

# **The Concept of “Europe” in the Narrative of Extreme-Right Nationalists during Europeanisation: a case from Georgia**

by

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis investigates the quest to Europe of Georgian extreme-right nationalist organization Georgian Power. Georgian Power promotes anti-egalitarian, xenophobic, white supremacist and anti-globalisation rhetoric, yet it still declares itself as the force striving towards traditionalist Europe. The thesis seeks to answer why such extreme-right nationalist organisation frames Europe as a desired destiny for Georgia. The thesis also investigates why despite its condemnation of many changes Europeanisation contributes in Georgia, Georgian Power does not reject Georgian government's stated goal to get closer to the European Union.

The thesis uses frame analyses and analyses the public and Facebook discourses of Georgian Power and its related Facebook page Edelweiss. It regards Georgian Power as a social movement that on one hand is constrained by existing historical and cultural frames, on the other hand, it uses political opportunities to advance its agenda. Based on Risse-Kappen's Europeanisation theory thesis regards Georgian power as one of the actor engaged in national and European identity renegotiation process.

The thesis argues that support of Europe by Georgian Power is shaped by several factors: first, Georgia's Russian "Other" framed in dichotomy with Europe; secondly, the "Muslim other" of Georgia that European extreme-right also frames as Europe's "other"; third, Georgian Power's fascination by Nazism and traditionalism that bounds it to Europe; fourth, flirting with political opportunism by Georgian Europe – anti-European discourse would discredit the organization even further.

The thesis will contribute to debates about Europe and Europeanisation, it also represents an important step towards studying Georgia's rising extreme-right nationalism.

Keywords: *Europeanisation, Extreme-right, Georgian nationalism, European Union;*

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## INTRODUCTION

### *Motivation*

Similarly to the rest of Europe, rise of extreme-right ethno-nationalist groups is increasingly visible in Georgia too. It attracted my attention as I closely follow public discussions in Georgia. It also attracted me as a social scientist. Understanding intolerant, anti-liberal/left and eclectic extreme-right nationalist groups that also do not challenge European integration of Georgia, is highly interesting for me, particularly as there is lack of research on this topic.

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In 2014, Georgia signed the Association Agreement with the European Union (hereinafter the EU) that further advanced the process of Europeanisation of the country. In 2017, the EU granted Georgia visa-liberalisation following the adoption of numerous painful reforms by the Georgian government. The Georgian Prime-Minister referred to achieving visa-free regime as a “truly historic day” that “will prove that Georgia’s policy on drawing closer to the European Union brings tangible results for every Georgian citizen.”<sup>1</sup> Reforms undertaken during Europeanisation attracted countless discussions in Georgia. Many Georgians, including some Orthodox priests and bishops publicly condemned Europeanisation claiming it would endanger Georgian traditions and national identity.<sup>2</sup> Out of many actors, that are already contesting and variously interpreting this process, some new groups emerged in

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<sup>1</sup> “European Parliament Grants Georgia Visa-Free Travel,” accessed June 5, 2017, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/02/european-parliament-grants-georgia-visa-free-travel-170202133759696.html>.

<sup>2</sup> One of the Orthodox Priest declared that “Getting closer to European values means getting far away from Jesus Christ.” More in Georgian at: “მღვდელთა: რაც უფრო დავუახლოვდებით ევროპას, მით მეტად ვშორდებით ქრისტეს • ტაბულა [A Priest: Closer We Get To Europe, Further We Get Away From the Christ],” ტაბულა, accessed June 5, 2017, <http://www.tabula.ge/ge/verbatim/96850-mghvdeli-rac-ufro-davuaxlovdebit-evropas-mit-metad-davshordebit-qristes>.

Georgia that this thesis will draw its attention on.

In the recent years, like in other parts of Europe, Georgia also witnessed the rise of extreme-right nationalism. The social media is often stormed by the posts from young extreme-right groups declaring themselves as nationalists. From many of extreme-right groups that emerged in Georgia, the Georgian Power gained the highest visibility in Facebook and Georgian media. Besides having 30000 followers on Facebook this year in April, Georgian Power staged numerous nationalist demonstrations and attracted a young crowd of 150-200 mostly consisting of boys between fifteen to twenty-five. One of the most interesting aspect about Georgian Power is that despite its anti-liberal, anti-left, anti-globalist, militaristic, white supremacist, homophobic and misogynist discourses, the group describes itself as “only true force in Georgia striving towards traditional Europe.”<sup>3</sup> Following the Facebook page of the group which represents their main platform, one can almost never see any direct critique of the EU or rejection of Europeanisation of Georgia that brought many reforms on the agenda the group opposes. Rather on the contrary, the group states that it supports transformation of Georgia into a “European state.”

Some groups in Georgia, particularly those often labelled as pro-Russian, advocated to abandon Europeanisation as Europe threatens Georgian national identity. They seek alliance with “traditionalist” Russia and Eurasian Union instead. Georgian Power also calls itself traditionalist and condemns liberal values, yet they offer distinctively different pro-European orientation. Georgian power and related Facebook platform called “Edelweiss” challenge mainstream liberal understanding of Europe and unlike pro-Russian Georgian citizens for

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<sup>3</sup> “ქართული ნაციონალისტები 26 მაისს რუსთაველაზე ჩირაღდებით მსვლელობას გეგმავენ [Georgian Nationalists Plan to Rally With Torches on Rustaveli On May 26],” accessed June 5, 2017, [http://resonancedaily.com/index.php?id\\_rub=2&id\\_artc=29202](http://resonancedaily.com/index.php?id_rub=2&id_artc=29202).

example, they do not (openly) reject Europeanisation of Georgia and they even emphasize Europeanness of Georgia.

Despite their condemnation of LGBT rights, liberal ideology (whatever that means for Georgian Power) that is clear from the discourses of Georgian Power, the group kept strong anti-Russian and distinctively pro-European outlook. The group identifies itself as part of pan-European group for ethno-nationalist Europe. It seeks to offer different image of Europe and Georgian nationalism itself.

In other words, Georgian Power generally opposes liberal values of Europe and Georgian government's acceptance of some of the legislative changes regarding gender identity, LGBT rights etc. adopted under Europeanisation process, yet, the group does not question Europeanness of Georgia, or Georgian government's will to join the EU. Above-mentioned young nationalist group shows strong anti-Russian stance and at the same time rejects liberal values of Europe, yet does not oppose Europe as such but rather promote traditionalist, Christian understanding of Europe of nation states.

While the extreme right groups are well studied, there is a shortage of literature regarding how the extreme right nationalist young groups position themselves during Europeanisation and what their attitudes towards Europe are. This is particularly true for the periphery of Europe, that often remains out of scholarly attention. This thesis will be a contribution to literature on intersections of European Studies, extreme right nationalisms and area studies and will offer view from the periphery of the continent about Europe. Nevertheless, it will contribute to understanding contemporary heated debates about Europe.

This thesis will seek to answer why extreme-right nationalist group like Georgian Power coming from geographical and political periphery of Europe - opposing liberalism (in a broader sense), multiculturalism, feminism and human rights – largely associated with Europe today - still favours “pan-European” nationalism. Another research question this thesis asks is that why the Georgian Power refrains from criticizing Europeanisation that contributed to many changes in Georgia these nationalists find unacceptable? The thesis will attempt to answer what factors make Georgian Power despite their resentment towards many of these values largely associated with Europe today, not outspokenly oppose (an even more, support) European integration of Georgia. How do Georgian Power nationalists justify their stated desire to “establish European state in Georgia?”

To get answers for the research questions, there will be several research objectives. First, to examine whether powerful “others” in Georgian nationalism, like the “Muslim other” or the “Russian other” are used by Georgian Power to frame their pro-European narratives. Second objective is to examine the European extreme-right influences on the repertoire and rhetoric of Georgian Power. Third objective examines the contradictions in Georgian Power rhetoric and repertoire and political opportunism the group conforms with.

In order to answer the research question, the thesis will use frame analyses and study the discourses by Georgian Power and related nationalist Facebook page Edelweiss. The main part of such discourse is developed at their Facebook pages and at the nationalist manifestations. The group time to time appears in Georgian media as well. the thesis will use historical analyses as well to interpret those historical narratives, processes and events that are important to seek answers to the questions asked above. To provide necessary information for background of the topic the thesis will use various articles, books and academic works.

In this thesis, I will argue that several important factors shape Georgian Power's complex framing of pro-European ethno-nationalist ideas. First, Georgia's historic "Muslim other" which is framed in opposition to "Europe" in Georgia. This somewhat echoes Georgia political elite's portrayal of Europe as Christian civilization to which Georgia as a Christian country should belong to. Secondly, having current and historic realities in mind, Georgian Power frames and "others" Russia while simultaneously stresses Georgia's belonging to Europe. Third, the thesis will argue that Georgian Power flirts with political opportunities. To advance its agenda Georgian Power does not openly display anti-European views insofar as support to European integration / EU membership remains very high among Georgian population.

The abovementioned framings of pro-Europe discourses by Georgian Power is given in details in thesis. Before empirical part, background part reviews Georgian nationalism and its Russian and Muslim "others." Besides, it shows Georgians' fears and ambivalences towards Europeanisation and official framings of Europe as a Christian continent by Georgian politicians. The literature review chapter discussed most relevant researches regarding extreme-right nationalist groups on, how they do framings and respond to political opportunities. The theoretical framework and methodology chapter defined Georgian Power as a social movement and used frame/discourse analyses which was applied to various Facebook posts of Georgian Power and its satellite page "Edelweiss", group's appearance in media, their public speeches from demonstrations, etc. Risse-Kapen's and Bhabha's theories on Europeanisation and history in the making respectively, are synthesized with the theoretical framework.

# CHAPTER 1 - LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

## 1.1 LITERATURE REVIEW

The first issue that arises about nationalist groups is how to define the self-described nationalist organisation of Georgian Power. The terminology regarding varieties of political right is highly problematic. The thesis will describe Georgian Power as extreme-right. The extreme right shares some properties with radical right, but most importantly, that extreme right unlike radical or moderate right does not produce significant political theory. Rather, it aims to produce propaganda, conspiracy theories and paranoia.<sup>4</sup> Georgian Power frequently expresses conspiracy theories and uses such theories primarily with anti-Semitic flavour. It also targets other groups, like migrants, Muslims, etc. Extreme-right is characterized by mobilization directed against those who are perceived not to be belonging the nation and race. Georgian Power and its ethno-nationalist primacy is to a degree white supremacist too. It portrays immigration as a decaying force against the white race. Recently, there is a tendency to use terms “radical right,” “populist right” and “extreme-right” interchangeably,<sup>5</sup> yet for academic consistency and the characteristics mentioned above, the thesis will define Georgian Power as an extreme-right organisation.

There are numerous of theories of extreme-right. Roger Eatwell discusses ten such theories that describe voting patterns for extreme-right political parties. As the thesis is concerned with young extreme right nationalists, these theories explaining electoral behavior might not be totally relevant, yet, one of such theories of “the social breakdown thesis”

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<sup>4</sup> Roger Eatwell and Noel O’Sullivan, eds., *The Nature of the Right: European and American Politics and Political Thought Since 1789* (London: Continuum International Publishing Group Ltd., 1992). p.71, p. 151

<sup>5</sup> Cas Mudde, *The Populist Radical Right: A Reader* (Taylor & Francis, 2016). p.4

believes that upsurge of extreme-right is connected to anomie and changing nature of social, class and religious structures. Eatwell mentions that “as a result, individuals lose a sense of belonging and are attracted to ethnic nationalism, which according to psychology research increases a sense of self-esteem and efficacy. For similar reasons, they may be attracted to family and other traditional values.”<sup>6</sup> Eatwell argues that particularly young people are vulnerable to such quest for affirming their belonging.<sup>7</sup> The thesis is primarily concerned with why extreme-right, anti-liberal Georgian Power still advocates for Europe in Georgia, yet thesis does not neglect the Georgian social context. Georgian civil society organisation “Human Rights Education and Monitoring Center” aftermath of racist incidents by Georgian Power argued that rise of extreme-right nationalist groups correlates with Georgian economic and political situation: rising economic inequality, high unemployment, urban ghettoisation, lack of access to quality education and many more were named as contributing factors to the rise of extreme-right.<sup>8</sup>

Scholars agree about complex nature of extreme-right and difficulty of defining it, yet there are number of characteristics that most of extreme-right groups, including Georgian Power satisfy. As Ebata argues, “right wing extremists are identified foremost by their fundamental expression of hatred, bigotry and prejudice rooted in an ideology of inequality.”<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Roger Eatwell, “Ten Theories of Extreme Right,” in *Right Wing Extremism in the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Peter H. Merkl and Leonard Weinberg (London: FRANK CASS PUBLISHERS, 2003).

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> “EMC 27 სექტემბერს ულტრანაციონალისტური ჯგუფების მიერ გამოვლნილო ძალადობის ფაქტს ეხმიანება,” [EMC regarding the violent incidents expressed by ultranationalist groups] October 1, 2016, <https://emc.org.ge/2016/10/01/emc-155/>.

<sup>9</sup> Michi Ebata, “Right Wing Extremism: In Search of a Definition,” in *The Extreme Right: Freedom and Security at Risk*, ed. Aurel Braun and Stephen J. Scheinberg (Avalon Publishing, 1997). p.12.

Ebata names several ways of expressing hatred by extreme right such as racism, xenophobia, homophobia, and religious intolerance. The hatred is often resulting in mobilizing actions against those who in the eyes of extreme right do not belong to their ideal version of the nation. Such hatred is manifested in hate speeches, hate propagandas and hate crimes that relies on “pseudoscientific theories and has religious and cultural overtones.”<sup>10</sup>

Besides some universal characteristics extreme-right groups have, national contexts are highly relevant for right-wing nationalist organisations. Caiani and others showed that extreme-right groups are deeply relying on their historic traditions, yet they also open for “emerging concerns.”<sup>11</sup> As much as there are universal characteristics of the extreme right, there are national nuances that shape their experiences. The cross-national analysis is relevant for this thesis about Georgian extreme-right, insofar as the research showed that despite some similarities extreme-right groups have in Italy, Germany or the States, they have some differences determined by different historic or current factors. These groups are adaptive to different political opportunities and they reflect on various crises and use them in according to their interest. Caiani and others develop theoretical framework highly relevant for this thesis. Their study refers to extreme-right as social movement. Regarding extreme-right nationalists as a social movement is one of the departure points in the thesis.

It is important to note that within right-wing spectrum there are different competing social movements.<sup>12</sup> Extreme-right wing groups as I mentioned have highly peculiar national character, but within national contexts there are some contestations. Merkl described right-

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Manuela Caiani, Donatella della Porta, and Claudius Wagemann, *Mobilizing on the Extreme Right: Germany, Italy, and the United States* (OUP Oxford, 2012).

<sup>12</sup> Ebata, “Right Wing Extremism: In Search of a Definition.”

wing social movement “dynamic product of right-wing subculture.” This is true for Georgian extreme-right too as wide range of contradictory narratives are developed within right wing movements, about role of Christianity in nationalism, issue of Russia, issue of Europe etc. Having said that, Merkl argues that there are no universally agreed definition or opinion in academia on what right wing extremism is or who can be counted as the right-wing extremists and that generalizing one country’s experience on the other ones will be misleading.<sup>13</sup>

Contestation arises especially as the social movements, including extreme-right nationalists, attempt to interpret their pasts and frame various issues. As Jane Jenson argued, “in competing for discursive space, communities are imagining more than their present and the future; they also reimagine their pasts. Therefore, social movements making national claims, like all other social movements, write and rewrite history in order to justify contemporary definitions of interests and strategies.”<sup>14</sup> Therefore, in social movements, it is often past and history that serves as basis to re-produce new discourses and frames. This is a highly relevant statement for this thesis. As the empirical part will show these past histories are not just sources to framing but constraints too that the extreme-right nationalists need to take into their account.

While it is true that extreme right groups’ worldviews and agendas are largely shaped by their national contexts, there is “same ideological heritage” these groups get inspired by.<sup>15</sup> As Ebata correctly notes it, this sort of “ideological heritage” is reflected in extreme-right organisations’ symbolism as well. Besides shared symbolism, right-extremists can be

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<sup>13</sup> Peter Merkl and Weinberg LEONARD, *Right-Wing Extremism in the Twenty-First Century* (Routledge, 2004). p.5.

<sup>14</sup> Jane Jenson, “What’s in a Name? Nationalist Movements and Public Discourse,” in *Social Movements and Culture*, ed. Hank Johnston and Bert Klandermans, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2003), 107–8.

<sup>15</sup> Ebata, “Right Wing Extremism: In Search of a Definition.”

influenced by their foreigner counterparts in various ways. This is largely true in case of Georgian extreme-right nationalists. Georgian Power often referenced and expressed its admiration towards nationalist and anti-liberal and anti-migration policies of Hungarian Prime-minister Orbán or other right-wing politicians in Europe.

Anti-migration and Anti-Muslim sentiments are one of the most pressed issues by extreme-right. José Pedro Zúquete was one of the first scholars to notice a highly interesting aspect. As extreme-right parties promoted assertive Christian identity for future of Europe, they framed immigration and “expansion of Islam” as a threat to not only a concrete national community, but to Europe as a whole. Extreme-right emphasized about danger of Islam for the entire continent – for many of these groups immigration and Islam became not just a national, but broader European, civilizational issue.<sup>16</sup> Although here Zúquete refers to political parties, his findings are highly relevant for this thesis. Georgian Power does not represent a political party, yet its framing resembles to the tendency that Zúquete noticed back in 2008.

Extreme-right’s discourses about migration are deeply connected to renegotiation of the role of women in nation. Extreme-right made women and body politics as one of its central themes. In Mostov’s words, as women are sacred markers of the nation, responsible for giving birth to new members of nation and their upbringing, they need to be protected from alien/foreigner/immigrant intrusion.<sup>17</sup> Ethno-nationalist vision by radical/extreme right shows woman’s body as sacred, passive and weak that needs male protection. Julie Mostov argued

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<sup>16</sup> José Pedro Zúquete, “The European Extreme-Right and Islam: New Directions?,” *Journal of Political Ideologies* 13, no. 3 (October 1, 2008): 328–31, doi:10.1080/13569310802377019.

<sup>17</sup> Julie Mostov, “Women and Radical Right, Ethnocracy and Body Politics,” in *The Radical Right In Central And Eastern Europe Since 1989*, ed. Sabrina P. Ramet (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1989), 49–63.

that in radical right<sup>18</sup> programmes the women, woman's bodies and proper gender roles are a matter of vital importance for the nation. Women, Mostov says, become markers and the property of the nation.<sup>19</sup> Mostov's work mainly refers to ex-Yugoslavia case yet it is still largely valid for our case as well. Radical right in Mostov's opinion frames its programme in nationalist terms, whether it refers to expressing homophobia, intolerance, or racism. Extreme right nationalists in Georgian case advocate for traditional gender order, portray feminism as an enemy of the nation and denounce mixing marriages, especially if Georgian woman marries a non-white man.

Importantly to this thesis, scholars have noted about internationalization of extreme-right - another important aspect about nationalist groups. Although this is not internationalization as in the case of socialist, liberal or some other political ideology followers, Ebata argues that right-wing organisations are aware of their counterparts from the other countries. These are "loose network of contacts" and extreme right groups do still mostly operate in their own countries, yet, one can observe the existing "transnational relationships... [that] stem from international currency of hatred that bonds them all together."<sup>20</sup> Whine in his article "Trans-European Trends in Right Wing Extremism" argued that easing borders in Europe, development of internet/social networks etc. boosted trans-European cooperation among extreme right (nationalists). Besides, social networks, namely YouTube, MySpace, Facebook are actively used by extreme-right groups to disseminate their ideas and recruit new members. These enabling processes are helping European extreme-right groups to establish closer

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<sup>18</sup> The book "The radical right in Central and Eastern Europe" Mostov's chapter is part of uses "radical right" as a synonym to "extreme right." It argues that ultra-right and extreme right are used interchangeably.

<sup>19</sup> Mostov, "Women and Radical Right, Ethnocracy and Body Politics."

<sup>20</sup> Ebata, "Right Wing Extremism: In Search of a Definition." p.220.

cooperation.<sup>21</sup>

Whine notes, that one can observe establishment of “pan-European extreme right identity, which claims to be based on common European histories, identities and cultures in reaction to the increasing presence of new immigrants and which is at times attracted to and influenced by American extreme right, but also repelled by American cultural and economic hegemony.”<sup>22</sup> These neo-Nazis sought “unity based on pan-Europeanism in the face of an ethnic, rather than strategic threat.” Determined by local Georgian context, Georgian Power yet still elaborates on a strategic threat coming from Russia and as well it pays significant attention to an “ethnic threat” coming from non-white immigration to Georgia and Europe.

Whine’s elaborated on Jean Thiriart and his “Jeune Europe”<sup>23</sup> movement. Thiriart was one of the pioneers of pan-European nationalist movement. He favoured white Europe that would include all the nations from Atlantic to Urals but not US.<sup>24</sup> Georgian Power undoubtedly has some influence from Thiriard and pan-Europeanism, yet they would not copy-paste Thiriard’s ideas. Georgian Power would not advocate for Europe “from Atlantic to Urals” due to Georgia’s “Russian Other.” These cherry-picking of discourses will be shown in the last chapter of the thesis.

Despite the fact that there is a vast amount of literature focusing on extreme-right, there is a significant gap in research this thesis attempts to fill in. This thesis seeks to answer why extreme-right nationalist groups in Georgia despite their rejection of many western values still

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<sup>21</sup> Michael Whine, “Trans European Trends in Right-Wing Extremism,” in *Mapping the Extreme Right in Contemporary Europe From Local to Transnational*, ed. Andrea Mammone, Emmanuel Godin, and Brian Jenkins (Routledge, 2012). p.321

<sup>22</sup> Ibid. p.318.

<sup>23</sup> “Young Europe” in French

<sup>24</sup> Whine, “Trans European Trends in Right-Wing Extremism.” p.319

advocate for “establishing European state in Georgia.” Several authors paid attention to the extreme-right and its relation towards Europe, however, like Zúquete, authors usually rather focused on political parties, not non-party actors. Besides, extreme-right and social movement studies focusing on non-party actors are mainly concerned with the Western or Central European far right groups. As there is almost no scholarly research available on contemporary Georgian young extreme-right groups and their pro-European narratives, this thesis should be useful guide for those interested in rising Georgian extreme-right nationalism and its framing of Europe.

## **1.2 EXTREME-RIGHT NATIONALISM AS A SOCIAL MOVEMENT**

In recent years, theorists tend to study extreme right wing groups as social movements. As the thesis discusses extreme-right group of young nationalists, it refers to not well defined entity that pursues non-institutional activities. Georgian Power is a non-party actor that represents grassroots activism, therefore thesis will consider it as a social movement. And here the thesis like other social movement studies of extreme-right, stresses about “political opportunities rather than social threats, organisational resources rather than grievances, frames rather than ideology, repertoire rather than violence, networks rather than individual pathologies, and relations rather than structures.”<sup>25</sup>

As defined by Sidney Tarrow social movement represents “collective challenges by people with common purposes and solidarity in sustained interaction with elites, opponents and authorities.”<sup>26</sup> Seeing the group as social movement which denotes their dynamic and collective participation for a common cause, is a useful departure point as it also entails

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<sup>25</sup> Caiani, Porta, and Wagemann, *Mobilizing on the Extreme Right*. p.9.

<sup>26</sup> Sidney Tarrow, *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics* (Cambridge University Press, 1998). p.4.

relations to environment and culture (social context). With this, the thesis is in line with recent literature about extreme right and social movements.<sup>27</sup>

### **1.3 HISTORY IN THE MAKING –THEORY BY BHABHA**

For the theoretical framework the thesis will extensively draw on Bhabha insofar as he emphasizes temporality and challenges historicity of discussing nations as cultural forces. He argues that narratives of nationhood that affect cultural production and political trajectory are influenced by the ambivalent nature of the narrative strategy of nations. In his introduction to “Nation and Narration” he discusses the ambivalence that is connected to a nation. He argues that ambivalence is what is materialized in languages and discourses of those who write the history of a nation and who live in it. Bhabha is rather interested in “new meanings and different directions to the process of historical change.” Thus Bhabha regards history as half-made, or being in the process of making. This thesis likewise will argue that the process of the “Europeanisation” of Georgia is the history in the making and that it is because of this that in Georgia we find so many different interpretations of national identity.<sup>28</sup>

### **1.4 RISSE-KAPPEN’S THEORY OF EUROPEANISATION**

One of the departure points of the thesis is that Georgia is engaged in Europeanisation process. Georgia significantly advanced its relations with the European Union in recent years: Georgia-EU signed Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement and Association Agreement in June 2014 and Visa-liberalisation agreement entered into force in March 2017. These agreements required Georgia implement reforms to further approximate with the EU. It reactivated talks regarding national identity, European identity and Europe in Georgia.

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<sup>27</sup> Bert Klandermans and Nonna Mayer, *Extreme Right Activists in Europe: Through the Magnifying Glass* (Psychology Press, 2006).

<sup>28</sup> Homi K. Bhabha, *Nation and Narration* (Psychology Press, 1990).

This thesis understands Europeanisation as a process that implies diffusion of European norms and laws as well as creation of European identity. It uses Radaellian definition that “Europeanisation consists of processes of a) construction (b) diffusion and (c) institutionalization, of formal and informal rules, procedures, policy paradigms, styles, ‘ways of doing things; and shared beliefs and norms which are first defined and consolidated in the making of EU decision as and the incorporated in the logic of domestic discourse, identities, political structures and public policies.”<sup>29</sup> Europeanisation understood this way emphasizes both, approximation of Georgia’s legislation to the EU law and in its national narratives.

For the purposes of the thesis, I will use Risse-Kappen’s theory, according to which Europe related political visions and Europeanisation will impact upon national identities. Risse-Kappen (2001, p.202) argued that “very content of a “European” collective nation-state identity might also vary, depending on how various ideas about Europe resonate with nationally constructed identities.” Due to differences among contexts, national communities understand what Europe European” is differently. <sup>30</sup> Therefore, this theory argues that identity of a nation-state might resonate with Europeanisation depending on local, national context.

For Risse-Kappen, the political elites “continuously pursue perceived instrumental interests.” As the parties aim at remaining in government their interest is to promote the ideas that are the best received in the country.<sup>31</sup> Similarly, extreme-right nationalist groups use the combination of ideas and discourses that they believe will advance their agenda better. Such

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<sup>29</sup> Michael Whine, “Trans European Trends in Right-Wing Extremism,” in *Mapping the Extreme Right in Contemporary Europe From Local to Transnational*, ed. Andrea Mammone, Emmanuel Godin, and Brian Jenkins (Routledge, 2012).

<sup>30</sup> Maria Green Cowles, James A. Caporaso, and Thomas Risse-Kappen, *Transforming Europe: Europeanization and Domestic Change* (Cornell University Press, 2001). P.202

<sup>31</sup> Ibid. 202

ideas can include identity constructions and promoting various kinds of ideas. Political elites try to make success of Europeanisation. Politicians will incorporate “Europe” in national narratives so that to justify the reforms of Europeanisation. While the politicians give a vague description of Europe and mostly portray Europe in civilizational terms, the group of young nationalists challenges this interpretation by offering a distinctively different idea of Europe which is conservative, traditionalist and Christian. It is this version of Europe that young nationalists would propose to join to.

## CHAPTER 2 - BACKGROUND: NATIONALISM AND EUROPEANISATION IN GEORGIA

### 2.1 THE PAST AND THE PRESENT OF GEORGIAN NATIONALISM

By the 19th century gradually all of the modern day Georgian kingdoms and principalities were annexed by the Tsarist Russia. Historical Georgian territories were fragmented into provinces where kinship and regional identities prevailed. In 1860s a group of young Georgians with Russian higher education training began to return to Georgia. This group, Tergdaleulebi (literally „the people who drank water from river Tergi”)<sup>32</sup> played a crucial role in shaping Georgian nationalism.<sup>33</sup> On one hand, Tergdaleulebi sought to overcome regional differences among Georgians and on the other, to create Georgian national consciousness amid Russification fears.

Tergdaleulebi did not demand Georgia’s separation from Russia, rather they aimed at achieving self-rule under the Russian Empire. They justified self-rule on basis of equality of nations in the empire. Tergdaleulebi’s nationalism was largely concentrated on Georgian language. Schooling mainly in Russian language was perceived as a threat of Russification. Thus, they promoted Georgian as a language for education among ethnic Georgians. Russia on one hand might have served as protector, saving country from Ottoman or Iranian threat, yet on the other hand, simultaneously Russia represented “other”, threatening Georgian attempts

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<sup>32</sup> Georgians travelling to Russia had to cross river Tergi (Terek) that runs across the Georgian Military highway leading to Northern Caucasus/Russia. “Drunk water from Tergi” was used to describe those who travelled/lived in Russia. River Tergi denotes symbolic boundary between Russia and Georgia.

<sup>33</sup> [https://www.researchgate41073\\_Travell.net/publication/2249ing\\_between\\_Two\\_Worlds\\_-\\_The\\_Tergdaleulebi\\_their\\_Identity\\_Conflict\\_and\\_National\\_Life](https://www.researchgate41073_Travell.net/publication/2249ing_between_Two_Worlds_-_The_Tergdaleulebi_their_Identity_Conflict_and_National_Life).

See also: Natalie Sabanadze, *Globalization and Nationalism: The Cases of Georgia and the Basque Country* (Central European University Press, 2010). PP 69-70

to self- preserving. <sup>34</sup>

After the Russo-Turkish war of 1877 the Russian Empire acquired territories covering modern South-Western Georgia (Region Achara) that was settled by Acharians - ethno-linguistically Georgians converted to Islam under Ottoman rule.<sup>35</sup> In order to ensure successful integration of ethnic Georgians from Achara into the new national project, Tergdaleulni and particularly its prominent member Ilia Chavchavadze sidelined role of religion in creation of Georgian nation and rather stressed the importance of the concept of history.<sup>36</sup> Chavchavadze did not neglect the role of language or other markers, yet, primary factor that brings nation into existence is its history. Although Chavchavadze himself sidelined role of religion, the fact that he had to dedicated several letters to the issue in which he argued about irrelevance of religion in defining Georgian nation, tells us importance of Christianity for wide Georgian public of that time. <sup>37</sup>

The Georgian nationalists' project of Georgian nation was an attempt to Europeanize the country. As Sabanadze mentions, Georgian nationalism modeled itself on a European, rather than Russian counterpart.<sup>38</sup> It was a quest for creating a new nation well expressed in Gogebashvili's<sup>39</sup> writings:

“Nobody dreams about restoration of the old Georgia, which belongs to the past and cannot be returned. It is the new Georgia that is the subject of our dreams and

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<sup>34</sup> Sabanadze, *Globalization and Nationalism*. P.70

<sup>35</sup> Frederik Coene, *The Caucasus - An Introduction* (Routledge, 2009). p. 162

<sup>36</sup> Gigi Tevzadze et al., *Identity Studies, Vol 1* (Ilia State University Press, 2009). p. 33

<sup>37</sup> Ilia Chavchavadze, “Ottoman’s Georgia,” 1878.,  
<https://docs.google.com/document/d/109EDUhdDrrCKzmmVANrZiY7lgkLqilqBvm2qBFJF2jk/edit>.

<sup>38</sup> Sabanadze, *Globalization and Nationalism*.

<sup>39</sup> One of the most prominent members of “Tergdaleulebi.”

aspirations. Georgia should look ahead towards Europe and not backwards Asia. It is from the West that we should learn education, scholarship and import best of social structures.”

Such orientation towards Europe is what Natalie Sabanadze calls “the most consistent characteristic of Georgian nationalism.” In her words, “Georgians considered themselves to be part of the Christian European civilization forcefully isolated from the rest of Europe by aggressive Muslim neighbours.”

In the eve of Russian revolutions of 1917-18 Georgia was dominated by national Marxist intellectuals who gained strong support among peasantry and workers. While Russia started withdrawing from the Southern Caucasus and Ottoman army advanced its positions towards it, these Marxist intellectuals’ Social-Democratic party developed strong pro-German orientation of Georgia and with the backing of Germans declared independence of Georgia on May 26, 1918.<sup>40</sup>

As Suny argues, such orientation to Germany was not just a political necessity created by the situation of that time, but to a large degree “Georgian intellectual affection for Germany as a center of European culture.” Georgian Social Democrats as Suny says, admired German Social Democracy, while Georgian nationalists on their own part, dreamt of restoring Georgian monarchy with the help of Germans.<sup>41</sup> This kind of affection towards Germany/Europe dominated large part of Georgian political and intellectual spectrum of Georgian Democratic Republic in 1918-1921.

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<sup>40</sup> Ronald Grigor Suny, *The Making of the Georgian Nation* (Indiana University Press, 1994). p.192

<sup>41</sup> Ibid. p.193

In February 1921, Georgian capital Tbilisi was captured Russian red army.<sup>42</sup> Georgian leadership exiled to France from where it continued struggle for Georgian independence. <sup>43</sup> In Georgia, Soviet regime was proclaimed, yet the uprising of 1924 against Soviets showed that support towards social-democratic government and independence was strong. <sup>44</sup> Since 1924 till the 1980s, Georgian nationalism manifested itself in 1956 against Khrushchev, in 1978 over Georgian language issue.<sup>45</sup>

Notably, it was in emigration where racialism previously unimportant for Georgian nationalism was developed by Georgian essayist Grigol Robakidze. Robakidze migrated to Germany from Soviet Georgia in 1930s. Gia Nodia assumes such ideas of race in Robakidze's works might have been influence from German writers.<sup>46</sup> Expressing anti-Soviet sentiments, Robakidze joined several Georgian nationalist organisations in Germany that collaborated with German Wehrmacht during World War II.<sup>47</sup> Therefore, important part of the nationalist ideology of Georgian Power - racialism and the idea of the race –can be found in Georgian nationalist narratives. In Soviet Georgia, on the other hand, as Sabanadze argued, the communists supported folklorized national culture and promoted “primordial view of

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<sup>42</sup> Firuz Kazemzadeh, *The Struggle for Transcaucasia, 1917-1921* (Hyperion Press, 1951). p.323.

<sup>43</sup> George Mamoulia, *Les combats indépendantistes des caucasiens entre URSS et puissances occidentales: Le cas de la Géorgie (1921-1945)* (Editions L'Harmattan, 2009). p. 29.

<sup>44</sup> Robert Conquest, *Soviet Nationalities Policy in Practice. (1. Publ.)* (Praeger, 1967). p. 56.

<sup>45</sup> Stephen Jones and Robert Parsons, “Georgia and the Georgians,” in *The Nationalities Question in the Post-Soviet States* (London and New York, 1998), p. 297.

<sup>46</sup> Ghia Nodia, “Components of the Georgian National Idea: An Outline,” *Identity Studies* 1, no. 1 (2009): 84–101.

<sup>47</sup> David Marshall Lang, *A Modern History of Georgia / David Marshall Lang*, Asia-African Series (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1962). pp. 259-60.

ethnicity” which made contrast with early Georgian nationalism of *tgrdaleulebi*.<sup>48</sup>

Turning to how post-Soviet Georgian nationalism made use of the above elements, we may distinguish three temporal phases. According to Natalie Sabanadze, in the first phase we discover national fundamentalism roughly during 1988-1992 that was characterized mainly by radical ethno-nationalism – aggressive nationalizing policies were not helpful with democratic transition from communism. During this era, “return” to democratic West however gained some ground. Sabanadze calls the second phase a phase of national apathy, referring to a decline of nationalism. The third phase is characterized by competing nationalisms. Appropriation of pro-European/pro-Western discourse by president Shevardnadze led to backlash that according to Sabanadze created new nationalist tendencies mainly focused on protecting the Georgian Orthodox Church as a fundamental pillar of Georgian identity. The third phase is characterized as well by powerful pro-European agenda by third President Saakashvili. His westernization agenda and rapprochement to the EU led to another backlash by different groups of the society.<sup>49</sup>

As for more contemporary times, Bogishvili and others name two major trends that characterize Georgian nationalism: “the progressive, Western-oriented approach and limited vision predicated upon ethnicity and a concrete religion. Both perspectives have a crucial impact upon the shaping of the Georgian national identity.”<sup>50</sup> Georgian nationalism then historically underwent considerable transformations. And today Georgian nationalism has evidently competing and contradictory narratives, especially as we refer to Europeanisation.

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<sup>48</sup> Sabanadze, *Globalization and Nationalism*. p.85-87.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid. pp. 89-111

<sup>50</sup> Diana Bogishvili et al., *Georgian National Identity: Conflict and Integration* (Tbilisi: Nekeri, 2016).

## 2.2 INTERPRETING EUROPE AS A CHRISTIAN CIVILIZATION IN GEORGIA

Europe in Georgian intellectual inquiry had been charged with different meanings and understandings. Brisku argued that the concept of Europe in Georgia has always been charged with different conceptual meanings. He claims that Georgian elites had triadic understanding of Europe: the first, Europe as a Geopolitical force; secondly, as a signifier of modernity and thirdly, component of identity comes into play.<sup>51</sup>

Since the early 2000s Georgian political elites push for European integration and Europeanisation of the country. Three different governments to different degree supported Georgia's rapprochement to the EU and other Western institutions. This process was characterized by strong emphasis on Georgia's Europeanness by political elites. The last three years or so, as Georgia significantly got closer to the EU, such discourses about Georgia's Europeanness got further activated and Georgian political class vaguely described what Europe means in cultural and broad civilizational and Christian frames.

In 2014 Georgia signed Association Agreement that included Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA) with the EU that brought Georgia's Europeanisation to a qualitatively different level. In this process, Georgia not only engaged in institutional and legal reforms to approximate its legislation to EU law, but also, Georgian political elites amplified their rhetoric about Georgia's belonging to Europe. Europeanisation implies not only that a given country would approximate EU law, but it also engages the national political community and elites with telling European stories of their own (national) identity.<sup>52</sup> One of the major

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<sup>51</sup> Adrian Brisku, *Bittersweet Europe: Albanian and Georgian Discourses on Europe, 1878-2008* (Berghahn Books, 2013). P.6

<sup>52</sup> Nevena Nancheva, *Between Nationalism and Europeanisation: Narratives of National Identity in Bulgaria and Macedonia* (ECPR Press, 2015).

components of illustrating Georgia's Europeanness was to portray Europe as Christian civilization that was not stranger to Georgia as the country was culturally Christian itself.

The Georgian Orthodox Church is an important political actor in the country.<sup>53</sup> Georgia, like the other Orthodox Christian countries, is a case of intertwined Church and State. Since the independence of Georgia from the Soviet Union, the Georgian Orthodox Church became increasingly powerful and ensured its special status in the constitution.<sup>54</sup> Given this fact, the governments aiming at benefits of European integration portrayed Europeanisation as Georgia's "return to Christian Europe" to counter the narratives by the Georgian Orthodox Church clergy that often display Europe/ EU as a liberal, anti-national project.

After 2003 Rose Revolution, Mikheil Saakashvili was elected as president of Georgia. Saakashvili is often regarded as the main political figure who started Europeanisation of modern day Georgia. During presidential inauguration in Tbilisi, President Saakashvili raised the flag of the EU alongside with the Georgian one in front of the Parliament. According to his inauguration speech:

"We [Georgians] are not only old Europeans, we are the very first Europeans, and therefore Georgia holds special place in European civilization. Europeans, and therefore Georgia holds special place in European civilization..." "[Georgia] has equally benign relations with all its neighbors, and at the same time does not forget to take its own place in European family, in European civilization, the place lost several centuries ago. As an ancient Christian state, we should take this place again. Our direction is towards European integration. It is time for Europe finally to see

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<sup>53</sup> Tornike Metreveli, "An Undisclosed Story of Roses: Church, State, and Nation in Contemporary Georgia," *Nationalities Papers* 44, no. 5 (September 2, 2016): 694–712, doi:10.1080/00905992.2016.1200021.

<sup>54</sup> For more detailed analyses on special status of Georgian orthodox Church in the Georgian constitution see: Mariam Begadze, "Georgian Constitutional Agreement with the Georgian Orthodox Church: A Legal Analysis," *Occasional Papers on Religion in Eastern Europe* 37, no. 2 (March 1, 2017), <http://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/ree/vol37/iss2/2>.

and appreciate Georgia and undertake steps towards us...’<sup>55</sup>

Saakashvili argued that Georgia, as it is part of Christian civilization should follow European Integration path. By referring to “lost” place in European civilization, he meant that Georgians followed Western/European path by adopting Christianity since IV century and that this bond was lost since medieval times, firstly because of Muslim empires (Turks, Persians, Ottomans) and then by Russian/Soviet annexation of Georgia.

In 2014, the Government of Georgia celebrated the signature of the Association Agreement by arranging a show-concert from where the President, Prime-minister and Parliament Speaker addressed the nation. An interesting speech was made by the parliament speaker:

“We, the small nation, are not worried that we are joining large Europe, because 13 states out of 28 EU member states are smaller than Georgia and 9 out of 28 [member states] have population smaller than Georgia... 40 million co-religionist Orthodox Christians, along with followers of other religions, are waiting for us in Europe; so we are not going into unfamiliar environment; we are returning back where we always belonged.”<sup>56</sup>

This trend of illustrating Europe as Christian civilization is still popular among Georgian elite. For more than a decade Georgian politicians framed Europe as a Christian civilization and portrayed Georgia as part of it. Nonetheless, seeing Europe with Christian frames and depicting it as culturally similar space has a long history in Georgia. However, despite such attempts, Europeanisation brought fears of preserving national identity in Georgia that I will address in the next sub-chapter.

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<sup>55</sup> “Civil.Ge | President Saakashvili’s Inauguration Speech,” accessed June 4, 2017, <http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=26694>.

<sup>56</sup> “Civil.Ge | Georgian Leaders Address Rally Celebrating Signing AA with EU,” accessed June 4, 2017, [http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php/\\_print.php?id=27421](http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php/_print.php?id=27421).

## 2.3 FEARS AND AMBIVALENCES TOWARDS EUROPEANISATION IN GEORGIA

In recent years, process of Europeanisation brought a lot emphasis on gender equality, protection of LGBT rights and non-discrimination of people based on gender identity etc. While number of requirements Georgia needs to comply did not cause much of resistance, issues like LGBTQ rights or discussing draft bill of anti-discrimination in the parliament caused heated debates. Powerful institutions like the Georgian Orthodox Church condemned legislation as inappropriate for Georgian nation and culture. This period of anti-discrimination legislation largely revealed fears towards Europeanisation many Georgians do have.

Tsuladze and others in their recent book focused on discursive aspect of Europeanisation in Georgia. Authors noted Georgian public discusses impact of Europeanisation on Georgia in two perspectives: these are utilitarian and identity aspects. The former aspect is somewhat believed to advance country's national security and save it from Russian threat, the latter however is characterized by ambivalent attitudes. It is primarily national identity that becomes a matter of concern among even those who support Georgia's Europeanisation. The book reveals that Georgian politicians incorporate Europeanisation narrative to benefit their political images vis-à-vis internal audience to gain electoral support. On population level, the ambivalences are expressed in terms of their concerns with identity. Many in Georgia believe European motto and approach of "Unity in Diversity" will help preserve Georgian national identity, however they also worry that Europeanisation will bring Western values that would degrade Georgian ones.<sup>57</sup>

Summing up, what Europe means in Georgia is contested and its different meanings

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<sup>57</sup> Lika Tsuladze et al., *Performing Europeanization – Political Vis-À-Vis Popular Discourses on Europeanization in Georgia* (Tbilisi: Center for Social Sciences, 2016).

evolve over the time. Georgian nationalism itself represented attempt to Europeanize Georgia in 19<sup>th</sup> century. The first Georgian republic (1918-1921) leadership also advocated for closer ties and cultural orientation towards Europe. In post-Soviet Georgia, approximation to the European Union and Europe is stronger than ever before. Despite Georgian political leadership's attempt to interpret Europe as Christian civilization, there is a tendency in Georgia of supporting Europeanisation while rejecting many of duties this process brings. Popular ambivalences towards Europe/European Union are clearly noticeable – Europe is often perceived as defender from Russian threat but it also brings concern about preserving national culture and traditions for some parts of Georgian society.

#### **2.4 THE MUSLIM “OTHER” IN GEORGIA**

Georgian historiography often frames the country's existence as struggle for preserving one's identity with the help of Christianity against Muslim invasions. In old Georgian historical sources the Muslim neighbors of Georgia Turks, Ottomans, Persians, Arabs were usually mentioned by the terms referring to their religions, rather than by their ethnicity names. Nino Chikovani names few examples, notably “Musulmanni” (Muslims), “Mohmadianni” (Mohammadians), “Islemta Eri” (Moslems' Nation), “Islemni” (Islam followers) or Sarkinozni (referring to Arabs usually).<sup>58</sup> As Nodia says “it is Orthodox Christianity that has preserved Georgia [throughout the Middle Ages] as from downfall of Byzantium until the arrival of Russia, it was Christianity that distinguished Georgia within Islamic neighbourhood.”<sup>59</sup> Process of Europeanisation resulted in further amplifying the Muslim “other” in Georgia. Jessica Preston argued that “Georgian elites have framed Georgian identity as being exclusively Christian in order to reshape their national identity after the fall of the Soviet

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<sup>58</sup> Nino Chikovani, *Religion and Culture in Southern Caucasus* (Tbilisi: Center for Social Sciences, 2006).

<sup>59</sup> Nodia, “Components of the Georgian National Idea: An Outline.” p. 90.

Union, and to reinforce their place in Europe as a Christian nation.”<sup>60</sup>

According to some scholars, Muslim “other” present in modern Georgian historiography is used to “define what is truly Georgian.” Stephen Jones argued that neighbouring Muslim powers were often portrayed as backward vis-à-vis Russia and Europe: 19th century Georgian intellectuals elaborated on Georgians’ struggle against “Didi Turkoba” (Great Turk Invasions). Further, in Jones’s words, “Georgian historians projected their country as historical Christian barrier to the Muslim East.”<sup>61</sup>

Equating Georgianness with (Orthodox) Christianity and “othering” Islam intensified during Georgian national liberation movement against USSR. In post-communist Georgia, Soviet secularism was followed by ethno-religious nationalism. In 1989, popular Georgian nationalist leader Zviad Gamsakhurdia who later served as Georgia’s first president, addressed Georgian Muslims living in Achara as “Acharians, you are Georgians too!”<sup>62</sup> This phrase echoes many Georgians’ views that Muslim Georgians are not true Georgians. Achara witnessed mass baptizing ceremonies where Muslim Georgians were baptized as Christians that As Khalvashi argues, were perceived as “return to nationality.”

Georgian historiography and nationalism largely interpreted XII-XVIII centuries as Georgia’s fight for defending Christianity against Muslim invaders. As Jones mentions, “Georgians’ Europeanness is bound up with the Church, which since the fourth century has been an outpost of Western Christendom in Islamic World... The Georgian so constructed,

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<sup>60</sup> Jessica Marie Preston, *“Adjarians, You Are Georgians Too”: Religion, Nationalism, and Ethnicity in the Framing of Georgia’s European Identity* (Budapest: Central European University, 2016). p.45

<sup>61</sup> Stephen Jones, *Georgia: A Political History Since Independence* (I.B.Tauris, 2015). p. 251

<sup>62</sup> Tamta Khalvashi, “ს ი რ ც ხ ე ჲ ჲ ს პ ე რ ი ფ ე რ ი ა [The Periphery of Shame],” March 28, 2016, [goo.gl/PXWjuq](http://goo.gl/PXWjuq).

was Christian, European, and a warrior-martyr.” (pp.90-91). Such depictions of the past by intellectuals had been reflected in arts and literature and “since the independence in 1991, museums have sprung up dedicated to the themes of medieval battles against Muslim enemies..” According to Stephen Jones, “Georgian Orthodoxy represented the front line of Western civilization, and its priests and martyrs were instrumental in preserving Georgian culture through the darkest period of Islamic occupation.”<sup>63</sup>

Therefore, Islam serves as a powerful “other” in Georgia. Georgian historiography framed the country as a Christian, therefore European country. Georgian nationalism often perceives Georgia as a European and Christian state surrounded by Muslim world. With on-going Europeanisation process, Georgia further strengthened its image as a state with Christian legacy to ensure the success of its European integration.<sup>64</sup>

## 2.5. THE “RUSSIAN OTHER” IN GEORGIA

Framing Russia as “Other” represents one of the most crucial aspects of Georgian nationalism. Georgian nationalism emerged during the Russian rule in Georgia. Despite the fact, that some Georgians saw Russia as protector from Iranian and Ottoman aggression, it was still largely directed against ethnic Georgians’ Russification. Georgian nationalism aimed at preserving Georgian language and culture which was limited under Tsarist Russia policies. Besides, annexation of Eastern Georgian kingdom in 1801 and subsequent acquisition of Georgian kingdoms and principalities are largely interpreted in Georgian history as loss of

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<sup>63</sup> Stephen Jones, “The Role of Cultural Paradigms in Georgian Foreign Policy,” *Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics* 19, no. 3 (September 1, 2003): 90–91, doi:10.1080/13523270300660019.

<sup>64</sup> Preston, “*Adjarians, You Are Georgians Too.*”

nationhood and national sovereignty. In 1832 as many as 150 people were arrested in Tbilisi for conspiring against Russian Empire to establish Georgian state.<sup>65</sup>

The most important time for emerging Georgian nationalism however was in the 1860s when home returning young Georgians started developing Georgian national consciousness that echoed anti-Tsarist sentiments. In one of his first works the Georgian nationalist leader Ilia Chavchavadze wrote: „where are the Georgian people now? Now we are under the Russian Tsar. Everything has changed...” As Reisner argued, some young Georgians, like Chavchavadze, “had to experience a condescending and ignorant behaviour by Russian officials serving their civilizing mission to Caucasian periphery” upon their return to Georgia. Russian educated Georgians’ group (Tergdaleulebi) thus actively rejected Russian assimilation and “maintained supremacy of their own culture.”<sup>66</sup>

Since the assassination of Tsar Alexander II somewhat liberal policies of Russia turned into more assimilationist policy aiming to Russify ethnic minorities, including Georgians.<sup>67</sup> Thus Georgian language diminished in public life served as crucial focus of nationalist intellectuals.<sup>68</sup> In 1879, “tergdaleuli” Iakob Gogebashvili, established “Society of Spreading Literacy Among Georgians” aiming at promoting Georgian language and literacy to resist Russification. In 1876 Gogebashvili printed “Dedaena” (Mother Tongue) – book for primary

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<sup>65</sup> Oliver Reisner, “Georgia and Its New National Movement,” *Nationalism in Late and Post-Communist Europe. Vol. 2: Nationalism in the Nation States*, accessed June 1, 2017, [https://www.academia.edu/743607/Georgia\\_and\\_its\\_new\\_national\\_movement](https://www.academia.edu/743607/Georgia_and_its_new_national_movement).

<sup>66</sup> Oliver Reisner, “Georgian Student Encounters with Russian and European Universities, 1861-1917 - A Generational Approach,” *Special Issue of Anthropological Researches* Vol. 2 (2014): 95

<sup>67</sup> Blauvelt and Berglund, 2016. In *Armenians in Post-Socialist Europe* edited by Siekierski and Troebst, p. 72

<sup>68</sup> Thomas de Waal, *The Caucasus: An Introduction* (Oxford University Press, 2010). p. 33.

school pupils to learn Georgian.

Georgian historiography interprets declaration of Georgian Independence on May 26, 1918 as liberation from 117 years of Russian oppression. An attempt to form a nation in 1918-21 by Social-Democratic government was interrupted by Russian red army invasion in February 1921. From 1922 to 1991 Georgia was part of the Soviet Union. As Suny argued, <sup>69</sup>Soviet nationality policy that aimed at assimilation in fact had an opposite effect and helped Georgians self-consolidate themselves as separate ethnicity. During Soviet rule, several crucial events happened in Soviet Georgia. In April 1978 students in Tbilisi demonstrated against a new draft of Soviet constitution in which it removed the state language status of Georgian, leaving this status only to Russian. Since 1990, April 14 is celebrated as “Mother Tongue Day” that serves as another reminder of the Soviet/Russian attempt to impose russification on to the Georgian people.

In 2006, Georgian authorities opened “Museum of the Soviet Occupation” in Tbilisi. The museum hosts rich sources depicting dramatic events from Soviet era between 1921-1991. <sup>70</sup> It promotes anti-Soviet sentiments which in Georgia is usually fused with anti-Russian narratives and attitudes. According to De Leonardis, the nation building project of Georgia during 2004-2012 was the process of deconstructing the Soviet past that was accompanied by government’s new European identity building process.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid. p.35

<sup>70</sup> Khincha,

<sup>71</sup> Fabio De Leonardis, “Memory and Nation-Building in Georgia,” in *Nation-Building and Identity in the Post-Soviet Space. New Tools and Approaches*, ed. Rico Issaacs and Abel Polese (Routledge, 2016), 24–45. P.24.

Georgian scholar Shota Khincha mentions that “Georgian collective memory is fundamentally shaped by the idea of independence and fight against Russian oppression, aggression or threat.” This image is further strengthened by recent political developments. In 2008, Russia invaded Georgia, which resulted in displacing thousands of ethnic Georgians from Russia-occupied regions. Russia on one hand represents occupation force (as regarded in Georgian legislation),<sup>72</sup> the West and Europe supports territorial integrity of Georgia and its sovereignty over both Abkhazian and Tskhinvali district breakaway regions.

For the purpose of this thesis, it should be emphasized that “the main matrix of memory narrative almost always relates [Russian aggression] to a pro-western discourse, reinforced with application of historical parallels.”<sup>73</sup> Georgian nationalists and intellectual circles often regard Russia and USSR as repressive colonial powers.<sup>74</sup> Georgian national narratives, often give dichotomy of Russia and Europe. While Russia is framed as backward and despotic, Europe is perceived as place of higher culture, democracy and progress. This image was present among Georgian intellectuals as early as 1900s and for last two decades “othering” Russia and relating it to pro-Europe discourses in further amplified in Georgia.

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<sup>72</sup> “Law of Georgia on Occupied Territories,” *LEPL Legislative Herald of Georgia*, accessed June 5, 2017, <https://matsne.gov.ge/en/document/view/19132>.

<sup>73</sup> Shota Kincha, “Memory and Trauma in Georgian Nationalism,” *Shota Kincha*, 2014, <https://shkincha.wordpress.com/2014/05/26/memory-and-trauma-in-georgian-nationalism/>.

<sup>74</sup> Gia Tarkhan-Mouravi, “Georgia’s European Aspirations and the Eastern Partnership,” in *The Making of Modern Georgia. The First Georgian Republic and Its Successors*, ed. Stephen Jones (New York: Routledge, 2014). P.49-72

## CHAPTER 3 - EMPIRICAL RESEARCH

*“Who are we? We are Georgian nationalists. We are against both pro-Russian as well as Liberal ideologies.” – Leader of Georgian Power*

In this chapter I first elaborate on methodology, case study selection and frame analyses. In the other sections I first describe Georgian Power and Edelweiss. Then, I analyze discourses of Georgian Power and will show how and why Georgian Power frames itself as a pro-European force.

### 3.1 METHODOLOGY AND SELECTION OF THE CASE STUDY

This thesis represents a case study research where case study represents an autonomous epistemic genre. The Case Study Research as an autonomous epistemic genre represents “the new project.” This project reemphasizes importance of description, yet it retains explanatory side as well. As Ruzzene argues, “it introduces the idea of “thick description” that is providing accounts of situated phenomena which are rich in detail and faithful to the complexity of the studied subject... it is rather providing understanding of the specific case by revealing its complexity.”<sup>75</sup> The present case study, similarly, reveals a complex nature of framing Europe during the process of Europeanisation. While explaining how a certain phenomenon happens, it shows how present discourse and framing is influenced by competing historic narratives, cherry picking of discourses, contemporary political opportunities and so on.

The present study represents a qualitative research. As for data collection method, I chose to study the official posts on Facebook pages of Georgian Power and related page “Edelweiss”

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<sup>75</sup> Attilia Ruzzene, “Using Case Studies in the Social Sciences: Methods, Inferences, Purposes,” *Erasmus Journal for Philosophy and Economics* 8, no. 1 (July 3, 2015): 123–26, doi:10.23941/ejpe.v8i1.194.

- the latter represents another Facebook page of Georgian Power; their public speeches from different gatherings and demonstrations; the speeches from their own videos; and speeches available through their media appearances.

There are several reasons for selecting the Georgian Power and Edelweiss. Out of many extreme-right nationalist groups that appeared in Georgia, Georgian Power was the most active and engaging on social media. In January 2017, the group's Facebook page was blocked by Facebook administration due to racist and xenophobic posts. The group quickly established a new page that already by the end of March was liked or followed by over 30000 Facebook users. "Edelweiss" is rather a page than organisation that copies the narratives of Georgian Power usually, yet their content has higher presence of posts supporting Hitler and Nazism.

Besides, Georgian Power staged several demonstrations that attracted 100 to 200 youngsters. Some of them ended up in arresting Georgian Power members. The group got frequent coverage from Georgian media, particularly as the group staged anti-immigrant demonstrations. Georgian Power and related nationalist organisations staged similar demonstrations not only in the capital city of Tbilisi, but in two other biggest cities of Kutaisi and Batumi as well. On Georgian Independence Day in 2016 I have encountered the demonstration held by the group on Tbilisi's main Rustaveli Avenue myself.

On April 25, while working on the thesis, Facebook blocked both pages of Georgian Power and Edelweiss once again that posed a serious challenge to the research. As I expected this scenario, I kept dozens of posts from their pages before. It however still made me discover more of their media appearances. It should be underlined here that I relied only on the narratives of Georgian Power members – media reports only helped me to collect those discourses, otherwise the research does not use media analyses.

### 3.2 FRAME ANALYSIS

This thesis will use frame analysis. The development of Frame Analysis is indebted with Erving Goffman. For Goffman frames represent “schemata of interpretation” that serve as guides in different situations. Frames are structures humans use to create meanings of their responses to various situations. Snow and Benford argue that social movements not just “frame the world in which they are acting, but they also frame social problems”. Framing, according to Benford, is a process in which “ordinary people make sense of public issues.”<sup>76</sup> Social movements and actors try to give meanings to different events, frame problems and disseminate their ways of framing to the public/audience.

Framing entails the construction of meaning, it offers a way as to how to interpret different events. The framing process is active and continuous as different actors, including social movements participate in the construction of the meaning they attribute to reality. The diversity of the views within a group makes this process dynamic. Framing unlike “ideology” denotes a work-in-progress, it means that something is on the way of becoming a way to understand process. Social movements and activists produce interpretive schemes that challenge already existing frames, and with this, they trigger debates and arguments.<sup>77</sup>

Framing is a dynamic, ongoing process” (Benford, Snow, p. 628).<sup>78</sup> Social movement actors largely shape the framings, based on their beliefs, experiences, ideas etc. but in this process, as theorists noted, there are number of factors that over the course affect and shape

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<sup>76</sup> Robert D. Benford, “Talking Politics. William A. Gamson,” *American Journal of Sociology* 99, no. 4 (January 1, 1994): 1103–4, doi:10.1086/230383.

<sup>77</sup> Robert D. Benford and David A. Snow, “Framing Processes and Social Movements: An Overview and Assessment,” *Annual Review of Sociology* 26 (2000). p.14.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

the framings, notably political opportunity structure, cultural opportunities and constraints and the targeted audiences.

For the purposes of this thesis it is important to note here that the mobilization of a movement and the actual process of renegotiating and re-producing frames largely depends on the political opportunities. Brulle and Benford (2012, p.4)<sup>79</sup> argue that “the collective perception of political opportunities and threats, the legitimacy of organisational forms, and resource constraints often depend on transformations of master frames.” This means that there is a connection between so called alternative framing of social movement and the mainstream political frameworks. Besides, there are cultural opportunities and constraints, like “extant stock of meanings, beliefs, ideologies, practices, values, myths, narratives...” (p. 629) that serve as “cultural resource base” for modifying, reproducing and interpreting frames.<sup>80</sup>

From the point of view of the analyses, to explain discourses and actions of extreme right nationalists it is highly relevant to note that “choice of frames is constrained.”<sup>81</sup> Extreme right nationalists play in fields already full of other actors. They need to gain supporters and frame discourses in ways that are best resonating with the members of their culture. These groups cannot totally neglect values of their own societies as they are socialized into them. Thus cultural characteristics play a crucial role in the actions and discourses of the extrem right

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<sup>79</sup> Robert J. Brulle and Robert D. Benford, “From Game Protection to Wildlife Management: Frame Shifts, Organizational Development, and Field Practices,” *Rural Sociology* 77, no. 1 (March 1, 2012): 62–88, doi:10.1111/j.1549-0831.2011.00067.x.

<sup>80</sup> Benford and Snow, “Framing Processes and Social Movements.” p. 629

<sup>81</sup> Caiani, Porta, and Wagemann, *Mobilizing on the Extreme Right*. P.16

which is largely connected to their efforts to become successful through resonating with the public.<sup>82</sup>

Social movements typically seek to succeed, spread their message and mobilize support. Social movement actors, thus seek to resonate their frames with the targeted audience. To do so, three conditions should be met. 1) Frame makers should be credibly promoting frames; they should possess some charismatic properties; 2) frame makers should address ideological, moral orientations and demographic characteristics of receivers/audience of the frame; 3) frame makers should formulate frames in a way that they satisfy cultural compatibility, narrative fidelity and “valuational centrality”.<sup>83</sup>

Audience therefore represents a constraint. The general audience shares the dominant worldview in a given society and the social movement represents what Brulle and Benford call “alternative challengers.” In order to be successful, alternative challengers need to resonate with audience’s mainstream frame. Taking into account cultural context and audience effect, one can say that “movement frames are thus historically developed meaning structures that provide an identity to specific networks of collective action.”<sup>84</sup>

To sum this up, Snow et al thus argue that “[social] movements’ interpretive schemata both draw from and modify elements of dominant culture.” Thus, collective action frames incorporate preexisting beliefs and symbols as well as oppositional values that emerge during

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid, p. 16

<sup>83</sup> Hank Johnston and John A. Noakes, *Frames of Protest: Social Movements and the Framing Perspective* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2005). P.13

<sup>84</sup> Brulle and Benford, “From Game Protection to Wildlife Management.” p. 6.

group's struggle.”<sup>85</sup> This means that extreme right nationalists' framing cannot totally neglect the mainstream political or historical narrative about Europe and Europeanisation. It is influenced by meta framings of Europe that exists in Georgia. Yet, one should not imagine that these narratives are stable and unchallenged. Frames are thus work-in-progress.

### 3.3 GEORGIAN POWER AND ITS DISCOURSES

Georgian Power was founded in 2015. The organisation is mostly comprised of young boys between 15-25, although sometimes girls appear as well during their demonstrations. Georgian Power unlike most of other extreme-right nationalist groups in Georgia, is very visible in a national media. The last year organisation's 11 members were arrested for attacking Turkish bars in downtown Tbilisi.<sup>86</sup> Besides, Georgian Power got worldwide media attention when Tbilisi's vegan-café employees blamed the group for attacking the café with sausages and meat products. The incident attracted worldwide coverage.<sup>87</sup> Georgian Power's demonstrations attract between 100-200 people.

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<sup>85</sup> Verta Taylor and Nancy Whittier, “Analytical Approaches to Social Movement Culture: The Culture of Women's Movement,” in *Social Movement and Culture*, Hank Johnston, Bert Klandermans. p.168.

<sup>86</sup> “Georgian Ultrationalists Arrested After Rampaging Through Central Tbilisi,” *Georgia Today on the Web*, accessed June 4, 2017, <http://georgiatoday.ge/news/4755/Georgian-Ultrationalists-Arrested-After-Rampaging-Through-Central-Tbilisi>.

<sup>87</sup> “Georgian Vegan Café Attacked by ‘Sausage-Wielding Nationalists’ | World News | The Guardian,” accessed June 4, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/may/31/georgian-vegan-cafe-attacked-by-sausage-wielding-nationalists>.

See also other international coverages of the incident like BBC: “Tbilisi Vegan Café Appeal over Meat-Wielding ‘Extremists,’” *BBC News*, May 31, 2016, sec. Europe, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-36416501>.

The main research question is why anti-egalitarian, anti-left, anti-liberal extreme-right nationalist group still advocates for “establishing European state” in Georgia? To answer the research question, an empirical research and its findings will be divided into five parts. First, the Russian “other” and its relation to pro-European discourses will be revealed. The second chapter will focus on Georgian Power’s quest for traditionalist Europe. Third chapter analyzes how Georgian Power and Edelweiss frame Georgia as defender of Christianity and Europe against Islam. Fourth chapter will discuss white supremacy and Nazi inspiration for Georgian Power – the ideas that bounds them with their European counterparts. The last chapter will focus on contradictory frames and Georgian Power’s flirting with political opportunism.

### ***3.4. FRAMING RUSSIA - EUROPE DICHOTOMY***

Several members of Georgian Power recorded a video commemorating February 25, 1921.<sup>88</sup> The video featured couple of loud and fast-read speeches with Scottish music on background. The February 25 manifesto as group calls it regarded the Soviet invasion of Tbilisi as “dark day” and “demanded justice for fallen Georgian heroes.” The first speaker in the beginning mentioned that:

“It was 95 years ago since Feb 25, 1921, from a dark day when Moscow red Hordes took Tbilisi. Today we stand in a place where Georgian resistance movement leader officers were shoot down by Bolsheviks. Blood of those heroes fallen for the independence are demanding justice. Justice is that that whatever taken from us will be given back to us.”

In the second part of his speech, the same face covered young man referred to so called pro-Russian parties and organisations operating in Georgia and not only accused them in “selling

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<sup>88</sup> The anniversary of Tbilisi’s seizure by Russian Red Army.

the country”, but also expressed the wish to take a revenge on them for lobbying Eurasian course of Georgia:

“We should make them in charge who sell Georgia. We address those organisations, media and political parties that are behind national cover nominally to cover their pro-Russian course, in fact are dogs sold on money. They have nothing in common with national ideology and conservative values. From today on, all the persons, that does not consider the Russian army and separatists on Georgian soil as enemies, those who will lobby pro-Ru Eurasian course of Georgia, we will make you responsible for that in person as you are shame of the nation.”

Since 2012 parliamentary elections when “Georgian Dream” coalition defeated “United National movement” several pro-Russian organisations and political parties found a fertile ground to start advocating for closer ties with Russia-led Eurasian Economic Union.<sup>89</sup> Some of these organisations called upon the Georgian government to abandon EU integration and restore ties with Russia instead. Furthermore, the young man from video accused of these pro-Russian organisations in using “nationalism” as a cover for hiding the pro-Russian leanings and called them “dogs that sold themselves on money.”

In the same video, the first speaker, after criticizing Russia and its Georgian supporters, addressed to “pro-European” Georgians. Here, like in many other cases one can find in Georgia, being pro-Russian is shown as the opposite of being pro-European Georgian – this opposition usually comes hand in hand. the first speaker continued:

“Organisation Georgian Power addresses to those Georgians who want traditional European state, where the pure Georgian land, the future of our children will be the supreme value, where we will not be slaves of any organisations, let’s unite with love of Georgia in battle. Our just battle will be blessed by Maro Makashvili,

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<sup>89</sup> “Georgian Dream” declared that they supported European and NATO integration of Georgia, yet they emphasized that they would change hostile policies of previous government towards Russia. Since 2012 parliamentary elections many pro-Russian organisations got activated, opposing Georgia’s EU integration. More can be seen at Dimitri Avaliani, “Russian Propaganda and „Soft Power” in Georgia,” 2017.

Kote Apkhazi, Ambrosi Khelaia, general Mazniashvili and fallen Junkers’<sup>90</sup> souls... As for Topadzes, Chkoidzes, Burjanadzes,<sup>91</sup> and Citizens union residues, there will soon come time when white George will demand Justice from you.”

The speech makes it clear that the vision of Europe the Georgian Power member(s) strive for is a “traditional” as opposed to pro-Russian course. Interestingly, striving for such “traditional European State” in speaker’s mind “will be blessed” by those historic figures from Georgian history that resisted Soviet occupation of Georgia. This is an attempt to frame fighting against Soviet/Russian occupation as fight for traditional European state building in Georgia. The narrative is not unique to Georgian Power. It echoes many Georgian officials’ public speeches and attempt of Georgian politicians that different scholars like Leonardis, or Shota Khincha discussed that I have mentioned above.

Anti-Russian framing in Georgia often comes together with pro-European (pro-Western) discourse and it portrays Russian “other” in dichotomy with Europe. As Shota Khincha noted, “Georgian collective memory is fundamentally shaped by the idea of independence and fight against Russian oppression, aggression or threat.”<sup>92</sup> As he interestingly put, “the main matrix of memory narrative almost always relates to a pro-western discourse, reinforced with application of historical parallels.”<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> The Georgians that resisted Soviet occupation of Georgia. Many of them died during 1921 while defending the Georgian Democratic Republic from Red Army invasion. Some were executed by the Soviet regime in the following years.

<sup>91</sup> Georgian politicians supporting closer ties with Russia and abandonment of European integration process.

<sup>92</sup> Shota Kincha, “Memory and Trauma in Georgian Nationalism,” 2014, <https://shkincha.wordpress.com/2014/05/26/memory-and-trauma-in-georgian-nationalism/>.

<sup>93</sup> *ibid.*

The second speech of the video starts with an important sentence in which the Georgian power member unhappily hints about a shared religion between Russia and Georgia.<sup>94</sup> Unlike pro-Russian Georgian organisations that cite Russia as co-religionist, the young nationalists of “Georgia Power” show that this factor was not deterrent for Russians to kill Georgians:

“My brothers and sisters, today is the day co-religionist neighbor, our quasi friend took Georgian blood once again. Day for which Georgian heroes sacrificed themselves. We will not forget this day. As history, dignity and blood are treasure given by the Lord himself... We are under occupation whirlpool, but we can still fight, fight against our ignorance, and therefore against the enemy. I, as Georgian warrior’s son, person with Georgian flesh and blood, address to the whole Georgia to unite, as unity is the power that is the beginning of the future”

Opposing Russia in relation to pro-European orientation is stressed by Georgian Power especially during their national media appearance. In the interview that was made after vegan-café incident, Georgian Power leader, answered journalist’s question whether they had political ambitions:

“We might be blamed a lot of stuff as we are anti-Russian, right-wing group. We have no political ambitions. We want to establish European nationalist culture. And, we do not respect any political parties and do not support their interests. We do not intend to change this in the future either.”<sup>95</sup>

In another media interview the leader of Georgian Power repeated that they wish to establish nationalist culture in Georgia and mentioned that they are against pro-Russian orientation.

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<sup>94</sup> Majority of Russians, like Georgians follow Eastern Orthodox Christianity. Georgian Orthodox Church and Russian Orthodox Church are in full communion. For more about the topic please see: Lucian N. Leustean, *Eastern Christianity and Politics in the Twenty-First Century* (Routledge, 2014).

<sup>95</sup> Giorgi Urushadze, „ქართული ძალის “ლოდო ბიკოლოზ ბურნაძე [Nikoloz Burnadze - “Georgian Power” leader, n.d., <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KvOMFIJ20aE>.

Similar comments were made by Georgian Power representatives in other media sources too that the group is “not the supporters of Russia” and that it is “the only force striving towards traditional Europe.”<sup>96</sup> The group frames Georgian nationalism as incompatible with both “Russian ideology” and “liberalism”:

Who are we? We are Georgian nationalists. We are against both pro-Russian as well as Liberal ideologies. It’s unacceptable for us that to be servants of any country whichever that country might be. ... Our goal is to develop and establish nationalist culture in Georgia...

What is clear from these messages is that Georgian Power frames anti-Russian orientation in opposition with their attempt to “establish European nationalist culture” in Georgia. The “Russian other” is probably the most powerful “other” in Georgian memory and nationalism. Russia-Georgian war in 2008 further strengthened Russia’s image as oppressor among Georgians, including for the Georgian extreme-right groups. In opposition to Russian “other” “European state” is framed as the desirable future. The narratives of Georgian Power do not show simple fascination by “nationalist culture” of Europe. They not only try to copy a European nationalist culture in Georgia, but also, they provide a certain view of Europe – traditionalist, nationalist – in which they do see the future of Georgia.

### **3.5. GEORGIAN POWER’S QUEST FOR TRADITIONALIST, EUROPEAN GEORGIA**

Framing “traditionalist Europe” as an ideal model for Georgia was repeated by Georgian Power some other media interviews. In interview with TV Imedi following a Vegan Café incident, Georgian Power stressed that they would like to see Georgia as “strong, European state.” However, leader of Georgian Power also emphasized in the very same interview that favouring European

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<sup>96</sup> “ქართული ნაციონალისტები 26 მაისს რუსთაველაზე ჩირაღდებით მსვლელობას გეგმავენ,” [Georgian nationalists plan to hold a rally with torches on Rustaveli Avenue] by Resonance Daily, accessed June 5, 2017, [http://resonancedaily.com/index.php?id\\_rub=2&id\\_artc=29202](http://resonancedaily.com/index.php?id_rub=2&id_artc=29202).

state does not mean a support for liberal state. It is characteristic for Georgian Power that in their pro-European statements they often put disclaimers or show it in opposition to something else. In the abovementioned discourse, they frame Europe in opposition with Russia. In the following case however, extreme-right nationalists claim that their support for European state does not mean support for “liberal state” but for traditional Europe.

“Georgian Power is a right-wing nationalist organisation. That is based on European Georgian nationalist ideology, we want strong state, strong European state, but not a liberal one. Liberalism opposes development of a country in a traditionalist way. The traditionalist values brought Georgia to this day. Nobody screened 26<sup>th</sup> of May, when hundreds of nationalists got to streets and celebrated this day like typically European nationalists celebrate.”<sup>97</sup>

These discourses further reveal that Georgia Power’s actions and repertoire is frequently inspired by traditionalist or nationalist forces in the core of Europe. This inspiration is well expressed by them as the group often shares Greek, Hungarian, Slovak, Polish, Ukrainian and many other nationalists’ marches on their social media channels. Their Independence Day celebrations are also imitation to Polish and other nationalist rallies across Europe. A representative of Georgian Power emphasizes that “we celebrated this day like typically European nationalists celebrate.” By emphasizing this aspect, Georgian Power reminds Georgian society that what they [nationalists] do should not be considered as dangerous, strange or unacceptable as this is how “European nationalists celebrate” as well.

The fascination of Georgian Power and of many other extreme-right Georgian nationalists with traditionalist Europe and by European traditionalists were once again revealed during Hungarian prime-minister Victor Orban’s visit to Tbilisi, Georgia. Several Georgian alumni of

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<sup>97</sup> Georgi Lobjanidze, *რა სწა რძოა დგენს ზოგიერთი სსშო მოძრაობა “ქართული ძალა”, რომელსაც კაცებს დაზღვევაში ადნა შა უღუბენ* [What Does Georgian Power Represent -Organisation That Some Are Afraid of and Some Blame in Vandalizing a Café], n.d., [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pfJT1FNwt\\_M](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pfJT1FNwt_M).

Central European University and dozens of other activists announced about staging demonstration nearby the venue PM Orban visited to protest recently adopted lex CEU. Georgian nationalists the same day announced a counter demonstration to support PM Orban and his “anti-liberal policies.” Facebook event of the counter demonstration cherished “nationalist, anti-liberal” policies of the Hungarian government and urged different nationalist Georgian groups to get to street to support it. Extreme-right nationalists including Georgian Power framed other Georgian activists’ protest over lex CEU as a liberal protest against Orban’s nationalist policies.

“On April 21, non-governmental organisations financed by George Soros are holding a demonstration to protest Europe’s one of the most outstanding politician -pursuing national, anti-liberal politics - Hungarian Prime-Minister Victor Orban. They protest against Victor Orban’s national(ist) policies.

This is the battle Georgians should engage as well, as we have experienced Soros’ experiments on ourselves since 2003. We call upon all nationalists, national-socialists, national-monarchists, national-anarchists, ultra-conservatives football hooligans and anti-liberals to gather at the same time and place, make counter demonstration to support Hungarian state’s national anti-liberal policies.”

Unlike Orban’s Europe that for extreme-right Georgian nationalists represents source of fascination, there is another kind of Europe, liberal one, that Georgian Power condemns and frames as place where “chaos”, “anarchy” and “rapes” take place. This framing however does not demonize Western or Northern Europe as liberal one, but rather portray them as victims of liberal ideology and immigration. In 2016 December, after viral scenes of Aleppo siege some Georgians organized the demonstration for accepting refugees from Syria. On contrary, Georgian extreme-right young groups staged manifestation against accepting any refugees in the country. During this demonstration, some Western/Northern European countries were cited as victims of immigration and refugees:

“Do think what kind of Georgia you want. Think what results did France, Sweden, Germany got after accepting large number of refugees after liberals lobbied it. Total chaos and anarchy; collective rapes.”

To make a case against immigration Georgian Power referred to terror attacks in

(western) Europe and framed them as result of refugee entrance to Europe and migration. It also framed migration and terror attack as liberals' fault in Europe that Georgian "leftists" should also take into consideration. Along with blaming liberals, Georgian nationalists praised European nationalists for their rise to defend traditional Europe and national identity. In the following discourse it gets clear that Georgian nationalists imitate European counterparts as they try to establish similar trend of "awakening nationalism" in Georgia to preserve Georgian national identity:

"And again, we talk here so that left liberals can hear: whoever wants free visa regime [for refugees], should see what happened in Brussels or Paris. Today European nationalists are actively protesting for national traditions and national identity preserving. Today that kind of nationalist wave in Georgia is uprising. Georgian youth is tired. We don't want to have two alternatives only that is side of pro-Russian traitors or the side of LGBT liberals' side... Is loving the homeland a crime?"

Georgian nationalists actively contributed to discussion about various political events in Europe. In the beginning of May, Edelweiss Facebook page commented on French Presidential Elections and Emmanuel Macron's win. Despite her pro-Russian stance, Georgian nationalists like "Edelweiss" favoured Marine Le Pen's win in the elections. The group compared Macron's win as "Frenchmen's suicide" that would, according to it, have grave consequences for France in the future. While commenting about the issue, "Edelweiss" quoted a short comment from a book project called "Sunset of Caucasus" in which along with Georgia, author, young Georgian boy mourns the fate of Europe as well.

Nationalist forces in France with Le Pen leadership are about to cease existence. Frankians' suicide will not allow French people to revive for many more decades. You can read all about this in "Sunset of Caucasus":

Glorious Napoleon's people represent lazy masses able of doing nothing, that is threatened with genocide by the gang of bankers that made it to leadership. In half of century we will get decayed race in France as in other countries in Europe that will lose its dominant properties and will cease to exist soon. Being mourner of Georgia I reach the fate of Europe too, but it is a fact that these two titans cannot live without each other."

Therefore, Georgian Power advocates for “traditionalist Europe” and frames it as a space Georgia belongs to. The group condemns “liberal Europe” on the other hand and frames it as bringer of “immigration, rapes and chaos.” Georgian Power’s fascination with nationalist Europe is deeply connected to their anti-Muslim sentiments and rejection of non-white, Muslim immigration. The following chapter will address how Georgian Power will merge anti-Muslim leanings with framing Georgia as Christian Europe’s defender.

### ***3.6. ANTI-ISLAMIC SENTIMENTS AND IMAGINING ONESELF AS A DEFENDER OF CHRISTIAN EUROPE***

Georgian Power and Edelweiss frame traditional Europe vis-à-vis liberal Europe. A “liberal Europe” is framed as place of rapes, chaos, racial decay and Muslim immigration. They compare the latter young healthy men’s invasion. The migrants are blamed in unwillingness to fight against radical Islamists. In 2016 December, anti-immigration Facebook event stated that the Georgian nationalists opposed “accepting Syrian/Arab/Muslim/Christian or any kind of refugees.”<sup>98</sup> Despite the fact that officially the event condemned any kind of migration, the public speeches of the anti-immigration protest were mostly anti-Muslim, orientalist and condemned “liberals” empathy towards refugees/migrants. One of the above discussed speeches from anti-immigration demonstration said that:

But then a liberal, 15-16 years old will say “but they are children.” They [liberals] watched two videos and now they’re saying: should not we save them from the death? It is logic question, right? But let’s start from the fact that absolute majority of refugees in Europe are 20-25 years old healthy men. When Kurdish women fight against Caliphate, these men are just like this [just running away]. Also, kids do

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<sup>98</sup> 1 NEWS, “საქართველო სირიელი ხალხისთვის ‘თუ არა უცხოელ ლტოლვილების მიღებას საქართველოში’ [‘Georgian for Syrian People’ or ‘No to Acceptance of Foreign Refugees’],” accessed June 5, 2017, <http://1news.ge/?id=9523>.

not die only in Syria and Aleppo. Time to time, Nigerian Muslims burn hundreds of girls, kids and elderly alive. Does this mean that wherever you have miserable people we should be responsible accepting them? How did those pay us back, that we have already gave shelter in Georgia?”<sup>99</sup>

In the narratives of Georgian Power anti-Islam attitudes are mixed with orientalist assumption. While extreme-right nationalists “other” Islam, they simultaneously frame Georgia’s Europeanness and belonging to the West. Framing Georgia as a defender of Christianity and it is intertwined with claims of belong to Europe.<sup>100</sup> Being Western and European is connected to being white and Christian in Georgian nationalists’ narratives. One of anti-immigration manifesto condemned globalization as force responsible for mixing Western and Eastern cultures, mixing white and black races:

“They’re taking away our identity and they want to mix our holy blood with others. I don’t preach fight among nations. I just want all the nations to preserve their self”<sup>101</sup>. Globalization nowadays drives us towards absolute zero, where there is no difference between races. If you have simple education in biology, you will guess that black is a dominant colour. Right those black races will become the future and white generation will be destroyed. The next generation will be biological mistake that will not be neither black, nor white, it will have both characteristics, but yet, still the black will win eventually and there will be no white blood, our blood”<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> წოწონავა აკაკი, “მართლ ისე ვართ რომ უკვე სხვებს ვასახლებთ აქ? - აქცია უცხოელ ლტოლვილების წინააღმდეგ,” [Article by Tsotsonava Akaki - Are we really in that way that we settle others here? - Demonstration against foreign refugees], *Georgian National News* -, December 25, 2016, <http://gnn.ge/?p=15698>.

<sup>100</sup> In Georgian discourses West, Europe and the EU are often used interchangeably.

<sup>101</sup> მანდარია თორნიკე, “ნაციონალისტები: გვართმევენ იდენტობას და ცდილობენ აღრიონ წმინდა სისხლ სხვა ერებთან,” *On.ge*, December 24, 2016, [Article by Tornike Mandaria: "The nationalists: they are eradicating out identity and try to mix our pure blood with other nations."]

<sup>102</sup> “უცხოელ ლტოლვილების შემოსვლ და უშვებელა” - ნაციონალისტების აქცია რუსთაველზე • ტაბულა [Foreign Refugees Should Not Be Accepted - by Tabula], *ტაბულა [Tabula]*, accessed June 4, 2017, <http://www.tabula.ge/ge/story/115881-ucxoeli-ltolvilebis-shemosvla-daushvbelia-nacionalistebis-aqcia-rustavelze>.

Besides, Anti-Immigration narrative is often framed in relation with abusing women by migrants. These narratives are interpreted as “normal” discourses that also can be found in Europe. This is not surprising as many right-wing parties in Europe often portrayed migrants as able bodied men that were about to “invade” Europe.<sup>103104</sup> During Independence Day in Georgia demonstration the leader of Georgian Power declared:

“They talk about gender theories, but they ignore how underage girls are forced to work in Arabic bar-whorehouses. And if we say something that normal right wing parties are demanding in Europe, we will be called “darks.” We will fight for two things this is holy Georgian land and Georgian children’s future. Any powers that will be against these, will be our personal enemies. ‘’ We greet independence day by marching with Georgian flags.. We do not sit in hookah-bars with Arabs”<sup>105</sup>

Arabic migration to Georgia is often illustrated similarly. Georgian Power refers to Arabic bars where they claim Georgian girls are serving foreigners. Fighting against this is framed as defending Georgian land from Arabs (read: Muslims/foreigners) and as saving “future of children.” Portraying women and girls vulnerable to foreigners had been a frequent

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<sup>103</sup> Czech President Milos Zeman compared migration from Western Asia to Europe to “organised invasion.” Agence France-Presse, “Czech President: Migrants Should Be Fighting Isis, Not ‘Invading’ Europe,” *The Guardian*, December 27, 2015, sec. World news, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/dec/27/czech-president-migrants-should-be-fighting-isis-not-invading-europe>.

<sup>104</sup> Similar speeches were made by Hungarian PM Orban: “Eighty percent of the immigrants are young men. They resemble an army more than they do asylum-seekers. They are uneducated, the majority of them speak only Arabic.” And another example: “Not several thousand, not several hundred thousand, but several million people are laying siege to the borders of Europe” See more in Hungarian: Fábíán Tamás, “Orbán: A Menedékkérők Egy Hadseregre Hasonlítanak,” October 2, 2015, [http://index.hu/belfold/2015/10/02/orban\\_a\\_menedekkerok\\_egy\\_hadseregre\\_hasonlitanak/](http://index.hu/belfold/2015/10/02/orban_a_menedekkerok_egy_hadseregre_hasonlitanak/).

Also, English translation provided by “Notable Quotes: Prime Minister Viktor Orbán,” *The Orange Files*, June 4, 2014, <https://theorangefiles.hu/notable-quotes-prime-minister-viktor-orban-by-subject/>.

<sup>105</sup> live24 news, *ნაციონალისტური მოძრაობა „ქართული ძალა“ 26 მაისი [Nationalist Movement Georgian Power - May 26]*, n.d., <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JMUW56SQEHU>.

framing strategy for Georgian power. In October 2016, the group leader brought a young girl to police station claiming the girl was physically abused and sexually assaulted by three men after she was violently kidnapped by “possibly by Turkish national.” Georgian Power was quick to make statement that the underage girl was victim of violence committed by “three young Turkish men.”<sup>106</sup>

Besides, during the last year, group staged few demonstrations through Aghmashenebeli Avenue in Tbilisi that is home to dozens of Turkish and Arabic bars, hookah-bars, restaurants, etc. During those rallies Georgian Power manifestos shouted nationalist slogans near Turkish cafés and offended café owners and clients. This action resulted in arresting 11 nationalists. Georgian Power tried to prove they have not committed any crimes. Instead, the group attempted to show themselves as victims of Turks and Arabs.

“They are threatening us that they will find us and take revenge for the crime we have not committed. Everyone, Turks and Arabs are threatening us in our own country. Imagine if Georgians threatened Arabs and Turks in their own countries. Do you know what would happen? They would annihilate Georgia.... During the rally we could not control who would walk with us, they arrested people that have not even took part in the rally at all. Our brother was arrested just for an attempt to stop the Georgian policeman from stepping over Georgian flag... People living next to Marjanishvili metro did see well how Turks attacked our boys and beat our flags. Besides, after the event Turks were walking around and beating up random Georgians passing by. Georgian criminal police did not raise the voice against this... There are different disinformation spread about us.... Everyone fights against us - be it mass-media, pseudo-liberals or politicians’ gang, Turks or Russians.

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<sup>106</sup> “ს ა ნ ზონ ა შ ი ა რ ა ს რუღწ ლო ვ ა ნ გოგო ს ს ცე მ ე ს და ჰ ე მ დ ა თ გ ა უ პ ა ტ ი უ რ ე ბ ი ს მ ც დ ე ლობ ა ;” [An underage girl was beaten in Sanzona, they also tried to rape her], *News.ge*, accessed June 5, 2017, <http://news.ge/ge/news/story/197849-sanzonashi-arasrultslovan-gogos-stseme-da-hqondat-gaupatiurebis-mtsdeloba>.

<sup>107</sup> “ქ ა რთუ ლო მ ა ლ ’ გ ა ნ ც ხ ა დ ე ბ ა ს ა ვ რ ც ე ლ ე ბ ს [Georgian Power Issues Statement],” *Hold.Ge - News Around You*, accessed June 5, 2017, <http://hold.ge/main/2385--.html>.

Georgian Power tried to portray itself as a victim and framed Turks as organizers of violence. It did not just create a violent image of Turkish café owners but, however, denial of committing any violence against Turkish migrants was changed in the very same speech.

Some of the most recent posts on the Facebook page of Georgian Power refers to Turkey and Islam. The group shared a video of Georgian pilgrimage to an ancient Georgian monastery located in modern-day North-Eastern Turkey. The video shows that Georgian pilgrims' Easter song chanting is overshadowed by muezzin's prayer from an old Georgian monastery which, according to the video, was converted to a mosque. Georgian Power shared the video and shortly commented on it in obvious irony as "brother Turks."

Edelweiss page recently shared Austrian historian Hugo Huppert's quote. These words are often shared in Georgian social media and I have personally encountered them many times, especially on extreme-right groups' social media channels:

"If not Tbilisi, there would possibly be mosques in Vienna instead of cathedrals, as Tbilisi citadel was the one Jalal ad-Din<sup>108</sup>, Genghis Khan and other Eastern sultans and shahs encountered first. Tbilisi stood as Europe's fortress from which the enemies of Christianity could only reach Europe weakened and exsanguinated."

This quote shows what many Georgians, including extreme-right nationalists believe. According to this vision, Georgia represented a defender of Christianity and Europe from Muslim

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<sup>108</sup> In Georgian history Jalal ad-Din is famous for his devastating invasion of Tbilisi in 1226. According to Georgian historiography, Jalal ad-Din forced Georgians to convert to Islam. The Georgian Orthodox Church claims that 100,000 Georgians refused Jalal ad-Din's order. The Georgian historiography sources say that Jalal ad-Din tore down Sioni Cathedral dome and installed his throne instead of where he ordered Georgians to step over Christian icons. On November 13 the Georgian Orthodox Church commemorates the day of 100,000 martyrs. With the initiative of some conservative Georgian politicians, Metekhi Bridge near to which the act of martyrdom happened was renamed as "the bridge of hundred thousand martyrs" several years ago. For more you can see: René Grousset, *The Empire of the Steppes: A History of Central Asia* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1970).

invasions in easternmost borders of the continent. Popularity of this phrase tells us about Georgians' quest for their place in Europe. It does not imagine and frame Georgia as another random country of Europe, but rather envisages it as defender of Christian Europe. It shows not only how the group sees its own past, but its relationship to Europe and Islam. It defines Islam as Georgia's "other" which interestingly also "justifies" Georgian claim about its place in Europe. This phenomenon can be described in Brubakerian sense, who noted about Christianization of nationalism and nationalization of Christianity. In order to claim Georgia's belonging to Europe Georgian Power usually "Christianizes" Georgian nationalism and stresses similarity with the West. On the other hand, vis-à-vis Islam, Georgian Power both nationalizes Christianity and Christianizes nationalism to stresses Georgian culture's difference from Islam.<sup>109</sup>

### **3.7 "DEFENDING CHILDREN'S FUTURE": WHITE SUPREMACISM AND NAZI INSPIRATIONS**

In one of the interviews Georgian Power representative called warned Georgian people that their children "would be more oppressed from foreigners" in the future. By portraying themselves as victims, Georgian Power framed migrants as a danger to Georgian children. "The fight for children's future" is framed in opposition with non-European migrations. Edelweiss page often shares white supremacist discourses that echo Georgian writer Grigol Robakidze's works and his ideas of racialism. Robakidze himself was influenced from Nazism in Western Europe in 1930s. In several instances, these pages directly quote Robakidze:

"Today is the joy of race. Racial worldview must be supreme everywhere and on everything. Georgian race celebrates, Georgian genes and blood celebrates. Georgian race saved human genes from extinction. Georgian race is a symbol of racial refinement, purity and crystallic quality – the mankind would be nothing without this race!"

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<sup>109</sup> Rogers Brubaker, "Religion and Nationalism: Four Approaches\*," *Nations and Nationalism* 18, no. 1 (January 1, 2012): 2–20, doi:10.1111/j.1469-8129.2011.00486.x.

Georgian Power-affiliated Edelweiss page often quotes Hitler and his “Mein Kampf” as well. The most recent Hitler quote shared on the page referred to the race and genes:

“Supreme goal of a national state is to gather and protect the oldest racial elements that represent the pride of mankind’s highest ancestry and genes.”

In some instances, white supremacy comes together with claiming to be from Western, European cultures. During the demo against possible influx of Syrian refugees one of the participants made a speech that echoes abovementioned attitudes. The demonstrator divided world civilizations/cultures roughly into two Western and Eastern cultures and emphasizing Georgia’s belonging to the former one. In the same speech, the orator argued that migration would threaten not just Georgian national identity and but Georgia’s westernness/Europeanness as well. In addition, losing the culture was framed through white supremacist lenses. It argued that with migration and mixing with people of “not-pure” blood, Georgians would lose themselves.

“Western culture is the highest self-conscious culture and we are part of it. Western and Eastern cultures are having different worldviews, with defining human being’s place in them, with their attitude towards fairness/justice and religion... Can you imagine the mix of these two cultures? Me not!...Today we gathered here to respect the idea that unites us, to respect our past, to change the present and to open the door to bright future where the will of a Georgian will be more valued than that of the other nationalities... They are taking away our identity and trying to mix our pure blood with other nations’. I do not preach national antagonism. Rather opposite, I want every nation to preserve itself, to not lose its own identity.”<sup>110</sup>

For extreme-right groups like Georgian Power and related Edelweiss page the racialism is a major pillar of nationalism. The racist discourses of these groups are not fed just by Georgian writer Robakidze’s works, but also it seems they read and share Western European

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<sup>110</sup> “თბილისში ქართველ ნაციონალისტების მორიგი აქცია გაიმართა [Georgian Nationalists Hold Another Rally in Tbilisi],” *ExpressNews*, accessed June 4, 2017, <http://www.epn.ge/?id=37722>.

racist philosophers as well. The “Edelweiss” page recently translated quote from Julius Evola,<sup>111</sup> Italian philosopher and fascist author in Georgian:

“Race is the driving force of nationalism, as feeling belonging to one race is even more mythical than real. It is more important to feel belonging to one nation. As a political myth – race is a nation in life, that does not get bounded by abstract legal or territorial boundaries. The race is not given by simple unity of civilization, language and history. Race concept is deeper than this, it reaches the very beginnings and being inseparable from the feeling of continuity... Racial theory makes feelings alive that reaches national formations of society.”

White supremacy and “traditionalism” frequently comes together with anti-liberal, militarist ideas in the narratives of Georgian Power. It frames its opposition to liberalism that is blamed as anti-nationalist ideology. However, Georgian nationalists still do try to emphasize peaceful manner of militarism that I assume is connected to discredited ideas of militarism and violence as means of solving problems in Georgian society:

“Differently from liberal idea that does not recognize nationality as such, militarism idea does not limit itself to materialism and it does not mean using hard military power and raising violence, as some opponents of this idea try to portray it. The main elements of this idea and therefore its style is to peacefully, in a conscious and authoritative manner, form population’s being and behavior. These are love towards distance, hierarchy, order, ability to control one’s own passions and individual interests vis-à-vis supreme principles and goals, namely towards dignity and responsibility, towards your nation and country, towards the purity of your blood and flesh.”

In the Facebook event of Independence Day demonstration that was organized by Georgian Power and related extreme-right nationalists, some even posted posters of Georgian Soldier from Nazi Germany army. The picture reads “your place is here”. The soldier wears a uniform with First Georgian Republic’s flag. Georgian Power unlike any other (at least official or

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<sup>111</sup> Julius Evola is named as their inspiration by many right-wing politicians across Europe and US. Jobbik leader Vona Gábor named him as one of the most important philosophers to shape his worldviews. See more at “Vona Gábor about the Islam,” *Jobbik.com*, December 9, 2010, [http://www.jobbik.com/vona\\_g%C3%A1bor\\_about\\_islam](http://www.jobbik.com/vona_g%C3%A1bor_about_islam).

mainstream) groups honoured not only those Georgians that died against Nazism but paradoxically, those political émigré Georgians as well that fought on the side of Nazi Germany. Georgian Power like some other young nationalist groups often display sympathy towards Georgians fighting against USSR in World War II. The Georgian legion of Hitler's army is often considered by these groups as fighters for Georgian independence from the Soviet Union. Their activities against USSR are framed as fight against Russian Imperialism.

Georgian Power's demonstrations usually are followed by some discussions in social media. "Tbilisi Forum" represents the biggest online forum in Georgia attracting several discussions regarding these young nationalists. One of the group members of Georgian Power also took part in discussion where he elaborated about how the group evolved. The discussion took place soon after 9<sup>th</sup> of May / Victory Day celebrations.

"Approximately a year ago Georgian Power represented a group of 100 people that gathered in Facebook. Several gatherings took place where hardly ten people would go. These people developed their ideas, established the aims. The first manifestation was the last year on May 9<sup>th</sup>. They were the only ones in the society that honoured Georgians fallen on German side as well. By the posters they also protested Russian imperialism." <sup>112</sup>

The same member attempted to emphasize Georgian Power's superficial connection to Nazism. It also interestingly framed such "superficial" fascination by Nazism and rallies dominated by Nazi symbols as "usual European gathering." Here referring something as "Europe" or "European" represents an attempt to normalize Georgian power and their activities. Besides, the post described the group's diversity and eclecticism:

"Some of these people's sympathy towards Nazism is superficial. Gradually there were opposing sides visible in the group. Some of them were atheists, others were coming out of Christian background. Some listened to heavy

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<sup>112</sup> "ქართული ძალა" -> თბილისის ფორუმი [Georgian Power - Tbilisi Forum]," accessed June 4, 2017, <https://forum.ge/?f=25&showtopic=34822635&st=15>.

[metal], (yet, to cool, patriotic one) – folk metal fans. Georgian Power is majority of this kind of people. They stage demonstrations to erect Mazniashvili statue, to limit entry of niggers from Africa that Saakashvili started forcefully. Nothing special, this is a usual European nationalist gathering.”<sup>113</sup>

This discourse gives interesting information on how some of the Georgian Power members might not openly use Nazi gestures as it is not accepted by people around them. As Nazism is obviously not well accepted in a Georgian society the group tries to refer it as “usual European thing”, connect it to Georgian symbols and traditions as well as it tries to blame others of being actual fascists:

“I personally have been on one of the demonstrations only. Unlike them I did not salute towards the Sun and did not upload the photo as even my relatives and acquaintances would not perceive it well. This is a bad reality as people do not know the meaning of nazi salutes. Hitler might have needed it or liked it. The true meaning of the salute is that the hand is directed towards the Sun and seven stars/planets. The Sun and those seven stars are united in the seven points of Borjghali.”<sup>114</sup>

The Georgian nationalists are fascinated by Nazism, its white supremacy and importantly, by those Georgians that fought on Nazi side during World War II against the Soviet Union. Anti-Russian and anti-Soviet narratives of Georgian Power match with their admiration of Nazism that they believe promised Georgians with independence from the USSR. Besides, significant part of Georgian Power’s rhetoric is derived from European Nazi and traditionalist philosophy. This is another important bond to Europe for the Georgian extreme-right group.

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<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

### **3.8 CONTRADICTIONS IN GEORGIAN POWER RHETORIC: FLIRTING WITH POLITICAL OPPORTUNISM**

Georgian Power and their discourses are eclectic and heavily relying on political opportunism. Georgian nationalism itself provides a good base for their eclectic and contradictory narratives. Such controversies arise with Islam, Christianity and Orthodoxy, the first Georgian Republic, the role of the Georgian Orthodox Church etc.

In official Facebook event for Independence Day nationalist rally, Georgian Power and their supporters' discourses were anti-Russian, anti-liberal and pro-European, yet still somewhat contradictory. Georgian Power posted several photos of European nationalists in the event page to show and inspire supporters how to properly celebrate Independence Day like Europeans. The posts featured Greek, Hungarian, Polish and some other European nationalists' gatherings commemorating their national holidays. Besides these, the Georgian Power also echoed first Georgian president's idea of united Caucasus:

“On May 26 rally we will wave the flags of Circassia and Chechnya that fought against Russian evil empire. Nobody should miss these flags with those villains that fought against us in Abkhazia. They were just jackals sold on Russian-Alan-Apsua money. Glory to Kartvelian / Georgian Caucasus Zviadi<sup>115</sup> was dreaming of!”

Waving Circassian and Chechen flags and “dreaming of united Caucasus” along with claiming to pursue European-type of nationalism and claiming to belong Christian civilization is contradictory as well as it represents political opportunism. The Circassians and the Chechens are typically Muslim majority nations. As we have seen, Islam is what Georgian Power frames Georgian nationalism against. In this case however, supporting Chechens and Circassians against Russian imperialism is politically beneficial for them as it further reinforces their image as anti-Russian nationalists.

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<sup>115</sup> Zviad Gamsakhurdia, the first post-Soviet era president of Georgia, popular Georgian dissident and nationalist that declared restoration of Georgia's independence from the USSR.

Besides, Georgian nationalists condemn migrations to Georgia and the rest of Europe are as “Muslim invasion” of Christian Europe. Georgian nationalists have not ever protested accepting war refugees from Eastern Ukraine. Thus, anti-immigration sentiments feature intersection of ethnicity as well as religion. While Georgian Power condemns Islam, it nevertheless shares pictures of girls with Georgian origins from Iran’s Fereydan province with emotional “Georgian Genes” title. Therefore, it welcomes Georgian Muslims, in which case religion does not come on the front side of discussion, while religion is major discussion topic once it refers to Arabs or Turks.

Role of Christianity by Georgian Power is seen as civilizational, cultural factor and to a lesser degree as faith. Christianity as a heritage and identity marker is instrumental to create difference with Islam and migrants with Muslim background/faith. Such difference helps Georgian Power to stress Georgia’s strive towards traditional Europe that is also Christian. Thus, emphasizing on Christianity has manifold purpose. It on one hand represents a good way of gaining support in Georgia where around approximately 90% of population identifies with Christianity.

An interesting trend can be observed with Georgian Power’s attempt of framing Georgia as a Christian country however. The group talks about Christianity in general and avoids using “Orthodox Christianity” as a defining marker. The Georgian Orthodox Church and various groups supporting closer relations with Russia in Georgia often promote Orthodox Christianity as a shared religion with Russia. In this sense, Orthodoxy is used as something to advocate against Georgia’s European Integration. Georgian Power neglects “Orthodox Christianity” in their discourses to avoid usage of common identification markers with Russia. “Christianity” itself generally, however, is used as the emphasized similarity with the rest of Europe.

Another contradiction is connected to the attitudes of the first Georgian Republic by Georgian Power. The group declares itself as anti-left and anti-Marxist. One of the slogans of the extreme-right group is “Good Night Left Side” and “Better Dead than Red” that is directed against soviet communism primarily, yet it is generally anti-left and anti-Marxist as well. Nevertheless,

Georgian Power typically uses symbols and flag adopted by Marxist/Social-Democratic government of Georgian Democratic Republic during 1918-1921. It was social-democratic party and its leader, Marxist intellectual Noe Zhordania who declared Georgian independence. Thus, Georgian Power's fascination by state symbols and legacy of the First Georgian Republic while dismissing the Georgian social-democrats' role in Georgia's nation building process represents a cherry picking and political opportunism full of contradictions.

Controversies arise also whether Georgian Power is financed by Russian sources. The group leader claimed in several TV interviews that they have no connection with Russia. It is hard to prove anything opposite in this thesis other than what the Group claims, yet one thing is clear that Kremlin affiliated media sources do usually cover nationalist/extreme-right demonstrations of Georgian Power with special emphasis on their "Georgians for Georgia/Georgia for Georgians" motto. In a country with ethnic and religious diversity and two secessionist regions occupied by Russia, many see Russian influence in further activation of ethno-nationalist discourses in Georgia.

Another important aspect why the group is advocating for "European state" in Georgian could be connected to the fact that majority of Georgian population supports European integration. As a survey "Knowledge and attitudes towards the EU in Georgia, 2015" conducted by Caucasus Research Resource Center showed, overall 56% of Georgians agree with a phrase that "I am Georgian, therefore I am a European." The number is the highest with age group of 18-35 and it amounts 62%. As the surveys show, 61% of Georgians also would vote for EU membership. The support is the highest among youngest cohort of 18-35 by 66%. In the capital city Tbilisi, the support stands at 77%.<sup>116</sup> Another recent survey "NDI: Public attitudes in Georgia, April 2017" also showed that support towards EU membership in Georgia remains high. On a question whether

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<sup>116</sup> "Knowledge and Attitudes toward the EU in Georgia, 2015," accessed June 4, 2017, <http://caucasusbarometer.org/en/eu2015ge/GEPOLEU/>.

they approve or disapprove Georgian government's goal to join the EU 80% answered positively. In ethnic Georgian settlements this number stands at 83%. Thus, openly rejecting Europeanisation and making anti-European statements would further discredit group. One of the reasons why the Georgian Power among many nationalist extreme-right groups gained most visibility and coverages in social and mainstream media is because of their pro-European framing of various issues.<sup>117</sup>

As different Georgian governments promise the Georgians European Union membership for almost two decades with no obvious success in sight, European integration becomes what Michael Herzfeld calls "static cultural idea."<sup>118</sup> In this process, as Herzfeld argues, some forms of debates are encouraged. Georgian Power for political opportunity reasons cannot probably totally neglect pro-European narratives that exists in Georgia, but it nevertheless "encourages the day-to-day subversion of norms."<sup>119</sup>

Georgian Power like any other social movement frames various issues in a way to maximize support. As a nationalist organisation it reimagines the past the way that is most suitable to gain success. For this, the Georgian Power nationalists often develop eclectic, contradictory discourses and alters information on factors they think would be beneficial for them. Thus, sometimes it might look for an unrealistic Caucasian unity with muslim Chechens, while it might use hate rhetoric towards Muslims and frame them as a threat to Georgian national identity.

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<sup>117</sup> Caucasus Research resource Center, "NDI: Public Attitudes in Georgia, April 2017," accessed June 4, 2017, <http://caucasusbarometer.org/en/na2017ge/JOINEU/>.

<sup>118</sup> Michael Herzfeld, *Cultural Intimacy: Social Poetics in the Nation-State* (Psychology Press, 1997). p.21.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid.

## CONCLUSION

The thesis represents one of the first scholarly attempts to understand extreme-right nationalist groups in Georgia and the reasons why despite their anti-liberal, anti-left and anti-equality discourse, they still declare strife towards the Europe, identified with human rights and equality. The theoretical framework of the research interpreted Georgian Power as a social movement that aims to take part in active renegotiation of national identity during the process of Europeanisation. The theories of Bhabha emphasized temporality of these framings. Risse-Kappen's theory of Europeanisation on the other hand emphasized that different actors contest and take part in interpretation of Europe, especially as this process involves national identity narratives.

The qualitative research found that pro-European narrative in Georgian Power discourse is complex: firstly, the group frames Georgia's Europeanness vis-à-vis Islam and Russia – echoing Georgian mainstream historic narratives, yet the Georgian nationalists frame it from extreme-right point of view. Second, it draws inspiration from the current European (extreme) right parties, extreme-right movements, Nazism and white supremacism that connects Georgian Power to Europe. Third and most importantly, Georgian Power takes into account political opportunities – in Georgia where the majority supports European integration, they avoid anti-EU, anti-European discourse.

Georgian Power uses extremist rhetoric and sometimes commits violent actions too. The group to a degree represents a counter-social movement that reacts on activated pro-Russian discourses in Georgia. On the other hand, it also represents a reaction on increased visibility of LGBTQ rights and changing gender norms in Georgia. The discussion in Georgian society about LGBTQ rights and similar highly sensitive issues were largely facilitated with Europeanisation process. Georgian Power however, that since the beginning has homophobic repertoire and discourse, framed these issues as liberal conspiracy and avoided discrediting Europe and

Europeanisation. For Georgian power this represents most differentiating factor from the other extreme-right groups in Georgia. The other extreme-right groups tend to associate egalitarian discourse with Europeanisation and reject it.

Georgian Power and Edelweiss are aware of their European counterparts. Polish, Greek, Slovak, Hungarian, Ukrainian and other nationalist movements are great source of inspiration for them. The Georgian extreme-right nationalists often portray them as role models. Imitating European nationalists is visible during Georgian nationalists' demonstrations. Needless to say, Georgian nationalists engage in public discussions regarding various events happening in contemporary Europe. The Georgian nationalists argue that Georgian and European "fates" are interconnected.

Georgian Power uses complex set of framings to advance their agenda. Sometimes, as we have seen in the thesis these framings can be contradictory and a result of deliberate cherry picking of historical discourses, various narratives and so on. To framing contemporary issues in beneficial ways for them, Georgian Power relates them to historical experiences, memories, narratives and discourses. As frame (re)producers they try to ensure to relate their interpretation to the values and normative considerations of Georgian society. Georgian power even justifies Nazi ideas as "usual European thing" in a country where pro-European leanings are still strong.

The fascination by Europe to a large extent is a result of diversity in understanding of what Europe is. There are many versions of what Europe is or what it should be. Success of extreme right or generally right-wing political parties in the core of Europe and their advocacy of traditionalist Europe are sources of inspiration for the Georgian extreme-right nationalists. Georgian Power found a role model for its Christian, traditionalist country image in Europe. For some people, like the Georgian extreme-right nationalists, traditionalism, intolerance, Nazism and anti-egalitarianism is what ideal Europe means. The contestation and ambiguity in how to define

Europe in the center of the continent, enables extreme-right nationalists in the periphery to strive towards Europe.

While many nationalist characteristics of Georgian Power are copied from Europe, it is still largely shaped by local Georgian context. Understanding Europe as Christian civilization by official and mainstream discourses in Georgia, historic interpretation of Islam as “the other” for Georgian nation (even if founders of Georgian nationalism once favoured concept of history over religion or other factors in defining nation) as well as factor of Russia largely define Georgian Power’s careful framing of pro-European discourses.

Framing Russia in opposition with Europe is actively echoed in discourses of “Georgian Power. While Russia is seen as aggressor, Europe is framed as a culturally closer space that also is understood as protector. Russia and the Soviet Union are often interchangeably used. Georgian Power frames Georgian nationalism as struggle against these two. And related to this, Georgian legion in Nazi Wehrmacht is represented as inspirational freedom fighters. This pillar is another connection to Georgian Power’s quest for “European traditionalist state.” It frames Nazi Germany as supporter of Georgia’s independence from leftist, communist USSR/Russia.

The abovementioned framings of pro-Europe discourses by Georgian Power is given in details in thesis. Before empirical part, the second chapter reviewed Georgian nationalism and its Russian and Muslim “others.” Besides, it showed Georgians’ fears and ambivalences towards Europeanisation and official framings of Europe as Christian continent by Georgian political elite. The literature review chapter discussed most relevant researches regarding extreme right nationalist groups and on how they do framings; how they respond to political opportunities. The theoretical framework and methodology chapters defined Georgian Power as a social movement and used frame/discourse analyses which was applied to various Facebook posts of Georgian Power and its

satellite page Edelweiss, appearance of the group in media, their public speeches from demonstrations, etc.

Here it should be mentioned that the qualitative analyses would significantly benefit if I would conduct in-depth interviews with members of Georgian Power. Having these interviews might have slight influence on research results. Apart from this, there is a research gap in literature as the topic is not well studied by academics – at least, one cannot find any literature besides journalistic articles regarding Georgian nationalists.

While this represents a limitation, it also represents the strength of this thesis. It is the first modest attempt to understand Georgia's rising extreme-right nationalism led by young people. Its focus on how the extreme right nationalists in Europe's periphery understand Europe can be a valuable contribution to European Studies field as well. In an era of rising violence, white supremacism and xenophobia, studying extreme right nationalism and their attempts to redefine Europe is increasingly important. The abovementioned thesis is a step in this direction.

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