
Demographic Manipulation in the Caucasus (with Special Reference to Georgia)

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The Caucasus contains Europe's richest patchwork of peoples, languages and cultures. As the Soviet Union collapsed, a number of ethno-territorial problems needed to be handled with extreme sensitivity if open conflict was to be averted. The gross insensitivity on the part of nationalists in Georgia that led to the bloody wars in South Ossetia and, primarily, Abkhazia are examined and placed in the historical context that has seen mainly North Caucasian minorities subjected to frequent demographic manipulation by two of the region's imperial powers, Russia and Georgia, who have regularly acted in concert over the last 200 years. Parallels between Shevardnadze's war in Abkhazia and Yeltsin's assault on Chechnia are drawn, and the case of such minorities in Georgia as the Mingrelians, the Armenians and the Meskh(et)ians is touched upon. The West's blind adherence to the principle of 'territorial integrity' is criticized for abandoning minorities to the whim of the local bully.

Introduction

If ever there was a region which, because of its rich patchwork of peoples, languages and cultures all dotted around an imposing mountain terrain, was *not* a candidate for the arbitrary drawing of frontiers as part of the creation of (nation-)states, such a region is surely the Caucasus. The Greater Caucasus Range runs for some 500 miles, and in this relatively narrow neck of land that separates the Black Sea from the Caspian Sea the following peoples are found.

- The indigenous Caucasian peoples, who collectively speak some 40 languages, divided into certainly three and possibly four language-families: Daghestanian/North East Caucasian, its clear but more distant relative North Central Caucasian, and North West Caucasian, all three of which possibly derive from a single, very remote ancestor; whilst it is impossible to prove that the final family, South Caucasian or Kartvelian, has any genetic links with any of the northern groups or indeed with any other language/language-family within or beyond the Caucasus.
- Peoples who speak a number of Indo-European languages (e.g. the Ossetians, Tats, Talysh and Kurds, who speak languages related to

Persian; and the Armenians, Greeks, Gypsies, and, of course, the Russians and other Slavs, who first appeared in the Caucasus area only in the second half of the 16th century).

- A variety of Turkic-speaking peoples such as the Turks themselves and the Azerbaijanis, plus the Karachais and Balkars in the north-west Caucasus, and the Nogais and the Kumyks in the north-east; to the north of Daghestan are the Mongol Kalmyks.
- The Semitic peoples (a small Assyrian group in Georgia, and Jews, among whom the Mountain Jews of Daghestan evidently speak Iranian Tat).

Most of these peoples live in one of the three internationally recognized Transcaucasian states of Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan, or to the north of the mountain range in the Russian Federation, where they are presently divided between a number of administrative units. In the Soviet period these were styled either autonomous republics or autonomous districts (*Oblasti*), although Chechenia under General Dzhokhar Dudaev declared itself independent in October 1991. The vast majority of the South Caucasian Laz population live in Turkey; the Black Sea littoral from Rize to the Georgian (old Soviet) border at Sarpi formed their historical homeland. In addition, one of the three North West Caucasian peoples has been absent from the Caucasus since 1864, when they left for Ottoman lands; these were the Ubykhs, whose language is now generally thought to be extinct, following the death, in autumn 1992, of the last fully competent speaker, Tevfik Esenç.

Historical Background

To facilitate an understanding of recent events they must be set within their historical context. The Caucasus has attracted the usually predatory interests of foreign peoples since the Ionian Greeks started to establish colonies along the Black Sea in the first half of the first millennium BC. Greeks were followed by Romans, Persians, Arabs, Seljuk Turks, Mongols, Ottoman Turks, Persians again and lastly Russians. The earliest probable case of actual enforced transplantation of communities was in the 17th century when Shah Abbas removed to Persia a number of villagers from Eastern Georgia, whose descendants still live in Fereydan and speak a now distinct Georgian dialect.

When the Russo-Caucasian War that had lasted most of the century came to an end in 1864 with the surrender of the North West Caucasian peoples (Chechenia and Daghestan had been defeated in 1859 when their Avar leader, Shamil, surrendered), the Tsarist authorities gave their mountaineer opponents a choice: be resettled in the Kuban plain, where they could be prevented from again taking up arms, or remove themselves to Ottoman lands, where they could live with Islamic co-religionists. All of the Ubykhs, who had lived around the modern resort of Sochi, the majority of the Circassians (particularly the Western Circassians, or Adyghe) who lived to their north and east, and very many Abkhazians, who were the only people from Transcaucasia to fight the

Russians in defence of Caucasian liberty, chose to leave their native lands. Representatives from many of the other North Caucasian peoples also left, so that today whole villages speaking a variety of North Caucasian languages are found dotted all over the Near East (especially Turkey), Circassians and Chechens also having sizeable representation in Jordan. Something of the human misery that ensued (from over-crowded boats that sank or attracted disease and from their ill-prepared reception in Ottoman territory, which was totally alien to peoples accustomed to the bracing air of the mountains) may be evidenced from the eye-witness accounts by British diplomats presented to Parliament on 6 June 1864 with the title *Papers respecting the Settlement of Circassian Emigrants in Turkey*. The poignant introduction to G. Dumézil's *Documents Anatoliens III* (1965) was written as a centennial retrospective, and the historical novel *The Last of the Departed* by the Abkhazian Bagrat Shinkuba (Raduga 1986 for the English translation) also deals with this period and the subsequent fate of the Ubykhs. No one knows exactly how many North West Caucasians left, but this almost wholly unknown diaspora was the start of the tragedy that saw the Abkhazians and the Adyghees swamped on their own soil: in 1989, out of a total population of 432,046 in Adygheia, there were 95,439 Adyghees and 310,096 Slavs, whilst the 93,267 Abkhazians in Abkhazia constituted only 17.8 per cent of this region's population, where the largest group (45.7 per cent) was made up of South Caucasian/Kartvelian Mingrelians, Svans plus some Georgians (in addition there were 76,541 Armenians, 74,913 Russians, 14,664 Greeks, and some others). Estimates suggest there may be half a million Abkhazians in Turkey, where the total North Caucasian population is probably somewhere between 2 and 4 million.

'Ethnic cleansing' did not, of course, begin with post-communist conflict in the former Yugoslavia. Perhaps the greatest ethnic cleanser of all—if we add to the millions of ordinary citizens simply exterminated in the Great Terror the large number of whole ethnic groups physically displaced—was Stalin. One of his earliest experiments in radical demographic surgery was in 1941, when all Germans from around the Black Sea, the Volga German Autonomous Republic (which ceased to exist thereby), the North Caucasus and Transcaucasia were transported to Siberia and Kazakhstan. Germans had originally settled in Russia in the 16th century at the invitation of Ivan the Terrible, but the largest immigrations (of peasant Germans) took place in the 17th and 18th centuries. If the removal of the descendants of these last can be 'justified' as a precautionary measure against their siding with the Nazi invaders, *even though they were full Soviet citizens*, what can be said of events in 1944? In addition to up to 250,000 Crimean Tatars, all the Balkars, all the Karachais and all the Kalmyks were deported to the east. Of the autochthonous Caucasian peoples all the North Central Caucasian Chechens and Ingush were also removed. The territories bearing the names of all these peoples were simply erased from subsequent maps, as the lands were reapportioned among neighbouring administrative units. Part of the Karachai lands and of Chechen-Ingushetia was reassigned to Stalin's native

Georgia, and part of the specifically Ingush territory was given to their Ossetian neighbours—it was as if these peoples had never existed. The reason offered for this ‘punishment’ was collaboration with the Nazis, though in a recently published article Avtorkhanov (1992) argues that the real reason for the expulsion of his native Chechens/Ingush was their continual rebelling against Russian rule (whether Tsarist or Soviet). The years 1956–1957 saw the rehabilitation of the deported peoples, and at this time the Karachais, Balkars, Kalmyks, Chechens and Ingush were allowed to return to their ancestral lands. Georgia, no longer favoured by a Kremlin supremo, had to return territory to the Karachais and Chechens, but interestingly the North Ossetians, traditionally seen as Russia’s Christian friends amid a sea of North Caucasian Muslims, were allowed to keep their slice of Ingush land. This has been the cause of much bloodshed between these two peoples since the disintegration of the USSR, even though both republics are part of the Russian Federation and both peoples are members of the Confederation of North Caucasian (Mountain) Peoples that developed in November 1991 out of the former Assembly, which itself was declared in Abkhazia in August 1989. Ingushetia, which previously had been associated with Chechenia in the Autonomous Republic of Chechen-Ingushetia, dissociated itself from Dudaev’s Chechenia after Yeltsin suggested that such a course would lead to a return to Ingushetia of the Prigorodnyi Raion, lost since 1944—not surprisingly, this did not happen.

Although we have said nothing in detail about the multitude of tribes in Dagestan, *all* North Caucasians are keenly aware of the historical tragedies inflicted on them as a result of imperial hunger for their territory. If the expulsions of North West Caucasians in 1864 and of North Central Caucasians in 1944 were dictated by St Petersburg and Moscow, Moscow was by no means the only threat.

Georgia

Let us look in detail at Georgia. The superficial view, apparently extending to Western policy-makers, since the collapse of the USSR, seems to have been that the central Georgian authorities have been plagued by some separatist manoeuvres in parts of the republic that are comparatively trivial legacies of Soviet times. Consequently it is contended that Georgia should be bolstered in order to provide a centre of stability in a region that could easily sink into a Balkan-like maelstrom. This widely held opinion is naive and totally contradicted by the facts of the case, so that I would urge all who hold it to consider most carefully the late Sakharov’s more informed judgement—that Georgia was one of the Soviet Union’s ‘little empires’—and to frame accordingly their policy towards this, the true source of instability in the Caucasus. After all, the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh is unlikely ever to spread to encompass the indigenous (*sensu stricto*) peoples of the region.

Table 1

Ethnic Population Distribution: Georgia 1979–1989				
	1979	1989	1979	1989
'Georgians'	3,433,011	3,787,393	68.8%	70.1%
Armenians	448,000	437,211	9.0%	8.1%
Russians	371,608	341,172	7.4%	6.3%
Azerbaijanis	255,678	307,556	5.1%	5.7%
Ossetians	160,497	164,055	3.2%	3.0%
Greeks	95,105	100,324	1.9%	1.8%
Abkhazians	85,285	95,853	1.7%	1.8%

Who is a 'Georgian'?

Are physical annihilation or wholesale transplantation the only methods by which an ethnos disappears from its territory? The land which today forms the internationally recognized Republic of Georgia is and always has been a cosmopolitan one.

Table 1 gives details of the seven largest populations in Georgia, from the 1979/1989 Soviet census. Even accepting these figures, the so-called 'Georgians' constitute only 70.1 per cent of the population. But we have already seen that there are four South Caucasian/Kartvelian peoples (Georgians, Mingrelians, Svans and Laz). Apart from some Georgians and almost all the Laz, whose territory has ended up in modern-day Turkey, all the rest live in Georgia, and yet Mingrelians and Svans (both of whom have their own language, quite different from, though related to, Georgian) merit no mention in the census data, because they are classified as 'Georgians'. This was not always so. Up to the census of 1926 each of these four peoples figured separately in the census returns. It seems to have been decided around 1930 that all four were to be officially reclassified as 'Georgians'; after 60 years of inculcation in an essentially Stalinist state that they were 'Georgian', it is hardly surprising that most Mingrelians and Svans today do seem to accept that this is the correct designation of their ethnicity. This was by no means the case historically; the very first sentence of the medieval Georgian chronicle written by Leont'i Mroveli makes it quite clear that Mingrelians were regarded as separate from the Georgians in the depths of local recorded history: 'We shall mention first that there was one father, Targamos by name, for the Armenians and Georgians, the Rans and Movak'nelians[?], the Heretians and Leks [Daghestanians], the Mingrelians and the Caucasians.' Also there is no perception at all among the Laz of Turkey that they are Georgians—as just noted, both Laz and Georgians live in Turkey, where the, deliberately confused, Stalinist thinking has not been imposed and so does not exist. Even more absurd within Georgia is the fact that the Bats people, who are related to

the Chechens and Ingush but who have lived for almost two centuries in the single eastern Georgian village of Zemo Alvani, are also classified as 'Georgians' for census purposes. How is this classification justified? It basically reduces to a question of language.

The Language Question

Apart from establishing central Soviet authority over the USSR's vast territory, one of the basic problems for the early Soviets was the prevalence of illiteracy across the country. It was decided that the best way to eradicate this would be to create a number of new 'literary languages', so that illiterate peasants could learn the new skills of reading/writing for their native language and then transfer this knowledge to a major regional language and ultimately to Russian. Though there were moves to establish literary languages for both Mingrelian and Laz (the latter of which even then had very few speakers in the USSR), these failed. The result has been that since the 1930s Mingrelians, Svans and Bats have usually had their children educated in Georgian schools (and some, especially in Mingrelia, in Russian schools), so that they are viewed as 'Georgian' in respect of their literature and general culture. Georgia's non-literary languages have remained an object of scholarly interest only, and it is for scholars (linguists/folklorists) that any texts are published in these languages. From the latest publication of Mingrelian prose texts, consider the complacency about the fate of their native(!) language revealed in the following quotation from the editors' introduction:

Today no-one can define exactly what will be the fate of the unwritten Kartvelian languages, Svan and Laz-Mingrelian, after a few centuries, but one can say that the materials in these languages that are fixed in print will in the future have the value of gold (Danelia and Tsanova 1991).

In other words, 'It is too bad if our language dies, but at least we can be content that we have laid a basis for its future study as a dead language!' In 1966 there was a large international celebration in Tbilisi of the 800th anniversary of the poet Shota Rust(a)veli, author of the national epic 'The Man in the Panther's Skin', which consists of circa 1,600 quatrains. K'ak'a Zhvania had spent years putting this into verse in his native Mingrelian. The authorities refused to let it be printed officially. Such is the concern evinced for the welfare of local languages (and, by extension, local cultures and ethnoses) other than Georgian. Georgians often quote the words *ra ena c'axdes, eri daeces*: 'When the language declines, the nation will fall'. The deliberate attempt to assimilate Mingrelians, Svans, Bats and Laz cannot be seen to be anything other than a glaring attempt to engineer a false demography of Georgia in order to increase the 'Georgian' ratio among Georgia's population at the expense of smaller peoples and to ensure the continued vitality of Georgian at the expense of lesser languages. The rather deprecating attitude

that there can be no culture without a literature, which is quite widespread in Georgia, is wonderfully expressed in one of Stalin's early articles:

National cultural autonomy presumes more or less developed nationalities, with a developed culture and literature. Failing these conditions, autonomy loses all sense and reduces itself to an absurdity. But in the Caucasus there are a number of peoples each possessing a primitive culture, a specific language, but without its own literature; peoples, moreover, which are in a state of transition, partly becoming assimilated and partly continuing to develop. How is national cultural autonomy to be applied to them? What is to be done with such peoples? How are they to be 'organised' into separate national cultural unions, such as are undoubtedly implied by national cultural autonomy?

What is to be done with the Mingrelians, the Abkhasians, the Adjarians [Muslim Georgians from the South West province of Adjara], the Svanetians, the Lesghians, and so on, who speak different languages but do not possess a literature of their own? To what nations are they to be attached? Can they be 'organised' into national unions? Around what 'cultural affairs' are they to be 'organised'?

The national problem in the Caucasus can be solved *only by drawing the backward nations and peoples into the common stream of a higher culture* (Stalin 1913:48–49).

For the history over the last 100 years of Georgian reactions to Mingrelian attempts to assert their separateness, see Hewitt (1995).

The Meskh(et)ians

Moves motivated by a desire to produce a more homogeneous Georgian state have taken even more drastic turns than this, however. Georgia, like the North Caucasus, saw mass expulsions in 1944, when the relatively few Laz and the Hemshinli (Muslim Armenians) were transported eastwards. Also expelled were a group of around 144,000 from the south-western province of Meskheti, which borders Turkey. During the rehabilitations of the late 1950s this group, like the Crimean Tatars and the Germans, were not given permission to leave Uzbekistan for their former homes. The changing attitudes in Georgia in 1988–1989 to this wretched group, who were the subject of world-wide press coverage in 1989 when attacked in the Ferghana Valley, are fascinating. Leading dissident Merab K'ost'ava, who was killed in a car accident in October 1989 and thus robbed of the chance of becoming Georgia's first elected president, took up their cause when it was possible to use them for propaganda purposes as a further example of innocent Georgians made to suffer by a hostile Soviet regime. He argued that they should be brought home and retaught, where necessary, their lost language, surnames and culture (including Georgian Orthodoxy). But, as it became apparent that perhaps the majority knew no Georgian, spoke a Turkic tongue and were Muslim, the tone of articles in the Georgian press took a different tack. It seemed, in my interpretation, that the aim was to downplay the number of true Georgians

who had been deported against those of Turkish sympathies and/or ethnicity so as to reduce the clamour that the Georgian government allow them to return, for the refusal to let them back was/is Tbilisi's and not Moscow's decision! The nationalistically inclined historian Lortkipanidze argued that the border region had been packed with ethnic Turks by the Turkish authorities from the 16th century to counterbalance local Georgians (vid. 'čveni ist'oriis ert-erti q'velaze t'k'iviliani purceli': 'One of the most painful pages of our history' in the daily paper *k'omunist'i* 'Communist' of 27 June 1989).

Worst of all were the reports from alleged eye-witness Meskhети residents who recounted in lurid detail childhood stories of how these 'Muslims' had constantly committed various atrocities against the peace-loving Georgian Christians (see, for example, Manana Zakaidze's 'xsovnas ra c'ašlis...' ('What will erase the memory...') in the periodical *soplis cxovreba* ('Village Life') ca June 1989). It is still Tbilisi's view that, whoever they might be, these Meskh(et)ians (usually referred to in non-Georgian sources as Meskhetian *Turks*) cannot be permitted to settle in a sensitive border area, into which Georgians have in any case since moved from other regions. Not unnaturally many of the Meskhians, realizing that they are not wanted either in Uzbekistan or in Georgia, have sought another solution, namely escape to Turkey. A recent Georgian comment written about them came from film director Eldar Shengelaia and writer L. Khaindrava in the weekly organ of the Georgian Writers' Union *lit'erat'uruli sakartvelo* (*Literary Georgia*) (2 November 1990, p. 6), as part of a reply to criticism of Georgia in an article by Solzhenitsyn. These Turks, the Georgian intellectuals asserted, could not be allowed home because many Armenians live in Meskhети; everyone knows how Turks treat Armenians, and so Georgia's Meskhian Armenians cannot be put at risk by reintroducing a Turkish group among them. This should bring a wry smile to the face of anyone who knows the generally prevailing Georgian attitude towards Armenians! The fact remains that, whoever the Meskhians from Uzbekistan may be (ethnically speaking), Meskhети is their ancestral home and they should be relocated there (or as near as possible) by the relevant government, which is the one sitting in Tbilisi. The question remains: why were the Meskhians selected for deportation? If it was because of their faith, why were the Muslim Georgians of neighbouring Ač'ara (Adjara) not removed as well, since Stalin (1913) wrote of them as following Turkish culture? If it was indeed that they were regarded as non-Georgian Turks, why were Georgia's Azerbaijanis not expelled also? Just as these questions remain, so do the Meskhians themselves remain a people in exile, unwanted in Georgia, Uzbekistan or anywhere else.

Abkhazia: Historical Perspective

Having discussed the questions of linguistic/cultural assimilation and deportation in connection with the Georgianizing of Georgia, we must now address the problem of Abkhazia. When this fertile land was denuded of much

of its native population in the 1860s/1870s, other peoples not surprisingly began to move in; it is at this time that the first significant Kartvelian (i.e. Mingrelian, Svan, Georgian) presence became attested in Abkhazia, which was independent when taken under Russia's protection in 1810 (see the imperial decree issued by Tsar Aleksandr I to the Abkhazian prince Giorgi Sharvashidze as reproduced on the inside cover of the *Istoriya Abkhazii* ('History of Abkhazia'), 1991) and which was administratively rejigged a number of times thereafter by the Russian authorities in the Caucasus. After the October Revolution, the Abkhazians linked themselves to their northern neighbours and relatives in the short-lived Mountain Caucasian Republic. Menshevik Georgia bloodily put down Bolshevik communes in both Abkhazia and South Ossetia and then seized the territory. Abkhazians viewed the arrival of the Red Army in 1921 as their salvation from Menshevik tyranny. For an Englishman's assessment of the nature of independent Georgia's Menshevik government, see Bechhofer (1921). An Abkhazian Soviet Republic was established, which entered the Transcaucasian Federation as a treaty partner with the Georgian Soviet Republic. This status, along with Abkhazia's right to secede, was set down in her 1925 constitution. In 1931, by which time Stalin had finally established himself as the undisputed ruler in the Kremlin, this status was reduced to that of an autonomous republic *within* Georgia. In recognizing Georgia's Soviet frontiers as those of the now independent Republic of Georgia, the international community gave legitimacy to that whim of Stalin's at the very moment that the world was starting to celebrate the final disintegration of that same Stalin's legacy.

From at least the 1880s Kartvelians have been producing arguments to try to establish historical rights to Abkhazia. It was actually suggested that Abkhaz was nothing more than a dialect of Georgian. Abkhazians thus become, in this uneducated view, some sort of Georgians. Whilst in the last century this may have been nothing more than a product of a poor understanding of the methodology of comparative philology, in view of subsequent examples of the nationalistically inspired prostitution of philology and history by Georgian scholars, perhaps one should remain suspicious. As early as 1889 Georgian historian Bakradze advanced the view that the Abkhazians were relatively recent settlers on 'Georgian' soil. In the 1890s there were arguments over the ethnic identity of the inhabitants of Samurzaq'ano (the southernmost portion of Abkhazia)—were they Abkhazians or Mingrelians? The demotion of Abkhazia's status in 1931, along with the arrival of the Mingrelian Lavrent'i Beria as Party Boss in Transcaucasia, saw the start not long thereafter of a ruthless drive to Georgianize the region. In addition to the slaughter of the Purges, which affected every corner of the USSR without exception, Abkhazia had to endure an extra layer of repression. In a deliberate attempt to swamp the Abkhazians in their homeland, non-Abkhazians (especially Mingrelians) were forced to move into the region, often trucked in and dumped with nowhere to live. Details from the relevant secret police files on this process were published in 1992 (*Abkhaziya: dokumenty svidetel'stvuyut 1937–1953*

Table 2

Demographic Changes in Abkhazia 1897–1970					
	1897	1926	1939	1959	1970
Abkhazians	58,697	55,918	56,147	61,197	77,276
Kartvelians	25,875	67,494	91,067	158,221	199,595
Russians	5,135	20,456	60,201	86,715	92,889

(‘Abkhazia: documents bear witness 1937–1953’)). Census data in Table 2 reveal the artificial dynamics of the population changes involved.

With these figures in mind, consider the words of Shevardnadze from his first address to the Georgian Parliament on the subject of Abkhazia following the elections of 11 October 1992:

It must be pointed out that the Georgians are not to blame for the reduction of the Abkhaz population at any time. The fact that the Georgian population has more than tripled since 1926 has nothing to do with that either. We must not forget that the Abkhaz population growth rate has been similar... As we can see, it is a natural process of growth, while the extremists try to ascribe it to the assimilative policy pursued by the Georgians (Shevardnadze 1992:20).

Abkhaz had been awarded literary language status in the 1920s and from 1928 had been written in a Latin-based script. When all similar so-called Young Written Languages had their scripts altered to a form of Cyrillic in 1936–1938, Abkhaz and the Ossetian of South Ossetia had theirs shifted to Georgian-based alphabets—in North Ossetia the script became Cyrillic-based. In 1944 all Abkhaz language schools were shut down and replaced with Georgian schools, the children being beaten if heard speaking Abkhaz, even though most of them had no reason to know Georgian. The most usual Kartvelian language heard in Abkhazia is Mingrelian, and, where mixed communities exist, Abkhazians usually also speak Mingrelian, though it is rare for Mingrelians even to have a passive knowledge of Abkhaz. Publishing in Abkhaz also ceased.

The self-taught expert on Georgian literature, P’avle Ingoroq’va, produced anew in the late 1940s the theory that the Abkhazians had first settled in Abkhazia only in the 17th century. Though this was an amplification of Bakradze’s earlier hypothesis, Ingoroq’va nowhere alludes to any earlier existing version of his fabrications, which were based on arbitrary Kartvelian etymologies of native Abkhazian toponyms, and on a mistranslation from the 17th century Turkish traveller, Evliya Çelebi. It is likely that Ingoroq’va was prevailed upon to produce these excessive claims to provide a sort of scholarly ‘justification’ for the planned deportation of the Abkhazians from land that would then have been argued not to have been their birthright. Towards the end of his life in the 1950s, a prominent Abkhazian revealed that there had

indeed been a plan to expel the Abkhazians but that this was abandoned as unnecessary in view of the intermingling of Kartvelians with Abkhazians and the banning of the Abkhaz language, all of which (it was felt) would lead to the Georgianization of the Abkhazians within a couple of generations. Pontic Greeks were also deported predominantly from the Kartvelian areas of Abkhazia and their property given to Kartvelians (*pace* Georgian novelist Ch'abua Amiredzhibi, who made the fantastic charge in *Literary Georgia* on 22 September 1989 (pp.3–5) that the Abkhazians were responsible for these deportations) (see also Agtzidis 1991). Secret police files from the 1940s, salvaged from the Abkhazian State Archives after they were deliberately torched by the Georgian occupying forces in October 1992, are published in *Central Asian Survey* 14.1, 1995.

Why is it necessary to dwell now on these manoeuvrings on the part of Stalin and Beria (and their local henchmen, Chark'viani in Tbilisi and Mgeladze in Sukhum)? Were not the anti-Abkhazian measures put into reverse after the deaths of the two main players? Were not Abkhazian schools reopened, publishing in Abkhaz restarted, and Abkhazians over-represented in terms of their actual numbers as a kind of compensation for what they had suffered from circa 1937 to 1953? With their pressure kept up, did they not gain their own university and some TV broadcasting in 1978? All this is true, but throughout this time, their so-called autonomy (as was true of all such autonomies across the USSR) was really a fiction, and all important decisions were taken in Tbilisi. The largest sector at their university was always the Georgian one, and their TV broadcasting was at first just two half-hour slots per week. The Kartvelians of today cannot be blamed for the sins of their fathers, but what is one to say when today they calculatingly seek to repeat them?

Georgian Nationalism and the Republic's Minorities

With the grip of Moscow becoming ever weaker as '*perestroika/glasnost*' unleashed forces that could not be reined in, the unofficial leaders in Tbilisi played the nationalist card—'Georgia for the Georgians!' became a popular rallying cry. Writers and scholars sensed the rising tide of populism and quickly contributed articles of their own to encourage people to think, in a common but sinister phrase that has been often repeated since the late 1980s, of the 'Georgian phenomenon'. Reading articles in *Literary Georgia* from the end of 1988 through the early months of 1989, a number of disturbing themes appear. For example, not only was the threat to Georgians delineated from the tendency of Muslims among them to be characterized by a higher birth rate than was typical of the Kartvelian population, but the taking of practical measures to reduce their fertility was also urged. T'ariel K'vanch'ilashvili's *mere ra ikneba?* ('Then what will there be?') in *Literary Georgia* of 30 September 1988 (p. 3), claims:

It's possible for us to name a number of countries in the modern world where the state directs the demographic process (e.g. China), albeit through limiting the birth-rate. Why should we exclude the possibility with us too that those peoples who have a high tempo of growth should limit their birth-rate? Then in parallel with this, favourable conditions should be created for those peoples with a tendency to lesser growth for the tempo of fertility among them to increase.

A second theme lauded Ingoroq'va for his contribution to the history of Western Georgia, with a request that his theories on the Abkhazians should be redisseminated and that he should be posthumously rehabilitated as a scholar of true standing (see various writings by the critic Rost'om Chkheidze, as in *Literary Georgia* of 21 April 1989). Third was the introduction of the draft for *A State Programme for the Georgian Language* (actually promulgated in the summer of 1989), wherein the needs of *no* language other than Georgian were even mentioned (much less safeguarded), and in which tests in Georgian language/literature were established for anyone wishing to pursue higher education within the republic.

These themes make clear that the republic was starting a slide into the unwholesome chaos of demagogy combined with chauvinism. Just one example of the sort of materials that were being published widely at the time confirms this. Taken from the Georgian language newspaper *axalgazrda k'omunist'i* ('Young Communist') (29 July 1989), the professor of literature Revaz Mishveladze writes:

Georgia stands on the brink of a real catastrophe—of extirpation. What devil ruled our minds, when we yielded up our land, gained inch by inch over the centuries, defended and soaked with our blood, to every homeless beggar that has come down from the fringes of the Caucasus, to tribes that have neither history nor culture. . . . We must make every effort to raise the percentage of Georgians [sc. Kartvelians] in the population of Georgia (currently 61 per cent [sic!]) to 95 per cent. The remaining 5 per cent must consist of only those who know Georgian, who have a proper respect for Georgia, who have been brought up under the influence of the *Georgian national phenomenon* [stress added]. We must persuade other nationalities, who are multiplying suspiciously in the land of David the Builder, that ideal conditions for the development of their personalities are to be found only in their homelands. Apart from a peaceful announcement to that effect, it is possible to bring the law to bear upon those guests who eventually prove obdurate and slow to leave. The law will state clearly that land will be taken at once from those who have illegally possessed it, that any buildings erected there will be demolished without compensation. . . . A few days ago a delegation from Georgia (which included the 1st Secretary of the Q'vareli *Raikom*) spent 8 hours in nervous conversation with the leaders of Daghestan, trying to reach agreement on the return to their fatherland of part of the Lezgians [actually Avars settled in eastern Georgia]. Finally, after reminding them of their patriotic duty, of the possibility of actual danger, we succeeded in partially accomplishing our mission.

The full fury of Georgian propaganda was concentrated on the Abkhazians after March 1989. There are many specific examples too numerous to recall

here. Fighting broke out in July over the *illegal* (sc. according to the Soviet norms of the day) opening by the Georgians in Sukhum of a branch of Tbilisi State University, which was seen as a threat to the viability of the Abkhazian State University. Had there been *real* concerns in Tbilisi about the treatment of the Kartvelian pupils and staff in Sukhum in regard to their right to continue using the Georgian language, a higher educational establishment could easily have been created in the Mingrelian capital, Zugdidi. But this was never proposed, because the Georgian authorities wanted more Kartvelian students in Abkhazia so that, by studying there, they could achieve residency rights and thus continue adding to the Kartvelian balance of the population. Zviad Gamsakhurdia had spoken of restricting Abkhazian autonomy to the two towns of Gudauta in the north and Ochamchira in the south, where they were still in a majority. Many armed Mingrelians, trying to get into Abkhazia to fight in July 1989, were found to have well-prepared maps differentiating the location of Abkhazian vs non-Abkhazian villages. In contrast to the wild charges made nightly on Georgian TV at this critical time and repeated frequently thereafter, Abkhazian news coverage was, in the opinion of this observer, professional, restrained and calming in its dignity. It should also be recalled that this fighting in Abkhazia was preceded by armed clashes between Georgians and the Azerbaijani minority south of Tbilisi.

From late 1989 it was the Ossets' turn to suffer the by now common abuse. In their case the most ridiculous claim about their recent status as residents of Georgia was made by Gamsakhurdia himself, namely that they had come into Georgia with the Red Army in 1921! Gamsakhurdia organized anti-Ossetian demonstrations in South Ossetia. In an interview with Dutch journalist, Laura Starink, which she published in *NRC Handelsblad's Zaterdag Bijvoegels* on 3 February 1990 and subtitled 'Our way is the way of civil war', he stated 'The Ossetians are a wild, uneducated people who must be made to fear the Georgians, just as the Abkhazians now fear us.' After his election he abolished the autonomous status of South Ossetia, and even today Kartvelians regularly refer to it only as the province of *samachablo* ('Fiefdom of the Machabeli clan') inside *shida kartli* ('Inner Kartli') (at best they call it *egret c'odebuli samxret oseti*: 'so-called South Ossetia'). The subsequent war in the region produced tens of thousands of refugees, with Ossetian residents both of this region and other parts of Georgia fleeing to North Ossetia, whilst Georgians themselves fled to central Georgia. Though a ceasefire was eventually negotiated after Shevardnadze's return in March 1992, no political solution has been put forward, and the South Ossetians remain determined to unite with their northern brethren in order to remove themselves from any further domination by Georgian chauvinists.

Apart from rousing Georgia's 400,000 Armenians by trying to impose Georgian prefects on them and laying claim to the churches these Armenians regarded as their own (see Wesselink 1992:41-44), Gamsakhurdia also arranged for the laying siege to some Avar villages in East Georgia (as mentioned earlier in the quote from Mishveladze), which led to the expulsion to

Daghestan of at least 4,000 Avars (and Didos, another Daghestanian minority).

Watching all this, the Abkhazians continued to work towards loosening their own ties with Tbilisi, fearing that all the signs emanating therefrom spelled their linguistic/cultural doom in an independent Georgia. The anti-Abkhazian campaign never really died. Lortkipanidze (1990) kept promoting her view that Abkhazia had two aborigines: Abkhazians and the ancestors of the Laz-Mingrelians. Academician Tamaz Gamq'relidze (honorary member of both the British and American Academies) produced a poorly argued, *aprioristic* linguistic variation on the Ingoroq'va fantasy which was not only published in its original Georgian in 1991 but was subsequently translated and published in Russia's most prestigious linguistics journal, *Voprosy Yazykoznaniiya* ('Questions of Linguistics').¹ The Georgian press then began to run exactly the same sort of articles early in 1992 that had prefaced their resort to arms in 1989. The Russian freelance journalist and part-time archaeological photographer, Viktor Popkov, who now heads a human rights' organization (Omega), wrote up his investigations into the 1989 fighting in Abkhazia, which he personally witnessed. They demonstrated beyond doubt the extent to which the violence that erupted there on 15 July was the result of long planning on the *Georgian* side. No Russian paper to which he submitted his work was bold enough to publish it. An English translation was prepared and distributed to all American senators by North Caucasians living in the US.

Shevardnadze and Post-communist Georgia

War in Abkhazia

Shevardnadze returned to head the State Council in March 1992, and world leaders began the rather unseemly rush to recognize his fiefdom, even though his State Council had come to power in a bloody coup that had toppled a democratically elected president, even though the war was still in progress in South Ossetia, and even though his then-deputy Ioseliani was leading his private Mkhedrioni militia in attacks upon the citizenry of Mingrelia, for Mingrelian Gamsakhurdia's power base was naturally located here. The Abkhazians and (let it be stressed) the other non-Kartvelian peoples of Abkhazia, who together constituted a 54 per cent majority in the region, were not as gullible as Western politicians and/or policy makers and saw no reason to change course in the naive belief that one man constitutes a nation. On 23 July 1992 they declared their 1925 constitution reinstated, which was *not*, as simplistically portrayed in the world's media, a declaration of independence from Georgia. The post-Soviet Georgian authorities had annulled all Soviet (i.e. post-1921) legislation, as part of which Abkhazia's status was defined. Left without any constitutional standing and as a temporary measure until a new constitutional framework could be devised, the Abkhazians reverted to their 1925 constitution, which defined Abkhazia as a full republic with equal status

to Georgia. Shevardnadze sent in his ill-disciplined National Guard on 14 August on the absurd excuse that Georgia's rail link to Moscow was being subjected to harassment here and that two kidnapped ministers were being held on Abkhazian territory—in fact, both these statements applied to activities of Gamsakhurdia supporters in the neighbouring province of Mingrelia. Only the previous day there had been negotiations in Sukhum on the form to be taken by the treaty relations with Georgia, implicit in Abkhazia's 1925 constitution. Indeed, a draft treaty published in the Abkhazian press in June belies Shevardnadze's assertion: 'They contemplate to conduct "a political dialogue on the ways and forms of relationship" as with a bordering State, *at the same time rejecting the idea of negotiations*' (1992:23, stress added). The only assistance available to the Abkhazians came from the volunteers (Chechens, Circassians and Ossetians) from the North Caucasian Confederation, the initial motivation for the creation of which had been specifically to counter the threats to the Abkhazians issuing from Tbilisi. Turkish Abkhazians also crossed to Abkhazia to defend the ancestral homeland.

The invaders quickly secured the main road leading from Mingrelia to the capital, Sukhum, causing the Abkhazian government to take refuge in the town of Gudauta to the north. Further north Kartvelian forces took control of Gagra and the coastal region between there and the Russian border at the River Psou. In the south the hinterland villages remained in Abkhazian hands, and the mining town, T'q'varchal, was besieged. On 3 September a ceasefire was negotiated in Moscow, with President Yeltsin pressuring the Abkhazian leader, Vladislav Ardzinba, to sign. The agreement called for withdrawal of Kartvelian troops from Sukhum and a restitution of the legitimate government. This rather central point was not observed, and so, quite understandably, the fighting resumed in October with the complete expulsion of the invaders from Gagra and the north of the province. Despite the fact that Tbilisi had palpably not fulfilled its undertakings, the Abkhazians alone were universally blamed for the breakdown of the ceasefire. This erroneous view is promoted in an unquestioningly pro-Georgian UN document (*Security Council S/24794* of 11 November 1992) and the slightly earlier and even more ignorant *Resolution on the Situation in Georgia* from the European Parliament, in which the Abkhazians are referred to as a 'terrorist-separatist movement' acting against 'the mainstream political movements in Georgia to build a free society based on human values' (stresses added).

The positions of the two sides remained more or less unchanged despite periodic heavy fighting until the summer of 1993. Again Russia brokered an agreement on 27 July of that year, according to which both sides were to hand over their heavy weaponry within 10–15 days to neutral observers, withdraw their fighters, and the legitimate government of Sukhum was to be restored. The tripartite monitors agreed that the Abkhazians were abiding by the first two clauses and that the Kartvelians were not. Complaints were sent (entirely in vain) to both Russia and the UN Secretary General. Some seven weeks elapsed, and it was clear that the Kartvelians were not going to pull out the

bulk of their troops and heavy artillery (*pace* almost the entire media and, most recently Goldenberg (1994:112)) or allow the Abkhazian government to resume its work in the capital. Fighting restarted on 16 September, when those who had been besieged in T'q'varchal for over 400 days burst out. Again the world's calumny fell upon the Abkhazians for breaking the ceasefire, but the question naturally arises as to why Tbilisi should have been allowed to go on failing to fulfil its obligations, which would eventually have meant that Shevardnadze would have gained by deception what he had manifestly failed to achieve by force—Shevardnadze is known by Georgians as *tetri melia* ('the white fox').

The Abkhazians and their allies re-established legitimate control over their capital on 30 September, and, with the exception of the upper reaches of the K'odor valley in the direction of Svanetia, the invaders were pushed back over the River Ingur border with Mingrelia shortly thereafter. Those who argue that most of the troops and heavy artillery had been removed from Sukhum in accordance with the agreement of 27 July have yet to advance an explanation to two questions: why in that case were the Kartvelians able to put up a full two weeks of resistance in the face of the determined and sustained North Caucasian onslaught (the volunteers having returned and the weaponry retrieved); and whence came the massed ranks of long-range artillery, filmed when inspected by Ardzinba in the immediate aftermath of the liberation of Sukhum?

The Abkhazians believe there is evidence to suggest that President Yeltsin both knew in advance of Shevardnadze's plans to invade and that he concurred with them in the mistaken belief that the military action would end in a swift victory for the central Georgian authorities.

In utterly cynical vein, Shevardnadze has from the start accused and continues to accuse the Abkhazians (particularly when haranguing still sympathetic international audiences) of practising ethnic cleansing against their Kartvelian population. His parliamentary address states:

The Abkhaz separatists have other plans too...to deport [the] Georgian population... These plans have already been declared and are now being implemented in the captured regions in the form of ethnic cleansing. It has been proved by the facts of shooting Georgians according to lists, compiled in advance... The Georgian side has never had or will have any intention of conducting an ethno-genocide of the Abkhazians or their ethnic cleansing, while the atrocities, committed by the Abkhazians against the Georgians in Gagra and Leselidze, as well as in other town and villages across the frontline go beyond all limits and aim at [the] complete deportation, genocide and ethnocide of the Georgians (Shevardnadze 1992:23–24).

Abkhazia is a member of the Unrepresented Nations and Peoples' Organization (UNPO, based in The Hague under the directorship of Dr Michael van Walt van Praag). A mission, including Lord David Ennals, was despatched to Abkhazia and Georgia in November 1992, and their report (UNPO 1993) explicitly rejects the claim that any mass murder of Kartvelians

took place in Gagra after its liberation in the autumn of 1992, as claimed by Shevardnadze and Georgian propaganda in general.

The Effect of the Georgian Occupation on Non-Abkhazians

Contrary to what happened in the case of Chechnia from the moment the Russians started their slaughter of innocent civilians, the world's media (most significantly television) paid little attention to Kartvelian behaviour in Abkhazia once the initial excitement over the fighting had subsided. The Kartvelians were, thus, relatively free in those areas under their control to act as they pleased, without any cameras to prick an indifferent world's conscience. Many journalists could not even correctly identify the Abkhazians; Hugh Pope of *The Independent* as late as 23 October 1993 was still blithely and negligently writing of them as 'Muslims' and 'speakers of a Turkic language', just as William Rees-Mogg in *The Times* of 26 December 1994 wrongly asserted the Chechens to be 'a Turkic people'. As Natela Akaba, Chairman of the Human Rights' Commission of the Parliament of Abkhazia, told Lord Avebury, Chairman of the Parliamentary Human Rights' Group in the UK, during his visit to Abkhazia in December 1994:

Ethnic cleansing was carried out by Georgians, but they escaped any criticism. People think such crimes are not going to be punished. If the crimes were condemned, the moral, if not the political, situation would be much better. The crimes were hushed up by FOG [Friends of Georgia], and Georgia has become a terrorist society (personal communication).

The Friends of Georgia (FOG) is an *ex vi termini* pro-Georgian organization consisting of representatives of such governments as the UK, USA, France and Germany to ensure that international bodies like the UN always work to the advantage of the Shevardnadze regime; befitting its acronym, it operates behind the scenes with no official reports made on its activities and deliberations.

Abkhazians were not the only targets of the Kartvelians at this time. During the course of the war three documents were prepared by the Abkhazians for dissemination to international human rights organizations: (1) Yuri Voronov and Natela Akaba's 'Facts and Materials about Atrocities and Human Rights' Violations Committed by Georgian Forces against the Population of Abkhazia from August to the End of November of 1992' (37 pp.); (2) Yuri Voronov's 'War in Abkhazia' (32 pp., prepared in April 1993); and (3) Natela Akaba's 'The Occupation of Abkhazia and its Consequences' (52 pp.). Mention might now be made of *Belaya Kniga Abkhazii 1992-1993* ('The White Book of Abkhazia 1992-1993') (Xalvash and Xagba 1993). The following are just a few quotations of witnesses from Akaba's document:

[My son] was beaten twice by the Georgian guardsmen. They shouted at him, 'Get out of here! There is no bread for you.' And he saw them taking bread by sacks. We Russians were not treated like human beings' (Russian testimony from 24 April 1993).

But the Georgian guardsmen declared that we Armenians supported the Abkhazians and that they would make the life in our village worse than in Karabakh and not a single woman or child would survive (Armenian testimony from 15 March 1993).

They dragged us out of the bus and started beating us only because we were speaking the Armenian language. On March 8 1993 I fled to Russia (Armenian testimony from 15 May 1993).

'How nice, an Abkhazian and an Armenian! You should be arrested at once,' they shouted. ... 'We've spoiled these Abkhazians too much since 1953 [the year of Stalin's death]. They must be all destroyed.' They also expressed indignation saying that the Armenians betrayed the Georgians and supported Abkhazians (Armenian testimony from 25 April 1993).

'If you want to live in Georgia, you must have Georgian citizenship and speak Georgian.' It is very hard to be a Russian in Sukhum today (Russian testimony from 24 April 1993).

Naturally the Abkhazians, along with many Armenians and Russians, fled for their lives from the occupied areas, creating a refugee problem that has been largely ignored to this day. But in addition to Abkhazians themselves, Armenians and Russians, targets were also made of the Pontic Greeks and local Jews, by the forces of Georgian chauvinism. As related by Clogg (1994):

Much of our knowledge of the plight of the Abkhazian Greeks is due to Vlas Agtzidis ... He accompanied operation 'Golden Fleece', the dispatch in August 1993 by the Greek government of a ship to evacuate just over a thousand ethnic Greeks from Sukhum to Greece. ... Agtzidis carried out interviews among a sizeable proportion of these refugees. His initial findings were published in *Eleftherotypia* (August 29, 1993) and he has now produced a much more detailed report on the consequences of the war for the Greeks of Abkhazia. This report makes grim reading. Take, for instance, the case of Xanthi Kyriazova from Sukhum. She was overpowered one night by a group of seven armed Georgian paramilitaries, who proceeded to extract five gold teeth with pliers. They tortured and murdered her seventy year old aunt, whose children had earlier fled to Greece. Afterwards she was killed and buried in the yard of her house. This was seized by a Georgian family who dug up her aunt's corpse. A.P. had the lobe of her ear shot off when she tried to resist a group of Georgians bent on rape. (A photograph of her damaged ear was published in *Eleftherotypia*).

Furthermore, at the end of 1993 UNPO sent a second mission (its report will appear in *Central Asian Survey* (14.1, 1995)) and in paragraph IIe we read: 'Georgian authorities claimed that the Jewish population was expelled by Abkhazian authorities. Greek villagers, however, explained that it was the Georgians who forced them and their Jewish fellow villagers to leave.'

Abkhazian Victory and its Aftermath

As the war reached its climax, Shevardnadze, in order to strive to engineer a settlement to the crisis, took off for Sukhum with the boast that he would fight

alongside his men with his 'bare hands'. The world's attention came to be fixed on tiny Abkhazia—more, one suspects, because of the presence of this one individual than out of any inherent interest in the struggle for minority rights. The upshot was that the Kartvelian defeat took place in the full glare of publicity, with the majority of the media reporting from the Kartvelian side and, as usual, reflecting the traditional Kartvelian view of themselves as Christian innocents doing battle with Muslim aggressors. The BBC English-language World Service was particularly bad in transmitting (from Tbilisi!) Georgian propaganda as hard news. As is well known, the recapture of Sukhum and shortly thereafter the territories to the south led to an outflow of thousands of Kartvelians across the Ingur into Mingrelia or over the mountains, already covered in snow, into Svanetia. The (not unnatural) sympathy shown by Western reporters for the plight of these wretched folk sharply contrasted with the silence that, as we have seen, accompanied the atrocities committed by the invading forces after their initial success, and lent support to the charges of ethnic cleansing/genocide emanating from Tbilisi. The UN Security Council passed resolution 876 on 19 October 1993 condemning, prior to any investigation, the Abkhazians for alleged violations of humanitarian law. And yet only days earlier the UN Secretary General had asked the Abkhazians to receive a UN mission to investigate these self-same claims. The Abkhazians had absolutely no objections to this visit, neither did they raise any reservations about participating in the UN-sponsored ceasefire talks in Geneva under Ambassador E. Brunner. Shevardnadze, on the other hand, made the sending of this mission to Abkhazia the *sine qua non* for Georgian participation in the Geneva talks. When the mission's report (S/26795) appeared on 17 November 1993, it was (surprisingly in view of previous UN statements) by no means the pro-Georgian whitewash expected by Shevardnadze, who promptly lost all interest in it. In paragraph IIIc of the second UNPO (1995) report we read:

In discussions with the mission, the principal accusation of Georgian authorities made against Abkhazian authorities was genocide committed against the Georgian population of Abkhazia. *The mission did not, however, obtain convincing evidence that would support this claim (stress added),*

whilst in paragraph IIc there appears the crucial observation: 'The majority of Georgians, however, fled before the Abkhazians and Northern Caucasus troops arrived.' Furthermore, in paragraph IIIa it is noted: 'Several Abkhazians responsible for crimes against Georgian civilians were prosecuted or are awaiting their trial in Sukhum', which rather contrasts with the statement:

Georgian authorities in Tbilisi were unable to provide the mission with evidence or data concerning the prosecution of Georgians, Megrelians [Mingrelians], Abkhazians or others who committed human rights violations and other crimes during the time Georgian authorities controlled parts of Abkhazia (paragraph IIIb).

Perhaps one should note at this point the following statement by the then Minister for Abkhazian Affairs in the Georgian government, Giorgi Khaindrava: 'All we have to do to destroy the genetic stock of the Abkhazians is to kill 15,000 of their young—we are perfectly capable of this' (*Le Monde Diplomatique*, April 1993). Despite these statements and despite the weight of evidence of Kartvelian atrocities in the named documents circulated by the Abkhazians, all that is heard from the British government are such anodyne statements as the following from Douglas Hogg, Minister of State at the Foreign Office: 'We would certainly accept that atrocities and human rights abuses have been committed by all parties in the dispute' (private letter).

Immediately after the mass movement of Kartvelians out of Abkhazia, Georgian sources began to speak of 200,000 and then 250,000 refugees on Georgian soil. These estimates were, of course, swallowed and repeated by the UN and Western media. Eventually the figure was inflated to 300,000 (see paragraph B of Security Council document S/1994/80 of 25 January 1994), and this figure was given most recently by UNHCR representative Larry Hollingworth in an interview on BBC Radio 4's *Today* programme on 7 January 1995. There is no way that this figure can be regarded as accurate. In the last Soviet census of Abkhazia in 1989 there were not even a quarter of a million Kartvelians living in Abkhazia, and so, even if one were to assume (which is not the case) that every last Kartvelian has left Abkhazia, there could not possibly be as many as 300,000 to pour over the border into Mingrelia. Nor did displaced persons of other nationalities dare to take refuge from the fighting in Georgia proper, for in the main they were forced from their homes during the first half of the war by *Kartvelians*, and had no reason to flee advancing Abkhazian troops in October 1993 in favour of rushing into a Mingrelia that was the site of a separate war being fought between Zviadists and supporters of the Shevardnadze regime. In his letter to Douglas Hogg of 16 December 1994, Lord Avebury quotes the figure of 52,000 Kartvelians (Mingrelians) residing at that time in Abkhazia's southernmost district of Gali alone, which suggests that the true figure of Kartvelian exiles to Georgia proper will be a maximum of 180,000. What help for refugees has been sent to the region has been largely channelled through Tbilisi for the purpose of helping those on the Georgian side of the Ingur—where is the assistance for those Abkhazians, Armenians, Greeks, Russians, Jews and others upon whom deliberate suffering was imposed as a direct and preconceived consequence of the invasion, which Shevardnadze acknowledged to have been *his* decision in a meeting in mid December 1994 with a visitor from the West (personal communication)?

During the UN-sponsored peace talks, which have been in progress since the end of 1993, discussions have centred on the two questions of Abkhazia's constitutional status and the return of the refugees, the Ingur frontier being controlled by 3,000 Russian peace-keepers as of summer 1994. According to article 3c of an agreement signed on 4 April 1994 in Moscow, refugees shall have the right to return free from the risk of arrest or persecution, though this

does not apply to those who committed war crimes or who took up arms in support of the invading forces or who are members of the Georgian military formations. A quadripartite committee consisting of Abkhazians, Georgians, Russians and the UNHCR was established to vet applications from prospective returnees. Though processing of applications is admittedly a slow business, even when approval has been granted to a specific number of returnees, it is often the case that nothing like that number crosses the border on the appointed day—Ardzinba told Lord Avebury in December 1994 that only 400 out of 1,126 granted permission to return had actually done so during a period of two months. One cannot exclude the possibility that some individuals are forced into submitting applications to return as part of a continuing political game and thus, having no real intention to go back, do not appear at the crossing point when expected.

The Abkhazians are of the opinion that it is largely only in the Gali district that Mingrelians innocent of involvement in the war are to be found, and that only such are deserving of permission to return. They fear that to allow a mass return of Kartvelians to settlements further north will only lead to a renewal of bloodshed, and would permit the Tbilisi authorities to win their decades-old aim of artificially swamping the Abkhazians on their native soil, by people they deliberately misidentify as 'Georgians' for the sole purpose of arguing that the territory occupied by 'Georgians' properly belongs to Georgia. They feel they have not endured all the suffering Shevardnadze's brutal invasion imposed upon them only to give up now all that their spirited defence of their homeland has earned them as regards the right, at last, to control their own destiny. As far as they are concerned, the days when Tbilisi was free to tamper with the demography of their homeland are permanently in the past. The number of refugees in Georgia proper from both (Shevardnadze's) Abkhazian and (Gamsakhurdia's) South Ossetian wars, who would not today be refugees had the two post-Soviet leaders of Georgia not begun these two wholly avoidable wars in the first place, is, in any case, more than offset by the number of Russians and Armenians who have abandoned this crime-ridden and continually fragmenting land for their own republics.

There should be no problem accommodating the exiles, who, if they truly regard themselves as 'Georgians' and belong to families forcibly transplanted into Abkhazia in the 1930s and 1940s, should feel themselves more at home here anyway than in the North West Caucasian territory of Abkhazia, which was only forced into an unwelcome subordination to his native country by Stalin as late as 1931. The problem is to make the Tbilisi authorities understand that such a divorce is by far the best way of starting the no doubt lengthy process of returning peace to what used to be one of the wealthiest and happiest of the Soviet republics.

As long as the West and international organizations like the UN and OSCE constantly harp on the need to preserve the territorial integrity of this or that manifestly ill-integrated state, such processes for resolving conflict and initiating the healing of wounds and hatreds cannot even get under way. At

the time of writing, a summit meeting between Ardzinba and Shevardnadze is anticipated in New York on 14 January 1995. Such a meeting has been twice postponed by Shevardnadze as a result of the adoption by Abkhazia of a new constitution (even though this is specifically sanctioned by the agreement signed in Moscow on 4 April 1994), and it is by no means certain that he will attend. The meeting is due to be chaired by the UN Secretary General, who, as a token of his commitment to neutrality between the two parties, accepted an honorary doctorate from the University of Tbilisi on a visit to Georgia in November 1994.

Abkhazia and Chechnia: Variations on a Theme

What parallels can be drawn with the war in Chechnia? If the Soviet authorities had decided to preserve the Mountain Republic to unite the myriad peoples of the North Caucasus, the world would have recognized such a sixteenth Soviet republic as a fully independent state after the dissolution of the USSR in 1991. But by the mere arbitrariness of fate, Chechnia, conquered only in 1859 and denuded of its indigenous population *en masse* by Kremlin orders from 1944 to 1957, was for most of the USSR's history slotted within the so-called Russian Federation. And it was with Chechnia as a constituent part that this Russian Federation was recognized by the international community.

In the three years between Dzhokhar Dudaev's unilateral declaration of independence and the Russian invasion, no country recognized Chechnia's independence. During the years of stand-off, the Russians imposed a commercial blockade of this land-locked state, which, however, continued to export its own oil and to refine oil from such republics as Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan, for which, in the absence of regular sources of income, it seems to have charged a high tariff (see Patrick Heren in *The Times* 7 January 1995). It cannot be denied that individual Chechens have been involved in organized crime, but this in no way justifies the hyperbolic claims from Moscow, lapped up by the ever headline-hungry Western media (see Richard Clogg's letter in *The Guardian* 23 December 1994), that the Chechens are a nation of criminals and brigands. And it has been the absurd excuse for this insane invasion that Moscow was only acting to restore law and order by disarming a criminal regime and its armed bands (who were portrayed as Muslim fundamentalists to boot). All this as though central Russia (not to mention Georgia) were not itself a veritable hotbed for all aspects of crime, organized or otherwise, that burgeoned after the Soviet collapse! Those who ordered in the poorly prepared conscripts, along with many of those 'liberals' who may oppose the specific tactics of their now disgraced president, argue that Chechnia is an integral part of Russia and must be brought to heel.

In exactly parallel fashion Tbilisi argues that Abkhazia is an indivisible part of Georgia now in danger of becoming a source of Muslim fundamentalism, to destabilize the area, and initially presented a patently false justification for its

own invasion in 1992. One would be hard pressed to name any Kartvelians who spoke out against bloodshed in Abkhazia in the way that honourable politicians, intellectuals and ordinary citizens of Russia have opposed Yeltsin over Chechnia. Despite the fact that it was the governments in both Georgia and Russia which instigated the use of arms to solve regional political difficulties, it has been the Abkhazians and the Chechens who have been unquestioningly labelled with the pejorative term 'rebels' (and, of course, 'separatists') by the Western media. Although the sympathies of those who unthinkingly use these terms seem to be with the Chechens today, the very terms surely carry the strong implication that it is the Chechens who are ultimately at fault—I do not recall any such application of these labels to the Kartvelians or the Balts when, in the lead-up to the disappearance of the USSR, they were agitating for their own independence. Why the double standards?

Just as there was silence over Kartvelian actions during the occupation of the southern half of Abkhazia, so it was not until the end of the first week in January 1995 that the first expressions of concern were mooted by Western leaders, starting with the French Foreign Minister A. Juppé. The UN, reportedly as a result of American insistence, has yet even to acknowledge the fact of the massacre inflicted by the Russian air force, and constant shelling. Presumably, just as Yeltsin himself hoped that Shevardnadze would quickly polish off his little local difficulty, and was thus not prepared to make himself available to respond to Ardzinba's attempts to persuade him to intervene in the early days to put a stop to the Abkhazian war, so the Western leaders were hoping that he would speedily achieve his aims over the holiday period and spare any of them the necessity of speaking out openly in condemnation of this blatant and undeniable abuse of human rights. If this is the case, then they were as mistaken in their evaluation of the situation as Yeltsin himself. In the case of the British government, it is only to be expected that their assessment was defective. Thus Dr R. Bridge (letter in *The Guardian* of 23 December 1994) was monitoring Chechen affairs at the British Embassy in Moscow in the months after Dudaev's declaration of independence. He claimed that the Russians only at that time began to call and spell the country 'Chechnya' in response to a request to do so from the Chechens themselves, having previously called and written it 'Checheniya'. In fact, from the earliest days of Russian involvement in this part of the North Caucasus they used the term 'Chechnya' (based on the name of the first Chechen village, or *aul*, they encountered, namely Great Chechān; see Gammer 1994:18), whereas the Chechens' native term for their land is 'Nwokhchijchō'.

It should come as no surprise that of all the leaders of the former Soviet republics only Shevardnadze has spoken approvingly of Yeltsin's actions, although this fact has been suspiciously ignored in the West. So, just as Shevardnadze grossly miscalculated in 1992 and perhaps had the covert support of Yeltsin, Yeltsin himself even more grossly miscalculated in 1994, and gained the full backing of Shevardnadze. His inhuman actions are a sad

reflection of the Russo-Georgian axis which in the 19th century caused so much loss of life and general suffering in the North Caucasus and led to Russia's eventual control of the whole region. Despite the events of the past few years, and the attempted suppression of the ethnos of the people in this region, the Shevardnadze/Yeltsin leadership still draws encomia from Western leaders and media opinion formers.

North Caucasian Minorities and the Credo of 'Territorial Integrity'

Morality aside, the stance of the West and such institutions as the UN to the cases of Chechnia and Abkhazia reveals an incompetence on the part of politicians and policy-makers that simply defies description. Despite the welcome appraisal on 7 January 1995 by Helmut Kohl of the assault on Grozny as 'complete madness', he added that, even so, no sanctions would be taken. Warren Christopher's expression of 'concern' the same day was set against his assertion that the US government hoped that the territorial integrity of the Russian Federation could be preserved. In other words, it is the necessity of preserving territorial integrity that is the supreme goal (which in the case of Russia reduces to the West conspiring to preserve the world's last European-based empire). The constant repetition of this is tantamount to a signal for those like Yeltsin and Shevardnadze, whose mind-sets were framed and whose reputations were made when they were regional functionaries (in Sverdlovsk/Ekaterinburg and Tbilisi, respectively) in the heavily centralized Soviet system, to carry on regardless because they see the greater good of territorial integrity being permitted to override whatever evil is perpetrated in the brutal attempt to secure it. And the reason for this emphasis on territorial integrity lies in a desire for the stability that comes from unity rather than a growing instability that is associated with fragmentation of states into ever smaller units.

Stability is obviously a good thing, and unity, where possible, is to be encouraged. But the crucial qualification is 'where possible'. When peoples have been artificially forced together by an oppressive, and for 70 years seemingly unshakeable system, it is hardly surprising if some, at least, of the administrative units devised by that system are inherently unviable. To pretend that by setting its face against change the West can collectively countermand the desire of certain peoples to remove themselves from the unwelcome and often hostile control of others, whom the West in its self-proclaimed wisdom (but actual ignorance) deems appropriate masters, is to retreat into a latter-day *Nephelococcygia*. And, in any case, why should an increase in the number of small states inevitably create greater instability? The basic error is compounded by the reduction of international relations to a matter of personalities. Shevardnadze and Yeltsin are men of whom the West approves, as 'democrats' and trustworthy. And so, when Western leaders should be formulating policy on the basis of the *actions* of foreign governments, they refuse to take proper account of the relevant actions and persevere in their support for the *personalities* responsible for those actions, which in the cases of concern here

are widescale deaths of North Caucasians in Abkhazia and subsequently in Chechenia.

In the meantime, an economically bankrupt Georgia (its economy in 1994 was one quarter of its size in 1990) and a hardly thriving Russia depend on Western support to spend huge amounts of money to help sort out the instability created by the resorting to arms of these self-same states in the first place. We have already discussed the displaced persons in Georgia, and now we are told of maybe three-quarters of its population having fled from Grozny in the depths of a Caucasian winter, with 40,000 exiles seeking refuge in neighbouring Ingushetia (population 250,000), where there are already 60,000 refugees who have fled the combined 'policing' actions of Russia and North Ossetia in the disputed Prigorodnyi Raion. This latter outcome the UNPO mission, in December 1994, decided was a policy of ethnic cleansing designed in part to try to entice Chechenia into intervention, which in turn would have given Yeltsin his excuse to topple Dudaev by deploying troops in Chechenia (UNPO in *Covcas Bulletin* 1994:20–21).

Neither party can hope to make the targets of its weaponry any more amenable to remaining part of the respective unitary state than they were before the hatred inflamed by the resulting death and destruction; and so the stability the West desires, and which conditions its shaming silence in the face of widescale abuses of basic human rights, becomes the source of the very instability that it was hoped to avoid in the first place. Does anyone really suppose that Georgia can be preserved as a stable entity within its currently recognized international boundaries when Abkhazia and South Ossetia are *de facto* lost already, when the south-western province of Ach'ara is run as the virtual fiefdom of its local hard-man, Aslan Abashidze, and when the area also in the south where the Armenians are concentrated reportedly flies not the Georgian but the Armenian flag? Does anyone really suppose that, whatever the outcome in Chechenia (and it is likely that the result will be years of guerrilla war in the mountains encompassing the other North Caucasians), the non-Russian peoples of the Federation, especially those in the North Caucasus itself, are willingly going to want to continue living under such a Russian 'democrat' when they had thought they had cast off their chains and were destined for a free and brighter future?

If the West and its institutions simply condemn all those who, at the close of the 20th century, dare to aspire to statehood to continuing repression and even possible death simply because that statehood was not seized before the creation of the UN in 1945 (see 'Protection of Minorities' prepared by Asbjørn Eide for the UN Economic and Social Council and numbered E/CN.4/Sub.2/1992/37), then the West can claim no moral superiority over the sorts of regimes it regularly and rightly censures. When the domestic policies of the British government are predicated on the belief that there is no such thing as society, it comes as no surprise that current British leaders are not prepared to act in defence of the even more amorphous 'international community'. It is to be hoped that the growth of this philosophy can be halted and then eradicated,

and perhaps the events in the Caucasus will provide the impetus for a new approach to be adopted to the problems of minority rights.

However one interprets it, demographic manipulation of Caucasian minorities looks set to continue. Meanwhile, as brave voices of conscience have been raised in Moscow from the start of the bombing in Grozny by such individuals as Sergei Kovalyov, Yelena Bonner, Anatole Shabad and Galina Starovoitova, the West stands condemned by the belatedness and utterly pusillanimous nature of its wholly inadequate response to the carnage.

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*This paper was first presented at the European Seminar at St Antony's College, Oxford, on 22 February 1993 and entitled 'Ethnic Cleansing in the Caucasus'. It was concerned primarily with the then ongoing war between Abkhazians and Georgians following the Georgian invasion of Abkhazia on 14 August 1992. As noted by two anonymous reviewers, to whom I am grateful for their helpful comments, much has changed since then, and these changed circumstances are accommodated in the revised paper. For full details of the Georgian-Abkhazian dispute up to the end of 1992 readers may consult Hewitt (1993b). For those unfamiliar with the Caucasus relevant background information is presented, although the Abkhazian question remains the central focus. At the time of writing (January 1995) more unnecessary deaths and suffering are being inflicted upon the north Caucasian region of Chechnia, and pertinent parallels with the war in Abkhazia are highlighted towards the end.

1. German translations of this work and the article by Lortkipanidze (plus one by L. Toidze) can be found in what previously could be regarded as a respectable journal, namely *Georgica* (15, 1992); for a rebuttal of Lortkipanidze see Yuri Voronov's review (1992), and for a rebuttal of Gamq'relidze see Hewitt (1993a).

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