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Tbilisi as a Center of Crosscultural Interactions (The 19th– early 20thCenturies)

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The city of Tbilisi – the capital of Georgia, during its long period of existence, has been an interesting place of meeting and interaction of different cultures. In this context, the present paper deals with one of the most interesting periods in the history of the city. From the beginning of the 19th century, when the establishment of the Russian imperial rule started in the Caucasus, Tbilisi became an official political center of the region; political and economic changes, occurring during the second half of the 19th century, significantly influenced ethnic and religious composition of Tbilisi, its cultural lifetime and mode of life in general.

For centuries-long period, Tbilisi, like other big cities (how much big does not matter in this case), was not only the *Georgian* city in ethnic terms; but also, it represented a blend of different religious and ethnic groups. Not only in a distant past, but just a couple of decades ago, when the phenomenon of the so called ‘city yards’ (which are often called as ‘Italian yards’ and which have almost disappeared from the city landscape) still existed in Tbilisi, their residents spoke several languages fluently. Ethnically and religiously mixed families were not rare. Such type of cities, termed as *Cosmo-policies* by some researchers, has an ability to transform a visitor, at least temporarily, into a member of “in-group”, in our case – into *Tbilisian*. This happens without any integration politics, through the inherent force of integration owned by these cities.¹Tbilisi managed to melt and transform external influences into its peculiar feature – “Tbilisian mode of life”, to be termed as “Tbilisian subculture”.² It has been remained as a city of Georgia, and could be called as the Georgian city at the same time, even at those periods when ethnic Georgians were not in a majority

¹ Zaal Andronikashvili, *Tbilisi – Cosmopolis* (Tbilisi, Edition of the Institute of Tolerance and Diversity, 2015), 227.

² Revaz Gachechiladze, R. “Tbilisi at the Beginning of the 20th Century”. *Tbilisi in the Era of Changes. Sociocultural Dimensions of Urban Space and City Planning* (Tbilisi, Tbilisi University Press, 2010),77.

of the city population.³ For centuries long period, including the 19th century, Tbilisi was the only “city”⁴ for Georgians and it was simply called as the *city*.⁵

Tbilisi was a political and cultural center not only for Georgians, but for Azerbaijanis, Armenians and other Caucasian people as well. A group of scientists refers to the cultural reality of Tbilisi as *multicultural cosmopolitanism*.⁶

The paper aims to track the process of transformation and change of this “*multicultural cosmopolitanism*” across the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century.

The historical context

Beginning from 1801, when the Georgian kingdom of Kartl-Kakheti was abolished, the Russian Empire incorporated all Georgian kingdoms and principalities within its borders. The process lasted up to the 1860s. During this period, the Georgian society substantially changed. New loyalties to the new rulers were formed among the Georgian nobles, part of which passed through anti-tsarist rebellions and plots in the first decades of the 19th century. The failed conspiracy of 1832 deeply affected their national feelings. Many Georgian noblemen entered the state or military service of the Tsarist Empire and “found a comfortable accommodation with the Russian rule”.⁷

Russian administration “encouraged aristocratic patriotism and limited the autonomy of local nobles” at the same time; dismissed from their traditional posts, the nobles were invited to enter the state service. On the one hand, this policy should make Caucasian administration more effective through recruiting loyal persons with the knowledge of local languages and peculiarities; on the other hand, this would ensure direct and strict subordination of the former authorities to the central power.⁸

³ Jozeph Salukvadze, “Tbilisi at the Crossroad of History and Cultures”. *Tbilisi in the Era of Changes. Sociocultural Dimensions of Urban Space and City Planning*. Tbilisi (Tbilisi University Press, 2010), 11.

⁴ Revaz Gachechiladze, “Tbilisi at the Beginning of the 20th Century”, 10.

⁵ Ronald G. Suny, “Tbilisi in the Russian Empire: On the Ethnic, Social and Class Composition of the Population”. *Tbilisi in the Era of Changes. Sociocultural Dimensions of Urban Space and City Planning* (Tbilisi, Tbilisi University Press, 2010), 43.

⁶ Ibid., 40.

⁷ Stephen F. Jones, *Socialism in Georgian Colors. The European Road to Social Democracy, 1883-1917* (Harvard University Press, 2005), 6.

⁸ Ronald G. Suny, *The Making of the Georgian Nation* (Indiana University Press, Hoover Institution Press, 1988), 68.

In the first half of the 19th century, numerous features of the earlier times were still maintained in the city life of Tbilisi. Traders and artisans were organized into guilds; together with them, citizens (*mokalakeni*) and city nobles represented the main social estates of Tbilisi;⁹ the first two groups were diverse in terms of ethnicity and religion. Appearance of the Russian army and administration significantly increased the demand on various goods, primarily on agricultural products and craft industry. The number of Russian and European artisans rised; consumers of their production were citizens who adhered to the European way of life and gradually emerged to the front stage of the city life.¹⁰

In 1821-1865, the population of Tbilisi increased from 15.374 to 67.770, comprising 5,6 per cent of the total population of Georgia;¹¹ according to the statistical information, it happened mainly at the expense of influx of peasants from the Eastern Georgia. Apart from this, workforce arrived from different parts of Transcaucasia and Persia, joined by Russian migrants from inner provinces of the Tsarist Empire.¹² The territory of Tbilisi was extended, incorporating its suburbs. New style constructions – houses and administrative buildings – appeared. The problem of planning of the city development became actual.¹³ Although, even after half a century of the Russian rule, Tbilisi life did not change much.

Period of the rule of Viceroy Michael Vorontsov (1845-1854) became a turning point in this respect. As Stephen Jones notes, “Vorontsov, an intelligent administrator, “Europeanized” Georgian civil life... The empire promised stability, protection, power and civilization, whether it was in the form of ballrooms or books... Chastened ex-conspirators appreciated these gains.”¹⁴

Vorontsov started implementing a long-term plan of the development of Tbilisi. The city became more comfortable, with apparent elements of the European style. Wealthy citizens travelled by carriages; national dresses were substituted with the European fashion, old wooden furniture – with the soft one, *chianure* and *zurna* (national and oriental musical instruments) – with piano and grand piano.¹⁵

⁹ *Essays in the History of Georgia*, volume 5 (Tbilisi, Publishing House “Sabchota sakartvelo”, 1970), 107.

¹⁰ Shota Meskhia, David Gvritishvili, Mamia Dumbadze, Akaki Surguladze, *History of Tbilisi* (Tbilisi, “Sakhelmipo gamomcemloba”, 1958), 385-386, 401.

¹¹ *Essays in the History of Georgia*, volume 5 (Tbilisi, “Sabchotas akartvelo”, 1970), 109-110.

¹² *Ibid.*, 112-113.

¹³ Shota Meskhia et al., *History of Tbilisi*, 396.

¹⁴ Stephen F. Jones, *Socialism in Georgian Colors. The European Road to Social Democracy, 1883-1917*, 8.

¹⁵ Shota Meskhia et al., *History of Tbilisi*, 409.

In the same period, Caucasian educational district was created; new schools – from elementary to pro-gymnasia – were opened. Beginning from 1849, statute granted 160 stipends per annum were delivered to the Caucasian students to study at the universities of Russia. Official newspapers were issued, library and Russian theatre established. Although these efforts were aimed at spreading the Russian language and strengthening Russia's influence, they have indirectly contributed much to the advancement of cultural level of the city life. Some old suburbs were incorporated in the city, new houses of nobles and rich merchants as well as public buildings were constructed.

After the agrarian and subsequent reforms of the 1860s, important changes took place in the economic life of Georgia. An increasing economic link between different parts of the country ended previous isolation and created foundations for the emergence of common national self-consciousness. A railway, first line of which (Tiflis-Poti) was completed in 1872, linked Western and Eastern parts of Georgia. In 1877, Kutaisi joined this line, and in 1883, Batumi was linked to the Caucasian railway network. It was a fact of great importance: migration became active between different parts of Georgia; isolated Georgian villages, once largely self-sufficient and only distantly related to towns, came in relation to each other.¹⁶

A portion of Georgian nobility failed to meet the new challenges and their economic and political positions rapidly declined. Looking for the better life, they migrated to cities, especially to Tiflis/Tbilisi, entered state service or tried to join public life of the capital. Their estates passed into the hands of rich merchants or wealthy peasants. Together with nobility, a portion of peasants who got freedom as a result of Agrarian Reform of 1864 also moved to the cities in order to solve economic problems they were facing under the new reality. In the cities, Georgians - representatives of various classes - came face to face with a well-entrenched, financially secure, urban middle class, which was not ethnically homogenous; they spoke different languages, went to different churches, and held different values. Cultural and linguistic differences reinforced social distinctions between the classes.¹⁷

In 1886-1897, population of Tbilisi (Tiflis) increased by 103 percent; it became a predominantly migrant city: in 1897, only 43.7 percent of its residents were born and brought up here.¹⁸ The percentage of different ethnic groups in the total population of the city gradually leveled, but the economic and political positions of ethnic

¹⁶ Ronald G. Suny, *The Making of the Georgian Nation*, 122.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 116.

¹⁸ Stephen F. Jones, *Socialism in Georgian Colors. The European Road to Social Democracy, 1883-1917*, 25.

Georgians still were not strong.¹⁹ Russians dominated in the sphere of city's administration, whereas Armenian bourgeoisie held leading positions in the field of economy and strived to take control over the management of the city.²⁰

As Stephen Jones notes, the modernizing Russian Empire helped to create conditions for Georgian national development: local intellectuals, an increasingly literate Georgian public, urbanization, improved communications between town and village; contacts with Europe contributed much to this process.²¹

Romance of Asia and Europe

By the beginning of the 19th century, the life of Tbilisi city was punctuated by holidays, festivals and public games, which continually interrupted the rhythm of the workweek;²² it had little to offer but card games, wrestling and drinking. In several decades, "From an "Asian" backwater ... Tiflis was transformed into a city where Georgian nobles could read European newspapers, mingle with Russian literary, and show off their wives in the latest French fashions."²³ Thus, already at the end of the 1850s, the Asiatic rust was removed from the Georgian Soul.²⁴

Two American missionaries, who traveled in Georgia in 1830, were impressed by the diversity of the population of Tbilisi who spoke different languages, wore different clothes and represented different nationalities: Russians, Armenians coming from the Ottoman Empire, Georgian and Armenian clergies, Armenian merchants of various cities, Georgian peasants, Laks, Persians, Circassians.²⁵

Alexander Duma who visited Georgia at the end of the 1850s, had described the Asian part of the city: "The main caravanserai in Tbilisi is built by the Armenian... It is occupied by all representatives of the Eastern world: Turks, Armenians, Persians, Arabs, Indians, Chinese, Kalmyks, Turkmens, Tatars, Circassians, Georgians, Siberians, and only God knows the full list of these peoples! All of them have their own appearance, dress, weapon, peculiar character and physiognomy. Entire network of trade routes and streets of the city, different from its aristocratic

¹⁹ Ronald G. Suny, *The Making of the Georgian Nation*, 116.

²⁰ *Essays in the History of Georgia*, volume 5, 700.

²¹ Stephen F. Jones, "Georgia: The Long Battle for Independence". *M. Rezum (ed.), Nationalism and the Breakup of an Empire: Russia and its Periphery* (Praeger Press, Westport, 1992), 80.

²² Ronald G. Suny, *The Making of the Georgian Nation*, 90-91.

²³ Stephen F. Jones, *Socialism in Georgian Colors. The European Road to Social Democracy, 1883-1917*, 6.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 33.

²⁵ Ronald G. Suny, "Tbilisi in the Russian Empire: On the Ethnic, Social and Class Composition of the Population", 42.

part, merges at the caravanserai. Each of this street has its own “specialization;” I do not know their Georgian titles, whether they have Georgian names at all, but I’d call them as streets of silver, merchant of weapons, traders of vegetables, dressmakers, shoe-makers and that of hatters ... There is nothing more interesting than walking in these streets; foreigner could hardly be tired of this adventure.”²⁶

As it was mentioned previously, the city was gradually enlarged in the 19th century, and the European style came into its architecture; although it maintained its Eastern nature. “Meidan, located in the Eastern part of the city, market, guilds – all were of Iranian origins; the newly constructed railways and districts of workers located at the Western part of the city resembled that of traditional industrial city of Europe.”²⁷

Out of those buildings, which have not lived through present times but played a crucial role in the city life for a long period, was a bridge connecting the left and right banks of the river Mtkvari from the 15th century onwards. It was called the Kakheti Bridge. The bridge was destroyed with time and was rebuilt only in 1851 by the Russian officials Gagemeister and Rais. They imposed tax for those who would use the bridge. After a year, a citizen of Tbilisi, trader Ivane Mnatsakanov paid 25 thousand rubles for the bridge and hand it over to the city. As a result, the imposed tax was abolished. Afterwards, the bridge and adjacent street were called as Mnatsakanov’s bridge and rise. After 30 years, the wooden construction of the bridge was changed with the iron one, whereas in 1950s, after the total reconstruction of that area of the city, the bridge was destroyed.²⁸

On the present-day territory of Tbilisi Botanical Garden, there was a Muslim cemetery named as Gorkhana (which means *a house of grave* in Persian). During the Soviet time, most part of the cemetery was levelled off by tractors and nearby Mosque was demolished as well. Only couple of graves of renowned persons were maintained; later on, a status of pantheon was granted to them. These are the graves of Mirza Shafi Vazeh, Mirza Fatali Akhundov, one of the founding fathers and the prime minister of the Democratic Republic of Azerbaijan Fatali Khan Khoisel (Khoyski) and couple of other personalities.²⁹ In 2006, the Heydar Aliyev Foundation renovated gravestones and surroundings of the burial places of the above-mentioned

²⁶ Alexander Dumas, *The Caucasus* (Tbilisi, Publishing house “Merani”, 1988), 168.

²⁷ Ronald G. Suny, “Tbilisi in the Russian Empire: On the Ethnic, Social and Class Composition of the Population”, 43.

²⁸ Alexandre Elisashvili, *How Tbilisi has been Changed* (Tbilisi, Bakur Sulakauri Publishing House, 2013), 11.

²⁹ Ibid., 17.

as well as some other outstanding Azerbaijani public figures buried in the Pantheon.³⁰ Today the pantheon is well maintained.

In the Sololaki district of the city, at the crossroad of modern-day Tchonkhadze and Gergeti streets, from the second half of the 19th century until the 1920s, the Catholic cemetery was located, together with a small church and church tower. They were placed in the middle of the territory, which was a property of St. Rosaria Brotherhood and was under the subjugation of the Roman-Catholic Church of Tbilisi, named after the Dormition of Virgin Mary. The Georgian Catholics – families of Andronikashvili, Zubalashvili, Tumanishvili, Djakeli, Chikovani, Mizandari, etc. had family graves at the cemetery. There was a marvelous garden of roses brought from India and Shiraz by the English military engineer, colonel-lieutenant Monsini. In the 1920s, Bolsheviks abolished the cemetery and replaced it with residence buildings and other functionary constructions.³¹

There was Shia Mosque close to the Metekhi Bridge, built by the Shah of Persia Ismail, although Tbilisians called it as Shah-Abas Mosque or Blue Mosque (due to incrustation of dome and Minaret). In 1950-1951, under the pretext of reconstruction of the Metekhi Bridge, the Mosque was destroyed; nowadays only remnants of the blue incrustations are preserved at the National Art Museum of Georgia; the wooden pulpit from the Shia Mosque – Mimbar – is maintained as well.³² Today only a Sunni Mosque remains in Tbilisi, where Sunni and Shia Muslims pray together.

European architects designed and constructed public buildings; most of them define the image of the city until present times. In 1835, under the order of Jacob Zubalashvili, Swiss architect Bernadotte constructed “Palace Hotel,” which was of classicist style being popular in those-days Russia. Firstly, the building housed a hotel. In 1840, it was purchased by the Exarchate, and Spiritual Seminary was placed there. Until 1905, the seminary remained in this building. In 1917, the building was restored to its primary function and “Hotel Palace” was placed there again; the hotel continued functioning after the establishment of the Soviet rule in 1921 until 1950. Then the building was reconstructed and from 1952, the Art Museum of Georgia named after Shalva Amiranashvili is placed there.³³

³⁰ Restoration of grave monuments to eminent persons of Azerbaijan in Tbilisi. <http://heydar-aliyev-foundation.org/en/content/view> (accessed 24.09.2016).

³¹ Alexandre Elisashvili, *How Tbilisi has been Changed*, 65.

³² Ibid., 21.

³³ About the Theological Seminary. Laboratory for the study of the Soviet past. <http://sovlab.ge/ka/node/362> (accessed 24.09.2016).

From the beginning of the 19th century, on the Freedom Square, at the place of the modern-day City Council, the two-storied building of Polizeimeister was located. Later on, the fire tower was built on it. In 1882-1886, under the initiative of the mayor of the city Alexander Matinov and according to the project of the architect Alexander Ozerov, the building went through full restoration. One more store was added to it and the fire tower was transformed into the city hall tower. From 1884, the main clock of the city is placed there. The building was reconstructed, and different segments were added, making it into the present-day image.³⁴

In 1840s, the Viceroy Mikhail Vorontsov came with the initiative of building Italian opera in Tbilisi, in the middle of the modern-day Freedom Square. Three-storied caravanserai would be built; opera would be placed on the second and third floors, whereas the first floor would be occupied by shops. Vorontsov referred to the merchants of Tbilisi to support the construction of opera, however, the only person - a merchant Tamamshev responded. He fully financed the construction of the building. It was built in 1847-1851 by an Italian architect Jovani Scudieri; the curtain was painted by the famous Russian painter Gagarin. The opera house was impressive and caught an eye of by-passers. Italian opera became common for the Tbilisi public; even children in Tbilisi yards sang Italian melodies.³⁵ Opera house became the place of expression of national feelings. In 1867, the students of classical gymnasium waved Georgian royal flag in one of its pits. For some time, the Russian administration prohibited to play Italian opera and substituted it with the Russian one. Although, later on, it had to bring back the Italians. In October 1874, when performance "Norma" was played at the Opera, fire was set at one of the shops of the building and the entire construction was burned. Nowadays, those time basements of the Opera are located under the pavement of the Freedom Square.³⁶

In 1895, German architect Paul Stern, under the order of Prince Oldenburg, built a palace on the territory of the German colonists. Presently, it is the house of Museum of Theater, Music, Cinema and Choreography.

The Polish architect Alexander Shimkevich, who in 1885-1891 was the chief architect of Tbilisi and was elected as a deputy of the city for several times, constructed the building of court in 1894. In 1905-1906, he taught architecture and painting at the Tbilisi School of Arts. Nowadays, those times building of court is a seat of the Supreme Court of Georgia.

³⁴ Alexandre Elisashvili, *How Tbilisi has been Changed*, 72.

³⁵ Shota Meskhia et al., *History of Tbilisi*, 441.

³⁶ Ibid., 77.

Shimkevich is the author of project of the building of “Artistic Society,” elaborated together with the chief engineer of the province Korneli Tatishchev. It was built in 1898-1901, with the financial support of the trading house “Isaya Pitoev and Company”. From the period of the Democratic Republic of Georgia, the building became the house of the Shota Rustaveli Theater.³⁷

In 1892, in the so-called “New Garden” (at the modern-day Freedom Square) opening of the monument of Alexander Pushkin was celebrated. Niko Nikoladze, representative of the second generation of *Tergdaleuli* movement, came with the initiative to raise funds for the construction of the monument and for granting his name to the street where the Russian poet lived during his stay in Tbilisi. The monument was made by the Polish sculptor Felix Khodorovich; pedestal was made by Italian mason Vinchentso Pileji, who lived in Tbilisi at those times. Nowadays, the monument of Pushkin is the oldest monument in Tbilisi (the earlier one was the monument of Mikhail Vornotsov, erected in 1867 and later on demolished by Bolsheviks).³⁸

In 1910, opening of a hospital was celebrated in Tbilisi, which was financed by Armenian merchant Mikhail Aramyants. The hospital is still called as Aramyants Hispoital. Aramyants also financed construction of the hotel “Majestic.” Its building was started in 1911 according to the project done by the Russian architect Alexander Ozerov, who was working in Tbilisi at that time, and was completed in 1915 according to the project of Tbilisian architect Gabriel Ter-Melikov. Nowadays, the hotel “Tbilisi Marriot” is located in this building.³⁹

In 1913-1916, the building of the Bank of Nobility was constructed according to the project prepared by architect Anatoly Kalgin and painter Hainrich Hrinevski. The decor of its facade is made by Neofite, Vladimer and Lavrenti Agladze. Presently, the building is the house of the National Parliamentary Library of Georgia.

Tbilisi had the most developed social infrastructure among the cities of the Caucasus. According to the annual publication “Caucasus Calendar” („Кавказский календарь”), in 1913, there was a private higher education institution in Tbilisi –higher courses of studies for women, as well as 5 Gymnasiums for men and 5 for women. Altogether, there were 150 different educational institutions in the city. A great majority of newspapers and journals of the Northern and Southern Caucasus was printed in Tbilisi, among them 19 Russian, 10 Armenian, 6 Georgian, 2 Azerbaijani and 1 German language editions. The city had 5 theaters, 8 cinema halls, 10 hospitals,

³⁷ Revaz Gachechiladze, R. “Tbilisi at the Beginning of the 20th Century”, 80.

³⁸ Alexandre Elisashvili, *How Tbilisi has been Changed*, 80.

³⁹ Revaz Gachechiladze, “Tbilisi at the Beginning of the 20th Century”, 79.

around 20 pharmacies, 37 hotels, dozens of banks and insurance companies; there were 10 public libraries, Orthodox and Armenian churches, Catholic and Lutheran Churches, 2 Synagogues and 2 Mosques; telephone network was also operating in the city and from 1904, tram also served its citizens.⁴⁰ By the beginning of the 20th century, there were around 600 manufactures and factories, including textile, match and tobacco producing, that of lather and beer.

Caucasian Tbilisians

Numerous renowned personalities of different Caucasian people were active in Georgia. In 1861, the work of first Kabardian historian Shora Nogmov titled as “History of Adige People” was published in Tbilisi. Famous Ossetian thinker Ioane Ialghuzisdze-Gabaraev (1770-1830) got spiritual education at the royal family of Erekle II and Giorgi XII. He mastered Georgian, Ossetian and Russian languages. He was active teacher and missionary. On the basis of the Georgian graphic, Ialghuzisdze created Ossetian alphabet in 1802, which was used by both Ossetians living in the South as well as in the North Caucasus. He translated liturgical books from Georgian into Ossetian language and played a crucial role in the Christianization of Ossetians living in the South Caucasus. The Georgian writer Daniel Chonkhadze (1830-1860) compiled Georgian-Ossetian and Ossetian-Georgian dictionaries, which were published later by Shiffner.

Since 1900s, Ossetians were launching their national cultural center in Tbilisi. In 1906, Ossetians living in Tbilisi established “Ossetian Publishing Society.” Giorgi Jioti and Vaso Tsabaiti were active members of this society. On the same year, publishing house “Ir” was founded in Vladikavkaz and Tbilisi.

The above-mentioned society launched Ossetian theatrical group, which staged performances in Ossetian language until 1980s. The leaders of the society appealed to the government several times with the request to establish Ossetian newspaper and got permission in 1907 (February 13). On the same year, on March 6, the first Ossetian newspaper “Nog Tsard” was printed in Tbilisi (this was the second Ossetian language newspaper; the first one was published in 1906 in Vladikavkaz, titled as “Iron Newspaper”). Even before the publication of the first issue of the newspaper, the Georgian newspaper “Isari” announced: “From the beginning of March, subscribers are available in Tbilisi for the Ossetian newspaper “Nog Tsard”, which will be published twice per week.” The circulation of the first issue was 400, later on reaching 1800. The first editor of the newspaper was Petre Tedeti; later on, this responsibility was assumed by Gaioz Tskhvrbat. The newspapers and journals published in Tbilisi printed the works of Ossetian writers in Ossetian language,

⁴⁰ Ibid., 75.

including those, which were banned or was impossible to publish in Vladikavkaz.⁴¹ In 1913, secondary school was opened in Tbilisi for ethnic Ossetian children.⁴²

In the 19th century, Tbilisi was a center of Azerbaijani culture and intellectual life. Azerbaijani poet, calligrapher and enlightener Mirza Vazeh, known through pseudonym Mirza Shafi (1792/96-1852), widely known as “Tbilisian Wise” lived and worked in Tbilisi. He was born and grown up in Ganja. In 1840, he passed exam at the Tbilisi Gymnasium in Tatar language and started to work as a teacher of Persian and Azerbaijani (or Tatar – as it was called at that time) languages at the local secondary school. His pupil was a famous Georgian journalist, writer and poet, editor of the journal “Tsiskari” Ivane Kereselidze. In 1844, Mirza Shafi founded literary-philosophical circle in Tbilisi. After two years, he was back to Ganja and started to work at the district school. Before leaving the city, he dedicated to it one of his famous poems – “Farewell to Tbilisi.” In 1850, he was back to Tbilisi and delivered lessons in Persian and Tatar languages at the Classical Gymnasium and at the boarding-school of Raevski and Hakke. He created “Tatar-Russian Dictionary” and “Reader”. He also built a garden in Sololaki and granted it to the city. He died in Tbilisi and was buried on the territory of the present-day Botanical garden.⁴³

His pupil, the German writer and translator Friedrich Martin von Bodenstedt translated poems written by Mirza Shafi into the German language. During his stay in Tbilisi (in 1844-1845), Mirza Shafi was his teacher delivering lessons in Azerbaijani, Georgian, Armenian and Persian languages. The translations named as “Songs of Shafi” were included in the book “Thousand and One Days in the Orient”, written by Bodenstedt and published in 1851. Later on, this book was translated into many languages, including Georgian.⁴⁴

Azerbaijani writer, enlightener, philosopher and playwright Mirza Fatali Akhundov (1812-1878) was a pupil of Mirza Shafi. He spent almost half of his life in Tbilisi and died there. He was born in Shakhi (Nukha) and got traditional Persian-Arabic education. From 1834, he worked in Tbilisi, at the chancellery of the viceroy as a translator of oriental languages; at the same time, he was a teacher of the Turkish

⁴¹ David Matsaberidze and Ivane Tsereteli, “Armenian Identity Narrative”. *Identity Narratives in Georgia: at the Origins of Multiethnic Georgian Nation (1860-1918)* (Tbilisi, 2014), 162-163.

⁴² *Ethnic Groups in Georgia* (Tbilisi, Library of the Public Defender of Georgia, 2008), 73.

⁴³ Eka Makharashvili, “Mirza Vazeh Shafi and Mirza Fatali Akhundov – Azerbaijani writers who were in love with Georgia”. *24 saati Weekend*. 27 February 2010. <http://www.24hours.ge/weekend/story/3791> (accessed 22.10.2016).

⁴⁴ Friedrich M. Bodenstedt, “One Thousand and one Days in the East”. Short translation from German. Introductory letter by Akaki Gelovani (Tbilisi, Publishing house “Sabchota sakartvelo”, 1965).

and Persian languages at the district school of Tbilisi. During his stay at the chancellery of the viceroy, he became a friend of the well-known Georgian public figures Platon Ioseliani, Dimitri Khipiani, Giorgi Eristavi. He started his literary activities in the 1830s. With the stage of a play “Vizier of Lenchoran’s Khan” (1873, Baky, in Azerbaijani language), the professional Azerbaijani theater was born. Akaki Tsereteli, who studied Azerbaijani language during his study at St. Petersburg University, translated this play of Akhundov into Georgian. Mirza Fatali Akhundov was one of his beloved writers. Translation by Akaki Tsereteli was printed in 1898 in the Journal “Krebuli” under the title “Vizier of Khan” and was played at the Georgian stage on the very same year. In 1898, Akaki Tsereteli wrote in the newspaper “Tsnobis Purceli”: “This play is written by Tatar writer Mirza Fatali Akhundov, whose writings are translated into foreign languages. At some point, he became under the scope of Russian writers, and those-days literary critic Apolon Grigoriev ... compared him to Moliere. As we, Georgians, are neither familiar with this writer nor aware of life of our neighbors – Tatars, I decided to translate one of the plays of Akhundov - *Vizier of Khan*.”⁴⁵

Comedies by Akhundov were published first time in Tbilisi, in Russian and Azerbaijani languages. Mirza Fatali Akhundov was a close friend of the famous Georgian poets and public figures Alexander Chavchavadze, Grigol Orbeliani, etc. Grigol Orbeliani played a crucial role in the decision to bury Akhundov on the territory of the present-day Botanical Garden when Muslim leaders of the city opposed his burial on the Muslim cemetery or somewhere close to it.

Famous Azerbaijani enlightener, writer and historian Abbas-Kuli-aga Bakikhavov spent several years in Tbilisi, where he entered the service of general Ermolov's chancellery as a translator and interpreter. Here he met and became friend with Alexander Chavchavadze, Nikoloz Baratashvili, Grigol Orbeliani as well as Russian and Armenian writers and public figures.⁴⁶

From the beginning of the 20th century, Azerbaijani journals were published in Tbilisi; these were the satirical journals “Mulla Nasreddin” (published from 1906 by Jalil Mamed-Guli-Zadeh) and “Tartan-Phartan.” The government had banned publication of “Mulla Nasreddin” several times due to its critical publications. The journal was positively assessed by the German writer Arthur Leist, who lived and worked in Tbilisi at that time. In 1908, he wrote a special letter on the journal: “What was not protested for centuries and was criticized only by some wise persons like

⁴⁵ Levan Bregadze, “Mirza Shafi Vazeh, Friedrich M. Bodenstedt”. *Enlightenment in Georgia. Ideas and Personalities*. <http://nateba.net/index.php/biographies/251> (accessed 22.10.2016).

⁴⁶ Shota Meskhia et al., *History of Tbilisi*, 442.

Mirza Shafi, what was hidden and unpublicized, was attacked by “Mulla Nasreddin” with word and caricature, strongly and brightly, what makes some laugh and some angry”.⁴⁷

Famous Armenian public figures lived in Tbilisi and several Armenian newspapers were published, just to name a few: “Mshak,” “Nordar,” “Horizon”. Armenian schools existed in the city.

Hovhannes Tumanyan was born in 1869, in the district of Lore. He died on March 23, 1923, in Moscow. After completing his primary education in the village, he moved to Tbilisi to continue his study at the Seminary of Nerses but did not manage to complete it due to financial shortage. He became active among writers’ circles in 1886. He wrote poems, fairytales, stories, allegories and ballades. Tumanyan dedicated numerous works to Georgia and to his Georgian friends (“Reconciliation,” “On Georgia,” “Soul of Georgia,” “To Georgian Poets”, etc.). Famous Georgian poet Titsian Tabidze wrote: “Georgian’s believed in Hovhannes Tumanyan’s sincerity and this was proved in Tbilisi at his anniversary. His patriotism did not hinder him to be that of Georgian orientation... Hovhannes Tumanyan’s influence on his people resembled that of Ilia Chavchavadze’s authority ... He had unique relations with Georgian poets. Hovhannes actively attended public speeches of Georgian poets and praised them ... He did not miss anniversaries and celebrations of Georgian poets and always appeared with written speeches. He was often hosting Muslim poets; Hovhannes was beloved one of them.”⁴⁸

Armenian writer Gabriel Sundukyan was very popular in Tbilisi. His play “Pepo” which was written in 1871 was staged at the Georgian theater in 1875; the following year, its Georgian translation was printed in the newspaper “Droeba” (N2, 1876), whereas in 1880 it was published as a separate book. Gabriel Sundukyan (1825-1912) spent his life in Tbilisi. He studied at different boarding schools and gymnasiums, graduated from the faculty of history and philology of the St. Petersburg University and afterwards joined chancellery of the viceroy in Tbilisi. Later on, he became a head of the special division taking care of the roads in the Caucasus and was awarded the rank of civilian colonel. He was actively involved in the city council. Sundukyan started his literary activities in the 1860s and was attached to the Armenian theater. He was one of its founding members. Sundukyan wrote on the Georgian dialect of the Armenian language, which contained lot of

⁴⁷ Levan Bregadze, “Mirza Shafi Vazeh, Friedrich M. Bodenstedt”.

⁴⁸ Titsian Tabidze, “Hovhaness Tumanyan”. <http://litklubi.ge/biblioteka/view-nawarmoebi> (accessed 22.10.2016).

Georgian words and phrases; he also widely referred to the Georgian folklore and translated his own works from Georgian into Armenian.⁴⁹

The founder of the new Armenian literature and Armenian literary language Khachatur Abovian (1805-1848) lived and worked in Tbilisi. He studied at Nerses Seminary and later on, in 1837-1943, worked as a supervisor of the local school.⁵⁰ Influential Armenian writer and political activist of the 19th century, Arfiar Arfiaryan (1852-1908) also lived in Tbilisi; in 1877-1878, during the Russian-Turkish War, he was a correspondent of the “Mshak” newspaper in Constantinople and during 30 years wrote on cultural and political affairs of the Western Armenians. Armenian writer, teacher and public figure, Ghazaros Aghayan (1840-1911), who was born and died in Tbilisi, conducted his pedagogical activities in Tbilisi and Armenia. He is the author of a textbook of Armenian Language. Michael Hovhannisyan, known under pseudonym Nar-Dos (1867-1933), who also lived in Tbilisi, was granted the status of public writer during the Soviet times.⁵¹ Writer Alexander Movsesyan (1858-1935), known under the pseudonym Shirvanzadeh, acted in Tbilisi from 1883. He lived in Paris in 1905-1910 and again in Tbilisi in 1910-1919. Later on, he emigrated again and was back in 1926 to the Soviet Armenia. He was granted the status of public writer of Armenia and Azerbaijan in the Soviet times.⁵²

The life and activities of the Armenian thinker and essayists Grigor Artsruni (1845-1952) should be mentioned in particular. His grandfather was deported in 1813 from Turkey to Georgia; his father was a colonel of the Russian Army and during 2 years, in 1866-1868, was a head of the city council of Tbilisi. Grigor was born in Moscow and graduated from Tbilisi Classical Gymnasium; later on, he studied at famous universities of Europe. In 1872, he founded literary-political newspaper “Mshak” (worker) in Tbilisi, which was published until 1920. The newspaper played a crucial role in the formation of ethnic identity of Armenians.⁵³ As G. Suny mentions, the newspaper was a serious challenge for the religious-centered traditional conservatism of the Armenian bourgeoisie.⁵⁴ His opponents blamed Artsruni for cosmopolitanism and negation of the peculiarities of the Armenian nation. Artsruni was a close friend of Georgian public figures Ilia Chavchavadze, Akaki Tsereteli,

⁴⁹ *Essays on the History of Georgia*, volume 5, 836.

⁵⁰ Gevork Abov. *Khachatur Abovyan. Life and Activities* (Yerevan, 1948).

⁵¹ *Essays in the History of Georgia*, volume 5, 835.

⁵² Hrach Tamrazyan, *Shirvan-Zade* (Moscow, Publishing House “Sovetski pisatel”, 1967).

⁵³ For more details see chapter 3 in the book: “Identity Narratives in Georgia: at the Origins of Multiethnic Georgian Nation (1860-1918)”. Tbilisi, 2014.

⁵⁴ Ronald G. Suny, “Tbilisi in the Russian Empire: On the Ethnic, Social and Class Composition of the Population”, 57.

Giorgi Tsereteli, Ivane Machabeli, Alexander Jabadari. In 1879, after the appeal of the masters of the Georgian theater, Grigor Artsruni transformed a portion of his caravanserai, which was situated at the present-day location of the Griboyedov Theater, into the permanent house of the Georgian troupe. According to the memories of the famous dramatist Avksenti Tsagareli, Artsruni gave serious financial privileges to the Georgian troupe and provided artists with financial support.⁵⁵

Tbilisi served as a center for scientific investigations in the Caucasus. In 1851, the Caucasian branch of the Russian Geographical society was formed in Tbilisi. In 1864, Archaeographic Commission was created, which issued twelve-volume “Acts of the Caucasian Archaeographic Commission” with extremely important materials on the history of the Caucasus.⁵⁶

In 1862, the Museum of the Caucasus was created in Tbilisi. A bit later, Caucasian Archaeological Committee was organized, which was transformed into the “Society of Lovers of Archaeology” in 1873.⁵⁷ Young Georgian intellectuals actively participated in the activities of the above-mentioned societies.

In 1878, it was decided to convene the 5th Archaeological Congress of Russia in Tbilisi. The organizational committee was headed by the Georgian historian Dimitri Bakradze, who presented a paper on the Georgian paleography at the congress. The congress started its work on 3 September 1883. It was an important event in the scientific life of the Caucasus.⁵⁸

Experience of urban life contributed much to the comprehension of ethnic, religious and cultural differences and their political expression in the form of nationalism. From the second half of the 19th century, a new generation of the Georgian intellectuals came to the fore. Returning to homeland from the Russian universities, they introduced the ideas of European and Russian thinkers to the Georgian public and contributed much to the creation of a new political and cultural framework for the further development of the Georgian society.

According to the modernist theories of nationalism, intellectuals are the central actors who employ the rhetoric of nationalism. They are the creators not only the nation itself but also of the universal discourse and meanings in which nations could

⁵⁵ Levan Bregadze, “Grigor Artsruni”. *Enlightenment in Georgia. Ideas and Personalities*. <http://nateba.net/index.php/biographies/251> (accessed 22.10.2016).

⁵⁶ Shota Meskhia et al., *History of Tbilisi*, 444.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 445.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 446.

be formed.⁵⁹ They play central role in the emergence of national consciousness, propagation of national values, bounding the people, defining its constituent parts and boundaries. Intellectuals do the “imaginative ideological work that brings together disparate cultural elements, selected historical memories, interpretations, while silencing the inconvenient and unheroic”.⁶⁰ Philologists, historians, poets, novelists, teachers and journalists play the most important role in this regard”.⁶¹

The young Georgian intellectuals of the 1860-70s were called *Tergdaleulebi* (those who have drunk from the river Tergi/Terek, the traditional border between Georgia and Russia). They defined contours and main directions of the Georgian national project. Their activities fit in its best with the first stage of the formation of nationalism as offered by Miroslav Hroch: struggle for the formation of cultural identity, reformation of language and rise of interest toward the national history.

Issues of the language, fatherland and past/history were the most significant points of the above-mentioned national project. History was considered as one of the main tools for the national consolidation; the new democratic public language was developed, which was understandable for all; it was promoted as a standard one through the Georgian newspapers and journals (“Iveria”, “Matsne”, “Droeba”, etc.), public schools, theatres, libraries, “Society for spreading literacy among Georgians”, “Historical-ethnographical Society”, etc.

While the problem of self-identification through defining borders of the *in-group* became the main issue for founders of the Georgian national project, they tried to eschew a danger of ethno-narcissism and called for the respect of other nations. Renowned poet and thinker of the same generation, Vazha-Pshavela, mentioned: “Some people think that true patriotism excludes cosmopolitanism. This is a mistake... When nations learn to respect their traditions, they will in their own separate ways increase the collective strength and beauty of the entire world... A person who claims to love every nation to the same degree is a liar... Patriotism is more a matter of feeling than of intellect; cosmopolitanism is a matter merely of the brain... Listen to the needs of your country, heed the wisdom of your people, dedicate yourself to their wellbeing, don’t hate other nations and don’t envy their happiness, don’t prevent other nations from achieving their goals. Work towards the

⁵⁹ Michael D. Kennedy and Ronald G. Suny, “Introduction”. *Intellectuals and the Articulation of the Nation*. Ed. by Ronald Grigor Suny and Michael D. Kennedy (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2001), 2-3.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ronald G. Suny, *The Making of the Georgian Nation*, 123.

day when no one will subjugate your nation and work for its progress until it equals the leading nations of the world”.⁶²

Activities of Tergdaleulebi contributed to the consolidation of the Georgian society. Now different parts of the country were joined together and united under the concept of “Georgia”, which, although divided into different parts, still formed a complete entity. Different classes acknowledged their common identity as “Georgians”, which should have been regarded as more important and fundamental than any other identity.⁶³

The same process took place among other ethnic groups as well. Coming in the close contact with each other, they faced a need of self-identification. According to Ronald Suny, Tbilisi was formed as a cradle not only for the Georgian but for the Armenian nationalism as well.⁶⁴ Armenian newspapers published in Tbilisi, especially Grigor Artsruni’s “Mshak” played a crucial role in the self-identification of Armenians and construction of the Armenian national project. As in the case of Georgians, the issues of language, fatherland and religion were the main points for the Armenian intellectuals collaborating with “Mshak”.⁶⁵ As for Azerbaijanis, notwithstanding the fact of their active participation in the cultural life of Tbilisi, they did not display any sign of ethnic mobilization or economic and political activism during the same period.

Thus, through extensive contacts with their co-citizens and foreigners residing in the cities, the process of ethnonational identification started among the Caucasian people; they thoroughly comprehended existing linkages with their ethnic brothers and tried to distance from those who were not aware of their language and customs.

⁶² Vaja-Pshavela, “Cosmopolitanism and Patriotism”. *Works* (Tbilisi, 1986), 41; for English translation see: Pshavela, V., & Gould, R. R., (Trans.) (2016). *Cosmopolitanism and Patriotism*. Asymptote (Oct 2016), University of Bristol, http://research-information.bristol.ac.uk/files/90452374/Cosmopolitanism_and_Patriotism_Asymptote.pdf

⁶³ Levan Gigineishvili, “Post- reform History Textbooks in Georgia: Changing Patterns and the Issue of Minorities in Georgian History”. *History Teaching in Georgia: Representation of Minorities in Georgian History Textbooks* (CIMERA. Geneva, 2007), 8.

⁶⁴ Ronald G. Suny, “Tbilisi in the Russian Empire: On the Ethnic, Social and Class Composition of the Population”, 40.

⁶⁵ For more detailed analysis of the problem see: Marieta Bazinyan, “Constructing a Nation: Identity Markers of Armenians (According to the “Mshak” Periodical Published during 1872-1892)”. *Analytical Bulletin 8* (Yerevan, 2015), 67-80.

The newly born intelligentsia, under the influence of the Western ideas, embraced the new conception of nation⁶⁶ and started to construct new nations.

After imposition of the Soviet rule, due to the complex and contradictory Soviet nationality policy, the republics of the South Caucasus became more homogenous. In the Soviet and post-Soviet Georgian, Armenian and Azerbaijani narratives, the history and culture of the dominant ethnic groups are highlighted in some details and are detached from each other to the extent that some shared elements are neglected. Although, according to Ronald Suny, even at the time of nationalist triumph, the colorful palette of people composing population of the city not in a distant past, becomes a source of nostalgia.

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⁶⁶ Ronald G. Suny, "Tbilisi in the Russian Empire: On the Ethnic, Social and Class Composition of the Population", 42.

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Summary

Tbilisi as a Center of Crosscultural Interactions (The 19th– early 20thCenturies)

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The paper highlights the cultural life and the multiethnic community of Tbilisi city population in the turn of XX-th century, when the economic growth in the South Caucasus urged the urban development and urbanization in entire region. Evidence is provided for the existence and active performance of cultural centers of various Caucasian nations in Tbilisi that used to be the political and cultural center of the South Caucasus under Tsarist Russia administration. The role of Tbilisi and its social environment in search for identity and growing nationalistic sentiments of a number of South Caucasian nations is justified in provided data and testimonies.

Keywords: Tbilisi, urban life, national identity, South Caucasian nations.