

GEORGIAN NATIONALISM AND THE IDEA OF GEORGIAN NATION

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Rezumat: Naționalismul georgian și ideea de națiune georgiană

Scopul articolului este de a furniza un discurs actual asupra istoriei naționalismului georgian și a ideii de națiune georgiană. Autorul propune o viziune alternativă a nașterii și emergenței naționalismului georgian și identifică principalele surse și subiecte ale discursului narativ național. Este sugerat faptul că originile naționalismului georgian trebuie date la începutul secolului al XIX-lea și nu spre finalului aceluși secol, cum a fost general acceptat până acum. Rezultatul acestei cercetări dovedește că conceptul de națiune georgiană, în ciuda modelului său vest european, nu este identic cu acesta. Moștenirea etnică a „naționalizării” comunității georgiene și impactul acestui fapt provin de la Imperiul Rus (din care a făcut Georgia parte în secolul XIX), dând cazului georgian o coloratură aparte.

Résumé: Le nationalisme géorgien et l'idée de nation géorgienne

Le but de l'article ci-joint est celui de fournir un discours actuel sur l'histoire du nationalisme géorgien et sur l'idée de nation géorgienne. L'auteur y propose une vision alternative de la naissance et de l'émergence du nationalisme géorgien et identifie les principaux sources et sujets du discours naratif national. On y suggère qu'on doit dater les origines du nationalisme géorgien au début du XIX-ème siècle et pas vers sa fin, comme on accepta de manière générale jusqu'à nos jours. Le résultat de cette démarche scientifique prouve que le concept de nation géorgienne, malgré son modèle ouest européen, n'est pas identique avec celui-ci. L'héritage ethnique de la "nationalisation" de la communauté géorgienne et l'impacte que celui-ci eut proviennent de l'Empire russe (dont la Géorgie fit partie le XIX-ème siècle) et donnèrent au cas géorgien un caractère et une colorature tout à fait spéciale.

Abstract: *The goal of the article is to provide up-to-date discourse on the history of Georgian nationalism and the idea of Georgian nation. The author discuss an alternative view on the time of Georgian nationalism's emergence and identifies the main sources and topics of Georgian national narrative. The early nineteenth century is suggested to be the date of Georgian nationalism origin, instead of the generally accepted late nineteenth century. The*

results of the present investigation also reveal that the concept of Georgian nation, despite its west-European model, did not completely match the original sample. The ethnic legacy of nationalizing the Georgian community and the impacts come from the Russian empire (part of which Georgia was in the nineteenth century) gave the Georgian case the special colours.

Keywords: *Georgia, Nation-Formation, Nationalism*

Introduction

The specialized literature on nations distinguishes between two main types of this phenomenon: nations as direct products of modernization and nations emerged as a result of nationalism. The most of the modern nations are products of nationalisms¹ and only few (according to L. Greenfeld, solely one – England²) have emerged as direct products of modernization. Certainly, the process of nation-building was not identical in different environments. If in the first case objective factors (like economic developments) were crucial, in the second one, the subjective factors (like shared memories, values, and symbols) were central.

The role of intellectuals was decisive in making nations of the second type. However, I do not understand this role as the elite's voluntarist social engineering, but rather see it through the eye of ethno-symbolism and, therefore, regard it as an activity within the culture of a potential nation. Here again, I agree with A. D. Smith (and also with many others) who considers the transition from the ethnic community to the national one as a conscious process led by intellectuals. Just intellectuals of nationalizing communities reinterpret ethnic heritage in terms of available cultural assets: *“In contrast to modern, perennial and primordial paradigms of ethnicity and nationalism, historical ethno-symbolism focuses particularly on the subjective elements in the persistence of ethnoeses, the formation of nations and the impact of nationalism. This does not mean that it takes “objective” factors for granted or excludes them from the purview of its analysis; but only that it gives more weight to the subjective elements of memory, value, sentiment, myth and symbol, and that it thereby seeks to enter and understand the “inner worlds” of ethnicity and nationalism...ethno-symbolists stress the relationship between various elites and*

¹ Anthony D. Smith, *The origins of nation. Becoming national. A reader*. Edited by Geof Eley and Ronald Gregor Suny, New York, Oxford. Oxford University Press, 1996 (first published in *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 12, 3, July, 1989, pp. 340-367), p. 122.

² Liah Greenfeld, *Nationalism. Five Roads to Modernity*. Harvard University Press. Cambridge, Massachusetts, London England, 1992. I use the paperback edition 1993, p. 23.

*lower strata (“the people”) they aim to represent. But this is not a one-way relationship. The non-elites, partly through the cultural traditions and partly as a consequence of their vernacular mobilization, influence the intelligentsia, the political leaders and the bourgeoisie, by constraining their innovations within certain cultural parameters and by providing motifs for their cultural projects and political goals”.*³

One can trace the process of shaping of Georgian ethnic identity⁴ back to the 15th century BC. We may argue on the existence of the pre-modern Georgian nation⁵ in the 11th-12th centuries. As for the modern Georgian nation, it emerged on a ground of a pre-existing ethnic community in the second half of the 19th century.⁶ It belonged to

³ Anthony D. Smith, *Nationalism. Theory, ideology, history*. First was published by polity press in 2001. I use the reprint of 2003, p. 57.

⁴ Colchi// *Kolkhi, Karti* were designations of ancient Georgian ethnic community. For more details see მარიამ ჩხარტიშვილი, *ქართული ეთნიკური რელიგიური მოქცევის ეპოქები*, თბილისი, კავკასიური სახლი, 2009. [Mariam Chkhartishvili, *Georgian ethnics in the epoch of religious conversion*, Tbilisi, Caucasian House, 2009]; Idem. Forging Georgian identity. Ideology of ethnic election. *Caucasiologic Papers* I. Tbilisi: Tbilisi University Press, 2009, p. 386-391; Idem, ქართლის მოქცევის ისტორია ეთნიკურობის კვლევის პრობლემატიკის თვალთახედვით. *ეთნიკურობა და ნაციონალიზმი I* (საქართველოს მეცნიერებათა აკადემიასთან არსებული ინსტიტუტთა შორის სემინარის მასალები). თბილისი: ინტელექტი, 2002, 32-47 [The History of Conversion of Georgia in Light of Ethnic Studies. *Proceeding of Inter-Institute Seminar at the Georgian Academy of Sciences*, Publishing House Intelecti, 2002], pp. 32-47.

⁵ According to ethno-symbolism some of the pre-modern communities might be considered as nations. For example, A.D. Smith thinks that many organizing principles of these communities might be interpreted as counterparts of recent national institutions: “...horizontal fraternity of citizenship would find its counterparts in popular participation in large-scale cults and rituals, in the performance of ethical and religious obligations which bind the community of presumed ancestry in into a community of faith and worship, in the sense of community evoked by symbols and myths of ethnic origins and elections, and shared memory of ancestors and heroic deeds. When such a fusion has occurred we may begin to speak on nationhood... In this way we can speak on distinct way of ancient nations”. See Anthony D. Smith, *Nationalism. Theory, ideology, history*, p. 111. As a historian with experience in studying of pre-modern period, I think that concept of pre-modern nation is very useful for adequate representation of nation-formation processes. For example, I have argued that Georgian pre-modern nation existed.

⁶ There is no consensus among Georgian historians concerning the date of emergence of the Georgian nation. Part of the scholars find it possible to speak about it even in 4th century BC, entirely ignoring essential unlikelyness between ancient and modern Georgian communities and also modern theories of nation. Others, who see the historical processes through the eye of modern understandings, think that the Georgian nation has emerged in 19th century. On some aspects of Georgian historiography concerning Georgian nation-

the second type of nations, i.e. it was a “nation of design”. This means that the decisive role in the making of the Georgian nation had been played by nationalism (an ideology and a political movement “*for attaining and maintaining autonomy, unity and identity of a population of whose members deem to constitute an actual or potential nation*”⁷), namely, an idea of a Georgian nation which was nothing more than a comprehensive nationalist story on the essence and perspectives of the would-be Georgian nation.

We must say a few words on the nature of the *idea of the nation*: it is a narrative of a specific kind. As any nationalist discourse, it may lack inner coherence. Sometimes it may accommodate diametrically opposite assertions; however, this fact does not create any problem for the whole story. Actualization of separate themes has a situational character. Some of the nationalist appeals are topical in one time, some others – at another time. The targets of national narratives are the heart of humans and not the minds. Because of this fact these narratives reveal great social power when they penetrate masses. They are able to support large-scale social solidarities like national identities.

Many Georgian intellectuals took part in the making of the Georgian nationalist narrative and tried to clarify the essence of *Georgianness*. The main designer and contributor to the Georgian nationalist project was the eminent Georgian writer and public worker Ilia Chachavadze (1837-1907). He outlined the idea of Georgian nation and gave the answer on the question: “Who are We”?

The Georgian historiography of the Soviet period labelled nationalism as the “false bourgeois ideology”. As subject of academic inquiries it was ignored. In result of this practice there had emerged a palpable gap in the study of Georgian nationalism. That is why the nationalist narrative proposed by Chavchavadze was not a topical problem of the Georgian studies.

After the break-up of the Soviet Union, some of the Georgian scholars (including me) devoted their scientific works to this problem; however, the gap still exists and in the representation of the history of the Georgian nation many crucial events and details are missing. This article attempts to fill this gap.⁸

formation see: Mariam Chkhartishvili, *The shaping of Georgian national identity: Iveria and its Readers. The Balkans and Caucasus: Parallel Processes on the Opposite Sides of the Black Sea*. Edited by Ivan Biliarsky, Ovidiu Kristea, Anca Oroveanu, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2012, p. 192-199.

⁷ Anthony D. Smith. *Nationalism. Theory, ideology, history*, p. 9.

⁸ Some of my views concerning this topic were already published elsewhere. See Mariam Chkhartishvili, Sophio Kadagishvili, *Georgian nationalism in the nineteenth century: values, ideals symbols. Proceedings*, vol. IV, Ivane Javackishvili Tbilisi State University,

The articles and literary fictions (poems, novels) by Chavchavadze serve as sources to this investigation. Many of these works were published in the *Iveria* periodical. *Iveria* was issued between 1877 and 1906. Chavchavadze was *Iveria*'s founder and editor. During three decades, *Iveria* cultivated the nationalist ideals in the Georgian community. As a result, the readers of *Iveria* were transformed into the members of the Georgian nation.⁹ Chavchavadze elaborated almost all the necessary topics to construct the “building blocks”¹⁰ of a Georgian national identity: the Georgian community's attitude towards its ethnic past, its social composition, the interrelations with *significant others*, the cultural uniqueness, the national character, common destiny and so on.¹¹

Historical Preconditions

Before discussing on the national narrative of Chavchavadze, I would like to highlight its preconditions. In the nineteenth century the Georgian national idea represented a combination of political and cultural forms of nationalism. It had arisen as a part of a political movement, as a response to the Russian oppression. The abolishment of the Georgian royal dynasty of the Bagratians by the Russian emperor's decree of 1801 represented the causing factors. This was an extraordinary event for the Georgians. The Bagratians were in power for at least ten centuries. In

Faculty of Humanities. The Institute of Georgian History, 2011, pp.426-435; მარიამ ჩხარტიშვილი, ქეთევან მანია, სოფიო კადაგიშვილი, ქართული ნაციონალიზმის წარმოშობა, *შრომები*. ივანე ჯავახიშვილის სახელობის თბილისის სახელმწიფო უნივერსიტეტის ჰუმანიტარულ მეცნიერებათა ფაკულტეტი, საქართველოს ისტორიის ინსტიტუტი, 2011 [Mariam Chkhartishvili, Ketevan Mania, Sophio Kadagishvili, *The arising of Georgian nationalism.-Proceedings*, vol. III, Ivane Javackishvili Tbilisi State University, Faculty of Humanities. The Institute of Georgian History, 2011], pp. 259-277.

⁹ მარიამ ჩხარტიშვილი, ქეთევან მანია, *ქართველთა ნაციონალური კონსოლიდაციის პროცესის ასახვა ბეჭდურ მედიაში. ივერია და მისი მკითხველი საქართველო*, თბილისი, უნივერსალი, 2011 [Mariam Chkhartishvili, Ketevan Mania, *Coverage of the process of the Georgian national consolidation in print media. Georgians as a readers of Iveria*, Tbilisi, Universali, 2011].

¹⁰ Ghia Nodia, *Components of Georgian national idea: an outline, Identity Studies*, I, Ilia State University, Tbilisi, 2009, p. 89.

¹¹ მარიამ ჩხარტიშვილი, ქეთევან მანია, *ქართველთა ნაციონალური კონსოლიდაციის პროცესის ასახვა ბეჭდურ მედიაში. ივერია და მისი მკითხველი საქართველო*, დასახ. გამოცემა [Mariam Chkhartishvili, Ketevan Mania, *op. cit.*], pp. 477-535.

the pre-modern era, Georgian identity was built, in many regards, on loyalty to the kings of this dynasty. Some scholars even assert that “*The abolition of the Georgian monarchy in 1801 assumed in the collective memory the character of a kind of traumatic fixation, to a significant extent; this became a determinant of those processes which occurred in Georgian political consciousness during the subsequent two centuries and which also happen today*”.¹²

The respond to this challenge was immediate. It was expressed in the popular uprisings of 1802, 1804, 1812-1813 against the tsarist Russia. The goals of these uprisings were political: restoration of Georgian monarchy. It was for the first time that people acted independently; however, the revolted population was yet unaware of the idea of *sovereign people* and people’s dominant role in the social life. The insurgents longed for nothing but the restoration of the authority of the Bagratians’ dynasty. The Georgian princes were invited to lead these movements. One of them was even considered as king of Georgia.

These uprisings were not successful. However, they are interesting as events announcing the birth of the Georgian nationalism. Despite the fact that, mainly the monarchy, as a form of political order is incomparable with the Enlightenment project and, accordingly, with the initial idea of nationalism, the mass character of these movements makes me consider them nationalist.

The failure of the above mentioned revolts made the Georgian elite think that the spontaneous rebellions might not be successful; it was necessary to conduct some preliminary work among the Georgian nobility and define the goals and tactic of the liberation movement.

The result of the relevant activities was the conspiracy of 1832. Almost all representatives of the Georgian high nobility were involved in it. The conspiracy also had political goals: it aimed to regain political autonomy of Georgia. Despite the facts that among the participants of this conspiracy there were Georgian princes, the conspirators perceived the constitutional monarchy or the republic as a political form for the future Georgian state. The participants to the conspiracy were acquainted with the ideas of the Enlightenment and longed to transform the native country into a republic, “to make Georgia as France”.

To ensure the mass character of their movement, the conspirators intended to involve the people in it. However, they did not plan to inspire the people with liberation ideas, but attempted to involve the people in the movement by false alarm

¹² Zaal Andronikashvili, George Maisuradze, *Secularization and its vicissitudes in Georgia*, in “Identity Studies”, Tbilisi, Ilia State University, 2010, no. 2, p. 7.

concerning danger coming from the Russian officials. Thus, the conspiracy was an essentially elite movement, though it recognized the importance of popular participation and popular governance as a form of political order.

The conspiracy was betrayed some time before its first action. Thus, this conspiracy, as well as the above mentioned popular uprisings, has failed. However, the importance of the 1832 conspiracy for the history of the Georgian nationalism was great. It made evident that the preliminary cultural self-determination is necessary before attempting to promote political goals.

The birth of the Georgian nationalism at the first years of the nineteenth century shows palpable discrepancy from the paradigmatic models. In England and France the kings were executed and only after these symbolic sacrificing the *sovereign people* occupied the place of the monarch. In Georgia, the people did not kill the king (the Bagratians' dynasty, as it was mentioned, was abolished by Russia), on the contrary: the people achieved social visibility in the struggle for the restoration of monarchy.

In 1860-1880ss the premature Georgian political nationalism was replaced by fully developed Georgian cultural nationalism. As it was already mentioned, its main author was Ilia Chavchavadze who, with his co-workers, was an active part of the societal life of the 1860s. For this reason the group of young Georgians was named as the "sixties generation". They were referred to as *Tergdaleulni* as well. The literary meaning of this word is as follows: "those who drank water of Terek (in Georgian *Tergi*) River". Terek was perceived as the borderline between Georgia and Russia. *Tergdaleulni* were Georgian intellectuals who had received education in Russia.

The sixties generation was called as the "sons", as well. The "fathers" were the generation of the 1830s, i.e. those who had taken part in the conspiracy of 1832. However, after the conspiracy failure, these political radicals were transformed into the loyal subjects of the Russian *Gosudarstvo* and the devoted servants of the Russian emperor. Because of this they were severely criticized by the "sons"; however, the "sons", in particular, Chavchavadze, considered the conspiracy as a very important stage in the development of the Georgian national idea, and he always showed his deep appreciation for the contribution of the "fathers".

According to some theorists of nationalism, the process of national consolidation begins with cultural mobilization and results in cultural self-identification. M. Hroch, for instance, who had studied European nationalisms, was able to found out the common paradigm for the development of nationalists movements: according to him, national movements begin from small circles of intellectuals (scholars, writers, artists etc.) who try to elaborate the idea of nation. It is

phase A, which is followed by dissemination of the idea through patriotic circles of agitators, educators and journalists (phase B). Only after this the ideas begin to infect the wider masses of the middle and lower classes (phase C).¹³

This pattern shows a straightforward linear link between elites' politics and mass movements. However, Smith and Hutchinson have found out that the real interrelation between cultural and political forms of nationalism is even more complicated and "*in practice, cultural and political forms of nationalism often succeed each other, and nationalists may oscillate between them*".¹⁴

As reader, I was able to guess that the Georgian case better fits the Smith-Hutchinson pattern, according to which political and cultural forms of nationalism may follow each other and cultural form should not necessarily antecede the political one, as argued by Hroch.

Georgian National Narrative by Chavchavadze: Main Themes

Main Ideal

The nationalist ideal of autonomy (which first and foremost means nothing but political independence), is universal. Thus, it is not an accident that the ideal of political independence of Georgia occupied an important place in Chavchavadze's narrative.

The peace obtained as a result of Georgia's incorporation into the Russian empire, in Chavchavadze's opinion was to enough to compensate the damage caused by the loss of independence. The main character of Chavchavadze's story *The Letters of the Traveler* (1861), Lelt Ghunia, an inhabitant of the Georgian highlands (and, accordingly, preserver of the nation's authentic self, as it was believed by the Georgian nationalists) expressed this idea with due clarity. Lelt Ghunia met the author travelling from Russia to Georgia in the borderland region of these countries. By this representative of the common people Chavchavadze expressed his regret about the Georgians not being independent: Lelt Ghunia, during the conversation with the traveler (i.e. the author), underlined that the country's independence was decisive for preserving national authenticity.

However, later Chavchavadze avoided to made public statements concerning this issue and devoted his life to ethno-cultural re-conceptualization of the native ethnic community. His attitude towards Russia was a result of his (and of many other

¹³ Miroslav Hroch, *Social preconditions of national revival in Europe*, Cambridge, 1985, p. 22-24.

¹⁴ Anthony D. Smith, *op. cit.*, p. 76-77.

Georgian nationalists') pragmatic calculations: the sad memory of unsuccessful uprisings and conspiracy against the Russian rule in the first decades of the nineteenth century was still fresh; apart from this, Georgia actually was in international isolation: Christian Europe showed no interest in Georgia, whereas Georgia's immediate neighbours – the Ottomans and Persians – were non-Christian and expansionist countries. Accordingly, Russia, as political partner, had no alternative in the eyes of the Georgian nationalists in the nineteenth century. They considered Russia as the guarantor of peace and favourable factor for modernization and promotion of the ideas of the Enlightenment.

Georgian Nation as Sacral Communion

The nations have sacral foundations¹⁵ despite the fact that the nation-building process implies a process of secularization, and at the same time with the spread of nationalism the religion gave up its positions in the public sphere.

Chavchavadze also considered nations as ethical communities; according to him, nations represent in-groups bound by common moral obligations. Without morality, the existence of the nation was impossible. The nation should follow moral principles if it aimed to survive. Very interesting in this regard is Chavchavadze's paper (published in *Iveria*, no 74, in 1887) on nation as a community with God's grace. In this paper for his point of view Chavchavadze referred to E Renan's essay *What is a Nation?*

At the first glance the impression is that, actually, the source of Chavchavadze's inspiration was the above-mentioned essay. However, it is obvious that Chavchavadze came to believe in the idea of nation as a sacral community independently. He already wrote about the Georgian nation as sacral communion in 1850s, while E. Renan's above-mentioned work was published in 1882. In the poems of 1858, 1860 Chavchavadze introduced the image of poet-prophet being in direct communication with God and leading the Georgian community in accordance with God's Commandments.

Chavchavadze, with the great intuition of a nationalist leader, guessed the social power of the ethic community and developed this theme in the Georgian national narrative. For critics of Chavchavadze the importance of the "idealistic"

¹⁵ On the sacral foundations of nations see Anthony D. Smith, *Chosen peoples*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003.

approach cultivated by the “humanitarian party” (i.e. Chavchavadze and his followers) was unintelligible.

Re-conceptualization of the Ethnic Legacy

In the 1860 concluding remarks of his critical review on Revaz Eristavi’s translation of *Madwoman* by Kazlov, Chavchavadze wrote: “*From our ancestors, we inherited the three sacred treasures: fatherland, language, and faith. If we do not even take good care of them, what kind of men are we, what will we be able to say to our heirs?*”

Chavchavadze began the conceptualization of the Georgian nation with reinterpretation of the main ethnic markers of Georgian identity. These were: (1) territory, which Chavchavadze conceptualized as *mamuli* (i.e. legacy left from fathers), (2) language, which, according to him, was the expression of the national spirit, and (3) Christian faith to which, he believed, Georgians’ devotion was unprecedented.

Each element of the triad was a building block of the Georgian national identity.¹⁶

To the fatherland, as national identity marker, Chavchavadze ascribed a special importance. He idealized Georgian peasantry¹⁷ as he (alike many nationalist leader worldwide) considered this social stratum as repository of “true virtue and authenticity” just because of peasantry’s firm attachment to the native land.

On the second place of the triad was language. The “sons” started debates with the “fathers”¹⁸ on the issues of language. They tried to bring closer the language of literature to the Georgian of everyday communication. Some scholars consider these debates between the two generations of Georgian nationalists in the context of the secularization process as the struggle for the secular Georgian.¹⁹

I think that this polemic was connected not only with the process of secularization, but also with Chavchavadze’s purpose to conceptualize the Georgian

¹⁶ Ghia Nodia, *op. cit.*, p. 89.

¹⁷ Idealization of peasantry is a common feature of nationalist worldview. As E. Hobsbaum puts it ‘...since the later eighteenth century... Europe had been swept by the romantic passion for the pure, simple and uncorrupted peasantry...’ E. Hobsbaum, *Nations and nationalism since 1780. Programme, Myth, Reality*. Cambridge University Press. 1990, reprint 2008. p. 103.

¹⁸ The cultural “war” between the “fathers” and the “sons” represents universal feature of nationalist ideology. See Anthony D. Smith, *The origins of nation...*, p. 123.

¹⁹ Zaal Andronikashvili, George Maisuradze, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

people as the source of legitimacy. Chavchavadze underlined that the arbiter of language was the people and not the “theory of alphabet”. The “theory of alphabet” was a title of the work by the eighteenth century Georgian Catholicos and erudite Anton (Bagrationi), who tried to reform the Georgians. Catholicos Anton distinguished different styles of Georgian: one for literature, another for common people and everyday communications. Chavchavadze and his followers insisted on one national language. For Chavchavadze it was not enough to create the standardized national language; simultaneously with the elaboration of a language, he intended to cultivate the idea of people as the source of legitimacy.

Within the triad, religion occupies the last place; despite this, it was a very strong marker of *Georgianess*. Chavchavadze presented Georgian community as a martyr for Christianity. He wrote: “*Christ our Lord has sacrificed for our sake, and we have sacrificed for Him*”²⁰ However, Chavchavadze’s attitude towards religion was ambivalent.²⁰ The reasons for such an attitude were the historical conditions: on one hand, throughout many centuries the Georgian culture and the collective memory of Georgians were forged in frames of Orthodox Christianity, on the another hand, Orthodoxy was also the religion of the Georgians’ main oppressor, i.e. the Russian empire. Thus, it is not an accident that in the above triad of the sacred treasures religion occupies the last place; and one more observation in this regard: to the Christianity Chavchavadze attached great importance, however, his nationalism was secular; he was against the clergy's participation in the state affairs.

Thus, Chavchavadze re-conceptualized the main Georgian ethnic markers and transformed them into the markers of Georgian national identity.

Georgian Nation as a Mnemonic Collectivity

As it was already mentioned in specialized literature, an additional factor against putting emphasis on religion, in particular, on Christianity was the existence of the Islamized Georgians. They lived in the south-western Georgian province of Ajara.

In 1877 during the war with the Ottoman Empire, Russia (with support from the Georgians) occupied Ajara. Thus, through the inclusion of Ajara into the Russian empire, it was actually regained by Georgia. The new political circumstances created a relevant practical task for Georgian intellectuals: to conduct the cultural merging of the Georgian population of Ajara with the Georgians that lived in other provinces of the country. It is why Chavchavadze proposed a modified concept of the Georgian

²⁰ Ghia Nodia, *op. cit.*, p. 90.

nation, based on the assertion of common historical experience as the most decisive factor for national in-group forming. In particular, in the paper published in *Iveria (The Ottoman Georgia, Iveria1877,#9)* he wrote: “Every nation lives by its history. Only history represents the treasury in which a nation finds its spiritual power, its heart, its superiority in morality or reason, its identity, its selfhood. We think that neither common language, nor faith or kinship is able to merge the humans so firmly in one whole, as history does. ... We are not afraid that our brothers who lived in the Ottoman Georgia are Muslims. Georgians can demonstrate that they do not touch human’s conscience and their brothers being distanced from them during many times will be welcomed again as brothers”.

After getting acquainted with this citation the first impression is that Chavchavadze attempted to redefine his assertions concerning the three main markers of Georgian identity proposed in the 1860s and tried to establish the new order of the “treasuries”.

Why?

First and foremost we should underline that historical memory, as the specific “item” in the package of national identity markers proposed by Chavchavadze, existed before the above-mentioned date; however, it was not accentuated. It was implied from the very beginning. By the second half of the 1870s it was only bolded and moved to the foreground of the national discourse.

Hence, the question arises: what were those newly emerged facts which made necessary to stress the specific importance of historical memory for Georgian nation’s existence?

As it was noted the above mentioned triad of “sacred treasuries” represented the main Georgian ethnic identity marker. In this definition, the Georgian identity was represented as not fully exclusive, and however, not sufficiently inclusive as well. By ascribing to historical memory the decisive importance, Chavchavadze made Georgian identity more open, more inclusive and prepared the ground for the concept of the Georgian nation according to the civic matrix of nationalism.

Ambivalence of Georgian National Narrative: Ethnic or Civic?

Was Georgian *eri* (Georgian word for nation²¹) conceived by Chavchavadze as ethnic or was it conceived as civic nation?

²¹ On essence of this notion see მარიამ ჩხარტიშვილი. ენტონი დ. სმიითი. ნაციონალიზმი: თეორია, იდეოლოგია, ისტორია .თარგმანი ინგლისურიდან,

As it is well known, the problem of ethnic/civic dichotomy was firstly identified by Kohn, who thought that Western forms of nationalism were based on the idea of nation as a national association of citizens who were tied by common laws and a shared territory. As for Eastern varieties of nationalism: they were based on a belief in common culture and common ancestry and regard a nation as an organically whole and exclusive group transcending its members who, from the moment of their birth (and during all lifetime), were marked by national features and inherited the national character. The causes of these differences should be found in non-similar social composition of these formations. If in the West, strong bourgeoisies could build civic nations, the East was the realm of imperial autocrats and feudal landowners creating soil for the emergence of organic conception of nation and mystical forms of nationalisms.²²

Since Kohn, many researches addressed this problem and clarified the main discrepancies between these two models. A. D. Smith, for example, underlined that in the “voluntarist” conception of the nation, individuals must necessarily belong to a nation in a “world of nations” and national states, but they can, basically, choose the nation they want to belong to. In the case of the “organic” conception, such a choice is not possible. Individuals, wherever they may migrate, remain an intrinsic part of their birth nation. A. D. Smith stresses that the provided features are characteristics of the normative types. He approaches different attempts aiming to provide more historically-recognizable schemes of distinctions, like the following: the old continuous nations of (mainly) Western Europe and the new deliberately created nations (nations of Eastern Europe and Asia), also, the distinction based on territory and those based on ethnicity.²³

The conceptualization of the Georgian *eri* by Chavchavadze was ambiguous. On one hand, Chavchavadze was elaborating the Georgian ethno-national identity: he perceived the native nation in terms of organicism. As any living creature, Georgian *eri*, according to Chavchavadze, had blood and flesh, soul and common will, legs and arms. It might be sorrowful, joyful, could cry, die, be tired, be exhausted etc. *Eri* was unity by ascription, emotional attachments²⁴ were decisive in forging of its identity;

ქართული ტექსტის რედაქტორი რ. ამირეჯიბი-მალენი. თბილისი: ქესც, 2004, გვ. 8-9 [Mariam Chkhartishvili Translator’s introduction. *Nationalism. Theory, ideology, history* by A. D. Smith. Translated into Georgian by Mariam Chkhartishvili, edited by R. Amirejibi-Mullen, Center for Georgia Language, 2004, p. 8-9].

²² Hans Kohn, *The idea of nationalism: A Study of its origins and background*. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1944.

²³ Anthony D. Smith, *op. cit.*, p. 39-40.

²⁴ Emotions played a great role in all forms of nationalism: “the cultural and psychological

common roots (/common blood) and inheritance was the organizing principle of *erovnoba* (nationhood). *Eri* in Chavchavadze's perceptions was a large-scale fraternity exercising ethnic majority rules. The addressees of Chavchavadze's nationalist appeals were exclusively ethnic Georgians.

On the other hand, Chavchavadze viewed in-groups based on kin identity less powerful than the entities bound by political ties. He tried to cultivate the ideals of civic nationality. He also underlined that law, liberty, and individuality are organizing principles of the nationhood. He longed to make the Georgian identity inclusive and overcome the closeness of ethno-cultural conceptualization of Georgian community.²⁵

Thus, the matrix chosen by Chavchavadze for conceptualization of the Georgian *eri* was not strictly ethnic; some principal features of it were indisputably civic.

To reveal the civic nature of the Georgian nation, the changes in the meanings of the terms are very characteristic. The case of the word *eru* is especially eloquent.

In the previous period word *natesavi* (the main segment of this word is *tesli*, "seed": in Georgian; so, *natesavi* means a group of humans of a common origin) was used to designate the Georgian in-group. It was replaced by *eri* in the times of Chavchavadze. In the Middle Ages *eri* referred to the socially-based identities. Only from nineteenth century it began to operate as a term designating in-groups based on ethno-cultural markets. *Natesavi* meant that the in-group consisted of members who were sure that they had one ancestry; in the case of *eri*, the basis for the group membership was not specified. Thus, *eri*, as well as *natesavi*, was used to designate human groups, though *eri* did not accentuate the common origin of the group members. In the second half of 19th century Chavchavadze entwined the term *eri* with the term *nation*. For instance, E. Ronan's famous work's title *What is a nation?* he translated as *What is eri?*

importance of the nation, and hence of nationalism, is even more profound. The ubiquity of nationalism, the hold it exerts over millions of people in every continent today, attests to its ability to inspire and resonate among 'the people' in ways that only religions had previously been able to encompass" (Anthony D. Smith, *op. cit.*, p. 2; in case of ethnic ones, the emotions are especially strong and potent).

²⁵ მარიამ ჩხარტიშვილი, ქეთევან მანია, ქართველთა ნაციონალური კონსოლიდაციის პროცესის ასახვა ბეჭდურ მედიაში. ივერია და მისი მკითხველი საქართველო, დასახ. გამოცემა, [Mariam Chkhartishvili, Ketevan Mania, *Coverage of the process of the Georgian national consolidation in print media. Georgians as readers of Iveria.*] Despite the huge number of examples analyzed in the above book, other relevant documents (yet unpublished) are available in abundance. The special investigation allows me to say that some of them are even more far reaching than those presented in the mentioned book.

Thus, despite the fact that Chavchavadze (as many nationalist leaders) looked at the native nation through the organicist and determinist lenses, he promoted the liberal (territorial) ideal of nationality as well.

The ambiguous nature of Georgian nationalism does not represent any paradox. Experts in the field argue that in some cases the “ethnic-civic” dichotomy is “*historically inaccurate and sociologically misleading. ... Most nations exemplify both principles of social organization, even if they choose to emphasize one of them over the other at any given time*”.²⁶

A. D. Smith even thinks that distinction between civic and ethnic conceptions of nations is simply fissionable. Very often in reality it is impossible to ascribe real communities to one or another type. Yet, for all apparent differences, the similarities are much more striking. They confirm that, despite the evident contrasts between “organic” and “voluntarist” types of nationalist ideologies, and the ethnic and civic conception of nations, there is greater affinity between the policies they inspire than one might be led to expect”.²⁷

The specific political and cultural conditions as well as the historical developments and inherent nature of the Georgian ethnic community predetermined the Georgian *eri's* conceptualization according to ethnic as well as civic matrixes.

Chavchavadze was sure that his (as it was already mentioned, ambiguous) understanding of nation was identical with the E. Renan's definition. This view is very puzzling: after all (according to the widespread opinion), E. Renan had provided a voluntaristic, etatist ideal of nationality. Many scholars even assert that his essay on nation should be considered as “classical texts for civic nationalism”. The question is: how this liberal understanding of nation might be fitted with deterministic elements of Chavchavadze's nationalism?

For Chavchavadze it was very important to underline that his opinion concerning this key notion of modernity coincided with the views of the eminent French scholar. Just by this fact one might explain the *Iveria's* permanent interest in E. Renan's works, his ideas and events of public and private life. The first remark on E. Renan in *Iveria* appeared in 1882, when the Georgian translation of Renan's essay *What is a Nation?* was published, while the last information is from 1903. During this period *Iveria* had published two different Georgian translations of *What is a nation?*

Why did Chavchavadze thought that his understanding of nation was identical to the definition proposed by E. Renan?

²⁶ Anthony D. Smith, *op. cit.*, p. 101-102.

²⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 42.

According to Renan, the organizing principles of the nationhood were not race, language or religion, but sentiment. Nation was nothing but continued consent. Thus, according to E. Renan, subjective factors create nationhood: *“A nation is a soul, a spiritual principle. Two things which, properly speaking, are really one and the same constitute this soul, this spiritual principle. One is the past, the other is the present. One is the possession in common of a rich legacy of memories; the other is present consent, the desire to live together, the desire to continue to invest in the heritage that we have jointly received. Messieurs, man does not improvise. The nation, like the individual, is the outcome of a long past of efforts, sacrifices, and devotions. Of all cults, that of the ancestors is the most legitimate: our ancestors have made us what we are. A heroic past with great men and glory (I mean true glory) is the social capital upon which the national idea rests. These are the essential conditions of being a people: having common glories in the past and a will to continue them in the present; having made great things together and wishing to make them again. One loves in proportion to the sacrifices that one has committed and the troubles that one has suffered... A nation is therefore a great solidarity constituted by the feeling of sacrifices made and those that one is still disposed to make. It presupposes a past but is reiterated in the present by a tangible fact: consent, the clearly expressed desire to continue a common life. A nation’s existence is (please excuse the metaphor) a daily plebiscite, just as an individual’s existence is a perpetual affirmation of life”*.²⁸

In regard to this quotation we should return to Chavchavadze’s views and analyze them once again. It is undisputable that, despite the elaboration of some civic components of the idea of Georgian nation, Chavchavadze created narrative of Georgian ethno-cultural community. The nation in his perception did not coincide with the state; national identity might only be inherited and its acquiring was not dependant on human’s will. Thus, Georgian national narrative proposed by Chavchavadze was more fitted with the ethnic pattern of the nation, than the civic one, while Renan’s concept belongs (at least as it is generally believed) to the civic one.

How to harmonize the above facts: on the one hand, the actual nature of Chavchavadze’s nationalism and, on the another hand, his strong belief in coincidence of his views with E. Renan’s understanding?

A.D. Smith analysis of Renan’s definition helps us solve this dilemma: *“The locus classicus for the debate about the two kinds of nationalist ideology can be found in Ernest Renan’s critique of Heinrich von Treitsckhe in his 1882 lecture entitled*

²⁸ Ernest Renan, *Qu’est-ce qu’une nation?* Translated by Ethan Rundell, Paris, Presses-Pocket, 1992, p. 10 (I use internet publication).

Qu'est-ce qu'une nation? Whereas Treitsckhe employed ethno-linguistic criterion to legitimate the German annexation of the disputed territories of Alsace and Lorraine claiming that despite their clearly expressed political will and historical memories, the Alsatians were 'objectively' ethnic Germans, Renan argued for more political, and to a certain extent voluntary, approach. While conceding something to the 'Germanicist' of thesis the origin of France, insofar as the Germanic (Frankish) tribes brought monarchical government and lasting territorial division to Western Europe, nevertheless affirmed the spiritual nature of nations and importance of historical memories and political will. Against ethnic determinism, Renan affirms the primacy of 'human culture' over particular national cultures, and the need for "consent, the clearly expressed desire to continue a common life. 'A nation's existence is, if you will pardon the metaphor, a daily plebiscite, just as the individual's existence is a perpetual affirmation of life'. This well-known passage is often taken out of the context to demonstrate a liberal and voluntarist ideal of nationality, in contrast with the organicism and determinism of German Romantic ideology. To be sure Renan eschews both determinism and the organic analogy, but it is not to assert a doctrine of voluntary nationality or the individual's right to choose her or his nation. Rather, he seeks to vindicate a historical and activist political understanding of the nation, one that would give weight to the "cult of ancestors" and to a "heroic past". The analogy of the nation with the individual is not intended to support liberal theory of individual preferences or a situational analysis of group identities. It is used to confirm the role of the past, of history and memory (and forgetting) as well as of continuing political will in forging of nations".²⁹

From the above discourse it is evident that E. Renan's understanding of nation was not strictly voluntaristic and it also was marked by ambiguity. This definition of nation was endowed by the features of both types of nationalism and for this reason it was open to ambiguous interpretations. Hence, Chavchavadze was quite right when he referred to E. Renan for his assertions concerning the essence of nation.

This ambiguous model might be referred to as Renan's model of nation conceptualization, however, it should be stressed that E. Renan's famous essay on nation was not Chavchavadze's direct source. To the identical point of view Chavchavadze came independently and common places in ideas, of Georgian and French thinkers, were supported by the atmosphere of all European discourse on a nation.³⁰

²⁹ Anthony D. Smith, *op. cit.*, p. 36-37.

³⁰ მარიამ ჩხარტიშვილი, ქეთევან მანია. ქართველი ერის კონცეპტუალიზაცია და ე.რენანის „რა არის ერი?“ ქართული წყაროთმცოდნეობა, 2011/2012, ტ. 13/14,

Conclusions

Thus, the main themes of Georgian national narrative were displayed. Of course, the idea of a Georgian nation created by Chavchavadze was richer than the author represented in this article. However, the above analyzed facts are sufficient to reveal the universal features, as well as specificity of the Georgian case, the creativity of the Georgian intellectuals while naturalizing general models of nationalism. The Idea of a Georgian nation shaped in the nineteenth century should be considered as a fact of the Georgian cultural history, the history of thoughts.

I would like to close this article quoting again from A. D. Smith: “*Very often nationalism concerns the realm of politics, but the significance of nationalism is not confined to the world of politics. It is also cultural and intellectual, for ‘the world of nations’ structures our global outlooks and symbolic systems*”.³¹

თბილისი, უნივერსალი, 72–89 [Mariam Chkhartishvili, Ketevan Mania, *Conceptualizing Georgian nation and What is a Nation by E. Renan*, in “Georgian Source-Studies”, vol. 13-14, 2013/2014, pp. 72-89].

³¹ Anthony D. Smith, *op. cit.*, p. 2.