Explanatory Notes

Transliteration and Translation

This book incorporates Georgian- and Russian-language sources, as well as names of places and individuals with multiple or contested spellings and transliterations given the multiplicity of local and administrative languages in use in the Caucasus. Russian transliterations follow the Library of Congress system, with exceptions made for more common English-language spellings. Georgian transliterations follow a simplified system familiar in current official and diplomatic discourse that does not distinguish between several Georgian consonants, nor does it deploy diacritical markers. The Georgian language does not use capital letters, a practice I retain in citations for accuracy. I do, however, capitalize most proper nouns in the main text for readers’ ease. I transliterate Georgian names and places into their Georgian variants, and names in Russian, Abkhaz, Ossetian, Armenian, etc., in the Russian transliteration style.

Because the archival trail and its protagonists tell their stories in a mixture of Russian and Georgian, in most cases I use translated abbreviations of Soviet institutions rather than Russian or Georgian versions (e.g., CC for Central Committee rather than TsK or tsk; MFA for Ministry of Foreign Affairs rather than MID). Notable exceptions are the security services (NKVD/MGB/KGB) and the All-Union Society for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries and its Georgian branch (VOKS/GOKS), for which I use the more commonly known Russian abbreviations. I also use the Obkom abbreviation (for district committee—oblastnyi komitet) with regard to Abkhazia, as the Abkhazian Obkom of the Georgian Communist Party was the highest party organ in the autonomous republic. I refer to the South Ossetian Autonomous Oblast’ (AO), but for other references to the oblast’ level of administration, I use the more neutral “district.”
Several of the locales discussed in this book went through name changes in the period under examination and/or continue to have disputed nomenclature. For these reasons, I use the common English-language version for Abkhazia (Georgian apkhazeti, Abkhaz Apsny); Sukhumi (Georgian sokhumi, Abkhaz Sukhum); and Tbilisi (called Tiflis until 1936). Abkhazian refers to the territory or institution; Abkhaz refers to the nationality and language. Rather than “Mingrelian,” I refer to this Kartvelian population as from Samegrelo/Megrelian, which is closer to the Georgian spelling, and to Adjara/Adjaran for the autonomous republic with its capital at Batumi.

Sources

This book draws from extensive research in Georgian- and Russian-language archival holdings, primarily in Tbilisi but also in central collections in Moscow and including some institutions and collections that no other foreign scholar has used to date (such as the Tbilisi Central Archive and Georgian National Academy of Sciences), in addition to more well-known party and security services holdings. The 1991 archival revolution in Soviet history saw a similar effort to move beyond Russian-language sources and perspectives. This book is one of few studies to draw from Georgian sources for the postwar period and thus illustrates a different story when taking non-Russian perspectives into account: Russian proficiency penetrated Georgia less than most other republics, and Georgian often proved a more useful means of discourse than Russian when engaging with co-ethnics in Georgia (and in Moscow). In the post-Stalin era, institutional archival holdings were increasingly in Georgian; they contain surprising candor and nuance in the post-Stalin period, particularly on topics related to nationality, culture, and language.

In addition to the party and government reports, memoranda, and decrees that help construct the political narrative of Soviet Georgian history, I use letters and petitions from citizens to better convey the nuances of the experience of nationality in the postwar Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic (GSSR). As historical sources, such letters bear specific merits and caveats. Though a letter conveys opinions of an individual writer or group of writers, the authors were politically engaged enough to send a letter in the first place, making it somewhat difficult to tell just how representative such opinions were within the broader
populace. At the same time, similarities between several letters—in
diction, appeal, argumentation, or location—suggest the existence of
more commonly held beliefs and signal the limits and possibilities of a
Soviet Georgian culture and worldview. Signed letters that frequently
included detailed contact information suggest that letter writers did not
view this action as an act of dissent but one that was firmly within the
bounds of their duties as engaged citizens. Anonymous letters, on the
other hand, suggested a fear of reprisal due to the sensitivities of
the opinions expressed.

The several hundred letters I analyzed addressed a diversity of is-
sues, citizen positions, and agendas: from deportees advocating re-
turn to complaints about the housing list; from defenses of Stalin’s
Georgian reputation to appeals to repatriate co-ethnics from abroad;
and from protesting a constitutional change about language to com-
plaints about violations of minority rights. Writers were Georgians and
non-Georgians, urban and rural, young and old, male and female, and
their letters spanned the entire period covered in this book, moving
beyond elite perspectives. While I do not claim that these letters repre-
sent public opinion writ large or the viewpoint of an ordinary citizen,
they still permit us to chart changes over time in the vocabulary, narra-
tive, and argumentation mobilized by diverse citizens attempting—and
succeeding—to negotiate Soviet and national forms of belonging. In
other words, this helps us to see not just how policymakers approached
nationality but also how citizens themselves actually experienced en-
titled nationhood in Soviet Georgia.
GEORGIAN AND SOVIET