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School History Textbooks and Nationalisms
in Central Asia and the Caucasus.

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Summary:

In the new nationalizing states, national historiography tries to play an instrumental role, resolving the task of consolidation of society and encouraging it toward successful nation-building. The national myth consists of three components. First, memories of the recent past engender victimization, which is utilized to legitimize the gain of independence and to provoke sympathy from the world community. Second, a key place in the national myth is occupied by the image of the great ancestors, which is supposed to charge society with positive energy. Third, such a myth, as a rule, cannot get by without the image of a great enemy. The author illustrates how these three components were constructed in various regions of the South Caucasus and Central Asia at various historical periods and what place they occupy in local school textbooks. Pursuing their own political interests, nationalist versions of history clash with each other and are capable of creating a "scientific" basis for ethnic conflicts. The author proposes approaches to enable the avoidance of such a "war for memory".

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Usually, in speaking about the negative aspects of the school teaching of history, teachers and instructors in an educational system as well as researchers concentrate their attention on "the language of the enemy," that is, on those lexical phrases or hidden meanings which create a negative image of the Other, demonizing him and turning him into an enemy. Such an approach makes great sense, of course. But in my view, it is particularly evasive and circumvents more fundamental issues. What is a school history course? What are its basic foundations, and what purpose does it pursue? And how much does this goal combine with the idea of tolerance? If the national idea is placed at the foundation, and the purpose is considered to be the development and strengthening of ethnic self-awareness, can the opposition of oneself to the Other be avoided? And should this Other necessarily be imbued with negative traits?

As one author noted 40 years ago, in a century of nationalism, history cannot help but be nationalistic.[1] This was said regarding unsuccessful attempts to write a single non-contradictory textbook on the history of Europe. Somewhat later, the attempts of Soviet scholars to write unified textbooks on the history of the Transcaucasus and then Central Asia ended in complete failure. It turned out that each national republic had its own vision of regional history, cardinally differing from analogous perceptions of its neighbors. To be sure, today, when on the one hand, globalization smoothes harsh cultural barriers, and on the other hand, the European Union demonstrates that even state borders can be elastic, the attitude toward national history changes.

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1   David Thomson, «Must History Stay Nationalistic? The Prison of Closed Intellectual Frontiers,» in: *Encounter* 30, no. 6 (1968): 22-28.

Today, one of the new popular trends of historical science in the West is the deconstruction of national history, and in the European Union textbooks are being written based on the ideology of cosmopolitanism. At the same time, directly counter to this tendency, the end of the 20th century is marked by a new wave of establishment of national states which have demanded their own national history. Therefore the "end of history," about which Francis Fukayama wrote, did not happen. Instead, we observe a new round of inter-ethnic strife and conflicts.

It is illustrative that the attempt by Georgian academics, supported by the Council of Europe initiated in 1997within the framework of the Tbilisi Initiative, to create a new universal version of history of the Caucasus met the same sad fate that its Soviet predecessors had.

For future discussion, we cannot get by without the concept of "nation". Today, this is used in two meanings. Originally "nation" was understood to mean a community of citizens of a state, in whose name political power was exercised. The Great French Revolution brought us this meaning of nation, and international legal documents understand nation in this way. Meanwhile, since the late 19th century, "nation" began to be understood also in the ethnic sense, limited by the civic community of people who belong to a given, specific ethnos. If in the first sense, the nation had an open, inclusive nature, in the second, it is closed and exclusive. Therefore much depends on the criteria which define ethnic community, and language, culture and even biological kinship can serve as these (if the ethnic affiliation is defined by parents, i.e. by blood). Accordingly, the first difficulty we encounter consists of the fact that in different ethno-social milieus, ethnicity can be defined in various ways and depend on various criteria. After all, it is precisely how people understand and describe their community that largely determines how they perceive their history.

Moreover, the legitimization of an ethno-national state requires proof of the long connection of ethnic predecessors to its territory. Descendents of nomads find it much harder to rely on such an argument than the descendent of farmers. In fact, the traces of activity of farmers is easier to discover, and their cultural achievements (architecture, art, crafts, artifacts of literature) is far more expressive. In addition, their cultural relicts mark a strictly limited territory, which is considered by right to belong to their descendents and legitimizes the "national state". Therefore, the farming ancestors are traditionally valued more than nomadic ancestors. That is why some descendants of nomads (Turkmens, Azerbaijani, Turks) display a tendency to emphasize their connection with those ancestors that were settled farmers and minimize the role of nomadic ancestors.

The Soviet Union was based on the principle of ethno-federalism, virtually or nominally placing in a privileged position the so-called "titular peoples," in whose name power was exercised in the Union republics. At the same time, the opportunities for ethno-nationalism were substantially limited by hash control on the part of the Communist Party with its ideology of internationalism. And those campaigns that from time to time were organized against "nationalism" were aimed precisely against ethno-nationalism. The fall of the Communist government and the collapse of the USSR led to the appearance of new states which inherited from the Soviet state the principle of ethno-nationalism. In other words, now the government in them began to speak on behalf of the dominant ethnos, and immediately arose the problem of ethnic minorities, which to one extent or another felt discrimination against them. This in fact created the grounds for what today are called ethnic conflicts. And hence the second complexity: the face of official story is determined by the interests of those possessing power, that is, those who speak on behalf of the dominant majority (the "titular nation"), in whose name history is written. Ethnic conflict, as a rule, seeks justification in

ideology demanding the restoration of justice. And from this comes the third difficulty: the historical narrative is not neutral regarding current politics; on the contrary, politics rely on a certain image of history which requires satisfying urgent political interests, and therefore the constant actualization of history occurs. Accordingly, the warring sides design their own conceptions of history, differing from one another, and it leads to what today is called "history wars" or "wars for memory"[2].

Therefore, in this case, the role that historical narrative can play in this must interest us, and broader, the "national myth". The national myth is a certain integral conception of a nation, its composition, its place in the world, its history and its future, including the formulation of the idea of the purpose of its existence. A huge role in this is played by the conception of national history. However, it hardly amounts to a historical narrative. It is a question of a very broad range of civic and cultural phenomena, from which is formulated what is called social memory.[3]

Cinematic productions, art works, paintings, music, sculpture, architecture and also monuments and memorial plaques are included in this. Place names also play an important role. All of this is memory, fixed in culture relicts and objects.

But there is another form of memory which is manifested in periodic mass actions. These are annual holidays, the celebration of anniversaries of famous people and significant historical events, and also regularly repeating rituals, both religious and secular. All of this is able to reinforce in people's memories in a certain way a composite picture of the past, and to define its key moments. Today, this is directed not only at the immediate participants of events and rituals, but to a far more mass audience, which has received the news of the event from mass media, and in particular, via television or the Internet. No wonder it is said that the event acquires a social significant only when it is broadcast over media.

Finally, it is impossible to forget the role of museums and their exhibitions which enhance the social memory with new dimensions and interpretations. Consequently, the image of history is not limited to historic texts but is composed on the basis of the most diverse sources. And this comprises the fourth complexity. All of this would have been impossible, however, without scientifically-formulated historic constructions, created by scholars and placed at the foundation of scientific literature. The purpose of a school is not preparation of specialist scientists, but the education of citizens of a state, that is, on the one hand, loyal to the government, and on the other, sensing their accountability before society. Not a single course of history, no matter how voluminous it may be can accommodate all the available facts. Moreover, a school textbook of history modest in size could not do this. Such a textbook proposes a definitive outline of a historic path, approved by the state and bound to serve as its legitimation. Consequently, the authors of such a textbook must, first of all, carefully selects facts, and secondly, interpret them in a particular fashion, so that they create a coherent picture of historic development and serve the given state and society.

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2   Today, such "history wars" are being waged in various places on the planet, where the minorities resort to historical arguments in the struggle against discrimination. See for example, on Canada: Arthur J. Ray, *I Have Lived Here Since the World Began,* Toronto: Key Porter Books, 2005, 360-389.

3   Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989; Elizabeth Tonkin et al., eds., *History and Ethnicity*, London: Routledge, 1989; Elizabeth Tonkin, *Narrating Our Pasts. The Social Construction of Oral History*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992; John R. Gillis, ed., *Commemorations. The Politics of National Identity*, Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1994; Jacob J. Climo and Maria G. Cattell, eds., *Social Memory and History. Anthropological Perspectives*. Walnut Creek: Altamira Press, 2002.

This is how the constructive activity of the state is manifested, which is interested in a certain vision of history. Depending on the political system of the state, one could influence the construction of the picture of the past in various ways through a system of universal education and educational standards, the practice of selection and preservation of information, the approval and financing of state holidays, the organization of particular rituals, the removal from the pedestal of some statues and the creation of memorial complexes, the state support of the activity of certain museums. Often it is the state that becomes concerned about establishing a standard list of significant historic personalities. Some of them are heroes and the memory of them requires immortalization; others are scoundrels and their names either have to be excised from the book of memory, or, on the contrary, preserved for the edification of descendants as a negative example. In the USSR, such a list was developed in the second half of the 1930s, and survived practically in unchanged form until the collapse of the Soviet Union. But in the new post-Soviet states, it was subject to revision, and in some places this process is continuing to this day. In fact, sometimes the former "scoundrels" are becoming "heroes" or vice-versa. But sometimes we can observe a desire to preserve both, as a result of which in some cities memorials to sworn enemies appear, although they are placed in different districts.

In Russia, the rejection of the former Soviet identity forces some authors of school books to turn Soviet soldiers in the era of World War II into ethnic Russians, and that leads to a dangerous distortion of the picture of the participation of Soviet people in the war on the Nazi aggression. The glorification of collaborationists, accepted in several post-Soviet states, has led to the same regrettable result.

In some eras, certain historical fact or subjects are consigned to oblivion, but others return once again from non-existence and become even crucial in the context of a new view on history. Therefore, it is essential to note how the selection of significant events are made, and what is considered an event, and what not. And how precisely the selected event is interpreted. Take, for example, the seizure of Geok-tepe in 1881; in the Russian Empire, this was seen as a triumph of Russian imperial might, the culmination of the building of an empire, and Dostoevsky extolled this. During the Soviet era, this event was suppressed. Today, for Turkmens, this is a Day of Memory, a symbol of the selfless devotion to one's people (although there was no single people at that time, there were only various tribes) and an uncompromising resistance of the Turkmen tribes to external expansion. After all, the defenders of Geok-tepe perished, but did not surrender. Thus, the physical defeat was converted into a moral victory.

For the USSR, the most important holiday was November 7, a symbol of liberation of the workers from oppression, a symbol of the emancipations of the nationalities. But in contemporary Russia, it was replaced by November 4, in memory of the repulsion of the "foreign intervention" of 1612 (although these events could just as well be interpreted as a dynastic struggle for the throne). Thus, the social-class approach was replaced by a nationalist one, even with an obvious portion of chauvinism, enabling radicals to organize on that day xenophobic "Russian marches".

Thus, radical political change entails a re-evaluation and re-writing of history.[4] Hence the fifth complication, forcing us to reject any possibility of creation of some absolute, objective historical narrative, adequate for all times.

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4 Carl N. Degler, «Why Historians Change Their Minds,» in: *Pacific Historical Review* 45, no. 2 (1976): 167-184.

Besides the official view on the past, there is private memory (diaries, letters, photo and movie materials, items inherited from ancestors), and also oral family history, creating certain discomforts and competition to it. Moreover, there is also the alternative past of the minorities (ethnic minorities, slaves, women, workers, regional and local groups, religious minorities, gays and lesbians, various forms of dissidents). These histories frequently clash, since, first completely different events seem significant to them, and second, one and the same events and one and the same historical figures can be interpreted and evaluated completely differently.

Modern states with rare exceptions are notable for their cultural heterogeneity. If this is taken into account in domestic policy, then this sometimes leads to the formation of an ethno-federative state construction, which we know from the example of the USSR. If such a state collapses, then several former ethnic minorities become the dominating majority in the new states. Yet the desired cultural homogeneity does not come about. Secondly, if it is a question of a large people (for example, Russians), settled throughout a huge territory, the cultural and dialectical variation are inevitable (hence in a number of cases the striving to depict oneself as a special ethnos like the Cossacks and the Pomors in modern Russia). Secondly, previous ethnic minorities are still preserved, especially if discrimination exists. Finally, thirdly, globalization provokes not only extensive communication across state borders but also massive migration which leads to the appearance of new ethnic minorities. To this is added the specific situation of post-Soviet communities which inherited from the USSR politicized ethnicity, which feeds ethnic nationalism and cultivates in the titular peoples hegemonic sentiments. And in the presence of a modern education system and wide access to modern scientific technologies this all leads to the appearance of alternative versions of history, inevitably entering into tense dialogue with each other which leads to symbolic rivalry. Consequently, in contemporary society, the existence of some unified, consistent form of history is not possible. Such a form exists only in dialogue and is constantly debated. Moreover, it is not a question of open falsifications, which also take place. It is about how various groups may build their identity in entirely different ways, and this influences the form of history. That accounts for the sixth complexity.

What, then, is peculiar to perceptions of former or existing ethnic minorities about their history? Recent history is interpreted by them as a history of oppression and discrimination under condition of an authority alien to them. Therefore, one of the peculiarities of such a version of history is victimization, which serves to justify the gain of independence and to legitimize the current state in the eyes of the world community. Victimization, however, worsens the moral state of the society, creating a sense of apathy and pessimism. This does not enable the society to successfully resolve complex tasks in building a new state. Social mobilization requires positive examples, which is how the second strategy is determined, related to searches for glorious ancestors in the pre-colonial past. Finally, the third strategy is aimed at creating the image of an allegedly eternal enemy, constantly intriguing against the people. Ideologues reproach this enemy for encroaching on the identity of the ethnic group and slowing its development or even dreaming of its destruction.

In fact, the image of the enemy created by the ethnic group reinforces it and leads to its internal consolidation. In other words, in this context the image of the enemy plays an important instrumental role.

For example, for Armenian, victimization is expressed in the memory of the genocide of 1915, which in turn caused sorrowful suffering regarding the loss of statehood and the long existence in dispersion. On the other hand, the time of Tigran the Great (95-55 B.C.) seems like a

Golden Age, the memory of which Armenians preserve far better than later Armenian states. And Turks serve as the image of the enemy, who have supposedly interfered with the survival of the Armenian people for ages. In an analogous way, Tajiks connect their Golden Age with the era of the Samanids. Their victimization is related to the image of the fall of the medieval state, and also the loss of the most important historical regions in the period of the formation of the Tajik SSR at the end of the 1920s. In turn, the enemy is also associated with Turks, who had put an end to the local medieval states and are claiming today the ancient or the medieval Iranian legacy.

For its part, Azerbaijan associates the Golden Age with the image of the medieval principalities, particularly the state of Sefevids (1502-1736). For several Soviet decades, the main enemy there was considered the Iranians, who conducted the Iranization of Southern Azerbaijan. Beginning in the late 1980s, however, people there have also believed in a worldwide Armenian conspiracy. And the defeat during the course of the Karabakh conflict (1988-1994) forced Azerbaijanis to perceive themselves as victims, depicting the story as if they had been oppressed by the Armenians for centuries: Heydar Aliev's decree "On the Genocide of the Azerbaijanis," issued March 26, 1998, spoke of the "two-century policy of genocide".

In Georgia, the image of the Golden Age is firmly fixed to the era of David the Builder and Czarina Tamara (XII-early XIII centuries). Recent times are shown as "dark ages," however a clear image of an enemy in the Georgian public consciousness was absent until recently except for a brief period of the second half of the 1940s, when the Turkish had a claim to this place. And only after the fall of the USSR, the authorities of independent Georgia began to cultivate the image of the hated "Northern neighbor." In Abkhazia, victimization is tied to the events of the Soviet era, with a reduction of the political status of the republic during the 1920s and 1930s and with the Georgification between 1937 and 1953. The Golden Age is discovered in the early medieval period, in particular in the form of the flourishing of an early medieval Abkhazian kingdom (7th through 10th centuries). And Georgians are the enemies, since they constantly encroach on Abkhazian identity, Abkhazian territory and the political rights of Abkhazians. Finally, in Southern Ossetia, victimization refers to two facts: the bloody suppression of the Ossetian uprising in democratic Georgia in 1920 and the Georgification in 1938-1953.

For peoples whose ancestors were nomads, victimization is related to the Eurocentric historiography, which for a long time depicted them as "barbarians" and destroyers of what was created by others. Their own creative element was denied, and their positive contribution to world history was not acknowledged.

Moreover, recent tragic events (the Armenian massacre in Sumgait in February of 1988, the Karabakh conflict, the Abkhazian-Georgian war of 1992-1993, attempts at a Georgian invasion of Southern Ossetia in late 1991-early 1992 and in 2008), first, are interpreted in a context of an image of victimization that has already formed, and second, only reinforces this image and lends it perennial meaning. A key term of contemporary victimization is "genocide," which serves to convince world public opinion that the military attack has as its purpose not the resolution of actual territorial and political problems, but the complete annihilation of a people. In other words, the recent events are extracted out of a historical context and become an inevitable link to an endless chain of historical events provoking the cunning and brutal actions of a historical enemy. Therefore, in Chechnya, even recently people have spoken of the uninterrupted 400 year war with Russia; in Azerbaijan, they announce "the

200-year genocide" by the Armenians, and, for example, in Guatemala, the Maya Indians cultivate a perception of a 200 year war with intruders. Moreover, modern bloody clashes lead to an actualization of history (historicism) and force it to be reviewed, demonizing its current enemy and turning it into an eternal enemy.

All of this leads to a substantial simplification of history. First, after all, the diverse factors operating in it are put into brackets (economic, social, political and such), the complexity of the social organization and socio-political heterogeneity of society; and secondly periods of calm, shared life with neighbors with different cultures, are ignored. Meanwhile, those neighbors are depicted as a well integrated socio-cultural organism, supposedly imbued with a united will. Thus, an ethno-racial approach to history emerges, developed by some European authors (Ludvig Gumplowicz and others) in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, which became one of the incentives for the genocide perpetrated later by the German Nazis. An example of such an approach is the recent book by the leading Ossetian historian M. Bliev on the history of Southern Ossetia, demonizing Georgians and imbuing them with an ineradicable wish to annihilate Ossetians (with this purpose, even Ossetian princes turn into "Georgians")[5]. In Armenia, people recall the "Aryan race," in Azerbaijan, they talk about the "Turkish race," in Ossetia they glorify the "Indo-European race" and in the school textbook a paragraph has even appeared about "the Aryan worldview," and in Georgia, they insist on the unusual persistence of "Georgian blood." In Tajikistan, Tajiks and Uzbeks are sometimes portrayed as various "incompatible races".

Usually, the rewriting of history goes along two lines. First, it includes a re-evaluation of the image of remote (primeval) ancestors, and second, forces one to provide a new interpretation of events of the recent past and judge the actions of their participants accordingly. The first strategy is a more complicated case, since it is related to identity and therefore creates more emotionally-filled collisions. In the modern world, ethnicity increasingly acquires a symbolic nature: representatives of ethnic minorities, fully integrated into a society and shifted to the language of the dominant population, often preserve a memory of their ethnic ancestors. This becomes their own political resource, enabling them to fight against discrimination. And it is connected to a historical image: we are different, because we have a different story, and our ancestors followed a different historic path. In that context, the image of the ancestors takes on important value inflation and actualizes. That is why I am emphasizing here precisely the images of remote ancestors.

The image of the ancestors, constructed by local scholars, is closely connected with current politics and reacts intuitively to its changes.[6] In 1918-1920, Armenian authors, in order to oppose the pan-Turkic project, tried hard to divorce their ancestors from the Caucasus. At that time, the migration theory reigned. Such sentiments were so much preserved in the Armenian diaspora that they declined to participate in common Caucasian unification projects. Then in the 1940s, in order to distance themselves from Nazi sentiments, Armenian authors made their ancestors aboriginals and tried sometimes to separate them from the Indo-European community. Later the ancestors were returned to the fold of the latter, but the principle of aboriginality prevailed, and the ancestral home was placed in the Armenian plateau. As a

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5   Mark Bliyevm, *Yuzhnaya Osetiya v kolliziyakh rossiysko-gruzinskikh otnosheniy оллизиях российско-грузинских отношений*, Moscow, Evropa, 2006.

6   For more detail see Victor. A. Shnirelman, *Voyny pamyati: mify, identichnost' i politika v Zakavkazye*, Moscow, Akademkniga, 2003; Osaka: National Museum of Ethnology, 2001 (Senri Ethnological Studies, vol. 57); idem, «Politics of Ethnogenesis in the USSR and After,» in: *Bulletin of the National Museum of Ethnology*, 30, no. 1 (2005): 93-119.

result, the nationalization of the kingdom of Urartu took place. If at the beginning, it was said there was infiltration of the ancestors of the Armenians in Urartu, and the gradual Armenization of its population, then later it would be already unconditionally declared to be Armenian.

All of this found reflection in the textbooks, the content of which for the last 50 or 60 years gradually changed. If initially the textbooks spoke of the arrival of the ancestors of Armenians from the West and the assimilation by them of local residents, then later it was a question of two different categories of ancestors -- the newly-arrived and local Anatolians, until finally, in the 1960s, Armenians were represented as the original inhabitants of the Armenian plateau. If in the first textbooks (1940s) Armenian authors were prepared to share with Georgians the Urartu legacy, then in time (after the 1960s), they began to depict their ancestors as the only successors to Urartu. In time, school books made a greater emphasis on the ancient nature of the Armenian people, "one of the most ancient peoples in the world"; its formation was connected to the Armenian plateau, an in fact the aboriginal model gained wider recognition; a feverish search was conducted to find more and more ancient "Armenian" state formations; the penetration of the Armenian population into the Arax Valley and the Ararat Valley were set back in time; and there was writing about the rapid and successful expansion of the Armenian language and its complete victory over the Armenian plateau in the 3rd through 1st centuries B.C. After this time, the entire local population was depicted as Armenians; there was, as a rule, no longer any question about any other group, of immigrants (Jews, Syrians) or aboriginals (Albanians). In other words, the textbooks purposefully imposed on the students an identity, based above all on language and territory, although the key role in Armenian identity for centuries was played by religion (Gregorian Christianity, or Monophysiticism). This is in fact what enabled the Armenianization of the Albanian Christians.

No matter how the Armenian authors perceive their origins, they have always tied Armenian identity above all to the Armenian language and literature. But for Azerbaijanis, language is far from primary. After all, over the centuries, the composition of the Azerbaijani population changed a number of times, and people crossed over from one language to another. Moreover, the very concept "Azerbaijan" was consolidated into modern Azerbaijan only after 1917. This is what it made possible the relatively frequent change of perception of ancestors: in the last 100 years, it changed five times. One of the first Azerbaijani politicians, Mamed Rasul-zade, categorically insisted in the 1920s on the Turkish origins of Azerbaijanis and ascribed a great role to the medieval migrations of the nomads, in particular, the Seldjuks -- all of this led to a mixing of the population and its move to the Turkish language. Then on the contrary, the first Azerbaijani Marxist authors completely rejected the role of migration and tried to prove that the Azerbaijani community was formed in an autochthonic manner from the coming together and mixing of Kurd, Turks and Armenians. In the 1940s, Azerbaijani authors tried in every way to distance themselves from Turkish kinship and searched for ancestors among the ancient Medians, who spoke one of the Iranian languages. In the 1960s and 1970s, there was a conception that enjoyed great popularity in academic research, whereby the ancestors came from ancient Caucasian Albania, whose population spoke one of the Northern Caucasian languages, but which in time moved to the Turkish language, preserving nevertheless their own settled farming culture. Then this theory was subjected to strong pressure from revisionists, who made every effort to try to Turkify the ancient population of Caucasian Albania, and thus rejecting the notion of a language replacement.

No matter how Soviet theories regarded the origins of the Azerbaijanis to the language factor, they all inevitably held to the principle of autochthonism, making a local settled population the

basis for Azerbaijani ethnogenesis and rejecting their nomadic ancestors in every way. All of this found reflection in the textbooks on the history of Azerbaijan which came out in the late 1930s. And from the late 1960s, a new tendency could be found in several textbooks which strove to backdate the Turkish language on the territory of historic Azerbaijan and search on its territory for earlier states. Even so, the ethnocultural succession was inevitably linked to the settled population, and the Turkish nomads gained a negative evaluation as tribes of barbarians, bringing only destruction and oppression.

Thus, if for Armenians language identity is characteristic, then for Azerbaijanis, it is territorial and regional. That is what forced Azerbaijani authors to ascribe an Azerbaijani identity to all historical figures creating on the land of Azerbaijan, which provoked surprise and dislike from Armenians, for whom identity was based on other foundations. Hence there were endless arguments about the ethnic identity of various historical figures of the medieval era. Thus, if Azerbaijani authors love to emphasize that for the last 2,000 years, Armenia did not have statehood, in particular in the South Caucasus, then Armenian authors note in reply that until the beginning of the 20th century, Azerbaijanis did not exist at all as a people. As a result, both make every effort to refute such charges concerning national vanity. Moreover, Armenian authors accuse the Turks of the "principle of assimilation" of a foreign population, however they themselves strive to nationalize the state of Urartu, in order to prove that the empire of Tigran the Great was not something accidental in their history.

But the chief disagreement concerns the interpretation of the history of Nagorno-Karabakh. In the early years of the Karabakh conflict its sources and reasons were related both by the Azerbaijani and the Armenians mainly to the events of the recent past: Azerbaijanis accused the Armenians of attempts to illegally appropriate their lands, and the Armenians relegated the onset of the conflict to 1921, when as a result of a complex political game, Nagorno Karabakh wound up within Azerbaijan. Depending on their own interpretation of the events, the Armenians discussed the Karabkh problem in terms of a "liberation struggle" or a "struggle for existence," and the Azerbaijanis, "aggression and occupation." Parallel to this, intellectuals on both sides made attempts to mobilize deeper layer of historical memory.

In the deep historical perspective, the problem of Karabakh was part of a wider issue about Caucasian Albania. For the last half a century, the disputes concern almost all the issues of its history: its geographic borders, political status and its change in time, the date when it accepted Christianity and its special features, its affiliations (Armenian or Albanian) to Christian cathedrals, the presence of a literary tradition, and precisely which one, and mainly, its ethnic identity, including the identity of prominent historical figures of the medieval era. In fact, both sides discussed the issue of "national self-consciousness" although right up through the 19th century, one can hardly speak of any "national self-consciousness"; one could only speak of a religious (church) affiliation. It was the latter that was the chief form of self-consciousness in the medieval era (the Albanian church survived until 1836).

Beginning with the late Soviet decades, in Azerbaijan, any memory of the role of Armenians in local history was deliberately suppressed. For example, in guidebooks of historical monuments and culture of Azerbaijan, the Christian heritage, with rare exceptions, is not mentioned, and in the 1980s even Caucasian Albania disappeared from them. Moreover, in independent Azerbaijan, the memory of the Armenian population was physically destroyed, as had happened with a unique medieval cemetery in Old Djuga in Nakhichevan. But this "war of the cemeteries" or the "headstone war," as one observer called it[7], began in the 1970s and 1980s,

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7   Ivanidze, Va, *"Karabakh, bol' moya…"*, Ogonyok 4 (1990): 26-29

that is, before the onset of military actions in Karabakh, and occurred equally in both Azerbaijan and in Armenia. Essentially, the local versions of history became one of the most important elements of the ideological indoctrination of the population, in preparation for the Karabakh conflict.

This trend reached its culmination in the late 1990s, when in Baku a decree was published, "On the Genocide of the Azerbaijani People," after which President Heydar Aliyev raised the question of the return of "the historical lands of Azerbaijan" and, following several revisionists, called Armenia "Western Azerbaijan." Apparently this political course has not changed in Azerbaijan to this day. In Armenia, there are also radical historians, calling Azerbaijan "Eastern Armenia," but they do not gain support from the local government and do not have authority in the scholarly community. Nevertheless, professional historians from both sides take part in the struggle for the long-sought image of Caucasian Albania.

The Abkhazian-Georgian historical rivalry touches even such issues as the origin of local peoples and the establishment of their ancient ancestors, the formation of ancient statehood and the identity of the first rulers, the ethnic composition of the early states, the degree of their consolidation and length of their existence, the nature of connections and relationships between Georgian and Abkhazian statehood, the special features of their culture and language. In doing so, interpreting in their own way the same historic data, both sides resolve these issues in completely opposite ways. If the Abkhazians perceive their ancestors as the aboriginals of the Eastern Pontus, then the Georgian historians until recently portrayed them as newcomers from the north, as if by the early 2nd century AD (according to G. Melikishvili) or in the 17th century (according to P. Ingorovka). Turning to the ancient layers of history of the South-East Pontus, Georgian authors describe the local tribes as the ancestors of the Georgians, and the Abkhazian authors – as the ancestors of the Abkhazians. One of the key problems related to the Abkhazian kingdom (8th - 10th centuries) was this: if the Abkhazians glorify it as the highest political achievement of their ancestors, then the Georgians populate it with Georgians, calling it an "authentic Georgian kingdom" and connecting it to the start of a deliberate formation of a "national Georgian statehood." Georgian authors ascribe to the creativity of their ancestors nearly all the antiquities of Abkhazia, starting from the dolmens of the Black Sea coast to the early Christian cathedrals. Of course, the Colchis kingdom is included in the earliest political formation in the Eastern Pontus. And the Abkhazian authors do everything possible to reduce the role of Georgian culture and statehood in Abkhazia. In the 1990s, history was taught in Georgian schools taking into account the version of P. Ingoroka. But the Abkhazians see in this version a malicious distortion of historical truth.

In the last decades of the 20th century, it was customary in Georgian historiography to depict Ossetians as bloody barbarians, organizing raids on peaceful Georgian settlements and unlawfully laying claim to ancient Georgian lands. This tendency was particularly marked in the late 1980s and early 1990s.[8]

A textbook of 1962 placed their settlement in the mountains of Northern Georgian in the 13th century, but then Georgian authors began to date this to the 14th and 15th centuries or even later. For their part, emphasizing their cultural and linguistic heritage with the Alans, and through them with even earlier Iranian-language nomads, the Ossetians tried to prove that their ancestors already lived in these areas from the start of the early middle ages. And they dated their arrival there in the early Iron Age or even the Bronze Age. If the Georgian authors saw

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8   For more detail see V.A. Shnirelman *Voyny pamyati: mify, identichnost' I politika v Zakavkazye*, Moscow, Akademkniga, 2003, 473-475.

these Iranian nomadic newcomers as vandals and bandits, the Ossetians viewed them as Kulturträger. The dispute concerns both the issue of identity of the Dvals, an ancient original local population. Ossetians want to see them as Iranians, and Georgians as Georgians, although more likely they were northern Caucasians, and possibly Vainakhs. All of these disagreements have found a place in school textbooks.

In Central Asia, a war for ancient ancestors has long been observer, conceived as local nomads of the early Iron Age (Sakae, Massagets, and others). This struggle increased particularly after independence was obtained and the formation of local independent states.[9] If the Tajiks see their ancestors in these nomads, then the Kazakhs, Uzbeks and Turkmens see theirs. Moreover, the Tajiks rely on the linguistic factor and point to the Iranian language of the ancient local population. For their part, the Kazakhs, Uzbeks and Turkmens sometimes emphasize the biological inheritance (by physical appearance or "blood") and sometimes even try to prove that there were Turkic-speakers among the ancient nomads. According to a more radical version, the ancient nomads were largely or completely Turkic-speakers. In any case, they are presented in the local textbooks as indisputably ancestors, regardless of whether they are Aryans or Turks. The Kazakhs even erected in Almaty, in honor of the gaining of independence, a 30-meter column which is crowned by a representation of a Sakae warrior. This underscores the role of the Sakae, who laid the basis for the glorious history, which led Kazakhs to the construction of their own independent state, and today this fact is noted in the school textbook.

In turn, in Tajikistan in 2006, a celebration was organized called the "Year of Aryan Civilization," which once again emphasized the "Aryan foundation" of the Tajik people. And in the local school textbooks, the history of the Tajiks begins with materials about the ancient "Aryans," playing the role of "cultural ancestors".

In other words, for their legitimization, modern nationalizing states try in every way to employ that image of ancient ancestors. Such ancestors, first of all, must be necessarily autochthonic, which enables them to claim a certain territory. Second, they must be as ancient as possible, which makes such a territory an indisputable historical inheritance of the titular nation. Thirdly, the creation of ancient statehood must be ascribed to them, which justifies the construction of the modern independent state. Consequently, ethnic nationalism experiences an inescapable need for an image of such type of ancient ancestors.

The nature of the available historical data, however, fails to meet the demands of the nationalist project.[10] For the ancient past, as a rule, is poorly covered by the sources. Moreover, there was nothing there like a modern nation or peoples or ethnoses. On the other hand, there were regional groups or tribes with completely different territorial borders, and actually the borders were highly flexible and changed from time to time. This was particularly true of the nomadic pastoralists, whose history constantly related to migrations and recombination of the social organization. Completely different states and political configurations are found in the past disconnected with modern statehood. Sometimes enthusiasts find something completely different from what they expected, for example, the dominance of the Slavic language and Orthodoxy in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania or the dominance of Iranian languages among the nomads of the early Iron Age in Central Asia, or the prevalence of ancient North Caucasian

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9 For more detail see Victor A. Shnirelman, «Aryans or Proto-Turks? Contested Ancestors in Contemporary Central Asia,» in: *Nationalities Papers* 37, no. 5 (2009): 557-587.

10 For a popular discussion of this problem see G.A. Dubovis, *Natsii bez durakov: istoriya Ukrainy i yee sosedey*, Kharkov, Folio, 2009.

(Udi) language in Caucasian Albania or the dissemination of the Greek language in the Eastern Pontus in the Byzantine era.

The medieval Georgian kingdom has fallen apart in the mid-fifteenth century, and its separate parts were under the control of Persia and the Ottoman Empire. And only in the 19th century in the Russian Empire its former lands were once again consolidated. But the tsar of Eastern Georgia even in the 18th century went on crowning himself "tsar of the tsars of the Abkhaz, Kartvels, Kakhetians and Armenians". In other words, the historical reality enters into clash with the dynastic claims, which in turn opens up the possibility for diverse interpretations of history. The modern nationalist project in the new states of the CIS (with the exception of Russia) requires a sharp break with the Russian and Soviet legacy precisely because this legacy is alive both in ideology as well as in the practice of these states.

In terms of institutions, the project of modern post-Soviet began to develop only in the 19th century within imperial Russia, and finally their territorial borders and political structure were formed in the Soviet era. And it is not an accident that the American historian Ronald Suny aptly named the USSR "an incubator of nations."[11].
Thus, the consequences of Russian colonization and the establishment of the power of the Bolsheviks were ambivalent. As the historical experience of colonial empires demonstrates, while stimulating the modernizing processes in the colonies, they themselves forged the foundations of their collapse. To rephrase the famous Marxist formula, we can say that they raised their own grave-diggers. After all, for the convenience of exploiting the colonies and for a more effective use of their resources, they created a local government apparatus, stimulating the development of local industry, developed the health and education system and raised the local educated intelligentsia. This occurred in the USSR as well, and therefore one has to avoid one-dimensional evaluation of the so-called Soviet nationalities policy.

Moreover, upon thorough study, no "pure" culture or "pure" ethnic history is found. In the Soviet era, historians were guided by the Marxist principles that [common] people are the creators of history. In fact, people were indiscriminately identified with the nation. And the Soviet version of history turns out to be nationalistic as well, although with a Marxist flavor, despite the slogan accepted regarding the national cultures, "National in form, international in content." Nevertheless, such an approach is vulnerable in two respects. First, it elegantly skirts the question of which particular history is being referred to. History, after all, can be political, social, cultural, ethnic, gender and so on. Accordingly, the historian can deal with various subjects that make history. And second, the formula avoided any clear definition of "people," under which the laboring masses were meant. Combining Marxist with nationalism, Soviet textbooks assumed that in terms of culture nobility and the commoners were the same people, despite social and class barriers.

Modern nations began to emerge only at the end of the 18th century, however. Before that, there were no nations. Moreover, if ethnicity was determined by language and culture, then in that case it emerged relatively recently. This is because first, the medieval aristocracy tried to maintain a distance between itself and the commoners and often not only did not associate herself with the "people," but tried all the best to erect insurmountable cultural barriers between her and them. This was a question not only of everyday life and social sub-cultures but even of the language of communication. The cases are well known of how the nobility would deliberately use different language. Thus, in Western Europe, the feudals communicated

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11 Ronald G. Suny, *The Revenge of the Past: Nationalism, Revolution, and the Collapse of the Soviet Union*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993.

in Latin for centuries. In the Hellenic states of Asia Minor and in the zone of Byzantine influence, the aristocracy used the Greek language, and in the zone of Iranian influence, spoke Aramaic. Thus, in Abkhazia before the end of the 10th century, the language of religion and business correspondence was Greek, and only later was it squeezed out by Georgian. On the territory of medieval Azerbaijan, the everyday language was Turkic, the language of science and literature for centuries was Persian, and in religion, Arabic dominated entirely. Sometimes the social and class distinctions were emphasized with the help of a biological metaphor: "akseek/ak suyak" (white bone) and "kara-seek/kara-suyak" (black bone) in Turkic nomads. And this was sustained by marriage practices.

For the aristocracy, it seemed important to have a prestigious genealogy, because precisely genealogical ties (and not culture or language at all) laid the foundation for the claims to power. Thus, dynastic marriages were practiced, as a result of which kinship ties between aristocratic families cut across state borders unimpeded and descendants from one aristocratic line could rule in other states. For example, descendants of the Bagratid (Bagration) family at one time ruled in both Armenia and Georgia.

It is no secret that the grandfather on the father's side, the mother, and the second husband of Tsarina Tamara descended from Ossetians. According to the Frenchman Jean Chardin, during the second half of the 17th century, many representatives of the Persian aristocracy, including the tsar, were Georgians or Cherkassians by the maternal line. The Russian princes were proud of their affiliation to the Roerik line, keenly aware that they came from German lands. Ivan the Terrible even sometimes called himself "a German." Sometimes, in order to raise their prestige, the rulers created fictitious genealogies. Thus, at one time the representatives of the higher aristocracy in Poland and in Russia tried hard to trace their roots to Emperor Augustus.

At the same time, kinship ties not only linked the aristocracy, but also engendered conflicts and the struggle for political inheritance in the event of a ruler's death. Therefore, neighboring rulers not only became relatives through marriages, but waged brutal wars against each other, occupying themselves with intrigues and the murders of their relatives. The common culture and language by no means prevented them from doing this.

For all these reasons, in different contexts, one and the same person could describe himself completely differently. For example, Judith, the second wife of Ludwig the Pious, in various situations called herself a Bavarian, a Saxon, a Frank, or an Alemanni. At the same time, a political usage of cultural aliens was a common practice. For example, in the last years of his rule, David the Builder brought into his service 25,000 Polovets (Turks-Kipchaks).

Political activity was a prerogative of the nobility, which took fateful political decisions and brought them to life. If many Georgian historians tried to envision the southern Georgian principality of Tao-Klardzheti as "the cradle of Georgian statehood," then the childless ruler of this principality David did not think of such a result of his activity. He bequeathed all of his domain to Byzantine as a result of which these lands were forever lost to Georgia.[12].
But Bagrat the III ascended the throne in Abkhazia (978) not because he was a "Georgian" but

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12 In his day, Academician G.A. Melikishvili convincingly demonstrated that the expansion of the territorial limits of the Abkhazian kingdom and its reinforcement did not enter the plans of David the ruler. Therefore, in Melikishvili's opinion, it would be inaccurate to consider him the unifier of Georgia. See G.A. Melikishvili, *Politicheskoye ob'yedineniye feodal'noy Gruzii i nekotoryye voprosy ravitiya feodal'nykh otnosheniy v Gruzii*, Tbilisi, Metsniereba, 1973, 133-138. For more detail on these events see M.D. Lordkipinadze and D.L. Muskhelishvili, editors, *Очерки истории Грузии. vol 2. Грузия в IV-X веках*, Tbilisi: Metniereba, 1988.

by virtue of his affiliation (through his mother Gurandukht) to the line of legitimate Abkhazian rulers.

The rulers were guided by their own interests, and not at all the interests of some "nation," which was not existent in the medieval era. The main purpose of the medieval state was the collection of taxes and the more, the better. That is what was behind the striving toward gaining of more territory. And the choice of this or that religion was determined by the benefits to the political alliance. For example, the rulers of South-Western Georgia, who became dependent on the Ottoman Empire, accepted Islam and were equally fluent in the Georgian and Turkish languages. For the tsar's son Vakhushti, whose mature years had passed in Russia, affiliation to the Georgians was defined by religion -- these were Orthodox who had subordinated themselves to the Catholicos Kartli. For their part, from the mid 11th century and right up to the early 19th century, the Albanians defined themselves by the church principle: that is, people subordinated to the "Albanian Catholicos". Popular culture and language were not the determining factor here. The borders of neighboring states constantly changed and were defined not at all by popular culture or language but the balance of political forces. For example in the mid-18th century, the Georgian Tsar Irakliy II took over the kingdoms of Kartli and Kakhetii, and also for a short time subordinated a number of Muslim khans and Armenian communities laying to the south and east. At that time Western Georgia did not belong to him, and was in nominal dependence on the Ottoman Empire. In other words, in the course of a century, any political unity in Georgia was out of question. Armenians as well entirely lost their statehood in 1045 (to put aside the Cilicia kingdom, which existed during a comparatively short time from 1097-1220). In the middle ages in South-Eastern Transcaucasus, there were various Turkish khanates ruled by numerous Turkish dynasties. But there were not any consolidated Azerbaijani people at that time.

While seeking to achieve political gains, especially at the face of a real threat, Georgian rulers frequently searched for help from their neighbors, trying to play with their discords. Furthermore, some of those who originated from the Georgian ruling lineage could serve Persia and others Russia. Thus, in 1679, Archil, the ruler of the Imereti principality, was dethroned by the Ottomans and fled to Russia. After unsuccessful attempts to return the throne, he remained in Russia, and his son became one of the associates of Peter the Great. On the contrary, Georgy, Archil's brother, became a general-governor of Eastern Persia and successfully put down a rebellion of the Afghans. Then he led the Persian army and perished in battle with the Afghans in 1709. In other words, if one brother served Russia in truth and faith, then the other served Persia. None of this had any relationship to Georgian interests.

In the medieval era, the nobility deliberately changed their allegiance that was considered a realization of the right of the aristocracy to free choice of the suzerain rather than treason. Thus, in 1564, Prince Andrei Kurbsky went over to the side of the Polish King Sigzmund II Augustus and took part in the Livonian war against Muscovy Rus. Then, on the side of the Russians fought Prince Peter Shchenyatev, who came from the Lithuanian line of the Gediminoviches. The princes crossed over to the other side together with their subjects regardless of any ethnic origin or cultural loyalty in doing so.

The commoners [people] were by no means integrated wholes, either: they had their regional cultures and languages, and their self-consciousness was determined, on the one hand, by community ties and on the other hand, by religious affiliation. In other words, even in this case language and culture did not serve reliable factors of integration. Such history undermines the nationalist project, and the latter does not need it. On the other hand, for the construction of

the desired version of history, this project resorts to a selection of fairly standard methods. It includes, at first, a one-sided depiction and simplification of history, in which the nation or the ethnos appears as a well integrated community, without internal contradictions and tensions; secondly, suppression of certain inconvenient facts or events; third, a rejection of certain historical facts; fourth, assimilation of alien heroes; fifth, ethnocentric reinterpretation of some events and a re-evaluation of the action of their participants; and sixth, use of falsifications. Moreover, the methodology of such a project makes a nation, ethnic and "national consciousness" timeless categories and discovers them in such eras when they simply did not exist. In fact, the ethno-national factor is a pivot of historical development.

One deals with such nuances of the historical narrative, which may be missed by the outside observer, but which inevitably are acutely noted by local residents. Thus, Georgians are unhappy about the fact that Abkhazian authors trace the early Christian cathedrals of Abkhazia to the "Byzantine" (or Abkhaz-Alanian traditions) and not to the "Georgian". But the Abkhazians are irritated by any mention of the fact that the Georgian language had influence on the Abkhazian. In addition, the "theory of double aboriginality" is unacceptable for them, as it claims that their ancestors came to Abkhazia only in the 2nd century AD. Among their ancestors the Abkhazians find tribal groups, noted by ancient authors on the territory of South-Eastern Pontus, but the Georgians claim them as theirs.

Finally, ethnocentric versions of history include "the hate speech". It includes such arguments as a division between "native" and "non-native" and also a representation of cultural or linguistic Others, with whom people had lived side by side for centuries as "guests," "newcomers," "occupiers". By its turn, the essentialization of historic categories leads to the construction of an image of the "eternal enemy," imbued with an immutable "mentality" and unusually persistent "system of values." Taken to its logical conclusion, such an approach leads to the rebirth of racial theory and is an expression of the cultural (symbolic) racism characteristic of modern times.

The French historian Marc Ferro distinguished between three levels of ethno-centrism: the first, a view of history through the eyes of the Europeans (technical progress identified with Europe); second, the mutual relations of each country with its neighbors; third, the predominance of the center over the periphery within the country.[13]. All of this is observed in the post-Soviet states, although in somewhat different form. Here the first form of ethnocentrism transforms into a glorification of distant ancestors, ascribed with great achievements, capable of triumphing over those who were seen as recent "colonizers". Such an approach then heals the "colonial trauma" and imbues the people with positive energy for successful nation-building (the function of "healing," according to Ferro)

The second level of ethnocentrism is frequently seen in the struggle with neighboring peoples for the same ancestors and their historical legacy. This does not necessarily lead to destructive outcomes. For example, for both the Tatar and the Chuvash of the Middle Volga River Valley, the Bulgarian ancestors are of a great value. Yet with the absence of any mutual territorial claims, such a struggle for the "Bulgarian legacy" is limited to a symbolic field, although it is reflected in local school textbooks. The battle for the "Aryan ancestors" in Central Asia also does not have serious political consequences. It is clear that such images of ancestors are intended for internal consumption. The struggle for ancestors takes on different nature where it is a point of a real political or territorial conflict, which is observed in the Southern Caucasus. To put it differently, the presentation of conflicting images of ancestors, by itself, is not doom

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13 Marc Ferro, *Kak rasskazyvayut istoriyu detyam v raznykh stranakh*, Moscow, Vysshaya shkola, 1992, 12-13.

to inevitable ethnic conflict. But where a real clash of ethnopolitical interests takes place, ethnocentric views of history are capable of ensuring "scientific foundations" and thus to provide conflict with a more harsh and uncompromising nature.

Finally, the third level of ethnocentrism concerns the sensitive sphere of mutual relations between the "titular peoples" and the ethnic minorities. For example, school textbooks of history are written on behalf of the "titular people," and ethnic minorities in them are not noted, either mentioned in passing or depicted entirely in a negative way ("barbarians," "thieves," "occupiers," "colonizers"). It is a question not only of the image but of real ethnic discrimination, which this image is supposed to justify. Ethnic minorities respond with a development of their "alternative history" serving them as an important weapon in the battle against discrimination.

Thus the "wars for memory" emerge. What can historians do to prevent them, or at least minimize the damage from them? A single universal solution can hardly be suggested, because each particular case has its specifics. On the whole, however, the following approaches can be formulated: some of them might be helpful in some particular situations, and other – in some others.

First, in order to avoid mythologizing, the historic narrative can be shortened, specifically, to not search for ethnic ancestors in prehistory or early history and not take history back to the last year. This might help to avoid creating a myth about ancient ancestors (since no matter how reliable archeological and linguistic constructions are, they still remain reconstructions), and also not to distort history through glorification of the current government. Second, one can reject the idea of continuing historical succession and emphasize the breaks in history, so as not to create a myth about the complete immunity of the ethnos in time (Ireland took this rout back in the 1980s). For example, there exists the opportunity to show the history of Russia not as an uninterrupted chain of events, but the changing of a number of entirely different political formations with a difference composition of population: Kievan Rus, Vladimir-Suzdal Rus, the Golden Horde, the Moscow principality, the Russian Empire, the USSR, the Russian Federation. And this can be done to an even greater extent in case of the Southern Caucasus and Central Asia. In doing so, it should be explained to school-children that ethnicity is based on language and culture, rather than any common political preferences and struggles. And the unity of culture hardly dooms people to allegiance to this or that political project; on the contrary, among the advocates of such a project one can find people of different ethnic origin (for example, many Russians in the Baltic region were for secession from the USSR).

Third, it is worth explaining to students the specific feature of the myth about the allegedly integrated national organism and demonstrating the complex heterogeneous composition of modern nations. It should be explained that the political (the state) unity of citizens does not contradict their cultural and confessional diversity. And ethnicity is not the main factor of historical development. For example, nations began to emerge only slightly more than 200 years ago, and ethnic factor acquired political significance relatively recently.

Fourth, it is impossible to limit history to the titular nation, and we must give a sense of history to the whole society, including ethnic minorities; we must show that their members also took part in the development of the society and state. Examples of this can always be found. Obviously, ignoring minorities leads to their alienation from the dominant society and the development in them of feelings of marginality and hurt. Fifth, one must not be silent about alternative history; we must give an explanation about the historical discourse on the

variation of historical models. Such an approach is capable of teaching students to think independently and to evaluate complex historical situations by themselves. Putting an emphasis on a person, it introduces them into a problem of choice and raises important ethical questions. Sixth, one should not suppress unpleasant moments in history since the social memory or the alternative history will recall them anyway. On the contrary, it is worth attentively analyzing and explaining the essence of such historical events. With these examples, one can teach children social responsibility.

Furthermore, historians are capable of opposing the use of national history for achieving current political gains. For example, today in the Ukraine, in the interests of current politics there is a campaign to represent the Holodomor as a "genocide of the Ukrainian people". But in Kazakhstan, where in the 1930s, due to the ill-conceived policy of sedentarization more than one million nomads died, politicians avoid ascribing the same significance to this. In other words, in various contexts politicians in various ways regard the actualization of history: in some cases they use it openly and in others they try to avoid it. I would also note that when in the fall of 2001 President Putin met with prominent Russian historians, they advised him not to turn to the early medieval history in the interests of current policy. In other words, a school has a choice. They can impose a national myth on the students, and, quite opposite, they can also teach them to be citizens, capable of thinking independently and becoming aware of their civic responsibility. Only the second path is cable of weakening "the memory wars" and avoiding destructive confrontation. And it is this path that leads to true democracy.

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