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## Societal Values in Georgia: Twenty Years Later

### Stalin and Georgian Nationalism

In the night of 25 June 2010 the monument to Stalin that had stood since 1952 in the central square of the Georgian town of Gori, the birthplace of the dictator, was removed. It was removed during the night to minimize possible protests by the local population against the displacement of the 12-meter high monument.

If anything symbolizes the remnants of the Soviet past in contemporary Georgia, it is the Gori monument to Stalin. Even after its removal it did disappear altogether from public space – it will be moved to in front of the Stalin museum some 100 meters away from the central square. However, the Stalin museum itself, which has remained almost unchanged since the 1950s, will be transformed – although it has not yet been decided whether into a museum of the Russian occupation or into a museum of totalitarianism. These two options are themselves emblematic of the dilemmas that accompany every attempt to re-evaluate the Soviet past in today's Georgia.

The removal of the Stalin monument in Gori was a significant event if one takes into account the history of previous failed attempts to do the same. In 1956, in the aftermath of the twentieth congress of the Communist Party, which had initiated the process of de-Stalinization, the communist government, taking into account the very strong local nationalist opposition, decided to leave the monument untouched.

Nor could it be removed in 1989 when the Soviet Union began to disintegrate. The so-called National Movement – an extra-parliamentary opposition to the enfeebled communist government afraid of any unpopular decisions – mobilized its supporters in the form of a rally to remove the monument, which was defended by the local population.

Even in November 2003, when after rigged parliamentary elections the so-called Rose Revolution swept away the government and installed a new generation of politicians, Stalin's popularity was still too strong for the ruling party to risk removing the monument.

Circumstances changed after the August war in 2008 between Russia and Georgia over South Ossetia and Abkhazia, breakaway regions of the latter<sup>1</sup>. During the conflict, Gori became one of the main targets of bombs and found itself in the center of international media attention, which did not leave Stalin's monument unnoticed. It was only after the war that the anti-imperial affect of the Georgian population was felt to be sufficiently strong for the monument to be displaced.

One could draw the hasty conclusion that the situation in Georgia is very similar to that in Russia where, in 2003, 53% of the Russian population thought Stalin had played a positive role in the history of the country<sup>2</sup>. This positive evaluation in Russia continues to this day, Stalin being associated with the order, stability and prosperity that are so lacking in today's society. This is confirmed by the existence of a strong Russian communist party. But this is not the case in Georgia. Since the fall of the Soviet Union left-wing politics and the communist movement have been marginalized. Thus we should seek another explanation for the popularity of Stalin in Georgia.

To explain this phenomenon one should first of all consider the pride with which Stalin is regarded in Georgia. This pride is intimately linked to a specific form of Georgian nationalism, which in the academic literature is referred to as ethnic nationalism as opposed to its civic counterpart. Ethnic nationalism is normally characterized as illiberal, ascriptive, exclusive and particularistic. It is because of this ethnic nationalism, argue many, that Stalin – who was by no means a Georgian patriot – can still be regarded as an important figure for Georgian identity, which is understood to be based on ethnicity and not on citizenship. Civic nationalism, the

1 See Cornell, 2009; and Asmus, 2010.

2 Slater, 2004, pp. 254–265.

second basic form of nationalism, is characterized in this context as liberal, voluntarist, universalist and inclusive.<sup>3</sup>

In the academic literature there are many voices who would perceive this dualistic classification of nationalism as problematic. But whether it is adequate or true in its own terms is not so important for the analysis of the Georgian context. The main actors in the political arena understand the situation with this dichotomy, and set as a goal the transformation of Georgia's ethnic nationalism into a civic one.<sup>4</sup> This is an interesting example of how a second-order scientific construction becomes part of a first-order political construction.<sup>5</sup>

Stalin's popularity in Georgia has been interpreted in the Georgian political discourse using this dichotomy. It is ethnic nationalism which makes Stalin a seminal figure for Georgian identity. If this ethnic 'Eastern' nationalism is transformed into a civic 'Western' one, the problem of Stalin for contemporary Georgia will disappear. On the other hand, there is the resistance of those who regard Stalin as a most important figure of modern history, and who are proud of his Georgian origin.

The question is how to relate these two stances towards Stalin, both generally to a broader context of Soviet historical legacy and modern Georgian identity, and to a wider context of societal values and their transformation after 1989. How can we explain the origin of the clash of these two discourses, these two systems of values? How can we locate them historically but also systematically?

3 Brubaker, 2005, pp. 132-146. The distinction goes back as far as Friedrich Meinecke's distinction between *Staatsnation* and *Kulturnation*.

4 This is how one of the leaders of the ruling United National Movement party described the situation in 2007. See Zedania, 2007, p. 21.

5 For the distinction between first-order and second-order constructions see Schütz, 1971, pp. 68 ff.

## The Study of Values: A Theoretical Approach

It is generally acknowledged that the international discussion in the social sciences on the transformation of values has for more than three decades been dominated by the approach worked out by the American political scientist Ronald Inglehart. Notwithstanding the criticisms this approach has drawn, no study of value change can ignore the immense amount of empirical material that has been accumulated within this theoretical framework.

Inglehart suggests two basic hypotheses on which his approach is founded:

- a) The scarcity hypothesis: The priorities of an individual reflect his or her socio-economic environment. Greatest value is accorded to things that are relatively scarce;
- b) The socialization hypothesis: Values do not derive directly from the socio-economic environment. There is a significant time deferral, since the basic values of a person reflect mostly the conditions that were predominant in their youth.

Inglehart regards two processes as being of fundamental importance for the transformation of value systems. The first is industrialization, which leads to rationalization, bureaucratization and secularization. The second is the rise of post-industrial society, which puts emphasis on individual autonomy and self-expression values. Both change people's orientation towards authority, but differently: industrial society brings the secularization of authority, while post-industrial society brings emancipation from authority.<sup>6</sup>

These two large processes are, according to Inglehart, reflected in the two dimensions of value systems.

The 'traditional vs. secular-rational' dimension reflects the contrasting value systems found in religious and secular societies. Traditional societies emphasize the importance of parent-child ties in traditional families and rest upon the recognition and valuation of authority. The value system characteristic of traditional societies puts

6 Inglehart and Welzel, 2005, p.25.

emphasis on absolute moral standards, and rejects divorce, abortion, euthanasia and suicide. Traditional societies are highly nationalistic. In contrast, societies with secular-rational values display the opposite preferences on all of these topics.

The 'survival vs. self-expression' dimension reflects the polarization between materialist and post-materialist values. These values represent a shift from an emphasis on economic and physical security, towards an increasing emphasis on self-expression, subjective well-being, and quality-of-life concerns. Societies characterized by survival values rest upon materialist orientations, show relatively low levels of subjective well-being, tend to demonstrate intolerance towards out-groups, such as foreigners and homosexuals, demonstrate relatively low levels of interpersonal trust, and emphasize hard work rather than imagination or tolerance as important things to teach a child. In contrast, societies that emphasize self-expression values display the opposite preferences on all of these topics.<sup>7</sup>

How does this classification of value systems relate to the problems of a transitional country like Georgia? The so-called 'Third Wave' of democracy, purported to have started in 1974 and to have continued through the nineties,<sup>8</sup> initially gave rise to optimism, which was later strongly moderated by the discovery of a wide gap between democratic ideals and their actual implementation in transitional societies. Inglehart suggests that this gap can be tapped analytically by introducing the dimension of values. Formal democracy can be transformed into genuine democracy only if the values of the citizens allow it. Those values that can be regarded as preconditions for stable and effective democracy are self-expression values.

The interesting and original point in Inglehart's discussion of the issue is not the assertion that values are important, but the method of measuring this importance. After analyzing the results from more than 80 countries worldwide, he came to the conclusion that 'formal' democracy tends to emerge when more than 30% of the population emphasizes self-expression values, whereas 'genuine' democracy makes its appearance when at least 45% of the population supports self-expression values.

7 Inglehart, 1990; Inglehart, 1997.

8 Huntington, 1991.

This classification of value systems is important, since it is closely linked to the question of political culture and to theoretical approaches towards its study. Many scholars have tended to argue that the survival of democratic institutions is connected with value orientations.<sup>9</sup> The entire literature on political culture depends upon this connection, which assumes that 'the fate of a political system is largely determined by its people's political attitudes and value orientations'.<sup>10</sup> There is another, diametrically opposed approach to the question which asserts that democratic norms can only emerge through practice under existing democratic institutions, which means that it is not the norms that are preconditions for democratic institutions but vice versa.<sup>11</sup> Inglehart and his colleagues, after empirically testing the question of the interdependence of values and democratic institutions, argue that it can be said with certainty that democratic institutions have little if any influence on self-expression values, but self-expression values have a strong impact upon democratic institutions.

To sum up Inglehart's approach: (a) there are two dimensions for placing a particular value system: traditional vs. secular-rational, and survival vs. self-expression; and (b) there are three basic types of value systems: traditional, modern, and postmodern. Inglehart and his colleagues have studied over 90 societies using this classification; for a study of Georgian societal values, this approach provides the most widespread methodology (for systematic study) and richest empirical materials (for comparative study).

9 Almond and Verba, 1963; Almond and Verba, 1980.

10 Inglehart and Welzel, 2005, p.245.

11 Rustow, 1970.

## The Study of Values in Georgia

A serious drawback when studying values in Georgia is that the country could not be included in the World Values Surveys until the fall of the Soviet Union. First results date from the 1990s<sup>12</sup>, but we cannot compare these with earlier data. Inglehart's approach was also used in a study of the values of Georgian society undertaken in 2006, which gives us a more recent picture of the issue.<sup>13</sup>

These two sets of data do not differ significantly from each other. In World Values Survey studies undertaken in the period 1990–1994, Georgia is placed in the vicinity of other ex-communist countries such as Armenia, Azerbaijan and Romania. It is located at the mid-point of the vertical axis (the traditional vs. secular-rational dimension) and significantly left of the mid-point of the horizontal axis (the survival vs. self-expression dimension). These results were largely confirmed by the 2006 study.

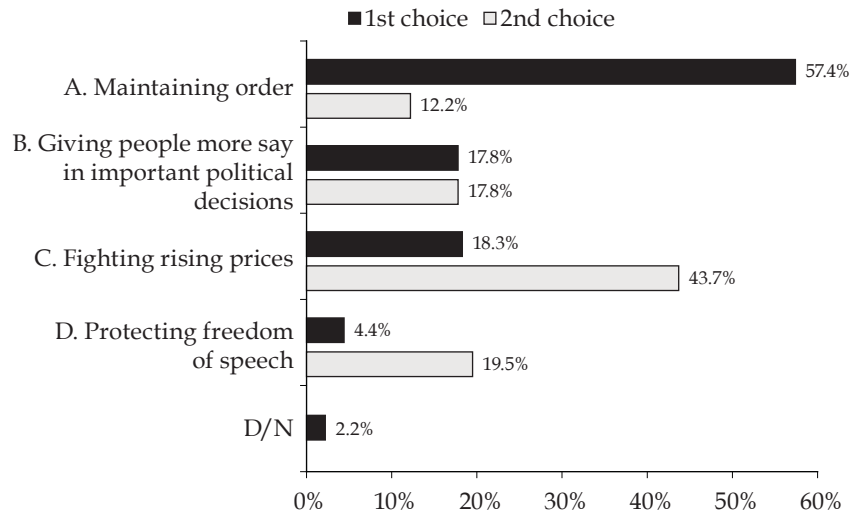
The answers to two questions given below provide the material that enables us to measure the ratio of survival / self-expression values in Georgia.

12 For the results see the website <<http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org>> (accessed 15 June 2010).

13 See Zedania, 2006.

Figure 1: Measuring Survival and Self-Expression Values

If you had to choose among the following things,  
which are the *two* that seem the most desirable to you?



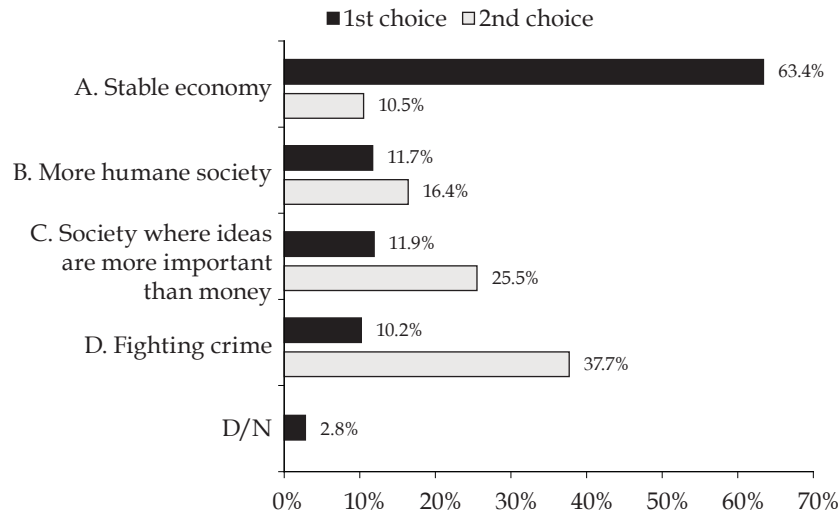
Respondents answer the question twice, so that one can identify their first and second priorities. Labelling the questions A to D, A and C should tap materialist orientations, while B and D should cover post-materialist values. As we see, the result is unambiguous: 57.4% name maintaining order as their first priority, whereas 43.7% regard fighting rising prices as the second priority for the country. This is a very clear valorisation of physical and economic security on the part of the Georgian public, which shows clearly the nature of the major problems in their lives. In comparison with these problems, post-materialist values such as democratic participation and self-expression are less popular.

The picture is the same when respondents answer the following question:



Figure 2: Measuring Survival and Self-Expression Values

If you had to choose among the following things,  
which are the *two* that seem the most desirable to you?



From these, A and D should tap materialist orientations, while B and C should cover post-materialist values. These answers confirm the responses to the previous question: the emphasis is on physical and economic security. 63.4% name a stable economy as their first priority, while 37.7% regard fighting crime as their second priority.

One of the most obvious indicators of the predominance of survival values over self-expression values is the way child education is viewed in Georgia: 70.8% regard love of hard work as an essential character trait to be taught to children, while only 3% regard imagination as essential.

Tolerance towards homosexuality is very weak: 79.2% of the public would not want a homosexual as a neighbour. Only 17.7% agree with the statement that people should be allowed to live a free sexual life, whereas 50.5% disagree with this statement.

The level and form of trust in a society is one of the major indicators of the system of values predominant in it. Correcting social

capital theories,<sup>14</sup> according to which interpersonal trust and voluntary associations are the communal ground on which democracies flourish, Inglehart draws attention to the fact that not every type of interpersonal trust activity in associations reflects emancipative values and creates the social capital necessary for democratic development. This is by no means a novel idea for the theory of social capital, which has devoted significant attention to the question of the negative effects that bonding social capital can have on society as a whole. But there is another interesting criticism based on a comparative analysis of the correlation between voluntary association membership and democracy: Inglehart asserts that the old Tocquevillian idea that associations are 'schools of democracy' does not find quantitative confirmation in his study. Confidence in public institutions, which was also thought to be an important factor in stabilizing a democratic regime, is not shown to have any impact either. It is interpersonal trust that shows a positive linkage with both formal and 'real' democracy. "Interpersonal trust does have a significant impact on effective democracy and seems to be a valid indicator of a pro-democratic civic culture".<sup>15</sup>

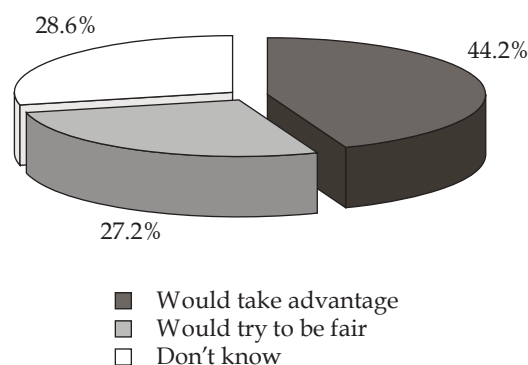
But this interpersonal trust is lacking in Georgian society, which in general seems to be sceptical towards 'non-personified' trust. 13% of those questioned stated that 'most people can be trusted', and 30.1% think that 'if you do not know someone personally you cannot trust him', 8.9% going even so far as to say that 'you can't completely trust anyone except blood relatives'. Based on these results, one can conclude that the Georgian society does not possess the resource of 'generalized' trust – a characteristic trait rather typical of traditional, pre-modern societies. This conclusion is only confirmed by the answers to the question whether they think their trust could be abused by others:

14 Putnam, 1993; Putnam, 2000; Fukuyama, 1995.

15 Inglehart and Welzel, 2005, p.256.

Figure 3: Measuring Trust

Do you think most people would take advantage of you if they got a chance, or would they try to be fair?



One can conclude that in Georgia the choice between survival and self-expression value systems is unambiguously on the side of survival values. This is not surprising for a country, which after the fall of the Soviet Union experienced civil war, two secessionist conflicts, an extreme deterioration in the economy and constant tensions with its strongest neighbor. These circumstances are covered by Inglehart's scarcity hypotheses: security is valued because it is hard to obtain. But according to the socialization hypothesis the predominance of survival values will be preserved during the generation born after 1989, since this generation was already socialized into these survival values.

As to the traditional vs. secular-rational dimension, here too Georgian society tends more towards a traditional value system than towards a secular-rational one.

Very strong family ties are indicated by the number that agree with the statement: 'One of my goals in life is to make my parents proud', with 40.7% agreeing and 41.7% strongly agreeing.

The obvious predominance of traditional values over modern ones is evident from the responses to the statement that 'traditions should be valued more than high technologies'. Some 66.4% agree with this statement and 23.4% disagree.

A total of 93.3% regard themselves as affiliated with a religion, although church attendance is rather low: only 11.5% attend church weekly. Since religiosity is measured by these two indicators – beliefs and practices – one can observe the influence of the forced secularization of the Soviet period. This could be an explanation for the significant gap between believers and practitioners of religion.

Overall, 93% of Georgians are very proud or proud of their nationality. This is where the question of ethnic nationalism comes into play. Certainly not every kind of nationalism can be regarded as part of a traditional system of values – here we find one of the problematic topics of Inglehart's theory, which does not take into account the possibility of modern, more civic form of nationalism. When analyzing each particular case, one should take into account the historical and cultural background in which a specific form of nationalism has developed in a country. In Georgia the birth of 'ethnic' nationalism took place in the nineteenth century within the framework of the Russia imperial system; in a situation where Georgian nationalism could not find a political form, it concentrated completely on culture, language and religion. This historical legacy, transformed but maintained during the Soviet period as well, continues to haunt the contemporary political discourse on ethnicity and nationalism, of which the popularity of Stalin is one – albeit the most sinister – symbol.

As can be seen from the results of the 2006 survey, the value system of Georgian society largely follows the traditional pattern. This is a challenge for the successful transformation of the Georgian state into a democratic one, since it can be assumed, as was demonstrated above, that there is a certain correlation between the stability of a democracy and a political culture based on self-expression values. Democratic institutions need values of trust, tolerance and civic participation strongly ingrained in a society. But this does not mean that alongside pre-dominant traditional values there are no bearers of modern and postmodern values in Georgia. There is a significant gap between the ruling political elite with its strongly modern value system and the general public with its traditional values.<sup>16</sup> This gap was, and still is, the origin of many tensions in the

16 See Zedania, 2007.

aftermath of the November 2003 revolution, since often the ruling elite is viewed as not conforming to the largely traditional pattern of values, attempting instead to change this pattern, which leads to a backlash from the population.

This gap becomes even wider when one thinks of the fact that the cultural elite of the country is best described by categories borrowed from the postmodern value system: unconditional personal freedom, creativity, human rights and political participation – these are all defining values for the journalists, artists and writers active in the civil sphere. This cultural elite itself is very small and these values are not shared by the most of the public, but the cultural elite has significantly greater possibilities to make its voice heard through the mass-media than do other groups. This means that so-called postmodern orientations and representations which correspond to them also have a rather strong presence in Georgia, notwithstanding the fact that they are not shared by the majority of the population.

The presence of all three values systems in the public sphere produces a rather unusual effect of different temporalities existing at the same time and has a significant impact upon the structuring of political discourse in Georgia.

### Societal Values after 2003

The November Revolution of 2003 was explicitly interpreted by its agents as a repetition of 1989.<sup>17</sup> It was to bring to an end what had not been fully achieved during the demise of the Soviet Union: the removal of the old Soviet elite and the old Soviet ways of governance. Its name – the ‘Rose Revolution’ – was explicitly modeled on the ‘Velvet Revolutions’ of 1989 in Eastern Europe. The Rose Revolution was to be the triumph of democracy in Tbilisi, like fourteen years earlier in Prague and East Berlin, with celebrating masses in the streets taking power into their own hands. This parallel has strongly affected the way democracy has been thought of in Georgia ever since – it is about large numbers of people taking to the

17 See Wheatley, 2005; Coppieters and Legvold, 2005; Welt, 2010.

streets. Peaceful revolution has been considered to be the preferred and legitimate way of gaining power, and this largely conditioned the strategy of the political opposition in 2004–2009 (that strategy being the emulation and repetition of the Rose Revolution). But it has proven impossible to mobilize the masses without resorting to populist, often xenophobic and fundamentalist rhetoric. This has led to severe skepticism within the Georgian political elite about the chances of genuine participatory democracy in the country, since the first and almost sole image associated with democracy is the image of large illiberal crowds demanding the resignation of the government. The general mood of disappointment with democracy, diagnosed in many places in Europe<sup>18</sup>, has also reached Georgia. Because of this, emphasis has been shifting slowly but surely from democratization towards modernization, the reconciliation of the two sometimes being presented as being problematic, if not impossible, at the country's present stage of development<sup>19</sup>. Modernization itself has been defined as a multi-faceted process encompassing tasks ranging from the improvement of public infrastructure and the reformation of public administration to the transformation of the value system of society. From this point of view, the removal of Stalin's monument in Gori was a moment in the broader context of a cultural policy aimed at the radical transformation of the public sphere. It was thought that the task of confronting and overcoming the Soviet past had not been achieved in 1989–1991 with the change of the communist regime. The revolution of 2003 and the new wave of modernization were needed to prompt reflection about those factors which should shape national identity, including a new value system, new attitudes towards the past, and new national projects (such as Euro-Atlantic integration).

This new cultural policy accompanying the modernization process can be exemplified in a large poster which appeared 2005 in Republic Square in central Tbilisi. This showed men, women and children with different features and dressed in different colorful costumes, a reference to different parts of Georgia and to the various cultures of the national and religious minorities living within

18 Krastev, 2010.

19 Darchiashvili, 2010.

the country. But the most important part of the poster was the text. Slogans were written in three languages: Georgian, English and Russian. All the three texts were identical in size and color. But they were by no means interchangeable. In Georgian the slogan read 'Dzala ertobashia' (Strength lies in Unity), the English came after the Georgian inscription and read 'Celebrating our Diversity'. The Russian slogan said: 'Gruzia – Nasha Rodina' (Georgia is our Homeland).

A discursive analysis of the picture and the slogans would concentrate on the interrelationship between the different discursive formations which can be rather easily identified because of the shortness of the texts and the fact that each discourse appearing on the picture is in a different language. One could speak of an interesting intersection of nationalist (the Georgian slogan) and multicultural (the English slogan) discourses in the post-Soviet space, together with the remnants of the Soviet discourse (the Russian slogan). But this discursive analysis should naturally be supplemented by an ideological analysis which has as its aim to identify the power-relations this picture and these texts are supposed to support and/or create. This ideological analysis would show how the incommensurable claims of (a) the project of modernization, (b) an unwillingness/incapacity to break completely with an older legacy, and (c) a postmodern sensibility imposing itself from the outside cannot be combined except in an imaginary construction where contradicting understandings of collective identity coexist in ideological space. We can see on this poster and its inscriptions all three systems of values listed above: traditional (which in Georgia is largely a Soviet tradition), modern (unity) and postmodern (diversity). The tensions between them in the ideological text are veiled by making each statement in a different language.

This tension and conflict between three different value systems existing at the same time and in the same space give rise to two sets of questions:

- 1) One might think that the conflict between traditional and modern systems of values in Georgia is to be conceived of in the following way: there is a traditional society which is being broken up by the advance of new, modern, secular-rational values. This would be a

one-sided and essentially mistaken picture of the whole process. One should rather view it as a juncture of two conflicting processes, one of which is modernization (including the onset of modern values), but the second of which is 're-traditionalization'. Traditional society is not something that is simply there and resists passively; it is a process that strongly and actively structures the social field, inventing traditions when there are none.<sup>20</sup> The main agent of this process of re-traditionalization in Georgia is the Orthodox Church.

Here one should recall the peculiarities of secularization and de-secularization processes in post-communist countries, the dialectics of which still awaits an adequate study. As far as the Orthodox Church in these countries is concerned, the main challenge it faces is the pluralism on both institutional and individual levels that is necessarily associated with the onset of modernity. Pluralism on the institutional level means that every religious monopoly, having survived the repressive policies of communist regimes, is being undermined in a more competitive and liberal environment. On the level of the individual it means that religion leaves the sphere of subjectively self-evident truth and becomes an object of decisions.<sup>21</sup> The Orthodox Church can react either by accepting this pluralism and adjusting itself to it, or by rejecting it and taking the road of neo-traditionalism (Berger). In Georgia, the Orthodox Church is doubtless opting for the latter alternative. From 1989 to 2003, during a period when there was a deficit of strong public institutions, it was the Orthodox Church that played the role of the sole stabilizing factor in the building of a new Georgian national identity. Orthodox Christianity became so intertwined with 'ethnic' nationalism that it became the main obstacle to the introduction of a more civic version of nationalism (the task explicitly envisaged by the new government since 2003). But this process has its positive side as well – it is since 2003 that tension has arisen between the State and the Church, a tension which is generally uncharacteristic of the Orthodox world. One may contrast this with the situation in Russia where the traditional 'symphonia' between the two institutions seems to have been

20 Hobsbawm and Ranger, 1983.

21 Berger, 2005.



re-established during the last decade.<sup>22</sup> In Georgia, despite the fact that both government and the Church do everything to conceal the tensions between them, it has become increasingly obvious that they are both going in different directions: the slogan of the government is modernization, while the Church is trying to return to tradition (frequently inventing the latter). It is precisely this that may be the first anticipation of the full-scale separation of Church and State without which there can no liberal democracy as such.<sup>23</sup>

2) A structural openness to different flows of information (which can be summarized under the title of globalization) gives rise to a second set of problems: those of modernization in a world which itself has gone beyond classical forms of modernity. When speaking about the postmodern system of values, one should take into account that this system has already found its reflections in many different spheres of life, starting with the arts and sciences<sup>24</sup> and ending with international relations.<sup>25</sup> While the emphasis of modernization is on the production of unity and homogeneity, postmodern values stress the principle of diversity. This means that modernity has to assert itself not only against the backdrop of the process of re-traditionalization, but also in a world which would like to leave its modernity behind, something which complicates the task of modernization in Georgia even more. This problem is related to a more basic structural problem of a country finding itself within a new temporal horizon which is neither its own nor that of the countries it tries to emulate. Initially (that is, in eighteenth-century Europe), modernization was not a project that could be compared with something extant that had already been achieved. But when, starting with the twentieth century, the difference between the center and the periphery becomes decisive, those regions still in need of development face a lack of time reserves. The periphery is under pressure to modernize and the dynamic developed as a result of this need looks very different from

22 Knox, 2005.

23 Manent, 2004, pp.39–54.

24 Lyotard, 1984.

25 Cooper, 2003.

the 'Western model' it tries emulate.<sup>26</sup> It is this temporal complexity that affects significantly the process of the transformation of societal values in countries like Georgia.

These two sets of questions could provide frameworks for further, more detailed and subtler studies of the transformation process of societal values in contemporary Georgia.

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26 Luhmann, 1995.

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