

# Georgian Cultural-Intellectual and National Islands beyond Ideological Frontiers

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## Abstract

*This paper examines the Georgian migrant press, which emerged as a result of the flight of Georgian intellectuals from the Soviet Communist regime. It reviews publications such as Chveni Droshta (Our Flag), Tavisuphali Sakartvelo (Free Georgia), Bedi Kartlisa (Destiny of Kartli) and others, which became cultural-intellectual and national islands beyond ideological frontiers. After the occupation of Georgia, the efforts of emigrants focused on generating an information war against the Soviet occupation. The emigrants living in Paris were especially active in this regard. The newspapers and magazines were mainly issued in Georgian, but also in English, French, and German.*

*Special attention is paid to the historical, literary and scientific journal Bedi Kartlisa (Revue de Kartvélogie), founded in Paris, in 1948, by Nino Salia. The journal brought together Kartvelologists living abroad, and played an important role in promoting Georgian history, literature, science, and culture. In this magazine, Georgian and foreign journalists, prominent writers and scientists worked together. The study aims to examine the pathos and the main topics of the emigrant press, based on the analysis of a large number of magazines and personal archives of Georgian emigrants. Their role in keeping the Georgian national soul alive abroad, disclosing the regime, introducing the Georgian intellectual and spiritual culture to the Europeans and transferring European ideas to Georgia are among the most relevant findings. The role of these magazines is invaluable not only in the history of Georgian journalism, but also in the history of the Georgian national struggle.*

**Keywords:** *emigrant press, ideological frontiers, emigrant Georgians, Soviet communist regime*

## Introduction

After the occupation of the Democratic Republic of Georgia by Russia and the loss of state independence, which resulted in the instauration of the Soviet Bolshevik regime, a significant number of Georgian political figures sought refuge in emigration. Upon their arrival in different

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countries of the world, the fugitive Georgians began to think of helping their homeland and their compatriots from a long distance.

This was obviously not an easy task. The Soviet system was working intensively abroad to stir up strife and distrust among Georgian patriots and incite them against one another. The agents of the Soviet government invaded all communities, which was a constant threat to Georgian unity. They did not stop in Georgia either. They did everything to undermine their authority in the eyes of the Georgian people and of foreigners, mainly by spreading slander.

So, living abroad was not safe for the Georgians who had fled their homeland. Along with nostalgia, which was later to take many lives, they had to endure many challenges in order to carry the national flag with dignity behind the 'Iron Curtain'. Their concern with Georgia became an integral part of their daily activities.

Georgian migrants tried to bring their intellectual forces together in order to use them in the service of the country. At the same time, they worked closely with foreign partners, informing them about the actions of the Soviet government, with a view to helping them see its true colours. In addition, Georgian intellectuals transferred knowledge from the Georgians to the Europeans and the other way around: they informed foreigners about the achievements of Georgian literature, science or culture, while also promoting Western cultural products for Georgians.

The action of Georgian emigrants spanned the entire area of public life: politics, education, science, journalism, culture. They would appear where intellectual forces gathered: in political parties or universities, in scientific journals, or in concert halls. Their talents and skills found their way everywhere. Thus, Georgian intellectual-cultural and national islands were gradually formed in different countries of the world, and so Georgians became ambassadors of Georgian culture in the diaspora. One important island was the emigrant press, which became one of the main tools in the hands of emigrant Georgians in their struggle to fight the Bolshevik regime.

## Methods

A huge number of issues related to Georgian diaspora magazines has been surveyed for this study. Worth mentioning are the following ones: a) the historical, literary and scientific journal *Bedi Kartlisa* (*Destiny of Kartli*) (the same *Revue de Kartvélologie*), founded in Paris, in 1948, by

Nino Salia. The editor-in-chief was Kalistrate Salia. In 1985, the publication was relaunched under a new format and title (*Revue des Études Géorgiennes et Caucasiennes*); b) *Chveni Droshta* (*Our Flag*) – the body of the Foreign Bureau of the Georgian Social-Democratic Party, also founded in Paris, in 1949, by Noe Jordania. The editor-in-chief was Mikheil Sturua. The last number was issued in 1991; c) *Tavisufali Sakartvelo* (*Free Georgia*) – a first emigrant political monthly magazine of the government of the Democratic Republic, issued in Istanbul and Paris, in 1921-1922, with the collaboration of N. Jordania, K. Chkheidze, Evg. Gegechkori, N. Ramishvili, Ak. Chkhenkeli, and other emigrant politicians.

### **The pathos of the emigrant press**

For the Georgians scattered abroad, the media have become a kind of unifier. Their pathos finds its best expression in the second issue of the magazine *Bedi Kartlisa* (1948), in the article “Towards Compatriots” by Grigol Robakidze. Here, the author writes that the Georgians who have found refuge in different parts of the world – France, Germany, Italy, Austria, England, America – are isolated not only from their homeland, but also from one another, and even though they are alive, are as good as dead for the others. It is necessary to create a kind of hearth abroad in order to enjoy at least a little of the lost homeland’s warmth and its cosy fire. “We want *Bedi Kartlisa* to become such a centre. If we are able to do that, then our duty to the homeland will be fulfilled: a sacred duty.” (1948: 2)

The editorial policy of the Georgian diasporic press was primarily determined by anti-Soviet attitudes. This was the main element that united almost all publications, regardless of their editorial board or country of issuance.

The pervasive anti-Soviet mood was accompanied by a national pathos shared by all publications. This was reflected in their titles: *Chveni Droshta* (*Our Flag*), *Iveria*, *Akhali Iveria* (*New Iveria*), *Tavisufali Sakartvelo* (*Free Georgia*), and others.

Freedom of speech was another distinctive feature of the emigrant press. These magazines and newspapers created a space where the Soviet Bolshevik regime was boldly criticized and the reality at home was accurately and objectively described.

These hallmarks of editorial pathos were unfamiliar to the magazines and newspapers issued in Georgia and in the entire Soviet

Union: under communist rule, an anti-Soviet mindset could not be conveyed, the word “national” could not be used, and no free speech was accepted. Every word was controlled there, having to pass censorship. Science, art, culture and writing were entirely in the service of the communist ideology. Only the ideas and scientific theories that followed in the footsteps of Marxism-Leninism were deemed correct, as the doctrine was acknowledged as a holder of absolute truth, with its proponents elevated to the level of religious figures. Consequently, the desecration of the Christian faith and its symbolism was incited.

The first issue of *Free Georgia* focuses on the prohibition of the freedom of speech. In the address by Noe Jordania, one reads:

Today, a Georgian citizen has the right to taste only the “happiness” of a communist paradise, but he cannot express his conviction about it. His mental nourishment today is just listening to the endless boasting and demagogy of the communists. Neither the correct information about what is happening in the country, nor the correct opinion to shed light on it, which struck him with the entry of communist brute force: both are forbidden fruits. (Jordania 1921: 1) [1]

According to the figurative evaluation of Akaki Bakradze, a well-known Georgian critic and public figure, who wrote the monograph called “Taming the Writing” (new edition, 2019), the following formula was in action in Soviet countries:

There is no God but Lenin and the Secretary-General of the Central Committee is his Apostle. Lenin’s place is permanent and irreplaceable. Only the place of the Apostle is vacant and, accordingly, it is occupied by the one who sits on the throne of the Secretary General of the CPSU ... As long as the Apostle or the Secretary General is alive and holds the position, he is as infallible and sinless as Lenin. If the Secretary General dies or is dismissed, then he is undoubtedly full of sin... This is not the case in the USSR alone. The same happens in other communist countries (Bakradze 2019: 134).

All chauvinist communists had their own “God” and did not recognize the “Gods” of other communist nations. For the Soviet citizens it was Lenin, for the Chinese – Mao Zedong, for the Koreans – Kim Il-sung, for the Vietnamese – Ho Chi Minh, for the Albanians – Enver Hoxha, for the Yugoslavs – Tito, for the Romanians – Ceausescu and so on (2019 135).

The emigrant press was an island of freedom, where journalists could express their ideas unconstrained. Thus, the Georgian media beyond the Soviet ideological frontiers was radically different from that within the ideological and geographical borders of the USSR. Even in this particular area of social activism, the face of the communist regime was perfectly reflected.

### **The main topics of the emigrant press**

#### **Politics**

The emigrant press covered virtually all topics, but one of their main concerns was politics. The domestic and foreign policy of the Soviet Union was intensively discussed. The first issue of the foreign bureau of the Georgian Social-Democratic Party, *Our Flag* (1949), features an analysis of the Soviet domestic and foreign policy by Noe Jordania. This text perfectly synthesizes the political messages that will follow in almost every issue, which basically describe the people as being of no value for the Soviet government, as material used for the purposes of the party. The Soviet domestic policy is manifested in maintaining power, in their being the masters and rulers of the whole country, constantly strengthening their dictatorship.

Foreign policy derives from domestic policy, in the sense that the Soviet government treats the foreign nations as they treat their subjects. Moscow's main goal is to bring under control as many nations and territories as possible, and thus to turn the Soviet regime into a world regime, so as to gain world hegemony. Moscow threatened all Slavic states from Eastern Europe, as well as Romania and Hungary, expanding its sphere of influence to these territories. According to the teachings of the Bolsheviks, there can be only one civilization; the existence of two opposite civilizations is impossible.

One important policy issue on the emigrants' agenda was to clarify Georgia's relations with other Caucasian nations. "If we want to discuss any regional federation or union – for us, Georgians –, first of all, the issue should be to unite in one federation or confederation of Caucasian nations" (Kordzaia 1949: 42). On April 22, 1918, when the nations of the Caucasus became independent in deciding their own destiny, their first step was to unite the nations of the Caucasus under a confederation. It seems that the idea that the Caucasus was an inseparable unit geopolitically, economically, and strategically, was

strong among the Caucasians, but under the influence of outside forces, this connection was soon disintegrated.

Another topic to which the political emigrant press paid great attention was tightening the relations with the states that shared the fate of the Soviet countries, thus strengthening one another, because they believed that their destinies were intertwined and the well-being of one state would inevitably lead to the well-being of others. After the end of World War II, the fate of Georgia was shared by a number of states that had been completely independent until 1939. Some, as is the case of the Baltic States, were incorporated in the Soviet Union, while others, like Romania, lost parts of their territories. "One of them will be released – we must mean that the time of our release is approaching", Kordzaia writes (1949: 43).

It appears that such topics were enjoyable for the emigrant press. The first issue of *Free Georgia* featured a call to the European Socialist parties and workers' organizations, expressing the hope that they would condemn the oppressors of Georgia. The famous English socialist MacDonald writes in the workers' newspaper *Forward*:

A small state only provoked envy in the hearts of the communists... The Bolshevik invasion and revolutionary uprising in this country... is the most cynical evil ever committed by the imperialist government in our time. As far as I know Georgians, they have not yet said their word (in Jordania 1921: 6).

At the same time, grief was often expressed at the passivity of the governments of capitalist and democratic countries, which did not support the anti-communist movement with money or weapons. Noe Jordania accused the Western world of national selfishness and noted that it was becoming a world event. In the article entitled "Conquest Day" (1952), which is dedicated to the 31<sup>st</sup> anniversary of the occupation of Georgia, he writes under the pseudonym of P.S. that the imperialistic action to conquer a small nation indicated that Georgia's occupation did not pose a threat to the independent existence of other nations. The calls, advice and warnings of the Georgians remained unheard. The Europeans, blinded by selfishness, did nothing, for decades, to stop the evolution of the Soviet regime. They had to taste the bitterness provoked by the consequences of the World War II – the awakening of Moscow's appetite for power and the Russians' coming nearer to the gate of Europe – to open their ears.

Gvarjaladze (1953) discusses the events ongoing in Europe in the period after 1918, stating that European countries themselves had to live in very difficult conditions, and that they were not interested in the fate of Georgia. In addition, Europeans failed to understand the imperialist and aggressive intentions of Moscow, and often believed its false promises. Europe was trying to establish a normal alliance with Bolshevik Russia.

Sarjveladze expresses similar views: Europe never understood Russia. It was interested in this immense country as a trading market. Europe had numerous opportunities to unite the nations trapped within Russia, to help them politically, to overthrow Russia's imperialist power. When Russia won the Great War alongside its allies and defeated Germany, it immediately took over the entire Balkan area. Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Romania, and Poland gathered around Moscow (1957: 6).

Establishing relations with the Europeans and then maintaining them was difficult. The Soviet government used Bolshevik methods to encumber these connections. The Georgian migrants were vigilant in this regard and tried to warn each other about the impending dangers. The author under the pseudonym "Nacnobi" ("Familiar") publishes a fragment from an extensive resolution of the Communist Politburo, issued in the newspaper *Rossiya* (#75), which stated: "We have to sow discord in organizations and turn them against leaders. Every effort should be made to defame individual members of organizations, especially prominent leaders" (Nacnobi 1952: 38).

In these hard times, the publication of each new 'island' in the media was an event of great importance which Georgian emigrants always met with special joy and hope. This form of social activity not only intensified the information war against the communist regime, but also strengthened the unity of the Georgians. The 10<sup>th</sup> issue of *Chveni Droshta* applauds the opening of the Georgian section of *The Voice of America* and publishes the statement of the US Secretary of State, A. Cheson, who mentions that, for the Americans, the name Georgia evokes the memory of the Argonauts travelling there in search of the golden ram, and the memory of Prometheus, who stole the sacred fire from heaven and gave people a weapon to fight for freedom. "Georgia has often been conquered, but never subjugated, the Georgian people have kept their face today and have never lost the will to fight for human rights", Cheson states (1951: 27). This address by the US

Secretary of State is a clear example of the extent to which Georgians worked to provide information to foreign partners in order to help them have relevant attitudes towards the Soviet regime.

### Science

Part of the emigrants chose Universities as their field of activity. In order to popularize the Georgian spiritual and intellectual heritage, they tried to establish Georgian language centres in foreign Universities, departments of Georgian language or history. Every news in this direction was actively covered in the emigrant press. For example, the third issue of *Chveni Drosha*, in 1949, published the information that Kemularia was working on the establishment of a Georgian language department at the Sorbonne, that an organizing committee consisting of Georgian and French nationals had already been formed. The magazine appeals to the immigrants to get involved and help achieve this great goal.

Mikheil Tarkhnishvili informs the reader in *Bedi Kartlisa* #4, 1949, that three excellent professors of ancient Georgian work brilliantly at the famous University of Lovani. These are: Gerard Garitte, R. Draguet, M. Mugdelmans. Together with other Georgian patrons, they established a new Georgian centre in Lausanne, purchased Georgian letters from Paris, and decided to promote Georgian literary monuments around the world.

Interest in Georgian philology also appeared in America, and its worthy representative was Robert Blake.

*Bedi Kartlisa* announced in #8 of 1950 that Prof. G. Garritt had taken photographs of all the Georgian manuscripts (about 90 pieces) that were still on Mount Sinai, and that their catalogue would soon be published in the same University journal *Le Museon* (Salia 1950: 31).

In 1955, with the participation of Georgian scientists, The Association of European Professors was established in Trieste, Italy. The Congress of the Association was held in Brussels on April 23-27, being attended by delegates from various European Universities and by numerous guests. Georgian scientists were represented in the Praesidium. M. Muskhelishvili was elected General Secretary of the Association, and Al. Nikuradze – Secretary of the Council.

Scientific articles, especially in the field of Kartvelian Studies, were often published in *Bedi Kartlisa*, issued in France. Scientific publications by Mikhael Tarkhnishvili, Mikhako Tsereteli and others on



the current problems of the Georgian language, writing, culture and history were often published here.

In addition to publishing essays of famous scientists, the journal collected scientific works previously printed in different editions at different times. It provided lists containing information on authors, titles, topics, place of original publication, which were helpful to other researchers. Every Kartvelologist scholar would offer the journal a printout of his letters – published in another magazine or their books. In this way, through *Bedi Kartlisa*, readers could get acquainted with all the materials about Georgian culture published abroad. At the same time, scholars tried to provide foreign scientists with information about research conducted in Georgia.

The editors of the magazine also started publishing it in French, but it was not easy to gather foreign Kartvelologists and persuade them to cooperate. Georgian figures had been working for years to achieve this goal. Having gathered a significant number of employees, a large part of the material was published in Western languages, in issues 21-22 of the magazine. The French version – *Revue de Kartvelologie* – was soon established. The editorial management of the journal was invited to the International Congress of Orientalists in Munich in 1957, which was attended by 1,500 scholars. There, their request that Kartvelology have an independent place in Oriental Studies was considered by a special congressional committee. The journal also took an active part in the International Congress of Byzantine Studies, which was held the same year. The number of foreign Kartelologists was not large at that time. The most important scholars were V. Allen, I. Molitor, K. Tumanov, H. Fogt, R. Stevenson.

Scientific news was always covered here. An article entitled “Issued” (#19/1955) publishes the information that Professor G. Karst’s new work on the origins of the Basques was issued (Salia). It is noted that Professor Karst, a well-known Iberologist once again enriched the literature on Iberology with this meaningful book. The author of the article advises all Georgians to read it. The magazine always praised the achievements of Kartvelology in Georgia, publishing reviews for new books and textbooks. For example, in 1955 #19, a review was published on the *Chrestomathy of Old Georgian Literature (Part One)* compiled by Sol. Kubaneishvili, Edited by Kekelidze, published by Tbilisi University Press (Salia). The 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Akaki Shanidze’s birth is also mentioned in #28-29 of 1958, etc.

## Literature

The emigrant press also paid great attention to literature. Works by both Georgian and foreign writers were often published. The fiction samples published here clearly show the editorial policy of magazines and newspapers: to publish works whose subject matter and pathos echoed the pain of the Georgian nation, or to cite relevant excerpts in the associated articles. For Example, G. Kereselidze, in his article "Jesus Christ and the Georgian Nation", quotes the words of the Swiss writer G. de Reynold: "Every call towards the past is a call towards the future; The call of the living, who ... wants to exist and therefore seeks to understand its basic nature in order to find a foothold." And he adds: "We, Georgians, are also experiencing dangerous times. We must always have our past in front of us and find in it the nature of Georgians created by our history." (1949: 9)

The journal *Bedi Kartlisa* regularly published the works or critical letters of the great Georgian writer G. Robakidze, whose opinions are valuable to the scientific or literary community. In one article, he posits that literature is not an import-export commodity, and compares common themes of Georgian and European literature, showing the similarities and differences between them. For example, the Georgian Mindia (the main character of Vazha-Pshavela's poem, *Snake Shirt*) tastes the snake meat and becomes a prophet. The German Siegfried swims in the blood of a whale and also becomes a prophet. The Georgian myth refers to a snake, and the German one to a whale, but mythologically they carry the same significance. The author asks: "Which clever person will come up with the question - did the Georgians "import" this mythical style from Germany, or did the Germans "export" it from Georgia?" (1949: 3-6)

Over time, more and more attention was paid to Georgian literature; it was highly valued and became the subject of more research. Remarkable in this regard is the re-established scientific body "Christian East" (*Oriens Christianus*). It was first released in 1901, discontinued in 1941, then revived by the German cultural-scientific community. Its publisher was a famous Arabist, Prof. Graff, who knew Old Georgian well.

## Culture

Culture was one of the most important areas where emigrant Georgians tried to popularize the Georgian gene. They conveyed the pain of the

Georgian nation to the audience through the language of art. At the same time, they worked hard to dispel misconceptions about Georgian culture, both at home and abroad.

The migrants founded the Society for the Study of Georgian Culture, under the chairmanship of Mikhako Tsereteli, and asked other Georgian emigrants who had experienced living abroad to help this society by becoming active members.

Georgians often organized Georgian Culture Days in the diaspora, and systematically covered information about such events in the press. For example, information about the establishment of the Georgian Cultural Center in Belgium is given in Mikheil Tarkhnishvili's paper, where the author informs the readers about his efforts in this direction: "It is a long time I have been collaborating in this field for ten years in various scientific centres in Europe – Germany, Belgium, and Rome" (1949: 28).

Nino Salia's papers on cultural topics were often published in the pages of *Bedi Kartlisa*. She informed the readers about the current events in the cultural sphere. With Ilia Jabadari's and El. Rukhadze's help, Georgian ballet evenings were often held in the Play Hall in Paris (Salia 1950: 31). The Society for the Study of Georgian Culture in Paris also hosted evenings for Georgian writers. On the evening dedicated to Grigol Robakidze, Nino Salia reported: "His wife wrote to me from Geneva, he returned from Paris as happy as if he had come from Georgia" (1950: 29).

G.N. (pseudonym), in the paper "Georgian artists in Paris", talks about the respective exhibition, mentioning that artists who are recognized in Paris have an outlet in the artistic arena of the whole world. The exceptions are the Soviet countries, where painting, and art in general, are placed under the general lines of the Soviet government, where an artist's aesthetic search and imagination are limited, if not strictly forbidden. Georgian artists in Paris are in a privileged position in terms of freedom: here, they have the limitless opportunity to show their talents and abilities. The author mentions Vera Paghava and Felix Varlamishvili, Georgian artists who organize regular exhibitions in France and in other countries (1954: 28-30).

Nino Salia emotionally describes the performance of the Georgian Ballet in Paris, on the scene of Alhambra Theatre:

Unbreakable national spirit, chivalry, high morals and purity, the highest worship of women, all the features that characterize and

express the Georgian nation in its dances, were spread on the scene of Paris... It is difficult to surprise Paris, what has not seen the World Art Center? But Georgian dancers presented the rich art of Georgia with such mastery that even Paris was fascinated and enchanted (1958: 39).

G. Dornan remarked in *Liberation*, in reference to the same event, that:

We thought that the flow of admiration for watching folk dances from Eastern countries was over. What could we expect after the ensembles of Polish, Czech, Hungarian, Romanian and Moiseev? We were wrong: it turns out that these dances, which the actors brought from a country on the border of Russia and Asia Minor, could be a perfect creation that we could learn from in many ways (ibid).

### Conclusions

The survey of the emigrant press has shown that missions and visions are common to almost all publications. This was to be expected, because the pain and problems of the diaspora are common to all, regardless of adopted spaces, and it is awfully hard to read the words hiding love and longing for the homeland without emotion. Behind each sentence there lies the image of a whole epoch, with its cruelty and ruthlessness.

The role of these cultural-intellectual and national islands is invaluable not only in the history of Georgian journalism, but also in the history of the Georgian national struggle. Georgian emigrants did everything in their power to make their life and work abroad useful for their homeland. These magazines are proof that their merits, beyond the ideological frontiers, were not in vain. In the field of science, literature and culture, the *Bedi Kartlisa* magazine is especially important in gathering the Kartvelologists abroad and in transferring knowledge to their readership. This journal should definitely be considered one of the foundations for the success of Kartvelological science.

The emigrant press, the electronic versions of which are currently uploaded on the digital platform of the National Parliamentary Library of Georgia, demands thorough research, as it must be offered a proper place in the history of Georgian culture.

### Notes

[1] *Tavisufali Sakartvelo* and *Chveni Drosha* were similar in subject matter and editorial policy.

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