

## CONFLICTS FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF NATIONALISM: CASE OF GEORGIA<sup>1</sup>

### Abstract

Georgia is a country, with two existing conflicts. The majority of the population thinks that conflicts emerged in the last century. It is believed, that the problem is only political and related to the geopolitical condition. We fully agree with the position according to which the current political conflicts between Georgians and Abkhazians and Georgians and Ossetians has been provoked by Russia in the beginning and moreover for the end of the twentieth century. But, now we try to observe these conflicts from the perspective of Nationalism.

According to the current theories, development of such collective-cultural identities, like ethnic groups and moreover the nations depend on many sensitive aspects. Except for economic, political and territorial issues, the most important is faith of common myths and symbols. The birth of nationalism, on which the formation of nation is based, is closely related and even inspired by the cultural conceptualization. In such time the strong feeling of authenticity and therefore neediness of separating from the *other* ones becomes inevitable. In the 18th century, cultural movement, which aroused in the Kingdom of Kartl-Kakheti, contained important ethno-cultural messages, according to which the Georgian unity sharply was divided from the *others*. In 19th century Iliia Chavchavadze, the founder of Georgian Nation, tried to rethink and shape new identity perception. However, since 1921, after the sovietization Georgian nationalism entirely was concentrated on the ethnical and religious moments.

In the presented paper, considering the historical past, we will try to understand the modern challenges faced Georgian society.

**Keywords:** *Nationalism, Nation, Identity and History of Georgia.*

### Introduction

As we know, any type of community has a bouquet of values on which is their collective intellectual being is based. In case of nationalism, the sentiments like this covers with many different, but interconnected moments, which makes ideological fundament for the shaping of national

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feelings and any shifting or changing within can lead to significant fluctuations of national body and even destruction of the political system.<sup>2</sup> Especially, in those cases, when above-mentioned attachments have been formed *La longue durée*.

One of the strongest ideas in Georgian nationalism is the feeling and belief that during the many centuries Georgians lived together with *others* without any confrontation. The most extensive expression of this attitude is the unity of the Caucasian people, formed by Leonti Mroveli<sup>3</sup> in the 11th century.<sup>4</sup> In the Soviet time, that became the main stronghold for the Georgian national conception. After the controversy between the Georgian-Abkhazians and Georgian-Ossetians, the equilibrium based on this faith was broken. Today, the political crisis created by military actions threatens the idea of Georgian statehood.

In this paper, we would like to find some answers and clarify how and when the conflicts began in Georgia? What was the real reasons behind them? Does it truly have only political origins or we can find ethnical and cultural roots?

We are trying to do this by observing several notes preserved in Georgian texts about Abkhazian and Ossetian peoples, e.g. in *The Description of the Georgian Kingdom* by Vakhushti Bagrationi. This source is also interesting as it was created in the eighteenth century in parallel with the revival of the cultural movement.

### **Actuality**

The main challenges to the modern Georgian society are conflicts in Abkhazia and Shida Kartli, so-called South Ossetia. The 1990s, when it escalated into an armed controversy, the conflict became a watershed in relationships between the Georgians, Abkhazians and Ossetians. However, the topics about history of Abkhazia and Shida Kartli/South Ossetia were not a novelty for the Georgian historiography. Important questions are still unanswered. From the view of traditional perspective historians and politicians simply could not explain the reasons of the conflict.

According to absolute majority of the assertions, the conflicts are artificially provoked, that was and is unambiguously associated with the de-

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<sup>2</sup> When we determining the nationalism, we rely upon A. D. Smith's interpretation. Anthony D. Smith, *Nationalism. Theory, ideology, history*, (Polity Press, 2001), 5-35.

<sup>3</sup> Leonti Mroveli was 11<sup>th</sup> century Georgian chronicler.

<sup>4</sup> Simon Kaukhchishvili, *The Georgian Chronicles*. The text established on according to all main manuscripts by Simon Kaukhchishvili, volume, I. Sakhelgami, (1955), 3

sire of Russia to create unstable environment in the region.<sup>5</sup> Any more or less cognizant person knows about negative traces of the northern neighbor in aggravation of the conflict. But, now we would like to know, was there particular ethno-cultural differences among Georgian, Abkhazian and Ossetian people, which had appeared earlier than the Russian factor would have a decisive significance.

However, after the confrontation, it became necessary reviewing the existing narratives. The works of the pre-conflict and post-conflict periods, differ from each other with their spirit. If before, the main goal of the researchers, despite several centuries of ethnical and political divisions, was to underline the sole of the people who lived in Georgia,<sup>6</sup> since 1990s, because of the desire to penetrate into the essence of the conflict, they started to acknowledge the conflicts as a historical fact.

### *Ethno-cultural attitudes*

Georgia is one of those countries that are distinguished from the others by its ethnical and cultural diversity. It is significant that despite the conflicts, this diversity is still considered as a strong side of Georgian society and culture. Thus, it turned out that the fact, which they consider as an expression of humanity, tolerance and solidarity of society is understood as violence by the ethnic minorities. From the retrospection of near past, it is difficult to say unequivocally, what provoked the conflicts: the third power, very specific and habitual view of the past by the historians, or ambitions of the politicians. The thing we can be sure in is that the abyss, developed between these peoples after the military conflicts in the 20th century becomes deeper. The above-mentioned reasons, which should not aggravate the conflict, were just the external factors and not the internal ones and without understanding the essence of the problem it will be impossible to solve the conflicts.

<sup>5</sup> Jemal Gamakharia, *From the history of Georgian-Abkhazian relations*, (Tbilisi: Sabchota Sakartvelo, 1991), 127; Gaprindashvili, M, Giorgadze, G, Giunashvili, J, Kacharava, I, Lomtadidze, K, Lominadze, B, Lortkipanidze, M, Melikishvili, G, Muskhelishvili, D, Nachkhebia, G, Zhordania, O, Sidamonidze, Q, Surguladze, A, Tsaishvili, S, Dzidziguri, Sh, Khoshtaria-Brosset, E, Jorbenadze, B., *For the distortion of the Georgian-Abkhazian relations (Answer "to authors of Abkhazian letter")*. (Tbilisi: Metsniereba 1, 1991.), 47-48; Teimuraz Mibchuan. *On the bloody footprint of Abkhazian separatism*, (Tbilisi: Publishing GPI 1994), 37, 58-59; Anzor Totadze. *The Ossets in Georgia: Myth and Reality* (Tbilisi: Universali, 2008), 3-5, 9-10. accessed at: [http://darbr.webs.com/OSËTI\\_latinuri.pdf](http://darbr.webs.com/OSËTI_latinuri.pdf); Lavrenti Janiashvili, "Historical writing – inspiration for the Ethnocentrism stereotypes" in *Occupied Akh'algori district and Dynamics of Georgian-Ossetian relations*, ed. by Jalabadze, N, Burduli, M, Janiashvili, L, Mgebrishvili, L, and Pirckhalava, E, (Tbilisi: Publishing Geoprint 2015), 53, 56-59; Manuchar Guntsadze, "Ossetian Rebellion in Shida Kartli in 1920 according to Georgian Press," *Georgian Source-Studies XIV-XVI*, (Tbilisi: Universali, 2013/2014): 40-42, 55-57.

<sup>6</sup> Davit Darchiasvili, "Akhalsikhe Georgian Jerusalem," *Reconstructions of History#1*, 8-52. Tbilisi, (2015): 10.

Before we analyze the sources provided directly by Vakhushti, we want to notice one circumstance, in particular, that absolute majority of historical sources, among them *Life of Kartli*,<sup>7</sup> acknowledges cohabitation, important military, political and cultural connections between the Georgians, Abkhazians and Ossetians. But, what does it mean? Maybe, this and other facts such as dynastic marriages and, that the rank of an Abkhazian king took the first honorable place among the titles of the Georgian kings, only prove, that keeping the balance and political conjuncture was important in the period of the Kingdom of Georgia too.

Thus, stating, that e.g. ethnical group living on the territory of Abkhazia was Georgian or on the contrary, was not ethnically Georgian, but they necessarily would become Georgians influenced by the domestic cultural environment;<sup>8</sup> also, giving a special importance and improper perception of migration processes, which could have caused changing of demographic picture (much more on the territory Abkhazia than Shida Kartli) in the 17th and 18th centuries, while discussing about the illegitimacy of the demands of ethnical minorities,<sup>9</sup> sounds not serious and intensifies the conflicts.

The point is that, when the Georgian *we-group* had cultural and political hegemony and the attitude of the Abkhazian ruling elite and among them of the Ossetians in the North Caucasus were unambiguously loyal towards the Georgian king, they did not pose a problem. The ethnical issue has arisen since the disbandment of the Georgian Kingdom and was extremely aggravated in the 18th century. That is one of the reasons why we mainly find positive messages in the old versions of the *Life of Kartli*.

What was changed in the 18th century? It was the period when the Georgian cultural and in general, socio-economic life started to revive. The *learned men commission* was established whose duties were to gather Georgian historical documents and old versions of *Life of Kartli*, for correcting and editing them according to the modern standards. In 1709, Vakhtang VI (ruler of Kartli in 1703-1714, king in 1716-1723) founded printing-house, which should help propagation of these new ideas.

The work of this movement did not slow down in the following period too. On the contrary, it should be said that over time, the movement became more and more serious. It was obvious that the final goal of the leaders was to unite Georgia. An introduction in *The Description of the Georgian Kingdom* by Vakhushti Bagrationi (1696-1739) is exactly evi-

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<sup>7</sup> *Life of Kartli* is the name of principal compendium of medieval Georgian historical texts, natively known as *Kartlis Tskhovreba*.

<sup>8</sup> Mibchvani, *On the bloody footprint*, 15.

<sup>9</sup> Mibchvani, *On the bloody footprint*, *Ibid.*, 12.; Janiashvili, "Historical writing – inspiration for the Ethnocentrism stereotypes," in 68-70.

dence of his goals, to create the *annals* in order to introduce a real history to the Georgians and thus develop allegiance, common memories and values system in the country population.<sup>10</sup>

In the second half of the 18th century, this movement had a wider scope in the united Kartli and Kakheti.<sup>11</sup> Erekle the Second (King of Kakheti in 1744-1762, king of the Kartli and Kakheti in 1762-1798) even aimed to set a system of common values in all strata of the society by developing the primary and secondary educational systems (also, by regulating the legislation and promotion of the socio-economic life), where the history of Georgia and the Georgian literature were taught together with other subjects. In 1790, signing the *Iverians*<sup>12</sup> *Union Treaty* points out that the political and cultural elite absolutely agreed with the main postulates adopted by Vakhtangi and Vakhushti. It should be said, that in the *Treaty*, where the common origin of Georgians and a historical destiny are underlined, was signed by all the rulers of Georgian kingdoms and principalities with the exception of Abkhazia.

So, in the 18th century, the Georgian elite tried to revive the feeling of the common destiny and collective memory icons. They wanted to create a common valuable system between the Georgians.

In parallel to discussing the meaning of history and memory, Vakhushti Bagrationi made his own definition of the Georgian unity. He specially underlined the fact that despite the breakdown into separate kingdoms and principalities, partitioned Georgia was and still remained united from the historical and cultural point of view. The mentioned fact is corroborated by the following:

If you ask any Georgian or Imerian, Meskhan, Heretian or Kakhetian: “what is your origins?”, they answer “Georgian” immediately. They share a common book and the language, created by the king Parnavaz I and when asking the same people: “which language and book do you know?” – They answer immediately: the Georgian one. They will not say: “the origin, language and written language of Imerians, or Meskhians, Heretians and Kakhetians, but of the Georgians.”<sup>13</sup>

As we see, Vakhushti determinesthe initial and main feature of the Georgians. The most importantmarkers are the ethnical origin, language and alphabet. It is evident from the text that Vakhushti emphasizes the

<sup>10</sup> Vakhushti Bagrationi, *The Description of the Georgian Kingdom*. The text established according to all main manuscripts by Simon Kaukhchishvili. ( Tbilisi: Sabchota Sakartvelo), 2, 4.

<sup>11</sup> Kartli and Kakheti are the historical and ethnographic regions of the Georgia. After the decline Georgian Kingdom, fractured into several kingdoms and principalities, among them were kingdom of Kartli and Kakheti.

<sup>12</sup> *Iveria* is a self-name of the Georgians into the old Georgian language.

<sup>13</sup> Bagrationi, *The Description of the Georgian Kingdom*, 291-292.

issue of religious unity as well.<sup>14</sup> It is obvious that the main goal of the author is to identify those characteristics that will help to differentiate the Georgian ethno-cultural *we-group* from the *other* ones. That is why he uses the well-known and most sensitive markers, language and religion as well. The fact, that he exactly knew what he said, is testified by that he especially underlines the issue of the Mengrels and Svans,<sup>15</sup> and points out that they were the historical and inseparable family members of the united Georgia, when determining the meaning of a common language in order to avoid any misunderstanding.<sup>16</sup> As for the Abkhazians and Ossetians, Vakhushti especially points out that none of these peoples have any ethnic or genetically relations to the Georgian community, unlike the Mengrels and Svans, and that they do not belong to the Georgian lingual and cultural group and do not have distinct religious unity with the Georgians. Here is what Vakhushti says about the Abkhazians:

...thieves and robbers, they travel on the sea by the boats, meet the boats of the Ottomans and the Laz people, govern Odishi and Guria.<sup>17</sup> But rather they are in battle cowards. They are greater resistance and brave in the sea warriors.<sup>18</sup>

Also, he specially outlines the fact that “they have their own language, but rather Georgian language knows only nobility”.<sup>19</sup> About Ossetians he writes the following:

They eat little food in their own country because they are satisfied with the food and water. But when paying a visit, they are greedy of food. They do not feel brave in the wars, as they are afraid of the armies. But rather they are brave and secretly creep to armies at night, ill-bred and fool, free and proud of their own country, they are modest and speak wisely, thieves, deceitful and greedy, acquisitive, libertine, captive buyers sell them abroad.<sup>20</sup>

As for the knowledge of the language: ‘only the leaders and the walkers in Kartli and Racha,<sup>21</sup> are speaking Georgian language...’ (Bagrationi, 1973, 639).<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 15, 25.

<sup>15</sup> Mengrels and Svans are Georgian subgroups. They speak the Svanian and Mengrelian language and are mostly bilingual. These languages belong to the Kartvelian language family too.

<sup>16</sup> Bagrationi, *The Description of the Georgian Kingdom*, 783, 788.

<sup>17</sup> Odishi is the name of historical part of west Georgia and another name of the Mengrels principality. Guria is one of the historical and ethnographic regions of Georgia.

<sup>18</sup> Bagrationi, *The Description of the Georgian Kingdom*, 785-786.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 786.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 637.

<sup>21</sup> Racha is an old Georgian historical and geographical region.

<sup>22</sup> Bagrationi, *The Description of the Georgian Kingdom*, 639.

Naturally, Vakhushti mentions the positive facts about the Abkhazians and Ossetians, but mostly about their external physical characteristics and not about the qualitative, cultural and ethnic characteristics, which could have a positive influence on formation of the mood of Georgian community.

It should be noted, that Vakhushti was the representative of the Kartli ruling dynasty, whose avowed goal was to restore the united statehood of Georgia. In this period, many important and pragmatic steps were taken both in the foreign and internal affairs. *The Description of the Georgian Kingdom* by Vakhushti was the text, which could and even should have become a textbook for the political leaders of the kingdoms and principalities of Georgia in the future.

When the author underlines his own task to develop unified consciousness, especially such emphasis about the issue of ethnic minorities, he makes us think that the goal of the author was to limit the Georgian ethno-cultural space, where as we can see did not leave the place for Abkhazians and Ossetians. Considering the above mentioned facts, we mean establishment of printing house, forming educational system and so on, we think, that the cultural movement, which has been developed during the 18th century, at least for the last decades of the century, overgrown to nationalism.

As for the next periods Ilia Chavchavadze, in his lifetime referred as father of Georgian nation, developed the concepts which were used in 18th century too. The difference was, that if in the 18th century elites were more faithful to these ideas, in the second half of 19th century, thanks to the printed media, they became public.<sup>23</sup> That time was distinguished by even the fact that, if in the early period, especially for the beginning of the genesis of the ideas of Georgian nationalism, these ideas were focused on the ethnic, religious and cultural unity (and it must be so at this time), later for balance, Ilia Chavchavadze installed the idea of the common historical past into the core of Georgian nationalism.<sup>24</sup>

On May 26, 1918 by establishing the Democratic Republic of Georgia, essentially a new stage started in the history of the Georgian nationalism. The existed situation was interesting from various points of view. By foundation of the state, the Georgian nationalistic project was put to the test. Also, it was interesting that the privilege of foundation the state fell to the Mensheviks wing of the social-democrats. Especially, on the background of the strained nationalistic sentiments and regional political con-

<sup>23</sup> Aleksandre Gabisonia, "Formation of the Georgian National Discourse," *Identity Studies* #4, (2012): 70-71.

<sup>24</sup> Mariam Ckhartishvili, Ketevan Mania, *Coverage of the Process of the Georgian National Consolidation in print Media: Georgians as Readers of Iveria*, Volumes IV, part. I. (Tbilisi: Universali, 2011), 539.

ditions, propagandizing international ideas by the leaders of a sovereign state would be at least politically disadvantageous. That is why the regulation of processes was made free. An irony of fate, even for the Menshevik government, the main goal became the independence and the maintenance of national unity.<sup>25</sup> Even in this case like the 1801, the forming process of Georgian nationalism canceled Russia's invasion.

Military attack with ethnic minorities in 1918-1921, and then sovietization of Georgia, the process of shifting from the ethnical concepts to the civic stopped. After the loss of independence, actualization of ethnical sentiments was expected.

The Georgian writer, who became a victim of repressions in 1937, by his novel *Jako's Lodgers*, published in 1924, responds to the events developed in Georgia in the twentieth century. In the novel *Jako's Lodgers*, the author demonstrated the two sores of the nation – the last offspring of the feudal aristocracy, the prince Teimuraz Khevistavi outcasted by the revolutionary Epoch and the Ossetian Jako, full of predator's energy and with an evil soul,<sup>26</sup> who stole his own property and even wife. Jako as a predator was not just a literary character, he represented the common image of an Ossetian settler with consciousness of a Georgian man. The novels by Aleksandre Kazbegi are also full of negative messages towards Ossetians. An Ossetian is represented as a dissembler and liar, a person who is an antagonist and can take liberties of doing things that are unacceptable for a Georgian person.<sup>27</sup> The same author enlivens the character of an Ossetian captive and kidnapper seller – Makhmeta, in his novel *Elguja*.<sup>28</sup>

It is interesting that in this period we find the literary compositions written about the Abkhazians and Abkhazia, where in contrast to the Ossetians, relatively positive messages are given. On the one hand, it should have been caused by that policy of the right of motion's to self-determination, which had a great scope in the Soviet period and excluded the ethno-national confrontation and on the other hand, by a long-term historical experience, propelled them peacefully solved inherent problems. As for the evidently negative attitudes towards Ossetians, it should have been caused by the especially complex migration processes in the 19th and 20th centuries.

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<sup>25</sup> Zurab Targamadze, "Georgian Interpretation of a National Issue," *Georgian Source-Studies XVII-XVIII*, (2015/2016): 238.

<sup>26</sup> Mikheil Javakhishvili, "*Jako's Lodgers*," *Georgian soviet novel.*, (Tbilisi: Merani, 1985), 9-10.

<sup>27</sup> Aleksandre Kazbegi, "*Tsitsia*". *Stories and Novels*, volumes 2, 2:67-163, (Tbilisi: Sabchota Sakartvelo, 1962 b), 125,127.

<sup>28</sup> Aleksandre Kazbegi, "*Elguja*". *Stories and Novels*, volumes 1:44-195, (Tbilisi: Sabchota Sakartvelo, 1962 a), 47.



***Conflicts and nationalism: pre, soviet and post soviet period***

Georgian nationalism is characterized by a lot of stigmas, understanding of which is impossible without realizing it. But the question is – Is it possible to answer the questions, contents of which are not dictated by the needs of a modern life, by reconstruction of the past? Probably no! At least, possible multitude answers often offer us completely new explanations, which are adjusted to the present tense, instead of describing past stories objectively. Especially, when the truth we are striving to gain is at odds with dormant ideas of our own imagination. Those imaginations are becoming real in parallel with this or that threat having a national character. After passing, it is lost back into a deep memory. The dialogue in the form of questions and answers, is determined by the content of the questions. For this reason, needed answers are impossible to find neither by historians and politicians nor by ordinary people.<sup>29</sup>

Although the 18th century is the period when the historically formed conceptions became bricks for developing of nationalism, the visions of modern Georgian regarding: *others, gender, age, traditions, ancestry, past, mourning, happiness, birth, death, the West, the East* are totally connected with a Soviet narrative and what they have in common with the same categories, historically shaped in Georgian's outlook, is only the fact that they are distorted copies of true ideas. Thus, this is a society with a bifurcated consciousness in the imagination of which there are actually confirmed memory-defined icons and symbols formed on Georgian historical grounds on the one hand and on the other hand, those symbols are parts of a Soviet history as well and accordingly, they dwell in Georgians consciousness as Soviet icons too. Twenty-five years of independence was not enough to overcome this resistance.

Reproduction of the nationalism ideas in Soviet Georgia, despite the fact, that the central government had announced the nationalism as a chauvinistic and a reactionary, did not stop. Reasons for that, with other factors as well, was strongly defined cultural identity of Georgian unity. During the Soviet times national ideas were transformed and unlike the concept, developed by Ilia Chavchavadze, which referred to ethnic and cultural movements, but eventually was directed towards the formation of a general social consensus:<sup>30</sup> feeling of the ethnic and cultural preferences has become central and uncontested.

<sup>29</sup> Georgian society, is still not released from Soviet mentality, has blurred visions about its own culture and history, which is becoming even more blurred by public efforts of collective reflection.

<sup>30</sup> Ckhartishvili, Mania, *Coverage of the Process*, 104.

In exchange to the party functionaries commitment to the Soviet policy, denationalization and plenty of practical examples of a particular progress in this regard, Georgians received a *myth* about their own elitism. Popularization of this *myth* especially helped unnatural mixing of the civil self-consciousness, which itself was due to the development of the *Media* opportunities at this period, with ethno-cultural conceptions. In reality, at the expense of those compromises, were carried out dismantle and falsification of Georgian national ideas.<sup>31</sup>

It should be noted that this process accidentally was helped by the Georgian historians. Despite the fact, that the majority of factual and chronological discussions regarding various issues of Georgian history in the Soviet Georgian historiography reflect historical reality, the context, where those ideas dominated and articulated, created and still creates artificial barriers for understanding historically established ideas of Georgian nationalism. In turn, neither Ossetian nor Abkhazian historians were distinguished with their balanced position.

The way, which stimulated Georgian ethnic nationalism in the Soviet period, as we have already mentioned, passed through belief of its cultural elitism and uniqueness. On the one hand, this fact comforted a human soul, who had lost independence and on the other hand, it played on its pride.<sup>32</sup> Soviet narrative reached the compatibility of multicultural and multiethnic environment with the principles of elitism, through marginalization of a national tradition of Georgian tolerance, hospitality and respect for foreigners. That is why Georgians stunned by the progress of processes today, cannot clarify its essence and absolutely sincerely cannot understand the reason of the 'ingratitude' Abkhazian and Ossetian people show in exchange for the favor they expressed over the centuries.

The fundamentals of the belief of Georgian ethnic group, as a sort of super-ethnic, shall be searched in a deep historical past, still in the 10th century. When term *Georgia* serves as a sort of social-cultural purpose together with its ethnic and political meanings.<sup>33</sup> However, during the Soviet era, attachment and faith with these ideas became much stronger and what is the most important, they were transformed into a new idea of the Soviet homeland and were perceived on an organic level. So much so, that the trauma caused by Russia's starting the invasion of Georgia in 1801 and collapse of Soviet Union in 1991, turned to be equally destructive for Georgians.

In 1990s the breakage of Soviet Union, the ideas of nationalism started to grow up in parallel to the national movement and gaining the inde-

<sup>31</sup> Targamadze, "Georgian Interpretation of a National Issue," 232.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 232, 237.

<sup>33</sup> George Anchabadze, "Principal Stages of Ethnical Development of the Georgian Nation from Ancient Times to the Phase of National Formation," *Identity Studies* #1, (2009): 60.

pendence. Formation of a new national narrative was conducted in a form of patriotic spirit and protection of home territories, its historical borders, the idea of autochthony of Georgians and faith to it, including the claim that the others had not been there. The vast majority of these slogans were well known for a Soviet version of Georgian nationalism too, but now they came to life and started real action. In parallel, the Soviet myths about Georgian – Abkhazian and Georgian – Ossetian idyll, were still existing.<sup>34</sup> Keeping the faith, that they have nothing to fight with Abkhazians, Ossetians and anyone, has helped to overcome complex of late nations.

So, we should not be surprised that the conflicts are perceived differently in a modern Georgian community and that there are contradictory opinions parallel to each other. You can meet people, who categorically deny the basis of ethnic confrontation. They believe that those are the processes, which are clearly externally managed. However, it is interesting that when the same people are asked to characterize, for example, Ossetians, Abkhazians or even other ethnic minorities according to specific features that are salient only for those ethno-cultures, it becomes difficult to select positive evaluations, which will indicate the narrator's sincere benevolence. We can find controversial discussions in modern studies as well. For example, one of the Georgian authors, who discusses the history of Georgian – Abkhazian relationship, despite his claim that the controversy is inspired by the third force only, points out at the end of his book:

We cannot say that there were no conditions – political, social-economic, religious and others for the controversy of Georgians and Abkhazians, which became a fact at the beginning of this century and subsequently deepened.<sup>35</sup>

Today does not have any significance what kind of political, cultural and genetic transformations were experienced by Abkhazians and Ossetians really. The fact is that the political claims of Abkhazian and Ossetian people, though, in our opinion they do not have any objective basis, are established on such historical and ethno-cultural concepts.

In 1993, a significant part of Georgian society opposed the nostalgia of a *big* Russian brother and a better *life*, activated as a result of a coup, civil conflict and economic collapse, with a radical understanding of nationhood. In such conditions, the issue of ethnic minorities took on the role of society unifier again. We can say that all the variations forming the

<sup>34</sup> M. Gaprindashvili, et al., *For the distortion of the Georgian-Abkhazian relations* 3, 68; Gamakharia, *From the history of Georgian-Abkhazian relations*, 131; Totadze, *The Ossets in Georgia: Myth and Reality*, 5, 35. (accessed at: [http://darbr.webs.com/OSETI\\_latunuri.pdf](http://darbr.webs.com/OSETI_latunuri.pdf) and others.

<sup>35</sup> Gamakharia, *From the history of Georgian-Abkhazian relations*, 132.

Georgian nationalism were unsuccessful and even for the end of the 20th century, as it seems is not still enough near to its civil form. The Qualitatively new and the most important stage for the Georgian nationalism was the Rose Revolution in 2003, when nationalism as a political idea began to grow up. Processes, which began after this event, are still going.

Political line of the Georgian nationalism is examined by the Russia – Georgia war in 2008, after what completely different agenda has been formed. If Russia used to play the role of a neutral party formally, this time its overt military intervention in the sovereign territory of Georgia meant to enter into an open and direct confrontation.

However, in our opinion only now Georgia was given the chance to finish its establishing as a *state–nation*. Western political values and sharing of them on the civic level, its connection with the faith of our future, gave us the chance to solve and clarify our problems with peace of mind.

### **Conclusion**

As we have already mentioned, there are numerous literature on conflict issue: books and articles are still written, conferences and public meetings are conducted, and conflicts are discussed in everyday life. Nowadays the most important intellectual challenge is understanding of the basis of the confrontation. Clarification of the essence of the conflict is significantly related to the research of Georgian nationalism issues. As we have seen, its perception is entirely linked to historical challenges. Such research requires a careful and detail study of the issue; therefore the present article doesn't complete the deal with the theme. On the contrary, it may cause additional questions and interest, which requires to be newly researched more and more materials.

However, what we can say from our standpoint? It is obvious that since the nineteenth century Russia has played a negative role in the relation of ethnic groups, living in Georgia. However, belief of Georgian society that the problem is externally generated and it has only a political character is not entirely true. Vakhushti Bagrationi's Description of the Georgian Kingdom, also the revived characters through the literature and verbal icons among the people, shows that at least, since the last decades of the eighteenth century, when the postulates of cultural movement becomes as an ideas of nationalism, Georgian narrative due to some kind of ethno-cultural reasons absorbs negative messages towards Ossetian and Abkhazian population. Ethno-cultural authentication, which primarily aimed to highlight the unity of Georgians, continued in the 19th century,

but at this time more emphasis was on historical-cultural moments and has outlined to the civil ambitions.

For the 20th century, the issue of nationalism can be divided into several phases: 1. In the Soviet period Georgian ethnic nationalism was encouraged, connected with the sense of elitism; 2. In 1990s, after acquisition of independence and subsequent military conflict, ethno-cultural elitism is replaced by patriotic ideas and ideas of protection of homeland borders, in Georgian nationalism, which was prompted primarily by the wish of building a democratic society; 3. *Rose Revolution* became something like turning point for Georgian nationalism from the transforming the old Georgian nationalistic ideas to the new and strong feeling of political identity.

And finally, Russia's negative role in aggravation of Georgian conflicts cannot cover the fact that the Abkhazian and Ossetian people have shared their propaganda, and although, they were acting according to the Russian policy, today this choice is their national position. Although the aforementioned issues are studied on a continuous basis, the sooner the ethno-cultural prejudices are identified, the sooner Georgians will know what they want and where they are going.