

Mariam Chkhartishvili, Sophio Kadagishvili

Georgian Nationalism in the Nineteenth Century: Values, Ideals, Symbols*

Introduction.

Social theorists distinguish two principal types of nations: nations being direct products of modernization processes and nations emerged as results of nationalisms. The Georgian nation belongs to the later type. Accordingly, representation of the history of Georgian nationalism is a key task of Georgian historiography. The Soviet historians treated nationalism as a false bourgeois ideology and placed it beyond the academic interests. It is why during the long period (until very recently) in Georgia the phenomenon of Georgian nationalism was neglected issue. Hence today the study of the problem lacks necessary insights.

Our goal is to fill up (of course, in short paper like the present one it is possible only partially) the existed gap and provide up-to-date discourse on the history of Georgian nationalism. In particular, we attempt to argue alternative view on the time of Georgian nationalism's emergence and define principle sources and stages of Georgian nationalism development. We introduce the early nineteenth century as a date of Georgian nationalism's origin instead of generally accepted late nineteenth century. We also try to show that the matrix of Georgian nationalism despite its west-European design was not always completely matched with the paradigmatic models. The ethnic legacy of nationalizing Georgian community and impacts coming from Russian empire part of which Georgia was in the nineteenth century gave to Georgian case specific coloring. All above components, namely, rich ethnic heritage ("the usable past"), European ideas of nation and Enlightenment, and disadvantages experienced by Georgians as ethnic minorities within Russian gosudarstvo,

* The paper was presented at the 5th Via Egnatia Conference held by the Saints Cyril and Methodius University of Skopje(17-19 June, 2011, Ohrid, Macedonia).

should be considered as sources of Georgian nationalist ideology.

Theoretical Background.

‘An ideological movement for attaining and maintaining autonomy, unity and identity for a population which some of its members deem to constitute an actual or potential nation’¹.

This working definition by A. D. Smith we are providing immediately so that to avoid ambiguity in understanding of the term.

In different environments nationalism is colored differently, however, essentially (in regards of general tactics and strategy) it remains everywhere same because of its fundamental ideals (national autonomy, national unity and national identity²) as well as core concepts (authenticity, continuity, dignity, destiny, attachment (‘love’) and homeland³), as convincingly assert A. D. Smith, are universal. These generic features give to nationalist ideology objective character: ‘Nationalism has its own rules, rhythms and memories, which shape the interests of its bearers even more than they shape its contours, endowing them with recognizably “nationalist” political shape and directing them to familiar national goals’.⁴

Like many specialists in field we think that nationalism is linked exclusively with modernity and its appearance on historical arena might be dated by the late eighteenth century, the period since French Revolution of 1789.

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’.⁵

Again like many specialists in field we are sure that decisive role in the process of national consolidation belongs to the cultural elite, but we understand role of the elite not as voluntary social engineering, but see it through the lens of ethno-symbolist approach, in particular, we consider it as a process of cultural self-identification in the limits set by the cultural givens of the populace being aspirant (potential nation) of nationhood. Here again we

¹ A. D. Smith. *Nationalism. Theory, Ideology, History*. First was published by Polity Press in 2001. We use the reprint of 2003. See p. 9.

² Ibid. 25.

³ Ibid. pp. 28-33.

⁴ Ibid. p. 3.

⁵ Ibid. p. 2.

share A. D. Smith's opinion treating the process of transition from ethnic community to national one as the process of selection and reinterpretation of the ethnic legacy conducted by intellectuals.

We think that most of the modern nations are products of nationalisms and only few (according to L. Greenfeld solely one – England⁶) had emerged as direct products of modernization. The principal indicator of nationalism is a conceptualizing of “people”. As L. Greenfeld puts it: ‘The specificity of nationalism...derives from the fact that nationalism locates the source of individual identity within a ‘people’, which is seen as a source of sovereignty, the central object of loyalty and the basis of collective solidarity’.⁷

The people becomes the only source of the authority and the ground for its legitimacy. The people begins venerating its own cult occupying the place which in pre-modern Christian Europe belonged to consecrated monarch: ‘Collective identity in the Christian world is grounded on two basic postulates: on Eucharistic unity of the Christian people...whose embodiment is the Church. The second is a loyalty of Church to the consecrated monarch. The king's immortal body is his kingdom’.⁸

The Enlightenment had changed the situation drastically. In public perceptions *sovereign people* occupied the place of the monarch. As a part of the Enlightenment project nationalism and nationalist movements are inseparable from extending of educational, mass media networks and creating new and essentially novel (in regards of their social functions) public spaces.⁹

Some scientists justifiably argue that from the very beginning nationalism came as a form of democracy. ‘The location of sovereignty within the people and recognition of the fundamental equality among the various strata, which constitutes the essence of the modern national idea are at the same time the basic tenets of democracy. The democracy was born with the sense of nationality’.¹⁰

⁶ L. Greenfeld. Nationalism. Five Roads to Modernity. Harvard University Press. Cambridge, Massachusetts, London England, 1992. We use the paperback edition 1993. See p. 23.

⁷ Ibid. p. 4.

⁸ Z. Andronikashvili, G. Maisuradze. Secularization and Its Vicissitudes in Georgia. – Identity Studies. Ilia State University, Tbilisi, 2010,#2, p. 6.

⁹ G. Tevzadse in his recent internet publications ‘What is the Enlightenment’ and ‘Great Identity’ (See the Journal Solidaroba) provides important data for showing the inherited links between the Enlightenment project and emergence of national identity.

¹⁰ L. Greenfeld. Nationalism. Five Roads to Modernity, p.10.

Forms, Principal Sources and Stages of Georgian Nationalism Development in the Nineteenth Century.

The nineteenth century Georgian nationalism represents combination of political and cultural forms. It had arisen as a part of political movement, as a respond on Russian oppression. The abolishment of Georgian royal dynasty of Bagratians by Russian Emperor's decree in 1801 represented the fact provoked it. This was extraordinary event for Georgians. Bagratians were in power at least during ten centuries. In pre-modern era in many regards Georgian identity was built on loyalty to the kings of this dynasty. It is why 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 extend, this became a determinant of those processes which occurred in Georgian political consciousness during the subsequent two centuries and which also occur today'.¹¹

The respond to this challenge was immediate. It was expressed in popular uprisings of 1802, 1804, 1812-1813 against tsarist Russia. The goals of these uprisings were political: restoration of Georgian monarchy. It was for the first time when people acted independently, however, it was not yet aware of the concept of *sovereign people* and its own (dominant) position on the social scale. People still longed to restore authority of Bagratians' dynasty. The Georgian princes were invited to lead these movements. One of them even was consecrated as king of Georgia.

These uprisings were not successful. However, they are interesting as events announcing the birth of Georgian nationalism. Despite the fact that, in principal, monarchy as a form of political order, is incomparable with the Enlightenment project and, accordingly, with initial idea of nationalism, the mass character of these movements allows us to treat them as nationalist ones.

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

The result of the relevant activities during several years was conspiracy of 1832. Almost all representative of Georgian high nobility were involved in it. The conspiracy too had political goal: to restore political autonomy of Georgia. Despite the facts that among the participants of this conspiracy were Georgian

¹¹ Z. Andronikashvili, G. Maisuradze. *Secularization and its Vicissitudes in Georgia.*, p.7.

princes, conspirators perceived constitutional monarchy or republic as political form for future Georgian polity. They were well aware the ideas of the Enlightenment and longed to make native country republican, 'to make Georgia as France'.

For ensuring mass character for their movement the conspirators intended to involve in the movement the people. However, they did not plan to inspire the people with liberation ideas, but attempted to involve the people in the movement by false alarm concerning danger coming from Russian officials. The conspiracy was elite's 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 of its first action. Thus, this conspiracy as well as above mentioned popular uprisings was failed. However, the importance of the 1832 conspiracy for the history of Georgian nationalism was great.

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

Later on, namely 1860-1880s the premature Georgian political nationalism was replaced by fully developed Georgian cultural nationalism. Its main designer and promoter was writer and public worker Ilia Chavchavadze (1837-1907) who with his co-workers took an active part in societal life from 1860s. For this reason this group of young Georgians was named as "generation of sixties". They were referred 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 borderline between of Georgia and Russia. *Tergdaleulni* were intellectuals who had received education in Russia.

The generation of sixtieth was also called as "sons". The "fathers" were the generation of 1830s, i.e. those who had taken part in the conspiracy of 1832. However, after the conspiracy's failure, these political radicals were transformed into the loyal subjects and the devoted servants of Russian *gosudarstwo*. For this they were severely criticized by "sons", however, the "sons", in particular, Chavchavadze, considering the conspiracy as a very important stage in the way of Georgian national idea's development, always

showed his deep appreciation to the contribution of “fathers”.

The cultural definition of the nation and cultural autonomy within Russian empire were Chavchavadze’s principal tasks. In his story *The Letters of the Traveler* (1861) he expressed regret for Georgians being not independent as it was case in the past times. However, afterwards, Chavchavadze did not articulate publicly the independence of Georgian state as political program. This position was result of his pragmatic calculations: by this time Christian Europe showed no interest to Georgia, whereas Georgia’s immediate neighbors – Ottomans and Persians – were non-Christian and expansionist countries. Accordingly, Russia as political partner had no alternative in the eyes of Georgian nationalists: Russia was perceived by them not only as the guarantor of peace, but also as the creator of environment favorable for promoting the ideas of the Enlightenment.

According some theorists of nationalism the process of national consolidation begins with cultural mobilization resulted in cultural self-identification. M. Hroch, for instance, who has studied European nationalisms, was able to found out the common paradigm for 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 these ideas begin to infect the wider masses of the middle and lower classes (phase C).¹²

This pattern shows 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’.¹³

As one was able to see Georgian case is more fit with Smith- Hutchinson pattern according to which political and cultural forms of nationalism may follow each other and cultural form should not necessarily predate the political one as was argued by Hroch.

Chavchavadze’s Cultural Nationalism and Idea of Georgian Nation.

Chavchavadze began with reinterpretation main ethnic markers. These

¹² M. Hroch. *Social Preconditions of National Revival in Europe*, Cambridge, 1985, pp. 22-24.

¹³ A. D. Smith. *Nationalism. Theory, Ideology, History*, pp. 76-77.

were: (1) territory which Chavchavadze conceptualized as *mamuli* (fatherland), (2) language which was expression of national spirit, and (3) Christian faith to which Georgians' devotion was unprecedented. 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 we are, what will we be able to say to our heirs?’

Each element of the triad was a building block of the Georgian national identity.¹⁴

To the fatherland as national identity marker Chavchavadze ascribed a special importance. He idealized Georgian peasantry¹⁵ considering it 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 “fathers” on the issues of language. They tried to make close language of literature with Georgian of everyday communication. Some scholars consider these debates between the two generations of Georgian nationalist in the secularization process context: they assert that this was struggle for secular Georgian.¹⁶

We think that the said polemic was connected not only with secularization, but also with desire to conceptualize *people* as source of legitimacy. Chavchavadze underlined that the arbiter of the language was people and not “theory of alphabet”. *Theory of Alphabet* is a title of the composition by Georgian Catholicos Anton (Bagrationi) who had tried to reform Georgian in the eighteenth century. Catholicos Anton distinguished different styles of Georgian: one for literature, another for common people. Chavchavadze and his followers insisted on one standard language. As it was already mentioned in special literature, sometimes Chavchavadze's linguistic proposals had populist nature and the criticism towards Catholicos Anton's innovations was not always fully correct. But for Chavchavadze was not enough to create the national standard language; he intended to cultivate the idea of Georgian *people as the source of legitimacy*. As oppression inflicted by

¹⁴ G. Nodia. *Components of Georgian National Idea: an Outline*, Identity Studies, I, 2009, p.89. (Ilia State University, Institute of Genealogy of Modernity: internet publication).

¹⁵ 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).

¹⁶ Z. Andronikashvili, G.Maisuradze. *Secularization and its Vicissitudes in Georgia*, p.11.

Russian empire on Georgia did not allow him to promote this idea in political life, he tried to establish it in the cultural sphere.

Chavchavadze presented Georgian community as a martyr for Christianity. He wrote: ‘Christ our Lord had sacrificed for our sake, and we had sacrificed for Him’. However, as it was mentioned in the special literature, Chavchavadze’s attitude to religion was rather ambivalent.¹⁷ It is not accident that in above triad religion occupies last place. To Christianity Chavchavadze attached great importance, however, his nationalism was secular in its character.

Chavchavadze saw that in new political realities Orthodox Christianity could not work properly as Georgian identity marker. As it well known for identity-building process is important to show authenticity which means the permanent affirmation of differences in face of others. Orthodox Christianity was not useful for this purpose as it stressed Georgia’s similarity (not distinctiveness) with Russians being Georgians’ *significant others*.

An additional factor against putting emphasis on religion was the existence of Islamicized Georgians. They lived in the southwestern Georgian province of Achara. In 1877 in the war with the Ottoman Empire, Russia (with support of Georgians) occupied Achara. Thus, through the inclusion of Achara into Russian empire it was regained by Georgia. The new political reality created the new practical task for Georgian nationalists: they should conduct the augmenting of Achara with other Georgian provinces. It is why Chavchavadze proposed a modified concept of the Georgian identity, based primarily on the idea of common historical experience. He wrote: ‘Every nation lives by its history. In history nation finds its power, its soul, and its moral and mental superiority. In our opinion, neither common language, nor faith and kinship can tie (nail) humans with each other stronger, than the unity of history’.

As it was noted the above mentioned triad of sacred treasures represented the principal Georgian identity markers. In this definition Georgian identity was represented as not fully exclusive, but, at the same time not sufficiently inclusive. By ascribing to historical memory the decisive importance, Chavchavadze made Georgian identity more open, more inclusive and prepared ground for development of civic idea of Georgian nation.

The modern Georgian nation emerged in the late nineteenth century and first two decades of twentieth century. We can point to many indicators that bear this out. The most characteristic indicator was the fact of inter-group

¹⁷ G. Nodia. *Components of Georgian National Idea: an Outline*, p. 90.

bonds' rethinking. If in the previous period the designation of Georgian in-group was the term *natesavi* (the main segment of this word, *tes-l-i*, in Georgian is "seed", so, *natesavi* means a group of humans being of a common origin), now it was *eri*. Simultaneously with this change, the sphere of usage of *natesavi* was narrowed to immediate relatives. In the Middle Ages *eri* was used to refer to socially-based identities. Only from nineteenth century did it begin to operate as term designating in-groups based on ethno-cultural grounds. *Natesavi* meant that the in-group consisted of members sharing a common origin, while in the case of *eri* the basis for membership was not specified. Thus, *eri* as well as *natesavi*, refer to a group of humans, though the last one does not accentuate (though does not exclude) the common origin of its members. They might be, but they also might not be the descendants of a common forebear. In current usage, *eri* means nation. Already in the second half of nineteenth century Ilia Chavchavadze entwined the term *eri* with the term of *nation*. For instance, E. Renan's famous work's title "What is a nation?" he translated as "What is *eri*?"

Thus, Chavchavadze was proponent of both ethnic and civic models of nation simultaneously. As it well known that nationalists' views lack inner coherence and often are characterized by paradoxes. The Georgian case is an eloquent testimony to this general assertion. On one hand, Chavchavadze saw Georgian nation in organicist and determinist way perceiving Georgian *eri* as living personality; on other hand, he promoted the liberal ideal of nationality; On one hand, the addressee of Chavchavadze's appeals were exclusively ethnic Georgians, as his main task was to define Georgian ethno-nation; on the other hand, Chavchavadze viewing the solidarity within a community based on kin identity less powerful than entities bound by political ties tried to cultivate the ideals of civic community.

Pragmatic calculations drove Chavchavadze to ambiguity of this kind: ethnic image of nation ensured firm bonds between community members and unbroken in-group solidarity; It was helpful for defining ethno-cultural boundaries of the nation. However, it was not enough for political self-determination: historically Georgia was multiethnic and multi-confessional country. Its existence was not possible without tolerant and in certain degree inclusive society. It is why for Chavchavadze was so important to promote and cultivate the ideal of nation's civic model as well.

Ilia Chavchavadze's object of inspiration was civilized West. Chavchavadze had an eye on events in Italy and Ireland. The hero of nationalist

movements for him was Garibaldi whose photo he had of in his study. His close relative and friend Kote Abkhasi recalled: 'Ilia wanted to be a priest and only because of Garibaldi had changed his mind'. He dedicated very nice poem to the victory of Garibaldi at Messina.

Chavchavadze thought that Georgians should follow the Western way. However, according to him Georgians should not transplant in their native country class struggle, which was not characteristic for Georgia. As most nationalists he was proponent of the social harmony. He thought that every rank in the Georgian society had its irreplaceable function. He believed that Georgian nobility (he belonged just to stratum of Georgian high nobility) should preserve its role of cultural elite. At the same time he was against serfdom and welcomed when it was abolished in 1864.

Some specialists in field assert that Georgian nationalism begins with Chavchavadze. As it was already mentioned, we think that Georgian nationalism began in the early nineteenth century with political demands. Chavchavadze was designer of Georgian cultural nationalism. This was the second stage of Georgian national idea's development. The main result of this stage was the conceptualization of Georgian nation.¹⁸

¹⁸ For some more details concerning the Georgian nationalism and, in particular, on Chavchavadze's public activities see M.Chkhartishvili. *Molding of Nationalist Ideology and Printed Media: Georgian Case.*- Ivane Javakhshvili Tbilisi State University. Faculty of Humanities. Institute of Georgian History. Proceedings, vol. II, pp. 426-447.