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Georgian Connections of the Iranian Constitutional Revolution of 1905-1911

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The Iranian Constitutional Revolution (1905-1911) quickly transformed itself from a domestic phenomenon into a symbol of the universal struggle of all peoples for freedom and justice. Internationalists from different countries arrived in Tabriz and Rasht to give everything, even going so far as to sacrifice their lives, for the victory of constitutionalist ideas — just as if they were fighting for their own motherland and their own rights. In 1910 Tria (Vlasi Mgeladze), a well-known Georgian revolutionary and participant in the Iranian Constitutional Revolution, reported on the activities of the Caucasian internationalists operating in Iran, that the Persians, Georgians, Armenians, and Jews fought together under the same revolutionary flag (Tria 1911: 332).

The Iranian Constitutional Revolution has left its indelible trace in the history of political organizations and the development of political life of

neighboring Transcaucasia. It found genuine support in both political and popular thought in Georgia and attracted Georgian society's lively and enduring attention. The Tbilisi and Batumi Social Democrat Committees, closely following the development of the Constitutional movement in Iran, became active participants in the movement from the beginning of the resistance in Tabriz. The first large group of Georgian internationalists arrived in Tabriz soon after Tabriz became a new center of organized constitutional resistance (Chipashvili 1983: 9). Their numbers grew gradually, and they soon constituted one of the most effective and important military corps among the revolutionary forces.

The subject of my current research project is the Georgian facet of Caucasian participation in the Iranian Constitutional Revolution. Present-day researchers as well as contemporaries have recognized Caucasian ties to the Iranian

constitutional resistance and, more generally, the political influence from Transcaucasia as one of the decisive factors in the revolution's progress (Afary 1996: 237; Bayat 1991: 252; Berberian 2001: 142-143; Chaqueri 1998: 89, 103; Guidor 1998: 303-304; Khachaturian 1998: 325; Tchilinkirian 1998: 233). However, there is a lack of research on Georgian involvement in the Constitutional Revolution. My research concentrates on such aspects as the ideological and practical attitudes of the Georgian revolutionaries toward the revolutionary movement in Iran; the organization and execution of assistance to the revolutionary groups in Iran's provinces of Azerbaijan and Gilan; Georgian revolutionaries' activities in Azerbaijan, Gilan and the Tehran expedition; and the identities and roles of the members of the Georgian groups who participated in the Iranian Revolution.

This research also examines the relationship between the Georgian revolutionaries on one hand, and the Baku Social Democrat organization and the Armenian groups in Transcaucasia and Iran on the other hand. Although this problem has been studied (Aliev 1965; Arutiunian 1955; Chipashvili 1983; Ivanov 1957; Kelenjeridze 1969), some aspects, such as the level of the involvement and the activities of the Batumi committee and the extent of the connections of the Georgian groups with the Armenian groups still require more study.

This research relies extensively on Georgian sources concerning the Iranian Constitutional Revolution. Various Iranian, European, and Armenian sources, memoirs of the contemporaries, letters and articles written by public and political activists are widely used in studies of the Constitutional Revolution in Iran. The use of Georgian sources is usually limited to a report by Tria,¹ which represents a small part of the extensive

¹ Tria, also known as Vlasa Mgeladze (1868-1944), was a Georgian revolutionary who participated in both the Russian revolution of 1905-1907 and the Iranian Constitutional Revolution, and a member of the Menshevik Party. In 1918-1920, he was a member of the government of the independent Georgian Republic. In 1921, after the occupation of Georgia by the Red Army, he emigrated to France. Tria's report "The Caucasian Social-Democrats in the Persian Revolution" was attached to the report of the 8th Socialist Congress in Copenhagen at Lenin's urgent request. It was published in 1910 and 1911 in Paris, and then republished in 1925 (Pavlovich and Irandust 1925: 109-116). Vlasa Mgeladze's complete memoirs were published in Paris, France in 1974 (Mgeladze 1974, vol. 3).

materials on the Iranian Constitutional Revolution that are available in the Georgian language. These include reports, diaries, and memoirs of the Georgian internationalist revolutionaries working in the constitutional resistance. Due to active involvement of a large number of Georgians in the events in Tabriz and Rasht, these sources address both the Azerbaijan and Gilan uprisings. Some of these materials have not been compiled and published in full even in Georgian. These sources can be very useful and valuable for the study of different aspects of the development of the Constitutional Revolution in Iran. Although the Georgian sources focus primarily on Caucasian involvement in the revolution, they also provide a large volume of insiders' accounts on local revolutionary groups, such as the Tabrizi and Gilani revolutionists, Dashnaks, and others, and their relations and collaboration with each other and with the Caucasians. These sources shed light on various developments in Rasht and Tabriz. Therefore, one of the most important goals of the project is to introduce and make available the Georgian sources, such as the memoirs of Sergo Gamdlishvili² and Apolon (Misha) Japaridze,³ Georgian participants in the Rasht resistance, to the broader scholarly community through the compilation and translation of these materials into one volume.

In addition to memoirs, materials found in the Georgian print media of the time are also an important source for studying issues related to the Iranian Constitutional Revolution. By the early twentieth century, much of the Georgian press was independent. It actively promoted progressive and revolutionary ideas and closely followed every development of the Iranian constitutional movement. Newspapers, such as *Talgha*, *Isari*, *Amirani*, *Ali*, *Chveni khma*, *Chveni azri*, *Akhali skhivi*, *Momavali*, *Mnatobi*, and others, regularly reported on the events in Iran from 1906-1911. During the Revolution, many major newspapers published in Tbilisi had their own correspondents in Iran, who went through

² Sergo Gamdlishvili (1882-1910) was a Georgian revolutionary and participant in the Russian and Iranian revolutions. He was executed by the tsarist authorities after his return from Iran.

³ In his memoirs Apolon Japaridze recalls that he traveled from Tbilisi to Baku and then to Gilan with false documents under the Armenian name of Mikhail Tratiants from Bayazeti. Apparently Japaridze kept this name throughout his revolutionary activities in Iran. Japaridze's Iranian memoirs were published in Georgian as supplement to a book by G. Chipashvili (1970: 89-98).

the battles in Tabriz, Rasht, Qazvin, and later, the march on Tehran alongside the revolutionaries. They published their letters and reports with detailed and lively descriptions of the political and military developments that they witnessed.

The memoirs of Sergo Gamdlshvili (Gurji Sergo) and Apolon (Misha) Japaridze stand out among these materials due to the richness of detail they provide. The two men participated in and wrote about almost every major event from the time of Gilan uprising (February 1909) to the takeover of Tehran (July 1909). In his memoirs Japaridze recalls his arrival in Gilan in early November 1908 (Chipashvili 1970: 89-90):

The Tbilisi committee sent Sedrak Zaridze, Kako Korinteli⁴ and me to the Baku committee. Two days later we were sent to Resht aboard the steamboat Lenkoran. We had false documents stating that we were workers of the Nobel office, and had to report to Mamed Baghir, an accountant at the Nobel office. Mamed Baghir received us as office workers ... To him we handed over everything we had brought on the steamboat, including arms. Mamed Baghir and I set up an underground arsenal of bombs and arms. After this, three-to-five people arrived on every trip made by the Lenkoran.

Starting with the description of the arrival of the Caucasian and other revolutionaries in Gilan, step by step the authors describe the activities of the representatives of different nations who came to support the constitutionalist movement in Gilan. The Georgian internationalists sent by the Tbilisi organizations were decisive figures in the takeover of Rasht, and instrumental in the military operations at Qazvin, Menjil, Rudbar, Yuzbashchai, Pachinar, and Ambu. Both sources provide detailed descriptions of the attack on the governor's palace in Rasht and the participation of various groups in it (Chipashvili 1970: 93-94; *Akhali skhivi* 1910c). Although the authors focus primarily on the Caucasians' revolutionary activities in Iran, they also report on the underground activities, political orientations, and strategies of other revolutionary groups in Gilan — the local revolutionaries, the

representatives of Sattar Khan in Rasht, Sepahdar's followers, Dashnaks, Hinchakists, and others. For example, Sergo Gamdlshvili describes how Sattar Khan's committee provided 7,000 rubles to help the Gilan resistance and how Mirza Kerim Khan traveled to Baku to purchase arms with these funds (*Akhali skhivi* 1910b). Gamdlshvili and Japaridze describe also the development of political and ideological differences among these groups, which they would eventually overcome, uniting in battle for a common goal. Authors relate the united expedition on Tehran, the first meetings of the Gilanis with the Bakhtiaris, the battles in Shah Abad and Badamek, combat in Tehran and establishment of Constitutionalist control in Tehran. They draw personal and political portraits of Sepahdar, Yephrem Khan, Panov, and other personalities in the resistance whom they met and got to know in Iran. For example, Gamdlshvili describes a meeting between Sepahdar and the Georgian revolutionaries in which he participated (*Akhali skhivi* 1910c). Throughout the narrative the authors mention many Iranian, Georgian, Armenian, Azeri, Russian, German, and Jewish revolutionaries.

Although these memoirs contain a large volume of factual material, they are not a simple chronology of facts but an in-depth examination of the political, economic, and social situation in Iran. They analyze the impact of external and internal factors on the situation, and the role and mission of the various revolutionary groups inside and outside of Iran. Therefore, these memoirs are valuable material for studying the development of the political ideologies and outlooks of Georgian revolutionists of the period, insofar as the memoirs reflect the ideology of the political organizations with which the authors were associated.

The letters and memoirs of all the Georgian revolutionaries and correspondents reveal that their solidarity with the Iranian Constitutionalists and sympathy towards the Iranian people were genuine. Frequent contact between Iranians and Caucasians, a result of the high number of Iranian immigrants to Transcaucasia, and of work in Iran by Caucasian activists and correspondents, to use the words of one Georgian revolutionary, "ignited a flame of sympathies and simple human solidarity" in the Caucasians and urged them "to go to Iran on the very first request" (*Akhali skhivi* 1910a). Indeed, the Georgian groups do not seem to have ever hesitated in helping Tabriz and Rasht resistance, and they made every effort to deliver aid as promptly as possible. Soon after the first fierce skirmishes

⁴ Sedrak Zaridze and Kako Korinteli were Georgian revolutionaries from Tbilisi sent by the Tbilisi Social Democrat Committee to Baku and Rasht to coordinate the transportation of people and arms to Gilan. Both were executed by the tsarist authorities in 1910 after their return from Iran.

between the Constitutionalists and the Royalists occurred in July, 1908 in Tabriz, a large group of Georgian revolutionaries from Tbilisi was already on its way to Tabriz to respond to the Tabrizi resistance request for assistance. A Georgian internationalist wrote in his memoirs that "the plight and the devoted and selfless struggle of Tabriz to save long-suffering Iran from the clutches of the enemy" created a deep feeling of solidarity among Caucasians and "many Caucasians immediately went to Tabriz and Resht and gave up their lives" (*Akhali skhivi* 1910a). The Georgians also constituted a majority of the Caucasian revolutionaries who arrived in Rasht during November-December of the same year (*Akhali skhivi* 1910a; Chipashvili 1983: 43).

Sergo Gamdlishvili, a young Georgian revolutionary and participant in both the Russian and the Iranian revolutions, noted in his memoirs: "All the torment, suffering, and hardship that the Caucasians and among them Georgians went through in Persia will be noted and recognized by the history of the Persian Revolution, if it is ever written" (*Akhali skhivi* 1910a). This hope, expressed by the dedicated internationalist who gave up his life at the age of 28 for the revolutionary ideas, urges us to address the issue of the contribution of the Caucasians to the Constitutional movement in Iran with the deserved attention.

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Selected Papers from the 2005 CESS Conference

Instructional Language, National Identity, and Higher Education in Rural Kyrgyzstan: The Debate at At-Bashy

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National identity and national language have been critical issues in the former Soviet Central Asian states both before and after independence, and negotiating these issues has been a primary undertaking of secondary education for almost a century. Another set of school-related issues in both Soviet and now post-Soviet societies involves social mobility, and in particular, the changing relationships between secondary education and university access. Struggles over instructional language and national identity, as well as how secondary education relates to higher education and social mobility, are particularly complex matters in the Kyrgyz Republic. My colleagues and I have undertaken fieldwork in eight rural secondary schools in different parts of Kyrgyzstan, where we have discovered important complexities and contradictions embedded within local understandings of language policy and practice, and where these matters also affect understandings about higher education and university entrance and success.¹

¹ The researchers, sponsored by a John J. and Nancy Lee Roberts Foundation Fellowship, which is administered by IREX, worked with the Kyrgyzstan Teacher Excellence Award program, administered by ACCELS, in 2004-2005. All interviews at At-Bashy and Choko were conducted in April 2005, in English, Kyrgyz, and Russian. All names have been changed.

Research Design and Methods

We have focused upon how schools and those whose work and study there interpret and negotiate school and community life on a daily basis, and have used case study research methods. These include document collection, oral histories and ethnographic interviews (Merriam 1998; Spradley 1979). In this work we have concentrated on how each school has maintained its coherence and focus and even become stronger (in some cases) over the past decades, as opposed to looking only for weaknesses and problems that international assessments of Kyrgyz education typically dwell upon.

Because this was a qualitative study, we had very few hypotheses to frame our work. For example, we did not set out to specifically investigate issues in the language of instruction or national language matters in our schools. Nor were we specifically interested in connections between the universities in Kyrgyzstan and secondary education. But each of these themes and concerns emerged in virtually every school we studied between 2004 and 2005. Our forthcoming book discusses at some length these matters, as well as a host of other important social and educational themes (DeYoung, Reeves and Valyayeva 2006). In this article we present just a few narratives concerning interpretations of national language issues and their perceived relevance to learning and university