History

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Reconstruction of Georgian Nationalism: The Role of Georgian Orthodox Church and the Institution of the Patriarch in the Reconstruction of Georgian Nationalism

Despite the fact that Georgian nationalism has been an a widely-studied phenomenon, in this article, I would like to demonstrate the role played by Georgian Orthodox Church generally and the Patriarch Institution particularly, in the reconstruction of popular narratives about Georgian nationalism. This article attempts to analyze how the Georgian Orthodox Church generally and Patriarch Ilia II, personally, were and still are able to generate and legitimize ideas about Georgian nationhood. Nationalism is of significant importance because it shapes Georgian beliefs and attitudes towards the state and Georgian identity. This research is based on content-analysis of epistles written by the Georgian Patriarch Ilia II, covering the period from 1978 to 2003. Using the content-analysis of epistles as the basis for research represents an original approach for studying the process of formation of Georgian nationalism.

Keywords: nationalism, religion, cult, moral, imagined community, authority, authoritarian ethics, charismatic authority, sublime, ideal, idealization.

Introduction

Georgian society is a reality represented by Georgian historical-religious narratives in a specific way. Any society produces power of morality to shape and orient itself through the particular value system. Georgian civilization is a system created as a product of its members' intellectual life. However, social realities affect and form participant individuals as well. A person, to some degree becomes subordinated to the collective life, bearing collective emotions and consuming collective goods (Durkheim, 1995).

The religious techniques of the Orthodox Church are mystical mechanisms and beyond their physical signs, mental operations are unfolding. The aim of religious techniques is not physical oppression, but on the contrary, the aim of religious operations is to reach, equip and make individual consciousness more disciplined (Durkheim, 1995). The power of the Christian Orthodox faith is spiritual and its supreme function is to influence the moral life of an individual.

The subject of this study is the role played by the Georgian Orthodox Church in shaping and forming Georgian national ideals. However, here enters the role of authorities as the most important contributors to the successful operationalization of ideals and value systems once created. The reason for choosing epistles as the basic material for analysis is the personal authority afforded to the Georgian Patriarch Ilia II. While creating and constructing ideals, it is authority, which plays a decisive role in shaping the minds and affecting the conscience of its followers.

According to Erich Fromm (Fromm, 2002), authority can be anyone – from parents to the state. Authority, which is believed to be perfect, is always seen as an ideal in which one should believe unconditionally and under whom one is subordinating itself. Thus authority incorporates ideas about the transcendental and the sublime.

Thomas Luckmann argued that there is an assumption in the sociology of religion, according to which religion is identified with the church (Luckmann, 1967). An additional complexity of the Georgian case is the personal authority of Ilia II, and concepts produced by him - *"Christian patriotism"*, which causes the tight interrelatedness of the Motherland and the Christian faith. In Luckman's view the model created by the church, which is internalized into an individual's life and which conditions integration and legitimization of behavioral norms, in the case of post-Soviet Georgia is due to the weakness of political organizations. The Orthodox Church becomes the constructor of not only individual but also state values. Even now it shapes those fundamental directions and value systems, which - as it argues - are vital particularly for its own wellbeing and the state's wellbeing in general. The strong authority of the Georgian Patriarch is the reason why norms dictated by the Orthodox Church are pursued and kept. what about the institutional specialization of the religion, it directs social understanding and society's view to the specific interpretation of the surrounding world and gives to the society unique patterns of specific social order.

Orthodox Church enters into relations with other specialized institutions whose foremost functions are secular in their character. Luckmann argues, that:

According to the context of relations, the church develops own secular interests, along with own doctrinal and liturgical traditions...While giving an official model to the church congregations, religious experts should reinforce secular activity of the church by giving sacred meaning to those activities. (Luckmann, 1967)

Methodology

As the research is based on the epistles of Georgian Patriarch Ilia II, I used the method of content-analysis in order to gather and analyze narratives about

nationalism included in the content. After analyzing the content of all the epistles from 1978 to 2003, I classified and connected topics in a most appropriate way to better demonstrate and understand the whole picture how Georgian church generally, and Georgian Patriarch particularly, were trying to reconstruct the ideas of Georgian nationalism.

In order to assess the social role of religion, I developed a theoretical framework for the research analyzing classical theories from the sociology of religion. Moreover, theoretical part of the research examines the importance of authorities. Examination of the concept of *authority* makes it easier to understand the authoritative power of Georgian Patriarch Ilia II. The work discusses the legislative fundamentals of authoritative power, the traditionalist and charismatic authority, the legislative forms of authority and hierocratic power. Among the various issues presented in the research, the following article includes the most important ones - the moral relationship between mythological ancestors and contemporary societies, the problem of idealization of the world, and the sublimation of ideas in specific personalities and institutions.

Having theoretical background as a strong foundation, this research aims at demonstrating the authoritative power of the Patriarch as an institution and the institution of the Georgian Orthodox Church. Also, this research discusses the power for legitimization of these strong institutions, their intervention into aspects of social life and their self-legalizing character revealed through purification of decision and regulation-making. The problem of nationalism is highlighted to underline the ideological basis of nationalism. Nationalism is represented as a system of ideal imaginary and, due to this fact that the meanings of religious and nationalistic feelings along with respective value systems are hardly differentiable. As a result, religious and secular interests of religious institutions mostly intersect each other.

Results

The Identical Nature of Orthodox Confession and Nationalism: Sacred Nature of Language

Throughout the history of the Georgian nation, "Georgianhood" was identified with the Orthodox faith. Long before the creation of Soviet Union, the Russian Tsarist Empire almost continuously fought against the Georgian Orthodox Church, which was thought to be the most important component of Georgian national ideology. The fact that the subordination of Georgian church was one of the main strategic objectives for the Russian Empire in order to assimilate the whole Georgia into Russian empire can be seen as a sign of ideological authority which the Georgian Orthodox church had; it is also a sign that the Orthodox faith and church were the most fundamental components defining Georgian national identity.

At the beginning of XIX century hundreds of churches were closed in Georgia. In 1811, the self-government of Georgian Orthodox church was abolished by Russian Empire. This event was followed by riots in almost every region of Georgia through 1818-1820. After abolishing the autonomy of Georgian Orthodox Church, liturgies in Georgian churches began to be held in Russian. The fact that religious practices were held in a foreign language created a kind of mental divorce between Georgians and their Church, ultimately causing a serious clash in the Georgian conscience (Ilia State University, 2013).

The creation of language barriers resulted in violent estrangement between Georgians and the Georgian Orthodox Church and opened the road for new demands. One of them was the need for the creation of a new ideal. Through the list of possible ideals, the most appealing and attractive was the ideal of the Georgian nation. An attempt to substitute the ideal of faith with the new ideal of the "Georgian nation", was the next political step done by the Church. According to G. Tevzadze, the ideal of the Georgian nation was born in the second half of XIX century. The clearest signs reflecting the idea of the

ideology of the Georgian nation was published media: newspapers and Georgian publishing house, headed by the society for expansion of literacy (Tevzadze, G.). According to Gellner and Anderson, a "nation" is an imaginary society, united by territory, language and culture (Gellner, 1983; Anderson 1983). Published media, according to Anderson, is one of the most important causes of the Reformations success and it created specific senses of time and contemporariness, simultaneously encircling and informing society as it expanded over a large scale. Along with the state intelligentsia, religious personalities also took part in the fight for keeping the Georgian cultural authenticity (Ilia State University, 2013).

History leaves the ideological, behavioral and institutional heritage, which in sum, compiles culture as a whole. Culture by itself is characterized by continuity. Cultural memory becomes re-activated as soon as the opportunity is given. This explains why in post-Soviet Georgia religious feelings and the authorities of the Patriarch and the Church have been strengthened (Ilia State University, 2013).

The Imaginary Religious-National Community

The importance of the Georgian Orthodox Church and the Georgian language for the authenticity of Georgian national identity is reflected in the popular expression by Ilia Chavchavadze "Language, Motherland, Faith." The second component, "Motherland" is indivisible from language and faith. Anderson argues that the images of nationalism could have been born only after fundamental cultural concepts had lost axiomatic meaning in human mentality (Anderson, 1983)**,** but in the case of Georgia, the first out of these concepts became the most important for keeping the national identity. The first concept represents the idea that the particular spoken and/or written language offers humans access to privileged ontological truth. The whole uniqueness of Georgian Apostolic Orthodox Church, according to Ilia II, is in

its origin. It is established by Christ's apostles, thus it is wholly connected with Jesus, the sacral object of Orthodox confession. As the truth is in Christ, so the Church as a "body of Christ," is the exclusive owner of the truth.

Throughout centuries, the dissemination of Orthodoxy and the church's truth and sharing of this truth within Georgian society has been done in the Georgian language. The Georgian language and the Georgian Orthodox confession are directly related to each other. The Georgian language and Orthodox faith are the key components of Georgian national identity. As mentioned earlier in this article, in his epistle, the Patriarch interestingly discusses Georgian statehood. The interpretation of Motherland by Patriarch Ilia II creates imaginary of a religious-national community, which is limited within a specific frame and is identified with cultural and spiritual history encircled within this frame **(**Easter epistle, 2003). It is interesting that the definition of Motherland by Patriarch Ilia II doesn't involve political borders or authentic political ideology of Georgia. Ilia II argues that leaving Georgia's political borders is dangerous for Georgia, as human beings who lives in abroad loses feelings of national authenticity **(**Easter Epistle, 2003). It seems that in order to keep Georgian language and faith, the feeling of Georgian nationhood and also keeping active belongingness to imaginary religious-national collectivity, it is vital to live on Georgian territory. The definition of Motherland, mentioned earlier also represents the importance of the *ancestors' cult* for Georgian Orthodox Church.

Cult of Ancestors

The ancestors' cult is the most represented phenomenon among other topics in the epistles. Its nature is especially emphasized and used for making historical narratives sacred by Patriarch Ilia II. The ancestors' cult and the narratives connected to ancestors are always closely related to the Georgian Orthodox Church. Thus, as a result, the Patriarch gives additional validity to

the importance of the church and confession for Georgia. Ilia II constantly makes a targeted selection of mythical and historical personages and emphasizes their purification for their deeds towards the Georgian Orthodox Church. The persons who fought for the Church and especially those who sacrificed their lives for the church are believed to have reached highest levels of patriotism - the fact underlining the identical interpretation of Church and Statehood. If discussed according to Durkheim (Durkheim, 1995), the ancestors and contemporary humans are associated in the same classified type and because ancestors are more sublime than contemporaries. The historical-religious personages represent rolemodels for modern humanity. *"..Instead of remaining outside the framework of society, they [ancestors] have become regular members of it",* writes Durkheim (Durkheim, 1995). Mythical and/or historical personages are closely akin to the members of contemporary societies. Due to the traditional fundamentalism of Georgian Orthodox Church, modern members of Georgian society must not only glorify the moral values of their ancestors, but also integrate themselves into the same moral system for their success and rescue. Good examples of religious nationalism are found in the following citations by Patriarch Ilia II:

The past of our country is full of examples about sacrificial love towards our Motherland: martyrs David and Constantine, Kings Archil and Luarsab, Dimitri Tavdadebuli, Queen Ketevan, and thousands of others sacrificed themselves for the confession and motherland and as role-models, entered the history of our folk and Church as great saints (Christmas epistle, 1997).

Can we imagine Georgia and Georgian folk without our confession and our relationships, our traditions and family-hood?! How would have been our country, if it didn't had such a sacrificial, devoted and strong defenders as were: Saint King Mirian and Queen Nana, Vakhtang Gorgasali, David Agmashenebeli, King Tamar, Archil and Luarsab, Dimitri Tavdadebuli, Queen Ketevan and thousands and ten-thousands other martyrs, who sacrificed themselves for the Motherland and confession (Easter epistle, 2002).

In the epistles, Patriarch Ilia II constantly emphasizes the sacralization of Georgian land:

The glorification of true Lord has been done more than two thousand years from our hallowed land; Twenty-hundred-years history of our Christianity is the secret of our survival and our divine renaissance (Christmas epistle, 2000).

Those collective ideals, writes Durkheim (Durkheim, 1995), which are represented by religion, are generated by an individual's internal world. Collective ideals condition collective directions of thought. Collective life teaches individuals how to form ideals and then, through assimilation of those ideals, gives a person the opportunity to perceive them. In the epistles, emphasizing the sacred nature of Georgian history serves to make a close connection between faith and nationalistic spirit and internalization of value system into the consciousness of society. The selective method used by Patriarch Ilia II while remembering saints recognized by Georgian Orthodox Church aims at the recreation and encouragement of those collective behaviors with all of those values and motivations being beyond those behaviors, which largely lay in the collective memory of society. It is noteworthy to mention that Durkheim believed that after internalization into individuals, collective ideals tend to transform according to an individual's habitus, taking different forms in each particular person. As society is more or less built upon evolving masses' ideas and thought systems (Durkheim, 1995), encouragement and activation of the ancestors' cult in contemporary society becomes dangerous as soon as it could be harmful for society's progress by developing social life in a more artificial way. According to political context, in times of the Soviet regime such emphases were important for strengthening the spirit of nationalism among members of Georgian society. Likewise, after the collapse of the USSR, Georgia officially gained independence and political freedom, actions which required correction and guidance. But, activation of such memories and proclivities in modern

societies affect masses of believers in a different way and might cause limited alternatives for envisioning progress.

The Importance and Function of the Church

After the end of the two-hundred-years of coexistence with Russian Empire and then, the 70-years of the Soviet regime, the reconstruction of Georgian national identity was the prior necessity in order to rehabilitate itself from the anomic situation and to resolve the state from deadlock. The Georgian Orthodox Church in the name of Orthodox Christian faith played an enormous role in these readjustment processes. If discussed according to Durkheim, the aim of religions is to form an ideal type of society. The fundamental feature of the religion is the acute idealization of the world. Every religion divides the world into two radically opposed parts - sacred and profane. The moral side of a religion aims at the substitution of the real world with the ideal world, and for this reason, it generates sublime ideas about the world and social order. In this process, the greatest importance is given to the cult – or to the active operational repertoire, with which the doctrine internalized into the behavioral mechanism gains the ability to work, simultaneously rampaging collective senses and at the same time strengthening and disseminating basic sets of values within large groups of society (Durkheim, 1995).

"The Church is the body of Christ. Its function is to cure human souls burdened with sins. The spiritual transformation is only achievable within the Church, because holly spirit rests here with all of his might and all divine secrets are fulfilled, sanctifying and enlightening believers" (Christmas epistle, 1998)*.*

The legitimization of the Orthodox Church is conditioned by the main object of the Orthodox faith - Christ. It is interesting that the sublimed idea about the superior and the transcendental entered the Orthodox Church through Christ himself. The Orthodox Church reflects the idea of Christ, thus it represents the idea of Orthodox faith. It owns the only truth, thus, it owns freedom, because

freedom is in truth, and truth is in God himself. We can argue that according to Orthodox Christian teaching, human beings, who are born with the right to have freedom of choice, are given only the right to make a radical choice – "to be, or not to be" under Christ's guidance. The Church is the only institution where religious rites are correctly fulfilled. Thus, the membership of the Church is immutable for believer. To some degree, servitude to and obedience towards the Church is equal to freedom, as only through this obedience one acquires an opportunity to access the truth (Christ) and thus, freedom itself.

Authority, according to Erich Fromm (2002), is the object, with which the supreme, sublime idea acquires rational, physical being. The rational, physical shape of the Orthodox confession's sublime idea is the Orthodox Church. As the Orthodox Church is conceived as an enactor of moral and ethical legislation, it becomes directly connected to each individual's and thus, generally speaking, to the whole society's super-ego. In this case, we are dealing with authoritarian conscience aimed at having not temporary, but long-term relationships with believers. Weber argues that traditionalist power is based on the belief in the holiness of daily-life; and according to Orthodox teachings, crucified Christ is permanently sacrificed for people's survival. Permanent activation of the sense of crime and the encouragement of contrition, also, recalling the doctrine that at the expense of peoples' lives the object of the religion sacrifices itself every day, affects the Freudian "Super Ego" and permanently reinforces the authority of the Church in peoples' minds and consciences (Fromm, 2002).

According to the Patriarch Ilia II, the doctrines, teachings and legislation of Christ's Church must remain unchanged, thus supporting and encouraging the firmness of a traditionalist world perception. The legitimating power of hierocratic government is founded on the Church's authority. The latter itself is strengthened by the idea of Orthodox Church authority – Christ/Logos. The Church is the conducting and executive organization of a specific ideology; moreover, its traditionalist viewpoint encourages the phenomenon of

unconditional power and the charisma of "the shepherd of Georgian nation" – Patriarch Ilia II.

The power of the Church and hierocracy has been and is still larger than the power of Georgian political organizations. Additionally, political organizations and political authorities receive their authoritative position among society only through cooperation and thanks to the acceptance from Church government. Due to this firmness of power and legislative strength, the Georgian Orthodox Church has played enormous role in re-construction of Georgian nationalism and Georgian identity.

A Significant Finding: the Concept of "Christian patriotism"

The analysis of epistles covering the period from 1978 to 2003 demonstrated the intervening power and interests of the Georgian Orthodox Church in almost every aspect of human life. A sharp emphasis is always on the vitality of Orthodox faith for Georgian society – the former enabling the latter to maintain Georgian identity. An important finding of this research was a concept of *"Christian patriotism"* that confirms my earlier suggested hypothesis. The Patriarch discusses Georgian national narrative and calls Georgian nation as an *outlasting nation*, and says:

Our people desired not only physical survival, but also maintenance of that huge mercy which came and entered our existence from the seamless robe of Jesus, from arrival of apostles, and from the vine cross of Saint Nino, granted her by Saint Mary the virgin (Christmas epistle, 1981)*.*

This demonstrates that Christianity and the Lord are so highly appreciated by and assimilated into Georgian nationalism that people were willing to sacrifice their lives not only to their homeland, but also to Christianity. Fighting for Christianity defined and conditioned the authenticity of Georgian society and the maintenance of national identity. The historical narrative

defines the most important motivation why Georgians fought over the centuries: maintenance of Christianity and preserving the sacral objects. Georgianhood and Christianity are identical. The Georgian land is holy as it keeps the seamless robe of Jesus, and it is the land chosen by Saint Mary the virgin. Homeland and Christianity are integrated values, and although freedom and authenticity are valid ideas, the ideological and national unification of Georgia is still done around religious, particularly, Orthodox Christian faith. *"Thus, it was Christianity, that saved us, and maintained our nationhood and freedom"* – writes Patriarch in his Christmas epistle in 1980.

Georgian national narratives are demonstratively religious narratives. National ideals and goals are identical with religious ones; the future of Georgia is thoroughly connected to the future of the Orthodox faith, and national development is directly related to the development of Orthodox Christian confession. The absence of narratives clearly secular in their nature might be the result of the fact that the main producers of those national narratives are religious institutions. The Durkheimian definition of the Church is relevant for the Georgian case too. The Church is a social organization, which has its own images about world order (Durkheim, 1995). The Georgian Orthodox Church is a superimposition of the function of state-leader. It puts major blocks in the building process of nationalism and national value system, and due to its religious nature, national narratives are structured with and build upon large number of religious themes. Such a closely interrelated connection between nationalism and the Christian faith unites the fundamental principles of Georgian nationalism, and represents the main orientation line for the epoch's development.

Patriarch tries to create collective memory, and hopes that the national spirit will be successfully formed in Georgian conscience. In during and after the collapse of Soviet Union such an attempt to re-create authenticity is especially important. And as a result - Homeland, Georgian language, history, famous heroes, fundamental orientation postulates and Georgian national model are

blessed and hallowed. Due to the absence or lack of nationalist movements and political organizations, the Patriarch Ilia II idealizes the model of Georgian nationalism. For the legitimatization of this ideal model, Patriarch bases project of Georgian nationalism on the religious fundaments.

Conclusion

A Civilization is created by society, and each individual is the product of this civilization. The wholeness of a society is represented through the image the society has about this unity, also the representation the society has about itself. The moral system of the society is sublimated into the sacred object (which is changing along the time) and with the traditional cult as a main contributor, continues to reach next generations through the tunnel of collective memory.

Sacred objects are those concrete figures which function to unite the society around imaginary icons of sublimed ideas being routed in them. Societies and collective perceptions create the circle with the center of specific signs and activities – the moral and cult are the substantial aspects of any sort and ideological belief. The moral is the main arbiter in the game of perceptions and beliefs – it is the fundamental regulator, while cult is the guarantor of permanent participation in this game along with expansion and dissemination of active empathy and solidarity. Without cult moral loses the ability to exist, equally as it is lacking morality, the cult itself becomes devalued; lacking ideological content, the cult is transformed as a part of mere folklore. Keeping this cult free of fundamental values as a tradition is a violation against human psychics. As long as society becomes encircled with the traditionalist barricades, it will be isolated and this will hinder the integration of the society into broader cultural space.

The late arrival of Enlightenment ideas in Georgia on one side, and the preservation and then intensification of traditionalist visioning on the other,

stipulated the discrepancies between the religious and political morals and the cult. The repugnancy of sacred texts and symbols from modern context, especially their interpretation with traditionalist representations, creates serious barrier for active reflection. Respectively, traditional cult preserves its values only ritually. The main function of political organizations is to strengthen nationalistic values among society and unite whole society around them. Their function is to create national identity for each member of the society, along with making modernization of world perception into the collective memory according and respective to the basic historical and value systems.

Nationalism and nation are those sacred concepts and sacred objects which create fundaments of civil religion. According to Anderson, the changes in the world perception revitalized these perspectives, weakened beliefs into sacred communes, languages and holy dynasties and generated ideas about nationalism. These changes were the harder influencers and supporters of ability to imagine the "nation" (Anderson, 1983). One of the main functions of religious institutions is to teach particular doctrines and guarantee proper performance of rites. The members who participate in those rites share group identity by accepting common sacred object(s) and try to reach it/them through rituals and rites (Durkheim, 1995). Religious organizations, as well as political agencies, attempt to create human identity and encourage primary sensation of given identity. Political and religious organizations construct collective memory, and thus they create collective reality. Notwithstanding the fact that reality exists as an independent phenomenon, its enforcement through the political or religious prism changes its colors and stimulates among society a specific vision of objective reality.

As nationhood and nationalism are secular religions by their nature, their substitution with transcendental religious values is simple. The absence of statehood and senses of secular nationalism or their weakness, produced by the weaknesses of political organizations, helps religious institutions, especially if this religious institution maintains authoritative stances itself. Among other

differences, the most important and noteworthy are the distinctively pregnable nature of political and religious institutions. Religious institutions, unlike political ones, have much implacable religious nature, thus, their ideology and disposition is very static. Because of this, those countries where religious institutions benefit from their great authority, while political organizations are positioned much lower on authoritative ladder, lean towards theocracy. Religious organizations, like political ones, have their own versions of organizing state and social order. As a result, in the countries where religious institutions are more popular than political agencies, the vision of world order modeled within and prescribed by religious organizations dominates. In order to activate collective effectiveness in cases when facing political failure also when value systems are destabilized, political and/or religious authorities try to regenerate traditionalist fundamental values and internalize them into the social conscience. Respective to the needs and demands of the state, the institution holding on to active ideology makes a thorough selection of historical narratives and events and sublimates supreme ideas in them. As a result, social conscience changes and the artificial construction of social reality unfolds. Concrete decisions, norms, morals and/or behavioral orientations are given sacred interpretations for their legitimization.

After gaining independence in 1991, Georgia found itself lacking experience in civil society and civic life in its national memory. While lacking a strong political nucleus and facing practically dissolved political organizations with distorted strategies for the future, Georgia felt a strong need for a powerful supporter and a foundation for future development. To strengthen itself, the state needed a powerful institution and the concept, which has a strong influence over the country and its society. Georgia had hardly any strong secular experience in its late history: concerning democracy, Georgia, as a new state had no opportunity to base itself on the First Republic as the First Republic was governed by Mensheviks. However, having huge conceptual meaning and validity historically, one of the strongest institutions was the church. Hierocratic experience absorbed in its memory various values powerful enough to give to political elites' stability to some degree. As a result, the

Georgian state chose its church as the main trustee to which it could base development processes and regain lost identity.

The space for development of nationalism, which was filled with civil values in the Western hemisphere, in case of Georgia became naturally filled by the Church. As a result, interests of the state and the Church found the point intersection. The values of statehood aspects of social life along with internalization of these values into society are done through their constant purification by Patriarch Ilia II. Throughout the history, identification of religious and state authorities, integration of state and religious narratives, the interception of hierocratic and state hierarchical interests and an attempt to keep the cult of ancestors active in the collective daily life serves for reconstruction the sense of nationhood among Georgian society. According to Benedict Anderson *"unconsciously making hypostases of nationalism, and then classifying it, human being interprets it as an ideology"* (Anderson, 1983). While discussing nationalism, Anderson argues that *"nation is imaginary political community – imagined inherently limited and independently"* (Anderson 1983). In the case of Georgia, as a result of the weakness of political organizations and due to the effective organization and authority of Georgian Orthodox Church, the Georgian nation, it can be argued, took the colors of an imaginary "religious community", the members of which became the followers of "religious patriotism." The fundamental goal of the Georgian Orthodox Church was to reconstruct the idea of Georgian nationalism; however, unlike Anderson's definition, the Georgian patriotism, according to the epistle by Patriarch Ilia II took the following shape:

The Motherland, this is a Georgian language, this is a spirit of our glorious ancestors, thousands of martyrs, kings, catholicons and patriarchs, worthies and Lord-arrayed fathers and mothers, this is our numerous temples and monasteries, our holies and sanctities, our art, architecture, writing. This is our temperament and way of thought" (Easter Epistle, 2003).

> *Thus, the close relationship between state interests of political and hierocratic governance has produced the concept of*

"religious nationalism". A concept, which was worked out by Patriarch Ilia II in his 1980 Christmas epistle and which still has its consequences in modern Georgians' perceptions about nationalism.

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