

**Religious Nationalism as an Explanation for the Destruction and Appropriation of
Armenian Ecclesiastical Cultural Heritage Sites within the Republic of Georgia**

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Abstract

In the years immediately following its independence from the Soviet Union, Georgia constructed one of the largest religious buildings in the world, the Sameba Cathedral. However, the cathedral was not constructed on an unassuming, vacant patch of land in the capital of Tbilisi, but on the site of a 17th century Armenian cemetery. Similarly, in 2017, the crumbling Tandoyants Armenian Church in Tbilisi was gifted to the Georgian Orthodox Church with plans to raze the church and build a Georgian Orthodox Church in its place. These are just several of the most recent and well known cases of erasure of Armenian church history in Georgia. Approximately eighty Armenian churches in Georgia were destroyed during Georgia's time as a member of the Soviet Union, but after freedom was attained in 1991 the policy towards these Armenian churches shifted to a new direction: appropriation. This appropriation and destruction of Armenian cultural heritage sites in Georgia is the direct result of a uniquely religious form of nationalism that exists in Georgia, and it has allowed for the creation the environment in which this cultural destruction has occurred.

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Introduction

In 1994, recently free from the clutches of the Soviet Union, Georgia constructed one of the largest religious buildings in the world, the Sameba Cathedral. However, the cathedral was not constructed on an unassuming, vacant patch of land in the capital of Tbilisi, but on the site of a 17th century Armenian cemetery. Similarly, in 2017, the crumbling Tandoyants Armenian Church in Tbilisi was gifted to the Georgian Orthodox Church with plans to raze the church and build a Georgian Orthodox Church in its place. These are just a couple of the most recent and well known cases of erasure of Armenian church history in Georgia. Approximately eighty Armenian churches in Georgia were destroyed during Georgia's time as a member of the Soviet Union, but after independence was attained in 1991 the policy towards these Armenian churches shifted to a new direction: appropriation.

Appropriation in this context can be as brazen and obvious as the above mentioned example of the Sameba Cathedral being built on an Armenian cemetery, but it can also be much more subtle. These appropriations usually take place under the context of "restoration" by the Georgian government or Georgian Orthodox Church, but often this restoration just results in the Armenian features of the church being removed. Examples of these "restorations" include Armenian inscriptions being removed, Armenian ecclesiastical architectural features such as high alters being removed, and even gravestones bearing Armenian epitaphs being removed. After these sites are "restored" they are often then appropriated, being converted to Georgian Orthodox Churches or in the case of Armenian cemeteries, the interment of Georgians in these cemeteries.

The purpose of this thesis will be to explore the erasure and appropriation of Armenian ecclesiastical architectural sites in Georgia, and seek to provide an explanation for this occurrence through a unique form of religious nationalism which exists in Georgia. Additionally, contemporary international conventions and agreements will be analyzed to

demonstrate that the actions of the Georgian government towards Armenian cultural heritage sites within the borders of Georgia represent violations of these international agreements. As a result, this project will add to the literature on the Georgian Orthodox Church by demonstrating another area of society in which the church asserts its power and influence. Despite there officially being a separation of church and state, the Georgian Orthodox Church is the recipient of benefits which are not available to other religious groups in Georgia, and holds significant political influence. This project will show that the Georgian Orthodox Church is using this position of power and influence to further marginalize a minority group and erase its culture, as well as show that the church has been able to achieve this position of power and influence as a result of the unique form of religious nationalism that exists in Georgia.

To show that this unique form of religious nationalism exists in Georgia, this project features an analysis of the literature on the late-antique origins of religious controversy between Georgia and Armenia and the formation of Georgian nationalism around the basis of Orthodoxy. Once the basis of a historical religious conflict between Georgia and Armenia, and the existence of a unique Georgian religious nationalism are established, the project then shifts to the contemporary period for an analysis of the destruction and appropriation of Armenian ecclesiastical cultural heritage sites in Georgia to demonstrate how the former can explain the latter. Finally, an analysis of international legal conventions to which Georgia and Armenia are both signatory parties will show that the Georgian destruction and appropriation of Armenian ecclesiastical heritage sights violates these international agreements.

Theoretical Framework

Rogers Brubaker writes about four ways of studying the relation between religion and nationalism: (1) to treat religion and nationalism as an analogous phenomenon, (2) to

specify ways in which religion helps to explain things about nationalism, (3) to treat religion as part of nationalism, and (4) to posit a distinctively religious form of nationalism. This project will focus on the third explanation, seeing religion and nationalism as deeply intertwined concepts. One hallmark of this explanation is the relation between religious and national boundaries. In the strongest version of this concept, a nation would be made up of only those of a particular religion. In the case of Georgia they appear to be trending towards becoming a homogenous state made up of members of the Georgian Orthodox Church.¹ This intertwinement can also be seen in national myths and symbols, and this thesis investigates Georgian myths to help prove this point.

By arguing that Georgian nationalism is distinctively religious, this thesis shows why Georgian churches and religious sites are given much more prominence and priority in Georgia, and why some of the preexisting Armenian sites are being removed to make way for new Georgian religious sites. The origins of the Georgian Orthodox religious tradition will be examined to illustrate their role in Georgian nationalism. Using Brubaker's theories, the history of Georgian and Armenian religious conflict will also be examined to illustrate that this erasure of Armenian religious sites in Georgia is the result of a distinctly religious form of nationalism.

Memory politics and collective memory are also crucial to for this project, collective memory being the projection of the past which is shared by a community. This memory is based on a set of beliefs that apply to the past - beliefs that do not need to correlate with facts or historical truths.² Collective memory is particularly important for religious and nationalistic groups, as it is a necessary tool for these groups to create a sense of belonging, and this sense of belonging can often come from buying into the collective memory narrative

¹ Rogers Brubaker, "Religion and Nationalism: Four Approaches" *Nations and Nationalism* 18 (1), 2012, pp.1-20.

² Piotr Forecki, *Reconstructing Memory: The Holocaust in Polish Public Debates*, (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2013), 13.

which that group pushes.³ In regards to the relation of collective memory to the destruction and appropriation of Armenian cultural sites in Georgia, the narrative is often pushed by the government that Georgia, and Tbilisi specifically, is for Georgians; and while there may have at one point in the near past been an Armenian church on that land, historically it is Georgian land, and as such Georgians have an inherent right to this land. Factually, this narrative of Armenian cultural heritage sites just being temporary placeholders on traditionally Georgian land is not always true, and is an example of the manipulation of collective memory.

Historically, there has been a substantial Armenian population in Georgia dating back to the 6th century, with the first Armenian diocese established in Georgia in the 12th century.⁴ In the beginning of the 18th century, Armenians made up 60% of the population of Tbilisi, the capital of Georgia, and in 1817 this number reached its peak at 75.6%, before falling to 36.4% by the end of the 19th century.⁵ Even into the 20th century, the Armenians still made up a significant portion of the population of Georgia, making up 21.3% in 1959 and 14.5% in 1979.⁶ These population statistics show that Armenians have a historically established presence as an ethnic and religious group in Georgia, specifically in Tbilisi, therefore the idea that they are not historically present is a product of collective memory manipulation by political actors.

Using theories on religious nationalism, as well as collective memory as theoretical framework, this thesis will show how the two can work together and be operationalized by political actors to contribute to the marginalization of a religious or ethnic minority within a state.

³ Ibid., 14.

⁴ Satenik Mkrtchian, "Contemporary Armenian Community in Tbilisi," *Iran and the Caucasus*, Vol. 13, No. 2 (2009), pp. 299-300.

⁵ Satenik Mkrtchian, "Contemporary Armenian Community in Tbilisi," *Iran and the Caucasus*, Vol. 13, No. 2 (2009), pp. 299-300.

⁶ Ibid., 301.

Review of Literature

The following literature review will review Armenian Culture in Georgia and International and Intranational Conventions and Laws.

Armenian Culture in Georgia

Armenian culture was once well established in Georgia, but in recent years it has been both appropriated and stolen by the Georgian government and the Georgian Orthodox Church. The discussion of the sources that follow help to demonstrate this.

Scholarly Sources

There does not appear to be a great amount of scholarship on the destruction or appropriation of Armenian cultural heritage sites in Georgia. In *Contemporary Armenian Community in Tbilisi*, Mkrtchian discusses the general atmosphere of Armenian culture in Tbilisi. He writes that in 1844 there were 21 Armenian churches and 65 Armenian priests in Tbilisi, and that today there are only two Armenian churches currently functioning in Tbilisi: St. Gevorg and St. Echmindzin, he adds that St. Gevorg is the center of Little Armenia in Tbilisi, and serves as a place for community gatherings and meetings where people could comfortably speak Armenian and discuss Armenian issues. He goes on to say that the Armenian diocese in Georgia has a problem with its official status in Georgia, as do many other minority religions there. On the topic of cultural appropriation, he says that the Armenian Apostolic Church has petitioned for the return of six Armenian churches in Georgia, and that five of them are in Tbilisi.

In *Edge of Empire*, Rayfield discusses Khojivank, an Armenian cemetery which was destroyed to make way for the largest Georgian Orthodox Church. He states that on 26 June 1865 trade guild members met at the cemetery and declared a strike on shops, inns, cabs, and restaurants. This shows that the cemetery was an important community gathering place and could have contributed to the reason for why it was destroyed. Rayfield also talks about one

of the earliest cases of theft of Armenian cultural property in Georgia. In 1903 General Grigori Golitsyn confiscated Armenian church lands and funds, thus creating a generation of Armenian terrorists and provoking ethnic violence in Tbilisi.⁷ This ethnic violence turned on to Golitsyn himself, when in July 1904 he was stabbed in the head by a group of Armenians, though he did survive.

Hovannisian elaborates on the story of Golitsyn in *Simon Vratzian and Armenian Nationalism*. He says that Armenian nationalism had become very strong in Tbilisi around the turn of the 20th century, and as such Golitsyn convinced Tsar Nicolas II to let him confiscate the properties of the church and place its schools under centralized governmental control. He believed that the network of parish schools under the Church of Armenia were the cause of this nationalism. This furthers the sentiments present in Mkrtchian's article that Armenian churches further foster Armenian culture in Georgia. Although Golitsyn was representing the Russian empire, it still provides important context for the theft of Armenian culture in Georgia.

International Conventions and Local Laws

These sections will look at international conventions on the protection of cultural heritage, as well as domestic cultural heritage laws in both Georgia and Armenia. The domestic building code of Georgia will also be analyzed to show the process a renovation must go through in Georgia.

International Conventions

The focus of this thesis is on the destruction and appropriation of Armenian cultural heritage property within Georgia, and as such it is important to define what cultural property is. Article 1 of the *UNESCO Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the*

⁷ Previously the Caucasus had been governed by a viceroy, but were now being ruled upon by generals who answered to the minister of interior. Golitsyn was appointed by Tsar Nicolas II to be the chief ruler of these generals in 1896. Donald Rayfield, *Edge of Empires: A History of Georgia* (London: Reaktion Books, 2012): 307.

Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property (1970) defines cultural property as property, which on religious or secular grounds, is specifically designated by each state as significant for archeology, prehistory, history, literature, art or science. Additionally, this property must relate to history, which includes the history of science, technology, military and society, or to the life of national leaders, thinkers, scientists, artists, and events of national importance. This last point is of particular interest to this project, as there exists a list of people who either are or were interned in the Khojivank Cemetery in Tbilisi before it was destroyed, and these people can be further researched to determine if they constitute being classified as national leaders, thinkers, scientists, or artists. Article 2 of the same declaration notes that the transfer of ownership of cultural property is one of the main causes of the impoverishment of the cultural heritage of the countries of origin of such property, and Article 3 states that the transfer of ownership of cultural property effected contrary to the provisions adopted under this convention will be illicit. This is relevant for the transfer of church property in Georgia from the Armenian Apostolic Church to the Georgian Orthodox Church.

Article 4 of the UNESCO convention further defines property, which forms part of the cultural heritage of each state. It says that property can be created by the individual or a collective of nationals of the state concerned, and cultural property of importance to the state concerned created within the territory of that state by foreign nationals or stateless persons resident within such territory. This would appear to cover property created by Armenians within Georgia. Article 5 states that states should set up national services which can handle the protection of cultural heritage.

Domestic Laws

Georgia maintains its own laws of cultural heritage protection, entitled the *Law of Georgia on Cultural Heritage Protection*, which were brought into force in 2008. Article 1 of

this states that the purpose of the law is to protect Georgia's cultural heritage and regulate legal relations arising in this field, while Article 2 deals with scope, noting that the law applies to the entire heritage on the territory of Georgia, while also empowering the state to ensure the safety of Georgian cultural heritage abroad. As mandated in the *UNESCO Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export, and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property*, Georgia has established an entity to handle cultural heritage. Article 4 of the Law of Georgia on Cultural Heritage Protection empowers the Ministry of Culture, Monument Protection, and Sport to monitor cultural heritage. Article 5 further establishes their role, stating that the Ministry shall ensure the supervision of cultural heritage protection and will lead and coordinate the uncovering, protection, and promotion of cultural heritage on the territory of Georgia. It will also be responsible for producing a comprehensive inventory of historic areas and will draft regulations for cultural heritage protection areas. Article 15 notes that it is not only the Ministry that is responsible for cultural protection, but that individuals and legal entities are also obligated to protect and take care of cultural heritage. This is relevant because it does not relieve the Georgian Orthodox Church and its members from the responsibility of protecting cultural heritage.

Article 15 covers how a property gets granted the status of a cultural heritage site, saying that the status shall be granted to a property based on its historical or cultural value associated with its age, uniqueness, or authenticity. This is relevant because as was previously mentioned, the Armenian Apostolic Church applied to have one of its churches be listed as a cultural heritage site, eventually having the request denied. Article 44 states that if any activity disturbs cultural heritage or creates a threat within a protection zone, the ministry shall apply to relevant state bodies with a request to restrict, suspend, or terminate such activity. This is relevant to the case because as previous articles mention, construction has occurred which has threatened cultural heritage. Finally, Article 29 is the only article which

directly mentions the Georgian Orthodox Church, saying that the public should be able to enter buildings of public interest, but when it is a building of the Georgian Orthodox Church, religious rights shall prevail over the right of the public for access to the building.

Interestingly, no other religious denomination is mentioned in the text, nor is anything relating to minorities.

The *Law of the Republic of Armenia on Intangible Cultural Heritage* was adopted by the Republic of Armenia in 2009, and provided protection for intangible cultural heritage both within its borders and abroad. Chapter Five of this law deals with the international cooperation of the Republic of Armenia in the field of intangible cultural heritage and preservation of Armenian intangible cultural heritage in foreign states. Article 16 of Chapter 5 states that Armenian intangible cultural heritage in foreign states shall be safeguarded in accordance with the interstate treaties of the Republic of Armenia, within the frameworks of the legislation of the country concerned, the principles and norms of international law.

Building Code

The building code laws in Georgia are also relevant, and are present in a 2011 USAID assessment of Georgian Building Codes. They found that building code in Georgia allows designers, architects, and engineers to use any methods they desire, and that no license is required to practice designing, engineering, or construction. There are two departments in Georgia which issue building permits, The Architectural Building Permit Office and the Construction and Inspection Office. There are five classes of construction projects that these departments handle, with one being the most simple, and five being the most complex, including projects like dams and power plants. Class Five projects are permitted by an office called MoESD. USAID found that not all construction and renovation projects actually apply for permits, as well as finding that certification is granted with minimum inspection and sometimes even without inspection. They also noted that no license or registration is required

for a contractor to build. The Architectural Building Permit Office deals with classes two through four, and the Construction and Inspection Office handles all projects up to class four, as well as handling all inspections for all renovation projects. This code will be important to understand how renovations and construction operates in Georgia.

Summary

Armenian cultural heritage sites are being destroyed and appropriated within the borders of Georgia, and the narrative being pushed in Georgia is that it is part of a reclamation of Georgian territory, however, this may be the result of a manipulation of the collective memory by political actors. This appropriation is also the result of a uniquely religious form of nationalism that exists in Georgia. The next chapter will cover in depth the history of religious conflict between Georgia and Armenia, and how it helped to shape the national image of Georgia as a devoutly orthodox state with Armenia as its heretical neighbor. Following chapters will provide an analysis of the contemporary destruction of Armenian cultural sites in Georgia using news reports, and will apply the international conventions to which Georgia is a signatory party to establish that this destruction and appropriation is a violation of international law.

Chapter 1: Religion in Georgia and Armenia

Religion is of the utmost importance in both Georgia and Armenia, however it is more so exhibited in a sense of feeling than in a demonstration of practice. The two nations exhibit low levels of religiosity when measured by attendance, prayer, and fasting, but overall have very high levels of trust in their respective religious institutions.⁸ In both Georgia and Armenia the army and the church are the two most trusted institutions, and this is a result of both institutions being perceived as protectors of the nation throughout history. Additionally, this intense sense of trust and pride being exhibited towards the church in Georgia and Armenia is a result of each state being home to a church that is exclusive and specific to their nation: the Georgian Orthodox Church, and the Armenian Apostolic Church.⁹ Further strengthening the link between religion and national identity in Georgia is the presence of a figurehead for the Georgian Orthodox Church. Patriarch Ilya II, who is among the most trusted and respected individuals in Georgia, and perceived as an uncorrupt leader.¹⁰ In both Georgia and Armenia religious identity is intrinsically linked with national identity, and this has allowed for a unique form of nationalism to flourish in Georgia, one in which to be

⁸ Robia Charles, "Religiosity and Trust in Religious Institutions: Tales from the South Caucasus (Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia), *Berkeley Program in Soviet and Post-Soviet Studies* (2009), 1.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 23-24.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 25.

Georgian means to be a member of the Georgian Orthodox Church. This chapter will provide a historical analysis for this linkage of Orthodoxy to the Georgian national image, and explore how Georgia's conversion to Christianity and doctrinal schism with Armenia contributed to Georgian nationalism and set the foundation which would allow for the appropriation and destruction of Armenian ecclesiastical heritage sites to occur.

1.1: Origins of Christianity in Georgia

The history of Christianity in Georgia dates back to the years immediately following the crucifixion of Jesus Christ when his apostles spread out across the world to spread his message to new audiences. The Georgian tradition maintains that the apostle Andrew planted the seeds of Christianity in Georgia, and this has always been a major point of pride for the Georgian people. However, this has not always been seen as factual truth by all. Opponents argue that Georgia was an insignificant territory at the time, and as such, would not have attracted apostolic attention.¹¹

Georgian Orthodox tradition states that Andrew came to Georgia, specifically to Samtskhe, performed miracles, demonstrated to the local population the characteristics of Christianity, and eventually baptized the governor of the entire Samdzivari as well as most of the local population.¹² With these newly baptized Christians he left a gift to help them remember the power of Christianity: The Icon of the Holy Virgin. This icon was placed in a church in Atskuri before being moved to Tsikhisjuari, and then finally to Imereti.¹³

When Andrew eventually left Georgia, he appointed a bishop as well as several priests and deacons, and with that the newfound Georgian Church had a hierarchical structure. Allegedly, Andrew came back to Georgia as many as three more times, however,

¹¹ Mamuka Matsaberidze, ed, *A Short History of the Georgian Church* (New York: Troitsa, 2014), 4.

¹² Tamila Mgaloblishvili, ed., *Ancient Christianity in the Caucasus: Iberica Caucasica Volume One* (Surrey, England: Cuzon Press. 1998.), 27.

¹³ Ibid.

this is much harder to prove. Georgian traditions also claim that he brought different disciples with him each time, and the following disciples join Andrew as those speculated to have preached in Georgia: Simon, Mattias, Bartholomew, Thomas, and Thaddeus.¹⁴ This claim of an apostolic presence in Georgia from the very beginning is important, as it gives the church a great deal of authority and legitimacy.

While Georgian nationalists trace the church's origins to Andrew, it really is not until the fourth century that Georgia would become theologically significant. Generally, Western Georgia received Christianity first, with the areas closer to the Black Sea being first to convert on a large scale, followed by those in the Caucasus mountains and the Caspian Sea. Christian burial sites in Mtskheta have been located and dated to the second century, which help to further confirm the early Georgian Christian tradition.¹⁵ The third century brought the first Christian communities to Georgia as the faith grew stronger in the region. In the third century, the church hierarchy was still exclusive to each individual church, there was no region wide religious authority at this time.¹⁶

The fourth century is perhaps the most important in the history of Christianity in Georgia. By 317 Christianity was declared the official state religion in Georgia, and by 324 there was a mass baptism of the Georgian people. The Georgian conversion narrative states that all of this was accomplished by one woman: Nino of Cappadocia.¹⁷ Tradition says that the Lord told St. Nino "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore, ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest" (Matthew 9: 37-38).¹⁸ St. Nino was born in Colossae in 280 CE, which is located present day Turkey and was the target of the

¹⁴ Mamuka Matsaberidze, ed, *A Short History of the Georgian Church* (New York: Troitsa, 2014), 5.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 7-8.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 11-12.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 13-14.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 13-14.

famous Letter of Paul to the Colossians.¹⁹ When she was twelve years old her family sold everything and moved to Jerusalem, however, she was quickly abandoned by her family and left as an orphan. She then had a divine dream in which the Virgin Mary appeared to her and told her to go north and preach the word of Jesus and gave Nino a cross to protect herself. Nino decided to travel north to Ephesus with a noblewoman who had been in Jerusalem visiting holy sites. Nino found herself living in a nunnery in Ephesus for some time until an envoy of Emperor Diocletian arrived. They were seeking to find a bride for the emperor and chose a princess who was living there with her stepmother, Hripsime. All of the women in the nunnery felt that Hripsime's chastity was being threatened, so they fled for the Armenian border. Unfortunately, crossing the border into Armenia would not solve all of their problems. Once there, Armenian King Tiridates learned of Hripsime's presence and decided he wanted her for himself. Upon her refusal, she was martyred along with a number of the other women in their party, however, Nino was able to escape.²⁰ This small anecdote provides an example of Armenia being depicted in a negative light in the Georgian religious tradition.

Nino fled to the mountains of Javakheti, where she settled and began to live on the shores of Lake Paravani. She survived by begging for food from shepherds and fisherman, and often heard them praying to their pagan gods Armazi and Zaden. She was greatly distraught by hearing pagan worship and asked the men where they were from. They informed her that they were from Mtskheta, and she decided that she needed to go there and spread the word of God. She traveled to Mtskheta with a group of Pagans traveling to pay tribute to their god, Armazi, and upon seeing sorcerers, fire worshipers, and seducers on Pompey Bridge she began to cry. When she

¹⁹ David Lang, *Lives and Legends of the Georgian Saints*. Crestwood (New York: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1956), 13-39.

²⁰ Ibid.

arrived in Mtskheta she witnessed a ceremony where Georgian Queen Nana and King Miriam offered sacrifices to the gods Armazi and Gatsi. This greatly upset Nino and she said a prayer to God asking that he allow the whole nation to see God's infinite power, and God sent a hurricane which destroyed the idols and city walls.²¹

After the great hurricane, she moved to the banks of the Kura River and lived in a bramble bush which formed a natural tent. Here she gained her first disciple, Sidonia, the daughter of a Jewish priest. She healed a pagan woman's son in the bush and converted many of the local population. Queen Nana soon became very ill and Nino was asked to come and heal her. Nino said she would heal the queen if she came to her bush, and there she successfully healed the queen. This led the queen to exclaim: "There is no God besides Christ whom this slave girl preaches." After King Mariam got lost in the woods of Tkhoti and a divine light led him out, he decided to convert all of Georgia to Christianity. The king sent a letter to Emperor Constantine asking him to send priests and bishops to baptize the Georgian population, and Constantine happily obliged. The king then asked Constantine for help establishing the faith in Georgia, and Constantine send him a portion of the cross from the crucifixion of Christ as a relic, as well as priests and masons to help build churches. The first church was built in Eursheti, followed by one in Mtskheta. Nino then moved on from Mtskheta and traveled to Kakheti where she converted many more people. She was able to convert the Queen of Kakheti in Bodbe, and it is after this event that she ascended to heaven, thus completing her legacy of bringing Christianity to an entire nation.²²

This foundational story of Georgian Orthodoxy, from its purported apostolic origins to its conversion under St. Nino demonstrates Georgia's long history with religiosity, and provides a national myth for the Georgian people. In this myth Nino, and by proxy Christianity, delivered Georgia from the wicked times of paganism and propoled the state into

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

a new era under Godly rulership. The apostolic origins of Georgia being linked to Andrew are also significant. In the Orthodox tradition St. Andrew is given the name “the First Called” as he was the first follower of Christ, and this ranks him as the highest of apostles, meaning Georgia’s apostolic origins supercede those of all other churches, with the exception of churches whose roots also lie in the missionary work of St. Andrew. Georgia’s exceptionally long link with Christianity have helped to shape the image of Georgia as that of a Christian nation, and this significantly contributed to the evolution of its religious nationalism.

1.2: Origins of Religion in Armenia

While like Georgia, the Armenian church does make claims of apostolic origins, in their case through the apostle Bartholomew, this is not met with much historical fact. In the 5th century narratives of Thaddeus, one of the seventy disciples mentioned in the Gospel of Luke, was said to have been the first notable Christian figure to preach in Armenia, as well as to be martyred there. In the 8th century a narrative began to be popularized that the apostle Bartholomew, who appears in the Gospel of John, also preached in Armenia. Both of these apostles would have been preaching in Armenia in the 1st century C.E., however, as with most stories of apostolic origins, the claims are not easily substantiated.²³

Regardless of if Thaddeus or Bartholomew ever did preach Christianity in Armenia, neither of them had any success in establishing a religious community. For this reason, Gregory the Illuminator is ubiquitously held as the founder of the Armenian church. Gregory was born and raised as Christian in the town of Caesarea in Cappadocia, and in 298 he went to Armenia with Trdat, a pagan, who had been visiting Cappadocia. Once back in Armenia, Trdat was convinced that he should become a Christian when he became struck with an illness after ordering the martyrdom of a group of nuns, who had come to the area fleeing Roman persecution. Gregory the Illuminator was able to heal Trdat of his illnesses, and as a

²³ Robert Thomson, “Mission, Conversion, and Christianization: The Armenian Example,” *Harvard Ukrainian Studies* Vol. 12/13, (1988/1989), 29.

result, Trdat decided to become a Christian, and to convert the entirety of his people. Gregory the Illuminator was sent back to his hometown of Caesarea in Cappadocia to be consecrated as a bishop in 314, and by the time he returned to Armenia pagan shrines had been felled, with Christian churches being built in their place. The central church was established in Ejmiacin (present day Vagharshapat), which was the location where Trdat had previously ordered the nuns to be martyred, and was also near the royal court. With this done, Gregory was able to establish a system of bishoprics, and eventually handed over the leadership of the church to his son.²⁴ Gregory desired to live a more solitary life, so after leaving the church to his son Aristakes, he moved to the Armenian province of Daranalik to live the rest of his days in the mountain Caves of Mane.²⁵ It is in the Caves of Mane that we find a connection to the Georgian story of conversion to Christianity. The Caves of Mane were named after a woman named Mane, who along with the Georgian convertor Nino, was a member of the group of women that were traveling with Saint Hripsime. Mane had spent time in the caves before eventually being martyred while traveling with Nino and Hripsime.²⁶ While this connection is not particularly significant, it does provide another example of the close relationship that the Armenian and Georgian churches once shared.

The Georgian and Armenian Christian origin stories show that both Georgia and Armenia have similar beginnings to their churches, both were converted by miracle workers from Cappadocia. Their churches were similar, and they were allies for many years, until eventually choices made over the rulings of the Council of Chalcedon would drive them apart. Armenia is regarded as the first state in the world to have officially converted to Christianity, with Georgia following them shortly thereafter. When the purported apostolic origins and conversion stories are considered along with this fact, it becomes clear that

²⁴ Thomson, "Mission, Conversion, and Christianization", 30-31.

²⁵ Moses Khorenats'i, *History of the Armenians* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978), 248.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 248.

Georgia and Armenia have about as long and storied relationships with Christianity that a state could have. Being two of the first states to convert to Christianity and maintaining that image into the contemporary period has shaped the national image of both Georgia and Armenia to be intrinsically linked with their respective Christian traditions.

1.3: Doctrinal Schism Between Georgia and Armenia

While both Georgia and Armenia maintain two of the oldest Christian traditions in the world, both adopted Christianity as a state religion in the first half of the fourth century, the two churches have long been on opposite sides of orthodoxy, dating back to the Council of Chalcedon in 451. The council was one of the foundational ecumenical councils of the early Christian church which helped to establish which beliefs would be orthodox. Specifically, at this council the nature of Jesus was discussed, and whether he was of one nature or of two. The orthodox position that was established was that Christ was of two natures, and this position became known as Chalcedonism. The opposing position, which broke with orthodoxy and believed that Christ was only of one nature, was known as miaphysitic. Immediately this did not have an impact on the Georgian and Armenian churches, but after several church councils of their own in the Caucasus in the sixth century, Georgia ultimately sided with Chalcedonism, and Armenia with Miaphysitism.

This sections on the doctrinal divide between Georgia and Armenia will explore why the two nations, previously close regional allies, went their separate ways over the discussion of the divinity of Christ, and show that Armenia sided with miaphysitism over a distrust of the Byzantine empire, and in an effort to preserve their Christian tradition in the face of its potential destruction at the hands of the Persians. By doing this, this section will show where the doctrinal split between Georgia and Armenia occurred, which resulted in each state practicing a different form of christianity, and resulted in Armenia having religious authority over Georgia for a number of years. During this period of authority over Georgia, Armenia

attempted to mandate the use of its language and implement its culture into Georgia through the church. The Georgian retaliation to this incursion was a key contributing factor to the foundation of its tradition of religious nationalism, as well as an aversion to the Armenian Apostolic Church which has resulted in the appropriation and destruction of Armenian ecclesiastical cultural heritage sites in the contemporary period.

1.3.1: Divine vs. Human Nature, and Early Ecumenical Councils

The Council of Chalcedon has its origins in the debate between *Christotokos* vs. *Theotokos*, and which of the two terms should be used when referring to the Virgin Mary. Eutychus was the main voice behind the position of *Theotokos*, which placed importance on Mary being known as the “Mother of God”, while Nestorius and the term *Christotokos* defined the Virgin Mary as as “Mother of Christ.”²⁷ The Bishop of Alexandria, Cyril, declared that *Theotokos* was the proper term and that Nestorius should revise his position, and this declaration was solidified at the Council of Ephesus in 431 C.E., in which *Theotokos* was proclaimed to be most in line with Nicene doctrine.²⁸

Immediately following this, the debate over the nature, or natures, of Jesus Christ rose to prominence. In the 440’s Pope Leo wrote the *Tome of Leo*, in which he proclaimed that Christ was one single person, but with two natures, divine and human. The other side of this debate would argue that Christ was of one nature, which was a combination of the human and the divine.²⁹ When Emperor Marcian ascended to the throne in 450 this position was strengthened with imperial support, but would need to be solidified with an ecumenical council, which took place in 451 C.E in Chalcedon.³⁰

²⁷ Habit Amirav, *Authority and Performance: Sociological Perspectives on the Council of Chalcedon AD 451* (Gottingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2015), 32.

²⁸ Ibid., 33.

²⁹ Ibid., 33.

³⁰ Ibid., 34.

1.3.2: The Council of Chalcedon

Chalcedon was a suburb of Constantinople, and the council was to take place at the Church of St. Euphemia, which sat on the bank of the Bosphorus strait.³¹ There were initially plans to host the council in Nicea, but the site near Constantinople was chosen, possibly in an act of environmental psychology, a theory in which the location, structure, and property of places can influence people's actions. In this case, the idea would be that by choosing a location that was so close to the seat of Emperor Marcian, as well as being the church of a martyr, it would subconsciously influence those in attendance to side with the emperor and orthodoxy.³²

Ultimately, whether due to environmental psychology or not, the will of the emperor was reflected in the outcome of the council. A new definition of faith regarding the nature of Jesus Christ was established, with the chosen wording being that Christ was “in two natures.” This new definition did not completely deny the implication that the humanity of Jesus Christ is separable from the divine nature, which is present in the *Theotokos* definition, it did completely deny the idea that the divine and human nature of Christ is mixed into one nature. Neither Nestorians nor Eutychians, who represented the two opposite extremes of the debate, were particularly pleased with the outcome, but both Emperor Marcian and Pope Leo were, and they had hoped for a sound closure to the issue, with it being established that a two natured Christ was the official orthodox position, with believers of a one natured Christ being heretical.³³ Those who followed the ruling of the Council of Chalcedon became known as Chalcedonic, and those who opposed it believing in only one nature of Christ, would come to be known as miaphystic.

³¹ Ibid., 38.

³² Ibid., 38-39.

³³ Ibid., 33.

1.3.3: Effects of Chalcedon in the Caucasus and the Council of Dvin.

Several factors played a partial role in Armenia not ultimately accepting the position of Chalcedon. Firstly, Nestorian propaganda had been spreading throughout Armenia at the hands of the Syro-Iranian church in the decades preceding the Council of Chalcedon in 451, which predisposed the Armenian religious society to the ideas of Miaphysitism.³⁴ Secondly was the issue of language. The Armenian language was developed at the beginning of the 5th century C.E, and the *Tome of Leo* was so poorly translated into the Armenian language that it appeared to support the Nestorian tradition.³⁵ The third factor which helped to predispose the Armenians to Miaphysitism was Emperor Marcian himself. He was profoundly unpopular with the Armenian people due to his refusal to provide them with military aid to protect themselves from the invading Persian forces, as an attempt to avoid an empire-wide all out war with the Persians.³⁶ Despite the emperor's good intentions to save the entire empire from war, it did not play well with the Armenian population. These factors worked together to lay the foundation for the Armenian church to become schismatic and part ways with orthodoxy.

The churches of the Caucasus did not make any immediate resolutions in the immediate aftermath of the Council of Chalcedon, this would come later, at their own council. The bishops of Armenia, Kartli, and Albania met for the first Council of Dvin in 505, and at this council they chose to express doctrinal unity with the empire.³⁷ However, at this point in time empire had drifted back into a Miaphysite position with the publication of the *Henotikon* in 482. In this publication, the Emperor Zeno writes: "He, having descended, and become incarnate of the Holy Spirit and Mary, the Virgin and Mother of God, is one and not two; for we affirm that both his miracles, and the sufferings which he voluntarily endured in

³⁴ Cyril Toumanoff, "Christian Caucasasia Between Byzantium and Iran: New Light From Old Sources," *Traditio* Vol. 10 (1954): 137.

³⁵ Toumanoff, "Christian Caucasasia Between Byzantium and Iran," 138.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid., 142.

the flesh, are those of a single person.”³⁸ This clearly takes a Miaphysitic stance, and was an attempt to reunify the Christian world, which had been somewhat divided after the rulings of the council of Chalcedon.

However, this stance of reunification would not be long lived. When Justin I ascended to the throne in 518 he rescinded on the words of Zeno in the *Henotikon*, and returned the empire to a fully Chalcedonic position.³⁹ Word does not appear to have traveled fast in the Caucasus, as the Second Council of Dvin was held in 555 C.E, and it was at this council that the Armenian church denounced the rulings of the Council of Chalcedon, and it can also be seen as the year in which the Armenian national church was established, independent of a ruling power.⁴⁰

Initially, Georgia mirrored Armenia in terms of the rulings of the Council of Chalcedon. After a late 5th century war with Iran, the Georgian King Vakhtang married a relative of Emperor Zeno, and subsequently brought his church in line with that of Byzantine church, and adopted Zeno’s *Henotikon*.⁴¹ There is no evidence to suggest that Georgian representatives were present at the Second Council of Dvin in 555 C.E, where Armenia officially adopted Miaphysitism. Georgia first shifted to a Chalcedonic position in the 580’s when Byzantine Emperor Maurice led successful military campaigns in the Caucasus and was able to weaken Iranian influence enough for Georgia to regain autonomy, and in this state, with their ties being very close with Byzantine, they adopted the Chalcedonic position.⁴² This would, however, be temporarily short lived. In 598 C.E, Georgian King Stepanoz switched from this Chalcedonic position to a Miaphysitic one in order to curry favor with the Iranians.

³⁸ Evagrius Scholasticus, *Ecclesiastical History* (AD431-594), translated by E. Walford (1846). Book 3, Chapter XIV, Line 138.

³⁹ Toumanoff, “Christian Caucasia Between Byzantium and Iran,” 145.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ronald Grigor Suny, *The Making of the Georgian Nation* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988): 24-25.

⁴² Suny, *The Making of the Georgian Nation*, 26.

He solidified this by placing a Miaphysite in the position of Catholicos of Kartli-Iberia, Kireon I.⁴³ However, complications arose when Kireon I actually changed his beliefs and adopted Chalcedonic beliefs. This was the beginning of the end of the miaphysitic belief in Georgia, as Kireon I was excommunicated by the Armenian Church at the Council of Dvin (608). It is important to remember that at this time Armenia was still in charge of the Georgian Church by way of Persian rule. The final acceptance of Chalcedonism in Georgia would come courtesy of Byzantine Emperor Heraclius. Heraclius led a successful campaign against both the Persians and Georgian King Stepanoz, and with Stepanpoz's departure went monophysitism. From here on out Georgia was a fully Chalcedonic territory and conformed to the Orthodoxy of the Byzantine Church, while Armenia remained anti-Chalcedonic.⁴⁴ Georgia became a place of refuge for Chalcedonic sympathizers in the region. Armenian Chalcedonians fled to Georgia and founded churches there, and even more came to Georgia when the Persian church in Ctesiphon prohibited Chalcedonism.⁴⁵

One argument for why Armenia accepted miaphysitism is that it was an act to protect themselves and their Christian tradition. Geographically speaking, Armenia was closer to the Persian empire borders than Georgia, and as such the Persian empire was more of a threat to the Armenians. Some sources suggest that accepting miaphysitism was the only thing that Armenia could do to remain at peace with the Persians.⁴⁶ Georgia did not have to take this step because historically they had been closer to the Byzantines, and as such, were able to align with them.

This visible split in allegiances, with Georgia aligning itself with the west, and Armenia with the east is also reflected in the contemporary political atmosphere. Public

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ronald Grigor Suny, *The Making of the Georgian Nation* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988): 26-27.

⁴⁵ Donald Rayfield, *Edge of Empires: A History of Georgia* (London: Reaktion Books, 2012): 53.

⁴⁶ Donald Rayfield, *Edge of Empires*. 52.

opinion polls conducted in 2017 show that 45% of Georgians support their country joining the European Union, compared to 30% of Armenians. When asked to choose which economic union would best benefit the future economic development of their country 25% of Armenians suggested joining the Eurasian Economic Union, led by Russia, compared to 6% who stated Armenia should join the European Union, led by Western European countries. When asked the same question, 10% of Georgians felt that their nation should join the Eurasian Economic Union led by Russia, while 29% said they would rather join the European Union, led by Western European countries. Respondents in Georgia and Armenia were also asked to list the “main friend” of their country: 63% of Armenians listed Russia as the closest ally of their country, compared to 6% of Georgians who said the same of Russia. 25% of Georgians listed the United States as the main friend of their country, compared to just 1% of Armenians who felt that the United States was their close ally. When asked who the main enemy of their country was, 40% of Georgians listed Russia, compared to just 2% of Armenians who saw Russia as a threat.⁴⁷

The data from these public opinion polls show that the doctrinal schism that occurred in the late antiquity have had long term and long reaching effects. Armenia aligned itself with the east as Russia, and Georgia with the west, manifested in the form of the United States and the European Union, and these ties have persisted to the present day. Georgia and Armenia have fundamentally different outlooks on who their allies are, and this has prevented a closer relation to the two states and has contributed to the environment that has allowed for the destruction and appropriation of Armenian culture to occur.

⁴⁷ Caucasus Research Resource Center, *Caucasus Barometer 2017 Regional Dataset (Armenia and Georgia)*, 2017.

1.3.4: The Consequences of Armenia's Miaphysitic Position, and the Role of Mazdaism

Armenia's acceptance of a Miaphysitic position did come along with a certain amount of privileges for them. Persia, which ruled much of the Caucasus at the time, was initially insistent on its controlled territory adopting its belief system, Mazdaism, however, eventually they came around and were accepting of Miaphysitism, as they believed it to be closer in nature to their Mazdaism than Chalcedonism was.⁴⁸ By 614, when Georgia had already firmly reverted to a Chalcedonic position, the Persian overlords made it compulsory for all churches in the Caucasus to accept and convert to the Armenian miaphysitic position. Along with their religious beliefs, the Armenians also attempted to mandate the usage of Armenian language in church services, which, had it been successful, could have destroyed Georgian culture as we know it today. The Georgian tradition has a story that this Georgian culture and language was saved by a group of Assyrian monks, led by Ione of Zedazeni, who came into the territory of Georgia to ensure the Georgian language was continued to be used in church services.⁴⁹ The specifics of how these Assyrian monks persevere the usage of the Georgian language in church services is not noted.

Several years later, beginning in the 630's, Byzantine Emperor Heracles began to seize territory in western Georgia. He mandated that services be delivered in Greek, and like Persia, made an alliance with the Armenian church. He is believed to be of Armenian origins, and established an agreement between Byzantium and the Armenian Church, once again placing Armenia in charge of Georgia. He also soon began the persecution of non-conforming Christians in the Georgian region.⁵⁰ This put the Georgian Church in a precarious position, and led them to reach out to one of the most powerful religious institutions in the region for support: The Church of Antioch.

⁴⁸ Matsaberidze, *A Short History*, 22.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 23.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 25-26.

The leaders of the Georgian Church decided to address the Patriarch of Antioch to seek the official autocephalous status for the Georgian Church in order to prevent a foreign church, such as Armenia, from ruling over it.⁵¹ Emperor Constantine Pogonatos called a church council in Constantinople to discuss the matter, which eventually decided to grant the Georgian Church autocephaly. The emperor also declared that the head of the Georgian Church would now have the title of Patriarch, set borders for the church, and granted the Georgian Church the right to bless their own myrrh locally. Ultimately the Unified Patriarchate of Georgia was established, but would only exist until the middle of the eighth century.⁵²

A war broke out between Byzantium in 1021, and would carry on until 1054. Georgia faced the issue of a portion of its population siding with Byzantium in this conflict, as they saw Byzantium as the “pillar of Christianity”, and their rulers were seen as direct executors of the will of God.⁵³ At the same time, Byzantium declared the Georgian Church unorthodox and heretical, and began persecuting Georgian monasteries and monks. Byzantium’s attitude toward Georgia would abruptly change when the Seljuk Turks invaded in the second half of the eleventh century and they needed a strong ally to their east.⁵⁴ A truce was soon signed in 1054 which ended the persecutions of Georgian monks.

Georgia sent its king, Bagrat, and the highest church authority, Giorgi Matasmindeli, to Constantinople to negotiate with Peter III, Patriarch of Antioch. Matasmindeli was eventually able to convince Peter III to recognize the rights of the Patriarchate of the Georgian Church, but unfortunately Peter died soon after and they would have to renegotiate with his successor, Theodosius, who felt that the Georgian Church should be subordinate to

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid., 27.

⁵³ Ibid., 36.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 38.

Antioch.⁵⁵ Theodosius' argument was that only a church established by an apostle should be autocephalous, and as the church in Antioch was established by Peter, it should rule over the Georgian Church. This led Matasmindeli to convince Theodosius that the Georgian Church was, in fact, established by the Apostle Andrew. Matasmindeli told Theodosius that Antioch should actually be subordinate to Georgia as a result of Andrew being the first apostle to Christ, thus superseding Peter in ranking. This was enough to convince Theodosius to recognize the autocephaly of Georgia.⁵⁶

This story of Georgian autocephalacy is also present in the 11th century text *The Life of George the Hagiorite*. In this story, the Georgian church is autocephalous, but the Patriarch of Antioch questions its validity, and George is tasked with defending the claim. To do so, he delivers the following quote to the Patriarch:

“Most Reverend Lord, your words are: ‘I sit upon the throne of Peter, the chief of the Apostles.’ But we are the heirs and the flock of him who was first called –that is Andrew – and who called his brother; by him we were converted and enlightened. What is more, one of the twelve Holy Apostles, namely Simeon the Canaanite, is buried in our land, in Abkhazia, at a place called Nikopsia. Through these Holy Apostles we received baptism; and since we came to know the One God, we have never renounced him, nor has our nation ever turned aside into heretical ways...We stand firmly based on this foundation of Orthodoxy and on the precepts which were proclaimed by those Holy Apostles...Reverend Lord, it is also fitting that he who is called should submit to him who calls him, so that it behooves Peter to submit to Andrew, who called him – likewise it behooves Peter to submit to Andrew.”⁵⁷

This quote is a definitive defense of all of Georgian Orthodoxy. It quells any questions or doubts that may be had about the right of Georgia to be autocephalous while also acknowledging Georgia's long-standing commitment to following a strict Orthodox line without heresy. It is possible that his statement about Georgia never turning towards heresy is a nod to Georgia's strong Chalcedonic history, as opposed to the monophysitic ways of its

⁵⁵ Matsaberidze, 38.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Wachtang Djobadze, *Materials for the Study of Georgian Monasteries in the Western Environs of Antioch on the Orontes* (Louvain, Belgium: Imprimerie Orientaliste, 1976), 56.

neighbor, Armenia. In an almost comical turn of events, George the Hagiorite goes so far as to suggest that the Church of Antioch should actually be subordinate to the Georgian Orthodox Church, while this was almost certainly a statement made out of jest rather than a serious request, George does have a point, and is able to turn Antioch's argument for authority on its head.

The story reiterates the claims of the Apostle Andrew in Georgia, and by stating that he supersedes even Peter, who the church in Antioch claims as their founder, the story puts forth claims that the Georgian Orthodox Church is superior to that of nearly every Orthodox church in the world. This story provides an example of ethnic election, in the sense that the Georgian people and their form of Orthodoxy is the ascendant form of Christianity, and that all other traditions should follow the example that the Georgians set. The privilege of ethnic election is bestowed only upon those whose lifestyle is an expression of sacred values, and the story of George the Hagiorite and Georgian autocephalacy, in concert with Georgia's Chalcedonic tradition, typifies this sanctified life and justifies Georgia's ethnic election as a chosen people.⁵⁸ The origins of modern nationalism lie within the ancient stories of "chosen people" and ethnic elections, and help to explain how Georgia's christian history explain the strong sense of religious nationalism that exists today.⁵⁹

1.4: Long Lasting Effects of the Late Antique Period

The above mentioned events which precipitated from Armenia's Miaphysitic position shows the struggle the faced at nearly every turn with nearby neighbor Armenia. The Armenian church was historically always seeking to establish dominance over the Georgian Orthodox Church, and this is especially evidenced in the discussed cases of Armenian attempts to remove the Georgian language from church services, and an attempt to establish rule over the Georgian Orthodox Church as a whole through Persian authority. The Byzantine

⁵⁸ Anthony Smith, *Myths and Memories of the Nation*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 130.

⁵⁹ Anthony Smith, *Myths and Memories of the Nation*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 141.

aggressions in Georgia with Armenian ties led Georgia to push for autocephaly for their church, which they were eventually granted. This instilled a sense of pride and independence in Georgians that contributed to the creation of a national image rooted in an independent Georgian Orthodox Church and left them averse to intrusions from foreign religious bodies, particularly the Armenian Church. During this period the dominant idea emerged that to be Georgian was to be a member of the Georgian Orthodox Church, and it was the evolution and acceptance of this image that contributed to the complacency in the destruction of Armenian cultural heritage sites in Georgia.

Chapter 2: The Destruction of Armenian Culture Sites in Georgia

Due to the presence of a thriving Armenian community, in the early 12th century an Armenian diocese headquarter in Georgia's capital of Tbilisi was established.⁶⁰ In 1817 the Armenian population reached its peak in Tbilisi, making up 75.6% of the population of the capitol city.⁶¹ This number has gradually fallen each year and now is in the single digits. As this number has fallen, Armenian cultural sites in Georgia have been erased and destroyed at an alarming rate. This erasure of culture of a neighbouring state sets a dangerous precedent, and this chapter will analyze cultural destruction that has occurred in Georgia.

2.1: A Tradition of Cultural Destruction in the Caucasus

The South Caucasus region is no stranger to cultural destruction between its three nations: Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan. Armenia and Azerbaijan have been locked in a brutal conflict in the Nagorno-Karabakh region since 1988 which has seen tens of thousands of lives lost as well as the loss of thousands of cultural heritage sites. The Armenian cemetery at Djulfa in the Azerbaijani enclave of Nakhichevan was once home to over 10,000 khachkars, but over the years thousands of them have been destroyed.⁶² In 2005 members of the Azerbaijani military were filmed destroying Djulfa with sledgehammers and discarding what they destroyed in the Araxes river. Satellite imagery showed that by 2009 the area was

⁶⁰ Satenik Mkrtchian, "Contemporary Armenian Community in Tbilisi," *Iran and the Caucasus*, Vol. 13, No. 2 1 (2009), pp. 300.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Khachkars are Armenian crosses that are carved from stone by craftspeople, and are common in Armenia as well as locations containing members of the Armenian diaspora. They are an important facet of worship for Armenians and are often memorials for deceased members of the community. They are generally around 1.5 meters in height, with a cross in the middle on top of a background consisting of elements of the following: the sun, the wheel of eternity, or carvings of saints or animals. No two khachkars are the same, and they are representative of the craftsman who created it. UNESCO, *Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage*, Fifth Session, 19 November 2010, 9-10.

completely flattened and empty.⁶³ Armenia has also taken to the destruction of Azerbaijani cultural sites, with the destruction of the Aga-Dede mosque and cemetery in the Masis region of Armenia.⁶⁴ The destruction of culture between Armenia and Azerbaijan has been well documented in scholarship, propelled by the ongoing war between the two nations, but what has been relatively ignored is the destruction of Armenian cultural heritage sites in Georgia.

2.2: The History of the Armenian Community in Georgia

Historically Georgia has been a multicultural country but it has been slowly creeping towards a homogenous state in the modern period, in part due to Soviet era population policies. The history of the Armenians in Georgia dates to the late 6th, early 7th century, but migration of Armenians to Georgia drastically increased after the fall of the Armenian Bagratuni state, and the capture of their capital city of Ani by the Byzantines.⁶⁵ In the late 12th century the Armenian community in Georgia had become so sizeable that the Armenian Apostolic Church established a diocese in Tbilisi, the Georgian capital. The Armenians living in Tbilisi at this time had full rights, and were active participants in Georgian political, economic, and cultural life.⁶⁶

Armenian migration persisted at a steady rate, and by the end of the 18th century when out of the Georgian capital Tbilisi's 20,000 citizens, 12,000 of them were Armenians. By this time many Armenians were now second and third generation descendents of immigrants, and were considered to be "locals." This is a testament to how well integrated

⁶³ Dale Sawa, "Monumental Loss: Azerbaijan and the 'Worst Cultural Genocide of the 21st century'" *The Guardian*, 1 March 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2019/mar/01/monumental-loss-azerbaijan-cultural-genocide-khachkars>.

⁶⁴ Tamir Taghizadeh, "Armenia is Wiping Out Azerbaijani Cultural Heritage" *The Guardian*, 2 September 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/sep/02/armenia-is-wiping-out-azerbaijani-cultural-heritage>.

⁶⁵ Mkrtchian, "Contemporary Armenian Community in Tbilisi," 299.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 300.

the Armenian community in Georgia was at this time.⁶⁷ This was also the period in which many Armenian churches were being built in Georgia.

Armenian population numbers in Tbilisi peaked in 1817 at 75.6%, and from that point on decreased. In the 1830's it was at 65%, the 1850's 54%, 1880's 47.7%, and at the end of the 19th century the Armenian community in Tbilisi made up only 36.4%.⁶⁸ Despite having declining population numbers, the Armenian community in Georgia still held an influential role. Armenians in this period generally lived in cities and worked in trades and crafts, while Georgians were mainly peasants and landowners. By the end of the 19th century 62% of Tbilisi's trade and industrial businesses were owned by Armenians, and throughout the 19th century there were successive Armenian mayors in the Georgian capital city of Tbilisi, with the home of one of these mayors, eventually becoming used as the City Hall of Tbilisi. The personal library of one of these mayors would be donated to the city upon his death and become the central Public Library of Tbilisi.⁶⁹

The above examples showcase the importance of the Armenian community and Georgia, and show how well ingrained the community has been in Tbilisi for centuries. However, in more recent years the Armenian population numbers have continued to fall, and with the fall in population has also come a natural fall in influence. In the 2014 census of Georgia, Georgians make up 86.8% of the population and Armenians make up only 4.5%.⁷⁰ The Armenian population has declined significantly, in the 1959 census they made up 11% of the population. In fact, every ethnic minority has declined in population since the 1959 census with the exception of Azerbaijanis, while Georgians have been growing. They made

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid..

⁶⁹ Ibid., 300-301.

⁷⁰ National Statistics Office Georgia (GEOSTAT), "2014 General Population Census," http://geostat.ge/cms/site_images/_files/english/population/Census_release_ENG_2016.pdf.

up just 64% in the 1959 census compared to the 86.8% they represent today.⁷¹ For religion, Georgian Orthodoxy makes up 83.4% while Islam makes up 10.7% and Armenian Apostolic makes up 2.9%.⁷² These statistics show that Georgia is trending towards a homogeneous state where the nation is made up of only those of their nationality and religion, but it should not be ignored that historically Georgia has been host to a populous and thriving Armenian community.

2.3: The Destruction of Armenian Ecclesiastical Sites in Tbilisi

Currently there are only two Armenian Apostolic Churches that are actively functioning in Tbilisi, St. Gevorg and St. Echmiadzin, with the former being the centerpiece of the Armenian community in Tbilisi. This is a drastic reduction from the pre-Soviet period in Georgia when twenty-two of the Armenian churches in Tbilisi were destroyed, six were Georgianized by Georgian Orthodox Church authorities, and seven remain in dire condition.

Before the rule of the Soviets in Georgia, Tandoyants Church was the centrepiece of the Armenian community in Georgia. However, in recent years the roof has collapsed and two of the four walls are nearly completely destroyed.⁷³ Renovations began on the church in 3 November 2017, however they were not done by the Armenian Diocese of Georgia, but by the Georgian Orthodox Church, who the had been gifted the property by the Georgian government in 2016. In December 2015, before the church was transferred, the Armenian Diocese of Georgia applied to the National Agency of Cultural Heritage Preservation in Georgia to try and grant the church the status of immovable cultural monument, but they

⁷¹ “Всероссийская перепись населения 1959 года. Национальный состав населения по республикам СССР” (“All-Union census of 1959. The national composition of the population in the republics of the USSR”), http://www.demoscope.ru/weekly/ssp/sng_nac_59.php?reg=8.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Hauer, Neil, and Bradley Jardine, “Georgian Orthodox Church takes aim at Armenian churches,” *eurasianet.org*, <https://eurasianet.org/georgian-orthodox-church-takes-aim-at-armenian-churches>.

never received feedback on the application.⁷⁴ This caused controversy because the Armenian Diocese of Georgia still claims the property as its own while the Georgian Orthodox Church claims that they are the rightful owner of the property because nineteenth century documents indicate that Tandoyants church stands on the grounds of a small Georgian church which was destroyed by Persian forces in 1622.⁷⁵ Georgian maps from 1913 and 1924 do cite the building as an Armenian church, but it was closed in 1927 during the Soviet occupation by the Tiflis Executive Committee Economic Sub-Division, and they used it as a movie theatre and a yard keepers club.⁷⁶ The Georgian Orthodox Church's current plans are excavate and clean the site before eventually building a new Georgian church on the ruins of the old one.⁷⁷

Another example is the Shamkoretsots church, also in Tbilisi. This church was damaged in a 1989 earthquake followed by subsequent fires in 2002 and 2012. The church has sat in decay ever since, and was the largest religious building in Georgia until it was usurped by the Sameba Cathedral in 2004.⁷⁸ The Sameba Cathedral itself is the subject of a major case of cultural erasure. Before the church was constructed as the home of the Georgian Orthodox Church and the largest religious building in the country it was Khojivank cemetery. This cemetery was was home to a multitude of famous Armenian writers and poets. While the cemetery still exists in a much smaller capacity, much of it was razed during construction for Sameba Cathedral, with hundreds of tombstones being desecrated and destroyed.⁷⁹

Another less extreme example is the Church of Surb Nshan in Tbilisi. It is located very near a sixth century Georgian Orthodox Church and when the Armenian diocese made

⁷⁴ "Government of Georgia Transfers Tandoyants Temple to Orthodox Church," *tdi.ge*, <https://www.tdi.ge/en/news/495-government-georgia-transferred-tandoyants-temple-orthodox-church>.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Hauer, Neil, and Bradley Jardine, "Georgian Orthodox Church takes aim at Armenian churches," *eurasianet.org*, <https://eurasianet.org/georgian-orthodox-church-takes-aim-at-armenian-churches>.

⁷⁹ Satenik Mkrtchian, "Contemporary Armenian Community in Tbilisi," *Iran and the Caucasus*, Vol. 13, No. 2 (2009), pp. 309.

an effort to clean up and restore the church several years ago the Georgia Orthodox Church forbade them from making the necessary renovations.⁸⁰ St. Gevorg or Mughni Church built in 1356 collapsed in 2009 and has sat in disrepair ever since. Yerevantsots St. Minas Church, built in 1790, was privatised and repurposed for a use other than a church. The Shamkhoretsonts St. Asdtvatsatsin Church and the Surb Nshan church are in danger of being completely destroyed.⁸¹

2.4: The Destruction of Armenian Ecclesiastical Sites Outside of Tbilisi

The Nnjman Sourb Astvatzatzin Church exists in the village of Nakhshigora, which is thirty kilometers west of Tbilisi. The church was built in 1835, but in 1996 the churches Armenian inscriptions were replaced with Georgian ones.⁸² The Sourb Astvatzatzin Church located in Shindis village, fifteen kilometers south of Tbilisi was constructed between 1866 and 1873, and was appropriated in 1998. The Armenian language inscription located above the entrance to the church was removed and replaced with a Georgian iconographic illustration.⁸³ The St. Gevorg Monastery in the village of Telet was constructed in 1681, and has had its Armenian inscriptions removed. One example is a khachkar engraving that is present at the church, which had the Armenian lettering behind the cross removed in 1997, while the cross was left intact.⁸⁴ The church also suffered the loss of marble slabs featuring Armenian language inscriptions, these were removed in 1990.⁸⁵

⁸⁰ Hauer, Neil, and Bradley Jardine, "Georgian Orthodox Church takes aim at Armenian churches," *eurasianet.org*, <https://eurasianet.org/georgian-orthodox-church-takes-aim-at-armenian-churches>.

⁸¹ "The Problem of the Return of Armenian Churches in Georgian to the Armenian Diocese in Georgia Issues Related to the Tandoyants Church," *armenianchurch.ge*, <http://armenianchurch.ge/en/news/articles/69-articles/1603-tandoyanc-eluit>.

⁸² "Nnjman Sourb Astvatzatzin Church, Nakhshigora Village, 1835." Research on Armenian Architecture - raa.am, http://www.raa.am/Jard/Georgia/Nnjman_2_E.htm.

⁸³ "Sourb Astvatzatzin Church, Shindis Village, 1866-1873." Research on Armenian Architecture - raa.am, http://www.raa.am/Jard/Georgia/Shindis_E_2.htm.

⁸⁴ "St. Gevorg Monastery of Telet Village," Research on Armenian Architecture - raa.am, http://www.raa.am/Jard/Georgia/Telet_E.htm

⁸⁵ "St. Gevorg Monastery of Telet Village," Research on Armenian Architecture - raa.am, http://www.raa.am/Jard/Georgia/Telet_E_2.htm

2.5: The Reaction of the Armenian Apostolic Church

The Armenian Apostolic Church Diocese of Georgia has spoken on the issue, recently releasing a statement in which they expressed concern over the treatment of their religious buildings in the territory of Georgia. They cite their own historical presence in country, dating back to the 5th century and articulate the idea that the church is much more than just a church, but the central point of a community. Since 1914 more than 400 Armenian schools, culture and philanthropic institutions, and hospitals have been attached to Armenian churches in Georgia and have provided services to the minority group.⁸⁶

The Armenian diocese feels that due to the absence of laws on restitution in Georgia, the Armenian Diocese of Georgia does not have the ability to protect its rights. They will continue to appeal to the Georgian authorities to have their property returned and to make sure no more of their places of worship will be demolished or ruined. The Armenian Diocese of Georgia feels like the current situation in Georgia is comparable to the Bolshevik seizure of churches in the 1920's. On this they said: "before the eyes of the Georgian Armenians the houses of faith built by our ancestors continue to be robbed" and "twice plundered: for the first time during the Soviet occupation, and the second time, in independent Georgia."⁸⁷

In their statement, the Armenian Apostolic Church Diocese of Georgia talks about one of the most important consequences of the cultural destruction that has befallen Armenian churches in Georgia: "Because these architectural monuments are not only the cultural heritage of Armenian people, but also the cultural heritage of our country, Georgia; destruction of these monuments leads to the distortion of the historical portrait of

⁸⁶ "The Problem of the Return of Armenian Churches in Georgian to the Armenian Diocese in Georgia Issues 11 Related to the Tandoyants Church," *armenianchurch.ge*, <http://armenianchurch.ge/en/news/articles/69-articles/1603-tandoyanc-eluit>.

⁸⁷ Hauer, Neil, and Bradley Jardine, "Georgian Orthodox Church takes aim at Armenian churches," *eurasianet.org*, <https://eurasianet.org/georgian-orthodox-church-takes-aim-at-armenian-churches>.

multinational Georgia.”⁸⁸ As shown by the population statistics in this chapter, Armenians are a historically well established ethnic minority in Georgia, and Georgia as a whole has not had a racially homogenous past, and pushing the narrative that Georgia is, and always has been exclusively a country of Georgians and Georgian Orthodox parishioners, and any other narrative would be a manipulation of the collective memory.

Another important point is brought up in the above quote from the Armenian Apostolic Church Diocese of Georgia, and that is while the heritage of Armenians in Georgia is Armenian, the fact remains that their citizenship is Georgian. Whether the Georgian Orthodox Church and Georgian government like it or not, these Armenian churches that have been built in Georgia are part of the Georgian story, and anything else would be a disservice to the Georgian historical narrative.

2.6: The Ruinous Effects of Cultural Destruction

The destruction of cultural heritage has far reaching negative effects throughout society, and is occurring in every corner of the globe, from the destruction of tombs and temples by Islamic extremist groups in the Middle East, to the eradication of native culture and communities in the United States. Just because the destruction and appropriation of Armenian cultural heritage sites is happening on a smaller scale than the more notable examples, and is even overshadowed in the South Caucasus region by the mutual carnage being carried out by Azerbaijan and Armenia does not mean it should be ignored and allowed to acquiesce. The senseless loss of any cultural heritage in the name of reshaping a national image should be prevented at all costs, with the parties responsible being held accountable.

⁸⁸ “The Problem of the Return of Armenian Churches in Georgian to the Armenian Diocese in Georgia Issues Related to the Tandoyants Church,” *armenianchurch.ge*, <http://armenianchurch.ge/en/news/articles/69-articles/1603-tandoyanc-eluit>.

Chapter 3: Cultural Heritage Law

The aim of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) is to strengthen the foundations of lasting peace through cooperation in education, science, culture, communication, and information, and through this mission they have created many documents and bilateral agreements to protect culture all around the world.⁸⁹ Several of these documents are directly relevant to the destruction of Armenian ecclesiastical cultural heritage sites in Georgia, with both Georgia and Armenia being signatory parties. By ignoring aspects of these agreements in order to purport the image of a homogeneous nation of Georgian Orthodoxy, Georgia is not contributing to strengthening the foundation of lasting peace in the Caucasus. Additionally, through UNESCO initiatives, both Georgia and Armenia have developed their own cultural heritage laws, which will also be analyzed in this section. If cultural heritage laws continue to be allowed to be ignored *en masse* there will be a great loss of cultural heritage throughout the world, with countries and majority ethnic groups being able to shape false narratives of their country's history in order to aid their contemporary agendas.

3.1: International Conventions

The *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights* was adopted in 1966 and put into force in 1976, and Georgia both ratified it in 1994. The relevant passage from the International Convention on Civil and Political Rights comes in Article 27, which says that “In those states in which ethnic, religious, or linguistic minorities exist, persons belonging to such minorities shall not be denied the right, in community with the other members of their group, to enjoy their own culture, to profess or protect their own religion, or to use their own

⁸⁹ UNESCO, *UNESCO in Brief - Mission and Mandate*, unesco.org, <https://en.unesco.org/about-us/introducing-unesco>.

language.”⁹⁰ The *Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National, Ethnic, Religious, and Linguistic Minorities* was adopted in 1992. Article 2.1 of the *Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National, Ethnic, Religious, and Linguistic Minorities* states that “persons belonging to national or ethnic, religious, or linguistic minorities have the right to enjoy their own culture, to profess and protect their own religion, and to use their own language, in private and in public, freely and without intervention or any form of discrimination” and Article 4.1 states that “States shall take measures required to ensure the persons belonging to minorities may exercise full and effectively all of their human rights and fundamental freedoms without any discrimination, and in full equality before the law.”⁹¹ The *Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property* was brought into force in 1970, and Georgia became a signatory party with a notice of succession in 1992. This convention defined what cultural property is, and how it must be protected.

Article 27 of the *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights* protects the right of minorities to enjoy their own culture, and that is currently not being allowed for Armenians in Georgia. Armenians cannot enjoy their culture if their churches and cemeteries are being destroyed or stolen and then being turned into churches of a completely different denomination.

Article 2.1 of the *Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National, Ethnic, Religious, and Linguistic Minorities* covers similar rights, adding that minorities have the right to enjoy their culture and practice their religion free from any discrimination. The fact that this is occurring to minority churches in Georgia and not to any of the churches of the

⁹⁰ United Nations, *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights*, 1966.

⁹¹ United Nations, *Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities*, 1992.

majority shows that this is discrimination, and that the Armenian minority is not able to enjoy their culture and practice their religion free from discrimination.

Article 4.1 of the same convention states that states must take measures to ensure that minorities are free from discrimination, and Georgia is not currently creating this sort of environment for its minorities. In addition to the churches and other cultural heritage sites of the Armenian minority being appropriated and destroyed, the Georgian constitution, which entered into force in 1995, states that the Georgian Orthodox Church does not have to pay any taxes on profits made from selling religious products, taxes on activities related to the construction, restoration, or maintenance of their property, or property tax on church buildings. This is a privilege which is only afforded to the Georgian Orthodox Church and not to the Armenian Apostolic Church or any of the other religious minorities in Georgia.⁹² This law directly inhibits religious minorities in Georgia from prospering, as they have a huge financial disadvantage compared to the Georgian Orthodox Church.

In Article 1 of the *Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property*, cultural property is defined as being either secular or religious in nature and is designated by a state as having importance to them in terms of archeology, prehistory, history, literature, art, or science. More specifically, it covers property related to the lives of national leaders, thinkers, scientists and artists, as well as events of national importance.⁹³ The construction of the Holy Trinity Cathedral by Georgian authorities, which was built on the grounds of the Armenian cemetery Khojivank almost certainly violated this article, as the remains of countless Armenians were scattered around the construction site before being removed all at once overnight.⁹⁴

⁹² “Court Rules Privileges for Georgian Orthodox Church Unconstitutional” *O-C Media*, <https://oc-media.org/court-rules-privileges-for-georgian-orthodox-church-unconstitutional/>.

⁹³ United Nations, *Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property*, 1970.

⁹⁴ Julia Hakobyan, “Havlabar: Armenian Community in Tbilisi Pays the Price of Urbanization,” *armenianow.com*. https://www.armenianow.com/features/7696/havlabar_armenian_community_in_tbi.

Article 1 of the *Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property* also defines cultural property as engravings or statuary art in any material.⁹⁵ As has previously mentioned, there have been many examples of Armenian language engraving being completely removed from Armenian churches in Georgia. This includes the Sourb Astvatzatzin Church in Shindis village, which had its engraving removed and replaced with Georgian iconographic artwork, and Nnjman Sourb Astvatzatzin Church in the village of Nakhshigora which had its Armenian engravings removed and replaced with Georgian ones.⁹⁶

Article 2 establishes that the transfer of ownership of cultural property is one of the integral causes of impoverishment of cultural heritage of the countries of origin of such property, and that as a result, the signatory parties agree to oppose the practice of transfer of ownership of cultural property. The country of origin of the cultural heritage in this case is Georgia, but Armenian in heritage, as they were built by ethnic Armenians within the territory of Georgia. Additionally, as Georgia is a signatory party to this convention, the transfer of ownership of the Tandoyants Surb Astvatsatsin to the Georgian Orthodox Church would represent a breach of the convention. While the cultural heritage sites were created by Armenians who lived permanently in Georgia, even if they had been constructed by foreign nationals they would be covered by Article 4, which states that cultural property of importance to the state created within the territory of the state by foreign nationals still constitutes protected cultural heritage.⁹⁷ This analysis of UNESCO shows that the Georgian state is unjustly allowing for the destruction of Armenian culture within their borders. The

⁹⁵ United Nations, *Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property*, 1970.

⁹⁶ “Nnjman Sourb Astvatzatzin Church, Nakhshigora Village, 1835.” Research on Armenian Architecture - raa.am, http://www.raa.am/Jard/Georgia/Nnjman_2_E.htm. “Sourb Astvatzatzin Church, Shindis Village, 1866-1873.” Research on Armenian Architecture - raa.am, http://www.raa.am/Jard/Georgia/Shindis_E_2.htm.

⁹⁷ United Nations, *Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property*, 1970.

history of the Armenians and the contributions that they have made to Georgian society should not be erased simply because they do not represent as large of a percentage of the population as they once did.

3.2: Domestic Laws

Through UNESCO initiatives, countries around the world, including Georgia and Armenia, have established their own local cultural heritage laws, and have established ministries and offices in their countries to monitor and preserve cultural heritage within their borders.

3.2.1: Georgian Law

Similarly to the *Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property*, the *Law of Georgia on Cultural Heritage* also provides a definition for cultural heritage, albeit with a wider scope. This document was brought into force in 2007, and replaced the 1999 *Law of Georgia on Cultural Heritage Protection*, which became invalid once this document was activated.

Article 3 of the *Law of Georgia on Cultural Heritage* defines cultural heritage as any kind of architectural, artistic, urban planning, agricultural, archeological, anthropological, ethnographic, or monumental impact related to the technological development of immovable or movable objects of artistic, aesthetic, historical, or memorial value. It also covers historical settings related to history, faith and tradition, and the past and present civilizations of the country.⁹⁸ This is directly relevant to the case of Armenian cultural heritage in Georgia, as it would appear to be granted the status of cultural heritage based on the provided definition. The vast decrease in the number of Armenians living in Georgia throughout history would not appear to affect the status of the cultural heritage that they created in Georgia, because the law notes that historical settings related to past civilizations are also pertinent to the law. This point is of the utmost importance, because it provides protection for cultural heritage created

⁹⁸ Article 3, *Law of Georgia on Cultural Heritage*, 2007.

by Armenian communities that are no longer present in Georgia, but it appears that this facet of the law is being ignored by the Georgian government.

While the Armenian ecclesiastical cultural heritage sites do constitute “cultural heritage” per the definition of both the United Nations and Georgia, perhaps the more important status to achieve is that of “immovable or movable objects of cultural heritage” and “area of immovable cultural property” as defined in the *Law of Georgia on Cultural Heritage*. An immovable object of cultural heritage is an object of cultural heritage which has been granted cultural heritage status in accordance with the procedures of this law, and an area of immovable cultural property is a land plot attached to immovable cultural property.⁹⁹ The administrative body that is responsible for granting this status is the Cultural Heritage Protection Council, which is an advisory body of the Ministry of Culture and Monument Protection of Georgia.¹⁰⁰

The basis for granting cultural heritage status to a property is its historical or cultural value, related to its antiquity, uniqueness or authenticity.¹⁰¹ This process came to fruition for the Armenian Orthodox Church Diocese of Georgia in the case of the Tandoyants Surb Astvatsatsin Church in Tbilisi. The Diocese applied to have the church listed as an immovable cultural monument in December of 2015. They were told that the procedures for granting the church the status of immovable cultural monument would be initiated, and that the Armenian Apostolic Church would be informed regarding the status of the process, however, they were never informed further regarding their application.¹⁰² Conversely, a representative of the Georgian Orthodox Church submitted an application with the National Agency of Public Registry to register the church as property of the Georgian Orthodox

⁹⁹Ibid.

¹⁰⁰Article 4, *Law of Georgia on Cultural Heritage*, 2007.

¹⁰¹Article 15, *Law of Georgia on Cultural Heritage*, 2007.

¹⁰²“Government of Georgia Transfers Tandoyants Temple to Orthodox Church,” *tdi.ge*, <https://www.tdi.ge/en/4-news/495-government-georgia-transferred-tandoyants-temple-orthodox-church>.

Church based on historical sources and maps that showed that there was at one point a Georgian Orthodox Church on the land where the Armenian church stands today.¹⁰³ This represents a major flaw in the *Law of Georgia on Cultural Heritage*: that a third party can circumvent the process outlined to grant the status of cultural monument, and go through an office that does not have a focus on cultural preservation in order to gain legal ownership and effectively lock out the Armenian diocese from an Armenian church in this case.

All of this is contradictory to Article 23 of the *Law of Georgia on Cultural Heritage*, which states that it is only permissible to use cultural property in such a way that does not damage or pose a threat to it, or diminish its cultural or historical value, or change its authentic elements or deteriorate its perception.¹⁰⁴ By turning an existing Armenian church into a Georgian church, the Georgian Orthodox Church is both changing its authentic elements and deteriorating its perception. Violations of this article can also be seen in the previously detailed cases of the erasure of Armenian cultural markers from ecclesiastical sites. As far as enforcement goes, the document only notes that any deliberate action taken against cultural property that may threaten or destroy the property will result in criminal liability in accordance with procedures established by Georgian legislation.¹⁰⁵ The unique relationship that the Georgian government shares with the Georgian Orthodox Church, and that Georgian society shares with religious nationalism is the impetus of this destruction of Armenian ecclesiastical heritage sites, and prevents any meaningful resolution to the problem of appropriation of heritage sites.

3.2.2: Armenian Law

The relevant sections from the *Law of the Republic of Armenia on Intangible Cultural Heritage*, which was adopted in 2009, pertain to the cultural heritage that is located outside of

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Article 23, *Law of Georgia on Cultural Heritage*, 2007.

¹⁰⁵ Article 23, *Law of Georgia on Cultural Heritage*, 2007.

their national borders. Article 16 states that Armenian intangible cultural heritage in foreign states will be protected in accordance with interstate treaties of Armenia and within the frameworks of legislation of the country concerned, as well within the principles and of relevant international laws. UNESCO states that traditional craftsmanship is protected under the definition of intangible cultural heritage, and Armenian engravings on churches and tombstones would appear to fall under intangible cultural heritage.¹⁰⁶ Specifically, at the fifth session of the Intergovernmental Committee in Kenya in 2010 Armenian Khachkars were inscribed on UNESCO's representative list of intangible cultural heritage.¹⁰⁷ It has already been established that the Armenian ecclesiastical cultural heritage sites should be protected under both UNESCO law and Georgian law, and being covered under Armenian law should only further that protection.

3.3: Large Scale Violations of Cultural Heritage Laws

The analysis of relevant legal codes in this section, both bilateral international agreements and Georgian and Armenian laws, has shown that the destruction of Armenian ecclesiastical cultural heritage sites in Georgia represents violations of cultural heritage protection laws. This widespread and unchecked appropriation and destruction should by no means be allowed to continue, with both the Georgian Orthodox Church and the Georgian State being held accountable. One nation's culture should not be valued over another, regardless of whether or not the culture is derivative of a diaspora or minority community. Additionally, the reshaping of a national image in order to exclude the contributions of one ethnic group comes with long lasting negative effects and sets a dangerous precedent.

It has already been established that the church is the most trusted institution in the country amongst Georgian citizens, which include politicians making policy decisions

¹⁰⁶ UNESCO, *Identifying and Inventorying Intangible Cultural Heritage*, unesco.org, <https://ich.unesco.org/doc/src/01851-EN.pdf>.

¹⁰⁷ UNESCO, *Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage*, Fifth Session, 19 November 2010, 9-10.

regarding cultural destruction, but a 2002 concordant between the Georgian Orthodox Church and the State further emphasizes the importance of the church in Georgia. This concordant gives the patriarch immunity and gives the church a unique consultative role in the government.¹⁰⁸ While the church does not have a direct, concrete role in the Georgian government, it does share a close relationship with the government that is a result of the unique form of religious nationalism that exists in Georgia, in part do the protectorate role that Georgian society associates with the church, and it is this unique religious nationalism and relation between church and state in Georgia that has facilitated the environment which has allowed for the destruction of Armenian ecclesiastical cultural heritage sites in Georgia.

¹⁰⁸ U.S. Department of State, *Georgia: International Religious Freedom Report*, 2007.

Chapter 4: Nationalism as an Explanation

In the strongest form of religious nationalism the concepts of religion and national boundaries are completely intertwined, with a nation being made up solely of members of the majority religion, in this case, Georgian Orthodoxy.¹⁰⁹ Seeing religion and nationalism as intertwined can also be seen in national myths and symbols that make up the iconic representation of the nation.¹¹⁰ The narrative of the nation is told and retold through national histories, literature, and popular culture, and these provide a set of stories, images, historical events, and national symbols which present the national image of a state as unified and essential.¹¹¹ These stories play an integral role in shaping the image of a nation and presenting a version of that nation that its people can be proud of. In the case of Georgia this national image is overwhelmingly based in Christianity and Georgia's history as an orthodox nation. It is this process that allowed for a uniquely religious form of nationalism to emerge in Georgia, which would ultimately contribute to the destruction of culture within Georgia that does not fit the national image, and has resulted in the erasure of Armenian cultural heritage sites.

4.1: National Origin Myths

The origin myth of a nation often places its material in a mythic time and provides an alternative history. Meanwhile, factual history is often ignored to the benefit of the foundational myth, as it better serves the image of the nation that is being attempted to be crafted.¹¹² Examples of this can be seen in the origin myths of both Georgia and Armenia.

¹⁰⁹ Rogers Brubaker, "Religion and Nationalism: Four Approaches" *Nations and Nationalism* 18 (1), 2012, pp.1-20.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 12.

¹¹¹ David McCrone, *The Sociology of Nationalism*, (London: Routledge, 1998), 52.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 52.

4.1.1: Georgian Origin Myth

One popular story for the origin of the Georgian nation utterly relates to religion. The tradition holds that when God was parceling out the countries of the world to all of the different nationalities, he forgot about the Georgians. Despite this, the Georgians invited God to a party, where they spent the whole night sharing wine and song. God had such a great time with the Georgians that he decided that he would give the Georgians the one spot on earth that he reserved for himself, and this spot was in the valley and hills south of the Caucasus Mountains, in the area that we today know to be the Republic of Georgia.¹¹³ Obviously there is no truth to this origin myth, as a timeline in which God would be assigning territory to the nationalities of the world does not logically make sense, but that does not detract from the importance of the narrative from a collective memory perspective. This story instills the idea that Georgians have a special relationship with God, more special than any other people in the world, because God so loved the Georgians that he gifted them the very best land on the planet, that he had been saving for himself. The narrative also places the physical land on which Georgia resides on a higher pedestal than any other land on the planet. In the origin myth, this land is said to be the best in the world, that God had set aside for himself. Portraying the land in this fashion instills an added sense of pride, and in the process, perhaps making those who reside on it more inclined to defend it. Additionally, depicting the land of a nation in a sacred way contributes to making the nationalism of a state religious.

Another, less Christian origin myth for Georgia, which is found in *Kartlis Tskhovreba*, asserts that the Armenians, Georgians, and a number of other Caucasian ethnic groups all came from one father, T'orgom, son of T'iras, son of Gamer, son of Japheth, son of Noah. After the Tower of Babel fell, T'orgom settled down between the Masis and Aragats

¹¹³ Ronald Suny, *The Making of the Georgian Nation* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), 3.

mountains, but this land did not suffice for all of his children, so he extended the boundaries to all of what we know to be the Caucasus region today. These Georgian origin myths exemplify Anthony Smith's idea that from 'whence we came' is central to the definition of 'who we are.'¹¹⁴ Through its myths Georgia shows that it comes from a position of favor with God, as God's chosen people, and that same position is visible within the destruction of Armenian cultural heritage sites in Georgia today. Today, Georgian Orthodoxy, as opposed to Armenian Apostolicity, is the chosen religion of the nation, and therefore it is Georgian Orthodoxy that will be represented through architecture and land in Georgia. Even the Chalcedonic controversy contributes to this image of Georgian Orthodoxy being chosen over Armenian Apostolicity, since Georgia ultimately chose Chalcedonism as opposed to Armenia's choosing of monophysitism. Georgia was in a position of Orthodoxy, being in line with the church leadership in Byzantium while Armenia was deemed heretical. Christian-centric origin myths in Georgia have played an essential role in the development of religious nationalism in Georgia, and embody the idea that ethnic Georgians and Georgian Orthodoxy represent the only admissible milieu in Georgia today.

4.1.2: Armenian Origin Myth

While the Armenians do not have an origin myth that is directly as Christian-focused as the Georgians, one of their central national myths is directly connected to that of the Georgians. One of the sons of T'orgom, the father of the Caucasian people in the Georgian myth, was Hayk, who becomes one of, if not the central figure in Armenian mythology. Hayk was a beautiful giant with curly hair and bright eyes who was also a very powerful warrior. Hayk was noted to be a proponent of independence, and he led his people from Nimrod, a town that was destroyed by biblical floods sent by God in the Old Testament, to mountains of

¹¹⁴ Anthony Smith, *National Identity*, (London: Penguin Books, 1991), 22.

Armenia, where they began to rule over the native population.¹¹⁵ Hayk then went on to defend Armenia from invaders numerous times throughout his lifetime.

Hayk is an incredibly important figure in the Armenian national story, as the word that Armenians use to refer to themselves is *Hay*, and their country, *Hayastan*, are both derivatives of Hayk.¹¹⁶ This story may not be as directly religious as the Georgian tale, but there is still significant Christian symbolism to analyze. Hayk is representing a character similar to Moses in this myth, in the sense that he is delivering his people from a troubled, heretical area, Nimrod, to a safe land of refuge in Armenia. This mirrors what Moses does in the book of Exodus, where he leads the Jews out of the heretical Egypt, and across the Red Sea to their promised land.¹¹⁷ This biblical story was likely the inspiration for the myth of Hayk. While this story of Hayk lacks in direct religious elements, it does contain many hints of ethnic election and morality. In the story, Hayk and the Armenians are the “chosen people” in the sense that Hayk leads them safely to a new land where they rule over the previous occupants of this land. This ethnic election comes with a moral obligation on behalf of the Armenians, that they have been chosen that they are a sanctified people who will set a moral example for which their subjects, in this case the native inhabitants should live.¹¹⁸ Despite the lack of the direct element of God choosing the Armenians, in the sense that he chose the Georgians in the Georgian origin myth, the same message of being chosen is conveyed through the ethnic election in the Armenian myth.

4.2: Further Georgian National Myths and Symbols

This is prominent in Georgia as many of the important national myths are coated in Christian imagery and language. This can especially be seen in the stories of David the Builder, an 12th century ruler and perhaps the most important ruler in Georgian history. He is

¹¹⁵ John MacCulloch, ed. *The Mythology of All Races* (Boston: Marshall Jones Company, 1925), 64.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 65.

¹¹⁷ Exodus 3:1-8.

¹¹⁸ Anthony Smith, *Myths and Memories of the Nation*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 130.

responsible for expelling the Seljuk Turks and unifying Georgia into roughly the territory we know it as today. After defeating them in battle several times he refused to pay taxes to the Seljuks and mandating his people return to their villages from the mountains, where they had been hiding to avoid the Seljuks who had been violently pillaging villages. He re-established royal authority over the church and invited foreigners, including Armenians, to settle in Georgia to help fight the Seljuks.¹¹⁹ In 1121 David the Builder led his army into battle against the Seljuks at Didgori and defeated them, thus unifying Georgia and bringing an end to Muslim rule over the state. Tbilisi, Georgia's capital, had been a Muslim town for over four hundred years until David the Builder recaptured it.¹²⁰ This story shows that in the Georgian tradition the event which unified their nation is a struggle between Christian and Muslim, with Christianity prevailing and saving the nation. This intertwines Christianity as an important part of the Georgian story.

Even once narratives have established Georgia as a Christian nation, there are yet other narratives that codify Georgian Christianity as superior to other forms of Christianity. An example of this is Georgia the Hagiorite, an 11th century Georgian monk. George the Hagiorite became an important figure of Georgian religious nationalism by defending a group of Georgian monks who had been accused of committing heresies by their Greek counterparts at the Monastery of the Holy Symeon. The Greek monks had written to the Patriarch in Antioch and asked him to "rescue us from these vain and alien men, for in our monastery there are about sixty men who call themselves Georgians, but we do not know as to what their intentions are or what their religion is."¹²¹ In reality, the Greek monks had collaborated to get the Georgian monks expelled from the church simply because of a personal grudge for

¹¹⁹ Ronald Suny, *The Making of the Georgian Nation*, (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1994), 34-35.

¹²⁰ Ibid., 36.

¹²¹ Wachtang Djobadze, *Materials for the Study of Georgian Monasteries in the Western Environs of Antioch on the Orontes* (Louvain, Belgium: Imprimerie Orientaliste, 1976), 53.

these specific Georgian monks rather than any sort of heresy, as their letter had originally alleged. This personal grudge was the result of the actions of a Georgian priest, who sometime before had visited the Monastery of the Holy Symeon and officiated the liturgy in improper garb, wearing only rawhide sandals and a short tunic rather than the proper priestly garment. The Greek monks admitted this to the Patriarch, who rightly seeing that this was a senseless argument being made by the Greek monks, called for George the Hagiorite to be brought in to explain Georgian Orthodoxy, and to dispel and questions about Georgian's devotion to Orthodoxy.¹²²

George the Hagiorite went on to explain Georgia's perception of Orthodoxy to the Patriarch, to which the Patriarch responded: "Blessed be the Lord: certain men were accusing the Georgians of shortcomings, but see now, they are in many respects above us, and above all in regard to the immaculacy of their church which they hold supreme." According to the story all of the bishops and eminences agreed with the Patriarch in his praising of the Georgian Orthodox Church, and that the accusatory Greek monks should be punished severely. George the Hagiorite stepped in and implored that they not be punished, but forgiven, to which the Patriarch agreed.¹²³ This passage is particularly clear in terms of being Georgian nationalistic propaganda. The quote from the preacher establishes that Georgia's version is superior to all other forms of Christianity, even that of the patriarch. At the same time, the passage is also showing Georgians to be a merciful and "christlike" people because once being told that the accusatory monks would be punished, George the Hagiorite does not allow this to happen, instead he expresses compassion.

On a whole, *The Life of George the Hagiorite* is a very nationalistic text. The whole point

¹²²Ibid., 52-54.

¹²³ Ibid., 52-54.

of the text appears to be to promote Georgian monastic life over all other monastic traditions. In this story George the Hagiorite is written to be the supreme example of monastic life, and on top of that he completely dispels false accusations by a group of Greek monks, belittling them in the process. In imploring that the Greek monks be excused from punishment, George is being portrayed as a benevolent figure who “turns the other cheek” and who does not wish any harm on his enemies. In summation, *The Life of George the Hagiorite* delivers a heavily nationalistic message propagating the idea of Georgian superiority in Orthodoxy to all other churches.

4.3: Other Facets of Nationalism at Play

While religious nationalism is the most important variant of nationalism at play, there are several other topics to consider. These include the relationship between architecture and language with nationalism, as well as nationalistic tendencies brought on by Russian incursions in the post-Soviet period.

4.3.1: Architecture and Nationalism

Architecture allows for the the shaping of the public sphere in the into the preferred image of the nation, and can be used to elicit national pride in this idea of the nation that is being portrayed through architecture.¹²⁴ In Georgia, this manifests itself in the form of Georgian Orthodox churches, both old and new. By slowing removing Armenian churches from the landscape of Georgia, and replacing each one with a Georgian church, the image of the country is being transformed into that of a homogenous, Orthodox state, with its Armenian history being forgotten and erased. Architecture also represents the will of a community, and what image they want to present of their community. In Georgia, it has become clear that the image that is desired to be presented is that of a Georgian Orthodox nation, rather than one with a rich history of Armenian heritage.

¹²⁴ Yael Tamir, *Why Nationalism*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019), 74.

4.3.2: Language and Nationalism

A common language is of integral importance to the national image of a state as it is the people's highest possible means of expression. It is also the purest product of national creativeness and is one of the clearest and most visible signs of national unity.¹²⁵ The origin of both the Georgian and Armenian alphabets is another issue which is a point of contention between the two communities, and as the development of languages lays the basis for national consciousness, just having two distinct scripts represents a split between Georgia and Armenia.¹²⁶ According to the narrative present in the Armenian tradition, the linguist and theologian Mesrop Mashtots is the creator of both the Georgian and Armenian languages. In this narrative, Mashtots created the Armenian alphabet in the early 5th century in order to combat Mazdaistic propaganda in Armenia, and once he had completed this task he set out to create alphabets for the Georgians and the Caucasian Albanians. This narrative is not agreed upon by Georgian scholarship. Eighth century Georgian historian Leonti Mroveli claimed that a servant of Georgian King Parnavasi created the alphabet, while the modern Georgian scholar Ivane Javakhishvili asserted that the Georgian alphabet goes back to the Phoenician-Semitic-Aramaic cultural world, and as such is completely unrelated to the Armenian script and the work of Mesrop Mashtots.¹²⁷ Considering how important language as a marker of national culture, it is understandable why there is a debate between Georgian and Armenian scholarship over the origins of the countries' respective alphabets. During the Chalcedonian controversy period in which Armenia's Mazdaistic loyalty had placed them in a position of ecclesiastical power over Georgia, they had attempted to mandate the use of the Armenian language and alphabet in Georgia, but were ultimately unsuccessful, with the use of the

¹²⁵ Rudolf Rucker, *Nationalism and Culture*, (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1998), 277.

¹²⁶ David McCrone, *The Sociology of Nationalism*, (London: Routledge, 1998), 53.

¹²⁷ Ronald Suny, *The Making of the Georgian Nation*, (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1994), 22-23.

Georgian language being restored.¹²⁸ This interaction left the Georgians averse to the Armenian script, and admitting that the language and alphabet that they had fought to preserve and use in the face of an Armenian incursion was actually the invention of the Armenians was simply not an option. In this case, the actual origins of the Georgian script are not important, as actual history is often forgotten in favor of a foundational narrative, and as language is one of the most important markers of community and national image, it is important to the Georgian national narrative that they control the story surrounding the origins of their language.¹²⁹ This debate does however typify another arena in which Armenia has attempted to assert power and authority over Georgia, leaving Georgia less receptive to Armenian culture within their borders.

4.3.3: Georgian Precedent for Establishing a Historical Narrative of a Minority Group as “Outsiders”

One of the main methods implemented by the Georgian Orthodox Church to justify the appropriation and transfer of property of Armenian churches is by claiming that while the land may be an Armenian church in its current form, at one point throughout the *longue durée* it was once a Georgian church, or the land of a Georgian.¹³⁰ This method has a historical precedent within the history of minority relations in Georgia, as it was used to justify the proposed population transfer of Georgia’s Abkhazian minority in the 1940’s and 1950’s.

Like the Armenians, the Abkhazians are ethnographically different from the Georgians. They speak Abkhazian, which is in the North Caucasus language family with Circassian and Ubykh, while Georgian is a part of the Kartvelian tree with Mingrelian, Laz

¹²⁸ Mamuka Matsaberidze, ed, *A Short History of the Georgian Church* (New York: Troitsa, 2014), 22.

¹²⁹ David McCrone, *The Sociology of Nationalism*, (London: Routledge, 1998), 53.

¹³⁰ “Government of Georgia Transfers Tandoyants Temple to Orthodox Church,” *tdi.ge*, <https://www.tdi.ge/en/4-news/495-government-georgia-transferred-tandoyants-temple-orthodox-church>.

and Svan.¹³¹ Religion is incredibly important in Georgia and the Caucasus as a whole, and this is another ethnographic area in which the Georgians and Abkhazians greatly differ. Abkhazians are 60% Christian, 16% Muslim, 8% atheist, 5% pagan, 3% local traditional religion, and 1% Jehovah's Witnesses, while Georgians are 83.4% Eastern Orthodox Christian, 10.7% Muslim, 3.9% Armenian Apostolic, and 0.5% Catholic.¹³² Abkhazian Christianity is a mix of Armenian Apostolic Christianity and Abkhazian Orthodox Christianity, a church which is not recognized by other Eastern Orthodox Churches, while the Christianity in Georgia is exclusively Georgian Orthodox. The fact that Abkhazian Christianity is made up of Abkhazian Orthodox Christianity and Armenian Apostolic Christianity, two churches with which the Georgian Orthodox Church has had doctrinal conflict with, contributes to the stark difference between Georgians and Abkhazians which has made the absorption of one into the other difficult.

In 1949, Ingoroq'va, a Georgian scholar, wrote that based on toponyms he had studied in Abkhazia, the Abkhazians that are alluded to in medieval Georgian sources were actually Kartvelians (Georgians), and they had no affiliation to today's Abkhazians, who he claimed came in the 17th century.¹³³ By doing this, he basically erased any claims that Abkhazians had to their land and property, as Georgia could claim that it was actually historically the property of Georgians. The context within which Ingoroq'va was writing is also important. At the time, it was widely known that Stalin was planning to deport ethnic Abkhazians to Kazakhstan and Siberia, so Ingoroq'va could have been writing to provide academic justification for the removal of Abkhazians from "Georgian lands."¹³⁴

¹³¹ George Hewitt, *The Abkhazians: A Handbook* (New York: St. Martin Press, 1998), 13.

¹³² Alexander Krylov, "Features of Religious Consciousness in Modern Abkhazia," *Credo Press*, <http://www.portal-credo.ru/site/print.php?act=fresh&id=188>.

¹³³ Scott Littlefield, "Citizenship, Identity and Foreign Policy: The Contradictions and Consequences of Russia's Passport Distribution in the Separatist Regions of Georgia," *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 61, No. 8 (2009), 1466.

¹³⁴ George Hewitt, *The Abkhazians: A Handbook* (New York: St. Martin Press, 1998), 14-15.

This narrative bears close resemblance to that which is being deployed in the contemporary period against the Armenian minority community in Georgia, and provides a historical precedent for the debasement of the legitimacy of a minority groups claim to territory in Georgia through attempting to shape the national image to make it appear as if Georgia is, and always has been the land solely of Georgians.

4.3.4: Modern Incursions in Georgia

Georgia has not known total peace and sanctity since becoming independent of the Soviet Union in 1991, and the desire of Georgia to keep its territory free from any outside influence also contributes to the national image, and to the apparent attempt to portray Georgia as a homogenous state. The land of a nation itself is often seen as cultural before it is seen as natural, and as a result, people often have a spectacular sense of pride in the landscape of their nation.¹³⁵ A people who have a great sense of pride in their land and nation, and Georgians do, as is illustrated in the above detailed myths, are very averse to incursions into their land, and unfortunately Georgia has suffered from a great deal of this during their period of independence.

In 1992, the year following Georgia's independence, they faced the Georgian-Abkhaz war, a brutal war with the Georgian separatist territory of Abkhazia, in which Russia aided the Abkhazians.¹³⁶ A ceasefire was eventually signed in 1993, but immediately thereafter, a new incursion would commence in Georgia: the issuance of Russian passports to Georgian citizens residing in Abkhazia. While the war ended with Abkhazia still being internationally recognized as part of Georgia, the Abkhazian people denied this, and along with it Georgian

¹³⁵ Simon Schama, *Landscape and Memory*, (Toronto: Random House of Canada, 1995). 61.

¹³⁶ For example, there was a case in Gudauta, Abkhazia of representatives of the Helsinki Human Rights Watch coming into contact with five men cleaning weapons in a hotel occupied by refugees who initially claimed to be businessmen visiting the area, before later admitting that they were Russian fighters trained by the KGB who were flown into Abkhazia on Russian humanitarian aid helicopters, and were being paid by the Transnistrian government in US dollars in bank accounts in Moscow. Human Rights Watch. March 1995. *Georgia/Abkhazia: Violations of the Laws of War and Russia's Role in the Conflict*, 51.

citizenship. Instead the Abkhazian people desired to be a part of Russia, holding a similar relationship with them as the United States has with the Marshall Islands.

The 1954 UN Convention Relating to the Status of Stateless Persons established that having citizenship is a basic and inherent right, and that the denial of citizenship would be a serious infringement on a person's rights.¹³⁷ In order to ensure this, states need to create the conditions necessary for the effective participation of persons belonging to national minorities in cultural, social, and economic life, as well as in public affairs.¹³⁸ These conditions were made available for Abkhazians, they just refused to participate, which would mean that they do not have a legitimate case for sovereignty and secession. The right to section prevails over territorial integrity only in the case of severe deprivation of a groups human rights, and again, this was not happening in Abkhazia, their perceived situation was completely self inflicted.¹³⁹ Minority groups do not have a legal right to autonomy, and granting Abkhazia autonomy would not guarantee success and peace in the region. What did, however, have legal protection was Georgia's territorial integrity, something that cannot be violated by a minorities' demand for secession.¹⁴⁰

Despite the claims of the Abkhazians and the Russians, this denial of citizenship was not happening in Abkhazia. After the dissolution of the USSR, the majority of Abkhazians rejected Georgian citizenship, which resulted in them having no citizenship at all. Instead opting to use locally issued papers which were not internationally recognized.¹⁴¹ The Abkhazians were not denied citizenship, they refused it. Several solutions with international precedent were chosen to try and bring some sort of solution to this problem. One of these

¹³⁷ United Nation, Convention Relating to the Status of Stateless Persons, 1954

¹³⁸ Hans-Joachim Heintze, "Implementation of Minority Rights through the Devolution of Powers - The Concept of 21 Autonomy Reconsidered," *International Journal on Minority and Group Rights* Vol. 9 (2002), 321.

¹³⁹ Ibid., 329.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 342.

¹⁴¹ Littlefield, "Citizenship," 1473.

proposals was to grant Abkhazian citizens “Nansen” passports which were historically given to Russians who fled the Soviet Union during the Russian Civil War, and gave stateless persons legal existence and documents which allowed them to travel internationally. This proposal was eventually not approved because the international community did not recognize Abkhazians as refugees, but as separatists.¹⁴² Another proposal was to grant Abkhazians passports similar to the passports which had been given to Kosovo Albanians by the United Nations Mission in Kosovo, known as UNMIK passports. The proposal was also eventually denied due to a lack of international recognition for Abkhazian independence. While over forty states recognized Kosovo at the time the UNMIK passports were issued, no one but Russia recognized Abkhazia at the time.¹⁴³

At this point, Russia decided to step in and issue citizenship to the Abkhazians. The way the citizenship process would work was that Abkhazians would mail their Soviet-era documents to a consular office which had been created specifically for this purpose in Sochi, and in return they would receive a Russian passport. This program was massively successful, and by 2003 over 80% of Abkhazians held Russian passports. By conducting this passport scheme, Russia was violating Georgian territorial integrity and harming Georgia’s attempts at consolidating a civic national identity over their internationally recognized legal territory.¹⁴⁴ This passport initiative would of course culminate with the 2008 Russo-Georgian war.

In August of 2008, Russia invaded Georgia’s other de facto territory within its internationally recognized borders, South Ossetia, under the justification that they were defending their co-nationals’ human rights.¹⁴⁵ The Russians invoked Article 51 of the UN Charter, which establishes the inherent right of the individual and the right to collective self-defense, with Russia arguing that there were Russian citizens in South Ossetia that needed to

¹⁴² Ibid., 1472.

¹⁴³ Ibid., 1472.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 1473.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 1461.

be protected. However, this was highly questionable due to the fact that in which these people had only recently become Russian citizens, and were encouraged to do so with economic rewards. Essentially, once enough people had accepted Russian citizenship, Russia invaded, because technically the territory was filled with Russian citizens.

The passport initiative and the war left Georgia very wary of minority groups with strong ties to a foreign state within their borders, as they saw that it could lead to foreign incursion into their land under the guise of protection, and as such the destruction and appropriation of Armenian ecclesiastical heritage sites in Georgia could have been influenced by this experience. This collective suffering of the Georgian people at the hands of a minority group and foreign power within their own borders also contributed to the desire to represent Georgia as a nation of Georgians, with no place for a strong and unified Armenian minority community.

4.4: Destruction of Armenian Cultural Heritage in Georgia and *La Long Durée*

In order to fully understand the the reasoning for the cultural destruction that has occurred in Georgia, it has been necessary to take in the breadth of Georgia's christian history, from the purported missionary work of the apostle Andrew in the first century to the eleventh century hagiography of Georgia the Hagiorite, to the present day relationship between church and state in Georgia. From the depths of this historical analysis the foundations of Georgia's unique form of religious nationalism has emerged. Georgia's orthodoxy has been tested throughout the centuries, but has always persisted. In the late-antique period Georgia and its regional neighbor Armenia faced off in a doctrinal battle which resulted in a schism between the two countries, placing Georgia on the side of orthodoxy and Armenia with heresy. This divide between Georgia and Armenia persisted throughout history into the present day, with each nation placing itself in different spheres of influence; Georgia with the West, and

Armenia with the East. The doctrinal split between Georgia and Armenia was a precipitating factor of this, and shows the importance that ancient religious decisions can have on contemporary society.

Due to the uniquely religious form of nationalism that prevails in Georgia, Georgian Orthodox ecclesiastical heritage sites are given prominence over their Armenian counterparts, and the collective memory is being manipulated to show Georgia as a homogeneous nation, devoid of its Armenian heritage. The Armenian community of Georgia has a long and storied history in Georgia, and its contributions should not be erased in favor of a new national image. The Armenian Apostolic church buildings are not only being destroyed, but are being appropriated and represented as Georgian churches, which presents the image the Armenian Apostolic Church has never been present in Georgia, while the Georgian Orthodox Church has been there all along. This erasure has been overshadowed by the war and cultural destruction occurring between Armenia and Azerbaijan in Nagorno-Karabakh, but it should not be allowed to continue and those responsible should be held accountable. In the case of the destruction of Armenian ecclesiastical heritage sites in Georgia a unique form of religious nationalism, in concert with the manipulation of collective memory, have allowed for political actors to contribute to the marginalization and erasure of culture of a religious and ethnic minority within a state.

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