

# **Language Policy and National Identity in Georgia**

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### **Abstract**

Language has been long recognised as a powerful marker of national identity, as has its role in transforming multi-ethnic societies into unified nations. Such is the case of multi-ethnic and multilingual Georgia, where language has today become a crucial factor in interethnic relations and in the Georgian nation-building process. This thesis sheds light on the nature of *kartveloba* (Georgianness) by examining Georgian language policy over the entire history of the nation.

Despite the country's long-standing civilisation and its established culture, Georgian statehood began to decline from the second half of the thirteenth century, until the country was eventually incorporated into the Russian empire at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Since then, there have been several attempts to instigate a 'national revival': 1) the cultural/linguistic movement of the nineteenth century, 2) the struggle to build a nation-state in 1918-1921, 3) the national liberation movement during the Soviet period (1921-1991), and 4) nation-state building in the post-Soviet period. All of these periods display common features with regard to language policy.

After investigating language policy and identity developments in the pre-modern period, this thesis examines Georgia under Russian rule (both Tsarist and Soviet), which made the country vulnerable to ethnic conflicts, and tries to explain the violent outcomes. The thesis goes on to examine public debate of language and minority issues, as well as efforts to elaborate inclusive language and ethnic policies in contemporary Georgia.

The main body of the thesis consists of six chapters. The first sets out the nature of the problem, the practical importance of this study, and its methods and structure. The second discusses the main concepts and theoretical considerations. The third traces the development of *kartveloba* before modern times. The fourth chapter examines the origin of modern national identity, whose main marker was the Georgian language. Chapter five analyses Soviet language policy in the wider context of the ethnic policy and analyses the nationalist aspirations of the Georgians in the twentieth century. Chapter six deals with official policies in the post-Soviet period, but also looks at language practice and attitudes among minority groups. Drawing on primary sources (such as government decrees, laws and other documents, media publications, social surveys and interviews), as well as secondary sources, it seeks to explain how Georgia has dealt with and reflected its multicultural character under different governments. It also investigates the role of language policy in the process of nation-building and makes proposals regarding ways that formulating language policy might help form civic society in Georgia.

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# Chapter 1

## Introduction

### 1.1 Outlining the problem and the current situation

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the construction of a new national identity for a multiethnic and multilingual population proved to be the most challenging task facing newly independent Georgia. The reason for this lies, on the one hand, in the Soviet legacy of institutionalised ethno-nationalism and ethnic animosities, and, on the other hand, in a strong sense of cultural identity, of *kartveloba* (Georgianness), deeply rooted in the pre-Soviet past.

The process of transforming Georgian society into a political nation and creating a sovereign state is still incomplete. Ethnic minorities in Georgia are largely excluded from the symbolic constitution of nationhood, although all civic duties (such as taxation or military service) fall on them as heavily as on ethnic Georgians, who constitute the majority of the population and who regard the state as exclusively theirs, especially in symbolic areas. In today's Georgia, ethnic minorities are tolerated, but no effort is made to understand their concerns and cultures. Much of the analysis in this work points out that ethnic Georgians regard all ethnic groups other than Georgian as inferior, and perceive ethnic diversity as a threat to Georgia's territorial integrity. This can be explained by recent historical experience, when conflicts between different groups in the aftermath of the Soviet collapse developed along ethnic lines in the post-Soviet space.

Narratives of disloyal ethnicities were created under the colonial regime, when ethnic minorities were alienated from the majority. These narratives were extensively used by ethnocentric nationalists when the communist regime weakened and ethnic nationalism manifested itself as the most powerful ideology. Ethnic outsiders were regarded as a threat to the state. This is especially true for the Azeri and Armenian communities living compactly in areas bordering their kin-states, with which they have closer ties than with the rest of Georgia, largely because of the so-called 'language barrier'. The 'language barrier' is a serious problem between Georgian-speaking and non-Georgian-speaking populations and is one of the fundamental reasons for the low participation of ethnic minorities in Georgia's socio-political life. It also raises the danger of potential contradictions between loyalty to a given ethnic group and to a wider national identity.

The violent political outcomes of ethno-linguistic tensions accompanying Georgia's independence, namely the *de facto* loss of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, generated fear of Azeri and Armenian irredentism amongst politicians and the majority of the Georgian-speaking population. The politicisation of ethnicity and language in Georgia, a country still vulnerable to ethnic conflicts, is a fundamental reason for the delay in ratifying the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, which Georgia undertook to sign when it was admitted to the Council of Europe in 1999. The Charter is based on the notion of a civic, rather than ethnic, understanding of citizenship and views linguistic diversity as an enrichment of, rather than threat, to the state. However, it is hard to win round to this view a country where ethno-linguistic nationalism has been a powerful political ideology dominated by historical and cultural claims, and where the language issue has been

inextricably linked to violent ethnic conflicts. Language policy is a key aspect of Georgia's decolonisation.

## **1.2 The scope of the study**

Language has been long recognised as a powerful marker of national identity. When attempting to form a nation from an old cultural entity or from groups who share recent history, a state gains power through language policy, by ensuring that a standard national language is used in all governmental and educational domains. Language policy can serve both to unify and to divide people. Policy makers are often motivated by state ideology, which may perceive linguistic diversity as a threat to national unity, or may support multilingualism. However, language policy is not only a top-down, but also a bottom-up process. *De facto* policy and language practice can differ from declared policy. While top-down policy emanates from government ideology, bottom-up policy stems from beliefs, attitudes and perceptions of different groups who are trying to negotiate in their own interests. Language policy not only concerns what languages people speak, but also how they use language in constructing their identities, and how they relate it to other symbols and markers of identity. Therefore language policy functions as a complex of linguistic as well as non-linguistic elements of identity.

Social influencers operating within ethnic groups in Georgia reinforce this sense of insecurity: they evoke legacies of domination and further polarise society. Political memories, myths and emotions also magnify fears, driving groups further apart. For that reason, if steps are not taken to integrate ethnic minorities into

Georgian society, then the absence of civic nationhood will threaten political stability, and ethnic groups may be influenced from outside.

This study is an analysis of the history and current state of language policy and national identity in Georgia. It sheds light on the nature of *kartveloba* (Georgianness) by examining Georgian language policy through different periods in time. It evaluates contemporary language-related government efforts, from the point of view of officially formulated goals, to build a political nation and create a common civic identity for the whole population. It should be noted, however, that nation-building is a very broad and complex subject, and no attempt is made to explore every aspect and dimension of it. This thesis focuses specifically on the role of cultural markers, especially language, in the development of *kartveloba* (Georgianness).

Despite the country's longstanding civilisation and its established culture, Georgian statehood began to decline from the second half of the thirteenth century, until the country was eventually incorporated into the Russian empire at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Since then, there have been several attempts to instigate a 'national revival': 1) the cultural/linguistic movement of the nineteenth century, 2) the struggle to build a nation-state in 1918-21, 3) the national liberation movement during the Soviet period (1921-91), and 4) nation-state building in the post-Soviet period. All of these periods reveal common features in language policy. The first steps towards becoming a modern nation were made in the nineteenth century when, influenced by European nationalist ideas, a secularisation of public life in Georgia took place. In Western Europe,

however, nationalism was a product of the Enlightenment, whereas in Georgia it was a response to colonialism. If in Europe language served as a tool for assimilating ethnic minorities into dominant ethnicities and to create national identities, in Georgia language was used as part of differentialist policies, focusing on the ethnic core of *kartveloba*.

### **1.3 The objectives, novelty and practical importance of the study**

The thesis seeks to address and provide answers to the five main research questions: 1) how has pre-modern experience shaped contemporary understanding of *kartveloba*? 2) Could the community of Georgians in the Middle Ages be considered a nation? 3) To what extent have colonial language policies determined post-colonial nationalism and conflicts in Georgia? 4) Which language policy might be the best for a multi-ethnic and multilingual Georgia, and what political consequences can be expected to ensue? 5) Why and how can Georgia become a civic nation with the help of language policy?

Georgia presents a fascinating case study for investigating the relationship between language policy and political ideology; it shows how political and intellectual changes affect language policy, and *vice versa*. In order to avoid further complications between ethnic groups and to build a new national identity, we must scrutinise the effects of elaborating inclusive language and ethnic policies. But in order to understand and analyse the public debate on language and minority issues in contemporary Georgia, as well as the conflict and violence that arose, we must also explore the historical circumstances which have given rise to modern national identification. While nationalism is a modern phenomenon, it is rooted in

preceding historical ideas, practices, symbols and myths. Therefore, this study takes a historical approach, focusing on political, cultural and linguistic dimensions of nation formation. Building on the insight of the ethnosymbolist paradigm, it presents a view of the Georgian nation as a historical collectivity over the *longue durée* and identifies the key role of language in defining membership.

While considerable research has been undertaken in the West on national identity and language policy in Tsarist Russia and the Soviet Union, especially in Slavic and Central Asian nations of both these empires, relatively little has been written about Transcaucasian groups, including Georgians, in the pre-Soviet, Soviet and post-Soviet periods.<sup>1</sup> Even when Western scholars touch on issues of Georgian nationalism and the role of language in Georgian national identity, they are mostly concerned with recent history. In general, Georgian ethnic, national and linguistic identity studies in the West lack historical depth. Although there have been several important studies of the development of the national question in the nineteenth and early twentieth century (Parsons 1987; J. Smith 1998; Jones 2005), the Soviet and post-Soviet periods are mostly concerned with ethnoconflicts and ethnonationalisms (Parsons 1987; Gachechiladze 1995; Coppieters 2002; Broers 2004; Goltz 2006) and major contributions to the knowledge of old Georgian history and literature outside Georgia (Allen 1932,; Braund 1994; Thomson 1996; Suny 1998; Rapp 2000; Rayfield 2000; Soltes 2003; Pelkmans 2006), these works do not look at the development of *kartveloba* (*Georgianness*) as such. In this study,

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<sup>1</sup> Armenians were more fortunate than Georgians in this respect, thanks to their substantial diasporas in Western countries who have contributed to the knowledge of Armenian history and literature outside the former Soviet Union.

Georgian and foreign historical sources and academic literature will be examined in the light of recent academic studies in ethnic and national identity. Primary sources for this work have been studied elsewhere from different points of view. The novelty of this work, however, is that the material is re-examined with an ethnosymbolist approach. The Georgian case is especially interesting for exploring the interplay of the ethnic and civic elements of nationhood. The analysis of the historical background of identity construction offered in this work explains why it is so difficult for civic nationhood to emerge in Georgia. At the same time, it shows how a civic understanding of Georgianness can gather strength from old values and symbols, myths and memories of *kartveloba*. Such an analysis has a practical importance and appears particularly useful in the current situation, when policy makers face questions of accommodating the needs of linguistically diverse communities and, at the same time, facilitating their integration into Georgian society.

This thesis contributes also to the general study of top-down and bottom-up language policies in colonial and post-colonial periods. Many academics, such as Laitin (1998), Martin (2001), Grenoble (2003) and Hirsch (2005), have examined top-down colonial policies in the Soviet Union: the general accuracy of their work is not in question. However, it is important not only to acknowledge varying top-down processes involving different groups, but also to distinguish them from bottom-up policies. The historical experiences of Soviet ethnic groups were varied, and language policy concerning them was correspondingly different.



As shown throughout this thesis, language is the most important marker of *kartveloba* (Georgianness) in all contexts – ethnic, national and state/political. The Georgian language was a distinctive characteristic of *kartveloba*, which at all periods of documented history united and, at the same time, distinguished Georgians from others. Unlike Western Europe, where language had little political significance in the Middle Ages, in Georgia, language was a symbol and a tool of political, cultural and territorial inclusion and exclusion as early as the twelfth century. The ideology of political rulers of the time may be the first example of linguistic culture manifested for political purposes. It certainly contributed to the development of the modern Georgian nation. Examining the history of Georgian language policy through an ethnosymbolist approach challenges the modernist understanding of nations and nationalism, according to which nationalism is a political ideology which ‘emerged in early modern Europe’ (see A. D. Smith 1996c: 447-8). The Georgian case supports the argument about the pre-modern existence of the nation and national identity at the élite level. While one case study will not put an end to debates on the issue of pre-modern nations, it can certainly move forward the debate on the question of ‘when is the nation?’ (Ichijo & Uzelac 2005).

#### **1.4 Methodology**

This work is based on a large corpus of primary sources: archival materials, old Georgian chronicles, official documents, and interviews conducted over several field work visits in Georgia (in total 10 months). It also uses secondary sources in Georgian, Soviet and Western academic literature. The main part of research was

conducted in libraries and archives. The purpose of the field trips to Georgia was to use local archives and other sources, and to conduct interviews with government officials, NGO representatives and Western experts on the subject, so as to understand better the situation on the ground from different perspectives, and to undertake a context-sensitive reading of the data. Some material is cited in the thesis with the permission of the interviewees.

The following people were interviewed in January 2007: Ms Lali Papiashvili, member of the Ethnic Integration Committee of Parliament; Mr Ghia Nodia of the Caucasus Institute for Peace and War; Dr Alex Rondeli, Mr Temur Kancheli, Dr Jonathan Kulik, and Ms Eka Metreveli of the Georgian Foundation for Strategic and International Studies; Mr Kakha Lomaia, then Minister of Education; Ms Nino Bolkvadze, representative of the OSCE High Commissioner for Minority Issues; Mr Tom Trier of the European Committee for Minority Issues; and Mr Levan Tarkhnishvili, Head of the Programme of Ethnic Integration in the Eurasia Foundation. In August 2008, I interviewed Mr Hans Gutbrot of the Eurasia Foundation in Georgia; Ms Ana Zhvania of the Security Council; Ms Bela Tsipuria, Deputy Minister of Education; Ms Nino Nakudashvili, Head of the Department of Minority Schools and Bilingual Education at the Ministry of Education; Mr Robert Wilson, Head of USAID in Georgia; and Ms Lali Meskhi, who deals with minority integration at the British embassy in Georgia. In March 2010, I interviewed Mr Temur Iakobashvili, State Minister of Integration; Ms Yana Fremer, producer of *Italian Courtyard*, a weekly TV show focusing on multicultural issues and the histories of ethnic groups in Georgia; Dr Simon Janashia, Head of the Department of Educational Policy at Ilia Chavchavadze State

University; Mr Beka Mindiashvili of the Office of Public Defender; Mr Kakha Gabunia of the Centre for Civic Integration and Inter-ethnic Relations; and Mr Levan Ramishvili of the Liberty Institute. In September 2010, the executive director of *Pervyi Kavkazskii* TV, Dr Robert Parsons was interviewed. I had also personal communications about the current situation regarding the integration of ethnic minorities with the following people: Gail Lapidus, Senior Fellow at the Centre for International Security and Cooperation; Tabib Huseynov of the International Crisis Group; Tom de Waal of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace; and Laurence Broers of Conciliation Resources.

### **1.5 The structure of the thesis**

This thesis consists of the introduction (which is the first chapter), five further chapters, and a conclusion. Chapter two introduces and discusses the main concepts related to language policy and planning, ethnicity and nationalism, including the Marxist-Leninist approach to disputed concepts. It reviews the most common paradigms and interpretations of nationalism (*primordialism*, *perennialism*, *modernism* and *ethnosymbolism*) and highlights a theoretical approach for this study — the ethnosymbolist approach. Using this approach, the chapter tries to set out the link between ethnic and national identity and language. The chapter then tries to engage critically with various attempts to develop typologies of nationalism. Finally, this chapter concentrates on the framework, stages and dimensions of language planning, and the political consequences of different types of language policy.

Chapter three discusses the history of language policy and planning in pre-modern Georgia and identifies key components of *kartveloba* (Georgianness). It also examines other ethno-national resources (such as religion, homeland, and the choice of myths and symbols) in relation to language, and touches on a fundamental question of nationalism: the debate about pre-modern nations. The chapter argues that a pre-modern nationalist ideology emerged in Georgia in the tenth-thirteenth centuries at the zenith of the country's political, military, cultural and economic strength. One of the questions addressed in this chapter is whether in the tenth-thirteenth centuries Georgians constituted a pre-modern nation.

Chapter four examines the origin of modern Georgian nationalism, the keystone of which was the Georgian language. After briefly reviewing Georgia's history before Russian annexation, it looks at the formation of Russian colonial language policy, which aimed to assimilate Georgians into the Russian empire, and shows how language policy became an important part, first of Georgia's resistance to russification and then of the nation-building process. The chapter demonstrates the ways in which language was conceptualised by nationalist thought as nationalists attempted to mobilise the masses and create a common national identity. The chapter ends with a short review of the years of Georgia's independence in 1918-1921, when Georgia tried to implement a pluralistic language policy towards its multi-ethnic population.

Chapter five gives an overview of Soviet language policy and its impact in Georgia. It examines the nationalist aspirations of the Georgians under Soviet rule and shows how the Georgian language gradually became a key element in the struggle for independence. It concludes that Soviet nationalities policy and

language policy, which excluded ethnic minorities from the titular nationalities of the union republics, were the main contributing factors in re-defining *kartveloba* (Georgianness), and Georgia as an ethnic nation in the twentieth century.

Chapter six discusses language policy and national identity in post-Soviet Georgia. It examines official policies under different political leadership using primary sources (such as governmental acts, laws and other documents, media publications, social surveys and interviews) and looks at language practices and attitudes among minority groups. This chapter investigates two competing projects of nation-building in today's Georgia (secular and ethno-religious) and argues that the Georgian language, with its symbolic role as identity marker, used for centuries to differentiate insiders and outsiders, could become a common basis for a new national identity, while *kartveloba* could shift its basis from ethnic identity to citizenship. The chapter concludes with a number of recommendations to improve language policy, so as to help the process of the integration of ethnic minorities into Georgian society and further the civic nation-building process.

## Chapter 2

### Key concepts

This chapter introduces and discusses the main concepts related to ethnicity, nationalism and language policy and planning. It aims to set out the link between ethnic and national identity and language. The Marxist-Leninist approach to disputed concepts is also examined.

Section 2.1 looks at key terms in the study of ethnic phenomena and discusses different conceptualisations of these terms in contemporary scholarship. Particular note is made of the ‘objective’ and ‘subjective’ characteristics of ethnic identity used in nation-formation and the construction of national identity in the modern world. Different viewpoints on the role ethnicity plays in nationalism are discussed.

Rather than present a full survey of the literature of nationalism, section 2.2 provides a brief review of the most common paradigms and interpretations of nationalism (*primordialism*, *perennialism*, *modernism* and *ethnosymbolism*) and highlights a theoretical approach for this study – the ethnosymbolist approach – which offers a well-grounded analysis and explanation of national movements, past and present. Engaging critically with various attempts to develop typologies of nationalism forms another area for discussion. This section also looks at different meanings and connotations attributed to understandings of nationalism, at interpretations of various terms in academic works written in Georgian or Russian during the Soviet period, and at the confusion they have caused and continue to

cause amongst Georgian scholars, politicians and the general public. Understanding the reasons and consequences of such confusion is relevant to the Georgian question examined here.

Section 2.3 introduces Marxism–Leninism, which condemned nationalism as a bourgeois class-based ideology. Particular attention is paid to the reversal over the years in Bolshevik and Stalinist attitudes to nationalism in the Soviet and post-Soviet space, which led to the emergence of multiple ethnic nationalisms among many ethnic groups within the Soviet Union.

Finally, section 2.4 concentrates on the framework, stages and dimensions of language planning and the political consequences of different types of language policy. Language has long been recognised as a powerful marker of national identity and plays an important role in consolidating a multiethnic society into a single, unified nation. Therefore, the role of the standard language in the nation-building process is also discussed.

## **2.1 Ethnicity and ethnic grouping**

Although the terms *ethnicity* and *ethnic group* have been actively used in different disciplines within the social sciences since the 1960s, they are used with various meanings. There are no universal definitions among scholars, and different meanings are assigned to these terms. *Ethnic group* sometimes refers to a group of humans living and acting together, and can therefore be translated as ‘people’ or ‘nation’ (Jenkins 2003: 9). *Ethnicity* is also used to mean race or culture (Malesevic 2004: 1). When independent states were created in decolonised Africa and Asia, *ethnicity* referred to different cultural groups. The phenomenon of

ethnicity received more scholarly interest in the 1960s (Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin 1999: 80) with the onset of emigration from post-colonial countries to wealthier states. Immigrants were referred to as members of ethnic groups.

The term *ethnicity*, deriving from the Greek *ethnos*, originally used to describe cultural strangers or non-Hellenic people, thus cultural ‘others’ and ‘outsiders’ (Malesevic 2004: 1; Gillespie 1995: 9), is closely associated with the issue of boundaries (Nagel 1994: 154). But how are ethnic boundaries constructed and what is the relationship between culture and ethnicity? Do ethnic boundaries coincide with cultural boundaries?

The relationship between culture and ethnicity is often discussed in the context of social interaction within the model developed by the social anthropologist Frederik Barth (1969). Barth argues that an ethnic group is defined through self-identification and the designation of outsiders. If ethnic groups mutually understand that they differ from each other, this is a ‘social reality’ in Barth’s words. Since ethnic boundaries are constructed through social interaction, they are social, not cultural phenomena. The focus for studying ethnicity should therefore be ‘the ethnic boundary that defines the group, not the cultural stuff it encloses’ (Barth 1969: 15). By ‘cultural stuff’, Barth means language, religion, traditions, customs, cuisine, etc. He further maintains that cultural differences between groups are results, rather than causes, of social boundaries which guard the ethnic group and separate insiders and outsiders.

Most works on ethnicity consider the cultural content of ethnic identity to be important in constructing ethnic boundaries (Nagel 1994; Jenkins 2003). For



Nagel (1994:161), culture is the basic material used to construct ethnic meaning. For Jenkins (2003: 13), ethnicity is a social identity that is mainly concerned with culture. Emphasising the cultural content is important for differentiating between ethnicity and its allotropes, such as nationality or national identity, which are similar but nonetheless different concepts from ethnicity in various ways (see section 2.2.3).

On the one hand, the social anthropologist Thomas Hylland Eriksen (2002: 34) notes that cultural boundaries are not well marked and do not necessarily correspond to ethnic boundaries. Not every group with a shared culture is an ethnic group since, on the one hand, culture can be shared with non-members, and, on the other, differences between cultural elements may exist within the same boundaries. As Eriksen (2002: 37) notes, '[c]ultural differences relate to ethnicity if, and only if, such differences are made relevant in social interaction'.

For A. D. Smith, whose approach is adopted in this study, ethnicity has, however, strong cultural roots. Belonging to an ethnic group means belonging to a unique culture and sharing among in-group members a belief in common ancestors.

The members of an ethnic community must be made to feel not only that they form a single 'superfamily', but that their historic community is unique, that they possess what Max Weber called 'irreplaceable cultural values', that their heritage must be preserved against inner corruption and external control, and that the community

has a sacred duty to extend its culture values to outsiders. (A. D. Smith 1996b: 189)

Despite differing definitions of *ethnicity* and *ethnic group*, one point of general agreement is that ethnic identity is a type of collective identity that is socially distinguished or set apart by others and/or by the group members themselves on the basis of cultural characteristics (Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin 1999: 81) and that there cannot be ethnicity if there is no distinction between insiders and outsiders. Identity is always about similarities on the one hand and differences on the other. It is important that an ethnic group regards itself as a distinct, unique population; its identity is constructed in opposition to other (similar) groups, thus creating a distinction between *us* and *them* (Barth 1969). As Eriksen (2002: 10) notes, '[g]roup identities must always be defined in relation to that which they are not – in other words, in relation to non-members of the group. Ethnic groups may become more similar when contact between them increases, but at the same time they may become more and more concerned with their peculiarity. Ethnic boundaries maintain and generate cultural similarities produced and reproduced internally, between group members, as well as emphasise differences *vis-à-vis* external others (Jenkins 2003: 12). For the social anthropologist Simon Harrison (1999: 10), cultural content within ethnic boundaries seeks to differentiate between *us* and *them*. He considers ethnic boundaries and cultural boundaries to be closely connected: a group tries to prohibit the cultural practices and symbols of outsiders, such as dress, faith, language, rituals, etc., and is likely also to exclude members of a foreign group. Thus, cultural boundaries,

highlighting the contrast between similarity and difference, are simultaneously concerned with inclusion and exclusion.

Given these understandings, ethnic identity is understood in this study as a collective cultural identity conceived 'in historical, subjective and symbolic terms' (Smith 1991: 25). This means that ethnicity derives from a largely subjective, mythical and symbolic interpretation of history and from objective cultural characteristics (such as language, religion, territory, etc.). The next section explores ways in which ethnic groups use subjective dimensions to interpret ethnic markers.

### **2.1.1 Markers of ethnic identity: objective versus subjective**

Various scholars highlight the importance of different markers contributing to the survival and maintenance of an ethnic group. Distinct and contrasting paradigms in the study of nations and nationalism (see section 2.2) adopt different approaches to ethnicity and disagree about the importance of individual features: political, socio-economic and cultural. For example, primordialists view ethnicity in terms of blood ties. Some modernists stress factors which are political in nature, such as the degree of a community's autonomy or its political will to survive, and claim that ethnicity is a product of political myths (Leoussi & Smith 2001: 71). Other modernists focus on the possession of a homeland, material resources and skills for the support of the community, that is, on economic variables. Others (ethnosymbolists) emphasise cultural elements, such as language, religion, traditions, history and so forth.

The characteristics of ethnicity can be considered as either objective or subjective. More accurately, features which are objective (territory, traditions, language, religion, etc.) can at the same time be viewed as subjective. That is to say that their perception and interpretation may or may not be relevant from the point of view of a certain group. Furthermore, the subjective dimension of an objective feature may change over time. Eriksen (2002: 38-39) cites the example of Serbs and Croats who speak virtually the same language, thus sharing an objective marker, but who practise different Christian confessions. This difference in religion was largely irrelevant until the outbreak of civil war in Yugoslavia in 1991, when suddenly the difference in faith was invoked and employed to create boundaries defining these two ethnic groups. Therefore, all markers of ethnic identity should be considered from the point of view of their relevance for a group and their power, ability and adequacy to define boundaries. It is not the presence of objective criteria which contributes to the existence of ethnic identity, but their subjective quality. For example, some ethnic groups (e.g. Armenians, Jews) have survived for centuries not only without political autonomy, but also without inhabiting the territory they consider their homeland. Thus, for an ethnic group, attachment to a territory as a 'promised land' is sufficient: the mythical homeland is more important in defining identity than the existence of physical territory, the actual territory occupied by the ethnic group (A. D. Smith 1986: 28-9).

Even such objective factors as a collective name, language and religion become important markers of ethnic identity and are venerated only when subjective dimensions, attitudes, perceptions and sentiments are presented together with objective characteristics. A collective name – an ethnonym – is important for

ethnic group formation because it distinguishes members from non-members, *us* from *them*. In many languages, one and the same word denotes *language* and *people* (Bartlett 1996: 128). Many ethnic groups have a name identical to the name of the language they speak; linguistic boundaries are often the same as ethnic boundaries. The definition of an ethnic group by language is an old phenomenon, widespread in the ancient world (Dalby 2002:128). For example, the ancient Greeks considered that speaking Greek defined them as Greeks. The particularly important role of language in defining ethnic identity is prominent in the Middle Ages. The post-Babel differentiation of language was the first step in the formation of different groups and this biblically based belief was professed by medieval scholars (Bartlett 1996: 128). Language helps to define the cohesion of an ethnic group and is often seen as a pillar of *groupness* (Leoussi & Smith 2001:170). This is not surprising, taking into account that ethnicity is a type of cultural collective identity and that language is the vehicle of culture. Nevertheless, even a major attribute of culture, such as language, is not enough to be a marker of ethnicity. Many examples across the world show that, on the one hand, ethnic groups can be divided internally by language and that, on the other hand, having the same language does not ensure that two or more groups will have the same ethnic identity and that language is unable to unite opposing ethnic identities. For example, Czechs and Slovaks speak very similar language varieties, but belong to different ethnic groups because of considerably different historical experiences (Barbour 2002a: 12). The absence of a distinctive language or its loss does not prevent an ethnic group from having a sense of unique ethnic identity. Many minorities in Russia have lost their languages in the last two centuries, but their

ethnic identities have not weakened (Khilkhanova and Khilkhanov 2004). The same can be said of religion. Religious communities often do not coincide with ethnic groups. For example, although the majority of Georgians are Orthodox Christians, more than four percent of Georgians are Muslim or Catholic (Beridze 2004: 80).

A. D. Smith, who underlines the importance of subjective ethnic markers (Smith 1996b: 189), suggests paying more attention to the memories, symbols, myths and traditions of ethnic groups in order to understand their survival. If a group is united by emotional bonds, a belief in a common descent and a shared history, an ethnic group exists, whether or not there exists an objective foundation for such a belief (Edwards 2005: 127; Weber 1996: 35). The myths of common ancestry and the memories of a Golden Age are very powerful in uniting the members of the group (A.D. Smith 1996b). Ethnic identity relies on values and symbols, myths and memories which the members of the group believe in: they do not necessarily have an objective foundation. An ethnic group does not have a biological origin: it is 'imagined', in the same sense as nations are 'imagined communities' (see section 2.2.3). For A. D. Smith, a shared ethnic past and culture, even attachment to a territory and other markers of ethnic identity, have a mythical dimension. He identifies six criteria for the formation of an ethnic group as (A. D. Smith 1991: 21): a named human population; with a myth of common ancestry; shared memories; shared cultural elements; a link to a historic territory or homeland; and a measure of solidarity.

Ethnic identity [...] may be seen as the product of shared memories of collective experiences and activities of successive generations of a

group claiming a common origin and ancestry. Ethnicity in turn may be defined as the sense of collective belonging to a named community of common myths of origin and shared memories, associated with a historic homeland. (A. D. Smith 1996a: 583)

The importance of the subjective dimensions of ethnic identity for the survival of an ethnic group has been noted by many scholars. However, Smith brings an important and new element into play – the idea of *ethnic election* (A.D. Smith 1999b: 331-355) as a significant factor in the creation and reproduction of the in-group. The belief in being a chosen people has inspired ethnic collectivities over many generations and has been an important factor in ensuring their long-term survival (A.D. Smith: 1999a:130). For example, ethnic collectivities which view themselves as successors of the ancient Israelites (see section 3.2.1) believe they have been chosen to preserve the true faith. Such myths sustain the community of cultural identity, helping it to survive over centuries and prevail against the loss of political independence and exile from the ancestral homeland. This belief in the possession of the only true faith encourages not only a sense of uniqueness, but also an urge to nurture ethnic values. It strengthens a community's attachment to its religion and sacred language, but, more importantly, to its historical territory. The homeland, regarded as God-given, is the place where the ethnic group's ancestors lived and fought for the freedom of the land where their heroes and saints are buried. All these factors contribute to the emergence of nations and nationalisms, as will be seen in section 2.2.3, which discusses the objective and subjective elements of ethnic identity (among them the myths of *ethnic election*) that are used in nation-formation and the construction of national

identity in modern times. However, before exploring the role of ethnic identities in modern times and the emergence of nationalism, it is necessary to look at the relationship between ethnic identity and its elements as they change over time.

### **2.1.2 Ethnic identity and historical change**

Barth (1969) argues the necessity of looking at ethnicity from a historical perspective: how did ethnically distinctive groups with separate genealogies emerge in a given area?

Ethnicity must by definition arise either from a process of social differentiation within a population, which eventually leads to the division of that population into two distinctive groups, or by an expansion of system boundaries bringing hitherto discrete groups into contact with each other. (Eriksen 2002: 79)

This view fits very well with social and cultural understandings of ethnicity, since both processes – social differentiation and cultural expansion – mark ethnic boundaries and become elementary dimensions of identity marking.

Depending to the levels of incorporation and self-identification displayed by human populations throughout history, A. D. Smith (1991: 20–21) distinguishes between *ethnic category* and *ethnie* (a French term he uses for *ethnic community*). Ethnic categories are ‘human populations whom at least some outsiders consider to constitute a separate cultural and historical grouping’. An *ethnie*, by contrast, is the highest degree of ethnic incorporation, self-awareness and subjective identification with the community, possessing different degrees of such attributes as historical memories, myths of common ancestry and narratives of origin, specific cultural



elements, association with homeland, a collective name and some elements of culture.

The evidence of tribes and ethnic groups, as well as certain *ethnies*, are found as far back as five thousand years ago. As Smith notes, at the point where written history begins, in the mid-third millennium BC, *ethnies* were already in existence, and named cultural communities appear as historical actors. Ethnically based kingdoms appeared in the ancient world and became prototypes for medieval kingdoms. In the modern world, ethnic communities not only still exist, but have played an increasingly important role, especially after the Second World War. They are often associated with political struggles for independence and ethnic conflict (for example, in Georgia), one of the causes of which may be a perceived threat to ethnic identity. In general, social identity becomes more important when faced with a perceived threat. Such threats can vary in nature – economic change (for example, industrialisation), integration into a larger political unit, changes in demographic profile, migration, and so on. For example, as will be discussed in chapter 3, oddly enough, one of the ways in which the Christianisation of Georgia gave a strong impetus to the development of ethnic identity was by intensifying ethnic sentiments, since this transethnic religion contained a threat to ethnic markers. The strength of ethnic ties increased after the disintegration of communist regimes, when national movements arose in post-communist countries. Despite the view held by some social scientists (for example, Marx; see section 2.2.1) that ethnicity and nationalism would decrease and eventually disappear, the break-up of the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia at the end of the twentieth century made it clear that ethnicity cannot be ignored.

The role of ethnic identity in national movements became the subject of growing academic interest in the second half of the twentieth century. Current scholars of nationalism have begun to look at links between ethnicity and nationalism more carefully, because of the ethnic revival and ethnic nationalist movements of the last few decades in various parts of the world. Some theorists have provided a better explanation than others of the ethnic roots of nationalism, suggesting that there is continuity between pre-modern ethnic groups and modern nations. The next section discusses nations and nationalism and their connection to ethnicity.

## **2.2 Nations and nationalisms**

Like *ethnicity*, the word *nation* has no universal definition among scholars and there is much confusion surrounding the concept. In daily usage and in academic writing, the term *nation* (derived from the Latin *natio*) is sometimes used as an equivalent of *ethnic group*, *country* or *state*. Some scholars offer a definition that would apply to an ethnic group. For example, Tamir (1995: 425) defines a nation as a ‘community whose members share feelings of fraternity, substantial distinctiveness, and exclusivity, as well as beliefs in a common ancestry and continuous genealogy’. As seen in the previous section, these are all qualities manifested by ethnic groups. Sometimes *nation* is used as an equivalent to *state*. From the Middle Ages to the early modern period, *nation* was used with different meanings and connotations in European languages (James 1996: 10-12). Some meanings include *foreign people*, *representatives of a community*, *élite*, *people*. Enlightenment philosophers used *nation* to describe *a people*. Sometimes *nation*

had the connotation of a distinct character. With the French Revolution (1789–1799) came the idea that each nation has a specific territory beyond which the claims of other nations apply (Miscevic 2005). Thus the Revolution spread a new meaning of this term – as an upholder of sovereignty – with a strong political connotation. From this time, the concept of *nation* becomes even more closely associated with the state, giving rise to the term *nation-state*.

By the end of the nineteenth century, Europe was divided into nation-states. Unlike states of former times, nation-states are sovereign territories for nations, where political, geographical and cultural entities coincide – that is, each member of the nation is a citizen of the state and the citizens of the nation-state share common values and culture. This is different from other, historically older kinds of states (O’Flaherty & Gisvold 1998: 265), where mere residents did not relate to the society directly, but rather belonged to one of its subgroups (Gellner: 1998: 22), and where cultural bonds did not require cultural similarities (Gellner 1998: 24). The most important thing about a nation-state is that it creates a uniform national culture through state policy: the nation-state is a political unit where cultural homogeneity is desirable (Wright 2000:3). This does not mean that *nation* is an equivalent of *nation-state* or that the nation and the nation-state coincide. They almost never do.

[W]hile the members of a nation are conscious of forming a community, the nation-state seeks to create a nation and develop a sense of community stemming from it. While the nation has a common culture, values and symbols, the nation-state has as an

objective the creation of a common culture, symbols and values.

(Guibernau 2005: 47-48)

Nevertheless, the substitutive use of the terms *nation* and *nation-state* illustrates the close link between people and territory, nations and states. Moreover, nationhood is a very strong form of territoriality. Striving to achieve political self-government is one of the major differences between an ethnic group and a nation.

Thus, an ethnic group is not a nation and a nation-state is not a nation, in other words, it is clear what a nation is not, but it is still difficult to define what it is. Hobsbawm (1992: 8) suggests calling a nation any group of people which thinks of itself as a nation; but in practice there are contradictory views about what constitutes a nation and how its membership should be defined. It is clear that a nation is a group of people, but how does it differ from other human groups? How is national identity different from other collective identities? What constitutes national identity?

Various scholars point out that a common culture and a belief in the right to self-determination within a given territory are necessary features of a nation. For example, Smith defines a nation as a named human population sharing a historical territory, common myths and historical memories, a mass public culture, a common economy and common legal rights and duties for all members (A. D. Smith 1991: 14). For Nodia (1994:11), a nation is ‘a community of people organized around the idea of self-determination’. Some scholars emphasise that this self-determination must be a territorial self-determination, that a belief in the right to control the homeland is what makes a nation different from other groups

(Barrington 1997). In this study, the modern nation is defined by a common culture, and the belief in the right to self-determination and to territory. It differs from pre-modern kinds of nations by the clarity of its borders, its status as a legal-political community, the mass consciousness it engenders and the legitimacy it derives from nationalism. According to A. D. Smith (2004b: 210), the pre-modern nation nonetheless forms a basis – albeit not the only basis – for the modern nation (see section 2.2.3 and chapter 3 for further discussion). While Western scholars have long debated the definitions of *nation*, Soviet scholars found it indisputably defined by Stalin in the *Great Soviet Encyclopedia* (see section 2.3). The term *nationalism* has also acquired multiple meanings. Some view it as a political principle, others as an extension of ethnicity, as a cultural project, as a linguistic movement, as patriotism and so on. In the post-Soviet world, there is much debate among scholars about whether nationalism means the same as patriotism (L. Berdzenishvili 2005). According to most, patriotism is loyalty to the state, while nationalism is loyalty to the nation (Roshwald 2006: 4). Nationalism and patriotism are easily confused because some scholars believe that state and nation are congruent: nationalism is ‘a principle which holds that the political and national unit should be congruent’ (Gellner 1983: 1), that is, one state – one nation. In the real world this is almost impossible. The difference between nationalism and patriotism is important for understanding Georgian nationalism (and Soviet and post-Soviet nationalisms in general), because these two concepts were confounded; while patriotism was valued, and loyalty to the nation would be described by this term, words like *nationalist*, *nationalism* carried negative connotations. For example, in Ozhegov’s dictionary (1986), *nationalism* is defined as a ‘reactionary

bourgeois ideology and politics, which inflames national hostility and puts the dominating nation in an exclusive position.’ A similar definition is given in all other Soviet encyclopedias and dictionaries.

Recent discussions of the doctrine of nationalism have led some theorists to conclude that it is impossible to have one universal theory or to generalise about such phenomena (Özirimli 2000: 226; Guibernau 2005: 45). This is due not only to different approaches to nationalism, but also to differences between the types of nationalisms, nations and national identities found in various parts of the world. The next section looks at different theories of nations and nationalism.

### **2.2.1 Paradigms of nationalism**

One paradigm of nationalism – *primordialism* – asserts that nations are natural, immutable and ancient phenomena and that national identity cannot be chosen. A more extreme variety of the primordial interpretation is *sociobiology*, which considers nations to be an extension of kinship ties. As such, Van den Berghe considers cultural symbols of groups (language, religion, etc.) to be biological markers, while Horowitz (1985) calls ethnic groups ‘super-families’ (Conversi 2007a: 16). According to the sociobiological approach, ethnic myths of origin are mostly based on real facts. Other primordial approaches assert that nations (as well as ethnic groups) are formed through cultural ties, which generate strong affection, emotions and attachments to groups, as well as beliefs and perceptions among their members (Özirimli 2000: 72-74).

Another paradigm, *perennialism*, maintains both that nationalism is a modern phenomenon and that nations have existed since time immemorial; they

may change in form, but not in identity (Hastings 1999a). In other words, nations are regarded as updated versions of immemorial ethnic communities, in all epochs of history (A.D. Smith 1998: 159). The goal of nationalism in this paradigm is to rediscover the appropriate past and ancient culture as a continuum that transmits the ethnic groups of history into the nations of modernity. There are two types of *perennialism*: *continuous perennialism* and *recurrent perennialism*. While the former focuses on continuity and assumes that some nations have a long history that can be traced back to the Middle Ages or even antiquity, the latter considers the phenomenon of nationhood to be historically universal, although particular nations may appear and disappear throughout history (A. D. Smith 1998: 159-165).

Yet another paradigm of nationalism – *modernism* – is shared by most contemporary theorists of nationalism. Modernism considers nations and nationalism to be the products of modernity and related to industrialisation, which demands a workforce with a basic knowledge of ‘high culture’. Many modernist scholars represent either an *instrumentalist* view, considering national identity as an instrumental choice, i.e., serving as the instrument of some interests (Gellner 1983; Anderson 1983), or a *constructivist* view, according to which a nation is socially constructed for political goals and is manipulated by élites in order to hold on to power (Hobsbawm 1992).

Modernists believe that before modern times people had no sense of nationhood and had loyalties only to their local place or religion or to the ruler and the ruling house. In the pre-industrial period, society was organised hierarchically, with the least enfranchised class of agriculture producer forming isolated local communities. This created and maintained cultural differences. According to

Gellner (1998), agrarian society could exist only by maintaining this hierarchical system, and the role of culture was to reinforce this system. When this is a main role of culture, of course culture cannot play the role essential for nationhood: it cannot mark the boundaries of a political unit. In other words, nationalism cannot arise in an agrarian society where there is no mobility, but where the members of the community are kept in their places and the cultural differences between different communities are emphasised (Gellner 1998). The knowledge of 'high culture' can be achieved only through modern education based on a standard common language which provides a means of communication with 'others who are like oneself' (Baycroft 2006: 33). The vernacular must necessarily become a written language if the masses are to be involved in a national movement. As one commentator explains, '[t]he survival of a nation and the success of its drive towards nation-state status are predicated upon the existence of a language that its people can speak, and more importantly, read and write' (Caviedes 2003: 250). Mass communication and education, what Anderson (1983) has called print-capitalism, made it possible for more and more people to relate to others. Only a state can provide the necessary educational and communication systems, and if nationalism is its ideology, then nationalism makes a nation and not vice versa: 'it is the state which makes the nation and not the nation the state' (Hobsbawm 1992: 44-45). Thus, according to the modernist paradigm, the nation is seen as something constructed from above.

Anderson (1983) agrees that the structural changes introduced by modernisation were a necessary element in creating new 'imagined communities'. Media printed in the vernacular, which become a new instrument for political



power (old established élites used it, as do new, créole élites in colonial countries) have played an important role. Unlike Gellner and Hobsbawm, Anderson supports a cultural understanding of nationalism. For him, nationalism as a cultural phenomenon can offer a feeling of community, and the community has a destiny. Therefore the nation can appeal to patriotism – it is something worth dying for.

Another interpretation of the modernist approach is Marxism, which claims nationalism to be a logical part of the historical development of humankind and a characteristic feature of expanding capitalism. For this reason, it shares the idea that a nation is a social construct and a modern phenomenon; but for Marx ethnic sentiments and national consciousness were ‘false’ feelings which would disappear at some point in history. Marx did not therefore develop a formal theory of nationalism, which is why Marxism cannot explain contemporary nationalist movements. Other modernists, who deny the historical roots of nations and believe that nation-building can proceed without the aid of an ethnic past, also fail to explain the aspirations of contemporary ethno-national movements.

Another disputed point in modernism is the origin of the *nation-state*. As mentioned earlier in this section, modernist theorists see the nation as a result of state nationalism. For example, Hobsbawm maintains that the French nation came into existence after the French state was established, because it was a state that promoted the unification of different languages and dialects spoken across its territory. While in the case of France and the USA a nation is brought into existence by the effort of the state, this is obviously not the case everywhere. There have been nationalisms of stateless nations which had none of the resources

available to Western states, but which were nevertheless able to form a nation (A. D. Smith 1991: 43-70).

A fourth paradigm of nationalism – *ethnosymbolism* – is situated halfway between modernism and perennialism and, in my view, provides a better explanation than other paradigms of the ethnic roots of nationalism, suggesting that there is continuity between pre-modern ethnic groups and modern nations. It does not deny the influence of industrialisation and capitalisation on nationalism, but, instead of adopting a radical modernist angle, it takes into account the primordial and perennial nature of groups. In other words, by sharing the view that nationalism is modern and is related to capitalism, ethnosymbolists are modernists. Like other modernists, ethnosymbolists understand the essential role of common culture, but they also recognise those elements that existed before modern times. That is, they argue that, although nationalism is a modern phenomenon, nations are products not only of modernity. The ethnosymbolic approach to nations was developed by A. D. Smith (e.g.1986, 1991,1999a, 2008, 2009), who analyses myths and symbols, memories and values of ethnic groups, which he calls *ethnies*, and argues that they form the cultural basis for the emergence of nations. Like Anderson, Smith also views nationalism as a cultural phenomenon and considers ethnic and national identities to be forms of cultural identities. He suggests that there is continuity between pre-modern collective cultural identity presented in *ethnies* and national identity found in modern *nations*. For Smith, *ethnie* is the more general form, and nation the more specific. But he believes that *ethnies* (a premodern basis for *nation*) and nations coexist, rather than develop in an evolutionary sequence. By this Smith distances himself from primordialism and

perennialism. Collective cultural identity can change, albeit slowly and within certain parameters; at the same time, it remains continuous, self-identical and, despite changes, preserved from generation to generation: it is even possible to look at development from an ethnic category to a nation as an uninterrupted line (A. D. Smith 1991: 19-42). For Smith, an ethnic core is a necessary condition for nation-formation and nationalism, because a community cannot survive without mythology and symbolism. The memories, myths and symbols of an *ethnie* provide the basis for cohesion in modern times.

The most important characteristic that distinguishes a *nation* from an *ethnie* is the public culture that imbues a majority of members of a given nation through a standard educational system and state institutions. In the case of *ethnies*, culture can circulate only within a particular segment of the population. Despite giving a list of differences between a nation and an *ethnie*, Smith himself admits that in practice it is not easy to distinguish between the two. Nations can emerge from *ethnies* in any epoch, although more nations appear in modern times because only now can a truly public culture exist, thanks to modern means of communication and education.

In *The Ethnic Origins of Nations* (1986), Smith underlines three kinds of revolution that have caused nationalism: the transition from feudalism to capitalism, revolution in the control of administration, and cultural and educational revolution. He considers the last to be the most fundamental in the emergence of nationalism. All three are results of modernism, but their features derive from characteristics that existed before modern times in *ethnies*. The function of culture in society after these three revolutions changed – it became politicised. The élite

and the masses became members of a society united by a shared culture. Such an understanding of culture is similar to modernist approaches, but for ethnosymbolism the core of a culture lies in the past of an *ethnie*.

Thus, ethnosymbolism combines perennialism with modernism in the sense that it underlines the *longue durée* between pre-modern and modern forms of social cohesion and takes into account the changes brought by modernity. It places shared myths of descent, memories, values and symbols at the centre of national identity and considers *ethnies* to be the foundation of modern nations. Therefore, it recognises an ethnic core in the formation of a nation.

Each of the paradigms discussed in this section have made its own contribution to understanding the phenomena of nation and nationalism, but this study will concentrate on the approach that supports the ethnic origin of nations. As such, nationalism is understood here as the desire of a culturally-based group for a nation-state – independence, territory and self-rule. An ethnosymbolic framework provides a firm explanation of so-called ethno-nationalism, as discussed in the next section.

### **2.2.2 Typologies of nationalism**

Over the last two centuries there has been much discussion about the two opposing views of nationalism represented by the French and German models – the so-called civic and ethnic models. The French conception associated with the name of Ernest Renan and his 1882 Sorbonne lecture *Qu'est-ce qu'une nation?* arises from the idea of a nation as a sovereign state, founded upon the will of free individuals, that is, a community of people based on a political choice. It started with the French

Revolution, when the third estate, calling itself a nation, opposed the old régime.<sup>2</sup> The nation of citizens, created by free choice, exercises its civil rights and duties. This kind of nationalism is aimed at unification rather than separation. In such a view the ideals of the Enlightenment – universalism and rationality – are declared.<sup>3</sup>

The second, ethnic conception of nationalism comes from the ideas of the German Romanticists, mainly Herder, who defended ‘the national character’, and is based on the common origin, culture, history, language and the spirit of a nation. Already in the nineteenth century, adherents of these two views were competing for a very practical purpose, to define the territorial situation of Alsace and Lorraine. Germans thought the two regions should become part of Germany, because their respective populations undoubtedly belonged to German history, culture and language. Renan maintained the opposite view, saying that a population does not make its choice of state based on ethno-cultural factors but rather for political reasons.

The distinction between these two types of nationalism was explained by the social structure of national movements. Where the third estate was already a strong force in the eighteenth century, the demands of movements were mostly concerned with politics, economics and civic rights. Where in the nineteenth century the bourgeoisie was still weak, the demands were concerned with culture.

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<sup>2</sup> The estates were divisions of society. The first estate comprised the nobility, the second estate was made up of the clergy and the third estate everyone else (Baycroft 2006: 6).

<sup>3</sup> Enlightenment is the era of the eighteenth century French intellectual movement with progressive and liberal ideas, which gave rise to the development of scientific knowledge in opposition to clericalism (Sinha 1996: 64)

Thus, the two distinct types can be called political/civic and cultural/ethnic/romantic nationalisms, respectively.

Brubaker (1992) investigates how French and German views of nation have influenced the formation of states. In France, the bureaucratic monarchy gave birth to a political and territorial concept of national identity. Around a political and cultural centre, the nation-state was gradually forming, and cultural assimilation was taking place – first, of regional cultural minorities and, later, of immigrants. In Germany, the idea of nationhood was not originally political, but cultural and linguistic. This helped the development of an ethno-cultural understanding of *nation*. Brubaker himself summarises the difference between French and German views of nation in one sentence: ‘The French understand their nation as a creation of their state, the Germans understand their nation as the basis of their state’ (Brubaker 1992: 184). According to him, there are two types of nationalism: one is focused on the state, its institutions and territory, stressing common destiny; the other exists in spite of the state, stressing a common past.

Kohn (1955) has suggested a dichotomy, based on geographical criteria, between civic and ethnic nationalisms. He argues that the civic nationalisms of Western Europe, which existed in unified states that developed early and were characterised by shared political history, citizenship, a strong political élite and a common territorial and legal framework, was progressive and liberal. By contrast, the ethnic nationalisms of Eastern European countries, lagging behind in modernisation, characterised by shared ancestral myths and historical memories and a common culture, were backward and illiberal. Kohn views the Western type, examples of which are Great Britain, France, the United States, the Netherlands

and Switzerland, as 'good', democratic, rational, civic and peaceful. Examples of Eastern nationalism are Germany and the countries of Eastern Europe and Asia. This form of nationalism is 'bad', ethnic, regressive, irrational, conflicting, violent, and atavistic. Ethnicity in such a discussion of nationalism is presented as something dangerous and a destructive force for the modern world.

Kohn's framework is out of step with contemporary studies in nationalism. Analysts who share his views always point to cases in modern history where ethno-nationalism has caused conflicts and even genocide (like the Balkans and the Caucasus). They avoid discussing successful cases of building ethno-nations in Europe (for example, Catalonia and Wales) where nationalism clearly has ethnic roots as well and which fall within the category of ethnic nationalism (for example, Basque or Catalan are not the same as French or British). As Saussure (2006: 3) says, the point of view determines the object of the study, not vice versa. The idea of a civic nation emerged in the West: it is a very powerful concept, but to consider it the only correct point of view for understanding nationalism is wrong. When analysing nationalisms of post-communist states, most Western scholars look at the last two decades of development, when the focus has been on violence and ethnic conflicts. Eastern nationalism was therefore assumed to be a primitive, backward movement (see Nairn 1997: 86). If everything that ethnosymbolism considers crucial for understanding nationalism – the ethnic core of a nation, its collective memories – is dismissed and its symbols and myths are overlooked, if it is assumed that Western nationalism is the only positive, progressive and rational kind of nationalism, then it follows that Eastern nationalism looks regressive and

undemocratic. In reality, civic nationalism does not exclude ethnic elements, while ethnic nationalism often encompasses civic elements/dimensions (Kuzio 2002).

Moreover, the civic-ethnic dichotomy has nothing to do with geographical concepts of Western and Eastern. Industrialisation occurred in the West and East at different times, and this played its role in the character of nationalism. A discussion of the two types must be related only to the resources used in creating national identity and mobilising people around the idea of nationalism (A. D. Smith 1986), as well as the aims of their movements. The historical-political background helps to explain the ethnic character of nationalisms in Eastern Europe (Schöpflin 2002: 279), where nations found themselves in circumstances (imperial or communist experience, assimilationist policies, etc.) where civic dimensions of nationhood (the will of individuals to form a nation of equal citizens, united in patriotism to a political unit) could not emerge. Therefore, different types of nationalisms must be understood as responses to different historical, political, economic and cultural situations.

In place of Kohn's framework, another kind of dichotomy related to the aims of nationalism is suggested here. Nationalism could be a political project, in which self-determination is understood either as nation-state building or as an ethno-cultural project aimed at the activation of an *ethnie*, cultural revival and cultural autonomy (self-determination). Sometimes these two kinds of nationalism are called state nationalism and cultural nationalism (Lalotou 2004: 94; Hutchinson 1999).



Smith also distinguishes between two types of nationalism – territorial and ethnic – but he does not tie these differences to concrete states. Many examples (Catalan, Scottish, etc.) show that civic and ethnic variants are not mutually exclusive and most nationalisms combine both civic and ethnic components. Smith’s approach underlines the dynamic character of the development of national identities and shows that in practice each nation has characteristics of both ethnic and territorial nationalisms (A. D. Smith 1986). Moreover, at different times in one and the same nation different types of nationalisms can take over. A. D. Smith (1998: 126) shows that even French nationalism, which is considered to be an embodiment of civic nationalism, has an ethnic core.

Smith also shows that in the modern world outside Western Europe, nationalists face a hard challenge in trying to consolidate nations around one of two types of nation. Many times making a choice is not totally deliberate, since it is dictated by the ethnic structure, culture and the political possibilities of a state. If the state has an ethnic core, that is, a majority dominating by number and culture, minorities could be assimilated: this is what happened in Western Europe. If there is no such core, they must become a political nation. In order to make this happen common institutions and systems of communication are not enough if the members do not feel an emotional quality, that is, a feeling of belonging to the community. And this is a time when a political nation seeks a common ethnic past, heroes and traditions. As Schöpflin (2002: 6) states, Western states, ‘far from having “left ethnicity behind”, as it were, have in reality done something else – they have contextualized it, they have successfully hemmed it in by constructing state

machineries and civil societies that ensure that ethnicity is not the sole source of political power’.

For Smith, ethnic nationalism is the mobilisation of ethnic groups through the rediscovery of an ethnic past; therefore ethnic identity can produce nationalism. Since ‘ethnic’ nationalisms share with the ‘civic’ nationalisms collective attachments to a ‘homeland’ (A. D. Smith 2008: 17), the idea of self-determination applies to territory occupied by an ethnic group. Therefore nationalist intellectuals mobilise people around the right to this territory. Their rhetoric is closest to the primordial understanding of nations as a natural and very old phenomenon. The ethnic model is very fertile in cases where pre-modern demotic communities have survived into the modern era. A large number of non-Western nations (e.g. Georgia, Armenia) began as colonies (e.g. Georgia), parts of empires, and their nationalism became a struggle for liberation. Unable to use civic and state institutions, they could rely only on culture and history. They had a great desire to protect a cultural heritage and make sure that the existence of groups was not under threat. As Eriksen (2002: 76) points out, ‘ethnic identity becomes crucially important the moment it is perceived as being under threat’. In order to protect ethnic identity, a group’s historical memory and cultural symbols can be manipulated, selected and even constructed, although not necessarily fabricated. The resources of liberal democracy, typical of Western European and North American states, as a representative political system based on universal voting rights, or competition by political parties for power, and on the protection of citizens’ rights (Bruce & Yearley 2006: 172), were not available to colonial countries (neither in the nineteenth nor twentieth centuries): civic values and

democracy had no chance to emerge. Such countries needed something else to preserve their identity: they used ethnic and cultural elements as the glue for national identity and an instrument for mobilisation around the idea of nationalism. The ethnic past, crucial for nation-building, is elaborated by philologists, historians, archaeologists, poets and writers in order to link the past to the present. In this way intellectuals help in modernising a nation. Their first task is to identify and codify national identity, then to mobilise people around the nationalist idea. The next section looks at the markers of ethnic identity used by national leaders to mobilise people around the ideology of nationalism and constructing national identities.

### **2.2.3 The ethnic origins of national identity**

There are similarities as well as differences between ethnic and national identities. National identity, like ethnic identity, has two sets of characteristics: objective and subjective. Objective features include language, land, religion and other more or less identifiable dimensions of ethno-national belonging. These objective markers become part of a subjective 'myth-symbol complex', which, according to Smith, is central to the national self-consciousness. The belief in the existence of objective characteristics, irrespective of whether this is true in reality, has great symbolic and instrumental value. The strength of ethnic boundaries is different for different groups. Various combinations of ethnic markers create unique national identities. As Hroch says:

Now the nation is not, of course, an eternal category, but was the product of a long and complicated process of historical development

in Europe [...] let us define it at the outset as a large social group integrated not by one but by a combination of several kinds of objective relationships (economic, political, linguistic, cultural, religious, geographical, historical), and their subjective reflection in collective consciousness. Many of these ties could be mutually substitutable – some playing a particularly important role in one nation-building process, and no more than a subsidiary part in others. (Hroch 1996: 79)

Like ethnic identity, national identity is also a type of collective cultural identity. Usually nations consist of several ethnic groups, and national identities are shared by several ethnic identity holders. Ethnic identities have their cultural contents. National identity is achieved through cultural integration, that is, by bringing together different cultural and social groups. At the beginning of the modern period, however, the process was achieved by assimilation (for example in France) rather than integration (discussed in detail in section 2.4.3).

For both ethnic and national identities a collective name is important: ‘collective names are a sure sign and emblem of ethnic communities, by which they distinguish themselves and summarize their “essence: to themselves’ (A. D. Smith 1986: 23). Here Smith is talking about ethnic identity, but if we recall his definition of a nation, it is obvious that he also considers an ethnonym to be a very important marker of national identity.

Another similar feature between ethnic group and nation is that both are ‘imagined communities’ (Anderson 1983). The members do not know each other

directly, and they include not only contemporary members but also ancestors and future generations. They also share a collective memory of the past, based on myths of descent, shared values and symbols, a common fate and history, links with particular territories, religion and myths of election, as well as the need for a collective defence against 'the other'. This is where modern nationalism finds its power. Nationalist scholars, especially historians and philologists, play a great role in discovering and reinterpreting the past, creating their own version of events and drawing the masses into their history. They act as 'chroniclers of the past, linking it to present' (Conversi 2007a: 22-23). A. D. Smith (1999a) considers the central role of intellectuals who provide solidarity among members by presenting evidence for ethno-history, tracing ethnogenesis and cultural markers, including language, names, homeland, customs, etc, through generations over a *longue durée*, in order to identify the links between pre-modern and modern times and to claim a nation's continuity. In his words, 'those nations with the most durable solidarity and most distinctive cultural heritage have emerged on the bases of strong pre-existing ethnic ties' (A. D. Smith 1999: 190). Therefore, the activities of historians and philologists are crucial for understanding the ethnic foundations of nations.

As occurs in many parts of Eastern Europe, including Georgia (see section 6.2), in order to reconstruct the community as a pure, original nation, the élite choose symbolic and social features from an earlier ethnic culture (A.D. Smith 2008: 21), through which they mobilise the masses around the past and try to generate national consciousness among them. Through these linkages between present and past, members of a nation feel that they are part of its history and gain the strength to engage in heroic action and to defend the interests of their nation.

Many modernists admit that nationalists use some elements from the past, mix them and create or invent traditions. Nationalism ‘does need some pre-existing differentiating marks to work on’ (Gellner 1964: 168). Nevertheless, such modernists argue that nationalism can proceed without help from the past. Smith agrees that nationalism helps to create nations (A. D. Smith 1991: 71), but he believes that *sacred foundations* and *deep resources* (A. D. Smith 1996a) provided by earlier communities (see below) are much more important in explaining nationalism, especially in understanding the ethnic character of many nationalist movements in the contemporary world. He also agrees that nationalist scholars play a vital role in constructing nations, rediscovering and reinterpreting the past according to the needs of their doctrines, but in most cases these interpretations are consonant with the historic and archaeological evidence.

History is no sweetshop in which its children may ‘pick and mix’; but neither is it an unchanging essence or succession of superimposed strata. Nor can history be simply disregarded, as more than one nationalism has found to its cost. (A. D. Smith 1994: 19)

In their attempt to confirm the legitimacy of political claims, nationalists look for what Smith calls ‘deep resources’. Among these ‘deep resources’, he identifies territorial attachments, myths of election and other myths and memories, especially those of a Golden Age or Golden Ages – periods when the community was wealthy, creative and powerful (A. D. Smith 2001: 23-24).

[T]he more faithfully recorded, better documented and more comprehensive a Golden Age, the more impact it can exert over later generations. [...] Successive generations of the community may differ as to which epoch is to be regarded as a golden age, depending on the criteria in fashion at the time. [...] [T]hose communities with well-documented rich ethno-histories possess 'deep resources' on which to draw, and so can sustain themselves over long periods and maintain an extended struggle for recognition and parity. Even where they lack political and military security, their successive layers of cultural resources underpin their political claims as well as their sense of common ethnicity. (A. D. Smith 1996a: 583-585)

But not all ethnic communities can appeal to 'a great past' or Golden Age. Smith draws attention to the 'uneven distribution' of ethnic history (A. D. Smith 1996a: 583). While some communities can boast of a rich, well-documented ethnic history (e.g. Armenians, Georgians), others have only bare, shadowy memories of the past and shallow traditions (e.g. Slovaks or Estonians) (A. D. Smith 1993: 131; 1999a: 17), but they are equally interested in a 'usable past' and 'rooted culture' and they often annex the past of neighbours and identify themselves with the communities with greater cultural pasts. For example, Abkhaz nationalists claim the historic and cultural heritage of a Medieval Georgian kingdom and Belorussians have similar claims concerning the Belorussia-Lithuanian Kingdom (Shnirelman 2000: 57). Therefore, the historical past and shared memories often have the form of myth (Smith 1991: 22); in fact, all markers of ethnic and national

identity have a mythical and subjective quality. Nationalist intellectuals, who invoke those myths and memories, discover the past and place the origin of their group in time, can mobilise people and establish solidarity only if they ‘fit’ popular traditions. Even if the members of a community are aware that the myths they accept are not strictly accurate, they consider that the story told is more important than its verifiable truth (Schöpflin 1997: 19-20).

[W]hen acting as ethnic entrepreneurs, nationalist historians must sell a plausible product that is both effective and affective. [...] National myths cannot be perceived to be inventions. Although the predictable nature of their construction and combination may lead observers to emphasize the element of artifice, historical mythologies as popular systems of belief also need to be understood through the eyes of their adherents, for whom they need to be perceived as first order truths. (Wilson 1997: 182-183)

Shared memories include religious movements and their leaders, saints, heroes, battles, dynasties and their king; myths include myths of origin (foundation myths), myths of national resistance, language myths, etc. They will be discussed in detail with regard to Georgia throughout this thesis, but here attention is devoted to religion and some religious myths as well as myths of homeland as important markers of national identity.

Belief has provided a great source for the symbols, memories and myths of ethnicity. In some places an image of a nation has been constructed around them (for example, Bosnian Catholics consider Bosnian Muslims to be a different nation



in religious terms), but in other cases, where ‘religious loyalties threatened to weaken or divide the nation, they would be ignored or suppressed in the national interest’ (Preece 2005: 29). This was the case in Georgia (see section 3.2).

Among myths of ethnicity the myth of being chosen is most powerful. Smith (2004a) and Hastings (1999b) believe in the power of an ancient election model in the formation of national identities and the persistence of nations. Religion reinforced the goals of an ethnic group and supplied cultural resources for the idea of a *chosen people*, which in turn guaranteed ethnic survival (A. D. Smith 1999a: 130). Myths of chosenness and ethnic election were common in the ancient world (A. D. Smith 1996c: 452). Such myths meant that a group had a sacred mission, moral obligations and special destiny. The paradigm of chosenness was provided by the Old Testament (Hastings 1999a: 196). The Jews believed they were ‘chosen’ (A. D. Smith 1996b: 190), but the myth of communal election is also found among Sumerians, Egyptians, Babylonians and ancient Persians. Nevertheless, it has been most powerful among Christians (Hastings 1999a: 198), who adopted the model of ancient Israel. Myths of ethnic election helped to draw a strict boundary against others, who did not have the same divine mission. Later, a secular ideology of nationalism ‘breathed new life’ (A. D. Smith 1999a: 140) into these myths. In modern times this idea of ethnic election ‘may either be fused within religious nationalism, where a particular faith and nation coincide, or a more secularized nation may simply inherit these ideological forms from its more religious past, preserving them while filling them with more secular-nationalist content’ (Hearn 2006: 175-6).

One of the powerful sources of historic continuity in identity development is the interrelation between a people and its land (A. D. Smith 2001: 24). Myths of ethnic election often strengthen a community's attachment to its homeland, which is regarded as God-given property (A. D. Smith: 1996b: 194). In general, the collective ownership of property is a salient marker of group's solidarity. Taking into account that the most significant property is a territory, territoriality is considered to be one of the most salient markers of national identity (Grosby 1995). As shown in section 2.1.1, the mythical homeland is more important for ethnic identity than the actual territory occupied by an ethnic group. However with nationalism, a broader geographic perception of home emerged: a feeling that this nation belongs only here and nowhere else (Kaiser 1994: 17-18). Nationhood cannot be achieved without self-determination over territory. As Penrose (2002) argues, nationalism, as a part of modernity, contributed to a major transformation in the significance of territory. Thus, territory or homeland has a more significant function for nations, and a belief in the right to control the homeland is what distinguishes a nation from ethnic groups.

But a nation is defined not only by the right to self-determination over a given territory, but also by a common public culture. As seen in section 2.2.1, Smith identified cultural and educational revolution to be the most fundamental factors in the emergence of nationalism. Modernity required the standardisation of skills and the homogenisation of culture which became possible through public schooling (Eriksen 2002: 103). Thus, a 'folk culture' was transformed into public culture through mass education and 'high culture', previously solely the property of the élite, became accessible to everybody. High culture 'overlaps with

communication, most notably language' (Conversi 2007b: 374). But language is more than just a means of communication. One of its fundamental features and functions is to mark identity (Joseph 2004: 11), in particular a common cultural identity. For nationalists it is also the bridge between their nation and the sacred (Blattberg 2006) and a symbol for the articulation of nationalist claims. According to Schöpflin (2002: 123), 'having one's own language means that political, social, cultural and civic institutions can operate without interference from outside'. Although a single shared language is not absolutely necessary for a nation, it is often very useful for nationalist ideology.

While the linguistically homogeneous state is extremely rare, and while a high proportion of languages are actually not sharply distinct from others, the demand for the linguistically homogeneous nation and clearly distinct national language has become a standard part of nationalist ideology. (Barbour 2002a: 14)

Nationalism sees a common language for the entire population as a vehicle for maintaining a nation. As Deutsch (1953) has pointed out, the study of the connection between nationalism, ethnicity and language is very complex. In modern times, an ethnic past (objective or not), together with language, becomes the basis for the process of turning ethnic identity into national identity. Linguistic homogenisation becomes necessary for cultural unity, communication and nationhood. In many cases a standard language is the most significant marker of national identity (see section 2.4.2). A literary (standard) language is also acknowledged by Marxism-Leninism as a necessary attribute of nationhood,

although Marx himself did not put primary emphasis on language or other cultural characteristics in nationhood but traced its economic roots, as shown in the next section.

### **2.3 Marxism-Leninism and nationalism**

Georgian nationalism, both in the Soviet and post-Soviet periods, has been heavily influenced by a Marxist-Leninist and Stalinist understanding of *nations* and *nationalism*. This section introduces the Marxist view of these concepts and then turns to the Bolshevik interpretation of the *national question*, which resulted in the emergence of multiple ethnic nationalisms amongst many ethnic groups within the Soviet Union.

Marxism is considered to be a modernist theory, since it asserts that nationalism is the result of an uneven development of capitalism. However, Marxist historians tend to adopt a primordialist approach, because they speak of nations as unchanged phenomena from ancient times (Chkhartishvili 2005: 231). Their belief in primordialism has its origin in Marxist social theory based on the economic development of humanity on the one hand, and the lack of a theory of nationalism within Marxism on the other hand.

As mentioned in section 2.2.1, Marx never developed a formal theory of nationalism; he had no need to, for he did not recognise the strength of national aspirations and considered them irrational. For him, ethnicity and national sentiments were ‘false consciousnesses’ that would eventually disappear (Schöpflin 2002: 8, 241). Marx believed that as a result of economic development, false feelings and irrational cultural or ethnic identity would eventually disappear

and be replaced by an economic identity – the only true identity based on individual economic interests (Schöpflin 2002: 10-11). The main actors of history – social classes (exploiters and the exploited) – have different, irreconcilable interests which are always economic in origin, no matter how much they are hidden behind other labels, for example, behind the label of nationhood in the capitalist era. As for collective cultural identities, according to Marx, these are not ethnic phenomena, but rather the result of socio-economic development (Chkhartishvili 2006b: 207-208). Marx recognised several stages of such development: primitive society, slave-owning society, feudalism, capitalism (the highest stage of which is imperialism), and socialism (the highest stage of which is communism) (Dorpalen 1986: 24). Later, Lenin further developed Marx's social theory and tied collective identities to different stages of socio-economic development: he considered *tribes/clans* (*plemya*) as typical for the feudal era, whereas *nationalities* (*natsional'nosti*) and *peoples* (*narodnosti*), as well as *nations* (*natsii*), according to him, appear under the conditions of capitalism (Hirsch 2005: 45). Finally, the disappearance of nations and the emergence of internationalism occur in the socialist era. Based on these categories, Marxist-Leninist historians presented cultural collective identities as absolutely immutable and continuous and a sequence of socio-economic development. In Marxist historiography, there is no clear distinction between the concepts of *tribe*, *nationality* and *nation* and there are no terms to describe pre-ethnic developments (Chkhartishvili 2006b: 208). When speaking of such phenomena, Marxist historians are forced to use the same term, *tribe*, interchangeably with *ethnographic group* (*etnograficheskaia grupp*) in

early Soviet ethnography, which seems to be an attribute of primitive and also slave-owning societies.

The confusion over the meanings of terms, along with various connotations assigned to some key concepts of nationalism in Marxist academic work, gave rise to Bolshevik and post-Soviet interpretations of these concepts. In the various union republics, from the establishment of Soviet rule until the collapse of the USSR, the Bolshevik interpretation, in turn, influenced the implementation of Soviet national policy towards both titular nations and minorities. The final goal was internationalism, *rapprochement* (*sblizhenie*) and *merging* (*sliianie*) (these concepts are discussed in detail in chapter 5) in the name of Marxist-Leninist ideology, which meant imposing a single Soviet identity, without national or ethnic boundaries. Marx's remarks on nationalism were to become essential principles of Marxism-Leninism.

### **2.3.1 Marxism and the national question**

For Marx, the history of humankind is a history of class struggle. The French Revolution established the political supremacy of the bourgeoisie. Modern society was divided into two major classes – the bourgeoisie (oppressors) and the proletariat (oppressed). Marx considered these two classes – and not nations – to be the main actors in history. Nationalism is understood by him as an expression of bourgeois interests, since, in his view, the bourgeoisie assumes that a nation consists only of its own class, whereas the proletariat, which does not participate in political power, has no nation.

At the time Marx was developing these ideas, nation-states in Western Europe were already established: for the most part, state boundaries were the same as national boundaries. The workers had to overthrow their oppressors within their states and become the ruling class of the nation. When, according to Marx, exploitation of one class by another class comes to an end, the proletariat will become a nation and this nation will differ from a bourgeois nation. In *The Communist Manifesto*, Marx and Engels wrote:

The working men have no country. We cannot take from them what they have not got. Since the proletariat must first of all acquire supremacy, must rise to be the leading class of the nation, must constitute itself the nation, it is, so far, itself national, though not in the bourgeois sense of the word. (Marx & Engels 1970: 55)

Marx recognises the legitimacy of nationalism as part of a logical historical development, belonging to the epoch of expanding capitalism. Thus, according to Marx's historical timeline, nationalism is a necessary characteristic of the bourgeois era. Since a society moves from one stage to another when the dominant class is displaced by a newly emerging class, in order to develop, state power has to be transferred from one class to another by social and political upheaval. Therefore, Marx supported national liberation struggles in order to abolish feudalism and to reach the next step of historical development. He treated nations 'as either reactionary or progressive, depending on their social location within the world economic order' (G. Smith 1996: 3). At the same time, Marx viewed bourgeois nationalism as an obstacle to the international unity of the proletariat.

Once capitalism had performed its historically progressive role, nationalism could not be progressive any more and ‘had to be thrown aside’ (Marx 1977: 101).

In Marx’s view, after capitalist development, together with its necessary condition, nationhood, society would move to the next step in history: a socialist revolution, which would bring economic structural changes which would make it possible to abolish differences between national cultures. Thus, in the socialist era national differences would disappear and nationalism would develop into internationalism. Lenin and the Bolsheviks (or ‘men of the majority’, which became a faction at the second congress of the Russian Social Democratic Party in 1903 after the split from the Mensheviks, or ‘men of the minority,’ over organisational issues (Hosking 1990: 26)) based their understanding of the national question on Marx’s remarks and further developed the Marxist approach to nationalism.

### **2.3.2 The Bolsheviks and the national question before 1917**

By the end of nineteenth century, Western Europe had established nation-states, where nations defined themselves within the borders of already existing states. As for Russia, this was still an agrarian, multi-ethnic empire where more than half of the population did not belong to the dominant ethnic group – the so-called Great Russians (a term given to Russians in the nineteenth century in contrast to Ukrainians, or Little Russians, and Belorussians, or White Russians). Some groups (e.g. Georgians and Armenians) with a developed ethnic consciousness found themselves part of an empire. They were influenced by the ideas of nationalism; the discrimination which they experienced as a result of imperialism encouraged



them to develop their own identity and to struggle for colonial liberation and self-determination (Chorbajian 1995: 229-230). According to Marx's timeline of historical development, these movements were understood as a revolutionary and progressive historic phase, through which every nation had to go on its way to internationalism.

Since a nation was a historical category of a particular epoch, it was impossible to avoid its formation. National movements had to be supported in order to accelerate the process of historical development. Moreover, national movements could become important allies for Marxists in their fight against the bourgeoisie. Lenin made the distinction between the nationalisms of the oppressed (the non-Russians of Russia) and the nationalism of the oppressors (the Great Russians). According to him, 'the nationalism of dominant nations (such as the Great Russians in Russia) was a reactionary force that hindered the development of other peoples. In preparation for socialist revolutions, it was essential to foster solidarity between the workers of the oppressor nations and the oppressed nations within these countries' borders' (Hirsch 2005: 52-53). Liberating national struggles of an oppressed people 'were to be treated with empathy as an expression of true grievances destined to decline spontaneously in a socialist society', whereas Russian nationalism 'was to be fought tooth and nail – reversing the political practices of Tsarist Russia' (Shanin 1989: 417).

Whether the Bolsheviks would support the right to self-determination also depended on the interests of the working class: non-Russian peoples of Russia had the right to set up their own nation-states, but secession had to be opposed if it was against the interests of the working class. Thus, Marxism needed to wean the

working class off bourgeois nationalism by supporting national self-determination movements only when Lenin considered them progressive and capable of being brought into the revolution (Wade 2005 151): that is, to split national alliances of different social classes and recruit the proletariat and the peasantry for Marxist interests.

Marx's view that nationalist movements could play a progressive role in the economic development from feudalism to capitalism (A. D. Smith 1998: 47) became an issue of political debate amongst his followers – the Bolsheviks, who placed class interests above national interests, and the Mensheviks, who placed national interests above class interests. The Georgian Mensheviks advocated the necessity of institutions that would help the development of every nationality (Pipes 1997: 37) and demanded territorial autonomy for the nationalities of the Russian Empire. The Armenian Mensheviks also demanded the introduction of cultural autonomy (Pipes 1997: 19). Lenin and the Bolsheviks thought that national autonomy would weaken the proletariat. They opposed the idea of the Bund (The Jewish Social-Democratic Party in Russia and Poland); they opposed socialist parties from the Baltic and Caucasian countries who sought the right to represent the working class of their respective areas. Lenin argued that nationality-based divisions would be an obstacle to economic development. Stalin agreed with Lenin and wrote in 1904: 'Clearly, the demolition of national barriers and close unity between the Russian, Georgian, Armenian, Polish, Jewish and other proletarians is a necessary condition for the victory of the proletariat of all Russia' (Stalin 1954a: 35). National independence was related to the bourgeois revolution. With the triumph of the socialist revolution, national boundaries would be destroyed. Once

the Russian proletariat took power, they would offer the right to self-determination to the oppressed nationalities. But, at the same time, Lenin made clear that the Bolsheviks' supreme task was to spread the socialist revolution and that the national question should be subordinated to the interests of the working class; therefore, the world revolution and the struggle for liberation would be supported only if it was directed against imperialism and autocracy, which in the nineteenth century and the beginning of twentieth century fought against democratic and national struggles in the Russian empire.

Many nationality-based political parties gained popularity after the 1905 Revolution. They started to demand the right to cultural autonomy and, in some cases, the right to political self-determination. Their demands were based on the example of political parties in the Austro-Hungarian Empire. In Lenin's view, however, the demonstrations of 1905 expressed not national aspirations but a universal desire for equal rights. He dismissed the significance of nationalism and emphasised the international character of proletarian struggles. Lenin, whose pre-revolutionary outlook was international (Gecys 1953: 100), wrote in 1913: 'Marxism cannot be reconciled with any nationalism [. . .] Combat all national oppression? Yes, of course! Fight *for* any kind of national development, *for* "national culture" in general? – Of course not' (Lenin 1964b: 34-35). Despite his clear point of view, the popularity of nationality-based political parties within the Russian Empire and the demands from the Mensheviks, as well as the national struggles of Austro-Hungary's multi-ethnic population, forced Lenin to understand the urgent need to elaborate a special programme for national and minority issues (Pipes 1997: 36-37). At the same time, he realised that a Bolshevik view on the

concepts of *ethnicity*, *nation* and *nationalism* was not yet formulated. He asked a young Georgian Bolshevik, Stalin, a representative of an oppressed nationality, to write an article on these concepts.

In 1913 Stalin wrote two articles: 'On the Road to Nationalism' and 'Marxism and the National Question'. Here, he defined a *nation* as a 'historically evolved, stable community arising on the foundation of a common language, territory, economic life, and psychological makeup, manifested in a community of culture' (Stalin 1953b: 307). Later, Stalin's definition of *nation* became standard for Soviet academic writing. Stalin's articles did not really represent Lenin's opinions. Lenin denied the existence of such concepts as *national culture* and *national psychology* – terms used by Stalin in the definition of *nation* as well as throughout the essay 'Marxism and the National Question'. Stalin's definition implied that nations had cultural identities and objective ethno-cultural attributes, such as a language and territory. The emphasis on territory as a necessary feature of a nation meant that some groups – for example, the Jews – could not be considered a nation since they had no common territory or common language (some Jews in Russia did not speak Yiddish). It also meant that minority groups in a given territory could not be called nations. Stalin argued that many peoples of Russia were primitive and that their cultures should not be preserved. In his opinion, territorial autonomy, rather than national-cultural autonomy, was the only way to solve national issues. Territorial autonomy would break national barriers and unite workers (J. Smith 2005: 19; Kaiser 1994: 104). In his articles, Stalin criticised the view of the Bund and Georgian Mensheviks. Unlike the Austrian Social Democrats, who assumed that nations were permanent entities, Stalin made

it clear that nations belonged to the epoch of expanding capitalism. In his view, most people did not have deep national feelings, and their movements came into existence as a result of political and economic oppression. Stalin suggested that in the transitional period of expanding capitalism in the Russian Empire, nations must choose not to secede, but rather to have regional autonomy, where they could use their languages. Thus, national majorities and minorities would live together in territorial autonomies and their 'international solidarity' would supplant national sentiments (Hirsch 2005: 27-28).

Any discussion of the right to political and national self-determination was completely absent from Stalin's article. That is why in 1914 Lenin wrote the article 'On the Right to Self-determination', in which he maintained that nationalities have a right to secede. In this article, Lenin explained that the Bolsheviks should support certain national movements in order to use them for their own needs. As a Marxist, Lenin believed theoretically that national consciousness, as a 'false consciousness,' would disappear at some point in history, but for the time being nations and national identities were real phenomena. The nationalisms of the oppressed peoples of the Russian Empire were legitimate movements against Great Russian chauvinism and could not be considered reactionary. They must be given support and granted forms of nationhood (Martin 2001: 8), although this was not a final goal of the revolutionary movement. The final goal was explained by Lenin in 1916: 'The aim of socialism is not only to abolish the present division of mankind into small states and all national isolation; not only to bring the nations closer to each other, but also to merge them' (Lenin 1964a: 147). In his 'Speech Closing the Debate on the Party Programme' delivered in March 1919, Lenin once again not

only advocated the merging of nations, but also supported the ultimate aims of a comrade Piatakov, according to whom ‘We don’t want any nations. What we want is the union of all proletarians’. To this, Lenin replied: ‘This is splendid, of course and eventually it will come about, but at an entirely different stage of communist development’ (Lenin 1965: 194). Lenin’s views on the right to self-determination and on ‘Great Russian chauvinism’ were later reversed by Stalin.

### **2.3.3 Stalin as a theorist of nationalism**

Stalin’s writings helped form the Soviet approach to many disciplines, but best known are his articles about nationalism and linguistics. Although these articles were not academic essays, but had a polemical purpose and were written to deal with particular circumstances, they became the basis of Soviet academic studies. Stalin’s article ‘The Social-Democratic view on the National Question’, which was meant as an interpretation of the ninth clause of the Party programme regarding the right to self-determination, was published in Georgian in *proletariatis brdzola* (*The Proletarian Struggle*), No. 7 (September 1904), and was his first work on the subject of national issues, although Western academic literature often states that Stalin did not touch on the subject before 1913 (see, for example, Pipes 1997: 37) and had no competence in the field. Here Stalin tried to define the Bolshevik approach to national issues as an interpretation of certain points of the Party Program:

Everything changes. [. . .] Social life changes, and with it the ‘national question’ changes too. At different periods different classes enter the arena, and each class has its own view of the ‘national question’.

Consequently, in different periods the 'national question' *serves different interests* and assumes different shades, according to *which* class raises it, and *when*. (Stalin 1954a: 31)

In this article, as an example of development of national consciousness, Stalin discusses nationalism in Georgia and identifies three steps of its development. The first stage left a visible trace in the lives of Georgians in the beginning of the nineteenth century with the plot against Russian rule in 1832 (see section 4.1.3). This, according to Stalin, the most significant event in the movement of Georgian nobility who wished to restore the Georgian Kingdom, was an expression of *feudal-monarchist nationalism*. The concept of *feudal-monarchist nationalism* was something new, unknown to Marxism, which considers nationalism to be a result of capitalist developments. Stalin considers it to be the first stage of nationalism. As mentioned above, Marxist-Leninists recognised two kinds of nationalism, bourgeois and socialist. In the first, the bourgeoisie is the leading class, and in the second, the proletariat. At the beginning of the nineteenth century Georgia was an agrarian country with neither of these classes. In the national liberation movement the Georgian aristocracy was supported by peasants, who suffered most from Russian rule. Rebellions against the Tsarist regime started immediately after the occupation of Georgia in 1801. The first uprising broke out in 1802 in eastern Georgia and was followed by others in 1804, 1812, 1819-20 and 1841 (see section 4.1.2). These movements are regarded by Stalin as the first stage of the national question. The next stages of nationalism Stalin connects with capitalism and the emergence of two classes: the bourgeois and the proletariat. Two other steps are

related to the emergence of the bourgeoisie and the proletariat and, correspondingly, are expressions of their interests.

Stalin's next, most substantial work on the national question was the 1913 essay on Marxism and the national question, which shows that he 'had given considerable thought to the problem of nationalities long before Soviets took power' (Stern 1944: 230) and gave answers to basic questions which later became a cornerstone of Soviet policy and Soviet studies in the field of nationalism. By the time Stalin was writing his famous essay, the Bund had for a decade been demanding organisational autonomy. Stalin's emphasis on territory as an essential marker of a nation was meant to answer the Bund's demand (see section 2.3.2). Jews did not have their own territory; thus they were not a nation and could not have national representation. The other goal was to show that the interests of revolution preceded those of nations. Stalin showed this by tying the idea of nationalism to the epoch of expanding capitalism. If a nation is a product of the bourgeoisie, it will no longer exist after capitalism is finished. In this article Stalin makes clear that nationalism can be studied only with reference to space and time. Like the previous article, this was not written as an academic essay but had a concrete goal, to refute the Bund's views. Therefore it is obvious that Stalin did not mean this work to be a universal textbook on nations and nationalism. Nevertheless his views became universal and his pre-revolutionary definition of the nation dominated in the Soviet Union. In volume 41 of the *Great Soviet Encyclopedia* (Shmidt 1938: 402), the article *nation* gives Stalin's definition of nation and calls it a *classic* definition of the term. The article states that the only scientific definition of *nation* was elaborated by Stalin, who creatively developed



Marxist-Leninist views on the national question. In later editions of the *Great Soviet Encyclopedia* nation was defined as a ‘historically constituted community of people, formed on the bases of territory, economic ties, literary language, some features of culture and character’.<sup>4</sup> Essentially it was still Stalin’s definition, but his name was not mentioned any more. Instead, the article said that this, the only scientific understanding of nation, was developed by Marx, Engels and Lenin. The articles also spoke about the differences between *bourgeois* and *socialist nations* (Stalin’s concepts).

Immediately after the Bolshevik Revolution, Stalin was appointed People’s Commissar for Nationalities and devised a Soviet national policy based on his own theory of nationalism, which meant the temporary admission of national aspirations in order to gain the support of oppressed groups of the former Tsarist Russia – ‘prison of nations’ (Lenin 1970: 10) – and the creation of nations out of ‘backward’ peoples, in order to make sure that every group had gone through all stages of the Marxist historical timeline (Hirsch 2005: 146).<sup>5</sup> National consciousness of all groups, as an attribute of bourgeois ideology, would disappear later, under socialism, and they would merge into one socialist nation. But after supporting the national development of all ethnic groups through the state-sponsored process of *korenizatsiia* (*nativisation or indigenisation*, discussed in

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<sup>4</sup> For example, the encyclopedias of 1967 (vol. 10, p. 77), 1974 (vol. 17, p. 375), and the *Georgian Soviet Encyclopedia*, 1979 (vol. 4, p. 189).

<sup>5</sup> The term ‘prison of nations’ was first used by a French writer Astolphe-Louis-Léonor, Marquis de Custine (1740-1793) in his *Empire of the Czar: A Journey through Eternal Russia* (Marquis de Custine 1990).

chapter 5), Stalin realised that history was not developing in accordance with Marx's timeline: nations were not only not disappearing, they were actually becoming stronger. The ideology of nationalism was competing with communist ideology and it was necessary to adopt a different strategy: to strengthen socialism and internationalism, on the one hand, and win the hearts of nationalists, on the other, by allowing cultural development, while removing political aspirations from their agendas.

In 1928 Stalin formulated his dual strategy for the transitional period of the proletarian dictatorship in one phrase: 'national in form, socialist in content' (Stalin 1955). This phrase asserted that 'proletarian culture does not cancel native culture, but pervades its content; native culture on the other hand, does not cancel proletarian culture, but lends form to it. National culture is a bourgeois phenomenon only when power lies in the hands of the bourgeoisie. Thus, as long as socialism is not yet formed, culture remains 'national in form, socialist in content' (Roucek 1960: 20).

In his next important work on the issue, 'The National Question and Leninism' published in 1929, Stalin does not speak about the disappearance of nations under socialism. On the contrary, he asserts that under socialism they will become even stronger:

The fact of the matter is that the elimination of the bourgeois nations signifies the elimination not of nations in general, but only of the bourgeois nations. On the ruins of the old, bourgeois nations new, socialist nations are arising and developing, and they are far more

solidly united than any bourgeois nation, because they are exempt from the irreconcilable class contradictions that corrode the bourgeois nations, and are far more representative of the whole people than any bourgeois nation. (Stalin 1954b: 355-356)

In his 1950 article, 'Marxism and Problems of Linguistics' (Stalin 1972), Stalin again maintained that nations result from a long historical development. Here for the first time he identified the stages of such development: *clan, tribe, people and nation*. This assertion, as well as all others by Stalin, immediately became a by-word in academia. It was cited by all Soviet social scientists, and even today among post-Soviet scholars is often considered to be a 'classical' statement.

Although Stalin tied nationalism to capitalism, his definition of *nation* suggests that nations were historically formed cultural groups. Those ethnic groups within the Soviet Union whose level of development was not enough to achieve the status of a nation had to be supplied, in order to accelerate their development through the Marxist historical cycle, with the attributes of a nation by Stalin's definition, that is, territory, language, culture and shared history. They needed a past within a given territory to claim it as their homeland. In the Soviet period, histories of ethnic groups were written and rewritten, with emphasis placed on the autochthonous relationship with occupied territories, shared language, religion, and so on. National histories were fabricated in order to convince members of nations that the historical events which actually took place within a given territory were part of the history of its current inhabitants.

Such an approach to the national histories of Soviet ethnic groups and the national and language policies based on it (see chapter 5) deeply affected the national identities of corresponding groups. People interpreted the past according to this approach and became bonded with places. Territory became a very important marker of their identity. In general, territory (homeland) has always been one of the defining factors of human identity, but in the era of nationalism – an ideology requiring that a nation has full sovereignty over its territory inhabited only by its members – such a bond became threatening to non-members and indeed eventually led in some places to ethnic cleansing.

Stalin's views, largely following the Romantic conception of national identity, were further developed by Soviet scholars, 'rooting contemporary realities in primordial origins' (Broers 2004: 73) and teaching masses their own histories. Through education the masses were invited to participate in the creation of primordial identities, increasing nationalisms empty of political ambitions, strengthening fixed territorial and ethno-cultural markers, and thus defining the ethnic character of their nationalisms, which soon after the Soviet Union was created, was no longer only a top-down process, but was moving largely from the bottom up, throughout the whole history of the Soviet Union.

The Soviet understanding of key issues of nationalism and nations played a crucial role in the formation of the national identities of titular nations of the Union's republics: it did not give minority groups within them a chance to share the national identity of the dominant group. Ethnic identities of minority groups, which caused bloody conflicts in the late Soviet and post-Soviet periods, were largely constructed through Soviet language policy, discussed in detail in chapter

5. Before turning specifically to the language policy in Georgia at different times in the next chapters, the importance of language policy for nation-building and the theory and various types of language policy will be discussed.

#### **2.4 Language policy and language planning (LPP)**

Language policy, as a response to linguistic diversity, is a set of statements and orders by governmental or other organisations, which usually leads to language planning, although there are cases when planning may lead to recognition of a need for policy. Language planning is the factual realisation of language policy. The term *language planning* was introduced by the Norwegian linguist Einar Haugen in 1959 and referred to all conscious efforts that aimed at changing language, language use or the linguistic behaviour of a society. According to Haugen himself, it could include anything ‘from proposing a new word to a new language’ (Haugen 1987: 627).

The objectives of the stated policy (either to maintain existing policy or to alter it) are to be achieved by various bodies through planning: how to optimise the functioning of the national language – to enlarge the spheres of its use, its development in all directions, to normalise the literary language, its use in the educational system and mass media, take care of minority languages and defending minority language rights and so on. All these aspects of language policy constitute a series of theoretical principles and practical measures, which are aimed at solving language problems in a state. Language policy may result in language legislation, which regulates the use of languages in different social situations. For example, a law might say that the polity over which it has jurisdiction shall be a unilingual

society. Alternatively, it may not be explicitly stated but rather concealed within some larger policy. The objectives of LPP are usually social, political, or economic in character.

Although throughout history almost all states had some sort of a language policy, LPP as an issue of sociolinguistic studies emerged in the 1960s, when many new states in Africa and Asia faced a problem of selecting and implementing a national language. This included creating alphabets, compiling dictionaries, terminologies for different disciplines, and so forth. According to the German linguist Heinz Kloss, issues related to the internal structure of the language (such as spelling reforms, the development of new terms and language standardisation, that is, the creation and establishment of a uniform linguistic norm) are concerns of *corpus planning*, whereas *status planning* refers to all efforts undertaken to change the use and function of a language or language variety within a society (such as using it as medium of instruction or as an official language). According to Kloss, *corpus planning*, focused on the linguistic characteristics of a language, involves linguists and philologists, whereas *status planning*, concerned with the social position of a language, is carried out mostly by state officials (Kloss 1969: 81).

Other linguists identify two more dimensions of language planning: *prestige planning*, directed towards creating a favourable psychological background crucial to the long-term success of language planning (Haarmann 1990), and *acquisition planning*, the effort to spread and promote the learning of a language. The latter was introduced by Cooper (1989) to describe the policies and strategies in order ‘to bring citizens to competence in the languages designated as “national”, “official” or “medium” of education’ (Wright 2004: 61). The efforts

may be based on policies of monolingualism (assimilationist) or multilingualism (pluralist) as discussed in section 2.3.2.

The process of language planning can be described by the useful framework of the four stages developed by Haugen (1987): *selection* (the choice of a language or language variety to fulfil certain functions in a society), *codification* (the creation of a linguistic standard/norm for a selected linguistic code), *implementation* (the realisation of the decisions made in the stages of selection and codification), and *elaboration* (terminological and stylistic development of a codified language to meet the demands of modern life and technology) (Mesthrie *et al.* 2004). These four processes do not necessarily occur in this sequence. Moreover, they can occur simultaneously.

#### **2.4.1 Linguistic standardisation**

The first process in Haugen's framework of language planning is *selection*, through which decisions are made with regard to the status of language/s; it is a stage during which some languages are legitimised to be used, learned and taught and therefore become official languages, while others are not. An official language refers to a language that has a legal recognition in a state and is used in governmental business, administration, the courts, media and education. Usually an official language is designated by law, but not always. Sometimes an official language is called a state language or a national language, but there is a difference between them. Unlike official languages, national and state languages also have a symbolic value for national unity. Some official languages might have a co-official status in a state or in some part of a state. For example, until 1992, Abkhazian was

the co-official language, alongside Georgian, in one part of the Georgian state, namely the Autonomous Republic of Abkhazia. Sometimes co-official languages are called regional languages (Mackey 1989: 6). Some other languages within a state might not have an official status, but are recognised by the state as a language of a linguistic minority.

This process of *selection* is a part of *status planning* and, therefore, involves the participation of statesmen or bureaucrats (Kloss 1969: 81). Selection is made among available languages and/or their variants. Where there is a single (not necessarily numerically) dominant group, there is no issue on the choice of language. The choice is related to political power and is not determined by linguistic factors. As shown in section 2.2.4, an official language is chosen/created by an élite/dominant ethnic group and then imposed on other groups. As a rule, it is a variant spoken in the politically and socio-economically advanced region (capital) which has *de facto* advantage, and its language becomes *post factum* official, since selection of an official language is always post-factum after the formation of the state (Wright 2004: 43).

After selecting the language/languages to receive official status, a variety of the language is chosen for standardisation. According to Kloss (1967), a particular dialect of a language to be recognised as official has to meet both the criteria of an *Ausbau* (upgrade) and *Abstand* (distance) language. These criteria are designed to distinguish between a language and a dialect, since there is no clear distinction that can be drawn between the two.



A variety of language can be called *Ausbau* when it has its own standard spelling and grammatical forms independent of other languages. Usually this involves having a certain amount of written literary production. A language is *Abstand* in relation to another language when the two are different enough for them not to be considered dialects of the same language (for example, Georgian and Russian). Thus, the first category is based on the social function of a language, the second on the structural properties of the linguistic system. Kloss's model for a dialect to achieve a status of language requires both *Abstand* and *Ausbau* criteria, but some languages are *Abstand* but not *Ausbau*, for example, minority languages used in the private domain (e.g. Bats in Georgia). On the other hand, a language can be *Ausbau* without being *Abstand*, when it is mutually intelligible with another language, but, based on *Ausbau* criteria, is considered to be a separate language (e.g. Norwegian with regard to Danish).

Many contemporary linguists do not regard mutual intelligibility as a distinct criterion because it is unclear how complete this mutual intelligibility must be: whether it is enough to be understood orally, or whether mutual comprehension extends to written texts. The same can be said of other purely linguistic criteria such as language structure or regular sound correspondence, which are not strict and universal enough to delimit language and dialect.<sup>6</sup> Joseph (2006: 27) notes that the question of what is or is not a language is a political question. Similarly, Millar observes that:

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<sup>6</sup> Establishing regular sound correspondence between sounds or sound clusters in etymologically identical words of different languages is a method of historical linguistics which proves a genetic relation between languages (Campbell 2004).

Max Weinreich is reported to have said that “a language is a dialect with an army and a navy”. It is possible to see what he meant by this: many languages could have been perceived as dialects of a larger language if the historical development of particular societies had been different; by the same token, there are a number of language varieties considered dialects which, if the history of the territories involved had been even slightly different, might now be perceived as languages. (Millar 2005: 57)

Indeed, political borders, as well as historical-cultural orientation and other extra-linguistic and socio-cultural factors, are essential, but most importantly, the language-users’ self-perception seems to distinguish a language from a dialect. Many languages spoken in China are far from mutually intelligible, but their speakers consider that they speak Chinese – that is, that their linguistic identity is Chinese and therefore these ‘languages’ are referred to as Chinese ‘dialects’. Communication between them is facilitated by a shared writing system. Thus, extra-linguistic factors – political, historical and cultural, together with the speaker’s linguistic identity – seem to be of the utmost importance.

On the other hand, because of external considerations, two variants of language can be regarded as different languages. This is especially true for the languages to which Kloss refers to as *Ausbau*, languages which have passed through a written stage of development. The best example of this is the proclamation of Serbian and Croatian as independent languages after the break-up of Yugoslavia. Until 1991, one Serbo-Croatian language existed (Carmichael 2002: 238), but the different and mutually irreconcilable feelings of identity among

users of its dialects became a reason to regard them as independent languages (Schiffman 2004: 66): different alphabets and different literary norms were established for three varieties (Croatian, Serbian and Bosnian) of what was once a single language. Moreover, the speakers of these three languages try to distance themselves from each other by borrowing vocabulary from other languages: Catholic Croatians mostly borrow from Latin, Czech and other Western European languages; Orthodox Serbians mostly from other Slavic languages; whereas Muslim Bosnians borrow from Arabic and Turkish. This is an example of deliberate changes made through language planning, namely through one of the stages of planning in Haugen's framework), *codification* (the creation of a linguistic standard or a norm for a selected linguistic code), which consists of three parts: *graphisation* (developing a writing system), *grammatication* (deciding the rules/norms of grammar) and *lexicalisation* (identifying the vocabulary) (Haugen 1987: 627).

All three of these processes were used to serve political purposes in the Soviet Union. For example, after the USSR annexed the Romanian province of Bessarabia in 1945, the province was renamed Moldavia and the variety of Romanian language spoken there was named Moldavian (Grenoble 2003: 89). In order to weaken any sense of common national identity with Romania, the Cyrillic alphabet and different grammatical norms were adopted and Slavic vocabulary was imported (Majewicz 1989: 13). These linguistic changes, together with historical and political developments, helped to establish a distinct Moldavian national identity so strong, that after Moldavia gained its independence in 1991, standard Moldavian was declared a state language and the use of the Latin alphabet was

restored (Grenoble 2003: 92). Proposals to change the name of the language back to 'Romanian' were rejected, however, despite the fact that Moldavian and Romanian are mutually comprehensible. On the one hand, the use of the Latin alphabet shows closeness to Romanian; on the other, Moldavians see themselves as a distinct nation and believe that they speak Moldavian, which they regard as the standard language corresponding to their vernacular. Their notion of language is based not on linguistic criteria but on socio-political factors. The Moldavian case shows that modern nation-states give language a role as a marker of national identity. There are many other examples of this in the world, like the much-cited Serbo-Croatian or Danish-Norwegian examples, to name only two.

The national language is promoted in education, the media and literary writing and, thus, is standardised. Therefore, it has high prestige and is usually perceived as more 'correct' than other variants of the language spoken in society. The situation in a society where there are two closely related languages, one with high prestige and one with low prestige, is called *diglossia*. Ferguson (1972) describes *diglossia* as a kind of bilingualism, where two languages – a high variety (H-language) and a low variety (L-language) – have different functions and are used in different domains, for example speaking Megrelian (as the L-language) at home and speaking Georgian (as the H-language of great ancient literature and liturgy) in other domains (work, school, church, etc.). L is the language learned as the mother tongue and H is acquired mostly through schooling. When L and H are related languages, there is a tendency among native scholars to view the L variety as a dialect and only the H variety as a language even when by all linguistic criteria

L is a related but separate language. This is a case with Megrelian and Georgian as discussed in section 6.1.3.

In a diglossic situation, the maintenance of domains for each language is regarded as essential for L language survival (Baker 2006: 212), because if an H language replaces the functions of an L language, it will inevitably lead to language shift. *Selection* of one single language for official use and its *standardisation* already gives this language an advantage. The two last processes of Haugen's framework, *implementation* and *elaboration*, as well as *acquisition planning*, offer further advantages to the standard language, simultaneously exposing other languages to potential shift, since 'any attempt to manage one language [. . .] inevitably has implications for all other languages' (Kaplan & Baldauf 1997: 321). Language shift, which is a kind of assimilation, might be planned (overt) or unplanned (covert). The rate and degree of the shift vary according to the type of language policy carried out in a state, whether by the government (top-down) or by the speakers themselves (bottom-up). Shiffman (2004: 13) suggests looking not only at overt (explicit) policies, but also at covert (implicit) policies, since formally stated or not, when carried out, they still have the same effect, and, where there is no official policy, the linguistic status quo becomes the implicit policy. For example, the American Constitution does not specify an official language, but the USA promotes one single language, and culture is mediated through that language in the same way as other nation-states. The same demands are made of immigrants in order for them to become citizens; knowledge of English is usually a requirement for getting jobs (Kymlicka 1997: 57). Thus, in the USA English is the *de facto* official language and a national

symbol. The next section looks at how language becomes a symbol of national identity and why.

#### **2.4.2 Standard language and national identity**

Before the emergence of nationalism in modern times, the political significance of language in human history was limited to the ruling class, and the linguistic diversity of a state was not a political issue. Medieval states were multilingual. The language used in official documents and education was seldom the language of everyday life. There was no feeling that all the people of the state should speak one language. It is only in modern history that the idea emerges of a nation being defined by its language.

Linking language to nation and the notion of a national language was developed by Romantic thinkers, such as Herder, Fichte and Humboldt, in nineteenth-century Europe. These intellectuals related language, territory and history to a nation. They promoted language to make a nation aware of its past and culture and find pride in them. For Romantic thinkers, where a distinct language existed, a distinct nation existed as well. In his *Addresses to the German Nation* Fichte (1968: 90) wrote: ‘Those who speak the same language are linked together by Nature – quite aside from any human intervention in the matter – through a host of invisible ties. [...] They are an indivisible, natural unit.’ The Romantic philosophers came up with the idea of a *folk-nation* and spoke about *national spirit* and *national consciousness* determined and expressed by *national language*.

According to these philosophers and their followers (in Georgia among other places, as shown in chapter 4), the main goal of the nationalist ought to be

the revival of a collective cultural identity through not only language but other 'primordial' cultural elements. For some modernist theorists of nationalism (e.g. Hobsbawm and Ranger), modern common cultures and national languages are essentially invented. They believe that modern common cultures and national languages are essentially invented. Gellner (1983) argues that intellectuals play a dominant role in the development of nationalism by using language as an expression of national identity, but this language is not necessarily the language of the peasants, who usually speak some variety of the language. For modernists a language, accompanying the spread of the idea of popular sovereignty and representative government, is artificially constructed by the élite in order to communicate with people, because unlike old states, the situation in modern states requires communication between its citizens.

As noted before, according to ethnosymbolism, the power of nationalism lies in memories, myths, traditions and symbols – a *living past*, rediscovered and reinterpreted by the nationalist intelligentsia: this is also true for language. In order to turn a language into a proper tool for the expression of a common 'high' culture and national identity it has to be upgraded to a standard language, that is, become semi-artificial. Indeed, today's standard national languages are constructed through a modernisation process, but they are not *invented*, but rather *rediscovered* (A. D. Smith 1986: 174-200). They are usually based on one politically advanced dialect, but often have elements of other dialects. If they were completely invented they

would not be able to create loyalty and serve their roles as symbols of national unity and the marker of national identity.<sup>7</sup>

Print-capitalism made it possible to spread a single standardised linguistic code to the masses. Those standardised vernaculars which are now the languages of modern nation-states made it easier for people to understand each other and reinforced the realisation that there was a wider community that spoke the same language. Standardised vernaculars opened a path for searching the roots of national identity in the remote past. They represent the ideal of Europe in modern times – one nation, one language – and motivate the standardisation or even the revival of a language, as in the cases of Hebrew and Irish. Through the printed word, the thinking of past generations became accessible (Puri 2004: 185) and the cohesion of the ‘imagined community’ increased. People could return to an idealised image of what they were. This helped them to discover the unique character and future destiny of the nation. ‘It is not enough simply to mobilize the masses; to sustain that mobilization, to turn “masses” into “nations”, it is first necessary to “vernacularize” them and thereby bestow a unique identity and destiny upon them’ (A. D. Smith 1991: 140).

Thus, not just a language, but a standard language is a marker of national identity, especially in places where a large majority of the nation speaks that language. However, because of voluntary or forced migration, annexation and other historical means, the populations of nearly all states speak more than one

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<sup>7</sup> Most theorists of nationalism recognise a standardised language as a very important element of nation-building. (e.g. Anderson 1983; Gellner 1983; Hobsbawm 1990; Greenfield 1992).



language – they are bi- or multilingual. The imposition of one single language can motivate repressive politics towards other, non-official languages and, correspondingly, their speakers, who might not have the same feeling of nationhood as the majority. There is a danger that linguistic division will lead to political division, especially when language is an important marker of ethnic identity among a minority population. Each political unit has boundaries, but its population shares not only political boundaries, but a whole set of values, symbols and institutions. One such symbol is language: therefore, the relationship between a political unit and its population, in general, and the degree to which linguistic conflicts occur, in particular, are significantly affected by the type of language policy the state adopts (see section 2.4.3).

Through a process of promoting a standard language governments of nation-states have conducted nation-building and become legitimate authorities, because a sense of common membership based on a common language has guaranteed equal access to the social institutions operating in the standard language. Thus, language has become a governmental issue. A ruling group has started the institutionalisation of its language and culture through education. This is achieved through language policy as a major tool of nation-building.

Since national identity, together with other factors, is defined by language, the latter is also a central issue of ethno-politics, because in multilingual states there is a danger of potential contradictions between loyalty to a given ethnic group and to a wider national identity. When, in a newly independent state, ethnic and linguistic diversity is found, it is viewed as a possible danger to the building of a nation-state. Therefore, in order to avert this danger, there is an urgent need to

create a unilingual society. Nationalistic campaigns and efforts to abolish linguistic diversity often run into obstacles caused by attachments to other languages, as well as to ethnic groups, since the role of language in maintaining ethnic boundaries is great. If ethnic groups do not have the appropriate conditions for keeping and developing their cultural and linguistic originality, then their ethnicity and language will be politicised. An extreme expression of this is separatism and the search for alternative loyalties to other states. Conversely, if ethnic minorities have the means to safeguard and develop their ethno-cultural originality, the political salience of ethnicity lessens. When different ethnic groups are brought together under a common political entity, one group and its language usually has a more powerful position than others. It does not matter whether the groups were brought together by invasion, conquest, migration or on a voluntary basis. When a part of the population has a distinct language, as a rule it views itself differently not only from a linguistic dimension, but also in many other respects. The danger of potential contradictions between loyalty to a given ethnic group and to a wider national identity is no less significant than the threat that arises from lack of a common shared identity and language in a multilingual state. There are many examples of this across the world, of which one example is Georgian. In Georgia, language is a fundamental marker of ethnic identity (see chapter 3). In general, when language plays such an important role in defining ethnic identity, it could also serve as the main binding factor for the nation, especially where language speakers represent a dominant group and the membership of a nation is determined by the language of the élite, identified with a dominant group, as a symbol of nationalism, unity, power and patriotism. In such cases, the dominant group

imposes its language on those with less power. This also means that other languages within a state have to be ignored or even suppressed. Then language becomes not just an instrument of inclusion, but also of exclusion, a tool for domination and oppression. Attitudes towards some groups are based on language: those who know the language have a higher status in a society than those who do not and whose loyalty is questionable.

The majority of modern states are multi-ethnic and multilingual. They exercise different types of language policy. Which language policy is the best and most democratic? One that helps assimilation or one that promotes linguistic pluralism? What political consequences ensue from different policies? The answers to these questions can be found, firstly, in international experience, and secondly, by analysing the context of each specific case.

### **2.4.3 Types of language policy**

Language policies can be classified into several types, according to the character of the relationship between a state and the languages spoken on the territory of its jurisdiction. Cobarrubias (1983) identifies four major ideologies behind language policies in multilingual states: assimilation, pluralism, vernacularisation and internationalisation.

Linguistic assimilation is aimed at the elimination of multilingualism and means the disappearance of languages and other cultural distinctions of small ethnic groups. Its ideology is based on the belief that everyone must speak and function in the official language of the nation. The policy of assimilation can restrict minority languages; that is, the elimination of linguistic diversity can be

achieved through a legal ban on the use of a language and often leads to language shift. In other versions of assimilationist policies other languages may be discouraged or ignored, which also could lead to shift, as shown in the previous section.

Linguistic pluralism, on the other hand, maintains and cultivates the right to multilingualism and involves the coexistence of different language groups on an equitable basis. It may try to reduce the possibility of language loss by ensuring its use not only in the private domain but in the public domain as well. This does not mean that all languages will be used equally, but it guarantees linguistic rights and mother tongue education, whether private or state-funded.

Two other ideologies centre on the status which language policy assigns to the indigenous languages spoken within the state's territory. Vernacularisation means the selection and restoration of an indigenous language as the main vehicle of communication and the official language. Internationalisation, by contrast, is the selection of a non-indigenous language of wider communication as an official language or language of education. Usually it is the language of a former colonial power (for example, in the postcolonial countries of Africa). The reason behind selecting a language of a colonial power is the purported 'ethnic neutrality' of a European language, which prevents segregation and avoids giving advantage to one ethnic group, although it erects social boundaries, since educated upper and middle classes are often the only groups proficient in the foreign language and with political power.

Assimilationist policies were carried out in all nation-states before the First World War, but, afterwards, the principle of self-determination (discussed in the next section), mostly based on language, was applied. Especially after the Second World War, an increasing number of states made significant attempts to accommodate linguistically and ethnically diverse groups. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights considers language to be one of the most fundamental components of human identity and encourages protection of minority languages.<sup>8</sup> It is obvious that issues of linguistic diversity themselves are not a problem for the stability and security of a state. All world organisations involved in the promotion of peace, such as the United Nations (UN), the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the Council of Europe, agree that multilingualism does not cause violent conflicts, but many conflicts around the world are the result of assimilationist policies (Kymlicka 2001: 248). The cause of conflict is a denial of the right to cultural and linguistic diversity (Koenig & Varennes 2001). Linguistic groups living under the rule of another group may develop linguistic nationalism. Myths of common ancestors, speaking a common language, serve a group's nationalist ideals. Such groups often follow Fichte's idea that 'whenever a separate language exists, there is also a separate nation which has a right to manage its affairs and rule itself' (1968: 184). While language policies promoting one single language are practical from the perspective of communication and are aimed at national unification, they may become a tool of separation (see section 2.4.2). Thus, the issue of minority language protection and

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<sup>8</sup> The Universal Declaration of Human Rights is available at: [http://www.osce.org/documents/odihr/1975/01/1903\\_en.pdf](http://www.osce.org/documents/odihr/1975/01/1903_en.pdf).

policies of multiculturalism and pluralism are important not only for human rights, but also for conflict avoidance.

A government decides what type of language policy will be implemented, but this does not mean that the policy cannot be changed by the people. There are many examples of democratic countries where the policy has changed according to the choice of a community. For example, the struggle for collective rights, among them language rights, in Catalonia and the Basque Country made it possible to win the status of official languages in the respective autonomous communities (Mar-Molinero 2002). Contemporary nation-states are characterised by the recognition of different linguistic groups, especially indigenous groups, which are expected to remain culturally distinct. Differences may even be supported by the state, but the preference for dominant languages is the case, not only in those states that promote monolingualism, but also in those with multilingual policies. In such states linguistic harmony and national/social integration is achieved by recognising the language rights of minorities, but at the same time establishing a unified, civic and cultural identity based on a standard national language. An advantage of a pluralistic language policy is that it allows practical and symbolic involvement in state life by offering minorities a cultural space within the wider society. It is precisely the sense of involvement at the collective level that welds citizens into a nation.

## **2.5 Conclusion**

This chapter has discussed the main paradigms in understanding *ethnicity*, *nation* and *nationalism* and highlighted the ethnosymbolist approach taken in this study.

The paradigms of nationalism based on the natural character of nations and referring back to the earliest periods of history (primordialism, perennialism) not only fail to explain the date of the emergence of nations, but also include all types of human groups in the category of nation. As argued in section 2.2, a nation differs from other collective identities and is defined here by common culture, the belief in the right to self-determination and the right to territory. Correspondingly, nationalism is understood as the desire of a culturally based group for a nation-state – that is, independence, territory and self-rule.

The modernist paradigm, although it has made an important contribution to nationalism studies, is also deficient in explaining certain nationalisms in the contemporary world. In merging their political and, at the same time, ‘ethnic’ character, it cannot inadequately explain nationalisms of non-Western stateless nations (both in the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries). These nations, without access to power and resources available to Western states in early modern times, were often influenced by their ethnic and cultural elements more than by the political and civic dimensions of those of the West.

The theoretical framework of this study – ethnosymbolism – offers adequate explanation of the continuity between ethnic identity and national identity and does not fail to account for the nature of ethnic and national ties and links between nationalism, the ethnic core of nations and cultural identities in different types of nationalism.

In modern times, a common cultural and political identity for all members of a nation is achieved largely by a standard language obtained through language

policy and planning. Soviet Georgia provides an interesting case where national language was manipulated, on the one hand, to create a sense of identity among certain groups, and, on the other, to exclude some other groups. Marxist-Leninist and Stalinist understandings of nations and nationalism (examined in section 2.3) and Soviet language policy (discussed in chapter 5) arguably strengthened the ethnic and linguistic character of Georgian nationalism and increased the potential for ethnic conflicts in post-Soviet Georgia.

The next chapters examine the emergence of Georgian national awareness from the ethnic and cultural identity of pre-modern times and show not only how ethnic boundaries helped to maintain Georgian ethnic group identity through periods when the cultural content embraced by these boundaries has changed, but also how the ethnic boundaries themselves have changed over time in their meaning or importance, while always referring to ‘the ancient language, religion, kinship system or way of life [...] crucial for the maintenance of ethnic identity (Eriksen 2002: 68). The study then explores the strategies used by the repressed Georgian nation under the colonial regimes of Tsarist Russia and the Soviet Union in order to survive repression and resist assimilation through colonial language policies.



## Chapter 3

### Language and identity in pre-modern Georgia

The material examined in this chapter has been studied elsewhere from various points of view. The novelty of this chapter is that the material is re-examined from an ethnosymbolist approach. Although recognising the importance of modernity and capitalism in the formation of nations, such an approach nevertheless holds that any study of nations must consider the culture of pre-modern times, specifically the culture and structure of an *ethnie* as a historical community preceding a nation. Once formed, an *ethnie* tends to be durable and its myths, symbols and memories, believed to be objective and legitimate boundaries, constitute a framework within which social and cultural processes develop. The ethnic resources form a core upon which national identity is built.

Each national identity is unique in the sense that the components used, selected and interpreted in the process of national identity formation are unique. In other words, the combination of these components is never exactly the same as in other national identities. Georgian nationalism and national identity are distinguished by the centrality of language as the strongest historical factor in national consolidation. Both Georgian and Western scholars have noted the linguistic foundation of Georgian nationhood, characterising the Georgians as ‘a highly language-conscious society’ (Law 2000: 169). As shown throughout this thesis, there are numerous examples in the history of Georgia when language was used to settle fundamental cultural and political issues, and defined Georgia’s

future path in history. Language seems to be the most important marker of *kartveloba* (Georgianness) not only in the modern era, but also in all periods of documented history. While cultural content and the enclosing boundaries of collective identity have changed over time to various degrees, language has remained a criterion of belonging, differentiating *us* from *them*. It is a central feature in all contexts – ethnic, national and state/political.

Over the centuries, language defined the membership of the Georgian *ethnie*, nation and polity as well as the perceived collective historical destiny of the Georgians. Therefore, in order to understand national identity in contemporary Georgia, a historical perspective on identity development is needed. The goal of this chapter, however, is not to review the history critically, but to draw attention to the linguistic and other cultural dimensions used in national histories of Georgia, which were later ‘popularized and institutionalized’ (Hobsbawm 1983: 13). Historiography in Georgia was one of the major instruments for constructing nationhood and therefore provided the discourse needed for nationalism. The input of Georgian nationalist historians in the Tsarist Russian, Soviet and post-Soviet periods is underlined throughout this thesis. However, this chapter gives a picture of *kartveloba* before ‘official’ histories were written. Special attention is paid to the linguistic foundation of *kartveloba* and the role of language in the understanding of the self. Still, Georgian nationalism is not simply an attachment to some linguistic sentiment, but a more complex phenomenon. Therefore, other motives for national identity construction should be explored in relation to language.

For that reason other key components of *kartveloba*, which later played a crucial role in nation-formation, are also identified in this chapter. After discussing the history of language policy and planning (LPP) in section 3.1, and examining some of the ethnic background and ethno-national resources (such as religion, homeland, and the choice of myths and symbols) in relation to language (sections 3.2.1 and 3.2.2), the chapter touches upon a fundamental question of nationalism debates regarding pre-modern nations (section 3.2.3). It is impossible to understand modern Georgian nationalism without analysing the history of ancient ethnic solidarity and in particular the role language played in the national consolidation of Georgians. Nor is it possible to identify the forces at work behind Georgia's recent ethnic conflicts without understanding the colonial language policy of the Russian empire (discussed in chapter 4) and, later, of the Soviet Union (discussed in chapter 5), when Georgia strove to revive the nation through linguistic consolidation.

Therefore, before analysing the emergence of the modern nation in the next chapter, this chapter will trace the development of *kartveloba* since ancient times, concentrating on the role of language and LPP in relation to ideology predating the Georgian national movements of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Cultural components of Georgian national identity reach far back into the Georgian past and can be traced over long periods of time. Not only are they tied to the process of modernisation, but their recurrence and continuity provided sources for modern nationhood in the nineteenth century, when the nationalist intelligentsia rediscovered myths, memories, traditions and symbols of national heritage of the Golden Age. While ethnosymbolism agrees with the modernist view that the

ideology of nationalism creates nations where they did not exist, it also asserts that many nations have grown out of pre-existing societies as a modification and extension of their cultural heritage and ethnic ties (A. D. Smith 1999a: 190-191). The modern Georgian nation is a product of modern nationalism as much as it is a product of the pre-modern development of ethnic elements recognised by the ethnosymbolist approach. It will be argued that a pre-modern nationalist ideology emerged in Georgia in the tenth-thirteenth centuries at the zenith of the country's political, military, cultural and economic strength, when the population of Georgia was united by well demarcated territory, an effective government, religion and, most importantly, language. A thousand years ago, the Georgian writer Giorgi Merchule defined Georgia as a country bounded by linguistic identity (see section 3.3.3). Since that time Georgia has been called *Sakartvelo* – ‘a place for Georgians’. One of the questions addressed in this chapter is what it meant to be *kartveli* (a Georgian). Did the Georgians constitute an ethnic group or a pre-modern nation? Could the community of Georgians in the Middle Ages be considered a nation? When addressing these questions, it is important to distinguish between modern and old nations and not to restrict the meaning of ‘nation’ to its modern meaning. The issue of a pre-modern nation also raises further questions, such as whether ‘nation’ has one single meaning when used with regard to the Georgian nation (discussed further in this thesis) and whether *kartveli* before modernity meant the same as in the later era of nationalism.

### **3.1 Language in ancient and medieval Georgia**

The Georgian people (currently about 4.5 million) came into existence through the long interrelation and confluence of related tribes. Although in ancient times there may have been more proto-Georgian speaking tribes in Transcaucasia (Suny 1998: 4), the three tribes which constitute the modern Georgian people are the Karts, Zans and Svans, corresponding to speakers of modern Kartvelian (South Caucasian) languages, that is Georgian, Megrelian-Laz (Colchian or Zan), and Svan. The Kartvelian language family descended from proto-Georgian (Kobalava 2008: 503). The Proto-Georgian (or common Kartvelian) language began to break up into distinct languages about four thousand years ago. The Svan language was the first to break away. It is now the native language of about 40 000 people and is mainly spoken in northwest Georgia, in the province of Svaneti. As for Megrelian-Laz, this became a distinct language in the eighth century BC. Megrelian is spoken in western Georgia (province of Samegrelo) by about half a million people and Laz is spoken mainly in Sarpi, a southwest Georgian village on the border of Turkey. Most Laz speakers live in Turkey along the Black Sea coast. Many linguists, particularly from outside Georgia and mainly guided by extra-linguistic criteria, such as different political borders, consider Megrelian and Laz (Chan) to be separate languages. However for most Georgian scholars, they represent two dialects of a single Megrelian-Laz language (Amirejibi-Mullen 2006: 5). On the other hand, a few contemporary Georgian 'linguists' consider the Kartvelian languages to be dialects of a single language, since Svan and Megrelian-Laz speakers in Georgia identify themselves as Georgians (see sections 5.2.1 and 6.1.3). Among the Kartvelian languages, only Georgian has literary status and a

long written tradition. Megrelian, Laz and Svan have always been limited to domestic use. Their speakers within Georgia often refer to their languages as ‘our kitchen language’ or ‘our cradle language’ and consider the Georgian language to be their literary and second native language. Georgian is also a main marker of the national identity they share with the rest of Georgians.

Particular historic conditions are necessary for a language to become the most important marker of cultural identity (Boeder 2006: 54). In the history of Georgia from the earliest times, there were several periods during which language played a more important role than at other times. Although discussions of language policy and planning within sociolinguistics mainly concern the modern era, old states more often than not had some sort of language policy, including the selection, implementation, codification and elaboration of languages in order to enable their functioning in a given society. The adoption of Christianity in Georgia in the fourth century was a strong incentive for language standardisation. In fact, the spread of Christianity became a language movement strengthening ethnic ties (see section 3.1.1). Later on, in the strong feudal state in the eleventh to thirteenth centuries, language became a political issue and the rulers of Georgia carried out a language policy which encouraged the further consolidation of the Georgian nation (see section 3.1.2).

### **3.1.1 Language standardisation after conversion to Christianity (5<sup>th</sup> – 10<sup>th</sup> centuries AD)**

Non-standard languages can be and often are markers of ethnic identity. However, in order to serve as a marker of national identity, a language has to be standardised

(see section 2.4.2) and become a literary language, i.e. it has to be a language in which literary texts are written. Most non-Georgian, as well as some Georgian, scholars support the view that the Georgian alphabet was created after the spread of Christianity in the fourth century in order to translate essential Christian texts. Pre-Christian inscriptions in Georgia are written in Aramaic and Greek scripts. The oldest inscriptions in the Georgian alphabet date back to the 430s AD and are found near Bethlehem in Palestine (Tsereteli 1960). The oldest Georgian manuscripts also date from the fifth century. Three scripts have been used to write Georgian: *Asomtavruli*, *Nuskha-khutsuri* and *Mkhedruli*. They represent a single alphabet which gradually acquired different graphic forms (Kemertelidze 1999: 232). *Asomtavruli* or *Mrgvlovani* was in use from the fifth through the eighth century. Gamkrelidze (1994) considers the Greek influence to be evident in *Asomtavruli*: in order to avoid violation of numerical values of letters, the order of letters follows Greek; the sounds specific to Georgian are added at the end. Each Georgian sound is represented by only one letter and the Georgian alphabet is almost totally phonetic, which indicates that its creator was familiar with the phonetic principles of sounds elaborated by Dionysius Thrax (Boeder 1975). During the ninth century, *Asomtavruli* gradually developed into *Nuskha-khutsuri*, which was replaced by *Mkhedruli* in the eleventh century and is used to this day. Since ‘[t]he development of a written form of the language has, throughout history and across cultures, been closely bound up with the recognition of a *standard* form of the language’ (Joseph 2006: 29), it is therefore possible to speak about the development of the Georgian standard language since the fifth century.

The difference between eastern and western Christianity contributed to the standardisation and spread of the vernacular. Religion was one of the most important markers of collective identity before the emergence of nationalist ideology throughout the world and Georgia is no exception. The defence of one's religion has often been understood as the defence of one's nation or ethnic group. For example, the Irish literary language had been created by the clergy (Safran 2008: 176); only later did it become a defining element of Irish identity together with Catholicism and territory. The Irish struggle against English domination was interpreted as the struggle between a Catholic Irish nation whose church language was Latin, and a Protestant English nation. Defending the Irish language was largely insignificant until the late nineteenth century (Barbour 2002b: 36). In general, until modern times in the western-Christian world, where Christianity was intended to be above national differences (Safran 2008: 176), the language used in the church was not the same as that used in day to day secular life. Holy texts, church services and prayers were written in Latin and local languages had no written forms. Literary languages were not the property of regular people, but of the upper classes.<sup>9</sup> However, in the Eastern Christian world, all national languages were equal and used in religious life (Bolkvadze 2006). There was thus a strong connection between religion and the literary language. Here the defence of one's

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<sup>9</sup> In Western Europe, Latin was the language of worship and contact. In the eastern part of the continent, Greek played the role of *lingua franca* and *lingua sacra* of the Orthodox Church until Slavic countries started using Church Slavonic as a sacred language and *lingua franca* in the tenth century (Wright 2004: 23). Arabic, used as a language of Islam, was often remote from local dialects (Kamusella 2001: 236).



nation was consciously linked to language and, as the Georgian case shows, language movements appeared much earlier than in the West.

In this way, one of the main factors differentiating Eastern Christians from Western European Christians was their use of language as an additional marker of identity. The Bible in the West was presented in the language of the masses only beginning with Martin Luther, who wished to ensure that the Holy Scripture was not the exclusive property of the clergy (Safran 2008: 174). Some Eastern Christian countries, among them Georgia, had the Bible translated into the language of masses much earlier. This fact served not only the spread of Orthodox Christianity, but also language development. Hence, the Eastern-Christian tradition enabled the standardisation of Georgian much earlier than the languages of Western European nations, the standard varieties of which are partly products of modernity (Barbour 2002a: 13).

The history of the Georgian literary language began with the translation of religious texts from Greek, Syrian, Armenian and Arabic, soon followed by original Christian literature.<sup>10</sup> Religious figures ‘used their native tongue for theological writings and commentaries, as well as in the day-to-day life of the Church [. . .] The difficult task of mastering a foreign language was thus confronted in the East by only a small number of individuals – those engaged in the work of translation and those who were destined to become leaders of the Church in their area, who spent time studying in Constantinople or Jerusalem and

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<sup>10</sup> It is often assumed that the earliest surviving original piece of literature is *The Martyrdom of Shushanik, the Queen*, written in 475-84 (Baramidze & Gamezardashvili 1968: 9).

returned with first-hand knowledge of major texts and doctrinal disputes' (Law 2003: 124).

Both original Georgian literature and the translated texts from the early Middle Ages show some degree of standardisation (Danelia 1998: 490). It is also obvious that the authors were trying to equip Georgian with all the vocabulary necessary for the status of *lingua sacra*. In this way, the first standardisers and codifiers of Georgian were religious figures. Translation work abroad became more intense from the tenth century. The modernisation of Georgian, carried out by translators, was a process of catching up with Greek and other developed literary languages. Despite the Eastern Christian tradition of equality of all languages, it was extremely difficult to compete with the Greek language. A Georgian monk, Ioane Varazvache, on Mount Athos, wrote in the tenth century:

In our Georgian tongue, no one had been found up till now to make accessible these holy books of the interpretation of the Holy Gospel. While the churches of Greece and Rome were filled with them, those of our land lacked them. Not only these books, but many others, were wanting in our language. Seeing this I, the poor John, the last of the monks, was sorrowful at this shortage of books in the Georgian land. So [...] I gave my son Euthymius a complete Greek education, and destined him to translate books into Georgian. (Blake, Athos Catalogue, #10. Cited in Lang 1955: 317)<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> *John* and *Euthymius* are equivalents of the Georgian names *Ioane* and *Ekvtime* respectively. Translations by Euthymius or Ekvtime Mtatsmindeli are discussed further in this section.

Language became central to the process of affirming not only cultural differences vis-à-vis Greek, but also to raising the prestige of Georgia on the whole. In this regard, the role of Ekvtime Mtatsmindeli and Giorgi Mtatsmindeli are especially important. Giorgi Mtsire in his biography of Giorgi Mtatsmindeli, indicates that several Greek religious figures and aristocrats told Giorgi Mtatsmindeli that although he was Georgian, he was equal to Greeks in knowledge and education (Giorgi Mtsire 1967: 148, 151, 153, and 177). For Georgian religious figures who worked abroad, especially on Mount Athos, it was important to be as strong and powerful as a Greek in order to be recognized as non-barbaric.<sup>12</sup>

Beginning in the eleventh century, translators and writers composed frequent commentaries of a linguistic character, such as the evaluation of translating skills. For example, Giorgi Mtatsmindeli (1009-1065) commented on Ekvtime Mtatsmindeli's (ca. 955-1028) translations from Greek into Georgian and vice versa, appreciating their high quality, which, in his words, is comparable only with the first anonymous translators of the Bible into Georgian (Giorgi Mtatsmindeli 1967: 61).<sup>13</sup> According to Giorgi Mtatsmindeli, Ekvtime 'distilled

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<sup>12</sup> The Monastery of Iviron on Mount Athos, named after the classical name of eastern Georgia, Iberia, was built by Georgians for Georgian clerics under the supervision of Ioannes the Iberian between 980-983. A large part of the Monastery's library (2000 manuscripts and 20000 books) is Georgian. For more information in English, see Dowling (2005) and Allen (1929).

<sup>13</sup> Ekvtime was fluent in Greek. Lang (1955: 314-215) gives a full list of the texts translated by him from Georgian into Greek. Some Greek originals of Ekvtime's translations are lost and, therefore, Georgian versions acquire the importance of primary sources (Mgaloblishvili 1998: 10).

the sweet honey of the books of God, with which he adorned our language and our Church' (translated by Lang 1957: 86). Giorgi Mtatsmindeli evaluates Ekvtime's contribution to the literary language as enlightenment for the Georgian language and Georgia, as well as his input into Greek language development (Giorgi Mtatsmindeli 1967: 41, 44). Giorgi Mtsire (1967: 121), a biographer of Giorgi Mtatsmindeli, evaluates Giorgi's contribution to Georgian in the same way. In general, practitioners of later generations have a high opinion of the translating activities of early religious figures. The input is measured by their choice of literature, translating skills and the work done in order to enlarge the Georgian vocabulary and protect the purity of the literary language (Tabidze 2005: 27-28).

Many early linguistic commentaries are related to translations from Greek and to grammatical features of the original language in comparison with Georgian. In this regard, the contribution made by Eprem Mtsire (? — ca. 1101) is immense. As Auroux (2000: 445) notes '[n]umerous original and translated works of Eprem Mtsire (Ephraim the Little, second half of the eleventh century) clearly reveal the attention the great scholar paid to linguistic problems [. . .] He deals with several linguistic features of both languages [. . .] Eprem shows considerable linguistic insight.' Eprem's contribution to the development of theological terminology, based on the terminological achievements of Ekvtime Mtatsmindeli, is significant (Chelidze 1997: 507). The fact is that some Greek texts<sup>14</sup> were translated first in the tenth century by Ekvtime Mtatsmindeli, and then again in the eleventh century

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<sup>14</sup> For example, the works of Maximus the Confessor, who is believed to have died in Georgia in exile in 662 (Ferguson, McHugh & Norris 1998: 743).

by Eprem Mtsire and other representatives of the Gelati Academy.<sup>15</sup> They show many linguistic differences, because Ekvtime was trying to simplify the texts for a broader audience, whereas the translations of the Gelati school were intended for the well-educated reader (Khoperia 2001: 136, 137). Eprem believed that, in order to put the Georgian language on an equal footing with Greek, it was necessary to translate Greek texts word for word. Some of his principles of translation, which altered the Georgian language considerably enriching it with new constructions and phraseology, include immediate translation from the original, keeping the natural style of the target language and providing full commentaries and glosses (Rayfield 2000: 9-10).

Eprem distinguished between *bookish* and *rural* languages. Analyses of several terms used for these notions show that by *rural language*, he meant colloquial words from geographical dialects, as well as a non-literary style of writing. The *bookish language* for him was the ecclesiastic language of high prestige (Bolkvadze 2005: 55-56). Eprem Mtsire also devised punctuation rules according to the Greek system and wrote the first explanatory dictionary in Georgian, where terms are listed in alphabetical order (Shanidze 1968: 121).

Eprem's most famous followers, Ioane Petritsi and Arsen Iqaltoeli, who are known to have been familiar with the Greek linguistic literature (Uturgaidze 1999:7), further elaborated theological and scientific terminology.<sup>16</sup> These two

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<sup>15</sup> Gelati Academy was the most important scholarly centre in western Georgia in the eleventh and twelfth centuries (Suny 1998: 38).

<sup>16</sup> Arsen Iqaltoeli is believed to be the author of the first original Georgian linguistic work (Shanidze 1990; Uturgaidze 1999: 11).

outstanding Georgian religious figures were invited to the newly established Gelati Academy by King David the Builder (1073-1125), who actively supported the development of education and research in Georgian and who had regularly selected Georgian children to be sent to the Byzantine Empire to study foreign languages and carry out translations into Georgian.<sup>17</sup> However, after the establishment of the Gelati Academy, called ‘the second Jerusalem of the whole East’ and ‘the second Athens’ by David’s historian for its educational activity (Davitis istorikosi 1955: 330-331), advanced courses in such disciplines as jurisprudence, natural sciences, mathematics, medicine, grammar, astronomy, historiography, philosophy, literature, architecture, music and arts were taught in Georgian (Narkvevebi III 1979: 370, 378-379). Theological and secular education in Georgian became possible through schools of philosophy and literary style based on philosophical and linguistic traditions brought by Arsen Iqaltoeli and Ioane Petritsi from Constantinople and from a Georgian monastery at Petritsoni in Bulgaria. In order to enable its use in different spheres of science, a conscious effort was made to promote corpus planning, in particular lexical growth. Arsen Iqaltoeli and Ioane Petritsi worked hard on the lexical elaboration and establishment of the Georgian scientific language and their work deserves special attention. Although they

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<sup>17</sup> In the early feudal period, only primary schools existed in Georgia and for advanced studies the Georgians had to go abroad. As revealed by Armenian sources, the Catholikos of Georgia Kirion (c 6-7 AD) went to Nicopol in Asia Minor for his theological education (Narkvevebi III 1979: 612-613). However, in eleventh- and twelfth-century Georgia, the number of elementary schools increased. Instruction was conducted under the Byzantine educational system – the so called *trivium-quadrivium*, which focused on grammar, rhetoric, philosophy, arithmetic, geometry, music and astronomy.

borrowed some Greek terms, they mostly created new grammatical and other scientific terms based on Georgian roots and Georgian affixation. Thanks to its productive word-formation and compounding abilities, it was easy to innovate in Georgian. New vocabulary elaborated by Ioane Petritsi, whose stated goal was to differentiate the scientific language from the language of common people, is linguistically motivated and reflects the exact meaning of each notion (Melikishvili 1999).

Not only was Georgian theological and scientific terminology elaborated in the process of translation mainly from Greek, but, in general, the development and modernisation of the Georgian literary language took place in competition with Greek. In the beginning, Greek was regarded as a model language giving the literate élite access to philosophy and Christian literature. It had an obvious influence on the Georgian language and graphisation (as mentioned above); it also influenced Georgian linguistic thought. Many Georgian grammatical terms of the eleventh and twelfth centuries, such as case names, are exact equivalents of Greek terms. They were used in later grammars and are partly used in modern Georgian linguistics. Eprem Mtsire and his pupils, who formed the School of Hellenophiles and adopted a principle of word for word translation, brought Georgian syntax closer to Greek syntax. Grammatical works written later, such as Zurab Shanshovani's (1737) first Georgian grammar followed by the monumental *Grammar* of Catholicos Anton (first version, 1753; second 1767), were based on a continuity of tradition going back to a source which was greatly influenced by the Greek cultural environment' (Aroux 2000: 446).

Before looking at the further development of standard Georgian in the next section, we may conclude that the development of Old Standard Georgian has to be viewed as part of the Christianisation of Georgia. The adoption of Christianity and the culturally transcendent quality of this religion enabled Georgians to communicate with the rest of the Christian world, thus ensuring Georgia's strong cultural identification with Europe (Jones 2005: 10). It is evident that religious figures contributed a great deal to the development of the standard language and upgraded it to the status of *lingua sacra*. However, without the patronage of strong monarchs, Georgian cultural and educational centres abroad would have been unlikely to achieve the striking success they had. They witnessed a great outburst of cultural energy resulting in the development of deeply Christian literature in Georgian – translations as well as the composition of saints' and martyrs' lives. With the financial support of kings and aristocrats, in the early Christian period Georgians started building churches and monasteries outside the country (e.g. in Egypt, Syria, Palestine and Byzantium) (Vachridze 2004). In addition to religious services, Georgian monks in these outposts performed national and cultural activities (Alasania 2006: 123), produced works in theology and philosophy, translated foreign works from various languages and copied old Georgian manuscripts. Religion and education were closely linked in the Middle Ages and the medieval church in Georgia 'was the purveyor and guardian of culture and language' (Rapp 2000: 570). The most important contribution to the standardisation and codification of the Georgian language was made by the Georgian Monastery of Iviron on Mount Athos, where the Georgian clergy was involved not only in literary work but also in seeking the recognition of Georgians



as a non-Barbaric people. Giorgi Mtatsmindeli's role in this regard is especially remarkable. According to his biographer, Giorgi Mtsire (1967: 176-180), the Byzantine emperor Constantine Ducas, agreed, when requested by the Georgian king Bagrat, to allow a greater number of monks in the Georgian monastery. Well aware of Giorgi Mtatsmindeli's activities and considering him equal to Greeks, the emperor received him as Georgia's ambassador. Several times during the meeting, the emperor said to Giorgi that, although he was Georgian by blood, he was equal to Greeks in knowledge (Giorgi Mtsire 1967: 151, 153). While this was personally flattering for Giorgi, it was somewhat humiliating for Georgians in general. Therefore Giorgi decided to show the moral superiority of Georgians. The two men started discussing spiritual issues and rules of faith, as the emperor was interested in the difference between the Georgian and Greek orthodoxies. In his answer, Giorgi emphasised the similarities, but then pointed out that, unlike the Greeks who in the past were involved in heresy, the Georgians had never changed their faith. Constantin Ducas was not insulted by such responses, since Giorgi linked heresies not to that emperor's reign, but to those of his predecessors. During his life on Athos, Giorgi Mtatsmindeli had to defend the equal treatment of Georgians many times. The Patriarch of Antioch, who considered Georgians uneducated, since he was not aware that any of the Apostles had preached in their country, required that the Georgian monastery obey the Greek monastery on Mount Athos. Giorgi was able to prove that Simeon the Canaanite was buried in Georgia and that Georgians were educated by the Apostles (Giorgi Mtsire 1967: 154).

By this time, the Georgian language had become a vehicle for spreading Christianity, given its status of *lingua sacra* through the translation of the Holy Scripture, the creation of an original Christian literature and the celebration of liturgy in Georgian. At the same time, the policy of using Georgian for religious purposes can be understood as a conscious distancing from Greek heritage and preservation of selfhood against Christian *others*. It is not surprising that the process of equalising Georgian with Greek became a language movement, grew into the idea of the superiority of the Georgian language and emerged as an ideology of a Messianic role of Georgia, as discussed in detail in section 3.2.2.

### **3.1.2. Towards modern standard Georgian (11<sup>th</sup> – 18<sup>th</sup> centuries AD)**

As has been noted in section 2.4.1, Haugen (1966) provides a model for the emergence of a standard language. First, one of the dialects has to be chosen (selection of norm) and then standardised through elaborating its grammar, dictionaries and translations (codification of form). After this, the newly standardised language has to be used in many social contexts (elaboration of function) and, finally, it has to be accepted by people (acceptance by the community). Standard Georgian has passed through all the stages of language planning (selection, codification, elaboration and acceptance).

Usually the dialect of a region that is politically, economically and culturally advanced becomes a standard variety (Melikishvili 2007: 125). Throughout Georgia's history, the province of Kartli was a cultural and administrative centre. Both the old capital of Mtskheta (since the third century BC) and the current capital Tbilisi (since the fifth century AD) are located in Kartli.

Therefore, the Old Georgian language (ca. 5-11 AD) was based mostly on the Kartlian dialect. But throughout the whole history of the literary language, Georgian has been enriched by vocabulary borrowed from different geographic dialects. At the same time, the process of corpus planning continued in contact with other languages which contributed to the lexical growth of Georgian (Lezhava 1984: 11-12).

Starting at the end of the eleventh century, Georgia became a powerful and a large state and by the end of the twelfth century included the territories of modern Azerbaijan, Armenia and a significant part of modern Turkey. During the reign of Queen Tamar (1184-1213), widely called Georgia's Golden Age or the Georgian Renaissance, Georgia was the most powerful country in Asia Minor (Kaufman 2001: 91). Prosperity, stability and success enabled Georgian kings to become guardians of cultural life. They supported the development of not only original religious and historiographic literature, but also Georgian secular literature: court poetry, chivalrous and romantic epics (expressing highly moral human aspirations), as well as the translation of Muslim books (Rayfield 2000: 61), mostly from Greek, Persian, Arabic, Azerbaijani and Tajik during this period (Baramidze & Gamezardashvili 1968: 14-15). Although the language of secular literature is closer to the spoken language, it follows the norms and standards of religious and scholarly texts elaborated through the conscious efforts of the Georgian clergy. Thanks to their work, by the twelfth century the Georgian language was already very rich and well standardised. As Rayfield (2000:9) explains:

The Georgian language at the greatest period of Georgian history and culture (the twelfth century AD) probably had the same number of speakers and readers and the same prestige among its neighbours, as the English language in the time of Shakespeare. It certainly had a longer history and drew on resources just as rich as those of English. The language of today is recognisably the same as the language first recorded in AD 430.

The fact that Modern Standard Georgian is essentially the same as Old Georgian indicates that the Old Georgian literary language was not too different from the dialects, meaning there was a high degree of linguistic homogeneity. Despite Old Georgian being comprehensible to modern Georgians, there are enough (mostly morphological) differences between them to enable scholars to distinguish two periods in the history of Georgian. Modern Georgian developed essentially between the twelfth and eighteenth centuries (I. Gigineishvili 1983: 13), although its beginning can be traced back to Ekvtime Mtatsmindeli's and Giorgi Mtatsmindeli's works. While revising old texts, they paid some tribute to previous translators, typically trying to bring old texts into conformity with contemporary language. Eprem Mtsire, on the other hand, as noted in section 3.1.1, initiated the development of a more bookish language, different from the daily language which had entered the writings of Athonites. One of the first extended narratives in almost colloquial Georgian is Makari Meskhi's translation (thirteenth century, revised fifteenth century) of the lost Syrian text of *The Life of Peter the Iberian* (Rayfield 2000: 89).

Invasions by foreigners in the thirteenth-sixteenth centuries caused a decline in Georgian cultural and scientific development in general and in linguistic thought in particular (Melikishvili 2007: 125-127). Georgian unity collapsed. There were several desperate but unsuccessful attempts to re-establish the kingdom (Suny 1998: 44-46). Cultural relations with the Christian world, maintained before through Georgian monasteries abroad (in Palestine, on Mount Sinai, Mount Athos, Black Mountain in Syria, Petritsoni in Bulgaria, Cyprus, etc.), were interrupted after the fall of Byzantium. There were no more schools which could set statutory standards and norms or principles of translation for Georgian. Political instability and cultural impoverishment left their mark on the literary language, which in this period is characterised by a diversity of grammatical and lexical forms. Many Georgian words as well as some scientific terminology elaborated by the Georgian cultural élite of the previous centuries were replaced by Persian and Turkish words.

From the seventeenth century, Georgian kings re-established ties with Europe (Potskhishvili 1999: 235). This fact did not have any positive political consequences for Georgia, but resulted in the arrival of Italian religious missionaries attempting to spread Catholicism among the Georgians. As Wright (2004: 112) notes, ‘those involved in conversion needed a common idiom with those they sought to convert. Christian missionaries often learnt autochthonous languages to proselytise.’ Italian Catholic missionaries were taught Georgian in Italy by the Georgian ambassador in Rome (Uturgaidze 1999: 30). After arriving in Georgia, they started writing grammar books and dictionaries of the Georgian language and later published the *Dizionario Georgiano e Italiano* composed by

Stefano Paolini (1629) and the first printed Georgian grammar, a Greek-based paradigm, by one of the missionary grammarians, Francisco Maria Maggio (1643) (Chikobava & Vateishvili 1983). These and other works by the Italians influenced the Georgian prince, Sulkhani-Saba Orbeliani (1658-1725), an outstanding writer and clergyman. Known as the father of the Georgian ‘enlightenment’, Orbeliani laid the foundation for standardising Modern Georgian with the support of King Vakhtang VI (1675-1737). He was the first to introduce modern schooling to Georgia and, most importantly, he composed *sitqvis kona* (Orbeliani 1991, 1993), an explanatory dictionary of Georgian that put an end to the distortion of the language, and also facilitated knowledge and correct use of its rich vocabulary (Bolkvadze 2005: 197). Rayfield (2000: 119) compares *sitqvis kona* to Dr Johnson’s achievements in England, arguing that Sulkhani-Saba did even more than Johnson, ‘for his material includes almost every text extant from the earliest period, and, as the medieval dictionaries compiled by translators such as Eprem Mtsire had disappeared with the Mongols, the lexicographer was working from zero’.

The introduction to the dictionary, where the Georgian sound system and grammar is analysed, shows that Sulkhani-Saba based his thought on the linguistic literature of the eleventh and twelfth centuries (Uturgaidze 1999: 83). Sulkhani-Saba’s definitions, referring to over one hundred and forty sources, are short and precise. When interpreting a word, he gives a list of semantically related vocabulary and explains suitable contexts for them. Sometimes he evaluates the words as ‘noble’ or ‘bad’ showing his own attitude towards various lexical units,

or marks them with 'not usable' as they are foreign words introduced into Georgian 'because of changes of time' and their use should be avoided.

There are many other features of this dictionary which make it of great importance for the restoration of the Old Georgian linguistic tradition and the adoption of contemporary tendencies and directions. Despite being a religious figure, Sulkhani-Saba used the language of the daily life of Georgians in his original non-religious literature and translations from foreign languages. In his lifetime, the Modern Georgian language was finally established (I. Gigineishvili 1959: 42).

Sulkhani-Saba's attitude to the Georgian linguistic heritage was quite different from that of his successor, the representative of the King's family and also a religious figure, Anton Bagrationi or Anton I Catholicos (1720-1788). Widely educated in religious studies and sciences, Anton became the head of the Georgian Orthodox Church at the age of twenty-four (Potskhishvili 1999: 235). He not only worked in theology and various spheres of science, but also initiated and supervised the opening of a number of Western-style schools in Georgia. He fostered Western education in general by establishing close relations with the Catholic missions and bringing Georgian principalities closer to Europe. He himself designed the curricula of the schools, translated and wrote handbooks for ethics, logic, rhetoric, grammar and stylistics as well as taught physics. He was very productive in creating original texts in almost all spheres of religious literature and translated many texts from Armenian. His *Georgian Grammar* (Anton pirveli 1997) is considered to be an important step in the development of Georgian linguistic thought, as well as a great contribution to the unity of Georgian

identity, since it set standards of literary Georgian in all the disintegrated kingdoms and principalities of his time (Uturgaidze 1999: 149; Babunashvili & Uturgaidze 1991: 7-8).

Despite his accomplishments, Anton had an overall negative influence on the development of literary Georgian. Influenced by Russian, Latin, Greek, Persian, Turkish and Armenian linguistic thought and rhetoric, he developed the ‘Theory of Three Styles’. He forbade writing about different topics in the same style, which meant using ‘high style’ for divine services and religious writings, ‘middle style’ for historical and literary texts and ‘low style’ for plebeians (Bolkvadze 2005: 158-161), the latter being actually the language of daily life in Georgia at the time. Due to Anton’s influential position in Georgian society, the ‘Theory of Three Styles’ became a norm and a law, which prevented the natural development of the Georgian literary language. Anton’s influential pupils continued this path and many important scientific, historical and literary texts from the end of the eighteenth century were created in a language which was largely artificial and incomprehensible to ordinary people. A single standard linguistic code as a medium of communication was rejected. Only in the nineteenth century, thanks to Georgian nationalists who needed to spread nationalist ideology among all Georgians, did it become possible to restore one common language for all Georgians, as discussed in detail in chapter 4.

It is possible to discuss more authors of different academic schools and periods who contributed to the codification, standardisation and elaboration of standard Georgian, but from what has already been said it is clear that linguistic



culture and language planning in Georgia existed from the earliest documented period.

### **3.1.3 The role of standard Georgian for *kartveloba* in the Middle Ages**

The existence of a standard language creates a ‘proto-nation’ (Hastings 1999a: 21). At the same time it helps the state to establish a universal language in education and government. Once a universal language is established, a more conscious community of users emerges. This community consists of one or more ethnicities which share political loyalty. This section shows that in the Middle Ages *kartveloba* represented a prototype of a modern nation and that Georgia resembled a nation-state in terms of accommodating and incorporating ethnic minorities into a strong unified polity based on shared language. The ideology behind a political claim of the right to the territory and cultural uniformity, identified here as a pre-modern equivalent of nationalism, is discussed in 3.2.3. At the same time, we should look at Georgia’s socio-political structure during the zenith of its feudal state because it has been used as a standard for contemporary Georgia in the process of building a nation-state.

In the eleventh and twelfth century Georgia, there were sufficient conditions for the existence of a peaceful multinational state, where minorities had the right to participate in state life. The reigns of David the Builder and Queen Tamar (1184-1213) were especially remarkable, when Georgia’s sociopolitical administration reached its greatest geographical size, resulting in the creation of a multiethnic empire covering the whole South Caucasus and most of the North Caucasus (Demetriou 2002: 865). The historian Ronald Suny (1998: 33) describes

Georgia of the eleventh-thirteenth centuries as the dominant regional state stretching from Muslim Shirvan (in present-day Azerbaijan) on the Caspian to Christian Trebizond (now in Turkey) on the Black Sea. In this way, Georgia became a Georgian-dominated imperial confederation, consisting of both Muslim Khans and Christian princes (Jones 2005: 11).

The first socio-political reforms aimed at strengthening the state are associated with David the Builder. Determined to create a centralised, stable and strong country, he took several important steps: 1) religious reform: at the Ruis-Urbnisi religious council (1103) he expelled 'unworthy' people holding high positions due to their noble origin, and subordinated the Church to the Crown (Alasania 2006: 124); 2) military reform: he created a new type of army which stood up better to invasions. In addition to having a twenty-thousand-strong Georgian regular army, a twenty-thousand-strong feudal lords' army and five thousand personal royal guards, he settled forty thousand Kipchak (nomadic Turkic people) families from the North Caucasus in various parts of Georgia; each family was obliged to provide one soldier with a horse and weapons in case of emergency. He made provision for the recruitment of a mercenary army among Ossetians, Kurds, etc. (Silogava & Shengelia 2007: 85); 3) sociopolitical reform: he suppressed the influence of powerful feudal lords and extended the power of the middle and lower classes, incorporating them into the political and social arena. The social system in Georgia took the shape of well-developed feudalism; 4) judicial reform: he subordinated the court to the new position of a Royal counsellor, through whom he supervised the court's activities and set up regional, corporative and social courts (Maskharashvili 2006: 129-130); 5) administrative

reform: he set up the institution of regional and border governors and six ministers; he created a rigid civil police, criminal police, tax police and secret police (Silogava & Shengelia 2007: 87; Maskharashvili 2006: 130-131).

These reforms and a new political apparatus substantially reduced any possibility of insurrections against an autocratic king and united Georgia in the face of external danger. Political, administrative and cultural figures collaborated closely. According to Chkhartishvili (2003), '[m]onasteries served to help different groups merge; the Georgian language and Orthodox Christianity represented the principal means of Georgian cultural expansion and the assimilation of non-Georgian subjects of the Georgian monarch.' Georgia was a united and independent state and Tbilisi attracted talented people. Remarkable achievements were made in science and culture. The necessary conditions for an educational system were created. There was no mass education, but for the élite, regardless of ethnicity or faith, a specifically Georgian system of education functioned. As a country at the crossroads between the West and the East, Georgia attracted not only Christian but also Muslim, especially Persian and Arabic, scholars and artists and absorbed these cultural traditions. Georgian kings offered protection to Arab and Persian writers and poets who came to Tbilisi in order to participate in literary contests (Narkvevebi III 1979: 493-495). Their works were translated into Georgian, enriching the latter with borrowed words.

Georgian rulers were tolerant of the non-Orthodox Christian and Muslim populations and created favourable conditions for freedom of religion. In the case of Armenia, after taking it from Seljuk control, Georgia helped restore Armenian autonomy and revived its original culture (Manandyan 1941:32). David the Builder

was well acquainted with Muslim culture and took part in theological discussions. There were many Muslims living in Tbilisi and the king granted them various privileges. He built community centres for them and provided the means to maintain them. He forbade Christians to do anything which might offend their religious feelings (Vivian 1982: 7). According to the Arab historian Mohammed Al-Hamay, David the Builder treated Muslims better than any Muslim rulers. He not only read the Koran regularly, but every Friday went with his children to the Great Mosque, listened and donated great sums of money (Defremery 1849: 486). Other Muslim historians confirm that David's successors continued this policy and practice of tolerance (Narkvevebi III 1979: 498). As a great statesman (and an equally great poet), who enjoyed international prestige not only because he built a strong state, but also a tolerant one 'where ecclesiastical and secular nobilities accepted their feudal obligations' (Rayfield 2000: 88-89) and where all ethnicities lived in peace, David the Builder set a model for his successors for accommodating ethnic and religious minorities and cross-class inclusion, as one of the important policies carried out by Georgian kings and queens. Tamar's contemporary Armenian historian Stepanos Orbelyan informs us that all confessional arguments were solved with the participation of leaders of all religions in courts where Muslims and Christians had equal rights (Narkvevebi III 1979: 499-500). Rayfield (2000: 81) argues that religious tolerance expressed in the masterpiece of Shota Rustaveli (1160 - ?), *The Knight in the Tiger's Skin*, suggests that Georgia in his time made little distinction between its peoples and their religions. Obviously this educated élite (among them Rustaveli and Petritsi) supported the policy of

tolerance and tried to enlarge the scope of Georgian thinking in order to match the political vision of the rulers (Rayfield 2000: 91).

Intermarriage with ethnic minorities was one expression of their accommodation. For example, David the Builder married a Kipchak princess and Tamar married an Ossetian prince raised at the Georgian king's court (Silogava & Shengelia 2007: 96). Another accommodating measure towards peripheral ethnic cultures expressed by Tamar was giving her first born son two names, one Georgian (Giorgi) and one Abkhazian (Lasha). The latter is an Abkhazian word meaning 'enlightened, resplendent' (Kaufmann 2001: 95).

The dominant Georgian aristocracy was able to incorporate the ethnic minority aristocracy, as well as representatives of the Georgian and non-Georgian middle and lower classes into the dominant Georgian cultural and socio-political sphere<sup>18</sup>. This defined a new and broader cultural and political identity for the society united by the language of prestige and education. Already by the end of the tenth century, Georgia had a rich original and translated religious, scientific and historical literature (Mgaloblishvili 1998: 12) and all the stages of language planning had been completed: first a vernacular, the Georgian language became a written language and a *lingua sacra*. By the zenith of the feudal period, however, its prestige was enhanced — it became a language of education, science, literature and faith, thus a universal language. Hastings (1999a: 21) notes, that:

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<sup>18</sup> For example, a rich Persian merchant, Zankan Zorababeli, organised Queen Tamar's marriage and the Armenianised Kurdish brothers Zakaria and Ivane Mkhargrdzeli held high positions at the king's court (Suny 1998: 39).

The more the vernacular is written, the more stable it becomes, the wider its ability to express current ideas, the larger the number of people who will understand one another better by using it and not something else. This almost of necessity begins to create what one may call at least a 'proto-nation' and its users start to see all sorts of benefits in further retrenching the use of the universal language in religion, government and education.

The Holy Scriptures, translated early on into Georgian and heard by people regularly in churches, helped the spread of Georgian and served as an instrument of nation formation. Georgian as well as non-Georgian sources confirm that all church services were held in Georgian (Rayfield 2000: 11). Consequently, great importance was attributed to the standard Georgian of Christian texts and the church service in promoting Georgian ethnonational consciousness. The religious identity of Georgians was not just about Orthodox Christianity, but Orthodox Christianity preached in Georgian. Thus, the status of *lingua sacra* was an additional salient marker of Georgian identity. It indeed became a decisive factor and a major instrument for the development of a sense of nationhood. This was not a spontaneous process, but, as shown above, a joint effort of religious figures and the supreme political rulers, under whose direct supervision the process of language planning and policy was accelerated and Georgian consciousness constructed (Chkhartishvili 2006a: 91). Their effort resulted not only in acquiring the status of *lingua sacra*, but also facilitated the development of a standard variety with a new symbolic function of marking national identity, thus strengthening the related process of nation-building.

Indeed one of the strengths of the ethnosymbolist approach lies in the ability to explain why some ethnic groups choose to assimilate or integrate into other *ethnies*. Knowing that a sacred, prestigious language of culture exists, strongly motivates people to learn it. Georgian, with its developed literary and educational traditions and status as *lingua sacra*, could play the role of a *lingua franca* as well. As the language of the powerful group and as the sacred and prestigious language, Georgian was put forward as the binding element of the ethnic élites, which accepted *kartveloba* as a linguistic, territorial and largely religious community and identity. It not only offered more cultural or socio-political opportunities to noblemen, higher clergy, military officials and rich merchants of all ethnic groups, but only those who had mastered Georgian could exercise power and influence in the country. By the eleventh century, Georgia's political, military and economic élite consisted of representatives of many different ethnic groups who accepted Georgian as 'their own', integrated into the Georgian state through it and for whom standard Georgian became a symbolic code of *kartveloba*. Non-Georgian (Armenian, Kurdish, Ossetian, Abkhaz and other ethnic) élites not only expressed their thoughts in Georgian, and communicated with each other and with God in Georgian, but also shared political loyalty and served Georgia. *Kartveloba* was no longer the preserve of the right genes or common descent, but acquired a broader meaning to designate a wider cultural community and identity (Narkvevebi III 1979: 370), not just the demarcation of an *ethnie* as in previous times. It was determined by cultural characteristics, particularly language, the relevance of which had increased as the basic component

of nationhood. Having these functions, Georgian in the Middle Ages can be compared to the national languages of modern times.

### **3.2 Language and identity in medieval Georgia**

Chapter 2 emphasised that by adopting an ethnosymbolist approach, this study distinguishes nations from nation-states and concentrates not only on the political dimensions of nations, but also on their cultural content, considering ethnic and national identities mainly as models of collective cultural identities. Unlike Marxist-Leninist analysts, who also consider culture to be important for nation-formation, ethnosymbolism does not view ethnic and national identities as stages of historical development and does not tie them to social constructions and class struggle. For ethnosymbolism, these identities are more complicated phenomena. Ethnic categories, *ethnies* and nations are forms of collective cultural identity distinguished by the level of incorporation and self-identification of people (see section 2.1.2). Soviet scholarship (which referred to the dominant groups of the union republics as nations and other groups as nationalities) considered Jews to be a nationality, not a nation, since they did not occupy a 'homeland' within the Soviet Union. A. D. Smith considers Jews to be an example of an *ethnie* of ancient times. Such *ethnies* at first sight resemble, but are not, nations (Armstrong 2004: 11). According to ethnosymbolism, in some cases, it is possible to look at the development of cultural identity from an ethnic category to a nation as an uninterrupted line (see section 2.2.1). Despite changes over time, the core of cultural identity remains constant and self-identical. This cultural core includes myths, memories and symbols of the nation.



When speaking of myths, memories and symbols of nations, A. D. Smith (1991: 25) defines the meanings of these concepts. Myths refers to ancient stories used to describe the origin of a given people and their destiny; memories refer to the ability to remember events, shared experiences, values and to express them with a collective name, common ancestor, history, territory and solidarity; symbols refer to people, things and events that prove the shared culture of these people. Mythology, symbolism and memories acting as ‘deep resources’ play a vital role in the *longue durée* of cultural communities and identities and later become sacred foundations of nations (see section 2.2.3), but before the emergence of nations they are essential for the survival of ethnic groups.

The goal of this section is to show how the contemporary Georgian nation is a product not only of modern nationalism, but also of the ideology of the Middle Ages, when the cultural foundations for nation-building were laid. It will try to show that the nation-building process in Georgia started long before modern times and that Georgian nationalism has strong roots in pre-modern consciousness. Whether the degree of the consolidation and consciousness reached the degree of national identity is arguable. Many theorists of nationalism (Özirimli 2000: 186) maintain that the degree of cohesion of ethno-religious formations of the Middle Ages could not form nations because they did not make claims to territory and there were no effective modern means of communication, therefore nationalism could not exist. This is one of the issues dividing the paradigms of nationalism discussed in section 2.2. Is it legitimate to speak about a pre-modern ‘nation’ and ‘nationalism’ in Georgia in the eleventh-thirteenth centuries? Part of the discussion

will involve exploring ethnic ties and sentiments and the pre-modern ideology of the 'invention' of a nation.

The evidence coming from Georgian historical chronicles and literature suggests that national consciousness appeared among the educated classes and was articulated first in the tenth century. Cultural homogenisation generating national consciousness was closely linked to the rise of a strong state and was rooted in three concepts: language, faith and homeland. Starting from the tenth century, a collective cultural identity of the Georgians was developed and strengthened in such a way that in the eleventh to thirteenth century the Georgians, possessing a new form of collective consciousness, formed a pre-modern nation. The dynasty and the church, the two pre-modern institutions that were able to provide institutional foundations for ethnic allegiances (Özirimli 2000: 184), worked in unison for the political consolidation of an ethnically, territorially, religiously and linguistically unified population forging loyalty to the dynasty and entrusting the people with a new destiny. By the twelfth century a significant amount not only of religious but also of historiographical literature existed. Old Georgian historiography used all the methods of modern scholarship in defining the boundaries of the community, outlining and cultivating the sense of uniqueness and the sacred mission of a nation, engendering an ethnic core upon which a nation could be built. Section 3.2.1 looks at the role of medieval historians in forging the nation.

Section 3.2.2 looks at language ideas and myths in old Georgia which seem to be the most powerful myths for Georgians. In the Georgian context, language appears also to be the strongest marker, a symbol of political, territorial and

religious unity. Together with other 'deep resources' of the Georgian nation, the idea of divine election through language was elaborated and cultivated by the educated Georgian élite in the Middle Ages and then rediscovered and revived in modern times. Section 3.2.3 examines the features that prove the existence of a community in Georgia in the Middle Ages with more of the features of nationhood than most groups at the threshold of the twentieth century: it was a named population with a strong sense of homeland occupying historic territory, it had myths of descent and several myths of election, shared historical memories, common linguistic and religious culture, mass common culture (such as religious practice), common laws and rights, and an effective government (dynasty).

### **3.2.1 Myths, memories and symbols of the Georgian nation**

After being fragmented by the Arab and Seljuk invasions, the Georgian lands were reintegrated again into a strong feudal state in the tenth century and a new royal dynasty, the Bagrationi, emerged. This dynasty signalled the revival of Georgian statehood, a task which required a new ideological foundation (Lerner 2004: 77): this foundation was laid by the writings of Georgian intellectuals of the time. For all its political, social and cultural achievements, the period from the rule of David the Builder until the end of Tamar's rule is widely termed Georgia's Golden Age or the Georgian Renaissance (Baramidze & Gamezardashvili 1968: 140). More importantly, this is the epoch when the cultural foundation for the emergence of a nation was laid down as a result of a new ideology adopted by political rulers, whose goal was to create a fairly homogeneous and loyal community which could attain and keep political independence. This ideology was strongly supported by

the educated élite, especially historians, who started selecting and reinterpreting past values and virtues, rediscovering and reconstructing often exaggerated heroism of past ages and an ancestral civilisation.

Ethnosymbolism considers the important role of historians in forging national identities (see section 2.2.3). Modernists also admit that nationalism sometimes takes pre-existing cultures and turns them into nations (Gellner 1983: 48). Halliday (2000: 167) considers writing history to be ‘central to nationalism [...] in the way it presents the origins of cultures and moral communities’. Although this is said about historians of modern times, it is also true of the first Georgian historians. Nationalist historians of modern times enquire into the ethnic past and link it to a sense of collective destiny. The Old Georgian historians did the same. They discovered the shared national past, the heroes of the nation, religious and military leaders, told stories of the collective past experience of the Georgians including the history of wars, foundations of cities and states, dynasties and their kings; they provided the sense of collective memories and evoked blood ties, beliefs, myths, sentiments and symbols and strong attachments among the members of the community, who spoke the same language and prayed to God in it.

Among intellectuals of the time, the role of the eleventh century historian Leonti Mroveli was especially important. In his *mepeta tskhovreba* (*The Life of Kings*) Mroveli identifies the glorious ancestry with the particular territory and the particular community, which survived over many generations.<sup>19</sup> Mroveli is a

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<sup>19</sup> *Mepeta tskhovreba* is incorporated in the most important Georgian chronicles *kartlis tskhovreba* (*The Life of Georgia*) (1955).

‘nationalist’ historian in the sense that he attempts to awaken the community to its true collective ‘self’, identity, authenticity, unity and fraternity through the inclusion of the required attributes of national identity – common ancestry, shared history, language, symbols, heroes, myths and so on. This is how Herder started ‘rediscovering the “collective self” in order to ascertain the authentic identity beneath the alien accretions of the centuries’ (A. D. Smith 1991: 75). And just as the nationalist ideal of unity has had profound consequences for European civic nations (A. D. Smith 1991: 76), Mroveli’s ideology had strong consequences for the formation of the early Georgian nation. While Western civic nationalism and nations are products of the bourgeoisie, the early Georgian nation owes much to the feudal aristocratic culture and the activities of Mroveli, other religious figures and the intellectual élite in the formation of an ethnocultural nation. All the markers of a nation which Mroveli emphasised, A.D. Smith (1991: 12) finds in ethnic nations: ‘Genealogy and presumed descent ties, mobilization, vernacular languages, customs and traditions: these are the elements of alternative, ethnic conception of the nation’.

Mroveli’s goal is to incorporate certain features of the earlier *ethnie* into the model of *kartveloba* of his time. In order to prove the continuity of *kartveloba*, he brings together a variety of evidence – mythological (especially for the pre-Christian period), linguistic, military, administrative, architectural, religious and social — and suggests a certain pattern of formation of the Georgian *ethnie*. By claiming a pre-existing cultural heritage, he does what A. D. Smith (1991: 65-66) calls ‘furnishing maps’ of the community, its origin and history, destiny and morality, through the use of history and the cult of the Golden Age. In section

2.2.3, it was said that not all communities can appeal to a great past or Golden Age, as their history is either poorly recorded or not recorded at all. The ‘better documented and more comprehensive a golden age, the more impact it can exert over later generations and epochs of that community’ (A. D. Smith 1996a: 583). Thanks to Mroveli, Georgian nationalists of modern times could turn to a well-recorded and rich ethno-history with several Golden Ages.

The first one is the epoch of Parnavaz (believed to have lived 299-234 BC) who, according to Mroveli, founded a unified state, military and administrative power, and Mtskheta, the military-administrative centre and the major trading artery. Before the unification there were two states on Georgia’s territory – Colchis (Egrisi) in the western part and Iberia (Kartli) in the eastern part (Braund 1996), first mentioned in Greek and Eastern historical and literary sources between the twelfth and eighth centuries BC and in Greek mythology in the fifteenth century BC (Chkhartishvili 2003). According to Mroveli, after the unification of the two kingdoms in the third century BC, Parnavaz encouraged the consolidation of separate tribes into a larger ethnic conglomerate and took several important steps in order to unify the country and to gain political control over the unified territory which he had divided into eight administrative units.<sup>20</sup> Among other steps, he put Georgian in a privileged position by forbidding the official use of any other

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<sup>20</sup> ‘The king appointed a military governor (*eristavi*) to each of the seven major provinces (Argveti, Kakheti, Gardabani, Tashir-Abotsi, Javakheti-Kolas-Artani, Samtskhe-Ajara, and Klarjeti) while keeping the central district of Shida Kartli under the administration of his highest official, the *spaspeti* [. . .] At the top of society stood the royal family, the military nobility, and the pagan priesthood’ (Suny 1998: 12).

language. Thus, governors and state institutions became instruments not only for administrative centralisation, but also for linguistic unification. According to the same source, during the reign of Parnavaz, six languages were spoken in Georgia (Georgian, Armenian, Khazar, Assyrian,<sup>21</sup> Hebrew and Greek), but the king ‘expanded Georgian, and no other language than Georgian was spoken in Georgia’ (Mroveli 1955a: 26). From a linguistic point of view, it is absurd to consider that no other languages were spoken at that time in Georgia, but by saying this, Mroveli underlines that the king’s decision to strengthen Georgian and forbid other languages in state institutions showed his political goal of integrating people of different origins and speakers of other languages into a common Georgian culture. The imposition of Georgian as an official language by Parnavaz upon his population (if such a thing took place) was most certainly dictated by the needs of effective governance, but Mroveli’s words indicate Parnavaz’s pride in reinforcing the status of Georgian and his appeal to linguistic ‘nationalism’. The significance of the expansion of the Georgian language and its official status granted by Parnavaz is also emphasised by another Georgian historian, geographer and cartographer of the eighteenth century, Vakhushti Batonishvili (1696-1757), in his *Description of the Kingdom of Georgia* (Batonishvili 1973). Although his work is about the medieval Georgian Kingdom, he finds it necessary to underline Parnavaz’s role in the development of the Georgian language and follows Mroveli: Parnavaz, the first king of Georgia, spread the Georgian language, so that no other language would be spoken besides Georgian, and Parnavaz invented the Georgian

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<sup>21</sup> Khazar in this context means Scythian-Sarmatian, while Assyrian stands for Aramaic (Alasania 2007:1).

script (Batonishvili 1973: 57). This source of the Georgian script is also claimed by Mroveli, who notes that Parnavaz ordered the writing of historical chronicles for the newly created state and either created an alphabet or made official one that already existed (Mroveli 1955a: 26). However, archaeological evidence does not support the assertion that Parnavaz created the Georgian script (see section 3.1.1). Whether he really did or not is not of decisive importance in this case. The important fact is that Mroveli has a clear understanding of the political significance of a language and an alphabet and connects the emergence of the script to the first king of Georgia; in other words, he considers that the graphisation of a language is related to the creation of a state. More importantly for understanding the development of *kartveloba*, he links language and alphabet, together with other markers (discussed below), to the emergence of the Georgian *ethnie*. This *ethnie* was a language community comprised of different ethnic groups and tribes, united by state power, which did not allow the linguistic pluralism of previous times and ensured an unambiguous polity by adopting a state language. According to A. D. Smith (1991: 26-27), the foundation of a unified polity plays a major role in the development of a sense of ethnic community and, ultimately, of a ‘cohesive’ nation. As will be shown later in this thesis, the collective sentiments and perception of language and territory of Parnavaz’s times were later employed in historical and symbolic terms to instil a sense of continuity from generation to generation.

Mroveli, who, for each epoch of Georgian history that he describes, writes not only about politics and language, but also about confessional issues, underlines that Parnavaz was able to unite the country not only through the language of



communication and administration, but also in terms of religion. He notes that before the adoption of Christianity, *Kartlosians* (the term used by the historian to designate ethnic Georgians as opposed to non-Georgian ethnic groups in Georgia) worshipped Armazi, 'God of Gods'. The idol of Armazi, considered to be Parnavaz himself, was erected in the centre of a newly built pantheon, while idols brought from different parts of former kingdoms stood on either side. Mroveli notes that loyalty to Armazi meant being *kartveli* (Chkhartishvili 2008: 223) and thus defines the boundaries of *kartveloba* by religion. The community of Georgians under Parnavaz occurs as a named population (Kartveli or Kartlosians) with their own territory (a state), a distinct language with an official status, and an official religion. For Mroveli, the Georgia of Parnavaz's time is a multi-ethnic political entity. It is a country of more than one ethnicity. The author justifies the eradication of local differences on the official level because it served the interests of cultural and political homogeneity. *Kartveloba* is a dominant identity and its cultural content, most notably language, expresses its dominance. The powerful group, while imposing its language on less powerful groups, simultaneously offered equal socio-political, economic and military opportunities to those who were fluent in the official language. Although, according to Mroveli, one of the significant changes under Parnavaz was religion, the formation of the Georgian *ethnie* was crowned by the establishment of a linguistic community, where no other languages were spoken.

Thus, in Mroveli's model of the development of an *ethnie*, it is possible to trace an ethnosymbolist model of the development of ethnic categories into an *ethnie*. 'How does an *ethnie* form?', asks A. D. Smith (1991: 23) and suggests a

pattern which includes the coming together of separate units under one polity or the assimilation of different tribes. For Mroveli, the process of formation of the Georgian *ethnie* starts by bringing together different areas inhabited by the Kartvelian groups (descendants of Kartlos) under the united power of the Parnavazid dynasty. The founder of the dynasty is also a founder of an *ethnie*, because during his rule the boundaries and cultural content of Georgian identity and community changed. A. D. Smith (2003: 28-29) identifies a ‘typical’ format and structure for an *ethnie*, including elements such as a large mass of peasants in villages and a small urban stratum (rulers, administration, nobles and military), a stratum of religious figures and the existence of values, symbols and communication using mainly rituals of worship. Mroveli credits all of these characteristics to Parnavaz, who brought the two proto-Georgian kingdoms under his rule, turned Mtskheta<sup>22</sup> into an advanced capital city, founded the royal Parnavazid dynasty, put the military nobility and the pagan priesthood at the top of society and ‘appointed a military governor [...] to each of the seven major provinces [...] while keeping the central district [...] under the administration of his highest official, the *spaspeti*’ (Suny 1998: 12).

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<sup>22</sup> Mtskheta, located approximately 20 kilometres northeast of Tbilisi, is one of the oldest cities in the Caucasus. Archeological evidence reveals Mtskheta to have been an advanced city since Parnavaz’s rule. Because of the historical significance and numerous ancient monuments, outstanding examples of medieval religious architecture showing the high artistic and cultural level attained by the ancient kingdom of Georgia, it became a Unesco World Heritage Site in 1994 (<http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/708>).

For ethnosymbolism, the subjective components of ethnic identity, such as myths, are very important, including the myths of origin and common ancestry (A. D. Smith 1991: 23). The resemblance between the ethnosymbolist model of the emergence of *ethnies* and Mroveli's model becomes clearer when considering how Mroveli ties identity of community to the myths of origin and the importance of historical continuity. According to Mroveli, the legendary founder and eponymous father of Georgians was Kartlos, a descendent of Noah. In this way, the historian links the Urvater of the Georgian people to the Bible (Coppieters 2002: 89). This is understandable considering that Mroveli was a Christian chronicler, probably a bishop (Rayfield 2000: 54). Ethnicity, in the sense of collective cultural identity in the Christian world, is based on common ancestry. Genesis traces the division of humanity into different peoples back to the three sons of Noah. Kartlos was a great grandson of Japheth, Noah's youngest son (Genesis 10: 3). The story of the Tower of Babel associates this ethnic division with linguistic division. It is since Mroveli's time that the Georgians know who they are: a community of common descent and kinship. As Eriksen (2002: 1007) points out '[k]inship terms are frequently used in nationalist discourse'. The myths of origin and kinship are very powerful because they link different generations and create 'imagined communities'. By evoking the mythological past and reminding the Georgians of their common heritage and kinship, Mroveli strengthened their sense of common cultural identity and of belonging to an 'imagined community', the sense of which can be based only 'on the shared memories of experiences and activities of successive generations of a group distinguished by one or more shared cultural elements' (A. D. Smith 1996a: 583).

Thus, Mroveli traces continuity between identities before his time and of his time by identifying ancestors. Smith (1998: 175) notes that the search for ancestors is part of the nationalist idea, which seeks to prove cultural authenticity and historical continuity. Descendants of Kartlos – Kartlosians (Georgians) had occupied the territory of Georgia from time immemorial. For Mroveli, this is the Georgians' original habitat. Therefore the myth of origin and ancestral myths are tied with homeland myths. Mroveli's message reads: it is our sacred land, 'the land of our forefathers, our lawgivers, our kings and sages, poets and priests, which makes this our homeland' (A. D. Smith 1991: 23). Thus, according to *The Life of Georgia*, the ethnic boundaries of *kartveloba* in the third century BC seem to be based on five concepts: ethnogenesis, territory, the myth of divine election (the new dynasty is started by Parnavaz who is the incarnation of the Armazi), religion (the Armazi cult) and the Georgian language.

Georgians remained faithful to Armazi until the adoption of Christianity. A. D. Smith (1991: 24) underlines the importance of cultural content and cultural changes in the formation of an *ethnie*. As discussed in section 2.2.1, ethnic boundaries and content embraced by *ethnies* are perennial, but not immutable. Collective cultural identities change over time, although within certain limits (A. D. Smith 1991: 24), but at the same time remain continuous and self-identical. A shift in the boundaries of *kartveloba* happened with the adoption of Christianity as the second major step in the development of Georgian identity after Parnavaz's reforms. Although there were Christians in Georgia from the first century, Christianity did not become an official religion until 326 (Binns 2002: 15-16).

In 326, Christianity was officially adopted by King Mirian (284-361) who, before the conversion, worshiped the cult of Armazi, considering himself a successor of Parnavaz's legacy (Chkhartishvili 2003). In this period Georgia was at an ideological crossroads as the Roman Empire and Sassanid Iran were struggling for pre-eminence in Georgia. King Mirian made a political and cultural choice by adopting Christianity and turned an ethnically heterogeneous state into a unitary polity with common Christian values and culture into which local peculiarities were incorporated (Chkhartishvili 2003). In the beginning, this transethnic and cosmopolitan religion, containing perhaps some form of threat to already established ethnic markers, caused an intensification of ethnic sentiments and met some resistance from the population. Mirian and his son fought against paganism, destroyed old idols and spread Christianity by force (Suny 1998: 21, 38). Local peculiarities were incorporated into the new religion and it was transformed into the ideology of group solidarity soon after, as happened in many other places where Christianity was naturalised and fused with ethnicity (Chkhartishvili 2003). While causing the intensification of ethnic markers and sentiments against the threat coming from its trans-ethnic character, Christianity stimulated the emergence of nations (Hastings 1999b: 394). The myth of chosenness became the movement of the cultivation of the peculiar culture which had to be preserved in a particular vernacular, as shown below. Therefore, cultural change did not destroy the former identity but renewed and redefined it.

The adoption of Christianity also changed the political orientation of Georgians. Most scholars (e.g. Chkhartishvili 2003; Alasania 2006) believe that the conversion of Georgia was, on the one hand, a result of missionary activities,

which started from the first century and became intense in the fourth century and, on the other hand, an expression of a political decision taken by the king, who hoped to use Christianity to form alliances with Rome against Persian aggression. The Persian empire was a dominating regional power in Mirian's time and the Georgian community felt its deep cultural and political influence (Chkhartishvili 2009a). In order to avoid merging Georgian with Persian cultural space, Mirian had to make a choice for a new political orientation for his kingdom. The geopolitical location of Georgia (situated at the crossroads of the West and the East), which was the second country to convert to Christianity after Armenia in 324, positioned it in the frontier zone of Christian resistance to Islam throughout its history (Jones 1989: 171).

According to *The Conversion of Georgia* by Mroveli (1955b), written as a biography of Saint Nino, the person who introduced Christianity to Georgia, the Armazi cult was very strong among Georgians in the pre-Christian period. Mroveli's *Conversion of Georgia* is a reworked version of the original, composed by an anonymous author (Rayfield 2000: 50) using various sources some time between the actual date of the conversion itself and the tenth century (Gippert 2006: 104). Linguistic analysis shows that 'the text undoubtedly draws upon a considerably older oral and/or perhaps written tradition' (Rapp & Crego 2006: 171). Some scholars, for example Chkhartishvili (1987: 89), believe that it must have been created no later than the fifth century and might even have been written shortly after the conversion. In any case, it is the oldest single source containing very important information for the history of Georgian identity. First of all, it shows how ethnic boundaries of the Georgian in-group are defined. When

speaking about the pre-Christian period, Mroveli underlines the strength of this purely Georgian religion – the Armazi cult – which distinguishes Kartlosians from the rest of Georgia’s population. At the same time, he notes that Georgia was awaiting a saviour-messiah and King Mirian knew about it, as well as about the fact that two members of the Jewish community of Mtskheta had allegedly witnessed the crucifixion of Jesus, brought Jesus’s tunic to Mtskheta (‘the second Jerusalem’) and that Christ’s tunic was buried there:

Elioz and all the Jews from Kartli [Georgia] went there [to Jerusalem]. And at the place they saw the Crucifixion of the Lord [. . .] And Elioz brought the tunic of our Saviour Jesus Christ to Mtskheta [. . .] he gave her [his sister] Christ’s raiment and she took and pressed [it] to her breast. And immediately her soul left her [. . .] Elios buried his sister with the tunic in her hands.

(Conversion of Kartli 2004: 170-171)

This fact, together with the traditional belief that several Apostles were buried in Georgia, prepared a solid basis for the advent of a widespread new religion in the country. According to Georgian ecclesiastical tradition, when the Apostles were sent out to preach Christianity throughout the world, the Holy Virgin – and Georgia is referred to as ‘Dedicated to the Theotokos’ (in other words, coming under the auspices of Virgin Mary) (Alasania 2006: 117) – gave her divine icon to Andrew the First-Called and sent him to Georgia, where he became the first preacher.<sup>23</sup> Andrew,

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<sup>23</sup> The icon is kept in the National Museum of Art in Tbilisi. According to the Georgian church tradition, some other great relics were kept in Georgia: the Virgin’s robe, now in the museum of

who on his third visit to Georgia was accompanied by Simeon the Canaanite (or Simon the Zealot) and Matthias, established the very first episcopacy in Atsquri and appointed the first bishop, priests and deacon (Alasania 2006: 118). The same tradition asserts that Simeon and Matthias died in Georgia and are buried in present day Adjara and Abkhazia respectively.<sup>24</sup> But Christianity did not officially spread throughout Georgia for another three centuries.

These traditional beliefs turned into the first myths of election. Several different passages of the text (Mroveli 1955b: 123-124, 128, 129) reveal a belief in being chosen by God after the Jews lost his grace. The land where Christ's tunic is buried as well as Elijah's mantle, a vivid memory of which the Jewish Diaspora of Mtskheta seems to have preserved for four centuries, had been chosen by God for his Kingdom: 'in this city [Mtskheta] is a marvellous sign, the garment of the Son of God, and they say that the mantle of Elijah is also here and that many miracles are here' (Conversion of Kartli 2004: 173). The text also emphasises the fact that Jews in Mtskheta, who held a dominant position before the adoption of Christianity, from now on give up this dominant place to the Georgians. A very interesting fact noted by Chkhartishvili (2002) regarding the text is that storytellers in *Conversion of Georgia* are the Georgian 'others' – Jews, Armenians and Greeks, who are competitors of the Georgians in being 'chosen people'. The author of the text considers it important to emphasise that all of these people acknowledge the

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Zugdidi, and the icon of the Mother of God created by Luke the Evangelist, now in the National Museum of Art in Tbilisi (Alasania 2006: 117).

<sup>24</sup> Some other sources also attest to the presence of the Apostles Bartholomew and Thaddeus. For more about the preachers in Georgia, see Dowling (2005).



burial of Christ's tunic in Mtskheta. As for the story of Elijah's mantle, it must be understood as a symbolic indication of the second coming, because, according to the Old Testament, Elijah, a prophet in Israel in the ninth century BC, did not die, but was lifted up to heaven and will return (Kittel *et al* 1985: 307). Chkhartishvili (2002) argues that the author of the text wanted to relate the Second Coming to Georgia by talking about Elijah's mantle, on the one hand, and about Mtskheta as 'the second Jerusalem', on the other.

Mentioning Christ's tunic and Elijah's mantle in the same passage brings the Old and New Testaments together. This is an important fact, because, as Hastings (1999b: 389) argues, a belief in being chosen in the Western Christian tradition depends more directly on the Old Testament, while the Eastern one rests mainly upon the New Testament:

In the West, far more than in the East, the road to an elect people lay across the Old Testament and the model of a chosen nation there presented, rather than the New, but also across the conception of the world as a society of nations witnessed to by New Testament texts [...] as well as Old Testament ones [...] While the New Testament offered little if any guidance about the nature of a nation, the Old Testament offered a great deal.

Considering the power of election myths in the formation of national identities (see section 2.2.3), the early Christian version of being elected is very important in discussing the Georgian proto-nation. Mtskheta, where Saint Nino stayed after her arrival in Georgia, is marked out not only with the presence of the

tunic and mantle, but is also the location of a royal court and garden, called 'heaven' in the Georgian text, where the first Georgian church is built. The word 'heaven' in Georgian (*samotkhe*) is a compound word consisting of the roots of 'three' (*sam*) and 'four' (*otkh*). According to the Holy Scriptures, the Heavenly Kingdom has three gates on each of four sides: 'There were three gates facing east, three north, three south, and three west' (Revelation 21:13). Chkhartishvili (2002) suggests that calling the Royal garden *heaven* associates it with the Heavenly Kingdom, a New Jerusalem and a spatial co-ordinate of the second coming of the Messiah. The Messiah will come to Georgia and will judge in the Georgian language. It will be shown later in this chapter that in subsequent centuries there was a belief that a Georgian king would be the Messiah. Later still, the belief in being chosen in the Georgian case became associated with the Georgian language (see section 3.2.2). The myth of chosenness gave rise to a movement that sought in part to develop a specific culture preserved in a specific language.

Mroveli, who understood the significance of language for an *ethnie*, again pays special attention to it at the time that Georgia became a Christian country, considering this time as a second Golden Age in Georgia's history. King Mirian, according to Mroveli, was Persian by origin, but the historian notes that '[h]e loved the Georgians, forgot the Persian tongue, and learned the Georgian language' (translated by Thomson 1996: 77). He became a Georgian and had Georgian consciousness, most importantly because he loved and knew only the Georgian language and because he was loyal to the cult of Armazi (the exclusive religion of the Kartlosians). 'King Mirian increased the well-being of the Georgians' (translated by Thomson 1996: 78) and they 'were happy' and considered Mirian to

be one of their own. As Jenkins (2003: 10) notes, '[s]hared language and ritual are particularly implicated in ethnicity'. Mroveli emphasised that his *kartveloba* was generated and confirmed through language.

According to *The Conversion of Kartli*, by the time of Christianisation under Mirian, the Georgian *ethnie* appears as a strongly established 'imagined community'; Mirian belongs to this 'imagined community' and his ethnic origin does not matter. This is an 'imagined community' of Georgians because it includes not only contemporary members, but also ancestors and future generations. Many examples of such an understanding of a community related by blood include the following two passages: 1) in The testament to his son Rev and his wife Nana, which is a part of the text, Mirian speaks of the idols of previous times, instructs his son to destroy them: 'From now on, whenever you find in your land these idols, the temptation of Georgia, burn them with fire and give the ashes to drink to those who mourn over them. And announce this to your sons' (Conversion of Kartli 2004: 193); and 2) Saint Nino, the introducer of Christianity to Georgians, speaking of the same idols in her address to native born people, calls them 'the gods of your fathers' (Conversion of Kartli 2004: 165). In this text, a community unified by the belief in common ancestry and cultural distinctiveness, thus an equivalent of *ethnie*, is referred to as *natesavi* (Chkhartishvili 2003), a term which in Old Georgian has several meanings: people, nation, kin, descendents, posterity (Rayfield 2006: 1048). For example, Mirian speaks of the Jewish community as of *utskho natesavi* – 'foreign people/nation/kin' (Mroveli 1955b: 87). Saint Nino, who was from Cappadocia, perceives Georgians as *utskho natesavi*. The term *natesavi*, to describe an *ethnie*, remained in use in later centuries and will be

discussed in relation with other terms used to describe ‘ethnicity’ and ‘nation’ later in this thesis.

One of the markers of in-group solidarity, and therefore a salient marker of an *ethnie*, is a collective ownership of property, most importantly of a land, which usually is regarded as God-given (see section 2.2.3). The power of a specific territory comes into play when space is a simultaneously historical, political and symbolic phenomenon. It must be noted that ‘[t]he relationship between people and land is the product over the *longue durée* of continual myth-making and the recitation of shared memories [...] The association is even stronger where the *ethnie* is also a community of believers, animated by a unifying faith and cult’ (A. D. Smith’s 1996a: 589). This argument is true for the community of Parnavaz’s time, as emphasised by Mroveli, as well as of Mirian’s time. When Saint Nino, before coming to Georgia, asks her teacher about the country to which she has been assigned to go, the land of the Georgians is described geographically, culturally and politically (Chkhartishvili 2002: 41). The teacher answers Nino’s question by saying that it is mountainous territory to the north of Armenia (geographical data), pagan (cultural data), and under Greek and Persian influence (political data) (Mroveli 1955b: 113). The community of the Georgians in Mroveli’s time collectively owns this property and their attachment to it is strengthened because it is also a sacred territory where several Apostles and first preachers are buried. The mission of a people united by faith and language must be realised in that special place. All possible territorial myths identified by A. D. Smith (1996a) as ‘deep resources’ of nations are brought together by Mroveli in the history of a single community: it is a place of origin, the scene of historic

events, battles and heroic deeds. It is a place which our ancestors defended collectively, where they spread their blood and where they are buried. Mroveli elaborated the myths of common origin of all Caucasians and explained how the concrete land came to belong to the Georgians. By emphasising the achievement of the ethnic past and outlining the authenticity of the Georgians on the given territory, Mroveli enforced also the feeling of a historic homeland. While exploring important events of the past, Mroveli emphasised also the history of Christianity in order to awake sentiments of solidarity in his fellow compatriots. This included listing several Apostles as contributors to the dissemination of Christianity in Georgia and the myths of election. According to Hastings (1999a: 196), writing the story of the baptism of a first king begins the Christian history of many peoples. The next step in the history of faith is claiming the divine mission according to the Old Testament paradigm which reinforces national identity and ensures its survival across the centuries (A. D. Smith 1991: 13). The election myths of newly Christianised Georgia were different from the pre-Christian period. They belong to the so-called Western model according to Hastings' classification (1999b) and come directly from the *Holy Scriptures*. The election myths in Mirian's period are based on several beliefs: 1) several apostles are buried in Georgia; 2) the royal city Mtskheta is a representation of heavenly Jerusalem; and 3) Elijah's mantle and Christ's tunic are kept in Mtskheta. The latter is the most important belief. Even today, it is the most significant fact in the history of the Georgian Church. But in Mroveli's time, the Georgian nation was singled out by a different myth of election. Georgians were entrusted with a divine sacred mission, which had to be

realised through language. Section 3.2.2 discusses the most important myth for Georgians.

### **3.2.2 The dominant myth: a special language for a special people**

As shown in section 3.1.1, the process of cultural crystallisation in the Middle Ages was linked to religion. Religion also stimulated the need for a new ideology taking into account several factors in Georgia's past: the autocephalous church, a standard literary and sacred language and myths of election. Before looking at myths of election as the most powerful myths of nationhood, the importance of receiving autocephaly and language planning will be considered.

Through the Eastern Christian tradition the Georgian Church became autocephalous, in other words, achieved international recognition and total ecclesiastical autonomy (Alasania 2006: 120) in 466, under King Vakhtang Gorgasali (447-522). It adopted the name of the Georgian Orthodox Church and maintained it until 1811 (Jones 1989: 173). The head of the Georgian Church received the title of Catholicos. Hastings (1999a: 196) notes that '[t]he total ecclesiastical autonomy of a national church is one of the strongest and most enduring factors in the encouragement of nationalism because it vastly stimulates the urge to tie all that is strongest in God's Old Testament predictions for one nation and New Testament predilection for one church contemporaneously to one's own church and people'. Hastings (1999b: 389) notes also the double effect of an autocephalous church: 'On the one hand, it stimulated the development of a literary vernacular which stabilized a given community vis-à-vis everyone else. On the other hand, it provided a political textbook. A Christian kingdom standing very

much on its own naturally applied to itself everything that it could find in the experience of Israel'. When biblical texts are translated into a vernacular, they create a more conscious community (Hastings 1999a: 31) and provide a strong resource for cultural identification and a path to nationhood. A nation's special mission and destiny applied to themselves according to the paradigm provided in the Bible – to become a chosen, holy nation and therefore to have a special mission, reinforces the process of identity formation. According to Safran (2008: 172-173), while Christianity demands attachment to the nation, almost all early national identities developed from religious consciousness: 'Loyalty to the nation was based on the belief that one's nation was God's chosen people'. Autocephaly of a church is distinguished by the fact that it provides the most systematic language planning. Hastings (1999b) sees the development of a belief in chosenness in the Eastern Christian world decisively determined by the translation of the Bible into vernacular languages and a church's attaining the status of autocephaly. Language planning and myths of election have deep ideological consequences leading to a belief in a fully elect nation, as a true successor of Israel. These are some of the conditions for creating a pre-modern nation. In the Georgian case, they are closely tied to other deep resources of nationhood such as myths of origin, myths of homeland and language myths. After introducing Georgian religious services, a new force appeared – the Christian doctrine preached in Georgian. Since then, the use of the Georgian language in liturgy ensured the further unification of all ethnic entities and reinforced ties between the political centre and the peripheries.

In the seventh century a new religion sprang up in the Arab Peninsula and Georgia was subjected to Arab invasion (Alasania 2006: 121). This was what A. D. Smith (1991: 25) calls a disruptive cultural change. The Georgian chronicler of the eighth century Ioane Sabanisdze (1981: 120) describes the situation in Georgia with grief that ‘many of those who betrayed Christ were tempted and misled from the Path of the Truth, some by force and lies, others by the inexperience of adolescence and by evildoing’, but, at the same time, he declares proudly that the majority of Georgians remained ‘devoted to the only begotten Son of God with love and fear of Christ, responsibility to the motherland, with patient grief and sorrows’. The author views religion as an instrument of homogeneity which was strong through the centuries and helped the Georgians to survive. It renewed the sense of common identity and, in fact, crystallised *kartveloba*. At this time, the western Georgian Church was subordinated to Constantinople, but in the ninth century, divine service in Greek gave way to Georgian, which at that time was the native tongue of the overwhelming majority of the population in the western part of the country, previously dominated by the speakers of other Kartvelian languages. Georgian speakers, escaping the Arab invasion of eastern Georgia, cut right into the middle of this territory and separated Zan speakers into two groups (now Megrelians and Laz). Since then, the majority of the population of what is now Imereti and Guria, are Karts, mixed with local inhabitants who soon mastered the Georgian language (Danelia 2006: 18-19).

The ecclesiastical union of a disintegrated Georgia was followed soon by the political unification of western Georgian lands with the south and east (except Tbilisi, which was liberated only in 1121) under the rule of Bagrat III (975-1014),



the king of Abkhazia and later (after 1008) the king of Georgia (Suny 1998: 32).<sup>25</sup> Bagrat's policy was supported by the Georgian Church, under the jurisdiction of which came other parts of Georgia (Lordkiphanidze 1987). Georgia was no longer simply a territory, but a community of faith ministered in the Georgian language. The united kingdom was called *Sakartvelo* (Alasania 2004), literally 'a place for Georgians'. It is a more inclusive term than *Kartli*, considering that *Kartveli*, just like in the early Christian period, did not carry an ethnic meaning, while Kartli was a collectivity of Karts related by blood. After establishing religious services in Georgian, religious identity appealed across ethnic boundaries, Christ's message was universal and so was the Georgian language. Religious identity coincided with linguistic and territorial identity. The Georgians occupied a clearly identifiable territory, possessed a distinctive Orthodox culture and spoke a common and unique language which set them apart from other Christian and non-Christian peoples.

As shown earlier in this chapter, a considerable corpus of original and translated literature was created in the Georgian language, which in the tenth century acquired a divine mission. The status of an official, standardised literary sacred language has great power to forge cultural homogeneity and play a vital role

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<sup>25</sup> Modern Georgian and Abkhaz scholars disagree about the issue of the ethnic origin of the ruling family of the Abkhazian Kingdom, although Abkhazian historians agree that the great majority of the kingdom's population was Kartvelian (Shirelman 2000: 57). Historical sources do not give information on the ethnic origin of Abkhaz kings, but according to their state and religious politics they were Georgian kings. The kings Leon II (758-798), Theodos II (798-825), Demetre II (825-861), Giorgi I (861-868), Konstantine III (893-922), Giorgi II (922-957) and Leon III (957-967) showed the strong determination for Georgia's political and religious unification (Akhaldze 2004), which was fulfilled under Bagrat III.

in the formation and preservation of the nation. Schiffman (2004: 74) notes that '[i]n linguistic cultures with ancient religious traditions, especially textual traditions, there are often ideas about language'. Georgia is no exception, but a special case in which a language myth at the same time is one of the myths of election. In the Georgian case, the idea of nationhood was strongly supported by the messianic idea expressed by the hymnographer of the tenth century, Ioane Zosime, who outlines the sacred mission of the chosen people, for '[t]o be chosen [...] is to be singled out for special purposes by, and hence to stand in a unique relation to the divine' (A. D. Smith 2004a: 48). Considering how deeply religious figures were involved in the development of language and culture, giving central importance to the purification and equalisation of Georgian with Greek, it is not surprising that the strong tendency to spiritualise the concept of speakers of this language as 'chosen people' took a definite shape. Zosime, in his *Praise and Glorification of the Georgian Language*, draws a sense of the uniqueness of the Georgian language and relates it to the destiny of the nation, reassuring his people that Georgia will see the days of Glory:

Buried in the Georgian language

As a martyr until the day of the Messiah's coming,

So that God may look at every language

Through this language.

And so the language is sleeping to this day.

And in the Gospels this language

Is called Lazarus.

[...]

Every secret

Is buried in this language.

[...]

And this language

Beautified and blessed by the name of the Lord,

Humble and afflicted,

Awaits the day of the second coming of the Lord. (Translated by  
Rayfield 2000: 33-34)

Taking into account the importance of myths of ethnic election for survival and nation formation, the cultivation of such a myth can be expected when a new ideology is founded. According to A. D. Smith (1996a: 587), one of the functions of myths of election is to offer to the members of a community a chronological scheme of status reversal: 'The elect may be persecuted now and subjects today; but in time their sufferings will be recognized and their virtue rewarded. They will, in the end, triumph over their enemies and attain the goal of their journey in history'. Entrusted by the mission of their language, the Georgians could look to their future status. In this way the language, together with religion, demarcated the boundaries of the nation.

Just as Fichte identified standard German as the most precious thing and superior to all other languages (Kamusella 2001: 238), centuries earlier Zosime preached the superiority and virtue of Georgian and the Georgians.

The belief in a national (religious, moral) mission in the Georgian case coincides with the mission of the language. This happened nowhere else in Europe at such an early date (Law 2000: 181). The idea of a special destiny for Georgians through their language was renewed, restored and rediscovered under different conditions at different times in Georgia's history, as shown later in this thesis. It inspired nineteenth and twentieth century nationalists, for whom the purity of the Georgian language together with Georgian Orthodoxy constituted evidence of Georgia's chosenness and the mission of the Georgian nation. The sharp boundary established by this belief justified a program of self-purification by modern nationalists, which entailed excluding and segregating outsiders through language. Understanding the continuing role of this pre-modern consciousness is crucial for explaining modern Georgian nationalism as discussed further in this thesis. The next section, however, summarises the ideology behind the emergence of this consciousness and tries to answer the question of whether or not the Georgians constituted a nation in the Middle Ages.

### **3.2.3 Pre-modern nation?**

The tenth century seems to be a turning point in Georgia's history, not only because it is Zosime's and Merchule's epoch, but also because the Bagrationi dynasty emerged in this century — the dynasty which gave rise to an unbroken ruling line until the incorporation of Georgia into Russia in 1801.

After the tenth century, the assertion of chosenness was enriched with certain other myths of election: the myth that Georgia comes under the aegis of the Virgin Mary, which existed before in oral tradition and in religious arts, entered the writings of Georgian intellectuals (Bezarashvili 2004; Machabeli 2004) and, more importantly, with a new dynastic myth, first articulated in the eleventh century by Sumbat Davitis-dze, claiming that the Bagrationi royal family descended directly from the Israelite King-Prophet David, and therefore was uniquely suited to rule (Sumbat Davitis-dze 1955). The main goal of Sumbat Davitis-dze's *Life and Known Facts about the Bagratid Kings* (ca. 1030) seems to be the legitimisation of the dynasty's authority, given by God (Sumbat Davitis-dze 1955: 376), to rule in Transcaucasia.

Soon after establishing their rule, the title of the Bagrationi kings changed to 'king of kings' (Sumbat Davitis-dze 1955: 382). As discussed in section 3.2.1, Georgia had been awaiting the Messiah since the fourth century. From the tenth century, Georgians believed that he would judge in the Georgian language. All the divine signs showed that God had a special attitude towards the Georgians and, with the emergence of the Bagrationi dynasty as descendents from the biblical king David, that divinity was embodied in real individuals (Chkhartishvili 2003). The Georgians were 'chosen' because, in addition to other signs, their kings were destined to govern and the Messiah would be a Georgian king. When the medieval Georgian kingdom became one of the pre-eminent powers of the Eastern Christian world under David the Builder, his sword was engraved with the inscription 'Sword of the Saviour'. A copper coin of his time was engraved with 'King of Kings, David, son of George, Sword of the Messiah'. Later Queen Tamar was

conceived as ‘the incarnation of the Holy Spirit and the place of her son’s birth was called ‘Bethlehem’, while the Georgian kingdom was described as *Paradise on Earth* by Georgian chroniclers and historians (Chkhartishvili 2003).

The Bagrationi dynasty united all the Georgian lands. These were the lands where people prayed in Georgian, where the saints, apostles and many Christian relics were buried. Hence, this was the dynasty under which the three concepts (language, faith, and homeland) were combined. According to A. D. Smith (1996c: 453-4), ‘to become national, shared memories must attach themselves to specific places and definite territories. The process by which certain kinds of shared memories are attached to particular territories so that the former become ethnic landscapes (or ethnoscares) and the latter become historic homelands, can be called “territorialization of memory”’. A. D. Smith also notes that ‘[i]t was only in the late medieval and early modern periods that the territorialisation of memory began to influence the ways in which some states became increasingly congruent with their dominant *ethnies*’. A similar process of nation-formation in the late Middle Ages can be discerned in French, English and some other European histories (A. D. Smith 1991: 55-58). They are seen in Georgia during the zenith of the feudal period, several centuries earlier than in Western Europe. The awareness of language as a boundary marker of a geographical and religious community was elaborated long before the enlightenment age in Europe. In section 2.2.3, it was claimed that one of the differences between ethnic and national identities is that ethnicity does not demand command over the land, whereas a nation holds that political boundaries should be the same as cultural boundaries: this nation belongs here and nowhere else.

Attempting to match this linguistic community to a political unit was first expressed in the tenth century by the outstanding Georgian writer Giorgi Merchule (1981: 279): ‘Georgia is the whole of a country where church services are performed in Georgian and people pray in Georgian’. Merchule issued a definition for Georgia as a geographic, religious and linguistic area: each individual worshipper offers up the prayer in Georgian and through this act unites in one ‘whole country’. At the same time, Merchule uses the unifying effect of language and religion to express a political claim: Georgia is a country bounded by linguistic identity. Considering that this is the language to which the divine mission of the Georgians is linked (by Zosime, also in the tenth century) and that this is the only land where the nation can fulfil its destiny and perform its mission, the importance of national territory or land becomes more obvious. The Georgians saw the realisation of their mission on this particular land and in this particular language with this particular faith for centuries. Taken separately, language, religion and homeland are powerful markers of community and identity, but in the Georgian case they coincide. For the Georgians it was not just Christianity, not just Orthodoxy, but Orthodoxy preached in Georgian on Georgian land that they would fight and die for. Merchule’s definition shows that these three concepts are not isolated from each other, but are closely tied together. With his definition, Merchule combined cultural identity with territorial community, in other words he gave territory a larger political, cultural and religious importance. He extended the meaning of a territory into a linguistic and religious identity and defined an ‘imagined community’ as the whole country where they pray in Georgian. Thus he recognised the power of language and its symbolic significance in controlling the

country and achieving ethnic integration. At the same time, his definition, based on faith, language and territory, served to differentiate Georgia from its neighbours, where language is singled out as a basis of faith and territorial claim.

In Merchule's time, many ethnicities lived in Georgia and his words should be understood not as an attempt to designate ethnic boundaries, but as a political statement made by the élite of a dominant *ethnie*, whose sacred language was a political (official) and cultural language, standardised and modernised, and therefore could function in all domains. The native speakers of this language sought a link between all ethnic groups and the state through the idea of unified language as a prominent marker of culture and political borders. Consolidation of power in a strong sovereign state, as well as legal developments discussed in section 3.1.3, made the emergence of such a link possible. Thus, during the zenith of Georgia's statehood, the assimilationist policy through language, religion and territory was formed among the elite of the multinational empire. It embedded an official symbolism of unity, representing the interests of one particular ethnic group over minority groups. It should be emphasised that Georgia at that time was an empire and not a nation-state, and that the assimilation did not take place across the empire, which remained an ethnic hierarchy based on military and economic domination. Apart from standardised laws, regular tributes and military conscriptions, the mass were permitted to retain their local customs and ethnic minorities their language and religion (Gachechiladze 1995: 22).

A close look at this pre-modern ideology shows the link between an ethnicity and a nation. It is an ideology designed to create an 'imagined community' through linking a dominant *ethnie* and its interests to a state, which is



possible if a common language exists. Eriksen (2002: 99) notes that according to most nationalisms, political unity should be ethnic in character because it represents the interests of a particular cultural group. This must be a wider group than a kinship-based community. In the Georgian case on the élite level this ideology represented everybody's interest and, as shown above, the minority élites were not denied access to power if they accepted the Georgian language as their own official and sacred language. Through the language of education, prestige and power, Georgia was able to develop harmony among those ethnic élites and offered a membership into a new kind of group – not just kinship, but a political-cultural identity which resembled national identities of the modern era. Thus, the term *Georgian* acquired the sense of a cultural and political identity of a community.

Many modernist theorists of nationalism, such as Gellner and Anderson, stress that nations are ideological constructions seeking to forge a link between a (self-defined) cultural group and a state (Eriksen 2001: 99), but they diminish the historical depth of such constructions. They do not recognise the ideologies of pre-modern times as nationalist, although in some cases (among them in Georgia), the ideology of an educated élite aimed to create a nation whose main referents are similar to those of modern times. A. D. Smith (1991: 78) identifies the sentiments and aspirations that nationalist ideology evokes: territory, history and community. The community in Georgia in the eleventh and twelfth centuries was a community united by the elements of national identity identified by A.D. Smith (1991: 13-14): '[t]hey include the idea that nations are territorially bounded units of population and that they must have their own homelands; that their members share a common

mass culture and common historical myths and memories.’ There is no clear evidence that the whole population of Georgia of the time felt, or did not feel, that they belonged to a nation. What is clear is that Georgia was a territorialised sovereign community, whose élite and at least a part of whose middle class had a clear, cultivated sense of collective identity vis-à-vis others. This brings us back to the problem of defining the concept of the nation and the question of ‘when is a nation?’. A.D. Smith argues that the modern nation and nationalism are recent phenomena, but he argues for the need for a historical analysis of specific nations. Such analyses reveal that certain processes and characteristics of modern nations could be found in the Middle Ages among specific communities. For example, during the zenith of the Georgian empire, the educated elite saw the kingdom as the true successor of ancient Israel and viewed *kartveloba* as a culturally unique community of common descent attached to the royal family. Here, we cannot speak of a modern nation, but we certainly can find a community of law and language, providing the conditions for the emergence of modern nations. First of all because, standardised laws and uniform legal institutions are crucial for the formation of nations for they provide a ‘roof of unity and solidarity among group members (A.D. Smith 2008: 39). Second, because, later in history, nationalists speak of the ages when the community was prosperous and glorious, cultivating this ‘golden age’, which becomes the cultural foundation of the modern nation. This implies that the category of the nation emerged over the *longue durée* and the concept of the nation should be separated from the concept of the nation-state. Hastings (1999a: 25) rightly notes that for a nation to exist it is not necessary for everyone within it to be fully conscious of it. He cites examples of early modern

Europe where many of the peasantry had little sense of being part of a nation, as well as the American nation which, coming into existence in 1776 did not include black slaves or offer them a sense of belonging. Recalling the definition of a 'nation' suggested in chapter 2, it is clear that at the zenith of feudal development, the Georgian community was not a community of legally equal citizens as in the case of modern nation-states. Nor did mass literacy exist in this period, but all other elements of a nation were present. It was a different, older type of nation, where the bond among the ethnically heterogeneous population was derived from a common religion, language, written history and rich literature, and subjection to a king who exercised consolidated political power over a well-demarcated territory. It is not a modern secular western nation, but what A. D. Smith calls an aristocratic (élite or middle class) nation 'with a distinct public culture, a historic sense of homeland, shared myths and memories, a clear self-definition, and standard laws and customs' (A. D. Smith 2004b: 207).

In the eleventh-thirteenth centuries, language and religion in Georgia stood for a political community and most notably, language became the basis of a medieval nation. It was a Georgian world defined by a common language as a common feature of all groups in this land. The language was a distinctive characteristic of this population, which united and, at the same time, distinguished them from others. It was inclusive of different ethnicities and in this way it resembles the modern conception of nation in its efforts to find common cultural ground for nationhood. This is an idea voiced by Merchule: a *lingua sacra* is the foundation of political legitimacy.

Leading modernists, such as Gellner and Hobsbawm, maintain that ‘the idea possessing a distinctive language entails having a common collective identity is not present before modern times’ (Hutchinson 1999: 393). The Georgian case, however, confirms otherwise: the Georgians in the high feudal period constitute a collectivity of people whose sacred and cultural language is Georgian. At the same time, the Georgian language employs the symbolic role of distinguishing *us* from *them*. It is important because the national collective identity is constructed vis-à-vis *others*. Merchule gave language the emotional power, binding people to the territory which soon after Merchule’s time became known by a new name. Considering this meaning, the new name of the state *Sakartvelo* – ‘place for Georgians’ – was a place of all ethnic and religious groups who lived in this state (Muskhelishvili 1993: 373). If a century ago the Georgians claimed political unity, in the eleventh century the political entity by its name claimed unity among all residents. Despite such a political claim, the medieval Georgian nation can be called a *cultural* or *linguistic nation*, since its creation is largely founded upon language.

Many modernists maintain that nationalism is a political ideology which ‘emerged in early modern Europe because of a growing chasm between society and the modern state’ (see A. D. Smith 1996c: 447-448). They treat culture and old ethnic ties as secondary in the nation-building process. Ethnosymbolism sees nationalism more as a cultural phenomenon than as a political ideology. For example, according to A. D. Smith (1991: 99), ‘as a doctrine of culture and symbolic language and consciousness, nationalism’s primary concern is to create a world of collective cultural identities or cultural nations.’ Roshwald (2006: 11)

notes that claiming some form of cultural or political-territorial self-determination is the essence of nationalism and 'wherever one finds a nation one is likely to find nationalism'. What does this mean? Can an ideology of the Middle Ages be considered nationalism?

The ideology behind those claims is more than ethnic ideology, first of all because Merchule's definition demarcates national boundaries: while '[e]thnic boundaries are not necessarily territorial boundaries' (Eriksen 2002: 39), national boundaries are associated with territorial ones. Moreover, in his definition, language is not a marker of ethnic identity, but a marker of national identity. According to Joseph (2004: 162-3), the difference between these two kinds of identity is that ethnic identity focuses more on common descent than on political aspirations, whereas 'national identity is focused on political borders and autonomy often justified by arguments centred on shared cultural heritage, but where the ethnic element is inevitably multiple'. And this is exactly what Merchule focuses on. Of course it is not a national identity in the modern sense of the term, since there was no idea of citizenship or conception of equal duties and rights; education was class-divided. But the unity was both political and cultural, and language defined the borders of the state. Language was a cultural means of social life, therefore, a part of the claim of nationhood. Anderson (1983: 133) has emphasised the capacity of language to generate 'imagined communities' and build in effect particular solidarity as the most important thing about language. People totally unknown to each other imagine a community through language. Without a need to know everybody individually, language becomes a symbol of solidarity. The illiterate mass heard liturgy and prayer in Georgian and this played a crucial

role for producing ties beyond personal experience and formed an ‘imagined community’ of the Georgians.

The ideology behind the assertion that language is a culturally, territorially and politically integrating force could be considered to be the pre-modern equivalent of linguistic/cultural nationalism or ‘early language ideology’, because it draws on the same kind of thought as the thought of Romantic thinkers who put forward standard German, the territorial spread of which demarcated the borders of Germany, as the binding element of the German nation (Kamusella 2001: 238).

A. D. Smith (1991: 85) argues that it is extremely difficult to define not only what nationalism is, but also when this ideology emerged, therefore he concentrates ‘on the rise of nationalist concepts, language, myths and symbols’, finding ‘a growing interest in the idea of “national character”’ in the seventeenth century among small European educated classes. He brings the example of Lord Shaftesbury’s high opinion of British attainments and Jonathan Richardson’s comparison of the English with the ancient Greeks and Romans. Section 3.1.1 discussed similar sentiments related to Georgia and the Georgian language in the Middle Ages. Especially Giorgi Mtatsmindeli’s words about the Georgians as guardians of the Orthodox faith express the early idea of ‘national character’ and assert the sense of national superiority. In general, the role of the intellectual élite in generating ‘national character’ and cultural identity, thus forging the process of nation-formation, cannot be overestimated, but as A. D. Smith (1991: 95) rightly concludes, such skills of intellectualism are not specific to the epoch of nationalism. The assertion that ‘we are who we are because of our historic culture’ (A. D. Smith 1991: 97) – culturally we are equal to Greeks, but morally we are

superior (Mtatsmindeli, Zosime) – are found in Georgia much earlier than modernity, as well as narratives of common origin, memories and traditions (Mroveli) and the claim to national territory and common culture (Merchule).

This is not to claim that by the twelfth century the Georgians formed a nation in the modern understanding of this word, but the roots for national identity were put down. The ideology of political rulers and cultural figures in Georgia of that time might be the first example of culture manifested for political purposes. Later, after A. D. Smith's three revolutions occur (1991: 61), the territorialisation of shared memories, myths and symbols became widespread and marked *kartveloba* in the modern era, when the nation gathered around the Georgian aristocratic ethnic core and incorporated the middle and lower classes. Which ethnic groups were incorporated and who were considered to be Georgians in the epoch of nationalism will be discussed in the next chapter. Before then, however, summarising the discussion, it is possible to conclude the following.

By the twelfth century a Georgian aristocratic nation emerged. The population existed within a clearly demarcated territory and was the subject of a unitary administration. The pre-existing Georgian *ethnie* with its durable history, memories and myths of origin and election, as well as symbols, such as language, religion and territory, were key components of the pre-modern nation. However, the community of the Georgians did not coincide only with the Georgian *ethnie*. The claim of territorial, religious and linguistic unity, voiced by Merchule two centuries before, could be made by different ethnic groups. They were all Georgians territorially, religiously and linguistically. Unlike in Western Europe, where territories were divided along linguistic lines and language had little

political significance (Calhoun 1993: 120), in Georgia, language was a tool of ethnic inclusion. This continued in later centuries (discussed in the next section) when Georgia was no longer bounded politically, territorially and religiously. Then the myth of chosenness, which meant seeing the glory not only in the past, but also in the future, through the language, helped *kartveloba* to survive. When Georgia was struggling over external and internal boundaries politically, territorially and religiously and when there was a challenge to cultural identity, greater emphasis on common identity was needed to save the collective consciousness. Language saved the sense of unity, which was forged through the linguistic dimension. The boundaries of *kartveloba* were changing in the Middle Ages and chapter 4 examines more changes to the meaning of being a Georgian, but despite all those changes in different epochs, *kartveloba* always implied a linguistic element. After Georgia's political disintegration, discussed in the next section, when historical territory and Orthodox faith could no longer play a unifying role (since they did not coincide with each other and with political unity), language remained a feature which differentiated all Georgians from all others.

The second main point to note is that the history of Georgian identity challenges the modernist understanding of nations and nationalism. While different from modern types of nationalism, pre-modern Georgian ideology was nonetheless nationalistic in the sense that some practices and ideas (for example, spreading a common language and culture as an integrating force) were similar to modern ideologies. Without understanding the subjective components of *kartveloba* over more than two millennia it is impossible to explain the important political consequences they had later. These components engendered the national self-



assertion of Georgians, provided a foundation of the modern nation and contributed to the development of modern nationalism.

While modernists are sceptical about using historical materials as evidence of the existence of pre-modern nations, they fail to explain the date of the emergence of nations and the nature of ethnic and national ties. Obviously, one case study will not stop the debates around the issue of proto-nations, but it may move the discussion forward.

## Chapter 4

### Language and identity in Georgia under Russian rule

The nineteenth century, the epoch of the emergence of modern nations and nationalisms in Europe, also signalled a new stage in the development of *kartveloba* (Georgianness). Notably, the first steps towards becoming a modern nation were made. This social change in Georgia was in line with the secularisation of public life taking place everywhere in Europe. Influenced by European nationalist ideas and the ‘spring of nations’,<sup>26</sup> it was also caused by the particular circumstances in which Georgia found itself.

Nationalism in the empires of Western and Eastern Europe emerged differently (see section 2.2.2). In Western Europe, it was a product of the Enlightenment, ‘which emphasized rational thought and civic duty to the state’ (White 2000: 252) and presupposed independence. In Eastern Europe, where nations found themselves within empires, nationalism was a response to colonialism and concentrated around ethnic and cultural elements. Likewise, Georgian nationalism was a response to a domineering colonial regime where national leaders faced the challenge of preserving *kartveloba* by codifying national identity around an ethnic core. Although European ideas of the Enlightenment reached Georgia in the eighteenth century (Silogava & Shengelia 2007: 167), there

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<sup>26</sup> ‘Spring of nations’ is a term in nationalism studies which refers to series of revolts in various parts of Europe against monarchical rule in the nineteenth century (e.g. Bailey 1991).

was no strong tradition of individual rights in Georgia; nor was there a strong imperial state, which could be redefined as a nation-state. Instead, over centuries of disintegration, Georgia was struggling to unite again. In the beginning of the nineteenth century, Georgia was annexed by the Russian empire. Owing to the late development of capitalism and colonial policy, the resources usually used to engender a sense of national identity and mobilise people around the idea of nationalism were not easily accessible. Institutional russification led to a decline in *kartveloba* and caused a conflict between the newly educated élites and their rulers.

The historian Stephen Jones (2005: 9) describes the Russian empire as ‘a police state’ which ‘exiled dissidents, spent a minimal amount on educating its subjects, and discriminated against national and religious minorities on a daily basis’. Nevertheless, since Russia had closer ties with the West, one of the indirect cultural consequences of annexation by Russia was Georgia’s opening to the modern West. The Georgian people, now given peace from Muslim invaders, were able to communicate with the wider world and receive a Europeanised education. In Russian universities, Georgian students were exposed to the ideas of modern nationhood and, as shown below, in the second part of the nineteenth century, nobles and ordinary people developed a sense of common identity. Georgia did not have its own ruling class or native bourgeoisie, but it could refer to a long history of statehood and linguistic traditions. The nation-building project could exploit a considerable and well-documented past (see section 2.2.3). While these pre-modern cultural and political traditions served as building blocks for a modern national project, they had to be re-constructed and re-interpreted.

This chapter examines the origin of modern Georgian nationalism, the keystone of which was the Georgian language. It shows how Romantic views on language and history enabled Georgian nationalists to ‘awaken’ the nation by reaching back into the Golden Age, and by reinterpreting the past in such a way that the country could identify itself in terms of a common language, religion and territory, thus emerging as an ethno-linguistic nation.

#### **4.1 Language and colonialism in Georgia**

After briefly reviewing Georgia’s history before the Russian annexation, this section uses primary and secondary sources to look first at the establishment of colonial policy and then at its intensification aimed at the assimilation of Georgians with the Russians by means of policies of russification and ‘divide and rule’.

##### **4.1.1 Language and identity in Georgia before the incorporation into the Russian empire (1801)**

The Mongol domination (1236-1327) led to the decline of the centralised power. Although there were several unsuccessful attempts to restore real power, Georgia had fragmented by the end of the fifteenth century. From the sixteenth century, Transcaucasia became a bone of contention between the Ottoman and Iranian empires. Completely surrounded by the Muslim world, Georgia was cut off from Europe (Gachechiladze 1995: 23). In the seventeenth century, the Ottoman Empire incorporated parts of Georgia and converted their population to Islam, although Georgian as a colloquial language was preserved. By the eighteenth century the country was divided into several independent kingdoms and principalities (Kartli,

Kakheti, Imereti, Samtskhe, Samegrelo, Abkhazeti, Guria and Svaneti), over which the monarch had at times only symbolic rule (Suny 1998: 41). Suny (1998: 55) describes Transcaucasia of this period as ‘a mosaic of kingdoms, khanates and principalities under either Turkish or Iranian sovereignty but actually maintaining various degrees of precarious autonomy or independence’. Despite a large territory occupied by the people who spoke a common language, largely shared a religion and possessed a common culture and history, it was no longer possible to speak of a united *kartveloba*, but there was a basis for its future emergence as a nation. A vague awareness of a unique common identity and shared history was maintained through the church, popular traditions, folklore and, most importantly, language. In the period of disintegration, the Georgian Orthodox Church continued to function almost everywhere in the Georgian language and was a symbol of common identity (Alasania 2006: 126). Based on such shared cultural markers, in 1790 a military agreement was reached between the Eastern Georgian kingdom, the kingdom of Imereti and the principalities of Guria and Samegrelo to fight jointly against foreign invaders. Interestingly, Abkhazia did not participate in this alliance. The text of the contract explained: ‘All the Iverians (that is ‘Georgians’) inhabiting the kingdoms of Kartli, Kakheti, Imereti, Samegrelo and Guria have the same faith, are born from one Church, speak the same language, experience love towards each other like blood relatives, and are related to each other’ (1790 treaty: 46). Obviously, Abkhazians were not considered Georgians at this time and *kartveloba* was an ethno-linguistic identity.

Despite being weakened, cultural life continued in Georgia, especially in Tbilisi, which was still a regional centre for education and science (Narkvevebi III

1979: 819). Cultural renaissance occurred in the eighteenth century under King Vakhtang VI (1675-1737), who established a printing house producing Georgian books. Between 1709 and 1722, more than twenty titles were printed, mostly in the liturgical *khutsuri* script. Two books, Vakhtang VI's own edition of Rustaveli's *Knight in the Tiger Skin* and a small encyclopaedia, were printed in *Mkhedruli* (Rayfield 2010: 747-748). Vakhtang VI also inspired the revision of the historical and juridical works and set laws of feudal Georgia (Silogava & Shengelia 2007: 155). He collected old Georgian manuscripts and created a library. After Vakhtang VI moved to Russia in 1723, the Georgians continued his efforts uninterrupted until the Persian invasion of 1795. There were several attempts by Georgian princes to revive Georgian printing and establish a public library, but these never came to fruition (Jersild & Melkadze 2002: 41). Only in 1846 did the Russian viceroy Vorontsov establish the first public library and purchase several thousand books (see section 4.1.2).

In the eighteenth century, Georgia was developing a modern intelligentsia influenced by the Enlightenment, with an interest in liberal thought. Contemporary scholars and public figures (such as Aleksandre Amilakhvari and Ioane Batonishvili) underlined the importance of education, science and economic and commercial development and respectful treatment of peasants. At the same time, they devoted their attention to restoring *kartveloba* by emphasising common cultural characteristics and a shared history. For example, Vakhushti Batonishvili, who showed great interest in the history and ethnography of the Georgians, argued that *kartveloba* as an identity was not eradicated and that any Georgian in different parts of the former kingdom, if asked about their origin, would 'reply

instantaneously: Georgian’ (Batonishvili: 1973: 291). At this time, the word ‘Georgian’ was synonymous with ‘Georgian Orthodox’ (Alasania 2006: 126). Vakhushti Batonishvili notes proudly that in all parts of the former kingdom, educated people speak and write in Georgian. He emphasises that the Abkhaz aristocrats also know Georgian (Batonishvili 1973: 785-786).

One of the signs of common identity among intellectuals was an attempt to revive ethnonyms and toponyms pointing at the former unity: *Iveria/Iberia* as a name for Georgia in Parnavaz’s time (see section 3.2.1). Beri Egnatashvili’s book *The New Life of Georgia* (1940) is especially important in this regard. Speaking about different parts of the former kingdom, he uses the term *sakartveloni* (literally ‘Georgias’), probably meaning that Georgia was not made up of components alien to each other, but of many little ‘Georgias’. Children were still taught literacy in monasteries and at home, but also visited schools set up by Catholic missionaries (see section 3.1.2). In the sixteenth-seventeenth century, Georgian literature was revived with new national-patriotic motifs in the works of poets, many of whom were kings (Silogava & Shengelia 2007: 151-152).

Despite fragmentation, the Bagrationi dynasty was able to unite most of eastern Georgia under King Erekle II (1720-1798). His kingdom of Kartl-Kakheti became the dominant power in Transcaucasia and northwest Iran. However, according to Parsons (1987: 26), Kartl-Kakheti was rather more pan-Caucasian in character than Georgian and contained a mixture of ethnicities, religions and languages. Erekle II did not feel secure facing the rival khanates and increasingly powerful Lezgin tribes who frequently attacked the kingdom from north-east Caucasia (Parsons 1987: 15-16). In order to achieve peace and stability, in 1783,

Erekle II signed the Treaty of Georgievsk with Catherine II of Russia, who was seeking greater political influence in the Black Sea region. Russia gained control of Georgian foreign relations and was obliged to protect Kartl-Kakheti from any foreign aggression, but promised the continuity of the royal Bagrationi (Bagratid) line. The kingdom was to remain independent in internal affairs (Silogava & Shengelia 2007: 166). Russia did not fulfil its promise of protection and left Georgia unprotected on several occasions. During the period when Kartl-Kakheti was under Russian protectorate, the population declined by half (Parsons 1987: 18). In 1795, the Persian warlord Agha Mohammed Khan (1742-1797) attacked the Georgian kingdom. The Russians arrived only after the Georgian army, greatly outnumbered by the Persian army, was defeated in an unequal battle and Tbilisi was razed to the ground.

#### **4.1.2 The establishment of colonial policy**

In 1801 Russia under Tsar Paul (1796-1801) violated the treaty with Georgia, occupied the weakened Kingdom of Kartl-Kakheti, incorporated it into the empire and removed the Bagrationi dynasty from the throne. The Georgian state was abolished and declared a province (*gubernia*) of Russia. Later, the western Georgian principalities were also annexed and the last Bagrationi ruler, King Solomon II of Imereti, was forced into exile to the Ottoman Empire. The remaining principalities had no other choice but to enter the empire. Russia feared a Georgian resistance movement (Lominadze 2011: 402) and therefore decided upon a process of step by step colonisation.



The system of measurements for colonisation started with the deportation of members of Bagrationi dynasty, who were active in anti-Russian movement (Akty II: 65). The next step was the abolishment of the autocephaly of Georgian Orthodox Church in 1811 and the imprisonment of Georgian archbishops. This step seemed necessary, since traditionally the Georgian Church played a great role in strengthening Georgian statehood. The Georgian church was subordinated to the Russian synod and a Russian exarch, unfamiliar with Georgia, became head of the Georgian church (Werth 2006: 84). Traditional Georgian social relationships were replaced by Russian ones. For example, the Georgian feudal system was transformed along the lines of the Russian system. Several rights were taken away from the privileged Georgian aristocracy, but other new rights were granted (e.g. more control over serfs, compensation for destroyed property, etc.).

After Georgia's occupation, the goal of the Russian government (understanding that many other countries – Iran, Turkey, France, and England – had interests in the Caucasus and specifically in Georgia) was to establish its power in the country and use it as a reliable bridgehead for further expansion of the empire and for pacifying the highlanders. The Caucasus became a military springboard and was to be ruled by military people. A governor-general was in charge and ethnic Russian military officials were responsible for maintaining law and order. Until 1840 all ten Russian governors were military people with no experience of civic administration.<sup>27</sup> Therefore, the government in Georgia had a

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<sup>27</sup> These were Knorring (1801-1802), Tsitsianov (1802-1806), Gudovich (1806-1809), Tormasov (1809-1811), Paulucci (1811-1812), Rtishchev (1812-1816), Ermolov (1816-1827), Paskevich

strongly military-occupational character and was based on the Russian army. 'Lazy, corrupt, ignorant and arrogant' officials and mainly uneducated clerks, distinguished by low morality and rudeness, would get drunk, wander in the streets and get in fights' (Rayfield 2000: 139). As governor Gudovich admitted himself in his rapport to the Russian authorities, he was obliged to assign night guards to the Russian officials in order to prevent drinking and force them to execute their duties (Akty III: 23).

Before the Russian occupation, Georgia was governed by the Code of Law of Vakhtang VI. Russia imposed its own rules and excluded the Georgians from executive and judicial affairs, but let them be advisors to the Russian administrators. The working language of the administration was Russian. But due to the lack of knowledge of the language and of Russian laws, Georgian advisers kept mostly silent (N. Berdzenishvili 1965: 266-267). New taxes were imposed upon serfs, who were obliged to billet Russian soldiers, provide horses, build roads, and maintain bridges. A passport system introduced in 1830 restricted serfs' mobility (Jones 2005: 5-7).

Georgian nobles were outraged by the corrupt Russian bureaucrats. Governor Tsitsianov (a Georgian by origin) realised the danger inherent in the overly rapid russification of administrative and judicial systems in Georgia. Since few in Georgia knew Russian and ethnic Georgians often lost their court cases just because of not knowing Russian (Akty II: 46), he asked the central authorities in

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(1827-1831), Rozen (1831-1837) and Golovin (1837-1842) (Lominadze 1980: 40, 68, 92-93, 95 and 166).

Russia to allow, at least partly, the use of Georgian there. In a petition dating from 1806, the Georgian aristocracy also asked the Tsar for the right to chose judges ‘who will judge in the Georgian language’ (Lominadze 2011: 112-113). Since the Russian government was more interested in the decay of Georgian, these requests were refused. The administrative reform initiated by Governor Paskevich in 1830 openly stated its goal ‘to rally Transcaucasia with Russia by civic and political ties in a comprehensive whole and force locals to speak, think and feel in Russian’ (Patrushevsky 1936: 280).

The policy of russification was in force also in the education system. The number of Georgian schools decreased; Tbilisi and Telavi religious school were abolished. Instead, in 1802, a Russian school for nobles was opened. In a letter to the Minister of Education, the governor of Georgia at the time, Tsitsianov, set out the function of the school: to establish a strong foundation for the Russian language in judicial proceedings (Akty II:195-7). Since the money dedicated to the school was misappropriated by the administrator, it soon closed (Kipiani 1990: 137). In 1804, a school for nobles opened. It taught the Georgian language to ethnic Georgians, but for one purpose only: to raise future bilingual employees. Children of Russian administrators did not have to study Georgian (Archive, fond 440, case 5, 213). Later, the teaching of Georgian even to the Georgians became a pure formality and soon disappeared completely (Chumburidze 2008: 303).

When the Treaty of Georgievsk was signed, the shared religion (Eastern Orthodoxy), as well as the strong memory of struggle with Islamic empires, was considered a basis for unity. The treaty said nothing about language, which is surprising considering that the Georgian language had served as a main marker of

*kartveloba* for centuries. Evidently this was not fully realised in Erekle's time, but Russia sensed that the relationship between the Georgian language and faith was a fundamental component of *kartveloba* and, therefore, started using language as a tool for separation (see section 2.4.3).

Considering the Georgian Church to be the main obstacle to assimilation, the Russian government was especially interested in training priests who could help with the task. For this purpose, in 1817, a Russian religious school opened in Tbilisi, followed by similar schools in other places. Predictably, these schools adopted the Russian education system, including the use of the Russian birch as a means of punishment (Kokrashvili 2008a: 48). After the conspiracy aimed at the restoration of the Georgian kingdom (see below), the government realised that nationalist ideas were nurtured in private and church schools, and, therefore, closed the few which still existed (Chumburidze 2008: 306). The *Documents Collected by the Caucasian Archeographical Commission* (Akty) (1866-1904) contain materials about the misdemeanours of Russian teachers, many of whom were drunkards. Therefore, the results of their instructions were poor. In 1829, dissatisfied with students' achievements in the Russian language, a director of the school of nobles Gruber advocated the opening of a boarding school, since in his opinion the main obstacle to russification was the fact that students spoke Georgian at home (Akty VII: 67).

The oppressive regime was accompanied by numerous clashes and wars with the rulers of local principalities and large peasant uprisings in many parts of the country. They were soon cruelly suppressed. The first uprising occurred in 1802 in eastern Georgia and was followed by other, poorly organised riots in 1804,

1812, 1819-1820, 1841 (Suny 1998: 70; Silogava & Shengelia 2007: 175). The rebels demanded the observation of the Georgievsk Treaty (1783), according to which Russia was not allowed to interfere with Georgia's internal affairs. Rebels were strictly punished and their children were sent to military orphanages in Russia (Akty VI 1874: 36). The Russian military historian Dubrovin (1866: 351) quotes Governor Tsitsianov's order during the riot of 1804: 'Chop and hack to pieces rebels mercilessly; destroy their villages. [...] when entering their houses do not show any mercy.' According to the same Dubrovin, besides more or less organised riots, many small clashes occurred frequently, mostly provoked by the discrimination of ethnic Georgians in the courts on language grounds. Thus, the uprising had a permanent character.

A conspiracy, aimed at the restoration of monarchy, was planned in 1832 by the Georgian educated élite. It was the last noble-led revolt, which, like previous insurrections, was suppressed. The leaders were punished with imprisonment and exile (see section 4.2.1).

The peasant revolts and the 1832 conspiracy demonstrated the hostilities of Georgians towards the Tsarist regime (Suny 1998: 72). According to the Russian language newspaper *Tiflisskiye vedomosti* (1830, 15 November), even after 30 years of Russian rule, Russian officials knew nothing about Georgians and their culture and this fact was seriously damaging Russia's reputation. The Russians realised the necessity of a more flexible approach in order to fully absorb Georgia. Therefore, they softened exploitation and became more careful and sensitive to local customs and traditions. Certain laws of Vakhtang IV were restored and all Georgian nobles were made equal in privilege and status to the Russian

aristocracy. A governor was replaced (1844) by a viceroy (*namestnik*) whose goal was to gain the support of the locals.

The first viceroy was Mikhail Vorontsov, a powerful and independent figure in the imperial administration (Jersild & Melkadze 2002: 31). Well-acquainted with Georgia, he was very successful in finding a common language with the Georgian aristocracy and in making them loyal servants of the empire (Antelava 1964: 46). His palace became a centre of brilliant social and cultural life (Hosking 1997: 20).

Russia provided contact with the Europeanised Russian intelligentsia and helped the Georgian nobles to collect taxes. Now their wives could follow European fashion and their children could go to schools where local administrative intelligentsia could be educated. Many were eager to take advantage of the privileges and found employment in Vorontsov's administration, thus becoming involved in the realisation of a colonial policy. As Jones (2005: 22) states, Vorontsov 'charmed away what was left of Georgian resistance to integration'. Brought up in London, Vorontsov saw Russia's role in Georgia not only as an exploiter of local resources, but the developer of European civilisation (Suny 1998: 93). Some Georgian nobles were quite comfortable with career opportunities for their family members. Encouraged to speak Russian even amongst themselves, they showed a readiness to accept cultural assimilation (Parsons 1987: 212) and sent their children to Russian-language schools (Jones 2005: 8). Many entered the Russian military, often reaching the highest ranks.

Vorontsov promoted art and more liberal education. In order to entertain Russian administrators and military officials culturally, he took great interest in transforming Tbilisi into a European city, with theatres, an opera house, a library, museums, numerous educational institutions, magazines and newspapers. Both the Georgian and Russian intelligentsia over the years donated books to the library, but it had few Georgian books. For example, in 1848, the number of volumes in Georgian amounted to just four, compared with 1488 Russian titles. In 1853, the numbers were ten and 2634 respectively (Jersild & Melkadze 2002: 45-48). Most books were in Russian, French, German and English, although Latin, Greek, Polish, Armenian, Azeri, Czech, Turkish, Arabic and Persian were also represented.

Vorontsov funded publication of magazines and journals, among them the first journal in the Georgian language, *Tsiskari*, on condition that it would not write about politics (Kikvidze 1954: 238). Instead, *Tsiskari* published articles about Georgian culture, literature and old Georgian manuscripts, and, despite the strict censorship, was able to spread European ideas. Along with the newspapers *Droeba* and *Iveria*, founded a little later (1866 and 1876 respectively), it encouraged the development of Georgian culture. Although Vorontsov's new policy gave more freedom to the national-cultural revival of Georgians, his sophisticated methods still undermined Georgian identity perhaps more effectively than the old policy.

For all his deeds, some Georgians were grateful to Vorontsov, but others understood his actions as means of soft russification (Rayfield 2000: 164). Indeed,

besides Westernisation, Vorontsov had also another ambition: to further acquaint Georgians with the Russian language and bring them closer to Russian culture, in order to finally russify them according to the formula ‘Russian soul, Georgian body’, voiced by Catherine II as far back as 1770 in a letter to count Nikita Panin, an influential Russian statesman and Catherine’s political mentor (Tsagareli 1891: 156). Vorontsov himself unveiled his goals on repeated occasions. For example, commenting on the opening of the theatre in Tbilisi in 1852, he underlined its importance for the gradual confluence of the locals with Russians (Akty X: 881). In his letter to general Chernyshev about reforms in the educational sphere, Vorontsov expressed his wish to improve the teaching of Russian, but also advocated the teaching of the local language in order to ensure a pool of reliable translators in the future (Akty X: 126).

#### **4.1.3 Intensification of linguistic russification**

From the second part of the nineteenth century the policy of russification became more systematic. The word ‘Georgia’ was prohibited in print (Suny 1998: 140). The Georgian language was extirpated from schools (Archive, fond 422, case 8813, 60). One Russian official stated in 1872 that he saw no need for teaching Georgian, which ‘makes children stupid’ and advised Georgian families to adopt Russian as a home language (*Droeba*, 1872, 3 November: 2-3). At the same time, in order to undermine the unity of Georgia, Russia forbade the teaching of Georgian in Samegrelo and Svaneti, and created for Svan (1864) and Megrelian (1899) alphabets based on the Russian alphabet (Kokrashvili 2008b: 281).



The Russian-language press regularly ridiculed Georgian culture; these actions were meant to strengthen Russian culture, which, the Russians hoped, would be ‘stronger than the local one’ (Khundadze 1951: 91). Russification intensified also in the Church. All exarchs were Russian; Georgian was excluded from church administration, and Georgian frescos were whitewashed. Georgian monks were ousted from monasteries, which made it easier to rob church treasures and sell centuries-old collections of books to foreign collectors (Durnovo 1907: 32-34). The Russian clergy regarded Georgians as ‘wild’ people and described their language as a ‘language of dogs’, while calling Georgian traditional church polyphony ‘barking’ (Werth 2006: 84; Durnovo 1907: 53). In Samegrelo and Svaneti, they tried to establish a liturgy in Megrelian and Svan, but the Georgians succeeded in undermining the policy. Afterwards it was suggested to using liturgy in Old Slavonic in Samegrelo and Abkhazia (Archive, fond 422, case 5402, 122). This did not work in Samegrelo; in Sukhumi (Abkhazia), however, Russian was established as a language of religious service despite the fact that three quarters of the population was Georgian (Durnovo 1907: 52). An officer of the Caucasian viceroy, Weidenbaum, advocated only Russian language education in Abkhazia: ‘It is clear that the role of champion of cultural ideas [...] must be played not by Georgian, but by the Russian language’ (translated by Gachechiladze 1995: 30). The first Abkhazian alphabet, based on Cyrillic, was created in 1862 by the Russian general and linguist Uslar. Uslar admitted that the Georgian alphabet, as the most perfect alphabet among the existing ones, would be best not only for Abkhazian, but for all Caucasian languages, even if this would not serve the interests of the Russian Empire (Uslar 1887: 48).

Later, after the assassination of Tsar Alexander II in 1881, the government adopted even harsher reforms in all spheres, including the church and education system. All progressive Georgian and Russian teachers were evicted from schools and replaced by reactionary teachers (Kokrashvili 2008b: 277). According to the new curriculum, children studied the Russian language in year one and all subjects in Russian from year two (Uchebnyi plan 1881). The salary of Georgian teachers was lower than that of other teachers (Chumburidze 2008: 317). Later Georgian was completely excluded from civil schools, but was permitted in some religious schools. Others, instead of the Georgian language and history of the Georgian church, taught Greek and Latin for twelve years (*Droeba* 1879, 5 October: 1-2). It was forbidden to speak Georgian even during breaks. In 1893 the students of Tbilisi religious school organised a protest about discrimination against the Georgian language and demanded that the language, literature and history of Georgia be taught. The Tbilisi gendarmerie brutally dispersed their demonstration and expelled 67 Georgian students (Gvantseladze *et al.* 2001: 96-97). In the same year, a director of public schools in western Georgia, Levitskii, expressed his opinion that it was impossible to attain the religious/spiritual unity of Georgians and Russians while they prayed in different languages (Archive, fond 422, case 5402, 50). The following year he demanded a decrease in the teaching of Georgian in public schools and an increase in the number of hours devoted to Russian (Archive, fond 422, case 8813, 28).

In 1902, the Holy Synod issued an order forbidding the teaching of Georgian in the Samegrelo region on the grounds that it was not the locals' native language. It had to be replaced with Russian, but Megrelian would also be

accepted as a medium of instruction (Kokrashvili 2008c: 296). The order was never realised, thanks to vigorous resistance from the local clergy and noble élite, as well as from nationalist leaders in Tbilisi (Broers 2004: 92). In 1904, in a public speech, a supervisor of religious schools, Vostorgov, strictly opposed the teaching of Georgian to Abkhazians, Ossetians and Megrelians. He accused Georgians of attempting to georgianise these peoples by forcibly imposing the Georgian language upon them (Werth 2006: 91). In 1909, the Holy Synod criticised the Georgians for their efforts to depict themselves as a homogenous group and to attempt to include other Kartvelians in their nation (Cadiot 2005). Similar policies were carried out in Adjara, which, after three hundred years, was recovered from Turkey in 1878 (Suny 1998: 134). Ossetians living in Georgia used Georgian as their literary language. Many of them were fully georgianised and used Georgian as an everyday language, but from the 1860s the teaching of Georgian to Ossetians was replaced by that of Russian and Greek (Chumburidze 2008: 319). In general, colonial demographic and ethnic policy was such that it broke the centuries-old natural process of integrating minorities into *kartveloba*. In order to avoid teaching Georgian in most places, Russia divided Georgians into eleven smaller ethnicities according to their respective provinces (Jones 2005: 16). For example, a director of Gori school maintained that Georgian should not be taught since it was a native language of only thirteen students out of fifty when, in fact, thirty-one were Georgians from different provinces (Chavchavadze 1997: 62).

At the same time, with the aim of aggravating the demographic situation, Russia started settling different ethnic and religious groups on Georgian territory. As a part of an earlier colonial policy, Germans, Greeks and Estonians were

already moved to Georgia in the first half of the nineteenth century. In the second half, however, the process of demographic change was intensified: Bulgarians, Moldavians, Lithuanians, Czechs, Finns and Avars were resettled in Georgia. A new wave of Armenians, refugees from the Ottoman Empire, was moved to Black Sea towns (Shavrov 1911: 59-60; Durnovo 1907: 37). By the end of the nineteenth century, they made up 10.46 percent of Georgia's population (compared with 4.71 percent in the beginning of the century when their migration began) (Antadze 1973: 89). Russians and other Slavic people, mostly religious minorities (such as Molokans, Dukhobors, Raskolniks, Old Believers and Skoptsy), migrated in significant numbers from the inner Russian provinces by court decision or their own accord, faced with the choice of accepting Orthodoxy or resettlement (Antadze 1973: 129; Narkvevebi V 1970: 122). As a result, by the end of the nineteenth century, Russians constituted more than four percent of the civilian population (Antadze 1973: 89). Many Russians were settled in Abkhazia, while almost half of the Abkhazian population was forced to move to Turkey (Songhulashvili 2005: 38). The Russian government persuaded the Georgian Muslim population to leave those territories which had been recovered from the Ottoman Empire. Pro-Russian ethnic groups, such as Armenians, Greeks and Russian sectarians, were settled there. For those Georgian Muslims who did not leave the territory they opened Turkish language religious schools and forbade the teaching of Georgian (Kokrashvili 2008b: 284). Georgians, however, welcomed their Muslim brothers, hoping to bring them back into the Georgian cultural environment. Shortly after the incorporation of Adjara, Ilia Chavchavadze, leader of nationalist movement, wrote: 'Our brothers in blood, the nest of our heroes, the

cradle of our civilisation, our ancient Georgia, has been united with us' (*Iveria* #1, 1879). Perceived as a lost region, Adjara had to be brought back despite religious differences: 'Neither unity of language, nor unity of faith and tribal affiliation links human beings together as much as unity of history' (Chavchavadze 1987b: 7). But the majority of Adjarians decided to seek refuge in Turkey, which promised them exemption from taxes and military service (Pelkmans 2006: 98). This came as a shock to Georgian nationalists, who blamed the authorities for treating the native population poorly.

In contrast to the Russian authorities, a small number of progressive Russian teachers opposed the colonial language policy. They demanded that Russian teachers learn the Georgian language, literature, traditions, etc. One such teacher was Stoianov, a principal of Kutaisi gymnasium. In 1880 he wrote:

In my opinion, the teaching of the Georgian language must increase [...] I have a particular opinion about the subject and I am ready to defend it everywhere. Georgian is a native language. Primary schools must function in Georgian and further teaching also must continue in the mother tongue. Therefore, teachers must be either Georgian or those Russians who have mastered this language. The children of Russians who graduate from gymnasiums, universities work in Georgia, but do not know the language and customs of Georgians. Englishmen who worked on the construction of the Poti-Tbilisi railway learned Georgian in 5-6 months. Whereas Russians, despite being in Georgia for more than

a half a century, do not know a word of Georgian. The teaching of Georgian needs to be obligatory. (Narkvevebi V 1970: 653)

Stoianov was criticised for his views and was dismissed soon after.

In concluding this section, it must be said that many Georgian historians and politicians consider a step undertaken by Erekle II as a fatal mistake (Chkhartishvili 2009b: 60), as it eventually ended Georgia's independence. But, some Western scholars, such as Parsons (1987) and Jones (2005), view the results of Erekle's decision to seek protection from Russia differently: although Georgia was subordinated to Russia, it was more united than it had been for centuries. Some of the obstacles threatening security and unity, as well as economic and social integration, were removed (Parsons 1987: 65). Jones (2005:12) notes that '[i]ronically, the Russian Empire reignited a sense of national unity' by annexing almost all territories of medieval Georgia'. Incorporation into the Russian empire had a positive impact on economic relations too. Although Russia was a backward state in terms of capitalist development, economic links between regions deepened and favourable preconditions for the establishment of in-group solidarity were created, especially after British engineers built a railway link between eastern and western Georgia in 1872 (Jones 2005: 12).

#### **4.2 The emergence of the modern Georgian nation**

The modern Georgian nation emerged as a result of a national-cultural movement, which was influenced by several factors: Romanticism, Russian colonial pressure and Armenian economic dominance. As seen in chapter 3, the communicative and symbolic role of language in Georgia shaped the relationship between different

ethnic groups and caused Georgia to emerge as a pre-modern nation. The medieval sense of national community was partly carried over into the modern epoch. When modern nationalism emerged, once again language was chosen to define a nation by élites as a crucial marker, this time, of the modern nation. This process was similar to ‘vernacular mobilisation’ in Western Europe.

Language policy and planning (LPP) became an important part of the nation-building process in Western Europe. Each state wanted a new shared standard language as a symbol of national identity. At the same time, a shared language could facilitate greater economic and political cooperation. The theory developed by German Romantic thinkers, according to which language was an essential characteristic of a nation, became very influential in Eastern Europe too. Following Herder and Fichte (see section 2.4.2), who mentioned that only through communication in an agreed code was it possible to develop a sense of common identity, language was singled out as an essential element of national movements during the ‘spring of nations’. As the idea of a national language spread widely, nationalist scholars began to engage in ‘vernacular mobilisation’, rediscovering the ethnic past through linguistics, philology, archaeology and history. In Georgia, too, language reform was not just exploited by nationalist leaders, but their movement became essentially a language movement. However, this ethno-national movement did not demand political independence because it could not challenge the imperial resources of the state with regard to communication, finances, and foreign affairs. The political demands were limited to cultural autonomy within Russia. Independence was a declared aim of Georgian Marxists, who, although having

strong ethno-national roots, brought an alternative ideology of nationalism to Georgia.

#### **4.2.1 Searching for the new boundaries**

One of the earliest manifestations of Georgia's opening up to Western thought was Georgian Romanticism. The decline of old patterns of life and the imposition of colonial rule fostered a nostalgic mood; combined with pride in Georgia's Golden Age, as well as hope in a better future, this led to Romantic patriotism. In the nineteenth century, an egalitarian setting for literature termed the 'literary salon' appeared in Georgia. National solidarity was first renewed in such salons among a small group of Georgian intellectuals. Writers, critics and editors translated European works with the ideas of national freedom, then gathered in aristocratic families and expressed their patriotic aspirations and anti-Russian sentiments, longing for Georgia's glorious past (Jones 1987: 62). Their nationalism was not extended to popular sovereignty and, essentially, was an élite nationalism. Georgian romantic poets cared about language, but their language could not become the marker of a common culture or influence a largely illiterate population, since these poets wrote in the artificially 'high' style of Anton I (see section 3.1.2). Their style resulted in the inevitable conflict between two generations (an old aristocratic élite and a young educated élite) in the second part of the nineteenth century (see below).

Most of these upper-class representatives, together with the intelligentsia of non-aristocratic origins, conspired against Russian rule in 1832 (see section 4.1.2). The idea for the conspiracy came from the grandsons of Erekle II living in Russia



(Suny 1998:71). Although the conspiracy wanted to restore the Bagrationi dynasty, some favoured more democratic government (Silogava & Shengelia 2007: 172). Among them, the commoner Solomon Dodashvili was the most prominent. He was also one of two participants who died in exile. Others were eventually pardoned and reconciled themselves to Russian rule. Among them were the ‘father’ of Georgian Romanticism, a son of the former Georgian ambassador to Russia, Alexandre Chavchavadze, and a future Governor-General, Grigol Orbeliani. Their biographies illustrate the transformation of the Georgian aristocracy from Romantic rebels into loyal servants of Russia. The failure of the conspiracy left its mark on Georgian society, noticeable in Georgian Romantic poetry. Hope of restoration of the monarchy and the dream of independence was soon forgotten.<sup>28</sup> The Georgian élite accepted their political future within the boundaries of the Russian state (Jones 2005: 2-6).

Despite its failure and restriction to the aristocracy, the conspiracy marked the emergence of the Georgian nationalist intelligentsia. While nothing was done to develop social equality, love for Georgia, expressed by Romantic poets, had a clear influence on the views of the next generation, educated in Russian and European universities. Old and new generations viewed Georgia’s future within Russia. Although they dreamed about Georgia’s glorious past, defended the Georgian language and Georgia’s interests, they believed that Russia’s protection was vital for Georgia’s survival.

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<sup>28</sup> Later, Stalin (1954a) called the conspiracy of 1832 the first stage in the development of national consciousness in Georgia (see section 2.3.3).

In the early 1860s, a new generation of Georgian intellectuals had returned home. Many of them belonged to leading aristocratic families and had received their education in Russian universities, thanks to the education policy of Alexander II, which granted stipends to Georgians. They established the Georgian press and several cultural societies (Jerschild & Melkadze 2002: 39) and engaged in reinventing and clarifying the boundaries of *kartveloba* through a search for pre-colonial culture based on language, homeland and history.

The major difference between old and new generations, known as ‘fathers’ and ‘sons’, was that the former dwelled on Georgia’s past; the latter, however, was more concerned with the contemporary situation: poor education, economic underdevelopment, social backwardness and isolation from the civilised world. Contrary to their fathers, the sons considered Georgia’s social development as an important component of their movement. One of the nationalist leaders, Gogebashvili (1984: 76), wrote:

Nobody dreams of restoration of the old Georgia, which belongs to the past and cannot be returned. It is the new Georgia that is the subject of our dreams and aspirations: Georgia should look ahead towards Europe and not back towards Asia. It is from the West that we should learn education, scholarship and import the best of social structures.

The future-oriented rather than past-glorifying nationalism of ‘sons’ was also a fundamental difference between Georgian nationalism and Russian nationalism, which looked at everything European with disdain and dreamed about the epoch of Peter the Great. Although the process of vernacular mobilisation around the ethnic

core often involves dwelling on past glory, Georgian nationalist leaders directed their efforts at awakening Georgians. Sharing their fathers' love of Georgia, they rejected non-productive backward-looking nationalism of their 'fathers' and did not look back nostalgically, but appealed to past national heroes as an ideal for contemporary community, setting continuity between the past and the present. According to A. D. Smith (1996a: 584), modern nationalists promise renewal, reintegration and restoration to a former glorious state: '[j]ust as "our ancestors" created a great culture of civilization, so surely can "we"', runs the leitmotiv. This is important, exactly because most nationalisms, viewed from inside, start out from a sense of decline, alienation and inner exile'. Georgians had a well documented ethno-history with more than one Golden Age, and even if sometimes they were exaggerated and idealised, they provided a sense of collective destiny. If the Romantic poets yearned for a distant past, the generation of 'sons' wrote literature about the real specific problems of Georgian society at the time (Parsons 1987: 218). The 'sons' are known also as *tergdaleulni*: those who drank the waters of the Terek, the river on the border with Russia. The Terek (*Tergi* in Georgian) functioned not only as the geographical and cultural boundary between Russia and Georgia, but also became a symbolic national identity boundary for those returning from Russia. In their search for a new Georgian identity, the *tergdaleulni* overturned the old élite nationalism with ideas of equal rights and scientific progress (Jones 2005: 35).

The nationalist agenda of the *tergdaleulni* was cultural and linguistic revival (see section 4.2.2), rather than centring on independence. Political demands were limited to cultural autonomy within Russia and schooling in the Georgian

language. They aimed at the preservation of *kartveloba* in the face of threats from russification. Influenced by democratic movements in Europe and by the strong spirit of patriotism of the previous generation, they actively supported the abolition of serfdom and called for national unity across social classes. The problem was that the Armenian bourgeoisie were not interested in the national idea of the Georgians.

Historically, the Armenians represented a permanent challenge for Georgian identity. The construction of identity requires the existence of ‘others’, because an in-group needs the sense of an out-group. The sense of otherness is especially acute when countries are neighbours and culturally close. As two neighbouring peoples of old cultures, the Georgians and Armenians viewed each other as an out-group and their identities were forged in competition and sometimes even lethal violence (Chkhartishvili 2009b: 110). The Armenian Church’s rejection of Chalcedon and subsequent ecumenical councils made it possible to develop a sense of unique faith among the Armenians. A sense of uniqueness was developed among Georgians as well, since the same event made them the only Orthodox people in the Caucasus. The Armenians, who lost their kingdom in the eleventh century and were under pressure from the Muslim world, looked for shelter in neighbouring countries, and many settled in Georgia. Before the Russian annexation Armenians already constituted 4.71 percent of Georgia’s population. In 1829-1831, after Russia supported their mass migration to Georgia, the percentage increased to 9.88 (Antadze 1973: 110). Before Georgia’s incorporation into Russia, the Armenians living in feudal Georgia had no political or social ambitions. However, under the Russian policy of accommodation (see below), the wealthy

Armenian bourgeoisie gained a new social status and the urban community of Tbilisi Armenians played an important role in the city's life. Some Armenians tried to assume Georgian identity, spoke Georgian at home and georgianised their names (Cornell 2002a: 197), but the process of georgianisation amongst Armenians was slow and the two communities remained segregated (Chkhartishvili 2009b: 123).

For centuries, the core of Armenian identity was religious and the Georgian word *somexhi* (Armenian) pointed to religious affinity. In the nineteenth century, however, *somexhi* became an equivalent of 'merchant, money-lender'. Psychological borders between the Georgians and Armenians were formed long time ago, and were so strong that it was, and still is, very difficult to conceptualise Armenians in the Georgian nation. Armenians were and are particular 'others' for Georgians; therefore, they were not invited to the Georgian in-group (Chkhartishvili 2009b: 121). After Georgia's annexation, the Russian government tried to intensify tensions between Georgians and Armenians, engaging some Armenians in suppressing rebels during the 1812 riot, although many showed loyalty to Georgia (Proneli 1907: 129-130).

Jones (2005: 8), Suny (1998: 95) and others note that merchants were the only class that benefited from Russian economic policy. The class of merchants was dominated by Armenians, since involvement in trade was considered demeaning among Georgians (Parsons 1987: 104). The Russian administration provided a stable economic climate, a new internal market, promoted foreign trade and freed merchants from serfdom, military recruitment, the poll tax and corporal punishment. Such treatment of the Armenians intensified the ethnic and social

class antagonisms that already existed between the Georgian nobility and Armenian bourgeoisie (Parsons 1987: 32-33, Suny 1998: 95). Ethnic and social antagonism between the two communities became even more bitter following the abolition of serfdom (1964), when the largely agrarian Georgian population began migrating to Tbilisi and Armenian demographic dominance over the city began to diminish (Suny 1998: 116). But Armenians continued to maintain control over the economic and political life of the capital and Georgians, a minority in the city council, were not able to participate actively in municipal affairs (Suny 1998: 141).

As A. D. Smith notes (1998: 27), conflict between waves of newcomers and urban 'old-timers' was usually social, but it could also be ethnic when these groups were 'visibly different, had entirely different belief systems and customs, or spoke a different language'. Although, it must be noted, truly ethnic conflict did not break out between the Georgians and Armenians. Inter-ethnic marriages were common, since the Georgian aristocracy wanted rich dowries and the Armenian merchants wanted their children to acquire a noble title (Gachechiladze 1995: 29).

At the same time, the nation-building era forced Armenians to reconsider the markers of their identity. Taking into account the importance of territory and cultural artefacts for nation-building, it is not surprising that Armenian scholars started focusing on the territorial marker of their identity and included Georgian lands and monuments into their project. Georgian nationalists identified the Armenians as a main threat to Georgia's historical past and cultural heritage by falsifying history. For example, one of the leaders of the *tergdaleulni*, Ilia Chavchavadze, in his polemical essay *Lament of the Stones* (1899) fiercely criticised Armenian historical scholarship, accusing Armenian scholars of

falsifying history and calling for the defence of national dignity (Chavchavadze 1987a).

As noted in the academic literature (e.g. Özkirimli 2000: 197; Judge 2002: 48), in the epoch of nationalism, when certain groups do not share the feeling of national identity with the majority and produce their own historical narratives, conflict is inevitable. Both Armenians and Georgians felt a need to rethink their own ethnic boundaries and distinguish themselves from each other. Georgians viewed Armenian economic control as an obstacle on their path towards nation-formation (Jones 2005: 68). When the Armenians were preoccupied with their own project of redefining national identity and could not play the role that the bourgeoisie played in western countries, there was no other way than to mobilise the Georgian people around the ethnic core and exclude foreign elements. National identity is forged and defined through a dual process of stressing the similarities of the in-group (the ‘self’) and its differences with those outside the community (the ‘others’). The need to define the in-group as different becomes more compelling when the significant ‘other’ denies the right of the community to form a nation. According to A. D. Smith (1999a: 197), this process tends to single out an ‘alien’ minority (non-members of the historic cultural community) and views it with suspicion and hostility. For obvious reasons, Armenians were identified as the ‘alien’ minority.

Nevertheless, most nationalist leaders advocated a non-confrontational approach and repeatedly emphasized that fairness for Georgians must not be achieved at the expense of others. For example, the most nationalistic paper *Iveria* wrote: ‘Self-government based on democratic foundations treats all citizens

equally and does not differentiate among religions and ethnicities' (*Iveria*, 1905, # 38: 1). Nationalist leaders repeatedly stressed that they especially appreciated friendship and unity with Russians and found common ideals with young Russia. One of the leaders of the *tergdaleulni*, Akaki Tsereteli (Klde #66, 1913), wrote:

We greatly appreciate brotherhood, unity and friendship with the nations of Russia. It is true that among Russia's people there are many who hate our brotherly relations, but there is also a young Russia, with which we want to walk holding hands in order to realize not only national, but also common human ideals, called brotherhood, unity, equality.

Unlike the assimilationist policy during the zenith of Georgia's statehood (see section 3.2.3), in this period, due to the increased competition between national groups and the fact that the Armenian bourgeoisie could not play the role of nationalist leader, the Georgian intelligentsia adopted a differentialist policy and concentrated on the ethnic core. They had to establish the boundaries of collective identity and define a common purpose for the emerging nation.

#### **4.2.2 Georgia's cultural and linguistic resistance to russification**

Cultural and linguistic resistance to colonial oppression started very slowly in the first half of the nineteenth century among intellectuals. They published their original and translated works in the *Literary Supplement to Tiflis Bulletin* (established in 1832), edited by Dodashvili. Previously, two Georgian-language newspapers had existed. The first one, *The Paper of Georgia*, appeared in 1819, but was soon renamed *The Georgian Paper* in order to ensure that the word



‘Georgia’ was not in official use anymore. The paper was written first in Russian and then translated into Georgian. The language and style of translations, as well as the punctuation, was so poor that it was sometimes impossible to make sense of the texts (Botsvadze 1976: 8-9). Therefore, the paper lacked subscribers and soon folded. The second paper, *The Tiflis Bulletin* (1828), was an improved version of the former and published articles about Georgian culture. Its editor was the same Dodashvili under whose lead the *Literary Supplement to Tiflis Bulletin* later became very active in intensifying national consciousness and attempting to defend the status of the Georgian language. Dodashvili’s journal, in fact, became a political organ of the failed conspiracy of 1832. As seen in section 4.1.2, under Vorontsov *Tsiskari* appeared, which was bitterly attacked by the *tergdaleulni* for using archaic literary language (Jones 2005: 36). Ilia Chavchavadze (*Tsiskari*, 1961, April issue: 26-27) wrote:

We have three divine treasures from our ancestors: homeland, language and faith. If we will not take care of them, what would we tell our descendants? We cannot speak of others, but we will not allow even our fathers to humiliate our language. A language is a divine thing, a public property. A man should not touch it with a sinful hand.

In this triad ‘homeland, language and faith’, the order was changed to ‘language, homeland and faith’, at the end of the twentieth century (see section 5.2.3). The nationalist leaders adopted it as their slogan and presented it as the main motto of Ilia’s movement, although in fact, Ilia never again mentioned this

trptych.<sup>29</sup> As A. D. Smith (2009: 31-32) notes, nationalist élites often had to carefully select/alter the range of ethnic symbols and memories if they were to carry the population with them. Historical memories, especially myths of war and ethnic resistance are particularly effective in creating the consciousness and sentiments of mutual dependence, which reinforces the shared culture and identity (A. D. Smith 2009: 28). Ilia would not risk losing non-Orthodox Georgians by stressing religious unity. In his famous article ‘*osmalos sakartvelo*’ (‘Ottoman Georgia’), to welcome Adjarians back to Georgia, he even argued that unity of faith was not as important as unity of shared history (see section 4.1.3). As mentioned in section 4.1.1, ‘Georgian’ was synonymous with ‘Georgian Orthodox’, however, Ilia Chavchavadze and his followers tried to find ways to incorporate Muslim Georgians into their secular nation-building process, but they were particularly concerned with social division (Parsons 1987: 272) and wanted also to incorporate all social classes into national unity. However, strangely enough, Ilia’s other triad from the poem *achrdili* – ‘brotherhood, unification, liberty’ – was never used by the nationalist leaders of either Soviet or post-Soviet periods. When Ilia mentioned those three treasures left to the Georgians by their ancestors, he did not mean the reconstruction of those concepts as markers for national identity, but he clearly understood the role of faith, as well as that of a territory and language, in the historical formation of *kartveloba*, although Ilia was not aware of Merchule’s definition of Georgia (see section 3.2.3).

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<sup>29</sup> Unfortunately, along with Georgian nationalist historians of the twentieth century, some Western scholars, obviously not having read Ilia’s works and having no idea what the context of this phrase was, repeatedly present this triptych as a motto of Ilia’s movement.

In order to foster internal solidarity in a colonial country that lacks control over its territory, a ‘returning intelligentsia’ often chooses the route of ‘vernacular mobilisation’ as a guardian of self-preservation and self-redefinition (A. D. Smith 2009: 55). The creation of an independent territorial nation out of the multi-ethnic colony was impossible in the *tergdaleulni*’s times, when political routes were blocked. Therefore, it was not set as a goal for the movement. Unlike political nationalists, who aimed to secure an independent, sovereign state for their nation, Georgian cultural nationalists aimed for the moral regeneration of their community. The first goal was survival, and then entry to the modern world through secularisation and Westernisation. The *tergdaleulni* encouraged Georgians to combine inherited values and traditions with Western ways and ideals. For this purpose, they had to investigate and reinterpret ethnic markers over the *longue durée*, on the one hand, and show ‘maps’ for a new destiny of the nation on the other. Following the principles of Romantic nationalism, they sought to employ history, archaeology and philology in this process of vernacular mobilisation. Vernacular culture, such as language, customs, art, folklore and ethnic history could provide powerful means for the mobilisation of the masses. Recalling great events and heroes of the past, an image of an aristocratic warrior society surrounded by the Muslim world and fighting to preserve Christianity, reminded people of their ancestors’ uplifting struggles. Although the *tergdaleulni* were fighting to establish a secular nation, they viewed Orthodoxy as a factor in historical solidarity. There was the question of how to reach ordinary people, separated from the national agenda by élite nationalism. In the early 1860s, the idea of a modern nation did not stir the emotions of the majority of Georgia’s rural

population. But there was a strong correlation between religion and language; it was therefore possible to mobilise people around their culture, language and faith. Afterwards, however, it would become possible to focus on social, economic and political aspects, thus to achieve ‘all the attributes of fully-fledged nation’ (Hroch 1995: 66).

A brief look at Georgia’s history suggests that Georgians fought for their religion, rather than language. But the confrontation with the Greek Church, as well as the definition of Georgia by Merchule and Georgia’s holy mission as identified by Zosime (see section 3.2.2), illustrates the importance of linguistic identity. Obviously, the Georgian language was a relevant issue and Georgians were defending Christian doctrine being preached in Georgian. Fighting for faith at the same time was fighting for language. Ilia Chavchavadze (1984: 608) wrote:

For us, Christianity is more than living according to Christ: it means our motherland, Georgia; it means that we are Georgians. Today all Transcaucasia makes no distinction between the Georgians and Christianity — they are one and the same thing. Instead of saying that someone became a Christian, they say, we say he became a Georgian. Our clergy knew only too well that fatherland and nationality, united by faith and conjoined with it, are an invincible weapon and shield in the face of the enemy. All sermons were designed to uplift the meaning of fatherland and nationality to the height of faith so that all people might serve these three intertwined, sacred and great objects with the utmost dedication.

Ilia's linguistic movement started as language reform (see below) and continued as a fight for the right to use Georgian, in particular in the church and in education:

In Russia, all non-Russian peoples are independent when it comes to administering their churches. The Armenians, Muslims, Jews, etc. are free in their religious affairs; they have religious schools of their own, in which children are taught in their native tongues and where much attention is paid to studying everything that is relevant to them. And their own clerics are administrating these schools independently. Strangely enough, only the Christian Orthodox Georgians are deprived of this right as though they are being punished for being Orthodox Christians. (Chavchavadze 1984: 678)

Educational reform is central to nation formation, which requires mass literacy and turns language into an effective boundary marker (A. D. Smith 2009: 82). Georgian could not compete with Russian unless it was modernised and used in different spheres. The *tergdaleulni* repeatedly demanded the development of a literary language closer to the spoken language of the ordinary people. Unlike most colonised people in Eastern Europe, Georgians already had a 'high' culture in the form of literary tradition and ecclesiastical language, but it was restricted to the élite (Broers 2004: 90). It had to be transformed into a vernacular-based secular culture to gain the support of the masses. Therefore, the *tergdaleulni* standardised a 'low' style and used it in literature and the printed media, introducing a style of narrative prose, the ethics of debate and reporting (Rayfield 2000: 179) and, based on a new standard, they created a modern, secular culture. Such use of language is

identified by Anderson (1983) as the crucial point in the creation of national identities. The *tergdaleulni* went through all the steps of language planning (see section 2.4), including graphization, unified orthography and corpus planning.

One of the challenges faced by the nationalist leaders was the diversity of Georgian identities since the fragmentation of the country until the Russian annexation, especially in places where the primary language was not Georgian but other Kartvelian languages. To overcome the language barrier, leaders needed not only unifying ideas, but also effective institutions and domains, where the language could be used. Promoting Georgian as a mother tongue was the main goal of the *Society for the Spread of Literacy among Georgians* (established in 1879). The Society taught Iakob Gogebashvili's *deda ena* (Mother Tongue), a systematic Georgian grammar for children (Jones 2005: 41). Literacy among the Georgians increased significantly thanks to the efforts of the Society, which sent textbooks and teachers to different parts of Georgia. This was especially important in Samegrelo, where the government started introducing Megrelian as a medium of instruction (see section 4.1.3) and in Adjara, where there was much anti-Georgian propaganda. The activities of the society went beyond the limits suggested by its name (Parsons 1987: 268). Through private donations, it supported libraries, collected old manuscripts, recorded folklore and trained teachers and, most importantly, fought social and provincial divisions by promoting Georgian as a national language. Its achievements earned it the name 'school of the Georgian nation' (Reisner 2004).

Despite strict censorship, the Georgian press and theatre also served as regular promoters of the Georgian language and Georgian national and civic

consciousness (Jones 2005: 34). *Iveria* (1882, #11: 90) emphasised the role of Georgian theatre in strengthening national consciousness. This was a period when the contemporary Russian administration, unlike Vorontsov, considered Georgian theatre as ‘dangerous’, as it increasingly stood for the cultivation of Georgian identity, and the administration stopped supporting it financially. The theatre’s building was confiscated and strict censorship was established over its repertoire. Nevertheless, the Georgian theatre continued to perform. Theatres opened in other big cities, too. Most popular were patriotic plays. A Georgian writer, Ekaterine Gabashvili (Klde #7, 1913), recalls an event in 1882: during the premiere of a patriotic show: ‘The old Georgian flag was brought to the stage. The whole audience stood up in front of this symbol of Georgia’s independence. Some people cried.’ This event outraged the Russian administration. Russian journalists tried to make fun of it and advised Georgians: ‘Don’t show this flag again. Sell it to the circus to cover the theatre’s expenses’ (*Droeba* 1882, # 10).

*Droeba* and *Iveria* regularly alerted their readers to events in Europe and national-liberation movements in various parts of the world, although the *tergdaleulni*’s movement sought the regeneration of the historic and linguistic community rather than independence. Nevertheless, it is impossible to overestimate the *tergdaleulni*’s role in shaping modern Georgian identity. As Jones (2005: 31) states, they were a vital link to Georgia’s Social Democrats, who combined the *tergdaleulni*’s ideas with socialist ideas (see next section).

In this respect Georgian Social Democrats or Mensheviks (see section 2.3.1), who were also nationalist (Jones 2005: 2), shared the concerns of the *tergdaleulni*, considering cultural autonomy the best way to secure national self-

determination. Before the October Revolution (1917) no single party in Georgia supported political autonomy. Nevertheless, shortly after the Revolution, the head of the Social Democrats, Noe Zhordania, led the country to independence (Jones 2005: 234-266).

#### **4.2.3 Independent Georgia**

The *tergdaleulni* movement was challenged by a younger educated generation of the Marxists in the beginning of the twentieth century. The formation of different political parties in Georgia was a natural consequence of capitalism, which progressed slowly. After almost a century of Russian rule, roads remained unpaved and impassable in winter. The first hospital was built only in 1872 (Jones 2005: 12). The building of factories was restricted, since Russia viewed Georgia as a mere supplier of raw resources and a market for Russian goods. By the beginning of the twentieth century, there were only about thirty factories in Georgia (Gachechiladze 1995: 28). Nevertheless, the political culture of the population was growing and several political parties emerged. Among them, the Social Democrats were the largest and most popular among Georgians. Drawing on Caucasian traditions of coexistence and cooperation, the Georgian Social Democrats were able to develop an appealing ideology of class unity across ethnic lines instead of seeking independence over nationalist opponents (Jones 2005: 16-17). In 1908 Zhordania wrote:

[T]he Georgian people [...] want national schooling, national theatre [...] they thirst more for Georgian literature and culture today, but nationalist politics they reject as before [...] Georgian Social



Democracy demands cultural autonomy [...] not political autonomy.

(Zhordania 1922: 58)

The Social Democrats were the first Marxists to show that nationalism did not contradict socialism. They filtered Marxist ideas through the Georgian culture (Jones 2005: 29; 47). They saw this as a way of retaining power. Later they started identifying themselves more with nationalist ideas and declared independence on 26 May 1918.

During its short existence (1918-21), the Democratic Republic of Georgia established state borders, carried out juridical reform, created a regular army, confiscated land from landlords and sold it cheaply to peasants, and declared Georgian a state language (Silogava & Shengelia 2007: 208-213; 223-230). Despite a difficult economic and financial situation, many reforms were carried out in the spheres of education and culture: for instance, the university and conservatoire were established, the first Georgian opera was staged and thousands of Georgian schoolbooks were printed (Gachechiladze 1995: 33).

At the same time, Russia and Turkey were encouraging separatist movements on Georgia's territory. Turks occupied south and south-eastern Georgia, but abandoned the territory following their defeat in WWI. Social Democrats viewed the middle class as the core of the nation. The Bolsheviks, the only party who did not support independence, considered the middle class the major enemy of the 'world revolution' and organised uprisings in Shida Kartli against the new European-style government (Gachechiladze 1995: 31). In March 1918, Abkhaz Bolsheviks demanded unification with Soviet Russia, whose

soldiers had entered Abkhazia. Armenia also had territorial disputes with Georgia demanding the lands in Javakheti, Adjara and Kartli and attacked Georgia in December 1918 (Silogava & Shengelia 2007: 215-216). Despite such a difficult military-political situation, the Democratic Republic of Georgia was able to maintain its territorial integrity and statehood. The Georgian army was able to make the Russian and Armenian armies withdraw, restoring its jurisdiction on respective territories.

The Georgian government, confronted by mutual antagonisms between different ethnic groups, had to elaborate ethnic policy. The Act of Independence (26 May, 1918) stated that within its boundaries, the Republic guaranteed equal civil and political rights to its citizens irrespective of their ethnicity, religion, sex and social status (The Act of Independence 1992: 4). The members of the newly elected National Council (later renamed Parliament) included not only Georgians, but also Russians, Armenians, Azeris, Abkhazians, Ossetians and Jews (Silogava & Shengelia 2007: 208). Records of the sessions of the Constitutional Commission (formed on 12 March, 1919) reveal the plans of the government for establishing a nation-state. The head of the Commission said: ‘Nowadays our duty is to create a whole firm national body [...] [T]he minorities must acknowledge that our republic is their homeland too’ (Archive, fund 1833, description 1, cases 180-181: 177, 180).

The Constitution was adopted (21 February 1921) and it was one of the most democratic constitutions of the contemporary world. According to article 107 (Constitution of Georgia 1992: 30), autonomy was granted to Abkhazia, Adjara and Saingilo (currently in Azerbaijan). It must be noted that following the

withdrawal of the Russian army, Abkhazia was governed by the democratically elected government, which in 1919 adopted the Act of Abkhazian Autonomy within Georgia (Silogava & Shengelia 2007: 214). As for Adjara, once the Turks had left, its Muslim population demanded reunification with Georgia in 1920. Articles 129-137 (Constitution of Georgia 1992: 34-36) dealt with ethnic minority rights and stated that all ethnic minorities had a right to free socio-political and cultural development and education in their own languages, as well as to form ethnic unions. The local governments had to operate not only in Georgian, but also in ethnic minority languages in places where the population of a minority exceeded 20 percent of the population. Parliamentarians who had not mastered the Georgian language well enough to deliver speeches in Georgian could do so in their native language.

Although the Constitution of Georgia was never implemented, as the Red Army annexed Georgia and later incorporated it into the Soviet Union (see chapter 5), it still played a significant role in Georgia's history. Together with the Act of Independence, it served as a basis for the struggle for independence in the following decades and the restoration of independence at the end of the twentieth century (see chapter 6).

### **4.3 Conclusion**

Despite political differences, various nationalist groups in Georgia were all forward-looking, pushing for progress and Western-style democracy. They regarded national and social issues as intertwined. The combination of the ideas of social democracy and nationalism made it possible to lead Georgia towards

independence. While the liberal Marxism of the Social Democrats attracted the Georgians with their ideas of ‘human emancipation’ and liberation, deriving its value from fundamental goals of humanity, rather than ‘narrowly nationalist’ movements, the lack of political continuity in the history of Georgia could have become an obstacle to sovereignty. But continuity of culture, and most importantly that of the language, compensated. This chapter showed the ways in which language was conceptualised by nationalist thought as it attempted to mobilise the masses and create common identity. The *tergdaleulni* changed the meaning of language as a modern symbolic phenomenon and as a bond between different social groups. Thanks to their efforts, an ‘imagined community’ of Georgians gradually took form. The Georgian language served not only as a medium for social integration, but also, thanks to its symbolic significance, weakened the dialectical barriers, thus, turned into a national language.

In the period of independence, the Georgian state tried to implement a pluralistic policy towards its multiethnic population and gain back the hearts of historic minorities that had been alienated through colonial policy. But to counter this, the ethnic conflicts inspired by the Bolsheviks during the short existence of independent Georgia provided a narrative of oppression of minorities, as well as the narrative of disloyal ethnicities. These narratives were used extensively by the Soviet and post-Soviet nationalists, as shown in the next chapters.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Language and identity in Georgia under Soviet rule**

Language policy was central to Soviet nationalities policy, the ostensible goal of which was to build a supranational, classless society. The Bolshevik Party programme, adopted in 1903 and proclaiming the belief in the equality of nations, promised equal rights to all nationalities, including education in their own language and the right to secede from the Russian empire (see section 2.3.2). After the Revolution, the Bolsheviks found themselves confronted with the practical task of gaining the support of the non-Russian population and controlling the former multi-ethnic empire. Nationalities policy, with its key focus on language, was viewed as an instrument for fulfilling this task. The Bolsheviks believed that by supporting and encouraging national languages and cultures they could gain the loyalty of local leaders and populations. Later, when all peoples of the Soviet Union reached the level of development of Great Russians, the Bolsheviks would have the opportunity to abolish national boundaries. The erosion of national consciousness and the emergence of proletarian consciousness would contribute to the unity of the world — the universal civilising mission of the Russian people: to design a truly international and attractive model of the state with a single Soviet identity.

Therefore, in the early Soviet years, the Bolsheviks supported the development of officially recognised nationalities that were identified with a single language and territory. However, this practice, instead of contributing to the

creation of a homogeneous nation and a single Soviet identity, in reality resulted in ethno-national identities becoming the most important identities for Soviet citizens. This threatened the realisation of the goal of the Socialist Revolution. For decades, the Soviet leadership and scholars were vigorously changing the implementation of the policy, adjusting it to the needs of holding the state together, simultaneously denying the existence of national aspirations. But the last decades of the Soviet regime showed national tensions and the USSR became a ‘volcano of nations’ causing explosive realignment of social and political forces (Brzezinski 1989: 1).

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, a number of analyses of Soviet nationalities policy have appeared in the West. Much of the literature focuses on the contradictory and experimental character of the policy. It increased the potential for ethnic conflict among groups whose national aspirations were ignored, then suddenly emerged and consequently led to the collapse of the empire, a conquest which went largely hand-in-hand with armed conquest of independent states. The general accuracy of the detailed interpretations presented and shared by many academics, such as Suny (1993; 1998), Kaiser (1994), Brubaker (1994; 1996), Pipes (1997), Laitin (1998), Martin (2001), Beissinger (2002), J. Smith (2005) and Hirsch (2005), is not in question, but it is important not only to acknowledge varying top-down processes towards different groups, but also to distinguish them from bottom-up policies. After giving an overview of Soviet language policy in the larger context of the nationalities policy (section 5.1), the chapter then discusses the nationalist aspirations of the Georgians under Soviet rule and shows how the Georgian language gradually became a key element in the struggle for independence (section 5.2).

## 5.1 Top-down policy

Before the Revolution, Lenin had declared that the Bolsheviks supported national self-determination not *per se*, but for pragmatic reasons, to mobilise the support of ethnic minorities, and that secession would be opposed if it was against the interests of the proletariat (see section 2.3.2). After the 1917 revolution, the right to secede was realised in the cases of Finland, the Baltic states and Poland. The independence of Georgia was also accepted, but the country was later annexed (see section 5.2) and in 1922, the Soviet Union was established. Before splitting in 1936, the three Soviet Socialist republics of Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan formed the Federal Union of Soviet Socialist Republics of Transcaucasia (J. Smith 2005: 199). They were declared to be sovereign states with the right to secession, but this right was primarily symbolic (Coppieters 2002: 91). Granting ‘sovereignty’ was determined by the practical need to overcome hostility towards the Soviet regime, a hostility common not only in Georgia, but also in many other places sovietised by force. Taking into account that the spread of the October Revolution — created in Russia by Russians and therefore really a Russian revolution — was bitterly opposed in many of the places that gained independence after the October Revolution (for example, in Georgia), and considering that their nationalisms were still very powerful, the Soviets had to win non-Russians over to the side of the Revolution (Haugen 1985: 12). Collaborating with the national leaders of borderlands meant attempting to sideline the national-political aspirations of formerly independent states but allowing their cultural development. Their consciousness had to be not political, but historical and cultural — the goal to be achieved by nationalities policy in the transitional period from capitalism,

and in many cases from feudalism (see section 2.3.3), to socialism. Local nationalisms could interfere with the Bolsheviks' main plan, and the Soviets decided to neutralise national élites and gain their trust by involving them in the building of a socialist society. In order to reach local audiences and overcome distrust towards Great Russians, it seemed necessary to grant those regions the right to some kind of self-determination – formal recognition of the independence of the union republics, a declaration on the equality of all ethnic groups and their languages, and the granting of the right to cultural freedom. The Soviet Union, the first state in history to place the national principle at the base of its federal structure (ignoring Switzerland), gave no real political sovereignty for its nationalities. Cultural, ethnographic, but not political or intellectual diversity was accepted. A constitutional recognition of the multinational character of the Soviet population and the establishment of fifty-three national-territorial units with official status, including the right to self-determination (secession for the union republics), created the psychological illusion that the peoples had some kind of control over their own destinies. The Bolsheviks still opposed any attempt at decentralisation in the economic and political sphere, but thought that granting cultural privileges and freedom to local national leaders who had previously fought the Bolsheviks could overcome their bourgeois mentality and secure their political loyalty. The task was not easy and comprised two main aims: as true Marxists, the Bolsheviks had to fight against the bourgeois ideology, that is nationalism, and, at the same time, to promote and encourage the national consciousness of diverse ethnic groups, as a transitional stage to the supra-national state, again in accordance with Marxism (see section 2.3). The approach to this dual task was



later formulated by Stalin, in 1928: the state was to be ‘national in form, socialist in content’ (see section 2.3.3).

Since the ethnic groups of the Soviet Union varied in their level of development according to Marx’s historical timeline (see section 2.3.1), policies towards them also differed. Soon after the Revolution, Lenin (1965: 195-196) explained that ‘different nations advance in the same historical direction, but by very different zigzags and by-paths [...] [M]ore cultured nations obviously proceed in a way that differs from that of the less cultured nations [...] [W]e must not act in a stereotyped way’. Well aware of the difficulties faced by the new regime in terms of national policy during the transitional period of overcoming bourgeois nationalism, Lenin was in favour of special measures for some nations. These measures would not be necessary if people had no specific national features. But, in Lenin’s opinion, there were no such people, and socialist society could be built only by helping all ethnic groups reach the next stage of their development (Lenin 1965: 195-196). Taking into account the nationalisms of ‘cultured nations’, such as that of the Georgians, who after the Revolution formed independent states and threatened to run counter to the establishment of socialism (G. Smith 1996: 4), the goal of communism had to be reached step by step. The first step was to use the local élite for transmitting the universal doctrine of communism to local people in their native tongues. In this way, communism would not seem like an alien ideology imposed by the Russian authorities, but rather would make Soviet power seem internal and native. As Stalin, People’s Commissar for Nationalities, explained in 1920, making Soviet power ‘near and dear’ required ‘that all Soviet organs in the border regions should as far as possible be recreated by local people

acquainted with the manner of life, habits, customs, and language of the native population' (Stalin 1953a: 370).

### **5.1.1 Language and the construction of nationalities**

National development implied several measures, including the creation of administrative units based on ethno-linguistic affiliations; reinforcing (in some cases, inventing) ethno-national identities through the manipulation of census data, languages, alphabets and history, and creating social conditions which would preserve old and newly established and officially recognized nationalities. In some places, particularly in Central Asia, new nations were artificially created (Mirsky 1997: 2). As Roeder (1991: 205) observes, '[t]he indigenous cadre was given an institutionalized monopoly of the public expression of ethnic identity, that is, it defined the ethnic markers that distinguished the nationality [. . .]. In the extreme, the markers identified by these élites defined new ethnic groups, such as Tajiks, that had not previously been communities with which élites and the masses had identified'. The local cadres were given the power to monopolise the mobilisation of resources for large-scale political action, i.e. they were assigned the role of gatekeepers, determining when an ethnic group could mobilise politically, since all the means of communication (print and broadcast media in local languages) and access to public places (halls, auditoriums, squares) were in their hands. The role of gatekeeper was to pursue the instrumental strategy of social transformation intended by the central government and, in return, local cadres were rewarded with a privileged position, as well as with material rewards (Roeder 1991: 206). Therefore, they were holding on to their status by being reliable servants of

socialism and played a critical role in the realisation of the Bolsheviks' plans – to remove political agendas from national movements and the political power needed for nationalism, that is, to encourage the building of nations which would later be referred to by Stalin as 'socialist nations' (see section 5.1.2), and which constituted titular nations of the union republics. There were fifteen of them by 1945. The titular populations of the union republics, even those who previously enjoyed political sovereignty, had to be satisfied with self-determination within their historical homelands, the borders of which were drawn in an ethno-federation of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. The nation-builders were encouraged to think of their homeland as the identity-marker of the ethno-republic and ethno-nation (G. Smith 1998: 6). The titular groups did not have to do anything to belong to the nations in which they were born. Their membership in respective 'imagined communities' was not only guaranteed, but even forced, through the strategy accomplished by national cadres. These cadres were assigned to create a new, local educated élite of professionals and intelligentsia which could take pride in enjoying privileged conditions within designated areas, where they had their own academies of science, universities, theatres, opera houses and so on. These nations considered their respective republics to be their exclusive homelands, and ethnic minorities were not considered part of them. The titular nations of each union republic took full advantage of their privileges. For example, by 1970, while 67% of the whole population of Georgia belonged to the titular nation, 83% of all university students were ethnic Georgians (Roeder 1991: 207).

Besides the titular nations, in each union republic there were ethnic minorities which, according to their level of development, did not attain the status

of a nation. Many of them were granted the status of autonomous republic (twenty in total), autonomous district (eight in total) or autonomous area (ten in total), but over fifty ethnic groups received no official status at all. Within such administrative units, many ethnic minorities were treated as 'guests' or non-indigenous settlers after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Independence did not provide them with equality (see section 6.2.1). For example, in 1991, president Zviad Gamsakhurdia told foreign journalists that Ossetians are unwanted guests in Georgia and they should 'go back' to North Ossetia (Brook 1991).

The ranking of national-territorial units had nothing to do with population size. Some larger groups had lesser status than some smaller groups. Granting some kind of autonomy to those ethnic groups which had already developed national consciousness could be explained by the Bolshevik belief that this could help gain the hearts of non-Russians. But it does not explain the reason for granting autonomy or enforcing ethnic consciousness on the groups where it was not strong or previously did not exist at all. There were other reasons behind each case and the three territories within the Soviet Socialist Republic of Georgia which were granted autonomous status (the Abkhazian Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic, the Ajarian Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic and the Ossetian Autonomous District), are good illustrations of some of those reasons. The titular nationalities in the Abkhazian and Ossetian autonomies were in the minority, but the Soviets needed to recompense them with autonomous status, because they took the Bolshevik side in the civil war and were expecting a reward for their support. The creation of the Ajarian ASSR, however, had foreign policy reasons behind it: to satisfy the demands of Kemalist Turkey (J. Smith 2005: 55). The fact is that

Ajarians were Georgians who converted to Islam when they came under Ottoman rule in 1614-1878 (Hirsch 2005: 133). The paradox was in designating the Ajarian autonomy as a religious enclave in an officially atheist state.

Each administrative unit was based on its language and culture and, in this way, as A. D. Smith (1991: 147-148) explains, the whole population was organised into recognisable *ethnies* by ‘selecting, fusing, even inventing appropriate languages and ranking them all in a hierarchy of ethno-national size and strategic importance. Thus small groups like Udmurts and Evenki were classified as peoples, while much larger and more developed communities, like the Georgians or Uzbeks, were treated as nations with their own sovereign territorial republics, administrations, party organizations, languages and cultures’. National development and the rediscovery of national cultures and languages among groups with their own administrative units were to be promoted by the new administration and new cultural élite. This élite emerged mainly from the working class and peasantry after the execution during the terror years of the old national intelligentsia (educated in the Tsarist period and therefore not to be trusted). They were used to the Bolsheviks’ own advantage, to become new national leaders and promote a culture – national in form – under complete equality and brotherhood, unlike western nations, whose national consciousness evolved in contexts of inequality and mutual enmity.

Under the state-sponsored policy of *korenizatsiia* (see section 2.3.3), the stated goals of which were to eliminate the economic and cultural backwardness of some peoples of the former Russian empire, to bring them to the same level of bourgeois development as some of the advanced nations of the country and to

harmonize their development with the Soviet regime, the new élite, known as ‘national cadres’, would keep alive historical memories and further develop national consciousness by promoting distinctive national identities of non-Russian peoples as represented by history, folklore, music, costumes, etc. (Martin 2001:13). But the main focus was on national languages, following Stalin’s idea that to make non-Russian peasants feel Soviet power as natives, they must function in their native language.

In each national territory the language of the titular nationality had to become an official language and be used in all areas of modern life: local administration, press, education, science, etc. The practical difficulty of fulfilling this task lay in the fact that most languages did not have scripts and had never been standardised and the population was largely illiterate, approaching 100% in some places (Kirkwood 1991: 62). The selection and codification of languages in such a linguistically heterogeneous country required an enormous effort from scholars. The first thing to decide was which script to adopt. Cyrillic was rejected for ideological purposes, as it was associated with Tsarist imperialism and Great Russian chauvinism (see section 2.3.2). The Arabic script used by Muslim groups was also undesirable, as the influence of Islam was to be contained. Gradually Latin gained favour as a neutral script. All the old writing systems, except Georgian and Armenian, were latinised. The new written languages used the Latin script (Martin 2001: 185), only to be cyrillicised in a few years when the policy of russification started (see section 5.1.2). This process of graphisation went hand in hand with the eradication of illiteracy under the slogan ‘Down with illiteracy’. Literacy centres, reading libraries and other cultural organisations were established

everywhere. The mass eradication of illiteracy was one of the greatest achievements of the Communists. According to Kurganov (1951: 256), by 1939 the number of literates for the whole country had reached 81.2% of the population.

After graphisation, the next practical tasks for scholars were grammatication and lexicalisation of new official languages in order to enable them to be used in public life and education and to reflect the new political and social reality brought about by the Revolution. At the same time, the whole process of codification (graphisation, grammatication and lexicalisation) had a hidden agenda: to segregate related ethnic groups from each other and establish distinct national identities, as demonstrated by the Moldavian example in section 2.4.1. Political factors also contributed to the standardisation of languages in Central Asia, where different standards were developed for mutually comprehensible Turkic dialects, creating languages maximally distinct from each other (Grenoble 2003: 138). Language also became a tool for defining a nation as it happened in the case of Belorussian nation in spite of the weakness of the Belorussian identity. Stalin, who was accused of artificially cultivating Belorussian nationality, maintained that indeed there was a Belorussian nation and it could develop only in its own language (J. Smith 2005: 27). Many smaller groups did not have any national consciousness, despite Lenin's (1965: 196) opinion that there were no groups without national features. According to the 1923 census data, many answering the census question about nationality described themselves as Muslims, peasants or named the village or town they were from. As part of their development, people unaware of their identity had to be told who they were (White 2000: 253). Thus, the population of the USSR was classified not only according to

territorial factors (different levels of administrative units), but also based on language and cultural similarities.

Besides using language for controlling national identities and, in case of the absence of such, creating them and organising people into nationalities, other measures were also taken. Soviet internal passports had a fixed, biologically defined, single, formally unchangeable ethnicity called 'nationality'.<sup>30</sup> It was transmitted by descent and officially recognised. Unlike the English term, 'nationality' in the Soviet context did not describe the relationship between a state and an individual and had nothing to do with citizenship. Soviet citizens belonged to various officially recognised nationalities based on Stalin's definition of a 'nation' (see section 2.3.3) which suggested the unity of territory, language, shared history and culture. The list of nationalities of Soviet people was created for the All-Union Census (1926) questionnaire, in which the most important question was about mother tongue. The questionnaire was elaborated by the experts together with central administrators and local leaders. There were debates about establishing an official vocabulary of identity categories, conscious that the adoption of particular terms could influence the census results, which then would influence many other decisions concerning borders disputes, national education, the distribution of land, etc. Many suggested using the Russian *narodnost'* (people) instead of the foreign word *natsional'nost'* (nationality). Georgian participants opposed this suggestion, insisting that Georgians already were a developed nation and did not want to be categorised as a people. They also complained about a

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<sup>30</sup> Except for the offspring of interethnic marriages, who could choose either of the parents' nationalities when they received their passports at the age of 16 (Brubaker 1996: 31).



number of peoples designated as separate nationalities, such as Megrelians, Svans, Laz, Bats and Ajarians, maintaining that they were just religious or tribal subgroups of the Georgian nation. Having them on the list of nationalities was understood as an attempt to undermine the Georgian nation and a continuation of the colonial politics of ‘divide and rule’. It turned out that more than fifty percent of Megrelians registered themselves as Georgians. Later Georgians maintained that more of them would have registered as Georgians if census takers had not insisted that they were Megrelians (Hirsch 2005: 132-133).

The final list of Soviet nationalities identified 172 peoples. In Georgia this list included Georgians, Turks, Armenians and Russians, whereas Laz, Megrelians and Svans were listed as part of the Georgian nation. From now on, the term ‘nationality’ included nations, peoples, national groups and ethnographic groups. Nations were defined as peoples making up the main population of union and autonomous republics. Peoples were the main population of autonomous districts and regions, as well as the big groups living compactly in defined regions and having literacy in their own language. Ethnographic groups included peoples representing ‘the remainders of different tribes’. National groups included those peoples whose main mass lived outside the USSR (Hirsch 1997: 272-274), such as Germans, Poles, Finns, Chinese and others.

After coming up with a list of official nationalities, Soviet policy makers needed to match former linguistic diversity with nationalities. In order to do so, they either differentiated closely related language varieties, as in the abovementioned example of Turkic dialects of Central Asia, or consolidated mutually incomprehensible languages into one national language (Grenoble 2003:

47). Languages were ranked according to a hierarchy of nationalities and the degree of development. Educational policies towards different groups were influenced by this hierarchy and varied from one year of schooling to a university education. Some languages (among them Georgian) had the necessary terminology, textbooks for various fields of science, highly qualified teachers/professors, the media, etc., whereas in many new literary languages it was impossible to teach various subjects because specialized vocabulary was lacking. Instead of elaborating scientific terminology for these languages, the language of instruction in national secondary schools was changed to Russian. Such a language shift made it easier to assimilate and russify the minorities. In some cases, turning to Russian as a language of instruction would happen earlier – even in the second year of primary school – because some languages had a limited vocabulary. As a result, such groups (for example, Abkhazians) became more fluent in Russian than in their mother tongue. Although russification was censured and rejected by the state, the role of *lingua franca* was reserved for Russian. The Russian language still opened more opportunities for social mobility. This was especially true for populations in places where national consciousness was weak and/or the degree of language development was low.

Even only one year of schooling required alphabets and standard language, therefore a wide range of languages underwent varying degrees of language planning, facilitating the development of a national literary culture. This supported Stalin's assertion that proletarian culture does not cancel out native culture (see section 2.3.3), which remains 'national in form'. National languages and cultures would bloom in the period when socialism was not yet established. The Bolsheviks

predicted that when socialism triumphed throughout the world, nations would merge and form a single proletarian society, which presumably would require a common culture and a single common language. This language would be neither Great Russian nor German, but something new, since languages would have opportunities 'to enrich one another on the basis of cooperation'. Stalin wrote:

*Firstly*, Lenin never said that national differences must disappear and that national languages must merge into one common language within the borders of *a single state before the victory of socialism on a world scale*. On the contrary, Lenin said something that was the very opposite of this, namely, that "national and state *differences* among peoples and countries [. . .] will continue to exist *for a very, very long time* even *after* the dictatorship of the proletariat has been established on a *world scale*. (Stalin 1955: 374)

Stalin foresaw the process of assimilation later, on a voluntary basis. Therefore, in the first phase of language planning and policy no attempts were made to establish a single language, despite the demands of some Bolsheviks. Imposing a single universal language was considered an expression of Great Russian chauvinism and therefore attacked by Stalin. In one of his speeches, he emphasised:

Some people (Kautsky, for instance) talk of the creation of a single universal language and the dying away of all other languages in the period of socialism. I have little faith in this theory of a single, all-embracing language. Experience, at any rate, speaks against rather than for such a theory. Until now what has happened has been that the

socialist revolution has not diminished but rather increased the number of languages; for, by stirring up the lowest sections of humanity and pushing them on to the political arena, it awakens to new life a number of hitherto unknown or little-known nationalities.

(Stalin 1954c: 141)

The outcome of supporting the development of small nationalities and their languages was a great step forward in the sphere of education in general, and in promoting small languages in particular. Another, although unintended, result of such a policy was that the ethnic identities of those nations which had an official homeland in the Soviet Union were significantly strengthened, where otherwise, at least in some places, they could have disappeared. But this policy of pluralism and linguistic federalism did not last long. It changed in the 1930s, when Stalin declared the victory of socialism in the USSR and no longer deplored the idea of a world language (Goodman 1956: 86). Nationality and language policy changed according to Stalin's reversed view, more focused on russification.

### **5.1.2 Russification**

The nationalities policy of the transitional period, with the help of language policy and census mechanisms, effectively taught Soviet citizens who they were. They were supposed to define themselves as representatives of one of the official nationalities. After the 1926 census, nationality became a major marker of identity in the Soviet Union, mainly according to the mother tongue as an obligatory marker of national identity. Even peoples who previously had not shown any level of national consciousness started describing themselves as members of

nationalities and used this term to claim their political and economic rights (Hirsch 2005: 145-146). This led Stalin to write the article 'The National Question and Leninism' in 1929 (see section 2.3.3), in which he concluded that, following the defeat of capitalism in Russia, new so-called 'socialist nations' had emerged to take the place of 'bourgeois nations'. The major difference between 'bourgeois' and 'socialist' nations was that the former were aimed against Great Russian chauvinism as a form of racial discrimination practised by Russians against minorities, preventing nations from merging into a single union, whereas with the establishment of 'socialist nations', there was no longer a need to fight against Russians, and the situation reversed to fighting against 'local nationalisms' (see section 2.3.3), as ugly forms of anti-Russian movements.

The fight against 'local nationalisms' was intended to suppress political identities which might compete with communist ideology. It was therefore accompanied by the extermination of nationalist élites (especially in 1936-38). Everyone associated with nationalist ideas was labelled 'counter-revolutionary' and either killed or sent to the Siberian camps. Survivors were terrorised. At the same time, some nations whose main mass lived outside the USSR (see section 5.1.1) were declared 'enemy nations' because they were believed to have ties with foreign nation-states, which could be used against the USSR. They were therefore subjected to ethnic cleansing (Martin 2001: 311). They could no longer be listed among official nationalities of the Soviet state. Accordingly, their national schools were abolished, and a few years later mass terror started against them, including arrests, deportation to remote areas and imprisonment in concentration camps, as well as the execution of almost one million individuals. During WWII, five

republics (the Volga German ASSR, the Chechen-Ingush ASSR, the Balkar Autonomous District, the Karachai Autonomous Region and the Autonomous Socialist Republic of Kalmykia) were abolished after their populations were accused of collaborating with the Germans (Hirsh 1997: 307, footnote 122). This discriminatory policy was extended to so-called 'indigenous' nationalities (among them Meskhetians from Georgia) as well. In the early 1930s, for political and economic reasons, the Soviet government decided to reduce the number of official nationalities by consolidating smaller groups into larger national-territorial units (Hirsh 1997: 273).<sup>31</sup> The process was accompanied by the eradication of traditional, sometimes ancient, institutions in order to speed up evolution. Many village and district-level ethnic units were abolished; minority political and cultural leaders were accused of nationalism and repressed during the Great Terror of 1936-1938.

Thus, fear of Russian chauvinism shifted to fears of local nationalisms. Correspondingly, with regard to nationalities and language policies, the emphasis shifted from pluralism to centralism (Haugen 1985: 12). In 1938, the government of the USSR decreed the teaching of Russian obligatory in all national schools. The vocabulary, grammar and alphabets of national languages were subjected to alterations: numerous non-Russian peoples switched from the Latin to the Cyrillic alphabet between the end of the 1930s and the early 1940s and the Latin alphabet was declared 'anti-proletarian' (Ornstain 1959: 2-3). The growing campaign to replace latinised alphabets with alphabets based on the Cyrillic script was officially

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<sup>31</sup> The list was reduced again to 104 in the 1970 census.

explained as a response to the democratically expressed wish of the Soviet people and was justified in terms of ensuring access to Russian culture (*Komunisti*, 1938, 8 February) and language for Soviet citizens. Russian was declared an instrument of the ‘most advanced culture in the world,’ from which the national languages of the USSR draw a ‘life-giving elixir’ (Goodman 1956: 93) and it was necessary to be acquainted with this language in order to share Russian civilisation. According to the central newspaper *Izvestiya* (1938, 14 April) and the Georgian newspaper *Sabchota mastsavlebeli* (15 January 1939), Russian had to be dominant, since this was a language in which Lenin and Stalin wrote their ‘incomparable’ and ‘immortal’ works. As Kirkwood (1991: 63) observes, ‘[d]e facto if not de jure Russian was thereby acknowledged as being of more importance than other Soviet languages’. On 13 April 1938, the People’s Commissariat issued a resolution ordering the teaching of Russian in the non-Russian schools of Georgia from the third grade and obligatory Russian courses for three years in all universities (*Komunisti*, 1938, 15 April : 1). The Ministry of Education of the Georgian SSR offered two explanations for the low level of Russian instruction: it blamed ‘people’s enemies’ working in the sphere of education, on the one hand (*Sabchota mastsavlebeli*, 1938, 21 April: 1; *Komunisti*, 1938, 8 February: 2), and a shortage of time, qualified teachers and schoolbooks, on the other (*Sabchota mastsavlebeli*, 1939, 21 August: 2).

Despite repeated directives by the Party and the government to improve the teaching of Russian in Georgian schools, this subject is still not taught properly. Enemies in the Peoples Commissariat of Education have prevented our schools from teaching the Russian

language suitably [...] The method for teaching this language has not yet been elaborated. (*Sabchota mastsavlebeli*, 1938, 15 April: 3)

In 1939, the Ministry selected the best teachers of Russian and gave them additional training (*Sabchota mastsavlebeli*, 1939, 24 June: 3), simultaneously increasing hours of Russian instruction in schools. The results of these measures were evaluated as partly fruitful a year later (*Sabchota mastsavlebeli*, 1940, 11 December: 3) and mostly successful by the beginning of 1950s (*Sakhalkhoganatleba*, 1951, 8 August: 2).

The theory of the Great Russian language being a world language was developed by the Georgian linguist Niko Marr, whose ideas dominated Soviet linguistics in 1930s and played a key role in the development of Soviet language policy (Grenoble 2003: 55). According to Marr's linguistic theory, all languages could be divided into four types according to the level of their development.<sup>32</sup> Languages develop in a sequence of stages corresponding to the development of the economy. The highest type includes Indo-European (inflexional) languages, among them Russian (Marr 1935: 23-24). In Marr's view, only these languages had a future and a chance to contribute to the future language of the world which would come to existence once world socialism had been established. In order to reconcile his theory with Marxism, Marr declared language to be a manifestation of class. According to Marxism, there was a certain relationship between society and language, namely, the economic structure of society was the 'basis' of the

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<sup>32</sup> Marr's theory was delivered as a series of lectures at the State University of Azerbaijan in Baku in 1927 and published in 1928. See Marr 1934: 3-126.)



political, artistic, legal, philosophical and scientific views of society, which was referred to as 'superstructure'. Marr considered language to be an element of Marxist superstructure, based on the economic structure of society: 'Language is genetically connected with society, and not only the concepts expressed by words but the words themselves and their forms, their actual appearance, issue from the social structure, its superstructural worlds, and, through them, from economics, from economic life' (Marr 1936: 46-47). According to him, in a classless society based on a common economic structure, in other words, where there exists a common 'basis', there will be only one common superstructure, or a single unified language. Thus, when all nations of the USSR merged, their languages would also merge and would probably resemble Russian. In Marr's thinking, the economic basis could be changed by force; therefore it was possible to accelerate the process by imposing one language, which seemed like a process naturally coinciding with socialist development (Grenoble 2003: 57).

Since Marr was considered to be the father of Soviet linguistics, his views encouraged other linguists to start the systematic glorification of Russian and maintain its future as a world language. The logic was such: if Latin was the language of the ancient world and the early Middle Ages, French became the language of the feudal era and international diplomacy, then English became a language of capitalism, looking to the future it was obvious that Russian would be the language of the new socialist world (Zaslavsky 1950). The director of the Institute of Linguistics of the Academy of Sciences, Viktor Vinogradov, published a book entitled *The Great Russian Language* in which he glorified Russian as a great medium of communication among Soviet peoples and as a servant of

communism. He wrote: 'The Russian language as a language of high culture is the ideal and pattern for the languages of the other nationalities. From it they derive the vocabulary and phraseology relating to the ideas of Marxism-Leninism and to the process of Socialist construction' (translated by Ornstein 1959: 5). Vinogradov inspired many linguists and non-linguists alike to praise Russian. In 1950 the newspaper *Literaturnaya gazeta* published an article by Stalin's assistant Zaslavsky under the title 'The Great Language of the Epoch', which claimed that '[t]he Russian language is the first world language of international significance, which rejects sharply the destruction of character by cosmopolitanism [. . .] Nobody can regard himself as educated in the full sense and true sense of the word, if he does not understand Russian and cannot read the creations of the Russian mind in the original language' (translated by Roucek 1960: 21).

Marrists considered the borrowing of Russian lexical, grammatical and phonological patterns to be natural, logical, necessary and positive processes. For example, regarding the Komi language, they praised the fact that 'as a result of contact with Russian, prepalatal affricates have lost their affrication', thus bringing 'the phonological systems of the Komi and Russian languages closer together' (Ornstein 1959: 8-9). In this way, small languages with little linguistic resistance were heavily penetrated by Russian. Extensive and enforced borrowings from Russian, referred to as 'enrichment', modified their phonology, morphology and syntax.

The pressure for russification intensified in the 1950s, despite Stalin's strict criticism of Marr's linguistic views. Inspired by the writings of another Georgian linguist, Marr's greatest opponent, Arnold Chikobava, Stalin accused Marr of

vulgarising Marxism in his 1950 article ‘Marxism and Problems of Linguistics’ (see section 2.3.3): ‘Spare us from Marr’s Marxism. N. I. Marr really wanted and tried to be a Marxist, but he could not become one. He was only a simplifier and vulgarizer [...] I think the sooner our linguistics frees itself of Marr’s mistakes, the sooner we can lead it out of crisis’ (Stalin 1950: 30-32).

Despite Stalin’s condemnation of Marrism, russification became even stronger with the policy of internationalisation, creating circumstances where everybody needed to use Russian in order to communicate. After the Second World War, reconstruction in different parts of the Soviet Union required the migration of populations. The Soviet regime started promoting the coming together of young workers and specialists of different nationalities in various projects, such as the exploitation of virgin lands, military service, etc., justifying this move in terms of economic needs. Not only young people, but whole families (mainly Russians) were selected to work outside their home republics. More than forty million Russians moved to the union republics (Brzezinski 1989: 6), creating interethnic collective farms, factories and plants where the use of Russian became a necessity. Upward mobility in political, military and scientific spheres also required fluency in Russian. Many parents, having the right to select either a national or Russian school for their children, chose Russian schools in order to provide their children with a better future. The need for any language other than Russian was questioned (Grenoble 2003: 57). The government encouraged this tendency at all levels of education.

The conditions requiring better knowledge of Russian stimulated significant changes in the education system: in many autonomous republics

national schools were closed; the number of schools which started teaching Russian from the first grade increased; secondary schooling was reduced from eleven to ten years, reducing the number of hours spent on native language, literature and history. As a result of such changes, many more people became fluent in Russian, but linguistic assimilation did not imply a change of ethnic identity. Many Russian-speaking minorities continued to identify themselves as members of certain ethnic groups. For example, while almost 70 % of Udmurts claimed Udmurt to be their native language in the 1979 census, only 15% of them actually spoke it (Drobizheva 1985: 7). This can be explained by the fact that the census question asked respondents to name their native language rather than the language they spoke primarily. Moreover, the language question immediately followed a question on nationality, prompting respondents to correlate 'native language' with nationality. In reality many respondents were linguistically assimilated, because there were no resources for native language education, and because material incentives motivated people gradually to assimilate.

Stalin's successor, Nikita Khrushchev (1953-1964), continued and strengthened the policy of russification. In 1961 the Party adopted a new programme called the 'Communist Manifesto of the Present Epoch', which was launched at the twenty-second Party congress.<sup>33</sup> Khrushchev emphasised a great achievement in the field of national relations (namely, the fact that the boundaries of the Soviet Republics, which were erected on the foundation of nationalities, were rapidly losing their significance), and threatened those who demonstrated

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<sup>33</sup> This title was used by Khrushchev in the Report on the Program of the CPSU October 17, 1961.

See *Pravda*, 1961, 19 October: 1-10.

even ‘the slightest vestiges of nationalism’ (Khrushchev 1961: 7). Considering reactions to the Party Programme, it was obvious that any desire to preserve national cultures and languages would be understood as an expression of nationalism and would be eradicated with ‘uncompromising Bolshevik determination’ (Khrushchev 1961: 3-4 ). Unlike Stalin’s formula of ‘national in form, socialist in content’, this policy demanded the elimination of barriers separating nationalities and the development of common characteristics, i.e. loss of national identity. According to Khrushchev, the development of national languages to some degree led nations away from each other instead of helping them to ‘come together’ (Khrushchev 1961: 7). Russian had to unite them. Khrushchev referred to the Russian language and culture as ‘the key to life’ (Khrushchev 1961: 3-4) and a bridge between national cultures and world cultures. Unlike the transitional period from capitalism to socialism under Stalin (see section 5.1.1), a new transitional period was beginning: socialism was giving way to communism. Now the Party had a duty to create the necessary conditions for the fusion of all nations into a single one. In the interim period, however, the Soviet nation would consist of bilingual people who would regard Russian as the most important language and would be loyal to the broader Russian community and leadership (Vardys 1966: 324). Khrushchev also banned the writing of history which idealised the past and the cultivation of national heroes which could arouse a feeling of national pride running counter to assimilationist policies.

Khrushchev’s attempts to eradicate linguistic and ethnic diversity provoked strong dissident movements (with regard to Georgia, see section 5.2.3), showing that national aspirations were only temporarily silenced by Stalin’s repressions.

Khrushchev's successor, Leonid Brezhnev (1964-1982), suggested that the Party did not expect nationalities to abandon their separate identities, but to work more closely together and be more aware of each other's cultures (Hosking 1990: 429). He nonetheless underlined that any attempts to restrain the process of rapprochement or artificially to strengthen national distinctions would not be tolerated (Olcott 1985: 104).

The new constitution, adopted under Brezhnev's rule in 1977, did not differ greatly from the old one except with regard to language use. The use of one's mother tongue was considered a general rule in the old constitution, but only as an 'opportunity' in the new one. Article 45 (Constitution 1977: 23) stated that '[c]itizens of the USSR have [...] the opportunity to attend a school where teaching is in the native language'. Brezhnev's ideas were reflected in language policy by a greater pressure towards russification, starting from the pre-school level. The number of schools offering intensive Russian and providing language laboratories and Russian audio-visual materials increased. As the language of Lenin and of the Great Russian people, reflecting the most highly developed culture, Russian was discussed at the 1979 Tashkent (Uzbekistan) conference in which the Georgian delegation did not participate (Bilinsky 1981: 318). Nevertheless, in the early 1980s, 10 500 four-year-olds in Georgia were already being taught Russian three times a week, for thirty minutes each lesson (Bilinski 1981: 322).

The assimilationist policy was not abandoned under the next Soviet leader, Yuri Andropov (1982-1984), who advocated the study of Russian in order to enable Soviet citizens to read the works of communist leaders, such as Brezhnev.

Andropov supported making ethnic groups equal in order to diminish the gap between modernized groups and those who were still 'backwards'. Since Slavs were considered the most advanced groups of the Soviet Union, equalisation meant catching up with them. But, as Jones and Grupp (1984: 159) note, 'for those minorities who have historically led the Slavs in the modernization process or in access to high status roles, for example, the Jews, Armenians, and Georgians – equalisation meant a gradual erosion of their relative advantage'. Nevertheless, the union republics had the most extensive networks of ethnic institutions (such as Georgia) and were thus less vulnerable to assimilation than populations of administrative units at lower levels in the hierarchy (Gorenburg 2003: 32). As a result of russification, many small ethnic groups gave up their own languages for Russian. The effect of russification also depended on the location of the ethnic population. Ethnic institutions operated only locally, within designated homelands and those who lived outside ethnic territories mostly became assimilated. The role of Russian as a second language for Soviet citizens increased especially in Central Asia, Ukraine and Belorussia. In other Republics the growth of Russian was not so rapid and in Estonia it was even in decline. The policy was least successful amongst Georgians, who had a strong sense of national identity, an old and rich culture, and a written language; they were thus able to resist russification, as discussed in detail in section 5.2.1.

Although before and after the Revolution communist leaders spoke about the merging and fusing of nations, this never happened, probably because it was never intended to organise the Soviet Union as a nation-state (Martin 2001: 15). The USSR was supposed to be a supra-national state. The model of assimilation of

minorities within the union republics was also rejected, even if such assimilation was completely voluntary (Martin 2001: 32). In order to prevent the establishment of civic nations and to keep ethnic minorities isolated, the Bolsheviks implemented a language policy which prevented ethnic minorities from knowing the national languages of the union republics and effectively excluded them from the nation.

Unlike a civic attitude to a nation, which views national affiliation as something that can be acquired and, therefore, as a matter of choice, it was not a matter of choice in the USSR. Nationality was registered in internal passports and other official documents and was transmitted by descent.<sup>34</sup> The union republics only superficially resembled nation-states with their constitutions, flags, anthems, national heroes, and anniversaries of great historical events and achievements; the lack of a common language for the whole population could not produce solidarity and a common national, cultural or even territorial identity. Being a citizen of a union republic had no significance. Shanin (1989: 415) cites an interesting example of the homeland perceptions of Soviet nations: ‘answering the question “what land do you call motherland?”, the majority of Georgians living in Georgia answered “Georgia”, while the majority of non-Georgian residents answered “the USSR”.’

Titular nations viewed the union republics as their possessions and treated other ethnicities with discrimination. In some places the struggle for equality of rights within individual republics was dominated by historical and cultural claims,

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<sup>34</sup> When the system of internal passports was first introduced in 1932, nationality was registered by self-designation, but later became dependent on parental nationality.



as well as by language debates, causing nationalisms of subordinated ethnic groups to coexist with nationalisms of dominated groups. By the late 1980s, top-down policy reinforced by the titular nationalities of the union republics was an equivalent of the central policy: if the Russians had the dominant status of ‘first among equals’ in the USSR, titular nationalities had the same status within their respective homelands. Local academics engaged in politicised history writing and linguistic research (discussed in section 5.2 with regard to Georgia) and explained the origin of every nationality in the USSR in a way that created only local loyalties (Tishkov 1992: 378). Primordial identities were constructed, fetishised and nurtured through the teaching of history (often overlapping national claims in time and space), through linguistic research and through the census. This set ethnic groups within union republics against each other, making for potential conflict, which later became a reality.<sup>35</sup> The various communities of union republics organised popular fronts to protest against nationality policies, resulting in demonstrations of hundreds of thousands. In some places, local authorities had close ties with popular fronts (Lapidus 1988: 101-102) and made a series of tactical shifts towards the position of the nationalists. For example, in 1989, the Georgian Supreme Soviet, with the approval of the first secretary of the Georgian Communist party, Givi Gumbaridze, adopted the right to veto all-Union laws. In 1990, it declared ‘the restoration of independence’ as the party’s main goal (Suny 1998: 323).

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<sup>35</sup> From the very beginning the claims of ethnic minorities were deliberately aggravated by the central authorities in Moscow, who needed their support in order to retain control over the union republics (Gachechiladze 1997: 52-53).

In order to maintain the integrity of the Soviet Union, the last leader of the state, Mikhail Gorbachev (1985-1991), was ready to sacrifice many aspects of the nationalities policy. He tried to find a non-imperial legitimising principle to hold the USSR together. By declaring *glasnost* ('openness') and *perestroika* ('restructuring'), he hoped to preserve the power of the Communist Party, but instead created the conditions for nationalist movements. Georgia was a good illustration of what had gone wrong with the nationalities policy of the Soviet Union (discussed in detail in the next section). Popular discontent over language policy emerged as a dominant issue in nationalist movements within all republics at the end of the 1980s. These movements wanted to raise the status of national territories and languages. The nationalisms of Soviet nations resembled the linguistic nationalisms of small nations in the nineteenth century. The reason for this resemblance lies in the lack of civic education and political experience among the Soviet nations, for whom civic nationalism was incomprehensible, whereas understanding linguistic demands was easy. After the disintegration of the empire these movements resulted in the increased segregation of ethnic groups within the former Soviet republics in the name of ethno-national purification. In contrast to Soviet policies, nationalist movements in the union republics were focused on developing the use and authority of the native languages. The next section looks at bottom-up and top-down policies within Georgia.

## **5.2 Bottom-up policy**

Georgia was annexed by the Bolsheviks against the wishes of Lenin, who, worried about the national sensitivities of the Georgians, wished to establish a coalition

government with the Mensheviks in power in Georgia at the time (see section 4.2.3). Stalin, however, justified the annexation by noting that the Soviets were in favour of an autonomy where power would be in the hands of the workers and peasants. In his view, since only Bolsheviks could represent the interests of workers and peasants, power must be in the hands of their party and nobody else (Cvetkovski 2001). With such an approach Stalin and his supporters ignored Lenin's desire to act cautiously towards Georgians, and in 1921 the Red Army invaded Georgia. The Menshevik government fled to France and a new Bolshevik government was installed in Tbilisi (Suny 1998: 209). The Georgians vigorously resisted Bolshevik rule and remained hostile to the Soviets for years. For example, 1924 was marked by an anti-communist rebellion in Georgia. The uprising collapsed after a few days, the leaders of the revolt were executed and the sovietisation of Georgia was accomplished.

In the Soviet period, Georgian national identity was consolidated around the myths, traditions, poetry, historical memories and symbols of the past. As shown in previous chapters, Georgia had many sources from which it could create and re-create historical narratives. The myths of election, myths of Golden Age and language myths which had helped the Georgians survive over many centuries were revived. Several generations of Georgian intellectuals had no other choice but to remain largely apolitical, return to cultural resources and take advantage of the mass education system and cultural institutions to voice national feelings. The writing and teaching of history was dominated by the themes of heroism and sacrifice, ancestry and rights to territory. Ethnic symbols and traditions were also celebrated by artists, who gave 'palpable "substance" or "body" to the national

idea' (A. D. Smith 2009: 96). One of the most popular themes in poetry was the Georgian language. Linguistic research and language planning also served the goal of strengthening Georgian national identity. On the positive side, all of these aspects strengthened *kartveloba* (Georgianness) and prevented the russification of the Georgians. On the negative side, however, Georgian nationalism during the Soviet period gradually became ethnocentric as expressed by a sense of superiority, once again through the Georgian language. Before discussing Georgian ethnocentrism in section 5.2.2, section 5.2.1 looks at language planning under Soviet rule.

### **5.2.1 The impact of Soviet language policy (bottom-up policy versus top-down policy)**

The historical experiences of Soviet ethnic groups varied; language policy towards them was differed correspondingly, depending on many factors, among them the stage of nation-formation, the number of Russian speakers in the area, the linguistic differences between Russian and the local language, the status of the latter and its importance for its speakers, etc. As shown in previous chapters, the Georgian people had a well-established sense of national identity, based mainly on their language with its historical prestigious status as a *lingua sacra*, its literary traditions and its unique alphabet. The status of Georgian was strengthened during the existence of the independent state in 1918-1921, when it was an official language (see section 4.2.3). It was taught as a mandatory subject in nationalised primary and secondary schools as well as at the newly established Tbilisi University. By the time of the Revolution, Georgia had very high literacy rates

(Grenoble 2003: 116). According to the 1926 census, 53% of Georgians aged between 9 and 49 years were literate (this number increased to 89.3% by 1939 and 99% by 1959) (Jaoshvili 1968: 61). Therefore, Georgia did not undergo linguistic *korenizatsiia* ('nativisation, indigenisation'). Georgian was declared the official language of the Soviet Socialist Republic of Georgia in 1924. The Soviet authorities did not challenge the use of the Georgian alphabet and supported the development of the language, which quickly assumed a hegemonic position (Martin 2001: 77), dominating in education, the mass media and book publishing throughout the existence of the republic. For example, in 1929, 71% of all books published in the republic were in Georgian (Broers 2005). By 1970, Georgian was the first language of 98.4% ethnic Georgians, including Svans and Megrelians (Grenoble 2003: 117; Zisserman-Brodsky 2003: 209), and by 1989, 94% of Georgian children were enrolled in Georgian-language schools (Enokh 1998: 134). The 1989 census listed 3 981 045 Georgians in the USSR, of whom 3 787 000 (98.2%) lived in the Georgian SSR (Zisserman-Brodsky 2003: 209).

Furthermore, among the major Soviet nationalities, ethnic Georgians were the most concentrated (95%) within their homeland (Gachechiladze 1997: 55). By the end of the Soviet period, Georgians were one of the least russified titular groups in the Soviet Union. Knowledge of Russian was somewhat higher among males who through obligatory military service were exposed to the need to learn Russian,<sup>36</sup> but among women, especially in villages, it was very low (Chinchaladze & Dragadze 1994). Altogether, proficiency in Russian among Georgians by 1989

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<sup>36</sup> Unlike the Tsar's army, the Red Army dispersed non-Russians among Russian recruits.

stood at 32% (Broers 2005). It can be argued that there was no real threat of full russification, especially taking into account the relatively small-scale migration of skilled Russian-speaking labour to Georgia (Parsons 1982: 551) and the low representation of Russian technocratic and management élites (Broers 2005). Nevertheless, Georgians felt their native language and national identity were threatened throughout the existence of the Soviet regime, especially after the proposal in 1978 to remove Georgian as the state language from the constitution (see in details in section 5.2.3).

In terms of language planning, several important steps were made during the Soviet period. These included the creation of a central committee for terminology at the Commissariat of People's Education in 1925; the opening of the Department of Scientific Terminology in 1936; the publication of eight volumes of the Georgian dictionary between 1950 and 1964; of the *Collected Norms of the Georgian Language* in 1970; and of various explanatory, orthographic, bilingual and many other kinds of dictionaries at various times (Tabidze 1999). Kartvelian languages became the object of study at the Institute of Linguistics at Tbilisi State University and in Georgian language departments of other universities. In the 1980s a special commission was established to improve the teaching of Georgian in schools and universities (Grdzeldze 1980: 164).

Despite these steps and despite Georgian having the status of official language, the influence of Russian in Georgia continued to be significant. Russian left its mark on Georgian vocabulary, syntax and stylistics. A simple comparison of Orbeliani's Georgian dictionary (1725) (see section 3.1.2) and the dictionary of 1950-1964 reveals that in the latter approximately 120 words were borrowed

directly from Russian and more than 700 words via Russian from other languages (Chanturishvili 1980: 79). In the beginning, the editors of the latter dictionary tried to create a new technical terminology based on Georgian roots, but after a special conference organised by the Institute of Linguistics in Moscow (1959), these attempts were condemned and even those words which were borrowed from foreign languages before the nineteenth century were altered to resemble their Russian equivalents (Chanturishvili 1980: 83).

The Soviet policy of assimilation through language provoked strong resistance in Georgia. One of the expressions of such resistance was linguistic purism, based on a belief that the Georgian language had to return to its original form and provide a direct link to the glorious past. Georgian was not only worth preserving, but also possessed special, unique qualities. Teachers, journalists, writers and poets propagated language myths. The most prestigious poets (e.g. G. Leonidze, L. Asatiani, I. Abashidze, A. Kalandadze, M. Machavariani, P. Khalvashi, I. Noneshvili) dedicated many poems to their native tongue, intensifying national feelings and inspiring people to love their great ancient alphabet and language. These poems often either underlined the importance of language as a marker of *kartveloba* (Georgianness) (e.g.: ‘If a Georgian true you are/ And speak the language of your land....’ by Irakli Abashidze, ‘Can you ever forget?’; ‘Is Georgian only a language?/ No, it is the religion of Georgians.’, by Mukhran Machavariani, ‘The Georgian language’), or stress an autochthonous character of Georgian. For example:

In Georgian mounts you were created,

Language of love, song and blessing.

From pre-historic tribes descending,

Torrential waterfalls, white dashing,

Ice-bound peaks eternal melting,

Soft, magnificent and flashing.

‘The Georgian Language’ by Lado Asatiani. Translated by V. Urushadze  
(1958: 229)

Scholarly investigations often supported the propagation of language myths and the cult of language. According to Abrahamian (1998), ethno-genetic reconstructions and linguistic theories in the Soviet Union often served nationalist ideas. Since both language and territory were important markers of a nation according to Stalin’s definition, stressing the autochthonous character of the language was an additional argument for claiming the right to a territory. Together with the doctrine of autochthony of the Georgian ethnic group in the South Caucasus, territorial claims became a source of conflict between Georgian and Abkhazian scholars (discussed in section 5.2.2). Linguistic theories served other goals as well. For example, in the 1980s, the ideas of the German Romanticists and the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis were used to maintain that bilingual education had a harmful impact on a child’s world perception. Such arguments sought to counter accelerated attempts to assimilate through the teaching of Russian (see section 5.1.2). Finally, some linguistic theories were used to maintain the superiority of Georgian over other languages. For example, Marr (see section 5.1.2) developed



the Japhetic theory,<sup>37</sup> claiming that Kartvelian languages, together with Sumerian and Basque, were the core of the major language families of the world. Although his theory was denounced in the 1950s, Marr's views remained widely held among the general public (Law 2000: 178). Georgian nationalists sought to demonstrate the superiority of Georgian, which in the 1980s resulted in the linguistic messianism articulated by the future president of Georgia, Zviad Gamsakhurdia, and became an essential means of ethnic mobilization in the struggle for secession from the USSR (discussed in detail in section 5.2.3).

Although the Georgian language was used in all domains, except in military service, Georgians were concerned over its failure to fulfil the role of a *lingua franca* within the republic. Consequently, the hegemony of Georgian within its 'own' social and political environment was perceived as incomplete (Broers 2005). Therefore, the bottom-up policy in Georgia had two aspects: one was directed against the russification of Georgians and the other sought the georgianisation of those ethnic minorities which Georgia considered as its historic minorities (Abkhazians and Ossetians) and whose segregation from the Georgians was in Moscow's but not in Tbilisi's interest (see also section 4.1.3). Thus, as a top-down phenomenon, georgianisation was an assimilationist policy and opposed a differentialist policy directed towards other minorities (such as Russian, Azeri and Armenian). The next section looks at Georgia's top-down policy towards its minorities.

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<sup>37</sup> For detailed analyses of Marr's linguistic theory, see Thomas (1957).

### 5.2.2. Top-down and bottom-up policies within Georgia

All languages of the Soviet Union except Russian were minority languages, including the titular languages of the union republics, among them Georgian. The authorities of the republic had to communicate with Moscow in Russian; PhD dissertations could be written in Georgian, but had to be submitted in Russian as well; and the study of Russian was compulsory in Georgian schools, while the study of Georgian in non-Georgian schools was not (Arutiunov 1998: 102). Altogether only 5.7% of non-Georgians knew Georgian fluently and 2% considered it to be their native language, whereas almost 50% did not know it at all (Grdzelidze 1980: 108, 155 and 160).

While Georgian was a minority language in the USSR, it was a majority language within the Georgian SSR. Linguistic minorities in Georgia included indigenous groups, none of which had written traditions before the Revolution: Megrelian, Svan, Abkhazian and Bats, as well as non-indigenous: Armenian, Russian, Ossetian and Azerbaijani. Megrelian and Svan survived over the centuries without any institutional support, using Georgian as a literary and sacred language. During the Soviet era, there was an attempt to establish print media in Megrelian in 1930-1935 (*kazakhishi gazeti* 'Peasant's Paper') and Georgian/Megrelian in 1936-38 (*komunari* 'Communard') (Grenoble 2003: 120). This attempt was greatly supported by some Bolsheviks, but failed. As a result of Megrelians and Svans being considered sub-groups of the Georgian nation (see section 5.1.1), the use of their languages and their local consciousness declined. In the 1926 census, 243 000 people stated their ethnicity as Megrelians and 132 000 as Svans, whereas the 1959 census reported only 11 Megrelians and 9 Svans (Grdzelidze 1980: 109). As

discussed in section 3.1, Megrelians, Laz and Svans consider themselves Georgians and perceive the Georgian language as their second native language. In the diglossic situation which exists, their native tongues have L-status and Georgian has H-status (see section 2.4.1). There is a debate whether genetically related Georgian, Megrelian and Svan are separate languages or dialects of the same language (see sections 2.4.1 and 6.1.3).

Diglossia exists also among Bats, a North Caucasian language spoken in Eastern Georgia by only 3 000 people and considered to be endangered. Its speakers are integrated into the Georgian nation and are not perceived as a different ethnic group, either by themselves or by other Georgians (Koch-Kobaidze 1999: 155). In the Soviet period, speakers of Kartvelian languages and Bats used Georgian as their literary language, their children went to Georgian schools and their cultural georgianization was completed during the Soviet era. The Soviet authorities did not interfere with this state of affairs.

By contrast, central and local policies towards other minorities were different. Moscow was interested in the segregation of ethnic minorities from the titular nation, continuing the policy of ‘divide and rule’ started by Tsarist Russia (see section 4.1.3). Georgia’s policy towards its non-indigenous ethnic groups (Armenians, Azeri-speaking Greeks, Azeris, etc.) was one of exclusion in places where they outnumbered the Georgians (e.g. Akhalkalaki, Ninotsminda, Tsalka and Marneuli). These minorities had neither the opportunity nor the need to learn Georgian. They preferred to go either to their national or Russian schools. Their lack of knowledge of the Georgian language became a reason for discrimination: they could occupy only subordinate positions, while Georgians had all kinds of

privileges and prestigious jobs (Suny 2001). The elements of Georgian national chauvinism witnessed in the nineteenth century (see section 4.2.1) were present also in the twentieth century and were encouraged by Georgian political and intellectual élites. National chauvinism, together with the Soviet policy of ‘divide and rule,’ prevented the integration of ethnic minorities into the Georgian nation. The language barrier between ethnic Georgians and these groups, and the resulting non-integration of the latter into socio-political life, was maintained after the collapse of the USSR and will be discussed in chapter 6.

As for those groups which Georgia considered its historic minorities (Abkhazians and Ossetians), there was an attempt to restore and maintain cultural influence over them. During *korenizatsiia* (‘indigenisation’), the Latin script was assigned to the Abkhazian and Ossetian languages (*Komunisti*, 1922, 20 October: 2; *Komunisti*, 1927, 25 May: 4). Unlike other languages, whose Latin-based scripts were changed to Cyrillic in 1938 (*Zarya vostoka*, 1938, 4 August: 2), the Abkhazian and Ossetian (in Georgia)<sup>38</sup> languages adopted the Georgian alphabet the same year: this alphabet remained in use until 1954 (Grenoble 2003: 119). The authorities justified this shift by making reference to the phonetic consistency of these languages, but had as a political motivation — the georgianisation of Abkhaz and Ossetians. The georgianisation policy was accompanied by the closure of Abkhazian and Ossetian schools in 1944-1953, and, in Abkhazia, by the manipulation of demographics, namely by an increase in the numbers of Georgians, Russians and Armenians (Coppieters 2002: 92). The Abkhaz

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<sup>38</sup> Ossetian in the North Ossetian Autonomous Republic within Russia switched from Latin to the Cyrillic alphabet in 1938.

interpreted this process as a Georgian attempt to colonise Abkhazia and responded by repeating their demands for secession from the Georgian SSR. The historical memory of these events, together with other factors discussed in the next section, acted as a catalyst for separatist movements in Georgia in the 1980-1990s and resulted in military clashes.

After Stalin's death in 1953, with the increasing policy of russification (see section 5.1.2), the Georgian script was replaced by Cyrillic and the Ossetian and Abkhaz schools were reopened. Despite their status as a literary language and in the case of Abkhazian, as an official language within the Abkhazian ASSR, where Abkhaz was spoken by less than a fifth of the population (Tishkov 1993: 7), these languages did not have technically enough vocabulary to handle the concepts of a modern society. The policy of creation of new words from their own sources was discouraged (Comrie 1981: 34) and they were forced to borrow words from Russian. These new words had to be taken in their Russian orthographic form and were to be pronounced in the Russian way. Phonological changes had far reaching influences on morphology and syntax as well (Sankoff 2001: 651). Thus, phonetic and grammatical features of Russian entered these languages.

Since Abkhaz instruction was restricted to primary school, after which instruction was in Russian (Grenoble 2003: 120), Abkhazs fluent in the dominant language would often switch to the language of wider communication. After Stalin's death, proficiency in Russian as a second language among Abkhazians increased significantly and reached 81.5% by 1989 (Broers 2005). In South Ossetia, too, instruction in local language schools was mainly in Russian and the native language played essentially a symbolic role. Moreover, native language

education was entirely absent outside the autonomous units, despite the fact that more ethnic Ossetians resided in other regions of Georgia (Tishkov 1993: 7). National minorities preferred to concentrate on Russian in national schools rather than on Georgian, the teaching of which, together with republican languages other than Russian, was only a formality. For decades, national minorities preferred to send their children to Russian schools, which offered a better chance of upward mobility (Safran 1992: 403). When in 1988 Georgia tried to strengthen the status of the Georgian language by introducing it as a compulsory subject in non-Georgian schools and universities in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, the local population resisted (Kokh-Kobaidze 1999). As a result, by 1989, only 1.6% of Abkhazians and 13.8% of Ossetians were proficient in Georgian within their autonomies (Broers 2005).

Georgia's top-down policy towards its historic minorities, justified by the prestige and literary tradition of Georgian as a symbol of high culture during medieval statehood, was reflected in historiography. The ideas of autochthony and exclusive claim of the territory has been the source of conflict between Georgians and Abkhazians since the middle of the 1950s (Broers 2005), when the Georgian philologist and historian Pavle Ingoroqva published a book (1954) denying Abkhazian autochthony in the South Caucasus and asserting that the Abkhazians migrated from the North Caucasus in the seventeenth century, while the term 'Abkhazian' mentioned in historical sources referred to one of the Georgian tribes:

It turns out now that that the Abkhazian region is an ancient Georgian land, which was inhabited by the Georgians from ancient times. The population of the Abkhazian region was Georgian not

only in antiquity, but also in the Middle Ages. [...] It was inhabited by three Georgian tribes: Meskhs (the same as Abkhazians), Kolchs (Megrelian-Laz) and Svans. (Ingoroqva 1954: 188 and 294)

This claim meant that the Abkhazians did not have the right to a territorial autonomy. Ingoroqva's view was adopted by other Georgian intellectuals and led to protests among the Abkhazian élite, which addressed Moscow with a request to join the Russian Federation. Their request was refused, but Georgia was pressed to distance itself from Ingoroqva's thesis (Coppieters 2002: 93). In the late 1960s similar views were voiced resulting in a renewed Abkhazian request for secession. The Abkhazian historical narrative described an independent Abkhazian state going back thousands of years. While the majority of Georgians did not question the autochthony of Abkhazians, they supported the idea of cultural rather than political autonomy, considering Abkhazia a Soviet political construct. In order to avoid further tensions, Georgia gave Abkhazia more cultural freedom, including autonomy in the media and education (Coppieters 2002: 96). However, the scholarly debate between incompatible positions and versions of history about the origins of the Abkhazian community continued. Expressing their confidence in the conflicting interpretations of historical sources, archaeological findings and linguistic data, both Georgian and Abkhaz academics abused scientific tools and used ethnogenetic mythology to legitimise claims for territory, political status and cultural domination, destroying the historic unity of the two communities. Abkhaz historians maintained that in the distant past their territory was inhabited exclusively by Abkhaz-speaking people and that Abkhaz was one of the oldest languages in the world, while Georgians asserted the linguistic and cultural

unification of the two communities a thousand years ago under Bagrat III (Rouvinski 2007) (see section 3.3.2). Similar disagreements about history existed between Georgian and Ossetian scholars.

By placing the principle of the first-settlers and the postulate of the continuous use of language on a given territory, Soviet academia allowed conflicting ethnic historical narratives and contributed to the post-Soviet Abkhaz-Georgian and Ossetian-Georgian conflicts. As Broers (2005) notes, '[q]uestions of language, and wider questions of membership in the Georgian nation and state, continue to be dominated by a series of mutually exclusive dogmas, axioms and myths of ownership rooted in characteristically Soviet categories and conceptions of history'. When radical Georgian nationalism emerged in the 1980s with the slogan 'Georgia for Georgians' (see section 5.2.3), Abkhaz and Ossetian intellectuals started mobilising their communities in the defence of their rights. Eventually the likelihood of armed conflicts, fuelled by ethnic mobilisation on both sides, increased significantly (see section 5.2.3).

In general, the Georgian SSR was a unique case in terms of privileged access of the titular nation to high administrative positions and the highest level of national self-determination within the Soviet Union (Christophe 2002: 153-154). Georgians enjoyed an overwhelmingly disproportionate share of the republic's high-ranking political posts and higher education institutes (Broers 2005). Unlike in other union republics (with the exception of Armenia), in Georgia the first party secretary was a titular national (Martin 2001: 87). Only since 1956, following the demonstrations against Khrushchev, was an ethnic Russian the second party



secretary. However, he knew no Georgian, and the controlling influence assigned to him was a fiction (Parsons 1982: 553-554). Georgians continued to increase their domination of the party, although it must be noted that the representation of Azeris, Abkhaz and Ossetians also increased, especially after Shevardnadze was appointed as leader of the Republic in 1972. Shevardnadze devoted more attention to the needs of ethnic minorities and considerably increased the amount of media in their languages (Parsons 1982: 554 and 562). Under Shevardnadze, the Central Committee of the Communist party of Georgia adopted an important resolution in 1983 to improve the teaching of Abkhazian (*Sabchota apkhazeti*, 1983, 22 January: 1). At the same time, he tried to accommodate both the Georgian and Russian languages: ‘Special attention is reserved for Russian, the language of international communication. The question may be put thus: together with their native language, each inhabitant of the Republic must have a perfect knowledge of Russian – the language of the brotherhood of Soviet peoples, of October, of Lenin’ (Shevardnadze 1981: 59). Despite his tactical accommodation of Georgian after the events of 1978 (discussed in section 5.2.3), Georgian intellectuals continued to worry about their language, which once again became a political issue. Georgian nationalism evolved to be indistinguishable from the struggle against potential russification (Toft 2002: 125) and maintained its traditional cultural and linguistic character.

### **5.2.3 Georgia’s linguistic nationalism**

The promotion of Russian aroused opposition among Georgian dissidents who came onto the scene after the mass demonstrations calling for independence in

Tbilisi on 9 March in 1956. The Soviet army killed dozens of young people and wounded hundreds. These demonstrations were a message to the centre that the needs of the periphery were not being met and that cultural identification could lead to political mobilization. Several illegal organisations started a dissident movement and openly propagated the idea of independence. Despite the repressive measures against them (including forced placements in psychiatric hospitals, exiles and arrests), the dissident movement became more organized in the 1960-70s (Daushvili 2008: 460-463). During the 1960s, Georgia's future president Zviad Gamsakhurdia (1991-1992), started publishing an illegal magazine, *Sakartvelos moambe* (*The Herald of Georgia*), promoting Georgian culture as a form of resistance against Russian domination. In the dissidents' opinion, a suppressed Georgian collective consciousness had to be reawakened using ethnic roots, mythology, language and collective memory, in other words, through the markers of ethnic identity identified by A. D. Smith (see section 2.2.3). Their writing expressed nationalist sentiment, mostly focusing on Georgian culture, history and language, unlike the Russian dissidents whose focus was on human rights (Coppieters 2002: 108).

Since the nationality-based federal structure of the USSR provided indigenous élites with the means to protect national interests and armed them with the Communist doctrine of developing the culture of every Soviet people (national in form), the local leadership often backed those interests. In this way they avoided direct confrontations with the public and actually worked on the forging of the nation (Gachechiladze 1997: 51-52). Considering that repression can have the opposite effect to what was intended, official responses to various manifestations

of national sentiments were no longer as brutal as in 1956. At the same time, the Georgian political élite realized that the need to avoid brutality had great bargaining power with the centre (Parsons 1982: 565). A good example of this was the decision to back down and restore the status of the Georgian language in April 1978, when an attempt was made to remove Georgian as the state language from the constitution. Several hundred Georgian intellectuals addressed a letter to Brezhnev and Shevardnadze expressing their concern about the limitations imposed on the teaching of Georgian history and language – a regulation regarding that dissertations be submitted in Russian and the propaganda of bilingualism (Solchanyk 1982: 36). At the same time, more than thirty thousand people demonstrated in Tbilisi against such constitutional changes on 14 April 1978 (Parsons 1982: 556). Rather than call in troops to suppress the demonstration, Shevardnadze restored the status of Georgian in the constitution (Shevardnadze 2006: 98). Because of these events, 14 April was declared Mother Tongue Day.

The events of 1978 led to wider resistance to russification. The Georgian media regularly published articles by representatives of the Soviet Georgian intelligentsia demanding the improvement of Georgian teaching and the use of the language in the press. For example, Shota Dzidziguri, Head of the Department of Modern Georgian language at Tbilisi State University, made recommendations on improving the teaching of Georgian and called for the involvement of the general public in the discussions (*Literaturuli sakartvelo*, 1978, 15 December: 2), while a professor of Russian language at the same university, Giorgi Tsibakhashvili, discussed the methods of teaching languages in general, emphasising the importance of the mother tongue for successful learning of all subjects (*Komunisti*,

1978, 6 July: 2). In 1979, one of the leading papers dedicated its editorial to the importance of one's mother tongue (*Literaturuli sakartvelo*, 1979, 25 May: 1). The same year, professor Gogiberidze suggested establishing a date to celebrate the existence of the Georgian alphabet (*Sakhalkho ganatleba*, 1979, 6 April: 4).

In 1981, the Georgian intelligentsia demanded the introduction of courses dealing specifically with Georgian history and language in schools and for all university students (Parsons 1982: 557). The demands were again met by the authorities: completely new textbooks were created for schools, a permanent commission on the norms of Georgian was established and the Georgian language became a mandatory subject in all universities. However, Gamsakhurdia, who at the time was a senior researcher at the Institute of Literature at the Georgian Academy of Science, continued to maintain that the Georgian language and culture were in danger. His propaganda was often supported by his own scholarly research, in which he discussed language myths and interpreted Zosime's hymn (see section 3.2.2) as an expression of Georgia's messianic mission and the moral superiority of the Georgians, thereby enforcing Georgia's hegemonic position (Gamsakhurdia 1990). Gamsakhurdia's linguistic-religious messianism was supported by the Georgian Orthodox Church and its leader Ilia II. The motto of the nationalist leaders 'homeland, language and faith' was presented incorrectly as the slogan of Ilia Chavchavadze (see section 4.2.2), whom Ilia II canonized as Saint Ilia the Righteous in 1987. Both, the Patriarch Ilia II and Gamsakhurdia were reinforcing the linkage between national identity, language, homeland and Orthodoxy. Their view about Georgia's history was a typical example of

ethnocentrism (Ramet 1989: 8).<sup>39</sup> Those who did not speak Georgian and could not share the holy mission of the Georgians became targets of suspicion and hostility.

Despite the growing assertiveness of Georgian and other cultural élites demanding more cultural autonomy for their republics, the Soviet leadership nonetheless underestimated the potential of national aspirations until Gorbachev came to the power. He was the first Soviet leader to challenge directly the traditional approach to nationalities, but it was too late. Nationalism as a response to centralisation, cultural russification and the repression of non-Russians was very strong almost everywhere, especially in the republics which were independent before Bolshevik annexation, and Gorbachev's policy of *glasnost* only unleashed the expression of their aspirations.

From this period the bottom-up policy lost its dissident character and the so-called 'red intelligentsia' got involved in the national movement.<sup>40</sup> In the late 1980s, several Georgian intellectuals used the media to encourage the authorities to establish a society for the discussions of important cultural issues. The local party leadership supported this idea because calls for independence were heard in many places, illegal political parties were gaining popularity and the possibility of the end of the USSR was evident. The authorities wanted to court the intelligentsia and responded by creating a special organisational committee to supervise the

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<sup>39</sup> Later Georgian ethnocentrists came to view the struggle for the church as a part of more general effort to preserve the Georgian nation, as discussed in chapter 6.

<sup>40</sup> The dissident intelligentsia included a limited number of outspoken anti-Communists (like Gamsakhurdia), who called the creative and academic professionals the 'red intelligentsia' to stress their ties with the authorities.

establishment of such a society. The committee consisted of well-known representatives of the intellectual élite who were loyal to the Communists. The society was named after the great Georgian poet of the twelfth century, Shota Rustaveli. The committee was chaired by a senior party leader, indicating that the Rustaveli Society, officially established on 20 March 1988 (*Komunisti*, 1988, 20 March), was initiated and controlled by the Communist Party of Georgia.

The increased freedom of expression under Gorbachev's policy led to the formation of groups that focused on linguistic issues. In November 1988, these groups organised demonstrations against russification in Georgia (Cook 2001: 438), which again led to Abkhazian demands for secession. Georgians responded by organising mass demonstrations demanding the preservation of their territorial integrity and the restoration of independence. On the night of April 8-9, 1989, Soviet troops attacked peaceful demonstrators with spades and toxic gas, killing twenty people and injuring hundreds (Gachechiladze 1995: 38). After a few months, the Georgian Supreme Soviet declared the primacy of Georgian laws over those of the Soviet Union and asserted that Georgia was an annexed and occupied country.

Quite understandably, ethnic minorities, who were referred to as 'guests' and whose presence in Georgia was viewed as a threat to the nation, felt increasingly insecure with Georgian nationalist activism and Gamsakhurdia's election campaign, represented by the slogan 'Georgia for the Georgians'. Even before the elections, violent unrest broke out in Abkhazia and South Ossetia in 1989. Abkhazians and Ossetians were accused of cooperation with the Kremlin. Indeed, by playing on interethnic conflicts in the non-Russian republics, the

Kremlin attempted to prevent union republics from leaving the USSR (Khazanov 1995: 41). Gamsakhurdia's presidency (October 1990 to December 1991) was not well received by Georgia's ethnic minorities, who feared the return of the georgianisation policy. The potential for conflict was high, especially in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, which as autonomous units had the legal instruments to oppose Georgian policy. They had institutionalised leaderships which could mobilise their communities against the Georgians. Polarised ethnic identities enabled the mobilisation of the population by local political and intellectual élites. Both Gamsakhurdia's aggressive attitude towards ethnic minorities and the radical leaders of the autonomous units contributed to the escalation of the conflict.

Georgia is often presented as a particularly well-known example of discriminatory treatment of ethnic minorities and was notable among the republics of the USSR for its ethnocentrism. However, several factors must be taken into account in order to explain Georgian ethnocentrism: Georgia had the most per capita autonomous units on its territory and was one of the most ethnically diverse republics; the Soviet Union was a totalitarian state and had little respect for human rights in general and minority rights in particular; decisions were taken in Moscow. Blaming local governments alone for the discrimination of entire groups is illogical (Cornell 2002b: 258). Finally, the ethnocentric vision of membership in the Georgian nation was largely a result of two factors: (a) the Soviet primordial approach towards nations and national identities which suggested that nations were historically formed cultural groups (see section 2.3) and which did not give minority groups a chance to become members of the Georgian nation (see also section 6.2.1); and (b) a confusion in terminology.

The confusion surrounding the Soviet terms denoting ‘ethnicity’ and ‘nation’ was discussed in section 2.3.3. In the Georgian language, however, the confusion was even more far-reaching. The term ‘nation’ is translated into Georgian as *eri*. *Eri* is a term which has undergone similar modification and shifts of connotations as the term *nation* in various European languages (see section 2.2). Originally *eri* denoted a social collectivity of people; in the Middle Ages, other terms, usually *natesavi* (see section 3.2.1), were used to indicate a group of people connected by blood ties, that is, an ethnic group. From the nineteenth century, *eri* replaced all other terms denoting ethnic groups. Since then, it has come to indicate Kartvelian groups in their entirety, i.e. Georgians, Megrelians and Svans. This semantic shift signalled a new stage of identity development among the Kartvelian groups. Although there was a belief in common origin amongst these groups, *eri*, unlike previous terms, did not emphasize genetic unity as a basis for existence, although it did not exclude it either. The middle of the nineteenth century saw another shift in the understanding of the term *eri*. This was related to increasing national awareness among Georgians and to the translation into Georgian of Renan’s essay ‘Qu’est-ce qu’une nation?’ (1882). The French *nation* was translated as *eri*, which from this time was used interchangeably either as an equivalent to the European *nation* or for *ethnicity/people*, both by scholars and in general popular discourse.

In the Soviet period, *eri* came to mean the same as the Soviet term *natsia* according to Stalin’s definition (see section 2.3.3), which became classic in the Soviet Union. Although later editions of the *Great Soviet Encyclopedia* did not mention Stalin, they defined nation in the same way, stating that the only scientific



understanding of nation was developed by Marx, Engels and Lenin. Georgian encyclopedias and academic works used the term *eri* with the same definition.

Thus, the term described a collectivity which had nothing to do with citizenship; it did not describe the relationship between a state and an individual. Essentially, *eri* was the same as an ethnic group. The Georgian political and nationalist discourse implied that the ethnic Georgians, or *eri*, deserved an independent and indivisible state of their own. In order to break up the Soviet empire and exercise sovereignty, it was necessary to purify the *eri*, i.e. create an ethnic nation whose members shared the belief in linguistic-religious messianism, while excluding ‘outsiders’, ethnic minorities who were not considered a part of the sacred mission and therefore were to be expelled from the nation or, at least, treated as a second class citizens. However, according to A. D. Smith (1999a:196), the creation of ethnic nations not only leads to the break-up of empires, but also breeds ethnic tensions and conflicts. Indeed, Georgia experienced an unusual level of misfortune and suffering in the post-Soviet era, as discussed in the next chapter.

To conclude, Soviet nationalities policy and language policy were the main contributing factors in the re-definition of *kartveloba* (Georgianness) as an ethnic nation in the twentieth century. These policies excluded ethnic minorities from the titular nationalities of the union republics. Therefore ethnic minorities were viewed as ‘outsiders’ and were denied the privileges that Georgians enjoyed. This was especially true for Abkhazians and Ossetians, who fought on the Bolsheviks’ side against the Georgians and were rewarded by autonomy, thus being shielded from Georgian cultural influence. The status of autonomy was a significant factor in the ethnic mobilisation of the respective communities and in the development of

national movements, as it provided institutions for strengthening identities as well as for getting external support in the case of conflict. At the same time, administrative élites in Abkhazia and South Ossetia used ethnic issues to their political and economic advantage. Thus the nationalism of the dominant group was opposed by the nationalism and eventually separatism of other groups. Both majority and minority nationalism were the result of efforts not only by administrative élites, but also by nationalist-minded intellectuals. Nationalist poets and writers cultivated a notion of sacred land and language, history and traditions. Scholars exaggerated the heroism of past ages and ancestral civilisation – at times not even their own – and used linguistic theories and ethnogenetic studies for nationalistic purposes.

## Chapter 6

### Language and identity in contemporary Georgia

Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, Georgia began an extremely painful process of transition from totalitarian regime to democracy. The new political leadership, as well as ordinary people burdened with the Soviet experience, were unprepared for building an independent nation-state. The definition of citizenship in ethnic terms established by Soviet practice (see section 5.1.1) and the interpretation of *kartveloba* (Georgianness) offered by radical nationalists in the 1980s (see section 5.2.3) effectively united Georgians against outsiders. The linguo-religious affiliation of Georgians over the centuries, described in previous chapters, became even more important after the disintegration of the USSR.

The post-Soviet reality, marked by the lack of a free civic society and corresponding political culture, provided a fertile environment for reviving and strengthening ethno-religious myths and symbols, which defined the direction and the pace of the transition process. In the search for a new identity, religion often provides the value system (Weissbrod 1983: 189). Thus, reference to the messianic mission of *kartveloba* (discussed in section 5.2.3) was no accident. The myth of election through the Georgian language (see section 3.2.2) became part of the national value system and justified intolerance towards non-Georgian speakers. It became extremely difficult to separate secular values of nationhood from religious ones and, therefore, to separate the state from the church, as language was viewed as a core value for both.

The Georgian case demonstrates the difficulties of complete secularisation of national identity as shown below. However, this chapter argues that a sacred language which for centuries was used to differentiate insiders and outsiders could become a common basis for a new national identity: *kartveloba* can turn from ethnic belonging into citizenship. Following an analysis of official language policy in Georgia after the dissolution of the USSR, especially with regard to status planning and acquisition planning (see section 2.4), this chapter also examines language practices and attitudes among minority groups. Drawing on primary sources (such as government papers, laws and other documents, media publications, social surveys and interviews), as well as secondary sources, the chapter analyses Georgia's reaction to its multicultural character under different governments. It also investigates the role of language policy in the process of nation-building and examines how language policy can help form a civic Georgia. Abkhazia and South Ossetia are excluded from the discussion, as these regions are *de facto* independent and thus unaffected by Georgian policies. In any case, they are inaccessible for the purposes of this study.

As shown in the previous chapter, the Soviet language policy of forcibly unifying people through language was one of the factors which provoked the collapse of the USSR. In different republics, national élites including communists adopted the rhetoric of the nationalists and demanded greater economic, political and cultural autonomy. If the idea of independence was a national dream throughout the decades of Soviet rule, by the late 1980s many came to believe that it could be achieved in their lifetime. Calls for independence were heard in many places. In Georgia, nationalism manifested itself as a struggle against 'foreign

occupiers' (Brzezinski 1989). Shortly before the dissolution of the Soviet Union (1991), Zviad Gamsakhurdia declared independence and became the first elected President of Georgia. Almost simultaneously with Georgia's independence, a split among the political élites emerged against the background of ethnic tensions in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Gamsakhurdia's opponents launched a violent *coup d'état* and overthrew the government on 6 January 1992.

The same year, Shevardnadze gradually acquired power in Georgia, which by that time was on the verge of collapse. Although under Shevardnadze territorial conflicts developed into full-scale military actions resulting in the loss of control over South Ossetia and Abkhazia, the political situation stabilised and Georgia made some progress towards democracy and a market economy. But eventually Georgia's former Soviet *nomenklatura* (Communist party secretaries, Komsomol leaders and red intelligentsia) returned to the political scene as governors, entrepreneurs and presidential advisers (Jones 2002: 264) and economic and democratic development slowed. Young pro-western politicians, who had previously joined Shevardnadze's government, now emerged as his political rivals. Many of them were educated in the USA and were known as *misisipidaleulni*: those who drank the waters of the Mississippi river (compared to *tergdaleulni*: those who drank the waters of the Terek (Tergi) river (see section 4.2.1)). Their political struggle led to the Rose Revolution in November 2003, which brought Mikheil Saakashvili to power.

Both Shevardnadze and Saakashvili distanced themselves from the ethnocentric nationalism of Gamsakhurdia, but did not abandon the national project and focused on the restoration of Georgia's image as a multi-ethnic and

tolerant European nation. Such a goal required a national sentiment to be shared by the whole population, but the process of nation-building and reconstruction of national identity was a difficult task in view of the damage caused particularly by the radical Georgian nationalist rhetoric of previous years, but also by the destructive role of ethnic minority leaders. In both majority and minority national movements, friction over linguistic issues had played a mobilising role. Therefore, it was important to elaborate a language policy that would become a basis for the integration of all ethnicities into a multi-ethnic society.

### **6.1 Language policy: top-down versus bottom-up**

Since language policies are strongly linked to political developments, and because historically the Georgian language had a dominant role in defining the Georgian nation, post-Soviet Georgia is a good case study of the interplay between language and politics. This section investigates how language policy in Georgia has been affected by political changes over the last twenty years. After discussing top-down policy, analysing legislation relative to language use and how comprehensively the laws were implemented under different regimes, it examines bottom-up reactions to the multilingual character of Georgia, as expressed in language perceptions and attitudes.

When discussing such issues, emphasis is placed on Azeris and Armenians for three reasons. First, they make up the largest minorities (6.2% and 5.7% respectively) after Georgians (83.8%) (Census 2002: 56). Second, they are geographically concentrated in Kvemo Kartli and Samtskhe-Javakheti respectively, where in some districts they account for the majority. For example, Azeris make

up 83% of the population in Marneuli and up to 60% in Bolnisi and Dmanisi, whereas Armenians account for 94% and 95% of the population in Akhalkalaki and Ninotsminda respectively (Census 2002: 60-63). Third, there are specific fears and insecurities associated with Azeris and Armenians, as discussed in section 6.1.3.

### **6.1.1 Language policy before the Rose Revolution**

In Soviet times, several important steps were taken to develop the Georgian language: mass education began using the Georgian language; normative grammar and dictionaries were created; Georgian became a language of bureaucracy and scientific research; a large corpus of literature was created, etc. Nevertheless the Georgian élite kept pressing the Soviet government for more rights for their native tongue (see section 5.2.3). Bottom-up language policy was increasingly becoming a means of the expression for local sovereignty. Nationalist discourse linked Georgian to the survival of the Georgian nation and focused on presenting Russian as the language of colonialism and destroyer of Georgian culture.

As a result of Soviet language policy, bilingualism was asymmetrical: while Georgians had to learn Russian, Russian-speaking migrants did not have to learn Georgian. Unlike other union republics, in Georgia there was no significant ethnic Russian minority. Russian speakers were mainly peripheral minorities (as were Armenians and Azeris) who were viewed as an instrument of colonial politics meant to undermine *kartveloba* (Georgianness). Nevertheless, despite being negatively viewed by many, Georgians still valued Russian as an instrument of

social mobility and as a language of wider interethnic communication during the Soviet rule (Chinchaladze & Dragadze 1994: 81).

After Georgia became independent, Russian lost its official status. According to article 8 of the Constitution of Georgia (1995: 9), '[t]he state language of Georgia shall be Georgian, and in Abkhazia also Abkhazian'. But granting the Georgian language the status of a state language was not enough to resolve the problem of its real status. In the regions densely inhabited by minorities, the state was not able to implement this article. One of the biggest challenges facing the political élite was the fact that a substantial part of the population did not speak Georgian, and Georgian was not the language of interethnic relations or of the bureaucracy, a function still fulfilled by Russian. It was impossible to involve them in state life on an equal basis. The language barrier remained a serious problem between Georgian-speaking and non-Georgian-speaking populations (especially in Samtskhe-Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli, considering the higher proportion of Armenian and Azeri speakers respectively) and was one of the fundamental reasons for the low participation of ethnic minorities in socio-political life. In order to address this problem, Shevardnadze introduced several important measures, carefully avoiding the interethnic confrontation prompted by Gamsakhurdia's rhetoric (see sections 5.2.3 and 6.2.1). In particular, this applies to teaching Georgian to ethnic minorities.



The Georgian Law on Education adopted in 1997 (section 1.4) guaranteed the right of minorities to receive school instruction in their languages.<sup>41</sup> Georgia thus continued the Soviet tradition of running ‘minority’ schools, a practice which had both positive and negative aspects. On the one hand, children belonging to ethnic minorities had the opportunity to receive instruction in their mother tongue.<sup>42</sup> On the other hand, this system reinforced existing segregation along ethnic and linguistic lines and prevented ethnic minorities from civic integration.

The Russian government provided textbooks for Russian schools, which enjoyed high status among ethnic minorities and were attended not only by ethnic Russians, but also by Armenians, Azeris and others. This is not surprising, given that Russian was the *lingua franca* during the Soviet era. By the end of Shevardnadze’s era, there were 239 Russian schools, 153 Armenian schools and 149 Azeri schools in Georgia (Korth, Stepanian & Muskhelishvili 2005: 33-34, 36-38). The statistical yearbook of the South Caucasus (2002) listed 38,000 pupils enrolled in Russian language schools, 38,000 in Azeri schools and 26,000 in Armenian schools.

The teaching of Georgian in minority schools (compulsory according to the Law on Education) was poor not only due to a lack of qualified teachers and adequate textbooks, but also to the absence of clear incentives, the minorities failing to see the benefit of learning Georgian. Even if they mastered Georgian,

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<sup>41</sup> All laws and legal acts related to language can be found at: [http://www.parliament.ge/LEGAL\\_ACTS/legi\\_in.html](http://www.parliament.ge/LEGAL_ACTS/legi_in.html) (accessed 31 August 2010).

<sup>42</sup> It is estimated that 13% percent of the population does not speak Georgian as a first language (Buchmann 2006: 7).

they considered it of little practical use. Russian remained indeed the *de facto* language of local government and other local authorities despite article 12 of Law on Public Office (1998) requiring that civil servants know Georgian. Strict application of all the laws related to the language use would clearly discriminate against ethnic minorities in the places of their largest concentration. In reality, local administrators often did not and still do not know Georgian, but were and are allowed to keep their positions in return for supporting the centre (Interview with Kakha Gabunia from the Centre for Civic Integration and Inter-ethnic Relations, 26 March, 2010).

The standard of teaching in Georgian universities was so low that it did not satisfy the needs of employers: ethnic minorities preferred to obtain diplomas in Russia, Armenia or Azerbaijan. At the same time, many representatives of minorities interpreted calls for learning Georgian as either discrimination or justification of assimilationist policies (Crisis Group Report 2006: 22). All these factors have contributed to the further marginalisation of Georgian, slowed down the process of linguistic decolonisation, and led Armenians and Azeris to bond more closely with their respective historical homelands.

Another measure introduced by Shevardnadze concerned the use of languages and alphabets in advertisements, inscriptions and signboards. It was regulated by the Law on Advertising adopted in 1998. Article 4 states: ‘Advertising is disseminated all over Georgia in the national language’. But while in Tbilisi Russian signboards disappeared with the introduction of this law, they could still be seen in regions inhabited by ethnic minorities (Korth, Stepanian & Muskhelishvili 2005: 25). Other laws relevant to the official status of Georgian

include the Organic Law on the Common Courts of Georgia (1997), the Administrative Code (1999) and the Organic Election Code (2001). While the Organic Law on Common Courts states that ‘any individual in court proceedings who does not know the official language shall be provided with an interpreter at the expense of the state’ (article 10), the Administrative Code reads: ‘[i]f the application/statement or any other document presented by an interested party is not in the state language, the party shall present a notarized translation of the document’, implying that the ‘interested party’ is responsible for expenses. The 2003 amendments to the Organic Election Code make provisions for voters who do not understand Georgian. Article 51 states that ‘[a] ballot paper shall be printed [...] in the Georgian language and, in Abkhazia, in Abkhazian, and if necessary, in any other language understandable to the local population’, but the same code (article 92.1) stipulates that those elected to parliament must know Georgian.

Some noticeable changes in language use under Shevardnadze occurred within the media. Former Moscow TV and radio channels were replaced by various local Georgian language channels, although non-Georgian films on all channels were still in Russian. English eclipsed Russian to a certain degree with the development of the Internet. Some efforts were made to increase local media in minority languages, but minorities still felt they lacked first-hand information on Georgian internal affairs (Crisis Group Report 2006: 18). The situation was especially desperate among Azeris, who had only one weekly newspaper, while Armenians had several daily, weekly and monthly newspapers, as well as a local Armenian language TV and a news web site. Both communities relied on satellite

TV for international news (Interview with Yana Fremer, the producer of *Italian courtyard*, 31 March, 2010).

In the last year of Shevardnadze's presidency (2003), the Georgian Chamber of Language (established within the president's office in 1997) drafted a language law, but it was not accepted by parliament, following criticisms by minority non-governmental organisations (Lezhava 2004: 211). Several issues were of concern. For example, article 11 of the draft law stated that every citizen of Georgia was obliged to know Georgian; however the law did not explain the legal consequences for those who did not. Nor was it clear how language competence would be measured. These points were not clarified in the second draft either (Korth, Stepanian & Muskhelishvili 2005: 27).

Another issue which concerned ethnic minority representatives was related to terminology. The law subsumed ethnic minority languages under the term 'foreign'. In the second draft, this was replaced by the term 'non-state languages'. Unlike Abkhazian, Armenian and Azeri were thus offered no official status. While the former was considered an autochthonous language, the latter were classed as immigrant languages. The classification of minorities as autochthonous and non-native/immigrant is a product of the Soviet legacy and is still used largely out of fear (see section 6.3.1). Azeris and Armenians are mainly concentrated near the borders of their historic homelands. The fear among the Georgians is that they will seek unification with their kin states, hence the government is reluctant to give formal status to their respective languages. The fear is somewhat understandable, considering Abkhazian and Ossetian separatism, and the activities of some extremist organisations in Samtskhe-Javakheti (see section 6.3.1).

Besides status planning and acquisition planning, some efforts were made regarding corpus planning under Shevardnadze, especially concerning the normalisation of scientific and technical terminology, namely Georgian dictionaries of market economy, law, finance, foreign affairs and diplomacy, political science, climatology, geomorphology, veterinary, art and many others were published.<sup>43</sup> In 1998-1999, public television broadcasted a programme entitled ‘Our Georgian Language’, which was aimed at eradicating grammatical mistakes from speech.

In conclusion, it could be said that under Shevardnadze large parts of the ethnic population did not sufficiently participate in the state-building process and their knowledge of Georgian remained poor. Besides the common assumption of the majority that, if given linguistic autonomy, Azeris and Armenians might make separatist claims, and the lack of open discussion of language problems, poor Georgian skills resulted from the non-existence of a unified strategy for minority integration, the lack of incentives for learning the state language, the lack of qualified teachers and study materials, as well as the Soviet legacy, which created a ‘language barrier’ between the majority and the minorities by promoting Russian as a *lingua franca*. Another aspect of the Soviet legacy was the practice of running ethnic schools in order to preserve minority groups, while at the same time doing little to promote the state language. After the Rose Revolution, the new government decided to concentrate more on the promotion of Georgian, rather than the protection of minority languages.

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<sup>43</sup> The list of scientific dictionaries is available at: [http://www.nplg.gov.ge/index.php?sec\\_id=32&lang\\_id=ENG](http://www.nplg.gov.ge/index.php?sec_id=32&lang_id=ENG) (accessed 30 June 2011).

### 6.1.2 Language policy after the Rose Revolution

Seeking to promote a civic, rather than ethnic identity, Saakashvili's government decided to elaborate a unified policy for minority integration, in which language policy had central importance, although it remains a complex issue even now. Soon after being elected president, Saakashvili met with representatives of the Azeri population of Kvemo Kartli and in his speech stressed the importance of knowing Georgian:

You are (among) the most hardworking citizens of our country [...]

Your children should learn the state language so that they have equal possibilities and equal rights to be promoted in the hierarchy of state structures [*sic*] ('Saakashvili stresses importance of knowledge of official language', *civil.ge*, 21 March, 2006. Accessed 25 May 2011).

As a symbolic gesture, Saakashvili often starts his speeches in ethnic languages when addressing minorities (see for example, 'Mikheil Saakashvili opens Samtskhe-Javakheti highway', *panarmenian.net*, 2010, 15 November. Accessed 27 May 2011), frequently emphasising the multi-ethnic character of Georgia and the necessity of minority integration through language. However, the current government is often blamed by its opponents for ignoring Georgian, because it has closed several TV programmes aimed at teaching Georgian and abolished the Chamber of Language (*Sakartvelos respublika*, 2006, 21 January). In reality, however, the current political élite have, in fact, taken a more assertive role in promoting and strengthening the status of Georgian throughout the country. The

measures undertaken by the government include changes in legislation and reforms in education.

In terms of legislation, several important steps were made. Namely, the following laws relative to language use were passed: the Law on Higher Education (2004), the Law on Broadcasting (2004), the Law on General Education (2005) and the Law on Self-Government (2005). While article 4 of the Law on Higher Education states that '[t]he language of instruction in higher education institutions is Georgian, in Abkhazia – also Abkhazian' and article 89 establishes national examinations in Georgian language and literature, foreign languages, general abilities and math, article 4.3 of the Law on General Education states that 'citizens of Georgia whose native language is not Georgian have the right to receive complete general education in their native language.' That said, articles 5 and 58 stipulate that the minority schools must follow the new national curriculum, which requires that all social sciences be taught in Georgian by the academic year 2010-2011 at the latest. These articles provoked unease among ethnic minorities, who felt that they would not master Georgian well enough by 2010. At the same time, they perceived this law as a threat to their ethnic identities, which are intertwined with language. While many representatives of ethnic minorities acknowledged that mastery of Georgian was an important tool for integration, the establishment of national examinations without special provisions for minority students has further exacerbated tensions (Bachmann 2006: 8). Some attempts were made to meet minority needs by offering exams in simplified Georgian for those who were applying to Russian-language faculties, but students still found them quite difficult (Crisis Group Report 2006: 26). Obviously the methods of examination were not

well thought out. Georgia had to choose between easing the integration process and education reform. Therefore, in the following year, students from non-Georgian schools were allowed to choose Russian for exams in some subjects.

In 2008, Saakashvili announced that poor knowledge of Georgian should not be an obstacle for anyone wishing to enter higher education in Georgia and minorities were granted the right to pass the unified national exams in Armenian and Azeri (*Georgian Times*, 2008, 25 February). Following this change, the overall results were much better: more ethnic minority students were able to enter universities, but they would graduate from Russian faculties and would face difficulties finding jobs. So, the best students of minority schools, not seeing any likelihood of employment in Georgia after graduation, have decided to study abroad, especially after the Azerbaijani and Armenian governments started giving scholarships to promising students to attend universities in Baku and Yerevan (the capitals of Azerbaijan and Armenia respectively). They are unlikely to return to Georgia, thus increasing the pace of the 'brain drain' (Tsipuria 2006: 21). Therefore, in 2010, in order to increase minority access to higher education and remove unintended discriminatory practice, the government decided to offer graduates of minority language schools a year of intensive Georgian at universities (Interview with the State Minister of Integration, Temur Iakobashvili, 22 March, 2010).

Another important measure undertaken by the government in order to strengthen the status of Georgian was state language promotion, as one of the objectives of the action plan for tolerance and civic education is the promotion of the state language (Ministry of Integration 2009a: 12). The process of



implementing the plan was launched in 2010 and includes several activities: a programme to enhance the teaching and learning of Georgian as a second language in minority schools; the development and improvement of Georgian-language textbooks and other teaching resources (including Internet programmes, software and education games); professional training programmes for Georgian-language teachers in places mainly populated by Azeris and Armenians; the development of special projects focused on civic integration; and state language acquisition programmes for adult learners (Ministry of Integration 2009b: 7-9).

Besides laws concerning education, two other new laws regulate language use: the Law on Self-Government and the Law on Broadcasting. The Law on Self-Government (article 10) established Georgian as the working language of local self-government, while the 2005 amendments to the Unified Election Code (see section 6.1.1) stated that all candidates for all level election commissions must be fluent in the state language (article 27.4 and 33(B).5). However, the law does not specify how fluency will be tested, and this omission leaves room to abuse and violations of the law, and thus does not create a sufficient basis to challenge language-related discrimination.

The Law on Broadcasting obliges public television to broadcast in minority languages as well as to produce programmes for the benefit of minorities. News report in Abkhazian, Ossetian, Armenian, Azeri and Russian are broadcast weekly on TV. In addition, a weekly show on public television supported by the UN, called Italian Courtyard, focuses on multicultural issues and the histories of ethnic groups in Georgia (Yana Fremer, producer of Italian Courtyard, personal communication, 31 March 2010). Commercial television stations also devote time

to minority issues. In 2009, the government launched the first Russian-language Channel *Pervyi Kavkazskii* (First Caucasian)<sup>44</sup> mainly targeting audiences in Russia and the North Caucasus. Ten-minute-long radio news programmes in minority languages (including Kurdish) are broadcast daily (Ministry of Integration 2009b: 11).

Along with legislative changes aimed at strengthening the status of the state language, the Ministry of Education has introduced several programmes for improving the overall education environment in both Georgian and non-Georgian schools. Not only did Georgian schools receive new textbooks, but non-Georgian schools did as well, replacing textbooks from neighbouring countries that were used before. While the Ministry of Culture started funding Armenian, Azeri and Russian newspapers, the Ministry of Education sent new qualified teachers to non-Georgian schools to teach Georgian language, literature and history, as well as to train local teachers (Tsipuria 2006: 25).

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<sup>44</sup> *Pervyi Kavkazskii* started broadcasting on Entel Satellite, a largely French-controlled company, but the company ceased broadcasting on Russia's insistence (see [www.1k-tv.com](http://www.1k-tv.com). Accessed 29 June 2011). Russian officials have condemned the First Caucasian Channel as Georgia's 'anti-Russian propaganda' and an attempt 'to plant ideology of extremism' in the North Caucasus (<http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=22509>; accessed 28 June 2011)). After its removal from the satellite, the First Caucasian Channel was available for viewers in Tbilisi only through cable networks and on the Internet. In early June the channel suspended broadcasting, although still keeping a presence on the Internet. It will be re-launched in January 2011 (Interview with Robert Parsons, Executive Director of the First Caucasian Channel, personal communication, 21 September, 2010).

An important step in teaching Georgian to minorities was the adoption of new textbooks for five different class years, aimed at developing communicative skills. Previously, Georgian-language textbooks (including student books, exercise books and teachers' manuals) were designed on the principle that students should have learnt grammar and literature in order to master the spoken language (Tsipuria 2006: 23), which proved to be ineffective. The retraining of local teachers of Georgian language and literature was realised with the support of the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities (Gabunia 2006: 40) (see below regarding the OSCE High Commissioner's role in language policy). At the same time, the authorities are exploring multilingual forms of education. The Ministry of Education started introducing pilot bilingual education programmes in twelve Azeri schools in Kvemo Kartli and Armenian schools in Samtskhe-Javakheti (<http://www.diversity.ge/eng/resources.php?coi=0|11|12>). Those who are just starting school as well as young adults will take advantage of these changes.

In 2006, the School of Public Administration opened in Kutaisi. Its goal was to train civil servants of minority origin. The school was well received, but minorities were not able to master Georgian during the three months' language instruction included in the six months' curriculum. Sixty-four students from different regions attended it in the first year, among them eleven Azeris, but only four Azeris obtained jobs, because, according to State Minister of Integration T. Iakobashvili (interviewed on 22 March 2010), there were no mechanisms to ensure their employment.

With the initiative of the Ministry of Integration other activities were also launched in 2010 in cooperation with other ministries. They include translating

ballot papers into minority languages, regional infrastructure development, supporting ethnic cultural centres, assistance to regional libraries, etc. (Ministry of Integration 2009b).

In addition to strengthening the status of Georgian, the government has taken measures to improve knowledge of English. The Rose Revolution was immediately followed by a fight against corruption and an orientation towards the West. Older public servants were replaced by a new generation and the process of forming a new élite started. Knowledge of English and computer proficiency became necessary for success. Foreign education became very valuable. Since 2005, a presidential foundation has been funding scholarships for one thousand Georgian students (including minority representatives) to attend MA programmes at major Western universities (<http://www.diversity.ge/eng/resources.php?coi=0|11|12>). The government has also recruited three hundred US and European professors to teach on a part-time basis at major Georgian universities, while several universities and high schools teach primarily in English (Matthews 2008).<sup>45</sup>

In 2010, English became compulsory from the first grade in schools ('Saakashvili speaks of linguistic, computer revolution', Civil.ge, 6 April, 2010. Accessed 22 October 2010) while Russian is optional. This decision, opposed by many,<sup>46</sup> appears pragmatic in a globalised world where English dominates and

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<sup>45</sup> For example, the Georgian-American University, the Black Sea University, the American Academy and the New School.

<sup>46</sup> See <http://www.tabula.ge/article-1885.html>; <http://www.7days.ge/index2.php?newsid=2478>; <http://www.momavali.wordpress.com/education/varazashvili>.

Georgia's investment-driven economy is seeking partners in the European Union; but it also fits with Saakashvili's policy of dragging Georgia out from Russia's orbit (*Guardian*, 2010, 12 October). Tbilisi municipality will launch free English and computer classes for adults from 2011, aimed at boosting career prospects ('English ousts Russian in ex-Soviet Georgia's schools', <http://www.france24.com/en/20100503-english-ousts-russian-ex-soviet-georgias-schools>. Accessed 1 March 2011).

One thousand volunteer teachers from abroad are teaching in different regions (*Guardian*, 2010, 12 October). The first wave of teachers under the programme 'teach and learn' arrived and started working in September 2010. Saakashvili stated that, as a part of a 'linguistic revolution', English will become every child's second language. As a truly transformative programme it probably will have few direct short-term visible consequences, but, more importantly, enormous indirect long-term invisible consequences. The government correctly stresses that English is a ticket to engagement with the broader world. Fluency in English is no guarantee of a job, but in many cases it is a necessary first step towards understanding Western values and connecting Georgia to the wider world.

During the next stage, English will be followed by Chinese, Arabic and Turkish (<http://www.civil.ge>, 2010, 16 August. Accessed 3 September 2010). Saakashvili did not mention Russian. Obviously the Government has no interest in helping its citizens to maintain or learn Russian. One of the most significant transformations related to language in Georgia has been the shift from Russian to English, although many households speak Russian at home not only in Kvemo Kartli and Samtskhe-Javakheti, but also in Tbilisi, not to mention in areas not

under Georgian government control. According to the 2002 census (Census 2002: 79), only 43 136 Azeris (out of 284 761) and 84 076 (out of 248 929) Armenians speak Georgian. Since Russian is no longer commonly known among young Georgians, who prefer to study other foreign languages such as English, one can assume that the linguistic isolation of minorities is even stronger among the young.

Russian is still the most common language in the South Caucasus and Central Asia, in Ukraine and Russia itself, and will maintain this status. However, it is being increasingly ousted from educational and scientific spheres as well as entertainment. The Parliament Committee of Education, Culture and Sport is working on amending the Law on Cinematography, according to which foreign movies, both in movie theatres and on TV, have to be shown in their original language (optionally with subtitles), rather than dubbed into Russian, as was the case before (*Financial Times*, 2010, 12 July).

Since the Rose Revolution, the laws related to language use have been more strictly enforced and in many administrative bodies the working language has changed to Georgian mainly because ethnic Georgians have been appointed to senior positions (Crisis Group Report 2006: 24). This has had equivocal results: on the one hand, laws on language use are better adhered to and the status of Georgian has strengthened; on the other hand, new laws have limited the abilities of minorities to participate. The International Crisis Group found multiple cases when Azeris faced problems when dealing with administrative bodies and in the courts after strict application of the law (Crisis Group Report 2006: 25).

Georgia's orientation towards the West, the firm decision in favour of closer integration with the European Union and impressive efforts to make economic and democratic changes have resulted in increased international support, especially in the areas of economic and legislative developments and the protection of human rights, including minority rights. The main international organisations involved in the promotion of peace and stability around the world, such as the United Nations (UN), the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the Council of Europe, link peaceful coexistence of linguistic groups with respect for minority rights, and acknowledge the need to promote and protect cultural and linguistic diversity (Koenig & Varennes 2001: 2). The OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities exercises an especially important role by supervision of minority treatment. After gaining independence, Georgia became a member of all these organisations and has tried to harmonise its legal system to adhere to their principles (Interview with Lali Papiashvili from the Ethnic Integration Committee in parliament, 6 January 2007). Therefore, in 2000 Georgia signed the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, but ratified it only in 2005 (Fact-Finding Mission 2005:6). However Georgia did not ratify the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages adopted by the Council of Europe in 1992 and aimed at preserving linguistic heritage in multilingual states. The Charter cannot be enforced and any state can choose whether to ratify it or not, but the fact that Georgia has still to ratify it has not gone unnoticed by the EU-Georgia Enlargement Action Plan,<sup>47</sup> which calls for the

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<sup>47</sup> The Action Plan can be found at:  
[http://ec.europa.eu/environment/enlarg/pdf/enp\\_action\\_plan\\_georgia.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/environment/enlarg/pdf/enp_action_plan_georgia.pdf)

ratification of the charter, the development of civic integration strategy and its implementation, with monitoring via appropriate instruments (see more about this issue below).

Education is the principal sphere of the strategy for integration. Therefore, international organisations fund several projects aimed at teaching the state language to ethnic minorities. One such project, Civic Forum for Ethnic Azeris in Kvemo Kartli was funded by the European Commission and aimed at facilitating the social and political integration of the Azeri population. The process included developing Georgian-language skills among Azeris. Along with designing a special Georgian-language acquisition programme for Azeri speakers, this part of the project was developed and administered by the International Centre for the Georgian Language (<http://www.icgl.org>) and its director, Rusudan Amirejibi-Mullen.

### **6.1.3 Perceptions and Attitudes**

The consequences of the Soviet nationalities policy (discussed in chapter 5) are evident in today's Georgia. Rather politicised, they are expressed in the perceptions and attitudes of Georgians and ethnic minorities towards each other and remain a substantial obstacle to civic integration. Ethnicity is still a primary focus of identity in Georgia; in other words, individuals tend to identify themselves not as members of a political unity, but as a member of an ethnic group. Georgia's minorities tend to prefer politicians of their own ethnic origin whereas ethnic Georgians distrust their loyalty (*Kviris palitra*, 2005, 3 October). Although the new government has made efforts to overcome such attitudes, in practice little has



changed. Ethnic minorities continue to reject many initiatives aimed at integration, while xenophobia and discriminatory attitudes towards minorities are typical features of Georgian society (Ombudsman's Report 2008). Rather than perceiving integration as something positive, ethnic minorities equate it with assimilation and therefore see it as a threat to their identity. In turn, Georgians view the minorities as a destabilising factor and threat to the Georgian state. Georgians feel betrayed by Abkhazians and Ossetians and fear that other minorities might do the same ('javakheti da borchalo apkhazetisa da samkhret osetis beds gaiziareben', *Sakartvelos respublika*, 2010, 25 September), especially since many of them live in the border areas next to their kin states (Matveeva 2004: 3).

As an ironic result of Soviet policy, ethnic groups pay more attention to their differences than to their similarities. Both the majority and minorities find it difficult to regard each other as *us*, rather than *them*, and such categorisation of *self* and *other* is still embodied by language. Georgians view language as essential to their very existence, while minorities fear that learning Georgian and Georgia's history from a Georgian point of view will somehow make them lose their identity and result in assimilation. They feel intimidated by the linguistic and cultural characteristics associated with the majority. On the other hand, many Georgians are not happy with expressing their identity merely in civic terms without reference to their ethnic genealogy. Therefore the resistance to integration is two-sided. The identities of both groups are largely based not only on myths, but also on confrontations and ancient hatreds, the stories of which filled history books in Soviet times. Conflicting ethno-territorial claims resulted in an enormous production of ethnocentric literature denying the presence of minority ethnic

groups in the distant past (see section 5.2.2). Although history was rewritten in post-Soviet textbooks, current-day equivalents still stress language when linking *kartveloba* to territory in their accounts of the history of modern Georgia, causing distrust among the Azeri and Armenian minorities (Mekhuzla & Roche 2009: 30).

Besides common components, there are distinct elements in the perceptions and attitudes of Georgians towards Azeris and Armenians respectively. In the case of Azeris, Georgians are more concerned with demography; in the case of Armenians, however, their concern relates to claims of territory and cultural heritage. Compared to other ethnic groups, the Azeri population in Georgia has grown much faster, almost doubling in the second half of the twentieth century (Basilaia 2008: 25). In the late Soviet period, Georgian nationalists started expressing fears of the ‘life-threatening expansion’ of Muslims (see for example, Broers 2004: 220). Despite the fact that many Azeris emigrated in the early 1990s, they still constitute the biggest minority in the country and continue to trouble ethno-nationalists, but unlike regular anti-Armenian media publications (‘Georgian-based Armenian civil society blaming Georgian press for anti-Armenian hysteria’. May 16, 2007. <http://www.media.ge>. Accessed 1 March 2011), there is almost no anti-Azeri rhetoric in the Georgian media.

Suspicious towards Armenians have deeper roots (see section 4.2.1), maybe because Armenians are more politically mobilised than Azeris. The tensions between the Armenians of Samtskhe-Javakheti and Georgians somewhat intensified after the Rose Revolution as a result of the withdrawal of a Russian military base which was providing the local population with a source of employment (World Directory of Minorities and Indigenous Peoples: Georgia

overview. Online version: <http://www.minorityrights.org/1909/georgia/georgia-overview.html#current>). Georgians do not take kindly to the activities of Armenian political organizations in Samtskhe-Javakheti, especially their claims relating to Georgian architectural monuments in the region, which Armenians claim as their own (Crisis Group Policy Briefing 2011: 10). The government of Armenia considers Georgia as an important neighbour and needs stability, since Armenia's export and import trade passes through Georgia. Although nationalist circles in Yerevan voice some criticism of Georgian ethno-linguistic policies ('Tbilisi needs to pay more attention to minority rights', 2006, 4 December. <http://www.djavakhk.com>. Accessed 2 March 2011), the Armenian government has a positive influence on the attitudes of Armenians in Georgia ('Lavrov hints at fomenting ethnic tensions inside Georgia', Eurasia Daily Monitor, 2010, 9 July. <http://www.jamestown.org>. Accessed 6 March 2011). For example, Armenia's president Kocharian urges Armenians in Georgia to learn the state language and try to integrate ('Kocharian urges Armenians in Georgia to learn Georgian', 1 May 2007, <http://www.caucas.com>. Accessed 5 February 2011). A stable Georgia is also of vital national interest for Azerbaijan. The government in Baku, and also the Muslim hierarchy of Azerbaijan, have always encouraged Georgia's Azeri minority to continue behaving as loyal citizens (*24 saati*, 2007, 28 June; 'Lavrov hints at fomenting ethnic tensions inside Georgia, Eurasia Daily Monitor', 2010, 9 July, <http://www.jamstown.org>. Accessed 6 March 2011). Azeris have not been politically active since the early 1990s, when they demanded autonomy (Sanikidze & Walker 2004).

It must be noted that the number of anti-Armenian media publications has decreased in recent years ('Armenian bishop Vazgen Mirtsakhaniyan: Armenians in Georgia are treated better than Azerbaijanis', 9 February, 2008, <http://www.today.az>. Accessed 6 March 2011), but anti-Armenian rhetoric periodically appears on local internet forums ('Georgian-based Armenian civil society blaming Georgian press for anti-Armenian hysteria', May 16, 2007, <http://www.media.ge>. Accessed 1 March 2011.) and in political discourse, which outrages civil society. For example, in 2004, MP Gocha Pipia publicly demanded information about the ethnic origin and faith of each member of government when it became known that the mother of the Prime Minister at the time was Armenian. In 2007, an MP from the ruling party Beso Jugheli made a statement denigrating Armenians on TV and radio ('MP denies plans to quit parliament over 'ethnic slur', 17 May, 2007, <http://www.civil.ge>. Accessed 6 March 2011).

In Samtskhe-Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli, the local population enjoys the right to use the Armenian and Azeri languages respectively in daily life, but both communities have demanded measures to preserve these languages in the future. Even though Saakashvili often emphasises in his speeches that the multi-ethnic make-up of Georgia is an asset, when promoting civic integration, government officials are quick to point out that integration does not mean assimilation, since part of the ethnic population remains suspicious of state language teaching and reacts negatively to efforts to spread the state language (Gabunia 2006: 39, Tsipuria 2006: 23). Another part of the ethnic minority population, however, openly demands improvement in the quality of teaching of the state language (Gabunia 2006: 38). If under Shevardnadze the minority population felt there were

too few incentives to learn Georgian, under Saakashvili many parents want their children to retain their own language, but at the same time to develop Georgian, so that they can participate in economic and political life. According to the High Commissioner on National Minorities (Fonblanque 2006: 57), there is a clear need to acquire real fluency in at least two languages, namely the mother tongue and Georgian.

Besides language, one reason for negative attitudes towards Georgians among minorities is the Georgian Orthodox Church's deep involvement in ideological issues. After the signing of a special agreement between the state and the Orthodox Church in 2002 (see section 6.2.1), other religious groups found themselves marginalized. Sometimes they have showed an open hostility towards the activities of the Georgian church. When the Orthodox Church opened a convent in an Armenian populated region, Armenians perceived this as an intrusion into local society (Fact-Finding Mission 2005: 16). According to a fact-finding mission, the real source of hostility lies not only in religious differences, but also in two different versions of regional history. For example, the Mission (2005: 16) heard hostile comments and expressions of anger from the local Armenian population regarding the religious celebration held in the Georgian church of Kumurdo (Georgian Soviet Encyclopedia 1983: 71), which Armenians consider their own, explaining the inscriptions in Georgian by the fact that when it was built (964) Armenians were using the Georgian language for political considerations. Recently, religious issues became even more sensitive when the Deputy Minister of State Integration, Elene Tevdoradze, announced that the Armenian Church would not be granted special status in Georgia ('Armenian

Apostolic Church will not get status in Georgia', 2010, 16 November. <http://www.news.am>. Accessed 4 February 2011). Many Georgian policy-makers fear granting status to minority religions and languages, arguing that such a move will weaken *kartveloba* as an identity and undermine the security of the state against Russia, the goal of which in Georgia has historically been domination through 'divide and rule' policies. After the *de facto* loss of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, Georgians think that Russia might play the Armenian and Azeri cards. However, Russia, seeking an instrument to destabilise Georgia, was able to play the ethnic card with Abkhazians and Ossetians because of Georgian ethnocentric nationalism at the time (see section 6.2.1). Imposing ethnic conflicts with Azeris and Armenians seems unlikely, especially if Georgia is implementing a reasonable ethnic policy that does not deprive minorities of their rights.

Nevertheless, Georgian politicians remain cautious and, while slowly moving towards pluralism, are not rushing to ratify the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, which Georgia is obliged to ratify. There is an ongoing process of trying to ratify the Charter in consultation with public officials, foreign experts, academics and civil society. For example, on 13-14 September 2010, these groups held a meeting with the State Minister of Integration Temur Iakobashvili (see for example, <http://www.gfsis.org/index.php/activities/view/event-calendar/dates/2010-09-14%202010-09-14>). Representatives of the European Centre for Minority Issues stress that the Charter offers sixty-eight possible measures and the state must agree to undertake at least thirty-five. At the meeting mentioned above, Iakobashvili stated clearly that, in terms of the protection of small languages, the Charter would only apply only to the languages

that are unique to Georgia (such as Abkhazian and Kartvelian languages); Armenian and Azeri would not be considered. The extent to which the government is going to become involved in the preservation of unique languages is not clear.

The issue of Kartvelian languages (Megrelian and Svan) is another topic of concern among policy-makers, since many in Georgia believe that their inclusion under the protection of the Charter may have negative effects on the consolidation of *kartveloba*. But besides Iakobashvili's comment (see above), there is some other evidence that the government is not excluding the possibility of adopting special measures to protect these languages. For example, the Ministry of Education admitted that these languages need to be protected and promoted as part of Georgia's cultural heritage, but all measures must be carefully considered in order not to stir up any tensions, and, at the same time, not yield to fears of jeopardising linguistic homogeneity.

The fact is that in recent years, the status of Kartvelian languages, especially Megrelian, has become the subject of debate in academia and the media in the context of broader discussions of what constitutes a nation (see also section 6.2). As with all other language questions, this issue is much politicised. A group of well-educated Megrelians actively promote their language,<sup>48</sup> while some scholars associate the protection of Kartvelian languages with the Soviet policy of division (see for example, Putkaradze 2005), not realising that their own definition of nation, which emphasises one language, is the Soviet definition. With such an

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<sup>48</sup> See for example Megrelian Wikipedia at [http://www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mingrelian\\_language](http://www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mingrelian_language) (accessed 29 June 2011) and Megrelian groups and pages on Facebook.

approach, these scholars question the loyalty of Megrelians as a group, which the latter find insulting. These scholars fear that recognising small languages might promote separatism and encourage movements toward secession. Therefore, they oppose the ratification of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages. For example, Teimuraz Gvantseladze, professor of linguistics, noted that Megrelians and Svans might start campaigning for recognition if the charter is ratified (Minority language controversy in Georgia, IWPR report, 2010, 22 October).

The absolute majority of Megrelians refer to their language as ‘the language of the cradle’ or ‘our kitchen language’, while reserving the term ‘mother tongue’ for Georgian (see sections 2.4.1 and 3.1). Written Megrelian, spelt with the Georgian script, is limited to small-scale and sporadic publications of a linguistic or folkloristic nature (Wheatley 2009: 13). The relationship between Megrelian and Georgian is characterised by diglossia. The overwhelming majority of Megrelians prefer Georgian as the language of education and media (Paulston & Peckhem 1998: 106). The right to use Megrelian and Svan in the private sphere was never been challenged. But if the Charter is ratified, these languages will acquire the status of minority or regional languages. Not familiar with the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, which cannot be used by those who pursue divisive political agendas to weaken Georgia (art. 5), some scholars argue that ratification will upset national cohesion. They therefore maintain that Megrelian and Svan are not languages, but rather dialects of Georgian (Amirejibi-Mullen 2006: 5-10). The arguments and anxieties regarding the revival of Kartvelian languages reveal fears associated with the Tsarist and



Soviet efforts to institutionalise Kartvelian languages as part of their respective ‘divide and rule’ policies (see sections 4.1.3 and 5.2.2). These fears expose not only the confusion over the terms such as ‘nation’, ‘ethnicity’ and ‘minority’ (see section 5.2.3), but also the lack of knowledge about language policy theory and practice, which shows that embracing small languages can contribute to the culture of a sovereign state. Unfortunately, the Georgian Orthodox Church, which enjoys great authority among Georgians, plays a negative role in clarifying such issues as shown in section 6.2.1.

## **6.2 Nationalism and national identity in contemporary Georgia**

As A. D. Smith explains (2002: 78), with the collapse of communism, national élites in some post-Soviet countries were driven back to their ethnic heritages and mythologies in the hope of realising the messianic mission of their respective communities. Long-suppressed nationalisms fuelled ethnic conflicts. When explaining such developments, instrumentalists tend to blame nationalist leaders who have manipulated ethnic symbols and myths. Primordialists, however, minimise the role of intellectuals and trace ethnic conflicts back to historic antagonism (A. D. Smith 2002: 79). Ethnosymbolists do not consider either of these approaches adequate and place the role of intellectuals in a larger historical and cultural context and try to analyse the complex relationships between élites and their communities. Intellectuals play an active role in the formation of a new identity, but they mislead their compatriots. Emotional and cultural pressure is two-sided. In this process the religious revival of a community is common, since old memories and myths are related to the religious mission of the group. Very

often nationalist leaders trace a myth of ethnic election from pre-modern times. If such myths were entirely religious in the past, today they are sometimes secularised, but have a deep religious content affecting the sense of value and exclusiveness of the community (A. D. Smith 2002: 98). In other words, both ethnic and civic nationalisms draw on myths and try to institutionalise them as an expression of identity. Intellectual élites and politicians try to direct their cultural policies to authenticate ethnic symbols on behalf of the community. During nation-formation in newly independent states, we observe sometimes a symbiosis of ethnic and civic elements, sometimes competition between them. The latter is especially true for Georgia.

Georgia is a good case study for exploring the interplay of the ethnic and civic elements of nationhood. As shown in this section, myths of ethnic election and ethno-cultural durability were initially used to demarcate exclusive boundaries for distinguishing members of the nation from non-members. This approach was later challenged by the alternative path offering a secular national destiny. Interestingly, ethnic and civic ideologies are still not entirely separated from each other. Despite offering and employing different ranges of identity markers while trying to reorganise collective memories, these projects feature certain similarities, as shown below.

### **6.2.1 *Kartveloba* – two projects of nation-building: ethno-religious versus secular/civic**

By the late 1980s, *kartveloba* as an identity was a framework of perceptions about Georgian history, culture, language, religion and homeland embodied in formal

and informal discourse. Essentially the ideology behind it was the same as the ideology of the high medieval ages (see section 3.2), but now it was the ideology not only of the élite. The institutionalised system of education in the Soviet Union covered all Georgians and produced generations of well-educated people. This helped to complete the process of modern identity formation, which started in the nineteenth century largely thanks to the Society for the Spread of Literacy among Georgians (see section 4.2).

In the nineteenth century, the leader of the nationalist movement, Ilia Chavchavadze, linked the nation to the secularisation of society (see chapter 4). In the twentieth century, generations of Georgians were atheists and, by the 1980s, the religious component of identity was subordinated to the national component. However, in the late 1980s, emphasising the formative importance of religion in the identity formation process often became part of informal education and nationalist discourse (Nodia 2009: 90), giving the Church the opportunity to come back on the scene. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, the notion that only an orthodox Georgian could be a ‘true’ Georgian was frequently expressed, meaning that Muslim Georgians in Adjara (see section 4.1.3) felt increasing difficulty in identifying themselves simultaneously with Islam and the Georgian nation (Pelkmans 2006:122). Ironically, Ilia Chavchavadze was canonised by the Orthodox Church in 1987 (Rayfield 2000: 159) and his words ‘language, homeland and faith’ were adopted as a slogan of nationalism (see section 4.2.2). Since then, the church slowly, but steadily started gaining the upper hand, subordinating national identity. Gradually, two competing projects of *kartveloba* emerged: one civic/secular, the other ethno-religious.

As discussed in section 5.1.2, Gorbachev's reforms brought about a dramatic politicisation of Soviet nationalisms. In Georgia, the cultural and linguistic nationalism of previous years was transformed into a national movement for political independence in the late 1980s. Georgia's national movement showed extraordinary strength, integrative potential and mobilising capacity (Christophe 2002: 149). Georgia was one of the first two countries (along with Lithuania) to replace the ruling communist *nomenklatura* with leaders of the national movement and demand the restoration of independence (Silogava & Shengelia 2007: 244-245). After almost two hundred years of Russian rule interrupted by only three years of independence (1918-1921), Georgians have had to redevelop and redefine *kartveloba* as a new political identity. However, the Soviet strategy of manipulating history and the concept of nation, on the one hand, and a feeling of pride in a glorious past deeply embedded in collective memory, on the other, pose a difficult challenge in the process of nation-building.

In such challenging circumstances, religion as a historical and cultural marker has understandably become the most important source for identity (see section 2.2.2). This was helped by a political leader in 1990-1991, Gamsakhurdia, who did not see any means of mobilisation other than a revival of the messianic myths of Georgians. As A. D. Smith explains, modern nationalism draws much of its passion from the belief in a national mission and destiny. Such a belief owes much to a powerful myth of chosenness or ethnic election (see section 2.2.3): 'We sometimes find examples of a symbiosis and even a fusion between the earlier religious myths and the national ideal. Here the old religious myths [...] are more or less consciously fused with a modern ethno-political nationalism' (A. D. Smith

1999b: 332). Myths of election are central to ensuring the persistence of the community through the centuries and national movements often concentrate on them in order to reproduce the meaning and purpose of the respective nation (Hutchinson 2000: 660). Revived and redeveloped, they are carried into the modern period when the nation faces difficult challenges. An ideological vacuum in post-Soviet Georgia was filled with religious symbols, memories and myths. Ilia Chavchavadze's secular project directed towards the future was replaced by Gamsakhurdia's ethno-religious project focused on the past.

Gamsakhurdia's rhetoric was based on the fact that the Georgian Orthodox Church, together with its *lingua sacra*, Georgian, remained the only bearer of the unity of the Georgian people and lands and that it was a unifier of the Georgian state at the zenith of its existence (see section 3.2.2). Georgian historiography assumed that Orthodox Christianity played a major role in preserving *kartveloba* vis-à-vis Muslim enemies and was therefore a 'guardian' of national identity.<sup>49</sup> Gamsakhurdia frequently emphasised the importance of Orthodoxy and the holy mission of the Georgians (see section 5.2.3). Indeed the Orthodox Church contributed to the collective identity, especially to the preservation of language as shown in chapters 3 and 4. But when Georgia gained its independence, it became obvious that a substantial part of the population could not speak Georgian. Minorities were perceived as instruments of russification and an assault on Georgian language and culture. Gamsakhurdia's intolerant ethnocentric discourse, with its potential for conflict, threatened minorities who were denounced as

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<sup>49</sup> Even nowadays the mission of Orthodoxy is presented as a restoration of unity.

‘ungrateful guests’ and even ‘traitors’. His aggression provoked fear and led to the alienation of minorities. Media in the early 1990s were filled with xenophobic articles, often denouncing minorities as ‘traitors’ (see for example *Sakartvelo*, 1992, 31 July: 1-2). The extreme position of the government is well illustrated by some slogans of the time, such as ‘Georgia for Georgians’ (see section 5.2.2).

Gamsakhurdia and his party, *Mrgvali magida* (Round table), built their political programme on ethnically defined myths. After winning elections and securing a parliamentary majority, *Mrgvali magida* did not introduce purely secular values, despite representing a secular population, and did not try to create new state symbols, institutions and laws for an independent secular nation, but rather introduced religious symbols, redefined the messianic idea of *kartveloba* (see section 3.2) and declared religious holidays as national holidays. Communist internationalist discourse was replaced with national chauvinistic discourse. Soviet atheism was replaced with religious discourse.

In his inaugural speech (cited in Matsaberidze 2007), Gamsakhurdia spoke about the historical relations between the Church and the state in Georgia. Towards the end of the speech, he made it clear that the national movement, in some sense, was a popular-religious movement to ensure the moral rebirth of the nation and reunification of the church and the state. Finally he said: ‘The Georgian nation is elect among its equals for its lifestyle, location and language. Georgia is destined to be the Theotokos’ (Alasania 2006: 117); in other words, God-bearing, coming under the auspices of Virgin Mary (see also section 3.2.1).

The fact was that Gamsakhurdia understood *kartveloba*, necessarily including Orthodox Christianity, as the identity of Georgian-speaking Orthodox Christians, i.e. of those who could fulfil the messianic mission voiced by Ioane Zosime in the tenth century (see section 3.2.2). The same year he was elected as Georgia's president, Gamsakhurdia published 'Letters and Essays', with an essay about Ioane Zosime's hymn 'Praise and Glorification of the Georgian Language', in which he tried to demonstrate that the hymn was a mythical foretelling of the special mission of Georgians among Christian nations, namely that the Georgian tongue is preserved until the day of the Second Coming (see section 3.2.2). Gamsakhurdia's political discourse posited that the Georgian Church and language were necessary conditions for independence and state-building, deriving from the myth of superiority of the Georgian language. Thus, his outline for the nation-building project was the moral, religious and linguistic regeneration of an old collective identity.

Other leaders of the national movement thought in the same way. For example, Irakli Batiashvili announced: 'I believe it is my duty as a Georgian to be Christian' (*Literaturuli sakartvelo*, 1991, 4 June). In order to 'restore justice' and 'return Georgia to Georgians', Guram Petriashvili, a nationalist ideologist, advocated printing only books written by Georgian authors (*Tavisupali sakartvelo*, 1991, 19 August).

Instead of addressing more pressing issues of identity or economic and political affairs, Gamsakhurdia evoked the unbroken continuity from Golden Age to the present. This idea easily flourished in the minds of those generations whose knowledge of history was marked by nationalist discourse (see, for example,

Ingoroqva's thesis as an illustration of such patterns discussed in section 5.2.2.), and who were attempting to build an independent state from scratch. However, because of the lack of interest in solutions to economic problems and the disregard of the political situation by Gamsakhurdia's government, Georgia missed a historic opportunity to start building a nation-state.

By favouring religious fundamentalism, institutionalised religious extremism and ethnocentrism, Gamsakhurdia made worse what were already difficult tasks. Ethnic identities of both Georgians and minorities became stronger. Ethnocentric politics resulted in numerous clashes with minorities, while Russia was providing large-scale aid to minority fighters (Silogava & Shengelia 2007: 245-246). Gamsakhurdia's international image was seriously damaged. Domestic opponents of his chauvinism, who were declared 'agents of Moscow', also called him a 'dictator' and 'fascist' (Nodia 1995: 107). Gamsakhurdia responded by ordering their arrest and in December 1991 armed conflict broke out in front of the government building, leading Gamsakhurdia to flee the capital (Silogava & Shengelia 2007: 246).

Following the ousting of Gamsakhurdia, Shevardnadze, the former First Secretary of the Communist Party of Georgia and Minister of Foreign Affairs under Gorbachev, returned to Tbilisi as a head of state. Largely because of his international reputation, he was able to escape Western criticism despite the fact that he came to power on the back of an illegal *coup d'état*. Besides the task of replacing a legitimately elected president, accommodating ethnic minorities and restoring the economy, Shevardnadze had to re-establish control over the whole territory of Georgia, since he had inherited a state engaged in two wars (with South



Ossetian secessionists and with supporters of Gamsakhurdia in western Georgia). In addition, Tbilisi had no control over Abkhazia or Adjara.

Shevardnadze's efforts had mixed results. The war with Abkhazian separatists broke out in 1992 and ended in Georgia's defeat. Georgia accepted the establishment of Russian military bases on its territory. In spite of popular opposition, it also joined the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) (Silogava & Shengelia 2007: 247). Russia established a firm military presence in the country and started supporting separatist regimes in Abkhazia and South Ossetia (Gachechiladze 1997: 58). Russia's peace plan paralysed talks between interested parties and created important incentives for the *de facto* states to pursue secession. For instance, Russia distributed passports to the residents of Abkhazia and South Ossetia (Asmus 2010: 73) and started paying pensions larger than those granted by the Georgian government to retired people within these territories. Although Abkhazia and South Ossetia were the target of an international embargo, Russia continued to trade with them.<sup>50</sup> By the time Shevardnadze was elected president (1995), Abkhazia and South Ossetia had achieved *de facto* independence; their politics and economy were criminalised and Russia had established a military presence in Georgia (Demetriou 2002: 860).

An experienced politician, Shevardnadze was more careful in playing the Orthodox card. Nevertheless, he was publicly baptised in late 1992 and received the name Giorgi (George), emphasising the importance of Saint George as a

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<sup>50</sup> In contrast, in 2006 Russia banned the import of meat, vegetables, wine and mineral water from Georgia.

protector of the Georgian nation. For his election as president, he took his oath in the main Orthodox cathedral (Andronikashvili & Maisuradze 2010: 5). With regards to national identity under Shevardnadze, although the ‘Georgian gene’ remained conspicuous in public discourse, it became less fashionable on a political level (Nodia 2009: 92). Instead of religious myths and a belief that the history of Georgia is a history of Christians fighting against Muslims, Shevardnadze promoted a secular myth, the idea of Georgian history as a history of the Silk Road. This is the so called ‘crossroads theory’, meaning that Georgian culture emerged from a fusion of eastern and western cultures. Philosopher Gigi Tevzadze (2009) argues that this myth has its origin in the beginning of the twentieth century and was revived in 1970s as a dominant theory of Georgian self-identification among Georgian scholars. It was also a theory that was used by foreign scholars in their definition of Georgian identity (see, for example, Magarotto et.al. 1982).

The leaders of the Rose Revolution have kept this myth and continued to promote it. Indeed, Shevardnadze’s main idea proved to be useful. Georgia found its historical mission – to be a bridge between the East and West – and started reviving this mission by offering transit routes for Caspian oil. The West showed interest in the region and Georgia became more involved in global processes. Georgia started receiving financial and political support from Western countries, especially the USA, which became an important international player in the South Caucasus. This period coincided with the boom of globalisation, improved and modern communication technologies such as the Internet, email, etc.

With Shevardnadze’s ideas, ethno-nationalist rhetoric declined and leading nationalist parties vanished from the political scene. Georgia grew more pro-

western and civil society became stronger. But despite the US government spending over USD 700 million in aid including aid from the IMF, the World Bank and European Union, the level of ordinary people's life did not improve because of widespread corruption in the government. Therefore, Georgia made no progress in state-building. Gradually, because of a series of disappointments in the West's unsuccessful involvement, anti-western and anti-globalisation discourse appeared. Some politicians, blaming the West for its 'bad' influence on Georgia, started to appeal to ethno-religious values again and voiced hatred of non-native religious minorities, especially the Jehovah's Witnesses, who were frequently harassed (Kiknadze 2008: 330). Orthodox priests sometimes participated in violent activities against religious minorities (Helsinki Commission Hearing 2004). The Patriarch openly urged the suppression of those 'sects' which were not 'historical' to Georgia, claiming that they put Georgian identity at risk (Ilia II 1999).

In October 2002, Shevardnadze and Ilia II signed a concordat guaranteeing a privileged position for the Orthodox Church within Georgia. A year later the president announced that he was going to sign an agreement between the Georgian government and the Vatican as a treaty between two sovereign states guaranteeing religious freedom and the legal rights of Catholics in Georgia. The Orthodox Church, believing in its right to oversee all church-state relations, was particularly critical of the treaty. It did everything in order to prevent the agreement being signed, and acted as a public whistleblower, causing mass protests in front of the parliament building. Some priests and high-ranking officials attended the protests. People held banners saying 'Hands off Georgia' and 'Georgia without the Vatican' (Brethren in Christ, divided, 2003, 29 September. <http://www.civil.ge>. Accessed 5

February 2011). Within two months, the Rose Revolution emerged and demanded Shevardnadze's resignation. Ilia II offered no support to the president (Crego 2007: 15).

One important step towards building a civic nation under Shevardnadze, which was initiated by the future leader of the Rose Revolution, Mikheil Saakashvili, was the removal in 1999 of the ethnic category from official documents (Matveeva 2004: 3). The general public as well as some politicians opposed the move but the young reformists won. It was at this point that it became obvious that there were two different nation-building projects: those who opposed the removal of ethnicity from identity cards viewed nationality as ethnic belonging; others understood nationality in the Western sense, as synonymous with citizenship (see below for further discussion).

Since the Soviet period, as a result of Marxist-Leninist elaborations, identification with an ethnic group has constituted a major sense of belonging. Many Georgians viewed the removal of ethnicity as the loss of identity, while minorities saw it as a move towards assimilation (Stepanian 2003: 20). Both the majority and minorities found it difficult to view the term *Kartveli* (a Georgian) as a term for citizenship. Therefore, instead of *Kartveli*, Georgian passports now read: 'Citizen of Georgia'.

Even if all the residents of the former Soviet Republic of Georgia obtained Georgian citizenship, before the Rose Revolution citizenship was an almost meaningless concept. Minorities were not provided with full citizenship in the form of proper participation in state life. Instead they were regarded as an

untrustworthy fifth column. In Gamsakhurdia's time, many believed that ethnic Georgians had a greater right to exercise citizenship than other groups, particularly those who had another state (Armenians and Azeris). The attitudes of ethnic groups towards each other did not improve under the next regime, although the constitution adopted in 1995 established the equality of rights and the principle of non-discrimination based on ethnic, linguistic and religious affiliation.<sup>51</sup> Shevardnadze's benign neglect and inability to find a solution to the multi-ethnic problems only deepened mutual mistrust, although there were no reported explosive conflicts in Kvemo Kartli and Samtskhe-Javakheti. Shevardnadze's period is best characterised as an attempt to find a balance between different interests in order to keep stability in the country, but this meant delaying long-term solutions. Minority regions were governed by clans who were obliged to support the government during elections. The state institutions responsible for minority issues were often ineffective and purely nominal. Such an atmosphere forced many minority representatives to leave Georgia. For example, according to the 2002 census, the number of ethnic Russians since 1989 decreased from 6.3% to 1.5 % (Census 2002: 55).

After the Rose Revolution the concept of a Georgian nation acquired a more political dimension. Western-educated Saakashvili engaged in a nation-building process by favouring a common political project for all ethnic groups and began to refer to Georgia's multi-ethnic make-up as a source of strength. In his 2004 inaugural address, Saakashvili (2004a) claimed that:

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<sup>51</sup> The Constitution of Georgia is available online at:

[http://www.parliament.ge/files/68\\_1944\\_951190\\_CONSTIT\\_27\\_12.06.pdf](http://www.parliament.ge/files/68_1944_951190_CONSTIT_27_12.06.pdf).

Georgia must become a model where every citizen will be equal before the law, where every citizen has equal opportunity to achieve success [...] Georgia is the home for all Georgians, as well as for representatives of ethnic groups that live in Georgia. All of Georgia's citizens: whether Russian, Abkhaz, Ossetian, Azeri, Armenian, Jewish, Greek, Ukrainian, Kurdish for whom Georgia is their own homeland, are our nation's greatest treasure and wealth.

If Gamsakhurdia emphasised ethnic markers as constitutive elements of the nation, Saakashvili (2004b) focused on political dimensions and tried to distinguish the term 'nation' from 'ethnicity', asserting that:

It is our responsibility to preserve the multiethnic and multi-religious Georgia that our ancestors have left us, because many nationalities, many ethnic origins are only a source of wealth. These are bricks for a new state building's large construction plan. [...] [A]lthough there are many ethnic groups, the nation and the nationality are only one — Georgian, and it consists of Georgians, Azeri-Georgians, Abkhaz-Georgians, Ossetian-Georgians, Armenian-Georgians and so forth.

In the interview given to the *Wall Street Journal* ('It takes Cultural Revolution', 2005, 19 August), Saakashvili spoke about the difficulties involved in the process of overcoming an ethnic mentality:

For multi-ethnic societies like Georgia, cultural change is impossible without changes in the perception of ethnicity. In this case, politicians should take the lead by speaking out and acting to defeat hate speech and prejudices and taking a firm line when it comes to protecting human rights. In Georgia, we dared to take positions that were previously considered political suicide, eliminating the poisonous nationalistic slogans of the early 1990s such as ‘Georgia for Georgians’ and creating a new politics that declares Georgia the motherland of all its citizens. And we are going even further, establishing merit-based affirmative action programmes that give ethnic minorities, such as Azeris, Armenians and Ossetians living throughout the country, a chance to serve in government at all levels. This way, they will become both participants in and contributors to the new Georgia.

Despite Saakashvili’s fine words, the reality is that ethnic myths remain important under his government. Such myths explain the fate and negative experiences of Georgia, deployed to some degree to disown responsibility for whatever goes wrong. This process goes hand in hand with the identification of an enemy who is attempting to destroy the nation. In general, a common enemy plays a key role in the construction of group identity: ‘There is no more effective way of bonding together the desperate sections of restless peoples than to unite them against outsiders’ (Hobsbawm 1992: 91). In Georgia, the most significant ‘other’ is Russia, which Georgians do not distinguish from the Soviet Union, especially after

the 2008 war.<sup>52</sup> The rhetoric is that communism was never natural to Georgia; it was a foreign import from the Russian oppressors, despite the fact that many communist leaders were ethnic Georgians and a large part of the intellectual élite felt quite comfortable under the Tsarist and Soviet regimes. Georgia is presented as a victim of Russian policies since its annexation in 1801 (see chapter 4) and generations of Georgians believe it is because of Russia that Georgia lost territories controlled earlier in its history. The influential Georgian politician Zurab Zhvania (2006: 160) underlined that at any important crossroads during Georgia's history, if given a choice, the country tried to get closer to the West. If in pre-modern times the Muslim world prevented this from happening by conquering Georgia (for example, when Ottomans occupied Tao-Klarjeti, the historic south-western principality in 1551), in modern times, Russia is responsible for the loss of some parts of Georgia's historic homeland.

Territorialisation is central to nationalism (A. D. Smith 2009: 44) and nations need to have political control over lands they perceive as their historical homeland. Abkhazia and South Ossetia gain even more importance for Georgians, because ethnic cleansing of Georgians occurred in both places. Therefore, these areas play an enduring role in Georgian politics. It is thus no surprise that the reintegration of Georgia's territories was identified as one of the major goals of Saakashvili's regime (see for example,

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<sup>52</sup> Georgia and Russia fought a brief war in 2008 that resulted in the regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia finally breaking away from Georgia. Russia recognizes both regions as independent, although virtually no other state does.



[http://www.president.gov.ge/index.php?sec\\_id=217&lang\\_id=GEO](http://www.president.gov.ge/index.php?sec_id=217&lang_id=GEO). Accessed 29 June 2011).

One of the key issues for Saakashvili's government was the defence of religious freedom, which is declared in article 9 of the Georgian constitution.<sup>53</sup> The same article acknowledges the 'particular role' of the Orthodox Church in Georgia's history. In some ways, two years after his inauguration, Saakashvili's rhetoric returned to ethnocentric nationalism. This could be the result of the ultranationalist and conservative discourse of some political parties which gained popularity demanding the preservation of ethnic *kartveloba* and frequently calling for Orthodoxy as the state religion. Perhaps Saakashvili's government wants to show that they are more patriotic and more Orthodox Christians than the other parties. After Saakashvili came to power, Georgia adopted a new flag showing a large cross surrounded by four small crosses, as a reference to Georgia's Christian identity. At his inauguration, Saakashvili took an oath in the Gelati Cathedral, on David the Builder's grave (Andronikashvili, & Maisuradze 2010: 5). Arguably the government tries to profit from the authority of the Church and does not want to criticise it openly, avoiding a conflict. Practically, the government does little to ensure religious pluralism. In fact, Georgia's government recognises the privileges of the Orthodox Church (see section 6.2.2).

Meanwhile, extremist ultra-nationalist religious and fascist movements, such as the Union of Orthodox Parents and the National Orthodox Movement,

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<sup>53</sup> According to 2002 census, 88.6% of Georgia's population is Christian. Among ethnic Georgians, 94.7% are Orthodox Christian, 3.8% Muslim, and 0.3 % Catholic. 9.9% of the total population is Muslim and 2.1% is Jewish (Census 2002: 80).

assault, often physically, representatives of other religions, atheists and people with liberal views. The Church does not condemn their actions. So far, there has only been one case of extremists being punished by the government ('Eight jailed over Kavkasia TV fist-fight', 2010, 13 August. <http://www.civil.ge>. Accessed 7 September 2010). When in 2008, the ombudsman named 13 instances of violence, the patriarchate denied them. Moreover, Ilia II told a BBC correspondent that the goal of these organisations was to protect the Georgian Church which was a worthy goal (Chitanava 2010). Press issued by the Patriarch's office (see the next section) contributes to the idea that ethnocentric and xenophobic policies can be legitimate, especially since the Patriarch's office does not condemn religious extremism and xenophobic behaviour towards religious or sexual minorities ('Church reacts on rumoured gay parade plan', 2010, 21 August. <http://www.civil.ge>. Accessed 20 September 2010).

Nevertheless, the abuse of religious minorities, including violence and their verbal harassment, decreased under the new government, according to the 2010 US State Department's Annual Report on International Religious Freedom (<http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2010/148936.htm>). The same report underlines that the problems remain because of the Georgian government's fear of offending the Georgian Orthodox Church.

### **6.2.2 Language, homeland, faith: Nation-building and the Orthodox Church**

As mentioned in the previous section, the role of the Georgian Orthodox Church in the development of *kartveloba* is acknowledged by the state. The Georgian Church was a guarantor of identity in pre-modern times (see chapter 3), but Orthodoxy

became more closely associated with modern Georgian identity in the Tsarist period when the Georgian Church became an exarchate of the Russian Church (see chapter 4). Autocephaly was regained in 1917, but it barely functioned and did not influence state affairs (Jones 1989: 177).<sup>54</sup> In the Soviet period, the Church lost much of its property, and public religious observance was banned. It belonged to the private sphere, but after the collapse of the USSR religion became an important part of public life (Serrano 2010: 46). The Orthodox Church claimed a right to the historical heritage (such as old churches and monasteries), but new churches were also being built everywhere. This process intensified under Saakashvili. Many business people started financing the activities of the patriarch's office. The Church has had its own television station since 2007 (*Ertsulovneba* available online at <http://sstv.ge>) and radio station since 2001 (*Iveria* at FM 105.4). Since 1977, when Ilia II became the patriarch, the Church also has published several magazines (*Jvari vazisa*, *Sapatriarkos utskebani*, *Sakartvelos sapatrarko*, *Saghtismetkvelo krebuli*, etc.) which often portray the contributions of the Church to Georgia's history.

In addition to many other privileges, every year the state budget allocates twenty-five million lari (roughly US 14 million dollars) to the patriarch's office. Interestingly, the government's Chamber of Control, which audits state spending, has no authority to check on expenditure of money given to the Church (Chitanava 2010). For Ilia II's birthday in 2008, the office received another half a million lari (interview with Basil Kobakhidze, on radio *Kviris palitra*, 2009, 4 November). The

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<sup>54</sup> The autocephaly was recognised by the Holy Synod of Constantinople until 1990 (The Blackwell Dictionary of Eastern Christianity 2000: 213).

same year, the government gave the patriarch's office nineteen Toyota Land Cruisers, each of which costs between forty thousand and sixty-five thousand US dollars (*Alia*, 2008, 24 January). Nevertheless, the Church demands even more funding (see for example, 'krtamshi gadakrili milionebi', 31 March, 2009. [http://www.religion.ge/news\\_one.php?cat=1 &lan=1 &news=1539](http://www.religion.ge/news_one.php?cat=1 &lan=1 &news=1539). Accessed 12 November 2010).

All this draws criticism from the West and outrage from civil society as well as from former and current Western-educated priests, who, unable to cope with the corruption and ignorance predominating in the Church, have decided to return to civil life. They openly confront the patriarch's office and priests, many of whom are former criminals (see, for example, interview with Basil Kobakhidze on radio *Kviris palitra*, 2009, 4 November; interview with Beka Mindiashvili, *Versia*, 2009, 9 February; and interview with Kakhaber Kurtanidze on radio *Liberty*, 2010, 5 November), and demand public discussions about transparency in the Church's affairs. In turn, the Church accuses civil society of fighting against Orthodoxy, which as the patriarch said on several occasions, has been a basis for making the community of *kartveloba* and, therefore, must be the ideology of independent Georgia (see for example, interview with Basil Kobakhidze on radio *Kviris palitra*, 2009, 4 November). Given the Patriarch's great authority in shaping public opinion, it is not surprising that his words influence decisions by political parties seeking popular support. Although the Patriarch does condemn attempts by politicians to involve him in politics ('Do not involve us in politics – Georgian Orthodox Church', 3 January 2008, <http://www.civil.ge>. Accessed 13 November 2010), he hints at his political choices. Before the 2008 presidential elections he

said: ‘The Georgian people should elect a person, who [...] will take care of our holy places, our Orthodox religion and church’ (‘Orthodox Church wants president who respects religion’, 4 January 2008. <http://www.civil.ge>. Accessed 13 November 2010).

In addition, Ilia II attends important state occasions and makes comments about all kinds of issues, always reminding people that Georgia, situated at the crossroads of east and west, north and south, is tempted by the influence of other nations’ lifestyle, be that liberalisation, democratic reforms, modern technologies, etc. In his view, such phenomena threaten Georgian national identity (see for example, his ‘Christmas letter’, *Sakartvelos respublika*, 2004, 7 January). The Patriarch’s office even commented on Saakashvili’s initiative to teach English to all children in Georgia (see section 6.1.2), claiming that studying English will make Georgian children stupid (‘ratom dagvghupavs inglisuris stsavleba pirveli klasidan’, *Tabula*, 2010, 15 November). Ilia II also commented on the president’s initiative to send students to western universities: ‘Young people are not yet strong spiritually, culturally [...] So we should refrain from sending young people abroad’ (Patriarch: ‘Refrain from sending kids abroad for education’, 2010, 3 October. <http://www.civil.ge>. Accessed 15 October 2010).

In 2007, with the Patriarch’s support, Tbilisi hosted the International Symposium on Globalisation and Dialogue between Civilizations. While Saakashvili spoke at the symposium about the symbolic importance of holding such an event in Georgia as a historically multicultural and multireligious country and emphasised the unbroken relations between the Orthodox Church and the Georgian state, Ilia II underlined the tolerance by the Georgia’s peoples of other

religions (*Ganatileba*, 2007, 31 May), as demonstrated in the old district of Tbilisi, where an Orthodox Church, a synagogue, a mosque and an Armenian church stand side by side. However, many Georgians perceive themselves as ‘hosts’ in the country and demand that the tolerated ‘guests’ behave appropriately, namely stick to the stereotypical social roles ascribed to different ethnic minorities (Elbakidze 2008: 39). For instance, Azeris are agricultural workers, Armenians are traders, Russians are servants, Kurds are street sweepers, etc. Schoolbooks for religion, history and literature as well as teachers of respective subjects often encourage ethnic stereotypes and negative attitudes towards religious and ethnic minorities. As a result, young Georgians often construct their relations with other ethnic groups accordingly. It is an established practice to invite Orthodox priests to consecrate schools (Elbakidze 2008: 42). Teachers regularly display positive attitudes towards Orthodoxy and negative attitudes towards other religions or atheism. For example, the third grade textbook for history of religion and culture, approved by the Ministry of Education, reads: ‘[T]here are people who do not believe in religion. They are called atheists. They are very pitiful’ (Tvaradze 2000: 21). Ilia II himself does not show much tolerance towards other religions (see, for example, his comment about Buddha’s monument on 19 November 2010, <http://www.eurasianet.org/node/62405>).

Other topics the Church comments on are also related to national identity. For example, in 2007, Ilia II announced that the restoration of the monarchy and the divine dynasty of the Bagrationi would help the restoration of territorial integrity. A number of political parties supported this idea (Andronikashvili & Maisuradze 2010: 5). The Church views itself as the preserver of the past and

believes that participation in worship means participation in the preservation of the nation (Tevzadze 2010: 75). Territorial integrity claims are largely based on the arguments of the continuous use of language and the first-settlers principle of autochthonous groups (see section 5.2.1) which portray minorities as ‘recent additions’ to the Georgian space, therefore not deserving the same rights as ethnic Georgians.

In his weekly sermons, Ilia II gives frequent consideration to those markers of national identity which might mobilize masses around the idea of an ethno-religious nation. For example, on 10 October 2010 he spoke about several issues: the importance of Georgian literature, the greatness of Georgian as an old sacred language and the importance of three Georgian alphabets (see section 3.1.1). He called for Georgians to read Georgian literature every day and for the use of all three alphabets in street signs. He reminded the nation of Ioane Zosime’s hymn and claimed that the Lord will preach in Georgian at the Second Coming. Most importantly, he talked about Megrelian and Svan, saying that these are not languages but dialects of Georgian (*Sapatriarkos utskebani*, 2010, 14 October), reflecting ongoing academic polemics in recent years regarding the status of these languages (see section 6.1.3). It is internally logical for Ilia II’s ideology to ignore or even suppress other Kartvelian languages, since in his understanding *kartveloba* refers to the identity of Georgian-speaking Orthodox Christians, i.e. those who can fulfil the messianic mission voiced by Ioane Zosime (see section 3.2.2). This discourse is based on the idea that the Georgian Orthodox Church together with its *lingua sacra* – Georgian, has remained the only bearer of the unity of the Georgian people and lands and that it was a unifier of the Georgian state at the zenith of its

existence (see section 3.2.2). Nowadays its mission is presented as the restoration of unity.

Moreover, Ilia II has revived the concept of 'heavenly Georgia'. As shown in section 3.2.1, this concept is related to the myth of the Messiah coming to Georgia. In his Easter epistles, the Patriarch keeps repeating the formula: 'Christ has risen, Georgia has risen!' (see for example, his 'Christmas letter', *Sakartvelos respublika*, 2004, 7 January). With such discourse, the Church tries to nationalise itself and in this attempt it gets great support from the general public. Sacred unity is gradually replacing secular unity (Andronikashvili & Maisuradze 2009: 285). According to a poll conducted by the International Republican Institute (IRI) in October 2010, the Church is the most trusted institution in the country and 91% Georgians trust the Patriarch, while only 42% trust the ruling party (*Messenger*, 2010, 29 October).

Civil society openly denounces the influence of the Orthodox Church, but the political leadership, as said above, is quiet. As for the opposition parties, many of them defend the Church and criticise the government for imposing Western values on Georgians. It can be argued that both the ruling party and opposition use the Church to gain popular support. According to a 2009 survey conducted by the Caucasus Research Resource centre, 83% of Georgians trust the Patriarch's office, while according to the 2008 survey by the centre on Conflict and Negotiations, more than 90% have a favourable impression of Ilia II (Chitanava 2010). The same survey found that 40 % of Georgians are in favour of restricting other religions.



The two projects of nation-building (ethno-religious and secular/civic) display some similarities. First, they both link their ideology to Ilia Chavchavadze, who actually advocated the idea of a secular nation. Territory and language are important for both projects as shown above.

A glorious past (which made *us* who *we* are) is part of the discourse of both projects. national sufferings in the hands of *others* are often embodied in both discourses, but the difference is that the secular project identifies Russia as the *other*, while the ethno-religious project sees Muslims as the main historical enemy and the West as the contemporary enemy. In general, the Georgian nation depends upon its enemies, actual or potential, to define it. The latter serve to define its nationhood, to excuse its limited current glory and to isolate responsibility and blame for its suffering and difficulties during the past, present or future (see section 6.2.1).

Having two competing national projects is not unique to Georgia, and not even to post-communist states. Religion, which was considered a relic of the Middle Ages, reappeared on the political scene in different parts of the world and challenged the state (see for example, Kepel 1994). A. D. Smith (2009:106) points out that in the West, too, both models of the nation have been increasingly questioned. He concludes that for understanding nationalisms in the modern world, it is not enough to uncover their secular drive: the culture and history of the community must also be grasped, since a civic nation gathers its strength from old values and symbols, myths and memories (A. D. Smith 2002: 113).

The competition between two forces of nation-construction – secular and ethno-religious – is likely to continue and it is hard to tell what the outcome will be. Religious nationalism can become a threat as it may intensify conflicts and destabilize the state, or it can become reformist and pro-democratic.

### **6.3 What future for Georgia?**

This chapter has argued that a colonial past has formed a central part of top-down and bottom-up ethno-linguistic policies in Georgia, pushing debates into historical claims rather than focusing on practical considerations of social justice and civic integration. Given the evidence, it is clear that the Soviet strategy of manipulating history and the concept of nation, on the one hand, and a feeling of pride in a glorious past deeply embedded in collective memory and forged by ethno-religious nationalists, on the other, pose a difficult challenge in the process of the nation-building in Georgia. Historical memories tie myth to territories and their claims have a great potential for violence, especially in Georgia where ethnic minorities are marginalised, do not know the state language and do not share national identity with the majority of the population. Georgia's current government understands the urgency of a better policy for integration – more so than the previous governments – and has formulated such a policy by adopting a National Concept for Tolerance and Civil Integration ([www.diversity.ge](http://www.diversity.ge). Accessed 20 May 2010) but its tangible outcomes are still to be seen. Since the language issue is a part of a wider issue of civic integration and national identity, it is important to evaluate existing policy and help the process of decolonisation with practical recommendations.

### **6.3.1 Evaluation of policy**

The evaluation of language policy is not an easy task, because a wide range of different outcomes must be taken into account, including economic integration. There have been some positive changes following the Rose Revolution. First of all, the state has invested in rehabilitating the infrastructure in regions inhabited by minorities (see for example, ‘Mikheil Saakashvili opens Samtskhe-Javakheti highway’, 2010, 15 November. <http://www.panarmenian.net>), but unemployment is still high. Second, some steps forward were made in terms of legislation and the rule of law. Third, several economic and educational programmes were undertaken in Kvemo Kartli and Samtskhe-Javakheti. Most importantly, the government has finally produced a formal policy for integration. However, judging by the level of state language competence among the minorities (especially the young) and their involvement in Georgia’s sociopolitical life, as well as the attitudes and perceptions towards each other among the minorities and the majority, it is obvious that Georgia still has significant deficiencies with regard to practical implementation of the policy. Problems, such as lack of competence in the state language, lack of qualified teachers and lack of information among ethnic minorities, remain. The participation of persons belonging to ethnic minorities in political, cultural and socio-economic life remains limited. The efforts of the authorities to offer minorities the opportunity to get involved is far from adequate (see for example, ‘Annual reports’ and ‘Evaluation Reports’ by the European Centre for Minority Issues). As a result, minorities seem less interested in developing a strong state for all and are more focused on their narrow ethnic problems.

In dealing with ethnic and linguistic diversity in the process of nation formation, Georgia has to find a balance between two goals: achieving national unity and ensuring minority rights. However, given the way in which some governmental decisions are received by different ethnic groups (see section 6.1.3), it is obvious that language issues are very difficult to solve and that explicitly declared progressive and democratic policies may fail in practice. The ratification of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, which Georgia is committed to since joining the Council of Europe in 1999, is still largely seen as a threat and feared by all sides (see section 6.1.3). While minorities are pushing for formalising the use of their languages, there is hardly anyone in the government or opposition who supports the acknowledgement of Armenian or Azeri even as working languages (Interview with the State Minister of Integration, T. Iakobashhvili, 22 March 2010) for fear of strengthening their ethnic identities, given the strong correlation between linguistic and ethnic identity in Georgia. However, ethnic identities, like any other identities, are dynamic phenomena and, although they are still very strong in Georgia, they themselves cannot generate conflicts if the state has the will to solve cultural, linguistic, political and economic issues and maintain a balance between civic belonging and ethnic belonging. Conflicts and tensions in multi-ethnic societies occur where minority rights, including linguistic rights, have been denied (Koenig and Varennes 2001: 2). While a common language is a legitimate state objective, it should not be forgotten that a nation-state is a political group of all citizens and not a linguistic group.

The government should make more effort to include minorities in state life. More sensitive and effective ethnic and linguistic policies will help overcome

mutual distrust and fear, and may even help build trust with Abkhazians and Ossetians. Successful policies will ensure that linguistic diversity will no longer serve to divide citizens into antagonistic communities. But the question is how language policy can help overcome the old mentality and gradually achieve the long-term goal of civic integration, so that all citizens, irrespective of ethnicity, can participate in state life and identify themselves with its symbols and values.

An important aspect of civic nation-building strategy is to make minorities feel they are genuine citizens and meet their demands, which include the following: 1) cultural/linguistic (the desire to preserve native tongues, faiths and identities, but also to learn the state language), 2) political (the desire to participate in state life; now they feel discriminated and perceive themselves as second class citizens), and 3) economic (the desire to have more opportunities for employment). While officials frequently make appeals for national integration, very little has been achieved in terms of the development of a national community based on civic values. The new policy gives priorities to a civic national identity and shared citizenship, but the state sometimes fails to distinguish ethnic and civic symbols and values. Therefore, mutual anxiety and mistrust between the majority and minorities remain.

The successful realisation of the goals declared by the new policy depends on how effectively each step of its main directions is implemented. The main directions, according to the National Concept for Tolerance and Civil Integration (<http://www.diversity.ge>. Accessed 20 May 2010), are: rule of law; education and state language; media and access to information; political integration and civil participation; social and regional integration; and culture and preservation of

identity. The next section attempts to make suggestions for measures in the sphere of language planning and policy that the government of Georgia could undertake in order to accomplish its main goal: to build a civic nation in which national identity is defined not by ethnic origin but, primarily, through a shared political experience and common constitutional guaranties. Since policy choices have consequences, each step listed below has to be carefully considered.

### **6.3.2 Why should, and how can, Georgia become a civic nation?**

#### **Depoliticisation of language issues**

Language policy questions are over-politicised in Georgia and this postpones solving problems. It is necessary to depoliticise it and elaborate a unified approach to language issues.

For Georgians, the Georgian language was the source of genuine community for many centuries; they therefore believe that it should also define the modern Georgian state. Ethnic minorities generally accept this prerogative of Georgian, but insist that language policy also preserves their languages and identities. Both sides view in each other's demands a potential threat to their ethnic identities. Language and ethnic policies can offer a potential way out of the existing mistrust and help to depoliticise these issues. Minorities whose languages and identities are recognised by the state are less likely to challenge its authority or threaten its territorial integrity (Preece 2005: 186).

### **Collaboration with minorities**

Civic integration is a process where members of both the majority and minority groups are required to do something (Modood 2007: 48), and no one group can be solely blamed for failing to integrate. Thus it is a two-way social interaction and while the government deals with many policy issues, some responsibilities should be taken not only on a national level.

It is essential to collaborate with minorities during the process of designing and implementing language policy. Since minority communities remain suspicious that the government is catering for its own interests and that policies have hidden agendas, blatant ethno-linguistic policies must be reworked in cooperation with minority representatives. The state should encourage them to express their interests and demands for the protection of their rights, as well as take some initiative in the decision-making processes of their communities. They should include clear definitions of all terms involved (such as nation, ethnicity, minority, autochthonous, linguistic rights, etc.).

### **Equality and the rule of law**

The Georgian government needs to address the issues of legal equality of all citizens and the supremacy of law (including the right to be elected to public office and freedom of political activities). The state should take affirmative action to remove obstacles to political, economic and social participations of ethnic minorities and encourage minorities to participate in decision making bodies. Efforts have been made, as discussed above, but further reforms are needed.

The state should fight against any kind of discrimination and guarantee ethno-cultural and religious freedom. The concordat between the state and the Georgian Orthodox Church, signed in 2002, does not comply with Georgia's constitution (article 19) and needs to be abolished. Although the Georgian government says that the concordat is 'largely symbolic' ('Report on national minorities in Georgia', 2009, 13 October. <http://www.civil.ge>. Accessed 14 November 2010), as shown above, this is not the case.

The state might consider offering better mass media provision in minority languages, since this could increase the participation of ethnic minorities in broader socio-political life, thus reducing the chances of a conflict of loyalty (see section 2.4.2). Non-Georgian speakers need to be better informed about the life of the state if they are to be expected to integrate into mainstream Georgian culture.

Language policy must become part of state ethnic policy, which will give each ethnic group opportunities to preserve its identity, develop it, and preserve its culture, traditions, and language. Only in this way will it be able to integrate into Georgian society and contribute to the development of civic society, social stability and the strengthening of democracy. The state should encourage socio-economic development throughout the country and ensure equality of access to employment, healthcare, public services, etc.

### **Legislation**

Unified policy and legislation on language issues is necessary. As is shown in section 6.1, issues related to language use are scattered in different laws. The absence of a unified law concerning languages makes the regulation and



implementation of laws difficult. As a fact, existing laws concerned with language use in education, administration and justice are not fully implemented or lead to *de facto* discrimination of ethnic minorities.

Since one of the goals of language policy is the inclusion of all groups in state political life, it is necessary to include them also in the discussion of the language law. Results of the analysis of language problems make clear the need to have multiple sources of information. Elaborated in this way, the law must become a subject of public discussion and secure the support of the population. The government must assure the population of the *bona fide* intentions of a proposed law. The population may recognise, partly recognise or not recognise it, but according to the extent of popular support, it will be possible to judge the results of the appropriateness of its adoption.

### **Culture and preservation of identity**

Language laws should regulate not only the use of the state language and minority languages but also so-called regional languages,<sup>55</sup> especially with regarding the protection of those which exist only in Georgia (Megrelian, Svan, Bats) and may have difficulty surviving. UNESCO classified them as ‘definitely endangered’ languages (Moseley 2010) and they need active state support (Amirejibi-Mullen 2006: 10). Concrete steps require changes in legislation and the ratification of the

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<sup>55</sup> In the Georgian context, the term ‘minority languages’ refers to the languages of non-autochthonous ethnic groups which do not identify themselves with the ethnic majority. Speakers of Megrelian, Svan and Bats consider themselves to be Georgians and their languages are referred to as ‘regional languages’ (Putkaradze 2005).

European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages. Although language survival cannot depend only on legislation as its main support, legal provisions may allow speakers to claim public space for their languages and cultures (Romaine 2002).

The current policy towards these regional languages, which can be described as a policy of tolerance, must be replaced by a policy of preservation and promotion, of viewing these languages as a part of Georgian cultural heritage not only in respective regions but across the country. Linguistic diversity should be presented as a central element of the Georgian culture. The current policy of excluding small languages from public domain, under which young upwardly mobile people are likely to shift to Georgian completely, will lead to language loss over time (Holmes 2001: 59). Support should be given for academic research on these languages as well as their promotion. If Svans and Megrelians demand the use of their languages in state life and education, the government might wish to consider this seriously, since it would reduce the further polarisation of the language question (see section 6.1.3) as well as help to void potential conflicts (see section 2.4.3).

The presence of a number of different languages is a national resource which can be used by a society in different spheres (such as foreign trade and educational advantage) (Ager 1996: 25). At the same time, keeping linguistic and cultural diversity is one of the basic conditions for the optimisation of interethnic relationships, because the right to publicly express one's distinct linguo-cultural identity will help to reduce fears of assimilation (Preece 2005: 175). Recognising diversity is the optimal way of responding to the 'problem' of minorities not only

for the sake of stability but also out of respect for the minorities themselves (Preece 2005: 187). The best way to promote a common identity is sometimes to allow differences to flourish (Patten 2001: 705).

### **Overcoming ethnic divisions**

When elaborating language policies and laws, Georgia's European orientation and international obligations in the sphere of language functioning must be considered. An optimal language policy for multilingual societies is not one which assimilates into one culture but one which helps creating an inclusive national identity and leads everyone to redefine themselves (Modood 2007: 150).

The Georgian government regularly says it wants to observe European standards (Minority language controversy in Georgia, IWPR report, 2010, 22 October). Ratifying the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, which views linguistic diversity as a source of cultural richness, can become a symbolic step towards overcoming ethnic divisions (ethnic mentality) and help with the creation of an inclusive national identity. The multilingualism of Georgian society must therefore be emphasised and this fact must be considered valuable and evaluated as a positive fact.

Instead of forbidding ethnic minorities to use their languages in official circumstances, the state first of all has to create appropriate conditions for learning Georgian. Before all citizens know the state language, local governments should have the right to use their respective minority or regional languages. In order to overcome short-term difficulties the use of respective minority languages could be allowed in Kvemo Kartli and Samtskhe Javakheti in local administration without

undermining the status of Georgian in the long term. This will not only constitute a pragmatic solution, but also a psychological one: by recognizing that these languages have a role to play within the state, the government will show that it values minorities and their cultures.

### **Language education**

Teaching Georgian to ethnic minorities must be improved, but before insisting on compulsory language learning, handbooks, self-teaching books, phrase-books must be created to improve students' cognitive skills and enable them to use language in multiple contexts. Language teachers need to be retrained and new qualified teachers must be prepared for children, as well as for adult learners. Bilingual education could provide the fastest solution to the existing problems and contribute to creating a multilingual society.

Bringing minority students into Georgian universities is very important for their integration. After receiving education in Georgia they are likely to remain in the country. The opening of Zurab Zhvania's School of Public Administration is a positive step towards adult education, but it needs to be improved.

In order enable ethnic minorities to participate in state life, the government has a responsibility to provide all citizens with equal opportunities to learn the state language and intensify its effectiveness. Minorities need to understand that learning Georgian is in their interest as well as in the national interest and need to understand the benefits of integration. In order to ensure the protection of their languages and to ease tensions, the promotion of the state language must be accompanied by discussions with parents and teachers about how their children are

educated. In general, open discussions on language policies are vital for its successful implementation.

### **Civic education**

The educational sphere is of crucial importance for the realisation of civic integration and the state should provide the teaching of subjects related to civic education, as well as promote public awareness of ethnic and religious tolerance. Young people need to be prepared for civic engagement and become aware that the richness lies in many different cultures.

Inter-ethnic confrontations are largely caused by exclusive historical narratives cultivated during the Soviet times in order to legitimize territorial claims (see section 5.2.2) at the same time serving as an instrument of divisive ethnic ideologies. Since then, history school books have not changed significantly. When the Geneva-based organisation Cimera, which specialises in minority inclusion, examined Georgian history books in 2007, it found that Armenians and Azeris were either absent from books or were presented in a negative light (L. Gigineishvili 2007). In such an ethnically diverse country, teaching exclusive versions of history only exacerbate tensions and contribute to the historical and cultural isolation of minorities. History textbooks need to be replaced by inclusive ones, which demonstrate the participation of minorities in Georgia's history and cultural life in a positive light. They must be free of ethnic myths and underline shared experiences and common elements which unite the different ethnic groups.

Finally, the state must make sure that top-down and bottom-up language policies coincide. This is possible only if minorities feel that they can really benefit

from learning the state language and that it is necessary for their social mobility. New symbols should be created, but that does not mean discarding the old ones. Nations need ‘usable pasts’ and myths which link them to the past. However, Georgia’s political and intellectual élite must decide how the past is used. Some old symbols, referring to the historical and cultural traditions of Georgia, could become valuable while acquiring new meanings.

The recent legislative reforms discussed above, as well as the adoption of the National Concept for Tolerance and Civil Integration and Action Plan, are promising steps towards the establishment of an inclusive nation-state which promotes cultural and linguistic pluralism. Implementing these recommendations may lead to the more effective political and cultural participation of minorities and defuse at least some of the tensions that Georgia is still experiencing.

## Chapter 7

### Conclusions

This study investigates the role of language policy in the development of the community defined by the characteristic known as *kartveloba* (Georgianness). Based on a large corpus of primary and secondary sources, it examines language in relation to other ethno-national resources (such as territory, religion, myths and symbols) by means of an ethnosymbolist approach. It argues that the Georgian language has been the most important marker of *kartveloba* throughout documented history.

The pre-modern history of *kartveloba* challenges the modernist understanding of nations and nationalisms, while helping to explain the nature of ethno-national ties and important political developments in modern times. Modernists are skeptical about referring to pre-modern history, the local culture and the social context of identity development, treating culture and old ethnic ties as secondary for the nation-building process. Georgia, however, is a case of where the culture of the pre-modern community possesses a symbol, the standard and sacred Georgian language, which has bound people throughout centuries and has become the foundation of the modern Georgian nation. A systematic analysis of *kartveloba* with the emphasis on language and the myth of election demonstrates that the modernist idea of ‘invented’ nations is mistaken, or at least is not universal. The present Georgian case study thus supports and contributes to the

ethnosymbolist paradigm for the study of nations and nationalism, according to which ethnic history, culture and symbols are essential for understanding modern national identities. Such an approach might usefully be used for the study of other contexts. Judgement passed on only recent history and actions of the last few decades can be rendered considerably more nuanced by taking into consideration a much longer historical period and the role played by ethnic myths and memories in their formation.

While it is often pointed out that language was of no political significance before the French Revolution, this study has shown that in Georgia language was the prime expression of political identity in medieval times. Although an attempt to match the linguistic community to a political unit and find common cultural ground for the foundation of the political legitimacy was first expressed in the tenth century, it was during the Golden Age (the eleventh-thirteenth centuries) that Georgia welcomed ethnic and religious minorities, based on their competence in the standard Georgian language, into the highest levels of state power. Georgia was well served by focusing on language rather than other markers in allowing individuals into its élite. As the language of the dominant ethnic group and as the sacred and prestigious language, Georgian was put forward as the binding element of *kartveloba* as a political identity. As such, Georgia's political, military and economic élite of the time consisted of representatives of the Armenian, Kurdish, Osetian, Abkhaz and other ethnic groups who integrated into the Georgian state through the standard Georgian language. In this sense, Georgian in the Middle Ages can be compared to the national languages of modern time. This study suggests that, in Georgia, national consciousness, closely linked to the rise of a



strong state, appeared among the educated classes much earlier than in Western Europe and the ideology of political rulers and cultural figures in Georgia of that time might be the first example of culture manifested for political purposes.

This is not to claim that in the High Middle Ages Georgians formed a nation in the modern understanding of the word, but that the roots for national identity had been established. Nation formation is a process and it is important to understand how the élite concept of the Golden Age turned into a mass phenomenon later on. Every case study of this type thus contributes to a better understanding of the question: ‘when is the nation’?

Analysing ethno-cultural history over the long term opens the way, on the one hand, for a more nuanced approach towards studies of ethnic and national identities across different epochs, and, on the other hand, for the establishment of links between these two phenomena. In turn, this linking between the different levels of social identity past and present helps to identify the conditions under which nations emerge. It also helps to understand why nations possess a particular character and what determines the emergence of inclusive and exclusive nations and nationalisms. As this case study has tried to show, ethnic heritage explains the durability and character of *kartveloba* as an identity, and sets limits within which modern nationalist élites can operate, whether their goal is to build a secular/civic nation or an ethno-religious one.

In different contexts – ethnic, national and political – the Georgian language has served different purposes, uniting the community and distinguishing it from others. It was a distinctive marker of *kartveloba* which arguably formed the

basis of a pre-modern 'aristocratic nation'. The boundaries of *kartveloba* varied in different epochs but, despite all those changes, *kartveloba* has always comprised a linguistic element. Following Georgia's political fragmentation in the late Middle Ages, the Georgian language still served as a symbol of common identity. Faced with a domineering colonial regime, Georgian nationalists in the nineteenth century were thus able to use language in their attempts to mobilise the masses and create a modern national identity.

Under Soviet rule, the Georgian language and bottom-up language policy once again became key elements of nationalism and the struggle for independence. However, the dissolution of the USSR posed a difficult challenge of redefining *kartveloba* for the newly independent Georgian state given the political culture inherited from colonial rule. Georgia started its existence torn by violence and territorial wars as a result of the inability of the state under the first two presidents to respond to the challenges it faced. Despite strong popular sentiment and beliefs together with the tendency to follow the familiar patterns of behaviour under Soviet rule, the country has made significant steps forward since 2004. However, the country still faces the problem of ethnic integration and the transformation of Georgian society into a political nation.

Language policy debates are always about more than language. As such, this case study contributes by virtue of its multidisciplinary approach to various academic fields, such as sociolinguistics, political ideologies, history, colonial and postcolonial studies, policy studies and identity studies. It is especially important to the study of the relationship between language policy and national identity. But every case of language policy and its use for national identity formation is specific.

Why language policy evolves in a certain way and how it affects people within different communities can be understood only by studying the dynamics of identity formation and the complex relationship between top-down and bottom-up perspectives over time. It is impossible to generalise about the best practices in language policy since there are too many variables in different places. Nonetheless, this thesis has attempted to illustrate the importance of policy that favours the effective political and socioeconomic participation of minorities through the accessing of rights, as these aspects of policy directly lead to integration which itself brings peace.<sup>56</sup>

The recent attempt by the government to turn *kartveloba* into a political identity and establish an inclusive nation is promising. Civic integration is the only way to build a democratic nation-state. If Georgia is to remain independent, efforts must concentrate on creating a symbolism that transcends ethnic divisions and forges a common bond, at the same time as asserting minority rights. If national identity is perceived as beneficial, ethnic differences may not seem so important; they could instead become a new set of ‘deep resources’, ensuring the solidarity of all citizens irrespective of origin. The common Georgian language, with its symbolic and communicative functions, can become a major marker of a new civic national identity. Language policy served as an instrument of Georgia’s colonisation and appropriate language policy must become an instrument of its of decolonisation.

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<sup>56</sup> This thesis was not able to address fully all aspects of language policy and national identity in Georgia. Aspects that are in need of further study include: the construction of national identity in the context of globalisation; gender and nation; education policy and school administration; social sciences and humanities and how they are taught; cultural awareness and tolerance; political discourse; as well as more detailed study of the linguistic situation and the ethno-linguistic identities of minority groups.

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