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IDEOLOGICAL DIALECTICS OF POST-SOVIET NATIONALISM¹

ABSTRACT

This article is an attempt at a critical examination of the ideological nature of nationalism in the post-Soviet world, with particular focus on the Georgian experience. Social, political, cultural and economic changes which took place in Georgia after the Soviet Union's dissolution also aimed to change the society's mental structure. In this context, the idea of nationalism is a way to reorganize politics and society. Nationalism in post-Soviet Georgia is accommodated in the paradigm of new ideological hegemony. Liberalism and conservatism considered as alternatives to communism have become the principal ideological dialectics of post-Soviet nationalism, which also mirrors the general ideological orientation of nationalism in post-Soviet societies. Also, political-ideological instrumentalization of nationalism has been aimed at strengthening political positions and privileges of the new ruling class, while it has also played one of the central roles in the political and cultural process of power struggle. This article sheds light on the major issues of ideological hegemony and reconstruction of nationalism in a changing post-Soviet society.

Key words

Nationalism; ideology; post-Soviet; hegemony; neoliberalism; Georgia

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Introduction

In his important work *Society of Individuals*, Norbert Elias argues that although society consists of many individuals, societies created by those individuals differ depending on the geographical and cultural space they occupy (for example, the Chinese society is different from the American one), and that “the society formed by many individual people in Europe in the twelfth century was different from that in the sixteenth or the twentieth century” (Elias, 2001, p. 3). One may probably claim that the thoughts of Elias are a mere standard intellectual observation that our social world is indefinite and subject to constant changes. However, this sort of simple observation can in fact be much more intriguing and provocative than it appears. The point is that “society” is commonly considered as or associated with the political-cultural community, and people often believe that they are part of an unfinished historical phase. Many believe that they do not change and always stay the same. This belief strengthens when we talk about traditional societies and small nations, who frequently are prisoners of their venerated past and archaic notions of fate, and thus they are unable to notice that the social world and individuals around them have changed.

Of course, the author does not argue that stubborn affirmation of being always the same is something which only happens to small nations or societies. Certainly, it could be the same with big nations, particularly when it comes to former empires which are the hostages of their own pleasurable past and have no desire to change their mental and cultural conditions. By using political or cultural elites, they attempt to always remain the same. Yet this is a mission impossible due to the world we live in, the world which undergoes permanent changes and very frequently transforms independent of us. However, a new transformation frequently depends on the social order in which we live; in other words, a new social order itself leads to the emergence of different types of society, and therefore individuals behave in a way corresponding to the social order they live in. For example, under the communist order the society is different than under the capitalist one, and thus the communist human condition differs from the capitalist one. Given this, societies and individuals change according to times, so everything depends on the era we live in and its spirit.

As the society of yesterday is different from the society of today, we also have no knowledge as to what the society of tomorrow will look like. Of course, we

can make assumptions, but we are not able to make an exact description as it does not depend on us in any way. Therefore we can only talk about what we already know, what happened in the past, and what is going on now. In this context, we can observe the society we live in; we can describe the emotions, attitudes, feelings and sentiments dominant in our present life and thus understand where we are.

As mentioned, the new order changes its society and individuals. However, this process of transformation is normally strengthened by a new ideological hegemony and mental homogenization which usually are the outcome of a new social or political order. As Ion Elster argues, ideology is “a set of beliefs or values that can be explained through the (non-cognitive) interest or position of some social group” (Elster, 1994, p. 238). Under the conditions of a new ideological hegemony, society and individuals are incorporated into particular ideological beliefs yet in such a way that they do not know that they are under ideological influence. There is nothing surprising about it because as a rule ideology functions in a manipulative way and by indirect practice. Zygmunt Bauman rightly observes that ideology is not “so much an articulated creed, a set of verbal statements to be learned and believed; it is, rather, incorporated in the way people live – ‘soaked in’ by the way people act and relate” (Bauman, 2001, p. 10).

Thus the power of ideology does not propose that an individual must understand what he or she believes in. On the contrary, ideology is more powerful when one unconsciously carries the opinions, beliefs and perceptions which are shaped by a given social order. Normally, individuals follow and share the spirit of the age and they believe that their thoughts are the outcome of conventional wisdom brought by that era.

1. Ideologization of Nationalism

Although our social world changes independently from us and a new order brings new ideological waves, individuals or groups are able to follow new changes and to contribute to the formation of new social order by fitting into it and by promoting attitudes dominant in the new order. In other words, a group or groups dominant in a society are able to introduce and popularize the practices engendered by the new way of life and probably unconsciously (or consciously – in this case this does not change anything) they can function as sort of classifiers of the norms and deviations characteristic of the new order.

Imagine an executioner of medieval inquisition, imbued with strong beliefs created by absolutism, and a person who is delighted to punish those dark forces

which represent attitudes considered “abnormal”,—i.e. inconsistent with the era. The executor is pleased to complete the mission assigned to him. Something similar occurs under a new order where we see the domination of those groups who represent themselves as apologists of new standpoints and attitudes formed by the new order, and who are filled with the spirit to struggle against darkness. This is what has happened also within the post-Soviet space, where liberalism and conservatism are considered signs of light while communism is darkness. Besides the ideological climate, there has been a change in the cultural agenda as well. The process of new nationalist reconstruction has begun and within it, right-wing forces fitting into the new social order make powerful attempts to standardize and approve which sort of nationalism is good and which is bad, what to believe or not to believe, how to think and how not to think, what the nation should look like and what it should not be.

At the first glance, it seems that nationalism is not a set of values but rather of sentimental attitudes of an individual, emotions with a national identity. However, it is not unknown in political theory that nationalism can be also considered as a sort of ideological category. For example, Michael Freeden perceives nationalism as a “soft” ideology (Freeden, 1996), while Michael Billig argues that nationalism is not just a form of identity but rather a way of thinking or an ideological consciousness (Billig, 1995). It must be argued that as a rule, political ideologies target nationalism in order to domesticate it; thus nationalism could not establish itself as an autonomous ideological category as it usually accommodates itself under the shelter of a specific political ideology. For example, liberals and conservatives have their own understanding of nationalism. This occurs even in the case of communists (though we may also argue that this system resists nationalism), who have their own method to accommodate or domesticate nationalism. For example, Andrey Zhdanov and Giorgi Dimitrov, prominent pro-Stalinist statesmen and communist ideologues accepted the concept of *healthy nationalism* and argued (in fact promoting the views of Stalin) that there could not be any conflict between properly understood nationalism and proletarian internationalism, and that the rootless cosmopolitanism which disapproves of national feelings and the idea of a homeland has nothing to do with proletarian internationalism (Banac, 2003).

Considering this, creation of a specific vocal apparatus and ideological dialectics of nationalism by political ideologies is not a novelty. Thus it is no surprise that dominant post-Soviet political elites also tend to offer their definitions of nationalism and export them into public discourse as the best, ideal model of it.

2. Formation of post-Soviet nationalism

Political and cultural disintegration of the Soviet Union gave rise to a new, massive nationalist wave which was characterized by radical anti-Soviet sentiments, social utopias and romanticism, and which bore the mark of ethnic nationalism. Generally speaking, nationalism in political theory has various forms; to clarify it better, it should be underlined that there are both good and bad forms of nationalism. A good form of nationalism is when it serves the consolidation of nation (of all its citizens) around a progressive political idea or project (for example, nationalism of Giuseppe Mazzini in Italy, anti-colonial nationalism in former Western colonies or nationalism of Ilia Chavchavadze in Georgia), while a bad form of nationalism is the one which provokes collapse of social cohesion and leads to social disintegration or atomization as a consequence of its practice, concept and outcomes. In other words, a bad form of nationalism produces not only social and cultural pathologies (xenophobia, racism, chauvinism etc.), but it also can function as a sort of cultural-political instrument used by a particular political class, rife with pathological narcissism and antisocial attitudes, to strengthen its power.

One may observe that in general, post-Soviet nationalism either has produced social pathologies or was used to manipulate the society in order to strengthen the power of a particular political class. For example, in Georgia, following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the first wave of nationalism arrived with the government formed by ex-dissidents in the early 1990s. It was specifically accommodated in anti-Soviet and anti-Russian (in the case of post-Soviet Georgia these notions are synonymous) rhetoric, which not only aggravated Russophobic hysterias but also deeply threatened Abkhazians and Ossetians. In other words, the nationalist discourse promoted by the dissident class created dozens of obstacles for Georgia in its early stage of independence.

The development of nationalism and the new paradigm of national consciousness in the post-Soviet area also contributed to the formation of political identity of post-Soviet states. Dmitiri Furman argues that formation of political trajectories of various states in post-Soviet space was greatly influenced by the religious-cultural factors. However, Furman also claims that this factor has not been the only determinant of their political routes – he emphasizes that creation of political orientation is also determined by what he calls “political coloration”:

All peoples have certain events and periods in their history of which they are proud, but these vary greatly in their political hue, and these differences have noticeable contemporary effects. To give an example: both Russians and Ukrainians are by and large Orthodox. The Russians created an imperial state, and the periods that loom largest in Russian national consciousness are dominated by the autocrats Peter the Great and Ivan the Terrible. The Ukrainians, meanwhile, have for most of their history been subordinated to other nations, but can look to the late medieval period for an unstable state of their own—the semianarchic semi-democracy of the Cossack Hetmanate of the 17th century. The differences between post-Soviet political developments in Russia and Ukraine are partly conditioned by this dissimilarity in the political coloration of national consciousness (Furman, 2008, p. 33).

According to Furman's approach, Georgia is somewhere in the middle. The current Georgian national consciousness is based neither on imperial tradition nor on the tradition of subordination. It can be said that post-Soviet Georgian national consciousness has been established by a different tradition or by a different principle and it demonstrates a specific diffusion of both traditions. For example, on the one hand Georgian national consciousness is influenced by the era of David the Builder, when Georgia appeared if not as an empire, then definitely as a very powerful kingdom among its contemporaries. On the other hand, Georgian national consciousness is determined by the national drama of victimization, of subordination by great empires and constant resistance against them. Considering this, the idea and ideological identity of post-Soviet nationalism is determined by these two principles: domination and subordination. For instance, the conservative ideological narrative of Georgian nationalism means to be proud of the glorious Georgian era of David the Builder's rule, but on the other hand this narrative also suggests that Georgian nationalism deals with historical suffering from great empires. At the same time, it should be stressed that the conservative narrative of post-Soviet Georgian nationalism is a normative replication of the dominant conservative paradigm that emerged from the age of crisis of democracy and which does not accept the *other*; to say it simply, it is based on the fear of the other, of an alien. Also, the conservative dialectic of Georgian nationalism obviously deals with preservation of so-called traditional values and in this way represents itself as a retrospective ideal.

The conservative narrative differs from the liberal dialectics with regard to post-Soviet Georgian nationalism. Post-Soviet liberal catechism constructs Georgian nationalism as a political and cultural project which favors discourses and perceptions that are rather uncertain and unknown for Georgians. For

example, the liberal discourse brands Georgian nationalism in the context of historical Europeanism of Georgians and Georgian state. As the author argued earlier, “The liberal counter-strategy portrays Georgia as part of European civilization and argues that it should follow the values that are celebrated in Europe. But this is perhaps wishful thinking. Modern European civilization is rooted in western Christianity and the ideals of the Enlightenment. There is no use pretending that Georgia has played any part in this history” (Berekashvili, 2018, p. 91). This means that the liberal narrative of Georgian nationalism is centered on the idea of sovereignty and secular state, and focuses its discourses on the traumas of the Soviet past. In this context, the liberal narrative of Georgian nationalism presents itself at the same time as an anti-Soviet narrative. Given this, as argued above, in the liberal ideological discourse Georgian nationalism is not merely a political project but rather a cultural or socio-cultural project aspiring to form a new post-Soviet society, to foster a mental transition of the society which in turn is supposed to contribute to the process of liberal transition where liberals are represented as exorcists whose principal mission is to expel the Soviet ghosts. Thus the liberal dialectic of nationalism clashes with the Soviet Georgian nationalistic discourse. Liberal exorcism, as the author calls it, is a cultural ritual which comprises the entire process of ideological works, including indoctrination of masses and reproduction of false social and cultural perceptions; false perceptions are promoted by using liberal social institutions and exported at least on the level of wishful thinking.

3. Fury and silence: the metamorphosis of nationalism in Georgia

The collapse of the Soviet system offered the dissident class an opportunity to come into power for a while. Unsurprisingly, dissidents perceived the idea of Georgia's independence from a cultural perspective only and lacked clear views regarding the political and economic future of the country. In other words, the rule of the dissident government was principally based on the conservative aura of cultural elements, social utopias, and romantic nationalism as well as on prominence of cultural symbols. It should be underlined that dissident nationalism was a sort of a dramatic manifestation of irrationalism composed from archaic elements, filled with mythologization and victimization of political and cultural past, and devoid of a rational view of future. Certainly, the newly awakened Georgian nationalism functioned as a reaction against Soviet political and cultural narratives, and it also aimed to revise the narrative on understanding Abkhazians and Ossetians, as well as on their origin and historical locus. In this

way, of course, nationalism also emerged and became sentimentalized in Abkhazia and Ossetia, which led to widespread struggle among Georgian, Abkhaz and Ossetian nationalists. It is not easy to argue that with regard to the conflicts that emerged in Abkhazia and Ossetia, the direct and whole responsibility should be placed on the dissident nationalism; however, it can be argued that together with other factors, the dissident nationalistic rhetoric and cultural politics in Georgia woke up the dormant Abkhaz nationalism as well as gave rise to new nationalist sentiments in South Ossetia. It can be said that the ideological dialectics of the initial wave of Georgian nationalism was radical-conservative and it was mostly based on cultural and ethnic dimensions.

Unlike the short period of Zviad Gamsakhurdia's political (dissident) rule, Eduard Shevardnadze's term at the office (the rule of ex-communist nomenclature) was not characterized by the rise of a new nationalist wave. Conversely, Shevardnadze's era was probably one of the quietest periods in the history of post-Soviet Georgian nationalism. At that time, nationalistic sentiments were present neither in the rhetoric nor in the agenda of political action of political class. Of course, this can be explained by Shevardnadze's pragmatic politics-towards Abkhazians and Ossetians or by the argument that under the hybrid political regime, the exhausted ruling elite had no room to produce a new cultural politics as they lacked both ability and desire to do it. The ex-communist nomenclature regime was all but spent and thus Georgian nationalism was waiting for its new era to be ushered by a future political elite. To sum it up, in the times of Shevardnadze, the ideological dialectics of nationalism practically did not exist, mirroring the ideological poverty of the contemporary system. In this way, a time came for a new era to emerge, in which a new wave of nationalism together with new forms of ideological dialectics of nationalism were waiting for inauguration.

This era arrived in 2003, following the Rose Revolution. The neoliberal autocracy formed by Mikheil Saakashvili required revitalization of recently forgotten nationalist sentiments in order to consolidate power. Saakashvili's nationalism, which was partially based on several practices of dissident nationalism, again challenged and threatened both Abkhazians and Ossetians. Although Saakashvili did not use direct threats or humiliating rhetoric against these two groups (for understandable reasons), his hysterical tone and eccentric actions – including the process of historical revision and formation of a new politics of memory where anti-Soviet and anti-Russian hysterias played a central role – again began a new age of confrontations between Georgians, Abkhazians and Ossetians. Moreover, the annual celebration of the Independence Day on 26 May

by a military parade aimed at demonstrating the military power and potential of the authorities provoked tensions in the political and social space of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Given this, Saakashvili's regime left a difficult legacy manifested in intensification of cultural and ethnic confrontation among Georgians, Abkhazians and Ossetians, and in provoking dramatic alienation of relations among them.

As mentioned above, creation of a new nationalist wave by Saakashvili's regime was aimed at consolidating the right-wing authoritarian system, while the regime's economic and cultural politics was also given a nationalistic coloring. In other words, Saakashvili's nationalism was characterized by ephemeral consolidation of Georgians through awakening of their national pride. In fact, this was a manipulative project which was used by the revolutionary class of the Rose Revolution to normalize and strengthen its ideological preferences. In this way, unlike in Shevardnadze's era, under Saakashvili's neoliberal rule post-Soviet Georgian nationalism regained its ideological dialectics, which was synergized with dissident conservative social and cultural elements as well as with socio-cultural and socio-economic doctrine of neoliberalism.

The Grand Inquisition: post-Soviet Georgian nationalism in the frame of neoliberalization and decommunization

Let us start from the following question: are there any contradictions between the conservative and liberal dialectics of post-Soviet Georgian nationalism? There can be no clear answer as it always depends on values and issues. Also, it must be taken into account that in general both these ideologies (despite crucial differences in values) are right-wing political beliefs. In turn, today in the political life of Europe, right-wing identitarianism functions as a sort of new ideology in the post-ideological age (Traverso, 2019). As a rule, there is a moral consensus among ideologically opposing groups with regard to Soviet traumas, an issue which practically does not raise any ideological polemics between liberals and conservatives. False perceptions of the Soviet past (as this past has not been objectively investigated) are sort of a means of national consensus. Thus it comes as no surprise that a dominant practice emerged in Georgia where the liberal political class was reconciled with the idea of moral rehabilitation of Zviad Gamsakhurdia and his rule. In this context, it is also unsurprising that despite the ethno-nationalist sentiments of Gamsakhurdia, his rehabilitation was also accepted by Mikheil Saakashvili and by the so-called class of pro-Western liberal reformers. The underlying objective was that the new wave of decommunization required rehabilitation of the dissident government.

Soviet Georgian nationalism was based on the communist notion of the Georgian nation as a part of one great cultural and brotherly entity as well as on the idea of sentimentalization and victimization of historical past (for example, Georgians perceived as victims of Muslim conquerors and as a nation fighting for cultural ideals). In contrast, under Saakashvili the post-Soviet nationalism was based economically as well as culturally on right-wing ideology, in particular on the neoliberal doctrine as well as on the program of decommunization, which was ultimately used to delegitimize all anti-right and anti-neoliberal social, economic and political thinking.

In the early period of Saakashvili's regime, he argued that people lived "as beggars and humiliated" and his solution was summed in the following ideological narrative: "We must decrease taxes and we must convince International Monetary Fund and other international organizations that we have too high taxes" (President of Georgia, 2004). This statement of Mikheil Saakashvili was a symbolic inauguration of what the author calls *right-wing disposition of post-Soviet Georgian nationalism*. In the era of Saakashvili, Georgian nationalism was based not only on the symbols and emotions (already celebrated in the times of Zviad Gamsakhurdia) but also on the idea of building the Georgian neoliberal state as a role model, as a sort of a new post-Soviet national concept and a project for other nations to emulate. In a way, neoliberal ideology was a nationalist project used as a means to fight against the Soviet past. Following the rise of neoliberal political and cultural class, discourses on economic freedom, deregulation and minimalist state were gradually strengthened as the approach to a brand-new Georgian state. In this way, Saakashvili was eagerly seeking moral and technocratic legitimacy from the international liberal class. This is exemplified in his speech before the parliament of Georgia: "Heritage Foundation promoted Georgia with 28 steps forward and it considers Georgia mostly on the list of countries with economic freedom"² (President of Georgia, 2006). With time, ideological radicalization intensified and the concept of Georgian state has become subordinated to the requirements of free market: "Let me welcome you and address Georgian business; the answer of Georgian government to the world economic crisis will be the following: better business climate in Georgia; greater liberal and open economy; greater atmosphere of freedom to do business; better climate to recruit the investments; more protected business; and more protected private property" (President of Georgia, 2009). He also emphasized the role of the state in his political belief: "The whole government will serve you. We understand

² All quotations from Georgian were translated by the author.

very well how important your success is for our people and for a better Georgia” (President of Georgia, 2009). Unsurprisingly, it is symbolic that similarly to the neoliberal doctrine, in the political thinking of Saakashvili the state is a servant of business and free market.

Georgian nationalism of the Rose Revolution era was entangled in the wish to compete with the Soviet past. It was pathologically focused on constant dispute with the times of the USSR, and the issues varied from economy and infrastructure to those of science and education. The idea was that the process of decommunization required constant fight with the Soviet past; it was supposed to legitimize the present by demonizing the past. This is very well illustrated in annual speeches of Saakashvili delivered before the Parliament of Georgia, in which he extensively presented his secret formula – to catch up and overtake the Soviet Union on the one hand, and to deconstruct the Soviet past on the other. Some of his phrases and notions are very illustrative: “This year and the next we will build more roads than were built in the ‘wealthy’ Soviet times”; “the new system of science will be free from the ineffective communist legacy – from the bureaucratic management of academia” (President of Georgia, 2006); “The year 2006 was the year when large-scale road building began. I would especially like to underline that never before, even in the period of Soviet empire, so many roads were ever built during one year” (President of Georgia, 2007); “This year, we’ll reach the level of the irrigation indicators noted in the Soviet Union, and after a couple of years we’ll overtake it” (President of Georgia, 2009); “Our century-old historical experience teaches us that those who dreamed of restoring the empires are becoming very dangerous just when they are weakening. Today, we see this process and that’s why we must be hundred times more careful so that the artificial attempt to resurrect the Soviet empire will not harm the security of our country and people” (President of Georgia, 2011).

The years 2003–2012 were characterized by anti-communist pathologies of post-Soviet Georgian nationalism, which, as argued before, empowered the neoliberal transition of social and political life. Given this, to clarify it once again, the fundamental socio-cultural and economic elements of neoliberal ideology, which include individualized society and economic deregulation, were contradictory to the socio-cultural and economic dialectics of communism. Therefore it should be remembered that neoliberalism in Georgia was not merely an economic doctrine but rather a mission in the style of the Inquisition, with social force – it had to expel the phantoms of communism in the new capitalist order.

4. The epigone order

In post-authoritarian Georgia (after 2012), neoliberalism and decommunization are still present and have reconsolidated as a new project of post-Soviet nationalism and as a social and ideological instrument to fight with the Soviet past. For example in 2013 the Minister of Education and Science Giorgi Margvelashvili (who was also nominated at that time by the Georgian Dream party as the country's presidential candidate) commented on changes proposed to labor legislation (which aimed to slowly advance labor rights in Georgia): "The Parliament is discussing the labor code which does not allow businesses to operate. In fact, it's a dream labor law for Rose Luxembourg, and I had no idea that our goal was to make dreams of Rose Luxembourg come true. There are such norms stated in the draft of law which will make employers in Georgia vanish; it poses a threat to the state and to business. This is very problematic, especially in the country where businesses must be developed and the state must implement reforms" (Interpressnews, 2013). Considering the experiences of the post-Soviet liberal intellectual class and their structure of thinking, this ideological speech of Margvelashvili is no surprise. Usually in Georgia a change of power does not really mean a change of the ideological agenda in the country; in this way, Georgian Dream is an integral part of that ideological homogenization which is becoming more evident in the age of Georgia's post-Soviet transformation, while resistance against any ideological process that does not suit the liberal and anti-communist narrative grows significantly.

The process of constitutional changes in 2017 is an example proving that there are no discrepancies in the field of ideological and social thinking between Saakashvili's neoliberal autocracy and post-Saakashvili political order. In the latter, neoliberalism continues to organize itself, but unlike during the Rose Revolution period, it is being organized without autocratic rule and in a slower way. During the constitutional changes in 2017, a deliberative method was used to discuss constitutional changes nationwide. Irakli Kobakhidze, at that time the chairperson of the parliament of Georgia, one of the leaders of the Georgian Dream and the conceptual architect of the new Constitution, reacted to students' demands for constitutional changes with the following comment: "Some young Communists do not allow 2500 people to discuss the Constitution of Georgia", adding that: "You have chosen the path of communism and this is a wrong choice. We call on you to walk through knowledge and learning. The place of young communists in Georgia will never be. This is pseudosolidarism, which

is characteristic of the Communists” (Georgian First Channel, 2017). After this statement, Kobakhidze explained his comment thus:

I have deliberately used the term “communists” instead of “socialists”. The common approaches expressed by these people have nothing to do with socialism and social-democracy, so I deliberately used the term “communists” and reiterate that communism shall never become the ideological movement in Georgia again with any perspective. Communism implies the left-wing radicals. It will never happen in Georgia. We have been through this period and it will never happen again in Georgia (Parliament of Georgia, 2017).

This strict disassociation between communism and social democracy given by Kobakhidze is a typical example how in Georgia (and not only there) the idea of communism is delegitimized so that the role of communism in strengthening European social democracy is forgotten. The Soviet Union, which had a major contribution to winning World War II, and communism, thus perceived as a winning ideological project, inspired the idea of European welfare state as a parallel to of the rise of communist ideology and the historic breakdown of capitalism in the first part of the 20th century.

Today Georgia experiences a sort of ideological struggle to gain monopoly and ownership of the cultural process of decommunization. In other words, the post-Soviet political class makes an attempt to radicalize political language and pits mental romanticism against communism as much as possible. In this process, it is pretty ironic that members of the pro-Western liberal class accuse each other of being communist. Thus competition is pretty high with regard to who, how and under which conditions will accuse whom. For example Giga Bokeria – a prominent representative of post-Soviet liberal enlightenment, one of Rose Revolution leaders, and an advocate of the decommunization project – believes that “leftists, socialists and Marxists talk about taking care to defeat inequality even if we all will become poor. And the results of this we see in many countries, to leave our common Soviet past aside; we can see today what’s going on in Venezuela and so on”. Bokeria also believes that it must be the duty of a government “to allow people to advance their life themselves; government and the authorities are not a parent. The government which has the role of a parent is very dangerous”. Furthermore, Bokeria argues that even social democratic thinking is dangerous: “Socialists and social democrats are represented as mainstream political and civilized forces in many countries. They are my ideological opponents and I believe that their ideas are dangerous ideas; however, they have the right to have those ideas” (Netgazeti, 2019). In this interview, given by Bokeria to a Georgian newspaper, his talk is entirely based on the grandiloquent

arguments that Georgian Dream is a party that pursues left-wing politics. This is particularly cynical as leaders of Georgian Dream repeatedly demonstrate and argue for their ideological beliefs that are harmonious with the right-wing political beliefs of Giga Bokeria.

5. Struggle for recognition: which nationalism is more pro-Western?

In his famous work *Left-Wing Melancholia: Marxism, History and Memory*, Enzo Traverso argues that “[t]oday, in the countries of the former Soviet bloc, the past is revisited almost exclusively through the prism of nationalism” (Traverso, 2017, p. 17). This is indeed true if one would look at the list of those post-Soviet states imprisoned by the fog of nationalism, which also detaches them from the civilization project, and sheltered in the cave of obscurantism. Intense competitive struggle with the Soviet past has become an ideological duty of the post-Soviet Georgian political and intellectual class, and we cannot simply claim that it is the duty of liberal class only. The point is that a traumatized perception of the Soviet past is characteristic both for post-Soviet Georgian liberal forces and for most of the counter-liberal forces (nationalists, conservatives etc.). Post-Soviet Georgian nationalism is a tragic farce of liberalism and anti-communism – a tragic farce in the sense of being an ideological process that is an outcome of our era, which is false and devoid of ideas, and where everything works the other way round and chaotically.

It is also a farce in a way that the behaviors of the political and cultural elite that conforms to the spirit of the age usually come into conflict with social resentments of the masses. In today’s post-Soviet space, which includes Georgia, nostalgia for communism is a practice that is gaining popularity; this is mostly caused by those social, economic, political and cultural catastrophes that emerged from the capitalist transition of post-Soviet space. Since the mentality of political and cultural class is imprisoned by social and cultural canons of neoliberal capitalism, the political class faces one principal task: to divide the society and to fight one another by using liberal and nationalist sentiments. In the battlefield of power, what has become the dominant issue is the struggle against the Soviet past, explicitly from two perspectives – liberalism and nationalism.

It is also cynical that in post-Soviet Georgia, both liberal and anti-liberal classes that attempt to gain the ownership of the nationalism project are West-centrist forces; in the end they always seek legitimacy of their narratives in the political and cultural sphere of the West. For example, liberals claim that

their pattern of nationalism is the right one as the West is based on the idea of secularism and individual liberty, while anti-liberals (e.g. conservatives and social traditionalists) also argue that authentic ideas and cultures of the West must be found in their ideological dialectics by making reference to *Brexit*, *Le Penism*, *Trumpism*, and most recently *Salvinism*. In this way, as the author argued earlier, “liberal (secular) and ethnic nationalists are engaged in competition to prove their pro-Western stances” (Berekashvili, 2018, 77). Therefore, of course, success and failure of liberal nationalists and ethnic nationalists in this battle usually depends on external factors – particularly on what happens in the center (meaning in the West) – as well as on the skills and opportunities which enable translating for a periphery those liberal or anti-liberal processes and sentiments which are present in the center. Of course, this is not an easy task as in this case the liberal and anti-liberal class of periphery must be familiar with the liberal or anti-liberal language of the center, to know well its mental apparatus, and they must install all this knowledge, language and ideological dialectics in the political, social and cultural life of periphery in a manner easy to understand. Certainly, it is also a question of power: generally speaking, language and communication have a very important function in social order in the sphere of creating power. Pierre Bourdieu rightly notices that linguistic exchanges are also “the relations of symbolic power in which the power relations between speakers or their respective groups are actualized” (Bourdieu, 1991, p. 37). In this context, we may say that the nationalist language used in post-Soviet Georgia is a mechanism used by the political and cultural groups to gain political and cultural power. We must also keep in mind that post-Soviet Georgian ideological struggle between liberals and conservative nationalists is not a novelty; it is a kind of tautology and it replicates the practice formed not only in the center but also in other post-Soviet peripheries.

Conclusion

The article began by arguing that a society changes together with the times and therefore the behavior and attitudes of individuals vary depending on the period in which they live. When we speak about the ideological dialectics of post-Soviet nationalism and when we attempt to understand this issue through contextualizing Georgian experience, the task is not so easy. This is due to the fact that the global or local reality in which we live changes so quickly that it is difficult to make valid predictions as to what sort of ideological dialectics of nationalism will ultimately prevail. This task is becoming even more difficult today, when

values and commitment are not reflected in the best habits of politicians and thus political elites (and cultural elites as well) attempt to fit in with new trends.

The author's goal was to critically describe the process dealing with the conformist conversion of political class according to the spirit of an epoch, and to see through this prism how the ideological morphology of nationalism evolved. However, there are still failures in this context; for example, during the earliest stage of post-Soviet transition, it seemed that the dissident class matched the spirit of that age by producing anti-communist and conservative nationalism, yet their ultimate fate was short and tragic. This was caused by the archaic mental structure of the dissident class, by their lack of knowledge of socio-cultural algorithms of the capitalist system, and lack of skills necessary to act in the new world. However, unlike the dissident class, the post-Soviet liberal class, armed with liberal manipulations throughout the neoliberal ideological training and upbringing gained in the West, managed to create a powerful ideological hegemony and then achieve ideological homogenization. In other words, the project of Georgian nationalism inaugurated after 2003 still remains the dominant paradigm, and its change has not yet become a part of the agenda of the political and intellectual class. On the contrary, this project has been radicalized as a result of conformism manifested in deeper neoliberalization and desovietization of political and intellectual vocabulary. This is why today's Georgian career-seeking political and cultural elite represents a part of one large ideological community that is a product of neoliberal globalism; to internalize the political and cultural elements of neoliberal globalism is the best roadmap for career seekers.

The ancient Romans said *Tempora mutantur, nos et mutamur in illis* (Times are changed, we also are changed with them). We do not know what the ideological dialectics of post-Soviet nationalism will look like in future society. We only know what it looks like today, and what we can say at most about the future is that, considering today's crisis of post-Soviet identity, we may suppose that nationalism will change its ideological dialectics again.

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