

For example, in their criticism of Armenia's political leadership, opposition groups label it as a "foreign yoke", provoking a strong response from the society. Enhanced by the lack of tradition for national statehood, this "ethnic persecution complex" creates an opposition between ethnic identity and any form of statehood, clearly hindering the emergence of Armenian national identity.

Yet, despite the inertia of the Communist past and the influence of current politics, the tendency towards objec-

tivity and a separation from politics is already apparent in Armenian historiography. Of course, the use of Armenian history as a political instrument will continue for a long time (and most likely, as in other countries, it will be impossible to eradicate this practice completely), but nevertheless, Armenian historians have taken the first steps.

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Opinion

Time Turned Back: On the Use of History in Georgia

By Giorgi Maisuradze, Tbilisi

“Forward to David Agmashenebeli!” is one of the most famous slogans of Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili's government. This evocation of the great Georgian ruler from nearly 1,000 years ago, known for his military and administrative reforms, symbolizes the basic attitude towards history in post-Soviet Georgia as well as the tendency to use history as a political instrument.

Contemporary Georgian politicians see history not as the past, but as a way to shape the future. This tendency highlights Georgians' peculiar attitude towards the representation of time. This forward-looking attitude makes it difficult to interpret the past objectively and draw lessons from it. At the same time, it hinders the state modernization process to the extent that such a process requires a realistic appraisal of the present and its problems.

At the end of the 1980s, Mikhail Gorbachev's Perestroika stimulated a national movement in Georgia and in parts of Georgian society. This movement created a so-called “contra-representational myth” of Georgian history, retelling Georgian history in a way that contradicted Soviet and pre-Soviet versions, but presented new myths as fact, which has become the foundation of contemporary Georgia and seeks to define its future direction. This myth is anchored in an idealization of the past which serves to compensate on a psychological level for the difficulties of the present. The transformation of history into some form of “contra-representational myth” began in the 19th century as an integral element of a burgeoning nationalist movement work-

ing to stimulate nation-building processes under colonial conditions.

The Development of History Writing as a Profession in Georgia

At the end of the 19th century, a professional group of historians appeared in Georgia. One of the main objectives of its founder Ivane Javakhishvili was demystifying the past as part of an effort to understand the overall sweep of Georgian history. Javakhishvili's *The History of the Georgian Nation* is the first Georgian historical narrative on which this whole new Georgian historiography is based.

The objectives of Georgian historiography changed considerably in the Soviet period, particularly starting in the 1940s, when the Stalinist regime began to use history writing as an instrument of policy and ideology. Stalin defined a nation as a group based on an historically established language, territory, economic life and psychological structure. On this basis, history became an element of Soviet nationality policy and a major instrument for advancing political claims, legitimized as representing “historical justice”. The most remarkable example of this use of history as an instrument was an article entitled “About our legal claims towards Turkey” written by the Georgian historians Niko Berzenishvili and Simon Janashia on a direct order from Stalin and published in December 1945. In this article, the “legality” of Georgia's territorial claims against Turkey were represented as being determined by history.

History and Ethnic Conflict

The instrumentalization of history under Stalinism also established a Soviet paradigm of historical thinking according to which history became both a way to build nations and a tool to be used in the political relations and legal treaties between nations. The results of this paradigm are visible in Soviet historiography following Stalin's death, when history became an important space for expressing nationalist feelings and fantasies, i.e. it became a key factor in building national pride. At the same time, Soviet nations were forming a certain parallel reality by reconstructing their past while simulating non-existent national foreign policies.

At the end of the 1980s historiography debates directly nurtured ethnic conflicts. In particular, this trend can be seen in the Georgian-Abkhazian conflict whose "ideological foundation" had been established through decades of debates among historians. Since 1988 Georgian historians, writers and leaders of the national movement, especially Soviet dissidents Akaki Bakradze and Zviad Gamsakhurdia, opposed the desire for self-determination of the Abkhazian nationalists who based their arguments on the centuries-old history of the Abkhaz nation, referring to the settling of "ethnic Abkhazians", i.e. "Apsuas," in the 17th century on the territory of modern Abkhazia. In pursuing the logic of their argument, the Georgian historians claimed that Abkhazia was an integral part of Georgia on the basis of historical development and argued that Abkhazians' claims to self-determination had no historical basis and as such were not legitimate if one views legitimacy as defined by history.

The outbreak of the Georgian-Ossetian conflict was the result of similar processes. The use of the term "Samachablo" promoted by first president of independent Georgia Gamsakhurdia at the end of the 1980s and beginning of the 1990s in place of the legal term "Autonomous Region of South Ossetia" had the effect of linking contemporary political realities to the Georgian feudal state of the middle ages, de-legitimizing this regional-administrative unit through historical refer-

ences. In 1990, Gamsakhurdia presented the abolition of the Autonomous Region of South Ossetia by the Supreme Council of Georgia as a "victory" of history against existing political realities. This decision resulted first in armed conflict and, subsequently, South Ossetia's de facto secession from Georgia.

Contemporary Myth Building

In parallel, the process of constructing a so-called "contra-representational myth" continued to develop, as politicians propagated a mythologized history as a political-ideological doctrine. An obvious example of this process is the book *Georgia's Spiritual Mission* based on one of Gamsakhurdia's speeches. In this book, Gamsakhurdia claims that the ancient population of Europe and western Asia are Georgians' ancestors, while Georgia is described as a source of Western civilization and, as such, has a particular mission regarding mankind. It should be noted that these ideas were not invented by Gamsakhurdia himself, he simply derived them from an esoteric modification of Georgian Soviet historiography. The transformation of history into a political mythology started once again in the latter part Shevardnadze's tenure when, in 2000, the country celebrated the 3000th anniversary of the Georgian nation and the 2000th anniversary of the Georgian Church.

The ideological instrumentalization of history culminated during the period of Saakashvili's governance by becoming the most important element in Saakashvili's political rhetoric together with references to the Orthodox religion. The slogan "Forward to David Agmashenebeli!" means to escape from the present problems and replace them with an idealized past. The use of such a slogan has the effect of trapping Georgia in a Soviet historical paradigm, while hindering a sober view of contemporary reality. This instrumentalization ultimately creates a situation in which Georgia perceives itself not as an independent state, but as a colony in which historical fantasies are the only form of political speech.

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