

From Establishment to Dissent: The Cases of the Litterateurs Tomas Venclova and Zviad Gamsakhurdia in Soviet Lithuania and Soviet Georgia

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Abstract

Soviet intellectuals were closely related with indoctrination practices and the legitimisation of the regime. During post-Stalinism Soviet intellectuals experienced the impact of destalinization by opening more room for the dynamic exchange of ideas and expressions. It is important to explore the Soviet peripheries, which were important for the demise of USSR, and to track down similar manifestations in them. This article pays special attention to those controversial situations in Soviet Lithuania and Soviet Georgia, that showed the shift in ideologies, conflicts in cultural establishment and the lines of cleavage that have emerged within the dissident movements. By embracing the Cold war atmosphere in Soviet peripheries, this article analyses the trajectories of two intellectuals - the poet Tomas Venclova and the literary critic Zviad Gamsakhurdia, who came from the families of cultural nomenklatura in Soviet periphery, but who in the 70's increasingly moved to the position of dissidents and human rights activists. Bearing in mind that Gamsakhurdia adopted an increasingly harsh nationalist rhetoric and Venclova declared cosmopolitan values, though both became well-known dissidents, the analysis provides the context of cultural process and ethnoparticularism in Soviet Lithuania and Soviet Georgia, revealing the similarities and differences in Tomas Venclova's and Zviad Gamsakhurdia's relationship with the cultural establishment and dissident movement. In doing so, this article places these cases in the broader context of ethnic particularism during the Cold War. The comparison of both cases allows us to argue that cosmopolitanism, especially bearing in mind that Soviet Lithuania was more open to various ideas from the West (if compared with Georgia), felt a stronger disciplining effect than a covered nationalist position.

Keywords: Human rights; dissidents; Venclova; Gamsakhurdia; Soviet Lithuania; Soviet Georgia; Cold war; ethno-particularism; nationalism; cosmopolitanism.



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The “Cold Warriors”, participants of the conflict that gripped the world for nearly fifty years, were not only the creators of confrontational policies and harsh rhetoric, but also those who adopted dissenting stances at the cultural and political level, often manifesting their approval for the standards of living and values of the other side. A cultural opposition emerged in Central Europe and in the USSR during the post-Stalinist period. It expressed its distance from Soviet and socialist standards and its fascination for Western democratic models. These views gradually gained ground, to the point that, in the late 1980s, they were no longer the expression of an isolated opposition, but had rather become part of the new mainstream.¹ During détente, a number of intellectuals had immediately decided to take a stance on the emerging issue of human rights violations in the Soviet Union, turning *de facto* into dissidents. Indeed, in the 1970s human rights movements in the USSR became the symbol of the dissatisfaction of part of the society, and of the appeal that Western ideals had on it. Daniel C. Thomas argues that the demise of Communist rule in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union was significantly influenced by the transnational diffusion of human rights values and standards.² Hence, this cultural shift was significant not only in East European societies, but also in the Soviet cultural establishment, which also felt the impact of these processes.

After the death of Stalin, Soviet intellectuals experienced the impact of destalinization, which opened up spaces for the expression and circulation of new ideas that often aimed at the reform of the Soviet system. After the Prague Spring and its repression, however, in response to the tightening up of the Party’s grip and influenced by the general atmosphere of Cold War, some intellectuals chose to confront the regime. Most of the studies focus on networks of dissent and underground activities in the Centre (Moscow, Leningrad).³ However it is equally important to explore the Soviet peripheries, which played a crucial role in the demise of USSR, and to track down similar emerging manifestations of dissent. This paper specifically focuses on those controversial situations that show shifts in ideologies and conflicts within the cultural establishment, as well as the emergence of cleavages within the dissident movements themselves. Such controversial situations can be seen in Soviet Lithuania and Soviet Georgia in the two multi-faceted cases of the “cosmopolitan” poet Tomas Venclova and the “nationalist” literary critic Zviad Gamsakhurdia. They both came from the milieu of the cultural nomenklatura (their fathers were recognized Soviet writers or poets), but in the 1970s both participated in the human rights movement and expressed criticism of the cultural establishment. Although both of them eventually became well-known dissidents, Gamsakhurdia and Venclova represented two very different approaches: the former adopting an increasingly harsh nationalist rhetoric and the latter declaring his cosmopolitan values. Therefore, it can be interesting to compare their cases. Through the analysis

¹ The collections described by the international research project “COURAGE. Connecting collections: Cultural Opposition – Understanding the Cultural Heritage of Dissent in the Former Socialist Countries” (funded by the European Union’s Horizon 2020 research and innovation program) show the scale of these cultural opposition activities in Central and Eastern Europe. See: <http://cultural-opposition.eu/#project>.

² Daniel C. Thomas, „Human Rights Ideas, the Demise of Communism, and the End of the Cold War”, *Journal of Cold War Studies*, April 2005, 7(2): 110-141. ·

³ Sarah B. Snyder, *Human Rights Activism and the End of the Cold War: A Transnational History of the Helsinki Network* (New York : Cambridge University Press, 2011).

of the artistic and socio-political trajectories of both these figures, the paper attempts to: 1) unravel the similarities and differences in Tomas Venclova's and Zviad Gamsakhurdia's relationship with the cultural establishment and dissident movement; 2) identify similarities, differences, and turning points in the cultures of two Soviet peripheries by placing these cases in the broader context of ethnic particularism during the Cold War.

The justification for the comparison of Lithuania/Georgia and Gamsakhurdia/Venclova is based on the observation that both peripheries had strong national and human rights movements and nationalist-oriented elites during the Soviet period, even if the Georgian ethno-particularism was stronger and the country's elites were more conservative than the ones in Lithuania. This research is based on three historiographical traditions: the cultural studies of Cold War, the studies of cultural and national policies in the USSR, and those on the nationalisms within the USSR. These approaches complement, rather than contradict, each other.

Among the scholarship on the cultural aspects of the Cold War, I will refer primarily to the works of Daniel C. Thomas, Sarah B. Snyder, Lyudmila Alekseeva and Ann Komaromi, who showed the importance of the human rights and dissent movement in the USSR in the context of bipolar confrontation between Washington and Moscow. For instance, Sarah B. Snyder has demonstrated how transnational networks of human rights activists pushed both Western and Eastern governments to pursue policies that fostered the rise of organized dissent in Eastern Europe and human rights activism in USSR.⁴ Lyudmila Alekseeva, who is a Russian historian, famous Soviet dissident and founding member of the Moscow Helsinki Watch group, has described the human rights movements in different Soviet republics.⁵ Ann Komaromi has looked at the history of Soviet dissidence by studying *samizdat* and the idea of a private-public sphere⁶. Regarding cultural and national policies in the USSR, I am using the insights of Yury Slezkine and Terry Martin, who illustrated that the Soviet system not only performed cultural standardization but also promoted ethnic particularism⁷ and ensured "affirmative actions" policies in favor of some nationalities.⁸ The latter co-existed with Russocentrism, an aspect that has been highlighted by several other authors, including Geoffrey Hosking⁹.

Concerning nationalism in Soviet Lithuania and Soviet Georgia, several scholars have argued that local elites in these peripheries were strongly nationalist while their position partially complied with the Soviet nationality policies. For instance, Erik R. Scott has shown that, during the Soviet period, Georgian elites were extraordinarily successful in adjusting to the Soviet system. They also contributed in shaping the system. At the same time, however, it was the intellectuals who ultimately called into

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Alekseeva, Lyudmila, *Soviet Dissent: Contemporary Movements for National, Religious and Human Rights* (Wesleyan University Press, 1987).

⁶ Ann Komaromi, „Samizdat and Soviet dissident publics“, *Slavic Review*, vol. 71, no.1 (Spring 2012): 70-90.

⁷ Yuri Slezkine, „The USSR as a Communal Apartment, or How a Socialist State Promoted Ethnic Particularism“, *Slavic Review*, vol. 53, no. 2 (Summer, 1994): 414-452

⁸ Terry Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923-1939* (Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 2001).

⁹ Geoffrey Hosking, „Review of Empire of Nations: Ethnographic Knowledge and the Making of the Soviet Union“, by Francine Hirsch, *Journal of Modern History*, 79, no.2 (summer 2007): 492.

question the legitimacy of Soviet power.¹⁰ Zviad Gamsakhurdia was one of them. The Lithuanian party and cultural elites also became nationalist-oriented after the death of Stalin, defending the peripheries' interests in various realms, from economy¹¹ to culture.¹² Soviet Lithuania's elites and the intelligentsia, in comparison with Georgia's cultural elites, were less connected with the center and its dynamics.¹³ However, the case of Tomas Venclova illustrates a deviation from the usual path: indeed, this is the case of a member of the cultural elite who actually detached from the milieu of local intellectuals. He was also nationally indifferent and who, having gained experience from Moscow dissident circles, chose rather an individualist trajectory in the 1970s (a development that was quite typical for democratic dissidents in Moscow).

This article is based on a selection of primary sources - the most important are those collected in the archives of Lithuania, Georgia and Russia, along with the interviews recorded with cultural figures in Lithuania and Georgia.

Writers in Soviet Georgia and Soviet Lithuania

Soviet Lithuania and Soviet Georgia entered the USSR under different circumstances. Both states declared independence in 1918, but their historical trajectories were different. Georgia had independence only for a limited number of years: in 1921 it was captured by the Bolsheviks and was incorporated into the USSR in 1922. Meanwhile, Lithuania lived through a period of independence from 1918 to 1940, when it was occupied by the Soviet Union. In both countries, intellectuals represented an important group that helped to legitimize the Soviet system.

Soviet Georgia

The development of Soviet intellectuals in Georgia coincided with similar processes taking place in the Soviet Union. Among intellectuals, the writers emerged as the dominant group. A famous quote from Stalin's speech at the home of Maxim Gorki in 1932 revealed the importance of writers in the cultural process: "Man proceeds in his life. However, you need to help him to transform his soul. The human soul is a very important product. You are the engineers of human souls."¹⁴

The implementation of Soviet regional policies followed specific dynamics, taking different forms in the different regions. One can mention, first of all, the ethnicities question, which was not ignored, but rather managed by adopting affirmative action,

¹⁰ Erik R. Scott, *Familiar Strangers: The Georgian Diaspora and the Evolution of Soviet Empire* (Oxford : Oxford University Press, 2016).

¹¹ Saulius Grybkauskas, *Sovietinė nomenklatūra ir pramonė Lietuvoje 1965-1985 (Soviet nomenclature and industry in Lithuania in 1965-1985)* (Vilnius: LII Leidykla, 2011).

¹² Vilius Ivanauskas, *Lietuviškoji nomenklatūra biurokratinėje sistemoje: tarp stagnacijos ir dinamikos (1968-1988)* (Lithuanian nomenclature in bureaucratic system: between stagnation and dynamics (1968-1988)) (Vilnius: Lietuvos istorijos institutas, 2011).

¹³ Vilius Ivanauskas, *Įrėmintą tapatybę: Lietuvos rašytojai tautų draugystės imperijoje (Framed identity: Lithuanian writers in the friendship of nations empire)*, (Vilnius :Lietuvos istorijos institutas, 2016).

¹⁴ 'No.38 Vospominanie K.L. Zelinskogo "Večer u Gorkogo" (26 oktyabrya 1932 goda)', in T. Vodop'yanova, T. Domracheva & L. Babaeva (eds), *Mezhdū molotom i nakovalnei. Soyuz sovetskikh pisatelei SSSR. Dokumenty i komentary* (Between the hammer and the anvil. Union of Soviet Writers of the USSR. Documents and Comments) (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2011), 163.

which guaranteed a certain amount of preferential support to national minorities.¹⁵ There was, indeed, some room for ethnic particularity. Accordingly, this approach allowed for the “*korenizatsyia*” (indigenization) in the field of culture. This increasingly opened some space for ethnic representations in different Soviet republics. However, early Stalinism was not the best time to promote a Georgian identity, whereas the Bolshevik policies were aimed at transforming society from an agrarian to an industrial one. The Great Purges strongly swept across a majority of the Georgian intelligentsia, including writers such as Titsian Tabidze, Mikheil Javakhvashvili, and others.

Despite the Great Terror, in the mid-1930s, the attention to the Georgian ethnic issues increased, gaining support at the central level. There were a few reasons for this shift. One was related to changes in the federal structure. In 1936, with the new “Stalin” constitution, the Transcaucasian SFSR was abolished, and a separate Soviet Georgian republic was formed. Another reason for this was related to Stalin’s personal interest in giving higher priority to Georgian culture, since he felt domestic and foreign enemies still perceived him in ethnic terms, as a “savage Georgian, who occupied power in Russia.”¹⁶ With the personal patronage of Stalin, ‘Georgian intellectuals, had greater facility than other groups (except Russians) to emphasise history, ethnic features and the national culture. For instance, two events organized at the end of the ‘30s revealed this attention to Georgian culture. The 750-year anniversary of the Georgian poet Shota Rustaveli, organized in 1937, became the biggest event of Georgian culture in the 1930s. The second event was the so-called “Ten-day Festival (*dekada*) of Georgian Art”, organised in Moscow on January 5-15, 1937. At that moment, it was probably the most important event representing Georgian culture, covering also the cultural production of the Mingrelian, Guri, Svaneti, Abkhazian, and Ossetian people. It became an introduction to the upcoming Rustaveli anniversary celebration. Georgian music, art, literature, and theatre gained great attention from the intelligentsia in the center and the central Soviet press.

During the pre-war years, escape from the Great Terror shaped the Stalinist milieu of Georgian intellectuals, who clearly avoided risky situations and showed devotion to Stalin. During WWII and the post-war period, the Stalinist leadership, seeking greater mobilization of the society, promoted patriotic narratives, emphasizing the role of Soviet nations fighting against fascism.¹⁷ After the war, Georgian writers made attempts to routinize this line of increasing emphasis on historical heritage, claiming Georgia to be a deeply historical nation.¹⁸ The “exoticism” of Georgian culture was

¹⁵ Terry Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923-1939* (Ithaca : Cornell University Press, 2001).

¹⁶ A grandson of the poet G. Leonidze during an interview in his grandfather’s house mentioned that Stalin was not recognized among pre-revolutionary Georgian local elites, the he sharply distanced himself from them once gained power, but at a later stage, being permanently conceived as a Georgian, he was willing to add more prestige to the Georgian side.

¹⁷ The striking example of the state’s focus on ethnic lines was Stalin’s speech (pledge) “For the Russian nation” on May 24, 1945, which were the culmination of this line (after the war attention to ethnic issues slightly diminished). See Nevezhin, *Zastol’ya Iosifa Stalina. Kniga pervaya: Bolshie Kremliouskie priemi 1930-1940 gg* (Feasts of Joseph Stalin. The first book. The Great Kremlin receptions of the 1930s-1940s) (Moscow : Novyi chronograph, 2011).

¹⁸ Speech of S. Chikovani in 1947, (National archives of Georgia (Central Archive of Contemporary History), f.8, op.1, d.1106, l.1- 62).

expressed in a much broader field, covering not only the high culture, but also food, and even toasting traditions, which were also co-opted into the general Soviet everyday culture.¹⁹ Previous members of different “fellow travellers” groups, who survived the Great Purges, such as G. Leonidze, B. Zhgenti, S. Chikovani, I. Abashidze, and K. Gamsakhurdia, became an important part of the establishment, increasingly routinizing their authority in the local cultural *milieu*. The accumulated authority of leading Georgian writers did not guarantee permanent security, but it gave more room to them, for instance, to maneuver during the *zdanovshchina* period (campaign against Western influence) in 1946-1948, demonstrating much bolder behavior than their colleagues in Lithuania.

Soviet Lithuania

The Lithuanian case was rather different. After occupation, Lithuanian Soviet writers were forced to ensure the legitimacy of Soviet order, while having hardly any possibility to express ethnic particularism. Local elites felt the consequences of the deportations of a significant part of the Lithuanian elites in 1940-1941 and after the war, during the postwar Soviet policy of denazification (Nazi occupation was between June 1941 and July 1944), and the anti-Soviet national resistance (1944-1953). For these reasons, attention to ethnic issues was limited. During the war and post-war period, Lithuanian writers, as well as the rest of the republic’s cultural intelligentsia, were new participants in the game. They learned how to be Soviet writers during their activities in the Soviet territories not occupied by Germans and had an intensive contact with USSR writers.

This group of so-called Muscovites shaped the new writers’ establishment. The purpose of Lithuanian writers was to visualize Soviet achievements. However, it was not an easy task to recognize which demands were being made from above. The *zdanovschina* in Lithuania showed that even major writers did not know how to produce texts without causing objections about their form or their content. Like the Great Purges in Georgia, the *zdanovschina* in Lithuania included macro terror or control policies, which clearly signaled that the room for maneuver available to Soviet writers was extremely limited. Afraid of harsh critics from Secretary of the Lithuanian CP, K. Preiksas in 1946, for nearly 10 years local writers did not attempt to write innovative books or poetry.

The most preferable were various stories of the “Soviet order” describing the emergence of *kolkhozes* or the pictures of New Soviet people (as seen in the literary work of T. Tilvytis and A. Gudaitis-Guzevičius). The Ten-day Festival (*dekada*) of Lithuanian literature and Art in 1948 and a similar *dekada* in 1954 (March 3-15) revealed that, compared to the previous *dekada* of Georgia in 1937, the Lithuanian *dekada* did not receive such headlines in central newspapers. For instance, in 1954, local leaders (party secretaries A. Sniečkus and V. Niunka, and the chairman of Lithuanian Council of Ministers M. Gedvilas), rather than the writers themselves or their reviewers, represented Lithuanian literature at the central level. They dissociated the local cultural life from the bourgeois interwar Lithuania. They emphasized that Lithuanian writers were on the way to developing a national culture suitable for the Party, and they admitted that many lessons still needed to be learnt.

¹⁹ Erik R. Sott, “Edible Ethnicity, How Georgian Cuisine Conquered the Soviet Table”, *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 13, 4 (Fall 2012): 831–58.

Changes during Krushchev's Thaw

Khrushchev's speech was an important factor in Soviet cultural life. Khrushchev's Thaw not only inspired the appearance of a new generation, the so-called "*shestidesyatniki*",²⁰ but also turned them back to look for new ideas. In Lithuania, the new generation of *shestidesyatniki* with such names as Justinas Marcinkevičius, Algimantas Baltakis and Alfonsas Maldonis found more room for Lithuanian ethno-particularism and opened rather wide official discourses of historic memory and ethnic nostalgia.²¹ Like in Georgia, it was at this point that an ethnic particularism officially promoted by the state did emerge.

Post-Stalinism in Lithuania created wider possibilities for discussing ethnic issues. In Georgia, however, it primarily meant a challenge to the existing pattern of cultural production, which already contained attention to ethnic questions. "National" narratives had already been routinized during Stalinism, and this had created rather satisfactory conditions for Georgian society and local elites. The massive protests in 1956, after Khrushchev's speech of the previous spring, could be explained by arguing that the "national pride" of "Georgianess" was abused, because the central leadership had crucially changed its attitude towards the Georgian Stalin. These protests reflected the alarm shared by Georgians who wanted to preserve their exceptionalism among other Soviet nationalities. In this context older elites continued the "Georgianization" process. At the same time, figures as I. Abashidze, G. Leonidze, G. Abashidze, K. Gamsakhurdia, and B. Zhgenti began further promoting ethnic issues at the official level, while often keeping a Stalinist type of rhetoric. The biggest difference between Georgia and Lithuania was that in Georgia it was not the *shestidesyatniki*, but the older generation that opened much earlier the discussion about ethno-historical values of Georgian culture, and these writers remained rather conservative in the epoch of the Thaw. In the 3rd Congress of the Georgian Writers' Union, Chairman I. Abashidze spoke about the necessity of preserving national literature from external influences and decadentism, giving the example of the importance of preserving Georgian national songs and dances, whilst warning against the possible harmful influences of modern dances from vinyl records.²²

Shestidesyatniki was not only the generation who believed in reformed socialism and attempted to go beyond a standardized role of Soviet intellectual but the one who actually followed a dual path in the post-Stalinist period. Significant parts of them adjusted to the system and were able to express a variety of ideas through the official channels. Others hardly accepted the tightening of the regime after the Prague Spring and turned to the path of dissent. Long-term human rights defender Lyudmila Alekseeva remembers that she and her fellow activists came from the circles of *shestidesyatniki*.²³ Vladislav Zubok noted the paradox: some activists started their

²⁰ Juliane Furst, *Stalin's Last Generation: Soviet Post-war Youth and the Emergence of Mature Socialism* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

²¹ Vilius Ivanauskas, 'Engineers of the Human Spirit' During Late Socialism: The Lithuanian Union of Writers Between Soviet Duties and Local Interests, *Europe-Asia Studies*, 2014, 66(4), p. 645–665.

²² The speech of I. Abashidze "High ideas requires high mastership", 1959, RGALI, f.631, op.42, b.35., l.1-33).

²³ Lyudmila Alekseeva, Pol Goldberg, *Pokolenie otepli. Vospominaniya (Generation of Thaw. Memories)* (Moscow : Zacharov, 2006).

careers as reformers of socialism, but ended as being radical human rights activists, supporting Western ideas.²⁴ In Lithuania, *shestidesyatniki* were those who, having institutional support during the post-Stalinism, gained the opportunity to express ethnic values by opening up to Western modernism.²⁵ Meanwhile, a more conservative model in the field of culture dominated in Georgia. Ethnic manifestations were less open to modernism. Therefore, the opposition in Lithuania was largely religious and nationalist, but also significantly open to cosmopolitan ideas from the West. Concerning Georgia, there was a demand to find more niches for the protection of Georgian heritage and expression of youth sentiments of contemporary nationalism.

However, in both Republics, the opposition movement coincided with the movement of human rights. As Lyudmila Alekseeva points out, first actions of dissent-oriented people appeared around the mid 60's, but the growth of *samizdat*, human rights protection and other dissent activities have been noticed at the beginning of the 1970s.²⁶ The new wave of human rights movement could have been observed in the mid-1970s, when the international Helsinki Act of Human Rights was signed. Soviet General Secretary Leonid Brezhnev and thirty-four other world leaders signed the Helsinki Final Act on August 1, 1975. It was published in Soviet newspapers and inspired the formation of human rights monitoring groups across the Soviet Union.²⁷ For several months, this remained a legitimate activity, but soon the KGB started to prosecute individual activists. However, dissent activities were pursued not only by the people who had permanent conflict with the regime but also by those who had been part of cultural establishment and had become dissatisfied with the official cultural channels and the restrictions on freedom, so much so that they chose to engage in underground activities. Tomas Venclova and Zviad Gamsakhurdia were among them.

Family Background

It would be impossible to clarify the personal trajectories of Tomas Venclova and Zviad Gamsakhurdia without studying their family backgrounds and especially the influence of their famous fathers and their fathers' relationship with both the system and the establishment. The *father-son* relationship in their cases was immensely important in their search for their own path, in absorbing or rejecting certain attitudes. The family factor allows one to speak of the social milieu²⁸ of both writers as one of the key factors.

²⁴ Vladislav Zubok, *Zhivago's Children: The Last Russian Intelligentsia* (Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press, 2011).

²⁵ Vilius Ivanauskas, *Įrėmintą tapatybę: Lietuvos rašytojai tautų draugystės imperijoje (Framed identity: Lithuanian writers in the friendship of nations empire)* (Vilnius : Lietuvos istorijos institutas, 2016).

²⁶ Lyudmila Alekseeva, op. cit.

²⁷ Sarah B. Snyder, "Human Rights in the Cold War," in Artemy Kalinovsky and Craig Daigle (ed.), *The Routledge Handbook of the Cold War* (New York: Routledge, 2014), 237-48.

²⁸ A strong impulse for such an attitude is offered by John Connely's work in which the author analysed the adaptation of the professorship of the socialist period to the system in Poland, Eastern Germany and the Czech Republic, see John Connely, *Captive University. The Sovietization of East German, Czech, and Polish Higher Education, 1945-1956* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2000).

During the early period of his work, Konstantine Gamsakhurdia, Zviad's father, was interested in Symbolism and Expressionism. When Georgia became a Soviet republic, he was for some time a member of the 'Academic group' (the so-called "fellow travellers"²⁹) of writers and did not hide his nationalist attitudes. In 1923, he wrote that "when people are defeated on the political front they must do their best on the cultural front".³⁰ Such and similar views sent him to the Solovki prison camps in the mid-1920s. Released several years later, he attempted to adapt to Stalinist culture, managed to avoid the purges of 1937 and, as part of the *milieu* of Stalinist art creators, gradually found a legitimate form of speaking about old Georgian history and culture. Although during the post-war years he enjoyed a high status, he nevertheless faced a number of challenges. A mention can be made of the speech of the chairman of the writers' organization Simon Chikovani at a meeting of Georgian writers in 1947, where Konstantine Gamsakhurdia was criticized.³¹ Chikovani acknowledged Gamsakhurdia's talent: he "stands out as a master of Georgian words and as a fairly popular writer" (he wrote the long short story 'A Silver Ring' on the theme of the Great Patriotic War), but criticized him for his inadequate representation of Soviet reality, for his earlier ideological oversights such as the collection of novellas that Gamsakhurdia wrote between 1916 and 1929 ("they are permeated with Nietzsche's views, with Zarathustrian maxims flowing freely. Permeated with erotic descriptions, decadent mood and understanding of art"). Gamsakhurdia was in no hurry to take the blame for inappropriate Western influences upon himself. In Georgia, unlike in Lithuania, the authors who were criticized during the period of Zhdanovism (1946–53) were bolder and did not automatically succumb to criticism; instead, they responded to it. At the same meeting, we can see Gamsakhurdia's quite heated verbal exchanges with Chikovani, and even with Petr Shariya, a representative of the Central Committee of the Georgian Communist Party responsible for propaganda. This episode reveals Konstantine Gamsakhurdia's prestige, which could not be damaged even by the criticism addressed to him during *zhdanovschina*.

Konstantine Gamsakhurdia had become the key representative of the historical genre. With several others – Irakli Abashidze, Grigol Abashidze, Giorgi Leonidze (until his death), Besarion Zhgenti and other representatives of the older generation –, he prominently dominated in the field of Georgian writers almost until the 1970s, and preserved his influence in the 1970s. Close contacts among the older writers and the formation of a peculiar circle determined the rather conservative content of Georgian literature. Interestingly, Konstantine Gamsakhurdia was one of the active Georgian writers in the local writers' union who, in 1966, unanimously and excitedly, reacted to the article of the Dagestani writer Ached Ageyev in the *Literaturnaya gazeta*. In this article, the author emphasized the dissolving of the national languages of the USSR, including Georgian, into the Russian language.³²

²⁹ During Soviet time "fellow traveler" or "poputchik" identified an intellectual, who was intellectually sympathetic to the Communist ideology, and who co-operated in the organization's politics, without being a formal member of Communist party.

³⁰ Stephen Jones, 'The Establishment of Soviet Power in Transcaucasia: The Case of Georgia 1921-1928', *Soviet Studies*, Vol. 40, No. 4 (October 1988), p. 616-639.

³¹ Simon Chikovani's speech (1947), Georgian State Archives, f.8, ap.1, b.1106, l.1-62.

³² Correspondence of the National Commission of the Writers' Union of the USSR, 7 January 1967 (an excerpt from the transcript of 6th Congress of the Georgian Writers' Union), RGALI, 631, 42, 411.

Konstantine Gamsakhurdia and his generation simultaneously took part in “finding the form” for Georgian ethnic particularism to be expressed in the Soviet international field by creating a Georgian culture that would be fairly strongly supported in the center and by maintaining activity in various channels of its dispersion. The 1956 protests, which were triggered by the speech that had denounced the Stalin cult, caused some anxiety for the Georgians as they became worried that the condemnation of the 'Georgian Stalin' would turn against Soviet Georgia and its culture. This anxiety troubled local writers as well. Together with others, Konstantine Gamsakhurdia took an active part in the preservation of the prominence given to Georgian culture during the commemoration of Rustaveli in the mid-1960s.

The case of Antanas Venclova was both similar and different. Having taken up a position of a left-wing intellectual during the inter-war period (he belonged to the 'Third Front', a left-oriented literary journal in interwar Lithuania (1930-1931) that brought together so called “progressive authors”), he was one of the local Lithuanian intellectuals who 'brought Stalin's sun' and thus legitimized the annexation of Lithuania by the USSR. He was among those who, during the war, retreated to the interior of the USSR, and who, after the war, took an active part in the restoration of the Soviet organization of writers, regularly participated in symbolic events, and, on behalf of the writers, expressed his expectations about the new liberated Lithuania. Antanas Venclova was frequently prominent with his verses at commemorations or glorifications of Soviet ideological symbols, such as Stalin and war victory. He was one of the leaders of the writers' organization. He arranged meetings in Kaunas and was prominent in the decade of Lithuanian culture in Moscow in 1948.

During the period of *zhdanovshchin*, the beginning of which in Lithuania was marked by Kazys Preikšas' speech of 1946, the surveillance for 'discrepancies' was aggressive, and even the works by such recognized authors such as Balys Sruoga, Vincas Mykolaitis-Putinas or even Antanas Venclova were singled out as incompatible with the standard.³³ In Venclova's case, in 1953 the KGB's attention was drawn to some poems from the collection *Rinktinė* (A Collection), even though the poet had been awarded the Stalin Prize for it. One of the stanzas of doubt-rising poems 'To the Victory Day' ('And, like waves, flow to the past / The mud of the trenches and fires and smoke / And Vilnius will revive free / Warmed by the golden light of spring') deserved criticism because, according to a report, the poem did not mention the role of Russians and other nations of the country in the liberation and the rebuilding of Vilnius and Lithuania. However, this episode was not so significant as to prevent Antanas Venclova from being appointed a chairman of the Writers' Union from 1954 to 1959.

Venclova was not as “ethnically engaged” and conservative as the Georgian artists of the same generation. Yet, the humanism that he expressed during the interwar period did not turn into an active internationalism-supporting position. Antanas Venclova was one of the more active poets who during the post-war years created the narratives of the 'friendship of nations' in his poetry,³⁴ but they did not become the poet's visiting card. The poet himself remained of a rather local significance: he did not have

³³ General meeting of Soviet Lithuanian writers, 1-2 October 1946, LMA, f.34, ap.1, b.19, l. 14.

³⁴ *Tiesa*, 8 April 1945, LMA, f.34, ap.1, b. 10l. 66. In No.34 of 1944, *Literatura i isskustvo* (*Literature and art*) published A. Atabekian's review of Antanas Venclova's collection *Rodnoe niebo* (*Native sky*).

solid connections in the centre and did not demonstrate the all-Union zeal that was characteristic for quite a number of cultural figures from the Caucasus. One can say that Antanas Venclova was in an interim position and was balancing between the dispersion of internationalism and retaining his attention on ethnic issues.

Konstantine Gamsakhurdia's demeanor of conservative ethnicity and Antanas Venclova's balancing position, as well as their being part of the establishment, markedly influenced their sons who were also embarking on a writer's path.

'Nationalist' Zviad Gamsakhurdia and the 'Cosmopolitan' Tomas Venclova

The family and its socialist cultural surrounding were extremely important factors in the formation of views and subsequent reactions to the challenges of the period for both Tomas Venclova and Zviad Gamsakhurdia. His father's historical novels, the attention to old Georgian culture and the style of his upbringing (the prevailing opinion is that Zviad was brought up like a 'Georgian prince') determined Zviad Gamsakhurdia's exceptional attachment to Georgia's old heritage and history, and an increasingly traditionalist line. His father's highly intellectual environment, a library of world literature masterpieces hardly available anywhere else and Tomas Venclova's personal predilection towards learning about the cultures of other countries helped them to form an understanding of the world literature and modernism that was deeper than that of his contemporaries or other budding writers.³⁵ These two personalities, although different in their world-views, were similar in the exceptional status of their families, in their public conduct that stood out against the background of artists of their generation, and in their failure to fit into the frame of a Soviet intellectual. This failure, for both of them, meant a particularly sharp conflict with the system.

Zviad Gamsakhurdia's case is especially prominent: his life experience encompasses the events of 1956, the dissident activities of the 1970s, the surrender to the pressure of the authorities and the KGB, and the leadership of a national movement in the late 1980s. In 1956, young Gamsakhurdia and thousands of residents of Tbilisi protested against Khrushchev's speech. As a pupil of Tbilisi secondary school No. 47, Gamsakhurdia and his friends (his future brother-in-arms Merab Kostava among them) protested on 9 March 1956, when Khrushchev's famous speech declaring the beginning of de-Stalinization provoked a massive reaction in Georgia. Shortly after that, early in December, a group of Gamsakhurdia's friends called 'Gorgasliani', distributed proclamations in which they wrote of the bloody night of 9 March, the liberation of Georgia, and the communist enemy.³⁶ The participants were disclosed, and the members of the group were taken to court. In 1958, he was arrested once more for similar activities, and this time he was locked in a mental hospital. It seems that only the prestige of his family saved him from serious trouble. Under the influence of the literary environment that surrounded him, he then graduated in philology and became a translator and literary critic. Later he taught at a university

³⁵ Author's interview with the writer Vytautas Bubnys.

³⁶ Document No. 1 of the criminal case No. 4612, in: Mary Barbakadze, 'The Beginning of the National Movement', *The Archival Bulletin*, no.12, 2012, LEPL Archive of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia, 5-7.

and was employed at the Institute of Literature of the Georgian Academy of Sciences. In 1966, he was admitted to the Georgian Writers' Union. As a translator, he mostly translated works by Western European authors; he was an active researcher of the creative work of Shota Rustaveli. He increasingly started to promote and defend cultural heritage, speaking against the possible falsification of history. He supported the traditional Orthodox Church and did not limit this position to the kind of ethnic particularism that was promoted through the official cultural channels of Soviet Georgia. Even when he started to cross redlines, Zviad Gamsakhurdia could feel safe because of his father's connections among high-ranking Georgian officials.

From the mid-1970s, Zviad Gamsakhurdia became actively involved in anti-establishment activities again, but for some time the status of his family protected him against tougher sanctions. Georgian dissident activities revolved around Zviad Gamsakhurdia and Merab Kostava. Similarly to what happened in other republics, the emergence of the Helsinki groups – whose activities went beyond the boundaries set by the center and Andropov's KGB – served as a great stimulus. They collaborated with the human rights activists from Moscow (since 1974) and the Amnesty International. Meanwhile, in their published samizdat journal “*Khronika tekushchikh sobytii*” (*Chronicle of Current events*) they criticized corruption, indifference to preservation of national monuments, the prison system, and other hot subjects. For instance, in 1975, Gamsakhurdia published a report on the trials of people tortured in Georgian prisons³⁷.

On the basis of the material on anti-Soviet activities prepared in 1977, Gamsakhurdia and Kostava were taken to court where they were accused of spreading anti-Soviet ideas and distributing illegal books (for instance, Solzhenitsyn's *The Gulag Archipelago*) under the cover of the protection of human rights. They were also accused of maintaining contacts with Russian dissidents (for instance, in 1974 and 1975 with Nataliya Gorbanevskaya who was working for Radio Liberty at the time), of engaging ever growing numbers of people in their activities, and publishing illegal periodical publications such as *Okros Satsmisi* (The Golden Fleece) and *Sakartvelos Moambe* (The Georgian Herald).³⁸ Zviad Gamsakhurdia and Merab Kostava were sentenced to three years in prison and two years of exile. Nino Kipshidze and Sohio Torchinava observed that, shortly after the sentence, the issue of their mental health was raised. Gamsakhurdia was sent to the Serbsky Institute in Moscow for tests. Their final report stated that “despite the fact that he is a psychopath and affected by megalomania, he is not suffering from any mental diseases. He can be considered accountable for his actions”. Merab Kostava was also recognized accountable.³⁹

Irakli Kentsoshvili, who was a member of dissident circles at that time and who was also mentioned in KGB reports on the activities of Gamsakhurdia's circle, remembers the communication of his group with the representatives of the Moscow Helsinki group, Andrei Sakharov's visit, and the fact that Gamsakhurdia's behavior was very different from that of his colleagues in Moscow. The latter aimed at a renewal and

³⁷ Lyudmila Alekseeva, op. cit., 114.

³⁸ Court verdict of 19 May 1978. See: Mary Barbakadze, 'Dissident Movement', *The Archival Bulletin*, no.12, 2012, LEPL Archive of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia, 11-18.

³⁹ Mary Barbakadze, Nino Kipshidze, Sophia Torchinava, *The Archival Bulletin*, no.12, 2012, LEPL Archive of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia, 11-18, 19-23.

modernization of the Soviet system, at bringing in more democracy to it, but they did not want the Baltic republics or Georgia to leave the USSR. Meanwhile, Gamsakhurdia made it clear this was not what he wanted.⁴⁰ As Lyudmila Alekseeva pointed out, the Georgian national movement, which closely coincided with the human rights movement, emphasized the independent character of Georgians (especially Georgia's historical independence), and harshly defended the Georgian language from the threat of Russification.⁴¹

The meeting of the Georgian Writers' Union on 1 April 1977 was very symbolic. The meeting was convened upon the receipt of the information from the prosecutor's department about Gamsakhurdia's anti-Soviet activities and agitation. It was during that meeting that he was expelled from the Writers' Union. By that time, his father had died. Individual details illustrated the situation when an insider becomes a 'foreign body' in the establishment of writers, and demonstrated the feeling of uneasiness among writers when a former insider had to be ostracized. The outcome of the meeting was predetermined: 'Members of the Writers' Union must build communism. Those who engaged in anti-Soviet activities could not stay'.⁴² Although the transcript of the meeting demonstrates the speakers' declarative positions, it also shows that Zviad Gamsakhurdia was considered an insider among the elite of the Georgian Writers' Union due to the status of his father and his family. Many of his 'sins' were treated as friendly transgressions. Konstantine Gamsakhurdia was part of the communist nomenklatura close to the party apparatus. He was one of the writers who belonged to the highest cultural elites of the republic (others being Irakli Abashidze, Grigol Abashidze, Giorgi Leonidze, Nodar Dumbadze). It was Grigol Abashidze, the chairman of the Writers' Union, who at the meeting spoke of his father's special merits and especially of his socialist novella *Mtvaris Motatseba* (Stealing the Moon). Curiously, the meeting was not in a hurry to condemn him, and was simply implying that the prosecutor's office had sent documents and material about anti-Soviet activities. Grigol Abashidze presented the charges made by the prosecutor's office. Nodar Dumbadze did not expand on them and just remarked that he did not find the illegal magazine *Okros Satsmisi* talented, and added that the editor of the magazine was unacceptable as a writer and as a communist.⁴³

Many of the participants pointed out that Konstantine Gamsakhurdia had been their best friend which was why they found themselves in a very difficult situation: Zviad implicated not only himself but the entire Writers' Union, because they had good relations not only with Konstantine but also with the whole family. Elguya Maghradze said that those who had read Konstantine's books fell in love with Georgia, its nation and literature, and therefore it was extremely hard to talk about his son. He added that Zviad was probably a victim of an unfair situation which had developed during the last twenty years: "why did not we stop him when he made his first false steps? He is of the same age as our sons, yet instead of stopping him we did the contrary. We

⁴⁰ Author's interview with Irakli Kentsoshvili, Zviad Gamsakhurdia's friend and brother-in-arms, 9 May 2012.

⁴¹ Lyudmila Alekseeva, op. cit., p. 105-120.

⁴² Nino Kispidze, 'Zviad Gamsakhurdia's Expulsion from the Soviet Union' *The Archival Bulletin*, no.12, 2012, LEPL Archive of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia, 34-52.

⁴³ Transcript of the meeting of the Writers' Union of Georgian SSR of 1 April 1977, p. 36-37. See: 'Zviad Gamsakhurdia's Expulsion from the Soviet Union'. *The Archival Bulletin*, no.12, 2012, LEPL Archive of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia, 34-52.

admired the struggle, and this could have pushed him forward. And now he is in opposition.”⁴⁴ Irakli Abashidze recalled how Zviad was admitted into the Writers' Union in 1966. The son of a great man spent eleven years in the union and nobody, including himself, had warned him:

“...he had been arrested before but I helped him then because Konstantine Gamsakhurdia said he would kill him if he did that again. Konstantine was a brother to me and his family was my friends. Later I visited him five times; he called me and Giorgi Natroshvili every day. It is our fault and we assume responsibility.”⁴⁵

In his return speech, Gamsakhurdia pointed out that he had not published the magazine. He gave his article to his friends to read, and it was not his fault that it was not published but spread around. However, the noncommittal attitude prevailing at the meeting did not leave any doubt regarding its outcome, although the condemnation of a former colleague was cautious. For instance, Demna Shengelaya mentioned that Zviad had grown up before her eyes but there could not be any doubt that it was he who had sent 170 letters to the priests and urged them to take care of the Georgian language.⁴⁶

By consensus, Zviad Gamsakhurdia was expelled from the Georgian Writers' Union. But a cautious observation was voiced that if he proved his innocence in the court, the decision of the Writers' Union would be annulled. Shortly, Gamsakhurdia was sentenced. Having spent two years in prison, he, unlike his brother-in-arms Merab Kostava, made up his mind to publicly repent of his mistaken path, bourgeois propaganda, and his spurious struggle 'for human rights'. Upon release, he partially resumed his earlier life and continued his literary work. As later circumstances showed, his repentance was not treated as a betrayal among patriots – rather, as a weakness or even a clever tactical move. The fact that Zviad Gamsakhurdia retained his previous values and that others admitted it shows that in the context of the changes of the 1980s he was at the front of national processes. He was a leader who embodied the strengthening of the traditionalist line and who became the first president of independent Georgia.

The case of Tomas Venclova reveals the more nuanced nature of Lithuanian cultural opposition, which alongside the human rights embodied not only anti-systemic national movement, but also manifestations of democratic standards and cosmopolitan attitude. Tomas Venclova never aspired to a political career: first, he was a man of literature, and even his dissident activities were more stimulated by his contacts in the dissident circles in Moscow than by his personal activism. His father Antanas Venclova closely observed the son's literary endeavours and quietly supported them as he found his son extremely talented. However, he was apprehensive of Tomas' unwillingness to adapt to the existing rules. Tomas Venclova himself linked the formation of his nonconformist views and humanism to the events during the Khrushchev thaw.

“I grew up in a family of a well-known and convinced communist, was a member of the Young Communist League and was interested in Marxism. I consider November of 1956, when the Hungarian uprising was suppressed, a boundary in my life (and

⁴⁴ Op. cit., 40.

⁴⁵ Op. cit., 42-43.

⁴⁶ Op. cit., 47-48.

possibly in the life of my generation). It was then that my attitude towards Communism, which has not changed (maybe became deeper as I acquired more experience and information), evolved. At the beginning there still were some hesitations and compromises. Let us say, I was impressed by the Soviet cosmos program – I even wrote a book about it. In general, like many in Khrushchev's times I was still expecting some gradual spontaneous humanization of the system. Time showed that they were rather futile hopes. Around 1962 I realized I would not write or work for them. I would not write at all and would not say what I did not believe. Having thus made up my mind, almost the only job left for me was that of a translator. On principle, I did not translate books that I found deceitful. Even that was difficult here. Of course, somebody else would have found it even more difficult. I was somewhat saved by my father's name and certain (rather relative, I must admit) financial independence: it is a rare thing here”.⁴⁷ (1977)

Noting his son's non-conformist attitude, Antanas Venclova did not stop him and, to the very end, hoped for his fluent integration into the literary field. Later, Tomas Venclova admitted that, to a great extent, he was dependent on his father's expectations:

“I was not a dissident in the true sense of the word during my father's lifetime. It was obvious that I could not find a place in the space of Soviet culture; he did not find it pleasant – after all, he wanted me to be published. I am grateful to him for never making any literary or other projections for me. It was a thoroughly correct position. After my father's death I became an open dissident who could be threatened with prison”.⁴⁸

Tomas Venclova has not been a traditionalist and has not glorified Lithuanian national culture. On the contrary, throughout the entire Soviet period and later in the West, he has been more interested in global culture and has been a researcher of Russian and Polish literature. In the context of national (ethnic) narratives, he demonstrated a national indifference rather than the cautious national enthusiasm that was characteristic of the art creators of his generation and of the older ones. This posture of Tomas Venclova was becoming more intense and brought about an obvious tension between him and the system. Having taken some steps in the field of literature, Tomas Venclova was never fully admitted to the Lithuanian Writers' Union. His father's prestige and his own talent were sufficient to draw attention to him, yet he manifestly did not conform to the priorities of the then local writers (attention to local culture, good relations with dominant writers).

The case of Tomas Venclova in the space of Lithuanian literature was very much out of the ordinary. Having grown up in the environment of the Soviet cultural elite and having lived in Moscow for some time, he immersed himself into the circles of the liberal intelligentsia, socialized with poets who were criticized by the authorities, and became friends with one of the best-known Russian poets Joseph Brodsky⁴⁹. He performed dissident individualism and democratism, like Moscow's democratic dissidents Amal'rik, Vol'pin and Alekseeva.⁵⁰ Tomas Venclova's fairly independent

⁴⁷ *Manau, kad... Pokalbiai su Tomu Venclova (I think that...Conversations with Tomas Venclova)*, Vilnius, 2000, 8.

⁴⁸ *Op.cit.*, p. 297.

⁴⁹ *Op.cit.*, p. 121.

⁵⁰ Ann Komaromi, “Samizdat and Soviet dissident publics”, *Slavic Review*, vol.71, no.1 (Spring 2012): 70-90.

conduct, his links with the *samizdat* culture in the center and his leaning towards global literature and aestheticism triggered a series of remarks addressed to him (and at the same time to other younger writers) at the meetings of the Writers' Union of the Lithuanian SSR, and even at the events organized by the Writers Union of the USSR. Therefore, it was fairly natural that he was not admitted to the Writers' Union in the spring of 1971, when several members of the board of the Writers' Union spoke against his creative work. On that occasion, out of ten candidates only Venclova was not admitted to the union. His father hoped that these were just procedural disruptions and failed to accept the fact that his son had been rejected by the local environment of writers. This expectation found reflection in his diary:

“Tomas was not admitted to the Writers' union because of insufficient quorum. Just. Marcin[kevičius] and Algimantas Baltakis praised him much at the meeting and said that he would be admitted in the nearest future” (2 April); “Tomas visited me yesterday again – enlivened, better-looking, and brimming with ideas. His poetry has been published in the fourth issue of Pergalė, Nemunas and Poezijos pavasaris also contain his material. All this boosts his mood and I am sincerely happy about it”.⁵¹

Later, Tomas Venclova would say: “I was an outcast, rejected by the regime and by Lithuanian society. Although I am not a Jew, I was a poet Jew, according to Tsvetayeva”.⁵²

Slightly older than Tomas Venclova, the dominant group of Lithuanian *shestidesyatniki* ('of the Sixties'), with names such as Justinas Marcinkevičius or Algimantas Baltakis, brought along a broader creative expression and lesser ideological engagement and introduced a fairly clear aspect of discipline⁵³ in the field of Lithuanian literature. This disciplining aspect, the themes and the means of expression that came along with this particular generation, as well as the relationship with the ideological priorities of the authorities enjoyed much stronger support than the line of the younger cohort based on modernism and creative search, which was quite often accused of a lack of ideology and formalism. Dominant part of *shestidesyatniki* generation, which had just begun to attain its creative maturity, quite soon found its way right to the core of the establishment: these writers eventually became heads of publishing houses and magazines, and the leaders of the Writers' Union. From the 1960s right to the national revival in the 1980s, they retained their dominating role, even in a broader cultural field. Due to their authority and accumulated cultural capital, they became members of the initiative group of the *Sąjūdis* reform movement. This generation increasingly paid more attention to the issues of cultural heritage and history in the changed social-cultural context. It corresponded with the attitudes of the local nomenklatura.

The established part of *shestidesyatniki* generation restricted rather significantly the younger cohort of writers, including Tomas Venclova. The areas of friction that had formed between different cohorts of writers in Lithuania were not a liberal competitive environment but a disciplining space in which the dominating writers

⁵¹ Antanas Venclova, *Prie Nemuno liepsnoja uogos (Berries are flaming at Nemunas)* (Vilnius : Knygnešys, 1996), 560-561.

⁵² *Manau, kad... Pokalbiai su Tomu Venclova ((I think that...Conversations with Tomas Venclova)*, (Vilnius : Baltos lankos, 2000).

⁵³ Vilius Ivanauskas, ““Engineers of the Human Spirit” During Late Socialism: The Lithuanian Union of Writers between Soviet Duties and Local Interests”, *Europe-Asia Studies*, 6:4, 645-665.

exploited the prevailing and legitimized themes, elevated them, and used them against other ideological lines. Ethnic particularism was especially important both as a discourse that was gaining dominance in the public space and as a resource of influence. For this reason, real and imaginary *liberal, formalistic, abstract, essayist, lacking-in-ideology, or cosmopolitan* postures were marginalized. The authors linked with them submerged themselves into even greater depths of Aesopic language, yet at the same time, they paid considerable attention to national culture. Writers like Sigitas Geda or Juozas Aputis, along with Tomas Venclova, found themselves targeted by criticism, became increasingly concerned with ethnic issues and the search for archaic aspects in Lithuanian culture. Such maneuvering was not characteristic of Tomas Venclova.

Compared to Lithuania the more conservative style of the Georgian establishment authors determined the different character of those authors who were instead retreating from that establishment. In the case of Lithuania, where more dynamic and more flexible authors dominated, a considerably broader amplitude of art creators emerged. In their outlook, they were leaning towards non-formal underground and dissent activities: from Mindaugas Tamonis who expressed patriotism, to Tomas Venclova, who was a cosmopolitan. In other words, more moderate conservatism in Lithuania produced more diverse contradicting positions and at the same time marginalized them, while in Georgia even a position opposing the system maintained a similar cross-section as its main line and did not submerge itself into cosmopolitan values.

As Zviad Gamsakhurdia's case illustrates, Georgian paternalism used to determine the attachment of authors to a particular social milieu. Being a member of an elite family guaranteed Gamsakhurdia a high status, a membership of the Writers' Union, and even a number of opportunities to become part of the official environment or to find favor with the authorities. Even with recurring 'transgressions', the issue of Gamsakhurdia's expulsion from the Writers' Union was raised without much enthusiasm. Gamsakhurdia constantly felt the paternal care and peculiar support of certain figures. It seems that such a chance for "the prodigal son" to return brought about his famous repentance: his trespass was not against the elite of local writers. His loyalty to Georgian culture was not put to doubt – what *was* put to doubt was the surrounding system or its individual rules. The case of Tomas Venclova was simultaneously very similar and very different. Like Zviad Gamsakhurdia, Tomas Venclova avoided the role of the standard Soviet intellectual or the intellectual trends promoted by older colleagues. However, Tomas Venclova and other Lithuanian writers remembered that, almost from the very beginning, he was an *alien* in the circles of Lithuanian writers and he was misunderstood by both ideological writers and those who followed the national line. At first, Tomas, the son of a famous poet, was seen as "born in a bookcase".⁵⁴ The irony was hiding the local writers' perception of Tomas Venclova's advantage and, at the same time, the skepticism directed at him. An extremely intellectual young man, whose lectures at Vilnius University attracted many young people and who was interested in Yuri Lotman's school, he appeared too distanced and too involved with "a far-fetched search". The gap was widening. A couple of months before his death, his father wrote in his diary about his son's quests:

⁵⁴ Author's interview with Algimantas Baltakis and Vytautas Bubnys.

“No doubt, he is a young man of great talent. I just wish he would not be distracted and focus on one aim, for example, poetry. Was it not a big mistake of my life (even if necessitated by the epoch) that all the time I was distracted by various genres when I could have written not two but four, six, or even eight novels. Or maybe it was good that I tried to move along with life and give what it demanded of me”.⁵⁵

It seems that the failure to identify with the circles of the local intelligentsia and the close ties with Moscow dissidents pushed the writer towards a more open confrontation with the system through participation in the human rights movement.⁵⁶ Tomas Venclova became one of founders of the Lithuanian Helsinki Watch group, which was established in 1976.⁵⁷ With the confrontation between Tomas Venclova and the authorities intensifying, in 1977, he was issued a permit to emigrate to the West (apparently, his father's authority played a role in this). It was a decision that was favorable to the local Soviet government, which did not want to have additional Venclova-related troubles with the central authorities, to the writer himself, and to the local writers who were inclined to push a different opinion out of their field of vision:

“Sometimes I used to joke that I left to lose the touch not as much with Soviet power as with the Lithuanian intelligentsia. I was utterly discontented with the helpless whisper in the kitchen (incidentally, people used to speak louder in Russian kitchens), and with that sick desire to preserve some uniqueness”.⁵⁸

Conclusions

1. Two forms of protest against Soviet standards are identified in the article: on the one hand, the national aspirations of those who sought a return to the ethnic origins and traditions beyond the level which was supported by official channels (Zviad Gamsakhurdia), on the other hand, the attraction to Western humanism and cosmopolitanism (Tomas Venclova). However, both forms were strongly related to Western democratic values as expressed by the defenders of human rights. Both forms of protest revealed a political mission in the context of the Cold War and ultimately called into question the legitimacy of Soviet power.

The relationship of the litterateurs Tomas Venclova and Zviad Gamsakhurdia with the Soviet system had a number of similar features.

Both authors grew up in the families of recognized Soviet art figures, yet despite their adaptation to the Soviet environment, their fathers were not ardent communists. Although well adapted to the Stalinist epoch, their privileged fathers were not entirely permeated by the communist ideology and did not create a protective ideological environment for their families. On the contrary, family status and social connections

⁵⁵ Antanas Venclova, *Prie Nemuno liepsnoja uogos ((Berries are flaming at Nemunas))*, (Vilnius: Knygnešys, 1996), 561-562.

⁵⁶ The prominent Russian dissident Lyudmila Alekseeva remembers that Tomas Venclova was one of her main assistants on the issues of human rights and in the attempts to found Helsinki groups when in the mid-1970s she came to Lithuania. See: Lyudmila Alekseeva, Pol Goldberg, *Pokoleniye otteveli* (Moscow : Zacharov, 2006), 432.

⁵⁷ Lyudmila Alekseeva, op. cit., 80.

⁵⁸ *Manau, kad... Pokalbiai su Tomu Venclova ((I think that...Conversations with Tomas Venclova))*, (Vilnius : Baltos lankos, 2000), 266.

opened more paths for their sons to get acquainted with global literature, prevailing trends or issues of cultural heritage.

The involvement of both authors in official literature was rather limited, and gradually they became increasingly involved in the non-official environment of writers: Tomas Venclova in Moscow and Lithuania, Zviad Gamsakhurdia in Georgia. For both writers, this dissociation from the establishment developed into dissident behaviour, human rights movement and an open conflict with the system. Both were affected by the global 60's and 70's, in the light that significant part of Soviet intellectuals opened up to Western universalism in the 60's, but only some joined dissent and human rights movement in the 70's. They also tried to detach themselves from the role of standard Soviet intellectual and tried to avoid the intellectual trends promoted by older colleagues.

3. The comparison of both cases allows to argue that cosmopolitanism, especially bearing in mind that Soviet Lithuania was more open to various ideas from the West (if compared with Georgia), felt a stronger disciplining effect than a covered nationalist position. The dangerous "bourgeois nationalism" was the object of surveillance by the responsible agencies (the KGB, Glavlit, and similar) and not of the writers themselves. Different acceptance of cosmopolitanism and "supervised nationalism" in Soviet peripheries are illustrated by the trajectories of the nonconformist litterateurs: Tomas Venclova's search for kindred spirits in the centre and his subsequent emigration from the USSR, and Zviad Gamsakhurdia's ability to form a circle of like-minded people on the local level and, with danger threatening, to search for possibilities of adaptation and survival without trying to leave the system.

4. Both cases clearly show that a dissident posture and involvement in underground activities were strongly marginalized, condemned and punished in the Soviet peripheries. At the same time, they demonstrate that a family of a recognized Soviet figure in small Soviet republics was a mitigating circumstance that to some extent could absorb the state's attempt to discipline any dissent.