THE FRIENDS SO FAR, THE FOES SO NEAR?
AMBIGUITIES OF GEORGIA'S OTHERING

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Abstract. Georgia has to look far for friends and perceives its immediate neighborhood as a rather hostile environment. For the South Caucasian state, this unfriendly encirclement manifests itself in othering two of its most powerful neighbors. Russia and Turkey are constructed to be the Other in relation to two key Georgian identity markers–Westernness and Orthodoxy. But perceptions of Us and Them are neither always led by exclusively negative perceptions nor directed only outwards. On one hand, Georgia's othering of Russia and Turkey stays incomplete, because the neighbors also represent characteristics close to aspects of the Georgian Self. On the other hand, a "spillover effect" of othering takes place within the Georgian state border in Adjara as well as in South Ossetia and Abkhazia, since Georgian identity parameters Orthodoxy and Westernness are challenged in those territories. Analyzing these complex links, the author discusses how Russia and Turkey can contain elements of identification with and differentiation from Georgianness simultaneously. Furthermore, it is explored, how othering is transmitted to objects within the state territory. Among other attributions, Adjara, South Ossetia and Abkhazia, are perceived to be insufficiently Orthodox or Western respectively. The main finding is that an explanation for those complex othering patterns in Georgia might be found in inherent conflicts within the Georgian Self. Discussing how Georgia's identity is formed between the extreme poles of Westernness and Orthodoxy, questions of how much Westernness is tolerable for Georgian Orthodoxy and to which degree Orthodoxy can be part of a Georgian Westernized society are not only key to understand the current Georgian Self, but to contextualize relations to Russia, Turkey, South Ossetia, Abkhazia and Adjara respectively.

Key words: South Caucasus, Georgia, Identity, Othering, Orthodoxy, Islamophobia, Westernness, Georgian Foreign Policy, Russia, Turkey

In order to create a positive representation of its identity, Georgia emphasizes different aspects of belonging. Due to geography and geopolitics, history and heritage, there exists a big variety of potential identities to choose from and no less options to distance oneself from. Like the other South Caucasian small states Armenia and Azerbaijan, Georgia emerges with a unique scheme of who is considered to be friend and who is foe in immediate neighborhood and beyond. While Azerbaijan and Armenia found mighty supporters in the region with Turkey and Russia respectively, Georgia feels itself to

belong to something spatially more distant. According to opinion polls, the thousands of kilometers distant United States are considered to be the main friend by a majority of Georgians (The Caucasus Research Resource Center 2019b). Neighboring Russia instead is considered to be the main enemy, followed by neighbor Turkey, though with significant distance (The Caucasus Research Resource Center 2019a). Due to different religious and ideological preferences, relations to Armenia and Azerbaijan are ambiguous as well. Accordingly, Georgia finds itself encircled by countries more or less strange to the construction of the Georgian Self. Or, as Stephen Jones put it:

> "Many Georgians believe that they are European, but are trapped in a non-European environment" (Jones 2004: 99).

Stephen Jones has described the components of Georgianness through several "cultural paradigms"[1]. He argues that the country's Western orientation and its Orthodoxy are the most crucial identity elements. While there is consent in the literature about those features being vital for Georgianness, the question has been neglected, how Georgianness is complemented by constructing a distance to its immediate neighbors, who represent a different faith or a different enthusiasm to westernize. This paper aims to contribute to this discussion, and I will focus on the process of othering, which is necessary for the identity development through identification with and differentiation from the own Self. I will discuss the respective construction of Others vis-à-vis Westernness and Orthodoxy. As the analyses will show, a clear line between the Self and the Other might not always be drawn sharply. Instead of an Us versus Them dichotomy we rather look at a complicated net of entities and attributions. To begin with, Russia serves as the main Other to Georgia's crucial Western identity. Nonetheless, Russian Orthodoxy is in close proximity to the second essential part of the Georgian Self–its own religiosity and respective conservative values. Then, analogously the process of othering Islam based on Georgia's Orthodoxy as an identity marker produces also a complex picture regarding neighboring NATO member and EU candidate Turkey. Accordingly, one and the same object can be a source of identification or differentiation at the same time.

Thus, my objective for this paper will be to discuss different aspects of who represents the Other for Georgia and to develop potential answers to the question, why the distinction between the Self and Other of Georgianness might be blurred. On one hand, I hope to shed light on the ambiguous processes of othering Georgia's two biggest neighbors Russia and Turkey. On the other hand, I aspire to discuss how Georgia's construction of Others affects different domestic groups within its state border as well. I will argue that the main reason for the complexity of Georgia's othering can be found in the Georgian Self: the country's main identity parameters Westernness and Orthodoxy are in conflict with each other. In their pure form, they appear to be mutually exclusive. Accordingly, in present day Georgia the construction of Georgianness between Orthodoxy and Westernness also constitutes a main cleavage in society. This ambiguity is transmitted into processes of othering, which remain accordingly rather flexible.

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[1] Jones, Stephen. (2004). The Role of Cultural Paradigms in Georgian Foreign Policy. In *Ideology and National Identity in Post-Communist Foreign Policy*, Fawn, Rick (ed). London: Cass, 81–108.

Othering as Identity Construction

With the collapse of the Soviet Union, constructions of national identities have been in high demand, aiming to support nation building in the now post-Soviet space (Jones 2004: 82). For relational constructivists, identity formation requires a negotiation process between the Self and Others, which results in demarcations between the two (Risse 2017: 83; Hagström & Gustafsson 2015: 5; Jensen 2011: 66; Göl 2005: 1; Neumann 1999; Wendt 1994: 386). For a domestic audience, discourses about who is friend and who is foe are perceived as important tools for mobilization and strengthening group cohesion (Szkola 2017: 7). Othering is not restricted to role identities, like ally or enemy, but the attribution of roles is unthinkable without the construction of Others (Rumelili 2004: 32) Applying discursive tools, the national Self emerges through precisely this differentiation from what an entity is not in relation to something other, thus constructing the "in" and "out", the "we" and "them" (Lindgren & Lindgren 2017: 381, 2017: 379; Staszak 2009: 43; Jørgensen & Phillips 2002: 50–51). According to Iver Neumann, to study the Self and Other nexus enables a better understanding about the constitution of various actors in foreign policy (Neumann 1999: 37). Kornely Kakachia argues that Georgia's foreign policy is particularly identity driven and not primarily based on realist assumptions like national interest or the balance of power (Kakachia 2012: 5).

In certain aspects, othering produces a moral order and reduces those who are othered to stereotypical negative characteristics. They also might be rendered as inferior or dangerous (Szkola 2017: 7; Hagström & Gustafsson 2015: 7; Brons 2015: 70; Jensen 2011: 65; Staszak 2009: 43). Particularly in postcolonial studies, scientific literature concentrates on analyzing relations between the imperial core and the formerly marginalized colonial Others (Mamadouh & Bialasiewicz 2016: 129). The formation of an European identity through othering Russia and Turkey has received a lot of academic attention in this respect (Lindstrom 2003: 319). Without question, othering as a process results in a certain judgement about the Other. But it does not necessarily have to produce a consideration of the Other as inferior. Instead, there can be positive othering with an object of aspiration, of identification and negative othering with entities, who show undesired characteristics (Russo 2018: 132). Alexander Wendt emphasizes this aspect back in 1994:

> "Identification is a continuum from negative to positive-from conceiving the other as anathema to the self to conceiving it as an extension of the self" (Wendt 1994: 386).

Lene Hansen observes that one Other might contain more than one attribution at the same time, when it quasi gets split into sub-Others. Using the US narrative about the war in Iraq, she demonstrates that the object of othering (Iraq) was split into the repressive Saddam Hussein regime on one hand and the oppressed Iraqi people on the other hand (Hansen 2006: 36).

The two last assumptions will play a crucial role in my analyses: First, the construction of an Other can but does not necessarily have to be negative. An Other can be perceived to be different from the Self, but might serve as a positive Other, an Other with whom similarities are shared. Second, one and the same Other can contain different

attributions. A third important condition of othering is that it might have an internal, a domestic element as well. Although principally directed outwards, the construction of an Other might also have powerful repercussions inside the country. This aspect of indirect othering will also play a major role in this discussion.

The departure point for this paper is Stephen Jones' study of Georgian identity markers. Jones developed four Georgian cultural paradigms: 1) Religious identity, 2) Western identity, 3) Anti-Russian Sentiment, and 4) Pan-Caucasian identity[1]. While the first two constitute the dominant elements of Georgianness, the Anti-Russian Sentiment will be discussed in this paper in form of a constructed Other. Putting Turkey and Russia into the context of the Georgian Selves and Others demonstrates that we do not look simply at relations between the two, but rather at a complex net of different attributions and entities.

Western Self: "I am Georgian, Therefore I am European"[2]

According to Jones, Westernness is one of the two crucial features of Georgian identity (Jones 2004: 88-90). The affirmation of Georgian Westernness[3] is directed to an external international audience as well as to the internal domestic public. At home, Westernization is perceived as modernization and thus "the aspiration to establish Western-style democracy became a part of the Georgian subconscious" (Kakachia 2012: 6).

In order to convince international partners to advocate for Georgian accession to NATO and EU, a powerful pro-Western narrative was created and reinforced (Kakachia & Minesashvili 2015: 171–172). Westernness is portrayed as an intrinsic, century old feature of Georgianness. To be European is not a recent state of mind, but a historic continuation and even a "matter of historical justice" (Kakachia 2012: 5–6), a "return to the West" (Storm 2019: 137), the attempt to "retake its rightful place in Europe" (Beacháin & Coene 2014: 923). This claim to reconnect to Europe is stated in a strategy paper of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs as well:

> "The highest priority of Georgian foreign policy is to achieve full integration into European political, economic, and security structures, thus fulfilling the historical aspiration of the Georgian nation to participate fully in the European community" (Georgian Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2000).

Implicit in this context is that Georgia is (still) not sufficiently European (Nakhutsrishvili & Lejava 2018: 12). The emphasize on the return to Europe includes the distance from it

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[1] The relevance of the Pan-Caucasian/South-Caucasian identity aspect has been questioned by Jones himself. A full analysis of this parameter is outside the scope of this paper. For further reading: Russo 2018: 128–139; Jones 2004: 90; Chikovani 2005: 52

[2] Georgian Prime Minister Zurab Zhvania spoke these words in a speech on the occasion of Georgia's accession to the Council of Europe in Strasbourg in 1999.

[3] In this context, Western identity and European identity are used interchangeably and might include identification with the United States as well. In line with Gamkrelidze, Europe is seen rather as a discourse and bearer of certain values than a coherent concept (Gamkrelidze 2019: 352).

as well as the aspiration to finally reach it (Gamkrelidze 2019: 351)[1]. At the same time, Europe is perceived to be on one hand superior and at the same time identical to the own identity (Hansen 2006: 35). Whether such popular historically and culturally grounded narratives about Georgia's ancient European identity are justified, is hard to tell. Donnacha Beacháin and Frederik Coene argue that such arguments are not "incontrovertible and waterproof". On the other hand, the authors state that there is no evidence of Georgia's non-European identity either and that to feel European might also be considered to be sufficient (Beacháin & Coene 2014: 928).

Although full accession to EU and NATO is out of sight for Georgia and despite changes in power, Western identity is stably featured since the mid 1990ies and has "become the point of national consensus that no party of any consequence challenged" (Nodia 2017: 18). Particularly the Saakashvili administration made Westernness the top narrative. Kornely Kakachia interprets this overload of identity rhetoric as an attempt to compensate for a lack of any tangible interest or military support of the West during the war in 2008 (Khelashvili 2012: 8). Then president Saakashvili presented the country as an integral part of the freedom and democracy seeking movements, as part of the "Arab Spring" regime change initiatives (Kakachia et al. 2018: 8). Fighting for democracy, Georgia was supposed to perform as a regional "norm entrepreneur"[2] in the post-Soviet space (Wivel 2016: 101). In this narrative, the Georgian democracy movement would spread into the entire region and cause a domino effect, sweeping authoritarian powers around peacefully out of office. It was hoped to receive respectively high credits for this pioneer role from Western states (Oskanian 2016: 5). Eventually, this democracy euphoria was hoped to also infect Georgia's secessionist entities Abkhazia and South Ossetia and thus reconnect them to Georgia proper.

It cannot be ignored that democratic aspirations and political realities have not always been congruent. The violent crackdown of opposition protests in 2007 under the Saakashvili administration was one such example. The sharp increase of Georgia's prison population, which quadrupled from 2003 to 2011 due to Saakashvili's zero tolerance policy was another alarming sign (Di Puppo 2019: 18). And also the Georgian Dream Coalition's handling of recent anti-government protest, aspects of the electoral reform, arrests of opposition members and the appointment of politically dependent judges do not look any more democratically mature (Jam News 2020). Society's reaction to such undemocratic steps is quite powerful and persistent (Roehrs-Weist 2018). Thus, the Georgian public might have internalized Western identity more successfully and sustainably than its political elite in the government.

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[1] A similar discourse took place in Slovenia and Croatia before their accession to the EU, focusing on Balkan, post-Yugoslav and European identity (Lindstrom 2003: 313–314).
[2] Scandinavian small states have been originally described to act as such "*norm entrepreneurs*" on the international stage with respect to promoting sustainable development, peaceful conflict resolution and redistribution of wealth (Ingebritsen 2002: 20).

Western Self Versus Russian Other: Favorite Foes Forever?

Out of all Georgian neighbors, in the recent discourse, Russia stands out as the most crucial, the most fundamental Other to Georgianness. While Jones discusses "Anti-Russiansism" (Jones 2004: 91–93) as a self-standing Georgian cultural paradigm, I contextualize Russia differently. I argue that Russia should be considered as the main Other to the Georgian Western Self. In this respect, Russia is framed to personify certain, specifically anti-Western characteristics. Since Russia has proven to be an assertive and hostile neighbor after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, sincere rapprochement cannot be on the agenda. Although Russia's ambitions as a Great Power might be comparable to those of the USSR, its ideational and material resources are scarcer (Timofeev 2017). In economic and innovative terms this lack of attractiveness becomes particularly obvious (Kakachia & Minesashvili 2015: 177).

Saakashvili had been particularly outspoken about this otherness of Russia. The war in 2008 had been contextualized in this respect as well. He claimed that Georgia had been attacked by Russia because of different values and its democratic and economic successes, which were not acceptable for Moscow (Atlantic Council 2010). Quoting Georgia's better ratings in the Corruption Perception Index (CPI) from Amnesty International, he emphasized Georgia's progressiveness and successes in combating corruption in contrast to the Russian Other with increased perceived corruption, which is expressed through a lower rank in the CPI:

> "Coincidentally and curiously enough, Russia moved the same for the same period, 78 positions down, so exactly the opposite movements"[1] (Atlantic Council 2010).

Russia is portrayed to be the main obstacle to full Europeanization and accession to NATO and EU precisely because of the Russian otherness of its political system and values. Accordingly, all hostile actions of the northern neighbor are interpreted to target Georgia's Western Self (Szkola 2018: 245). In Saakashvili's view, Russia showed a certain degree of inferiority, since it could not reach the state of an open and democratic society yet (Atlantic Council 2010). This moral judgement is characteristic for othering processes and enables a positive self-image. After the transition of power in 2012, the ruling Georgian Dream Coalition sought a less confrontational course towards Russia and might be characterized to be more balanced in comparison to the uncompromising westernizing United National Movement under Saakashvili (Buzogány 2019: 98). Despite this re-orientation of the government, public anti-Russian sentiment remains high. According to 2019 opinion polls from the Caucasus Barometer, Russia is seen as the main enemy of the country by 49% of the population, the highest value since 2013 (The Caucasus Research Resource Center 2019a). One reason for the peak in 2019 might be the government's violent reaction to protests in Tbilisi in June 2019. They were triggered by

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[1] The rank in this index is of limited information value, though. This is due to the fact that the total amount of ranked countries varies each year and that it is relational to the other countries. A more objective criterion would be the absolute CPI score. Georgia was first analyzed in 1999 and scored 2,3 in comparison to 2,4 for Russia (10,0 is the best, corruption-free score). When the interview with the Atlantic Council was conducted in 2010, Georgia scored 3,8 and Russia 2,1. So while there is a significant decrease of corruption in Georgia, the increase of corruption in Russia is not equally strong.

the speech of a Russian MP in the Georgian Parliament in Russian language (Machaidze 2019). Accordingly, they need to be understood as an expression of opposition to Russian policies as well as of the public impression of alienation from the Georgian Dream Coalition government.

Today, despite different agendas and instruments of the Tsarist Empire, the Soviet Union and present day Russian Federation, enmity is constructed as a continuum towards the "oppressing other" (Leonardis 2016: 48). However, the perceived Anti-Westernness of Russia is a crucial parameter, which defines the degree of attributed otherness. Russian annexation, which started in 1801 after Ottoman rule, was seen instead rather as an opportunity to reconnect to the Christian West and its ideas despite scarifying Georgian independence (Jones 2004: 89). Jones argues further that despite an anti-European image due to autocracy in the Tsarist Empire and anti-Western Soviet ideology, both systems did represent a link to European culture (Jones 2004: 92). Other authors emphasize the othering of the Soviet Union and describe Communism as an important Other again, isolating Georgia further from its Europeanness (Kakachia & Minesashvili 2015: 174). The attempt to other the Soviet Union is noticeable in many spheres. One example of this attitude is the renaming of central public spaces with Russian or Soviet names in the capital Tbilisi to "Western Ones" like Freedom Square or Europe Square (Leonardis 2016: 51). Another example is the Victory Day Celebration. This day can neither be ignored out of respect for the veterans, nor can it be celebrated in a Soviet traditional way, emphasizing the glory of the Red Army with a military parade. Tbilisi celebrates this day now in a "European way" on the 8th of May instead of the 9th. The main direction is to establish "mournful remembrance as the dominant emotional component rather than a celebration of glory crowned by a military parade, as it is in Russia" (Khutsishvili 2018: 74).[1]

Western Self and Russian Other are mutually constitutive in a self-reinforcing process. Accordingly, othering is fostered by a high degree of perceived Russian Anti-Westernness. Russian assertive foreign policies for its part additionally deepen this otherness. The persistence of Moscow's interference in Georgian affairs is unprecedented in the post-Soviet space[2] (Cornell 2014: 36). On the other hand, the extensive use of various soft and hard power instruments against Georgia has so far rather strengthened Westernization efforts (Delcour & Wolczuk 2015: 462). This development materializes itself within the state borders as well. Promoting a Western identity and othering Russia resulted in unbridgeable conflicts between Georgia and its secessionist entities South Ossetia and Abkhazia.

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[1] The question about how to deal with Stalin in his homeland Georgia and more specifically in his hometown Gori, which is home to a controversial Stalin museum, remains ambiguous, too. For further reading: Leonardis 2016: 52; Kabachnik 2018.

[2] This status might be challenged by Ukraine.

Western Self Versus Secessionist Entities: Intrinsically Anti-Western?

Not all of Georgia's official state territory can share the enthusiasm about Westernization. In Georgia's secessionist entities, a feeling of ancient Europeanness is rather absent and reconnection to the West (and Georgia) is not attractive for South Ossetians and Abkhazians. That the West supports Georgia's maximum demand of territorial integrity is one of the reasons, why Abkhazia and South Ossetia cannot identify themselves with the West properly. This leads to intrinsic opposition to NATO and EU and might not come as a surprise (Cooley 2017: 3–4). Furthermore, Western players inhibit the recognition of the secessionists' main goal of independence. Not only do those factors prevent identification with the West in particular, in more general terms, cultural paradigms of the center cannot be shared by the secessionists anyway. This is due to the fact that, they need to establish their own identity narrative and precisely need to create their own boundaries of us and them (Szkola 2018: 245).

Since Georgia's aim is territorial integrity and the secessionist entities are therefore regarded as part of the Self, there is no direct othering of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. We rather look at a form of indirect othering, which contains three main aspects. First, the entities themselves are portrayed as anti-democratic with a low rule of law status. Thus, they are constructed as anti-Western per se. This view included accusations of a low level of human right protection as well as broad criminal activity in South Ossetia and Abkhazia (Civil.ge 2005b, 2005a). After 2005, the emphasis at least in the academic discourse about the state of democracy shifted towards the democratic achievements in secessionist entities (Kopeček et al. 2016: 89). The secessionists' democracy development does not necessarily have to be worse than in their parent states, since both might show similar scores in democracy ratings like the Freedom House Index (Blakkisrud & Kolstø 2012: 286). Another effect related to the Georgian Western identity narrative was that democratic ambitions were not always met by the Georgian reality itself. Repressive behavior like the violent crackdown of protests in 2007 harmed the logic of the democratization champion narrative and "did not make convincing the skeptical Abkhazians and Ossetians about the inevitable attractiveness of Georgian capitalist liberal-democracy easier" (Oskanian 2014: 12). An increasingly assertive reintegration course under Saakashvili and measures to enforce it, like the isolation of South Ossetia from 2004 onwards alienated them even further (Waal 2008). Finally, the war in 2008 did sustainably spoil Georgia's already complicated relation to its secessionist entities (Blakkisrud & Kolstø 2012: 290).

Second, othering is expressed indirectly, through aversion against Russia not against Abkhazians themselves (Khutsishvili 2018: 80). For Georgia, Russia's activity is solely interpreted as neo-imperialist (Atlantic Council 2010; Abushov 2009: 190). Blaming exclusively Russia to initiate and foster conflicts with Georgia's minorities was and is a popular nationalistic topos after independence from the Soviet Union (Sadigbeyli 2002: 54). This is strongly connected with the denial of any separate identity for the secessionist entities, but the perception that they are nothing else but "Russian puppets". Thus, any potential Georgian responsibility can be externalized (Kakachia 2012: 5).

Third, there is a "spillover effect" of othering Russia. Because the negative sentiment against Moscow is not shared in the secessionist entities, South Ossetia and Abkhazia are indirectly othered as well. Their Russia friendly attitude is largely a consequence of the strong ethno-nationalistic Georgian course after independence (Oskanian 2016: 6). For South Ossetians and Abkhazians, who had certain autonomy rights during Soviet times, living under georgifying conditions in independent Georgia became increasingly "unthinkable" (Cornell 2003: 151). Massive Georgian isolation efforts have made Russian patronage inevitable (Ker-Lindsay & Berg 2018). Recent fieldwork has shown that Russia is not perceived as an Other there, but rather associated to the Self. Based on a survey from 2017, across all age groups (18 to over 60) more than 70% of the inhabitants of South Ossetia and even more than 80% of the Abkhaz population agree that they are part of the "Russki Mir"[1] (O'Loughlin et al. 2017: 18). In an earlier survey, the team around O'Loughlin asked whether the collapse of the Soviet Union was the right or the wrong step. A clear majority in Abkhazia[2] and to a bigger extent with over 70% in South Ossetia perceive the dissolution as the wrong step (Toal & O'Loughlin 2014). Finally, starting in the early 2000s, Russian passports were issued in both secessionist entities. Accordingly, the majority of inhabitants in South Ossetia and Abkhazia are Russian citizens (Gerrits & Bader 2016: 303).

Orthodox Self: I am Georgian, Therefore I am Orthodox?

Stephen Jones put "Religious Identity"[3] first when he described Georgianness (Jones 2004: 85–87). The Georgian Orthodox Church (GOC) is presented as the stable preserver and transmitter of Georgia's ancient heritage and therefore essential for the fight for independence during the most tumultuous times and occupations. In this respect, similar to constructing intrinsic Westernness, Georgia's antiquity and heroism as a defender of European Christianity is emphasized through its role in fighting non-Christian invasions (Kakabadze & Makarychev 2018: 493). Accordingly, the GOC is rather of national importance than of religious. "It represents politics, not metaphysics" (Jones 2004: 87). Its importance for the national liberation movement in the 1980ies and the role to protect Georgia's identity is described similarly to that of the Polish Catholic Church (Kakabadze & Makarychev 2018: 493; Jones 2004: 86). With 70% either trusting or very trusting the GOC (The Caucasus Research Resource Center 2019c), the Church is a highly respected institution. Another important criterion is its stability, which is particularly obvious in comparison to other institutions like a volatile party system (Reisner 2015: 99).

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[1] The "*Russian World*" is a fluid idea, which moves between the promotion of Russian language and culture abroad and the protection and management of the relation with compatriots in the neighboring countries. It includes the understanding of a distinct Russian cultural space, which can be understood in contrast to imagined other concepts like "The West" (O'Loughlin et al., 2017, p. 7; Toal, 2017, p. 243).

[2] The survey shows different results for different ethnic groups in Abkhazia. While the values for inhabitants from Abkhaz, Armenian and Russian origin do not differ significantly, Georgians/Mingrelians perceive the dissolution of the Soviet Union to a lesser extent as a wrong step and are less supportive of the Russian leadership.

[3] In this context, religious identity is used synonymously with Georgian Orthodoxy or more broadly Christianity and is institutionally represented by the Georgian Orthodox Church (GOC).

Starting with Shevardnadze, the GOC gained concrete political influence. The former member of the Politburo of the Communist Party Shevardnadze got baptized by Patriarch Ilia II in 1992 and a symbiosis between politics and the GOC began, where the latter would guarantee support, while the government would grant certain privileges to the GOC (Halbach 2016: 15). Saakashvili instead took office with a different approach. Promoting a Western democracy model, secularism was more in line with his vision of statehood. Emphasizing a civil instead of an ethno-religious understanding of Georgian nationalism, his government hoped to include minorities more successfully (Reisner 2015: 98). The year 2012 changed the power balance between the state and the GOC towards the Church again. Oliver Reisner argues that the GOC's support for the Georgian Dream Coalition already during the campaign caused the newly elected government to return those favors (Reisner 2015: 106–107). Consequently, the GOC takes an increasingly engaged stand as a political actor in domestic like in foreign policy (Siroky et al. 2017: 506; Halbach 2016: 20). Sophie Zviadadze concludes that the GOC is today "the most 'visible' actor in Georgia's public life" (Zviadadze 2015: 51).

In contrast to the recent omnipresence of the GOC in public discourses, during officially atheist Soviet times, religiosity was practiced rather in domestic spheres (Gurchiani 2017: 518). Ketevan Gurchiani argues further that despite the institutional invisibility, Orthodoxy was a vital element of Georgianness during Soviet times as well, differentiating the country's identity from others "in the vast pot of Soviet 'atheist' nations" (Gurchiani 2017: 517). Due to the deep religious permeation of politics, culture and society, Georgian identity is often equaled to being Georgian Orthodox (Minesashvili 2017b: 7; Ladaria 2002: 108). This construction "creates a normality in which the community expects its members to be Orthodox Christians" (Gurchiani 2017: 527). Such an assumption marginalizes other religious or ethnic minorities and became a source of serious dissent with these groups (Jones 2004: 86). Before we come to those domestic repercussions of the Orthodox Self, I want to discuss how this stark religious identity affects the construction of external Others. Except of Russia[1], all of Georgia's neighbor countries practice a religion different to Orthodoxy. Turkey, as the successor state of the Ottoman Empire and influential partner of recent Georgia stands out in this respect and is subject to a complex construction of othering.

Orthodox Self Versus Muslim Other: A Matter of Turkey's Heritage?

The construction of an ancient Orthodox Self differentiates the Georgian identity from surrounding neighbors of different faith, in particular Muslims (German 2015: 607). Jones does not dismiss the idea of othering Islam, but regarding Turkey he argues that its othering is based on "historical experience rather than religious differences" (Jones 2004: 97). Until the fall of the Iron Curtain and respective reconnection to the Turkish neighbor, Ottoman and Turkish heritage in Georgia has been mainly framed in terms of invasion and expansion (Kononczuk 2008: 32) or forced disconnection from Georgia's rightful cultural European and Christian habitat (Tsintskiladze 2019; Kakachia & Minesashvili

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[1] In the bordering Russian region North Caucasus instead, Islam is the dominant religion.

2015: 176). Experiencing vivid Turkish engagement[1] in various spheres after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, nevertheless, Islamophobic connotation prevails. Andrea Weiss and Yana Zabanova observe that Georgian-Turkish relations include "anti-Muslim and anti-Turkish sentiments in line with narratives prevalent in national historiography and with dominant currents in the Georgian Orthodox Church" (Weiss & Zabanova 2016: 5). In line with that, I would argue that it is impossible to separate the historic from the religious image of Turkey. Accordingly, the Orthodox Self is also constructed in differentiation to a Muslim Other, which is (externally) most significantly represented by Turkey.

The othering of Turkey is common practice in the public and political sphere. Monitoring 17 Georgian tabloid and mainstream media outlets, the Media Development Foundation issues annual Hate Speech reports with significant amounts of Turcophobic messages. In the respective report from 2018, Xenophobic messages were the third year in a row the most common objects of Hate Speech (Gogoladze 2019). Within this category, Turcophobic statements were the second most voiced ones. The majority of those Turcophobic messages dealt with assumed Turkish cultural, economic and religious expansion. This perception can be partly explained by the activity of Turkish donors and their support for the construction of religious buildings and Islamic centers (Khalvashi 2012: 15). One persistent source of conflict is the reconstruction of the Aziziye Mosque in Batumi. Critics argue that the mosque will be a fully functioning religious center and a powerful symbol of Turkey's presence (Chedia 2012). Proponents argue, that mosques had been part of Georgia's heritage just as Orthodox churches and deserve preservation as well (Zviadadze 2015: 54).

The engagement of Turkish state and non-state-actors in the field of religious education is seen particularly critical. Finding no adequate institution at home, Georgian Muslims get educated directly in Turkey and are suspected to promote the interests of Turkish clerics back home (Ivanov 2011: 82; Sanikidze & Walker 2004: 15). Another ambivalent issue is that of the flourishing entertainment industry in Adjara. Adapting to the demands of Turkish tourists, businessmen or transit drivers had massive implications for the locals. Tamta Khalvashi discussed, how increased lorry traffic from Turkey replaced the traditional citrus fruit business in Gonio, a small village between Sarpi and Batumi. The truck drivers were not only in demand for parking spaces and restaurants, but their presence triggered the large scale appearance of illegal brothels in resident's buildings, crowding out traditional family life (Khalvashi 2015: 114).

The unease towards the Turkish visibility in Adjara led to political mobilization and took Turcophobic characteristics (Smolnik et al. 2018: 573). Turcophobia became a unifying tool for some politicians, particularly during the election campaign in 2012 (Weiss & Zabanova 2016: 6; Cecire 2013: 122; Goksel 2013: 2). The calculation of the Georgian Dream Coalition, which had the support of the GOC, can be roughly explained

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[1] Trilateral cooperation with Azerbaijan is flourishing around the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline and had been extended by a military component. Furthermore, there is deep economic integration with a Turkish-Georgian Free Trade Agreement and a very liberal border regime, which allows border crossing only with ID cards.

as follows: Since rapprochement with Russia is on its agenda, Turkey plays the role of the "only real alternative to the 'enemy' Russia" (Mindiashvili 2012). This framing is different to the rather inclusive character of the previous Saakashvili government, where Turkish investments and deepened bilateral ties have been fostered heavily. The hope was to overcome prejudices in society through prosperous economic relations and people-to-people contacts (Goksel 2013: 6). This aspiration seemed to have been over optimistic and Saakashvili's statement that "Turkey has won the hearts of every Georgian" (Kiniklioğlu 2004: 45) was surely too optimistic.

To reject Islam is considered to be naturally Georgian, but this othering does not only affect neighboring Turkey. Having traditionally and persistently complex relations to Ankara and being home to a significant Muslim minority, already mentioned Adjara is an internal object of this othering as well.

Orthodox Self Versus Muslim Minorities: Not Georgian Enough?

Like discussed, Orthodoxy is such a strong component of Georgian identity that those, who have a different religion might be subject to othering. Like in the indirect othering of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, all Adjarians are considered to be part of the national Self, of the Georgian nation. In reality instead, we look again at some indirect and internal othering. This is by no means a new development. Starting already from medieval times, Georgians could quasi be deprived of their Georgianness by practicing a faith different from Christian Orthodox:

> "'French' became the name used to describe Catholic Georgians, Muslim Georgians became 'Tatar', and those baptized in an Armenian church, 'Armenians'" (Gurchiani 2017: 517).

This othering of Muslims comes to the surface particularly in Adjara. Many inhabitants of the region bordering Turkey converted to Islam overtime after its incorporation into the Ottoman Empire starting from the 15th century. In the late 19th century, Russia controlled the province and later on it became an autonomous region within the Socialist Soviet Republic Georgia (Cornell 2003: 163). After Georgia's independence, urban inhabitants in Batumi converted in large numbers to Orthodoxy, but in the rural areas in upper Adjara, Islam dominates (Pelkmans 1999: 54). People from Adjara do not define themselves as a distinct ethnic group but identify as Georgian. Since the rebirth of Georgian nationalism in the 1980ies and the growing visibility of the GOC, this creates a particular identity dilemma for the local Muslim minority (Pelkmans 2003: 46). Dominant Orthodoxy creates stark assimilation pressure for those parts of the Georgian society, which are not Orthodox (Reisner 2015: 105). Uwe Halbach describes Adjara therefore to have become an arena of "Kulturkampf" between the Christian Orthodox majority and the Muslim minority, which intersects with resentments towards growing Turkish influence (Halbach 2016: 21).

Nonetheless, it shall be mentioned that besides of the othering and its political exploitation, there exists a valuable heritage of interreligious harmony in Georgia. Anthropologists have described traditional ceremonies, which mixed Muslim, Christian, pagan and secular elements like the Alaverdoba festival in Kakheti, whose religiously

inclusive character came under threat recently due to restrictive interference from the local Orthodox Church authorities (Mühlfried 2015). In all day life, there seems to exit in some parts a rather high degree of religious flexibility as well in Georgia. People are able to switch codes between the Self and the Other easily, depending on whether they are in a Muslim, Christian or mixed context (Smolnik et al. 2018: 573).

Identity Flexibilities: Positive Others and Cleavage within the Selves

Like discussed, Russia is the most obvious Other to Georgia's Western identity construction. Emphasizing Russia's democratic inferiority, the othering of the Northern neighbor is clearly negative in this respect. Despite this differentiation from Russia's anti-Western position, Russia's ideas of religious conservatism fall on fertile ground in Georgia and are in line with those of the GOC. The Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) is a crucial actor in the traditional value discourse. The ideals of the ROC are very near to the Georgian Orthodox Self and rather an object of identification than of distinction.

Both Churches are connected through "'Orthodox brotherhood'" and the ROC is an important point of reference for the GOC (Kakabadze & Makarychev 2018: 493). Being the bigger brother in this relation, the ROC is an influential actor towards Georgian orthodox culture (Makarychev & Yatsyk 2017: 12). Both Churches agree about the superiority of Orthodoxy and the respective lack of morality in the West (Kakabadze & Makarychev 2018: 496). This orthodox consent is in stark contrast to the official pro-Western orientation of the government. Accordingly, religion might serve as a powerful soft power tool for Russia (Siroky et al. 2017: 513–514). Although this is obviously in line with Russia's interests, whether there is a strategy for that as such is disputed. Andrey Makarychev and Alexandra Yatsyk emphasize instead that the ROC lacks any specific policy towards Georgia. They argue further that instead of the ROC pushing its agenda it might be rather the GOC utilizing elements of the conservative discourse for their domestic purposes (Makarychev & Yatsyk 2017: 12). However, the GOC has its own communication channels to Russia, which became even more relevant after the war in 2008 (Russo 2018: 119). In 2013, Patriarch Illia II met with President Putin in Moscow and emphasized the need of pragmatic relations between both countries (Halbach 2016: 19). After meeting Putin, the Georgian Patriarch emphasized the eternal love between both countries (Kakachia 2014: 4–5). Stressing the unity between both Churches and states by the GOC, the othering of Russia in solely negative terms is accordingly not complete. Through Orthodoxy, othering Russia has a positive aspect as well.

To describe othering Turkey only as negative stays incomplete as well. Relations to the Western neighbor are rather multidimensional and go far beyond the construction of Turkey solely as a Muslim country. In one respect, the negative othering of Turkey is broken by vivid economic activities. Besides of trade relations, Turkish direct investments in Georgia are significant and Turkish companies got involved in several infrastructure projects, like the construction of a hydropower plant on the Chorokh river or the management of the airports Tbilisi and Batumi for the TAV airport holding (Goksel 2013: 1). Additionally, despite long lasting "historic enmity" following invasions and dominations, Turkey has never behaved subverting or destructive toward the Georgian

state after independence. Although Ankara tolerates support for Abkhazia and thus de facto challenges the embargo, in Adjara, the province where it is perceived to play the role of a patron to some extent, Turkey did not attempt to ever question Georgia's territorial integrity (Waal 2010: 147). Even more important is Turkey's identity aspect Westernness. Jones goes as far as to say that the crucial role Russia once played for the modernization of Georgia in the 19th century is now performed by Turkey (Jones 2004: 97). For Georgia, "Turkey became a 'window overlooking Europe'" (Kononczuk 2008: 32). When both countries started to deepen their cooperation, Turkey was accordingly perceived to be vital for Georgia's Westernization. Holding the status of a member candidate for the European Union and being an active NATO member, Turkey was anticipated to actively promote Georgia's accession to these institutions. It was hoped that Georgia would be serving as a transit partner for oil and gas from Azerbaijan and the Caspian Sea to Turkey, good governance in return would flow to Georgia via Turkey from Europe. Thus, Turkey was seen to be a "proactive integration corridor"[1] (Goksel 2011: 6). Although those anticipations were often disappointed by a rather volatile foreign policy course of the ruling AKP in Turkey, at the end of the day, Turkey is Georgia's Western neighbor. It is still the only country within reach with direct and long-lasting ties to the West. Thus, Turkey is not only an object of negative othering in the Orthodoxy-Islam identity context but is object to positive othering as well. Accordingly, Georgia's Western identity construction leads also to a positive picture of and approach to the Turkish neighbor to a certain extent.

Having analyzed the othering of Russia and Turkey respectively the question remains, why as well Russia as Turkey are positively and negatively othered. I would argue that one of the main reasons is the inherent conflicting character between the two discussed Georgian identity parameters, Westernness and Orthodoxy. To find a suitable position between these two extremes is in constant negotiation in Georgia. The question is to which degree an Orthodox country can follow Western values or, vice versa, which degree of Orthodoxy is tolerable for a Western culture.

To find answers to those questions is a rather difficult and dynamic endeavor along the cleavage of conservatism versus progressiveness in Georgian society. The GOC has not only a pro-Russian position but shows a distinct anti-Western attitude. Western liberal values are doomed to conflict with Christian morality or Georgian traditions (Minesashvili 2017a: 21). At the same time, neither democracy itself (Minesashvili 2017b: 7), nor integration into EU and NATO was ever officially questioned by the GOC (Kakachia 2014: 5). There are even communication channels with both institutions and Georgian clergymen visited NATO and EU (Kakabadze & Makarychev 2018: 496). An obvious and often quoted battleground of this conflict is the question about minority rights and most evident the rights of sexual minorities. For the GOC, more equality is perceived to threaten the position of families and thus might potentially harm the nation (Minesashvili 2017b: 7). So far, the public space is rather dominated by the reactionary camp. This

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[1] With new domestic and foreign policy priorities of the recent government, today, Turkey rather challenges and questions norms of the European Union (Fischer and Seufert, 2018, p. 271). Despite anti-Western rhetoric, Turkey's anchoring in Western institutions, particularly in NATO is not seriously questioned.

became obvious in 2013 when priests led a violent attack against pro-LGBT activists, who rallied against Homo- and Transphobia. An event, which also demonstrated "the impotence of the police, and the indifference of the political elite" (Beacháin & Coene 2014: 936). The controversy and impossibility to officially conduct a Pride March in Tbilisi in 2019 is another example (Civil.ge 2019).

The extent to which the GOC dominates the public and political discourse points to the second question of whether the GOC is granted too many privileges and that accordingly, religious freedom as a fundamental right and secularity as a state principle might not be given. The GOC enjoys for instance to be freed of tax payments (Minesashvili 2017b: 6). Furthermore it receives significant state funding as a compensation for damages and confiscations during the Tsarist Empire and afterwards by the Soviet Union (Grdzelidze 2010: 169). Religious minorities not only have fewer privileges, but also they are not sufficiently protected from discrimination or intimidations by the government. The reluctance of state authorities to secure the interests outside of the major religious group violates secular principles (Mikeladze 2013: 52). Nino Tsagareishvili sees the constitutional freedom of religion under jeopardy as well, since "law enforcement bodies have not adequately responded to the recent facts of religious intolerance in Georgia" (Tsagareishvili 2015: 4–5). The EU Association Implementation Report on Georgia from 2016 states as well, that "state institutions have on some occasions failed to act promptly and efficiently on human rights violations and discriminations against minorities, LGBTI community or religious minorities" (Association Implementation Report on Georgia 2016: 4).

Conclusion

Georgia's identity is constructed in differentiation from and identification with external Others. In the following diagram, this ambiguous process of constructing the Other against the Self shall be recapped. At the same time, certain symmetries in the process get visualized, since we look at three forms of othering: 1) negative as well as 2) positive othering which is both targeted externally. As a by-product of the first, there also exists indirect othering directed inwards:
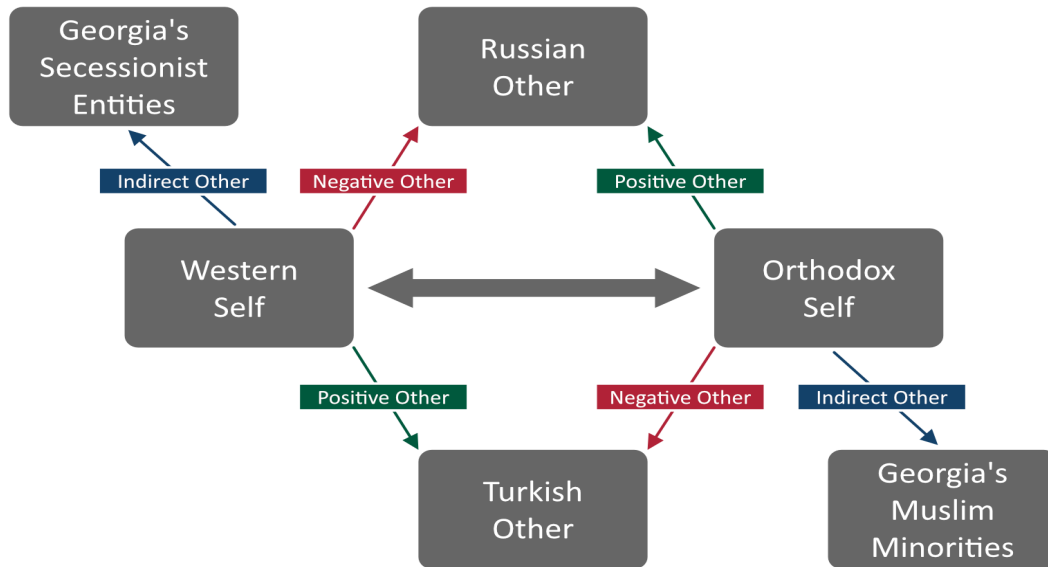
Looking at its immediate neighbors, Russia and Turkey respectively serve as important references for otherness to Georgian Westernness and otherness to Georgian Orthodoxy. This relatively straight forward relation gets blurred not only by a "spillover effect" of othering to either the secessionist entities South Ossetia and Abkhazia, but also by a transmission to its domestic Muslim minority in Adjara. In addition, the matter gets further complicated by certain characteristics of Russia and Turkey, which disrupt their solely negative othering. Since both countries represent elements of Orthodoxy (Russia) and Westernness (Turkey) as well, they function also as objects for identification and are thus positively othered. That leads to a rather complex relational net, where one and the same object can be perceived as a positive as well as a negative Other. This construction therefore stays incomplete and controversial. Since the same ambiguity is found in Georgia's main components of the Self as well, I have argued that the reason for this flexibility can be found precisely in the very construction of Georgian identity. Since Georgian Orthodoxy and Westernness are mutually exclusive in certain respects, despite all rhetoric and attempts, their equally strong existence in Georgian society cannot be a matter of fact, but rather a matter of permanent recalibration to either of the two extremes.

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