

Religion as a Marker of Identity for Georgians (1860-1918)

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*Keywords: religion, identity marker, identity formation, "we" group
and "others", intellectuals, nationalism*

Introduction

In European countries, the process of self-determination of nations and formation of the main markers of identity began in the 19th century. The quest for answers to either of the questions “Who are ‘we’?” and “Who are ‘they’?” has not lost its relevance in the 21st century. Today’s answers to these questions are closely related to 19th century developments and to the beliefs and thoughts of the intellectuals of that time. Furthermore, the issues discussed by Georgian intellectuals in the second half of the 19th and at the beginning of 20th century remain controversial and still cause some public disputes. Therefore, it is important to track the identity formation process, which the current study is trying to do for the Georgian case.

The paper aims to study the role of religion in the process of identity formation in Georgia from the 1860s to 1918. This is a period when the narrative of Georgian identity was shaped, so the ideas widely discussed among the intellectuals of that period determined the main identity markers and the main borders of the “we” group. Moreover, the identity markers formed in the 19th century still shape current discussions on national issues. Georgia is a multi-ethnic and multi-religious country. Therefore, it is important to know exactly how other religious groups were placed within the scope of the “we” group, and whether or not religion represented an identity marker that drew a strict line between the “we” group and the “others”. What thoughts were common among the thinkers of that period?

Were there different opinions on this issue? Regarding religion and identity, what kind of ideas were transmitted to people and in what form?

The main research question is the following: What role did religion play in the process of defining “we” and “others” in Georgia (1860-1918)? A preliminary hypothesis is that religion was an important marker of identity, which determined the boundaries of the “we” group in Georgia from 1860 to 1918. Moreover, even today, in the 21st century, Georgianness is largely associated with the Georgian Orthodox Church and therefore there are certain expectations that a century ago the situation was quite similar and religion represented an important marker of identity. The current analysis is an attempt to check whether or not this is true.

Sources and background literature

The study investigated the following newspapers published in Tbilisi (Tiflis) between 1860 and 1918: *Samshoblo* (“Homeland”), *Iveria*, *Sakhalkho Purthseli* (“Public Sheet”), *Droeba* (“Times”), *Tanamedrove Azri* (“Modern Opinion”) and the Armenian newspaper *Mshak* (“The Cultivator”).¹ Georgian intellectuals were trying to spread their ideas through these newspapers. The paper studies their views on identity and their attitudes towards religion as a marker of the “we” group.

The research owes much to the works of Stephen Jones² and Grigor Suny³ about the Georgian political situation and Russian imperial context in 1860-1918. In his book, Jones reviews the stages of formation of Georgian nationalism, the opinions of different generations of Georgian intellectuals, as well as the confrontation and similarities among them. Jones’ book made it possible to understand the context in which this paper tries to analyze the intellectuals’ rhetoric and statements published in newspapers. Grigor Suny examines the stages of formation of the Georgian nation, discusses the

¹ These newspapers are easily accessible in the appendix of the book Chikovani N., Chkhaidze I., Matsaberidze D., Tsereteli I., Kakitelashvili K., *Identity Narratives in Georgia: at the Origins of Multiethnic Georgian Nation (1860-1918)*. Tbilisi, 2014.

² Jones S. F., *Socialism in Georgian Colors*, Harvard University Press, 2005.

³ Suny R. G., *The Making of the Georgian Nation*, Indiana University Press, Hoover Institution Press, 1988.

interaction between Marxism and the national project *Tergdaleulebi*, the founding fathers of Georgian nationalism. His book shows the impact of the imperial context on Georgian intellectuals.

While discussing the theoretical framework, the paper uses some works by Benedict Anderson⁴, Ernest Gellner⁵, Miroslav Hroch⁶ and Anthony Smith⁷. The main theoretical framework is based on Miroslav Hroch's three phases, which characterize every national movement. The paper also uses a book by Michael Kennedy and Grigor Suny – “Intellectuals and the Articulation of the Nation”⁸, specifically the introductory part of the book, where the authors analyze the role of intellectuals in the process of the formation of a nation.

Methodology

The study is mainly based on the framework of the modern theory of nationalism, according to which nations and nationalism are modern phenomena⁹ that emerged along with the spread of print capitalism. The current study uses the thesis of Suny and Kennedy that nationalism is formed from the top down by intellectuals. The role of intellectuals is also widely discussed in the mentioned works of Benedict Anderson, Ernest Gellner, Miroslav Hroch and Anthony Smith. Smith insists that “one factor **does** appear to be a necessary condition of all nationalist movements... the role of the intelligentsia”¹⁰.

⁴ Anderson B., *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, London; New York: VERSO, 2006.

⁵ Gellner E., *Nations and Nationalism: New Perspective on the Past*, Cornell University Press, 1983.

⁶ Hroch M., *Social Preconditions of National Revival in Europe: A Comparative Analysis of the Social Composition of Patriotic Groups among the Smaller European Nations*, Cambridge University Press. 1985.

⁷ Smith A. D., *National Identity*, London: Penguin Books, 1991.

⁸ Kennedy M. D., Suny R. G., *Intellectuals and the Articulation of the Nation*, The University of Michigan Press, 1999.

⁹ Gellner E., *Nations and Nationalism: New Perspective on the Past*, Cornell University Press, 1983, p.7.

¹⁰ Kennedy M. D., Suny R. G., *Intellectuals and the Articulation of the Nation*, The University of Michigan Press, 1999, p. 17.

The current study is placed in the three phases model by Miroslav Hroch, where the works of intellectuals are closely related to national movements: during Phase A, intellectuals study cultural elements, the history of the nation, language and traditions¹¹; then in Phase B, the intellectuals bring their knowledge to the masses, spread their ideas about the nation, mobilize people around their ideas and “imagine”- in reality, create - the nation¹²; in Phase C, national movement and the nation become obvious. The Georgian case that is the subject of this paper’s examination involves all the three phases – Phase A when the intellectuals studied the history, culture and the origins of the Georgian nations, then Phase B - the epoch of agitation and spreading ideas. Newspapers were everywhere, people were taught how to read, they were also taught what to believe and what to fight for. It is interesting that the *Tergdaleulebi* played the main role during both phases. The last, third phase – the rise of a mass movement, which succeeded in forming an independent state. (It lasted only a few years, but still, the project for which the *Tergdaleulebi* had laid the foundation reached its main goal – independence).

The research uses qualitative and case study methods. The paper analyzes the role of religion in the identity formation process from 1860 to 1918 in Georgia. During this period, newspapers represented the only means of spreading ideas among the masses. Intellectuals used this tool successfully and shaped public opinion through articles published in the newspapers. Therefore, to understand the role of religion in the identity formation process and find the main markers of identity, it is crucial to analyze local newspapers and conduct a discourse and content analysis of the published articles. The paper also uses the method of rhetoric analysis, which aims to identify the main signals and find the message the author is trying to transmit.

Definition of terms and concepts

The work uses a modern understanding of the concepts of *nation* and *nationalism*, according to which nation and nationalism are modern

¹¹ Hroch M., *Social Preconditions of National Revival in Europe: A Comparative Analysis of the Social Composition of Patriotic Groups among the Smaller European Nations*, Cambridge University Press. 1985, pp .22-23.

¹² *Ibid*

phenomena, dating from the period of the French Revolution, and were formed in parallel with the modernization process. Benedict Anderson defines nations as imagined communities. “Even in the smallest city, it is difficult to know all your fellow residents personally,” Anderson says¹³. So you “imagine the group which you think you belong to.” This process is a modern phenomenon, because only with modernization did it become possible to communicate through newspapers. Anderson points out that “print languages laid the basis for national consciousness”¹⁴, and the intelligentsia was central to this process¹⁵. As for Nationalism, it is “a political principle that holds that the political and the national units should be congruent”¹⁶.

The Russian Imperial Context and Georgian Intellectuals

Georgia was a part of the Russian Empire between 1801 and 1918, so the Russian Imperial policy had its impact on the Georgian identity formation process. After the peasant reform, economic and administrative reforms and communication development, the economic contacts between different regions of Georgia became more intense¹⁷. The migration of the impoverished nobility and peasants to big cities and back to their countries made more interaction possible between different parts of Georgia and people became more interconnected. Communication reforms, road building and railway development brought an end to isolation.

Suny points out that, paradoxically, the Russian assimilatory policy in the South Caucasus resulted not in assimilation but in the remaking of

¹³ Anderson B., *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, London; New York: VERSO, 2006, p.6

¹⁴ *Ibid*, p. 44.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, p. 116.

¹⁶ Gellner E., *Nations and Nationalism: New Perspective on the Past*, Cornell University Press, 1983, p. 1.

¹⁷ Chikovani N., Chkhaidze I., Matsaberidze D., Tsereteli I., Kakitelashvili K., *Identity Narratives in Georgia: at the Origins of Multiethnic Georgian Nation (1860-1918)*, Tbilisi, 2014, p. 284.

nations, with their underlining differences¹⁸. On the one hand, Russia sustained regional identities through the administrative division of the territory into East and West and by official recognition of subnational groups¹⁹. On the other hand, Georgia was reunited under Russian rule; Russia annexed all medieval Georgian territories and the Tsarist policy improved communications (the first railway was built in 1872) and created a common market²⁰. Wars against traditional enemies - Ottoman Turkey and Iran - renewed a national solidarity among Georgia's intelligentsia²¹. Even if these were the Empire's wars, the Georgians felt that they fought for the unification of their country.

The Tsarist administration played an important role in maintaining tension between ethnic groups. However, their policy of Russification was not always consistent. As Jones says, sometimes their management pattern was more centralizing, sometimes decentralizing, inclusive, exclusive, flexible or inflexible²². Together with other factors, it depended on a chief administrator, the so-called *glavnoupravliaiushchii*. Some of them were "militarily inclined autocrats" like Ermolov and Paskevich, while some were more democratic rulers like Vorontsov. As Jones calls it, the difference was between ruling "by the European or the Asian method"²³. But the goal was common – Russia wanted all of its territory integrated into "the cultural domain of the Russian Empire," but it was up to debate how fast this process should take place and which methods should be used²⁴.

The Georgians were not a nation in the modern sense of the word at the beginning of the 19th century. As Grigor Suny points out, people from Georgia were divided²⁵. Perhaps they shared some cultural features, but the

¹⁸ Suny R. G., *The Making of the Georgian Nation*, Indiana University Press, Hoover Institution Press, 1988, p. 114.

¹⁹ Jones S. F., *Socialism in Georgian Colors*, Harvard University Press, 2005, p. 14.

²⁰ *Ibid*, p. 12.

²¹ *Ibid*.

²² *Ibid*, p. 3.

²³ *Ibid*, p. 4.

²⁴ *Ibid*, p. 5.

²⁵ Suny R. G., *The Making of the Georgian Nation*, Indiana University Press, Hoover Institution Press, 1988, p. 114.

fact that they were part of the whole was often missed by the majority and the discourse lacked a sense of unity. For example, a man from the Eastern part of Georgia who died in the battle in the Western part of Georgia was buried with an interesting inscription on his tombstone – “Died abroad.” That means that the people from different parts of the same country did not consider themselves as part of the same homeland. Everything began to change when young energetic intellectuals took the stage.

The *Tergdaleulni* (in Georgian this literally translates to “people who have drunk from the river Terek”) graduated mainly from Universities in Russia. These were the youngsters with new ideas, who gathered around a common goal – creating a Georgian nation in the European sense. They were fascinated with new ideas about nationalism, equal rights and scientific progress²⁶. They attacked the entire social structure dominated by the aristocracy and imperial rule. The *Tergdaleulni* transformed the Georgian language and made it more comprehensible for ordinary people²⁷. They had a clear plan of how to make a nation and they pursued their goals till the end. Their efforts were directed to the creation of unity and overcoming tribal rivalries and fragmentation.

The *Tergdaleulni* never openly demanded political independence from the Empire, instead they tried to use all the benefits of Russian Imperial rule – from political reforms to educational possibilities in Russian universities. Tbilisi was transformed into a European city, where the nobles could read European newspapers, and walk with their wives in the latest French fashions²⁸. The activities of Georgian Intellectuals turned Georgians into an active political unity – a nation. Some scholars may argue that they saw the future of Georgia as part of the Russian Empire, but they tried to do their best with the tools they had. They were wise enough to foresee the consequences of the irresponsible, irrational statements about political freedom from the Empire at a time when the Georgians even had no sense

²⁶ Jones S. F., *Socialism in Georgian Colors*, Harvard University Press, 2005, p. 35

²⁷ *Ibid*, p. 36.

²⁸ *Ibid*, p. 6.

of unity. So they decided to go through cultural nationalism in order to make possible the achievement of their main goal – political freedom²⁹.

Religion as an Identity Marker and the Georgian Intellectuals

The Georgian intellectuals devoted a significant amount of time and space to identity issues in newspapers. The second half of the 19th century was a time when the Georgian nation was formed and intellectuals were establishing their own ideas about the nation. The current study examines the role of religion in the nation formation process.

In 1915, Tedo Ghlonti³⁰ published his article “The Integrity of Georgianness” in the local newspaper called *Sakhalkho Purtseli* (People’s Leaflet), where he proved the importance of self-governance by showing that Georgians are the ethnic majority, so “national order is a desperate need”³¹. Tedo Ghlonti insisted through statistical data that the Georgian nation was treated as a narrow religious and ethnic group, while the Muslim, Jewish, Catholic and Gregorian Georgians were removed from the “we” group. In reality, Tedo Ghlonti thought that the Georgians’ “ethnic body was united, firm and ready for national self-governance”³².

According to Tedo Ghlonti, focusing on religion was an intentional attempt for the disintegration and fragmentation of the Georgians. The scholar insisted that because of historical accidents or various political reasons, some Georgians had changed their religious affiliation - they had become Catholic, Muslim or Gregorian. And it would be unfair to remove them from the “we” group just because they had left the confession pursued by the majority of Georgians. Furthermore, Tedo Ghlonti insisted that even

²⁹ Ibid, pp. 32-35.

³⁰ Tevdore (Tedo) Ghlonti (1888-1937) – political and public figure, publicist, economist. In 1918-1921 he was the founder of the Georgian National Council and the Georgian Republic.

³¹ Ghlonti T., *The Unity of Georgianness // Sakhalkho Purtseli*, #279, #315, 1915, in Chikovani N., Chkhaidze I., Matsaberidze D., Tsereteli I., Kakitelashvili K., *Identity Narratives in Georgia: at the Origins of Multiethnic Georgian Nation (1860-1918)*, Tbilisi, 2014, p. 306

³² Ibid, p. 307.

such evidence as forgetting the language and altering surnames were not enough to prove that these people did not belong to the Georgian nation³³.

If not religion then what defines identity? According to Tedo Ghlonti this is an “expression of a natural will” and “the issue of affiliation to a particular nation could not be resolved in any other way but by hearing the announcement of an individual about his or her identity in front of the competent institution”³⁴.

Therefore, self-perception and choice are more important than religious affiliation – this is the modern concept of civic nationalism, and not the ethnic one, according to which you belong to a certain nation at birth and can never change your nationality. Tedo Ghlonti insisted that a Jew’s desire to be a part of the “we” group and his claim of being culturally akin to the Georgians is more than sufficient to consider him as a real Georgian regardless of religion: “An expression of individual’s will determines one’s nationality. There is no doubt that neither religious affiliation of Gregorian, Jew and Muslim, nor religious skepticism and even atheism are able to prevent people from being Georgians, or followers of other nationality”³⁵.

One can encounter the same thesis in the article³⁶ published in *Tanamedrove Azri* (“Modern Opinion”) in 1916 under the title “Nationalistic Hysteria.” The article claims that “instead of historical, territorial or religious principles” what should be promoted is a “personal principle.”³⁷ Religion is not a decisive factor in national identity issues, but rather “each citizen should decide for himself or herself what nationality he or she belongs to”³⁸.

³³ Ibid, pp. 308-309.

³⁴ Ibid, p. 310.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ The author’s identity is not specified

³⁷ *Georgian Muslim’s day* // Modern Opinion, # 60, 1915 in Chikovani N., Chkhaidze I., Matsaberidze D., Tsereteli I., Kakitelashvili K., Identity Narratives in Georgia: at the Origins of Multiethnic Georgian Nation (1860-1918), Tbilisi, 2014, p. 316

³⁸ Ibid.

According to Grigol Volski,³⁹ not just religion, but even shared origins cannot determine a “we” group and Georgianization is possible⁴⁰. A discriminatory approach, through which people are divided by religion is severely inadmissible for him. In all religious groups, there are bad people and good people, and this does not depend on the religion to which they belong: “It is a bad action which triggers hatred, not origins or faith”⁴¹. Faith is a matter of conscience, religious affiliation is a very personal space, not a public one. “A man is measured only by his actions... by how good a citizen he is”⁴². Grigol Volski argues that after accepting the language and cultural features or traditions as their own, one can assume that the Georgianization process is complete.

However, not all intellectuals shared the idea that religion has no importance in the nation formation process. Some of them placed religion as the main marker of defining the “we” group and the “others”. There was a big debate in Georgian intellectual circles about a Georgian Jews and whether or not they should be perceived as part of the Georgian “we” group and how their otherness was determined by religion itself. This paper does not aim to provide a detailed picture of this debate, but we can review some related processes later in the essay.⁴³

The Georgian intellectuals’ works were dedicated to identity issues – how was the concept of the Georgian nation or Georgianness related to religion? Were Muslims, Gregorians and Jews placed within the “we” group, or not? The following sections provide the intellectuals’ attitudes toward each group.

³⁹ Grigol Volski (pen name Gr. Umstipharidze) (1860-1909) – Georgian publicist, poet, physician, public figure, with Polish origins.

⁴⁰ Volski G., *Jews case in Georgia* // Droeba, #186, 1883, pp. 1-3, in Chikovani N., Chkhaidze I., Matsaberidze D., Tsereteli I., Kakitelashvili K., *Identity Narratives in Georgia: at the Origins of Multiethnic Georgian Nation (1860-1918)*, Tbilisi, 2014, pp. 357-358.

⁴¹ Ibid, p. 356.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ You can see more about this debate in Chikovani N., Chkhaidze I., Matsaberidze D., Tsereteli I., Kakitelashvili K., *Identity Narratives in Georgia: at the Origins of Multiethnic Georgian Nation (1860-1918)*, Tbilisi, 2014, pp. 178-245.

Georgian Muslims

In the attitude towards Georgian Muslims, one can notice an attempt to slide the religious factor back focusing on shared history and ethnic origins. In this regard, the contribution of the *Tergdaleulebi* is quite remarkable. They were trying as much as possible to include the Georgian Muslims within the “we” group. This issue became especially relevant when the Muslim part of Georgia, Adjara, was reunited with the rest of Georgia. The intellectuals were facing a problem – the Georgian speaking people living in Adjara and practicing a different religion should be incorporated into a common cultural space. Thus, there were no differences in attitudes towards this issue: Adjarian means Georgian, regardless of religious affiliation.

The Georgians’ founding father Ilia Chavchavadze⁴⁴ paid special attention to the incorporation of Georgians with different religious affiliation into the “we” group. In 1877, he published an article under the title “Muslims’ Georgia” (or “Ottoman’s Georgia”), which can be regarded as an ideological platform for the *Tergdaleulebi*. Ilia Chavchavadze highlights the nation’s bonding factors and says that religion is not one of them. Moreover, he said that little attention should be paid even to language and ethnicity: “Neither the unity of language, nor the unity of faith or ethnicity can bind people together more than the unity of history”⁴⁵. His whole article aims to spread the idea that, historically, Georgian Muslims together with the rest of Georgians, often risking their lives, fought for the freedom and prosperity of the country, that they always were patriots of Georgia, that they were patriots today and would continue to be in future too. This may sound contradictory to Ilia’s previous quote, where he insists that Georgians inherited three gifts from their ancestors – their homeland, language and faith. But we should take into account that this quote was said in a different context by a much younger Ilia Chavchavadze. After the

⁴⁴ Ilia Chavchavadze (1837-1907) – Writer, publicist, political and public figure, the leader of the *Tergdaleulebi*, one of the founders of the Georgian National Project, the leader of the Georgian National-Liberation Movement.

⁴⁵ Chavchavadze I., *Muslim’s Georgia, 1877*, in Chemi Rcheuli, Tbilisi: Palitra L, 2012, Vol. 45, p. 3.

historical moment when Adjara joined Georgia, Ilia had to redefine his triad. According to Ilia Chavchavadze's new approach, religious differences were insignificant: "We are not scared of religious diversity"⁴⁶. One should consider the time when this letter was written. In 1877-1878, there was a war between the Russian and Ottoman Empires, and the Georgian intellectuals hoped for the accession of the Muslim part of Georgia – Adjara. That is why Ilia Chavchavadze concludes his letter with a call to battle: "... And if there is need to shed our blood, does a Georgian feel the fear and does not sacrifice his life to the Homeland, for which our great ancestors were fighting more than two thousand years?"⁴⁷. Indeed, the Caucasian front of the Russian-Turkish war soon became the national war for Adjara. Later, when this part of Georgia was joined to the country, the problems of integration of different religious and cultural groups became even more evident.

In this regard, there is a significant article published in *Tanamedrove Azri* ("Modern Opinion") under the title "A Georgian Muslim's Day" where the author⁴⁸ described the difficult living conditions in Adjara. The author calls to the rest of the Georgian population for help⁴⁹. In this article, Adjarians are considered Georgian Muslims, which on the one hand emphasizes the religious affiliation of the local population, and on the other hand insists that, despite this affiliation, the locals are considered to be members of the "we" group.

In the process of defining Georgian identity, religion is given less importance – this idea is expressed in the speech of the representative of the Georgian Muslim community Memed Abashidze.⁵⁰ He gave this speech at the meeting of Christian and Muslim Georgians in 1905: "We are Muslims by faith but we are Georgians by nationality... We are connected to Tatars

⁴⁶ Ibid, p. 7.

⁴⁷ Ibid, p. 8.

⁴⁸ The author's identity is not specified

⁴⁹ *Georgian Muslim's day* // Modern Opinion, # 60, 1915 in Chikovani N., Chkhaidze I., Matsaberidze D., Tsereteli I., Kakitelashvili K., Identity Narratives in Georgia: at the Origins of Multiethnic Georgian Nation (1860-1918), Tbilisi, 2014, p. 314.

⁵⁰ Memed Abashidze (1873-1937) - Georgian public figure, writer, publicist.

only by faith and to Georgians – by nationality”⁵¹. Abashidze also warns about several attempts imposed from outside forces which aim to incite Christian and Muslim Georgians against each other. However, these attempts failed, Abashidze insists, because national conflicts cannot arise between Georgians. Religion is not as important when we have to deal with one nation. For Memed Abashidze, Muslims and Christians were equal members of the Georgian community. He expressed the fear of religious controversy, but assumed that after they talked to people from both groups and “opened their eyes,” all danger would pass.

Grigol Volski tried to reduce the role of religion too and gave the example of Georgians from Batumi (Adjara): “No one can say they are not Georgians just because they practice Islam and not Christianity”⁵².

In the case of Muslim Adjarians, there is one approach in all sources examined here – religion should not be considered a marker of national identity, because in this case, the Adjarians will be left out of the group. This is categorically unacceptable for the intellectuals reviewed in the current study. The situation is quite different when it comes to other ethnic groups. In this case, for some intellectuals religion still regains the function of an identity marker.

Georgians and their place in the “we” group

The Georgians perceived themselves with regard to the Armenians and their relationship well defined as the “we” and “others” groups. For Georgians, there were “our” Armenians who lived in Georgia and “other” Armenians who lived outside of Georgia and the Georgian public discourse lacked any particular interest towards them. As for “our” Armenians, the Georgian attitude towards them has sometimes been confrontational and, on

⁵¹ *Georgians and Muslims Congregation* // Iveria, #98, 1905.. In Chikovani N., Chkhaidze I., Matsaberidze D., Tsereteli I., Kakitelashvili K., *Identity Narratives in Georgia: at the Origins of Multiethnic Georgian Nation (1860-1918)*, Tbilisi, 2014, p. 342.

⁵² Volski G., *Jews case in Georgia* // Droeba, #186, 1883, pp. 1-3, in Chikovani N., Chkhaidze I., Matsaberidze D., Tsereteli I., Kakitelashvili K., *Identity Narratives in Georgia: at the Origins of Multiethnic Georgian Nation (1860-1918)*, Tbilisi, 2014, p. 357.

other occasions, the Georgian intellectuals perceived Armenians as the role models for Georgian society.⁵³ Another issue was how much religion, in particular Gregorianity, the main factor in the identity formation process, in defining who was Georgian and who was Armenian.

While discussing the attitude towards Gregorians, the paper uses some critical articles published by Tedo Ghlonti. He had received these letters as a remark from his readers regarding his publication. These letters seem really useful for analyzing religion as a marker of identity. One of them refers to Gregorians. Ghlonti did not name the author, but the fact of the publication express his ideological support towards him. The unknown author while talking about Gregorians highlights: “Gregorians are ethnic Georgians (the Georgian and Armenian Churches separated only in in the 7th century and some Georgians found themselves within the Armenian Church) and Armenians, who became Georgians through culture in the course of time”⁵⁴.

In this critical letter, one can identify two main notions: first, the author does not consider religious affiliation as a defining criterion for being a part of the Georgian nation – “ethnic Georgians” can be those who retained the Gregorian faith after the split of Georgian and Armenian Churches; and second, it is possible to become Georgian “in the course of time” and through adopting the local culture. This is a modern concept of civic nationalism, according to which nationhood is defined by common citizenship regardless of ethnicity, race or religion. So, you are not destined to belong to some nation by birth, but your national consciousness can change. Tedo Ghlonti fully agrees with the pathos of the letter mentioned above. Paying less attention to religious differences in the nation defining process and assuming that the affiliation to the Orthodox Church does not determine the “we” group “will make the concept of Integrity of

⁵³ More information can be found in the appendix of Chikovani N., Chkhaidze I., Matsaberidze D., Tsereteli I., Kakitelashvili K., *Identity Narratives in Georgia: at the Origins of Multiethnic Georgian Nation (1860-1918)*, Tbilisi, 2014, pp. 115-159.

⁵⁴ Ghlonti T., *The Unity of Georgianness // Sakhalkho Purtseli*, #279, #315, 1915, in Chikovani N., Chkhaidze I., Matsaberidze D., Tsereteli I., Kakitelashvili K., *Identity Narratives in Georgia: at the Origins of Multiethnic Georgian Nation (1860-1918)*, Tbilisi, 2014, p. 309.

Georgianness more meaningful and the Georgian nation more interesting and diverse”⁵⁵.

The Armenian newspaper *Mshak* published in 1880 in Tbilisi analyzed identity markers: “Armenian Catholics living in Tbilisi, Akhaltsikhe and Kars region call themselves Georgians. Ethnically they are Armenians, according to religion they are Catholics, but Georgians can assimilate them and convince that they are true Georgians just because their spoken language is the Georgian one. So this is how strong national self-consciousness is in Georgians, that they can integrate different ethnic and religious groups through their language”⁵⁶.

The author claims that religious homogeneity is not crucial in the process of the “we” group formation – people with different faiths are accepted as true members of Georgian society. “The main protector of national principles is neither religion nor origins, but mainly the language and the homeland”⁵⁷. According to the article the main marker of identity is language – “It is language and only language through which a man can become a member of a concrete nation”⁵⁸. The Armenian newspaper *Mshak* notes regretfully that “Georgians can convince Armenian Catholics that religion and even ethnic belonging are not crucial from the national perspective, in the process of defining their ‘we’ group. You can belong to another religious or ethnic group; you can have another faith, but you can still be a true Georgian”⁵⁹.

This article is very interesting in the sense that it showed how Armenians perceived Georgians’ identity markers. However, Tedo Ghloni’s letter the analyzed above and highlighted that there were lots of problems related to identity issues; that everything was not as perfect as *Mshak* perceived, that the integration process through language and culture

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ *Georgians and Armenians* // *Mshak*, #167, 1880, pp. 1-2 In Chikovani N., Chkhaidze I., Matsaberidze D., Tsereteli I., Kakitelashvili K., *Identity Narratives in Georgia: at the Origins of Multiethnic Georgian Nation (1860-1918)*, Tbilisi, 2014, p. 324.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid, p. 325.

was not a smooth process at all. It should also be noted that all intellectuals reviewed in the current study consider Gregorians as an integral part of the Georgian “we” group (of course assuming that the Gregorians considered themselves a part of Georgian society).

Georgian Jews

The situation of the Jews was relatively complicated. If, with respect to other religions, the intellectuals more or less agreed to consider them as Georgians, Georgian Jews were not always accepted as members of the “we” group. Not only did Georgian intellectuals have some fundamental divergences of attitudes, but the Jews’ opinions about their place in society were also varied. Some of them considered themselves real Georgians, others insisted that religion is the main marker of their nation.

In one of the letters received by Tedo Ghlonti, its Jewish author tries to identify the major factors that determine nationality and opposes the statement that religion is a main marker of identity: “Which nation, which people do Georgian Jews belong to? Do they constitute an integral part of the Georgian nation or not? - in terms of nationality and not faith, of course. I remember the words of the late Archil Jorjadze: we can explain nationality by three factors: language, territory and customs. As for religion, it is a matter of conscience, anyone should believe in whatever they want to believe, it’s their own business, not ours.”⁶⁰

The author highlights these identity markers in his letter to Ghlonti: language, territory and customs, that is to say, culture. As for religion, its function as an identity marker is diminished – “religion is a matter of conscience, anyone is free to believe in what they prefer.” However, this letter also shows the common trend of that time – it seems that religion was often used as a marker of identity. The author complains to Tedo Ghlonti, “...If you protest against the trend of not considering Georgian Catholics as Georgian, why don’t you resist the unfair expressions about Georgian

⁶⁰ Ghlonti T., *The Unity of Georgianness* // Sakhalkho Purtseli, #279, #315, 1915, in Chikovani N., Chkhaidze I., Matsaberidze D., Tsereteli I., Kakitelashvili K., *Identity Narratives in Georgia: at the Origins of Multiethnic Georgian Nation (1860-1918)*, Tbilisi, 2014, p. 309.

Jews?” This reproach shows that not only the Jews had suffered, even Georgian Catholics had not been considered members of the “we” group. Otherwise there would be no need for criticism. In addition, Tedo Ghlonti noted that the “Georgian nation, which in reality represents a culturally and nationally whole unity, was artificially divided into several parts according to dialect, regions, religion and other insignificant factors”⁶¹.

According to the above mentioned, we can conclude that some Georgian intellectuals oppose to the common trend of using religion as an identity marker. Besides presenting the views of Tedo Ghlonti, we can cite the words of Archil Jorjadze,⁶² another bright representative of the Georgian intelligentsia, who assumed that religion is a private and personal affair. Tedo Ghlonti considered the author of the letter as a real Georgian despite his religious affiliation: “According to religion he is a follower of Moses’ faith, but he is a real Georgian to me... he is inspired by deep and sacred Georgian patriotic feelings”⁶³.

According to Ilia Bakhtadze,⁶⁴ there is only one thing in which Georgian Jews differ from the rest of the Georgians – faith. In other respects, they were quite similar. However, there had recently been some alienation and fear among these people due to their faith⁶⁵. This was mainly related to prejudices widespread in small villages, according to which a Jew needs a Christian child’s blood for their sacrificial rituals. Ilia Bakhtadze

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Archil Jorjadze (1872-1913) – Georgian politician, one of the founders of the Social-Federalist Party and the main ideologist.

⁶³ Ghlonti T., *The Unity of Georgianness // Sakhalkho Purtseli*, #279, #315, 1915, in Chikovani N., Chkhaidze I., Matsaberidze D., Tsereteli I., Kakitelashvili K., *Identity Narratives in Georgia: at the Origins of Multiethnic Georgian Nation (1860-1918)*, Tbilisi, 2014, p. 309.

⁶⁴ Ilia Bakhtadze (pen name Ilia Khoneli) (1859-1900) – Georgian publicist, journalist, translator.

⁶⁵ Bakhtadze I., *Feuilleton // Iveria*, #198, 1886, pp. 1-3. In Chikovani N., Chkhaidze I., Matsaberidze D., Tsereteli I., Kakitelashvili K., *Identity Narratives in Georgia: at the Origins of Multiethnic Georgian Nation (1860-1918)*, Tbilisi, 2014, p. 358.

felt that the only way to eliminate these stereotypes and disintegration was through education⁶⁶.

Religion was not a factor, which is why Jews did not fall out of the scope of the “we” group. For example, for Niko Nikoladze,⁶⁷ the inclusion of ethnic minorities, and in particular Jews, was closely related to the national education system. He did not consider religion as the main identity factor. If a Jewish child was given the same education as a Georgian one, and had the same perspectives or rights, then “after one or two generations, Uriahs will be similar to the rest of the Georgians”⁶⁸. Nikoladze highlighted the importance of the education system in spreading cultural elements and making a nation.

However, in contrast to the authors mentioned above, Niko Khizanashvili,⁶⁹ argued that religion was a crucial marker that determined the character of any relation: “If a Georgian hates a Jew, it is only religion which is the cause”⁷⁰. Although he considered that, by accepting Georgian culture, the traditions and language of the Jews could be incorporated into Georgian society, he nevertheless insisted that “a Georgianized Jew is not wholeheartedly a Georgian. For this kind of Jew, Georgia is a temporary home, a charming and pleasant abode, but not a homeland”⁷¹. Rabbi David

⁶⁶ Ibid, p. 359.

⁶⁷ Niko Nikoladze (pen name Skandeli) (1843-1928) – Georgian publicist, critic, revolutionary, democrat, political and public figure, a member of Ilia Chavchavadze’s team.

⁶⁸ Nikoladze N., *Jews in Georgia* // Droeba, 1871, #32, pp. 2-3 in Chikovani N., Chkhaidze I., Matsaberidze D., Tsereteli I., Kakitelashvili K., *Identity Narratives in Georgia: at the Origins of Multiethnic Georgian Nation (1860-1918)*, Tbilisi, 2014, p. 350.

⁶⁹ Niko Khizanashvili (1851-1906) – Georgian scientist, lawyer, historian, ethnographer, publicist, literary critic

⁷⁰ Khizanashvili N., *Our Jews” (Cveneburi Jews) (remarks)* // Iveria, #141, 1902, p.2 In Chikovani N., Chkhaidze I., Matsaberidze D., Tsereteli I., Kakitelashvili K., *Identity Narratives in Georgia: at the Origins of Multiethnic Georgian Nation (1860-1918)*, Tbilisi, 2014, p. 361.

⁷¹ Ibid, p. 363.

Baazov⁷² agreed with Khizanashvili in that religion was a marker of identity: “Religion defines our nationality and even our exclusive history”⁷³. Both authors paid particular attention to the aspect of religion and considered it as the main marker of the “we” group. Khizanashvili even insisted that this marker is recognized by both groups – Georgians and Jews.

At the same time, the analysis of Georgian press materials published in 1860-1918 showed different positions too, spread among Georgian intellectuals and their Jewish colleagues. A good example of this was the Georgian Jew Joseph Khananashvili,⁷⁴ who argued against using the word Jew towards Georgian Jews, and introduced a new term - “Georgian Israeli”. He explained that this term expressed only faith and not nationality, while the word Jew expressed ethnic belonging. According to him, Jews living in Georgia were ethnically not different from the rest of the Georgians. So they must be named in a different way. The term “Georgian Israeli” meant that these people were ethnically Georgians but with a different religious affiliation⁷⁵.

Joseph Khananashvili highlighted the Georgian Jews’ belonging to the Georgian “we” group and claimed the Georgian language was their mother tongue, while he considered Hebrew as the language of religion. According to him, “Georgian Israelis” are very close to the Georgian people

⁷² David Baazov (1883-1946) – One of the leaders of the Jewish community in Georgia, public figure, a bright representative of the Zionist movement in Georgia, Rabbi of Oni (a town in Georgia’s mountains)

⁷³ Baazov D., *Oni’s Rabbi on Georgian Israeli’s issue* // Samshoblo, # 429, 1916, p. 3 in Chikovani N., Chkhaidze I., Matsaberidze D., Tsereteli I., Kakitelashvili K., *Identity Narratives in Georgia: at the Origins of Multiethnic Georgian Nation (1860-1918)*, Tbilisi, 2014, p. 391.

⁷⁴ Joseph Khananashvili – Georgian Jewish intellectual, public figure, publicist. In 1921, after Soviet occupation he emigrated to France with the Georgian government-in-exile.

⁷⁵ Khananashvili J., *Forced definition for the attention of the Georgian Israeli* // Samshoblo, 1916, (#392 pp. 2-3; #393 pp. 2-3); *The Georgian Israeli’s response to “not Georgian” Rabbi* // Samshoblo (#410 pp. 2-3; #411 pp. 2-3) in Chikovani N., Chkhaidze I., Matsaberidze D., Tsereteli I., Kakitelashvili K., *Identity Narratives in Georgia: at the Origins of Multiethnic Georgian Nation (1860-1918)*, Tbilisi, 2014, p.364.

and separated from the rest of Jews around the globe in spite of a shared religion. For “Georgian Israelis,” Russian Jews would never be closer than Georgian Christians or Muslims. Moreover, Joseph Khananashvili referred to Russian Jews as aliens⁷⁶.

“We expect more consolation from Christian or Muslim Georgians, than from Russian Jews, because we have known each other for more than 20 centuries”⁷⁷. He also emphasized that religious unity could not create a solid basis for solidarity and that the unity which formed for centuries based on a historical past and culture was stronger and more stable than a religious one. He insisted that, in a foreign country, a “Georgian Israeli” is more pleased and full of emotions when seeing a Georgian (it does not matter whether it was a Christian or Muslim) than a Russian, Italian or American Jew, even with the same religious affiliation⁷⁸.

Joseph Khananashvili also criticized the above-mentioned Rabbi Baazov, who reprimanded Georgian Jews for singing Georgian bedtime songs to their children and not Jewish ones. Joseph Khananashvili explained that Jewish lullabies were not close to the hearts of Georgian Jews’ children, because “they have a Georgian spirit, not a Palestinian one”⁷⁹. Moreover he criticized the Rabbi for highlighting religion as a main factor for nationality: “I said that religion is not a factor which determines nationality... religion and nationality are different and separate things... you, as it is expected from the cleric, want to make religion a cornerstone of everything in life... and do not even know which factors really determine nationality”⁸⁰. The author considered the Rabbi’s opinion far from reality and explained this backwardness through his religious affiliation. “We are Georgians by ethnicity and Jews by religion” – for Joseph Khananashvili this was the most accurate picture of the “Georgian Israeli.”

For the current analysis, the most important part of the article is where religion and national affiliations are separated from each other. “Do

⁷⁶ Ibid, p. 366.

⁷⁷ Ibid, p. 369.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid, p. 371.

⁸⁰ Ibid, p. 373.

Polish, Italian, French, Georgian or German Catholics belong to one nation, just because all of them share one religion?”⁸¹ – this rhetorical question underlined the author’s belief that the religious factor was not a crucial one in determining one’s nationality. And if French and German Catholics did not constitute one nation, why should a “Georgian Israeli” be a part of the big Jewish community and not the Georgian one? Joseph Khananashvili cited some European intellectuals and insisted that the basis of nationality was the “people’s subjective conscience”⁸². Joseph Khananashvili argued that while, in the past, religious differences hindered people from creating one nation, nowadays the importance of religion had significantly diminished. For him, the determining factor of the nation was the language: “Language plays the most important role when you wonder the nation to which a man belongs”⁸³. Compared with the linguistic, cultural and historical markers of identity, religion was quite an insignificant factor. In the nation and identity formation process, less importance should be given to religious affiliation: “I have already repeated and I will repeat it again that religion is one thing, nationality is another and this two affiliations are separated from each other... Do you really believe that Georgians are Georgians just because they recognize Christ? What does religion have to do with nationality?”⁸⁴. Joseph Khananashvili insisted that the beliefs which linked religion to nationality indicated cultural⁸⁵. He also rejected the threats of assimilation from the Georgian side: “Why should we, ‘Georgian Israelis’, be scared of Georgianization when we are already Georgians by nationality?”⁸⁶.

His theses were also shared by Mikheil (Mikhako) Khananashvili,⁸⁷ who noted that Georgian Jews differed from the rest of the Georgians only

⁸¹ Ibid, p. 374.

⁸² Ibid, p. 373.

⁸³ Ibid, p. 374.

⁸⁴ Ibid, p. 375.

⁸⁵ Ibid, p. 377.

⁸⁶ Ibid, p. 368.

⁸⁷ Mikheil (Mikhako) Khananashvili (1888-1972) – Georgian Jew, Intellectual, after Soviet occupation he emigrated to France with the Georgian government-in-exile, but later he came back to Georgia.

by religion⁸⁸. He linked the opposite opinion with the “Russian *chinovnik* (beaurocratic) spirit”⁸⁹. “Despite religious differences, we – Georgian Jews and Christians, have one precious homeland, one mother tongue, a shared past and a bright future”⁹⁰.

The Georgianization of Jews was considered possible by Grigol Volski too (Volski 1883: 357-358). However, as we have already mentioned above, for some intellectuals being a Jew ruled out being a Georgian and despite the good relationship between Georgians and Jews, different religious affiliation means that they could not be placed in one group.

Conclusion

The present study examined articles about nationality and identity markers published in several newspapers. The research question was the following: What role did religion play in the process of defining “we” and “others” in Georgia (1860-1918)? The results of the study do not show a clear-cut answer to the research question and do not agree with the hypothesis put forward at the beginning of the paper, according to which religion was an important marker of the identity formation process. Some authors highlighted the importance of language, culture, customs and traditions or a “personal will” in the defining nationality. They insisted that religion should not have a crucial importance in detemining the “we” group. However, the paper analysed the opposite narrative too, according to which religion creates nationality and, therefore, represents the main marker of identity. Also, the paper found some differences among the attitudes towards different religions. Muslim Ajarians are considered as members of the “we” group by all the intellectuals analyzed above and in this case, all authors insisted that religion should not be a determinant marker of identity. The attitude dramatically changed when they began to talk about Georgian Jews. There, one could identify **two** conflicting positions: **some of them**

⁸⁸ Khananashvili M., *Few things about the Georgian Jews* // Sakhalkho Purtseli, #607, 1916, pp. 2-3 in Chikovani N., Chkhaidze I., Matsaberidze D., Tsereteli I., Kakitelashvili K., *Identity Narratives in Georgia: at the Origins of Multiethnic Georgian Nation (1860-1918)*, Tbilisi, 2014, p. 387

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

argued that religion formed the nation and connected people, therefore it did not matter culturally how close Georgian Jews were with the rest of the Georgians, how native the Georgian language was for them or how much they considered Georgia their own country, being a Jew meant standing out of the Georgian “we” group; but **others** strongly contradicted this position and considered Georgian Jews an integral part of Georgian society.

To conclude, the beliefs and opinions spread out among the period from 1860 to 1918 among Georgian intellectual circles were not homogeneous. But, in most cases, the intellectuals recognized the importance of language, culture and history, while religion was given a relatively small role in the nation-forming process. Another issue is how much these ideas were shared by ordinary people. The current study does not aim at being generalized on the entire Georgian society or on all Georgian intellectuals of that period. It can also be said that no one would have criticised religion as a marker of identity if no one had considered religion as a marker and there had not been several cases of manipulation by this.

**Կրոնը որպես ինքնության ցուցիչ
վրացիների համար
(1860-1918)**

*Մալումե Խվադագիանի
Իվանե Ջավախիշվիլու անվան
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Այսօրվա «ո՞վ ենք մենք» և «ովքե՞ր են նրանք» հարցերի պատասխանները կապված են դեռևս տասնիններորդ դարում ձևավորված հանրային պատկերացումների հետ, որոնք ձևավորում էին ժամանակի մտավորականները պարբերական մամուլի էջերից: Սույն հոդվածը քննարկելու է ինքնության ձևավորման այս տեսանկյունը Վրաստանյան օրինակի վրա՝ ուսումնասիրելով կրոնի դերի ներկայացումը ինքնության ձևավորման մեջ Վրաստանում 1860-1918 թթ. ընթացքում: Հաշվի առնելով այն փաստը, որ Վրաստանը բազմէթնիկ և բազմադավան հանրությունն ունի՝ կարևոր է ուսումնասիրել հիմնական ինքնության ցուցիչները և «մենք» խմբի սահմանները: Ուսումնասիրվել են 1860-1918 թվականների ընթացքում Թիֆլիսում լույս տեսած հետևյալ պարբերականները. *Մամշոբլո* («Հայրենիք»), *Իվերիա*, *Սախալխո Փուրցելի* («Հանրային թուղթ»), *Դոռերա* («Ժամանակ»), *Թանամեդոմվե Ազրի* («Արդի միտք»), ինչպես նաև հայերեն պարբերական «Մշակը»: