



University of
Zurich^{UZH}

Rita Willaert: Baku Martyr's Lane, 2008



CONFLICTING NARRATIVES

History and Politics in the Caucasus

Call for Papers:
International Conference,
December 09-11, 2015



AN INITIATIVE OF GEBERT RÜF STIFTUNG IN COOPERATION
WITH THE UNIVERSITY OF FRIBOURG

— GEBERT RÜF STIFTUNG —
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This conference is organized with financial support of the Academic Swiss Caucasus Net (ASCN) programme.

CONFLICTING NARRATIVES

History and Politics in the Caucasus

Historical narratives have played, and continue to play, an important role in the political development and national consolidation of the states and ethnic territories of the Caucasus region. The political elites, together with historians, are the driving force in writing and presenting history. History serves as basis for national mobilization and means to create a consensus on a national past. In most cases, national narratives have been established as opposed to the supra-national Soviet and imperial histories. In conflict situations, history serves as a powerful force to legitimize specific claims – over territory, resources and peoples. History is often being used as a tool of political competition rather than critical analysis.

History is highly politicized especially in countries facing deep political or even territorial divisions; in these countries, national narratives often develop around political claims rather than representing a reflection of the past in its own right. In Georgia, we see a tendency to use historical narratives as part of a political and propagandistic fight against Russia. In Azerbaijan, there is a prominent trend of putting the nation into the context of ancient civilization and using this as an argument in the country's struggle against Armenia over Karabakh. In Armenia, too, history is often used as a political instrument, especially when dealing with Azerbaijan over the Karabakh question. A strong "anti-colonial" focus on history can be observed within the secessionist territories of the South Caucasus (Abkhazia, South Ossetia, Karabakh), or in some of the autonomous republics in the Russian part of the Caucasus (Chechnya, Dagestan, Ingushetia, etc.). In Russia, the most important political player in the Caucasus region, the historical discourse has been fluctuating between nostalgia for the empire and attempts to critically reconsider the Soviet Communist past.

Historical research cannot flourish and live up to academic standards when put to the service of political goals. This conference seeks ways beyond the politics of history towards the development of

historical research. In order to understand the Caucasian conflicts, we also need to understand the underlying historical myths and conflicting narratives. This conference thus aims to identify and analyze those conflicting issues of the past, which complicate relations within and between the individual states and ethnic territories, and seeks new approaches based on new archival sources. The questions put forward are: Which are the conflicting issues? How do notions of the past manifest themselves in public discourses? To what extent do historical myths impact the political development? In which way does politics influence historical narratives and historiography? Which are possible ways out of this predicament? What is the state of historical research on sensitive issues of the past in the Caucasus, and is a new interpretation of the history of the Caucasus possible?

By bringing together historians and specialists from the Caucasus, Russia, Europe, the United States, and Switzerland, this conference represents a pioneering endeavor to approach these questions in a comprehensive manner and put them into new perspective. Apart from papers dealing with more general issues of historiography and the interplay of politics, nationalism and history writing, this conference also seeks to identify and address some of the most contested issues in recent Caucasian history. This call for papers therefore looks for historians who have done research (preferably based on archival material) on one of the following topics:

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History and Politics in the Caucasus

Russia-Georgia Relations: Contested Issues

The incorporation of Georgia into the Russian Empire

The Bolshevik take-over and incorporation of Georgia into the Soviet State (1921)

Stalinist terror in Georgia / Stalinism in Georgia (1930s-1950s)

Georgia and its Minorities

Georgian-Abkhaz/Georgian-Ossetian/Georgian-Armenian relations in the early 20th century (preferably the period of the Russian Civil War to the early Soviet period)

The issue of “Georganization” in the later Soviet period

Georgian nationalism in the 1980s and minorities responses

Nagorno Karabakh / Armenian-Azerbaijan Relations

Pogroms / mass violence in the early 20th century (preferably late Tsarist period, Civil War, early Soviet period)

Soviet nationalities policy in the 1920s and the issue of Karabakh

The Karabakh issue during late Soviet times

The North Caucasus / Russia and the Peoples of the North Caucasus

The issue of “genocide”, deportations, forced resettlements in North Caucasian history (19th/20th centuries)

Soviet nationality policy (“korenizatsiia”) towards the mountaineers of the North Caucasus

“Banditry” and armed revolts during the early Soviet period

The issue of “collaborationism” during World War II

The North Caucasus in the late Soviet period: A time of “non-events”?

We welcome proposals from senior as well as younger researchers from all over the world, but especially encourage PhD students and Postdocs from the Caucasus region to apply. Please submit your application via Email (including a one-page outline of your proposed paper, a CV and list of publications) by

May 31, 2015, to:

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About the Academic Swiss Caucasus Net (ASCN):

ASCN is a programme aimed at promoting the social sciences and humanities in the South Caucasus (primarily Georgia and Armenia). Its different activities foster the emergence of a new generation of talented scholars. Promising junior researchers receive support through research projects, capacity-building trainings and scholarships. The programme emphasizes the advancement of individuals who, thanks to their ASCN experience, become better integrated in international academic networks. The ASCN programme is coordinated and operated by the Interfaculty Institute for Central and Eastern Europe (IICEE) at the University of Fribourg (Switzerland). It is initiated and supported by Gebert RUF Stiftung.