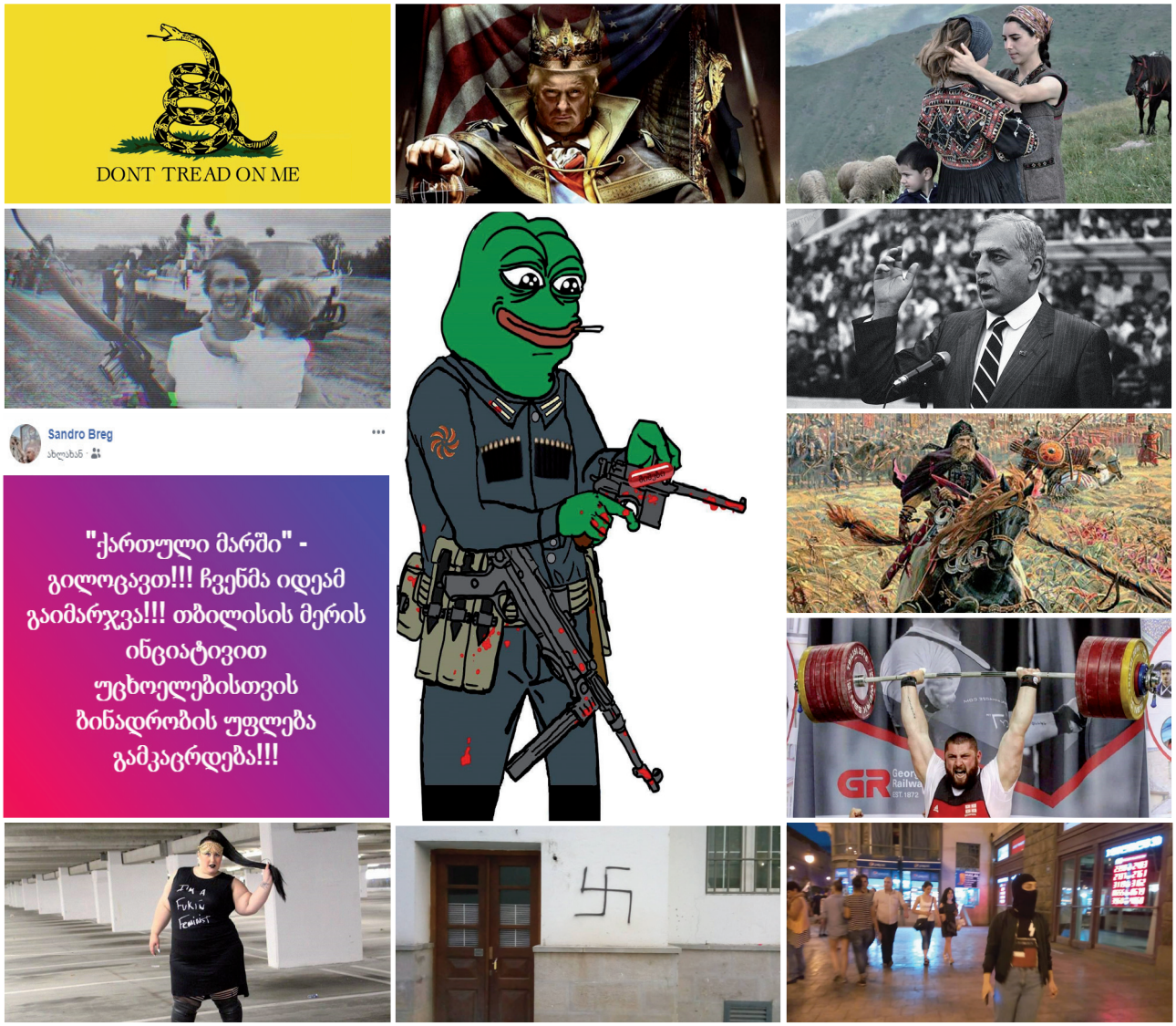
ULTRANATIONALIST NARRATIVE OF ONLINE GROUPS IN GEORGIA



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2019

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Authors and researchers:
Ketevan Sartania, Aleksandre Tsurkava

Assistance in meme content analysis:
Temur Gugushvili

Research assistant:
Ana Mikadze

Study supervisor and Editor:
Ekaterine Chitanava

Translation:
Natia Nadiradze

Design:
Tornike Lortkipanidze

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"My sweet homeland, why are you fretting?
If the present does not favour us, the future is all ours"

Ilia Chavchavadze
1872

INTRODUCTION

The present study was written in July 2019. It provides an overview of the main narrative(s) of ultranationalist groups in order to better understand the relevant issues that tend to periodically frame the agendas of popular public discussions.

We, the authors of the study, are both observers (for the purpose of this study) and participants of the process (meaning all the social and political events that are happening in Georgia), making it impossible for us to distance ourselves from the events researched. In addition, the abundance of information and data pertaining to the study has complicated the task of researchers to include all relevant matters within the confines of a single paper. Therefore, we have highlighted only those important issues, the analysis of which, in our opinion, will make a worthy contribution to the study of the Georgian ultranationalist discourse.

What distinguishes this study from other similar attempts is our focus on the Internet, a rapidly changing and versatile research area. This study represents an attempt to capture some recurring and stable trends in an otherwise fluid environment in the hope that we can stimulate thought and further discussion thereon.

We would like to express our sincere gratitude to all respondents for generously giving us their time, to members of academia for their expertise and recommendations, and supporters for their encouragement.

INSPIRATION

This study was inspired by the story of a young man, who was a member of a left-wing youth organization in Georgia. He was interviewed by a researcher for a particular study and, later on, the researcher discovered that this interviewee had joined a neo-fascist movement.

This personal ideological shift raised many questions. What changed this young man's mind? When and why do we change the social groups to which we are affiliated? What factors contribute to a person feeling a sense of belonging to a certain group and how often is it possible for one to change their identity?

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND RELEVANCE

The present paper describes the forms and content of discourse created by ultranationalist groups in the Internet space in Georgia.

"Ultranationalist discourse' is not an evaluative analytical category, and researchers tend to differentiate between the researched groups and their narratives. As this study is descriptive, its aim is to study narratives. Therefore, the conceptualization of the content promoted by online groups is shaped by how these groups identify themselves. At the same time, representations of the narrative(s) by these groups in a public space are often contradictory to their content[1].

The Internet and social networks, particularly Facebook, have created a favorable environment in which to observe manifestations of ultranationalism in Georgia. The resultant databases of photo, video and text materials along with the responses of their audiences and creators are updated routinely. Through such interactive processes, internet users create and transform the events depicted in such material into a story, a rolling history, and a context which influences further events and people's lives beyond the Internet.

This study is descriptive; it aims to display the ultranationalist discourse from the perspectives of those groups that enjoy some public visibility, are covered by local and international media, and conduct various street rallies, demonstrations and other events.

The presence of ultranationalist sentiments, as well as activities of groups propagating them, is not a novelty in the history of independent Georgia.[2] Since the 1990s, street rallies organized by religious extremists have targeted free speech in the spheres of culture and media, as well as the rights of religious minorities.

Since gaining independence from the Soviet Union, Georgia has faced various serious challenges. Indeed, the restoration of independence, the corresponding domestic political and economic processes, and civic

1 For instance, the content of statements disseminated by the Georgian March is contradictory to most of the following commonly shared narratives of the Georgian civic nationalism: anti-imperialism, anti-Russian foreign policy, pro-Western trajectory, equality, inclusion and secularity (Note of Ekaterine Chitanava).

2 Eka Chitanava and Katie Sartania, "Public Space: Battleground in the Revanchist City" in The rise of illiberal civil society in the former Soviet Union? 2018. P.22 Available at: https://bit.ly/2p0FO4b

and territorial conflicts that arose have altogether formed a component of the national identity that Vamik Volkan would call a *chosen trauma*. The 'chosen trauma' here refers to a shared mental and mnemonic representation of the massive trauma experienced by their ancestors who fought against various enemies through the centuries. Even today, one may feel that the sense of identity they feel with their ancestors and their actions and way of life is under threat. It is during such situations when the aforementioned chosen trauma comes to the fore (Volkan, 2001) and manifests itself in a variety of forms in daily life. In the process of identity formation, various practices acquire a ritualistic and sacred status, shaped precisely by this sort of chosen trauma. In Georgia's case, the trauma can be encapsulated by the ideas of 'fighting' and 'survival.' Invariably, historic or religious local narratives will consist of some episodes and examples of both fighting and survival. Therefore, the ultranationalist narrative is entirely built on examples of heroic and patriotic sacrifice and the importance of a divine power in this process, such as alluded to in Galaktion Tabidze's collection of poems "My Homeland" in which he wrote "the Roman Empire fell but Georgia (a small country) is still there."[3] Such a perception of history reinforces the feeling that the fight is supported by divine forces and that it is hence unique and stands in sharp contrast to others: "We have survived as we deserved it in God's eyes." The interpretation of some ultranationalists therefrom is that having fought and sacrificed, Georgia and Georgians earned their survival. Such mystification makes both the process of identity formation and identity itself sacred. The chosen trauma justifies failures and losses by generating at the same time some hope of survival supported by the apparent presence of divine forces. Ultimately, such self-identification and identity requires one to focus less on the present reality.

Since Georgia reclaimed its independence, the process of national identity formation has undergone numerous phases.[4] Looking at Georgian identity, researchers often describe this as incomplete. Simply put, the post-independence Georgian society, in transition[5], has been searching for its identity from some of the following labels: post-Soviet; post-Socialist; independent; pro-Western; regional leader[6]; and pro-European.[7] These different labels characterize the discourse on Georgia's aspirations in published research.[8] Most of these labels imply elements of fighting, whether it be fighting for independence, fighting for a pro-Western course, fighting for regional leadership, or something else. The search for Georgian identity embraces all of these labels while efforts are made at the same time to reject each of them too. These labels are not mutually exclusive and, as the political process has evolved, their use and meaning have undergone considerable changes.

A significant part of Georgia's recent history has entailed a process of self-identification for various social and political groups. Every group and narrative emerging in this period of time contributes to a whole process and space. However, for the purpose of this study, we have decided to focus on specific groups and spaces.

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3 Galaktion Tabidze "My Homeland "Collection of poems.

4 Revaz Koiava, "Georgian national narratives with regards to conflicts of 1991-2012". Tbilisi: *Caucasian House,* 2016. Available in English at:http://regional-dialogue.com/en/georgian-national-narratives-on-conflicts-1991-2012/

5 Sopho Omanadze et al., Generation in Transition: Youth Study 2016 (Tbilisi: Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, 2017). Available at: http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/georgien/13150.pdf

6 Readout of Vice President Biden's Call with Prime Minister Giorgi Kvirikashvili of Georgia (November 4). Available at: https://ge.usembassy.gov/vp-biden-kvirikashvili/

7 The Constitution of Georgia. Chapter 11, Article 78: Integration into European and Euro-Atlantic Structures. Available at: https://matsne.gov.ge/en/document/view/30346?publication=35

8 Jeremy Frankel, "Keep the Republic of Georgia a Pro-Western Democracy". The American Spectator, November 26, 2018. https://bit.ly/2JJAtdN

We link the active representation and empowerment of ultranationalist and far-right groups in Georgia with the change of government that took place in 2012 and the violent events of 17 May 2013 against members and supporters of the LGBT+ community.[9]

The year of 2013 was marked by amplification of the ultranationalist discourse. An assault against participants of a demonstration dedicated to the International Day Against Homophobia and Transphobia (IDAHO) by members of the Georgian Orthodox clergy and their supporters[10] accentuated the discontent of violent groups with respect to certain social issues. In the same year, Internet users with an ultranationalist self-identity started creating pages and groups online, and even started holding small-scale protest rallies and introductory marches. However, prior to 2015 these ultranationalist groups remained mostly unnoticed by the wider public.[11]

On a global level, the strengthening of far-right narratives has been tied to the refugee/migrant crisis of 2015.[12] Seemingly different local and global contexts contributed to the creation of the following common themes and content in the Georgian ultranationalist discourse: anti-migration and anti-Muslim sentiments; and opposition to the LGBT+ community and liberal ideology supposedly manifested in NGOs such as the Open Society Georgia Foundation ('Soros') and some feminist groups. A combination of such themes and concepts, as well as actors, symbols and predispositions characterizing local culture, created a 'liberal-conservative' antithesis whereby the term 'liberal' was taken to equate to 'foreign and strange' while 'conservative' was perceived as an authentic representation of 'the common interest'.

This narrative has become even more pronounced on Facebook where various emerging pages have been created to represent and encourage identities (political, cultural, and social) and to gain supporters. Indeed, it was through Facebook that the Georgian March (introduced and described later in the research paper) managed to mobilize its supporters in July 2017.[13]

According to OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), statistics on hate crimes in Georgia have only been available since 2014.[14] Data provided by the Analytical Department of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the Ministry of Justice, the National Statistics Office of Georgia and the Supreme Court all suggest that the number of hate crimes has been rising since then. However, it is difficult to know for sure whether the rate of such crimes has actually risen or whether the reporting thereof has simply improved. Data collected by state agencies pertaining to hate crimes suggests that the following recurring motives are often behind such crimes: gender identity and sexual orientation; religious identity; racism; and xenophobia. These motives are consistent with key categories (religion, gender groups, etc.) that this study has identified in the narratives of ultranationalist groups. It is not the aim of this study to confirm the presence of a potential link between hate crimes and ultranationalist groups. Crime statistics corroborate the concerns of civil society about the gravity of hate crimes in Georgia. The threat of violence based on intolerance and xenophobia became especially ap-

9 "Confrontation at the rally dedicated to the International Day Against Homophobia" *Radio Liberty* [Last accessed: 16/01/2019]. Available in Georgian at: https://bit.ly/2QxkwYK

10 "Anti-homophobia rally will not be held," *Radio Liberty,* 17 May 2013. Available in Georgian at: https://bit.ly/2Kcwohy

11 Human Rights Education and Monitoring Center (EMC): "A statement regarding a video released by racist groups" 22 September 2015. Available in Georgian at: https://bit.ly/2HIuHqI

12 UN Refugee Agency, "The year of Europe's refugee crisis" 8 December, 2015 https://bit.ly/2I7PrH4

13 Elene Khachapuridze,"The Georgian March" – a xenophobic rally taking place in Tbilisi. Netgazeti, 14 July 2017. Available in Georgian at: https://bit.ly/2WarIQs

14 OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), Hate Crime Reporting- Georgia; (Warsaw: OSCE, 2017) https://bit.ly/2HJGODV

parent in 2018, when a human rights activist, Vitaly Safarov, 25, was stabbed to death. According to available official records, allegedly, this was the first murder to be committed on grounds of ethnic and racial intolerance in Georgia.[15]

Online social movements constitute just one of many parts of internet culture. For social groups and movements, social media has become a key platform and the main venue for self-organization and mobilization (Dolata, 2017). The widespread availability of technological infrastructure enables groups to undertake *connected action* (Bennett, Segerberg 2012, 2013) which entails the mobilization of ideas through social media, as well as collective and simultaneous manifestations of protest. The growing usage of the Internet and its ever-evolving functions have increased its significance in shaping the public opinion (Facebook, YouTube).[16] In Georgia, the internet space has blossomed into an essential platform for exchanging opinions, engaging in discussions, and voicing political statements.

The ultranationalist vector is not merely a thinly-spread mass of internet-groups and informal associations, nor is to void of political or organizational activities. Rather, various ultranationalist formal groups and even NGOs often launch legislative initiatives [17] or pursue party political activities.[18]

The Alliance of Patriots of Georgia (APG), founded on 19 December 2012, is a mainstream political organization which is characterized by xenophobic and populist narratives. The APG is a political party[19] which receives funding from the state budget after having successfully passed the threshold of 5% of the vote in the 2016 parliamentary elections. In the Parliament of 2016-2020, the APG has seven seats. The party identifies itself as center-right and claims to "promote a moderate conservative ideology, Georgian spirit, culture and traditions, as well as democratic values."[20] Party leaders are former members of Media Union *Obiektivi* that carries the same ideology as the TV channel *Obiektivi* and use their views or to mobilize supporters for rallies and demonstrations.

On 14 July 2017, shortly before a demonstration organized by the Georgian March, rumors about a Georgian teenager allegedly 0being raped by an Iranian national had spread among the public. The rally was held on Aghmashenebeli Avenue where organizers made the following two explicit demands: 1. "All illegal foreign nationals (Iranians, Arabs, Africans etc.) leave the Georgian territory!!!"; and 2. "We will clear our streets of foreign criminals!!! Georgia for Georgians!!!"[21] Former politicians and MPs, as well as members of the APG, participated in the rally.[22] In addition to political leaders, informal groups identifying themselves as ultranationalist also joined the rally. The rally gleaned significant public attention, and much discussion ensured among the wider public about the political ideology, origins, and funding of these ultranationalist groups.

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15 Eka Kevanishvili, "An account of the key witness in Safarov's murder case," *Radio Liberty*, 14 May 2019. Available in Georgian at:https://bit.ly/2Edoocf

16 Sophie Zviadadze, " I 'like' my Patriarch. Religion on Facebook. New Forms of Religiosity in Contemporary Georgia" *Heidelberg Journal of Religions on the Internet*, Vol 6, Page 164, 2014, DOI: https://doi.org/10.11588/rel.2014.0.17365 https://bit.ly/2JK2WQC

17 Zviad Tomaradze's legislative initiatives. Available in Georgian at: https://www.ifact.ge/tomaradze/ [Last accessed: 09/06/2019]

18 The Patriotic Alliance of Georgia. Available in Georgian at: http://patriots.ge/about-temp/

19 The Parliament of Georgia. The Organic Law of Georgia on Amending the Organic Law of Georgia the Electoral Code. Available in Georgian at: https://bit.ly/2wpDdEB

20 http://patriots.ge/about-temp/

21 Giorgi Tskhadaia,, "On the March of Georgians,"*Radio Liberty*, 19 July 2017. Available in Georgian at: https://bit.ly/2YXePGj

22 "Who was in and who was out in Tbilisi's far-right March of Georgians [Analysis]", *OC Media*, 17 July, 2017 https://bit.ly/2HH0mIN

Informal associations and political groups have been trying to create an alternative space on the Internet or television to distance themselves from the liberal mainstream. They disseminate ultranationalist and conservative narratives as well as cultural, religious, ethnic and political symbols via digital technologies through new media (photo and video clips). Such narratives are characterized by **anti-liberal and anti-globalist content, and anti-migration, Islamophobic, nativist[23], and anti-gender sentiments.**

Alternative space, encompassing both physical and virtual dimensions, is a central topic for the present study. In the context of this paper, alternative space is defined as containing a form and content different from those presented in conventional media. The anonymity offered by social networks and the lack of regulations have created an environment that is conducive to the growth of non-mainstream social groups. Until 2019, Facebook did little to control the activities of far-right or other radical groups, however the platform has recently started to impose some restrictions on such groups. [24]

What do ultranationalist groups talk about? What are their main narratives? What does a Georgian ultranationalist identity, according to Facebook groups, look like? What methods are used to express these identities? And, finally, what kind of context does such activity create? The goal of this study is to describe the ultranationalist narrative(s), to identify main themes therein and to highlight the forms of expression used by these groups to strengthen their identity.

23 Political scientist Cas Mudde (On Extremism and Democracy in Europe, 2016) believes that nativism is a combination of some sort of nationalism and xenophobia. Nativism holds that states should be inhabited exclusively by members of the native group ("the nation") and that "non-native" elements (persons and ideas) are fundamentally threatening to the nation-state's homogeneity. Nativism looks for both domestic and foreign enemies. Nativist thinking has a long history in Western societies. The term was coined in relation with Know Nothing movement of the 1840s in the United States. Nativist movements share negative sentiments towards migrants with different racial and religious background. Unlike xenophobia, nativism creates the image of "them" from eugenic perspective (blood, place of birth, health). In Europe nativist sentiments often target refugees and labor migrants, as well as minority groups residing in the country (e.g. Roma population in Hungary). Nativism has ethnic, racial and religious dimensions (Note by Eketerine Chitanava).

24 Joseph Cox and Jason Koebler, "Facebook Bans White Nationalism and White Separatism". Vice, March 27, 2019 – https://bit.ly/2HRi11b

THE AIM OF THE STUDY

This study aims to describe the most popular and most widely shared ultranationalist online narratives in Georgia by looking at ultranationalist groups' Facebook activities and the content of their Facebook pages (text, photo and video materials).

For the purpose of this study, Facebook pages and users shall not be examined individually but rather as parts of a discourse pertaining to a specific political ideology. The decision to examine the discourse in a holistic manner was based on the assumption that in the process of creating a discourse, the boundaries between its creators and audience become blurred. Facebook per se cannot be treated as a guarantor of identification as one user does not necessarily equal one individual. Therefore, when referring to the 'user,' the authors mean a Facebook profile rather than an authentic individual.

It would be beyond the scope of this study to attempt to answer questions concerning the social, economic, political or cultural leanings of administrators of Facebook pages or their users. Meanwhile, it is also not the intention of this study to collect information on the financial sources of such groups.

ABOUT TERMINOLOGY

An ideology is a system of ideas held by a particular individual or group of individuals.

In the present study, ultranationalism is used as an umbrella term which covers radical and far-right, extremist ideologies. The term encompasses a wide range of classic ideologies (including national-socialism and fascism). Meanwhile, we find the combination and interpretation of historical contexts of different epochs and examine how these have been merged with antiliberal, antisemitic, pro-Russian, and sometimes even anti-Russian narratives.

Racism, xenophobia, ethnonationalism, and different forms of conservatism represent aspects of far-right nationalism[25]. Ultranationalism is often constructed as a response to dissatisfaction with the existing political reality, and from a combination of nihilism and mistrust that are nurtured by failure, fears, phobias, and/or threats to internal and foreign policies. The main articulated demand is building a strong state which can respond to current challenges and provide solutions to existing social and political problems. The term "ultranationalism" carries certain peculiarities in different contexts. At the local level, it depends on the political, social, economic and cultural processes ongoing within the given country, as well as its foreign policy and the interpretation thereof, as well as conflicts and historical experience.

The Radicalisation Awareness Network's (RAN) report of 2019[26] differentiates between the routes people take to becoming far-right extremists (FREs). Each of the different routes correspond to different motives for participation, although activists can of course take more than one route.

Revolutionaries on the far-right are frequently stimulated by a sense of adventure. They tend to become active at a very young age (i.e. between the ages of 12 and 16) in local neo-Nazi or skinhead groups. Their first engagement in activism is often in the form of anti-social or provocative behavior such as rioting, vandalism and street fighting.

Wanderers on the far-right tend to view themselves as saviors, defending 'the people' of 'the nation' and they are convinced that migrants receive preferential treatment. Members of this group have often previously been politically active at national or local level, but grew disillusioned or disappointed therein.

Converts on the far-right are characterized by strong feelings of abandonment from their government. They tend to have been raised in disadvantaged circumstances that necessitated a daily struggle in their upbringing.

Conformists on the far-right often find themselves playing an active role in mobilization without realizing it. Motivated by the desire to please or support a friend, they join demonstrations or distribute flyers. Although they do have some feelings of dissatisfaction, they are not ideologically driven.

25 Vieten, M. Ulrike, Poyinting Scott "Contemporary Far-Right Racist Populism in Europe" *Journal of Intellectual Studies*, 2016; https://bit.ly/2lsKzou

26 Sterkenburg, Nikki., Gssime, Yasmine., Meines, Marije. *Local-level management of far right extremism.* RAN Centre of Excellence (RAN CoE). Rotterdam, Netherlands. January 23-24 EX POST PAPER RAN LOCAL – FRE 23-24 January 2019 https://bit.ly/2k047QQ

Loners on the far-right usually become radicalized online before meeting like-minded people offline. Their ideas are strengthened by alternative (online) media and interaction with like-minded people (online and offline).

Above-described typology is also determined by the particular time and context. All of its features cannot be generalized for all contexts, countries and cultures. However, we still find different fragments and sometimes altered forms of the far-right ideology elsewhere, including Georgia.

The specifics of the Georgian context are shaped by historical-political experience, as well as construed views about the future of Georgia, and the idea of Georgia as a nation-state. At the same time, it is difficult to describe these phenomena in specific terms, as the post-independence identity formation process is still ongoing and incomplete Every day, we face new political realities and these changes influence, and add new insights to the term "ultranationalism" as well as its understanding and interpretation.

The main focus of the present study is to describe the ultranationalist narratives and understandings thereof. It does not aim to create social profiles of groups or to conduct political assessments such as, for instance, finding out whether such groups are funded by neighboring states (e.g. Russia). The main research task for the authors is to deconstruct the ultranationalist narratives. What are the symbols and cultural images that represents ultranationalist narratives in modern Georgia?

Due to the limitations of this study, the following questions are not addressed: Who is speaking on behalf of ultranationalist groups, how are they related to other groups or political actors outside the country, and what are the sources of their funding?

This study has a particular scope and research-field, namely social media, where ultranationalist sentiments are mobilized, and where narratives are (re)produced and expressed in simple forms, such as through messages, symbols, memes, images and photos. Thus, important characteristics with respect to identity are constantly found, formed and spread from the Internet into the physical space and vice versa.

Translation is a unique feature of Georgian ultranationalist discourse, entailing the adaptation and adjustment of narratives (symbols and messages) of global, international, Western far-right, fascist or antisemitic social movements to a specific local context. Despite the fact that the Georgian ultranationalist discourse differs from global, far-right narratives and movements in terms of its focus on national symbols and concepts, anti-globalist messages and sentiments, it is at the same time nurtured by global, far-right narratives.

In much of the academic literature, scholars have tried to agree on common classification and terminology applicable to different countries and the political parties, groups and organizations therein. This approach is somewhat problematic, because ultranationalism might take on a specific form in a specific context and its ideology or narratives may vary from one country to the next.

To illustrate this point, in some European states, far-right or ultranationalist political parties do not have well-conveyed anti-LGBT+ sentiments, but in other countries these sentiments are clear and central to the far-right rhetoric. In Georgia, it is important to consider modern historical events. At the end of the 1990s and during the 2000s, Georgian extremists targeted religious and ethnic minorities, but since 2010 the main target groups have become LGBT+ groups while anti-gender equality narratives have also begun to prevail.

The Far Right in Europe: an Encyclopedia, published by the University of Huddersfield, explains that the far-right is an often confusing and bewildering part of the political spectrum.[27] Its authors argue that 'far-right' would usually by implication take place in the post-war period, in the sense that far–right political movements of the pre-1945 era are usually labeled as 'fascist.' However, in Georgia, such classification of political parties is not relevant due to the Soviet past.

The authors argue that in the context of Western Europe, there is some kind of agreement about this terminology[28], however they do not take into consideration the historical experiences of Eastern European and post-Soviet states where social movements took on specific characteristics and meanings after the fall of the Soviet Union.

Terminological Dilemma

Ultranationalism, far-right radicalism, Nazism, neo-Nazism, fascism, neo-fascism, and ultraconservatism are sometimes used as synonyms in oral or written media reports. In post-Soviet states, due to their contexts and the limited academic studies therein, researchers face the dilemma of having to adopt broadly applied terms despite these sometimes being vague and inaccurate upon translation, thereby causing confusion and mistrust among the general public in such states towards an academic study.

Usually, researchers refer to political party ideologies, their historical roots, origins, pre-election programs, their value-systems, their target audiences and other characteristics when determining the relevant terminology to be used.

Hence, in the present study, while defining the term "ultranationalism," we rely on the social media narratives of formal and informal groups/organizations. There are two main criteria when arriving at a suitable definition: how the groups identify themselves; and how they present their understandings of ultranationalism including reinterpretation of historical context, family, traditions, gender roles, religion, homeland, blood, fighting, freedom and independence through illiberal, anti-gender, Islamophobic, antisemitic, and anti-migrant discourse. However, this definition is not rigid. It may change and be adapted according to the given political environment. Ultranationalist narratives are intended to speak on behalf of 'the nation' and tend to monopolize definitions of national identity and produce social norms opposing liberal democracy and non-dominant groups.

27 Davies, Peter J. and Jackson, Paul. *The far right in Europe: an encyclopedia*; University of Huddersfield Repository. Greenwood, Oxford. ISBN 9781846450037 https://bit.ly/2lv5VS7

28 Davies, Peter J. and Jackson, Paul. *The far right in Europe: an encyclopedia.* University of Huddersfield Repository. Greenwood, Oxford. ISBN 978-1-84645-003-7

KEY FINDINGS

The analysis of the narratives identified on the Facebook pages of online ultranationalist groups yielded the following main observations with respect to the aim, projected threats and communication strategies of the groups in question.

Georgian Idea

Who/what do they protect? – Monarchy as a state order; the idea of Messianism and isolationist Orthodox Christian ideology; close ties to Russia, which is presented/perceived as a historical friend and a country with which Georgia shares a common dominant religion.

Threats: The West (the EU and other states seen to promote liberal values) as an actor 'legitimizing' so-called filthiness (e.g. anti-discrimination laws); and a demographic threat posed by immigration whereby ethnic Georgians may become a minority in Georgia.

Strategy: Social networks (e.g. Facebook), archaic language, extracts from various canonical literature most of which is obtained from Russian or other unidentified sources or based on quotes accredited to Russian clergy/saints.

Georgian Power

Who/what do they protect? – Traditional gender roles (powerful men and weak women) and the family institution; Georgian women are portrayed as having a blend of subtlety, grace, fight, sacrifice, purity, as well as physical and spiritual beauty; and Georgian men portrayed as symbols of physical fitness and strength.

Threats: LGBT+ community; decriminalization and legalization of drugs; migrants (from Asia and Africa); Islam (portrayed as synonymous with terrorism); multiculturalism; and feminism.

Strategy: Social network (Facebook); cynical, ironic, non-normative language; and visual techniques (cartoons/caricatures/memes).

Georgian March

Who/what do they protect? – Purports to protect ethnic Georgians by group members (despite assaulting (both physically and verbally) ethnically Georgian public figures); heroization of the Georgian King David the Builder, the first President Zviad Gamsakhurdia, and other historical figures; and manipulation of historical memory.

Threats: Non-governmental organizations (especially *Open Society Foundation*); the LGBT+ community; and migrants (from Asia and Africa).

Strategy: Offline activities such as rallies and protests; making presence known in national media; social networks (Facebook); radical and hysterical speech (e.g. "deadly hunger"); and personalized visual materials (photos of group members).

Nationalists

Who/what do they protect? – The declared goal of the page is to protect Georgian culture, values and identity, however, there is no specific content providing evidence of such activity.

Threats: Liberal values; migrants (from Asia and Africa); LGBT+ community; and ethnic minorities.

Strategy: Sharing: multimedia posted by other ultranationalist Facebook pages along with minor comments; heroic ballads; and narratives about heroism and bravery of Georgians.

- One of the motives behind setting up groups/movements is to create an alternative space that is different from that of the mainstream media.
- Groups differ from each other based on their organizational arrangement and goals.
- Groups use online media to disseminate their narratives, ideology and views, to comment on ongoing developments, to maintain and gain supporters, and to influence public opinion and carry out trolling.
- Ultranationalism is an umbrella term for the narratives used by these groups. Ultranationalism in this particular context implies both negative and positive content. The positive content consists of the narratives of "fighting" and "survival," the heroization of historical figures, highlighting the special role of religion, as well as the uniqueness of traditions and culture. On the other hand, the negative content is manifested through illiberal and anti-Western ("the West" here means the EU as well as European liberal groups) sentiments targeting NGOs and the Open Society-Georgia Foundation (representing as portraying anti-Western political parties), liberal mainstream media, and business, cultural and intellectual elites.
- The narratives adopted and professed by the groups are built on a local interpretation of international politics against the backdrop of confrontation between Western ultranationalist and populist parties as well as the U.S. President Donald Trump, and liberal parties and the EU.
- The groups use historical and cultural symbols to convey their positive narratives while visual materials such as caricatures and cartoons depicting liberal groups, LGBT+ communities and feminist groups are used as negative content.
- Some groups have pro-Russian agendas manifested through religious or other arguments, while others express anti-Russian sentiments.

- According to recent research, despite the fact that some ultranationalist, far-right groups may not support Russia openly, these groups indirectly still share "Russian narratives"[29].

- Since openly pro-Russian narratives may sometimes fail to mobilize supporters, the groups use some expressions to legitimize their group/identity and to stress their non-Russian orientation: 1) "There are similar groups in Europe too" or "we are just like the European far-right"; and 2) "we have neither a non-pro-Western nor a pro-Russian but a national narrative"[30].

29 OC Media, Analysis | Georgia's far right are anti-Russian but share Russian narratives, 2 April, 2019. https://oc-media.org/analysis-georgia-s-far-right-are-anti-russian-but-share-russian-narratives/?fb_comment_id=2269447133078155_2471824486173751

30 At the same time, part of the narrative promoted by the groups is built on the idea of Georgia and Russia belonging to the same communion. It is characterised by antiliberal, anti-global, anti-immigration, Islamophobic, nativist sentiments which is in line with the Russian Eurasian ideology (*a note of Ekaterine Chitanava).*

METHODOLOGY

Based on the aims of the study the researchers chose to use qualitative research methodology. For data description, researchers collected quantitative data pertaining to the subject matter of the research while critical discourse analysis was used for the data analysis (Norman Fairclough, Teun Van Dijk). For the description of online ultranationalist narrative, the following four Facebook pages were selected: Georgian Idea, Georgian Power, Georgian March and Nationalists.

Selection criteria:

1. Number of likes for pages
2. Visibility/media coverage, rally/march in public space
3. Postings, frequency of uploading data

Page	Number of likes	Obtained activity	Daily activity	Words in each post
Georgian idea	61837	1541	6.6	137
Georgian Power	25454	704		37
Georgian March	17525	1212	3.4	54
Nationalists	5375	560		27

The data was collected on 10 June 2019.

Data Collection

The core area of research is data obtained from Facebook pages. Therefore, based on the objectives of the study and specifics of the research area, the researchers had to first collect texts and visual materials, and bring them to a condition which would then allow in-depth analysis.

An open source code written in a Python programming language was chosen as a data collection instrument. The code was designed to mine data from Facebook posts of authors and users' comments in an automatic mode. Since the study focuses on texts written in Georgian, the research team had to edit the code by integrating a Unicode utf-8-sig and tailoring to the objectives of the study. By using the above-mentioned instrument of Facebook API (Application Programming Interface) we collected publicly available data from published posts and comments and converted them to CSV format for further analysis.

Categorization of Data

After collecting all posts from selected official Facebook pages, starting from the very first public activity on each of the pages until 5 June 2018 (the date of completion of the data collection phase for this study). After entering the collected data into a unified database, the data were then categorized into themes based on their content. To categorize the data, the researchers identified thematic categories that were common (to varying degrees) across all four Facebook groups.

The categorization of the collected data was carried out in two stages. First, the data were categorized automatically, whereby the posts were distinguished from each other, defined, and grouped based on the aim of the study. Establishing the context for a large volume of information and preparation for the next stage was critical for this approach. The presence of multiple categories in a number of posts (i.e. some posts often covered several broad categories) emerged as a challenge. In such cases, multi-category posts were placed under the main category defined by the researcher. Ultimately, around 20 main categories across the selected Facebook groups (with varying degrees of commonality) were distinguished.

The second stage of this process entailed analytical categorization: a process of distinguishing a dominant narrative for each of the targeted Facebook pages. The output categories were then further fragmented to identify the key content, and then grouped and described. A holistic text was created to describe the categories.

Ultimately, the following categories were defined within the scope of the study: *women's issues (feminism); issues related to the LGBT+ community; religion; the history of Georgia (ancient/modern); world history; local news; racialism; ethnicity; culture; migrants; Europe; the USA; Russia; Turkey; army-militaristic content; drug policy; identity; and calls for action.*

1. **LGBT+ community** – Portrayed as a synonym of some sort of threat to Georgia's demography, 'degeneracy' of Georgians, loss of traditions, feminism, the Western negative propaganda, anti-religiosity and anti-Georgian-ness. This theme is related to the West, Europe, EU integration and threats leading to the abandonment/loss of Georgian identity.

2. **Women's issues (feminism)** – Opinions and assessments about women. Views about the appearance of women and their engagement in politics or their dealings with social issues. Derogatory comments and photo/video clips and memes concerning such topics as liberal ideology, integration in the EU structures, abortion, the family institution, globalization, religion, and sex education.

3. **Religion** – This category focuses on Islam as an opposing religious identity. Muslims are portrayed as a threat to Christian Europe and 'Orthodox Georgia,' while Islam is interpreted as a driver of terrorism and migration. It should also be noted that other religious minorities are also mentioned in the examined Facebook posts and comments, but rarely. Religion is especially prominent in terms of celebrations of the Georgian Orthodox Church, historical excerpts, and images of saints all of which aims to highlight the invaluable contribution of the Church and certain religious figures to Georgian history and the preservation of Georgian identity against the backdrop of invasions of non-Christian conquerors.

4. **Migrants –** The primary focus here is on migrants from Asia and Africa, and those employed in non-Georgian businesses as well as in other sectors. In addition, this category also covers themes related to the origins and ethnic backgrounds of individuals owning bars, clubs and cafes in some of Tbilisi's neighborhoods, as well as prostitution, rape, illegal migration and the selling of land to foreigners. Targeted Facebook pages also included highlights of crimes allegedly committed by migrants in Europe in the Georgian language while Georgian migrants are described as a noble group who work hard abroad to save the Georgian economy and culture.

5. **Racialism** – Physical traits, ethnicity and religion constitute the key criteria defining a group as being of 'another race.' Such an approach revolves around the notion of such 'other races' having a lower level of civilization and ethnocentric beliefs. Indeed, biological and cultural racism are used to discredit various groups. Concerns over the growing presence of non-white and non-Christian communities are justified by the alleging of demographic threats. Gender and mixed family themes are used to develop negative connotations (specifically where a white Georgian (either male or female) chooses a non-white individual or a Muslim as a partner or a spouse).

6. **History of Georgia** (ancient and modern) – This can entail historical figures, including kings and saints, references to dates of battles, heroic narratives, brief historical overviews of events in which Georgia prevailed over its enemies, or stories of historical characters' sacrifices for their homeland. This category may also encompass posts which long for the re-establishment of a monarchy as well as sentiments about the divine origin of the Bagrationi and the nobility of their dynasty. These messages are backed up by sources in an attempt to justify the demand for a re-introduction of a monarchy as a state order that would be compatible with Georgian culture. *Modern history of Georgia*, as a sub-category of history. covers the period since the 1990s to the present day. This sub-category concerns discussions around Georgia's domestic and foreign policies with a focus on the presidency of Zviad Gamsakhurdia (1991–1992). In addition, it covers issues such as the work of the "Round Table – Free Georgia"[31], the 9 April tragedy, the Rose Revolution, the August 2008 war, and photo and video materials pertaining to Georgian casualties of the war(s) in Abkhazia. The targeted Facebook pages often spread information about people they consider to be domestic enemies and traitors for releasing accounts of Georgian history that may deviate from the ultranationalist understanding/version.

7. **World history** – This category generally tends to cover: Italian and German politicians of the first half of the 20th century; state and military leaders; the visualization of historical materials about the World Wars; quotes by Mussolini, Hitler, Stalin and other dictators and strategic reviews and biographies of historical characters. Often, the political and cultural information presented on these pages makes no reference to original sources. Ultimately, their versions of world history are built on the history of war.

8. **Drug policy** – The reform of the drugs policy in Georgia is interpreted as the promotion of drugs, and a threat to Georgia's demography, Georgian genes, and the healthy functioning of society.

31 The Administration of the President of Georgia, The President of Georgia Zviad Gamsakhurdia (1991 – 1993) (Retrieved on 10/11/2019) https://www.president.gov.ge/eng/Zviad-Gamsakhurdia-en.aspx

9. **Culture** – This is manifested through poems, excerpts from novels, out-of-context quotations by writers such as Ilia Chavchavadze and Vazha-Pshavela, and various visual materials and songs about "the homeland," nationalism, religion, "the nation," and women.

10. **Europe –** This category encompasses rhetoric about the end of European civilization and involves demonstrations of support for anti-liberal and conservative groups in Europe, as well as attempts to demonize the European continent and especially the EU because of the latter's perceived liberal policy with regard to LGBT+ communities, uncontrolled migration and freedom of religion. Against this backdrop, Georgia is described as a nation facing the threat of degeneration on account of its aspirations toward EU membership.

11. **Russia –** This category contains somewhat mixed messages. On one hand, the content focuses on the category of religion, and emphasizes Georgia's cultural affinity with Russia as an Orthodox state, sometimes quoting members of the Russian clergy. On the other hand, some of the content concerns Georgia's territorial integrity, and presents Russia as an occupant and aggressor.

12. **Turkey –** The country is viewed as heir to the Ottoman Empire with discussion frequently revolving around its alleged religious, cultural and economic expansion into Georgia. Arguments about the apparent threats coming from Turkey are heavily based on historical experiences and Turkish economic interests in the Adjara region of Georgia where there are many Turkish restaurants, cafes and shops.

13. **The United States of America** – Following the election of President Trump, the image of the US in the eyes of ultraconservative or ultranationalist groups has been positive. The groups perceive that, under Trump, the USA has handled the issue of immigration with impressive strength compared to the EU.

14. **Local news** – Most materials of this kind are taken from other media sources but are contextualized to fit the agendas of the specific Facebook pages. In addition, alternative sources are also used with an aim to disseminate information across specific groups. These alternative sources of media are distinguishable from mainstream media sources in the sense that they are characterized by the creation of alternative information narratives.

15. **Global news** – This comes in the form of fragmented information, mainly about migrants, Muslims, feminist groups and the LGBT+ community and displays the West as societies and states that are exclusively concerned with issues related to these groups. Parallel narratives are also spread promoting President Trump, Viktor Orban (Hungarian Prime Minister) and Matteo Salvini (Italian Minister of Interior and a leader of the far-right Northern League). In this context, information about international politics disseminated by ultranationalist Facebook pages represents an attempt to promote an alternative to the European/international order that Georgia generally aspires to be part of.

16. **Appeals** – The targeted groups plead with their followers/subscribers to partake in rallies, to share information, and to like or block online content among other activities.

Analytical Categorization

This approach allows for establishing correlations between subjects and objects expressed in the data, identifying hierarchical order and ascertain interrelation between these hierarchies. While applying the method of analytical categorization the researchers used the method of latent semantics indexing applying to the same words used in different contexts. These words with varying connotations and denotations are largely defined by those contexts in which they are used. *Europe* is the most common example of polisemantic usage: it is characterized as *liberal and yielding traditional values* which means that it poses a threat to Georgia. In other cases, it is described as *Christian, nationalist and anti-Islamic*,[32] and therefore desirable and promising for Georgian ultranationalist groups.

Examples:

In Essen (Germany) a Moroccan migrant spit at a passerby. This is too much! Defamation of this sort and cases of even worse violence committed by these brats in Germany and other countries in Europe have now become daily routine! Well done Europe for making such a huge step towards democracy (2017-10-11 10:57:23, Nationalists)

Thousands of Poles stood in a chain along the state border and prayed against the Islamization of Europe (2017-10-11 9:51:28, Nationalists)

All nationalist movements are out in Hungary and Macedonia against George Soros which resulted in an attack against the Soros foundation in Macedonia!!! (2018-02-15 7:12:43, Georgian March)

Methodology for Analysis of Visual Materials

Most of selected Facebook groups rely on visual data for representing emotions, sentiments and messages that these pages disseminate on a daily basis. Analysis of memes published on Facebook pages of ultranationalist groups is one of the core components of the study. The analysis of memes aims to examine the target Facebook pages in order to identify which themes, symbols, metaphors and expression techniques are used by the groups for spreading their main ideas.

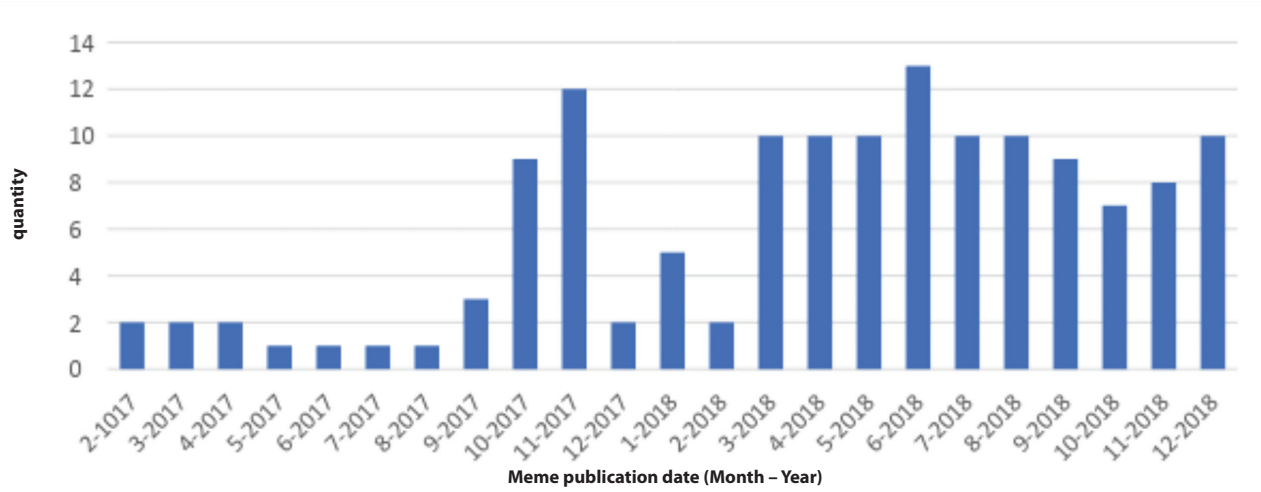
Visual data analysis was carried out by using a content analysis method and a respective computer software.

Data Collection and Sampling Method

In total of 140 memes published on Facebook page of Georgian Power (from February 2017 through December 2018) were analysed within the frame of the study (Diagram 1). It should be noted that quantitative characteristics of memes – number of comments, shares and emoticons per "meme post" were also integrated in the process of analysis. The diagram below shows that according to the Georgian Power Facebook page the use of memes has been on the increase.

32 While discussing pan-European nationalism, researchers single out a cluster of Western and Northern European populism. A famous researcher of nationalism Roger Brubaker (2017) argues that in some countries (in particular the Netherlands, France, Scandinavian countries, Belgium, Austria and Switzerland) a "new populism" transformed a political semantics of "us-them." The collective "I"is determined wide a wider, civilization related rather than nationalist attribute. This transformation has been triggered by "threats posted by Islam." With this understanding, Christianity as a civilization-based identity represents an antithesis of Islam: the Christian world and European values are endangered.

Diagram 1. Number of memes according to the dates of publication



Data Analysis Method

To analyze the data, the researchers used a directed approach method of content analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). One of the key characteristics of the directed approach is the development of conceptual categories for the data coding purposes based on a theory or other data and research. Categories developed as a result of texts have been used for analysing memes. Considering the fact that the analysis is based on visual materials, before the actual coding, components of memes were defined as a coding unit (e.g. text, a concrete symbol, part of a symbol etc).

Thematic codes were defined based on conceptual categories. It should be noted that in accordance to the principle of evaluative analysis (Kuckartz, 2014), a code "coded part" was also developed together with thematic code. The coded part was used for ascertaining a degree of the "coverage" of a meme's coded part. Classification of the "coded part" is based on percentage of the "coverage" of the coded part.

- Small coverage 1% – 33%
- Medium coverage 34% – 37%
- Large coverage 68% – 100%

Using above described codes/categories, the researchers coded 140 memes. Even though a coding system/ conceptual categories had been developed well in advance, the coding process nevertheless underwent some changes – new codes were developed and several existing codes were consolidated. After the finalization of the process, coded memes were then analyzed through different approaches.

Here is the analysis of coded information through the following methods:

- Frequencies of thematic codes, distribution in percentages
- Cross-tabulations with one variable being a thematic code, while the other one is a characteristic of a meme or evaluative code

- Different approaches were used for the thematic proximity analysis which include coefficient (Friese, 2014), c coefficient (Armborst, 2017) and multidimensional scaling (Verbi, 2018)

Interviews with Experts

In addition to the data analysis described above, the researchers also conducted expert interviews using a semi-structured questionnaire. Up to 20 respondents including religious scholars, anthropologists, researchers of culture, international relations, politics and other social scientists took part in this component of the study. Transcripts of audio recordings and information obtained from the respondents complemented the analysis of the identified categories.

Limitations of the Study

Based on available resources and goals of the research, a decision was made to focus on the analysis of the discourse. Therefore, the study does not cover demographics pertaining to page administrations and their audience, authors of the discourse, their individual activities in other dimensions. Nor does the research look into social status and views of the latter or views that are not important for the study. The issue encompasses a multitude of layers which would be impossible to cover within a single study.

The study focuses on spontaneous narratives created by the selected groups without any involvement of the research team. Members of the groups had no knowledge of the ongoing study of their narrative.

Data of the social network are fluid with some of the pages being periodically inaccessible or new pages being created. Because of fast and constant changes of the target space of the research, an emphasis was made on narratives created by these groups.

ONLINE NARRATIVES OF SOME FACEBOOK GROUPS

A group's organization—its combination of roles for members, norms, status, positions, number of supporters, influence and activity—determines its structure.

When it comes to online groups, the description of a group coincides with characteristics of a social group but without sharing all of the latter's standard features. Based on available information and the goal of the study, the following specific characteristics were developed to define a group: time of the establishment of the group, influential or well-known members of the group, description of an online platform, description of symbolic signs, description of the language of postings, overview of potential rival or supportive groups, public standing, future plans around a structure of the group and existing social networks.

The digital ultranationalist alternative space consists of Facebook pages and Youtube accounts. Ethnographic study of these accounts suggests that they first appeared on the Internet in between 2013-2015. They caught attention for their symbolic, visual and radical linguistic characteristics. Even though these groups adhere to a shared ideology and identify themselves as ultranationalist, there are yet considerable differences among them. Certain history of interacting with each other and the presence of a shared ideological rival – the liberal wing, have contributed to the development of a common communication network. It is thanks to this network that they emerge as a homogenous group united against a shared enemy when the time calls for joint efforts. Critical differences reflect distinctive individual features of these groups including demographics, values and goals with respect to foreign, religious and immigration policy priorities. Therefore, since 2013-2015 there has been a wide scope of coverage within ultranationalist online groups present in the public sphere.

Bergmann

In 2014-2015 the name Bergmann was spray painted on the walls of undergrounds and streets. Shortly after, a Facebook page and a YouTube channel were created. The Facebook page was used for disseminating information about gatherings of group members and their activities. On 21 September 2015, a Facebook page Georgian Ultras published a video recording of two episodes of physical assault by an organized group against peaceful civilians in the streets of Tbilisi with a caption "Bergmann against niggers."[33] Two members of the group physically and verbally abused a national of Nigeria and their companion and fled the scene.[34] Although this incident triggered some discussions in the public, it failed to draw attention to the group. However, Bergmann continued to create a history of some sorts and mobilize supporters by releasing similar videos and photos. Because of these activities and the content of released materials, Bergmann's Facebook pages had been repeatedly reported by individuals or organized groups and subsequently blocked by Facebook for a while. Presumably this experience has informed a strategy for creating multiple Facebook accounts. A group under Bergmann's name was busy spreading various video materials depicting physical training, boxing, weightlifting. These materials also contained episodes of violence. Therefore, group members used YouTube channels to create their own identity and gather supporters.

33 "Bergmann against niggers – racial discrimination in Tbilisi," Reg TV Posted in September 2015. Available at: https://bit.ly/2YR550v [Last accessed: 4/10/2019]

34 Human Rights Education and Monitoring Center (EMC). A statement regarding the video released by racist groups, 22 September 20015. Available in Georgian at: https://emc.org.ge/ka/products/gantskhadeba-rasistuli-dajgufebis-mier-gavrtselebul-videostan-dakavshirebit

After the first appearance of the group in the public space, many members of the public believed that the incident was nothing more than a mere altercation based on a misunderstanding by some youth with negative attitudes towards the black. However, the name of the group went unnoticed. "Bergmann" is a German word and in Georgian means a "mountain man." According to historical records, 130 Georgian migrants led by Theodor Oberländer, professor at the University of Königsberg and the Abwehr colonel founded a Bergmann Battalion. Oberländer was a researcher specializing in the Caucasus Studies and had an excellent command of Georgian, Chechen and Azeri languages, as well as the solid knowledge of the entire region. Because of the historical context, today's Bergmann resonates with the military battalion Bergmann with a fascist ideology by the former's efforts to link events of the Second World War and developments in the Caucasus with challenges that Georgia has been facing. By May 2019 Bergmann's Facebook page can no longer be found, supposedly after its temporary closure.

The National Front

An Internet channel and videos attributed to the National Front dates back as early as 2013 and are some of the earliest analyzed examples of Georgian ultranationalist activity. The first YouTube video is dedicated to a map of Georgia in the 21st century and territorial changes that the country underwent. As a contrast, the video then shows rallies organized by human rights advocates, members of LGBT+ community and their supporters in front of the Parliament building. Against the backdrop of societal problems (drug abuse, environmental pollution, poverty, alcoholism, cheating politicians and 'a threat to become a national minority in our own country') the LGBT+ rallies are presented as strikes of a stark contrast. The second part of the view represents the National Front as an alternative to the existing situation with a photo of Zviad Gamsakhurdia, Georgia's first president. Videos released by the National Front also shows Giga Khvedelidze, a member of the Georgian Idea, a political party with pro-monarchy aspirations. A video released on 27 January 2013 depicts a rally in Vake Park in protest of selling "Georgian soil" to foreigners with a slogan "Georgian land for a Georgian village! Stop selling Georgian land!" A tricolor Georgian flag, as well as a new Georgian flag, images of Giorgi Antsukhelidze, a soldier tortured to death during the Russian-Georgian war of 2008, David the Builder[35], Ilia Chavchavadze[36], Akaki Tsereteli[37], Merab Kostava[38] and St. George are also seen in the clip which ends with an appeal to "Save Georgia, blood and honor."

The Georgian Idea

The Georgian Idea is a political association which, according to the information obtained from the Public Registry, was registered on 6 November 2014.[39] A leader of the association, Levan Chichua, one of seven individuals apprehended after a fight in Kavkasia TV channel, had served a prison sentence since 2010.[40] Chachua was

35 David IV, also known as David the Builder, of the Bagrationi dynasty, was a king of Georgia from 1089 until his death in 1125

36 Ilia Chavchavadze was a Georgian writer, political figure, poet, and publisher who spearheaded the revival of the Georgian national movement in the second half of the 19th century, during the Russian rule of Georgia

37 Akaki Tsereteli was a prominent Georgian poet and national liberation movement figure of 19th Century

38 Merab Kostava (1939-1989) was a Georgian dissident, musician and poet; one of the leaders of the National-Liberation movement in Georgia. Along with Zviad Gamsakhurdia, he led the dissident movement in Georgia against the Soviet Union

39 Identification number: 205315844

40 "The Georgian Idea" *Myth Detector.* https://bit.ly/2wqr6qD

invited to participate in a TV show in a capacity of a member of an extremist religious organization 'Union of Orthodox Parents.'[41] Chichua, was released from prison in 2013 with a status of a political prisoner. Among the detainees was also Zviad Bliadze, who happens to be a co-founder of the Georgian Idea (source: The Public Registry). The first activities on a Facebook page of the Georgian Idea go back to 25 December 2013 when the group posted Gabriel the Monk's quote regarding the restoration of monarchy in Georgia. The group publishes on average six posts every day. Unlike other target pages, content of these posts is rich totaling an average of 137 words.

Now the cross borne by the Patriarch has become heavier as he carries both his cross and that of the King's. We are not going to be saved unless there is a king. Why? Should the nation not have a sceptre? If not, let's dig out King Tamar and David the Builder from their graves – apparently, they are no longer needed!
Holy Father Gabriel (Urgebadze) (2013-12-25 10:44:45)

The analysis of the text suggests that the Georgian Idea is both an online group and a political organization. The group uses its Facebook page to promote its political ideology and views. The following dominant categories were identified as a result of thematic grouping of textual (posts) and visual (photos) data: appeals, religion, gender categories (feminism, LGBT+), migration, foreign policy and monarchy.

Religion and the State

The Georgian Idea stands out with frequent postings on a religious topic. They often use archaic language, excerpts from canonical literature (most of them are Russian language sources) or unidentifiable sources, quotes from members of the clergy accompanied by comments containing appeals or slogans.

There is no Russian saint that Georgia loves more than Seraphim of Sarov… possibly because he is too a laborer of the mysterious land which Virgin Mary proclaimed as her fourth lot, fourth garden, or because of his words which he left to his homeland: "never wage a war with Georgia as you swill wage a war against the Holy Mother… devious Antichrist will never reign in this land and in the End Times wine for a divine dinner will be brought from Iveria… (2017-01-14 15:37:44)

Antiliberal Sentiments, Appeals and Mobilization

The group slams liberal values and rejects the idea of a secular state based on constitutional order. Liberal policies are labelled as 'neoliberal dictatorship' while its actors are 'Neoliberal Bolsheviks.' The narrative promoted by the group focuses on threats of devaluation of Georgian values and national culture, and the alarming situation with this respect. It also informs readers about the need for their civic engagement and calls for awakening, actions, proactivity and stepping out of the virtual space. There have been attempts to seek partner groups and mobilize.

"Georgia is facing a hard time. Bolshevik atheists of the new time have been nurturing a revolution in Georgia. Their goal is to cause Georgians lose their national pride, morality and faith in God. They want to destroy everything that forms the foundation for the Georgian state" (2018-05-13 14:35:38)

41 "Seven sent to pre-trial detention over Kavkasia TV fistfight." *Civil.ge,* May 10, 2010. https://old.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=22284&search=

"No one is going to do your job! Protect the future of your children! Do not create an environment of pedophiles around them!... It is time that "rhetoric of Georgian patriots" went beyond the virtual borders and put an end to a liberal tyranny of sodomites in Georgia!" (2018-05-07 4:21:36)

"We did it. With pain but we still managed to legalize (the anti-discriminatory law) ... from a mystical perspective it is a treason of a soul at the expense of earthly comfort! (if it can be called a comfort at all)" (2017-02-04 8:51:24)

Migration/Foreigners

The content of postings opposes the selling of land to foreigners, ID cards and legalization of marijuana. In most cases, there is no single actor that critique is aimed at. Posts and comments demonstrate discontent with the United National Movement (UNM) and disappointment with the Georgian Dream. A desire to establish a 'new national-liberation movement' can also be observed. The party believes that 'God, homeland, family and morality,' rather than human rights are the supreme value with no conceptualization of these terms. What Georgia needs is the reclaiming of its historical territories, strengthening of 'traditions, spirituality and awareness,' development of the 'national economy' so that Georgians are not replaced by foreigners.

Foreign Policy, Pro-Russian Narrative

The party's foreign policy vision opposes the European integration process and demonstrates greater trust towards a Russian agenda. A union with Russia is justified by messianic narratives, myths of cultural affinity, common faith and anti-Western sentiments.

... It is important to activate a direct political dialogue with Russian authorities to resolve problems and issues affecting people living in the territory of modern Georgia, even more so that Russian authorities and Putin personally have repeatedly appealed to the Georgian side in support of a political dialogue. Our Western partners also support this idea. The Russian Federation is our great neighbor, we share the faith (which is of utmost importance to us), enjoyed outstanding warm and neighborly relations under the Soviet Union. Our ancestors fought together in the Second World War to liberate the world from fascists. Over the course of many centuries Georgians and Russians fought side by side against common enemies and numerously liberated Georgian lands from conquerors. Sadly, there have been certain difficulties in our relations which have never been consistent with a true aspiration of Georgian-Russian relations…

In future we will move towards establishing a strategic partnership with Russia. Even more so when Russia is a great country and we belong to the same communion – we are Orthodox, multi confessional and multi ethnic countries [...] We greatly appreciate the fact that the United States of America is our strategic partner. God willing, with your help, America and Russia will achieve progress, with other states, including our country, in peace and consent.

An address of the Georgian Idea to the President Trump of the U.S.A and President Putin of the Russian Federation.

"Levan Chachua, a chair of the public-political movement the Georgian Idea, former political prisoner; Davit Kartozia – advisor of the political council at the Georgian Idea" (2017-02-14 0:37:59)

We have tolerated and legalized a sin to pave our way towards Europe, in other words, to "material well-being `` and "freedom `` as we imagined. This is exactly a spiritual meaning of the antichrist's seal – reject the Lord, tolerate evil and gain earthly well-being. (2017-02-04 8:51:24)

The Georgian March

Georgian March was founded in 2017. On the webpage it is characterized as 'radical, popular right-wing organization'. According to the commonly held view, 0ne of the key characteristics which distinguish radical far right and extremist alt-right groups is parliamentary and extra-parliamentary activities. The term "right-wing extremism" refers to groups which carry out their activities beyond a legislative body[42] whereby 'extremist' relates to the vision of the group on a total transformation of the society based on an idealized image of the future or future vision.[43] In this sense, the Georgian March is an extremist radical organization. Street rallies and demonstrations constitute the core of the group's activities.[44] However, statements made routinely by one of the group leaders, Sandro Bregadze with respect to the intention to participate in parliamentary elections demonstrate the aspiration of members of the Georgian March to engage in parliamentary or institutional activities. Ideological connections with Russia catch an eye when it comes to discussing the group's tactics and narratives.[45]

The first occasion when the Georgian March caught the public's attention was on 14 July 2017 when the group led a march at Agmashenebeli avenue. In the aftermath, information about a Georgian boy having been raped

42 'Radical ultra-rights' denotes groups who strive to get engaged in parliamentary activities or participate in elections. Such groups do not always fight against a democratic system. Sometimes they speak on behalf of 'real democracy.'

43 Rydgren, Jems., "The Sociology of the Radical Right"; Department of Sociology, Stockholm University, S-106 91 Stockholm, Sweden, 2006 https://bit.ly/2VYGyEG

44 "About the Georgian March." Available at: https://bit.ly/2YXePGj ; "Members of the Georgian March hold a rally in front of Open Society – Georgia Foundation office." https://bit.ly/2VXE0GT "A rally held by the Georgian March with respect to the Football Federation resulted in detentions." https://bit.ly/2VTBQIs

45 For the connections of the Georgian March with Russia, see "The anatomy of Georgian New-Nazism", Transparency International Georgia, 2018. https://bit.ly/2LiHOC2
When it comes to close links between European ultranationalist movements and the Kremlin, researchers highlight not only financial, but also structural, organizational and ideological (anti-liberal policy) affinity.
For instance, in his book "Tango Noir: Russia and the Western Far Right" Anton Shekhovtsov argues that Soviet sentiments in the West stemmed from the ideas of nationalist Bolshevism deeply influenced by left Nazism and Pan-European fascism of Otto and Gregor Strassers. Ideological ties between Russian and European far right movements goes back as early as Soviet era. National Bolshevism was arguably the first significant movement that conceived Germany and Soviet Russia as natural allies in their struggle against international capitalism and Western imperialism. National Bolsheviks rejected the treaty of Versailles as they associated it with Western domination over Germany. They also believed that by making an alliance with the Soviets and weeding out capitalism, Germany would be able to strengthen German Volk and escape from the shackles of France and Great Britain. Late in the 1950s, Soviet Russia launched an active pro military neutrality and anti-NATO campaign in West Germany and Austria.The spread of antiliberal sentiments and the Russian-Western ultranationalist alliance was associated with the works of two prominent representatives of Pan-European fascism, American philosopher Francis Parker Yockey and Belgian revolutionary Jean-Francois Thiriart. Yockey distinguished between the two Russia: one was "the true Russia" and the other – the Bolshevik Russia. The first, true Russia is spiritual, primitive and religious. It detests Western culture, civilization, nations, ideas, religions, cities and technologies. Everything Western hostile and unacceptable. Bolshevik Russia, on the other hand, welcomes Western technologies and economic models. Yockey believed that the West should infiltrate its own ideas into Russia's political and cultural life which would result in Russia's westernization and a formation of new symbiosis: The European imperium. Jean-Francois Thiriart also supported the Euro-Soviet idea which would defeat American liberalism.
Shekhovtsov believes that concepts, arguments and narratives developed since the 1920s until the 1980s, comprises a set of powerful ideological tools that have been employed by contemporary Western far-right activists and ideologues to ideologically justify their cooperation with Putin's regime.
The first substantial contact between the Western far right and their Russian counterparts after the collapse of the Soviet Union are associated with Aleksandr Dugin, one of the Kremlin's main ideologists. During the 1990s, Dugin elaborated the Eurasian doctrine, a political, cultural and economic bloc of post-Soviet countries including Georgia, the Near East and South Asian countries to counterbalance Euro-Atlantic Alliance. In this fight Russia may partner with the countries defeated in the Second World War, Germany and Japan, and the US' political enemy – Iran. In Dugin's view Eurasia is associated with a plurality of value systems, tradition, ethnonationalism and human solidarity, while Euro-Atlantic space is dominated by American liberal nationalism, the suppression of cultures and traditional societies, exploitation of people and imprisonment within the artificial social constructs. Dugin argues that Eurasianism will eventually defeat its eternal adversaries represented by the United States and its allies, and rise victorious over liberal democracy.
Dugin was inspired by Evola's Imperium idea which he transformed into the Eurasian Imperium. In 1995, inspired by the ideas of Jean Thriard, Dugin declared that Germany and Russia would become the most powerful states of Europe stretching from Dublin to Vladivostok, thus repeating Thriard's view and taking it up to a new level. Anton Shekhovtsov argues that Dugin's Neo-Eurasianism is a fascist ideology, which is revolutionary in its nature and aims at creating a totalitarian, Eurasian empire by Russia (Note of Ekaterine Chitanava).

by a national of Iran had been released to the public. The key slogan of the march was to expel illegal migrants from the country and introduce harsher migration policy.[46] The group continues to focus on anti-immigration policies which target only specific regions or countries not the whole migrant population.[47] Considering this focus, rhetoric of the Georgian March is deeply xenophobic and racist, and the LGBT+ community is cast as the enemy. Appeals for homogenous unity and idealized past is an overarching positive narrative which the group uses on their Facebook page.

Former politicians and familiar faces for the public are in the forefront of the Georgian March. One of the leaders Sandro Bregadze, is a founder of a public movement 'Nationals' and a former deputy state minister for diaspora issues of the Georgian Dream government. Previously, he served as a deputy minister for refugees and accommodation. Bregadze was one of the leaders of the Democratic Revival Union active in 1992-2004.[48] Active members of the Georgian March included a founder of a public movement 'Civic Solidarity' Gia Korkotashvili[49] and a leader of a public movement 'Homeland, Language, Faith' Lado Sadgobelashvili.

The preferences of the organization are inconsistent. On the one hand, they openly confront the National Movement, but on the other, express discontent towards the Georgian Dream ruling party. Posts on Facebook page can be divided into positive and negative narratives. *Migration and foreigners, LGBT+ issues, non-governmental organizations and political parties* constitute a negative narrative, while *religion, mystification of the past, striving towards homogenous unity for the protection of the nation and using names of historical figures in political statements* create the positive narrative.

The Georgian March often resorts to Orthodox clergy and historical events for the legitimation of their standing. Sandro Bregadze has made several statements on his intent to run for elections. In 2018 information about his nomination for presidency circulated in the media.[50] In 2019 the Georgian March together with several other groups announced to the public that they had established a new public-political movement in the run-up to the elections.[51] In addition to nominating a presidential candidate, the organization also gained some publicity for their statements about the 'fatal hunger strikes.'[52] However, the leader of the Georgian March has never run for the elections. Nor did they go on a hunger strike. Therefore, the group creates an impression of a fake and populist actors who have come together for a specific goal.

The photos of the group's leaders, statements about them[53] and information about those detained at their rallies are posted on the group's Facebook page to create an impression that members of the Georgian March are ac-

46 "It has been decided!!! Everyone whose heart beats for the homeland!!! It is either us or them!!! The Georgian March takes off at 8 PM on 14 July in front of School 24!!! There is an ultimatum for all illegal foreigners (Iranians, Arabs, Africans etc) to leave the Georgian territory!!! This is our response to 51-year-old Iranian raping Georgian boys!!! We will clean our streets from foreign criminals!!! Georgian for Georgians!!! An announcement of the Georgian March, 2017.

47 "The following issues will be a priority for a presidential program: military political neutrality and the restoration of Georgia's territorial integrity based on this neutrality. In addition, a flow of migrants will be stopped; the immigration law will become extremely strict and we will not receive migrants from African and Asian countries, we will pass laws prohibiting propaganda of immorality and homosexualism and capping off bank terror; selling of Georgian land will be banned by passing a respective law. Our specialist will soon start developing quite a comprehensive program,"- Bregadze told the Liberal. https://bit.ly/2ScaUTS

48 Democratic Revival Union, a Georgian regional party, in 1992-2004 a ruling party in Adjara Autonomous Republic

49 The Civic Solidarity movement was founded in 2013 with the purpose to promote dignity and rights of citizens. https://bit.ly/2I3wW6M

50 "The Georgian March nominates Sandro Bregadze for presidency."*Netgazeti,* April 16, 2018. https://bit.ly/2Qw44be.

51 "Sandro Bregadze and his team entering politics."*106 FM. Fortuna,* April 5, 2019 https://bit.ly/30RoYWS

52 "This won't be like previous rallies which resembled more of a diet. This will be something like a "fatal hunger", a protest by Irish patriots, which, sadly claimed the lives of 10 patriots" – said Sandro Bregadze."April 12,2018 https://bit.ly/2HmhaWc;

53 "Sandro Bregadze: Congratulations!!! Rustaveli Avenue is free!!! Sods-fags-pushers have fled!!! People are praying at the 9 April memorial!!!"

tive participants of ongoing political and social developments, have political rivals in the face of parties or public groups. Thus, by employing ultranationalist narrative, the Georgian March positions itself as a defender of history,[54] the homeland, and perceived national values. However, most of the statements available on their Facebook page concern their detention, anti-LGBT+ demonstrations, various announcement, including the intention of group members to go on a hunger strike or participate in the elections.

Migration/Foreigners

On 2 February 2018, the Georgian March released statements on setting up "community patrols" aimed at helping out "the migration police." The migration policy pursued by the March focused on migrants from Asian and African countries. In his statement, Bregadze labels them as an illegal and threatening group.

"Community patrol" works in many countries of the world. Their main activities include a fight against illegal migration and criminal migrants who are raiding streets in Europe. Sadly, we have been facing the similar problem in Georgia. Therefore, we will also fulfil the functions of immigration police.[55]"

"The main function of the "community patrol" is to uncover offences committed by foreigners and report them to the law enforcement. Mostly it concerns African migrants who illegally enter Georgian territory and live here."

They are involved in illegal activities such as drug dealing, human trafficking and prostitution. Our patrol will have a demonstrative function and the function of prevention. Let's say there will be 30-40 young sportsmen walking up and down Aghmashenebeli avenue. They will be well dressed, and with good manners. Of course, this will be a prevention for all criminals. Surely, they will be scared and either they will leave the country or continue with their criminal activities – said Bregadze.

In April 2018 the leader of the Georgian March said he would run for presidency. His election program would be similar to that of Marine Le Pen, a leader of the French National Rally, a far right political party, but "tailored to the Georgian reality":[56] "Our first and foremost priority is to stop illegal migration to the country and improve demographic situation." However, Bregadze did not run for the office.

This movement will adopt a right-wing nationalist ideology in line with European nationalism similar to Salvini's party who is an Italian deputy prime minister and Madame Le Pen's party in France. We will participate in all political processes including elections and we hope to be successful in the upcoming elections. [57]

54 "As we all remember from history, even fifth graders do, the main goal of our invaders, our enemies was to force Georgians destroy vine and grow marijuana instead so that they sank into oblivion, stripped of their Georgianess, turned into just a mass and eventually lead to a disappearance of the Georgian nation". September 14, 2018 https://bit.ly/2J7nAIQ

55 "Bregadze: Community Patrol will protect Georgians from foreign criminals", *Info9,* February 9, 2018 https://bit.ly/326Zohh

56 "Bregadze: In case of my presidency, LGBT propaganda will be prohibited", *Metronome.ge,* April 18, 2018, https://metronome.ge/story/143653

57 "Bregadze: A new political movement will be created, which will participate in all political processes", *Interpressnews*, April 5, 2018 https://bit.ly/2LW8GH8

LGBT Issues

Statements of the Georgian March concerning LGBT+ community posted on their Facebook page provide views of the group with respect to organizing rallies, occupying public space and drug policy. The page provides Sandro Bregadze's quotes or full texts of his statements. Confrontation between the Georgian March and LGBT+ community is related to the public space and points to the important historical context.

Rustaveli [Avenue] is ours and gays are not going to hold a pride there – don't you get what is going on or are you pretending to be stupid??? What the heck they want at Rustaveli [Avenue]? (2018-05-16 7:11:43)

Even though this statement is dated 16 May 2018,[58] its context relates to events of the 1990s and is informed by the importance of Rustaveli Avenue, as a public space, acquired by these very events: this is the site of the tragedy of 9 April 1989 and the place where the act of Georgian independence was announced to the public in 1991. There are also a series of other significant political events that are associated with this place. Bregadze refers to the Parliament as the "Government's Palace," a term which brings in the context of the 1990s and religion:

At Rustaveli [Avenue]??? Here, just within a stone's throw from the Government's House, they are holding a rally in parallel. What is important here is not who walks on Rustaveli [Avenue], but the fact that on the day of holiness of the family that the Church established, they are staging a gay rally thus putting the two in the same space. (2018-05-16 7:11:43)

On 17 May 2013, a year after a violent dispersal of a peaceful demonstration celebrating the International Day Against Homophobia and Transphobia, the Georgian Patriarchy offered to establish a Family Holiness Day. The content of a statement released by the Georgian March on 16 May 2018 is based on the recollection of the historical significance of the area around the Parliament of Georgia, which allows the author to manipulate with the historical memory. Members of the Georgian March call themselves "national leaders". The same term is used while referring to the leaders of dissident "National Movement" of the 1980-1990s. Importantly, the National Movement is associated with the restoration of Georgia's independence and the fight for independence in the country's recent history.

The post ends with highlighting the importance of the "center of Tbilisi":

[...] Chokhosanis [men wearing Chokha, a Georgian traditional garment for men], flag bearers and horsemen will march down Rustaveli Avenue, we will go up to the Holy Trinity Cathedral, then go home and make a toast to Georgia. At that time gay sodomites will kick off their gay-party in the center of Tbilisi and by doing this they will spit in the soul of Georgia. This is the reality!!! [...]!

The reference to "Chokosani", "flag bearers", "horsemen" serves to remind us of the past and represents a symbol of fight, victory and national unity. Therefore, activation of the collective memory, reference to the past and its comparison to the present, is mere manipulation but also a powerful narrative.

The rally of a healthier part of Georgia at Rustaveli in front of the Parliament...!!! Praise to the Lord!!! We have won!!! There is always point in fighting... ✊ ✊ ✊ ❤❤❤❤❤ ..... Georgia will never be the country of drug lords and sods! ...!!!! (2018-05-14 13:26:36)

58 "A gay pride will be held on 17 May, this is a bitter reality." *Alia.ge*, May 16, 2018 http://alia.ge/news/12880

In order to maintain peace in the country, the Georgian March will no longer hold any of the announced rallies on 17 May provided that sods will hold back from a gay-rally! we will join prayers in churches and events of the Patriarchy! If LGBTs do not accept this proposal, it will be a proof that this is a provocation and politically instigated act! All burden of responsibility will lie within organizers of this provocative rally! (2018-05-16 20:05:36)

"People are gathering at the Parliament!!! 8 leaders of the Georgian March have been arrested, and so are all national leaders because of sods!!" (2018-05-17 8:34:34)[59]

By hinting at an episode of the memory (fight for freedom or restoration of independence) the group tries to tip nationalist sentiments. LGBT+ community is positioned as a foreign, enemy and a national threat which further reinforces the fear of "degeneration."

Religion

The organization often uses religious symbols, religious dates, the Orthodox Church and the Patriarch as a means for mobilization and political legitimacy in the narrative promoted by the Facebook page.[60]

The Georgian March wishes you a happy Antipascha!!! Antipascha, Svetitskhoveli. We are stronger than we have ever been!!! (2018-04-15 7:06:30)

Sandro Bregadze quotes the Patriarch, the most influential clergy in the country[61] and use these quotes to make a reference to imprisonment of members of the organization:

The Patriarch has commended the truth when he said that Georgia is going through the hard time, something that has not happened in a very long time. Every sphere is occupied by traitors of the country. At least we have not had political prisoners but the country already has seven political prisoners, the ones who have been imprisoned for their love of God" 62 (2018-04-24 13:54:02)

The Georgian March displays its members as victims, heroes, warriors who protect their values. Fighting is an important aspect of the Georgian history whereby warriors are always right because of a natural motive of self-protection and survival. Against the backdrop of this context, Bregadze talks about groups confronting the "national narrative":

Look at TV channels – the Soviet dictatorship has been replaced by a sodomite-liberast dictatorship with TV hosts openly show undesirable respondents the door and block all access to the media. If you do not praise sods, or denounce the Church, or are not a slave to Soros, then you are not going to be allowed to voice your opinions to people.

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59 All three quotes have been copied from the Facebook page administered by the Georgian March. The statements concern rallies held aftermath a raid conducted by special task squad in the Basiani and Gallery clubs.; Additional police units were deployed at Basiani." *Netgazeti*, May 12, 2018 http://netgazeti.ge/news/275986/

60 " Who was in and who was out in Tbilisi's far-right March of Georgians [Analysis]," *OC Media,* https://bit.ly/2HH0mIN

61 "Institutions with the highest performance ranking are the Orthodox Church (61 per cent), public service halls (59 per cent), and the army (55 per cent)" NDI Political Poll, 2018 https://bit.ly/2HsbcmA

62 On 19 March 2019, members of the Georgian March organized a rally at TV company Rustavi-2. They argued that a TV host Giorgi Gabunia, while talking about the crucifixion of Jesus Chris in his show P.S. insulted religious feelings of believers. Members of the rally sieged Gabunia's vehicle and verbally insulted the TV host. As a result of the incident, the Ministry of Interior detained six members of the Georgian March. "Six detained after assault on Rustavi 2 TV journalists." https://old.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=30963&search=

They make a traitor out of a hero, turn an honest man into a scoundrel, smear a human loving person as a homophobe and with audacity that is unheard of, will announce the white as the black. (2018-04-24 13:54:02)

The Georgian March creates an image of an enemy from LGBT+ community, media and some of the NGOs.[63] In their narrative liberal values contradict religion and benevolence. Bregadze's statements are populist in what he criticizes rich elites which are compared to "simple people."

On the other hand, the class of the spoiled – collective Saganelidzes – instill false fears among the public that if they raise their voice, destabilization will ensue and the country will sink into an eternal chaos. But who needs the stability of this bog??? Only the sated class who live a happy life, who sucks on our blood every single day making themselves voraciously rich but would not even spare us a crust. Stability brings nothing to the poor. The poor are hungry today and will be hungry tomorrow. But if they raise their voice, they may put hunger to an end. But the sated are still out telling them off raising concerns to keep the stability! Do not utter a word!!! Sadly, the subjugated are forced to put up with living in a bog and be hungry with the hope that the collective Saganelidze becomes kind one day and throws something at the mercy. (2018-04-24 13:54:02)

The statement criticizes all governments but one of Gamsakhurdia because of their liberal ideology. Bregadze ends the statement with an appeal and a main slogan of protest rallies of 2012: "down with the system."[64]

Appeals

The Georgian March often post various political and civic appeals.

We hereby declare that there will be no more unrestrained rule of sods and drug lords in the center of Tbilisi. We all gather at 18.00 near the Concert Hall and march down to the Parliament!!! I call on all patriots to join us!!! (2018-05-12 16:05:06)

Everyone who think that these young people should be released from prison, like and share this photo!!!" (2018-04-26 10:26:03)

To all members of the Georgian March! We are gathering at 18.00 at Rustaveli in front of the Parliament!!! We will protest against the debasement of the sacred!!! (2018-04-19 5:05:22)

"Please share!!! Please share with everyone who supports the liberation of the innocent boys!!!" (2018-04-18 8:12:48)

We call on all patriotic forces, all Georgians who still believe in and cherish fairness, dignity and loyalty to God, those for whom "homeland, language and faith" are still the sacred holy trinity, join us in protecting our national dignity and Orthodox faith that is in our genetic code that ancestors granted us! Sorosism is not to win in Georgia! Only the national idea will flourish in Georgia! Freedom to political prisoners! Georgian for Georgia! God is with us! (2018-04-30 14:34:21)

63 Most of ultranationalist organizations are registered as "non-governmental organization"

64 Eka Kevanishvili, "Down with the system" -Student's slogan," *Radio Liberty*, September 24, 2012. https://bit.ly/2MCV0Tx

During the research, the Facebook page of the Georgian March was closed or inaccessible on several occasions. Posted statements are written in a radical language and set in an ambiguous context. Posts may be divided into two main categories: posts about ongoing events and developments fall under the first category, while the comparison of ongoing events to the past or religion which highlights the present as alarming and tragic, comprises the second category. Those who are not aware of the current developments or activities of the organization, are likely to find the context difficult to comprehend as there are numerous references to the words such as "national", "homeland", "religion" etc. The other part of the posts is meant to provoke nationalist sentiments, emotions and predispositions in readers. Therefore, posts create an impression that any piece of information may be deemed trustworthy for the audience because of this very vocabulary.

In November 2017, the leader of the Georgian March released information about the upcoming closure of the organization:

"I believe that the society which deserves Bokeria, Gvaramia, the Republican Party and others like them, does not deserve the Georgian March. Therefore, the Georgian March must shut down. I see no point in the organization to continue its functioning. I will raise this issue, but everyone should decide on what action to take. If the March remains, I will opt out." [65]

In April 2019 the information was released on creating a new "movement of right-wing nationalist ideology" with a working title "the National Front" on the base of the Georgian March, the Civic Group of Army Control, the Nationalists movement and several other public organizations.[66]

The Georgian Power

The Georgian Power got registered as a noncommercial legal body on 24 July 2015. After six months, on 8 December 2015, the organization fell apart.[67] However, some members continue their activities in both virtual and physical space. Currently the Georgian Power runs three Facebook pages.

One of the leaders of the Georgian Power was a member of the National Front until 2015. According to the charter of the organization, their key priorities are to "contribute to the preservation of national consciousness, uniqueness, and independence among Georgians residing abroad, deepen the latter's ties with their homeland and prepare grounds for their return to Georgia." [68]

According to the information about the Georgian Power available on their Facebook page, the Georgian Power is a "right-wing nationalist/conservative platform." The page also contains more than 500 photos and memes. The information available on the Facebook page can be divided into three main categories: texts, photos and video materials.

Members of the National Power are young people who often use memes, an important characteristic of the Internet pop-culture on the group's Facebook page. Through the page the group members express their views with

65 "The Georgian March first appeared in the public space in 2017,"*Imedianews*, 15 November, 2015 https://bit.ly/30huot9

66 An organization titled the National Front has been functioning since 2013

67 This process was triggered by confrontations and conflicts with other organizations

68 Excerpt from the registry of commercial and noncommercial legal bodies. Application N1007890, registration NB15153547

regards to feminism, LGBT+ community, historical context, military history and migrants. The use of non-normative language, ironic and cynical expressions and visual materials distinguish the group from other nationalist groups and organizations. In addition, the Georgian Power seems to have no preferences with respect to any political party. They criticize governments and political parties for their liberal ideology.

Activities of the Georgian Power in the public spaces are limited to protest rallies[69] while the group demonstrates no intention to get involved in institutional, parliamentary or law-making processes. Demands voiced by the Georgian Power concern the construction of monuments of historical figures, regulation of migration and celebration of symbolic dates. Demonstrations held by the group contain elements of performance as its members often wear military garments and ski masks. Members also chant during demonstrations. Video and photo materials pertaining the demonstrations of the group are important as they are uploaded to the Facebook page as a continuation of digital performance.

Women/Feminism

In their Facebook narrative the Georgian Power create two dichotomous categories with respect to feminism and women: 'the beautiful' and 'the ugly.' Feminist women are displayed as "ugly" while non-feminist women are portrayed as having beautiful bodies and being in harmony with nature. In support of this narrative, the group uses contrast photos of "beautiful" (slim, blond) and "ugly" (obese, with short haircut) women.

"Marxist feminist women full of complexes against private property and men v. strong, beautiful, educated nationalist girl with conservative values." (2018-05-29 10:20:13)

The Georgian Power also uses a hashtag #ფემინიზმიკიბოა which is a Georgian translation of the expression "Feminism is cancer" and relates to third wave feminism. The group slams the right to abortion and creates an impression as if animal rights are more important for feminists than human rights. In addition, feminist and "beautiful non-feminist" women have dissenting attitudes towards abortion (a photo of a good-looking woman with a caption "she has had no abortion. #fourteenwords and that of a "pro-murder" women). The Georgian power believes that feminists choose to remain silent about gender-based abortion:

"Killing an unborn child without any reason is the right and progress. They talk about women's rights but say nothing about those 20,000 girls who are killed unborn just because they are girls, not boys. This example alone will suffice for us to see how honest they are. They only talk about freedom but the minute you start arguing they never start looking for answers! Sexist, homophobic, racist! But you must know that a nationalist (both men and women) is much more emancipated, independent and a powerful citizen!" (2017-11-19 11:03:57)

Many of the group's posts focus on women's looks. Georgian women are often posed against the background of nature in the mountains, with a headscarf, long hair or a plait to create an image of a noble woman. Such photos are often accompanied with poems or excerpts from various literary works. Together with feminine traits, the Georgian Power highlights strength and bravery of the Georgian woman (photos of women boxers or fighters are usually provided as visual proof of the above).

69 The group organized rallies to promote various issues. They first appeared in the public space in Batumi followed by a rally in Tbilisi on the day of Sokhumi's fall (29.09/2015), a rally to voice a demand for the construction of a monument of Giorgi Mazniashvili (29/11/2018), a demonstration against accepting migrants displaced as a result of the war in Syria (3/04/2016), a rally on the day of holiness of family in Batumi, Adjara (17/05/2016).

"A new uniform of the wrestler Liana Jojua. We published a video about this girl long before she became popular :) #ძალა (power)." (2018-03-05 16:04:35)

"Are you seriously saying that there is not a single good Georgian girl left? And that there is no point as everyone will just get blended with a nigger or a Mongol? That is how you are going to justify you sitting around doing nothing? Surely there are still maidens in Iberia, there is a girl out there somewhere waiting for you, who will happily reproduce your genetics, to be your friend and comrade-in-arms. You need to fight for this. Get yourself to fight, don't nag that the world has become so dirty that there is nobody to understand such a pure and creative person as you are." (2018-04-08 1:00:01)

The Recent History, Heroes and Collective Memory

The cult of ancestors is the most powerful and most legitimate of all cults as our ancestors made us what we are. Heroic past, great personalities – this is the social capital that our national identity and the national idea are based on, says Homi Bhabha, a literary and cultural critic.

With this respect, the Internet group creates its own historical narrative based on shared and consented imaginations of ancestral origin and the past. These very imaginations help a group to stress their uniqueness and claim historical supremacy over other groups.

The Facebook page of Georgian Power also serves as a space for creating a collective memory and a biography by offering stories about participants of various wars or heroes survived in oral traditions.

"In this photo Tsitrusa and Tsuga are on the Abkhaz front, on the Georgian soil. I wonder what kind of Georgia this Georgian boy fought and died for? Who we pay greater attention: to those who returned from the war or the trans? Let's think about it. Good morning!" (2017-12-14 23:56:20)

"Zurab Iarajuli. A photo just before his last exhibition. His life was claimed by Apsua brothers. But they are Caucasians and we must love his killers! Let's be tolerant to the very end." (2018-01-13 13:54:04)

Texts contain sentiments about Abkhazia, for example, by re-posting a status of a veteran of the Abkhaz war and an accompanying interpretation by the Georgian Power:

"I fell asleep at dawn … I was in Akhali Atoni… I met Guguta Malania, I did not meet him – he was there at an easel… he was painting with a simple pencil, but the colors were the most beautiful… yet the pencil he was painting with was of the simplest type… as if I was hurrying… I did not have my arm weapon with me and I was worried thinking where I had left it… I woke up heartborken" – I saw this status about 10 hours ago at a profile of Zaza Davladze, a veteran of the war with Abkhazia. We are still dreaming of our land but the time will come when we will dance on the corpses of Apsuas and Ossetians. (2017-12-01 13:38:27)

On 27 September Facebook page administrators and members of the group gathered at Rustaveli Avenue to mark the anniversary of the fall of Sokhumi. For the past few years, the Internet has been used to symbolize the date.

In order to create a new type of narrative, the Facebook page resorts to the recent past, especially the events, characters and dates of the 1990s with Zviad Gamsakhurdia being the only president to whom the group gives credit. Gamsakhurdia is praised as "as the president who brought freedom." A calendar of the Georgian Power highlights important dates: the establishment of the National Guard, Independence Day, the fall of Sokhumi, the Army Day.

"What do I mean when I say that we lack principles? We killed the president who gave us freedom, then we elected his killer, and then the children of the killer, then the benefactor of these children and the killer, and then this dough-man to appease this benefactor. Everyone is going to use us as a doormat unless we are clear what our values are." [2017-12-07 12:45:49]
"1956… Zviad Gamsakhurdia with friends putting up pamphlets condemning a bloody intervention by the Soviet army in Hungary". [2018-05-28 9:25:48]

"If you are in a celebratory mood, then celebrate, or shut up. Even the Independence Day cannot be celebrated without excessive doublespeaking and philosophy. Everyone suddenly is wise. We can see our situation very well, but today is the day of joy and of rethinking our potential! Once again, congratulations to all!" [2018-05-26 12:26:30]

"On 20 December 1990 the Georgian National Guard was founded. I wish the National Guard to rise to the most powerful and elite division". [2017-12-20 1:49:33]

"On 23 December 1991 a civil war broke out in Georgia which ended with expulsion and death of Zviad Gamsakhurdia. Since then the country has been governed by the Citizens' Union". [2017-12-22 12:30:46]

World history, Attitude Towards the Fascist Germany

Looking for possible connections with the fascist Germany is an important narrative promoted by the group. Hitler is depicted as a supporter to Georgia's territorial integrity during wars and insurrections at the onset of the 20th century.

"Hitler is said to have brought in Noe Zhordania and asked to contour the map: 'we have no clue where Nikopsia and Darubandi are. We want to set up a reichskommissariat in Tbilisi with Arno Schiskedanz as its chief. It happens that he does not know the borders either.' Noe looked around, composed himself and uttered: 'Here are Nikopsia and Darubandi (see the map) ...' 'All right,' – said Hitler. 'Thank you very much.' Some still believe Stalin gave lands to Georgia… God save us…

Gravestones of Georgian nationalists, a gruppenführer Ivan Sanodze (1919-1945) and a private Giorgi Samadashvili (1920-1945). They were Wehrmacht volunteers" [2017-12-06 14:26:30]

World History and International Context: Stalin vs. Hitler

The importance of world history in the context of Georgia is manifested in Stalin-Hitler dichotomy – which one was 'uglier' and which one brought greater damage to Georgia? In the group's view, it was Stalin who "killed our grandfathers."

"Hitler killed our grandfathers and that is why the son of bitch is rotting in hell. Stalin also killed our grandfathers, but, what we can do – the time was bad. God bless his soul. He was a saint!" [2017-12-05 2:48:25]

Migration/Rights of Foreign Nationals

In December 2016 the Georgian Power and other ultranationalist groups (Edelweiss, Ultras) organized a rally against Georgia's accepting foreign refugees.[70] The main slogans of the rally were "Refugees not welcome"; "Glory to the Nation, Death to the Enemy!"[71]

Several speakers at the rally noted that they are against foreign refugees in Georgia and support local refugees/internally displaced persons. Members of the rally collected clothes to donate to internally displaced persons in Georgia.

Immigration policy, restricting citizenship rights to foreign nationals, and selling land for agriculture have been widely discussed in political or public circles for the past few years. These discussions often take place against the backdrop of anti-Muslim sentiments reinforced by terrorism threats.[72]

Issues related to selling lands to foreign nationals have been manipulated by various groups in the run-up to the Presidential elections. Norms regulating selling and acquisition of lands have gone through a series of changes since 2011. Pursuant to new constitutional changes which took effect on 16 December 2018, agricultural land is now qualified as a "resource of particular significance." These changes restrict property rights for foreign nationals.

Georgian Power occasionally shares information about legislative initiatives of Emzar Kvitsiani, a member of the APG, and Zviad Tomaradze, a director at Georgian Demographic Society 21, in order to demonstrate their support.

For instance, as a result of amendments to the Organic Law of Georgia on the Georgian Citizenship taking effect on 21 July 2018 rules for granting Georgian citizenship have become much harsher with the period of lawful permanent residency extending from five to ten years. The amendments were initiated by the Legal Committee of the Parliament of Georgia. However, the need for similar changes for "improving demographic situation" had been voiced by Emzar Kvitsiani and Zviad Tomaradze (07-3/88, 05.09.2017): *"Georgia, as part of the universe belongs to the Georgian nation as part of humankind. Therefore, there is a need for important changes in the legislation so that Georgians do not become minority in Georgia",* – an explanatory note to the proposed amendments read.[73] In 2018 Kvitsiani withdrew his bill as the legislative changes covered some of his suggestions.

The Georgian Power shared a status posted by Tomaradze (the author of the bill):

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70 "As of today, there are around 1400 asylum seekers in Georgia. In 1999 Georgia joined the 1951 Geneva Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and took the responsibility to protect asylum seekers, refugees and persons with humanitarian status," *Netgazeti,* 2016 http://netgazeti.ge/news/164251/

71 The slogan is widely used at various rallies and demonstrations organized by nationalist and national-socialist groups. See https://itv.ge/?m=16&CID=52485

72 Transparency and Diversity Institute, *Racial Intolerance and Xenophobia: Rights of Foreign Nationals in Georgia (2019). Available at:* https://bit.ly/2UgyJOR

73 Parliament of Georgia, Explanatory Memo, https://info.parliament.ge/file/1/BillReviewContent/157435?

"Great news!!! Since May 30 last year Emzar Kvitsiani and I have been demanding rules for granting Georgian citizenship to foreigners to be harsher [...]
There is always a point in keeping up fighting!
Share! (2018-07-20)

Religion

Religion in the discourse of the Georgian Power is a means to draw a line between 'us' and 'them.' At the same time religion serves as a route towards the Western civilization. By pointing to the role of Orthodox Christianity, the group demonstrates the affinity with Western Christian civilization and distances from Islam as historically unacceptable and 'foreign.'[74]

The Nationalists

Unlike other Facebook pages described above, the page attributed to the Nationalists no longer functions. Presumably, it was shut down as a result of multiple reports submitted by Facebook users. However, the page still managed to achieve its goal, at least to some extent; it mobilized supporters and promoted its preferred narrative throughout its existence. As the name suggests, the group members identified themselves as nationalists and patriots.

"To cut it short, this is not a page for Mishists, Bidzinists, Mkhedrioni members, liberals and LGBTs. This is a page for die hard nationalists and true patriots". [2018-05-23 16:39:58]

According to the critical discourse analysis, the main aim of the discourse is not to hold down positions at a power vertical. Therefore, a logical part of the process is not only the presence of a page but also submission of multiple reports against this very page. Both are an instrument in an information war. The first post of the Nationalists was published on 19 September 2017. When the research team started data collection, the Facebook page had 5375 likes and total of 560 posts were accessible. The page is one of many short-lived 'mushroom pages'- they are opened to actively promote narrative, draw public attention to their causes and then are blocked until other pages with similar or different names pop up again.

Reporting on and subsequent shutdown of pages promote the identity of nationalist network with other ultranationalist groups express solidarity and support to the former. They share an ideological enemy and recognize that they may be the next target.

The Nationalists often shared multimedia published by other pages with the addition of brief comments. These materials constitute the third of collected data. Texts are short with an average of 27 words each.

Posts and visual materials (photos) published on the Facebook page were grouped into thematic categories. Subsections below provide an overview of these categories based on dominant narratives.

74 Otari Kobakhidze,"*The Concept of Europe in the Narrative of Extreme-Right Nationalists during Europeanisation: a case of Georgia*" Central European University, 2017.

Migration

Migration and *racial issues* are the most prominent themes in the Nationalists' narrative. The group tended to selectively share video and photo materials depicting non-white persons in the streets of European countries. They made an emphasis on 'immoral behavior' of non-white migrants in order to strengthen sentiments about the supremacy of the white race. The content was used to warn Georgians against similar looming threats unless the migration policy changed.

"A migrant beats up a woman in Hungary. Share with everyone so that it is clear what may happen after migrants enter the country." [2018-05-08 10:11:52]
"Migrants attack the French family." [2018-05-05 8:01:24]
"Migrants' invasion in Europe and total fuss and hassle." [2018-04-26 12:57:33]
"Migrants crossing the border like jackals." [2018-04-29 4:09:39]

Ethnic Minorities

This is an arbitrary title of a category which comprise the narrative of the Nationalists with respect to Georgia's ethnic minorities and neighboring countries. The posts published on the page make negative reference to ethnic minorities. They create an impression and perception that ethnic minorities dominate over ethnic Georgians. Historical experience of conflicts and confrontations happening at different times with neighboring countries further reinforces the perception of looming threats by alienated groups. For instance, Muslim citizens of Georgia residing in Achara are often posed as threats accompanied by Turkophobic statements. Armenophobic texts were also found at the data collection stage.

"Threats voiced by Turks in the background of the Ottoman anthem from Batumi – "Georgia, we are already here striding on the land of the ancestors." [2018-03-27 7:05:49]

"Armenia – one of the most disgusting nations (most of them – we do not mean all of them.) You should know that this nation is not our friend, they just want to hang out with us because every single food item is delivered to them via us – they have no other way for this. Georgia can block the roads and devote them to destruction. Imagine for just a minute what they would have done if they were us: they would have blocked them and made us pay for this. In general Armenians do not like any other nation but Georgians are 99% one of the most hated nations. The reason is that we have the sea, mountains, forests, rivers and many other things that they do not have. They pretend as if they stand by us, but whenever an opportunity arises, they will be against us 99%." [2018-05-26 13:11:26]

The page of the Nationalists repeatedly stresses and reminds the public of Russia's occupation of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali region. At the same time, the group denies accusations of alleged funding that they receive from Russia. The Nationalists also believe that Hereti and Lazeti are occupied territories just like Abkhazia and Tskhinvali region.

"When Samachablo and Abkhazia are occupied, when Hereti is seized, when Lore and Lazeti are seized, when wishes of drug addicts are immediately fulfilled, when some Iranians have more rights in Georgia than Georgians, when abortion is allowed, when marijuana is allowed, when people get arrested as if they were mad dogs, when red and blue colors instill fear rather than provide sense of security, when even a police officer treats you unfairly, I think it is time to stand together". [2018-05-31 7:21:42]

Identity

The identity of the Georgian nation is an important issue for the Nationalists. Their posts contain heroic ballads, exemplary behaviors, and myths about uniqueness of Georgians. Many of them also aim to illustrate social and political degradation as well as abasement of values. Liberal ideology is posed as the deadliest threat to the Georgian identity.

"When the Lord was distributing the earth among peoples, Georgians ran late. Everything had already been divided. The Lord asked them why they had been late. Georgians explained that they grew hungry on their way, ate some bread and raised a toast to the glory of the Lord. The Lord loved what Georgians had to say: I was going to keep a small garden of Eden to myself but I am going to give it to you so that you can take care of it and praise me. This beautiful place today is called Georgia." [2018-05-28 7:40:06]

"Future generations must be raised in a way that they are absolutely sure of the greatness and strength of their nation. They must be raised on examples set by our heroes and great rulers. Every Georgian must fathom the true meaning of history and know who the real enemies are." [2018-04-30 5:37:23]

LGBT Issues

Polarization becomes evident when it comes to discussing issues being in the focus of the public. The analysis of other pages has revealed that liberal values, feminism and LGBT+ rights are discussed in an extremely negative context. The Nationalists seem to pay little attention to feminism, while LGBT+ issues, on the other hand, seem to be much more topical to the group members who believe that LGBT+ persons are not members of the Georgian society.

"17 May 2013 – the day when the Georgian nation was an example of unanimity by f%$£g off Soros followers sick with liberalism." [2018-04-30 12:43:50]

"People in the past did not really fought for immorality. "They were simply executed." This country is preserved only for those who respect traditions, love their country and will protect it, those who are either men or women as they should be." [2018-05-31 3:02:30]

Appeals

Posts published by the Nationalists often contained appeals for awakening and mobilization against a common enemy.

"These drug addicts are standing on the 9 April Memorial. Come to the Paitchadze Monument at Dinamo Arena at 15:00 tomorrow to protest against all this together. We are not going to be beaten by drug addicts and LGBTs." [2018-05-12 14:28:16]

"We call on everyone to stand together under the same idea so that we destroy this obscenity and sodomic order once and for all in our country. We must destroy it because this is the country of David and Tamar, because we have children growing up, because we have dignity and honor, and finally because we are Georgians and therefore Caucasians. We rely on you on 17 May. Here is an action plan. Now is the time for you to act!!!!" [2018-05-15 13:13:23]

GLOSSARY

Not only does language highlight the culture of the group, but also it creates a framework for the cultural development. Grammar, structure, and terminology influence the way reality is perceived by users of the language (Whorf 1956). Definitions of the terms below are our version of meanings. We hope that our interpretation is as close to the source as possible.

The preliminary analysis of the texts showed the need for a glossary of terms which would also help researchers and readers to have a better understanding of the logic of the content as well as of the context. Social groups are characterised by elements of communications which can be fully comprehended only by the member of this particular group. The presence of a shared language is one of the most important indicators of shared culture (Kuipers 2014). A distinct language is a symbol of delimitation from other social subjects. At the same time, it also indicates that there is a shared perception by the group members, in this particular case, this is a perception shared across the audience of Facebook pages. Every page studied is characterized by a unique style of communication whether it be in the form of a text or a visual material. Presumably, while working on the content, the authors hope that they will be able to deliver messages to their audience who will be able to understand the conveyed information. Not only does the language symbolize the group culture, but also it creates a framework for the development of culture. Grammar, structure and categories existing in every language, shape the perception of reality of language users (Whorf 1956). The definitions of the terms provided below are the product of our interpretation that we hope, stand close to their meaning as implied in the original source.

IDzation – *A process of replacing standard identification document with ID cards launched by the Government of Georgia. The Georgian Idea is one of the movements campaigning for an alternative of a non-electronic identification documents for Georgian citizens. Use: "The Georgian Idea supports and joins fathers of the Church and believers in their protest against the ID-zation and in demand of alternative documents! /with the Superior Zosime."*

Politikan – A person who uses politics for personal gain, a politician without morale.[75] The term is used with a derogatory connotation to describe Georgian political groups.

Blue Commissioners – According to Zneoba.ge website the European Commissioner for Enlargement Štefan Füle was nicknamed the Blue Commissioner in Moldova, a name which is reminiscent of the institute of political educators of the Red Army. The term is used to criticize EU policies and those implementing these policies.

Bariga – According to the Georgian Idea the term is a derogatory term for a drug dealer or pusher.

Defenders of Barigas – The Georgian Idea uses the term in reference to participants of a street protest at Rustavi Avenue in the wake of the special operations in Basiani and Gallery clubs on 12 May 2018.

Slaves of Kanduri – Kanduri is a fictional character of "Data Tutashkhia", a novel by Chabua Amirejibi. Kanduri was arrested for theft. Later on, serving as a chaplain at the Bishop's residence, he was engaged in activities discordant with a clergy. Use: In September 2012, an online magazine "Georgia and the World" published a letter with the heading "Bishop Kanduri", dedicated to the Poti-Khobi Bishop Grigol. The author of the letter explains

75 Samson Uridia et al, edited by Vazha Gurgenidze Public Servant's Dictionary,United Nations Development Program, . Tbilisi, 2004.

that the term is used in reference to all "evil" clergymen.[76] In this particular case, the term is used with respect to those journalists who are tasked by various members of the clergy to criticize the nephew of the Patriarch Ilia II Bishop Dimitri.

"[...] therefore, those who trigger gossip and suspicions towards Bishop Dimitri (not only corrupt journalists who are truly slaves of Kanduri)" [2017-02-22 15:29:19, The Georgian Idea]

Liberast – A term coined in the 1990s in Russia which is a combination of 'liberal' and 'pederast.' The term, which is widely used in the Internet discussions, has a negative connotation and is used with the purpose to belittle people with liberal values. According to the Russian Akademik encyclopedia, the term was coined by a Russian publicist Ilia Smirnov.[77] Use: "The First Channel, it was too soon that you have felt a liberast hand of a neo-Bolshevik Ninia Kakabadze". *[2018-04-07 8:49:05, The Georgian Idea]*

Libero-Feminism – The term is used in a negative context and refers to a conjunction of liberal and feminist movements.

Rednex/redneck – American slang to describe an uneducated, poor, white person living in the rural U.S. The terms were coined in the 19th century and its meaning varied across time and states. For instance, in North Carolina rednecks were mostly referred to white Protestants while in other states the term would be used in reference to Communists. In addition, the terms were used with respect to miners, who wore red bandanas in Virginia and Pennsylvania.

#fourteenwords/ 14/88 – "We must secure the existence of our people and a future for white children."[78] The slogan was first used by a leader of American white supremacy movement David Lane. He argued that sacred white race must be protected against extinction because of mingling with other races. 14/88 is a coded slogan whereby 14 denotes fourteen words, while 88 stands for the eighth letter of the Latin Alphabet (an abecedarium) – H. In this particular case, double H is an acronym of Heil Hitler, a Nazi salute.

76 "Bishops Kanduri are awaiting the Patriarch's demise like hyenas." http://geworld.ge/ge/9485/

77 "Liberast," Akademik https://dic.academic.ru/dic.nsf/ruwiki/98867

78 The slogan consists of 14 words.

CALENDAR

A calendar is a system for organizing days for various purposes. Historically, the calendar was related to payment of debts, amongst other events. In ancient Rome, locals would pay their debts at the beginning of each month. The introduction of the calendar has a long history, and it organized life according to religious, state (public) and personal dates. Therefore, any dates indicated in the calendar impact current social and political processes. At the same time, calendar formation is a dynamic process that reflects events that are important for a specific community. Why is the calendar necessary, and how does it impact the lives of people or societies? As the research emphasizes the most recent history of Georgia, this study provides a description of recently added holidays to the modern calendar.

This chapter of the study looks at the dates which are important to the political life of the country and are considered to be somewhat controversial. New dates appear to mark human rights, battles of religious or other social groups, and symbolic or historic moments. These groups strive for recognition, legitimation, increased influence and a place within public space or political life. Specific dates are associated with the assertion of influence by and representation of these groups. Such events could be viewed as a historical pattern, since the majority of historical dates and celebrations bear significance associated with battles, achievements, defeat, or victory. They define the identity or memory of a group, whether a social or imagined community. In Georgian context, such dates have not been assessed holistically, or the analysis is simply fragmented. Dates reviewed in this chapter may not represent public or official celebrations, but marking these dates are associated with public discussions, demonstration of power, and in some cases, the violence of one group against others. These dates and resulting events were followed by significant discussions, which have revealed sources of influence or groups left beyond the power. In the context of Georgia, given symbolic celebrations are also clearly associated with urban-geographic characteristics, more specifically, with the capital and Rustaveli Avenue, buildings of Parliament and State Chancellery, territory around Tbilisi Concert Hall and therefore, the political, economic and cultural center of the city.

National and historic dates established after Georgia reclaiming its independence – 9 April 1989 (Civic Consent and Commemoration of Victims of the Fight for Independence, Adoption of the Act of Restoration of Independence of Georgia, Day of National Unity), 26 May 1918 (Independence Day of Georgia) – are linked to common spaces. Rustaveli Avenue and the territory around the Parliament gives historic legitimation to any demands or protests and therefore, the goal of each of the groups is to fight for the given space.[79] However, establishment of the new calendar does not consider this approach, since it is a subject for wider and historic study.

The present study looks at the process of adoption, recognition and marking dates of the newest calendar. Who introduces these dates, when, and against whom? To answer these questions, several dates should be recalled and aligned in a timeline.

79 Eka Chitanava and Katie Sartania, "Public Space: The Battleground in the Revanchist City." July 18, 2018 https://bit.ly/2NChlf6

International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia (IDAHO) – May 17

International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia was first commemorated in Georgia on 17 May 2011.[80] This date marks the World Health Organization's decision in 1990 to remove homosexuality from the International Classification of Diseases. On this day in 2012, there was a demonstration in Tbilisi. As the members of the demonstration were marching down Rustaveli Avenue, the route was cut off by members of Union of Orthodox Parents and Union of Vakhtang Gorgasali.[81] Some Orthodox clergy also participated in the blockage. In 2013, marking the date was followed by a violent counter-demonstration of Orthodox clergy and their supporters. LGBT+ persons, human rights activists and their supporters left Rustaveli Avenue with busses and under the protection of police cordons.

Day of Family Purity and Respect for Parents in Georgia – May 17

Since 17 May 2014, Day of Family Purity and Respect for Parents has been marked in Georgia. This celebration was initiated by the Patriarch of Georgia, Ilia II.[82] Every year on this date since 2013, Orthodox clergy and their parishioners organize a walk from Rose Revolution Square to Holy Trinity Cathedral. During the march, participants pass the site, where on the same day of 2013, the Day against Transphobia and Biphobia was dispersed, as a result of attack from the counter demonstration. In 2014, on Family Purity Day, participants demanded that "gender identity" and "sexual orientation" be removed from the anti-discrimination law of Georgia. [83]

On 17 May 2016, Demographic Society XXI and Levan Vasadze, chair of the Board hosted a World Family Congress. Within the framework of the congress and the celebration, the Atskuri icon of Virgin Mary preceded the walk from Rose Revolution Square to Holy Trinity cathedral. Patriarch Ilia II met the participants in the Cathedral and held a service. [84]

National Costume Day – May 18

Since 2016, an initiative group has been trying to announce May 18 as a National Costume Day and an official public holiday. The group collected signatures to submit to the parliament. The main goal of the celebration is to "promote Georgian culture,"[85] which will "attract tourists and revive traditions." According to one of the organizers, the date was selected with respect to the day of political independence: "May 18 is only a week apart from May 26, Independence Day of Georgia, and most importantly, it is an International Day of Museums."

Co-organizers of the National Costume Day are "Shavparosnebi" ("Carriers of Black Shields")`[86] and Georgian Martial Arts Federation (founded in 2011, although existing since 2000 as Georgian Martial Arts). The website of

80 Facebook page of Equality Movement/თანასწორობის მოძრაობა, 2011 https://bit.ly/32nGN0z

81 Radio Liberty "Confrontation during demonstration on the day of combating homophobia", May 17, 2012 https://bit.ly/2QxkwYK .

82 Youtube Channel of Orthodox Videos, "Sermon of the Patriarch 17.05.2014 (Day for family unity and respect for parents)." May 17, 2014 https://bit.ly/2XFw579

83 Netgazeti, "Parade of priests and parish", May 17, 2014 http://netgazeti.ge/news/31797/

84 YouTube Channel of Georgian Broadcaster , "May 17 is the day for family unity and respect for parents in Georgia" 17 May 2016 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mp6cR1daLds

85 Palitra Kviris, "National Costume Day – a new celebration," https://bit.ly/2NDzgHM

86 Ambion, "Black Shields – warriors distinct with war techniques," 24 November, 2011 http://www.ambioni.ge/savfarosnebi

the Georgian National Tourism Association states that National Costume Day is celebrated in over 20 towns of Georgia, within the framework of Check-in Georgia campaign.[87]

Didgori Day (Didgoroba) – August 12

On the internet, it is reported that August 12 has been celebrated as Didgori Day since 2011. The organizers of the event are Regional Administration of Kvemo Kartli and Tetritskaro Municipality.[88] This is a public celebration that marks Georgia's victory in the Didgori Battle of 1121[89]. Members of the Parliament, Emzar Kvitsiani and Nukri Kantaria attempted to make a celebration a public holiday. At the same time, a group of ultranationalists arranged a walk on Agmashenebeli Avenue to mark Didgoroba on 12 August 2018.

Day of Fall of Sokhumi -September 27

The day is linked to the war in Abkhazia and events of 1993. On 27 September 2015 ultranationalist groups organized a walk on Aghmashenebeli Avenue with the slogan "Glory to the Nation, Death to the Enemy."[9091]

Queen Tamar's Day (Tamaroba) – May 14

Tamaroba is marked on 14 May and is linked to Queen Tamar. She was canonized as a saint by the Georgian Orthodox Church and therefore, May 14 is a religious day. The date first appeared on the calendar in 1917, after Georgian Orthodox Church regained its autocephaly. However, during the "Bassiani events" of 12-13 May 2018, the Georgian March tried to use the day of commemorating Queen Tamar to occupy the public space on May 14, which had already been taken by another group.[92]

The holidays listed above, including their symbolic meanings, dates, geographic locations of marking these days indicate efforts of the groups to gain domination over public spaces where they could talk on behalf of Georgian people, history, ancestors, national values or religion. Efforts of the groups (intuitive, informal, symbolic) to create their own holidays or attach symbolic meaning to dates of significance within the collective memory are indicative of their attempts to shape a new culture based on their narratives.

Newly established or re-activated holidays are linked to religious or historical dates. The Day for Family Purity and Respect for Parents was established in Georgia after the violent events of 17 May 2013, following the initiative of the Orthodox Church of Georgia. Tamaroba was used by the Georgian March after a violent dispersal of Bassiani Club on 12-13 May 2018 to give sacred connotation to their gathering. National Costume Day, May 18,

87 National Tourism Administration of Georgia, "National Costume Day," https://gnta.ge/ge/8413/.

88 Ambebi.ge "Didgoroba is marked today," 12 July, 2011 https://bit.ly/2L7giqZ

89 According to Georgian historical accounts, The Battle of Didgori was fought between the armies of the Kingdom of Georgia and the Great Seljuq Empire on August 12, 1121. The Seljuq was unable to maneuver, and suffered a defeat due to King David IV of Georgia's effective military tactics.

90 Voice of America, "March of neo-Nazis in Tbilisi using white nationalism symbols," 28 September, 2016 https://bit.ly/329VXX7

91 Youtube Channel of Reg TV ,"Glory to the Nation, Death to Enemy", 30 September, 2016 https://bit.ly/2Jxggqg

92 "On May 14, May 18, people and clergy will step out at the Concert Hall and fill out the whole of Rustaveli Avenue all the way to the Freedom Square, to mark Tamaroba, holiday of St. Queen Tamar!" says the statement. https://bit.ly/2XMKCOt

is more of a cultural and economic importance, where the State and the National Tourism Agency are engaged as organizers. The holiday promotes national cultural traditions and values. Didgori Day has been celebrated in Georgia for a long time now. The latest emphasis on this day is linked to the initiative of the members of the Parliament to announce the day as an official public holiday. September 27, the anniversary of the Fall of Sokhumi is marked by some social groups including those with ultranationalist inclination who organize a march on Rustaveli or Agmashenebeli Avenue. Use of dates in the politics of memory is aimed to interpret events (Verovšek, 2016). Influencing the calendar is a process of "conquering hearts and mind", which, in turn, is linked to the fight for finding a place in the power structure. By opposing new dates, power groups participating in calendar politics, try to revitalize the old and create new holidays, speak on behalf of the nation and national values. They become exclusive respondents to the question: who are we?

The Day of Allotment to Mother Mary[93] – May 12

Following an initiative of the Patriarchate of Georgia,[94] on 8 May 2019, resorting to a summary procedure during an extraordinary session, [95] the Parliament of Georgia announced May 12 as the day to mark the Day of Allotment to Mother Mary[96] and allocated up to 900,000 GEL from the state budget to organize various activities.[97] According to one of the resolutions of the government, the action plan for implementing activities for the celebration was approved, according to which lectures, literary evenings, conferences, movie screenings, plays, folklore concerts were planned in Tbilisi as well as in the regions. Respective amendments to the Labor Code of Georgia was approved by 96 to 0 votes.[98] Prior to this initiative, May 12 was already a public holiday – the day of St. Andrew.

The majority of the above-described dates are linked to the religion, while in terms of the calendar – spring and summer seasons.

93 Lomsadze, Giorgi., "In times of trouble, the Georgian government turns to Mother Mary," Eurasianet, May 29, 2018 https://bit.ly/2JFsmMP

94 TV Pirveli, "The Parliament of Georgia announced May 12 as the day to mark St. The Day of Allotment to Mother Mary", 28 December, 2018, https://bit.ly/2K56dKA

95 The Parliament of Georgia, Parliament held an extraordinary session, 6 May, 2019 https://bit.ly/30mg4zU

96 Liberali, "the Parliament of Georgia announced May 12 as the day to mark St. The Day of Allotment to Mother Mary", 8 May, 2019 https://bit.ly/2Xu1Klt

97 Tabula, "the Parliament of Georgia announced May 12 as the day to mark St. The Day of Allotment to Mother Mary and allocated up to 900,000 GEL from the state budget to organize various activities", 10 May, 2019 https://bit.ly/2XuqKiU

98 TV Pirveli, "May 12 was announced as the day of St. Mary's Patronage over Georgia, and was established as a national holiday,"28 December, 2018 https://bit.ly/2K56dKA

INTERNET CULTURE AND MEMES

The Internet has changed the ways and methods of social mobilization. The dynamic nature of unfolding political processes in 2010 and 2011 created an environment in which the internet became more influential. From the Arab Spring to the Occupy Wall Street movement, the Internet was a promising space to grow grassroots movements, as it provided a horizontal space without the need for leadership. Images of the protests – squares and public spaces full of people – quickly went viral around the world. Intensive coverage of events and rapid distribution of information inspired hopes that the digital future would bring equality, democracy and openness through technology, and would result in people being more connected.

What Is a Meme?

A meme is a visual material characteristic of Internet culture, which contains an image, text, and a collage of various symbols. A meme could be anything that has the capacity for copying, mimicking, symbolizing, or adding meaning without changing the main content and a message.

Memes differ in genre, content and style. The main language of memes is humor, irony and cynicism. Memes tell stories using symbols. In some cases, one meme combines several stories, which may be from different times, far from historic or cultural contexts. These stories may end up in the same meme due to irony, cynicism or the absurd. Memes have no single specific author. They become authorless and public after going viral, as they can be changed, imitated, added and expanded by anyone. Due to such characteristics, memes seem democratic. However, as they tend to maintain the main idea, memes are in fact structurally autocratic (Stepka Hristova, 2014).[99] For example, if a meme is created to mock any social group, any further changes and additions only strengthen and expand it, without changing the primary content.

In the digital cultural war (Angela Nagle, 2017) ultranationalist groups have taken a lead in using memes. Nagle associates this with the onset of presidency of Trump and several American webpages.[100]

The attractiveness of memes is the fun, anonymity, humor, irony and sense of belonging to a group whose members can understand coded content shared within memes. In 1976 Richard Dawkins used the term "meme" to describe imitation, which brings together different cultural elements. Content of memes often carries several messages, distinct from each other.

Memes: Georgian Power

Memes appearing in the Georgian internet space are not unique. Memes created by ultranationalist groups follow the pattern of those found in the global network. Their content pertains to the local context and serves to degrade roles of women and glorify Georgian men, mock the LGBT+ community and feminists, female pol-

99 Stefka Hristova, "*Visual Memes as Neutralizers of Political Dissent*", *TripleC*, 21 March, 2014 https://bit.ly/32n7SkC

100 4chan is an English-language internet platform that was established in 2003 to upload photos. The page is associated with internet subcultures and anonymous groups, including far right nationalist groups. The purpose of the group is to promote meme culture.

iticians, promote racist and anti-Islamic attitudes, romanticize Georgian nature, and battle episodes from the Georgian history.

The Georgian Power uses three Facebook pages to promote memes. One of them is an official page, while the other two are used to multiply the content produced by the official page. If the primary page is blocked, the other ones are used as backups. The meme is not unique to Georgian context, so there are versions from different cultures adapted to the Georgian context. Materials produced by the Georgian Power are under a strong influence of American ultranationalist groups and the Internet. Materials distributed by this page is also characteristic to the American context and at times, not very understandable to Georgian reality. Regardless, audience participation is still high.

Meme #1

The photo above (Meme #1) contains an American context. The Gadsden Flag is associated with 18th century colonies, with the initial slogan of Join or Die.

Unlike other Georgian internet-ultranationalist pages, the Georgian Power is distinguished by an abundance of memes. This way of strategic communication has become a signature of the group – visual communication, symbols (including a mix of cultural symbols), and (re)contextualization of current and historical events through memes – creates a context easy to share. Meme culture is already popular amongst young users, and adding the ultranationalist narrative to this particular type of culture is much easier than mobilizing supporters through the use of only textual materials.

"Media show" (Angela Nagle, 2017) evolving around memes is a global phenomenon characteristic to ultranationalist groups both in the US as well as in Europe and Georgia. Context, symbols, style, language and technique of creation of memes are different, while structure and the main messages remain the same (transgression, militarist memes, patriotic memes, conservative and ultranationalist memes). The Georgian language has difficulty adapting to the Internet terms and language, especially when English expressions, internet slang, global nationalist discourse and meme dialectics have to be translated and contextualized simultaneously.

Analysis of Memes

Based on the methodology used for the study and analysis of memes, the researchers identified several main categories, or thematic characteristics. These categories are most frequently repeated in memes of the Georgian Power. Memes proposed by the Georgian Power mainly deliver content of historic, conservative, militarist, and cultural genres, which are revealed by emphasizing Georgian ethnos, appearance, blood and nature. Militarist, 'patriotic' and conservative narratives are expressed through historical movies, photos of war participants, appearance of Georgian ethnos – photos of the 'Georgian Family', which often emphasizes ethnic and geographical belonging, for example, a Kakhetian man, a Megrelian girl, and many children.

Photos are often followed by captions and notes from the administrator, of how to understand the given photo. Such photos are characterized by ironic and humorous tone, which is filled with hatred, abusive, or xenophobic language. Such partisan commentary does not allow audience the freedom of interpretation.

The Georgian Power, 12 July 2018

Historical Remix

The flag of the first Republic of Georgia and photos of participants of the war in Abkhazia, women or children with firearms, contextualization of various historic fragments into one photo – use of hipster photo filters, blurring effects, color games, and pop-art cultural aesthetics make such photos attractive to young followers of ultranationalist culture.

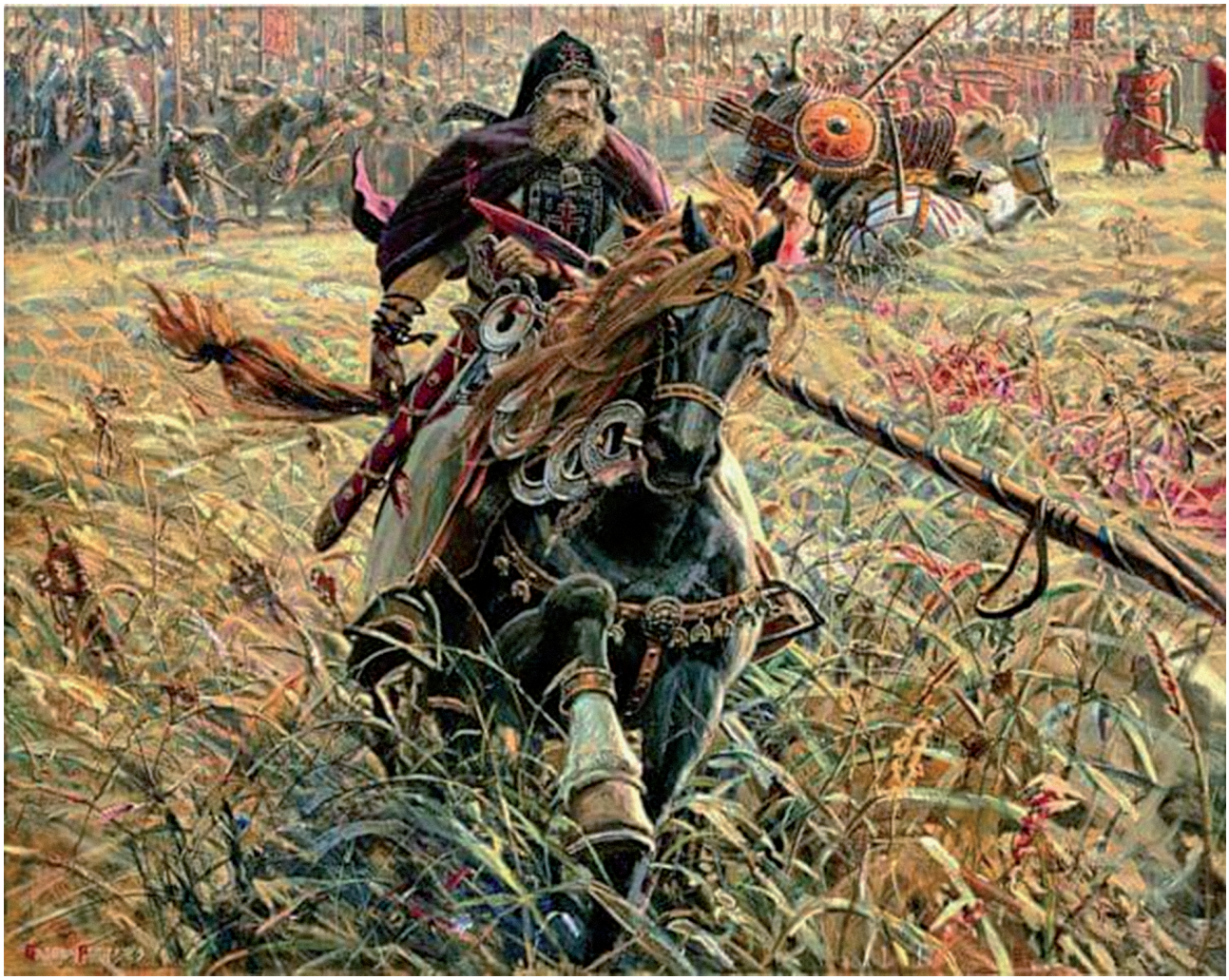

Photo #1 – Contextualized Marabda Battle

2 July 2018[101]

Photo #1 from the Facebook page of the Georgian Power, shows Battle of Marabda, held in 1625 on Marabda valley between armies of Kartli and Kakheti and Shah of Iran. The photo shows a warrior on the horse with pointing spear, on the background of armed soldiers, associated with the battlefield. The photo is processed and leaves an impression of a movie shot.

Using such emotion, modern elements, and sacred examples from the past allow connection with modernity and the content assumed in the photo becomes relevant to youth culture.

101 Ryzhenko, Ravel., "Victory of Monk Peresvet", 2005. https://bit.ly/2XsrgsF

Georgian Power, 20 June 2018

Photos of historic remixes do not stem from only the historical memory of the Georgian context. It feeds from world historic fragments. There is a frequent reference to Israeli military politics: If Georgia desires to regain lost territories Georgian authorities have to pursue similar policies. This is the narrative implied in photos of women with children and arms. On one hand, an image of a woman is a symbol for beauty, tenderness, and obedience, while on the other hand, an image of women fighting for their homeland or families is taken from movies or other sources. As a result, the youth page offers dual conceptualization of the role of a woman: a symbol of family, tenderness and beauty or the image of a militarist or nationalist woman.

Appearance of Georgians

Physical or biological characteristics and features are an important topic in memes of the Georgian Power. Photos of unknown or famous people with ethnical or racial characteristics with accompanying captions or notes often appear on the page of the group. In case of women, color of the skin, hair, eyes, and figure are highlighted alongside with either modest garment or traditional Georgian costume. Women are mostly pictured against the background of the countryside or animals, creating linkage with wild romanticism, past, and nostalgia for traditional roles of women. Memes also show comparison between urban and rural places, which presents a contrast between artificial and natural. When women are posed against the background of landscapes or villages, they are represented as a natural phenomenon.

Georgian Power, 2 October 2018

On the other hand, this category shows female human rights activists, politicians or publicly active women as ugly. The researcher of gender studies Mariam Chanchaleishvili, using examples of feminists and female politicians from Facebook discourse, argues that attempts to "uglify women" is retaliation for their disobedience. Patriarchal society constantly tries to "punish" such women, to eliminate the threat that may come from the possible loss of male privileges. According to the study, images of feminists and female politicians are built through deviation from traditionally recognized feminine nature. Feminist woman becomes unacceptable and "ugly," since she is an activist, while criticism of female politicians targets their looks, even when a discussion is about their expertise. A common strategy seen in memes is to use the photos of female human rights activists and feminists to deride their appearance. Weight, facial characteristics, style

of dress, and masculinity are all characteristics for which feminist women are called "ugly" in online spaces (Mariam Chanchaleishvili, 2016).

In case of the Georgian Power, such attitude creates a contrast with 'Georgian blood' and 'Georgian genes.' It creates an impression that a Georgian woman – her appearance, obedience and sacrifice for the family or the homeland – is unknown to feminist women. Abusive comments mocking their appearance are common as well.

The Georgian Power, 13 June 2018

At the same time, the image of a Georgian man is depicted as a warrior, father of children, and defender of the family and homeland. The page frequently publishes photos of young men with a healthy appearance, or during physical training. It often shows photos of boxers or other sportsmen succeeding in various tournaments. Photos usually show the national flag and other national symbols, which symbolize power, health, and fight. These narratives are intended to create a sense of nationalism in the audience.

Georgian Power, 22 September 2018

If the contrast to the Georgian woman is a feminist woman, the antithesis to Georgian men are young drug or alcohol users. In such interpretations, drug-using men are weak and powerless, and therefore cannot perform their main duty – protect the homeland in case of war.

Nature and Animals

Photos of nature and animals published on the page of the Georgian Power, symbolize harmony, nostalgia, land, territorial uniqueness, and the national integrity. The page often publishes photos of landscapes from different parts of Georgia stressing the superiority and uniqueness of Georgian land and people. Photos from Abkhazia also appear alongside images of mountainous regions of Georgia. The beauty of mountainous communities is accompanied by nostalgia towards deserted villages and a fear of loss of the territory.

Other Memes

Memes published by the Georgian Power contain messages that openly confront **Islam, feminism**, the **LGBT+ community, migration**, and the **EU**. Using existing cultural symbols and combination of sacred signs, these memes create a discourse according to which anything that is not militaristic or distinctly nationalist, or is divergent from the traditional roles of men and women, can be labelled as anti-national.

Racism:

Aborigine population of Australia still believe that the sun is an egg tossed into the sky; they also have an "ancient" myth about how God created camels (in reality, camels were first brought to Australia in the 1800s by white settlers). Average IQ of Australian aborigine population is 64, while it is 73 for Africans and 100 for whites.

Each person is an individual, each race has the right to existence. Each nation has the right to maintain identity.

The Georgian Power, August 14, 2018

Anti-migration narrative

12 November 2018

Translation:

Kartli, Kakheti and Imereti people, Guria and Samegrelo. Stupid xenophobe Georgians!!

Awww <3
4 Somali refugees
Diversity is our strength!

Translation:

multiculturalism: what I ordered
vs. what I received

Conclusion

Visual materials described above are based on the photos published by only one group – the Georgian Power and, obviously, this limits the possibility to generalize conclusions. However, certain patterns can still be identified.

Meme culture is becoming more popular: sharing information through memes is simple, since one photo may contain several messages, using a combination of visual materials and ironic or humorous content, making it easy to understand and remember. "Those laughing at these memes partially share its content," says the German "Guidelines for Media Partisans," providing a useful description of the goal of ultranationalist memes and describing its content. Irony and humor are the main tools for ultranationalist media memers. Ultranationalist groups use postmodern aesthetics to connect historical narrative to the modern style and ensure aesthetic appeal of militarist, nationalist and racist attitudes, and their entrenchment through humor. In Georgian context, memes create ambiguity mixing eras, countries, and phenomena, while it remains strict about the narrative.

While other Georgian ultranationalist pages usually transform fears into anger, ultranationalist meme culture transforms fear into humor, cynicism, and irony and thus tries to fight off the fear. It tries to mock sources of fear and threats of destruction. Therefore, a new, group identity is created, where the young ultranationalist is not an angry Georgian but rather, an online culture savvy Internet partisan enthusiast whose main weapon is hate and cynical language expressed through memes.

INTERPRETATION AND ANALYSIS

Theoretical Framework

The methodology for the given analysis which revolved around processing text to address the research problem and its goals was based on critical discourse analysis (CDA) (Van Dijk 1993; Chouliaraki & Fairclough 1999). We can identify three main stages of analysis here: text analysis (1); text production process analysis (2); and sociocultural context analysis (3). Social processes can be viewed as interactions between three levels of social reality: social structures, practice, and events. Social practice ensures mediation between general or abstract social structures and specific social phenomena (Chouliaraki & Fairclough 1999). This enables the identification, description, and explanation of hidden power struggles in the text (Van Dijk 1993; Van Dijk 2012) at both macro and micro levels. 'Fighting' for example, carries two main connotations. On the one hand, it refers to a struggle for space in politics and, on the other hand, it refers to a struggle for values. In this case, the focus of the study is on bringing together existing cultural values and historic fragments, and presenting them as the national, universal, and true discourse. In the process, cultural values are linked with historic fragments and are strengthened with irrational characteristics like "Georgian blood," "Georgian soul," or "Georgian genes." Finally, this form of cultural conservatism takes on populist dimensions, since it offers nothing other than speaking on behalf of 'ordinary people.'

From a sociological point of view, discourse comprises any practice that individuals use to assign meaning to social reality. Therefore, discourse has a broad meaning; it is a social process with text being just one of its many instruments. At the same time, any practice or social item can, ultimately, be written about and turned into a text.

For the purpose of the present study, the emphasis is placed on spontaneous discourse as the authors created their discourse naturally, without any awareness that this discourse would become the subject of a study.

To understand the narratives described in this study we used a theoretical framework of mediatization. The Facebook pages on which we have focused and the sources used by them define themselves as new/alternative media. They often state that traditional media either does not provide a platform, or provides only a restrictive platform, for ultranationalist groups. The discourse described herein identifies both a process and the contours of power. The creation of alternative media by these groups provides them with an avenue through which to spread ideas and information (Wodak, 1990). Such a method reflects the semiotic power meanings conveyed through the positive 'us' and negative 'them' dichotomy (Forchtner, Krzyzanowski, Wodak; 2013).

In order to process and analyze the data collected, we should consider that all discourses are embedded in symbolic and cultural environments where they gain meaning.

Against the backdrop of social power distribution, the hierarchy of social groups is manifested through access to platforms. A platform (alternative space) is the only means through which a discourse can appear in the public space. For informal social groups in the modern Georgian context, the Internet in general and social networks in particular have become such platforms. For certain communities, social networks have become the main setting for political games. Indeed, in some ways, social networks have come to replace the public space.

Ultranationalist groups have made successful use of Facebook so far. It has become their main source for the dissemination of information. The ultranationalist Georgian Facebook community tends to include organizations

that categorize themselves as NGOs. Such organizations tend not to have official web pages, and instead create Facebook pages. They use Facebook to publish official statements, photo and video materials, and to run live broadcasts commenting on political or social events on the Internet and beyond. The purpose of such activity is to engage with their like-minded audiences, and to maintain and increase their follower base. 'Access to the platform,' privilege of creating discourse, and its scale are proportional to social power. The hierarchy in this regard includes the following: political subjects engaged in state management; social institutions; formal and informal groups; and individuals or audience members.

These groups try to polarize opinions whereby negative and positive events are exaggerated to portray a whole group or nation in a way that fits the agenda of the group(s). Ultranationalist internet groups or ultraconservative internet NGOs share negative events or negative stories of certain figures to portray enemy groups in the desired way. For example, the victory of a specific athlete representing Georgia at an international tournament is perceived as a victory of 'the nation,' while socially unacceptable video, photo, or text content might be used as a way to highlight 'dangerous threats' to Georgia. The interpretation of specific facts by ultraconservative groups, followed by open or subtle claims of being oppressed or victimized, serves to maintain their dominant position and their social, political or economic privileges (Van Dijk, 1993). Therefore, Facebook has been manipulated to take on the function of a public space, where quasi-discussion revolves around national identity.

Identity

Ultranationalist groups in Georgia build their identity in opposition to liberal groups or through politics that applies a pseudo-nationalist narrative. This identity is constructed, on the one hand, through continuous biased interpretation of events, and on the other hand, through drawing from separate, fragmented stories from history and international politics. For the purpose of this study, 'ultranationalist narrative' is an umbrella term used to cover content that brings together anti-liberal and conservative ideas; such a narrative comprises many levels and dimensions. The opinions expressed by these groups are sometimes contradictory with their proclaimed ideology.

Ultranationalist groups can represent ideas that are anti-liberal, anti-western, sometimes pro-Russian, sometimes anti-Russian, anti-human rights, anti-equality, anti-democratic, pseudo-patriotic, nationalist, often national-socialist, (ultra)conservative, militarist, counter-cultural, fascist, or Nazi. Some of these groups emerge at different times, and then disappear or disperse before later reappearing as newly-merged groups.

The narrative of discontent proliferated by ultranationalist groups is part of a strategy to construct an identity and to gain the status of a political agent. This fragmented process is mainly manifested through the Internet and social networks (Facebook in particular) where the tools for interaction include official public pages as well as internal, semi-open or closed groups.

The Facebook activity of the groups that were studied could be compared to an evolving on-stage performance (Goffman, 1956). Social groups conduct their activities virtually, due to their lack of sustainability and propensity for quick change, and they cannot easily be structurally described. Even so, it is possible to substantially describe the hierarchy of groups, in which the following three main groups of actors can be identified: **avant-garde, supporters,** and **audience**. Due to the amorphous nature of the groups, it is difficult to talk with precision about the goals of their members.

Avant-garde actors may have ideological, financial or other motivation for being involved with these groups. The functions of such actors include recruitment, generating ideas and creating the main content for the group, widening the audience, developing group strategy and defining regulations for interaction with other groups.

Supporters meanwhile are both the means to achieve goals as well as an end in themselves within the strategy of avant-garde actors. The main role of supporters is to recognize the narrative (using the 'like' function), reproducing it (using the 'comment' function) and sharing it (using the 'share' function).

Audience comprises external actors who are interested in the groups, although their motivations and attitudes are not clear. Audience members can be viewed more as potential supporters and enthusiasts of the network, rather than actual supporters.

Online social movements (OSMs) – their focus is on building and maintaining a collective identity within the groups and holding quasi-participatory discussions. OSMs use the unique possibilities presented by the Internet to work with geographically isolated groups, and to encourage users to act anonymously to avoid any concerns about perceived stigmatization for expressing or agreeing with views in line the agendas of these groups.

OSMs comprise *individuals, networks,* and *groups*. They are united under a common origin, common goal(s), common actions, and collective identity, through which group members share interests that oppose those of mainstream groups (Taylor, Whitter 2002). Collective identity can be expressed via:

1. Boundaries between a person and a group;
2. Identification of the shared interests of group members; and
3. Symbols that reflect the purpose that the group intends to serve.

Online ultranationalist groups focus mainly on a common goals and shared qualities. Such groups are characterized by *self-identification, a focus on 'saving the white race,' 'the nation,' Christian culture, and a sense of belonging to some or all of these factors.*

OSMs have three main functions that they offer to a group's supporters and viewers:

1. Free space (Polletta 1999)
2. Cultural haven (Hirsch 1990)
3. Safe space (Gamson 1996)

Looking at some of the studied groups, a sense of being neglected by the political, economic and cultural elite, distancing themselves from their daily problems, and generally cynical attitudes all trigger a sense of insecurity and fear among the members of such groups, which could be expressed angrily in a conducive environment. In this regard, anger is not merely a psychological aspect. Instead, anger here takes on a political dimension, which has the potential for organization and resistance. Organized anger, in turn, generates hope for a better future, and may entail the pursuit of a battle for inclusion to reach their goal. However, the narratives of such groups suggest that the "fight" is often not all that inclusive.

The term 'politikan' can be found in many of the reviewed texts (politikan; политикан),[102] which means the caste of privileged politicians that are presented as lacking morals and a sense of responsibility with respect to their duties they have pledged to fulfil (Rome: Saggi Italiani, 2007).

In the Georgian context, "politikans" are politicians that put their own interests ahead of public interests and fail to uphold the value system condoned by and expected of the public. Some Georgian ultranationalist groups try to distance themselves from Georgian political parties. They instead try to strengthen and preserve their version and representation of Georgian nationalism, and present it as the answer to the discontent shared by much of the Georgian public.

The narrative described in this study is separate from the groups per se as well as their political or social goals. It represents some attitudes, sentiments and beliefs that exist in the collective oral Georgian discourse. However, the representation of nationalist narratives in the public space by certain groups is often cartoonish and may even contradict the intended meaning. For example, the narrative put forward by Georgian March is based only on subjective designations such as, religion, nationality, or history. However, these notions often lack substance. The narrative of Georgian Power is linked to global events and their contextualization in Georgia, including constant digital confrontation with migrants, Muslims, feminists, and the LGBT+ community. This group, through Facebook, often produces disparaging photoshopped images to depict the above groups, accusing them of treason and presenting them as a 'strangers' in the Georgian reality. Meanwhile, Georgian Idea is a pro-Russian political organization that presents its narrative through religious, monarchical and theological themes.

The picture emerging from this study includes a power landscape, which is not horizontal but also has no distinct vertical axis and can embrace all kinds of political actors. In this landscape, each of the actors strive to strengthen their own positions. Even though ultranationalist and conservative groups can be arbitrarily put together based on the common denominator of a shared narrative, one should keep in mind that these groups choose to work with different target groups and thus find themselves engaged in niche politics.

Using clearly-defined target audiences and language, these groups try to penetrate areas pre-defined by their assumed position on the political spectrum. Their goal is to adopt a niche, establish a presence, and then expand.

Therefore, the process of identity-building encompasses a synthesis of historic, cultural and political discourse, which creates a perception that these groups represent a larger segment of society than is actually the case. They are politically attractive to a certain element of society due to their familiarity, their apparent approachability, and their non-normative behavior and language. These groups can be considered populist as they consider society to be ultimately separated into two homogenous and antagonistic groups, namely 'the pure people' and 'the corrupt elite,' and argue that politics should be an expression of the *volonté générale* (general will) of the people.

Discourse, Language, Narrative and Ideology

According to the data collected during this study, discourse refers to where a certain hierarchy is formed between text, symbols, language, narrative, and ideology. Text and symbols form the content which expresses shared values and aspirations, reflects a common past, and develops a joint project for the future. The ultrana-

102 Table vocabulary of the clerk / UNDP; [authors: Samsom Uridia et al.; edit: Vazha Gurgenidze] – Tbilisi, 2004

tionalist narrative distinguishes between Georgian and non-Georgian, and between Orthodox and non-Orthodox. In other words, it represents a structure of binary positions ('us' and 'them'). As for the language, this is a means to express existing and derived contents of the culture. Language is not always unified is this can encompass various sociolects (social dialects, or different languages, used by different groups) within a community or a nation, according to which differences are formed between groups through linguistic expressions, intonations, slang, jargon, archaic reconstructions, etc. Language is a power landscape of sorts, where groups use both archaic language categories and forms and also create a new vocabulary. Constructions within the Georgian language which are considered archaic are usually associated with the homeland, religion, traditional gender roles and other associated cultural characteristics. Polysemic terms (e.g. Europe, the West) meanwhile are often used by groups to produce narratives, which, according to the context, can have flexible meanings.

In the studied groups, subjective understanding is linked to territory, which can be both physical and virtual. Metaphysical Georgia comprises historic territories of Georgia, Georgians (both living within Georgia, or those living abroad), and ancestral or historical populations who once lived on the land today known as Georgia. This archaic form of language is used to talk to large groups, to heighten expectations and to stimulate attitudes that already exist in the culture and does not require any specific education or knowledge to bring them to the fore. Therefore, the 'homeland' and 'nation' can be imagined through linguistic constructs and symbols. The use of such forms of language, in turn, are linked to historic persons, writers and statesmen (the approaches of the groups in this regard are selective and fragmented), while a new vocabulary is linked with the Internet and global processes, and is adapted to Georgian. Such phraseology is characteristic of the avant-garde, who are pioneers in terms of using new language categories and meanings. In this case, the main goal of language is to articulate discontent and to promote solutions.

The political ideology of ultranationalist groups tends to be incomplete and fragmented, and their economic and social visions are at times unclear. Their identity is based on producing an image of enemies, and polarizing societal views. Therefore, these groups are characterized by reactionism.

Analysis of Categories

According to Van Dijk's schema described above, we can briefly characterize models that the groups being studied use while producing their narratives.

- Accessibility: description of the platform and audience.
- Themes: what groups discuss, what they emphasize and the links they perceive between events and fundamental values (as seen in the violent response to the anti-homophobia demonstration on 17 May 2013.
- Argumentation: 'facts' followed by negative interpretation.
- hetoric: using hyperbole in the assessment of negative actions of 'others' in contrast to 'our' positive action. This process entails downplaying any actions of the group that might be perceived as negative.
- Vocabulary: selection of words that have positive or negative connotations and, at the same time, respond to the era or time that we live in.
- Citing influential persons.

INTERPRETATION OF THEMATIC CATEGORIES AND CONCLUSION

A history of Georgian identity-building can be interpreted as a *narrative of survival*; that is, survival is the main goal of the ultranationalist narrative. The process of narrative creation reveals a certain strategy with events viewed in a negative context presented as creating a threat to Georgian identity. The narartive of survival creates fear in readers that may turn into aggression or anger that may ultimately serve as the grounds for change. According to Tamta Khalvashi, an anthropologist: "These groups do not only mobilize around the problem, whether it is religious identity or the kind of state we want to be in the future, but rather what we should not be and what we want to deny." Observations of the narrative of the groups suggest that the idea of being Georgian under the ultranationalist narrative is formulated as part of a dichotomy of 'good' and 'evil, 'known' and 'unknown,' and 'us' and 'them.' Definitions of being Georgian and the Georgian identity presented in this study are part of a narrative expressed by the groups under study and do not necessarily express the views of other groups when it comes to Georgian identity.

The following main categories were identified during the study: women's issues (feminism); LGBT+ community; religion; Georgian history (ancient); Georgian history (modern); world history; local news; global news; racialism; ethnicity; culture migrants; Europe; the United States; Russia; Turkey; drugs policy; identity; and appeals for action. These categories often overlap or intersect. Even though the described narrative concerns ultranationalist attitudes, the given thematic categories and content expressed in the posts cannot be understood without some knowledge of international politics or global history.

Categories formulated within the framework of the study are transient; they exist here and now, but could be replaced by other topics depending on how the country develops politically and socially.

This study's unified understanding of the narrative of the groups was based on the thematic categories listed, with an illusion subsequently created that these groups share a concrete definition of Georgian identity. In their narratives, the groups are the sole bearers of this knowledge which gives them power. Daily appeals of these groups through Facebook display themselves as the only ones who are effectively 'woke' and brave enough to contradict existing 'elites' and 'politikans' and spread their 'truth.' This creates a virtual free space for those who are like-minded, whereby representatives of the avant-garde and supporters of ultranationalism invite and attract viewers.

Groups studied within the framework of this study each create one meta-narrative, which we have divided into conditional categories during the process of analysis. Their narratives often intersect with one another. Discourse nexuses are evident, and based on the concept of intertextuality they may be understood through discourses floating around society. There are some distinct categories, where it would be difficult to tell who is speaking without using synthesized micro narratives. For example, LGBT+ issues, feminism and drugs policy are interlinked categories, which are seen as representative of liberal ideology, which, according to these groups, is mainly implemented by the EU.

Of the categories listed above, these processes can fall under *appeals, vocabulary, citing influential persons and storytelling strategies*. The *appeals* category refers to instance of apparently urgent need for action.

"No other can do what you have to do! Protect the future of your children and don't create an atmosphere of pedophiles for them! It is time for Georgian "patriotic pathos" to go beyond virtual borders and bring an end to a liberal tyranny of sodomites in Georgia with effective actions."

The vocabulary used in this appeal and other like it play an important role in creating certain predispositions. "Liberal tyranny of Sodomites" on the one hand, implies some religious meaning while at the same time criticizing political ideology. In addition, it seeks to create a dichotomy in values whereby anything liberal cannot be Georgian, and vice-versa.

The groups have different channels for spreading information. Facebook groups, YouTube channels, websites and Internet TV channels are directly or indirectly linked to such groups by name. Releasing the same information simultaneously from these various channels creates a feeling of trustworthiness and a sense that what is being conveyed is important. Therefore, an illusion is created that the information is realistic and reliable, and, more importantly, stimulates a sense of emergency, where action (i.e. spreading the information) is vital. At the same time, it is important to spread the information in a synchronized manner to create a sense of unified timing. This conjunction of information and time stimulates an impression of virtual unity and of an actual group.

Historical and contemporary events are equally important in the narrative. These are reviewed in the context of existing groups/pages, and coincide with the views of the audience. In such processes, validity loses its importance, and instead network efforts – repetition of the same action (in this case, a narrative) by several people at the same time – takes on greater significance.

Even though there are some differences between groups and some groups use different language for different target audiences, they all speak of the same topic and are pursuant to the same narrative. Therefore, these groups are perceived as a homogenous group.

According to the narrative of the studied groups, being Georgian is linked to an identity that is associated with a specific geographic area belonging to those who speak Georgian. They are unified by an unwritten, oral agreement about nationalism, patriotism, and history. Ultranationalist identities are 'granted from God' and, therefore, are innate and related to a birthplace. Georgians do not today have to struggle to become Georgians, but their ancestors had to fight to maintain the Georgian identity. This gift comes with the responsibility of transferring Georgian identity onto future generations 'uncorrupted.'

Categories identified through this study have been divided into positive and negative narratives. For example, the categories of religion and history are the main elements of positive content, used by groups to contrast the past with the current reality: the past was good, the present is bad, and therefore it is necessary to fight for a better future. Categories identified as negative in the narrative include LGBT+ issues, liberal ideology and the EU. These three main topics are presented by these groups as threats to Georgian history, identity, and religion.

To strengthen their arguments, these groups often use quotations from opinion leaders. Fragmented quotes of religious leaders, political or historic persons, and public actors are applied by all groups as a means to legitimize their own narratives and ideas. What these groups share is a historic continuum or some sense of heritage.

Although they have many similarities, these groups' narratives have different target audiences. For instance, the main target audience for Georgian Power are young people as they are seen as being most familiar with the

language and symbols (memes) used by the group. Meanwhile, it is difficult to define a target audience for the narrative of Georgian March, since this group has no consistent political (or other) ideology, apart from populism. The narrative of Georgian March is distinctly reactive and characterized by impulsive reactions to current events. Elsewhere, Georgian Idea harnesses a distorted interpretation of Orthodoxy and anti-democratic monarchal aspirations. Its page often quotes Russian spiritual leaders, Raphael Karelin, Seraphim of Sarov, and Paisios of Mount Athos from Serbia. The narrative of Georgian Idea is difficult to understand for people without some knowledge of theology, as their published texts are quite long, and the language used is archaic. At the same time, its page also focuses on universal values and categories.

Even though the study concerns broad concepts such as Georgian identity and national or historical identification issues, this paper has no ambition of convincingly answering or making conclusions about such issues because identity research entails an observation of a current and incomplete process.

According to the thematic categories, the narrative creates an illusion that these groups know precisely what comprises Georgian identity. The world they describe in their narratives implies that they are the only ones who possess this knowledge, which is an attempt by these groups to exaggerate the level of power they have. Daily Facebook posts of these groups are intended to demonstrate that they are always prepared to face existing 'elites' and 'politikans,' and ready to spread the 'truth.'

At the same time, the narratives of the Facebook pages of the groups presented in this study represent only a fragment of the ultranationalist landscape in Georgia. To establish a more complete picture, further contextualization of other groups, events, and political, economic, social, and historical processes is needed. Modern Georgian history is full of defeats and difficult social and economic conditions, which nurtures the narrative of survival and leaves space for quasi-nationalist groups to claim ownership of the nationalist narrative.

Narratives described here are characterized by abstract ideas and goals, such as 'elimination of immorality,' and 'protection of Georgian identity.' Finally, there is an impression that their narratives are linked to 'sacred themes' like Georgian nationality and identity. Some groups maintain links to, or express affinity with, Russia, whereas others: make arguments regarding the unacceptability of minorities; criticize colonial politics; emphasize the state of emergency and the urgent need of action; create the image of an enemy by dichotomizing the 'liberal West' and 'conservative West'; or polarize opinions in general. In spite of the many listed intra-group differences, in a public space these groups are perceived as a homogeneous unit.

Some groups have a pro-Russian slant with respect to religious, political or other arguments, while others express anti-Russian sentiments. However, according to recent research, despite some ultranationalist, far-right groups not supporting Russia openly, all of these groups indirectly share "Russian narratives."[103]

Since the narrative is fluid and ongoing, it is difficult to make final and sound conclusions. All topics discussed in this study are relevant here and now, and are part of ongoing processes. Categories are not however rigid 'items' that could be used to build the Georgian identity. For some groups presented herein, for example Georgian March, such an approach is pragmatic: leaders use their narratives as tools for political mobilization. Some of the categories presented herein mimic the narratives promoted by ultranationalist/far-right groups active in the

103 OC Media, Analysis | Georgia's far right are anti-Russian but share Russian narratives, 2 April, 2019. https://oc-media.org/analysis-georgia-s-far-right-are-anti-russian-but-share-russian-narratives/?fb_comment_id=2269447133078155_2471824486173751

West, and allude to how issues in the West could be replicated in Georgia ("waves of migrants have flooded European civilization" – "we will share the same fate"). By using simple communication and a common vocabulary, this connection and imitation seems relevant, understandable and easy to believe for Georgians.

This study has revealed the need for continuous research on the research topic which should include the involvement of academic circles, public groups, students, international scholars, representatives of various disciplines and other actors.

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