

TRANSLATION AND SOVIET NATIONALITIES POLICY: THE VIEW FROM THE PERIPHERY

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Abstract: The literature on translation in the Soviet Union has largely focused on the “center” — i.e., on state-sponsored policies and translation into Russian. This article seeks to address that imbalance by turning scholarly attention to how Soviet translation policy was experienced in the periphery, that is, in the various Soviet republics, a complex story long suppressed beneath the propagandistic veneer of *druzhba narodov*, or “friendship of Soviet peoples.” At the same time, this article aims to address the rather desultory treatment of translation in the now vast literature on Soviet nationalities policy and, more broadly, on Soviet coloniality, by examining the role of translation in both a practical sense, as a techne of communist internationalism, and in a metaphorical sense as symbolizing the Soviet state’s commitment to fostering greater mutual understanding and respect among its constituent peoples. These dual aims are then explored through the life of Armenian writer, editor, and translator Karen Mikaelian.

Keywords: adequacy; anthologies; Armenian literature; *druzhba narodov* / friendship of Soviet peoples; interlinear translations

1. Introduction

The anglophone literature on translation in the Soviet Union, inaugurated in the 1990s with Lauren G. Leighton’s *Two Worlds, One Art: Literary Translation in Russia and America* (1991) and Maurice Freidberg’s *Literary Translation in Russia: A Cultural History* (1997), greatly expanded in the first and second decades of the twenty first century when the opening of archives following the fall of the Soviet Union began to bear fruit — especially in relation to the censorship of translations.¹ The vast majority

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¹ Some examples include isolated chapters in the collected volumes *Contexts, Subtexts and Pretexts: Literary Translation in Russia and Eastern Europe* (Baer 2011), *The Art of Accommodation: Literary Translation in Russia* (Burnett & Lygo 2013), *Going East: Discovering New and Alternative Traditions in Translation Studies* (Schippel & Zwischenberger 2016), *Translation in Russian Contexts: Culture, Politics, Identity* (Baer & Witt 2018), *Translation under Communism* (Rundle et al. 2022), *World Literature in the Soviet Union* (Tihanov et al. 2023), and Muireann Maguire and Cathy McAteer’s *Translating Russian Literature in the Global Context* (2024), as well as

of that research, however, has focused on the Soviet (Russophone) center and translations *into* Russian, albeit with some very notable exceptions, such as individual articles and book chapters in English and more substantial works published in the languages of the post-Soviet republics (e.g., Strikha 2006; Chernovatyi & Karaban 2007; Kalnychenko & Poliakova 2011, 2015; Kolomiyets 2015; Maskaliūnienė & Tatolytė 2024). This article seeks to address that imbalance by turning scholarly attention to how Soviet translation policy was experienced in the periphery, that is, in the various Soviet republics, a complex story long suppressed beneath the propagandistic veneer of *druzhba narodov*, or “friendship of Soviet peoples,” which involved “the most extravagant celebration of ethnic diversity that any state had ever witnessed” (Slezkine 2000: 1).

At the same time, this article aims to address the rather desultory treatment of translation in the now vast literature on Soviet nationalities policy and, more broadly, on Soviet coloniality. As Ivars Šteinbergs (2022: 141) notes: “[R]arely does research on Soviet coloniality encompass an inspection of the processes of translation” — although translation played a central role, both practically and symbolically, in forging and maintaining the multi-lingual, multi-ethnic Soviet state. As Dmitrii Usov noted in the introduction to his 1934 monograph *Basic Principles of Translational Work* (*Osnovnye printsipy perevodcheskoi raboty*): “Translation is a powerful instrument for the brotherhood of the peoples of the USSR. Translational activity, its organization and the oversight of its implementation should attract society’s attention” (Usov 1934b: 3). In fact, Soviet nationalities policy is a major reason that “translation became one of the major Soviet industries as well as the main source of sustenance for hundreds of professional writers” (Slezkine 2000: 336).

To carry out these two aims, this article pays particular attention to how translators in the various non-Russian republics negotiated the state’s shifting nationalities policy, motivated not simply by a desire to survive but also by a desire to project a worthy image of their native literature while staying true to their ethical understanding of the translator’s task. This investigation is informed by Hermine Ohanyan and Artur Ishkhanyan’s (2026) reinterpretation of Soviet internationalism “not as a historical ideal or failed project, but as a *game state* — a dynamic, tension-ridden configuration in which solidarity and coercion, cultural autonomy and ideological control, coexisted without resolution.” In relation to Soviet nationalities policy, the rules of the game were set by the center, creating the conditions in the republics for both compliance and resistance and, in some cases, producing complex entanglements of the two. The nature of the game from the perspective of the republics — and the very high stakes involved — will be illustrated through the life and work of the Armenian writer, editor and translator Karen Mikaelian (1883-1941).

monographs, such as Samantha Sherry’s *Discourses of Regulation and Resistance: Censoring Translation in the Stalin and Khrushchev Era Soviet Union* (2015), Natalia Kamovnikova’s *Made under Pressure: Literary Translation in the Soviet Union, 1960-1991* (2019), Elizaveta Vasserman’s *Andrei Fedorov in the History of Translation Studies* (2026), and Kamovnikova’s *The Fearful Steepen: Russian Translations of “Ulysses,” 1920–1930s* (2026).

2. The Shifting Rules of the Game

Initially, the nationalities policy promoted by Lenin and Stalin was meant to distinguish the new Soviet state from the tsarist empire, famously described by Lenin as a “prisonhouse of nations,” in which non-Russians were labeled as *inorodtsy* (or aliens).² In general, Soviet nationalities policy walked a rather fine line between recognizing the distinct value of the languages and cultures of the various non-Russian peoples of the USSR, while insisting on a common Soviet culture, as captured in the formula “nationalist in form, socialist in content.” As Gorkii put it in his essay “On Language”: “We must not forget that our nation is multilingual to an immeasurably greater extent than any of the countries of Europe, and that, while multilingual, our nation must be ideologically one” (qtd. in Usov 1934b: 3).

The Soviet policy of indigenization (*korenizatsiia*), formally introduced in 1923, initially under the term nationalization (*natsionalizatsiia*) (Martin 2001: 74), celebrated and bolstered the languages and cultures of the various non-Russian peoples of the USSR. The policy aimed to create cadres of local administrators, thus “mak[ing] Soviet power seem indigenous” (ibid.). The policy was institutionalized through the creation of autonomous and constituent republics and administrative regions based on ethnicity as well as through “dual control,” which meant that non-Russian leaders in prominent local roles were typically monitored or paired with Slavic or Russian officials to ensure loyalty to Moscow’s central directives. In the late 1920s, during the first Five-year Plan (1928-1932), a period described by Sheila Fitzpatrick as the Soviet Union’s “cultural revolution,” which coincided with Stalin’s consolidation of power, there were increasing calls to pay less attention to the literatures and cultures of the bourgeois capitalist West and to pay greater attention to the literatures and cultures of the Soviet peoples, both large and small. This focus on intranational, or intraunion literature was heralded by Maksim Gorkii in an article published in *Pravda* on September 19, 1928, titled “The Literary Creation of the Peoples of the USSR.” There, he asserted, “workers and peasants of the Union of Socialist Soviets must know their neighbors of different languages well, as their mutual goal of creating new forms of state life calls for that” (qtd. in Khotimsky 2011: 75).

In some republics, notably Ukraine, the policy of indigenization spurred a broad cultural renaissance. Fearing this would lead to calls for greater autonomy, however, Stalin made it clear in a 1929 speech to Ukrainian writers that the ultimate aim of the indigenization policy was not in fact to consolidate national cultures but rather to hasten their eventual disappearance: “[W]e are conducting a policy of maximum development of national culture so that it can exhaust itself completely and then a base can be created for organizing an international socialist culture not only in content but also in form” (Clark & Dobrenko 2007: 62). The speech foreshadows the “Great

² As Slezkine (2000: 219) notes in regard to the use of *inorodtsy* in tsarist Russia, “Some non-Orthodox were legally designated as ‘aliens’ (*inorodtsy*), a term whose etymology (‘non-kin,’ ‘non-native’) suggested genetic difference but which was usually interpreted to mean ‘non-Christian’ or ‘backward.’”

Retreat” (Timasheff 1948) from indigenization that began in the early 1930s,³ culminating in the Great Purge of the second half of that decade, “which targeted the national elites of the national republics in particular” (Kaplan 2020: 83). The end of indigenization was marked not only by the arrest and/or execution of intellectuals and other cultural figures in the republics charged as “Trotskyite nationalists” or with committing “nationalist aberrations,” but also by mass deportations — between 1935 and 1938 at least ten different nationalities (Poles, Germans, Finns, Estonians, Latvians, Koreans, Italians, Chinese, Kurds, and Iranians) experienced some degree of mass resettlement (Martin 1998: 815).

3. Translation and/in Soviet Nationalities Policy

To understand fully the role of translation in relation to Soviet nationalities policy, one must recognize that it had both a practical and a symbolic dimension. It was not only the means by which internationalism was forged, but it also served as a symbol, a demonstration of the state’s rhetorical and material commitment to internationalism both globally and within the Soviet Union. In its practical role, translation was often covert, a necessary though unremarked *techne* of Soviet internationalism, as, for example, in the series of ten-day celebrations in Moscow, known as *dekady*, dedicated to the cultures of the various republics and meant “to demonstrate the success of Soviet nationalities policy, specifically, the nation-building activities fostered by this policy in the area of culture” (Kaplan 2020: 81).⁴ The first was dedicated to the Ukrainian SSR

³ While the “Great Retreat” usefully describes the overall trajectory, it obscures regional variation, in particular, the fact that the attack on national intelligentsias did not begin simultaneously everywhere. The conventional dating of the “Great Retreat” from *korenizatsiia* (indigenization) to the early 1930s — popularized especially by Terry Martin’s *The Affirmative Action Empire* — needs qualification, particularly in the Ukrainian case. The show trial of the fabricated Union for the Liberation of Ukraine (*Spilka vyzvolennia Ukrainy*, SVU) took place in Kharkiv (then the capital of the Ukrainian SSR) from 9 March to 19 April 1930. Arrests connected with the case began in 1929. Forty-five Ukrainian intellectuals, scholars, writers, and church figures (many linked to the All-Ukrainian Academy of Sciences and the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church) were publicly tried; hundreds more were arrested in connection with it. The charges were entirely invented by the GPU. Historians of Ukraine consistently treat the SVU affair as a deliberate political signal that the case (arrests from early 1930, sentences 1931) were near-simultaneous operations. Both targeted the non-Bolshevik and national-communist intelligentsia that had driven the cultural and linguistic revival of the 1920s. In both republics (and the closely related Ukrainian-speaking areas of the North Caucasus), the 1929–1931 wave marked the practical end of the liberal phase of *korenizatsiia*, even though the full all-Union “Great Retreat” (formal elevation of Russian, further purges, etc.) continued into the mid- and late 1930s (see Mace 1983; Kostyuk 1960; on Belarus, see Plokhyy 2006). All this is to say that, while the various non-Russian peoples of the Soviet Union had to navigate the shifting nationalities policy of the state, those shifts were experienced somewhat differently, requiring that any history of translation done from the periphery of the Soviet empire must take into consideration the individual experiences of those peoples.

⁴ As Kaplan (2010: 84) comments, “Each *dekada* was conceived as a showcase for evidence of mature nationhood and cultural progress,” and, as such, the *dekada* was meant to be “a ritual of integration” (86) into Soviet culture. As Isabelle Kaplan notes (2020: 83), “The Great Terror, which targeted the national elites of the national republics in particular, did not leave *dekada* planning

(March 1936), followed by Kazakh SSR (May 1936), Georgian SSR (January 1937), Uzbek SSR (May 1937), Azerbaidzhan SSR (April 1938), Kyrgyz SSR (May-June 1939), Armenian SSR (October 1939), Belorussian SSR (June 1940), Buryat-Montol ASSR (October 1940), and Tajik SSR (April 1941) (Kaplan 2020: 81).⁵ While “the dekady before World War II emphasized music and dance” (Ibid., 89) over the written word — the culminating event of the dekada celebrations was typically “an original Western-style grand opera in the republican language” (ibid., 84) — translation was nevertheless an essential feature of the those celebrations, although mostly as a practical affordance. At the first dekada celebration in 1936, for example, the Kyiv State Academic Opera and Ballet Theater performed two operas at the Bolshoi Theater; one was by Ukrainian composers while the other was a Russian classic, sung in Ukrainian. Furthermore, as Isabelle Kaplan (2010: 82) notes, “The groups would bring all scenery and costumes from Kiev, as well as a staff of stagehands, along with Ukrainian and Russian booklets with summaries and other information about each opera.” At the same time, there were the obligatory panegyrics to Stalin and the Soviet state that had to be rendered, often very quickly and using interlinear trots, into Russian.

Translation played a more overt role in carrying out the friendship of peoples initiative in the realm of literature. As Natalia Kamovnikova (2019: 151) notes, “The widely propagated friendship of nations [...] was expected to manifest itself in different spheres of social life, including publishing.” One of the most visible manifestations was the publication of translations into Russian in the form of anthologies, beginning in 1924 with the *Anthology of Ukrainian Poetry in Russian Translations* [*Antologiiia ukrainskoi poezii v russkikh perevodakh*] edited by Aleksandr Gatov and Serhiy Pylypenko, with an introduction by Aleksandr Biletskii [Oleksander Biletskyi]. Another highly visible manifestation was the journal *Druzhba Narodov*, founded in 1939, which published translations and critical essays related to the literatures of the republics. Translation played an especially visible role and assumed a distinctly symbolic resonance in connection with the Pushkin Centennial in 1937, “and thereafter by national republics in connection with their national poet jubilees” (Kaplan 2020: 90n51), discussed in greater detail below.

Indigenization had for the most part a very positive effect on translation into the languages of the republics. This was especially true in Soviet Ukraine. As the literary critic and translator Elizaveta Starynkevich [Elyzaveta Starynkevych] noted in a 1930 review essay:

A year ago on the pages of *Krasnoe Slovo*, Professor A.I. Beletskii noted the colossal leap forward in the art of translation that has occurred in Ukraine before our eyes over the first decade of the revolution. The author of the article noted that the view regarding the artistic significance of translations into Ukrainian had fundamentally changed. If not long ago,

unscathed; it is telling that between May 1937 and May 1939, the only dekada held in Moscow was that of the Azerbaijani SSR.”

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another reader was astonished at the “pointless waste of effort and resources” that he saw in the publication in Ukrainian of canonical texts, “which one could read in Russian,” and if the very idea that it was possible to translate the great works of world literature into the “simple” and “impoverished” Ukrainian language seemed ridiculous, then already in 1928-29 the appearance of many undoubtedly valuable literary translations (of prose and poetry) compelled that very same reader to acknowledge that he had been gravely mistaken. The Ukrainian language has proved itself fully equal to the demands placed upon it by the thematics and stylistics of translated texts, and the expenditure of effort and means to publish classic works [in Ukrainian translations] is fully justified. (Starynkevich 1930: 111)

The end of indigenization, however, brought about a shift in translation practice: translations from Russian into Ukrainian would have to remain closer to the original in terms of word choice and syntax and it became difficult to publish a Ukrainian translation of a foreign work if a Russian translation already existed (see Kalnychenko & Kolomiyets 2022: 160–64; Kolomiyets 2023).

The increasing visibility of translation led, perhaps inevitably, to discussions of translation quality. As Gorkii made clear in his closing address at the First All-Union Congress of Soviet Writers: “It is necessary to publish in the Russian language collections of recent prose and poetry of the national republics and oblasts, *in good translations*. (Applause)” (*Pervyi Vsesoiuznyi S’ezd Sovetskikh Pisatelei* [hereinafter PVSSP] 934, 677; emphasis added). Over the course of the 1930s, however, those discussions of translation quality became increasingly entangled with broader debates over the relationship between form and content in the arts, or how to balance the oneness of Soviet culture with the distinct traditions of the various Soviet peoples. As Gorkii noted in his opening remarks at the First Writers Congress: “Our geographic unity and our unity of purpose do not limit the variety of our creative devices and ambitions” (PVSSP 1934: 1). The end of indigenization did not spell the erasure of national form; rather, it altered “the amount of room allowed for ‘national form’” (Slezkine 2000: 330). As this relates to literary translation, the form, while still important, was made secondary to the content, as evident in the repeated interventions of the Soviet state to prevent “excessive” attention to form, which peaked in the 1930s with the campaign against formalism. The hierarchy of content over form was later reflected in Ivan Kashkin’s concept of “realist translation” (1955), according to which the translator’s primary allegiance is to the underlying reality described in a literary text.

As a result, translators and readers of translated literature had to balance their interest in cultural particularities with a commitment to the underlying socialist reality, or the oneness of Soviet culture. Consider the editors’ statement in the inaugural issue of the journal *Inostrannaia Literatura*:

Every people values the particular, unrepeatable features of its national culture.⁶ A love for the particularities of a national culture, however, does not imply a cult of the solitary: all

⁶ Here the editors are parroting a statement made by Stalin on April 7, 1948: “Every nation, whether large or small, has its own specific qualities and its own peculiarities, which are unique to it and

peoples have common aspirations, a common truth. Committed to the lofty principles of internationalism, the Soviet people respect the cultures of all peoples — big and small. They know that all peoples make their contribution to the culture of humankind. (Editorial Board 1955: 3)

The fact that the amount of room allowed for national form was shifting and ultimately determined by the center made certain translators especially vulnerable, namely, those influenced by Russian Formalism who believed in the equal treatment of form and content, and those working in the Soviet periphery. Mikaelian belonged to both groups.

4. Translation and the Inequities of the Friendship of Soviet Peoples

While the state's promotion of translations of the literatures of the fraternal Soviet peoples resulted in some translation scandals — such as translations of folk poetry from Central Asia done from “paraphrases” with no original, an extreme example of the general tendency toward radical domestication when working with low quality interlinear translations (Witt 2013) — the policy was not all window dressing. The Soviet state did indeed make unprecedented material investment in the translation of the literatures of the republics, with many of those involved, in both the center and the periphery, deeply concerned over the quality of the translations. Moreover, not all translation activity was between the center and the periphery. Friendship of Peoples also promoted translation between the non-Russian republics. Already in 1930, Elizaveta Starynkevich (2011: 445) could boast in an essay on the current state of translation in Ukraine: “From Belorussian writers, we now have translations of Charot, Byadulya, Bahdanovich, from Georgian writers, we have a translation of Dibvadze, and from Yiddish, of Abramovich [Mendele Moykher-Sforim], Sholem-Aleichem, Reyzen and others.” Nonetheless, Gorkii's utopian vision of a multi-ethnic socialist state in which “every work of every ethnic group in the Soviet Union [would] be translated into the languages of all the other ethnic groups” (Gorkii, qtd. in Chukovskii 1936: 7) repeatedly ran into significant institutional and attitudinal impediments.

On a very practical level, the problem was not simply that “the translation of literature into Russian, let alone the other languages of the Soviet Union, was time- and resource-consuming” (Kaplan 2020: 90), but that the Soviet state lacked the necessary cadres of trained translators and interpreters in many of the relevant language pairs; this affected the ability to provide translations at all, as well as the quality of the translations that were provided. Needless to say, these problems tended to affect certain languages more than others, namely, the languages of Central Asia and the Caucasus, resulting in inequalities that paradoxically reproduced, rather than eliminated, some of the linguistic and cultural hierarchies inherited from the Russian Empire. As Katerina Clark notes in relation to the 1920 Congress of the Toilers of the East, held in Baku: The organizers “were faced with the impossible situation of making the speeches,

which other nations do not have. These peculiarities form a contribution that each nation makes to the common treasure of world culture, adding to it and enriching it” (qtd. in Slezkine 2000: 337).

delivered in several languages, accessible to all the delegates, who represented a wide range of languages and educational levels.” Their “solution” further exposed the unequal treatment of the delegates representing the peoples of the former Russian Empire, the Caucasus, Central Asia, and the wider East:

Initially, after its delivery, each speech was laboriously translated orally and generally in summary form into some of the major languages of those represented, and into Turkish and Farsi in particular, but also into Chechen, Kalmyk, and other languages of Soviet minority peoples. Nevertheless, angry delegates complained from the floor about not being provided with a translation into their particular language or about translations being too reduced. By September 4, it was clear that at the consequently slow rate of progress in getting the scheduled speeches delivered it would be impossible to finish the congress on schedule, and so Zinoviev declared that from then on they would provide translation in only three languages — Russian, Turkic-Azerbaijani, and Farsi. Those who did not understand them could huddle with a delegate who would translate for them and were often relegated to the corridor for this purpose. Some languages were more equal than others, and most were being marginalized (Clark 2021: 4).

The lack of trained cadres of translators in the languages of the republics led to the dubious practice of using interlinear translations (*podstrochniki*), according to which a literal translation of the source text, typically from a Central Asian or Caucasian language, was then “revised” stylistically by a Russian writer, who typically did not know the source language — or much about the source culture (see Witt 2013). Moreover, the quality of the interlinear translations themselves was often very poor, which gave the end translator further license to take stylistic liberties. As Aleksandr Zhovtis describes the preparations for the Kazakh *dekada* festival in 1936: “Like flies around honey the fellow-travelers were gathering round hastily prepared editions. Hurriedly interlinear trots were produced, hurriedly they were rhymed by people who had never seen a line of Kazakh poetry before, in the pre-holiday turmoil the manuscripts were submitted to type-setting” (qtd. in Witt 2011: 164). While interlinear translations were praised under Stalin as contributing to the “victory of Lenin’s and Stalin’s nationality policy” (Tarlovskii 1940: 266), they were lambasted by members of the Soviet Union’s creative intelligentsia — in private while Stalin was alive and openly after his death. In 1961, the poet and translator Nikolai Chukovskii (son of Kornei Chukovskii) gave a damning assessment of the use of interlinear translations in his essay “The Tenth Muse.” Following a discussion at a recent conference on Central Asian literature, Chukovskii (2013: 117) notes: “Perhaps, the greatest evil which the delegates at the conference unanimously discussed was the established habit of doing interlinear translation.” He goes on to point out that translators of Western literature rarely use them, which explains why there are so many excellent Russian translations of Western literary works, which is not the case with Central Asian literatures. As Chukovskii describes it:

If the translation of an Uzbek novel into Russian is required, the procedure is as follows: Someone called an interlinearist [*podstrochnikist*], a person who knows Uzbek but doesn’t have a good command of literary Russian, hastily translates the novel into very bad Russian. He does it horribly, without even following the rules of Russian grammar. The only reason

for such a translation is to somehow let the reader figure out the general idea on his own. This bad translation is called an interlinear translation. As it is impossible to publish such a work, it is submitted to a person who knows literary Russian but doesn't know Uzbek and who can refine the translation. This person is called the translator of the Uzbek novel, which doesn't make any sense, since refining a low-quality Russian text is what we call editing, not translation. (117)

Chukovskii then calls for an end to the practice, concluding: "the tradition of interlinear translation is a vestige, a holdover from the time when the intelligentsia in our republics was weak and insignificant in number, and there was a dearth of individuals capable of raising translation to an adequate level. This time has passed" (117). This negative view of *podstrochniki* was common among members of the late Soviet intelligentsia as it came to symbolize the top-down cultural production of the Stalinist era.⁷

It is worth noting here that Soviet translations *into Russian* were often praised for being done directly from the original, with indirect or relay translation being cast as unprofessional and outdated. Consider, for example, the blurb for the first Soviet translation of *The Thousand Nights and a Night*:

Unlike the previous Russian editions representing abridged translations from the French or English, *One Hundred and One Nights* in the Academia edition appears for the first time in its entirety, without any abridgements, in a scholarly translation directly from the Arabic original. The translation was done by the Arabist M. Sal'e under the editorship of Academician I. Iu. Krachkovskii. (1929: n.p.)

What was condemned as an inadequate relay practice when the target language was Russian could nevertheless function as an acceptable and even institutionally prescribed method when the target language was not Russian. In fact, for translators in the republics, direct translation could be politically suspect. Consider the case of the Kazakh poet and translator Turmaghanbet Iztileuov (1882-1939) who was arrested in 1937 for, among other things, undertaking a translation of the Persian epic poem *Shahnameh* by Ferdowsi directly from the Persian (Zhangyru 2021: 7). Portions of the translation were published only posthumously, in 1961 (Aiagan 2005: 450).

Notably, Chukovskii blames the problem of indirect translation on the underdeveloped intelligentsia in the republics, not on Great Power chauvinism (*velikoderzhavnyi shovinizm*), which was one of the major attitudinal impediments to the equal treatment of the literatures of the republics. In fact, it was a prominent theme

⁷ An interesting counterexample is that of the translator Semen Lipkin. As a Jew, Lipkin was himself a member of a discriminated minority, and in the preface to his fictional account of a translator of Caucasian literature, titled *Dekada*, he discusses how an assignment to translate a Kalmyk poem inspired him to explore Kalmyk language and culture: "I didn't know the Kalmyk language. I had only a vague idea of Kalmyk history and customs. In the face of such ignorance, it was impossible to limit myself to an interlinear trot. I began to study the work of historians and travelers — Pal'mov, Grumm-Grzhimailo, Iakinf Bichurin, Pallas, and others; I acquainted myself with V. Ia. Vladimirtsov's *Comparative Grammar of the Written Mongol Language*, and so on" (Lipkin 2008: 101). Lipkin also acknowledges in his preface and in the novel that he — and his fictional doppelgänger, Stanislav Bodorskii — were exceptions to the rule (for more on this, see Baer 2023).

at the First All-Union Congress of Soviet Writers in 1934, one raised by Gorkii himself in his opening address:

I feel it necessary to point out that Soviet literature is not only Russian-language literature, but all-Union literature. Since the writers of the fraternal republics, who differ from us only in language, live and work in the light and under the beneficent influence of the idea that unites all working people who have been divided by capitalism, it is clear that we have no right to ignore the literary output of the national minorities simply because ours is greater. The value of art is measured not by quantity but by quality. If we have had the giant Pushkin in our past, this does not mean that Armenians, Georgians, Tatars, Ukrainians and other nationalities are incapable of producing great masters of literature, music, painting and architecture. (PVSSP 1934: 15)

Gorkii then reads a letter from a Tatar writer who, while acknowledging that the work of “writers of previously oppressed and backward peoples” are “far from perfect,” laments that, “the established literary community in the center continues to regard us as ‘ethnographic exhibits’” (ibid.). In his closing address, Gorkii calls upon those assembled to “begin the process of mutual and deep familiarization with the cultures of the fraternal republics” (ibid., 676).

While one perceives a subtle note of paternalism and great power chauvinism in Gorkii’s claim that the literatures of the republics have yet to produce a Pushkin, this attitude is more evident in Gorkii’s refusal to permit an abridged Ukrainian translation of his novel *Mother* (*Mat’*, 1906) for young people — not because the novel would be shortened, but because he considered Ukrainian to be a dialect. As he expressed it in a letter to the editor-in-chief of the publishing house, the writer Oleksa Slisarenko:

Dear Aleksei Andreevich, I am categorically against the shortening of the novel *Mother*. It seems to me that the translation of this novel into the Ukrainian dialect [*narechie*] is not needed. I am surprised by the fact that people who posit the same goal do not only maintain the difference of dialects by striving to make a dialect a “language,” but also oppress those Great Russians who find themselves in the minority in the region where this dialect is spoken. Under the old regime I vigorously protested against such phenomena. It seems to me that under the new regime we should strive to eliminate everything that prevents people from helping one another. And so, it turns out looking rather odd: some strive to create an “international language,” while others do the exact opposite. (Gor’kii 2013: 63)⁸

⁸ This short, one-paragraph-long letter from Gorkii is heavily annotated in the complete collection of Gorkii’s letters published by Nauka. One footnote indicates that another Ukrainian publisher approached Gorkii a year later with a request to translate the same novel, *Mat’*, into Ukrainian, and Gorkii agreed, later praising the translation (Gor’kii 2013: 471). And when traveling across the Soviet Union in 1928, Gorkii met with Ukrainian writers at the Kharkiv House of Literature, where he addressed his earlier reference to Ukrainian as a dialect: “I’m not a philologist and I didn’t mean to insult the Ukrainian language as I didn’t understand the nuances. In general, I consider the entire incident a result of an argument between Slisarenko and me, and in the heat of the polemic, a lot of extraneous things are said” (471n2). While the second part of his excuse is very plausible, the first part of his excuse sounds disingenuous as in the letter Gorkii makes a clear distinction between a dialect (*narechie*) and a language (*iazik*) and then criticizes the attempt to turn a dialect into a language. He does on several occasions declare that he is not a nationalist and believes in a single

Such chauvinism is less extreme though still evident in Usov's *Basic Principles*, which was dedicated to the translation of textbooks from Russian into the languages of the various republics, underscoring translation's role in the Soviet state's "civilizing mission" in regard to its minority peoples. As Usov writes in the introduction:

The growth of the cultures of the peoples of the USSR, proletarian in content and national in form, the polytechnicization of our schools, the introduction of the most backward segments of our society to various branches of science and technology, and active participation in the political life of the country — all this is closely connected to the development and consolidation of the national languages and to the enrichment of the literature in these languages. Such enrichment facilitates the work of translation. (Usov 1934b: 3)⁹

Central to the civilizing mission built into the Soviet promotion of the friendship of peoples was that more "advanced" cultures should support the development of those cultures considered "backward." In relation to the theater, for example, "if a national repertoire was still incomplete, translations from most nineteenth-century Russian and west European literatures were actively encouraged or provided" (Slezkine 2000: 335-336). While Soviet nationalities policy supported translation in both directions — i.e., from the languages of the republics and regions into Russian and from Russian into the languages of the republics and regions — it was through translation into Russian that the literature of the republics and regions could be consecrated, to use Pascale Casanova's term, or as Alexander Fadeev (1960: 447) put it, "enter the cultural fund of the entire Soviet people," reflecting the growing linguistic and cultural chauvinism of the Soviet Union under Stalin.¹⁰

common language, whatever it may be, as "multilingualism complicates communication between people" (471n3).

⁹ That being said, the urgent need to translate textbooks, as well as the works of Marx and Engels, Lenin, and subsequently Stalin, into the languages of the republics led to an expansion of translation theory beyond belles-lettres to consider a type of text that combined elements of scientific and technical writing with elements of belles lettres but having a strong polemical bent. It was alternately labeled *obshchestvenno-politicheskaia literatura* [socio-political], *sotsial'no-ekonomicheskaiia* [socio-economic] (Usov 1934a: 5; Usov 1934b: 3), which was distinguished from *politicheskaiia literatura* [political writing], *obshchestvovedchestkaia* [social-science literature] (Fedorov 1936: 1), and *sotsio-politicheskaia* [socio-political] (Fedorov 1953). This was a crucial stage in the development of text typologies for translators that sought to cover every possible text type (Baer & Hofeneder 2025).

¹⁰ While "the dekady before World War II emphasized music and dance" (Kaplan 2020: 89), over the written word, translation was nevertheless a necessary feature of the dekada celebrations, mostly as a practical affordance rather than a symbol. At the first dekada celebration in 1936, for example, the Kyiv State Academic Opera and Ballet Theater performed at the Bolshoi Theater two operas by Ukrainian composers as well as a Russian classic, sung in Ukrainian. And, as Isabelle Kaplan (2010: 82) notes, "The groups would bring all scenery and costumes from Kiev, as well as a staff of stagehands, along with Ukrainian and Russian booklets with summaries and other information about each opera." The culminating event of the dekada celebrations was typically "an original Western-style grand opera in the republican language" (Kaplan 2020: 84). That being said, translation was far more visible and assumed a symbolic resonance in connection with the Pushkin Centennial in 1937 "and thereafter by national republics in connection with their national poet jubilees" (Kaplan 2020: 90n51).

5. Modes of Compliance

Years before the First All-Union Congress of Soviet Writers, calls to pay greater attention to the literatures of the fraternal peoples of the Soviet Union — instead of kowtowing to the West — increased following the adoption the First Five Year Plan (1928-1932). In the center, compliance was reflected most visibly in works of translation theory. In some cases, the compliance was rather superficial, a strategic nod to the state-sponsored initiative. For example, Dmitrii Usov, a translator who worked primarily from French, offered as the rationale for his 1934 *Basic Principles of Translational Work* the promotion of closer union among the Soviet peoples. The theoretical positions outlined in the book, however, reflected Usov's views on translation developed out of his practice with Western European languages. Similarly, though somewhat less superficially, Kornei Chukovskii increasingly incorporated the literatures of the Soviet peoples into his discussions of translation. In the 1936 edition of *Iskusstvo perevoda* [The Art of Translation], he includes a discussion of Russian translations of the Georgian poet Georgii Leonidze. His attention to the literatures of the republics became considerably more pronounced in the 1941 edition, retitled *Vysokoe iskusstvo* [A High Art], which contained an entire tenth chapter, "Russkie 'Kobzari' (Na putyakh k sovremennomu stilyu)" [Russian "Kobzars": On the Way to a Modern Style], devoted to Russian translations of Taras Shevchenko. This 1941 Shevchenko chapter is not merely a token reference to a Soviet "fraternal" literature. Its final sections explicitly discuss "Soviet Style of Translations of Shevchenko" and "Shevchenko in the Great Family." Previous editions of Chukovskii's writings on translation — the 1919 and 1920 editions of *Principles of Literary Translation* (*Printsipy literaturnogo perevoda*) and the 1930 *Art of Translation* (*Iskusstvo perevoda*), co-authored with Andrei Fedorov — discussed only Western authors (see Baer 2022).

One of the major and most performative modes of compliance with Soviet nationalities policy from the periphery as it evolved over the course of the late 1920s and 30s involved expressions of gratitude toward the Soviet state, in general, and to Gorkii, in particular. In an essay titled "A Fighter for the Literature of the Fraternal Peoples" ("Borets za literaturny bratskikh narodov") dedicated to Gorkii following his death in 1936, Mikaelian favorably contrasted Soviet support for the literatures of the various peoples of the USSR to the situation in tsarist Russia. As Mikaelian writes:

At that time the publication of any "inorodcheskoi" [non-Russian] book in Russian translation was a tortuous enterprise. If some "fanatic" got the idea to step across the border of national insularity to acquaint Russian readers with his literature, he would have to find a rich countryman with political connections, a Maecenas, or appeal to some "charitable" organization. And if Armenian literature has turned out to be the exception to these sad "rules," then this occurred entirely thanks to the initiative and support of Aleksei Maksimovich Gorkii. (Bagdasarian 2010: 90-91; quotation marks in the original)

While the Soviet state did indeed support such translation projects, one could also say that the Armenians found in Gorkii a powerful Maecenas.

Another very visible form of compliance from the periphery involved the offering of translations as tribute. This was most obvious in relation to Pushkin centennial celebrations of 1937. Those celebrations also marked a distinct moment in the institutionalization of Russian chauvinism, serving to cement Russian as the primary language of Soviet culture. As Slezkine (2000: 331) notes: “As the [1930s] progressed, the Party began to endow Russians with a national past, national language and an increasingly familiar national iconography, headed principally by Alexander Pushkin — progressive and ‘freedom-loving’ to be sure, but clearly celebrated as a great Russian, not a great revolutionary.” Representatives of the various non-Russian republics followed the rules of the game by boasting of their translations of the Russian poet, vying with one another to show their loyalty to and affection for Russophone culture. As Mikaelian wrote in an article dedicated to the poet’s centennial, titled “Pushkin in Armenian Literature”:

Among the countries that began to translate the works of Pushkin into their language, Armenia occupies one of the first positions. It is also in the lead regarding the number of translations of individual works published before the October Revolution into the languages of the peoples occupying the former Russian empire. Attraction to the artistic genius of the poet began among the [Armenian] intelligentsia already during the lifetime of the poet. (MLA, Karen Mikaelian, N12)

Mikaelian concludes another article on the same theme with praise for the Soviet state, while aligning Pushkin with the basic precepts of Socialist Realism:

Only with Soviet rule has Armenia taken serious steps in understanding the entire depth of Pushkin’s oeuvre, unlocking the “secret” of his simplicity of lexis and form, of his authentic realism. Only with Soviet rule have the greatest works of the poet been translated, some of which have already been published. Never before has Pushkin occupied such a firm place in Armenian literature as he does today, never has he been so near and dear to the Armenian people as in our age of the great friendship of the peoples of the country of socialism. (MLA, Karen Mikaelian, N124)

Soviet nationalities policy, Mikaelian asserts, enhanced the Armenian people’s love for the Russian poet.

6. Modes of Resistance

Resistance to Soviet nationalities policy in the republics took a wider variety of forms, one of the earliest of which was translation criticism. In fact, Gorkii’s mention of the need for “good translations” at the First All-Union Congress of Soviet Writers may have been a reaction to criticism from the republics. Already in 1927 the Ukrainian writer and critic Yurii Savchenko published an article titled “An Initiative” (“Pochin”) in Ukrainian, criticizing the Russian translations of Ukrainian poet Pavlo Tychyny — although not before acknowledging the cultural and political significance of those translations:

The plan to provide the Russian reader with translations of Ukrainian literary works is beginning to become a reality. There is no need to dwell on the immense historical significance of this undertaking in general, and specifically when it is realized through the publication of Tychyna's poetry in Russian. Setting aside the well-known *Anthology of Ukrainian Poetry in Russian Translation*, the not entirely successful translation of Khvylovy's *Blue Etudes*, and a number of other minor attempts to introduce the Russian reader to Ukrainian literature, one must acknowledge that the published volume of Tychyna's poetry in Russian is, in fact, the first serious attempt to give that Russian reader a true impression of modern Ukrainian literature in general, and of Pavlo Tychyna's work in particular. (Savchenko 1927: 63)

Savchenko concludes the essay on a positive note: "An initiative, albeit not entirely successful, yet of great significance" (71).

A year later, Oleksandr Finkel' [Aleksandr Finkel'] published an essay in the journal *Krasnoe Slovo* titled "Ukrainian Writers in Russian Translations" ("Ukrainskie pisateli v russkikh perevodakh," 1928), in which he assesses the state of Russian translations of modern Ukrainian literature during the early Soviet period.¹¹ Written in the context of intensifying Ukrainian-Russian literary relations, the article offers a sharp, principled critique of how Ukrainian writers are represented in Russian. Finkel argues that translation is not merely a technical or artistic task but a socio-literary act that shapes one literature's image in another. Poor selection and low-quality translations can distort cultural understanding and reinforce harmful "great power" attitudes. Finkel's piece is a pioneering example of translation criticism in the Ukrainian-Soviet context, combining detailed textual analysis with broader cultural and ideological reflection. By demanding respect for the artistic integrity and national specificity of Ukrainian literature, the author resists both Russocentric condescension and uncritical "internationalist" simplification.

Two years later, Volodymyr Derzhavyn [Vladimir Derzhavin] published a critical overview of four recently published Russian anthologies of contemporary Ukrainian literature under the title "Russian Translated Anthologies of Ukrainian Literature" ("Russkie perevodnye antologii ukrainskoi literatury," 1930). While noting that their appearance modestly improves a previously catastrophic situation, Derzhavyn argues that the collections nonetheless fall far short in filling the gap in intra-union literary exchange. He systematically evaluates each of the Soviet collections — *The Contemporary Literature of Ukraine* (*Sovremennaia literaturnaia Ukraina*, 1930), *Almanac of Contemporary Ukrainian Literature* (*Al'manakh sovremennoi ukrainskoi literatury*, 1930), *The Revolutionary Poetry of Western Ukraine* (*Revoliutsionnaia poeziia Zapadnoi Ukrainy*, 1929), and *From Ukrainian Poets* (*Iz ukrainskikh poetov*, 1929) — according to the selection of authors and works, the quality of the translations, and the explanatory apparatus. Derzhavyn finds that most of the poetry selections are uneven or unrepresentative (especially of the newest proletarian and Komsomol voices), the translations are often free, inaccurate, or stylistically weak (with rare exceptions, such as Ushakov's work), and the prose sections are outdated or poorly chosen. He is particularly harsh in regard to what he considers arbitrary

¹¹ Many thanks to Oleksandr Kalnychenko for bringing these texts to my attention.

alterations of meaning, inadequate representation of key figures and trends (neo-classicists, certain modernists, Western Ukrainian writers), and the almost uniformly unsatisfactory quality of the paratextual material, such as prefaces, notes, and bibliographical descriptions. The article concludes that such general mixed anthologies have largely outlived their usefulness and should give way to more carefully curated, stylistically adequate, and socially purposeful collections that truly convey the current state of Ukrainian Soviet literature to the Russian reader. Notably, both Finkel's and Derzhavyn's articles were written in Russian, addressing the powers-that-be, demanding from the Soviet center a greater concern over translation quality.

The struggle for better quality translations both into Russian and into the languages of the republics was a central concern of the Armenian writer, editor and translator Karen Mikaelian. While Mikaelian launched his career as an author of short stories and essays, he turned quite early to translation through his involvement with the pre-revolutionary anthology of Armenian literature in Russian translation, *Poeziia Armenii s drevneishikh vremen do nashikh dnei* (*Poetry of Armenia from Ancient Times to Our Days*), under the editorship of Valerii Briusov. Mikaelian would also play a major role in the Soviet collection, *Anthology of Armenian Poetry* (*Antologiiia armianskoi poezii* 1940), under the editorship of Maksim Gorkii (for more on these anthologies, see Frank 2023). Mikaelian's role in both anthologies involved preparing and correcting the interlinear translations that would be used by the Russian end "translators." He also made himself available to explain some of the finer points of those interlinear translations, as evident in his correspondence with the Russian translators (see Bagdasarian 1984). Against the poor-quality interlinear translations that were more or less the norm, Mikaelian's stand out as of another order altogether. As his biographer Robert Bagdasarian (2010: 101) comments, "The high literary quality" of Mikaelian's interlinear translations "did much to ensure that the Russian translations came out accurate and vital (*polnokrovno*)." As Nikolai Tikhonov, one of the editors of the Soviet volume, pointed out, "the contribution of Mikaelian [is] obvious and deserves every kind of gratitude for it is thanks to his tireless oversight that the slightest inaccuracy was removed, that images were not replaced by approximate ones, that precise expressions were not rendered by random lines of verse" (qtd. in Bagdasarian 2010: 101).

Mikaelian's commitment to providing high-quality interlinear translations with commentary was grounded in the notion of "adequate" translation, first formulated by Fedor Batiushkov in his introduction to the 1920 revised edition of *Principles of Literary Translation* (*Printsipy khudozhestvennogo perevoda*). For Batiushkov, an "adequate" translation is one that pays equal attention to the form and the content of the original. In fact, Mikaelian makes frequent reference to Batiushkov's term, using it precisely as Batiushkov formulated it. For example, in an unpublished essay titled "On Translations from Armenian" ("O perevodakh s armianskogo"), Mikaelian writes:

Providing a translation of the ideational content of a work in a form arbitrarily selected by the translator, without observing the distinguishing characteristics of the original employed by the author, can, under our conditions of poetic mastery, be done by anyone endowed with poetic talent. Such a translation can be very beautiful, but it cannot be true, or as we say, *adequate*" (MLA, Karen Mikaelian, N133; emphasis added).

While making use of Batiushkov's term, Mikaelian traces the approach back to Briusov, citing his foreword to the 1916 anthology of Armenian poetry, for which Mikaelian contributed the interlinear translations:

Already Briusov in his foreword to the collection *Poetry of Armenia* [Poeziia Armenii] posited the foundation of translation to be the artistic recreation of the original, while nonetheless considering the preservation of its formal characteristics to be necessary for any cultured translation. (ibid.)

By opening the sentence with “already” (*eshche*), Mikaelian suggests that Briusov was promoting *adequate* translation *avant la lettre*, as the term was only introduced by Batiushkov four years later.

It should be noted that Batiushkov's concept of *adekvatnost'* had particular implications for translators working in the non-Russian republics insofar as Batiushkov asserts that adequate translation is only possible or will only occur when the source and target cultures are at an equal level of “spiritual development” (*dukhovnoe razvitie*). It is likely that Batiushkov had in mind that Russian literature and culture had by the early twentieth century reached a level of parity with the great literatures of Western Europe — Batiushkov was a specialist in Western European literatures and his examples of non-adequate translation involve eighteenth-century Russia and eighteenth-century France. In the republics, however, advocating for “adequate” translation was an assertion that the literatures of the non-Russian republics, in this case, Armenia, were no less developed than Russian. Mikaelian makes this point rather directly in the paragraph of his essay on translations from Armenian immediately following his mention of adequacy. Here he condemns an approach to translation that, according to Batiushkov, stems from the target culture's sense of superiority:

To adopt this principle of translation [i.e., rendering the content at the expense of the form] in relation to Armenian poetry, distinguished over the course of its thousand-year history by an incredible variety and lavish opulence of forms — would mean failing to provide a true representation of it. (ibid.)

As Mikaelian argues, Armenian literature is fully deserving of adequate translation.

Mikaelian invokes adequacy once again in another unpublished essay, “On Armenian Versification” (“Ob armianskom stikhoslozhenii”), which was written to provide greater insight into the formal properties of Armenian poetry for Russian poet-translators working with interlinear trots. As Mikaelian explains:

In compiling the present anthology, the editors set themselves the task not only of providing the precise content of the works, [as well as] the phonic and verbal characteristics of the language, but also, to the extent possible, of recreating the metrical structure of the originals. [...] The desire to provide translations that are *adequate* to the original, in terms of both content and form, inspired the poet-translators contributing to the present anthology who, despite their ignorance of the Armenian language, were able to make skillful use of the interlinear trots and transcriptions with rhythmical-metrical designation provided to them to find a Russian tonic meter corresponding to the original. (MLA, Karen Mikaelian, N131; emphasis added).

The anti-colonialist implications of Mikaelian's use of adequacy are more openly expressed — although safely directed as pre-revolutionary Russian translators — in an article published in *Literaturnaia Gazeta* to advertise the forthcoming *Anthology of Armenian Literature*. In referencing Briusov's 1916 anthology, Mikaelian writes:

It is this anthology that seemed to break the impenetrable ice of indifference toward the literary riches of those peoples inhabiting the periphery of the immense Russia of small nations. For the first time Russian poets, having cast off their semi-disdainful attitude, descended from their poetic tower to cast an eye on the literature of one of these small peoples, revealing literary riches previously unknown to them and presenting them to the Russian public not with the carelessness of a dilettante but by applying the requisite methods of the art of translation. (qtd. in Frank 2023: 57)¹²

Mikaelian's essay on Armenian versification was originally intended for inclusion in the collection *Anthology of Armenian Poetry*, which was released belatedly in 1940, after undergoing another round of censorship. By that time, Mikaelian was in prison, making the publication of the essay impossible. It may be that Mikaelian's scrupulous attention to form was judged to be excessive by the Soviet censor, for while a source-oriented approach — described in Soviet translation discourse as *chuzheiazchnost'* (foreign languageness) (Fedorov 1930: 118-125; Usov 1934b: 4; Saianov 1934/1937: 8-9) — was an acknowledged and, in some contexts, a defensible option through the mid-1930s, it became increasingly suspect. After World War II, the official position was that translations should not violate the norms of the target language (Fedorov 1953).

In any case, Mikaelian's translation activities were not restricted to producing detailed interlinear versions intended to enable Russian translators to render Armenian poetry more adequately. Mikaelian was himself a translator, and in the 1920s he translated into Armenian a collection of stories by Oscar Wilde. The positive reception of the collection led the Armenian poet Yeghishe Charents, who was then working at the Soviet State Publishing House in Armenia, to commission an Armenian translation of Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*. A respected poet, Charents was an early proponent of communism and a member of the Bolshevik Party. In fact, his translation into Armenian of "The Internationale," with a musical arrangement by Romanos Melikian, was published in Moscow in 1928. However, his increasing disenchantment with Stalinism and, as a result, his increasingly erratic behavior led to greater oversight by the Soviet authorities; as a result, the distribution of his final collection of poetry, *The Book of the Road* (*Girk' Chanaparhi*), was delayed so as to undergo another round of ideological revision before its eventual release. Charents was arrested in 1937 as a "Trotskyite-nationalist" and died shortly thereafter. And so, when Charents commissioned the translation of *Gulliver's Travels* into Armenian, he was already in the crosshairs of the state, which may explain his instructions to Mikaelian.

Charents made it clear to Mikaelian that he was to translate Swift's novel "from the academic Russian edition, while also taking the English original into account" — and to submit the translation in four months' time (Bagdasarian 2010: 106). He was also

¹² This is my translation of the Russian passage quoted by Frank.

told to translate the Russian foreword as well as all the paratextual material from the Russian edition. Mikaelian could add notes to elucidate obscure passages for the Armenian reader, but those should be clearly distinguished from the Russian annotations. For Mikaelian, whose high standards of translation were grounded in Batiushkov's concept of *adekvatnost'*, Charents' instructions were difficult to follow, especially as he began to discover a great number of divergences between the academic Russian translation and Swift's original. Writing to Charents on 7 October 1931, Mikaelian expresses his increasing exasperation:

The English and the Russian are so different that when I follow the Russian, the translation moves further from the original, but when I follow the original, then the translation comes from the original and not from the Russian, comparing it with the original, as you demanded. And ultimately, that comparative translation has produced a total mess, neither this nor that, so that the reader, if he should compare them, would find a work that is neither the one nor the other. After lengthy deliberation, I stopped translating, although I had already finished one hundred pages. (qtd. in Bagdasarian 2010: 107)

When Mikaelian returns to the translation, he commits himself to following the English original. As he informs Charents: "I will translate the entire work from the original, while keeping the Russian translation close at hand. There are, of course, many divergences, however, my translation is closer to the original. In my translation I attempted to preserve the style, turns of phrase, long paragraphs, and color so characteristic of Swift" (ibid., 107). Mikaelian's commitment to *adekvatnost'* led him to resist — indeed, reverse — Charents's original instruction to translate from the Russian, while keeping the English original at hand. He would translate from the English original, while keeping the Russian translation at hand.

7. Conclusion

Mikaelian is an inspiring though ultimately tragic example of a translator attempting to navigate the shifting and increasingly dangerous terrain of Soviet nationalities policy while retaining his integrity as a translator and an editor of translations. Although he tried to follow the rules of the game through a combination of rhetorical compliance and genuine passion for promoting the literature of Armenia, that very passion, which led him to insist on the right of Armenian authors to high quality, *adequate* translations, might have spelled his doom. He died in a Soviet prison in 1941, supposedly of "heart failure," but his body was discovered only recently in a mass grave of political prisoners (Bagdasarian 2010: 208).

His example, among others, contributes to our understanding of the workings of Soviet culture, underscoring the need to abandon reductive binaries such as loyalist and dissident. Most translators in the Soviet periphery followed a path shaped by some complex combination of compliance and resistance as they negotiated ideological commitment to Soviet internationalism (whether strategic or sincere), national pride, and professional ethics.

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Conflict of Interests

The author(s) declare no ethical issues or conflicts of interest in relation to this research.

Ethics Statement

The author(s) confirm that this study was conducted in accordance with the Journal's Research Ethics and Integrity Statement and that all ethical requirements applicable to the study have been fulfilled.