EUROPE OUTSIDE OF EUROPE: A CRITICAL GEOPOLITICS OF THE EUROPEANISATION OF GEORGIA

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On February 25th, 2019, after a four and half hour flight from Amsterdam, I landed at Tbilisi’s international airport. Walking up to the passport control booth after alighting the plane, it struck me that there was not one, but two officers at work there. Evidently, the young Georgian customs officer was being trained by her more experienced peer. Both officers’ uniforms were adorned with flags in red and white; those of their country. The older officer, however, clearly disseminating his experience to new employees, did not wear a flag on his shoulder that should endow him with any legal authority in Georgia. He was Austrian. Experienced customs officers from EU-countries training younger ones from various other countries shouldn’t be a particularly noteworthy occurrence. However, while an Austrian - clearly European - flag need not provide one with any particular legal standing, the discursive story is a little more complicated.

After an interaction that lasted little more than a minute - EU-citizens are rarely questioned upon entering Georgia - the Georgian officer stamped an outline of the Georgian territory into my document of identity. The casual traveller could be easily forgiven for believing the Georgian borders are as straightforward as this simple outline suggests. “Here is Georgia, and only once you cross one of these lines, you are in another country (or possibly at the bottom of the Black Sea),” the stamp seems to suggest. Those familiar at least with the existence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, of course, know the reality is a little more complicated.

Having passed the passport control without any hassle, I arrived to the luggage collection belts. A rather unremarkable hall, save, perhaps, for the two enormous Georgian flags hanging from the ceiling. Yes, I know, this is Georgia, it’s clear now. Or is it? Having collected my luggage, I wrestled myself through a barrage of taxi drivers offering to drive me to Tbilisi for prices that might afford one a month’s rent in some dilapidated apartment block on the outskirts of Tbilisi - Gldani, Mukhiani, Dighomi Massive - to find a slightly more quiet spot to indulge in a well-deserved cigarette after a long flight. Outside the airport, the Georgian flags are no longer alone. Now, there is also the blue- and yellow flag of the European Union. So did I leave Europe or not?

Having found a somewhat more reasonably priced taxi into the city, we immediately turned on to Europe Street after leaving the airport grounds. While it is not one of the prominent boulevards straddling Tbilisi named after Europe - those are reserved for
historically famous Georgians such as Shota Rustaveli, Davit Aghmashenebeli, or Ilia Chavchavadze - its name is not insignificant. After having had a very clear and simple outline of the borders of the country stamped into one’s document of identity, the first road international travellers pass is named after Europe. It thus seems clear and simple: this is Georgia, but it is not only Georgia, it is also Europe.

Reality is a bit more complicated, and certainly a whole lot more ambiguous. This thesis, in ways that shall be detailed below, seeks to find some order in this profound ambiguity in Georgia’s relations and discourses about Europe, but also about itself in the context of Europe. Doing so while staying in Tbilisi would have been much more difficult - and certainly much less fun - without my flatmates and friends there - Zurab, Anya, Mahmoud, Nikita, Anton, and Anuki. Throughout my stay here, they have been the best companions I could hope for. Not only did they prove to be an endless source of good times and wine; they were also able to provide me with a wealth of information. It is common knowledge now that one should not ask Nikita for something when in a hurry; name one old church or Soviet mosaic you chanced upon, and before you realise an hour has passed and you now know of the existence of every 13th century church in the Kvemo Kartli region.
Note on Translations and Transliterations

An obvious challenge in this study is the availability of translated sources. While for a small country and language family (approximately five million speakers worldwide) whose literature has only recently gained more attention in the English-speaking world, a remarkably large volume of works is already available in English, some important sources still lack translations. For the most important of these, most notably some of Ilia Chavchavadze’s (1837-1907) texts, Eduard Shevardnadze’s presidential inauguration speeches (1995 and 2000), and Georgian textbooks used in schools, I have undertaken the translation of relevant sections of these works into English myself. In those cases, the original is always given in footnotes, both in the Georgian script as well as its Latinised transliteration.

Transcribing the Georgian script into the Latin one presents one with a number of difficulties. With 33 letters, no immediate one-on-one transliteration is possible. Some letters are easily transcribed by using combinations of Latin letters approximating the respective Georgian letters’ pronunciation – the ც is easily rendered as ‘ts’ as in the English ‘hits’; the ხ uses ‘kh’, with a sound approximating ‘ch’ in the Scottish ‘loch,’ but significantly harsher. Wendell Steavenson (2002) was not entirely incorrect when writing that Georgian’s various ‘k-like’ letters tend to “sound like someone being stabbed in the throat.”

The language’s unaspirated or expletive consonants present a larger challenge. Basically, four consonants (k, t, ts, ch) have what sound like alternative versions which are pronounced without exhaling, but which are in fact entirely separate letters (k has ց and ქ; t has თ and ტ; ts has ც and წ; and ch has ჩ and ჭ). The official transcription system of the Georgian Academy of Sciences mandates the addition of an apostrophe after the Latin equivalent to indicate unaspirated consonants (Kiziria 2008), so that, for example, the Georgian word ქარგი (‘good’) would be transcribed as ‘k’argi.’

In this thesis, I have elected to follow this system only partially for two reasons. Firstly, within Georgia this system is not consistently applied. On directional signs by the side of the road, for example, the town in which Ilia Chavchavadze was born frequently appears as ‘Kvareli,’ even though given its Georgian spelling - ყვარელი - its transcription ought to be ‘Qvareli.’ Secondly, many names of persons as well as localities already have
established – albeit officially incorrect – transcriptions outside of Georgia, which usually omit the apostrophe used to indicate unaspirated consonants. Therefore, for names used in my text I also omit these apostrophes, whereas in the provided transliterations for my own translations I follow the official transcription rules, in regular words as well as names. Hence, to avoid confusion, I write the surname of Georgia’s former president as ‘Saakashvili’ rather than ‘Saak’ashvili’ (სააკაშვილი), and that of its greatest 19th century writer as ‘Chavchavadze’ rather than ‘Ch’avch’avadze’ (ჭავჭავაძე).

Finally, as for pronunciation of names, Georgian is a notoriously difficult language to pronounce. The list below, focusing on difficult or unusual letters and sounds, is attached to facilitate the pronunciation of Georgian names used throughout this thesis.

- კ - transcription k'; unaspirated i.e. pronounce without exhaling.
- ტ - transcription t'; unaspirated i.e. pronounce without exhaling.
- ფ - transcription p; sounds like normal p, but as Georgian has no f it is also used for loan words.
- პ - transcription p'; unaspirated i.e. pronounce without exhaling.
- რ - transcription r; pronounced as a strongly rolling r with one’s tongue just behind the teeth.
- ღ - transcription gh; pronunciation similar to French r as in ‘la France.’
- ჩ - transcription ch; pronounce as the ‘tch’ in ‘catch.’
- ჭ - transcription ch'; unaspirated, pronounce similar to above, but without exhaling.
- ც - transcription ts; pronounce as in ‘hits.’
- წ - transcription ts'; pronounce similar to above, but without exhaling.
- ხ - transcription kh; pronounce as ‘ch’ in Scottish ‘loch,’ but much harsher.
- ყ - transcription q; pronunciation lacks equivalent in most European languages; sounds most closely like unaspirated b.
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I. INTRODUCTION

If the European Union truly seeks to become an “ever closer union,” as the Maastricht Treaty (1992) asserts, one of the most pertinent tasks for the Union will be the formation of some kind of European identity, a sense of attachment on the part of its citizens. Although most citizens of EU member states will admit they are European, consecutive Eurobarometers show that for most this rarely trumps their sense of national belonging, and politically it holds relatively little value. At the same time, it remains unclear what being ‘European’ means. In the wake of World War II, Winston Churchill (1946) called for the defense of “this noble continent”; Dutch far-right politician Thierry Baudet claims he is in favour of Europe, and therefore opposed to the EU. Clearly, the idea of ‘Europe’ means at least something to many of the continent’s inhabitants. But what it means to be European, the extent to which groups of people view themselves as European, and the way in which the denomination of ‘European’ is used politically is subject to enormous variations, over time as well as between different individuals. This is perhaps nowhere more clear than in its very borderlands, where the notorious fuzziness of boundaries of identification is emphasised by variations in belonging. For this reason, the edges of what is conventionally understood to be the European continent present an excellent test case to study the development and changes of a sense of belonging to Europe.

One such region, the South Caucasus, is particularly interesting in this regard. Although especially in Georgia a strong sense of Europeanness persists today, this sentiment of belonging is a relatively new phenomenon. The three small countries making up the South Caucasus – Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan – “have always been the ‘lands in between’” (de Waal 2010, 1), and as such they are “traditionally associated with transport, transit, and transfer” (van der Zweerde 2014, 38). Georgia, today the most Western-oriented of those three, has for the vast majority of its history been on the ‘edge of empires,’ as Donald Rayfield (2012) entitles his history of the country. Variously caught in between Byzantine, Persian, Arab, Mongol, Ottoman, or Russian Empires, Georgia has nonetheless been able to maintain a sense of its own distinct national identity in one way or another. If we follow Benedict Anderson’s (1983) famous designation of nations as ‘imagined communities,’ however, there are still “different ways to ‘imagine’ the nation” (Malinova 2008, 42). One way in which national imaginations may differ, as alluded to above, is their belonging to a wider regional or continental ‘community,’ and by extension the imagination of a wider
regional political identity and the role it plays in a more local sense of identity. Georgia, situated on the very edges of Europe, has in this respect been undergoing a notable change over the past two centuries. Having been largely absent until fairly recently, imageries representing Europe or the European Union are today ubiquitous in Georgia, with its capital of Tbilisi possibly flying a larger number of EU-flags than any EU capital (Mühlfried 2007). This is relevant for the EU and students of European identity because it indicates how regional identities such as ‘European’ may be combined with national identities and used politically. On the other side of the coin, it also provides clues as to how a sense of wider regional belonging – of Europeanness – may modify the national imagination over time.

Research Questions

In this study I address this apparent change in two distinct but related ways. My main research question concerns the shifting focus of Georgia’s identity: how is Georgia represented and imagined as a specifically European country, both inwardly and outwardly? In so doing, I acknowledge that a strictly fixed definition of what Europe or European is or where it is is neither possible nor desirable. Instead I proceed from the assumption that it is a meaningful (geo)political denomination, the exact significance of which is subject to change over time. My secondary research question addresses the way this changing imagination intersects with the wider geopolitical conditions and conflicts of the region. More specifically, I study how this changing identity relates to Georgia’s longstanding but difficult relationship with its large northern neighbour and former metropolitan centre, Russia. In other words, this secondary question concerns the way a European identification may be used as a geopolitical tool.

Chronologically, I trace back the idea of Georgia – and in some cases the Caucasus region more generally – as European or not, beginning in the early 19th century, as Georgia first came under Russian control, up to the present. Tracing the history of this geopolitical designation of Georgia through the prism of its relations with Russia (whether the Russian Empire, the Soviet Union, or the Russian Federation) also relates to Georgia’s conflicts with its de facto states of Abkhazia and South Ossetia/Tskhinvali. In Georgia, these regions are widely perceived as Russian occupations (Kabachnik et al. 2012). Of note, moreover, is the fact that the question of Russia’s Europeanness has been debated there for at least two centuries (Coates 2001), and often intersected with its discourses towards the regions it held. By contrast, although some debate about Georgia’s Europeanness emerged during its
national revival in the late 1800s, the balance only started tipping in favour of Georgia being European in the late 1920s (Rayfield 2015). Today, the European Union explicitly affirms Georgia’s Europeanness as well as its perspective to future EU-membership (European Parliament 2014), and through its European Neighbourhood Programme (ENP) explicitly engages in the ‘Europeanisation’ of its neighbours (van Houtum & Boedeltje 2011). Russia, on the contrary, now defines itself as Eurasian, strictly differentiating itself from Europe. My hypothesis as to the second research question is thus that Georgia has become a microcosm of a wider geopolitical strife between the European Union on the one hand, represented among others by its Eastern Partnership Programme (EPP) and its resource interests in the region (Gachechiladze 2002), and the Russian Federation on the other, as demonstrated by the ‘spheres of influence’ or ‘Russian World’ discourse the Russian regime espouses today (Suslov 2018; Müller 2011). In this study, I find that today, within this strife, the concepts of ‘Europe(an)’ and ‘civilised’ are employed as discursive weapons.

**BACKGROUND: GEORGIA, A MICRO COSM?**

Politically, the 2003 Rose Revolution and the subsequent election of Mikheil Saakashvili to the country’s presidency in January 2004 set Georgia on a decisively pro-European course. This change of outlook, furthermore, was solidified in the 2008 Russo-Georgian war, which culminated in the seemingly definitive loss of Georgia’s breakaway territories of Abkhazia and South Ossetia/Tskhinvali, and supplemented the country’s – or at least its government’s – pro-European stance with a decisively anti-Russian one. This opposition between Georgia (as European) and Russia is furthermore interesting because the question of Russia’s Europeanness has been debated there much longer and much more explicitly than in Georgia. Donald Rayfield (2015, 244-245) notes that neither Georgia’s earliest secular literature nor its later re-emergence as part of its 19th century national revival was very much concerned with Europe. The country’s ‘national epic,’ Shota Rustaveli’s 13th century *The Knight in the Panther’s Skin*, was modelled primarily on the famous Persian poets of the time. Not until the early 20th century would writers such as Mikheil Javakhishvili (1880-1937) come to look more towards the west. The image is thus one of a country levitating towards Europe and beginning to define itself as distinctively European where it did not do so before.

The combination of this pro-European stance with an anti-Russian one raises important geopolitical questions. The Russian Federation remains heavily invested in the South Caucasus, providing support to Georgia’s *de facto* states of Abkhazia and South
Ossetia/Tskhinvali and considering Armenia its closest ally (Pototskaya 2014). Prior to the 2008 war, the Russian regime distributed passports to Abkhazians and Ossetians, arguably amounting to a discursive annexation of these territories (Artman 2013). Russia subsequently used the possession of Russian citizenship of residents of these territories as justification for its conduct in said war. This suggests that the Russian regime’s investment in the two breakaway regions may have two distinct reasons. Firstly, by demonstrating its forceful protection of its citizens (i.e. residents of Abkhazia and South Ossetia/Tskhinvali), the regime projects an image of strength and resilience inwards, to its own population. Secondly, outwardly its official recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia/Tskhinvali as independent states was at least partly motivated by frustration over widespread EU- and NATO-led recognition of Kosovo, a move heavily criticised by Russia (Littlefield 2009).

Geopolitically, then, the South Caucasus and Georgia specifically is a region which two larger geopolitical entities attempt to bring into their respective orbits. On the one hand the EU, which today considers itself the embodiment of the European continent, plays an important role and has since 2004 become increasingly involved in Georgia, both economically and (geo-)politically (Popescu 2007). The Russian Federation, on the other hand, considers EU-enlargement up to its own borders as an important geopolitical threat and provocation. Moreover, inwardly Russian pre-eminence over its direct neighbours is presented as a natural state of affairs, challenges to which are, within the Russian World doctrine, considered inherently objectionable (Müller 2011). Russian involvement in the Caucasus, however, has a longer history. While Georgia first became a vassal state of the Russian Empire in 1783, it was formally annexed in 1801. Subsequently, Georgia and the Caucasus more generally became a popular topic for Russian romantic writers of the first half of the 19th century. Of Georgian cultural production of the time, by contrast, not much is known or remains available today, making it difficult to reconstruct a discourse as to its Europeanness. However, the fact that neither Georgia nor western European powers seem to have been much concerned with the Caucasus at the time suggests that it was first of all a Russian affair.

Very broadly, throughout this study I find that four distinct discontinuities can be discerned throughout the last two centuries. In roughly the first half of the 19th century, Georgia was represented by Russia as Asiatic and backwards, a narrative in which the Russian Empire figured as the region’s civiliser, and as such advanced a discourse reminiscent of other European colonial empires. From about the 1860s onwards, the
discourse in Russia moved towards representing the Caucasus as part of European Russia. Simultaneously Georgia’s national revival started emerging, increasing availability of Georgian sources, which indicate that, insofar as they were concerned with the question, the pivotal figures of this question did not conceive of Georgia as a European country. Subsequently, as the region’s prevalence in Russian literature dwindled, in the early 20th century the discourse among writers from the Caucasus itself, while aware of the region being on the borders between Europe and Asia, started tipping more in favour of seeing Georgia as a European country, whereas now doubt was cast on Russia’s own Europeanness. The final discontinuity occurs almost a century later. After Saakashvili’s assumption of the presidency, which was roughly concomitant with Putin’s rise to power in Russia, Georgia moves strongly to the west, while Russia abandons it. In this context, the dominant discourse in Georgia today is that Georgians have always belonged to the ‘European family,’ whereas the Putin government in Russia seeks to actively present the ‘Russian World’ as not a nation but a civilisation as an alternative to the (western) European one. Consequently, the concept of ‘Europe,’ whose association with ‘civilisation’ in the Caucasus remains strong today, is turned into a discursive tool in Georgia’s conflict with Russia.

**Approach**

Before proceeding to outline how I study the change in Georgia’s changed sense of Europeanness, a few words must be said about the very concept of ‘Europe,’ ‘European,’ or ‘Europeanness.’ As briefly mentioned before, I proceed from the idea that ultimately ‘Europe’ is not strictly definable, nor should it be. Europe, as a supposed geopolitical entity distinct from its Others, is ultimately a construction that “has never existed beyond the political will to make it meaningful” (Bueno Lacy & van Houtum 2015, 477). First emerging in the Renaissance (Wintle 1999), Europe as a significant political idea has been used not only as an identificatory category, but also as an exclusionary device to promote the idea of a particular civilisation as superior over ‘Others’ (Balibar 2003, 1-10). Consequently, the fact that ‘Europe’ as an entity signified more than a merely physically geographic entity, as one might define an island simply by its coastline, allowed a degree of uncertainty to creep in which is ultimately of the very essence of what ‘European’ means. If ‘Europe’ is to represent not only a geographical entity but also a civilisation, possible identification with this denomination becomes not only geographic in a basic sense, but also geopolitical. In other words, Europeanness then comes to mean more than mere location on the surface of the
Earth; it may also be interpreted as membership in an allegedly common civilisation, shared history, or set of political values.

For present purposes, this identification of Europe with more than just geography and the general fuzziness of the concept of ‘Europe’ – regarding the question of what as well as that of where – has two main effects. First of all, it means that the answers to both questions can be subject to changes over time. Where and what Europe is imagined to be today may very well be vastly different from where and what it was thought to be in the early 1800s. Secondly, given that Europe is imagined as a geopolitical entity and identity, its identity is constructed against an Other in a twofold way. The first of these is a construction of alleged European civilisation as superior in contradistinction to allegedly inferior cultures or civilisations located outside the conventional geographical boundaries of Europe. The prime example of this Othering being the similarly vaguely defined ‘Orient’ (Saïd 1979), this way of constructing European identity was most explicit during colonial times, for which reason I briefly return to postcolonialism below. The second way in which the idea of Europe as a civilisation is construct through Othering is by internalising as well as externalising its own geographic boundaries (Balibar 2009). Hence, particularly states in Central- and Eastern Europe are sometimes referred to as ‘the Other Europe,’ struggling with “a desire to be fully recognised [as European]” (Passerini 2000, 58).

These two elements – the context dependence of the concept of Europe and its identity being constructed against an Other – result in a particular notion of the concept of Europe that is of primary importance in this study. As the idea of a European identity crystallised at a time when European empires were colonising vast parts of the world and engaging in self-proclaimed civilising missions, ‘Europe’ came to mean not only a civilisation, but came to be identified with the very idea of civilisation as such (Dainotto 2007, 46). This identification was politically useful because it enabled European states to ‘prove’ their own superiority while simultaneously ‘justifying’ their colonialism abroad. Hence, throughout the centuries of colonialism the relation between colonised and colonisers – to a large degree concomitant with European and non-European – came to be viewed as a relation between backwardness and civilisation (Saïd 1993, 131). Similarly, as the idea of a dichotomy or essential difference between ‘west’ and ‘east’ crystallised in the 19th century, this difference came to be constructed decisively in favour of the west as ‘civilised’ and the east as ‘backwards,’ ‘Asiatic’ (a word which, in those times, carried similar connotations) or ‘oriental’ (Brisku 2009, 52-53; Saïd 1979 [1994]).
Hence, I study the idea of Georgia as European/non-European and its history and geopolitical significance partially through the lens of postcolonial studies and the typical colonial relations it highlights, which I have outlined above. Such relations are understood here along the lines of Edward Saïd’s (1979) orientalism and imaginative geography. In brief, orientalism implies that, while Europe’s Other is viewed as backwards or primitive, this is not done without a certain romantic admiration. Imaginative geography – which, one might argue, encompasses all geography – rather than being mere reflections of a real and factually objective representation actively creates the way certain spaces and the separations between them are conceived of. As Saïd (1979, 12) phrases it, orientalism (and imaginative geography by extension) is a “distribution of geopolitical awareness” and an “elaboration” of distinctions between this place and that. As such, imaginative geographies “shape the ways in which, from our particular perspectives, we conceive of the connections and separations between [different places]” (Gregory 1994, 204). In this sense, imaginative geography is a type of discourse in the sense that to possess knowledge of geography “is to gather together the whole dense layer of signs with which it [...] may have been covered” (Foucault 1966 [2005], 44). This in turn makes knowledge of geography explicitly political because such signs are never neutral. One might, for example, say that the boundaries of the continent known as Europe are such and such, and that this is a strictly neutral affair. But that would be to neglect the deep meaning commonly attached to the signifier ‘Europe’ or ‘European.’

One potential drawback of viewing the relation between Georgia and the Russian Empire in the 19th century in terms of colonialism and orientalism here is the question of whether the non-overseas territorial possessions of the Russian Empire (and similarly the Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman Empires) count as colonies in the same sense. There are certainly many differences between the colonial experiences and post-colonial conditions in the various countries which once constituted Western European overseas colonies, such as, say, Senegal, Kenya, and Indonesia, and those Central and Eastern European countries which were largely dominated from an imperial metropolitan centre (generally speaking, Moscow/St. Petersburg, Istanbul/Constantinople, or Vienna) but within an empire that was nonetheless contiguous. Yet there are also ample similarities. Many of these go back in some way to the familiar colonial designation of ‘backwardness’ or ‘underdevelopment.’ Moreover, this attitude was not unique to the imperial metropolises, such as from Moscow to its Central Asian possessions, or to the Caucasus in the 19th century. Indeed, it was (and still is) not uncommon to distinguish Western Europe from ‘the other Europe’ (Velickovic 2012; Kovačević 2008). In other words, the imaginative geography of the east-west dichotomy
which emerged through colonialism persists even today, and is also internalised within what is conventionally understood to be the European space.

Hence, until long after the revolutions of 1989, a sense of being ‘not fully European’ lingered among citizens of countries such as Croatia, Bulgaria, or Ukraine. Larry Wolff notes a particularly revealing instance of this patronising stance of Western European academics towards their Eastern counterparts in a 1985 conference entitled “Origins of Backwardness in Eastern Europe” (Wolff 1994, 9). Yet while many countries east of the former Iron Curtain have ample in common in terms of historical experiences with their counterparts in Africa and Asia, subsuming them under this header is reductive. Indeed, as Martin Müller (2018) notes in a particularly lucid article, the manifold and varied experiences of Central and Eastern Europeans are not adequately captured by either one of the usual umbrella terms: ‘global north’ or ‘global south.’ As a consequence Müller calls for a further theorisation of the ‘global east’: too rich to be part of the global south, yet too poor to be part of the global north.

My framework thus consists of the colonial attitude of associating ‘Europe’ with ‘civilisation,’ and hence following the orientalist imagined East-West dichotomy. Traditionally, the establishment of the aforementioned colonialist dichotomy also includes the idea of a ‘civilising mission,’ wherein an allegedly civilised European power presents its own colonial conduct as a beneficent attempt to enlighten and civilise barbaric peoples. Given that, as outlined above, this own positive identity is constructed against an Other, this civilizing mission was not meant to elevate the Other, but to reduce her so as to elevate oneself. This is consistent with the prevalent approach in critical geopolitics, as it implies that territories or spaces do not have any intrinsic meaning but are instead constructed ideologically and invested with meaning through geopolitical processes. Therefore I follow this view in thinking of borders in terms of bordering (van Houtum & van Naerssen 2002), i.e. as verbs rather than nouns (van Houtum 2010, 290). This working assumption implies that borders are not fixed natural entities, but are constantly undergoing changes instigated by a wide variety of (geo-)political actors. Rather than representing a mere political struggle to gain primacy over otherwise ‘neutral’ or ‘objective’ spaces, geopolitical actions on this view are themselves engaged in the very production of those spaces (Agnew 1998; Ó Tuathail & Dalby 1998; see also Lefebvre 1992). This renders the conventional understanding of Europe’s outer borders1 as fixed entities irrelevant, as these are then not “self-evident

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1 In the Caucasus, the physical boundary between Europe and Asia is conventionally located on the watershed of the Caucasus main range. As the border between Georgia and Russia does not always
testaments of spatial, ethnic and civilisational splits” (Bueno-Lacy & van Houtum 2018, 3). The observation that Georgia’s imagination of its own identity and, more importantly, its geopolitical position have undergone significant changes over the past two decades is consistent with this framework.

This approach dovetails with what Chiara Bottici (2007) has termed political myth. Political myths do not stand in an oppositional binary with factual truth because myths do not address questions of truth, but rather a need for significance (Bottici 2007, 131). Political myths consist of three main elements: significance, process, and narrative (Bottici & Challand 2013, 91). For myths to provide significance or meaning requires them to have a certain degree of emotional resonance (Bottici 2007, 196), which in turn renders myths particularistic: what is meaningful or significant is so only in a specific context, affecting particular agents or groups at specific places and times (ibid., 178-179). Myths in this sense intersect with Mikhail Bakhtin’s (1981) concept of chronotope, literally meaning ‘time-place,’ as they are significant precisely at a specific time and in a specific geographical place. Myths, moreover, are processes rather than static objects in that they need to be re-enacted and represented constantly, and as such they are always subject to change (Bottici & Challand 2013, 90). Hence myth in Bottici’s conceptualisation is always “work on myth” (Bottici 2007, 133). As processes, however, they are simultaneously passive as well as active, as the actions producing political myths are themselves always conditioned by the context – and hence the myth – in which they take place. Hence, synthesising the critical geopolitical approach with the concept of political myths, bordering practices can be interpreted as processes – political myths – engaged in the creation of specifically spatio-political significance.

Political myths are different from other forms of myths in that they specifically address the political conditions of the group for which they are significant, and as such provide an impetus to act upon those conditions (Bottici & Challand 2013, 92). More specifically, political myths provide a ground – in the sense of the German begründen – for political action. Political myths’ capacity of grounding, furthermore, goes some way towards elaborating why myths cannot be approached from the standpoint of ‘truth’ or ‘objective

strictly follow this watershed, some parts of Georgia are in Europe even on this ‘restrictive’ delineation.

2 Bottici and Challand distinguish political myths from cultural myths. I do not go into the specificities of cultural myths here, but permit me to note that the authors themselves admit that, while philosophically it makes sense to maintain the distinction, in reality the boundaries are fuzzy, and political myths and cultural myths are always intertwined (Bottici & Challand 2013, 93).
political myths defy ordinary refutation because they consist of “convictions in the language of movement” (Sorel 1999 [1908], 29); a political myth is “not a theory regarding the constitution of the world, but rather the expression of a determination to act within it” (Bottici & Challand 2013, 92). Regarding the interplay between identity and myth, it is important to note that the conceptualisation of myths as grounding a determination to act renders them decisively forward-looking. This also explains the strong connection between myth and identity. Similar to myth, Bottici and Challand (2013, 36) write, “identity is constructed not only as a dimension of the past (who we have been), but also in relation to the future (who we want to be).” Myths thus are an essential component of the construction and imagining of identities and concomitantly of belonging – of potential Europeanness – because both are future-oriented. In this sense, thus, Georgia’s Europeanisation may be hypothesised to partially consist in a response to its contemporary (geo-)political conditions, but also partially express “a desire to be fully recognised [as European]” (Passerini 2000, 58).

Methodologically, I first of all approach the question of Georgia’s Europeanisation in a – for lack of a better word – discursive way. As outlined above, I understand borders and boundaries in terms of bordering, as verbs. One implication of that assumption is that there can be no neutral third person representation of borders or borderscapes, but instead every such representation is part of the very bordering process itself. For a significant part of this study, I therefore follow the approach that Johan Schimanski (2015) has called border aesthetics, acknowledging that artistic productions can be, intentionally or not, part of practices of shaping and scaping borders. Benedict Anderson (1983 [2016]) involved the analysis of print media, which he likens to a particular kind of book (ibid., 34), in his method to analyse the rise and spread of nationalism. Focusing on newspapers, Anderson argues that print media has had the effect to consolidate national communities for two reasons: their wide distribution and timeliness, leading to an almost simultaneous mass-consumption of their contents; and their unification of vernacular languages, whereas Latin had earlier been the primary language of books. The combination of these two elements allowed for the unification of various dialects into a unified language as well as the common activity of consuming the same information among a wide range of agents, which together reinforce the idea of a commonality; indeed, of an imagined community.

Novels – works of fiction – Schimanski (2015, 46) argues, are relevant to studying practices of bordering in very similar ways. Because of the widespread distribution of novels – through time as well as through space – they have an excellent capability to present and
spread particular notions of borderscapes. In other words, given that aesthetics concerns, among other things, sensory perception (Rancière 2004), aesthetic works such as novels are part of bordering practices by actively making perceived or imagined borders – between states, between cultures, between civilizations – not only visible, but engaging in their very creation (ibid., 41). In this sense, thus, novels are part of discourses as “practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak” (Foucault 1969 [2002], 54). The importance of works of fiction, moreover, is reinforced by the fact that in the Russian Empire of the 19th century, censorship was such that most works that were explicitly philosophical or political as such were repressed, whereas works of fiction enjoyed a somewhat higher degree of freedom. As a consequence, intellectual and political debates in 19th century Russia played out more through discourses presented in novels than in treatises or essays.

While I explain the reasons for selecting the works I analyse in more detail while discussing those novels, a few general remarks about my methods of selection are in place here. First of all, note that novels can be part of discourses in two ways. First, and most obviously, they are actively engaged in discourses and processes of bordering, and in so doing help shape them. Second, novels are also written within the context of already ongoing bordering processes. Hence, as they may also reflect discourses which were prevalent as they were composed, reading them retrospectively may be instructive to tease out such discourses. Hence, while the first point suggests that especially novels with a wide readership are relevant to this study, the second indicates that less widely read novels may also be relevant contributions. The latter is especially true of novels published (or unpublished) under conditions of censorship, as inconvenient truths contained in them may be perceived as potentially harmful to oppressive regimes, and may thus be seen as counternarratives. Hence – and I return to this in more detail when discussing these novels – the 19th century Russian writers I discuss (Pushkin, Lermontov, Tolstoy), are especially important because of their immense popularity. For similar reasons, the Georgian writers Ilia Chavchavadze and Otar Chiladze are important: Chavchavadze is one of the most widely revered historical Georgians today, and as architect of Georgia’s national revival was popular in his own day as well; Chiladze has been one of Georgia’s most popular writers since his first publication in 1972, and is generally thought to be the country’s only Nobel prize nominee (Rayfield 2013).

A further factor in selecting works to be analysed is pertinence to subject matter. While both, say, Fyodor Dostoyevsky and Mikhail Bulgakov attained immense popularity
among Russian as well as foreign readers, neither of them concerned themselves very much with the Caucasus and Russian rule therein, nor with questions of Europeanness. The three Russian writers named above, by contrast, have all visited the Caucasus: Lermontov and Tolstoy as part of their military service and Pushkin in temporary exile. Hence these writers include not only their own experiences in their constructions of borderscapes in the Caucasus, but they have also attained those experiences through their active engagement with the Russian Imperial authorities. In similar vein, more emphasis is put on Chavchavadze than on Vazha-Pshavela, who were contemporaries, because Chavchavadze much more explicitly advocated for Georgia’s national revival, and often explicitly engaged with Russian rule over Georgia in his works.

Other sources analysed in this thesis are manifold. They include historical maps, which as visual signs indicate the way a territory is given meaning and therefore reveal imaginative geographies and their changes over time. Furthermore, contemporary Georgian schoolbooks – particularly history textbooks – are analysed. As Bottici and Challand (2013, 6) correctly point out, history textbooks “provide the ‘bottom line’ of what a society thinks about itself.” Therefore, as influential documents of an official discourse within Georgian society, they provide an important reflection of the way the question of Georgia’s Europeanness is thought of today. Finally, political speeches and statements, particularly by high-ranking officials, are analysed mostly in terms of geopolitical speech acts, performative acts of speech that not only reveal but actively create an imaginative geography by their very saying that a particular piece of territory has such-and-such a meaning.

In part, I subsequently read these works by combining semiology and iconology. This study is not concerned with posing explicit questions as to Georgia’s (perceived or imagined) Europeanness to particular individuals. Rather, it proceeds from the observation that Georgia’s Europeanisation is a process with a long history which is currently underway, and subsequently seeks to assess how this process and identity are represented and symbolised in a variety of objects endowed with meaning. In studying these symbols, myths, and imaginings, I employ semiology, i.e. the study of signs. As Roland Barthes (1957, 111-112) elaborates, any text – which in his view includes any object expressing meaning – consists of three elements: signifier, signified, and sign. That which is signified is expressed, at first glimpse, by the signifier. At this stage, however, these are still two distinct concepts; as soon as they are combined and employed in reality to engage in this relation of signification, they form a sign. The distinction between signifier and signified makes it possible to conceptually
separate the ways, for example, borders or regions are described in works of fiction from their actuality. In other words, employing this method entails acknowledging that signifier and signified do not correspond inherently or essentially. On the contrary, signs are imbued with a particular meaning and present a particular view on what they intend to represent.

To further embed analysed signs in a meaningful context, this method is at times supplemented with the iconological method, distinguishing three levels of subject matter and, by extension, of meaning: natural subject matter, conventional subject matter, and intrinsic meaning (Panofsky 1939, 5-7). Natural subject matter in this constellation is less relevant, as it concerns bare objects and forms. Conventional subject matter is concerned with the transformation of bare objects and events into meaningful ones. For example, if I encounter an acquaintance across the street and see her holding up her hand while looking in my direction, I do not merely see someone holding up her hand at me, but I see someone waving at me. In other words, this particular action – and this similarly holds for events and objects – is endowed with a certain meaning which is recognisable to me. Intrinsic meaning, finally, is the “unifying principle” (Panofsky 1939, 5) connecting conventional to natural subject matter. By incorporating knowledge of context and background – cultural elements, political conditions, situatedness, and so on – it seeks to explain why certain physical objects, events, and actions are endowed with a particular meaning and why it is recognised as such. This context relates to what Mikhail Bakhtin (1981, 84) calls chronotope – time-space – in that it concerns not knowledge of a temporal situation but also of a spatial one.

Primarily, however, I read these works through the lens of my theoretical framework, outlined above. As such, I use that framework to tease out, for example, colonialist discourses in texts, so as to be able to embed them in my framework and make sense of those texts in the context of my research questions. Using this theoretical framework and some of the essential concepts described above as a lens to study texts and other signs about Georgia, Russia, and Europe, enables me to use this framework as a general structure to connect the different dots to, so as to finally paint a more complete picture of these bordering processes and discourses regarding them.

In this study, to conclude, I combine the semiological and iconological methods with an approach proceeding from the assumption that the meaning of spaces is often constructed – deliberately or not – and in which these methods are employed to deconstruct and investigate these meanings. This is an appropriate and conventionally employed method to study these phenomena. One potential drawback is that it relies on argumentation rather
than (quantitative) data. In other words, semiology and iconology do not enable scholars to make unrefutable claims pertaining to causality and to definitively explain the underlying mechanisms behind some political phenomenon. It only allows one to investigate symbols and texts and advance compelling arguments to explain the meaning behind those symbols and texts. Despite this limitation, it remains an appropriate method because in large part this limitation is not inherent to the method but to the objects of study. Signs and symbols do not permit straightforward observation because such observation would not go beyond the subject matter. Therefore these methods must be employed to contextualise and situate these symbols, embedding them in political conditions endowing them with meaning.

**Relevance**

As noted, this study seeks to build upon earlier work in critical geopolitics by investigating the bordering practices at work in Georgia, and focusing on the way in which Georgia is increasingly representing itself as a European country. Georgia, and the Caucasus at large, have been subject to a wide variety of geopolitical studies. Both the ‘ordinary’ geopolitics of its conflicts, i.e. as merely a struggle between international powers (e.g. Suny 2010; Pototskaya 2014; Torosyan & Vardanyan 2015) as well as more critical perspectives, concerned with the creation of spaces as a result of such struggles (Kabachnik 2012a; 2012b; Artman 2013; Ó Tuathail & O’Loughlin 2013; Littlefield 2009), have been addressed. While new borderscapes emerging as a consequence of this geopolitical constellation have been studied (Jolicoeur & Labarre 2015), the change in Georgians’ views and representations of themselves and their country as specifically European have received little attention. Similarly, the history of this association and the (dis)continuity between Russian colonial representations of the Caucasus and Georgia’s own representations of itself since the beginning of Georgia’s incorporation in the Russian Empire in 1801 have seen comparatively little scholarship. Therefore, this study seeks to contribute to an already rich body of literature in critical geopolitics by investigating the intersection between the creation and modifications of borders and political spaces in Georgia by geopolitical actors and Georgia’s view, imagination, and representation of itself.

Scientifically, therefore, this study seeks to contribute to an already extensive body of work on the concept of ‘Europe,’ its borderlands, and the way it is imagined and used discursively and politically (e.g. Bottici & Challand 2013; Bueno Lacy & van Houtum 2015; Diez 2004; Cooper 2015; Delanty 2006). In an extensive study on the formation and
imaginings of European identity, Chiara Bottici and Benoît Challand (2013) explicitly state that their work is not to be considered definitive, but rather developing a framework and setting an agenda for future research into different iterations of this identity. This study seeks to contribute to that framework and project by specifically focusing on the construction and imagining of Europe and European identity at the very edges of Europe. Particularly these peripheral regions may be critically illuminating in this respect. As Étienne Balibar (2003, 1-2) reminds us, in constructing identities these peripheries take center stage. The outer edges of the space taken up by a particular identity, in other words, are crucial in the formation of that identity. It is there that a collective identity may define itself against what it is not, i.e. it explicitly differentiates itself from other possible identities. A study of Georgia’s Europeanisation is therefore a potentially valuable contribution to research on European identity. Moreover, while the use and misuse of the identity marker ‘European’ by colonial powers has been extensively studied, its use by former colonised peoples today is less well-documented. This study therefore also contributes to the critical geopolitics framework by showing the long history of bordering practices through multiple historical eras and in varying (geo)political conditions.

Societally, given the resurgence of nationalism across Europe in the past decade, national identity is back on the political agenda with a vengeance. A conundrum that has long plagued the EU is the apparent impossibility of forming a distinctive (pan-)European identity and a European polity, as opposed to a Union consisting of various national(ised) polities. Moreover, particularly since Russia’s 2014 intervention in Ukraine, a new geopolitical tug-of-war between the EU and Russia seems to have become apparent. Russia’s allegedly aggressive conduct outside its own borders, moreover, is not limited to Ukraine but has long included Georgia. Georgia, moreover, is vital for the transportation of natural gas from the Caspian Sea to the EU (Gachechiladze 2002; European Parliament 2014) and hence for its energy security. Disregarding the Baltics, Georgia is easily the most democratic country in the former USSR (Freedom House 2018). The EU, for its part, has affirmed that it views Georgia as a European country and may therefore be a future candidate for membership in the Union (European Parliament 2014). All of the above reasons, clearly, render stability in Georgia and knowledge of its political conditions, including its democracy and nationalism, of central importance to the EU. This study contributes to a better understanding of (1) the workings of collective (regional/continental) identity in the context of conflicts and; (2) the geopolitical struggle which seems to be underway on the edges of
Europe, and the way in which this shapes the multifaceted understandings of what ‘Europe’ means, and how this has changed throughout the past two centuries. In so doing, it may provide vital insights to be used in dealing with these issues.
“So the goddess who inspires me, 
light-winged companion of my dreams, 
has flown to the frontiers of Asia; 
she has picked herself a garland 
of wild Caucasian flowers.”
Alexander Pushkin (1822 [2005], 146)

Whereas Russian involvement in the Caucasus commenced in the mid-18th century and gained real traction with the 1783 Treaty of Georgievsk and subsequently with Russia’s annexation of Georgia (formally the Kingdom of Kartli-Kakheti at that point) in 1801, little was known among the Russian public of the region until several decades later. Indeed, even among government elites based in St. Petersburg extensive knowledge of the Caucasus was uncommon (Atkin 1980, 163). For these reasons, particularly the works of Alexander Pushkin and Mikhail Lermontov are of enormous importance in tracing back discourses relating to the Russian view towards the Caucasus. It is hard to overstate the immense role played by Russian romantic literature in constituting and consolidating the image the Russian public had - and to some extent still has - of the Caucasus as a region. In the early 19th century, civilisational discourses in Russia with regard to the Caucasus started becoming more widespread and more commonly known to Russians who were not themselves directly involved in the Caucasus. As noted in discussing my theoretical framework, ‘Europe’ or ‘European’ are, of course, not synonymous with ‘civilisation’ or ‘civilised.’ However, in colonial discourses these terms are often equated, where a purportedly civilised European state or empire sets itself a mission to civilise what it considers to be backwards or undeveloped peoples. In the Caucasus, Georgia is a special case as it tended to be viewed as
the most developed of the peoples of the Caucasus. Hence Mikhail Semyonovich Vorontsov, viceroy of the Caucasus (1844-1853) considered Georgia not quite European, but capable of being redeemed by being ‘Europeanised.’ So, too, Mikhail Lermontov thought Russian involvement in the Caucasus a necessity to convert a backwards region into a European one (de Waal 2010, 43). As this section aims to show, Russian involvement in Georgia and in the Caucasus more generally in the 19th century is a remarkable case of the equation of ‘European’ with ‘civilised.’ It does so primarily by teasing out the discourse on the Caucasus exemplified in two of Russia’s foremost writers of the time: Alexander Pushkin and Mikhail Lermontov.

A look at these poets and novelists shows how the intermingling of romantic fiction with purportedly ethnographic information and travelogues effectively justified Russia’s involvement in the region in two steps. First, an image and concomitant imaginative geography of the Caucasus was constructed, including Georgia, as a backwards and underdeveloped, though exotic and romantic place. Subsequently, this image was used to actively justify and excuse Russian colonialism in the Caucasus, arguing that despite their backwardness the peoples of the Caucasus were not beyond redemption. Furthermore, it needs emphasising just how strongly these two writers influenced the Russian discourse on the Caucasus. Pushkin’s stories set in the region, where he spent two months in exile in 1822, were one of the primary sources of information on the region for the larger part of the Russian population, frequently blurring the distinction between fact and art (Layton 1994, 33-35). Lermontov, too, strongly influenced the Russian public’s perception of the Caucasus, leading some to argue that he ‘invented’ the Caucasus as a region (Hokanson 1994), echoing Foucault’s notion of discourses as “practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak” (Foucault 1969 [2002], 54). Indeed, more than a century after Lermontov’s travels in the Caucasus, Dagestani poet Rasul Gamzatov wrote that “it was not a general before whom the Caucasus bowed, but the poetry of a young lieutenant” (quoted in de Waal 2010, 43).

For all their differences, there are some similarities in the portrayal of the Caucasus and its peoples between the two authors discussed here. First of all, both justify or make excuses for Russia’s colonisation of the region and its brutalism in subjugating its peoples, at times presenting an extremely rose-coloured view of events. Secondly, the Caucasus is portrayed with relative consistency as a destination for young romantic Russian officers in search for adventure - such as Lermontov himself. This designation of the Caucasus and its
‘wild freedom,’ moreover, has been influential to such an extensive degree that it lives on today (Hokanson 1994, 336). Thirdly, and relatedly, both combine their view on the Caucasus as a barbaric or backwards place with a great deal of exocitism or orientalism, thus establishing the well-known narrative of the ‘noble savage.’ Finally, it must be noted that both are inconsistent in referring to the various peoples in the Caucasus: sometimes, they indicate specific peoples - Georgians, Ossetians, Circassians, Chechens - whereas at others they refer to them simply in general terms, not infrequently as ‘Asiatics.’

In the present context, this may be seen as both a blessing and a curse: on the one hand, it makes it more difficult to discern the authors’ view on, specifically, Georgians, and the discourse about them they helped constitute. On the other hand, it is instructive to the extent that it reveals a tendency to portray the Caucasus and its varied peoples as monolithic - not unlike Western European portrayals of the Orient. More important, this monolithic portrayal reveals something about the discursive function of such portrayals. Relatively little attention is paid to the immense diversity present within the region; instead, the educated Russians receive more attention. In so doing, both authors intermingle processes of bordering and othering by highlighting the alleged contrast between Russians and the inhabitants of the Caucasus. As such, these descriptions of the various peoples of the Caucasus serve to an important degree to contrast them to Russians, and concomitantly to ‘prove’ the Europeanness of the Russian Empire.

**Orientalising the Caucasus**

For many educated Russians, Alexander Pushkin’s *A Prisoner of the Caucasus* (1822) was their first introduction to the mountainous region on the empire’s southern borders. Pushkin’s story of a Russian prisoner in a Circassian mountain village quickly rose to fame: it was translated quickly after, reissued many times, and refashioned into a performance by the Russian Imperial Ballet (Grant 2009, 13). Moreover, the prisoner motive in the ‘wild’ and ‘free’ Caucasus was, thanks to Pushkin, to become a staple of Russian literature. Hence, given the prevailing view at the time of poetry as “artful fact rather than frivolous artefact” (Layton 1994, 34), Pushkin was particularly influential in creating the Caucasus as a literary topos (Gutmeyr 2017, 98). In so doing, his *Prisoner of the Caucasus* did not only popularise a new genre of fiction in the Russian Empire, but also contributed greatly to the Russian discourse on the Caucasus on the region. The way the Caucasus as a place is represented in Pushkin’s story and those influenced by it, moreover, remains in vogue to this day (Grant
2009, 13). In short, the way the Caucasus is presented as a literary topos by Pushkin first and others in his stride - notably Lermontov and Tolstoy - firmly establishes the Caucasus as Russia’s east: Russia’s Orient (Ram 2006, 23).

The blurring of the line between ethnographic reality and fiction becomes immediately clear from the structure of *A Prisoner of the Caucasus*. While the story itself tells the tale of a Russian soldier captured by Circassians and held hostage in their village over the course of an unspecified period of time, until a local woman falls in love with him and finally frees and rescues him, Pushkin interrupts his story with an ostensibly ethnographic section to describe the context in which the story is set. While at first glimpse this lends Pushkin’s ethnographic details a certain appearance of reliability, the local Circassians are described and orientalised in no unclear terms. Clearly establishing a chasm between the ‘European’ Russian and their ‘oriental’ Others, Pushkin begins his ethnographic observations by writing that “it was the outlandish people of those parts that the European found most fascinating” (Pushkin 1822 [2005], 137), continuing to describe how the fascinated Russian prisoner observes the local customs, dress, festivities, the “simplicity of their lives” (ibid.), and is clearly fascinated “by the savage nation’s lifestyle” (ibid., 139).

The line between fact and fiction becomes especially blurry if one considers the extent to which the supposedly more narrative parts of the story - as opposed to its ostensibly merely descriptive section - intertwine with these ‘ethnographic’ observations by referring to the local people and their traditions in largely similar ways. Indeed, in the Caucasus, where “a wild imagination lies in ambush in the empty silence,” local men enjoy talking at ease “about the pleasures of their wild, free lives” (ibid., 132-133). Moreover, not only the local peoples are viewed as ‘wild’ and ‘free’; the Russian captive has also abandoned home “in the cheerful company of freedom - or freedom’s ghost” (ibid., 134). In this sense, Pushkin thus not only constructs an orientalist image of the peoples inhabiting the Caucasus as the ‘noble savages’ enjoying their ‘simple’ lives in ‘wild freedom,’ but also creates an imaginative geography of the Caucasus region as such as a region where such unbounded freedom can be enjoyed. Moreover, by explicitly emphasising how the ‘European’ is fascinated by the local inhabitants and how Russians have ‘abandoned home,’ the above passage is also a prime example of bordering and othering: the local inhabitants are, apparently, exotic others to the ‘European’; Russians in the Caucasus have abandoned home, and hence the Caucasus is clearly not Russia, nor European, but something else altogether. This juxtaposition of ‘European’ and ‘Russian’ in contradistinction to the local inhabitants is crucial. It is this
contrast that, as briefly mentioned before, serves to prove the Russian Empire’s Europeanness.

This imaginative geography found much resonance in Russia and became a successful narrative for decades, if not centuries, to come. The view presented by Pushkin of the native inhabitants of the Caucasus as fascinating, free, and wild, though savage and ultimately untrustworthy and deceitful will be important in the way he is to justify Russia’s involvement in the region later. First, however, I turn to another influential contributor to the circulation of such Russian discourses on the Caucasus. Mikhail Lermontov’s most internationally famous work and the only prose novel published before his premature death at only 26 years of age, A Hero of Our Time (1840), presents two different views on the Caucasus through the eyes of two different personas. Firstly, the narrator and his travel companion through the mountainous regions of Northern Georgia, frequently express their frustration with the backwardness and unreliability of the inhabitants of the Caucasus. Consequently, both are delighted to have found a Russian to undertake the journey together with, who is reliable and capable of engaging in serious conversation. Secondly, the narrator is given a number of notebooks narrating the exploits of an officer his travel companion was formerly stationed with, one of whose stories he tells the narrator himself along the way. This officer - Grigory Pechorin - entertains a clearly more positive - though no less orientalist - view of the Caucasus. For him, the Caucasus is a place of freedom, exotic peoples, and wild adventures involving the backwards locals.

The frustration expressed by the first two narrators (the narrator proper and his travel companion) speaks in rather unambiguous terms about the peoples of the Caucasus. The “Asiatics” inhabiting the region cannot be depended upon, will try to extract tips at every possible turn, lack proper manners, and are generally “rascals” (Lermontov 1840, 4; 28). Such descriptions of the peoples of the Caucasus are supplemented by the narrator’s discontent with the region’s lack of development: there is no proper infrastructure, no suitable spaces to receive travelers and accommodate them on their journey, and by and large the (mostly aristocratic) Russians who travelled to the region at the time were left to their own devices, at the mercy of unreliable locals, or at the grace of Russian travellers with more experience in the region. The local inhabitants, in typical orientalist or colonialist fashion, appear only as they are spoken of, as part of the general decor (Scotto 1992, 251). Similar to how Pushkin described Circassians, Lermontov thus paints local inhabitants in monolithic fashion, and is especially at pains to contrast them to the Russians travelling in the region. This othering,
moreover, takes place also on a more metadescriptive level: not only is a clear contrast established between Russians and local inhabitants as such; there is also an important contrast between the way those are represented. Among certain diversity is present among Russians: some wish to return as soon as possible to their civilised Russia, whereas others are fascinated by this exotic region.

Essentially, this early description sets the stage for two points. Firstly, the region’s alleged underdevelopment provides a handy stepping stone to justify Russia’s much-needed interventionism and civilising mission in the region. Secondly, it sets the stage for a more romantic view towards the peoples of the Caucasus, whose ‘backwardness’ also possesses certain charms and attracts the more romantically inclined Russians. Of course, these are by no means accurate ethnographical or historical renderings of the Caucasus. However, up to the 1820s almost nothing was known about the region among the general Russian population, and consequently Pushkin’s and Lermontov’s descriptions of the Caucasus resonated strongly with the Russian audience, for whom they were not only taken as literary works but also as realistic portrayals of a new Russian Imperial region (Layton 1994, 32-35).

Of all characters in *A Hero of Our Time*, Pechorin himself clearly entertains the most romantic view of the Caucasus. In *Bela*, the first story in *A Hero of Our Time*, he schemes to kidnap the daughter of a local prince. Pechorin’s fellow officer at the local Russian regiment, who relates the story to the narrator, criticises Pechorin for his schemes, to which Pechorin retorts that “a wild Circassian girl should consider herself lucky to have such a nice husband as he” (Lermontov 1840, 17, emphasis added). According to Pechorin’s logic, Bela will be his wife after having been kidnapped because of the local traditions. Moreover, despite considering the inhabitants of the Caucasus “savages” (ibid., 90), Pechorin studies their way of horse riding and dresses according to local customs. Hence, in typical orientalist fashion, Lermontov describes his view on the antiquated and backwards customs of the peoples of the Caucasus, though not without a certain admiration and without adopting some of their ways.

Finally, before moving on, both works discussed above establish a particular imaginative geography of the lived space of the Caucasus, which further advances the discourse of Othering between allegedly ‘civilised’ Russians and ‘backwards’ locals. The contexts in which local inhabitants of the Caucasus appear are essentially of two types: as assistance to Russians, for example in helping them cross a mountain pass, or as nuisance or outright danger, kidnapping or robbing Russian travellers. Local inhabitants of the Caucasus
are not represented as having any significant agency; they act only insofar as Russians compel or incite them to act. These correspond also to the types of spaces in which they appear: in primitive mountain villages, or along roads (whether in the plains of the Northern Caucasus or among the mountains of the High Caucasus). By contrast, Russians appear engaging in high society, in the Russian cities that had already been established in the Caucasus, and travelling to more urban destinations such as St. Petersburg. In this way, Pushkin and Lermontov also engage in a type of othering relating to lived space, in which the lived spaces of inhabitants of the Caucasus appear notably different from those of Russians. In turn, this generates a certain imaginative geography of the Caucasus as an empty space, which subsequently may serve to justify the Russian Empire in its colonisation of the region.

**Justifying Russian Colonialism**

Most discourses on the Caucasus and Georgia among the Russian public emerged only after part of Russia’s colonial goals had already been accomplished: Pushkin published his *Prisoner of the Caucasus* in 1822, Lermontov’s *A Hero of Our Time* was published in 1840, but Russia annexed Georgia in 1801. In this sense it is perhaps unsurprising that both are more concerned with the peoples of the Caucasus who had at their time of writing not yet been fully subjugated, such as Circassians and Chechens. There are, however, reasons to believe that their orientalisation of Caucasian peoples extends to Georgia and Georgians. Firstly, while imaginative geography need not follow ‘normal’ geographical logic, the typical designation of the lands south of the main Caucasus range as ‘Transcaucasia’ suggests a specifically Russian view towards the territory; Georgia can only be Transcaucasia if one views it from Russia. As a consequence, the people inhabiting the lands beyond these allegedly ‘wild’ and oriental mountain peoples must logically also be viewed as no less oriental. Secondly, and more compellingly, when Pushkin and Lermontov in fact do reference Georgia or Georgians, they do so in similar - though not necessarily identical - terms as when they describe other peoples in the Caucasus.

Hence, in the epilogue to his *Prisoner of the Caucasus*, Pushkin writes of “how the Russians were betrayed and slaughtered as they lay with vengeful Georgian girls” (Pushkin 1822 [2005], 146). Here, he echoes his own earlier description of Circassians as wild and free, yet also untrustworthy and lusting for revenge, full of “Circassian tricks” (ibid., 138). Unsurprisingly, then, Pushkin continues in praise of “the glorious time when our two-
headed eagle, scenting bloody combat, rose up high against the disaffected Caucasus” (ibid., 147). Particularly, he praises General Yermolov, because of whom “at last it was time for the Caucasus to bend its snowy head in self-abasement” (ibid.). In an 1820 letter to his brother, Pushkin tells of his admiration for Yermolov, writing that “the Caucasian region, the torrid boundary of Asia, [...] has [been] filled with his name and his beneficent genius” (Pushkin 1967, 75). It is doubtful whether the peoples of the Caucasus similarly viewed Yermolov’s ‘genius’ as ‘beneficent’; he was known as one of the crudest and harshest generals serving in the Caucasus in the 19th century, and responsible for many a massacre. It is noteworthy in this regard that almost no press coverage of Russia’s Caucasian campaigns existed at the time, as a consequence of which stories such as those of Pushkin and Lermontov were for most Russians the main if not only source not only on the Caucasus and its peoples, but also on the Russian Empire’s conduct there (Layton 1994, 33-34). Positively assessing Russia’s efforts to civilise the Caucasus, in the final lines of A Prisoner of the Caucasus Pushkin writes that the peoples of the Caucasus “will not stay true to their ancestral ways” and will “forget the call of hungry conflict,” as a consequence of which in the future “the traveller will ride without fear” in the Caucasus (Pushkin 1840 [2005], 147-148).

With regard to Georgia specifically, it is particularly instructive to look at the retrospective view on its annexation by the Russian Empire in 1801 presented in Lermontov’s narrative poem Mtsyri³ (1840). Whereas in many other cases the dominant discourse advocated Russian colonialism in the Caucasus to attempt to ‘civilise’ its ‘backwards’ peoples, in Mtsyri Lermontov tells the story of how Russia’s efforts have already proven successful in Georgia. Consider, to begin with, these lines, which introduce the story’s setting and backdrop to the reader:

> Just an old watchman, feeble, grey
> attends the ruined church today;
> by men forgotten he has been,
> also by death, as he sweeps clean
> gravestones with legends which keep green
> tales of past fame - of how, worn down
> beneath the burden of his crown

³ The Latin rendering of the title Mtsyri is based on the Russified Georgian word მწირი (‘mts’iri’). If its title is translated into English, it is usually rendered as ‘The Novice,’ although the Georgian original may carry a variety of meanings, including ‘novice monk’; ‘sojourner’; ‘stranger’; ‘bastard’; and ‘recluse.’
a certain king conveyed his land
in such a year, to Russia’s hand.
(Lermontov 1840b [1983], 82)

Note, first of all, the way in which Georgia is represented here. Its setting is Jvari Monastery, overlooking the town of Mtskheta, situated just northwest of Tbilisi and functioning as its capital until King Vakhtang Gorgasali moved it to Tbilisi in the 6th century, and again intermittently during periods when Tbilisi was occupied by invading forces until the latter’s definitive recapture by Davit Aghmashenebeli in 1122. The 6th century monastery atop a hill (Jvari/ჯვარი, meaning ‘cross’) is important because it is said to be the site where Saint Nino first raised her cross in the 4th century in her efforts to christen Georgia.

Hence, in these lines Lermontov first establishes Georgia as a country with an ancient history - notably a Christian one - not only by his explicit words but also by the specific setting of the tale. It is, however, not only ancient, but also “by men forgotten” and the only thing to keep alive the “tales of past fame” are gravestones. Hence, Georgia is not only ancient, but is presented as a country stuck in its ancient past, as “a faded spot that history, civilization, and enlightenment had long passed by” (Scotto 1992, 248). This conforms perfectly to Lermontov’s view on Russian colonial rule as “a necessary but brutal force dragging a backwards region,” including the “antiquated Georgians” who linger in the past, “into Europe” (de Waal 2010, 42-43). Here, the borderscapes established by Russian discourses in the Caucasus become slightly more complicated. In Lermontov’s depiction, Georgia is not as backwards as, for example, Circassia and Chechnya. Instead, his description is more similar to how Western European empires and orientalists would see such regions as Persia: while acknowledging their ancient history, they have become stuck in said history as though time stood still.

The most important lines, however, are the last four, relating an inscription on one of the graves on the floor of the church narrating how a Georgian king no longer willing to rule voluntarily sought the incorporation of Georgia into the Russian Empire. However, while the 1783 Treaty of Georigievsk established the Kingdom of Kartli-Kakheti as a Russian protectorate to absolve the Georgian royal dynasties of any loyalty to the Persian shah voluntarily, its 1801 annexation by the Russian Empire was all but voluntary. While Georgia’s final king, Giorgi XII, had wished for his son Davit to be his successor, the Russian tsar had already decided that no successor would be appointed and Kartli-Kakheti would be formally incorporated into the Russian Empire (Rayfield 2012, 258-259). What makes those
four lines especially important, thus, is that they reveal something of Lermontov’s views and intentions with his narrative poem *Mtsyri*.

Following this overtly pro-Russian reading of Russia’s annexation of Kartli-Kakheti, Lermontov continues:

*And so heaven’s benediction fell*

*on Georgia! - it has blossomed well;*

*the hedge that friendly bayonets made*

*since then has kept it unafraid,*

*enclosed in its own garden-shade.*

(Lermontov 1840 [1983], 83)

This antiquated kingdom with a king tired of ruling, in the image sketched by Lermontov, has fared well under Russian rule. Three elements are particularly noteworthy in this passage. First, Lermontov continues the narrative of Georgia’s annexation being voluntarily, but adds that its decision has proven to be a wise one, given that Georgia has “blossomed well” under Russian rule. Secondly, note how Lermontov does not speak once of the indignation among Georgians when their dynasty was deposed and their country annexed. Instead, Lermontov presents the annexation as Russian magnanimity taking upon itself to protect the Georgians, who prefer to remain in their garden protected by a hedge of “friendly bayonets.” In other words, Russia did not annex Georgia for self-serving reasons, but rather out of its well-intentioned desire to protect the Georgians from harm. Thirdly, note how the annexation’s positive effects are described as “heaven’s benediction.” It is, thus, not only the Russian tsar who wishes well upon Georgia by protecting it, but heaven itself working through the tsar and his empire. This Christian motive of an empire fulfilling god’s wishes through colonising and ‘protecting’ those incapable of doing so for themselves is not unique to the Russian Empire, but in fact is common across many European colonial empires of the time.

To wrap up the above discussion, note how the narratives on the Caucasus advanced by Lermontov and Pushkin fit into the concept of political myth as discussed in my theoretical framework. Through their stories set in the Caucasus and their depictions of local inhabitants, Pushkin and Lermontov paint a complex borderscape in which the peoples of the Caucasus are the uncivilised Others to civilised Russians. This corresponds to the idea, noted above, that the boundaries of what is ‘European’ exist only insofar as efforts are undertaken to *make* them exist; insofar as they are considered to be meaningful under given
conditions. As such, the works discussed here are also excellent examples of border aesthetics to the extent that, as fictional representations of such borders and civilisational splits, they engage in the very creation of these boundaries. The bordering established by Lermontov and Pushkin were meaningful for very specific reasons. The complexity in the bordering stems from the fact that while Georgia and the Caucasus were Russian, but simultaneously they were not quite Russian; they had not been Russianised, Europeanised, or civilised sufficiently. While the imaginative geography portraying the Caucasus as Asiatic and as Russia’s Other was necessary for its own definition of its identity as well as the justification for its conduct in the Caucasus, this entire constellations may be seen to function as a political myth. Recall how political myths are distinctively forward-looking, embedded in (political) practices, and used for a collective to deal with its political conditions. The Russian Empire, as does the Russian Federation today, suffers under some degree of Othering present within the boundaries of what is conventionally understood to be Europe, where Russia is seen as ‘the other Europe’ or ‘not quite European.’ Within that context, painting itself in positive contrast to allegedly backwards peoples in the Caucasus, which it subsequently set about civilising, serves to prove not only to other European empires its own Europeanness, but perhaps even more so to itself.

**GEORGIA FROM ORIENT TO EUROPE TO NATIONAL REVIVAL**

The decades following the majority of Russians’ first acquaintance with the Caucasus saw increased Russian influence over the region, with the administrative centre of the Russian Empire’s Caucasian possessions located in Tbilisi. Concomitantly, the region also witnessed a peculiar redrawing of its imagined geography: whereas in the first half of the 19th century and earlier the Caucasus had still been considered Asian, antiquated, or backwards, from the late 1840s onwards this perception started to change. At the same time, the second half of the 19th century saw the beginning of Georgia’s national revival. As Benedict Anderson describes, public intellectuals and (fiction) writers, actively propagating the return of a ‘national consciousness’ played a large role in these processes, among other things by standardising the national language (Anderson 1983 [2016], 44-45). The role played by the examples that Anderson uses, such as Pushkin in Russia, Taras Shevchenko in Ukraine, and Ivan Vazov in Bulgaria (ibid., 72-76), is roughly similar to the role played by Ilia Chavchavadze (1837-1907) in Georgia. Chavchavadze, educated in law in St. Petersburg
before returning to Georgia to engage in widespread and diverse programmes of national revival, remains today one of the most universally revered figures not only in Georgia’s literary history, but in the country’s history per se (Rayfield 1994 [2010], 177-181).

This chapter engages with the increased representation of Europeanness in Georgia throughout the second half of the 19th century, together with its national revival. To do so, I first take a step back to compare (predominantly Russian) cartography dating back to the centuries prior to Russia’s annexation of Georgia to maps produced about a half century after Georgia became a part of the Russian Empire. As becomes apparent when comparing maps produced in the 1860s, the mid-19th century in particular saw a rapid change in the imaginative geography of Georgia as European or Asian. Much of this, as will become clear below, may be attributed to Mikhail Semyonovich Vorontsov, Russian Viceroy of the Caucasus from 1844 through 1853. Thus the Russian traveller Arnold L. Zisserman wrote in his travelogues that “in 1842 Tiflis was an Asiatic city, but in 1878 it was a European one” (Zisserman 1879 [2018], 7). Next, I move to discuss Georgia’s national revival in the late 19th century. As one of the most important historical intellectuals of Georgia - sometimes even called the father of the Georgian nation - Ilia Chavchavadze will be one of the most important sources there. Chavchavadze was, however, not alone. While primary known for his folk tales and fables, Vazha-Pshavela (pseudonym of Luka Razikashvili, 1861-1915) also has more politically and socially themed essays to his name. Though not as important historically as Chavchavadze, Vazha-Pshavela nonetheless contributed greatly to Georgia’s national revival, and concomitantly to its discourses on its place in the world.

**Mapping Russia’s ‘Europeanism’ of the Caucasus**

“As long as the memory of Georgia is not destroyed, the name of Vorontsov will not be forgotten.”

- Akaki Tsereteli (quoted in Rayfield 2013, 290)

A notable change in discourse coincides exactly with the rule of Viceroy Mikhail Semyonovich Vorontsov in the Caucasus (1844-1853). While initially partly appointed by the Tsar to subjugate the still rebellious mountain regions in the Caucasus (mainly Dagestan and Chechnya), his main residence as regional ruler was in Tbilisi, and he made Georgia into his personal ‘vanity project.’ When Vorontsov first arrived in Tbilisi he saw an oriental, Persian city. One of his major projects for the city was the construction of what is today Rustaveli Avenue (originally named Golovin Prospekt), which was part of his efforts to transform Tbilisi into a truly European metropolis (de Waal 2010, 46). Rustaveli Avenue’s location is
relevant as well: ending in Erivan Square (today Liberty Square), a large open air Middle Eastern-style marketplace, this new European boulevard lined with baroque and neoclassicist architecture provided the ultimate contrast to its ‘oriental’ neighbour in Tbilisi. Vorontsov, notorious among Russian elites for his liberalism, thus entertained notions of Georgia similar to those held by Lermontov and Pushkin: when he arrived it was essentially backwards and oriental, yet he also believed that it was possible for him to drag it into the present and Europeanise Georgia.

Vorontsov’s efforts, furthermore, were not limited to his imagination and the aesthetic qualities of Tbilisi. He instantiated a large number of reforms, ranging from emancipation of serfs, land reforms and mandatory schooling to the development of infrastructure and fighting corruption among the local Russian bureaucracy and army. Most notably, however, is Vorontsov’s attitude towards the local population and culture. Himself educated as a classicist, he encouraged the study of Georgia’s ancient history and connection with Ancient Greece under the name of Colchis. Closer to the present, he mandated all schoolchildren to be educated in at least one Caucasian language besides Russian. The fact that this requirement included the children of local Russians gained him the scorn of many Russians, but made him the most (or only) Russian ruler fondly remembered in Georgia (Rayfield 2013, 286-290). Hence, while Vorontsov’s thinking towards the Caucasus in general and Georgia specifically certainly retained its orientalist traits, he also managed to pursue much needed reforms and developments, some of which made it to Russia proper only after they had been implemented in Georgia (e.g. Vorontsov initiated the emancipation of serfs in Georgia during his time there, whereas in Russia emancipation was only begun in 1861).

Particularly notable here is the reconfiguration of lived space in Georgia throughout Vorontsov’s rule. His focus, in contrast to earlier iterations of Russian discourse on the Caucasus, was predominantly on Tbilisi (then called Tiflis). This very fact already denotes a shift, as it no longer emphasises the rural and non-urban dwellings of inhabitants of the Caucasus, as Lermontov and Pushkin were wont to do. However, Vorontsov appears to have seen a connection between lived space and (imaginative) geography: while upon his arrival he viewed Tbilisi as an Asiatic or oriental city and Georgia as a backwards and antiquated region, precisely by reconfiguring the space in which lives are lived – the city – he thought to be able to convert and civilise the region, bringing it into Europe. This corresponds to the notion in critical geopolitics that borders exist only insofar they are thought to exist, and as a consequence that they can be remade. Vorontsov thus seems to have had a particular idea of
what being European meant, and subsequently engaged in remaking the border between Europe and Asia by actively seeking to Europeanise what he considered a backwards region.

Unfortunately, few sources exist of Western European travellers to the Caucasus in the 19th century, and the impressions Georgia made on them. One notable exception is the British traveller and diplomat Oliver Wardrop.\(^4\) Travelling to Georgia in 1887, Wardrop writes of Georgia in terms reminiscent of Vorontsov, and his travel notes perfectly reflect the general discourse in Russia, of Georgia as a place on its way to civilisation through Russia’s efforts. Upon arrival in the Black Sea port of Batumi, Wardrop (1888, 1) notes that the city is divided in two: an ancient “Asiatic” part, and a “European” part no older than seven years. Noting that much work has yet to be done on its infrastructure, Wardrop had no doubt that a bright future lay ahead for the town. Nevertheless, despite the apparent emergence of ‘European’ cities and of a ‘European’ country, Wardrop consistently establishes a divide between Europeans and non-Europeans. Describing the demographic makeup of Tbilisi, he notes that it is populated by, among others, Russians, Georgians, and Armenians, and some Europeans (ibid., 9–10).

At the same time, Wardrop establishes a degree of ambiguity with regard to the supposed ‘Europeanness’ of Georgians. Notable in this regard is his description of what the local Russians have nicknamed the “Georgian Parliament,” the local shareholders’ banks where the intelligentsia conduct public discussions and hold speeches. Relating how he is impressed by “these handsome, warlike Asians in their picturesque garb,” he remarks that they nonetheless conduct their business in ways not unlike Britons would in London (ibid., 13). Curiously, what Wardrop seems to indicate here is precisely the change in consciousness of and discourse on Georgia as European or Asian. The picture he paints is one of still exotic, Asian people who already act as if they were European. In other words, Wardrop establishes a gap, a form of othering, but it is nonetheless not an unbridgeable one: Georgians, while today (i.e. in Wardrop’s day) still Asian, may be able to ‘become’ European and are currently engaged in this process. Moreover, this is an exemplary expression of discourses as creating the objects of which they speak. Wardrop undoubtedly entertains a notion of what the signifiers ‘European’ and ‘Asian’ mean, yet his observations of Georgians in Tbilisi reveals a certain ambiguity as to the stability of these categories. Georgians, looking like Asians but acting like Europeans, do not conform neatly to either one of these ideal types.

\(^4\) Notable, Wardrop was later to become the British Chief Counsellor of Transcaucasia (1919-1921) during Georgia’s short-lived independence during the Russian Civil War.
Finding himself in the midst of these apparent changes Georgia, and more importantly discourse on Georgia’s supposed Europeanness, is undergoing, Wardrop is moreover clear about its sources and the way these are represented in Georgia. Describing the Caucasian Museum, a Russian museum on the Caucasus not unlike those opened by its Western European counterparts to disperse information about their ‘exotic’ or ‘oriental’ colonies, Wardrop notes that the entrance is adorned with a large painting entitled ‘The Arrival of the Argonauts in Colchis.’ The well-known Greek myth of Jason and Medea and their quest to retrieve the golden fleece in Colchis is used today as ‘proof’ of the narrative spun by some Georgian nationalists that Georgia is in fact one of the ancient ‘origins’ of Europe, as it establishes a connection with ancient Greece and allegedly shows Georgia to have been one of the earliest recipients of European culture. On the painting Wardrop saw, however, the faces of the Argonauts were all portraits, with the most important one, Jason, being depicted as Mikhail Vorontsov.

While no information about this particular painting beyond what is described by Wardrop is available today, what it represents is rather clear, if not exactly subtle. Georgia, it seems to say, first received the ‘gift of civilisation’ in ancient times from Jason and the Argonauts, from ancient Greece, which is popularly viewed as the cradle of ‘European civilisation’ today (Bottici & Challand 2013). Centuries later, Georgia remains stuck in its antiquated past, as described by Lermontov in Mtsyri. It is important to bear in mind the context of this painting: not only during Russian Imperial rule over the Caucasus, but also in an explicitly imperial museum. Viceroy Vorontsov is, then, represented as the person who, as representative of the Russian Empire, brought civilisation and modernity to Georgia once more, consistent with “imperialism’s image as the establisher of the good society” (Spivak 1988, 299). Hence this painting and Vorontsov’s figuring in it also represents the Russian discourse of itself as a civiliser with beneficent intent, bringing what Bruce Grant (2009, xv) calls “the gift of empire,” used to legitimate Russian colonial rule.

The increased perception of Georgia as European by Russians is most clearly represented in maps of Russia dating back to the late 18th century. Russian cartography - or, rather, cartography of Russia - took off in the late 17th century during Tsar Peter the Great’s rule (1682-1725), who first commissioned maps to be made of the Russian imperial territories on his visits to Amsterdam (Bagrow 1962). A survey of maps of Russia and the Black Sea region paints a remarkable picture of Russia’s involvement in the Caucasus. Many maps - whether produced in Russia or elsewhere - explicitly distinguish between European Russia
and Asian Russia. In selecting these maps, particularly chronology is important, as they are meant to show the change in discourse in the Russian Empire towards the Caucasus in relation to its colonialism there. Furthermore, while preference is given to maps produced or commissioned in the Russian Empire, mapmaking took off relatively late there in comparison to its western European counterparts. However, as extensive exchange of information between imperial centres existed, maps of Russia produced elsewhere were largely reliant on information from Russian sources, as a consequence of which they may be seen as representative as well. Tracing this imaginative boundary from the first maps of Russia, long before its annexation of Georgia, to those produced some half century after colonising the Caucasus shows a clear redrawing of those boundaries. Interestingly, the image that emerges aligns perfectly with the discourse teased out in the previous chapter, and subsequently followed by the likes of Mikhail Vorontsov. While the historical progression of these maps shows that Georgia, indeed, was ‘redeemable’ as a Christian country, and thus eventually becomes included in European Russia, the Russian Empire’s Central Asian possessions remain, regardless of Russia’s ‘civilising’ efforts, firmly within Asia.

One of the first detailed maps including the Russian Empire is French royal geographer’s Nicolas Sanson’s map of Europe, produced in 1651 in Paris (Figure 1). Still more than a century before the Russian Empire was to become seriously involved in the Caucasus, the entire region is still included in the ‘Partie d’Asie,’ of which significantly fewer details are provided. Indeed, as in Africa, only the names of some coastal cities are provided, whereas the way the part of the world the map names ‘Asia’ is to some degree reminiscent of the colonial attitude to ‘terra nullius’ or uninhabited land, which was represented as empty and therefore open for appropriation by colonial empires (Kofman 2003, 397). More important, however, is where exactly the boundary between Europe and Asia is drawn. While medieval maps traditionally located Europe’s eastern border on the River Don, this border started to slowly expand eastwards towards the Volga or Ural as more became known of Russia’s eastern expansions (Wintle 1992, 145). On this map, however, it follows neither. Instead, it follows exactly the boundaries of the Russian Empire, suggesting that what lay beyond has not yet been civilised as European. This map is therefore an important example of the imaginative geography we have seen above in Pushkin, Lermontov, and Voronstov, wherein the Russian Empire is portrayed as the European civilising force in otherwise backwards regions.
More than a century later, on a map published in 1794 by the London-based publishers Laurie & Whittle drawn from the archives of the Imperial Academy in St. Petersburg (Figure 2), the Russian Empire’s expansions towards the Caucasus are shown, but they are explicitly included in ‘Asian Russia.’ The boundaries between Europe and Asia here are slightly different than in Sanson’s map (notably Astrakhan is no longer included in Europe), but not in ways relevant for present purposes. Almost two decades after Russia’s annexation of Georgia, relatively little has changed in terms of the imagined boundary between Europe and Asia. This map is mostly relevant for two reasons. Firstly, it clearly represents an imaginative geography of a civilisational split as a hard line between Europe and Asia, and as such also divides the Russian Empire into a European and an Asian part. Secondly, contrary to Sanson’s map discussed above, the mapmakers explicitly state their Russian sources for drawing this map. As such, it corresponds to the idea that Western European maps, at least in this period, relied heavily on information provided by the Russian Empire in drawing up their maps of said empire.

On an 1818 map published in the US by John Pinkerton (Figure 3), the boundary runs first along the Don, switches to the Volga at Volgograd and to the Kama just south of Kazan,
to finally run along the Ural mountains towards the north. While it shows the entire Caucasus as well as the plains to the north of it to be still part of Asia seventeen years after Russia annexed Georgia, note that the most dominant Russian discourses on the Caucasus, including Georgia, emerged even later. As discussed in the previous chapter, Pushkin most influentially published his stories set in the Caucasus in the 1820s, and Lermontov some two decades later.
However, in 1818 the Russian Empire’s self-proclaimed civilising mission had only just begun. Therefore it is particularly instructive to look at maps produced some decades later. For example, on an 1855 map published in New York by J.W. Colton (Figure 4), while the eastern borders of European Russia remain mostly the same, its southern reach is dramatically extended so as to now include the entire Kuban Steppe, the Caucasus, and the south Caucasian possessions of the Russian Empire at that time. More importantly, this
change is apparent in maps produced in the Russian Empire as well. A map entitled “General Political Map of European Russia [Генеральная политическая карта Европейской России]” from an 1860 atlas published in St. Petersburg by Russian geographer Nikita Zuev (Figure 5) clearly shows Russia’s Caucasian domains now as part of European Russia, where about seventy years before it did not. More specifically, ‘Europe’s’ eastern borders have now shifted to the Ural river draining into the Caspian Sea at Atyrau (contemporary Kazakhstan) and further north over the Ural mountains, where it is conventionally located still today, whereas its southern borders are now contiguous with the southern limit of the Russian Empire in the South Caucasus.

Figure 4 (Source: Library of Congress)
While the juxtaposition of the maps presented in figure four and five, respectively, shows that this change was not only presented in either of western-made or Russian-made maps, especially the Russian map in figure five is important here. Two elements are especially notable. Firstly, apart from the borders of European Russia, it also includes information about the perceived borders of Europe per se. Note that while the South Caucasus is included in Europe, it divides the Ottoman Empire or Turkey into ‘European Turkey’ (the Balkans and Thrace) and ‘Asian Turkey’ (‘Азіятская турція’). This also means
that Adjara and parts of Guria, today two provinces in southwest Georgia but under Ottoman control until 1878, are here still part of ‘Asian Turkey.’ More importantly, however, is the fact that this establishes a geographic oddity where some parts of what is considered to be Europe here (Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan) are due directly east of a part of Asia, which moreover stretches for about 1500 kilometres further west until Constantinople (today Istanbul). Hence the suggestion is, once again, that the Russian Empire is the agent of Europe, engaging in Europeanisation, in this part of the world, whereas the Ottoman Empire, as an Islamic empire, purportedly cannot fulfill that role. Secondly, note that the map shown in Figure 5 is specifically a map that was part of an atlas. This suggest more widespread distribution, and hence more capacity to influence public perception of what is perceived as European Russia. As such, this view of what is European, and concomitantly what is Asian, becomes more ingrained in the Russian public perception of their geography.

Finally, literary discourse also adapted to this changed perception. While the prisoner motive, popularised so successfully by Pushkin the 1820s, remained unwaveringly popular, changes to the way the Caucasus was constructed also became apparent. Lev Tolstoy’s *A Prisoner in the Caucasus* (Tolstoy 1870 [1998]), is both similar to and different from earlier incarnations of this narrative in important ways. Its narrative is still that of a Russian officer, Zhilin, captured by locals in the Caucasian mountains identified as Tatars (a generic term used in the 19th century to refer to any Muslim subject of the Russian Empire). While the story, similar to Pushkin, extensive descriptions of the way Zhilin’s captors lived in their mountain villages, it no longer does so in as explicitly orientalist tones as Pushkin’s version. More important, however, is the brief story of an old man inhabiting the village. The man, who remains unnamed, Tolstoy tells, was prior to the Russian invasion the bravest and richest of the entire community, only to see seven of his sons killed by Russian soldiers and the eighth one to defect to the Russian army (Tolstoy 1870 [1998], 26). While Tolstoy here does not explicitly condemn the brutality of Russia’s campaigns in the Caucasus, the way he tells this old man’s tragedy is also a far cry from the glorification of General Yermolov’s ‘beneficent genius’ by Pushkin, as discussed above.

Hence, in Tolstoy’s version of the prisoner story, a somewhat less colonial and orientalist view seems to begin emerging. It may remain questionable to what extent this was truly a representation of the dominant public opinion in Russia at the time, and not closer to a counternarrative. Conversely, it is more likely to be an early example of Tolstoy’s philosophy of non-violence developed later in the 19th century (Tolstoy 1894).
Simultaneously, however, it remains relevant in the context of this study because of its immense popularity, and by extension its potential to influence the public discourse and imagination of the Caucasus and Imperial Russia’s conduct therein. The story was first published in a collection intended to be used in Russian schools, drastically increasing not only its distribution but also its potential impact. In the forty years between its first publication and Tolstoy’s death in 1910, his *A Prisoner in the Caucasus* sold an impressive two million copies in the Russian Empire alone (Grant 2009, 14). This thus shows just how important print media, as Benedict Anderson argued, can be in shaping discourses and identities.

While the dominant Russian imaginative geography in the early 19th century firmly placed the Caucasus in Asia, this chapter has shown that by the 1850s, that view had begun to change. As such, particularly the maps presented here are excellent examples of the redrawing of supposed borders and boundaries, and concomitantly the reshaping of imaginative geography, according to ideological needs. They therefore also demonstrate imagined civilisational splits, such as between Europe and Asia, to be shifting over time, rather than fixed natural entities. Moreover, given the changed view presented not only in maps but also in Tolstoy’s prisoner story, border aesthetics and imaginative geography indeed go hand in hand here. To a large degree, this period of time is a continuation of the discourse dominant in the earlier 19th century. Earlier, Russian othering of the Caucasus served to establish itself as European, and provide the Russian Empire with a civilising mission akin to those of Western European empires. The decades following the deaths of Pushkin and Lermontov continued that narrative, but now clearly presented its success: the Caucasus has become European.
III. From the Terek to the Neva and Back:

The Tergdaleulebi and the National Revival

“Now!.. Where is our nationality? We are subjugated by the Russians. Now everything is in vain, everything annulled.”
- Ilia Chavchavadze (1867 [2017])

While throughout the latter half of the 19th century changes in imaginative geographies of Georgia and Europe were becoming more pronounced, orientalist traits thus remained. For example, Vorontsov considered Georgia “not yet ready for a university” (Rayfield 2013, 286). At the same time, he enabled and stimulated Georgian students to study at any university in the Russian Empire. This latter move was to prove crucial in the later developments of Georgia’s own discourse, and most notoriously its emancipation from Russia. Some decades later, it was especially those Georgian students who had studied at Russian universities, most notably in St. Petersburg, which has long been Russia’s most European and least Russian city (Boym 2000), who were to become the advocates of Georgia’s national revival in the second half of the 19th century (Nodia 2009; Chkhartishvili 2013). These public intellectuals and writers were commonly known as the tergdaleulebi (თერგდალეულები) or ‘those who have drunk from the Terek,’ the river rising in the Georgian part of the High Caucasus, but almost immediately flowing northwards into Russia. The caveat to this national revival was, however, that due to their education in Russian universities these Georgian revival advocates, the most important of whom are Ilia Chavchavadze and Vazha-Pshavela, they had become somewhat detached from Georgia itself (Reisner 2009; de Waal 2010, 50). Ironically, then, it appears to be the case that in the end Georgians themselves came back to Georgia convinced of the need to modernise their own country with ideas they acquired abroad.

All translations from Chavchavadze’s text are mine. The originals are given in footnotes so as not to affect the general readability of the text. Original: Original: „აწინა?.. ერობა სადა არნ? რუსობაჩი ვარნ; აწინა ყველაი გაცუდდის, ყველაი გაუქმდის”; [ats’ina?.. eroba sada arn? rusobachi varn; ats’ina qvelai gatsuddis, qvelai gaukmdis].
However, while the modern ideas of social change and national revival they brought back to Georgia with them established a gap between the tergdaleulebi and the rest of Georgian society, their ‘Russification’ or ‘Europeanisation’ must also not be overstated. As Donald Rayfield (2016, 245) notes, even late 19th century Georgian literature rarely concerned itself with Russia, let alone with Europe. Notable in this regard is the fact that the ‘great’ Russian works of literature set in the Caucasus never really gained a foothold in the Caucasus itself. The only Russian authors by whom Georgian writers were influenced to some degree were either explicitly political writers, such as Alexander Herzen or Nikolai Chernyshevsky, whose political ideas had some degree of influence on the tergdaleulebi, or writers who were considerably less famous and influential within or outside of Russia. Moreover, especially Ilia Chavchavadze was highly critical of the Russian Empire. In this sense, his works can be seen as an emancipatory counternarrative, in opposition to the dominant Russian narrative of the time, while being one of the first iterations of the establishment of a distinctively Georgian discourse.

Russian influence is probably most clearly reflected in some of Ilia Chavchavadze’s works. For example, the harsh criticism towards the landed gentry expressed in his novella Is this Man a Human?! (კაცია - ადამიანია?! [k’atsia - adamiania?!] 1863 [2017]) echoes the biting satire found in works by Mikhail Saltykov-Shchedrin. Moreover, some of Chavchavadze’s works have been endowed with more meaning a century later than the writer himself seems to have initially intended. His phrase inventing the Georgian triad of ‘fatherland, language, and faith’ was to become formulaic in the 1980s as Georgians once more sought independence, but Chavchavadze himself does not appear to have attached the same importance to this particular phrase. It was originally written in a critique of a poorly translated Russian poem, and Chavchavadze does not develop this triad beyond this one phrase (Nodia 2009, 88). More important in the context of Georgia’s national revival is his Letters from a Traveller (მგზავრის წერილები [mgzavris ts’erilebi]), a short travelogue from Vladikavkaz in the Northern Caucasus to Tbilisi, in which he criticises Russia while outlining the idea of Georgia’s national revival.

One particularly striking element is that, while travelling along the same road as the narrator in Lermontov’s aforementioned story ‘Bela,’ the narrator of Chavchavadze’s Letters from a Traveller describes local Russians in terms similar to those used by Lermontov to describe Caucasians: praising the way Russian artists beautifully paint Russian carriage drivers, Chavchavadze remarks how they represent “their brutish appearance, and their
weakish slouching, inhuman and beastly twisting about” (Chavchavadze 186 [2017], 91). More importantly, as the narrator later on briefly halts his journey across the mountains at the Lars posthouse (contemporary Verkhniy Lars, the first town in Russia across the border from Georgia), the local lieutenant introduces himself to the narrator, before embarking on an impassioned discourse about the prosperity which Russian rule has brought to the Caucasus. Importantly, throughout this conversation Chavchavadze’s tone is overtly satirical, casting doubts on the value of Russia’s civilisational efforts.

Upon the narrator’s having introduced himself as someone travelling from St. Petersburg, the officer is delighted, as “in this deserted and wretched place, [he] only has one enjoyment, which is to meet travelers from enlightened countries” (ibid., 96). The officer then continues to praise St. Petersburg, claiming it to be the heart of Russia, with its wide avenues, which is “unlike your filthy town has” (ibid.). Ignoring the officer’s question as to whether he has seen Izler’s Garden in St. Petersburg, the narrator attempts to engage in serious conversation by probing him on how he can know Petersburg to be the heart of Russia with such certainty. In response, however, the officer – who throughout the conversation keeps jumping from one subject to the other – complains that “you people, whether Georgian or Armenian, do not have the custom of learned conversation, and that is why you keep leaping from one subject to the second” (ibid., 96-97). Throughout the entire subsequent dialogue, the Russian officer keeps emphasising in various ways that the South Caucasus is extremely uncivilized and unenlightened, and at every turn at which the narrator notes some of Georgia’s achievements, the officer praises Russia for having shown Georgia the enlightened path towards those achievements, crying out that “wherever she sets foot, she establishes civilisation” (ibid., 99).  

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6 Original: “[...] ობორრი ობაღრილი საზამთა, ობობო ობობო-ზამთარული ფხლუშა, უფასოდან და ჰიმეფოლი მოხვრა-მოხვა” [imisi oqraquli sanakhaoba, imisi midun-modunebuli zlazova, uadamiano da pirt' qvuli mikhvra-mokhura].

7 Original: “ამ უდაბურსა და ვერანა ადგილას ერთი ეგ სანამღურად მაქს, ორმ შექმნილი ბოლო მუდმი განთავსებული ქვეყანიდან” [am udabursa da verana adgilas erti et siamovnebagha makvs, rom shevkhdebi kholme myzavrs ganailebulis keveqandami].

8 Original: “[...] არა ჰგავს თქვენ წიტიან ქალაქსა”; [ara hgavs tkven t'it'ian kalaksa].

9 Original: “თქვენ, აქაურები, ესე იგი ქართველები თუ სომხები, სამეცნიერო ლაპარაკს ჩვეულნი არა ჰართ, ამიტომაც ერთის საგნიდამ მეორეზედ გადახტებით ქელმე”; [tkven, akaurebi, ese igi kartvelebi tu somkhebi, sametsniero lap’arak’s chevulni ara khart, amit’omats erti sagnidam meorezed gadakhtebit kholme].

10 Original: “საცაფეხს შესდგამს, დაამყარებს ხოლმე ცივილიზაცია”; [satsa [pekhs shesdgams, daamqarebs kholme tsvilizatsias].
If Chavchavadze’s satirical tone was not yet clear enough, he truly makes a laughing stock out of the officer when he tells the story’s narrator his own invention. Contending that his self-proclaimed intelligence must be put to use, he relates how, after the liberation of serfs in Russia, the hired staff would frequently steal from their masters. To remedy this problem, the officer has invented a way to trap two flies in his box of sugar, so that when the flies have escaped he knows someone has lifted the box’s lid before him. To the officer’s question of whether he understands how brilliant his invention is, the narrator’s sole answer is a curt “very well,” before moving on to relate his onward journey (ibid., 99-100).

The most important element of this story for present purposes is the juxtaposition of the officer’s adamant conviction that Russia represents the pinnacle of civilisation, with St. Petersburg at its heart, and his own objectively silly demeanour. In thoroughly satirical fashion, Chavchavadze thus relates how the Russian view of the Caucasus as uncivilised or unenlightened is based more on their own delusions of grandeur than on anything else. The Russian imperial view towards the Caucasus is thus judged as being arrogant at best. Unsurprisingly, then, Chavchavadze is of the opinion that Russian civilisational efforts are neither necessary nor ‘civilisational.’ He explicates this further when the narrator, having continued his journey into contemporary Georgian territory and moved past the mountainous town of Stepantsminda, meets a local Georgian, and complains about Russian rule. “Where is our nationality?,” he asks rhetorically, complaining of their subjugation by the Russians and that “now, everything is in vain, everything annulled” (ibid., 107).

Importantly, thus, Chavchavadze explicitly connects the desire and need for a national revival in Georgia to the arrogance and self-proclaimed but doubtful civilising mission of the Russian Empire in Georgia.

Not all ‘architects’ of Georgia’s national revival were as concerned with questions of development and civilisation as Chavchavadze was. Vazha-Pshavela (pen name of Luka Razikashvili), while primarily known for his fables and tales of nature, also has a number of essays discussing the question of Georgia’s belonging to his name, yet nowhere discusses the questions relevant to this thesis in great detail. The short essay Language (ენა [ena], 1901) establishes Vazha-Pshavela as an advocate of a national revival, lamenting the improper use of the Georgian language and its contamination with neologisms while rebuking criticism he has apparently received of writing in an archaic style (Vazha-Pshavela 1901 [2019]).

11 Original: “ძალიან კარგად”; [dzalian k’argad]
12 Original: “აწინა?.. ერობა სადა არნ? რუსობაჩი ვარნ; აწინა ყველაი გაცუდდის, ყველაი გაუქმის”; [ats’ina?.. eroba sada arn? rusobachi varn; ats’ina qvelai gatsuddis, qvelai gaukmdis].
relevant because it affirms the stance Vazha-Pshavela takes in other essays. Clearly aware of the question of regional belonging facing Georgia, Vazha-Pshavela opts for an entirely independent path. He laments especially younger Georgians who think that “we are nobody and a nonentity if we don’t join another nation” (Vazha-Pshavela 1893 [2019], 32). His general position appears to be that Georgia would be perfectly well-off on its own; in other words, Georgia needs neither Russia nor Europe.

More remarkable, however, is Vazha-Pshavela’s discussion of genii who, by virtue of their greatness, belong to humanity instead of to one specific nation. Obligatory, of course, is for him to name Shota Rustaveli as one of these genii. More important are those he compares Rustaveli to; recalling that Rustaveli himself modelled his work on the great Persian poets of his time, and was to be compared to them for centuries after, Vazha-Pshavela now does not name Haafez or Rumi, but Shakespeare and Goethe (Vazha-Pshavela 1905 [2019], 21-22). Hence, while Vazha-Pshavela does not explicitly write about regional belonging or Georgia’s place in the world in relation to imaginative geographies of Europe, he appears to some degree mindful of it: the masters of (western) European literature, indeed often viewed as part of the pinnacle of European culture, are now the measure of greatness. Notable, furthermore, is Vazha-Pshavela’s apparently complete unconcern with Russian literature. While to deduct from this that he did indeed see Georgia as European and not part of the Russian world would be to go to far into speculation, the suggestion itself remains remarkable.

Finally, reading Vazha-Pshavela in the context of especially Lermontov’s poem Mtsyri, discussed above, Vazha-Pshavela advocates for Georgia to stay within its ‘peaceful garden,’ not minding whether or not it is antiquated. This is especially true if one considers his (fictional) stories, many of which praise Georgia’s mountain people, who still live their lives peacefully in more traditional ways (notably, Vazha-Pshavela himself was from the mountainous region of Pshavi, in today’s Tusheti, as his pseudonym indicates). However, contrary to Lermontov, Vazha-Pshavela does not consider Russian protection (or anyone’s, for that matter) a necessity to achieve these goals. Hence, while Vazha-Pshavela has little to say on the topic of whether Georgia is Europe or not - or whether it should be - he is, with Chavchavadze, an interesting example of decolonial writing. Indeed, while affirming some of the views Lermontov put forth some half century earlier, Vazha-Pshavela writes about these in terms completely unrelated to any discourse of ‘civilising’ or ‘development.’
whatever way Georgia is represented or imagined, thus, it begins, by the likes of Vazha-Pshavela and Ilia Chavchavadze, to acquire a more clearly represented voice of its own.

Hence, by the end of the 19th century, Georgian writers and intellectuals had established a firm counternarrative to the prevalent Russian discourse of the earlier decades of that same century; one which moreover found much resonance in Georgia itself. This is especially true of Ilia Chavchavadze. While the latter discusses the idea of Europe only rarely or fleetingly, he particularly challenges the Russian idea that the Russian Empire had come to civilise the Caucasus. Through the latter’s juxtaposition of ‘civilisation’ and ‘European,’ where its own civilising mission served to prove its supposed Europeanness, Chavchavadze also raises a critique of the Russian Empire’s own Europeanness. His bitingly satirical tone, moreover, appears to challenge not only Russian civilisation, but the very link the Russian discourse had established between its Europeanness and its colonialism in the Caucasus. Chavchavadze thus pushes back against both the Russian imaginative geography to the extent that he challenges the change visible throughout the 19th century; for any Russian civilising mission in the Caucasus to have been successful, its object must first have been ‘backwards’ or ‘oriental.’ In other words, the very premise of this supposed civilising mission is flawed.

At the same time, however, reality was more complicated than this forceful rejection of Russian rule suggests. Chavchavadze returned to Georgia armed with ideas of national revival and political emancipation to oppose the Russian Empire. But the place where he acquired these ideas matters: St. Petersburg. Indeed, the very concept of tergdaleulebi suggests not only a mere ideological or educational divide between educated upper class Georgians of the time and the rest of the country, but also a geographical one. Seen from Georgia, crossing the Terek is synonymous with going to Russia proper (i.e. as opposed to the entire territory controlled by the Russian Empire). A mere divide between an educated elite and the rest of a people is a common occurrence within many states and eras; this divide being expressed in explicitly geographical terms, however, is less common. There is therefore a complex interplay between different imaginative geographies at play here. As Edward Saïd (1979, 54) remarks, “imaginative geography of the ‘our land-barbarian land’ variety does not require that the barbarians acknowledge the distinction.” Clearly, by means of his discourse challenging the Russian Empire’s civilising mission, Chavchavadze – from a supposed barbarian land – does not only refuse to acknowledge the predominant Russian imaginative geography, but actively challenges it. At the same time, however, the concept of tergdaleulebi
implies that an essentialised difference was perceived between Georgia and Russia proper. This first challenge to supposed Russian civilisation while maintaining the difference between Georgia and Russia is crucial here: it provides an important stepping stone into the next century. As I will elaborate upon below, this dividing line was maintained – though not in terms of the concept of tergdaleulebi – but its normative content was slowly but surely turned on its head. Steadily, Georgians came to view Georgia more and more as part of Europe, whereas Russia was increasingly viewed as a brutal and imperialist force which, if it was to be seen as European in the first place, did not exactly live up to what being European was perceived to signify.
IV. TURN OF THE CENTURY, TURNING TABLES?

The turn of the century, especially if one considers World War I the beginning of what is famously referred to as ‘the short twentieth century’ (Hobsbawm 1995), brought considerable changes to Georgia and the South Caucasus at large. For obvious reasons, not all of these can be discussed at length here. In terms of the Georgian, and more generally Caucasian, discourse towards Europe, however, some remarkable reversals were to take place. In the mid-1800s, as discussed above, Viceroy Mikhail Vorontsov considered Georgia backwards and exotic, yet redeemable through Russia’s efforts to Europeanise and civilise the country. In a series of discursive developments that would likely have nonplussed Vorontsov, but to some degree building on Chavchavadze discussed above, the early 20th century saw the beginning of the reversal of this hierarchy, one that moreover lives on today and is to play an important role later in this thesis. Slowly but surely, these changes meant that it was no longer Russia’s role to civilise the ‘backwards’ Caucasus, but the Caucasus – and Georgia specifically – that functioned as a civilised European bulwark against antiquated Russian imperialism.

In literature, too, such changes are apparent. Two literary works are of particular importance in this section. The first is Mikheil Javakhishvili’s picaresque novel Kvachi Kvachantiradze (commonly anglicised as simply Kvachi), a story about a Georgian swindler who takes his schemes and scams from Tbilisi to Odessa and from Paris to St. Petersburg. Notably, Javakhishvili’s 1924 novel, to which I return below, is one of the first instances of a Georgian novel clearly concerned with Europe (Rayfield 2016), but still revealing a profound ambivalence towards the continent or the idea of it. The second literary work of special interest here is Kurban Saïd’s Ali and Nino, set in Baku during the turmoil during and following World War I and subsequently the Russian revolution. Themes such as orientalism and the imagined geographies of Europe-Asia are a central part of the book. However, one cannot discuss Ali and Nino without some degree of justification concerning two issues.

The first issue is that of authorship. Almost nothing is known with absolute certainty about the illustrious Kurban Saïd, under whose name the book was first published in Vienna in 1937. There is widespread agreement that Kurban Saïd is in fact a pseudonym, but with
that consensus the limits of agreement have also been reached. The options range from the well-researched and generally plausible argument that it may have been the pseudonym of Lev Nussimbaum (who after converting to Islam adapted the name Essed Bey), a Kyiv (or possibly Baku)-born Jewish journalist who spent his childhood in Baku (Reiss 2005), to the downright incredible claim by the Italian Bello Vacca, Nussimbaum’s friend and drug dealer (ibid., 326-327), that he was in fact the author of Ali and Nino. The general view in Azerbaijan, where Ali and Nino is considered one of the most important literary works of the 20th century, is that Kurban Saïd was the pseudonym of Yusif Vazir Chamanzaminli (Blair 2011), an Azerbaijani writer and statesman involved in the struggle for Azerbaijani independence during the Russian civil war. Finally, there is the claim made by Tamar Injia (2009) that, regardless of who Kurban Saïd was, his most famous novel was in fact extensively plagiarised from Georgian writer Grigol Robakidze.

The second question I must address here is that of place. Whereas this study is concerned with Georgia specifically, Ali and Nino is set primarily in Baku, with only brief excursions to Tehran, Tbilisi, and Nagorno Karabakh. In Azerbaijan, it is considered one of the most important works of national literature. However, regardless of the fact that it is sometimes presented as a ‘love story’ or a ‘romance,’ its primary themes are, in fact, identity and belonging, and to some extent orientalism (Courville 2016). As will be discussed in more detail below, one of the primary instances of divided identities concerns precisely the couple whose love Ali and Nino narrates: Ali Khan Shirvanshir, the novel’s protagonist, a young man from a noble Muslim family, is attached dearly to Baku, but feels at home in Persia—and, to his own admission, in Asia. Nino Kipiani is a Georgian princess whose home is also Baku, but who feels equally at home in Tbilisi while longing for Paris, Stockholm, or Berlin.

Hence, as I will detail further below, Ali and Nino precisely reflects the idea that the Caucasus is a region torn between Europe and Asia, ever struggling with its difficult identity. As a novel set in neighbouring Azerbaijan and purportedly written by a native or at least long time resident of Baku, its view towards Georgia as distinctively more European highlights this struggle. Finally, I am in no position to judge the accuracy and plausibility of claims pertaining to the books authorship. Nevertheless, Ali and Nino remains exceedingly relevant to this study for three reasons. Firstly, its setting in the Caucasus region is portrayed realistically, indicating the fact that its author must have been well acquainted with the region and its particularities. Secondly, it deals extensively with some of the central topics of this thesis. Thirdly, it is held in high regard today, in the Caucasus as well as elsewhere,
despite its being largely unavailable there during the Soviet era. Hence *Ali and Nino* may be seen less as contributing to, but more as a reflection of, the discourses on Europe, Asia, and regional belonging and identities in the early 20th century, which continues to influence such discourses today.

**Ali and Nino: torn between Asia and Europe**

“Georgians seem to me like noble deer, strayed amongst the jungle mixtures of the Asiatics.”
- Kurban Saïd (1937 [2000], 108)

The novel *Ali and Nino*, as briefly introduced above, sheds an interesting light on sentiments of belonging and place at play in the early 20th century Caucasus. Through the lens of its protagonist, the noble Azerbaijani boy Ali Khan Shirvanshir, it portrays the deep ambiguity characterising the region’s wider sentiments of belonging. Although the main protagonist is not Georgian and only small sections of the novel are set in Tbilisi, its portrayal of Nino, representative of Georgia, is particularly noteworthy with regard to these sentiments of belonging. All the more so since Ali, in response to Nino’s thoughts, opinions, and actions, frequently affirms or even reinforces the apparently imagined chasm between them. Baku, a multicultural city inhabited by Azerbaijanis, Armenians, Georgians, Russians, and others, is at a tipping point: it has yet to be decided whether it is to be European or Asian. In the eyes of the protagonist and his beloved, Nino, on the contrary, Georgia’s fate has been decided: “St. Nino came from the West, carrying her vine, and it is to the West we belong” (Saïd 1937, 116). Three themes in particular are important in discussing the region’s relation to Europe in the context of *Ali and Nino*. Firstly, its inhabitants’ ambivalent attitudes to Russian ‘civilising missions’ and concomitant Europeanisation. Secondly, the imaginary geography and borderings established between European and Asian (represented mostly by Persian). Thirdly, and finally, these come together in establishing Georgia as a type of heterotopia (Foucault 1984); a space that is simultaneously very real where it is, yet is not truly there because it does not truly belong there.

The role played by the Russian Empire is emphasised from the outset, if not very subtly. Echoing Viceroy Vorontsov’s opinion voiced over half a century earlier, young Ali and Nino’s geography teacher points out that exactly the South Caucasus is the most ambiguous of regions in terms of belonging. Yet the novel is at times decolonial in its portrayal of the Caucasus. Besides its taking local inhabitants as protagonists and
emphasising their diversity – as opposed to Lermontov and Pushkin above – this is especially visible in its emphasis of local peoples’ own agency. As the aforementioned teacher points out to his students, “it is partly your responsibility as to whether our town [Baku] should belong to progressive Europe or to reactionary Asia” (Saïd 1937, 13). This indicates, as Mathieu Courville points out, the duality inherent in Saïd’s notion of imaginary geography, with which Ali and Nino is rife. Before deciding whether one belongs to Europe or Asia, one must first create some clarity as to what these really mean (Courville 2016, 420). The teacher is clearly representative of the (imperial) Russian view on this division - or at least the author’s perspective on that view - as being the civilising force in a backwards region that may yet be part of ‘progressive’ Europe. This ‘gift of civilisation’ - what Bruce Grant calls a “gift of empire” - conforms to the prevailing opinion among the Russian intelligentsia in the late 19th century (Grant 2009, 43-48). Indeed, Russia’s eventual victory over and subjugation of the Caucasus peoples was viewed as a “triumph of civilisation” and as repaying Russia’s debt to the West by extending eastwards the civilisation they had received from Western Europe (Romanovskii, quoted in Grant 2009, 47).

The Bakuvians of Ali and Nino, by contrast, are decidedly more ambivalent both towards Europe and towards Russia’s claim of being representative of Europe and, by extension, civilisation. On the one hand, while in exile in Tehran, Ali Khan’s father laments that, now that it has been captured by an alliance of Armenian and Russian forces, Baku has become a European city (Saïd ‘1937, 170). Earlier on, however, the Armenian Nachararyan comments that the sole thing that has kept Baku from being a European city is reactionary Russia (ibid., 82). Irritation, if not downright frustration, with Russia’s patronising attitude towards the Caucasus - treating them as ‘children’ not ready to govern themselves (ibid., 81) - is widespread throughout Ali and Nino. Commenting on the “immense cultural difference” between Azerbaijan and Persia perceived by an English officer in Baku, Ali replies that, although they are centuries ahead, “the Russian administration has suppressed [Azerbaijan’s] cultural evolution” (ibid., 219).

Despite this affirmation of Europeanness, the ambivalence remains, which brings us to the second theme from Ali and Nino to be discussed here. The imagined difference and boundaries between Europe and Asia are most clearly represented in Nino - Georgian, European - and Ali - Azerbaijani, Asian - themselves. Though his true home is Baku, Ali feels at home in Tehran, tolerates Tbilisi, but shudders at the thought of visiting Paris, Berlin, or Stockholm. When both families are in temporary exile in Tehran, Ali Khan takes part in local
celebrations, traditions, and rituals with conviction. Nino, on the contrary, hides away from public view, and stays with her family in their own home, receiving “Georgian friends and European diplomats,” while she “ate English biscuits and talked to the Dutch Consul about Rembrandt” (ibid., 202). In other words, while Ali fully immerses himself in this Persian - ‘Asian’ - space, Nino detaches herself from it by establishing a European space in her parents’ home, reaffirming the perceived essential difference between Europe and Asia, represent here by Georgia and Persia. The establishment of such complex geographies of belonging and of difference - between Europe and Asia - in fact continues diachronically, after the couple’s return to Baku. Returning to a city in ruins, Ali and Nino set about rebuilding their home, consequently also refurbishing it in a European rather than Persian style on Nino’s initiative, to which Ali reluctantly agrees. Remarkable, finally, is the fact that Nino has now come to see herself, or Georgia, as part of the European civilising efforts of ‘backwards Asia’: “either you shut me up in a harem or else I’m the proof of our country’s cultural progress” (ibid., 217, emphasis added).

One remarkable idea hinted at throughout many passages in Ali and Nino as well as in works previously discussed is the instability of imagined dividing lines between Europe and Asia. After a coalition of Russians and Armenians captured Baku and most of its Muslim population has left for Persia, Ali’s father consoles Ali by pointing out that Baku need no longer be his home, since it is no longer Asia: “Asia is not dead. Its borders only have changed, changed forever. Baku is now Europe. […] There were no Asiatics left in Baku any longer” (ibid., 170). This calls into question what exactly the categories of ‘European’ and ‘Asian,’ and concomitantly the imaginary division between them, are based on. While cultural aspects and sentiments of belonging play a role, the most neatly fitting divide is one of religion. The Georgians, Azerbaijaniis, Armenians, and Russians figuring in Ali and Nino all have in common that they call Baku their home. Russians are frequently referred to as the region’s civilisers or Europeanisers; Georgians as “Europe’s ambassadors in Asia” (ibid., 132); and the Armenian Nachararyan, finally, by kidnapping Nino and trying to take her away from Ali, maintains that he “will save [her] from the claws of Asia” (ibid., 130). The main difference between these categories of characters on the one hand, and Ali and his compatriots on the other, is one of religion: while the Azeris are (Shi’a) Muslims, the others are all Christians of various persuasions. This is important because Christianity is a major source of (imagined) pan-European identity or of Europeanness, indeed a political myth that is often used to indicate what ‘Europeanness’ allegedly means (Bottici & Challand 2013, 28). It is at the same time a highly problematic one, having long been intimately connected with
racialised categories of European/non-European, white/black, Christian/non-Christian and used to establish not only an essentialised imaginary division but also a hierarchy between those categories (Topolski 2018), in which it overlaps with the orientalist imagined geography of an essentialised east/west division. While hierarchy is expressed in Ali and Nino not primarily as such, but mostly in terms of the personal preferences of the novel’s main characters, the extent to which this historically imagined division aligns with the one established in Ali Nino is remarkable.

Hence, through the lens of its protagonist Ali Khan Shirvanshir and by means of his relationship with the Georgian princess Nino Kipiani, Ali and Nino establishes intriguing forms of heterotopias and chronotopes with regard to Georgia and Europe. Heterotopias - literally ‘other places’ - establish links between different places and spaces by separation and relation. In so doing, they capture in one space what that space is not, or what it is imagined to be. Hence, by “juxtaposing in a single real place several spaces, several sites that are in themselves [perceived as] incompatible” (Foucault 1984, 6), Ali and Nino brings to the fore the deep ambivalence characterising Georgia’s location in the world and its supposed orientation towards Europe. Georgians are represented as “Europe’s ambassadors in Asia” (Saïd 1937, 132); Europeans who are displaced in Asia (ibid., 108), incompatible with it, yet still there. Nino dreams of going to Paris, while Ali feels more at home in Tehran. In so doing, it establishes essentialising dividing lines between ‘progressive’ Europe and ‘backwards’ Asia which simultaneously divide Ali and Nino from one another and present Georgia as a heterotopia: a place that is where it should not be, intrinsically connected to a Europe far away, yet geographically located in an Asia where it should not be. Analogously, reading heterotopias as “places within places” (Bueno-Lacy & van Houtum 2019, 590), Europe is here established as a heterotopia in Georgia, in which Georgia is a piece of Europe not fully in Europe, but instead in Asia.

As indicated above, the idea of Georgians as displaced Europeans in Asia was not always as prevalent as it appears to be in Ali and Nino. By means of what Mikhail Bakhtin (1981) has called chronotopes, nationalism or national discourses may easily dispense with such historical accuracy. Chronotopes were initially theorised by Bakhtin as a literary device to indicate the intrinsic connectedness between time and space in novels - two characters meet not only because they are in a given place, but also because they are there at a given time, to put it most simply - it has since been used in different fields and attained a wider meaning. Notably, functioning as “time-space distortions” (Bueno-Lacy & van Houtum 2019,
nationalism and national discourses typically use chronotopes to maintain “invented traditions” (Hobsbawm 1992) as eternal. Hence, guiding a slightly disconcerted Ali through Tbilisi, Nino comments on how ‘European’ the city feels, as opposed to ‘Asiatic’ Baku. Indeed, because St. Nino - one of Georgia’s most universally revered saints and the one held largely responsible for christening the country in the 6th century - came from the West, Nino maintains, Georgia forever belongs to that same West (Saïd 1937, 115-116). To have been able to maintain their national identity, projected here as intrinsically connected to Europe, Nino continues, Georgians have for centuries withstood invasions by ‘barbaric’ Asiatics: Mongols, Persians, Turks, Arabs.

Just how much of this chronotopic distortion is captured in this short passage is remarkable. As discussed above, the idea of Georgia being European was at the time of writing a fairly new and not yet universally accepted idea. In response to Nino’s conviction that Georgia has always belonged to the West, Ali replies that Georgia would be nothing without its national poet, Shota Rustaveli - who in Georgia has the cultural status that might be attributed to Shakespeare in England or Goethe in Germany - and Rustaveli, for his part, would be nothing without Persia (ibid., 117). And indeed, as Rustaveli himself writes in the introduction to his famous epic, the 12th century The Knight in the Panther Skin, he writes in the fashion of and is primarily influenced by the great Persian poets of the time.

Hence, in conclusion, Ali and Nino establishes a complex imaginative geography of the Caucasus in relation to Europe, in which Georgians figure as the most ‘European’ of its peoples. It also pays tribute to the complexity of historical loyalties and belongings, in the sense that, while Georgians at first glimpse to be unambiguously European, their indebtedness to a region firmly posited as Asian and as decidedly different from Europe is also hinted at. In this sense Ali and Nino is exemplary of the fact that identities - a ‘European’ identity no less so - are always constructed against an Other or a difference, i.e. by means of b/ordering and othering. In other words, positing Georgians as European serves to distinguish the others around them from Georgians, or, vice versa, to establish Georgians as a geopolitical anomaly in the Caucasus. Given the time in which the novel is set (World War I and the Russian Civil War), this is an important factor: with calls for independence growing and brief self-determination as the Georgian Democratic Republic (1918-1921) looming, the question of regional belonging was once more foregrounded as one that Georgia would have to make (Rayfield 2016, 245). Finally, in a number of ways it follows ‘traditional’ markers used in political myths of supposed Europeanness, the most notable of which here is
Christianity. It is because, as highlighted above, St. Nino arrived from the west to christen Georgia that Georgia belongs to that same west. This last point is important given the remarkable consistency with which such markers of regional identity or belonging were used in this particular period.

**AMBIVALENT EUROPEANISATION**

As Mikheil Javakhishvili’s 1924 novel *Kvachi* shows, Georgia’s supposed Europeanness in the early 20th century was more ambivalent than *Ali and Nino*’s Georgian protagonist suggests. Javakhishvili is an essential writer in discussing Georgia’s increased sense of Europeanness as well as the ambivalence towards the concept of Europe through the prism of Georgia’s relations with Russia for a number of reasons. Javakhishvili himself was influential at the time, particularly within Georgia, and strongly disliked among Russian elites. His opposition to Bolshevik rule and his involvement in politics during the Georgian Democratic Republic (1918-1921), moreover, bolstered his unfavourable position with the authorities. Despite frequent arrests and censorship of his works, Javakhishvili nevertheless enjoyed great popularity among his Georgian readership (Rayfield 1994, 245-246). In continuation, but also radicalisation, of the line begun by Chavchavadze, therefore, Javakhishvili represents a definitive break between the Georgian discourse about themselves and the Russian narrative towards the Caucasus. This break was brought to a head during Stalin’s terror, as Javakhishvili was brutally beaten and later executed in September 1937. Notwithstanding, in the period of destalinisation he was rehabilitated and once more attained immense popularity among particularly Georgian readers (ibid., 247).

The protagonist of his most important work, *Kvachi*,¹³ though sometimes expressing doubts about modernity’s danger to some forms of ‘traditional morality’ (though himself having no problem discarding any form of morality), feels at home in Paris as much as in Tbilisi. Simultaneously, a large degree of ambivalence is revealed in that *Kvachi*, the novel’s protagonist, often speaks about “the madness, immorality, and depravity afflicting rotten Europe” (Javakhishvili 1924 [2015]), 298). Two themes in particular, to be expanded upon below, are noteworthy in *Kvachi* in this context. First of all, it reiterates a Georgia which belongs to Europe, but is geographically remote and detached from it to such an extent that it can be ‘abandoned’ by Europe. Secondly, the novel reflects the process of ‘becoming

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¹³ When italicised, *Kvachi* refers to the novel by Javakhishvili; when written in standard characters, *Kvachi* indicates the novel’s protagonist of the same name.
European’ and modernisation characteristic for this particular period. Notable, however, is the fact that the Russian Empire (or, later, the Soviet Union) is no longer the agent of this Europeanisation but, as we saw in Chavchavadze above, actively differentiated from this Europeanness.

Javakhishvili’s Kvachi is to some degree a representation of the modernisation of the Caucasus as a whole and its dealings with Europe. While the writer and his main character, Kvachi, are clearly Georgians, among Kvachi’s friends, who play a major role in the novel and the discourse it reflects, are a mix of the main inhabitants of the Caucasus. Gabo Chkhubishvili and Chipi Chipuntiradze are clearly Georgians. Jalil is Turkish, though he may also be Azeri, given that referring to Azeris as ‘Turks’ was common practice until fairly recently. Sedrak Havlabariani seems of mixed descent: ‘Sedrak’ is clearly an Armenian name, whereas Havlabariani as a surname is somewhat more ambiguous. Its ending in ‘-iani’ is common among Megrelians, but his proper name might also be Havlabarian, the ‘-ian/yan’ ending clearly being Armenian, with the Georgian nominative ending added to the name. Furthermore, the name indicates the Avlabari district of Tbilisi, which was long shared between Armenians and Georgians, and where today the only still operating Armenian church in Tbilisi remains.

This brief exposition of the origins of the novel’s main characters, besides its protagonist, is important because these reflect the way in which the supposed Europeanness of the different characters develops. More specifically, while Kvachi himself, by means of their travels through Europe and adopting what he views as European ways (types of dress, activities, food) advocates a Europeanisation of the Caucasus, he is only half successful in doing so. As some of the characters, while in Paris, reminisce about the joys of the life they knew in Georgia, Kvachi himself laments that he “thought that these are men who’ve become European, educated, and civilized: actually, they’re still complete Asiatics!” (Javakhishvili 1924 [2015], 265). Kvachi himself, on the other hand, counterpoints that he has no desire for any specific homeland, but that the world is his homeland, while he rejoices in “culture, civilization, progress” (ibid.), all of which he appears to consider absent from his native Georgia. Eventually, Gabo, Sedrak, and Jalil return to Georgia while the rest stay in Paris.

This passage is important because it reflects precisely the fractured nature of the supposed ‘Europeanisation’ of the Caucasus. Note, first of all, that the most ‘European’ characters (i.e. those who stay in Europe) are all Georgians, echoing the discourse in Ali and
Nino explicated above. Furthermore, especially notable is that this section represents Georgia being torn between a wish to, as it is put here, progress and become European on the one hand, but also desiring to hold on to what Georgians consider their traditions and their ‘way of life.’ The image thus sketched, then, is one in which Georgians and by extension Georgia are capable of becoming European, but cannot at the same time hold on to their traditional ‘Georgianness.’ In this sense, what is considered ‘essential’ to Georgia, Kvachi seems to argue, is incompatible with what is European and ‘civilised.’ Notable, finally, all returnees to Georgia have elected to lead a rural life designated as ‘traditional,’ but which for Kvachi means that they “reverted to being Asiatics” (ibid., 267). On the opposite side, Kvachi’s family members are amused but not convinced when they see Kvachi wearing European style clothing (ibid., 365), once again reflecting the split between ‘European’ or ‘Europeanising’ and non-European.

**SCYTHIANS, MONGOLS, AND EUROPEANS: A DISCOURSE ON RUSSIA**

At first glimpse, thus, Kvachi seems to entertain a notion of Europeanness not unlike the one held by Mikhail Vorontsov: Georgia, while not behaving in European fashion in this day and age, carries within itself the potential to realise itself as a truly European nation. Javakhishvili, however, is diametrically opposed to Vorontsov in terms of the role played by the Russian Empire. Indeed, the Russian Empire or, later, the Soviet Union, plays little active role in terms of Georgia’s supposed or attempted Europeanisation in Javakhishvili’s *Kvachi*. It is, at most, a medium: the Russian Empire (whether in St. Petersburg, Odessa, or Tbilisi) is a significant part of the backdrop of the story, but its role is evidently presented differently than by the likes of Lermontov, Pushkin, and Vorontsov in the 19th century. Even more, where, as discussed above, Kurban Saïd clearly presented Russia as the agent of Europeanisation in the Caucasus, Javakhishvili puts into doubt the very Europeanness - and hence the legitimacy of it being Europe’s ‘agent’ - of Russia itself. In terms of the discourse traced throughout this thesis, then, Javakhishvili is to a great degree the heir of Chavchavadze.

Javakhishvili questions the Europeanness of Russia primarily in a parable presenting a distinct version of its origins and history *Kvachi*. Once, Javakhishvili writes, there were a
Scythian and a Mongol\footnote{Scythians and Mongols were both peoples who are generally thought to have greatly influenced Russian history and the initial establishment of a Russian state. Scythians were a people already referenced by Herodotus who lived predominantly in what is now Ukraine and southern Russia, and the first Russian state, established in Kyiv as the Rurik Dynasty, is often thought to have been the result of intermingling of Scythians with Scandinavian raiders. Notable in this regard is the fact that Javakhishvili entirely leaves out the supposed (part) Scandinavian origins of Russia. Mongols, through the Mongol invasions in the 13th and 14th centuries, have clearly left their mark on Russian history as well as, supposedly, genetics. Notably, this is a theme that is sometimes referenced in Russian literature as well (e.g. in Andrei Bely’s \textit{Petersburg} (1913)).} with two sons named Ivan and Peter. Ivan, the elder, leads a life that one might describe as ‘traditional,’ and his younger brother obeys him. At one point, however, Peter sets off west and walks for nine months only to return after nine years. Peter’s travels had changed his appearance remarkably: he now wore a wig, shaved off his long beard, and was clad in a distinctly different style of clothing. “From now on,” Peter tells his brother Ivan when he returns, “I’m called Europe” (ibid., 385). The brothers’ names, as this brief introduction clarifies, are not chosen randomly: Peter clearly recalls Tsar Peter the Great (ruled 1682-1725), the famous modernising tsar of the Russian Empire and the namesake of St. Petersburg. Ivan, as will become clear from his sometimes rather brutal ways, is probably a reference to Tsar Ivan IV Vasilyevich (ruled 1547-1584), commonly known as Ivan the Terrible. Ivan, too, is notable for the changes he effectuated within Russia: by proclaiming himself Tsar, he transformed medieval Russia into an Empire in 1547, and by allegedly having killed his heirs he effectively ended the Rurik dynasty, which after a period of civil war eventually led to the establishment of the Romanov dynasty, which was later to expand Russia into an empire of formidable proportions.

After Peter’s - representative of the later centuries of the Russian Empire - return a battle between the two brother ensues which eventually sees Ivan give in to Peter’s Europeanising efforts, and follow his younger brother’s orders. The old, wild, and savage Russia, Javakhishvili implies, has now been subdued by the apparent necessity to become European and concomitantly ‘civilised.’ Ivan finally breaks after having been ordered by Peter to go to war for four years (World War I), which leads to the tsar being dethroned, and another battle for dominance between the two brothers ensues (the Russian Civil War). Particularly notable about this episode is Ivan’s reassurance that he feels no affinity for Peter’s supposed culture and civilisation (ibid., 388-389). Javakhishvili’s historico-political message is that Russia’s supposed Europeanisation was always a mere elite affair; it subdued the Russian masses into behaving as the aristocracy wanted them to, but fell short of truly turning Russia into a European country. The masses, themselves having no affinity to this
supposed idea of being ‘European,’ had to act as though they were European only so the elites could comfortably tell themselves they were part not only of the Russian, but of the European elite. Geopolitically, the image thus sketched is one of a country dressing only in European colours so as to hide its non-European body underneath; at the end of the day, the dress is either taken off or wears down, and Russia’s non-European body is revealed once more.

Javakhishvili, however, takes his discourse even farther. After Ivan’s victory over his brother, two figures make their entry into the parable: John Bull, representing the British Empire, and Jacques de Paris, representing France; indeed, the archetypes of the ‘European’ empires into whose mold Tsar Peter the Great sought to forge Russia. Having tried to dissuade Ivan from going through with his revolution, they are nonplussed when they see a number of figures, clearly representative of French and British colonies, “rolling up their sleeves, loading their guns, [and] sharpening their swords” (ibid., 395). Finally, this episode ends with John Bull and Jacques de Paris - supposedly the ‘real’ Europe - accepting Ivan as their equal. What Javakhishvili puts forth here is not merely the failure of Peter’s attempt to make a European country out of Russia, but the breakdown of this very idea of ‘European’ itself. The idea of ‘Europe,’ Javakhishvili implies, only seemed great and worth striving for because it was able to subjugate and rule other peoples. As these peoples rise up concomitantly with Russia’s revolution, it no longer seems worthwhile for Russia to mimic Europe in subjugating other peoples.

The parable is therein reminiscent of Chavchavadze’s *Letters from a Traveller* in calling into question the very idea of Europe as supposedly synonymous with ‘civilised.’ In a fashion typical of colonial empires - and the Russian Empire no less so - Europe seems to have needed to subjugate others in order to be able to elevate itself. This is, as detailed in earlier chapters, precisely part of Russia’s reasoning throughout its colonising of the Caucasus: it set itself a mission to supposedly ‘civilise’ the Caucasus in order for it to become equal to its Western European counterparts. Europe was a continent made of empires that alleged to civilise other peoples by subjugating them, all the while maintaining only a facade of civilisation itself, which Russia sought to mimic. As this image of civilised/civilising Europe crumbles, it retains little appeal. Hence part of Russia’s colonialism is presented here as its effort to become European itself, masked by its alleged attempts to ‘civilise’ or Europeanise the Caucasus. Javakhishvili, however, maintains that Russia was never truly
European: “Russians have found their soul again. They had forced it into European clothes and plastered it with European cosmetics” (ibid., 419).

Geography also plays a role in this questioning of Russia’s Europeanness. No longer is St. Petersburg, as 19th century Russians would have it, the epitome of Russia’s Europeanness. With St. Petersburg afflicted with the debauchery effectuated by Rasputin, Kvachi finds the true Europe in Paris and Vienna, with St. Petersburg being merely an empty shell of those cities’ essence. This discourse on Russia’s Europeanness makes Georgia’s place in this whole all the more interesting. Towards the end of Kvachi, Javakhishvili entertains a notion similar to Kurban Saïd’s, noting Georgia as a European country geographically remote from Europe. Recall, however, that in Saïd’s version Baku transformed into a European city as it was captured by Russia. In Kvachi, the opposite happens. As British ships sail away from the Black Sea port of Batumi, Kvachi laments that “Europe has gone” and “we’ve been abandoned in Asia again” (ibid., 451). Georgia, Javakhishvili writes, had a choice between Europe and Russia. With Europe having left, only the Russian path remains, a path “which is red and thorny” (ibid.).

The geopolitical image sketched by Javakhishvili thus shares with Saïd’s Ali and Nino that it establishes Georgia as at basis a European country which is nonetheless disconnected from Europe, as a sort of Europe outside of Europe. Similarly, both draw a complicated geography of the Caucasus as a place in which Europe and Asia meet, and which due to its being a meeting point has a choice to make. The major difference, however, is that in Ali and Nino Russia was the agent of this Europeanisation in the Caucasus. In Kvachi, on the contrary, Georgia’s choice is explicitly between Europe and Russia. As also argued in Javakhishvili’s parable on Russia’s origins and identity, at the end of the day Russia is not Europe, nor is it compatible with Europe. For all its Europeanness as presented in the final parts of Kvachi, however, Georgia remains remote from it and actively requires European assistance to maintain within a distinctly European geography; assistance which, when Georgia was invaded by and incorporated into the Soviet Union in 1921, it did not receive.

What is also discernible here is the first instance of what we might call the use of Georgia’s remoteness from its alleged true belonging – Europe – as a political myth. Lamenting the plight of Georgia being recaptured by the Bolsheviks, the abandonment by Europe serves to make sense of the political conditions under which Georgia laboured. By installing a sense of Georgia not truly belonging in the Soviet Union – or in any Russian-dominated entity – Javakhishvili establishes a forward looking notion that can provide
significance and help making sense of a situation the country nonetheless finds itself in. Indeed, the imaginative geography established by the political myth of Georgia’s detached belonging in Europe provides significance and an alternative view towards the future in adverse conditions; it calls, as Javakhishvili himself did, for opposition to Russian rule. It therefore aligns with political myths as determinations to act in the world, even more so as it intertwines a description of the world (i.e. the imaginative geography of the constellation of Georgia-Russia-Europe) with a determination to act within it (i.e. opposition to Soviet rule).

GOING EAST OR WEST: GEOPOLITICAL SPEECH ACTS

Importantly, this rather new imaginative geography propagated by Javakhishvili was not limited to literature or ‘border aesthetics’ alone. Indeed, another domain in which these markers surface once more is that of ‘geopolitical speech acts.’ Notably, the period of Georgian independence during the Russian Civil War is also the period when processes of othering most explicitly start to reverse. Where in the 19th century Russia had designated its Caucasian possessions as ‘Asian’ and engaged in a colonial civilising mission towards them so as to prove its own supposed Europeanness, the opposite is later to be the case. While a limiting factor is the absence of reliable documentation of influential politicians in Georgia in the 1910s and 1920s, some excellent examples of geopolitical speech acts remain.

The foremost of these comes from a speech by Noe Zhordania, one of the leaders of the Georgian independence movement and its president during its brief independence (1918-1921). At a speech made at the Georgian Constituent Assembly in January 1921, Zhordania said:

“Soviet Russia offered us military alliance, which we rejected. We have taken different paths, they are heading for the east and we, for the west. We would like to yell at Russian Bolsheviks: turn to the west to make a contemporary European nation.”
(Source: Georgian National Museum).

Note, first of all, the fact that the instability of geopolitical categories is, as in Ali and Nino and Kvachi, explicated: Zhordania does not speak in terms of being ‘naturally’ European, but instead of choosing to be European or not. Yet this simultaneously reveals an idea of something supposedly intrinsic to being European. It is, Zhordania seems to suggest, by choosing a particular path for the future and by being a specific type of country that one’s
Europeanness is determined. This determination to act and an account of the present conditions that is decisively future-oriented is, once again, reminiscent of the concept of political myth as I have described above. Finally, it is notable that Zhordania speaks specifically of a contemporary European nation. Georgia, here, is no longer an antiquated country that requires Russian Imperial intervention to drag it into a European modernity; now, independent Georgia itself is on the path to that same modernity, and highlights that Russia has to choose to make: does it follow Georgia to make a contemporary European nation, or does it remain stuck in its brutal and imperialist past?

Hence Zhordania’s speech can be read as an early iteration of the ‘return to Europe’ theme prominent in the 1990s after the fall of the Soviet Union, to be discussed below. This is supplemented by another significant geopolitical speech act which effectively reaches across Georgia’s history to establish it as a country that had, in fact, always been European, an idea that would become even more explicit about a century later under Saakashvili’s rule (to be discussed in more detail below). Giorgi Chubinashvili, a prominent Georgian historian, wrote that “by adopting Christianity [...] Georgia strengthened its general position in the progressive ranks of the world’s cultured nations. It established an eternal connection with Europe’s culture” (Georgian National Museum). While Chubinashvili thus explicitly uses Christianity as a marker for supposed ‘Europeanness,’ he also maintains some ambiguity: an ‘eternal connection,’ after all, need not mean the same as being European. It is this precise ambiguity that seems characteristic for Georgia’s discourse towards Europe in the 20th century.

To conclude, in the early 20th century a remarkable change occurs in Georgian/Russian discourses on the Europeanness of Georgia. As I have argued earlier, the early 19th century witnessed a colonial power occupying Georgia and engaging in the Europeanisation of a region which it considered backwards and Asiatic. In the second half of that same century, Georgia had acquired a more explicit voice of its own through such national revivalists as Ilia Chavchavadze and Vazha-Pshavela. Although the question of Europeanness sometimes shines through in these writers, it was if nothing else only an issue in the background. In the early 20th century, then, a significant geopolitical choice first faced Georgia. It is hence unsurprising that the question of its supposed Europeanness became more pronounced in discourses advanced by Georgian voices. The more remarkable aspect, however, is the apparent complete reversal of the geopolitical imagination of the relations between Georgia, Russia, and Europe: for Lermontov, Pushkin, and Vorontsov, Russia was
the enlightened empire seeking to civilise and Europeanise Georgia; for Javakhishvili and Zhordania, Russia was the brutish and violent empire from which Georgia had liberated itself, but against which it still required European assistance in order for it to maintain its own Europeanness, presented as ultimately incompatible with being a part of Russia. As will become clear in later chapters, the discourse thus established proved to be a powerful and resonant one. Although the Soviet period is characterised above all by relative silence on such questions - unsurprising given its harsh repression - Georgia’s rightful return to Europe and the imaginative geography establishing a dichotomy between Georgia and Russia which is analogous to that established between Europe and Russia returned with a vengeance.

**THE SOVIET PERIOD: BROTHERHOOD AND ‘EQUALITY’**

For obvious reasons, the Soviet Period is notoriously more difficult to analyse in the terms used above. Censorship became harsher and its methods of oppression more sophisticated. Javakhishvili was killed in the purges of 1937 under the auspices of Lavrentiy Beria – Stalin’s hangman; Zhordania died of natural causes in exile in Paris in 1953; the death of Kurban Saïd remains difficult to pinpoint because it requires clear consensus on who Saïd was in the first place. Accordingly, sources that can be used to tease out discourses on supposed Europeanness throughout the Soviet Period are severely limited. The Soviet Union’s official ideology, moreover, promoted equality and brotherhood among peoples. The only caveat to this supposed equality is Soviet nationality policy, particularly from the 1930s onwards, which does establish a hierarchy of the various peoples living under Soviet rule. In so doing, it also provides clues as to the continuation or discontinuity in this discourse.

If an ‘imperial’ relationship is a political relationship in which a central authority or ‘metropole’ establishes and maintains dominance over a political community distinct from its own (Suny 2001, 24-25; Doyle 1986), the Soviet Union was, other than the Russian Empire, only imperialist to some degree. Such is evidenced, for example, in the fact that the Georgian Joseph Jughashvili was to become the Union’s leader in 1922, something inconceivable in tsarist Russia. Simultaneously, however, Soviet nationality policy maintained a hierarchy of peoples living under its rule. While Soviet nationality policy does not refer to Europeanness as such, the hierarchy it established reveals to a large degree a continuation of the imaginative geography already present in the Russian Empire. Among the ‘developed’ peoples were Russians, Ukrainians, Jews, Armenians, and, indeed, Georgians. The less
developed ones include, most importantly, the Central Asian peoples, many of whom have their own independent states today, such as Tajiks, Kazakhs, and Uzbeks, as well as numerically smaller peoples today mostly residing in autonomous territories in the Russian Federation and some other former Soviet states such as Tatars, Ossetians, Kalmyks, Lezgins, and Chechnyans (de Waal 2010, 80-81).

Effectively, being part of the former meant it was easier for individuals to move up the career ladder, as well as potentially larger autonomy locally. As Thomas de Waal relates, an Armenian village boy could grow up to become First Secretary in the Tajik SSR; for a Tajik to attain the same position in Georgia or Armenia would have been impossible (ibid.). While of the three major nationalities in the South Caucasus both Georgia and Armenia were considered part of the ‘advanced,’ ‘western’ peoples, Azerbaijan was not. For present purposes, however, two elements about the hierarchy thus established are important. Firstly, with the exception of Azerbaijan and smaller peoples in the North Caucasus, the imaginative geography established by this policy overlaps almost perfectly with the boundaries between European and Asian Russia as seen in the late 19th century. Secondly, although practicing religion was at best strongly discouraged and at worst outright illegal in the USSR, it remains noteworthy that, of the so-called advanced peoples, Jews are the only non-Christian group. Indeed, none of the Soviet Union’s numerous Muslim peoples were included, whereas only numerically very small predominantly Christian peoples (e.g. Ossetians, Abkhazians) were excluded.

Hence, an analysis of Soviet nationality policy along these lines suggests that, while official opinion on hierarchical relations between peoples was abandoned, a discourse of various levels of advancement between peoples not unlike the one present in the late tsarist period persisted. Note also that this cannot have consisted purely in a titular nation’s primary allegiance during the Russian civil war: the entire South Caucasus briefly united in independence of Russia in the Transcaucasian Democratic Federative Republic in April 1918 until the Federation disbanded about a month later, after which Georgia, in strong opposition to the ultimately victorious Bolsheviks, was an independent country until 1921 under a Menshevik government.
VI. THE UNSTEADY ‘RETURN’ TO ‘EUROPE’

The reversal of narratives that had begun in the early 20th century – where now Russia’s, rather than Georgia’s, Europeanness was put in question – was in some ways continued after Georgia gained independence from the Soviet Union in 1991, yet in others much radicalised. The post-Soviet period is also the one in which the discourse of Georgia as a distinctively European country increased steadily. The growing preponderance of this discourse of Europeanness proceeded, roughly, along three main lines. Firstly, beginning already in the Soviet period itself, more emphasis was put on Georgia’s or proto-Georgian peoples’ relations with ancient Greece as Colchis. This ancient Greco-Roman heritage is, as noted above, a common if not necessarily factually correct assessment of the origins of Europe. Secondly, the ‘return to Europe’ theme, which was common among many former Warsaw Pact countries, was no less influential in Georgia, albeit slightly later. Thirdly, Georgia’s Europeanness was to be offset against its allegedly brutal and imperialist neighbor, serving as a contrast not only to differentiate Georgia as European from a less civilised and imperialist adversary, but also to cast doubts on Russia’s Europeanness as such.

This chapter focuses on numerous sources to elaborate upon the aforementioned threads. As before, discourses elaborated by means of Georgian literature will play a significant role. The fact that this period is more recent, however, also brings with it the advantage of the wider availability of more varied sources. Hence, geopolitical speech acts from presidential speeches, symbolism in Georgia today, Georgian school textbooks, and other sources will also be included in my analysis. Many elements of this discourse may at face value appear rather unspectacular. However, if one considers the discourse elaborated upon below in the context of especially the 19th century discourse advanced by the Russian Empire, the almost complete reversal of roles and positions becomes striking to say the least.

ANCIENT COLCHIS, ANCIENT EUROPEANS?

While in earlier periods the ancient history of Georgia and the Caucasus at large were occasionally referenced, they were never explicitly used as sources for any narrative of Europeanness. Lermontov, in Mtsyri, acknowledged the ancient Christian tradition of the
country; Vorontsov, as a trained classicist, encouraged historiographic studies of the region’s ancient history. From the late 20th century onwards, however, a more coherent discourse was constructed that would eventually form the basis for claims of Georgia not only as an ancient European country, but that would go so far as to call Georgia the home of ‘the first Europeans.’ As Chiara Bottici and Benoît Challand (2013, 30) explain, ancient Greek philosophy and culture and its heritage is one of the ‘default’ elements on which ideas of a common European identity are based, regardless of whether establishing such a link is factually correct, or whether entertaining the notion of a common, unified European identity is feasible or desirable in the first place. Using this common trait, then, functions effectively as a political myth meant to address the conditions of a country feeling a stronger need to ‘prove’ its own Europeanness than perhaps some others do. Moreover, it adds a temporal component to imaginative geographies, as it alleges that the current understanding of imagined dividing lines between ‘Europe’ and ‘Asia’ is not a recent developed, but a centuries old fact that has merely been forgotten or repressed at specific times in history.

An early iteration of this narrative is Otar Chiladze’s 1972 novel A Man Was Going Down the Road (Chiladze 1972 [2012]). Chiladze, regarded as one of Georgia’s greatest 20th century writers and generally agreed to be the country’s only literature Nobel prize nominee (Rayfield 2012), rewrites the ancient Greek myth of Jason and the Golden Fleece, retelling the story from a Georgian perspective while simultaneously providing a well-hidden critique of the contemporaneous Soviet authorities. While the historical region of Colchis, situated on the far eastern coast of the Black Sea – or Euxine, as it was known to the Greeks – is generally agreed to mostly overlap with today’s Georgian regions of Adjara, Guria, Samegrelo, Svaneti, and Abkhazia, as well as with parts of Turkey’s Rize province, no reference to (proto-)Georgians or the Georgian language was made in the original Greek story. In Chiladze’s story, by contrast, one of the main protagonists of the story in Colchis is King Parnavaz, whom, again, does not figure in the original Greek myth. Parnavaz (ruled 299-234 BC), instead, is generally considered to be a proto-Kartvelian king, who ruled several centuries before the Christening of Georgia, the founding of Tbilisi, and the establishment of the royal Bagrationi dynasty (Rapp 2014). Today, while perhaps not having ascended to the ranks of Georgia’s most revered monarchs – Davit Aghmashenebeli, Queen Tamar, Vakhtang Gorgasali – Parnavaz is considered an important early Georgian monarch.

Hence, by not only having figure an explicitly Georgian monarch in the myth of the Golden Fleece, but indeed by forging him into one of its main characters, Chiladze creates a
narrative thread establishing Georgia as an ancient European country. Note, too, that while many legends surround the life and rule of Parnavaz, including that of having universalised the Georgian language in Kartli, he is not generally considered one of the archetypically important historical monarchs of Georgia (Rapp 2014). It is therefore all the more striking for Georgian president Eduard Shevardnadze (1992/1995-2003) to explicitly reference Parnavaz in his inauguration speech in November 1995. His inauguration, together with the independence of Georgia, Shevardnadze (1995 [2007], 29) emphasises, “is not only the celebration of contemporary Georgia,” but instead “it is also the celebration of Parnavaz, Vakhtang Gorgasali, […].” What furthermore makes Parnavaz’s mention noteworthy is the fact that, despite the heavy Christian emphasis during Shevardnadze’s inauguration (his speech was introduced by the Catholicos-Patriarch Ilia II, with a celebration later to take place at nearby Mtskheta’s Svetitskhoveli Cathedral), is that Parnavaz is notoriously a pre-Christian – and probably pagan – monarch.

The ‘origin’ of the Georgian people

Every imagined community features some sort of myth, narrative, or discourse detailing its alleged origins. While such discourses do not generally contain much value in a purely academic sense (Anderson 1983; Balibar 1992), they hold meaning to the extent that the collective whom it purports to describe believe in it. An alleged geopolitical entity known as ‘Europe’ is therefore similar in that it also exists only insofar as meaning is made of it. Narratives concerning the origin of a people or purported nation are among the most important of these, but they are typically constructed in a retrospective way: the red thread that is narrated through a people’s and territory’s history has a designated end point, and a source that must say something about that point. Importantly, this point need not only be in the present. As a collective narrative of identity, discourses on a people’s origin look to the future at least as much as to the present, as “identity is constructed not only as a dimension of the past (who we have been), but also in relation to the future (who we want to be)” (Bottici & Challand 2013, 36).

15 While he was first elected president in 1995, Shevardnadze served as interim president from March 1992, after Zviad Gamsakhurdia was deposed in a military coup and later killed himself. Given the chaos in which Georgia was engulfed under Gamsakhurdia’s rule and the period of civil war shortly after his ouster, Shevardnadze’s government oversaw, despite rampant corruption, the first period of relative calm in Georgia since 1989.

16 My translation. Original: “ეს არა მარტო თანამედროვე საქართველოს დღესასწაული” [es ara mart’o tanamedro’ve sakartvelos dghesasts’auli].

Analysis of two history books used in Georgian secondary education is used here: one concerning general (world) history, and one specifically on Georgian history. Both have been approved by the Georgian Ministry of Education and are widely used in Georgian secondary education.\textsuperscript{18} As noted above, historical narratives are essential in shaping the contemporary self-consciousness of a people. History education then occupies a special position within that self-consciousness, given that for most members of society it will be their first acquaintance with such historical narratives. Hence, as Bottici and Challand (2013, 6) correctly point out, history textbooks “provide the ‘bottom line’ of what a society thinks about itself.” While the ambiguity of Georgia’s wider regional belonging is acknowledged from the very beginning – the very first paragraph states that “Georgia is situated at the confluence of two large continents – Europe and Asia”\textsuperscript{19} (Asatiani et al. 2012, 8) – more emphasis is nonetheless put on the country’s Western connections. A chapter discussing “the question of the origins of the Georgian people”\textsuperscript{20} (ibid., 23-25) discusses a number of possible explanations, but specifically emphasises that the Georgian people “was already of special interest to the Ancient Greeks”\textsuperscript{21} (ibid., 23).

More importantly, the educational programme then proceeds to discuss a number of early (proto-)Georgian states. While it notes that the availability of sources is by definition a complicating factor when discussing history this ancient, the authors go on to state that “inscriptions discovered in Western Georgia nominate the 11\textsuperscript{th}-8\textsuperscript{th} centuries BC for the second large Georgian state”\textsuperscript{22} (ibid., 31). This state, indeed, is the Colchian state. Establishing a reliable history of ancient Colchis is difficult, if not impossible. Donald Rayfield, the most prominent historian of Georgia writing in English, writes that sources are sometimes precise, yet few and far between, and pinpointing the exact location of noted historical localities is often next to impossible (Rayfield 2012, 11-16). Originally trained as a linguist, Rayfield’s account of Colchis is to a large degree centred around linguistic data, the

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\textsuperscript{18} As with Georgian-language sources used above, all translations are mine, and originals are given in footnotes where necessary.
\textsuperscript{19} Original: „საქართველო იორდალი დოდეკა კონტინენტით - ევროპისა და აზიის შესართავს დასახლება“; “sakartvelo or dide kontinentit - evropisa da aziis sheitarvas dasakhleba.”
\textsuperscript{20} Original: „ქართველი ხალხის წარმომავლობის საკითხი“; “kartveli khalkhis ts’armomavalobis sak’itkhi.”
\textsuperscript{21} Original: „ქართველი ხალხის წარმომავლობისა და მონათესავეობის საკითხი ჯერ კიდევ ძველ ბერძნებს აინტერესებდა“; “kartveli khalkhis ts’armomavalobisa da monatesaveobis sak’itkhi jer k’idev dzvel berdznebs aint’ereshbat.”
\textsuperscript{22} Original: „ლურსმული წარწერები დასავლეთ საქართველოს ტერიტორიაზე ძვ. XI-VIII საუკუნეებში ასახელებენ მეორე დიდ ქართულ სახელმწიფოებრივ გაერთიანებას – კოლხის“; “lursmuli ts’arts’erebi dasavlet sakartvelos t’erit’oriaze dzv. XI-VIII sauk’uneebs ei sahklebeben more did kartul sakhelmts’ipoebrii baertianebas – k’olkhis.”
\end{flushleft}
more so as linguistic kinship is in many cases one of the few available sources. Although the Georgian language is unrelated to any other except its close relatives of Migrelian (Georgian Megreli), Svan, and Laz,23 evidence of extensive borrowing from other languages (Assyrian, Urartu, Greek) exists.

While the precise extent of these linguistic relations is beside the point here, what matters is that evidence suggests that the Georgian language was spoken in what is known today as Georgia at least some three thousand years ago. However, while the apparent age of the language ought to be primarily of (academic) interest to linguists, in societal discourses it tends to be used as a basis to establish historical narratives as well. Indeed, by describing Colchis as “the second Georgian state” a historical continuity is established whose basis is dubitable at best. In the context of this thesis, however, it has a twofold effect: first of all, it establishes a clear and important connection between what was purportedly ‘Georgia(n)’ and ancient Greece. Given that Ancient Greece is a common source for myths, narratives, and discourses about what the purported basis for a common European culture is (Bottici & Challand 2013, 27), its second effect is then to establish Georgia – given this alleged continuity – as a country and people that has always been European. It is this latter point to which I now turn.

‘Return’ to Europe

“Today we salute all of Georgia’s friends. Georgia is returning to the European family where it belongs.”

- Mikheil Saakashvili (2006)

As the Soviet Union and many of its satellite states collapsed between 1989 and 1991, across many of them – particularly all those who were not Russia - calls for a ‘return to Europe’ became ever more vocal (Tulmets 2014, 1-20). In brief, the narrative they espoused was that although their common home was Europe, however ill-defined, they had been violently torn from it and kept from returning to their proper home by the Soviet Union, while

23 Of these languages, Megrelian is the most commonly spoken today, and also the closest relation to Georgian, being almost entirely mutually intelligible and spoken by some 300,000 people mostly in the Western Georgian region of Samegrelo (lit. ‘land of the Megrelians’). Svan, spoken in the rugged mountains of northwestern Georgia, only boasts around 50,000 native speakers today. Laz, finally, is spoken by less than 100,000 people, mostly living in Turkey’s northeastern regions, where some cities still bear Kartvelian names (e.g. Artvin). Given the fact that speakers of Laz have lived under Ottoman and Turkish rule for much longer than other Kartvelian speakers, the Laz language features a much more substantial Turkish and Islamic influence, and hence is the most distant cousin of Georgian.
simultaneously those Western Europeans whom were supposed to be their fellow Europeans did not always acknowledge them as ‘fully’ European (Mälksoo 2009; Müller 2018; see also Wolff 1994). Discussing how across the former communist countries the early 1990s suddenly witnessed a frantic renaming of businesses – hotels, cafés, cinemas – with (Western) European names – or better still, naming then ‘Hotel Europa’, Café Europa, and so on – Croatian writer and essayist Slavenka Drakulić remarks on what the renaming frenzy appears to signify: “there can never be enough signs to indicate and emphasise that indeed this is not the old, communist, poor, primitive, Oriental, backward Eastern Europe any longer. Can’t you see that we belong to the West too, except that we have been exiled from it for half a century?” (Drakulić 1996 [2011], 10).

However, while countries such as Croatia, Poland, and Slovakia, bordering ‘traditional’ Western European countries such as Germany and Austria or being just a brief naval passage removed from Italy or Sweden have a clear geographical proximity to Western Europe, Georgia had a more difficult case to make. To some degree, while inhabitants of Estonia, Hungary, or Albania were perhaps not recognised as fully European in the early 1990s, no one would deny that the territory of these countries was, in fact, in Europe; they simply had some catching up to do. Georgia, on the contrary, had a more ambiguous relation with the boundaries of Europe. It is important to restate at this juncture that while no objectively factual borders of Europe exist, nor does ‘Europe’ as such exist, these imagined geographies of separation and difference have force as political myths because they tend to be collectively *imagined* to exist, i.e. they are imagined and therefore real.

Perhaps partially as a consequence of Georgia’s distance from the conventional centres of Europe, and partially as a result of the chaos that engulfed the country in the early 1990s, this supposedly glorious return to Europe was not strongly emphasised by its first two presidents, Zviad Gamsakhurdia (1991-1992) and Eduard Shevardnadze (1992 (interim)/1995 (elected)-2003). Both men, arguably, were still very much part of the Soviet repertoire of public figures. Gamsakhurdia (1939-1993), son of prominent Soviet writer and bureaucrat Konstantine Gamsakhurdia, was a Soviet dissident and human rights campaigner turned far right nationalist and ethnic provocateur who was killed (or, in the generally accepted explanation, killed himself) in the chaos of 1993. Shevardnadze (1928-2014), in some ways his opposite, was a typical late-Soviet career politician, climbing from First Secretary of the Georgian Communist Party to Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Soviet Union under
Gorbachev, to finally become president of independent Georgia and leading a government that rivalled the late Soviet Union in terms of corruption.

The point is this: contrary to many who led the overthrow of other East- or Central European regimes, neither Gamsakhurdia nor Shevardnadze were of a younger generation without extensive experience of working in or with state bureaucracy. Particularly Shevardnadze was an archetypical example of Soviet Nomenklatura. It is therefore perhaps no surprise that it was Mikheil Saakashvili, much younger and more charismatic than Gamsakhurdia or Shevardnadze and educated in the United States in the 1990s, who, after leading the Rose Revolution to overthrow Shevardnadze in 2003, became the first to firmly incorporate Georgia’s European identity in the country’s foreign policy (Coene & Ó Beacháin 2015). In this Saakashvili bears a certain likeness to the tergdaleulebi, entertaining notions of moving Georgia westwards by having himself been educated in the (relative) west. However, even briefly before Saakashvili was elected in January 2004, Shevardnadze in his later years already started emphasising Georgia’s western home. In an address to the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council Summit in Prague in 2002, Shevardnadze not only stressed that Georgia’s lasting independence would in the future be guaranteed by its prospective membership in NATO, but also that “due to historical vicissitudes, [Georgia] has for centuries been cut off from the western civilization although it always saw its rightful place there” (Shevardnadze 2002).

If Georgia’s ‘return to Europe’ discourse took centre stage slightly later than it did elsewhere, however, it was propagated all the more enthusiastically. At Saakashvili’s inauguration in 2004, he appeared in front of the Georgian Parliament flanked not only by the Georgian flag, but also the European one. In his inauguration speech he remarked that he had “not raised the European flag by accident – this flag is Georgian as well, as far as it embodies our civilization, our culture, essence of our history and perspective, and vision of our future” (Saakashvili 2004). In this brief passage, Saakashvili advances a narrative that does not permit any doubt: everything about Georgia – its civilisation, its culture, and its history and future – is unabashedly European. While out of context, this statement might appear unremarkable if not exactly subtle, it becomes particularly striking if we look back: Lermontov and Pushkin spoke of Asiatics; Vorontsov encountered a Persian city; even Ilia Chavchavadze, the father of Georgian nationalism, regarded Georgia as being situated in Western Asia (Brisku 2009, 52). Moreover, Georgia is not simply European; Europe embodies the “essence of its history.” In other words, everything that points to Georgia or Georgian
history being anything else than European is but a footnote to a core that is itself essentially European.

This speech, hence, is an excellent example of Challand & Bottici’s noted point that history is told from the present, and who we are today is decided by who we want to be in the future. This fact is emphasised by the frequency with which Saakashvili stresses that the construction of a stable European state – i.e. living up to their European identity – important for the prosperity of future generations; more importantly, it is “the Georgia [...] our ancestors dreamt about” (ibid.). In this way, a coherent and continuous line from the (unnamed) ancestors of the Georgian people to the present is forged, reinforcing the idea that what Georgia is considered to be today is what it always was, or at least always dreamt to be. He goes further than most in propagating this continuity. Whereas Georgian history education maintains a link with ancient Colchis, suggesting that Georgians, too, are ancient Europeans, Saakashvili goes beyond that: “We are not only old Europeans, we are the very first Europeans” (ibid., emphasis added). What Saakashvili may have had in mind is a set of (proto-) human skulls found at the archaeological site of Dmanisi in southern Georgia. While scientific debate over what the discovery of these skulls between 1991 and 2005 tells us is far from over, the suggestion that these may have been among the first early hominins to cross from Africa into Europe is incorporated in Georgian discourse to prove that Georgians are, indeed, “the first Europeans” (BBC 2000; see also Lordkipanidze 2013).

While this idea of Georgians being ‘the first Europeans’ turned out to be relevant in discourses about its Europeanness in the context of its conflict with Russia later on – to which I return below – in his second inauguration speech, following his re-election in 2008, Saakashvili was slightly less explicit. While most of the speech emphasised what had been achieved since he first took office in January 2004 and what remained to be done, by 2008 stressing Georgia’s Europeanness had become part and parcel of Georgian politics. Similar to 2004, Saakashvili now stressed that “Georgia is forever yoked to Europe, [...] joined by a common and unbreakable bond – one based on culture and our shared history and identity” (Saakashvili 2008a). More striking here is that Saakashvili also appears to reveal an early foray into a narrative that was to become more influential after the August 2008 Russo-Georgian war. When he stresses that, by electing him as president, “the people of Georgia demonstrated their clear and unequivocal sentiments about Georgia’s Euro-Atlantic destiny,” (ibid.) he not only reiterates Georgia’s alleged place in Europe as a ’destiny,’ but also implies that his opponents do somehow not acknowledge this alleged ‘destiny.’ Today,
one of the most common ways in Georgian politics to denounce or outright smear one’s political opponents is to call them ‘pro-Russian’ or ‘Russian-funded,’ the discursive opposite of which is Europe.

In that discourse, Europe gradually becomes associated more strongly with ‘progress’ – indeed quite similar to Noe Zhordania’s speech discussed above. Remarkably, Saakashvili’s successor, opposition candidate Giorgi Margvelashvili, used this notion of Europe against Saakashvili himself during his inaugural speech in 2013. While emphasising that Georgia is “European in terms of self-awareness and an integral part of Western civilization by nature,” he nonetheless admits that hitherto Georgia has “failed to translate [its] being European into institutional dimensions” (Margvelashvili 2013). While these remarks are, if worded slightly differently, close to Saakashvili’s and thus in keeping with the discourse, the association of Europe with ‘progress’ becomes stronger. Consider this passage:

“By ensuring a precedent of transfer of power through parliamentary and presidential elections, we succeeded in moving to a substantially new stage in the development of our state. The post-Soviet period is over, and the development of a modern type of democracy has started, laying the foundation for a new, European kind of political culture” (Margvelashvili 2013, emphasis added).

A few elements in this passage are of note. First of all, Margvelashvili explicitly identifies peaceful transfer of power by democratic means with a European political culture. This is another element – to be returned to below – which is also used in opposing Georgia’s Europeanness to the alleged brutality of its larger northern neighbour. Secondly, note that Margvelashvili does not only allege the Soviet period to be over, but also the post-Soviet period. Implicitly, the preceding years seem to be considered merely an intermittent stage for a country liberating itself from the grips of an imperialist Soviet Union and returning to its rightful place: Europe.

The combination of these two elements results in a third implication in this passage: Mikheil Saakashvili, who enthusiastically installed European symbols in Georgia’s institutions and was the first to really initiate the path to what became considered Georgia’s European ‘destiny,’ was himself not only not quite part of this ‘new beginning’ for Georgia, but indeed even an obstacle to its path towards Europe. Hence we see here how the discursive opposition between ‘Europe’ and ‘Russia’ begins to be established and used in
Georgia as an opposition between ‘progress’ and ‘stagnation’ or ‘backwardness.’ A discursive opposition, moreover, which is used not only to offset Georgia against its allegedly imperialist neighbour, but which is also used internally to gain electoral advantages over one’s opponents.

Following the completion of Margvelashvili’s term in office, Salome Zurabishvili – who ran as an independent candidate but was supported by Margvelashvili’s Georgian Dream party – struck a more conciliatory tone in her inaugural speech. Nevertheless, she did not tone down from emphasising the Europeanness of Georgia and its association with progress. Rife with symbolism, Zurabishvili’s inaugural ceremony took place in Telavi, the capital of the eastern Georgian region of Kakheti and the residence of Georgia’s last great king, Erekle II (1744 (Kakheti)/1762 (Kartli and Kakheti/Georgia)-1798). Organising the inauguration in Telavi is historically significant, Zurabishvili emphasises, because:

[Erekle] laid the groundwork for the creation of a modern European nation. But it is also here in Telavi, that King Erekle’s plans to create a modern state, establish new standards and put our country on the path towards Europe, were shattered. It is here in Telavi that the country’s western progress was halted.

(Zurabishvili 2018, emphasis added)

Recall, to begin with, my discussion of Lermontov’s poem Mtsyri above. Referencing the Russian annexation of Georgia in 1801, Lermontov writes that the antiquated Georgians have fared well under Russian protection. Vorontsov would later view this annexation as necessary to drag a backwards region into Europe, in a time when, although Erekle II did indeed unite and modernise the eastern half of Georgia (Kartli and Kakheti) Georgians themselves were not much concerned with Europe and its national revival similarly did not emphasise Georgia as European.

Indeed, where the Russian Imperial view of the 19th and late 18th century figured the Russian Empire itself as the agent of Europeanisation and progress and the entire Caucasus as Asiatic and backwards, in an excellent example of history being told in retrospective fashion, today the Georgian narrative emphasises how the Russian annexation of 1801 ‘shattered’ the plans to move Georgia towards Europe. Thus, firstly, Zurabishvili’s inaugural speech – as those of her predecessors – emphasises not only Georgia’s ultimate belonging to Europe, but also how for almost two centuries it has been kept away from its European home by Russian. In that sense, the significance of the symbolism of Telavi and Erekle II today is not inherent, i.e. meaningful in a particular way regardless of context, but precisely in the
context of the conflict between Georgia and Russia. The fact that Erekle’s alleged European plans for Georgia were blocked more than two centuries ago is insignificant were it not for the fact that Georgia’s Europeanness, progress, and Western path is today still perceived to be under threat. Zurabishvili thus does not only paint a certain portrait and takes part in a certain discourse on Georgian history; she also draws a historical parallel to allege this history to be relevant still today.

By intertwining historical analogies with imaginative geographies, Zurabishvili here not only engages in a geopolitics but also a chronopolitics, understood here as a politicisation of time, is intimately intertwined with geopolitics because together time and space provide a precise locality which is held to contain some particular political importance. Time and space are therefore intimately intertwined in politics (Klinke 2012). By highlighting the notion that the particular meaning attached to a territory – Georgia as European – is not only contemporary but effectively continues in a straight line from the past up to the present, historical time is politicised in the sense that it is being framed in terms of today’s geographic imaginations. Such chronopolitics, in fact, is a common occurrence in post-Rose Revolution Georgia, to which I return below, as frequent references are made to a European Georgia in a chronopolitical context, though not without some contradiction: a Georgia in Europe is alleged to always have been the case, yet it was also the not yet realised dream of contemporary Georgia’s ancestors.

GEORGIA IN EUROPE: THE AMBIVALENCE REMAINS

While, as discussed above, consecutive Georgian presidents have at least since 2002 been very clear on the question of Georgia’s Europeanness and its regional belonging, throughout society a more ambiguous view prevails. Presidential speeches are prime examples of ‘elite discourse’; such discourse is, of course, in a mutually influential relation with what one might call more ‘popular’ discourse or popular geopolitics (Müller 2008a; Dittmer & Gray 2010). Popular discourses revealing a certain attitude towards Georgia-as-Europe, Europe as such, and Russia’s role in this constellation are embodied in a number of practices and symbols. These include commonly used school textbooks, popular demonstrations, and cultural productions such as – like above – literature.
An important example of such ambiguity is Otar Chiladze’s 1995 novel *Avelum*, generally regarded as one of the greatest achievements in 20th century Georgian literature (Rayfield 2013). An important first clue is the alleged meaning of *Avelum*, the novel’s title as well as the name of its protagonist: “free citizen with full civic rights” (Chiladze 1995 [2013], 7). Spanning the 33 years – not coincidentally the lifetime of Jesus Christ – between the violent dispersal of a demonstration in Tbilisi in 1956 and the April 9 tragedy in 1989, when pro-independence demonstrators were attacked with spades, tanks, and nerve gas, the novel is witness to the gradual growth of connections between Georgians and western Europeans. This increase in contact, and the conflicting loyalties it brings, is embodied in Avelum, the novel’s protagonist, whose ‘empire of love’ collapses concomitantly with the Soviet ‘empire of evil.’ Besides his wife in Tbilisi, Avelum’s ‘empire of love’ notably consists of mistresses in Moscow and Paris; cities which, of course, are not chosen arbitrarily. Avelum’s relationship with Françoise, his French mistress in Moscow, is permeated with alienation and lack of understanding.

At heart, Avelum longs for France and for the extramarital daughter he has there. Yet, he is also scared of what he will find if allowed to travel to France; the contradiction between the disgust he expresses with what he views as the depravity of French (or Western European) sexual morality (Chiladze 1995, 55) and the life he actually leads with several mistresses is exemplary of a particular type of flirtation with what ‘Europe’ is often taken to represent. One might ask if, in symbolic terms, France can be identified with Western Europe so easily here. It must be noted that there is a tradition of imagining Europe from without Europe or from its edges by means of a limited number of cities or countries which are held to be exemplary. In Russian literature, particularly in the 19th century, the most common candidates tends to be France and Germany/Switzerland (see, for example, Dostoevsky’s *The Gambler* and *The Idiot* or Pushkin’s *Eugene Onegin*, which is set in Russia but in which the main protagonists are obsessed with French and German culture). In Georgian literature, too, since (western) Europe has started playing a role of any significance, France plays a role of note. In Javakhishvili’s *Kvachi*, the novel’s protagonist travels to Paris and Vienna as the primary representatives of European culture; the acquaintance with whom the narrator of Chavchavadze’s *Letter’s from a Traveller* discusses the reasons for progress in Russia remaining so far away is a French fellow traveler (Chavchavadze 1861 [2017], 91).24

24 My translation, original: იმიტომაც შორს არის წასული!... [imit’omats shors aris ts’asuli!...].
If France in *Avelum* represents Europe, what Europe means to the novel’s protagonist is simultaneously a longing and a fear: contrary to Soviet Georgia, in France Avelum could truly be a ‘free citizen with full civic rights,’ but he also fears the alleged depravity of such a liberal society, even though Avelum himself indulges in its liberties. Avelum’s relationship with Françoise, then, is analogous to the relationship between Georgia and Western Europe that Chiladze paints; one fraught with misunderstanding, alienation, and longing. Avelum gets closer to Françoise once she manages to secure residence in Moscow for longer periods of time, yet looks down on her for the privileged foreigner’s life she leads there, having “what’s called European fun, sitting on an embassy floor slurping champagne from someone else’s glass” (Chiladze 1995, 272). As the Soviet Empire crumbles, Avelum – and Georgia – faces a choice: Tbilisi or Paris; east or west? When Avelum eventually elects to travel to Paris, he is immediately disillusioned with Europe; culturally, as described above, but politically as well. History repeats itself: Georgia may look to Europe, but Europe does not look back; in 1921, as the Bolsheviks invaded and captured independent Georgia, Europe stood by and did nothing; in 1989, as Soviet Troops violently crush a Georgian pro-independence demonstration, Europe stands by and does nothing (ibid., 212). Ironically, Avelum speaks only Georgian and Russian, and Françoise only French and Russian, as a consequence of which they communicate only in Russian. As much as Avelum thus seeks to break free from Russia and the Soviet ‘empire of evil,’ he fails to escape from it, as his dialogue with Europe remains mediated by Russia.

Avelum’s – and Chiladze’s, as the line between the novel’s protagonist and its author is often blurred – frustration is partially also directed against his fellow Georgians. They have no idea, he seems to allege, what this Europe everyone desires actually means. This frustration is echoed in two other post-Soviet Georgian novels. In Dato Turashvili’s (2008) *Flight from the USSR*, whose original title translates to ‘The Jeans Generation,’ a group of students seek to escape the Soviet Union by hijacking a plane while their peers are more preoccupied with getting their hands on a pair of jeans, in terms of cultural artifacts representative of the West in the 1980s and officially unavailable in the Soviet Union. In his 2010 novel *Adibas*, Zaza Burchuladze (2010) similarly voices discontent with many of his fellow Georgians’ preoccupations. Set during the 2008 Russo-Georgian war (which nonetheless remains in the background and is rarely mentioned explicitly), the novel’s characters move through Tbilisi looking at billboards and storefronts advertising contraband Western brands (to which the novel’s title is a reference), while less than one hundred kilometres away Russian artillery is shelling the Georgian city of Gori. Displaying
disillusionment similar to Chiladze’s discussed above, Adibas “is a judgement on a society that is pretending to adopt western European hedonism when military force is overwhelming the country” (Rayfield 2015, 254).

This ambiguity with regard to Georgia’s Europeanness sometimes translates into inconsistency. Georgian geography textbooks used in secondary education, for example, explicitly state that “the Caucasus is situated on the border zone between Europe and Asia” (Bliaidze et al. 2014, 103). Acknowledging that the precise boundary is a matter of some contention, four possible borders are named: the Kuma-Manych depression in southern Russia, previously uniting the Black and Caspian seas; the watershed of the Greater Caucasus main range, roughly but not entirely following the border between Russia and Georgia and Russia and Azerbaijan; going along the state borders of Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan with Turkey and Iran; or following the northern slopes of the Javakhetian-Armenian volcanic highlands. Of these options, only the third is explicitly political, the rest being based purely on geological features, and the third is similarly the only one that would include all of Georgia in Europe. The last option, following roughly the Lesser Caucasus, would exclude a number of Georgia’s southern regions including Samtskhe-Javakheti, Adjara, and parts of Guria and Imereti. The authors name no option which they find most plausible or which is generally accepted. When discussing the various countries of the world, however, they are less ambiguous. Discussing the world’s basic political geography continent by continent, they name Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan all as part of Europe (ibid., 53). Furthermore, while this would seem to follow the third of the four options they list later, that border would recreate the geographic oddity of Turkey being both west and east of parts of Europe, whereas Turkey is now included in Southern Europe.

As for history education, some ambiguity was already discussed above as to education pertaining to Georgia’s own history. Looking at the world history curriculum provides one with a further interesting view on Georgia’s perception of its own place in the

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25 My translation, original: კავკასია ევროპისა და აზიის სასაზღვრო ზოლში მდებარეობს [k’avk’asia evrop’isa da aziis sasazghvro zolshi mdebareobs].

26 Paraphrased. Georgian original: 1. სამხრეთი ზოლში კუმა-მანჩის ღრმულს, რომელიც ევრეს და აზიეს შორის წარსულში შავ და კასპიის ზღვებთან ერთად აერთებდა; 2. სამხრეთი ზოლში კავკასიონის მთავარი წყალგამყოფი ქედის თხემს; 3. სამხრეთი ზოლში საქართველოს, აზერბაიჯანისა და სომხეთის საზღვო საზღვრებთან და ირანთან; 4. სამხრეთი ზოლში ჯავახეთი-სომხეთის ვულკანური მთავარი ჩრდილო ფერდობს [1. sazghvro miuqveba k’uma-minichis ghrmulis, romelits geologur ts’arsulshi shav da k’asp’is zghvebs ertmanetan aerbeba; 2. sazghvro miuqveba k’avk’asionis miwari ts’qalgamqopi kedis tkhebs; 3. sazghvro miuqveba sakartvelos, azerbaijanisa da somkhetsis sakhelmts’ipo sazghvra turkettan da irantan; 4. sazghvro miuqveba javakhet-somkhetsis vulk’anuris mtianetis chrdiloes perdobs.]
world. In general, history curricula will, insofar as they do not only discuss the country’s own history, focus on nearby countries and the wider region with whom the geographical territory that state now occupies frequently interacted throughout history, or similarly on developments elsewhere that had a major impact on domestic developments. In this way, pupils are imbued with a sense of their country’s historical international relations and historical place in the world, as well as wider regional belonging. In Georgia today, a strong focus is on European history is prevalent. Particularly in the ancient period, some regions outside of Europe are discussed, such as Mesopotamia, Assyria, the Hittite Kingdom, Urartu, and Egypt (Akhmeteli et al. 2013, 8-11). From the Ancient Greek period onwards, however, most non-European regions and historical states are discussed only insofar as they directly impacted Georgia. For example, the Arab Conquests of the Middle East are discussed mostly to introduce Arab Rule in Georgia (ibid., 49-52). Meanwhile, events like the 4th and 5th centuries in Europe and the Reformation in Europe, which had no direct impact in Georgia, are discussed at length. Similarly, feudalism is explicitly discussed “in Europe and Georgia” (ibid., 42-45), but not in the Middle East or in Russia.

To be sure, being taught about European history and one’s own place in the context of that history does not immediately make one European per se. However, it does have a twofold effect in the context the question of Georgia’s Europeanness. Firstly, discussing Georgian history in conjunction with European history (as, for example, in the chapter on “Feudalism in Europe and Georgia”) tends to create a sense of connection. It maintains that there is a link between Europe and Georgia that is apparently worth discussing. Hence, if history education “provide[s] the ‘bottom line’ of what a society thinks about itself” (Challand & Bottici 2013, 6), the Georgian curriculum reveals the idea of a connectedness to Europe that is stronger than Georgia’s link to many of its direct neighbours. Secondly, the strong emphasis on Europe in history as well as geography also has the simple but potentially impactful effect of students being more knowledgeable about European history. As a consequence, they may be imbued with a stronger sense of empathy and sentiments of belonging towards Europe, rather than other regions of the world.

This is so because history itself has a geographical or geopolitical significance. This is all the more true for historical education. Indeed, when studying history, one not only asks oneself “when did this happen?” or “what happened in such-and-such a century?” but also

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27 ეგვიპტე [egvip’te]; ძველი შუამდინარეთი [dzveli shuamdinareti]; ახმეთელი, თხეთის სამეფო, ურარტუ [asureti, khetebis samepo, urart’i].

28 Original: ფეოდალიზმი ევროპ’აში და საქართველოში [feodalizmi evrop’asa da sakartveloshi].
“where did this historical event take place?”. Therein, an overview of world history may also reveal a collective understanding of belonging or place in that world history; “why is this history important to us?” might be a subsequent question to those named above. As such, the historical places that are considered important in education of world history today also provide a glimpse into the general self-understanding of Georgians’ place in the world, and concomitantly of the imaginative geography shaping that world.
VII. EUROPE BETWEEN GEORGIA AND RUSSIA

By way of brief recap, recall that the story of ‘European’ Georgia began with the Russian Imperial orientalisation of the Caucasus. While in 1801 the Russian Empire perceived a backwards region populated with ‘Asiatics,’ throughout the 19th century it gradually became more included in European Russia. Towards the end of the 19th century, during its national revival, an increasing decolonial sentiment developed in Georgia by the likes of Ilia Chavchavadze and Vazha-Pshavela. In the early 20th century, Georgians were already firmly established as Europeans detached from Europe in the eyes of Kurban Saïd, whereas Mikheil Javakhishvili challenged the Europeanness of Georgia’s former imperial master and purported ‘Europeaniser.’ Throughout the 20th century, this reversal of roles continued up to the present. In this final section, I argue that Georgia’s increased sense of Europeanness developed to a very large extent as a result of its relations with Russia – whether the Russian Empire, USSR, or Russian Federation – but not in the sense that the Russian Empire itself had hoped. The Russian Empire, in the early 19th century, hoped to colonise and ‘civilise’ the Caucasus to prove to its Western counterparts its own Europeanness, i.e. that it was worthy of being counted as their equal. Instead of following the same path towards being acknowledged as European with Russia, Georgia developed this increased sense of Europeanness against Russia. Thus, the forceful reiterations of Georgia’s Europeanness, while having a long history of reshaping borders and boundaries, function today as a political myth which invests Georgia’s conflict with Russia with a particular meaning and lends it a specific understanding.

This is most explicitly visible today. Indeed, much of its European imagery symbolises not only Europe, but in particular ‘not Russia.’ The European flags flown alongside the Georgian one on government buildings were introduced by Saakashvili, the country’s most anti-Russian president. Tellingly, the only other non-EU member state displaying the same number of European flags is Ukraine, where many can be found in Lviv and Kyiv, but almost none in the significantly more Russian-speaking Odessa. Effectively, this public display of Europeanness is used to explicitly distance Georgia from what it perceives to be an imperialist neighbour. In a speech made after the Russian government formally recognised Abkhazia and South Ossetia in August 2008, Saakashvili argued that
this is “no longer a matter of only Georgia or a matter of Georgian-Russian relations; this is a matter of Russia and rest of the civilized world” (Saakashvili 2008b, emphasis added). The Russo-Georgian war of August 2008, Saakashvili implies, is no longer merely a conflict between two sovereign states over two breakaway regions; it is now a matter of civilisation. Thus, being able to equate ‘European’ with ‘civilised’, Saakashvili actively uses the heightened sense of Europeanness as a weapon against Russia, as well as to attract attention to Georgia and its fate among a wider range of international actors.

By framing the conflict in this way, Saakashvili thus not only lumps Georgia in with his notion of ‘the civilised world,’ but also frames Russia’s conduct as an attack on this civilised world, and concomitantly the Russian government itself as fundamentally antithetical to this civilised world. In a joint statement with German chancellor Angela Merkel a little over a week earlier, Saakashvili reinforced this sentiment by stating that “we need 21st century solutions to the 20th century conflicts, and not 19th and 18th century solutions that were taking place until now” (Saakashvili 2008c). Georgia, Saakashvili suggests, has moved on to arrive at the 21st century and become a ‘civilised’ country; Russia, on the contrary, remains stuck in its imperialist past, and has thus far failed to prove itself to be a modern European country.

Throughout August 2008 there is a host of other instances of what I have earlier called geopolitical speech acts. On August 12th, shortly after the beginning of the war, Saakashvili addressed a crowd of Georgians in Tbilisi flanked by a number of European presidents, notoriously from countries with their own history of adverse relationships with Russia – Lithuania, Estonia, Poland, Ukraine, among others. Emphasising their support and cooperation, he stressed that “this is the new Europe” and that “this is why Georgia is the real European country” (Saakashvili 2008d). Elsewhere, Saakashvili explicitly connects the events in Georgia to Soviet interventions in the 20th century, comparing the Russo-Georgian war of 2008 to Budapest in 1956 and Prague in 1968 (Saakashvili 2008e). Even more strikingly, he stresses that the Russian tanks that have entered Georgia are not “in some indefinite Caucasian territory, but in a free European country” (ibid.). Two implications of that statement are particularly interesting. First, similar to my analysis above, Saakashvili implies a particular notion of what a European country is, i.e. what it means for a country to be ‘European’ and ‘free.’ Second, his ‘indefinite Caucasian territory’ is much more ambiguous and open to various interpretations. It does, however, clearly imply that a European country is something more than just any Caucasian territory. However,
determining whether Saakashvili refers to Chechnya, Russia’s other notorious war in the Caucasus, or to Russia’s colonization of the Caucasus in the 19th century, which would typically represent territories as empty or indeterminate, would lead too far into speculation.

In more abstract, conceptual terms, Saakashvili establishes a chronotope, or ‘time-place’ by engaging, as I discussed in the case of Zurabishvili above, not only in a geopolitics, but also in a ‘chronopolitics.’ Geopolitically, a particular meaning is attached to the originally purely descriptive name of a continent, which is used to demonstrate that his opponent – Russia under the leadership of Putin and Medvedev – cannot be part of this continent, this civilised world, because it does not live up to its standards. Temporally, Saakashvili connects the notion of being a modern 21st century state to being part of this civilised, European world, to argue that Russia has in a temporal sense not moved on from its imperial past to join the ranks of civilised states. As a consequence, there appears to be a particular notion at play of what this geographical space – Europe – means and stands for not merely as such, but specifically in this day and age. In some ways, the generally ill-defined term ‘civilised’ takes centre stage here as much as it did in the 19th century, similarly being used as a stick to beat one’s adversary in a disagreement between two states, cultures, peoples, or entities. A similar notion is visible in particularly anti-Russian readings of Georgian history and of the history of the relation between the two countries. When Salome Zurabishvili, as discussed above, stated that Georgia’s path towards the west, towards Europe, was thwarted in Telavi, she effectively echoes the sentiment voiced by Saakashvili, but also by Javakhishvili’s aforementioned discussion of the possibility of Russia becoming European. In this view, Russia could never have ‘Europeanised’ Georgia, as it sought to do in the 19th century, because it has hitherto itself not been properly European and civilised, or at least not behaved in such a way.

Whenever conflicts emerge between Georgia and Russia today, a very similar style of rhetoric is used in Georgia. In June 2019, in the context of an assembly of lawmakers from Eastern Orthodox countries, Russian State Duma Deputy Sergei Gavrilov addressed the Georgian parliament in Russian from the parliamentary speaker’s chair. The symbolism of this event, a lawmaker from a country which Georgians allege occupies some twenty percent of their territory addressing the Georgian parliament from its chairperson’s seat in his own language, sparked large protests in Tbilisi (RFE/RL 2019). Besides the obligatory Georgian flags waved at the protests, most commonly European and Ukrainian flags were shown, while some Russian flags were burned and anti-Putin banners were flown. As a first point,
the juxtaposition of waving European flags at a Georgian protest against the Russian government, while simultaneously showing solidarity with Ukraine, clearly show how flags symbolising Europe are seen to be the opposite of flags symbolising Russia. As relations between Tbilisi and Moscow subsequently soured and the Russian government initiated a campaign to hurt Georgia’s economy by banning direct flights from Russia to Georgia and urging Russian citizens not to visit the country, a larger, mostly grassroots campaign was started in Georgia to draw in visitors from other parts of the world, although the campaign was clearly aimed mostly at Europeans.

Besides a wide range of photographs and images displaying Georgia’s natural landscapes, historical sites, and cuisine, more geopolitically sensitive iterations were also used. One of the most interesting of these is an image first published on social media by the bilingual Georgian/English paper The Financial (Figure 6) which was subsequently widely shared on social media by individual Georgians as well as by government agencies, most notably gaining more widespread attention after being shared by the Georgian Embassy to Denmark. The text on the image welcomes visitors to Georgia, allegedly “Putin’s most hated country,” while stating a few potential points of interest to tourists. Leaving no doubt as to whether Georgia is European, it names not only the fact that Georgia is “one of the oldest Christian countries” and boasts “Europe’s highest permanent settlement,” but also revives the aforementioned idea that Georgia is the “homeland of the first European,” referring to

![Image of a mountain with text reading: WELCOME TO GEORGIA. PUTIN’S MOST HATED COUNTRY. Cradle of winemaking, Homeland of the first European, Europe’s highest permanent settlement, One of the oldest Christian countries.]

Figure 6 (Source: The Financial)
the ancient hominin skulls found at the Dmanisi archaeological site. Particularly by means of that last statement, facts which in themselves have no bearing on politics are imbued with a certain geographic meaning (i.e. the skulls found at Dmanisi are European), which is then in turn used in a geopolitical strife with Russia.

Similarly, more interesting than the relations between Russia and Georgia during the Soviet period is Georgia’s retrospective view on those relations. As discussed above, Soviet nationality policy included Georgians in its list of ‘advanced’ peoples, as a consequence of which many Georgians – including most famously Iosif Jughashvili, better known as Stalin, and Eduard Shevardnadze – were able to ascend through the ranks of Soviet bureaucracy. During the Soviet period, in other words, Georgians were full-fledged members of Soviet society, with restrictions imposed on them that did not differ significantly from those imposed on Russians and others. However, as Georgia sought independence in 1990, rather than merely declaring its newfound state as sovereign, it went further back in history by declaring the 1921 Bolshevik invasion to be an illegal annexation and international crime and announced the treaty by which Georgia later entered the Soviet Union to be null and void (Jones 2015, 36). In similar fashion, the section of the Georgian National Museum in Tbilisi dedicated to the Soviet period is called the ‘Soviet Occupation Exhibition Hall.’ Today, Georgia celebrates its annual Independence Day on May 26th: not the day it formally acquired independence from the Soviet Union or international recognition, but the day its Act of Independence was signed in 1918. Effectively, this establishes a sort of historical continuity which is then alleged to be violently interrupted by ‘Soviet Occupation,’ which also negates any cooperation between Soviet Georgia and the rest of the Soviet Union. In other words, Georgia’s membership in the Soviet Union was unilateral and superimposed on it by an essentially imperialist power. A power, moreover, which in the eyes of many Georgians retains most of its imperialist features today.

RUSSKIY MIR: AN ALTERNATIVE TO EUROPE?

If we follow the argument that imagery and symbolism of ‘Europe’ is used in Georgia today to differentiate Georgia from Russia, which is perceived to be imperialist, it is also useful to briefly look at the predominant view in Russia and the discourse propagated by Russian government elites.29 Russian foreign policy discourse has, at least since 2007, been dominated

29 This thesis has focused on Georgia. For the sake of completeness, the discourse advanced by its primary opponent and at which Georgia’s European symbolism and references are aimed must be
by the concept of ‘Russkiy mir’ or ‘Russian world.’ Mikhail Suslov (2018) identifies three different iterations of this concept, temporally changing since the demise of the Soviet Union. Beginning with a deterritorialisation in the 1990s before moving towards the Russian concept of ‘sovereign democracy’ in the early Putin years, the concept of Russian world has in its most recent stage (which Suslov identifies around 2010) been reterritorialised so as to include the Russian discourse on its allegedly natural spheres of influence. In terms of geopolitical ideology, Russian world today seeks to provide an alternative to a Western-dominated world, favouring a ‘world of worlds’ in which various civilisational blocks compete for power.

In a very broad sense, the general idea behind the concept of Russian world is that Russia is a civilisation rather than a nation (Zevelev 2014), and, likewise, that the Russian world extends beyond the borders of the Russian federation. As a consequence, challenges to Russian prevalence in the regions considered to be part of the Russian world are considered illegitimate and, to proponents of the Russian world concept, such challenges do not fit within the realm of rational analysis of world politics (Müller 2011). In the context of Russian world, the existence or ‘creation’ of Russian diasporas abroad is used instrumentally as a practice of bordering (Pieper 2018). Russian-speaking populations in, among others, Ukraine (Ferguson 2018), Estonia (Kallas 2016), are by default included in this concept of Russian world or Russian civilisation. Given the fact that the Russian Federation itself is an immensely multi-ethnic and multi-national state, the concept of Russian civilisation does not rest on a purely ethnic basis. This fact, in particular in the context of breakaway regions or de facto states over which the rump state has no authority, makes it possible for the Russian government to actively create Russian compatriots abroad.

In Abkhazia and South Ossetia/Tskhinvali, the Russian Federation started by simplifying Russian passport application procedures in 2002, by which, in the words of Vincent Artman (2013, 682), an “epistemic linkage between population and territory” was manufactured (see also Littlefield 2009). The issue of passportisation came to a head in 2008, when Georgia under Mikheil Saakashvili sought to reinstate control over the South Ossetia/Tskhinvali region, and the Russian government subsequently used the Russian citizenship of Ossetians to justify its conduct as ‘humanitarian intervention’ (Toal 2017). While geopolitical and civilisational attitudes towards the concept of Russian world vary discussed. However, given that this has not been the focus of my thesis, this section will necessarily be brief.
(O’Loughlin et al. 2016), many populations tend to agree with the concept for instrumental reasons, as aligning with the Russian Federation is, for Abkhazians and Ossetians, the only realistic way to maintain their independence from Georgia (Toal & O’Loughlin 2013). Notwithstanding the initial instrumental appeal, by means of being factually included in the Russian sphere – possessing Russian citizenship, receiving Russian pensions, potentially finding employment in the Russian Federation – Abkhazians and Ossetians do gradually become ‘Russianised’ and adapt to the idea of being part of Russian civilisation. In other words, the idea of ‘Russian world’ becomes an essential part of their ‘lived space,’ (Lefebvre 1992) investing the space they experience with a particular meaning.

Hitherto, I have discussed the concept of Russian world mostly in its purely geopolitical, or rather, geo-ideological meaning. However, it also carries a more straightforward ideological meaning, which serves to differentiate it from Europe or ‘the West’ not only geographically but also in terms of its political ideology. The contrast that proponents of the Russian world seek to draw manifests itself most clearly, firstly, through the concept of ‘sovereign democracy,’ and, secondly, by means of its opposition to liberal values fostered in Western Europe. While Russia’s sovereign democracy concept is used predominantly to differentiate itself from former Warsaw Pact countries which have either joined or seek to join the Western sphere of states represented by the EU and NATO, it also represents the Russian Federation’s desire to be acknowledged as a ‘normal’ negotiation partner in international politics, while cloaking the Federation’s still obvious democratic deficit. Its main critique of states such as Lithuania and Estonia, but also Georgia, is that they too quickly bow to the demands of international bodies such as NATO and the EU. Sovereign democracy is thus primarily an alternative way of organising a state, internally as well as externally, that seeks to provide an alternative especially to the EU model of cooperation between states which requires those states to relinquish part of their ultimate sovereignty, as well as EU- and US-led democracy promotion in its near abroad (Makarychev 2008; Babayan 2015).

In terms of liberal values, the Russian government presents itself as an alternative to western Europe, which it alleges has forsaken the sacred unity of the family by going along with such movements and ideologies as sexual liberation, feminism, and LGBTQ rights (Foxall 2019). This latter point also explains the affinity of many contemporary western European conservative and far right parties with the Russian government and state, some of the most famous examples being Marine le Pen in France, Thierry Baudet in The
Netherlands, and Viktor Orbán in Hungary. Ultimately, however, the geopolitical thrust of these ideological points remains limited. This is shown by the fact that governments which ideologically align with the Russian Federation, but who govern states whose relationship with Russia is historically fraught with suspicions, such as Poland, refuse to ally with Putin while governments whose country’s historical relationship with Russia is less troublesome do not (Bayer 2017).

The same is true, but even more explicitly, of Georgia, a country whose relationship with Russia is troublesome in a much more acute sense than, for example, Poland’s. For example, in a 2011 survey, 88% of respondents in Georgia responded that homosexuality is never justified (Caucasus Barometer 2011), a number slightly higher than in Russia, yet the Georgian state has much more forceful protections in place for the local LGBTQ community than the Russian Federation. Yet geopolitical anxiousness about Russian interference overshadows the frequent alignment on other ideological issues. The Georgian government, for its part, maintains these protections despite the disagreement from the vast majority of its electorate for fear of alienating its western European allies. During the controversy surrounding Tbilisi Pride in June 2019, the organization of the Pride consistently referred to anti-LGBTQ activists as ‘Russia-funded’; an accusation which is a common, if not the most common way to denounce one’s political opponents in Georgia.

Finally, the opposition that the Russian government seeks to pose by means of the Russian world concept comes back to the Russian-Georgian discursive conflict precisely because it seeks to provide an alternative to ‘Europe.’ For if ‘Russian world’ is meant to be an alternative to ‘Europe,’ the opposite is also the case. In other words, if one can differentiate oneself from (western) Europe by aligning with the geopolitical and ideological concept of Russian world, it is by default also possible to oppose Russia by aligning oneself with Europe. Given Georgia’s difficult historical as well as contemporary relation with Russia, a strong need to distance oneself from the Russian government pervades Georgian society. Given the geopolitical othering present in contemporary relations between Europe and Russia, as well as the fact that Russia is actively and explicitly seeking to provide an alternative geopolitical ideology to oppose the EU, the easiest and most explicit way to differentiate oneself from the Russian Federation becomes alignment with EU or the concept of ‘European.’
VIII. CONCLUSION: THE GLOBAL EAST AND ‘EUROPE’ AS A DISCURSIVE WEAPON

While in some parts of the world ‘being European’ may mean no more than a simple geographical indication, in spaces where the question of Europeanness gets more contentious the very meaning of ‘Europe’ may acquire significantly more meaning. As I have argued in this thesis, Georgia has a long history of contention with its primary adversary in the international arena, the Russian Federation, over the question of Europe. One my conceptual points of departure therein was that there is no objective, primordial meaning to a geographical denomination, whether this concerns its geographical boundaries or what it signifies to be part of said geographical entity. I have then sought to trace back the history of discourses around the supposed Europeanness of Georgia through the prism of about two centuries of its relations with Russia. In so doing, this study contributes to the undefinability of the concept of ‘Europe’ by tracing back the history of its use through the prism of Georgian-Russian relations, and the varying imaginative geographies going along with it.

I have found that in the colonial years of the 18th and 19th centuries, ‘Europe’ – at least for the Russian Empire – signified modernity, civilisation, and progress. Itself often denounced as Europe’s internal Other or as not quite European, the Russian Empire needed to find its own Other to prove to its western imperial counterparts its own Europeanness, which it found in the Caucasus, a territory which it could ‘civilise’ and ‘Europeanise.’ In the process of this civilising mission, Russian aesthetic products, here represented first and foremost by literature, actively engaged in processes of bordering and othering by establishing hierarchically ordered imaginative geographies. As such, they are excellent examples of border aesthetics in that they engaged in the very creation of the dividing lines and differences they purported to merely describe.

From around halfway through the century onwards, the Russian perception of the Caucasus started to change, as shown by maps produced in Russia in the mid-1800s which now firmly include the Caucasus in European Russia. Around the same time, a heightened self consciousness among peoples in the Caucasus emerged, which in Georgia culminated in
its national revival spearheaded by Ilia Chavchavadze. While the question of Europeanness was not very explicitly discussed in late 19th century Georgian discourse, some, such as Chavchavadze, returned the favour by discussing Russian ‘brutishness’ and lack of progress and development. Chavchavadze, with decolonial sensitivity, propagates an important counternarrative to Russian prevalence in the Caucasus. He challenged not only the Russian imaginative geography, but the very premises on which the Russian Empire based this imagination.

After the restoration of Georgia’s independence in 1991, finally, the long history of these discourses gradually became more weaponised. The assertions made by almost every consecutive Georgian president on the fact that Georgians, they would allege, had always known themselves to be part of the European family, is especially striking in the light of the almost complete absence of any reference to ‘Europe’ a little more than a century later. The concept has become weaponised because it is viewed as the strongest denominator allowing Georgia to disassociate itself from the Russian Federation. Strikingly, while Tbilisi can in no way be described as an imperial centre to Russia, the equation of the notion of European with familiar civilisational discourses is now reversed, with Georgia alleging that Russia remains stuck in its past and has not shown itself worthy of being considered a modern European country. Russia, for its part, seems to have abandoned the wish to be recognised as fully European it maintained in the 19th and early 20th centuries, and instead opted for presenting itself as not a nation or a mere state, but veritably and alternative civilisation to the Western European one.

This point explains how the geographical denominator ‘Europe’ can be utilised as an empty signifier in Georgia. Its various iterations in contemporary Georgia tend to contain little inherent meaning that all have in common, save for the fact that they are used antagonistically to oppose and differentiate Georgia from Russia. In this sense, a sort of discursive triangle emerges: given that social or discursive identity is constructed as difference, a large part of determining collective identity concerns differentiating it from what it is not (Laclau 2005). The first two parts of the triangle concern the mutual discursive othering between the EU – viewing itself as the ultimate representative of Europe – and Russia, which by means of the concept of ‘Russian world’ presents itself as a civilisational alternative to Europe. The third point, Georgia, constructs an important part of its contemporary international (geo-)political identity on differentiating itself from Russia. Given the already – and longstanding – othering ongoing between Russia and Europe, one of
the most discursively forceful ways of doing so is by identifying Georgia as European, while maintaining that Russia is not or cannot be European.

The fluidity of the concept of ‘Europe’ has long been acknowledged and much research on it has already been conducted. My research affirms that notion, but also contributes to it by showing how in specific circumstances this allows the denominator ‘European,’ as a not purely geographical but as an actively geopolitical label, to also be utilized as a rhetorical and geopolitical device. In Georgia today, the imaginative geography established in the orientalist period is maintained to some degree, albeit in slightly different terms. While earlier this imaginative geography established a normative imagined dichotomy between east and west, and these were roughly equated with ‘Europe’ (west) and its Others (east), today the concept of Europe has been actively redefined in Georgia with specific ideological reasons. As such, Europe is still considered normatively more desirable as ‘not-Europe,’ and it is alleged that the Russian government today is insufficiently European. Thus, while earlier research has demonstrated the geopolitical weaponisation of the concept of ‘Europe’ by the EU itself (e.g. Bueno Lacy & van Houtum 2015), my research shows that this concept may also operate in different ways under different conditions. Indeed, whereas the EU, internationally the most powerful player in the European region, uses the concept of Europe to ‘prove’ its own prevalence in the region, Georgia today actively uses ‘Europe’ as a tool to distance itself from another powerful player in its own region, the Russian Federation. Today’s Georgia seeks to remain free from Russian interference, and, as it turns out, adding the denominator ‘European’ to its own name gives this desire extra rhetorical weight.

Finally, this study also contributes to the variety in understandings of ‘colonial’ and ‘postcolonial.’ As my earlier chapters have attempted to demonstrate, in the 19th century the relation between the Russian Empire on the one hand and Georgia and the Caucasus at large on the other was colonial in ways very similar to the relation between western European empires and the ‘orient.’ In other ways, however, particularly the decolonial development of relations between Georgia and Russia are very different from the colonial experiences of other peoples. An anecdote well-known in former Soviet states recalled by Martin Müller (2018, 9) illustrates this: an old man relates to his interviewer how he “was born in Austria-Hungary, went to school in Czechoslovakia, married in Hungary, worked most of his life in the Soviet Union, and retired in Ukraine.” When the interviewer subsequently asks him
whether he travelled a lot, the old man replies that he never moved from Mukachevo.\textsuperscript{30} The point, illustrated by the above anecdote and many others, is that what Müller calls the ‘global East’ does not fit comfortably into existing categories. This study has therefore responded to Müller’s call for more theorisation of a global east, characterised above all by being “different but similar, Other but not quite” (Müller 2018, 5). Georgia, as I have shown, is determined precisely by such conditions, whether in its relation with the EU or with the Russian Federation. Like many states that could be categorised under the global East, its former colonial state (or, in this case, its successor) remains on Georgia’s doorstep; in some cases, one foot is already inside. I therefore want to conclude by extending Müller’s call by expanding it, realising that in theorising the conditions of various states captured by this category, attention must also be paid to the unique relationship and development thereof they maintain with the states which ruled them in the past.

\textsuperscript{30} A city today in the Zakarpatska region in extreme western Ukraine which has throughout the past two centuries, in ways not unlike Georgia, found itself incorporated within a number of different empires and states, but always on the very edges of them.
By way of a brief addendum, permit me to note that, to some degree, I was to acquire personal experience with this weaponisation and its concomitant anti-Russian sentiment. The organisation at which I conducted my internship, Caucasian House, has on multiple occasions been accused of being pro-Russian – politically, the worst one can be called in Georgia – for the simple fact of advocating the maintaining of an international political dialogue with the Russian Federation. The two are, after all, neighbours. During my stay in Tbilisi I was also able to follow the June 2019 demonstrations firsthand, witnessing a crowd of Georgians in front of the parliament jointly shouting ‘Putin khuylo,’ a phrase insulting Putin whose popularity is ubiquitous not only in Georgia but also in Ukraine (the Lviv-based brewery Pravda even went so far as to name one of their beers after this phrase).

Moreover, Caucasian House commissioned me to write an article for their analytical portal, the preparation of which provided me with plenty of ideas I could later use in this thesis. Through their very personal experience with the rhetorical use of the discourse of ‘Europe vs. Russia,’ they were able to provide me with a host of suggestions as for where to look. It appears, sometimes, as though NGOs in Georgia such as Caucasian House and many others are the only actors actively trying to find a resolution to Georgia’s conflicts with Russia. Russian politicians have no desire to do so because they can maintain a degree of leverage over a small but rebellious neighbour; Georgian politicians find it useful to retain the possibility of denouncing opponents for allegedly being pro-Russian, which if nothing else is easier than advocating a coherent political programme by oneself.
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