Russian Influence on the Formation of Georgian National Identity

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ORIGINAL STUDY

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ABSTRACT

The research investigates how Georgian national identity evolved while Russian influence shaped this foundational development. Throughout history the Caucasus region has maintained its complex ethnic and religious diversity because numerous nations have lived there while multiple empires and states have conducted invasions and occupations. Attempts to seize the region by Ottomans, Russia and Iran affected the identity formation in the Caucasus. Georgian identity provides one of the clearest examples. In this study it will be claimed that since the 18th century the Russian influence was the determining factor in the formation of Georgian national identity. In this context, first it will be analyzed the concepts of identity and national identity. In this section concepts of culture and cultural nationalism will be also examined. In the second section of the study the main components of Georgian national identity will be analyzed. The third section starts with the Treaty of Georgievsk in 1783 which was a breaking point for the Georgian identity. In this section it will be evaluated the transformation of Georgian national identity from 1783 to the end of Russian Tsardom. In the final section of the article, the Menshevik administration of the short-lived independent Georgia will be examined. The Sovietization processes beginning with the Red Army's capture of Tbilisi will be examined followed by an analysis of USSR influence on Georgia through its efforts to modify Georgian identity.

Keywords: Identity, National identity, Georgia, Russia, South Caucasia

Introduction

Georgia, which is home to many different ethnic groups such as Karts, Mengrel-Chans (Laz), Svans, Ossetians, Abkhazians, and others, refers to itself as Kartveli and calls Georgia as Sakartvelo (საქართველო). Sakartvelo means 'the place where the Kartvelians live' and actually refers to the lands in the east of modern Georgia (Gahrton, 2010, p. 23). Georgia is located in the Caucasus region, known as "Kavkas" in ancient Greece and "Caucasus" in the Roman period. Ottoman archive documents also show that the region was known by

different names such as Circassia, Kuban and Dagestan (Üstünyer, 2010, p. 26). Thanks to its mountainous geography, the Caucasus has been both a transit and an escape point throughout history (Yerasimos, 1995, p. 271). It connects the Caspian Sea to the Black Sea thus serves as a bridge between Europe and Asia. The Caucasus Mountain range divides the region into north and south. The North Caucasus came under Russian Tsardom control in the 19th century and became a battleground between Russia and Muslim tribes. On the other hand, the South Caucasus, located south of the Greater Caucasus Mountains served as a gateway to Asia (Uschan, 2015, p. 7). The region has also been referred to by different names that imply 'beyond the Caucasus'. In this context, Europeans have used the term 'Transcaucasia', the Russians have referred to it as 'Zakavkazie' (Закавказье), and the Ottomans have employed the expression 'Maverâ-yi Kafkasya'.

Adopting Christianity by the King Mirian of Kartli as the state religion in 337 was a turning point for the Georgian territories (Gahrton, 2010, p. 35). In 975, western and eastern parts of Georgia were incorporated by the King Bagrat III. The capital city of the newly established the Kingdom of Georgia was Kutaisi. Although there were threats to the Kingdom from Byzantium and Seljuks. The victory won by King David IV (the Builder) at the Battle of Didgori in 1121, weakened the Seljuk influence in the region. In this battle David IV signed an agreement with the Kipchak Khan Atrakh and received military support. After this victory Tbilisi became the new capital of the Kingdom. The agreement required each Kipchak family to send one son to serve in David's army while the Kipchaks settled in Georgian territory with their 40,000 families (Üstünyer, 2010, p. 63). The Kipchaks supported David in his victory which earned him the title 'Agmashenebeli' meaning 'the Rebuilder of the State.'

The Georgian Kingdom reached its peak during the Golden Age under Queen Tamar who ruled from 1184 to 1213. The reign of Queen Tamar remains a source of national pride because it brought significant advancements throughout various sectors including economy and politics as well as military and artistic development. During this period, the entire Black Sea coast, the Laz lands and Kars were taken over by the Georgians. The most important victory of the Georgians was won against the Seljuk armies in Pasinler in 1204 (Berdzenişvili & Canaşia, 2000, pp. 153–154). During this period when architecture, agriculture and literature developed, Shota Rustaveli, one of the leading figures of Georgian literature, served in the court of Queen Tamar. From 13th to 14th century the Mongol invasions started towards Georgia and the Golden Age of Georgians was ended. During this period, Georgians were represented by some kingdoms and principalities. The most prominent of these were the Ottoman-led Kingdom of Imereti in the west, the Kingdom of Kartli in the centre, and the Kingdom of Kakheti in the east. During this period, coast of Black Sea was under the control of Ottoman-protected principalities. The northern coast between Sochi and Sukhumi was controlled by Principality of Abkhazia, the Sukhumi and Poti by Mingrelia and the southernmost area between Poti and Batumi by Gurya (Yerasimos, 1995, p. 276).

As can be understood from above, the existence of many large and small powers in the region throughout the centuries formed the basis of power struggle that will continue until today. Conflict between Russia and Georgia started in the early 19th century. Russians provided support to different groups including Georgians in region to ensure the balance of power. Especially from the beginning of the 18th century interaction between Russia and Georgia continued uninterrupted. Analyzing this interaction is important to understand the formation of Georgian national identity and Russia's effect on it. This will also help us to understand the modern conflicts in the region. Therefore, in this study it will be analyzed the Russian influence on the formation of Georgian national identity. The qualitative

methods will be used by examining books and article about Georgian history and culture. The concepts of identity, national identity, cultural nationalism will be put under the scope. The originality of the study lies in its questioning the traditional view that argues the Russian expansionism had a destructive effect on the development of Georgian national identity. This study argues that, contrary to the traditional approach, the modernization policies of the Russian Tsardom and the industrialization and localization policies of Soviet Union made significant contributions to the formation of Georgian national identity.

The study starts with the analyze of concept of identity. In the first section main approaches to the concept of identity, national identity, and cultural identity will be examined. Following the conceptual and theoretical framework the main components of the Georgian identity will be analyzed. In the third section the political history of Georgia from the beginning of 18th century to disintegration of the Russian Tsardom will be explained. This period is important to understand the interaction between Russia and Georgia. After the disintegration of the Russian Tsardom a civil war break out in Russia. During the civil war Menshevik rule from 1918 to 1921 established the independent Georgia. In the fourth and final section Bolshevization and Sovietization of Georgia will be analyzed. The impacts of Soviet policies on the formation of Georgian identity will be examined.

Conceptual framework: Identity, national identity and culture

The identity is a multidisciplinary concept used in a wide range of social sciences, from political science to psychology, from anthropology to sociology and linguistics. However, the concept's widespread use in multiple disciplines leads to a conceptual ambiguity (Buckingham, 2008, p. 1). Identity, which reveal the social nature of a person, is a set of signs, qualities and characteristics. Identities are developed by both self-definitions and perceptions of others. Although people think that they construct their identities through their own definitions, social and environmental factors can not be ignored.

Identity and self are the main components to understand the formation of group friendships and hostilities. The study of identity exists at three distinct levels which include individual identity and group identity and national identity. The nature of both intra-group and inter-group ties depends on ethnic identity which researchers can study at the individual level. Social identity shows how groups within a society interact through competition and political changes. National identity stands as a basic concept which influences violent conflicts between minorities and international conflicts (Jussim *et al.*, 2001, p. 3).

The concept of identity exists as a wide subject which researchers can study through personal and social and religious and additional contexts. In this study it is not possible and necessary to analyze every aspect of identity. Therefore, it will be focused on national identity, considering the case study. The effect of culture and cultural nationalism on the development of national identity will be also evaluated. The definition of nation requires examination before studying national identity. Ernest Gellner explains in his book "Nations and Nationalism" that nations emerge from the collective beliefs and solidarity and loyalty of their people (Gellner, 2013, p. 78). Gellner identifies two essential elements which drive the creation of national identity through the process of nation-building: will and culture. According to Gellner groups that become nations establish their identity through these two fundamental elements. Gellner explains that nations can be defined through the combination of culture and will when these elements exist together with political units under specific circumstances. By certain conditions, Gellner means the formation of a standard and central high culture that is not only for the elite but also for the entire people, the establishment of a common education system that has well-defined boundaries

and serves the high culture, and the cultural identification of the people with this system (Gellner, 2013, pp. 137–138).

Benedict Anderson, a key reference in identity studies, defines the nation in his work "Imagined Communities" as an imagined political community. Like Gellner, Anderson views the nation as an 'invented' concept, but unlike Gellner, he frames this invention as a form of 'imagination' and 'creation'. In contrast, Gellner perceives this invention as a form of 'fraud' or 'fabrication'. Anderson sees nationalism—and consequently the process of acquiring national identity—as a process of awakening for nations, while Gellner defines it as the creation of nations that never existed (Anderson, 1995, pp. 20–21).

The common culture, history, language, religion, geography and symbolic elements that individuals and groups have are effective in shaping national identity. National identity, on the one hand, shows how individuals define themselves, and on the other hand, it reveals how societies differentiate themselves from other societies. The most important concept in this differentiation process is undoubtedly the concept of the 'other'. The concept of the other unites people who differentiates themselves from other groups and creates solidarity especially during national crises. It is a reference point for self-definition processes and reveals the uniqueness of a group.

Zygmund Bauman, in his interview with Benedetto Vecchi, adopts an approach that overlaps with Anderson and Gellner in his definition of national identity. According to Bauman, the concept of national identity is not a natural phenomenon but artificially created. The emergence of identity as an idea became possible through the combination of belonging crisis and the drive to match actual conditions with the standards established by this idea (Bauman, 2017, p. 30).

According to Anthony Smith national identity represents a political community concept which exists even with minimal strength. A political community needs to have a single law that defines common institutions and rights and duties for its members in order to exist. The political community needs to maintain its existence in a defined geographical area (Smith, 2017, p. 24). Like Smith's views, Parekh also attaches importance to the strong relationship of national identity with land, unlike other types of identity (Parekh, 1995, p. 255). A person's sense of belonging to a group or community can be explained by the concept of group identity. However, this group identity can become a national identity only if there is a geographical area where the group has established a bond of belonging, a political organization in this area or at least an ideal of organization.

National identity relies on culture as its essential foundation because it unites common beliefs and values to form a collective sense of "we." Through this mechanism people recognize their membership in a community while developing feelings of connection to others. Language serves as a cultural transmission tool in this situation. National identity construction depends heavily on culture because it enables the development of historical memories and mythological narratives which unite people into collective groups (Smith, 2017, pp. 31–32).

Cultural nationalism operates as an approach to develop a nation. Political nationalism follows cultural nationalism in emergence because it works to establish political independence for national groups (Woods, 2016, p. 430). Cultural nationalism functions to advance political nationalism and national identity development. The Georgian language together with Orthodoxy function as fundamental instruments for constructing the 'other' within Georgian territories. The upcoming section evaluates how language and religion impact Georgian cultural nationalism before studying their effects on national identity formation.

National identity development depends heavily on the 'other' when analyzing local identity relations with occupying powers. When groups unite against colonial or occupying powers they begin to create new identities through their collective efforts. Identity

development extends past basic external threat identification of the other. The external power manifests itself through various forms of otherness which combine political aspects with social and cultural elements and external threat characteristics. Throughout its history Georgian territories have needed external threats to develop their identity because of continuous foreign invasions and occupations.

Formation of georgian national identity and 'others'

The Georgian kingdoms which maintained their existence under weak central authority throughout Georgian lands continued to experience strong neighboring influence (Souleimanov, 2013, p. 72). Georgian national formation together with their ethnic origins developed through their interactions with neighboring nations along with their continuous conflicts (Suny, 1996, p. 111). The conflicts taking place on Georgian lands form part of the 'Great Game' according to literary sources (Tellal, 2005, p. 65, 2010, p. 193; Kasım, 2006, p. 33; Nation, 2007, p. 3). The Eurasian territorial struggle for dominance exists in its most general form (Suny, 1996, p. 111). During the 'Great Game' Georgia maintained the position of a 'pawn' between powerful nations (Broers, 2009, p. 99; Jones, 2009, p. 93). In this case, the best concept to describe Georgian lands would be 'buffer zone' (Tabachnik, 2019, p. 225). Before Christianity, Georgian lands served as a buffer zone between the Greek civilization in the west and the Persian Empire in the east. In later periods, it played this role between Muslims and Orthodox Russia, the Sunni Ottoman Empire, and Shiite Iran, and from the 16th century onwards, between the Ottoman Empire, the Safavid State (Iran) and the Russian Empire (Mirzayeva, 2019, p. 538).

Georgia, due to its geographical location, has the status of a passageway between the East and the West (Goltz, 2009, p. 10). The demographic structure of the region has also changed considerably over time due to the effect of being a trade route for Silk Road between Europe and China. Its strategic location has also triggered the desire of many external powers to occupy the region. In this context, the cultural richness of the region can be described as both a blessing and a curse (Suchkov, 2018, p. 311). Because the Caucasus was home to many ethnic groups, including Armenians, Azerbaijanis, Abkhazians, Ossetians, Russians, Jews and Tatars, as well as Georgians.

During periods of conflict with the Muslim Dagestani groups in the region, the Kings of Georgia have at times relied on the support of Orthodox Russia. The Turkish support for Muslim populations in the region together with Safavids growth led Georgian monarchs to seek alliance from Russian Tsardom starting from the 16th century. This search resulted in the signing of the 'Oath Book Agreement' with Russian Tsardom in 1587. According to the agreement Russia became the protector of Georgia against external threats such as Ottoman and Safavid states. The agreement unsettled Georgia's Muslim neighbors, creating insecurity rather than security. The agreement caused Safavids, under Shah Abbas, to intensify their attacks on Georgia (Tsurtsumia, 2020, p. 97). Russia's inadequate military force and reluctance to provide support led Georgians to turn European monarchies, especially Spain and France. However, the European monarchies refrained from providing military aid to the Georgians, and instead, Catholic missionaries were sent to Georgian lands by the Papacy (Tsurtsumia, 2020, p. 98).

Language and religion are founder elements of the national identity in Georgia. According to the Georgian national narrative, the Georgian state is a natural phenomenon and there is always possibility of threat to the existence of this state. And this potential threat may not only be limited to the state and state institutions but also to the culture and identity. If Georgian people manage to preserve their national identity through language and religion, these threats will be meaningless (Batiashvili, 2012, p. 195). The Georgian

national narrative positions the Georgian national identity, which it interprets through language and religion, before the Georgian state and its lands. Because even though the state does not have the capacity for official governance, the Georgian identity has continued and will continue to exist on Georgian lands.

According to the Ilia Chavchavadze, the architect of the Georgian national idea, Georgian people inherited three 'treasures' from their ancestors. The first is ancestral homeland, the importance of which was emphasized above. The other two are language and faith. In Chavchavadze's eyes, ancestral homeland, which is expressed as 'Mamuli' has a special importance. Mamuli's connection to birth and motherhood, distinguishes it from 'Samshoblo', which also means homeland. Samshoblo was about being born, being a native, and being there. Mamuli was a non-passive concept that conveyed a message of national awakening (Nodia, 2009, p. 89). The land referred to by Anderson in his "Imagined Communities" represents Mamuli for Georgians. Mamuli exists in Georgian collective memory as a cultural and historical symbol. The other treasures Chavchavadze mentioned above are language and faith. The Georgian language and Orthodoxy were the fundamental elements in preserving Georgian culture for centuries despite the lack of central authority on Georgian soil.

The Georgian ancestral homeland consisted of the Kartli, Kakheti, and Imereti regions and extended beyond the borders of modern Georgia. From the 18th century onward, the Kartli and Kakheti Kingdoms emerged as forces that undermined the Iranian power in the region. They entered into conflicts with the small khanates of Yerevan, Nakhchivan, Ganja, Sheki, Karabakh and Baku, located in the lands of today's Azerbaijan and Armenia. Throughout the course of these hostilities, they largely acted in concert (Çelebi, 2020, pp. 30–31).

Another element that has been effective in the formation of Georgian identity is the Georgian language. The Georgian language stands out as one of the oldest languages in history. Georgian is one of the prominent Caucasian languages with a written tradition before the 19th century. It was developed as a written language towards the end of the 4th century AD for the spread of Christianity in the region (Sukhishvili, 2017, p. 27). The use of Georgian language as a written language to spread Christianity ensured that the language was preserved without significant change over long periods of time. Another element in the preservation of the language was that minimal changes were made in the transition from the spoken form to the written form (Lomtadze, 2021, p. 165). Linguistic homogeneity, achieved with the standardization in the 12th century, became a characteristic feature of the Georgian language (Sukhishvili, 2017, p. 28).

In the 12th century, which was seen as the Golden Age of Georgian history and in which important developments took place in many areas from economy to politics, from social life to the army, there was also a very important transformation in terms of the Georgian language. The reformist movement led by Shota Rustaveli attempted to renew the Georgian language. Rustaveli's long poem "The Knight in the Panther's Skin" is one of the publications in which this change is most clearly seen (Lomtadze, 2021, p. 168).

The standardization process of the Georgian language has disrupted by Mongol invasions in 13th century. Invasions both led to political independence loss of Georgia and created conditions for linguistic variations across different regions. Ottoman, Persian, Lezgi raids and internal conflicts that followed the Timur invasions halted the development of Georgian culture (Toumanoff, 1943, p. 162). As a result of interaction that took place during the invasions, foreign words, especially Turkish, Arabic and Persian entered the Georgian language. Orthodoxy has played an extremely important role in the formation and reproduction of Georgian identity. So much so that it is almost impossible to separate the religious discourse and the nationalist discourse in Georgia, two concepts that have

deeply influenced Georgian identity (Zedania, 2011, p. 123). From the fall of Byzantium to the transition to Russian domination, the element that distinguished Georgians from their neighbors in the lands they inhabited was their Orthodox faith (Nodia, 2009, p. 90). It has been argued that Orthodoxy, which is seen as an indispensable part of the Georgian nation-building process in the Caucasus, saved and preserved Georgian ethnic identity, language and national consciousness (Vachridze, 2012, p. 84).

Nutsa Batiashvili similarly refers to the Georgian language and Orthodoxy, which highlight the Georgian national consciousness, and points out the emphasis placed on three behavioral patterns of the Georgian nation in Georgian historiography. The first of these is the Georgians' ongoing efforts to unite the historical Georgian lands under a powerful state, as in the Golden Age. The second is the Georgians' ability to preserve their national culture and identity, despite being constantly defeated and assimilated by their external enemies. The third and last is the fact that this people, who have been subjected to external pressure throughout history, have been able to resist their enemies and preserve their culture thanks to their 'innate abilities' (Batiashvili, 2012, p. 190).

The russo-georgian divide: From georgievsk to the disintegration of the Russian tsardom

With the Treaty of Oath Book, Ottoman and Safavid attacks on Georgian territory intensified. Russian Tsardom, which assumed the protection of Georgians by this agreement was both incapable and unwilling to respond the attacks. The attacks of the Leks, a people of Western Iran origin supported by Safavid Shah Abbas, have caused heavy destruction in Georgian territory. The Georgian nation therefore turned towards the west direction (Berdzenişvili & Canaşia, 2000, p. 292). The Kingdom of Georgia in its attempt to create ties with influential European powers like Spain and France, received no military backing and was instead, subjected to Papal appointed Catholic missionaries. This situation made the Georgians to open dialogue with the Russian Empire (Tsurtsumia, 2020, pp. 97–98).

Nikita Panin, the foreign affairs minister of Catherine II once said, "Georgia needs a Russian heart and a Georgian body" (Tsurtsumia, 2020, p. 100). The Georgian territories should be administered by Georgians who represent Russia's wishes. Pavel D. Tsitsianov, as a Georgian nobleman who fits exactly this description, played an important role in consolidating the Russian Tsar's rule in Georgia. Tsitsianov confirmed Panin's statement when he said, "I was born in Russia, I was raised there and I have a Russian soul" (Gvosdev, 2000, p. 103). Georgia, which was placed in the southern border of the Russian Empire and was to keep the Ottomans and Iran from these borders, should not be given a free hand. The Treaty of Georgievsk, signed in 1783 aimed at achieving this goal.

The 'Treaty of Georgievsk' was meant to help Russia protect the Kingdom of Georgia from external attacks, especially by the Lek irregular forces and their Ottoman allies. However, the Treaty of Georgievsk was not sufficient to withstand the heavy Iranian pressure on the Georgian Kingdom. The Russians ignored King Erekle's pleas for aid against the Lek invasions (Berdzenişvili & Canaşia, 2000, p. 295). Moreover, on August 14, 1787, the Ottomans gave an ultimatum to take back the lands they had lost with the Treaty of Küçük Kaynarca in 1774. The Russian Tsardom's reply to this ultimatum on September 3, 1787, was the declaration of war. So, the Russian troops had to leave Georgia to Vladikavkaz, deep inside Russia (Gvosdev, 2000, pp. 62–63). Tbilisi which was left without any form of defense after the Russian troops' withdrawal was almost destroyed by the Safavids in 1795. Russia's actions were seen as a let down by the Georgian people which strengthened the negative view of Tsardom in Georgia and led to anti-Russian feelings in Georgian society. It became clear that Russia's true aim was to use Georgia as a steppingstone to its expansion into the South Caucasus region rather than to protect it. As a matter of fact, the first thing

the Russian Tsardom did in Georgia was to build military roads through the Caucasus Mountains (Gahrton, 2010, p. 36–37).

Turkish-Russian war in 1787, increased Georgian feelings of abandonment and betrayal toward Russia. Thus, Russian-Georgian relations began to deteriorate. In November 23, 1800, Russian Tsar Pavel I announced the annexation of Georgian Kingdom to Russia. The Georgian Kingdom officially became part of Russian Tsardom in 1801. After annexing Crimea in 1783, the Russian Tsardom turned towards the Black Sea coast after establishing its dominance in Georgia. In 1803, they took control of Mingrelia, in 1804 Imereti and Gurya, and finally in 1810, Abkhazia (Yerasimos, 1995, p. 277). In this way, they reinforced their dominance in the Caucasus with their presence in the Black Sea.

The Georgians, who were 'incorporated' into the Russian Empire, had experienced periods of unity and splendor in the past, but by the end of the 18th century they were a defeated, divided, underdeveloped and practically in danger of extinction (Suny, 1996, p. 109). The Russian Empire's political and social integration brought economic security together with fresh communication channels for Georgians who belonged to various origins while their language and national identity faced extinction. The Russian Tsardom's annexation of Georgian lands united all Georgian-speaking populations under one political rule for the first time since the 15th century. The security provided by the Russians allowed the reestablishment of the agricultural economy and the rebirth of urban life (Suny, 1988, pp. 295–296). These prepared the necessary ground for the development of national consciousness. The children of Georgian nobles received western education in St. Petersburg and Moscow.

The return of young Georgian intellectuals to Georgia in the mid-19th century was the starting point of the national awakening of Georgian nation. Among the young intellectuals led by Ilya Chavchavadze were Dmitri Kipiani, Akaki Tzereteli, Nikoloz Nikoladze, Giorgi Tzeretli, Iakob Gogebashvili. In reference to the education they received in Russia, they were called "Tergdaleulebi", meaning to drink from the water of the Terek River. The young people who studied in St. Petersburg and Moscow universities gained their first European and nationalist ideas returned to Georgia to make substantial progress in developing the Georgian national idea. The main objective of these individuals was to promote Georgian language usage in Russian-educated territories of Georgia while boosting the number of literate Georgians. To this end, in 1863, "Sakartvelos Moambe" (The Georgian Messenger) magazine was established by Alexander Chavchavadze. This was followed by the newspaper "Droeba" (Time), which began publication in 1866 under Giorgi Tsereteli. Chavchavadze also edited the "Iveria" magazine, which became a central gathering point for Georgian intellectuals (Çelebi, 2020, pp. 131–133).

The translation of the Bible from Latin into their own language was a turning point for Western European linguistic nationalisms. The new language reduced Church power in Europe which allowed local nationalistic movements to gain momentum. On the contrary, in Georgia, the Bible was translated into Georgian centuries ago and religious services have been provided in Georgian for a long time. This situation gave the Georgian Orthodox Church (GOC) a special uniqueness. The Russian annexation dealt a heavy blow to the status of the Church in Georgia. GOC lost its autocephalous status when it was incorporated into the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC). The Russian authorities banned the use of Georgian language in religious services and church activities, so worship services began using Russian.

The Georgian nationalist intellectuals Ilia Chavchavadze together with Dimitri Bakradze and Akaki Tsereteli and Iakob Gogebashvili worked to restore the Georgian language which had suffered suppression during Russian church rule. The main goal of these intellectuals was to establish Georgian language as the leading language for secular literature. The

intellectuals founded the "Society for the Spread of Literacy among Georgians" in 1789 to achieve their goal. The society functioned as both a literacy growth platform and a national emergence training center for Georgians. The institution operated without traditional educational functions. It was an institution where the foundations of the Georgian nation were laid and gradually developed (Tevzadze, 2009, p. 12).

The military operations of Russian Empire in the North Caucasus in the mid-19th century soon spilled over to the South Caucasus. Military and political pressure on Georgians were raising but this pressure was also developing the Georgian national consciousness. The national consciousness in Georgia became institutionalized in the late 19th century. Loyalty to regions, religion or feudal lords has been replaced by national consciousness (Suny, 1996, p. 110). Although Russian administrators serving in Georgia attempted to eliminate the country's unique social and cultural characteristics, they were unsuccessful. Such assimilation efforts only served to increase Georgian nationalism. As mentioned above, the initiatives of Georgian intellectuals were undoubtedly influential in this increase in awareness among the local people. During the dominance that the ROC tried to establish over Georgian Orthodoxy from 1811 onwards, the Georgian language became a field of protection for the identity of the Georgian people under the leadership of the young intellectuals (De Waal, 2010, p. 34). Russia's policy of repression on the language had the opposite effect, and the Georgian language became one of the pillars of national identity.

Russia's suppressive measures and cultural assimilation policies were accompanied by modernization initiatives. As a result, Georgia under the Tsarist rule experienced improvements in trade and industry. This was an important development in terms of economic and political integration in Georgia. Mikhail Vorontsov, the Russian Governor-General of the Caucasus from 1844 to 1854, sometimes resorted to rewards and sometimes to pressure to recruit Georgian nobles into the service of Tsardom. Russia abolished the privileges of the Georgian nobility, although this caused social unrest. Unable to fight the Russian Tsardom, Georgian nobles eventually became the loyal servants of Russia. In the last quarter of the 19th century, when serfdom was abolished, the urbanizing Armenian middle class posed both an economic and cultural challenge to the Georgian noble class (Suny, 1979, p. 72). The underlying reason for this challenge was that the Georgian nobles, who could not keep up with the modernization and capitalist transformation that took place in the regions under the control of the Russian Tsar since the 1850s, sold their lands to the Armenian bourgeoisie. The growing Russian control over Georgian territory enabled the Armenian business class to gain more power (Çelebi, 2020, pp. 131–133). The modernization period brought construction of roads, bridges, factories and housing to Georgia, but development extended beyond infrastructure development. The city of Tbilisi started performing Russian theater productions and opera performances. The first library together with bookstore in Tbilisi became operational during this time (Tsurtsumia, 2020, p. 103). The economy visibly improved in the Georgian territories where the bourgeoisie began to emerge. As a result of legal reforms implemented in 1865, village councils were established, with headmen and members elected, and a tax and civil service system was put in place (Çelebi, 2020, p. 131).

The increasing interest of Europeans in Baku's oil in the 1870s brought the Batumi Port to the forefront as an international trade center. The construction of a railway line between Tbilisi and Baku at the same time also increased interest in Georgian lands (Seferov, 2005, p. 288). With the political movements that started in Russia in the 1880s and the problems that Tsarist Russia experienced in suppressing these movements, it was seen that Russian pressure in the Caucasus decreased somewhat. The moderate attitude of the Russian central administration in the Caucasus towards the education of local languages paved the way for the development of national consciousness among Georgians. Especially

organized university students were acquiring Georgian publications and trying to organize a national movement through these publications. In 1886, one of these students, theology student Yoseb Laghiashvili, was caught with a handwritten journal called "Kvalili", and his scholarship was cut off and his education was prevented (Çelebi, 2020, p. 146). Laghiashvili stabbed to death the Russian rector of the Tiflis Theological School where he studied, which was a development that increased national consciousness and accelerated political organization among Georgians (Tsurtsumia, 2020, p. 104).

Menshevism and sovietization of georgia

The Russian Tsardom transitioned into a new era because anti-regime movements together with political uprisings gained strength and expanded throughout the empire during the early 20th century. The movements and anti-Tsarist activities established Georgia as their most influential and important headquarter. Different groups initiated their activities before the end of the 19th century under the slogans "Georgian Independence Union" and "Independent Georgia" (Çelebi, 2020, p. 147).

The Second Congress of the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party created a division between Russian communists through the leadership of Vladimir Lenin as "Bolshevisk" majority and Julius Martov as "Menshevisk" minority from July 30 to August 23, 1903. The research omits the information about this division together with the distinction between their approaches. The Mensheviks believed socialism would emerge through capitalist development, yet the Bolsheviks rejected all bourgeois institutions by supporting a complete revolutionary transformation of the system. The Mensheviks opposed the Bolsheviks because they believed their approach would cause civil war according to Tellal (2017). The division in Georgian lands led to socialists in Georgia choosing the Menshevik path as their preferred choice. The extensive impact of Noe Jordania as a Georgian intellectual during this period was undeniable. Bolshevism proved unsuccessful in both Georgian territory and the entire South Caucasus region. The Menshevik social democratic groups held the most significant influence throughout the region (Çelebi, 2020, p. 149). The transformation of Georgian national identity developed along the Bolshevism-Menshevism axis during this period.

The Georgian Menshevik movement displayed several defining features that distinguished it from other movements. Menshevism spread across a broad social base including intellectuals together with workers and peasants throughout Georgia. The Russian Menshevik movement cut ties with Tbilisi because their Georgian comrades went so far as to ask Western imperial powers for help against Bolshevism (Ascher, 1992, p. 48). Tbilisi witnessed the formation of a Menshevik movement which focused on fighting Bolshevism by collaborating with German and British forces. This movement would soon seize power.

Georgia entered a new stage of national development after the establishment of the Democratic Republic on May 26, 1918, as the Menshevik movement rose to power. The independence experience from 1918 to 1921 activated nationalist feelings throughout Georgia according to Targamadze (2018 p. 139). Starting from this period Georgian nationalism began to form using anti-Ossetian sentiments in Georgian literary works. The Georgian novel "Jako's Tenants" from 1924 presents Jako as an ambitious plundering Ossetian landlord who stole both property and the wife of Georgian feudal aristocrat prince Teimuraz Khevistavi during the revolutionary period (Targamadze, 2018, p. 140). Through these works an exclusionary nation-building process occurred which led to the marginalization of minority groups within Georgia particularly the Abkhazians and Ossetians.

Jordania who led the Menshevik movement in Georgia used Marx's teachings to explain how the bourgeoisie functioned as a bridge between feudalism and socialism. The

bourgeoisie recognized the need for a transitional phase. The Menshevik government which represented the working class maintained opposition to imposing severe costs on both the middle class and the former nobility. It tried to provide the necessary conditions for the creation of a national bourgeoisie (Lang, 1962, p. 211). In this respect, the Menshevik administration sharply differed from the Bolsheviks, who saw the bourgeoisie as the 'enemy' of the working class.

Under the Menshevik government Christian figures were brought to the fore. The revolutionary red flag replaced by the emblem of St. George. The Georgian language was made the official language while the use of Russian was restricted. The Bolsheviks strongly condemned the Georgian Mensheviks by labeling them as 'rabid reactionaries'. Bolsheviks accused them as being pawns of German and British imperialism. As Lang has strikingly stated, few regimes have been as intensely criticized as the Mensheviks ruled the Georgia between 1918 and 1921 (1962, p. 210). The Mensheviks' rule in Tbilisi did not last long under these attacks, and on February 25, 1921, the Red Army captured Tbilisi.

After the capture of Tbilisi by the Red Army, the Mensheviks were forced to flee from the country. By the initiatives of the French Prime Minister Aristide Briand, Georgian Mensheviks could escape through the Black Sea on French ships and arrive in France. This development caused that the Georgian national identity evolved in two ways. The first, as Kekelia (2023 p. 258) also stated, was conducted by the immigrant/exiled Georgian Mensheviks who constructed a national identity through a victory narrative based on occupation and tragedy. On the other hand, the Soviet Georgians declared their unique status through separation from every ethnic group within Soviet Georgia. The Georgians maintained their claim of being unique from all other ethnic groups throughout both the Soviet and post-Soviet times during domestic ethnic conflicts in the country.

The Bolshevik leader Vladimir Ilyich Lenin acknowledged Georgia's distinct form. After the Red Army captured Tbilisi Sergo Ordzhonikidze received a telegram from Lenin which advised him to give special benefits to Georgian intellectuals and small traders and to find acceptable terms with Menshevik Georgians and to select Georgian-specific tactics instead of Russian-style Bolshevization methods (Blank, 1990, p. 55). Lenin was aware of the complex cultural and religious diversity of the Georgia and planned a moderate socialist transformation. He sent a telegram to Ordzhonikidze to ensure this smooth transition. But Ordzhonikidze and Stalin had already turned to radical 'Russian-style' policies (Suny, 1988, p. 212). The Tbilisi-based Bolshevik administration disagreed with the Baku-based Caucasus Bureau (Kavburo) of the Communist Party about how Georgia should become Sovietized.

The Red Army's invasion of Russian cities resulted in the creation of Soviet republic capitals which removed regional leadership but simultaneously boosted local nationalist movements. The Bolshevism gained control of Georgia through the localization (korenizatsiya) policy of April 1923 even though it had minimal presence in other regions. The aim of the policy protection national cultural identity and by this way creating a new social system. This policy allowed the Bolsheviks to achieve two goals: to create a voluntary national state model and to fill the gap in bureaucrats to govern the union republics (Jones, 1988, p. 616). So even it was under Moscow's control, the Union republics maintained their independence. The nation-building initiatives of the Union republics emerged directly from this political situation. The Georgianization approach became prevalent in education and art alongside the promotion of Georgian language and culture during this time.

The People's Commissar of Nationalities Stalin introduced this policy because he fought against Great Russian chauvinism and local nationalism. According to Stalin Great Russian chauvinism alongside local nationalism toward Russians and local chauvinism toward non-Russian neighbors represented the biggest threat to Soviet nation-to-nation relations.

According to Stalin schools together with local administration and the party needed to become 'national' to combat this danger. The nationalization concept in this context followed a Soviet-based framework. The method focused on eliminating nationalist movements based on ethnicity.

The localization policy operated alongside the development of an administrative system which incorporated a leading (titular) nation within each Soviet republic. This system had an ethno-federal structure. Thus, nations could maintain their unique language and cultural practices within designated areas. Iosif Vareikis and Isak Zelensky stated in their book named 'National State Borders of Central Asia' (1924) that this model was like a communal office with various administrative divisions representing different rooms. The host Moscow adopted an approach which supported these divisions instead of working to eliminate them (Slezkine, 1994, p. 415). The administrative structure enabled Bolshevism to take control in Georgia during Sovietization because of its establishment.

The Sovietization process in Georgia started in 1920 while the country experienced both economic recovery and stability as well as economic expansion. The Red Army's entry into Tbilisi showed that Georgia suffered from a critical lack of food and money throughout the entire nation. The Bolsheviks first nationalized all private property and banned property acquisition or leasing. The properties of the GOC were also nationalized. All direct land taxes were abolished and complete tax exemption to peasants were granted (Suny, 1988, p. 225). This policy was a foundation for the future development of agricultural and industrial sectors.

The Soviet government supported both economic growth and stability through its concessions which promoted Georgian national culture and language. The Soviet government constructed educational facilities to develop Georgian national heritage while supporting Georgian language publications and funding Georgian opera and theater and film productions (Suny, 1988, p. 233). The first decade of Soviet Georgia saw half a million people acquire reading and writing skills. The communist government provided extensive literacy and social enlightenment programs to all Soviet republics (Parsons, 1982, p. 551). The language development of Georgia received substantial backing from these initiatives which laid the groundwork for national consciousness to emerge.

The Soviet republic of Georgia maintained the strongest protection of its language throughout all Soviet republics. The Soviet administration allowed Georgians to use their alphabet officially together with Armenians which became the main reason for this policy. The Georgian language escaped Russification because of Soviet administration policies (Vihavainen, 2018, p. 91). Research from 1979 showed that 99.5% of Georgians in Georgia spoke Georgian as their native language but only 25.5% of the population demonstrated fluency in Russian as a second language. The Soviet Georgian language policy established Georgian as the leading educational language throughout the nation because Russian and Armenian schools comprised less than 10% of all schools (Parsons, 1982, p. 556). The population statistics of Georgia influenced this development. The Georgians represented the smallest ethnic group beyond the Union Republic territory which made their diaspora ineffective (De Waal, 2010, p. 31). But at the same time, this ineffectiveness protected the Georgian culture from external influences. On the other hand, Georgians came important positions in the Soviet Union and occupied administrative positions. Undoubtedly the well-known example was Joseph Stalin. But the famous Politburo members Sergo Ordzhonikidze and Anastas Mikoyan were also Georgian.

The Soviet modernization policy in Georgia followed the pattern of transforming peasants into Georgians as described in Eugene Weber's book "Peasants into Frenchmen". Weber examines the political and social and cultural development of the French population throughout the 19th and 20th centuries in his outstanding research (Weber, 1976). According to Weber peasants became integrated into French culture and state institutions

after the French Revolution while the Bolshevik and Soviet rule in Georgia established national identity for the mostly illiterate rural population. In particularly, under the Stalin's rule the policy of rapid industrialization caused urbanization and modernization in Georgia. Many infrastructure and superstructure investments were made in Georgia, including schools, factories, airports, and hydroelectric power plants. Thanks to the latter, electricity production in Georgia rose from 20 million kilowatt-hours in 1913 to 2,5 billion kilowatt-hours in 1957. The scientific and academic sectors experienced major advancements during this period. Scientists from the Georgian Academy of Sciences participated in international meetings and conferences that took place in major European cities. It became possible for Georgian science and academia to integrate with international academia (Lang, 1962, pp. 266–267). The developments in industry, urbanization, academia, and science inevitably contributed to the evolution of national identity.

First Bolshevization and then Sovietization, which is a troubled times for most of the Georgian people, created the 'most Georgian Georgia' throughout the history. Localization policy of Soviet Union developed the Georgian culture on Georgian territory. Moreover, in the Soviet ethno-federal administrative system Georgians became titular nation and have chance to control other ethnic groups in Georgian lands. The economic growth and parallel cultural development that took place in Georgia, which had the smallest urban population in the Caucasus and even among all Soviet republics (Suny, 1988, p. 297), allowed the consolidation of Georgian national identity and the construction of an identity, especially through language.

Conclusion

The multicultural and multi-ethnic structure of the Caucasus with complex political and social context have made Georgia a natural target for occupations and invasions of regional powers. Despite these negatives, they had a positive impact on the development of national identity. Although they were seen as 'pawns' between the Ottomans, Russia and Iran, they have managed to pass on their language and religion to the next generations.

In Georgia, which was annexed by the Russian Tsar in 1800 and lost its independence, the contributions of the Tsarist administration to the development of Georgian national consciousness are undeniable. The Georgian nobles were appointed to important positions in the Tsarist administration in Georgia. Their children received western-style higher education in major Russian cities. During this period, nationalist movements were on the rise in Europe and spreading to the other regions. Georgian students in Russian universities were inspired from these movements. They were the representatives of the national awakening in Georgia. The Georgian youth who returned from their education established vital tasks for activating Georgian national consciousness. According to Ernest Gellner in his work "Nations and Nationalism" nations exist only during the time of nationalism (Gellner, 2013, p. 137). The modernization processes which started their acceleration during the Russian Tsardom's rule from the mid-19th century established the necessary conditions for the start of nationalist times in the Tsarist territories.

The Russian Civil War and the resulting Bolshevik Revolution were extremely influential in the formation of Georgian national identity. Unlike the other parts which separated from the Russian Tsardom, the Mensheviks took the control in Georgia. The Mensheviks governed the Georgia with a socialist understanding that included social democracy. This approach distinguished them from the Bolsheviks. The Menshevik understanding enabled the conditions which allowed nationalism and national identity to improve.

Following the short-lived rule of Mensheviks, the Red Army entered into Tblisi and the Bolshevization and then Sovietization of Georgia began rapidly. With the Soviet Union's

policy of localization (korenizatsiya), the dominant ethnic groups within the Soviet republics, called titular nations, had the opportunity to develop their languages and cultures in a way that would dominate other groups. Georgia was not an exception. Through the Soviet ethno-federal system Georgians obtained governance of their territory which encompassed multiple ethnic populations. The Soviet control system created identity crises and ethnic conflicts which evolved into international problems after the Soviet collapse primarily affecting the Abkhazians and Ossetians.

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There is only one author.

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Author contribution

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