The National Question and the Georgian Social-Democratic Movement under the Russian Imperial Rule (1892-1903)

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Abstract

The article examines the ideological transformation of the Georgian Social-Democratic Movement - *Third Group* - regarding the national question between 1892 and 1903. The study discusses the formation and early development of the *Third Group,* focusing on its emergence as a political movement, its entry into the socio-political arena, and the adoption of its first political program.

Initially, the paper explores the movement's ideological foundations, including the party programs and publicistic writings, showcasing its efforts to incorporate European social-democratic ideas. Moreover, it provides the policy analysis in relation to the national question and the issue of Georgian autonomy. Finally, the article contextualizes the program and ideological perspectives of the Georgian Social-Democratic movement within the broader framework of imperial Marxist and Social-Democratic political movements in Europe, with a particular focus on the Austro-Hungarian model.

Keywords*: Nationalism, National Question, Social-Democracy, Georgian Social-Democracy.*

Introduction

Political movements in Eastern Europe primarily emerged during the 1870s and 1880s. In Georgia, the early signs of a social movement were evident in the 1870s, influenced by two key factors: the activities of Russian *Narodnik* groups and the underground resistance of students at the Tiflis Theological Seminary against Tsarist policies. These emerging movements exhibited a synthesis of both Western European social-democratic traditions and Russian ideological currents.

What was Georgian Social Democracy and who were Georgian Social Democrats? In 1894 Famous Georgian journalist Giorgi Tsereteli wrote an article about the first circle of Georgian social-democrats - The *Third group*[1]: "*The Third Group* includes village teachers, educated seminarists and graduates of the Pedagogical Institute, and aims at teaching illiterate people how to read and write, to provide them with the scholarly views in order to follow the developments of this particular period“ (G. Tsereteli, 1894, p. 3). Georgian Social Democrats, who were newly acquainted with the political theory of Marxism included Noe Jordania[2], Pilipe Makharadze, Egnate Ingorokva, Silibristro Jibladze, Isidore Ramishvili, Mikha Tskhakaia etc. The younger generation who joined the movement in the late 1890s and early 1900s were Akaki Chkhenkeli, Noe Ramishvili and Irakli Tsereteli. The movement had an intellectual core, press,

[1] The Third Group (*Me'same D'asi*) The journalist Giorgi Tsereteli (1842-1900) classified the social and political groups from the 1860s into three distinct categories. The First Group represented the initial generation of "Tergdaleulebi" primarily dedicated to cultural and educational activities (Tergdaleulebi refers to young Georgian intellectuals and public figures graduated from various universities of the Russian Empire. They left Georgia, crossed the "Terek" River, and traveled to get an education). This group was led by prominent writers and public figures such as Ilia Chavchavadze (1837-1907) and etc. Their political outlook was largely aligned with cultural nationalism. The Second Group comprised a radical-democratic faction within the first generation of Tergdaleulebi, focusing on the economic and political development of Georgian society. Ideological leaders included prominent public figures like Niko Nikoladze (1843-1928), and Giorgi Tsereteli. The Third group consisted of young individuals who emerged in the public sphere around the 1880s-1890s

[2] Some authors refer to him as Zhordania.

agitators, protagonists, and a wide circle of supporters, especially in Tbilisi, Batumi, Chiatura, and Guria (Iremadze et al., 2024)

The years of 1892-1893, the formal emergence of the Georgian Social-Democratic movement, were characterized by two key conferences of former seminarians and populist intellectuals. The first conference took place in Western Georgia, in the settlement of Kvirila in 1892 (Chichua, 1933) followed by a second gathering in Tbilisi, the political and cultural center of the Caucasus. The *Third Group* functioned independently for eleven years before officially joining the Russian Social-Democratic Workers' Party in 1903.

Although the Social-Democratic political movement initially concentrated on the issues of a specific territorial unit, it was profoundly influenced by the broader political discourses and ideological debates shaping contemporary European political movements. This period was marked by an intensified engagement with the national question and the development was significant as it reflected the broader patters of typical political movements within the imperial context. As in most small nations within the Eastern European empires such as Austro-Hungary and Russia, the issue of nationalism in Georgia created a significant challenge.

The research aims to study the ideological transformation of the Georgian Social Democracy in relation to the national question from 1892 to 1903. This research addresses the following question: How did the Georgian Social-Democratic movement perceive and engage with nationalism within the broader context of its struggle against tsarist rule?

This study argues that between 1898 and 1903 the Georgian social-democratic movement underwent a remarkable ideological transformation, manifested primarily by a reduction of narrowly Georgian national influences in its political outlook and by the clear adoption and institutionalization of European political perspectives.

To explore the ideological transformation of the Georgian Social-Democratic Movement, the research applies context and comparative analysis methods. Context Analysis of primary and secondary sources includes a comprehensive examination of foundational texts, such as the first program of the Social Democratic Party, party programs of the Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party (RSDLP) from 1898 and 1903, newspaper articles authored by Jordania, published between 1892 and 1905, programs of European Social-Democratic Parties, and programs of smaller national social-democratic parties within the Russian Empire, including Polish, Latvian, Ukrainian, and Jewish parties, in relation to their national policies, as well as the scholarly literature about European Marxism and Social-Democracy's stance on national issues. Comparative analysis includes the ideological evolution of national-social democratic movements, both within Georgia and in other imperial states. It contributes to identifying overarching trends and patterns in the ideological development of these movements across different national and political contexts.

Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

The research concentrated on the mass mobilization strategies employed by the Georgian Social-Democratic movement. According to Ronald Suny: "Georgian social democracy was unique in the Russian Empire, and because of its close connection with both the ethnically diverse workers movement and the massively organized Georgian peasantry*"* (Suny, 2022, p. 265). To analyze the national policies, the article uses theoretical frameworks designed by prominent leaders of the Austrian Social Democratic Party - Otto Bauer and Engelbert Pernerstorfer. Austrian social democrats highlighted the importance of nationalism, represented in the statement that "Austria can only exist if the national question is resolved" (Pernerstorfer,

1907, p. 7). Eric Hobsbawm's work *Nations and Nationalism since 1780* offers a comprehensive framework for categorizing and analyzing the social democracies of Eastern Europe. He highlights how Marxist movements, despite their internationalist ideology, often evolved into national parties in practice. *"*For instance, in Finland, the socialist party effectively became the de facto Finnish national party, securing 47% of the vote in the last free elections before the Russian Revolution of 1917. Similarly, in Georgia, the Mensheviks played a central role in the national movement, while in Armenia, the Dashnaks, who joined the Socialist International, emerged as a key political force" (Hobsbawm, 2012, p.p. 171-172).

Brubaker's theories of nationalism and Beissinger's theories of mobilization contributed to the understanding of the connection between national question and the mass mobilization of society. Brubaker (Brubaker, 2010) portrays nationalism not as a fixed cultural entity, but as a set of political projects, practices, and categories that produce and mobilize collective identities. Brubaker emphasizes how demand-makers, such as political figures and social movements, create categories of inclusion and exclusion, shape channels of resistance organization, and create "groupness," thereby generating enhanced solidarity within groups. His approach shifts the analysis from static nations to dynamic processes of classification, categorization, and mobilization.

Mark R. Beissinger's work on mobilization (Beissinger, 2002) provides a very important theoretical framework for the study. He considers collective actions as a product of the interaction of organizational capacity, political capacity, and strategic choice, rather than as a simple response to discontent. Beissinger argues that the articulation of social grievances in connection with the national question is crucial for mass mobilization. Both theoretical perspectives are therefore instrumental in explaining the formation of the Georgian Social

Democratic movement. In this context, nationalism did not displace social concerns, rather, it facilitated their prioritization, which in turn reshaped the articulation of the national question itself.

For the studying of ideological development of Georgian social democracy, it is necessary to note several monographs that are of particular historical value. One of the main works is Stephen F. Jones's "Socialism in Georgian Colors: The European Path of Social Democracy" (Jones, 2007), which represents a complex study of Georgian social democracy. The author analyzes the process of development of the Georgian political movement through the eyes of European historiography.

This study was based on the following sources: the party programs and the theoretical views of the party leaders. In this regard, the list of works studied within the framework of the study is quite numerous, however, the newspaper report of the program developed in 1893 “Economic Success and Nationality” and the program of the United Russian Social Democratic Workers’ Party in 1903 (Caucasian Union of the R.S.D.M. Party, 1905) are distinguished. As for the thoughts of the leaders, the over 200 letters of Jordania, published in 1894-1903, were selected. The purpose of this collection was, on the one hand, to demonstrate the inconsistency of the views of Jordania, the leader of the Menshevik wing of the Georgian Social Democrats, and on the other hand, to portray Jordania as an aggressive nationalist. Although, this will not be enough for tracking the ideological transformation process, given the principles and goals of its compilation, but it will be very useful for analyzing side effects.

The Formation of the *Third Group* and the Role of the Founding Father of the Georgian Social Democracy - Noe Jordania

Jones identified three critical trends in the formation and development of the Georgian Social Democratic movement. "First, of course was the influence of Russian socialist groups. The second - European socialism, and the third, and more controversial influence - *Tergdaleulebi.* The broader societal context of Georgia influenced both its practical demands and intellectual trajectory (Jones, 2007). Among these three influences, the Georgian Social Democrats were mostly affected by the cultural nationalism of the *Tergdaleulebi*. Emerging in the 1860s and 1870s, this movement of educated Georgian youth - initiated by writer, publicist, and national figure Ilia Chavchavadze - gained momentum through his extensive journalistic and organizational efforts. The 1870s were remarkable period of national growth, as the establishment of institutions such as the *Society for Spreading of Literacy among Georgians, The Nobles Land Bank,* and various theatrical and historical societies laid the foundation for a distinct vision of cultural nationalism. This ideology, centered on the promotion of the Georgian language, education, and historical consciousness, significantly shaped the intellectual and social environment in which Georgian Social Democrats emerged. Many of them were either graduates or teachers at Literacy Society schools, contributors to its affiliated press, and participants in its cultural initiatives (Jones, 2007). Although the *Third Group* was deeply influenced by the cultural-nationalist legacy of the *Tergdaleulebi,* their initial political opposition was directed against the bourgeois-liberal circles associated with Chavchavadze and his newspaper *Iveria* (Suny, 2022).

The first public appearance of the Georgian Social Democrats was held in May 1894, during the funeral of Egnate Ninoshvili (Ingoroqva)[3].] The funeral became more than a commemorative event, it transformed into a symbolic ceremony marking the public emergence of a new political force. At the grave, Ninoshvili's close associate, Silibistro

[3] Egnate Ninoshvili (1859-1894) - Georgian writer, one of the founders of the social-democratic movement.

Jibladze (1859-1922), delivered a speech that resonated with ideological conviction: "Our new master is materialism - it is rapidly taking root in our country. Our present reality is shaped by the existence of two opposing forces or classes: on one side, the representatives of physical and intellectual labour; on the other, the chairwarmer bourgeois-capitalists. The fate of the former is unbearable labour and exhaustion; for the latter, the enjoyment of the fruits of others' labour... To overcome this perversion, the current state of affairs is, in the words of one scholar, 'pregnant with the present*"* (Jibladze, 1894, p. 12).

The first gathering of Georgian Social Democrats - commonly referred to as the "Kvirila Conference" - was held on December 25, 1892, in the Kutaisi governorate. According to the letters of Jordania, the meeting was prepared throughout 1892, led primarily by Egnate Ninoshvili (Jordania (*Rcheuli Natserebi*, Publisher - Sharadze), 1990). The Kvirila Conference, was dominated by seminarians[4], and partisans of the *Narodnik* movement, whose ideological orientation significantly influenced the proceedings. Nevertheless, the participants failed to reach consensus on the formulation of a concrete political program, prompting the organization of a second conference in February 1893.

As Jordania noted, during this second gathering in Tbilisi for the first time within the entire Russian Empire, the ideas of the Russian *Narodnik* movement came into open conflict with traditional Marxist socialism (Jordania (Rcheuli Natserebi), 1990). Although the original text of the program developed within the framework of this meeting does not exist, a newspaper article authored by Jordania *Economic Success and Nationality* was published a year later, was the foundation of the movement's program. A constant leitmotif in Jordania's program was the

[4] The Tiflis Theological Seminary was founded in 1817. The Seminary became one of the main pillars of Russification in the hands of local curators of the Russian Imperial government, where the Georgian language and history were persecuted. The seminary mainly educated the children of poor nobles, clergymen, and, in exceptional cases, peasants.

Marxist conception of the economic base and the foundation it supports. The program articulated the thesis that national and individual freedom can only be attained when both the nation and the individual achieve economic self-sufficiency and are integrated into a broader economic system. In the program, Jordania stated: "A nation that is materially united is also ideologically united. There exists a shared desire among all to engage in national activity and to strengthen the nation" (Iremadze et al., 2015, 180). Jordania further voiced particular concern over the failure to consolidate the peasantry and the prevailing tendency toward atomized, individual existence. He argued that capitalism dismantles the internal economic bonds of a nation, which ultimately threatens the nation's very existence. As Jordania wrote: *"*Human necessity has intertwined all members of the nation so that breaking it would spell the death of the nation itself. Here, unity is the fruit of material development and is completely based on life. Accordingly, the political forms of the nation are built and changed, and history is given this or that direction" (Iremadze et al., 2015, p. 180).

In the 1880s and 1890s, patterns of urban and rural population distribution in Georgia underwent significant transformation as large numbers of the rural proletariat migrated to urban centers in search of employment in emerging industrial sectors. Between 1886 and 1897, the population of Tbilisi increased by approximately 103 percent, surpassing 160,000 inhabitants (Jones, 2018). Alongside Tbilisi, Batumi experienced particularly rapid demographic growth, driven by its strategic role as the principal port for exporting Baku oil. The city's population rose from 8,671 residents in 1882 to 28,508 by 1897, reflecting Batumi's expanding importance as an industrial and commercial hub within the Black Sea region (*Essays in the History of South-West Georgia*, V 3, 2008).

The first party program, Georgian social reality and its historical echoes are prominently featured. The program highlighted two fundamental challenges stemming from the fragmentation and isolation of Georgia's regions: first, the lack of economic integration and the slow pace of urbanization; second, the persistent failure to foster national unity and cohesion. Jordania's text reflected the socio-economic conditions of Georgia in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Despite the formal abolition of serfdom, a genuine capitalist revolution had not occurred. The countryside remained under the control of a elite, and the structural foundations necessary for national consolidation were still absent. In the Georgian countryside, particularly in Eastern Georgia, a new form of exploitation emerged. The traditional feudal lord was replaced by a usurer, who no longer governed with "divine mandate", but through material power. Usury, unlike productive capital, generated no new value; it was oriented solely toward profit, and its ultimate outcome was the deepening impoverishment of large segments of the rural population (Iremadze et al., 2015).

In addition to his analysis of Georgian socio-economic conditions, Jordania drew on European examples to contextualize and reinforce his arguments. In the Georgian case, he saw parallels in the way economic dominance, whether by foreign bourgeois elites or internal aristocratic remnants, was used to suppress the development of a cohesive and economically independent national movement (Iremadze et. al., 2015).

Jordania concluded his program by stating the following: "This way we went to the following conclusion: 1. Material well-being, regarded as both the foundation and the essential source of human existence; 2. The freedom of both the nation as a whole and the individual, considered a prerequisite for achieving the paramount goal and serving as the central objective of the actions of the progressive vanguard; from this, 3. The cultivation and revitalization of

national consciousness among the people, alongside the recognition and protection of human rights and human dignity for every individual, must be grounded in a solid economic framework" (Iremadze et al, 2015, p. 212).

Since 1893, when Jordania started traveling and studying in Europe, the influence of European socialism, particularly Marxism, got stronger within the Georgian *Third Group*. During this time, Jordania met prominent European socialists, including Jules Guedes, Jean Jaurès, and Paul Lafargue, as well as Karl Kautsky. In Geneva, Jordania became affiliated with the so-called *Labour Group* of Russian socialists. Through these associations, Jordania got acquainted with all the key European socialist thinkers, many of whom he knew personally (Jones, 2007).

Between 1895 and 1896, the national question gained even greater significance within the *Third Group*. During this period, Jordania got acquainted with the theories of Karl Kautsky in Europe. Jordania was assured that social question was inherently linked to the national question, particularly concerning oppressed nations (Jordania (Chemi Tsarsuli),1990). Upon his return from immigration, Jordania observed that between 1893 and 1897, the activities of Marxist groups were largely confined to establishing connections with small worker groups and engaging in illegal propaganda. The *Third Group* members did not have strong connection with the broader working class. Following his return, Jordania convened a conference In Tbilisi at the end of 1897, during which the framework for the subsequent large-scale activities of the Georgian Social Democrats was outlined. At this conference, Jordania not only succeeded in persuading his colleagues of the necessity of advancing to a new phase of the political movement, but also provided a reasonable justification for this shift, drawing on examples from European socio-political movements and the attitudes of the working class that he had studied.

Under the oppressive conditions at the seminary, the establishment of underground reading circles and secret opposition to the imperial authorities became an important experience for the Georgian socialists. These early acts of resistance served as a rehearsal, preparing them for their eventual participation in the larger political struggle. The spread of the *Third Group's* ideas was further facilitated by the growing popularity of Egnate Ninoshvili's works, which vividly depicted social realities. Ninoshvili's writings were deeply instilled with descriptions of the harsh social conditions in the Georgian countryside, highlighting the plight of the Georgian peasantry (Ninoshvili, 1954).

In the subsequent years, the *Third Group* actively engaged in theoretical debates concerning both social and national issues. In 1897, Jordania published an article titled *Newspaper Iveria and Nationality* in the newspaper *Kvali*, in which he further clarified the theses presented in the party program. The central thesis of the article reiterated the key role of economic development in national progress. Jordania argued that economic development inevitably leads to the concentration of capital in the hands of a specific segment of the nation. This process, he noted, also resulted in the division of the nation into social classes and the emergence of class conflict. While in developed countries, economic development and the ensuing class struggle were typically dominated by the bourgeoisie, in less developed nations, the working class undertook this leading role. Jordania also addressed the role of urban centers in the process of economic and national development, emphasizing that settlements predominantly inhabited by working-class populations, where educational institutions emerge, play a crucial role. Jordania summarized the ongoing struggle with conservatives, stating, "Social Democrats everywhere and always unite progressive groups against the conservatives" (Jordania (I), 1920, p. 128).

In 1896, Jordania openly opposed the *First Group* in his article *Intellectuals of the 1960s and Today's Life.* In this article, Jordania outlined the specific areas of disagreement between the ideas of the *Tergdaleulebi* and those of the *Third Group*. Jordania acknowledged the positive contributions of the *Tergdaleulebi* in terms of national consolidation, yet he criticized their approach to education, specifically their belief that education alone could resolve the national question. Jordania's perspective was rooted in the view that national development must occur within the context of class struggle, and he argued that this framework is a fundamental prerequisite for the nation's pursuit of progress (Jordania (II), 1920).

At the initial stage of the development of the Social Democrats, a significant distinction emerged in the social context specific to Georgian reality. Traditional European socialism was primarily aligned with the interests of the urban and working classes, whereas in Georgia, the urban space was limited in size, and the working class was relatively small in number. From the outset, the Georgian Social Democrats aimed to broaden their support base beyond the urban workforce. They sought to unite not only urban workers but also rural workers and peasants, as well as the petty bourgeoisie, which predominantly consisted of small-scale urban owners. Jordania even acknowledged that his interest in European socialism was particularly stipulated by comparisons between the life of the Georgian peasantry and that of European peasants.

A New Era for Development of Georgian Social Democracy

1898 marked a significant turning point for the movement, when the newspaper *Kvali* became a periodical of the Social Democrats. It played remarkable role in the political activities of this period. The newspaper served as the primary means of communication between political entities and the public, becoming the most effective mechanism for disseminating political

ideas. Jordania highlighted the importance of *Kvali*, noting, “With this change, *Kvali* became the first legal newspaper of Georgian Marxists. It was, at the same time, the first such example in the entire Russian Empire, where socialists had no legal newspapers anywhere" (Jordania (Chemi Tsarsuli) 1990, p. 34).

Starting from January 1, 1898, Jordania began publishing a series of articles in *Kvali* titled *Current Questions.* These articles outlined the key components of the new program of the Social Democrats, and discussed different topics, such as, innovations in the political movement, stance of the movement in relation to Marxist movement, etc.

In 1898, Jordania's views marked a significant departure from those expressed in the first program of the *Third Group* in 1893. This shift is particularly evident in the scope and depth of the topics addressed. In contrast to the earlier program, which only superficially touched upon issues such as class struggle, national development, and the role of the intelligentsia in society. Jordania explored the stance a Marxist group should adopt toward the historical process of capitalism and the manner in which the development of the bourgeoisie ought to be understood within that framework. He examined how the nation, more broadly, could use the advancement of capitalism as a foundation for social and economic progress. Jordania further reflected on the potential constructive dimensions of class struggle itself, considering how such conflict could contribute positively to societal transformation. Moreover, he analyzed the ways in which class struggle shaped national development and addressed the role society. His ideas were aligned with the views of European Marxist groups of the time, would become the foundational pillars for the Georgian Marxist political movement (Jordania, 1898).

In addition to formulating the new program of the *Third Group* in 1898, Jordania also clearly articulated his position towards the nationalist group. In his articles *Current’s Questions*

and, later in 1898, in the series *Intelligentsia* published in *Kvali*, Jordania revisited his earlier stance towards the *Tergdaleulebi.* While he had previously opposed the *First Group* on political and ideological grounds, the confrontation between them intensified significantly in 1898. Jordania later criticized the First Group from an ideological standpoint. By 1898, he began to highlight the negative role played by the nationalist group in various articles. These critiques were primarily focused on the group's rejection of the theory of class struggle and their adoption of the *Theory of Common Ground*, by Ilia Chavchavadze. For Jordania, this theory represented not a path to national development or progress through unity among all classes, but rather an effort to maintain the existing social system, benefiting only a select few. The theory in the view of the *Third Group*, was seen as an indication of the interests of a particular class over those of society as a whole, which fundamentally contradicted Marxist principles from the outset.

In 1898, in his series of articles *Intelligentsia*, Jordania remarked: 'They have escaped the economic development of our country, which increased the gap between classes and nations. In this way, the intelligentsia obscures and shrouds in a haze the existing antagonism that really exists in life, but has not yet fully come to the fore. By doing so, it hinders the progress of life and the consciousness of this progress. The intelligentsia, in its role, plays an involuntary, reactionary part" (Jordania, 1898, p. 1). Then Jordania concludes: "It is dead to the present and will remain dead to the future. Neither a diploma nor intellectual mediocrity can save it" (Jordania, 1898, p. 1). With these assessments, Jordania captured a discourse that, until 1898, had existed somewhat implicitly within the *Third Group* but then became more explicit.

In June 1901, Jordania was arrested by the imperial - *Okhrana* (Department for Protecting Public Security and Order). Following his departure from the editorial office, *Kvali* adopted a more radical stance under its new editor, Irakli Tsereteli (1881-1959), one of the

prominent leaders of the 1917 February Revolution of Russia. Tsereteli took a much firmer position regarding the national question and the groups with nationalist aspirations. In the first half of 1903, Tsereteli published a series of articles in the editorial column of *Kvali*, titled *"Patriarchy, Nationality, or Service to the People?"*. In this article, the core position of Tsereteli is revealed, offering a clear insight into the ideological transformation of the *Third Party*. Tsereteli maintained a fundamentally Marxist perspective, emphasizing the economic dimension of class struggle, the development of capitalism, and the interests of the bourgeoisie. His article, which can be regarded as the programmatic theses of the Social Democrats during this period, not only challenged the nationalist *First Group* but also confronts the young autonomists, specifically the so-called *Tsnobis Furtseli* group.

In 1903, the leaders of the Social Democrats strongly opposed Chavchavadze's *Theory of Common Ground*.[5]. Tsereteli offered a critical assessment of the calls for unity, stating: "He who for several centuries considered himself the father of the country, who thought of himself as the sole defender and bearer of the language, culture, and customs, with his defeat, all his virtues seem to vanish and be destroyed. It was in this context that dissatisfaction with the present, hopelessness about the future, and only nostalgic memories of the past arise, which so clearly characterize our fellow countrymen" (I. Tsereteli, 1903, №14, p.p. 1-2). Tsereteli views the union with the Russian Empire as somewhat positive, comparing it to the metaphor of tying a small boat to a large ship in the ocean, making it easier to navigate and effect significant social transformation. This section of Tsereteli's article clearly reflected the attitude of Georgian social

[5] "The Theory of Common Ground " was initially introduced and promoted by Ilia Chavchavadze, a leader of Georgian cultural nationalism. Later, it was presented to the public under a nearly identical title by Archil Jorjadze (1872-1913), a leader of the nationalist ~~direction~~ socialist-federalist party. This theoretical approach essentially opposed the Marxist vision of "class struggle," which was gaining popularity in Georgia at that time. The theory aimed to be a unifying perspective for all classes of the Georgian population. It sought to demonstrate common interests across all classes and to avoid class fragmentation. Ultimately, neither Chavchavadze's vision, which was focused on cultural aspects, nor Jorjadze's vision, which significantly addressed social challenges, garnered broad support from the broader.

democracy towards the union of a small regional entity with a larger political force at the dawn of the 20th century.

The Second Congress of the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party (RSDLP), Merging and New Program

During the Second Congress of Russian Social Democratic Labour Party (RSDLP) in 1903 Georgian Social-Democratic Movement joint to the RSDLP. Therefore, it is important to analyze the benefits of this "unification" to the Georgian left-wing political context. However, this merge was challenging, and the process was far from being smooth. Instead, the merge was a complex negotiation of ideas, ideologies, and strategies, with many of the old programs and distinct positions of the Georgian Social Democrats still in place, though adjusted to fit the broader structure of the Russian Social Democratic movement.

Jordania's reflections in 1949, published in exile in his work *Georgian Social Democracy*, provided a retrospective evaluation of the strategic and tactical decisions made by the Georgian Social Democrats, particularly the 1903 merger with the RSDLP. He emphasized that “[the Georgian movement] initially developed independently, carving its own path within the broader framework of Marxist socialism. After ten years, the realization grew that the power of a small nation like Georgia was insufficient to challenge the imperial dominance of the Russian Empire on its own. It happened at the 1903 congress in London. By merging, the Georgian Social Democrats hoped to amplify their revolutionary potential, aligning their struggles with the larger Russian movement and focusing on the on the recognition that the fall of the Tsarist system and the establishment of the People's Republic. were the necessary first steps to achieving broader social and political demands” (Chvni Drosha, 1949, N5, p. 1).

During the discussions regarding the merger the initial generation of Georgian Social Democrats, particularly those associated with the *Third Group*, were largely opposing to merging with the RSDLP. Jordania, in particular, did not share the ideological stance of the RSDLP and remained committed to the principles of European Marxism. In his later memoirs, Jordania critically reflected on the initial entry of the RSDLP, expressing strong disapproval of the manner in which this integration occurred. He recalled an incident from early 1902, when, while in prison, he received a letter from the Tiflis Committee bearing the inscription *Russian Social Democratic Workers' Party* left him deeply shocked. He further concerned that the Georgian Social Democrats had been incorporated into the Russian Party not as a regional entity, but rather as a local one,. He expressed his apprehension about the ideological discrepancies between Georgian and Russian Marxist perspectives, particularly with respect to the peasant question, national issues, and organizational matters, which he believed had been inadequately addressed by the RSDLP. Given the considerable differences between the two movements, Jordania considered the integration into the Russian Party to be potentially dangerous (Jordania (Chemi Tsarsuli), 1990).

A crucial element in the preparation for the Second Congress of the RSDLP and the eventual integration of the Caucasian social-democratic groups with the imperial RSDLP was the establishment of the Caucasian Union of the RSDLP in March 1903. This organizational alliance played a pivotal role in laying the groundwork for the subsequent merger between the Caucasian social-democratic factions and the broader Russian Social-Democratic Party. The creation of the Caucasian Union effectively formalized the political and organizational connection between these regional groups and the imperial RSDLP, facilitating the convergence of their efforts within the larger framework of Russian socialism. Jordania endeavored to

preserve a degree of autonomy for the Caucasian groups within the RSDLP. To this end, in the first half of 1903, he proposed the creation of a program that would represent a distinct Caucasian union within the broader RSDLP framework. Although the outlines of the program was not published (Jordania (Chemi Tsarsuli), 1990).

The Second Congress of the RSDLP convened in Brussels in July 1903 and later moved to London, where the final discussions, debates, and the adoption of the party's program and organizational regulations took place. The Georgian Social Democrats, however, were poorly represented at the congress due to their lack of preparation. Jordania joined the congress later, without an official mandate, further limiting his ability to influence the discussions. The decisions made at the Second Congress had a profound impact on Georgian Social Democracy, with no resolutions addressing the crucial issues for Georgia. The congress's decisions severely restricted the autonomy of the Georgian Social Democrats, marking a setback for their aspirations within the larger socialist movement (Jones, 2007). Another significant aspect of the controversy at the congress was the issue of the peasantry, a matter Noe Jordania had been addressing even before the unification. While Russian Social-Democrats at this stage did not recognize the peasants as a revolutionary class, the Georgian Social-Democrats, led by Jordania, had a different view.

The congress of the Russian Social-Democratic Workers' Party concluded in August 1903, culminating in the development of its final program, which was covertly published in Georgian in 1905. The program comprised 16 key points, with several particularly noteworthy articles: The Autocracy of the People, Universal, Equal, and Direct Suffrage; Extensive Local Self-Government; Complete Freedom of Conscience, Speech, Press, Meetings, Strikes, and Associations; Education in the Native Language; The Right of Nationalities to Organize Their

Own Affairs; The program recognized the right of nationalities to independently organize their own affairs, affirming the principle of self-determination. These provisions, especially those relating to national self-determination, regional autonomy, and cultural rights, were of profound importance to the Georgian Social Democrats, who viewed them as crucial for protecting the interests and aspirations of the Georgian people within the broader socialist movement (Program of the RSDLP, 1905).

Following the Second Congress of the RSDLP, Georgian Social Democracy remained an integral part of the RSDLP for 14 years (officially 15 years, until November 1918), playing a significant role in its activities. Not only was Georgian Social Democracy involved in the RSDLP's operations, but it also assumed an active leadership role, particularly after the party split into two factions. The Georgian Social Democrats aligned with the Menshevik wing and emerged as its dominant political force.

The Ideological Attitudes of Georgian Social Democracy to the Nationalist Issue and its International Analogies

The discussion and comparison of the national policy within the Georgian social democratic movement is particularly intriguing when viewed in the context of the broader events unfolding on the European continent at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries. While Karl Marx, in his *Communist Manifesto* asserted that workers have no homeland, the reality was that workers did, in fact, possess a national identity, often a stronger one than their shared class identity in terms of mobilizing the masses. Anthony Smith, in his analysis of identity and group cohesion, argued that social class does not have collective identity because it lacks cultural depth (Smith, 2008).

In the context of socialism and social democracy, the views of Karl Kautsky were pivotal in reconsidering Marxist positions on the national question. In the final decade of the 19th century, Kautsky, drawing on examples from Germany and the Austro-Hungarian Empire, examined the significance of the national question in relation to modern capitalism and the rise of the bourgeoisie, specifically the role of the nation, national consolidation, and nationality. In his work *Nationality in Our Time*, Kautsky observed: "There is no historical example that suggest that a rhetoric of "national unity" has yielded greater material benefits to any class than this event has brought to German trade" (Kautsky, 1896, p. 35). He underscores the idea that economic development plays a crucial role in fostering national consolidation, stating, "The more modern economic development advanced, the more the need for all those speaking the same language to form a single state increased - a need that would eliminate the dividing barrier between peoples speaking the same language" (Jones, 2007, p. 44). These themes of Kautsky's theory found a parallel in the program of the Georgian Social-Democratic Union of 1893, where Jordania highlighted the vital role of capitalist development in the formation and unification of the nation. Kautsky's theory introduces an important dimension by acknowledging that, in multinational empires, alongside class oppression, there exists another critical form of oppression - national oppression. Kautsky stated that the fight against national oppression and the promotion of linguistic and ethnic identities often serve the interests of the national bourgeoisie, potentially benefiting them most (Kautsky, 1896, p. 25). Consequently, he warned the proletariat to remain cautious in such struggles. In the context of Georgian social democracy, both Irakli Tsereteli and Jordania recognized this dynamic from the early 1900s. They were particularly aware of the dangers posed by the strengthening of the national bourgeoisie amid

the national question struggles, cautioning against the unintentional empowerment of this class during the fight for national liberation (I. Tsereteli, 1903).

Among social democratic movements, the Austrian Social Democratic Party made significant strides in addressing the national question. At the Brunn Conference in 1899, the party adopted a program that articulated its stance on the issue, which consisted of five key articles. The core principles of this program were later published in Georgian by Akaki Chkhenkeli (1878-1959), a prominent leader of the Social Democrats. Chkhenkeli's version of the Brunn Program included the following articles: 1. Austria should be transformed into a single democratic state union of nationalities, 2. The historical kingdoms and states should be replaced by self-governing bodies, 3. All self-governing sections of the same nation should be consolidated into a unified national union, 4. The rights of national minorities must be safeguarded by a law passed by the imperial parliament. 5. Any form of national superiority should be rejected, instead, the necessity of a specific number of official languages will be determined by the imperial parliament (Chkhenkeli, 2000).

The program of the Austrian Social Democratic Party regarding the national question was largely shaped by the visions of key party leaders, including Otto Bauer and Engelbert Pernestorfer. Pernestorfer presented a compelling formulation for addressing the issues of national minorities in his work (Collection of Articles) *The National Question and Austrian Social Democracy*, which was illicitly published in Georgian. Pernestorfer articulated his belief that "Socialism yearns for the highest development of humanity; its real goal is to prepare the way for such development." He stressed that socialism is not merely about alleviating material deprivation, but about fostering human freedom and self-awareness. Since humanity existed in the form of diverse nationalities, Pernestorfer argued, socialism must strive to ensure that all

nationalities are free, independent, and self-aware (Pernerstorfer, 1907). He further asserted that any social-democratic approach that disregards the national question would diminish the richness of human society. Instead, social democracy should focus on resolving national issues, as only socialism can bridge the gap between different nationalities and unify them. He concludes by stating, "Every nationality wants to have a home where it will be the master" (Pernerstorfer, 1907, p. 26).

The ideas of the Austrian Social Democratic Party were well known to Georgian Social Democrats and became particularly relevant after the first revolution, as the question of renouncing autonomy arose, and some members of the party began to reassess existing policies. Understanding Georgian Social Democracy within the broader context of socialist movements in the Russian Empire yields interesting insights. Alongside the Georgian movement, the empire was home to the oldest Polish Socialist Party, as well as Lithuanian, Latvian, Ukrainian, Armenian, and Jewish socialist groups, including the Bund. The Polish and Jewish socialist movements did not fully merge with the RSDLP, unlike the Georgian Social Democrats, and often engaged in sharp conflicts with the RSDLP, particularly over the national question. While the Polish and Jewish socialist parties were purely national, the Georgian Social Democratic movement united representatives from all Transcaucasian nationalities, with Georgian groups constituting a substantial majority - often exceeding 80%.

The tendency to view the social democratic parties within the empires of this period as national parties were widespread, with their success often attributed to their ability to unite social and national demands. Eric Hobsbawm observed "A single whole combination of social and national needs was a much more effective mobilizer of the masses fighting for independence than purely national appeals, which attracted the dissatisfied lower middle class."

This observation highlighted the strategic advantage of integrating social justice and national liberation, which resonated more deeply with a broader segment of the population than appeals based on national identity alone (Hobsbawm, 2012).

The Georgian Social Democratic Party could be regarded as thoroughly fragmented, shaped by the complex dynamics of contemporary Western and Eastern European empires and the ongoing debates surrounding pressing issues of the time. The discourses within Georgian social democracy, influenced by European socialism, highlighted the divisions and fragmentation within the movement, particularly on key ideological matters. Among these, the shifting political positions on the national question, and their transformation in response to changing circumstances, mirrored broader trends within the larger European political movements. As Jordania himself observed, at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, Russian socialist theorists scarcely addressed the national question. In this context, Ioseb Jughashvili, later known as Stalin, played a pivotal role with his 1904 article *The Social-Democratic View on the National Question. "*Stalin's work, particularly relevant to the Caucasus and Georgia, takes a more radical stance than Jordania's regarding the Georgian bourgeoisie. He argues that the Georgian bourgeoisie exploits nationalism for its own gain and stresses the need to break down "national barriers" from an internationalist perspective. Stalin's views mark a clear departure from those of Georgian Social Democrats, advocating for a more thorough rejection of nationalist tendencies in favor of broader class-based unity (Stalin, 1951 (I)).

After the 1905 revolution, the Russian Bolsheviks and Mensheviks increasingly addressed the issue of nationalism, reflecting the growing importance of national questions in the empire's diverse social and political landscape. In 1913, at Lenin's request, Stalin published *Marxism and the National Question,* which became one of the foundational texts for the

subsequent development of Marxist theories on nationalism. In this work, Stalin sought to refine the Marxist understanding of national issues, arguing that national movements could align with socialist principles under certain conditions. His work would later influence both Soviet policy and broader Marxist debates on the national question, particularly in multinational states like the Russian Empire.

Conclusion

Throughout the formation of the Georgian Social Democratic movement, it integrated the intellectual and political movements of the time, drawing on the broader European socialist tradition. By the end of this formative process, Georgian Social Democracy had solidified itself as a European-style social democratic movement, firmly adopting and uniting the key ideological principles of European socialism. This ideological alignment not only defined its domestic policies but also allowed it to participate in the broader European political discourse on class struggle, democracy, and national self-determination.

The social democratic movement in Georgia underwent profound transformations during the initial years of its development. The movement gradually distanced itself from the strong Russian populist influences, adopting a more distinctly European Marxist perspective. This ideological shift was accompanied by significant changes in the movement's strategy. The Georgian Social Democrats began to present the peasantry as a revolutionary class, challenging the earlier view that workers were the sole agents of revolution. This shift also expanded the space in which the movement operated, with growing Russian influence in this space and increased opposition from right-wing nationalist factions.

Between 1898 and 1903, the movement's ideological trajectory took another turn, leaning more towards internationalism. The focus shifted towards broadening the scope of the revolutionary struggle, emphasizing the need for a global rather than merely national or regional revolution. In line with this shift, the party's stance on the autonomy of small nations also evolved. Rather than advocating for national autonomy, the Georgian Social Democrats prioritized local self-government as a solution, aligning with the broader internationalist outlook and prioritizing the resolution of national questions within the framework of expansive self-governing structures rather than separate national independence.

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