

Georgia's Liminal Identity or the Never-ending Stage of Transition

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Abstract. *The following article addresses the issue of Georgian society's insecurity in the East/West discourse and how such insecurities are employed by the various political actors in the identity production processes. The ambiguous state of in-betweenness in this paper is conceptualized as liminality. It is argued that based on the liminal identity, discourse is articulated, which is used as a legitimisation and justification of certain foreign policy agenda. This paper also argues that the processes which can be observed in the contemporary Georgia, can be an interesting case study for post-colonial scholarship. The following research tries to combine International Relations, post-Soviet studies, post-colonialism and cultural-anthropology and develop an effective research framework for the processes taking place in the wider region.*

Key Words: Liminality, Georgia, the West, Europe, self-colonisation, identity, foreign policy.

Introduction

It is said that when you visit Georgia for the first time, there are two questions you are usually asked: *'How do you like our food?'* and *'Do you think Georgia is Europe or Asia?'* The following paper is not an attempt to provide an answer to any of these questions, but it rather tries to uncover the origin of Georgian society's insecurity about its positioning in the East/West discourse and how such positioning is employed by the two competing narratives in the processes of identity production. This stage of transition, being neither here nor there, is conceptualized as liminality and an attempt is made to illustrate how various interest groups inside the state (liberals and populists in this case) make use of such positioning. At the same time, it is argued that the transition processes of such states will always remain half complete, living them in the permanent state of liminality and at the same time reproducing the Western superiority. The following study is also looking at how two contradicting discourses produce and reproduce different identities, such as European/Western versus Eastern/Caucasian/non-European and how these discourses shape foreign policy goals? These tension between identity and foreign policy goals became especially apparent with the NATO and EU enlargement to the East. As the borders of those institutions expanded, new immediate neighbours came into existence, such as Georgia, Ukraine or Moldova. It is argued in this paper that the liminality or the transitional stage can become an important tool in the hands of the small states to guide themselves in the contemporary international system. By contributing to

the NATO mission in Afghanistan or the EU's mission to Central Africa, Georgian liberal discourse reproduces its European identity - being in the same team with the West; Meanwhile, challenging populist discourse tries to portray these developments as “the war of others” where Georgians have nothing to do and consequently argue for their withdrawal.

The theoretical framework proposed for the study of the discursive identity construction processes in Georgia during 1991-2016 draws on diverse and interdisciplinary sources. This research tries to combine liminality, which is borrowed from cultural-anthropology and the concepts of self-colonization from the post-colonial studies. As the specificity of the topic requires, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) has been selected as the main methodological tool.

This study tries to develop an interdisciplinary research tool that can effectively be applied to the study of not only the post-Soviet space, but can be generalised to the all states or societies which are located on the crossroads of different, sometimes even mutually exclusive, identities.

Theoretical Framework

Liminality

The concept of liminality originated in anthropology and is connected with the works of Arnold Van Gennep and Victor Turner. While observing the

ceremonies of various tribes, Van Gennep concluded that in the rites connected with the pregnancy, betrothal or initiations the concept of transition plays key role. He divided a complete scheme of rites of passage into three stages: “*preliminal rites (rites of separation), liminal rites (rites of transition), and postliminal rites (rites of incorporation)*” (Gennep, 1908, 1960: 11). Victor Turner picks up on this classification and further develops the concept of liminality in his analysis of African tribes (Turner 1967). He characterizes transitional period as a process of becoming, the starting point of which is the detachment from “*an earlier fixed point in the social structure or a set of cultural conditions (a 'state')*” (Turner, 1967: 94). This is usually followed by the liminal state of the subject, which is characterized by ambiguity as “*he passes through a realm that has few or none of the attributes of the past or coming state;*” (Turner, 1967: 94). One of the reasons for confusion is the subjects positioning of neither here nor there. As the passage is completed, a subject returns back to the stable state and through the new structural arrangements acquires new rights and obligations, as well as, is expected to behave within the certain customary norms and standards. Liminality, according to Turner, is characterized by an absence of any property, status, secular clothing, kinship etc. but at the same time it has positive aspects. It is an important process of passage, which leads to the transformation and rebirth of the subject undergoing it (Turner 1967).

This concept of liminality is especially important for the following study of the identity building in the Georgian society because of its ability to overcome binary oppositions and further extend the understanding of

political subjects as Self-Liminal-Other. This feature of liminality helps to better study the process of formation of the identity, which is in a constant flux, in the state of becoming. Especially when the discourse of 'becoming European' is analysed, or to be more precise, how countries which are going through transition fall short to complete the process and keep remaining the second-class status states in comparison to the Western European counterparts. *“Thus, what constitutes liminality is not the (possibility of) transition, but rather the fact that this transition is priory constituted to always remain half-complete”* (Rumelili, 2012: 503). As it is illustrated below, this is exactly the case we can observe in contemporary Georgian discourse.

In this light, the discourse on democracy prevalent in the Georgian society can be compared to the double-faced ancient Roman god Janus. On the one hand, democracy is perceived to be a universal value, but on the other, it is understood as something particular to the West and the discourse of democratization goes hand in hand with the discourse on Europeanization or Westernisation. Democracy instead of making either/or distinctions, differentiates between Self and Other on a temporal basis (Rumelili, 2013). It should be noted that since discourse on democracy carries universalistic elements, in order to validate itself or reproduce, it needs to be recognized by those, who are not democratic yet as an ultimate goal they aspire, thus placing themselves in the liminal or in the transitional position. Democracy promotion thus becomes linked to the identity reproduction, as it acquires hierarchical features by individual polities representing themselves as more democratic than their significant

others (Rumelili, 2013). Meanwhile, the discourses on the West are more particularistic and are constructed on the representation of exclusive group of societies which are connected with the shared historical or cultural narratives. This shared history is understood as the source of the universal values of humanism and secularism and therefore differentiates the West from those societies which have only second-hand experience with them, either through colonialism or self-colonialism. As the result of the connection between these universalistic and particularistic discourses, discourse on democracy acquires hierarchical features where the West has superiority in criticising the non-West. Or in other words, it leaves non-West in the constant state of transition to become the West. Due to this tension between the universalistic and particular discourses, the space appears, which is constructed through discourses and represent a possibility of existing beyond a Self/Other dichotomy. This space can be described as liminal.

Some liminal actors might reproduce and try to maintain existing social categories in response to their liminal positioning, while others might challenge an existing social order through the employment of their liminality. These kind of practices are usually the consequences of domestic discourses on their liminality (Rumelili, 2012). *“The development of the liminal imaginary in geopolitical and foreign policy discourse can be seen both as a means of resistance to the fact of being defined by Europe, as in Turkey, and as a means of accepting definition coming from Europe, as in Romania”* (Stoicescu, 2008: 16). In Georgia's case, it can be argued that while liberals try to reproduce the existing social order by advocating

further reforms and modernisation moves to become more Western or 'civilised,' populists tend to challenge existing social norms by voicing their support for better relations with Russian Federation and rejecting plans for NATO membership.

Identity and foreign policy

The issue of the liminal identity of Georgia has a vital influence on the formation of its foreign policy. *“Foreign policy relies upon representations of identity, but it is also through the formulation of foreign policy that identities are produced and reproduced”* writes Hansen (2006: 1). By claiming that these two are interlinked and complete each other, she makes an interesting point which can be also observed in the current Georgian competing discourses. European identity forces liberals to formulate a pro-Western foreign policy discourse, while non-Western identity calls for a pro-Russian or more isolationist agenda. At the same time, it can be argued, that identity is produced and reproduced due to the foreign policy goals. In other words, perception of Russia as a threat to its national security, memories of 2008 August war or Kremlin's support to the two breakaway regions, leads part of Georgian society to reproduce its European identity. From this perspective, it can only survive within the European family of states, it has always been part of, but due to the Soviet occupation, had been left on the other side of the Iron Curtain. The legacy of the August war and the developments around the two conflict zones is so sensitive, that even populists with their openly pro-Russian foreign policy discourse,

cannot deny these facts. But unlike liberals, they see solutions in declaring neutrality or getting on better terms with Russia, which would imply halting the project of integration in the European institutions. In other words, it can also be argued that non-Western/non-European identity discourse is reproduced through foreign policy considerations; projecting Russia as the only solution to existing problems while rejecting West as the troublemaker.

This study of Georgia's liminal identity and its exploitation by the various groups in forming their narratives and foreign policy goals relies on Hansen's conceptualisation of identity. *"Policies are dependent upon representations of the threat, country, security problem, or crisis they seek to address. Foreign policies need to ascribe meaning to the situation and to construct the objects with it, and in doing so, they articulate and draw upon specific identities of other states, regions, peoples and institutions, as well as on the identity of national, regional self"* (Hansen, 2006: 6). This leads Hansen to conceptualize identity as discursive, political, relational and social. First two aspects signify that identities are not objective; identity cannot be found somewhere in extra-discursive realm. Relational feature of identity means that it is always given through the reference to something else, something it is not. While social features of identity stem from it being articulated collectively, individual identity being constituted within the collective. Identity and policy is understood to be linked through discourses, but not being in a causal relationship *"as representations of identity are simultaneously the precondition for and (re)produced through articulations of policy"* (Hansen, 2006: 10). In other words, those who

formulate foreign policy or are actors, interested in altering the existing goals, try to present their claims as legitimate and natural.

Self-Colonisation

As it is argued in the present study, liberal groups in the Georgian society, advocate a process of self-colonisation. Self-colonisation differs from classical colonialism as *“according to classical definitions, colonization (and its ideological system, colonialism) refers to the processes of domination in which settlers migrate from the colonizing group to the colonized land”* (Etkind, 2011: 7). Against this backdrop, according to Kiossev (n.d) self-colonisation as an analytical concept can be used for cultures that have succumbed to the actual power of the West even without being actually colonised. Kiossev claims that, despite they have not been directly affected by the colonial rule or any major colonial conflicts, historical circumstances transformed them into an extra-colonial *“periphery.”* But *“the same circumstances however put them in a situation where they had to recognize self-evidently foreign cultural supremacy and voluntarily absorb the basic values and categories of colonial Europe. The result might be named ‘hegemony without domination’”* (Kiossev, n.d). Georgia has never been directly colonised by any major Western European empire. As the result, the liberal narrative tends to recognize the supremacy of the European cultural or other standards, vis-à-vis the Russian Empire, Soviet or independence experience.

According to Kiossev, as the processes of self-colonisation take place beyond colonial realities, such as economic exploitation, military or political dominance etc. Social imagination becomes vital element. Social imagination is understood as “a background intuitive knowledge, a body of stereotypes shared by a community” (Kiossev, n.d). In such understanding of self-colonisation processes, parallel can be drawn with another important contributor to the post-colonial scholarship and her work. Zarakol (2010) in “*After Defeat. How the East Learned to Live with the West,*” introduces the notion of stigma in the studies of International Relations. She defines it as “*the internalization of a particular normative standard that defines one’s own attributes as discreditable, as it is a label of difference imposed from outside*” (Zarakol, 2010: 4). Transferring these two concepts and putting them within the framework of the case study of Georgia, one might argue that the liminal positioning of Georgian society within the East/West discourse and subsequent ambiguity regarding its identity, becomes the key source of the social imagination. In other words, never-ending stage of transition, which is destined to remain always half-complete, produces certain knowledge which is largely accepted by both sides. At the same time, it maintains hierarchical discourse of the West being superior. Subsequently, what one might observe, are two parallel processes taking place at the same time. Internalisation of certain normative standards and stigmatisation accompanied by the processes of self-colonisation.

The idea of Europe in such discourses becomes the point of reference for the identity production processes. “*It became the natural vehicle of the positive, always neutral, and universal—whereas “our own” was always*

perceived as external and distanced to this neutral point” (Kiossev, n.d). As the result of such attitude, anything “*our own*” lacks universality and self-sufficiency. The collective imagination absorbs such identity through “*the filters of the absent, defective, hybrid, substandard*” and becomes “*European but not quite*” (Kiossev, n.d.). This makes the self-colonizing process self-traumatizing/stigmatizing at the same time.

Such discourse regards Russia as anti-Western or Oriental and tries to distance Georgia from it. This is not the first time an attempt is made to apply a post-colonial perspective to the study of the post-Soviet space. But literature usually focuses on Tsarist Russia or Soviet Union as an occupant and at the same time coloniser of the post-Soviet space (Morozov, 2015). The following research departs from this perspective and instead of focusing on Russia as a coloniser, tries to illustrate how self-colonisation vis-à-vis the West takes place. It is argued that liberal discourse in the Georgian society tries to present Russia as different or significant Other of Europe, something, the West is not. Thus, the process of self-colonization taking place in the contemporary Georgian society is not through the context of Russia being the bearer of the European values. It is rather presenting the former as an external Other of Europe and advocating for the internalisation of the latter identity.

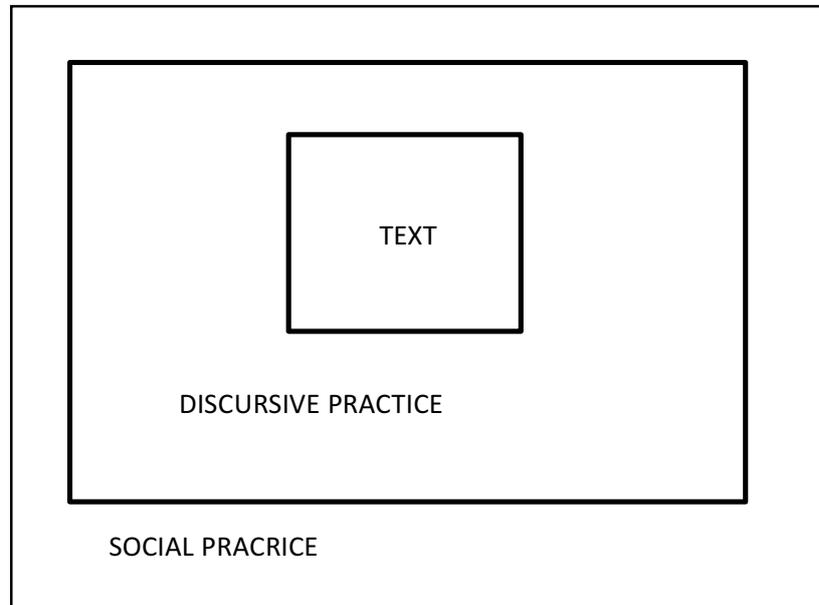
Methodology

The focus of this study is how dwelling on Georgia's liminal positioning vis-à-vis the West, two competing discourses are produced. In order to analyse these two competing narratives, this study relies on the critical discourse analysis (CDA). More specifically, it will rely on Fairclough's model of CDA.

Before moving to the concrete methodological tool of CDA, it is important to explain why discourse analysis as an approach is important for the following study. Discourse analysis in general, not only critical, place vital importance on the language, which is perceived as a contributor to the construction of reality, or in other words, physical objects, which exist out there in real life, gain meaning only through discourses. "Language, then is not merely a channel through which information about underlying mental states and behaviour or facts about the world are communicated. On the contrary, language is a 'machine' that generates and as the result, constitutes, the social world" (Jorgensons and Philips, 2002, 2010: 9). Or in other words, language is not just a reflection of pre-existing reality. It is important to note that the language itself is situated in the discourses, meanings change from discourse to discourse, while this patterns themselves are maintained and transformed in discourse practices (Jorgensons and Philips, 2002, 2010: 12). As the result of above mentioned, the main focus of discourse analysis should be the constitution of subject which comes into existence through discourses.

As it was already mentioned, this study relies on Fairclough's model of CDA. One of the central points of his approach is the understanding of discourse as an important form of social practice, which itself produces and changes knowledge, identities, and social relations. In addition, discourse is in a dialectical relationship with other social dimensions, as it is also shaped by other social practices and structures (Jorgensons and Philips, 2002, 2010).

One of the key methodological tool borrowed from Fairclough in this study, is his three-dimensional model. This model is an important framework to analyse so called communicative events or the specific use of language such as newspaper articles, political speeches, interview and so on. The use of language in a communicative event itself consists of three dimensions illustrated in the figure below. It is a text; it is a discursive practice, which implies production, distribution and consumption of texts; and a social practice. Therefore, the main purpose of the CDA becomes the analysis of the link between the texts or language use and the social practice, being mediated through the discursive practice.



(Fairclough, 1992, 2012: 73)

CDA is a very problem-oriented research and while conducting it, interdiscursivity, intertextuality, relationship between certain social actors and institutions has to be taken into account. “Every individual text is always located within a shared textual space” (Hansen, 2006: 55). Hence Hansen argues for an intertextual reading of the particular text. It means analysing how identity and policy are articulated within the original text, how they are presented in “later re-readings” and how these two differ from each other. Such intertextual reading within the framework of discourse analysis helps to understand how discourse embedded within the official texts and representations are projected to the larger public and legitimized. This leads to the concept of interdiscursivity which indicates how discourse are linked to each other and even refer to each other. For instance, how discourse on foreign policy or security is linked to the discourse on identity.

Results and Discussions

As it was already mentioned in the first part of the paper, liminal or the state of ambiguity is largely caused due to the Georgia's geographical location (being at the crossroad between Asian and European civilization) as well as due to the historical experience and cultural elements.

Historically, being surrounded by the Muslim empires and being invaded many times, Georgian nobility always kept an eye on the West and tried to involve Europe in the affairs of the region. There exists historical evidence, such as the correspondence between the Queen of Georgia, Rusudan and the Vatican, where the former urges the Pope to send military support against Mongol invaders in return for converting from Orthodox Christianity to Catholicism. But Queen Rusudan was not the only one, trying to seek the Western support on the bases of being Christian and therefore being a part of the European family. Later on, with the fall of Constantinople, Georgian kings and nobles kept correspondence with Popes and rulers of the Western kingdoms, calling for uniting forces to overcome the domination of Turks and free the "ancient Christian lands" from unbelievers. Within such messages an emphases were put on Christianity being the connector of the Georgia with the rest of the Europe. In early 18th century, Georgian diplomat Sulkan-Saba Orbeliani travelled to France and Vatican with a mission to ask for help from the European kingdoms. But his mission was unsuccessful. Orbeliani allegedly converted to Catholicism to make his claims stronger, but in vain. Sulkhan-Saba's

journey became the symbol of the West's neglect of Georgia in latter's popular culture. Later on, when Russian empire came into the immediate neighbourhood of Georgian kingdoms, Orthodox Christian Northern neighbour seemed to be the best alternative for a small kingdom involved in the never-ending warfare with Muslim neighbours. But protectorate agreement of 1783 of Georgiyevsk between Georgian king and Russian empire didn't live up the expectations of the former. In the end, Russian empire simply annexed South Caucasus. But on the other hand, being the part of the Russian empire, gave an opportunity to Georgians to get of more European culture and contemporary tendencies of that time through the saloons of Saint Petersburg. The founders of the modern Georgian nations, such as Ilia Chavchavadze and his fellows, also known as Tergdaleulebi, received education in Russia. In the end of the World War I, which gave chance for independence to some nations incorporate in the Russian empire, discussions about Georgia being the part of the European family came up again. In this light, a quote from 1918 of well-known Georgian writer Mikhail Javakhishvili, who later became the victim of the red terror, should be mentioned: *"...argument and quarrel whether we support North, West or East is pointless and even dangerous. We should turn towards that direction where the world turns. And it unstoppably goes towards the West. Its road does not go through Moscow or Petrograd, but cuts through the Black Sea and goes to the Danube valley. Enough of feeding with the European culture sifted through Moscow-Petrograd, which contains more of Mongolian poison, rather than Western pure drink..."* (Javakhishvili, 1918 as cited by www.timer.ge)

It nicely illustrates the discourse of Russia being the different, Other from Europe, despite being the source of European culture for isolated Georgian society. In the words, as the first head of the state of the Democratic Republic of Georgia, Noe Zhordania put it: *“Our life today and our life in the future is ... indissolubly tied to the West, and no force can break this bond”* (Zhordania, 1920 as cited in Jones, 2014).

But young republic's strive to the West was quickly interrupted by the Soviet invasion and incorporation of the Democratic Republic of Georgia into the USSR. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, the discourse of Georgia's return to the European family took a new start.

While liberals present the period of 1921-1991 as the years of the occupation which prevented Georgia's return to its European roots, the populist narrative claims that in the Soviet times, unlike nowadays, Georgian society was highly developed and perceived as an equal by the other members of the USSR. As the head of the one of the NGOs advocating for Georgia's membership in the Eurasian Economic Union remarked: *“I do not remember Georgian as a waiter during the Soviet times. ... Is not it better to be a professor?!”* (Chkoidze, 2015) Implying that Georgians are serving as the waiters and waitresses to the rich citizens of the Western countries. Or in the words of the one highly influential priest, who while referring to the Soviet period remarked: *“If back then they were ruled from the Kremlin, now they are ruled from the West, from Washington. But with one difference, back then we were republic of the united country, with equal rights but now we are not even a state”* (meaning the state of the US) (Gignadze, 2015, as cited in Tabula, 29 December 2015). These examples nicely sum up how populists

try to articulate discourse which instead of self-colonisation argues for a change of the foreign policy agenda. Meanwhile, dominant liberal discourse tries to portray Soviet Russia as different, strange to Georgian society and culture, something which Europe is not. And in this light present occupation museum in Tbilisi or TV series such as “Occupation” by one of the main TV channel Rustavi 2. It consists of couple of documentaries about Russian activities in Georgia, from the years of the first republic up to 2008’s war.

Within the discourse on the Soviet Union, the figure of Stalin and the interpretation of his role represents another key point, around which the two narratives collide. The liberal groups in the society see him as an evil dictator, whose crimes are equal, if not worse, to Hitler’s, while populists regard him as the world’s best known Georgian, who defeated Nazism and whose memory should be honoured. These competing narratives are immediately translated into the discussion of restoring Stalin’s monument in his home town or about the future status of his museum. As well as the legal issues surrounding the usage and display of the Soviet symbols.

Reference to Georgia’s European identity can be found on the daily basis. Flag of the European Union, which is also the flag of the Council of Europe, Georgia is member of, is actively used by public institutions. During his first inauguration speech in 2004, president Mikhail Saakashvili has called flag of Europe flag of Georgia as well, and characterized Georgians as the very first Europeans (Civil Georgia, 2005). This discourse usually stems from labelling the remains of ancestors of modern human beings found in Georgia, which are said to be 1,8 million years old, as the “first

Europeans.” Tourism agency of Georgia since 2011 started using a motto “Georgia – Europe started here” (Ó Beacháina and Coeneb, 2014: 923). From times to times, liberal discourse also argues for celebration of Christmas on December 25th or victory day on May 8th instead of 9th, both of which stands in contrast to Russia (Tevzadze, 2016). These cases illustrate the role texts, as it is defined by CDA, play in the identity production processes in everyday practice.

Within this context, Georgia's membership in the European institutions is seen and presented as the return to its “European roots,” joining the “family,” it has long been separated from due to the Soviet occupation. A good illustration of this point, is provided by the late prime-minister's historic speech of 1999, in the connection with Georgia's acceptance as the member of the Council of Europe.

“We are so happy, and proud that my generation, our generation, was privileged to announce in this hemicycle these very simple words ... I am Georgian and therefore I am European” (Zhvania, 1999).

Liminal identity and subsequent ambiguity does not only stem from Georgian domestic discourse itself. One of the main contributor to the creation of the liminal spaces is the West itself, or more specifically the EU's neighbourhood policy. Eastern Partnership or any other foreign policy tool, which is designed by the Brussels' to deal with the new neighbours, is creating a new liminal space. It never denies prospects of membership for those states, but at the same time, leaves them in a constant state of transition. This was especially the case with the 2004's so called the “big

bang,” when the union became immediate neighbour of countries like Ukraine or Moldova; which were regarded as potentially endangering the EU member states with the possible penetrations of the human trafficking and organised crime. As the result of the concerns with its own security, European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) was developed to promote the EU type of order in its neighbouring states, to transfer ‘stability, prosperity, shared values and the rule of law’ to these countries for the sake of its own security (Balzacq, 2009, Jeandesboz, 2009). As Hadfield argues, the ENP, “*by denying standard membership while setting normative standards as benchmarks that will ultimately contribute to its own security,*” reveals instrumental and cultural asymmetry embedded in the EU's relations with its new neighbours (Hadfield, 2009: 98). Such absence of “methodologically identified incentives” from the EU might eventually ruin the credibility and legitimacy of the EU actorness, leading to disillusion, to discontent. And a vacuum will emerge, which will be filled from “*the only other continental powerhouse: Russia*” (Hadfield, 2009: 103-194). The results of recent (2016) parliamentary elections in Georgia illustrate this trend. First time in the recent history of the country, political party with the anti-Western platform got seats in the parliament.

The same argument can be made in relation to NATO enlargement and Georgia's aspirations of membership in the alliance. Communiqué of the NATO Bucharest Summit of 2008 stated: “*NATO welcomes Ukraine's and Georgia's Euro-Atlantic aspirations for membership in NATO. We agreed today that these countries will become members of NATO*” (NATO, 2008), but without any concrete time frame or details. Such vague statements

contributed for further liminal positioning of Georgia, constantly failing to achieve standards high enough to even get a membership action plan (MAP), a commonly regarded technical predecessor of membership in the North Atlantic alliance. Georgia became one of the largest contributor to the ISAF operation of NATO, it managed to maintain expenses on defence above 2% of the country's GDP, one of the key NATO requirements, even most of the member states fail to meet. Georgia is recognized as one of the closest partners of NATO (Stoltenberg, 2016), it opened a joint military training facility with NATO, but still falls short to be granted the MAP. This has led to the adoption of a liminal discourse on foreign policy from both sides, that is being democratic and modern, but still not enough so.

An important factor, which should be noted is that in the discourse of the liberal groups, EU and NATO are both associated with the Europeanness and membership of both of them with the main criteria of achieving full transition from the liminal state. The discourse on NATO and Georgia's aspiration for the membership is rather vividly presented by liberals as an issue of identity and culture. The equation mark is usually put between NATO and the EU, both being associated with the Western identity. The Westernisation discourse within the Georgian society should be understood in this framework. Being in the same military alliance with the major Western powers in the liberal discourse is not only presented as the shield against the traditional threats such as a direct military aggression coming from Russia or territorial integrity being undermined. It is also projected in terms of values and identity in the framework of a civilizational discourse - the West versus the East. As Georgia's defence

minister at that time remarked in 2016 comparing it to football, *“After Georgia left the Soviet Union (in 1989), our teams had the option to join leagues in Asia and we would have won everything, ... But we took the decision to join Europe’s Champion’s League. We want our teams to play Real Madrid or Barcelona even if we sometimes lose. ... We have been ready to be part of Europe since the 11th century when we sent our first ambassador to Paris ... We want to be officially and formally part of something that we believe we are part of culturally”* (Khidasheli, 2016 as cited in USA Today, 13 February 2016). Against that backdrop, it is interesting to look at the Information Centre on NATO and the EU, which is an organization founded in 2005 by the president’s decree. It has offices in the main towns of the country and tries to promote those Western institutions, especially among school and university students. *“More Europe in Georgia and more Georgia in Europe”* as well as *“more NATO in Georgia and more Georgia in NATO”* mottos were coined trying to emphasize the country’s belonging to the Euro-Atlantic space. TV channel Rustavi 2 started broadcasting weekly show called NATO here (NATO აქაჟრობას - in Georgian). The aim of the program is to provide more information about NATO to the population of Georgia as well as help the audience to tell apart the myth from the truth. In the same context, radio liberty, soon after the Association Agreement with the EU was signed, started broadcasting show called *“why Europe?”* The aim of the show was to explain to the Georgian audience why Europe is important for Georgia, why European values matter and so on (radio Liberty, 2015).

Closer examination of the case of Georgia reveals some peculiarities and characteristics which can be widely generalised to other post-Soviet

societies as well, which are in the state of becoming, changing and constructing their new identities. It can be argued that Europeanisation or the processes of Georgia's European identity production on the daily bases is rather an elitist project. Political establishment tries to legitimise certain foreign policy agenda with the reference to the identity, while society itself is still in flux and ambiguous stage.

NATO and the EU are perceived by Georgians as the shield and protection from the actual physical threats coming from the neighbouring Russian Federation, but at the same time, due to the historical experience discussed above and the geographic locations, an average Georgian feels different and not related to Europe culturally or linguistically. Therefore, it's not surprising that 2009 and 2011 opinion polls illustrate that the majority of Georgians (60%) feel themselves as only Georgians, while only 13-16% perceive themselves as Europeans in addition to their Georgian identity. Hence, despite Georgians would really want their country to be an essential part of Europe, it is the drive for security and prosperity, rather than the result of ethnic or cultural identity (Tarkhan-Mouravi, 2014: 65).

In such circumstances, challenging, populist discourse gains more and more popularity, especially due to the liminal stage, or the phrase of transition which is pre-destined to be always half-complete. The latest parliamentary elections in Georgia (2016) illustrated such trend. It was the first time in the recent history, political party with the platform against Georgia's membership in NATO got seats in the parliament. The main message Patriotic Alliance tried to convey was that NATO simply would never accept Georgia as a member, while at the same time, such rhetoric

put country under danger from Russia (Inashvili, 2016 as cited by news.on.ge).

Another important peculiarity of post-Soviet states is that what qualifies as liberal or populist groups in these countries is very region specific and carries some cultural connotations. There are issues which are so sensitive and strongly felt in the society, that even those groups, which are perceived to be liberal and pro-Western in the political establishment, cannot overcome the influence of certain conservative or cultural elements. One of the clearest indication of such trend is the discourse articulating around the issue of the inclusion of the definition of marriage in the constitution. Currently, Georgian constitution does not specify the gender of partners entering the union. Prime minister of Georgia, as well as some other members of the political establishment couple of times made statements in support of specifying that it is a union between a male and a female. Some populist groups were able to collect enough signature to submit appeal to the president, demanding referendum on this issue.

Most of the liberal groups in the current political establishment expressed their support for the inclusion of the definition of marriage in the constitution. Even those parties which were opposing, including Republican Party, which is generally perceived as the most liberal and pro-Western party in the Georgian political spectrum, did so, not because of their support for the same-sex marriages, but rather because this issue was not important. President, who was responsible for deciding whether there should be a referendum or not, despite enough signatures were collected, rejected such idea. But his justification was not because he publicly

supported legalisation, but rather that it was not important at that moment. *“presented formulation [of the question] does not fall under referendum, since this issue is already solved in the Georgian legislation and it is decided that marriage in order to establish a family is the voluntary union of man and woman”* (Margvelashvili, 2016 as cited in news.on.ge). Instead of defending the rights of sexual minorities to get married, liberal groups tried to avoid this issue by referring to the civil law which already defines marriage or simply dismissing this issue as not being important.

It should be noted that the populist discourse itself is not united and coherent. Even inside these groups, when their discourses are closely examined, one might encounter contradictions and peculiarities. Texts produced by these groups represent rather very unique mixture of different, even exclusive concepts and ideas. One of the such is the image of Stalin being Orthodox Christian. In addition, within the populist group some might agree with the hegemonic discourse of portraying Russia as an occupant, or rejecting Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) or any other alliance with the Kremlin, but they do it along with the rejection of the Western institutions. While other fractions of challenging larger populist discourse will call for closer association with Russia and for the membership of the EEU.

Conclusion

To conclude what has been argued above, contemporary Georgian society seems to be stuck in the never-ending stage of transition. This phase, which is characterised by ambiguity, was conceptualized as liminality. Fairclough's critical discourse analysis model was used to explore the public discourse in Georgian society, articulated around the liminal identity vis-à-vis the West. This research revealed that there are two competing discourses floating in the society. The dominant basic discourse can be labelled as liberal, which, based on the interpretation of cultural aspects, such as Christianity or historical experience, projects Georgia as a part of the European family. Subsequently, liberal discourse calls for more pro-European foreign policy agenda, as it sees the dream of Georgian society in the return to its European family roots. Usually, liberal discourse puts NATO and EU integration on the same level and presents it in a civilizational discourse. The membership of these two organisations is presented to the wider society not only as the protection form and the prevention of the actual threats coming from Russia, but as an identity issue. Appeal to Georgia's European identity might even seem against any rational considering the geopolitical circumstances in the region, clashes of interests of big players, such as Turkey, Russia, Iran and others. In the words of Rondeli (2001: 195) "[Georgian] attempts to integrate their country into European structures is often seen as strategic idealism, which goes against all geopolitical arguments and even common sense." But at the same time, due to the historical, cultural or other elements, Georgian

elite is actively producing the image of Russia as an “Other” or something Europe and therefore Georgia, is not. “In this non-region of the world, Georgia is a European island in the South Caucasus” (Khaindrava, 2015: 51). Reference to Georgia’s European identity domestically or abroad can be described as the way of engaging the West more into the region. While liberal discourse tries to promote Georgia’s European identity as something different from Russia, something its Northern neighbour is not, it also calls for the self-colonisation processes. Dwelling on Georgia’s liminal identity, as being not European enough and being in the stage of transition, it reproduces the discourse of the Western superiority and hierarchical status.

On the other hand, in contrast to the dominant liberal discourse, challenging populist, nationalist discourse propagates more anti-Western foreign policy agenda. In the similar manner of former, they also rely in their articulation on the liminal identity and the state of ambiguity. But unlike their competitors, populist groups claim that as Georgia is not an equal of the Western European states, instead of self-colonisation measures and changing society, it should rather switch foreign policy agenda more towards the Russian Federation, as the mutual historical experience of Soviet past or Russian empire, makes Georgian national identity more closely related to Orthodox Christian Russian one.

It also revealed that the grand project of identity building and production is elitist discourse which tries to create the base for legitimisation of certain policies or agendas. It can also be argued that these two competing narratives are very cultural and region specific, as for example, being liberal in Georgia differs from its Western counterpart. In

addition, it should be noted that these discourses themselves are not unanimous, but rather full of internal differences and sometimes even contradictions.

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