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**Soap Opera Politics: Displaying Socio-Political Issues in the
Georgian TV Series *Chemi Tsolis Daqalebi***

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Declaration

I hereby declare that I have prepared the submitted dissertation myself and only used the cited sources and literature. Additionally, I hereby declare that I have not been awarded any other degree or diploma for this thesis or its substantial part.

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Abstract

This thesis examines the Georgian soap opera *Chemi Tsolis Daqalebi* (My Wife's Girlfriends) within the local political and social landscape of a highly polarized new democracy in Georgia. This satirical fiction of the everyday lives of a group of friends interwoven with plotlines about political elections, domestic violence, poverty, and homophobia display current social realities in meticulous detail. Such events include workplace discrimination based on sexuality, violence against women, and political campaigns leading to elections. I argue that displaying socio-political themes in fictional media serves as a tool for bringing these topics closer to the viewers, inciting their interest and connection. Furthermore, the fictional nature of the television program allows for the criticism of those in power positions. The thesis outlines the post-1990s political context of Georgia and its shift from socialism to a market economy and the contemporary social challenges given the changes in public media. The tools of coding and content analysis are deployed for examining *Chemi Tsolis Daqalebi* to show the intricate relationship between politics, media, and social sector, and pop culture in Georgia.

Keywords:

Entertainment fiction, Georgian politics, Homophobia, Poverty, Domestic violence, Media Polarization, Citizenship

Introduction

According to its official website, the television series *Chemi Tsolis Daqalebi* (My Wife's Girlfriends) that this thesis explores is “the most popular Georgian TV show of all time” (*Chemi Tsolis Daqalebi*, n.d.). This self-proclaimed title is not far from the truth: *Chemi Tsolis Daqalebi* is significant in Georgian popular culture, captivating audiences with its engaging storytelling and relatable characters. However, not only praise is heard about the series. Georgian prime minister Irakli Kobakhidze has remarked about *Chemi Tsolis Daqalebi* that its “LGBTQ+ propaganda is going against people, it’s completely unacceptable coming from an opposition-allied television. Society, naturally, has negative reaction to this.” He even went so far to blame the series for contravening Georgian identity: “They try to normalize cursing. From this, we can see that they don’t like elements of our national identity. They specifically, by cursing, are trying to disrespect the Georgian language” (*Khelisupleba Chemi Tsolis Daqalebs utevs.*, n.d.). For better or worse, *Chemi Tsolis Daqalebi* has become a frequent conversation topic in schools, universities, and workplaces, putting the characters of the show in the middle of the everyday lives of Georgians.

The series centers on a group of young Georgian women, Nina, Kato, and Tina, who are childhood friends with memorable characteristics. Nina is a stay-at-home mother of two; Kato is a femme fatale, always intertwined in romantic problems; and Tina is a feminist working for an NGO as a lawyer on domestic violence cases. Throughout the seasons, many additional characters that relate to these three women are introduced. The group navigates life in 2010s Tbilisi amid the social and political troubles of unemployment, changing gender roles, domestic violence, integration into the European Union, and many more.

My interest in analysing the series in more depth has developed from being a viewer who grew up watching this series. Initially drawn to it for its entertainment, I later began to notice the ways it reflects and comments on political and social affairs in Georgia. I first learned what NATO MAP, a plan for joining the alliance, was when, in the fictional reality of *Chemi Tsolis Daqalebi*, Georgia was awarded it. The realization of the importance of Georgia’s Euro-Atlantic integration followed. Difficult and intense topics such as domestic violence, homophobia, and gender discrimination also entered my consciousness and that of my peers’ through *Chemi Tsolis Daqalebi*, and I started connecting the fictional events to real

ones. This realization sparked my fascination with the affordances of entertainment television and its potential to comment on and frame social and political events.

Georgia, as a highly polarized new democracy, presents a fertile ground for such a television show to thrive. Exploring various socially and politically charged topics like domestic violence, gender discrimination, or homophobia through the lens of different characters and plots provides viewers with subtle insights into the country's political landscape and social dynamics. With its instructive plotlines, *Chemi Tsolis Daqalebi* not only portrays such social injustices but also serves as a litmus test for identifying them and sets an example of escaping and neutralizing them. The narrative also connects the characters' personal lives with broader themes such as political elections, social media propaganda, and the criminal justice system. *Chemi Tsolis Daqalebi* serves as an exemplary case study to examine how entertainment media, politics, and society interact. The show's ability to frame political and social problems within its plotlines is essential in analyzing the role of entertainment media in political communication.

Exploring how it engages with and reflects the political and social environment of Georgia, the thesis is organized as follows. Chapter One summarizes the theoretical perspectives and empirical research on the relationship between politics and entertainment. It explores the evolution of television in the post-broadcast era, the role of political fiction, and the political relevance of entertainment television. The chapter also examines the specific mechanisms through which entertainment media shape political discourse in Georgia. Chapter Two centers on the methodology and outlines the research strategy, sampling methodology, and data collection methods used in this thesis. It discusses the quantitative and qualitative approaches employed to analyze *Chemi Tsolis Daqalebi*, including content analyses. Ethical considerations and research positionality are also addressed. Chapter Three comprises a quantitative analysis of the series seasons one to five. It categorizes episodes based on their social and political content and explores specific themes such as gender roles, social class, job insecurity, immigration, poverty, homophobia, and domestic violence. The aim is to quantify the extent to which these themes are present and track their evolution over time. Chapter Four consists of a discourse analysis of these seasons through the lens of Georgian state politics and social affairs. This chapter offers a detailed discourse analysis of the series' portrayal of social and political issues. It contextualizes these portrayals within the real-life political landscape of

Georgia, examining how the series comments on, frames, and displays social issues and state politics. The analysis explores the narrative strategies used to address themes like state politics, gender roles, homophobia, and social justice. A conclusion brings these chapters together and summarizes the main findings, showing how entertainment and politics relate in *Chemi Tsolis Daqalebi*.

Chapter 1. Television, Political Fiction and the Media Landscape in Georgia: a Literature Review

The relationship between politics and entertainment has been the subject of longstanding scholarly interest and debate (Van Zoonen, 2004; Putnam, 2000; Postman, 1985). This chapter will provide an overview of the key theoretical perspectives and empirical research that have explored the multifaceted ways in which entertainment and politics have influenced and defined each other. Considering the role of television in the internet era and the ways fictionalized media, specifically soap operas, can frame, comment on, and influence real-life politics is the primary aim of this chapter.

1.1 Television in the Post-broadcast Era

When examining the role of television and fictionalized media in relation to social and political matters, it is necessary to look at the alterations that the medium of television underwent over the past two decades with the rise of the internet. Scholars have predicted the demise of television from the early 2000s, calling the internet, which seemed like an antithesis of television, its “wingman” (Sandvig, 2017). And yet, researchers now conclude that the end of television is not in sight. How television is consumed, however, has changed significantly, as watching TV can refer to a TV show people see on Netflix, a YouTube video transmitted on a LED TV screen, as well as an analogue cable television. Shah et al. (2021) define television as everything that allows us to perceive audiovisual material, everything that allows the experience of “seeing distantly” - “The medium is defined by its technology and functions, not by its structure (p. 754). Hartley (2008) specifies that television has migrated out of the living rooms to streaming services, personal computers, and small screens on mobile phones. Thus, the essentialist understanding of television as bound to the TV set is challenged in the era of the internet. Hartley’s definition widens these boundaries when referring to television as controlled audio-visual media content delivered to the viewer by various means, from YouTube video to streaming outlets of various channels. He argues that the digital mediascape has not replaced the already existing one but rather supplemented it. In relation to the overall popularity of television, Hartley acknowledges the decline in viewers' interests in analogue television but counters this with the observation that rather than abandoning television, people have a wider choice of consumable content than ever before.

In the post-broadcast era, television and its functions come in many forms through various apparatuses like smartphones, laptops, or personal computers. Further, he notes that the Internet, specifically social media, gave otherwise passive viewers an outlet to perform DIY journalism. While having a democratizing effect, this led to making the content less professional and more fun-oriented. Instead of dichotomizing earlier and contemporary TV, deeming the former immensely more important than the latter, Hartley advises that researchers should take a non-essentialist approach and examine the affordances of 21st-century television rather than disregard it (Hartley, 2008).

Similarly to Hartley, Johnson (2019) sees the internet era as a shift from how television was delivered to audiences. While in the broadcast era, television viewing was a rather simple process, in the digital era, the internet and television converged to create a more complex and influential means of ubiquitously available content that can be chosen according to individual preferences. Johnson also directs our attention to the geopolitical situation, emphasizing that change comes gradually with technological progress. For example, according to a survey conducted by National Democratic Institute in Georgia in 2021, TV was still the main source of information for 57% of surveyed people (NDI, 2021). The habits of audiences vary according to the technological advancements available to them. Presenting contemporary television as a fluid mixture of media convergences, including social media, streaming services, and conventional broadcasting (Johnson, 2019).

With this non-essentialist definition of television that considers it beyond analog TV, the ratings and trends, including news, TV series, and talk shows, are promising. The convergence with the internet or streaming services affords television the luxury of cyclical and stable change that invites viewers to adapt to new ways of consuming content and is not alienating for them (Shah et al., 2021). Among the array of content created and transmitted by television, political fiction appears to be one of the most profitable. Precisely political fiction was what brought viewers attention back to TV screens after the decline in popularity of television during the 1990s (Riegert, 2007).

1.2 The genre of political fiction

Identifying political fiction as a genre in film and television presents challenges, raising questions about its definition and boundaries. Does "political" refer solely to on-screen conventional politics, or can it encompass stories and characters that evoke viewer sympathy. Every media message, whether affirming or deconstructing stereotypes, can be considered political. The Library of Congress defines political fiction as a "fictional work centering on the political milieu, often of candidates, elections, and elective or appointive office. Some of the protagonists may be corrupt or dictatorial" (*Library of Congress Genre/Form Terms PDF Files*, n.d.). It further notes that the work addresses a concrete sociological issue or problem. Haas et. al. (2015) suggest that political fiction is a hybrid genre that combines elements of various classifications, such as political satire or comedy. Additionally, political fiction may not yield high cinema box office returns, leading filmmakers to use allegories or depoliticize content (Haas et. al., 2015). The interpretation of political messages in the media is subjective and relies on viewer perception. In terms of television, Riegert (2007) has suggested the term "policotainment" that emphasizes the ways in which "politics and political life are interpreted, negotiated, and represented by the entertainment industry." Policotainment gained prominence after the decline in popularity of television during the 1990s (Riegert, 2007). Alternatively, Hartley (2008) proposed the term "democrataintment" as a function of the television to elicit and strengthen citizenship through taking up a pedagogical role towards the viewers. Citizenship, in this case, refers to engagement, rights, and responsibilities of a citizen within the political and social spheres (Cohen, 1999). By transmitting curated democratic messages through TV programs, audiences get the chance to interact with complicated topics in an accessible way.

Scholars have developed various typologies to categorize the diverse field of political fiction, which encompasses a wide range of entertainment media that engage with political themes, ideas, and issues. These analytical frameworks aim to systematically analyze the content, intent, and impact of political narratives in film, television, literature, and other forms of popular culture. One theory, proposed by communication scholars Christiane Eilders and Carsten Nitsch (2015), classifies political fiction based on the level of political content and the filmmaker's intentional political messaging. This matrix distinguishes between "pure political" works that have a high degree of political content and explicit political intent, "politically

reflective" fiction that has political content but low intentional messaging, "auteur political" media that conveys politically charged symbolism and themes, and "socially reflective" narratives that reflect broader social attitudes and discussions without explicitly addressing political themes.

Other typologies, such as those developed by Holbert (2005), further refine these classifications by considering the degree of political intensity and the viewer's expectations and reception orientation. For example, media scholar Liesbet Van Zoonen (2004) framework identifies four common ways that fictional worlds frame politics: the "Quest" narrative that follows a protagonist's political journey, the "Bureaucracy" depiction of political institutions and processes, the "Conspiracy" framing of hidden political machinations, and the "Soap" portrayal of the personal and interpersonal dynamics of political figures. These typologies help scholars to systematically study and frame the complex intersections between politics and entertainment media. By organizing this heterogeneous field, researchers can better understand how fictional narratives engage with and shape political discourse, influence public opinion, and reflect broader societal attitudes toward government, power, and civic participation. As suggested by Van Zoonen (2004), Nærland (2020), Machado-Borges (2007) and others, political fiction can have political and social significance, which is explored in the upcoming section.

1.3 Political relevance of entertainment television

The genre of entertainment television has often been disregarded in academic research on political communication, resulting in a gap of knowledge on the convergence of the two. This section explores the contrasting views of media scholars on the political relevance of entertainment television. Until the early 2000s, views that reduced the role of popular culture and entertainment media to pure enjoyment or even portrayed it as harmful prevailed in media and political scholarship. In his influential work, "The Culture Industry Reconsidered," Theodor Adorno (1963) claimed that mass-produced media contributes to numbing the viewer and making them susceptible to ideological manipulation. In his view, the main result of mass media was to turn artistic expression into a commodity by standardizing cultural products, which led to diminishing the capacity for viewer's critical thoughts. Likewise, Postman (1985) argued that television negatively alters the epistemology of politics. While deeming print

media an integral part of democracy, Postman argues that television claims the entertainment format for politics and minimizes politicians to nothing but units of consumption. Later on, Putnam (2000) accuses television of being the main force dividing people and civil engagement, while Scheuer (2001) blames television for being trivial. The latter deems television to be intrinsically conservative due to its inability to unfold and explain complex phenomena like liberalism, or the same goes with the dichotomy of left and right.

Can politics be combined with entertainment? Can citizenship be pleasurable? These questions posed by Van Zoonen (2004) raised new debates about what is meant by politics and citizenship. If defined as a sphere isolated from societal intervention, politics can become uninteresting and alienated from the citizens. If the definition of politics is limited to state politics, political affairs, and political actors, the political sphere can become inaccessible to the citizens of the country. It has to compete for societal attention with various distractions, such as all types of media, education, and societal obligations, to secure a relevant space in the livelihood of a citizen. Van Zoonen (2004) argues that the relationship between state politics, entertainment TV media, and individual citizenship is symbiotic. The political sphere, to become relevant, needs to permeate the domestic part of a citizen's life, which is effectively done with social media or entertainment television. Subsequently, the latter achieves the purpose of money-making (Riegert, 2007). The level of citizenship can also be propelled by having the political realm engagingly explained to the audience (Van Zoonen, 2004). Opposing the view that entertainment television is only relevant to viewers with lower levels of education, Van Zoonen (2004) claims that viewers often draw their reactions to political actors and processes displayed on the screen from already existing ideological standpoints.

Here, Van Zoonen (2004) distinguishes between the social and political trajectories of the term citizenship. While social citizenship focuses on a social conflict occurring outside the political arena, studies on political citizenship seek to outline a person's place vis-à-vis the institutional political process. Comparing behaviors of fans and political citizenship, she argues that by challenging the notion of the political sphere being void of emotions and the entertainment sphere being voided of rationality, scholars should rethink the role of entertainment media in politics.

Similarly, Nærland (2020) examines how fictional entertainment can mobilize attention and interest toward political issues while concentrating on TV series; he defines

entertainment as cultural products and practices designed to provide pleasure, diversion, and enjoyment to audiences (Staiger, 2005). This form of entertainment media is part of the everyday lives of people, and while also depicting it, its main goal is to evoke pleasure in the audiences. This happens through various dramatizations of plots that incite emotional engagement or by causing feelings of belonging to a certain community. Based on his research of Norwegian media audiences about the Norwegian teen drama TV series *Skam* (shame), Nærland (2020) outlines the five meaningful ways TV series contribute to public connection or “individual’s orientation towards the sphere of politics” (p. 95) The first way is referred to as *charging*, which represents the function of a TV series to incite interest in issues of political significance by causing the viewers to identify, sympathize, or empathize with fictional characters. A good example of this is the TV series “West Wing,” which showcases the private lives of politicians and creates the space for audiences to relate to them, thus charging the public connection. The *deepening* function is defined as a TV series displaying a fictionalized political realm, thereby helping the audiences make sense of political reality and events in real life. *Affinitive belonging* is an effect of the TV series to spur feeling of belonging to specific politically interested communities. *Extension/Introduction* is a function of a TV series to incite or prolong interest in specific political matters. Lastly, the *solidification* function emphasizes the habitual character of watching TV series. Even though Nærland argues for the ability of entertainment fiction to motivate public connection, he acknowledges that it can have a reverse effect, such as distracting a citizen from real life and suggesting a certain form of escapism. Moreover, he highlights the supplementary character of forging civic connection through TV shows and underlines that the primary motivator of public connection is traditional news programs that display the current political and social reality (Nærland, 2020).

Nærland and Van Zoonen believe that the reductive viewpoint of entertainment media, presenting television and politics as opposing ends of the binary spectrum, is essentialist. Furthermore, Van Zoonen (2004) underlines that authors such as Adorno relied on the “othering” of the ordinary, television-watching folks. Scholars like Putnam or Postmann believe that citizens should rise above the popular television culture and become “good citizen”. In a similar way to acquiring “good taste” as a marker of cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1989; Van Zoonen, 2004). While neither Van Zoonen (2004) nor Nærland (2020) fully reject the possible negative implications of political entertainment, they advocate for not

“eradicating the entertainment from politics” (Van Zoonen, 2004, p. 15) but rather for researching in what ways a citizen can be entertained and what types of public connection can the entertainment television hone.

The connection between entertainment and real-life politics becomes apparent in the cases of celebrity politicians like Donald Trump, Volodymyr Zelensky, and even Václav Havel. This raises questions about the role of celebrities in democratic politics. Archer and Caswton (2021) argue that celebrities' epistemic power can be used to support the legitimacy of democratic elitism, the belief that while elites should rule society, they must be subjected to democratic disputes. On the other hand, celebrities can also direct attention to less-acknowledged societal issues and encourage public connection with the political realm. Several reasons can be outlined why celebrity epistemic power can be useful for democratic life: 1. It can serve as a check on the power of professional politicians; 2. It can bring care to those outside of the political class, to people and their problems that political elites are ignorant of due to the void between politics and people; 3. It can bring the message to people in an engaging manner. However, celebrity involvement in politics comes with its disadvantages, like incentivizing harmful competition that can be damaging to democracy. While it is argued that celebrity politicians can play a useful bridging role between the masses and politics, it's important to acknowledge that such celebrity politicians should be autonomous from the influence of those who run the industry (Archer & Caswton, 2021).

1.4 Politics and soap operas

Having examined how entertainment television may suggest new narratives and perspectives that make sense of politics and incite the public connection to the realm of institutional politics, Van Zoonen (2004) looks at the role of traditionally feminized media in the male-dominated world of politics, specifically soap operas and their generic features. She notes that the generic features of soap operas and politics do not coincide: one is emotional, the other rational; one is private, the other public. These dichotomies are similar to the ones applied to binary genders, female and male, valuing one pole above the other. An example is framing political debates or conflicts as resembling soap operas in order to discredit them, which usually has the negative connotation of being “effeminate and unmanly” (Van Zoonen, 2004, p. 23). These arrangements are the reason why soap operas can at the same time be

“mobilized as an inspiration to political campaigns and exploited as an instrument with which to condemn political acts and behaviors” (Van Zoonen, 2004, p.23). The “Soap Metaphor,” as Van Zoonen calls the usage of “soapy” to discredit the opponent, further detaches the viewer from the sphere of institutional politics and furthers the divide between a citizen and a governor. This contrasts with the potential of soap operas to enable a hybrid understanding of politics by showing the emotions, private matters, and personal weaknesses of political figures or institutions. This can have a humanizing effect that naturally brings the political realm closer to the viewer as well as challenges the masculine preconditions. An example is again ‘The WestWing,’ which provides a look into the affairs of the White House and invites empathy with the private and public difficulties of the politicians, hence enabling the public to engage (Van Zoonen, 2004).

Apart from entertainment, fiction’s role is to unite broader audiences and the sphere of politics. Machado-Borges (2007) looks at how soap opera plots have worked as shields for commenting on political and societal problems in Brazil. She argues that TV series characterized by melodramatic storylines, romance, and high levels of emotional conflict criticize and comment upon real political events and even define what is considered “political” in the context of Brazil. To make sense of the relationship between entertainment media and politics, Machado-Borges identifies three intersections between soap operas and politics. First, the negative representation of institutional politics refers to the telenovela’s inclination to portray politics and political figures as either corrupt or incompetent, spurring the viewer’s interest by making the connection between a fictional and real-life politician clear. For example, the common display of corruption as a tool for promoting consensus among consumers on what is right and what is wrong. This can be explained by Brazil’s authoritarian regimes and generally turbulent political landscape. Machado-Borges also mentions that even though during her research most viewers drew clear parallels between fictional and real-life political characters, these plot lines did not seem to be among their favorites. As a second convergence, Machado-Borges talks about telenovelas’ ability to overshadow important political events in the country and emphasizes the escapist character of entertainment media that can have a negative influence on citizenship: “Media networks create consumers, not citizens” (Machado-Borges, 2007, p. 167). The third way of looking at telenovelas and political relationships, similar to Van Zoonen’s analyses, is through a feminist lens. By

introducing private matters into public politics, telenovelas contribute to broadening the definition of politics, democracy, and political citizenship (Machado-Borges, 2007).

Having looked at the various ways and results of different portrayals of politics in soap operas, we can outline four different ways in which soap operas can affect the political engagement of viewers: 1. It can bring the political realm closer to the citizens by humanizing the political actors. This is done by giving them personality, emotions, and struggles outside of their political career. In other words, showing the part of the politician's life that regular viewers usually do not get in traditional news broadcasting. 2. Pointing to problematic socio-political issues such as corruption, poverty, or gender inequality while being under the pretense of fiction. 3. Overshadowing the events of political importance; and 4. Broadening the field of politics by politicizing the personal. Nærland's five ways of how TV series contribute to public connection described in the earlier section comprise another take on how soap operas affect politics (Machado-Borges, 2007, Nærland 2020).

1.5 Political and media arenas in Georgia

Georgia's political landscape is characterized by a sharp polarization that extends beyond the realm of politics and into various aspects of public life. The divide between the two major political parties, *Georgian Dream* and the *United National Movement*, and their differing stances on Georgia's geopolitical direction have fostered a deeply polarized society. *Georgian Dream*, who is the current governing party, self-characterizes as center-left as opposed to center-right *UNM* (Kakhishvili et al., 2021). This polarization is exacerbated by the strong influence of traditional values supported by the Georgian Orthodox Church and the aspiration to position Georgia as a Western society that embraces diversity, on the other hand (Kuprashvili 2018). This division is not confined to the political sphere but permeates the media landscape as well, contributing to a complex environment. The Georgian media is marked by a high degree of political polarization, state interference, and control, low levels of journalistic professionalism, and a close association of political elites with certain media outlets. Additionally, the presence of oligarchs with close ties to political parties further exacerbates the media's polarization and undermines public trust in its impartiality. The lack of media diversity and the dominance of a few powerful outlets have also enabled the spread of

misinformation and conspiracy theories, further deepening the existing societal polarization (Robakidze, 2019).

Amid this complex media environment, the role of entertainment fiction in conveying political messages has become increasingly significant. Satirical political narratives and fictional depictions of the political sphere have the potential to offer critical perspectives that may be marginalized in the mainstream media (Machado-Borges, 2007). The following sections explore the impact of the media on stimulating and perpetuating societal polarization, as well as its potential role in initiating reconciliation between citizens and state politics.

1.5.1 Georgia's Political Landscape from the 1990s to the Present

Georgia is a newly democratic state that underwent the transition from socialism to a market economy at the beginning of the 1990s with the fall of the USSR. Khelaia and Chivadze (2021) divide the post-transition political context into two stages. The first stage, from 1990 to 2003, was characterized by the rapid transition to a market economy through the creation of necessary institutions such as proper laws that, in turn, contributed to the emergence of new capitalist inequalities. This period was marked by a power struggle between representatives of the old state nomenklatura, political elites, and criminal unions, all vying for economic and political prosperity and resource distribution. Additionally, the War in Abkhazia (1992–1993) and the country's pro-Western course, which met resistance from pro-Russian factions, further complicated this era. The second stage began with the Rose Revolution in 2003, which brought the *UNM* to power, and continues to the present day. This period has been defined by a plethora of political and economic reforms that aggressively established a neoliberal order. The second stage can be further divided into the years under the governance of *UNM* (2003–2012) and *Georgian Dream* (2012–ongoing), during which the neoliberal order has been maintained with some differences in urban politics and business (Khelaia and Chivadze, 2021). This era also witnessed the 2008 Russo-Georgian War, a brief but intense conflict over South Ossetia ending with Russia recognizing the independence of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, further straining Georgia-Russia relations and impacting regional stability (Allison, 2008).

Gegeshidze and De Waal (2021) observe sharp levels of polarization that affect not only everyday politics but also societal values and the country's geopolitical direction. The

polarization is centered around the de facto leaders of *the Georgian Dream* and *UNM*, Bidzina Ivanishvili, an oligarch who founded the *Georgia Dream* in 2012 and since then has repeatedly exited and entered the political arena, and Mikheil Saakashvili, a third president of Georgia and a long-term leader of *UNM*. The latter is currently imprisoned for various charges including crossing the Georgian border illegally, after escaping the prison sentence in Georgia by fleeing to Ukraine and becoming governor of Odessa oblast in Ukraine (Demytrie, 2021).

. However, the roots of this clash are not primarily ideological but rather historical. Georgian nationalism heavily relies on an "us vs. them" narrative that has been predominantly focused on Russia since the 1980s, when the country experienced its first societal split between pro and anti-independence from the Soviet Union. While all actors in the polarized political sphere have rejected a direct alliance with Russia, some aim to fully cut ties with the country, while others deem it beneficial to maintain an active relationship with the northern neighbor. Both the *Georgian Dream* and *United National Movement* subscribe to Georgia's Euro-Atlantic integration, but the *Georgian Dream* takes a more lenient approach to Russia benefiting the country with different actions like halting the Anaklia port project (Standish & Chkareuli, 2023), while the *UNM* takes a harder line. The parties' varying levels of Western commitment and tactics further contribute to the polarization, which benefits both sides by demotivating the emergence of new, important political parties (Gegeshidze & De Waal, 2021).

In the public life, where the strong pull towards traditional values backed by the Georgian Orthodox Church clashes with the aspiration to position Georgia as a Western society. Polarization is so pervasive that a person's values and beliefs are often informally assumed based on the political party they support or the TV channel they watch. For example, supporters of the *Georgian Dream* party are often associated with more conservative and pro-Russian views, such as anti-abortion and anti-immigration, while *UNM* supporters are seen as more progressive and pro-Western, supporting equal rights, minorities and bodily autonomy. However, those assumptions do not necessarily coincide with reality (Gegeshidze, De Waal, 2021).

This intensifies during times of civil unrest, such as the events of the summer of 2019 ("Gavrilov's Night") when on an Inter-Parliamentary Assembly on Orthodoxy a communist party deputy of the Russian Duma Sergei Gavrilov during his opening speech sat on the chair

of the chairman of the Parliament of Georgia causing the protest from the parliamentary opposition. The same evening thousands of people went out to the streets for an anti-occupation protest. This cycle of protest lasted the whole summer of 2019 (Khelaia, Chivadze, 2021). These events have led to the creation of influential civil movements, like "Shame," but their demands often align with those of the opposition party, the *United National Movement*, which allows the government to discredit them. The polarization was further exacerbated in 2021 when the government failed to support or protect the Tbilisi pride march, despite calls from foreign embassies in Georgia (Gegeshidze & De Waal, 2021). This political and societal polarization, which contributes to the divide between citizens and the political sphere and discredits the civil sector as a check on the government, has been a defining characteristic of Georgia's flawed democracy for the last 30 years. Alongside this two-party confrontation, a significant number of citizens have been relegated to a bystander position, leaving them feeling disconnected from the political process and unable to influence the direction of the country.

Apart from troublesome state politics, contemporary Georgian society faces various social issues. Stigmatizing gender roles, as explored by Sumbadze (2008) in 2000's Georgia, reinforces expectations of women as homemakers and men as breadwinners, further creating unequal opportunities. As recently as 2024, the parliament of Georgia abolished gender quotas on parliament membership, taking away opportunities for many women (Shoshiashvili, 2024). At the same time, financial difficulties, poverty, and lack of employment have consistently been major challenges for Georgian society. Every second person in Georgia deems their economic situation unfavorable (NDI, 2023). The lack of employment often turns out to be the reason for immigration; in 2008, one in every ten families had at least one family member in immigration. This number rose to one in six families in 2023 (NDI, 2023). Discrimination based on gender and sexual identities or expressions is another issue Georgian society faces. According to the 2011 Caucasus Barometer survey, the vast majority (88%) of Georgia's population at the time viewed homosexuality as unacceptable. Links are drawn in order to outline the roots of such homophobic attitudes, including those of religiosity and inherently masculine national pride (Mestvishvili et al., 2018).

Overall, in the midst of various social issues, Georgian society can be characterized by mistrust in government. The Majority of people believe that the parliament does not work in

their best interests and does not manage to adequately fulfill its obligations (NDI, 2023). Similar attitudes are translated in relation to media outlets; the majority of the population (51%) does not trust any media outlet. 55% of *Georgian Dream* supporters only trust the TV channel *Imedi*, while 25% of opposition supporters prefer *Mtavari Channel*. These trends are further examined in the following section.

1.5.2 Georgia's Media Landscape

The Georgian media landscape is characterized by its polarized and hybrid character, reflecting the country's complex political realities. Maisashvili and Mumladze (2023) describe the Georgian mediascape as a "Mediterranean" model, where a plurality of media outlets exists with a high degree of political polarization. This model is common in many post-Soviet countries, including Georgia, and is marked by state interference and control over the media, political parties' influence on the media agenda, low levels of journalistic professionalism, and the close association of political elites with certain media outlets. Robakidze (2019) further outlines the hybrid nature of the Georgian media, which combines pluralistic and polarized characteristics. The author focuses on two dominant TV channels in 2019, *Imedi* and *Rustavi 2*, and notes that the media sphere reflects political reality, perpetuating the dichotomy between the *United National Movement* and the *Georgian Dream* political parties and contributing to societal polarization. The issue of media funding is also highly relevant, as it directly influences the ability of media channels to deliver content and has been used as a lever for promoting the political agendas of different parties throughout Georgia's history. This polarized media landscape is further exacerbated by the presence of oligarchs and their influence over various media outlets. Wealthy individuals with close ties to political parties often own or control major media organizations, using them as platforms to advance their own political and economic interests. This has led to a situation where objective and impartial reporting is often overshadowed by partisan narratives and biased coverage. Moreover, the lack of media diversity and the dominance of a few powerful outlets have contributed to the erosion of public trust in the media. Citizens often perceive the media as being beholden to political interests, making it challenging for them to access reliable and unbiased information. This, in turn, has fueled the spread of misinformation and conspiracy theories, further exacerbating the polarization within Georgian society (Robakidze, 2019).

In this complex and challenging media environment, the role of entertainment fiction in conveying political messages becomes increasingly important. Satirical political narratives and fictional depictions of the political sphere can provide an alternative platform for addressing sensitive issues and offering critical perspectives that may be suppressed or marginalized in the mainstream media.

To conclude this section, Georgia's political and societal landscape is deeply saturated with polarization, which has significantly impacted the country's democratic processes and public life. The sharp divide between the *Georgian Dream* and *UNM* parties, influenced by historical, ideological, and geopolitical factors, has not only marginalized other political parties but has also permeated into public life, shaping societal values and citizen identities. The media landscape in Georgia mirrors this polarization, contributing to the erosion of public trust in the media. As the country grapples with these issues, it becomes important to explore strategies for bridging the divide between citizens and state politics and promoting a more unified and inclusive political and societal environment. The role of entertainment media and its quality of being shielded by the narrative of fictionalization might afford it to serve as a check on the state as well as conventional news media outlets.

Chapter 2: Methodology

2.1. Research aims and questions

The goal of this study is to contextualize the TV show *Chemi Tsolis Daqalebi* in relation to Georgian politics during the period before and after the change of government in October 2012. This period is significant as it marks the beginning of societal polarization, dividing the Georgians into opposing sides. I am interested in the meanings transmitted, that is, how *Chemi Tsolis Daqalebi* portrays the political and social realm at that time and what the affordances of entertainment media are.

This thesis poses the following two research questions:

1. Which specific political narratives does the TV series transmit through the narrative tool of fictionalization, and how?
2. How does *Chemi Tsolis Daqalebi* employ the tools of fictionalization (Machado-Borges, 2007), charging (Nærland, 2020), and a “soap” framework (Van Zoonen, 2004) to bridge the gap between a citizen and a sphere of politics?

To address these questions, quantitative and qualitative methods will be used. The reason for using quantitative data analysis is to outline what percentage of the TV show is concerned with state politics and provide insight into the frequency and prominence of social or political themes. Qualitative analysis, on the other hand, allows for a deeper understanding of the specific political and ideological messages portrayed in the TV show. It will enable a more nuanced examination of how political themes are presented and interpreted, potentially influencing the viewers’ perception or understanding of Georgian politics (Asa Berger, 2014).

2.2 Sampling and methods of data collection

The sampling for this research involved the selection of sample episodes from the target years of 2011 through 2015. The sample was chosen upon investigating the series from season one and was cut at the saturation point for this research, season five. As Georgia underwent a polarizing change in government during this timeframe, the display of political and social content in *Chemi Tsolis Daqalebi* proved to be insightful for answering the research questions posed above.

Having established the timeframe for the materials to be examined, the next steps included the selection of episodes from the seasons aired during these years. This was done by accessing the material on the official YouTube channel of the TV show, watching the recaps or full episodes, and making small descriptions and codes for each. The mention of social or political topics like gender roles, homophobia, or state politics was coded accordingly. The episodes with at least some political content or display of a social issue were selected for further discourse analyses. Apart from the five seasons, two feature films taking place in the same cinematic universe, with the same actors, film crew and contributing to the plot were explored. In the scope of this research, they will be considered as single episodes, with the first film continuing season two and the second film continuing season four. The films, likewise, were accessed on YouTube and summarized and coded similarly. Seasons one to five, taking place in this study's target timeframe, summed up to 189 episodes. The two full-length films bring the count to 191 episodes. In view to determine the scope of state politics and social issues covered in the TV series, the following steps were taken: 1. The episodes were accessed on the YouTube channel of the TV Show, and 2. The relevant seasons in relation to the target years have been determined

The quantitative analysis involved coding each episode according to the proportion of political content it contained, ranging from purely entertainment-focused to predominantly political narratives. For this, the simplified version of typologies suggested by media scholars like Holbert (2005), Eilders and Nitsch (2015) were utilized. Each episode was coded in relation to the mention and framing of a social issue like immigration or unemployment and political events like election or a political talk show.

The episodes that featured a social issue as a point in plot were considered **socially reflective**. This is usually the case with casual misogyny or homophobia. The episodes with narratives that condoned a specific injustice and played an educational role were deemed to have **political and social value**, like plotlines displaying the injustice of workplace discrimination. The episodes that featured representatives of state politics, like politicians or experts, were categorized as **purely political**. Having highlighted the episodes with some socio-political context helped identify the pool for further, qualitative observations. The highlighted episodes deemed relevant to this research were further examined and categorized into eight categories of social and political relevance.

The qualitative content analysis then delved deeper into the central themes and discourses present in the episodes identified as having socio-political relevance. This involved contextualizing the narratives portrayed in the show within the contemporary political landscape of Georgia during the 2011-2015 period. By examining the links between the fictional representations and real-world events and debates, the study aimed to illuminate the space that *Chemi Tsolis Daqalebi* occupies within the Georgian mediascape and the broader societal implications of its narrative transmissions. For this, the interpretative approach, defined by Van Zoonen (1994) as an inductive approach aiming to arrive at an empirically grounded understanding of socially constructed reality, was used.

Ultimately, this multifaceted methodological approach allowed for a nuanced understanding of the interplay between entertainment television and its ability to shape political discourse and civic engagement. The findings from this analysis will serve as a foundation for further exploration of the complex and evolving relationship between politics and entertainment.

2.3 Ethics and Research Positionality

In order to maintain the ethical integrity of the study, all the materials for data collection were accessed through the official YouTube channel of the TV show. The series is accessible to anyone for free; hence, no purchase of the subscription was necessary. Furthermore, while analyzing the news articles to map out the Georgian political arena in target years, free internet archives were used to access the relevant articles from the period.

As to my own role in the data analysis, as a Georgian citizen, I am not neutral on these topics. I believe that political fiction, which aims to convey democratic values through television entertainment, plays a crucial role in Georgia's democratic development. I hold that using entertainment fiction to reach and educate citizens about state and social affairs is essential for advancing democratic processes in the country. With my personal conviction and history of being a devoted viewer of *Chemi Tsolis Daqalebi*, this research maintains an open-minded standpoint. The goal is not to assess audience perception or intent but rather to analyze how politically charged the show is and its contextualization within real-life political situations. I account for my biases as a person invested in the democratization of Georgia.

However, the research will focus on questions such as the representation of state politics in the TV show and highlight socio-political themes without placing subjective value judgments.

Chapter 3: Quantitative analysis of socio-political content in *Chemi Tsolis Daqalebi*

3.1 Determining the extent of political and social content in *Chemi Tsolis Daqalebi*

This chapter examines to what extent the episodes of seasons one to five of *Chemi Tsolis Daqalebi* feature state politics and social topics. Coding of episodes is used to identify specific themes or content, like gender roles, state politics, or homophobia, and to create a helpful classification for later discourse analyses. In the first section, I overview politically and socially charged episodes in the chosen timeframe and associated trends. Conversely, the specific topics and the trends of their mention are mapped out during the five seasons of *Chemi Tsolis Daqalebi*.

3.1.2 Coding the Social and Political Content

In the scope of the quantitative analyses, 189 episodes and two films were examined. Using the classification suggested by Christiane Eilders and Carsten Nitsch (2015), which distinguishes "Pure political" media as having a high degree of political content, "Socially reflective" films that reflect social topics and discussions without addressing politics, and "Politically and socially reflective" fiction that has political and social content. The coding entailed assessing the level of political and social context. The episodes with high political context, for example, showcasing political figures or institutions, were coded "Purely political." The episodes that center on social issues but acknowledge the political sphere, like the display of job insecurity, were considered "Politically and socially reflective." Lastly, the episodes centering on social issues without the explicit mention of state politics were categorized as "Socially reflective."

Based on this coding scheme, 82 out of 191 episodes were categorized as socially and politically charged, meaning they displayed, to a different extent, a social issue prevailing in Georgian society. This social issue included immigration, unemployment, domestic violence, gender discrimination, and homophobia. Social and political content was displayed in all five seasons and appeared to increase over time. The following table shows the number of socially and politically charged episodes for each season and the social or political themes these episodes deal with.

	Season I (N=50 episodes)	Season II (N=21 episodes)	Season III (N=42 episodes + film)	Season IV (N=30 episodes + film)	Season V (N=46 episodes)
Number of socially reflective episodes & topics	N= 7 Gender roles (2) Social class (1) Unemployment (3) Emigration (1)	N= 3 Domestic violence (1) Homophobia (1) Unemployment & Emigration (1)	N = 11 Gender roles (2) Domestic violence (9)	N =9 Unemployment (2) Gender roles (2) Domestic violence (4) Criminal gangs (1)	N=13 Social class (1) Unemployment (1) Gender roles (9) Homophobia (2)
Number of purely political episodes & topics	0	0	N= 1 Homophobia & State politics (1)	0	N=22 State politics & corrupt media (22)
Number of politically & socially reflective episodes & topics	0	0	N=6 Workplace discrimination & homophobia (6)	6 episodes Corrupt media (4) Criminal gangs (2)	N=4 Corrupt media (2) Criminal gangs (2)
% of socio-politically charged episodes	14%	14.29%	40.5%	46.7%	84.8%

Figure 1: Breakdown of number of socio-politically charged episodes and the themes.

Furthermore, the quantitative breakdown (Figure 2.) suggests that as the series progressed, the creators of *Chemi Tsolis Daqalebi* increasingly incorporated more overtly political themes and narratives, likely reflecting the evolving political landscape in Georgia during the 2011–2015 period.

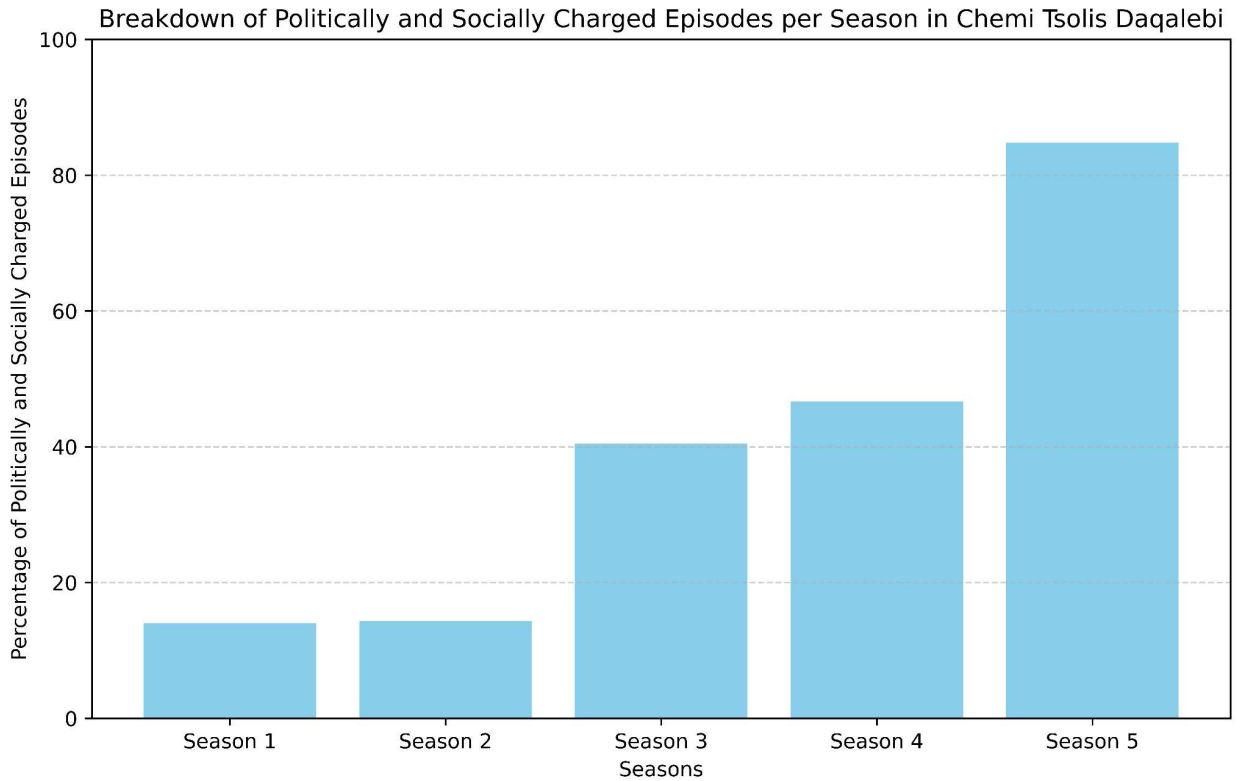


Figure 2.

It can be observed that *Chemi Tsolis Daqalebi* frequently engaged with social topics right from its first episodes, though the surge in political content began with the first film, *Chemi Tsolis Daqalis Qortsili*, and continued in season three of the TV show. From the analyzed data, we can observe that this film was the first instance to ever be characterized by a higher level of political and social importance. Before that, seasons one and two can only be found in the socially reflective category. From the third season to season five, strong social and political content is observable.

Figure 2: Breakdown of socio-politically charged episodes by seasons.

It is important to note that *Chemi Tsolis Daqalebi* emerged in the Georgian mediascape in 2011, which was the last year of the right-leaning *United National Movement* comprising the majority in the parliament. *Chemi Tsolis Daqalebi* at this time was televised by channel Rustavi 2, one of the channels on the right-leaning, *UNM*-supporting side of the politically polarized media spectrum. With the elections and change of government in the autumn of 2012, *UNM* was voted out of the parliamentary majority, with the more left-leaning *Georgian Dream* taking its place. However, for over a year, the two parties managed to work together as *UNM* leader Mikheil Saakashvili remained in the position of president and *GD* leader Bidzina Ivanishvili led the parliament. The 2013 presidential elections saw *GD* candidate Giorgi Margvelashvili win (Fischer and Halbach, 2013). Before 2013, the political and social content in *Chemi Tsolis Daqalebi* was significantly lower than the upcoming seasons, which saw the rise of politically charged episodes.

The increase in the number of politicized episodes in the later seasons, from the year 2013 when the *Georgian Dream* controlled the parliamentary and presidential powers, can reflect increasing tensions from newly identified oppositionary role of *UNM*. In this political climate, this increase begins to suggest that *Chemi Tsolis Daqalebi* becomes part of entertainment media that is also a political commentator, albeit one where political content is shielded or disguised by fictionalization. Machado-Borges (2007) suggested that this can be done in order to criticize and comment on real social and political issues. *Rustavi 2* is identified as *Georgian Dream* opposing television closely linked to the narratives learning towards *UNM*. The role of socio-political critic that *Chemi Tsolis Daqalebi* assumed can identify the political leaning of the filmmakers as opposing the newly formed *GD* government. This increase in socially and politically charged episodes of the TV shows aired on the TV channel leaning towards *UNM* after the change of government outlines the role of this entertainment fictional media as a tool for commenting and framing political and social life. In this case, the lens the TV show implies is critical.

In conclusion, the quantitative analysis of *Chemi Tsolis Daqalebi* revealed a significant increase in politically and socially charged episodes as the series progressed amid the political and social shifts in Georgia, centering particularly on issues related to state politics, corrupt media and criminal gangs. Through content coding the specific socio-political topics were identified as follows: Gender roles, unemployment, emigration, domestic violence,

homophobia, workplace discrimination, social class, criminal gangs, corrupt media and state politics. Content analysis in subsequent sections will explore into the specific ways in which the series engaged with and critiqued real social and political issues, shedding light on its significant role in influencing public perceptions and opinions.

Chapter 4: Qualitative analysis of socio-political content in *Chemi Tsolis Daqalebi*

After the quantitative breakdown of the five seasons of *Chemi Tsolis Daqalebi*, certain patterns, like the increased socio-political content and the diversified focus on specific social or political matters in different seasons, became apparent. This chapter aims to provide a discourse analysis of the topics covered in particular episodes in relation to the contemporary social and political situation in Georgia. The growing display of social and political themes is contextualized through references to political life of the country in the period studied. Additionally, the ways *Chemi Tsolis Daqalebi* comments on, frames, and displays social issues and state politics are explored through the lens of the political relevance of entertainment media. Ultimately, answering the research questions of which social and political narratives *Chemi Tsolis Daqalebi* transmits and how they utilize tools for bringing the political realm closer to the citizen.

4.1 Contextualizing thematization of gender roles

The evolving political climate and social dynamics in Georgia during the 2011–2015 period, as reflected in the changing narratives and themes explored in the TV series *Chemi Tsolis Daqalebi*, demonstrate the power of entertainment television to comment on and frame events of political and social significance. This discourse analysis starts with the first two seasons that aired in 2011 and 2012. As we can see in Chapter 3, these two seasons suggest a relatively limited focus on overt political themes such as elections or political figures, with the narrative primarily centered around interpersonal relationships and family dynamics within the main characters' lives. The social issues mentioned during this period are interwoven into the interpersonal narratives of characters' lives and serve as a tool for portraying the real life of young Georgian people, including the conversations and experiences of social challenges like immigration, poverty, and gender roles in their daily lives.

Gender roles that stay prominent throughout the five seasons of *Chemi Tsolis Daqalebi* are first reinforced with the introduction of the initial cast. The audience is introduced to three childhood best friends: Nina, a housewife with two children whose husband does not allow her to work; Kato, a divorced events manager with an abundance of romantic interests; and Tina, a feminist working at an NGO as a lawyer in domestic gender-based violence cases. By showcasing the archetypes of these three women navigating

their lives in Georgian society, the TV series reinforces or, on the contrary, breaks the gender norms prevailing in 2011–12's Georgia. Badurashvili et al.'s (2009) study that examines the distribution of gender roles in Georgian families shows that in 2009, 25% of surveyed men were solely responsible for family budgets, in contrast to women receiving an allowance from their male partners. In addition, Sumbadze's (2012) study of Generation and Values demonstrates that 62% of 18–24-year-olds agreed that family decisions should be made according to men's wishes; this percentage increases to 66.7% among 40–50-year-olds and further rises to 77.5% for those aged 60–70.

A feminist, working single woman in this environment was an innovative take on the usual framing of independent women as the points of ridicule in mass entertainment media (Scharrer, 2013). However, the portrayal of gender roles in *Chemi Tsohis Daqalebi* has not remained unchanged throughout these seasons. In the first season, the audience is faced with elements of traditional gender roles. This is the case when feminist Tina is not able to deal with a mouse infestation at her house without the help of a man or when Nina is offered a job by an acquaintance but quits after a day because it appears to be harder than being a housewife. The shift towards showcasing gender roles comes in season 5, such as when Nina's family hires a male nanny who manages to be better at his job than all his previous female counterparts. While Nina's traditional family finds it hard to cope with this fact, the viewer is made to sympathize with the nanny and his supporters. Eventually, the family also comes around.

The shift from affirming to breaking gender roles does not imply a shift in the attitudes of the producers. *Chemi Tsohis Daqalebi* heavily utilizes the satirical form to communicate its message. The earlier instances of affirmed gender roles could be classified as a satirical tool for showcasing the warped reality of gender equality in Georgia. Furthermore, this instance highlights the pedagogical nature of this TV Show framing a social issue in a way for the viewers to sympathize with the democratic standpoint is an example of framing for connection. Helping the viewers sympathize and identify with characters and forge the public's interest in socially charged topics (Nærland, 2020).

4.2 Social class, unemployment and emigration

In addition to gender roles, episodes in the first and second seasons explore social class job insecurity, emigration and poverty. These interconnected topics suggest a web of

commentary on contemporary struggles around social class and economic insecurity in Georgian society. The TV series highlights the shortcomings of the state in terms of unequal job market by showcasing the lengthy process of securing a job with social stratification and subsequent immigration for employment purposes. One instance that highlights the framing of social elites is the meeting between Tina, the feminist, and her partner's parents, who are ridiculed and discredited as pretentious members of high-society. The forms of social class are further explored, for example, in an episode in season IV that portrays the life of a family living in a high-end district of Tbilisi. The show frames the upper class as a point of ridicule by portraying the family as having poor taste, being impolite, and unaware. Interestingly, the portrayal of the other side of the socio-economic spectrum - a poor family living in the suburbs is tied to a secondary and unlikable character: Tina's stepfather, whose son is a gambler with many children. The display of poverty is limited to him asking Tina's family for money and losing money in the casino or online-bets. Additionally, in season V, the audience is presented with a character who has a significant debt in the bank, an ex-husband of a woman from the friend group. By the nature of his being an unemployed ex-husband living off of his mother's money, he can be considered an unlikable character. This suggests a social class bias that portrays people of lower class status as lazy and irresponsible, while upper class is characterized as ridiculously luxurious.

In addition to these portrayals, the episodes of the first five seasons of *Chemi Tsolis Daqalebi* present topics of job insecurity and emigration in relation to financial difficulties. Dato, the husband of one of the main characters, loses his job and decides to join forces with his friends to start an unsuccessful pig farm business. An interesting correlation can be observed in this storyline between unemployment and gender roles - when he loses his job and spends more time at home, his daughter inquires if he is her new mother – suggesting that in Georgian society, masculinity is tied to employment while caring is tied to femininity. Struggles with employment are present throughout all five seasons explored in this thesis, including in relation to workplace discrimination.

Emigration is one of the phenomena presented on two separate occasions during the run of the first five seasons of *Chemi Tsolis Daqalebi*. First, the audience learns that the mother of one of the main characters, boy crazy Kato, is a Georgian emigrant in the USA. From a conversation Kato and her are having, we learn that she works as a caretaker of an

older American person, again highlighting the caring role of a woman even while employed. According to the survey conducted by the national statistics office of Georgia in 2008, one in every ten Georgian families has one or more members working as migrants abroad, sending their wages home. In the scope of the survey, 7,000 Georgian families were interviewed in 2008. The survey concluded that 75.5% of people emigrated for reasons connected to their inability to secure a job in Georgia or other types of financial difficulties (სარალოძე, 2017). Showcasing a member of a family in immigration can be interpreted as drawing attention to the job market crisis in Georgia at that time or as a mere depiction of reality, where every 10th family has a member working abroad. Another depiction of immigration is displayed to the viewer when Dato, Nina's husband's sister Tea, who lives in the Netherlands with her husband, comes back to Georgia and marries a Georgian man, Bacho. Throughout the episodes, the audience learns that Bacho merely wanted a reason to immigrate to the Netherlands. In this instance, Bacho is portrayed as a mercantile fraud who is plotting to leave Georgia in search of a better life through a fake marriage, though his life does not appear to be all that bad. While Bacho is a clear anti-hero of this story, many Georgians resort to illegal emigration primarily because they see it as the sole salvation from financial difficulties (ჯაშიაშვილი, 2020).

The first five seasons of *Chemi Tsolis Daqalebi* to some extent display a culture of poverty, socio-economic divides, and emigration, though in the majority of the cases the blame is put on the person in need. This approach aligns with the political orientation of the TV channel, which, by the nature of the TV being controlled audio-visual media (Hartley, 2008), has a say in what gets airtime and what does not. While, as mentioned earlier, *Rustavi 2* at that time self-identified as a television critical to the government, likely to favor the right leaning *United National Movement*. The underlying alignment of *Georgian Dream* and *UNM*, mentioned in earlier chapters, leaves out pressing social and economic decline and poverty while pursuing specific ideas of “backward” socialism and glorious free market capitalism, alienating the financially disadvantaged (Gagyi & Ivancheva, 2017).

4.3. Violence against marginalized groups

The warped idea of gender equality in Georgian society has been present all through the five seasons of *Chemi Tsolis Daqalebi*, in some cases enacted in everyday conversations

while other times through the portrayal of gendered and domestic violence. The first depiction of domestic violence in an episode of season II is displayed as a misunderstanding, when Neliko, Tina's mother, gives herself a bruise by hitting a broom in her eye. The people around her are convinced that this was her husband's doing, though no one intervenes. Season III further explores topics of family violence when it opens with the display of Nina's child, Jeko, being hit by his grandmother for not coming home on time from a walk with friends. "I'm on the way to getting justice; justice will punish the family member who physically or mentally harasses the child," we hear from Jeko as he is getting ready to call the police. The introduction of a new character, Natashka, a school friend of the main characters, further thematicizes the context of domestic violence. Her violent husband from Gonio, a seaside town in Georgia, from whom she is running away and going back throughout the third season, is portrayed as a composite character of violent men using the classical tools of gaslighting and manipulation to lure Natashka back to their family. Additionally, violence is presented at the workplace of one of the main characters, Tina, who is employed by the non-governmental organization "Ardabagi," which specializes in cases of domestic violence. One of her cases concerns a victim of domestic violence, Nino, who arrives in Tbilisi from another region and sues her husband. The episodes take the viewer through the judicial hearings. This story critically addresses the idea of a victim going back to the abuser but presents a happy ending in the form of court proceedings and the survivor obtaining proportionate measures of a restraining order and custody of her children. The last storyline centering on domestic violence is that of Kato, one of the main characters who married her high school admirer Dito. Dito is a member of a criminal gang, an issue that will be explored below. Throughout the timeline of *Chemi Tsolis Daqalebi* Kato and Dito form the most important romantic union of the show. This changes when, in the last episode, Kato learns that Dito cheated on him during a work trip. Upon being confronted, Dito becomes aggressive and hits Kato. "I will not cry or be depressed like Nina. I have literally nothing to beg of Dito Sharashenidze." We hear Kato say to herself in the mirror as the last phrase of the season foreshadowing a divorce. The two cases of violence, against Natashka and Nino, portray abusers who are not from the capital, have scarcer financial sources, and have a lower understanding and acceptance of gender equality. While this suggests a link between the culture of poverty and violence, portraying

people of lower cultural and financial class as violent abusers, with the example of Dito, the series emphasizes that everyone can find themselves in this situation.

The year 2013, apart from political change, saw a shift in social perceptions of domestic violence. While according to a survey in 2010, 78% of respondents in Georgia believed that domestic violence should not be discussed publicly (Javakhishvili et al, 2010), in 2013, more than half deemed it unacceptable and punishable by law (Sumbadze, 2013). Being terrorized by their male family members is something many Georgian women are familiar with, as heteropatriarchal gender roles and discrimination are part of their lives. “Men and women should not be equal. Men should have their functions, women theirs,” is a statement by one of the respondents in a survey conducted in rural areas of Georgia (Sumbadze, 2008). The topic of domestic violence was so tabooed that in the years of 2005 to 2010 only 11 articles covered the topic in the print media (Javakhishvili et al., 2010). Georgia had implemented the anti-domestic-violence law in 2006 that criminalized domestic violence which was later amended in 2009 and 2013 to include the gender aspects of it (Javakhishvili & Jibladze, 2017).

Considering the lack of representation of domestic violence in non-entertainment media and the opinion shift of the general public displayed by two surveys, the role of *Chemi Tsolis Daqalebi* in taking up the issue appears remarkable. Showing the patterns and pathways to escape violent situations, *Chemi Tsolis Daqalebi* serves as a manual for those in similar situations. Jeko’s speech about calling the police is reminiscent of an anti-violence ad that calls upon the victims to notify the necessary organs, while Nino’s story highlights the existence and importance of NGOs specializing in rescuing victims of violence. By siding with the victims, *Chemi Tsolis Daqalebi* emphasizes the problematic aspects of violence and the beliefs existing in Georgian society. By incorporating this issue with interesting plotlines, especially concerning the characters the audience grew to love, like Kato, *Chemi Tsolis Daqalebi* can incite the public’s interest and contribute to formulating their opinion. The portrayal of domestic violence is a good example of framing a hero and an anti-hero. Through the words and actions of the heroes, *Chemi Tsolis Daqalebi* communicates the possible freedoms and responsibilities of people and aids the democratic discourse and the public’s interest and understanding of the spheres of law, politics, and social justice (Nærland, 2020).

Apart from domestic violence, gender-based discrimination and violence are topics explored in the scope of the first five seasons of *Chemi Tsolis Daqalebi*. Natashka, the woman who had experienced domestic violence from her husband, is left single after her husband gets in jail for starting a fight. The husband appoints one of his male friends to “look after” Natashka, which means to control and terrorize her every move. The appointment of a “deputy husband” to take care of Natashka further underlines the perceived passive social position of women and displays the patterns prevailing in rural Georgia.

4.4 Homophobia and workplace discrimination

Alongside the financial and gender inequality issues in Georgian society, homophobia and sexuality based discrimination occurred frequently in 2011-2014’s Georgia. Prime example of this is the Pride March of 2013, where thousands of violent men called upon by the orthodox church violently attacked LGBTQ+ activists (Gegeshidze & De Waal, 2021). The first time *Chemi Tsolis Daqalebi* introduced a seemingly queer character was in season II, although the character was rather “queer-coded”, i.e. coded as queer without explicitly confirming their identity (Veera, 2023). Kato’s coworker, Tornike, is a feminine man, works in the office with only girls, gossips, and engages with them on equal terms - a deviation from the archetype of the Georgian man. Season II never addressed his sexual identity directly, though in conversations about his partners, gendered language is avoided. The Lack of grammatical gender and gendered pronouns in Georgian language proved advantageous in avoiding clarity of his sexual preferences. In the first feature film, *Chemi Tsolis Daqalis Qortsili*, which directly follows the events of season II, the queer identity of the character is confirmed. In a revealing scene, Tornike confesses his feelings to his male boss, who responds with disgust and further terrorizes Tornike in the course of the third season. The film and subsequent seasons constitute a turning point when *Chemi Tsolis Daqalebi* became more explicitly socially and politically charged, commenting on and exploring issues of sexual politics and identity. The third season is when the framework of the TV show shifts from a mere sit-com to being more socially and politically oriented.

Homophobia is further explored in season three on a personal and institutional level. The main characters, Nina, Kato, and Tina, and their friend Natashka, are discussing Kato’s queer co-worker when Kato and Natashka act actively homophobic. Kato devastatingly tells her friends what a tragedy it is “when you think a person is normal and he turns out to be gay.”

Natashka supports this narrative and shares that her husband has participated in a homophobic attack in their hometown. Tina, the feminist, scolds her friends for their opinions and tells them that “violence is a tragedy, not being gay.” Nina, a housewife, supports her “Gay is also a human,” the audience hears, though when she’s asked whether or not she would want to have a gay child, she adamantly refuses such a possibility. This conversation presents some of the attitudes of Georgian people at the time. For example, the 2011 Caucasus Barometer survey found that 88% of the Georgian population deemed homosexuality unacceptable. While homophobia in Georgia is not uniform or unchanging, it is important to consider the role of the orthodox church that supports and motivates hate groups to act violently towards LGBTQ+ people, utilizing hate-speech and emphasizing “traditional values.” In the political dichotomy discussed in earlier chapters, pro-Western opposition is openly condemning homophobia, while pro-Russian political forces play on the fear that western countries will legalize same-sex unions that, as they claim, will lead to immorality in Georgia (Mestvishvili et al., 2017).

The discussion around this topic was exacerbated when, in the framework of the association agreement with the European Union and subsequent visa liberalization, Georgia was advised to implement laws against all forms of discrimination. The Georgian Orthodox Church met this proposition with strong opposition. In cooperation with conservative groups, they recommend excluding "sexual orientation" from the incomplete list of grounds for discrimination. Regardless, the law passed in May 2014 and includes the prohibition of discrimination based on language, religion, and sexual orientation (Ioanna Sakellaraki, 2014). In response to this, *Chemi Tsohis Daqalebi* presented a two-faceted storyline regarding systemic homophobia and workplace discrimination. After Tornike declares his love to his homophobic boss, he is faced with daily abuse in his workplace. The boss questions and undermines every decision he makes, disregards his achievements, and overall treats him unfairly. This treatment culminates in the boss’s decision to fire him. Tornike stands up for himself, approaches the company lawyer, and asks for his worker rights to be safeguarded. The company lawyer is then shown to talk to Tornike's boss:

***Lawyer:** You seemed to be very happy with Tornike’s performance, and now you talk about him with such disgust, so I understand what the matter is. Listen to me carefully: You don’t need gays at work, and I don’t need homophobes, scandals, or injustice.*

Tornike's boss: *You have a weird perception of justice. Yesterday I learned that Tornike, who I fired, is still at work and is working on presentations.*

Lawyer: *Why did you not ask who let him stay and why?*

Tornike's boss: *Here, everyone is someone's protégé... Gays also have lobbyists*

Lawyer: *For you, the most important thing should be the result, not the orientation of the person giving you the result. Tornike stays at work. You should continue working and stop interfering with other people's private lives.*

The depiction of the company lawyer as a respectable professional who is ready to stand up for the ones discriminated against at the workplace can help strengthen the importance of anti-discrimination law. This example once again highlights the capability of *Chemi Tsolis Daqalebi* to bring important socio-political matters close to people's everyday life. Similarly to other storylines, the audience is guided as to who to support and sympathize with.

In the same season, another storyline on workplace discrimination conveys the position of *Chemi Tsolis Daqalebi* as a supporter of anti-discrimination law. When Tina's stepfather, Avto, invites his coworkers and a boss to his house for dinner, his boss inappropriately acts towards Tina, asking her for her phone number and touching her nonconsensually after she refuses him multiple times. Tina does not accept his advances and harshly rejects him. The next day, Avto loses his job. This angers Tina, and she goes to his office to confront the boss. Tina, sitting in frame in front of a European Union flag and Avto's boss in front of a Georgian flag, as representatives of wishes and aspirations, proceed to have a conversation.

Boss: *Are you here to fight?*

Tina: *Yes, can I?*

Boss: *I don't have time to talk to hysterical women.*

Tina: *You will have to listen to me. Why did you fire Avto Natsvlshvili?*

Boss: *Budget cuts.*

Tina: *I think he appeared to be in the middle of private vengeance, and I will make sure to have a proper reaction. I guess you think being the head of a department is an unmeasurable power. I will make sure to notify the court, law, NGOs, and media so that you will no longer be able to sack people due to private matters.*

Boss: *Why are you threatening me?*

Tina: *I'm not threatening you, just warning you: don't make people lose their jobs due to your private problems.*

As a result of this conversation, Avto gets to keep the job, and the audience is reminded of the importance of leverage when faced with workplace discrimination. The choice of a traditional, heterosexual man, Avto, as the victim is interesting in contrast to Tornike. These storylines complement each other and emphasize that the anti-discrimination law can be useful for everyone. Different storylines centering on the same issue, as in the case of domestic violence or workplace discrimination, create a diverse picture and manage to bring the topic closer to the viewer.

4.5 Criminal groups, corrupt media, and state politics

As displayed in the quantitative breakdown in chapter 3, the percentage of politically and socially oriented episodes surged in the third season. The third season follows the events after the first film, *Chemi Tsolis Daqalis Qortsili*, which, in the scope of this study, is considered one episode of the TV show. This film is focused on the wedding between Kato and Dito and suggests an insight into various Georgian traditions and customs. In the last minutes of the film, Dato, Nina's husband, gets a call during the wedding, goes up on the stage, and announces, "They gave us MAP." Subsequently, a black screen appears on which the acronym is spelled out: "MAP: a NATO membership action plan." while the abbreviation was frequently featured in Georgian media and public discourse, only few people were aware of what it actually stands for. Its association with Kato and Dito's wedding this narrative links the reception of MAP with joy, celebration, and happiness, similar to a wedding, and signifies the shift of *Chemi Tsolis Daqalebi* from a socially aware sitcom to becoming a political commentator.

After this instance, the sphere of state politics and governance enters the field of *Chemi Tsolis Daqalebi* in season V and heavily dominates it. Events in this season unfold following the second film, *Chemi Tsolis Daqali Kinoshi*, which centers on Kato playing a role in a film made by her most recent admirer. At the end of the film, Kato's ex-husband, whom she divorced due to domestic abuse, falls into the river Mtkvari in a car and presumably dies. The ex-husband, Dito, is a member of a highly respected criminal group of socially successful

businessmen who often resort to unlawful behavior to prosper their business and private lives, rarely getting in trouble for it. This arrangement is reminiscent of the first period of post-USSR breakup as defined by Khelaia and Chivadze (2021), when power was distributed between old state nomenklatura representatives, political elites, and criminal groups. Dito's group is present throughout the five seasons, where the plotlines connect them to a display of the power dynamics between them and other businesspeople as well as their overall violent and misogynist conduct. Dito's violence towards Kato is but one example. In season three, for example, the group chains down a man who was bothering a girl this group respects. They held the man hostage for days, abusing and harassing him. A similar narrative shift, as with gender roles, is visible here, from portraying the group as neutral or likable in a satiric manner to openly condemning their behavior. Criminal groups are part of Georgia's everyday street life, where young boys are lured into a street authority, bringing them to the life of violence, lawlessness, and trouble. Terms like *Kanonieri Kurdi*, referring to a man who enjoys money and power on the street or *dzveli bichebi* to denote respected teenagers who aspire to reach the level of *Kanonieri Kurdi* are still part of Georgian vocabulary today (Zakharova, 2015). Presenting his type of clans as unattractive and emphasizing the issues of violence connected with them can forge the public's interest in problematizing gangs (Nærland, 2020).

Season V of *Chemi Tsolis Daqalebi* opens up with the display of a newscast reporting on the deaths of Dito and his gang members as a result of a road accident. "According to proven gossip," we hear from the news anchor, placing the news report in the world of satire. Throughout the season, the portrayal of the media as a corrupt and untrustworthy institution prevails. With the introduction of Anka, another girl who joins the main girl's group, certain relevant characters appear. Anka has an affair with a married politician, Tsotne Tsotashvili. Most of the representation of state politics is presented through his career as a politician. The display of private affairs of the politician puts this storyline in the soap framework, explored by Van Zoonen (2004) as a tool for making the sphere of state politics more interesting to a general viewer. Tsotne belongs to the fictional party "*ura patriotebi*," a term to describe people of radical nationalist sentiments in Georgian language. The audience sees Tsotne in a professional setting for the first time during a talk show where they are discussing the law his party initiated, prohibiting building anything but churches on the borders of Georgia. "You don't want to support my vision because it's crossing your business that you have in the name

of your mother-in-law”, the audience hears from Tshotne before the two opposing sides start a heated argument. The conflict ends as soon as the live broadcasting ends, and the two politicians are seen to shake hands and act friendly, highlighting the performative nature of politics. Even if, on the surface, the politicians seem to disagree and fight with each other, in many cases, they both benefit from such discussions. Portraying themselves as adamant supporters of different topics, in this case, the law about building churches. Similarly to this, the two sides of the Georgian political spectrum, who vocally hate each other, also benefit from this rivalry. By discrediting *UNM* and acting on the fear that people have of them coming back to power, *GD* manages to keep the ruling position. *UNM*, on the other hand, enjoys the position of the main opposition party and demotivates the creation of new forces by emphasizing this binary conflict and the lack of space for new parties (Gegeshidze & De Waal, 2021).

The trend of discrediting the seriousness of political affairs as mere play continues all throughout the season. In one of the most telling moments, Tshotne sneaks into the parliament building, where the scene was actually filmed, and delivers a lengthy speech on his political beliefs and Georgian national pride before getting interrupted by the calls of his mistress Anka. He says:

“I stand here and watch how my homeland is destroyed. I stand here and have a plan to save my homeland. We need to lock up our country. Do you remember, my Georgians, how it was in the old Georgian fairy tale? A bird should not chirp above and an ant below. We are surrounded by foreign words, foreign people, foreign products, and foreign qualities, and everything was destroyed. Soon we will probably be weakened, unsuccessful and devoid of our own history and, what is the biggest trouble, devoid of our future.”

The eerie atmosphere of the empty parliament and a mistress interrupting a speech about traditional values puts Tshotne at a point of ridicule and insincerity. His discreditation is not left merely to the viewer, since in the middle of the season, Tshotne received a ransom note called “Patriot in Love,” consisting of his and Anka’s leaked sex tape. The young man who is blackmailing Tshotne asks for 5000 Georgian Lari and for him to go on live television and support marriage equality. He does as instructed and justifies his support of marriage equality

by the fact that “the government will know exactly who is taking part in this abnormal union.” Soon after, he was kicked out of his party and founded a new party called “Eclectic Georgia.” The portrayal of politics or the political sphere without principles can contribute to the formation of public opinion and distrust in government leaders. Irony is used frequently to show the insincere nature of politicians, commenting on them in an unfavorable light.

In order to popularize his new party, Tsothe decides to write a song and create a video clip, bringing together media populism and politics. Ironically, the song is called “Homeland, My Eclectic,” and it features churches, people on the street, and him helping everyone out. The last shot shows him kissing the portrait of his family and putting it next to the orthodox icons. The clear discrepancy between his personality and the persona he puts up for the public becomes readily available, further highlighting the performative character of politics. The final performance in this season takes place when, with the aim of restoring his respect and support after the scandals mentioned earlier, Tsothe hires a team of experts who suggest that he act as if saving a person from drowning. Unfortunately for him, another person from the street turns out to be faster and successfully saves the hired actress. In the midst of professional as well as personal downfalls, Tsothe decides to go on live television: “No one wants to hear the truth; no one wants to hear the lies. I am tired of everyone, and I am resigning. Do whatever you please, popularize whomever you want (to the journalist), fuck all of you.” He then proceeds to leave the broadcast live as well as the city, go to his village, and lay in grass as the final shot of season five.

Corrupt media is also a topic explored in the scope of season five. The relationship between journalists and politicians is portrayed as informal party, and complex. For example, when a law suggested by Tsothe regarding the churches, is stolen by another party he casually calls one of the channels and tells them precisely how to cover the story - “mention that the law was originally initiated by us.” In other cases, the media is a democratizing force. When Tsothe goes to a channel and offers them money to change the narrative of a story about him, the media records his requests and broadcasts them on live television. Some allusions to Georgian media are made. When the fictitious paper *Aghmart-Dagbmarti* (uphill-downhill) published an article called “Tsothe Tsothashvili is a faggot not only by soul but also bodily,” the audience might think of *Asaval-Dasavali* (going up and down), who is renowned for their hate-filled headlines. TV channels *Bedniereba* (happiness) and *NegaTV* can also be associated

with the channels Imedi (belief) and *Rustavi 2*, respectively. *Imedi* is a government-supported TV channel that mainly centers on the news that is profitable for the reputation of the government, leaving out the critical commentary. *Rustavi 2* is positioned as a critical media outlet, usually covering the negative aspects of political affairs. *Chemi Tsolis Daqalebi* was aired on *Rustavi 2*, the prototype of which in the fictional world is NegaTV. It's important to highlight that NegaTV is not presented as better than Bedniereba (the prototype of Imedi), but rather both of the fictional TV channels are characterized as corrupt. The illusion of independent media that does not follow the party interest does not exist in these seasons of *Chemi Tsolis Daqalebi*, which is not the case in the real Georgian mediascape. Independent media existed during these years, though it was far less popular than channels like *Rustavi 2* or *Imedi*.

Chemi Tsolis Daqalebi comprises a fictionalized media that is concerned with social and political topics that according to Nærland (2020) can mobilize attention towards socio-political issues. Specifically, the two functions of fictional media that he mentioned can be observed with *Chemi Tsolis Daqalebi*: *charging* and *deepening*. Showing the human sides of politicians, like having an affair or family, helps viewers identify with them making them more involved in these processes. Additionally, display of fictional political reality, helps the audience make sense of the real-life political realm. Furthermore, as Machado-Borges (2007) argues, fictionalized media can be a powerful tool for commenting on real-life socio-political matters, especially in the non-democratic states where media freedom and plurality is not granted. The politicization of *Chemi Tsolis Daqalebi* after the change in government might indicate that the Tv series was used precisely for the reasons of commenting on and with the pretense of fictionalization.

4.6. Conclusion

This chapter explored the socio-political narratives presented in the TV series *Chemi Tsolis Daqalebi* and examined how these narratives reflect the socio-political climate in Georgia from 2011 to 2015. Through content analysis, the chapter reveals how the series evolved from a focus on personal and family dynamics to addressing broader social and political issues.

The initial seasons primarily centered on interpersonal relationships, subtly integrating social issues such as gender roles, emigration, poverty, and unemployment, highlighting the gender stereotypes, financial difficulties, and social class biases prevalent in the country. As the series progressed, it increasingly addressed explicit socio-political themes, including domestic violence, underscoring the importance of legal protection and societal support for victims. display of homophobia and workplace discrimination highlighted both personal and systemic discrimination, emphasizing the need for anti-discrimination laws and the importance of standing up against injustice in the workplace. The primary focus of the last season on politics and media displayed the insincere nature of Georgian political and media spheres.

Chemi Tsolis Daqalebi effectively used satire and dramatization to make complex socio-political matters accessible and relatable to a broad audience. By humanizing and personalizing these issues, the series helped foster public interest and engagement, encouraging viewers to sympathize with the characters and, by extension, with the real-life issues they represent. Furthermore, while presenting the fictional media landscapes and usage of wordplay, the series allowed for links between the real media outlets and the fictional ones to be drawn.

Conclusion

This thesis has explored the intersection of entertainment and politics through the lens of the Georgian television series *Chemi Tsolis Daqalebi* (My Wife's Girlfriends) between 2011 and 2015, a time of political changes from the *United National Movement* being the ruling party to *Georgian Dream* claiming this position after the parliamentary and presidential elections in 2012 and 2013, respectively. The thesis is grounded in research that addresses the idea of television in the post-broadcast era as a relevant tool continuing to influence and affect the public. Additionally, the research explores the political relevance of entertainment fiction and the power it holds in inciting the public's connection to the sphere of politics. The literature detailing the political and media arenas in Georgia is also considered. By analyzing the show's social and political contents, the specific issues tackled and addressed, their frequency, and providing some links to political developments and occurrences in Georgia at that time, the analysis provides new insights into how entertainment television can reflect on and comment on political and social realities in Georgia. The quantitative analysis of *Chemi Tsolis Daqalebi* identified specific socio-political narratives and showed a significant evolution in the portrayal of social and political themes. Here, the coding of the episodes showed that initially, the series focused primarily on personal and interpersonal dynamics, with limited direct engagement with political issues. However, as the series progressed, there was a marked increase in the inclusion of political and social content, particularly after the 2013 elections. The increase in political criticism and display of social issues can be explained by the affiliation of the channel *Rustavi 2*, where the series were broadcast, with the newly formed opposition party *UNM*.

The textual analysis of selected episodes and interactions further elaborated the content and examined how *Chemi Tsolis Daqalebi* framed specific social and political issues. The series used satire and dramatization to comment on topics such as gender roles, homophobia, domestic violence, and media corruption. These portrayals were often reflective of real-life social and political issues, providing a critical lens through which viewers could engage with contemporary debates. The series' treatment of gender roles evolved from reinforcing traditional stereotypes to challenging them, particularly in later seasons. This shift mirrored broader societal changes in Georgia regarding gender equality and women's rights. For instance, characters like Nina were initially portrayed in traditional roles, but later seasons

depicted more progressive changes, such as Nina hiring a male nanny, which challenged traditional gender expectations. This relates to the function of the entertainment media, as defined by Nærland (2020), to engage viewers with socially important issues and forge the connection between a citizen and politics.

The multifaceted depiction of domestic violence reflected the struggles faced by women in Georgian society. Characters like Tina, who worked at an NGO focused on domestic violence, highlighted these themes and exemplified a positive role model in terms of outlook. Natashka and Nino, on the other hand, who repeatedly went back to their abusive husbands, were cast in unfavorable light. The series tackles homophobia by including LGBTQ+ characters and storylines. The character Tornike's experiences with discrimination at work and the conversations among main characters about LGBTQ+ issues highlighted the tension between traditional values and modern, progressive attitudes. This was particularly significant at the time, amid the controversy following the anti-discrimination law. The portrayal of these topics in *Chemi Tsolis Daqalebi* shows that the entertainment media can be used as a tool for commenting on social and political issues. Moreover, it can be used for transmitting harsher criticisms as it is, after all, fictional. By intertwining the commentary into the entertaining and interesting soap narrative, viewers who would not tune in for a news report or educational programme get exposed. Furthering the scope of people reached and educated on topics like domestic violence or homophobia.

The series critically portrayed biased media and political populism, often using satire. The character Tsothe Tsothashvili's involvement in media scandals and his superficial political maneuvers exposed the performative nature of politics and media-driven populism. This critique was presented humorously yet incisively, making it accessible to the audience. By framing and commenting on socially and politically charged topics, several concepts actualizing entertainment media in terms of political communication have been evident. *Chemi Tsolis Daqalebi* uses humor and dramatization to address serious political and social issues, making them accessible and engaging for a broad audience. Siding with the victims or the characters that support equality and democratic values, in my reading, shows how social issues are taken up in ways that are democratic and in alliance with euro integration.

Chemi Tsolis Daqalebi not only reflects the polarized and evolving political landscape of Georgia but also actively engages in commenting upon it. The series exemplifies the

concept of democratization, using entertainment as a vehicle for political and social commentary. By integrating political narratives into its storyline, the show educates viewers on democratic principles and civic responsibilities, aligning with the theoretical frameworks proposed by scholars like Hartley (2009), Van Zoonen (2004), Nærland (2019), and Machado-Borges (2007).

The findings of this thesis suggest that entertainment television can play a significant role in political journalism and civic engagement. *Chemi Tsolis Daqalebi* provides a valuable case study of how entertainment media can influence public perception and discourse, highlighting the importance of examining such media as potent tools for political communication. This thesis emphasizes the critical role of entertainment media in the cultural and political life of a nation, demonstrating its potential to educate, engage, and mobilize the public in meaningful ways and what I call soap opera politics.

There are also limits of what I could research: due to the extensive number of episodes (19 seasons, 903 episodes), this study only examined the first five seasons which included the critical period of 2011-2015 with the change of government in Georgia. This means, that the analysis cannot address more recent political and social developments. The initial trend I identified suggested that with every season, the percentage of politically and socially charged episodes increased, transforming the framework of the soap opera. Hence, it would be insightful to further analyze the series and see if this pattern has changed. Future research can be gathered around different transformative events in recent Georgian history, such as the 2016 and 2020 parliamentary elections, the 2018 presidential elections, or the raided Pride Parade in 2021 and the summer of protests following 2019 Gavrilov's night. The developments of Georgian mediascape, precisely the emergence of the TV channels *Mtavari* and *Formula*, where *Chemi Tsolis Daqalebi* is now televised, should also be considered.

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