

The Art (or Politics?) of Reviewing  
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I was initially approached for a paper on the Georgian-Abkhazian dispute in the summer of 1991 for the New York "Nationalities' Journal". At that time Abkhazia was striving to achieve a new, constitutionally-based *modus vivendi* with the Georgian authorities in Tbilisi following the clashes with fatalities that had occurred in Sukhum and Ochamchira in July 1989. I had made it abundantly clear in the summer of 1989 that I had no truck with the unbridled voices of Georgian nationalism that were in the ascendancy at the time, whilst I found the way that social activists and intellectuals in Abkhazia were presenting their case in the face of the onslaught across the whole Georgian media or in a variety of Georgian publications both dignified and convincing. In putting together the original article it was my intention to present a comprehensive background to the problem in terms of ethnicity, history, and demography, detailing the arguments offered by both sides in support of their contradictory cases. This approach I deemed essential (a) since Western audiences knew little or nothing of the parties concerned, and (b) in order to do justice to the demands of objectivity. Since, however, I personally do not find the Georgian case stands up to scrutiny, being often based on manipulation or distortion of facts -- and I have spent a significant amount of time over the years reading what many Georgian spokesmen have written on this question in their own language, something that hardly any Western commentator can do, whilst those who can are largely ignorant of, or uninterested in, the Abkhazian point of view --, my sympathies will have become quickly obvious to any reader.

Following the start of the Georgian-Abkhazian war in August 1992 I was invited to write a paper on the conflict for the journal *Central Asian Survey*, on the editorial board of which I was also asked to sit. I decided to keep the main body of the earlier version, regarding the presentation of basic data and the opposing arguments to be essential for what was likely to be an entirely new audience, but I updated the description of unfolding events to the time of writing. The paper had also been presented at a day's conference at London University's School of Oriental and African Studies on 15th June 1992 devoted to territorial disputes in Transcaucasia, and so, when a volume of that day's talks was being compiled, I again updated the section on recent developments for inclusion in the publication to be entitled "Transcaucasian Boundaries" (edited by John Wright et al., UCL Press, London 1996) -- some documentation given in the appendices of the CAS version was not included in the UCL book, though the revision now ended with a reproduction of a sheet prepared and distributed by the Abkhazian authorities in the final days of the war to remind all

citizens of the importance of not attacking or mistreating any member of the Georgian forces who laid down his arms in the wake of the Abkhazian victory.

The absolute tragedy of the Abkhazian and later Chechen conflicts was that there was absolutely no need in either case for there to have been one single death. And the responsibility for the slaughter rests fairly and squarely with the macho-politics pursued (entirely predictably) by the two lifelong apparatchiks who headed the respective aggressor-states. What compounds the basic tragedy is that, because of the superficiality of Western attitudes towards the two individuals concerned and the prevailing insouciance over the fate of the various minorities living within their fiefdoms, no pressure was exerted to halt the humanitarian crimes being committed by the state-forces in both war-zones -- on the contrary, both regimes have benefited from unabated Western support, whilst the Abkhazians in particular, the clear victims of aggression, have been portrayed as the guilty party both by black Georgian propaganda and Georgia's Western supporters (whether in politics or the media). As the almost total refusal of Western agencies to accept the reality behind ongoing events in the Georgian-Abkhazian conflict not merely continued but became more entrenched, it became more important that the true nature of Georgian activities following their invasion of Abkhazia and subsequent 14-month occupation of much of the southern half of that republic be made known.

Before addressing the criticisms expressed about me in published reviews, let me make one thing clear. I am, as a Caucasologist, interested in the well-being and future survival of ALL the indigenous languages of the Caucasus, whether we are talking about those exclusively spoken within the Caucasian frontiers of the former USSR or among diaspora-communities across the Near/Middle East. This commitment involves recognising the status and essential worth of each of the almost 40 languages concerned, encouraging speakers themselves both to take pride in their unique cultural heritage and to understand the importance of keeping the languages alive, by discussing relevant issues in articles or on other appropriate occasions. Support for language-groups in no way (necessarily) entails political separatism, and those who think that it does betray their own superficial approach to the problem. Where, however, any of the language-groups in the area are subjected to unwarranted pressure, threats or indeed outright physical violence, the perpetrators of such unacceptable behaviour should expect censure, even if they themselves form a Caucasian linguistic group. It is one of the most disgraceful aspects of the Georgian-Abkhazian conflict that, whilst brave souls in Russia had the courage to speak out against the Kremlin's inhumanity in Chechnia, not one single Georgian of note has to my knowledge censured the Shevardnadze or the preceding Gamsakhurdia regimes for their outrageous treatment of the Abkhazians. Only when past (or indeed current) mistakes are recognised and acknowledged can the basis be laid for the

rapprochement and reconciliation, which is an essential foundation if lasting peace and stability are to be created in this quarter of the Transcaucasus. That outcome is what I have fervently desired from the start and still hope to be achievable. My views on the nature of Georgian-Abkhazian or Georgian-Mingrelian or Georgian-Daghestani or Georgian-Chechen relations are not predicated, as some seem to believe, on anti-Georgian sentiment. If (some) Kartvelians and their sympathisers find my views not to their liking, they should seriously ask themselves what it is about Georgian behaviour that in some respects at least could arouse such a response in someone who has since 1975 primarily been a Georgian specialist...

Now that the background is (or should be) clear, let us proceed to examine the reviews that have appeared of "Transcaucasian Boundaries". The following statement, by Svante Cornell, the only one of the four reviewers not personally known to me, appears in *Central Asian Survey* 16.3, 1997 on page 441: 'The three contributions concerning Georgia are especially valuable, since they cover an area of conflict which has received very little scholarly attention, especially when compared with the conflicts in Nagorno Karabagh and Chechnia [sic]. The three authors (John F. Wright, 'The geopolitics of Georgia'; Julian Birch, 'The Georgian/Ossetian territorial and boundary dispute'; George Hewitt, 'Abkhazia: a problem of identity and ownership') are all respected specialists on the Caucasus, and provide high-quality impartial accounts of the problems of Georgia and its minorities. In George Hewitt's chapter on Abkhazia, the author's background as a linguist is manifested. This is not necessarily to the detriment of the chapter; quite to the contrary, the chapter is a well-balanced mix of politics, history, and linguistic information which is helpful in tracing the origins of the different peoples of Georgia. It is also free of the esoteric political jargon that is omnipresent in much of the literature on conflicts'.

Another recent comment (for the journal published by SOAS' Geopolitics and International Boundaries' Centre) is by Hovann Simonian, who writes: 'In "Abkhazia: a problem of identity and ownership", George Hewitt analyses crucial aspects and periods of Abkhazian history. Although Hewitt does not hide his sympathies for the Abkhazians, he does not fail to show the Georgian point of view on discussed issues, which, combined with his knowledge and expertise of the area, contribute to the high quality of his essay'.

As may be seen, both these commentators stress the balanced nature of the basic presentation, which, as I outlined above, was what I hoped to achieve from the very start. We turn now to the comments of Felix Corley, 'writer and commentator on religion/eastern Europe' (to quote his business-card), in *Slavonic and East European Review* (75.2, 1997, 382-3): 'Even were one back in 1992, at least three of the pieces -- those on Karabakh by Christopher Walker and Sulejman Alijarly and that on Abkhazia by George Hewitt -- show serious inadequacies as contributions to

"understanding the complex geopolitical problems" of the region, as the back cover asserts. Far from elucidating the conflicts, these partisan pieces to a greater or lesser extent obfuscate and at times mislead the reader. Determination to prove their case that their favoured nation (for Walker the Armenians, for Alijarly the Azeris and for Hewitt the Abkhaz) have exclusive right to the respective contested territory in a region of the world that has seen continuous shifting populations leads to a curious mixture of half-truth, selectivity and even absurdity.

[...] Hewitt is especially partial in his conspiracy theories about the alleged aims of the Georgians (or rather the "Kartvelians") to eliminate the Abkhaz and appropriate their homeland, and he seizes on every passing remark by unimportant figures which in his view denigrate the Abkhaz. Hewitt's sympathy for the plight of the Abkhaz leads him to exaggeration. Though he was completing the article in July 1992 (and thus just before the worst phase of the hostilities broke out), it was even then untrue to declare that "the Abkhazians continue to pursue their cause with moderation and dignity" (p. 206). Neither the Georgian nor the Abkhaz side displayed much moderation at all.

[...]This collection [...] will remind us all of the time not so long ago when academia both here and in the region was partially deformed by the uncritical service of nationalist ideology at the expense of rationality and objectivity'.

Dr. Stephen Jones, an ex-patriot Briton at Mount Holyoke College (USA), writing in *Europe-Asia Studies* 49.3, 1997 (533-4), weighs in with the following: 'Stalin was not specifically responsible for nationalities in 1931 (Hewitt p. 203)...

[...]The article by George Hewitt on Abkhazia should not be in this book. Despite a reasonable start, its scholarly veneer dissolves into a vindictive anti-Georgian tract. It is a shame that in such a tragic conflict, a British scholar should paint this one-sided picture, relying on evidence from Russian observers, who cannot be relied upon to be objective, and the shoddy literature of the UNPO (Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organisation). His use of language is quite offensive. The Georgians are accused of "robbery, rape, torture and slaughter", but the Abkhazians, despite the high civilian casualty figures on BOTH sides, simply reminded their co-ethnics of "their moral duty not to harm (Georgian) troops laying down their weapons". In good Soviet style, he castigates "Shevardnadze's Western friends" and the "core of docile Western journalists" in Tbilisi. Abkhazia is now peaceful, he tells us, "though pockets of resistance have had to be mopped up in some of the villages". He does not explain why the 250,000 Georgian refugees are afraid the return although he probably has good arguments as the Honorary Consul of Abkhazia in London, why they should not return'.

Let us deal with relevant accusations in order, bearing in mind that Mr. Corley does not know Georgian and is thus quite unable to say what was/is being written/said

by Georgian spokesmen in their native tongue about Abkhazia or with what degree of ferocity.

There has never been any intention on my part or, more importantly, on the part of the Abkhazian socio-political leadership to argue for, or seek to establish, exclusive rights for Abkhazians within Abkhazia. The Abkhazians were in large measure able to win the war because they were supported by virtually the whole non-Kartvelian population of Abkhazia (and, indeed, by some courageous Kartvelians too), which was the entirely natural consequence of the way that ALL minorities in Georgia were targets for abuse and/or threats once the nag of Georgian chauvinism was given its head post-1988. One palpable example of the way the Abkhazians have indicated their willingness to cooperate with other minorities living now in Abkhazia was the immediate replacement of the Georgian sector of the local university (caused by staff and students going off to found their illegal branch of Tbilisi State University in Sukhum in 1989 as part of the anti-Abkhazian agitation urged on them by Georgia's radical leaders) by an Armenian sector, with teaching of and in Armenian. Immediately before the start of the war in August 1992 a 4-man delegation visited Sukhum's twin-town of Kilmarnock in Scotland, and one of these much sought-after places was allotted to a local Armenian. Note also the establishment in 1995 of a newspaper ('Gal') partly in Mingrelian (deliberately eschewed as an official language of publication in Georgia itself since 1938) to serve the largely Mingrelian-speaking population of the Gal District.

From early 1989 Georgian publications were replete with articles on the theme of who were 'guests' on Georgian soil and what the Georgian authorities should do about them in view of the demographic danger allegedly posed by especially Georgia's Muslim populations (N.B. that ethnic Georgians in the S.W. region of Adjara are almost all Muslims themselves) -- though it has been part of the anti-Abkhazian campaign to paint them as one of these Muslim minorities, the majority of Abkhazians within the Caucasus are Christians, to the extent that religion has any significance in the republic. Coupling this with (a) numerous articles questioning the origin of the Abkhazians or their right to live in Abkhazia and (b) well-documented moves to rid E. Georgia of its Daghestani population (see, for instance, Bob Chenciner's 'Daghestan: Tradition and Survival', Curzon Press, 1997, pp. 260 & 278), does Mr. Corley, even without the benefit of the hindsight that tells us what actually happened to the Abkhazians during Shevardnadze's war of 1992-93, seriously wish to argue that at the time I was describing the Abkhazians were under no threat of elimination or of seeing their homeland appropriated?

I stand charged with seizing 'on every passing remark by unimportant figures' that denigrate the Abkhazians. My selection of quotes was chosen at random from a HUGE range of available alternatives (of the existence of which Mr. Corley is

perhaps understandably ignorant) simply to indicate the widespread nature of the anti-Abkhazian sentiment and to illustrate the essential traits of such outpourings. The leading political figures at the time of the first clashes in Abkhazia in July 1989 were Merab K'ost'ava, Zviad Gamsakhurdia, Gia Ch'ant'uria (all now very conveniently dead), and I could with consummate ease produce quotes from all three (I did quote Gamsakhurdia, first president of post-Soviet Georgia) that would fit without difficulty into the mould delineated by the actual citations. Popular writers who contributed to this distasteful genre include: Guram Pandzhik'idze (one-time director of the publishing house Sabch'ota Sakartvelo and later of the Writers' Union of Georgia), Revaz Mishveladze, Revaz Dzhaparidze, Rost'om Chkheidze, and the popular poet T'ariel Ch'ant'uria. From the world of scholarship we have such leading lights as: historians Prof. Marik'a Lortkipanidze, Prof. Nodar Lomouri, Lovard T'ukhashvili, and linguists Prof. Aleksandre Oniani (a Svan), and Academician Prof. Tamaz Gamq'relidze (Director of the Georgian Oriental Institute, Corresponding Member of both the British and American Academies and Honorary Doctor of Chicago University), both of whom have in their own way attempted to justify the slur made on the Abkhazians and their history in Abkhazia in P'avle Ingoroq'va's notorious work from the 1940s. An open-minded reader of Georgian interested in the genre might be advised to peruse the articles brought together in the 1993 'apxazetis sisxliani kronik'ebi' (Abkhazia's Bloody Chronicles), but, sadly, Mr. Corley does not qualify. During the early-to-middle stages of the war the then-commander of Georgian troops in Abkhazia, Gia Q'arq'arashvili, subsequently made Minister of Defence by Shevardnadze, or Shevardnadze's Minister for Abkhazian Affairs, Giorgi Khanidrava, both issued clear threats of genocide (see, for the latter, *Le Monde Diplomatique* of April 1993). After the war in early 1995 Shevardnadze himself spoke at Chatham House, London, of the need to suppress separatism wherever it arose in the world and whatever the cost; he was referring to Abkhazia and Chechnia, and, in the context of the savageries being committed in Chechnia as he delivered his speech, his words could only be interpreted as a warrant for genocide -- they were warmly praised by the chairman, Lord Geoffrey Howe, and the text subsequently appeared in, of all journals, *The New Statesman and Society*. How 'important' do the personages have to be to satisfy Mr. Corley? But, of course, he is not alone in attempting to portray the anti-Abkhazian group as being insignificant or relatively restricted in number. Consider, for example, Gia Nodia's contribution to Bruno Coppieters' (ed.) 'Contested borders in the Caucasus' (VUB Press, Brussels, 1996), where he attempts to limit the blame for inciting Georgia's minorities exclusively to Gamsakhurdia from among the radicals and talks of the Abkhazians reacting to remarks from only 'some politicians' on the Georgian side. Or again note the emphasis in the following quote: 'Due in part to the statements of some eccentric

politicians in Tbilisi, Ardzinba felt threatened by Georgian independence', which is part of Irak'li K'ak'abadze's contribution to 'Perspectives on Central Asia' II, 6, 1997 (published by the Center for Political and Strategic Studies). The truth is, sadly, that anti-Abkhazianism was/is much more rampant than the Kartvelian authors would like to have one believe or than Mr. Corley clearly does believe.

Mr. Corley detects exaggeration in my claim that the Abkhazians were pursuing 'their cause with moderation and dignity', adding that neither side displayed much of either characteristic. I beg to differ and challenge this reviewer to document his charge.

And now to Dr. Jones, who does know Georgian, which is of little advantage in itself if discrimination in judgment is lacking; I cannot vouch for his knowledge of Abkhazian affairs. His first (trivial) objection can be swiftly dismissed, for a careful reading of the passage concerned should reveal that my reference to Stalin being in charge of nationalities 'at the time' related not, as alleged, to 1931 but actually to 1921, when Stalin WAS in charge and DID have Ordzhonik'idze as his lieutenant in their shared homeland, though I admit that a more felicitous punctuation would have rendered the dating unchallengeable.

My 'one-sided picture' is argued to derive from my reliance on 'Russian observers', whose objectivity must stand in doubt. I agree that (official) Russian sources discussing Caucasian matters, if unsupported by independent testimonies, MIGHT be open to suspicion of subjectivity, but, since I am not aware that I WAS relying on such unsupported Russian observations, I fail to understand the reason for this imputation of unreliability. Since, however, the noble doctor goes on to equate my tactics with those typical of the 'good Soviet style', I can only assume that he is essaying what has become par for the Georgian course, namely: since Russia was the West's bogeyman for so long this century, blame everything on them and thus seek to absolve Georgia from any sense of responsibility for the utter chaos that two successive, hardly competent leaders (Mingrelian Gamsakhurdia and Georgian Shevardnadze) with their bevy of hangers-on have created in their once proud republic. Dr. Jones demeans himself and his case by descending to the same level as, for example, one of the most uncouth apologists for the Georgian cause, Ramaz K'limiashvili, an example of whose style is this risible outburst in an edition of the Georgian paper 'P'olit'ik'a' (it is undated but clearly appeared during the war when the Abkhazian government had taken refuge in Gudauta in N. Abkhazia): 'A very strong disinformation-machine is active abroad. Its centre is now in London, where official representatives in Western Europe of the regime now fled are operative, along with the ideologue of the Abkhazian separatists, George Hewitt, and a group of communists with pro-Russian orientation under the supervision of Donald Rayfield [professor of Russian and a distinguished commentator on Georgian literature --

George Hewitt] who are alarmed that Georgia has broken with Russia and communism etc... They are sufficiently active, and innumerable slanderous articles are being published about Georgia'. Does Dr. Jones seriously wish to claim that Western leaders have NOT shewn bias in the way they have consistently turned a collective blind eye to the misdeeds of Shevardnadze and Yeltsin? Can he seriously entertain the belief that the Western press HAS been fair to the Abkhazians in their consistently weak and reporting of the conflict with heavy pro-Georgian bias?

Dr. Jones is troubled by my use of language. Personally speaking, it is not words, even such words as 'robbery, rape, torture and slaughter', that I find offensive but the actions they name. I devoutly wish that the use of such terms to describe Georgian behaviour during the war had not been necessary, but no-one who has bothered to read 'The White Book of Abkhazia' with its details of the horrors imposed on the non-Kartvelian populace in the occupied areas could quarrel with this language. Since we are talking of all-out war from August 1992 to October 1993, it is hardly surprising (and undeniable) that there were 'high civilian casualties on BOTH sides', but the point to the open-minded is that one side started this conflict quite deliberately and that their actions throughout the war were motivated by a desire to inspire such fear in the non-Kartvelian population of Abkhazia (see, for example, Prof. Richard Clogg's article on the treatment of the Greek population as written up in the paper 'The Greek American' for 26th March 1994) that they would, if not killed in the conflict, simply abandon Abkhazia in the hope of a more peaceful life somewhere else (but where?). Blame usually attaches more to one side than the other for a conflict, and there can be no doubt at all to anyone properly acquainted with the facts that the blame in this case rests solely on the Georgian side (and on Shevardnadze in particular). Does Dr. Jones, a historian, need to be reminded that, though many German civilians perished in World War II, that conflict was caused by the Hitler regime? -- the number of dead once war breaks out is tragic but an essential irrelevance in the apportioning of blame for the conflict's inception.

When the war was indisputably won, the Abkhazians distributed a leaflet urging non-retaliation against fighters (they cannot be dignified with the title 'soldiers') laying down their arms. Given all that tiny Abkhazia had suffered needlessly at the hands of Shevardnadze's marauders, do they not deserve credit for taking this action? Dr. Jones cannot bring himself to offer even a grudging approval. If, on the other hand, he knows of any planned campaign on the part of the Abkhazians to match their opponents' barbarity of engaging in 'robbery, rape, torture and slaughter', I do encourage him to publish it.

Of all the international agencies that have taken the trouble to interest themselves in the Georgian-Abkhazian conflict there is but one which has endeavoured to consult both sides properly and to reach a considered conclusion on the basis of their

investigations. This description applies not to the UN, not to the CSCE (now OSCE), not to the European Parliament, not to the Council of Europe, and most definitely not to any Western foreign ministry with their unreasonable and unreasoned devotions to Shevardnadze, but to the Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organisation (The Hague). Far from being a purveyor of 'shoddy' literature, this organisation has produced two carefully researched reports (both published in Central Asian Survey) on the conflict, which deserve to be attentively read by anyone seeking enlightenment on this conflict. The respect that this lone voice for the world's minorities enjoys is shown by the fact that, prior to its (over-hasty) admission to the cosy club of the UN, Georgia was, like Abkhazia and Chechnia, a supportive member... Dr. Jones' charge is nothing less than an indictment of his own ignorance and one that, after mature deliberation, he will no doubt come to regret.

When the last Soviet census was conducted in 1989, there were 239,872 Kartvelians (most of whom were Mingrelians) resident in Abkhazia. It cannot be denied that the majority of these decided that the safest policy, given the hatred their compatriots' actions had deliberately stirred up amongst the Abkhazians during the war, was to flee into Georgia proper -- and (there is no mystery about this) it is fear of the consequences of this undeniable hatred which is the reason why most have not returned home to the present day. Almost at once Georgian propaganda started talking of 200,000 refugees. This rapidly increased to 250,000, and then to 300,000 and even to 350,000 refugees from Abkhazia on Georgian soil, figures that have been quite gullibly taken on trust by many international organisations. No agency has ever conducted a survey of the actual numbers, but, if the figure of a quarter of a million is anything like accurate, there would clearly be not a single Kartvelian left in Abkhazia. This is absurd, for quite sizeable numbers never even left and many have returned (whether officially or unofficially) to the Gal District in particular. It is encouraging that in recent Reuters' reports from Georgia the much more realistic figure of 150,000 Kartvelian refugees from Abkhazia has started to be used. And in Coppieters' 'Contested Borders' the author A. Zverev also speaks of 160,000. Dr. Jones betrays his cavalier attitude for facts by parroting the 250,000 figure, invented (like the even larger totals) to attract greater sympathy and thus higher amounts of humanitarian aid for Georgia -- who, though, is interested in sending any to the principal victims of the war, the Abkhazians?

And finally Dr. Jones naively calculates that the case I present can be undermined by the coup de grâce revelation that I was asked as early as 1993 by Pres. V. Ardzinba to be Abkhazia's Honorary Consul in the UK, not that this is a recognised office, given that Abkhazia itself remains an unrecognised state. This is true -- I am happy to admit it and take pride in doing so. I have never sought to hide this fact, and, while we are on the subject of personal rather than academic matters, one wonders why Dr.

Jones did not also mention that I have been married to an Abkhazian (with whom I communicate in Georgian) since 1976, a fact of which I am equally proud. Could it, perhaps, have been that I might also have been tempted to mention that he is married to a Georgian?

It would appear that objectivity for Mr. Corley and Dr. Jones is defined as the equal apportioning of favour/blame to each and every party to a dispute. Even if THEY are content to operate with such a definition, I most certainly am not. Objectivity, whether in the world of academia or journalism, consists of fairly presenting the facts and reaching considered, logical conclusions on the basis of those facts. If this necessitates the apportioning of blame, then so be it.

While on the subject of review(er)s, I should like to take this opportunity to mention two others. In 1990 I, as outgoing president of the European Caucasological Society, together with my successor in that post, Prof. D. Rayfield, organised at SOAS, London University, that year's biennial colloquium for the Society. In my own presentation I dealt with the arguments advanced by my old tutor for Svan, Aleksandre Oniani, in his article 'Abkhazia and NW Georgia according to the linguistic evidence', published in the Georgian-Russian bilingual weekly *Saxalxo Ganatleba* (Narodnoe Obrazovanie) 'Popular Education' over the New Year 1989-90. One of his aims was to argue, in the manner of the discredited Ingoroq'va, that the Abkhazians migrated onto the territory of Abkhazia some 400-500 years ago. I challenged his arguments and concluded that there is no evidence of any kind whatsoever that argues for the arrival of the Abkhazians on their historical homeland at any time during the Christian era -- in other words, they have been resident on their territory for at least 2,000 years (and, I have no doubt, considerably longer). This article was included in the volume from the colloquium that I edited under the title 'Caucasian Perspectives' (Lincom Europa, 1992). This book was reviewed by German Caucasologist Dr. Martin Haspelmath in *Language* 69.4, 1993, 860-1. His comment on my paper was this: 'A very explosive issue is the relation between Abkhazians and Georgians. GEORGE HEWITT ('Language contact in N.W. Georgia: Fact or fiction?') attempts to demonstrate mutual influence between Abkhaz and Kartvelian languages, showing that the Abkhazians have lived in present-day Abkhazia for at least 2,000 years, and not just 400-500 years as some Georgians claim (as if it mattered for the resolution of the current ethnic conflict). Unfortunately, Hewitt is not free of (anti-Georgian) emotions either, and the fact that the Georgian point of view is not presented at all in the volume does not help the reader to get a balanced picture'. Two points deserve comment here (in addition, that is, to noting that he does not address the value of the linguistic arguments at all in this most prestigious of purely linguistic journals). Firstly, the assertion that the Abkhazians are (relative) newcomers to Abkhazia is part of the Georgian nationalist case that they (thus, in Georgian terms)

have no real claim to special status on that territory. The 'scholarly' arguments marshalled in defence of this 'theory' are anything but scholarly, and, if scholarship stands for anything, the exposure of pseudo-scholarship surely falls within its remit. By revealing Oniani's linguistic sleight of hand and proposing a minimum of 2,000 years of residence, I am NOT thereby implying that only the Abkhazians should have exclusive rights in Abkhazia, and, as I stressed above, this is not part of the Abkhazians' case either. And so, Haspelmath's parenthesised aside is unjustified, as is a parallel remark later offered in his own review of the book by Prof. Dieter M. Job.

Equally without foundation is his charge that the Georgian case is unrepresented. In responding to Oniani I naturally had to present his original arguments, which thus do find expression in the volume. If Haspelmath believes that space has to be allotted to palpable nonsense in order to satisfy some (again perverse) definition of balance, that is his business. Personally, I stand persuaded that only articles that deserve publication on their merits should indeed be published.

In December 1995 my 'Georgian: A Structural Reference Grammar' was published by Benjamins. It consists of xviii+714 pages. It was reviewed in two and a half pages by Dr. Kevin Tuite of Montreal (*Functions of Language*, 1997, 258-260). Apart from (a) wasting (presumably) valuable space on my non-pc use of 'he' to refer to both sexes, and (b) unfavourably comparing the length of my 9-page bibliography with that of a work of a totally different genre (which I had already negatively reviewed) -- compare the mere 2-page list of references/authors cited in Hans Vogt's 1971 reference-book 'Grammaire de la Langue Géorgienne' --, he says this: 'In the preface Hewitt mentions that around the time he received the commission to write GSRG, "an unforeseen rift in my relations with Georgia" led to Georgian becoming "a virtual dead language" as far as he was concerned (p. xiii). This does not strike me as the most auspicious circumstance in which to write a reference grammar of a language that is very much alive. One annoying, but not particularly harmful, consequence is the 17-page introduction, in which the reader is treated to Hewitt's views on language and ethnic identity, and the linguistic policies of post-Soviet Georgia. [...] I would have liked [...] less intrusion of a linguist's personal views on political and social questions'. In the Introduction I described the Kartvelian peoples as consisting of Georgians, Mingrelians, Laz and Svans. Since, as I recounted above, I have never shared the opinion that has become Georgian orthodoxy since only around 1930 that these peoples are correctly classified as 'Georgians' -- and the Laz, who live mainly in Turkey, quite adamantly do not share this category-confusion --, I see no reason why I should not have the right to state my own opinion in the Introduction to my own grammar, which is, after all, the section of the book designed to orientate readers within the socio-political context in which the language about to be described is spoken. Does Dr. Tuite, who, I seem the recall, is married to a Svan-

Mingrelian, suppose that only socio-political opinions that are viewed with favour by the speakers of a language are to be aired in grammars of that language? This strikes me as a decidedly odd way of approaching language-description. And, if he has a full complement of arguments to prove that my assessment of imposed ethnicity in the region is misguided, let him publish them so that the persuasiveness of his case can be judged by all interested parties. One unpromising pointer resides in the title of the one and only published volume that, as far as I am aware, the Canadian anthropologist has contributed to Kartvelology. The 148-page offering consists of texts with translations and boasts the title 'An Anthology of Georgian Folk Poetry' (Farleigh Dickinson University Press, 1994). Unsuspecting readers would conclude from this that the original texts represent the Georgian language exclusively, but they would be in error, for Svan and Mingrelian poems are also included. And yet, more encouragingly, in the article on the Svans he contributed to the 1994 'Encyclopedia of World Cultures' (vol. 6), Dr. Tuite does on p. 343 (col. 2) use the term 'Kartvelians' as a superordinate for all four of the South Caucasian/Kartvelian peoples, of which I whole-heartedly approve, when he writes: 'The Greek geographer Strabo...describes the Svans as fierce, warlike mountain people, ruled by a king and a council of 300 elders and capable of fielding an army of 200,000. (This figure may be an exaggeration, or perhaps Strabo was including other Kartvelians under the designation "Svan")'.

[N.B. The encyclopædia just mentioned incorporates a separate article on the Mingrelians, which owes its existence to my convincing the editorial board that, if the Laz and the Svans were to be graced with articles independently of the Georgians, then justice demanded that the Mingrelians should likewise not be treated under the heading 'Georgians', as planned. The resulting entry was compiled by none other than Dr. Stephen Jones, partly on the basis of some rare materials from my personal library that he requested me to photocopy for the purpose. On p. 262 (col. 2) he correctly stresses that Mingrelian is 'not mutually intelligible with Georgian'.]

At the time I was asked to write the Benjamin grammar I had been working on Georgian for over 15 years. Regardless of my relations with Georgia and Georgian speakers at the time of the book's composition, I think that such a period of intensive study fully justified my acceptance of the commission, and the work should be judged for what it sets out to be, namely as accurate and complete a description of the standard Georgian literary language as I was/am capable of producing. I am quite prepared to take issue with Dr. Tuite on the purely linguistic aspects of the work that he was able to salvage enough space to criticise.

It goes without saying that reviewers should always be competent; but, equally, competent reviews should address the main rather than irrelevant peripheral issues.