We are not enemies, we just disagree...?

An agonistic analysis of the role of contestation in the process of democratic development in Georgia

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Abstract

Since independence, Georgia's political trajectory of democratic development has become all the more aimed towards integration with the EU and further disassociation from the Soviet past and Russia. By the engagements facilitated through the EU's Eastern Partnership and the Association Agreement, the narrative of Georgian national identity as fundamentally European is seen as an all-encompassing consensus that lies as a ground for the envisaging of the process of democratic development. Such an establishment and commitment to a consensus does according to the agonistic approach to democracy inhibit an inclusive process with open possibilities for contestation. Through semi-structured interviews with actors from the political realm and the civil society, the role of contestation in the process of democratic development in Georgia was explored in a narrative analysis informed by the agonistic approach to democracy. This study concludes that despite that there is no legal hindrances for contestation in the Georgian political environment, the normative approach towards anti-Western sentiments and the view of politics as an antagonistic zero-sum game stifles the possibilities for agonistic contestation. All the while, the civil society is utilized instrumentally to display a political setting where contestation plays a role in informing the process of democratic development.

Abbreviations

AA	Association Agreement
AP	Alliance of Patriots
CIDA	Civil Development Agency
DCFTA	Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement
ENP	European Neighbourhood Policy
EU	European Union
FD	Free Democrats of Georgia
GD	Georgian Dream
GDI	Georgian Democracy Initiative
GIP	Georgian Institute of Politics
GRASS	Georgian Reform Associates
GYLA	Georgian Young Lawyers Association
IDFI	Institute for Development of Freedom of Information
ISFED	International Society for Fair Elections and Democracy
NDI	National Democratic Institute
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
TI	Transparency International
UNM	United National Movement

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1   Introduction

Georgia is often described as a success story from the post-Soviet space and in particular in the Caucasus region, in terms of establishing principles and institutions for democratic rule. In 2005, during an address at Freedom Square in central Tbilisi, George W. Bush famously stated; "Georgia is a beacon of liberty for this region and the world", a beacon that will inspire change "from the Caspian Sea to the Persian Gulf and beyond" (George W Bush cited in the Guardian, 2005). The epithet of Georgia as a beacon of liberty is still commonly referred to in discussions regarding the state of democracy in the region[1] where Georgia is regularly hailed as the most democratic. In 2012, Freedom House stated that Georgia preforms significantly better on their democracy index than the neighbouring states (Freedom House, 2012). This trend is further evident in the *Nations in Transit* reports published by Freedom House each year, where Georgia continuously preforms better than the surrounding states (Freedom House, 2017). Furthermore, Georgia's engagement with the EU through the Eastern Partnership, focusing on strengthening democratic rule, stipulates specific areas for Georgia to work on and commitments to fulfil for further integration. Pluralism in the political environment is specifically mentioned to be such an area where there is a need for improvement. The ENP Action Plan for Georgia states that Georgia should; "Encourage greater political pluralism: strengthen the role and functioning of political parties in Georgia" (European Union External Action, 2015). This highlights that political pluralism and inclusion is an aspect that has been acknowledged to be deficient in a democratic sense in the Georgian context. This leads one to question what role pluralism, opposition and contestation plays in the process of democratic development in Georgia.

1.1   Research purpose and research question

Since the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991 and the subsequent establishment of Georgian independence, the political sphere in Georgia, has been colored by struggles regarding what the Georgian state should be in the absence of the Soviet state and identity. The configuration of the Georgian identity and the positioning of the state in the

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[1] The region as applied here, refers to the Southern Caucasus, Central Asia and Russia.

international sphere, which in the Georgian context are coupled processes, have dictated the transition from the Soviet past and democratic development in Georgia. Kuzio (2001:171) argues that inclusion and the social relations between different identities in the process of establishing and configuring the national identity is an imperative factor for the advancement of the transitional process. This means that the narration of the national identity and in extension the transitional process constitute arenas for antagonisms and conflictual intersections. These conflictual intersections are according to the agonistic approach to democracy the core of political life; how they are acknowledged, approached and realized, play a fundamental role in political and societal construction. Hence, the purpose of this research is to explore the role of contestation in the process of democratic development in Georgia through a viewpoint of agonism. The aim is to analyze how the Georgian case relates to philosophical stand-points of agonistic democracy and how that manifests in the social relations and political conduct.

The research question that will be addressed is;

What is the role of contestation in the process of democratic development in Georgia through an agonistic perspective?

1.2 Delimitations

Due to the limited scope of this study, it is of weight to acknowledge certain aspects that are significant but will not be discussed in further depth. For the purpose of the research, the terms of transition, democratization and democratic development will not be conceptually differentiated and thus applied interchangeably as according to how the source in the matter uses the expression. It is however noteworthy to acknowledge that there is a vast literature on the conceptuality of these terms. Furthermore, the accounts presented in this research are focused around the participants; their views and opinions. The role of other actors that are influential but active in other domains than conventional politics will therefore not be addressed, primarily this refers to the Orthodox Georgian church which is a major stake-holder but outside the scope of this study. Moreover, although the discussion regarding the adoption of Western style democracy in non-Western countries is viable there will be no discussion regarding this but democracy is seen as an aspiration, as it was approached throughout the study.

1.3   Case selection

The rationale for choosing Georgia as a case study for this research is grounded in the situation outlined in the introduction of this chapter; Georgia is seen as a relatively successful in the post-Soviet context when it comes to democratic development but there are still evident questions regarding pluralism and contestation. An additional reason for the case selection stems from the possibility to conduct the study in the given country. As there is no legal restrictions for the operations of political parties and civil society in Georgia, the sphere is rather vast and vibrant and therefore more suitable for this research than other states where there are restrictions or where participation is connected to evident risk for the interviewees.

1.4   Previous research

Since the implosion of the Soviet Union in 1991, the transition of the newly independent states has become a topic that rendered extensive research. Many studies have departed from different points with various aims, it is therefore of weight to address the previous research to position this study within the academic field. This section will focus on the dichotomic issues of universalism and particularism as well as transition as a linear process as opposed to cyclical processes.

The dichotomy of universalism and particularism has played a large role in the development of the academic debate on the topic of post-Soviet transitions. Many studies such as Linz and Stepan (1996), Huntington (1991), Schmitter and Karl (1994) and Blanchard et.al. (1991) relates the post-Soviet states to the wider context of processes that occurred in the aftermath of the collapse of authoritarian regimes in states around the world in the previous decades, primarily so in southern Europe and Latin America. This strand of research focuses on theory building through generalizations of patterns across the processes of states' transitions. Similarly, a thread of research takes the same route of generalization in the quest of theory building, although, with a more nuanced focus on the post-Soviet space and similar cases from post-Communist regimes. Bova (1991) means that the transitions that took place in Hungary, Romania and Poland are useful to assess in a comparative perspective to the post-Soviet states. Gel'man (2003) contests that some generalizations can be made for the processes that have taken place and still are taking place in the post-Soviet space despite the diversity that exists amongst these states. Other scholars such as Pavlínek (2003), Valiyev (2012), Stark (1992) and Lipset (1994) oppose the universal approach by questioning how

suitable it is for understanding the multi-layered and complex dynamics of the respective societies that inform and affect each process. Pavlínek (2003:93) means that the generalization approach for theory building fails to acknowledge the unique starting point for democratization that characterizes each society which impacts each country's process. Stark (1992) means that transitions in Eastern Europe should be approached as a situation of plurality of transitional processes which calls for refraining from general theoretical explanations and blueprint models for explaining consolidation of democracy. Valiyev (2012) further highlights the importance of the uniqueness of each case and how that should reflect in the methodological approach for research on the topic.

Another dichotomic question that is a prominent within the research on transition processes is the assumption of what's to come of processes and whether the processes are a linear or cyclical chain of events. One school of research departs from assumptions of a set end goal being achieved through a linear process. Rustow (1970) illustrates this approach by the teleological stipulation that a state in transition moves away from autocratic rule towards democratic rule. The transition is perceived as a linear process that occurs step by step, each step is a move closer to democracy. Many scholars within this stream of research as Lipset (1959), Kugler and Feng (1999) and Mueller (1995) emphasizes a causal relationship between industrialization and economic development with consolidation of democracy. Other scholar highlights variables as education (Feng and Zak, 1999), accountability (Schmitter and Karl, 1991) and civil society (Petrova, 2007) as imperative for consolidation of democracy. Carothers (2002) and Bunce (2003) are critical against the assumption of a linear path of transition and the existence of given variables creating certain outcomes. Carothers sees that transitions from one authoritarian system most often is a set of cyclical progressions rather than a linear process. The cyclical perspective of transition highlights the factor of the "grey zone" of regime transition and the phenomenon of backsliding. Carothers argues that many states goes through cycles of transitions where they develop certain traits of democracy while still remining semi-autocratic, evident through traits as feckless pluralism and dominant-power politics. At the same time, there is consistently a risk of backsliding where the means of autocracy becomes more prevalent again after democratic improvements have been made. Berglund (2014) argues that Georgia since 2003, has been in cycles of decline and reinforcement of dominant-power politics and feckless pluralism an argument that once again leads one to question what role contestation plays in the Georgian process. Followingly, this research is positioned within the stream of particularism and adopts the perspective of transition as cyclical processes.

2   Theoretical framework

This chapter will discuss the agonistic approach to democracy that provides the theoretical departure points for the study. Primarily, the core aspects of agonism will be addressed, and so in relation to liberal and deliberative models for democracy to provide a contextual account. Subsequently, Chantal Mouffe's model of agonistic pluralism will be addressed in more depth. The critique against the model and agonism will then be discussed to conclude the chapter.

2.1   Agonistic democracy

The approach of agonistic democracy emerged in the latter part of the 20_{th} century as a counter alternative to the models for democracy focused around the strife for consensus Agonistic democracy formulates a viable alternative to primarily liberal and deliberative models of democracy through its critique against the notion of the availability of a universal consensus. Agonistic models for democracy centres around the concepts of plurality of identities and the conflictual nature of political life, which as according to agonistic thinkers is the core of politics, that never can or should be eliminated through a consensus. Agonistic thinkers resonate with the view of conflict of interests between different political identities, agons, as a natural and inevitable part of political life, Andrew Schaap (2009:3) expresses this as

> Rather than representing conflict in terms of communicative rationality, agonists view conflict as an unavoidable and constitutive aspect of politics. Moreover, rather than seeking to establish a foundation for political institutions in terms of rational principles to which all could agree, agonists understand institutions to be contingent outcome of political struggle. Following from this, agonists critique mainstream political theory for seeking to subordinate politics to transcendent reason.

Schaap's illustration shows how the starting point for agonistic democracy is a critique of the dominating consensus driven paradigm within political theory and with this a shift in the perception of the role of consensus and conflict in the political realm. Agonists see that the conflictual nature of politics should take shape in the realisation and respect for your agons, political opponents. The plausibility of democratic agonism hinges on the success of the turning antagonisms in to agonism and enemies into

adversaries (Mouffe, 2000:12-15). Agonistic adversaries make no claim to changing the other's view through debate and deliberation but realises their opposing stances and that they will and should, remain that way (Ivie, 2003:182-183). Politics should not facilitate or aim to reconcile agonistic adversaries but rather provide the framework within which the agonistic conflict can take place (Mouffe, 2000:177).

The agonistic critique against consensus driven politics, advocated by liberal and deliberative theorists has its roots in the adversary ontological standpoint regarding harmony and conflict. The political aim for a universal public consensus has constituted a rather unchallenged dominating discourse in political theory and conduct for a period of time. Liberal and deliberative democratic theory is concerned with the legitimacy of power and makes claims for justification of this through the trajectory of harmony, reached through consensus (Gambetta, 1998:19-20). One of the main contemporary proponents for liberal democracy, John Rawls, argues that political power is only fully legitimate if it is based on and exercised in conjunction with a constitution. A constitution, which all free and equal citizens should be reasonably expected to reconcile with and support since it is the concrete translation of the hegemonic ideals and principles that in the given context institutes their *common human reason* (Rawls, 2005:137). With this, Rawls argues that the exercise of authority and power in democratic societies gains legitimacy by decisions that can be derived from what he calls *common human reason.* In Rawls' view, societies and thus members of societies develop decisive trains of thought and judgement which is a shared view in the given society, this is referred to by Rawls as the *common human reason.* This *common human reason* is a basis for the decision that are taken in societies, on the grounds that the decision is reached by drawing from the *common human reason,* a harmony is reached through the accomplishment of a legitimate consensus which Rawls refers to as *overlapping consensus* (Rawls, 2005:55). Rawls' argument draws from the tradition of Kantian ethics whereas reason is a key component in the view of human nature and societal construction (Wood, 2008:19).

Another theorist stemming from the Kantian schools is Jürgen Habermas who also sees human reason and rationality as focal points for politics. Although, Habermas understanding of the creation of reason, differs from Rawls' view. While Rawls sees the public consensus as a base for discussion, regarding the actual debate, Rawls sees that it is not beneficial in a democratic society since it will lay ground to increased disagreements and in turn also impact decision and policy implementation processes in the way that they become less efficient in driving through change (Heysse, 2005:268-270). Habermas on the other hand argues that reason is discursive in its nature. It stems from communicative relations and consensus is an outcome of the public discussion rather than a ground for political debate. This focus on the communicative aspect of construction of a shared reason transpires through the deliberative model of democracy (Elster, 1998:1 and Dryzek, 2000:21-22). The deliberative model of democracy places participation and the political dialogue at the centre of politics. Deliberative democracy

sees the inclusion and participation of different political identities in the public debate as a strengthening aspect for the outcome since inclusive deliberation preceded and prompted the decision for consensus. According to Habermas, the consensus reached through inclusive deliberation is rational and in line with the public reason existent in the given society (Heyyes, 2005:271-273). Habermas highlights the emphasis on discursive reason through the following statement;

> There is only one reason why discourse ethics, which presumes to derive the substance of a universalistic morality from the general presuppositions of argumentation, is a promising strategy: discourse or argumentation is a more exacting type of communication, going beyond any particular form of life. Discourse generalizes, abstracts, and scratches the presuppositions of context-bound communicative actions by extending their range to include component subjects beyond the provincial limits of their own particular form of life (Habermas, quoted in Payrow Shabani, 2003:63).

Agonistic thinkers oppose the view of the existence of a shared common reason and the availability of a rational consensus based on this reason. Agonistic democracy departs from the ontology that there is a conflictual nature within social relations that cannot be mitigated away by essentialist claims or suppressed by political measures. Chantal Mouffe (2013:3) critiques the liberal model of democracy by asserting that the common view held by liberal thinkers is based on a one-dimensional view of pluralism, identity and the existence of a common human reason. Mouffe states;

> The typical understanding of pluralism is as follows: we live in a world in there are indeed many perspectives and values, but due to empirical limitations, we will never be able to adopt them all; however, when put together, they could constitute a harmonious and non-conflictual ensemble…Indeed, one of the main tenets of this kind of liberalism is the rationalist belief in the availability of a universal consensus based on reason (Mouffe, 2013:3)

With this, Mouffe illustrates the view held by agonists regarding the pitfalls of liberal democracy due to the reliance on the belief in a shared reason and the availability of an all-embracing consensus. Honig (1993) adds to this criticism by the argument that democratic theory based on Kantian ethics, moral and reason contributes to what Honig calls *displacement of politics*. Honig develops the term *displacement of politics* to address the pre-occupation with bureaucracy, administrative politics and normalization applied systematically by liberal and deliberative models of democracy both in the normative and practical realms. This pre-occupation does, according to Honig, shift the focus of politics away from the conflictual nature that creates political life and thus the meeting between agons. The liberal and deliberative take on politics instead takes an approach whereas politics, conceptually and territorially, is confined with the task of stabilizing moral and political subjects, consolidation political identities while building consensus and preserving existing agreements through judicial, administrative or

regulative means. Honig means that this view of sees the purpose of politics is to resolve institutional issues and to move on to the task on the agenda, this to enable free modern subjects to live in a society free from political conflict since these have been resolved through the political process (Honig, 1993:2).

Honig's account give witness to the post-foundational ontology that shapes the agonistic approach. Honig pinpoints the view upheld by theories with roots in the Kantian tradition where politics is a process that aims for an end goal. This end goal differs between different political systems as well as from time to time, as per se, reaching of a consensus on an issue can constitute such a goal that liberal and deliberative democracy envisages politics towards. Tully (1999) provides an account that bridges the focus on the conflictual nature of politics with the post-foundational ontological stance, he states:

> Politics is the type of game in which the framework - the rules of the game - can come up for deliberation and amendment in the course of the game. At any one time, some constituents are held firm and provide the ground for questioning others, but which elements constitute the shared 'background' sufficient for politics to emerge and which constitute the disputed 'foreground' vary (Tully, 1999: 170).

Mouffe furthers this argument by arguing that politics envisaged towards an end goal is in fact what can cause political instability. This approach to politics and the depoliticization of an issue through the removal of that issue from the political agenda after the consensus is agreed upon eradicates the possible avenue to express dissent and oppositional views on the topic through formal political actions, thus an environment is created where opposing views than that of the hegemonic norm needs to seek alternative paths for expression. Mouffe means that this environment is a pre-condition that is favourable for the emergence of violent antagonisms due to the lack of space to express opposing views within the sphere of normal politics (Mouffe, 2013:20). For agonistic thinkers, politics is post-foundational, a never-ending process that should not be intended or aimed towards reaching an end goal thus the participation and the political process in itself is the core and meaning of political life.

These accounts highlight how the agonistic approach to democracy differs from that of liberal and deliberative democracy. The focal point of politics that we should focus on is the conflictual nature that exists within societies and therefore shapes political life. Furthermore, agonistic democracy does not aim for an end goal for politics but rather the process of inclusion in political life in itself is the purpose of politics. The agonistic approach to democracy deals with further aspects more intrinsically such as hegemony and pluralism, however, as for the case of many different theoretical streams in political science these aspects are dealt with in different manners depending on the theorizer. For this research, Chantal Mouffe's version of agonistic democracy will be the framework that will be applied in the empirical analysis and therefore Mouffe's model will provide the ground for the continued theoretical discussion.

2.2   Mouffe's model of agonistic pluralism

Chantal Mouffe has developed a model for agonistic democracy throughout the last few decades. Mouffe presents the model, which she calls agonistic pluralism, in several writings, dealing respectively with different aspects of the model more in depth. The different aspects that underpins Mouffe's model that will be discussed in this section is; hegemony and antagonism, *politics* and *the political* as well as depoliticization and over-politicization.

2.2.1   Hegemony and antagonism

Mouffe departs from two key concepts for her model of agonistic pluralism*;* hegemony and antagonism. The aspect of hegemony is cemented as a central focal point within agonistic approaches which transpires throughout. The hegemony that Mouffe addresses with her agonistic model is a hegemonic order in society which is accepted as the only possible order and therefore is unchallenged. Examples of such hegemonic order is the unchallenged nature of the liberal democratic order in the US as well as the global order of globalized neoliberalism that has dominated the international sphere since the end of the Cold War (Mouffe, 1993: 23 and Mouffe, 2013: XII). This type of hegemonic order contains power relations and modes of domination of the identities that are not included in the hegemonic order. Mouffe argues that the hegemonic orders that are in place today are based on their claims of being reasonable and rational, much as in line with the thoughts of Rawls and Habermas. In the words of Mouffe;

> In politics, the very distinction between 'reasonable' and 'unreasonable' is already the drawing of a frontier; it has a political character and is always the expression of a given hegemony. What is at a given moment deemed 'rational' or 'reasonable' in a community is what corresponds to the dominant language games and the 'common sense' that they construe...in a modern democracy, we should be able to question the very frontiers of reason and to put under scrutiny the claims to universality made in the name of rationality (Mouffe, 1993: 143).

Through this Mouffe rejects the idea of an objective truth, reason or rationality as an underlying factor of such form of hegemonic order. Further, due to the lack of a universal sense of reason, the hegemonic order currently in place is always receptive to challenge through counter-hegemonic challenges of different forms (Mouffe, 2013: 2).

The concept and actual being of a hegemonic order becomes into real question when coupled with the other concept central to Mouffe's model; antagonism. According to Mouffe, every society consists of different political identities that represents diverse

values, interests and views in relation to societal and economic issues. These differentiating values and stances that are represented by the political identities are grounds for antagonisms that exists in the relations between identities through their expressions and positioning in relation to each other. These antagonisms are inherently embedded in all social relations, can take their expression in different forms and this creates dynamics were violent expression of antagonisms is always possible in every order (Mouffe, 2013:2). Liberal and deliberative theories' incapability of addressing and envisaging politics accounting for the antagonistic dimension of social relations is what prevents them from provide a framework for adequate conduct of politics (Mouffe, 2013:3-4).

2.2.2 *Politics* and *the political*

Mouffe differentiates between two societal dimensions, *politics* and *the political*, the two dimensions are imperative aspects for the model of agonistic pluralism. The term *politics* is "an ensemble of practices institutions whose aim is to organize human coexistence*". The political* on the other hand is defined as "the ontological dimension of antagonism*"* (Mouffe, 2013: xii). These are concise definitions put forward by Mouffe, however, the definitions offer no explanation of what the terms entails and due to the complex nature of the dimensions and dynamics between them that are contained in Mouffe's analysis the concepts need to be developed further.

Politics refers to the formal conduct of politics through the institutional framework that is set up in given systems and societies. The term through this understanding relates to the utterance of governance in the form of policies and laws as well as political expression of normalized formal party politics. *Politics* is therefore a rather narrow interpretation of political conduct. It is within the realm of *politics* that Mouffe sees that hegemonic orders can be established through the political conduct and governing by the incumbent regime (Mouffe, 2013). This is further the aspects of political life that through hegemonic conduct can act as a mechanism that strangles the conflict inherent in society, this aspect will be developed further in the following section.

In contrary to the *politics,* Mouffe's concept of *the political* is wide ranging and includes many different facets of societal life. Mouffe's definition of *the political* as "the ontological dimension of antagonism*"* somewhat indistinct in what it actually entails. Mouffe draws from Schmitt's (1932) *The Concept of the Political* for her development, understanding and use of *the political.* Schmitt highlights the of the complexity of *the political*, he states;" One seldom finds a clear definition of *the political"* (Schmitt, 1932:20). Schmitt's thesis is, as in line with other agonistic thinkers, a critique against

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liberal politics that are based on a universal sense of reason then in its conduct leads to a state of neutralization and depoliticization of political topics through hegemonic political discourse. Schmitt places emphasis on the relation between the state and society and especially on how neoliberal politics that aims to eradicate the conflictual war-like nature of the politically involved society, *the political* (Schmitt, 1932). Mouffe sees this in a similar fashion and *the political* can be describes as the part of society where political stances and opinions are expressed in social relations and different outlets in everyday life (Mouffe, 2013). *The political* is therefore a force that transpires throughout society as a constant expression of political life in organized and unorganized manners.

2.2.3 Depoliticization and over-politicization

The dimensions of *politics* and *the political* are what constitutes the basis for the problem analysis of Mouffe's model of agonistic pluralism. While *politics* aims to diffuse the antagonism existent in *the political, the political* informs the *politics* on what topics that the *politics* should aim their focus towards at given times. Mouffe argues that rationalist approaches aiming for reaching a consensus regarding political questions are with the coming of a consensus suffocating *the political* (Mouffe, 2000:101). As per this trajectory liberal and deliberative democracy presents a challenge due to the risks of depoliticization within the realm of *politics* and over-politicization leading to expression of the antagonisms in unfavourable way within *the political.* In contrary to liberal and deliberative view of the public debate with participation leading to robust and lasting consensus, Mouffe sees this as the exact scenario prompting a situation of depoliticization of an issue in the *politics.* Once a consensus is reached regarding a political issue and subsequently pushed through by implementation of policies, laws or other political mechanisms the topic moves off the political agenda and debate in relation to the topic subsides within the *politics* despite that the topic might still be a matter of debate and contestation within *the political.* Therefore, every decision taken should according to Mouffe be in the form of a *conflictual consensus* which means that adversaries are accepting of their irreconcilable differences in opinions and that each decision taken is always up for contestation (Mouffe, 2000). Mouffe states;

> Nevertheless, it should not be forgotten that under modern conditions the most that a theory of justice can aspire to is to cement a hegemony, to establish a frontier, to provide a pole of identification around a certain conception of citizenship, but in a field necessarily criss-crossed by antagonisms where it will be confronted by opposing forces and competing definitions (Mouffe, 1992: 57).

Mouffe equates the depoliticization of political issues and the establishment of hegemonic norms with a post-political state. This refers to when no real option of

choice of path is presented to the electorate through the available candidates since they are in large gathered around the same vision and not presenting viable options to the established hegemony in different contexts (Mouffe, 2005).

2.3   Critique of Mouffe's agonistic approach

In conjunction with agonism becoming all the more developed and recognized within the field of political theory in the last decade (Mouffe, 2013:1) it also has become the subject of substantial criticism from deliberative thinkers in turn, that should be acknowledge and met prior to applying the framework through empirics.

Deliberative theorists, John Dryzek, provides an extensive critique against Mouffe's model of agonistic pluralism (Morrell, 2010). Dryzek initiates his critique against Mouffe agonistic approach by acknowledging the foundational thought of Mouffe's theory, that antagonisms in societies should be transformed to agonisms for vibrant and inclusive engagement (Dryzek, 2005:221). However, this convergence of agreement between Dryzek and Mouffe is also where the similar views end. Dryzek opposes Mouffe's view of political identity and the role it plays in political life. Dryzek argues that Mouffe's conception of political identities is contradictory and inconsistent. Mouffe (1993:12) states; "no identity is ever definitely established, there always being a certain degree of openness and ambiguity in the way different subjects are articulated". For Dryzek, this notion of identity is inconsistent due to the emphasis put on political identity as a creation of unity and agency while it is according to Mouffe never consolidated. Dryzek means that the type of confrontation between political identities actually acts as a catalyst for further polarization and consolidation of identity (Dryzek, 2005:220-221). Instead, Dryzek, proposes that the origination of adversaries should be reframed and shifted away from the notion of identity and rather take the liberal route and base adversary positions on first and foremost the individual and her rights (Dryzek, 2005:224). Dryzek contends that a shift like this away from identity to the individual would to a large degree transform much antagonism to agonism since identity is discursively created with a large degree of affect involved in the process while an emphasis on needs and individual rights are less likely to result in hostility since the aspects of values and affect is less prominent (Dryzek, 2005:225). This in conjunction with the deliberative focus on communicative action rather than confrontation in the political forum is according to Dryzek a more constructive way to conduct politics with aims for a pluralist society (Dryzek, 2005:225).

The critique from Dryzek against Mouffe's model is extended further in relation to his view on consensus. Consensus is in Dryzek and Niemeyer's (2010) view a rather complex term, that is not only multi-faceted but also multi-levelled, a concept which

there is no clear definition of what consensus actually means or what it concretely refers to. To address this discrepancy in understanding and use of the notion of consensus in political theory, Dryzek and Niemeyer introduces the concept of meta-consensus which refers to a consensus on a higher ground in terms of the rules of the game than in relation to stances on particular issues. They argue that deliberation should strive for reaching meta-consensus on values, beliefs, preferences, and discourses, separately or in conjunction with each other, which normatively creates the environment where the actors come to a consensus to respect each other positions and how the confrontation between those positions can play out (Dryzek and Niemeyer, 2010: 86). In the existence of a meta-consensus, confrontation through communicative action can take place in different societal forums and political institutions since the meta-consensus adds the element of respect for the adversaries' position and how the confrontation should play out (Dryzek and Niemeyer, 2010:86-95). Through these assertions, Dryzek and Niemeyer, argue that Mouffe's model is identical to the deliberative model in that in the strife for establishment of a hegemonic order which guarantees and sphere for contestation between adversaries (Dryzek and Niemeyer, 2010:93).

Dryzek and Niemeyer's critique against Mouffe's vision of agonistic democracy becomes all the more analytically tangible when considered in relation to Mouffe's reply. The utter fact that political identity and mobilization around them can lead to antagonism is the reason as to why it is imperative for the political process not to enter into the post-political state. In a post-political state, without any real political alternatives, antagonisms have restrained space to develop into agonisms and therefore are forced to be channelled through alternative channels rather than through *politics* (Mouffe, 2000:101). Furthermore, Morrell (2010) highlights the profound difference between Mouffe's model and the critique from Dryzek and Niemeyer; the principles which the order or meta-consensus is based upon. The concept of meta-consensus bases itself on reason and morality that advocates for political contestation between stances. Mouffe on the other hand sees the establishment of an order as purely political decision which rejects the idea of the common good and can be challenged throughout the course of the game (Morrell, 2010).

3   Methodological framework

In this chapter, the philosophical standpoints and the methodological approach for the research will be developed. The initial section will address the ontological and epistemological assumptions the research departs from, subsequently, the single case study design which the research is structured around will be disused. Narrative analysis which is the method applied for the research will be developed. The interview technique, sampling and material also be addressed before the chapter is concluded.

3.1   Philosophical assumptions

The field of political science deals with an array of social dimensions and thus inquiries. The way of perceiving and understanding the social world and subsequently how to conduct research within this realm is surrounded by a rather dichotomous and vivid debate between the positivist and interpretivist approach (Aliyu et al, 2014, King et al, 1994: 36 and, Guba and Lincoln, 1994). Therefore, it is of weight to situate the research within the discipline in terms of ontological and epistemological assumptions and stances before developing the methodological framework that will guide the research.

The research will be stemming from the interpretivist ontological and epistemological stances and thus be conducted through qualitative analysis. The ontological departure that shapes the interpretivist form of research is based on the notion of relative realities and the rejection of the thought that there is one objective reality existing. Realities are intangible and contextual, in relation to different social dimensions and dynamics individuals creates their own reality, therefore, there is no universal reality that shapes societies or that can be the departure point for research (Guba and Lincoln, 1994: 110-111). The world is for interpretivist a creation of our making that is ever-changing and re-interpret (Wogu, 2013: 67). The interpretivist research approach seeks to understand the meaning of practices within the contextual setting and cultural norms in which the case is embedded (King et al, 1994: 37). Moving from the ontological assumptions shaping the interpretivist approach, the epistemological stances are defined by the apprehension that findings from research are interactively created throughout the process of the research by the relations and interpretation of the case and subjects that the researcher employs (Guba and Lincoln, 1994: 111 and Rapley, 2001:304). This means that interpretivists do not seek 'the truth' but rather one version of a truth in the given context.

This approach to research further highlights the role of reflexivity, namely, that the research will be shaped by my role as a researcher through my own identity, preunderstandings and interpretation of the material. Knowledge and finding in this sense is connected to my role as a researcher and my background as well as the methods applied (Anderson, 2008: 185). The aspiration is therefore not to find 'the truth' but a version of a truth, in a relative contextual setting through a descriptive inference (King et al, 1994: 35-38). As for the research, my identity as an English speaking western woman affiliated to the Western educational system affects the research in multiple ways. Primarily, my own pre-understanding of democratic development is based much on the Western view of the concept. My identity further affects what type of participants that are willing to participate in the research. As I am representing a university located in the West there is certain assumptions connected to me which limits my access to organizations and persons that does not want to be associated with those assumptions. This reflects in the sampling where exclusively all the participants are positive towards the West and my identity thus assessed positively.

3.2 Single case study

The research will be based on a single case study design focusing on the process of democratic development in Georgia. The single case study design aims for deep and comprehensive knowledge and understanding of the given case by immersion into the contextual setting. Through the understanding of processes and relations of the case study, inferences will be drawn (Gerring, 2004: 352). In qualitative research, stemming from the interpretivist ontology, a single case study is well suited for drawing out and understanding complex relations and as well as holistic perspectives through interlinking of variables handled (Stake, 2000: 24). The single case study design is pertinent for the research through its ability to engage with one case to explore multiple social dynamics in the contextual setting, as expressed by Baxter and Jack;

> This qualitative case study is an approach to research that facilitates exploration of a phenomenon within its context using a variety of data sources. This ensures that the issue is not explored through one lens, but rather a variety of lenses which allows for multiple facets of the phenomenon to be revealed and understood (Baxter and Jack, 2008: 544).

The departure from the interpretivist ontological assumption interlinked with the single case study design will allow for exploring social relations and how actors in Georgian politics and society perceive their reality in relation to contestation in the frame of the process of democratic development.

3.3   Narrative analysis

The theoretical framework of agonistic pluralism will be applied to the single case study Georgia through the method of narrative analysis. Narrative analysis is grounded in the thought of social life in it ontological status is storied, through narrating and rehashing stories, individuals and groups makes sense of themselves and other as well as their reality in their surrounding and context (Somers, 1994:613). The stories that are created and recounted influences the self-perception of individuals and groups and how they want to portray themselves towards others in the setting. Depending on how the stories are constructed, anchored and re-told, different aspects are accentuated and emphasized for prominence for the one expressing the narrative as well as for the one perceiving it, this process can arguably play a role in the creation of identities and realities respectively (Sarbin, 2011: 5). The identities that are constructed and expressed through different narratives are multiple and interchangeable in ongoing processes expressed through social relations in temporal and spatial manners (Somers, 1994: 614). Andrews et al (2013: 2) contend that narratives can tell us a lot about social life more than what is being spoken or written;

> By focusing on narrative, we are able to investigate not just how stories are structured and the way in which they work, but also who produces them and by what means; the mechanisms by which they are consumed; how narratives are silenced, contested or accepted and what, if any, effects they have

Narratives exists in multiple layers in societies, Somers (1994) classifies four different archetypes of narratives that exists in relation to each other; ontological, public, conceptual and meta/master-narratives. The ontological narrative refers to the narrative of self-identity of the individual. The ontological narrative is utilized for defining the self as well as guide what to do in given circumstances by placing the self in the context of a story and acting accordingly to narrative structure of that story (Somers, 1994: 30). Public narratives are those narratives that applies to entities that spans further than the individual. Public narratives are expressed in different spheres such as for example families, organizations and nations. These groups selectively choose happenings and historical events to construct their narrative accordingly (Somers, 1994: 31). Conceptual narratives relate to concepts and explanations developed and employed by social researchers for developing an analytical vocabulary for narratives (Somers, 1994:31). The final dimension of narratives as defines by Somers is meta-narrative or as more commonly referred to as master-narrative. The master-narrative is within in the conceptual setting that the other dimensional narratives exist within. The master-narrative is the dominating narrative relating to the big over-arching questions that shapes the trajectories the by the society/country/community (Somers, 1994: 32-33). For the purpose of this research the ontological, public and master dimensions of narratives will be in focus since the dimensions themselves are all entailed within Mouffe's concept of the *politics* and *the political.*

The process of the creation and re-affirming of a self- or group-identity relies on the attribution of agency to the individual in conjunction with the existence of an epistemological other, a cohesive and consolidated identity requires an epistemological other to define itself in relation to (Somers, 1994: 613). Furthermore, individuals, groups and identities make sense of their own narrative and reality through a positioning of their narrative in relation to others' narratives, this entails both positioning in relation to similar narratives and identities but also towards the epistemological other (Somers, 1994:614 and Bamberg, 2004). The creation of a narrative and the positioning of that narrative in relation to others in the terms of an identity or group in the setting of a society brings the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion into the equation of identities and narratives. Narratives in the public and master dimensions can constitute tools for creating and consolidating collective identification whereas the ontological and public narrative dimensions relates itself to. This dynamic of collective identification can in its positioning in relation to the epistemological other can be a source for inclusion as well as exclusion (Ahonen, 2001: 179-180 and Fincham, 2012: 303-306).

The essence of narrative analysis based around the construction and narration of identities that are perceived as multi-layered in their existence corresponds with the view of identity employed by Mouffe while also allowing for exploring the narrative relation to the *politics* and *the political.* Mouffe (1995) state that identity is multiple and contradictory and hence never fully fixed and encompassing intersections of the subjects positioning in the societal context in relation to different topics. Furthermore, Mouffe's agonistic approach highlights citizenship as inclusion through a political community formed by a common bond and not a substantive idea of the common good, the model for the good life. The common bond is constituted by a sense of inclusion of diverse political identities existent in society into the framework of institutions and principles for political engagement which promotes a society without a given shape or path but with continuous reformation (Mouffe, 1995:37). Henceforth, the understanding of identity as anti-essentialist and multiple while providing a base for inclusion and exclusion renders narrative analysis as an appropriate form of inquiry for this research due to ability of exploring identity and narration of it in a layered multi-dimensional manner.

The theoretical framework will be applied to the case of the process of democratic development in Georgia through exploration and analysis of three key factors drawn from Mouffe's model of agonism and adapted to the case. The first factor that will be explored is the perception different actors have of the process of democratic development, how they conceive the process and what defines it according to them. The second factor is the subjects' experienced relation to the political trajectory in regard to the process of democratic development, here, the main aspect in focus is the feeling of inclusion/exclusion. Subsequently, the third concept is the subjects' perception of availability to act politically in order to influence the development and integrational trajectory and in relation to this, the relations they feel they have to other actors. The approach and analysis of these concepts will enable for assessing the case through an

agonistic perspective by making it possible to identify and pin-point possible conflictual intersections and how they are played out in the political environment and structure. The approach and analysis can show whether there are traits of agonistic pluralism existent and utilized in the process or if traits of agonism are absent from the process, and if so, how this is indicated.

3.4   Semi-structured interviews

The case study of Georgia is explored through a minor field study with Tbilisi as a base location in a duration of eight weeks. The purpose of the field study is data collection through interviews with different actors. The interview technique that is employed for the research is semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews are a method for collection of qualitative data in which the researcher asks the interviewee open-ended questions which allows for a greater range of answers than closed questions whereas the answers alternative are pre-determined through the construction of the question (Ayres, 2008:811). Open-ended questions allow for the interviewee to highlight the aspects they consider important in relation to the context presented by the researcher (Roulston, 2008:583). An interview protocol, developed by the researcher, is used for guiding the interview to keep the conversation within the scope of the research topic. The protocol can be based on questions or topics to be covered in the interview that are based on the underlying conceptual framework or phenomenon in focus for the research (Ayres, 2008:811). The interview technique inherits flexibility in terms for how the researcher employs and navigates through the interview protocol and follow up questions in relation to the answers given. The nature of semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions allows for "a rich, deep and textured picture" of the interviewee's reality and relation to the research topic (Rapley, 2001:315).

An interview protocol has been developed for the interviews which is focused on the key concepts drawn from Mouffe's agnostic model. The protocol is structured as per the themes of inquiry. The same interview protocol is used for all the interviews except those interviews with representatives for the Georgian government and the EU delegation to Georgia for which the protocol was adapted slightly.

3.5   Sampling and ethical considerations

The sampling for participating interviewees departs from a wide-perspective angle of what type of actors and persons that can inform the study. A primary focus in the sampling is towards oppositional political parties and civil society organizations active in the field of democratic governance. In total, 12 interviews with 17 individuals were conducted during March and April 2017 in Tbilisi Georgia.

As for ethical considerations, the location for the interview was decided by the interviewee, most often the interviews took place in the office facilities of the interviewee's place of work. A small number of interviews took place in a public space that the interviewee decided upon. In the cases of consent from the interviewee, the interviews were recorded for transcription, in the cases where the interviewee did not want to be recorded, notes were taken during the interviews. Furthermore, the names of the interviewees are included as per consent. The material gathered through the interviews constitutes the main source of empirical material for the research. In addition to the interview data, statements, policy briefs from political actors and civil society organizations as well as media coverage of political events relevant to the research also provides an empirical basis for the analysis.

4 Narratives of democratic development in Georgia

The analysis is structured around three aspects which are divided into two different chapters in order to structurally analyze the empirical material as per the theoretical framework. This chapter is focused around the initial two aspects explored in the interviews; the narratives of democratic development in Georgia and the positioning of them in the wider context of the political landscape. This initial chapter will provide a background and contextual setting for the subsequent chapter that will focus on the opportunities for contestation in the process of democratic development in Georgia.

Prior to embarking on the analysis, a short context of the Georgian political landscape will be provided. This is imperative for the analysis due to the understanding of the nature within which the actors in focus for the research operates.

4.1 Georgian political landscape

The legal structure of Georgian political landscape pose very few obstacles for formal participation (Nodia and Atilgan, 2016:8). Due to this, there is a large number of political parties active on the Georgian political scene[2]. These structural underpinnings and constellation has been the case in Georgia since independence (Kakachia and Lebanidze, 2016:146-147). The Georgian electoral system is a mixed system, with half the parliamentary mandates allocated by proportional election while the other half is allocated by single majoritarian districts. This is accompanied with a threshold of 5% in the proportional section (TI Georgia, 2016 a). Georgian electoral politics since independence has been signified by a dominant party in possession of constitutional majority in parliament and a relatively small and fragmented parliamentarian opposition[3]. Georgian political parties also struggle to move away from personality

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[2] In the parliamentary election 2016, 19 electoral subjects were on the ballots while a further 29 parties were refused registration due to inconsistencies in the application or withdrew their registration prior to the elections (Central Election Commission, 2016 a, 2016 b).

[3] The election in 2012, did however result in a different scenario with the Georgian Dream coalition gaining simple majority with the former ruling party UNM constituting a rather significant oppositional force (Kakachia and Lebanidze, 2016:151-52). However, the 2016 parliamentarian elections resulted in a single party once again gaining constitutional majority since GD won 115 of the total 150 mandates in the parliament (Central Election Commission, 2016 c).

driven politics to institutionalize and mobilize support through grassroot engagement[4]. Political parties have therefore a tendency to disappear from the political arena if they fail to reach electoral success (Bader, 2008, Kakachia and Lebanidze, 2016:152).

Civil society in Georgia enjoy freedom to operate in Georgia and are granted protection and autonomy through the legal code of Georgia (Freedom House, 2016). Civil society in Georgia has become more vibrant and active throughout the years, however, civil society also experience difficulty in reaching through the structural domain to engage grassroots. Civil society is therefore, to a large degree a professional sphere who acts as watchdogs, financed almost solely by foreign donors (Ibid. and Kakachia and Lebanidze, 2016:143-145). The media environment is like the other spheres formally open for pluralism. The media freedom and protection of the right to expression is according to Freedom House assessed as strong. However, media outlets in Georgia are highly politicized and often connected to a political force which means that most media outlets portray a certain political view (Freedom House, 2016). Considering these aspects of the Georgian political landscape, the departure is an environment that in the legal and theoretical terms does not pose any structural hindrances for political contestation, this is a factor that is highlighted by all the participating interviewees in the study, no matter in what sphere they are active, they do not experience any legal restrictions or barriers for their operations.

4.2   Georgia's European way

The collapse of the Soviet Union and the establishment of Georgia as a fully sovereign state - created a number of challenges as well as opportunities. Beside internal turmoil of a Hobbesian state of chaos that shaped the early years of independence, Georgia was also faced with a question regarding their belonging in the wider international context, is Georgia a part of the West or the East? (Nodia, 2016:5-6). From the outset of independence, *The Return Europe* has been an outspoken political aspiration (Nodia, 2016:9).

The Rose Revolution 2003 that resulted in the ousting of president Shevardnadze, who had been in power since 1995, and consequently the inauguration of Mikhail Saakashvili in 2004, constituted a powerful springboard for further acceleration of Georgia's international orientation towards the West. In his inauguration speech Saakashvili declared;

> Georgia is the country of unique culture. We are not only old
> Europeans, we are the very first Europeans, and therefore Georgia
> holds special place in European civilization…Georgia should be

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[4] Out of the 19 electoral subjects on the ballot for the 2016 parliamentary election the names of 13 of them included the name of the chairperson of the party (Central Election Commission, 2016 a).

formed as the state assuming international responsibility, as the dignified member of international community, as the state, which regardless the highly complicated geopolitical situation and location, has equally benign relations with all its neighbours, and at the same time does not forget to take its own place in European family, in European civilization, the place lost several centuries ago. As an ancient Christian state, we should take this place again. Our direction is towards European integration. It is time for Europe finally to see and appreciate Georgia and undertake steps towards us. And first signs of these are already evident. Today, we have not raised European flag by accident - this flag is Georgian flag as well, as far as it embodies our civilization, our culture, essence of our history and perspective, and vision of our future (Saakashvili's inauguration speech, Civil.ge, 2004).

With this Saakashvili regime set the tone early on by declaring Georgia as a European country. Saakashvili embraced the narrative of Georgia as an ancient European state, the statement *I am Georgian therefore I am European*[5] signifies the public rhetoric for Georgia's European belonging (German, 2015:606 and Ó Beacháin and Coene, 2014:923). In Georgia, the path since independence has, by domestic forces been perceived as parallel with the transition processes that took place in the Baltic states which has resulted in EU membership. With this, the political narrative of Georgian independence shifted away from the Soviet past and Russian dependency rather than maintaining close ties to Russia as other states in the region opted for (Devdariani, 2017, Interview). The master-narrative centred around the notion of Georgia being an old European country who now can return to their roots have been widely promoted through political conduct (German, 2015:606). This is evident by the focus towards the EU has remained as a main priority for Georgian governments ever since, as demonstrated by the bi-partisan resolution of foreign policy adopted 7th of March 2013 which states;

> Integration into the European and Euro-Atlantic structures represent the main priority of the country's foreign policy course. For the purpose of achieving strategic priority of achieving membership in the European Union and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, Georgia will take further steps for building and strengthening of democratic institutions; establishing governance system based on the principle of rule of law and supremacy of human rights; ensuring irreversibility of sustainable economic development. Georgia will not join such international organizations, whose policies contradict these priorities; (civil.ge, 2013).

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[5] Zviad Zhvania, former chairman of the Georgian parliament (1995-2001) and Prime Minister (2003-2004). Stated at the inauguration of Georgia as a member of the Council of Europe, 27 January 1999.

Furthermore, the negotiations and process and the eventually the signing of the AA between Georgia and the EU in 2014 cemented Georgia's European way (Council of the European Union, 2014).

The European way constitutes the master-narrative that has, and continues to, influence and guide the Georgian process of democratic development. The narrative is multi-dimensional in how it is utilized Ó Beacháin and Coene (2014), Nodia (2009) and Minesashvili (2016) argue that, in the sense of cultural belonging, creation of the *other* as well as a blueprint model for governance and democratic rule, Europe has become entwined with the Georgian national identity. The narrating of the Georgian national identity has become bound to Europe through emphasizing historical and cultural ties between the two entities (O' Beacháin and Coene, 2014, Devdariani, 2017, interview). Coene (2016:63) further argues that Georgia as a country and its people belonging to Europe is in itself portrayed as an absolute truth, there is no other place where Georgia belongs than in Europe. This sentiment echoes in the political realm while it extends beyond that as well. Exclusively, all participating interviewees concurs on the fact that Georgia's only way is the European way, there is no other option for Georgia. Head of EU assistance coordination department, David Bujiashvili, expresses this as; "We don't have another way to go, the other way is Putin's way, you see, it's EU or Putin's way" (Interview, 2017). Coene 2016 (63-64) points out that this rhetoric, have been a prominent factor in Georgian politics since the late 1990's, and questioning of Georgia's European belonging by linking Georgia to the East, is purely an attempt to soil Georgia's name. Minesashvili (2016) means that this type of rhetoric is utilized in order to create a frontier and cement the break from the epistemological *other*. The narration of Georgian national identity as a European country leans itself on *the other* constituted by Russia. Through the narrative of European belonging, the Russian model embodies the anti-thesis of what the Georgian identity entails. One interviewee highlights the departure from the portrayal of Russia as a friendly partner that existed in Georgia Previously to the image that is dominant now of Russia as an oppressor and occupant (Devdariani, 2017, interview). This change of perception of Russia adds to the division from the Soviet past and the barrier around the Georgian identity in relation to *the other* which contributes to consolidation of the dominant political perception of Georgia as a European country.

The image of Europe further provides a blueprint for democratic governance in the Georgian development process (Nodia, 2009: 94, Interviews[6]). Throughout interaction with the interviewees, a conceptual image of Europe crystallizes. Europe is defined by actors in Georgia as a legitimate and sound actor that symbolizes democratic governance, human rights and rule of law (Interviews[7]) Many emphasizes this aspects with the conjoined argument, that the process of moving closer to the EU and the

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[6]Mentioned in interviews with; Bujiashvili, Devdariani, Gaprindashvili, Giorgobiani and representatives for the EU-delegation to Georgia
[7] This way of describing Europe and the EU is recurring in all the interviews

implementation of the AA is not hinging solely on a future EU membership, the process is not without value even if it does not conclude in membership in the EU. The process in itself; concretized through the implementation of the AA, entails a number of commitments substantively manifested through reforms that are aimed to promote and strengthen democratic rule and governance in Georgia, which is of value with or without a membership in the EU (Interviews[8]). This perspective with a blueprint and a concrete way through to fulfil that blueprint staked out by the various commitments and reforms that the AA binds Georgia to showcases a scenario with a clear end goal for the political process for Georgian democratic development, the goal of the process is reached when the commitments and reforms in the AA have been implemented successfully.

4.3   Dissenting views of the master-narrative

The focus towards Europe is markedly prominent as the master-narrative of democratic development in Georgia, although, there are complex dynamics and conflictual intersections existing in the process that puts this rather straight forward path guided by fulfilling of commitments by reforms, that is the dominating narrative, into question.

4.3.1   The anti-Western narrative

The majority of the interviewees highlights that anti-Western sentiments existences amongst certain segments of the population as an alternative narrative to the pro-European way. These sentiments are mentioned in connection to what apprehensions there might be in the Georgian society in relation to the integrational process. Exclusively, all interviewees connect these sentiments to the influence of Russian soft power in Georgia. As according to a public opinion survey conducted by the Caucasus Research Resource Centre in 2015 showed that an increasing number of respondents since 2009 think that the process of EU-integration does constitute a threat towards the traditional Georgian values. In the same opinion poll an overwhelming majority of 74% responded that to be a good citizen it is extremely important to follow traditions (Caucasus barometer, 2015). This view echoes through the views held by all the interviewees where they see that anti-Western propaganda is particularly successful in Georgia when attributing Europe as a threat against traditional and religious values. The portrayal hinges on the idea that if Georgia move closer to the EU, Georgia and you as a Georgian will lose your identity, and traditional values (Bujiashvili, interview, 2017). Erekle Urushadze from TI Georgia expresses;

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[8] Mentioned in interviews with Bujiashvili, Devdariani and Gaprindashvili.

There are fears amongst some segments of the population and some of the forces on the extreme right or some of the forces that might be sponsored by Russia might be trying to capitalize on these fears. They spread a lot of disinformation, saying things like if Georgia gets closer to Europe, the EU will require Georgia to legalize same-sex marriage and a lot of people with conservative traditional beliefs are afraid of that. Even though this is on no way a part of Georgia's collaboration with EU and it's not part of the AA process, they spread a lot of lies of how things are in Europe, they write newspaper articles that paedophilia is legal in Europe and things like that that are clear lies but people who aren't well informed, especially people in the region that have no access to the internet, may believe this (Urushadze, interview, 2017)

While another interviewee active in the civil society said;

They have their media they have their civil society groups and the campaign is not that Russia is good but that the west is so bad. It does not look like there is a choice between Russia and the west, no, this is practically talking against everything that I linked the west…if you become European you will not be able to buy some foods, like a pig suckling. Why? Who says this, where do you see this? There is no like very ground type of discussion etc. this is some kind of news, fake news in Facebook and for thousands this is for smiling but for tens this is a real danger and you know, they share this and conveniently, it works (Devdariani, interview, 2017).

However, even though that this aspect and sentiments are highlighted as something that is real and does affect certain segments of the population, primarily in the rural areas with a high level of ethnic minorities, this is considered to be ontological narratives and not a real threat to the pro-European orientation. In fact, Devdariani, who is the director of CIDA, an organization which facilitates a network for civil development through civil society engagements, expresses how these sentiments exists with individuals and not mobilized in organizational manners (Devdariani, interview, 2017). The anti-Western sentiments that in fact do exist amongst some parts of the population are rather perceived more as a result of a low level of knowledge regarding what the EU actually is and what a future membership could bring to Georgia, as a former parliamentarian for FD expresses "the electorate in Georgia is not highly educated, they don't understand what EU membership in reality means" (Giorgobiani, interview, 2017). This perspective held by the majority of participants in the study illustrates that the anti-Western sentiments are not seen as a conflictual intersection between different political views.

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4.3.2 The fragmented pro-European narrative

In relation to dissenting views of the narrative of democratic development, many interviewees draw attention to the factor of fragmentation amongst the pro-European forces which they consider to be more problematic and a bigger obstacle for democratic development than that of anti-Western sentiments (interviews[9]).

> You said pro-Europeans and anti-Europeans, how they are interacting, it is absolutely antagonistic. But for me, it is even more alarming that you have this political polarization in Georgia even between pro-European forces. It is complete polarization, and that polarization has unfortunately increased in Georgia, that is one of the weaknesses of Georgian democracy, I forgot to say and mention before. One of the weaknesses of Georgia's democracy is an increased polarization between political forces. You have, hatred increased, you have less cooperation and more loose a zero-sum game between them. That is even more problematic that the antagonism between pro-European and pro-Russian forces (Gaprindashvili, interview, 2017).

As previously discussed, the political landscape is plural in the sense of the existence of a high number of political parties notwithstanding, the compatibility of the ideological stances of many of these parties, the level of fragmentation and tensions amongst them remains high. The aspect of a lack of party policy programmes and importance of personality in Georgian politics is highlighted recurrently in interviews. Stances in political issues and policies are not regarded as important as the personality that is connected to the party in question (Interviews[10]). This has been the scenario in Georgia for since independence, as for example after Shevardnadze's exit from office and politics his party imploded and still this is focus on personality is the basis for building a party in Georgia, UNM is highly connected to Saakashvili as a person while GD is built around the personality of Ivanishvili (Urushadze, interview, 2017). Furthermore, the electoral support for the parties are rallied through the demonization of the opponent and the person associated with the party rather than the political views and proposed policies of the party (Interviews[11]). One concrete example of this is the campaign UNM leads on its website that is entitled; STOP Bidzina![12] (UNM.ge, 2017). All interviewees, expect Bujiashvili[13], have the perspective of Georgian political forces being all the further polarized and in conjunction with this, the political environment is perceived as becoming less apt for the entities to meet in a constructive manner not shaped by antagonistic relations between them (Interviews).

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[9] Mentioned in all interviews except from the interview with Bujiashvili who represents the administration of the government
[10] Mentioned in interviews with EU-delegation, Japaridze and Bezhitashvili, Larsen and Urushadze
[11] Mention in interviews with Gaprindashvili, Japaridze and Bezhitashvili, Macharashvili and Urushadze
[12] Referring to the founder of GD Bidzina Ivanishvili
[13] Bujiashvili represents the administration of the government.

Although this might not constitute a dissenting narrative ideologically or geopolitically to the European way, the fragmentation, tension and personality focused politics amongst the pro-European parties lie as ground for the creation of duelling narratives in the process of democratic development and governance. Lincoln (2013) argues that since at the least the Rose revolution in 2003, domestic Georgian politics have been influenced by a counter-narrative to that of democratic development and EU-integration that shapes Georgian foreign policy as well as much of the perception of Georgian democratic development held by outside actors. The domestic sphere is shaped by parties led by a strong-man mentality with low levels of institutionalization and internal democratic structures that make use of democratic tools and reforms while focusing their political actions on the discrediting and eradicating on the political opponent rather than promoting viable policies for different sectors in an environment with political contestation (Interviews[14]). Lincoln (2013) and the interviewees that are not representing the incumbent government further argues that continuously, events takes place in the domestic sphere that questions the real commitment to democracy development. The previous government as well as the incumbent government, both showed an animosity to following through on reforms that would contribute to the consolidation of democracy. The interviewees highlight the judiciary as an institution that the current and previous governments have refrained from reforming in order to retain the judiciary as a political tool influencing cases sensitive for the government as for example the lengthy case of the ownership of the oppositional national TV-station Rustavi 2[15][16].

4.4   Positioning of narratives

The positioning of different narratives in the wide context of the political landscape is, as argued by Somers (1994), Ahonen (2001) and Fincham (2012), important to address to understand how actors they assess their own role in the political order. Connecting to Mouffe's framework, the narration of identities as included or excluded from *politics* affects how actors perceive themselves and their possibilities for contestation. It is of weight to emphasise that the notion of identity as according to Mouffe is an anti-essentialist conception that is never fully set; "The "identity" of such a multiple and

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[14] Mentioned in interviews with Gaprindashvili, Japaridze and Bezhitashvili, Lomtadze, Tsulukidze and Urushadze.

[15] The judiciary was mentioned by all interviewees as problematic for the development of democracy and the case of Rustavi 2 was highlighted or referred to in all cases.

[16] Rustavi 2 is the sole national oppositional broadcaster. In 2015, a lawsuit was filed against Rustavi 2 by former co-owner of the channel, Kibar Khalvashi, who claimed that he was coerced into selling his share of the ownership in 2006 and asserted that his shares of the ownership should be reinstated. The 2nd of March 2017 after a lengthy judicial process, the Supreme Court of Georgia handed down the ruling in favour for Khalvashi, who is affiliated with the incumbent government. Many voices from the civil society, opposition and international community means that the case and judgement is politically motivated and a way for the current government to control all the national broadcasting outlets (Civil.ge, 2015 and civil.ge, 2017 a)

contradictory subject is therefore always contingent and precarious, temporarily fixed at the intersection of those subject positions and dependent on specific forms of identification" (Mouffe, 1992:28). This perception of identity ties in with the positioning of narratives, which in a likely manner takes a lucid form and can thus position themselves in different ways in given contextual settings.

4.4.1 Positioning of the anti-Western narrative

The anti-Western narrative, as discussed in the previous section, is highlighted by interviewees as an alternative narrative for democratic development, although, the anti-Western narrative is predominantly perceived by the interviewees as sentiments existing within certain small segments of the population. Throughout interviews, the segments of the population that are seen as the ones harboring and reproducing anti-Western sentiments are primarily ethnic minorities as the Armenian and Azerbaijani population who access media through Russian outlets due to limited knowledge of the Georgian language along with ethnic Georgians residing in villages in the rural regions of Georgia (Interviews[17]). Founder and director of the civil society organization CIDA, Zviad Devdariani (2017, interview) expresses:

> Because many of those national minorities, they don't know the Georgian language, practically, their informational source is the Russian TV from the satellites. The enemy is sharing their information and they have no access to the Georgian media because of the problems regarding language, practically, they are linked to the information source of the occupants. On the daily basis, they receive the information regarding Ukraine, Georgia and the West etc. from the Russian news...Also in the villages of Georgia, it is more difficult for our case to justify why West than to justify why Russia.

The interviewees argue that the anti-Western narrative is marginal in Georgian society and especially so in the politics. Head of the EU co-ordination Unit in the Georgian ministry of EU and NATO integration, David Bujiashvili (2017, interview), means that the anti-Western sentiments are not a major problem in the national setting and rather is a problem localized to rural regions. Furthermore, additional interviewees argue that the anti-Western propaganda and the anchoring of the anti-Western narrative is mostly successful in areas where the educational levels are low and the poverty levels are higher while the political integration and inclusion remains low (Interviews[18]). The lack of awareness regarding the EU in conjunction with the absence of what is seen as

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[17] Mentioned in interviews with Devdariani, Gaprindashvili, Giorgobiani, Macharashvili, Tsulukidze and Urushadze.
[18] Mentioned in interviews with Devdariani, Gaprindashvili, Lomtadze, Macharashvili, Tsulukidze and Urushadze.

tangible results from the integrational process are highlighted as reasons as to why the anti-Western narrative continuously exists and arguably is gaining strength in Georgia (Interviews[19]). In terms of the relations and debate between the pro-European voices and the anti-Western voices in Georgia, there is a state of affairs that crystallized amongst the interviewees and their organizations. Interviewees attests that they do not meet any anti-Western forces in an organized manner or debate forum of kinds. The different narratives for development exits in parallel to each other rather than engaging with each other in a political debate and process (Interviews[20]).

Through the accounts presented through the interviews, the perception of the anti-Western forces and the interaction that the interviewees experience and sees between their own organizations and the wider pro-European narrative places the anti-Western narrative in a marginal position in the political landscape outside of the realm of *politics*.

4.4.2 Positioning of the fragmented pro-European narrative

The positioning of the pro-European narrative in its fragmented form is rather lucid and complex, much as argued by Mouffe (1992) and Somers (1994). The narrative takes its departure in the same ideological stand point as the master-narrative of Georgia's European way, however, the positioning of the narrative is dependent on the situational context and the issue of matter.

Through the interviews, it crystallized that the European way is the path for democratic development is hegemonic within the realm of *politics*. One interviewee expresses that there is an "over-consensus" in terms of Georgia's integrational process with the EU and NATO. The main political parties are all in agreement in regard to this, which is a source of pride for Georgia in the post-Soviet context (Japaridze, 2017, interview). This extends beyond the political parties and is a something that is evident in the civil society and society as a whole as well (Interviews[21]). While the majority of the interviewees have a sense of inclusion in the process of democratic development in the sphere of *politics* they also highlight that the inclusion is something that does not transpires through all the parts of the process but rather a fixture that occurs at times. Kakachia and Lebanidze (2016:152) means that the relations amongst the pro-European voices are complex since the logic of dichotomic competition between government and opposition has become dispersed through the notion of many voices rather being oppositional to the former rulers UNM more than the incumbent GD. Which means that the positional lines between pro- and anti-government are blurred and undistinguishable at times. One

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[19]Mentioned in interviews Devdariani, Gaprindashvili, Tsulukidze and Urushadze.

[20] Mentioned in interviews with Devdariani, Japaridze and Bezhitashvili, Tsulukidze and Urushadze.
[21] Mentioned in all the interviews

interviewee representing one of the most prolific civil society organizations in Georgia, GYLA, states that the relationship between different pro-European voices and especially so between the ruling power and the civil society, is an interesting relationship that is neither black or white, never fully inclusive nor exclusive (Macharashvili, interview, 2017). The narration of the pro-European opposition is that they are substantially included in the process of democratic development regarding certain thematic issues where the government assesses that the skills of the given organization is suitable for consultation or where the presence of an oppositional voice is perceived to add legitimacy to given step in the process. Actors in the civil society particularly emphasized this, many interviewees said that they feel like they have a good relation to the government and are included in the process in certain regards, as stated by Macharashvili from GYLA (2017, interview);

> There are other cases were they practically come to us and ask for help because we have some knowledge that they need. An example of that is one of my colleague recently wrote a research what the anti-corruption efforts should be, the government basically based an entire chapter of the new action plan on the basis of our research.

This account of inclusion in the political process is echoed by the director of GRASS, Gaprindashvili (2017, interview);

> As we speak I can claim that we have developed quite a meaningful cooperation with the parliament, with the chair-person of the foreign relations committee and with the chairperson of the European integration committee and with the first deputy chair of the parliament.

In these instances, the narrative of pro-European voices perceives and position themselves as a part of the political process for democratic development and thus position the narrative within the realm of *politics*.

The positioning of the narrative of the fragmented pro-European force is also dependent on the positioning and rhetoric's used by the ruling majority when speaking to and about the other pro-European forces in the Georgian political landscape. The majority of the interviewees representing non-governmental forces accentuated how they are portrayed as villains and enemies of the state in terms of the process of democratic development by the ruling power in instances the topic of discussion is sensitive for them, as expressed by two interviewees; "they vilify us whenever we say something unfavourable about them. The way they vilify us is by saying GYLA equals Europe equals devilish, perverts, whatever" (Macharashvili, 2017, interview) and "They think that we are an enemy of the country. They call us a puppy of sorrows" (Tsulukidze, 2017, interview). Gaprindashvili from GRASS (2017, interview) means that the ruling power in Georgia use a tactic to refer to oppositional forces as to denounce the role and impact of their opposition by excluding them form the realm of the *politics*. One way this is concretized through is the use of the terms "street opposition".

we have this phenomenon, perhaps, we invented this terminology here, for the parties who are not members of the parliament, once upon a time, well fairly recently, they are called "street opposition". That terminology was promoted by the government, "street opposition". That terminology already contains certain humiliations and certain insults against the political opponents… When you call somebody a street guy, "street opposition" you have this tendency of excluding those from the development of the country (Gaprindashvili, 2017, interview).

These accounts showcase that the positioning of the fragmented pro-European narrative is complex and is dependent upon the situation. The narrative is constructed in a sense to be a partner to the government and in line with the master-narrative in the sphere of *politics* for the process of democratic development all the while the it also constitutes a source for criticism and opposition to the master-narrative in terms of the political conduct in relation to certain sensitive issues as reform of the judicial and electoral systems and the Georgian media landscape. This shows how the narrative is being positioned and positions itself within the realm of *politics* in certain regards while under other circumstances it is excluded from that realm and thus is limited to give expression to a voice in *the political.*

5 Opportunities for contestation

The dissenting views of the master-narrative for the democratic development are rather different in their ideological departure as well as in their guises, a situation that allows for assessing the Georgian case from two different angles; one assessing the role of ideological contestation through the anti-Western narrative as well as the role of contestation within one ideological stand-point through the fragmented pro-European narrative.

The initial section of the chapter will address the role of ideological contestation of Georgia's European way. Followingly, contestation within the fragmented pro-European way will be addressed. Throughout the interviews three themes or perhaps arenas have surfaced as integral for assessing the role of contestation amongst the pro-European forces; the climate of the political debate, the structural setting for contestation and the political process. These themes will be explored to assess the role of contestation through the agonistic viewpoint in a thorough manner.

5.1 Contestation of Georgia's European way

As discussed in preceding chapter, the master-narrative for democratic development in Georgia is shaped around Western orientation through integrational processes with NATO and the EU, processes that are concretized through commitments and reform agendas for Georgia to fulfil and implement. This commitment to move closer to the West have shaped Georgian foreign policy and thus the domestic political process since the early 2000's. This conception of Georgia as a Western state has been consolidated and solidified in the sphere of *politics* through the years in the form of acts like the signing of the AA in 2014. This narrative that has been dominant in the Georgian process of democratic development in the last decades, despite this, an anti-Western narrative exists in the country, a narrative that questions and criticizes the choice of Georgia's European way. These narratives are in rather stark ideological opposition to each other, a situation that according to the agonistic approach is an inevitable feature of political life that should be accepted and embraced in the political process through continuous inclusion of political stances and identities through respectful meetings of

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agons. The Georgian process of democratic development seemingly does not take an agonistic approach; through the accounts presented by the interviewees the meeting of agons in the ideological sense is absent from the political arena (Interviews[22]). This absence of meetings between ideological agons has its ground in the accounts presented by the interviewees on the view of the viable options for democratic development in Georgia and how the alternatives are perceived. Exclusively, all the interviewees express that there is no other viable option than the European way for Georgian democratic development, this remains the view even if the EU will be a different constellation or even non-existing in the future; Georgia's path for democratic development should still be aimed at moving closer to Europe (Interviews[23]). One interviewee that is the chairperson for the political party Girchi and also a former parliamentarian expresses that there is an "over consensus" amongst the major political parties and voices in Georgia regarding the country's trajectory towards the EU, namely, there is no political party or voice in the conventional sense that is in opposition to the trajectory of EU integration within the sphere of *politics* (Japaridze, 2017, interview). Furthermore, most of the interviewees attributes the path of EU integration as the "right/good way" or referring to the anti-Western narrative as "the wrong narrative" (Bujiashvili, 2017, interview). As stated by one interviewee;

> In my organization and the people, I work with, that I have meetings with and my friends, I know that they want to become EU members, I know they have the ***right*** values they want to be with the west they want the US, they really appreciate these values of democracy and human rights (Tsulukidze, 2017, interview; emphasis by author).

A further account adds to this by;

> To show a real case of what Europe is…It is not direct propaganda, I mean this ***good*** propaganda, we will have this kind of life standard in this country and if we speak about our European movement, this is our goal, this kind of village here (Devdariani, 2017, interview: emphasis by author).

These accounts signal a perception of that there is one way for Georgia process of democratic development that is the "right" one or perhaps the "good" one. As in relation to Mouffe (2013) this constitutes a vision of a model that is that is based on the thought of a universal reason of what is the right and best way for the conduct of politics. This is further fostered through the form of engagement that is utilized and promoted between the different ideological stances. The engagement between the different stances is limited to start with but is also further constrained in a twofold sense, the level on which the engagement occurs and how the engagement is normatively approached and in extension how the engagement is executed practically. The level of the engagement from between the different stances is from the perspective of civil society organizations, political parties and institutions is focused on the level of individuals rather than on

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[22] Mentioned in interviews with Bujiashvili, Devdariani, EU-delegation, Gaprindashvili, Japaridze and Bezhitashvili, Khachidze, Macharashvili, Tsulukidze and Urushadze
[23] This perception was shared by all the interviewees

engagement with other organizations, parties or institutions that are representative for the opposing ideological stance. One interviewee, representing a civil society organization, states that they have engagements with individuals that ontologically identifies with the anti-Western narrative albeit no engagement through advocacy or debate with organized actors representing the anti-Western ideology (Devdariani, 2017, interview). The interviewees representing the political party Girchi concurringly argues that the there is no real engagement or debate taking place between the political parties of different ideological stances. Highlighting AP in particular and their conducts in the electoral campaign and subsequently in parliament, furthermore, the meetings of the ideological opponents take the form of being disruptive rather than constructive, meaning that AP uses tactics to disrupt the political discussion and process rather than engaging in a constructive dialogue (Japaridze and Bezhitashvili, 2017, interview). Conceivably concretized in the parliamentary session held on the 19th of April when Emzar Kvitsiani of AP threw a pen and a glass of water at Gigi Bokeria of European Georgia[24] while insulting and trying to approach Bokeria for a physical altercation (Tabula.ge, 2016 and Interpressnews.ge, 2016). Through the viewpoint of Mouffe's agonistic model, this illustrates a scenario where the antagonisms that exists in the relations between the pro-European and the anti-Western narrative remains antagonistic rather than being adapted as agonistic political stances. Rather than respecting the stance of the opponent and engaging in a political struggle with them, the antagonistic nature remains primary and the struggle is thus either absent or disruptive.

A further testament as to how ideological contestation is absent is made evident through the way that the meetings between the stances are narrated by actors. The predominant approach adapted by interviewees advocating for further integration with the EU is focusing on public awareness raising regarding the EU and what further integration concretely mean for the citizens of Georgia in their day to day life (Interviews[25]). Bujiashvili from the Ministry for EU- and NATO integration states the following in a response to the question of what is the most important in the process of democratic development in relation to ideological differences;

> It is about to make the benefits of the EU the focus. To make it much
> more visible for the population, what these reforms stand for and how
> they are going to benefit each citizen, each customer, what are the
> benefits (Bujiashvili, 2017, interview).

The origins for this strategy for engagement is to counter the anti-Western narrative by focusing in on the anti-Western propaganda that is recurring in media outlets

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[24] Gigi Bokeria was formerly a member and parliamentarian for UNM but left the party in January together with a faction after a lot of internal struggles, especially with and about Saakashvili. Bokeria instead established European Georgia which he now represents in the parliament (civil.ge, 2017 b)
[25] Mentioned in interviews with Bujiashvili, Devdariani, Giorgobiani, Macharashvili, Tsulukidze and Urushadze

broadcasting in Georgia[26]. Throughout, interviewees argued that increasing public awareness of the benefits of the process of EU integration would be a catalyst for weakening the ontological narratives of Georgia as a non-Western country and thus have an impact that would lessen the support for anti-Western political forces (Interviews[27]). Gaprindashvili, Director of GRASS states;

> The organizations like us have been trying to debunk the fake news and to bust the myths around the EU and the list is really long but so far perhaps what should worry us is not about that kind of propaganda, which is there of course, but perhaps again have we have from our side, I mean from the government's side, is the European, the REAL stories from the EU and the REAL benefits from the EU. For instance, the DCFTA benefits, we have now potential in front of us, that should be promoted by us, by the government and by the NGO's etc. that is the best strategy to counter that sentiments and propaganda run by Russia etc. It is not enough but it is one of the best ways (Gaprindashvili, 2017, interview).

Additionally, one interviewee from the civil society adds that people living in rural areas of Georgia and making a living by producing agricultural products in general have a very little awareness regarding the EU while the knowledge of Russia since the Soviet times is strong and the current status between the countries regarding access to the market is familiar to them and therefore a more comfortable and viable political option for them. By explaining the unpredictability of the Russian option and how policies might change from one day to another in conjunction with presenting real examples of rural lives in the EU is the way that the anti-Western propaganda and thus the narrative can and should be countered (Devdariani, 2017, interview).

This illustrates that the narrative of the pro-European is not up for ideological contestation through counter-hegemonic challenges due to the lack of inclusion and meeting of agons representing different stances (Mouffe, 2013:2). Furthermore, the way engagement with the ideological opponent/epistemological *other* is based around the notion of educating the *other* and consequently pursued them that the position they hold is less suitable or viable than that of the ideological opponent. Through the engagements that does actually occur between the ideological agons, the inherent antagonistic relations between the two are not realized as an unavoidable aspect of the political conduct but strategies are employed to eliminate the antagonisms rather than engaging in an agonistic political struggle through continuous debate. When assessed in relation to the previously discussed excluding of the anti-Western narrative from the realm of *politics,* the Georgian case showcases a scenario where the dominant narrative of Georgia's European way is being established as a hegemonic frontier for political

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[26] There is a large number of broadcasters in Georgia that broadcasts in the Russian language, some are domestic in the source but most are foreign (Dzvelishvili and Kupreishvili, 2015)

[27] Mentioned in interviews with Bujiashvili, Devdariani, Khachidze, Macharashvili and Tsulukidze

conduct while the ideological role for contestation of this hegemonic model remains absent from the political realm.

The European way for Georgia's continued process of democratic development is, as previously stated, argued by one interviewee surrounded by an "over-consensus", a term that refers to the perceived fact if Georgia's path for furthering democratic development is decided on within the sphere of *politics* and therefore not up for debate or contestation (Japaridze, 2017, interview). In line with Mouffe's theoretical model, the establishment of the European way as a hegemonic frontier with an absence of ideological contestation in the sphere of *politics* creates a scenario where the question in its current status is depoliticized and in a post-political state. Furthermore, the political processes and practices for democratic development are solely aimed towards furthering the integrational process with the EU and the debate that takes place between actors is regarding the tools and mechanism that are the most effective for advancing the process rather than the political options (Devdariani, 2017, interview). In addition, Bujiashvili (2017, interview) adds that the anti-Western narrative has no impact on policy development or implementation, even so in cases of implementation where the narrative is more prominent in the given society, especially so in areas heavily populated by Armenian and Azerbaijani minorities as for example the Samtskhe-Javakheti region[28]. The focus on the tools and mechanisms for the integrational process is a case of what Honig (1993) refers to as *displacement of politics* and Mouffe's (2005) notion of post-political. The political process has moved from a political struggle between agons and is instead focused on the bureaucratic means for the purpose of a society enabling subjects to live in absence of political conflict while the political options that are presented in a debate are gathered around similar ideological stand points. The situation illustrates a scenario where the is pre-conditions for an ideological conflict being stifled by ignoring or preventing it from playing out in the forum of *politics*. This configuration and narration of politics where ideological agons do not engage in a political struggle or meet in a conflict and where the topic is in a state of depoliticization provides a ground where the avenues for expressing critique and dissent of the hegemonic frontier non-existing within the realm of *politics*.

5.2   Contestation within the pro-European path

As outlined in the previous chapter, the narration of the pro-European path for democratic development take a very different shape in is positioning and relations to the master-narrative than that of the anti-Western narrative. This also reflects in the role of contestation within the fragmented pro-European path in relation to the anti-Western

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[28] The Samtskhe-Javakheti region is located in southern parts of Georgia in connection to the borders to Armenia and Turkey. The region is populated by a high number of national minorities, primarily Armenian (Geostat, 2015).

narrative since the narratives are intertwined and overlapping in terms of stand-points and positioning in relation to certain thematic issues and contextual settings.

5.2.1 The climate of the political debate

The climate of the political debate in Georgia is in large stipulated around the same factors that shapes the political landscape; personality and fragmentation in a framework of a zero-sum game. As previously discussed, personality has since independence dictated the political spectrum and remains to do so in the current time. A charismatic leader is in large the decisive factor rather than ideology and coherent policy when it comes to voter behaviour (Kakachia and Lebanidze, 2016:146). This phenomenon is evident in the political debate and the climate that surrounds it due to the topical focus on personality as the identifying factor for the party in question or the debater itself in the instances of meetings of the agons. Additionally, besides personality, personal rivalry also is prominent in the debate. Political analyst at GIP, Joseph Larsen states "There is also this personal rivalry between Mischa and Bidzina[29], it is surprising that politics is still defined by that but it still is" (Larsen, 2017, Interview). One interviewee attests that this plays out practically in the tactics of the major oppositional party, UNM, in their engagements with the incumbent ruling party, GD. The tactic is to focus on the personal endeavours of the founder of GD and former prime minister Bidzina Ivanishvili, in attempts to vilify him and connectively so GD which is identified through the person Ivanishvili. Reciprocally, GD applies tactics that targets the legitimacy of Saakashvili and in extension UNM by referring to the *bloody nine years*[30] and steering the debate solely to the topics where UNM's credibility is still in question due to the events that occurred under their rule (Giorgobiani, 2017, interview). Moreover, interviewees representing the EU-delegation to Georgia highlights the presence of historic bitterness and the aim of exploiting the opponent's weaknesses in the political debate which further contributes to an antagonistic debating climate focused on diminishing the opponent for own winning's sake rather than on concrete discussion regarding current political issues. Urushadze from TI (2017, interview) adds to this account;

> There is a lot of polarization, there is a lot of radicalism, there is a lot
> of messages that try to delegitimize the opposing side and to present
> the opposing side, whether it is the government side or the
> oppositional side, as a not legitimate political opponent, but people
> who are trying to destroy the camp.

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[29] Referring to Mikheil Saakashvili and Bidzina Ivanishvili
[30] This term is used to refer to Saakashvili's and UNM's time in power, often used by GD supporters to denounce Saakashvili's nine years in power to a rule of tyranny and suffering largely without democratizing reforms.

This account is illustrated by how non-parliamentarian oppositional political parties perceive their role and relation to the government. Tamar Giorgobiani, representing the Free Democrats of Georgia, states;

> If you are not on my side, you are very bad and ugly person. The way of debates it is in a very rude way. They are talking about each other and say bad things, we don't have constructive conversations between opposition and the government. Everything that is said by the opposition is bad and unacceptable (Giorgobiani, 2017, interview).

Zurab Japaridze, chairperson of the political party Girchi, further states;

> You don't have this respectful treatment of opponents in Georgia in politics, it is not only with Girchi, you hardly find it. Parties against each other, it is like war, no respect at all…If you look at their rhetoric they will not confess it, they might say they are not a party and with 0.5% support it is not a party and things like that. They try to avoid to debate with us and that is one of the problems with us and that is one of the problems we have (Japaridze, 2017, interview).

An attest for this is the report on hate speech presented by the Media Development Fund which states that during 2016, there were 15 cases of hate speech by GD aimed towards UNM whereas in seven of those cases contained encouragement of violence against UNM officials and members, as for example the statement uttered by GD representative Omar Nishnianidze on the national TV-station Tabula;

> They [UNM] should had been beaten already, if they were 46 punished in the past, this would not have happened today. They must not be beaten on the election day and during election period, but otherwise they should be beaten... All Georgia blesses the hands of those who beat up Bokeria and others, so how can we punish them? (Media Development Fund, 2016)

These illustrations are echoed through monitoring reports of the pre-election period to the parliamentary election in 2016. TI Georgia, ISFED and GYLA asserts that;

> In several cases, confrontations between political party activists escalated into physical violence during the pre-election period. Representatives of the opposition as well as the ruling party were subjected to violence. Several television debates between political opponents also ended with a physical confrontation. Relatively frequent were attempts by political party activists to interfere with the campaign activities of their opponents, which, in some cases, led to confrontation (TI Georgia, ISFED and GYLA, 2016).

The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (2016) also acknowledges this in their report and encourages the political subjects to focus their campaign and debates on substantial political issues rather than questioning legitimacy of opponents through critiquing the election framework.

Most the interviewees mean that this normative approach to political debate is a factor that leads to a hostile climate for the political debate where the discussion regarding political position and policy programmes are absent, as stated by Macharashvili from GYLA

> They [debates on political issues] don't exist!... 90% of the decision making is emotional. What I always have been feeling is that people don't vote around the issues or substantial debates but around how they like and dislike. One guy or woman might be a pure speaker and they appear to be very traditional, very god sons and daughters of the country so that someone will vote for them, which is very painful but I think that it is not just the voters to blame but also the political parties who instead of working around substantial issues, they manipulate popular concepts in their favour (Macharashvili, 2017, interview)

This illustration of the climate for the political debate in Georgia showcases a polemic environment where antagonisms between political subject standing close to each other on the ideological scale is the dominating factor for the conduct of the debate. In contrary to Mouffe's model, where the position of the opponent should be accepted and realized as a vital part of political life that should be a part of the realm of *politics,* the Georgian case is structured around the notion of politics as a zero-sum game where the perception of the ultimate outcome is if the opponent becomes diminished or eradicated from the political scene.

5.2.2 The structural framework for contestation

> No Georgian government has been autocratic enough to discount genuine challenges from the opposition, but the system had also never been democratic enough for the opposition to be confident that they can fully rely on electoral mechanisms to come to power (Nodia, 2016:83)

The structure of the Georgian electoral system is an aspect that through interviews been highlighted as problematic for the process of democratic development due to the high level of fragmentation and antagonism amongst electoral subjects and ultimately how the electoral system acts as an enabling factor for the realization of the zero-sum

approach to politics, which in turn affects the opportunities and the role that contestation plays (Interviews[31]). The Georgian political landscape contains a large number of political parties, although, only three parties[32] gained enough votes to secure seats in the parliamentary election in 2016 through the proportional part of the election while only one majoritarian candidate, not affiliated to GD or UNM, managed to gain a parliamentary seat. In the current constellation of the parliament, GD's mandate with 115[33] seats grant them constitutional majority while UNM's mandate weakened has significantly from 65 to 27 and the anti-Western party AP secured 5 mandates (Central Election Commission, 2016 d).

Aprasidze (2016:119-122) argues that the electoral system is preferential for a dominant-power construction where one power gains a majority, not uncommonly a constitutional majority, and thus enjoys a status of rather uncompromised and unchallenged control of the power apparatus. Despite the large amount of parties on the political scene, is there realistically only one party that can be characterized as strong at given times since electoral successes means to capture the entire power apparatus (TI Georgia, 2011:1). The power that can be apprehended or captured, according to Aprasidze, is used to eliminate the opponent from the political scene as in the case in the aftermath of the 2012 election. Although, the election results was the first time in Georgian history of party politics a former ruling party did not vanish from the political scene after electoral defeat but managed to remain on the political scene as an active oppositional party, the actions from the new government however upheld and sustained the zero-sum approach to political competition by the aim to eliminate the main oppositional party by a process of "restoring justice" which entailed arrests and prosecutions of high-ranked officials and party-members of UNM. As for example; the imprisonment of the former mayor of Tbilisi, Gigi Ugalava, in 2013 for misuse of state funds and creation of "fake jobs" as well as Saakashvili's choice to exile due to threats of prosecution and the following revocation of Saakashvili's Georgian citizenship (Kupatadze, 2016:122). Throughout the interviews, respondents representing oppositional political parties and civil society organizations argue that in conjunction with the normative zero-sum approach to electoral politics, there are two factors that greatly contributes to this scenario favourable to a dominant-power structure; the 5% proportional threshold and the majoritarian component of the election (Interviews[34]). Japaridze chairperson of Girchi highlights the difficulties the threshold poses;

> I think we need to reduce the threshold of 5% to get in to the
> parliament, it would allow for small parties to try their strengths and
> get into the parliament…Now, it is a bit difficult because of this
> threshold and we have to create some kind of bloc with some other

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[31] Mentioned in interviews with EU-delegation, Gaprindashvili, Giorgobiani, Japaridze and Bezhitashvili, Khachidze, Lomtadze and Macharashvili.
[32] As mentioned previously in relation to Bokeria, UNM split in January and the new constellation European Georgia is now also represented in parliament (civil.ge, 2017 b)
[33] Including the independent candidates supported by GD
[34] Mentioned in interviews with Giorgobiani, Khachidze, Lomtadze, Japaridze and Bezhitashvili,

> party that you don't really trust and they don't have an idea what they
> want, just to be a larger group and have a chance to pass this threshold

Japaridze's statement draws attention to the scenario for contending on the political scene. All the while the parties can form election blocs the feasibility of this option must however be seen in the light of the fragmentation and antagonism that colours the relations between electoral subjects. The antagonistic relations between electoral subjects makes this option hard to realize and capitalize on which in turn catalysts the positioning and dominance of the ruling party against the possible contestation in form of oppositional forces. In relation to this, it is appropriate to also highlight the financial aspects of the electoral threshold that further impacts the sustainability and survival of the parties. To secure financing form the state budget, the political parties or the election blocs must attain 3 % of the proportional vote in parliamentary or local government[35] elections for the minimum amount of funding. Parties can also receive state funding for the expenses for election campaigns if they get 5 % or more in the proportional part of the parliamentary election or if their candidate get 10 % or more in the first round of the presidential election. Due to the low level of grassroot engagement in Georgia, the funding through membership fees is not a developed system. The additional source for funding for the political parties' therefore stem from donations from individuals or corporate enterprises. (TI Georgia, 2016 b). This adds a further obstacle for parties to establish themselves and remain on the political scene after an election result that is insufficient to grant them with state financing if they have no or limited access to private donations. The threshold due to this affects the parties' possibilities of fully entering and remaining in the formal setting for contestation while it also acts as a physical barrier for the possibilities for organized forms of contestation within the framework of institutional party politics by being a hinder for inclusions as well as sustainability for the parties with less electoral support.

An additional catalyst for the maintaining and re-enforcement of the dominant-power structure in Georgian party politics and therefore limiting the opportunities for contestation in the institutional domain is according to many interviewees the majoritarian component of the parliamentary elections (Interviews[36]). One interviewee from a civil society organization means that the majoritarian system showcases the centrality of personality and clientelism in Georgian politics and how it works in favour for the incumbents that are more well-known in societies through their current term as well as availability to campaign funding and media outlets [37] (Lomtadze, 2017, interview). The familiar faces of the incumbents are pitted against a large number of oppositional candidates, due to the high level of fragmentation, generally resulting in significant scattering of the oppositional vote in the first round of the election which prevents any substantial mobilization behind one oppositional candidate.

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[35] Local government is referred to as Sakrebulo in Georgia
[36] Mentioned in interviews with Gaprindashvili, Giorgobiani, Japaridze and Bezhitashvili, Khachidze and Urushadze
[37] The largest and most well-funded political parties have their own national broadcasting channels through which they convey messages, TV is the most popular form of media in Georgia (NDI, 2016)

The structure of the electoral system does through this dynamic limit the possibilities for any substantial contestation while the subsequent disbursement of the mandates makes the strong party even stronger, relating to the real percentage of support, as one interviewee states;

> One thing that also needs to be mentioned is that 49%, if I'm not mistaken, of the population did not go and did not vote. You have a question of legitimacy, whoever went and voted, it was, if I'm not mistaken, 24-25% who voted for the current ruling party and this is one of the discrepancy with the voting system in Georgia, when matter of fact, you have this fact that 24% voted for ruling part and that party with this amount of votes, 24%, got constitutional majority in the parliament…Having the constitutional majority and that kind of power in the parliament is a challenge, not only in Georgia, but is could be pose a challenge in any other well established democracy in the world for instance, including Sweden. This is the challenge in Georgia and we already see the quite alarming developments stemming from that unrestricted power (Gaprindashvili,2017, interview).

Most of the interviewees concurs with Gaprindashvili, that the electoral system results in a skewed representation. It is noteworthy to acknowledge that in early May 2017 a draft on the constitutional changes was presented by the incumbent government which signifies a move from the split system to a fully proportional system. The planned system for the distribution of the votes have however rendered concern from civil society and the international community since the proposed changes will distribute all the votes for the parties that do not clear the threshold exclusively to the winner rather than a proportional divide amongst all the parties that clears the threshold, leading to a disproportionately strong mandate (civil.ge, 2017 c). This once further showcases how contestation is perceived and practically omitted while the dominant-party is in an adventurous position in the current and proposed electoral system whereas the opportunities for contestation are limited.

5.2.3 The political process and contestation.

As Mouffe outlines in her agonistic model, the envisaging of politics and the political process in themselves are important aspects to consider in terms of contestation and agonistic conduct of politics due to the post-foundational ontological assumptions. Mouffe argues that the political process and inclusion of different political identities and thus ideological stances, in that process is the core purpose of politics. The purpose of politics is not to reach an end goal for the politics but rather to guarantee the inclusion of the diverse political identities in a constant and continuous process where everything is up for contestation, including established political decisions, through the notion of

conflictual consensus (Mouffe, 2000 and Mouffe, 2013:20). It is therefore of weight to address the political process to understand the role of contestation in the process of democratic development in Georgia.

As discussed previously, the process of democratic development in Georgia is dominated by the narrative of *The Return to Europe*, a narrative concretized through first and foremost through the AA. The process is stipulated by the implementation of the reforms and commitments set out by the AA (Bujiashvili, 2017, interview). This stipulation shows that the process is aimed at a clear end goal, the process of EU integration and the AA provides a blueprint for how the Georgian democracy should develop (O' Beacháin and Coene, 2014, Nodia, 2009, Minesashvili, 2016). The conduct of politics is focused on the end goal of implementing all the reforms and commitments as like a check-list for developing and consolidating democracy. One interviewee means that the political process in current time, is primarily focused on finding the most appropriate and effective tools for advancing the implementation process. This posture towards the political process is a stark contrast to the Mouffe's post-foundational view of constructive political conduct and it brings us to assess if the relations between the incumbent ruling majority and the oppositional voices, parliamentarian and non-parliamentarian, are inclusive in terms of the political process (Devdariani, 2017, interview).

The current setting in parliament with constitutional majority with one party, grants them with the power to push through legislation and constitutional amendments in their own command, without a political process that counters in other voices. Urushadze from TI states that the antagonistic relations between the different parties and the set up in parliament with the concentration of power with one party have resulted in very few examples of constructive engagements between the government and opposition (Urushadze, 2017, interview). Another interviewee active for good governance means that the dynamic between the government and the opposition is shaped by the incumbents practice of side-lining the opposition in the legislative process and public debate, he states; "Inclusiveness, although it was promoted rhetorically from the government it has never been the case in full. Inclusiveness is not there". As for example, advisory groups in parliament including the opposition have not been staffed or functioning as they should according to (Gaprindashvili, 2017, interview). The case of Rustavi 2 also for many of the interviewees, signals a facet of the practice of side-lining the opposition by capturing the entire media landscape as well as the formal power apparatus (Interviews[38]). Lomtadze from IDFI further argues that with the constitutional majority and a clear agenda of what should be done through the AA, consultation and debate is seen as hindering for an effective legislative process for implementation of the commitments (Lomtadze, 2017, interview). This extends further than the relations between the government and opposition and affects the relations between the government and the presidential institution. In recent times, the rhetoric between the institutions have become increasingly heated and the government have

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[38] The case of Rustavi 2 was a previously mentioned highlighted or referred to in all interviews.

overruled the president's veto which was casted against legislative proposals with the attribution that the president is being disruptive for the process (Democracy & Freedom Watch, 2017, civil.ge, 2017 d, and civil.ge, 2017 e). Many of the interviewees mean that this practice of side-lining oppositional voices effects the perception of possibilities for political expression for parties and individuals in the electorate. The interviewees active in non-parliamentarian oppositional parties, Giorgobiani and, Japaridze and Bezhitashvili state that their opportunities to engage in a substantial political debate is restricted due to the unwillingness from the government and other parliamentarian parties to engage with them in in between the election periods. As Japaridze states; "After the election, it is just dead… nothing is happening, there is no political debate…There is no the political debate between the parties". An inclusive political debate with more voices is therefore limited to take place in relation to an election, at the other times, debate is in large absent. Moreover, political process transpires through the society and that people feel like the only time politicians want to listen to them is ahead of an election, otherwise, the contact between the politicians and the electorate is perceived as limited or even non-existent (Larsen, 2017, interview). This further attest to the status of depoliticizing that surrounds many topics and process in Georgian politics.

As outlined throughout this chapter, there are normative assumptions, structures and practices that are utilized for side-lining and diminishing the role of the opposition and contestation in the process of democratic development in Georgia. Despite this, plurality and contestation is still a feature of the process, although, it is facilitated through a strategic and instrumental engagement with, or perhaps "use of" the civil society. Interviewees from civil society organizations describe their position and role in the process of democratic development as not fully included nor excluded. In certain circumstances, they perceive that they are valued by the government for the process and included in the proceedings while in other instances they perceive that they are viewed as an enemy to the government and an obstacle for the government's agenda and thus consciously excluded from the process; "we are either the villain or an accredited source, depending on what we are saying" (Macharashvili, 2017, interview). Gaprindashvili (2017, interview) states that GRASS at current time have developed what he regards as a relatively meaningful and substantive cooperation with the government and parliament when it comes to the process of EU integration and the anti-annexational strategy in the relations to the breakaway regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. At the same time, there are occurrences where the recommendations presented by GRASS and other civil society organizations are ignored or where they are excluded altogether from the process. Gaprindashvili expresses;

> Recently the law was adopted by the parliament, in a way they were trying to show off to the wider public that they were listening to different expertise from the NGO community. Of course, we have quite an expertise, first and foremost I am talking about TI and GYLA etc. and that expertise has been there. Their advices have been there even in the draft laws, it has been there. But in the end, the majority did not listen to them, they listened partially, they listened to the

extent that would allow then to say to the wider public that "we have been engaged in the dialogue with different actors, including the NGO community".

Other civil society organization concurs with this illustration of partial inclusion and the utilization of civil society for strengthening the illusion of a plural and inclusive democratic process. The interviewees representing GYLA, IDFI and TI mean that they are included in process that are less sensitive for the government and where they can capitalize on including civil society by gaining legitimacy through an open façade towards critique and contestation. Discussions regarding anti-corruption and open governance are situations where the civil society organizations perceive that they tend to be included. Proceedings in relation to the electoral or judicial system, that are more sensitive topic for the government and them retaining their dominant-power status, tend to be conducted in a manner that excludes the involvement of civil society organizations; "So, things that might influence the elections, things that might influence the security forces and the control of the state security, these are the areas where you wouldn't be having the government being cooperative, it is a very closed circle for them" (Lomtadze, 2017, interview). The rhetoric applied by the government is that they are always open for discussion of all topics, however, in sensitive issues they use a practice of accelerating the process which in practice limits the opportunities and openings for actors to engage in a discussion. Macharashvili states;

> …there are cases where some laws are very sensitive to the government and they try to adopt that in a very fast way. They say: everything was open they could have come and asked but we already adopted that so we have no time. What the government often uses is accelerating the process to make sure that we [civil society] are naturally left out of it (Macharashvili, 2017, interview).

These accounts show a situation where the role of contestation is complex, although there are no legal barriers for engaging in contestation but the relationship to the epistemological *other* and the country's electoral traditions creates an environment where contestation is antagonistic and the opponent is an enemy that should be ignored or eliminated which is made possible by the structure of the system. Furthermore, pluralism and contestation are despite this regarded as normatively important for living up to expectations and commitments posed on Georgia by primarily the EU and thus contestation is utilized for showcasing a state of pluralistic democracy which is concretized by the inclusion of civil society organization in the proceedings. The exclusion of the civil society organizations at other times also shows that contestation is not wholeheartedly welcomed and embraced but rather used as a strategic measure to exacerbate the notion of an inclusive open democracy.

6   Concluding discussion

Based on the analysis presented in the previous two chapters and certain additional information that have come out of the interviews, some concluding remarks and discussion points are pertinent to address in order to adequately summarize the thesis and present possible departure points for further research.

The Georgian transitional process from the Soviet past has been of many different facets. Though, since the Rose revolution in 2003, the narration of the Georgian national identity as fundamentally European, has taken centre-stage in the quest of Georgia's *Return to Europe* and process of democratic development. Georgia's European way has dominated the political sphere, domestically and internationally, while being reciprocated by the EU's commitment to Georgia through the AA. The European choice for Georgia, has in large been portrayed as an all-accepted consensus, an absolute truth. Although, through interviews it has become apparent that this consensus is not an all-encompassing truth for everyone in Georgia. In contrary, amongst certain segments of the population the narration of the identity hinges on anti-Western sentiments. In general, these sentiments are perceived as a manifestation of a lack of awareness and knowledge of what integration with EU means concretely rather than being a valid political opponent. The anti-Western voices are comprehensively excluded from the realm of *politics* in the normative approach and in the practice of political conduct, this narration of Georgian identity is thus a voice that continuously exists in *the political* without the availability for an outlet in the *politics.* Furthermore, through interviews a fragmented constellation of the pro-European voices has also crystallized. Despite the similar ideological stances held by many of the pro-European voices, the narration of the process of democratic development differs vastly amongst them. While the actors are aiming for the same stated outcome, further democratic development through integration with the EU, the perception of the other actors is interchangeably that of a partner contra an enemy.

Through the analysis of the empirical material it has become evident that the role of contestation in the process of democratic development in Georgia through an agonistic perspective is complex. The findings from this research shows a two-fold role of contestation in the Georgian process of democratic development; the ideological contestation that is stifled and consequently absent from the process and the non-ideological contestation that is antagonistic in its nature of a zero-sum game, although, contestation is still being realized as a tool for implying democracy and is henceforth utilized as a strategic means for legitimization. In the ideological sense, there is as stated an "over-consensus" amongst actors that are active in the realm of *politics*;

integration with the EU is the only way forward for democratic development in Georgia. The political contextual setting is constructed and narrated around this idea and despite there being an alternative path through an anti-Western approach promoted by certain forces, the debate between the actors representing the different ideological approaches is non-existent. The two exists in parallel to each other where the pro-European path monopolises the space in the *politics.* When assessing contestation on non-ideological grounds the situation is different. There is a lot of engagements between actors within the pro-European movement but the relations between them are built around the notion of a zero-sum game for elimination the opponent. The mode of contestation is as a result antagonistic rather than agonistic, the antagonistic social relations between actors remains the main focus in the engagements in conjunction with a belief that they should be eliminated rather than realized by constituting the core of political life. Through conversations with representatives from civil society organization it is nevertheless clear that contestation and inclusion of different voices is understood as important by the government, perhaps not for the government themselves in practice but for the outside perception of the Georgian government. This assertion is evident in the practices employed by the government to purposely include civil society actors in processes and consultations in instances where they have the same desired outcome in mind and the political risk thusly is low, meanwhile, where the government and the civil society have different visions for the preferred outcome and the political risk for the government is seemingly higher, the civil society actors are systematically excluded. Consequently, the Georgian cases shows few signs of adaptation of an agonistic approach to contestation in the process of democratic development and is seemingly rather fostering a political environment apt for exclusion and antagonism.

Throughout interviews a recurring theme has come to light; a sense of apathy in the electorate. Many interviewees expressed an apprehension regarding the state of the civic inclusion and participation in the Georgian democracy. The election turnout in the 2016 parliamentary elections on 51% was lower than expected and far below the 60% turnout in the previous election 2012 which raises certain concerns of the electorates participation and inclusion in the building and consolidation of Georgia as a democracy. The majority of the interviewees mean that this is a result of the process of democratic development being elite-driven rather than inclusive. The politics and the process itself is hence out of tune with reality of a large proportion of the Georgian population that lives very different lives with poverty and existential concerns and yet has there not been a political party that successfully articulates the political needs and will of the Georgian electorate thoroughly. If such a force comes on to the political scene many interviewees doubt that the orientation towards the EU will constitute a deciding factor and the so-called "over-consensus" might no longer be given as an absolute truth. Accordingly, further research in the relations between the politics and the electorate might render interesting and insightful notions for the future of Georgian democratic development as more inclusive and participatory process.

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Appendix 1

Interview protocol – civil society and political parties

- **Presentation of the interview subject**
  - Name, age, organization and amount of time active in the organization/similar activities.
  - Background

- **Perception of Georgian development and democratization**
  - How democratic is Georgia according? Is the country developing in the right direction?
  - How would you describe development and democratization in Georgia?
  - **Could you specify three aspects that for you defines the development and democratization process in Georgia?**
  - Defined as positive or negative?

- **Relevant actors for the process - International**
  - In the international context, who do you asses being important actors for the process of democratization? Why are **these** actors important? What other actors do you not think are as important and why?
  - How does your opinion of this relate to the view you think the government holds? Why do you think the government prioritize these actors?

- **Relevant actors for the process – domestic**
  - What actors in the domestic sphere are according to you important for the process? Why are these actors important? What other actors do you not think are as important and why
  - How does your opinion of this relate to the view you think the government holds? Why do you think the government prioritize these actors?

- **Trajectory of EU-integration**
  - **In relation to the trajectory of EU-integration, what do you associate with EU-integration? Practically normatively?**
  - What are the benefits and downfalls of this paths?
  - A large majority of Georgian state that they are supporting further integration with the EU which is also the path the government is taking, however, a majority of Georgians say that they think that the country is not changing or going in the wrong direction, why is this you think? What does this relate to?

- **If not this path, what option is there for Georgia in regards to further development/democratization**
- What fears do you have or you think others have for choosing this path or another path? **Gay rights, gender equality and rural society. Georgian identity, traditions and values.**

- **Inclusion/Exclusion**
  - In relation to different actors, do you sense that your organization is included in the process of EU-integration? Why not/how? And as a private person? Within in which institutions?
  - Connecting to the fears for the different paths for development, how do you feel that these are mitigated in the political realm? Are the different views taken into account?
  - How does the government deal with the tensions/difference of opinions publicly? How do they portray actors?
  - Do you feel that actors with all opinions are included in the process? Are any particular actors excluded? For what reason? **Are there any topics you feel that the government and political parties overlooks?**
  - **How are the relations between different actors? Tone of the debate?**

- **Possibilities to act and influence the trajectory**
  - How do you asses your own possibilities to act and influence the trajectory? What type of space is available to act in?
  - In what form, do you think you and others can act and influence? What spheres? Institutions?
  - How are the acts received?
  - Is there certain actors you feel have less space than others to act?
  - How do you think actors and people that are excluded from the political sphere might choose to act if there is no space given in the political sphere? Change political party? Populism? Violence?

Appendix 2

Interview protocol - Government representative and EU-delegation

- **Presentation of the interview subject**
  - Name, age, organization and amount of time active in the organization/similar activities.
  - Background

- **Perception of Georgian development and democratization**
  - How would you describe development and democratization in Georgia?
  - Could you specify three aspects that for you defines the development and democratization process in Georgia? And the same for EU-integration
  - Defined as positive or negative?
  - Why are these aspects important?
  - Would you consider EU-integration a part of Georgian democratization?

- **Relevant actors for the process - International**
  - In the international context, who do you asses being important actors for the process of democratization? Why are these actors important? What other actors do you not think are as important and why?
  - How does your opinion of this relate to the view you think the government holds? Why do you think the government prioritize these actors?

- **Relevant actors for the process – domestic**
  - What actors in the domestic sphere are according to you important for the process? Why are these actors important? What other actors do you not think are as important and why

- **Trajectory of EU-integration**
  - In relation to the trajectory of EU-integration, how do you asses this path?
  - What can EU-add to Georgia? In development or other aspects?
  - What difficulties can the EU pose towards Georgia?
  - What are the benefits and downfalls of this paths?
  - If not this path, what option is there for Georgia in regard to further development/democratization
  - What fears do you have or you think others have for choosing this path or another path?

- **Inclusion/Exclusion**

- o How are different views in regard to the trajectory mitigated?
- o Is there space for a debate regarding the path or is it in regard to the execution?
- o In terms of contestation, within which spheres do you experience this, formal politics, societal debate or in some other way?

- **Possibilities to act and influence the trajectory**
  - o What type of action do you see in regard to expressing discontent with the path?
  - o The election results – what signals does the entry of AP?
  - o Is this worrying or how do you assess this?