

Tolerance Building through History Education in Georgia
 How to Teach History and Citizenship in a Multicultural and Multi-confessional Environment?

EUROCLIO/MATRA Project (2008-2011)

How We Lived together in Georgia in the 20th Century
 29 Worksheets for Interactive History Teaching

EXTERNAL REVIEW

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*based on R. Maier’s lecture at the Final Training Seminar in Tbilisi, 2-3 September 2011

Introduction



National, cultural and religious minorities are often considered a problem. I would like to emphasise that this is by no means inevitable and that this is usually not the fault of the minorities themselves. Minorities are turned into a problem by states and societies that organise themselves according to principles that attribute no intrinsic value to these minorities and/or even question their right to exist.

According to Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor, a lack of recognition for the identity of a minority on the part of the state or the majority society is often the reason behind ethnic conflicts. He calls therefore for a ‘*culture of recognition*’, on which he has built his theory of multiculturalism. The goal of multiculturalism is a multicultural society that does not exert pressure on its participants to become assimilated. The ethnic and cultural groups should exist individually. The theory is based on the assumption that those belonging to one of the various ethnic groups are capable of showing understanding, respect and tolerance towards one another and of considering each other equals. In Western Europe there is heated debate on the subject of multicultural societies. Even proponents of multiculturalism like Daniel Cohn-Bendit have had to admit that such a society can also be ‘harsh and lacking in solidarity’. For recognition by no means indicates a willingness to make sacrifices for others.

Just as multicultural societies are by no means free of conflict, it would be an illusion to believe that conflicts can be avoided by smoothing over cultural and religious difference, or even denying it altogether. The ideology that states achieve perfection and follow a kind of natural order when they are nation-states consisting of an ethnically homogenous population appeared in 19th-century thought and took on an acute form in the 20th century. From bitter experience we know today that ‘ethnic purity’ is an artificial concept that bears no relevance to reality. It is a fictional idea which leads to inhumanity when subjected to political implementation.

Germany – my home country – is in the process of acquainting itself with its some three million Muslim citizens. The difficulties inherent in demonstrating religious tolerance become obvious whenever religious coexistence moves beyond the various versions of Christian beliefs. The Germans – like all Europeans – find themselves confronted by new challenges regarding the principle of religious privilege. Should we reserve

the role of a central European religion for Christianity, or should we reconcile ourselves to the idea of a multi-religious dimension to Europe with equal rights? Young people are subjected to proponents of both positions. It is the task of the history classroom to present the pupils with historical situations which illustrate when and to what extent the words and deeds of the Church had beneficial or detrimental effects on the peaceful coexistence of humanity. Thus the next generation can approach the open questions on the relationship between secular power and religion with substance and responsibility. From the perspective of history didactics, such historical accounts are always suitable instructive objects that provide orientation for dealing with the present and shaping the future.

Teaching Materials

In a multiethnic state such as Georgia the question of how to integrate minorities has become existential. As Martin Luther King once said, '*Integration doesn't make sense without a share in power*'. This means that the majority society must be willing to hand over power to the minorities and show toleration of their cultural identity. This is part of a culture of recognition, to return to the words of Charles Taylor. A national minority is not appreciated and respected for their ability to adjust, but for their own specific qualities. This is somewhat neglected – and now I will come to speak of the educational material – in the chapter on the Kistinty population. Here the authors provide sources that demonstrate Kistinty adapting so completely to the Georgians that they could practically be considered of Georgian origin. Assimilation and the fading out of special qualities are thus presented in a positive light.

A minority's own history is an especially significant part of their cultural identity and specific characteristics. This shifts history teaching into the focus of the discussion. In this regard your project makes a highly valuable contribution. When I participated in the project's stocktaking conference in November 2008, we all had a clear idea of the deficits in Georgian history textbooks. Nino Chikovani had just presented her precise analysis of how history lessons deal with multi-ethnicity. She came to the conclusion that the newest textbooks no longer ignore ethnic and religious minorities. Minorities are, she said, no longer marginalised by a Georgian ethno-nationalism. This was a huge step forward. But Nino Chikovani also pointed out something rather crucial: 'The presented material reflects the *existence* of minorities rather than their *participation* in the common history. The impression is that these groups reside separately, rather than in interaction with each other.' From this assertion we can derive a criterion with which to assess the teaching materials being published nowadays. And I can already tell you that the educational material presented here has passed the test.



The solutions, however, are not simple ones. I know of textbooks from other countries where national minorities are addressed specifically in situations where the history of a certain minority is interwoven with the history of the national majority. Unfortunately these are generally the moments of conflict and the minorities therefore constantly appear as 'troublemakers'. This manner of integrated portrayals therefore harbours danger. The educational materials presented here, however, escape this danger – so effectively, in fact, that almost the opposite extreme may be cause for concern. Are conflicts ignored or omitted? Is the history of minorities and majorities living together presented too harmoniously?

In the materials I found not one negative mention of minorities, not one negative stereotype, no pejorative caricatures, no enemy images. I am sure, however, that there is prejudice amongst the population. I realise that the authors wanted to avoid reproducing this prejudice. They wished to demonstrate kindness. There is also no depiction of the processes of inclusion and exclusion resulting from the construction of identities. Only positive examples of intercultural life in Georgia in the 20th century are given, leading partially to an

unrealistically rosy picture of the past. Using history to develop tolerance might then be considered indoctrination.

Events are taken as examples that I cannot imagine were really as harmonious and free of friction as they appear. For instance, how was a man converting to Islam seen by his previous religious community afterwards? We hear nothing about this. If people in the village Baraleti really lived together for several centuries in peace and friendship, why did the national/cultural identities remain so clearly separated after several generations and can still be identified so accurately by the demographic census?



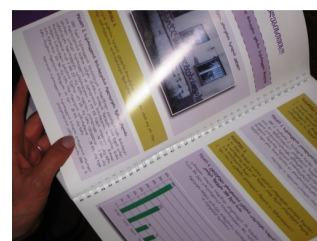
I would like to call for a clearer designation of contradictions and conflict. If we do not make prejudice an object of study in the classroom we leave it untouched. Many pupils may not be aware that their opinions are based on prejudice. Pupils should experience how prejudice evolves, how stereotypes work. Using specific examples, they can learn that prejudice often says more about the person expressing it than about those to whom it refers. Xenophobia and a fear of minorities are expressions of insecurity, of a lack of self-confidence, of weakness. The psychological mechanism of degrading the out-group in order to strengthen and

lend a sensation of superiority to the in-group is generally new to pupils. Reflection on this, however, would be a highly worthwhile learning objective.

Encouraging features

I have been following the progress of the project under discussion and the development of teaching materials with much personal appreciation and curiosity. When I state '*with personal appreciation*', it is because I admire the courage required to take on such a sensitive, yet necessary topic. Even in western societies, debates on multiculturalism are not for the faint-hearted. I also write '*with curiosity*' because there are hardly any orientation models for such teaching materials. The authors were therefore, to a certain extent, breaking new grounds and they had to find their own way. This applies to the methodological approach as well as to the search for sources, which demands a high degree of creativity. It was simply fascinating for me to watch the authors master this challenge.

Up until now the educational material was only available to me as a print-out of an electronic file. I am now delighted to see the high quality of the book in its non-electronic form. But its potential was visible even from the print-out: It is a modern exercise book, to a large extent based on sources. It can be used directly in class. The teacher can teach with the book systematically, or he/she can select individual chapters and integrate them into class. The book thus offers a high level of flexibility.



What did I like about it?

1. I like the approach from the personal living environment. This is already clear from the table of contents: Everyday Life, Religion, Migration, Family – all topics that pupils can immediately relate to their own lives.
2. I like the interesting and lively chapter headings, which inspire a desire and curiosity to find out more about the specific topic. Here, the authors use provocative questions, memorable metaphors, and also an emotional hue. The prevalent style is lively and fresh.
3. The authors work sensibly and to great effect with the principle of examples. They take a specific street, a certain village, a particular family, and use these examples to illustrate complex structures and contexts.
4. The authors make extensive use of 'oral history'. As eye-witnesses are still available for many of the topics, this approach makes a lot of sense and is highly productive. The eye-witness reports are of

great value. They are easy to analyse; perhaps one might identify with the person; emotions are not eliminated. And so I would suggest that, if the audio files of the interviews exist, they should also be proposed as sources to the students (downloadable on the website). This would add a nice touch of authenticity. Additionally they offer teachers the possibility to change teaching media and teaching methods.

In most cases, I was also convinced by the multiple perspectives approach, especially well presented in the context of the *Ergneti market*. The role-play suggested is suitable for strongly encouraging the potential for critical thinking. It is also a bold step to cast a critical light on actions taken by the state. In a democratic state, however, one should be able to take this for granted.



Just leafing through the book, I noticed that images play a very important part in this educational material. That's a good thing, as there is nothing more dull and off-putting for pupils than pages and pages of grey type. Furthermore, the pictures are used as historical sources and not simply as illustrations or 'decorations'. In many cases, the pupils are asked to observe the images very closely and are asked questions about them.

Written statements are made easier to remember by especially designed diagrams. This was also a point in the materials' favour. I was astonished to find that the authors entrusted the pupils with highly sophisticated tasks, such as to making a film or to creating a website. I hesitated briefly, wondering whether this was really realistic. But I concluded that it is precisely this kind of task that proves the innovative and forward-looking design of this educational material.

I was interested to see whether and how the book addresses the topic of '*Stalin*'. The topic was not ignored, which I also assessed positively.

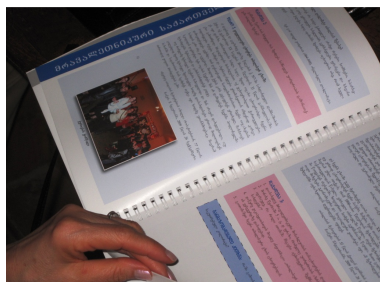
Challenges

However, there are also a few fundamental problems:

1. National identities are often presented as given rather than constructed. Students should also come to realise that national identities are sometimes products of negotiation.
2. Whenever films are used as sources – which I welcome – then these must be prepared carefully. In this case we are dealing with Soviet films that of course convey certain information, but they are embedded within complex propaganda. It must be made clear to the pupils that these are construed, and they must be given the tools necessary to decipher these constructions.
3. It should go without saying that the ethnic minorities should be called by the name that they themselves use. The '*Udiny*' are referred to in the book as '*Udijtsy*', which in my view is not right.
4. If you propose to play role games you should give instructions, make proposals and not only present materials. The role-play referring to the *Meskhetintsy* is difficult for me to follow.
5. Avoid passages with an encyclopaedic character. The units on the Baltic communities in Georgia are interesting, but there is perhaps an overload of information. The teaching aims should be made clearer (at least in the teachers' manual). It is demonstrated very well that the Baltic people in Georgia could be excellent 'ambassadors' in the countries they originally come from. They are building 'bridges'. This might be a didactic focus on this topic.
6. The ethnic Georgian (and therefore dominant) view on the conflict in the region of what is now called South Ossetia is overt in the worksheet that deals with the issue.

The extensive use of 'oral history' harbours some dangers. Eye-witnesses can make mistakes, and false or misleading statements. It must therefore be made possible to correct these. The pupils must be given the

techniques necessary to question statements made by an eye-witness and to assess his/her viewpoint critically. This possibility is not always provided by this book.



This lack of critical assessment opportunity I particularly noticed this in the chapter on the ‘*Story of the Spanish Grandmother*’. The grandmother’s account of the Spanish Civil War is highly problematic. How could it be otherwise? She is not a historian, and almost a generation has passed since the events. The year dates are imprecise and the character of the war cannot be reduced to a struggle between fascists and communists. Yet an exercise demands of the pupils to read the historical facts out of the grandmother’s story. This does not do justice to the ‘oral history’ source. Here we are dealing with a secondary source which is also highly subjective. As historians you will know the familiar saying that ‘the eye-witness is the historian’s greatest enemy’. This warning should at least inspire us to point out the difference between primary and secondary literature to the pupils, by all means using the example of the Spanish grandmother.

Eye-witnesses tend to unroll their whole lives with all the conclusions, morals, myths and suppression that they wish to pass on as their life experience. Of course, such life stories are constantly subject to re-interpretation. It is a well-known fact that older people see their past, especially their youth, in a brighter light. Bad memories are minimized; good memories are emphasised. And the influence of the present is always a dominant filter. The construction of the past is interwoven with the demands of the present and the expectations of the future. The interviews carried out for this project – not only that with the Spanish grandmother – would certainly have led to different results and answers ten, twenty or thirty years ago. This must be made clear to the pupils. This is very important.

Some of the information on the photographs is too sparse. In order to use photographs as sources we need proper information about them (who took the photograph, with what intention, under which circumstances, and for whom? – the more information we get, the better). Sometimes there are real contradictions: On the photo showing a “street in Tbilisi at the beginning of the 20 century” you can see a modern car (see unit ‘*Tbilisskij dvornik*’).

Suggestions for continued work

Use extracts from novels, poems and samizdat literature as sources too! Poets and writers have always been social seismographs and specialists in social relationships as well as collective memory. The poet Vazha Pshaveli is only mentioned in the context of the *Kistintsy*. His texts are not taken as an object of study to address the relationship between ethnic Georgians and Kistintsy, however. Literature is a very efficient means of creating critical awareness in the student, much more so than film. Films from Soviet times are full of ideologies and were highly controlled by the authorities. But you can find literature from that time which gives you more realistic impressions. You should especially use samizdat literature.



Stress the commonalities and more often the economical and cultural impacts of living together. You did it perfectly in the unit on ‘*Theatres in Tbilisi*’. Over the course of history Georgia has gained a lot from the intercultural competence of its inhabitants (for example knowledge of languages). The glory of Georgia as a nation of excellent commercial travellers and merchants is based on it.

I also would recommend a unit addressing the role of sports in intercultural life in Georgia. I am not aware how the minorities are represented in the mass media, TV etc. But these can represent popular points of

communication for inter-culturality.

When posing questions, it is important that students have access to sources that fully prepare them. Sometimes it is useful to have 'further suggested reading' and sources such as encyclopaedias to investigate basic facts of interest for certain topics. If you ask interesting questions and only provide limited information, the result (although unintended) can be negative stereotyping and narrow-minded analysis.

Put in more provocative questions like: "The Soviet regime oppressed religion. Did this have a positive impact for living together in a religiously heterogeneous society?" Or: "Looking back to Soviet history a person expressed in an interview 'Nobody cared about nationality'. Would you contradict this? "

Involve the pupils even more in the action! Ask them to go to the older generations of their own family or neighbourhood and interview them. Or ask them, for example in the context of 'mixed families', whether they would be willing to marry someone from another ethnic group or religious community (Why/Why not?) This kind of pupil-centred teaching is much more effective than demanding the pupils to empathise with evacuated Russians during World War II and to depict their impressions in a letter to fictive friends. In my view this is an excessive demand with no productive effect.

There is a wealth of methodological approaches which help to centre the lesson more on the pupils. They can also be used to extend the questions asked to the pupils. I will give 3 examples:

1. Give the pupils a printed list of incomplete sentences and ask them to complete them. For instance: 'Minorities would be easier to integrate if the Georgians ...' Afterwards, allow the pupils to discuss their 'answers'.
2. Give the pupils a list of statements on a particular topic and ask them to tick those they agree with. For instance on the subject of integration: 'A person is integrated ... when he/she dresses like the Georgians ... when he/she owns a house ... when he/she speaks Georgian ...' this can also trigger interesting discussions.
3. I have taken the third example from an educational handout developed in the context of mediation in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. It is a role-play during which young people follow the interaction between majority and minority, becoming aware of themselves in this context (enclosed in the participants' folder)

Conclusion

Perhaps my review appears too uncritical. I should comment here that I had the opportunity to express my critique of the first draft before publication with the result that many critical aspects have already been addressed and corrected by the authors. All in all the 29 worksheets represent a vivid and effective tool for history teachers in Georgia, ready for practical implementation. By integrating the history of minorities in the history of the country they precisely address a crucial point in the modernization of history teaching. These teaching resources are a product of excellent cooperation between researchers and pedagogues. I am sure that they will be a stimulus for curriculum developers and even for academic historians in Georgia. The worksheets can of course be improved. They might still pick up some theoretical thoughts based on constructivism, they might be more aware of methodological problems of certain media or sources, and they might be even more pupil-centred. But considering that the authors have faced a lot of challenges and they did not have any orientation models at their disposal they did a remarkable job. Their experience is worth being adopted not only in Georgia but also in other countries, where minority problems and multiculturalism impact society and pedagogical actors.