Transformation of Academic Identities in Georgia

Diffractive Narratives in-between *De*futuring and *Re*futuring

by

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation research explores the complexity of transformations of academic lives and academic identities along the multiple, non-linear, conflicting, and paradoxical trajectories of the pre-Soviet, Soviet, and post-Soviet times and spaces. Academic literature on the post-Soviet transformations of higher education has usually focused on structural reforms and policy changes, as well as their compatibility with the European and Western higher education policy agenda. Guided by the theoretical insights from the decolonial and post-Socialist transformation studies, this dissertation research intends to decenter the education policies and reforms from being a focal point of analysis; instead, it spotlights the transformation of Georgian academics through their memories, lived experiences, and imaginations about the future. The study offers insights into personal and collective experiences of being and becoming an academic in the process of navigating the evolving historical, political, cultural, and institutional contexts at three public universities in Georgia. Drawing on the narrative-ethnographic methodology, this study explores the complicated scenes and nuances of Georgian academic space by portraying how academics construct, reconstruct, adjust, resist, negotiate, and reinvent their academic selves during the post-Soviet transformations. Diffractive analysis of the narratives and ethnographic observations illustrates multiple intra-actions of academic identities through various temporal and spatial reconfigurations, revealing that the Soviet past is not left behind, and the European future is not that certain. Instead, the liminal academic space is haunted by the (re)awakened pasts and (re)imagined futures, and their inseparability enacts various co-existing scenarios of *de*futuring and *re*futuring of academic identities.

DEDICATION

To my dad, Soso Tsotniashvili,

My dad is the most influential teacher in my life. Since my childhood, with his remarkable mathematical pedagogy, he taught me to take on difficult tasks and embrace the thinking process. His words, 'Even if you don't find a solution, stay with the problem, be patient, and keep pondering; eventually, a different perspective and understanding will emerge,' has guided both my life and academic journeys.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

ECTS - European Credit Transfer System

EHEA -European Higher Education Area

ENQA- The European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education

ESG - The Standards and guidelines for quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area

EU - European Union

GTU - Georgian Technical University

HEI - Higher Education Institution

ISU -Ilia State University

QA - Quality Assurance

TSPI - Tskhinvali State Pedagogical Institute

TSU - Tbilisi State University

UN - United Nations

US - United States

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

We are still far from the democratic future that we were expecting as a result of the post-Soviet transformations. Similarly, the higher education system is still not as prestigious and profound as we expected it to become after joining the European higher education space. The primary problem with the post-Soviet future is that society has not yet learned how to be free and responsible for our own future. We fight our Soviet selves every day.
(Erekle, a professor from Ilia State University)

The sentiments about the unattained future of post-Soviet transformation shared by a professor from Ilia State University illustrate the struggle of the Georgian academic community amidst the geopolitical, historical, and cultural transition, which is echoed throughout the broader society. This narrative brings into focus the inherent tension of being and becoming in the space between Soviet and Western modernity, highlighting the question of *what has been* and *what is yet to come*, while emphasizing the limits of the society in envisioning and shaping its own future. With this research, my goal is to uncover the intricate layers of the post-Soviet transformations of the Georgian higher education system and untangle the question of being and becoming. By putting into focus the transformation of academic identities, I intend to explore the possibilities for Georgian professors to reclaim the power of reimagining and reconstructing the academic space and their academic identities.

Setting a Research Stage

The breakdown of the Soviet Union in 1991 triggered major political, economic, and social transformations in post-Soviet Georgia and created new possibilities for the development of the higher education system in the country. However, the euphoria of independence and freedom was soon replaced by existential concerns. The aftermath of

the Soviet Union's collapse had a profound and detrimental impact on the higher education system, destroying higher education infrastructure, breeding corruption, and compromising academic capacity (Chakhaia & Bregvadze, 2018; Parliament of Georgia, 2001; Perkins, 1998). Furthermore, the political and economic crisis had a profound effect on the academic community, which had to survive an ongoing post-Soviet crisis and, at the same time, reinvent and reposition academic lives in the context of the new post-Soviet reality.

The chaos of the first decade of post-socialist transformations was soon followed by the influx of neoliberal policies implemented by the new pro-Western government (Jibladze, 2017). Georgia joined the Bologna process in 2005, making European higher education policy and structure the central reference point for the transformation of the national higher education system (Jibladze, 2013). The combination of the post-Soviet crisis, Soviet legacies, and radical neoliberal reforms narrowed the choices for the development trajectories of the higher education system and locked it into the dominant Western paradigm. Since then, the Georgian higher education system has been going through continuous reforms, striving to achieve the declared goal of making the system more compatible with European standards (Darchia et al., 2019; Parliament of Georgia, 2001). However, the process has been complicated by the unstable political landscape, multiple and often contradictory policies, as well as reactions and tensions between and within academic communities, policy-makers, and the broader stakeholder circles. As a result, despite continuous higher education reforms, even after three decades of post-Soviet transformations, higher education institutions (HEIs) still suffer from outdated practices inherited from Soviet times combined with the adverse effects of the rigid and

technical adaptation of the European policies (Huisman, 2019; Kuraev, 2016; Oleksiyenko, 2016; Tsotniashvili, 2020) which are also becoming obsolete. This condition is symptomatic of the implementation of global neoliberal policies in higher education systems and requires critical examination of the impact of dominant, universal, and singular project of modernization and development on academic communities (Johnson, 2008; Silova, 2009).

Academic literature on the transformation of higher education in post-Soviet countries usually focuses on structural reforms and policy changes, as well as their compatibility with the European and Western higher education policy agenda. What is often missing is a thorough investigation of the lived experiences of individuals profoundly impacted by these reforms and, at the same time, essentially determining their (un)success and (in)effectiveness. Consequently, the existing literature fails to grasp the intricate social, cultural, and contextual layers of the post-Soviet transformations, which shape the transformation trajectory itself. In this regard, my goal is to decenter the education policies and reforms from being a focal point of analysis and turn to academics who have been navigating the labyrinths of higher education reforms along with the chaotic political, cultural, and economic transitions. In this regard, I foreground this study around the concept of academic identities, which hold significance for capturing the complexity and dynamics of the academic realm as they encompass the intricate values, beliefs, behavioral patterns, and cultural essence of the academic community (Henkel, 2005a, Henkel & Vabø, 2006).

Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

Guided by research in decolonial and post-socialist transformation studies, this dissertation research explores the complexity of the transformation of academic lives and academic identities along the multiple non-linear, conflicting, and paradoxical trajectories unfolding over the pre-Soviet, Soviet, and post-Soviet times and spaces. It spotlights the identity formation of Georgian academics through their lived experiences, storytelling, and imaginations about the future. Specifically, the study intends to explore the following research questions:

1. How do Georgian academics construct, deconstruct, and reconstruct their academic identities in light of the post-Soviet transformations of academic space and time?
2. How do academic knowledge production spaces impact the formation of academic identities in the transition from Soviet to Western modernity?
3. How can the de-/re-construction of academic identities impact the future imaginaries of Georgian higher education?

While pursuing this study of exploration of academic identities, the goal is not only to find similar themes and patterns but to illuminate differences in experiences, perceptions, and contexts by analyzing the data diffractively through each other and the theory (Barad, 2007). This approach enables disruption of the established binaries and singular understandings of the post-Soviet transformations, bringing into focus new meanings of "what is/might yet be/have been" (Barad, 2017, p. 113).

Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

The theoretical and conceptual framework is designed to uncover the complexity of the transformation of academic identities in the post-Soviet context. For this purpose, I initially planned to combine three different but interconnected perspectives: academic identities, decolonial and post-socialist transformation studies, and hauntology. The conceptualization of academic identities provides a multifaceted lens for the investigation of lived experiences of academics shaped by their individual characteristics and interactions with others through which they make sense of their academic lives during the transition from Soviet to post-Soviet time and space. Research in decolonial and post-socialist transformation studies is used to situate the academic identities in the post-Soviet context and enable its critical reexamination. The concept of hauntology is used to explain the interconnectedness of the memories about the past, experiences of the present, and imaginaries about the future. Bringing these three strands of literature together seemed meaningful and productive (at least initially) for addressing the research questions. However, during and even after finishing the research fieldwork in Georgia, I noticed that I was struggling to answer my third research question about envisioning the future of Georgian academic space. This realization was particularly disturbing as this was my biggest hope and ambition for commencing this research to explore alternative trajectories for the future development of the Georgian academic space through the voices of Georgian academics. I had an especially difficult time identifying narratives that portrayed the envisioned or desirable futures, as many of my respondents would simply say: “It is difficult to say anything about it,” “I do not have a planned future,” or

"When you told me that we will also talk about the future plans, it made me smile because I realized that I do not want to stay at the university anymore."

My initial reaction was desperation – not only because I thought I was failing to answer my dissertation research question but also because of the possibility that Georgian academics were losing all hope in their future, and the stories about possible futures were disappearing, too. This admission was a difficult one to make, as I did not want to acknowledge that the disconnection from the future was also a finding – perhaps the most important one – even if I felt desperate about it. Grappling with this uncomfortable challenge has led me to explore a fascinating strand of literature on *de*futuring – adding another conceptual layer to my theoretical framework – which offered a critical theoretical tool and language to explore the unsustainable practices embedded in modern/colonial institutional design, including in the post-Soviet academic life. First articulated by the Australian design theorist Tony Fry (1999), the concept of *de*futuring offers a powerful means to comprehend that we live in a world that is taking away futures for ourselves and others and, at the same time, entails a mode of acting in the world that can help us contest the negation of the world – that is, *de*futuring holds the key to *re*futuring. In other words, Fry offers a critical deconstructive reading and comprehension of *de*futuring designs that are essential learnings for *re*futuring. This theoretical lens and closer reading and rereading of the data over time helped me to see the narratives about the future in more meaningful ways – both as *de*futuring and *re*futuring – and also helped me to rethink these narratives as the "necessary learning" that provided openings for envisioning alternatives. The other three concepts shaping the theoretical framework of this study are briefly reviewed below and further elaborated in the theory chapter.

Academic Identities

The concept of academic identity is a multifaceted, contested, and evolving notion, which encompasses various perspectives and interpretations across different onto-epistemological and disciplinary traditions. According to Henkel (2005a), strong and stable communities, deeply rooted values and beliefs, behavioral patterns, and even myths are at the core of the formation of durable academic identities. However, the influx of neoliberal principles and marketization in higher education, along with the emergence of quality assurance regimes, have impacted the academic landscape, challenging the traditional understanding of academic identities as stable and enduring entities (Barnett & Di Napoli, 2008). In these circumstances, academics engage in the dynamic process of redefining their identities and roles in relation to others within the academic community and in the broader context. In the context of Georgia, the turbulence of the global higher education trends is further complicated by the post-Soviet transformations. Therefore, the formation of academic identities entails multiple streams of transformations, such as national, political, economic, social, cultural, and generational transitions between the Soviet, post-Soviet, and Western times and spaces.

Academic literature on academic identities predominantly highlights the individual and social dimensions of academic identities and the importance of their intersectionality. The main sources of the formation of individual identities include personal and demographic characteristics and related experiences (Gill, 2017; LaSala et al., 2008; Pifer &Baker, 2013), agency, and personal lives (Clegg, 2008a; McAlpine et al., 2014). Collective identity implies that an individual belongs to a particular social group(s) and members of this group share similar social identifications, values, and

beliefs, distinguishing themselves from the identification features of other social groups (Jenkins, 1996; Stets & Burke, 2000). Risse (2011) highlights that "collective identities are not only shared, they are collectively shared" (p. 22). Collective identities also entail emotional attachment to particular groups (Risse, 2011; Stets & Burke, 2000). Although academics are part of increasingly diversifying academic communities and networks, scholarly literature predominantly highlights institutional, disciplinary, and professional dimensions as the sources of the formation of social identities. Furthermore, scholarship on academic identities mostly derives from the Western epistemic space. Therefore, it vastly misses the consideration of complexities, uncertainties, precarity, and behavioral patterns of non-Western universities and cultures.

Based on the exploration of a wide variety of complex and contested conceptualizations of identities across different disciplines, my research study has been designed to foreground a multidimensional analytical lens situated in the context of post-Soviet transformations. For the purposes of my research, I define *academic identity as a liminal state of being and becoming, which constitutes a reflexive and diffractive process of construction, deconstruction, and reconstruction of the academic self over time and space through adjusting, resisting, negotiating, and reinventing it.* This means that academics hold multiple identities – while some become dominant at certain periods of time, others remain subsidiary and some disappear. Moreover, identities are constructed, deconstructed, and reconstructed through the individual's personal characteristics and their socialization with others; changing political, cultural, institutional, or community-based settings; persisting beliefs and past experiences gained in various social contexts;

past, present, and future images of 'self' seen by the self and by others; personal memories, emotions and experiences; and the fixed personal essence of self.[1]

Decolonial, Post-colonial, and Post-socialist Identities

Scholarly literature in decolonial and postcolonial studies provides a critical perspective to reexamine the implementation of Western neoliberal reforms, which overlook the diverse historical, economic, and cultural contexts, impose technical 'solutions' for complex problems, and push the local systems of non-Western countries in the singular trajectory – and ultimately a trap – of (Western) modernity and progress. Post-socialist transformations share similar trajectories with other decolonial and postcolonial settings (Silova, 2014; Tlostanova, 2015), thus offer a useful perspective for situating the study on academic identities in the post-Soviet context. These theoretical perspectives help to understand how academic identities evolve in response to the processes of de-Sovietization and re-Westernization that shape the Georgian academic space.

Decolonial thinking encompasses two foundational acts – delinking and border thinking (Mignolo, 2011a) – which disrupt the dominant discourse through the voices and narratives of academics, challenging the established hierarchies, as well as binary and deficient understandings of non-linear and non-monolithic transformations occurring in the Georgian academic space. Delinking from the dominant trajectory of re-Westernization and the accompanying hegemony of knowledge production in the post-socialist space allows to "reclaim our own positions as epistemic subjects" (Silova et al.,

[1] See Table 1, which summarizes the conceptual framework for the transformation of academic identities.

2017, p. 74) and explore alternative options for education transformation trajectories. Furthermore, decolonial research uncovers and brings into conversation the decolonial practices that Georgian academics have been mastering throughout the Soviet and post-Soviet times to navigate the Soviet and Western policy regimes. Thereby, decolonial research of academic identities has the potential to reposition and portray academics as active agents in shaping their academic identities and reshaping the broader academic space.

Haunted Identities

Academic identities are entangled in time – they are shaped by past experiences, knowledges, and emotions – and they are bound to the envisioned future (Brew, 2014). Drawing on Derrida's (1994) concept of hauntology and emphasizing the indeterminacy of time and being, Barad (2017) notes that hauntings are not simply the immaterial memories of the past, but they are "ineliminable feature of existing material conditions" (p. 107). Exploring the transformation of academic identities from the hauntological perspective challenges and disrupts the linear conception of time, history, progress, and democratization assumed by Western modernity. Recognizing the interconnectedness of different temporal and spatial configurations (spacetimemattering), I use the hauntological lens to explore academic identities and reveal the complicated and diverging paths, (re)turnings and departures to and from certain Soviet and post-Soviet timespaces.

Overview of Research Design

The design of this study is built on narrative ethnographic inquiry (Chase, 2005; Gubrium & Holstein, 2008). This methodological choice allowed me to immerse myself into the Georgian academic community and capture the richness and complexity of the concept of academic identity by collecting a variety of narratives and, at the same time, paying attention to the cultural, emotional, and behavioral elements of academic lives and academic environment.

In order to align the research design with the theoretical and conceptual underpinnings of this study, I have incorporated the narrative inquiry and narrative identities as a method (Bochner & Ellis, 1996; Clandinin, 2006; Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007; McAdams, 2011; Mishler, 1999; Sarris, 2022; Sfard & Prusak, 2005) and combined it with the decolonial methodological approach (Silova et al., 2017; Sium & Ritskes, 2013; Smith, 1999; Thambinathan & Kinsella, 2021).

For narrative inquiry, identities are the narrated composition of individuals' lives, indicating the constantly developing story of 'selves' and others, as well as the interpretation of the social world. Narrative inquiry creates a space for the expression of emotion, feelings, and reactions, enabling the researcher and participant to become "fully immersed - morally, aesthetically, emotionally and intellectually" (Bochner & Ellis, 1996, p. 4). Clandinin (2006) introduces the three commonplaces of narratives: (i) temporality, holding experiences that are shaped through the past, present, and future of people, places, and things; (ii) place, shaping our experiences, stories, and identities; and (iii) sociality, encompassing people's experiences under certain social conditions shaped through historical, cultural, social, institutional and linguistic factors. Sociality also

indicates the interaction between the researcher and participants. Consideration of these three dimensions enables exploration of the “complexity of relational compositions of people’s lived experiences…and … imagine the future possibilities of these lives” (Clandinin & Huber, 2010, p. 436).

McAdams (2011) highlights that the story itself (and only a story) is an identity, where the life story is a “finished product” of identity for a certain point of time (thus, still recognizing the ‘work-in-progress’ nature of a self). Sfard and Prusak (2005) further emphasize that they view stories as identities and not as identities that are expressed in stories.

Approaching the ethnographic narrative inquiry from the decolonial lens intends to create a respectful, sincere, and non-hierarchical space between the researcher and the researched for storytelling and reflexive expression of thoughts, emotions, and imaginations. The decolonial endeavor of inquiry engages the participants in decolonial thinking, which entails returning to the past and retelling and reclaiming stories of lived experiences that have been concealed underneath the rhetoric of post-Soviet transformation and European modernization, conveying the moral and epistemic violence preceded by Soviet repressions.

Ethnographic narrative inquiry provides a wide variety of options for collecting the data, as for the ethnographic eye, everything around is a source of data. For the purposes of this study, the primary data collection methods incorporated life story interviews, walk-a-long interviews, and observations of daily academic life and university public events. The study engaged academics from three Georgian universities: Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University (TSU), Georgian Technical University

(GTU), and Ilia State University (ISU). All of them are public universities located in Tbilisi (the capital city of Georgia), but they have different historical legacies, academic traditions, and institutional cultures. The study primarily relied on 22 interviews conducted among the academics of three universities, who were selected through purposeful sampling aiming at collecting diverse narratives from academics with different academic and personal backgrounds and characteristics. The analyzed interview data constituted a total of over 75 hours.

The data analysis relied on the dynamic and interactive engagement with the data and theory, following the process described by MacLure (2008), which involves "poring over the data, annotating, describing, linking, bringing theory to bear, recalling what others have written, and seeing things from different angles" (p. 174). This process incorporated the diffractive analysis (Barad, 2007; Mazzei, 2014) and a three-dimensional narrative analysis (Clandinin and Connelly, 1990, 2000). Diffractive analysis of narratives and ethnographic fieldnotes entails the practice of "reading insights through one another in ways that help illuminate differences as they emerge"(Barad, 2007, p. 03) and creates a possibility for reconfiguring the material-discursive practices and produces new meanings and understandings for the open-ended process of its materialization in time and space. Meanwhile, the narrative analysis situates the data in time and space through broadening, burrowing, storying, and restorying, providing the richness of contextualization of narratives and highlighting the social, cultural, and historical contexts in which the stories are enacted. Moreover, this approach engages the emotional, moral, and aesthetic qualities of storytelling in the analytical process. These analytical approaches enable comprehension of the data, finding the threads and disjunctions

between them, linking them with the ethnographic fieldnotes, thinking through the theoretical frameworks, and drawing certain contours for organizing narratives and constructing the structure for writing the study findings.

My writing process was guided by "writing as a method of inquiry" (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005, 2008). This approach embraces the inherent subjectivity and reflexivity of a researcher in the ethnographic inquiry. It fosters the interpretive process while foregrounding interactions between the data and theory. Moreover, it articulates the role of the researcher in the diffractive reading of the data, as the data and theory are threaded and cut together apart through their intra-action with the researcher's subjectivity. This approach enhances the diffractive process of unfolding the differences in studying the identities of Georgian academics, bringing into focus new meanings and understandings. It opens up the space for further diffractions through the intra-action of this study with the reader and, therefore, for the new meanings of "what is/might yet be/have been" (Barad, 2017, p. 113). Writing as a method of inquiry not only enriches the research process but extends its significance beyond its immediate context, fostering a continuum of meaning-making through intra-actions between the researcher, the researched, and the readers.

Overview of the Dissertation

The dissertation is structured across six chapters, providing a comprehensive study of the transformation of academic identities and academic space in the context of post-Soviet transformation with a spotlight on Georgian universities as the location of the research field. Chapter 1 serves as an introduction to delineate the research purpose and

research questions, as well as provide a theoretical and methodological overview in which the study is grounded. Chapter 2 delves into the historical and geopolitical context of the emergence and transformation of higher education in Georgia. The chapter is divided into sections that correspond to distinct historical eras determining the trajectories of higher education development from pre-Soviet times to the current day. Chapter 3 provides a literature review of the theoretical and conceptual perspectives foregrounding this study. Informed with this review, this chapter introduces the theoretical and conceptual approaches that have been used for conducting a decolonial study of academic identities haunted by the Soviet past, the continuum of the transitioning present, and the influence of the Western/European future. Chapter 4 describes the narrative ethnographic design of this study and provides the researcher's positionality in relation to making certain methodological and theoretical choices. This chapter also introduces the research fieldwork sites and the research participants by their collective and composite narratives. Chapter 5 provides the findings of the study and uncovers the multiple practices of the "art of duplicity" mastered by the Georgian academics through which they have been navigating the post-Soviet transformation of the higher education system and negotiating and reinventing their academic selves. Chapter 6 summarizes the main highlights of the study, emphasizing the theoretical implications and contributions to the academic literature. It also discusses the implications of the findings for policy and practice.

CHAPTER 2

HISTORICAL CONTEXT: TRAJECTORIES OF HIGHER EDUCATION TRANSFORMATION IN GEORGIA

Pre-Soviet Higher Education Legacy

The significant events in the development of higher education in Georgia coincide with the periods of the political and economic prosperity of the country. According to the historical sources (Iremadze, n.d), the tradition of academic education in Georgia traces back to the 3rd-4th AC when the Greek-style educational center Higher School of Philosophy and Rhetoric of Colchis was founded in the ancient Georgian kingdom Lazica (controlled by the Roman Empire). During this time, Lazica gained partial autonomy from the Roman Empire and extended its territories (Javakhishvili, 1951). Another seminal time for the cultural and educational advancement of the country coincides with the most prosperous period in Georgian history starting from the 11th century, during the reign of the greatest Georgian king - David (IV) the Builder (1089-1125), who was the founder of the Gelati Academy and Monastery. The academy was located in the western part of Georgia and represented a theological-philosophical school “synthesizing the knowledge and faith of Athens and Jerusalem” (Tavadze, 2018, p. 148). It operated as an important educational and cultural center throughout the medieval period and provided space for research “untrammeled by strict dogmatic restrictions” (Tavadze, 2018, p. 138) and for the development of original Georgian thought (Javakhishvili, 1983) emerging at the crossroad of cultures. In the same period, a scholar from the Gelati Academy - Arsen

of Ikalto - founded an educational center in the East part of Georgia - Ikalto Academy. The teaching at Ikalto Academy was built on the Greek Trivium-Quidrivium model, integrating philosophical and theological knowledge (Khuroshvili, n.d). The academies remained prominent educational and cultural centers for centuries. However, the geopolitical changes c followed by the gradual annexation of Georgia by the Russian Empire in the 1800s impeded their operation.

Under the Russian Empire, Georgian youth from noble families traveled abroad, predominantly to Russia or Germany, to receive education. While young intellectuals appreciated the education received in Russian universities, they were also humiliated by Russia's imperial attitude, treating Georgians as ignorant, justifying the annexation of the Caucasus by presenting Russia as being "obliged to bring Russian and Western culture to the peripheral region" (Reisner, 2009, p. 42). This young generation of Georgian intellectuals called themselves "Tergdaleulebi," denoting a journey from Russia to Georgia as they had to cross the River Tergi at the Russian-Georgian border (Reisner, 2009). This geographical borderline has also acted as a space where the identities and minds of Georgian intellectuals returning to their homeland were unsettled. Georgians educated in Russia often experienced an identity crisis, commonly accompanied by anxiety, caused by their disappointment with Georgia's traditional, religion-based, and hierarchical societal culture and deprived state of homeland contested by impressions about the effectiveness of the Tsarist state institutes and the advantage of secular education (Reisner, 2009; Chavchavadze, 1861). This discomfort became a seed for initiating a

national movement for “Georgia’s national rebirth” at the time of regaining independence from Tsarist Russia in 1918 (Reisner, 2009).

Georgian intellectuals saw education as the main force for modernizing Georgian society, inspiring national revival, and restoring oppressed and unsettled identities. In 1879, a more institutionalized form of the national movement, “Society for the spreading literacy among Georgians,” was established by national movement leaders Ilia Chavchavadze and his associates with the main mission to sustain and promote the Georgian language, disseminate education among broader society, and promote cultural development (National Archive of Georgia, n.d). The Society founded schools and other educational and cultural societies and published books in Georgian, including the first textbook in Georgian literacy authored by Iakob Gogebashvili. The Society also supported the development of the Georgian press, hence creating a platform for expressing public opinions and communicating the ideas of the national movement (Jones, 2005; Reisner, 2018). Therefore, national sentiments have always been an important identity component of Georgian intellectuals and academics.

The Society strived to establish a national university, as well. However, this idea was not supported by the authorities of Tsarist Russia due to the fear that the university would empower the revolutionary movement. The Russian authorities also brought up a colonial argument in the discussion that Georgia did not have sufficient scholarly and academic capacity relevant for the university and suggested focusing on polytechnical institutes (Liluashvili & Gaiparashvili, 2016). Nevertheless, along with the growing revolutionary movement in Russia, Georgian intellectuals re-engaged in

the discussion of planning and establishing a national university. After the Russian Revolution of 1917, Georgia became an independent state. Under the leadership of Ivane Javakhishvili and the enormous efforts of his associates, the first university in the Caucasus region, Tbilisi State University (TSU), was officially established on February 8, 1918 (Jorbenadze, 1968). This event was described as the “restoration of the sovereignty of the Georgian mind” (Liluashvili & Gaiprashvili, 2006, p. 13) as it coincided with the period of Georgia’s liberation from Russia’s imperial-colonial order. The university was established as an autonomous institution based on a European model integrating teaching and research and a democratic governance style. Initially, the priority was given to establishing the Faculty of Philosophy as the founders considered the development of public opinion as a major mission of the university, later followed by the Faculty of Natural Sciences and Mathematics and the Faculty of Medicine. Although the university was struggling with the scarcity of financial resources and political instability in the Caucasus region, it still kept developing and expanding, tried to be politically active and provide academic commentary on ongoing political and societal events (Liluashvili, 2006; Jorbenadze, 1968). However, its development as an autonomous institution perpetuating its original mission was interrupted by the Soviet invasion of Georgia in 1921, suspending Georgia’s short-lived independence for the next 70 years.

The short period of independence was not sufficient for the fundamental transformation of post-colonial society (Nodia, 2018). However, the three years of independence (1918-1921), which were accompanied by national movements and the creation of cultural and educational foundations such as the Society for the Spreading

Literacy among Georgians and Tbilisi State University, created a meaningful ground and a strong reference point for the idea of building an autonomous and liberal academic space in Georgia. The short period of independence also changed the "national psyche" (Nodia, 2018, p. 53), as the "nationalism rooted in memories of life without the USSR" (Suny, 1993, p. 156) gave a strong impulse to pursuing the idea of an independent Georgian state during the years of the demise of the Soviet Union (Nodia, 2018).

Sovietization of Higher Education

The Sovietization of higher education was gradual during the first five years (1921-1926). At the beginning of Soviet rule, the Communist Party officials started intervening in university governance. The Faculties of Philosophy and Natural Sciences were restructured as one pedagogical faculty, and new programs with industrial profiles were opened (e.g., mechanics, construction, mining) (Jorbenadze, 1968). The influence of Soviet ideology on higher education became prominent in 1926 when the Soviet government abolished the autonomy of the university. This meant that higher education institutions became subordinate to the People's Commissariat of Enlightenment (an agency of the Soviet government in charge of education), which appointed the rector, members, and president of the governing body and approved the appointment of professors (Fitzpatrick, 1992). The Communist Party officially assigned a representative at an institution who had equal power as a rector, and important institutional decisions were made jointly (Kuraev, 2016). In the same year, the rector of the TSU, Ivane Javakhishvili, was dismissed

from his position and, for several years, was even denied delivering the lectures (Nadiradze, 2012).

In 1936, a central Higher School Affairs Committee was created, which was responsible for teaching and methodological aspects of all universities in the Soviet Union, resulting in the unification of the higher education teaching curriculum (Matthews, 2012; Jorbenadze, 1968). The schools of social sciences were restructured to train the servants of the Soviet government. At several universities across the Soviet Union, social science programs were completely shut down because of the shortage of professors who would teach the social sciences based on the Marxist-Leninist ideology (Fitzpatrick, 1992).

In Georgia, academic fields such as philosophy, psychology, and history were abandoned. Instead, courses perpetuating Soviet ideology, such as Soviet constitution, socialist history, historical materialism, and socialist economics, became mandatory (Liluashvili & Gaiparashvili, 2006; Fitzpatrick, 1992). For teaching Marxist theories, more Communist lecturers were recruited, however, literature highlights that their academic competencies were weak, and in some cases, their appointments were a formality (Fitzpatrick, 1992).

With time, sustaining the original values of the university became more difficult. The academic tradition was not strong enough to resist the Soviet ideology, especially since it was based on repressive measures, particularly against the intellectual elite who were seen as a threat to the regime. In the 1920s, an article on 'anti-Soviet agitation and propaganda' became part of the criminal code of the Soviet

republics and was used to punish intellectuals for expressing their critical views[2] (Maggs, 2017). The Soviet repressions started in the early 1920s and reached their peak in 1936-1938 – a period which became known as the Great Purge or Great Terror – when about one million people from Soviet republics became victims of Stalin's regime (Conquest, 2018). The communist government openly stated that they "took the administrative measures to deport" a considerable group of the intelligentsia on ideological grounds (Fitzpatrick, 1992) or sentenced them to death for treason and treachery (Conquest, 2018). To survive the repressions, many members of the intellectual elite emigrated to Europe. Those who stayed had to find ways to navigate the new regime by implicitly sustaining the original mission of the university or collaborating with the Soviet regime (Gaiparashvili & Liluashvili, 2006; Shlapentokh, 1990).

Two major trends influenced the Soviet higher education system in the 1930s. First, the Communist Party leadership was concerned about the lack of educated and skilled party members, as the party was predominantly composed of peasants and working-class people. This urged them to make radical changes in the education policy in order to create "its own elite" (p. 381) coming from the working class (Fitzpatrick, 1979). Another major factor was the Soviet political and economic policy of national industrialization (Kuraev, 2016). Academic education was seen as inadequate for equipping labor with relevant technical skills; thus, it was replaced by programs with technical specializations. As a result, in 1930, TSU was reorganized and separate institutions were established, including the Polytechnical Institute of

[2] This article was abolished only in 1989.

Georgia, Agrarian Institute, Georgia State Medical Institute, Tbilisi State Pedagogical Institute, Institute of Finance and Economics, Institute of Soviet Construction and Law (Jorbenadze, 1968). During the 1930s, there was a mass influx of students coming from the Communist Party and the working class enrolling in technical education. However, the increased focus on technical education was disputed even among the leadership of the Soviet authorities, as the system failed to prepare qualified graduates ('cadres') able to make competent decisions (Fitzpatrick, 1979). Similarly, the decision about the breakdown of TSU was criticized for impeding the development of scientific and scholarly work in the areas crucial for the Soviet state's development (Jorbenadze, 1968). As a result, in 1933, TSU was re-established, covering programs in the fields of physics and mathematics, natural sciences, history and literature, economics, Soviet construction, and law. On a larger scale, in the 1930s the Soviet policy was considered as an attempt for the "rehabilitation of the bourgeois experts" (Fitzpatrick, 1979, p. 390). By the end of the Great Purge, Stalin already considered that a new Soviet intelligentsia (also called "toiling intelligentsia") was created and "the remnants of the old intelligentsia were dissolved in the body of a new, Soviet, people's intelligentsia" (Fitzpatrick, 1979, p. 399).

Although the hostility between the Soviet state and intellectuals has lasted throughout the entire Soviet history, and its intensity was changing in different republics at different time periods, the animosity and marginalization toward the pre-revolutionary educated stratum decreased by the beginning of the 1940s (Shlapentokh, 1990; Tromley, 2013). Besides, the vision of the Communist state towards education shifted, stating that the party would ultimately make all workers

and peasants "cultured and educated" (Fitzpatrick, 1979, p. 399). The intellectuals were seen as the agents for realizing the Soviet project of modernization and culturalization of society. However, the combination of the traumatic experiences of the Great Purge, followed by material rewards for the new intelligentsia, *taught* them the "limits of its [intelligentsia's] autonomy" (Suny, 1994, p. 282), and the Stalinist system made the entire spectrum of intellectuals more dependent on state power (Tromly, 2013).

Making educational and cultural development part of the Soviet agenda had some positive effects on higher education in Georgia. In 1941, the Science Academy of Georgia was founded by prominent Georgian scholars. Several research institutes were established under the supervision of the Academy. Some of the academics returned from emigration and some were released from imprisonment (Jorbenadze, 1968). Higher education became accessible, especially for workers and peasants. The number of students from 1927 to 1940 grew almost five times and reached 812,000 (Matthews, 2012). By 1940, TSU had the highest number of students (9581) in the Soviet Union (Jorbenadze, 1968).[3]

Massification of higher education continued in the postwar period as well. The expansion of the higher education sector and several significant scientific headways in terms of using atomic and nuclear energy and the development of the Soviet space program made Soviet higher education one of the largest and most advanced systems in the postwar era (Johnson, 2008; Matthews, 2012; Yelyutin, 1959). However, as

[3] Average enrollment in large universities was 9000 students by 1978 (Matthews, 2012).

discussed below, universities have also faced the systemic and ideological shortcomings of Soviet higher education.

The Soviet Higher Education System and its Challenges in the Postwar Period

There were three types of HEIs operating in the Soviet Union: universities, polytechnical institutes, and specialized institutes. Universities were major scientific and educational centers that trained specialists for scientific research institutes. Polytechnical institutes were the engineering schools that trained students in about 42 specialties, while the specialized institutes educated specialists in specific narrow fields, such as institute of economics, teacher training institute (pedagogical institutes), etc. (Rosen, 1963; Yelyutin, 1959). By 1960, out of 739 higher education institutions, only 4% were universities, and out of 303 Soviet higher education specialties, 71% were in industrial, agricultural, and economic fields (Rosen, 1963). It is noteworthy that new higher education institutions were opened in geographically diversified locations in different Soviet republics (Matthews, 2012; Rosen, 1963).

At that time, there were 18 HEIs in Georgia; among them, only one was a university, one polytechnical institute, and the rest were specialized institutes in agriculture, zoo-veterinary, medicine, subtropical economy, arts, music, sports, theater, foreign languages, and five pedagogical institutes (Rosen, 1963). In line with Soviet industrialization goals, the education system heavily focused on producing specialists predominantly in industrial, engineering, agricultural, and economic fields (Kuraev, 2016). The concern regarding the narrowly specialized educational programs focused on technical skills remained throughout the Soviet years since it

created barriers for students and graduates to move between different disciplines and acquire management and decision skills (Fitzpatrick, 1979; Johnson, 2008).

It is noteworthy that in 1934, a uniform system of teaching was adopted, which also included post-graduate education. As a result, two scientific degrees could be acquired. Master of Science qualified a graduate to be a lecturer or a docent, and a Doctor of Science qualified a degree holder for professorship (Yelyutin, 1959).

Research and scientific work were carried out by universities and scientific institutes functioning under the Academy of Science. However, as the number of universities across the Soviet Union was up to 30 (among them only one in Georgia), the major research and scientific work was carried out in the research institutes.[4] Thus, the division of teaching and research activities between the higher education institutions and research institutes is one of the major characteristics of the Soviet higher education system, which became a chronic weakness of the system even in the post-Soviet era (Johnson, 2008; Kuraev, 2016).

In the Soviet system, all 15 republics followed the central law and adopted it in the local system. The system was governed by the Ministry of Higher and Secondary Specialized Education through corresponding ministries and committees in each republic (Rosen, 1963). It should be noted that the higher education institutions, along with the Ministry of Higher Education, were subordinated to different ministries with relevant profiles (Yelyutin, 1959). According to Avis (1990), by 1990, about 896 HEIs were functioning under the jurisdiction of over 70 different ministries

[4] There were more than 3000 research institutes across the Soviet Union under the Academy of Science (Yelyutin, 1959).

across the Soviet Union. In the literature, such an arrangement of the system is often discussed as inefficient, arguing that because of the parallelism of functions, it consumed more human and financial resources. Besides, heavy bureaucracy hindered the flexibility of the system and its fragmentation between different economic sectors created barriers for flexible employment in different sectors (Avis, 1990; Johnson, 2012).

At the institutional level, university governance was highly centralized and controlled by the Communist Party. Formally, higher education institutions were governed by elected rectors and Academic Councils. However, 'elected rector,' in reality, was proposed by the party. Besides, the Executive Council, which along with the university administrators consisted of the Communist Party and even the KGB representatives, had the main decision-making power (Chitashvili, 2020).

The expansion of higher education was dramatic in the postwar period. The number of students grew from 1.5 million in 1953 to 5 million in 1978 (Matthews, 2012). It is noteworthy that in 1958, compulsory secondary education was extended to 8th grade, which significantly increased prospective higher education enrollments (Rosen, 1963). Thus, along with the increased access to higher education, its overexpansion became one of the main challenges for the Soviet state. Specifically, the literature highlights that the massive expansion of higher education was happening at the expense of quality (Fitzpatrick, 1979; Johnson, 2008; Matthews, 2012; Zajda, 1984). The system, at different times, struggled with a high dropout rate (e.g., in 1968, it was about 50% (Tomiak, 1975) and a drop in the state budget spent per student (Matthews, 2012). The growth in enrollments was also a result of an

increased number of admissions in the part-time (evening and correspondence students) sector making up 40% of student intake by 1978, which lacked academic rigor (Matthews, 2012; Rosen, 1963).

Despite the increased access to higher education, social inequality in the student body remained a challenging issue. For example, as a result of Khruschev's policy to allocate quotas for students from the families of workers or collective farmers, their representation increased mostly in the pedagogical and agricultural institutions, while the most prestigious universities that were located in the capital cities predominantly served students from privileged backgrounds (Matthews, 2012). Besides, in the planned economy, student enrollments and their preparation in specific specialties were based on the estimations of the requirements of the economy for six to ten years (Yelyutin, 1959). However, in the postwar period, there was an excessive number of graduates in industry-related specializations (Matthews, 2012).

Another critical issue caused by higher education expansion was the scarcity of qualified academic staff. Even the Booklet on Soviet Higher Education prepared by the Minister of Higher and Specialized Education of the USSR (Yelyutin, 1959) underlines that student enrollment in higher education increased at a faster rate compared to the training capacity of faculty members. In 1959, 5000-6000 more professors were needed to maintain the quality of education and research. It is noteworthy that from 1954 to 1975, the number of Doctoral degree holders grew from 9000 to 32000 (Matthews, 2012), which also raises a question about the quality of doctoral education in light of its significant expansion. In the postwar era, every

Soviet leader from Khrushchev to Gorbachev initiated education reforms to address the systemic problems of Soviet higher education.

The Khrushchev's Era (1953-1964)

If a single crucial matter characterized this period in the area of education, it would be Krushchev's lift of censorship on the academic intelligentsia. This period is known as the period of de-Stalinization. In pursuing his de-Stalinization policy to gain support from intellectual communities, Khrushchev reduced censorship and made the academic environment more liberal (Shlapentokh, 1990). Khrushchev's liberalization policy is known as a period of 'thaw,' which aimed at cultural restoration and moral regeneration of intellectual society (Tromly, 2013) and adjusting the deficiencies of the post-war higher education system. Specifically, it addressed the issues such as outdated textbooks, the deficit of qualified academic staff and scientific personnel, slow tempo and low quality of their preparation, uneven quality of graduates from different institutions and strengthening the ties between education and the Soviet economy (Rosen, 1963; Zajda, 1984).

Despite the 'thaw,' Kurushchev's politics and statements about de-Stalinization faced resistance from the Communist Party representatives and were perceived as a tragic event in Soviet history, even among students and intelligentsia. This tendency was also particularly notable in Georgia. Because of Stalin's Georgian origins, Georgians considered Khrushchev's statements criticizing Stalin's "cult of personality" as a "humiliation of the entire nation," which triggered demonstrations in 1956 in Georgia (Avalishvili, 2016, p. 38). It is paradoxical that protecting Stalin's

dignity became a matter of national pride for Georgians, as many Georgians became the victims of Stalin's repressions. It is also noteworthy that initially, the protests started against the de-Stalinization statements, but soon, they triggered deeper national sentiments and with the escalation of the demonstrations, gained the nationalist underpinnings (Avalishvili, 2016). The 5-day protests of 1956 were dispersed by Soviet troops, resulting in arrests and shootings with up to 90 casualties. Many of those were students. This indicates that universities harbored seeds of resistance to the Soviet government, which was growing with time, regardless of the harsh handling of demonstrations by the Soviet regime. As a result of these events, appreciation of Marxist-Leninist ideology was cracked and the hidden nationalistic attitudes and movements became more visible (Avalishvili, 2016; Kldiashvili, 2016).

Brezhnev's Era (1964-1982)

Due to the persisting deficiencies in the higher education system, at the beginning of the 1970s, new reforms were initiated by Brezhnev. The stated goal of the reforms was to make the education system more connected to the national industry and to advance university education and research (Kuraev, 2016; Johnson, 2008). The reiterated emphasis on making the higher education sector more applicable to the national economy highlights the flaws in the centrally planned economic and education sectors and the deficiencies in the quality of higher education. Besides, the emphasis on advancing scientific and research activities has been a major concern of reforms in the postwar era. Brezhnev's reforms also highlight the need for closer collaboration between the academic staff of the

university and that of the research institutes operating under the Academy of Science (Tomiak, 1975).

While the critics of Brezhnev's leadership characterized it as a period of stagnation, his proponents called it a period of stability. The main issues of his leadership include slowed economic growth, the spread of corruption and the shadow economy, and lagging behind the economic and technological developments of the West (Bacon, 2002). It is noteworthy that Brezhnev considered corruption and the shadow economy as “normal” phenomena. In several Soviet republics, including Georgia, the issue became strongly entrenched (Fowkes, 2002). As a result of the policy of decentralization and increase of local political control in the 1960-1970s, local government in Georgia became corrupt and inefficient, failing to meet its economic targets (Suny, 1994).

By 1970, Georgia had one of the largest percentages of its population in higher education compared to other Soviet republics. Tbilisi State University was one of the largest (after the University of Moscow, Leningrad, and Kyiv) and most well-performing institutions in terms of the number of students, academic staff with scientific degrees, and infrastructure (Suny, 1994; Tomiak, 1975). However, the higher education system overall was struggling with corruption, a high number of missed classes, and graduates avoiding the assigned jobs.

Apart from the corruption, another feature of Brezhnev’s era was the intensified cultivation of communist ideology and increased party control on higher education (Shlapentokh, 1990; Zajda, 1984). This policy particularly impacted post-graduate education as graduate students were considered to be the next generation of

intellectuals. Their selection for the graduate program was also politicized, preventing the "politically suspicious or even neutral students" from joining the graduate programs (Shlapentokh, 1990, p. 27). The order of awarding a postgraduate degree, which was adopted in 1972, required that topics of doctoral and candidate dissertations should contribute to Marxist-Leninist theory, the intellectual work should have demonstrated loyalty to the communist ideology and be intolerant to the bourgeois ideology (Shlapentokh, 1990; Zajda, 1984). Besides, scientific and academic positions were included in the Soviet nomenclature, meaning that their appointments in research and teaching positions had to be endorsed by the Communist Party.

The increased engagement of intellectuals in Soviet political life during Khrushevs's "Thaw" policy and lifted censorship was seen as a threat by Brezhnev's administration. Starting from the end of the 1960s, the Soviet authorities increased pressure on intellectual activities and suppressed dissent opinions (Sandle, 2002; Shlapentokh, 1990). The measures and sanctions used to treat dissidents included dismissals from jobs, arrests, exiles, public humiliation, and even confining people in psychiatric hospitals[5] (Sandle, 2002).

In the 1970s, there were several dissident movements taking place in the Soviet republics. In Georgia, the protests became dramatic in 1978 when the Soviet government tried to change the constitution to replace Georgian as a single official state language and to recognize Russian as an official state language as well. This was

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[5] According to Shlapentokh (1990) at that time dissidents were considered as people with psychiatric problems, and their treatment in the psychiatric hospitals was normal.

the first large-scale (about 20,000 demostrants) street demonstration after the 1956 protest. It was, again, triggered by nationalist sentiments, which made the Soviet government retain the clause (Sakwa, 1998; Suny, 1994). The demonstration was mainly dominated by students. Although the bloodshed was minimized under Shevardnadze's administration, many of the demonstrators were arrested or dismissed from their jobs (Sakwa, 1998). Still, those demonstrations strengthened the dissident movements and opposition against the communist government. For example, in 1981, about 1000 students and professors of Tbilisi State University protested the cancelation of Akaki Bakradze[6]'s public lecture on political grounds (Sakwa, 1998; Suny, 1994). Thus, as the Soviet system started to crack, the nature of the ideological pressure moved to the push and pull mode. However, the economic and scientific decline, corruption, and the efforts of the communist party apparatus and the KGB gradually demoralized and weakened intellectuals and dissent movements. Moreover, the open slots were filled with unqualified scholars (Shlapentokh, 1990). According to Shlapentokh (1990), as a result of Brezhnev's policy towards intellectuals, widespread corruption, and conservatism in higher education and scientific institutions, Soviet republics lost three or four generations of 'able' scholars. Thus, the structural problems in the education sector strongly impacted the human capital of the Soviet state and became one of the major reasons for the upcoming dissolution of the Soviet Union.

[6] Famous Georgian author, historian and literary critic (1928-1999)

Gorbachev's Era (1985-1991)

Inheriting deep economic and political crises from the Brezhnev era, Gorbachev initiated reforms toward the liberalization of political and economic policies. However, his initiatives received skepticism and mistrust, as in Soviet society, it was believed that any reform would be followed by corruption and another wave of repressions (Shlapentokh, 1990, p. 229). From 1987, clear statements regarding the democratization and active involvement of liberal intellectuals in the political processes sent a more convincing message about moving to a new phase of Soviet history. Gorbachev openly criticized the ineffective educational, scientific and intellectual decline in all areas during the Brezhnev time (Shlapentokh, 1990). Along with the political-economic reforms, known as *perestroika* or restructuring (Mccauley, 2013), Gorbachev's government initiated the restructuring of higher education in 1986 and proposed a document called "Guidelines for the Restructuring of Higher and Secondary Specialized Education in the Country" (Salevyev et al., 1990).

The main goal of the reform was to improve the quality of teaching, learning, and research in higher education and to substantially improve the connection between education, science, and the economy (Avis, 1990; Salevyev et al., 1990). As a result of the reforms, with the goal to restore the prestige of higher education and raise the standards of academic quality, HEIs became a subject of regular state inspection, academic staff were expected to improve their teaching methods and materials, and their annual assessments were taken into account for their future employment and remuneration (Avis, 1990). However, according to the survey conducted by the

Ministry of Education in 1987, a large majority of students could not notice any improvement as a result of the reforms. Also, almost half of them were critical about the lack of qualification of academic staff (Avis, 1990; Salevyev et al., 1990). Avis (1990) characterizes Soviet society as resistant to reforms, especially because of their skepticism to change considering the historical experience. This characteristic is quite noticeable among academics. Only 15% of academic staff participating in the survey approved the reforms, and only 25% found the new policy of performance-based financial rewards motivating (Avis, 1990).

The liberalization of intellectual and political space resulted in a division in the intellectual community between liberals and conservatives. Liberals believed in the idea of democratization and Westernization and at the same time, radically criticized and harassed the conservative part of the society. Conservatives were considered to be nationalists who were skeptical about the democratic changes. It is noteworthy that the nationalist sentiments of conservatives were towards the Soviet state rather than towards the nation-state (Shlapentokh, 1990). Thus, the Soviet Union managed to create and well-establish the Soviet identity. As Suny (1993) explains, overall improvement of social welfare and social transformation were the major grounds for the assimilation of different republics into the Soviet culture and loyalty to the Soviet state. Thus, the anxiety of redefining the national identity has been part of the intellectuals' lives in transition between different geopolitical times and spaces.

It may seem paradoxical that during the time of change of the Communist regime, one of the main ideas and sentiments that liberals were striving for was

national survival and independence. Such movement was particularly strong in the Transcaucasus, Baltic states, and Ukraine (Shlapentokh, 1990; Suny, 1994). The new political climate allowed the creation of new civil associations and societies. Liberal intellectuals and the general public who supported the democratization process started the protests against the local Communist parties. In Georgia, the nationalist protests were joined by a wider population in 1989 after the Soviet troops brutally dispersed the 9th of April demonstrations in Tbilisi. The protesters called for the independence of Georgia and recognition of Abkhazia as an integral part of its territory (Beisinger, 2002; Gachechiladze, 2014; Suny, 1993). Demonstrations, in the end, resulted in declaring independence from the Soviet Union. One of the leaders of the nationalist movement, Zviad Gamsakhurdia, became the first elected president of Georgia in 1990. On 9 April 1991, as a result of the public referendum, Georgia restored its independence.

The breakdown of the Soviet Union in 1991 opened up new futures and imaginaries for former Soviet countries (Silova, 2014). This also implied new possibilities for the development of the higher education system and the creation of a new future for the development of post-Soviet Georgia. However, the emerging socio-economic and political crisis significantly impeded the realization of these possibilities.

The political elite lacked the experience to handle the political and socio-economic crisis created after the rapid collapse of the Soviet Union. The armed conflicts in two of Georgia's regions (Abkhazia and South Ossetia) [7] during 1991-

[7] Abkhazia and South Ossetia are the autonomous republic of Georgia, currently occupied by Russia.

1993 resulted in the displacement of about 250,000 and lost territories in 1993[8] (Gachechiladze, 2014). At the same time, as a result of the contention between Gamsakhurdia's (who soon became authoritarian leader) government and opposition, part of which was led by powerful criminals, Georgia experienced a civil war where different groups were involved in street fights, even in the central avenue of the capital city (Kukhianidze, 2014). This created additional social and economic burdens and political crises in the country. Gamsakhurdia was overthrown from power in 1992 and replaced by Edward Shevardnadze - the former Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Soviet Union and former leader of Georgia's Communist party. Although he had political experience and managed to stabilize the political situation, his administration maintained a Soviet style of governance, feeding crime and corruption (Kukhianidze, 2014). Thus, due to the economic downturn and the collapse of the Soviet Union, Gorbachev's planned reform to restructure the Soviet higher education system was never fully implemented. However, some of its components, along with the strongly rooted Soviet legacies, became the starting point for the transformation of higher education in the post-Soviet era.

Summary of the Soviet Legacies that Have Been Haunting the Academic Identities in the Post-Soviet Times

To summarize, six major themes could be identified from the Soviet higher education reforms that substantially impacted the state of the academic profession and

[8] The conflict was renewed again in 2008, when Georgia tried to join NATO, resulting in losing more territories (overall, 20% of Georgian territories are occupied by Russia) and 17 000 more internally displaced persons.

the identities of academics. First, the long history of repression of intellectuals and persecution of freedom of expression, combined with material privileges and social status, produced the 'tamed' Soviet intelligentsia. Regardless of some attempts to liberate the intellectual spaces during Khrushchev's and then Gorbachev's administrations, the experience of reinstating the repressive measures made the intellectuals and scholars skeptical of and resistant to changes and reforms. Thus, it is not surprising that the role of universities as the main player in building the independent Georgian nation-state in the pre-Soviet time and then the Soviet nation-state has been substantially weakened in the post-Soviet era. Although the scale of dissent in intellectual opinions has substantially grown in the post-Soviet period, usually, the publicly active intellectuals were the writers, artists, representatives of NGOs, and journalists, but less the ones affiliated with academic institutions. Thus, intellectuals from academic circles experienced double subjugation from the political regime and institutional censorship.

Second, the division of the intellectual community during Gorbachev's era into liberals and conservatives, and the tendency of radical criticism of the conservative academic community created a societal crack. This tension continued and escalated during the post-Soviet transformation period.

Third, economic deprivation and corruption, which started during Brezhnev's administration and continued through the post-Soviet era, had a dramatic impact on damaging the reputation of academics. Furthermore, the scarcity of qualified academic staff, lack of discipline, nepotism, and recruitment of unqualified academic staff caused the decline of the prestige of the academic profession. Moreover, due to

the crisis of the academic profession, the younger generation was hardly interested in joining the academia and the profession was struggling with aging (Johnson, 2008; Salevyev et al., 1990).

Fourth, the separation of teaching and research between higher education and research institutes, as well as the lack of autonomy of academics, impacted the academic profession immensely. As a result, the roles and responsibilities of academic staff at HEIs (except the universities) were limited to solely teaching activities. By the end of the 1980s, only 34% of academic staff had an academic degree (Doctor of Science or Candidate of Science) (Salevyev et al., 1990). Besides, due to the centralized higher education curriculum, academic staff did not have an agency for designing the program curriculum or even developing the courses they were teaching. The academic staff was also scarcely involved in the university administration.

Fifth, the post-Soviet transformations intensified concerns about the disciplinary composition of the academic staff. Due to the strong focus on and allocation of resources in the STEM fields, post-Soviet higher education is characterized by a strong academic tradition in mathematics and physics. However, the system inherited a weak scholarly legacy in the fields such as social sciences and humanities, which were strongly ideologized.

Sixth, there are concerns about the institutional legacy of HEIs. The Soviet regime uprooted the idea of university autonomy, which was replaced not only by centralized governance but also by direct Party control. The crisis of the Soviet system, which was characterized by inefficient governance, corruption,

incompetence, and privileges, was also mirrored in the higher education and scientific institutions.

Thus, these conditions became the starting point of the post-Soviet transformation, which is still influencing the academic culture and identities in modern time and space. I divide the timeline of the post-Soviet transformation of the higher education system into three parts: 13 years of chaos, 17 years of reform, and current days of lost opportunities.

13 Years of Chaos (1991-2003)

For 13 years after the breakdown of the Soviet Union, Georgia experienced a dramatic social and economic crisis. From 1990 to 1994, the national GDP declined by 68% and the economic stagnation continued for a decade *(World Bank*, n.d.). The crisis strongly impacted the higher education system and impeded its development. The share of education funding as a percentage of GDP declined from 7% in 1991 to 1% in 1994, and it was 1.8% in 1998 (Chakhaia & Bregvadze, 2018; Parliament of Georgia, 2001). As a result, salaries of academic staff have significantly declined. The monthly salary in 1994 was about $15 (Chitashvili, 2020), which is ten times less compared to what it was in 1990 (Lomaia, 2006). Moreover, according to the 1999 survey, almost no one had received a salary on time in Georgian HEIs. On average, the payments were delayed for 2-4 months (Lorentzen, 2000). In this condition, corruption flourished and it existed in different forms, such as cronyism, bribery, extortion, purchasing the books authored by the lecturers in exchange for the grade, and licensing of private institutions (Heyneman, 2010; Lorentzen, 2000). The deprived higher education infrastructure and corruption

compromised academic capacity and standards, discredited the system and promoted elitism and unfair distributions of educational and career opportunities for youth (Chakhaia & Bregvadze, 2018; Parliament of Georgia, 2001; Perkins, 1998). It is noteworthy that, similarly to demonstrating resistance against the Soviet regime, Heyneman (2010) highlights a 'surprising trend' that individual faculty members demonstrated strong resistance to corruption, emphasizing that professional morality exists even in the most austere environments.

Overall, the socio-economic decline and deterioration of the higher education system pushed academics to find alternative jobs and income sources for survival, and many of them left academia. The country experienced a colossal brain drain of Georgian scholars to the West, especially in the STEM fields (Chitashvili, 2020). Thus, the scarcity of academic staff during the Soviet system became even more severe in the post-Soviet period. Furthermore, in light of the induction of the market economy, the major change in the system was the legalization of private higher education institutions (Chitashvili, 2020). As a reaction to abolishing the Communist state control, education in the former Soviet states, including in Georgia, became one of the most unregulated spheres (Wolf, 2002). This created a space for the rapid expansion of private higher education institutions. The number of HEIs grew from 19 public HEIs in 1990 to 26 public and 214 private institutions by 2000 (Parliament of Georgia, 2001). As the system with 19 public HEIs in 1990 already struggled with the deficit of qualified academic staff, the rapid expansion of private institutions has had a long-lasting demolishing impact on the overall academic environment and standards.

Besides, the Soviet curriculum, teaching and learning methods, and teaching materials became outdated (Heyneman, 2010; Lorentzen, 2000; Reilly, 1996). In the post-Soviet era, the popularity of the STEM fields was replaced by the growing demand for programs in law, economics, business administration, journalism, foreign languages, and medicine. However, some of those areas were unknown to former Soviet states or the content of the Soviet time courses was no longer relevant to the new reality (Heyneman, 2010). Thus, the higher education system lacked the capacity to prepare graduates for the market economy (Parliament of Georgia, 2001).

Although there have been several attempts to launch higher education reforms since 1991, it was only in 2000 that the Georgian government took a more comprehensive and strategic approach for the modernization[9] of the system. Initially, the goal was to conduct a comprehensive study of the higher education sector and develop the conceptual paper "Main Directions of Higher Education Development in Georgia" (2001). The study was supported by the Council of Europe, the Open Society Foundation, and the World Bank. The recommendations developed with the support of international organizations became the main document for the development of the Law on Higher Education. Although the national experts participated in the study and development of the conceptual paper, the study and recommendations were guided by the higher education agenda of international organizations and international standards and practices. For example, the introduction of the document highlights that "modernization of the old

[9]While the notion of modernization is usually associated with the modernization theory that originated from the industrialization era, this term is still frequently used in the political and policy rhetoric regarding the reforms aiming at transformation, renovation and restructuring of the older systems with Western practices.

system and its alignment to the *international standards* requires the development of the adequate legal base" (Parliament of Georgia, 2001, p. 1). The document posits implementation of the Bologna process[10] and the European higher education model as the means for Georgia "becoming a part of the global educational space and its equal partner" (p. 16). But before commencing the reforms in 2004, due to the absence of the legal framework, the educational system was in inertia, still following the Soviet rules and practices in the post-Soviet time (Glonti & Chitashvili, 2007; Parliament of Georgia, 2001).

There is a scarcity of literature that describes the institutional processes and developments inside the HEIs. A little more is known about the processes at the TSU, where in 1994, the "Concept of University Education" was developed, which became a guiding document for other HEIs before the higher education law was adopted. The concept conveyed some of the main principles of university governance in the pre-Soviet time, such as institutional autonomy and democratic governance (Kopaliani et al., 2018). From the oral stories, we know that some other internal initiatives were carried out to transform universities[11]. However, there are contradictory opinions in academic circles. Some think that those initiatives were interrupted and damaged by the radical reforms that started in 2004 when the entire focus shifted to Europeanization and standardization of the processes. Others think that those initiatives were not impactful and it would have been impossible to recover from the crisis without radical changes. The latter opinion is frequently supported by recalling the multiple examples of systemic flaws and moral

[10]Bologna process is a supranational higher education policy process aiming at structural convergence of higher education systems, academic degree structures and quality standards across Europe.
[11] The findings section reveals various examples of such transformative initiatives.

crises of people in power. For instance, Jibladze (2015) describes that due to the absence of accountability between HEIs and the state, the university rectors enjoyed excessive power over HEIs and the system. They became notorious for abusing power, using university resources for private interests and being involved in various corruption schemes. Moreover, rectors were also blamed for sabotaging several reform packages facilitated by the World Bank (Jibladze, 2015).

Thus, several years since the collapse of the Soviet Union were characterized by a chaotic experience for academics in the former Soviet republics, which eroded the higher education system even more. Academics had to figure out new ways of intellectual and academic lives. However, this has been a difficult task in the post-totalitarian time and space, where instead of exploring the possibilities in the newly gained freedom, academic society was drowning in the decaying Soviet academia. In these conditions, academics sought inspiration for solving the present problems in the past, including pre-Soviet academic heritage, which, to its end, was based on the European university model. However, after more than 80 years, higher education in Europe has been evolving and moving towards creating a global and (to a certain extent, another) unified system. Thus, European aspiration for Georgian universities meant to catch up on 80 years of development and prove themselves 'Europeans.' However, as will be discussed in the next sections, this endeavor was never about becoming peers with the European HEIs but rather catching up with the race from the periphery.

Repositioning in the European Educational Space: Between Chaos and Reforms

After the fall of the Soviet Empire and the end of the Cold War, the former Soviet republics had to figure out ways of interacting with the multifaceted world and redefine their geopolitical positions with Russia, the European Union (EU), and the United States (US), and the rest of the world (Silova, 2011). They had to overcome the economic crisis and make the political choices of building an independent nation-state and creating a higher education system that could respond and transform the post-totalitarian society. However, due to the compound of the economic and political crises in the newly liberated states and the influx of international aid, the agenda of post-Soviet transformation was defined and taken over by international multilateral organizations such as the World Bank, United Nations, and EU agencies, private foundations (e.g., Open Society Foundation), imposing universal neoliberal educational policies that in several cases were voluntarily 'borrowed' by the national governments (Silova, 2009; Johnson, 2008). Initial common higher education reforms implemented in post-Soviet space were the marketization and privatization of higher education and implementation of the standardized university entry examinations (Silova, 2009), followed by a restructuring of the higher education model in accordance with the Bologna process.

While all post-Soviet countries, to some degree, declared their aspiration to move towards democratization, marketization and liberalization of national policies, regardless of their common historical legacy of Soviet rule, the post-Soviet transformations did not unfold evenly (Huisman, 2019; Silova, 2009). The literature on post-Soviet transformation highlights several factors that resulted in uneven patterns of development in higher education systems in former Soviet states. Some of them include differences in

the strength of higher education and research capacities (e.g., Russia and Ukraine), possession of energy and natural resources (e.g., Kazakhstan, Russia, Azerbaijan, and Turkmenistan), reform-minded governments (e.g., Georgia, Ukraine, Kyrgyzstan experienced political revolutions in 2003, 2004, 2005 respectively) or vice versa, dysfunctional governments (e.g., Moldova, Armenia, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan) or authoritarian governments (e.g., Belarus, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan), geographical proximity to Europe and clear determination to 'return to Europe' (Baltic states), pre-Soviet academic heritage, cultural and religious differences (Johnson, 2008; Mostafa, 2009; Niyazov et al., 2020; Silova, 2011).

Academic literature widely criticizes the "traveling education reform packages" (Silova & Steiner-Khamsi, 2008, p. 1) produced in the Western democracies and brought into the post-Soviet education space, assuming that they could fix the inefficiencies of the Soviet system and promise to make post-Soviet higher education institutions a part of the global higher education space (Silova, 2009, 2011; Silova & Steiner-Khamsi, 2008). Such assumption of universal transfer and implementation of global neoliberal policies dismisses not only the contextual differences between the Western and post-Soviet spaces, but also ignores multiple configurations of the factors that shaped the diverse higher education landscape within the post-Soviet space.

Meanwhile, increased global pressure for economic competitiveness and ambition to become a leading knowledge-based economy led the EU to strengthen its higher education capacity by creating an integrated European higher education space (Olsen & Maassen, 2007). As a result of the intergovernmental cooperation, the Bologna Process was initiated by the Bologna Declaration signed in 1999 by the ministers responsible for

higher education. However, over time, the process became highly influenced by the Council of Europe and the European Commission (Boyadjieva, 2007). The Bologna Process, which implies structural convergence of higher education systems, academic degree structures, and quality standards across Europe became the main device for defining the European higher education policy and creating the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) (Gornitzka, 2007; Olsen & Maassen, 2007). The Bologna Process also became the main reference point for transforming the post-Soviet higher education systems (Huisman et al., 2018).

Former Soviet states joined the Bologna process at different times, but the transformation process was not linear and varied in speed and degree of implementation. Baltic states (Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia) were the first to join the Bologna process in 1999 and implement the European policies. Armed conflicts and dramatic economic downturn delayed the transformation processes and accession of Caucasian countries till 2005 (Silova, 2009). However, in the case of Georgia, being trapped in economic turmoil and military threats strengthened the aspiration for accession to the European Union and gave an impulse to political revolution, bringing a pro-Western reform-oriented government to power. Those events also accelerated the implementation of the Bologna-inspired reforms, which had serious consequences, which will be discussed in the following sections. Central Asian republics did not have such an urge for Europeanization. Their reluctance can also be explained by the drastic religious and cultural differences compared to the Western world. From the beginning, they were more inclined to keep the Soviet educational model while attempting to create their own system that better fit their needs (Silova, 2009). However, the existing economic crisis,

dysfunctional governance, and imposed traveling education policies left the systems in the upheaval of the post-Soviet chaos. Central Asian countries, except Kazakhstan (which became a Bologna member in 2010), never became members of the Bologna process. In Ukraine, similarly to Georgia, the Revolutionary government in 2004-2005 gave an impulse to the modernization of the higher education system and joined the Bologna process in 2005. However, due to the return of the Soviet-minded government, the transformation of the system was delayed for another decade (Oleksiyenko, 2016). For Russia, the implementation of the European education policies was an entry point for integrating into the global educational space (Telegina & Schwengel, 2012). After joining the Bologna process in 2003, Russia implemented various Bologna reforms; however, it still kept the elements of the Soviet system. For example, Russia still has parallel Soviet and European structures of educational programs and degrees (Smolentseva et al., 2018). As a response to the Russian invasion and war in Ukraine, the European Commission suspended the membership of Russia in the Bologna process and the European Higher Education Area in 2022 (BFUG meeting LXXX, 2022). The decision has fueled a discussion among Russian policymakers about returning to the Soviet higher education model (Sabzalieva, 2022).

17 Years of Reforms (2004-2020)

As a result of the Rose Revolution on November 23, 2003, a pro-Western government came into power in Georgia with the political ambition to carry out transformative reforms towards democratization, economic liberalization, modernization of the state institutions and accession to the European Union (Chakhaia & Bregvadze,

2018). The rhetoric of the new revolutionary government had strong patriotic and nationalistic motives. The political leaders portrayed neoliberal reforms as the means for building a strong nation-state. Their narratives also presented Westernization and European integration as nationalistic projects claiming that Georgia should return to its European historical roots. The famous words spoken by the Prime Minister of Georgia, Zurab Zhvania at the Council of Europe in 1999 – "I am Georgian, therefore I am European" – are still one of the most influential events in modern Georgian history, redefining Georgians' European identity.

The state-wide reforms' core strategy was the modernization of state institutes and the elimination of corruption. Among other public domains, the reforms drastically impacted the higher education system and HEIs in particular. The initial three years were particularly transformative (2004-2007). The government took three major steps to transform the higher education system and eradicate corruption. First, reorganization of the structures and human resources at the Ministry of Education and at public HEIs was initiated. This implied mass dismissals of administrative/academic staff from the Ministry and HEIs and the announcement of open competitions to recruit new staff (Lomaia, 2006). Similar measures were carried out at large public universities. Many of the university rectors and professors were dismissed and open competitions were announced for academic and administrative positions. The numbers and details about the processes are not discussed in the existing literature. From oral stories and informal conversations, it can be assumed that this was a necessary step to 'clean' the HEIs from corrupt administrators and decrease the inflated number of employees. However, this process

was still controversial as there were many cases of unfair dismissals, politicization of the processes, and abuse of power from the state[12].

As for the structural institutional reforms, many academic departments were merged or terminated. For example, at TSU, the number of faculties (administrative units) was reduced from 18 to 6, which optimized the administrative resources and created space for more interdisciplinarity between narrowly specialized programs. However, such decisions and directives were coming directly from the ministry and there was no space for discussions within the HEIs, which created tensions and resistance of academic staff towards the reforms. Second, to address the most corrupted segment of higher education - admission exams - unified national admission exams were introduced. This implied centralization of every step of the examination process, from the development of the test to student enrollment, to ensure objectivity and transparency of the admission process (Lomaia, 2006).

It should be noted that rhetoric from high-level government officials expressively presented ongoing reforms as a leap of societal and cultural transformation. For example, they presented the open competitions or the unified admission exams as the end of systemic nepotism and corruption and the beginning of the "virtuous circle of meritocracy" (Lomaia, 2006, p. 171), where hard work was appreciated. This was also part of the broader governmental rhetoric regarding the norms that they intended to establish in the public sectors and in society.

[12] Findings sections provide the narratives of academics regarding these controversies.

Third, a critical part of the reform was restructuring and shifting the Soviet system towards the European model of higher education. European supranational higher education policy – the Bologna Process – became a central reference point to reform the higher education systems in former Soviet states, including Georgia (Jibladze, 2013). After adopting the law on higher education (2004), Georgia joined the Bologna Process in 2005 by signing the Bologna declaration at the Bergen Ministerial Conference. This pivotal step served the country's aspiration to become a member of the European Union and helped the policymakers streamline the scattered reform attempts (Chitashvili, 2020; Jibladze, 2015). In this process, Georgia adopted the European three-cycle higher education system (Bachelor, Master, Doctoral), higher education quality assurance (QA) system, moved to the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS)[13], and implemented the European Qualifications Framework.

Each of those shifts, leveraged and justified by the Bologna Process "requirements" and European integration procedures, had explicit and implicit policy implications and created a new setup of the higher education system in the country. For example, moving to the European three-cycle higher education degree structure was used for detaching the doctoral degree awarding mandate from the Academy of Science and its research institutes and giving this function solely to universities. While this decision was justified by the optimization of resources and integration of teaching and research, its execution was quite problematic. This attempt was a step towards weakening the role of the Academy of Science and research institutes as they were considered too difficult to

[13] ECTS is a unified system of accumulation of academic credits that can be transferred across the European higher education institutions. ECTS is based on unification of the workload necessary for achieving the learning outcomes of a specific component of a study program.

reform. Particularly, because of the lack of relevant budget, research, and scientific sector development were left out of the government's priorities. The already scarce budget of the Academy of Science was considerably downsized and the institution was left to fade away (Chitashvili, 2020). Some of the research institutes were shut down and others were integrated into four large research universities. However, the integration of research institutes into universities was implemented in a technical manner, which lacked a strategic vision and provision of financial resources. Thus, instead of having a synergic effect, it triggered post-merger tensions and problems with synchronizing the administrative processes and resources (Bregvadze, 2020). Moreover, thousands of research institute staff were left on a meager salary or unemployed. As a result, over the course of post-Soviet years of chaos and reforms, the scientific potential of the country has been significantly weakened.

The central axis around which the government built the implementation of the Bologna principles was higher education quality assurance. The QA system was launched in 2005 (in the form of institutional accreditation) and up until now, it went through two waves of fundamental revisions (in 2010 and in 2018). European QA policy[14] intends to create a culture of accountability and continuous quality enhancement of teaching and learning in higher education (ENQA, 2015). However, the introduction of institutional accreditation[15] in initially played the role of gatekeeper in the system for closing the low-

[14] European higher education policy for QA is outlined in the The Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG). Compliance of the national system with the ESG is a precondition for being registered in the European Quality Assurance Register, which means that the national higher education system is trustworthy and reliable, thus it simplifies the process of recognition of qualifications and internationalization efforts.

[15] Authorization of HEIs, which was initially introduced as institutional accreditation (in 2005) is a mandatory procedure to evaluates the compliance of the HEIs with the QA standards required for acquiring HEI status and be recognized by the state (Parliament of Georgia, 2010)

quality private HEIs and eradicating the diploma mills (Chitashvili, 2020; Jibladze, 2015). Also, some public university branch campuses were shut down and several HEIs merged.[16] After finalizing the first cycle of institutional accreditations in the country, the number of HEIs reduced from around 300 in 2004 to 63 in 2010 (NCEQE, 2018).

Launching the QA system and preparing for institutional accreditation was an immensely stressful and intensive experience for HEIs. The decisions were made top-down, and HEIs were receiving already approved regulations with frequent revisions that they had to follow (Chitashvili, 2020). Due to the government's ambition to make radical changes in a short time, implementation was rushed and had many flaws (Jibladze, 2013; Tsotniashvili, 2020). The reform and its revisions required academic staff to completely restructure the academic programs according to the ECTS and make them compliant with QA standards. It was quite a complicated task as in the Soviet system the higher education curriculum was centralized and academic staff lacked such competencies. Despite this, insufficient time and resources were allocated for providing comprehensive information and capacity-building sessions for academics. As a result, due to the lack of a holistic approach to the reform and incompatibility between the rushed political tempo and the slower academic one, the QA reform became a technical process of rewriting regulations and programs, which created deficient practices and hindered the qualitative development of the system (Chitashvili, 2020; Jibladze, 2013; Tsotniashvili, 2022; Veiga & Amaral, 2008).

[16] For instance, Ilia State University was founded as a result of the merger of 6 institutions.

Tensions Associated with the Reforms and Their Impact on Academics

The initial radical reforms significantly impacted and, to a certain point, marginalized academics. The overly top-down approach and dismissals from HEIs created tensions between and within academic communities and policy-makers. While the government and their proponents justified the reforms as an imperative for eradicating corruption and accomplishing international commitments, the multilayered crack between the 'progressive' and 'conservative' academic groups that broke in Gorbachev's era has deepened. Some of the radical statements from various public officials escalated the tensions and created bipolarity. The academics protesting the reforms were labeled as Soviet/red intelligentsia and were even called 'flushed-ups'[17] (chareckhilebi) after President Saakashvili used this term to describe a Soviet mentality in a specific context.[18] However, it became a widely used jargon in the next few years of reforms. Such labeling and radical politics significantly suppressed the legitimate discussion and criticism of the reforms. At the crossroads of authoritarianism and democracy, where the post-Soviet academic space is flooded with the rhetoric of modernization, internationalization, and European integration, academics are striving to reject the totalitarian legacy. However, as the post-totalitarian systems and institutions are prone to establishing and maintaining power and privileges, academics have attended to the increased politicization of the academic space, which makes the democratic future confusing (Oleksiyenko, 2022).

Academic literature highlights that the Bologna Process triggered the discussions and tensions related to national identities and Europeanization (Bulajeva & Hogan-Brun,

[17] 'Flushed-ups' literary means washing up a big amount of dirt with an intense flush of water.
[18] For example, at a meeting with the students who won school Olympics in 2006.

2014; Hörner, 2014; Kozma, 2014). However, as mentioned above, in the case of Georgia, Europeanization was portrayed as a way to return to Georgia's pre-Soviet European identity. Moreover, the Bologna process was used by the government to build a national system. While such sentiments against the Bologna Process are still expressed, it is framed as irrelevant and/or pro-Russian and is dismissed. Thus, the Soviet past and political conflict with Russia radicalized Georgia's European aspirations and narrowed the options for development scenarios of the higher education system.

To move from the general rhetoric about the reforms to their implementation, a rushed transition to introduce the Bologna policies, opaque and incomprehensible regulations and their frequent revisions created anxieties and resistance of academics towards the reforms. In addition, the professional development of academic staff in line with the 'modernization' of the system never became a government priority, while academics were frequently criticized for being incompetent to carry out changes (Tsotniashvili, 2022). Lack of experience and scarcity of support necessary for the system-wide substantial transformation in terms of redesigning the academic programs, changing the teaching and assessment methods, and navigating the new quality assurance regulations disengaged academic staff from the ongoing reforms. As a result, those tasks were technically carried out by the administrative support staff (newly created QA offices in the HEIs). Similar to other higher education systems, an attempt to institutionalize the internal quality assurance and accountability system increased bureaucracy (Anderson, 2006; Cardoso et al., 2016; Jibladze, 2013; Newton, 2000). This created resistance and dissatisfaction among the Georgian academics, who argued that it was a wasted effort. However, while the resistance towards the change was high, as years went by, academic

staff considered the institutional development of HEIs as a positive outcome of the QA system implementation (Shurgaia, 2015).

While a system-wide professional development policy for academic staff was never developed, internationalization of the system rapidly increased mainly through the EU and US funded projects. As a result, participation in international mobility and scholarship programs became the primary venue for the professional development of Georgian academics. However, the scale of the programs has been limited, particularly for those who lack English language proficiency (Bregvadze et al., 2019; Tsotniashvili, 2022). It should also be highlighted that the socialization of post-Soviet academics with the Western academic space has particular implications. Along with the advantages of participating in international mobility programs, Western-trained academics returning home experience the frustration of their inability to "catch up with the West" (Silova et al., 2017), comparing the academic work benefits/conditions of their European or US colleagues. The professional and cultural experiences acquired through international mobility programs would, inevitably, increase the tension and divergence of academic identities between those who participated in them and those who did not.

Another tension was created in the research domain. On the one hand, the research capacity in STEM, which was the stronghold of Soviet academia, deteriorated. This condition left the esteemed academics without any support to reinvent themselves in the new reality. On the other hand, social science research, which was absent from the Soviet research scene, could not be developed due to the lack of relevant financial or policy support. Therefore, academics have the hard task of establishing themselves in the field.

The final point that creates tensions during post-Soviet transformations is the freedom of expression and academic freedom. The complicated political context weakened the ability of academics to regain freedom and independence in the post-totalitarian reality (Kobakhidze & Samniashvili, 2022). Academic freedom is guaranteed by the Constitution of Georgia and the law on higher education (Parliament of Georgia, 2004). In scholarly literature or public sources, less is known about the interference of academic freedom in those domains. But the reason behind this is not just adherence to the law but the legacy of self-censorship inherited from the Soviet regime, which limits the discussions on academic freedom or taking advantage of academic freedom in scholarly work (Kobakhidze & Samniashvili, 2022; Oleksiyenko, 2020; Smolentseva, 2003). Violation of the freedom of expression by university hierarchies or political forces is a more prominent issue, which manifests in limiting the promotion opportunities or even dismissals of academics on the grounds of their political opinions (Kobakhidze & Samniashvili, 2022), stirring up the memories of the Soviet repressions.

The revolutionary government stayed in power until 2012. While the new government mitigated the rhetoric towards the radical changes, the European integration and the Bologna Process still remained the main direction of the system development. As the development of the higher education system in Georgia largely revolved around quality assurance, the higher education development agenda of the new government prioritized it once again.

The reform of the QA mechanisms, which was launched in 2017, intended to address the flows in the system and make it development-oriented and outcome-based, which would give an impulse to the HEIs to improve. Furthermore, the reform intended

to make the system compliant with the ESG, therefore responding to the expectations of the European Higher Education Area and the Georgia-EU Association Agreement requirements towards Higher Education (Darchia et al., 2019). Although the reform was successful in meeting European standards, [19]its transformative power for the national system and universities was limited. While academics have been struggling to navigate the labyrinths of higher education reforms, the QA reforms were criticized for focusing merely on formal changes and having a minor transformative impact on educational quality (Chitashvili, 2020; Jibladze, 2013; Tsotniashvili, 2020), resulting in collective anxiety, restlessness, helplessness, and frustration towards the system.

Some of the surfaced reasons behind the disappointing outcomes, such as the unstable political landscape and inconsistent policy implementation, previous experiences and skepticism towards the reform, and low state funding for HEIs, could be identified (Amashukeli et al., 2020; Darchia et al., 2019). However, in order to break the cycle of re-emerging disruptions and frustrations, it is essential to untangle and recognize the roots of the problems.

I see reviewing Soviet history and reflecting on the experience accumulated over more than 30 years of post-Soviet transformations as an opportunity for re-examining and reclaiming the past. This can serve the academics and universities as an enabler to consciously reinvent and reposition themselves in the current realm.

[19] As a result of the reform Georgian national quality assurance agency and quality assurance system was evaluated as compliant to ESG (2015) by the experts from The European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA), thus, became a member of ENQA in 2019 and registered in European Quality Assurance Register in 2020.

Current Days of (Lost) Opportunities (2021-present)

The current policy for higher education development in Georgia is quite different from my wishful scenario described in the paragraph above. During the last two years, the decision-making in higher education is in pending condition. Some of the areas, such as strengthening the capacity of QA mechanisms and governance of qualifications (based on European best practices) (NCEQE, 2021), are in motion due to the EU-funded Twinning project.[20] The Ministry of Education and Science, with the support of international experts, developed another "National Education and Science Strategy of Georgia 2022-2032."The development process of the strategy still lacked the substantial engagement of academic circles, but the 'participatory process' was covered by a few focus groups with stakeholders. The Strategy is built on aligning the higher education, research, and innovation policies with the EU policies and EHEA priorities (MoES, 2022). The approval of the Strategy was pending for eight months for unknown reasons. Another crucial issue for the Georgian higher education system, which has been frequently criticized by the HEI leadership and academic community, is the funding policy. The development of the new funding model has been a subject of World Bank projects in 2018 and 2020 (IIQ, 2020). Although the draft of the model has been developed, the decision about its public discussions or approval is still pending. Thus, policy-making in Georgia is still driven (if at all) by the EU and World Bank projects. The inert state of the higher education system resonates with the current state of the

[20] The project aims to support Georgia to adjust the policy and guidelines of NCEQE with EU standards considering the best European practices of implementation of EU Educational Strategy as well as considering the national context of Georgia and thus ensuring NCEQE's position as a full member of the family of European educational agencies.

political establishment, keeping the status quo and avoiding any changes (which reminds one of the Brezhnev era) that can risk the number of their voters.

Thus, while the academic system in Georgia moves towards Westernization, the process is simultaneously fast and slow. Higher education policy reforms are challenged by complex and contradictory historical, political, cultural, and societal contexts. Some decisions are made and executed in a rushed manner, resulting in unintended and unfavorable outcomes, and some get stuck at times at the system or institutional levels. Countries that lack experience are prone to uncritically adopt the policies developed in the ”Global North” (Blanco Ramírez, 2014) and implement them more rigidly and technically (Oleksiyenko, 2016). In this process, they mutate into deficient, malfunctioning practices that require another revision of the system, again, solely based on the *European experience*. As Shahjahan et al. (2017) describe, "We chase a wild goose, where restlessness kills our capacity to observe and to reason with patience, attention, and wisdom...this draws attention away from a deep existential crisis" (p. 65). Thus, we are trapped in the constant transition, catching up with the West. In this condition, the development of the national system becomes overly dependent on global triggers, and universities become dependent on the impulses of national policy changes. Such a pattern disempowers the local systems and individuals, such as policy-makers, academics, and HEI administrators. It limits the capacity of local actors to take a deeper introspective exploration to make their own decisions in response to the social, economic, and historical post-socialist context.

While all higher education systems are resistant to change, universities “at a specific moment in history is an amalgam of sometimes contradictory elements

originating from different historical periods" (Ringer, 1979 as cited by Tromley, 2013, p. 15). Thus, the current state of Georgian university is a compound of the pre-Soviet, Soviet, and post-Soviet pasts, and also the ambiguous future (which, to its end, is the product of the past) drifting between the Soviet and Western spaces. Therefore, academic culture and identities are evolving in the realms where pre-Soviet histories, Soviet totalitarian experiences, and (yet expected) Western democracy intersect and bypass each other. In this pattern, the future of the higher education system in the former Soviet time and space becomes obsolete.

De Sousa Santos (2012) argues that to reorient the future of universities, they should confront the 'strong questions' rooted in the university's historical identity and mission. The 'strong questions' cause the perplexities that need to be transformed into positive energy, fueling the deeper deliberation in the open and contradictory field of policy-making. Instead, those perplexities are being dismissed and strong questions receive weak answers manifested in reforms, which, in the end, immobilize systems (De Sousa Santos, 2012). This argument is well-echoed in the current political order in Georgia. Declaring the perplexity of the future is not a favorable position for the political elite. Moreover, digging deeper into those perplexities and decision-making politics is a prolonged process, which does not fit with the political time driven by the quick, populist solutions and messages on Europeanization and modernization that become further intensified from elections to elections, while trapping the higher education system in perpetual inertia.

CHAPTER 3

LITERATURE REVIEW: THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Academic Identities

Studying academic identities is instrumental in understanding the complexity of academic life, as well as interactions between individuals, institutions, and communities that shape the academic world (Henkel & Vabø, 2006). The turbulent academic environment and the transformation of policies, funding, and governance are considered to be the main forces that impact academic life and intensify attention on changing academic identities (Barnett, 2000; Clegg, 2008a; Henkel, 2009; Ylijoki & Ursin, 2013). According to Henkel (2005a), strong and stable communities, deeply rooted values and beliefs, behavioral patterns, and even myths are the core of the formation of durable academic identities. However, in the age of 'supercomplexity' (Barnett, 2000), the influx of neoliberal principles and marketization in higher education, along with the emergence of quality regimes, impact the academic landscape and challenge the traditional understanding of academic identities as stable and enduring entities (Barnett & Di Napoli, 2008). In these circumstances, academics engage in the dynamic process of redefining their identities and roles in relation to others within the academic community and in the broader context. Barnett and Di Napoli (2008) describe this as a "historical process of construction, deconstruction, and reconstruction of academic identities" (p. 6). This process also involves finding an academic self "from where they [academics] find a sense of meaning and worth" (Henkel, 2012, p. 3). Delanty (2008) further highlights that the formation of identity gains its momentum in crisis and the crisis is

very well apparent in today's academic life, which unfolds the diversification of academic identities in multiple ways. In the context of Georgia, this condition is compounded by the complexity of the historical, cultural, and political transformation from the Soviet to the Western academic system.

While there is a growing body of literature on academic identities, there is also a concern that the concept of identity is used without any explanation or is poorly defined (Barrow et al., 2020; Castelló et al., 2021; Sfard & Prusak, 2005). In particular, studies often describe how academic identity is shaped but avoid the definition of what identity is. Therefore, prior to discussing the notion of academic identities in more detail, I will explore a general conceptualization of identity and identity formation deriving from psychological, philosophical, and sociological disciplines.

Conceptualization of Identities

Drawing from the historical overview of the conceptualization of identity, Peter Taylor (2008) identifies four positions or stages of conceptualizing identities: (1) taken on through shared practices based on acceptance of given truth (Greek and Christian influence), (2) constructed through individual's thought and reflection process contesting the dogmas and traditions (Descartes), (3) co-constructed through individual's traits and beliefs derived from non-rational, subconscious and emotional processes (Hagel and Freud), (4) politicized and embodied concept, which is continuously 'under-construction' in indeterminate and complex context (Lacan, Foucault, and Butler). While these positions follow the chronological evolution of the scholarly understanding of identity, all four traditions confluence the prevalent conception and understanding of academic identities in different social contexts today (Taylor, 2008).

Identity is a complex and contested notion. Its contextualization and description of its nature vary and sometimes contradict each other across various onto-epistemological and disciplinary traditions. From the metaphysical and philosophical points of view, identity is what individuals preserve across time and what makes us who we are, underlying the persistent and stable nature of identity (Shoemaker & Tobia, 2019; Olson, 2008). According to Olson (2008), memory and physical continuity are the major sources of evidence for identity. Manuel Castells (2010) underlines that identity is an individual's source of meaning, where the construction of meaning is based on cultural attributes. For Taylor (1989), identity, or knowing of who you are, is a compass that orients us in moral space.

The psychological theories of identity also emphasize moral traits as the most significant properties of personal identity (Shoemaker & Tobia, 2019). Shoemaker and Tobia (2019) argue that moral properties are the core mechanisms for the judgment of identity, therefore, moral changes have a strong impact on identity change, spilling over into changes in perceptions, personality, desires, and even memories.[21] Other identity properties also include perceptions, preferences, personality traits, and values. Oyserman et al. (2012) define identities as "the traits and characteristics, social relations, roles, and social group memberships that define who one is" (p. 69).

Giddens (1991) distinguishes identity from self, articulating that "the 'identity' of the self, in contrast to the 'self' is a generic phenomenon, which presumes reflexive awareness" (p. 52). According to Oyserman (2001), self-concept and identity are the

[21] Such conceptualization of personal identity strongly resonates with the discussion on moral order in higher education in general (e.g., Brady, 2012; Nixon, 2008; Tesar et al., 2021) and particularly in post-Soviet context (e.g., Oleksiyenko, 2020, 2022; Oushakine, 2009; Tomusk, 2004).

theories of our personality, of who we are, what we know about ourselves, and where we belong. She highlights that our conception of self is shaped through "improving oneself, knowing oneself, discovering oneself, creating oneself anew, expressing oneself, taking charge of one's self, being happy or ashamed of oneself" (p. 449). All these 'self' projects provide useful analytical lenses for exploring the simultaneous and asynchronous streams of construction and reconstruction of academic identities.

A substantial body of academic literature on academic identities draws on the social constructionist perspective, emphasizing that identities are socially forged and formed in relation to others, mediating the values and culture of the social world they inhabit (Barnett & Di Napoli, 2008; Hall, 1992; Henkel, 2005a; Jenkins, 1996; Pick et al., 2017). This conception of identity bridges the personal (internal) and public (external) worlds and stabilizes the subject (Hall, 1992). According to Bauman (1996), identity is a creation of modernity, as a 'problem' of self-formation toward 'what is demanded to be' (p. 19) from an individual. While the modernist approach to identity intended to construct and keep solid and stable identities, in the postmodern world, stable identities become fragmented into multiple, sometimes contradictory and unresolved components. Bauman highlights that the postmodern problem of identity is to "avoid fixation and keep options open" (p. 18) and compares it to the videotape that is erasable and reusable. Davies (2000) underlines that in the poststructuralist discourse, the stable and fixed quality of self as a noun shifts to the self as a verb, where selves are continuously made and remade through discursive possibilities.

The accelerated changes in the dominant societal structures and processes shake an individual's position in the social world. Hall (1992) labels this condition as a "crisis

of identity" (p. 273), where individuals confront multiple possibilities of identity reconstruction (Hall, 1992, p. 277). According to Jenkins (1996), identity is a basic cognitive mechanism for orienting ourselves in the human world. He explains that the construction of individual or collective identity is a continuous and reflexive process, synthesizing the definition of self and the definition of self by others. This conceptualization also resonates with Bauman's (1996) explanation that identity is a means for placing oneself in a specific setting in a way that "both sides would know how to go in each other's presence" (p. 19).

Conceptualization of Academic Identities in Literature

The concept of academic identity is a multifaceted, contested, and evolving notion, which encompasses various perspectives and interpretations across different onto-epistemological and disciplinary traditions. In the realm of 'supercomplexity,' the confluence of different conceptualizations of identities enables a comprehensive exploration of the intricate process of formation of academic identities, taking into account the dynamic interplay between personal and social dimensions.

In the following subsections, I will review the personal and social dimensions of academic identities. Furthermore, I will discuss the relevance of the prominent scholarly literature on academic identities in the post-Soviet space, highlighting the contextual peculiarities. Subsequently, I will explore the prevalent factors contributing to the formation of academic identities, including the institutional, disciplinary, and professional dimensions.

Personal Identities. A substantial body of scholarly literature focuses on personal identity in the formation of academic identities. One of the dominant streams of research

presents the notion of personal identity through demographic categorization, such as gender, race, and class. Such an approach to studying personal identities is situated in the Western academic context and focuses on the "previously absent or underrepresented" populations pursuing academic careers (Pifer & Baker, 2013, p. 122). In Western academic literature, gender identities are one of the most researched components of personal academic identities (Pifer & Baker, 2013). For example, Gill (2017) highlights the 'hidden injuries' related to mental and physical well-being, economic stability, and work-life balance that female academics face while pursuing academic careers. LaSala et al. (2008) discuss how LGBT academics navigate and endure their academic careers. Clegg (2008b) explores gendered discourses of the academic identity and position of a woman as an intellectual.

It should be noted that in Georgia, the issue of gender identities in relation to academic careers is not visible in the policy or scholarly domains or even in academic or informal discussions. There is no research or statistical data that could allow making an argument on this issue.[22] The reason behind this could be that gender as a social construct is still in the infancy of the academic or public policy scene, while in Western systems, the identity politics of gender or race are constituted in the laws and sustained and produced through their expression in legal categories (Delanty, 2008).

Another prevalent component of personal academic identity presented in the Western academic discourse is race, which in the context of the US academic space, addresses the experiences of African, Latino, Asian, and Native American academics

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[22] In Georgian HEIs, 55% of teaching and academic staff is women; however, at this point, there is no data available about gender distribution by academic rank (Geostat, 2021).

(Pifer & Baker, 2013). In the case of Georgia, the ethnicity of academics (predominantly Armenian, Azerbaijani, Abkhaz or Ossetian) could be relevant. However, the ethnicity of academics is not identified in any statistical data or even in the personal professional profiles and documents of academic staff. Thus, on the one hand, the academic literature on personal identities of academics is predominantly situated in the Western context and its operationalization is limited to some demographic categories that are not attuned to the problem of personal identities in non-Western societies. On the other hand, academic identities and experiences of minority groups remain understudied in Georgian academic space.

Another body of literature on personal identities is discussed from the critical realism perspective, emphasizing individuals and their agency as the main source for identity formation while also recognizing the significance of context where its development is situated (Castelló et al., 2021; Clegg, 2005, 2008a; McAlpine & Amundsen, 2011). However, they are still focused on understanding various educational contexts rather than academic identities as such. For example, McAlpine et al. (2014) use the notion of identity-trajectory, emphasizing the individual's academic journey over time, where the individual's intentions, agency, and personal lives are central to understanding academic practices. Clegg (2005) emphasizes that studying how academics exercise agency at the micro-level is critical for understanding macro-level changes in higher education and gaining a more comprehensive insight into how those changes are interpreted, received, or resisted by academics.

While examining academic identities through the demographic categorization of personal identities or focusing on how academics make sense of the ongoing academic

practices and education reforms is important, such research fails to portray the dynamics of identity construction, deconstruction, and reconstruction, as well as to uncover the complexity and potential of analyzing academic identities through putting the academic 'self' into focus.

Social/Collective Identities. Studying academic identities from the perspective of collective identities is rarely presented in the academic literature. The notion of collective identity is implicitly mentioned in some manuscripts; however, they predominantly lack definition, conceptualization, or marking of the meaningfulness of researching academic identities from a collective perspective. Derived from the social identity theory, collective identity implies that an individual belongs to a certain social group/s. The members of this group share similar social identifications, values, and beliefs and distinguish themselves from the identification features of other individuals or social groups (Jenkins, 1996; Stets & Burke, 2000). While academics hold their individual identities in different institutional or community settings, their academic identities are also shaped through seeing, making meaning, and understanding the social world from a certain group's shared, collective perspectives. Risse (2011) highlights that "collective identities are not only shared, they are collectively shared" (p. 22). Collective identities encompass similar values, beliefs, behavioral patterns, norms and understanding, use of language, and other shared properties. They also entail emotional attachment to particular groups (Risse, 2011; Stets & Burke, 2000). Academics are part of increasingly diversifying academic communities and networks (e.g., disciplinary communities, institutions, faculties, academic divisions, and professional roles), some of which are relatively stable, but others are changing, renovating, or fading. Membership of multiple social groups –

simultaneously or across different times and spaces and intersections of different personal or collective identities – can be fulfilling and empowering but also can be distressing and contradictory (Delanty, 2008; Stets & Burke, 2000). Nevertheless, collective identities have the potential and capacity for social mobilization and collective action (Risse, 2011).

Academic identities are influenced by the changing educational policies and regimes, but at the same time, academics mutually influence the academic space around them (Delanty, 2008; Pifer & Baker, 2013) through "accommodation and agency, action and reaction, adjustment and resistance" (Nixon, 2015, p. 1). Thus, shifting attention to the individual or collective 'academic selves' and their personal experiences of defining and redefining their identities through different times and spaces could unfold the ways for the conscious and purposeful construction of the academic space.

Factors Shaping Academic Identities. Academic literature discusses the institutional and disciplinary dimensions and characteristics of an academic profession as crucial factors in shaping academic identities. I will discuss each of them separately below. However, in reality, these elements intersect, reconfigure, and confluence the continuous process of construction, deconstruction, and reconstruction of academic identities (Delanty, 2008; Henkel, 2005a, 2005b; Pifer & Baker, 2013; Taylor, 2008). Furthermore, individuals have multiple identities simultaneously, and academic identities co-exist with other aspects of an individual's personhood (Clegg, 2008a). Moreover, the plurality of identities is present within an individual's academic domain, which is multilayered, defined, and redefined in different contexts over time, overlapping and contradicting each other in different circumstances (Evans, 2015; Nixon, 2015). Evans

(2015) further explains that certain identities come into motion and become dominant at certain periods of time, or even momentarily, while others remain subsidiary and some disappear.

Institutional Identities. The institutional settings and structures of universities vary in terms of types, missions, cultures, and values. Delanty (2008) theorizes academic institutions in terms of process rather than a fixed structure. He argues that due to the increasing external pressures, universities are constantly in motion. Recent trends in higher education, such as managerialism, marketization, commercialization, accountability, performativity, internationalization, and technological developments, strongly influence the institutional context of the academic workplace (Clegg, 2008a; Krause, 2009; Pifer & Baker, 2013). Induced market principles, the language of competition, and framing the success of academics under the performance review metrics create tension between academics and academic institutions. The neoliberal logic of academic institutions results in the dominance of institutions over the agency of academics, causing incongruence between the values of academics and institutional context (Davies, 2005; Harris, 2005). Such tensions create a crisis in academic life, therefore giving an impulse to reshape academic identities (Delanty, 2008).

While discussing the institutional contexts of universities in relation to the formation of academic identities, scholarly literature predominantly emphasizes unfavorable changes and trends, such as neoliberalism, performativity, or accountability, as a source of the formation of academic identities. The scholarship on academic identities pays inadequate attention to the university as a site of organizational norms, culture, and traditions, which is embedded in the broader historical and sociocultural

context. Hence, mainstream research mostly focuses on ongoing institutional changes influenced by global trends and puts emphasis on the changing nature of academic identity, while its enduring features and their intra-actions with the changes are overlooked.

Disciplinary Identities. Disciplinary identity underlines belonging to a specific academic community and sharing values, culture, working practices, languages, beliefs, and ideas about knowledge (Becher & Trowler, 2001; Henkel, 2009, 2005). Similar to other factors, disciplinary culture is also changing and disciplinary boundaries are blurring, creating new interdisciplinary configurations destabilizing the historically bounded academic identities (Henkel, 2005b; Trowler et al., 2013). Moreover, the epistemological contestation and development of knowledge production make the formation of academic identities more complex. The combination of conceptual, theoretical, and methodological choices creates epistemic communities and enacts the concept of epistemic identities (Henkel, 2005b; Trowler et al., 2013). Epistemic identities are strongly influenced by the personal characteristics of academics, such as class, gender, and nationality (Henkel, 2005b). Moreover, academic identities are increasingly influenced by networks and memberships in various knowledge or disciplinary communities (Delanty, 2008; Pifer & Baker, 2013).

Professional Identities. While discussing academic identities, scholarly literature widely uses the notion of professional identity (Clarke et al., 2013; Henkel, 2012; Pifer & Baker, 2013). Although the definition of professional identity is not clearly articulated, it is usually contextualized through the interplay of academic roles, career stages, as well as disciplinary and institutional contexts (Clarke et al., 2013).

The roles in the academic profession usually cover teaching, research, and service to society. However, today, they exist in multiple configurations of those functions along with other administrative domains. The variations in terms of the intensity of the roles that academics take (e.g., teaching-focused, research professor) and the time they dedicate to academic and non-academic jobs influence the changing nature of academic identities (El-Khawas, 2008). In Europe and the US, there is also an increasing emphasis on another component – revenue-generating entrepreneurial activities and technology transfer. Academic identities are frequently presented by the roles that academics take, such as teacher identity or researcher identity (McAlpine et al., 2008). Castells (2010) contests this approach and highlights that roles and identities must be distinguished from each other. Although the roles are implicated in identities, identities are the stronger notion. The role organizes functions that are defined and negotiated by and with the institutions. Identities organize the meaning and "are sources of meaning for actors themselves, and by themselves, constructed through a process of individuation" (Castells, 2010, p. 7).

The literature highlights that the neoliberal policies in higher education, particularly impact professional identities, as they stir up concerns about job security, autonomy, and academic freedom, which are seminal components of academic identities (Barrow et al., 2020; Harris, 2005; Pifer & Baker, 2013).

Beijaard et al. (2004) also highlight the personal factors in the formation of professional identity. However, they emphasize the contextual surroundings of a person and ongoing interaction of the personal and professional domains shaping the conditions for 'being' and 'becoming' a professional. Therefore, the nature of professional identity

is seen as changing and dynamic, creating the professional image of self, seen by the 'self,' seen by others, and the one the 'self' intends to become.

The Gaps in the Literature. The research and theorization of academic identities have flourished in the Western (Anglo-American) academic space. Europe (particularly the UK), the USA, Australia, and New Zealand are the dominant sites where academic identity research is produced. As a result, while the theoretical and methodological approaches are useful contributions to studying academic identities, they vastly miss the consideration of complexities, uncertainties, precarity, and behavioral patterns of non-Western universities and cultures. In the Western academic space, neoliberal trends are perceived as the most threatening and influential factors that dislocate academic identities. Literature highlights that two major conflicting systems – academic and managerial – cause the tensions of identities. The academic value system is based on a liberal and collegial value system where scholarship is driven by curiosity and principles of academic freedom, while the managerial one is oriented toward efficiency, accountability, and outcomes (Shams, 2019; Winter & O'Donohue, 2012).

While these trends have also spilled into the non-Western space, global education policies are still resentfully challenged by local complexities and complications, diffracting the strong neoliberal impact in multiple and unpredictable ways. In the former Soviet states, the tensions and crisis of academic identities go beyond the prevalent academic versus managerial debate and are embedded in socialist legacies and drastic post-socialist political and societal changes. Therefore, the formation of academic identities implicates the multiple streams of transformations, such as national, political, economic, social, cultural, and generational transitions between the Soviet, post-Soviet,

and Western times and spaces, forming a non-linear process characterized by divergent, conflicting, and even paradoxical matters. Therefore, exploring academic identities as a socially constructed phenomenon should encompass the national, historical, and cultural context of higher education, workplace, behavioral patterns of individuals and social interactions, and their intersections with the impactful Western influence. In this regard, the conceptualization of identities as narrative identities is particularly helpful, as it enables exploration of the contextualized understanding of reconstruction and deconstruction of academic identities.

Narrative Identities

There is an increasing interest among higher education scholars to approach the research of the academic profession and identities from the narrative identity perspective. It is an attempt to put the experiences, feelings, emotions, and imaginations of academics as the focus of the research (e.g., Beattie, 2015; Evans, 2015; McAlpine et al., 2008; Wright & Ørberg, 2019; Ylijoki & Ursin, 2015; Ylijoki, 2005). It is important to notice the difference between exploring academic identities through narrative inquiry and understanding academic identities as narrative identities, while sometimes this difference is blurry. In this section, I only focus on the latter one. As McAdams and McLean (2013) define it, "narrative identity is a person's internalized and evolving life story, integrating the reconstructed past and imagined future to provide life with some degree of unity and purpose" (p. 233). Constructing and narrating life stories embraces personal agency, reflexivity, and exploration of the present being, synthesizing the memories and envisioned future (McAdams & McLean, 2013). Narrative identity encompasses an individual's understanding of self and cultural context, which are the sources for

interpreting, orientating, and relating to the social world (Ylijoki & Ursin, 2015). Narratives embody a moral compass, enabling an individual's moral judgment, core values, and beliefs that are shared in a given culture (Harré, 1983).

The stories adapted and transformed in the process of narration are the major source for individuals to understand themselves and build their identities. In the academic setting, academics tell, negotiate, create, and co-create stories, fueling the construction of the meanings of various events and their relation to those events (Ylijoki & Ursin, 2013).

Aspired by the view that "human beings are active agents who play decisive roles in determining the dynamics of social life," Sfard and Prusak (2005) present identities as stories about persons, highlighting that identities may be defined as a collection of narratives about individuals that are "reifying, endorsable and significant" (pp. 15-16). The authors stress that they view stories as identities and not as identities that are expressed in stories. They argue that narratives are the product of discursive diffusion, consciously or unconsciously recycled from the narratives floating around us. Thus, stories are in constant interaction and a person cannot be considered to be the sole author of a story even if it is told by her/himself (Sfard & Prusak, 2005), which underlines the socially constructed nature of identity. The narrative identities enable exploration of the complex and dynamic notion of academic identities embedded in the historical, social, and cultural context, forming multiple temporal and spatial intersections.

Intersectionality of Academic Identities

Individuals have multiple identities framed around different personal and social factors, which continuously intersect with one another under particular conditions (Given,

2008). Pifer and Baker (2013) suggest that using the intersectionality theory within and between social, professional, and personal identities and characteristics provides a useful lens to understand how particular identities shape and become salient, while others become auxiliary or even fade. These intersections generate ongoing and often conflictual processes of negotiation of identity where the experiences of academics are complex, contested, and changing, thus offering a "holistic picture of ever-evolving academy" (Pifer & Baker, 2013, p. 127).

In the Western epistemic space, intersectionality focuses on the different combinations of intersections between various social and individual identities, such as gender, race, class, and other social locations, based on which individuals or groups experience the power of oppression differently (Crenshaw, 1994). In the context of academic identities, the intersectional lens is used to understand the phenomena such as "oppression, participation and (in)visibility" in an academic context (Pifer & Baker, 2013, p. 125). However, in the Georgian higher education space, such social characteristics are still concealed behind the relentless race toward Westernization and Europeanization of the higher education system. In this context, the identities of Georgian academics are predominantly formed through intersections of their personal, educational, and professional characteristics and experiences through which they continuously cross temporal and spatial boundaries between Soviet and Western imaginaries. Furthermore, the institutional and disciplinary affiliations, along with the transitional geopolitical, cultural, and historical contexts in which these experiences unfold, contribute to a dynamic and intricate landscape for identity formation.

Conceptualization of Identities in the Context of Georgian Academic Space

Exploring the wide variety of conceptualizations of identities invokes a sense of hidden polarity in approaching the nature of academic identities from different perspectives. For instance, whether we approach the study of identity as socially constructed or as a unique 'self,' is it stable or fluid, single or multiple, self-imagined or seen by others, or even categorized through political mechanisms, is it a matter of being or becoming? The specific choices of its conceptualization can be useful for specific contexts and research goals. However, my understanding of identities fuses and embraces its multiple and sometimes contradictory conceptualizations. Hence, I see these multiple interpretations of identity made from different epistemological or disciplinary standpoints as complementary rather than contested.

For this study, my goal is to design a conceptual framework that provides a multidimensional analytical lens for studying academic identities that are situated in the context of post-Soviet transformations. For the purposes of this research, I define *academic identity as a liminal state of being and becoming, which constitutes a reflexive and diffractive process of construction, deconstruction, and reconstruction of the academic self over time and space through adjusting, resisting, negotiating, and reinventing it.* Academics hold multiple identities; while some become dominant at certain periods of time, others remain subsidiary and some disappear. Moreover, the transformation of academic identities in the post-Soviet academic space is shaped by the continuous interaction of five main pillars: personal core, historical national and cultural context, higher education context, social group context, and personal factors. Therefore, academic identities are constructed, deconstructed, and deconstructed through the

individual's personal characteristics and their socialization with others; changing political, cultural, institutional, or community-based settings; persisting beliefs and past experiences gained in various social contexts; past, present, and future images of 'self' seen by the self and by others; personal memories, emotions and experiences; and the fixed personal essence of self.

Table 1

Conceptual Framework of Transformation of Academic Identities

<table>
<tr><td colspan="5">Academic identity is a liminal state of being and becoming, which constitutes a reflexive process of construction, deconstruction, and reconstruction of the academic self over time and space through adjusting, resisting, negotiating, and reinventing it. Academics hold multiple identities; while some become dominant at certain periods of time, others remain subsidiary and some disappear.</td></tr>
<tr><th>Personal core</th><th>Historical, national and cultural context</th><th>Higher education context</th><th>Social group (university/faculty/ disciplinary) context</th><th>Personal factors</th></tr>
<tr><td>Core personality traits</td><td>-Pre-Soviet past
-Soviet legacies
-Post-Soviet transformation
-Westernization</td><td>-Soviet higher education legacies
-Post-Soviet transformations
-Neoliberal reforms</td><td>-Characteristics of academic profession
-Collective values and self-image
-Institutional/ disciplinary traditions, culture, behavioral patterns
-Formal and informal relationships</td><td>-Personal characteristics
-Personal biographies and experiences
-Past, present, and future images of self
seen by self
seen by other
-Personal values, beliefs and moral order
-Narrated self and narratives about others</td></tr>
<tr><td>Reveals 'self' in unique ways</td><td colspan="4">Constitute persisting and changing elements</td></tr>
</table>

The contexts, elements, and processes described in the table continuously intra-act with and rewire one another, shaping multiple identities and their relational patterns. In

order to explore the transformation of the identities of Georgian academics, it is essential to situate this conceptual framework within the context of post-Soviet transformations. In this regard, I find the decolonial, post-colonial, and post-socialist transformation perspectives especially meaningful. These theoretical perspectives help to understand how academic identities evolve in response to the processes of de-Sovietization and re-Westernization projects that shape the Georgian academic space.

Decolonial, Post-Colonial, and Post-Socialist Perspectives

While higher education systems in the former Soviet Union have been dramatically impacted by the global neoliberal policies in multiple ways, the implementation of reforms has taken "unanticipated trajectories and led to unknown destinations" (Silova, 2009, p. 298), which often have turned out to be different from the expected 'progress' toward Western norms and Europeanization of higher education. Recognizing that universities are embedded within each country's social, cultural, historical, and political context is not a surprising fact (Zembylas, 2021). The system is still considered 'underdeveloped' by Western experts and, therefore, is subject to constant 'development,' causing disappointment in the society and relentless anxiety among academics. This tendency is symptomatic of the re-westernization and homogenization efforts of higher education systems and requires critical examination of the dominant, universal, and singular project of Western modernization and development.

Scholarly literature on decolonial and postcolonial theories provides a critical perspective to reassess the implementation of Western neoliberal reforms in the post-

Soviet space as the post-socialist transformation shares a similar trajectory with other postcolonial and decolonial settings. In this context, the Western neoliberal university model, characterized by competition, productivity, prestige, and marketization (Barnett, 2012), has become a model to follow for everyone and the yardstick to measure against. As Stein & Andreotti (2017) argue, this Western model is deeply rooted in the elements of modern/colonial imaginary that includes

> a racialized hierarchy of humanity; teleological, Euro-supremacist notions of human development and history; transcendentalization of both the nation-state and the capitalist market as institutions that, even as they may be critiqued and reformed, are accepted as the best of all possible modes of social, economic, and political organization; possessive individualism, and property ownership as the basis of personhood and worthiness; a strictly binary and heteropatriarchal gender and kinship system; objectification and exploitation of "natural resources"; and the universal value of Western reason (p. 174).

This colonial "matrix" of power orders both social meanings and relations according to a global imaginary premised on a singular trajectory of space and time, with the Western university model positioned as the apex of linear progress and development (Chakravartty & Silva, 2012; Mignolo, 2000, 2011; Silova, 2014; Stein & Andreotti, 2017). As a result, Georgian academic space and academic lives have become subjugated by the contemporary modern/colonial imaginary about "what it means to be a university" (Zembylas, 2021, p. 62). In the transition from Soviet to Western modernity/coloniality, the hierarchical patterns of academic and knowledge production space have been mirrored in the formation of academic identities, creating dominations, marginalizations,

and division among the academic communities. Therefore, decolonial research of academic identities in the Georgian context acknowledges modern/colonial patterns in the academic space while taking a step towards articulating alternatives. In the following subsections, I will first explain the concept of coloniality and decolonial option in the context of post-socialist transformations and then discuss the application of decolonial perspectives in studying academic identities.

Coloniality/Modernity and Alternative Trajectories for Education Policy

According to Mignolo (2011a), 'coloniality'[23] is constitutive of modernity as the development of Western civilization is built on the colonization of other cultures (traditionally referring to the British, French, Spanish, Portuguese, and Dutch colonies and the global order originated in the sixteenth century) and exploitation of their wealth, hiding the 'darker side' of modernity (p. 2). Western modernity and, therefore, 'coloniality' implies a monocentric, universal, rational, hegemonic project of 'development,' which devalues and homogenizes the multiplicity of non-Western realities (Mignolo, 2011a; Silova et al., 2017).

As Mignolo (2011a) explains, both postcolonial and decolonial theories confront the colonial legacies and logic of coloniality, but they are two different projects. Postcoloniality refers to the historical end of territorial colonialism and contests the colonial legacies and struggles against the political, economic, and epistemic domination of colonial power (Crossley & Tikly, 2004; Loomba, 1998). Decoloniality emerged as an

[23] Initially introduced by Peruvian sociologist Anibal Quijano in the late 1980s, who explains that the colonial matrix of power consists of four interrelated domains of management and control: control of the economy, of authority, of gender and sexuality, and of knowledge and subjectivity (four "heads") that stand on the two "legs" - racial and patriarchal foundation of knowledge.

option of Western modernity, aiming at unveiling the structure of the colonial matrix of power hidden behind the rhetoric of 'modernization and development,'[24] dispelling the 'myth of universality' and multilayered hierarchies (geopolitical, epistemic, linguistic, spiritual, societal, sexual, racial, aesthetic) ingrained in the colonial and imperial relational order (Mignolo, 2011a). Still, the decolonial option does not intend to be another single option but instead offers a possibility of multiple coexisting trajectories. It also does not imply isolation from the global world but calls for replacing imperial cosmopolitanism with decolonial cosmopolitanism, therefore replacing monocentric universal global order with pluriversality (Mignolo, 2011a). Mignolo (2011a) introduces five competing but coexisting trajectories that are shaping the pluriversal world order of the 21st century, one of which is the decolonial option and the other four are re-westernization, re-orientation to the left, de-westernization, and spiritual options. Silova, Rappleye, and Auld (2020) apply these five trajectories to reimagine the future of the global education policy agenda.

Re-westernization perpetuates the political, economic, social, and epistemic domination of the Western capitalist world commencing the mission of democratization, modernization, international development, humanitarianism, and anti-terrorism campaigns. In the education policy context, the re-westernization trajectory is manifested in the form of the global neoliberal educational policy agenda, portraying economic growth and human capital development as the primary goals of education. Influenced and supported by various powerful international organizations, neoliberal educational policies

[24] The modernization and development are the prominent notions that underpin the political and policy discourse of post-Soviet transformation reforms (e.g., modernization of higher education system, modernization of state institutes, modernization of infrastructure).

have been underpinning the education reforms of developing countries, including the former Soviet states (Silova et al., 2020).

Re-orientation to the left seeks alternatives for non-capitalist futures, therefore reorients the de-westernization project towards socialism, which conveys the risk of establishing a new universal Global Left project, not leaving the space for alternative worldviews (Silova et al., 2020; Mignolo, 2011a). Contesting the unequal power dynamic of the education policy scene between the Global South and the Global North, this trajectory renders the possibility to build cooperation between more equal, symmetrical power, such as South-South cooperation (Silova et al., 2020).

De-westernization efforts originated in East and Southeast Asia to confront the political, racial, and epistemic domination of the West while seeking self-affirmation. However, de-westernization and re-westernization trajectories share and retain the capitalist economic principles (Mignolo, 2011a). Silova et al. (2020) illustrate the influence of the de-westernization trajectory on education policy, where the policy transfer logic remains the same, but its source shifts from West to East, for example, Uzbekistan borrowing policies from South Korea (e.g., see Gong, 2020).

Decolonial option represents a deliberate attempt to *delink* from the Western epistemic system that was imposed during colonialism as an objective and universal order. The decolonial trajectory involves uncovering the logic of coloniality, challenging its superiority, and recognizing multiplicity and the co-existence of alternative options. One example of an epistemological delinking is Kuan-Hsing Chen’s (2010) *Asia as Method*, which offers a decolonial, de-imperial, and de-Cold War analytical framework that moves beyond Western-centric interpretations of history, enabling scholars to

imagine historical experiences in Asia as "an alternative horizon" for posing a different set of questions about world history (p. xv). In the field of education, scholars have used *Asia as Method* as an inspiration to articulate alternatives in childhood studies (Burman, 2018; Millei et al., 2018; Yelland & Saltmarsh, 2013), global citizenship education (Abdi et al., 2015), and comparative and international education (Silova et al., 2018; Takayama, 2016; Zhang et al., 2015;).

Spiritual option, similarly to the decolonial option, contests the knowledge and subjectivity sphere of the colonial matrix, proposing to fundamentally delink from political and economic principles of modernity, liberating spirituality from the colonial power and uncovering the 'ways of life beyond capitalism' (Mignolo, 2011, p. 62). Silova et al. (2020) view the spiritual option as a means to open up new ontological possibilities. For example, Silova (2019) explores the 'pagan' worldviews and nature-centered spiritualities that are present in Latvian school textbooks, contesting the boundaries of the comparative education field established within the frames of rationality and universality of Western knowledge; Shahjaham et al. (2017) use the Dagara's[25] teachings to uncover the crisis of the modern imaginary of higher education on an example of global university rankings.

Recognizing the coexistence of all five contesting trajectories shaping the world order of upcoming decades, I focus on the decolonial option for analyzing the post-socialist transformations of higher education in Georgia. The pertinence of using the decolonial lens in the context of post-Soviet transformation is twofold. First, although the

[25] West African indigenous group

former Soviet countries were not officially Soviet colonies, ideological domination and violence of the communist regime and practices of repression, which were vastly present in the academic space, convey a colonial pattern (Tlostanova, 2015). Therefore, postcoloniality is implicated in the post-Soviet condition. Second, due to the spillover of the Western influence over the post-socialist space after the fall of the Berlin Wall, the possible decolonial transformation was replaced by the re-westernization trajectory. The rhetoric of democratization and modernization of the former Soviet space portrayed the Western modernity and neoliberal system as the opposite of communism (Mignolo, 2011; Silova et al., 2017) and as a means of liberation from the Soviet colonial legacy or de-Sovietization, hiding the epistemic, geopolitical, and economic power of coloniality. Thus, the post-Soviet transformation of Georgia, along with the de-Sovietization attempt, constitutes the re-colonization from the West or re-westernization.

Moreover, the post-Socialist transformation studies provide a more profound and critical understanding of the de-Sovietization and modernization endeavors carried out in the post-Soviet countries, where the Soviet legacies are continually haunting and defying Western neoliberal reforms. Silova (2014) argues that post-socialism and post-colonialism, sharing a common epistemological foundation, provide a critical perspective on the established neoliberal and globalization frameworks and challenge the dominant epistemic space of Western modernity. Drawing on Said's (1978) work on Orientalism, Silova (2014) conceptualizes the interplay of three dominant themes that shape the post-socialist transformations, including the narratives of (1) the crisis, (2) the "return to Europe," and (3) project-driven nature of transformation. This pattern of post-socialist transformation was also present in the Georgian geopolitical context, defining the

trajectory of transformation of the higher education system. The socioeconomic and political crisis, which followed after the dissolution of the Soviet bloc and was amplified by the armed conflicts, created the urgency for the newly independent state to seek support from the West, making European Integration and NATO membership the strategic direction of the country. Subsequently, the developmental projects and neoliberal reforms supported by Western international aid defined the perpetual path of post-Soviet transformation with the imaginary goal of "catching up with Europe." The discourse of Western modernization in the post-Soviet context conveys the tendency "to reject everything "old" (or Soviet) and embrace everything "new" (or Western)" (Silova, 2014, p. 188), perpetuating the binary and hierarchical interrelation between the East and West. Moreover, it portrays the local academic communities as ignorant and incapable of taking meaningful action, while positioning Western "experts" as the holders of the knowledge needed for the modernization and development of the local system. Such representation marginalizes and disempowers local actors, hindering their agency in shaping their own academic futures. This colonial power dynamic traps and constrains the possibilities of envisioning alternative options for transformation. In this context, the post-colonial and decolonial lens offers a valuable perspective for critically examining post-socialist transformations (Silova, 2014).

In the higher education context, the influx of Western reforms overlooks the diverse historical, economic, and cultural contexts, imposes technical 'solutions' for complex problems, and pushes the local systems of non-Western countries into the trap of modernity and progress. Thus, taking a decolonial/post-colonial turn enables uncovering the "ambivalences, contradictions, and uncertainties inherent in post–socialist

transformation processes" (Silova, 2014, p. 182). The decolonial option implies recognizing the source and geopolitical location of knowledge and power layered in Soviet and Western epistemic space, acknowledging the knowledge that has been neglected as a result of the modernity/coloniality (Mignolo, 2011), and deliberately reexamining their relevance to the current and desired realm. Furthermore, it opens up an opportunity to 'delink' from the dominant trajectory of re-westernization and the accompanying hegemony of knowledge production in the post-socialist space in order to "reclaim our own positions as epistemic subjects" (Silova et al., 2017, p. 74) and explore alternative options for education transformation trajectories.

Decolonial Perspectives in Academic Identity Research

Exploring academic identities from the decolonial perspective enables critical examination of the complexity of changing higher education context. However, in the academic space impacted by Western neoliberal principles, identity as a construct also creates divisions, categories, classifications, and hierarchies. The historical consequences of the repressive and indoctrinating Soviet regime, which has been replaced with the Western neoliberal order, have created the societal cracks and hierarchies that vividly surfaced during Gorbachev's era and escalated in light of the Western reforms after the Rose Revolution. As a result, the academic community has been divided between Soviet-minded/conservative/flushed-ups and progressive/liberal/open-minded groups.

Furthermore, the neoliberal reforms have triggered multiple tensions and divisions in the academic community, such as control, prestige, performativity, competition, individualism, and efficiency. Hey (2004) argues that the neoliberal regime in academia has erased the personal and emotional elements of academic identities that

are being replaced by performance measures. Therefore, academic and knowledge production space in the transition from Soviet to Western modernity conveys colonial hierarchical patterns (Silova et al., 2017), which is also mirrored in the formation of academic identities creating dominations and marginalizations between and within the identities layered in their multiple intersections. Therefore, the problem is not the construct of identity itself but its application as an apparatus for categorization and hierarchical division generated from within the epistemic space of Western modernity/coloniality.

In this regard, taking a decolonial lens in higher education research enables interrupting the political agendas and higher education policies that blindly replicate the Western hegemonic discourses and gain power through the rhetoric of Europeanization and modernization. Engaging in the decolonial research of academic identities reveals and disrupts the hierarchical patterns and relations formed in academic space by highlighting the complex and complicated process of post-Soviet transformations. It has the potential to create a collective and cohesive space for co-existence and re-existence, as well as recognize different worldviews and ways of constructing academic lives on a non-hierarchical basis. As Davies (2019) explains, "the university is multiple" (p. 217) and individual academics are the ones holding differing realities together and "academic space gains strength through its very plurality" (Barnett & Di Napoli, 2008, p. 6).

According to Mignolo (2011b), decolonial thinking encompasses two foundational acts – delinking and border thinking. Delinking implies epistemic disobedience, which does not intend to replace the dominant knowledge, but advocates

for the nonhierarchical co-existence of different views and epistemologies (Mignolo, 2011a, 2011b; Tlostanova, 2012;). Border thinking implies “dwelling and thinking in the borders of local histories confronting global designs” (p. 277), where borders are not just territorial, but they are epistemic and ontological (Mignolo, 2011b). In this context, identity work can function as a means for revealing and overcoming the legacies of oppressive experiences, cultural norms, and academic lifestyles from the Soviet or post-Soviet contexts and reclaiming the power in transitioning political, societal, and academic spaces (Beattie, 2015).

Therefore, engaging in decolonial thinking and delinking from the dominant discourse through the voices and narratives of academics disrupts the established hierarchies, as well as binary and deficient understandings of non-linear and non-monolithic transformations occurring in the Georgian academic space. Instead, it opens up the venues to uncover and bring into conversation the decolonial practices that Georgian academics have been mastering throughout the Soviet and post-Soviet times to navigate the Soviet and Western policy regimes. Thereby, decolonial research of academic identities has the potential to reposition and portray academics as active agents in shaping their academic identities and reshaping the broader academic space.

Haunted Identities, ***De*futuring, and *Re*futuring**

Academic identities are entangled in time – they are shaped by past experiences, knowledge, and emotions and they are bound to the envisioned future (Brew, 2014). The decolonial study of academic identities involves acknowledging and reclaiming the past experiences that may have been marginalized or rejected in order to conform to the

dominant political or epistemic orders. Therefore, it recognizes that the present and future are haunted by the past. Drawing on Derrida's (1994) concept of hauntology and emphasizing the indeterminacy of time and being, Barad (2017) notes that hauntings are not simply the immaterial memories of the past, but they are "ineliminable feature of existing material conditions" (p. 107). Based on Quantum Field Physics, she argues that "hauntings are mere rememberings of a past (assumed to be) left behind (in actuality) but rather the dynamism of ontological indeterminacy of time-being/being-time in its materiality… Each moment is thickly threaded through with all other moments" (Barad, 2017, p. 113). Furthermore, Barad's ethico-onto-epistemological framework of agential realism challenges the pre-existence, fixation, and separation of different entities. Instead, it emphasizes their entangled and relational nature that is reconfigured and produced through constantly ongoing agential intra-actions over space and time or spacetimemattering (Barad, 2007). The concept of spacetimemattering marks the inseparability of space, time, and matter, each of which, at the same, is the subject of diffraction and therefore interfering with multiple entanglements and "cutting through one another" (Barad, 2014, 2017). Barad (2020) introduces diffraction as an entry point to the "hauntological nature of quantum entanglements" (p. 245), which also enacts the differences, "virtual wanderings, alternative histories of what if/might yet be/have been" (Barad, 2017, p.113).

With regard to understanding identities, Barad (2020) argues that the "self" is not a discrete individual but rather an "iterative intra-action of all matter of time-beings" (p. 108). Identities are not fixed but are dispersed and diffracted through various timespace reconfigurations and are open to "future reworkings." Decolonial research on the

transformation of academic identities in Georgia indicates movement between different timespaces of post-Soviet transformation through memories, lived experiences, perceptions, and narratives about the future. It involves noticing the hauntings within the Georgian academic space through intra-acting with the ghosts of the past and specters of the future. It has the potential to open up the alternative 'imaginative possibilities' of post-Soviet academic space or identities of individual academics that are constrained by the dominant and 'pragmatic' policies and structures in higher education.

Exploring the transformation of academic identities from the hauntological perspective challenges and disrupts the linear conception of time, history, progress, and democratization assumed by Western modernity. Recognizing the interconnectedness of different temporal and spatial configurations, I use the hauntological lens to explore academic identities. It reveals the complicated and diverging paths, returning and departures to and from certain timespaces. In this context, I use the notions of *de*futuring and *re*futuring as a spectrum of possible reconfigurations of academic identities that come to matter through memories, lived experiences, and imaginations about the future of Georgian academics.

Fry (2020) introduces the notion of '*de*futuring' which, in its literal meaning, marks the unsustainable trajectory of the current time, emphasizing that the future that is in auto-destruction mode is the "product of how we made …the word, both materially and immaterially" (p. xi). However, he suggests that *de*futuring, as a mode of critical inquiry, is able to unmake the "negation of world future" through critical deconstructive readings and comprehension of *de*futuring designs. He argues that "*de*futuring is a necessary learning that travels before any design or constructional action if any effort is

to be made to acquire the ability to sustain" (p. 2). Therefore, a critical understanding of *de*futuring patterns can lead to *re*futuring. Tlostanova (2020) emphasizes that decolonial thinking to overcome the modern/colonial predicaments and also 'immobilizing localities' are critical for reimagining "the self and/in the world and a new political imagination to *re*futuring" (p. 25).

Therefore, the trajectory toward a better future is not linear, singular, or certain. Instead, the project of reimagining the future of academic identities becomes diffracted into its multiple configurations that exist along the spectrum of *re*futuring and *de*futuring. As Fry (2020) argues, telling and rewriting stories are essential methods for rethinking the existing designs and "confronting an impossibility and a necessity" (p.1). Therefore, to address my research goal of reimagining the future of academic identities, I intend to portray the narratives and stories feeding the critical and conscious ways of being an academic in the post-Soviet transformation of higher education. But along with that, I will also show the identity patterns that are stealing the future on a daily basis; therefore, I will tell the stories of '*de*futuring.'

CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, my goal is to design methodological approaches for exploring how Georgian academics construct, reconstruct, negotiate, and reinvent their academic selves amid the post-Soviet transformations. This entails designing the data collection methods that comprehensively capture the notion of academic identities and their embeddedness in the evolving political, historical, and cultural context. Furthermore, the design of this study intends to engage academics in decolonial thinking, disrupting the established discourse about the past, present, and future, while reimagining alternative possibilities. This entails decolonization of the research methodology itself, where the researcher should be conscious of "underlying assumptions, motivations and values which inform research practices" (Smith, 1999, p. 21) and committed to fostering a collaborative, equitable, and safe research environment that acknowledges diverse perspectives and experiences.

Ethnographic Narrative Inquiry

The research design of this study is built on the ethnographic-narrative inquiry, which incorporates the ethnographic and life history work (Chase, 2005). The narrative ethnographic approach entails immersing oneself as a researcher in the field of study where the stories and narratives emerge, shape, and reshape. Hence, it involves close observation of the social situations, actors, narratives, and behaviors of the actors and their interrelationships – a process which provides the sensibility to capture the rich and contextually situated narrative practices. Furthermore, it enables access to the

multilayered embeddedness of the narratives and uncovers the threads and relations between different life stories (Gubrium & Holstein, 2008). Narrative ethnography relies on the dialogue between the researcher and the researched, which emphasizes the intersubjectivity of constructing, interpreting, and understanding the stories (Tedlock, 1991).

Along with the ethnographic considerations described above, in order to ground the research design in the theoretical and conceptual underpinnings of this study, I have incorporated the narrative inquiry and narrative identities as a method (Clandinin, 2006; Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007; McAdams, 2011; Mishler, 1999; Sarris, 2022; Sfard & Prusak, 2005) and combined it with the decolonial methodological approach (Silova et al., 2017; Sium & Ritskes, 2013; Smith, 1999; Thambinathan & Kinsella, 2021). Furthermore, for the analysis of the narrative and observation data, I have used three-dimensional narrative analysis (broadening, burrowing, storying, and restorying) and diffractive analysis (Barad, 2007, 2014; Mazzei, 2014; Taguchi, 2012), where the narratives and observations diffract one another. Table 2 below summarizes the theoretical, conceptual, and methodological design of this research.

Table 2

Design of the Study

<table>
<tr><th colspan="4">Theoretical and Conceptual Foundations</th></tr>
<tr><td>Decolonial and Post-Socialist Transformation Studies</td><td>Academic Identities</td><td>Hauntology</td><td>Defuturing
⇔
Refuturing</td></tr>
<tr><th colspan="4">Research Methodology</th></tr>
<tr><td>Ethnographic Approach</td><td colspan="2">Narrative Inquiry
&
Narrative Identities</td><td>Decolonial Methodological Approach</td></tr>
<tr><th colspan="4">Data Collection</th></tr>
<tr><td>Life-story Interviews</td><td>Walk-a-long Interviews</td><td>Observations</td><td>Complementary sources: Informal communications, institutional documents, descriptive statistics, websites and social media pages</td></tr>
<tr><th colspan="4">Research Sites and Participants</th></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Three Public Universities in Georgia</td><td colspan="2">22 Academics (Purposive Sampling)</td></tr>
<tr><th colspan="4">Data Analysis</th></tr>
<tr><td>Narrative Analysis</td><td colspan="2">Diffractive Analysis</td><td>Writing as a Method of Inquiry</td></tr>
<tr><th colspan="4">Presentation of the Findings</th></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Threading the Data Together-Apart</td><td colspan="2">Individual, Composite and Collective Narratives</td></tr>
</table>

Narrative Identities and Three Commonplaces of Narrative Inquiry

Narrative inquiry is the most widely used methodological approach for studying academic identities. There are multiple configurations of how narratives and identities are methodologically and theoretically intertwined, sharing similar characteristics of being fluid, as well as socially, culturally, temporarily, and spatially embedded (Clandinin & Huber, 2010; Connelly & Clandinin, 2006; McAdams, 2011). When discussing the relevance of narrative inquiry for studying identities, various scholars (Clandinin, 2006; Huber et al., 2013; Huber & Yeom, 2017; King, 2003) refer to the Nigerian writer Ben Orki's quote (1997) about storytelling:

> We live by stories, we also live in them. One way or another we are living the stories planted in us early or along the way, or we are also living the stories we planted – knowingly or unknowingly – in ourselves. We live stories that either give our lives meaning or negate it with meaninglessness. If we change the stories we live by, quite possibly, we change our lives.

Many scholars – especially those working with narrative approaches and indigenous knowledges – metaphorically or theoretically weave together and even equate the stories to people's lives and their identities (McAdams, 2011; Mishler, 1999; Sarris, 2022; Sfard & Prusak, 2005; Silko, 1977; Wagamese, 2011). For example, Wagamase (2011) writes that "We are all story" (p. 2). In his book "Truth about stories: A native narrative," King (2003) concludes that "The truth about stories is that that's all we are" (p. 92), bringing Leslie Silko's (1977) quote: "They aren't just entertain-ment/Don't be fooled/They are all we have, you see/All we have to fight off/Illness and death. You don't have anything/If you don't have the stories" (p. 2). Similarly, Clandining and Connelly (2000) highlight that "Narrative inquiry in the field is a form of living, a way of life" (p. 78), while McAdams (2011) claims that "identity is a story and only a story" (p. 103).

According to McAdams (2011), narrative identity highlights that the story itself (and only a story) is an identity, where the life story is a "finished product" of identity for a certain point of time (thus, still recognizing the 'work-in-progress' nature of a self), while the process of narration is a process of construction of identity (McAdams, 2011, p. 104). According to his definition, "narrative identity is the internalized and evolving story of the self that a person constructs to make sense and meaning out of his or her life" (p. 99). McAdams (2011) situates narrative identities in the temporal and cultural

dimensions. He highlights that narratives about past experiences and imagined futures explain “how the person came to be and where his or her life may be going” (p. 99). Narrative identities encompass culturally established norms of what is good, moral, and worthy in the given society and are constructed as a “joint product of the person him/herself and the culture wherein the person acts, strives and narrates” (McAdams, 2011, p. 112).

The main task of the narrative inquiry is to explore authentic expressions of personal experiences and meanings ascribed to those experiences, identities and identity processes (Daiute, 2013). Connely and Clandinin (2006) highlight that narrative inquiry studies experiences as stories, and “people shape their daily lives by stories of who they are and others are and as they interpret their past in terms of these stories" (p. 375). For narrative inquiry, identities are the narrated composition of individuals’ lives indicating the constantly developing story of ‘selves’ and others and the interpretation of the social world. Narrative inquiry creates a space for the expression of emotion, feelings, and reactions and enables the researcher and participant to become “fully immersed - morally, aesthetically, emotionally and intellectually” (Bochner & Ellis, 1996, p. 4).

Based on Deweyan ontological perspective (which implies that reality is relational, continual, and situational), Clandinin (2006) argues that narrative inquiry takes place in three commonplaces - (i) temporality (narratives hold experiences that are shaped through the past, present, and future of people, places and things.), (ii) place (all events, including the inquiry and the ones under inquiry, take place in a particular place, which shapes our experiences, stories, and identities, and (iii) sociality (narratives encompass people’s experiences under certain social conditions shaped through

historical, cultural, social, institutional and linguistic factors. Sociality also indicates the interaction between the researcher and participants) (Clandinin & Huber, 2010; Clandining & Connely, 2006). Consideration of these three dimensions in the research process distinguishes the narrative inquiry from other methodological approaches and enables exploration of the "complexity of relational compositions of people's lived experiences…and .. imagine the future possibilities of these lives" (Clandinin & Huber, 2010, p. 436). Therefore, narratives through which individuals construct and negotiate their identities are also temporarily, spatially, and socially constructed.

These conceptualizations of narrative inquiry resonate with Barad's (2017) work on diffraction and entanglement, especially the question of "what analytical tools might we use to understand not merely the entanglements of phenomena across scales but the very iterative (re)constituting and sedimenting of specific configurations of space, time and matter, or rather, spacetimematter(ing) and the (iterative re)making of scale itself?" (p.109). Spacetimemattering stresses the inseparability of moments, places, and things, while it is being reconfigured through their ongoing and dynamic intra- actions (Barad, 2017). I view the narrative identities of academics as these spacetimematterings – sedimenting and enfolding in the post-Soviet transformation time and space (which encompasses the pre-Soviet, Soviet, and post-Soviet times and spaces). The process of the narrative inquiry – telling and retelling of the lived experiences of academics shaped through socially, temporarily, and spatially situated narratives and interaction between the researcher and the narrator – entails different intra-actions and reconfigurations. This process can remake the educational and epistemic system constrained by dominant policy discourses, which indicates the decolonial project.

Decolonization of Research Methodology

Narrative inquiry, and particularly storytelling, offers possibilities for exploring academic identities from the decolonial lens. Sium and Ritskes (2013) highlight that "stories are decolonization theory in its most natural form" (p. 2). The four courses of narrative inquiry outlined by Clandinin (2006) - living, telling, retelling, and reliving - resonate with Smith's (1999) decolonial perspective on a research process, while she dwells deeper and emphasizes the need for critical examination of histories. Smith (1999) highlights that reexamining the past and uncovering alternative histories (telling and retelling) is a basis for finding alternative ways of doing (living and reliving). Therefore, decolonization implies reclaiming the past through "telling our own stories" (p. 29) and also revisiting and rewriting history. In the context of post-socialist transformations, the decolonial undertaking of narrative inquiry implies unveiling the stories and experiences of Georgian academics, which have been concealed underneath the rhetoric of post-Soviet transformation and European modernization, conveying the moral and epistemic violence preceded by Soviet repressions. Therefore, the exploration of academic identities using the decolonial narrative inquiry allows us to gain a deeper understanding of the transformation of higher education and explore alternative future trajectories.

It should also be noted that narrative inquiry is not inherently decolonial and it requires a researcher to deliberately apply decolonial methodological practices. To decolonize the research process, it is critical for the researcher to be aware of the "underlying assumptions, motivations, and values which inform research practices" (Smith, 1999, p. 21) and attune to the systematic fragmentations and disconnections from "histories, landscapes, languages, social relations, ways of thinking, feeling and

interacting with the world" (Smith, 1999, p. 29) inherent in the (post)imperial and (post)colonial societies. Based on Hall (1992), Smith (1999) summarizes the way in which the Western knowledge system functions and defines the ways of doing research: (1) allowing 'us' to characterize and classify societies into categories, (2) condensing complex images of other societies through a system of representation, (3) providing a standard model of comparison, and (4) providing criteria of evaluation against which other societies can be ranked (p. 45). I find consideration of these points critical in studying academic identities, particularly in the process of data analysis and presentation of the findings with their complexity. Thambinathan and Kinsella (2021) propose four practical ways in which researchers can attempt to decolonize the research methodology and process: (i) exercising critical reflexivity, (ii) enabling reciprocity and respect, (iii) embracing "other(ed)" ways of knowing, and (iv) embodying a transformative practice. Furthermore, Hailu and Tachine (2021) embrace the concept of intellectual solidarity, emphasizing that "solidarity should be more than intellectual engagement .. but a developing relationship of understanding and learning of lives, love, death, injuries, tensions, ethical commitments, and aspirations" (p. 26).

Approaching the ethnographic narrative inquiry from the decolonial lens intends to create a respectful, sincere, and non-hierarchical space between the researcher and narrator for storytelling and reflexive expression of thoughts, emotions, and imaginations. The decolonial endeavor of inquiry engages the participants in decolonial thinking. Clandinin and Rosiek (2007) use Anzaldua's words on borderlands, described as a "vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary … in a constant state of transition"(p. 3), to explain narrators' internal and

external struggles, as well as cultural, ideological, and institutional border crossings in the process of narration.

Research Questions

My research goal is to explore the formation of academic identities through the narratives of lived experiences of Georgian academics in a decolonial pursuit of reimagining alternative future possibilities. In pursuing this project, this ethnographic narrative inquiry attempts to explore the following research questions:

1. How do Georgian academics construct, deconstruct, and reconstruct their academic identities in light of the post-Soviet transformations of academic space and time?
2. How do academic knowledge production spaces impact the formation of academic identities in the transition from Soviet to Western modernity?
3. How can the de-/re-construction of academic identities impact the future imaginaries of Georgian higher education?

Entering, Proceeding, and Positioning My Researcher "Self" in the Study Field

The field sites for this study included three Georgian public universities. The primary data collection activities took place from Fall 2022 through Winter 2023. My personal and professional background (e.g., as a Georgian native with over 12 years of professional experience in the Georgian higher education system)[26] gave me a multifaceted perspective and sensibility regarding the academic culture and environment.

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[26] It is described in more detail in the biographical sketch section.

While all personal, educational, and professional experiences related to the Georgian academic space constitute my current academic self, my family background, my prior role as a policy-maker at the national quality assurance agency, and my current position as a doctoral researcher at ASU have been the most influential experiences that sparked my curiosity in studying academic identities and shaped its conceptual and methodological choices. These were also the dominant factors that influenced my positionality in the research field.

These experiences have provided me with a wide network and connections with the academic community, which made it easier to gain access to the research sites, recruit the study participants, establish trust, and develop authentic, respectful, and reciprocal relationships with them. During my doctoral studies in Arizona, I have continually remained interested, informed, and involved in the developments of the Georgian higher education system through personal and professional connections. Moreover, before starting the fieldwork, I did a comprehensive literature review regarding the Soviet and post-Soviet higher education systems. Therefore, as I embarked on the research fieldwork, I was both conscious and excited about engaging with the stories and the aspects of the Georgian academic community that I had yet to discover.

While I see and sense myself as an insider in the Georgian academic space, I should acknowledge that I am also an outsider at the same time as my current researcher identity is associated with Arizona State University. While walking together with my participants around the university premises and meeting other colleagues on the way, I was usually introduced by my respondents as a researcher pursuing her doctoral studies in the US or sometimes even as a "guest from the US." A couple of participants even

offered to carry out the interviews in the English language. Furthermore, I am also an outsider in terms of my position in relation to universities, as I do not have an affiliation with them. Moreover, my former job in the national Quality Assurance agency constitutes my role as an outsider who was part of the struggle that academic communities experienced due to external QA regulations. In this regard, at the beginning of our conversations, I explained the contextual and theoretical underpinning of my research and encouraged the expression of diverse, different, and critical opinions. These introductions, including the fact that I had left the job some years ago to pursue doctoral studies and my genuine interest in understanding their life stories combined with attentive and emotional engagement in their storytelling, was changing my positionality over the course of the interviews and was making me more "one of them" than an outsider. Still, I should highlight that the same job experience gave me valuable insights into understanding the institutional and academic culture at each of these universities, as during 2017-2018, I was in charge of their institutional accreditations and therefore attended the evaluation site visits, as well as read their institutional documents and evaluation reports.

My pursuit of this research, beyond the research goals and questions stated in the chapters above, is fueled by my personal unwavering curiosity in understanding certain behaviors, opinions, actions and immobilities, noises and silences, and dynamics of interrelations that shape the various configurations of Georgian academic space. These configurations invoke multiple senses, emotions, and thoughts, not only in me or among the academics but in the broader society, which is a source of whether we feel hopeful or hopeless about the future.

My research field experience was accompanied by the dynamic emotional journey between hopefulness and hopelessness. While some narratives and life story experiences were highly inspiring, exciting, and funny, others were concerning, disappointing, and even infuriating. Carrying a decolonial consciousness helped me to overcome the emotional struggles caused by my limited ability to comprehend the underlying causes and reasons behind some of the opinions and actions shared by my respondents, particularly when they contradicted my own values and beliefs. Those tensions and contradictions led me to delve deeper into the experiences and circumstances that enacted these conflicting narratives and ultimately extended my interpretive and analytical perspective, even though certain areas remain mysterious.

This is where my academic community of family and friends played a pivotal role in my research. Discussions with my dad and some of my friends working in academia helped me to make sense of and interpret underlying reasons for certain narratives and behaviors and the standpoints from where they were enacted. Although the purpose of this study is not to write about my intellectual and emotional reflections, regularly writing reflective memos and having these discussions prepared me for subsequent interviews or observations, allowing me to prompt my participants to share their reflective or diffractive opinions and experiences on the issues that were still new and puzzling for me. This active, reflective, and diffractive research process enabled me to thread together – and apart – the narratives and observations and put certain pieces of the puzzle together.

Therefore, my dissertation research, at each of its stages – from defining the research topic to writing the findings and conclusions – is far from being objective. Instead, this ethnographic endeavor bears “both the limitations and the strengths of

human feelings" (Richardson & St Pierre, 2008, p. 480). Drawing on the poststructuralist perspective, Richardson and St. Pierre (2005) highlight, "What something means to individuals is dependent on the discourses available to them" (p. 961). Therefore, this study is based on the reflective and diffractive enactments produced through the intra-actions of the following factors:

1. My personal and professional experiences, the methodological and theoretical knowledge explored over the course of the Ph.D. program, and then extensive discussions with my research supervisor.
2. The stories of the personal and academic experiences of my research participants and the intersubjectivity between the researcher and the researched through which the stories and observations were collected.
3. Discussions with my closer academic community of family members and friends or broader academic communities.
4. The socialization within the long-standing narratives that have been floating, circulating, and intersecting throughout the post-Soviet transformation of the Georgian universities.

The stories, analysis, and findings generated through this research do not intend to present an objective picture of the identities of Georgian academics. This is primarily due to its inherent impossibility, as identities are not fixed or objective; instead, they are in a constant state of construction and reconstruction. Furthermore, research on academic identities through narrative ethnography entails multiple interpretations of narratives, unfolding through telling and retelling the stories about the self, which diffract and gain new meanings through their interferences with the researcher and with the reader.

Therefore, the aim of this study is to pull a thread from the entanglement of identities of Georgian academics, bring into focus the new meanings and understandings, and open up the space for further diffractions through other resonating and dissonant experiences unfolding the new meanings of "what is/might yet be/have been" (Barad, 2017, p. 113).

Collecting the Narrative and Ethnographic Data

Ethnographic inquiry provides a wide variety of options for collecting the data, as for the ethnographic eye, everything around is a source of data. However, for the purposes of this study, the primary data collection methods incorporated life story interviews, walk-a-long interviews, and observations of daily academic life and public events carried out at three different universities in Georgia. Other complementary sources of data include various informal communications, institutional documents, basic descriptive statistics regarding the academic (requested from EMIS[27]), as well as websites and social media pages of the universities. I was also following the related active discussions in the media and social networks.

Life Story Interviews

I used the life story interview as the main axis of the ethnographic narrative inquiry. On the one hand, life stories provide narratives of lived experiences and happenings from academics' lives. On the other hand, it allows the participants to reflect on and recognize deeper meanings of their experiences, feelings, and events in the process of storytelling (Atkinson, 1998).

[27] Education Management Information System under Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia.

At the beginning of the interviews, I briefly introduced the research topic and my positionality and then explained the format of the interview as a dialogical space to tell the stories and share interpretations and emotions. During the first part of the interview, I asked participants to share personal experiences that led them to their academic careers, their educational and professional experiences, significant moments, and transitional events in their academic lives. During the interviews, I also asked them about the 'turning points'[28] of their academic lives. In order to capture the details of academics' experiences, tensions, emotions, interactions, times, and places from significant events, I engaged them in *memory work.*

As Keightley (2010) explains, memory-work deals with respondents' remembered accounts through which they make meaning of the past and the present, therefore, it is "a lived process of making sense of time and the experience of it" (p. 55-56), rather than the accuracy of telling specific events. Memories are implicated in the "construction of individual and collective temporal identities and historically rooted cultures" (Knightly, 2010, p. 56) and provide narratives that are an amalgam of intersecting relational elements of social and temporal life.

The next section of the interview protocol prompted the academics to tell stories about their present academic lives. This was followed by questions about their future projects, hopes, dreams, and imaginations of their academic lives and academic system. I finalized each interview with their reflections on the stories told and on the interview process.

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[28] McAdams (2001) identifies high points, low points and turning points as the *nuclear episodes* of life stories.

All interviews were conducted in the Georgian language. Initially, the interviews were planned for 2-3 hours. However, in certain cases, after 3 hours of interviews, I realized that we were not even close to the end, and I would ask the participants to plan another meeting to continue the interview, some of which lasted 5-6 hours. Initially, I asked the participants to meet at the university premises, preferably at their offices or the places that had some kind of significance for them. The majority of the interviews were conducted on university premises, as planned. However, if it was more convenient for the participants, I met some of them at the coffee shops near the university buildings, and I even conducted a couple of interviews at the parallel (secondary) workplaces of my respondents. These choices of interview locations also indicated the diversity of academic lives. For some of the professors, academic work was a primary occupation and they spent most of their time at the university, while some of them did not even have offices or considered it inconvenient for the interview as the space was shared with other colleagues. For some of the participants, their academic job has become an auxiliary occupation and they have engaged in parallel jobs, appearing at the universities only to conduct classes.

Along with recording the interviews, I was also taking observation field notes regarding the environment of the interview, emotions, behaviors, and reactions of the participants. I wrote down the moments that stood out to me the most, the questions that remained unanswered, and themes that threaded throughout different interviews or stood out as unique.

Walk-a-long Interviews and Observations

Along with planning the primary life story interviews with my respondents, I also invited them for walk-a-long interviews (Dwyer & emerald, 2017). It entailed walking around the university premises of the choice of the participants, where they would share the places and artifacts that had certain meanings for them and tell related stories. Walk-a-long interviews also allowed me to observe the university premises, engage in interactions and conversations with other academics that we were meeting along the way, and in one case, even hide with my respondent to avoid uncertain encounters. During the fieldwork, I also attended various public events at all three universities, which not only provided me with unique ethnographic data but also gave me a better sense of the academic environment and interrelational dynamics within the academic communities.

Research Sites

The study engaged academics from three Georgian universities: Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University (TSU), Georgian Technical University (GTU), and Ilia State University (ISU). All of them are public universities located in Tbilisi (the capital city of Georgia), but they have different historical legacies, academic traditions, and institutional cultures. Selecting the research participants from three universities with different historical and institutional legacies allowed for the exploration of how academic identities are enacted in the academic spaces where the intertwined pre-Soviet, Soviet, and post-Soviet conditions create diverse temporal and spatial entanglements.

I will briefly describe each of the universities separately based on the information provided on their websites and the data collected during my research. In particular, I will

also bring the extracts from their mission and vision statements to portray how the institutional narratives portray and position the institutional identity of each university. Furthermore, to provide a contextual understanding and sentiments regarding the institutional identity of each university, I will construct collective composite narratives[29] told by the professors of each university portraying their sentiments, attitudes, perceptions, and values embedded in the institutional contexts.

Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University is the oldest university, not only in Georgia but also in the Caucasus, named after its founder - Ivane Javakhishvili. It was founded in 1918, right after Georgia gained its independence from the Russian Empire. The foundation of the University was an important part of the project of the Georgian national movement. Its main building has historical importance, which was initially constructed as a Georgian Gymnasium in 1900-1906, presenting an example of the Renaissance Revival architectural type. The mission statement of TSU highlights that it is a "spiritual and intellectual successor of multi-century Georgian culture, humanistic traditions and old Georgian educational, scientific and cultural centers … The mission of Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University is to worthily bear the name of the first Georgian university; to maintain leadership, along with historical leadership, within Georgia's higher educational space; to belong to the list of the world's leading universities; to promote national and universal welfare" (TSU, 2022). The vision statement emphasizes that by conveying European values, TSU will harmonize its educational programs with societal and labor market requirements, enhance basic and

[29] The methodology for constructing the composite and collective narratives is described in the section on data analysis (p. 134)

applied research activities, and internationalize educational, research, and administrative processes (TSU, 2022).

Currently, TSU integrates seven faculties (Faculty of Exact and Natural Sciences, Faculty of Humanities, Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences, Faculty of Economics and Business, Faculty of Medicine, and Faculty of Law) and 27 research institutes (TSU, 2022). It offers about 200 academic educational programs. The number of academic staff is 956, and the average age of professors is 65, for associate professors, it is 60, and for assistant professors - 52 (EMIS, 2022). The number of active students is approximately 21000 (EMIS, 2019).

The composite narrative below presents the collective bittersweet sentiments and perceptions of TSU professors regarding the history of the institution and its institutional identity in relation to their academic selves:

> To me, TSU is associated with grace and dignity. This is a place where the history of the Georgian university began. Thinking about this makes me proud to be a part of it. It is also a responsibility for me, especially when I go abroad. We are perceived as a developing country, and I always want to prove that we are not any less than them [the West].
>
> I think the fact that most of us have spent our entire academic careers here as students and then as staff creates deep sentiments and connections with this university. It is some kind of a sense of duty to serve it back and make an effort to make it better. Many of us have a strong loyalty to this university, which motivates us to stay here and keep moving, regardless of many problems and disruptions. But it is also a source of many disappointments, which makes me

think about leaving. If I was younger, I would pursue my academic career abroad.

There are also people who all the time talk about how their heartbeat increases when they step into the university, they have the perception that they are doing a grand national job, as if they are inspirited by Ivane Javakhishvili himself, but in reality, they are not doing anything for it.

I love TSU, and I see the urgency that we need to transform and renew ourselves. Otherwise, I feel like we will go extinct. At every phase of our history, TSU has been the mini representation of what is going on in the country. Now, everything is very inert. Even if you try to make changes, at some point, you feel that this effort is wasted. Those attempts mostly stay at the stage of talks and then they sink into bureaucracy.

Georgian Technical University was founded in 1922 as the polytechnic faculty of Tbilisi State University. It was established in 1928 as an independent "Georgian Polytechnic Institute" and achieved University status only in 1990. The mission statement of GTU is as follows: “The mission of the Georgian Technical University, the center of the greatest traditions of science, education, and culture – is to train competitive specialists, carriers of national and universal values, civic consciousness; to offer new opportunities in research, education, and technology, to facilitate a knowledge-based economy building in the country and conduct innovative activities to integrate into the international ecosystem” (GTU, n.d.-b). The vision of the GTU puts emphasis on internationalization of its teaching and research process, also highlighting the importance

of ‘modernization’ of “traditional organizational units” along with maintaining the old traditional structures.

GTU comprises 12 faculties (Faculty of Civil Engineering, Faculty of Power Engineering and Telecommunication, Faculty of Mining and Geology, Faculty of Chemical Technology and Metallurgy, Faculty of Transportation and Mechanical Engineering, Faculty of Architecture, Urban Planning and Design, Faculty of Law and International Relations, Faculty of Engineering Economic, Media Technology and Social Sciences, Faculty of Business Technology, Faculty of Informatics and Control Systems, International Design School, and Faculty of Agricultural Science and Biosystems Engineering) offers about 170 academic educational programs and 15 research institutes (GTU, n.d.-a). GTU has 1213 academic staff, and the average age of professors is 68, for associate professors, the average age is 60, and for assistant professors - 48 (EMIS, 2022). The number of active students is approximately 24000 (EMIS, 2019).

The composite narrative below presents collective sentiments, attitudes, and perceptions regarding the GTU and its institutional identity, which shapes the individual and collective identities of GTU professors:

> I have a very special attitude toward GTU, it is a home. My dad was a professor, I came here for the first time when I was two years old and spent my whole life here as a student and then as a professor. What I have and not just me but many of my colleagues, have it from GTU. During the Soviet times, GTU had a pivotal role in the construction of strategic sites and the industrialization of the country. But after the breakdown of the Soviet Union, the entire chain of collaboration between university, state, and industry failed. The university was

> left without resources. There was no electricity, no heating, there was nothing. Professors were still coming and delivering the lectures, and students were coming too. I am sad that we could not recover from the post-Soviet crisis, it has been prolonged for too long. We were so dependent on the state that even now, we do not initiate anything on our own.
>
> Still, with very limited resources, we are striving to create the foundation for the economic development of the country, even if it is not seen by the public. There are people who are highly qualified, but unfortunately, they are very few (probably 10-20 %). They publish in world-class journals. We are different from other universities. GTU does not sacrifice its staff (does not fire) because of their age. There should be other solutions for the renewal of the academic staff and overcoming the problem of aging or otherwise, some of the technical fields are disappearing.
>
> I love this university and I am proud to be a professor here. It is painful for me to hear all the belittling critics toward GTU and its professors. There should be a way to overcome this bullying from the public.

Ilia State University was founded in 2006 as a result of the mergers of six different academic institutions (established during the Soviet time) with profiles in pedagogy and languages. Establishing Ilia State University was a part of the higher education reform project of optimization and modernization of the higher education system. The university carries the name of a Georgian writer and leader of the national movement in the pre-Soviet time - Ilia Chavchavadze (also mentioned in the first essay), transcending his liberal ideas to the values of the university. The mission statement of

ISU is to create, transfer, and apply knowledge for the purposes of scientific advancement and public development at the local and international levels. According to its vision, ISU strives to become a leading and rapidly developing research university contributing to public well-being (ISU, n.d.).

Currently, ISU comprises four faculties (School of Arts and Science, School of Natural Sciences and Medicine, School of Business, Technology, and Education, and School of Law) and offers about 80 academic programs. While the ISU did not inherit the rich research tradition from its successor educational institutes, a wave of reforms in 2010 prompted the merger of 26 research institutes (previously governed by the Academy of Science) into Ilia State University. Currently, it is considered to be one of the most prominent research universities in Georgia. ISU has 375 academic staff. The average age of professors is 58, the average age of associate professors is 50, and the average age of assistant professors is 43 (EMIS, 2022). The number of active students is approximately 16000 (EMIS, 2019).

The composite narrative below encapsulates shared sentiments and viewpoints about the institutional identity of ISU, in this context, understanding of the 'self' as a member of its academic community:

> Being a professor at ISU means that I am a professor of the most liberal, experimental, bold, rebellious, and autonomous university in the country. We see ourselves as the island of freedom. It encourages and does not suppress experiments and initiatives. Due to the academic community at large, I have a sense of pride that I am a part of it and I think we also have arrogance toward

other universities. It is quite comfortable to be a professor here, the administration is supportive and flexible.

We have a strong common understanding of ISU as a liberal academic space that is free from political influences, but I think there is a more individualistic culture. I do not feel much engaged in the academic community. There are people who were here from the first day of its foundation, probably, they are more engaged and have a stronger sense of community.

We were kind of a micro model of the Rose Revolution, and the idea of the foundation of this university was to create a Western type of progressive, research-oriented, and liberal academic space, but over time, some of these principles have lost power. We are not doing very well, but when we compare ourselves to other public universities, we feel better about our academic selves and our workplace. In this country, having such a free academic space from political influences gives me moral peace. Still, I want this university to be doing better, I want myself as an academic to be more engaged. But we became too comfortable with the current state and it makes us less active to take action.

Research Participants

I used purposive sampling (Silverman, 2013) to select the research participants. Initially, I was planning to select 5 participants from each university, but as a result of connecting and getting engaged in the fieldwork, I incorporated the purposive sampling with snowballing effects, which resulted in interviewing 30, but for the dissertation, I will primarily rely on 22 interviews, nine from TSU, six from GTU and seven from ISU,

which constitutes a total of over 75 hours of interview data. It should also be noted that some of the participants, who are currently affiliated with one of these universities, had prior educational or working experience at other universities. Their narratives about these transitions and differences in the institutional contexts were also used in the analysis. My purposive and snowballing sampling strategy was informed by two factors: (i) to facilitate the collection of diverse narratives on academic identities and (ii) to identify academics with diverse backgrounds and characteristics that matter in the Georgian academic space. In this regard, I selected prominent academics from different age ranges, gender, educational and career backgrounds, academic positions, disciplinary affiliations, and dominant academic roles. To protect the confidentiality and anonymity of the research participants, I use pseudonyms (except for the cases when the participants indicated in the consent forms that they wanted to be mentioned by their real names) and note their certain identity characteristics in the text where it makes a difference and at the same time is safe to be used with certain identifiers. However, to provide an insight into their personalities, I introduce them through the composite extracts from their narratives about their personal experiences and their academic selves shared in a first-person narrative style while being conscious about confidentiality and subject protection. These short texts hold the historical and contextual elements in which these narratives of selves were shared and enacted (see Table 3).

Table 3

Research Participants' Narratives of the 'Self'

Pseudonyms/ Names	University affiliation	Narratives about the self/personal identities
Alexander	GTU	I always liked Sci-Fi stories, that's why, initially I chose to study biology. I defended a dissertation in molecular biology in 1982 at Moscow State University. I am a scientist by nature. This was an excellent scientific experience for me. I think students also like my teaching; I joke sometimes and they have fun.
Ana	ISU	In my childhood, I liked painting/drawing and writing cartoon screenplays. When I was in high school in the early 1990s, we had an opportunity to go to GTU at the Institute of Architecture and attend the workshops taught by professors. It was very different from the school environment, we were treated with respect as adults. I was inspired by my supervisor from GTU, who was always staying with us until late hours and guiding us on our project. I am also devoted to working with students and engaging them in different projects.
Davit	GTU	I graduated from school with a golden medal in 1965. My dad influenced my decision to become a mathematician. He liked reading biographies and memoirs and he was impressed with the life of Niko Muskhelishvili.[30] At the age of 24, I became a candidate of science, and after ten years, I defended a dissertation for a doctoral degree. Science is an integral part of my existence; I cannot live without it. But teaching is pivotal, too. Without stepping into the classroom and transferring knowledge to my students, I would not be a professor.
Erekle	ISU	I was born in the village of Soviet Georgia in a family of peasants. My grandmother did not have any education, but she was disciplining us with her unique methods of reading books. That's when I

[30] Famous Georgian mathematician, one of the founders and the first president of the Academy of Science in Georgia (1941–1972).

		discovered my passion for philosophical texts and decided to study philosophy at the university during the Soviet time. I love teaching, it is the main reason to be a professor. I also see it as my duty to be engaged in the open and honest expression of ideas and opinions and being engaged in the public discussion.
Elene	TSU	Originally, I aimed to pursue medicine, but a massive corruption scandal erupted at the medical university a year before my school graduation, it was in the late 1980s. Because of that, they enrolled everyone and for the following year when I was applying there were no admissions at all ... At that time, I did not quite know what psychology was but, I am glad that I chose this field. I think my academic identity is still in the process of formation. Participation in different international exchange or mobility programs has been the most influential experience. I always try to update my teaching through my new research and experiences and evoke curiosity among my students. On a personal note, my communication skills are my strength, I am the hub of networks (she smiles).
Eva	ISU	I think I ended up becoming a professor through the chain of accidents. To me, academic identity is an auxiliary identity, part of my broader professional identity. I see myself as someone who is contributing to societal development and being an academic is one of the ways to do it. That's why students and teaching are the most important parts of my academic job. I know that students also like me because I have very collaborative and interactive communication with them. I'm trying to challenge them and encourage them to see issues from different perspectives.
Gia	ISU	I got interested in physics because of the people around me who were physicists. Also, it was important for me that there was no protectionism and corruption in Physics and Mathematics. At that time, by the initiative of Ilia Vekua,[31] successful students could go and work at the research institutes. Since I was a third-year student, I've been working at this research

[31] Famous Georgian mathematician, and a rector of TSU (1966-1972).

		institute; it is like a home. I enjoy being a professor at ISU, too, but 'home is home' [research institute]. During the 90s, I was regularly working in Germany, it was an important turning point for me, especially in that difficult time. I became a member of a completely different, open academic community. But then I decided that I wanted to live in Georgia. What concerns me about our current state is that we have good traditions and the potential to position this country as a significant contributor of new knowledge in certain areas, but none of the governments have visions and priorities for this. We should find our place in something, but instead, we are losing our individuality and our identity in the scientific space.
Gogi	TSU	My school teacher inspired and encouraged me to study philology. When I was a student, in the early 1980s, there was an opportunity to go to Germany to the student camp, but this should have been approved by some kind of secret service officials. In my youth, I had a bohemian style and outlook. That man did not like me, probably because I did not look like a Soviet man and did not give me approval. But then the Secretary of Komsomol supported me. What disturbs me about the current situation is that society is becoming more pragmatic and more illiterate.
Ilia	ISU	I received a German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) scholarship to do an MA program in Germany. After coming back, I started working at the university, which made me realize that I had an intrinsic desire to be in the academic space. I like research and enjoy pursuing my curiosity. So I started a doctoral program. I never wanted to stay abroad, to me it is important to be in Georgia and contribute here with my teaching and research. I think I am one of the good professors, but I am not excellent because I am busy with other jobs too and sometimes cannot dedicate enough time for updating my teaching. In terms of research, my other job is also about doing research, so it helps me to be active.
Irma	GTU	I finished school specializing in mathematics with a gold medal and wanted to study medicine, but there was already a nest of corruption in 1966. Information

		measurement technologies was a new program at GTU and I chose this program. I was still interested in medicine, so I tried to integrate my interests and after graduation, I started to work at the experimental research lab in the field of medical engineering. I liked working with students and wanted to pursue an academic job and scientific work was always a significant part of my academic life. I think it is essential to do research to be able to evoke the desire to do research among students.
Lado	TSU	When I was finishing high school in 1972, I came across an article in the newspaper that there was a new program offered at TSU called Economic Cybernetics. This caught my interest and later I appreciated this choice because it was a new program built on mathematical models; hence, it was less ideologized. Consequently, when the socioeconomic system underwent a transition from communism to capitalism, the knowledge I gained in this field remained pertinent and adaptable to the evolving landscape. For me, science is a way of life that embodies a perpetual state of having doubts and questions and a quest for answers, seeking something new and unexplored. My aspiration is to leave a substantial and enduring scientific legacy in my field. Similarly, in teaching, what matters are the students that I leave behind and the scholarly accomplishments that they achieve.
Lela	TSU	When I was a child, around 9 or 10 years old, during the summer break while being in nature, I discovered my profound love for plants and a desire to study them and found out that the profession for this pursuit was called biologist. Throughout my doctoral studies in early 1990, I encountered numerous challenges. When I was conducting experiments, one day, I came to the university and saw that the serums that I had been collecting for six months were floating in the water due to a mistake of a commandant. The other time, due to power outages, our fridge melted and ruined all the materials. My initial dissertation defense date was canceled because it was too cold, and there was a war in Abkhazia. However, even in these adverse conditions, we still kept doing our

		work. Probably, this resilience was implanted in us from the Soviet regime that we should serve some kind of an idea by all means. It's good that in our case, this idea was science. Nonetheless, I reached a point where I got weary of the constant necessity to strive and fight to make things happen at the university, all while working on a very low salary, and recently, I became skeptical about my future academic pursuits.
Levan	ISU	In my childhood, I had an insatiable fascination with different alphabets. I would become incredibly excited every time I encountered a new type of script. I filled large notebooks with texts and letters in various alphabets, combining writing and painting. Therefore, it was clear from the beginning that arts and humanities were my true calling. When I grow old and retire, I will paint the Chinese hieroglyphs on my house walls. As for now, I am a highly enthusiastic professor for whom this work is valuable, always trying to experiment and introduce some revolutionary initiatives. I get very sentimental when my students come well-prepared, engage in discussions, or when I read their final papers and realize how much they have learned.
Maia	TSU	I studied at Komarov school.[32] During those "dark 90s," the Dean of Applied Mathematics and Computer Sciences visited our school to talk to us and invite us to apply for their programs. It was a good choice because computers were new then and demand for this profession has been increasing. Our department and the Institute of Mathematics were one of the strongest. We had a new IT lab and we were learning everything with our professors, who generously shared their space and knowledge with us. It was a bright spot in the time of darkness. Throughout my career, I've navigated a dual identity between the academic job and the IT field. However, I always felt a true aspiration toward academia. This inclination probably comes from my family's ties to academic space and from the sense of duty and

[32] Public school in Tbilisi, Georgia, specialized in physics and mathematics.

		inspiration I derived from my dedicated professors who invested so much effort in us in the most difficult times. However, this double life is challenging. I would like to be fully committed to academic pursuits and enhance my research activities, but the meager university salary makes it difficult to sustain a livelihood solely through academic work.
Marine	TSU	My grandmother instilled in me a deep appreciation for education. She was also the reason why I never saw myself as a Soviet person. My grandmother was 17 when the Soviets came. Her recollections about the pre-Soviet time exposed me to alternative and distinct contexts. During the Soviet time, choosing a profession meant committing to it for life. So, I was considering many different options. In 1975, a conversation with my dad's guest from Moscow, who was a consultant in sports physiology, sparked my interest in Psychology; he even sent me a book titled "Human Information Processing" by Normand Lindsay. After reading this book, I decided to pursue psychology, which I viewed as a means to satisfy my curiosity, play with different thoughts, and explain human behavior rather than a clinical field. One of the most significant events in my life was the street protests against the Soviet law in 1978 about the language policy. I participated in the protest and signed a statement as well, which led to a conflict with my father, who had received a warning from his KGB friend. That was when I realized that there are no unquestionable authorities. This event was a critical matter of national identity and a societal and individual test, defining our capacity to conform or confront the regime - a matter that remains relevant in today's academic and intellectual circles.
Nata	ISU	Since my childhood, I envisioned myself continuously gaining knowledge and becoming a scholar. This inclination was rooted in family values. Being a student of Levan Berdzenishvili[33], a recently released political prisoner in 1980-90, was an inspiration to pursue classical philology. Another influential person was my German language teacher, who

[33] Well known Georgian professor of philology, public figure, and author.

		nurtured my desire to study in Germany. During the civil war in Tbilisi, she would go out in the street to call me from a telephone kiosk and inform me about various study programs. When I was admitted to the university in Germany, the embassy required a sponsorship document with an official stamp. I remember myself being a 19-year-old shy girl standing in the street in front of the Philharmonic hall, thinking who I should ask for such a stamp. Randomly, I walked into the technical library building and saw some kind of a federation of judo or wrestling and three men sitting there. I mustered the courage to approach them and explain that their official stamp on my paper would help me to study in Germany. To my delight, one of them told me, "As long as you study well, of course, I will stamp the paper." That's how I made my way to study in Germany. As a professor, I am hyperactive and dedicated to academic commitments. In teaching, I prioritize making class time meaningful for my students. Witnessing the evolution of their perspectives and building a strong connection with them brings me immense satisfaction. My research is propelled by my curiosity and desire to explore and understand.
Nina	GTU	I came to GTU as a student in 1961 and I am still learning. I loved math and drawing, so I decided to study Construction. Many of my school classmates also chose the same program, and to this day, they remain my friends and colleagues. An interesting and funny twist in my journey was that even though I excelled in drawing, I got a satisfactory grade on the entrance exam and was admitted to the night sector of the program. There were several options and requirements to transfer to the day sector. One of them was being good at sports. A good friend of mine who was a sport shooter. He took me to the shooting hall and trained me. Consequently, I joined the Georgian national shooting team and that's how I got transferred to the day studies. I had a joyful and fulfilling academic journey. I participated in the construction of strategic buildings all over the Soviet Union, traveling to various places from the Arctic Ocean to the East. During that time,

		there was profound support for Science, but then the economic crisis destroyed it and we still have not recovered from it.
Otar	TSU	I grew up in the "Italian courtyard"[34] neighborhood, and this communal environment had a profound impact on me, as the entire neighborhood lived there as one big family. One of my neighbors, Guram Dolidze, was a physicist. Conversations with him inspired me to pursue physics. I first heard about the particle accelerators from him. I defended my dissertation in Dubna,[35] still during the Soviet time, but I had an interest in what research institutes were like outside the Soviet Union. After the wall fell, I went to work at CERN.[36] I am deeply grateful for this opportunity because here, I would not be able to afford living by doing science. However, my family remained here, and I always wanted to come back. Working with students and young researchers brings me great joy. I do my best to guide them in their work and help them to participate in international fellowships. I dedicate most of my academic time to my students and they also provide valuable assistance in various experiments.
Petre	GTU	I think my true calling lies in the field of design. I have an innate sense of aesthetics. Unfortunately, in Soviet times, design or *moda* [fashion] were not popular fields. I was also good in humanities and I gravitated toward this field. Teaching, in my view, is akin to a theatrical performance. You should captivate the audience with your gestures, depth of knowledge, style, and eloquence. In my youth, I struggled with pronunciation. I've been practicing in front of the mirror to refine my speech. The decision of what to teach in a particular class should be made by sensing the readiness and interests of the audience. Those who rigidly follow the syllabi lack the spark.

[34] Type of residential apartments in Tbilisi, which was dubbed as "Italian" during the Soviet time because of the noisiness of those neighborhoods (Kitachaev, 2022).
[35] City in Russia, where Joint Institute for Nuclear Research is based.
[36] European Organization for Nuclear Research, based in Switzerland.

		Now, as I am getting old, I grapple with the feeling of insecurity. I have this sense that I am becoming redundant here. If I had a decent pension, I would leave and dedicate myself to scholarly pursuits at my leisure. But if they make me retire, it will be difficult to survive. Besides, we, the older generation, still harbor a passion for academic work.
Rezo	TSU	I enrolled at TSU in the early 2000s, when the study process had many flaws. We still had to write down the monotonous lectures of our professors and attend classes on unrelated topics. I realized that I had to put in a significant independent effort to truly learn and develop research skills. I began by taking numerous online lectures and then participated in various international mobility projects. Having experienced Soviet-style lectures, I was determined to ensure that my students had a different experience. I always try to synthesize diverse methods from my international experiences and use them in my classes. I observe how my students perceive it and think about how I can make their learning more impactful. My academic identity is strongly defined by TSU. It is an immensely complex institution, we have many problems, but I've been part of it since my undergraduate studies, and I know how to navigate those complexities and authorities.
Shota	TSU	I studied fiction translation and literature at the university. Even before completing my degree, in around 1983, I started my teaching career at school. During the late 1980s, I worked at the Ministry of Education. Considering the new reality that came with "Perestroika," we were developing a new concept paper in education. An interesting episode from that time was that in 1989, on February 25, I was arrested for participating in the demonstrations requesting Georgia's independence from the Soviet Union. A woman named Tina, working in the chancellery of the Ministry, discreetly concealed this fact so that I did not get fired. Hence, the Soviet control and influence were already weakened. I think it was always weaker in Georgia because there were always people like Tina who did not take foolish Soviet rules and control seriously.

		My academic identity is dominated by my professional experience and this is where I see my role. I want my students to be able to deconstruct and rebuild the education system and institutions and to know how each of its components works. I am trying to help them in finding their personal interest and connect them to their research and academic pursuits.
Sopo	TSU	I pursued a degree in chemistry at the university. Following my graduation, I started to work at the Research Institutes of Metallurgy and later at the Institute of Geology. However, at that time, safety conditions were not that good at the lab and I got poisoned. After this, I decided to change my occupation and become a teacher, and I also shifted my academic focus to didactics. I've been working at TSU since 1982, taking different roles and observing how the field of pedagogy has been evolving. During the Soviet time, pedagogy was one of the most ideologically influenced fields. Nonetheless, in Georgia, in contrast to Russia, many of the professors and teachers were avoiding this ideological intention that "we should mold a communist." We were laughing about such narratives.
Tamar	GTU	I completed school in 1988. I was good at math so I decided to enroll in what was then a polytechnical institute, which now is the Georgian Technical University. I was aware that this program offered an opportunity to study abroad, but I got married and could not pursue this opportunity. Since then, I have been with GTU. In 1997, I began teaching in the first English-language program in Economics of Informatics. My dad created this program, I was helping him, too. My brother, Niko, was studying for a Master's program in a similar field in the US, and he was bringing new textbooks and literature for our program. As a professor, communication with students is particularly valuable for me. Our field evolves so fast that my students and I are learning together. Now, in my administrative role, I emphasize a personalized approach. I consider the individual needs and issues of my colleagues and students and try to provide support and assistance to the best of my ability.

The purpose of individually introducing the characters of this study is to provide a succinct glimpse into their personalities, which becomes blended into their academic identities. Therefore, it gives the reader a better understanding of individual academics who collectively shape the identity of Georgian academics as explored in this study. However, in order to protect the confidentiality and anonymity of research participants, not all the characters appear individually in the findings chapter. Considering the terms and conditions indicated in the interview consent forms and the sensitivity of the narratives, respondent names are mentioned only in certain instances. Nonetheless, the composite narratives and individual accounts encompass the voices of all characters, with some narratives presented without explicit reference to names and contexts.

Data Analysis

After completing the data collection, I engaged in the simultaneous process of transcribing and translating the data. For organizing the data, I used MAXQDA, a software program designed for computer-assisted qualitative and mixed methods data, text, and multimedia analysis. Along with this process, I initially started to create and assign codes to certain sections of narratives. Jackson and Mazzei (2012) argue that "coding takes us back to what is known, not only to the experience of our participants but also to our own experience as well" (p. 12). Being aware of the traps of coding the qualitative data and its incongruence with the goals and theoretical frameworks of this study, I only used it as a tool for organizing and threading the data *together-apart*. As for engaging in the depth of the analysis, I followed the process described by MacLure

(2008), which involves "poring over the data, annotating, describing, linking, bringing theory to bear, recalling what others have written, and seeing things from different angles" (p. 174). I found this process very helpful in comprehending the data, finding the threads and disjunctions between them, linking them with the ethnographic fieldnotes, thinking through the theoretical frameworks, and drawing certain contours for organizing narratives and constructing the structure for writing the study findings.

As much as each of the narratives generated rich data with thick descriptions of the situated stories, I noticed how they were unsettling my already written texts, understandings, and hidden expectations. The more interviews were analyzed, the more I noticed how some stories were contesting the narratives of other participants and also the interpretations of their own experiences. Of course, I was aware of the contrasting opinions established in academic circles regarding the frequently discussed topics, but the nature of these divergences was mostly dual and dichotomous. Such binary divisions in the positions, discourses, and narratives are natural as they have been emerging from the split time, space, and imaginaries of the Soviet and post-Soviet contexts. Moreover, as Batiashvili (2018) argues, Georgians are the "Bivocal Nation," noting how this "bivocality" holds the tension between self-idealizing (e.g., narrative about heroism and unity) and self-condemning (e.g., narratives about betrayal and divide) narratives about Georgianness. In the modern social and political discourse, this bivocality stems from the 19th-century imperial order of the Russian Empire in Georgia, therefore, from the modern/colonial past.

With the time spent in the research fieldwork and then during analyzing the narrative and field note data, I started to notice that there were not just contesting or

concurring narratives but that these narratives were also completing, explaining, questioning, and making new meanings through each other, both individually and collectively, while also acknowledging the unanswered questions. I should highlight the role and ability of my participants in interpreting and theorizing their own narratives and broader academic context. This is probably what distinguishes this research on academics from other studies, where research participants engage in the research process as respondents and become collaborators in the theorization and interpretation process. It was also notable that their theorizations were derived from their disciplinary and epistemic backgrounds. Through sharing, interpreting, and theorizing the stories of lived experiences, my research participants were shaping and presenting academic identities of “selves” and “others” as individuals, communities, and holders of certain experiences, beliefs, and values. These stories were interacting and intersecting with each other in time and space, creating new configurations in shaping and reshaping the academic identities of Georgian professors.

Such relationality could be better explained by Barad’s notion of intra-action (2007). Making an ontological shift from individual to relational existence, she argues that there are not independent and separate individual agencies that are interacting with each other, but they are ontologically inseparable, mutually constituted, intra-acting entangled agencies. According to Barad (2007), individual agencies do not precede their interaction, but they “emerge through their intra-action” (p. 33). Therefore, their boundaries, properties, and identities are continuously shaped and reconfigured in relationality. The notion of intra-action also challenges the traditional understanding of

causality, where the cause precedes the effect. Instead, it argues that cause and effect are mutually constituted through intra-actions that “cut things together apart” (p. 389).

Diffractive Analysis

To trace intra-acting relational emergence and existence of academic identities across space and time, as well as to capture their entangled nature, I have used the diffractive methodology for data analysis. Barad (2007) explains diffraction as a physical phenomenon exhibited in the behavior of waves through their interference. Diffraction patterns are produced through combining or spreading out of the waves as they encounter the obstruction. The interference of the waves can enhance (constructive) or diminish (destructive) intensity of their flow, create patterns of resonance and dissonance, and create “new possibilities for understanding and for being” (p. 142). In this context, analyzing the narratives and fieldnotes diffractively entails the practice of “reading insights through one another in ways that help illuminate differences as they emerge” (Barad, 2007, p. 03). Mazzei (2014) further suggests that *plugging in theory* in the diffractive analysis enacts new connectives between and within the texts.

Haraway (1992) explains the difference between the ways of thinking diffractively and reflectively. She argues that reflection or reflexivity is about mirroring and sameness, inviting “the illusion of essential, fixed position,” while diffraction marks the patterns of differences that emerge in the process. Diffractive reading and analysis of academic identities enact the intra-actions within and between narratives “in which matter-in-the-process-of-becoming is sedimented out and enfolded in further materializations” (Barad, 2007, p. 170). Therefore, it creates the possibility for

reconfiguring the material-discursive practices and produces new meanings and understandings for the open-ended process of its materialization in time and space.

The life stories of Georgian academics that were ‘coming to matter’ in the process – from the interviews until this point – have been disrupting and reconfiguring certain pre-existing singular or binary positions and understandings held by myself, by the research participants, and by the stories themselves. They were intra-acting with one another, creating new connections, patterns, and understandings. Therefore my goal in writing the research findings is not to present them as groups of similar and contrasting narratives or to put them against one another, but rather to show the “continuities and breaks” (Bozalek & Zembylas, 2017) of making the new meanings and (un)understandings through their resonansing and desonansing intra-actions. Approaching the analysis diffractively was also helpful in capturing the dynamics between the *de*futuring and *re*futuring narratives. It should be noted that certain *waves of constructive narratives* enhance and intensify the *de*futuring patterns, while the *deconstructive interferences of those waves* have the potential to break the *de*futuring stream and diffract toward *re*futuring.

Broadening, Burrowing, Storying, and Restorying

Along with the diffractive analysis, I also use Clandinin and Connelly's (1990, 2000) analytical approach to narrative inquiry, which incorporates three components: *broadening, burrowing, storying, and restorying*. I use this approach as it aligns with the narrative inquiry's temporal, spatial, and social methodological domains and is based on a combination of analysis of the narrative and the ethnographic field data. The first component - *broadening* - refers to the participant's character, values, and the social,

historical, and cultural contexts in which the story and the narration take place. Therefore, the analysis relies not only on the narratives but also on the ethnographic field notes and contextual literature. *Burrowing* focuses on the emotional, moral, and aesthetic qualities of storytelling and indicates 'therapeutic' questioning of the origins of the feelings exposed during the interview. Hence, burrowing pays attention to the intimate experiences of the participants, revealing how certain events impacted their lived experiences. This leads to the third component of the analysis, which, from the narrator's standpoint, indicates creating a new meaning of past events, *restorying* past experiences, and creating a new story of self. At the same time, the former two steps allow the researchers to orchestrate participants' significant lived experiences (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Kim, 2016).

While I carried out the fieldwork in three different universities in Georgia, I should clarify that my goal is not to compare the academic identities according to the three different locations. Instead, I intend to bring the diverse historical, cultural, and physical spaces and times into the interplay of 'spacetimemattering' of academic identities which construct, deconstruct, and reconstruct by intersections, diffractions, and configurations of personal and social domains through time and space.

Presenting the Narratives

I present the data in the form of individual, composite (for resonancing narratives) (Willis, 2019; Wertz et al., 2011) and collective narratives (as a collection of dissonancing narratives) (Bosanquet et al., 2017; Davies & Gannon, 2006). Each composite narrative is developed from more than three interview transcripts. I made sure

that the data I was composing together were supporting, enhancing, and adding to each other's arguments on similar questions and topics. Weaving the composite narratives together amplifies the power of different voices in unity. Moreover, composite narratives reflect the conceptualization of the identity formation process enacted through and in relation to others. Furthermore, combining the narratives allows a higher degree of autonomy for the researcher to tell the stories with detailed contextual descriptions while still protecting the anonymity and confidentiality of the respondents (Willis, 2019). Composite narratives were also helpful for combining the narratives of academics from different universities that portray the transversal experiences across universities, even when the institutional and cultural identities of universities are different. However, I should note that using the composite narratives does not undermine the goal of the diffractive analysis to present the differences; instead, the composite narratives are diffracted through one another or through other collective or individual narratives. These diffractions construct rhizomatic threads of the narratives that move in different directions or intersect with each other and create the knots between the threads. Hendry, Mitchell, and Eaton (2018) present narratives as a "web-like, rhizomatic entanglement" (p. 26) that constitutes a flow of continuous diffractions.

Writing the Findings

Relying on these analytical processes and apparatus, I approached the writing of the findings as a process of reflective and diffractive engagement in the meaning-making of the data through theory. Such an approach has been introduced by Richardson and St. Pierre (2005, 2008) as "Writing as a method of inquiry." It approaches writing the

findings not merely an act of reporting the data, but as a continuation of the research process, where the writing process, the writer, and the written product are intertwined (Richardson &St. Pierre, 2008). “Writing as a method of inquiry” presents the writing of the findings as a creative, analytical process that embraces the researcher’s subjectivity, reflexivity, and interpretive process while foregrounding interactions between the data and theory. This approach is particularly relevant for writing the ethnographic research findings, as “it is not separable from the [researcher’s] self” (p. 481). While being engaged in this dynamic process of writing the findings, in several cases, I reconnected with my research participants, asking them to clarify, discuss, and interpret certain narratives and contexts, add more details, or talk about the subsequent developments that occurred after our interview.

Treating the writing process as a method of inquiry enabled a more comprehensive and dynamic exploration of the research findings where the different kinds of data were intra-acting with each other and with the theory. It fostered the analytical process from which new understandings, connectives, and meanings emerged.

CHAPTER 5

FINDINGS: NAVIGATING THE HAUNTED POST-SOVIET ACADEMIC SPACE THROUGH MASTERING THE 'ART OF DUPLICITY' BETWEEN THE HAUNTINGS OF THE FUTURE

In the late 1980s, there were many signs of the Soviet state losing its power; however, the breakdown of the Soviet Union was still a startling and unexpected event for many. As Aleksei Yurchak (2006) writes, "the [Soviet] system's collapse had been profoundly unexpected and unimaginable to many Soviet people until it happened, and yet, it quickly appeared perfectly logical and exciting when it began" (p. 4). Georgian academics, some of whom at that time were students or already professors, had similar reactions. Reflecting on the breakdown of the Soviet Union, they would say that they were not expecting the breakdown at all until the minute it was announced on TV. This was an unexpected event even for those who were involved in the national independence movements. Although there was a common underlying animosity toward the Soviet system (even among the people who were not dissidents), there was still a fear of what the dissolution of the Soviet bloc would bring, as no one knew what would come after that. Nina, a professor from GTU explained:

> The entire senior generation of my family was shot in 1937 (during the Great Purge). Having a protest against the Soviet state was in our DNA and we had the intuitive desire for the Soviet regime to end; however, the expectation that the system would collapse was scary for everyone around me. We would wish for a peaceful and smooth transition, but this did not happen.

The breakdown of the Soviet Union and the transition to an independent state in Georgia was accompanied by quite diverse and divergent opinions, senses, and emotions, such as euphoria, happiness, confusion, fear, anxiety, and desperation in the society at large. Universities and academics suddenly found themselves in the new post-Soviet reality and they had to make adjustments in their academic lives. While many contrasting stories could be told about the transformation of the Soviet academic system, one of the main predicaments of that time was the lack of resources, knowledge, and experience for reinventing the post-Soviet university. In this realm, the well-mastered "art of duplicity" – a useful skill for navigating not only the Soviet academic space but all aspects of social life – regained its momentum in the post-Soviet context that has been haunting academic identities and university life aftermath.

Gail Kligman (1998) introduces the notions of duplicity and complicity as the modes of communicative behavior and social relations in socialist and post-socialist societies. She defines duplicity as a conscious deceitful behavior or 'double-dealing,' which involves a social actor's deliberate intentions, while complicity refers to being an accomplice of a certain policy or system and passively or actively assisting "that in which they do not believe" out of "fear, indifference, or alienation" (p. 14). Therefore, such communicative behavior feeds the endurance of the 'evil' systems, spinning the threads of complicity (Kilgman, 1998, p. 15). While such behavior challenges the morality of everyday life, being grounded in fear, indifference, alienation, or personal benefits, it "makes everyday life livable - even if at the cost of a corrosive derangement of private and public selves" (Kilgman, 1998, p. 15). She explains that the public self refers to the publicly displayed conformity in speech and behavior, and the private self is the one

found in “the innermost depths of the mind to preserve a kernel of individual thoughts” (p. 15). Kligman (1998) uses the Romanian word ‘dedublare’ to describe the conflict between the public and the private selves caused by the act of duplicity and provides its ‘rough’ definition – “division in two, or dual or split personalities” (p. 15). While the accurate, literal translation of ‘dedublare’ could not be found in the English language, there is one in the Georgian language – “gaoreba” or გაორება. The peculiarity of such linguistic expression stresses the cultural embeddedness of the notion in post-communist or post-socialist societies.

When talking about the academic community, Marine, a professor of psychology at TSU told me that for her it was still an unresolved challenge to figure out “how people think one thing, say something else, and do something different or even the opposite.” She related this to the split personality of a Soviet man, the so-called Homo Sovieticus, but as described in her quote, the personality is not split just between the dual public and the private selves but rather has multiple splits and dualities in the identities of Georgian academics. Kligman (1998) explains that the split (გაორებული [gaorebuli]) personality and duplicitous behavior reflect a “structurally determined survival mechanism” and a tool for manipulating systems, especially in the repressive and totalitarian order. The narratives of Georgian academics are rich with stories of survival and manipulation of the Soviet regime through the “art of duplicity,” and those narratives are abundantly present in the post-Soviet stories of academic lives as well. I argue that along with transitioning from the Soviet to post-Soviet spaces, practicing duplicity has become a normalized way of navigating the Georgian academic space, forming an ingrained part of academic identities and trapping academics in a certain (limiting) mode of thinking and being.

Normalization of the practice of duplicity, once used for survival, conveys the risks of becoming blind towards self-sabotaging traps and thus undermines the present and the future being and becoming of academic identities and imaginaries of academic life in the post-Soviet context.

Making visible and unsettling the normalized acts of duplicity in the Georgian academic space through the diffractive analysis challenges the established binary (e.g., Soviet/Western, new generation/old generation) or even singular interpretations of academic lives in transition from the Soviet to the post-Soviet period (e.g., "we are in the hole," "we are in the swamp"). In this context, the intra-actions between and within the narratives allow for new meanings and understandings to emerge and "come to matter."

I will organize this chapter around the two time junctures significant for defining the trajectories of higher education development in the country. The first time juncture corresponds to the breakdown of the Soviet Union; the second one marks the initiation of the higher education reforms after the Rose Revolution. However, I should note that the stories and analysis presented in these sections traverse between the Soviet and post-Soviet times and spaces.

When we talk about the breakdown of the Soviet Union and the post-Soviet transformation of the academic system, the conversation is filled with contradictory rhetoric about its dramatic change and persisting Soviet legacies. Duplicitous social and political practices and discourses, which have been embedded in everyday life and identities since the Soviet times, implicitly and explicitly prevail in the post-Soviet academic space.

Tracing Back the Practices of Duplicity (Early 1990s Time Juncture)

I use three examples to set up the stage at the breaking point of the Soviet Union and transition to the post-Soviet context, tracing back the emergence of duplicitous practices and showing diffractively how duplicity has been practiced and experienced in the academic space. For this purpose, I asked the participants to hop back to the days of university life when the Soviet Union broke down and recall the impressions and experiences from those moments. Many of the academics – still with surprise – were remembering oddly quick changes that they witnessed at universities, some of whom were still students or aspirants at that time. It was impressive to observe that many of them vividly remembered the same scene from Tbilisi State University (TSU) – the door signs of different departments changing overnight. I present these multiple, resonating memories as a composite narrative:

> I still have a visual memory of the door sign in the second building of the university (TSU), on the third floor on the right – "Katedra of Atheism." It was there at the end of the first semester of 1991, but when we came back for the second semester, it was replaced by the sign "Katedra of Religious Studies," the Marxism-Leninism Katedra became the Katedra of Philosophy, the Soviet mandatory course 'Scientific Communism' was renamed as Political Science. Yes, the names changed, but the professors were the same, their teaching styles and their attitudes were the same, the content of the courses and materials were the same, and nothing has changed in reality.

These memories were recalled with a sarcastic smile and confusing astonishment as the participants were connecting this memory episode with many other memories since then.

These narratives were followed by the following reflections: “We are pretending that we are changing things, but nothing is changing in reality,” “these changes are just the facade,” ”after all these years, we are still in the hole,” “we are in the swamp.” Although sharing these stories seemed amusing at first, they also stirred up a sense of anger, disappointment, and regret about the ‘lost time’ and hopelessness during the interviews. While reading and rereading the narratives diffractively, I realized that these reflective narratives were mirroring the original story of the current state of being that would move our gaze to the dead ends (or *de*futuring). However, taking the diffractive approach has the potential to trouble the perception of “nothing is changing,” the conception and sensation of nothingness and emptiness. Drawn on the quantum field theory, Barad (2020) argues that as the time-being is indeterminate, nothingness is not empty, rather it is “innumerable imaginings of what might yet be/have been … nothingness is material, even in its non/presence” (p. 91). Barad (2017) also argues that nothingness is the colonialist apparatus used to impose a colonialist or imperialist agenda of modernization, civilization, or development. In particular, the interviews brought into focus reflections on how the Georgian academic space encountered the imposition of both communist and Western modernization along with the neglect of what already existed. Disregarding what was already there as if it had never existed or labeling it as deficient is also a populist tool used by politicians and governments to highlight “their” achievements. It is explicitly expressed in such a common narrative as “for the first time in history [we will do something or we achieved something],” implying that “everything that was new and reformed was assumed to be good and everything that was old or Soviet was bad,” as one of the interviewed professors explained. Another faculty member who was criticizing the

Soviet system and was looking forward to the reforms in higher education regretfully mentioned, “When the reforms started, the rhetoric and approach was that everything was starting from that moment as if nothing had ever happened before that and as if nothing was already there.”

Therefore, disregarding what is already there with the narratives that “nothing has changed” disempowers academics and gives power to politicians and administrators for political manipulation, even when they are the ones imposing the reforms and policies that “do not change anything.” Moreover, holding the perspective of “nothing has changed” is a shortcut conclusion, which mystifies the complexity of the intra-acting processes and makes them stable and fixed. It distances and separates the system from the actors as if the system functions on its own, thus disengaging academics or even the universities and limiting their response-ability for the formation of the academic space. It also devalues previous efforts, pains, and experiences and degrades the identity of the academic community and academic selves. Analyzing the narratives of duplicity diffractively – looking beyond the nihilism and hopelessness and understanding what is hiding behind the facade, what is kept in those deep dark holes, and what is happening in the swamps – can reconfigure those narratives and generate new meanings. It could thus serve as an entry point to *re*futuring.

As shown in the example above, one common way of how duplicity is practiced and experienced is by changing the surface to hide the matter/content inside in a survival mode, which creates frustration, the illusion of stability, and emptiness at the same time. On the other side, duplicity is also practiced through sustaining the surface and pretending that ‘nothing has changed’ but instead changing the matter inside it. Many of

the professors, even during the interviews, were laughing about the official regulation that required them to use the Marxist-Leninist theories in their dissertations and were amused to remember the creative ways in which they had dealt with it:

> Without those quotes, you would not be able to receive approval from VAK (Higher Attestation Commission under the USSR Council of Ministers). You would receive feedback that you did not make a reference to any of the classics. It is funny now, but there was even an unofficial collection of citations of those quotes. Already since the 1980s, no one cared about it anymore. We were using those cliche quotes but no one was taking it seriously, we were laughing about this. We were just using those quotes for the sake of formality.
>
> In the late 80s, when the national movement was gaining support, we, as students were active participants in the ongoing protests. We also started a request to remove the mandatory ideologized courses such as History of the Communist Party, Politeconomy, and Scientific Communism from the program. The system was still rigid and universities could not change the curriculum, but they changed the class schedule and moved those classes to the end so that we could easily skip the classes. The attitude in society, in general, was very cynical toward the Soviet government, especially in Georgia. This double standard that you are thinking something but doing something else became embedded in our daily life.

As shown in this narrative, duplicity was jointly practiced by students, professors, and universities, keeping the form unchanged on the surface but navigating and getting rid of the ideologized Soviet practice. Some of my respondents recalled their experiences as students during those times, noting that they were not only skipping classes but were

also proud of being "bad" students in those classes. Lela, a professor from TSU joyfully confessed that when she was taking the enrollment exams in aspirantura, she had to pass scientific communism (in addition to the foreign language and discipline-related subjects), which she rigged and did not actually take that one exam. Alexander from GTU also shared proudly and with affirmation, "I had the lowest grades in those courses." In this context, duplicity became a common communication method between the professors, students, and universities existing and surviving in the Soviet and post-Soviet academic spaces. The duplicitous strategies were sometimes translated into controversial actions and attitudes, such as taking pride in skipping classes, having low grades, or even engaging in corrupt behavior to manipulate, degrade, tease, and trick the system. Such duplicitous behaviors present the form of 'tricksterism.'

According to Tlostanova and Mignolo (2012), in the Caucasian and Central Asian context, tricksterism denotes the decolonial act of subversion, resistance, and re-existence for liberating knowledge and being, and overcoming norms and limitations. As she explains, tricksterism conveys "ambiguity, deceit of authority, playing tricks on power, metamorphosis, a mediating function between different worlds, manipulation and bricolage as modes of existence" (p. 88). Development of the trickster consciousness and behavior also entails questioning and reconceptualizing the meanings, as well as negotiating and repositioning individual and communal identities. The narratives and behaviors of Georgian academics abundantly illustrate the trickster consciousness manifested in mocking and teasing the authorities and stemming from the multiple traumatic and emotional experiences imposed by the Soviet and Western repressive politics of modernization. However, while tricksterism and duplicity are the ways of

survival and resistance, they have limits in terms of manifesting the power of confrontation, instead they mutate into complicity to the system.

Furthermore, the composite narrative above emphasizes that the duplicitous and cynical attitudes toward the Soviet system were common – “especially in Georgia.” According to Batiashvili (2015), resistance toward external domination is one of the strong elements of Georgianness presented in the Georgian narrative framework, and “act of resistance… symbolizes the endurance of the Georgian spirit” (p. 43). Disregarding the rules and regulations, while making the system look foolish is a prevailing act of resistance in the narratives of Georgian academics, which has been flourishing in post-Soviet times as well. According to Tlostanova (2012), trickster consciousness or identity is frequently manifested in mocking or playing around the systems or authorities. Such patterns are generated through the multiple psychological reactions to repressive regimes and dehumanizing politics ranging from “losing any instinct of self-preservation to a ubiquitous irrational fear” (p. 133). Observing the transformation of higher education and political changes in Georgia, Shota, a professor from TSU, clearly recognizing the negative side of the double standards, said: “These double standards are bad because you are playing and simulating all the time. Instead of state building, we are *playing* state-building” (emphasis added). And still, he continued with an amusing tone, “In Georgia, if you came out to the street with the pioneer tie, 'old boys’[37] would catch and beat you. So you had to put the tie in your pocket and then put it on again at school so that the school director would not beat you.”

[37] Dzveli bichebi or ძველი ბიჭები - literally translated as old boys, is a street subculture of thuggish youth with their own honor code and criminal mentality.

This example shows that Georgian academics had to navigate the contradictory regimes and space way before they started their academic careers. Even as children, they had to master 'the art of duplicity' in order to navigate the parallel and conflicting cultural regimes of formal and informal social settings. This story made both of us laugh at the audacity of our rebellious Georgianness, even when it is expressed in a criminal mentality or behavior. However, as he said, "We are playing and simulating all the time," which makes us more complicit than rebellious to the system we are laughing about. I will further explore the related narratives below.

These examples should be seen not as two types of duplicitous practices where the surface is changing and matter inside remains unchanged, or where the surface remains the same but the matter inside changes, but as a spectrum of multilayered configurations of what changes and what stays stable while practicing the art of duplicity. Sometimes the surface is changing and the matter inside it is changing too, but not in the way it looks on the surface. Besides, everything around us evolves through multiple intra-actions and reconfigures over time and space, even if we do not notice it at first glance. The Faculty of Political Sciences no longer offers the Marxist philosophy and there is no longer the requirement of referencing the Marxist-Leninist quotes in the dissertations, but the multiple varieties of duplicity are still haunting everyday life in the post-Soviet academic space.

The story of the professor from the Biology Department at TSU is both a direct and metaphorical example that diffracts the polarity of duplicitous practices and shows its in-betweenness in the transition from the Soviet to Western academic time and space. Lela remembers that in the late 1990s, with the funding of the Tempus project, the

Biology Department bought the first Centrifuge produced in Europe, which was a significant step forward for advancing their lab activities. However, due to the uneven surface of the lab room in the Soviet university building, the machine did not work:

> When we installed and turned it on, we saw the notification on the screen that the Centrifuge needed to stand on a flat surface. The same was with the PH meter when the machine sent us a request to put it on a flat surface and adjust the humidity. Western technologies were fighting us, but we tamed them, we deleted the program, which was detecting the uneven surface features. Of course, we were careful not to delete something that would impact the outcomes of the experiments.

This story illustrates that the process of importing and fusing Western policies and ways of knowing and being in the post-Soviet academic space was not smooth and linear, but it was inclined and bumpy as the biology lab floor surface. Therefore, the assumption that the implementation of the rigid and radical reforms would clean up the complicated landscape to ensure the success of the reforms was challenged by the well-developed alternative and duplicitous thinking and behavior of Georgian academics.

The Duplicity of History: Dark/Sweet 1990s

Before moving to the next time junction marking the initiation of the reforms toward the de-Sovietization and Westernization/modernization of the Georgian higher education system, it is essential to uncover the conserved history of the 1990s. During the interviews, this period has been mentioned as one of the most difficult and challenging times in the history of Georgian universities. Therefore, it has been one of the most

impactful periods that has been haunting the present and future of academic lives, and even the interpretations of the (Soviet) past of what was before ‘everything fell apart.’ This period of history is usually deficiently presented in the public and scholarly discourse (Bregvadze & Chakhaia, 2018; Glonti & Chitashvili, 2007; Heyneman, 2010; Jibladze, 2015; Lorentzen, 2000; Perkins, 1998), depicting the post-Soviet state of universities in terms of the proliferation of corruption, deterioration of higher education infrastructure, the irrelevance of knowledge and qualification of academics, and deterioration of educational standards. However, underneath these narratives are hidden stories about the “true transformations,” “true autonomy,” “true engagement,” dedication, and heroism – along with survival. Therefore, the concept of "bivocality" within Georgian identity (Batiashvili, 2018) finds clear expression in the narratives concerning the 1990s, a period often referred to as both the "dark 90s" and the "sweet 90s" in the everyday discourse of the Georgian society. Since these contrasting descriptions of the past are the most impactful hauntings of the present, my goal is not to overlook the deficient and troubling practices but to diffract them with promising and inspiring stories. Therefore, by telling the ‘sweet’ side of the stories, I intend to bring the inspiring ghosts from the past into play to intra-act with and to haunt the present and future.

Stories of Survival and Dedication

When remembering the 1990s, the first things that academics talk about are the destroyed university infrastructure, survival, and darkness, but at the same time, they also bring up the dedication of professors in maintaining uninterrupted university life. The

composite narrative below illustrates the upheavals that the Georgian academics had to navigate after everything, along with the Soviet Union, fell apart:

> Don't make me remember that. Those years were terrible, we had to physically survive. We did not have salaries for months. No one cared about science anymore. At that time you would see or hear of prominent scholars – those who dedicated their whole life to university and science – selling books in the street. There was a period when in my department we were receiving three pieces of butter and cheese and we were giving them to our colleagues who had children. Students could come in with a gun and knife and ask you for a grade.
>
> We did not have gas or electricity, there was no heating in the buildings. We had electricity only in the morning from 8 to 10 AM. I knew that I had to write at that time, and readings could be done by candlelight. I was sitting with the coat and gloves typing texts/doing experiments/reading the lectures/drawing the architectural designs. The rain and wind outside were similarly felt inside. Rain was coming down in the building. Once, my colleague, who put a bucket to collect the raindrops coming into her room, found the water frozen in it the next day.

The narratives about the cold weather, freezing university buildings, and wearing warm clothes all the time were so abundantly present in the narratives that one might think that there was always winter. Despite those troubled times, when ‘no one cared about the science” and the “academic process was falling apart,” the narratives illustrate many examples of commitment and dedication toward universities, disciplines, and academic roles. Lela, from the Biology Department of TSU, recollected the episodes that

demonstrate the strong commitment of professors toward the university and the discipline:

> Ketino, my colleague whom you just met, was walking several kilometers in the winter and was carrying with her the reagents to make sure they were kept in proper conditions to be usable for experiments for students. We had a vivarium and some animals were frozen. One professor, Diana Dzidziguri, just by herself allocated one room for rats and mice where she was breeding them. She kept that room warm, and even when she did not have enough food for herself, she fed those animals with soups and vitamins. She slept there to pay attention when it was time for the rats to give birth, etc. At some point, I started to work as the head of the lab in a private hospital. The hospital had unlimited lab supplies and reagents, so basically, what I was doing was a robbery of the hospital – I was taking some of those materials to the university. These moments of loyalty to the university saved the field in that dark time. When you are a biologist, it means you love this field. It was similar for the mathematicians or physicists. They were spending their salary (if they ever received it) to provide supplies for their classes and students.

Another professor from GTU, Irma, shared:

> The pathos of our department was not to stop the scientific work, regardless of the critical difficulties that we were facing. We knew that if we stopped, it would mean going backward. So we kept doing the experiments. We could not keep the vivarium at the university, so Guram Abuladze, head of pharmacology, allocated

> a room in his house for the animals, and he and his wife were taking care of them. We were sometimes going there and bringing some food.

Ana, from ISU who studied at GTU, fondly remembers his professor:

> At that time, the entire study process was failing, professors were missing classes, even on exam days, without any advance notice. But I got lucky. When I was in my third year, we were divided into small groups to work on practical projects. The supervisor of my group was Nodar Buzaladze, he taught us everything – even the things that were not in the curriculum. We were staying in his office until late to work on our project, sometimes even at candlelight and he stayed with us watching our work. He was everything to us.

Reflecting on Silko's (1977) work "Ceremony," Rupprecht (2002) highlights that in the post-colonial context, telling and retelling stories from the past about the unrecognized realities enables the diffraction of the established discourses and creates the potential for "recovery of personal and public identity destroyed by ..marginalization" in the post-colonial context (p. 43). It generates the alternative reality of the past, therefore repositioning the subjects of the past reality in the present. Moreover, the narrative from the 1990s reveals the acts of solidarity among the academic community. Viewing the concept of intellectual solidarity from the black and indigenous theoretical lens, Hailu and Tachine (2021) emphasize that solidarity should go beyond the act of intellectual engagement and foster the development of "relationships of understanding and learning of lives, love, death, injuries, tensions, ethical commitments, and aspirations" (p. 26). The solidarity generated through experiencing hardship and trauma during the 'dark 1990s' shaped the collective identity of Georgian academics.

True Autonomy and Transformations

Along with the stories of survival and dedication, academics are remembering the state of the university in the 1990s as "truly autonomous," where many department-level (bottom-up) initiatives were transforming and restructuring the old Soviet programs and practices. The composite narrative from the professor of TSU provides insights into what it meant to be truly autonomous in the 90s:

> In 1994 universities were given full autonomy. At that time, the Ministry was not controlling the university. We had complete freedom in designing and renewing the curriculum. We only needed approval from the university council. Rectors' conference was the most powerful structure in the system. The president of the country was listening to them more than he did to the Minister of Education. At that time, we were carrying out a truly democratic reform in the university. Many departments were renewing their programs, considering the new reality and new societal and market needs that we were facing. For example, programs in psychology and teacher education were completely transformed. The Faculty of Physics restructured its programs from 5 years to two-cycle bachelor's and master's degree programs before those regulations were adopted in the system. We were exploring the programs from European and American universities, we were finding connections with them and adopting the approaches that we were finding relevant and doable for us. Our colleagues and even family members going abroad were the main sources for bringing the textbooks and materials that we were using for our programs. We had the freedom and agency to explore and be creative. Even in those dark and cold days we were staying at the university

> and discussing those changes. Our community and the spirit of joint effort was strong and helped us to endure in that difficult time. But then everything started to become standardized again. The things that we were happy to do in those dark 1990s were – creating real change – became a formality during the reforms.

This narrative clearly highlights the significance of freedom and autonomy in making the transformative changes that emerge from within the academic community. The transformation approaches described in the narrative contest the implementation of the global policies for fixing the local problems, instead providing a clear example of finding the local solutions for the local problems. Therefore, exploration of local practices even from the 'dark 1990s' can provide examples for *re*futuring. However, in the case of Georgia, the refuting potential from the 1990s could not (yet) be realized. Marine, a professor from TSU, explained:

> The only chance this country could have to restore its higher education was between 1992 - 2004 when universities had full autonomy. Unfortunately, the intellectual elite used this time to construct corruption schemes. This was a missed chance and I cannot forgive this to any rectors. They stole not just money but the future of the university.

Choreographed Art of Duplicity: Navigating the Post-Soviet Education Modernization Reforms (Mid-2000 Time Junction)

Drastic geopolitical, economic, and social changes in transition societies, especially when accompanied by repressive methods or imposed by external forces, create a fertile ground for duplicitous acts. For this reason, I use the mid-2000 as the next time juncture for diffractive analysis to tell the stories and experiences of how Georgian academics have mastered the "art of duplicity" in a time of multiple transformations of post-Soviet higher education. This was the time when the new government initiated reforms aimed at modernization and Europeanization of the higher education system in Georgia. While engaging in the diffractive analysis of the narratives, I will move backward and forward in time to find the cuts and continuities in those stories and disrupt the binary understanding of the transformation of academic space and identities. In particular, the binary narratives tell stories about the progressive and conservative Soviet academics, about reforms that offended and denigrated the academic community but brought the new progressive generation to universities, about radical reforms that eradicated corruption, and the repressive reforms that destroyed universities and science. The narratives of academics convey the patterns of duplicity enacted at various levels – system, institutional, collective, and individual – manifesting in multiple configurations.

In this context, the game of duplicity in the academic space became the common playground for communicating and behaving through a jointly choreographed 'effort' (or effortlessness) of different actors. While recognizing the co-creation of the "art of duplicity" in the Georgian academic space, as the government holds an asymmetrical

power advantage over other actors in leading the reforms, my entry point will be through the stories about how the government contributed to creating the duplicitous discourse and practice at the foundation of those reforms. Therefore, to engage in the diffractive analysis of the transformation of academic identities, I will plug the data on the government's duplicitous policies and actions in the transformation of the post-Soviet higher education system into the experiences, emotions, perceptions, and selves of the academics in different temporal and spatial locations. The goal of using the concept of 'plugging in' is to "read the texts through, with, and in relation to each other to construct a process of thinking with the data and with the theory" (Mazzei, 2014, p. 744). My goal is thus to construct a thread of analysis that weaves together the thoughts, meanings, and understandings of the transformation of academic identities.

Government's Game of Duplicity

Interviews with Georgian academics revealed that the discursive framework of duplicity has been set up and shaped by the mismatching statements, narratives, promises, and actions of the government and university administrators[38] during Georgia's post-Soviet transformation of academic space. The government's dominant rhetoric about modernization, Europeanization, liberalization, and democratization of the system was quickly perceived as repressive, assaulting, and disrespectful toward the academic community. This is clearly highlighted in the following composite narrative:

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[38] While the government is the system level actor and the university leadership represents the institutional level actors, in this case I discuss them together. This is because at that time, the rector was informally but directly nominated by the Ministry to execute the tasks and plans given by the government in the framework of the reforms. Informal nomination of the rector by the government is still a common practice; however, the main underlying goal of such practice is to have politically reliable and controlled figures in the university leadership rather than tasking the rectors to make certain changes at the university.

> The rhetoric at that time was that big changes were starting, that the system was becoming meritocratic, Bologna process requirements had to be met – and it sounded in a way that we all should have changed if we wanted to stay at the university. Many of us also wanted the changes, but the tone of those narratives was assaulting, implying that everything that you know, the way you teach, and the work you do is old-fashioned, Soviet, and does not have any value anymore. Behind the rhetoric of modernization, European integration, and transformation were the actions of *neo*bolsheviks. The process was completely politicized. They fired everyone with the goal of rehiring the most qualified people and getting rid of the inflated or corrupt segment of staff, but with them, they also got rid of the people who were considered "politically unreliable." Then, after one or two years, many of those people who were fairly fired were rehired as a result of nepotism and pressure from some political authorities. The funny thing is that some of them were rehired with the "modernized" names – if they were laborants[39] before, now they became specialists or consultants.

This composite text is constructed from the narratives of academics of different generations. However, it was interesting to see that the older generation who had experienced various waves of repressions during the Soviet regime and was expecting the liberalization of the academic space from the Western-oriented reforms, soon saw the parallels between the Soviet and Western modernization projects. Hence, they became skeptical about Georgia's European reforms, realizing that they were not that European or democratic (idealized, therefore, unreachable perception of the Western modernization

[39] the Soviet time title to describe a lab technician or assistant.

project). This difference between the generations was diffracted because of two main factors - the younger generation was not the target of the repressive approaches and disrespect; it was the older generation that was collectively presented as Soviet-minded, conservative, corrupt, and irrelevant to the new reality. Therefore, those experiences for the older generation of professors were more painful and harsh. The younger generation did not experience the Soviet regime as academic professionals and was not in a position to claim similar experiences. One of the older professors said, “We, who experienced the Soviet system, have more protest and skepticism because we see similarities; those who have not lived during the Soviet regime might not even realize how Soviet these new reforms are.”

The academic community of Georgian Technical University painfully remembers 2006, when at the time of the first institutional accreditations, GTU’s accreditation was suspended for one year. While some common explanations circulated in the general public (and were also echoed by several study participants) – the prevailing corruption, low academic quality, and failed academic processes – the academic community at GTU saw this as a politicized decision and a fight against the university and the rector. The following composite narrative offers interesting insights:

> When they suspended the accreditation, there were rumors and fear that the government wanted to completely shut down the university. We all saw this as the government fighting against the university. Maybe there were problems at the university, but suspending the accreditation process was not a fair decision because the accreditation was restored after one year, but we did not change much. The only thing that changed was a forced resignation of the rector and

privatization of some of the GTU property, which the previous rector did not allow.

From these narratives, it was clear to me that the government's practice of duplicity was alleviating the stressful experience of academics, shifting the focus from internal problems (such as corruption and failing academic processes) to unfair treatment by the government. With the fuzzy narratives – such as "they suspended the accreditation, not because of the corruption, but because they wanted to sell the university property" or "not because of the corruption, but they wanted someone in the leadership who they could control" – academics were renegotiating their collective identity which was challenged by the label of the corrupt or the Soviet.

Therefore, behind the narratives and actions that were taken in the name of the reforms, there were underlying political agendas and private interests, such as dismissing staff members to rehire the qualified ones but also getting rid of the politically unreliable segment; changing the university management to eradicate corruption but with that, receiving permission for privatization of the university property,[40] pretending to engage in modernization and democratization but instead establishing fear, disrespect, distrust, and control. Such duplicities in governmental narratives and behavior created a duplicitous playground for other actors as well to renegotiate their roles, responsibilities, agency, academic identities, and positions, which was frequently translated into denying their responsibilities, giving up their agencies, focusing on their public image in the eyes of others and the self.

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[40] This pattern of pushing the rectors to resign, on the basis of privatization of the university properties has popped up in several other cases during the governance of both, the previous and the current governments.

Another (and probably unintentional) duplicity of the government politics in higher education reforms was about creating the expectation to make the Soviet higher education system European; however, many of the academics highlighted that the reforms were more about the eradication of corruption rather than advancing the academic system. Even the implementation of the quality assurance system, the main goal of which should have been the advancement of educational quality, was initially used as a tool to eradicate corruption in higher education and at the related state units. Fighting corruption is still the main and powerful argument used by all generations of academics to justify the radical and aggressive politics of the government. Along with this justification, all of my research participants agreed that even this goal could be achieved with more humane and respectful approaches. A professor from an older generation underlined, “Many of us were supporting the reforms to clean the system from corruption because it was also about our reputation. Not everyone was involved in it, but everyone’s reputation was damaged. But some of the things that they did were assaulting.” While similarly ambivalent and contradictory attitudes are expressed in the narratives of many participants about this issue, there are differences in how academics explain the reasons behind hostile interventions.

Looking back from the present time, several academics explained that they considered those aggressive approaches to be necessary and inevitable at that time, saying that “nothing was happening and there was not a desire to change anything, it was such a swamp of corruption that without forceful actions the whole process would fail.” However, their perspective has changed over time and now they are explaining it with the lack of experience to implement the reforms *quickly and efficiently* while mitigating the

resistance in the academic circles. For this reason, some of the highly qualified and authoritative academics who were questioning and resisting the changes were fired because they were seen as a threat to the reforms and to the reputation of the reformist university administrations. Those opinions, to some extent, were also shared by the older generation of academics. However, my attention was drawn to the tendency of the older academics to present the government as the enemy of the university and academic community. One of the faculty members said, “We saw that the government wanted to break the axis/foundation of this university…they just wanted to break us.” Another one commented: “It was a political revenge with the name of the reform and the Bologna Process – the goal was to dehumanize and damage the reputation of academics.” It puzzled my mind to understand why the government would want to break the university, what the government officials were revenging for, or why professors would think that it was the goal of the government. I also asked these questions during the interviews, but the responses derailed the topic as the interviewed academics did not have clear responses to those questions except for their intuitive assumptions. During the analysis, I realized that those perceptions were reflections of the experiences that they had or heard about from the close circles during the Soviet times about taming the academic system and community using diverse and hostile methods.

Those were the reflections that the new generation of professors could not have. While these reflections explain how academics make sense of the specific governmental reform approaches, the narratives also show that academics anticipate aggressive and disrespectful approaches as a consequence of the reforms. This is another form of duplicity in politics - through the publicly stated goal of eradicating corruption in

universities, the government demoralized and diminished the academic community and universities, while increasing the degree of control over them. Universities were presented as unreliable and incapable of carrying out academic work unless strict control was imposed over their academic and administrative processes, finances, procurements, and even the elections of the rectors (informal influence). Thus, concealed behind the narratives of eradication of corruption, as well as the enhancement of transparency, efficiency, and quality, the government took away the university's autonomy and disempowered the academic community.

Still, to diffract this reflective understanding, I engaged in follow-up conversations with my research participants, some of whom were also holding administrative positions during the 2000s' reforms. What I learned was that the narratives about the breaking of the academic community and the university were connected to the anger that the younger and revolutionary generation had towards the Soviet past, viewing it mainly through a single prism of corruption, backward thinking, and being stuck in Soviet nostalgia. Erekle, from ISU, explained, "This transitional period made the Soviet intelligentsia protective of the Soviet legacy and resistant to change, while the liberal intellectuals became more radical in their critique and action toward the older generation." As a result, many tactical and aggressive decisions were generated from the reactive state of thinking, rather than elaborate planning.

The revolutionary government was changed in 2012; however, being subjugated by governmental and political control is still one of the main challenges for Georgian public universities. More merciful politics of the new government toward the academics and intelligentsia brought about new forms of duplicity, making the academic space more

complicit in the same system it was opposing. This scenario mirrors the Soviet strategy of taming the intelligentsia by giving them privileges after the purge. However, this time it was not one Soviet regime but an interplay of the two different governments (led by the United National Movement (2003-2012) and led by the Georgian Dream (since 2012) - both pretending to be modernizing and developing the national higher education system and fostering its integration into the Western academic space. The narratives describing the practices of duplicity by the current government will be discussed in the following sections.

Conflicting and Split Identities between Us and Them

The project of transformation and Westernization of (post)Soviet higher education in Georgia became a project of eradication of corruption, which was embedded in the struggle of morality, divisions between the generations, cultural norms, beliefs, and worldviews. Sopo, a professor from TSU, said, "The new reformist leadership divided the academic community, and they made us fight each other. The opposition emerged. I was in this opposition as well, we all were." While the divisions might seem clear-cut – black and white – on the surface, even this short fragment disrupts this binary division by noting that *everyone* was in opposition in the *divided* academic community who were *fighting each other*. This narrative shows the complicated interrelationships within and between the academic community and the neoliberal administrative power. This condition brings about the question of reshaping and redefining the academic identity of the self seen by the self and in the eyes of others, which, in the context of duplicity, Kligman (1998) distinguishes as the private and public selves. I will continue the

diffractive thread of the "art of duplicity" through the stories of how academics have been navigating in the transitional, polarized, and already long-time duplicitous academic space while reshaping and renegotiating their academic identities.

Art of Duplicity to Resist Changes

Scholarly literature widely criticizes the implementation of the neoliberal post-Soviet education reform packages that are often presented – and perceived – as universal globally, dismissing the contextual differences and multiplicity of different onto-epistemologies (Silova, 2009, 2011; Silova & Steiner-Khamsi, 2008; Tomusk, 2004). Those critiques reverberated in the narratives of academics, mostly blaming the policy-makers and university administrations for the formal, technical, superficial implementation of the Bologna reforms. By weaving together the composite narrative of academics, I examine the 'facade changes,' then plug in the experiences, feelings, and senses of academics to understand material-discursive patterns of the facades and unfold the diffractive patterns to explore the "not-yet-known" intra-actions that 'come to matter' as I uncover new meanings layered under the facade:

> I still thought that the Bologna process reforms would be more impactful than they actually were. The reason was that the people who were implementing those reforms thought that if they changed the form, the content would change automatically. To give you an example from statistical physics: it has quite strict rules and they only work when the system is big; if it is a small system, it does not work. We are taking the systems and schemes from big systems that do not work here. We have different realities and different resources. I think it is a good thing

> that we took the European higher education model, but the problem is that we only took its form but not the substance. Many things get interrupted in the middle of implementation, every new policymaker starts by asking for new kinds of documents and we are not able to move forward. Just writing the standards and frameworks and modifying the verbs according to order #69n[41]does not change anything inside, but we are wasting a lot of energy and time on it. We are very good at writing documents, but the reality and documents are different. Everyone gets tired of reproducing the useless papers without achieving the actual outcomes, it causes resistance.
>
> It is also because the policy-makers have a limited understanding of the university system. You cannot transform the university when you do not understand its substance in its depth. Then it becomes violence. The violent reform worked to some point, but it pushed back and became counterproductive.

This composite narrative about the facade changes mainly underscores the lack of competence of the policy-makers in higher education policy implementation, while academics are detaching themselves from being the co-creators of the facade. They present themselves as the complicit actors of the system in reproducing the *useless reports and papers* and therefore building the facade that they disapprove of and, through the "art of duplicity," become resistant to changing the interior content matter that they

[41] #69n is an order of the minister of education in Georgia, which defines the national qualifications framework and classification of study fields. The document is based on the European Qualifications Framework and International Standard Classification of Education.

would want to see as an outcome.[42] I would like to highlight that it is not the goal of this analysis to blame certain actors for certain actions and consequences, even if it reads like this, but the goal is to untangle the intra-actions that generate such discursive-material paradoxes. The diffractive analysis is helpful in unfolding those contradictory patterns with and through noticing how the academic identities get disrupted, safeguarded, and transformed in this process.

Hierarchical and Forceful Interrelationships

Sopo, from TSU painfully remembers the initial stage of implementation of the Bologna reforms and their impact of making the academic community silent and obedient:

> The implementation of neoliberal reforms was built on creating fear and disregard for all that we had done. The people who were appointed to administrative positions with the goal of implementing the reforms at the university were belittling academics. They somehow considered that they knew everything and they represented the change. While we, the professors, who wrote the programs, who knew our subjects and had experience in what we were doing became the "others" whose knowledge and experience were no longer worthy. We attended some training and workshops where the tone of the speech was superior and disrespectful. We were even scared to ask a question because it would validate their superior attitude toward us. The system made you look stupid. The system

[42] While this is the general narrative of frustration that nothing is changed inside, there are many narratives about the substantial changes that have been taking place when individual academics or groups take the initiative and ownership. I will write about this in a different section.

> made us abide by all these expectations and generated feelings and experience of resentment inside us. Now I do not expect that I will be active.

Sopo connects this kind of hierarchical relationship between the system and the academics to the colonial pattern of the hierarchical interrelationship between international organizations and the "developing countries," where the knowledge of the so-called international practices is more valued than the in-depth comprehension and understanding of the local context and needs. The narratives of academics underline that the colonial and superior attitude in the implementation of the neoliberal reforms made the academic community silently obey the formalities of the 'modernized' system, which brought the "art of duplicity" into play.

The Duplicity of Agreements

> *-You think, he would accept the fables?*
> *-No, but he would not say no, either.*
> (Shengelaia, 1983, 18:37)

The excerpt from the Georgian movie "Blue Mountains or Unbelievable Story," portrayed above captures the ambiguities and duplicities established within the Soviet workplace, where the roles remain unattended and clear answers are evasive, avoiding the responsibilities and possible disagreements. This particular passage or the short title of the movie "Blue Mountains" is still part of the everyday discourse of Georgian society, used to describe the similar situation encountered at various public institutions, including the universities.

Several professors mentioned that even now – or especially now — if they disagree with some institutional or system regulations they are hesitant to speak up. This

can be because of the fear of disrupting their relationships with the leadership or because of the established common sense that even if they express their critical opinion, no one will listen and consider. Therefore, “It becomes unquestionable obedience, but behind this obedience is the thinking that they [policy-makers, administrators] can do or talk whatever they want. I too will pretend that I do what they ask, but I will do it the way I want to do it.”

The narrative of one of my respondents, who was appointed to the administrative position at the Faculty of Business and Economics at TSU in the late 2000s, presents a scene of how the art of duplicity is practiced. First, I plug in his brief profile to analyze the act of duplicity in relation to his identity. Ilia was in his late 20s at that time and recently returned from Germany after graduating with a master's degree and was motivated to contribute to the implementation of the reforms. He underlined that his role was to assist the dean in the implementation of the Bologna policies; however, he was perceived as a threat by others who thought he wanted to take the dean’s position. Until the dean realized that it was not his intention, he was isolated from the university processes for about a month. Even the office assigned to him was on the last floor of the building, far from everyone and everything. This is how he remembers the dynamics of the transformation among the faculty:

> When the reforms started, the resistance from the academic staff was everywhere but it was not a direct confrontation. They know very well how to avoid and navigate those changes. No one will tell you that they will not do it, but they will do anything for those changes not to work out. You agree on something, and then you hear from someone else that this person is doing the opposite of what we

agreed on. In the beginning, I saw it as a challenge, but at some point, I realized it did not make sense and I left the university.

Another professor, Lado, who held a strong academic authority in the same department, remembers his conversation with a newly appointed rector (during the same time period) whose mandate was to implement reforms at Tbilisi State University:

> When the reforms started and the new rector was appointed, I met her as a head of the katedra. We had a good conversation and agreed on certain things about the plans for the study process and staffing policy. But soon I realized that she did the opposite of what we agreed on. In 2005, I left the university because there were many contradictory things happening. After that, we met again at one of the events and she told me that she would support me if I returned to the university. Of course, I did not go back.

Those two fragments from the same time and the same department expose the multifacetedness of practicing the art of duplicity by the academic staff and the university leadership. All actors have similar (and at the same time different) interests and motivations in practicing duplicity. According to the interpretation of the first professor, the academics from the Faculty of Business and Economics resisted to participate in the reforms because these reforms were disrupting their inert way of being an academic. Moreover, they saw it as an assault to have someone younger than them in charge; they did not confront either as they saw it as a threat to their job security. In another case, the professor suspected that even if the rector genuinely agreed with him during their conversation, she did not even have the agency to act on it, as she was directly appointed by the Ministry, and she also could not confront him as she had to be careful with Lado's

academic authority. These narratives also show that the duplicitous behaviors are the intra-actions creating certain reconfigurations of public identities which serve certain purposes. For example, non-confrontational and obedient academic identity, which will be discussed in many other cases too, is enacted through the threat of job security and stability, but also to create the image that the faculty supports the reforms out of the fear of being labeled as Soviet. A resistant identity, not to follow the lead of younger colleagues, safeguards the imaginative hierarchical position of the self in the academic community.

Interestingly, both of my respondents mentioned above left the university due to encountering the duplicitous patterns of communicative and behavioral dynamics at the university; however, the difference in their academic identities diffracts the underlying patterns of these reasons. Ilia left the university because he considered that he could not make the changes at the university, as that was the mission that he identified with his academic self. For Lado, the duplicitous behavior from the Rector was perceived as an assault on the academic authority which is a valuable dimension of his academic self. These examples also show one of the 'solutions' that academics find if they are not willing to join the game of duplicity when it disrupts their imagined academic self - they leave the university. Therefore, academics practice duplicity to safeguard their academic identities and they also disengage from the same game of duplicity when it disrupts their academic identities. The ones who stay in this game maintain the status quo through practicing duplicity, and the ones who choose to leave also maintain the same status quo by not facing or addressing it. Both of the scenarios close up the options for academic space and academic identities to evolve and limit their capacity to stay relevant to the

changing and complex societal reconfigurations. In short, both of the scenarios illustrate the process of *de*futuring.

How the Post-Soviet Becomes Soviet

As it was highlighted in the narratives above, one of the common practices of duplicity is manifested in differences between the documents/regulations and the actual practices taking place at universities. Those practices have been vastly enacted in the process of transforming the Soviet centralized system of curriculum development and adjusting it to the European higher education structures, qualifications, and quality assurance system. The scholarly literature and academic community vastly criticize the superficial implementation of the European quality assurance system and qualifications framework in the post-Soviet space. I will try to dig deeper to explore the scenes beyond this superficiality and their reconfigurations over time.

One of my respondents who was in charge of implementing the Bologna changes at GTU in the 2000s remembers that despite her immense effort to explain new approaches and regulations to the academics and engage them in those processes, it was very challenging to make changes because the academic community was skeptical and did not have hope that the reforms would make things better. One of the explanations for this condition was related to the phenomenon of the Soviet man:

> It is extremely difficult to make a change among people who are not used to change, who spent their whole lives following what was already there, provided by the Soviet state, teaching the same subject, using the same textbook, same curriculum … moving away from this imaginary is extremely challenging.

She remembers that when they were discussing the new terminology for designing the programs and course syllabi, people were completely silent or were laughing about some of the requirements. However, because the universities were under time pressure to go through the first institutional accreditation, they were also limited in time and resources, but still had to comply with the requirements. Therefore, the institutions started to create the templates and tell the academic staff, ”Just write the document according to the templates, and do whatever.” Therefore, it was a double deal made between the university administration and the academics to trick the system, as they were under the threat of losing the accreditation, losing jobs, and losing their reputation. While this practice is still common at various universities (although to a different extent), it was disturbing to see how GTU has institutionalized it over the years and made it a norm. Almost all of the academics from GTU whom I interviewed said that due to the quality assurance system (implying the national system that is presented to be in compliance with the European requirements), they cannot or do not make any changes in the course syllabi or the program during the accreditation term (4-7 years). Even if the same course is taught by different professors over the years, they have to use the same syllabus initially created for accreditation.

While the external quality assurance system has certain limitations regarding making the changes in the accredited programs and informing the national quality assurance agency about the changes, the strict restriction about not allowing any changes is established by the institution, which uses external (European) regulations to justify this decision. Hence, the university administration prioritizes formal compliance with the regulatory requirements to avoid the risk of additional monitoring from the national

quality assurance body over improving the content of the programs or giving the academics the freedom and ownership to make decisions about their teaching. Irma, a professor from GTU noted,

> We are tired of this pressure to write those documents and then rewrite them again and again in compliance with the new regulations that the government imposes on us. Then we start to question – was it not easier when we received programs from Moscow? We did not even need to waste time in making the changes in every syllabus, it was already approved. Because what we are doing now is becoming quite similar to Soviet standardization.

Similar examples could be found at other universities, too. Therefore, the interplay between the state and universities to implement the European higher education quality assurance system in the post-Soviet Georgian context creates the mirage of the "same Soviet standardization." Over time, this Soviet mirage becomes a post-Soviet reality.[43]

It should also be noted that, to some extent, the academics share the sentiments of the administration and prefer to stay on the safe side and in compliance with the regulations rather than enjoy their academic freedom. Moreover, the practice of duplicity choreographed jointly by the state, university, and academics undermines the intentions and expectations toward the new policy change in the system, as it is no longer taken seriously. Sopo, from TSU said:

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[43] It should be noted that while there are significant differences between the unification of the (post)Soviet and the European higher education systems, the European approach provides much more freedom and flexibility. Some of its regulatory documents (for example, European qualifications framework or International Standard Classification of Education) are prone to over-standardizing the systems and decontextualizing the local differences, especially when they are rigidly interpreted and implemented by the country policies.

> The problem today is that we do not take the reforms seriously. The government is doing it because its main goal is to make the system *look compliant* with the European system, the universities do it to *look compliant* with the national regulations, and we do the technical paperwork to be *compliant* with university regulations.

This narrative describes the hierarchical and colonial power structure, where the actors at each level play the game of duplicity to show their compliance to a superior structure. Therefore, the effort, time, and resources spent on implementation, even when it is believed that they do it for the advancement of the system, drains the academic and creative energy and feeds the normalization and institutionalization of the same game of duplicity.

Double-consciousness of the Georgian Academic Space

Hopping back in time when the system-scale reforms had not yet started reveals the enactment of the still unsettled, ‘spur-of-the-moment’ pattern of duplicity. In the late 1999s and early 2000s, academics were already expected to ‘modernize’ their teaching and research, hence, to rework and reposition their academic selves. One of the main signs of change and transformation was to make the teaching and learning process interactive and student-centered. This implied allowing the students to ask questions and express their opinions during the lectures, which in the Soviet system was solely reserved for professors, while students were expected only to listen and write down the notes. Levan, a professor at ISU remembered that when he was a student in the early 2000s at

TSU, a professor of literature told the class for the first time that they could interrupt him and ask questions, but he soon realized that the professor did not really mean it:

> I was naive and I understood that he meant what he said. I interrupted him, asked a question, and responded to it, too. He got assaulted and his face became red from anger. I did not even say anything shocking, just talked about Freud's interpretation of Faust. So the 'asking a question' option did not really exist even when they [professors] told that you could do it.

This short memory highlights that the act of duplicity is not always intentional. Instead, it shows that the transition from the Soviet to Western education space is a process that unsettles and dislocates academic identities. This also means that academics themselves are in the process of becoming aware of their transitioning selves and finding out to what extent they are able to deconstruct and reconstruct their identities or find alternative ways to navigate the context and become complicit in the new reality, which to its end is not fixed. While giving students the option of asking questions was an attempt of a professor to become a modern lecturer, it intimidated his unquestioned authority which was cherished in the Soviet classroom. Therefore, the act of duplicity can be more of a reactive rather than intentional behavior at a time when academics are experiencing significant identity transition.

Georgian academics experiencing the infringement of their (Soviet) academic identities by Western epistemic space fosters the emergence of double-consciousness. Originally coined by an African American sociologist W.E.B Du Bois, double consciousness describes the experience of African Americans living in a society where their identity is defined and shaped by both their self-perception and the distorted

perceptions imposed by others, where the self is constantly negotiated in relation to dominant norms and discourses. According to Du Bois, double consciousness is a peculiar sense of "always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity" ([1905]1995, p. 3). He also highlights that the experience of double consciousness engages individuals in the constant self-reflection and self-examination through which one develops the "gifted second sight." This second sight allows one to see and understand the world from a unique double-lens perspective and to see the self "through a veil" (Du Bois, 1996, p. 3). Drawing on Du Bois's work, Tlostanova and Mignolo (2012) argue that double consciousness creates a fruitful ground for the emergence of border thinking, which challenges the imperial powers and discourses while creating the decolonial options for rearticulating one's self.

The narrative explaining the patterns of practicing duplicity in the hierarchical/colonial power structure of higher education politics simultaneously reveals the double consciousness not only among the academics but also the national education system, including the universities. In this context, practicing duplicity and pretending complicity creates a space for alternative options. It is a different question of how governments and universities use this space. I will focus on academics who sadly are present at the bottom of this hierarchical structure. While some narratives show the similarities between the Soviet and Western standardization patterns and obedience of the academic community to the long-practiced centralization of their work, other narratives show critical resistance and questioning of the system.

Being at the bottom of the system, on the one hand, means that the non-complicit space that is left for academics is quite limited, but on the other hand, it means that non-complicit behaviors could be less visible and, hence more widely practiced. Narratives of academics show both cases that co-exist, intra-act with one another, and diffract the patterns of duplicity and complicity nurtured through the modernity discourses in the Soviet or Western spaces. In this process, they reconfigure the academic space and identities. For example, Sopo, from TSU talking about the hierarchical ladder in the higher education system, said with worry:

> You cannot be creative in this system when everything is only about the formality, when you have to use only pre-defined certain verbs in certain tenses in the programs and syllabi to describe how you are teaching and what you intend to achieve with your teaching. When you look at it critically, you find out that if you follow those formulations they are limiting you, *those sentences are not authentic and natural, those are not my verbs.*

A professor from ISU expressed a similar concern saying that the university quality assurance office is asking them to use certain formulations when designing the programs and syllabi. She said:

> When I do everything the way they tell me to do, then I cannot recognize my syllabus and my course. If we [professors] argue about it they avoid taking any responsibility for it. Instead, the university blames the external quality assurance system and you are accepted to take it as a norm.

One of the common practices used by academics to navigate the formalities in the system is the art of duplicity itself. Several professors shared that they change and update

the content or material in their courses, but do not change them in the syllabus to avoid the rigid formalities. Therefore, they keep the facade on paper to trick the system but create parallel alternative options to enjoy their academic freedom and creativity in their teaching.

Surprisingly, some Georgian academics have witnessed how the practices of duplicity were used to create parallel or underground spaces during the Soviet time when curriculum and textbooks were centrally controlled and ideologized. Erekle, a professor from ISU remembers that when he was a student at TSU at the Department of Philosophy in the 1970s, he realized that the philosophical texts they were studying at the university were flooded with ideologized cliches. However, with the help and courage of some of his professors, he became aware of how to navigate the censored and controlled Soviet academic space. He recalls that professors could not openly discuss issues and even their writings were ideologically stamped. However, in personal communication, they encouraged students to be critical and aware of the ideologized narratives. He recalls:

> My professors Guram Tevzadze and Eduard Kodua gathered a group of students. It was a kind of a hidden student circle and told us that the Marxist interpretation of philosophical concepts was neither single nor original. They encouraged us to read the texts in the original. They would meet us at late hours and discuss those texts with us… with the help of our teachers we could recognize the truth and the authors' main ideas behind those ideologized narratives.

He added that it was a special skill gained by the Soviet man to be able to decipher and see the implied meanings beyond the political language and discourses and find alternative, hidden channels to navigate the Soviet space, and therefore to develop a

double-consciousness of a (post)Soviet man. Practicing duplicity was also used as a means of disrupting the single socialist narrative and creating an alternative, critical epistemic space, thus giving an example to future academics for how to overcome the dogmatic formalities of the system whether it is Soviet or Western.

On the other side of these positive insurgencies are also cases when professors still teach outdated material and largely ignore the learning outcomes, teaching, and assessment methods indicated in the syllabi. One of the professors from GTU told me jokingly: "Some older professors during the lectures tell students about their personal stories, the similar ones that you are interviewing me about." Eva from ISU told me how one of the doctoral students was complaining to her about one of the doctoral courses, where the professor was mostly talking about her dog and coffee, while completely ignoring the course content. Therefore, for the academics that could not keep up with the changing academic space, practicing duplicity is a way of survival to safeguard the academic job by pretending that they are compliant with modern requirements.

Elene, a professor from TSU shared another example of confronting the duplicitous formalities in the system. She started to notice and question the uniformity of curricula and syllabi in the milieu of the Bologna reforms when she was invited to participate in the international academic mobility programs and saw that the interpretation of the Bologna process in European universities was different from how it was applied in Georgia. About four years ago she also became the accreditation expert in Georgia and realized that various state regulations and requirements were misinterpreted by the university administrative staff. She explained:

> The meanings and definitions of regulations and policies are getting lost at the institutional or department level until they come down to the regular professor. The experience I gained through international mobility programs and as an accreditation expert gave me the hint and power to question the illogical explanations and limitations that we frequently hear. For example, the QA person from the faculty told me I could not do something in my program, but when I double-checked with the university's central QA office, they told me I could do it. So it then depends on your experience and personality if you just believe and obey what you are told or if you start to question and find ways to navigate this system.

This narrative highlights the significance of personal traits and experiences in shaping the relationship and position of academics toward the institution and the system. It also emphasizes that Georgian professors lose their academic power through socialization in the Western academic space as part of the (post)Soviet reforms and regain this power through their personal socialization in the same Western academic space. This brings about questions regarding the intentions of the government in shaping higher education politics and how the universities respond to them. Several professors from TSU and ISU expressed their concern and disappointment that universities and university leadership are betraying their principles in defending institutional autonomy and the academic freedom of its academic community, instead of conforming to government policies. A professor from ISU said:

> Universities, even the ISU, whose main institutional identity reflects liberal values and freedom, do not openly resist those foolish bureaucratic regulations. In

> today's academic space, you cannot see critical opinions on government policies. Somehow they are all entangled individually or institutionally, and everyone prefers to keep silence and stability.

This narrative circles back to the pattern of different actors jointly playing the game of duplicity, and also explains how universities, as the mediators between the government and the academic community, prioritize serving state politics even when it disrupts the university's autonomy and the agency of the academic community.

The Duplicity of Power and Autonomy

> *"We say we are autonomous, it is even defined by the Constitution of Georgia, but we are not. Let's face the reality."*
> (Rezo, a professor from TSU)

The narratives of Georgian academics show vast practices of duplicity in exercising the power and autonomy in university life today and in the past. By duplicity of power and autonomy, I mean taking away the legitimate (de jure) agency of the academics by the university administrators or external political authorities and establishing or pursuing the already long-standing de facto hierarchical practices. The narratives of the research participants illustrate that academic power and authority are not always related to academic performance, reputation, or even the formal hierarchical position held at the university. Instead, they split and emerge from various reconfigurations of internal and external political influences. As highlighted by Oleksiyenko (2023), the long-standing institutional unfreedom of post-Soviet universities

urges academics and administrators to favor loyalty to the hierarchical organizational culture of unfreedom that "empowers the positions of the already powerful and represses dissent of the disadvantaged" over the autonomy, creativity, and meritocracy (p. 18).

During my fieldwork, I witnessed the resignation of the rector of Tbilisi State University toward the end of his second term. There were many rumors in academic circles as many people suspected that he made this decision under political pressure. And then, there were many predictions and presumptions about who was going to be the next rector. According to the Law on Higher Education of Georgia, the rectors of public universities are elected by the university's Academic Council composed of academic and scientific staff elected from all faculties. Therefore, the law gives the full right and responsibility to the academic community to elect the rector. However, various circumstances regarding the rectors' elections at public universities have been creating doubts about the political influence and control of this process over the years. The case of the recent elections of a new rector at Tbilisi State University clearly vindicates these doubts (unless you are one of those academics who intentionally chooses not to see or say it).

About two weeks after the resignation of the previous rector, a new acting rector was elected by the academic council. But the information about his election as an acting rector was already published in the media about ten days before the elections were carried out. Moreover, there were many social media posts congratulating him on winning the elections, surprisingly, even from the representatives of the Ministry of Education and the governing political party, who later (probably after finding out the formal side of the

elections) deleted those posts. In one of the interviews on October 9, 2022),[44] the newly elected rector said that he did not have any intention to become a rector of TSU. But on October 20 he was elected as an acting rector where he was the only candidate. He received 28 votes out of 30 because two members abstained from voting (they did not vote against the candidate).

Over the course of my experience in the Georgian higher education system, I had heard many other cases of political interventions in the resignation and election of rectors at public universities, which always made me curious about the internal university dynamics and relationships that were making such external political interventions possible. The curiosity about the mystery of how and why the academic community gives away its power to the external political actors and how their individual or collective academic identities shape such power reconfiguration haunted me during my research fieldwork as it was one of the main topics discussed in the academic communities. The narratives of academics recall the continuous practice of political interventions in post-Soviet university life through influencing the rector's elections/resignations since the mid-2000s. However, it should be noted that university context makes a difference. For example, Ilia State University is one of the few, if not only, universities where the rectors are elected without external political approval or intervention, and after the expiration of the term new rectors get elected. At Tbilisi State University, none of the rectors have finished their terms since the early 2000s. They all resigned or had to resign as a result of political pressure. While in the post-revolution history of GTU, one rector resigned before his term expired, and another one was elected for the third term (therefore for

[44] https://www.radiotavisupleba.ge/a/32072204.html

more than the maximum of two terms defined by the law).[45] Both practices were influenced and supported by the governing party/ministry.

Due to the prominence of this topic in my fieldwork, I will focus on the case of resignation and election of the rectors at TSU to discuss the duplicity of power and autonomy at the university. However, questioning this issue led me to find out the different patterns occurring at two other universities (ISU and GTU) that diffract the vicious circle of political influence over TSU. Therefore, I plug in the culturally ingrained duplicitous power dynamics of Georgian academic space in the intra-action with academic identities to construct the thread of diffractive patterns of their reconfigurations.

During the interviews, I asked academics how they saw the ongoing process regarding the resignation of the previous rector and the emergence of the newly elected rector as the only candidate for the acting rector's position (at that time) and how those processes were affecting their academic lives, emotions, and attitudes. I was also asking if they saw the external political interventions in those processes and what it meant for their personal or collective academic identities. While most of my respondents were quite open about expressing their emotions and opinions about this issue, I noticed how others became more reserved and cautious in choosing their words. For example, when talking about the resignation of the previous rector, two of my respondents were correcting their own words: "he was dismissed..oh..he resigned." One of them tried to stay neutral and distanced from the processes and said, "I do not have any evidence about the political

[45] Such legal or political manipulative practices were also used in other regional public HEIs.

influence; it is possible, but I do not know." Therefore, the widely used self-censorship and double-consciousness of academics expressed in their communicative and behavioral patterns were also applied during the interviews when talking about political influences.

The composite narrative below gives an insight into how the TSU professors articulate the political influence of governing parties over the rector's elections at TSU. I should note that they were telling this as a fact, something that they dislike, but as if it is a normal and fixed reality:

> Since 2004, none of the rectors were elected by the academic community, they were all appointed (de facto) by the criteria of loyalty to the governing political party. The only exception could be Vladimer Papava. He was elected in 2013, right after the change of government, and at that time, universities were beyond the attention of the governing party. But soon again, the government wanted to take some of the university property, but the rector resisted, so they turned on the mechanism to push him out of the office.

Several academics also described the political mechanism used for pushing the rectors from the office before their term expires:

> In the university administration, there are people tightly connected with the governing political party, there are interest groups that are coordinated by the political party, and the state law enforcement bodies to influence various university affairs. They artificially create student groups who initiate the protests demanding the resignation of rectors. They were used in the case of Papava, in the case of Sharvashidze, and they will be used to make Samushia when the party decides. A rector is a political tool that is not elected by the academic community

> and does not have such accountability to the academic community; instead, rectors are loyal to the governing party. This tradition of aggressive student protests (Kmara style[46]) that started during the Rose Revolution is still present.

As this composite narrative illustrates, external political pressure on universities' internal affairs is exercised through some of the university staff members themselves and student groups that are coordinated by the state. This model, to some extent, mirrors the Soviet system when the university had a parallel governance structure - communist party and academics. However, in the Soviet system such a parallel system was officially established, while in the post-Soviet time, it presents an artifact of the duplicity of power which disrupts the agency of the academic community and university autonomy guaranteed by the constitution of Georgia. The composite narrative below describes the thoughts, feelings, and emotions of academics experiencing the duplicitous autonomy and violation of their academic agency and identity:

> We say we are autonomous, but we are not. The government has this power, and the academic community is weak to resist. This should be causing a protest, but the problem is in each of us. Everyone thinks that everything is already decided and it does not matter if we protest or not. No one likes what is happening, people are angry, but everyone avoids openly protesting and fighting. Look at the election results, none of the academic council members voted against, even those who are known for being courageous or having high moral standards. They either did not go to the elections at all or did not vote and left the bulletin

[46] Students' organization was established at TSU to protest the corruption in 2001. Soon it became a youth movement that played a significant role in the Rose Revolution in 2003. Some of the leaders of Kmara became the key figures in the new revolutionary government.

empty, but no one voted against him. We talk about it, but only in our close circles, behind closed doors.

The sense of fear is still quite strong. You cannot say everything to everyone, and you should be cautious about what you are saying loudly. It happens with various issues, but it was very visible when the rector resigned and suddenly a new acting rector was elected. People were avoiding expressing their opinions about it, they were observing how the leadership positions and relationships would reconfigure and thinking about how to adjust to it.
You do not know whom to trust. You are noticing that some colleagues with whom you had a good relationship and open communication are changing their tones and attitudes toward you, their narratives are changing. And you know why. Because you are associated with the former rector and those people do not want to be seen with you. This is very toxic. Those people are usually the ones engaged in administrative positions or the ones who feel insecure about their academic qualifications.

As shown in this composite narrative, the duplicity of university autonomy, taken away by the government, disempowers the academic community and disrupts their identities. Academic identities become split between the wishful scenario of protesting and fighting for their autonomy and the exhaustion, silence, alienation, and fear. Hence, this dissonance becomes filled with the narratives of how everything is already defined at a higher level and how their protest does not matter. This narrative also illustrates the strategies of Georgian academics to navigate the changing power dynamics by staying silent, observing, reconsidering their connections, and adjusting accordingly. While such

a communicative behavioral pattern is an attested means for survival in the conditions of changing leadership, it enacts and reveals the duplicity in the personal, collegial, and professional relationships, as well as in the relationships with the self which challenges the individual and collective values and morality of academic identities grounded in fear. The composite narrative below gives more insight into the fear at the university:

> We are not ready to resist this. You know that if you speak up you will have problems. You might not be fired, but based on your opinions you become categorized if you are "ours" [complicit with the system] or "other." Then, you will see the obstacles if you want to initiate or do something, receive a promotion, or take an administrative position. *No one will tell you directly that it is a punishment for your critical opinion, but you will know it.* There is this silent noise or buzz that gives you these indications. That's why they are silent, including myself. I have to close my eyes on certain things.

This narrative underscores that even the strategies for creating fear and mitigating resistance against the violation of power and autonomy of the academic community are practiced in an implicit, duplicitous manner. More importantly, they are practiced by the academics themselves who become the host bodies for perpetuating the political power and control against them and molding their lives to conform.

Distancing the self from the processes that are obnoxious for the academics and disrupt their academic identities is another prominent behavioral pattern. One of the professors said with relief:

> I am happy that I am not in the academic council, I could not tolerate this again. I know, I am isolating myself from this process and it might not be right, but it

disturbs me so badly and I am ignoring reality. Even if you try to fight this, it is a "fight against the windmills." I can fight but those decisions are not made at my level, it is beyond me.

The narratives depicting the power dynamics between the state and the academic community vividly highlighted the disempowerment of the academic community, which is rooted in the belief about the impossibility of getting rid of political control and reclaiming academic autonomy.

During our conversations, we all agreed that in the upcoming rector's elections, the candidate supported by the government would become the rector. At that time, we were not yet sure if the acting rector was going to also participate in the rector's elections. All my respondents were confident that for the rector's elections, there would be more candidates participating. Their confidence gave me optimism and curiosity about what would happen if another strong candidate was nominated by the academic community. I was also intrigued to find out how the academic community receives a message that a certain candidate is the government's candidate and how the duplicitous power flows, given that these things usually happen implicitly. The rector's elections were planned for December 27, 2022. But, to me and many of my research participants, everything became clear a month before.

The Duplicity of the Anniversary Celebration as it Became an Election Campaign. On my 34th birthday, November 25, 2022, I went to the 100-year anniversary event of the Faculty of Economics and Business in the "Maghlivi"[47] building of TSU. The big auditorium was full of professors. Soon the acting rector arrived with the Minister of Education and the event started. It was opened by the dean of the faculty who talked about the history and the role of faculty in the development of economic thinking in the country. Then he gave the floor to the acting rector, followed by the Minister of Education and the anniversary event of the Faculty soon gained the shade of the election campaign of the acting rector.

The acting rector appraised the performance of the faculty and at the end of his speech, highlighted that *the faculty will have his continuous support and announced that the following year he will support the renovation of the two floors of the Maghlivi building*. The Minister of Education took the floor, congratulated the audience on the anniversary, and talked about the Faculty of Business and Economics being a leader in preparing the human capital of the country in the economics field. At the end of his speech, he highlighted that *a new phase of development is starting at TSU and he was glad that in this important phase, the university will be led by a true professor and a member of the Academy of Science - Jaba Samushia.* Two esteemed professors were awarded medals for their contribution to the academic and scientific development of the Faculty. In their speech, they also affirmed their support for the acting rector saying that *he is a true professor of TSU, and to them, he already is a rector (not the acting rector).*

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[47]Maghlivi or upper/tall [building] is a 14-floor building, where the Faculty of Business and Economics is located. This name is associated with the fact that when it was built (in the 1980s) there were no other taller buildings around.

Therefore, authorities at three levels - minister, acting rector, and esteemed professors promoted the acting rector in front of the academic community to be elected as a rector. At that time, there were other events taking place at various faculties of TSU where the acting rector and the minister were appearing together.

I received a clear message, and so did the academic community. Jaba Samushia was the only candidate in December 2022 as well and he was elected as a rector with the same vote distribution as it was in the case of the acting rector's elections. After the elections, I talked with one of my research participants and asked about her perspectives and sentiments as her prediction appeared to be wrong. She told me that for her it was a clear sign that the academic community was in complete obedience to the government.

In an attempt to diffract the patterns of the duplicity of power. To diffract the narratives of frustration expressed by my participants, I asked them if they saw a capacity or small signs in the academic community that could turn around the power dynamic in favor of academic power and autonomy. But in response to this, I received more affirmations and explanations of why it was not possible, which I present as a composite narrative below:

> I do not see such signs. Maybe I am the wrong person to ask this question. I am not even interested in this anymore. I cannot even remember when there was such a bad situation at the university. Anyone who can actually do something just avoids the trouble. At TSU everyone knows that this is decided outside the university and no one wants to participate in the competition when they already know they will lose. Until we do not internalize the understanding that universities must be free from the political interventions it will be like this. The

> academic community lacks unity, which is why, at this point, I do not think that we have power. Some people are fine with what is happening, they feel secure in this environment, it is a known situation for them and they know how to navigate it. What is happening at the university is disturbing, but it is a mini model of what is happening in the country, which I cannot change. It is a swamp.

This narrative again underlines the pattern of distancing from discomforting academic space and avoiding the trouble in the conditions of asymmetrical power distribution, where significant decisions are made outside of the university. Besides, it highlights that even if all of my respondents from TSU had a critical opinion regarding the ongoing processes, there are academics for whom this kind of power configuration is acceptable and convenient. For example, one of my respondents found an argument to justify the convenience of electing the rectors that are desired by the governing party saying that in this case, the university will have more financial support from the government. Some of the academics do not see it as disempowering because they take advantage of their connections with the political or administrative authorities, which is a personally empowering condition for them.

After these conversations during several interviews, I caught myself insistently asking my respondents to think again about how the academic community can overcome the vicious circle of political control over the university. I even mentioned ISU as an example to show the possibility of electing the rectors at a public university without political intervention. I could notice how their institutional identities were disrupted by bringing ISU as a comparison into the conversation. Some responded that because of the historical and political significance of TSU in Georgian society, it is always under more

intense political pressure. But some responded with the question: “Did you know that there was also only one candidate participating in the elections, are you asking them about it?”

So I asked my research participants from ISU about it. I found out that some of them did not even know that there were two candidates participating in the elections. However, the candidate who was elected as a rector had a significant advantage compared to the other one. She was a vice-rector prior to being elected as a rector, had strong support from the academic community, and also has a solid academic and scholarly reputation. The other candidate, whose scholarly background is also strong, was not a professor of ISU at the time of the elections and did not live in Georgia. Several professors explained that the candidate who would have the support from the previous rector would be the main candidate to be elected as a rector. Therefore, the influence of the university’s internal authority is strong over the election process; however, all academics were confident that the rector was elected without the intervention of the external political forces and they supported the elected candidate. Erekle, a professor from ISU explained why there was not more than one candidate participating in the elections (he thought there was only one candidate):

> When you live in a political system where the university can be used as an instrument of a political game, having many candidates in the elections is risky because someone might be used by the political party to make the university an addition to the political system. We have some kind of unconscious intention to protect the university from political influence. This is how we are protecting

> ourselves: we support the candidate who we trust and who will protect the university from those political influences.

Therefore, while the political party intervention in the rector's elections at TSU ended up with a single-candidate election, in the case of ISU, the fear of party influence also generated a reconfiguration where there was a unity in the academic community supporting a single strong candidate from the academic community participating in the elections.

The recent attempt aimed at damaging the reputation of the rector of ISU and the reaction of the academic community explains the ground of this fear and the logic of its prevention. A group of students, who were not even ISU students, initiated a protest stating that certain budget spending was not transparent. When it became clear that such complaints were not justified, they started to attack and damage the rector's personal reputation. This attack was orchestrated through three unequivocally pro-governmental TV media channels. Therefore, it created reasonable doubt about the government's attempt to take control of ISU. However, this attempt was strongly resisted by the academic community of ISU. There were several petitions created against it, social media was flooded with posts supporting the rector and university, openly expressing doubts about the involvement of the government's hand in this attack, and saying that in case it became necessary, they would also start the street protests. Therefore, the academic community of ISU showed strong unity and resistance in the critical moment to defend the autonomy of the university. This attack disappeared in a week. This example diffracts the myth about the inevitability of party control over the university leadership.

While the composite narrative of TSU professors highlighted the impossibility of liberating the university from political control, it also provided one of the keys that could make it possible. The narrative emphasized that the academic community was weak because there was no *unity*. The example from ISU also affirmed this. However, the academic community of TSU was trapped in the pending mode that something would change on its own or that the leader would emerge. The narratives highlighted that there are many people who are ready and dedicated to work and make changes, but they need a "leader who has a vision and strength to bring the academic community together," or "the right time to come."

Before concluding this section, I would like to briefly discuss an example of GTU, which presents another diffraction in the scene of the duplicity of power and autonomy. The current rector at GTU is seen as a strong leader by the academic community. According to my respondents, he is a strong supporter of the governing party and he also has support from the government. However, none of the GTU professors saw his election as an attempt of a political intervention, arguing that before, he was a successful dean of one of the leading faculties at GTU. Otar, a professor from TSU echoed the same argument mentioned by the GTU professors, presuming that in the existing system, a university might benefit more from governmental support towards the rector. Alexander from GTU also highlighted, "It is a public university, of course, the candidate for rector's positions must be supported by the ministry." While the narratives of GTU professors provide fair arguments about disregarding the dominance of political influence on the rector's elections, some of the narratives also challenge the understanding and internalization of the concept of university autonomy.

From the narratives and attitudes of academics, it is clear that the distribution of academic power and autonomy between the state and university is different at ISU and GTU, being strongly defined by the institutional identity of each university - the first one sees itself as a "freedom island in the Georgian academic space" and the other one sees itself as closely associated with and dependent on the government. As for the TSU, its relationality with the state and identification of its own institutional self is divided, disrupted, unsettled, and edgy. While such a position may cause anxiety and restlessness among academics, it also provides multiple possibilities and breaks for *re*futuring, even if it is not visible on the surface.

While this section focused on an example of rector's elections, it should be highlighted that duplicity of power and autonomy spills over into other domains of academic life and space, limiting the power, agency, and capability of academics to move away from the survival mode and leading to the *de*futuring of the academic space. Hence, it limits the possibilities for moving into the mode of creation and reimagination [*re*futuring] of Georgian universities and academic identities. However, narratives of academics also provide various keys for reclaiming the power and reimagining and co-creating the Georgian academic space and academic selves.

The Duplicity of the Academic Workplace

"It is like I have the freedom to do anything,
but I cannot do anything."
(Petre, a professor from GTU)

"Better the devil you know,
than the good you don't know."
(Georgian Proverb)

Pulling a thread of narratives of academics about the institutional policies of their employment, performance evaluation, and remuneration and their implementation reveals multiple patterns of duplicity. The internal policies that are defined by universities are manipulated by the universities themselves through their incoherent and uneven implementation. On the surface, such an approach provides more flexibility and a lenient treatment toward academics. However, this intention becomes challenged and diffracted by the narratives of academics. They reveal contradictory and paradoxical material-discursive patterns and identity reconfigurations that come to matter through the intra-actions of faculty-related policies, their implementation, perceptions and reactions of academics. Narratives of academics diffract the meanings of being and becoming an academic in the duplicitous academic workplace.

Academics from all three universities have expressed their concern regarding the institutional policies according to which the appointment term of academics is limited from 2-5 years (in certain cases, it is ten years for professors). After the expiration of this term, academics have to participate in the open competition to be reappointed for the same position (or for a higher position if it is available, which is usually pre-negotiated

with the university/faculty administration).[48] The composite narrative below highlights the collective concern and anxiety of esteemed academics about the bureaucratic procedures that they have to go through regularly, which is also an emotionally taxing experience for them as it makes them feel unrecognized and unappreciated:

> We have contracts for certain years (3-10) and after the expiration of the term, we have to participate again in the open competition. It is assaulting, you have to prove again and again that you are qualified for this job when I am doing so much. In the end, participating in these open competitions is just a formality, a competition of papers. Last time, when I collected and finally submitted all documents to reapply for this position, I suddenly felt such anger. Since 1999, I went through 5 open competitions to get reappointed into this position. My scholarly index is not low, I brought large-scale grant projects for this university. After 20 years, I still have to prove that I am qualified. When I complain to the administration, they tell me that it is a rule for everyone and this is a problem. Those who have proven their qualifications with their dedication and performance are not 'everyone.'

The following composite narrative explains the logic of this policy, arguing that at the beginning of the reforms, short-term contract was justifiable, however, its usefulness and effectiveness has expired:

> At the beginning of the reforms, universities were trying to put some pressure on academics and take them out from the inert, Soviet way of being a professor.

[48] The law on higher education of Georgia, allows indefinite appointments for the professors with exceptional achievements, however, it is up to the university academic council to make a decision about such appointments.

> Short-term contracts were a message that if you want to be rehired you should show the results. But in today's reality, this logic is not working anymore. It does not matter if you have exceptional performance or if you have not published anything for years. Everyone is rehired.

This narrative also signals that the regulations that were adopted for certain purposes lose their applicability over time and, in an attempt to keep the stability, they mutate into duplicitous practices that become counterproductive.

Interestingly, as illustrated in the narratives, job security is not the main reason for worry and anxiety among academics. As I found out, the purpose of periodical open competition aimed at transparent and fair selection of the most qualified candidates became fictional at Georgian public universities. Usually, when there are calls for academic positions everyone in the academic community knows whom it is announced for, and other candidates rarely even apply (even if they apply, they have almost no chance for appointment). There have been a few cases when a new candidate was recruited in the place of someone who was already working in that position, but this usually means that the outcome was pre-negotiated with the university or faculty administration beforehand.

However, the other side of the story suggests that the short-term appointment of academics, hypothetically, is a mechanism for institutions to dismiss the academics if such necessity appears, whether it is fair or not. Therefore, even if in practice such policy does not disrupt the continuity of academic appointments, it is a mechanism for the system to hold the power over academic job security. Hence, the system provides the stability of academic appointments while implicitly holding power over the autonomy

and agency of academics, which causes dissonance and duplicity between the sense of stability and instability. Levan, from ISU explained, “With the three-year contracts, it is uncertain to make plans, it is not even enough to supervise a doctoral student.”

For many of my respondents, one of the most challenging questions to answer was related to their plans regarding their future academic selves. Many of them simply did not have any answers to this question. The implicit sense of instability in academic jobs, which is presented to be stable, is one of the reasons that prevent academics from planning and creating their academic futures, thus reinforcing the stream of *de*futuring. Another factor is also related to the fact that universities do not have any clear pathways of progression in academic and scientific careers. In fact, this practice is quite mysterious.

Implementation of the academic staff performance evaluation system represents another example of practicing duplicity, where institutional regulations are developed to meet the requirements of the external QA standards for institutional authorization. However, its implementation is limited to demanding the submission of annual or bi-annual self-evaluation performance reports from academics. Academics from all three universities say that the only thing that has changed with this evaluation system is the additional paperwork that they have to do when submitting their self-evaluation reports, but it does not have any negative or positive consequences.

While performativity in academic and scholarly work is criticized in the academic literature (e.g., Ball, 2012; Oleksiyenko, 2018; Shahjahan, 2020; Stengers, 2016), establishing the faculty performance evaluation systems gave academics hope that their workplace would change. They had the expectation that performance evaluation would expose the dedication and hard work of the enthusiastic and creative segment of

academics, that it would open the gate for their academic career progression, and that their performance would be translated into the remuneration policy. However, more than four years after the initiation of the reform, its duplicitous implementation causes frustration among academics and disrupts their identities. The composite narrative of academics from TSU, ISU, and GTU reveals their resonating experiences and feelings regarding the deficiency of the performance evaluation system:

> We do the annual self-evaluations. But if I do not publish anything, no one will ask me about it. It might be considered for the next appointment, but we were already submitting similar documents for those open competitions. What we have is a superficial formality. I submitted the self-evaluations several times, but I cannot remember if this had any consequences. Some professors do not even submit those reports anymore or put just the basic information in them.
>
> We also do self-evaluation reports about our scientific work for the Academy of Science. The evaluation of our department is always excellent, but it is not translated into anything. The university does nothing to encourage hard-working and distinguished professors, they should feel that they are appreciated. We have many professors at this university who last published 20 years ago in some kind of local publication. They have the same status as me when I am making an effort to publish in prestigious international journals, and I spend months on it. I am not saying that they should be punished, but if I am doing more than others, it should be recognized somewhere.

When discussing faculty performance evaluation, academics predominantly associate it with research productivity. On the one hand, this is because the requirements

regarding publications and research productivity are vaguely written in the faculty contracts and regulations which leave many open-ended questions about what is considered good performance and what are the related consequences. One of my respondents highlighted:

> I was an associate professor for more than ten years, and my performance in terms of publications or grant projects was much better than what the average professor does at this university. I thought the university would see the evaluation results and for the next term they would make a call for the professor's position, but I was wrong. They were going to make a call for an associate professor again. Then I had to write a letter about my achievements and ask them to make a call for a professor's position. I was asking academic council members about it, I wanted to know how the system works, and they were telling me they did not know. I assumed that it was because of my personal conflict with the university leadership.

This narrative illustrates that in case of certain conflicts and tensions, the duplicity of the system can be manipulated by the university administration to disfavor the achievements of certain academics and impede their career progression.

While many of the research participants had critical attitudes about the dysfunctional implementation of the performance evaluation system, some of the professors appreciated its flexibility. Tamar from GTU, who also holds an administrative position and therefore is aware of the related administrative issues, said: "This system is quite flexible, we try not to press ourselves or others, because in some cases it is related to financial issues too." Alexander, a professor from GTU explained, "I do not feel any

pressure due to the evaluation system, it is quite flexible. I cannot say that I am working a lot. I like doing research anyway. I do not care about it." These narratives illustrate that for some of the professors, the system of performance evaluation is completely fictional, they do not have any pressure or expectations from its implementation.

Interestingly, this positive perception regarding the loose performance evaluation system is diffracted by the narrative of the academics who take advantage of the merciful implementation of the performance evaluation system and at the same time recognize that it creates a maleficent and discouraging climate in the academic workplace. Eva, a professor from ISU explained:

> I have not published anything for several years, but I was recently reappointed with no problem. The institutional rules do not work, but no one talks about this because everyone prefers to keep stability and avoid changes, as we say "Better the devil you know than the good you don't know." But it does not make sense. I would prefer to have a more coherent and fair system. It would also give me incentives to improve my academic performance.

While several academics mentioned that they have complained and asked the university administration about the deficient faculty reappointment and performance evaluation practices, the academic community at large keeps silence and status quo, because they prefer *the known devil over the unknown virtue.* Apparently, the university administrations also share the same sentiment and keep the duplicitous systems running while maintaining stability. Therefore, instead of addressing the challenges and making the changes, university administrations and academics (with a few exceptions) jointly keep silent about the academics whose performance does not meet university

expectations and about the institutional systems that function deficiently. However, the main problem is that they also drag into this silence the exceptional performance of academics. Therefore, in an attempt to keep stability, the identities of the most dedicated and hard-working segment of academics become disrupted as they feel unappreciated, unrecognized, and distrusted. This sense of being disappreciated is particularly caused by the circumstances when the academics with significantly better performance (based on personal and common opinion) have similar or sometimes even lower salaries compared to other colleagues with apparently lower performance. Furthermore, such an approach makes the academic workplace less attractive for the younger generation, while the aging of academic staff has been a commonly expressed concern among my respondents of all generations.

The narratives of academics uncover the institutional reasons behind the fictionality of the faculty performance evaluation system and explain the still ambiguous approaches toward research productivity. The composite narrative below weaves together those explanations:

> I don't know why it is still a problem, what are we afraid of? University administration is avoiding any complications and is keeping the status quo. If the evaluation system is objectively and coherently implemented, it will expose that a lot of people are not able to satisfy the requirements. You cannot fire those people, it is not serious. The question is what kind of responsibility does the university take on by accepting those unsatisfactory results and how do they support academics to fill the gap?

When you are requiring something, you should provide the conditions for academic staff to be able to do it. The attitude towards evaluating research productivity is quite flexible because it is related to the financial issues that universities cannot provide. Moreover, from the financial standpoint, universities prefer the academic staff to have more teaching workload, because this is what brings the income, while in the case of research, they should be investing in it.

These explanations reveal that while institutional policies require (vaguely but still) research performance and productivity from academics, universities do not provide the conditions for professors to pursue those activities. While the system pretends to be merciful towards the expected outcomes that academics could not achieve, it creates a sense of shame, anxiety, and dissatisfaction with the academic self. While talking about the lenient performance evaluation and flexibility of the requirements regarding research productivity, several professors noted:

> It is like I have the freedom to do anything, but I cannot do anything. This environment does not make me excited, motivated, or satisfied with the academic work. If you do something - good or not - it's not a big deal. No one cares.

Erekle used Max Weber's concept of the "Iron Cage" to describe the condition of academics entangled in bureaucratic processes that fail to yield the desired outcomes. This notion metaphorically represents a paradox of modernity, where the rationalization and bureaucratization of the social order – aiming at progress and efficiency – cause a sense of disillusionment in society and separation from the meaningfulness of their actions and place in the world (Mitzman, 1971). In the context of the Georgian academic space, the "Iron Cage" embodies the experiences and emotions of academics who have to

adhere to various bureaucratic processes and regulations that purportedly serve the enhancement of educational quality, appraisal, and appreciation of their academic performance. However, the contextual essence of these regulations and their inconsistent implementation cause relentlessness and disappointment in academics; even the perceived stability, freedom, and flexibility enabled by the duplicitous implementation of these policies appear to be fictional as ultimately academics lose their sense of agency and power of creation. Yet, practicing the art of duplicity in relation to the performance evaluation system, which perpetuates the neoliberal principles in academia, provides a space to rethink the alternatives for creating a fair, inclusive, and encouraging academic workplace.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

At the end of the interview on the 3rd floor of Maghlivi building, I took an elevator with my respondent - Rezo, to go down. The elevator looked new, but it was making a disturbing noise. In the middle, our supposedly short elevator journey was interrupted. A random woman stopped the elevator and asked: "Are you going upstairs?" Rezo smiled and responded: "We were going down, but as you stopped it, now we will go up." Then we went all the way up to the 9th floor and restarted the journey down.

(Vignette from the fieldwork, November, 2022)

The vignette about the movement and performance of a newer elevator installed in the Soviet building is a figurative illustration of the multiple disruptions, interruptions, complications, and non-linearity of the post-Soviet transformations of higher education space. It shows that when you think you are going in one direction or toward a better future, you might end up going in the opposite direction or toward *de*futuring; but even if this path is disrupted and delayed, it has the potential for *re*futuring. This episode also illustrates that Georgian academics have acquired the experiential knowledge to navigate through and anticipate these disruptions with ease and a smile. However, the untapped potential to drive transformative changes by addressing the root problems, rather than expanding the time and energy to navigate the flawed system, is yet to be realized. The findings highlight that the power and agency of Georgian academics are scattered and diminished through various factors, such as long-standing implicit and explicit repressive practices of academic communities, uncritically and rigidly imposed reforms and modernization projects, increased administrative and bureaucratic power, political interferences and influences taking away the institutional autonomy of universities, and the damaged reputation of the academic profession to mention a few. Therefore, this

research argues that rethinking and reimagining the identity of the academic self is a necessary act for opening the space to reclaim the power and agency among academics.

Built on the decolonial ethnographic narrative inquiry, this research has used storytelling as a primary tool for the exploration, narration, and re-articulation of academic identities traversing between the past, present, and future. In this context, the notion of narrative identity is particularly helpful as it encompasses the deeply personal, internalized stories of Georgian academics and the complexity of the social, temporal, and spatial context in which these stories of their lived experiences have evolved. The ethnographic approach of the study allowed close observation of the social situations, actors, their behaviors, and interrelationships, along with the interactions between the researcher and the researched. Moreover, carrying the decolonial lens throughout the data collection and analysis process fostered a dialogical, safe space for storytelling, expressing emotions and doubts, and engaging in critical reflections. This approach serves as a useful apparatus to do the meaningful reworking to *re*think, *re*tell, and *re*imagine the academic space and the identities, as well as potentially to reposition and reclaim the academic self as an epistemic subject.

Continuities of the Soviet Legacies and Contested History

Based on the existing scholarly literature, this dissertation provides an extensive historical review of geopolitical, cultural, and historical changes along with the development of the higher education system in Georgia. It also identifies the gaps regarding the lack of description and analysis of various transformation processes that were carried out at the universities during the Soviet and post-Soviet periods. Drawing on

life-story interviews with academics has been valuable in addressing these gaps by highlighting their lived histories.

The historical review of the Soviet period revealed the six major themes haunting the transformation of identities of Georgian academics in the post-Soviet context. These themes include the long history of repressions of intellectuals combined with the merciful effort made for 'taming' the intelligentsia, uprooting the academic freedom and university autonomy, divisions of the academic communities into progressive and conservative, economic deprivation and corruption, separation of teaching and research, as well as the ideologized, weak scholarly legacies in certain disciplines.

The findings of the study showed that these historical legacies are still haunting the Georgian academic space and present academic lives. For example, replacing the revolutionary and reformist government, which was viewed as oppressive and dismissive of the academic community, with the current government's more merciful politics, especially toward the older generation of academics, repeats the Soviet pattern of taming the intelligentsia by granting privileges after the purge. This recurring pattern aligns with the political establishment's strategy for maintaining power and control, which makes the academic space and its members complicit to the system. The findings of the study unveiled various examples of university autonomy violations and the expansion of the political influence of the government over various university matters. This influence was particularly evident in processes such as elections of rectors, hiring and dismissals of academics, as well as suspension of institutional accreditation. These interventions not only eroded institutional autonomy but left academics in a perpetual state of uncertainty and survival. Such a predicament of higher education politics constrains the sense of

agency in pursuing and advancing teaching and scientific work. The study also highlights the implicit use of the political objective of elimination of corruption as a means to assert control over university activities, resulting in a reduction of institutional and individual academic autonomy.

Barkey and von Hagen (1997), in their work, underscore the persistence of imperial legacies that the nation-states carry forward after gaining independence from empires. These continuities are manifested in various aspects, such as infrastructural, bureaucratic, political, and cultural dimensions. The research on academic identities particularly emphasized the profound influence of these continuities in behaviors and (in)actions of academics in navigating the legacies of the Imperial past. This influence persists within the academic and broader public space, which strives to escape from or neglect the presence of these legacies in current academic life and future imaginaries. However, as highlighted by De Sousa Santos (2012), to reorient the future of universities, we should confront the 'strong questions' and address the root problems embedded in the university's historical identity and mission. The section below further discusses and problematizes the capacity and strategies of the academic community in confronting the root problems and reorienting the futures.

Furthermore, the historical review identifies three phases of the post-Soviet transformation in the Georgian higher education system, which strongly resonates with the three dominant themes: (1) the crisis, (2) the return to Europe, and (3) project-driven solutions describing the nature of post-socialist transformations (Silova, 2014). First, the 13 years of chaos, which is based on the review of the literature, emphasizes the socio-economic and political challenges that also spilled over into the higher education space

and created a “crisis” in the system. This was followed by 17 years of reforms aimed at Westernization and European integration of the higher education system, highlighting the tensions, contradictions, and inconsistencies in their implementation. The final section on the current days of (lost) opportunities underscores that despite the multiple waves of reforms and support provided by international organizations, the Georgian higher education system has not yet become as modern or as European as it was anticipated throughout the three decades of transformation. Therefore, it challenges the established patterns of policy-making and policy implementation, its overdependence on global agendas, calling for introspection, critical reflection, and a conscious reimagining of alternative prospects.

The findings of this study contest the commonly discussed histories of post-Soviet transformations as it is presented in the scholarly literature. The narratives derived from the lived experiences of Georgian academics provide thick, contextual, and experiential descriptions and details that are often overlooked by scholars who tend to focus on the systems and policies. For example, the narratives tell stories about the exceptional dedication of Georgian academics continuing their academic and scholarly work even during the most difficult and chaotic years. Narratives also highlight the professors’ proactive initiatives and expertise in reshaping the educational programs and academic fields by incorporating international practices, while considering the local context, needs, and available resources. This period, which is usually referred to as the “dark 1990s,” was found to be a unique time for the system when universities were truly independent and autonomous. However, the higher education reforms that addressed various systemic

flaws and eliminated corruption inadvertently undermined the transformative efforts that were initiated from within the academic community.

Furthermore, the findings shed light onto the controversies surrounding the implementation of higher education reforms, presenting examples and arguments from academics that both support and critique the processes and the outcomes based on their personal experiences. Additionally, these narratives also highlight the concerns associated with expressing critical opinions towards the Bologna-inspired reforms, which could lead to the perceptions and labels of being old-fashioned, Soviet, or even pro-Russian, especially during the initial phase of the reforms.

Thus, the Soviet past and political and armed conflicts with Russia had a radicalizing effect on Georgia's European aspirations. In turn, the uncritical and rigid implementation of reforms has narrowed the scenarios for more deliberate developments of the higher education system. Therefore, the Soviet past and looming threat of Russian influence, and even violations of the country's sovereignty became the haunting factors in the development of the higher education system, which became excessively dependent on the Europeanization agenda, lacking the considerations of the local societal needs, priorities, issues, solutions and available resources.

The oral histories uncovered by this study re-examined established narratives, shedding light onto the continuities of the Soviet legacies in the present academic space and bringing into focus alternative stories of transformations. It enriches existing scholarly literature and history about the transformation of universities in Georgian and informs the broader studies of the post-Socialist transformation of higher education systems.

Art of Duplicity and Transformation of Academic Identities

These Soviet legacies, which are deeply intertwined with the drastic geopolitical reorientation to the West, have resulted in the urgency for Georgian academics to adjust to the post-Soviet reality, prompting them to reinvent, renegotiate, and reposition their academic identities in the Western/modern academic space. As stated by Bauman (1996), identity is a creation of modernity, emerging as a 'problem' of self-formation toward 'what is demanded to be' (p. 19). The findings of this study reveal multiple patterns and strategies used by Georgian academics to navigate the complicated, non-linear, shifting academic time and space, which are implicated in the transformation of their identities. Among these strategies, the "art of duplicity" stands out as a widely practiced skill used not only to navigate the Soviet totalitarian space but also the post-Soviet transformation processes in higher education.

I should note that the concept of duplicity prominently emerged in the stories of academics when they described the general trends and concrete examples in the behaviors within academic communities, as well as actions taken by institutional and system-level actors. On the one hand, academics expressed concerns regarding the duplicity observed in the conduct of others, while, on the other hand, they also implicated themselves in the collective act of duplicity, saying: "we are pretending…", or "we are playing and simulating all the time."

The conceptualization of duplicity introduced by Gail Kligman (1998) suggests that it is a conscious deceitful behavior or 'double-dealing,' which involves deliberate intentions of a social actor. She further explains that, while the act of duplicity challenges

the morality of everyday life and causes the corrosion between the individual's private and public selves, it is a way of survival in the uncertain, fearful, and repressive realm.

The study outlines three patterns of duplicities that are practiced in the Georgian academic space to navigate the reforms imposed by the global policy agenda to modernize and Europeanize the higher education system. The first one underlines the practice of duplicity when the facades are changing, but the internal matter remains the same (e.g., changing the titles of departments and programs, while keeping the teaching practices and materials the same); the second one emphasizes the pattern of duplicity through sustaining the surface and pretending that 'nothing has changed' but instead changing the matter inside it (e.g., keeping the same syllabi over the accreditation period, but changing the teaching content and methods in practice). The third one highlights the multiple configurations of divergences in-between the facades and internal matter, manifested in the differences in what is thought, written, said, agreed, and practiced.

The findings vividly illustrate that the mastery of duplicity among Georgian academics and beyond has become a common way of communicating and behaving through a jointly choreographed 'effort' (or effortlessness) among different actors, shaping the rules of navigating the post-Soviet transformations and (re)constructing the social or collective identities of Georgian academics. The narratives of academics convey the patterns of duplicity enacted at various levels – system, institutional, collective, and individual – manifesting in multiple configurations. The findings revealed the prominent patterns and causes for practicing the duplicity in Georgian academic space, such as resisting the imposed changes, avoiding the consequences of agreements, differences

between the regulations and implemented practices, and differences between the formal and informal (external) authorities.

The findings from this study further diffract the conceptualization of duplicity and reveal multiple patterns enacted in the post-Soviet academic space. In particular, the findings of the study highlight that the act of duplicity is not always an intentional and deceitful act. Instead, the transition from the Soviet to Western education space is a process that unsettles and dislocates academic identities. In this process, academics themselves are in the process of becoming aware of their transitioning selves. Therefore, even in the process of attempting to become complicit with the new reality, they are experiencing double consciousness, enacting their reactive behavioral patterns of duplicity.

Furthermore, the findings of the study diffract the conceptualization of practicing duplicity as a "conscious deceitful behavior." Instead, this research argues that over time, practicing duplicity becomes normalized behavior in everyday life, which shapes the nature of common communicative and behavioral patterns. As explained by Bauman (1996), identity is a means for placing oneself in a specific setting in a way that 'both sides would know how to go in each other's presence" (p. 19). As explained by Kligman (1998), deceitful behavior emerges from the state of survival. However, its normalization undermines the necessary efforts and conscious actions to make academic life meaningful.

Examining the practices of duplicity from a decolonial perspective adds a different layer to its negative connotation. This theoretical lens reveals the decolonial acts of "tricksterisms" or subversion, resistance, and re-existence for liberating knowledge

and being and overcoming constraining norms and limitations (Tlostanova, 2012). For instance, the narratives of academics revealed stories about creating alternative spaces for discussing the original philosophical texts (free from communist ideology) during the Soviet time; stories about tricking the system by creating the course syllabi in response to the formal, restrictive accreditation requirements, but disregarding those limitations and making the teaching more iterative and creative process provide such examples. However, the findings also illuminate the limits of tricksterism and duplicity as the mechanisms of resistance in confronting the "difficult questions" and addressing the problems. In the Georgian academic space, these optimistic scenarios of resistance and liberation are challenged by the narratives of unquestioned complicity feeding the colonial power dynamic where actors at each level play the game of duplicity to show their compliance to a superior structure (e.g., government looks compliant with the European policies, universities look compliant with the national regulations, and academics look compliant to university administration). As a result, the effort, time, and resources spent in practicing duplicity drain the academic and creative energy and feed the normalization and institutionalization of the same game of duplicity. The regret about the 'lost time' in playing the game of reforms – instead of making an effort for substantial transformations – causes disappointment and relentlessness. Therefore, the systemic and long-time-played game of duplicity undermines the capacity to confront and address the root problems and becomes one of the reasons that the anticipated optimistic futures have not yet arrived.

These trends of duplicity significantly contribute to the major stream of *de*futuring, which is associated with the lack of capacity for reimagining not only the

futures of the academic space but even individual academic aspirations and plans. The findings unveil a noticeable absence of stability, fairness, recognition, and support in the academic workplace. Those factors evoke a sense of exhaustion and anxiety toward an academic job. Notably, some of them, especially the younger academics, are considering leaving academia, which already struggles with aging and a lack of qualified academics in certain study fields.

The findings bring to light the diverse decolonial acts arising from the practice of duplicity. Yet, on the flip side of this narrative, duplicity also engenders complicity, silence, compliance, and disempowerment within the academic community. These factors render academics passive, isolated and trapped in a state of constant anticipation for eventual change.

While these practices feed the stream of *de*futuring, the theoretical and methodological underpinning of this study allows us to diffract their meanings and view them as the 'necessary learnings' for confronting (instead of conforming to) the past and the present while envisioning the future. This way of decolonial thinking and critical understanding of *de*futuring patterns should be re-channeled to overcome the 'immobilizing localities' and for a critical reimagining of "the self and/in the world and a new political imagination to *re*futuring" (Tlostanova, 2020, p. 25). It is noteworthy that the narratives of academics also revealed the already existing example of decolonial thinking and *re*futurings both from Soviet and post-Soviet stories. They are further discussed in the section on implications for policy and practice.

Theoretical Implications and Contributions

This study identifies some gaps in the literature on academic identities in non-Western contexts. Based on a comprehensive literature review and the analysis of different conceptualizations of identities derived from various disciplinary foundations, my study introduces a conceptual framework that situates the research on academic identities in various geopolitical, cultural, institutional, and social contexts, while considering the personal characteristics and experiences of an individual. Moreover, the conceptual framework on the transformation of academic identities can be used to delve deeper into the contextual intricacies of various dimensions of academic systems through the concept of academic identity as an analytical tool.

Incorporating decolonial studies and hauntology in the study of academic identities has opened an opportunity to illuminate the interwoven nature of different temporalities and indeterminacy of the liminal process of being and becoming. It has highlighted that identities are neither fixed nor finished, and they can be reconfigured through revisiting past stories and revisioning future imaginaries. Engaging in decolonial thinking and delinking from the dominant discourses through spotlighting the narratives of lived experiences and shifting identities in the academic space disrupts the established hierarchies, as well as binary and deficient understandings of non-linear and non-monolithic transformations occurring in Georgian higher education.

One of the main goals of this study was to explore alternative perspectives and possibilities for the development of Georgian academic space and reimagining its future(s). The theoretical and methodological choices intended to find the breaks and continuities in the established discourses, meanings, and understandings of Georgian

academic space, diffract the meanings and conceptions of being and becoming an academic through revisiting and reexamining the past, present, and envisioned future. Rooted in modernity, the dominant understanding of the future is related to the optimistic linear assumption that it will be *better* and *brighter* (Andreotti, 2016). However, various critical, post-colonial, and decolonial studies – further reinforced by the findings of this research – challenge this assumption, arguing that existing understanding of development, progress, and productivity leads to *de*futuring designs, ecological crises, and social inequality (Escobar, 2018; Fry, 2020). These theoretical perspectives hold significant implications for Georgian academic space, urging us to rethink the continuous striving, comparison, and appropriation of the Western academic space. Instead, we are invited to reorient the main focus toward addressing local issues, establishing sustainable practices, and ensuring the agency and freedom of academics to foster the emergence of ideas and development of solutions from within the academic spaces.

Implications for Policy and Practice

The findings of this dissertation offer significant implications for government, universities, and academics in Georgia and beyond, particularly in the post-socialist education space. This study urges us to rethink the established policy discourses, dependence on the superior power structures, the state of inertia, and the individual, as well as collective roles in reimagining and recreating sustainable academic space. However, within the current political context dominated by the populist conservative and nationalist narratives – both globally and specifically in Georgia – the political agenda and decisions are driven by the imperative goal of maintaining political dominance.

Many of the suggestions that I would like to make regarding the empowerment of academics and fostering their agency contradict the current politics which extend their control over the intellectual and cultural spaces every day. Therefore, the current political establishment, being itself in the mode of survival and perpetuation of control, lacks innovative and creative capacity. Such political dynamics nourish the stream of negating future possibilities, thus contributing to *def*uturing.

Therefore, my foremost hopes about the consideration of the findings and implications of this study are directed toward the universities and academic communities. I hold the aspiration that this research will help academics to navigate the disturbing political realm, unveil the avenues for reclaiming their power and autonomy, reimagine their identities, and move from a state of survival to a proactive state of creation and transformation. Therefore, the recommendations focus on diffracting the instances and processes of *de*futuring and reframing their meanings to inform the movement toward *re*futuring.

One of the established tendencies that characterize the Georgian academic space is its dependence on the political decisions made by the policymakers, without the participation of universities and academic communities in the process or with their complicit participation, ultimately positing the policy-makers responsible for all the flows of the system. However, inspired by Barad's (2007) ethico-onto-epistemological framework, and the shift from individual to relational existence, my research presents the academic system as an entanglement where both the policy-makers, universities, and academic communities intra-act and create certain configurations. Therefore, the political establishment, even if it holds the power of dominance, is not a separate agency

responsible for the existing power or policy configurations. Instead, those configurations come to matter through the intra-actions between and within the entanglements of the academic system, including the academic communities and university administration. In this context, avoiding the responsibility for certain policies and power configurations entails giving away the power to enact the desired reconfiguration.

One of the significant findings of this research indicates a lack of university autonomy, enacting a lack of agency of individual academics. The reasons for such configuration are layered in informal political influences, as well as system-wide and institutional regulations, signaling *de*futuring of academic space. This finding reveals the informal political influence over the university autonomy (e.g., a duplicitous election of the rector at TSU) and, at the same time, it shows an example of confronting this political pressure by the unity of the academic community around the foundational principles and values of universities, and a strong sense of institutional identity (e.g., the attack on the rector of ISU). However, when it comes to the formal regulations that are limiting the agency and autonomy of academics in their teaching (e.g., QA, NQF), work conditions (e.g., low salaries, dysfunctional performance evaluation systems, aging of academics) or system-wide issues (e.g., state funding, policy priorities) do not manifest the power to influence the formal policymaking process or become the creators of those policies. Therefore, the unity of the academic community should be viewed not only as a means and power of resistance but also as the power of creation.

Findings emphasize the equivocal and duplicitous policy practices enacted by universities through the recruitment and performance evaluation policies of academics, disrupting the stability of the academic workplace. Although the duplicitous and merciful

implementation of policies pretends to be guaranteeing job security, it discourages the most capable and motivated segment of academics, while silencing the entire academic community, with a few exceptions of academics who question and challenge those policies. The discouraging, unfair, and unstable institutional mechanisms limit the realization of the academic and scholarly potential of professors. Moreover, these conditions render the academic profession less appealing to younger generations, exacerbating the challenges associated with the aging and ongoing or potential decline of certain study fields due to a shortage of professors in those domains. Therefore, universities and academics should reconsider their perceptions and understandings of a stable and fruitful workplace and co-create a more encouraging and attractive climate for existing and future academics.

Moreover, the findings of the study reveal various singular and binary interpretations of the established present and past discourses that trap our understanding in the constrained imaginary that everything old is bad and everything new or Western is good. The examples from the chaotic and dark 1990s provide important insights about creating transformative impacts through conscious consideration of local issues and solutions. Therefore, the experience from the times that were considered the most difficult and ruined hold significant knowledge and experiences that can inform the *re*futuring visions and efforts. Moreover, even the practices from the Soviet past that are completely marginalized in the current discourses hold important lessons for the present time. However, the narratives reveal that learning Soviet or Western practices can have a positive impact when they are consciously and deliberately used by academics and

policymakers, in contrast to the practices imposed by the global or local policies and reform efforts.

Circling back to the vignette about the complicated elevator journey and considering options for finding a solution, it would not be wise to simply destroy the Soviet building (often viewed as more reliable and stable than the newer constructions), whether because it is Soviet or because the new elevator is malfunctioning. Instead, a thorough and introspective examination is necessary to trace back and reflect on the root causes of the problem regarding the quality, adequacy, installation, maintenance, or other factors causing the noisiness, shaking, and unintentional movement of the new elevator, giving anxiety to passengers about the possibility that it might fall any time. Therefore, we need to understand the essence of the problem, reexamine and rethink the past, and take responsibility for reconfiguring the problems of our time and rearticulating options for the future. This approach can potentially transform the anxiety of 'falling down,' replace the *de*futuring designs with more meaningful and sustainable practices, and help academics (re)gain greater confidence about the future, whether it appears to be brighter or uncertain.

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APPENDIX A

IRB APPROVAL

EXEMPTION GRANTED

Iveta McGurty
Division of Educational Leadership and Innovation - Tempe
-
Iveta.Silova@asu.edu

Dear Iveta McGurty:

On 11/23/2022 the ASU IRB reviewed the following protocol:

Type of Review:	Initial Study
Title:	Transformation of academic identities in the post-Soviet time and space: Narratives from Georgia
Investigator:	Iveta McGurty
IRB ID:	STUDY00016906
Funding:	None
Grant Title:	None
Grant ID:	None
Documents Reviewed:	• Email Recruitment Script for interviews.pdf, Category: Recruitment Materials; • Georgian Technical University site permission, Category: Off-site authorizations (school permission, other IRB approvals, Tribal permission etc); • Ilia State University Site permission, Category: Off-site authorizations (school permission, other IRB approvals, Tribal permission etc); • IRB academic identities.docx, Category: IRB Protocol; • Life story interview consent form, Category: Consent Form; • Life story interview protocol, Category: Measures (Survey questions/Interview questions /interview guides/focus group questions); • shadowing consent form, Category: Consent Form; • shadowing protocol, Category: Measures (Survey questions/Interview questions /interview guides/focus group questions); • Tbilisi State University Site permission, Category: Off-site authorizations (school permission, other IRB approvals, Tribal permission etc); • walk-a-long interview consent form, Category: Consent Form; • walk-a-long interview protocol, Category: Measures (Survey questions/Interview questions /interview guides/focus group questions);

The IRB determined that the protocol is considered exempt pursuant to Federal Regulations 45CFR46 (2)(ii) Tests, surveys, interviews, or observation (low risk) on 11/23/2022.

In conducting this protocol you are required to follow the requirements listed in the INVESTIGATOR MANUAL (HRP-103).

If any changes are made to the study, the IRB must be notified at research.integrity@asu.edu to determine if additional reviews/approvals are required. Changes may include but not limited to revisions to data collection, survey and/or interview questions, and vulnerable populations, etc.

Sincerely,

IRB Administrator

cc: Keti Tsotniashvili
Keti Tsotniashvili

APPENDIX B

PROTOCOL FOR A LIFE STORY INTERVIEW

Thank you for agreeing to participate in the interview. My research goal is to explore the transformation and construction of academic identities in Georgia in light of the post-Soviet transformation and Europeanization of the higher education system. For this purpose, this interview aims to explore your life journey in the Georgian academic space, starting from your educational background to your academic career and your hopes and plans for the future.

Before we move to the questions, I would like to highlight that while working in the higher education system for more than ten years, I've repeatedly been coming to the conclusion that academics are the key players of the HE system and they are the most important actors to seek the answer on tensions, contradictions, and frustrations caused by still present Soviet legacies and continuous European reforms. I suggest we find answers to some of those questions during this interview. I would like this to be a space for storytelling and open expression of opinions, doubts, and concerns.

This interview will be recorded upon your permission; however, we may stop recording at any time during the interview. Participation in this interview is voluntary, and you may choose to quit at any time.

Before we begin, do you have any questions?

Start Recording.

1. Tell me about the journey of your academic career.
    1. Tell me about your personal biography and experiences that inspired you to become an academic.
    2. Tell me about your educational background and how it impacted the formation of your academic 'self'.

3. What have been the major historical or geopolitical changes that have impacted your academic career, academic life, and you as an academic? Could you recall and describe some of those events?
4. Tell me about your experiences, perceptions, and emotions about the continuous reforms in the higher education system.
5. Could you recall some of the major elements or changes in your disciplinary field that impacted your formation as an academic?
6. How has the institutional environment at your university impacted your academic self (e.g., institutional mission, the composition of academic and administrative staff and their interrelations, and infrastructural changes)?
7. Could you recall some of the significant events or changes in the system/institution/department that have impacted your academic life (e.g., teaching and research activities, engagement in the academic community and relations with colleagues, and your beliefs)?
8. From your experience, what period of time was the best/worst for you as an academic? Why?

   Engage in memory work

   Let's focus on the specific event and recall the details about the event, place, time, people, interactions and conversations, reactions, feelings, and emotions.

   - *Would you like to share any reflections on remembering this event?*

2. How would you describe your current self as an academic? *(As an individual, as part of this university, as of your disciplinary field, in terms of your dominant academic role)*

1. How do you think others (colleagues/students/etc.) see you as an academic?
2. What are some of the factors, policies, and institutional narratives that shape your current academic image?

3. What are some key anxieties and pressures you are experiencing as an academic? *(Competencies, expectations, time, salary, institutional/departmental power dynamics, political influences)*

4. What are some of the major factors that make you happy about your academic job?

5. As an academic, what do you see as your most important mission? What are your values, beliefs, and moral order that you adhere to?

6. What are your future plans for your academic career?

   1. What kind of academic would you like to become?
   2. Are there some of the things that you would like to change or improve in your academic self?
   3. What are some of the factors, policies, and narratives that shape your aspirations?

7. Could you share what would be the ideal academic space in the context of the Georgian higher education system to achieve those goals?

8. Could you think of any alternative ways of the future of the Georgian higher education system and academics in terms of their mission and actions?

9. Could you share some of your reflections on what we have talked about? What thoughts and emotions has it evoked?

10. Would you like to make any concluding remarks?

APPENDIX C

PROTOCOL FOR WALK-A-LONG INTERVIEW

Thank you for agreeing to participate in my research and guiding me around the university facilities. My research goal is to explore the transformation and construction of academic identities in Georgia in light of the post-Soviet transformation and Europeanization of the higher education system. The goal of the walk-a-long interview is to explore significant historical events, places, and artifacts. In the process, I will also ask you to share your own opinions, experiences and memories related to specific places, times, and artifacts.

This interview will be recorded upon your permission; however, we may stop recording at any time during the interview. Participation in this interview is voluntary, and you may choose to quit at any time. I will also take some pictures and video recordings upon your permission.

APPENDIX D

PROTOCOL FOR SHADOWING

Thank you for agreeing to participate in my research and to spend your academic day with me. My research goal is to explore the transformation and construction of academic identities in Georgia in light of the post-Soviet transformation and Europeanization of the higher education system. The goal of the shadowing activity is to observe the daily activities of academics, interactions in the academic workplace, and institutional and disciplinary dynamics of academic life.

During the day I will not interrupt your regular activities, but I will be taking notes. From time to time I might ask you to interpret or explain some of the events, interactions, places and artifacts.

Your participation in this shadowing activity is voluntary, and you may choose to stop participating in it at any time.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

I was born at the time of Soviet Perestroika in Tskhinvali, a city in Georgia, which became occupied by Russia in 1991 as a result of the armed conflict provoked by Russia between Georgians and Ossetians. As a result, my family, where all adults were involved in the education sector, was displaced from home. My family's life was tightly intertwined with the academic life of Tskhinvali State Pedagogical Institute (TSPI). My grandfather was a well-known professor of Georgian literature and a member of the Academy of Science. Later, my father and uncle also became professors at TSPI. While my mother was a teacher of Georgian literature and history, she graduated from the TSPI, where my grandfather was her professor. As a result of the Russian occupation of the Tskhinvali region, not only my family life, but also the academic life of TSPI, and the academic lives of my family members were interrupted and dislocated from their regular temporal and spatial locations.

In this positionality statement, I will talk more about my professional and academic background as I see more clearly how those experiences have shaped my interest in the post-Soviet transformation of higher education and academic identities. However, I suppose that the source of my particular interest in studying academics derives from my personal and family background, which is yet an unexplored part of my own academic identity.

At this point, my interest in the exploration of academic identities in post-Soviet Georgia is mainly shaped by questions, tensions, and frustrations experienced while working at the national education quality assurance agency in Georgia, leading the higher education quality assurance system reform that aimed at harmonization of the national

system with the European standards. My policy-making and policy-implementation aspirations and insisting performance of working on the QA reform was fueled by two factors. First, the political and expert narratives portrayed the transformation and Europeanization of the Georgian higher education system as the critical mission for the improvement of the higher education system in the country. I wanted to be a part of this mission. And second, my graduate school experience at Vanderbilt University, which valued the developmental impact of international organizations and policies in 'developing' countries, built the aspiration among students to join the international development efforts. Moreover, as a recipient of the US State Department scholarship and later returning to Georgia, I was expected to contribute to the development of my country.

Those aspirations were dramatically challenged by the political intrusions and unintended outcomes of the reforms I was involved in, then smashed by my doctoral journey at Arizona State University. Reading and discussing the higher education policies from the decolonial lens, understanding the essence of the post-socialist transformations, and criticizing the mainstream Western epistemologies put me in a controversial, discomforting, and confusing position. However, later on, this discomfort helped me to gain a more clear understanding of the root causes of my frustrations and disappointments with the failing higher education reforms.

Because of my involvement in the quality assurance system reform, I have been frequently invited by students and researchers doing their research on higher education reforms in Georgia. Additionally, I have been invited as a guest speaker at different universities, where I engage with education policy and administration students to discuss

the QA system and reforms. I gave one of these kinds of interviews while working on my dissertation proposal, and that was when I realized that my academic identity has been transforming and contested. I recalled that during the years when I was still working at the quality assurance agency, my responses conveyed an imperative tone explaining the significance of the reform and the right ways of doing it. The interviewers and students were also happy with my responses as I gave them concrete answers to "What should we do to improve higher education in Georgia?" However, I noticed that during the last two years, most of the interviews and lectures that I gave have been ending with silence and disappointed faces and some ironically smiley comments, "so, we are trapped," "there is nothing we can do." This is when I felt the urge to turn around the pessimistic atmosphere. I usually would say that we have learned a lot from international practices and acquired significant experiences, but now it is time to critically reflect on them, talk about the problems more openly, and try to recreate our future, rather than primarily be dependent on the internationalization and Europeanization agenda in higher education. However, this response has not yet been enough to defeat the frustration that I caused by my initial responses. It seemed too vague and too slow to achieve significant transformation, which is usually the expectation created toward Western education reforms and Europeanization policy agenda. With this research, I tried to create more clear premises for reimagining the Georgian higher education space.

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