

NATIONAL BELONGING IN POSTSOCIALIST GEORGIA: LIBERAL MULTICULTURALISM MEETS DZVELI TIFLIS OR OLD TBILISI

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Introduction

In this paper I will discuss the research that I conducted in Tbilisi with support from Title VIII funds through the American Councils for International Education. The combined research and language grant allowed me to investigate questions regarding recent changes in the Georgian social and political climate with respect to minorities. My plan was to investigate an initiative to incorporate Western liberal forms of multiculturalism into Georgian society. Multiculturalism in Georgia today finds itself within an overarching reform movement that contrasts with both earlier nationalism and the economic and moral stagnation of the Shevardnadze period. Specifically, the president Mikheil Saakashvili has proposed to make Georgia the “motherland of all its citizens” invoking a Georgian citizenship that is less invested in ethnic meaning than with a secular notion of citizenship that is more typically associated with the democracies in the West. The most concrete manifestation of this new orientation is the government’s ratification and adoption in 2009 of the “National Concept and Civil Integration Project ” (herein the National Concept), but in this paper I will additionally discuss how signs, symbols, and sentiments in heritage venues such as the museum can also reveal changing views of society.

Background

Within anthropology, I specialize in the role of representation and expressive practices and for this study, I focus my investigation on the heritage industry, in particular museums, touristic ventures, historical site development, public relations (PR) campaigns, and the reception to these phenomena by Georgians of all backgrounds. The national museum is an important venue of research within visual anthropology as it conveys the collaboration between state and the knowledge and creative industries to craft national culture through public exhibitions

(Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998). Unfortunately, because of the Georgian National Museum's ongoing renovation, I was unable to conduct the ethnography I originally intended for the central branch, which houses the well-known homoerectus finds from Dmanisi, Zezva and Mzia. Instead, I focused on the ethnographic museum, the wider net of Georgian arts and culture organizations, and local NGOs that dealt specifically with ethnic and social minorities.

Georgian culture industries find themselves in an interesting bind today. In order to be consistent with new state policies, they will have to continue with their popular post-Soviet project to build Georgia's cultural institutions while at the same time clarifying and building the role that all individuals play regardless of ethnic, confessional, and sexual orientation. This may not necessarily be mutually compatible considering that Georgians have been particular enthusiastic about Georgian culture building that predates the Soviet period and neglects hybrid or "oriental" Georgian traits. Although I did not find institutional leaders articulating this contradiction in words, I believe that certain offices, like the public ombudsmen, are spaces of contention in this former Soviet society. Today ordinary Georgian citizens must now recognize that his or her rights are as much as the rights of the next-door neighbor regardless of whether he or she is Armenian, Kurdish, Assyrian, Azeri, Ukrainian, homosexual or a Jehovah Witness.¹

I noticed in my discussions with Georgians, both leaders of NGOs and ordinary individuals, that although some may realize this complexity, others highlight the needs of ethnic Georgians only. The more aligned the person was to a Western civil rights orientation, the more able he or she was to collapse the two possibilities into one human rights context in which a single group's rights could be compatible with the rights of all citizens. This is why certain

¹ Public Movement Multinational Georgia [PMMG] lists 15 different ethnic communities: Armenians, Assyrians, Azeri, Bulgarians, Czechs, Germans, Greeks, Kurds-Yezidi, Latvians, Lithuanians, Ossetians, Polish, Russians and Ukrainians [<http://www.pmmg.org.ge>].

ethnic, sexual, or subculture community members did not deny their Georgianness but rather asserted that they could be X as well as Georgian.

It should be noted, however, that overall multiculturalism in its Western packaging is still a foreign concept for Georgians, considered an import, and incongruous with general trends in Georgian personal relations. This paper will review my interactions and observations in Tbilisi over the course of nine months, six of which were the funded portion by American Councils. I will address if these encounters present a picture that is consonant with a nation espousing to support and fully integrate all its citizens.

Establishing Multiculturalist Grounds in Georgia

Multiculturalism is a catch-all term that refers generally to ethnocultural diversity. But as Will Kymlicka warns us, it also risks misunderstanding because of the various permutations of social diversity that exist in the world (2007: 17). For our purposes, the kind of multiculturalism looked at here is the social doctrine, the ideology that prompts governments to recognize the citizenship rights and cultural identities of ethnic minority groups and create policies in their favor (Bennett, Grossberg & Morris 2005; Taylor 1995).

In Georgia, cultural diversity itself derives from a variety of historical events and geographic realities. Besides the insulating effect of the Caucasus Mountains, a topographical feature that has been shown elsewhere on the planet to maintain rather than eradicate differences, in Georgia demographic fallout from the waning Ottoman Empire, casualties from Soviet population policies, religious dissenters from both Europe and Russia, as well as close long-term ties with neighboring communities can explain why almost a fifth of the country is not an ethnic Georgian but belongs to over a dozen other communities (Kikodze and Godzerdishvili 2009).²

One could also maintain that in Georgia a certain Caucasian cosmopolitanism exists, particularly

² See footnote 1.

in the capital city, where it functions as repository of cultural influences. As the Georgian national tourism board describes:

“Not quite Asian and certainly not really Middle Eastern, yet not fully European either, Georgia is an exotic mixture of influences not seen anywhere else... To be sure, we Georgians are neither Russian nor Slavic, and our language is much older and from a different linguistic family” [<http://georgia.travel/culture/>].

It is this set of varied circumstances and long-standing intercultural relations that makes Georgia a good place to study multiculturalist policies.

In this dissertation, therefore, I choose to observe Georgian diversity where it finds itself in particularly close quarters, in the capital Tbilisi. I have found that Georgians see their city as a creative center and a source of tolerance, as this set of writers describe in an urban development plan: “The city is [or has] the creative integrity, it represents the unity based on the diversity of differences and interests” (Gunia-Kuznetsova et al. 2004).³ Georgian claims of tolerance go as far back as the 11th century to King David Aghmashenebeli, the Builder, who officially permitted Moslems to practice their dietary rules apart from the Orthodox Christian community (Interview with Beka Mindiashvili, Fall 2009). In fact, in the Georgian language “discrimination” has no Georgian counterpart while tolerance—*semwynareoba* meaning literally to “calm down”—does.⁴ Georgians are cognizant of racist episodes elsewhere in the world and will point out that the kind of atrocities that occurred in the heart of Europe in the 20th century have never existed in Georgia. Tbilisi is simply not a city to produce ghettos. As I was often told, “It is not a [a case of] ‘You are Armenian and I am Georgian.’” My

³ The writers are referring here to the “palimpsest” metaphor that is used elsewhere by critical theorist Zaal Andronikashvili. Andronikashvili is currently writing a book on the subject. See his abstract from the Spring 2007 conference “The Caucasus: Directions and Disciplines” at http://ceeres.uchicago.edu/Caucasus/Caucasus_abstracts.shtml.

⁴ Or one can use the adopted Western term “tolerantoba.”

hunch, therefore, is that by looking at multiculturalism as it exists in Tbilisi, one might learn what Georgia *already* knows about intercultural life rather than what it needs to be taught.

This idea of a tolerant Tbilisi dovetails happily with the goals of the new Georgian leadership who are eager to downplay evidence to the contrary.⁵ My study shows that compared to pre-Saakashvili times, Georgia is making inroads in their policies towards minorities by building the institutional infrastructure and putting programs into place that teach and promote a secular civil society. Put simply, Saakashvili articulates the reason for this: “The strength of a unified Georgia is its diversity” [<http://www.diversity.ge/eng/welcome.php>].

Civil Society Organizations and the Community Leader

Georgia’s intentions with respect to minorities and other underrepresented peoples is made clear by the sheer number of organizations dedicated to this issue. If one takes the whole tripartite of modern liberal principles—civil society, democracy-building, and human rights—then a plethora of organizations are at work in Georgia. Diversity.ge, the online clearinghouse of government activities and accomplishments, lists literally dozens of organizations and programs.

I met with officers of a variety of these kinds of NGO or public initiatives, including The Centre for Tolerance, run by Beka Mindiashvili and PMMG, Public Movement Multinational Georgia. The stated purpose of Mindiashvili’s centre is “to support the creation of tolerant, just, equal and peaceful environment; fight against discrimination on a religious and ethnic basis... and civic education” (Public Advocate’s Website). Housed under the auspices of Georgia’s Public Advocate which itself was instituted in the late 1990s with over a million dollars of support from

⁵ The two conflicts with Abkhazians and South Ossetians from the early 1990s endure as serious unsolved territorial issues, while the 2008 war with Russia has further exacerbated the impression that Georgia cannot solve its problems with minorities.

the UNDP, the Centre for Tolerance performs as a conduit to the government, advocating for the rights of nonGeorgian communities and publishing the journal “Solidareoba”. PMMG fulfills a similar function but additionally represents and educates these communities. Both associations left me with insights, contacts, and encouragement that the presence of minorities in Georgia is neither ignored nor are minorities sitting quietly waiting for the integration to come to them.

The directors and upper level administrators of these organizations are a younger (mid 40s seems to be the cut-off) and highly educated slice of Georgian society. They resemble what has been described as the “new” intellectuals, an NGO crowd that is financially supported by grants (Muhlfried 2005) and ideologically more “third sector” than entrepreneurial or civil servant (Tuite 2008). This demographic in fact describes Saakashvili and his Rose Revolutionaries. Many have diplomas gained overseas, speak foreign languages other than Russian, and their organizational websites are available in English. These NGO types have one ear tuned to the West, its priorities and expectations, and the other on Georgian realities. They are able to frame their organization’s profile in ways that immediately “make sense” to the foreign observer and are mindful of their presentation.

That is the distinct impression given to me when visiting the offices of Inclusive Foundation, whose leader had spent many parallel years maintaining a job at a Western European relief organization while building the first grassroots organization advocating for the rights of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transexual (LGBT) community in Georgia. My conversation with this community leader vascillated from queer theory, the fine distinctions between European organizations, and his childhood summers in Kakheti.

I also met with individual leaders of the newly organized ethnic *sabcho* or councils. These individuals were the equivalent of what in the United States we would call the ethnic

community leader. They are mostly in unpaid and voluntary positions within their community and can differ from the new intellectuals in their foreign language skills and overall social capital. Exceptions exist when these representatives are both members of a subaltern or minority group and a leader, which was the case of the aforementioned LGBT community leader. Yet they revealed important aspects of Georgian society with respect to age, education, and the hierarchies within minority groups. For example, one Azeri leader with political aspirations spoke to me as if rehearsing his talking points with respect to the National Concept and felt less inclined to share personal experiences. Older respondents emphasized Tbilisan loyalties and deemphasized conflict. All stayed clear of irreconcilable cultural traits and all spoke Georgian well. For example, although I can speak Turkish, the Azeri leader found discussing these particular issues easier in Georgian. Clearly these were mobilised advocates for their community, ready and eager to function within the newly emerging institutional environment of Saakashvili's government, quite a different case I am told than with the ethnic communities of the Georgian regions or provincial heartland.

Furthermore, it is important to keep in mind the nature of minority relations under socialism and how new forms are emerging in their wake. The rights of the minority were accorded through levels of autonomy within the greater community rather than inclusion, while those minorities who had with titular republics outside Georgian borders like Azeris and Armenians would in theory express national loyalties toward them and vice versa, , creating a disjunct between ethnicity and place of residence for these particular community members. For example, only with the passing of the National Concept did the longstanding practice of sending history textbooks from Baku and Erevan to the regional Azeri and Armenian schools stop, and this occurred only once Georgian history textbooks could be written in these languages. This

change in practice coincides with additional programs that are in the midst of implementation, like prep classes and college entrance exams in minority languages. The task of integrating Georgia's minorities, especially ones living outside Tbilisi, is comparable to walking out from a Soviet-imposed shadow and affects both Georgians and minorities alike. Further research is vitally needed to document these processes of integration and their reception by all parties in the project.

Georgian Heritage Development after 1989

I have shown a snapshot of Saakashvili's drive to inculcate civil society in Tbilisi, the city symbolic of Georgia's "tolerance". But outside of Saakashvili's pronouncements, what is the greater canon of Georgianness, the narrative of the nation? And, are multiple voices included in this story? In this next section I will describe the picture that is emerging and patterns of cultural representations in certain cultural venues, where the means of representation are reminiscent of Benedict Anderson's "Imagined Communities" (Anderson 1991). In other words, these are ideas about culture and nation that are conveyed through books, exhibits, historic representations, crafts development, arts festivals, and television productions. I will integrate into this discussion the sentiments of dozens of respondents, some of them interviewed formally using images carefully chosen from the environment to target feelings of belonging in Georgian cultural and national habits.

Building Georgia, old is new.

Georgian heritage development since the end of the Soviet Union can be summarised as a popular embrace of tradition, of romanticized pasts that existed prior to the Soviet period and it was not until opposition grew against the Shevardnadze government in the early 2000s that newness became something of its own force. The new leadership had a novel approach to

government, different ways of communicating, and in general they were younger (Shatirishvili 2003; Tuite 2008). During the Rose Revolution, for example, Paul Manning shows how a popular cartoon series *dardubala* actually formed an elemental part of the aura of change that ousted the Shevardnadze government (Manning 2007). But with few exceptions, the first half of Georgia's post-Soviet development and to a great extent even today the past engages the attention of both the young and old. From books, conferences, souvenirs, food and dance, it seems that Georgians see tradition as a way to confirm, clarify and underline what it is to be Georgian and for what reasons they strove for independence.

In Georgia, people have an uncomplicated relationship with culture that can be summarised with the simple question “Do you love our country?” This was a question I was asked often, once in particular by a young woman at the city festival Tbilisoba who was enthusiastically helping a face painter, greeting and ushering new customers to his stall. Her question was obviously rhetorical and not meant to elicit actual gripes or critical insights. This kind of question is meant to affirm all that the asker assumes is well-known and liked about Georgia: the hours-long feasting, limitless Georgian hospitality, colorful dances and bursts of song, and of course the wine. In Georgia, culture is still cool. A young person can wear the traditional clothes of his forefathers—the chokha—with pride, dance the traditional dances, sing in polyphony, and prefers to eat the mainstays of Georgian cuisine rather than or at least in tandem with innovations. To a great extent, many young people seem to be carrying on the social rules of conduct and intersocial behavior of his or her ancestors did.

I gathered a good understanding of young people's sentiments from supervising a three-month visual anthropology project with a group of Tbilisi State University students. This group of 18-20 year olds documented Tbilisoba and assembled photoessays based on the question

“Who (or What) represents Tbilisi?” I harnessed this young group’s energies in order to understand something about the priorities and sensibilities of young people who had experienced only an independent Georgia and could not remember the Soviet period. The group seemed unanimously comfortable in their “Georgian skin” and they were quick learners, eager to know more about semiotic methods and forms of representation. I found their creative projects significantly tuned to the effects of change and globalisation, not because these students were overtly critical of change or naively supportive of tradition but because these emerging signs of dissonance seemed to engage them intellectually. Although it is not difficult to find other young people who are critical of the system, and I did interview these kinds of respondents, the general impression during my fieldwork was of the prevailing admiration for Georgian culture as it is defined traditionally.

The sentiments of minority respondents in my sample did not resoundingly contradict those of the majority. Like Georgians, minorities too count the merits of Georgian practices, giving the impression overall that it was not problematic for them to engage and enjoy the Georgian feast, songs, friendships, dance and even some of the “light” Church activities (for instance performing the role of godmother or godfather during baptisms). The rule for both Georgians and minorities alike seems to be that one should not criticize Georgian practices. As one observer of Georgian minority politics observed, for a minority to speak too loudly is to invite the label of “unappreciative” which as minorities and still considered at one level of consciousness as “guests” on Georgian soil is considered a critical break of the code of hospitality, no small error in this part of the world (Broers 2008). I would add that for all Georgians, traditional practices have acquired an aura of immutability and it is often met with

criticism when one challenges the Georgianness of these practices, tries to create innovations, or rejects them outright (Crego 2007; Muhlfried 2005; Titsishvili 2009).

Small yet perceptible changes: Is this a multicultural turn?

As has been demonstrated in critical race and gender studies, what is absent in the popular imagination is as important as what is present. Therefore, it can be argued that the hegemonic presence of Georgianness in the arts, culture, and other expressive fields creates an environment that is not conducive to Objective 6 of the National Concept which is “to encourage participation of national minorities in cultural life of the country and support their cultural heritage” (<http://www.diversity.ge/eng/concept.php>). Still, over the course of researching this project and during the months I spent conducting fieldwork in Tbilisi, I noticed a slow but perceptible turn. This last section will use examples from three different organizations to show how this change is visible in Georgia and will comment on the possible relationship of these changes to the seeding of a new mindset in Georgia.

Tbilisi’s *Kafkasiuri Saxli* [Caucasian House] stands out as a Georgian NGO that has endured, enriched and been enriched over the course of approximately four decades of Georgian history. Started in the early 1970s by a Georgian historian and literary figure, the organization stands apart as a local NGO that has been from its inception devoted to thinking beyond and between borders. While the original purview of Caucasian House was to translate and disseminate Georgian literary masterpieces, its underlying mission was apparently something greater—to be a “hearth of free and democratic thinking”—and came into fruition through the thaw of the Soviet Union and with even greater clarity in today’s changing political environment and greater funding possibilities.⁶ With a grant from a German organization, *Kafkasiuri Saxli* has

⁶ See the website of the organization: <http://www.ccrghouse.ge/>

revamped its website and now sponsors crafts revitalization projects, arts education at a local school in Kakheti, an annual human rights-oriented film festival, and as before they continue their popular Thursday evening talks and publish diverse works and translations in many languages of the region.

Like other Georgians, the administrators of Caucasian House repeat the refrain that “We Georgians have always been friends with our neighbors” but go the remaining distance by promoting their arts, literature, and languages. Caucasian House is truly a ground-up organization that has expanded with the help of foreign funding. Yet, it differs slightly from other Georgian NGOs, which have been financially and ideologically backed by foreign organizations from their start. For instance, Caucasian House lacks a wide presence in the Georgian imagination in the way that perhaps Open Society Georgia does, an organization which is a go-to organization for jobs and grant opportunities. Older and better educated Georgians might recall the director of Caucasian House Naira Gelashvili’s tireless publication of diverse works of literature throughout the 80s and 90s, but they are not so familiar with what Caucasian House does today. As Kevin Tuite would say, these original Caucasian House founders are a form of the older intellectual, albeit with a cause that stretches the limits of Georgian heritage work, while its newer leaders, Naira’s daughter among them, continue and reconstruct these good works to fit the ideological environment of the 21st century context. I would claim that Caucasian House is truly embracing multiculturalist values yet doing it in an organic Georgian way.

What are the ties that keep local creative works in sync with the greater world around them? My fieldwork at *Georgian Arts and Culture Center* [GACC] allowed me to see how cultural heritage alone, no matter how unique and impressive, does not build the arts nor convey

its value to the outside world. Rather, a set of entrepreneurial and networked leaders create these links through locating fund, forging collaborations, and remaining cognizant of the market. So today, Georgian arts are becoming less a sequestered and untouchable domain but making their way into the popular imagination as profane objects in the home and office and generating income at multiple levels of Georgian society, for the artist, shops, and arts organizations. GACC has also introduced a cross-cultural project with next door neighbor Armenia funded by British Council. It hosts the entire project on its website and by doing so promotes not only Georgian creative practices but South Caucasian arts overall, building multiculturalism into the everyday in a fluid and seamless way.

In Georgia, as newer forms of expression begin to coexist with traditional ones, it does not have to mean that Georgian expression has been precluded. In principle, they can and should coexist together in the “rights to culture” environment that is the basis of liberal multiculturalist philosophies. That is why today, quite a lot of young people are embracing their Orthodox Christian roots, while at the same time others are experimenting with controversial styles and ways of being. “This is my right,” they claim in short clips featured at the TeenTV webblog. Every year since 2005, Internews Georgia Youth Program has been running My Express youth video production project in order to give high schoolers a chance to write and create their own short video productions. The stories they have chosen and produced—about same sex relationships, Halloween parties, skaters and rockers, the controversial sex show “Night with Shorena”—have actually created a lot of controversy within Georgian society, even prompting a so-called raid by the conservative watchdog organization “Orthodox Parents Union” during a post-production party.

Internews is in fact situated directly in the wider neoliberal discourse that is the subject of my dissertation: It is a cross-cultural learning project funded by USAID and the British Embassy in order to engage the publics of all three South Caucasian states, Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan. Every year, a group of comparable young people is chosen from each country and given intercultural learning workshops in a neutral summer camp setting while taught the basics of journalism and TV production. Then upon returning to their societies, they act as “intercultural ambassadors” and apply their newly acquired skills through television production. Basically, therefore, Internews can be called either “art at the service of a greater social cause”, or evidence that liberal philosophies have crept into post-Soviet life in ways that are not entirely sanctioned by the local publics.

Conclusion

My conclusions about the state of multiculturalism in Georgia remain tentative as I must still review in detail, translate in some cases, and synthesize nine months of field data. My goal was to talk to as many constituents as possible, minority and Georgian, NGO and public, local and foreign. I believed I succeeded and where time has not permitted a deeper acquaintance with certain individuals or venues, the process of analysis and writing will fill this deficit.

Nonetheless, I will present here some key points that should be taken into consideration while moving forward and for others to take heed when approaching this issue.

First, pragmatic conditions play a large role in determining the reception to multiculturalism in Georgia. Georgians are still highly charged with the task of assuring their welfare. Like in the difficult early years of independence, many people are concerned with jobs, food, and the bare necessities of life and this guides their feelings about who should receive benefits. For instance, when posed the question of whether the disabled should be accommodated or given preferential treatment, most respondents although sympathetic could not imagine the

government or even private enterprise according preference to a disabled citizen over a deserving and able-bodied individual, Georgian or other.

This would equally apply to the way that political conditions determine minorities' sense of belonging and vice versa. Most nonGeorgian respondents acknowledged a difference in climate between the administrations of earlier periods, in particular Gamsakhurdia's time, and when Saakashvili came into power. They believed that either material conditions were finally going to improve or that the force of the new president's political campaign would inspire a less discriminatory social atmosphere or both. Apparently there has even been some return migration. In at least one formal interview and from several encounters, I learned that minority residents of Tbilisi had tried life elsewhere, in Armenia, the Ukraine, Germany, or England but that these Tbilisians had returned in or around the time of the Rose Revolution. In part, some returned because life was not better abroad and they missed Tbilisi, but in other cases, they believed that Saakashvili signaled an ethnic-neutral form of government. Some Ossetians told me how they or their relatives had had to change their names during the troubling early period of conflict with Ossetia. The recent episode with Russia had served to once again become a concern for these kinds of minorities who wish to remain in the shadow or integrate under the false cover of a Georgian.

Secondly, I would like to reiterate the role of understanding the foundations of multiculturalism, its basis in a "rights-to-culture" philosophy. In order for multiculturalism to be successfully implemented in Georgia, certain negative associations, for instance that these programs might afford privileges to certain groups over another, need to be minimised. As I have stated before, the possible greater inclusion of non-Georgians does not preclude the expression of Georgian nor any other ethnic group's expressive rights within a rights-to-culture philosophical

environment. I have shown that both traditional arts venues as well as new media opportunities are becoming wider outlets for Georgian society. But I was also cautioned on more than one occasion that in order to understand Georgian multiculturalism one had to first understand Georgians, to understand how they “tick” so to say. But are Georgians of one voice? Certainly not and many proponents of civil society would agree that a healthy heterogeneous environment is the first step for building a democracy.

It will take some time to break out of the habits formed in the context of previous regimes. I am referring here more to the Soviet regime rather than to the period of Gamsakhurdia’s rule where discriminatory sloganeering like “Georgia for Georgians” although serious, seemed more transitory than reflective of actual intercultural relations. Instead I refer to the ways that knowledge is built in culture, ethnology, or folklore studies and primarily meant to serve the *Georgian* nation rather than to explore cultural contingencies, hybridities, or exceptional cases (Martin 2001; Slezkine 1996). But until Georgia’s *own* thinkers take up this issue more closely, like Nino Titsishvili the musicologist who has called on a more critical reception to UNESCO world heritage designations in Georgia, there will be less of a tendency to view civil society as a force imposed from above and more as a movement “for Georgians *and* Georgia”.

Finally, Tbilisi is a bright spot on this horizon. Its original mosaic offers a novel and authentic way to accommodate different voices. Georgians themselves understand this and are busy reconstructing the city center and revitalizing annual festivals, like Tbilisoba. Quite simply, the municipality wants a more sophisticated byline for these festivals, to clean up the messy edges of previous Tbilisobas and to move public interest from the edges of the Mtkvari River and up to Charden, where Georgia’s modern café society prospers. In 2009, the best example of this



Tbilisoba poster campaign at Haydar Aliyev Square, Tbilisi, Georgia (picture taken by Hulya Sakarya, October 2010).

new attitude
 was a highly
 conspicuous
 public relations
 campaign of
 attractive
 young
 minorities
 claiming “I
 Love Tbilisi” in

seven different languages and posted along one edge of the Old District square (see pix below). Yet before Georgia’s diversity is subsumed within cliché or skewed in order to advertise this presence to the outside public, I would call for more clarification of just what kind of hybridity exists in Georgia.

In a joint production funded by the UNDP, Georgia’s *Pirveli Arxi* [First Channel] has been broadcasting the television talk show *Italiuri Ezo* [Italian Yard] for almost two years. *Italiuri Ezo* satisfies Objective 6 of the National Concept, the support of minority expression. It uses the symbol of the famous Tbilisan inner courtyard to showcase the lives of colorful minority figures while introducing topics of integration and tolerance to the general public. As one of my respondents claimed, it is the Italian yard that best represents the Georgian spirit. It is where families of different ethnic origins live together like the multiple voices of the polyphonic song, their lives crossing on a daily basis, creating a multiethnic universe through centuries of mutual aid and comraderie. Nonetheless, this aspect of the Georgian spirit, a kind of enduring intimacy

that transcends ethnic and religious boundaries, is not impermeable to the tides of change, nor should it be accepted at face value. The same respondent who praised these yards, for instance, added from the confidence of his own comfortable apartment which he shared with noone, “I grew up in an Italian Yard and I wouldn’t want to live in one now.”

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List of Activities

Georgian National Museum, Ioseb Grishashvili Tbilisi History Museum, January 20, 2010.

“Holiday Moments: Photographic Essays on the City of Tbilisi.” [photography exhibit].

Caucasus Research Resource Center, February 2, 2010. “Heritage as Resource: For Whom is Culture Developed in Post-Soviet Georgia. [public talk].

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