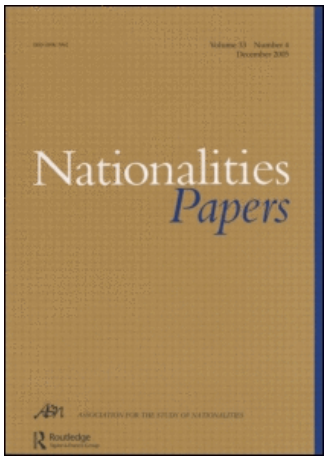

Nationalities Papers
Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:
http://www.informaworld.com/smpp/title~content=t713439073

Abkhazia: Patronage and Power in the Stalin Era

To cite this Article: Blauvelt, Timothy , 'Abkhazia: Patronage and Power in the Stalin Era', Nationalities Papers, 35:2, 203 - 232
To link to this article: DOI: 10.1080/00905990701254318
URL: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00905990701254318

Nationalities Papers, Vol. 35, No. 2, May 2007

Abkhazia: Patronage and Power in the Stalin Era

Timothy Blauvelt

Abkhazia during the Stalin era was at the same time a subtropical haven where the great leader and his lieutenants built grand dachas and took extended holidays away from Moscow, and also a key piece in the continuing chess match of Soviet politics. This paper will examine how and why this small, sunny autonomous republic on the Black Sea, and the political networks that developed there, played a prominent role in the politics of the south Caucasus region and in Soviet politics as a whole during the Stalin period.

Patrons and Clients

The patron–client model concentrates on how members of a hierarchy are bound into factional entities through personal ties. These factional entities, or patronage networks, are used by leaders to consolidate their power and by clients to gain power. Client relationships can range from outright nepotism to loose alliances based on shared interests. The defining characteristic, however, is the exchange of services between patron and client, personal loyalty and support for the patron in return for tenure in office and promotion (and all of the benefits that accompany official positions) for the client.[1]

In a phenomenon that Andrew Walder refers to as the "unintended social consequences of the party's ideological orientation," in Communist Party states the Party can gain loyalty and ideological adherence by giving preferential treatment to officials and other individuals at various levels of the hierarchy. The standard mode of exercising authority in such systems requires, in turn, the cultivation of stable networks:

> . . .[P]arty branches develop stable networks of loyal clients, who exchange their loyalty and support for preference in career opportunities and other rewards. The result is a highly institutionalized network of patron–client relations that is maintained by the party and is integral to its rule: a clientelist system in which public loyalty to the party and its ideology is mingled with personal loyalties between party branch officials and their clients.[2]

As both Walder and Sheila Fitzpatrick emphasize, patron–client relations in Communist states are unlike those in other kinds of system because of the nearly

Timothy Blauvelt, American Councils for International Education: ACTR/ACCELS Country Director, Georgia. Email: timblauvelt@hotmail.com

ISSN 0090-5992 print; ISSN 1465-3923 online/07/020203-30
DOI: 10.1080/00905990701254318

total control by the government over resources and their distribution—a government and state based around the reality of deficit. Unlike other political systems, in the Stalinist state the government (1) was the official distributor of goods and had a near-monopoly on their production, (2) was nearly the only employer of citizens, and (3) continuously tried to regulate the lives of its citizens, through the demand for endless documents and written positions without which functioning in normal life became impossible.[3] Everything necessary and desirable in daily life was available only through interaction with government: trade, travel, finding an apartment, going to university, getting married, etc.

The extent to which the patron–client relationship formed the basis of political authority from the top down is a recurring theme in the literature on political decision making and elite recruitment during the Stalin era. The essence of Stalin's approach to political control was the manipulation of the formal and informal structures of the government and Party apparatus to create and maintain a bureaucratic base for the leader's authority, a system referred to by Robert V. Daniels as the "circular flow of power."[4] This system was formalized by the decision of the 8th Party Conference of 1919 to give the central Party hierarchy primacy over local Party organizations and Stalin's systematization of the center's ability to direct the appointment of local Party secretaries. In this way, the center (and Stalin as the General Secretary) could control the process that confirmed the leader's own authority.[5] Stalin's power rested on his authority to "recommend" candidates for local Party offices, to influence upcoming cadres through the *nomenklatura* system, to get rid of unsatisfactory clients through the use of "party discipline," to rotate client assignments between the center and the regions, and to send central elites to the provinces to deal with problems. The local clients, in turn, used their local authority and networks to ensure the required outcomes in elections to Party congresses that in turn supported the General Secretary.[6]

Stalin fully established this system of the circular flow of power by 1930, but it was not invulnerable. There were two principal threats to this system: entrenched and self-sustaining local fiefdoms, and rival central elites with the ability to create their own client networks, either in geographical regions or in institutions.

The revolutionary luminaries who were Stalin's contemporaries probably never fully understood the rules of this game, and were fairly easily sidelined and eliminated. Later elites were usually "yes men" who lacked the capacity to be a threat (the circular flow of power is a good strategy for maintaining authority, but it is not necessarily effective at developing the most talented cadres). But in the interests of implementing difficult and important policies and tasks, it was sometimes necessary to promote (or tolerate) clients with particular efficiency and ruthlessness, elites who understood the rules of the game only too well.

Political patronage was characteristic of all levels of Soviet leaders, from Stalin all the way down to the lowest level local bosses. As Ken Jowitt has argued, Stalinist leaders constantly sought to promote their own people, cadres that were personally

loyal to their boss and whose interests were directly tied to his. Authority in regions and in institutions, in turn, became entirely personalistic: the status and power of an institution or a region were inseparable from the status and power of the person in charge. Leaders at all levels became patrons for groups of political dependants, subordinates and assistants, from whom they demanded loyalty in return for protection and the distribution of privileges and deficit resources. By surrounding himself with his own "*semeistvo*," a leader could keep threats to his authority or criticism from below to a minimum.[7]

Stalin himself directly criticized these local fiefdoms in his speech to the Plenary session of the Central Committee in March 1937, saying that local leaders were selecting subordinates, "acquaintances, chums, fellow locals (*zemlyaki*), masters in flattering their chiefs," according to personal rather than objective motives. "Local big-shots are creating defensive 'clans,' the members of which try to live in peace and not offend one another or wash dirty laundry in public, praising one another and once and a while sending facile and nauseating reports to the center about successes." In a draft version of this same speech, Stalin emphasized the underlying political motive and the threat to his own authority that he saw in patronage networks: "What does it mean to drag along with oneself a whole group of chums? . . . It means that you've got a certain independence from local organizations and, if you like, a certain independence from the Central Committee."[8]

Soviet nationalities policies added a further ethnic element to the functioning of patronage networks in national minority regions. Soviet indiginization policies specifically encouraged the development of ethnically based hierarchies led by local ethnic entrepreneurs as a means of control through monopolizing mobilizational resources, deterring the expression of unsanctioned ethnic agendas, and preventing the surfacing of alternative ethnic elites.[9]

The case of Abkhazia in this period demonstrates well the creation and functioning of patronage networks by local elites. At the same time it demonstrates both of the elements of the threat to the center of rival elite power bases to the functioning of the circular flow of power, and Stalin's attempts to use one against the other: efficient central elites and their patronage networks against entrenched local elites and their local patronage networks.

Nestor Lakoba's self-sufficient local fiefdom in Abkhazia in the 1920s and 1930s, despite Lakoba's personal relationship with Stalin, represented a direct challenge to the essential base of Stalin's authority. As a rival elite, Lavrenty Beria's ambition and ruthlessness made him very valuable to Stalin for eliminating Lakoba's fiefdom when the time came, and for many other tasks besides. But Beria's ability to create and maintain his own patronage network, both institutionally and geographically (in Abkhazia as well as throughout the Transcaucasus and elsewhere in the Soviet Union), made him a long-term threat. It was in Abkhazia as well, by supporting the patronage network of his client Akaki Mgeladze, that Stalin attempted to use the circular flow of power to undermine the network and personal authority of Beria.

The "Soviet Riviera"

Abkhazia was often described as the "Soviet Riviera." Located on the Black Sea coast, its geography and outstanding climate and subtropical flora, along with its agricultural capabilities and the resorts constructed there, made it some of the most attractive real-estate in the former Soviet empire. It was also an ethnically defined geographical entity, suborned after 1931 as an Autonomous Republic to the larger (and also ethnically defined) Georgian Union Republic.

Abkhazia's standing as a subject of Georgia is a controversial question that is colored by the territorial disputes of the present day. In any case, Abkhazia and Georgia have a long historical association stretching back to the ancient Colchid kingdom and continuing through the medieval Abkhazian princedoms. At their height, these covered large portions of the western Caucasus range, and later had close interactions with other Georgian princedoms and kingdoms.[10] Abkhazia was officially incorporated into Russia in 1810, following the incorporation of the Eastern Georgian Kingdom in 1801 and Mingrelia in 1806,[11] although consolidation of Russian control (and subordination of Abkhazia to the Caucasian administrative district, as *Sukhumskii otdel*) took place only after the Russian victory in the Russian–Caucasian wars in 1864.[12] This was followed by waves of Abkhaz uprisings against the Russian administration (particularly in 1866 and 1877) that resulted in large-scale deportations of ethnic Abkhaz to Turkey, followed in turn by the immigration into Abkhazia of other ethnic groups, such as Greeks, Bulgars, Armenians, Russians, Estonians, and Germans, and especially by Mingrelian Georgians from western Georgia in the 1870s and 1880s.[13]

The status of Abkhazia during the period of the Russian Revolution and its subordination to the independent Georgian Democratic Republic that existed under Menshevik chairman Noe Zhordania from 1918 to 1821 are controversial elements of present-day disagreements. From the Georgian point of view, the Georgian military (which entered Abkhazia in 1918) was protecting its traditional territory from the threat of incursion from the Bolsheviks and from the White Russian armies. From the point of view of present-day Abkhazians, the Georgians were an unwelcome occupying force. Given the Menshevik character of the Georgian Democratic Republic, Soviet historiographies strongly supported the Abkhaz position (although laying the blame on the evils of Menshevism and capitalist imperialism, rather than on Georgian nationalism as such).[14] The Abkhazian Bolshevik guerilla group *Kiaraz*, in line with Bolshevik practice in other minority populated regions, used appeals to Abkhazian nationalism and made promises of land redistribution to gain the support of the predominantly peasant Abkhaz population against the Georgian Menshevik government.[15]

Using the pretext of worker and peasant uprisings, the Red Army finally invaded the Georgian Democratic Republic in February 1921, driving its leadership into exile. Soviet power was declared in Tbilisi on 25 February, and in the Abkhazian capital

of Sukhumi on 4 March 1921. On 31 March Abkhazia was declared independent from Georgia and nominally equal in status to a Union Republic, a status that it retained until being joined with Georgia as a "federal republic" on the basis of a "special union treaty" (*osobyi soyuznyi dogovor*) in February 1922.[16]

Lakobistan

The key figure to emerge in the leadership of Soviet Abkhazia was Nestor Apollonovich Lakoba. An ethnic Abkhaz[17] born in the village of Lykhny in 1893, Lakoba was an Old Bolshevik (joining the Party in 1912) and a close associate of Sergo Ordzhonikidze. A former seminarian like Stalin, he had been involved in underground agitation in Abkhazia, Batumi, Grozny and southern Russia after the 1917 Revolution.[18] Lakoba was a leader of *Kiaraz* and a member of the Abkhazian Revolutionary Committee, and was among the three signatories of the triumphal telegram to Lenin declaring the victory of Soviet power in Abkhazia in March 1921. In February of the following year he was elected Chairman of the Council (Soviet) of Peoples Commissars of Abkhazia (*Sovnarkom*) at the first Congress of the Abkhazian Soviets.[19]

Using his power base in the government as chairman of the *Sovnarkom*, the *korenizatsiya* affirmative action policies, his close personal association with leading Bolsheviks, and his personal authority, energy and charisma, Lakoba created a powerful patronage network in Abkhazia. Although he never held an important post in the Party per se, he often addressed Party conferences and congresses throughout his 15-year leadership (even at the national level, such as the 15th Congress of the All-Union Party in Moscow in December 1927); and the Party Secretary (officially First Secretary of the Oblast Committee of the Abkhazian Organization of the Communist Party of Georgia) was always secondary to the authority of Lakoba. It is also possible that Lakoba's position in the government rather than in the Party apparatus made him less vulnerable to central Party manipulation and less susceptible to control through "party discipline." Perhaps because the Party organs reported to Tbilisi, while Lakoba's power base rested in the organs of the government (the *Sovnarkom* and later the TsIK) and in Lakoba's own patronage ties to Stalin, Lakoba behaved in open defiance of the local Party organization, refusing to attend any of its sessions.[20]

As the journalist Zinaida Rikhter wrote in *Kavkaz nashikh dnei* in 1924:

> [t]o Nestor, as the peasants simply call him one on one, they come with any little thing, bypassing all official channels, in certainty that he will hear them out and make a decision. The *predsovnarkom* of Abkhazia, Comrade Lakoba, is loved by the peasants and by the entire population. Comrade Zinoviev, when he was in Abkhazia, joked that Abkhazia should be renamed *Lakobistan*.[21]

Lakoba had very close ties early on with Sergo Ordzhonikidze, and from the early 1920s he began to have regular access to Josef Stalin. It is possible that Lakoba and

Stalin met during the Civil War. In any case, Stalin had a long association with Abkhazia, going back to his days as an underground revolutionary in the Caucasus, and from the mid-1920s onwards he began to vacation regularly in various dachas there. According to the contemporary Abkhaz historian Stanislav Lakoba, Nestor Lakoba was recruited early on by Stalin as an associate in his political intrigues. After studying documents in Nestor Lakoba's archive, Stanislav Lakoba argues that Stalin, using Ordzhonikidze and F. E. Dzerzhinsky as intermediaries, employed Nestor Lakoba in his plan to isolate Trotsky in Sukhumi immediately following Lenin's death. Trotsky had been suffering from a persistent illness, and set off for Sukhumi for treatment in January 1924. Lakoba was asked to keep Trotsky entertained—and essentially out of the way—during Lenin's funeral and the ensuing period. Thus Stalin was the primary orator at the funeral, giving him a critical advantage in his struggle for the post-Lenin succession.[22]

Although in general Abkhazia's peripheral location and pseudo-independent status kept it removed from the political machinations of the center, by the late 1920s Lakoba faced several complications for his fiefdom. The first was the shortage of ethnic Abkhaz cadres and the absence of a mechanism for their education and advancement. The ethnic balance remained unfavorable to ethnic Abkhaz, and they were heavily outnumbered by Georgians and especially by Russians in the government apparatus and in the Party. Budget allocation overall was comparatively very low for Abkhazia, even in areas of comparative advantage such as subtropical agriculture and resorts. Industry was practically non-existent.

Using his close contacts with Stalin, Ordzhonikidze, and other key figures in the central apparatus, as well as Abkhazia's favorable climactic conditions, Lakoba gained significant investment for the republic and increased his Abkhaz patronage network within the apparat throughout the 1920s. As a result of the *korenizatsiya* policy of increasing representation in the Party and government of titular nationalities, the proportion of Abkhaz in the Party increased from 10% in 1923 to 25.4% in 1926, and to 28.3% in 1929.[23] Investment in resorts and the infrastructure increased dramatically in this period, along with the infrastructure of roads and city facilities to service them.[24] Geographical survey work began in the coal-rich region of Tkvarcheli in 1926, and work began on the first mine shafts in 1930.[25] Small communal electrical stations were built in Gudauta, Ochamchira and Gali in the late 1920s, and in the early 1930s construction began on large-scale electrical plants in Sukhumi and Tkvarcheli.[26]

Lakoba's personal style of rule differed greatly from the Stalinist ideal, embodied by Ordzhonikidze, of the tireless rough-and-ready leader ruling by shouting, intimidation and threats and upbraiding his subordinates with profanity.[27] Physically very small and nearly deaf (hearing only with the help of a bulky apparatus), Lakoba cultivated an image of himself as a wise native sophisticate, beloved of his people, and always ready with a pithy Abkhaz folk saying.[28] Nevertheless, he managed his local fiefdom in the same way as leaders throughout the Soviet Union: appointing clients and rewarding them with privileges, apartments, dachas, and access to

consumer goods; and punishing them by the threat of removal and the associated loss of these same privileges.[29]

An impending challenge for Lakoba's network was the industrialization and collectivization plans of the First Five Year Plan, declared at the 15th All-Union Party Conference in 1928. Although the industrialization aspects of the Plan had little direct implication for the primarily agricultural and resort-based economy of Abkhazia, one aspect of the program involved the reformation and purging of the government apparatus ordered by the central authorities for autonomous and national republics to coincide with the "re-election" campaign of the Soviets in 1930–1931. That Lakoba had significant forewarning that something of the sort was coming is indicated by his report to the First Session of the 4th Assembly of the Central Executive Committee (TsIK) of Abkhazia on 11 March 1927.[30] Preceded by Kalinin's address to the 4th Session of the USSR TsIK in December 1928, the specific order for the "accounting and checking" campaign (*otchyotochno-proverochnaya kampaniya*) of city and rural Soviets was given by declaration of the Georgian Republican TsIK in January 1930, and repeated in a declaration of the Abkhazian TsIK the following month.[31]

The goal of the "checking" campaign was officially to

> test the work of all the Soviets and their participation in the implementation of the Five Year Plan for the development of the national economy and the policy for the socialist reconstruction of the countryside and the decisive attack (*nastupleniye*) on capitalist elements in the city and the countryside ... to give the wide working masses the ability to check the fulfillment of demands of the electorate by the Soviets made in the previous election campaign and to check the work capability of individual delegates

and

> to involve the working masses and peasants and on the basis of the growing activeness of the working masses to attain the strengthening and enlivening of the work of the city and rural Soviets.[32]

The "checking" extended beyond the Soviets to trade unions and Party members in general, and the real intention, of course, was a general purge.

Another element of this process was the reorganization of the government (i.e. the Soviets—Lakoba's power base). According to the Decree of 17 April 1930,[33] the Soviet of Peoples Commissars of the Abkhazian Socialist Republic (of which Lakoba was chairman) would be dissolved and its functions given over to the Presidium of the Central Executive Committee of the Republic. The same decree contains the directive that, in conjunction with this reorganization, "the title 'Treaty (*dogovornaya*) Republic' that had been in effect since February 1922 should be removed, and replaced with the words 'Autonomous Republic.'"[34] The decision was formalized at the 6th Congress of the Abkhazian Soviets on 11 February 1931.[35]

What Lakoba's attitude and approach to these changes were is difficult to judge from available sources. The change in status from essentially that of a Union Republic to an Autonomous one within Georgia is seen by contemporary Abkhazians as a significant blow to aspirations to national independence.[36] Given the largely formal nature of such legal instruments, the personal nature of authority and patronage, and the degree to which Abkhazia was already integrated into the Georgian republic in any case (and it can be argued that Abkhazia's "union" status in reality was largely fictitious), it is quite possible that Lakoba was little bothered by the change.[37] Indeed, it appeared to have little effect on his personal authority within the republic.

The "checking" and reformation of the Soviets and the Party ranks led to significant numbers of expulsions, particularly of ethnic Abkhaz cadres, a decision that has also been seen as a blow to Lakoba's position, given the importance of *korenizatsiya* to his patronage leverage.[38] The extent to which Lakoba's patronage networks were based on ethnicity is reflected by the fact that the overwhelming majority of the officials and Party members removed following Lakoba's downfall in 1936 and afterwards (on the accusation of association with Lakoba, by then an "enemy of the people," or for expression of Abkhazian nationalism) were ethnic Abkhaz.[39] Statistics for Party membership in Abkhazia show a significant drop in ethnic Abkhaz cadres between the years 1929 and 1931: from 28.3% (the highest percentage of Abkhaz in the Party for the entire Soviet period) to 18.5% (see Table 1).[40] It is possible, however, that this might not have been as damaging to Lakoba's position as it seems. While the proportion of Georgian cadres increased slightly in this period (from 24.9% to 25.3%), there was a very significant increase in Russian cadres: from 24.5% to 36.8%.[41] These percentages of ethnic Russians among Abkhazian Party cadres are remarkable, considering that during this period Russians made up less than 10% of the overall population of Abkhazia.[42] It is possible that Russians were particularly valuable for their education and language abilities, and perhaps they were seen by ethnic Abkhaz as less threatening than Georgians. The number of Abkhaz (and, more importantly, Lakoba clients) in high positions appears to have remained quite high, while most of the Russians, and Georgians as well, were appointed to assistant and secondary positions.[43] In such positions the latter groups' education and linguistic skills would have been useful, given the official status of the Russian and Georgian languages in addition to Abkhaz, and the regular exhortations that paperwork be conducted in all three languages.

Lakoba also appears to have benefited from the reorganization of the Soviet apparatus. In February 1931 he was "elected" Chairman of the Presidium of the consolidated Central Executive Committee, while the elimination of a second chairmanship (that of the Soviet of Peoples' Deputies) removed the possibility of a rival within the government hierarchy. The Party hierarchy and the Party First Secretaryship, meanwhile, remained largely deferential to Lakoba, although they often complained about Lakoba's "insolent" attitude towards the Party organization in reports to the Georgian TsK.

Collectivization

The more intractable problem for Lakoba was the collectivization of agriculture. It is not clear whether Lakoba's reluctance to implement collectivization stemmed from ideological convictions, concern for the well-being of his subject population, or because of the potential damage to the client networks of his power base. Whatever the reasons, Lakoba's first strategy for dealing with collectivization was to stall. Numerous declarations and decrees by state and Party discussed the region's shortcomings and the need for planning, conviction and enthusiasm for eventual implementation of collectivization and "dekulakization," but little concrete action was proposed or taken.[44] The official explanation was "local conditions," "backwardness" (*otstalost'*) of local agricultural methods and "primitive technology,"[45] as well as the lack of kulaks.[46] But Abkhazia's peripheral locations and Lakoba's personal connections to Stalin and other Kremlin leaders seem to have played a role as well in delaying the onset of collectivization in the republic.

Relations between Abkhazia and the center (both Tbilisi and Moscow), and between Lakoba and the Party apparatus in his own republic began to take on an increasingly confrontational tone on the subject of delaying collectivization.[47] Remarkably, however, Stalin and Ordzhonikidze came to Lakoba's defense. In October 1929 Stalin accused the Abkhazian Party of "not taking into consideration the specific particularities of the Abkhazian situation, imposing sometimes the policy of mechanically transferring Russian forms of socialist construction onto Abkhazian soil."[48]

By January 1931 the issue was stated from the center as an ultimatum, in the form of a directive. Groups of Party activists were sent to the villages from the center to agitate and help drive the peasants into the kolkhozes. As happened elsewhere, the peasantry resisted, driving their livestock into the mountains, hiding them in ravines and towns, selling them off for very low prices, or slaughtering them. Unlike in the north Caucasus where the NKVD engaged in armed confrontation with the mountaineers, however, in Abkhazia the local authorities refrained from heavy-handed methods, apparently fearing an armed uprising. Moscow and the Party, meanwhile, demanded unconditional fulfillment of the directive.

The issue came to a head with the so-called "Gudauta Incident" in February 1931. Around 20 February large crowds of peasants began to gather in Lakoba's hometown of Lykhny, as well as Duripshi and Achandari, in the Gudauta district to protest against collectivization.[49] Over the next several days, the size of the meetings grew, and the participants took oaths to support one another and to stand up against Soviet power. Party and Komsomol members were required to give up their Party cards.[50] Besides appropriations and other measures designed to force them into the collective farms, the participants also protested against the division of peasants into class categories (*bednyaki*, *kulaki*, etc.), as well as against the government's anti-illiteracy campaign, apparently because it forced women to attend evening classes away from their families and children, on pain of a 100–300 ruble fine for skipping a session.[51]

By 26 February the big guns of the Georgian Party organization arrived on the scene, including First Secretary Yason Ivanovich Mamulia and secret police head Lavrenty Beria.[52] But delegations from the demonstrating peasants wanted to speak to nobody but Nestor Lakoba. The peasants appealed to Lakoba, praising his love and care for the people, and asked him to allow them to be resettled in Turkey, where they would live with their brother Abkhaz who had fled there in the nineteenth century. Lakoba calmed the crowd, but told them that he could not resolve the issue on his own and that permission had to come from Moscow. The assembled peasants asked Lakoba to intercede on their behalf with Moscow, and Lakoba promised to do so.[53] The demonstration continued for two days, and began to disperse only after Lakoba promised to go in person to Moscow.

The peasants' hopes were in vain, however. The central authorities allowed time for passions to settle, and then several weeks later the leaders of the demonstrations were rounded up in a single night and charged with unrelated crimes. Nevertheless, the collectivization drive for the moment was not continued. Lakoba went to Moscow for negotiations, and upon his return the campaign resumed in a completely different manner: there was no "dekulakization" and no deportations, and horses were not communalized. There was no further discussion of resettlement to Turkey, but as the émigré Russian historian S. Danilov wrote: "[a]pparently, N. Lakoba all the same this time was able to ask of his chum, the 'boss' (*khozyain*) of the country, a certain alleviation for the 'showcase' republic."[54]

It has been argued by Abkhazian historians that the price Lakoba paid for this leniency in collectivization was his acquiescing to the reduction in status of Abkhazia to an Autonomous Republic within Georgia. There is no documentary evidence for this claim, but the timing is striking, as the status decision was finalized at the same time as the resolution of the "Gudauta Incident" in February 1931.[55]

According to Stanislav Lakoba, Beria believed that Nestor Lakoba had in fact instigated the whole affair.[56] Indeed, that belief is not without merit: it is difficult to believe that the demonstrations could have reached the scale that they did without at least Lakoba's tacit approval. As Philip Roeder has argued, because indigenous cadres in the Soviet ethno-federal system were assigned a monopoly over the mobilizational resources within their ethnic group and at the same time assigned the responsibility to create an ethnically distinct stratification system in official institutions that would impede the emergence of alternative ethnic entrepreneurs outside of these institutions, these collective mobilizational resources could in turn be used as instruments of ethnic assertiveness directed against the center.[57] Roeder was writing about the demands of ethnic elites during the perestroika period of the 1980s, but if it is true that Lakoba was able to mobilize Abkhaz national feeling to deter the center from implementing its collectivization policy, then this may very well represent an early manifestation of such ethnic assertiveness that decades later would play a central role in the collapse of the whole system.

Although the final report of the Georgian TsK on the disturbances was critical of the local leadership in Abkhazia for "weaknesses in class struggle with kulaks" and lack

of preparatory work among poorer peasants, in the short term the incident was beneficial to Lakoba in that as a solution to these problems the TsK ordered a furthering of *korenizatsiia*: the removal of all secretaries of local Soviets who did not speak Abkhazian, the introduction of more Abkhaz into local leadership structures, and the conducting of local administrative affairs in the Abkhazian language.[58]

The pace of collectivization remained remarkably slow in Abkhazia, and was not seriously implemented until after Lakoba's death in 1936. If official figures are to be believed, while 52.7% of all agriculture in the USSR was collectivized by 1931, and 61.5% in 1932, in Abkhazia by 1934 only 34.1% had been collectivized.[59] As Stanislav Lakoba points out, paradoxically at the same time that collectivization in the republic was largely a fiction, in 1935 Abkhazia and Nestor Lakoba were awarded the Order of Lenin for "outstanding success in agriculture and industry" on the basis of tobacco production, which was produced by individual farmers rather than by collective farms.[60]

Despite Lakoba's success in suspending collectivization, however, the issue would become a powerful weapon in the hands of his adversaries and rivals, and would be used as the pretext for the denunciation of Lakoba as an "enemy of the people" and the purge of his associates following his death. For the moment, though, Lakoba appears to have remained in good standing with Stalin.

The Rise of Beria

The relative advantages of adversaries and rivals was particularly relevant in the early 1930s, as the period coincides with the rise of Lavrenty Beria to power, first as secret police chief in Georgia in 1926, then as First Secretary of the Georgian SSR in 1931, and then as First Secretary of the Transcaucasian Socialist Federal Soviet Republic in 1932, which until 1937 included Armenia and Azerbaijan in addition to Georgia. Beria was an ethnic Mingrelian, born in Abkhazia in the village of Merkheuli, not far from Sukhumi.

Again based on Nestor Lakoba's archive, Stanislav Lakoba argues that at first Beria was able to get access to Stalin only through Lakoba. Among those papers there was a letter from Beria to Lakoba from September 1929 asking for a meeting with Stalin, who was then vacationing in Abkhazia.[61] Lakoba agrees, and at the meeting implies that the "young, energetic Chekist" should be advanced to a leading Party position. Stanislav Lakoba argues that Nestor Lakoba made the recommendation based on the fact that Beria was young, he was originally from Abkhazia, and he did not (at the time) have independent access to Stalin. Thus such a person "as the head of the Transcaucasian Party apparatus would be useful to the Abkhazian Republic."[62]

Lakoba may have had a further reason for backing Beria's candidacy. In the wake of Stalin's letter of criticism in October 1929, Lakoba was investigated by a joint

commission of the Central Committees of the Georgian and Transcaucasian Republics headed by Amayak Nazaretyan. According to its report presented to a joint session of these Central Committees on 11 April 1930, the Nazaretyan committee considered a number of accusations against Lakoba from 1922 to 1929 involving abuse of his position to protect or avenge relatives (including one accusation of murder in relation to the executions of two persons accused of killing one of Lakoba's relatives). Although the committee found "the presence in the Abkhazian [Party] organization of elements of factionalism, degeneration, '*khozobrastaniye*,' nepotism, and group cohesion reaching toadyism," the charges were dismissed and Lakoba was declared "rehabilitated" because of lack of evidence, because of the "kulak" origins of some of the accusers, and because Lakoba and the Abkhazian Party organization had already publicly demonstrated sufficient self-criticism.[63] As head of the Georgian secret police, Beria would have been in an excellent position to put pressure on Lakoba through supplying or withholding evidence to the investigating commission.

In any case, Lakoba appears to have seriously miscalculated in recommending Beria to Stalin. Over the next half decade relations between the two rapidly worsened, resulting in a vicious rivalry. Yet despite all of Beria's efforts to discredit him and undermine his authority, Lakoba managed for a long time to maintain his close ties with Stalin.

A battle of backstabbing between Beria and Lakoba is evident in the letters that Beria sent to Sergo Ordzhonikidze in an attempt to validate himself in the face of criticism from Lakoba. In one such letter, dated 18 December 1932, Beria complains that Lakoba has told Ordzhonikidze that Beria said "Sergo would have shot all the Georgians in Georgia if it was not for me . . .". In another, from 1933, Beria complains that Lakoba has been spreading disinformation about the former's alleged involvement in Musavat (Independent Azerbaijani) intelligence in 1920.[64]

The bizarre incident of an apparent assassination attempt on Stalin off the coast of Pitsunda in northern Abkhazia in September 1933, in which a boat on which Stalin was a passenger came under gunfire from the shore, appears to have been another such attempt to undermine Lakoba (and in any case accusation of involvement in this supposed attempt on Stalin's life was yet another of the pretexts for the repression of Lakoba's associates after 1936).[65]

Another situation that appears to have attracted Beria's attention as a means to compromise Lakoba was the issue of the Greek population in Abkhazia. A report addressed to Beria by Georgian secret police chief head Tite Lordkipanidze argued that the Greeks in Abkhazia, instead of trying to emigrate, as earlier, were penetrating collective farms in order to undermine the system from within. In a handwritten note on the first page, Beria orders this report to be passed along for the consideration of the All-Union Central Committee.[66]

In 1933–1934 and 1935 two further "checks," or *proverki*, were carried out on the orders of the center, to verify documents and remove "unwanted" and "hostile" elements. The first one was fairly mild, as in Georgia overall Party membership

was reduced by 16.2%, whereas the Abkhaz Party organization does not seem to have been affected much at all.[67] The second one, although planned before the assassination of Sergei Kirov in 1934, appears to have been a preparation for the violent purges of 1937. Although still bloodless, the checking was unusually strong in the Caucasus, where 18% of cadres were removed from the Party (as opposed to 9% throughout the USSR).[68] Although there are no precise numbers of members expelled in Abkhazia specifically due to this *proverka*, the membership in the Abkhazian Party organization declined by 28% (or 756 people) between 1935 and 1936 (see Table 1).[69] The expulsions appear to have been distributed evenly across ethnic groups, however, as no significant change is apparent in the percentages of nationalities represented.[70]

In 1934 a book went to print in Abkhazia entitled *Stalin i Khashim, 1901–1902*, about Stalin's revolutionary period in Batumi, with a foreword written by Lakoba. A review of the book appeared in *Bolshevik* in 1935, and apparently Stalin was very pleased with the interpretation of his past.[71] It is possible that Lakoba's success in this endeavor (and its effect on Stalin) was one of the inspirations behind one of Beria's most sycophantic (and successful) career moves: the publication of Beria's largely fabricated (and ghostwritten) *On the Question of the History of the Bolshevik Organizations in the Transcaucasus* in 1935, an outrageously exaggerated account of Stalin's revolutionary activities in the Transcaucasus.[72]

Nevertheless, Stalin appears to have continued to favor Lakoba. In December 1935 Lakoba was summoned to Moscow and at a session of the All-Union TsIK was awarded the Order of the Red Banner for his achievements in the civil war, his second major decoration in the same year. And Lakoba continued to have direct access to Stalin at his dachas in Abkhazia. According to a number of sources, by late 1935 to mid-1936 Stalin met frequently with Lakoba and tried to arrange his transfer to Moscow, most likely as successor to Genrikh Yagoda as Commissar of

TABLE 1 Membership in the Abkhazian Party organization, 1929–1940[a]

Year	Abkhaz	Georgians	Russians	Armenians	Other
1929	28.3	24.9	24.5	8.8	13.5
1931	18.5	25.3	36.8	9.1	10.3
1933	19.0	26.6	35.1	9.5	9.8
1935	17.6	25.0	35.2	11.4	10.8
1936	21.8	26.3	29.1	11.2	11.8
1939	14.9	48.2	16.3	15.4	5.2
1940	17.2	40.3	19.4	15.2	7.9

[a] Compiled from information in *Abkhazskaya oblastnaya organizatsiya kompartii Gruzii v tsifrakh.*

State Security.[73] An indication of Lakoba's standing at the time is given by the coverage given in *Pravda* to Lakoba and Abkhazia on the occasion of the 15th anniversary of Soviet power in Abkhazia: usually the anniversary of a Union Republic gets a page to a page and a half; on 4 March 1936 the Abkhazian anniversary took up nearly the entire edition of *Pravda*. What is more, the issue contained a photograph taken in 1927 with the text: "Comrades Stalin, Ordzhonikidze, Mikoyan and Chairman of the TsIK of the Abkhazian SSR N. Lakoba (right) in Sukhum. The photo was taken in 1927, and is published here for the first time."[74] As Stanislav Lakoba points out, the Party bureaucrats of the period understood well that the appearance of Lakoba on the first page of the paper, surrounded by members of the Politburo, was no accident. It meant that Lakoba's transfer to Moscow was all but decided. And the date given in the text, 1927, was meant to draw attention to Lakoba's long and close association with Stalin and other Party and state leaders in the Caucasus.[75]

But perhaps because of his reluctance to give up his Abkhazian fiefdom, or perhaps because he realized that to do Stalin's bidding would mean taking over from Ezhov as chief hangman in the continuing purges, Lakoba refused Stalin's entreaties to accept promotion and transfer to Moscow. For whatever reason, in so doing Lakoba sealed his own fate. With Lakoba's continuing rejection, Stalin's patience appears to have worn thin. By the second half of 1936 Lakoba seems to have finally fallen out of favor with Stalin. Earlier in that year Beria scored a tactical victory, installing a protégé, the former secret police officer Aleksei Agrba, as First Secretary of the Abkhazian Obkom, a position that until that time had always been held by Lakoba loyalists.[76] The official renaming of the city of Sukhum as Sukhumi (the Georgian form, with the Georgian "i" nominative ending) in August 1936 has also been seen as a blow against Lakoba.[77] A directive of the Georgian Central Committee of 19 November 1936 ordered the immediate liquidation of the "illegally existing" representation of the Abkhazian TsIK in Moscow.[78]

In a well-recounted series of events, in December 1936 Lakoba was summoned to Tbilisi for official meetings in the TsK of the Georgian Party and in the *Dom pravistel'stvo*. After refusing several requests by Beria and his wife to dine at their home on 27 December, Lakoba relented and attended. After dinner Lakoba, Beria and Beria's wife decided to attend the opera *mzechabuki* ("Sun Youth") at the Tbilisi Ballet and Opera Theater on Rustaveli Avenue. Midway through the performance, Lakoba began to feel ill, and returned to his room at the Orient Hotel further up the street. He died early the next morning, but not before supposedly (and famously) gasping "Beria, the snake, has poisoned me!"[79]

The cause of death was given officially as an unexpected heart attack. The body was returned to Sukhumi for an official funeral. Flowers and telegrams were sent by all manner of friends and well wishers from throughout the Soviet Union, and many highly placed officials came to Abkhazia to be present at the funeral. Beria did not attend, and Stalin did not even send a telegram.

After Lakoba: *Berievshchina*

Lakoba's end was most likely "overdetermined." Even if his death was, by outlandish coincidence, a result of natural causes, once he had fallen from Stalin's graces by refusing to be transferred to Moscow his days were clearly numbered. For one thing, the Great Purge of 1937 was designed specifically to destroy precisely the kind of regional fiefdom that Lakoba had built up in Abkhazia. For another, Beria would be only too happy to take the opportunity to remove not just his personal rival but also Lakoba's entire network in Abkhazia, so long a thorn in his side, and install his own. Most likely, in murdering Lakoba, Beria was acting with Stalin's consent, if not on his direct orders. Lakoba had such authority and was so popular in Abkhazia that what was to follow would be made much simpler by his absence.

What was to follow was the declaration of Lakoba as an "enemy of the people" and the wholesale elimination of Lakoba's entire extended family and power structure, down to his brother, wife and sons, to coincide with the purges of 1937. Although, as Amy Knight has argued, while Beria was most likely reluctant to implement the purges in Georgia (as they potentially threatened his patronage network as well),[80] he went about the task with particular ruthlessness, and nowhere more so than in Abkhazia. The entire Party network was decimated,[81] and show trials of Lakoba's former associates were staged.

Beria installed his protégé Aleksei Agrba in Lakoba's place, and two more of his men, State Prosecutor V. Shoniya and Public Accuser Mikhail Delba, led the show trials that convicted Lakoba's followers.[82] Agrba had briefly been the head of the Abkhazian oblast' ChK in 1922, and then became a prototypical Beria client: he was installed by Beria as head of the Transcaucasian GPU in 1931–1933 (after Beria was promoted from that position), and was then made chairman of the Azerbaijan GPU in 1933–1934.[83] Agrba himself soon also fell victim to the purges, and was tried and shot after being criticized in *Pravda* (and by extension by the center).[84] Beria had to sacrifice Agrba, but he retained control of Abkhazia, installing clients in key positions: Kiril Bechvaya and then Mikhail Baramiya as First Secretaries of the Abkhazian Party organization, Avksenti Rapava as Chairman of the Central Executive Committee, A. Chochua and then Mikhail Delba as Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet, and K. Chichinadze and later Aleksandr Mirtskhulava as Chairman of the *Sovnarkom*.

The majority of important positions throughout the structures of Abkhazia were now filled with Georgians (primarily Mingrelians) loyal to Beria, from government positions to the administrators of collective farms, cooperatives and resort complexes.[85] The percentage of Georgians among Party cadres began to rise significantly compared with ethnic Abkhaz and especially Russians. This is clearly reflected in the data for admission of Party members for the period (see Table 2).[86]

The extension of Beria's control over Abkhazia thus coincided with the beginning of several large-scale policies of "Georgification" of the republic. Beginning in 1937,

TABLE 2 New members accepted into the Abkhazian Party organization, 1939–1943[a]

Year	New members	Abkhaz (%)	Georgians (%)	Russians (%)	Armenians (%)	Other (%)
1939	842	14.9	48.2	16.3	15.4	5.2
1940	2,434	17.2	40.3	19.4	15.2	7.9
1941	992	20.6	50.8	10.9	10.9	6.8
1942	1,179	12.3	51.2	22.3	6.3	7.9
1943	1,919	13.8	43.3	17.1	16.3	9.5

[a]Compiled from information in *Abkhazskaya oblastnaya organizatsiya kompartii Gruzii v tsifrakh*.

a large-scale policy of voluntary "resettlement" of Georgians, mainly Mingrelians from western Georgia, was set in motion. Started under the auspices of the Georgian Party Land Administration Committee, the policy to resettle kolkhoz workers from the less fertile mountain regions to the collective farms in Abkhazia (and after 1937 collectivization set in at full tempo)[87] was subordinated in May 1939 under the administration of the central USSR "Resettlement Administration" (*Pereselencheskoe upravlenie*).[88] The resettlement policy was essentially a corollary of large-scale collectivization, as the new immigrants were planted directly into the expanding network of kolkhozes. The policy would continue through the mid-1950s, and would have significant impact on the nationality balances in the republic, further reducing the percentage of the Abkhaz titular minority.

The resettlement was officially voluntary, but in general it was simply another aspect of forced collectivization. There are numerous incidents in official reports of resettled collective farm workers trying to escape from the kolkhoz and return to their original homes.[89] There are other cases, however, of peasants appealing to the Resettlement Department and asking to be resettled in Abkhazia.[90] It is difficult to obtain precise figures for the number of people resettled, but documents of the period indicate that from 1937 to 1950 2,410 apartment buildings were constructed and 2,443 households were settled.[91] Census data show that between 1939 and 1959 the Georgian population in Abkhazia grew by 66,000.[92] There are most likely other demographic factors at work here as well, but they are difficult to document. KGB reports and dissident letters indicate that a number of Abkhaz, especially from the intelligentsia or those involved in education, left Abkhazia for Russia—either Moscow or Krasnodar *krai*—in order to continue their careers after political changes removed the Abkhaz and Russian languages from much of public life in the republic (especially in education; see below).[93] It is also likely that a substantial population of ethnic Abkhaz managed to re-identify themselves as Mingrelians. The similarities in some Abkhaz and Mingrelian surnames, and also the fairly high degree of bilingualism in Abkhaz and Mingrelian among ethnic Abkhaz, suggest that there was a significant amount of intermarriage and interrelatedness, thus

facilitating re-identification.[94] The majority of the Greek population was collectively deported during the war, and it is likely that some of them altered their official nationality to Mingrelian or Russian to avoid this fate, as did some Laz families.[95] Nevertheless, as Daniel Muller points out, in comparing 1939 and 1959 census data for Abkhazia, there were 48,172 more Georgians (the category into which Mingrelians were now incorporated) in 1959 than would be predicted through natural growth, and therefore, despite the assimilation of Abkhaz and Greeks, the increase of the Georgian population can only be explained by extensive resettlement during the period.[96]

The 1922 Constitution of the Georgian Socialist Republic declared that "national minorities of the Georgian SSR are guaranteed the right for the free development and use of their native language in both their national-cultural and general state agencies," and by agreement of the governing organs of Abkhazia and Georgia the language of government departments in Abkhazia would be Abkhaz, Georgian and Russian.[97] This caused a great deal of difficulty, in terms of the logistics of recruiting trilingual employees, typewriters in all three scripts, and the amount of duplicate (and triplicate) paperwork involved. Although the official requirement for Abkhaz was useful for Lakoba in advancing ethnic Abkhaz cadres, and although significant efforts were made during the 1920s and 1930s to develop the Abkhaz language and introduce a more sophisticated vocabulary, in practice the language of government and of daily life in Abkhazia was Russian. This situation was formalized in Section II of the Abkhazian 1925 Constitution, Paragraph 6 of which states that "The language of state bureaus of the Abkhazian SSR is acknowledged to be the Russian language."[98] In Abkhaz schools (then as now) instruction up to the 4th form was conducted in Abkhaz, but then higher grades in all subjects were taught in Russian.

Starting in 1938, a campaign of Georgification began in the sphere of language. The earlier Latin-based script of Abkhazian was replaced by an adapted variant of the Georgian alphabet.[99] At a conference of the Abkhazian Party in May 1937 it was "proven" that the earlier Abkhazian alphabets "bore a Russifying character."[100] There was little doubt that the move was meant as a first step towards replacing Russian and Abkhazian in schools with Georgian. This move was delayed somewhat with the onset of the war, but was brought to fruition in 1944–1945. Abkhazia would seem to be a unique case, at a time when in most other national republics and minority regions Latin-based alphabets were being replaced by Cyrillic ones as part of a general policy of consolidation and Russification. The policy of changing and translating place names from Abkhazian and Russian into Georgian, begun apparently on the initiative of Beria in his struggle with Lakoba, continued after Lakoba's death.[101]

Abkhazian Trump Card

By all accounts, Beria retained control over his fiefdom in Georgia and in Abkhazia, even after being summoned to Moscow as First Deputy Chairman of the USSR NKVD

in August 1938. His replacement as First Secretary of the Georgian Party was the 31-year-old Nestor Charkviani, who had previously been Third Secretary, and had earlier made his career as editor of the newspaper *Komunisti*. According to several sources, Beria had tried unsuccessfully to place his protégé Valerian Bakradze in that position.[102] Charkviani, in any case, although an outsider to Beria's network, at the start appeared to be amenable to Beria. According to Ronald Grigor Suny, "[l]ater developments suggest that Charkviani acted as a client of Beria's, maintained the personality cult of Beria in Georgia, but in time (particularly after World War II) began to establish his own political machine in the republic."[103] As Amy Knight argues, Stalin most likely approved of Charkviani instead of Bakradze as a means of reigning in Beria's dominance in Georgia.[104] Nevertheless, Beria continued to maintain control of his Georgian network and to draw strength from it for his position in Moscow.

Beria also had a solid network in place in Abkhazia, but during the war his grasp began to weaken. In February 1943 Beria's client Baramiya was promoted from First Secretary of the Abkhazian Party to the position of Second Secretary of the Georgian Party in Tbilisi, and was replaced by Akaki Mgeladze. An ethnic Georgian born in the Guria province, Mgeladze grew up in Abkhazia and had been the head of the Abkhazian Komsomol, then of the Georgian Komsomol, and later of the "Gruzneft" state oil concern. He had briefly been transferred to the army as a political commissar on the Transcaucasian front, before being summoned to Abkhazia to take over as First Secretary. According to Mgeladze's memoirs, within three days of assuming his new post he received a call from Stalin in the middle of the night. Stalin told him that his appointment had been decided by the Politburo in order to increase the republic's production of tobacco, which was vital for the war effort. The clear implication is that Stalin himself was behind the appointment.[105]

While Beria maintained some of his dependants in Abkhazia, such as Mikhail Delba and Aleksandr Mirtskhulava, it became increasingly clear that Mgeladze was Stalin's man. Indeed, Mgeladze has been characterized as the ideal Stalinist "new man," the model for the post-war type of client, the type that Stalin intended to use to replace the "second generation leadership" such as Beria and Khrushchev, had his apparent plans for a new purge come to fruition.[106]

Building up his own client network in Abkhazia, Mgeladze, like Lakoba before him, based his authority on his regular personal access to Stalin while the latter vacationed at Abkhazian dachas. Mgeladze's memoirs are filled with case after case in which he is able to gain investments and civic improvements for his republic by informally bringing up the subject with Stalin at his dacha, bypassing entirely the lines of subordination to the Georgian Party Central Committee.[107] According to Mgeladze (and Mirtskhulava as well), Beria was less than pleased by the former's access.[108] Moreover, unlike in Charkviani's Georgia, in Abkhazia there was no cult of Beria. There, only one collective farm bore Beria's name.

Meanwhile, the Georgification policies begun earlier continued at full tempo under Mgeladze. The conversion of education into the Georgian language resumed with the convening of a commission of Abkhazian pedagogues in 1944 to prepare a program. On the same day, "recommendations" were presented to the Abkhazian Party that stated that the current system of education was a brake on the development of national culture, and that "Georgian culture, as unquestionably higher in relation to Abkhaz culture, has a direct influence on it and enriches it." The transition of Abkhaz schools to instruction in Georgian was considered to be "judicious and overdue."[109] On 13 March 1945 the Abkhazian Obkom of the Party approved a resolution to implement the transition, and beginning with the 1945–1946 school year primary and secondary education was conducted in Georgian.[110] This led to a reduction in the number of schools in predominantly Abkhaz regions, as more than 220 teachers were relieved of their positions for not having sufficient knowledge of the Georgian language, which together with the Abkhaz students' inability to study in Georgian led to overall decreases in their educational success and opportunities for higher education.[111]

The renaming of toponyms with Georgian equivalents resumed with a new urgency and degree of coordination. A special "Commission for the Transcription of Toponyms for Populated Areas" was created in March 1947 under the auspices of the Presidium of the Abkhazian Supreme Soviet. From 1948 to 1952 more than 150 place names were changed, as were names of streets, squares, railway stations, and schools.[112] The resettlement of Georgian collective farm workers continued at nearly pre-war levels.[113]

Similarly, as Mgeladze consolidated his control over Party cadre appointments, the dominance of ethnic Georgians in the Party reached previously unheard of proportions. The striking increase in the rate of recruitment of Georgians at the expense of Abkhaz and other minorities is particularly reflected in the percentages of new members accepted into the Party during this period (see Table 3).

Similarly, KGB reports from the period reflect repeated complaints that ethnic Abkhazians were being removed from positions at all levels and replaced with Georgians.[114]

Although ethnic Abkhaz were becoming increasingly marginalized, these policies provoked the first emergence of a new post-war Abkhaz nationalism. In March 1947 three Abkhaz members of the intelligentsia, G. Dzindzaria, B. Shinkuba, and K. Shakryl, wrote a letter addressed to All-Union Central Committee Secretary A. A. Kuznetsov in Moscow in which they complained about these actions by the Georgian leadership of the Abkhazian Party. Although the three were punished "for the attempt at disinformation of the TsK of the VKP(b) and for slander of the Abkhazian Party organization," and criticized by Mgeladze for "bourgeois nationalism" and "fascism,"[115] the letter is important as the first clear statement of Abkhaz national grievance since the fall of Lakoba, and set the pattern for future such appeals by Abkhaz intellectuals directly to Moscow, bypassing the Georgian Party hierarchy.

TABLE 3 New members accepted into the Abkhazian Party organization, 1944–1953[a]

Year	New members	Abkhaz (%)	Georgians (%)	Russians (%)	Armenians (%)	Other (%)
1944	2,358	14.9	40.0	19.9	15.6	9.6
1945	2,880	11.0	47.1	18.0	14.5	9.3
1946	2,185	11.5	56.1	13.1	12.8	6.4
1947	2,288	14.9	50.1	14.3	14.7	5.9
1948	748	9.1	50.9	20.9	8.2	10.9
1949	636	3.6	68.6	16.8	8.8	2.2
1950	531	9.2	71.0	9.2	9.5	1.1
1951	835	17.1	65.3	7.7	7.1	2.7
1952	854	12.1	64.4	14.6	5.6	3.1
1953	946	7.5	67.3	14.2	8.4	2.5

[a]Compiled from information in *Abkhazskaya oblastnaya organizatsiya kompartii Gruzii v tsifrakh.*

By the late 1940s it would seem that Stalin's toleration for and even encouragement of the patronage networks of Mgeladze in Abkhazia and Charkviani in Tbilisi was part of a long-term balancing game to restrict the power of Beria, as well as to set the two off against each other.[116] An article by Mgeladze appeared in the Georgian newspaper *Komunisti* that criticized the dominance of local bosses and the appointment by them of loyal people, regardless of the degree of competence of such appointees, and implied that the practice was especially widespread in Georgia. As Amy Knight argues, "[t]hese criticisms were later said to have been intended as a signal to Charkviani to curb such practices, but they could have been directed against Beria as well."[117] In his memoirs, Mgeladze recounts one incident in which Charkviani attempted to place his own client as Mgeladze's replacement as First Secretary of the Abkhazian Party, but Mgeladze is able to use his favor with Stalin to install his own client in that position.[118] In another incident, Mgeladze describes a conversation in which Stalin criticizes "insufficiencies" in Charkviani's Georgian Party apparatus.[119]

By 1951 it appears that Stalin had made the decision to actively move against Beria, and Mgeladze's Abkhazian network seems to have been an important trump card in those efforts. The culmination of that was the raising of the so-called "Mingrelian Affair," in which beginning in November of that year Beria's clients who were ethnic Mingrelians (and many of Beria's clients in Georgia were Mingrelians) were accused of forming an underground and subversive nationalist group with the goal of gaining independence for Mingrelia. Although the move was initiated by Stalin himself and orchestrated at first by USSR MGB chief Ignatiev (an enemy of Beria), Mgeladze came to play an important role. Most of the main targets of the Mingrelian affair were Mgeladze's predecessors and earlier opponents in the Abkhazian Party

who had later been moved to the Georgian apparatus, such as Baramiya, Mirtskhulava, Rapava and Shoniya.[120]

At the same time, Stalin increased Mgeladze's authority by dividing Georgia into two new *oblasti*, the Kutaisi and Tbilisi *oblasti*, and naming Mgeladze as the head of the Kutaisi one. Mgeladze was able to install his own client, Sh. D. Getia, as his replacement as Abkhazian Party First Secretary,[121] and to expand his network throughout western Georgia. Then, as a conclusion to the process, in March 1952 Stalin replaced Charkviani with Mgeladze as First Secretary of the Georgian Party, and Charkviani's clients were replaced in positions in the Georgian Party by Mgeladze's clients from Abkhazia.[122]

The undermining of his Georgian network could only have been a tremendous blow for Beria. He was able to start to regain control of it only after Stalin's death in March 1953. One of Beria's first moves was to rehabilitate and reinstall his clients who had been the victims of the Mingrelian affair.[123] He simultaneously moved against Mgeladze and his network, replacing him as First Secretary of the Georgian Party with Aleksandr Mirtskhulava and purging Mgeladze's clients.[124] Mgeladze himself was detained and interrogated in April 1953, and was released only after signing a self-denunciation.[125] He was pronounced guilty in June of that year by the Georgian Central Committee of taking bribes while he was Abkhazian First Secretary.[126]

Conclusions

Patronage Networks and Center–Periphery Relations

From the very beginning of Soviet power, the center used Abkhazia as a restraint upon Georgia and the Georgian elites. This tactic continued through the Stalin period, and most likely afterwards as well. This was only facilitated by Abkhazia's status as a crucial citrus and tobacco producer and as a resort paradise, and by the frequent presence of center elites in resorts and dachas there. This direct access to high-level elites in turn gave Abkhazian elites (whether ethnic Abkhaz as in the case of Lakoba's network or Georgians in the case of Beria's and Mgeladze's networks) tremendous advantages and privileges vis-à-vis the republic center in Tbilisi. Leaders in Abkhazia were able to form extensive patronage networks at a time when such networks were being actively rooted out in other parts of the USSR, although clearly the increasingly confrontational nature of relations between center elites (i.e. Stalin and Beria), and Abkhazia's value as a tool in those struggles also played an important role in that respect. Beria's network in Abkhazia was crucial to the control of his power base in the Georgian republic as a whole, especially after 1938 when he became head of the NKVD in Moscow. Mgeladze's Abkhazia-based network, in turn, became a powerful tool in Stalin's hands, first in dislodging Charkviani's network in Tbilisi and, more importantly, in denying Beria control of Abkhazia, and later in undermining Beria's geographical power base in Georgia as a whole.

Patronage and Ethnicity

In the case of Lakoba, the patronage network was based on the *korenizatsiya* nationalities policy, centered primarily on the Abkhaz nationality. Whether Lakoba was primarily an Abkhaz nationalist or a committed Bolshevik internationalist is difficult to say, but in any case both Abkhaz nationalism and Soviet nationalities policies were of pragmatic value and worked in the same direction. Lakoba was able to use his local network to derail or soften policies directed from Tbilisi or from Moscow.

If it was true that Lakoba was the instigator behind the popular Abkhaz uprisings in 1931, and that he was able to mobilize an Abkhaz ethnic agenda as an instrument to force a deal with the center to halt or forestall the implementation of collectivization, then this may well have been an early manifestation of the sort of power that entrenched local ethnic patronage networks could bring to bear against the center. It is easy to understand why Stalin took such pains to smash regional patronage networks such as that of Lakoba during the Great Terror, and the fact that they popped up again afterwards is evidence of how inherent they were to the Soviet institutional system.

The period after Lakoba's death, and particularly under Mgeladze, was the nadir for the Abkhaz ethnic group. But the period also saw the first emergence of the nationalist strategy that Abkhaz elites would use repeatedly for the rest of the Soviet period: appeals to elites in the center, bypassing the republican leadership, as a loyal minority threatened by a potentially chauvinistic local majority. The pattern of letter writing to the Central Committee by Abkhaz intellectuals, followed by public demonstrations, would be repeated like clockwork every decade until 1989. The ability of Abkhaz elites, again, to communicate these appeals was greatly helped by their continuing access to central elites during the latter's visits to the Black Sea coast, even though they were without the benefit of a Lakoba-like figure with direct access to the very top. This continued to be useful for Moscow in that, as was the case during the period of Lakoba's fiefdom, it acted as a balance to the Georgian elite. After 1954 the Abkhaz alphabet reverted to Cyrillic, and education in schools (including most Georgian ones in the republic) reverted to the Russian language beyond the primary grades. The Georgian elites, in turn, used the Georgian language (which very few Abkhaz spoke) as a means of restricting the access of Abkhaz elites to advancement in education, economics, and government within the union republic, leaving ethnic Abkhaz with little option but to stay at home or to try to achieve success and advancement in the center or elsewhere in the Soviet Union.

Beria and Mgeladze most likely had strong Georgian nationalist streaks in their characters (Mgeladze probably more so than Beria), especially in comparison to Stalin.[127] Mgeladze seems never to have seen any contradiction between his Georgian nationalist instincts and his ardent Stalinism. In the cases of both Lakoba's and Mgeladze's patronage networks, nationalism was an important tool, but most likely was secondary to political expedience. Beria's ability to use his Georgian-based patronage network to his advantage was strongest in that period when his control

extended to Abkhazia as well as to Georgia proper. Beria was well able to co-opt clients of different ethnic groups (and as pointed out above, some of his key clients in his Abkhazia network were ethnic Abkhaz), but the core of his networks, both in Georgia and beyond, were centered on his fellow Mingrelians. Although Mgeladze was not opposed to appointing ethic Abkhaz to high-level positions, the Georgification policies that intensified during his tenure undoubtedly strengthened his position and authority in Abkhazia and in relation to Tbilisi.

NOTES

1. Willerton, "Clientelism in the Soviet Union," 159–83; and Rigby and Darasymiw, *Leadership Selection and Patron–Client Relations in the USSR and Yugoslavia*.
2. Walder, *Communist Neo-Traditionalism*, 6.
3. Fitzpatrick, *Povsednevnyi Stalinism*, 89.
4. Daniels, "Political Processes and Generational Change," 109.
5. Rigby, "The Soviet Political Executive, 1917–1986."
6. Daniels, "Political Processes and Generational Change," 109–14.
7. Jowitt, *The New World Disorder*, pp. 121–58.
8. Speech of 5 March 1937, *Complete Works, tome I, volume XIV*; cited in Fitzpatrick, *Povsednevnyi Stalinism*, 44–45.
9. Roeder, "Soviet Federalism and Ethnic Mobilization," 150–55.
10. Anchabadze and Dzindzariya, *Druzhba*, 14, 29–41.
11. Ibid., 49–50.
12. Shariya, *Abkhazskaya tragediya*, 9.
13. Ibid. Also see Gogebashvili, "Kem zaselit' Abkhaziyu?"
14. See Anchabadze and Dzidzariya, *Druzhba*, 119; and Anchabadze, *Ocherk etnicheskoi istorii abkhazskogo naroda*, 110–11.
15. Anchabadze et al., *Istoriia Abkhazskoi ASSR (1917–1937)*, 49–58.
16. Lakoba, *Ocherki politicheskoi istorii Abkhazii*, 86.
17. Here and elsewhere I use "Abkhaz" as an ethnic category (i.e. *abkhaz*, *abkhazy* in Russian), and "Abkhazian" and "Abkhazians" as a category of citizenship (i.e. *abkhazets*, *abkhaztsy*) that can include non-ethnically Abkhaz residents of Abkhazia as well.
18. Bgashba, *Nestor Lakoba*, 14–17.
19. Ibid., 40.
20. Conversation with S. Lakoba, September 2006.
21. Cited in Lakoba, "Ya—Koba, a ty—Lakoba," 54. The same article is included in Lakoba, *Ocherki politicheskoi istorii Abkhazii*, 101–40, and is often cited as such. Page numbers in the present paper refer to the Iskander et al. citation.
22. Lakoba, "Ya—Koba, a ty—Lakoba," 50–54.
23. *Abkhazskaya oblastnaya organizatsiya kompartii Gruzii v tsifrakh, 1921–1980* (Sukhumi: Alashara, 1980). While an immensely useful source, information in this work is arranged primarily by year rather than by category. Therefore, for comparison across years, data must usually be assembled from throughout the book, thus making it impossible in most cases to reference specific page numbers.
24. The number of available spaces for patients and vacationers increased from 150 in 1922 to 1,420 in 1930, and 3,680 by 1935. See Pritsker, *Istoriya kurortov Abkhazskoi SSR*, 44.
25. Abshilava, "Razvitiye promyshlennosti Abkhazskoi ASSR za gody sovetskoi vlasti," 36.
26. Ibid. 37.

27. Fitzpatrick, *Povsednevnyi Stalinism*, 42–43.
28. This image of Lakoba is emphasized in Aleksei Argun's play *Stalin and Lakoba*.
29. Interview with S. Lakoba, September 2006.
30. "Ob uproshchenii i udeshevlenii gosapparata," in N. A. Lakoba, *Stat'i i rechi* (Sukhumi: Alashara, 1987), 242–44.
31. Sagariya, *Sovetskoe stroitel'stvo v Abkhazii, 1929–1937*, 37–38; see also "O chistke gosapparata," in *Abkhazskaya organizatsiya Kommunisticheskoi partii Gruzii v rezolyutsiyakh i resheniyakh oblastnykh partiinykh konferentsii i plenumov, 1922–1930* (Sukhumi: Alashara, 1971), 246–49.
32. Sagariya, *Sovetskoe stroitel'stvo v Abkhazii, 1929–1937*, 38.
33. "Postanivleniye III sessii 5-ogo sozyva TsIK Abkhazii ob uproshchenii, udeshevlenii i ratsionalizatsii verkhovnogo upravleniya respubliki," document no. 131, *Sovety Abkhazii, 1922–1937: sbornik dokumentov i materialov* (Sukhumi: Alshara, 1976), 227–28.
34. Ibid., 228; "O rabote Abkhazskogo obkoma," Resolution of the 12th Conference of the Abkhazian Organization of the Communist Party of Georgia, 12–17 April 1930, in *Abkhazskaya organizatsiya Kommunisticheskoi partii Gruzii v rezolyutsiyakh i resheniyakh*, 205–06.
35. Sagariya, *Natsional'no-gosudarstvennoe stroitel'stvo v Abkhazii, 1921–1931*, 143.
36. The re-institution of the 1925 "Treaty" Constitution by the Abkhaz Council of Ministers in August 1992 was the apparent pretext for the Georgian military invasion.
37. As Sveltlana Chervonnaya points out, Lakoba himself on this point wrote: "Historical and economic conditions demand that Abkhazia and Georgia form a single whole . . . For the working masses of Abkhazia the question is answered once and for all: Abkhazia and Georgia have a single destiny." Cited in *Conflict in the Caucasus: Georgia, Abkhazia and the Russian Shadow* (London: Gothic Image Publications, 1994), 42.
38. See, for example, Slider, "Crisis and Response in Soviet Nationality Policy," 51–68.
39. See, for example, the lists of more than 75 such persons in the memoranda and *spravki* of Colonol Ubilava, Chief of the 5th Dept. of the Abkhazian ASSR MGB from 1945 to 1947 given in Lakoba and Anchabadze, *Abkhazskii arkhiv*, 11–71.
40. *Abkhazskaya oblast'naya organizatsiya kompartii Gruzii v tsifrakh*. The actual number of Abkhaz Party cadres fell from 390 in 1929 to 286 in 1931, while the number of Party cadres of other nationalities grew continuously during the period (ibid., 20–21).
41. Ibid.
42. In 1926 Russians made up 6.2% of the overall Abkhazian population. Party Archive of the Central Committee of the Georgian Communist Party—today officially referred to as the Presidential Archive of Georgia (Partarkhiv TsK KPG), f. 14, op. 7, d. 3516, p. 38 (12).
43. In 1931 ethnic Abkhaz made up 37.6% of Chairmen of Regional Soviets, and 37.2% of members of regional Central Executive Committees. Ibid., 14.
44. See, for example, Lakoba's speeches "O nashikh khozyaistvennykh nedochyotakh," at the plenum of the Abkhazian Obkom of the Communist Party of Georgia, 6 July 1928 and "Puti khozyaistvennogo i kul'turnogo stroitel'stva v Abkhazii" at the 5th Congress of the Abkhazian Soviets, 3–4 April 1929, both in N. A. Lakoba, *Stat'i i rechi* (Sukhumi: Alashara, 1987), 290–324; and "O vesennei sel'skokhozyaistvennoi kampanii," Speech by M. Chalmaz at the 2nd Session of the CEC of Abkhazia, February 1930, in *Abkhazskaya organizatsiya Kommunisticheskoi partii Gruzii v rezolyutsiyakh i resheniyakh*, 200–04; Partarkhiv TsK KPG, f. 14, op. 7, d. 3516, p. 55; f. 14. op. 6, d. 67.
45. Lakoba, *Stat'i i rechi*, 323.
46. According to Stanislav Lakoba, Nestor Lakoba said "We have no kulaks, so therefore the question of the liquidation of the kulak as a class falls away." In S. Lakoba, "Ya—Koba, a ty—Lakoba," 58.

47. Partarkhiv TsK KPG, p. 14, op. 7, d. 3516, pp. 2–3.
48. Ibid. Lakoba himself answered this in his speech at the 6th Congress of Communist Organizations of the Transcaucasus on 10 July 1930:

    In organizing collective farms they [i.e. the center] sometimes arrogantly brush aside fundamental forms of collective farms—machine associations and tractor associations for joint working of the land—they brush aside strengthening cooperation and generally any cooperative forms of construction. In those places where conditions are objectively difficult for collective farms, in my opinion, it is worth not being stingy in allocating resources to organize demonstration kolkhozes and sovkhozes. In this relation more or less visible steps have not been seen . . .
    If the proposition is true that the development of kolkhozes as large-scale productive units is first of all linked with industrialization and the electrification of the country, then in Abkhazia the situation with electrical construction leads but to the fact we are limited to only the moon . . . For years we've been beating the drum about an electrical station, but so far it's not visible. The geniuses of electrical construction from the camp of specialists roaming around from the republican organs in the Transcaucasus are playing a dirty trick in the affair of electrical construction, when we're talking about the backwards regions of the Transcaucasus. Is it not time to give more serious attention to this troubling question? (In N. Lakoba, *Stat'i i rechi*, 342–43).

49. "Informatsionaya zapiska: Po voprosu vozmusheniya krest'yan i ne preznaniya provodimykh na sele meropriyatii po Gudautskomu raionu," 22 February 1931 (Partarkhiv TsK KPG, f. 14, op. 6, d. 267, pp. 172–77).
50. "Protokol ob"edinennogo zasedaniya Byuro Raikoma i GaVKK ot 4 marta 1931 goda" (Partarkhiv TsK KPG, f. 14, op. 6, d. 267, pp. 31–38).
51. Ibid. According to the police reports, the peasants were also unhappy about the behavior of young Abkhaz women under the influence of the Party: "We peasants protest against the division of peasants into *bednyaki* and *kulaki* and so forth. Women, and mainly Abkhaz girls, don't listen to their relatives, and wear their dresses in an unacceptable manner—it's offensive just to look at them—all of this is a violation of our traditions" (police report of speech by demonstration organizer Ktit Gunba).
52. "Operativnaya svodka no. 12 o polozhenii Gudraiona na 27/II-1931 goda," in Partarkhiv TsK KPG, f. 14, op. 6, d. 267.
53. The peasants apparently declared "We will leave all our non-movable assets, we will leave our houses with everything that has been added to them, we'll take with us only portable things, and all the rest we will voluntarily give over for the benefit of the Soviet state!" In Danilov, "Tragediya Abkhazskogo naroda."
54. Ibid. Danilov's 1951 recounting of this incident is supported in extensive detail by documents from file 267 of Partarkhiv TsK KPG, f. 14, op. 6 ("Informsvodki Abkhaz. GPU: dokladnaya zapiska raikoma o rukovodstve obkoma vo antisovetskikh vystupleniyakh krest'yan v Gudautskom raione"). Also interesting, on pages 177–79 of that file, is a letter to Transcaucasian Party head Kartvelishvili, Georgian Party chief Mamulia and secret police chief Beria written by the Secretary of the Guduata regional Party committee, Zakhar Agrba and his deputies, in which the authors complain about Lakoba and his handling of the incident:

    the leadership of the Party committee cannot be felt, which is seen from the fact that there is no firm leadership, and not a single issue is resolved without the participation or agreement of N. Lakoba . . . All the time in Abkhazia class struggle is watered down,

> and they try to make it so that no Abkhaz are subject to repressive measures, and as a consequence the kulaks feel themselves free and present opposition to economic-political campaigns . . . The authority that [Lakoba] enjoys in the upper levels of the countryside is evidenced by the kulaks speaking in the recent Lykhny events, who said that "you are our sovereign, you are our savior" . . . As a result of this, and with the active support of the kulaks, the attitude is strengthened among the masses that the collectivization and liquidation of illiteracy campaigns are carried out just by the regional organizations and not by a directive of the center, about which they see nothing. This attitude among the masses was the result of the appearance of N. Lakoba at the meeting.

Perhaps not surprisingly, Agrba would go on to become an important client of Beria.

55. See Lakoba, "History: 1917–1989," in George Hewitt, ed., *The Abkhazians: A Handbook* (Surrey: Curzon Press, 1998), 94.
56. Lakoba, *Ocherki politicheskoi istorii Abkhazi*, 86.
57. Ibid., 169–70.
58. "Rezolyutsiya Byuro TsK KP(b) Gruzii po Abkhazskomu voprosu," Partarkhiv TsK KPG, fond 14, opis 1, d. 3516, pp. 23–27.
59. Sagaria, *Sovetskoe stroitel'stvo v Abkhazii*, 80; *Narodnoe khozyaistvo SSSR za 70 let: Yubileinyi statisticheskii ezhegodnik* (Moscow: Finansy I Statistika, 1987), 35.
60. Lakoba, "Ya—Koba, a ty—Lakoba," 58.
61. On the stationery of the Authorized Representative of the Transcaucasian Federation OGPU: "Dear Comrade Nestor! I send my thanks and best wishes. Thank you for the letter. I very much want to meet with Comrade Koba before he leaves. If you get a chance it would be very good if you can remind him about this. I've recalled Comrade Nodaraya. In return a good Chekist is coming. Regards. Your Lavrenty Beria. 27.9.29." In ibid., 60.
62. Ibid.
63. "Protokol ob"edenennogo zasedaniya prezidiuma ZKKK TsKK KP(b) I TsKK KP (b) Gruzii ot 11/IV-30 g." Partarkhiv Ts KPG, f.14, opis 7, delo 3516, pp. 1–3.
64. Mlechin, *KGB*, 193–94.
65. Lakoba ("Ya—Koba, a ty—Lakoba," pp. 61–63) offers one explanation of this event, while Beria's son Sergo gives an entirely different one in *Moi Otets* (Moscow: EKSMO, 1994).
66. "Dokladnye zapiski o politicheskom poloshenii grecheskoi derevni v Abkhazii i neobkhodimykh meropriatiyakh," 1 January 1932, Partarkhiv TsK KPG, f. 14, opis 7, delo 141, pp. 1–5.
67. See Suny, *The Making of the Georgian Nation*, 267.
68. Ibid., 271.
69. *Abkhazskaya oblastnaya organizatsia kompartii Gruzii v tsifrakh*, 54.
70. Ibid.
71. Lakoba, "Ya—Koba, a ty—Lakoba," 63.
72. See Knight, Amy, *Beria: Stalin's First Lieutenant* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), 57–64.
73. Mlechin, *KGB*, 199.
74. Lakoba, "Ya—Koba, a ty—Lakoba," 66.
75. Ibid.
76. Knight, *Beria*, 72.
77. *Abkhazia: dokumenty svidetel'stvuyut: 1937–53* (Sukhumi: Alashara, 1992), 4; Archive of the Abkhazian Institute of Language Literature History (ABIYaLI), f. 5, op. 1, d. 72, p. 12; ibid., f. 5, op. 1, d. 77, pp. 1–3.

78. Partarkhiv TsK KPG, f. 14, op. 16, d. 135 (6777), p. 257.
79. Lakoba, "Ya—Koba, a ty—Lakoba," 68; Mlechin, *KGB*, 199. In a recent interview, Davlet Kandalia, Lakoba's driver and bodyguard, offers a completely different retelling of Lakoba's death. According to Kandalia, the fateful dinner took place at the home of Sukhishvili, the founder of a well-known dance ensemble, rather than at Beria's home. Late in the evening Lakoba was brought to Kandalia in their hotel covered in dirt, as if he'd been taken all around the city in order to allow the poison to take effect. Kandalia says that before expiring Lakoba whispered two things in his ear: first, he ordered Kandalia to kill his murderer (which Kandalia laments that he was unable to fulfill), and second, that there was a briefcase in his car containing a note from Lakoba to Stalin about Beria, Lakoba's written agreement to become Commissar of Internal Affairs, and a request to join Abkhazia to the Krasnodar region of the RSFSR. Lakoba asked Kandalia to send these papers to Poskrebyshev, but the messenger had a heart attack on the train to Moscow and the papers disappeared, and on the following day Kandalia was arrested. "Nestor i ten,'" *Ogonyok*, no. 42, November 2003, v. 4818 (http://www.ogoniok.com/win/200342/42-60-63.html).
80. *Beria*., 67–86.
81. By the late 1940s, people who joined the Party in 1933–1936 made up only about 0.02% of total Party membership in Abkhazia, i.e. about four individuals (*Abkhazskaya oblastnaya organizatsiya kompartii Gruzii v tsifrakh*).
82. *Abkhazia: dokumenty svidetel'stvuyut*, 433–52; *Sovetskaya Abkhazia*, no. 253, 3 November 1937.
83. *Organy VChK-GPU-OGPU na Severnom Kavkaze i v Zakavkaz'e (1918–1934gg)* (Moscow: Memorial and Kavkazskii Uzel', 2004), 37–38.
84. *Abkhazia: dokumenty svidetel'stvuyut*, 464–65. His brother Zakhar Agrba, earlier the head of the Gudauta Regional Party, and later the head of the Abkhazian Party Auditing (*revizionnaya*) Commission, was also removed as an "enemy of the people" (Partarkhiv TsK KPG, f. 14, op. 11, d. 209, p. 130).
85. Danilov, "Tragediya Abkhazskogo naroda."
86. *Abkhazskaya oblastnaya organizatsiya kompartii Gruzii v tsifrakh*.
87. To 93.8% by 1940, according to official statistics (Anchabadze, *Ocherk etnicheskoi istorii Abkhazskogo naroda*, 118).
88. See Postanovleniye no. 1447 Soveta Narodnykh Komissarov Soyuza SSR of 14 September 1939, "Ob organizatsionnykh voprosakh pereselencheskogo upravleniya pri Sovnarkome SSSR," signed by Molotov, in *Abkhazia: dokumenty svidetel'stvuyut*, 22–23; Central State Archive of Abkhazia (TsGAA), f. 214, op. 1, d. 7, l.l. 2–3.
89. Ibid., p. 136; TsGAA, f. 618, op. 1, d. 1, pp. 85–92.
90. Ibid., p. 177; TsGAA, f. 618, op. 1, d. 5, p. 58.
91. Ibid., p. 10; see also TsGAA, f. 618, op. 1, d. 14.
92. *Narodnoe khozyaistvo Abkhazskoi ASSR: Statisticheskii sbornik* (Tbilisi: Metsniereba, 1973), 45–48.
93. See particularly the reports on G. D. Gulia, N. E. Geria and M. A. Lakerbaia, in Lakoba and Anchabadze, *Abkhazskii arkhiv*.
94. See Muller, "Demography," 218–40.
95. Ibid., 236.
96. Ibid.
97. Anchabadze, *Ocherk etnicheskoi istorii Abkhazskogo naroda*, 125.
98. Cited in Shamba and Neproshin, *Abkhazia*.
99. Anchabadze, *Ocherk etnicheskoi istorii*, 126. A Cyrillic-based alphabet had been created at the turn of the century by the Russian soldier and linguist P. K. Uslar, and was replaced by a

Latin-based alphabet designed by the linguist Nicholas Marr in 1926. That alphabet was in turn replaced in 1929 by the Latin-based alphabet of N. Yakovlev.

100. *Abkhazia: dokumenty svidetel'stvuyut*, 13; Partarkhiv TsK KPG, f. 14, op. 11, d. 208, p. 186.
101. Ibid., 486–89; see Party Archive of the Akbhaz Obkom (PAAO), f. 1, op. 1.
102. Angeli, "K politicheskim sobytiiam v Gruzii," 20; Charkviani's son Gela has footage of his father repeating this, filmed in 1994, that will be part of an upcoming five-part television documentary. Interview in Tbilisi, April 2004. Aleksandr Mirtskhulava, then First Secretary of the Georgian Komsomol, said that Stalin wanted to transfer Bakradze to Moscow, perhaps to an even higher position, but Beria insisted that he remain in Georgia as Chairman of the *Sovnarkhom*. Interview in Tbilisi, April 2004.
103. Suny, *The Making of the Georgian Nation*, 278.
104. Knight, *Beria: Stalin's First Lieutenant*, 89.
105. Mgeladze, *Stalin kakim ya ego znal: stranitsy nedavnogo proshlogo*, 40–43. Aleksandr Mirtskhulava, a Beria client and the then-Second Secretary of the Abkhazian Party, insists that Mgeladze was in fact appointed by Beria, who later regretted his choice (interview in Tbilisi, April 2004). Charkviani claimed in his memoirs that Mgeladze did not meet Stalin until the fall of 1948, although this seems rather unlikely (Charkviani, *gantsdili da naazrevi*, 660).
106. Montefiore, *Stalin*.
107. The list Mgeladze gives in his own transcription of his interrogation at the hands of Beria in 1953 includes the following: completion of the construction of the Sukhumi Hydro-Electric Station, the building of the Sukhumi water pipeline, a seawall for the Sukhumi Embankment, the bridge on the River Besleti, the building of the Sukhumi Drama Theater, the building of residential housing and public parks in the city, a new water supply line and plumbing for Gagra, the building of the Bagnari Hydro-Electric Station for supplying resorts in Gagra, a bridge on the River Zhoekvara, and many other investments for the resorts in Novy Afon and Gudauta. In each case, Mgeladze describes the need to Stalin, who then says: "Draft the proposal. We will support you." Mgeladze, *Stalin kakim ya ego znal*, 256–61.
108. "Stalin often personally received me, and called about various issues. I, for my part, personally cooperated and together with him resolved various problems. Beria was unused to this sort of arrangement. The Georgian leadership had always agreed ahead of time on issues, and only then made a report to Stalin." Ibid., p. 248. Also, interview with Mirtskhulava, April 2004.
109. *Abkhazia: dokumenty svidetel'stvuyut*, 13; PAAO, f. 1, op. 1, d. 822, pp. 19–22.
110. Akaki Mgeladze, "Dokladnaya zapiska rukovoditelya Gruzinskoi SSR rukovoditelyu SSSR I. Stalinu o probleme Abkhazii 1952 g."; PAAO, d. 1, op. 1, d. 822, p. 9.
111. Kuraskua, *Abkhazskaya natsional'naya shkola (1921–1958)*, 102–04.
112. *Abkhazia: dokumenty svidetel'stvuyut*, 12, 496–518; TsGAA, f. 201, op. 1.
113. *Abkhazia: dokumenty svidetel'stvuyut*, 531–36.
114. See, for example, Section III of Lakoba and Anchabadze, *Abkhazskii arkhiv*, 99–142.
115. Kolbaya *et al.*, *Labirint Abkhazii*, 21–22; ABIYaLI, pf. 5, op. 1, d. 72, pp. 1–10.
116. According to Charles Fairbanks: "First Stalin arrayed Charkviani's clientele and Mgeladze's against Beria's (or Baramiya's and Zodelava's). At this stage both Charkviani and Mgeladze were allowed to fulfill their obligations as patrons by promoting members of their clienteles … In the second stage (April–May 1952) Charkviani's clients were displaced in favor of the appointees of Mgeladze's." In "Clientalism and Higher Politics in Georgia, 1949–1953," cited in Suny, *The Making of the Georgian Nation*, 288.

117. *Beria*, 156–57.
118. Mgeladze, *Stalin kakim ya ego znal*, 159.
119. Ibid., 183–84.
120. Aslanishvili, *megrelta sakme*.
121. Mgeladze, *Stalin kakim ya ego znal*, 159.
122. Suny, *The Making of the Georgian Nation*, 288. As his son points out, Charkviani was officially "relieved" (*osvobozhdyon*) from his post, which was a much better fate than being "removed" (*snyat*). Later he was able to continue his career in Uzbekistan, and then in Moscow. Interview with Gela Charkviani, February 2004.
123. "Zapiska L.P. Berii v prezidiym TsK KPSS o nepravil'nom vedenii dela o tak nazyvaemoi mingrel'skoi natsionalisticheskoi gruppe," 8 April 1953, in Naumov and Sigachev, *Lavrentii Beria*, 29–37.
124. Mirtskhulava wrote that he was offered the position of First Secretary of the Georgian Party by Malenkov and Khrushchev, but he at first refused to accept. But Beria then told him to "accept or else . . .," in "Beriam mkatsrad gamaprtkhila, tsekas mdiunobaze uari ar metkhua," *Asaval-dasavali* (Tbilisi weekly newspaper), vol. 134, no. 10, 4–19 March 1997, 6.
125. Mgeladze, *Stalin kakim ya ego znal*, 248–61. Mgeladze ended up as chairman of the Bibnisi collective farm in the Kareli district of Georgia, and appears to have remained a devoted Stalinist to the end of his life. Interview with Natela Mgeladze in Tbilisi, March 2004. Mirtskhulava, as Georgian First Secretary, says that he was under pressure to exclude Mgeladze from the Party, but declined to do so, enabling Mgeladze to keep his Party membership. Interview in Tbilisi, April 2004.
126. Knight, *Beria*, 187.
127. Although possibly exaggerated for the sake of posterity, in his memoirs Mgeladze repeatedly emphasizes his support for Georgian culture and cultural figures and his opposition to the idea of the separation of Abkhazia from Georgia.

REFERENCES

Abshilava, A. A. "Razvitiye promyshlennosti Abkhazskoi ASSR za gody sovetskoi vlasti." In *Abkhazskaya ASSR v bratskoi sem'ye sovetskikh narodov*. Sukhumi: Alashara, 1972).

Anchabadze, Z. V. *Ocherk etnicheskoi istorii abkhazskogo naroda*. Sukhumi: Alashara, 1976.

Anchabadze, Z. V., R. M. Butba, and G. A. Dzidzariya, eds. *Istoriia Abkhazskoi ASSR (1917–1937)*. Sukhumi: Alashara, 1983.

Anchabadze, Z., and G. Dzindzariya. *Druzhba: izvechnaya, nerushimaya*. Sukhumi: Alashara, 1972.

Angeli, Sandro. "K politicheskim sobytiiam v Gruzii." *Ob'edinennyi kavkaz*, no. 5 (May 1953): 20.

Argun, Aleksei. *Stalin and Lakoba*. Sukhum: Alashara, 2002.

Aslanishvili, Alven (Aleko). *megrelta sakme*. Tbilisi: gamomtsemloba "tsotne," 2005.

Bgashba, Mikhail. *Nestor Lakoba*. Tbilisi: sabchota sakartvelo, 1965.

Charkviani, Kandid. *gantsdili da naazrevi*. Tbilisi: merani, 2004.

Daniels, Robert V. "Political Processes and Generational Change." In *Political Leadership in the Soviet Union*, edited by Archie Brown. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989.

Danilov, S. "Tragediya Abkhazskogo naroda." *Vestnik Instituta po izucheniyu istorii i kul'tury SSSR*, no. 1 (1951): 2–12.

Fitzpatrick, Sheila. *Povsednevnyi Stalinism. Sotsial'naya istoriya Sovetskoi Rossii v 30-e gody: gorod*. Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2001.

Gogebashvili, Yakob. "Kem zaselit' Abkhaziyu?" *Tiflisskii vestnik*, nos. 209, 210, 243–46, 248–49 (September–November 1877).

Jowitt, Kenneth. *The New World Disorder: The Leninist Extinction*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992.

Kolbaya, Vakhtang et al. *Labirint Abkhazii*. Tbilisi: Parliament of Georgia, 2000.

Knight, Amy. *Beria: Stalin's First Lieutenant*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993.

Kuraskua, V. B. *Abkhazskaya natsional'naya shkola (1921–1958)*. Sukhum: Abkhazian State University, 2003.

Lakoba, N. A. *Stat'i i rechi*. Sukhumi: Alashara, 1987.

Lakoba, Stanislav. *Ocherki politicheskoi istorii Abkhazii*. Sukhumi: Alashara, 1990.

——, ——. "History: 1917–1989." In *The Abkhazians: A Handbook*, edited by George Hewitt. Surrey: Curzon Press, 1998.

——, ——. "Ya—Koba, a ty—Lakoba." In *Moe serdtse v gorakh: ocherki o sovremennoi Abkhazii*, Fasil Iskander et al. Mari Republic: IOSHKAR-OLA—*Izdatel'stvo Mariiskogo poligrafkombinata*, 2001, 54.

Lakoba, Stanislav, and Yu. Anchabadze, eds. *Abkhazskii arkhiv: XX vek*. 2nd ed. Moscow: Nauchnyi Tsentr "Abkhazskaya Entsiklopediya" and Moskovskii Issledovatel'skii Tsentr Abkhazovedeniya, 2003.

Mgeladze, Akaki. *Stalin kakim ya ego znal: stranitsy nedavnogo proshlogo*, edited by Natela Mgeladze. Tbilisi: privately published memoir, 2001.

Mlechin, Leonid. *KGB: predsedateli organov besopasnosti: rassekrechennye sud'by*. Moscow: Tsentropoligraf, 2002.

Montefiore, Simon Sebag. *Stalin: In the Court of the Red Tsar*. New York: Knopf, 2004.

Muller, Daniel. "Demography." In *The Abkhazians: A Handbook*, edited by G. Hewitt. Surrey: Curzon Press, 1998.

Naumov, V, and Yu. Sigachev, eds. *Lavrentii Beria. 1953: Stenogramma iyul'skogo plenuma TsK KPSS i drugiye dokumenty*. Moscow: Mezhdunarodnyi fond "Demokratiya," 1999.

Pritsker, L. M. *Istoriya kurortov Abkhazskoi SSR*. Tbilisi: Metsniereba, 1987.

Rigby, T. H. "The Soviet Political Executive, 1917–1986." In *Leadership Selection and Patron–Client Relations in the USSR and Yugoslavia*, edited by T. H. Rigby and Bohdan Darasymiw. London: George Allen & Unwin, 1983.

Rigby, T. H, and Bohdan Darasymiw, eds. *Leadership Selection and Patron–Client Relations in the USSR and Yugoslavia*. London: George Allen & Unwin, 1983.

Roeder, Philip G. "Soviet Federalism and Ethnic Mobilization." In *The Soviet Nationality Reader: The Disintegration in Context*, edited by Rachel Denber. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1992.

Sagariya, B. E. *Natsional'no-gosudarstvennoe stroitel'stvo v Abkhazii, 1921–1931*. Sukhumi: Alashara, 1970.

——, ——. *Sovetskoe stroitel'stvo v Abkhazii, 1929–1937*. Sukhumi: Alashara, 1986.

Shamba, T. M, and A. Yu. Neproshin. *Abkhazia: Pravovye osnovy gosudarstvennosti i suvereniteta*. Sukhumi: "Abkhazia—strana dushi" Internet group, 2003.

Shariya, Vitalii. *Abkhazskaya tragediya*. Sukhum: 1994.

Slider, Darrell. "Crisis and Response in Soviet Nationality Policy: The Case of Abkhazia." *Central Asian Survey* 4, no. 4 (1985): 51–68.

Suny, Ronald Grigor. *The Making of the Georgian Nation*. 2nd ed. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994.

Walder, Andrew G. *Communist Neo-Traditionalism: Work and Authority in Chinese Industry*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986.

Willerton, J. P. Jr. "Clientelism in the Soviet Union: An Initial Examination." *Studies in Comparative Communism* 12 (Summer/Autumn 1979): 159–83.