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Field Report

My goal in the CRRC-UC Berkeley Field Project workshop (November 3 to November 16, 2013) was a re-conceptualization of methodological and theoretical framing of a newly introduced syllabus entitled *Imperial legacies: political and symbolic borders in the Abkhazia region of Georgia*¹. And I think, there has been considerable improvement in terms of defining conceptual issues, clarifying topics, expanding reading materials, introducing new and refining existing teaching methods (please see the bibliography and the revised syllabus).

In order to achieve my goals I was involved in various activities at the Institute of Slavic, East European, and Eurasian Studies (ISEEES) at the University of California, Berkeley (UCB). First, at the workshops I received very valuable feedbacks, comments and suggestions concerning my course syllabus and field issues from professors and graduate students (Edward Walker, Stephan Astourian, Brandon Schechter, Charles David Shaw). Dr. Walker, who was my host professor, made detailed notes on my course syllabus project. He suggested raising normative questions and presenting the complex nature of the course subject (e.g.: How diverse should a country be? How similar or different should a society be?). He also mentioned the importance of providing clear and working definitions for key concepts and terms. This included discussing the emergence of empires and borders in a historical perspective (states as products of coercion and elite agreement backed up by force); observing international law on territorial integrity and domestic law on secession, etc. In addition, he suggested that the Abkhazia question should be put in a comparative perspective as a broader topic. Particularly interesting was his recommendation to unsettle prejudices in class regarding ethnicity, ethnic groups, racism, and nationalism.

¹ The revised title is *Imperial legacies: real and imagined borders in Abkhazia region of Georgia*

Apart from this workshop, I attended regular classes and had individual consultations with Berkeley professors (Melanie Feakins, Nick Tackett, Alexei Yurchak), which also gave me interesting ideas about my field. The very important aspect of this visit was a possibility of working in Berkeley libraries and purchasing books that substantially contributed to expand bibliography and improve topics of my course. In addition to conceptual issues, I got some new ideas about teaching methods and formats through attending classes and receiving feedback from professors and graduate students. Furthermore, we had a special workshop on syllabus design with Kim Starr-Reid. Consequently, I tried to make significant conceptual and technical changes in my revised syllabus. Here are slightly expanded topics covered in my final syllabus:

- Imagining Russian/Soviet imperial legacies and boundaries in Georgia (theoretical framework and key concepts)
- Borders and cultural landscape before Russian domination
- Russian-Tsarist multiethnic colonization and “Russification project in Abkhazia: Georgian and Abkhazian cultural disintegration (Creating Abkhazian alphabet; reducing the role of Georgian language, culture and church, etc.)
- Borders and State formation: Abkhazia region during the First Democratic Republic of Georgia (1918-1921)
- Forced Sovietization of Georgia; Soviet nationalities policy and administrative division; Abkhazian autonomy within Georgian Soviet republic; local institutions as legitimate basis for political claims
- Soviet Abkhazian academia and cultural elite; modeling the region as “ethnic landscape”; “territorialisation of memory” and emerging conflicting historical narratives of belonging/not belonging
- National movement and mobilization in Georgia and gaining independence; law wars between central Georgian and local Abkhazian governments in early 90s of 20th century; international and domestic laws on territorial integrity

- Georgian-Abkhazian ethnic conflict and ethnic cleansing
- Post-war reality: politics of exclusion and dividing lines between Abkhazian and Georgian “spaces”; legitimizing ethnic cleansing
- Living in exile: Georgian refugees’ memories and imaginings of homeland
- Rose revolution 2003 and redefining Georgia’s location - “rejoining of Europe”; overcoming soviet legacies - the main goals of new political elite; new policy toward Abkhazia and South Ossetia; Russian-Georgian war in August 2008
- Perspectives of the Georgian-Abkhazian conflict resolution; good experience and long history of living together; Abkhazia - a space of multiple belongings (cultural hybridity, “practicing borderland”); shared (Georgian and Abkhazian) religious and cultural practices

In summation, the Case-UC Berkeley Field Project gave me an opportunity to improve a new syllabus on one of the most topical issues in Georgia. However, an original, mutliperspectivte and fundamental investigation of the Georgian culture in the context of imperial legacies and boundaries have not been conducted yet. During Soviet period Georgian studies was based on “Marxism-Leninism” theoretical framework and methodology. Consequently, there was no room for studying any subject from the perspectives of different theories or disciplines. Although after collapsing of Soviet Union the communist ideology disappeared, humanitarian and social sciences in Georgia still lack employing new approaches and methodologies. Thus, this visit has inspired me to conduct research on the observed subject that will shed new light on very interesting cultural features of the Abkhazia region as well as on Georgian culture generally.