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The Effect of Destalinization on the Development of Georgian
Nationalism in 1960's – Case of March 9th, 1956 Events

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Abstract

The Effect of Destalinization on the Development of Georgian Nationalism in 1960's – Case of March 9th, 1956 Events

Most of the current problems in Georgia have its root in the Soviet period. It is important, to study the effects of Soviet policies on the developments in Georgia that have the effect up until today.

The subject of this research is the Destalinization policy initiated by Nikita Khrushchev and its effect on the development of Georgian nationalism. The aim is to understand the extent of this effect and the reasons behind it. For this reason the objectives are to first examine the Soviet policies of institutionalizing nationality, national policies elaborated and implemented by Stalin in every Soviet republic, including Georgia to assert his role in developing the notion of Georgian nation and Georgianness in the Soviet Union. Following this to determine whether these policies and their results had any impact on the events of March 9th, 1956 and why did the secret speech become a trigger that set it off and finally to look at the nationalist groups in Georgia after March events, at the aims and motivations behind the activities conducted by these groups and the ideas of their leaders and members to see whether they were inspired or otherwise affected by abovementioned events. The Hypothesis that this research aims to prove is that Destalinization and denouncing Stalin's cult had a symbolic effect on the later development of Georgian nationalism.

Thus the independent variable is the Destalinization policy started by Khrushchev that resulted in March events in 1956 and the dependent variable is the later development of underground Georgian nationalist movements at the end of the 1950's and the beginning of 1960's.

This research takes previously existing views on the effects of March events on Georgian nationalism in general and locates specific evidence for this claim and in the process discovers new aspects of this process.

ანოტაცია

დესტალინიზაციის ეფექტი ქართული ნაციონალიზმის განვითარებაზე 1960-იან წლებში
- 1965 წლის 9 მარტის მოვლენების საკითხი

საქართველოში ამჟამად არსებული პრობლემების დიდი ნაწილის ფესვები საბჭოთა პერიოდში შეგვიძლია ვიპოვოთ. აუცილებელია შევისწავლოთ საბჭოთა პოლიტიკის გავლენა საქართველოზე, რომელის გავლენაც დღევანდელ დღემდე სახეზეა.

ამ კვლევის თემაა დესტალინიზაციის პოლიტიკა, რომელიც ნიკიტა ხრუშოვმა დაიწყო და მისი ეფექტი ქართული ნაციონალიზმის განვითარებაზე. მიზანი არის იმის გაგება, თუ რა დონეზე გამოიხატება ეს ეფექტი და რა არის ამის მიზეზი. ამისათვის პირველი ამოცანაა საბჭოთა პოლიტიკის განხილვა ნაციონალიზმის ინსტიტუციონალიზების კუთხით, პოლიტიკა, რომელიც ჩამოაყალიბა და გაატარა სტალინმა ყველა საბჭოთა რესპუბლიკაში. ამის შემდეგ უნდა განისაზღვროს ჰქონდა თუ არა გავლენა ამ პოლიტიკას და მის შედეგებს გავლენა ამ პოლიტიკას 1956 წლის 9 მარტის მოვლენებზე და რატომ იქცა ხრუშოვის საიდუმლო სიტყვა მის მაპროვოცირებლად და, საბოლოოდ, მარტის მოვლენების შემდეგ ქართული ნაციონალისტური ჯგუფების აღწერა, მათ შორის მათი მიზნების, მათი ქმედებების უკან არსებული მოტივაციების და მათი ლიდერებისა და წევრების იდეები, რათა დადგინდეს მოახდინა თუ არა მათზე გავლენა ზემოთ ხსენებულმა მოვლენებმა. კვლევის ჰიპოთეზა, რომლის დამტკიცებასაც ისახავს ის მიზნად მდგომარეობს შემდეგში: დესტალინიზაციას და სტალინის კულტის დაგმობას ქართული ნაციონალიზმის განვითარებაზე სიმბოლური ეფექტი ჰქონდა.

შესაბამისად, დამოუკიდებელი ცვლად არის ხრუშოვის მიერ დაწყებული დესტალინიზაციის პოლიტიკა, რამაც 1956 წლის მარტის მოვლენები გამოიწვია, ხოლო დამოკიდებული ცვლადი არის 1950-იანი წლების ბოლოს და 1960-იანი წლების დასაწყისში ქართული მიწისქვეშა ნაციონალისტური მოძრაობების განვითარება. ეს კვლევა იღებს უკვე არსებულ შეხედულებებს მარტის მოვლენების ქართულ ნაციონალიზმზე გავლენის შესახებ და ეძებს კონკრეტულ მტკიცებულებებს ამ შეხედულებების გასამყარებლად, ამავდროულად აღმოაჩენს ამ პროცესების ახლა ასპექტებს.

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Introduction

Problem statement

Much of Georgia's last century is connected to the Soviet Union that occupied the country for 70 years. Thus many recent developments and problems that the country is now facing have their roots in this period, from the current occupation of Abkhazia and South Ossetia by Russia to the demands for Stalin's monument in his birth-town of Gori. Resolving these problems, I believe, requires thorough research of our past and the analysis of the events that led to today's problems. Since the rise of some ultra-nationalistic movements in Georgia, who tend to lean towards closer relations to Russia, it is important, to go back to the near past and examine the emergence of Georgian nationalism in the Soviet Union. Lack of research on this topic can mislead interpretations over Georgian nationalism, Soviet rule in Georgia and by some still admired leader Stalin, that are far from the truth.

Since the first Georgian republic and its occupation by Soviet forces, the event of March 9th, 1956 was the first major protest not only in Georgia, but in the whole Soviet Union and yet, much remains unknown, from the number of killed and injured, to what exactly these events led to. There have been research and theories over the causes of the mass uprising, the aims and motivations behind it and that it, one way or another, led to broader Georgian nationalist movement. Some theories consider these events as the push towards reevaluation of what it meant to be a Soviet citizen and Georgian at the same time, others focus on the somewhat paradoxical role of Stalin, his cult and his nationalistic policies in these events and subsequent Nationalist movements. The straightforward answer to these questions might be impossible, as there are various accounts from the participants of these events that sometimes contradict each other, such as their perception of what were these events all about and if they were nationalistic in their sentiment. Georgian archives of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, both party and security archives contain documents concerning these events, such as telegrams between Georgian KGB officials and central KGB leadership in Moscow, interrogations of those detained, personal letters

and reports on closed meetings of primary party organizations over Khrushchev's so-called secret speech, containing the concerns that Georgians had towards new policy of Destalinization initiated by this speech.

All of this, according to the scholars, both Georgian and non-Georgian, who worked and wrote on this subject and whose work will be quoted and analyzed in this research, conclude that these events had an impact on the subsequent development of Georgian nationalism, but the question remains - what was this effect and hence what role can these events and the cult of Stalin be attributed in the development of Georgian nationalism.

Researching this subject is not only important in the historical context, to analyze first mass uprising in the Soviet union, the event that some authors see as the first crack that culminated in the collapse of the communist party and the state, but also to understand Georgia's recent past and the role of Stalin, whom, unfortunately, some still see as a great son of Georgian nation.

Many scholars, like Rogers Brubaker see the role of soviet policy of what he calls "institutionalized multinationality" (or as Ronald Suny calls it - renationalization), soviet policy formulated by Joseph Stalin in his works, such as "Marxism and the national question" and later implemented through Soviet Union with the aim of turning member units "national in form but socialist in content." This, is seen by Brubaker and others as precisely what would turn out to be the demise of Soviet Union.

But it would not be visible until the first demonstrations that displayed a nationalistic sentiment and this was the demonstrations following Khrushchev's secret speech, which marked the beginning of the process of Destalinization by denouncing Stalin and his policies, exposing his crimes and his desire to create his own cult that according to Khrushchev was far from Marxist-Leninist ideology. This shift caused great confusion through the Soviet Union and especially in Georgia, where people saw it as a threat towards them as Georgians, as main villains of Khrushchev's speech had exactly this in common. This gave the way to emergence of the result of abovementioned policies of institutionalizing nationalism.

Aim and Objectives

Thus the Aim of this research is to examine the effect of the process of Destalinization, started from the Secret speech by Nikita Khrushchev on the 20th party congress denouncing Stalin and his cult and led to March demonstrations on the later development of Georgian nationalism in late 1950's and 1960's. It will examine the main points of the secret speech regarding Stalin and his policies and the response that it got from Georgians, both during the March events and later on.

The **hypothesis** that will be examined in this research is that the process of Destalinization and denouncing Stalin's cult had a symbolic effect on the later development of Georgian nationalism, as far as Stalin, being Georgian, was by some viewed as a symbol of Georgian nation, that was now under threat from new leadership.

For this, the first objective of the research will be to examine the Soviet policies of Institutionalizing Nationality, nationality policies elaborated and implemented by Stalin in every Soviet republic, including Georgia to assert his role in developing the notion of Georgian nation and Georgianness in the Soviet Union.

Second objective is to determine whether these policies and their results had any impact on the events of March 9th, 1956 and why did the secret speech become a trigger that set it off. The demands of protesters and later discussions on March events, secret speech and Destalinization policy in Georgia have to be analyzed to determine whether it was nationalistic in content and thus could have had an impact on the later development of Georgian nationalism.

To examine this impact the third objective of this research will be to look at the nationalist groups in Georgia after March events. These were small underground groups, such as "Gorgasliani" as well as later larger movements towards independence of Georgia. It will look at the aims and motivations behind the activities conducted by these groups and the ideas of their

leaders and members to see whether they were inspired or otherwise affected by abovementioned events.

Theoretical Framework

In order to understand the processes that follow the change in course after Khrushchev came to power, especially his Destalinization policy and the effect it had throughout the Soviet Union and particularly in Georgia, and why it would lead to mass demonstrations and in a way the revival of nationalist sentiments, first we have to understand the effect of Soviet policies towards nationalism, which were started by Lenin and continued by Stalin.

In order to connect the nationalist movements in Georgia to these policies, this research will be grounded in the theories of the Modernist school of Nationalism studies, which considers nationalism to be a modern phenomenon. More specifically, the theoretical framework proposed by Benedict Anderson in his work "Imagined Communities".

Soviet policies that many scholars have described as an anomaly or a paradox are called by some, like Ronald Suny Renationalization policy or by Rogers Brubaker "Institutionalizing nationality".

Even though Soviet renationalization policy was supposed to be national only in form and not in substance, as it was meant to serve as a tool to bring all the nations closer in the union of socialist states and the national aspects, such as language were meant to be used to spread socialism and subsequently blur the boundaries between the member states, but the policy backfired and served as a means to the opposite end. Anderson, as well as Eric Hobsbawm mention this much in their works, that Marxist movements and states tend to become national not only in form, but in substance, meaning that they became not socialist, but nationalist. "Nationalism has proved an uncomfortable anomaly for Marxist theory and, precisely for that reason, has been largely elided, rather than confronted." writes Anderson. (Anderson, 2006)

Anderson views nationalism as a cultural artefact, the meaning of which changes over time. In his work he tries to locate the creation of these artefacts in modern period, more specifically after the 18th century and tries to explain how they are created and arouse attachment widely.

Anderson argues that the possibility of imagining nation arose, when religion, monarchy and the perception that the origins of the world and men were identical declined. This, according to him started in Western Europe in the age of reformation and enlightenment and spread throughout the world.

According to him the tool for the spread of nationalism were, what he calls “census, map and museum” meaning the nature of human beings ruled by the colonial state, geography of the domain and legitimacy of its ancestry, as he explains.

“Interlinked with one another, then, the census, the map and the museum illuminate the late colonial state’s style of thinking about its domain. The “warp” of this thinking was a totalizing classificatory grid, which could be applied with endless flexibility to anything under the state’s real or contemplated control: peoples, regions, religions, languages, products, monuments and so forth. The effect of the grid was always to be able to say of anything that it was this, not that.”

(Anderson, 2006)

Thus, according to Anderson what he calls “official nationalism”, and what resembles the rationalization policy of the Soviet Union, is a self-protective policy, coming from the state and serving its interests. He also states that this model, typical to imperialist and colonialist states is later adopted by revolutionaries, among which he mentions Bolsheviks, as it is inherited from the fallen (in this case Tsarist) regime:

“Thus the model of official nationalism assumes its relevance above all at the moment when revolutionaries successfully take control of the state and are for the first time in a position to use the power of the state in pursuit of their visions. The relevance is all the greater insofar as even the most determined radical revolutionaries always, to some degree, inherit the state from the fallen regime.”(Anderson, 2006)

These points, in regard to Soviet policies towards nationalism are repeated in the works that are used as the foundation of this research. For example Ronald Suny writes, that Lenin's nationality policy "in the hands of the Stalinists had created nationalized republics even as they tried to develop a multinational unity on the basis of the Russian language." We can find the same position in Yuri Slezkine's "The USSR as a communal apartment":

"Lenin's acceptance of the reality of nations and "national rights" was one of the most uncompromising positions he ever took, his theory of good nationalism formed the conceptual foundation of the soviet union and his NEP-time policy of compensatory "nation-building" was a spectacularly successful attempt as a state-sponsored conflation of language, "culture", territory and quota-fed bureaucracy." (Slezkine, 1994)

The difference is connected with the language, because Slezkine recognizes the role it played and how it was used by Soviet state to deliver the ideas of the Soviet leadership to its citizens, who did not have a common language. The importance of language and education in the development and spread the concept of nationalism is also emphasized by Anderson.

As for the "census, map and museum" approach, this similarity can also be found with colonial powers. Soviet census did not just serve the statistical purpose, but determined ethnic origins of the people under Soviet rule.

"Just as "class origins" became an important criterion for matriculation in institutes of learning or promotion into responsible position, so during the "cultural revolution" national origins also was often more important than acquired skills. The korenizatsiia policy of nativizing the schools and the governing apparatus was put into high gear. At the same time, however, it was accompanied by attacks on local nationalism." Writes Suny. (Suny, 1994)

In the words of Rogers Brubaker "Ethnic nationality served not only as a statistical category, a fundamental unit of social accounting, but also, and more distinctively, as an obligatory ascribed status." (Brubaker, 1996)

Maps were also redrawn not only in Georgia, but in Central Asia and almost every member state of Soviet Union and History was promoted but under the direction of central government to serve their purposes.

“Although the full aspirations of Georgian nationalism were not promoted by Soviet authorities, the intelligentsia did receive patronage of the arts and language, satisfying in part its national aspirations.” Writes Suny. (Suny, 1994)

This institutionalization of territorial and ethnocultural nationality, according to Brubaker, served as a fundamental social category and “inadvertently created a political field supremely conducive to nationalism.” (Brubaker, 1996)

All of this began after the creation of Soviet Union but reached its peak during Stalin's rule as he was the main creator of the policy and participated actively in its implementation. Thus Stalin became a symbol of Soviet nationalization policy and this was especially true in soviet Georgia.

Literature Review

This research will be divided in five main parts that will serve to explain the events chronologically and try to demonstrate the links between them. First chapter deals with Soviet renationalization politics under Stalin. Renationalization is a term used by Ronald Suny in his work “The Making of the Georgian nation”, Rogers Brubaker uses the term “Institutionalizing nationality” and Slezikine simply calls it Soviet nationality policy, a policy under first Lenin and later Stalin that aimed to create nations that were national in form, but socialist in content. As Brubaker argues in his work “Nationalism Reframed”, this later led to the ultimate demise of the Soviet Union. Second reason, why it is important for this research to first analyze this policy is to understand the aspects of Stalin's cult in which this policy served as a major building block. For this part main sources will be Suny's “The Making of the Georgian Nation” to describe the policy, its development and effect on Georgia. Slezikine's article “USSR as a communal apartment” also offers a valuable description of Soviet renationalization policy, its aims and its methods. Brubaker's “Nationalism Reframed” will be used in the analysis of this policy as he explains the effect and consequences.

Second chapter will deal with the Destalinization policy. To make this term operational, this research will concentrate on the beginning of the Destalinization policy. Its official start is marked by Nikita Khrushchev's "Secret speech" on 20th party congress denouncing the cult of Stalin. In this part I will analyze Khrushchev's speech, underline the parts that caused discontent in Georgia and try to explain the possible reasons behind this reaction.

Third part will be focused on the events of 9th March, 1956. In this part I depend on existing archival materials, kept in Georgian Ministry of Internal Affairs archives, mostly Section II which is the Soviet Party archive. Based on this I will chronologically describe the events, what lead to them and what was the result. The archival materials include official communications between Georgia and central leadership in Moscow, official reports and accounts of eyewitnesses. Apart from this I will depend on memoir by the participant of these events, namely Georgian writer Akaki Tsereteli and a book by Givi Vefkhvadze who made a film on these events.

Fourth chapter will depend on abovementioned memoirs and party archive materials that contain the information on the aftermath of the massacre of 9th march and describes the public reaction to these events. Archives contain documents from party meeting that were held after March events to bring Khrushchev's new policy to the people. These measures, that were meant for damage control aimed to reeducate party members over new party policy to prevent another mass discontent. Nevertheless, there were some members, who did not understand, or disagreed with the new policy and were unhappy about the developments in Georgia following its announcement. Their anonymous letters and cards are kept in the archive and are valuable in understanding the scale of reverberations of March event in the society.

Fifth chapter will include underground movements in Georgia after 1956 and examine if these events had any effect on their development and if so, on what scale. For this I will rely on archival materials kept in Security archives that contain the information on the arrests and trials of the members of these underground groups, individuals that were deemed as nationalists, what where they accused of and why. In conclusion I will try to establish the link between on the one

hand Soviet renationalization policy and the shift under Khrushchev, the process of Destalinization and mass demonstrations and on the other hand the March events and the emergence, agenda and aims of these groups.

Methodology

For these purposes, this research will rely on qualitative content analysis of various official and scholarly documents, as well as the analysis of several memoirs and literary works from the period in question.

I chose several memoirs that contain fullest description of the events including speeches during the demonstrations. As for the scholarly analysis, I chose mainly foreign scholars, who worked on the topic in Georgia or outside. The reason behind this that they view the events as outsiders and do not have any emotional attachment towards the events that took place that could be reflected on their analysis. The research chosen in this manner belongs to authors who have worked in this field and have published multiple studies concerning Georgian socio-political situation and history and have a deep understanding of these subjects. It should be mentioned, that as of this writing I could not find any scholarly analysis on this topic, considering March events in connection with later Georgian nationalist movements by Georgian scholars.

Different frameworks on the development of nationalism can also be applied to these events. The Author has limited access to archival materials and none to the materials in Russian archives concerning these years and thus relies on the secondary sources analyzing these materials, which can also be subject to author's interpretation and might lack information that can give scholars, who will examine them new and different insight. Memoirs, that will be analyzed might also be subjective and contain the interpretations of authors, but, as we are analyzing the events that took place more than 60 years ago, they, along with archival materials (which are also limited due to the Soviet secretive policies, restrictions and the fact, that some of them were destroyed) are, I believe, the best way to reconstruct the past today.

As mentioned above, for these reasons the research will use the existing archival material and memoirs for first hand recounts that will help reconstruct the events. During analysis the views of various scholars will be examined and incorporated. This will serve the aims stated above, to prove or disprove the suggested hypothesis. Further research on this topic can not only use different theoretical framework to analyze the same events, but also can broaden this subject by expanding existing materials with interviews of contemporaries and participants of these events, by researching separately Soviet policies of institutionalized multinationality and Georgian nationalist movements and explain them through different perspectives, including events other than March demonstrations and Destalinization process.

Soviet Renationalization Politics under Stalin

To understand the reasons why would Destalinization and denouncement of a brutal dictator cause dissatisfaction and discontent in people, who were oppressed by him, we need to study Stalin's cult and major part of the foundation of his cult – Soviet nationality policy.

Both Lenin and Stalin understood, that it was impossible to spread the ideology of socialism on the territories and among people, who did not understand it, spoke different languages and had vastly different traditions. Acknowledging this, they devised a policy that aimed to institutionalize these differences and use them in support of their aim.

“Nations were to be seen but not heard; culture was to be “national in form but socialist in content” ...the republics would be national in name only.” (Brubaker, 1996)

This policy resembled colonial practices of other major powers that used same tools, ethnic policies, redrawing maps and recreating history to serve their goals. In case of Soviet Union, because of the already existing differences between the annexed states and territories, the specificities of this policy varied.

“For some nationalities renationalization meant the creation of an alphabet and written language. For others it involved the initial establishment of a political framework...For Georgians renationalization involved the gradual re-establishment of their political control and ethnic dominance over their historic homeland.” (Suny, 1994)

Also for this purposes the policy of *korenizatsiia*, nativizing the schools and governing apparatus was initiated. State sponsored cultural and educational programs served the purpose of convincing people, that Soviet state was not discarding their history and culture, but was embracing it. Simultaneously, it attacked every manifestation of local nationalism. This policy was put in high gear especially during the Second World War and after and can be considered as a way of moral encouragement of Soviet peoples through their own heroic stories. For example, during the Second World War in Georgia, under Stalin's direct orders and directives, movie “Giorgi Saakadze” was filmed. Stalin's involvement in this project is described by Georgian

officials, such as then first secretary of the Central Committee of Georgian Communist Party Kandid Charkviani, who, in his memoirs writes, that Stalin read the scripts and gave his remarks over the historical accuracy and what was supposed to be underlined in the movie. Charkviani also underlined that fulfilling such project during the war would have been impossible without the support of Stalin. Same is said about his role in the huge celebration of 750th anniversary of Georgian epic poem “The Knight in the Panther’s Skin” that was held in 1937. Charkviani wrote in his memoirs, that the idea belonged to Stalin and he himself participated in the redaction of the publication. He also describes the meetings in Stalin’s *dacha* in Sochi with the historians tasked with writing a textbook for high school the discussions and corrections he made in this regard. (Charkviani, 2015)

All of these demonstrates the extent with which Stalin was himself involved in the process of institutionalizing nationality and this was not the case exclusively for Georgia. This policy was in place for every member of the Soviet Union, but considering the fact that Stalin himself was Georgian, his involvement in these processes took different meaning for Georgians.

“By the late Stalin era (1945-1953), understandings of Georgian national identity were closely intertwined with pride in Stalin as a co-national.” (Kaiser, 2015)

She argues, that the aim of the policy distinguished it from other such colonial practices, as it was meant “to cultivate and institutionalize national distinction in order to accelerate the process of overcoming them.” (Kaiser, 2015)

As Rogers Brubaker mentions, this policy went beyond its intended role of bringing together members of the union under the Communist ideology:

“Ethnic nationality served not only as a statistical category, a fundamental unit of social accounting, but also, and more distinctively, as an obligatory ascribed status.” (Brubaker, 1996)

During Stalin’s rule, even though he himself was far from being a Georgian patriot and his ethnic background had no effect of the scale of repressions in Georgia, this practice was still more convenient for Georgians, who prided themselves of being fellow-countrymen of the “great leader”.

Even though this policy was designed to fight the forms of nationalism that posed as threat to Soviet regime, it still lead to nationalization of republics not only is for, but in content too. As Brubaker wrote:

“Far from ruthlessly suppressing nationhood, the Soviet regime pervasively institutionalized it...It went further than any other state before or since in institutionalizing territorial nationhood and ethnic nationality as fundamental social categories. In doing so it inadvertently created a political field supremely conducive to nationalism.” (Brubaker, 1996)

Policy Shift under Khrushchev – The Beginning of Destalinization Process

Following the death of Joseph Stalin, Nikita Khrushchev and new Soviet leadership began the Destalinization policy, which meant that they were trying to restore the power to collective leadership and the party and thus eliminate what Khrushchev named “cult of personality”. This policy was stated at the 20th party congress, in February 1956.

Khrushchev criticized Stalin for creating cult around himself and diminishing the role of the party and collective leadership, which he argued was a transgression of Marxism-Leninism. Khrushchev also accused Stalin of waging repressions and labeling innocents as enemies of the people, executing or deporting them. He talked about Beria Gang and its central role in Stalin’s repressions and abuse of power, fabrication of cases and persecution of innocent people.

The Secret Speech, delivered at the 20th party congress on February 25, 1956 by Nikita Khrushchev was the biggest step towards change in Soviet history since Stalin’s death and towards a new political course. As he said, aim of the Destalinization policy was “...Overcoming the cult of the individual which is alien to Marxism-Leninism, as well as the problem of liquidating its burdensome consequences.”

Khrushchev brought up several examples of party members being wrongfully accused and punished without a proper trial. He announced that these people should be rehabilitated and that the leadership should become more collective, hold party congresses more often and return to the original Marxist-Leninist path.

“Stalin had sanctioned in the name of the central committee of the all-union communist party the most brutal violation of socialist legality, torture and oppression.”

(Citations from Khrushchev’s speech are taken from the translation published in “The Guardian”)

“Beria was unmasked by the party’s central committee shortly after Stalin’s death. As a result of particularly detailed legal proceedings, it was established, that Beria had committed monstrous crimes and Beria was shot.”

He also underlined that the praise that was directed towards Stalin in his lifetime, as the winner of the Great patriotic war and great leader of the Soviet Union was false and was in most part created by Stalin himself, who edited his own biography and achievements. In fact, argued Khrushchev, Stalin was not a great military leader and his decisions brought huge harm to the Soviet Army. Stalin also was not a great leader because he diverted the country from the true socialist path envisioned by Lenin. “Not even Tsars created prizes which they named after themselves.” said Khrushchev indignantly.

Khrushchev also tried to explain why he and other Presidium members, who were present at the 20th party congress and supported the message of his speech, did not act before. The reason was, that under the conditions of terror and intimidation, members of Politburo were in a difficult situation of not knowing where they would be sent next “to home or to jail”. Another reason that he gave was, that in the last year’s central committee plenary sessions were not convened and politburo sessions were occasional.

“Then we will understand how difficult it was for any member of the politburo to take a stand against one or another unjust or improper procedure, against serious errors and shortcomings in leadership practices.”

As for Georgia specifically, Khrushchev mentioned the “case of the Mingrelian nationalist organization which supposedly existed in Georgia.” Khrushchev announced that this was proven to be “a slander directed against the Georgian party organization.”

“We know that there have been at times manifestations of local bourgeois nationalism in Georgia as in several other republics. The question arises: could it be possible, that in the period during which the resolutions referred to above were made, nationalist tendencies grow so much that there was a danger of Georgia’s leaving the Soviet Union and joining Turkey?”

Later he himself answered the question:

“This is of course nonsense. Everyone knows how Georgia has developed economically and culturally under Soviet rule...”

....it is clear, that, as the economy and culture develop, and as the socialist consciousness of the working masses in Georgia grows, the source from which bourgeois nationalism draws its strength evaporates.

As it developed, there was no nationalistic organization in Georgian. Thousands of innocent people fell victim to willfulness and lawlessness, all of this happened under the “genius” leadership of Stalin, “the great son of the Georgian nation”, as Georgians like to refer to him.”

In the end of the speech he announced:

“We cannot let this matter get out of the party, especially not to the press. We should know the limits; we should not give ammunition to the enemy; we should not wash out dirty linen before their eyes.”

Thus the congress session closed and while all the speeches and discussions from 20th party congress got published in subsequent days, this speech was not available to the public. The report was sent to Georgia and read out at a closed session of the top party leadership on March 6th.

Interestingly, on March 8 in the #57 issue of “Communist” newspaper, there was an article published by I. Petrov about the 35th anniversary of the 10th party congress in which he wrote:

“During this period [meaning between the 19th and 20th party congresses] the central committee of the party undertook the efforts to explain the role of masses and Marxist-Leninist understanding of the role of individual for the party masses. Central committee radically opposed the cult of individual, which is alien to the spirit of Marxism-Leninism and the spread of which caused the underestimation of the role of masses and collective party leadership and often caused serious mistakes.”(Petrov, 1956)

Other facts concerning the demonstrator’s knowledge of parts of the secret speech, which becomes evident in the letters, as preserved in the archive, lead some scholars to doubt the role of Georgian party leadership in the demonstrations.

“The spread of information about the content of the “closed letter”, Khrushchev’s report on the “cult of personality”, also suggests involvement on the part of the local leadership.” writes

Timothy Blauvelt citing the then head of the KGB Ivan Serov's March 22 report about the fact, that the people were aware of the content of the closed letter even before March 6:

"[The spread of information] was facilitated by the fact that the permanent representative of Georgia in Moscow, finding out from the delegates of the congress about the issue discussed in the closed session, spoke by telephone with leadership officials of the Georgian SSR and informed them about the contents of the report." (Blauvelt, 2009)

Even though much of the speech was focused mainly on Stalin's transgressions, the fact, that most criticized leaders were both Georgian fueled fears among Georgians that the status of Georgian people within the Soviet Union would suffer from this. As Timothy Blauvelt writes: *"Because of the institutional character of the Soviet state with regard to its national-territorial units, and despite the fact, that Stalin himself was a Great Russian chauvinist rather than a Georgian nationalist, and that Georgians suffered just as much as if not more than other republics in the mass purges during Stalin's rule, the fact that Stalin was a Georgian had particular implication for the standing of Georgians and the Georgian republic in the Soviet ethnic hierarchy."* (Blauvelt, 2009)

The Events of March 9, 1956

According to the top secret document sent to the Presidium of the CPSU Central Committee from the Central Committee of the CP of Georgia, they took into account the fact, that in previous years Georgians, mostly the youth gathered at Stalin's monument and brought wreaths and recited poetry, CC of the CP of Georgia through party organizations took measures not to celebrate the anniversary in 1956. They held sessions on March 3, 5 and 6 for leading party, Soviet and agricultural officials where the secret speech was read and explained, but, as they explain in the report, the distorted contents of the speech spread in public and took provocative forms that fueled the protest. (MIA Archive of Georgia, Section II, f. 1, op. 103, d. 7,11)

Manifestations started from March 4th and on March 7th, according to the official report, up to 25-30 000 people took to the streets. It grew even more on March 8th and demonstrators demanded to meet Vice chairman of the Communist party of China Zhu De, who was on an official visit in Tbilisi.

Even though Georgian CP conceded in some parts to the demonstrators, publishing articles on third anniversary of Stalin's death in republic papers and displaying flags with black ribbons as well as allowing gatherings in remembrance of Stalin in schools and near the Stalin monument, manifestations did not stop and officials blamed it on nationalist elements and anti-communists, who, in their view tried to escalate the tensions. On the night of March 8th, on Lenin square and near Stalin's monument on the embankment of river Mtkvari 35-40 000 people were gathered according to the official numbers in the abovementioned report. In their description of events, soldiers had no choice, but to use weapons, after shots were fired at house of communications, where, according to this document protesters demanding the send a telegram to the youth of USSR started throwing rocks, broke windows, waved flags and broke into the building wounding several soldiers. According to the official accounts, number of the dead was 13, wounded – 63, 8 out of them died later. But the account of the participant and eyewitnesses differ from this account, claiming, that demonstration was peaceful and unnamed. According to their accounts,

some cases soldiers used chauvinist remarks, which was denied by the commission created by Georgian CP CC to investigate the events. (MIA Archive of Georgia, Section II, Special Folder, d. 36 as cited in Barbakadze, 2014)

Even though this commission denied, that the wounds, that demonstrators sustained were inflicted by anything other than firearms, medical reports show, that not only were the bullets fired in the back, but many injuries were inflicted by hard, blunt objects. (MIA Archive of Georgia, Section II, f. 1, op. 1, d. 37)

Based on the social makeup of the demonstrators some believe that perception of a change in the republic's status played a role in provoking the demonstrations, as many were representatives of youth who believed, that this would lead to diminished opportunities for them in education and career. From the 21 death that was acknowledge by Soviet government, only one was over 30 years old. 11 were under 20. (MIA Archive of Georgia, Section II, f. 1, op. 1, d. 37)

The fact, that many of the demonstrators were representatives of youth, many of them still in school and university is visible from their number among those killed, arrested or interrogated and is confirmed in the accounts of eyewitnesses. Some scholars believe, that as this generation did not have to live through the great Stalinist terror and were raised with the policies devised by Stalin, they perceived him differently, than what Khrushchev described in secret speech.

“For young Georgians, not fully acquainted with darker side of Stalin’s reign, his memory was still sacred and his career represented a great achievement by one of their nation.” (Suny, 1994)

The fact, that the content of Khrushchev's secret speech was at least partly know to the demonstrators is evident from the letters collected during the demonstrations which, from protesting the abolishment of commemoration of Stalin's death later turned into a critique of Georgian local leadership and the central leadership in Moscow.

“Khrushchev thinks, that only he knows Marxism. Stalin is accused of cruelty, but who does not know, that revolution without the casualty [sacrifice] does not exist. This is recognized even by those whose fathers and mothers were repressed by Communists.” Reads one letter, by a

demonstrator, collected from 9 to 11 march, 1956. (MIA Archive of Georgia, Section II, f. 14, op. 103, d. 13)

“Like once Lenin came out against the revision of Marxism, and how now there are no people like Lenin in the Kremlin, because of this we, Georgian people demand to adopt Stalin’s ideas without criticism and revision.” Reads another. (MIA Archive of Georgia, Section II, f. 14, op. 103, d. 13)

Also from the archive we have the demands and speeches expressed by the demonstrators such as one from March 8:

“Stalin is not Georgian, not Russian, not Armenian, and not Jewish. Stalin is an epoch and no one can eradicate him from history.”(MIA Archive of Georgia, Section II, f. 14, op. 103, d. 13)

There is an anonymous letter addressed to the head of the central committee of the Georgian Communist Party Mzhavanadze dated March 1, 1956 that reads:

“You are blind and do not have a brain in your head. Historically Russian Tsars are brainless and monkey Khrushchev is like them, making enemy of millions of people. Great Stalin indeed did a great job enduring such enemies from within and without. You think you rose in the eyes of workers and peasants? Just the opposite, your value dropped in the eyes of the workers of the world.

If it is a cult for Stalin, What is it then, for Lenin? Why did not Khrushchev mention that, if he is not a dog?

He is sowing the national hatred in the eyes of the world.”(MIA Archive of Georgia, Section II, f. 14, op. 103, d. 12)

Writer Akaki Tsereteli, who during Stalin’s rule was a political prisoner and spent 10 years in camps, also attended these demonstrations and wrote in his diaries about what the events. He recorded a speech by a young protester, who made a great impression on Tsereteli:

“Georgian statehood had a rich history for 30 centuries. This dignity and independence was stolen from Russian empire. Georgia should regain its independence because only independent, strong Georgia can honor its great son.” (Tsereteli, 1994)

He also mentioned the fact, that on demonstrations, they played Georgian anthem, which he considered to be impossible during Stalin’s rule.

Of course, this does not mean that part of the demonstrators were not there just to defend the dignity of their beloved ruler. Many were party members and some displayed their party membership card with pride. (Many of the killed and wounded also had these cards and were members of the communist party) Many speeches were concentrated on how great a leader Stalin was and what a great party he created. But the subsequent developments show how this belief and trust towards the party started to fade after the massacre that took place on March 9th.

There are numerous accounts from people, who attended the demonstrations about the events that unfolded. Many, especially in the party and leadership, as well as some members of intelligentsia, talked about some provocateurs exploiting people’s sentiments for their own, destructive purposes, which lead to the confrontation, clashes and subsequent tragedy.

But some of the accounts also mention, that most part of the demonstration was peaceful, with recital of verses and songs and patriotic slogans.

There is an account addressed to Mzhavanadze from the secretary of the committee of the first sewing [tailoring] factory in Tbilisi Leila Gamrekeli, who, as she says in her letter dated March 23, attended the demonstration near the Stalin monument to maintain the public order and make sure that no member of the factory would misbehave. She writes, that until 5 pm, there were verses, songs and patriotic messages, but after that came provocateurs and wounded youth, who said, that there was a shooting at the house of communications, where the second protests was going on. She recalls:

“The Presidium was calling them “Friends, do not touch Red Army members with your hands. If they hit you, do not move your hand.” “Glory to the great Russian people, to the peace in the whole world, to Lenin and Stalin.” (MIA Archive of Georgia, Section II, f. 14, op. 103, d. 11)

According to her account then came the tanks and soldiers started surrounding protesters and beating them. She asked a soldier to let her leave.

“Now you want to leave you Georgian dog? This is your end.” came the answer. She managed to run away at some point and found that the roads were blocked and soldiers were pursuing people and shooting at them.

Tsereteli did not witness the shooting himself, but he writes about the aftermath, that he saw when he was looking for his own children on the sites of protest. He writes that he saw at least two bodies ran over by tanks on the embankment and that all the evidence was erased in the following days. Tsereteli also mentions that following the massacre there was no word in press about it, which is proven to be right after the examination of the newspapers published in Georgia at the time and that families of the deceased were not given the bodies, or the freedom to express their grief publicly. According to him bodies were given to families on March 14th, with closed cars provided by government and 4-5 overseers. Only the closet relatives were allowed to attend funerals (Parents, children, spouses) and family had to pay 300 (by some accounts 301) Soviet Rubles in advance. (Tsereteli, 1994)

This is confirmed in the accounts from victim’s families recorded by Givi Vepkhvadze for the two part movie March 9th, 1956. Tsereteli also mentions that the number of dead was from 200 to 300. Vepkhvadze and his crew investigated this claim. In his book “March 9th, 1956 in the frame and out of the frame” he brings two other accounts, one is by Irakli Dughashvili, who worked with the then minister of the internal affairs Vladimir Janjghava and says that he delivered to the minister the list of those killed that consisted of 93 Surnames. Another is by Former Georgian president Eduard Shevadnadze, who, at the 28th congress of the CPSU in 1990, when he was already a minister of foreign affairs of SU that Khrushchev’s direct order to bring out the tanks and armored vehicles in the streets of Tbilisi resulted in death of 150 people. (Vepkhvadze, 2001)

Thus the exact number of the dead is still unknown. So is the information about who gave the orders and what the role of Georgian local government in it was.

Reverberation of March Events in Georgian Society

Considering the fact that little was known to general public about how the events unfolded and what were the consequences, because there was no discussion and nothing written in the press, there were many rumors about the number of dead and arrested. There were also rumors about persecutions and the plans for next demonstrations, but they have never been confirmed.

Official numbers given by the government were 21 dead and 54 wounded. Among the dead 3 were women, 10 were students and 3 were under the age of 16. 11 of them were party members. Many wounds were inflicted with bullets. In a telegram from Chairman of the KGB of Georgia, Inauri to Chairman of the USSR KGB Serov, the number of arrested by March 26th is 375, 34 of whom were CPSU members, 165 Komsomol members and 142 non-party members. (Barbakadze, 2014)

Given the number of students attending the demonstrations in Tbilisi, as well as in Batumi and Gori, it was decided, to take measures to observe the mood among them, re-educate them and remove the professors who were deemed to be a bad influence. Professors were fired from Tbilisi State University as well as Batumi pedagogical university. Bureau of the Georgian Central Committee decided, that there were unhealthy attitudes towards the Communist Party in Georgian Higher Party School. Students were expelled for expressing their critical positions towards the party and professors were fired. Propaganda was deemed to be necessary and regional, municipal and district committees were tasked with holding educational lectures, publishing works by Soviet writers, broadcasting speeches by youth, making films and staging plays about Soviet youth, organizing camps and etc. (MIA Archive of Georgia, Section II, f. 14, op. 31, d. 55)

Many researchers conclude that Georgian leadership was taken by surprise and was not able to control the situation and the orders to disperse the demonstration were given by the central government in Moscow. In the interview with Timothy Blauvelt Eduard Shevardnadze emphasized that Mzhavanadze was powerless to take such a decision himself.

The Georgian local government followed the events from March 4 but did not act until March 8 when the special session of the central committee was held. On March 9 Mzhavanadze and other representatives met organizers and asked them, to disperse the crowds. On the same day Mzhavanadze, Giorgadze and Mchedlishvili addressed the crowd at Stalin Monument and offered concessions, such as publishing the articles about Stalin in the local newspapers, holding official memorial meetings in offices and factories (according to newspapers they were held in many parts of Georgia after the events of March 9). But the crowd did not disperse and later on, after using force against them, government blamed on the provocateurs.

Even though Georgian government and its inaction was severely criticized in Moscow, there were no consequences for them.

After using violence to disperse the crowds on March 9th, Communist Party started what can be called damage control by discussing the matter and Khrushchev's new policy on party meetings, where, according to the archival documents, it became evident, that not only the questions and discontent towards new leadership and their new policy remained, but new issue of using such force against demonstrators was rising.

The secret letter was discussed at Komsomol meetings and the archives hold letters with questions concerning the speech and events of the March 9.

The main questions were: why was the peaceful demonstration dispersed using violence and who ordered it, why was not the issue of cult of individual discussed before and why was it being discussed only in relation to Stalin, why were his crimes discussed only after his death and not when they were committed and what would the party gain from this?

“You are saying that the sad events that happened in Tbilisi on March 9 is the result of the cult of personality. Please explain what wrong it did for the party, how did it diminish its success when this cult existed with joy? On the 60th anniversary of Stalin's birth, comrade Mikoyan was saying “Stalin is Lenin today” - is not this a hypocrisy?”

“Were the speeches of Khrushchev, Mikoyan and others on the 70th anniversary of Stalin’s birth and the 19th party congress also redacted by Stalin (as they claim, that he praised himself) and if they were, why is there nothing said about this in the secret speech?”

“Comrades Voroshilov, Molotov, Kaganovich, Khrushchev, Mikoyan, Malenkovich were working with Stalin. If they noticed such mistakes, why did they not inform the party and if they knew and chose not to speak, how justifiable is it?”

“When we say “Great genius Lenin”, is this considered as aggrandizement of the cult of individual and if not, why?”

“Would we not reach better results in mobilizing the masses to build communism if we corrected Stalin’s mistakes, and kept his name as usual in people?” (MIA Archive of Georgia, Section II, f. 14, op. 103, d. 12)

Questions were asked about the massacre that took place in the streets of Tbilisi as well. People wanted to know who made the decision to fire towards the crowds and why was this necessary.

“In modern conditions, bullets are not used to disperse the unarmed civilians even in the capitalist states.” Was written in one anonymous letter written on the meeting of Komsomol presidium that took place on March 26-27. ((MIA Archive of Georgia, Section II, f. 14, op. 103, d. 12)

Such questions, along with the ones about the whereabouts of Stalin’s family, the fate of his works (where they to be published again?), his corpse (would it stay in the mausoleum?), decorations and awards in his name (would they still be given out?), what exactly constituted as an aggrandizement of the personality cult and etc. were asked at every such meeting.

This shows, that the communication between the new leadership and people, at least Georgian people was not effective, that the new policy raised many questions that went unanswered and the events of 9th March increased the mistrust towards the new government even more. The questions raised about the cult of personality, why it was not discussed in context of praise towards Lenin, why new leadership did not act or express concern sooner, as they were not actually new to the situation, why was the blame only ascribed to Stalin and Beria, both of whom

happened to be Georgians, what did this mean to the party, that was, in most part creation of Stalin's policies, reflect the suspicion that developed towards the new leadership in Moscow, that claimed to be different from the previous, but yet used the same methods, as far as Georgians were concerned.

“The swift and brutal response from the Soviet government illustrated starkly its inability to resolve the dilemma of how much of the Soviet system to change and how much of Stalin’s authoritarianism to preserve.” (Suny, 1994)

Underground Movements in Georgia

Even though there have been many arrests and executions of people deemed by Stalin's regime as anti-Soviet and nationalistic, the beginning of Georgian dissident movement is considered to be 1953 and the first such illegal group existed from 1953 to 1956. The name of the group was "Gorgasliani" and members were eight high school students (10th and 11th grade), two among them later became the founders of Georgian national movement, Zviad Gamsakhurdia and Merab Kostava. Gamsakhurdia became the first president of Georgia after gaining independence. Other members were Anatoli Mikadze, Teimuraz Tsertsvadze, Vladimer Sikharulidze, Tamaz Gunjua, Teimuraz Metreveli and Guram Dochanashvili.

The activities of this illegal group is described in their official case. They were charged under article 58-10, anti-Soviet propaganda and agitation, article 58-11 which meant organized actions to prepare or execute crimes and article 58-21, propaganda and agitation related to the national or religious hostility or separatism. (MIA Archive of Georgia, Section I, f. 6, d. 4612 as cited by Tushurashvili&Luarsabishvili, 2014)

According to the investigation they prepared proclamations with anti-Soviet content and spread them. They held meetings and discussions over the creation of illegal group and fighting against the decisions and actions they did not agree with in 1953, but did not create the group or take any action before 1956, when, after the events of 9th March Gamsakhurdia raised this subject again. Group held first meeting in July 1956 and set creation of independent Georgian state as its goal. Members of the group collected money among themselves and Gamsakhurdia bought typewriter with Georgian font. On December 2nd that same year proclamations (7 posters) appeared in the streets of Tbilisi (near Opera house).

"Georgians! Have you forgotten the bloody night of March 9th? Have you forgotten bloody years of 1924 and 1937? These were the years, when the Georgian people was attacked and slaughtered. How long will we subordinated to the communist party? Our ancestors did not forgive their abusers and we must not disgrace ourselves either.

Today, the whole humanity is concerned with the offenses committed by Moscow. The issue of Georgian's existence is on the agenda. For this reason, it is time to unite under our flag to fight unanimously against our conqueror.

Look around, world is raging. The day of judgement is near for the executioners in Kremlin. The blood that was unjustly shed in Tbilisi, Poznan and Budapest demands justice. Their days are numbered.

Georgians! Nobody is our defender. We must help ourselves. We must gain freedom with struggle! Best regards to the heroic Hungarian people! Let their heroism be an example for all captivated nations! Keep your hands away from Hungary!

Down with the occupiers and their military gangs who have the blood of our people on their hands!

Down with Georgian Communists, who have betrayed us! Long live free and independent Georgia! The betrayer who takes down this poster will be strictly punished!" (MIA Archive of Georgia, Section I, f. 6, t. 9, d. 5638, as cited by Barbakadze, 2012)

Members of the group were arrested on December 15th. They admitted their guilt and in April 1957 judge sentenced them to jail from 5 to 3 years. Court took into consideration the extenuating circumstances and imprisonment was changed into probationary sentence for all of them.

But this was not the only illegal group created by youth that spread proclamations deemed as anti-Soviet and nationalistic.

In October, 1956 proclamations by group calling themselves Union of All-Georgian Youth were spread. "Freedom to Georgia" was the title.

"Freedom, independence is the subject of national dignity. Georgians! Do not forget the blood of the youth that colored the streets on March 9^h." This is a fragment from that proclamation that was printed in an illegal printing-house set up in a cave outside Tbilisi by brothers, Giorgi and Mikheil Fitskhelauri. 240 leaflets were found in the cave when brothers were arrested. They served 4 years in a camp in Siberia. (Vepkhvadze, 2001)

Two others were also arrested for setting up an illegal printing-house and printing anti-Soviet proclamations in March 1958. Irodi Pachulia and Givi Baramidze served 5 years each. During the court hearing Pachulia said, that the decision of printing proclamations came after March 1956 events, when innocent people were shot and he, along with Baramidze viewed it as oppression towards Georgian people. They printed poems and demands for setting up a memorial for those who died on March 9th. (Vepkhvadze, 2001)

Dissident movements and illegal printing spread in the regions too. For example the documents from the arrests made in Zugdidi from 1961 to 1963 shows that three anti-Soviet youth groups, “Youth Organization for Fight to Free Georgia” created in 1960 and consisting of 5 members (4 of whom were communist party members as well) and “Revolutionary committee to Free Peoples of Caucasus” created in 1962 and consisting of 10 members (9 of whom were also communist party members) and third illegal group consisting of students from the industrial school of tea technology in Zugdidi were printing proclamations with anti-Soviet and nationalist content and then spreading them in various cities, for example Tbilisi, Kutaisi, Sokhumi, Poti and etc. They were printing poems written by their members that were deemed to be nationalistic, unhealthy and dangerous by Soviet government.

They were all expelled from the party, some of them were fired from working places and some received warnings. In response to the threat coming from these illegal groups Communist party expanded its own propaganda among the youth. (Jakhua, 2018)

Another such anti-Soviet nationalist group was set up in Zugdidi by brothers Zaur and Indiko Kobalia and connected to such group in Kutaisi created by G. Dvali in 1961. They called themselves AER. In 1962 they held illegal meetings, new members were swearing in and money was being collected for their future plans. They stole a printing machine from Zugdidi regional hospital and started printing anti-Soviet proclamations in a cave.

“Comrades! The AER Committee continues its work. The recent activities carried out by the Communist Party are clear and their results are the outcome of the wrong work of the party. The party is in crisis. Socialism has reached its peak in development already. Communism is no longer built, since the party is not able to strengthen its ideology through self-criticism. Comrade

workers and peasants! Don't follow the venture propaganda of the Communist party carried out for self-defense. Follow human moral and national pride." Read one proclamation spread by the group.

Members of the group were sentenced 2-5 years in labor colony. (Jakhua, 2018)

The arrests did not diminish this sentiment in the public, the sense of injustice connected to the March events and the disappointment towards Communist party. Number of illegal underground groups fighting against Soviet regime and/or for the Independence of Georgia grew in the coming years. The demands and the emphasis made by these groups changed, they shifted from the events of March 9th and it was mentioned less and even less was Stalin. For example in 1978 demonstrations were held over the official status of Georgian language. The mood was increasingly anti-Soviet. This and the attitude towards Georgian/Russian languages is visible in an article published in New York Times on June 10th, 1962 titled "Tiflis crowd hoots down song in Russian by Goodman vocalist". Article describes the visit of famous Benny Goodman Jazz band in Georgia and concert that was attended by 8,000 people in Sports palace. Apparently, crowd disliked bands vocalist Joya Sherrill singing "Katusha" in Russian, which surprised the band and the observers. The article attempts to explain the reasons to American readers.

"There have always been as certain amount of linguistic and political conflict between Georgians and Russians" and makes it clear, that the problem was not Ms. Sherrill singing as her other songs were met with applause.

At the end of the article there are few words on Georgia's history as well as Stalin:

"Soviet Georgia, where Stalin was born and where his memory dies slowly, is only about 2 hours by air from Moscow. But the people of Georgia are proud of their ancient culture and devoted to their language and customs... Except for brief intervals, Russians ruled Georgia until 1924, when Stalin took over the leadership of Soviet Union. At first Stalin showed a distaste for his native land and purged members of the Georgian Communist party who sought a more independent position for the republic within the Soviet Union. However Stalin's purge did not seem to make much of an impression on Georgians, a clannish mountain people. Despite an official ban, statues

and portraits of the downgraded late dictator are prominently displayed in Tiflis and throughout the republic.” (New York Times, July 10, 1962)

This shows, that Stalin still played a role in lives of Georgians even after 10 years from his death and denouncement, but his factor was fading and new, factor of national pride was taking place that was connected to Georgian language, literature, traditions, everything, that was promoted during Stalin’s policies and that was perceived to be under threat from new government in Moscow.

Conclusion

The aim of this thesis was to show the connection between the Soviet Renationalization policy and perception of Stalin on the one hand and on the other how this could result in mass uprising in Georgia after the policy shift under Khrushchev and initiation of the Destalinization policy and thus have an impact on later development of nationalist movements in Georgia.

First part of this thesis aimed to demonstrate the connection between Stalin, explaining the nature of Renationalization policy and the effect of it that became visible after the policy shift. As a conclusion it can be said, that as Stalin was the main author and creator of this policy and actively participated in shaping and executing it, he was closely associated to it and its outcome and became a symbol of it. Thus, when Khrushchev denounced Stalin, his personality cult and his policies it complicated the understanding of people of what the new policy was going to be, what this shift would mean for them and what kind of changes were taking place.

This caused especially stark reaction in Georgia, as Stalin and Beria, only two leaders being condemned for every wrong in the last 30 years of Soviet rule, being Georgian was seen as an attack directed towards Georgian's in general. Khrushchev in his speech aided to the creation of this perception by deliberately mentioning that Stalin was seen in Georgia as a great son of their nation despite all his wrongdoings.

Another aspect was that the new leadership was not so new after all and all of them, including Khrushchev worked under Stalin and praised him enthusiastically while he was alive and in power. This raised questions over why were they silent all this time, why condemn Stalin now and why were they not being punished for their part in the wrongdoings. The question of Lenin was also raised in connection of what was to be considered as a personality cult and did Lenin fall in that category as well.

After the content of Khrushchev's speech leaked in public in Georgia mass demonstrations were held. Many of the demonstrator were simply defending the "great son of their nation", but there

were some, as this thesis shows, who were less concerned with Stalin's honor and more about the injustice of this new policy and the fate of their nation.

The demands varied from hanging Stalin's portraits and publishing verses praising him to the independence of Georgia from Soviet Union and Russian rule.

Naturally, this, being the first major protest in the Soviet Union, caused concern in Moscow and at the end they chose to use the approbated method of force to disperse the crowds.

This resulted in deaths. Number of the dead stayed secret and to this day it is impossible to determine how many died on March 9th and afterwards because of the bullets and other weapons used against them.

Funerals were held in secret and families were not given the chance to mourn their dead properly. This raised more concern in Georgian public and number of rumors were spread that affected the general mood in the republic.

To fight the consequences of these events, Soviet government decided to put propaganda and re-education over new policies in high gear and punish every group or individual that expressed anti-Soviet or nationalistic sentiments.

Number of these groups was growing steadily. As was show, this were mostly groups created by youth that were printing proclamations and calling for Georgians to fight for independence and not forget the bloody events of 9th March. Members of these groups were persecuted, but some of them later became the leaders of broader Georgian nationalist movement and laid foundation to Georgia's independence.

Many scholars agree, that Soviet nationality policy created the ground for the creation of nationalist movements.

“...The regime went to remarkable lengths, long before glasnost and perestroika, to institutionalize both territorial nationhood and ethno-cultural nationality as basic cognitive and social categories. Once political space began to expand under Gorbachev, these categories quickly came to structure political perceptions, inform political rhetoric, and organize political action. They made claims to national autonomy, sovereignty, and secession conceivable, plausible, and

ultimately compelling. And they continue to orient political understanding and political action in Soviet successor states today.” (Brubaker, 1996)

Thus Brubaker viewed the end of the 1980's and the beginning of 1990's, the period of dissolution of the Soviet Union as a time, when the crystallization of all these polices happened to shape the nationalists movements.

In this thesis I argue, that the results of these process were visible as far back as 1956 and that despite the representation of the events of March 1956 by the Soviet government as the rise of Stalinist cult in Georgia, there is an evidence, that there was more to the protest then simply defending Stalin's name, that Stalin became and served as a the symbol for some, who used this and the actions of the Soviet government against unarmed protesters as an argument, a tool to put forward demands for independence.

The crystallization process that Brubaker describes did not happen only in the 1980's and at the end of the Soviet rule, but began 30 years earlier in the form of underground youth movements that would later continue to develop into fully formed dissident nationalist movements that would play a key role in the dissolution of the Soviet Union and gaining independence for their countries.

It is indeed paradoxical, that the person, who persecuted so many nationalists, patriots of their country and members of intelligentsia, who cannot in any way be called Georgian patriot or nationalist, served as a symbol, a spark to put these processes into action, but it should be said, that this role was temporary and as was mentioned in previous chapters it faded out and gave way to different issues around which the movement was centered.

Hypothesis set forward in this thesis was that the process of Destalinization and denouncing Stalin's cult had a symbolic effect on the later development of Georgian nationalism, as far as Stalin, being Georgian, was by some viewed as a symbol of Georgian nation, that was now under threat from new leadership. Examined materials prove this hypothesis and demonstrate the other aspects of the role of Stalin in the process and the extent of this Symbolic effect as well.

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ივანე ჯავახიშვილის სახელობის თბილისის სახელმწიფო
უნივერსიტეტი

ქეთევან ხუციშვილი

დესტალინიზაციის ეფექტი ქართული ნაციონალიზმის
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ევრაზიის და კავკასიის კვლევები

თეზისი წარდგენილია ევრაზიისა და კავკასიის კვლევების ფაკულტეტზე მაგისტრის
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