

The Transcaucasian railway and emergence of Georgian Nationalism

Introduction

The construction of the railway at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century was a pivotal event in the history of Transcaucasia.

The Caucasus and Georgia in particular, experienced an imperial expansion through the network of railroads, which produced a new environment for people to navigate, in the form of passenger trains, freight wagons and train stations. Railways reworked the existing geography of the country. The advancement of communication system in the Tsarist Russia and in particular, adoption of the telegraph, massive railroad constructions and improved road infrastructure, accelerated the contacts between the cities of the vast empire. As a result, urban spaces became ethnically more diverse, and this contrast of identities strengthened the bases for a "national imagination".¹ Same was true for Tiflis, where for the first time Georgian peasants encountered the local Armenian bourgeoisie. This encounter highlighted the ethnic differences and strengthened the ethnic affiliation amongst the Georgian ethnies.

Ronald Suny considers the railways as an important tool for industrialization and regional integration in the Caucasus, although the discussion does not go further than that.

The societal and spatial changes brought on by the Transcaucasian railway has not yet been fully explored. One can only assume that railways contributed to the emergence of Georgian nationalism, but its particular implications need to be researched and placed in the broader context together with the other factors that I have mentioned before- namely the emergence of a printed press and role of intellectual elites. One way to examine this causality is to look closely at the discourse generated by educated elites on the pages of Georgian periodicals in the second half of the 19th century. Georgian intellectuals wrote extensively on the social

¹ Suny, Ronald Grigor. *The making of the Georgian nation*. Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994, p. 122.

changes taking place in Georgia and analyzed their possible impact through the lenses of European experience on nation-building. Railroads and their alleged transformative impacts were in the focus of their attention.

Railways bring social changes and have both a local and macro-historical dimension. However, it is also important to understand the geopolitical context that led to the decision of the Russian Empire to start building a railway in Transcaucasia. The railway was an imperial project, and its history a part of the process of imperial expansion.

Thus, in this essay, based on archival documents and press materials, I will discuss the opening of the Transcaucasian railway line and the processes that followed it.

In this essay I will discuss three main questions:

A) Why did the Russian Empire decide to develop the Transcaucasian Railway? B) What did Georgian intellectuals expect from the Transcaucasian railway? C) What were the concrete effects of the railway and how did it affect Georgian society in the second half of the nineteenth century?

The essay consists of 4 parts. In the first part I will discuss the development of rail transport in Europe and Russia in the context of industrial revolution. In the second part I will provide an overview of Transcaucasian railway history and discuss imperial motivations behind the project. The third part will examine the attitudes of Georgian intellectuals towards railways through the Georgian press and the last part I will re-center the discussion of Georgian nationalism around the question of material and social transformations brought by the railways, mainly within the context of unification and connection between different regions of Georgia.

Development of railway transport in Tsarist Russia

Railways appeared in the first half of the 19th century. Great Britain is regarded a birthplace of railways, where in 1825, the first railway line connected the cities of Liverpool and Manchester.

Eric Hobsbawm in his monumental monograph, *The Age of Capital*, notes that in the second half of the 19th century, the railroad became a medium of international trade.² Railroads connected industrial centers and port cities around the world, allowing rapid transportation of raw materials to industrial centers. In addition, the railway became a prerequisite for military success. A notable example of this was the Crimean War (1853-56), where Britain made efficient use of its transport infrastructure, by rapid transportation of soldiers to the battlefield.

The 1830s saw a boom in railway construction. By the end of the 1840s, the total length of railways in Europe was 17,000 miles, and within 40 years, it had increased to 100,000 miles. By 1850, the leading nation was the United Kingdom, with 10,000 miles of railways. It was followed by Germany with 6000 miles, France with 3000 miles, Austria and Belgium with approx. 1000-1000 miles and the vast Russia backlogging with only 500 miles³.

The Russian Empire was the tenth state, where the railway was built. The first railway of Tsarist empire opened in 1837. The line connected the Royal estate, Tsarskoe Selo and the city of Petersburg.

Overall, means of transport communication in Russia were poorly developed. Technological backwardness, including the underdevelopment of the railway system and the low mobility of troops, significantly contributed to Russia's defeat in the Crimean War (1853-56). After

² Hobsbawm, Eric. *The Age of Capital:1848-1875*. London: Brettenham House, 1995. P 125.

³ *Ibid*.

the war, two solutions were considered, either repairing the existing roads or starting a large-scale railway construction.⁴

The construction of the railway was associated with large costs. This factor hindered the initiation of large projects. A solution was found through the introduction of an internal state loan system. In 1857, a Russo-French joint-stock company was established in Russia.⁵ Over the next 10 years the company built a railway network of 4 thousand miles. In a meantime, state facilitated the inflow of capital, and as a result, the scale of infrastructure projects increased. This is when discussions about Poti-Tiflis railway started.

Construction of Poti-Tiflis railway

Georgia became part of the Russian Empire in 1800 (formally annexed in 1801). At that time, the road system in Transcaucasia was poorly developed.⁶ The state of transportation infrastructure very well reflected the political fragmentation of the region. The rulers of the once-divided kingdoms of Georgia regarded the absence of roads as a crucial factor for maintaining their political independence. The lack of road infrastructure served as a deterrent against potential invasions, impeding the adversaries and preventing the centralization of power.

The Russian Empire on the contrary, required roads to assert control over the territory. The overland route connecting Transcaucasia came across the Greater Caucasus range, but due to harsh climatic conditions, it was impassable for much of the year. The empire placed significant emphasis on developing both military and transit infrastructure. Constructing a

⁴ This view-point was presented by the Austrian engineer, Franz Anton von Gerstner in his address to Russian Emperor, Nicholas 1st. Gerstner emphasized the military significance of the railroad, as the most effective way to exercise control over the vast empirical space.

See, Schenk Benjamin, *Russlands Fahrt in die Moderne : Mobilität und sozialer Raum im Eisenbahnzeitalter*. Stuttgart: Steiner, [Train to Modernity: Mobility and Social Space of Russia in the Age of Railways], 2016, 27.

⁵ Janelidze Otar, Daushvili Alexandre, *Sakmiani Sakartvelo: 1801-1921, [Capitalism in Georgia: 1801-1921]* Tbilisi: LLC Alternative Media, 2022, p.310.

⁶ Gugushvili Paata, *Sakartvelosa da Amierkavkasiis Ekonomikuri Ganvitareba XIX-XX Saukuneebshi, [Economic Development of Georgia and Transcaucasia in the XIX-XX Centuries]*, Tbilisi: Science. 1984, p. 62.

railway in Transcaucasia along the historical trade route, from the Black Sea port of Poti to Tiflis, the regional capital, would restore the historical transit function of the Caucasus. Besides economic expediency, this initiative was driven by the political imperatives of the empire. The Crimean War highlighted Russia's evident lag behind the industrialized Western empires. Achieving military and political success necessitated the development of a capitalist economy, wherein the railway would play a crucial role. The Crimean War itself underscored the effective military use of railways. Consequently, the development of the Caucasian railway became a pivotal element in the modernization efforts of the Russian Empire.

By the time discussions about the Transcaucasian railway arose, Russia had already laid its first railway line. Thus, the idea of the Poti-Tiflis railway aligned with the empire's overarching goal of becoming an empire on rails.⁷ The first study on the feasibility and approximate cost estimation of the railway in Transcaucasia belongs to the engineer Boleslav Statkovsky. He carried out this research on the instructions of the viceroy of the Caucasus, Alexander Baryatinsky. According to Statkovsky's project, the railway line was supposed to run from Tiflis to Baku. The approximate cost of the project was 16 000 £ per mile.⁸ It compares with British costs of about £17,000 a mile, French of £14,000 and Indian of £17,000. It was funded partly by the government, partly by loans from European bankers. Its great advantage was that it was usable all the year round and thus well justified on military grounds.⁹ In general, Statkovsky considered the railway line to be economically profitable and supported it.

The same year, 1857, Baryatinsky sent a report card to the Russian emperor, Alexander II, in which he justified the need for a railway. He argued that the railway would help the empire to establish control over the periphery. As a result, the region would be integrated into the

⁷ *Ibid* see An argument introduced by Schenk about consolidation of Russian national space through railway construction p. 59.

⁸ Central Historic Archive of Georgia (CHAG) 279/1/5968/191-209.

⁹ Searight, Sarah. "Russian railway penetration of Central Asia." *Asian affairs* 23, no. 2, 1992, 171-180.

imperial space.¹⁰ Another pressing problem for the empire was a large-scale robbery and smuggling in Western Georgia. Gurians were engaged in trade with Muslim compatriots. Industry and trade in the Southern provinces of the Tsarist empire could only prosper in case communications were improved.¹¹

In 1863, Mikhail Romanov replaced Baryatinsky as the viceroy of the Caucasus. Soon after, Alexander II was presented with a project of Transcaucasian railway created by British engineer Prince Belly. The project envisaged the construction of a railway line connecting the Black and Caspian seas. The project was approved, but for financial reasons, decision was made to start the working on the Poti-Tiflis section first, as Western Transcaucasia was of greater importance both from a military and economic point of view. Poti stood as a sole port on the eastern coast of the Black Sea under Russian control. Simultaneously, the plan was already in motion to connect the Caspian and Black seas. The active exploitation of Baku oil signaled that it was only a matter of time before this route would become essential.¹²

The total cost of the Poti-Tiflis section was estimated 16 million Manats.¹³ The construction was completed in 13.5 months. In 1871, on August 14, the first train left Kvirila station for Poti, although the "birthday" of the Caucasian Railway is considered to be October 10, 1872, when the first train arrived from Poti to Tiflis.

The Railways Issue in the Georgian Printed Press

Georgian periodicals, most prominently, *Droeba* (The Times) and *Iveria* (Georgia) played a pivotal role in the making of Georgian nation. Through printed press Georgian intellectual elites defined the markers of a new Georgian identity and disseminated them among the small literate strata of Society. Parallel to that process, Society for Spreading the Literacy

¹⁰ CHAG 279/1/5968/214.

¹¹ Rayfield Donald, *Edge of Empires: A History of Georgia*, London: Reaktion Books, 2012, 296.

¹² *Argutinskii-Dolgorukov, A.M.M, Istoria Soorujenia I Ekspluatatsii Zakavkazskoi Zhelesnoi Dorogi za 25 let io Syshestvovania [History of construction and Exploitation of Transcaucasian Railroads in first 25 years of its Construction]* 1871-1896, Tiflis: Transcaucasian railroad, 1896, 49.

¹³ CHAG, 279/1/47/3.

Among Georgians engaged in a campaign of spreading the literacy amongst the peasant communities.

The basis for the new national identity was the European idea of progress. Georgian intellectuals were inspired by the peasant liberation discourse popular in the 1850-60s. They aimed at modernization and reformation of Georgian society in almost all spheres of life¹⁴.

While the Russian Empire viewed the construction of railways in Transcaucasia primarily as a means of military dominance and imperial consolidation, Georgian intellectuals, drawing on European experiences, foresaw additional, unintended consequences for the Empire. They closely observed the political, societal, and technological advancements in Europe. Unlike the Russian perspective, Georgian intellectuals anticipated the potential economic development of the region and the national consolidation of disintegrated Georgian regions as significant outcomes of the railway project.

While many writers acknowledged the direct benefits of railroads for national development, the topic sparked active debate in the pages of the press. Intellectual entrepreneurs like Niko Nikoladze and Giorgi Tsereteli passionately advocated for railroads as a means of promoting economic well-being. They countered railway skeptics who viewed railroads as a threat to traditional economic structures and questioned their accessibility for the poor. Their efforts sparked significant societal discourse within the empire and even led to the emergence of a petition system, where regional communities independently sought to improve their well-being.

In the next sections I will explore some of the major themes in this discourse, demonstrate the major arguments pro and against the railway construction.

Niko Nikoladze and his pro-railway stance

¹⁴ Reisner Oliver, Sakartveloshi Samokalako Sazogadoebis Ganvitarebis Taviseburebebi [Trends of Civil Society Development in Georgia] extract from the book: Teoriebi, Diskursi da Realoba [Theories, Discourse and Reality] editor, Zedania Giga, 2023.

Niko Nikoladze stands out as one of the most prominent public intellectuals in modern Georgian history. He played a pivotal role in laying the foundations of the national economy in Georgia based on capitalist principles. Nikoladze was the first mayor, planner, and visionary behind the project of the port city of Poti. His name is closely associated with the Transcaucasian railway, infrastructure development, and road building in Georgia. In fact, he even coined the term 'Liandagi' in Georgian to refer to railway tracks. Together with Sergei Meshki, the editor of periodical *Droeba*, Ivane Meskhi, Giorgi Tsereteli and many others, Nikoladze wrote extensively on the issue of railroad construction.

For Nikoladze, railways were essential for fostering interaction, trade, and connectivity, which he deemed as fundamental prerequisites for education and success. While his discourse primarily revolved around economic development rather than nation-building per se, he recognized that a thriving economy was crucial for improving the well-being of Georgians, enhancing their interconnectedness, and fostering cooperation among them.

Nikoladze's advocacy efforts intensified after it became known that the initial railway route bypassed Kutaisi, the capital of Western Georgia, by 6 versts. This decision was primarily driven by economic considerations of the empire to reduce construction costs. Nikoladze claimed that the absence of a railway within the city would diminish its importance and adversely affect its trade and economic vitality. Drawing from the European and Russian experiences, Nikoladze noted that towns and trading posts located far from railways, which had been bypassed during construction, often suffered a decline and eventual abandonment.¹⁵ Conversely, land and property prices in cities near railways plummeted due to decreased trade, leading residents to migrate closer to the railway lines. Nikoladze had a point, indeed, over time, settlements and trading posts in areas distant from railways gradually vanished.

In 1871 citizens of Kutaisi petitioned to the Viceroy of Caucasus requesting the inclusion of Kutaisi in the railway line. The Viceroy agreed to permit the addition of a separate branch

¹⁵ *Droeba*, 1871, August 12, N 31, Potis Ambebi [Poti News].

connecting the main artery to Kutaisi. While this decision allowed passengers to reach Kutaisi, Nikoladze believed that it would not suffice to accelerate the city's economic development. He argued that Kutaisi needed to be part of the main line, ensuring that not only intended visitors but also those traveling through would be compelled to stay and utilize the city's services and commodities, thus stimulating economic activity.

In the follow-up petition, residents of Kutaisi expressed their willingness to cover the costs of the railroad themselves in order to secure the main line to the city instead of just a branch. This was indeed a fascinating example of self-organization driven by clear economic interests.

In this context it is relevant to mention Paul Manning's characterization of the Georgian intelligentsia as a mediating figure between the colonizer and the colonized, as well as between existing reality and future progress.¹⁶As Manning suggests, it is often not immediately evident to the local population what the exact benefits of innovations are, thus mediator's function is crucial; they must elucidate the utility of the common good in a manner that resonates with and engages the common people, so that to persuade them in need for putting actual effort in railroad construction.¹⁷

Recognizing the potential benefits of railways beyond mere transportation, Nikoladze and Giorgi Tsereteli represented railways to villagers as catalysts for educational opportunities and societal advancement, which requires sacrifices from the population. Their suggestion for the railway project comprised three key components:

- A) Land for railway construction and stations should be provided free of charge;
- B) Peasants should contribute their labor, working six days a week towards the construction effort;
- C) Materials necessary for construction should be supplied by nobility.¹⁸

¹⁶ Manning Paul, *Strangers in a Strange Land: Occidentalists Publics and Orientalist Geographies in Nineteenth-Century Georgian Imaginaries*, Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2012, 76.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ *Droeba*, 1884, October 7, N 216, Pasukhi Iason Kapanadzes [Response to Iason Kapanadze].

Eventually this campaign proved successful and several small branches were built, including Shorapani branch. It is important to note that unfortunately newspapers do not give us any specific information about the actual attitude of peasantry. What we know is that in couple of years small village of Shorapani had its own railway station, school, ambulatory, kindergarten and even a small drama theatre.¹⁹

One of the main arguments of pro-railway group, advocated by Nikoladze himself, was the transformative impact of railways upon education. Nikoladze viewed railways not merely as a means of transportation, but as a liberating force, alleviating the burden of labor on individuals. He argued that railways would not only foster economic prosperity but also enable people to reap the benefits of progress, fostering an increased interest in education as an essential pathway towards a brighter future.²⁰

Although Nikoladze and others did not explicitly discuss the railway as a nation-making tool, their advocacy for improved regional connections and increased communication inadvertently solidified of the perception that such developments equated to economic prosperity.

Petitions for the railways

The decisions made by the Tsarist empire regarding the construction of railroads, were primarily driven by the specific economic considerations, particularly the need to connect vital trade hubs and industrial regions within the empire. A notable example of this strategic approach was the construction of Baku-Batumi railway, which was primarily motivated by the need to expedite the oil extraction in Baku. Consequently, the route of each railway line was determined by these economic imperatives, resulting in the inclusion of certain cities and regions while excluding others, such as Abkhazia.

¹⁹ *Droeba*, 1884, November 9, Pasuxad Rkinigzis Sargeblobis Uarmkhopels [Response to the critique of Railway Utility].

²⁰ *Droeba*, 1871, August 12, N 55, Potis Ambebi [Poti News]; *Droeba*, 1871, August 18, N 32, Potis Ambebi, Dasaruli [Poti News, Ending].

Case of Kutaisi was a successful example of local activism spurred by economic grievances. With the support of Nikoladze, residents of Kutaisi mobilized in response to a noticeable decline in trade following the bypassing of their city by the railway. Through financial contributions and concerted advocacy efforts, they successfully secured permission to construct a railway branch, thereby elevating Kutaisi to the status of a railway-connected city.

The success of Kutaisi inspired similar demands in other parts of the Georgia, notably in Adjara, and Sokhumi in Abkhazia. While *Droeba* documented these demands/petitions, specific details such as the demographics of supporters, including their social class affiliations and age, are unknown.

For example, a report published in *Droeba* in 1883 notified about a collective effort of local merchants and the entire population had reportedly sent a telegram to the Ministry of Roads, urging for the immediate construction of a railway line.²¹

The very same year another petition was published in *Droeba*, this time originating from Sokhumi:

*We were informed from Batumi that the merchants and all the people there have sent a telegram to the minister to open a fast railway line there. As we see now, no one is looking for us, they don't build roads for us, so we have to take care of ourselves again. Therefore, on November 28th we, the residents of the city have gathered in Sokhumi, where General T. Grigol Sharvashidze and others talked about the fate of the city. We talked about laying the railway from Sukhumi to Akhal-Senaki. This idea was inspired by ch. GR. Shervashidze. People received this idea with great admiration....*²²

On that very meeting, as article reported, the inhabitants of Sokhumi expressed their readiness that the nobility would allocate construction materials, and the local peasants would lay the tracks for the railway with their own efforts, in case they received permission

²¹ *Droeba*, 1883, May 12, N 78, Akhali Ambebi [News Section].

²² *Droeba*, 1883, December 14, N 84, Droebis Korespondentsia [Droeba Correspondence].

from the central government to lay the railway. It seems that the desire was great among the population, because they realized what material prosperity the railway line would bring to them, and also, as the article reported, scarcely inhabited Abkhazia would be filled with residents.

It is noteworthy, that the two regions where petitions came from, Adjara and Abkhazia, held significant importance for Georgian elites. They represented areas that were either recently incorporated into common Georgian realm via Russian empire, such as Adjara, or sparsely inhabited by Georgians, like Abkhazia. These regions played a pivotal role in the nationalist discourse, as they differed somewhat from the more homogenous parts of Georgia while simultaneously being seen as historical lands in need of "Georginization".

The discourse surrounding railway development, driven by the elites, fostered mobilizational patterns centered around common economic interests. Notably, these demands were not suppressed by the Empire, likely because they were not articulated in explicitly nationalistic terms.

Actually, from two petitions discussed only one was successful, Adjarian railway was constructed soon enough due to its strategic importance as a portal city, Abkhazian railway connecting it to the rest of Georgian regions was built only in the Soviet period. It seems that Empire's approach remained focused on enhancing its imperial control and economic considerations, with this last one historically dictating the transportation routes.

The critique of the railways

Nikoladze and Tsereteli had been criticized in the series of anonymous letters published in *Droeba*. Authors argued that those two public intellectuals had no right to speak on behalf of the local population, -while intellectuals may have claimed to advocate for the best interests of regional communities, the actual voices and grievances of the peasants went unheard.

For instance, in November 1884 an anonymous article was published in *Droeba*.²³ It addressed the alleged negative impact of railways on the well-being of peasants. For many peasants the physical transportation of goods from villages to cities constituted their primary source of income. The authors argued that with the increased usage of railways, peasants would be marginalized in the competition and left without income. Thus, article contended that the peasants' agreement to the construction was a result of coercion rather than genuine consent. Secondly, author tried to challenge the assumption, that railways were gateway of educational opportunities based on empirical data. For instance, article mentions that in the Northern Caucasus 9 out of ten villages had no railway connections, but almost every village had a school. There were schools in Kakheti, but no railroads and so on.

While the first argument about economic disadvantages potentially inflicted upon peasants seem more plausible as short term effects, I think second argument unfairly disregards the potential positive impacts of railways that they most certainly had in European context.

Railways and the making of the Georgian national space

Although not explicitly stated, it is evident that Georgian intellectual elites viewed railways as a means to modernize Georgian nation. The discourse primarily centered around economic prosperity, yet figures like Nikoladze directly acknowledged that improved economic well-being and enhanced regional connectivity would also lead to higher literacy rates, stability, and overall prosperity.

However, the railway was not the sole focus of discussion; elites also pursued other avenues of progress, with a central emphasis on fostering literacy among Georgians.

The impact of the railway line was profound, giving rise to new settlements and the expansion of existing villages. This phenomenon is captured in the *Droeba* article from 1883: *Take Samtredia in Imereti, for instance, which stands as a prime example of the transformative potential of railways. Just a decade or so ago, this area was densely wooded*

²³ *Droeba*, 1884, October 24, N 229, Akhali Movlena Chvens Tskhovrebashi [New Event in Our Lives].

*and inhabited only by wolves and jackals. With the construction of the Poti-Tiflis railway, a railway station was established in this previously uninhabited wilderness. Nowadays, Samtredia has evolved into a bustling trade village, experiencing gradual expansion, particularly following the construction of the Batumi railway line. The value of land has soared exponentially, foreshadowing Samtredia's promising future as a major trading hub. It is entirely conceivable that in the near future, Samtredia could evolve into a thriving city.*²⁴

Two years later, *Droeba* published an article stating,

*With the construction of the Batumi railway, Samtredia station has gained prominence, transforming this once uninhabited area into a bustling small city. Now serving as a junction for three railway lines, trade activity in Samtredia is thriving.*²⁵

The expansion of interactive trade spaces and the transformation of small villages into cities due to increased transit significance signal substantial changes in the socioeconomic fabric. However, gauging the impact of these transformations on ordinary citizens, especially the peasantry, proves challenging with only the information available from periodicals.

This challenge was further complicated by the fact, that all announcements were made in Russian, a language foreign to many. Additionally, the consequences for impoverished individuals who inadvertently breached these regulations were severe, often resulting in physical punishment.²⁶

Therefore, while the expansion of railways and the establishment of trade hubs undoubtedly altered the physical landscape, the exact impact on the everyday lives of ordinary citizens, particularly the peasantry, remains uncertain. However, according to newspaper reports, one notable outcome is the increased communication between regions, which likely had a unifying effect on Georgian society.

In 1872, Giorgi Tsereteli expressed concern about the isolation of Georgians from one another due to the lack of roads, stating, "Kartleli [Inhabitant of Eastern Georgian province

²⁴ *Droeba*, 1883, August 14, N 160, Akhali Ambebi [News].

²⁵ *Droeba*, 1885, January 17, N 12, Shinauri Qronika [Internal News Section].

²⁶ *Droeba*, 1883, May 28, N 99, Letter.

"Kartli"] does not know the character and life of those from Kakheti [Province in the Eastern Georgia] Kakheti does not know those from Imereti [Province in the Western Georgia] and the cycle continues..." This sentiment underscored the profound disconnect between various regions.

By contrast, in 1871, an author of a *Droeba* article asserted that railways would have a profound social impact by connecting previously disintegrated Georgian regions. Railways, according to the author, not only transcended physical barriers but also catalyzed changes in behavior, culture, and economic activity. The author particularly emphasized that these transformative changes were largely attributed to the advent of railways.²⁷

"There are be a hundred workers on railways; Among them, there are twenty people from Imereti, and the rest are all from Samegrelo". In addition to the fact that the railway physically facilitated the movement, the inhabitants of different regions were involved in the railway work itself.

The role of railways, as described here, has parallels in the French context, as articulated by Eugene Weber. Weber introduced the concept of the "agencies of change," identifying three primary forces that transformed French society and fostered a sense of French national identity: roads and railroads, schooling, and military service. He adopted both micro and macro historical perspectives in his analysis.²⁸

Before 1870, Weber argued, France lacked a cohesive national identity. He illustrated how market forces, education, railways, and military service all played pivotal roles in integrating the peasantry into the nation during the latter decades of the 19th century, thereby bridging the gap between popular and elite cultures.

Similarly, in the Georgian context, railways played a significant role. On one hand, they contributed to the modernization of society, as emphasized by the elites. On the other hand, railways facilitated the emergence of class solidarity along nationalistic lines. Increased

²⁷ *Droeba*, 1871, April 30, N 17, Oriode Sikva Rkinigzaze [Couple of Words about railways].

²⁸ Weber Eugen, *Peasants into Frenchmen: The Modernization of Rural France, 1870-1914*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999.

urbanization and interactions between Armenians and Georgians fostered a heightened sense of Georgianness.²⁹ This suggests that railways not only facilitated physical connectivity but also played a role in shaping national identity and solidarity.

Summary

In the Georgian context, unlike in France where modernization, according to Weber's paradigm, was primarily a state-driven top-down process, Georgian nationalist-minded elites assumed a similar role. These elites spearheaded efforts to modernize Georgian society through the construction of railways. They utilized upon the project of Tsarist empire, which itself had very different intentions over the importance of railways. Thus, unintendedly for the empire, railway contributed to societal changes in the Caucasus. It is important to undernote that Georgian elites had to manoeuvre in a complex environment. Unlike France where feudalism ended by 18th century and the concept of citizenship emerged, Georgia did not experience those developments until 1917.

The local population at times found themselves caught in the fervor of these elites' drive to modernize, as they ventured into various regions advocating for a new set of needs, beliefs, and expectations associated with railway development. Simultaneously, these elites sought to homogenize the national language and replace local dialects with a unified national language. In this way, Georgian elites played a central role in shaping the trajectory of modernization, exerting influence over both the physical infrastructure of railways and the cultural and social fabric of Georgian society. I attempted to reflect on some of those impacts on the daily lives of Georgians. The research of periodicals proved that railways brought together Georgians from different regions. In that regard railways contributed to dismantling of localized economies and social networks, aiming to replace them with new forms of social relations centered around the railways.

²⁹ Supra note 1, p. 122.

Bibliography

Archival Sources

Central Historic Archive of Georgia (CHAG) 279/1/5968.

CHAG 279/1/5968.

CHAG, 279/1/47.

Newspaper

Droeba

Books

Argutinski-Dolgorukov A. M. Istorია Soorujenia I Ekspluatatsii Zakavkazskoi Jeleznoi Dorogi za 25 let io sushestvovania 1871-1896 [History of Construction and Exploitation of Transcaucasian Railway during first 25 years of its existence], Tiflis: Transcaucasian Railway, 1896.

Gugushvili Paata, Sakartvelosa da Amierkavkasiis Ekonomikuri Ganvitareba XIX-XX Saukuneebshi, [Economic Development of Georgia and Transcaucasia in the XIX-XX Centuries] Tbilisi: Science. 1984.

Hobsbawm, Eric. The Age of Capital:1848-1875. London: Brettenham House, 1995.

Janelidze Otar, Daushvili Alexandre, Sakmiani Sakartvelo: 1801-1921 [Capitalism in Georgia: 1801-1921] Tbilisi: LLC Alternative Media, 2022.

Manning Paul, Strangers in a Strange Land: Occidentalists Publics and Orientalist Geographies in Nineteenth- Century Georgian Imaginaries, Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2012.

Rayfield Donald, Edge of Empires: A History of Georgia, London: Reaktion Books, 2012.

Reisner Oliver, Sakartveloshi Samokalako Sazogadoebis Ganvitarebis Taviseburebebi [Trends of Civil Society Development in Georgia] extract from the book: Teoriebi, Diskursi da Realoba [Theories, Discourse and Reality] editor, Zedania Giga, 2023.

Schenk Benjamin, Russlands Fahrt in die Moderne : Mobilität und sozialer Raum im Eisenbahnzeitalter. [Train to Modernity: Mobility and Social Space of Russia in the Age of Railways] Stuttgart: Steiner, 2016.

Suny, Ronald Grigor. The making of the Georgian nation. Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994.

Weber Eugen, Peasants into Frenchmen: The Modernization of Rural France, 1870-1914. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999.