

Nationalism and Representation of Gays and Lesbians in Post-Soviet Georgia

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Abstract

Nationalism, typical to the post-soviet Georgia and its impact on the lives of sexual minorities is the main theme explored in this thesis. However, the religion and mainly the Georgian Orthodox Church plays an enormous role in establishing contemporary Georgian nationalism at the expense of marginalization of sexual or religious minorities in the country. It keeps on defining the borders and limits of Georgian national identity. In this paper I argue that Georgian nationalism with the support of Georgian Orthodox Church constructs the image of heteronormative Georgian society, where the deviance from this heterosexual image is marginalized and labeled as the product of globalized western world.

Contents

Introduction.....	1
Chapter 1: Overview of the Existing Literature on Nationalism and Sexuality	5
1.1. General overview	5
1.2. Nationalism in post-soviet countries	9
1.3. Nationalism in post-soviet Georgia.....	10
1.4. Intersection of Nationalism and Sexuality	13
1.5. Nationalism and Sexuality in post-soviet countries	14
Chapter 2: Historical Background of Nationalism and Religion in Georgia	17
Chapter 3: Discourses around Sexual Minorities in Georgian Media	22
3.1. Homosexuality as a threat to Georgian culture and religion.....	22
Orthodox Christianity as an integrated part of Georgian Identity	22
3.2. Homosexuality as an ailing fashion of the west.....	29
3.3. Homosexuality as a threat to nation’s demography	36
Chapter 4: Georgian closet, view from within.....	40
4.1. Introduction.....	40
4.2. Personal discussions: family, friends and LGBT organizations	41
4.3. Georgian Society and its faults: discussions about traditions, religion and politics.....	45
Conclusion	50

Introduction

Long lasting Soviet rule left important marks on its successor states, be it sudden outbursts of nationalisms, or the preservation of taboos on sexuality, in the former soviet countries. Both, sexuality and nationalism, and the connections between them are the major constituents of my thesis.

The Soviet regime's attempt to homogenize its member states into one "soviet identity" did not always prove to be effective. The Former Soviet Republic of Georgia could be brought as one of the prominent examples for such noncompliance. With a strong sense of national and cultural identity, Georgian nationalism resisted the regime's attempt to homogenize and blend its cultural heritage into soviet ideology. The most vivid example of this resistance was demonstrated on April 14th, 1978, when around five thousand Georgians took to the streets of the Georgian capital, Tbilisi, to protest against regime's decision to declare Russian as the official state language in the country. Later, in response to the massive protests, the chief of the Georgian Communist Party, Eduard Shevardnadze announced that the previous status of Georgian, as an official state language would be retained. (Suny, 1989; p.309)

The Georgian language as a defining constitutive of nation was also often promoted by Georgian Orthodox Church. In 1980, The Patriarchate of Georgian Church, Ilia II in his Christmas appeal declared: "where language declines, so the nation falls" (Jones, 1989; p.186) Religion has played an enormous part in shaping contemporary Georgian nationalism. To be Georgian, amongst many other things, implies being an Orthodox Christian for the majority of population in the country. This is why I find it crucial to examine the role of religion in discussion about nationalism in Georgian context.

However, if Georgian nationalism in the soviet period had self-defensive function, after the fall of the Soviet Union and with the new forces of globalization, that country was forced to face, Georgian nationalism took completely new forms. This new kind of nationalism, typical to the present day Georgia and its impact on the lives of sexual minorities is the main theme explored in this thesis. However, as I have already mentioned, religion and mainly the Georgian Orthodox Church has played an enormous role in establishing contemporary Georgian nationalism and at the expense of marginalization of sexual or religious minorities in the country, it still keeps on defining the borders and limits of Georgian national identity. Here I argue that Georgian nationalism with the support of Georgian Orthodox Church constructs the image of heteronormative Georgian society, where the deviance from this heterosexual image is marginalized and labeled as the product of globalized western world. Therefore, the main questions that this thesis aims to answer are the following: How does the Georgian Orthodox Church define and shape nationalism in present day Georgia? How is the image of heterosexual Georgians constructed by the church or those pro-nationalist politicians who use the popularity of the Georgian Orthodox Church for their political goals? And finally, if what I am arguing is true, how do Georgian gays and lesbians themselves perceive and react to their exclusion from the national image of the country?

In chapter 1 I will examine existed literature on nationalism and sexuality. This chapter demonstrates that the connection between nationalism and sexuality has been thoroughly explored as on the examples of post-soviet countries, so outside the former soviet region, however I believe that this work will make a new contribution to the existed data on intersecting points of nationalisms and sexualities in post-soviet region, namely with the new dimension of

religion, which as I argue on the specific example of post-soviet Georgia, plays an important role in shaping contemporary nationalism and exclusion of sexual minorities from the national image. Chapter 2 presents the historical background of the rise of nationalism and the popularity of the Orthodox Church in Georgia.

Chapter 3 explores the ways Georgian nationalism allied with the Orthodox Church marginalize sexual minorities from the national narratives, for this purpose, using discourse analysis as a method, I have analyzed different kinds of media, namely the so called “conservative press” which is celebrated in Georgian society for their anti-governmental vision and resonant TV shows from one of the most popular broadcasting channel - Rustavi2. This analysis has revealed three major themes in media debates around sexual minorities in Georgia, these are: homosexuality as a threat to Georgian culture and religion; homosexuality as an ailing fashion of the west; and finally, homosexuality as a threat to the nation’s demography. However all three themes are deeply connected to the ideology that Georgian Orthodox Church propagates through popular press. The analysis in Chapter 3 explores this point more explicitly.

In order to present the whole picture of sexual minorities’ exclusion from the national image, chapter 4 examines how the discourses, analyzed in chapter 3 affect Georgian gays and lesbians and how they fit themselves into the national image. The main questions posed here are: what are the main factors that maintain the place they have in mainstream society? What is the main source for them, which keeps maintaining the homophobic ideology in society, is it the state, the church, the media or all of them together?

For this purpose, I have used qualitative research method, in particular, oral history interviews. According to Portelli, oral history as a method tells us more about the meaning, than about an event. It is the best tool for discovering “unexplored areas of the daily life of the nonhegemonic

classes.” (Portelli; 1998. p. 67) Overall, I have interviewed 10 respondents, (five of them identifying themselves as gays and five – as lesbians) The age of respondents varied from 25 to 35 years old, I used the combination of semi-structured and in-depth interviews, as my primary goal was to have a deeper access to their opinions and thoughts, as well as their points of view about social issues of gender and sexuality. (Denzin, 2003) in order to gain a deeper access to their opinions and feelings of the respondents, I have asked 15 to 20 open-ended questions, in several cases, posing additional context-related questions. All the interviews were conducted in the capital of Georgia, Tbilisi, as I found that the customs and traditions of rural Georgia would make it hard for respondents to reveal and talk about such personal issues as their sexuality. Access to the respondents has been gained through snowball sampling method, Women’s club, Georgian non-governmental organization for LBT people, has been very helpful for providing access to their female members and space for conducting interviews with them.

Chapter 1: Overview of the Existing Literature on Nationalism and Sexuality

1.1. General overview

In this chapter I will discuss various theories of nationalism. Those theories of nationalism and their aspects, that I find most important in understanding how nationalism and sexuality interact between each other, both in general and on the example of post-soviet Georgia, will be discussed in more details below. As Tamar Mayer rightly observes, nations and sexualities are constructed in opposition to each other, “they are all part of culturally constructed hierarchies” and they imply power relations, which is expressed in favoring one particular nation or sexuality on the expense of exclusion of all the others. (Mayer, 2000; p.5) The way this kind of power relations are constructed in post-soviet Georgia is the main subject explored here.

Nationalism is a complex concept, and it may imply different things depending on the context in which it is used. Anthony D. Smith (2001) suggests his own definition of Nationalism as “an ideological movement for attaining and maintaining autonomy, unity and identity for a population which some of its members deem to constitute an actual or potential ‘nation’.” (p.9) However, this definition mainly highlights Nationalism as a movement and not an ideology, and my understanding of the concept in this work implies both, nationalism as a movement and as an ideology.

The context in which I am examining nationalism in the Georgian reality, in particular the points of intersection with the marginalization of sexual minorities requires looking at nationalism both, as a movement and as an ideology: nationalism as a movement is demonstrated by the ways it is expressed in the political agenda of the government as well as the opposition parties, the ways

they promote the national superiority of Georgian land, people or customs and traditions. Nationalism as an ideology refers to what Benedict Anderson calls, “imagined community”, as he argues that nations are constructed in the minds of their members, as they may never meet or hear from their fellow members.(Anderson,1991) Zurab Davitashvili (2003) suggests Carlton Hayes’ similar approach to Nationalism, according to which nationalism is a feeling, characteristic to the members of nation; where loyalty to the nation is justified by the faith that your nation is primary and by the imaginary mission, it has to fulfill. (p.48)

Catherine Frost (2006) discusses moral implications of nationalism and singles out seven types of theories around nationalism, where “six suggest a certain moral worth to nationalism and one suggests the absence of such worth.” (p.11) She believes that there is a certain degree of truth in all of them, however they are all limited, as she discusses the drawbacks of all these theories. These are: Dark side theories (Ernst Gellner, John Stuart Mill); Remedial theories;(Allen Buchanan); Dysfunctionalist theories (Ernst Gellner, Tom Nairn); Social trust theories (Yael Tamir, David Miller); Self-esteem theories (Charles Taylor); Autonomy based theories (Will Kymlicka); and finally, Cultural preservation theory (Chaim Gans).

Followers of dark side theory argue that the age of nationalism is characterized by such tendencies as hatred, repression and chaos. Frost (2006) focuses on three variations of dark side theories, based on the idea of progress, the will and social order. As she puts it, “nationalism can be variously constructed as threatening progress, subjugating the will, or undermining the basic order of politics, and therein supposedly lie its dark tendencies.” (p. 14) In this way, nationalism is seen by these theorists as a force, that keeps the nation and the state from further development. However Frost argues that these theories imply only the partial truth about nationalism, since

nationalism as a retrograde force is true only in particular situations. Further, she points to the orientalist tendencies of such theories, as it assumes that only advanced nations, know how to achieve progress and well-being of the nation and state. (p.14) In the context of post soviet Georgia, the United States of America and the EU are considered as advanced and powerful, therefore the aspiration towards fulfillment of all the standards and recommendations imposed by these countries on Georgia is very high in Georgian governmental elites. However, on the other hand, this outside influence is the subject of discontent of pro-nationalistic and anti-governmental political parties.

According to dysfunctional theorists, the origin of nationalism lies in the challenges of modernity, as Tom Nairn argues, nationalism is a compensation for the marginalization and inequality, brought by “the ordeal of ‘development’.” (Nairn, 1981, as cited in Frost, 2006) However, Frost argues that this theory limits our chances for challenging nationalist claims.”Unless we mean to give carte blanche to nationalists, we need to keep open the possibility of the denial of nationalism or nationalist claims.” (Frost, 2006; p.22)

Social trust theorists argue for nationalism’s moral values in terms of close relationships and belongings it facilitates among the representatives of the nation, which on the other hand enriches their moral and political lives. (Frost, 2006; p.22) According to David Miller, beliefs and identity that are shared by the representatives of the same nation, strengthens social trust among them. (Miller, 1995, as cited in Frost, 2006)

Self-esteem theorists, like Charles Taylor argue that with the new challenges of modernity, people tend to embrace nationalism in search of self confidence. Unequal international development lower national elites’ self-esteem in comparison to their more successful states, as a response they stress their nation’s difference, which according to Taylor is often expressed as

nationalism. (Taylor, 1999 as cited in Frost, 2006) Avishai Margalit and Joseph Raz argue that nations are important for individuals, as being a member of a particular nation feeds individuals' need for secure identity, identity on the other hand is important for their well being. (Margalit & Raz, 1990 as cited in Frost, 2006)

Will Kymlicka (1995) follower of an autonomy-based theory, is concerned with the value of culture, be it the culture of the dominant nation or national minority. Culture, for him is the basis and the essential part of individual autonomy. In other words, he argues that everyone should have access to societal culture, as only the culture is able to provide autonomy and liberal order. According to Frost, this theory "suggests that cultures, even national ones, are intimately linked to the realization of a liberal order." (Frost, 2006; p. 28)

The cultural preservation theorist, Chaim Gans argues that nationalism is essential for preserving the culture of the nation. In his words, people "need to be able to hope that what they do has some prospect of enduring and/or being remembered." (Gans, 2003 as cited in Frost, 2006) In contrast to Gan's approach, Frost (2006) argues that cultures also need to evolve, "adapt to new circumstances, innovate new practices and solutions, and generally behave like the vital and evolving entities they are." (p.33) She fears that if public institutions follow this theory and keep on reproducing the same culture, it will develop into "outdated husk of dogma and routine." (p.33)

In order to fully understand the problem of nationalism in Georgia, I will mainly rely on dysfunctional, self-esteem and cultural preservation theories. Dysfunctional theory sees nationalism as an answer for the development brought by modernity. I would argue that in Georgian context, newly emerged post-cold war nationalism is a response for the marginalization of the "old values" of Georgian nation. Cultural and political elites, who profited from the

popularity and societal disposition under the soviet period, as well as in the early 90s, now are threatened by the new political order, and by attempts to bring democratization to the country. This confrontation is expressed in discontent and denunciation of everything new and “western”, which has been implemented in the country for the past several years, among them are the recent enhanced visibility of Georgian gays and lesbians in media or on the covers of popular press. Similar approach is expressed by self-esteem theorists, however the phenomenon of unequal international developments play the crucial part here. Threatened by the progress of other post-soviet nations, such as Polish or Latvian, national elites begin to stress their own nation’s difference and uniqueness. Unlike the dysfunctional approach, this phenomenon is present in both, governmental and anti-governmental levels. From the point of marginalization and ignorance of gay and lesbian issues in the mainstream political agenda, which was often expressed by Georgian gays and lesbians in their interviews (see Chapter 4), this could be expressed in the constant emphasis on the uniqueness of Georgian nation, as highly religious and cultural nation, unlike its more developed neighbors. Religion and Georgian Orthodox Church’s condemnation of non-traditional sexual practices is expressed in almost every discourse in Georgian media, which is discussed in more details in Chapter 3. This point is directly linked with the cultural preservation theory of nationalism, as culture and religion are seen as two inseparable units in Georgia.

1.2. Nationalism in post-soviet countries

The Transformation from communist to post-communist states has been characterized by strong nationalistic forces by many scholars in the field. The fall of the Soviet Union generated a need for a shift to the new order and political system for its successor states. These kinds of transformations, according to the above discussed *dysfunctionist theory*, implies resistance to the

challenges of modernity and inequalities it is usually followed by, the natural reaction for these states, as Nairn would argue, is to resist to the newly established order, which in most cases was expressed through strong nationalistic movements. The search for the roots and the ways of dealing with the newly erupted nationalism in post-communist states has been a subject of research for many scholars, like Richard Kaplan (1992) or Neil MacFarlane (1997). Various books and articles has been written on this issue, however roots and types of nationalism vary from culture to culture, from nation to nation, and shared communist past may have imposed certain common characteristic to the nationalisms in all these countries, like the resistance to the newly established social or economical order, however, as in depth analysis of nationalism is not the primary goal of this thesis, I will give an overview of theoretical data on nationalism specifically on the example of post-soviet Georgia.

1.3. Nationalism in post-soviet Georgia

Nationalism in Georgia has been the subject of research for various local and international scholars in the field, to name a few – Natalie Sabanadze, Stephen F. Jones, Ghia Nodia and Ronald G. Suny.

How nationalism is shaped and affected by globalization; are those, at one glance, contradictory forces able to coexist peacefully in the same nation-state? Or they are predestined for clash and confrontation. These are the issues that Natalie Sabanadze (2010) analyzes in her research, *Globalization and Nationalism, The Cases of Georgian and the Basque Country*, where the phenomenon of nationalism is handled through the prism of globalization. Here she argues that nationalism and globalization are not contradictory forces, as it was previously assumed by such scholars as Mark Jurgensmeyer (2002) Gerard Delanty,(2002) or Anthony Giddens (2002); they are able for peaceful coexistence; moreover, these forces tend to complement each other. This

argument is based on her observation about the nature of nationalism, which as she states, “is neither cultural, nor exclusively defensive and isolationist force.” (Sabanadze, 2010; p. 4) Her arguments are backed up by two case studies of Georgian and Basque nationalisms, as cases against two kinds of approaches to globalization, one that appeals for post communist nationalisms as the main evidence for resurgence of nationalism in globalized context (such as in Georgia); and the other, that assumes that globalization caused the intensification of traditional nationalistic movements (such as in Basque Country) (Sabanadze, 2010; p.8)

I find this work important and contributive to the existed data on nationalism for two main reasons: first, she doubts the practice of drawing the lines between old (established as a result of the French revolution in the 18th century Europe) and new nationalisms, the latter seen by the majority of scholars as the main reason for wars and destruction. Second, she argues against the prevalent idea about the dark forces of new nationalism and observes two main differences between pre-Cold War and contemporary nationalisms, which is embedded in the perception of “threat”. Arguing that in the era of old nationalisms, “threat” was coming from other particular state or nation, while the contemporary nationalism sees it in the strong forces of globalization. (p.46) I find this point especially important in understanding the phenomenon of new, post-soviet nationalism in Georgia. As the following chapters of this thesis, clearly demonstrates that Georgian Orthodox Church and particular political leaders see the “internal threat” of different sexual practice in Georgia, as coming from the outside, globalized world, be it United States or European Union. Here I would argue that “threat”, in the cases of post-soviet nationalisms has gained a two sided character, on the one hand it is seen as an outcome of globalized world, as Sabanadze mentions, but on the other, this threat has already been implemented and fully

established inside the nation. In such cases, the only way left to overcome this “internal threat” for political or religious elites is by excluding and not acknowledging it as the part of the nation. However, Sabanadze (2010) also observes that these nationalisms do not always find response in the state, and are mainly in opposition to the state authorities, and their aspirations towards international recognition. These kinds of nationalisms, she mentions, “do not carry state-building ambition and instead develop mainly in opposition to the state.” (p.42) This point is directly linked to Georgian reality, as I have already mentioned, the most fierce guards of morality and traditions are those political or religious leaders, who are in opposition to “pro-western“ president Mikhail Saakashvili or other mainstream governmental leaders.

Similarly, Stehen Jones (2006) , in his article *Georgia, Nationalism from under the Rubble* also challenges many scholars’ perception of post-soviet (new) nationalisms as solely atavistic and destructing, which is necessarily presented with wars and ethnic conflicts. He argues that types of nationalism have varied from time to time. In the period of Zviad Gamsakhurdia, the first president of newly established Republic of Georgia, according to Jones, nationalism in Georgia could be characterized as ethnic and violent, however the past experience and the present condition of the country should be also considered. He defines Georgian nationalism in the period of the second president, Eduard Shevardnadze as “constructive, legitimate and stabilizing” (p.253) However, his analysis is supported solely with primary historical material and in my view lacks more credible data, and what’s more important the role of religion, which as I argue throughout this thesis, is completely ignored from the national characteristics of contemporary Georgia.

1.4. *Intersection of Nationalism and Sexuality*

As my thesis aims to explore the connections between nationalism and sexuality on the specific example of post-soviet Georgia, I find it important to give a brief overview of the already existing literature, exploring these two, at one glance different phenomenon in relation to each other. As the majority of literature about nationalism, as well as the theories discussed above are mostly gender blind, with the rise of women's studies such feminist scholars as Yuval Davis (1997), Anne McClintok (1995), Tamar Mayer (2000) or Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (1999) have shown that nations are gendered. As McClintock (1995) observes, "All nations depend on powerful constructions of gender. Despite many nationalists' ideological investment in the idea of popular *unity*, nations have historically amounted to the sanctioned institutionalization of gender *difference*."(p.353)

One of the first to explore the intersecting points of nationalism and sexuality was George L. Mosse (1985). In his influential book, *Nationalism and Sexuality: Middle Class Morality and Sexual Norms in Modern Europe* he argues that the perception of respectability is highly affected by forces of nationalism, as nations, as we have already mentioned, are gendered. On the example of 18th century France and England, the author illustrates how nations construct the ideal images of manliness and womanhood. "Masculinity meant depth and seriousness, while the feminine was shallow and often frivolous." (pg. 16-17) the images, which did not fulfill these criteria, were stigmatized and labeled as "perverts" or "half-men" (p.31)

Throughout my thesis, I rely on Mosse's concept of "respectability", according to which, as Mosse argues, the groups that are not regarded as moral or "respectable", such as homosexuals (or according to Mosse, Jews) are stigmatized. (Mosse, 1985)

Tamar Mayer (2000) in *Gender Ironies of nationalism: setting the stage* also stresses the importance of sexuality when discussing the intersecting points of gender and nationalism.

Sexuality, according to her, like gender and nationalism is culturally constructed and is embedded in power relations. Mayer observes the intersecting point of sexuality, gender and nationalism in the following statement: “One nation, one gender and one particular sexuality is always favored by the social, political and cultural institutions which it helps to construct and which it benefits from – and thus each seeks to occupy the most favored position in the hierarchy (of nation, gender and sexuality).” (p.5) She cites Benedict Anderson (1991) and argues that nations are constructed as “hetero-male project and imagined as brotherhood”, because of these power relations gays and women are often oppressed and punished in these societies. (p. 6)

Julie Mostov (2000) in her *Sexing the nation/desexing the body: politics of national identity in the former Yugoslavia* argues that gender and nation construct one another: “nations are gendered and the topography of the nation is mapped in gendered terms.” (p.89) National discourse heavily uses the images of mother, wife and maiden; on the other hand nation neutralizes the sexuality of its female members.

As I focus specifically on relationship between nationalism and representations of sexual minorities, below I will present a brief overview of the existing research concerning with sexual minorities and their representations in the context of post-socialist nationalisms.

1.5. Nationalism and Sexuality in post-soviet countries

Gordon Waitt (2005) in his article *Sexual Citizenship in Latvia: geographies of the Latvian closet* explores the exclusionary politics of Latvian elites towards sexual minorities. By analyzing political discourses in the country, he argues that even after decriminalization of homosexuality, post-communist Latvian political leaders keep on sexing the nation as heterosexual and excluding gays from the national narratives. As a result of propaganda for

nuclear Latvian families, “same sex attracted people were positioned as both non-Latvians and non-citizens.” (p.169)

Laura Essig (1999) also discusses the issue homosexuality and its connection to the soviet nation of Stalinist Russia, here she argues that homosexual practice was sin against nature and against society and such persons could never be patriots. “Queers were fascists, fascists were queers. Good citizens – always straight – must control, punish, and eventually eliminate treasonous desires.” (Essig, 1999; p. 5) Soviets regarded homosexuality as a wholly western phenomenon, tracing its roots from capitalist countries. It was believed that homosexuality was widespread only in western capitalist countries while highly moralistic soviet society was free from this disease, and even if this “sexual perversion” was mentioned and discussed, it was considered as shameful and criminal, punishable under Union-wide law, by up to 5 years of imprisonment or labor. (Essig, 1999; p. 6)

Gay and lesbian rights in the context of post-communist nationalism are also explored in Voichita Nachescu’s (2005) *Hierarchies of Difference: National Identity, Gay and Lesbian Rights, and the Church in Postcommunist Romania*. Here the author states the similar argument, that the Romanian society’s and religious authorities’ resistance towards decriminalization of homosexual relationships “was due to essentialist nationalist assumptions which denoted them as alien and threatening to the family- and religion-oriented Romanian way of life.”(p.57) However, her analysis is focused on the year 2000, when the debates around the abolishment of Article 200, according to which homosexual relationships were regarded as criminal reached its peak and as a result escalated into the negative attitude towards sexual minorities in Romanian press.

Though, unlike Waitt's research in Latvia, Romanian debate around homosexuality, similar to Georgian is embedded into religious discourse.

As I will argue in the following chapters, this idea of "respectability" and socially acceptable morals of sexual behavior in the case of contemporary Georgia is mostly constructed and shaped by religious elites, however pro-nationalistic political leaders, threatened by the modern forces of globalization also stress the idea of "real Georgian-ness" (Kartveloba) which in most cases is constructed as an Orthodox heterosexual male/female.

Chapter 2: Historical Background of Nationalism and Religion in Georgia

As the aim of this thesis is to show the strong link between Georgian nationalism, frequently embedded in religious discourse and the state of present day oppression towards sexual minorities in Georgia, this chapter will give a historical and analytical overview of the rise of nationalistic and religious discourses in socialist and post-socialist Georgia.

The history of Georgia under communist rule dates back from 1921, after the Red Army invaded and conquered the Democratic Republic of Georgia. Despite the governments and nationalistic guerrilla military troop's short term resistance, the republic of Georgia was declared as Georgian SSSR in 1921.

Historically, Orthodox Christianity played an important role in defining Georgian nation and its identity. Throughout the centuries, numerous conquerors of different religious belief were perceived as exceptionally dangerous for Georgian nation, as in the first case it was subjected as a threat to Georgian Orthodox Church. Famous words of 19th century Georgian publicist and the father of Georgian national movement, Ilia Chavchavadze: "Language, Fatherland and Faith" is still popular and widely articulated in contemporary Georgia. These words reveal the substantial role of Orthodox Christianity in the national identity of Georgian population. The fact that he is still regarded as one of the most respected and influential Georgians, ever lived proves that this religious rhetoric is still, if not even more popular in contemporary Georgia. The Harmonious coexistence of Georgian nationalism and Orthodox Church, according to Paul Crego (n.d.) was the main reason for the Georgian Patriarchate to canonize Ilia Chavchavadze as Ilia the Just in 1990s, as an argument he brings the following words of Ilia Chavchavadze:

Christianity, in addition to the teaching of Christ, means among us the entire Georgian territory; it means k'art'veloba ["Georgian-ness"]. Today, as well, in all of Transcaucasia, Georgian and Christian mean one and the same thing. To convert to Christianity -- is to become Georgian. (Crego, n.d.; p.3)

Georgia is regarded as one of the oldest Christian countries. It is believed that St. Nino from Cappadocia spread Christianity in this region in 327 A.D. The head of Georgian Orthodox Church, the Patriarch is the most cherished and praised figure among Georgian believers. Even though, Georgia is multicultural country with wide variety of religions, around 84% percent of the population is orthodox Christian.(The World Handbook, n.d.) Hence the ideology of Georgian Orthodox Church is quite influential for the majority of Georgians. Over the centuries, Georgian Orthodox Church had a great impact on constructing modern discourse on decency, manners and morals of social behavior, even under communist rule, despite the regime's attempt to abolish and oppress religious belief in society, Georgian church was seen as the only shelter from foreign conquerors and a place where people could retrieve their lost national values and traditions.

As Ramet claims, today the majority of developing post-soviet countries strive towards European Union and try to adopt EU requirements, but the main hinder, as she states, is in century-old traditions and regulations of Orthodox Church. "From the Orthodox viewpoint, it is the EU, if anything, which should be adjusting its standards to those of the Orthodox Church!" (Ramet, 2006; p.150) From the orthodox viewpoint, the "idyllic past" is seen as opposed to the rotten and sinful present, with drug addiction, pornography, sexual deviances, AIDS, crisis of national identity, disregard to family values and other evils so common to modern society. She also argues that for Georgian Orthodox Church this "idyllic past" is to be found in the times, before Christianity was separated into Eastern and Western churches, as well as the times before

the communists came to power. (Ramet, 2006; p.151) During the soviet regime, with the strong atheistic propaganda, religion and church life in Georgia began to decline, the majority of churches have been closed down, which was followed by legal restrictions on religious activities in the republic. However the situation has radically changed, when in 1962, the Georgian Orthodox Church joined World Council of Churches. According to Jones, this fact has “added to the church’s status and politicized the church leadership...” (Jones, 1989; p. 178) The rise of Georgian church’s significance was also coincided with the Khrushchev’s *glastnost* era and enthronement of Ilia II as the patriarch of Georgian Orthodox Church. Jones (1989) also mentions that Ilia II played an important role in linking Georgian Church with the national interests of the country, “church and national interests coincide in particular in the spheres of language, territory and in the interpretation of national history” (p. 184) as well as concern with the nation’s moral and biological well-being, since the church actively took part in “issues such as abortion, alcoholism, and drug taking...” (p.187) As the following chapters will demonstrate, the status of nation’s moral guardian is still well adopted by Georgian Orthodox Church in contemporary Georgia.

After the fall of the Soviet Union, Georgian Orthodox Church now allied with the governmental elites and the first president of post-soviet Georgia, Zviad Gamsakhurdia has reached its peak of popularity in Georgian people. Despite his short term of presidency, which lasted from the fall of 1991 to 1992, Zviad Gamsakhurdia’s managed to raise the status of Georgian Orthodox Church through his nationalistic rhetoric. Paul Crego cites Gamsakhurdia’s inauguration speech, where he emphasizes the strong link between the state and Orthodox Christianity:

The rebirth of the Georgian state, the resurrection of its independence, cannot succeed apart from the rebirth of a significant living faith, outside of a moral rebirth. Both Georgia's past and present support this. Exactly so, the Georgian national movement has been and is genuinely and closely united with a religious consciousness and in the bosom of the church. The contemporary movement, in its essence, is a popular-religious movement as it gains understanding not only with the manifestation of national-political purposes, but also envisions a moral rebirth with the assistance of Christian faith and consciousness. The national regime will work to resurrect the traditional unity between church and state.(Gamsakhurdia, 1991 as cited in Crego, n.d.)

As Sabanadze (2010) observes, “With the 1990 elections, the nationalist regime in Georgia replaced the communist one.” (p.92) This was the regime, that tried to distance the country from Russia and achieve quick integration into North Atlantic structures, however lacked patience, diplomacy and political experience. Instead, the government abolished the South Ossetia’s autonomous status and started campaign against ethnic minorities. This campaign, as Sabanadze mentions, was followed by “the outbreak of two ethno political conflicts in the autonomous regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia respectively.” (Sabanadze, 2010; p.93)

I find that this brief period of Georgian history, when Orthodox Christianity was perceived as the integral part of Georgian nationalism, has greatly influenced the further development of the country and the role of Georgian Orthodox Church in the political life of the country. Religious authorities take active participation in civic and political life of present day Georgia. For example, in the fall of 2007 during one of his Sunday sermons, Patriarch Ilia II called for establishing constitutional monarchy in the country, this statement was followed by severe political debates between government and pro-nationalist opposition parties, who supported and Patriarch’s suggestion.(“Georgian Church”, 2007)

Sabrina P. Ramet traces the roots of Orthodox Church’s intrusion in civic and political lives, which are mainly the case of post-communist Eastern European countries. She observes that one of the major traits that distinguish Orthodox Church from other religions is the evidently

expressed conservative approach. It is resistant to all changes and nostalgically aspires to the times when it had the full authority and influence on people. (Ramet, 2006; p.148) In Georgian case, this was the first years of Georgian independence from the communist regime; however with the global forces, rapidly gaining foothold in the country, as well as implementing the ideology and values of so called “western world” , Georgian Orthodox Church, threatened by nation’s corruption, has adjusted the role of national guardian. Most explicitly this is expressed in the ways, the church, allied with pro-nationalistic opposition parties are handling the issues of sexual minorities in the country. These ways are going to be thoroughly explored in the following chapter.

Chapter 3: Discourses around Sexual Minorities in Georgian Media

In this chapter I analyze different kinds of media discourses around sexual minorities in Georgia, from so called popular press to resonant TV shows. Here I argue that negative representations of sexual minorities and issues around them are closely tied to nationalism and Georgian Orthodox Church as an inseparable part of Georgian nation and its culture. In this analysis I have singled out three major themes, frequently declared by the media as being one of the most significant factors in the debates around sexual minorities. These are homosexuality as:

- a threat to Georgian culture and religion;
- an ailing fashion of the west,
- a threat to the nation's demography.

However as I will demonstrate in the chapter, all these discourses are intertwined amongst each other, in order to construct homosexuality as grievous sin and anti-national phenomenon, which is implemented in the country as a result of the outside influence, corrupts the nation's religious and cultural values and threatens its prosperity and further development.

3.1. Homosexuality as a threat to Georgian culture and religion

Orthodox Christianity as an integrated part of Georgian Identity

The strong bond between '*Georgian-ness*' and morals of Orthodox Christianity is strongly present in almost every discourse around homosexuality in contemporary Georgia. In order to illustrate this tendency, first, I will analyze articles concerning sexual minorities from the so called popular press, mainly those publications that are celebrated among Georgian people with

their conservative and anti-governmental approach. These are weekly newspapers, *Asaval-Dasavali*, *Alia*, *Qronika* and magazine *Tbiliselebi*. All of these periodicals illustrate homosexuality in terms of incompatibility with Christian morals. At the same time, Orthodox Christianity is seen as inseparable part of being Georgian. The whole picture is constructed in a way, that homosexuality is condemned by the Georgian Orthodox Church, and as Orthodoxy and its morals are (or should be) the highest values for Georgian people, the government and the population should do their best to condemn and eradicate this ‘sinful’ practice. This is how the issue of homosexuality and the recent visibility of gays and lesbians is handled by this certain segment of Georgian popular press, also called “conservative press” by Georgian intellectuals and different public figures.

Publicist Dito Chubinidze leads a column, called *From Week to Week (Kviridan-Kviramde)*, in the newspaper *Qronika*, where he overviews Georgian social and political debates of the previous weeks. In 2009, N6 (133) issue of *Qronika*, Dito Chubinidze starts his column by discussions about the Munich Conference, which took place the week before in Munich. But the main theme of his discussions is the absence of ‘the Georgian subject’, in the agenda of Munich conference, and in spite of this, Georgian President, Mikhail Saakashvili’s useless attendance there. In the Georgian subject, the author implies the discussions about the recent war between Georgia and Russia in the August of 2008, which resulted in the Russian Federation’s official recognition of Georgia’s two breakaway regions, Abkhazia and South Ossetia as independent states.

It’s hard to say if this conference in Munich will be similar the conference held in 1938, when the fascist plan of Czechoslovakian segregation was signed. It’s also hard to say, if Jo Biden’s statement, that U.S will never recognize the independence of Georgian breakaway regions, Abkhazia and South Ossetia will approach or distance us from the retrieval of these regions, but the only thing that can be said without doubt, is that as far as the first and

foremost strength of our country, Georgian Orthodox Church is firmly standing on its feet, Georgia will survive.

This statement clearly demonstrates the religious and national inclinations of the author, whose column originally aimed to highlight the political situation in the country, now declares that both international and Georgian politicians are powerless for the country's integrity and only the church, as the highest institution in the country can rescue it from these politicians ruinous decisions.

Apart from politicians, who are against the church and seek for country's salvation in the west, the author also criticizes what he calls "Saakashvili's pocket media", mainly broadcasting channels *Rustavi2* and *Imedi*, since they are seen by him, as the successors of the president's pro-western politics and "try to corrupt Georgian Orthodox Church's authority at every possible chance." Homosexuality as an illness, coming from pro-western politics of the government and its supporters, like sociologist Emzar Jgerenaia is not bypassed in the column as well. The author concludes with the rumors he heard about Emzar Jgerenaia , who as the author states, "is going to hold an onanist parade in front of the municipal government building". By assaultive word "onanists" the author clearly means homosexuals, as he also mentions Emzar Jgerenaia's previous scandalous statements about the similarities between Georgian "*Qeipi*" (Georgian word for the drinking feast;, traditionally only men are the participants of the feast) and "*Gaypi*" (game of words, meaning the feast of gays), when he declared that Georgian drunk men, with embraces and expressions of love towards each other are acting like gay men. Jgeranaia's this statement was perceived as offensive to Georgian traditions, which was followed by severe debates in Georgian media. The author finishes his column with the following ironic appeal: "Boys, throw mud at God and fatherland, it pays."

In 2007, an interview with Georgian poet Rezo Amashukeli appeared in the same newspaper, where Georgian poet expresses his discontent with Georgian president, Mikheil Saakashvili and his pro-western politics, which in his view, attempts to de-authorize Georgian Orthodox Church, the Patriarchate and the patriarch of Georgian orthodox church, Ilia the Second himself, which by the latest sociological survey, held by NDI¹ in April, 2010 is recognized as the most truth worthy and authoritative figure in the country. In an interview, Rezo amashukeli declares:

If not the Patriarchate, numerous gay and pederast parades would be held in Georgia by now, I won't hold it away from you, when I heard that their parade was going to be held in Tbilisi, I phoned the patriarch immediately, he was in Sioni² by then, I was shouting and pleading for help desperately. The next day the patriarch was in Tbilisi, if not him, lots of men would walk with lipsticks plastered on their seats nowadays. (Qronika (#37 (300))

The patriarch, Ilia II as the head of Georgian orthodox church is seen as the only power, able to stop the western 'illness' from invading the culture and traditions of Georgian people. However, in an interview about the legalization of homosexual marriage, the chairman of National Forum³, Gubaz Sanikidze declares:

May they not even dream about it, this will be never legalized in Georgia. It contradicts not only to Georgian traditions, but the whole human tradition is against it. Not only Georgian Orthodox Church condemns this practice, but all the other religions as well, amongst them Islam and Judaism. (Alia, #95 (2068) 2007)

As homosexuality is regarded as the foreign threat, as an outcome of country's expedited westernization, the only way left to confront this process is regarded as an intensification of national identity. Stressing Georgian century old traditions, written language and culture, with its legends about virile male heroes and shy, feminine queens and heroines, in contrast to Europe's relatively brief history is the most common way, expressed in debates about sexual minorities, as a phenomenon that can never be fully recognized as Georgian.

¹ National Democratic Institute

² City in Georgia

³ Georgian nationalist political party

This point is very well expressed in an interview between the journalist of magazine *Tbiliselebi*, Nino Khachidze and the members of Women's Fund,⁴ Nana Panculaia and Mariam Gagoshashvili, where the journalist expresses her worry about one of the project of Women's Fund, aimed to raise the visibility of Georgian lesbian, bisexual and transgender women in Georgian society. During the interview, Nino Khachidze assumes that according to cultural traditions, there is no problem for Paris to have a gay mayor, however she finds completely unimaginable for the mayor of Tbilisi to be gay.

I am Georgian by nationality, Orthodox Christian by faith; my mentality is shaped by my country's cultural and religious values. According to my cultural traditions, the symbols of manliness for me are Avtandil⁵ and Jokhola,⁶ and of womanhood – Tinatin⁷ and Queen Qetevan. How could I and lesbian or a bisexual understand each other? (Tbiliselebi, #47 (147) 2010)

This project by Women's fund has caused many debates in Georgian press, the same issue but now embraced in religious discourse is discussed in another weekly periodical, *Asaval- Dasavali*. In 2009, #48 (793) issue of the periodical, journalist Jaba Khubua, under the *Religion and Modernity* column, published an article titled "Georgia as Sodom and Gomorrah". The author begins the article with the story of Sodom and Gomorrah, claiming that if Georgia will continue its gaze towards west, the same punishment will be sent to it, as to what god sent to cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. In the article, Khubua talks about the Women's Fund and the LBT contest it has announced. The contest was announced for the best post-card design, handling the issues of sexual minorities in Georgia in the most artistic and innovative way. However,

⁴ Women's rights organization

⁵ Male protagonist in Georgian poet, Vajha Pshavela's epic poem "*The Knight in the Panther's Skin*"

⁶ Protagonist in Vajha Pshavela's poem "Legend of Host and Guest"

⁷ Female protagonist in Georgian poet, Vajha Pshavela's epic poem "*The Knight in the Panther's Skin*"

Khubua's interpretation of the project was quite different, from the one, the head of the fund announced above. Khubua writes:

This contest shortly means that people sinful in Sodomite sins will be financed. If today they don't dare to come out, soon they will find their place in society, participate in different TV shows and be published in various newspapers and magazines; maybe they will even establish their own political party. As a minimum, we are guaranteed with the pride of gays and lesbians on Rustaveli Street.

He then announces names of the Women's Fund employees under the shame-list, as people who are disgracing Georgian religion and culture and asserts: "Here, dear friends! With the help of these 'corpses' we are threatened by the perspective, portrayed above." (Khubua, 2009; #48(793))

When on the same issue, newspaper Alia(# 133 (2418)) asked the chairman of Human Rights Committee in Georgian Parliament, Dimitri Lortqipanidze to express his views, he answered: "All kinds of expansion that aims to eradicate Georgian consciousness and abolish our church and faith needs to be strictly condemned". (Zedelashvili, 2009; # 133(2418))

As I have discussed earlier, so called "conservative press" in Georgia, mainly newspapers *Alia*, *Asaval-Dasavali* and *Qronika* preach against Georgian government's aspiration towards western values. However, apart from western culture and values, with its sexual freedom, so foreign to Georgian society, one could assume that another imaginary threat for Georgian Orthodox church is different religious rituals and denomination of the Catholic Church, which is often identified with the west, mainly such political allies of Georgian government, as U.S and the countries of EU. The fact that the sameness of denomination in religion plays the crucial role for Georgian culture and for the vindication of Georgian identity is obvious even from the past history of the country. When threatened by the Muslim conquerors of Iran and Ottoman Empire, the king of

Kartl-Kakheti ⁸Erekle II decided to ally with Orthodox Christian Russian Empire and concluded the Treaty of Georgievsk ⁹in the 18th century.

In spite of the war between Georgia and Russia in August, 2008, some religious figures still express their aspirations towards 'Orthodox Russia'. However, after the war, regardless its religious denomination, Russia is regarded as the first-rate enemy of the country in almost every discourse of contemporary Georgian society and pro-Russian aspirations are quite unpopular in Georgian population. However, various religious periodicals openly express their neutral position towards Russia as an orthodox country, along with the hostility towards western culture and sometimes, Catholicism as well. For example, an interview with the head of St. Mary's church, archpriest Davit Gegeshidze, published in religious periodical *Qvakutxedi* (Basic), we read: "Instead of this false-liberal freedom, I'd wish a true liberty for Georgia" and "If Russia is our enemy, so is the western world. While one kills the flesh, other kills the soul. When a flesh is killed, the soul keeps living, but the death of the soul causes eternal sufferings." (Gegeshidze, 2009; N2(32); pg.13-14).

In the fall of 2007, the producers of live TV show, *Geobar* aired on Rustavi2 excluded one of its participants, Pako Tabatadze from the show, based on an argument that his sexual orientation contradicted to the moral values rooted in Georgian society. *Geobar* was a reality TV show, where several participants shared a house and worked in the bar, once a week organizing different entertaining events. Every Saturday, spectators of the show could attend the event and take participation in the course of the show. Between the events, they could watch the lives of the participants in the house; their relationships and preparation for the event aired live on TV. But one October morning Pako publicly announced: "I am gay, one person in two, I'm both a

⁸ Historical province of Georgia in the 18th century

⁹ Treaty concluded between Russian Empire and Georgian kingdom Kartl-Kakheti, which established Georgian Kingdom under the Russian rule.

man and a woman, so I am the competitor for everyone in this show.” The next day, the host of the show announced Rustavi2’s decision, to exclude him from the show. This fact caused many discussions among human rights activists and liberal-minded civil society, condemning and criticizing broadcasting channel’s decision. Many argued that the decision was influenced by representatives of Georgian patriarchate. As publicist on religious issues and former cleric, Vasil Kobakhidze, stated in his interview to local LGBT magazine “ME”,

The main source for aggression and hatred towards homosexuals comes from the ideology campaigned by Georgian patriarchate, however it is also deeply rooted in our culture. As it often happens in feudal-traditional society, one’s own identity is asserted on the expense of the minorities, people who think differently, homosexuals, women or children. As for the case of Pako Tababatadze, the patriarchate was not involved in it, in direct way, they did not even call the broadcasting channel, they appealed to the political governors and that’s how they achieved their goal. (Kobakhidze,2008; (#2 (8), pg. 16-21)

The fact that official ideology of Georgian patriarchate condemns homosexuality can even be seen from the title of an article, published in the official publication of Patriarchate, *Sapatriarqos Uckebani* (Patriarchate’s Annunciations). According to Zurab Ekaladze’s article “Homosexuality (Sodomy) – the heaviest sin” the main problem of Georgian society and religion is open and unconcealed propaganda of homosexuality through mass media, like “public discussions about intimate lives of many homosexual celebrities, interviews with modern homosexual artists or sportsmen and so on.” (Ekaladze, 2001; № 11 (113)

3.2. Homosexuality as an ailing fashion of the west

In various discourses homosexuality in Georgia is presented as an ailing fashion of the west, which is gaining a foothold in Georgia with country’s purposeful integration into the European culture and its institutions such as NATO or EU. This tendency traces its roots from the soviet past of the country, when as Laura Essig argues, homosexuality was regarded as a wholly

western phenomenon, prevalent only in capitalist countries. It was believed that homosexuality was widespread only in western capitalist countries, while highly moralistic soviet society was free from this disease, and even if this “sexual perversion” was mentioned and discussed, it was considered as shameful and criminal, punishable under Union-wide law, by up to 5 years of imprisonment or labor. (Essig, 1999; p. 6) However, after the fall of the Soviet Union, when the taboo on sex and sexualities was abolished in Georgian media, the term “homosexual” was only used in relation to western celebrities. (Agdgomelashvili, 2006; p.1) The terms “Homosexual” and “Georgian” together are rarely used even in contemporary media discourse, but when it is, it’s mostly presented in such a discourse, where western gay and lesbians are funding and promoting gay rights and homosexuality in Georgia. For example, in 2007 in an article published in Alia, under the title “*Pederasts* are getting ready to hold a “*parade*” in Tbilisi”, the author Irakli Mamaladze writes about the “dubious office financed by Dutchman gay-fathers” somewhere in the Vera district of Tbilisi, where, according to the rumors he heard, Georgian gays and lesbians hold gatherings and “spend days and nights thinking about the ways to promote gay rights in Georgia”. Mamaladze continues: “Representatives of different sexual minorities from all over the world often visit Tbilisi and train Georgian gays, how to popularize homosexuality in Georgia.”

The “dubious office” Mamaladze writes about, is Inclusive Foundation, the first and so far the only organization working for LGBT rights in Georgia. As he wasn’t able to contact the representatives of the organization, from the employee of the nearby office “XXI Century” he received information, about the latest joint project of these organizations, called “All Different –

All Equal”¹⁰, which according to the author’s assumption is secret preparation for gay pride in the capital of Georgia.

On this arrangement, which is going to take place in Tbilisi, different representatives of Georgian religious and sexual minorities will get together and paint the streets of Tbilisi with paints; however, it is unknown so far, what exactly they are going to write on the walls. This won’t be the only arrangement, the Dutch organization is going to participate in, according to unofficial information, there is going to be held a mighty gay pride in Tbilisi, with the approval of Saakashvili’s government. It is unknown yet, when Georgian and foreign gays are going to exhibit themselves in the streets of Tbilisi, the only known fact is that gays from all over the world will visit Tbilisi, openly support oppressed Georgian gays and encourage them, with the following words - “Don’t be afraid brothers, we stand by you.

The article ends with the following words: “Putin was ridiculed by Georgian government when he raided the gay gatherings, saying that he violated the rights of homosexuals. Let’s see if Saakashvili himself will be the subject of mockery. If not Putin, Georgian society will definitely ridicule him, as gayness is unknown for Georgian mentality.” (Alia, #82 (2055) 2007)

Another quite frequent discourse is about the recommendations of European Union for its candidate countries, among which Georgian pro-nationalist politicians and religious authorities single out the recommendation about the marriage legalization and freedom of expression for sexual minorities. Georgia is not an EU candidate country, and it is not obliged to fulfill EU recommendations, however its expedited advance towards Europe and expressed desire to be accepted in such military unions as North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) cautions and frightens the guardians of Georgian traditionalism and its religion. In the preface of an article, titled -“Gay marriages are going to be legalized in Georgia! What is written in EU recommendations” we read:

¹⁰ European youth Campaign run by the Council of Europe promoting human rights and tolerance

Pederasts are coming, hide away your men! – remember this famous hit from Radio 105? It is possible that soon we, Georgians will have to shout out these famous words once more and literally hide our men away. The thing is, that among ten recommendations of European Union for its candidate countries, one clearly recommends to fulfill the whole set of obligations towards sexual minorities: promote the freedom of expression for their rights and opinions and what’s more important, officially legalize their marriages, all of this above has to be done with the governmental maintenance. (Alia, #95 (2068) 2007)

In an interview with Gubaz Sanikidze, which appears in the same article, the leader of National Forum declares: “To hell with European Union, Europe is in moral crisis, this is not just my opinion, great thinkers have been discussing this for a long time.” After the journalist, Mamuka Kantaria’s question about the possible confrontation between the Georgian government and Orthodox Church, he answered:

Of course, this means conflict. This means Sodom and Gomorrah, which is forbidden by our faith. If our political leaders in government are glad from this kind of Europeanism, they can go to Netherlands and hold male hip dance there, I don’t want this kind of Europe.

Similar rhetoric is revealed by Georgian poet, Rezo Amashukeli’s in an interview, which I have already mentioned in the previous subchapter, published in *Kviris Qronika* (#37 (300)) (Week’s Chronicle) in 2007. Famous poet, known for his words in the same article about the Patriarch Ilia the 2nd as the only figure able to stop recent propagation of sexual minorities in Georgia, now declares:

Americans want us to solve three quite delicate issues: 1.The equal position of orthodoxy and all kinds of sectarianism; 2. Give privileges to the representatives of sexual minorities, and legalize their marriages; 3. Re-Settlement of so called, Meskhetian Turks in Georgia, as according to them, they are Georgians as equal as we are. All these three postulates have the purpose to destroy Georgia eternally. (Kviris Qronika (#37 (300)), 2007)

Meskhetian Turks are regarded as ethnic Georgian group, once located in Southern Georgia, now called Meskhetia, near Turkish borders. There are many debates about the lineage of this ethnic group; however some believe that the term “Meskhetian” refers to their ethnic belonging to Georgians, who converted to Islam and learned Turkish language during Ottoman rule in

Meskheta. During the soviet period, with the command of the head of Soviet NKVD Lavrenti Beria, Soviet troops deported more than 100 000 Muslims from this region to Central Asia, imputing them as “untruths worthy population”¹¹. (Aydingün, 2006)

The presence of xenophobic attitude towards Muslim ethnic identities in present day Georgia could be explained by historical past of Georgia under Ottoman rule, when Meskhetian Turks, once regarded as “authentic” Georgian orthodox population, changed their religion and culture from Orthodox Georgians to Muslim Turks, regarded as the greatest betrayal of Georgian highest values such as orthodox faith and Georgian culture or language. (Aydingün, 2006)

The similar tendency could be traced towards sexual minorities as well. Tracing its roots from the soviet past, homosexuality was regarded as criminal and uncommon in Georgia, as well as other soviet countries, which was thought to be spread only in capitalist countries of the west. However, soviet rhetoric about homosexuality lacked its religious connotation, as after the fall of communism, the religious discourse in Georgia blossomed with double force, as an authentic composition of *Georgian-ness*, being oppressed for over 70 years under communist rule. Even though soviet rule, with its ban on religion is regarded as a black spot in Georgian history, and famous public figures active in soviet period are rarely seen or heard in Georgian media, soviet discourse of homosexuality, as a western ill of capitalist countries, it is still present in some present day media resources.

For example, in 2008 newspaper *Kviris Qronika (Week's Chronicle)* (# 31 (345)) published an interview with soviet period Georgian sociologist, Anzor Gabiani, under the title: “How homosexuals trapped inexperienced boys”. In the foreword of an article, by journalist, Nino Godziashili, we read:

¹¹ Retrieved from: <http://www.cal.org/co/pdf/mturks.pdf>

Since Georgian politicians directed their gaze towards west, the number of homosexuals in our country has raised significantly. Lesbians and “homiks”¹² opened their own club in Tbilisi, imagine yourself, they even intended to hold a parade. They even say that, they are all gathered in governmental institutions and are busy by tempting young office-seekers. It is interesting, how did homosexuals propagated in Georgia? This is the issue we discussed with Georgian sociologist Anzor Gabiani. (# 31 (345))

In an interview, Georgian sociologist tells about his 25 year experience of work in research center against problems of criminal nature during the soviet period. In his own words, he was commissioned to research “suicides, professional criminality and homosexuality, in one word, criminal word”. Even though Georgian sociologist refers to his work experience in soviet period, when homosexuality was regarded as criminal and was punishable up to 5 years of imprisonment, the connotation of this statement in present day Georgia, when homosexuality’s decriminalization in the country dates back to the year of 2000, still implies criminal elements of homosexual practice. When the journalist asked about his view on the nature of homosexual propagation in Georgia, the sociologist answered:

Following to our country’s Europe-isation, even in such a traditional country as Georgia, homosexuality is gaining more and more wide scale and difficult nature; what’s more, it is increasing. Unfortunately, young people and children, not knowing the taste of women yet, are being trapped in this process, some falsely and some by force. Homosexuals have their own clan, like mafia, all over the world and they support each other in everything, which is very dangerous, in nature. There are unimaginably rich people among them also.

As seen above, the recent enhanced visibility of sexual minorities in Georgia is attributed to the country’s “Europe-isation” , as with the fall of soviet union and the termination of country’s international isolation, “homosexual mafia” – which is spread all over the world, now approaches to “such a traditional country as Georgia”. This kind of nostalgia towards soviet past can only be traced in relation to homosexuality, as a prior threat to national identity in Georgian present day media. This kind nostalgia towards soviet past, when homosexuality was criminalized is openly expressed in the following statement by Anzor Gabiani:

¹² Russian slang for homosexual

Someone might impute my statement as a sin, but women's homosexuality has no serious consequences, majority of lesbians stay women, they still can create a family and give a birth to child. Of course it is shameful and has to be condemned when it increases in nature; however male homosexuality still stays forefront, as exceptionally dangerous phenomenon. That's why, in order to save our future generation, homosexuality has to be punishable by law, only if it's not the case of obvious genetic pathology. It is a known fact, that "mamtmavlebi"¹³ try to find jobs in places with lots of boys, like schools or kindergartens, it's not hard to trap them falsely. During the homosexual intercourse, prostate gland is being irritated, which causes erection and then passes on as a habit, this is pseudo-homosexuality. Unfortunately, they have extracted an article from criminal law, according to which homosexuality was punishable severely enough for a long period of time. Fortunately, Georgian society is healthy and the raise of homosexuality didn't change people's mentality, population's attitude towards this fashionable trend is strictly negative. Why taking bad examples from others? Imitation in this issue, especially for such a small country as ours, is going to end with sorrowful results. Georgian men have to think about the procreation of the nation.

This interview reveals almost all the major discourses, discussed in this chapter. First of all, the religious connotation of homosexuality: acknowledgment of female homosexuality, by the respondent as a less dangerous and shameful practice is embedded in religious discourse, as he is afraid that some might perceive his confession as a sin. Secondly, it expresses the attitude of society to homosexuality as an ailing or criminal practice, which has to be treated (in the case of obvious genetic pathology) or be punishable under criminal law, as male homosexuality is regarded as a threat for nation's demography. Demographic problem of the country is another quite popular discourse around homosexuality, which is frequently presented in private or public discussions about the threats of homosexuality for such a small country like Georgia.

¹³ Georgian slang for homosexual, which according to established idea, implies the criminalization connotation of the term, as Sodomy law was also known as law against "mamtmavlebi" in the Soviet Georgia.

3.3. Homosexuality as a threat to nation's demography

Georgia is a small country with total area of 69,700 km² and with the population of 4,385,400. The data is taken from the National Statistics Office of Georgia¹⁴, with the exclusion of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, former Georgian autonomous territories that are not controllable by Georgian government since the 1992 civil war in the country, which resulted in de-facto independence of the two breakaway regions. Numerous wars left its impact on the sharp decrease of the Georgian population, according to National Statistics Office in Georgia, Georgian population reached around 5 million in the early 1990s, while according to the data of 2009, the population of Georgia consisted of 4 385 400. Another factor could be the economic crisis of the newly established independent country, as the economic distress caused the massive flow of migration to western countries. It is believed that more than 1.5 millions of Georgians left the country during 1990s searching for the better life in Russia and countries of EU¹⁵.

Societal worries in media about the population shortening is seen from such titles as “ If things go on like this, there will be no Georgian left in Georgia by 2050”¹⁶ and “Democratic Movement – United Georgia: Compared to the 80s birth-rate has declined twice”¹⁷ However in 2008, #31th issue of Asaval-Dasavali (#31 (725)) managed to link Georgian society's troubles over demography to all American “sins” and “dissolutions” in an article, about American FTM transgender man Thomas Beatie, who gave birth to a girl. under the title: “Careful Georgians, American man has given birth to a child! SOS!” The author, Jaba Khubua begins the with the following words: “In the U.S. which has to deliver democracy in Georgia, a man gave birth to a

¹⁴ Retrieved from: http://www.geostat.ge/index.php?action=page&p_id=473&lang=eng

¹⁵ Retrieved from : <http://www.migrationinformation.org/Profiles/display.cfm?ID=314>

¹⁶ Retrieved from Online news agency Ambebi.ge - <http://www.ambebi.ge/sazogadoeba/9463-qthu-ase-gagrzdelda-2050-tslithvis-saqarthveloshi-qarthveli-aghari-qnebaq.htm>

¹⁷ News agency GHN : <http://www.ghn.ge/news-11325.html>

child” The author criticizes American President, George Bush’s military politics by stating, “apart from killing peaceful population in Iraq and Afghanistan, it seems that Bush is also concerned with the demographic development of the U.S.”He also mentions Russian President, Vladimir Putin’s disturbance over Russian demographic decline and expresses his worries about Georgian President, Mikheil Saakashvili’s disregard over the same issue:

While even men give birth in our friendly America, Georgia dashes towards demographic catastrophe. Mortality rate already surpasses birth-rate in our country. If you look through the statistical data, and see how many childless or single child families live in Georgia, you would see the perspective of nation’s extermination quite vividly. Georgian demographers already talk about the secret plan, according to which only 600 thousand, around the half population of Georgia is going to be left by the year 2050!

The article goes on with blaming U.S for propagating the so called “family planning” and “birth-control” systems in “such developing countries, as Georgia”, as Khubua continues: “The sovereigns of death teach families how to survive with poor income, the major condition for the survival is “family planning”, which means to reject or postpone birth-giving.”

The decline in Georgian demography is blamed to American and all western medical novelties for Georgian society, such as sexual education at schools, HIV prevention and management, birth control and infertility management, which was foreign and unknown for Georgian society before the country’s expedited integration in international organizations, since the fall of Soviet Union and mainly since 2004, when the newly elected President Mikheil Saakashvili declared the country’s integration into global world issues as the main motive of his presidency. As Georgian nationalism implies fear and discontent with everything foreign or unknown and is being labeled as “anti-Georgian”, this article similarly reveals fear and discontent of everything “western” that does not fit into authentic Georgian standards and traditions. The cult of motherhood in Georgia can even be seen from the first lines of poem “Georgian Mother” by

Georgian poet Simon Chiqovani, telling about the mother of nine virile heroes, as she blessed his sons before letting them go to fight with the conquerors and watched his sons, as they got wounded encouraging them not to give up and exterminate the enemy. (Chiqovani, 2010)¹⁸

This purposeful degradation and the elimination of the country's population, in the author's view is the outcome of present-day government's aspirations towards implementation democratic and liberal values in the country, which the Georgian society associates with the countries of EU and the United States.

Americanization of Georgia which is rapidly increased in its force by the fifth year of Mikheil Saakashvili's presidency implies lots of things. Apart from the purpose to destroy the Georgian gene, pseudo-liberalism and pseudo-democracy, imported in Georgia under the label of "western values" also aims to breed the new type of Georgian man, which is Georgian-American. This Georgian-American has to be a woman turned into man, who will be artificially impregnated afterwards and give birth to a new Georgian-American. This means that apart from ideological and mental mutations, Georgia is threatened by biological mutations as well. Georgians, be careful! If you don't want to find your daughter coming back home as a man, remember Thomas Beatie – an American man who just recently gave birth to a child!

Khubua's this statements blends together various themes, that I have discussed earlier, such as Georgian national identity, outside threat for the national identity, namely one of the most sacred values of Georgian society - nuclear family and the sexual depravity of Georgian youth; However, the most important implication of this article lies in the author's attempt to spread the moral panic in Georgian society, about the degradation of Georgian national identity, implying both Georgian traditional values and heterosexual identity, which is threatening the nation from the 'west, in particular the U.S.

However, this is just the one side of debates around sexual minorities in Georgian popular press, limited number of magazines, such as *Liberali* and *Thkheli Shokoladi*, *Newspaper Batumelebi*

¹⁸ Original poem retrieved from : <http://burusi.wordpress.com/2010/04/04/simon-chikovani-6/>

and online magazine *Netgazeti.ge* are known for their neutral approach towards sexual minorities. Among Georgians, these publications are labeled as “liberal press”, since the main politics of these publications is directed towards protection of human and minority rights.

In conclusion, I would briefly like to demonstrate Nino Dzanava’s article, published in online magazine, *Netgazeti.ge* on May 17, 2010 in response to the international day against homophobia and transphobia. I believe that this article, titled “*I am homosexual, I am Orthodox, I am Georgian*” encompasses all the discourses around sexual minorities, that are so poignant in present day Georgia. Here she discusses those homophobic facts that are frequent on societal, political, and religious levels in the country.

Homosexuality is associated with the obscenity and depravity for the majority of Georgians, most of the people around us want to “exile homosexuals on the foreign island” or just “burn them on the fire.” The means for such statements are coming from the numerous analyses of web-forums or social networks, stories told by homosexuals themselves, homophobic facts or speeches.

She then goes on discussing Georgian politicians’ frequent homophobic statements, and states that the use of word “homosexual” is quite frequent among politicians, “especially with the upcoming mayor elections, which is the best tool for them to discredit their political opponents.” And finally, homosexuality as a religious problem in the country is well illustrated in the following passage: “With the religious estimation of homosexuality, the status of homosexuality has changed from “the discourse of illness” to “the discourse of sin”. In the country, where the majority of population is Orthodox Christian, this fact is even more complicated.” (Dzanava, 2010)

Chapter 4: Georgian closet, view from within

4.1. Introduction

In the previous chapter I have examined the tight ties of nationalism and sexuality, how existed homophobia expressed through different means is embedded in nationalistic terms in Georgian media and how it reflects the existed attitude towards sexual minorities prevalent in Georgian society. This chapter aims to highlight the opinions and attitudes from the inside of Georgian closet, the one that is marginalized and is often the victim of stereotypes and prejudices dominant in Georgian media and society. The chapter will examine how the discourses examined in the previous chapter (homosexuality as a threat for Georgian culture and religion, as an ailing fashion of the west; and as a threat for nation's demography) affects gay and lesbian community, how do they fit in dominant social norms, what are the main factors that maintain the place they have in mainstream society, what they perceive as main obstacle in challenging dominant ideology and establishing social equality. What is the main source for them, which keeps maintaining the homophobic ideology in society, is it the state, the church, the media or all of them together? Do they challenge the existed ideology? How they do it? If not, what are the barriers for them?

I will argue that homosexual practice is perceived as deviant and abnormal in Georgia and the main factor for constructing and reinforcing this kind of view is deeply rooted in Georgian traditional image of family, which is constructed through the images of virile men, who are devoted to the nation's well being and prosperity, as well as the image of true woman, that is constructed through mothering to virile Georgian heroes. I will also argue that the church plays a great role in maintaining and propagating these values, emphasizing to "true" nature of Georgian people, which implies being Orthodox Christian, being devoted to the needs of motherland, and hence establishing nuclear heterosexual family.

Gays and lesbians are one of the most marginalized groups in Georgian society; they lead quiet lives and are rarely active in public sphere. This chapter aims to spread the light to their opinions and thoughts, how they perceive their own status in society. The questions as well as the data obtained through interviews reveal two aspects of their lives, personal and public. In the First part, I will discuss the level of their openness, the extent to which respondents are open about their sexuality with family, friends or relatives. What do they perceive, on the personal level, as the major factor, preventing them from more openness towards society? And what are the places (if they are) where they feel liberated and open. Second part of this chapter aims to give voice to their personal views about the state of homophobia in Georgian society and the institutions or traditions that promote existed homophobia, or the ways out of the existed situations, proposed by them.

4.2. Personal discussions: family, friends and LGBT organizations

All respondents stated that the issue of their sexuality was tabooed in their families, none of them revealed their sexual identity to their parents and family members, however at the same time all of them were open about their sexuality with friends, at least to their close friends. “I don’t perceive a person as a friend, who will know about my sexuality and don’t take me the way I am” – says 33 year old Elene (f). At the same time, the issue of family and reluctance of Georgian gays and lesbians to be open to their parents and family members, is seen as the most painful and poignant issue among gays and lesbians, I have interviewed.

On the question, why he hesitates to reveal his sexual identity to his parents, 27 year old Dato (m) says that he is not courageous enough yet, but at the same time, he doesn’t exclude the

possibility of discussing these issues with them, however he is not sure about the time or the ways of revealing his true self to his family members.

Despite their concealment in the family relations, the stories of family reception and understanding towards the non-traditional sexual orientation of their children is perceived as something exceptional, yet according to the stories, told by respondents this kind of acceptance is rare, but still present in Georgian reality. When discussing family relations and the problems of coming out with parents, Maka (25, f) states:

There are rare cases, when parents support their gay or lesbian children, but in the most cases they are concerned about the reaction of their neighbors, friends or acquaintances. I have a lesbian friend, whose parents know about her sexual identity. I envy her, but on the other hand I am happy for her. I envy that this girl was destined to have such parents, who acknowledged the inner state of their daughter and even let her bring her girlfriend to live with them. Though this girl is still young and her parents may think that it's temporal and that she will overcome her disposition towards same sex, still they have really supported and respected her decision in this particular stage of her life. I am honestly grateful for that, there are so many occasions when such kids ended up at the cemetery, because there was no one to encourage or support them in such situations. (Maka, 25, f)

Maya's (31, f) discusses parent's acceptance of gay/lesbian children in the prism of Georgian cultural aspects, she draws parallel between the acceptance of Georgian ethnic and sexual minorities, stating that Georgian nature is hospitable in essence, that is why the guest is always welcomed, however, she adds that this tolerance doesn't last long, as the picture radically changes when the issue of coexistence comes in.

This is the nature of Georgian people, if compassion and pity is provoked, then the acceptance and tolerance is guaranteed, but this kind of acceptance is based on pity, not equality. I know such story, when the acceptance of family towards their "different" child was based on pity. A friend of mine, MTF transgender female told her parents that something was wrong with her, that she needed help, in this way her parents had to adapt to the situation and accept her the way she is. She always tells me that it's the matter of approach, how you explain and reveal yourself to them, but I think it's the same, this way you are provoking pity for yourself, instead of declaring that you are a normal person, with no problems and nothing's wrong with you. (Maya, 31,f)

Similar approach is expressed in Giorgi's (26, m) statement, as he discusses a typical Georgian trait, which in his view is one of the major factors, enhancing existed homophobia in the country:

Typical Caucasian and Georgian phenomenon for me is the tight relationships between parents and children; I mean our youth's dependence on their families. At the same time, parent's excessive control over their children's lives, intervention in their privacy, and endless questions like – where are you going? What are you doing, etc.. I think this factor plays an important role in reinforcement of homophobia in Georgia, because the factor of trauma is higher in such cases, on both sides. Moreover, the means of expression is taking poignant forms here, it may be blackmailing for suicide, if the child won't change his life, and it may be shame, shame of society. They want to declare their children to the society, saying – look this is my child, he has a wife and a child, etc. The situation in west is different; there the respect and consideration for children's personal lives is much higher. (Giorgi, 26, m)

As the above statements reveal, one of the most painful themes, on the personal level, for them is the concealment of their sexuality in the family settings. They beforehand acknowledge that if they'd reveal their true self to their parents, their non-traditional sexuality would not be accepted, which could lead to different undesirable consequences, like turning them out of the houses, breaking off relationships etc. As most of them live with their parents, and some are even financially dependent on them, the only solution for them is to stay in the family closet and find compensation and freedom of expression in the circle of friends or in LGBT organizations. Not all of them keep contact with such organizations, but those who do, consider these organizations as the only place, where they can acquire their lost freedom.

I am the member of Women's Club; this club has helped me in many ways. I feel wonderful and liberated for those several hours that I spend there, there I feel like home, like in my own, personal country. It has broadened my circle of friends and gave me the possibility to express my true self. (Nata, 25, f)

However Dato (27,m) is skeptically disposed towards such organizations, he doesn't believe they can bring any change in societal perception of gays and lesbians, he never had any contact with LGBT organization, however admits that such organization still can bring some good to Georgian gays and lesbians, though only on a level of psychological consultations.

Such kind of organizations may be helpful in offering psychological aid to those gays or lesbians, who just came out and need support and encouragement from the people that are just like him. To know, that they are not alone in their difficulties. Sometimes, I think that it would be great for me, to know that I can go to a place, where I could openly speak about such issues, I can't normally speak about, where I could meet new people; however I don't think this type of organization can solve concrete problems, prevalent in Georgian society. (Dato, 27, m)

Overall, when discussing personal issues, almost all respondents I have talked to named troubled relationship or the concealments in their families as the main factor for their discomfort and oppression in Georgian reality, however the only exception is Nata (25,f) who prefers to be open and in peace with the society, rather than in family.

When I walk in the streets hand in hand with my girlfriend, I try to make distance from her, not to draw attention. For example, I remember once, when were sitting in a bar with my girlfriend and just looked at each, we heard a guy from the back seat, loudly declaring that we were lesbians. That is why the first thing that makes me feel oppressed in Georgia is our society. Lots of gays and lesbians are in concealment nowadays, only because of society. For example, my mother knows nothing about me; however I prefer to be in the concealment in the family, rather than outside, in the streets or among other people. (Nata, 25, f)

Here we can see that family relations and unacceptability of their parents for different children is the most painful theme on the personal level of Georgia gays and lesbians, however this kind of rejection towards all different can be traced in the societal attitude; parents themselves, as Giorgi (26, m) stated, “want to declare their children to the society” and make sure that he/she completely fits in the national expectations of Georgian male or female. On the basis of these statements it can be argued, that the image of nation, as portrayed by the Church or national ideology is so firmly inculcated in the minds of ordinary citizens, especially the older generation, that even in the tight circle of family members, Georgian gays and lesbians cannot escape from the marginalized status, that the dominant society ascribes to them. In other words, wider national ideology is fully reflected in much narrow circle of family members, leaving no other choice for them, but to dream about leaving the country and family, for their “own, personal

countries”. As Nata, (25, f) observed, for those several hours that she spends among people that she does not have to hide her true self, she feels liberated and free, like in her “own, personal county”.

4.3. Georgian Society and its faults: discussions about traditions, religion and politics.

Georgian traditional society, Orthodox Christian morals, and the government, on the one hand striving for accomplishment of EU standards, but on the other compromising with the church are still perceived as the main factor for existed homophobia by the majority of respondents. This is expressed on almost all levels of their public lives, such as the media, streets, clubs or cafes, where they seek for comfort and relaxation from the concealment and tension at home. When discussing the major factors of homophobia in the society, these three factors were named by all of them, however the majority of respondents prioritized the strong hold of traditions and family values in the Georgian society, others privileged religious institutions and some named populist politics of the government, unable to resist and confront the authority of Georgian Orthodox Church, as the main factor, promoting homophobia in the country.

The dominance of heterosexual family values and expectations that at certain age everyone should settle down and marry to opposite sex is the main abusive factor for Sandro (28, m), which as he claims is also a strong reason for promoting homophobia.

The most poignant factor, that I have to overcome at every stage of my life is the general expectations from the society, that every young female or male has to marry to opposite sex and have a child, regardless if the family is based on shared love or not. This pressure is very poignant even on heterosexuals, not to mention gays or lesbians, who in most cases don't even want to have a family. But they see it as the only way to avoid gossiping, or blame from their relatives. I find this pressure, as the main problem for us, nowadays. (Sandro, 28, m)

For Nata (25, f) the most painful are those homophobic statements, coming from Georgian society and her everyday acquaintances, though she finds it hard to trace the roots and reasons for such actions:

Georgian people don't have their own point of view, they all look at each other and that's how opinions are established. Religion has nothing to do with it, they just can't perceive and accept different people among them, they call us sick and perverts. In fact, it's them, who are sick, I don't think it's because they are all religious. If they think that they are so traditional, why don't they wear Georgian traditional clothes and leave us alone instead. (Nata, 25, f)

Though for Maya (31) and Elene (33) the main factors of Georgian homophobia come from the popularity of Orthodox Church and the outward piety of the majority of the population in the country. They think, that it is also closely linked to the idea of *Georgiannes*, as being Georgian for most of the believers is associated with being Orthodox, hence thorough protection of all canons and rituals that Georgian Orthodox Church propagates in Georgian society, in such cases there is no place left for 'others' or 'different'.

Religious identity is extremely important for Georgian people, when religion comes in, there is no place left for any kinds of minority, be it sexual, ethnic or religious. The identification is so narrow and concrete, that I am Georgian; hence I am an Orthodox Christian, the offspring of my nation and thereby I must have a family, spouse and children; that I have to reproduce and work for my country's benefit, that tolerance is completely out of context in such cases. (Maya, 31, f)

As I have already discussed, this strong link between *Georgiannes* and Orthodox Christianity in contemporary Georgian society can be traced from the first years of Georgian independence from the Soviet rule, when in the early 90s, the first Georgian president Zviad Gamsakhurdia's strong nationalist ideology forwarded the image of Georgian nation, as strongly intertwined with the ideology of Orthodox Christianity. Georgian Orthodox Church, on the other hand, as Jones (1989) observes, shapes the moral image of the nation by taking active participation in condemning such acts as alcohol or drug abuse, abortion and deviance from the heterosexual

image of the nation. The marriage as a sacred union is severely defined by Georgian Orthodox Church, numerous canons regulates what is accepted and what is forbidden between husband and wife, after the church canonizes their relationship. At the same time, Georgian Orthodox Church views homosexuality, as “strictly religious problem, and only after that, it is social or medical problem.”(Ekaladze, 2001) Ekaladze also mentions that according to the church, the purpose of sexual relationships should only be procreation; all the other kinds of sexual relationships are strictly condemned and considered as a grievous sin. .”(Ekaladze, 2001) But if, as Ekaladze states, in case of regret, the Church is ready to tolerate, as the above statements by the respondents have revealed, Georgian society is less tolerant.

Apart from societal and religious problems, some respondents have also stated the Georgian political system, as well as the government’s lack of interest and motivation in protecting sexual minorities’ rights, as one of the factors for maintaining homophobic situation in the country.

The biggest fault of our political system is the absence of antidiscrimination law. This means that if you get fired on the basis of your gender or sexual identity, you won’t be protected by any law. Also we don’t have a law against hate speech; this is why Georgian sexual minorities are unprotected nowadays. On the other hand, no one wants to expose themselves, because you can’t trust police or Supreme Court, either... On the contrary, they might oppress you even more. (Mariam, 26, f)

Similar attitude is expressed in Maya’s comment:

As for sexual minorities, even human rights organizations are not working for protecting their rights, moreover, some of them are straight homophobes themselves. There is one human rights organization in Georgia and if I remember correctly, Zurab Kervalishvili is the head of this organization. When we planned to organize campaign for minorities, called All Different – All Equal, he was the first to condemn this plan, as they believed that we wanted to organize gay pride in Tbilisi, but in essence it was aimed for all minorities, for disabled people, ethnic, religious and sexual minorities as well. (Maya, 31, f)

Even though the ruling political system in Georgia is seeking for implementing liberal and democratic values in Georgian society, it could be argued that the existed liberal aspiration is not

the current government's political will, but mere compulsory reforms for accomplishing different European institutions' requirements, in order to gain membership in such international organizations as NATO or to acquire favorable disposition of EU. One of the examples for this argument could be named the total ignorance of sexual minority issues in Georgia;

However, on the other hand, Mariam (26, f) and Maya (31, f) argue, that the reason for this ignorance is the extreme unpopularity of sexual minority issues in Georgia society. The government tries not to bring up unpopular issues on the forefront of the political agenda, as it fears to lose people's goodwill and support.

European Union offers us to satisfy its requirements; however western political system is based on the individual priorities, whereas in such post-socialist countries as Georgia, communist mentality still outbalances western values, according to this mentality, government should serve to community, not individuals. This is the main reason, why we are in this situation nowadays. (Maya, 31, f)

Mariam (26, f) believes that political system, religious authority and traditional society are all intertwined in causing and promoting homophobia in Georgia.

You can't single out just one; all three of them, religion, government and society are tied together. To take religion separately, I don't think it could be the reason for homophobia alone, neither is government, which was liberally inclined in the first several year of the rule. They even blamed Misha¹⁹ for bringing homosexuals to Georgia, that he even patronized them. But he appeared to be a very populist politician, in several years he allied with the church, as the most popular institution in Georgian society. This move was very mob oriented and after that things have changed in worst direction for us. (Mariam, 26, f)

In this way, we can argue that Georgian Orthodox Church plays the major role in constructing the image of Georgian, as heteronormative society. As the Orthodox Christianity was named by influential political and religious authorities, such as Zviad Gamsakhurdia and the Patriarch of Georgian Orthodox Church, Ilia II, as the foremost characteristic of Georgia nation, and as this ideology is still deeply inculcated in Georgian society, being Georgian for the majority of

¹⁹ Short name for Mikheil, implying the president of Georgia, Mikheil Saakashvili.

Georgians implies being Orthodox Christian. Thus, national identification of the Georgian population is linked to the Orthodox Christianity. National identification, according to above discussed self-esteem theorists - Margalit and Raz, is very important for individuals self-esteem, as it feeds individuals' need for secure identity, which at the same time is important for their well being. (Margalit & Raz, 1990 as cited in Frost, 2006) According to this theory, we can argue that in order to identify themselves as the full-right members of the nation, people tend to embrace all the proclaimed characteristics of the nation,. On the other hand, the further establishment and reinforcement of the national identity is achieved on the expense of marginalization and exclusion of the "other", the one that does not fit into the image of the nation. Similarly, in order to enhance their national identities, Georgian people tend to demonstrate their devotion to the Georgian Orthodox Church by oppressing sexual minorities, as inadequate for both Georgian traditions and the Orthodox Church.

I believe that this is one of the main reasons why, as Mariam (26, f) and Maya (31, f) stated, the issue of sexual minorities are extremely unpopular in Georgian society. Thus, government tries to avoid raising these issues in the mainstream agenda of Georgian political life.

Conclusion

It is assumed that the fall of the Soviet Union has caused the outburst of nationalisms in its successor states, Georgia was no exception, but the role of Georgian Orthodox Church in the process of shaping nationalism in the country is significant even in the present day Georgia. The interaction between the Georgian Orthodox Church and contemporary Georgian nationalism, and the ways they influence on the lives of sexual minorities was the main subject of this thesis. My main argument, throughout the thesis was that Georgian nationalism with the support of Georgian Orthodox Church constructs the image of Georgian nation, as solely heterosexual, and the deviance from this heterosexual image is marginalized and oppressed in the country.

The research has been conducted on two levels, the analysis of media discourses around homosexuality has revealed the main tools and themes, used by Georgian media to marginalize and exclude Georgian gays and lesbians from the national image of the country. Three main themes have been singled out during this analysis, these are: homosexuality as a threat to nation's culture and religion; homosexuality as an ailing fashion of the west; and finally, homosexuality as a threat to nation's demography. The analysis has also shaped the ways of interaction between Georgian nationalism and the Orthodox Church, which traces its roots from the early 90s, with the strong nationalist rule of the newly established independent country. This was the period when the strong bond of the nation and the religion was especially vivid. It shaped the image of the nation as heterosexual, religious, family-oriented and hard-working for the country's prosperity. The deviances from this image is still strictly condemned and marginalized in present day Georgia.

On another level, this thesis aimed to reveal the attitudes of Georgian gays and lesbians about the present homophobic situation in the country and their opinions about the main defiant reasons for

this situation. For this purpose, 10 respondents (5 of them identifying themselves as gays, and 5 as lesbians) were interviewed. The age of respondents varied from 25 to 35 years old. The interview was conducted on two levels, one set of questions revealing their private lives, such as relationships with the family, friends or LGBT organizations. Another set of questions aimed to demonstrate their opinions about Georgian political or social lives and the ways it influences existed homophobia in the country; as well as their opinions about the main ideology or institution of the country, reinforcing their marginalization in the society. As the interviews revealed, three main factors were named by all of them, these are: Georgian traditional society with strong family values, Georgian Orthodox Church as the most popular institution in the country; and the government, unable to resist the church's authority.

Interviews, as well as the media analysis have demonstrated that the Georgian Orthodox Church plays an important role in defining the nation's moral values. As the church, mainly the Patriarch of the Georgian Church was named as the most popular and trust-worthy person in the country, governmental elites try to avoid raising such unpopular issues in the political agenda of the country, as the issue of sexual minorities, as it would lead them to the direct confrontation with the church. On the other hand, pro-nationalist political leaders allied with the church continue to define the borders of the national identity and exclude and marginalize those, who don't fit in it.

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