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Papers of the Struggle for the Strengthening the National Identity. In the Archives of Georgian Public Figures

Abstract: *The article examines the struggle for the consolidation of national identity reflected in the archives of outstanding Georgian public figures of the 19th-20th centuries. The unfiltered and authentic narratives documented in personal letters and other archival material provide a clear picture of the challenges faced by a nation caught in the grips of an imperial regime and the daily efforts Georgian figures made to overcome these difficulties.*

The documentary material presents the efforts of scientists-historians, writers, and many Georgian representatives of the Russian military-bureaucratic elite to resolve various issues related to the preservation of national identity, namely: to restore the autocephaly of the Georgian Orthodox Church, To increase the rights of the Georgian language in the educational system, to publish Georgian books, to preserve the items of the national spiritual and material culture, to increase the awareness of Georgia abroad, etc.

The emigrant archives, which were handed over to Georgia after the collapse of the Soviet Union, provide information about how Georgian emigrants abroad, escaping the Soviet regime, tried to establish a patriotic narrative different from the imperial one prevailing at that time. This cultural diplomacy, while still part of the empire, created the conditions for the rejection of the self-absorbed imperial heritage and the rise of nationalism based on a healthy, authentic heritage.

The issue is studied based on the personal letters of Platon Yoseliani, Dimitri Bakradze, Zakaria Chichinadze, Theodore Jordania, Grigol Orbeliani, and the materials of the emigrant archive.

Keywords: *National Identity; Georgian Public Figures; Emigrant Archives; Imperial Regime; Authentic Heritage.*

Introduction

Georgia, due to its strategic location, was the battleground of great empires for centuries. There is no great conqueror left in history who did not fight against Georgia. Romans and Byzantines, Parthians and Iranians, Arabs and Mongols, Ottomans and Persians tried to wrest

the country situated at the crossroads of Asia and Europe. Georgia withstood their invasions, but from the second half of the 18th century, the situation became complicated. Georgia's northern neighbor, the Russian Empire, under the mask of common faith, successfully gained a foothold in Georgia, in 1801 annexed it, and declared it an ordinary Guberniya (province) of Russia. The latter was essentially different from other conquerors. None of them tried to destroy the statehood of Georgia, cancel the independence of the Georgian kingdom-principalities, overthrow the royal Bagrationi dynasty and the throne of the Catholicos-Patriarch, and replace the Georgian language with their own. They were satisfied only with tribute and the participation of Georgians in their wars.

The article examines the struggle for the consolidation of national identity reflected in the archives of outstanding Georgian public figures of the 19th–20th centuries. The unfiltered and authentic information documented in personal letters and other archival material presents the efforts of scientists-historians, writers, and many Georgian representatives of the Russian military-bureaucratic elite to resolve various issues related to the preservation of national identity, namely: to restore the autocephaly of the Georgian Orthodox Church, to gain the right to conduct teaching process in the Georgian language in schools, to publish Georgian books, to preserve national spiritual and material culture, to increase the awareness of Georgia abroad, etc.

The emigrant archives, which were handed over to Georgia after the collapse of the Soviet Union, tell us about how Georgian emigrants abroad, avoiding the Soviet regime, tried to establish a patriotic narrative different from the imperial one prevailing at that time. This cultural diplomacy, while still part of the empire, created the conditions to reject forced imperial heritage and raise nationalism based on a healthy, authentic heritage.

Research methods: I studied the issue based on the private letters of Platon Yoseliani, Dimitri Bakradze, Zakaria Chichinadze, Theodore Jordania, Grigol Orbeliani, and the materials of the emigrant archive. The addressees of the letters are well-known writers, historians, and public figures, representatives of politics, culture, and art, military and political officials of the Russian Empire, as well as people little known or unknown to Georgian readers. The letters along with a lot of other information related to various aspects of the political, socio-economic, and public-cultural life of Georgia, the sad present and uncertain future of Georgia, contain important data about the struggle of Georgians to

strengthen their national identity. The special importance of the letters is determined by the fact that in them, there are clearly outlined the details of the daily life of the country caught in the ravages of the colonial regime, the light and shadows of that time, the problems the population of Georgia faced, as well as the methods and measures that our leaders used to overcome them and preserve national identity.

Discussion

Struggle for national identity

Our research aims to manifest the facts of the struggle of Georgian patriots in the Russian pincers to preserve and strengthen their national identity both within the country in the 19th century and beyond its borders, during their stay in political exile in the 1920s–1930s. Despite the different periods, our issue is united by one thing - the struggle of Georgians to preserve their national identity in the conditions of the conquering policy of the Russians, first in the 19th century with Tsarist Russia, and after 1917, with "White" and later with "Red" Russia, which in the form of a new empire, the Soviet Union, appeared before the mankind.

Struggle for national identity in the 19th century

Georgian public figures of the 19th century had to overcome many challenges faced by the country due to the colonial regime. The most important thing was to save the national spirit, which they saw in various measures, such as: establishing the Georgian schools, banishing so-called 'dumb' method and process teaching in the Georgian language in schools, creating textbooks in the Georgian language, collecting deeds and chanters, to read out the inscriptions from the stones of churches-monasteries, to write the history of Georgia, maintain and protect the church museum, to publish scientific articles in Georgian and Russian languages throughout the empire on urgent issues, establish a Georgian-language press, develop national literature, etc.

The preservation of national identity in 19th-century Georgia required, first of all, the protection of its main markers – language and culture – on the guard of which Georgian patriots stood. They fought selflessly for the restoration of the limited rights of the Georgian language in the educational sector. The Georgian historian Theodore Jordania made the greatest contribution to this work. In 1896, he was appointed as the supervisor of the parish schools of the Guria-Samegrelo

Eparchy. His letters show how many problems Georgian figures had to overcome in their relations with the local and Russian authorities. In 1897, he writes to Alexander Kiphshidze that 'the spread of the persecuted Georgian literacy in Samegrelo has a thousand-thousands of enemies... both at home and abroad', that "the Georgian language is in a terrible state in Samegrelo during this barbarism" (Gigashvili, Gotsiridze, 2021, pp. 170-171). As a result of his selfless work, the number of schools and pupils increased as far as possible, the rights of the mother tongue were restored, and the so-called 'dumb' method was limited. 'My work in Samegrelo has been fruitful so far: we have opened many new schools, where the Georgian language has a prominent place. We created so many difficulties for the Ministry that it was forced to introduce Georgian in some schools. We sent several important documents to the government to protect the language and local church customs, and almost all of them were tolerated' – he wrote (Gigashvili, Gotsiridze, 2021, p. 184).

Two years after the appointment of Theodore Jordania to the above-mentioned position, there were already 192 schools in Samegrelo, that is, three times more, where more than 6,000 students studied (Gigashvili, Gotsiridze, 2021, p. 174). "We have a lot of obstacles from Levitskyi and the police, they send wrong information, accuse me of patriotism, and make the government doubt," – he wrote to Tedo Sakhokia in 1897 (*Ibid.*). He constantly requested free school textbooks and notebooks from the "Society for Spreading Literacy among Georgians." In case of delay, he openly expressed his displeasure. Regarding this issue, he wrote to Tedo Sakhokia, whom he highly valued and often asked for mediation: "If Gogebashvili is reconciled, ask him to send the textbook "Kokori" (Buttonhole-flower) and "Dedaena" (mother tongue), free of charge... and then I will show you how many schools I can open" (*ibid.*).

The nature of the linguistic colonization policy of the Russian tsarism has been clearly seen in the letter sent by the Georgian historian Dimitri Bakradze to the Exarch of Georgia, Alexi Ilinsky, on September 3, 1864, where it can be seen that the presence of Russian-speaking teachers was a necessary component for opening schools in Georgia (Gigashvili, 2019, p. 114).

The deplorable state of the Georgian language in the conquered country is well testified by the Georgian grammar printed in parallel columns, written by Platon Ioseliani to the order of the clerical author-

ities. In this fact, the goal of tsarism – the universal spread of the Russian language in Georgia can be recognized. No matter how paradoxical it sounds, Georgians had to learn the Russian language using Georgian grammar! The request of the clerical authorities to compile a Georgian grammar with a Russian translation, I think, was a response to the educational resource compiled by Platon Ioseliani for the students of this seminary – "Georgian alphabet." This was argued by Konstantin Pobedonostsev, chief prosecutor (ruler) of the Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church, adviser to the emperor, and member of the State Council, 1892 "Georgian school should be considered as a tool for the spread of the Russian language" (Sharadze, 2001, p. 53).

Platon Ioseliani laments the decline of the Georgian language and literature in a letter sent to Marie Brosset on April 14, 1838. He considers it the duty of every Georgian "to do his best to take care of the public affairs to restore the lost language and writing (literature)" (Gigashvili, 2019, p. 16).

Earlier, on February 2 of the same year, he wrote to Marie Brosset, who was interested in the history, language, and culture of Georgia: "The fact that you gave priority to my language, which was almost completely abandoned by Georgians, proves that you, sir, are (and I say this without any pretension) one of those men who love science for science's sake" (Gigashvili, 2019, pp. 14-15).

During the campaign against the Georgian language in the 1870s, the Georgian poet, the representative of the Russian military-bureaucratic elite, general Grigol Orbeliani actively engaged in the struggle for the protection of the native language. In one of his letters, he writes: "In Georgia, Jews, Tatars, Armenians, and others pray in their own languages, and no one interrupts them; Even the Frenches sing in Georgian, and should only Georgians be deprived of the right to pray in Georgian? Why? There a no sense here, only dimming, rusting of mind?" (Meunargia 1054, 106).

The poet expresses dissatisfaction with the government's policy in the field of education. In his mind, the existing education system only ensured the obedience of the population and did not contribute to the economic development of the country, which was supposed to improve the socio-economic condition of the inhabitants (*Ibid.*, p. 158).

He is particularly critical of the judicial system and openly states his opinion on the need to separate Georgian justice from the common Russian judicial system. In his opinion, the court, where the criminal does not understand the language of the judge and the latter does not

know the language of the criminal, cannot deliver a fair verdict. "What would the Russian people in Moscow say if courts were held in English," he wrote on November 20, 1882. Grigol Orbeliani was dissatisfied not only with the fact that court proceedings were not conducted in Georgian but also with the fact that these proceedings were taking too long (*Ibid.*, pp. 156-157).

Maintenance of monuments of national writing and culture and their promotion was one of the important forms of resistance in the way of preserving national identity. For this purpose, Platon Ioseliani began the historical and geographical description of Georgia based on Georgian and foreign sources, searching for old Georgian books and historical documents and purchasing them with his funds, copying inscriptions from the stones. It was not an easy task. Moreover, the colonial government created barriers on this path. One of such hindering factors was the control imposed by the tsarism on the use of Georgian historical documents. From the letter written by Platon Ioseliani to Marie Brosset on May 12, 1838, we learn that the deeds of churches and monasteries, including the "deeds of donations" of the Georgian Kings, were kept in the office of the Tiflis Synod for internal use, and their viewing was allowed only by order of the St. Petersburg Synod (Gigashvili 2019, 20).

Zakaria Chichinadze's merit in finding the historical heritage of Georgia and passing it on to his descendants is invaluable. On February 26, 1880, he reported to Marie Brosset about his work in this direction. By the 1880s, he had already published Dimitri Bakradze's works "The Mirian King and Saint Nino" and "Poems of Noble Gr. Orbeliani"; In 1873, he started the study of ancient Georgian writing, for which he bought 300 handwritten books from persons, and compiled a directory of 1,200 handwritten books, which were placed in the private libraries of monasteries of Georgia. He found the 6th-century Gospel parchment written in Khutsuri alphabet, 10th and 13th century books, and in 1878, he started writing biographies of Georgian writers. In two years, he had already written the biographies of 169 Georgian writers of the 9th-18th centuries (Gigashvili, Gotsiridze, 2021, pp. 14-15).

The struggle for the restoration of the autocephaly of the Georgian Orthodox Church was one of the most important activities of Georgian intellectuals in the 19th century. Zakaria Chichinadze's letters clearly describe the deplorable situation in the churches. The letter sent to Alexander (Alex) Okropiridze, the bishop of Guria in 1882–1885, on March 27 1883, shows that he explains the basis of the anti-national

mood in the churches by the loss of Georgia's independence and autocephaly of the church. Here, we get acquainted with his explanation of the reasons for the strength of Christianity in the past and the decline of Christianity in the present: "Our old time, the church arena and the priesthood of that time stood high because the religious love was tied to the love of the estate, that's why it seems clear from our history that the clergy of Georgia always worked unswervingly" (Gigashvili, Gotsiridze, 2021, pp. 17-18).

This letter is important because of another factor: it reflects the dissatisfaction of the Georgians of Tbilisi due to the unusability of the native language in liturgy in the churches and monasteries: "The Georgians of Tbilisi miss the mass in the Georgian language, a great rebuke is heard among the people." In a letter dated June 5, 1883, he expresses his protest with heartache: "Oh, why won't God or the nation retaliate that there is no single Georgian bishop in the capital of Georgia?" (Gigashvili, Gotsiridze, 2021, p. 21).

The letters contain rich information about how Georgian patriots tried to raise national consciousness in the historical territory of south-western Georgia, which after the Russian-Turkish war of 1877-1878, Russia seized from Turkey and returned it to Georgia, thus expanding the territory of its colony.

In the letter sent to Mikheil Machabli, Zakaria Chichinadze asks for 300-400 rubles for the publication of materials related to Georgian Muslims and emphasizes the importance of this "historical task": "It is necessary to publish such books because Georgian Muslims read them" (Gigashvili, Gotsiridze, 2021, pp. 55-56). He reflected the results of his ten-year selfless work in his book: "The Conversion of Georgians to Islam" (Chichinadze, 1915).

Legal and illegal Georgian magazines and newspapers of the 19th century played an extremely large role in strengthening the national identity of Georgians, about the importance of which the recognized leader of the national liberation movement of Georgia, Ilia Chavchavadze, wrote in 1862: "For many years, our society has not had a single living thought, a single sober feeling in its heart. We turned to crumbs in such a way that we even split the great word "motherland" into pieces. This word did not mean our homeland, but the property of each person. It will not be four or five years since such a miraculous word regained its lost meaning. This is a merit of magazine "Ciskari" (Chavchavadze, 1988, p. 461).

These publications strengthened and raised even higher the flag of the national liberation movement directed against the tyrannical regime of Tsarist Russia, fiercely fought against social and national oppression, for protection of the Georgian language, publication of Georgian books, creation of Georgian schools, new national institutions: Georgian Bank, Society spreading literacy among Georgians, Georgian dramatic society and others, for curbing the reactionary Russian press inciting against the dignity and interests of Georgia, for the organization and proper celebration of great national holidays, and so on.

Struggle for national identity in the 20th century

The press remained one of the most powerful forms of resistance in the 20th century. Because it was difficult to talk about the national program and problems in Georgia due to political conditions, a part of Georgian patriots spread these ideas from abroad. Georgian magazines-newspapers published by them in Western Europe (Paris, Geneva, Berlin) served to strengthen the national liberation movement of Georgia and the national identity of Georgians, tried to introduce European progressive thinking in Georgia (Sharadze, 2005, p. 12), declared a struggle against Russification, loss of territory, political-economic and cultural persecution of Georgians on their own land. The sources testify to the participation of a significant part of the Georgian intelligentsia in this process, their active involvement in collecting money and solving other organizational issues for the publication of national magazines and newspapers abroad and for the distribution of the published copies among the population of Georgia (Sharadze, 2001, pp. 23, 28).

In order to expose the "violence and injustice" committed by the Russian government against Georgia (Sharadze 2001,38), their activities awakened the Georgian people, and ideologically prepared them to move to a new stage of the struggle for national identity. The newspaper "Sakartvelo", published in Paris, in the 6th issue of 1903, writes the response of "Droshak", the body of the Federation of Armenian Revolutionaries, to the publication of the newspaper. Armenians welcomed the goal of establishing the newspaper to "awaken Georgians' national consciousness and prepare the ground for Georgia's autonomy" (Sympathy of Armenians, 1903, p. 4). It was in the throes of the empire that the Georgian Independence Committee prepared agreements with the governments of the Ottoman and German empires stating that in case of the victory of the German bloc in the First World War, these states would recognize the independence of Georgia. As Kalistrate Salia

wrote about the activities of the Georgian Independence Committee: "Georgia received real help from Europe for the first time in its long history. The West helped the Georgian nation to restore its suppressed rights" (Salia, 1962, p. 30). Thus, the Georgian patriots gradually stuck the national identity from simple demands to the restoration of Georgia's state independence.

The newspaper "Tavisupali Sakartvelo" in the 4th issue of April 1914 (Geneva) wrote: "One of the goals of positive action is to make the past spiritual work of the Georgian nation assimilated, studied and embodied by modern Georgians. This establish a broken thread of Georgian creativity and will give us a way to give our own national existence an indigenous soil."

Data Vachnadze in the 2nd issue of the magazine "Samshoblo" in 1929 evaluates the political situation of that period and the importance of getting rid of Russian domination: "After a long wait, we have stepped into such a historical era, when the national self-establishment of the nations enslaved by Russia, in the space of the former Russian Empire rushes to its logical conclusion. Even the core of the Slavs is experiencing a crisis. The ancient, strong, and rich branch of Slavism, the nation of Ukraine, this barn of the territory of the Slavs, the former cradle of the so-called Russian history, culture, the basis of its economic and political strength, is unstoppably escaping from the yoke of Moscow and must create its own Ukrainian state. This sacrificing struggle between Ukraine and Moscow is growing day by day. This struggle is nurtured by the objective conditions of life of these two Slavic nations, their historical past, national difference, and political ideal. Their separation should be followed by the disintegration of the huge and Conqueror Moscow state" (Vachnadze, 1929, p. 5).

As a result of the pressure of the dictatorial ideological policy, a number of issues in Georgia were covered in an unobjective and tendentious manner. Georgian historians working in Georgia were limited to evaluate historical events impartially. Due to the current conjuncture, in many cases they were forced to present the real historical situation unilaterally, beautified, from a pro-Russian and Marxist-Leninist point of view. This is especially true when studying the issue of Russian-Georgian relations. Georgian historians working in the West had the opportunity to express their opinions and views freely. They exposed the historical injustice because of which the Georgian people became victims after the conquest of Georgia by Russia. They wrote the authentic history, created objective works depicting Russia-Georgia relations.

For example, we can name Al. Manvelishvili's "Russia and Georgia", the first volume of which was published in Paris in 1951 and which "successfully filled the great gap in our historical science of the Soviet period" (Nikoleisvili, 2007, p. 271). Aleksandre Manvelishvili testified the Russian sources to reveal the negative aspects of the Russian-Georgian relationship, which once again emphasizes the non-tendency of the author and the truth of his reasoning, shows the academic nature of the work.

Criticism of Russia's aggressive policy on the pages of the press contributed to preserving national identity. In 1926, Giorgi Gvazawa wrote in newspaper "Mamulishvili": "Russia conquered the Caucasus twice in a century and it will always be like this until the nations of the Caucasus cannot rise to the awareness that only the whole Caucasus can break the path of Russian imperialism. The time has passed when Georgia looked to Russia as a savior and protector; the days have also passed when the nations of the Caucasus looked to Georgia as a source of income and an arena for invasion. Now everyone has learned that their freedom and property will be secured only when Russian imperialism is blocked in the Caucasus" (Gvazawa, 1926, p. 1).

The former ambassador of independent Georgia to Germany, Vladimir Akhmeteli, in the article "Action Program of the Caucasian Nations" published in the 2nd issue of "Caucasian" magazine in 1937, especially distinguished "divide and conquer" policy from the threats coming from Russia. He wrote: "If they paid any special attention to any nation, they did it to sow envy and bitterness among the others. By such actions, first the king's officials, and now their epigones, only tried to give a fatal blow to the first nationalistic and indivisible idea of the unification of the nations of the Caucasus. Such a system is used even now, not only in our country, but in all parts of Russia, wherever those who, according to their estimation, are called "foreigners" live. Here is the danger! This is who our main enemy is – the power that shows such expansions and such depressing potency. Getting rid of this power by common measure is the need of our time! This should be the content of the active program of the Caucasian nations. This task is not so easy to give ourselves to other implicit fears. Caucasians should not be scared. If we overcome this difficult task, Caucasian nations desiring a free and independent life, with the same united force, will not find it difficult to prevent another threat from wherever it may be (Akhmeteli, 1937).

Conclusion:

Thus, the personal letters of Georgian scientists-historians and writers of the 19th–20th century contain important information about the struggle of Georgian patriots for the preservation and strengthening of national identity, the knowledge of which expands and makes our understanding of them more complete. If we take a look at the long-term struggle of Georgians for national identity, the logic of the actions of Georgian patriots can be seen: at first, they tried to restore the broken thread with the past by collecting historical documents, copying inscriptions from tombstones, to raise the national culture to a new height and the broad strata of the population by developing folk creativity, ancient writing, and modern spoken language. They engaged in a liberation struggle against Russia and their own degenerate renegades to restore free national statehood. This is a classic way of tempering the national identity of any nation under the colonial yoke.

This battle in Georgia was not easy. It was not easy to fight for identity in other countries either. The merits of Georgian patriots are determined by the fact that they correctly saw the epochal challenges and took thoughtful steps. Their actions and events were absolutely adequate, which brought positive results, such as: the increase in the number of like-minded people, the establishment of national institutions, the raising of the national spirit among the population, later their active involvement in the process of building the national state, and after the conquest of the country by the modernized Russian empire, raising the flag of the national liberation movement again. Even today, Georgia is facing huge challenges. Totalitarian thinking creates serious problems in the way of building a democratic state. In this case, the protection of democracy is vital for the civilized world.

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