

**SINGLE MOTHERS – UN-RESPECTABLE “OTHERS”
OF GEORGIAN NATIONALISM**

Production of Subjectivities through “Nesting Respectability”

By

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ABSTRACT

I focus on the relationship between nationalism and female sexuality in contemporary Georgia and analyze it through the experience of single mothers. Based on the research, conducted in April 2012 with 12 middle-class Georgian women, I elaborate on the links between the dominant nationalistic discourses and personal experience of single mothers. I explore the ways in which nationalism takes advantage of religion in order to control female sexual behavior and establish icons of “respectability” (Mosse, 1985) as a mandatory framework for its members. The gap in research of Georgian nationalism, gender and sexuality as well as total invisibility of single mothers makes my research an important contribution to the field. I argue that Georgian nationalism uses religion as well as ideas about virginity, femininity and motherhood as a weapon against women and defines what an acceptable female sexual behavior is. The traditional framework of femininity politicizes singleness as un-desirable status for a Georgian woman, excludes single mothers from the respectable category and attaches them the label of “women of loose behavior”. In opposition to the exclusion, single mothers produce new subjectivities by moving the borders of un-respectable behind them and construct respectable selves based on the national ideals. I claim that the production of selfhood through the set of traditional, patriarchal forms is a means of resistance in the Georgian context.

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INTRODUCTION

You know what happens in Georgia, if you are a single mother, men have this impression as if all doors are open, meaning you are sexually available - Ani (34 years, urban).

My mother came and saw the situation I was in: my friend could hardly afford to pay the rent, we were half starving ...And she took me home, saying: 'before your belly becomes visible, I will at least feed you normally' - Eka (26 years, rural).

When our parents met in order to clarify things, his mother directly told my mom: your daughter lies to you, she was not a virgin; my son will name all the guys she had before - Nato (28 years, urban).

My child gave me enormous strength. I even thought about suicide, I confess, and not once. The only reason why I changed my mind was: what will happen to my child? ... If she was not in my life, I cannot imagine what would happen to me - Ninia (27 years, rural).

Yes, I proved to myself and others that I can do it alone - Lika (36 years, urban).

(Interviews with single mothers, April 2012)

In this thesis, based on the research - conducted in April 2012 in 3 different regions of Georgia, I elaborate on the links between nationalism, gender and sexuality by focusing on the experience of single mothers in contemporary Georgia. I explore how the dominant discourses and personal experience are connected; what are the ways in which nationalistic discourse defines the experience of single mothers? What are the ways in which single mothers construct their selfhood as subjects with consciousness “shaped by the social” (Abrams 2010, p. 55)? I deal with the frameworks of “proper” Georgian womanhood/motherhood, which is one of the central interests of nationalistic discourse. I explore the ways in which nationalism justifies control over female sexual behavior and imposes invented ideals of “respectability” (Mosse, 1985) as a norm. I am interested to explore how female sexuality is articulated and established in Georgian culture

in accordance to Orthodox Christian norms, how it relates to Georgian nationalism and how it influences personal as well as broader perceptions about the role and place of women.

The previous research addressing the issues of Georgian nationalism and motherhood was conducted by Anna Rekhviashvili (2010)¹ in her thesis “Nationalism and Motherhood in Contemporary Georgia”. Through the analysis of interviews with 13 married woman Rekhviashvili has concluded, that “internalized national values and concerns ... is tightly connected with ... women’s most innate desire and most profound experiences” (Rekhviashvili, 2010, p. i). She has also argued that women’s acceptance of national norms influence their decisions about “when, how and with whom” to become mothers (Rekhviashvili, 2010, p. i).

My sampling of un-married mothers illustrates different, and sometimes more complex relationships between nationalism and motherhood: in addition to how single are affected by the nationalistic discourse, I analyze the ways in which their agency and resistance become evident. But, prior to analyzing how these women relate to the nation, it is important to explore more critically the structure that defines their subject position. There is a big gap in the research of female sexuality and Georgian nationalism, which is a result of tabooed issues around sex and sexuality. The taboos themselves play a crucial role in canonizing the limits of female sexual behavior through Orthodox Christian morals. I define religious discourse as subordinated to nationalism and therefore, saturated with reiteration of national ideals of femininity. I argue that the alliance between nationalism, religion and respectability affects women in general, but I focus on the experience of single mothers - as one of the most vulnerable groups among Georgian women.

¹ She has an MA degree in Gender Studies, defended her thesis at Central European University, Budapest, Hungary.

As mentioned above, I am concerned by the framework of respectability as the existence of fixed ideal implies the rejection of those, who do not fit in the idealized framework (Mosse, 1985). More specifically, I am interested to explore the connection between the acceptable forms of womanhood/motherhood, established by the nationalistic discourses and the exclusion of single mothers from the respectable category. In this thesis I argue, that nationalism takes advantage of religion to legitimize its control over female sexuality and defines what proper femininity and female sexuality is. Nationalistic discourse strives to reaffirm the framework of female respectability as a marker of true Georgian woman, where the respectability is largely defined by the virginity before marriage and a married status after definite (though quite young) age. Keeping into consideration the influence of social context in shaping subjectivities (Abrams 2010, p. 55), I state that respectable category defines the ways in which single mothers construct their selfhood. In opposition to the exclusion, they try to rework framework of respectability, move borders of un-respectable behind them and produce subjectivities which are fit for national ideals. I derive the concept of “nesting respectability” from the term “nesting orientalism” (Bakic-Hayden, as cited in Ashbrook, 2008, p. 22) in order to refer the ways in which single mothers try to create belonging to the images of Georgian national women. I claim that the production of selfhood through the set of traditional, patriarchal forms is a means of resistance in the Georgian context.

SUBJECTIVITY VERSUS NATIONALISM, GENDER AND SEXUALITY

As an illustration of how strong influence of Georgian national narrative is, I want to mention briefly about the survey conducted in 2009 by Caucasus Research Resource Centre (the size of

sampling: 1686, age: eighteen years and above). The results show, that 63% of the interviewees never justify the behavior of a woman, who bears a child outside of marriage. 27% might justify such a behavior if they know the circumstances. The same survey conducted in 2011 (the size of sampling: 1818) represents altered results: 50% of interviewees “never justify” a single mother and 36% support “sometimes”. In comparison to the attitude towards single mothers, it is interesting to look for the results of pre-marital sex: 64% never justify a woman, who will have a sexual intercourse before marriage. In case of pre-marital sex, the age of a woman does not play an important role: the results of Caucasus Barometer 2010 (sampling 2089 person) demonstrates, that for 72% of interviewees woman’s cohabitation with a man is not justified from any age. The results about the “head of the family” and “breadwinner” were also compatible with a patriarchal society: according to 63%’s opinion, a man should be making decisions in the family. And even higher percentage – 83% accept that “normally”, man should be a breadwinner too.

These data illustrate specificities of the Georgian context, where my interviewees live, endure and resist. Also, these results support my thesis statement: dominant discourses try to establish the icon of a respectable Georgian woman, who mirrors inner purity through the restrained sexual behavior; consequently, the out-of-marriage reproduction is not condoned and accepted. I develop sub-discussion around the invasive character of nationalistic discourse and deal with the ways in which single mothers construct their subjectivity. I argue, that construction of their selfhood is strongly influenced by the cultural context, because “that cultural context, as it were, is already there as the disarticulated process of that subject’s production” (Butler, 1995, as cited in Elder-Vass, 2012, p. 191). On the other hand, I take Saba Mahmood’s (2001) position, stating that even in the described conditions - there is a room for agency (p. 203). She defined agency as

the “capacity for action that historically specific relations of subordination enable and create” (Mahmood, 2001, p. 203).

In the analysis of subjectivity I incorporate the above represented debate and base my perception of agency on Mahmood’s perspective, meaning that while single mothers are “produced” as subjects under the influence of Georgian culture, they still find a “capacity for action”; even though dominant national narrative imposes established form of respectability, they still rework it to find some space for their sense of self-worth. Analysis of single mother’s subjectivity gives an interesting angle to realize how personal experience, perception and beliefs are connected to the social, cultural and national contexts.

In order to analyze how Georgian nationalism, gender and sexuality are interconnected and how they define acceptable norms of national femininity, I refer to western authors and apply their theoretical frameworks to my research. I take George Mosse’s (1985) understanding of the importance of respectability for nationalistic ideologies (p. 1). He refers to nationalism as “the most powerful ideology of modern times”, where “respectability” denotes “decent and correct’ manners and morals, as well as proper attitude towards sexuality” (Mosse, 1985, p. 1). Mosse claims, that nationalism is the most important signifier in framing normative sexuality in modern times; therefore, analysis of the correlation between nationalism and respectability “can help us to realize where we stand, how we got there and how we might change” (Mosse, 1985, p. 2). Similarly, I aim to contribute to the research of nationalism and sexuality through Georgian example, where nationalistic discourses are strongly defined by the established gender stereotypes around sexual behavior. In this context, single mothers appear to be deviation from the established norms of respectable sexuality. Focusing on their personal stories, I analyze how the framework of respectable Georgian woman/mother has been developed and affirmed

historically; how it defines the place of single mothers now; and by help of this analysis challenge the established norms of female sexuality in Georgian culture.

Sexuality is primary concern of Mosse's work because "it is basic to human behavior and preoccupied the moral concerns of respectability" and within nationalistic discourse, behavior is meant to express inner morality and decency (Mosse, 1985, p. 2). From this perspective, it is exactly the "behavior" of single mothers – out-of-marriage reproduction – that becomes the main marker of their "morality". As long as nationalism is concerned with moral behavior of its members, such "behavior" appears to be enough ground for labeling single mothers as not proper members of the nation".

What is now established as normal and morally acceptable in the modern society was not there all the time of human history. Nationalism started to emerge at the end of eighteenth and beginning of nineteenth century (Mosse, 1985, p. 3) and influenced to draw a firm line between "normality and abnormality"; the ideology provided tools "to enforce control and ensure security" (Mosse, 1985, p. 10). The control is a key concept for nationalistic ideologies, including governance over nation's "biological and symbolic" reproduction (Mayer 2000, 6:18). Moreover, nationalisms have "typically sprung from masculinized memory, masculinized humiliation and masculinized hope" (Enloe, 1989, p. 44), meaning that nationalism is an initially masculine ideology, defined by male desire and thought. Even though some women support the nation and participate in the national "spectacle" (McClintock, 1993, p. 70), they still perform as the secondary players. McClintock argues that nationalism became so powerful exactly by its potential "to organize a sense of popular, collective unity through the management of mass national commodity spectacle" (McClintock, 1993, p. 70). She puts a huge emphasis on the national performance through marked objects such as "flags, uniforms, logos" and etc. which

symbolically dissolves the differences between the social classes and creates a perfect possibility to “manage” with “crowds” (McClintock, 1993, p. 71).

One way of thinking about nationalism is to “imagine” (Anderson, 1983, p. 6) it as a form of the family, which unifies and brings together those “who share a sense of belonging” to one and the same community (Mayer, 2000, p. 1). The equation of nation with family has several layers: “the family offers a “natural” figure for sanctioning social hierarchy” (McClintock, 1993, p. 63). “Family tropes” (McClintock, 1993, p. 63) also serve to reinforce and naturalize gender hierarchy within the family realm. As long as “natural” gender hierarchy implies couple-centered and male-headed families, single mother families logically fall into the category of un-natural and thus un-desirable. In other words, nationalism in its very “iconography of familial and domestic space” (McClintock, 1993, p. 63) strives to preserve existing norms, which imply rejection of any deviation including woman-headed families.

Another way of viewing nationalism is when a nation is defined as “soul, spiritual principle” and “moral consciousness” of the state (Renan, 1990, as cited in Mayer 2000, p. 2). Women, as “biological and ideological reproducers” (Anthias & Yuval-Davis, 1989, p. 9) of the nation, are perceived as primarily responsible for maintaining and later on, transmitting morality and spirituality to the next generation. In order to guarantee its “maintenance”, nationalism frames codes of behavior, icons of idealized womanhood, which must be preserved and enacted for the sake of the nation (Mosse, 1985, p. 90).

To sum up the above represented definitions, if the nation is imagined as a family, it requires/fetishizes couple marriage as well as hierarchized families, and so legitimizes both dependence and subordination of women to men. If it is imagined as a spiritual or moral

consciousness, it puts a responsibility on women to reproduce this morality biologically and ideologically. Women's reproductive ability defines their role inside the big national family: "femininity is generally produced as a means of supporting the nation's construction, through symbolic, moral and biological reproduction" (Mayer, 2000, p. 16). If a woman does not embrace the traditional virtues, she won't be able to provide a proper generation to the nation. In other words, it is a woman's duty to reproduce a nation, but she is encouraged to reproduce the "right kind" (Anthias & Yuval-Davis, 1989, p. 8) in morally acceptable ways. As far as morality is concerned, a family is perceived as the only realm for this kind of reproduction. Nationalism contributes to the reinforcement of family values, which functions as an axis of its ideology. Accordingly, subversion of family hierarchy will not be welcomed within nationalistic discourse, instead – it will be understood as a threat to national values. As long as single-mothers form women-headed families, it can be assumed that they will also be perceived as threats to the established norms in Georgian society. In Chapter 3 this point will become clearer as I will analyze the attitude from the society, in which influence of nationalism can easily be detected.

Nationalistic representation of women as primarily mothers puts them in inferior position in comparison to men - motherly responsibility is "often used as weapons to prevent women's equal participation with men as workers and citizens" (Anthias & Yuval-Davis, 1989, p. 13). When the whole idea of the nation is based upon its composition of "sexed subjects", it is crucial to keep those subjects performing their gendered roles; because while doing so, they construct not only "their gender identity but the identity of entire nation as well" (Mayer, 2000, p. 5). Thus, reiteration and reinforcement of stereotypical gender images and roles is central to nationalistic discourse. I argue that this discourse is directly influencing establishment of negative attitudes towards single mothers - some of them do refuse traditional gender roles by

adopting the role of the breadwinner in the family. In the Georgian context single mothers even challenge established norms of female sexuality, which, according to the national requirements, must be kept restrained before the sacred bonds of marriage. In this sense, single mothers find themselves labeled as women, whose reputation is in question.

A similar point comes up while examining the idealization of women within nationalistic discourse. Similar to respectability, idealization serves to justify the control over women's sexuality. As Mosse puts it: "If the woman was idealized, she was at the same time put firmly into her place. Those who did not live up the ideal were perceived as a menace to society and the nation, threatening the established order they were intended to uphold" (Mosse, 1985, p. 90). If I apply Mosse's view to my research, single mothers are excluded because they are perceived as threats to national values. They are women, who were supposed to be guardians of traditions and to maintain the healthy spirit of the nation. But instead doing so, single mothers have transgressed the established boundaries through reproducing outside the family realm, and thus have endangered the established norms of patriarchal Georgian society.

METHODOLOGY AND LIMITATIONS

The methodology of this work covers analysis of historical background of Georgian national narrative, the literature where this narrative is framed, public and political discourses, commercial and other popular cultural representations. At some points, I also draw on my personal experience as a single mother. By using these methodological tools in Chapter 1 and Chapter 2 I explore the context extensively, which helps give a complex picture of how Georgian

nationalism has been developed, how it relates to female sexual behavior and how women respond to it.

In Chapter 3 and Chapter 4 I deal with the interview material, collected in April 2012. I have conducted twelve interviews with Georgian single mothers of different age, ranging from 26 to 55² in two main cities of Georgia and one regional centre. I found my respondents through snowball sampling before I arrived to Georgia for the research. The starting point of my snowball was a circle of my acquaintances, which expanded later by help of personal networking. All of my interviewees, except one woman from the region (Eka, 26 years), have higher education on BA or MA level, meaning that my research is limited to one social group – educated middle class. 8 of 12 are working single mothers, while 4 others, according to personal situation, have chosen different survival strategies: Eliso (47 years) is mainly supported by the father of her child; Nato (28 years) lives with her parents; Meri (55 years) helps in the household to relatives and lives in their apartment with daughter; Eka lives at “Mother and Infant Shelter”, project launched by “World Vision”, which will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 1. At the moment of the interview, Eka was being trained as a hairdresser as a part of the project.

Some of the interviewees regarded the presence of their family members hindering, which could “lead to less openness and more guarded answers” (Abrams, 2010, p. 63), accordingly, I interviewed them in my apartment. The interviews were semi-structured, but I had prepared list of questions as a guideline for me. I represented my project as a research about single mothers, without elaborating on every detail, including the part of research, where I was observing constructions of subjectivity. The reason of keeping part of the project unrevealed was the caution to avoid preliminarily shaped representation of self-images.

² All the names are changed as agreed with the interviewees

The fact that I am a single mother myself helped create a feeling of trust between me and my interviewees. Meanwhile, my relation towards the gathered material is still more subjective and emotional. Even though my “absence of neutrality” (Abrams, 2010, p. 55) was acknowledged before going to the field, it still turned out to be problematic during the process of interviews. My emotional involvement in the topic posed number of challenges to me, including hardship to restrain coolness, but the beneficial side of in-group interview facilitated more openness of my interviewees. They, without exception, were discussing very intimate details such as contraception, pre-marital sex, relationship with their partners and etc. Several of them found it difficult to explain motherhood feelings or put their thoughts into words. They expressed concerns about being bad respondents or not giving relevant material for my project. In general, interviews went smoothly; it was similar to the friendly chat, which produced the very interesting material presented in this thesis.

From other methods of data gathering I chose interviews, because this method helped me explore the material created in a “three-way dialogue”: “the respondent with him or herself, between the interviewer and the respondent and between the respondent and cultural discourses of the present and the past” (Abrams, 2010, p. 59). This “three-way dialogue” resulted in the data, which is the most relevant in answering my research questions. Even though I use the category of “single mother” in my project, I still find categorizing problematic, especially because the word “single” has a negative connotation in Georgian. It describes the state not just as being on one’s own, but as lacking someone who was meant to be with you. Literally, Georgian “single” sounds as “a person with only one hand”. In this sense, the term “single mother” sounds victimizing in Georgian. Leontine Young’s work “Out Of Wedlock” helped to clarify my concerns: “The discussion of unmarried mothers ... is in no way intended to mark them out as a special kind of

people but rather to define the social problems which trouble them as individuals” (Young, 1954, p. viii). This view helped me to shape my attitude: I identified them as a specific group with specific subject position in the given society, which was the focus of my research while analyzing correlation of nationalism and respectability. In the frames of my thesis, I interviewed single mothers who gave birth out of marriage. Because of time constraints, I had to limit my research to this group, even though divorced women or widows are also identified as single mothers.

Chapter 1 is structured according to the historical development of Georgian national narrative, where I look at how the image of national mother was shaped and established historically, while Chapter 2 represents articulation of nationalism in popular media during the recent times. Through this analysis I support my argument about the link between the nationalism and respectability, which results in the exclusion of single mothers from national narrative. In Chapter 3 I move on analyzing interview material, where I look for the invasiveness of nationalism in the ways how family, friends, colleagues, neighbors or other members of the society relate to single mothers. I argue that national narrative becomes tangible and extremely visible when the object of criticism appears to be an un-married woman with a child. In Chapter 4 I engage with the narratives about the construction of selfhood of my interviewees and map out their subjectivity, which leads me to the conclusion of the thesis. I argue that single mothers are perceived as un-respectable “others” of Georgian nationalism because of “improper” form of reproduction and sexuality; while single mothers, from their side, try to rework nationalism and reclaim worth by constructing subjectivities within the respectable framework of a Georgian mother. In other words, the exploration of the relationship between dominance and resistance,

power and agency - helps depict a broad picture of alliance between Georgian nationalism, religion and respectability.

CHAPTER 1: ALLIANCE OF GEORGIAN NATIONALISM AND RESPECTABILITY: INVENTING GEORGIAN NATIONAL MYTH

In the first part of this chapter I draw attention to the history of Georgian nationalism, how and by whom national narration was framed and how it reflected women. I argue that the icon of a Georgian mother, established during the revival of Georgian nationalism during nineteenth century, is still kept intact as the main marker of Georgian nation today. By elaborating on how Georgian national myth frames female sexual behavior, I argue, that single mothers are not perceived as respectable Georgian mothers on the basis of “improper” reproduction outside of family realm. As part of single mothers’ experience in Georgian context, I briefly address welfare policy, which ignores them as the social group with specific needs. I argue that this ignorance is created in part by the negative, nationalistic perceptions. I problematize the abolishment of the social status “single mother”, which consequently abolished any possibility of social benefits while still leaving them open to the negative effects of nationalist discourses/attitudes.

1.1. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The most repeated sentence in relation to Georgian nationalism might be the one emphasizing how strongly it is intertwined with religion. The famous national motto “Fatherland, Language, Religion”³ is as popular today, as it was by the end of nineteenth century, during the revival of

³ Words by Ilia Chavchavadze (8 November 1837 – 12 September 1907) who was Georgian writer, poet, journalist and lawyer.

Georgian National Movement. Birth of Georgian nationalism is linked to the colonial past of the country. Being under the rule of Russian empire gave rise to the first national protests in the second half of nineteenth century.⁴ The beginning of twentieth century and the change of political situation incited the revival of Georgian nationalism. Georgia was separated from Russian empire and in 1918, the “independent state of Georgia was established” (Rekhviashvili, 2010, p. 13). In 1921 Georgia was annexed by Soviet Russia and Georgian nationalism was confined to limit itself to “primarily cultural issues, such as language, education, the restoration of monuments, literature, films” (Jones, 2006, p. 255). These limits influenced aftermath development of Georgian nationalism, the silenced aspects - especially politicized repression of religion - burst out with regained power after Georgia become an independent state again in 1991. Consequently, new rise of Georgian nationalism started. The enormous popularity of religion and its strengthened bonds with nationalism was also connected to this change. As Chris Hann (2006) points out in relation to post-soviet countries, “in some cases it was a direct consequence of the emergence of new sovereign states, but even where the boundaries of political unit were not altered, religious revival was intimately connected to the politics of ethnicity and religion” (p. 7). Georgia was no exception, and religiosity has become “part of the campaign for every political party⁵” (Maisuradze, 2012, para. 4).

For the present moment, the authority of Georgian Orthodox church has increased so much, that it appears to be one of the most influential institutions in the country. Rekhviashvili (2010) underscores, that this situation has resulted into different controversies on political arena: the new government, which came into power after so called “Rose Revolution” in 2002, “has

⁴ In 1881 David Eristavi (1847-1890) translated the play “Homeland” from French and adapted in to the Georgian situation. The performance of the play in 1882 gained a great success among Georgian elite.

⁵ All Georgian texts are translated by me.

introduced nationalist agenda, loaded with national symbols (new flag and hymn)”; the president was inaugurated in a church and etc. At the same time, government claims to have pro-western politics, which sometimes are incompatible with Georgian values. Accordingly, oppositional parties often criticize their political course as non-Christian or threatening to national values. In short, modern nationalists from both sides speculate with religion in order to “legitimize political aims” (pp.14-15).

1.2. ICON OF A GEORGIAN MOTHER

As already mentioned, Georgian national narrative started to develop in the second half of eighteenth century. In this process, Georgian writers and publicists played an important role by framing national myth about - who we were, what we look like now, and who we strive to become - through their works. Ilia Chavchavadze, the author of already mentioned national motto became the leader of national movement. He grounded “his vision of Georgia on European models of liberal nationalism” (Nodia, 1998, p.17). The above mentioned slogan puts religion on the last position, which, according to Nodia, can be regarded as an attempt of secularization of Georgian Nationalism. Nodia also notes that in the medieval periods “Georgian-ness” was equated with being an Orthodox Christian” (Nodia, 1998, p.17). In contrast to this, Ilia Chavchavadze tried to bring in a bit more secular narration, where Georgianness was still based on religion, but notion of “fatherland” was prioritized (Maisuradze, 2007, para. 2).

It is important to elaborate on the main concepts of Ilia’s work as long as his novels and poems had tremendous influence on “cultural paradigms and codes” (Maisuradze, 2007, para. 2). According to Maisuradze, Ilia’s activity – in the public as well as literature sphere – is working

on national project, based on “fatherland” narration, which aims to establish cultural identity (Maisuradze 2007, para. 3). This identification defines national awareness and as theories of nationalism have argued - gender and sexuality are key concepts for such processes of identification. One of the most important characters in this narration is “Mother of Georgia”, whose icon was created in Ilia’s novels and poetry, for example the poem “Mother of Georgia” (1858) or the novel “Otarant’s Widow” (1887). In the mentioned poem Chavchavadze defines the mission of Georgian mother - she has to give birth to a hero, a son, and bring up for the nation. The novel “Otarant’s Widow” represents an exemplar mother, a widow, whose personal life has ended at the moment when her husband passed away. It would be simplification of the novel to represent it as only dedicated to a sacrificed Georgian mother, but in the limits of my focus, I concentrate on that part. The novel actually promotes a strong single woman, who is performing as mother and father simultaneously. The village respects her but it is hard to say if anybody loves her; mostly, people experience a fear towards her authority. There is only one man, who had always been in love with widow, but never dared to ask her in marriage. This is a complete icon of a Georgian mother, whose personal life should be limited to her children’s bringing up; sexual activity is out of question in this case (Chavchavadze, 1887).

On the other hand, Ilia Chavchavadze was supporting women’s emancipation together with his colleagues Sergei Meskhi, Vazha Pshavela, Akaki Tsereteli. At the end of nineteenth century outstanding Georgian writers and poets were addressing Georgian nation to change traditional attitudes towards the gender roles of women. Ilia Chavchavadze (1888) brings examples of foreigner women to point out women’s capability to be realized in different spheres (para. 5). At the end of the article, he concludes: “All the above mentioned is a strong argument for mother’s emancipation and only men’s obstinacy can reject it. It will be great if our women follow these

examples and acquire will to pursue this kind of activity” (Chavchavadze, 1888, para. 6). It must be still pointed out, that Chavchavadze addresses “mother’s emancipation” and not women’s. Despite the apparent contradiction of his support for women’s emancipation, it was only for women - as mothers. This point demonstrates exactly what I am arguing – in Georgian nationalistic discourse a woman is only seen as a mother. And if I refer to Chavchavadze’s icon of a Georgian mother again, she (even emancipated) is meant to give birth to a hero for the nation. As Maisuradze points out, his work emphasizes absence of “father” figure and after Chavchavadze was murdered, the nation recognized him as “the father of the nation”; later on, canonized as a Saint Ilia the Righteous. “These facts gave Ilia’s national narration religious character ... and elevate his work to the level of unquestionable dogma” (Maisuradze, 2007, para. 17). Through this “unquestionable dogma” modern nationalists try to reaffirm respectability as the marker of Georgianness, as it will be analyzed in the next chapter. Meanwhile, except some feminists, nobody ever emphasizes that Ilia Chavchavadze was at least urging for emancipation. Instead, they refer to other works inspired by patriotic spirit in order to reiterate national myth, which confines Georgian women to motherly roles. Obviously, nationalists are selective about the history and literary heritage, and they focus only on that works, which reaffirms established norms of female sexuality.

1.3. “CULT OF WOMEN” - PATRIARCHAL VERSION

While analyzing female sexuality in Georgian nationalistic discourse, I argue that religion is used as a weapon against women⁶; it never appears as an obstacle or basis for judgment of heterosexual male behavior. Accordingly, sexuality within Georgian nationalism is more defined

⁶ And male homosexuality, of course. This point is very central for Mosse’s analysis of nationalism and sexuality.

by patriarchal than religious norms. On the other hand, religion is used successfully to advocate the restrained female sexual behavior. Virginity is still among widely discussed issues and as I will demonstrate later in this chapter, dismantling of the institution of virginity is deemed as a threat to Georgian statehood and the nation.

The national narrative about female sexuality is articulated not only through historical myths, literary works or nationalistic discourses, but through certain linguistic expressions too. These expressions also contribute to establish norms and limits to female sexuality. I want to draw attention to some Georgian words, which define cultural understanding about respectability. The word, describing chaste and modest Georgian woman “Mandilosani”⁷ is similar (but not equal) to English “lady”. The word is in everyday use and emphasizes the respect and esteem towards addressed woman. “Mandilosani” is unique Georgian woman, full of dignity, with high values and morality. Every “true” Georgian man sees as his own responsibility to protect the chaste of such a woman. There is a special toast for “Mandilosani” on the traditional Georgian feast: “For all those “Mandilosani”-s, who deserve to be included in this toast”. So, we see quite explicit exclusion of those, who do not “deserve” Georgian men’s respect. If “Mandilosani” is respected for her dignity, which includes sexual modesty - mysterious “others” must be sexual, thus fallen women. Georgian journalist⁸ Niko Nergadze refers to this term in his radio reportage called “I hate Mandilosanis”, which was broadcasted at Georgian branch of Radio Liberty in May 2012. In this reportage Nergadze criticizes this fetishism about “Mandilosani” and states that the word “woman” is not an insulting one either. It is also important to note, that the usual word for “woman” – “Qali” - implies that a woman is mature, and probably, she already has sexual

⁷ “Mandili” is a traditional Georgian kerchief, accordingly “Mandilosani” is a woman deserving to wear it

experience. Accordingly, in discourses this word is avoided as a colloquial and loaded one. Lady or “Mandilosani” are used instead.

Lali Surmanidze (1998) refers to the myth, according to which there is “women’s cult” in Georgia (para. 4). She argues that actually, only the notion of mother is fetisized in Georgian culture (Surmanidze, 1998, para. 4). Motherhood is “women’s real mission on earth” (Rekhviashvili, 2010, p. 22) and a marriage is women’s main career achievement in the social hierarchy. At the same time, for a woman, whose first aim should be to become a mother, it is crucially important to preserve virginity before marriage. So, virginity appears another object of fetishism, which is kept in order to get married. In Georgia virginity is a symbol of pureness of women, “attribute of their value” (Surmanidze, 1998, para. 30), which must be preserved before marriage as an illustration of female respectability. Motherhood is women’s first (and maybe the last) sacred function performed for the future of the nation.

Virginity is a measurement of women’s “honesty”⁹ too, where “honest woman” means a woman without sexual experience. Georgian poetry has century-old history for reaffirming desexualized icons of women, including the poems by outstanding Georgian poet Galaktion Tabidze (1908): “More far away you are from me, more I feel for you, I love my dream into you”. The frameworks of unattainable and unapproachable women has established “untouchedness” as the dignity of “women of men’s dreams”. Mosse’s emphasizes how women’s “bridal purity in all her thoughts and actions” (Mosse, 1985, p. 93) is characteristic to nationalist discourses. As it follows logically, joint efforts of nationalism and respectability represent sexually active women as un-respectable ones.

⁹ The adjective “honest” is used in Georgian language to mark that a woman is chaste. Chastity itself is directly connected with virginity. Accordingly, in such a context being “honest” means that she was virgin

In my opinion, this specific negative attitude towards sexually active women is also determined by the limit of words, which would denote sex in a positive sense. The words meaning the act of sex have a negative or neutral connotation in Georgian language. There is no word or phrase which would represent sex as something associated with love, like English expression “to make love”. The most colloquial word, an equivalent of “fuck” – “Mothkvna” has a very negative, almost insulting connotation. The word also describes the direction of the action – a man is “fucking” a woman. Consequently, by using this word a woman appears to be a passive object of man’s filthy action. There is another expression, which literally means “conjugal duty” – “Tsoqmruli-Movaleoba” - which describes sex as a duty, but exclusive duty of husband and wife.

Words denoting a woman, who has a sexual intercourse out of marriage, have semantics of “whore”. Among some old words “Kharcha” and “Medzavi” are met, which are defined in the oldest Georgian dictionary by Sul Khan-Saba Orbeliani¹⁰ as - “other woman than wife”, “woman in intimate relationship out of wedlock” (Surmanidze, 1998, para. 31). The most trivial word to use towards a woman, who was “conquered” - “Nakhmari” –describes a woman, who was already “attained” and thrown away and thus, has lost her dignity. There are more words, which describe immoral women, but no word for a man committing the same “crime”. “Meqaltane” means a man, who loves women and has lots of relationships, but as conquering women generally affirms men’s masculinity, this word does not have negative connotation in the language. Moreover, “manly virtues” are evaluated according to their sexual experience and popularity in women.

According to the above represented information, there are two main icons of women in Georgian culture: one positive and another negative - one excluding sexuality and another connected with

¹⁰ Georgian writer, scientist, political figure (1658-1725)

sexual sins (Surmanidze, 1998). Consequently, everyday repetition of these words reiterates and establishes the certain attitude towards female sexual behavior: sex, which does not take place in the realm of Georgian family, is a sin and initially wrong. Women, as “biological and symbolic reproducers” (Mayer, 2000, p. 6) of the nation, must be kept pure and innocent, otherwise, it will pose threats to the nation’s spiritual survival.

1.4. STRATEGIC IGNORANCE OF SINGLE MOTHERS - WELFARE POLITICS

Within the frames of my project I limit myself to exploring interrelation of nationalism, gender and sexuality. While doing so, I keep my focus on single mothers as an example of the excluded group. This statement becomes more and more grounded as I go further in my analysis and elaborate on the established norms of respectable female sexual behavior. In addition, it is still relevant to complete the picture of the context by bringing a brief review of welfare politics, which is one of the determinants of specific experience in Georgian context. Though, I cannot expand my research to the detailed elaboration on welfare politics; in this part of the chapter I represent the information and data available for me through internet. The exploration of welfare politics is a part of a discussion of how nationalistic discourse shapes the history of welfare legislation that deals with single mothers.

Absence of statistical data about single mothers is the main obstacle in doing a research on this social group. Though, while I started researching the topic at the end of 2010, I found information about the joint initiative of “Anti Violence Network of Georgia” and “Georgian Young Lawyers Association”: the new project “Strengthening the Role of Civil Society for the Promotion of Women’s Rights, Democratic Reforms and Supremacy of the Law” was launched

on 28th of May 2010. One of the goals of the project was named as “collection of data about single mothers, who gave birth out of marriage”. To my astonishment, I was unable to get any further information about the project now: the web-page of “Anti Violence Network of Georgia” has stopped functioning; indicated phone-numbers are invalid at the moment. Web-page of “Georgian Young Lawyers Association” does not contain any information about the mentioned project. Accordingly, I assume that the project was cancelled, meaning that data about single mothers is still uncollected and thus unavailable.

It is important to note, that social status “single mother” was abolished some years ago, which abolished any opportunities for social benefits too. It is interesting why and exactly when this happened and what was the basis of the decision. The answers I got from the hot line of Ministry of Labor, Health and Social Affairs are the following: the status of single mother was abolished long ago - but they were unable to name the exact year; it was a residue from Soviet era and probably, ministry did not see an actual importance in it; they could not even remember any kind of social benefits connected to this social status. The only information I could get from a friend was that the status “single mother” was abolished in 2006, and during its existence the social benefit for single mothers constituted 5 GEL (approximately 2.50 Euro) per month.

Though, not all the social benefits to all social groups were cut in 2006. In order to get a clear idea of the situation, I checked information on the official page of government of Georgia, where I found an act, signed by then Prime-Minister Mr. Zurab Nogaideli about “Intentional Social Assistance”. Single mothers do not appear in this document. The document refers to a program, which started in 2006 and is aimed at families, who are certified as “below the poverty level”. As Davit Pavliashvili, a head of the Department of Social Security, states during the interview with

Ms Eka Kevanishvili in 2008: “We are mainly focused on the programs for those who fall below the poverty level. If a single mom is below the poverty level, social assistance by all means will be provided to her. However, only those over the age of 18 years who have children and lost their main breadwinner can receive this social assistance package”.

The changes which followed in labor code are more serious and gender sensitive. According to the Labor Code (issued on 25th of May, 2006, Chapter VI, Paragraph 27) a woman is given 477 days of maternity leave, from which only 126 days are reimbursed. The amount, which is transferred by the state, constitutes 150 GEL per month - making 600 GEL for 126 days. The employer is not obliged to pay a woman during the maternity leave at all. It is also worth notifying, that before 2007 only 12% of salary was cut by the state, which was increased and now constitutes 20% (Purtsvanidze, 2010, p. 4). In her work Purtsvanidze also states, that mentioned Labor Code does not consider issue of a pregnant woman strongly enough.

In addition to the above mentioned social insecurity, state kindergartens accept children only above the age of two. So, according to all these parts of the context, what are the options for mothers? First: if their husbands can support, they can take 577 days of maternity leave. Second: they might prefer to refuse career at all; or, 577 days of maternity leave might result in losing the job. The last option is to return at workplace after 4 months and leave the infant either under the care of parents, if possible, or hire a private nanny, which is not a cheap service. Unambiguously, these changes in legal system affect men and women differently; and they affect unmarried mothers more than married ones. The system makes single mothers become the most vulnerable group in the given circumstances, and sometimes leaves them without an option.

The only project, which is still in force, was founded by World Vision Georgia. In my opinion, it is important that the only shelter in the country is internationally based, indicating how Georgian government ignores single mother's issues. I visited Mother/Infant shelter firstly in 2010 in order to interview Ms. Marina Menteshashvili, former manager of this shelter. Starting from January 2007 the institution is operated by the government under the Ministry of Labor, Health and Social Affairs. The shelter is located in the capital of Georgia, Tbilisi, in the building of Infant House.

It is significant that this project was not launched by Georgian government. Of course, it is important that "Mother and Infant Shelter" exists and functions, but it cannot be regarded as sufficient on the scales of the whole country. According to the official records (2009) of National Department of Statistics, among all newborns 2434 infants were discharged from hospitals only on the basis of mother's statement (Chitnava, 2012, para. 8). It can be assumed, that a considerable quantity of those mothers are single mothers, meaning that their number is growing in the country. The following chapter of this thesis will be dedicated to give broader picture of the lives of some of them and analyze - how their personal experience is connected to the social atmosphere of the country.

I want to conclude this section by addressing NGO sector, which has quite lot representatives in Georgia and is mostly supported by the international donors. For example in the list of donors and partners of the organization names as - "Article 42 of Constitution", are found: British Embassy Tbilisi, Foreign and Commonwealth Office of UK, Open Society Georgia Foundation, European Commission Delegation to Georgia, OSCE Mission to Georgia. In the description organization claims that they offer juridical assistance to socially unprotected groups, including women. I had the consultation with their lawyer in summer 2011 and she promised to represent

my interests in the court whenever I needed. After two months, when I was in a need of immediate help, they refused by stating that - at the moment their recourses were limited and they only worked on strategic cases. If a case of a single mother is non-strategic for an organization, who claims to be addressing issues of socially unprotected women, government's silence around the issue becomes less surprising.

According to all the information I represented in this section, I claim that ignorance of single mothers *is* a political decision of the state, affecting the place of these women in Georgian society. The situation of ignorance is connected to the nationalistic discourse, which promotes images of true Georgian mothers and ignores those, who do not "live up the ideal" (Mosse, 1985, p. 90). State is not raising the issue of single mothers intentionally, thus leaving only idealized images visible and affirming it as the only alternative for a respectable Georgian woman/mother.

To sum up the overall discussion of this chapter, firstly, it represents historical development of Georgian nationalism, which has determined the form it has now. The present framing of national narrative is strongly connected to the religious discourse, which tries to legitimize control over female sexual behavior and does not leave space for single mothers to be included in the respectable category. Moreover, as a social group, single mothers do not even exist in the country. The development and changes in legal system and insecurity in the social sphere makes them as one of the most vulnerable groups amongst the population.

CHAPTER 2: MODERN MYTH – VIRGIN BRIDES, OBEDIENT WIVES AND PLAYBOY HUSBANDS

I move on by exploring contemporary Nationalistic discourses in order to put together how the historical background has influenced modern understanding of what true Georgian woman/mother should look like. I analyze sermon by Patriarch of Georgia, delivered in April 2012, which was addressing the roles of Georgian mother. I regard this sermon as a part of nationalistic discourse according to the huge authority of Georgian Orthodox Church. I also refer to the discourse around women's sexual behavior through TV show "Midday", broadcasted in November 2011, where a Member of the Georgian Parliament builds very firm and clear connection between the chastity of Georgian woman, solid Georgian family and the state building process. In contrast to this, I analyze popular commercial by the Bank of Georgia (2011) in order to point out how Georgian popular culture promotes male promiscuity and how Georgian audience embraces it.

2.1. LEGITIMIZING GENDER-BASED DISCRIMINATION IN RELIGIOUS DISCOURSE

The alliance of nationalism and religion put limits on female sexual behavior and legitimize it as a norm. Mosse (1985) points out, that through this lens, behavior becomes "an expression of inner piety" (p. 5). As discussed in the previous chapter, Georgianness constitutes being a Christian, meaning that the behavior of a Georgian woman should mirror Christian spirit too. Obviously, Georgian Orthodox Church has the most radical position concerning sexuality, but the point here is that religious discourse focuses only on female sexual behavior. If I refer back to the relationship between nationalism and respectability, and its close connections to the family

values, women are assigned the role of “biological and ideological reproducers” (Anthias & Yuval-Davis, 1989, p. 9) of the nation, accordingly, their proper sexual behavior becomes a specific concern.

In contemporary Georgia, influence of church is tremendous. The current Patriarch Ilia II is often regarded as the biggest authority in the country. For example, the launch of a pro-natalist campaign in 2007, when Patriarch “declared to be willing to baptize every third child of each family” increased birth rates by 18-20% next year (Rekhviashvili, 2010, p. 20). As it is clear, Orthodox Church is intensively involved in the survival process of the nation (Rekhviashvili, 2010, p. 20).

Now I move to the analysis of the above mentioned sermon by Ilia II. He has addressed gender equality and the responsibilities of a Georgian mother:

Nowadays, there is a recognized term as if wife and husband are equal. Gospel teaches us, that it is a husband who is the head of the family. Family is one body and one body cannot have two heads (...). Happy family is the one, where a mother sacrifices herself to the family (...). Today we teach our children how to accumulate money, we teach our children everything, foreign languages, and different activities, but we forget about the main. We teach them how to be happy on this earth, and happiness is seen in material wealth. We must remember, that a happiness constitutes in love and respect of each other. For example: a spouse, a husband returns from work, you must offer some rest, you must offer to wash his feet, and you must offer food. Warmth is what you should show.

Firstly, it is interesting that men and women are only discussed through family roles – men are husbands and women are wives. According to the Patriarch’s speech, a good mother is only the one who sacrifices her life to children; he does not state the same in relation to fathers. The Patriarch also mentions pronoun “our” and then refers to foreign languages, meaning that he is not discussing family relationships in general, he is reminding “us” how Georgian husband and wife should look like. The culmination of the speech is how he defines happiness, as “love and

respect of each other”, but as it turns out, it is only wife’s obligation to offer “warmth” and “foot-washing” as an indication of respect. Moreover, the Patriarch supports gender-based discrimination as a lesson from Gospel. Accordingly, I define this discourse as a nationalistic, because it stresses what “our” families and “our” wives must perform in order to be seen as good Christians and good Georgians. Although this is only one example of such speech, it illustrates the general direction of discourse in Georgian churches, which influences peoples’ understanding about the nation, gender and sexuality.

2.2. NATIONAL SEXUALITY IN POPULAR CULTURE

It is interesting and contradictory, that Georgian culture, which claims to be defined by Christian morals, never restricts or judges heterosexual male activity. The double standard of nationalistic discourse puts emphasis on female sexuality and bases its arguments on religious motives, while never uses the same tools in relation to men. The following part of the chapter deals exactly with this contradiction: I illustrate how Georgianness is used to justify control over female sexuality; and how the same discourse either ignores or even promotes male promiscuity. My analysis of femininity will be based on the TV show “Midday”, dated as near as 20th of November, 2011. In contrast to this show, dedicated to outline what a true Georgian woman should look like, I will discuss extremely popular New Year commercial from Bank of Georgia (2011), representing virile Georgian Macho. By analyzing this patterns of Georgian popular culture, I want to demonstrate my main claim: establishment of gender stereotypes around female and male sexual behavior do influence the place of single mothers in Georgian society.

2.2.1. TV Show “Midday”

“Midday” is broadcasted on one of the most popular televisions in Georgia - Rustavi 2, which was oppositional channel before the Rose Revolution. After the revolution it became presidential channel and their politics always coincide with the politics of the ruling party. The mentioned show has an entertaining character and aims to raise some issues which will attract the attention of Georgian audience. The topic of that program, which I want to analyze, is so called “institution of virginity” and its importance in the building process of healthy Georgian state. The related question is set on the poll to find out the opinion of the audience. The group of presenters is constituted by two men and two women: Mr. Levan Butkhuzi, Mr. Dima Oboladze, Ms Baia Dvalishvili and Ms Lika Evgenidze. The guests of the show are: Ms Ketato, a singer; Ms Mariam Gagoshashvili, who has an MA degree in Gender Studies, Representative of Women’s Fund in Georgia; and Mr. Dimitri Lortkipanidze, a Member of the Georgian Parliament and the Deputy Head of Human Rights and Civil Integration Committee¹¹.

Before I start analyzing the speech of Mr. Lortkipanidze, I want to draw attention how the program coordinators formulated the question itself: “Is virginity before marriage a must?” First, in they used gendered equivalent of “marriage” instead of a neutral word. They selected the word – Gatkoveba – which denotes the act when a woman is getting married. The stem of the word – Tkoveba – denotes to allow somebody temporarily use of something, the preposition – ga - expresses the direction of the action: a woman is “borrowing” herself to a man. To cut the long story short, even the use of the word “Gatkoveba” instead of neutral “to get married” emphasizes that creative team also contributes to the reinforcement of nationalistic discourse.

¹¹ During the show he mentioned that he was declined from this position

In order to channel the topic according to the theme, hosts try to warm up the conversation by discussing general discourses, predominant in Georgian society. They try to be fair and in opposition to the institution of virginity, refer to another “tradition”. Mr. Dima Oboladze:

When we speak about patriarchal society, I cannot help thinking of the “tradition”, when father’s friends take a boy of 13-14 ages to “women”¹² as we say it. In my opinion, it will be better if “this thing” happens in a natural way instead of “prescribed” one. It is so important to do things independently in order to develop leadership qualities in men.

Even though he raises important issue that nation does not give to “women and men the same access to the rights” (McClintock, 1993, p. 61), but at the same time proposes division of desirable characteristics in men and women: having “leadership qualities” and “to do things independently” coincide with “ideals of manhood” (Nagel, 1998, p. 245). In other words, the focal point of his criticism is that mentioned “tradition” creates an obstacle to develop proper characteristics in men. He does not problematize the subject of male virginity or criticize normalized male pre-marital sexual activity. It is also interesting how he frames the notion of “natural”: the “natural” form of male sexual behavior is directed to the opposite sex and initiates development of manly characteristics. This point brings me to Mosse’s discussion of “normality” and “abnormality” (Mosse, 1985, p. 10) - the dichotomy, which is established exactly through the correlation of nationalism and respectability. As a result, there are some behaviors which are put into normal – thus natural category, and behaviors, which are only fit for abnormal – thus unnatural one.

In the second part of the show, guests are invited in the studio. I will focus on the speech by Mr. Dimitri Lortkipanidze, the representative of a right wing party. He starts with loud and direct statements:

¹² meaning to take the boy to sex worker in order to get the first sexual experience

Virginity means innocence, purity and at this point we are crossing religious issues, because the church teaches us to preserve it ... It must be mentioned that if Georgian nation preserved itself till today, it is due to the traditions we are nurturing ... The family has been built on the institution of virginity. The family has always been necessary and sufficient condition for building a healthy nation.

As it is explicitly stated in his speech, for Georgian nation family has always been a central institution. The main ground of his point is religion, and through it, he tries to build strong argument why female virginity is important for the “healthy nation”. Lortkipanidze is very firm in his beliefs and continues to build up more clear connections between the institution of virginity and Georgian nation:

Now I want to analyze - if dismantling of institution of virginity threatens the state - through pure Human Rights perspective. In my opinion, it definitely threatens; because a very dangerous experiment with the same purpose started in the USA in 60s ...following events were drugs, issues of LSD, the problem which became a major concern in the USA ... Every person is free in his/her choices, but the formation of public opinion in the state must be based on the development of institutions, including church. Because the tragedy which occurred in America during 60's – I refer to what happened as a tragedy in the name of sexual revolution – was not sufficiently resisted by the Church.

Even though he is quite vague about the link between Human Rights and the “dismantling” of virginity institution, I can infer that he means protection of the people of one’s nation from “harmful influence” (such as drugs, in this case), which he mentions later. It is also very interesting perspective that he directly sees connection between the “loss” of this institution and the “tragedy” that happened in the USA. So, his urge for the preservation is defined by his concerns to protect his own nation from the same danger. It is also worth emphasizing, that he always refers only female virginity, because in Georgian male virginity is denoted by another word. Lortkipanidze continues his nationalistic speech from a very personal perspective and refers to his own daughters in order to ground his “analysis” on something very valuable:

From my seven children three are girls, and I have the right to express my personal approach towards virginity. And I am peaceful about them, because they are in the bosom of the church.

Here we can see that Mr. Dimitri's defense of women's virginity conforms to what Joan Nagel (1998) has argued about "male honour": she points out two main reasons why women's sexuality turns out to be focal interest of the nation: "women's sexuality is of concern to nationalists, since women as wives and daughters are bearers of masculine honour" (p. 255). Lortkipanidze's reference to his own daughters emphasizes that he has a direct responsibility to protect their purity in order to protect his own "masculine honour". On the other hand, he demonstrates his contribution to the nation: he has seven children; he performs as a good Georgian by reproducing the nation in proper ways, in large amounts and with Christian values.

One of the last traits of "respectable" femininity, as discussed by Lortkipanidze, is chastity:

According to stereotypes, in order to conquer a heart of a virgin (girl)... one must fight with dozens of barriers. If this example initiates a negative in anybody, in me it is only associated with positive feelings – the fact that these barriers exist (...). It is absolutely healthy that a woman possesses modesty and this modesty is affirmed by the institution of virginity.

He does not mention "modesty" as just desired feature, but as an "absolutely healthy" condition, which naturalizes possession of this "quality". Also, romanticization of "to conquer" a woman idealizes the icon of a virgin. Similar to respectability, idealization serves to justify the control over women's sexuality and put them "firmly ... into place" (Mosse, 1985, p. 90). Lortkipanidze's claim also refers to another "established" patriarchal norm: he wants to preserve

woman's role as a passive player in relationships, the one who is waiting for the knight to come and conquer her innocent heart and body¹³.

Even though Lortkipanidze's nationalistic statements are always justified with the requirements of religion, he mostly referred to female sexuality and importance of its control. But, by the end of the show, he expressed his concerns about male sexuality too:

This is a double standard I am myself speaking about. A person might go to the church and then go to "Sauna"¹⁴(...). There was a post on Facebook: "Cheers to the institution of male virginity! Let women beg us from now on!"

This Facebook post was followed by the laughter in the studio. Of course, it is ridiculous to speak about male virginity in Georgian society and the following part of the chapter will illustrate this claim very vividly.

2.2.2. Commercial by the Bank of Georgia

Indeed, the icon of "true" Georgian man does not include the framework of being a virgin or monogamous. On the contrary, according to how masculine power is represented, they are even required to be promiscuous. Similar to idealization of female chastity, this "standard of masculinity" puts pressure on men and pushes them to play a macho. On this background, it must not be surprising, that the Bank of Georgia (BOG), which has quite extensive marketing campaign, uses image of a promiscuous man to represent its corporate identity. The third series of the New Year commercial for 2011 was one of the most popular in the last years. The bank is

¹³ There was no space to analyze this comment in the paper, but I still decided to mention in comments. In order to support his arguments about female virginity, Mr. Lortkipanidze went so far that he referred to sexually transmitted diseases: "If we speak about prevention measures, is an institution of virginity one of the means of reproductive health?"

¹⁴ The trope which implies the act of going to sex-workers.

represented by a self-assured Santa in the corporate colors of the BOG. He is surrounded by three girls, all of them dressed in the colors of competitor banks: TBC Bank, Bank Republic-Societe Generale Group and Liberty Bank. I want to put emphasis on the names of other banks: none of them contains the word “Georgia”. In my opinion, BOG has an ambition to represent “himself” as representative of national “virtues”. Representatives of “Other” are dancing during the video half-naked, while BOG is fully dressed in Santa style suit. In short, masculine bank is represented in the zenith of his glory. The important part is the end of the video: music changes, car with steamed glasses in the focus, and suddenly several pair of hands appear simultaneously: the “real man” has conquered all of them together.

This commercial reaffirms the stereotypes about the roles and behavior of men and women. Promiscuity is allowed for men, it even defines their true masculine traits and superiority. Competitor banks are insulted in a way, because they are weak, they are seduced, conquered, and thus made not respectable anymore. What would happen to the image of BOG, if it was a woman who dragged three men in the car? Will it still influence the targeted audience in a good way? The answer is simple enough: promiscuous woman would not be a good image for the Bank of *Georgia*. This virile masculine image illustrates the phenomenon of “Ubiquitous Male”: “... to be a man ... one must impregnate women, protect dependents from danger, and provision kith and kin... We might call this quasi-global personage something like “Man-the-Impregnator-Protector-Provider” (Gilmore, 1990, as cited in Nagel, 1998, p. 245). This “quasi-global” (Nagel, 1998, p. 245) image of “Ubiquitous Male” becomes a local one through the influence of nationalistic discourse. It is exactly nationalism that defines male image of the Bank of Georgia: masculinity is meant to emphasize strength, self-assurance and ability to conquer.

2.3. PARADOX, RESISTANCE OR CONFORMISM?

The context what I have described so far is not as hegemonic as it might seem from the very first glance. The nationalistic discourse tries to impose its ideals, but in every context there is group of people who are more or less selective. This sort of resistance towards nationalism can be regarded as a form of agency. The issue I want to introduce is paradoxical as well as subversive in some ways: plastic surgery of virginity renovation. One of the most popular TV shows, “Profile”, discussed the issue of virginity in 2010 and invited the most requested plastic surgeon of Georgia. As it turned out, the operation was still very popular in the country and cost around 300 Euros. The surgeon mentioned one example, when a woman at the age of 41 made the operation, because she was getting married. He also remembered the case, when one and the same woman went through the operation three times.

In April 2012 the same surgeon was interviewed during the Easter fast. I find it extremely interesting to quote one of his answers here:

Since the fast has started I have not performed this operation. Girls do not get married during the fast. When the fast will be over, they will visit us again, perhaps.

This quote is an example of how joint cooperation of nationalistic and religious discourse, plus urge for virginity from potential husbands, puts a pressure on women to play a spectacle of respectability. The part of the story is that these women/girls go against imposed norms, but at the end of the day, still prefer to fit the image of desirable wife. Another paradox in this quote is the religious motives for not getting married during the fast, but addressing plastic surgeon right after it's finished. This is not to suggest that these women have double standard of values, this is to underscore how the subversive actions can be converted into the results, which reaffirm the challenged tradition. On the other hand, they exercise an agency while consciously making both

steps: firstly - opposing the established norms by having pre-marital sex; and second - by going to the plastic surgeon. This example illustrates my argument, elaborated in Chapter 4, that agency and resistance can be found in the sets of conforming actions too.

This chapter was addressing issues of nationalism, religion, gender and sexuality by depicting picture of Georgian nationalistic discourse through media and popular culture. I mostly focused how mandatory female virginity is articulated as a marker of Georgianness in these discourses. I analyzed TV Show “Midday”, where a member of the Georgian Parliament, Mr. Dimitri Lortkipanidze urges for female virginity and claims, that it is the basis of strong Georgian family; and because the family itself is the basis of Georgian nation, tradition of female virginity should be nurtured and preserved. His patriarchal speech is saturated by nationalistic ideals and obviously, supported by the majority of the audience: 78% of them vote for “Virginity is a must for women”. When in contrast to female “purity”, the commercial by the BOG gains extreme popularity in the same society, a huge gap between female and male sexual behavior is once more emphasized.

The analysis represented in this chapter supports my general argument about single mothers - if dismantling of virginity institution affects Georgian statehood and nation so directly, then single mothers might be regarded as embodiments of this threat: they do not respect institution of virginity and in addition, reproduce outside of strong, pure, religion-based Georgian family. As it has been demonstrated, religious leaders as well as politicians are strongly involved in preservation of the unit which, by their definition, constitutes a true Georgian family. In this traditional realm the main actor should be a man breadwinner, who must be respected and welcomed by an obedient wife. In opposition to this discourse, single mothers represent a danger to the nation and to the established gender hierarchy by forming women-headed families without

a male “patron” besides them. In the following two chapters I deal with the interview materials, through the analysis of which invasive character of nationalism can easily be detected. Chapter 4 represents a very interesting insight of the correlations between nationalism and respectability – I demonstrate how single mothers produce new subjectivities through “nesting respectability” in order to reclaim worth and construct respectable selves. At the same time, I explore the ways in which their agency is exercised through these acts of conformism.

CHAPTER 3: SINGLE MOTHERS – “OTHERS” OF GEORGIAN NATIONALISM

The previous chapters have brought my discussion to the analysis of interviews, where the influence of nationalism becomes tangible. In this chapter I explore different aspects of nationalism - represented in the ways how people relate to single mothers. Even though nationalistic discourse does not directly exclude single mothers as such, I argue, that abolishment of social status for single mothers and total silence around their problems *is* influenced by the national beliefs about proper forms of motherhood. Everyday promotion of the role of true Georgian mothers gives me ground to assume, that nationalists try to keep alive the ideal in order to guarantee minimum of deviations. Single mothers, as one of the deviant representatives, must be kept invisible and out of state's concern, otherwise it will become an accepted practice and nation will lose its unique virtues. If I refer back to Mosse's (1985) argument (introduction of this thesis) about the idealization of women within nationalistic discourse, those, who do not “live up the ideal” (p. 90) are perceived as threats to the nation. I argue that single mothers are also seen this way, because they are the ones who drag the name of nation in the mud by betraying traditionally accepted norms of chastity and reproduction.

In the following chapter I present the stories of single mothers, who find themselves as attached the label of “women of loose behavior” on the basis of their status. I bring those reflections by my interviewees, where they have encountered with embarrassing or insulting situations; in some cases, they have subjected themselves to hard living conditions in order to keep pregnancy in secret for the sake of family reputation. This chapter explores how the very existence of the ideal of untouched, innocent, sexually inexperienced women influences exclusion of “others”, in this case – single mothers. In the previous chapter, where I analyzed nationalistic discourses in

media, it was clearly shown how politicians and representatives of Georgian Orthodox Church try to preserve these stereotypes as markers of Georgianness. In the following pages I give the picture of the context where single mothers are affected by nationalistic discourse and are perceived as un-respectable category of mothers. In short, I present individual stories - how certain women have experienced being a single mother in contemporary Georgia. The quotes of interviews, represented in this chapter, illustrate the influence of virgin/whore dichotomy as one of the signifiers to label single mothers; also, I demonstrate how nationalism takes advantage of gender stereotypes to justify repression over female sexuality. I explore the ways in which single mothers respond to this stereotypes– how they find ways to construct new senses of selfhood in compliance as well as in defiance of the national standards that condemn them.

3.1. REPUTATION IN QUESTION

As I already mentioned in the introduction of this chapter, established icon of a respectable Georgian woman as untouched and innocent creates labels for the women, who are sexually active before/out of marriage. Consequently, if a woman is a single mother, it is assumed that she might allow sexual advances from anybody. This claim does not relate to only those single mothers, who have reproduced out-of-marriage. Even divorced women find themselves in the similar situation. As I was discussing in the Chapter 1 of this thesis, the icon of a respectable single mother as represented in Ilia Chavchavadze’s “Otaraant Widower” constitutes a woman, who totally refuses her personal life and never ever allows sexual advances in order to keep her reputation intact. I argue that this national narrative is still alive, and puts a big pressure on single mothers, who have to endure either the label of “women of loose behavior” or dedicate their

personal life to the future of mother-heroine without a smallest space for sex in it. Lika (36 years, urban), who is financially independent and does not really care about other's opinion, still remembers neighbor's comment:

She hinted something like if I know myself who the father is. Probably, neighbor guys were discussing something like this about me.

The perception of female chastity as the main dignity of a Georgian woman is influential to initiate this kind of comment. "The intersection of nation, gender and sexuality is a discourse about moral code" (Mayer, 2000, p. 6) and of course, "morality" becomes a key issue when object of focus is a woman. As I have demonstrated in Chapter 2, while analyzing extremely popular commercial by Bank of Georgia - similar "moral codes" never emerge while discussing sexual behavior of a Georgian man. On the contrary, promiscuity *is* a marker of a true Georgian man. The fact that Lika's sexual activity is "evident" through her status as a single mother, "naturally" says a lot about her "morals" in general. Merely because Lika has an out-of-wedlock child, her neighbors assume that she might have had so many lovers she could not differentiate who the father is. The neighbor boys in this case represent men of the nation, who discuss and criticize sexual behavior of a Georgian woman.

I almost beat my neighbor boy. Once I walked and heard them talking about me: she didn't even get married, nothing whatsoever, and she has a child. And they called me a very bad word, so to say a woman of loose behavior. Of course, I couldn't endure this (...). This was the worst thing ever; all the previous worries and troubles seemed so small in comparison to this - Nato (28 years, urban).

Nato is unwilling to name the exact word the guy's used, but I assume they addressed her as a "whore" and the only reason was her unmarried status. The respectable woman, so to say, opposite of "a woman of lose behavior" would normally get married first and reproduce in a proper way. A woman is meant to be "the custodian of tradition" (Mosse, 1985, p. 97) and if she

has betrayed those traditions, she is not likely to transfer cultural/national values to her child too. By transgressing the established boundaries of chastity, single mother automatically becomes the “other” – someone not deserving respect of men of the nation. For Nato, the above quoted memory is more painful than recollections of her spiritual hardship.

Eliso (47 years, urban) remembers how the father of her child reacted when he learned about the birth:

When the child was born, my friend called him. He said, is the child mine? My friend cursed him.

Eliso’s ex-partner’s questioning of paternity can be interpreted in many ways. Firstly, he plainly expressed that Eliso is not “that type” of a woman he would trust. This attitude implies his perception of women’s chastity in general: if Eliso was “chaste and modest, exemplifying”, distinguished with “bridal purity in all her thoughts and actions” (Mosse, 1985, p. 93), he would not dare to pose such a question. The fact that Eliso was a divorced woman, having an intimate relationship, gave him grounds to suspect authenticity of her honesty.

You know what happens in Georgia, if you are a single mother, men have this impression as if all doors are open, meaning you are sexually available. Imagine, where I live now, I was born there, I went to school there, almost everybody knows me. Then I got pregnant and returned home. And after all, one of my old acquaintances, my classmate, tried to approach me, the guy I could never imagine to be dare enough to approach anybody. He was this shy type, you know. But he assumed that in my situation even he could achieve something. He examined the grounds, and he was not the only one who tried the same. Something like, if you don’t have a husband and have children, so, what is the difference for you – Ani (34 years, urban).

Ani’s quote is interesting and important to analyze. She referred to the stereotype, which is very strong in patriarchal Georgia, where chastity of an unmarried woman is measured through virginity. Lali Surmanidze addresses this stereotype as a “positive icon”, where “purity is understood as excluding sexuality, indifference and even disgust towards sexual life”

(Surmanidze, 1998, para. 26). Ani's quote points out exactly the same: existing virgin/whore dichotomy, which reinforces perception of non-virgins as sexually obsessed and accessible for anyone. This stereotype is so deep and strong that even a very shy guy dares to "examine grounds" with Ani: if her reputation is already damaged, she can have dozens of lovers and nobody would care, including herself.

Natia (31 years, urban) was dating with a married man during three years. It is interesting how he justified himself through attaching label to Natia's reputation:

"Nobody could prove him that he was dating with me before I got pregnant. As I learned later, he would say: she's just a chick¹⁵ ...Of course, when I got pregnant everybody learned about our relationship. Whenever I would arrive in my hometown, his wife would somehow check this out, come wherever I was and arrange demonstrations against me, they would curse and scold me and etc".

Tamar Mayer gives a name of "gender irony" to similar contradictions: "Man praise traditional roles for women but embrace for themselves practices which are based on modernity (Mayer, 2000, p. 10). The above represented quote demonstrates the same contradiction and double standard of patriarchal society: a woman is required to be a virgin and sexually passive while a man is given unlimited freedom even after the marriage. For Natia's ex-partner, it was a strong argument to refer Natia as a "chick" in order to avoid his wife's anger. It is interesting, that wife did not go forward to check their actual relationship after this "argument". It is also interesting, that all his male friends knew Natia and spent lots of time in a friendly circle together. Again, they did not criticize Natia's ex partner for betraying his wife: if Natia was just a "chick", then it was totally "normal" for a "normal" Georgian guy to play with her a bit. He was a "man", after all!

¹⁵ Meaning a woman of a loose behavior, not a whore but somewhere in between of whore and a respectable one. Somebody who allows sexual advances.

Ninia (27 years, rural) experienced discrimination when she started a new job in the regional centre near her village:

In the very first week there was an incident, and the only reason was my status as a single mother. Even though they don't know that my child is born out of marriage, even being a divorced woman means a lot in the village. I came to job and the editor told me: you know, guys from police discussed that one girl from our office is not honest¹⁶; and before you came, such rumors had never been spread around our office. Now you came and it started, probably, they were discussing you.

It is obvious that label of a single mother means more in the rural areas in general. Ninia's story is deeply complicated exactly because of her rural origins. While being a student in the city, she got pregnant from a man, with whom she was dating as a future fiancée. After two years of traditional relationship, meaning just walking together hand-in-hand, the man invited her into his house for the dinner with his mother. It was not the first time for Ninia to visit him at home, and she was acquainted with his mother too. To Ninia's surprise, mother left the dinner very quickly, and in her presence just one door afar, the fiancée raped her saying: "I am a man. I cannot restrain my wishes for so long". I will elaborate on Ninia's reflections of that moment in the next chapter, also about the reasons why did not she report the case to police, but now I want to emphasize how male sexual urge is justified in the culture. If a person is a man, it is absolutely understandable that he has his sexual requirements. Ninia's fiancée did not view his action as a rape, after the sexual intercourse he asked her to stay at his home as his wife. Here we struck another tradition, named as "kidnapping of a bride", which is quite popular in the regions even nowadays. I cannot expand this topic, but it must be mentioned how the "traditions" legitimize domestic violence and gender-based sexual roles and meanings as a part of the culture.

¹⁶ Meaning "chaste".

If I go back to Ninia's story, she realized her pregnancy quite late because her period did not quit. Nobody around her, except her sister, knew about her pregnancy. After the child was born another man asked her into marriage and she accepted this proposal:

The biggest mistake I committed was when I thought about neighbors and village. I thought, it would be easier for my parents to learn that I got married and I have a child than to accept my out-of-wedlock one. This thought led me to the biggest mistake of my life (...). Because of - Oh, what people will say”.

She justifies her decision by the context, where her out-of-marriage child would be stigmatized. She preferred to subject herself to an ambiguous future with a person in order to save her family from “shame”. This marriage did not last long and Ninia returned to her village with a child as a divorced woman. But even this status turned out to be a heavy burden in rural area. According to traditional, national gender roles, women are “conceived more passive than active” (Mosse, 1985, p. 17), meaning that a woman is obliged to endure unhappy family life “passively” - she is not meant to dare “active” steps like divorce. A good Georgian wife keeps a family at any expenses, even at the cost of self-sacrifice. Knowing the situation and context, Ninia keeps in secret her story, but even divorced status becomes a sufficient ground to put her name in question. Her employer, the editor of newspaper is careful about the reputation of her office; and logically, the first person she can “blame” is Ninia - a woman without a “patron” to protect her dignity and control and justify her sexual behavior.

As a logical consequence of what was discussed above, “what other people will think and say” is above all other concerns, above all troubles and personal problems in Georgian context. In this part I draw attention to those parts in the interviews, which clearly demonstrate this claim. As Mayer states, “nationalism, gender and sexuality are all socially and culturally constructed” (Mayer, 2000, p. 1), accordingly, cultural construction of “proper” sexuality creates specific

attitudes towards “deviants”. For people, who live in close relationships with neighbors, relatives and friends, it is crucially important not to become “others”; they try to conform to socially constructed norms at different prices. Even in cases when single mothers did not care about rumors, their family members would still oblige them to pretend in order to be included in national framework of respectability.

During this period even the priest suggested my mother that 'I give you blessing to lie to other people as if she got married and left for some place' ...though, I was still closed, still left apart from my family. I was at my Granny's apartment in order to make people think as if I got married and was leaving somewhere else. I was in the terrible circumstances, I mean living conditions as well as spiritual one. I had terrible periods, depressions and all - Nato (28 years, urban).

Nato recalls the period of panic in her family, when her mother is desperate about her out-of-marriage pregnancy. The priest considers importance to keep respectable reputation of a girl and suggests Nato's mother to lie. This simple sentence about priest's advice reveals mysterious layers of people's faith – it is hard to imagine a priest giving “blessing” on a lie. This advice can be interpreted as a tactical step in order to support Nato, but still, it sounds very much hypocritical. It says a lot about how people are selective towards religion. The paradox of Nato's quote can be analyzed through the lens of post socialism: during the communist times women in Georgia used to address abortion as the only way of contraception and even after the “revival” of Orthodox church, religiousness does not prevent them from preserving the same attitude. Also, it must be kept in consideration that reawakening of faith is something specific to post-socialist countries and Georgia is no exception: “state socialism fancied itself as post-religious; postsocialism has seen the revival of religion” (Pelkmans, 2009, p. 183). In the attitude of Nato's mother the revival of faith is evident, but blended with the relics of communist past, and this mixture is intertwined with nationalistic concerns.

Another part of Nato's recollection is a logical follow up of priest's advice. Nato was isolated at her grandmother's apartment in order to invent a story of her marriage for neighbors. It would be unfair to say that her family did not care about her, but they also cared about the reputation. This was the reason of leaving her alone in the worsened spiritual conditions.

Another interviewee, Tina (39 years, urban)¹⁷ also mentions the story she invented for "others":

I was struggling with my own pains inside; I was desperate because I lost that person. It was not like, you know, as if my aim was to get pregnant and quit this relationship. I had so much to grieve about and I didn't want these questions from other people. So, my friend suggested to invent a story as if I dated with this person during 2 years, that ragtag lied to me about divorce, and then we went together¹⁸ and there I found out about him being still married and this kind of fairytales. In my opinion, most of the people guessed what happened, but several impolite ones told me: you are big enough to have a brain in your head, how come you dated with a person during two years and didn't get interested whom you were following.

Tina points out the phenomena, when not very close people feel as if they have right to give questions about such issues like love, relationships and criticize her for committing mistakes. I argue that this happens because behavior of every Georgian woman is seen as connected to the nation, its healthy spirit and virtuous aims. These issues are not seen really "private" because they influence the image of the nation as a whole. Tina justifies her "fairytale" by referring to her inner sorrow and unwillingness to be a focus of unnecessary attention and questions. But still, the fact is that she tries to produce an acceptable story for the dominant culture in order to maintain her reputation as a respectable woman.

Eka (26 years, rural) was four months pregnant when her mother learned about it. Eka moved to Tbilisi after getting pregnant in order to hide this fact from the family members. There, she was living with her friend in the rented out flat:

¹⁷ Tina was raised up in rural area, but lives in the city since becoming a student.

¹⁸ She uses Georgian word "Gayola" which implies to go with somebody as a wife.

When my mother came and saw the situation I was in, my friend could hardly afford to pay the rent, we were half starving (...). And my mother took me home, saying: 'before your belly becomes visible, I will at least feed you normally'. I had a small belly, it was winter and I was hiding my pregnancy quite well. But I was tensed all the time ...When I understood that belly was becoming noticeable and it would be harder to hide it, I returned to Tbilisi again.

As it is shown explicitly in Eka's quote, her mother was unable to leave the daughter in hardship, especially after seeing the living conditions. But a rural housewife cannot allow herself to defend the "wrong" step of her daughter directly; instead, she becomes her "confederate" and keeps her before pregnancy reaches a certain term. After the belly becomes visible, mother still surrenders Eka to the poor conditions in Tbilisi, where she might starve and freeze. Similar to what I argued in the previous paragraph, Eka's mother is concerned about the village because the improper behavior of her daughter mirrors the image of the family. Her family reputation does not only matter for her - surprisingly, it matters for the image of the kin, the village and for the whole nation as well.

3.2. WOMEN'S SHAME AS SUBJECT OF MEN'S HONOR

Following the discussion above, I move on to elaborate how female sexual behavior is connected to men's honor, where "men's honor" can be taken as a trope for "nation's honor". In this part of the chapter I demonstrate how men keep up the position of the protectors of female dignity. In Georgia women are meant to have a man patron on the every stage of their lives: before marriage these patronage is performed by the father and brothers (if available), and after a woman gets married - the position is inherited by the husband. If a woman has lost her "patrons", close relatives or male friend's of the family often feel obliged to take this responsibility. By bringing

up this issue I want to emphasize that a Georgian woman is not meant to act without a “patron”, without a man who would keep her in control. On this background, single mothers appear as women without “patrons” (Kevanishvili, 2008, para.16), which entitles brothers, fathers or their friends to become the “defenders of the family and the nation” (Nagel, 1998, p. 254). If women “embody family and national honour” (Nagel, 1998, p. 254), single mothers threaten nation by improper sexual behavior and out-of-marriage reproduction.

There was some holiday I do not remember, something like when you visit cemetery and all relatives are there. And my uncle said – you shamed your father’s name. On some other occasion, my father’s friend remarked: look how you behave yourself! - Meaning as if I behave myself as a whore - Lika (36 years, urban).

Not only an uncle allows himself to remind Lika how her “behavior” has damaged her father’s name, but even for the father’s friend it is “reasonable” to comment on that. No matter how Lika behaved herself in fact, the men feel obliged to remark what is becoming for a decent daughter.

I was 8 months pregnant when my brothers learned about it. They didn’t even know where I was, I tried to keep my location in secret, but frankly, they didn’t really try to find me. They declared on the phone, that they were angry on me and I couldn’t go back home. They said, you dragged our kinship’s name in the mud, how come that somebody visiting our region dared such a thing, you put a shame on our family ...My mother somehow managed to be with me when the child was born, generally, they didn’t allow her to visit me ... They started communicating with me only when my child was 4 months - Eka (26 years, rural).

Unlike to Lika, who is an independent person, Eka lived with her brothers and parents when she got pregnant. Actually, she had nowhere to go and at the moment of interview, she was still living in “Mother and Infant shelter”, referred to in the introduction of this thesis. As she noted elsewhere, she herself does not want to go back home, but brother declares her exclusion from the family as a form of punishment. He demonstrates how “honour is seen more as men’s

responsibility and shame as women's" (Rozario, 1992, as cited in El-Solh & Mabro, 1994, p. 8). Moreover, Eka's brother considers not only family reputation, but refers to the whole kinship. As I stated earlier in this chapter, family and kinship concerns are directly linked to the nation. Family, being a central institution of nationalism, legitimizes gender hierarchy, which puts women under the control of men for the sake of the family and the nation. Eka's brother addresses her ex-partner's action as "daring", meaning that he also transgressed existing norms by seducing a virgin. But, keeping into consideration the image of a virile Georgian macho, the "seducer" is never judged for his "natural" masculine sexual desires.

To sum up this section, I demonstrated how the joint "alliance between nationalism and respectability" (Mosse, 1985, p. 10) influences single mother's experiences in Georgian context. Actually, they stand in front of the dilemma: either to perform as a respectable Georgian mother and refuse sexual life completely, or to live with an attached label of "women of loose behavior". On the other hand, I argued, that women's reputation is taken as mirroring family's and thus, nation's image. Accordingly, it becomes not women's but family's concern to take care of their proper sexual behavior and guarantee the healthy spirit of the nation.

3.3. ELIGIBILITY FOR MARRIAGE - VIRGINITY AS A MUST

As was predictable, several interviewees mentioned how so-called "institution of virginity"¹⁹ contributed to their stories. As I underscored while analyzing speech by Mr. dimitri Lortkipanidze in Chapter 1, dismantling of virginity institution is often depicted as a threat to

¹⁹ This is word for word translation for the Georgian phrase, which refers to the tradition of keeping virginity before marriage

Georgian state building process. Mosse points out that “nationalism – and the society that identified with it” uses the icons of “chaste and modest woman to demonstrate its own virtuous aims” (Mosse, 1985, p. 90). The same icons are referred to in order to promote the necessity for the protection and reproduction of these virtues. Every attempt to fortify virginity institution is justified by the “fact” that an axis of a strong Georgian family is a chaste woman. As analyzed in Chapter 1, female virginity before marriage is naturalized as a dignity for a true Georgian woman. Consequently, this stereotype has a huge influence to label “Others”, including single mothers, as ones who do not keep up with the Georgian traditions. In many cases, “non-traditionalism” becomes the main determinant for men to abandon pregnant women and refuse to form a “traditional” family with them. While remembering about the hospital and aftermath period, Eliso (47 years, urban) remarked about her ex-partner:

Then he started chasing me, as it turns out, he wanted to see the child. Then he asked me to show the baby. I said, ok, you do not deserve but I will still allow you, but I will never ever forgive you that you did not show up in hospital. Maybe he got afraid to come to hospital, afraid of mother, or relatives, I have no idea (...). You know, he wanted a virgin wife.

Eliso refers to the situation, when her ex-partners visit to hospital would be understood as if he “upgrades” her in the status of the wife. She tries to explain how 41 year old man could be afraid of mother or any other member of the family, but then she adds the main criteria: she, in her 40 years (at the moment of pregnancy) was not a virgin. Instead, she was 6 years older, divorced woman, who did not fully satisfy the requirements of a desirable wife.

As I have referred to Mosse’s claims about the interrelation between nationalism and respectability, the very existence of the fixed norm implies that “outsiders” (Mosse, 1985, p. 1) are rejected and excluded. Similarly, the normalization of virginity as the main criteria for a

future wife results in abandonment of non-virgin, sexually active women. The following quote is a clear demonstration of this statement:

When his parents asked him what was our relationship and who I was for him, he said that he was not the first one for me, and that's why he regarded me as just another chick, not as a future wife. When our parents met in order to clarify things, his mother directly told my mom: your daughter lies to you, she was not a virgin; my son will name all the guys she had before - Nato (28 years, urban).

It is an interesting that the only argument, and as it turns out - quite important one - is Nato's previous sexual experience. The fact that her ex-boyfriend even threatens to "name all the other guys" is also worth paying proper attention. If Nato was a virgin, family would require from her ex-boyfriend to take the responsibility for "seducing" her, but as long as she was not "that type", she could be used as an object of entertainment without any obligations. Even though in Georgian culture it would not be regarded as a "heroic" deed for a man to expose one's "secrets", Nato's ex-boyfriend as well as his parents still prefer to infringe this rule in order to guard another boundary – the tradition of female virginity. As mentioned already, dismantling of this tradition is perceived as a threat for losing unique Georgian identity. As I was arguing in Chapter 1 and Chapter 2, the reinforcement of the "institution of virginity" contributes to mark single mothers as not respectable and thus, not eligible for marriage.

3.4. PARENTS AS A DECISION-MAKING BODY

Gender hierarchy within the family is an important and solid structure in for most Georgian families. Parents regard children as small kids no matter how old they are. It is very important to point out, that generally, it is an elderly mother who appears as the main guardian of traditions:

There were several persons who wanted to marry me afterwards. And every time, the same would happen. Mothers would say: she (Ninia) was married, she is divorced, she has a child; even if she was an angel, we will not allow her in our family - Ninia (27 years, rural).

Of course, it is important that Ninia lives in the region, but even in urban areas a divorced woman is not a desirable fiancée. Eliso's example is the case to refer:

He loves me, he is unable to leave me, but he cannot admit this because of the family. And he can never admit this, because his family is never going to allow him marry me. He's 41 actually, but he still considers his mother's opinion ... The family is against this marriage - Eliso (47 years, urban).

According to the categorization, offered by Yuval-Davis and Anthias (1989), women do not perform only the role of transmitters and reproducers of culture in the nation building process. They also appear “as participants in national, economic, political and military struggles” (p. 7): “especially older women who are ... empowered to rule what's “appropriate” behavior and appearance and what is not and to exert control over other woman who might be constructed as “deviant” (Yuval-Davis 1989, as cited in Mayer, 2000, p. 6). In case of Ninia and Eliso “empowered” mothers played an important role to prevent their remarriage, because single mothers' lifestyle did not match to the requirements set by the national traditions.

To conclude, this chapter represented single mothers' experience as an example of the “others” of nationalism. I have argued that nationalistic discourse exclude single mothers by promoting gender-based stereotypes, which become main determinants of female chastity. I have demonstrated how national narrative becomes a significant marker of single mothers experience in Georgian context. I also elaborated on the importance of “patron” – a man figure besides a respectable Georgian woman, who is entitled to guard national honor by protecting the dignity of a woman. The dignity in this sense is expressed through proper sexual behavior, which distinguishes true Georgian woman from the women of other nations. By questioning the

promotion of “virginity as a must” I do not establish another norm – not being a virgin. Instead, I argue against established norms and fixed categories, which create labels, stigmas and margins for those, who do not accept them. But as it will be analyzed in the following chapter, national narrative is extremely pervasive and has a huge influence on the excluded groups too. Through the analysis of single mothers’ subjectivity, I illustrate how these surrounding conditions influence single mothers and initiate resistance through building new senses of selfhood.

CHAPTER 4: SUBJECTIVITY OF SINGLE MOTHERS – HOW PERSONAL IS CONNECTED TO SOCIAL

The main focus of this chapter is subjectivity of single mothers, the exploration of which will illustrate how personal experience is connected to the social context of Georgia. I map out the construction of selfhood of single mothers as narrated during the interviews. Nationalistic discourse largely defines the ways in which these women relate to themselves and conform to dominant forms of femininity, but I still argue that conformity leaves the room for agency. And through this chapter, I explore how and in what ways the agency is exercised.

In order to address these complicated issues of single mothers' subjectivities, I would like to clarify some terms and notions. I address Chris Weedon's (2003) review about subject and subjectivity in feminist theory: "Subjectivity ... variously refers to the conscious thoughts and feelings of the individual, her sense of self and, in psychoanalytic and post-structuralist contexts, it encompasses unconscious meanings, wishes and desires. (...) in experience-based theories of the subject, a woman's self is formed by her observation and practical engagement with the world. Identity is used to refer to a woman's conscious sense of who she is" (p. 112). This quote points out the difference between subjectivity and identity – subjectivity denotes conscious and unconscious, thoughts and desires, when identity refers to how a person sees him/herself consciously.

Another perspective on subjectivity is represented by Lynn Abrams (2010) in "Subjectivity and Intersubjectivity". She defines subjectivity as individual's "identity informed and shaped by experience, perception, language and culture – in other words, individual's emotional baggage" (p. 54). She also refers to structuralist understanding of subjectivity, where consciousness is seen

“as shaped by the social – that is ... social class, race and gender” (Abrams, 2010, p. 55). Abrams refers to Michel Foucault too, who put an emphasis on the notion of “the power” (Abrams, 2010, p. 57). Foucault focused on female sexual behavior and the ways in which the control over women’s bodies “were rigidly enforced by their peers and, most importantly, by themselves” and addressed this phenomena as “internalization of discourse” (Foucault, as cited in Abrams, 2010, 57:11). According to this review, Abrams states, that “self” must be “conceptualized ... as the outcome of a dialogic process as an individual consciousness or subjectivity engages with existing discourses in society” (Abrams, 2010, p. 57). In other words, Abrams sees a production of “self” in a dialogic process, where “individual consciousness” communicates with broader discourses.

As mentioned already, language is regarded as an important variable in composition of a subject, because “language pre-exists and produces subjectivity and meaning” (Weedon, 2003, p. 121). Yet, this attitude is criticized by some authors as long as language itself is also influenced by the context: “(...) for radical linguistic constructionists, it is language that shapes our understanding of the world, rather than the world that shapes the way we describe it using language” (Elder-Vass, 2012, p.10). All the above mentioned components can work simultaneously and “produce subjectivity”: the language, which already offers limited choice of meanings; the context which has influenced the formation of language; and the subject, also influenced by the context, who makes choice of words and meanings.

Joan Scott (1991) approaches importance of language in a different way and states that the theory about construction of subjectivity as “a discursive event” should not be perceived as “linguistic determinism” (p. 34). She argues that this theory suggests “to refuse a separation between 'experience' and language and to insist instead on the productive quality of discourse

(...). And subjects have agency. They are not unified, autonomous individuals exercising free will, but rather subjects whose agency is created through situations and statuses conferred on them. Being a subject means being 'subject to definite conditions of existence' (...). These conditions enable choices, although they are not unlimited. Subjects are constituted discursively, experience is a linguistic event (it doesn't happen outside established meanings), but neither it is confined to a fixed order of meaning" (Scott, 1991, p. 34).

All the represented arguments are important and interesting for my project: I am interested to map out "individual's emotional baggage" (Abrams 2010, 54:9); the relationship between the individual and society/community/discourse; the "internalization of discourse" (Abrams 2010, 16) as well as invasiveness of those discourses. On the other hand, I am focused to illustrate the agency that single mother's do exercise, while keeping into consideration the specific context they live in – this agency is shaped through the experience single mothers are subjected to in modern Georgia. In addition to the above said, I observe single mother's experience as a linguistic process: they have choice of words, which are limited to specific meanings. In short, my intention is to explore single mother's subjectivity: by mapping out the complex ways in which personal and social are connected I am developing the conclusions of this research.

4.1. TRADITIONAL NORMS OF FEMININITY – UBIQUITOUS CHASTITY FOR ALL GEORGIAN WOMEN

As I already mentioned, I conducted twelve interviews with single mothers of different age. Only one of them said she wanted to have a child and consciously quit contraception. All the others stated that single motherhood was not a planned circumstance in their life, but a surprise, mostly - unpleasant. There was a considerable difference between the experience of women from urban

and rural areas. Urban women mostly stated that what other people would say was not important for them. On the other hand, women who were born and raised up in rural areas, and whose parents still lived in the village, subjected themselves to harder circumstances and living conditions in order to avoid rumors, as discussed in Chapter 3.

In this chapter I observe how single mothers speak about their experience: as predictable, they use terms, influenced by the dominant discourses about female sexual behavior, elaborated in Chapter 1 and Chapter 2. For example, Eka (26 years, rural) recalls her experience with the following words:

I couldn't forgive myself, because such a thing shouldn't happen to me. I never thought about such a thing. My life style was not likely to lead me this way. ... Of course my lack of experience played a role. I was absolutely honest²⁰, nobody had ever touched me even with finger (smiles). The relationship²¹ between us happened only once. ... He knew he touched such a holy thing, I am telling you this as a woman to woman, I don't like to talk about this topic generally. And he knew this. If I were a person who previously had another and another and another, I would feel even less hurt. Because where those "anothers" had been, he would become just another too.

Eka refers to single motherhood as “such a thing”, “this way” as if she transgressed the right road of her life. Her choice of words is influenced by nationalistic discourse about the chastity of a Georgian woman: if she is not a virgin, she is not chaste and “honest” anymore. Eka also refers to her virginity as “such a holy thing”, assuming that for those, who are not virgins, experience of being abandoned in pregnancy will be much less painful. The influence of virgin/whore dichotomy, analyzed in Chapter 1 and Chapter 2 is evident in Eka’s representation of herself. By using the word “absolutely” she tended to underscore her total inexperience in relation to sexuality, which says a lot about her dignity.

²⁰ As already mentioned in the Chapter 1, the adjective “honest” is used in Georgian language to mark that a woman is chaste. Chastity itself is directly connected with virginity. Accordingly, in such a context being “honest” means that she was virgin.

²¹ She is referring to sexual intercourse.

Another interviewee, Ninia (27 years, rural area), refers to existing taboos related to sex and sexuality, which is obviously stronger in rural regions:

I didn't even have corresponding information, because a village is still different, you also know that, it cannot be compared to the city. There are different attitudes and opinions in the city (...). You will not believe, but I became a mother without even knowing what the sex was. When I say this, people start teasing me.

Even though Ninia criticizes the culture, later in the interview she mentioned proudly that while dating, she never let him (to the father of her child) kiss or embrace her. As I already discussed Ninia's story in more detail in Chapter 3, she became the victim of rape:

When I am alone, I still hear that voice cynically saying: just for information, Ninia, you are not a virgin anymore.

Even at the moment of interview, when Ninia was recalling such a traumatic episode, she did not consider as a right step to report the case to police. For her, the most important issue was to hide what had happened from everybody. After learning about pregnancy, she even chased that person - hoping that he will still marry and save her from public shame. Ninia's story is horrible in many ways, but I only put emphasis on the fact how she still related to the issues of virginity and female sexual behavior according to the cultural norms.

The discourse around virginity as the main dignity of Georgian woman and an axis to build a strong and pure Georgian family on - is more than influential; it determines the way of framing the stories. The fact is that the culture offers them very limited choice of words to refer to sexually active women; all such words are negatively loaded, close to whore in the meaning and opposite of a chaste. Accordingly, single mothers, who have already transgressed the established border of "chastity", still have an attempt to represent themselves through the traditional notions of dignity in order to avoid the label of opposite one.

4.2. MEANINGS OF MOTHERHOOD

In this section I draw attention to how single mother's related to motherhood and women's role in general. Firstly, I will refer to nationalism once more. Women's role in nationalistic discourse is fixed firmly, and it is "that of a mother, symbol of national hearth and home" (Nagel, 1998, p. 256). Limiting women's activity to motherly roles serves national agenda of cultural and biological reproduction. It was interesting for me to explore the ways in which single mothers relate to their experience of motherhood, especially, if I compare it to the results of Rekhviashvili's (2010) research, which I referred to in the introduction. Rekhviashvili analyzes interview material, where married women regard motherhood as "one of the most exciting and important experiences in life", which is directly "shaped by their perception of mothering role for multiplying of Georgian nation, and passing on the cultural values to future generations" (Rekhviashvili, 2010, p. 25). In contrast to this, my interviewees do not link their experience to the reproduction of Georgians, or to the falling birth rates in the country, which threatens Georgian statehood. But their emphasis how motherhood is important in the life of women - is still derived from nationalism and its "discourses around women's primarily role as "mother" (Anthias & Yuval-Davis, 1989, p. 13).

Some of my interviewees explicitly mention the "mother instinct", which, according to their narrative, is present in every woman:

: You know, in every woman there is this mother instinct. As long as I remember myself and when I started to think, I always had this in my head – when I will have a child, when I will become a mother. That I will for sure have a daughter and will name her Anna. I mean, motherhood is the most important, above important for me - Tina (39 years, rural).

Tina does not question how the idea about motherhood came to her mind in childhood. Was it because of so called “mother instincts”²² or much stronger nationalistic ideology about the role of women? As Nira Yuval-Davis and Flora Anthias state in “Woman-Nation-State (1989), “central dimensions of the role of women are constituted around the relationships of collectivities to the state” (p. 1), meaning that for the continuation and development of the nationhood it is necessary to keep women’s roles as reproducers of the nation. The discourse about “natural” instinct, which is “just” embedded in women’s minds and souls, is a nice example of how women themselves have believed who they are “naturally”. Tina as well as other interviewees took this notion for granted, never exploring the power of nationalism as a discourse shaping norms of proper female sexuality. Tina’s sentiment exemplifies how motherhood is believed to be “fulfillment of woman’s natural desire – clearly showing how dominant national values become internalized and experiences as one’s internal attitude and feeling” (Rekhviashvili, 2010, p. 26). Within nationalistic discourse, women’s sexuality is a central concern because they appear to be “a social category with a specific role” (Anthias & Yuval-Davis, 1989, p. 6) – that of a mother.

While explaining the meaning of motherhood for them, my respondents connected it to the personal feelings. Compared to Rekhviashvili’s research, where most of the interviewees represent married women pursuing traditional family life, my sampling of un-married single mothers are not that much concerned about the reproduction of Georgians for the sake of the nation. But still, two of them referred to “real Georgianness” in regard to their children, where Georgianness was defined as something very rare in our times:

²² These ideas about the “naturalness” of gender, and reproduction, and their connection to the nation, have been seen by scholars like Mosse as part of the particularly “scientificized” character of modern nationalism, and by Foucault as part of modern biopolitics.

I want to bring him up as Georgian. I already image to what classes I will take him (...). For me, a good Georgian man is a different thing. For me Alex (the father of her son) is not a Georgian man, really manly. Of course, bringing up is the most important. (...) I want to take him on two classes: Georgian dances and swimming. (...) Georgian dances, in my opinion, develops gentlemen characteristics and attitude towards women - Mari (33 years, urban).

Mari's ideas about Georgianness represent nationalistic belief about the exclusiveness and uniqueness of her nation. For her, "gentlemen characteristics" or "attitudes towards women" are positive features by which Georgian men are gifted. She believes that national heritage such as Georgian dances help to develop such traits in a person; but at the same time admits, that "real Georgianness", which means being "really manly", is not met in every Georgian man. The emphasis on manly characters is familiar within nationalistic discourse. Joan Nagel (1998) refers to Mosse while bringing together all the "manly virtues" common to "normative masculinity": "willpower, honour, courage, discipline, competitiveness, quite strength, stoicism, sang-froid, persistence, adventurousness, independence, sexual virility tempered with restraint, and dignity" (p. 245). Nationalistic discourses do work to make people believe in the unique character of "their" men. Mari too, trusts in "patriotic manhood" (Nagel, 1998, p. 242) and distinguishes Georgian man from the men of other nations. If I go back to what I was arguing in the previous chapters, the reference to "real Georgian man" - as the form of masculinity they desire to embody in their children - implies their own attitude towards the "national values": if they have an ambition to bring up "real Georgians" it means that they represent good Georgian mothers too. Otherwise, it would be impossible to transfer those cultural values which are meant to be specific to Georgianness.

During the process of narrating their stories, my interviewees constructed motherhood through the stereotypes about womanhood; feeling of having a child was mostly explained as something

exclusively granted to women, something every women must experience in order to understand, something adding a value to a woman's self-appreciation:

This child is everything for me. To be alone in the age of 47 would be terrible. I tell you, if I was well-off, I would adopt one more child ... I'm so glad I gave birth, that I have a child. I would go crazy if I were alone. ... No woman should stay alone, it is meaningless - Eliso (47 years, urban).

For Eliso, it is not important to live without a partner, but she cannot imagine her life without a child. The child gives her a feeling of living for somebody, being with somebody and having a meaning. But she is expanding her experience to all other women, which implies that a life of a childless woman is meaningless. Here, I refer back to the centrality of constructions of traditional femininity and masculinity in nationalistic discourses. Spike Peterson (1999) underscores the importance of “politics of identification”: “Firstly, constructions of femininity and masculinity that uniform our identification as women and men have pervasive implications for the lives we live and the world(s) in which we live (...). Second, to the extent that personal gender identities constitute a “core” sense of “self”, they fundamentally condition our self esteem and psychological security” (p. 37). In case of my interviewees, politicized construction of femininity is internalized to such extent, that motherhood constituted the “core” of their self. They base their present self-esteem on the established, politically predefined notions of femininity. Accordingly, their reference to chastity or special Georgian characteristics constitutes part of their self too. This is how they see themselves – realized women with children, who have performed their gender identity.

Motherhood feeling is that you can sacrifice yourself for the well-being of your child. And this feeling is a reimbursement. You cannot get this feeling without having a child. (...) in my opinion, every woman must have a child, because motherhood is such a different feeling. You get something different from life, you are finding new goals, and you are living differently in general – Natia (31 years, urban).

Natia's comment is similar to Eliso's, she also refers to motherhood as a must for all women.

Even though neither of them connects motherhood to the homeland directly or Georgia's cultural and biological reproduction, the way how they represent themselves as women and mothers conform very closely to nationalistic discourses.

Motherhood is something really cool. ... You realize so many things only after you are mother yourself. I don't know. My child gave me enormous strength. I even thought about suicide, I confess, and not only once. The only reason why I changed my mind was: what will happen to my child? ... I couldn't sacrifice my child, but I could sacrifice myself anytime. (...) child is everything for the mother. If she was not in my life, I cannot imagine what would happen to me – Ninia (27 years, rural).

Ninia explains her feelings of motherhood in different terms. She connects her becoming a mother to her physical and psychological survival and present strength. Ninia, as others, differentiates between women's and men's attitudes towards children. Mother is the one who will sacrifice herself, she has different feelings naturally and this she has more obligations towards the child. This stereotype about difference is also characteristic to nationalism, and similar to the other discourses around women's roles. As I have demonstrated so far in this chapter, single mothers perform the role assigned to them by interaction of "nation, gender and sexuality" (Mayer, 2000, p. 6). They construct stories about themselves according to the dominant narrative about motherhood and thus, relate themselves with the national icon of a good Georgian mother.

When Ninia states "child is everything for the mother", it implies that in case of men, child does not mean that much. This kind of attitude is influenced by the "sex role theories", where "role enactment" is "defined by biological differences, the dichotomy of male and female (Connell, 1995, p. 26). Nationalism, as primarily masculine discourse (though supported by some women as discussed in the previous chapter), reinforces this dichotomy and naturalizes subordination of

women through it. This subordination is also achieved by “family tropes”, which are used to legitimize “subordination of woman to man, and child to adult” as “a natural fact” (McClintock, 1993, p. 64). The ways, in which single mothers construct selfhood through established norms of femininity - how they explain meanings of motherhood as the most important stage in women’s life – are based on and influenced by nationalistic discourse.

As I have elaborated in Chapter 1, national narrative frames a very specific icon of exemplary Georgian mother, who, after reproduction loses her personality and becomes only a Mother; who is meant to sacrifice her personal life, present and future for her children. I refer to the novel “Otarant Widow” by Ilia Chavchavadze, which was written in 19th century, but the traits he attached to Georgian mother are still alive within Georgian nationalistic discourse. In the following paragraph I point out how the national icon of self-sacrificed mother defines subjectivity of single mothers.

“I endured things for my child. And for myself too. My personal life is my son, of course. I surrendered a lot for this child. For example, I could get married even with this child. I could go abroad, but I didn’t go and leave this child here. I have put aside everything mine. I refuse so many things, everything is for my child. Absolutely everything”- Eliso (47 years, urban).

I had always been very trusting person towards feelings, love. Now everything is very much behind, and my child is on the first place, and that I am a mother. I want or not this child is my priority – Ani (34 years, urban)

I cannot understand a woman, for whom life without a child would be easier – Mari (33 years, urban).

Eliso points out that she “surrendered a lot” for the sake of her child. She does not even allow herself to think about the possibility of marriage, because she has “put aside” everything personal. Ani underscores that at this moment of her life, “child is on the first place”. As for Mari, she refuses to understand a woman who prefers “easy” life to the pleasures of motherly

self-sacrifice. As it is evident from these quotes, single mothers follow to the national narrative about “Otarant Widow” (Chavchavadze 1987), who sacrifices herself to the future of her son. This novel, as mentioned already in Chapter 1, is taught at schools and reinforces ideal of a Georgian mother, who is meant to forget about personal pleasures. For me, it is astonishing to see how single mothers refer to their personal life using similar notions and understandings, by which, they perform as dedicated, respectable Georgian mothers. By telling their stories with the similar notions, they represent themselves as belonging to the national framework.

4.3. BELONGING TO CHRISTIAN FAITH

Religion was one more platform for creating certain kind of belonging to the Orthodox Georgian nation. As I have discussed in Chapter 1, Georgianness is defined through language, ethnicity and religion. Non-Christians or representatives of other ethnicities are hardly considered as Georgians. One of my respondents refers to Christianity in contrast to Islam:

We are Christians, not Muslims, we don't have polygyny here - Ani (34 years, urban).

Ani does not mention Muslims in order to depict them as backward because they allow polygyny, she just pointed out her ex-partner's preference for simultaneous multiple relationships. But still, the emphasis on “our” religion and othering of Islam makes it clear “who we are, what we represent” (Nagel, 1998, p. 248) as Georgians. The reference Ani makes about religious identity is a reference to national identity as well, which is directly connected to her experience. Even though she has stepped beyond the established border of sexual activity, she still views her experience as within the framework of Christianity; she depicts herself as a Christian person who would not accept Islamic polygyny. This small quote is a very significant

demonstration of how people are selective about religious as well as national requirements. Ani reworks these requirements in accordance with her own experience and finds herself still fit for representing a Christian identity.

In fact, Ani is not the only one who refers to Christianity. Most of my interviewees emphasized their attitude towards religion:

When I was desperate, I intensively started praying. I was going to church every weekend during the pregnancy. ... I was feeling psychologically weak, and in prayers there are lots of things like “Please God, make me stronger” and whatever and bla-bla-bla and when I was reading this, it was calming me down. Nothing else. And I believed that God would help me. And I don’t know, actually, I am fine now and I am quite happy with my life. I don’t know, in my opinion, God did help me – Natia (31 years, urban).

I was in monastery during a month or something – Mari (33 years, urban).

As it is clear from the quote, in the moment of desperation and loneliness religion seemed as salvation to Natia. But her comment to prayers as “bla-bla-bla” makes it a bit confusing what is her attitude at the moment of interview. When another interviewee, Mari mentions her stay in Monastery, keeping in mind how Georgian nationalism is intertwined with religion, it is clear that she creates belonging to Georgianness - she emphasizes how she performed well as a Christian person.

The following quote is very interesting by its twofold relationship towards religious restrictions:

If I were a small girl, depended on somebody else, giving birth would be an irresponsible step. This sounds a bit non-Christian to make an abortion because of material things but perhaps I would not give birth in such a case – Khatuna (44 years, urban).

Khatuna expresses her personal opinion about the responsibility that must be acknowledged before deciding to keep pregnancy or not, but justifies herself in the very following sentence for

this “non-Christian” attitude. Even though she would not give birth in case of financial instability, she still acknowledges that a good Christian should not have ideas like this.

4.4. SINGLE VERSUS MARRIED, SIGNIFICANCE OF MARRIAGE, SIGNIFICANCE OF A COMPLETE FAMILY

Almost all of my interviewees construct their self-image as single mothers in opposition to married women. They justify their present singleness by pointing at the unhappy relationships, which they see as bare reality behind the happy surface of married life:

I will tell you a very simple story. I came to work yesterday and I saw my colleague in tears. She has a crazy husband, pathologic person, he will get drunk, but even sober attacks on the family members, comes to the workplace and curses her and everything, and everything finishes with police... I don't understand this, why one should live with such a person. Because she has nowhere to go. Because she cannot support her child independently and is supported by parents-in-law. The husband does not represent anybody, wherever he started a job, he was fired shortly. And she is enduring such a husband. Personally I could never endure this. And my present, let's call it strength, is also determined by my character that I would not endure anybody "sitting on my neck", I will not allow even my son to do it (...). In my opinion, she is a single mother too, because her husband absolutely does not care about the child. The priority for him is a drink or a drug. One must prefer to be without a husband than be with such a person. Maybe, I am speaking nonsense, but this is my viewpoint - Lika (36 years, urban).

Lika brings an example of alcoholic and drug addicted husband in order to explain why she prefers to have no partner at all. She perceives herself in a better situation through the worse example around her. Lika sees her strength in the ability to manage things alone. She refers to her friend's husband as someone who “doesn't represent anybody” because he does not guarantee financial support to the family. In other words, she constructs herself-image as “happily single” in contrast to unhappy married friend. Thus, Lika also tries to reshape the stereotype of a single mother, who is meant to be helpless just because she is single. Lika's

comment tends to shake general perception about single people as necessarily lacking something/somebody; it also serves as a reminder, that marriage is not always the guarantee of happiness.

Eliso, was more direct in expressing her opinion about the functions of a husband:

And if I told you that I have any problems that he is not sitting all the time in my house, no, on the contrary, frankly, I swear, on the contrary. Some want to have a man in order to say that they have a husband but I don't want. ... Some have husbands like, I prefer not to have any husband than somebody like them (raising her tone emotionally)! C'mon, when I am taking care of everything, what to do, what to feed them with, and to be their nurse, I don't need men like that (laughing) ... What is the most important today? Finances and nothing else. Today the most important thing is to be financially well-off. It is a man, a woman, a mother and a father - money, there is nothing else. Many have husbands at home and they call him a husband but I don't want such a husband, no way. Some like it this way but I don't.

Eliso's discussion reveals her attitude towards the gender stereotypes about men: the man is a real man and a real husband only in case if he brings considerable amount of money at home. At this point, Gilmore's analysis of the phenomenon of "Ubiquitous Male" springs out, which I have referred to in Chapter 2: "Man-the-Impregnator-Protector-Provider" (Gilmore, 1990, as cited in Nagel, 1998, p. 245). Gilmore's "Ubiquitous Male" is relevant to describe a good Georgian man too. In addition, "the-Protector-Provider" Georgian man is meant to have the full authority in the family – as he represents the breadwinner. Eliso's attitude towards the role of men fits this framework of good Georgian man completely; she prefers to see her singlehood as a better option in contrast to families, where the man is not able to fulfill his "functions" as a "Protector-Provider". This image of masculinity is exactly what is established by nationalistic ideologies, aiming to limit women's role to reproducers and prevent their participation in nation-building process. But, it must be mentioned that most of my interviewees challenged the notion of

“Protector-Provider” by their singlehood. Except three of my respondents, all performed so called “masculine” role in order to guarantee future for their children and themselves.

Tina, who was a dedicated mother and as confessed during the interview, had a sexual relationship with only one man so far, defended her image of a chaste woman by discussing an example of her colleague:

One colleague of mine who changes one man per week, and even when married she used to have lovers, now she's divorced with two children; and once, while talking generally, she said such a thing, – oh, I want a small girl so much, you are so happy, I would give birth too, but I cannot do it this way. What you mean by this way, I asked. And she – without a husband. It's incredible that a person, who cannot count the number of men she had, thinks she is more honest than me.

Tina is upset when her colleague names her situation as “this way”, meaning that there is something deeply wrong in Tina’s behavior. While narrating this episode, she constructs herself as more chaste than that woman, who had been married and reproduced under culturally accepted family circumstances. She refers to the number of men the colleague had and by this, indirectly, but still contributes to virgin/whore dichotomy: a woman is not “honest”, meaning chaste, because she was sexually active. Tina, not intentionally, but judged another person in order to represent herself as still chaste and respectable, no matter how she reproduced.

In Tina’s quote I see the significance of linguistic discourse in the production of her subjectivity. As I elaborated in previous chapters, discourses around female chastity are firmly based on the institution of virginity. Also, every expression or word which denotes female sexual activity has a negative meaning. As I have demonstrated through the analysis of nationalistic discourse, delivered at TV Show “Midday” by Mr. Dimitri Lortkipanidze, Georgian nationalists strive to preserve these notions and stereotypes as the markers of Georgianness. I base my arguments on

the analysis of one discourse, because it clearly demonstrates the trend characteristic to Georgian nationalism. If I go back to Tina's quote, her subjectivity as a chaste woman is constructed under the limitations of language. She does not want to identify herself with the opposite of chaste, which is the only option suggested by the language and by the context. Tina tends to preserve self-esteem which is defined in the given cultural constraints established limits to female sexuality.

The analysis, represented so far in this chapter, demonstrates how single mothers rework nationalistic ideologies in order to create belonging to the culture they identify with. They try to move borders of un-respectable behind them. This reshaping of the framework of respectable represents something similar to “nesting orientalism”, the term introduced by Milica Bakic-Hayden, denoting “gradation of otherness and primitiveness” (Bakic-Hayden, as cited in Ashbrook, 2008, p. 22). From “nesting orientalism” I adopt the term “nesting respectability” in order to address the ways in which single mothers produce subjectivities – they try to fit to national frameworks by pointing at someone else, who is “less chaste”.

Another interesting example of addressing “others” while justifying one's own experience is based upon the stereotype that every woman wants to get married:

There are so many women in Georgia, to be married (single) or could not get married (spinster), and they want a child very much, but they cannot dare to make this step - Khatuna (44, urban).

In Georgian, there are three words expressing the marital status of a woman: to be married, married and could not get married – Gasatkhovari, Gatkhovili, Gautkhovari . “To be married” and “could not get married” categories are differentiated according to the age of a woman. To say it shortly, women's status is always defined in relation to marriage, which is taken for

granted as a necessary and desirable step in the life. Khatuna's way of discussing the topic reaffirms the mentioned stereotype about women and marriage, meaning that if a woman is single at some age, it is not that she chose it this way, but that she "could not get married". Khatuna also assumes that every woman even in the category of "could not get married" wants to have a child, but they are not courageous enough to resist established norms. Thus, she constructs her identity as a strong person because she dared to "make this step".

Lali Surmanidze points out two main attitudes towards women in Georgian society: "mother-woman is fetishised and a woman as an independent social individual has less value" (Surmanidze, 1998, para. 42). Besides that, the above mentioned status of "could not get married" has its influence, too. Most of my interviewees regard themselves as "marriageable" till now, but at the same time, they feel angry knowing that "other" people would think as if they "could not get married".

I was 3 months pregnant when he asked me to make an abortion, I do not need this child, he said. I do – was my answer, and if you don't, please disappear. We were talking in the car. I said: I don't have any problems with that, I can get married with this child, and I really could. I could marry better man than he is – Eliso (47 years, urban).

Eliso uses the phrase "I don't have problems with that" in order to emphasize how normal it is for her to live without a husband. At the same time, she mentions that she "could marry better man than he is". She, as some others, makes it clear that if she wants, she can always find a husband. But, as I quoted previously in this chapter, she deliberately decided to sacrifice her personal life to her child.

Mari (33 years, urban) expresses her attitude more explicitly:

My relative called once to my Mom, you know, a cruel person, and told: I am so happy that Nino at least has a child even though she couldn't get married. You see, me, 32 years

*old, could not get married. I'm sorry but what does that men, could not get married? ... I never had problem to get married, to get appropriately married*²³.

Adjective that Mari uses to characterize her relative is quite harsh, because she thought of Mari as unfit for marriage. This point is interesting in a sense how single mothers still try to belong to a respectable category: by leading a chaste life after out-of-wedlock motherhood, by emphasizing their sacrifice towards their children, by pointing to other women who are less chaste, or by underscoring the fact that they still can get married. Of course, not all of them shared this attitude, but “normal” in relation to family was always used to denote “mother, father and a child”.

The importance of “complete” family and marriage is an example of how nationalism influences people in a subtle way. As repeated already, family is a central institution of nationalism; reinforcement of “family values” is on national agenda as it was demonstrated in Chapter 1 and Chapter 2. The traditional understanding of a family legitimizes gender based hierarchy and guarantees the position of “the head of the family” to men. In other words, nationalism in its very “iconography of familial and domestic space” (McClintock, 1993, p. 63) strives to preserve existing norms, which initially imply the rejection of any changes. Even though my interviewees have challenged established norms by reproducing out of marriage, all of them expressed wish to have a “complete family”. Again, nationalistic discourse become visible while exploring the desires and wishes of single mothers.

4.5. STRENGTH AND RESISTANCE

²³ There is a Georgian expression “to get well married”, referring to a woman who gets married on a well-off person from a respectable family.

So far I have demonstrated how single mothers are conforming to national discourses of gender, sexuality, and motherhood. Now I move on exploring agency and resistance which is exercised through these traditional sets of meanings. I take Saba Mahmood's (2001) position in relation to the term "agency" (p. 203). Mahmood criticizes perception of agency as "one that seeks to locate the political and moral autonomy of the subject in the face of power" (Mahmood, 2001, p. 203). Instead, she suggests a new way of understanding - agency as a "capacity for action that historically specific relations of subordination enable and create" (Mahmood, 2001, p. 203). This is a very powerful criticism, which entails rethinking and reconsideration of prescriptive approach towards different cultures, where "western" experience might not work as long as the subjects are shaped under different traditions.

While analyzing veiling in Egypt, Mahmood suggests engaging more deeply "with the architecture of the self that undergirds a particular mode of living" (Mahmood, 2001, p. 217) instead of simply seeing these women in a need of emancipation. Similarly, while analyzing subjectivity of single mothers, I explore how this particular mode – becoming a mother – is important for "architecture" of womanhood. More precisely, how single mothers construct their "self" around the meaning and importance of motherhood in women's life.

Resistance is another important concept, elaborated within and beyond feminist theory. According to Mahmood's text, she appreciates post-structuralist analysis, but still criticizes it: "She [Butler] locates the possibility of resistance to norms within the structure of power itself rather than in the consciousness of an autonomous individual" (Mahmood, 2001, p. 211). More specifically, Mahmood does not agree with the definition of agency, when it is "always derived from, and directed at, the articulation of resistance to social norms and the subordinating function of power" (Mahmood 2001, p. 211). This kind of understanding of resistance and, accordingly,

agency, tends to give women certain status such as marginalized, stigmatized, subordinated, and suffered and etc. (Mahmood 2001, p. 207). She argues that desires are different in different cultures at different times and accordingly, “desire for freedom and/or subversion” should not be taken for granted (Mahmood, 2001, p. 211). In other words, feminism limits itself by “prescribed” notions and perceptions about what women *should* want or what is the *right* form of resistance. In this chapter, I use notion of resistance based on Mahmood’s argument in order to point out, how these women endure and resist through the set of traditional, patriarchal forms.

The experience of becoming a single mother in patriarchal country like Georgia, as painful as it had been, is still perceived as motivating by all of my interviewees. Without exception, they relate to their present self as more assured, purposeful and strong personality than before:

You know, firstly, I proved to myself that I can, not only to myself, but to absolutely everybody. Because I really did it, and brought him up, and secondly, that... You know, I escaped, perhaps, that unnecessary relationship, unnecessary fighting, begging, that his your son and take care of him, I cannot do that... (...). And yes, I proved to myself and others that I can do it alone ... I have never asked anything to anybody in my life, I feel quite proud about that – Lika (44 years, urban).

While speaking about why she did not try to get alimony, Lika starts to shape her understanding of self through her capability to manage things all alone. As she mentioned elsewhere during the interview, she had always been a strong personality, but one more proof is her experience as a single mother - her ability to cope with things on her own.

Before becoming a single mother, Mari (33 years, urban) was addicted to antidepressants, sleeping pills and alcohol while she tried to escape depression evoked by her relationship with a married man. She speaks about her child as somebody who saved her life:

If this child wasn't born, I don't know who I could be. I mean, the life I was living, how messy it was after the relationship with Dato, this child saved me. My relatives call him a 'messiah'.

In Mari's case, motherhood turns out to be a salvation from her addiction. Elsewhere during the interview she mentioned becoming hysterical after a childbirth, but she underscored several times how she appreciated who she was now exactly because of the child.

Eka (26 years, rural) speaks about her present self in relation to motherhood feelings more extensively:

I became absolutely different person. When my child was born, I was born again in that moment. Because before that I had no idea what the child was. When he was in womb I loved him already. (...) And during the last months I was telling him: get out faster, I miss you. I quitted worrying about anyone else, even about my mother. Everybody, including my mother will take care of themselves, I thought. I became a different person in that exact moment when my child was born. When they lay him down on my chest and he was looking for the breast by instinct, and then they told me to feed him, and like this, laying I fed him ... I discovered features in myself which had been silenced before. As it turned out, I can do more than I could ever imagine. ... And now I have bigger plans, so much bigger that I want to reach a lot in a short period of time. But in a decent and honest way, by my own labor. I know I have to suffer a lot, but I am not going to stop, I am not lazy at all. I have to do something impossible.

While speaking about who she is now, Eka goes back into the memories about pregnancy and delivery. This reveals how important becoming a single mother is for her to see herself in a different way. The importance of being single is that it helps her acknowledge she has no right to stop. This acknowledgement makes her discover "silenced" strength and gives unbelievable optimism.

The following quote is different from all others and interesting in many ways:

The fact that I turned out to be a single mother, initiated a protest, no, something like... you know, I became like excessively self-assured. As if I am justifying let's say my behavior, as if I like that I am alone. I am very far away from feminism or whatever, in

my opinion a normal family is a mother, a father and a child. The only thing that makes me thoughtful and hurts, is that child is big now and asks me questions – Khatuna (44 years, urban).

It is very interesting that Khatuna tries to detach herself from feminism immediately. Even though she referred to herself as an independent, working single mother several times elsewhere during the interview, she still does not want to see herself as a feminist. This might be also influenced by more general atmosphere in Georgia, where “feminist” turns out to be an insulting word for women. Another interesting point in Khatuna’s quote is how she explains her self-assurance: in order to feel comfortable with her present self, she needs to justify her singlehood and even like it. She acknowledges why she needs this justification, but meanwhile mentions what she regards as a “normal” family: “a mother, a father and a child”. This contradiction reveals what I am trying to argue in my thesis: single mothers try to create belonging where dominant ideas about normalcy exclude them.

In the above mentioned quote Khatuna called herself a single mother, but later during the interview she expresses her disapproval of the term:

What does “single” mean? There are families, perfect at the first glance, but the woman is still single, poor and oppressed there.

It must be clarified here one more, that in Georgian the word “single” has a negative connotation. It describes the state not just as being on one’s own, but as lacking someone who was meant be with you. Literally, Georgian “single” sounds as “a person with only one hand”. In this sense, the term “single mother” is victimizing and thus problematic. As demonstrated in Khatuna’s quote, she puts single, poor and oppressed together, and of course, she does not want to associate this state to herself. Almost all of my interviewees have expressed the same sentiments about the term “single motherhood”, it sounds as “helpless” for them, and that is why they avoid using it in

regard to themselves. Once more, the relation towards the term “single mother” exemplifies the portion of language and cultural meanings in production of subjectivities. It illustrates how these women exercise agency and resist dominant judgments in order to create stories and selves that offer them a sense of self-worth.

In this chapter I have represented interview material, by analysis of which I have explored the ways in which single mothers relate to themselves and construct their subjectivities. As I mentioned already, I take Saba Mahmood’s take on resistance and agency, meaning that this chapter is not dedicated to simply demonstrate how single mothers conform to nationalistic ideologies. Instead, this is an attempt to point out how these women rework nationalism, religion or gender stereotypes in order to build self-esteem. On the one hand, they believe in the crucial importance of motherhood in women’s lives while challenging the role and place of mother in the family. These acts of agency, in producing their new subjectivities, still reflect national narrative about ideals of women and meanings of motherhood. Moreover, single mothers share beliefs about the “complete” family. But, on the other hand, through these very traditional sets of meanings they challenge the family hierarchy - form female-headed families and support their children without having a “patron” besides them. Their stories do mirror the influence of dominant discourses, but at the same time rework traditional notions of motherhood through their experience as single mothers.

CONCLUSION

The analysis of historical development of modern Georgian nationalism, where framework of true Georgian women has been established, and exploration of quite recent discourses in popular culture and media illustrate two main icons of women: 1) A positive and respectable one, who embodies virtuous characteristics of a true Georgian woman; she is obliged to restrain her sexual behavior, keep virginity before marriage, get married at a definite age and reproduce Georgians within the realm of Christian, traditional family. Moreover, the private life of a good Georgian mother is limited to her children and husband. 2) While female sexual activity is strictly confined to marital life, the un-respectable icon represents a woman being in intimate relationship outside the sacred bonds of marriage. Actually, any expression of female sexuality before marriage is equated to being “a woman of loose behavior”. Consequently, single mothers find themselves in the second category due to “improper”, pre-marital sexual activity and out-of-marriage reproduction.

I argue that negative attitude towards female sexual activity is also partly defined by the limited choice of linguistic expressions. When all words denoting a sexual act represent women as objects of male sexual assault, it consequently influences to establish the very limited understanding of sex and sexuality. Absence of a word, which would represent sexual intercourse as an act of making love determines the connection of pre-marital sex with something filthy, sinful and initially wrong for a Georgian woman.

Throughout the thesis I have demonstrated how Georgian nationalism takes advantage of religion in order to legitimize repression over female sexual behavior. National narrative builds its arguments on the Christian values to justify urge for female virginity before marriage. In

opposition to this, promiscuity is perceived as inseparable trait of a true Georgian man, who is never judged through religious lens. This contradiction becomes the basis of my argument that religion is used as a weapon against women, but it never appears crucial to define heterosexual male promiscuity in negative terms – or in the same way, at least.

While doing my research I encountered phenomena, to which I had not paid proper attention before. Even though “We are Christians, not Muslims, we don’t have polygyny here” as stated by Ani (34 years, urban), it turned out that 5 from 12 interviewees had been dating with married men, while some of them kept the relationship after childbirth as well. Mostly, it was not a case of several dates, the women actually performed as second wives for these men. The emphasis on Christian values, which is so much embedded in Georgian nationalistic discourses, disappears from people’s actual practices completely. The mentioned phenomena might be an interesting focus for the future research, giving another insight to the multiple layers of patriarchal structures of Georgian nationalism.

The analysis of interviews in the Chapter 3 and Chapter 4 bring my discussion to the conclusion, that invasive influence of Nationalistic discourse determines a certain place and label for single mothers: they are regarded as traitors to traditional values, who threaten the spiritual health of the Georgian nation. Also, single mothers are perceived as women without a “patron” (Kevanishvili, 2008, para. 16), a man - who would guard national honor by protecting and controlling their proper sexual behavior. The ways in which single mothers relate to themselves and construct their subjectivity illustrate how they reshape nationalism, religion or gender stereotypes in order to move the borders of respectability behind them and appear within the framework of respectable Georgian mother. The exploration of the relationship between dominance and resistance illustrates single mothers’ agency to find a space for the sense of self-worth. I adapted

the term “nesting respectability” in order to point out how these women rework ideologies in order to create belonging to the culture they identify with. I argue that the production of selfhood through the set of traditional means is a way of resistance in Georgian context, where these women perform stronger roles than they are traditionally ascribed. In opposition to the exclusion, they reclaim appreciation as good Georgian mothers and construct strong, self-assured subjectivities, who exercise agency by reshaping the established limits of respectability.

Though, based on the research of 12 interviews, where sampling consisted only by the educated middle-class women, I cannot make claims for the general significance of my conclusions. I consider the possibility of different results if my respondents had different social backgrounds. For example, if I conducted interviews with uneducated women, who have never had jobs - it might be more difficult to explore resistance or agency. Their concerns would probably be addressed at financial aspects, absence of social benefits and etc. As I mentioned while referring to welfare system, this topic was not expanded in this thesis, but it must be researched and analyzed in the future. Also, it is important to collect statistical data about single mothers in order to engage in large-scale analysis of this social group.

What I have depicted through this research is the broader picture of the Georgian context, where single mothers - together with all other women - craft their stories under the pressure of dominant nationalistic discourse. While analyzing personal experiences of single mothers and the reasons why they have become “others” of Georgian nationalism, I do question fixed icons of virgin brides and subordinated wives. Though, by challenging the discourse around female virginity, I do not establish another norm – not being a virgin. Instead, I argue against any kinds of “musts” - which invent dichotomies, binaries and polarities and put Georgian women either in proper or improper category.

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