underline here that quite often real linguistic considerations had little to do with the discourse used by politicians who, nevertheless, did appeal for "scientifically proved evidence". That is because one of the most valuable features of language as a political resource originates in proper nature of language, which allows a wide variety of perception patterns with respect to language identification and differentiation. This enables politicians to use language for the purposes of symbolic differentiation/ homogenization.

Figure 3.1 Use of Language in the Process of Myth Construction

Upgrading / maintenance of the ethnic group's status is on agenda
↓
Appropriate myth of the distant past is created
↓
Originality (continuity) of language is confirmed though the myth of
the distant past, which links language to a particular geographic area
↓
The language is ascribed to the ethnic group in question, whose
autochthonous status is now confirmed/denied through language

3. 2. CYCLES OF ETHNOGENETIC MYTHS FORMATION IN THE USSR

The above examination of the relations between language and myth construction enables to identify the links between historiography and language politics in the Soviet Union. As we saw in the previous Chapter, the duality of the Soviet approach to language policy was expressed through its bipolarity in the autonomous republics, which meant the co-existence of two contradictory trends – its indigenization (*korenizatsia*) and internationalization (Russification) thrusts. At the same time, the trends were never in equilibrium, i.e. at one period, indigenization was intensified while internationalization weakened, and vice versa. In the cases of ethnic rivalries in the Soviet territory, the intensification of indigenization trend was often used by the titular ethnic groups of the Union republics in order to advance its linguistic offense against other ethnic group in the area under the titular control. As Rouvinski and Matsuo show (2003, 106-107), it is possible to correlate the shifts in the Soviet language policy with the stages of the process of politicized ethnogenetic mythology formation in the USSR. This, in turn, allows us to show the strategic use of language by ethnic leadership during the course of acquisition / maintenance or attempts to upgrade the autonomous status of ethnic group. These stages can be described as follows (see also Table 3.2).

Table 3.2 Stages of Ethnogenetic Myths Construction in the Soviet Union

Stage 1 (1920s)	Building of early idealized historical versions based on the combination of the postulate of the continuous use of language and first-settlers principle with the simultaneous extensive introduction of local languages in the domains of language use in the territories in question
Stage 2 (end of the 1920s to the second part of the 1930s)	Introduction of 'internationalism' to Soviet historical science, first clashes of myths produced by indigenous historians of rival ethnic groups
Stage 3 (end of the 1930s to the mid- 1950s)	Domination of the ethno-genetic myths of the titular ethnic groups of the union republics and the first Russification campaign, which downplayed the role of local non-titular languages
Stage 4 (mid-1950s to the end of1980s)	Appearance of cycles of myths formation, further Russification and the struggle of local ethnic groups to maintain the status of their ascribed language through the ethnic myths

The first stage falls in the period of the 1920s. This phase can be characterized by the struggle of ethnic leaderships to obtain a higher autonomous status, because during this time the politico-administrative structure of the USSR was not firmly established yet. The process was shaped up by building of idealized historical versions that ascribed great doings in the past to a particular ethnic group, sometimes even usurping the other people's historical past known from ancient written sources. This was an early period in the construction of ethnogenetic myths. As we have shown in the preceding Chapter, during this stage, the emphasis on the developing of local languages was very strong, and new local ethnic elites in autonomies regarded as pivotal the task of promoting the versions of history that would combine the postulate of the continuous use of a "common national language" with respect to the territory in question.

The second stage (end of the 1920s – first pat of the 1930s) can be described as the period of an intensive introduction of Marxism in the Soviet science. Historians were required to adopt the "internationalist approach" to their research. The latter was understood as the study of global universality of the logic of development and was supposed to confirm the inevitability of the coming world unity based on the communist principles. This dogma had swayed the day in the Soviet academic institutions in central Russia. During this period, to study the historical process of one or another ethnic group

separately from the historical process *in toto* meant for a scholar to carry the risk of being accused in "bourgeois nationalist deviation." One was supposed to conceive ethnogenesis as an endless process of mixture of ethnic groups, which was perceived to lead to a merger of distinct ethnic groups into a 'uniform historical entity' following the changes of socio-economic formations. It was during this period when Marr's doctrine was supported by the Soviet authorities at the highest level.

However, the new approach met a severe resistance from the local indigenous elites (Slezkine 1996, 219-220) and it was not always completely followed by scholars in the autonomies although they had to make necessary corrections in their interpretations of the final versions presented to the general public. The certain degree of ambiguity remained until the second part of the 1930s, when the emphasis in the Soviet language policies shifted towards the Russification, and, subsequently, the change of paradigm in Soviet historiography also took place.

The third stage signified a move to the so-called "all-Soviet nationalism" (Shnirelman 1998a, 69-70), which turned out to be a new version of the Russian chauvinism and which, *prima facie*, seemed to be a blow to regional ethnocentric historical narratives. However, Moscow's authorities needed a solid historical base for the new Soviet ethno-territorial division. The schools of internationalists were strongly criticized by the authorities, and many scholars who supported the internationalist school were physically eliminated during the Stalin's terror in the end of the 1930s. Meanwhile, the Russian imperial pre-revolutionary historical tradition was partly rehabilitated and historians in central Russia renewed their search for the historical roots of the Russian people, Russian statehood, and the origins of Slavs. At the same time, these developments were reflected *en situ* by a situation where ethnic leadership of autonomous territories, subordinated to the authorities of titular ethnic group of a union republic, had not only to abandon any hope for the upgrading of the autonomous status for their respective ethnic group but often had to defend the status they had already held from being downgraded. Titular ethnogenetic myths came to dominate. In many regions, the instruction on the languages other than Russian and language of the titular ethnic group of a union republic was prohibited.

The next, fourth stage, begins in the second part of the 1950s, when the existence of two seemingly contradicting approaches in the Soviet historiography, namely, to promote the "all-Soviet nationalism" and ethnocentric, became evident. The authorities in Moscow wanted to restrain the potentially dangerous growth of ethnonationalism by encouraging non-Russian ethnic groups to go ahead with an "advanced program" for its "national development" (Suny 1996, 377-378). Moreover, the ethnogenetic myths constructed in the non-Russian autonomies competed not as much with Russian historical interpretations as with rival versions produced by indigenous scholars of other non-Russian ethnic groups. Therefore, while the focus of language policies was to promote a wider use of the Russian language, language remained closely linked to ethnic identity everywhere in the Soviet Union. Unable to advance in linguistic terms the use of regional languages, ethnic leaders made enormous efforts to promote the production and dissemination of ethnocentric myths, which were based on the combination of the postulate of the continuous use of the language ascribed to their ethnic group and the first-settlers principle. This led to the formation of language-territory complex. As we explained in *Chapter One*, this complex is viewed as the core of ethnic enclosure. In order to examine in more detail how in the process of ethnic enclosure myths were distributed and maintained among ethnic groups and how myths reinforced language-territory complexes, it is necessary to review the teaching of local histories in schools of Soviet autonomies.

3.3. MYTHS AND TEACHING OF LOCAL HISTORIES IN SCHOOLS OF SOVIET AUTONOMIES

The frequent change of official versions of history of ethnic groups in the Soviet Union can be regarded as one of the most important indicators of the existence of the cycles of ethnogenetic myths formation, explained in the preceding part of this Chapter. Usually, official history is understood as the version of history approved by the authorities. However, even in the USSR, the authorities normally would never explicitly state that one or another version of history is 'approved' as an official one. One way of knowing the official version of history is to examine the narratives of school textbooks, which were used to teach local histories in autonomies, since in the Soviet Union the

authorities exercised the total control over the system of education. The comparison of the methods of teaching of all-Union history and local history shows how the ethnic group in question was exposed to myths of ethnogenesis and how the clash of myths made an impact on the perceptions of the importance of language and the knowledge of the distant past for the present and future of ethnic groups.

The teaching of histories other than the history of the USSR and universal history was officially introduced to the school curricula everywhere throughout the Soviet Union, except for schools in the Russian Federation, in the academic year of 1960/61 (Kuzin 1979, 3). However, the actual teaching of local histories in the autonomies started much earlier, in the 1920s-1930s, i.e. in those days when the teaching of history as a school subject common for all Soviet schools was replaced by *обществоведние,* the Soviet version of civic studies (*Social Science in Soviet Secondary Schools…* 1966). Students were learning their ethnic histories in the classes of *краеведение*, or regional studies, and often the material related to the historical development of the area in question was also to be found in geography and literature textbooks. These subjects had been kept in the school curriculum ever since, including the period when history as a subject was rehabilitated in Soviet schools in the second part of the 1930s and the directive of introducing a 'stable' (meaning 'unified') all-Union history textbook was made known by a 1937 publication in *Pravda* of a letter signed by Stalin & Co (Bordugov and Bukharev 1999, 36). However, contrary to the story with the textbooks of the history of USSR, when at any given time the students of any school in the Soviet Union used the only version of the textbook approved by the All-Union Ministry of Education and all the textbooks had to be replaced throughout the entire country as soon as a new edition was published (Wertch 2002, 80), the textbooks of regional histories had to be approved by republican or autonomous ministries of education, and the local authorities had a significant degree of freedom in choosing the content of the textbooks[1] (Kuzin et al 1979). Often, these textbooks had been published

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[1] This is one of the reasons why the textbooks published locally have different formats: some have maps but others not, some provided students with chronological tables but others not, etc. The polygraphic quality of books also varies greatly. Surprisingly enough (or may be not), it seems that until the middle of the 1970s, there was no any detailed set of directives or rules, approved at an all-union level, on the issue of regional histories, which could be expected in such a highly-centralized structure as the Soviet Union (see, e.g., Marykhuba 1994, 284-285)

in the titular or regional languages but a Russian-language edition was always printed simultaneously or soon after.

The official Moscow's requirement to the authors of the textbooks on local histories was "to convince students, based on the facts in the republican or local history, that friendship of the peoples of the Soviet Union was forged as far back in history as in times immemorial" (Kuzin et al 1979: 3). However, since the end of the 1930s, i.e. during the period, which corresponds to the Stage 3 in our periodization of the process of ethnogenetic myths formation in the USSR (see Table 3.2), the main concern of the central authorities was to make sure that the textbooks' narratives emphasize the "unbreakable friendship" of the Russian people and ethnic group in question for many centuries. A few attempts to break the rule were quickly frozen off[2]. As a result of this policy of Moscow, each group wanted to show their higher historical status of the links with Russians. The indigenous authors of the textbooks on republican histories were literally competing with each other in showing whose ethnic group had closer and earlier contacts with Slavs, sometimes ascribing to the former or to the latter or to both such adventures as the achievements of Alexander the Great would simply fade[3].

On the other hand, the situation with the central control over the picturing of the relations amongst non-Russian ethnic groups in the distant past was quite different. Normally, party offices in the autonomies, regional ministries of education and academies had a quite comfortable field of maneuver, and Moscow usually was reluctant to intervene unless there was a risk of an open protest in relation to the introduction of a new official version of regional history. Moreover, the approach to build the *fabula* of ethnic histories on the "first-settlers + continuous use of language" principle itself was never questioned. The methodological recommendations for teaching republican histories in the Soviet Union called upon the teachers to use extensively extra-curriculum material and allowed a much greater flexibility of lessons' planning as well as the curricula design than in the case of teaching a unified all-Union

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[2] For example, in 1943, the entire print run of *History of Kazakh SSR* was destroyed in Alma Ata because it had mentioned the tsarist Russia as the major and the most dangerous enemy of Kazakhstan (Bordugov and Bukharev 1999, 52)

[3] For instance, the 1950 edition of the textbook on Armenian history has a paragraph dedicated to the "broad links" between medieval Armenia and Kiev Rus (Shnirelman 2003, 76)

history. The teachers of non-all-Union histories[4] had more freedom in choosing the themes and methodology of teaching, selecting questions for examination, etc., in particular, when dealing with the history of the remote past. Even in carefully edited Soviet publications, it is possible to notice some evidences of how different the teaching of supposedly unified republican histories was in various parts of one and the same republic. For example, in Ukraine, Ukrainian history was taught differently in Eastern, Central-Dnieper and Western areas, where, using the Soviet wording, teachers were "trying to reflect on the local specifics through the extensive use of regional extra-curriculum material" (Kuzin et al 1979, 11). The authors of the methodological recommendations for teaching regional (republican, local) histories advised teachers to avoid the duplication of the themes in the course of the all-Union and local histories, notably, when teaching ancient history, which, in practice, often meant the replacement of the themes in the course of the all-Union history by the topics concerned with the history of the distant past of the territory in question. As the author of one of only few reports on these issues published during the Soviet times cautiously acknowledges, "Themes related to regional history prevail" (Kuzin et al 1979, 8-9). Moreover, the teachers of regional history were allowed to allocate twice more time for teaching history of the remote past than it was perceived by the all-Union history curricula (Kuzin et al 1979, 12).

The Soviet methodology of teaching history facilitated an easy absorption of a simplified version of history by the students. Teachers in the Soviet Union were taught that if historical data is clearly presented and concretely discussed, even small children can understand the most complicated generalizations of the historical process: focusing students' attention on single, important facts or events and making generalizations about the character of certain happenings or developments are some of the common techniques which Soviet history teachers were encouraged to use in the classrooms (Medlin 1960, 107). In the textbooks of the history of the USSR, there was very little information concerning the early developments in the areas outside Russia proper. For example, the Short Course of the history of the USSR published in 1950 (*Kratkii kurs istorii SSSR* 1950), does not mention any significant events in the distant past in the

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[4] Usually, the same people who taught the course of the history of the USSR.

Caucasus. The more recent editions of the all-Union textbooks of the history of the USSR contained more information about ancient history, in particular, they had mentioned the closeness of the Scythians and the Slavs, the importance of the Alan state, and that modern Ossetians are descendents of the inhabitants of the Alan state[5] (*Istoriya SSSR* 1985, 10). On the other hand, these textbooks emphasized that in the Transcaucasia smaller states were under the great Georgian influence and eventually became a part of the unified Georgian state[6]. In the 1985 edition of the textbook of history of the USSR, amongst all other – non-Russian – ethnic groups in the Soviet Union, only Georgians are mentioned as "one of the peoples who created their own alphabet very early" (*Istoriya SSSR* 1985, 12).

The issue of school graduate examination is worth of mentioning here as well. The lack of a detailed information about the distant past in the textbooks of the history of the USSR did not cause much trouble to students of schools in Soviet autonomies since in the final exams on the all-Union history there were few questions related to these themes: the final state exam in the history of the USSR was devoted almost entirely to subjects of recent Soviet-Russian history and to the official history of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (see, for example, *Programmy srednei schkoly po istorii sssr* 1957, Medlin 1960, 110). However, that was not the case with the exams on republican histories in many schools outside the Russian Federation. Graduates of those schools had to pass the exam, which contained questions concerned with the early history of the territory in question (Kuzin et al 1979, 4), and students were preparing to this exam using the textbooks published locally. These textbooks' representations of history of the distant past were much less ideologically-driven than the descriptions of the more recent events. Instead, they were almost exclusively ethnocentrically based.

Drawing a line here, it is possible to make several conclusions evaluating the place of language in the construct of the ethnogenetic myths. Firstly, since language

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[5] In ancient times, Scythia was a vast state in Minor Asia, inhabited by a group of Iranian nomadic people. Alans are related people and there is agreement amongst most historians that the Ossetian ethnic group was formed as a result of the mixing of Alans, who arrived from the Eurasian steeps, with the local highlanders from the central Caucasus (Shnirelman 2003, 462).
[6] The territorial dispute between Georgians and Ossetians in the Soviet period is linked to the creation of the South Ossetian autonomy within Soviet Georgia in April, 1922 (the review of the South Ossetian ethnogenetic myths is given in *Chapter Six*)

identification was central to nationality policy in the Soviet Union, for ethnic groups it was necessary to maintain links between language ascribed to the group and the territory in question in order to preserve or upgrade the status of the ethnic group. Usually, the way to maintain such links was to create a myth of ethnogenesis built on the combination of the postulate of the continuous use of language and the first-settlers principle, and indigenous intellectuals played an important role in this process. Ethnogenetic myths made a core of official histories of ethnic groups, and the possibility of changing the version of official histories provided by the Soviet political settings led to a clash of myths of rival ethnic groups and the appearance of cycles in the myths formation. As we show in our examination of the South Caucasian ethnic conflicts in the following Chapters, this process made a major impact on the political environment in Soviet autonomies, enabling ethnic leadership to attempt an ethnic enclosure of the territories in rivalry, and greatly contributed to the growth of ethnic tensions in the area.

Part II

The Policy of Ethnic Enclosure in the Caucasus

CHAPTER FOUR
THE FORMATION OF ABKHAZIAN AND GEORGIAN ETHNOGENETIC MYTHS

> Russian Tsarizm did not have enough time to Russify
> Abkhazians, but we, as a kin tribe, should Georgianize
> Abkhazians through our culture
> Noe Zhordania,
> the leader of Democratic Republic of Georgia
> (1918-1921)

Some twenty or thirty years ago, the region, which is squeezed between the Western part of the Caucasian Mountain Range and Black Sea and covers the area of 8,600 square kilometers (see Map 1), was a primary attraction for the millions of Soviet people who dreamed about spending their short summer vacation in the best resorts of Gagry, Pitsunda and Sukhum. Some of the former fashionable resort houses are still stay intact but many more are abandoned and many other are in ruins – a silent reminder of the horrors of an ethnic war. This is the Republic of Abkhazia, which for the most part of the last century used to be called the Abkhazian Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic – part to the Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic, one of the fifteen republics that constituted the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, and which in the very end of the 1980s, became a scene of one of the most brutal ethnic wars that took place in the Caucasus after the demise of the Soviet Union. However, the ethnic tensions between Georgians and Abkhazians started long before the date when the USSR ceased to exist. The aim of our examination in this and the following Chapters is to examine the history of the conflict between Georgian and Abkhazian ethnic groups in order to identify the role language plays in the conflict.

4.1. PREVIOUS STUDIES OF THE GEORGIAN-ABKHAZIAN CONFLICT

Before exploring the long history of the Georgian-Abkhazian conflict, some words about sources are necessary. The issue of availability of primary sources to study the role of language in the Georgian-Abkhazian conflict deserves a special note before proceeding with any further explanations. Firstly and most importantly, as a result of the Georgian-Abkhazian 1992-1993 war, many primary documents related to the pre-Soviet and Soviet period of Abkhazian history perished. The main archives in Sukhum were burnt down by the Georgian army, including the archive of the Gulia Institute for Abkhazian language, literature and history and the regional party archive, which was located at the Abkhazian parliament building. Moreover, the members of the Georgian secret services visited private apartments of Abkhazian scholars to make sure

Abkhazians do not keep some archive material at home[1]. However, the Soviet-time periodicals turned out to be a very useful source of information since they published many documents and directives approved by the Soviet and Communist party authorities[2]. In addition, interviews held during a field trip to Abkhazia as well as in London and Washington, DC. were also very helpful, in particular, with regard to the examination of the events that took place in Abkhazia during the late stage of the USSR existence and during the period after the end of the Georgian-Abkhazian war, when Abkhazia experienced (and continue to experience) not only diplomatic but an informative blockade as well.

Secondly, so far in the academic literature, there were only few attempts to evaluate specifically the Soviet language policies in Abkhazia and there are still many gaps in this area though there is a number of publications, which examines language policies in all Georgia, including Abkhazia *inter alia* (Tarba 1964, Hewitt 1989, Enokh 1998, Kuraskua 2003). Thirdly, while the examination of the content of historiographic production focusing on the distant past of Abkhazia is one of the major objectives of this Chapter and a quite significant number of books and academic papers in the Russian language was accessible for the author, for historical production in the Georgian language we had to rely on the descriptions provided in Sagariya (1992), Marykhuba (1994), Shnirelman (2001, 2003) as well as on the references made in several other sources.

Fourthly, while there are quite many Soviet-time publications on Abkhazian history in the 19th and 20th century, the focus of the research conducted by Soviet historians was to study primarily the issues concerned with economical development of the area. Such topics as, for example, ethnography, political development, and political aspects of the Russian colonization turned out to be much less explored[3]. Few

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[1] Interview with Vasiliy Avidzba, Sukhum, 4 August 2005.

[2] A collection of regional Abkhazian newspapers is kept at the Republican Library in Sukhum; some Abkhazian and Russian-language newspapers as well as Soviet-time central periodicals can be found at the Russian State Library in Moscow.

[3] In an opening address to the conference organized by the Gulia Abkhazian Institute for Humanitarian Research in Sukhum in 2001, Abkhazian historian Oleg Bgazshba underlined the existence of crucial gaps in the knowledge of the important aspects of the Abkhazian historical development during the period of the particular interest for the author of this publication (Bagazsh

exceptions are the 1926 book written by Konstantin Kudryavtsev "History of Abkhazia", which has a chapter on the political activities in Abkhazia in the 19th century (Kudryavtsev 1926); Georgiy Dzidzaria's "Essays on history of Abkhazia (1910-1921)" (Dzidzaria 1963) and "Mohajirs and the issues of Abkhazian history in the 19th century" (Dzidzaria 1975). The last two references provided a great deal of factual information for this part of the research. However, it was in the end of the 1980s, when Abkhazian historians and political scientists were able to start publishing the results of their inquiries into the political history of Abkhazia during the period that started with the Russian advance to the South Caucasus continues till the events that led to violent phase of the Georgian-Abkhazian conflict. In 1990, Abkhazian historian and political scientist Stanislav Lakoba publishes his "Essays on the political history of Abkhazia" (Lakoba 1990). This was indicative of one of the first attempts to review the Soviet-time interpretations of the recent history of the region. After the Georgian-Abkhazian 1992-1993 war, the area of Abkhazia studies witnessed a blossom of publications. However, most of them seemed to be of rather low academic standards because their main purpose was to justify political ambitions of Abkhazian and Georgian politicians of the time. Meanwhile, since the second part of the 1980s, one could easily spot a constant growth to history and politics in the South Caucasus amongst the Western scholars caused by the need to analyze the growing tensions in the area and many excellent works had appeared (Slider 1985, Suny 1994, Brook 1992, Anderson and Silver 1996, O'Ballance 1997, Fairbanks 2001, Coppieters 2002)[4]. In addition, European, US and Japanese universities invited several prominent Abkhazian and Georgian scholars to share their knowledge and to conduct research abroad[5]. Illustratively, in the beginning of the 2000s, a number of important works on the contemporary history of Abkhazia (two in Russian and one in English) had been published in Japan, namely "Abkhazia de facto or Georgia de jure: the politics of Russia in Abkhazia in the post-Soviet period 1991-2000" (Lakoba 2001), "Abkhazia after the two empires: 19th -21st centuries" (Lakoba 2004), and "The Value of the Past: Myths,

2004, 15).

[4] After all, Western scholars had fewer political constrains in their research than historians in the Soviet Union

[5] Among them, University of California at Berkeley in the USA and University of Brussels in Europe stand apart from the list for in the 1990s they have published a significant volume of academic literature on the issue of the Georgian-Abkhazian conflict (Derluguian 1995, Nodia 1997

Identity and Politics in Transcaucasia" (Shnirelman 2001). In Abkhazia proper, despite of the difficulties caused by the current situation in the republic, the scholarly research on the issues related to historical past of the area continues at the Abkhazian Gulia Institute for Humanitarian Research and Abkhazian State University[6]. Drawing a line here, it is necessary to emphasize that although there are still blind spots left to be shade by future researchers and the historiography of the Georgian-Abkhazian conflict is rather fragmented, it was possible to collect enough factual data and information for the purposes of our examination in this volume.

In order to provide a comprehensive review of the Georgian-Abkhazian conflict and highlight various attempts at ethnic enclosure of Abkhazia, we have divided our description of the course of the conflict into three major periods:

- *Chapter Four:* Foundation of Abkhazian and Georgian myths of ethnogenesis and early attempts at enclosure of Abkhazia (19th century – 1921), the period, which starts with the establishment of the Russian colonial rule in Abkhazia and continues till the collapse of the Democratic Republic of Georgia

- *Chapter Five* is dedicated to the examination of the period of mutual Georgian and Abkhazian attempts to conduct the policy of ethnic enclosure in Abkhazia and its time frames can be placed between 1921, the year of the declaration of the Abkhazian Soviet Socialist republic and the end of the 1980s, when the ability of the central Soviet authorities to control the situation in the South Caucasus greatly weakened and the clash of policies of ethnic enclosure became particularly strong.

- Our narrative in *Chapter Six* focuses on the review of the events that led to the Georgian-Abkhazian was and we examine the impact of ethnic enclosure on the relations between Georgians and Abkhazians in the after-war period as well as the content of contemporary Georgian and Abkhazian ethnogenetic myths. In this Chapter, we will also show similar trends in the development of ethnic conflicts in other areas of the South Caucasus

4.2. LANGUAGES IN ABKHAZIA: A LINGUISTIC PERSPECTIVE

It is a well-known fact that the Caucasus is one of the most linguistically diverse areas in the world; according to linguists, more than forty distinct languages can be found in

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[6] During the field trip to Abkhazia in August 2005, the author was able to talk to some members of the department of Abkhazian history of the Abkhazian State University. Indicatively, the study of historiography of Abkhazia in the 19th and 20th centuries is one of the priority lines of research for contemporary Abkhazian historians

this 'mountain of tongues' (Cluck 1993, 8). The titular languages of three South Caucasian Soviet Union republics: Georgian, Armenian and Azerbaijani genetically belong to distinct groups of languages: Georgian is South Caucasian, Armenian is Indo-European, and Azerbaijani is a Turkic language. While Georgian and Armenian languages have a long-standing literary tradition and their own writing systems, which can be dated to 4th and 5th centuries, Azerbaijani language cannot claim such a heritage: it used Arabic script until 1929, then Latin-based script and since 1939 a Cyrillic-based one[7]. What is common for Georgian, Armenian and Azerbaijani languages, however, is the fact that all three languages enjoyed a high degree of the political support during the entire Soviet period and the level of linguistic resistance to Russification was high as well. This was not the situation with other South Caucasian languages, which had to compete with both Russian and a titular language of the union republic. Except for a short period of the early Soviet years (corresponding to Stage 1 in our classification of the stages of ethno-genetic myths formation in the USSR described in *Chapter Three,* Table 3.2), the speakers of the majority of non-titular languages in the South Caucasus did not have access to education in these languages nor to publication or media use (Hewitt 1989, 125).

All three union republics of the Soviet South Caucasus were very diverse in terms of their ethnic composition. At the same time, Georgia was considered the most linguistically diverse amongst them for only 70 per cent of its population claimed Georgian as their 'native' language (while in Azerbaijan and Armenia this figure is over 90 percent, Grenoble 2003, 111). Languages spoken in Georgia belong to a number of distinct language families: Northwest Caucasian, South Caucasian, Nakh-Daghestanian, Indo-European (Russian, Armenian, Ossetic), Turkic (Azerbaijani, Urum) and even Afro-Asiatic (Assyrian Neo-Aramaic and Semitic)[8]. Here, a special note is due with regard to the issue of linguistic division between Northwest Caucasian and South Caucasian families of languages. According to linguists, there well can be a genetic relationship between the Northwest Caucasian and Nakh-Daghestanian languages but

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[7] After the demise of the USSR, the Azerbaijanian authorities decided to revert to a Latin script again (Grenoble 2003, 112).
[8] According to linguists, there well can be a genetic relationship between the Northwest Caucasian and Nakh-Daghestanian languages but no such link can be found between Northwest and South Caucasian families of languages (Law 1998, 193).

no such link can be found between Northwest and South Caucasian families of languages (Law 1998, 193, see also Figure 4.1). However, as we will see later on, this linguistic stand was often denied when the question of the origins of languages in the Caucasus was made a key theme in political discourses in Abkhazia.

Figure 4.1 South Caucasian and North Caucasian Families of Languages

(Adapted from Hewitt 1999, 167)

South Caucasian
- Georgian
  - Georgian
  - Judeo-Georgian
- Svan
- Zan
  - Laz
  - Mingrelian

North Caucasian
- Nakh-Daghestanian
- Northwest
  - Abkhaz-Abazin
  - Ubykh
  - Circassian
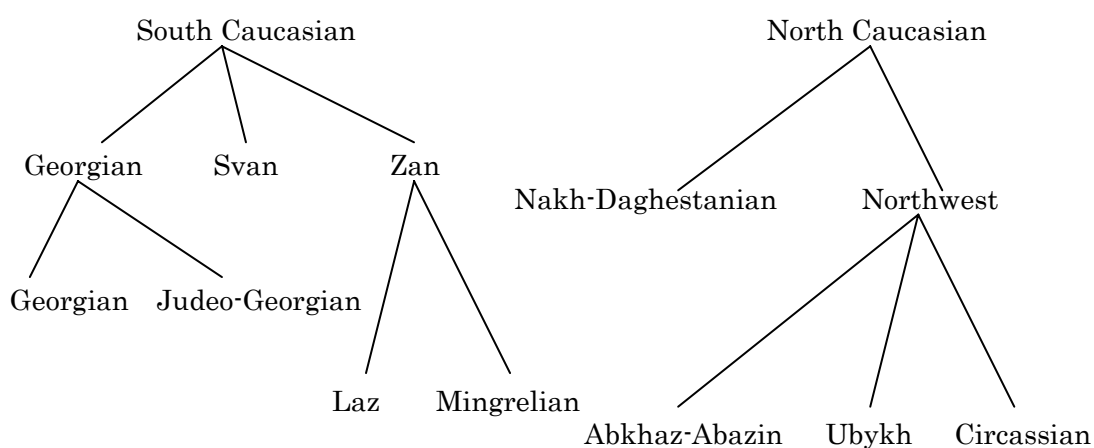
The linguistic diversity of the South Caucasus was one the reasons why the Bolsheviks, when they took control over the South Caucasus, faced quite a difficult task of achieving the goals set by the literacy campaign of the 1920s-1930s, not only from political but from a linguistic perspective as well. One of the greatest difficulties was the absence of written forms for many languages since the phonological complexity of these languages made the development of writing systems for them particularly difficult. This was one of the reasons why Soviet language planners readily placed a significant part of the minority languages in the South Caucuses at the first level in the 1920s' classification of Soviet languages, i.e. these languages were classified as least developed (see Table 2.1). The fate of many non-titular languages in the area was thought to remain "underdeveloped" and only a much smaller number of languages would receive written forms, as we will see from the examination of language policies further in this Chapter.

The titular language of the union republic – Georgian – belongs to the South

Caucasian family of languages[9] According to the 1989 census, the number of speakers of the Georgian language was slightly less than five and a half million people (Grenoble 2003, 115). The other three members of the same family of languages are Mingrelians, Laz, and Svan. However, during the most of the Soviet period, there were not officially counted separately from the speakers of the Georgian language. In strictly linguistic terms, Georgians speak *kartuli*, or "Georgian". The Mingrelians of western Georgia speak Mingrelian, a related language but one incomprehensible to *kartuli* speakers. Since Mingrelian is not a literary language, Mingrelians read and write in Georgian[10]. The Laz and Svans are smaller groups speaking Kartvelian languages less related to Georgian (Hewitt, 1989, 123-125). Nevertheless, officially, Mingrelian and Laz are grouped together as one language – Laz, although the languages are not mutually intelligible (Hewitt 1989, 123). The territorial spread of languages in Georgia (including the territory of Abkhazia) can be characterized by the concentration of the speakers of minority languages in the compact areas, which can be easily seen on Map 2.

Keeping in mind the ambiguity of the survey's question on 'native language', which we explained in *Chapter Two*, it is difficult to evaluate the true linguistic patters of population in Georgia but Table 4.1 can be of suitable reference. The comparison of the geographic distribution of languages and the disparity in the number of speakers of one or another language in Georgia shows the important characteristic of the area in question: despite of the great gaps between the number of speakers of the Georgian language and the numbers of speakers of other languages, non-Georgian speaking population is located in compact areas and, thus, is able to resist the linguistic assimilation.

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[9] The family of languages is also called Kartvelian (Hewitt 1989, 123)

[10] Currently, the number of speakers of Minglreian language is estimated by the figure of 400,000 people. During the period from 1930 to 1938, few newspapers were published in Mingrelian using the Georgian alphabet with some additions. Recently, there was an attempt to create another written form of the Mingrelian language. In addition, in some cases, for some Mingrelian communities in Abkhazia, it is the Russian language which is the primary written language (interview with George Hewitt, London, 20 April 2005)

Table 4.1 Languages Spoken in Georgia in the end of 1980s[11]
(sources: Hewitt 1989, 124; Grenoble 2003, 116)

Language	Number of speakers
Georgian	3,901,380
Svan	35,000
Judeo-Georgian	20,000
Mingrelian	400,000
Laz	2,000
Nakh-Daghestanian	3,000
Abkhaz	101,000
Assyrian Neo-Aramaic	3,000
Ossetic	164,000
Armenian	437,000

Since the focus of examination in this Chapter is on Georgian and Abkhaz languages, we should also provide a more detailed description of the two. The Georgian language has a long literary tradition: the unique Georgian alphabet was devised in the 4th century AD (Hewitt, 1989, 125) at times when Christianity was introduced to Georgians. However, the modern Georgian alphabet, *mkhedruli*, is secular. The only difference between mkhedruli and religious alphabet, *xucuri*, is that in the former there is no distinction between capital and lower case letters. The long-established tradition of Georgian language played an important political role in the processes discussed in this volume, since even before the introduction of the Soviet power in the South Caucasus, Georgia could be characterized as a highly languguage-conscious society. At the same time, there is no common view on the spread of the Georgian language in the past. In fact, as we will see later, it is only during the Soviet and post-Soviet periods of Abkhazian history when this issue became one of the most debatable by Georgian and Abkhazian linguists and historians One of the reasons is that the early historical sources already underline the complexity of the language situation in the region. In late 1st century BC, the Greek historian Strabon wrote that some 300 languages were spoken in Dioscurias[12]. Some sources dated by the first part of the 18th century provide a more detailed information about the language situation and show a picture of several dialects of the Georgian language being spoken in various parts of the territory under the Georgian control at that time, a certain degree of bilingualism in Chaneti (Lazistan), and

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[11] Including Abkhazia
[12] Today's Sukhum.

in Abkhazia and Mingrelia only the elite had been reported as knowing the Georgian language (Law 1990, 168). At the same time, for linguists the fact is certain that except for Georgian, other Caucasian languages spoken in the territory of the Georgian SSR did not have literary forms until the second part of the 19th century, when Abkhaz language obtained its first script: the first grammar of Abkhaz appeared in lithographic form in 1862/63[13], authored by the Russian linguist Peter Uslar (Uslar 2002, original 1887). At the same time, our particular interest to the review of the linguistic situation in Abkhazia can be dated by the end of the 19th century, when Abkhazia was under the Russian colonial rule. It was at that time, when the schooling in Abkhaz started and when the growth of the interest to the Abkhaz language and Abkhazian history amongst Abkhazians intellectuals laid the first adobes in the foundation of the Abkhazian ethnogenetic myth, and, as we show below, this period corresponds to the first stage of Hroch's periodization of the process of national mobilization.

4.3. RUSSIAN COLONIZATION OF ABKHAZIA IN THE 19TH CENTURY AND THE CHANGES IN ETHNO-DEMOGRAPHIC COMPOSITION OF THE AREA.

In what follows, we can observe various early attempts both by Abkhazians and Georgians to separate themselves and/or include the other, i.e. to ethnically enclose the territory of Abkhazia. For centuries, the great powers of the time disputed the territory of Abkhazia. The soldiers of Byzantium, Persia, the Arab Caliphate, the Ottoman and Russian Empires left their footsteps in the land of mythical Colchis[14]. The rulers of Georgia also made their claims on the area. However, medieval Georgia was often divided between separate principalities and did not act as a unified state. It is only from the 10th to the 13th centuries, when Abkhazia was made part of the united Georgian-Abkhazian Kingdom. In the subsequent period, the Abkhazian principality was either in a union with similar neighboring states, subordinated to them or was an independent polity.

In the 16th century, the influence of the Ottoman Empire increased in the South

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[13] In print only in 1887.
[14] In Greek mythology, Colchis was the home of Medea and the destination of the Argonauts, a land of fabulous wealth and the domain of sorcery. Abkhazia was believed to be the land of Colchis

Caucasus. Two centuries later, this led to a series of the Russian-Turkish wars. Begun in the 18th century, the Russian advance to the Caucasus continued in the 19th century, and in 1864 Abkhazia became the last of the Caucasian principalities to be annexed to the Russian Empire[15]. According to an Abkhazian historian, at the time of the Russian conquest, Abkhazia presented "a self-contained homeland of three northwest Caucasian peoples: the Abkhaz-Abazians, the Ubykhs, around Sochi, and the Circassians in the uplands of the Caucasus" (Otyrba, 1994, 283).

The figures showing the number of people, who resided in the area in the beginning of the 19th century, vary greatly. The most accurate estimation seems to be the figure of 100,000 people, which is based on the archive research of the documents containing demographic information collected by the Russian military corpus in Abkhazia (Tsvijba 2001, 74). There is no doubt that ethnic Abkhazians constituted the overwhelming majority of the population (Tsvijba 2001, 119-135). Meanwhile, the Russian advance caused the great in-migration of the population, and it was during this time when a significant part of the Armenian population moved into Abkhazia, looking for a refuge from the Turkish genocide (Otyrba 1994, 283; Tsvijba 2001, 90-95; Gumba 2003, 12). In addition, the Russian Empire conducted an aggressive policy of settling the migrants from Russia and Ukraine in the region, which was accompanied by a stream of the migrants from Georgia wishing to settle on fertile Abkhazian soils (Otyrba 1994, 284). Abkhazians did not support the Russian imperial rule, and a number of rebellions took place. The harsh suppression of these rebellions by the Russian army was the major reason for a mass out-migration of the Abkhazians to the Ottoman Empire and the Middle East. These Abkhazians became mohajirs[16].

Many Abkhazians were sent to exile to central Russia and Siberia as well (Lakoba 1990, 38). Moreover, after the Turkish attack on Sukhum in the summer of 1877, which was supported by mohajirs, Abkhazians were declared the "guilty people"

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[15] Officially, the name of Abkhazia was never used by the Russian authorities after July 1864. Instead, in the official documents, the area was referred to as 'the Sukhum district' (Tsvijba, 2001, 77).

[16] Mohajir is an Arabic word meaning refugee or immigrant and is used to designate Muslim refugees. At the time the Russian colonization began, the majority of Abkhazians were Muslims. It is interesting to note that in 1912, the Turkish general Rashit-pasha with his Abkhazian wife created an Abkhaz alphabet based on the Arabic graphics (Boguua, 2005, 538).

and, except for the representatives of upper classes, they were not allowed to settle in major towns such as Sukhum, Gudauta and Ochamchira (Lakoba 1992, 206)[17]. This decision facilitated the process of the settling of non-Abkhazian migrants. Thus, as a result of the Abkhazian rebellions and the subsequent exiles, the number of ethnic Abkhazians in Abkhazia was greatly reduced and accounted in 1897 only for 58,697 people (see Table 4.2).

Table 4.2 Ethnic composition of Abkhazia in 1897
(adapted from Lakoba 1990, 42)

Ethnic group	Absolute number	Per cent to the total population
Abkhazians	58,697	55.3
Georgians	25,875	22.4
Armenians	6,552	6.2
Greeks	5,393	5.1
Russians	5,135	4.8
Ukrainians	809	0.7
Jews	136	0.1
Estonians	602	0.5
Other	2,980	2.9
TOTAL	106,179	100.0

The change in the number of Abkhazians as well as of the demographic situation in the area is the reason why many modern Abkhazian leaders, whishing to emphasize the fact that in the past the population of Abkhazia was much larger than today, argue that Abkhazians, wherever they live, continue to constitute a cohesive ethnic group who were "artificially separated by the Tsarist Russia"[18].

For the Russian-controlled territories in this part of the South Caucasus, to which Russians referred as 'Eastern' and 'Western' Georgia, the 19th century was marked by the extensive reforms, conducted by the Russian colonial administration, which changed the domains of the use of the Georgian language. In 'Eastern' Georgia (today's proper Georgia), during the period from 1801 till 1814, all Georgian schools were closed down and the printing of books in the Georgian language was totally banned (Hewitt 1989,

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[17] Abkhazians were officially "liberated from the guilt" only in December 1907 (Lakoba, 1990, 57).

[18] Interview with Maxym Gvindzshia, deputy minister of Foreign Affairs of Abkhazia, 2 August 2005, Sukhum. This kind of argumentation is often used by the Abkhazian authorities today, in the discourses related to the issue of the return of the Georgian refugees from Abkhazia, demanded by the international agreements signed by Abkhazia in 1994.

126). The situation changed under the rule of the Russian viceroy, Mikhail Voronstov, who was willing to grant Georgians a greater local autonomy, expecting to have a more effective administration (Rhinelander 1999, 88). In particular, the printing of the books in the Georgian language and the use of Georgian as the language of tuition in schools was partially permitted. Some scholars of this period in the Georgian history even argue that under the patronage of Vorontsov and his followers (1870s-1890s), "the culture of Georgia blossomed [like it was] the Georgia's second golden age" (Rhinelander 1999, 102). At the same time, the Russian rulers were eager to continue the policy of Russification as well, although not as strict as in the beginning of the 19th century. For example, only those native Caucasians who could speak good Russian had chances to be promoted in the administrative hierarchy of the Russian administration in the Caucasus (Rhinelander 1999; 91, 95-96). The Russian language was the only language used in Georgian courts as well (Rhinelander 1999, 95).

It was the Georgian Orthodox Church, one of the oldest Christian confessions, which played an important role in the attempts to expose the population of not only 'Eastern' but also of the 'Western' Georgia to the Georgian language. The Georgian intellectuals paid great attention to the role of the Georgian Orthodox Church in the creation of the all-Georgian national identity, and the use of the Georgian language in the religious services, in particular during the prayers in schools, was considered by the Georgian intellectuals to be a very important tool in reaching this objective (Lilienfeld 1993, 12). According to the Georgian bishop in Sukhum Kirion, "Georgia enlightened Abkhazians and therefore has acquired the right to govern them!" (cited in Marykhuba 1994, 385).

Now, let us turn to the situation in Abkhazia. Regarding the role of the Georgian Church in spreading the knowledge of Georgian in Abkhazia, it is important to note that during the second half of the 19th century, all schools in the provinces of the Russian Empire were divided into three categories. In schools classified as 'type I', school services and prayers were in the local languages, which was also taught at the school. The schools classified as 'type II' were mixed schools for the children of various ethnic origins, and in these schools it was permitted to have religious services and

prayers in the local languages but teaching was permitted in the Russian language only. Finally, schools classified as 'type III' were the schools, in which the language of tuition was Russian, no local languages were taught, and services and prayers in local languages were neither allowed. (Hewitt 1989, 127). Most of the schools in 'Eastern' and 'Western Georgia' were classified as 'type I' and a significant number of school hours were devoted to the study of the Georgian language (Hewitt 1989, 127). The first school in Abkhazia, opened in the Okumi village in 1851, falls under the 'type II' classification, i.e. the language of instruction was Russian but the prayers were in Georgian. This school was attended by 27 students only, children and 20-25 years old men (Tsvijba 2001, 30). In 1865, there were 17 church schools in Abkhazia catering 362 students (Tsvijba 2001, 30).

The situation with the schooling in the Abkhaz language started to change with the creation of the first Abkhaz grammar in 1862[19].The linguistic part of Uslar's study examined the Bzyp dialect of the Abkhazian population living in the area of the Bzyp River. This dialect is considered more complex than the dialect of the Abzhui Abkhazians, who inhabited the area near the Kodori River. That is why, aiming at the creation of an alphabet, more suitable for schooling, in 1892, David Machavariani[20] and Dmitriy Gulia[21] made a revision of Uslar's grammar in 1892, which this time was based on the Abzhui dialect. In 1863, a primary school for the 'highlanders'' was opened in Sukhum[22]. The language of instruction was Russian. However, just two years later, Abkhaz was added to the curricula: in 1865, the first Abkhaz primary was published (Biguaa 2003, 534). In 1870, another school, in which Abkhaz was one of the languages of instruction, was opened. In 1901, there were already 100 schools in Abkhazia attended by 3,951 students (Biguaa 2003, 535). In 1908, Abkhazian linguists A. Chukbara and N. Patepa presented a new textbook of the Abkhaz language and in the

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[19]The Uslar's alphabet was actually first published after his death, in 1887, in the monograph "Ethnography of the Caucasus. Linguistics. The Abkhaz language" (Uslar 2002, original 1887)

[20]David Machavariani worked as an advisor of the Sukhum school for 'highlanders' (Tsvijba 2001, 31).

[21]Abkhazians call Dmitriy Gulia the 'Father of the Abkhazian literature', acknowledging the impact of his activities on the spread of the Abkhaz language and the development of the Abkhazian literature.

[22]Symbolically, the building of the first Abkhazian school was one of the first restored buildings in Sukhum after the 1992-1993 war.

next year a new Abkhaz primer[23] was published (Lakoba et al 1993, 538). In 1912, in addition to the textbooks of the Abkhaz language, the indigenous Abkhazian geographer and cartographer M. Chachba published a map of Abkhazia in Abkhaz for Abkhazian schools (Biguaa 2003, 539).

Since the church schools, in which the language of instruction was Georgian, continued to constitute the majority of schools existed in Abkhazia, in particular, in the rural areas, in the end of the 19th century, in order to promote Abkhaz in these schools, the Abkhazian intellectuals made efforts to translate the books used in the prayers to the Abkhaz language. This was facilitated by the decision of the Russian Orthodox Synod to create the Sukhum diocese in 1885 (Biguaa 2003, 536) and a committee for the translation of the church books to Abkhaz in 1892. Many Abkhazian intellectuals, including D. Machavariani and D. Gulia, took active part in the activities of the committee (Gulia 2003, 370). At the same time, the majority of population in Abkhazia remained illiterate. To tackle this problem, in 1909 "The Society to literate Abkhazians" was established, and soon it had branches in several other areas of Abkhazia[24] (Biguaa 2003, 70-71). The growth of the number of schools was continuous, and in the 1914-1915 academic year there were already 156 schools in Abkhazia, attended by 8,700 students (Hewitt 1989, 137). The schools were opened not only in Sukhum and other Abkhazian towns but almost in every village as well (Lakoba at al 1992, 264). The opening of schools in the rural areas was a very significant development since the majority of the Abkhazian population at that time was rural. In 1915, a teacher's seminary was opened in Sukhum, in which Abkhaz was taught by D. Gulia (Biguaa 2003, 539). The opening of a professional training school was an important step towards the improvement of the schooling in the Abkhaz language: the graduates of the seminary were sent to work in every corner of Abkhazia (Gulia 2003, 368-369).

The Abkhazian intellectuals placed a great importance on the need of preserving the Abkhaz language for "people who forget their language without trying to

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[23]The primer, which is used in Abkhazian schools today, is the 14th edition of the same primer published by A. Chochua in 1909 (interview with the minister of education of Abkhazia Indira Vardania, in Sukhum, 3 August 2005)

[24] It is interesting to note, that the Society to Literate Abkhazian was opened soon after a similar organization was founded by the Georgians (Lakoba et al 1993, 264)

defend it are fated people. Their future is death and extermination" (cited in Achugba 1995, 68, originally published in *Moambe* journal, 1895, No.9). Machavariani illustrates his statement on the importance of language for the future of Abkhazians by a story, which was told by his Mohajir friend about the switch to the Mingrelian language of the population in the Samurzakano area who supposedly used to speak Abkhaz[25].

The review of the schooling in the Abkhaz language cannot be separated from the examination of evidences of the growth of the interest of the Abkhazian intellectuals to study of history and language of Abkhazians. It is because a rise of such interest corresponds to the 1st stage in Hroch's classification of the growth of nationalist movement. The period from the middle to the end of the 19th century can be characterized by the appearance of a number of publications related to the history of Abkhazia. Most of them were written by those Abkhazians, who had returned to the area after they had completed their studies in Russian universities. One of such examples is a series of reports on the Abkhazian ethnography, which was published in 1850 in the journal "Caucasus" by S. Zvanaba, who spent four years at a college in St. Petersburg (Lakoba et al 1993, 261-262). From the 1870s to beginning of the 1880s, a series of books on the 'Caucasian Highlanders' was published in Tiflis. These books not only presented the reader with an extensive review of the geography and customs in the Caucasus but also contained information about history of Abkhazians amongst other 'highlanders'. Many of these publications were available in a public library, which was opened in Sukhum in 1896 and in several other libraries located not only in Sukhum but in other Abkhazian towns as well (Biguaa, 2003, 536). In 1913, D. Machavariani published "The guidebook to the town of Sukhum and Sukhum district, with a historical-ethnographic essay", which had been reportedly very popular among the readers and visitors to Abkhazia (Biguaa 2003, 539). Few years later, the first archeological expedition arrived in Abkhazia and generated a great interest of the local residents, which led to the opening of a museum of regional history in 1870 (Gulia 2003, 258). It was during these years, when Dmitriy Gulia, whose version of the Abkhazian history has contributed greatly to the formation of the Abkhazian ethnic myth in the 1920s, started the collection of materials on the Abkhazian history and Abkhaz language.

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[25] Samurzakano was attached to Abkhazia after the establishment of the Sukhum district. The ethnic composition of the area was predominantly Mingrelian (Tsvijba 2001, 109).

Gulia was advised in his work by D. Machavariani (Gulia 2003, 368).

In 1913, D. Gulia was assigned to conduct a research on the Abkhazian folklore by "The Society to literate Abkhazians" (Gulia 2003, 370-371). This work of Gulia became known to Marr, who was very interested in Abkhaz as a part of his own study. In 1912, Marr made an attempt to establish relationships between Abkhaz and Japhetic and published a work showing the genetic ties of the two (Grenoble 2003, 118). On the other hand, at the time of the first acquaintance of Marr with Gulia's work, the ideas of the former were already very popular among Georgian intellectuals and became part of the common knowledge of educated Georgians. For example, in «History of Georgia», a Georgian author argued that "[t]he Japhetic family had the following branches: Elamite, Primitive Local «Armenian», Georgian, Chan-Mingrelian and Svan. In this way Georgian is today the national [*erovnuli*] language of all Japhetids; this language united every branch of the Georgian [k'art'uli] race and makes of them a single people which is today known as the Georgian people' (S.R. Gorgadze (1910), Sak'art'velos istoria, Tiflis: Shroma for Jejili, 1910/11, 1, cited in Law 1998, 178). By linking Abkhaz to Japhetic family, Marr – perhaps unconsciously, helped to reinforce the Georgian view of Abkhazians as members of the same ethnic group as Georgians.

It is possible to make several conclusions based on our examination of Abkhazian history during the period from 1810 to 1917. Firstly, since the beginning of the 19th century the ethno-demographic patterns of Abkhazia had changed considerably. Whereas in 1810 ethnic Abkhazians constituted an overwhelming majority of the population in the territory in question, toward the end of the first decade of the 20th century, the number of Abkhazians living in Abkhazia decreased dramatically. Moreover, ethnic Abkhazians were forced to rural areas while urban settlements witnessed a massive inflow of Russians, Armenians and Georgians. Secondly, it was the Russian language, which took the dominant positions in the important domains of language use in Abkhazia and many other languages were brought to the area by the migrants as well. Thirdly, because of the in-migration of other ethnic groups, the period under review is marked by the growth of the interest of Abkhazian intellectuals to Abkhazian history and the Abkhaz language, which resulted in the beginning of the schooling in Abkhaz

and first publications dealing specifically with the issues related to the history of the area. These are the important features of the 1st stage of the growth of the nationalist movement in Hroch's classification.

4.4. LANGUAGE AND THE ISSUE OF ABKHAZIAN AUTONOMY IN THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF GEORGIA

After the fall of the monarchy in Russia as a result of the 1917 February revolution, on 9 March 1917, the Russian provisional government headed by Alexander Kerensky created the Special Transcaucasian Committee, to replace the Russian colonial administration in the Caucasus (Lakoba 1990, 62). Immediately on the next day, in Sukhum, at a "meeting of the representatives of the peoples of the Sukhum district", the Abkhazian prince Alexander Shervashidze[26] was given the post of the Chair in the Abkhazian "Public Security Committee". Another Abkhazian prince Tatash Marshania was appointed the head of the 'militia' (Lakoba 1990, 62)). However, the real influence of the government of Kerensky in the Caucasus became very weak during the spring and summer of 1917 due to the scope of the problems the provisional government had to deal with in Russia. And it became even weaker when in the end of August General Kornilov attempted a revolt against the government. The revolt was unsuccessful, but Kornilov had a strong support amongst the Cossacks in the southern part of Russia, whose leader, General Alexei Kaledin, proclaimed that the "recovery of Russia should start from its periphery" (Denikin 2002, original 1923, 19). The continuous diminishing of the ability of the central Russian provisional government to control the Russian provincial territories resulted in the establishment of the "South-Eastern Cossacks Union" in early October 1917 (Lakoba 1990, 62). The political stand of the Cossacks, who declared they would build a "democratic federative republic" and provide 'internal' autonomy to all highlanders in the Caucasus was supported by the Alliance of Highlanders of the North Caucasus and Dagestan[27]. On 3 November 1917, in a specially organized meeting in Vladikavkaz, the major city in North Ossetia, a 'union treaty' was signed between the two organizations. When a few days later, the Bolsheviks took power in Petrograd, the united government of the South-Eastern Union, which was

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[26] Alexander Shervashidze belonged to the traditional Abkhazian noble family.
[27] The Alliance of Highlanders of the North Caucasus and Dagestan was established in Vladikavkaz on 17 May 1917 (Lakoba 1990, 62).

based in Ekaterinodar[28], declared that it is the only legitimate authority in the Southern Russia and in the Caucasus (Denikin 2002, 20).

Among those who attended the October meeting in Vladikavkaz was the Abkhazian delegation led by the prince Shervashidze. When the delegation returned to Sukhum, Shervashidze attended the Congress of Abkhazian people. The delegates of the congress had to make a decision with respect to the proposal of Shervashidze to join the South-Eastern Union (Lakoba 1990, 63). A delegation from Tiflis also attended the meeting. The Georgians were aware about Shervashidze's trip to Vladikavkas and wanted to dissuade Abkhazians from joining the union since they wanted to establish their exclusive control over Abkhazia. However, their attempts failed: the congress took the side of Shervashidze and appointed Semen Ashkhatsava to represent Abkhazia in the government in Ekaterinodar. It seems that Georgians were surprised by this decision. That is because in addition to the expectation of the support by the Mingrelian residents in Abkhazia, Georgians have already attached a very high political value and prestige to the Georgian language and were not prepared to treat Abkhaz equally. According to a member of the Georgian delegation, "[Abkhazia cannot be separated from Georgia because] Abkhazians were not able to create a literary language and today they substitute it by a deformed Russian alphabet. They are unable to create their own alphabet… Therefore, they should return to the Georgian alphabet, to the Georgian language, in which the Abkhazian upper class was educated for many centuries" (cited in Lakoba et al 1993, 283). Here, we can see one of the early Georgian attempts at the inclusion of Abkhazian people and language.

In a declaration adopted by the congress, Abkhazians expressed their concerns with the unstable political situation in Russia and in the Caucasus and called upon the "brothers from the North Caucasus and Daghestan" to help to protect Abkhazia in case the assistance is needed (Lakoba 1990, 64). The congress also established the first Abkhazian People's Soviet (APS), and Simon Basaria was appointed the head of APS (Lakoba 1990, 64). Less than two weeks after the end of the congress, Basaria was invited to deliver a speech at the opening session of the first Georgian parliament in

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[28] Today's Krasnodar, a major city in the south of Russia

Tiflis. In his speech, Basaria made clear that Abkhazians consider the status of Abkhazia equal to the status of Georgia: "The Abkhazians have formed an alliance with their northern brethren. They are also convinced that in the near future they will join the noble Georgian people in a common alliance of all Caucasian people. In this future alliance, the Abkhazian people see themselves as full members of the United Alliance of the Mountain Peoples" (cited in Lakoba 1998, 298). In February 1918, APS and the Georgian National Soviet concluded an agreement on "the issue of the establishment of the relations between Georgia and Abkhazia". In this document, Abkhazia was defined as "inpartible territory", and its future status had to be decided by its Constituent assembly (Lakoba 1990, 68). This was a rare moment when both sides admitted their equal status, even though this development can be seen as just a compromise.

But the honeymoon was a short-lived one. The debates in Tiflis over the future of Abkhazia took place in parallel with the confrontation in Sukhum between Menshevik's APS and Bolshevik's Military Revolutionary Committee. Next year, a peace conference was held in Batumi and attended by the delegations of Germany, Turkey, the Transcaucasian republic and the representatives of the North Caucasus. On May 11, 1918, during the conference, the independence of the Caucasian Mountain People's Republic (which from now on included Abkhazia) was announced (Lakoba 1998, 296-297, Shnirelman 2001, 204). Less than two weeks later, the Transcaucasian Democratic Federal Republic (ZDFR) collapsed, and the independent Georgian republic was declared on 26 May 1918.

During the period of 1918-1921 that followed the establishment of the independent Georgia, the political life in South Caucasus was far from tranquil. The aftermath of the "Caucasian May"[29] led to the clash of Turkey, Germany, and British interests in the area and both Abkhazian and Georgian ethnic leaders were trying to get a maximum advantage of the situation. In addition, the Russian Civil War severely hit the region. Thus, it was the support of the military might of Germany that helped Georgian troops to occupy Sukhumi and a significant part of the Abkhazian territory in

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[29] Sometimes, May of 1918 is referred to as "the Caucasian May" since it was the time of the independence parade in the Caucasus: Armenia and Azerbaijan had declared independence also in May, 1918.

the second part of June 1918 (Lakoba 1998, 299, Shnirelman 2001, 204). In their turn, Abkhazian leaders mobilized the Abkhazian Diaspora in Turkey. In June and August 1918, Shervashidze, Marshaniya and Basariya appealed to Abkhazians living in Turkey, whose forefathers – mohajirs – were compelled to leave Abkhazia in the 19th century (Lakoba 1998, 299; Shnirelman 2001, 204). The appeals generated the necessary support for the Abkhazian prince and his supporters, and groups of ethnic Abkhazians from Turkey took part in the fighting in Abkhazia in the summer of 1918 (Shnirelman 2001, 203-205). Eventually, however, the Abkhazian Social-Democrats, who were dependent on Tiflis, took the power.

It is difficult to give a comprehensive description of the language policy of the independent Georgian government in Abkhazia in the period of 1918-1921. However, there must be no doubt that the new government in Tiflis attached high priority to the reinstatement of the Georgian language as the dominant language in the areas under the Georgian control. Illustratively, just five days after Georgia declared independence, N. Chkheidze, the Chairman of the National Council wrote to the Georgian Technical Society on 31 May 1918, asking for the assistance in organizing the mass conversion of Russian typewriters to the Georgian font as quickly as possible (Law 1998, 171). During the brief period of independent Georgia, Georgian was the only official language. The on-going armed clashes in the area could hardly encourage a normal functioning of the school system. Although, for understandable reasons, there is a scarcity of the factual material related to this period, it is a documented fact that in 1918 Georgian was officially introduced as the only language of administration in Abkhazia. At the same time, being treated as "the invention" of the Russian colonial administration, the Abkhazian alphabet was prohibited (Shnirelman 2001, 204). This period also witnessed first attempts to use historical knowledge in order to justify the political ambitions of the Georgian leadership, which on several occasions advocated to historical justification of Georgian rights on Abkhazia based on the ideas of Ivane Dzhavakhishvili. This Georgian historian argued that the Abkhazian and Georgians are very closely related ethnic groups and Abkhazia was always a part of Georgia (Shnirelman 2001, 215).

On 25 July 1918, the deputies of the Abkhazian National Soviet adopted a

special proclamation, which demanded the Georgian authorities to stop the 'policy of nationalization, which is in fact is the policy of Georgianization' (Lakoba 1993, 321). In the same document, Abkhazian deputies addressed the issue of the official language in the area and required the government in Tiflis to give Russian the status of the official language of Abkhazia 'because of a high degree of internationalization of Abkhazia, gave to Russian the status of the official language of Abkhazia" (Lakoba 1993, 321). In a speech delivered to the Georgian constituent assembly, the Abkhazian writer Leo Shengelaya pointed out that "many delegates forget the real situation of Abkhazia. Here, the majority of the population speaks Russian language[30]" (Lakoba 1993, 322). There are documents showing that the Georgian government conducted the policy of expanding of Georgian settlements in Abkhazia and the compulsory tuition in the Georgian language was introduced to schools in the region (Marykhuba 1994, 415). On the other hand, while the issue of the Abkhazian autonomy was discussed and in March 1919, the People's Soviet of Abkhazia passed the "Decree of the Abkhazian autonomy" (Lakoba 1990, 67), the autonomy was not legally defined in the Georgian 1921 Constitution. In the article 107 of the new constitution, the territory of Abkhazia was called the "Sukhumi Province" and Georgian was declared the state language there (Marykhuba 1994, 415). Meanwhile, according to the draft agreement on the Abkhazian autonomy, it was the Russian language, which the Abkhazian Menshevik leadership wanted to become the official language of autonomy (Marykhuba 1994, 415). In addition, the Georgian government in Tiflis conducted an aggressive policy of resettling ethnic Georgians from the Eastern part of Georgia in Abkhazia (Sagariya 1992, 17-21). Thus, when some Abkhazian authors refer to the events that took place in Abkhazia under the rule of independent social-democratic Georgia, they refer to them as to the period of the first attempt at "Georgianization" of Abkhazia (Otyrba 1994, 284-285).

As we will see in the following Chapter, the policy of the Georgian independent government conducted in Abkhazia from 1918 to 1921, left a long negative trace in historical memory of Abkhazians and was one of the key factors, which

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[30]As we discussed earlier, in the beginning of the 20th century, the population of Abkhazia was already ethnically and linguistically very diverse. For many ethnic groups Russian was the lingua-franca. In addition, it seems that there was also a significant shift to the Russian language among Abkhazians living in urban areas.

contributed to the persistence of hostilities between Abkhazians and Georgians during the entire Soviet period. The policy of "Georgianization" of Abkhazia can be rightfully called the policy of ethnic enclosure aimed at homogenization and inclusion of Abkhazians in Georgian ethnic group through language, while Abkhazians were trying to differentiate themselves, or exclude, by emphasizing their separate identity, by language as well.

CHAPTER FIVE
LANGUAGE AND MYTHS IN SOVIET ABKHAZIA (1921-1988)

> Sokhumi is speaking. Tbilisi time is 5 o'clock in the evening.
>
> Abkhazian Radio Russian-language broadcast, 1981

In this Chapter, the focus of our examination is on the mutual attempts at ethnic enclosure of Abkhazia by Georgians and Abkhazians during the most of the Soviet period in history of the conflict. During this period, the Georgian-Abkhazian conflict can be viewed as a nested conflict, and, as we will show, it was language, which enabled – through the construction of ethnocentric myths – the perceived identification of the population that inhabited Abkhazian territory in the distant past with ancestors of Abkhazians (in the case of the Abkhazian myth of ethnogenesis) or Georgians (in the case of the Georgian ethnogenetic myth). Therefore, the description of the content of Georgian and Abkhazian historiographic discourses is central to the narrative of this Chapter. We also point out at an interesting phenomenon of "Abkhazian letters", a specific product of nested settings of the conflict and an important tool of the status struggle.

5.1. THE EARLY SOVIET YEARS AND THE STATUS STRUGGLE IN ABKHAZIA

The Red Army entered Abkhazia on March 4, 1921. Soon after, in a telegram sent by the Abkhazian Bolsheviks to Moscow, they addressed the issue of the future status of Abkhazia (Gumba, 2003, 9). The answer came in the form of a decision taken by the Caucasian Communist Party Bureau: "1. The existence of an independent Abkhazia is considered to be economically and politically not expedient. 2. To advise comrade Eshba [Abkhazian Bolshevik leader] to submit his final decision concerning whether Abkhazia will join the Georgian federation on the treaty conditions or as an autonomous region of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic" (November 16, 1921 decision of the Caucasian Communist Party Bureau, quoted in Gumba 2003, 10). However, with the establishment of the Soviet power in Abkhazia and Georgia, two separate Soviet Socialist Republics of Georgia and Abkhazia with equal status were created and have joined in 1922 the Transcaucasian Socialist Federal Soviet Republic (Shnirelman 2001, 206; Cook 2001, 28).

It is possible to identify several reasons why the decision of the Caucasian Bureau was not implemented right away in 1921. One is that the Abkhazian newly

established elite successfully managed to show that the Abkhazian ethnic group possessed all the necessary characteristics for a nation, defined by Stalin and discussed in *Chapter Two*. It was argued that after the serfdom was abolished in Abkhazia, the capitalist relations were speedily developing in the area – one of the necessary conditions to be considered as a nation from the Marxist point of view. At the same time, Abkhazians – contrary to many other ethnic groups in the South Caucasus, was able to show that Abkhazians had their distinct language! Abkhazians had textbooks and other literature published in the Abkhazian language well before the establishment of the Soviet power in Sukhumi. As was shown earlier in this chapter, the first script for the Abkhazian language appeared in the 19th century. Therefore, the following comparison of the situation in the 1920s between Abkhazians and neighboring Mingrelians gives us a clue to understand the importance of language for this initial period of acquiring ethno-territorial autonomy under the Bolshevik rule in this particular area of the Caucasus.

As a reminder, it was the policy of the Russian imperial authorities in the Caucasus to limit the possibilities for education in the Georgian language in those areas where the population was considered as not possessing the knowledge of that language. In such cases, Georgian in the Russian colonial administration thought to use the Georgian Orthodox Church in order to spread the knowledge of the Georgian language. In the beginning of 1900s, a "language battle" took place between the Russian and Georgian authorities over the issue of prayers in Mingrelia. In response to the attempts of a Russian administrator to translate the prayers to the Mingrelian language, a Georgian educator wrote: "Mingrelians understand Georgian prayers no less than the Georgians themselves! The Mingrelian language is the Old Georgian language" (cited in Hewitt 1989, 127). However, as we have discussed in *Chapter Four*, the linguists treat Georgian and Mingrelian as separate languages. The following correspondence between the Bolsheviks' leaders in the 1920s clearly shows that Stalin and other Bolshevik leaders did realize that the level of mutual intelligibility between Georgian and Mingrelian is low but they denied the acceptance of the idea of Mingrelian being a distinct language in order not to award Mingrelia with autonomous status.

In the letter written by Mikoyan to Stalin[1], on 8 June 1923, the Communist leader argued the need to maintain the "internal equilibrium" in Georgia by limiting the number of autonomies in Georgia. In another letter[2], dated by 9 September 1925, Sergo Ordzhonikidze wrote to Stalin that the issue of the Mingrelian autonomy is the hottest issue in Georgia, and the immediate task – from his point of view – is not to allow the use of Mingrelian beyond the Mingrelian peasants' homes. Thus, rephrasing the title of the famous Stalin's speech, the "immediate tasks of communism" in Georgia and Transcaucasia "to eliminate nationalist survivals, to cauterize them with red-hot irons…. while preserving the independence of Soviet Georgia" (Stalin 1921, 99-100), were seen by the ethnic leadership in Tiflis as not to allow Mingrelians to acquire (symbolically, of course) the major characteristic of a nation under the Soviet settings – the separate Mingrelian language! In response to the proposal of one of the Mingrelian communist leaders to allow the use of Mingrelian as a business language in the rural Soviets and courts of those areas, where peasants did not understand Georgian, Ordzhonikidze asked Stalin to support the prohibition of such a move, because any speculation of a possible Mingrelian autonomy "would oppose all Georgia against us and would destroy Abkhazia". Obviously, the "destruction of Abkhazia" must be understood as the destruction of the Georgian positions there. Soon, the leaders of the Caucasian Bureau requested Stalin to clarify his position towards the Mingrelian, Ossetian, and Abkhazian ethnic leadership. Stalin's reply was not delayed. In his letter to Ordzhonikidze dated 17 September 1925, Stalin wrote: "Sorry for my jokes about Mingrelian autonomy being understood seriously by some confiding comrades. You can announce on my behalf that I am … not going to support autonomy for Mingrelia."[3].

In the same year, 1925, when Stalin gave the right to the "Georgian comrades" to act on his behalf, the Abkhazian status was changed – downgraded – to a "union republic with treaty ties to Georgia". But it was not until 1931 when the Abkhazian status was again reduced to that of the Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic within the Georgian SSR. Until that year, Abkhazia enjoyed *de-facto* quite independent policy[4]

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[1] Published in *Nezavisimaya Gazeta,* 27 June 2001
[2] Published in *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* 27 June 2001
[3] Published in *Nezavisimaya Gazeta,* 27 June 2001.
[4] Of course, within the limitations applied by the Soviet system

(Gumba 2003, 15). That was possible, partly at least, because of the creation of an appropriate myth of the Abkhazian ethnogenesis by the indigenous intellectuals in Abkhazia, which enabled them to provide a necessary justification for their political leadership's stand in the status struggle in Abkhazia. As we will see from the subsequent examination in this chapter, the Abkhaz language played a central role in the discourses of Abkhazian historians. It is because – as we discussed in *Chapter Three* – the Soviet political settings required ethnic group, which leadership aspired for autonomous status, to show the continuous use of their distinct language in the territory in question, i.e. in Abkhazia.

During the period that followed the establishment of the Soviet power in Abkhazia, the in-migration of non-Abkhazian population to the area continued. This was, in part, related to the processes of modernization and industrialization in the republic, which required the use of qualified labor force. In addition, some Abkhazian historians argue that the new Bolsheviks Georgian government followed the same principles of 'Georgianization'' of Abkhazia as the government of independent Georgian republic, namely, to settle ethnic Georgians in the territory in question (Lakoba 1990, 88; Marykhuba 1994, 27). In fact, in 1926 the number of Georgians living in Abkhazia was already greater than the number of ethnic Abkhazians (Table 5.1 and Figure 5.1):

Table 5.1 Ethnic Composition of Abkhazia in 1926
(adapted from Lakoba 1990, 42)

Ethnic group	Absolute number	Per cent to the total population
Abkhazians	55,918	26.4
Georgians	67,494	31.8
Armenians	30,048	14.2
Russians	20,456	9.6
Other	33,570	18.0
TOTAL	212,033	100.0

Figure 5.1 Changes of Ethnic Composition in Abkhazia 1897 -1926
(adapted from Lakoba 1990, 42)
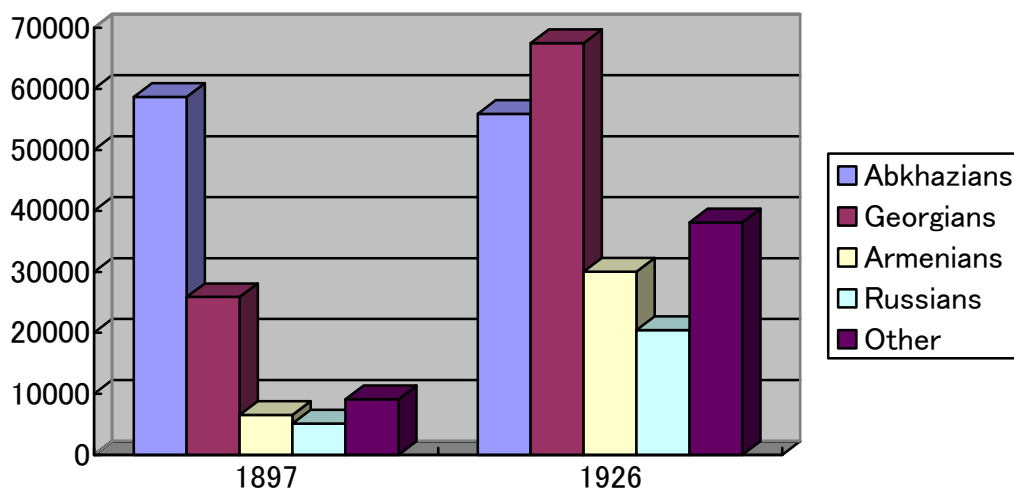
In this situation, language quickly became one of the hottest issues in the relationships between Georgian and Abkhazian ethnic leaderships. During the 1st Congress of the Georgian Communist Party, which started on 23 January 1922, i.e. just one month after the 'treaty on special relations' between Georgia and Abkhazia was signed, the Georgian communists demanded a privileged position for the Georgian language. To alleviate the tensions, Ordzhonikidze was even forced to make a special declaration: "If Georgians want to make the Georgian language the language to be used in the official domains, then we should allow Armenians and Abkhazian to use their languages as well" (cited in Marykhuba 1994, 412). Nevertheless, the 1925 Constitution of Abkhazia declared Russian language the official language to be used in public and business domains in Abkhazia (Article 4), since the majority of population in Abkhazia did not speak Abkhaz. The Constitution also guaranteed the freely use of all other 'national' languages in cultural and political domains in the republic. However, soon after the adoption of the Constitution, the Central Committee of the Georgian Communist Party required the Abkhazian authorities to use the Georgian language (Marykhuba 1994, 412). Yet, on 13 August 1925, despite of the pressure applied by Tiflis, the Abkhazian regional party committee reinstalled the use of the Russian language as a business language in the area. Then, in September 1925, the Georgian communists insisted on the development of a special decree 'on the use of languages in Georgia and Abkhazia' (Marykhuba 1994, 412) Following the intensive debates

between Georgian and Abkhazian authorities, in June 1926, a decision was made by the Executive Committee of the Abkhaz Soviet to implement the policy of the use of three languages in the republic: Georgian, Russian and Abkhaz, which led to a significant replacement of non-Georgian party and Soviet officials by Georgians, 'in order to facilitate the use of the Georgian language in public domains' (Marykhuba 1994, 412.) A year later, the 1927 edition of Abkhazian Constitution declared the parallel use of three languages – Georgian, Abkhaz and Russian as business languages in the republic (Marykhuba 1994, 413).

In parallel with the above-described events, in 1921 the Abkhazian authorities started the local program to address the issue of education in Abkhaz language. However, in the majority of schools opened during the period from 1921 to 1927, Abkhaz was not the language of instruction, as can be seen from the following Table 5.2:

Table 5.2 Schools in Abkhazia in 1921-1926
(adapted from Kuraskua 2003, 12)

Academic Year	Number of schools	Schools with instruction in Abkhaz	Number of students	Number of Abkhazian students
1921/22	146	20	10,468	2,390
1922/23	183	31	11,408	2,390
1924/25	237	40	14,797	2,600
1926/27	273	43	19,179	6,073

Thus, facing the problem of the language shift amongst Abkhazians, the Abkhazian ethnic leaders, nevertheless, were able to attach the enormous political value to the Abkhaz language in its efforts to maintain the Abkhazian autonomous status by making language the core element of Abkhazian ethnogenetic myths.

5.2. THE EARLY ABKHAZIAN AND GEORGIAN MYTHS OF ETHNOGENESIS

The earlier period of the construction of Abkhazian and Georgian myths of ethnogenesis falls within the first stage of the periodization of the process of politicized ethnogenetic

mythology formation in the USSR explained in *Chapter Three* (see also Table 3.2). One of the first evidences for the commencement of this first stage in Abkhazia is the book written by Simon Basaria, the Abkhazian Communist leader at that time, which was published in 1923 (Basaria 1923). Placing the emphasis on the role of the Abkhazian language in justification of the independent statehood for Abkhazia, Basaria argued that Abkhazians had never experienced the language loss and this is one of the direct evidences of Abkhazia being independent from Georgia since those were the Georgians and not the Abkhazians, who periodically were losing their independence (Basaria 1923, 49-50). Basaria identified his fellow people with the classical Heniochi tribe that settled in Colchis as early as in times of Ramses II[5] (Basaria 1923, 136-138). The Abkhazian local authorities actively supported this version during the 1920s, and Basaria delivered many public lectures during this time. The Abkhazian Ministry of Education published a special pamphlet propagating the idea that throughout its entire historical development, Abkhazians always maintained their independent status from Georgia (Shnirelman 2001, 221-222; see also Appendix 1).

In 1925 the "Father of the Abkhazian literature" Dmitriy Gulia published first volume of his "History of Abkhazia" (Gulia 1925). Following Marr, Gulia included the Abkhaz language in the Japhetic family of languages and directly connected it to the Urartian cuneiform inscriptions[6] (Gulia 1925, 36-40). In "History of Abkhazia", the place names and river names in the territory of Georgia, including its eastern part, were considered to have the Abkhazian linguistic origin (Gulia 1925, 47-52; 62-64). While combining the postulate of the continuous use of the Abkhaz language with the first-settlers principle, Gulia argued that Abkhazians arrived from Egypt and Abyssinia and must be considered descendants of the Colchians. The latter, according to Gulia, are thought to live in the eastern Black Sea region but should not be identified with the Mingrelian-Laz population (Gulia 1925, 89-90). Gulia also argued that Hittites

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[5]. The Colchis Kingdom is geographically placed in the territory of modern Abkhazia. However, there are little historical evidences that the Colchis Kingdom ever existed in reality while there are archeological traces of the Heniochi tribe dated as early as the 3rd millennium BC. Ramses II (1304 -1237 BC) was one of the most famous ancient Egyptian pharaohs.

[6] Urartu' is an Assyrian name of an ancient country of southwest Asia centered in the mountainous region southeast of the Black Sea and southwest of the Caspian Sea, which is known from the early 13th century BC. Urartians were succeeded in the area in the 6th century BC by the Armenians. Oldest Urartian cuneiform inscriptions found are from the end of ninth century BC.

(Abkhazian ancestors) founded Sukhum – one of the earliest cities in the Caucasus[7] (Gulia 1925, 145-147; see also Appendix 1).

The book created opposing reactions among the Abkhazian and Georgian authorities during the 1920s: Abkhazian authorities approved the idea of the Abkhazians being more "civilized" than the Georgians but disliked the version of the Abkhazians being "newcomers" to the area. For understanding the reasons of a rapid growth of historical awareness among Abkhazians, it is important to note that Gulia, similarly to Basaria, conducted a very active propaganda of his ideas: he made numerous personal presentations to the general public, from schoolteachers to Soviet and Party elites (Gulia 2003, 10). From these lectures, Abkhazians learnt that there were attempts at mass Georgianization of their ancestors in the medieval times. However, Abkhazians were more civilized than Georgians because of the formers' contacts with the classical Greeks and were able to resist the process of Georgianization.

Also in 1925, another Abkhazian intellectual, S.M. Ashkhatsava, argued that the "Old Georgian alphabet" was actually invented by Abkhazians and served both as the Abkhazian spoken and written state language. Moreover, any links between that "Old Georgian alphabet" and contemporary Georgian language were denied and the medieval inscriptions glorifying the "Abkhazian Kings" had been identified as the inscriptions in the Abkhazian language. In addition, Ashkhatsava declared that there are evidences (Abkhazian toponyms in Georgia), which confirmed, from his point of view, that it was the Abkhaz language, which made an impact on the development of the Georgian language and not vice-verse. Therefore, Abkhazians played a major role in the state that arose after the decline of Urartu while Georgians and Armenians played minor roles. The Abkhazian Kingdom incorporated all the Georgian lands and David the Builder and Queen Tamar were Abkhazians[8]. Of course, there must be no surprise that the Abkhazian local authorities actively supported these ideas of Ashkhatsava's during

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[7] The Hittites Empire stretched from Mesopotamia to Syria and Palestine and dominated Mesopotamia from 1600 BC to 1200 BC.
[8] The Georgian King David the Builder (1089-1125 AD) made Georgia a powerful state and its economic strength led to a cultural Golden Age in the 12th Century. Georgia's favorite monarch is David's granddaughter, Queen Tamar (1184-1213 AD), who managed to significantly extend the area of the Georgian influence in the South Caucasus.

the 1920s. Through public lectures and special pamphlets published by the Abkhazian Ministry of Education, Abkhazians were exposed to the myth of the existence of the Abkhazian "Golden Age" between the 8th and 15th centuries (Shnirelman 2001, 220-221, see also Appendix 1).

Finally, in the 1920s, Marr himself took part in the creation of a favorable ethnogenetic myth for Abkhazians. He argued that the Abkhazian language is related to the North Caucasian family of languages and the presence of numerous Georgian loan words in Abkhazian is the result of only recent cultural processes. Since Abkhazians not only founded their own state but also incorporated Georgians into it, the Georgian language was very much influenced by the Abkhazian language, not the opposite. Marr had declared that Abkhazians arrived in the eastern Black Sea region already in classical times and pushed unrelated Colchians southward. Moreover, in the past Abkhazians occupied much larger territory than in modern days, and were superior to Georgians in socio-economic terms (Shnirelman 2001, 216-217, see also Appendix 1).

As we can see from the above description, despite the fact that the versions of Abkhazian history in the 1920s varied in scientific details, this historiographic production served perfectly the interests of the newly established Abkhazian ethnic leadership. During the early period of the Abkhazian ethnogenetic myths formation, Abkhazian leaders had little restrictions for the dissemination of these versions of history and actively used the instruments of the autonomous structure under their control in order to maintain a high degree of historical awareness among the population in Abkhazia and the formation of the Abkhazian ethnogenetic myth. The versions of history appeared in Abkhazia in the 1920s successfully combined the postulate of the continuous use language and the first-settlers status[9], and, thus, were in perfect match with the political dogma of the new rulers in Moscow. Loosing to the Georgians by the share in total population in the area as well as by the number of speakers of 'native language', the successful steps had been implemented so as to differentiate as much as possible Georgian and Abkhaz and to symbolically force out the Georgian language from Abkhazia, making the history of the territory in question exclusively Abkhazian.

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[9] The version of the distant past offered by Gulia (1925) does not entirely fit into scheme but it was rather an exception.

5.3. "GEORGIANIZATION" OF ABKHAZIA AND THE DOMINATION OF GEORGIAN MYTHS OF ETHNOGENESIS (END OF THE 1930s – FIRST PART OF THE 1950s)

Following Hroch's classification of the nationalist movement, discussed in *Chapter Three*, the period of 1920s in modern Abkhazian history can be related to the Stage B – the period of intensive patriotic agitation, which led to the growth of ethnic awareness among Abkhazians, the formation of Abkhazian ethnogenetic myth, and, consequently, to the empowerment of Abkhazian indigenous elite in the autonomy. However, the strengthening of the positions of the Abkhazians by no means satisfied the Georgian republican leadership. At the same time, the Soviet political settings required Georgians to introduce such version of the distant past that would contain enough efficient contra-arguments to oppose the version advocated by Abkhazians. However, besides the early explanations offered by Dzhavakhishvili (see p. 92), the Georgian historical school followed the ideas expressed in the beginning of the 20th century by A.S. Khakhanov. This famous Georgian historian argued that Georgians were the first-settlers in Abkhazia, but he also admitted that the Abkhazian language is a distinct language (Shnirelman 2001, 228-231).

An unexpected help came not from a Georgian but from a Czech scientist Bedrich Hrozny. He argued that the Hittite language belonged to the Indo-European stock. This opened the way for the Georgian intellectuals to construct the Ibero-Caucasian language family[10] embracing both Kartvelian (to which Georgian language belongs) and North Caucasian languages (to which Abkhaz language belongs) families of languages. Using the approach proposed by Hrozny, Dzhavakhishvili – now on service to the new Bolshevik Georgian authorities – confirmed the existence of the Ibero-Caucasian language family (and, thus, the closeness of the Abkhazian and Georgian languages) through the analysis of a great number of epigraphic sources, tribal names and place names, including both eastern and western parts of the Georgian union republic (Shnirelman 2001, 231-234).

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[10] In the past, the Eastern part of modern Georgia was called by the name of a mythical land of Iberia: Armenians and Persians used to call Georgians in this part of the Caucasus "virkas" or "virshbuns", and the root of two words gave birth to the Caucasian Iveria (or Iberia). The idea of the Ibero-Caucasian language families is built on the assumption of close relations between Kartvelian and most of the other languages spoken in the Caucasus.

In 1931, shortly after the idea of the Iberian-Caucasian family spread over, the Abkhazian status was downgraded to that of an autonomous republic within Georgia. This decision was adopted during the 3rd session of the Abkhazian Central Executive Committee and approved by the 6th Congress of the Soviets of Abkhazia. Notwithstanding the declarative style of discussions during such congresses during the Stalinist times, the voices of opposition to this decision were heard (Gumba 2003, 50). There was little room, however, for the ethnic Abkhazian leadership to maneuver: if Abkhazian and Georgian are considered very similar languages belonging to one language family, then the main argument for treating Abkhazians as a really distinct from Georgians ethnic group based on the postulate of the distinctiveness of the language is lost. As we will discuss in the next chapter, even today Georgian intellectuals continue to insist that Abkhazian and Georgian are members of the same, so-called Ibero-Caucasian – language family. The clue to understanding the importance of the issue of the belonging to one or another language family is the fact that a language family unites languages with *common origin*.

It was the Russian historian Alexander Fadeev, who had been living in Abkhazia for a long time and who attempted to come up with a changed version of the Abkhazian ethnogenesis. In 1934, he argued that there were neither "states" nor "people" in the region but small linguistically unrelated groups with unstable membership in the times of early Colchis, and the Abkhaz and Kartvelian languages existed as distinct languages. Fadeev treated the historical role of the Abkhaz language very high, arguing that the Kartvelization of the joint Abkhazian-Kartvelian state took place in the middle ages. At that time the Kartvelian language of the dominant majority was adopted as the state language used for bureaucratic purposes, in the liturgy, and in literature (Shnirelman 2001, 224). However, even this "mild" version of the Abkhazian past seen separately from the mainstream of the Georgian history was rejected by the Georgian authorities (Shnirelman 2001, 225).

Another wave of Georgianization, or the attempt to implement the policy of ethnic enclosure, can be traced in the period that starts with the adoption of the Soviet

Constitution in 1936. The wave of mass terror in the second part of the 1930s that followed up left no hope for the Abkhazian ethnic leadership to change the situation any time soon. Many Abkhazian intellectuals were physically eliminated. In 1938, the Georgian historian S.N. Dzhananshia published the book called *The Feudal Revolution in Georgia*. Despite of its title, a great deal of the book was dedicated not so much to the problems of feudalism in Georgia as to the denial of the Abkhazian existence as a distinct ethnic group (Shnirelman 2001, 234-237, see also Appendix 1). Dzhananshia argued that there are no different origins for Abkhazians; Abkhazians are members of the same historical ethnic community as Georgians are; the history of Abkhazia is an integral part of the overall history of Georgia. A revised version of the Dzhananshia's book was published as a chapter of the standard school textbook to be used everywhere in Georgia, including, of course, Abkhazia (Shnirelman 2001, 234-237). The ideas of Dzhananshia had the complete support of the authorities on the Georgian republican and Moscow levels and a series of generous reviews accompanied the textbook publication (Shnirelman 2001, 237).

That is how the new Georgian attempt at ethnic enclosure of Abkhazia had started. It chronologically corresponded to the third stage of the periodization of the process of ethnogenetic myths formation in the Soviet Union (Table 3.2). The new myth of ethnogenesis freed hands of the Georgian ethnic leadership, and the representation of ethnic Abkhazians in autonomous branches of power in Abkhazia was greatly restricted. First of all, from a power perspective, by the mid-1940s ethnic Abkhazians were entirely forced out from the power structures in autonomy (Marykhuba 1994, 34). The replacement of ethnic Abkhazians started in the second part of the 1930s, when the discussion of language issue and appeals to historical justification of the actions of authorities were permanent subjects of public speeches. For example, on 15 August 1937, the *Soviet Abkhazia* newspaper published an article entitled "We should fight the enemies of people without any mercy" authored by Michael Delba[11]. A significant part of the writing is dedicated to the issue of the language of tuition in the schools in the territory of Abkhazia.

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[11] 'Besposhadno borot'sya s vragami naroda', *Sovetskaya abkhazia*, 15 August 1937.

The importance of the topic is emphasized by the fact that it is discussed in line with the problem of collectivization. Delba writes, "… Lakoba[12], using false arguments, justified an urgent necessity to attach several Mengrelian-Abkhazian villages to the Ochamchira district… One of the most close to Lakoba people, former People's Commissar of Education of Abkhazia, Zantariya, was forcing Mingrelian children, who did not speak any Abkhaz, to study in the Abkhaz language, denying them the possibility to study in their native Georgian". At the same time, the first language for the population of this area was the Abkhaz language (Sagariya 1991, 429). According to the author of the newspaper's article, Zantariya's measures must be classified as 'a state treason and gangsterism'. As Delba further generalizes, "expressing an animal hatred towards the Georgian people and the Georgian culture, Zantariya, being a People's Commissar of Education of Abkhazia during five years, was particularly desperate to disorganize the work of the schools where Georgian was the language of instruction". Other than 'favoritism towards the Abkhaz language', Delba mentions only the achievements of public education in Abkhazia: the rise of the number of schools and the existence of a pedagogical institute (of course, 'despite the enemies' actions').

As can be seen by the further political developments in Abkhazia, such a heavy public critique of the use of the Abkhaz language in schools can be easily explained by the intention of the authorities to prepare a background for the introduction of severe limitations on the use of Abkhaz language in Abkhazia in the near future. Several months later, the Abkhazian Central Executive Committee approved the candidature of the author of the article, Michael Delba, to become the People's Commissar of Education in Abkhazia (Sagariya 1991, 433), but his name continues to appear on the pages of 'Soviet Abkhazia' in the quality of a public prosecutor rather than an educator. In his speeches, revealing the 'crimes of the enemies of the people', Delba continues to devote much attention to the distant past of Abkhazia[13]. It is because the authorities wanted to emphasize that historically Abkhazia was always part to Georgia: the charges of planning a detachment of Abkhazia from Georgia were common in numerous court

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[12] Nestor Lakoba was the leader of Abkhazia in the 1920s and a close friend of Stalin. Lakoba died in December 1936.
[13] See, e.g., 'The Speech of the Public Prosecutor Comrade Delba M.K.' in *Sovetskaya abkhazia*, No. 253, 3 November 1937.

cases held in Sukhumi and Gagra in the end of the 1930s. Many of those accused by NKVD[14] were intellectuals, employed in the area of education and mass media and who made a sound contribution in the developing of Abkhazian versions of history of the distant past. One of the victims was historian Ashkhatsava. The Troika of the Georgian NKVD accused him in the participation in the Lakoba's group and planning the detachment of the Abkhazian ASSR from Georgia[15].

The Georgian advance in Abkhazia was temporarily stopped by the events of the Second World War, when the area witnessed harsh combats between Soviet and German armies. However, with the front line receding away from Abkhazia, the Georgian attempt at physical ethnic enclosure of Abkhazia regained its force and continued from 1945 to 1953. One of the most important characteristics of this period was the order to replace Abkhaz as language of instruction to Georgian in Abkhazian schools. In addition, the Georgian textbooks replaced textbooks in Russian and Abkhazian (Kuraskua 2003, 54-69). Even before that, in 1938, a Georgian-based script was introduced for the Abkhaz language (Hewitt 1989, 136)[16]. Following the death of Lakoba, many Abkhazian intellectuals and politicians were repressed (Marykhuba 1994, 32-35; Shnirelman 2001, 208; Coppieters 2002, 91). Also, a large number of non-Abkhazians were moved from western Georgia and Russia into Abkhazia (Sagariya 1990, 52-62). Besides the ban at schools, the use of Abkhaz for radio broadcasting and publishing was also prohibited and in some areas Abkhazians were forcibly resettled (Hewitt, 1989, 139; Shnirelman, 2001, 208; Coppieters, 2002, 92). The overwhelming majority of toponyms in Abkhazia were changed so as to sound "perfectly Georgian"[17] (Sagariya 1990, 501-507).

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[14] People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs

[15] On 13 November 1937 he was sentenced to a capital punishment (Sagariya 1990, 483)

[16] The switch to a Georgian-based script corresponded chronologically to the campaign of changing of previously Latin-based scripts for all the "young written languages of the USSR" but in all cases save for Abkhazian and Ossetian the switch was to the Cyrillic based scripts (Hewitt, 1989, 136).

[17] Including the name of the capital: Sukhum was to be called Sukhumi from now on. Former Turkish name of the Georgian capital Tiflis was changed to Georgian Tbilisi (*Sovetskaya Abkhazia*, 23 August 1936). The public announcements were allowed only in Russian or Georgian languages (Marykhuba 1994, 157). Abkhaz was also banned from the radio broadcasting (Bebia 2002, 22-23). In addition, the spelling of last names was also changes in some cases to sound "Georgian" (Kuprava 2004, 55)

The choice of the arguments used by Georgian authorities to justify the switch of Abkhaz to Georgian language is indicative of the importance of ethnogenetic myths in Abkhazia. On January 9, 1945, by the proposal of the first secretary of the Abkhazian regional party committee (ARPC) Akakiy Mgeladze and two other party bosses (I. Tuskadze and G. Karchava), the ARPC Bureau created a commission on the reorganization of the Abkhazian schools. The familiar Delba was appointed the chairman[18]. The commission also included the Abkhazian People's Commissar of Education S. Sigua, the head of the schools' section of the regional party committee Sh. Khubutiya, and A. Chochua, the director of the institute for Abkhazian studies. The Commission was given a one month period to prepare the recommendation on how to 'improve the quality of the educational-ideological work in Abkhazian schools' (Sagariya 1990, 481).

However, the commission was not able to perform the task assigned before the deadline of February 9, which was a rare happening in the atmosphere of the maintaining of a very strict party discipline during the Stalin's era. The report to the secretary Mgeladze was presented with more than a month delay due to difficulties in gathering information and preparing the recommendations: Abkhazians were trying to preserve as much as they could with respect to the position of the Abkhazian language in schools in the Abkhazian territory, despite of the fact that only few representative of the Abkhazian intelligentsia were allowed to participate in the discussions (Sagariya 1990, 483-484). This suggestion seems to be reasonable because, as we will see further on, the Commission's recommendations included some symbolic gestures towards Abkhaz.

Besides being a political document, the Commission's report provides some useful – and true! – statistics on the situation with the public schooling in Abkhazia in 1945, otherwise unavailable to a researcher. In the beginning of 1945, the Abkhazian ASSR counted with the total of 417 public schools, amongst them 81 were Abkhazian (i.e. in which Abkhaz was used as the language of instruction; Sagariya 1990, 484-485). The schools were attended by the total 51,745 students, and 9,179, or 17.7 per cent,

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[18] At this time, Michael Delba occupied the post of the Chairman of the Presidium of the Abkhazian Supreme Soviet (Sagariya 1990, 84).

were ethnic Abkhazians (Sagariya 1990, 485). In Abkhazian secondary schools, the language of instruction from the 1st thru 4th grade was Abkhaz, and from the 5th grade till the graduation (10th grade) – Russian (Sagariya 1990, 485).

Referring to the results of the visits of the Commission's members to schools and meetings with the general public, the report suggests that the quality of education in those schools, in which the language of instruction is Abkhazian, is much lower than in other schools and explain it by the difficulties experienced by the Abkhazian students when they have to switch from Abkhazian to Russian in the 5th grade, in which they have to repeat the primary school curricula because of the lack of the knowledge of the Russian terminology used in the higher grades (Sagariya 1990, 486) As a result, the Abkhazian graduates of the secondary schools do not have a background necessary for entering the institutions of higher education (see Table 5.3).

The Commission's recommendation is certain: the instruction in the Abkhaz language in schools should be discontinued. Instead, the language of instruction should be switched to Georgian. The following arguments are used to advocate this recommendation: the knowledge of the Georgian language by a significant part of the Abkhazian population, the lexical similarities between Georgian and Abkhazian languages, and the same corpus of the languages. At the same time (and this is particularly important for the author of this publication) is that the members of the Commission decided to justify their recommendation not only by purely linguistic arguments. On the last page of the report we read the key statement of the Commission:

> '[The switch of the language of instruction from Abkhazian to the Georgian language is justified because] during many centuries, the political, economic and cultural life of Abkhazians and Georgian people had been characterized by a joint struggle for their common independence against the numerous external enemies. From the times immemorial, Abkhazia is an inherent part of Georgia' (published in Sagariya 1990, 485)

Table 5.3
Ethnic origins of students at the Sukhum State Pedagogical University in 1945
Source: The report of the Commission for the reorganization of the Abkhazian schools, March 1945 (published in Sagariya 1990, 484-485)

Year of studying	Number of students	Ethnic origin of students			
		Georgians	Abkhazians	Russians	Armenians
1	294	212	27	30	14
2	202	135	6	37	11
3	45	33	none	6	1
4	81	58	1	10	1
TOTAL	622	432	33	84	27

The above-mentioned symbolic gesture to the Abkhaz language was the Commission's recommendation to leave the teaching of the Abkhazian language and literature as one of the compulsory subjects in schools (Sagariya 1990, 485). However, this was never fully put in practice by the authorities, since, as we will see further on, many Abkhazian schools were simply closed down and their facilities transferred to the newly created Georgian schools and institutions of professional pedagogical education.

Based on the recommendations of the Commission on the reorganization of the Abkhazian schools, on 12 March 1945, the Bureau of the Abkhazian regional party committee issued a resolution No. 274 on "The measures for the improvement of the quality of education in the schools of the Abkhazian ASSR", which required the switch of the language of instruction from Abkhazian to Georgian from the 1945/1946 academic year (published in Sagariya 1990, 486). Justifying the change of the language of instruction, the resolution once again emphasized the historical closeness of the Abkhazian and Georgian ethnic groups as an argument for the prohibition of the teaching in the Abkhaz language (Sagariya 1990, 486).

A minute to the Secretary of the Central Committee of the Georgian Communist party K. Charkviani written by A. Mgeladze in May 1945 illustrates how the resolution No. 274 was seen to be put into practice by the authorities in the territory of Abkhazia (published in Sagariya 1990, 488). The Abkhazian party leader argues that there are not enough qualified teachers for the implementation of the plan to switch the

language of instruction in the Abkhazian schools from Abkhazian to Georgian, and the Georgian pedagogical training institution in Sukhum alone cannot fulfill the gap. Therefore, as Mgeladze proposes, it is necessary to replace the Abkhazian schools by Georgian pedagogical schools in every big town of Abkhazia, namely in Gagry, Gudauty, Ochamchiri and Gali, instead of the reorganization of the former Abkhazian schools (Sagariya 1990, 488). Because of the urgent need to prepare more Georgian teachers, Mgeladze also suggests to close down the Abkhazian pedagogical institute in Sukhum (Sagariya 1990, 489). All of the Mgeladze's suggestions had been approved by the Bureau of Central Committee of the Communist Party of Georgia on June 12 (Lakoba and Anchabadze 2003, 142).

It is difficult to find the credible evidences of what was really taking place in the process of the implementation of the resolution No. 274 in Abkhazia since not many related official publications could be found in mass media of this period for understandable reasons. Not much is left in the archives of the Soviet time either. At the same time, there are few other sources of appropriate information. One is only very recently open, formerly highly classified reports, sent to the security services by the informers of the Ministry of the State Security (MGB) of the Georgian SSR (Lakoba and Anchabadze 2003). These reports clearly show that the common Abkhazians regarded the 're-organization of the Abkhazian schools' as an attempt by Georgians to assimilate and / or to force out Abkhazians from the territory in question: "The process of georgianization of Abkhazia is very obvious. Everybody talks about this" (Report N 2/1-1227 to the Ministry of State Security, dated 4 October 1945, published in Lakoba and Anchabadze 2003, 24), "There is georgianization everywhere, people are different now… Nowadays, nobody notices Abkhazians, nobody wants to preserve our culture." (Report to the Ministry of State Security dated November 11, 1945, published in Lakoba and Anchabadze 2003, 14).

There are also traces of a silent resistance *en situ* to the school reforms, when Abkhazian teachers were trying to ignore the directives from Sukhum. The following opinion of a teacher was, perhaps, shared by the majority of Abkhazian teachers at that time: 'For an Abkhazian, it is becoming very difficult to live in Abkhazia… Now

Georgians will force us out of the republic. This is obvious, because they [Georgians] deny us the right to teach our children in our own language (Report to the Ministry of State Security dated 21 June 1945, published in Lakoba and Anchabadze 2003, 24).

From the following minute sent by the head of the MGB head-quarters in Sukhum to the party secretary Mgeladze on 2 October 1945, i.e. one month after the first academic year of "re-organization" had started, another form of a silent resistance to the actions implemented by the Georgian political elite was the refusal of Abkhazian parents to send their children to the newly opened Georgian schools, which replaced the Abkhazian schools. The operatives of MGB interrogated the school principals and teachers and found out that parents don't want their children to study in new Georgian schools and trying to place students to the schools with Russian as the language of instruction (Lakoba and Anchabadze 2003, 145-148). There were also cases, when the principals of schools in the Abkhazian countryside refused to hire Georgian teachers sent by Tbilisi (Lakoba and Anchabadze 2003, 61)

Of course, the security services maintained an especially tied surveillance over the most prominent figures of the political and cultural life of Abkhazians as well. That is because the opinions expressed by such persons as Dmitriy Gulia or Georgy Shakerbaya even in private conversations were quickly becoming known to many other Abkhazians. Without the access to a public tribune, the representatives of the Abkhazia intelligentsia used any opportunity to make their views known to the fellow Abkhazians through friends and relatives, who, in their turn, were spreading a word to their friends and people whom they trusted[19]. Thus, the following report of an MGB informer on the views of Dmitriy Gulia, expressed by the latter in an informal meeting at the then Marr Abkhazian Scientific-Research Institute on December 3, 1945, is very important for the understanding of the Abkhazian point of view on the Georgian arguments of the closeness of Abkhazian and Georgian ethnic groups, at the time of the re-organization of the Abkhazian schools:

'During many centuries, [ethnic groups] have come to the contact with each other.

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[19] Interview with V. Avidzba in Sukhum, 4 August 2005. This is also confirmed by numerous secret MGB reports (Lakoba and Anchabadze 2003)

This contact is the reason why some less developed groups, in order to [enrich] their vocabulary, borrow many words from the groups with higher developed culture. For example, in the Russian language, there are many borrowed words from French, Tatar, etc. But does this mean that Russia and her culture are relative to, say, France? All of you, of course, know the first Abkhaz [script], which I created with K. Machavariani. Till recently, this script did not contain any Georgian letter sign but served perfectly the needs of the Abkhaz language. Due to a political necessity, the [Cyrillic-based] alphabet was replaced by Georgian letter signs. If necessary in the future, it is possible to change the Georgian letter signs by any other, and still, this is not going to be an evidence in the establishing of the relevance of one ethnic group to another.

The history of Georgia can be traced from a very distant past, but the same is true for the Abkhazian history as well. They both have a starting point in the depth of the centuries… Because Abkhazians were less developed, they became adopting many features of the Georgian culture, as Georgia was a neighboring state" (published in Lakoba and Anchabadze 2003, 26-27).

The above excerpt from the Gulia's statement can be regarded a perfect summary of the Abkhazian critique of the Georgian arguments in times when the latter were publicly supported by the authorities in Abkhazia in the second part of the 1940s. The officially supported Georgian position was based on the denial of the identification of Abkhaz as a distinct language and led to the rejection of the right of the Abkhazians to be treated a distinct ethnic group. For the Abkhazian intellectuals, the Georgian attempt to link the language issue to the historical arguments in order to provide a background for the Georgian advance over Abkhazia was very clear: at the same meeting, in which Gulia was speaking out his position on the issue of the linking Abkhaz to the Georgian language, one of the leading Abkhazian scholars in the area of historical linguistics, Georgiy Shakarbaya, expressed his concerns in the following way: 'Abkhazia, with all her historical past and present, has been thrown away from the face of the earth! Therefore, I have decided to terminate my research on the origins of the Abkhaz language [since there is only space for the Georgian history and language]…' (Lakoba and Anchabadze 2003, 25).

Meeting no publicly expressed objections on the part of the Abkhazian intellections, a new version of the distant past of Abkhazia was mobilized by the authorities to support the Georgian-dominated political changes in the autonomy. In this version, Abkhazians was presented as members of the Georgian ethnic group, speaking a dialect of the Georgian language. First, however, some ideas of the past were rehabilitated to support the introduction of a new version of the Abkhazian distant past.

One of such examples is the book written by a professor of the Russian College for Foreign Affairs who visited the area in the 18th century[20]. The author argued that the geographical names on the territory of Abkhazia are mostly of Georgian origin. Obviously, it must be understood that this book proves nothing except its political value for the Georgian ethnic leadership at that time for there is no way to ascertain which was the language spoken 300 years ago in Abkhazia "Abkhaz" or "Georgian". Many place names in Abkhazia could be treated as Abkhazian but they can be regarded Georgian as well: the Georgian scholars – and the authorities – interpreted the place names as "genuine" Georgian at one time and very much the same names had been interpreted by the Abkhazian historians as "genuine" Abkhazian names at another time. As was written in the comment to the Kerr's book, "It is very important that, according to the data of the scientist and professor of the Russian College for Foreign Affairs[21], in the first part of the 18th century, Mingrelia had borders up to Novii Aphon[22]. Although Apsnuis[23] had reached Inguri[24] at the end of the 18th century, they still had a political dependence on Mingrelia and the Imeretian Kingdom[25]. It is very likely that the author refers to the historical border between the two *Georgian* provinces" (emphasis added, cited in Khoshtaria-Brosse 1996, 27).

The major contribution to the arrangement of the new version of Abkhazian history was made by Georgian scholars in the end of the 1940s. In 1948, the Georgian historical linguist G. Khachapuridze assessed the "Georgian writing system" as the evidence of the Georgians being "gifted" people and of the territorial integrity of the ancient Georgian state (Shnirelman 2001, 241, see also Appendix 1). Furthermore, he argued that Georgians are part to the "Hittite-Iberian group", historically located on the vast territory from Asia Minor and Northern Mesopotamia up to the Caucasian Mountain ridge. Khachapuridze considered this group to be the founder of the Urartian

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[20] G. Kerr, *The names of the Georgian provinces, villages and cities in the majority of cases with Georgian and Latin characteristic transcriptions*, published in 1732 (the content is described in Khoshtaria-Brosse 1996, 27-28).
[21] The comment was published in 1949 in a Georgian republic journal (Khoshtaria-Brosse 1996, 28)
[22] The city is located in close proximity to Sukhum.
[23] Abkhazians
[24] The name of river on the border between Abkhazia and Georgia
[25] Historical Imeretian Kingdom was a neighboring state of Abkhazia, located in the Western part of Georgia proper.

state, whose population was identified with Georgians. For Khachapuridze, there were no distinct Abkhazian people at all. This work enjoyed the complete support of the republican and central authorities. The pamphlet with the description of the major ideas of the Georgian historian was published in Moscow (Shnirelman 2001, 241).

The Abkhazian intellectuals, who survived the Stalinist terror, were forced to publicly deny their previous ideas of the independent Abkhazian history and separate Abkhazian language. Moreover, the book "About my 'History of Abkhazia' was published in Russian, Abkhaz, and Georgian and sent to the numerous addresses of the Soviet and party elites, schools, etc[26]. The most famous Abkhazian historian's name – Dmitriy Gulia – was printed on the cover but in reality, he was not the author the book. There are evidences that this book was published by an order of the local KGB – under the control of Georgians at that time (Shnirelman 2001, 243). The volume argued that Abkhazia is an "inseparable" part of Georgia (Shnirelman 2001, 240-241, see also Appendix 1). Gulia was able to denounce the falsification by a letter sent to the Institute for Abkhazia language on 20 December 1953, i.e. several months after the Stalin's death:

> "To the Academic Council of the Institute for Abkhaz language:
> In 1951, the book under the title "About my 'History of Abkhazia'" was published in Sokhumi. This book was published in Russian, Abkhaz and Georgian languages. The publication is an attempt to deny the existence of history of Abkhazians as a [distinct] people, and criticizes myself as an author. Surprisingly, the book carries my name!
> By this letter, I confirm that I am not the author of this book, which content is entirely falsified… Signed: Dmitriy Gulia, People's poet of Abkhazia, Ph.D. in History" (translation from the original letter kept at the Gulia Fund of the Gulia Abkhazian Institute for Humanitarian Research)

The book of Pavle Ingoroqva "Giorgi Merchule – a Georgian writer of the 10th century" (Shnirelman 2001, 242-244) became a true apogee of the Georgian ethnocentric historiography. The chapters from the book were published periodically during 1949-1951. In spite of its title, the voluminous book of almost a thousand pages (Shnirelman 2001, 242) was dedicated to the discussion of the ethnic origins of the Georgian ethnic group. Ingoroqva argued that the Apsilae (Abkhazians) are a Georgian

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[26] The print out of the book was 10,000 copies (Marykhuba 1994, 417)

tribe with a Georgian dialect; there is no doubt that even the Abkhazian place names in Abkhazia are of Georgian origin. Moreover, because of the language continuity, it must be considered as proven that only Georgian tribes lived in Abkhazia to the 8th century AD, although later on they gradually began to call themselves Abkhazians. Support of the book by the Georgian republican authorities was enormous; a series of generous reviews were published in the Georgian media and the main ideas of Ingoroqva were circulated through mass media and officially organized meetings everywhere in Georgia, including, of course, Abkhazia (Marykhuba 1994, 151-152; Shnirelman 2001, 243; Coppieters 2002, 93). The complete book was published in 1954, but the Soviet settings at that time started to shift once again after the death of Joseph Stalin in 1953 and the domination of the Georgian ethnogenetic myth in Abkhazia was about to be challenged by Abkhazians.

5.4. ABKHAZIAN 'REVIVAL'

The shift of paradigm in the policy of Moscow, which is characterized as the fourth stage in the process of ethnogenetic myths construction (see Table 3.2) gave a chance to Abkhazians to try to restore the control over their autonomy they had lost as a result of the policy of ethnic enclosure conducted during the Stalinist era by the Georgian ethnic leadership. They also counted on the Moscow's desire to replace the ethnic Georgian leadership in Abkhazia (Marykhuba 1990, 122).

Following the change of Moscow's attitude towards Georgians, the ban on Abkhaz language was lifted and the schools reopened. Very symbolically, the script for Abkhazian was changed once again: in 1954 a Cyrillic-based script replaced the Georgian script adopted for the Abkhazian language in 1938[27] (Hewitt 1989, 136). Also, the revision of the official version of Abkhazian history started, and Abkhaz restored its status of a distinct language spoken continuously by Abkhazia since the distant past (see Appendix 1). In 1953, a radio broadcast in Abkhaz renewed (Bebia 2002, 32)[28]. A new

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[27] And Hewitt wonders why the decision for the switch was made by a "commission" and not by linguistics! (Hewitt, 1989,136)

[28] It is interesting to note that when the decision was taken to renew the radio broadcasting in Abkhaz, the authorities experienced difficulties in hiring Abkhaz-speaking staff. Eventually, it was decided that some "minor mistakes" by the program presenters can be accepted (Bebia 2002, 32).

periodical in the Abkhaz language was inaugurated, and another one a year after Nikita Khrushev delivered his speech denouncing the Stalin's rule (Hewitt 1989, 141). In the same year, 1957, mass protests took place in the city of Sukhum. Abkhazians protested against the references made in the Georgian mass media to the book of Pavle Ingoroqva (Marykhuba 1990, 127). Bearing in mind the restrictions of the freedom of speech and organization in the Soviet Union, it would be impossible to organize such demonstration without an approval of the local, i.e. Abkhazian authorities.

Thus, in the Georgian textbook published the following year, 1958, the Georgian intellectuals had to change their positions in the issue of the Abkhazian language. It was no more possible to openly deny the existence of Abkhaz as a distinct language. So, the question of the language of Abkhazians was simply ignored. However, in the Georgian version of the distant past, the Georgian language was used so as to justify the presence of Georgians on the territory of modern Abkhazia. This was the way to build a new version of the distant past by using language as a link between history and modern day claims on the territory in question. The authors of the textbook argued that, historically, there are three distinct groups (Mingrelian-Chan, Kart and Svan) within the Kartvelian family of languages. At the same time, while the population of the early state in the territory of Abkhazia was heterogeneous, its population was gradually assimilated by the Georgians and shifted to speak Georgian, and the Georgian writing system forced out the Greek one in the territory of modern Abkhazia (Shnirelman 2001, 247, see also Appendix 1). Concerning the issue of which language was spoken in the distant past of the area, the textbook showed that the earlier speakers of the three Kartvelian languages were located at the same areas as their descendents today: the Mingrelian in the southeast and eastern Black Sea regions, the Karts[29] to the east of them, and the Svans in the highlands and in the lowlands of western Georgia. The Abkhazian kingdom was called "the true Georgian Kingdom" and its foreign policy was characterized as the Georgian foreign policy. Thus, by means of approving this textbook as a standard textbook for the schools in Georgia, Tbilisi wanted to impose an image of

That is because the most important for Abkhzain authorities was the symbolic meaning of the fact that Abkhazian radio once again is broadcasting in Abkhaz.

[29] Kartli is the central region of Georgia and the seat of its capital, Tbilisi. The mythical hero Kartlos is said to have been the father of the Kartli tribe.

the glorious history of early Georgia upon the public mind as well as to justify the Georgians rights in Abkhazia.

The attempts at symbolic enclosure of Abkhazia can be clearly seen from the further examination of Georgian textbooks published during this period. The textbook authored by the Academician Dzshavakhishvili was the first Soviet Georgian standard school history textbook, which was approved for the use in Georgian high schools in the second part of the 1940s and published in both Georgian and Russian languages (*Istoriya gruzii* 1950 for a Russian-language edition). The writing of the textbook took place during the time, when Abkhazian, belonging to a different family of languages, was declared a dialect of the Georgian language and prohibited from being taught at schools in Abkhazia (Sagariya et al 1991, 484-485). The Georgian textbook's narrative traces the beginning of history of a unified Georgian nation from a very distant past, declaring the state of Urartu an ancient Georgian state, and characterizes the Abkhazian Kingdom as a "Western-Georgian State", settling exclusively the representatives of Kartvelian ethnic groups to the disputed territory in the distant past. The authors of the textbook regard the extensive use of the Georgian language in Abkhazia in the past as one of the central evidences of the dominance of the Georgian ethnic roots in the history of Abkhazia (*Istoriya gruzii* 1950, 152-165).

A new version of the textbook of Georgian history was published in the Georgian language in 1958 and its Russian-language edition was printed a few years later (Shnirelman 2003, 330). The new edition was needed because the policy of Moscow toward Abkhazia had changed and the voices of Abkhazians were now heard by the central authorities. However, another reason was the publication of the first textbook of the Abkhazian history written by Abkhazian indigenous scholars and printed in Abkhazia proper (*Ocherki istorii abkhazskoi assr* 1960). The authors of the new Georgian history textbook decided not to deny the fact that the population of Abkhazia in the distant past was multiethnic but, instead, argued that the overwhelming majority of non-Georgian ethnic groups ended up being linguistically assimilated by Georgians (*Istoriya gruzii* 1962, 50-51). This idea remained the mainstream of Georgian textbooks' narratives throughout the rest of the Soviet era.

Let us take a closer look at the seventh edition of the 'History of Georgia', a textbook for grades from 7th through 10th, published in 1973 (*Istoriya gruzii* 1973, the run of the Russian-language edition was 20 thousand copies). The description of the distant past of Georgia starts with the chapter entitled "Georgian tribes and their neighbors" and the scene is set at the distance of three thousand years in the past. The authors acknowledge the linguistic differences of the ancestors of modern inhabitants of Georgia but link linguistically the majority of ancient population to the modern Georgian language and to the common 'root' of a 'cohesive' Georgian nation. The mention of Abkhazians in this part of the textbook is made in relation to the description of a group of tribes, the majority of which inhabited neighboring territories and not Georgia proper. Abkhazians are presented as late-comers in the territory in question (*Istoriya gruzii* 1973, 9). To illustrate the wide spread of the Georgian language in the remote past, authors decided to include a report of the classical Greek historian Xenophon, who had mentioned that the language of one of the Georgian tribes was heard spoken in the Black Sea coastal area as early as in 401 BC (*Istoriya gruzii* 1973, 13). When authors describe the extent of the political influence of the Kartli Kingdom[30] upon the Western Georgia (i.e. Abkhazia), they also explain to students that the growth of the influence of the Kartli Kingdom resulted in the 'cultural-ethnic' unification of the population of Georgia, and this process took part not only in the area of spiritual and material culture but with respect to the language as well (*Istoriya gruzii* 1973, 27). The visual illustrations to this part of the textbook include almost a page-wide picture of a stone inscription in the Greek and Aramaic languages (*Istoriya gruzii* 1973, 28), an ancient inscription in the Georgian language (*Istoriya gruzii* 1973, 30), and a half-page big picture of a table, which shows the development of the Georgian alphabet (*Istoriya gruzii* 1973, 31). Obviously, the choice of illustrations reflects the desire of the authors to underline the importance of language in linking territory through its historical past to the modern day's political stance of the Georgian politicians, in particular, as concerns the Georgian claims of Abkhazia. In the latter part of the textbook, we find another picture, which choice seems to be driven by similar considerations. This is a photograph of a bridge over the river Baslati located near the Abkhazian capital Sukhum: the bridge

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[30] It is difficult to overestimate the importance of the historical image of the Kartli Kingdom for Georgians.

has an inscription made in the Georgian language in the 12th century (*Istoriya gruzii* 1973, 65). In general, among quite a small total number of illustrations in the textbook, as much as a third part of all illustrations is related to the issue of the Georgian language in one way or another.

Now, let us take a look at the Abkhazian "counter"-myth. As we have mentioned earlier, the first Abkhazian school history textbook was published in 1960 and represented an attempt to provide Abkhazian schoolchildren with a version of history of Abkhazia appropriate from the point of view of Abkhazian ethnic leadership. Explaining Abkhazian students the ethnogenesis of the Abkhazian ethnic group, the Abkhazian authors managed to combine very old local elements of the legendary Colchis with the cultural heritage of tribes originated in the Asia Minor and argued that the latter mixed with local inhabitants in the territory of Abkhazia and transmitted them their higher culture and language. All this, according to the textbook's narrative, took place as early as in the 2nd millennium BC (*Ocherki istorii abkhazskoi assr* 1960, 12-19 and 34-35). Thus, in the textbook's narrative, Georgians (and other member of the Kartvelian group) were forced out of the territory in question. The distant past was left to the Abkhazian ancestors alone. Interesting enough, however, the following chapters, dealing with the more recent past of Abkhazia, in particular, with the history of the Abkhazian Kingdom, followed the line expressed in the Georgian textbooks: some part of the textbook were written by a Georgian scholar (*Ocherki istorii abkhazskoi assr* 1960, 48-63 and 68-71).

The next Soviet-time edition of the textbook on Abkhazian history reflected this ambivalence but the major objective was achieved: ancestors of Abkhazians have been declared the first settlers in Abkhazia, which was confirmed by the postulate of the continuous use of the Abkhazian language (*Istoriya abkhazii* 1986). Moreover, whereas the publishing of the textbook on the issue of Abkhazian history (to be used at schools of Soviet Abkhazia) was always the subject of a very strict control by Tbilisi, Abkhazian teachers en situ were able to provide their students with additional information and interpretations, which differed from the Georgian version of the regional history.[31]

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[31] Interviews with Prof. George Hewitt in London on April 20, 2005, and with Prof. Vasiliy Avidzba

In addition to the revision of textbooks, the change of the official versions of Abkhazian history was reflected in media publications in Georgia and Abkhazia. For Abkhazian and Georgian historians, one way to support the "historical" right of the Georgian presence in Abkhazia were the interpretations of the ancient inscriptions found in the territory of Abkhazia. A typical example of the signs collected is the following inscription found in a monastery in the Gal region[32] of Abkhazia: "Mother Mary, be kind to solicit under your Son for the Abkhazian King Bagrit and his mother, Queen Guranduht". The inscription is dated by 999 AD. According to the Georgian historians, Bagrit III (970-1014 A.D.) was the first tsar of the united Georgia, and his mother was the daughter of the Abkhazian tsar George II (922-957 AD). Therefore, according to the Georgian version of the Abkhazian distant past, this inscription confirms that as early as in 999 AD Abkhazia was already under the Georgian rule. Being formally very "scientific" discoveries, the news about new inscriptions or about new interpretations of previously collected artifacts were highly publicized through mass media. For example, in 1967, the regional Abkhazian newspaper "The Soviet Abkhazia"[33] published an article about the discovery made by the Georgian historical linguist Shervashidze in a small village in Abkhazia, which, as explained by the author of the article, A. Avidzba, confirms the fact that the church was built by the Georgian tsar George III in the period between 1156-1778 AD. Thus, Georgians had been ruling Abkhazia as early as at that time. The importance given to this definitely not epochal finding can be understood very clearly if we remember that shortly before the publication of the article in *Sovietskaya Abkhazia* another "discovery" was made, which had a long-lasting effect on the Abkhazian myth of ethnogenesis. This other event was the attempt by the Russian historical linguist G.F. Turchaninov to interpret the inscription in an unknown language as a sign made in the Abkhazian language.

The story of Turchaninov's "discovery" starts in 1960, when a peasant, who worked at his garden near the city of Maikop[34], found a stone with signs that looked

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in Sukhum on 4 August 2005.
[32] Gal is the area in the South of Abkhazia bordering Georgia
[33] *Sovetskaya Abkhazia*, 7 October 1967
[34] Maikop is the capital of the Russian Autonomous Republic of Adygheya, which borders Abkhazia

like an inscription. This stone had all the chances to be simply thrown away but the peasant – accidentally – showed his finding to a schoolteacher. The teacher, in turn, sent the inscription to the Leningrad Institute of Archaeology. There was no one at the institute who could decipher the sign – it was made in an unknown language (if in a language at all!). Then, Turchaninov decided to study the artifact. In 1963, the scientist from Leningrad declared that he had solved the puzzle of the inscription:

"The signs on the Maikop stone looked similar to the pseudo-hieroglyphic Phoenician writing. Yet, Maikop is located very far from Phoenicia. Therefore, it was necessary first of all to identify the age of the inscription. I have established that the sign was made between 12th and 13th centuries B.C… I had denied the possibility the sign was made in the ancient Circassian language because the Circassians came to the area later than 12th or 13th century B.C. Therefore, the only option which was left open was to try to read the inscription in the language of the neighboring people - the Abkhazians" (cited in Khoshtaria-Brosse, 1996, 12).

And Turchaninov did manage to read the sing in the "ancient Abkhaz language"! We will skip here the description of the methodology which Turchaninov used to decipher the inscription, but the conclusion of his work is an important contribution to the strengthening of the links between the major components of the Abkhazian ethnogenetic myth. In the annotation to his book, Turchaninov wrote:

> "In the book, the inscriptions have been deciphered and analyzed, which establish the existence in the Caucasus of the previously unknown civilization and the creation by this civilization of the syllabic way of writing belonging to the ancestors of the Abkhazians, Abazins, and Ubykhs, who called themselves "Asshuis" and their country "Ashuiya". In the 3rd millennium B.C., this country extended from Black Sea in the South till modern Maikop in the North and transcended the river Kuban in the Northwest and Phasis (Rioni) in the Southeast. The literary monuments of the Ashui language are dated by the period between the middle of the 3rd millennium B.C. and 4th-5th centuries A.D. (cited in Khoshtaria-Brosse 1996, 13).

Furthermore, here is another far-reaching conclusion: "Thus, it turned out that the syllabic writing has the Abkhazian origin. But since this particular type of syllabic writing gave rise to the Phoenician writing, which, in turn, laid the foundation of all the

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from the North of the Caucasian Mountain range (See Map 2)

European writing system. Then it is necessary to conclude that not the Phoenicians but the Ashuis (i.e. the ancient Abkhazian slaves in Phoenicia) caused the appearance of the Phoenician writing system at the first place"[35]. That is how the Turchaninov's discovery opposed the Abkhazian myth of ethnogenesis to that supported by the Georgian ethnic leadership, and the Abkhazian language to the Georgian language. Turchaninov's tale was highly criticized as unscientific by the leading historians, linguists, and archaeologists on the all-Soviet level, especially in the tribune of the major magazine in the discipline "Voprosy Istorii" (Khoshtaria-Brosse 1996, 17; Shnirelman 2001, 270). However, the idea of the great past already penetrated deep into the minds of the wide masses of the Abkhazian population, and, of course, was readily used by the Abkhazian indigenous intellectuals in appropriate versions of history (Shnirelman 2001, 283, see also description of the work of Ye. S. Shakryl in Appendix 1) thus contributing to the strengthening of the Abkhazian ethnogenetic myth.

In response to this "discovery", a new book of a Georgian historian was published. Georgy A. Melikishvili used the local names and some linguistic arguments to show that Mingrelians and Svans were the dominant population in the area around the contemporary Sukhum (Shnirelman 2001, 247-254). Another book with similar ideas was published by Kh.S. Bgazhba, who argued that Abkhazian was greatly affected by Georgian (Shnirelman 2001, 209). Thus, the idea that Georgians are the first settlers in the territory of modern Abkhazia was propagated again and led to the new Georgian attempt to reject the Abkhzain version of the distant past and ethnically enclose Abkhazia.

5.5. THE PHENOMENON OF ABKHAZIAN LETTERS

The period in recent Abkhazian history from the second part of the 1950s to the end of the 1980s can be characterized by the appearance of cycles in the changes of the official version of the distant past of Abkhazia, the process which made a significant impact on the changing of Abkhazian and Georgian myths of ethnogenesis and contributed to the

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[35] As we will discuss later in Chapter Six, this conclusion will be extensively exploited by the Abkhazian ethnic leadership some twenty five years after the day of the Turchaninov's "enlightening".

persistence of the hostilities between two ethnic groups. In order to examine one of the very interesting features of this process, we have to turn to another important source, namely to letters, which were sent by the Abkhazians to Moscow. The examination of the phenomenon of the so-called 'Abkhazian letters' serves as an important instrument for a better understanding of the development of the inter-ethnic relations in Abkhazia as well as in finding out *wie es wirklich war*, if to borrow the famous expression of Leopold von Ranke. More importantly, however, although the existence of Abkhazian letters was known to scholars since the end of the 1980s (see, e.g., Sagariya 1990, 556-564; Marykhuba 1994, 87-89, 159-163), the letters were not a subject of examination as regards their role in the process of formation, maintenance, and distribution of Abkhazian myth of ethnogenesis and the role of language in the Georgian-Abkhazian ethnic rivalry.

The Abkhazian letters is a specific product of a nested conflict in Abkhazia, caused by the ethnic inequality embedded in the system of administrative-territorial division of the Soviet Union, which is characterized by the hierarchy of ethnic groups, and, the system of subordination of autonomous party and executive branches of power. This system of subordination worked in such a way that for the most of the Soviet period Abkhazian local authorities were not able to address the issues of their concern directly to Moscow and had to deal with the Georgian Republican Party committee and republican ministries. On the other hand, as early as in 1932, the Central Party Committee in Moscow established a special department to work with the correspondence sent from situ (Kazakevich and Kaliteevskaya 1986, 12). Soon after, similar departments had been organized in regional and local party committees. The volume of letters sent to Moscow increased after the end of the Stalin's epoch and reached its peak in the second part of the 1980s. The "[l]ist of requests constantly repeated in the letters addressing the issues of inter-ethnic relations and received by CC CPSU"[36] mentioned dozens of letters sent from the autonomous republics and autonomous districts requesting the change of the status of the republics. Needless to say, none of the above-mentioned letters is sent by titular ethnic groups of union republics. At the same time, it is also clear that Moscow's authorities did use this

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[36] *Izvestiya Ts.K. KPSS*, 1989(9), 198-200

correspondence in their relations with the republican authorities and brought in the play the argumentation and information from the correspondence received directly from autonomous republics.

Abkhazian intellectuals started sending letters to Moscow in the second part of the 1940s, when in 1947 historians and philologists, D. Dzidzaria, B. Shinkuba and K. Shakryl, employed by the then Marr Institute of Abkhazian history, literature and language, sent a letter to the secretary of the CC CPSU A. Kuznetsov, protesting against Georgianization of Abkhazia and pointing out the facts of discrimination of ethnic Abkhazians in the republic (Sagariya 1990, 531-536). However, this letter was redirected by Moscow to party authorities in Tbilisi and the authors of the letter were severely criticized (Marykhuba 1990, 87-89). While Abkhazian intellectuals sent several other letters soon after the first 1947 letter, our particular interest goes to the period after the Stalin's death when the Abkhazian letters turned to be a quite effective tool in the struggle for the maintenance / upgrade of the status of Abkhazian autonomy and generated a mass resonance in Abkhazia.

It is possible to identify several common features of the Abkhazian letters. Firstly, all of the letters start with appeals to the principles of the Soviet ethnic politics, which – according to Abkhazians – had been distorted by the Georgian authorities. Secondly, the authors of the letter placed focus on the use of historical arguments, namely the first-settlers principle and the continuous use of Abkhaz language. Thirdly, the letters contain detailed description of the Georgian versions of history of Abkhazia and provide contra-arguments of Abkhazian historians. Last but not least, these letters were subject of discussion in many formal and informal meetings throughout Abkhazia, often even before the letter was sent, and Moscow's authorities were forced to react. In many cases, the letter led to turmoil in Abkhazia and Moscow and Tbilisi had to make some concessions to Abkhazians in order to heal the tensions. In total, there were more than 60 letters sent to Moscow from Abkhazia, which addressed the issue concerned with the autonomous status, history of Abkhazia and Abkhaz language (see Appendix 2 for the list and description of the most important letters).

Abkhazian letters were usually given names according to the number of people who signed the letter. Thus, the letter sent in 1967 after a meeting in Sukhum (7-11 April 1967) and addressed Brezhnev, Kosygin and every member of Politburo and all Union Supreme Soviet, became known as 'Letter of Eight'. The authors of the 'Letter of Eight' raised their concerns over the continuation of the falsification of Abkhazian history by Georgian historians, in particular, the denial of the first-settlers status of Abkhazians and their distinctiveness as an ethnic group, toponyms in Abkhazia, and the status of the Abkhaz language (Marykhuba 1994, 159-163). On behalf of the participants of the meeting, the letter also demanded to upgrade the status of Abkhazia in the Soviet Union in order to avoid the risk of 'Georgianization' of Abkhazia. The authors of the letter delivered the document personally to Moscow, where they met a secretary of the Central party committee V. Vasil'ev, who was in charge of the ethnic issues in South Caucasian republics (Marykhuba 1994, 159). The letter brought some fruits to Abkhazians: Moscow instructed Tbilisi to 'ease the pressure on Abkhazians' and some of Georgian local bureaucrats in Abkhazia were dismissed from their posts[37]. One of the other noticeable developments associated with the 'Letter of Eight' was the permission granted in 1971 to familiar Turchaninov to publish his book about the "phenomenal" discovery (Shnirelman 2001, 271). In the same year, a historian in Abkhazia, Yuriy N. Voronov, an ethnic Russian, was able to publish a book arguing that the Abkhaz language is not related to the Georgian language and that Georgians are newcomers to Abkhazia (Shnirelman 2001, 327).

Another example of the importance of the use of letters as a tool in the status struggle in Abkhazia is the 1977 'Letter of Hundred and Thirty'. The letter was addressed to Brezhnev, members of Politburo and Supreme Soviet of the Russian Federation and discussed the following issues: the continuous falsification of Abkhazian history by Georgian historians, teaching of history of Abkhazia at schools and universities in Abkhazia and Georgia, changes of toponyms and ethnic composition of Abkhazia, the status and domains of use of the Abkhaz language. The authors of the letter demanded the transfer Abkhazia to the Russian Federation. Indicatively, the letter was signed by many common Abkhazians, not only intellectuals and discussed at a

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[37] Interview with Vasiliy Avidzba, 4 August 2005, Sukhum.

number of informal meetings in various towns and villages, including a mass meeting, in which thousands of people participated in the village of Lykhny on 2 April 1978. There was also a number of strikes which could be linked to the 'Letter of Hundred and Thirty' (Marykhuba 1994, 298-305)[38] The 'Letter of Hundred and Thirty' had a significant impact in Abkhazia. Special sessions of the Georgian Republican and Abkhazian regional party committees were held in Tbilisi and Sukhum and publications on the issues raised in the letter had been arranged in regional newspapers. Meanwhile, the new 1978 Soviet Georgian Constitution was adopted. In the Constitution, the Georgian language was given the status of official language. It is interesting to note that the declaration of Georgian as the official language was not planned in the draft version of the constitution. However, following the protests in Tbilisi, the final version of the Soviet Georgian Constitution incorporated an article that declared Georgian the official language in the republic (Hewitt 1989, 140). Moreover, while contemporary Georgian authors argue that the protests in Tbilisi in 1978 had nothing to do with the Abkhazian issue, it had: during the turmoil the above-mentioned book of Voronov was ritually burnt on the Rustavelli prospect, the central street in Tbilisi (Shnirelman 2001, 291).

In response to the Tblisi demonstration, a mass meeting took place on 22 May 1978 in Sukhum, which was attended by the secretary of Politburo Igor Kapitonov and the first secretary of the Georgian Communist Party Eduard Shevardnadze. Abkhazians demanded the rejection of the official status of Georgian in Abkhazia. This request was denied, but the central and republican authorities were forced to make a number of concessions to Abkhazians. For example, Moscow paved the way to an increased representation of ethnic Abkhazians in the local administration. Ethnic Abkhazians were promised 40 percent of government and judicial posts (Cook 2001, 35) and the Abkhazian University was established (Hewitt 1989, 140, Shnirelman 2001, 210). That was done because "no other republic of the USSR witnessed such mass protest movement, including long-term strikes by workers and clerks" similar to those that took place in Abkhazia (Shnirelman 2001, 210). The authorities also requested the Gulia Institute of Abkhazian Language, Literature and History to examine the issues concerned with the interpretation of the Abkhazian distant past raised by the authors of

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[38]The village of Lykhny is of great symbolical importance for Abkhazian – it was the residence of the Abkhazian prince during the time of the Abkhazian principality.

the letter (Marykhuba 1994, 164-186, interviews with George Hewitt on 20 April 2005 and with Vasiliy Avidzba on 4 August 2005)[39]. Abkhazians were also given their own TV station, which started its work on 11 November 1978 (Bebia 2002, 174).

However, the clash of Georgian and Abkhazian ethnogenetic myths continued in the years that followed the 1978 turmoil in Abkhazia and Abkhazian intellectuals continued sending of letters to Moscow's authorities. In 1988, the 'Letter of Sixty appeared'. This document of the length of 87 pages addressed the famous 19th All-Union Communist Party Conference in July 1988 in Moscow and was signed by a number of prominent Abkhazian intellectuals. Amongst the most important issues discussed in the letter was the examination of the Abkhazian ethnogenesis, and the authors of the letter placed great emphasis on the autochthonous status of Abkhazians in the area. There were also references to the change of the autonomous status of Abkhazia in the Soviet Union, the language politics in Abkhazia, falsification of history of Abkhazia by Georgian historians, toponyms in Abkhazia and changes in ethnic composition of the autonomous republic. Concluding the letter, Abkhazian intellectuals demanded the upgrade of the status of Abkhazia from autonomous republic in Georgia to a separate union republic (Marykhuba 1994, 383-439). The 'Letter of Sixty' was written in times of Gorbachev's perestroika and glasnost. Therefore, it was possible to publish the outline of the letter's content in several regional newspapers and discuss the idea expressed in the letter in meetings throughout Abkhazia as well as at a session of the all-Union conference on ethnography and anthropology. As a result of the efforts of 'Sixty', Moscow's authorities sent a commission to Sukhum and Tbilisi. On the other hand, in the end of the 1980s, Moscow already started to loose its influence over the policy conducted by the Tbilisi's authorities and the Moscow's recommendation did not produce the effect similar to the outcome of Abkhazian letters sent during the previous decades. The events that led to the violent phase of the Georgian-Abkhazian ethnic rivalry are discussed in the following chapter of this volume. However, before proceeding to the next chapter, it is necessary to briefly outline the important findings in our examination of the role of language in the conflict in Abkhazia during the period that starts with the Russian advance to the area early in the 19th century and continues

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[39] The Institute's report mentioned that there were at least 32 publications in Georgian mass-media that included Ingoroqva's thesis in a modified form (Marykhuba 1994, 206-218)

through the most of the 20th century.

To the end of the 1980s, despite of the gradual shift of the majority of Abkhazians to Russian, the Abkhaz language always remained of a great symbolic importance for Abkhazians. The same is true for Georgians although they had never experienced the decline of a number of speakers of Georgian at a scale similar to the Abkhaz language. The core of Abkhazian and Georgian ethnogenetic myths is the combination of the postulate of the continuous use of language ascribed to the ethnic group in question and the first-settlers principle. In addition, frequent changes of official versions of ethnogenesis and constant references to the distant past made by both authorities can be seen as the causes for an extremely high degree of historical awareness among Georgians and Abkhazians.

In the second part of the 20th century, the Soviet political settings created the environment for the appearance of the phenomenon of Abkhazian letters, a specific feature of the process of ethnic competition in Abkhazia during this part of the Soviet period of recent Abkhazian history, which facilitated the achievement of the goals to maintain the autonomous status of Abkhazia and provided opportunities to attempt to upgrade the status in the system of Soviet ethno-territorial division The clash of Georgian and Abkhazian attempts at ethnic enclosure of Abkhazia, accompanied by the changes of ethnic composition of the area, contributed to the growth of ethnic hostilities among Georgian and Abkhazians, which reached its peak at the time of the weakening of Moscow's control in the South Caucasus, which will be the theme of our next Chapter.

CHAPTER SIX
GEORGIAN-ABKHAZIAN WAR AND THE PERSISTENCE OF MYTHS

In this Chapter, we will continue the examination of the role of language in the Georgian-Abkhazian conflict. We will describe the events that led to the violent phase of the conflict in the beginning of the 1990s as well as the continuation of the attempts at ethnic enclosure of Abkhazia during the period that followed the ceasefire. In addition, we will discuss the role of language in other South Caucasian cases, in particularly the Georgian-South Ossetian and Armenian-Azerbaijani ethnic conflicts.

6.1. THE BREAK-UP

According to the latest Soviet census, conducted in 1989, the population of Abkhazia was equal to 525,100 people (Amkuab and Illarionova 1992,. 15). While there were 102,.938 Abkhazians in the whole USSR, of this total 93,300 lived in Abkhazia proper[1] (Amkuab and Illarionova 1992, 15). Thus, in the beginning of the period of the Soviet demise, demographically, ethnic Abkhazians represented a significant minority in their own autonomous republic (see Table 6.1 and Figure 6.1). The number of people, who currently resides in the territory of Abkhazia is not clear, but according to the officially declared results of a recent census conducted by the Abkhazian authorities 14-20 January 2003, the number of people permanently living in the republic was 210,000 including some 40,000 ethnic Georgians living predominantly in the Gal region (*Abkhazia v tsifrah…* 2005)[2].

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[1] An indeterminate number of Abkhazians, likely more than those residing on the territory of the former USSR, live in the Near East, predominantly Turkey, where many Abkhazians have succeeded in preserving their language. There are smaller Abkhazian diasporas who continue to speak Abkhaz in the other countries as well (interview with George Hewiit, London, April 20, 2005)

[2] The censors counted only those people, who permanently reside in Abkhazia during the period of more than one year (*Abkhazia v tsifrah…* 2005, 3)

Table 6.1 Ethnic Composition of Abkhazia: 1959 – 1989

(source: adopted from Amkuab and Illarionova, 1992)

Ethnic group	1959	Per cent to total population	1970	Per cent to total population	1989	Per cent to total population
Abkhazians	61,200	15.1	77,300	15.9	93,300	17.8
Georgians	158,200	39.1	213,300	41.0	239,900	45.7
Russians	86,700	21.4	92,900	19.0	74,900	14.3
Other	98,600	24.4	103,500	24.1	117,000	22.2
Total	404,700	100	487,000	100	525,100	100

Figure 6.1.Changes of Ethnic Composition in Abkhazia 1959-1989
(source: adapted from Amkuab and Illarionova, 1992)
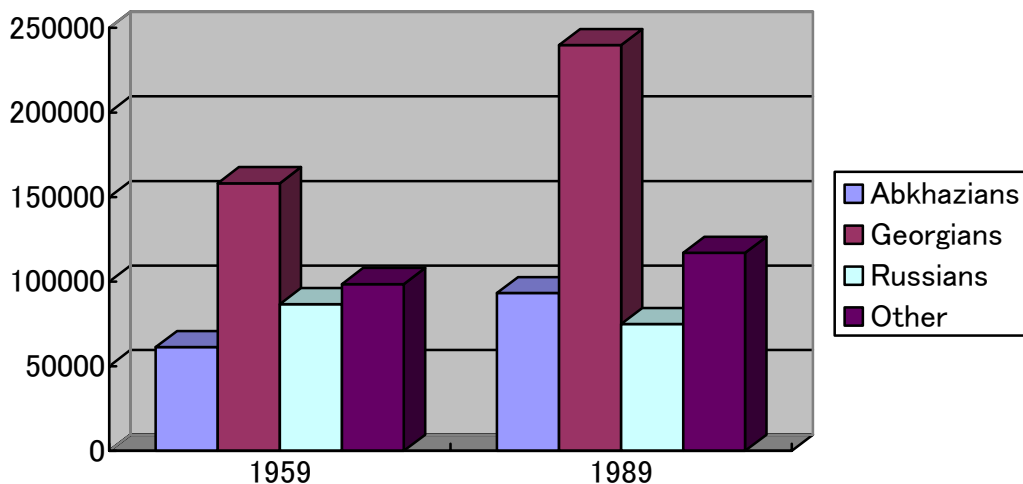
The change of ethnic composition in the autonomous republic, unfavorable for Abkhazians, became one of the topics discussed at a mass meeting, which took place in the village of Lykhny on 18 March 1989. The participants demanded the restoration of the Abkhazian 1921 status and adopted the "Lykhny declaration". It is important to note that despite of the fact that the meeting was organized by *Aidgylara*[3], which already had established its own network in autonomy, the party and Soviet leaders of the Abkhazian

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[3] The Aidgylara ('Unity' in English) People's Forum of Abkhazia was founded in Sukhum on 13 December 1988 and soon became an influential political organization in Abkhazia. Many Abkhazian intellectuals were members of Adigylara. The organization supported the elections of Vladislav Ardzinba, then the Director of the Abkhazian Gulia institute for language, literature and history, and the future first president of Abkhazia in the All-Union Soviet parliament. A famous Abkhazian writer A. Gogua was the head of *Aidgylara* at that time (Marykhuba 1990, 450)

autonomy also put their signatures under the document. Moreover, the Abkhazian authorities had been informed about the planned rally and supported it (Marykhuba 1994, 462; Kaufman 2001, 103). The core demand in the Lykhny declaration was to restore the 1921 status of Abkhazia, i.e. to upgrade it to the union republican level[4]. The full text of the Lykhny declaration was published in the Abkhazian republican newspapers *Apsny kapsh* (in Abkhaz) and *Sovetskaya Abkhazia* (in Russian). The declaration was signed by more than 30,000 Abkhazians not only during the meeting in Lykhny but also after the publication in mass media. The document was then handled to the central authorities in Moscow, including CC CPSU and Soviet of Ministries of the USSR (Marykhuba 1994, 463).

Meanwhile, the authorities in Tbilisi started to prepare the implementation of a new Georgian language program, and it was planned to establish a branch of Tbilisi State University in Sukhum. In July and August 1989, dozens of people died in armed clashed between Georgians and Abkhazians in Sukhum and Ochamchira over the planned establishment of the university's branch (Shnirelman 2001, 213). These events were indicative of the approaching of the violent stage of the Georgian-Abkhazian rivalry in Abkhazia[5]

In August 1989, by the decision of the Supreme Council of Georgia the Georgian language program[6] became a law. While the Georgian language was the official language in the entire territory of the Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic at that time, in Abkhazia the Georgian language had equal status with Abkhaz and Russian and it was the Russian language that was predominantly used in Abkhazia (interview with George Hewitt, 20 April 2005). The law, however, declared that the Georgian language

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[4] *Sovetskaya Abkhazia N 58, 24 March 1989*

[5] Traditionally, many Abkhazians as well as representatives of other ethnic groups in the Caucasus had in their possession guns, the fact which has been evaluated as a "cultural feature" of the mountain people (Galtung 1997; Kaufman, 2001, 90). In today's Abkhazia, amongst 120,000 adult population living in the area, 50,000 posses guns (*Moskovskii komsomolets*, April 16, 2003, see also "Workshop 'Light Weapons and Security Issues in the Caucasus': a Safeworld publication, 2002, in Russian)

[6] The context of the Georgian Language Program was made public in December 1988. The primary objective of the Georgian Language Program was to significantly expand the practical domains of the use of the Georgian language in Georgia. The law also established a new national holiday in Georgia – the Day of the Georgian Language (Law 1998, 190).

should be used in all public domains everywhere in the Georgian SSR, including Abkhazia. In addition, the Georgian Language Law required the mandatory teaching of Georgian in *all* schools and the mandatory Georgian language and literature test for entering the higher education institutions everywhere in the union republic (Law 1998, 190)[7].

At the same time, as it has been noted by many scholars, the period of Gorbachev's *glasnost* resulted in the tremendous growth of possibilities to publish many "ready-to-use" ideas everywhere in the Soviet Union. This was true for Abkhazia and Georgia as well. The stream of simplified versions of the results of complicated academic research on the topics of Abkhazian and Georgian history spread the pages of newspapers and the screens of TV. In Abkhazia, in the end of the 1980s, the local authorities were able to exercise almost the total control over the public media, and the local TV studio broadcasted several program in a week dedicated to Abkhazian history. In February 1989, the Abkhazian TV broadcasted a program entirely dedicated to Turchaninov's "discovery", and in the same month the newspaper *Abkhazskii Universitet* published a full text version of the TV program (Khoshtaria-Brosse 1996, 19). In the following month, Turchaninov took part in a conference in Sukhum. His account on the details of the researcher's participation in this presumably academic event is very interesting for our understanding of the way the Abkhazian population was exposed to the myth of ethnogenesis:

> "During the time I arrived in Sukhum, the Maikop inscription was already well studied but my related publication was cancelled. Nevertheless, as soon as I arrived in Sukhum, I felt that people know my secret, even people who had never seen me before knew about my work. They were stopping me along my way and asking: "When you are going to present your report?" I was surprised: "What report?" "About ancient Abkhazian inscription". I was telling them, there is not any inscription. However, they were arguing with me, "Yes, there is an inscription". Thus, I understand, there is no way to deny. The date for the meeting at the Abkhazian institute of language, literature and history was decided. However, I asked the authorities to limit the list of attendants of the conference.

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[7] Explaining the language policies in modern Georgia, it is interesting to note that despite the fact that the Georgian parliament has been working on a new language law since 1997, a decision was made on 17 May 2002 to stop the debates on the final approval of the new bill for indefinite period. The deputies from the group "Georgia Prevails" demanded that no provisions must be made for the official use of any other languages in Georgia except Georgian (www.parliment.ge accessed 25 April 2006).

> Yet, when I came to the meeting, I could not understand what is going on – people were coming and coming. Not scientists. Therefore, I decided to write the Maikop inscription on the whiteboard in the way it would be written in modern Abkhaz. I then asked the Abkhazians: "Do you understand?" They understood. Only after that I started my explanations. This is how everybody understood that it was really the Abkhaz language, though very ancient" (cited in Khoshtaria-Brosse 1996, 18)

At the same time, not only Abkhazians but Georgians as well have rehabilitated old ethnogenetic myths, in which language was used as a core element providing links between distant past of Abkhazia and Georgian ethnic group: both sides of the coming warfare were able (and eager) to use the most extreme arguments. In 1989, the Georgian mass media had already fully rehabilitated the ideas of Pavle Ingoroqva, who argued that there is no distinct Abkhaz language (Chapter Five, p. 115). In addition, there are evidences that it was the authorities in Tibilisi, who arranged the anti-Abkhazian campaign that took place in Abkhazia in 1989 and involved an active propaganda of Ingoroqva's ideas (Shnirelman 2001, 307-308). In this environment, the adoption of the Georgian Language Law in August 1989 was regarded by Abkhazians as a sign of the readiness of the Georgians to start the implementation of a new attempt at Georgianization of Abkhazia. While contemporary Georgian authors argue that the immediate motivation for the approach chosen by the Georgian leadership in 1989 was the desire to reach the Georgian independence and not the planning of a forced assimilation (see, for example, Nodia 1997 20), for Abkhazians, the ideas expressed by the authorities in Tbilisi during that time immediately evoked memory of two previous attempts at Georgianization, in 1918-1921 and in the end of the 1930s – first part of the 1950s.

The outbreak of ethnic violence in Abkhazia took place in parallel with the processes of disintegration of the Soviet Union. In both Georgia and Abkhazia the Communist nomenclature was rapidly losing its ability to control the political agenda (Marykhuba 1994, 450-460; Kaufman 2001, 103-104). At the same time, similar to the development of the nationalist movement in small European nations described by Hroch, it was the indigenous intellectuals who started to take over the control of the political agenda (Kaufman 2001, 105 and 116). In Sukhum, the representatives of the Abkhazian intellectual elite were among those who organized in August 1989 the "Congress of Highlanders of the Caucasus" (Lakoba 1998, 299). In the same month, an article was

published in one of the major Georgian periodicals, claming that many Abkhazians are really ethnic Georgians who changed in the official documents their ethnic identity in order to get jobs reserved by a quota for ethnic Abkhazians (Kaufman 2001, 106). Later that year, the Georgian Supreme Soviet adopted a new election law, which made impossible Aidgylara's participation in the coming elections. In response, Abkhazians decided to boycott the all-Georgian elections (Kaufman 2001, 109).

In the October 1990 elections, the organization "Round Table/Free Georgia" headed by Zviad Gamsakhurdia received the majority of votes. After the elections, Gamsakhurdia "had … achieved such status as an icon of Georgian nationalism [and now] himself symbolized Georgian nationalism" (Kaufman, 2001, 109). Clearly enough, Gamsakhurdia made the following reference to the relations between Abkhazians and Georgians in the Soviet past: "In 1936-1954, the domination of the separatists and Apswa [i.e. Abkhazian] violence against other nations living in the Abkhazian ASSR was stopped. Yet, in the years after Stalin's death the separatists did their best to take revenge and restore the situation that [they had] obtained during the time of Lakoba [that is, in the 1920s]" (cited in Shnirelman 2001, 310). As a number of scholars have shown, the ideas propagated by Gamsakhurdia had wide support by the Georgian republican authorities and among Georgians living in Abkhazia proper (Shnirelman 2001, 310-311).

Gamsakhurdia, being a historical linguist, actively used Marr's ideas and popularized them in a popular book "The Spiritual Mission of Georgia" (1990). However, as noted by Law (1990, 172-174), whereas Marr had been anxious to enhance the status of the Japhetic languages in general and of Ibero-Caucasian languages in particular (i.e. not exclusively of the Georgian language), his more extreme followers amongst Georgian nationalists preferred to ignore that aspect of his work equating Japhetic with proto-Georgian. According to Gamsakhurdia, "the proto-Georgian or Japhetic root-language is a unique language-generating phenomenon, the common root of every language originating from it by a process of differentiation" (Law 1998, 179). Moreover, Gamsakhurdia combined the Japhetic hypothesis with some messianic hints to create a myth of salvation for the Georgian language, and hence for the Georgian

nation as well, whereas other languages were downgraded to the status of "Johnny-come-lately offshoot' of the Japhetic language (Law 1998, 179). The new government of Georgia began an active propaganda of the Gamsakhurdia's views using mass media formerly under the control of the communist leadership (Kaufman 2001, 109). In addition, many Georgian intellectuals who were active in the pursuit of the ideas similar to that of Ingoroqva, had been appointed at the important posts in the government (Kaufman 2001, 109). In sum, the combination of the adoption of the Georgian Language Law in 1989 and active propagation of the same myth of the distant past as the one used by the Georgian ethnic leadership in 1930s-1940s to justify their advance in Abkhazia caused great alertness among Abkhazians.

During 1990, both sides still refrained from violence. That is why some scholars refer to this period in the Georgian-Abkhazian relations as the "war of laws" (Nodia 1997, 27; Kaufman 2001, 115). Keeping in mind the symbolic importance of the official language policy, it is not simply a coincidence that, when in August 1990 Tbilisi adopted a law declaring the Georgian language the only official language of the Supreme Soviet of Georgia, Abkhazian delegates to the Abkhazian Supreme Soviet declared Abkhazian sovereignty[8] and the Abkhaz language was given the status of state language while both Abkhaz and Russian were declared the official languages in Abkhazia. The Georgian deputies boycotted the meeting (Kaufman 2001, 116). Following the decision of the Georgian Supreme Soviet to annul the Abkhazian "sovereignty", the Abkhazian parliament became divided, and ethnic Georgian deputies started to hold their meetings separately from Abkhazian colleagues (Shnirelman 2003, 277). In December 1990, Vladislav Ardzinba, an Abkhazian historian, was elected the Abkhazian Supreme Soviet Chairman. In the following year, while the central Georgian authorities boycotted the all-Soviet referendum on a new union, the Abkhazian population took part in the voting and supported the idea to preserve the USSR (Marykhuba 1994, 467). Meanwhile, in April 1991 Georgia declared its independence from the Soviet Union, and Zviad Gamsakhurdia was elected the first president of the new independent Republic of Georgia. At the same time, there was no unanimity

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[8] This parade of "sovereignties" took place throughout all the Soviet Union at that time. In practical terms, "sovereignty" meant that local authorities declared the superiority of local laws over the all-Soviet legislation (or over the laws of a union republic, if that was the case, e.g in Abkhazia).

amongst the Georgian political elite in the issue of the policy towards the autonomies in Georgia. That was, in part, because "Gamsakhurdia's increasingly erratic behavior began to alienate large segments of the Georgian elite" (Kaufman 2003, 202). When the conservative part of the Soviet leadership attempted an unsuccessful coup d'état in August 1991, Gamsakhurdia was already losing power in Georgia. After the Soviet Union finally ceased to exist in December 1991, Tbilisi faced a severe fighting between supporters of Gamsakhurdia and the National Guard under the command of Tengiz Kitovani. In March 1992, Kitovani and three other leaders of the ruling council formed a new government and invited Shevardnadze, the former Georgian Communist leader and later the Soviet Minister of Foreign Affairs, to become a new head of the Georgian State. Gamsakhurdia escaped to his native village in Mingrelia and was later killed there (Shnirelman 2003, 277).

The military council in Tbilisi reinstated the Georgian Constitution of 1921, in which no provision for Abkhazian autonomy was made. In May 1992, the Georgian Government demanded the dissolution of the Abkhazian parliament and new elections of the Abkhazian Supreme Soviet. The acting Abkhazian Supreme Soviet proposed a draft treaty on federative or confederative relations to the Georgian State Council, but no reply was given by Tbilisi. In July 1992, the Abkhazian Supreme Soviet reinstated the Abkhazian Constitution of 1925, according to which Abkhazia had equal status with Georgia (Shnirelman 2003, 277). On the other hand, as will become clear in the following part of this Chapter, both the Abkhazian and Georgian leaderships keenly felt the need to strengthen their ethnogenetic myths as one of the most important tasks at the moment when opposition between Abkhazians and Georgian was reaching the critical point.

6.2. THE CLASH OF GEORGIAN AND ABKHAZIAN MYTHS

The myths formation accelerated with the rise of tensions between Georgians and Abkhazians. The core components of the Georgian version of history of the distant past of Abkhazia at this time can be easily identified in the book written by Mariam Lordkipanidze and entitled "Abkhazia and Abkhazians" published in Russian, Georgian and English languages in Tbilisi in 1990 (Lortkipanidze 1990). Despite of the author's

claim that 'the purpose of the essay is ... to shed light on the meaning of the terms «Abkhazian» and «Abkhazia» in the written sources of various languages and different times as well as their modern meaning' (Lortkipanidze 1990, 3), the main objective of the book is to support by historical arguments the political stand of the Georgian ethnic leadership.

Indicatively, the story about the search for the meaning of the terms "Abkhazian" and "Abkhazia" starts by defining the geographical location of Abkhazia: 'The modern Abkhazian ASSR lies in the north-western region of Georgia – in the historical and modern Western Georgia' (Lordkipanidze 1990, 61). In the subsequent paragraph, the author argues that, although 'there is no consensus in the scholarly literature regarding the oldest ethnic map of Western Georgia, in particular its Black Sea littoral (oldest here means 6th-5th millennia BC), from the 2nd millennium BC on, the picture is clear – the area of today's Abkhazia was inhabited by the Georgian (Kartvelian) population'. How this has been proved? The answer of the Georgian historian is that there are linguistic evidences of the "Kartvelian ethnic element" occupying the mountain as well as lowland parts of the Western Georgia in the 2nd and 1st millennia BC (Lordkipanidze 1990, 62). As an example, Lortkipanidze emphasized that the name 'Sukhumi' (Abkhazian capital) has Svan (Kartvelian) origin (Lordkipanidze 1990, 63). Another 'evidence': ancient Greek mythology describing the arrival of Argonauts to Colchis, shows the existence of the Kartvelian language by the time of the Argonauts' adventure while during the period under discussion the Kingdom of Colchis embraced the entire lowland of Western Georgia (2nd millennium BC) Facing a difficult task of explaining the mention of the presence of Apsilae and Abasgoi [Abkhazian ancestors] in the territory of Abkhazia in the 1st and 2nd century BC in the Greek written sources, Lortkipanidze argued that they are the same Kartvelian (Georgian) tribes as the neighboring tribes Egris (Laz), Svans and others while the modern Abkhazians are Apsua that immigrated from the North Caucasus in the 17th century. According to this Georgian version, there was a «gradual process» of the widening the concept of «Abkhazia», since the name «Apshileti» of Georgian medieval sources corresponds to the Apsilia of Greek sources. Therefore, at some period, the entire Western Georgia became known as Abkhazia (Lordkipanidze 1990, 64).

Another brick in the corpus of the Georgian version of the distant past of Abkhazia is Lortkipanidze's examination of the reign of the Prince Leon. The author writes, "[t]he ethnic affinity of the Leon is unknown, for there is no indication on this in the written sources. However, this is not crucial. Important is the fact that by its *language* [and] *writing* the Abkhazian Kingdom was a Georgian state, and their kings – judged by these characteristics – were **Georgians** [emphasis added]". Soon after that, the Georgian historian concludes that "The Kingdom of Abkhazia was a Georgian (Western Georgian state)" (Lortkipanidze 1990, 64). Following the discourse on the abolishment of the Greek Episcopal in Abkhazia, Lortkipanidze emphasized that "the Georgian Church opposed its Greek counterpart with the Georgian language and built its own churches and monasteries with services held in the Georgian language" and that "[hagiographic and hymnographyc works were written in the Kingdom of Abkhazia ... in the Georgian language" (Lortkipanidze 1990, 65)

Later on, Lortkipanidze's focus is again on the use of the Georgian language as the proof of the "Georgioness" of Abkhazia: "From the beginning of the 9th century – if not earlier – the Georgian language gradually acquired a dominant status in the Kingdom of the Abkhazians, becoming the language of culture, the Royal office, and the Church" and "As a rule, in Georgian written sources of the period under discussion 'Abkhazia' and 'Abkhazian' generally implied 'Sakartvelo' (Georgia) and 'Kartveli' (Georgian)" (Lortkipanidze 1990, 65). The language is used as a major evidence to prove the author's point of view once again when she discusses the ethnic identity of the population of Sukhum in the other part of the book. Lordkipanidze refers to the 1330's letter sent by Pietro Geraldi, the Catholic bishop of Sukhum, according to whom inhabitants of Sukhum during that time were "not some distinct Abkhazians (sic!) [and] they did not differ from Georgians in language, religion, and way of life, so that they were [regarded] Georgians by foreigners" (Lordkipanidze 1990, 69) Finally, turning to the period of the 15th – 16th centuries, Lordkipanidze mentioned a "complex… immigration process ... timed to the gravest situation obtaining in Georgia», which resulted in the settlement of Daghestanian tribes in Kakheti, of Ossetians in Inner Kartli, and of people of Circassian-Adyghe stock in the Western Georgia (Lordkipanidze 1990,

67).

The following part of the book reveals that the aim of the author is somewhat broader than a simple discussion of the use of the name Abkhazia and Abkhazians in the written sources, since Lordkipanidze focus is places on the description of the Ossetian settlement to the territory of modern South Ossetia in times "when the state is weakened, the process gets out of hand [and] a grave situation arises" (Lordkipanidze 1990, 67). The main idea of the author soon becomes clear. She writes, «[p]resumably, Georgians called them [Ossetians – sic!] 'Abkhazians'" (Lordkipanidze 1990, 67). Lordkipanidze refers to the testimony of the Italian Giovanni Giuliano da Lucca, who traveled to the Western Georgia in 1630 and noticed that the language of Abkhazians is very different from the languages of their neighboring peoples[9]. In this part, Lordkipanidze also emphasizes the aggressive nature of this people – "they were never molested by others, but they attacked and plundered one another" (Lordkipanidze 1990, 69).

Further in the book of Lordkipanidze, the perceived linguistic identification of inhabitants of Abkhazia is called upon in order to reject the possibility of building by modern Abkhazians a successful combination of the first-settlers principle with the dogma of the continuity of the use of the language ascribed to the modern Abkhazian ethnic group. In order to achieve this aim, the Georgian historian examines the hypothesis that the people who were called Abkhazians in the North-Western part of the Caucasian mountain range in the period after 17th century had their vernacular and this is the language used today by the Apsua [Abkhazians] as their spoken and written language. She writes that if to accept this hypothesis, than it is necessary to assume that "people speaking the Apsar language arrived and settled in Georgia later, bringing with them their unwritten language" (Lordkipanidze 1990, 71).Summing up her previous linguistic-historical assumptions, Lordkipanidze argues that "in the Kingdom of the Abkhazians the Georgian ethnos proper formed an overwhelming majority while the Abazgians[10] and the Apshil (Abkhazians) – if considered as a non-Georgian ethnos – represented the [minority] of the population" (Lordkipanidze 1990, 72). And, according to the Georgian author, this is proved by the fact that before the mass migration in the

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[9] Ossetic language belongs to the Indo-European language family
[10] One of the Abkhazian tribes.

Middle Ages, the "genuine" Abkhazians spoke the Georgian language!

After briefly touching upon the destructive policy of the Russian tsarist government in Georgia and the positive role of the Georgian democratic government (1918-1921) towards Abkhazia, the Lortkipanidze's discourse continues to cover the period of the establishment of the Soviet power in the region. As in other similar publications, the word "enemy" is used in the description of the events surrounding the creation of the Abkhazian Soviet Republic. Those "enemies" (actually, highly respected political figures by Abkhazians) have being blamed for the complete ignorance of the interests of the Georgian population of Abkhazia (Lordkipanidze 1990, 73). The Georgian author rejects the right for Abkhazia to be separate from Georgia, which she considered to be "[historically] untenable claim". Here, the proper Georgian rulers of that time – the Georgian Bolsheviks – have been also accused of compromising the Georgia's unity. In Lortkipanidze's interpretation, Georgian Bolsheviks ignored and violated the legitimate rights of the Georgian people, in particular of that part of the Georgian people, who for centuries lived on their own land, and would now have to live in the Abkhazian state" (Lordkipanidze 1990, 74).

The change of the ethnic composition of Abkhazia during the Soviet period is justified by Lordkipanidze as a "natural and legitimate situation because the territory of modern Abkhazian Autonomous Republic largely formed part of Georgian states, being the habitat of the Kartvelian ethnos from the earliest times. This, of course, does not rule out the possible assumption of the non-Georgian, i.e. North-Caucasian, origin of the Abazgians-Apshilae. However, the Abazgians-Apshilae ethic group always constituted a minority" (Lordkipanidze 1990, 75). Then, once again, the Georgian author uses the combination of the first-settlers principles with the dogma of the continuous use of language in order to build a plausible for Georgians version of the Abkhazian past. Lordkipanidze argues that "in the significant part of the territory of historical Georgia, mainly in the Western part, although in the East as well, there is a presence of the Svan and Mingrelian toponyms, which leads to a presumption that these toponyms are not so much of Svan or Mingrelian linguistic origins but belongs to a common Kartvelian linguistic basis… but does not form part of the modern Georgian language. This, in

turns, confirms the existence of the Kartvelian (Georgian) ethnos in the whole territory of the historical Georgia" (Lordkipanidze 1990, 58-59[11]).

Finally, the foremost conclusion is made by Marian Lordkipanidze in order to support the political stand of Georgians in Abkhazia: "today those [people] who call themselves Apsua... constitute a nation that has no other homeland [but] Georgia... 'Abkhazian' is a collective name, not possessing a single meaning." (Lordkipanidze 1990, 76). We include such a lengthy examination of the book written by Lordkipanidze in this part of the Chapter because the book's narrative reflected all major elements of the contemporary Georgian version of history of Abkhazia, which continue to constitute the foundation of the Georgian myth of ethnogenesis and which have been actively disseminated by Georgian mass media since the end of the 1980s.

Let us now turn attention to the examination of the Abkhazian version of the distant past, which was supported by the Abkhazian authorities at the time of disintegration with Georgia. When the Georgian control over the textbooks on Abkhazian history disappeared in the very end of the 1980s, Abkhazian historians intensified their work on the new version of the textbook and completed the task by the beginning of the 1990s. The 1 September 1992 was to become the day when schoolchildren of Abkhazian schools were to start learning the Abkhazian history using a new "emancipated" version of the textbook. However, almost the entire run of the textbook was destroyed in the flames of the subsequent Georgian-Abkhazian war, which started in the summer 1992 and described later in this Chapter (Lakoba et al 1993, 406-407). Yet, the textbook was quickly reprinted next year (in a Ukrainian printing house), when the combat was still on: five thousand copies of a school history textbook published during a war are a sure sign of how important this textbook was for the Abkhazian leadership.

The introductory chapter to the textbook entitled "The origins of the Abkhazian people" (Lakoba et al 1993, 5-12) was written by Vladislav Ardzinba, the Abkhazian leader at that time and a professional historian. The entire paragraph is built on the

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[11] The quote is from the Russian version of the text since this part seems to be missing in the English version.

combining the postulate of the continuous use of language with the first-settlers principle. The author tells the students that there are only few sources, which can shed the light on the issue of the Abkhazian ethnogenesis but here '[the Abkhazian] language comes to a rescue' (Lakoba et al 1993, 5). The statement that 'as it is widely acknowledged, the Abkhazian language is one of the oldest languages in the world' (Lakoba et al 1993, 6) and is truly autochthonous to the geographical space occupied by Abkhazians today is supported by extensive explanations in the area of historical linguistics, including the examination of the Abkhazian topography and vocabulary. However, the key idea of the chapter can be easily found in the following sentence: '… in the modern Caucasus, there are two autochthonous families of languages: the North-Caucasian and the Kartvelian, *but [historically] they are not related to each other* [emphasis is mine – V.R.]' (Lakoba et al 1993, 7). This rejects any linguistically-based claim of Abkhazia being a Georgian territory. Moreover, as a general rule, each chapter of the new Abkhazian textbook devotes significant attention to the linking of the Abkhazian language to the historical past of the territory claimed by Abkhazians either when talking about the language spoken by the inhabitants of Abkhazia during the Iron Age (Lakoba et al 1993, 31) or explaining the origins of the words 'Georgia' and 'Kartvel', through the prism of a 'true ethno-political nomenclature' (Lakoba et al 1993, 90). When the textbook's narrative turns to the discussion of the Georgian-language church inscriptions found in the territory of Abkhazia, it is emphasized that the Georgian language was the language spoken by an 'internationalized Abkhazian elite' in addition to the Abkhazian language, and was not the language known to the majority of the 'common Abkhazian people' (Lakoba et al 1993, 101-105). Therefore, the authors of the Abkhazian textbook do not have a fear of putting as an illustration to this chapter a photograph of the bridge over the Baslati river, already familiar to us, which carries a Georgian-language description and which was used in the Georgian textbooks (Berdzenishvili 1973) as one of the major historical evidences of the Georgian rights on Abkhazia (Lakoba et al 1993, 103).

Another book that serves as an example of the Abkhazian version of history is called "Abkhazians – Who they are?" (Voronov 1993). It was written by Yuri Voronov, whose book was ritually burned during turmoil in Tbilisi in 1978 (see Chapter Five, p.

125). Voronov is building the Abkhazian ties to the area in question following the approach that "the linguists identify the existence of the Abkhazian-Adyghe proto-language by 3rd millennium B.C. The separation of the proto-language into the three major branches: Abkhaz, Ubykh, Adyghei began approximately 4 thousand years ago…" (Voronov 1993, 6). Subsequently, Voronov shows that the Abkhaz language as part of the North-Caucasian language family presents a relic of some ancient language family that existed thousands years ago in the territory of entire Caucasus. With respect to the issue of links between Abkhaz and the Kartvelian languages, Voronov emphasizes that "the hypothesis of closeness of the Abkhazian-Adyghei language [i.e. North-Caucasian] and the Kartvelian (Georgian) languages and of the common Ibero-Caucasian language[12] family is now considered to be erroneous."

Closing our examination of Georgian and Abkhazian versions of the distant past of Abkhazia, which were supported by the authorities from the end of the 1980s to the beginning of the 1990s, it is important to emphasize that despite of the opposing conclusions made by Georgian and Abkhazian historians, their narratives are based on mostly the same historical data, the only difference is the interpretation. Another common approach applied by the scholars is to use language in order to link the corresponding ethnic group to the area in question and justify the first-settlers status in Abkhazia. This is the most crucial element of Georgian and Abkhazian ethnogenetic myths, the basis of the entire construct and the reason why such an enormous political value was attached to language in the course of the conflict. Both Abkhazian and Georgian authorities maintained an extreme degree of historical awareness amongst the population and actively exploited mass media and school system for the propagation of the appropriate version of history, thus constantly strengthening the language-territories complexes and symbolically enclosing Abkhazia. As we will see in the next part of this Chapter, this made a noticeable impact on the behavior of combatants during the 1992-1993 Georgian-Abkhazian war.

6.3. THE WAR AND BEYOND: THE CLASH OF MYTHS CONTINUES

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[12] See Chapter Four for the explanations concerning the notion of the Ibero-Caucasian family of languages

On 14 August 1992, the Georgian National Guard entered Abkhazia (under the pretext of fighting the supporters of Gamsakhurdia), stormed the parliament building and occupied Sukhum. It is obvious that the Georgian myth of ethnogenesis penetrated deeply the minds of the Georgian military. It can be partially proved by the fact that one of the first targets to destroy in Abkhazia were those related to the scholarly research on Abkhazian history. The archives of the Abkhazian Gulia Institute of Language, Literature and History were destroyed along with the National State Archives of Abkhazia. Many other sites associated with the Abkhaz language and history and thus perceived to be the symbols of Abkhazian "separateness" had been perished as well (interview with Vasiliy Avidzba, 4 August 2006). The violent phase of the conflict between Abkhazians and Georgians can be rightfully identified as an ethnic war, if the term is understood as "an organized armed combat between at least two belligerent sides, which involves ethnic markers as language or religion or the status of ethnic groups themselves and where at least one thousand people killed" (Kaufman 2001, 49)[13]. The Georgian troops also clashed with the Russian armed forces stationed in Abkhazia at that time, when Russian militaries were ordered to help to evacuate Russian vacationers from the Abkhazian resort. Some Russian civilians were also killed (Kaufman 2003, 203).

In September, the United Nations dispatched its first fact-finding mission to Abkhazia[14]. In the meantime, the Georgian advance was stopped: the Abkhazian political leadership was able to mobilize the assistance from the indigenous groups in the North Caucasus, Russian Cossack volunteers and members of the Abkhazian Diaspora (descendents of mohajirs) in Turkey (Fairbanks 1999, 26). There are evidences

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[13] According to the Georgian official data, approximately 4,000 people were killed as a result of the war and many more are missing (Web Site of the Georgian parliament at http://www.parliament.ge/GENERAL/HotPoints/ABKHAZIA/gen_E.html accessed 15 October 2005). According to the Commander-in-Chief of the CIS Peacekeeping Forces Sergey Chaban, the figure of direct casualties is 'more than 7,000 people' (interview to "Peacekeeper.ru" on 21 June 2006, http://www.peacekeeper.ru/index.php?mid=1530, accessed 3 July 2006). According to the data provided by the Abkhazian Ministry of Foreign Affairs to the author of this publication during the field trip to Abkhazia in August 2005, the total number of victims of the Georgian-Abkhazian war is more than 20,000 people.
[14] The web site of the UN Observer Mission to Georgia (http://www.un.org/Depts/dpko/missions/unomig/index.html, accessed 25 April 2006).

that the regular Russian army also took part in the fighting siding with Abkhazians[15]. In early October, Abkhazians recaptured the city of Gagra and the rest of the northwest Abkhazia. After an incident in December, in which the Georgian forces shot down a Russian helicopter evacuating Russian refugees, Russian planes bombarded Georgian positions (Kaufman 2003, 203). Georgia was pressured to sign a ceasefire and to pull back heavy weaponry from Abkhazia.

In the next year, 1993, the ceasefire was broken out. Both Abkhazia and Georgia appealed to the UN, OSCE and NATO to intervene. A new ceasefire was agreed by a trilateral agreement sponsored by Russia. In August 1993, a United Nations Military Observer Mission in Georgia was established to monitor the ceasefire[16]. However, on 16 September 1993, the Abkhazian forces launched a surprise attack on Sukhum and took control over the capital on 27 September 1993. The Georgian troops were pooled out of the region and the majority of ethnic Georgian population became refugees[17]. Later that year, a memorandum of understanding was signed between Georgia and Abkhazia in Geneva. However, in March 1994, while Shevardnadze visited the United States, the Georgian parliament disbanded the Abkhazian Supreme Council and the Abkhazian side suspended the negotiations till April, when Georgians and Abkhazians signed a formal ceasefire ("1994 Moscow agreement") and consented to deploy the CIS peacekeeping forces (CISPKF). The problem of internally displaced population was continually discussed during the course of the year but with little progress. In 1997, economic sanctions were imposed on Abkhazia by the member-states of the Commonwealth of Independent States[18]. The restrictions on crossing the border between Abkhazia and Russia were also introduced.

In November 1994, the Supreme Council of Abkhazia approved a new Abkhazian Constitution. Abkhazia was declared a "sovereign democratic state, subject to international law" (The 1994 Constitution of Abkhazia, Article 1). The Article 6 of the Constitution declared that "the official language of the Republic of Abkhazia is

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[15] *Moskovskii komsomolets,* 14 August 2002

[16] http://www.un.org/Depts/dpko/missions/unomig/index.html, accessed 24 April 2006).

[17] Approximately 200,000 people (Kaufman 2003, 204)

[18] Evidently, the sanctions were the result of the Shevardnadze's agreement to join the CIS and to accept the stationing of the Russian troops in Georgia (Kaufman 2003, 204).

Abkhaz. The Russian language as well as the Abkhaz language shall be recognized as the languages of the government, public and other institutions. The state shall guarantee all ethnic groups living in Abkhazia the right to use freely their own languages". Note that no special provision was made for the Georgian language. In contrast, in the new 1995 Georgian constitution, adopted by the Georgian parliament, the status of Abkhazia was not defined. Although the new constitution contained some concessions towards Abkhazians, in particularly, it granted both Georgian and Abkhaz language the official status, the latter had official status only in the territory of Abkhazia while Georgian was official language everywhere in the republic (the Georgian 1995 Constitution, Article 8).

During this period, the negotiations between Abkhazia and Georgia focused on the issue of the Abkhazian status as well as on the return of Georgian refugees to Abkhazia. However, in 1996, new parliamentary elections took place in Abkhazia. The elections were immediately declared illegal by the Georgian government (Kaufman 2003, 203). At the same time, a special representative of the United Nations Secretary-General was appointed to monitor the situation in Abkhazia. A meeting between Shevardnadze and Ardzinba took place in Tbilisi but did not produce any significant results. Meanwhile, the Abkhazian parliament adopted the "Declaration on the Deportation of Abkhazians (Abaza) in the 19th century" (Gumba 2003, 57). The declaration served as the basis for the justification of a new position in the issue of refugees in Abkhazia. From now on, the Abkhazian authorities believed that the return of Georgian refugees can be tied to the issues of Abkhazian "refugees" in Turkey[19]. Immediately, the Georgian historians presented their answer to the new Abkhazian point: "Since 1864, Russian authorities had been constantly considering the option of settling the Russian Cossacks in Abkhazia [on the territory] up to the border on Inguri river, to form Cossacks regiments and finally, to annex this territory to Russia (to the present-day Kuban district). However, the Abkhaz (Georgian)[20] people opposed this provocation, which was one of the reasons for the rebellion in 1866" (J. Gamakharia, B. Gogia, *Abkhazia – Historical Part of Georgia*, Tbilisi, 1997, cited at www.abkhazia.ge).

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[19] This option to condition the return of the Georgian refugees to Abkhazia with the repatriation of ethnic Abkhazians from Turkey is discussed by some Abkhazian intellectuals (Gumba 2003, 34). This is also a stand, which is shared by some staff of the Abkhazian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (interview with M. Gvindzshia in Sukhum on 2 August 2006).

[20] Sic in original!

Thus, paradoxically, according to this version, it was not the Abkhazians, a distinct ethnic group, but Georgians who had to flee to Turkey!

In 1998, elections to local administrations took place in Abkhazia (again declared illegal by Georgia). Serious armed clashes between Abkhazian and Georgian forces occurred in the Gal region in May, the so-called "six-day war", while another confidence-building meeting under the aegis of the United Nations in Athens brought no substantive progress. In December, the Tbilisi-based "Abkhazian government in exile", which consisted of the Georgian deputies to the Abkhazian Supreme Soviet, created the Party for Liberation of Abkhazia (their activities are discussed later on). The next move was made by Abkhazians, and in 1999, on the basis of the referendum on the issue of independence of Abkhazia, organized by the Abkhazian leadership, the independence of Abkhazia was proclaimed. Soon after, however, Abkhazia asked the Russian government to grant Abkhazia the status of "associated member" of the Russian Federation. The request was unsuccessful. During the following two years, periodical violent clashes continued between Abkhazian and Georgian forces. In October 2001, a UN helicopter was shut down during the monitor mission in the Kodori valley leading to a new round of hostilities escalation between Abkhazia and Georgia[21]. In 2002, the mandate of CISPKF expired and it was declared that the peacekeeping forces are leaving Abkhazia. However, later that year, the CISPKF mandate was extended once again.[22]

New parliament elections were conducted in Abkhazia in November 2002[23]. In the following spring of 2003, Abkhazia witnessed a serious political crisis, forcing the prime minister and most of the cabinet members of the Abkhazian government to resign. Apparently, the crisis was related to a new round of trilateral negotiations between Abkhazia, Georgia and Russia that took place earlier this year in Sochi. The details of this Russian-sponsored agreement had not been disclosed to the general public[24]. At the

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[21] http://www.un.org/Depts/dpko/missions/unomig/index.html (accessed 25 April 2006).
[22] As in April 2006, the future of the CISPKF contingent is unclear. Currently, there are 2,500 peacekeepers stationed in Abkhazia (*Nezavisimaya Gazeta* 3 April 2006)
[23] http://lenta.ru/vybory/2002/03/02/abkhazia (accessed in April 2006).
[24] Internet news web-site *Lenta.ru* (http://www.lenta.ru/vojna/2003/01/28/passports/ and *Gazeta.ru* (http://www.gazeta.ru/print/2003/03/07/putinverneta.shtml), accessed in April 2006).

same time, it is very interesting to note that amongst those who organized the anti-governmental protests was the group of Abkhazian intellectuals from the organization Aidgylara, but this time the protests were directed at the Abkhazian political leadership[25]. The following review of the paper published by one of the most prominent contemporary Abkhazian intellectuals shows the reasons for the dissatisfaction of the Abkhazian intellectual elite with the state of affairs in today's Abkhazia.

The paper is authored by the senior researcher of the Abkhazian Gulia Institute for Humanitarian Research, Guram Gumba, and is entitled "The Form and Core of the Nationalist Movement of the Abkhazian People". Many parts of this work were published during the period from November 2002 to January 2003 in various Abkhazian periodicals[26]. It seems that the leitmotif of the Gumba's paper is the idea that "the intellectual elite of the Abkhazian nation has not realized yet the true essence and aim of the Abkhazian national movement" (Gumba 2003, 32). According to the author, the reason for the "backwardness" of Abkhazian intellectuals is "the intensive onset of Georgian intellectuals, who are superior in number and are constantly trying to reject the uniqueness and richness of Abkhazian ethnic and political history, culture, language, including the denial of the proper existence of the Abkhazian ethnic group, which is regarded as one of the Georgian ethnographic groups"(Gumba 2003, 33). The Abkhazian intellectual then continues with his contra-arguments: "The [Abkhazians] are the people with a two-thousand years' practice of a continuous statehood. They were active protagonists of the important historical events and made important contributions in the formation of ancient civilizations. These achievements are used today by many modern states. And the very same people experience the tragedy of doubt if they could exist as a separate state!" (Gumba 2003, 37). According to the author, one "tragedy" leads to another: "… it is sad to admit that part of the Abkhazian people, already free and possessing an independent state, are willing to live rather captive under the severe laws of Russia than to be free and independent" (Gumba 2003, 39)[27]

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[25] *Apsny*, 16 April 2003

[26] *Respublika Abkhazia*, 29 April 2003

[27] The last sentence from the passage quoted above refers to the initiative of the Abkhazian leadership to establish the "associative relations" with the Russian Federation

The end of the year 2003 was marked by dramatic political events in Georgia. During the so-called "rose revolution" in November 2003, Shevardnadze – a man who had ruled Georgia in total for more than 30 years – was forced to resign. The demonstrators led by Mikhail Saakashvili stormed the parliament building in Tbilisi. In January 2004, Saakashvili was elected the president. The new Georgian leader took a strong stand in the issue of 'gathering all Georgian lands together' and declared the return of Abkhazia, Adzharia and South Ossetia under the rule of Tbilisi as a main objective of his government[28]. Later the same year, on 3 October 2004, new presidential elections were held in Abkhazia. These were the first elections, in which Ardzinba, who was the leader of Abkhazia for more than a decade, did not participate. However, Ardzinba strongly backed then-Prime Minister Raul Khadjimba, also evidently supported by Moscow.[29]   Despite all this support, on 12 October Abkhazia's Supreme Court, following a series of contradictory decisions made by the Electoral Committee, declared that the next president of Abkhazia should be Sergei Bagapsh, Khadjimba's opponent. Yet, under the pressure of Ardzinba, this decision was cancelled by the Supreme Court later the same day. After the supporters of Raul Khadjimba seized the building of the Supreme Court and destroyed the protocols from local electoral constituencies, the new elections were in place. Both Moscow and Tbilisi were watching the development of events in Abkhazia very closely but it seems that the first

(http://lenta.ru/vojna/2002/03/01/associated). However, Sukhum failed to explain what exactly is understood by the "associative relations" with Russia. Meanwhile, the Georgian government launched a series of protests related to the issue of the Russian passports in Abkhazia http://rusnet.nl/news/2003/01/27/brief01.shtml, accessed June 12, 2003). According to the Russian law until June 30, 2002, anyone who lived on the territory of the USSR before January 1, 1992, was entitled to receive Russian citizenship using a simplified procedure. Since Abkhazians do not have their own internationally recognized documents (the Abkhazian internal passport had been introduced only in the beginning of 2006), the only way to cross the border between Abkhazia and Russia is to use a Russian passport. In addition, Russian retired nationals living abroad are entitled to receive Russian pensions, which is an important source of income for senior Abkhazians. It is believed that the majority of the Abkhazian adult population posses the Russian passports (*Moskovskii Komsomolets*, June 12, 2002) although the exact numbers have not been disclosed by Moscow. According to the information published in *Literaturanaya Gazeta* (Vol. 28-29, July 10-16 2002) the order to make the procedure of receiving the Russian citizenship by Abkhazians as easy and fast as possible was given directly by the Russian president Putin.
[28] http://www.lenta.ru/vojna/2004/12/16/minister/ (accessed 25 April 2006)
[29] Posters of Russia's President Vladimir Putin together with Khadjimba, who like Putin began his carrier at KGB, were everywhere in Sukhum.

was more successful in forcing opposing candidates to find a common ground[30], and in early December 2004, Bagapsh came to an agreement with Khadjimba under which they would run in new elections under a national unity ticket, with Bagapsh as presidential candidate and Khadjimba as vice-presidential candidate. The ticket won the elections with over 90 per cent of the vote, and the new administration took office on 12 February 2005[31].

It is important to note that during the war and in the post-war period, Georgian intellectuals – supported by the authorities in Tbilisi – continued to cave such myths of the distant past that copy the ideas promoted by Georgian intellectuals in the 1930s-1940s and from the end of the 1980s to the beginning of the 1990s. For example, in the book entitled "On the Traces of Abkhaz Separatism" published in Tbilisi in 1994, a Georgian historian, T. Mibchuani, argues that approximately 80 per cent of present-day Abkhazians are Georgians by their origin. Those Abkhazians of Georgian origin bear Georgian last names and have namesakes common only amongst Georgians. Therefore, "Abkhazians have no any other close relatives in the entire Caucasus but Georgians".[32]

For Georgian authorities, because of the tremendous symbolic power language has in the conflict in Abkhazia, any move to promote the Abkhaz language is considered to be one of the most serious crimes committed by the Abkhazian "separatists". According to the resolution adopted by the Georgian parliament, anyone involved in the crimes against "major human rights and freedoms" in the region of Abkhazia is considered to be an outlaw. Notwithstanding the fact that the Georgian constitution declares Abkhaz the official language in Abkhazia, according to the official resolution of the Georgian parliament, the acts of "violation of the official status of the Georgian language" are among the "major human rights and freedom" violations and come abreast of terror, murder, taking hostages, kidnapping for money extortion, destruction

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[30] From October to November 2004, high-ranking Russian officials visited Sukhum several times
[31] http://www.vpk-news.ru/article.asp?pr_sign=archive.2005.69.articles.cis_01 (accessed 25 April 2006). In time of the author's visit to Abkhazia in August 2005, the Abkhazian government was still undergoing a process of consultations and rotation; some of the positions in the power structures were still vacant as a result.
[32] The web site of the Abkhazian government in exile at www.abkhazia.ge.

and misappropriation of state and refugees properties (the official English translation of Parliament of Georgia Resolution No. 1330-RS, 20 March 2002). It is appropriate to note here that the resolution was adopted in the parliament of Georgia, in which a number of parliamentarians is considered by Georgians to "legally represent the will of the people of Abkhazia"[33]. In addition, the proper office of the "legal government of Abkhazia" (which mostly consists of the Georgian deputies to the Abkhazian parliament elected in 1991) is located in the Georgian parliament compound.

The image of "the government in exile" should not shadow the real power under its control. Immediately after the Georgian-Abkhazian war of 1992-1993, the today's "legitimate government of the Autonomous republic of Abkhazia" was called the "Supreme Soviet of Abkhazia in exile". Since 1994, the "legitimate government of Abkhazia" employs 55 thousand people[34], and has a complex structure, including the Council of Ministers and ministries. It has its own Internal Ministry, which employs over 1,500 people as well as military forces under the direct control by the head of the Abkhazian government in exile, which until recently was headed by a major-general of the Georgian army[35]. The "government" is financed by the state budget of Georgia, and the high-ranking members of this Georgian-supported structure repeatedly argue that "Abkhazia will be never independent! Nobody is going to allow that. Therefore, there is only one option left – to restore peace by force"[36].

The 'Georgian Abkhazians' are also very active in propagating the idea of Abkhazia being always a part of Georgia. The former head of the government Nadareishvili published a book about "genocide in Abkhazia", in which the government in Sukhumi was accused of ignorance of historical evidences and falsification of the history of Abkhazian people (Shnirelman 2001, 311). The book fully supported the ideas

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[33]The official web site of the Georgian parliament http://www.abkhazia-georgia.parliament.ge/ (accessed 20 April 2006)

[34] I.e., one third of all Georgian refugees from Abkhazia!

[35] During the period from 1991 to 2004, the Abkhazian government in exile was headed by Tamaz Nadareishvili (see his interview published at http://www.abkhazeti.ru/pages/main/publik.html, accessed 20 April 2006). In March 2006, Georgian President Saakashvili appointed Malkhaz Akishbaya the new head of the government in exile (http: kavkaz.memo.ru/newstext/news/id/963449.html)

[36] Interview with Tamaz Nadareishvili (published at http://www.abkhazeti.ru/pages/main/publik.html, accessed 20 April 2006)

of Ingoroqva. The author argued that the first settlers of Abkhazia were Georgians and the genuine language of Abkhazians is the Georgian language, which was disturbed by the mass migrations of the Adyghe-Circassian highlanders in the 17th century. At the same time, Abkhazia always remained an integral part of Georgia and there had never been any non-Georgian state there. Thus, the goal must be to revive Georgian genes and spirit (Shnirelman 2001, 312). Another example of the propaganda conducted by the 'Abkhazian government in exile' is a brochure entitled "Who Are Abkhazians?", which content is reproduced in the Internet[37]. The words ascribed to Dmitriy Gulia, are used as an epigraph: "Abkhaz and Georgians are the same" to the part describing "The Horrors of Abkhaz Separatism". Without any reservation, the anonymous author starts his story by telling the visitors of the web-page that "Abkhazia is the same old and origin[al] part of Georgia such as Samegrelo, Guria, Adjara, Imereti, Svaneti, Kakheti, etc. Population of these geographical areas of Georgia is called Abkhaz, Mingrelians, Gurians, Adjarians, Imeretians, Svanetians, Kakhetinians, etc. However, all of them are Georgians and *their language was and still is the Georgian language as well* [emphasis added]". Why is that? According to the logic of the author of the pamphlet, it is because "all Christian cultural monuments of Abkhazia with Georgian epigraphy till 19th century are of Georgian origin". As was explained above, the overwhelming importance of the inscriptions found in churches and monasteries in the territory of Abkhazia for showing the "Georgian connection" has been built-up on the basis of the postulate of "the Georgian language continuously used in the area for a thousand years". Hence the conclusions: "They [Abkhazians] can survive in unified Georgia [only]" and "[Kin]-related Georgians and Abkhazian peoples do not need any mediator at all. They will find out mutual language [by] themselves, like namesakes and relatives, form their own government and ruling bodies".

In addition, a significant part of the pamphlet is dedicated to the discussion of the role of intelligentsia in defining the fate of Abkhazia. The author is impressed by the idea that "Abkhazians was so highly committed to the single state of Georgia and Georgian nation that it took [Russians] more than one century to [subordinate] one part of Abkhaz intelligentsia (higher strata of population)." In the subsequent part, however,

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[37] http://www.abkhazeti.ru/pages/main/history.html, accessed 25 April 2006

the logic refuses to serve the writer: "The majority of subordinated Abkhaz intelligentsia was those foreigners turned to Abkhazian "nationality", who were granted privileges in acquiring top positions in the highest government bodies… Abkhazia turned into arena of outrageous activities of strangers. Russian ideological services *physiologically* have [pressured] Abkhazian people for more than [a] century in order to create the Image of Enemy [out of] Georgians. For this purpose, they fabricated tens of written publications, radio and TV programs, declaring that Georgians had not lived in Abkhazia until the 20th century, trying thereby to mislead those unconcerned" The names of Voronov and Turchaninov are mentioned amongst the authors of the publications that 'falsify the true history of Abkhazia'.

Concluding the "introductory" part, the author emphasized the importance of language issue. The object of attention is now Stanislav Lakoba, who, "encouraged by successes of anti-Georgian ideological war" and "devoted to Ardzinba's policy argued that world community would speak Abkhaz language in the nearest future, while actually this language (Adigei-Apsua) is known by the minority of Abkhazian people". According to the publication, the consequences of the Lakoba's approach are dramatic: "All mentioned [above] stimulated certain euphoria among Abkhaz separatists, which, in its turn, gave them impetus to accomplish heavy crimes against humanity and mankind that are still remained unanswered".

The continuation of claiming the first-settler status by Georgians in the large territory of the South Caucasus can be also clearly seen from the examination of the narratives of contemporary Georgian textbooks, which reflect the official version of history approved by the authorities. For instance, describing geography of Southern Georgia, the textbook entitled "Motherland" (for the use at 4th grades) explains students that 'in the past, the territory of Georgia was much bigger than today, and the state border lied much further to the South. The enemies were constantly trying to tear away the southern part of Georgia and partially reached their objectives: some indigenous Georgian territory is now making part of Turkey' (*Rodina* 1999, 83). The narrative in the 1998 edition of the textbook of Georgian history to be used in the 8th grade goes even further: it claims extensive areas of 'genuine Georgian lands', which nowadays

make part of Azerbaijan and Dagestan and some of which Georgia lost as far back in the past as 600 years ago! (*Istoriya gruzii uchebnik dlya 8 klassa* 1998, 8). In modern Georgian textbooks, the word 'enemy' is frequently used. E.g., 'enemies' are blamed for 'sowing hostilities between Georgian and Abkhazian people in order to detach genuine Georgian land – Abkhazia – from Georgia (*Istoriya gruzii uchebnik dlya 8 klassa* 1998, 80-81). The task of explaining to 4-graders who those enemies are is left for teachers since the textbook's narrative never provides an explicit answer to this question. However, the narratives of the textbooks for higher grades contain many references to the historic animosity of non-Georgian people toward Georgians (for example, when describing 'the insidiousness of the North Caucasian mountain people,' i.e. Ossetians: see *Istoriya gruzii uchebnik dlya 9 klassa* 1998, 19), in addition to the numerous references to the cruelty of Russians and Turks.

In modern Georgian history and geography school textbooks, language continues to be extensively employed in order to link Georgian ethnic group to the past of the disputed territories. For example, the authors of the Russian-language edition of the geography textbook to be used by 8th-graders equate the importance of studying geography to learning of the Georgian language and history (*Geografia gruzii* 1998, introduction). Therefore, in addition to the provision of the geographical names in the Georgian language throughout the textbook, authors put a map, which shows the spread of the languages in the Caucasus, even before political and physical maps of Georgia! Not surprisingly, the Abkhaz language is listed in the same group as the Georgian language (*Geografia gruzii* 1998, 5). The other textbook, starting with the argument of the linguistic similarities between the language of the Urartu people and the modern Georgian language (*Istoriya gruzii dlya 8 klassa* 1998, 22-23), emphasizes the use of 'Kartli (Georgian) language as lingua franca in the Western Georgia (i.e. the territory, which, in the Georgian interpretation, includes Abkhazia) as early as in 4-3 centuries BC (*Istoriya gruzii dlya 8 klassa* 1998, 26). Thus, when later on, following numerous mentions of the importance to study the origins and history of the Georgian language for Georgians today, the textbook's narrative turns to the description of the foundation of a new state formation in the northern-western part of the Caucasus in the end of the 7th century AD, students must not be surprised that, according to the authors of the textbook,

this was a 'big Georgian state' created under the name of the 'Abkhazian Kingdom' (*Istoriya gruzii dlya 8 klassa* 1998, 77). In another chapter, dedicated to the description of the processes leading to the creation of a united Georgian nation, the authors argue that, in the beginning of the 9th century, it was the Georgian language, which prevailed in 'every corner of the historic Georgia' (i.e. including the territory of Abkhazia) and 'started to spread in the Northern Caucasus, among Ossetians as well' (*Istoriya gruzii dlya 8 klassa* 1998, 99-101). The chapter is followed by an assignment to answer the question "What was the role of the Georgian language [in the process of the formation of the unified Georgian nation]?" (*Istoriya gruzii dlya 8 klassa* 1998, 106). Overall, upon finishing the reading of any Georgian history textbook, few readers are left without the impression that there is no other language, which has more historical links to the vast territory of the South Caucasus than the Georgian language.

The role of language for Abkhazians is continued to be highly appreciated by the Abkhazian authorities as well. To understand the place of the Abkhaz language in contemporary Abkhazia, the activities of the State Fund for the Abkhaz language are worth mentioning here. As we show in previous Chapter, only a very small part of the population of Abkhazia is fluent in Abkhaz[38]. That is why one of the main objectives of the Foundation is to expand the knowledge of Abkhaz amongst Abkhazians. Various methods have been used: more hours are dedicated to teaching of Abkhaz at schools and the number of publications in the Abkhaz language had increased. A special budget is allocated to the translation of animated films for children to the Abkhaz language. At the same time, no official language policy in the form of a language law has been adopted in Abkhazia although a draft for the language law has been discussed for a number of years[39]. The domains of the use of Abkhaz language remain very limited and it is likely that there are less speakers of Abkhaz nowadays then there were in 1993[40]. However, as we showed in this Chapter, the Abkhazian leadership continues to exploit the Abkhaz

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[38] There is no any reliable data showing the number of speakers of Abkhaz in Abkhazia today (Interview with G. Kvitsinia, the head of the State Fund for the Abkhaz language, Sukhum, 5 August 2006)

[39] Since 2005, the new Abkhazian government is trying to speed up the adoption of the language law. Following the initiative of the President Bagapsh, a special group within the government was created (Interview with Maxym Gvindzshia, 2 August 2005). However, the issue has not been resolved up to the date.

[40] *Respublika Abkhazia,* 29-30 April 2003

language as a key political resource in its opposition to the Georgian ethnic group by maintaining the role of Abkhaz in linking the Abkhazian ethnic group to the territory in question through the myth of Abkhazian ethnogenesis.

Summing up, from our examination of the developments that led to the 1992-1993 Georgian-Abkhazian war, the course of the war and the after-war period, it is clear that the attempts at mutual enclosure of Abkhazia were continuous and greatly contributed to the growth of ethnic hostilities between Georgians and Abkhazians. In the following part, we would like to take a brief look at the role of language in other South Caucasian cases, namely, in Georgian-South Ossetia and in Armenian-Azerbaijani ethnic rivalries.

6.4. THE POLICY OF ETHNIC ENCLOSURE IN SOUTH OSSETIA

A review of the place devoted to language in political discourses of ethnic leadership in other cases of ethnic rivalries in the Soviet Caucasus shows appealing similarities with the case of the Georgian-Abkhazian conflict. In South Ossetia, language was clearly exploited in a similar way to the Abkhazian case.

The principal point of disagreement between Georgians and Ossetians is the *historical right* of the Ossetians to political autonomy within the boundaries of the territory which is known today as South Ossetia. There is agreement amongst most historians that the Ossetian ethnic group was formed as a result of the mixing of nomadic Iranian-speaking Alans, who arrived from the Eurasian steeps, with the local highlanders from the central Caucasus (Shnirelman 2003, 462). The Alans' state suffered heavy losses from the Mongols, and they had to leave fertile lowlands and take refuge in the highland gorges. It was during further mass migrations caused by the Mongol invasions that some Alans began to cross the Great Caucasian Ridge and infiltrate the territory of the South Caucasus, including the territory of today's South Ossetia. However, in the 17th – 18th centuries AD a significant number of Ossetians started their "descent" from the hills to the fertile southern lowlands of Georgia, a step which was welcomed by local Georgian landlords, who needed labour. Therefore, the Georgian myth of the distant past categorically identifies Ossetians as the "newcomers"

in the area. Such a conclusion is confirmed, from the Georgian point of view by, for example, the evidence that many historical names in South Ossetia are based on the Georgian language (Lordkipanidze 1990, 66-67). That is why, while the Georgian ethnogenetic myth does not deny the links between Ossetians and Alans, it denies any "linguistically-proven" indications of the presence of the Ossetian ancestors in the territory of South Caucasus.

When this historical discourse became an official history in Georgia shortly before the Second World War, the script of the Ossetic language was changed to a Georgian-based one, and soon after all schools with Ossetic as the language of instruction in the territory of South Ossetia were closed down (Shnirelman 2003, 463). However, South Ossetian historians tried to show that the area in question presents clear evidence of a strong cultural-linguistic continuity of the Alan-Ossetian people – speakers of the Iranian language– during more than two thousand years. South Ossetians argue that Iranian-speaking ancestors dominated the process of the Ossetian ethnogenesis, and they push the Iranian tradition deep into the history of the Caucasus by demonstrating the uninterrupted millennial presence of Iranian-speakers in the Caucasus, especially in its central part. The close links between the Alans and another people of the ancient Caucasus – the Scythians – have also been established by Ossetian historians. Thus, the South Ossetian ethnogenetic myth presents Ossetians as the direct descendants of the Alans (i.e. the original Iranian-speakers) AND the Scythians. It also postulates that the people who lived in the area in question in the distant past as early as the 1st century AD probably spoke an Indo-European language, if not an Indo-Iranian language (*Ocherki istorii yougo-osetii* 1985, 58-59). This allows South Ossetians to justify their status as the first-settlers in the territory in question and significantly extend their ethnic boundaries. Summing up, the clash of Georgian and South Ossetian ethnogenetic myths can be rightfully regarded as attempts to ethnically enclose the territory of South Ossetia.

6.5. ETHNIC ENCLOSURE IN ARMENIAN AND AZERBAIJANI TEXTBOOKS

The names of Nagorny Karabakh and Nakhichevan made headlines of the world newspapers in the second part of the 1980s. It was one of the first indications of the

coming serious ethnic turmoil in the Soviet Caucasus. However, a 'peaceful co-existence' of Armenian and Azerbaijani official ethnic histories was more than questionable during the most part of the Soviet history.

Here again, we can observe a case of symbolic ethnic enclosure by rival ethnic group, Armenian and Azerbaijani. We will start our comparison with the examination of the textbooks dedicated to the Armenian ethnic history. The teaching of the history of Armenian people was officially introduced in Armenian schools early in the 1930s and had been taught uninterruptedly on a regular basis to the high school students throughout the entire Soviet period (Shnirelman 2003, 73). Thereat, the Armenian history textbooks stand apart not only from the Azerbaijani textbooks but also from the textbooks published in other republics in that as the name of the course suggested, the textbook pretended to explain the historical development not of an ethno-territorial entity as in the case of other textbooks but of the entire ethnic group, the 'Armenian people'. Of course, the plans of the unification of Soviet Armenia with the former Armenian territories outside the Soviet borders, which were in Moscow's agenda during a certain period of the Stalin's rule, had to do a lot with this fact, but we also have to remember that, contrary to the Azerbaijani historical school formed in the beginning of the 20th century, the origins of the Armenian historiographic tradition can be dated as early as 1st millennium AD[41].

The early Soviet textbooks of the Armenian history followed the tradition of the pre-revolutionary Armenian historical school by showing the migration of the Armenian ancestors from the West to the East, their gradual colonization of the Armenian highland and their assimilation of indigenous tribes that happened to live here before Armenians (*Istoriya armyanskogo naroda* 1944, 30-31). However, with the strengthening of the positions of the Azerbaijani historiography and the growing importance of the first-settlers dogma for achieving a successful symbolic ethnic enclosure, on the one hand, and the growing tensions in Nakhichevan and Nagorno-Karabakh, on the other hand, the authors of the Armenian textbooks started to

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[41] After all, in the second part of the 1940s Stalin had similar plans with respect to Azerbaijan as well: he wanted to unify Soviet and Iranian parts of Azerbaijan. See L. Fawcett, *Iran and the Cold War: the Azerbaijan crisis of 1946*, Cambridge and New York: University Press, 1992.

place a greater emphasis on the local Anatolian ancestors of the Armenians (*Istoriya armyanskogo naroda* 1950, 21). As a result, since the middle of the 1960s, the official version of the Armenian history was to view the Armenians as the only autochthonous inhabitants on the vast historical area of Asia Minor, and the only inheritors of the Urartu state (Shnirelman 2003, 74).

The 1972 edition of the textbook of Armenian history is a good example of a symbolic ethnic enclosure if the latter is understood in terms of expanding the ethnic homeland in time and space dimensions (*Istoriya armyanskogo naroda* 1972, the print run of the Russian-language edition is 8,000 copies). The textbook's narrative begins with the statement that originally Armenia occupied a vast territory from the Euphrates River in the East to the Mediterranean coastline in the West (*Istoriya armyanskogo naroda* 1972, 3). The students then were required to identify the borders of the original Armenian territory on the map. In order to create a link between Urartu people and modern Armenians, it is argued that while the traces of the Urartu culture have been found in cultures of several modern ethnic groups, it is only Armenians who can be truly considered the direct descendents of Urartians because the Urartu culture flourished on the Armenian soil and because Urartians transmitted their skills and customs to Armenians. The evidences? The modern Armenian vocabulary contains many words from the language of Urartians! An illustration showing an Urartian cuneiform writing accompanies the discussion of the Armenian linguistic heritage (*Istoriya armyanskogo naroda* 1972, 12-13).

In the chapter entitled 'The origins of the Armenian people', the authors acknowledge that there is no common view on the issue of the Armenian ethnogenesis and tales and myths cannot be treated as accurate sources of information. However, they then immediately suggest that all tribes, who lived in Great Armenia in the distant past, spoke various dialects of one and the same language – Armenian, and this is a clear evidence of the continues use of the Armenian language everywhere in this territory (*Istoriya armyanskogo naroda* 1972, 16-17). The textbook refers to the observations made by the Greek geographer Strabon and provides students with an extract from Strabon's writings on the spread of the Armenian language in the area in question

(*Istoriya armyanskogo naroda* 1972, 34-35). According to the explanations provided by the textbook, when this territory was divided between Rome and Persia in 387 AD, the Armenian kingdom continued to play an important role, and the foundation of the Armenian writing system and literature was laid down as early as in 405-406 AD (*Istoriya armyanskogo naroda* 1972, 47-48). The theme of the importance of the Armenian language for the fate of the Armenians continues through the narrative and the textbook devoted a half page for the photograph of the cover of the first Armenian printed book (*Istoriya armyanskogo naroda* 1972, 130).

Explaining the relations between Armenians and other ethnic groups, the textbook points out the cooperation between Armenians and Georgians but tends to emphasize the superior role of Armenians in these unions (*Istoriya armyanskogo naroda* 1972; 54, 74, 93). This position is very different from the one expressed in earlier textbooks (*Istoriya armyanskogo naroda* 1944: 30-31; *Istoriya armyanskogo naroda* 1950, 19), when Armenian authors were willing to share the Urartu heritage with the Georgians and to acknowledge the presence of other historical groups, such as Albanians, extremely important for Azerbaijani historians[42]. Thus, after the 1960s, in the Armenian textbooks, a huge part of the South Caucasus became ethnically enclosed exclusively by the Armenians.

If the Armenian historians had to find a suitable solution for the first part of the "first-settlers + continuous use of language" equation, Azerbaijani scholars faced, perhaps, a more difficult task of solving the second part of the equation. The work under the first edition of the school textbook of Azerbaijani history started in 1935 but was interrupted in 1937 (the authors happened to be arrested, Shnirelman 2003, 135). However, the historians, newly appointed for this work, managed to finish the textbook draft fast, before the spring of 1939. As the enclosure technique was still in its testing stage by the Azerbaijani authors, they did not pay the necessary attention to the language issue but, instead, uncompromisingly called all ancient tribes in the territory of the modern Azerbaijan "Azerbaijanians"[43]. The textbook's narrative was tolerant with

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[42] Caucasian Albania was an ancient state founded in the late 4th – early 3rd century BC, which occupied the territories including those claimed in modern times by both Azerbaijan and Armenia
[43] While the proper name "Azerbaijan" was adapted by historians as late as in the 18th century

respect to the fact that those "Azerbaijanians" happened to speak the Armenian language before the Seljuk invasion[44] forced them to switch to a Turkic language (*Istoriya azerbaijanskoi ssr* 1939). The case was different, though, with the next edition of the textbook, which was published just two years later. From now on, the Albanian alphabet[45] (introduced in the 5th century AD by the Armenian enlightener Mesrop Maštots) was declared Azeri, thus given to this ethnic group the missing element – a gift of a writing system, which could easily compete in terms of its antiquity with the Armenian and Georgian writing systems (*Istroiya azerbaijana* 1941, 42). Later, the Azerbaijanian historians made a few good attempts to get rid of the uncomfortable presence of an Armenian in the story with the Albanian alphabet. For example, the 1972 edition of the textbook of the 'History of Azerbaijan' is presented as a new step towards having a better textbook of the Azerbaijani history written based on the latest achievements of the modern Soviet science (*Istoriya Azerbaijana* 1972, the print run of the Russian-language edition is 40.000). This textbook devotes to Mesrop Maštots a much more modest role of a "digester" of the previously existed Albanian alphabet (*Istoriya Azerbaijana* 1972, 27). The photograph of an Albanian inscription occupies a central place of the textbook's page devoted to the explanations of the Albanian writing system (*Istoriya Azerbaijana* 1972, 26).

The 1972 edition of the Azerbaijani history textbook is a clear indication of how far the authors of the textbook have advanced in the task of combining the first-settler principle with the postulate of the continuous use of language in comparison with the 1939 edition of the textbook. *Exempli gratia*, the Azerbaijani historians could not avoid the discussion of the issue of the history of Nagorno-Karabakh for understandable reasons. While in the previous editions of the textbook, the 'existence of strong cultural-economic ties' was used as an explanation of the inclusion of the Armenian Nagorno-Karabakh to the Soviet Azerbaijan, in the 1970s, the authors of the textbook have managed to show – using language as an evidence! – that Nagorno-Karabakh is originally an Azerbaijani land and Armenians are the late-comers

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(Shnirelman 2003, 136)

[44] Seljuk Turks from Central Asia invaded the area in the 11th century.

[45] The Albanians are believed to spoke Udi, language which belongs to the North-Caucasian family of languages. The majority of modern Azerbaijanis speak Azeri, a Turkic language belonging to the Altaic family of languages.

to the area in question. According to the 1972 edition of the textbook, the area of Artsakh (Nagorno-Karabakh) the Armenian population used the territory as a shelter from the invading Arab Caliphate in the 8th century and their language was mixed with the language of the local autochthonous Albanian tribes, resulting in the emergence of the 'Karabakh dialect of the Armenian language' (*Istoriya Azerbaijana* 1972, 20). A few pages later but in connection with the previous description, Azerbaijani students learned that the population of Karabakh spoke the Albanian language and the tribes, who inhabited the area between the Kura and Aras rivers, spoke the Aran language, which was devoted the status of an intermediate joint between the languages of the Albanian tribes and the modern Azeri language, thus significantly expanding the territory under the Azerbaijani control in the distant past (*Istoriya Azerbaijana* 1972, 23). It is obvious that the mission to ethnically enclose the territory disputed with Armenians was eventually successfully carried out by the authors of the Azerbaijani history textbooks.

CONCLUSION

Let us first summarize what we discussed so far in this publication.

In *Chapter One*, we reviewed major previous studies on ethnicity. The review showed that shared language is one of the most important defining criteria of an ethnic group. The modernist approaches to explain the role of language in the context of modernization, especially in the context of nation-building or state-building, effectively establishes that a shared language is a prerequisite for a modern nation. Many scholars of ethnicity also correctly emphasize the role of ethnogenetic myth and system of its dissemination (school system and print media). Yet, they do not provide us with any clue to the cases where two or more ethnic groups are competing or rivaling with each other. Moreover, they assume that the sharing of a common language is real or achieved successfully. However, in order to explore the role of language in ethnic conflict in general or Caucasian ethnic conflicts in particular, we need to deal with such cases that are neglected by the previous studies on ethnicity.

For this purpose in mind, we examined several conceptual tools and concepts so far proposed to deal with ethnic hostility and conflict. Among them are the notion of nested conflict, homogenization and differentiation of language, elite closure, and language officialization. On the basis of the review, we proposed a new concept of ethnic enclosure as a theoretical framework to understand the role of language in ethnic rivalry or conflict.

The concept of ethnic enclosure enables us to view ethnic rivalry as a process of simultaneous exclusion and inclusion, i.e. as enclosure. The model of ethnic enclosure was introduced so as to account for a specific type of the policy of ethnic leadership aimed at the exclusion of rival ethnic group(s) from the disputed territory. A policy of ethnic enclosure heavily relies on the employment of such myths of ethnogenesis, which expand in time and space dimensions the group's attachment to the territory in question and which place argument of the continuous use of language by the ethnic group at the core of the entire myth's construct.

It is possible to distinguish two facets of ethnic enclosure: symbolic and practical. As a result of the attempts to implement a symbolic ethnic enclosure, ethnic groups acquire a language-territory complex – a particular way of collective remembering based on a strong correlation between the territorial boundaries of the ethnic group, its ascribed language and the historical past of the territory in question. Often, the process of the formation, maintenance and spread of language-territory complex is a cyclical one. Moreover, in the case of mutual ethnic enclosures, language-territory complexes are formed simultaneously among the ethnic groups that are involved in a territorial dispute. Thus, the existence of a strong language-territory complex can be an important feature of the relationships between ethnic groups and one of the causes of long persistence of inter-ethnic hostilities.

Next it was necessary to examine Soviet language and ethnic policies to properly set the context of the Caucasian ethnic conflicts, because they are both constrained and accelerated by the Soviet policies. In *Chapter Two* we showed that despite the changes of policies, fluctuations between internationalization (Russification) and indigenization, the essence of the Soviet ethnic policies have been consistent. The Soviet administrative territorial division was hierarchical and ethnic, and ethnic groups were ranked and placed somewhere in the territorial-administrative hierarchy of the Soviet Union. In the hierarchy some ethnic groups enjoyed greater autonomy according to their rank, while others suffered from lower rank and less autonomy. The most important criterion of this ranking was language, more precisely, the language that is uniquely associated with a particular ethnic group.

The system of ranking of languages became closely linked to the system of ethno-territorial division in the USSR. The Soviet political settings facilitated the implementation of the policy of ethnic enclosure by leaders of ethnic autonomies in the Soviet Union and provided a fertile ground for the growth of strong language-territory complexes among rival ethnic groups in many parts of the USSR. This was one of the reasons why the efforts of ethnic leaders had to be directed towards language, in order to maintain or upgrade the status of their group in the hierarchy, and usually this objective could be achieved by the promotion of an appropriate myth of ethnogenesis,

the core element of the policy of ethnic enclosure.

In *Chapter Three* we showed what was actually done in order to create, maintain and disseminate ethnogenetic myths that could be used in the process of ethnic enclosure. Under the Soviet political settings, language was considered to be the "primordialized" property of an ethnic group, and it was necessary to show that the ethnic group in question had continued to use its own, distinct language for a significantly long period of time. Moreover, the postulate of the continuous use of a distinct language had to be linked to the first-settlers status in the territory of autonomous unit. The outcome of the efforts to maintain or upgrade the status of an ethnic group was closely tied to the availability of historically-proven link between the area inhabited by the ethnic group and the language ascribed to the ethnic group. However, often there were the scarcity of historical evidences or they were contradictory. That is how the role of intellectuals became of an enormous importance.

The way intellectuals were involved in the process of myths construction in the Soviet Union can be viewed as a staged process and it is necessary to adapt ethnogenetic myths with the shifts in the Soviet language policy. When indigenous historians conducted their research on the topics concerned with the distant past of the area in question, the results of such academic endeavor were in high demand by ethnic leadership, which needed scientific evidences to support the politically important stand of the continuous use of language by the ethnic group. The simplified versions of academic publications were turned into official histories, incorporated in textbooks of local history and made public through mass media, thus, leading to the transformation of a purely scientific account of the distant past into a myth of ethnogenesis held by the majority of ethnic group.

In addition, the teachers of local histories in Soviet autonomies were allowed a significant degree of freedom in choosing the methodology of teaching and the curricula content, which, in turn, facilitated the process of myths dissemination and absorption. Furthermore, since the changes of official histories of one or another ethnic group were part of the policy of ethnic enclosure, the introduction of new interpretations of the

distant past and attempts at changing the patterns of perception with regard to language ascribed to the ethnic group in question greatly contributed to the growth of language-territory complexes of rival ethnic groups.

Another main objective of this research was to apply the notion of ethnic enclosure in order to explain the role of language in ethnic rivalries in the Caucasus. The focus of our attention in *Chapters Four, Five* and *Six* was on the conflict in Abkhazia. The examination of the role of language in the Georgian-Abkhazian conflict disclosed some very important aspects of how language is exploited as a political resource. It is possible to summarize the major findings as follows.

Firstly, due to the unfavorable treatment of Abkhazians by the Russian colonial administration in the 19th century and as a result of the policy of the re-settlement of non-Abkhazians (mostly Georgians) in the territory of Abkhazia during the first part of the 20th century, the ethnic composition of the population in the territory in question dramatically changed. This can be seen as part of physical enclosure (homogenization) on the part of Georgians. Ethnic Abkhazians numerically became a minority in Abkhazia and suffered a significant language shift to the Russian language. However, since language was a crucial political resource, the real ability of population to comprehend Abkhaz, Georgian or Russian mattered the least while the perceived identity or differentiation – the most. That is why, during the entire course of the development of the Georgian-Abkhazian ethnic rivalry, the ethnic leaders in Abkhazia and Georgia were able to exploit language as a political resource based on the formation, maintenance and dissemination of opposing patterns of perception with respect to the Abkhaz language.

Secondly, the conflict between Abkhazians and Georgians during the most of the Soviet period had a nested structure. On the one hand, Georgians were the titular ethnic group of a union republic and subordinated to the central authorities in Moscow. On the other hand, Georgians were a dominant group with respect to Abkhazians, since Abkhazian autonomy was made part to Georgia. Hence, the struggle for the maintenance and upgrading of the status of the ethnic group became a key objective of

the political leadership in Abkhazia. The Soviet political settings for the status struggle required ethnic groups to demonstrate the continuous use of their ascribed language in combination with the first-settlers principle and the roots of Abkhazian and Georgian ethnic groups were extended deep into the remote past. Here, it was language, which enabled – through the construction of ethnocentric myths – the perceived identification of the population that inhabited Abkhazian territory in the distant past with ancestors of Abkhazians (in the case of the Abkhazian myth of ethnogenesis) or Georgians (in the case of the Georgian ethnogenetic myth). These are clear examples where language plays a great role in the ethnogenetic myths.

Thirdly, the school system and mass media were actively used by both parties to the conflict in order to distribute new versions of history and, consequently, to reinforce the myths of ethnogenesis. During the most of the 20th century, the shifts in the Soviet political environment created opportunities for Abkhazian and Georgian ethnic leaderships to promote opposing versions of official histories of Abkhazian and Georgian ethnogenesis, sometimes even simultaneously, leading to the emergence of myths construction. That is why the role of intellectuals in the construction of an appropriate version of the distant past became of crucial importance. In addition, the Soviet education system allowed a significant degree of academic freedom in the teaching of local histories, and both Georgian and Abkhazian school students were constantly exposed to the rival versions of history of the distant past of Abkhazia. In the narratives of locally published textbooks, language was always presented as a key evidence of the first-settlers status of ancestors of Abkhazians (in Abkhazian textbooks) or Georgians (in Georgian textbooks).

Fourthly, the examination of the development of the Georgian-Abkhazian ethnic rivalry during the period from the end of the 1950s to the end of the 1980s exposed an interesting phenomenon of the so-called Abkhazian letters. The Abkhazian letters clearly exemplifies the nested nature of the conflict. More importantly, however, these letters, like other documents, emphasized the existence of 'scientifically proven' evidences for Abkhazians being first-settlers in the area and Abkhaz being spoken continuously in Abkhazia from time immemorial. Besides, the authors of the letters

denounced Georgian 'falsification of historical truth', pointing out the facts of the appearance of new versions of history produced by Georgian intellectuals or publications in mass media of 'distorted' descriptions of Abkhazian history. The letters were sent directly to the central authorities in Moscow but the content of the letters was always made known to the majority of Abkhazians and generated mass support among them. Normally, Moscow was forced to respond to the letter in one way or another, providing Abkhazians with some concessions, and, thus, the Abkhazian letters can be considered an important tool of the status struggle in the specific nested settings of the Soviet ethno-territorial division.

Fifthly, by its goals, methods, and the way the war is financed, the Georgian-Abkhazian ethnic war is a clear example of a new type of war resulting from a political rivalry that turned violent. According to Mary Kaldor, in 'new wars', political elites heavily rely on 'new identity' politics, which are employed in the context of the failure or the corrosion of other sources of political legitimacy. This type of identity politics is inherently exclusive and therefore tends to fragmentation (Kaldor 1999, 78-79). Kaldor also points out one of the most important characteristics of a new warfare, namely, that while avoiding open battle, 'warring parties share the aim of sowing 'fear and hatred'… and operate in a way that is mutually reinforcing, helping each other to create a climate of insecurity and suspicion' (Kaldor 1999, 9). The continuous reinforcement of language-territory complexes at a core of attempts at mutual ethnic enclosure of Abkhazia implemented by Georgian and Abkhazian ethnic leaderships after the active combat is over is surely attributive to the persistence of hostilities between Georgians and Abkhazians.

It is also possible to agree with theorists of the new war approach that the strategic aim in this type of warfare is population expulsion, which leads to forced migration and displacement. Actually, the striking increase in the number of internally displaced persons and refuges in contemporary world is a direct result of the tactics of the warring parties to target primarily civilians in those violent conflicts that can be characterized as new wars and in which land or valuable recourses are at stake[1].

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[1] See, e.g., Rouvinski and Vasquez 2005 for the examination of the case of IDPs in Colombia.

However, although the wars in the Caucasus are indeed fought over tangible resources such as territory or resources, what differentiate Caucasian cases from many other new wars and what make the achievement of effective conflict resolution in this region so difficult are the intangibles like myths and symbols. That is why the conflicts in the Caucasus can be better explained by the concept of ethnic enclosure. As argued by Kaufman, '[e]xisting strategies of conflict resolution fail in ethnic wars because they are based on an inadequate understanding of how ethnic identities work, why group members mobilize for war, and how they can be mobilized for peace' (Kaufman 2006, 203). In fact, various efforts of international mediators to reach a lasting solution and escape stalemates in Abkhazia, South Ossetia or Nagorny Karabakh have not being successful so far[2].

Some scholars explain the persistence of ethnic hostilities in the Caucasus by the notion of security dilemma[3]. Indeed, the actions of Caucasian ethnic leaderships in the end of the 1980s, when the degree of Moscow's control over the Caucasus started to diminish, can be explained by the rise of their security concerns. Moreover, as we showed in this publication, during the entire Soviet period, the appeals to the notion of historical superiority of one's ethnic group with respect to the disputed territory and the importance of this stand for the well-being of the members of the ethnic group in question in the specific Soviet political settings undoubtedly contributed to the rise of fear and insecurity among Abkhazians and Georgians.

Last but not least, our case study in this volume clearly confirmed the major assumptions of the notion of ethnic enclosure as regards the way language functions in an ethnic rivalry. It can be argued that the entire course of the development of the Georgian-Abkhazian conflict can be viewed as a sequence of attempts at ethnic

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[2] As Gen Kikkawa emphasized, the absence of an international standard for the recognition of independence is one of the obstacles for "making the domestic root causes of conflicts a matter of international concern so the international community … can play a more effective role…"(Kikkawa 2003, 55).

[3] See, e.g., Nodia (1997), Haindrava (1999). The notion of security dilemma, applied to the study of ethnic conflicts by Barry Posen, refers to the situation when two parties – in our case ethnic groups – are drawn into conflict even though none of them actually desires a conflict at the first place. The dilemma raises because "what one does to enhance one's own security causes reactions that, in the end, can make one less secure" (cited in Kaufman 2001, 9).

enclosure by Georgian and Abkhazian ethnic leaders and both Abkhazians and Georgians hold a very strong language-territory complex. With the demise of the real control of the Soviet authorities over the Caucasus in the end of the 1980s, the clash of Georgian and Abkhazian attempts to implement the policy of ethnic enclosure in Abkhazia led to a dramatic escalation of ethnic confrontation and resulted in an ethnic war. Today, the continuation of the attempts to ethnically enclose Abkhazia is one of the major reasons for the endurance of the hostilities between Abkhazians and Georgians.

Let us now summarize the main conclusions as a result of the examination of language and conflict in this volume. They are threefold.

First, on the basis of the review of previous studies on ethnicity and ethnic conflict and considering the Soviet ethnic policy, we proposed the concept of ethnic enclosure as a model to understand persistent ethnic rivalry and hostility where a shared political myth with an intangible factor like language at its core plays a very important role.

Secondly, the case study in this volume presents the first attempt at a comprehensive examination of the role of language in the Georgian-Abkhazian conflict, providing an overview of the conflict process as a continuous development from the 19th century to the present day. The new concept of ethnic enclosure accounts for the long process of clashes of myths between Georgians and Abkhazians. The concept can also be applied to other Caucasian conflicts such as Georgian-South Ossetian conflict and Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict over Nagorny Karabakh.

Thirdly, through the case study under the framework of ethnic enclosure, the present publication demonstrated that an intangible or symbolic factor like language is one important dimension of ethnic conflict.

Epilogue

There is a traditional game in Abkhazia. It is called "Charazh". The idea of the game is to make a horse accelerate and then slide through a wet field. The horse must not stumble and must not interrupt its slide. The horse that leaves the longest track wins. Sometimes, it seems that politicians in the Caucasus are trying to play a similar game when they talk about who was first in Abkhazia and whose language has being spoken uninterruptedly from ab uribe condita. What the politicians forget, though, is that the horse will eventually stumble. Or their horse may never fall as it is mythical.

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Appendix 1 List of Textbooks

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Abkhazia

Abkhazy: istoriko-etnograficheskie ocherki, by Sh. Inal-Ipa, Sukhumi: Alashara, 1965

Ocherki etnicheskoi istorii abkhazskogo naroda, by Z. Anchabadze, Sukhumi: Alashara, 1972

Istoriya abkhazii, ed. by Z. Anchabadze et al., Sukhumi: Alashara, 1986

Istoriya abkhazii: uchebnoe posobie, ed. by S. Lakoba et al., Sukhum: Alashara, 1991

Ocherki istorii abkhazii: uchebnoe posobie dlya srednikh i vysshykh uchebnykh zavedenii SNG, by V. Yagovitin, Maikop: Adygeya, 1995

Armenia

Istoriya armyanskogo naroda, vol.1, ed. by Samvelyan et al., Erevan: Izdatel'stvo AN ArmSSR, 1944

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Istoriya armyanskogo naroda: uchebnik dlya 8 klassa srednei shkoly, by S.P. Pogosyan, Erevan: Luis, 1972

Azerbaijan

Istoriya azerbaijanskoi ssr: uchebnik dlya 8 y 9 klassa, Baku: AzFAN, 1939

Istroiya azerbaijana (kratkii ocherk), Baku: AzFan, 1941

Istoriya azerbaijana: uchebnik dlya 7-8 klassov, by A.I. Guliev, Baku: Maarif, 1972

Georgia

Istoriya Gruzii: uchebnik dlya starshikh klassov srednei shkoly, eds. N. Berdzenishvili et al., Tbilisi: Gosizdat GSSR, 1950

Istoriya Gruzii: uchebnik dlya 7-10 klassov, 7th edition, eds. N. Berdzenishvili et al., Tbilisi: Ganatleba, 1973

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Tbilisi: Ganatleba, 1997

Istoriya Gruzii: uchebnik dlya 8 klassa russkoi shkoly, 2nd edition, by N. Asatiani and M.Lortkipanidze, Tbilisi: Ganatleba, 1998

Geografia Gruzii: uchebnik dlya 8 klassa srednei shkoly, by N.Beruchashvili and N. Elizbarashvili, Tbilisi: Ganatleba, 1998

Istoriya Gruzii: uchebnik dlya 9 klassa russkoi shkoly, by N. Asatiani, Tbilsi: Ganatleba, 1998

Rodina: uchebnik dlya 4-go klassa, 1st edition, ed. by D Dondua et al, Tbilisi: Intelekti, 1999

Ossetia

Geograpfia severnoi osetii: uchebnoe posobie dlya 9-10 klassov, vol. 2, ed. by A.A. Tedtoev and Z.A. Tsgoev, Ordzshonikidze: Ir, 1978

Ocherki istorii yougo-osetii, ed. by A.I. Robakidze et al., Tbilisi: Metsniereba, 1985

Istoriya osetii s drevneshikh vremen do kontsa 19 veka: uchebnik dlya starshikh klassov srednei shkoly, ed. by M. Bliev and R. Bzarov, Vladikavkaz: Ir, 2000

Appendix 2 Abkhazian Letters

Date	Senders	Addressee(s)	*Content*	**Outcome**
25.02.1947	Scholars of the Marr Institute for Abkhazian history, language and literature Dzidzaria, Shakryl et al	Central Committee of the all-Union Communist Party	Authors protest against the ban on the Abkhaz language in Abkhazia, the 'Georgianization' of toponyms in Abkhazia, absence of ethnic Abkhazians in the local branches of power, the restriction of publication of the results of scholarly research in Abkhazian history .	The authors of the letter were severely criticized by the authorities and some were forced to leave Abkhazia
19.04.1957	Local party and Soviet authorities in Abkhazia (Labakhua and Tarba)	Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union	Authors protest against the falsification of Abkhazian history in the book of Pavle Ingoroqva and the propaganda of the major arguments of Ingoroqva's book in the mass media.	Some concessions are made so as to allow publication of the Abkhazian versions of history of the distant past
15.06.1965	Scholars of the Sukhum Pedagogical Institute (Shakryl et al)	Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union	Authors protest against new falsification of Abkhazian history in a book on the issue of the Abkhaz language, in which an attempt is made to deny the distinctiveness of Abkhazians as ethnic group by denying the existence of Abkhaz as a separate language	Local authorities in Abkhazia openly criticized the book and local newspaper published several reviews of the Abkhazian scholars on the issues related to the distant past of Abkhazia

| Date	Senders	Addressee(s)	Content	Outcome
12.04.1967	Scholars of the Institute for Abkhazian history, language and literature Shakryl, Shamba et al ("Letter of Eight")	Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, the Soviet of Ministers of the USSR, the Supreme Soviet of the USSR	The letter was written after the publication of the book by Georgian scholar, in which Abkhazians are denied the first-settlers status in Abkhazia based on the argumentation similar to the ideas expressed by Ingoroqva. Authors expressed their protest against the continuous 'distortion' of Abkhazian history in publications in mass media, TV and radio broadcasting and demanded the upgrade of the status of Abkhazia in the Soviet Union in order to avoid the risk of 'Georgianization'.	The content of the letter was discussed in a mass meeting in Sukhum. Concessions were made to Abkhazians, some ethnic Georgian party and Soviet bureaucrats were transferred from Abkhazia, publication of books by Abkhazian scholars was facilitated
c. June 1977	Staff of the Abkhazian State Museum Abregov at al	Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union	'Distortions' of Abkhazian history in mass-media publications, rejection of the argumentation provided by Georgian scholars with respect to the distant past of Abkhazia and languages spoken in the area in the past. The authors requested Moscow's authorities to allow wider publication of the results of research conducted by Abkhazian scholars in academic press and mass media	Some concessions were made to allow publication of those books of Abkhazian historian, which were restricted from publishing by the Georgian authorities

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10.12.1977	Abkhazian intellectuals and common Abkhazians, "Letter of Hundred and Thirty"	Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union Supreme Soviet of the Russian Federation	The authors protest against the continuous 'distortion' of Abkhazian history by Georgian historians, demand changes of toponyms in Abkhazia, and ask for the transfer of Abkhazia to the Russian Federation	Wide resonance in Abkhazia. The letter's content is discussed at mass meeting through entire Abkhazia. A number of strikes can be linked to the 'Letter of Hundred and Thirty" as well. A mass meeting in Sukhum was attended by high-level authorities from Moscow Important concessions have been made to Abkhazians
15.06.1978	Scholars of the Institute of Abkhazian history, language and literature Damenia, Argun et al, "Letter of Nineteen"	Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union	Authors protest against the continuous policy of Georgianization of Abkhazia and falsification of Abkhazian history and request the transfer of Abkhazian autonomy to the Russian Federation	The authors of the letter were criticized by the Georgian republican party's authorities. However, some concessions were also made and local authorities were instructed to ease restrictions on the work of Abkhazian intellectuals
17.06.1988	Scholars of the Institute of Abkhazian history, language and literature Gogua, Dzshonia et al, "Letter of Sixty"	Presidium of the 19th Conference of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union	Authors of the letter provide a review of the history of relations between Abkhazians and Georgians and underline the facts of discrimination of Abkhazians in Abkhazia. They also point out the continuation of falsification of the history of Abkhazia by Georgian scholars and emphasize the first-settlers status of Abkhazians in Abkhazia	The full text of the letter was published in a local newspaper. Moscow's authorities pressured Georgian authorities to provide Abkhazians with some concessions

Date	Senders	Addressee(s)	Content	Outcome
18.03.1989	Local Abkhazian party and Soviet authorities, scholars, common Abkhazian (some 30,000 signatures), "Lykhny declaration"	Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, Council of Ministers of the Soviet Union, Academy of Sciences of the Soviet Union	Authors provide a brief discourse into history of the changes of autonomous status of Abkhazia and emphasize the distortion of a true history of Abkhazia in Georgian historiography used to justify the downgrading of the status of Abkhazian autonomy. Authors demand the upgrade of the status of Abkhazia to the union republic, i.e. the restoration of the status Abkhazia had in 1921	Full text of the "Lykhny declaration" was published in several regional Abkhazian newspapers. Abkhazian authorities refer to the declaration and a meeting in Lykhny where the content of the document was discussed as "All-Abkhazian referendum". Moscow's response was limited to sending a commission consisted of the deputies of the Supreme Soviet

Sources: Sagariya 1991), Marykhuba 1994, Bebia 2002, Shnirelman 2001, 2003; and local Abkhazian newspapers

Map 1 Georgia and Abkhazia

source: Adapted from Map of Georgia, Central Intelligence Agency, 1999
(at the University of Texas Perry-Castañeda Library Map Collection)
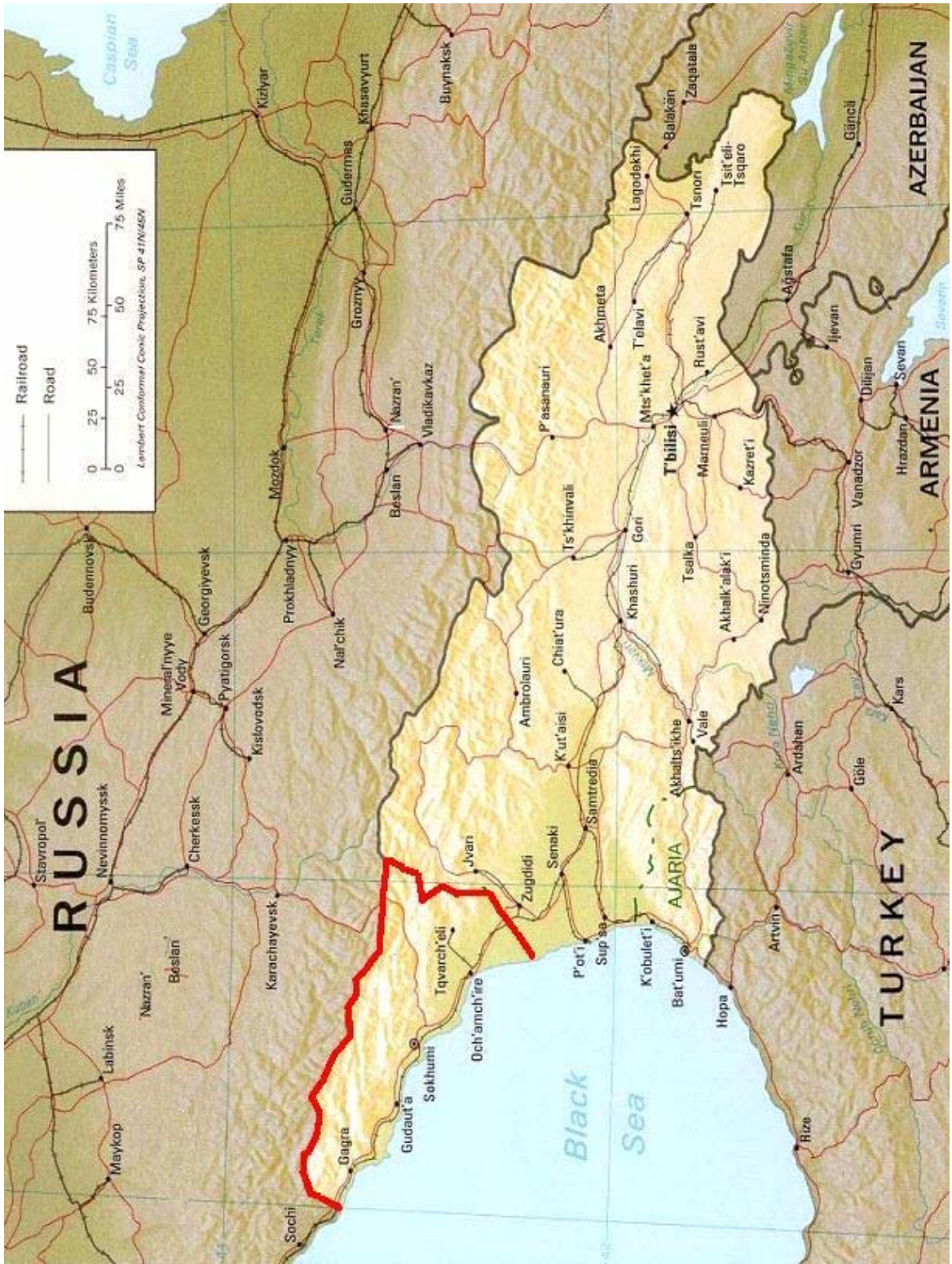
Map 2 Languages of the Caucasus

source: Adapted from H. Glück (ed.), *Metzler Lexikon Sprache*, Stuttgart / Weimar: Metzler 1993, p. 299