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**RESISTANCE AND ACCOMMODATION
IN THE STALINIST PERIPHERY:
A PEASANT UPRISING IN ABKHAZIA***

In early February 1931 the Party apparatus began mobilizing for the wholesale implementation of collectivization in the Abkhazian countryside, beginning with the spring sowing season. The local Party and government newspaper, *Sovetskaia Abkhazii*a, brimmed with articles about tobacco and corn-planting quotas and exhortations to fulfill the plan. Collectivization had been slow to reach Abkhazia, as the subtropical and seaside region was considered lower in priority than the grain-producing regions, such as the neighboring North Caucasus or the Volga and Don river basins to the north. When those areas were wracked with the all-out onslaught of the collectivization campaign and resistance to it the year before, in the spring of 1930, the local authorities in Abkhazia made only a half-hearted effort to collectivize the Abkhaz¹ village communities and to implement crop and

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¹ 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 nonethnically Abkhaz residents of Abkhazia as well or things that are not specifically ethnically defined (i.e., an Abkhaz village, but the Abkhazian government).

livestock requisitioning. These measures had been “disrupted” by peasant disobedience, which the local government made no effort to punish.²

Now Abkhaz peasants began riding from village to village in the Gudauta district³ to call for a traditional gathering, or *skhod*, to express solidarity and protest against the measures of the Soviet collectivization campaign. Peasants from these villages began gathering in the town of Duripshi on February 17. Over the next two days the size of the demonstration grew from 400 to 1,000 peasants, many of them armed with rifles and revolvers, with speeches being made decrying the requisitioning, the planting quotas, and the effects that the peasants perceived the collectivization measures were having on their society and traditions. On the night of February 19, it was decided to send delegates to the Armenian and Georgian villages to try to rally support from representatives of other ethnic groups, and also to summon a gathering of women. The question was raised of reconstituting *Kiaraz* (which means “mutual support” in the Abkhazian language), the Abkhaz national resistance movement that had helped to bring the Bolsheviks to power in Abkhazia ten years earlier. By February 20, all agricultural work had come to a standstill in the Abkhaz villages of the Gudauta district. Many of the members of the village soviets went to join the *skhod*, and all of the schools, shops, cafeterias, and cooperatives were closed.⁴

On February 21, a meeting was held of the organizers of the *skhod* together with representatives from each of the villages, at which the primary grievances were aired and the question of *Kiaraz* was discussed again, along with the idea of staging a traditional oath-taking. The next day, two representatives of the government, M. Chalmaz and Kh. Shamba, managed to address at least part of the *skhod* and convey the official proposal for negotiations. The peas-

² This was facilitated by decrees of the Central Committee and of the District Committee of the Transcaucasian Federative Socialist Republic (the “Zakavkazskii kraevoi komitet,” or “Zakkraikom”) in late February 1931 that included Abkhazia among the “sufficiently difficult” regions in which the full implementation of collectivization was to be delayed. See G. A. Dzidariia, A. E. Kuprava, B. E. Sagariia, and Z. V. Anchabadze (Eds.). *Istoriia Abkhazskoi ASSR (1917–1937)*. Sukhumi, 1983. Pp. 219–220.

³ Abkhazia at this time was divided into five districts, each of which had differing ethnic distributions. Gudauta district had the highest concentration of ethnic Abkhaz, and was (and still is) considered to be the geographical center of Abkhaz culture and identity.

⁴ Section II of the Archive of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia (Sakartvelos shss arkivi (II), formerly known as the Party Archive of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Georgia, or Partarkhiv TsK KPG). F. 14. P. 6. D. 267 “Dokladnaia zapiska raikoma o rukovodstve Obkoma, o anti-sovetskikh vystupleniakh krestian v Gudaurskom raione.” L. 3 “Informatsionnoe soobshchenie no. 3.”

ants replied that they were prepared to negotiate only with Nestor Lakoba, the head of the government in Abkhazia. Runners were sent from the skhod to the surrounding villages to bring out all of the remaining peasants, while at the same time the authorities deployed secret police and military units to the village of Baklanovka, eight kilometers away. On February 24, the skhod moved to the village of Achandary, a traditional spot for oath-taking, and over the next two days thousands of peasants took an oath to support each other and to stand firm in their demands. As the oath-taking was getting underway, government official K. P. Inal-Ipa and Gudauta district party chief Z. S. Agrba went to the skhod to offer the conditions for a meeting with Lakoba on February 26 in the village of Duripshi, and brought delegates of the skhod back with them to Gudauta to verify that Lakoba was indeed present and willing to meet. While Red Army troops arrived in Baklanovka, the skhod convened in Duripshi at 2:35 p.m. in its largest ever mass, more than 4,000 peasants. During the next forty minutes, the individual village “obshchinas” selected their representatives to a so-called Presidium, whose members then met with Lakoba at a table set up in the very center of the skhod.

Collectivization and Response in the Periphery: Soviet Abkhazia

From late 1920s, the Soviet regime began implementing full-scale (*sploshnaia*) collectivization in agricultural regions throughout the Soviet Union.⁵ Yet the implementation of the policy in different places was far from uniform, as were the responses to it. The peasantry reacted in many cases to the first collectivization campaigns with uprisings and civil disturbances, and the regime reacted violently in kind, often using extreme force to put down these insurrections regardless of the human cost. In some places, relations collapsed between the authorities and the local population (as in the nearby Don region),⁶ and elsewhere insurgency warfare broke out (as in the even closer North Caucasus, where armed bands took control of regional centers).⁷ At the height of the “civil war” in the countryside in the spring of 1930 there were more than 10,000 peasant uprisings.⁸ In a large and diverse

⁵ See Alec Nove. *An Economic History of the USSR*. London, 1992. Pp. 160-165.

⁶ See D’Ann Penner. *Ports of Access into the Mental and Social Worlds of Don Villagers in the 1920s and 1930s* // *Cahiers du Monde Russe*. 1998. Vol. 40. Pp. 171-198.

⁷ See V. Danilov, R. Manning, and L. Viola (Eds.). *Tragediia sovetskoi derevni. Kollektivizatsiia i raskulachivanie. Dokumenty i materialy v 5 tomakh. 1927–1939*. Moscow, 2001. Vol. 2. Pp. 430-432.

⁸ See Lynne Viola. *Peasant Rebels Under Stalin: Collectivization and the Culture of Peasant Resistance*. New York, 1999. P. 103.

empire such as the USSR, this very size and diversity could present both a challenge and a resource for administration and implementation at the local level. The empirical study of an exceptional case in the periphery, that of the peasant uprising in Abkhazia in the spring of 1931, can perhaps offer insights into the complex, composite, and uneven society that was the Stalinist USSR. The case, which involved the mediation (and perhaps even the mobilization) by the Abkhazian leadership and its negotiation with both the “local” center in Tiflis (Tbilisi) and the imperial center in Moscow in order to resolve the situation peacefully, also provides the opportunity to address at the local level the issues raised by the recent literature on “subjectivity” and resistance under Stalinism,⁹ whether acts of resistance such as a peasant disturbance among a national minority in a peripheral region of the empire necessarily existed within the context of a regime-centered “Stalinist” outlook or whether imperial exceptionalism here as well provided an entirely different context. In this way, the Abkhazian case offers the opportunity to draw together the recent approaches to peasant resistance, which stress the “conflict of cultures” between town and countryside and the efforts of “authorities” to “colonize” the rural milieu;¹⁰ to “subjectivities” in people’s collective mentalité in the rural and national periphery; and to the structures and cultures of imperial diversity and the ways in which exceptionalism affected the interpretation and implementation of central policies and decisions in the periphery.

Unlike in other peripheral regions of the USSR, in Abkhazia the titular ethnic group, a minority in its own republic, played a central role in the establishment of Soviet power. Following the February Revolution, the Kiaraz national resistance movement, led by Abkhaz Marxist revolutionaries such as N. A. Lakoba, E. A. Eshba and K. P. Inal-Ipa, emerged in the spring of 1917 and quickly established contacts with the Bolsheviks.¹¹ With encouragement from Moscow, in the spring of 1918, Kiaraz made a failed attempt to capture Sukhumi and establish a Military-Revolutionary Committee and an “Abkhazian Commune” (along the model of the Baku Commune).

⁹ See Jochen Hellbeck. *Feeding the Stalinist Soul: The Diary of Stephan Podlubnyi, 1931–1939* // *Jahrbucher für Geschichte Osteuropas*. 1996. Vol. 46. Pp. 344–374; and Paul Bushkovitch and Andrea Graziosi (Eds.). *Assessing the New Soviet Archival Sources* // *Cahiers du monde russe*. 1999. Vol. 40. Pp. 13–64.

¹⁰ John Keep. *Recent Western Views of Stalin’s Russia: Social and Cultural Aspects* // Harold Shukman (Ed.). *Redefining Stalinism*. New York, 2006. P. 151.

¹¹ S. Lakoba and G. Bzhagba (Eds.). *Istoriia Abkhazii s drevneishikh vremen do nashikh dnei*. Sukhumi, 2003. P. 270.

After fighting in the North Caucasus as the “Abkhazian Hundred” together with Red Army units in the Russian Civil War, Kiaraz returned to lead an insurgency in Abkhazia against the recently formed Georgian Democratic Republic. These Abkhaz Marxist-nationalist underground cells regularly received instructions, literature, and money from the Caucasian District Committee of the Russian Communist Party in Moscow.¹² Bolshevik support for insurgency in Abkhazia only intensified after the legalization of the party in Georgia as a result of the May 7, 1920, treaty with Moscow, as “the conducting of legal work in no way diminished that of illegal work” aimed at inspiring “armed uprising.”¹³ After the Georgian government was finally driven into exile by the 11th Red Army in late February 1921, it was Kiaraz leaders Lakoba, Eshba, and N. Akirtava who declared the establishment of Soviet power in Abkhazia on March 4.

The tiny republic on the Black Sea shoreline on the southern slope of the eastern Great Caucasus Range, with a population at the time of about 160,000,¹⁴ was given the status of a Soviet Socialist Republic on March 31, 1921, as a reward to the Kiaraz leadership for the Abkhaz support for the Bolsheviks and also to lend authority to the new Abkhaz party leadership among the local population. This status was altered shortly afterward, in February 1922, to that of a “treaty republic” that entered the newly formed Transcaucasian Socialist Federative Soviet Republic (TSFSR) through the Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic, yet the primacy of the ethnic Abkhaz elites in the state administration remained unquestioned, and fit into the newly emerging local “affirmative action” basis of Soviet nationality policy.¹⁵

As Douglas Northrop has pointed out, indigenous elites in minority regions in the early Soviet period, like those in other colonial areas and periods, were situated between the central authorities and the local populations and played “a crucial mediating role between these worlds, and indeed were instrumental in bringing about their mutual transformation.”¹⁶ These

¹² Dzidariia, Kuprava, Sagariia, and Anchabadze (Eds.). *Istoriia Abkhazskoi ASSR*. P. 52.

¹³ *Ibid.* P. 61.

¹⁴ According to official figures, the population of Abkhazia as of January 1, 1921, was 159,937. By 1929 it had risen to 210,152. See: 10 let Sovetskoi Gruzii, 1921–1931. *Statisticheskii sbornik*. Tiflis, 1931. Pp. 18–19.

¹⁵ See Timothy Blauvelt. *From Words to Action! Nationality Policy in Soviet Abkhazia, 1921–38* // Stephen F. Jones (Ed.). *Democracy and State-Building in Georgia, 1918–2010*. New York, forthcoming; and more generally Terry Martin. *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923–1939*. Ithaca, 2001. Ch. 1.

¹⁶ Douglas Northrop. *Veiled Empire: Gender and Power in Stalinist Central Asia*. Ithaca, 2004. P. 210.

local Bolshevik elites “personally embodied many of the complexities and contradictions of [the] Soviet colonial project” in that they had the authority to make decisions and also the incentive to subvert the interests of the state to their own, and as such they “give unique insight into the paradoxical functioning of the Soviet colonial system.”¹⁷ The Abkhaz local leadership, drawn largely from the former Kiaraz leadership, centered around the Central Executive Committee (TsIK) chairman, Nestor Apollonovich Lakoba. An Old Bolshevik who joined the party in 1912 and who, like Stalin, had studied at the Tiflis Seminary (that school of revolutionaries), Lakoba had long associations with important party figures such as Sergo Orjonikidze, Sergei Kirov, Lev Kamenev, Felix Dzerzhinskii, Lev Trotsky, and Stalin himself. He headed an extensive patronage network of Abkhaz elites and he appears to have been genuinely popular among the ethnic Abkhaz population.¹⁸ Fazil Iskander in his novel *Sandro from Chegem* described Lakoba’s popular standing:

Sometimes familiar people would pause under the balcony [of the TsIK building] and ask with a gesture, is Lakoba there? Uncle Sandro would make a fist and gently shake it to show that Nestor Apollonovich is holding strong. In response they would nod cheerfully and continue on their way with an extra bounce in their step. Sometimes, knowing that Lakoba had gone someplace, the people would gesture to ask, to where? Uncle Sandro would point to the east to indicate to Tbilisi, or with a more significant gesture to the north, which meant to Moscow. Sometimes they would ask, again with a gesture, has Lakoba not returned yet? In such cases Uncle Sandro would nod in confirmation or shake his head in the negative. In both cases the people would nod in satisfaction and, taking pleasure in touching upon affairs of state, continue on their way.¹⁹

Unlike indigenous elites in other minority regions who were distrusted by the center and seen by their own populations as central government representatives, Lakoba and his subordinates had strong support both from

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ The journalist Zinaida Rikhter described him thus 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 beloved by the peasants and by the entire population. Comrade Zinoviev, when he was in Abkhazia, joked that Abkhazia should be renamed *Lakobistan*.” Cited in: Stanislav Lakoba. *Ya – Koba, a ty – Lakoba* // G. Gublia (Ed.). *Nestor: agealashearak’ea*. Sukhum, 2006. P. 198.

¹⁹ Fazil’ Iskander. *Sandro iz Chegema*. Vol. 1. Moscow, 2003. Pp. 316–317.

Moscow and from the local population (especially among the Abkhaz). Lakoba's power base and patronage network was in the government institutions, as he was chairman of both the Sovnarkom and the Central Executive Committee (the former was fused into the latter in 1930). The position of Abkhaz Party first secretary was secondary to Lakoba's authority, and at times Lakoba was openly defiant of the local party Oblast Committee (or Obkom), which was subordinated to the Georgian leadership in Tiflis, with whom Lakoba's relationship could often be more turbulent.²⁰ Abkhazia was also an increasingly popular spot for government dachas and vacation resorts, especially among elites, including Stalin himself, who vacationed there for long periods during the 1920s and 1930s and in the nearby resorts around Sochi to the north. This gave local elites ample opportunities to interact with central elites and to develop valuable network ties.²¹

Lakoba's style of governing involved a concerted effort to maintain social and ethnic harmony in Abkhazia, even when that conflicted with Bolshevik demands of class conflict.²² Accusations regularly surfaced of favoritism and nepotism, of bypassing formal procedures, of a lenient attitude toward former nobles and landowners, and of downplaying the social division of the peasantry into the categories of poor peasants, middle peasants, and kulaks, as was demanded by Bolshevik theory of class struggle in the countryside. A scathing report by a commission of the Central Executive Committee of the Transcaucasian Federative Socialist Republic in 1925 referred to Abkhazia as a "Soviet principedom" that was "a Soviet republic in name only," in which "the Abkhaz comrades govern with only one desire: to make the Abkhaz people dominant in the economic and cultural life of the country. This is the holy of holies of their entire political existence."²³ One supporter later wrote in her memoirs that Lakoba's approach "corresponded to his conceptions of a certain social harmony within the boundaries of Abkhazia, since Abkhazian life, [was] steeped in *atalychestvo*,²⁴ that is, milk-brotherhood,

²⁰ See Timothy K. Blauvelt. Abkhazia: Patronage and Power in the Stalin Era // *Nationalities Papers*. 2007. Vol. 35. P. 207.

²¹ *Ibid.* Pp. 202-232.

²² Adrienne Lynn Edgar found similar behavior among local elites in this period in Turkmenistan. See *Tribal Nation: The Making of Soviet Turkmenistan*. Princeton, 2004. P. 5.

²³ See the report of the so-called Azatyan Commission. *Sakartvelos shssarkivi* (II). F. 14. Op. 2. D. 485. Ll. 49-74 "Dokladnye zapiski komissii Zak.TsIK-a po obsledovaniu Abkhazskoi, Iugo-Osetinskoi oblastei, Akhaltsikhskogo, Akhalkalakskogo i Ozurgetskogo uездov."

²⁴ From the Turkish *Atalyk*, or fatherhood, referring to the tradition of aristocratic families having their sons raised by servant families.

[which] has over the course of many generations provided wide opportunities for interaction among representatives of various layers of society.”²⁵ One dramatic example of this disregard for Bolshevik class theory involved an intervention by Stalin himself, when, in October 1929, a Party commission recommended Lakoba’s removal because of a number of alleged transgressions.²⁶ In a letter cosigned and endorsed by Orjonikidze (and preserved among Lakoba’s personal papers), Stalin protected Lakoba from removal, but subjected him to sharp criticism: “The mistake of Com. Lakoba is that, a) despite all of his Bolshevik experience, he sometimes makes the mistake of seeking support in all layers of the population (this is not Bolshevik policy), and b) he finds it possible sometimes to not subordinate himself to the decisions of the *Obkom*. I will not mention any such facts, as they are all well known. I think that Com. Lakoba can and must free himself of these mistakes.”²⁷

With the calm and stability of the mid-1920s and draining of malarial swamplands along the Abkhazian coast, the Abkhaz peasantry continued their traditional subsistence agricultural practices, centered primarily on maize. Abkhaz also became involved in the more profitable citrus and tobacco production, which had earlier been exclusively the domain of Greek and Armenian commercial farms. Even in this period, however, these crops were produced primarily on large, industrial farms in the southern districts of Gali, Kodori, and Sukhumi. In the republic as a whole, however, in 1929 more than 65 percent of the arable land was planted with maize.²⁸ Throughout Abkhazia, villages and farming plots were unusually spread out and often distributed among hills, mountains, gorges, and thick forest. Villages were small (with an average size of 400 residents) and on average located eight to ten kilometers apart.²⁹ In the primarily Abkhaz regions such as Gudauta and Kodori, farming was conducted by individual households, but ones deeply connected to family and kinship networks that provided mutual assistance (called *aitskhrara*) during harvesting and times of trouble (what is referred to in Soviet sources as “village comradeships” (*poselkovye tovarishchestva*), “the simplest form of cooperation.”³⁰ It was considered

²⁵ Adile Abbas-olgy. *Ne mogy zabyt’*. Moscow, 2005. P. 101.

²⁶ Sakartvelos shss arkhivi (II). F. 14. Op. 7. D. 3516. Ll. 1-3.

²⁷ Hoover Institution Archives (HIA). N. A. Lakoba Papers. Box 1. Folder 55.

²⁸ A. E. Kuprava. *Abkhazskaia derevnia na puti sotsializma (kanun kollektivizatsii 1926–1929 gg.)*. Tbilisi, 1977. P. 65.

²⁹ *Ibid.* P. 16.

³⁰ Z. B. Anchabadze, G. A. Dzidzariia and A. E. Kuprava. *Istoriia Abkhazii. Sukhumi*, 1986. P. 181.

a particularity of Abkhazia that entire villages and even groups of villages tended to be dominated by particular families or clans (*rody*), hence the village social structures overlapped with those of family and kin.³¹ Official sources complained of a “continuation of ‘anachronistic’ patriarchal relationships” in the Abkhaz countryside, such as the *agup* system of adoption by richer peasants with large herds of the animals of poorer peasants for grazing in mountain pastures during the summers, reverence for “former nobility,” and underground selling and purchasing of land.³²

During the first two years of collectivization, in 1929 and especially 1930, Lakoba made use of Abkhazia’s peripheral location, “backward” (*otstalye*) conditions, and his personal connections to Stalin and other Kremlin leaders in order to stall on implementation. A number of party declarations and decrees criticized the region’s shortcomings and the need to meet contracting and requisition quotas and to isolate the “kulaks” in the villages but, referring to “local conditions,” “backwardness” of local agricultural methods, and “primitive technology,”³³ the local Abkhaz leadership made few efforts to actively implement the collectivization measures or to punish peasant foot-dragging and disobedience.³⁴ By the start of 1931, however, the center increased the pressure to implement collectivization by issuing a directive as an ultimatum and by deploying groups of party and Komsomol activists to the villages.³⁵

The Mood in the Abkhazian Countryside and Peasant Grievances

From the start of the peasant uprising on February 18, the general mood of the peasants, according to the secret police reports, or *svodki*,³⁶ was of

³¹ Kuprava. Abkhazskaia derevnia. P. 17.

³² A. E. Kuprava. Klassovaia bor’ba v Abkhazskoi derevne. Sukhumi, 1984. P. 44. Such instances of criminal cases being brought for illegal land purchases in the mid-1920s were particularly prevalent in the Gudauta region. See Ibid. and also Kuprava. Abkhazskaia derevnia. Pp. 49-52.

³³ Nestor Lakoba. Stat’i i rechi. Sukhumi, 1986. P. 323.

³⁴ Blauvelt. Abkhazia: Patronage and Power. P. 211.

³⁵ St. Lakoba. Ocherki politicheskoi istorii Abkhazii. Sukhumi, 1990. P. 88; A. E. Istoriia kooperatsii Abkhazskoi ASSR. Sukhumi, 1988. P. 156.

³⁶ These were a series of special, daily (and sometimes more frequent) reports (*informatsionnye soobshcheniia*) on the events that were prepared by the Abkhazian GPU, and apparently sent directly to the Georgian GPU and the Bureau of the Georgian Central Committee and held in the Georgian Party archive. For a discussion of the difficulties of working with *svodki* and secret police reports, see Sarah Davies. Popular Opinion in Stalin’s Russia: Terror, Propaganda and Dissent, 1934–41. Cambridge, 1997. Pp. 9-12, and

resoluteness mixed with desperation. "Either we will die or we'll be successful," said Akhmed Gitsba, one of the leaders, "but we will not allow them to mock us [*izdevat'sia nad nami*]," and he recited an Abkhaz folk aphorism that likened their cause to "what the rooster crows the last time before his head is cut off at Christmastime."³⁷ Another peasant declared that "the last day has come for us peasants, and we will do what was done when they tried to carry out collectivization in 1930."³⁸ The demands were repeated many times that collectivization be halted, that the requisitions and the planting quotas (*kontraktatsiia*) for seed, tobacco, and corn be eliminated, and that outside party members and especially Komsomol members be removed from the village (whom the peasants described as "a degradation of the tradition and life of the peasantry").³⁹ The peasants also discussed keeping local party and Komsomol members under observation and forcing them to give up their party cards and thus renounce membership.

A constant theme in the peasants' complaints, as recounted in the *svodki*, was that collectivization and the other activities of the Soviet authorities undermined Abkhaz national traditions. One peasant was reported as saying that "we Abkhaz stood up to preserve our national culture, norms, and traditions several times in the old day against the tsarist government, and now we will not fear to spill blood for this."⁴⁰ A peasant agitator in Lykhny village said that everybody should join the *skhod* "who wants to live peacefully on their plots, in order not to lose their Abkhaz conscience (*chto by ne teriat' Abkhazskuiu sovest'*)."⁴¹ Soviet power had not made the peasants happy, a report stated. For ten years they had endured hardship and become firmly convinced that the more time passed, the more the peasants were

Lynne Viola. *Popular Resistance in the Stalinist 1930s* // Lynne Viola (Ed.). *Contending with Stalinism*. Ithaca, 2002. Pp. 28-31. Despite recent critiques of the inherent biases in the *svodki*, that were "all produced by ideological agents with a revolutionary mission, which politicized their perception of 'unhealthy' moods," (see Jochen Hellbeck, reply to Sarah Davies // *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History*. 2002. Vol. 3. No. 2. P. 439), the current author agrees with Mark Edele that "a careful, contextualized reading of a wide variety of evidence is the most pragmatic and most prudent course of action," as no historical sources exist that are "clearly polished windows to the past." Mark Edele. *Stalinist Society, 1928–1953*. Oxford, 2011. P. 239.

³⁷ Sakartvelos shss arkhivi (II). F. 14. Op. 6. D. 267. L. 163 "Informatsionnoe soobshchenie no. 1."

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid. L. 157.

⁴¹ Ibid. L. 64 "Informatsionnoe soobshchenie no. 4."

losing their character (*obezlichivaiutsia*) and viewed collectivization as a means of “destroying their unique national traditions”⁴² with measures that “fundamentally contradict our traditions formed over centuries.”⁴³ One of the mechanisms of this was seen not in collectivization itself, but in the educational campaigns that were carried out along side it, particularly those for “liquidation of illiteracy” (*Likbez*) and universal education (*Vseobuch*). The former required women and young girls to attend evening literacy classes instead of caring for their families and young children, which “is a moral violation of our way of life,” and they were subjected to fines of 100–300 rubles for missing sessions. The latter “is restructuring our society in a collective farm way and retraining our children only for collective farm construction.”⁴⁴ The influence of the Party was also affecting the behavior of young women more generally, which the peasants felt to be undermining traditional values: “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.”⁴⁵

Women themselves participated in the *skhod* in large groups (usually reported as 300–400) on several of the days, but appear not to have been involved in the organizational and leadership group. On February 20, it was decided to summon a women’s *skhod* for the next day in order to “make the same demands,” and several hundred women attended over the next few days. Women are reported as having “agitated for their men to go to the *skhod*.”⁴⁶ On February 22, one peasant woman addressed the *skhod* and is recorded as saying “All of us will be lost if you *muzhiki* are not up to it – give us women weapons and we will fight to the last drop of blood. Either we will be killed or we will be free!” This speech apparently “strongly aroused the masses and was met with loud shouts of ‘Hurrah!’”⁴⁷ Women (and children and the elderly) were specifically summoned to attend the culminating meeting with Lakoba on February 26, and several women were chosen to speak. Two of these, Khisada Tranba and Zina Azhiba, appealed directly to Lakoba: “We live poorly and with difficulty and we have nothing. They have offended everybody, our girls are shamed to go anywhere. In 1918 when our menfolk fought under your leadership for Soviet power, your promises

⁴² Ibid. L. 157 “Informatsionnoe soobshchenie no. 1.”

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid. L. 156; L. 53 “Operativnaia svodka no. 12.”

⁴⁵ Ktit Gunba. Ibid. L. 62.

⁴⁶ Sakartvelos shss arkivi (II).F. 14. Op. 6. D. 267. L. 28 “Operativnaia svodka no. 9.”

⁴⁷ Ibid. L. 67 “Informatsionnoe soobshchenie no. 4.”

were different, and now we are convinced that you have deceived us. Can you not save us from this situation? There is nothing in the cooperatives and they give us nothing.” Five or six more women were then reported to have said “essentially the same thing.”⁴⁸ Thus in the Abkhazian case women played a visible and sometimes central role, yet they did not “speak for the men” as often occurred in “bab’i bunty” elsewhere in Russia and Ukraine.⁴⁹

If the authorities would not meet their demands, over and over again the peasants stated that they would request that “the road be opened for us to Turkey,” and that they would abandon Abkhazia. This was an echo of the experience of several generations earlier, when following the conclusion of the Caucasus War of the nineteenth century, the tsarist military allowed (and encouraged) several hundred thousand Abkhaz and other mountain peoples to emigrate to Ottoman Turkey.⁵⁰ These mass emigrations (or deportations) took place in the 1860s and 1870s, and were still within living memory of the Abkhaz peasantry, who seemed to assume that in the worst case the Soviet authorities would also agree to such an accommodation.

Some of the reported peasant speeches verged into rumors and conspiracy theories. The usually practical skhod leader Ktit Gunba spoke of a circular that required all of the villages to select ten healthy and pretty girls from each *obshchina* and send them with their bedding to the Sovkhoz.⁵¹ Another organizer, Bessarion Gunba, said that “they take Abkhaz girls to Sukhum and rape them there,” and that “in Sukhum there is a monkey research station in which there are no females, and in place of them they are taking Abkhaz women and using them to mate with the monkeys.”⁵² All of the tax money gathered by the Soviet authorities, he continued, was being used to pay off

⁴⁸ Ibid. L. 53 “Operativnaia svodka no. 12.”

⁴⁹ See Lynne Viola. *Bab’i Bunty and Peasant Women’s Protest During Collectivization* // Russian Review. 1986. Vol. 45. Pp. 23-42.

⁵⁰ See Dana Sherry. *Social Alchemy on the Black Sea Coast, 1860–65* // *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History*. 2009. Vol. 10. No. 1. Pp. 7-30.

⁵¹ Ibid; In *Sakartvelos shss arkhivi* (II). F. 14. Op. 6. D. 267. L. 5 “Informatsionnoe soobshchenie no. 3,” it was reported that the peasants “were told by a government official” that ten young girls would be taken from each village and “sent to the kolkhozy for the use of the kolkhozniki.” The peasants allegedly intended to report to Lakoba the surname of the official who said this.

⁵² *Sakartvelos shss arkhivi* (II). F. 14. Op. 6. D. 267. L. 59 “Operativnaia svodka no. 13.” There was (and is) in fact a monkey research station in Sukhumi, that was created in 1927 by the RFSFR Commissariat of Health (Narkomzdrav) and that in 1932 became the Sukhumi Filial of the All-Union Institute of Experimental Medicine. See Dzidariia, Kuprava, Sagariia, and Anchabadze (Eds.). *Istoriia Abkhazskoi ASSR*. P. 266.

the debts to Europe.⁵³ Among the most extreme intentions attributed to the peasants in the svodki was to take up arms against Soviet power, to either overthrow the local soviets and create their own government or to take to the forests to wage insurgent warfare against the regime and to burn down all of the kolkhozy.⁵⁴ Supposedly the reason that the peasants demanded the meeting with Lakoba was in order to take him hostage or assassinate him.⁵⁵ Word spread among the peasantry that the Red Army had dislocated to the nearby village of Baklanovka and was preparing to arrest the leaders of the skhod and “shoot the kulak element,” a rumor that the authorities themselves encouraged and that was not far from the truth. One of the speakers at the skhod on February 21 riled up the crowd by claiming that it was said at a government meeting in nearby Lykhny that “We have been coddling the peasants – we should shoot thirty people from each village, and then the rest will calm down!”⁵⁶ Rumors also circulated that quantities of weapons were being smuggled into Abkhazia from abroad and that help would come from Georgia, Azerbaijan, Lezgia, and the North Caucasus.⁵⁷

Often in the svodki, however, when the peasant speeches and statements are reported in greater detail, their complaints, concerns, and demands are rational and quite specific, and they contradict the more alarmist reports that the peasants intended armed revolt to overthrow Soviet power. Skhod leader Bessarion Gunba is reported as saying, on February 24, that “we are not going against Soviet power, we are only raising demands for the cancellation of collectivization.”⁵⁸ Another report stressed that “according to a source among the returning peasants, the skhod will not offer armed resistance to the government.”⁵⁹ The detailed issues seem to be reported in the svodki with some degree of sympathy for the peasants’ concerns. “An important reason for the calling of the illegal skhod,” reports one, was distortions in the meat requisitions on the part of certain local officials. The peasants were promised consumer goods in exchange for voluntarily giving up livestock, but this did not take place, and what little payment the peasants were given was late in coming.⁶⁰ The confiscated livestock was brought to collection

⁵³ Sakartvelos shss arkhivi (II). F. 14. Op. 6. D. 267. L. 59 “Operativnaia svodka no. 13.”

⁵⁴ Ibid. Ll. 43 and 47 “Operativnaia svodka no. 11.”

⁵⁵ Ibid. L. 45.

⁵⁶ Ibid. L. 3 “Informatsionnoe soobshchenie no. 3.”

⁵⁷ Ibid. Ll. 60 “Operativnaia svodka no. 13”; L. 43 “Operativnaia svodka no. 11.”

⁵⁸ Ibid. L. 201 “Informatsionnoe soobshchenie (v dopolnenie k no. 7).”

⁵⁹ Ibid. L. 44 “Operativnaia svodka no. 11.”

⁶⁰ Ibid. L. 153 “Informatsionnoe soobshchenie no. 1.”

centers that were unprepared, and the animals were dirty and hungry and became diseased. All of this “acted morally on the peasants and caused frustration that gradually accumulated, until the peasants said: ‘They take away the livestock, they don’t settle up with us, and they don’t keep them in good conditions and they die. They take the animals from us but don’t use them for their goals and needs and they starve and die.’”⁶¹ The peasants were also agitated because the promises that state insurance (*gosstrakhovanie*) would be voluntary, but it was later made compulsory.

In his speech on the day of the meeting with Lakoba in Duripshi on February 26, Ktit Gunba also focused on the lack of consumer industrial goods (*promtovary*): “We are naked and barefoot. If they have something, they don’t give it to us.”⁶² Addressing Lakoba directly, Gunba focused in particular on the theme of the social contract that the peasants felt that they had established with the Soviet Abkhazian leadership, a theme that came to be central to the peasants’ appeals to that leadership: “For all of the thirteen years of the existence of Soviet power, all of the peasants supported it, and it defended their interests. But since last year things have gone bad. The requisitions began, and they uprooted the corn and planted tobacco in its place. The price for this is very low, which hits the peasants hard. For meat requisitions they were promised goods exchange at a 30 percent rate, but this was not fulfilled.”⁶³ Another *skhod* leader, Osman Butba, complained that “we pay three times over – in taxes, to the cooperatives when receiving goods, which are given first to the Communist and Komsomol members, and then nothing remains for the peasants, and to use the mills requires paying. Now the mills are being closed, and the women have to grind corn by hand. The peasants have no medical assistance, and the taxes are crushing them.”⁶⁴ Butba went on to accuse the local regional officials of not paying attention to the dissatisfaction of the peasants, and the Komsomol members whose “defacing of the village soviet and conducting of searches in houses and granaries” and “incorrect definition of the peasantry” (i.e., dividing them up into the Soviet doctrinal categories of poor, middle, and kulak peasants) made life in the village unbearable.⁶⁵ The following speaker “made similar complaints about the distortions,” and added that “we do not have in mind an armed uprising,

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid. L. 52 “Operativnaia svodka no. 12.”

⁶³ Ibid. L. 61 “Operativnaia svodka no. 13.”

⁶⁴ Ibid. L. 62.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

but we gathered in order to express our outrage, and if our demands are not satisfied we will be forced to abandon Abkhazia.”⁶⁶

Response of the Regime

The approach of the local and republican authorities to deal with the skhod included simultaneously appeals for negotiation, surveillance, prophylactic actions among the peasants who remained in their villages and among the non-Abkhaz nationalities, active efforts to infiltrate agents and informers to subvert the skhod from within, and the massing of military forces in order to threaten the use of force. From the evening of February 19, the peasants organized armed patrols to maintain order and to “keep under observation” local Party and Komosmol members and they set up guard posts on the periphery of the meeting area in order to prevent such people or other potential traitors from coming or going during the night to report to the authorities.⁶⁷ Central to the organizers’ strategy was the taking of the oath, a long-established tradition among the Caucasian mountaineers of the Kiaraz insurgency, and one that both the peasants and the authorities seem to have taken very seriously. As Ktit Gunba explained, “we took the oath in order to unify and to speak as one, and in the case of need to protect ourselves from the provocateurs in our midst.”⁶⁸ Given the kinship bases within villages, it would seem that the primary purpose of the oath was to enforce trust across village and kinship communities. Officials reported that they were unable to get information out of the peasants who had just taken the oath, as they refused to speak to government representatives.⁶⁹ The svodki reported many incidences of Party and Komsomol members giving up their membership cards, either willfully or under duress, and often taking the oath as well. From the fifth day of the uprising, it was reported that the peasants had “dispersed the local Komsomol cells” and took away and ripped up the members’ cards, and that “there were cases of members voluntarily going over to the skhod.” One Komsomol member named Otyrba told the skhod: “I fought for the peasantry, and I will be with the peasants!” Another, Besa Basba, who was both a Komsomol member and a Red Army veteran, also joined the skhod and allegedly helped to identify other Komsomol members

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid. L. 1 “Informatsionnoe soobshchenie no. 3”; L. 7 “Informatsionnoe soobshchenie no. 5.”

⁶⁸ Ibid. L. 52 “Operativnaia svodka no. 12.”

⁶⁹ Ibid. L. 30 “Informatsionnoe soobshchenie no. 7.”

and forced them to give up their cards.⁷⁰ During one of the official party meetings to boost morale in the village of Dzhirkhva on February 23, two members shocked the organizers by handing in their cards and renouncing the Komsomol.⁷¹ Prior to the oath taking in Achandary, the secretary of the Lykhny village party cell was also alleged to have given up his card and to have confiscated them from Komsomol members.⁷² Later that day several more Komsomol members gave in their cards and stated “We were mistaken that we did not immediately join the skhod – you are our fathers and we will be with you.”⁷³ More Party and Komsomol members reportedly gave up their cards and joined in when the oath taking began on February 25.⁷⁴ The chairman of the Achandary village soviet was supposedly approached by the peasants “and told categorically to go to the skhod and take the oath,” while the other members of the soviet went into hiding.⁷⁵ Similarly a Komsomol member who was a teacher “fled to a different village, fearing that he would be forced to join the skhod in Achandary.”⁷⁶ The authorities were often able to keep close track of those Party and Komsomol members who went over to the skhod. A svodka from February 23 lists thirteen such people, of whom two were teachers and the rest were poor and middle peasants.⁷⁷

Nevertheless, the authorities were usually able to conduct surveillance, recruit informers and gather information about who said what. The authorities also had to infiltrate people into the skhod simply in order to disseminate their appeals for negotiation, as the skhod leaders often prevented government delegates from addressing the crowd.⁷⁸ From early in the crisis, on February 19, an “intelligence group” made up of Komsomol and Party members was formed in Gudauta in order to prepare surveillance and subversion missions. Secret instructions were sent down “the network line” of the “agents in residence” (*rezidentura*) and to some of the informers, who were given specific tasks in order to “service the villages and towns.”⁷⁹ The surveillance

⁷⁰ Ibid. L. 66 “Informatsionnoe soobshchenie no. 4.”

⁷¹ Ibid. L. 9 “Informatsionnoe soobshchenie no. 5.”

⁷² Ibid. L. 67 “Informatsionnoe soobshchenie no. 4.”

⁷³ Ibid. L. 18 “Informatsionnoe soobshchenie no. 6.”

⁷⁴ Ibid. L. 31 “Operativnaia svodka no. 10.”

⁷⁵ Ibid. L. 37.

⁷⁶ Ibid. L. 43 “Operativnaia svodka no. 11.”

⁷⁷ Ibid. L. 49.

⁷⁸ Ibid. Ll. 152 and 155 “Zapiska po priamomu prokhodu.” In one incident, the peasants physically detained two government representatives and forced them to sit under a tree for several hours. See Ibid. L. 63 “Operativnaia svodka no. 13.”

⁷⁹ Ibid. L. 152 “Informatsionnoe soobshchenie no. 1.”

was successful enough that at some points the svodki authors offered assessments of the mood of the skhod leaders. On February 20, it was reported that some of the organizers, such as Ktit Gunba, Bessarion Gunba, and Churad Dvandba, were “themselves frightened by the situation that has emerged, and are themselves trying to ease the atmosphere.”⁸⁰ Several days later it was reported that two tendencies were emerging among the leadership, the first more radical and “clearly kulak,” which aimed at stirring up the masses further, and the second, “more rational and wavering,” which again included the initial organizers Ktit and Bessarion Gunba, who were “frightened by the consequences of the emerging situation,” and would like to relinquish their leadership roles except that “if they go the first group will be left in charge, which they think will lead to even worse consequences.”⁸¹ Yet later in the svodki it was reported that these leaders held firm in their convictions and commitments. Bessarion Gunba was quoted on February 24 as saying, “I personally will not give in, and I consider my fate to be decided. From the side of the authorities I expect to be shot.”⁸² It was reported repeatedly that the authorities thought that many of the participants felt “terrorized” by the leadership and intimidated by their influence, and left to their own devices would defect from the skhod.

In one svodka, the authorities described sending a group of six “Abkhaz chekists” into the skhod at Achandary, three of whom were ordered to “conduct subversion work among the population and to recruit individuals to undermine those meeting in Duripshi.” The other three were tasked with “supporting communication with the *agentura* in Duripshi” in order to pass on information on the mood of the skhod.⁸³ In another svodki, twenty-three “deserters from the skhod” supposedly came over to the government encampment in Baklanovka, and fourteen of them were “selected to be sent back for subversive work from within.”⁸⁴ In an update sent on February 22 to Zakkraikom Chairman M. Kartvelishvili and Georgian secret police head L. P. Beria by the emergency leadership group in Gudauta that included Lakoba and Georgian Party First Secretary S. A. Mamulia, it was reported that “in each *obshchina* we have our people who carry out subversion work from within” and that “all of our agents in the village have been given the task of influencing the most reliable and tested peasants, and after working

⁸⁰ Ibid. L. 165 “Informatsionnoe soobshchenie no. 2.”

⁸¹ Ibid. L. 4 “Informatsionnoe soobshchenie no. 3.”

⁸² Ibid. L. 27 “Operativnaia svodka no. 9.”

⁸³ Ibid. L. 49 “Operativnaia svodka no. 11.”

⁸⁴ Ibid. L. 40.

on them, sending them back into the skhod for internal subversion work.”⁸⁵ Other svodki, however, reported that this “subversion work” was having little effect, primarily because of the taking of the oath of solidarity by the peasantry.⁸⁶ “Fighting groups” (*boevye gruppy*) were also formed in order to intercept the messengers sent from the skhod to the villages to mobilize support, and in some cases armed guards were stationed at the village entrances for this purpose. A number of such messengers (*khodaki*) were detained, and in one case, on February 24 in Lykhny, a shoot-out took place during an attempted arrest.⁸⁷ Government and Party officials also carried out meetings in a number of villages and towns of Party and Komsomol cells, professional unions (*profsoiuzy*), and collectives (especially among Georgian, Greek, and Armenian peasants) in order to bolster their support for the Party and to keep them from going to join the skhod or taking the oath.⁸⁸ In some cases the peasants not attending the skhod are reported as “pledging to organize new kolkhozy” in response to the “kulak agitation.”⁸⁹

The svodki and special bulletins also detailed the authorities’ mobilization of military force as a means to intimidate and influence the skhod. On February 22, Lakoba and Mamulia reported to Beria that GPU and Red Army units had been deployed to Baklanovka, “about which the skhod knows,” in order “primarily to act psychologically on the skhod, to embolden the terrorized part of the skhod that would like to free itself but doesnot dare show this to the leaders, to show that this gamble (*avantiura*) will not pass without harsh consequences.” In the worst case, they reported, “the armed forces will be assigned to seize the leaders and disperse the skhod,” a scenario that they clearly hoped to avoid “and to implement only in the case of absolute necessity . . . if the affair cannot be resolved by peaceful means.”⁹⁰

Perceptions of Ethnicity as a Unifying and Mitigating Factor

Although the skhod started out in the ethnically Abkhaz villages and largely remained an Abkhaz affair, a number of attempts were made to involve representatives of other ethnic groups. On the second day of the

⁸⁵ Ibid. L. 152 “Zapiska po priamomu prokhodu.”

⁸⁶ Ibid. L. 35 “Operativnaia svodka no. 10.”

⁸⁷ Ibid. L. 34.

⁸⁸ Ibid. L. 68 “Informatsionnoe soobshchenie no. 4.”

⁸⁹ Ibid. L. 153 “Zapiska po priamomu prokhodu”; Ibid. L. 8 “Informatsionnoe soobshchenie no. 5.”

⁹⁰ Ibid. L. 153 “Zapiska po priamomu prokhodu.”

demonstrations it was decided to send delegates to the Armenian villages of Mtsava and Ankhva to drum up support there.⁹¹ As a result of this agitation, apparently only “about ten” Armenians joined the skhod.⁹² On February 22, two Georgians working in the Abkhaz villages were sent to the Georgian-populated Gali district of Abkhazia and to the city of Zugdidi in Georgia to inform people about the skhod and to try to get Georgians to participate. Two people were also “assigned” to appeal to Greeks, Armenians and Turks.⁹³ The svodki also describe the efforts of the authorities to prevent the uprising from spreading to the other ethnic groups, such as propaganda meetings in the Armenian villages⁹⁴ and “strengthening the Party presence” in the Georgian villages.⁹⁵ As the uprising was reaching its climax, it was reported that “in the non-Abkhaz villages all work and activities go on as usual.”⁹⁶ According to a svodka just after the end of the events on February 28, “every day representatives of the Achandary skhod came” to the Armenian village of Mtsara “and cursed all of the Armenians because they did not go to the skhod and did not join together with the Abkhaz,” which was unfortunate, as “the interests of the Armenians and of the Abkhaz are identical.”⁹⁷ In some cases the svodki report the refusals of the leaders of some ethnic communities, as on February 22, when the Turkish elder Hasan Abdur-Rakhman-olgy supposedly told the Abkhaz delegates that “there is nothing for Turks to do at your skhod.”⁹⁸ Most interesting were the reported reactions of Russian elders. Approached for support on February 23, for example, a Russian elder in the town of Bombory said “They might forgive you Abkhaz and be tolerant toward you. But if we Russians think about revolting, they will send half of us to the Solovki prison camp.”⁹⁹ Thus it seemed to be understood that the ethnic Abkhaz peasants could get away with behavior that their Russian neighbors could not.

⁹¹ Ibid. L. 154 “Informatsionnoe soobshchenie no. 1.”

⁹² Ibid. L. 57. It was later reported that a group of twenty Armenians “who had been present at the skhod in Duripshi on February 26” held their own “unsanctioned skhod” in the Armenian village of Khabua several days later, where they made a formal appeal to Lakoba stating that because of the poor quality of the land in their areas they were unable to meet requisition quotas. See Ibid. L. 68 “Informatsionnoe soobshchenie no. 4.”

⁹³ Ibid. L. 18 “Dopolnitel’noe soobshchenie no. 6.”

⁹⁴ Ibid. L. 24 “Informatsionnoe soobshchenie no. 7.”

⁹⁵ Ibid. L. 154 “Zapiska po priamomu prokhodu.”

⁹⁶ Ibid. L. 12 “Informatsionnoe soobshchenie no. 5.”

⁹⁷ Ibid. L. 56 “Operativnaia svodka no. 13.”

⁹⁸ Ibid. L. 64 “Informatsionnoe soobshchenie no. 4.”

⁹⁹ Ibid. L. 22 “Informatsionnoe soobshchenie no. 7.”

The Peripheral Center, Social Contract, and Mobilization of Protest

A striking aspect of the Abkhaz peasants' appeals is the way in which they address Lakoba and the Abkhazian government directly in terms of their understanding of the social contract, as if they considered the leadership to be Abkhaz first and Bolshevik second. It was rumored that Lakoba would be forced to take the oath and to "go with the people, or else they will declare him a traitor to his people."¹⁰⁰ "Once the Abkhaz took the oath for Soviet power," one peasant reportedly said, "and now the authorities are afraid of this oath."¹⁰¹ The skhod leaders, the svodki reported, "had resolved that upon the arrival of Lakoba they will propose to him that in 1918 they took the oath together for SOVIET POWER against the Mensheviks and agreed always to be together. Now we do not agree with the activities and policy of SOVIET POWER and we demand that he take the oath of loyalty to be with us and lead our movement."¹⁰² As the person "most responsible for instituting Soviet power in Abkhazia," the peasants said that "he brought this disease from Russia, and he should swear to die with us if anything should happen to us."¹⁰³ The peasants' sentiments were expressed most directly by one of the skhod leaders, Seid Ebzhnou, in his address prior to the meeting with Lakoba on February 26: "In 1918 all of us peasants fought for Soviet power under the leadership of N. Lakoba, we trusted him and we entrusted our fate to him... now we ask the government to back off on [the collectivization] activities and to allow our nationality to live by agreement [*zhit' po dogovoru*]."¹⁰⁴

The assessment of the svodki authors was that the planning for the uprising began a month earlier, in mid-January 1931, when meetings were held in the house of Osman Tvanba in Duripshi. Fifteen individuals were identified as having attended these meetings, including the alleged leaders, Ktit and Bessarion Gunba, Kadyr Benia, a former tsarist officer in hiding named Amish Bazba, and Tvanba himself. This leadership group decided "to elect from each *obshchina* four reliable people for undertaking the necessary work and plan of action." Benia gave a horse to Makhmed Tvanba, who then rode to each of the Abkhaz villages to alert the peasants to the calling of the skhod. A funeral at the home of the Tarnava family in Lykhny

¹⁰⁰ Ibid. L. 7 "Informatsionnoe soobshchenie no. 5."

¹⁰¹ Ibid. L. 15.

¹⁰² Ibid. L. 18 "Dopolnitel'noe soobshchenie no. 6."

¹⁰³ Ibid. L. 45 "Operativnaia svodka no. 11."

¹⁰⁴ Ibid. L. 51 "Operativnaia svodka no. 12."

on February 14, which also coincided with the end of the Muslim fast and was attended by some 200 peasants, became a venue for further dissemination of the information. Yet what is most striking and intriguing about the reporting of the supposed planning of the uprising in the official *svodki* is the conspirators' statements regarding Lakoba and the central Abkhazian leadership. At a secret meeting in Duripshi, Ktit Gunba is reported to have said "Let's organize a *skhod*, and NESTOR LAKOBA secretly informed us that if the Abkhaz stand against the collectives and in general against the measures carried out by Soviet power in the village, then he will tell the higher government of the USSR that it is impossible to implement in Abkhazia that which is done in Russia, and that if we rebel [*vzbuntuemsia*] then they will not drive us into the collective farms and they will back off from collectivization."¹⁰⁵ Similarly, on the first day of the *skhod*, one peasant, Mikheil Sanava, stated that "The government of Abkhazia does not want to implement collective farms or other campaigns in the village. Everybody must come to the *skhod*, and the Abkhazian government will come."¹⁰⁶

When Lakoba finally made his appearance at the *skhod* in Duripshi on the afternoon of February 26, the organizers had done their best to mobilize all of the Abkhaz peasantry, including children, women, and the elderly, to arrive at the *skhod* by 2:30 p.m.¹⁰⁷ After a series of fiery speeches by the leaders and other peasants, including women, the crowd of more than 4,000 peasants parted, and Lakoba was led to a table in the very center of the crowd. But by then, even if he feared for his physical safety or even his life, Lakoba had probably already achieved his primary goal: to get the peasants to agree to select delegates for negotiations that could be continued in a less public setting. During forty minutes of deliberation, each of the villages designated their delegates, and a group of six peasants joined Lakoba and his aides at the negotiating table. "It is possible that some mistakes and distortions of the Soviet apparatus have taken place in certain cases," Lakoba began. The issues brought up were important, he told the peasants, but they could not be resolved on the spot. Lakoba proposed that the *skhod* appoint delegates to meet with government officials behind closed doors, and "the government will hear out the complaints of the population." If such an agreement were acceptable, Lakoba concluded, "the government will find the means and resources to resolve these issues, and particularly for the prevention of

¹⁰⁵ Ibid. L. 163 "Informatsionnoe soobshchenie no. 1."

¹⁰⁶ Ibid. L. 159.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid. L. 42 "Operativnaia svodka no. 11."

unacceptable action of nefarious elements and the *kulachestvo*.”¹⁰⁸ According to the *svodka*, “this speech of Lakoba was received somewhat cautiously, but it made the necessary impression.” A series of further speeches by peasants and more women followed, but by the next day the *skhod* dispersed and the crowds headed back to their villages.

Plurality of Centers: Scapegoating the District Leadership and Criticism from the Imperial Center

Like Stalin’s approach a year earlier in March 1930, when, at the height of the chaos of the collectivization campaign in the main grain-growing areas, his famous “Dizzy with Success” article blamed all of the mistakes and excesses on the local Party officials who were attempting to implement the campaign, a form of “Stalinist populism,” the central Abkhazian leadership also made a scapegoat of the local officials in the Gudauta region.¹⁰⁹ Early in the demonstrations, Lakoba’s deputy, M. Chalmaz, addressed part of the crowd and claimed that the central government in Sukhumi had no idea that the requisitioning of livestock and seed was taking place, and Lakoba and other government officials attributed “excesses and distortions” on the ineptitude of the local Gudauta party leadership. Incensed by this attribution of blame, Gudauta Regional Committee Secretary Zakhar Agrba, and two other local government officials, Kobakhiya and Kharaziya (all three ethnic Abkhaz), sent a secret report to the Zakkraikom Chairman M. Kartvelashvili, Georgian Central Committee Secretary S. Mamulia, and secret police head Lavrenty Beria, attacking the shortcomings of Lakoba’s leadership style. “Over the course of the past ten years, since the Sovietization of Abkhazia, the leadership of the Abkhazian Obkom has come under question again and again, but it usually never comes to anything. The situation that has been created recently in connection with events in the Gudauta district forces us regional officials to appeal directly to the Transcaucasian Party organization,” they wrote. “From the very first day the authority of the party Obkom has not been felt and is very weak; not a single issue is resolved without the participation or agreement of N. Lakoba.” In resolving the Gudauta stand-off, Lakoba and other central leadership officials “did not fully present the party line in the countryside and did not emphasize its significance,” but rather they “put the blame on the local organs, as if [we] were responsible

¹⁰⁸ Ibid. L. 52 “Operativnaia *svodka* no. 12.”

¹⁰⁹ See Sheila Fitzpatrick. *Stalin’s Peasants: Resistance and Survival in the Russian Village After Collectivization*. New York, 1994. Pp. 62-65.

and acting without the sanction of the center.” Worse still, Lakoba and his associates M. Chalmaz and Vasili Lakoba agreed with the peasants’ assertions that there were no differences between rich and poor peasants: “All the time class conflict is glossed over in Abkhazia, and they try to keep any of the Abkhaz from facing repressive measures. As a result the kulaks feel themselves free and unrestrained, and they hinder the conducting of economic-political campaigns. The kulaks use their situation to terrorize the poor and middle peasants, at the same time taking advantage of their kinship connections.”¹¹⁰

A latter assessment by an Instructor Kozlov, sent from the Central Committee in Moscow to investigate the causes of the uprising, similarly criticized the Abkhazian leadership for neglecting Bolshevik ideology regarding social structure: the poor peasants fell under the influence of the kulaks “because of the populist [*narodnicheskie*] ideas [of the Sukhumi officials] and the lack of slogans of class war.” Yet the response from the central leadership was essentially one of concessions and accommodation. The examination of the causes of the incident by the Georgian Central Committee and the Zakkraikom focused on the supposed necessity of properly mobilizing the middle and poor peasants against the kulaks in the Abkhazian countryside, and it found particularly that *korenizatsiia*, or ethnic indigenization, had not been implemented fully enough in Abkhazia. In its “Resolution on the Abkhazian Question,” the Bureau of the Georgian Party TsK placed blame for the failure on the “distance of village soviets and executive committees from the poor and middle peasants,” and on the “absolutely insufficient involvement of ethnic Abkhaz in the soviet and collective farm apparatus, extremely weak implementation of the decision on *korenizatsiia*, and nationalization of the apparatus.” A number of measures were proposed to increase the use of the Abkhazian language in official paperwork, to appoint more ethnic Abkhaz to positions in the state apparatus and village soviets, and to provide higher educational opportunities to promising young Abkhaz in Tiflis, Moscow, and elsewhere. The resolution also addressed the small percentage of the proletariat among the ethnic Abkhaz, and it encouraged the directors of industrial projects in Abkhazia (the Tkvarcheli coal works, the hydro stations, and the state farms) to allocate financial resources for hiring ethnic Abkhaz workers, in order to give young Abkhaz more opportunities and to relieve pressure in the countryside.¹¹¹

¹¹⁰ Sakartvelos shss arkhivi (II). F. 14. Op. 6. D. 3516. Ll. 177-179.

¹¹¹ Ibid. L. 26.

Negotiating Accommodation

The draft of a telegram in Lakoba's handwriting from his personal archive, which appears to have been written around February 24, shows the nature of the challenge that he seems to have faced. Referring to the organizers of the uprising in the harshest tones ("kulaks, criminals, former police, bandits, recidivists!"),¹¹² Lakoba nevertheless emphasized that, besides the leaders, most of the participants were either "hesitant middle and poor peasants who are terrorized," or the "conscious group of poor and middle peasants who openly support us."¹¹³ He also reported a harder line view of the peasants' intentions: "The plan of the class enemy is as follows: to finish taking the oath, and then to organize an armed detachment to move the skhod to those villages that have not yet joined the movement." Several days of unsuccessful negotiations by the Gudauta officials and "the fact that we have not used repressive force against the organizers of the movement who are hiding behind the backs of the 'people,' and the firm conviction of the leadership group in the nonuse of force by Soviet power," meant that the threat of violent conflict was growing stronger by the day "and as a consequence this will make the use of armed force inevitable." Lakoba then recommended "immediately introducing into the region an aerial squad and a company or division of the GPU from Tiflis, which we can use to disperse the skhod and seize the leadership group." Yet it seems clear that Lakoba's plan was precisely to avoid this outcome, as "if we act responsibly this thing will not end with an armed confrontation with the skhod."¹¹⁴ Lakoba needed to demonstrate to Tiflis and to Moscow as well as to the skhod leaders that he was taking a hard line and was willing to use force if necessary. Yet at the same time, he needed to create a situation in which he could deal in secret with the peasant leaders in order to offer the concessions that would resolve the situation without violence.

What happened after the skhod dispersed on February 26–27 is not entirely clear. It seems that over the following days Lakoba and some of his associates held closed meetings (*soveshchaniia*) in a traditional meeting place in the village of Lykhny with the small group of elected peasants'

¹¹² According to the *svodki*, of the twenty-nine individuals identified as belonging to the "leadership group," fourteen were middle peasants, twelve were "rich" (*zazhitochnye*), one was a former aristocrat, one a former tsarist police official, and only one a kulak. See Sakartvelos shss arkhivi (II). F. 14, Op. 6. D. 267. L. 9 "Informatsionnoe soobshchenie no. 5."

¹¹³ HIA. N. A. Lakoba Papers. Box 2. Folder 14. P. 1.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.* Pp. 2–5.

representatives. The Gudauta Regional Party Secretary Agrba repeatedly expressed anger and frustration that Party officials were not permitted to attend these meetings: "I consider it unacceptable for Bolsheviks when we are not allowed to sit at the meetings in Lykhny!"¹¹⁵ According to a later history of the uprising by the Russian émigré historian S. Danilov, Lakoba promised to put deal with the local excesses, and to use his connections in Moscow in order to soften the collectivization methods in general: "Apparently, N. Lakoba... this time was able to ask of his chum, the 'boss' [*kho-zyain*] of the country, a certain alleviation for the 'showcase' republic."¹¹⁶ And indeed, it appears that collectivization was not resumed in Abkhazia on a large scale until after Lakoba's death in 1936 and the elimination of his leadership group the following year.¹¹⁷ The Georgian Party's resolution on the affair included a number of points about halting the evening *Likbez* and other educational policies as well as the insensitive requisitioning that had so irritated the peasantry.¹¹⁸ It seems likely that it was Lakoba's intention to make these assurances to the peasants, but that he knew that he could do this only in the setting of closed meetings with a small number of delegates, and not in public in the full hearing of the local and central Party officials.

According to Danilov, the peasant leaders of the skhod were all arrested in a single night and charged with crimes unrelated to the affair.¹¹⁹ The report of Instructor Kozlov from the Central Committee does indeed mention that "it should be considered how to seize [*iz'iat*'] the leaders of the uprising."¹²⁰ There is no further reference to their fates in the Georgian archives. Yet by May 10, 1931, Lakoba had successfully purged the local Gudauta regional Party organization. Ten officials, including Khazariya and Kobakhiya (who had both signed the letter of complaint to the Zakkraikom together with

¹¹⁵ Sakartvelos shss arkhivi (II). F. 14. Op. 6. D. 267. Ll. 98 and 100 "Protokol Ob"edinennogo zasedaniia Biuro Raikoma i RabKK ot 4 marta 1931 goda."

¹¹⁶ S. Danilov. Tragediia Abkhazskogo naroda // Vestnik Instituta po izucheniiu istorii i kul'tury SSSR. Munich, 1951. No. 1. Pp. 2-12.

¹¹⁷ See Z. V. Anchabadze. Ocherk etnicheskoi istorii abkhazskogo naroda. Sukhumi, 1976. Pp. 117-119. That accommodation to the peasants' demands was Lakoba's intention would seem also to be suggested by the peasant delegates sent to Gudauta on February 24 to verify Lakoba's presence, who reported, "we were told that collectivization would be postponed and 'kontraktatsiia' abolished, and we can plant anything we want." Sakartvelos shss arkhivi (II). F. 14. Op. 6. D. 267. L. 47 "Operativnaia svodka no. 11."

¹¹⁸ Sakartvelos shss arkhivi (II). F. 14. Op. 7.D. (3516) 33. Ll. 24-27.

¹¹⁹ Danilov. Tragediia Abkhazskogo naroda. P. 11.

¹²⁰ Sakartvelos shss arkhivi (II). F. 14. Op. 6. D. 267. L. 96 "Protokol Ob"edinennogo zasedaniia Biuro Raikoma i RabKK ot 4 marta 1931 goda."

Agrba) were removed “strictly as a result of the Gudauta incidents.”¹²¹ A year later, Lakoba was again involved in a clash with the Georgian Central Committee over his apparent attempt to halve the tobacco requisition quota for Abkhazia.¹²²

Conclusions: Imperial Exceptionalism in the Stalinist Periphery

As only one out of thousands of peasant uprisings that took place throughout the USSR in the early 1930s, what can the “Gudauta affair” further tell us about the much-studied phenomenon of peasant resistance under Stalinism? As Lynne Viola has argued, since collectivization represented an attack on the peasants’ customary norms and their very subsistence, the causes and content of resistance to it was in many ways “generic.” Both economic and social justice concerns seem to have been central causes of the peasant uprising in Abkhazia, much as with uprisings elsewhere in the Soviet Union. Also similar to other cases of peasant rebellion was the role of traditional, pre-revolutionary traditions of protest, such as the peasant *skhod* and ritualistic aspects of this protest like the taking of the oath in the traditional place.¹²³ The Abkhazian case also begs the question of the subjective mentality of the actors in this Stalinist periphery: of what the Abkhaz peasants and elites viewed as the possible outcomes, and in turn, whether their act of resistance existed strictly within the context of a larger, regime-centered “Stalinist” outlook, or it represented something external to that outlook.¹²⁴ The reports of the peasants’ behavior and intentions in the *svodki* and official reports are often contradictory: all of the peasants were heavily armed, or only the leaders were carrying weapons; they were drunken and disorderly, or such behavior was strictly forbidden and discipline was enforced by self-created security patrols; they threatened to murder those who refused to take the oath, or they did not. At times the peasants were reported to be eager to use

¹²¹ Ibid. L. 137 “Svodka po voprosam Gudautskogo raiona.”

¹²² In his written appeal to Stalin, Kaganovich, and Molotov about this issue, Lakoba made no attempt to deny the charge, arguing only that he was unaware that the decision had already been made by the time he commented on it. See HIA. N. A. Lakoba Papers. Box 1. Folder 42. Pp. 8-14.

¹²³ On the role of the traditional *skhod* in Abkhaz culture, see A. E. Kuprava. *Iz istorii abkhazskoi traditsionnoi kul'tury (narodnye skhody)*. Moscow, 1998.

¹²⁴ For a critique of arguments for resistance or dissent outside of the revolutionary regime-centered outlook, see Jochen Hellbeck. *Speaking Out: Language of Affirmation and Dissent in Stalinist Russia* // *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History*. 2000. Vol. 1. No. 1. Pp. 72-73, 82-84.

violence against the regime and its officials and to seek to overthrow Soviet power and to elect their own soviets. In other reports of peasant statements, however, they seem to emphasize that their goal was to address specific policy concerns and if this should fail, that their most radical strategy was the resort to exit to Turkey, itself a prerevolutionary tradition and a distinctly non-Stalinist outcome. The peasants are not represented as naive or apolitical – in one particularly detailed report, Ktit Gunba spoke at length about how the elections to the soviets “were a ridiculous farce.” They were surely aware of the level of violence that had accompanied collectivization and “dekulakization” on the other side of the Caucasus range, as a number of “kulak” refugees from the Kuban region had fled to Abkhazia and were in hiding there.¹²⁵ Yet the view of the Soviet state for the Abkhaz peasants seems to have been a rather parochial one, centered on Abkhazia itself, on Lakoba and the Abkhaz government, with which the peasants felt a personal connection and a sense of social contract. There are no reported appeals to Stalin or to Moscow, only to Sukhumi and to Lakoba; they understood that the higher *instantsiia* was in Tiflis and Moscow, but, in their view, that was the responsibility of Lakoba. They had sworn the oath to fight together in Kiaraz only ten years before, a part of the life experience of many of the skhod participants, and they had done so not in the name of Bolshevism per se, but of Kiaraz and Abkhazian national identity (or at the very least of their local community identity) and for Bolshevik promises of some form of autonomous status in a Soviet state. Instead of chasing the local Party and Komsomol members out of the community (although they repeatedly demanded that external Komsomol members no longer be sent in), in the Abkhazian case the peasants forced them to take the oath, to renounce their memberships, and join with their people.

In this regard, the nationality aspect of the Abkhazian case perhaps makes it most significant. As Viola has written, “ethnicity likely played a significant, sometimes key, role in peasant resistance,”¹²⁶ but it was an aspect that had been little studied. The sense of Abkhaz national identity seems to be one of those that survived “within the hegemonic political culture of Stalinism,” and it was a sense of identity that existed not just among the protesting peasants, but that seems to have been shared by the ethnically

¹²⁵ The authorities apparently considered the agitation by these Circassian and Adygei refugees to be among the causal factors of the Gudauta uprising. See Sakartvelos shss arkhivi (II). F. 14. Op. 6. D. 267. L. 100 “Protokol ob”edinennogo zasedaniia Biuro raikoma i RabKK ot 4-go marta 1931 g.”

¹²⁶ Viola. Peasant Rebels Under Stalin. P. 9.

Abkhaz patronage network that controlled the republic's leadership under Lakoba. Ethnicity here seems to approximate a form of "gendered resistance": in the same way that women's role in the "bab'i bunty" in Russia and elsewhere in peasant rebellions against collectivization was viewed as apolitical by the regime and thus tolerated in a way that similar actions by men would not have been because of the supposed backwardness of the women, here too the Abkhaz, by virtue of the official "backwardness" of their nationality, were also treated with special leniency by the regime. The ethnic Russian peasants seemed to realize this and refused to join the Abkhaz *skhod*, and perhaps this also explains the reluctance of Georgian peasants to join as well. Although some of the organizers may have been punished, besides accommodation on the particular issues of collectivization policies, the focus of the resolution of the Georgian Central Committee and the Zakkraikom focused on intensifying *korenizatsiia* and created more opportunities for Abkhaz cadres in government administration and in industry.¹²⁷ Resistance to collectivization throughout the USSR was viewed as hostile enemy activity, to be opposed by overwhelming force, as "kulak resistance" had to be crushed and broken, and took place on a large scale, even in the neighboring North Caucasus districts. Yet in Abkhazia, despite the fact that the peasants were armed and openly insubordinate, the peripheral center was willing to resolve things peacefully through negotiation and accommodation. The case demonstrates the ability of peripheral elites to manipulate levels of authority and official policy, in this case nationality policy, to achieve specific policy outcomes. As Stephen Kotkin points out, "the Soviet dictatorship was made up of myriad officials, who build mini-empires (transferable across institutional lines) while indulging in personal whims."¹²⁸ The Abkhazia case shows how one such "mini-empire" in the periphery was able to maintain (if only temporarily) its own status quo in the face of powerful directives from above. Accusations of ethnic favoritism, clientelism, and accommodation of the hated kulak relating to the Gudauta affair of 1931 would be among the bases for accusations during the show trials in 1937 against the Abkhazian leadership after the death of Lakoba, when the Georgian leadership under L. P. Beria, assisted by the NKVD, posthumously declared Lakoba an "enemy of the people," decimated his patronage network, and began large-scale "Georgification" of

¹²⁷ Sakartvelos shss arkivi (II). F. 14. Op. 7. D. 3516. Ll. 23-24; Blauvelt. *From Words to Action!*

¹²⁸ Stephen Kotkin. *The State – Is It Us? Memoirs, Archives, and Kremlinologists* // *Russian Review*. 2002. Vol. 61. P. 46.

the republic.¹²⁹ As Ronald Suny has pointed out, an irony of state repression of resistance is that it often resulted in amplifying older cultural identities and loyalties, such as nationalism, which went underground and “became a source of strength,”¹³⁰ and also entered the realm of folk mythology, forms of identity that coexisted “within and beyond the dominant Soviet political culture.”¹³¹

The 1931 uprising joined the chronicle of events of “national awakening” in Abkhaz historical memory over the next fifty years. Abkhaz dissident intellectuals and historians, by the Brezhnev period and afterward, argued that the real root cause of the uprising was not collectivization at all, but rather the reduction in the republic’s status from “treaty republic” to autonomous republic, which had been formalized just weeks before in early February 1931.¹³² This change in status was not covered in the press or included in the published materials from the Party and government meetings at which the decisions were made, and it seems that the issue was not under public discussion. There are no references to it at all in any of the *svodki* and the reports, and it is not mentioned in any speeches, demands, or complaints. The issue may have been on Lakoba’s agenda and may have been one of the motivating factors if in fact he was playing a role in using the events for “ethnic mobilization,”¹³³ but there is no documentary evidence to support

¹²⁹ Thus, instead of the “mice burying the cat,” in the case of Abkhazia, the “dog buried the cat,” to rephrase Fitzpatrick’s metaphor (see Idem. Chap. 11). The incident, and particularly the stated desire to emigrate to Turkey to join the Abkhaz diaspora there, may also have contributed to the alleged consideration on the part of Beria and Stalin to deport the entire Abkhaz population from their republic in 1949. See Ronald G. Suny. *The Making of the Georgian Nation*. Bloomington, 1994. P. 289; Aleksandr M. Nekrich. *The Punished Peoples: The Deportation and Fate of Soviet Minorities at the End of the Second World War*. New York, 1978. Pp. 42, 104-105.

¹³⁰ Ronald G. Suny. *The Revenge of the Past: Nationalism, Revolution, and the Collapse of the Soviet Union*. Stanford, 1993. Pp. 114-115.

¹³¹ Viola. *Popular Resistance in the Stalinist 1930s*. P. 42.

¹³² See Blauvelt. *Abkhazia: Patronage and Power*. Pp. 211-213; S. Danilov. *Tragediia abkhazskogo naroda*; S. Lakoba. *Ocherki politicheskoi istorii Abkhazii*. Sukhumi, 1990. P. 86; Igor’ Marykhba. *Efrem Eshba (vydaiushchiisia gosudarstvennyi deiatel’)*. Sukhumi, 1997. Pp. 132-133; O. Kh. Bgazhba and S. Z. Lakoba. *Istoriia Abkhazii s drevneishikh vremen do nashikh dnei*. Sukhumi, 2007. Pp. 321-322.

¹³³ Stanislav Lakoba argues explicitly, with no supporting evidence, that Nestor Lakoba agreed with Stalin to trade Abkhazia’s union republic status for the cancellation of collectivization. See Stanislav Lakoba. *History: 1917–1989* // George Hewitt (Ed.). *The Abkhazians: A Handbook*. Surry, 1998. P. 94; and *Ocherki politicheskoi istorii Abkhazii*. Pp. 90-91. He also argued (*Ibid.* P. 89) that the deployment of military forces to Abkhazia was the work of Beria and that Lakoba played no role in this, an argument that is belied

this interpretation. Because so much political action in the Soviet period took the form of patronage networks that, in peripheral regions such as Abkhazia (and the Caucasus more generally), were inherently perceived as ethnically defined, the results of such actions came to be seen as ethnically motivated, especially in historical memory. It is significant that the 1931 peasant uprising was the first public expression of dissatisfaction with the Soviet regime and its policies in Abkhazia, and the first act of disobedience on the part of the Abkhaz since the end of the Caucasus wars of the nineteenth century. The event has come to be portrayed in the Abkhaz interpretation of history both as the first in a long series of public expression of Abkhaz nationalism and as one event in a litany of oppression that has become an element of faith and one of the perceived national grievances against the Georgians for their apparent role in the affair and the repressions that eventually resulted from it, grievances that ultimately contributed to the catastrophic separatist conflict in the immediate post-Soviet period decades later.

SUMMARY

This article is a micro-study of a case of peasant rebellion in a peripheral region of the early Stalin-era Soviet Union that was dominated by an ethnically based local patronage network. Using primary source materials (especially secret police reports) from the Georgian party archives and from Nestor Lakoba's personal archive, the article examines the significance of nationalism and ethnically constructed identity for peasant resistance under Stalinism within the context of imperial exceptionalism. The study explores the role of the center-periphery relationship in the attempts of the local leadership to accommodate the peasants' demands and to resolve the incident peacefully, and also the resulting trajectory of the incident in local historical memory, in order to demonstrate the ways in which the complexity and diversity of the Soviet empire presented both challenges and opportunities for both the center and the periphery. In so doing, the study draws upon and consolidates recent approaches to peasant resistance, subjective mentality, and imperial diversity under Stalinism.

by the telegram draft in Lakoba's personal archive. See HIA. N. A. Lakoba Papers. Box 2. Folder 14. P. 5. On Nestor Lakoba's use of ethnic mobilization, see Blauvelt. *Abkhazia: Patronage and Power*. P. 212.

РЕЗЮМЕ

Статья Тимоти Блаувельта представляет собой микроисследование крестьянского восстания в периферийном регионе довоенного СССР, где существовал местный специфический режим патронажа, основанный на этническом родстве. Речь идет о достаточно уникальной для раннесоветского политического контекста ситуации в Абхазии, которую автор не только реконструирует, но и анализирует в рамках подходов, характерных для изучения крестьянских движений и субъективной ментальности. Однако основной рамкой анализа выступает имперское разнообразие и проблема имперской исключительности. Автор решает вопрос о роли национализма и этнических идентичностей в крестьянском протестном движении в Абхазии в указанный период, опираясь на источники из архивов Грузии и личный архив Нестора Лакобы. Действия местного партийного руководства, стремящегося удовлетворить требования крестьян мирными средствами, часто вопреки давлению из центра, он анализирует в контексте отношений центра и периферии в Советской империи, указывая на вызовы и дополнительные возможности недетерминированного действия, которые создавала реконструированная им имперская ситуация.