Georgian Nationalism: Language, Homeland, Faith in the Context of God's Sovereignty

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DOI: https://doi.org/10.62343/cjss.2024.239

ABSTRACT

This research examines the complex relationship between Georgian nationalism and its interaction with the ecclesiastical and state spheres, focusing on power, authority, and identity. It investigates the Georgian Orthodox Church's influence on sovereignty through traditional forms of authority. The study defines nationalism within theoretical frameworks, such as ethnosymbolism and the distinction between civic and ethnic nationalism. It traces the historical development of Georgian Orthodox nationalism and its entanglement with religious discourse.

Keywords: *Georgian Nationalism, Sovereignty, Orthodox Church, National Identity, Authority, Messianism, Ilia Chavchavadze*

INTRODUCTION

This study examines Georgian nationalism's complex interplay with ecclesiastical authority and state power, focusing on the Orthodox Church's engagement with sovereignty. It explores the historical and contemporary evolution of Georgian nationalism, its entanglement with religious discourse, and its impact on individual freedoms and societal cohesion.

METHOD

The research employs a historical and textual analysis methodology, drawing from ancient Georgian sources and canonical texts. It includes examining significant events, such as the canonization of Ilia Chavchavadze and explores the intersection of nationalism, religion, and statecraft through primary and secondary sources.

RESULTS

The study reveals that Georgian nationalism is deeply intertwined with the Orthodox Church and state mechanisms, often using religious authority to reinforce national identity. The research also highlights how historical and contemporary expressions of nationalism have shaped Georgian identity, with significant figures like Ilia Chavchavadze promoting a national ethos centered on language, homeland, and faith.

DISCUSSION

The research highlights the deep intertwining of Georgian nationalism and the Orthodox Church, where faith and national identity have historically shaped cultural and political dynamics. While the Church has played a pivotal role in fostering Georgian identity, often using religious symbolism to support nationalist agendas, this alignment has raised concerns about its impact on individual rights and freedoms. The canonization of figures like Ilia Chavchavadze exemplifies how religious narratives have legitimized state power, entrenching the Church's nationalist role. However, the study argues that this model is increasingly unsustainable and calls for the Georgian Orthodox Church to reevaluate its mission, advocating for inclusivity and human rights. Drawing on early Christian teachings, such as those in the Epistle to Diognetus, which reject nationalism in favor of a transcendent, faith-based identity, the Church could redefine its authority to honor its spiritual heritage and support a more inclusive and equitable national identity.

Theoretical Approaches to Georgian Nationalism

Georgian nationalism, as understood through ethnosymbolism, modernism, and the blend of civic and ethnic nationalism, draws heavily from broader theoretical frameworks, though not directly from Georgian-specific studies. The ethnosymbolic perspective, as articulated by Anthony Smith (1991, 1-38), links nationalism to the historical myths and symbols that shape national identity. This connection connects with Georgian religious and cultural narratives. The modernist view, supported by scholars like Benedict Anderson (1983, 1-24) and Ernest Gellner (1983,1-41), suggests that nationalism is an outcome of modernization, the emergence of the modern state, and mass education. In Georgia, nationalism has evolved with these modern processes, mainly through key figures such as Ilia Chavchavadze, whose national identity vision combines ethnic and civic elements. His "Language, Homeland, and Faith" concept promotes a form of nationalism that incorporates shared cultural heritage and political values, offering a more inclusive model of identity.

Research Question: How has Georgian national identity shaped the Georgian Orthodox Church's authority across different historical periods, including the Middle Ages, the Chavchavadze era, and the present?

As I reminisce about my anticipation as a student awaiting the arrival of a university professor, a significant moment unfolded when one such professor, adorned in clerical attire with distinct regalia, assumed authority before our interview. This attire, coupled with the inherent prestige of the professorial position, imbued a sense of superiority. While the professor's expertise was undeniable, their perceived trustworthiness and ability to make judicious decisions truly vested them with authority (Heyward, 1999, 56-57).

Within academic and ecclesiastical settings alike, the love for power and authority (McWhorter, 2009, 20-25) often manifests as a natural fixture and standard. Instances may arise where a professor fails to respond, breaks promises, disregards communication, and deems engaging unnecessary. Prioritized needs influence these displays of power collectively exercised by those in positions. Responses may vary depending on the correspondent's status or significance in societal hierarchies (Feder, 2011,54-55). This dynamic underscores how authority can either facilitate or impede interactions, contingent upon one's perceived utility or insignificance.

Despite contemporary skepticism towards authority, particularly within institutional frameworks, the Church grapples persistently with its significance. Whether rooted in conviction, scripture (Fiorenza, 2007,11), tradition (Ivelashvili, 2019, 10-15),[1]

1 The implementation of preservationist policies aimed at safeguarding tradition may inadvertently

Alternatively, office and authority remain deeply entrenched in ecclesiastical life. Nevertheless, the Church confronts a conspicuous crisis of authority, compelling introspection and adaptive measures.

At the heart of this dilemma lies the Church's entanglement with sovereign (Jackson, 2007,22) power. While unavoidably influenced by societal norms, the Church must resist full assimilation into prevailing power structures. Instead, it must reclaim its distinctive calling, disentangling itself from notions of sovereign exceptionalism.

This multi-faceted issue demands a comprehensive examination of significant dynamics and their intricate interplay. Firstly, the challenge resides in leaders assuming entitlements akin to sovereigns, often obscured under the guise of prerogative. Secondly, drawing insights from ecclesiastical discourse, individuals within the Church must acknowledge their inherent positioning within power relations and actively shape their interactions with authority (Kalantzis, 2009, 28).

However, this pursuit encounters hindrances posed by a pervasive allure toward monarchical ideals, frequently marginalizing dissenting voices. Consequently, the Church must redefine its mission, prioritizing inclusivity and collaborative endeavors over hierarchical paradigms.

This does not endorse completely abandoning authority; instead, it offers an opportunity for its renewal. By reimagining authority within the Church, rooted in humility and collective discernment, it can effectively navigate the complexities of modern society while remaining true to its core values. This expression of authority finds its most fitting embodiment in the concept of nationalism.

The Challenge of Nationalism

The prominence of nationalism[2] within both the Georgian Orthodox Church and the state highlights the importance of understanding its historical roots (Hillerbrand,

precipitate the marginalization and suppression of minority religious practices and beliefs, a phenomenon recurrently observed in Georgia and persisting in contemporary times. Such occurrences manifest through both overt and covert mechanisms. For further exploration of this topic, refer to the following scholarly text: Religious Minorities in Samtskhe-Javakheti (Ivelashvili, 2019).

2 Georgia's historical narrative and its national aspirations prompt a nuanced consideration of the term "national." This term encompasses political affiliations with nation-states, religious fervor, ethnic distinctions, the subtleties of conventional or imaginative nationalist sentiments, and its intimate connection with personal identity. Readers are urged to approach this complexity with attentiveness.

1971; McGreevy, 2003, 26).[3] This research explores its historical foundations, employing a methodological framework grounded in ancient Georgian sources. Central to this inquiry is the evaluation of nationality through the lens of Eastern Orthodox Church teachings, particularly delving into the pivotal issue of the Orthodox Church's relationship with nationality. Such discourse has gained paramount importance in recent years due to alarming instances of distortion within the Orthodox Church, where it is erroneously perceived as a nationalistic entity. Hence, it is essential to critically analyze both historical and contemporary viewpoints to identify evolving perspectives over time. Criticism does not merely involve pinpointing isolated issues within the church; it is about reshaping a church culture entrenched in sovereign power dynamics.

Among the myriad facets to consider, one stands out as paramount: the gradual, pervasive, and quasi-official entwining of the "national" descriptor with the essence of the "Orthodox Church" (Grdzelidze, 2023b 6-7), signaling a profound integration that borders on institutionalization (Kekelia, 2013, 1-9).

The Perspective of the Early Church on Nationalism

The *Epistle to Diognetus* unequivocally acknowledges that Christians are indistinguishable from one another, regardless of language or location. Nationalism and ethnic distinctions are deemed irrelevant, as Christians are defined not by their earthly affiliations but by their shared faith and unity as a singular community: "For Christians cannot be distinguished from the rest of the human race by country or language or customs" (Richardson, 1970, 216). For Christians, the distinguishing markers of their identity were not rooted in traditional cultural attributes but rather in their spiritual ethos. This disregard for earthly distinctions, such as food and language, served to dismantle barriers between Christianity and the burgeoning phenomenon of nationalism, which has since evolved into a formidable challenge for the faith. The Letter to Diognetus elucidates the mindset and practices of early Christians, highlighting their adaptable engagement with diverse cultural contexts:

3 The researcher concludes that the notion of a "national church" is a recent concept, not found in early Christianity or the early Middle Ages. Instead, the concept of territorial churches prevailed during this period. The emergence of the idea of a "national church" coincides with the rise of powerful states seeking control over religious institutions, notably during the Reformation in the 16th century. Movements such as Anglicanism and Gallicanism contributed to the development of this concept, embodying elements of religious nationalism by intertwining secular and divine authority. Despite this influence, the concept was not present during the era of the Ecumenical Councils. The researcher suggests that while these movements did not directly establish the model for the "national church," they fostered the seeds of religious nationalism that later materialized into this form.

"Yet, although they live in Greek and barbarian cities alike, as each man's lot has been cast, and follow the customs of the country in clothing and food and other matters of daily living, at the same time, they give proof of the remarkable and admittedly extraordinary constitution of their commonwealth... Every foreign land is their fatherland, and yet for them, every fatherland is a foreign land" (Richardson, 1970, 217).

Their pragmatic approach to life prioritized unity beyond geographical confines, rallying around a shared ideology while navigating challenges posed by cultural differences. Central to their ethos was the notion of solidarity and the belief in a universal human fraternity, transcending boundaries of identity and contention (Hippolytus, 2022, 41).[4] *The Preaching of Peter* echoes the sentiment, advising against worshiping like the Greeks or the Jews but advocating for a new form of worship through Christ (Ferguson & Kalantzis, 2016, 63). Ceasing from further elaboration on the early church discourse, the Letters of Ignatius: Smyrnaeans offers a more nuanced perspective, positing that the essence of the church transcends terrestrial delineations such as land, language, or nationality and is instead rooted in Christ Himself. Ignatius articulates this notion succinctly, asserting, "Wherever Jesus Christ is present, there resides the Catholic Church" (Richardson, 1970, 115). (cf. ὅπου ἂν ᾖ Χριστὸς Ἰησοῦς, ἐκεῖ ἡ καθολικὴ ἐκκλησία, 8.2) (Ignatius, 2024, 1). While Ignatius may espouse contentious viewpoints, it prompts inquiry into his stance on the concept of nationalism.

The notion of a national church lacks precedent in the traditions of the early church; it emerged subsequently, as I aim to illustrate using the example of the Georgian church.

The Georgian Church and National Identity

The advent of Christianity in Georgia during the early 4th century marked a watershed moment, catalyzing political and cultural changes. Geopolitical tensions often mirrored religious and national divides, exemplified by the conflict between Georgians and Persians, who clashed largely due to their divergent religious affiliations. Georgians aligned themselves with the Greeks in matters of faith (Javakhishvili, 1960,

4 This excerpt is particularly interesting, as it discusses the concept of "one house," suggesting that Christians should have everything within a single household: "Eat in one house and do not take meat outside," for there is one assembly and one house, that is, one church, in which the holy body of Christ is consumed. Therefore, from this one house—the church—the meat will not be taken out, and anyone eating it elsewhere will be punished as a godless person and a thief (Hippolytus, 2022, In Sanctum Pascha, Brepols Publishers NV; Les Éditions du Cerf, 41, 1-6:Ἐν οἰκίᾳ μιᾷ βροθήσεται καὶ ἔξω τῶν κρεῶν οὐκ ἐξοισητή, μία γάρ ἐστιν ἡ συναγωγὴ καὶ μία ἐστὶν ἡ οἰκία, τοῦτ' ἔστιν ἡ μία ἱερὸν σῶμα τοῦ Χριστοῦ ἐσθίεται, καὶ διὰ τοῦτο ἔξω τῆς μιᾶς οἰκίας – ἐκκλησίας – τὰ κρέα οὐκ ἐσθήσεται, ὁ δὲ ἀλλαχοῦ ἐσθίως καὶ κλέπτης κολασθήσεται).

286). However, the embrace of Christianity ushered in a redefinition of Georgian identity. With the emergence of a common religious framework, Georgians began to perceive themselves as bearers of a unique spiritual mission, consolidating around a collective sense of purpose and significance (Chkhartishvili, 2009, 1-9). This shift in consciousness elevated Georgia to a symbolic center of religious authority and cultural distinction on the world stage. This profound sense of spiritual identity, forged during the period of religious transformation, proved instrumental in sustaining Georgian cohesion, eclipsing the conventional markers of power such as economic prosperity or military strength (Brosset, 1849, 45-78).

In the fifth century, Georgian nationalism emerged from a deep-rooted devotion to Christianity, which had become synonymous with Georgianness. Prior to the fourth century, Georgians were pagans until the arrival of Saint Nino, marking a significant shift towards Christianity (Jeck, 2021, 221-238). *The Life of Kartli* portrays the gods of Georgia as powerful entities in a comprehensive nature-religion, with Mtskheta serving as a notable cult site. Despite Persian attempts to introduce Zoroastrianism, the Georgian elites resisted, viewing Christianity as a preferable alternative. This resistance stemmed from a desire to avoid Persian influence and maintain their distinct identity. Conversion to Christianity, catalyzed by figures like Saint Nino (Vashalomidze, 2007, 50-54), ultimately solidified Georgian national identity, with King Mirian and his queen Nana leading the nation in embracing the new faith.

The Christian conduct of the monarchs, along with their sermons, cultivated narratives that reinforced the ethos of nationalism. These accounts emphasized divine favor and the omnipresence of God. Vakhtang's admonition highlights a failure to grasp the spiritual dimension, reluctance towards embracing the infinite and luminous life, and a profound lack of comprehension regarding the divine essence as the creator of all existence (Jeck, 2021, 235). Vakhtang's campaign is framed within a paradigm that extends beyond the ephemeral realms of self-interest and geopolitical maneuvering. Contrary to seeing himself merely as a subordinate to the Persian monarch, he conceives of his role as a humble devotee to the eternal God of Christianity. This deity, whom he venerates as the "consubstantial Trinity" and the "creator of the world," embodies an enduring source of divine glory and eternal significance in Vakhtang's worldview.[5] In a manner akin to the narrative propagated by Russia, which asserts its

5 For an examination of the early dogmatics of Georgian Christianity, refer to Kekelidze (1955) and Hage (2007). Kekelidze's work, Geschichte der Kirchlichen Georgischen Literatur, edited by P. Michael Tarchnišvili and Julius Assfalg, provides a comprehensive overview of ecclesiastical Georgian Literature (Kekelidze, 1955). Hage's Das orientalische Christentum offers an in-depth analysis of the Georgian Orthodox Church within the broader context of Eastern Christianity (Hage, 2007, pp. 112–126).

invasion of Ukraine as a safeguarding measure to uphold sanctity within its borders, Patriarch Kirill perceives the conflict as a "holy war" (Understanding War, 2024, 1). It is framed as a mission to defend Christian principles, national dignity, and identity. Drawing parallels, the portrayal of Vakhtang's endeavors in *the Life of Kartli* echoes a similar sentiment. He is depicted as safeguarding the sanctity of Jerusalem and rescuing Christendom from the brink of destruction by the Persian king (Jeck, 2021, 235).

Subsequent rulers of Georgia similarly tread the path of forging national identity under the banner of divine sanction. Nonetheless, it is pertinent to acknowledge that ecclesiastical authorities confronted analogous challenges. Commencing from the 8th and 9th centuries, the transformation of spirituality into a cornerstone of national identity becomes increasingly evident.

Nationalizing and Dogmatizing Language, Fatherhood, and Faith

Spanning from early medieval manuscripts to 19th-century correspondences penned by "founding fathers," the narrative of conversion is depicted not solely as Georgia's embrace of Christianity but also as the gradual shaping of its political identity (Aleksidze, 2016, 227). The enduring resonance of Gregory of Khandzta's words, enshrined within the annals of Georgian history, highlights the intertwined identity of faith and nationality. Specifically, within these conceptualizations of nationhood, Georgianness becomes inexorably linked to adherence to the Orthodox faith.

Khandzta states, "Georgia is reckoned to consist of those spacious lands where church services are celebrated, and all prayers are said in the Georgian tongue. Only the Kyrie-eleison, which means 'Lord, have mercy,' or 'Lord be merciful to us,' is pronounced in Greek" (Lang, 1956, 148). This oft-cited passage from a 10th-century hagiographic text serves as a cornerstone for inscribing Georgian nationhood within the realm of Christianity. Moreover, as demonstrated by Aleksidze, it delineates the contours of the 'body politic' by demarcating the territory where prayers are uttered in the Georgian language (Aleksidze, 2016, 227-28).

Furthermore, from a nationalistic theological perspective, the belief in Georgian messianism, particularly intertwined with the Theotokos, holds significant significance. This belief's origins can be traced to monastic centers outside Georgia's borders. Messianism, aligning with the broader Judeo-Christian-Muslim tradition of anticipating a divine Savior, originated in late Judaism and was further developed within Christianity. Garcɥa-Arenal (2006, 3-4) emphasizes the importance of examining messianic movements not only through theological or religious lenses but also from political and social viewpoints to understand their impact on originating communities.

The study of religious factors shaping national identity during the medieval period is exemplified in Georgian hagiographic texts from the 10th to 11th centuries (Grdzelidze, 2009a, 53-162), particularly those composed outside Georgia (Lang, 1976, 154). These texts, such as the "Life of Hilarion the Georgian" and others, provide insights into Georgian nationalism beyond its borders, notably reflecting messianic beliefs. The establishment of the Georgian Monastery of Iviron on Mount Athos facilitated the preservation of Georgian identity amidst Byzantine imperialism (Porphyrogenitus, 1967, 45-46). Tensions between Greek and Georgian monks on Athos underscored questions of orthodoxy and linguistic differences, with Georgian monks led by figures like Hilarion asserting their rights and credibility. These texts serve as foundational sources for understanding the interplay of religion and nationalism in shaping Georgian identity.

The latter section of the "Life of John and Euthymios" reveals a significant rift between the Greek and Georgian communities on Mount Athos, centered around the wealth of the Iviron Monastery. Greek monks targeted the monastery due to its riches, exacerbating tensions between the two groups (Končošvili et al., 2014, 156-159). The Greeks' impetus for targeting the monastery derived from a perceived deviation from orthodox doctrine on the part of the Georgians, a sentiment bolstered by linguistic and liturgical disparities, notably the absence of Greek language in their religious observances (Grdzelidze, 2009a, 30,89, 91-93). This episode not only highlights the intricacies of intercommunal relations on Mount Athos but also underscores broader themes of Georgian nationalism and religious fervor, as evidenced by the depiction of the Georgian faith as intrinsically national: "This is the true faith of our people: having accepted it once, we have not strayed either to the left or to the right, and will never stray unless it is the will of God" (Grdzelidze, 2009a, 144). Furthermore, the invocation of Mary's authority to legitimize the Georgian presence on Mount Athos further accentuates the intersection of religious and nationalist sentiments. The historical significance of this episode lies in its citation of a purported dialogue involving Mary, serving as a compelling defense of Georgian orthodoxy and cultural distinctiveness. While the authenticity of this document remains subject to scrutiny, its historical resonance endows it with narrative potency, symbolizing the enduring struggle for identity preservation in the face of external encroachments:

"Do not you know that many people are settled on this Mountain who speak their language and they can be saved by God? Whoever will not accept them will be my enemy because these people (the Georgians are implied) are given to me by my Son because of their steady orthodoxy and because they believed in my Son and were baptized" (Abuladze, 1967, 20).

The concept of the sacredness of the Georgian language predates the events discussed. It was articulated by the monk Ioane, also known as Ioane Zosime, in his hymn titled: "ქებაჲ და დიდებაჲ ქართულისა ენისაჲ" ("Praise and Glorification of the Georgian Language"). This hymn extols the Georgian language and ascribes to it a singular purpose. Ioane Zosime expounded the notion that the Georgian language lay dormant, akin to a martyr, awaiting the second coming of the Messiah. Drawing a parallel, he likened the language's revival to that of Lazarus in the Gospels (Rayfield, 2000, 32-33). The Georgians cherished their language as sacred, viewing it as the cornerstone of their identity. This belief spurred them to fight both physically for their homeland and intellectually for their language's preservation. The Iviron monastery played a central role in safeguarding Georgia's cultural and intellectual heritage amidst adversity.

Linguistically, Greek represented sacredness for Greeks, while Georgian served as the foundation of Georgian ethnicity and messianic belief. This cultural conflict unfolded amid Byzantine imperialism and Georgia's political consolidation, shaping the Georgian messianic faith, which portrayed Georgia under the protection of the Mary. This belief, originating in texts from the Iviron Monastery, became emblematic of Georgian identity, both within and beyond Georgia's borders (Grdzelidze, 2009a, 52-162).

20th Century Struggle, Present Ultra-Nationalism

Ilia Chavchavadze was later sanctified by the church as St. Ilia the Righteous, earning the epithet "Uncrowned King of the Nation" (Abašiže et al., 2006, 61). His canonization was a testament to his embodiment of national consciousness. Chavchavadze's endeavor to nurture national identity revolved around three fundamental pillars—"Ena, Mamuli, Sartsmunoeba" or "Language, Homeland, Faith." He perceived nations as ethical communities, underscoring the imperative role of shared moral obligations in their cohesion and survival (Chkhartishvili, 2024, 1-5).

One of Chavchavadze's notable works, published in 1887 in *Iveria* (no. 74), delved into the notion of a nation as a community blessed by divine grace, drawing inspiration from E. Renan's essay "What is a Nation?" This paper reflects his profound perspective on the subject.[6]

6 During the 19th century, known as the era of nationalism, new conceptions of nationhood emerged across Europe and beyond, each emphasizing the need for a distinct identity. For the French, Germans (especially after unification in 1870), and the British, national identity was closely tied to statehood and imperial ambitions. Meanwhile, many peoples around the world formed nations within imperial-colonial contexts, shaping their unity through diverse factors. After the Russo-Ottoman

In 1860, at the age of 23, Ilia Chavchavadze embarked on his journalistic career with a critical evaluation of Revaz Eristavi's translation of Ivan Kozlov's "Madwoman" in the magazine *Tsiskari*. This discourse marked a significant exploration into the essence of Georgian identity. Chavchavadze evocatively expressed, "From our ancestors, we inherited the three sacred treasures: fatherland, language, and faith. If we do not even take good care of them, what kind of men are we, what will we be able to say to our heirs?" (Nodia, 2009, 89).

Chavchavadze's intellectual journey reshaped Georgian historiography by redefining the nation's foundational elements. He endowed territory with the concept of "mamuli," symbolizing an ancestral legacy, envisioned language as the embodiment of the national ethos, and attributed an unparalleled devotion to Christian faith among Georgians. Each facet of this triadic framework became integral to Georgian national identity, illustrating Chavchavadze's pioneering contribution to scholarly discussions on nationhood.

Ilia Chavchavadze dubbed the "father of the nation," introduced the inaugural definition of the Georgian nation. Soviet authorities in 1937 initiated a cult around Chavchavadze, merging his ideology with state narrative and control. In 1987, amidst Soviet influence, the Georgian Orthodox Church canonized him (Tsipuria, 2024. 2-4), blending national and religious identity. However, his slogan, "Language, Homeland, Faith" was later manipulated by the late 20th-century nationalist movement, fostering ethno-religious extremism (Shogren, 2024, 4). Revising this, protesters in April 2024 altered it to "Language, Homeland, Unity," aligning with Chavchavadze's original ethos against divisive narratives. This signifies a modernized return to Chavchavadze's principles amidst contemporary political strife (Maisuradze, 2024, 1).

In Georgia, nationalism manifests in multiple forms; one operates under the guise of divine authority, where the state collaborates with the church to regulate public sentiments. Together, they assert divine providence, positioning themselves as earthly arbiters of power and sovereignty. This particular form of nationalism intertwines

War of 1877-1878, Adjara, which had been part of the Ottoman Empire for over four centuries, was integrated into the two Georgian-inhabited gubernias of the Russian Empire. It was during this period that Ilia Chavchavadze articulated his seminal programmatic letter, "Osmalo's Georgia," in which he proposed a revolutionary, secular conception of nationhood tailored to Georgian realities. He asserted, "Neither linguistic unity, nor religious conformity, nor tribal affiliations can unite people as profoundly as shared historical experiences. A nation bound by common historical struggles, enduring together through trials and tribulations, finds strength in unity and loyalty." Chavchavadze's formulation redefined the Georgian nation as a historically-rooted collective, where individual attributes such as language, religion, or clan affiliations were secondary. In this framework, the nation transcends ethnicity, linguistic homogeneity, or religious adherence, elevating the homeland—the collective estate—as the sole sacred entity that unites all its inhabitants into a cohesive national identity.

tradition, language, and faith, supplanting the traditional role of God, as previously outlined. However, nationalism in Georgia also takes secular forms, influenced by cultural and historical narratives extending beyond religious authority. This broader spectrum of nationalist expressions poses significant challenges to individual rights and freedoms, mainly when fundamentalist orientations dominate, undermining the principles of diversity and liberty.[7]

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7 For further exploration of the concept of freedom, readers are encouraged to consult Papanikolaou's (2017) work, "Whose Public? Which Ecclesiology?" In Political Theologies in Orthodox Christianity: Common Challenges and Divergent Positions (pp. 229-242). New York, NY; London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark. Nationalist ideologies fuel oppression and discrimination against sexual minorities, as evidenced by numerous instances in Georgia where the church, often with state backing, perpetrates aggression against these marginalized groups.

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