

It's not destiny that makes the man, but the man who makes his own destiny.
Ilia Chavchavadze

NEW iveria

№4 September 2023

“THE PORT THAT NEVER WAS”

Interview with Stefan Tolz

Fady Asly

“KIDNAPPED!”

Eduard Marikashvili

U.S. SANCTIONS OR THE COURT CLAN THAT STARTED TO SING

Mikheil Antadze

WHITE FEVER OF AUGUST

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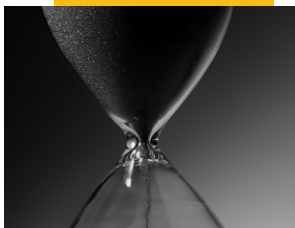


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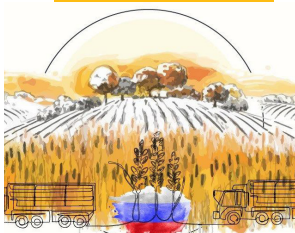


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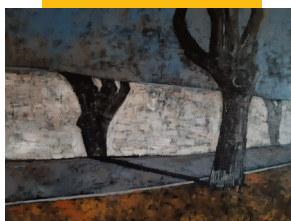
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Zaza Bibilashvili

Where we were Where we are now, Or woe from wit

It so happened that in recent years our existence has been largely defined by fear.

It seems paradoxical, but this ancient, proud people, driven by a sense of honour and justice, is ruled by fear. So much so that their cherished dignity and pride has been lost somewhere, behind everyday worries and mores.

Some are afraid of war, some of losing their jobs, some of political change (“You may feel bad now, but if I were not here, you would feel worse!”), and all fear natural disasters (unless you are a family member of a high-ranking official, in which case the whole state works for you). At the same time, every disaster has become life-threatening: no one can protect you, no one can save you, “whatever happened, happened”, they will say, “well, where were you?”, they will reproach them as they continue to float in great, no – colossal – corruption.

Fear is a human emotion, and a legitimate response to real danger. However, when fear is artificially induced or the source of danger becomes the purveyor of fear, it trans-



The year 2008, Russia-Georgia war

forms into a tool for controlling the masses. This leverage perpetuates human and civil degeneration, compelling individuals to set aside their dignity, self-respect, and the pursuit of justice and freedom. People are then forced to endure various forms of humiliation, all the while fearing an imaginary enemy or a fabricated threat.

The soil is fertile for the enemy: the older a nation is, the more it has seen and expe-

Fear is a human emotion, and a legitimate response to real danger. However, when fear is artificially induced or the source of danger becomes the purveyor of fear, it transforms into a tool for controlling the masses. This leverage perpetuates human and civil degeneration, compelling individuals to set aside their dignity, self-respect, and the pursuit of justice and freedom. People are then forced to endure various forms of humiliation, all the while fearing an imaginary enemy or a fabricated threat.

rienced, the more increasingly fearful and cautious it becomes... From legitimate caution to prosaic conformism, and from conformism to collaborationism, there is often only one step.

This is how they rule our country, using the classic methods of totalitarian regimes. I used to write that they ruled, but my friend would always correct me – “to rule is different, today they are not ruling Georgia, they are controlling it.” And it is true.

In the era of Putin’s propaganda, “divide and conquer” has been replaced by “intimidate and control”: keep quiet or someone will come, catch you and kill or rape you (so what if the topic of “26,000 raped men of the best breed” has become one of Russia’s most comical propaganda myths). “Condemn the West because the West wants war and bloodshed.” (So what if NATO and the European Union mean exactly the opposite – peace and prosperity? After all, they are the heirs of Soviet propaganda that fought Western “imperialism” and “militarism” for decades). Logically, these people are afraid not of the Russian horde (which strengthens their backs), but of the mythical “global war party” and scare us with those “few families” that allegedly rule America and Swiss banks...

There is nothing more primitive than what the Russian propagandists and the Georgians who voices them come up with. But it works.



The year 2023, the tragedy of Shovi

Meanwhile, the country’s Prime Minister – the one whom the oligarch sometimes refers to as “call him whatever you want” and sometimes as “the guy who doesn’t need to

be told twice” – sends his son to America on a charter flight, and the government tells people that the plane was rented by the Prime Minister’s unemployed retired father... First they rob us, then they mock us.

The friends of the Prime Minister’s wife attending the Prime Minister’s wife’s birthday party are served by young men from the state security and protocol services – opening doors, moving cars to the parking lot, pushing journalists away...Whatever catches the eye – clothes, wristwatches, jewellery - leaves no doubt: no salary could buy this. You don’t have to look for corruption here, it’s obvious and visible. Never before has there been such a level of greed and cynicism (“He’s the Prime Minister, not a factory worker, isn’t he?!”) ...

Every rain brings new fears: will something happen in Racha or in the Vere valley?

The year 1992, the beginning of the war in Abkhazia



Maybe this time we should avoid the new road to Vashlijvari. Won’t the Rikoti collapse again? A natural disaster has buried sleeping children in Guria. The Shuahevi dam is leaking. The new Racha road collapsed here, the section connecting Ozurgeti and Chokhatauri there.

If there is no rain or flood, there may be a fire and the archive will burn down (it is a separate question how such a treasure can be left unattended, but it is also part of the struggle of the same evil force with our history, our memory, our identity)...

If you survive a natural disaster, the police may arrest you for standing in front of Parliament with a blank sheet of paper (like one of the authors of this issue) or for expressing solidarity with Ukraine in front of the Telavi Theatre (as your humble servant)...

Almost every other week is a week of mourning... From mourning to mourning, people are thinking of running away because decent, law-abiding people no longer see a future in this country.

Fifteen years ago, under the previous government, an MP used an ethnically offensive term in a public speech and was expelled from the parliamentary majority. For more than 15 years, xenophobic statements have been part of the everyday language of the government and its political and media satellites.

Fifteen years ago, we used to laugh at the fact that the government of that time would often solemnly inaugurate unfinished projects. In the last eleven years, we have become accustomed to the government “inaugurating” its promises. Yes – promises! They would draw something utopian on a big banner, invite TV channels, hold a briefing and sell what they had drawn on the banner as an achievement (“In 2030, Georgia’s GDP per capita will be 10 thousand dollars!”)... Thus, for example, Ivanishvili has handed over the hippodrome to the city four times.

We had to thank the oligarch four times for his ‘unprecedented philanthropy’. This was also the case with the Laguna Vera, which was ruined in his hands, and which he “restored” and “donated to the city” several times, each time through a virtual campaign. In the end, he sold both for a lot of money. He benefited, and Tbilisi will get another concrete monstrosity instead of recreational areas, which will make living and moving here even more hellish. In the past, if something bad happened, it was a topic of conversation for months. Now, for every bad thing, a few days later, or even the next day, there is a new bad thing. Sometimes even on the same evening.

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Who could imagine the organised swearing at Europe and America? Haven't they made us accustomed to it? We were the first at the door of the European Union. Our “pro-Western” government has done so much that we have been pushed to the back of the line. Who complains about Ukraine and Moldova, we are behind even Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Do you believe this is all a coincidence? Absolutely not. It is a conscious, consistent, and deliberate policy with the aim of lowering the bar, expelling the good, and escalating despair among those who remain. The focus of this policy has been on widespread corruption and even greater moral degradation.

Remember what Putin said after the 2008 war? “What the Russian tanks could not do, the Georgian people will do.”

And indeed, we have done it. What's more, we still fail to grasp the cause-and-effect relationship between our choices and the reality to which we are now hostages. Our contribution lies in the fact that, for the first time in Georgia's history, we have judges sanctioned for distorting the political system and a former general prosecutor sanctioned for connections with Russian security. This same prosecutor assaulted the former head of the audit service in front of cameras yet currently enjoys full inviolability, even beating an acting minister in the basement of his house. Our contribution extends to having prisoners apprehended by a sanctioned prosecutor and tried by a sanctioned court.

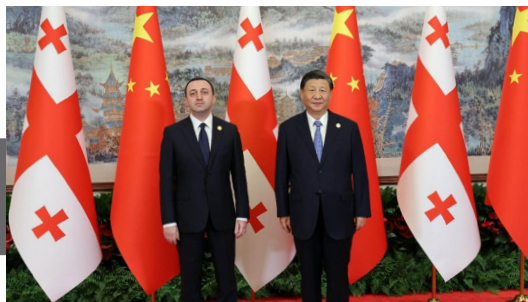
In the past, if something bad happened, it was a topic of conversation for months. Now, for every bad thing, a few days later, or even the next day, there is a new bad thing. Sometimes even on the same evening.

So much has happened just this summer alone:

-The tragedy in Shovi – when they told us that they don't have helicopters, and even if they did, nothing would change, or that a helicopter is not a car that you can just go and buy (if Ivanishvili needed one, would they say that?). They are telling us: what happened, happened. Let's forget and continue the bleak routine.

- The Declaration on Strategic Partnership with China resembles a document drafted by one party and merely signed by the other, lacking any statements regarding the preservation of Georgia's face and dignity (before they came to power they threatened us with an influx of Chinese, and after they came to power they unilaterally cancelled the visa regime for a country of one and a half billion people, against national interests and common sense).

*The year 2023,
Gharibashvili in China*



- The 15th anniversary of the 2008 war was memorable because the representatives of the occupation regimes and the Tbilisi government used the same words and the same messages, directing the vector of anger and political responsibility at the previous Georgian government.

- Talking about the Prigozhin riot and his terrorist assassination by Putin - in yet another episode of Russian political savagery – the only interesting and meaningful thing to us was how the Ivanishvili regime wholeheartedly supported Putin.

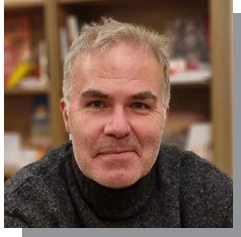
Meanwhile, the 30th anniversary of the 1992-1993 Russian-Georgian war in Abkhazia has come. The next issue of the journal will be devoted to the topic of Abkhazia. In the meantime, let us remember, compare, and ask:

Where were we and where are we now? How did we end up here? And what is our personal contribution to this tragic but hopefully not fatal process?

Let's not think in the context of the past, but in the perspective of the future: let's learn from our mistakes at least once. ■

Where were we and where are we now? How did we end up here? And what is our personal contribution to this tragic but hopefully not fatal process?
Let's not think in the context of the past, but in the perspective of the future:
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The Port That Never Was

Interview with Stefan Tolz

“New Iveria” interviewed German director and documentary filmmaker Stefan Tolz, one of whose latest films “The Port That Never Was” was shown to Georgian audiences as part of the 23rd Tbilisi International Film Festival. The interview was recorded in Georgian. The text has been edited by us.

- Thank you so much for agreeing to this interview! Let’s start at the beginning: how did you end up in Georgia?

When I was 15, I went to America to study for a year. Since then I have travelled to many countries, exploring different cultures and lifestyles. I developed a strong interest in learning about new countries and their people. Perhaps this interest influenced my decision. I enrolled in the directing department of the Munich Film School.

While at the film school, I had a colleague who had received a scholarship to study in Moscow. I also wanted to experience life in this huge “red world” on the right side of the map. I was curious to know what was going on in this empire of evil, what it was like, and it didn’t really matter whether it was the Soviet Union or one of the Eastern Bloc countries.

I enrolled in a Russian language course and won a one-year scholarship. Initially, I was set on going to the Moscow Film Institute, but I met a teacher who was well-versed in Soviet cinema. When I shared my decision with him, he posed a crucial question: did I want to study cinema or actually make movies? I responded that I wanted to make movies. He then advised me, “If you want to make movies, go to Georgia. In Moscow, they only care about foreign currency.”

That’s how I ended up in Tbilisi in 1990 during Zviad Gamsakhurdia’s presidency. At that point, I knew very little about Georgia, except that “Dinamo” Tbilisi had won in Düsseldorf. I visited a theatre institute to inquire about the schedule of the Russian language sector, and Gogi Dolidze, the dean of the film faculty, responded in English, “My dear friend, we don’t have any lessons in Russian, but you’re going to have a very good time in Georgia.”

Indeed, that time was truly unforgettable. I was the first Western student at the Film Department of the Theatre Institute. This period brought a great achievement for me, because it was here that my so-called “film soul”, my “film language”, matured. Here I learnt to do what I love, to make films, everything related to cinema and most importantly - why it is so important what a person will leave to future generations in this field. I learnt all this thanks to my relationship with Rezo Gabriadze. I often had the pleasure of visiting his family. We drank tea and talked a lot about cinema. My professor in the field of documentary film was Mr Gia Chubabria. At that time I also had the privilege of getting to know your great film directors: Tengiz Abuladze, Eldar Shengelaya, Temur Babluani, the film artist Dima Eristavi and others. The relationship with these people, of course, had a great impact on me.

I was a member of a minority who came from the West and knew everything about the events of that time, who loved Georgia. I perceived all the events and considered myself an interpreter of the events, who had to convey everything in the language of cinema. The fact that it is so close to you and you are a part of it obliges you to describe everything and preserve it for future generations. Someone will pass it on through a book, but I will pass on all these accumulated stories through a film.

- You live in the house of Vakhushti Kotetishvili and you are personally connected to this place...

Mr Vakhushti Kotetishvili was the protagonist of my first film, which I made in 1990-91. I then created a portrait of Georgia based on the stories of six people I met during my studies. I gathered them around a table, where Mr Vakhushti was the tamada (you know what kind of a toastmaster he was) ... The title of the film was "Caucasian Feast". That was the beginning of my career in Georgian cinema.

Then there was the film "On the Edge of Time: Male Domains in the Caucasus." (2001), depicting the world of people living outside of time at the turn of the century. This film won the Golden Gate Award in San Francisco and the Grand Prix at the Taiwan International Film Festival.

Then there was the film "Full Speed Westward" (2013). I started making the film in 2011, when Nicolas Sarkozy visited Georgia. It was the day Bidzina Ivanishvili publicly announced that he was going into politics. At that time you could see the following picture: Bidzina Ivanishvili had a separate fortress on the right bank, Mikheil Saakashvili had a presidential palace on the left bank, with the Mtkvari River running down the middle.

It was a perfect scenario for a fairy tale. That was when I decided to make a film. With the help of my Volga-21, which in the film is a symbol of the old Soviet Union, I try to show, together with the characters of the film, Georgia on its way in search of its future.

It was a very labour-intensive process. I worked on the film for three years. The film won an award in Chicago and was screened all over the world. I think the current processes also demonstrate the relevance of that film. A trilingual version of these three films called "Georgian Trilogy" was released in DVD format in cooperation with Bakur Sulakauri publishing house and is still available in shops.

- Let's move on to the subject of Anaklia. How did you become interested in Anaklia Port? Where did the idea come from, did Mamuka Khazaradze and Badri Japaridze come to you, did you hear about the project and get interested? What sparked your interest in the subject?

When I was working on the film "Full Speed Westward" in 2012, I filmed several novellas about entrepreneurs - businessmen with a Western orientation. One of them was Mamuka Khazaradze. He talked about the projects he was working on with his associates. At that time, the Green City was being built on Lisi. I have known him ever since. These novellas are published on the website called Volga Salon.

So when I heard that there was such a big project, I got interested immediately, because for such a small country as Georgia, such a port would of course be of great importance, and I thought that if Mamuka Khazaradze won such a tender, it would be very interesting to film the process. I met Badri Japaridze and asked him to talk to Mamuka



*Stefan Tolz with cameraman
Nick Voight*

Khazaradze and his partners, to tell him that I wanted to start a film project, because I thought that Anaklia was a really important project for the future of Georgia. However, if I were to produce such a film, I should have the right to see everything from the inside, to film everything I consider important for the film and to show the whole picture, and not to limit myself to press conferences. We agreed on this, but in the course of the work it turned out to be very difficult and sometimes impossible. The camera crew was not allowed to film many things or go to certain places. It was very difficult, especially in cases when I was with them, but didn't have the chance to film.

What was happening in the country was not just an economic issue, it was about politics as well. I was not looking at it as a German, Stefan, just living in Georgia, I was observing people's emotions, the feedback was important to me, it was important to understand what this political situation meant for the citizens of Georgia.

I visited Anaklia for the first time in 2017. As soon as the project started, I started filming. On this small example, on the example of the development of this village, we wanted to show what the Chinese are doing, what is happening in the world, what Russia is doing, that was the main idea at the beginning. The whole film with its complex themes



Government meeting on the day the contract with the consortium was terminated

was very interesting for me. What is important in the film is that it tells not only the story of Mamuka Khazaradze, we also have the character of Katy, a modern young woman with a European vision, we have Nugzar Gabelia, a resident of Anaklia, a family of refugees from Abkhazia. We tried to show how the processes that were taking place affected the country and the heroes of our film. The filming took five years. It was definitely one of the most difficult projects for me in every respect.

- And yet, why was this port not built? The government asserts that Mamuka and Badri failed to attract any money, and claim that this is a legal issue with its own rules and procedures. In your perspective – coming from someone who not only observed everything through the lens of a film director during the filming process but also witnessed the unfolding events on the ground – what happened?

First and foremost, it must be emphasized that to undertake the construction of such a port, assembling a proficient team is imperative. A team with formidable individuals is necessary to secure the required funding and international support. At the project's commencement, with Giorgi Kvirikashvili as the Prime Minister, it appeared that influential figures were steering this endeavor. When initiating a project of this magnitude, effective public relations play a crucial role in garnering funds. While not the sole determinant, it remains a significant factor. When seeking international funding, the project's image must be robust, accompanied by positive news that resonates with the public.

When Giorgi Kvirikashvili suddenly left the position of Prime Minister, and the investigation

When Giorgi Kvirikashvili suddenly left the post of Prime Minister and after the initiation of the investigation into the money laundering case against Khazaradze-Japaridze was publicly announced, this process was closely watched in the West. I'm not an expert on this, but

there were claims that it was not a case of money laundering but rather a form of black PR, which, despite the eventual absence of confirmation for the money launder-

ing accusation, had a detrimental impact on the Anaklia project. The uncertainty surrounding the investigation instilled fear among potential investors, affecting the project's progress.

- To the best of our recollection, the National Bank, prosecutor's office, the judiciary, and executive authorities were all actively engaged in this process, publicly asserting that the project was unprofitable and that consortium members would not be able to generate revenue from it. This concerted effort seemed like a coordinated attack on the project. If the Anaklia port had been constructed, it could have served as a stark contrast – similar to the dichotomy between East Berlin and West Berlin – illustrating the disparities between the territory occupied by Russia and the rest of free Georgia. The envisioned “shining” city surrounding the major port would have operated in close proximity to the occupation zone.

It was to be a major port operating near the occupation zone, around which a “shining” city was to be built. Who was interested in the failure of the Anaklia project? What explanations have arisen from the film?

The idea was that this project should have been financed by the private sector and not by the state, because the state does not have that much money, but when Prime Minister Kvirikashvili left and when banks and investors started asking questions, it turned out that they needed some guarantees. This is what Mamuka is talking about. International banks need the state to undertake some commitments. We know that the tender was held with the participation of 12 consortia. Not 2, but 12. All of them withdrew from the tender because the state refused to issue guarantees. It is difficult to say why the state should not want to realise this project, what could be the reason...

The first conceivable reason could be that, in their assessment, it was deemed a suboptimal bid, leading them to express regret in halting the project while stating a genuine desire for its continuation. Various challenges such as economic concerns, job creation, and other factors were acknowledged. However, providing guarantees at that stage was deemed unfeasible due to the potential for exacerbating existing problems.

The second reason could have been that there was someone behind it who did not want this project to be implemented. Or perhaps there was someone who did not want Mamuka Khazaradze to implement it with his partners.

The third potential reason could be linked to the interest of Bidzina Ivanishvili and Irakli Gharibashvili in the Port of Poti. During my visit to the Port of Poti, I observed a substantial area earmarked for the construction of a container terminal – a sizable expanse. I also spoke to one of the representatives of Maersk, who said that the cargo does not leave this port and more than half of the containers are empty, and they enter through the entrance, but do not leave. Maersk argued that, at present, there was no imperative to construct a new port. According to their representative, if there were a noticeable increase in cargo, it would be financially self-sustaining, eliminating the need for financial support from Georgia's budget. They expressed willingness to undertake the construction independently once cargo volumes justified it. Subsequently, they initiated the paperwork to proceed. However, counter to regional expectations, political representatives of Poti opposed the endeavor.

It is now known that Bidzina Ivanishvili himself and the company that controls the



Anaklia - port territory

Poti economic zone have their own interests. Of course, this is very important. This is the third possible reason: those who are behind the port of Poti did not want the port of Anaklia to be built.

However, when war broke out in Ukraine, it became clear that if Georgia had a good infrastructure, it would be a extremely valuable port strategically.

- Even before the war in Ukraine, Mamuka Khazaradze posited that the halting of the project might align with a direct Russian objective. According to his perspective, the project was stopped on the instructions of Russia to avoid undermining Russian interests. In essence, Anaklia was seen not as a competitor to Poti but as a potential rival to Russian ports. This viewpoint was echoed by American officials, who emphasized that the Anaklia project held not only economic significance but also geopolitical importance for Georgia and the West.

This was expressed during Prime Minister Mamuka Bakhtadze's visit to Washington.... This point of view is also presented in the film, but time will show what in reality was behind it. In this film I have presented dry factual information and events. It may be obvious from the film that I am neither an economist nor a lawyer, I am just interested in important and interesting processes happening in the country and I am trying to bring these stories to people through the film so that they see what is really happening.

- The European television premiere of the film "The Port That Never Was" occurred on the French-German channel ARTE, followed by a screening at the Tbilisi International Film Festival. However, it is essential for a broader audience, both in Georgia and internationally, to have the opportunity to view it. What steps do you plan to take to achieve this goal?

I believe that the most suitable approach would be to have the film broadcast on a public television channel, serving as a neutral platform. Public television's role is to present content that is intriguing to the public, particularly when handled by an independent third party. Following the broadcast, an hour-long discussion involving ministers could provide valuable insights into the accurate or inaccurate portrayal of such a crucial stage and events in Georgia.

As mentioned earlier, I have a positive collaboration with a public channel on various projects. Given the involvement of German public television and the German-French channel ARTE in this film, the first channel stands as our primary partner and holds the initial right to broadcast. If, for any reason, they opt not to air it, we

can explore discussions with alternative channels.

In my view, it is preferable for this film to reach a few thousand viewers on public television, fostering a neutral audience, rather than being confined to a sharply "opposition" or "pro-government" viewership. The film aims to ignite a spark that encourages people to reconsider events, fostering a critical assessment. I am hesitant to have the film showcased on any government or opposition channel. My hope is that a public channel will eventually acquire and present the film to a broader audience.

In general, the best format for showing such films is the cinema, because there the viewer is not distracted as when watching at home, and all attention is directed to the film. The Goethe Institute was ready to sponsor this screening, but the Georgian film distribution company refused. For example, "Full Speed Westward" had a successful



Stefan Tolzi with the family of internally displaced persons living in the territory of Anaklia port

run in cinemas for six weeks, offering audiences the chance to watch it in both English and Georgian, fostering an environment where viewers could form their own opinions about the film.

In our industry, the first window is cinemas, the second window is streaming video – Netflix and similar online platforms where you pay to watch, and then there is television, which is free. This right is granted to television under licence and the last one is the possibility to watch online for free. Of course, we can release this film through the Kavea Plus online cinema, which is the last resort for anyone who wants to see the film online. However, as a producer who has invested money in this project, I want to export and sell this film abroad, in the international market, in Sweden, America... and if this film is shown online somewhere, it certainly reduces the chance of presenting it at the festival. It also reduces the chance that foreign TV stations will buy it. With this film, I want to show people in America what they don't know about Georgia, show people in Sweden what they haven't heard about. Maybe they know about the Sukhishvili and have seen documentaries about Georgia and its beautiful nature, but they don't know what's really happening in the country. They will learn much about politics with this movie.

- Are you already working on a new project?

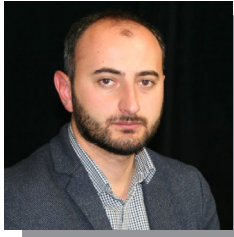
Yes, I am currently involved in two projects simultaneously: a documentary and a feature film. The concept for the feature film originated many years ago, conceived by myself and my friend Lasha Bakradze. The film unfolds within a single setting, the shop "Waters," serving as a communal space for residents and visitors of Tbilisi. Behind the shop lies a laboratory where the Master of Water and his descendants craft the magical waters that played a role in both the creation and downfall of the Soviet Union.

This fairy-tale film explores the notion that the entire history of the Soviet Union was shaped within the confines of this small shop. It suggests that the elixirs produced in this laboratory contributed to the Soviet Union's victory in World War II – featuring creations like space water. However, the film's central theme revolves around the water of happiness, a concoction that the protagonist aspires to create. My objective is for this film to become a trademark of Tbilisi, like the French film "Amelie" has become for Paris.

Regarding the documentary, it revolves around Soviet lemonades, drawing inspiration from the story of Harry Truman gifting Stalin 100 bottles of Coca-Cola in 1952 to showcase the excellence of American lemonade. Although Coca-Cola was well-received, Stalin expressed the need for better lemonade, leading to the summoning of Mitrofan Lagidze, the master of beverages, to Moscow. His task was to create the world's finest lemonade.

This story has achieved a legendary status, documented in books about Lagidze, although its authenticity has not been verified. Our film retraces the narrative, with filming taking place in Tbilisi, Moscow, America, and beyond. The film's central question revolves around the potential impact on Georgia if the lemonades crafted by Mitrofan Lagidze, the creator of these recipes, had gained widespread popularity. If Lagidze water, instead of Coca-Cola, had become a global sensation, simply saying "I am from Georgia" would no longer prompt the question: "Where from?" This beverage, akin to the world's finest lemonade, would emerge as a symbol of Georgia's vibrant and diverse cultural identity.

- Thank you very much for the interview, We wish you success! ■



Eduard Marikashvili

U.S. SANCTIONS OR THE COURT CLAN THAT STARTED TO SING

You may wonder why this brief article requires two headlines. I will certainly address that question, but before doing so, let me share information about the unprecedented decision made by the US Secretary of State on April 5, 2023, regarding Georgia.

On April 5, the announcement of sanctions against three current judges and one former judge of Georgia came as a surprise, akin to a thunderbolt from a clear sky. Mikhail Chinchaladze, Levan Murusidze, Irakli Shengelia, and Valeri Tsertsvadze were publicly sanctioned under the 7031(c) visa ban. The decision was grounded in allegations that these individuals were involved in significant corrupt activities.

Given the identity and actions of those subjected to sanctions, the decision did not come as a surprise. In Georgia, discussions about longstanding issues have been ongoing, and the State Department's issuance of this significant document validates the existence of these problems. The individuals in question are accused of abusing their positions as court chairmen and members of the High Council of Justice, thereby eroding the rule of law and diminishing public trust in the Georgian judicial system.

The effect of surprise is linked to the author of the sanctions. Even for the most ardent supporters of the Georgian judiciary, the legal assessment by the United States of America of the activities of members of the Georgian court clan at the state level, which led to the imposition of sanctions, went beyond their dreams. But what would America be without such a commitment to the process of supporting democracy and the rule of law in its friendly nations?

It is crucial to understand the implications of publicly authorizing the denial of a visa under Rule 7031(c). This law governing visa restrictions has been in effect in the United States since 2008, aiming to identify and combat foreign corruption and human rights abuses. The U.S. Secretary of State possesses the authority to impose visa restrictions on both former and current officials, as well as their family members, who are found to be involved in significant corruption or severe human rights violations. A single credible piece of evidence is adequate to make this decision.

Interestingly, in contrast to the Magnitsky Act, which has a 5-year statute of limitations (applicable to acts committed within the last 5 years before the judgment is made), the Visa Restrictions Act does not have such a statute of limitations, and its va-

lidity is not retroactively limited. Here, this detail causes a special political and legal effect for the clan that started singing and Georgian justice.

As previously mentioned, the U.S. Secretary of State highlights the abuse of power and involvement in significant corrupt activities by the sanctioned judges during their tenures presiding over the court and serving as members of the High Council of Justice. The sanctioned judges had occupied key positions, including member of the High Council of Justice, secretary of the same council, and chairman of the Tbilisi Court of Appeal, for an extended period.¹ We are referring to the period from 2007 to the present day. Allegations of abuse of power for personal gain and involvement in grand corruption relate to this entire period for visa restriction purposes. And this, based on the authority of the High Council of Justice and the importance of the Court of Appeal, raises serious questions about the decisions taken with their participation and the legitimacy of the justice system with their presence in the judiciary today.

Another crucial nuance highlighted in the public statement of the U.S. Secretary of State is noteworthy. The Secretary of State asserts that the United States supports all judges who exhibit the courage and integrity to act impartially and independently. In



this regard, Murusidze and his “associates” may genuinely feel the weight of this statement. For them, U.S. visa restrictions pale in comparison to the potential consequences if individual judges comprehend the message.

The clan’s power architecture rests on the silence and obedience of individual judges. The existence of the clan is directly related to the uniform silence of the judicial system. The clan’s problems also arise when a crack appears in the collective silence and individual judges begin to talk openly about their problems.

That is why, while the whole society was celebrating the visa sanctions against the Clan and its family members, the Clan decided to consolidate the judiciary around itself.

1. Mikheil Chinchaladze has been in the judicial system since 2007. In 2007-2017, he was a member of the High Council of Justice of Georgia. Since 2017, he has been the Chairman of the Tbilisi Court of Appeal. Levan Murusidze has been in the judicial system since 2005. In 2013-2017, he was a member of the High Council of Justice of Georgia. He was re-elected to the same position by the Conference of Judges in 2022. Irakli Shengelia has been a judge in the judicial system since 2007. In 2017-2021, he was a member of the High Council of Justice of Georgia. Valeri Tsertsvadze, member of the High Council of Justice in 2007-2013, secretary of the High Council of Justice in 2008-2013. In 2007-2017, he was the Chairman of the Tbilisi Court of Appeal.

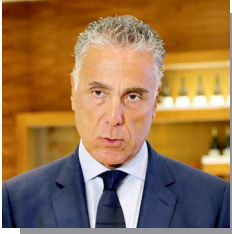
The sanctioning of three active and one former judge was a threat to the entire judiciary, and hundreds of judges gathered around the Georgian table to demonstrate unity and strength. A tipsy Murusidze topped off this gathering by singing a Georgian song in

The existence of the clan is directly related to the uniform silence of the judicial system. The clan's problems also arise when a crack appears in the collective silence and individual judges begin to talk openly about their problems.

front of the cameras. Before that he responded with a poem by Giorgi Leonidze to the US Secretary of State and told the audience that he, who prefers “Alazani pheasant” to everything else, cannot be defeated by sanctions. Perhaps this statement of the sanctioned judge would have been convincing, if he, being on the verge of losing everything, had not remembered “the fluttering of wings of the pheasant over Alazani”.

Finally, let us turn back to the issues related to the two headlines of the article. After the police arrested me for holding a blank sheet of paper in front of the Georgian Parliament on 2 June 2023 and kept me in the pre-trial detention isolator for 48 hours, the case was brought to court. I am writing this article while waiting for the court to consider the declaration of me as a “hooligan”. After the first instance hearing, Levan Murusidze, who was sanctioned, will preside over the case in the court of appeal. Perhaps you are unaware, but it is Levan Murusidze who has been adjudicating cases initiated on charges of administrative violations for years in the appeals court. Meanwhile, an intriguing picture unfolds outside. While those who should normally get a sanctioned clan out of court are busy playing motorball, the clan has reacted to the sanctions in its own way, albeit somewhat effectively – by taking steps towards internal consolidation.

Nevertheless, this historic decision will not be without consequences. The first effect of the announcement of sanctions was the shattering of the illusion of the clan's invincibility and inviolability. Subsequently, its “authority” in the court will continue to erode and the cracks in the judges' united silence will continue to deepen. ■



Fady Asly

KIDNAPPED!

“New Iveria” is pleased to share an excerpt from Fady Asly’s book, “Life with Scorpions,” vividly portraying a poignant yet representative story from Georgia’s pre-Rose Revolution era.

As I was heading to Tashkent airport, my phone rang. It was Imad Bekai, our sales manager.

- Mr. Fady, I have bad news, Charbel was kidnapped from the warehouse an hour ago!

- Crap, I said! Anyone hurt?

- No, he was alone in his Niva driving into the warehouse when a car with three people carrying machine guns cut him off, broke the car window, pulled him out and drove away very fast.

- OK Imad, call Achico our lawyer, brief him of the facts and head immediately to the police station with him to file an official report. I am in Tashkent on my way to Baku then Tbilisi, I should get there around midnight.

Charbel my deputy, a handsome man in his mid-thirties, cool, relaxed and tanned, sporting a ponytail, and a father of two cute little girls! What a responsibility on my shoulders I thought! Besides dealing with the government, I will have to deal with a totally emotional and panicked family - the worst liability possible in those circumstances.

I called my partner Fady Nahas in Istanbul and briefed him of the developments, and we both agreed that the most rational thing would be to keep the family away from Georgia so as not to complicate the situation on the ground.

My first visit next morning was to Philip Remler, Charge d’Affaires of the US embassy in Georgia, to tell him what had happened; my suspicion was that this must have been masterminded by one of our competitors with the help of law enforcement.

The police had informed us that the kidnappers would surely make contact to demand a ransom and we waited...

Days passed without news from Charbel; I had requested Dunia, Charbel's wife, to leave Georgia to avoid any threat on her life and on the lives of her children and to avoid the kidnappers contacting her instead of contacting us, which would have complicated things further.

In addition, having a panicked and distressed wife calling every five minutes was seriously counterproductive.

My partner Fadi hosted the family in an Istanbul hotel on full board for weeks and the agreement was that they were not allowed to come to Georgia.

We knew that with the family in Georgia, the kidnappers would have more leverage to play with their emotions and exert pressure on us.

One thing I had decided on irrevocably was that no matter the amount of the ransom, I would not pay it; if you pay a ransom once you will pay a ransom every day and considering that our company was operating in several countries of the region, paying a ransom would be a clear invitation for more kidnappings.

Weeks passed and still no news, then a month later Imad called me.

- They have called, they have called, he said.

- And?

- They have requested 500,000 dollars and have given us 48 hours to respond. They will call me back in 48 hours! What should I say?

- You will tell them that Fady Asly will pay you 1,000 dollars and that's it! You will tell them that Charbel's monthly food allowance is 1,000 dollars and since they have been feeding him for a month I am happy to send them this allowance!

- How can I tell them this? They will kill him!

- Calm down, they will not kill him; they didn't feed him for a month and take all those risks just to kill him upon the first phone call.

Two days later the same kidnapper called and when Imad told him the answer he went nuts on the phone and started insulting Imad and insulting me and shouting death threats, then silence....

A few days later, I was relaxing by the Sheraton pool in the afternoon when my mobile rang. It was an officer from the Ministry of Internal Affairs.

- Mr. Asly, I need to talk to you about an issue. When can we meet?

- Sure, where are you now?

- At the ministry, but I don't want to meet you here.

- Fine, then come to the Sheraton.

- OK, I will be there in thirty minutes.

A chubby man in his forties approached my table. Mr. Fady, I am Gia who just called you.

- Welcome Gia, please have a seat. What would you like to drink?

- Nothing at all, thank you.

- So what's up?

- Mr. Fady, I had to talk to you regarding the kidnapping of your deputy.

- You have news?

It is not that I have news, we know who did it, we know where he is but the matter is blocked at the highest level at the ministry.

- You mean by the Minister?

- I cannot tell you by whom, all that I can advise you to do is to move it from above the Minister.

- Thank you Gia for your help. I greatly appreciate it.

Gia left, leaving me alone with my thoughts and many questions.

Why would an official from the Ministry of Interior, whom I had never met before, volunteer such information? I

Why is the Ministry concealing that they know the whereabouts of Charbel?

Is the Minister personally involved in the kidnapping?

The one thing that became obvious to me was that state structures were definitely involved in the kidnapping and covering it up and I became really very angry! I thought to myself, you want to fuck with me? I will fuck with you!

I immediately called Gia Alikhanashvili, CEO of McCann Erikson, the advertising company, and asked him to meet me at our offices at ten the next morning.

- Gia, how many billboards are there in Tbilisi?

- I guess about 150 or 200.

- I want them all!

- All? Are you planning some mega campaign? Some of them are booked for a long time!

- Yes I am, just book as many as you can!

- OK, but booking all those billboards might cost in the region of 100,000 dollars.

- I don't care, just negotiate the best price for me.

- What are you advertising?

- Charbel!

- Charbel?

Yes, Charbel! I want a picture of Charbel on each and every billboard in Tbilisi and I want the caption on the picture to say just one thing: Kidnapped June 7, 2001.

And so it happened, ten days later all the billboards in Tbilisi featured Charbel's picture like a movie star, with the caption: Kidnapped June 7, 2001 in both English and Georgian.

Two billboards greeted travelers at Tbilisi airport and bid them farewell, we had billboards in front of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, billboards facing the Prosecutor's office, billboards along Shevardnadze's route to and from his residence, billboards everywhere.

The power of those billboards was that they kept me fully mobilized, since every time I drove through Tbilisi I would see one of them and would get very angry thinking to myself, I will fuck your mothers, you don't want me to do business here? Great! Then no one else will do business here either!

Sometime in July while I was at the office I was surprised by a visit from Charbel's father and wife who, despite our request, had decided to fly to Tbilisi.

His father started shouting that I was doing nothing to free his son.

I told him that, first of all, we had an agreement that the family would remain in Istanbul, secondly they would screw things up here if the kidnapers learned that they were in Georgia, thirdly, if they wanted to handle the negotiations themselves then fair enough, but in this case I wanted nothing further to do with the matter.

Charbel's father and wife made a huge fuss. I asked them to leave the office and they refused, so I called the police and had them evicted.

I understood their distress and I was very sorry for them, but still I knew perfectly well

how counter-productive their presence would be in Georgia and that they would harm Charbel much more than help him.

Charbel's brother called me hours later totally out of his mind, cursing me and insulting me for evicting his parents.

One of the people I visited regularly regarding the kidnapping was Soso Alavidze, the colorful Chief of Tbilisi Police; Soso was a very influential figure, a handsome man, always dressed up in designer clothes, with a collection of Rolex wristwatches and sexy German cars. Soso owned a huge mansion on what is called "Corruption Hill" in Tbilisi; people were claiming that he was corrupt, but for me, he was a charming person, very charismatic and very straightforward.

Soso would brief me on developments, or rather the lack of developments, and we always kept on very friendly terms.

About a month after the billboards were displayed I visited Kakha Imnadze, the Press Secretary of President Shevardnadze.

Kakha was a young man in his early thirties, blond with smart eyes, western-educated, a native English speaker. In short he was an island of the West in an ocean of the East.

- Kakha, I said, it's been almost two months since my deputy was kidnapped and there is still no action from the government. I was told by someone from the Ministry of Internal Affairs that they know who kidnapped him, they know his whereabouts but they are doing nothing to release him! Someone is blocking it!

- Fady, it is a very difficult situation at the Ministry. Listen my friend, ask Philip Remler the US Charge d' Affaires to meet me and I will advise him how to proceed.

I met Philip the same day and briefed him of my conversation; Philip scheduled a meeting with Kakha the next day and was advised to bring the matter to Nugzar Sajaia, Secretary General of the Security Council, a powerful and influential man very close to President Shevardnadze.

Kakha told Philip that the only person who could scare Targamadze, the Minister of Internal Affairs, would be Nugzar Sajaia.

Philip visited Sajaia and discussed the matter with him and Sajaia promised that he would take immediate action.

On August 19th, Soso Alavidze called me and asked me to visit him urgently; when I got to the office that I had already visited so many times, with those exotic fish swimming peacefully around their giant aquarium, Soso was pacing the room feverishly.

fully around their giant aquarium, Soso was pacing the room feverishly.

- Fady, he said, keep it to yourself, but I am resigning tomorrow and Charbel will be freed a couple of days later as soon as my successor is appointed; they want you to think that I was the one blocking his release and that I was dismissed for that.

Indeed, Soso resigned the next day on August 20 and Kakha Bakuradze was appointed Chief of Tbilisi Police.

I heard the phone ring in my dream and then I realized I wasn't a dream! My mobile was ringing at five in the morning, I picked up and it was Dato the head of my security on the line.

-Congratulations sir! Charbel is released!



Charbel Auni before the kidnapping and on the day of liberation

This was August 24th, my security detail were already in the yard waiting for me to drive to the hospital where Charbel was sent once he had been “freed” 77 days after he was kidnapped.

Charbel was being thoroughly examined by the doctor and I was shocked when I saw him! He had lost twenty kilos and had a huge black beard; he looked like those savages in the movies.

He ran to me, hugged me, and couldn’t stop crying. He was emotionally and physically drained!

I was surprised to see Kakha Targamadze at the hospital. I didn’t greet him, thank him or even acknowledge his presence; I still have very strong suspicions that he was directly involved in the kidnapping.

Charbel had been kept chained to a bed for 77 days, blindfolded with a leather mask very similar to the one in the movie “The Man with the Iron Mask”.

He hadn’t been allowed to shower for the whole period of his captivity, he had to eat and go to the toilet while chained to his bed.

He was kept in an apartment next to the airport road and was removed from the apartment and placed on the last day in some abandoned construction site out of Tbilisi where the police staged the scenario of his “liberation” through a special operation.

The interesting thing is that while we were negotiating with the kidnapers and informing them that we would pay no ransom, Charbel was telling them exactly the same story.

- I know my boss very well, he will never bow to pressure and will never pay my ransom. The best that you can hope for are a few thousand dollars gathered by my colleagues at work; you’d be better off killing me and not wasting your time.

Fortunately, he was freed and the tactics of the very unconventional billboards made the headlines in the New York Times.

A few days later Charbel flew to Lebanon for a rest and never came back to Georgia; his brother called me shortly afterwards to apologize for insulting me on the phone and thanked me for getting back Charbel alive. ■





Ketil
Kurdovanidze



Georgian Europeanism manifested itself in a brief but significant episode of modernism in the early twentieth century. Nevertheless, Georgian modernism did not repeat the paradigm of European modernism, which was completely devoid of national sentiment.

Georgian modernism developed individually, making the national theme the subject of reflection. This did not necessarily mean a break with the wider European cultural context, as shown by the Bolsheviks' fierce struggle against any avant-garde ideas with a Western touch after they came to power. Moreover, the Russian authorities saw the persistence of a strong national character in Georgian modernism as a potentially dangerous trend. Therefore, in the wake of general repression, the modernised Russian Empire found memory erasure and falsification of history to be the most effective weapons of war. But it was then that the era of the "revival of memory" began in the West. Henri Bergson's ideas inspired Marcel Proust creatively, and later Vladimir Nabokov, Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung wrote about the culture of memory. Western culture responded to great social and political changes, but modernism confined itself to the question of subjective memory and used the reflection on it as a medium, an artistic method. A vivid example of this is Marcel Proust's seven-part novel "In Search of Lost Time".

In the wake of general repression, the modernised Russian Empire found memory erasure and falsification of history to be the most effective weapons of war.

Many interesting works are devoted to Proust's artistic method, concepts, and signs of time.

However, I will focus on one crucial issue here: memory as a catalyst for change and transformation. Proust's protagonist undergoes constant evolution, and this change is not dictated by external circumstances but by his inner life – shaped by memory, the collaborative effort of the conscious and subconscious based on recollections and impressions.

This doesn't necessarily imply an attachment to the past for the hero, but rather an attempt to comprehend it. Memory, in this context, serves as a teacher, urging him to interpret the available knowledge. He believes that transcending physical time is possible only by uniting the past and the present. Retrieving lost time equates to surpassing the constraints of time and, consequently, embracing eternity through the creation of a work of art.

Naturally, when we talk about Proust, we do not mean a mechanical memory that cannot revive the past. It is about creative memory. Proust claims that reviving the past is the birth of a person who lives invisibly in each of us, this invisible person is immortal, because it is connected with the creative ability, the driving force of constant renewal, and finding and revealing it in oneself means victory over death.

This is precisely the primary objective of reclaiming lost time: transcending the harsh reality that time inevitably erodes. Triumphant over time equates to overcoming one's own mortal nature. The author must relinquish his life to bestow it upon his character. Hence, he opts to seclude himself and write a novel. Photos of ancestors, old possessions, and familiar locations are insufficient to bridge us with the past. Remembering is a poignant experience – both for the good and the bad – requiring a reassessment. The good no longer exists, and the bad prompts reflection on how one might have acted differently from the current standpoint.

Although “In Search of Lost Time” is an embodiment of the writer's subjective memory, Proust does not aim to recount specific events or his own biography. Instead, he endeavors to unveil a different, inner reality to the reader, convincing them that personal development is disconnected from social or historical occurrences, emphasizing the significance of subjective perception.

Proust's objective is to make not only the characters but also all readers sense the importance of self-reflection, recognizing that inner life holds greater authenticity and that societal factors, institutions, norms, and traditions cannot exert influence without personal will. It is within this realm that true freedom and immortality can be attained. Proust effectively achieves this goal, leading Virginia Woolf to declare, “Proust is my adventure.” This marks the artistic resurgence of subjective memory as the adventure of an entire era, characterized by profound change through a return to memory.

Indeed, following in the footsteps of Proust and thinkers of his era, a significant shift in the Western thinking paradigm commenced, which Georgian modernism unfortunately did not reach. This transformation deeply frightened the Bolshevik government, which had ascended to power through force. Consequently, they waged a particularly brutal and violent campaign against artists. In the context of that time, art stood as the sole remaining valuable entity, where the heartbeat of freedom could still be heard.

Occupation entails more than just the destruction of territorial and institutional independence; it primarily sets out to erode the fundamental pillar of human identity. This process begins with the curtailment and ultimately the obliteration of the historical, cultural, and social memory of a society. The Soviet system, in its association with various states, systematically deprived them of this foundational element. The enduring consequences, as we witness, continue to be painful and catastrophic.

In the 1980s, the role and function of memory underwent a profound transformation. The modernist concept of understanding time became a thing of the past, and the collective nature of memory became associated with postmodernism. Today, the issue of social memory and identity is given more and more attention in cultural studies, museums of memory are built (there is such a museum of occupation in Georgia), monuments are erected, memorial days are established, special brochures are published as facts expressing collective memory, because events that unfolded in Europe after the Second World War concern not only the victims of the war but also the broader issue of reaching consensus on universal values.

In the contemporary Western world, the idea of cultural or historical relativism is gaining ground. The boundary established by modernism between subjective memory and social events is disappearing and is becoming one whole. This is why, when we speak of collective memory, we also mean historical memory, which does not mean that there is no national narrative of its own; on the contrary, small postcolonial narratives, historically and culturally grounded, are created as a counterbalance to the grand narratives of em-

Memory, in this context, serves as a teacher, urging to interpret the available knowledge.

pires, which also implies an awakening of memory suspended by colonialism. Hundreds of articles are devoted to the study of memory every year, accompanied by discussions and debates, although all agree that subjective memory cannot exist outside of social discourse.

Recently, interest in the problems of memory and identity has been observed in our country as well. However, Georgian literature addressed this topic earlier than social sciences. In the 1990s, there were authors who wrote about an identity crisis, about cultural and anthropological degradation, but these topics were lost in the chaos of political events.

The current situation in our country, when independence and hard-earned freedom are once again under threat, reminds us once again that neither then nor now have we understood not only the distant but even the recent past of our country – when the enemy used our history as a weapon of struggle, took advantage of the short memory of a society that had distanced itself from it, and began to manipulate such values, the instrumentalisation of which is always justified for fooling the population of such countries.

It was imperative to counter this unrestrained propaganda and remind society that history, embellished with myths and falsehoods, requires rewriting, while the recent past needs to be revived and comprehended.

Speaking of memory, I cannot help but mention the fiction and documentary prose of Zaza Bibilashvili, recently published in two books by the publishing house “Intellect.” “Delirium” and “Georgian Matrix” share a common narrative thread. They form a comprehensive collection of short stories that bear a striking resemblance to the cinematic method of storytelling and the conceptual understanding of reality by Marcel Proust, albeit within a completely different context.

Similar to Proust, it is not a continuous stream of memories but consists of individual episodes that collectively create a sense of continuity. The past comes alive not only through memory but also through details, dialogue, sounds, landscapes, and objects. Their recurrence consistently transports us back to the past and prompts reflection. However, unlike Proust, these texts underscore the social and political context. Although the author personally witnessed and participated in the events described, his assessments, opinions, or attempts to judge the events are rarely found in the text. The author serves as a narrator rather than a character, an observer rather than an active hero. He selects, systematizes, and presents the events without offering commentary or drawing conclusions, leaving that space for the reader.

Rarely have I encountered an author who gives the reader the right to actively participate in the narrative, pushing the boundaries of authorial competence and making the reader feel that this is their adventure.

The past comes alive not only through memory but also through details, dialogue, sounds, landscapes, and objects.

“Delirium”, the first book of the two-volume series by Zaza Bibilashvili, echoes the novel-anti-utopia of the same name by American writer Lauren Oliver, which delves into the mechanism of vitality of the totalitarian regime.

People living in an alternative present are taught that love is a disease, or Amor Deliria, i.e., a nervous disorder, and are forced to undergo a procedure to cure it. An 18-year-old girl is looking forward to undergoing the procedure to cure her of this terrible disease, because government propaganda has convinced her that love is the country’s most dangerous enemy. There are opponents of this idea, but they are arrested and severely punished.

opponents of this idea, but they are arrested and severely punished. Despite such ter-

ror, the girl falls in love with a young man from the opposing camp and escapes with him from the love-deprived country where they were deceived, bullied, and deprived of freedom.

In contrast to Oliver's novel, Zaza Bibilashvili's characters do not run away; instead, they live and adapt to the existing conditions, often unaware that their problems stem from cohabiting with this degraded Soviet culture. The author emphatically notes that our living space is still polluted with the waste of this culture, although the Soviet system has collapsed, but the society has not yet managed to dispose of the debris it left behind. This is why the text feels so familiar and relevant, evoking memories of days gone by with recognizable characters, stories, moral and ethical dilemmas, as well as mental and intellectual parameters.

According to the author, the only non-alternative solution is transformation, and he illustrates this with his own example, showcasing how he changed through continual self-reflection.

The second book of the two-volume set, "The Georgian Matrix", like Ariadne's thread, leads us to the way out of the labyrinth. Here the concept of memory is conceptualised in terms of the anatomy of events. How should we be cured, what is the cause of our illness and were we sick at all, maybe we were indoctrinated by the regime, convinced by propaganda? Maybe it indoctrinated us with the very idea that each of us should feel powerless and voluntarily withdraw from the process of collective struggle?

of collective struggle? Has it been designed to erode our unified sense of history and foster self-identification not with common values but with narrow personal interests?

In this part of the text, the author demonstrates how important the role of memory is in those moments when we find it most difficult to concentrate and, as John Locke would say, then the memory begins to operate in the mode of an archive of ideas. It is the actualisation of ideas and their interpretation that we talk about in this part of the two-volume set. The author points out that the actualisation of memory in the modern era is unthinkable without a social and political context, since even the most personal perception cannot be separated from the social context in the era of globalisation. The author also discusses the interpretation of the past, emphasizing that renewal and reflection aid in overcoming identity crises. In this, he echoes David Hume's concept of identity, asserting that identity is not a static construct established once; rather, it is continually evolving based on time and context. Embracing the inevitability of change is the very solution that will enable us to surmount stagnation, marginalization, and the restriction of ourselves to local interests.

Due to the nature of the text, the author adopts a lyrical-satirical style of narration, as the stories told here are both humorous and dramatic simultaneously. Even small details expressing the identity of the characters, including their spoken language, are meticulously observed. If we categorize "Delirium" as fiction-documentary prose or, more precisely, as a form of edutainment, "Georgian Matrix" serves as an example of one of the popular genres of non-fiction – post-documentary prose.

Regardless of classification, these books are a must-read. They are worth reading not because they deserve numerous accolades, but because they implore us to embrace renewal, encourage change, and remind us that we should reclaim lost time, with each person writing their own book. ■

Rarely have I encountered an author who gives the reader the right to actively participate in the narrative, pushing the boundaries of authorial competence and making the reader feel that this is their adventure.





Nanuka Bregadze



Aidan Yusuf



Russian Wheat and Flour

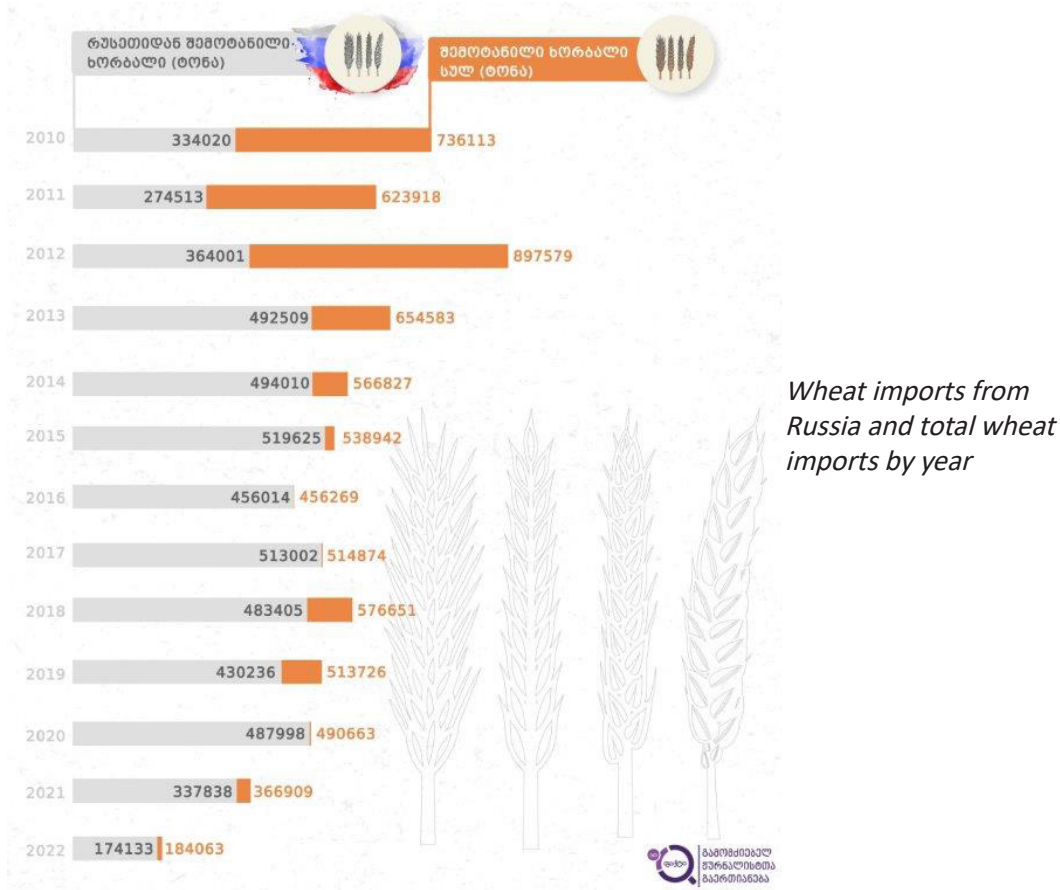
A New Puzzle for Georgia

Russian wheat and flour pose a new threat to the economy of Georgia. Any developments in Russia directly affect our milling and baking industry. In recent years, Russia has changed its wheat export policy, which has created big problems for the Georgian industry:

- Imports of high-quality wheat have decreased, and now the country does not have even a two-month supply of this strategically important product;
- Imports of Russian flour have increased, causing serious damage to Georgian mills and Georgian wheat growers;
- The government is doing nothing to reduce dependence on Russia; moreover, Russian business interests are actively interfering in the wheat and flour milling industries.

Georgian bread has been baked from Russian wheat and flour for decades. Since 2009, we have been buying most of our wheat and flour from Russia. In terms of im-

ports, the second and third places are usually taken by Kazakhstan and Ukraine. Official statistics show that wheat and flour imported from Russia is the cheapest. Ukrainian wheat is the most expensive, although after the beginning of the war we practically stopped imports from Ukraine.



The situation for Georgian millers and bakers remained relatively stable until June 2021. However, Russia increased the tax on wheat exports, leading to a significant rise in the price of Russian wheat. Despite this increase, Russian wheat remains more affordable compared to wheat from other countries.

An additional important factor is that, unlike wheat, Russia has not imposed a tax on flour exports. Consequently, while wheat imports into the country have decreased, there has been an increase in the import of Russian flour.

“iFact” tried to find out which companies import flour from Russia today. According to the data of the National Statistics Office of Georgia in 2021, the number of companies importing up to ten thousand tons of flour increased three times compared to the previous year, and in 2022, 187 new importers appeared on the market.

The increased price of wheat has led to the fact that the cost of flour produced in Georgia has also increased and it cannot compete with Russian flour. One bag of flour imported from Russia is 10-12 GEL cheaper than flour produced in Georgia. Therefore, the flour mills have either stopped or are milling just a little flour and working at a loss. Due to this, they had to lay off staff and they no longer buy Georgian wheat, which was used for mixing with Russian wheat.

What is the situation in the flour mills?

The rise in the price of Russian wheat posed a threat to the viability of the Georgian millers' businesses. Industry representatives express that such a dire situation has never been experienced before. Millers are grappling with the following challenges:

- Russian wheat has become more expensive, leading to increased production costs that cannot compete with the affordability of imported flour from Russia.
- Millers have had to decrease production and lay off employees, whose knowledge and experience were crucial resources for the companies.
- Despite appeals for assistance from the government, it seems unable or unwilling to help address the issue.

Marina Katsitadze, the owner of Georgia's oldest flour mill complex, "Progress," situated in Rustavi, had to lay off 50 people during the crisis. To retain the remaining 150 employees, she continues to operate at a loss. However, she no longer envisions a future for her business.

"We have lost contact with major suppliers. We used to bring the wheat by ship or wagon; now we bring it by car... Now the situation is unstable, and we are following inertia. Business doesn't resemble business anymore. The feeling that tomorrow you will be planning, preparing, thinking about changing equipment, renovation, repair – you lose the desire for it because you don't see any reason for it," Katsitadze shares.

Marina Katsitadze highlights that previously, they used to supply 5-7 thousand tons of wheat, equivalent to a two-month stock. Now, at most, they have supplies for 10 days, totaling up to a thousand tons. The cost of importing one ton of wheat is approximately \$350. Raw materials are brought from Larsi by cars. Currently, they are processing 30 percent of production, having decreased from 4,000 tons to 1,800 tons per month.

"Considering that for the security of any country, there should be a 3-month supply of wheat, and even more so if there is a war in neighboring countries, today we are not safe. Flour is stored for 2 months, wheat – 2 years. God forbid that the flour does not arrive, you yourself understand the danger we are facing," warns Marina Katsitadze.

Levan Janashia has two flour mills, in Tbilisi and Gori. He says that due to the wheat export tax imposed by Russia, they are working with a 15-20 percent load compared to usual.

"This is a floating fee, the data changes every 2-3 weeks. It was set in the summer of 2021 and rose from \$20 to \$142, somewhere in 8-9 months," Janashia tells us.

Since raw materials have become more expensive for the flour millers, the price of flour milled from these raw materials and produced on-site has also increased. Flour imported from Russia is not subject to any tax in Georgia; therefore, it is cheaper than locally produced flour.

"In our country, the monthly consumption of first-quality flour averages about 25-30 thousand tons. Previously, flour imported from Russia accounted for, on average, one thousand tons of this quantity. As of today, it has risen to 20 thousand tons, sometimes even more. The cost of a bag of flour was 70-72 GEL, and the selling price of imported Russian flour was 50-55 GEL. No one pays much attention to the quality there anymore because there is a big difference in price," explains Janashia.

Lado Bidzinashvili heads the "Baraka" flour mill. His flour mill was able to process and sell approximately 2,000 tons per month before the Russian export tax was introduced. Now it has come down to 500-700 tons.



The decrease in productivity was followed by the dismissal of employees from the company: now only 40-50 people are employed out of 150.

“We are telling the state that all flour production is stopped. If we stop today, and if we want to start this production tomorrow, we won’t be able to start it again. We need a period of about 2-3 months because it is specific work. Specialized staff is needed. When the production stops, these personnel start to leave; they find work elsewhere, and it is not easy to find them after that,” explains Bidzinashvili.

Levan Janashia and Marina Katsitadze say the same thing, pointing out that there is a shortage of skilled workers in this field in our country. According to them, they managed to retain the people who are still employed, but only at the expense of losses.

The Chairman of the Association of Wheat and Flour Producers, Levan Silagava, explains that the flour mills tried to keep 60-70 percent of the workers and now about 3,000 people work in the mills of Georgia.

“Flour does not need technical staff, flour needs to be brought, sold... it needs a warehouse and accounting. The entire technological cycle does not require people. “These 3,000 people have been retained, but they will probably be released in the near future if no decision is made,” Silagava tells us. They are waiting for a decision from the government. Negotiations have been going on without results for the second year. The millers see a solution in imposing a surcharge on cheap flour imported from Russia, which the government does not agree to because it fears it will increase the price of bread. The millers here also had an opinion on how it would be possible to avoid the increase in the price of bread. It was said that the so-called social bread bakers would be supplied with flour at a cheap and fixed price.

“Social bread” is called what most of the population buys in stores every day.

“We would supply flour to bakers at their target price so that it wouldn’t get more expensive, and the price for the rest of the quantity used in confectionery or bakeries we would regulate ourselves,” Levan Janashia tells us. On 3 April, the Minister of Agriculture, Levan Shamugia, officially announced another rejection of this proposal. In response, the millers voiced a new proposal. This time, they proposed to ask the government not to tax only those 7 thousand tonnes of flour, which we import from Russia and from which bakeries bake the so-called ‘social bread’.

The chairman of the Association of Wheat and Flour Producers, Levan Silagava, says that, on average, the tax on one ton of imported flour should balance the additional tax that wheat importers now have.

“Our task is to introduce an equalizing tax, which will return the same regime for flour and wheat. 200 GEL is the average amount that would create the balance. It can be a three-month process and then it can be revised,” says Silagava.

Bread bakers do not like the solution found by the millers. The head of “Bread Bakers Association”, Malkhaz Dolidze, thinks that it would be more logical for the millers to demand a reduction in VAT and tariffs, rather than taxing imported flour, which will make flour more expensive for bakers.

It seems that flour importers are not satisfied with the current situation either.

“Mardi” LLC has been importing flour from Russia since 2014. In 2018-2021, it was among the top ten largest importing companies. We spoke to its director Nugzar Goniashvili.

“We are on our last breath... prices are falling catastrophically, and we can’t keep up with imports. Before you bring it in, you calculate the cost price, that is, what it costs



you, and before you actually bring the flour to the warehouse and intend to sell it, you get a lower price on the spot,” Goniashvili tells us.

According to him, they lose on the sale of each newly introduced batch.

The main reason for this is that supply exceeds demand and new importers have appeared on the market. This is confirmed by official data. We have checked the companies that import flour from Russia to Georgia in the Public Registry database. In total, there will be 320 such entities in 2018-2023. More than 90 of these companies were es-

Wheat imports from Russia and total wheat imports by year



established after Russia introduced a tax on wheat exports in 2021. In 2022, 187 new importers entered the market. As data from the Public Registry shows, Georgian citizens predominate among flour importers. 21 of them have dual Russian-Georgian citizenship. 11 importers are citizens of Russia. Apparently, each link of the industry faces such fundamental problems that threaten their business.

Marina Katsitadze, the owner of the “Progress” flour mill, believes that the government is willing to help them, but the results are not yet visible. Now she is waiting for the next meeting.

“Our problem concerns Georgian wheat farmers and the families of those citizens who have been laid off by the closed flour mills. They care about all this, but for some reason they are unable to address the problem. Everything ends at the level of understanding and meetings,” says Katsitadze.

What danger does Russian wheat and flour pose to Georgian wheat farmers?

Georgian wheat farmers have become another victim of flour imported from Russia. They can no longer sell wheat, and hundreds of tonnes of grain are rotting in warehouses. Millers complain about the quality of their wheat. The small amount that the mills are now grinding is mostly grain imported from Russia. Georgian wheat gets rotten and is thrown away.

According to flour millers, Georgian wheat alone is not suitable for obtaining top-quality flour. It is suitable only for mixing.

On 2 April, eight wheat producers published a video in social networks asking the state to help sell wheat. In the video they say that in previous years they already had no grain for this period, and now they cannot sell it at all. The video notes that with the help and encouragement of the state, wheat was sown and warehouses were built. Now the crops there are rotting and there is not enough space for the new crop.

We talked to Nikoloz Beniaidze, Chairman of the “Georgian Grain Producers Association”. He sowed wheat on 1,500 hectares in and around Shirak. He has been involved in this business since he was 16 years old, now he is 45 years old and says that this is the first time they have had such a crisis situation.

Previously, wheat produced in Georgia accounted for only 10-15 per cent of the entire market, and the rest was imported grain. Georgian farmers have never had problems selling wheat. This year, after the autumn, they can no longer sell grain.

There are now more than 30,000 tonnes of wheat for sale. Harvest time is approaching and they will be faced with the problem of accommodation. Along with all the benefits, if they cannot repay the bank loan, they will also face the loss of land.

“It was a cheap agro-loan, up to 100,000 GEL per farmer, which encouraged us to sow more area of wheat, which put us in a particularly bad situation, to pay 100,000 GEL, last year we needed 100 tons of wheat and this year we needed to harvest 180 tons of wheat. I took another loan now to cover the old one,” says Beniaidze. Together with Nikoloz, 46 farmers from three villages are united in the cooperative. They have sown crops on a total of 4,000 ha under cheap loan terms, and he said all of them are in this situation these days.

In 2020, another sub-component for the financing of one-year crops was added to the “Preferential Agrocredit” program, which has been in place since 2013.

Within the framework of the program, banks provide loans of up to 100,000 GEL for working capital, and the state helps farmers to pay the loan. 7,060 beneficiaries benefited from this sub-component in 2020 and 2022, of which 4,000 are wheat farmers. According to the information provided by the Ministry of Environment and Agriculture, the co-financing of loans issued by banks cost the budget more than 11 million GEL.

The ongoing changes in Russia’s wheat industry have highlighted the inconsistency of the Georgian government’s approach to the agricultural sector. It appears that the money spent from the budget over the years has neither developed the sector nor reduced the country’s dependence on Russia.

We have written twice to the Ministry of Agriculture and Environment and asked for the information on the Ministry’s policy on increasing wheat yields and improving wheat quality.

Unfortunately, we never received a concrete answer to this question.

The written response lists the programs that generally operate to finance grain crops. We asked the representative of the press office of the Ministry for help in recording an extensive interview with the responsible person; however, despite the promise, he did not assist us. Accordingly, from the given article, the reader should understand logically what policy the government is pursuing in this direction. Cheap credit and government funding have led to an increase in stocks of low-quality wheat, which, when it comes down to it, does not allow millers to operate freely.

The ongoing changes in Russia’s wheat industry have highlighted the inconsistency of the Georgian government’s approach to the agricultural sector. It appears that the money spent from the budget over the years has neither developed the sector nor reduced the country’s dependence on Russia.

Dear Ms. Nanuka,

In response to your application No. 014, received by the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Agriculture of Georgia on 26 April this year, I am sending you a list of projects/programmes undertaken and being implemented by the Agency, within the scope of competence, indicating the purpose of financing for current and fixed assets of grain crops:

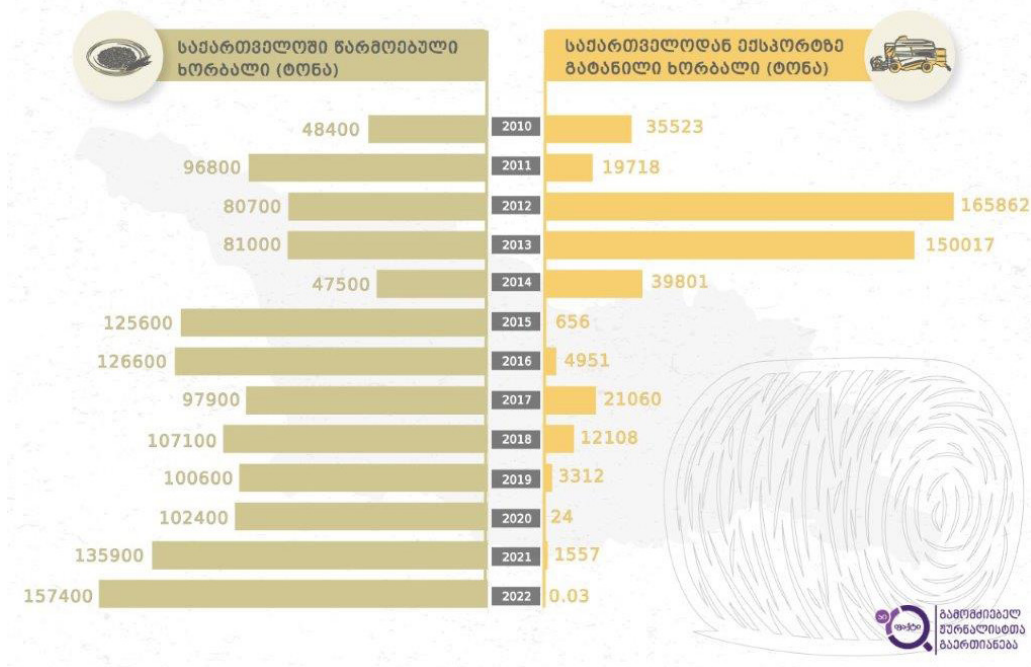
Project/program name	Year of project/program initiation	Year of project/program completion	Co-financing defined by the agreement (GEL)
"Agro Insurance Program"	2014	Ongoing	3,121,314.78
Co-financing project of processing and storage enterprises	2014	Ongoing	6,121,314.93
The "Young Entrepreneur" programme to support young entrepreneurs in rural areas.	2018	2021	59,860.80
Integrated development program for pilot regions	2022	Ongoing	1,026,000.00
Preferential agro credit project	2023	Ongoing	27,856,163.23

Nikoloz Beniaidze says that our wheat is mostly of medium quality. There are no funds to work on improving the quality: "This requires excellent technologies... intervention, proper nutrition, proper cultivars, suitability to the climate, and when a person cannot pay a loan, what kind of technologies are we talking about?"

In response to wheat farmers, Agriculture Minister Otar Shamugia says, there is a policy in place to increase the wheat harvest by 50 per cent. To achieve this goal, they are waiting for the conclusion of American experts: "They will study the entire value chain of wheat production and accordingly give us recommendations in the direction of promoting the industry; After that, we will already carry out additional activities".

In July 2022, the government restricted wheat farmers from exporting grain for one year. "Taking into account the situation created in the region, in order to ensure food security, it is important to sell locally produced wheat and barley only in the domestic market," said the then Minister of Agriculture Otar Shamugia. On April 6, four days after the wheat farmers released the video, the restriction was lifted. Farmers do not consider this a solution because the export price is unacceptable for them.

"The cost of wheat at this time last year was GEL 1.10. We planted it at that price and now we have to sell it at 55 tetri. We can't pay off the debt, otherwise we would have sold at that price.



Wheat produced in Georgia and exported

The export restriction has also been lifted, but it is worth 55 tetri even there and it is not profitable for us. If we sell at least at cost price, we will free the warehouses and cover part of the debt,” Nikoloz Beniaidze, chairman of the Grain Producers Association, stated in an interview with bm.ge.

Statistics show that only a small portion of wheat from Georgia is exported, and this is unlikely to significantly change the situation.

Update: The Ministry had to revise its position in light of the protests from wheat farmers and the dissatisfaction expressed by millers. On May 29, they announced that they would impose an additional fee of 200 GEL per ton on imported flour for 5 months. The regulation entered into force on June 12. ■





David Khvadagiani

“MOSCOW GOLD” AGAINST GEORGIA

On 10 February 1918, the first session of a representative body, the Transcaucasian Sejm, convened by the Transcaucasian Commissariat, was held in Tbilisi, in what is now the Opera House. The convocation of the Sejm was an important political act: it was the culmination of disagreements with Moscow after the Bolshevik coup in Russia in October 1917. The Transcaucasian Sejm legalised secession from Soviet Russia and paved the way for the creation of the Transcaucasian Independent Democratic Federative Republic, which was proclaimed later on 22 April 1918.

The Georgian Social-Democrats, the Armenian Dashnaksutyun, the Azerbaijani Musavat, and other parties opposed to Bolshevik Russia had ambitious objectives against the backdrop of global events. They aimed to establish the Transcaucasian Democratic Federal Republic, with Tbilisi as its political center. For Tbilisi, left without an ally amid the ruins of the Ottoman and Russian empires, the integration of Transcaucasian countries into the United Republic and control of the Baku-Batumi highway were crucial factors. This strategic move aimed to draw the attention of powerful European states and secure a strong protector and ally.

However, the local Bolsheviks, a Moscow stronghold, did not sit idle. On the basis of a directive received from Moscow, they organised a large demonstration in Tbilisi's Alexander Garden against the Transcaucasian Sejm, protesting against the secession of Transcaucasia from the Soviet Russia. The famous Bolshevik and “teacher of Stalin” Arkela Okuashvili wrote in his memoirs about this Bolshevik rally on 10 February: “On this day was the opening of the Menshevik Sejm. We gathered under the leadership of our committee from each district. Among us were; Filipe Makharadze, Seryozha Kavtaradze, Kamo's sisters: Petrosyan Javaira, Arusiaka, Lusika, Sandukhti,

Iason Dzorbenadze, Giorgi Chkheidze, Nestora Tsertsvadze, Stefane Shaumyan, Nikolai Kuznetsov, artilleryman Petrenko (Navtlukh) Kivkutsani, Malakia Toroshelidze, Armen Sabashvili, Iason Dzorbenadze from the 3rd district came with his comrades, Anton Mgaloblishvili held the banner. Stefan Shaumyan and Nikolai Kuznetsov were in the former Armenian seminary, they had to come to the opening of the rally”. The Bolsheviks' official pretext was the legalisation by the Transcaucasian Sejm of secession from Russia and the protest against the closure in the previous days of the Bolshevik publications “The Caucasian Worker” and “The Struggle” by the government. However, in reality, their plan mirrored the Russian model. Just as the previous year saw them suc-



cessfully storm the Winter Palace in Petrograd to capture the government, they aimed to attack the former Viceroy's palace and destroy the Transcaucasian Commissariat.

The Georgian Bolsheviks had once already failed in their plan to seize power when on 12 December 1917 the newly formed Guard disarmed the Bolshevik garrison of the Tbilisi arsenal. They were driven by a desire for revenge, but their plans were foiled again. A special detachment of the Transcaucasian Commissariat, commanded by Georgian officer Vlas Imnadze, opened fire on the Bolshevik rally and dispersed it by force. Arakela Okuashvili recalled: "... I turned my face towards the bell tower, one bullet hit me in the lapel of my coat, I managed to get out safely to the Treasury building, there was a fierce firefight, rifles and machine guns were firing. I turned round and saw Philip Makharadze running away. He had a hat in his hand, his coat was dusty. He must have fallen. I grabbed his hand and rushed him into the Zemel shop to Gabo Okoyev. We entered the back room of the shop from the courtyard. Filipe was given a chair, Gabo's wife Satinika cleaned his coat. Filipe was very excited, calling out in Russian: "Eto k luchemo, eto k luchemo." (meaning – this is for the better).

At that time even Arakela Okuashvili did not understand what was meant by the first Bolshevik of Georgia – Makharadze, who after the Russian February Revolution of 1917 was brutally defeated by the leader of the Georgian Social Democrats, Noe Jordania, in a political discussion who also thwarted Makharadze's efforts to bring the Russian "Bolshevik Revolution" to Georgia. But fact was, that day marked the onset of a continuous three-year struggle between Georgia and Russia. From the declaration of Georgia's state independence on 26 May 1918 until 1921, the Bolsheviks, backed by the funding and support of Soviet Russia, orchestrated three uprisings against Georgia. These events were accompanied by assaults from the volunteer army of the "Second Russia," participating in the Russian Civil War, as well as two full-scale invasions by the Soviet Red Army. The second intervention in 1921 proved fatal for Georgia, leading to 70 years of Soviet-Russian occupation and terror.

Before this tragic outcome, significant battles unfolded. In one such battle, the Georgian Bolsheviks were rightfully branded as "agents bribed with Moscow's gold."

THE BOLSHEVIK "AGRARIAN TERROR" OF 1918

On 3 March 1918, under the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, Russia recognised the Batumi district, Kars and Ardahan lands as the property of the Ottoman Empire, but the Transcaucasian Democratic Federal Republic and the Transcaucasian Sejm, convened on 10 February, did not accept these conditions. after which the Ottomans began to occupy the territories by force of arms.



Filipe Makharadze at the opening of the memorial to the fallen Bolsheviks, 1922



Arakela Okuashvili

The Ottomans were given an opportunity to take revenge for their defeat on the Caucasus front, which was met by duly mobilized Russian satellite Bolshevik forces in the Caucasus, who tried to implement a small model of the Leninist course in the Caucasus and turn the global “imperialist war” into a Bolshevik revolution.

From late 1917, the Bolsheviks contributed greatly to the collapse of the Transcaucasian front and, supported by a mass of Bolshevized soldiers, attempted for the first time to proclaim Soviet power in Tbilisi, although the Transcaucasian Commissariat and the Executive Committee of the Tbilisi Council of Workers’ and Soldiers were able to defend the city and the railway. The Tiflis Red Guard (later the People’s Guard) thwarted these coup plans by seizing the Arsenal and disarming its garrison.

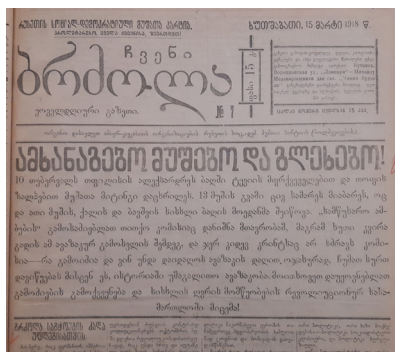
In the spring of 1918, the Bolsheviks stirred up a series of uprisings in Georgia. The uprisings were organised from the Kavkaz (Vladikavkaz), the main city of the “Soviet Republic of Terek” in the North Caucasus: Bolshevik uprisings broke out in Kakheti, the mountains of eastern Georgia and the mountainous part of Imereti. Alexander (Sasha) Gegechkor’s units were particularly active in the counties of Samegrelo and Racha-Lechkhumi, followed by the declaration of Soviet authority in Lechkhumi and the loss of the Transcaucasian government’s de facto control over the region.

On 26 March 1918 the Bolsheviks seized power in Sukhumi and proclaimed Soviet power in the whole district.

Events were particularly dramatic in the Dzhava and Tskhinvali districts of the Gori district, populated by Ossetians. Contemporaries assessed the armed uprisings that broke out there as “agrarian anarchy” and pointed out that the inclusion of a significant mass of the Ossetian peasantry in them was also conditioned by their difficult socio-historical background.

The resettled and landless Ossetian peasantry didn’t wait for the development of a new land reform after the revolution, as the majority of the peasantry in other regions did. Spontaneously and arbitrarily, they began seizing the lands and property of former landlords, and, in some cases, physically liquidating them. The brutality of the rebellious peasants, including former soldiers and deserters, was also influenced by the well-crafted agitation of the Bolsheviks. They conducted covert agitation among the peasantry, suggesting that “the Mensheviks and the Guard had sold out to the nobility and were planning to restore serfdom.”

The anarchy in Gori district (Mazra) presented a special threat to the Transcaucasian authorities, as it jeopardized the central railway line. The defense of Batumi would have become impossible if the group of deserters operating in Gori district, led by Isak Kharebov, a former lieutenant colonel of the Russian Imperial Army, had succeed-



*The newspaper “Our Struggle”
March 15, 1918*



*Noe Ramishvili and
Noe Zhordania*

ed in taking over Tskhinvali and Gori. To address this, the Transcaucasian government had to reorganize the armed forces, albeit at the expense of weakening the Batumi District front. Guard commander Valiko Dzhugeli managed to defeat the rebels and restore order within a few days, but this was enough time for Batumi to fall without outside help.

On 1 April 1918 (April 14 in the new style), Batumi fell, and the Ottoman army gained control over Adjara. On 17 May 1918, the Guards occupied Sukhumi, and Valiko Dzhugeli triumphantly entered his hometown. Subsequently, the Georgian army, along with the Guards, successfully cleared the entire region of Abkhazia of Bolshevik forces.

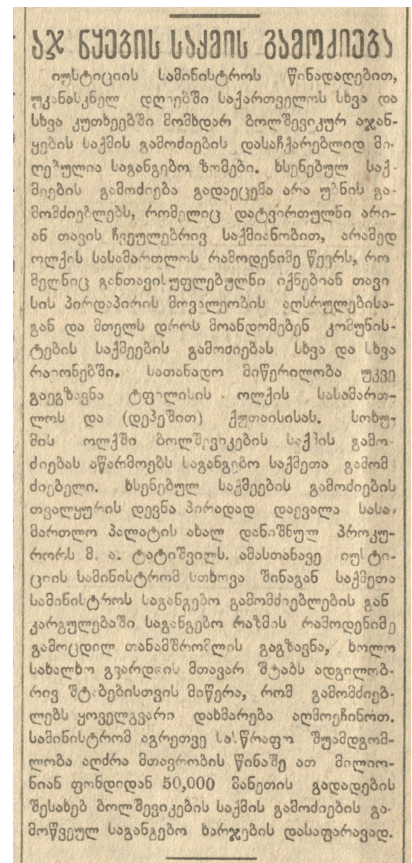
Following Germany’s offer of protection and alliance, Georgia declared its state independence on 26 May 1918. With the support of the Georgian authorities and the People’s Guard, all pockets of rebellion were neutralized during the summer, initiating a process of stabilization in the country.

THE 1919 DREAM OF A RUSSIAN “ COUP”

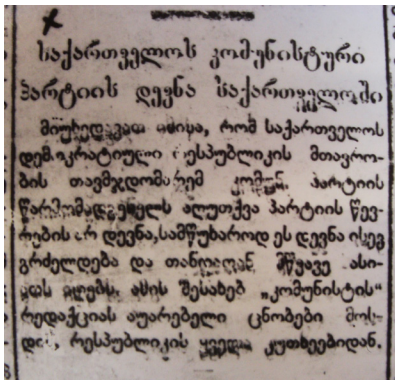
From the autumn of 1919, following the Bolsheviks’ success in the Russian Civil War, they resumed activities in Georgia. However, unlike the previous year, they no longer possessed ample resources to organize an uprising in the region. The self-government and land reforms implemented by the Georgian government, along with informational efforts, fostered loyalty to the republic among the rural population and mitigated the potential for a social upheaval. Additionally, the effective operations of military counterintelligence and the special division (security service) of the Interior Ministry further contributed to stabilizing the situation.

The Caucasian Regional Committee of the Communist Party of Russia changed tactics: this time the uprisings were not organised spontaneously, but involved surprise attacks and the establishment of control over the state administration, post and telegraph and other important facilities by well-organised groups in virtually all districts of Georgia and in the capital Tbilisi. They were also planning to arrest members of the government and, by neutralising them, to exert decisive influence on the Georgian armed forces, which would be virtually left without leadership.

Particular attention this time was paid to the capture of the Transcaucasian railway and the Tsipi tunnel, which would give a significant advantage to the organisers of the uprising. The committee sent the Georgian Bolshevik Ivan Dzhejelava to the district of Gori to lead the uprising. The plan was as follows: armed detachments were to occupy the town of Khashuri; Arsen Lomidze was to attack from the Ali side, Znaur Aidarov from the Khtsisi side, and Tate Buhrikidze from the Surami side.



“The Republic of Georgia newspaper”, November 12, 1919.



*"The Communist" newspaper
June 13, 1920*

The Bolshevik uprising of 1919, which was supposed to start on 7 November, was doomed to defeat: Georgian security services knew their plans in advance, and the Bolshevik, illegal military-revolutionary headquarters, in which a Georgian counter-intelligence officer was embedded, was detained by a special unit of the Ministry of Internal Affairs in the "Aurora" hotel on Vorontsov Square.

Among those arrested was the chairman of the so-called Garrison Military Council, Iliia Mgeladze (pseudonym "Korogli"). The center of the rebellion was liquidated, the RCP(B) of the Caucasus Regional Committee canceled the preparations, but due to the lack of information, rebellions still started in Kakheti, Guria, Abkhazia and Gori districts, although the units of the People's Guard met the demonstrations prepared and had no problems in liquidating these hotbeds.

The failure of the November Uprising dealt a severe blow to the Bolsheviks. Soon after, the government of the Democratic Republic of Georgia released a statement by the Minister of Internal Affairs, Noe Ramishvili, in which he detailed the Bolsheviks' plans. In an interview with a British correspondent, Ramishvili also revealed that the Bolsheviks had brought 87 million manats from Soviet Russia, which they had spent on bribery and propaganda. However, he emphasized that the Georgian government had been aware of their plans from the beginning and had no difficulty neutralizing them.

After the liquidation of the uprising, the military field command sentenced to execution several Bolsheviks arrested in Guria, Gori district, and other places. According to the decision of the military field court, the Ossetian Bolshevik Znaur Aidarov, who had been imprisoned, was also shot (in 1938 the Soviet occupation authorities gave the name of Znaur Aidarov to the Kornisi district in Shida Kartli).

On 30 November 1919 counter-intelligence officers of the People's Guard arrested Georgian Bolshevik leader Filipe Makharadze, disguised as a priest, on Kodjori Street in Tbilisi.

The Guards seized secret documents from Makharadze, wherein it became known how the Bolsheviks planned to seize state institutions in Tbilisi and other cities.

1920 - "RED VENDÉE."

In 1920, at the instructions of Sergo Ordzhonikidze, head of the Caucasus Bureau of the Russian Communist Party, extensive preparations were undertaken in the Caucasus. In April, a "South Ossetian Partisan Brigade" was created from Ossetian militant Bolsheviks who had fled Georgia in previous years, and Razden Kozaev, an old Bolshevik, was appointed its political commissar. However, Kozaev had no time for work in the brigade, more important things were awaiting him. In May, the 2nd conference of the newly created South Ossetian organisation of the Communist Party of Georgia elected him a member



Iliia Mgeladze

of the district committee and brought him to Moscow to present the “Appeal of the workers of South Ossetia” to Vladimir Lenin. Kozaev was received by Lenin during the Second Congress of the Comintern in Moscow and was given the promise to help the “rebellious workers of South Ossetia”.

May 1920 was a difficult start for the countries of the Transcaucasus:

Soviet Russia took advantage of the conflict between the republics of Armenia and Azerbaijan. As most of the Azerbaijani army had been mobilised in Ganja and Karabakh against the Armenian army, it occupied Baku almost without a fight and continued its offensive directly towards Tbilisi. But this attack was not the result of inertia. Bolshevik combat units were already prepared to operate in the rear, both in Georgia and in Armenia, and immediately tried to seize power, which manifested itself in a Bolshevik uprising in the Kars district, an attempt to attack the military school in Tbilisi and to capture members of the government, but this operation also failed. Nikoloz Nizharadze, a counter-intelligence officer of the People’s Guard headquarters, uncovered and arrested a group of terrorists led by the Bolshevik Pavle Mardaleishvili.

The plan was as follows: when the Red Army attacked Tbilisi, the Bolshevik terrorists, who had a secret base in the village of Maghliki in Imereti, were to blow up the railway bridge at Rion station, thus cutting off supplies to the Georgian army and the People’s Guard. A similarly dangerous military situation was created in other parts of the country: the Georgian army and the People’s Guard had to repel the Red Army division in the east – from Piolio, Sadakhlo and the Red Bridge. A tense situation was also created in the Batumi region, from where the British were already withdrawing, and a covert battle was under way to recapture the region.

The Georgian authorities were aware of the British withdrawal plan and began moving military units from Ozurgeti as early as January, and from the end of April Georgian troops became more active in the Artvini and Khulo directions. On 2 May Georgian units occupied Artvini, but serious problems arose in the direction of Khulo. In the Batumi district, where the volunteer army had considerable influence, there was a strong Bolshevik underground and a pro-Ottoman and then pro-Turkish organisation, the Batumi Islamic Council, aka “Sedai Mileti”. Establishing control over the Batumi district by the Georgian government was not in the interests of either of them. This coincided with secret negotiations between Soviet Russia and Kemalist Turkey, and armed units of the “Sedai Mileti”, linked to the Bolshevik underground, put up serious resistance to the Georgian army on the Kobuleti and Khulo roads. Bolshevik terrorists Akakii Surguladze and Germane Dzhibladze, on the instructions of Sergo Gubelia



“The Devil’s Whip” newspaper #31, 1920



Melkisedek Kedia and Platon Pachulia

(Medzmariashvili), head of the Batumi Bolshevik Committee's combat groups, blew up the railway bridge over the Kintrishi River on 23 April to stop the Georgian army's advance.

On 5 May 1920, the Red Army finally took up positions opposite the Georgian coastal forces near the Psou River. Military intelligence agents became active on the Abkhaz side. At a time when the Georgian Democratic Republic was under pressure from Soviet Russia, the authorities had information from the Georgian intelligence network in the North Caucasus about the invasion by Ossetian Bolshevik units that would again threaten the rear of Tbilisi and the main roads and railways of Georgia, which soon became a reality and the "South Ossetian Partisan Brigade" broke into the rear of the Georgian army and the People's Guard in the direction of Java-Tskhinvali.

The commander-in-chief of the Georgian armed forces, Giorgi Kvinitadze, was forced to regroup his troops and send battalions of the People's Guard from the eastern front in the direction of Tskhinvali. The beginning of anti-Soviet uprisings in Ganja in early May and in Zakatala district on 9 June gave him such an opportunity: in Zakatala district protests of Azerbaijani beys – Galadzhiev, Kardashev and Abasov – began with the support of agents of Georgian military intelligence, and according to unconfirmed information Georgian special services supported the Ganja uprising – it was controlled from the office of Noe Ramishvili. The Red Army command was forced to send significant units against the rebellious Azerbaijanis.

The underground struggle continued in the rear of the Georgian armed forces: on 6 June, Georgian counter-intelligence arrested the Bolshevik Sofia Pressman at Natanebi station, who was carrying a huge number of proclamations against the Georgian government and the British, printed on behalf of the Batumi Committee of the Russian Communist Party, from the editorial office of the newspaper "Communist" in Tiflis to Batumi. The proclamations consisted of two parts: one was directed against the Georgian government, accusing it of "intending to retake the Batumi region by force of arms", the other against the "British imperialists".

In June 1920, six battalions of the People's Guard, artillery, and cavalry units completely cleared the Gori district of rebellious Ossetian Bolshevik units and averted the danger of a blockade of Tbilisi.

On 13 June 1920, the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Georgian Democratic Republic closed the newly opened newspaper "Komunist", published on the basis of an agreement of 7 May 1920 "for the rebels of South Ossetia", because of its support to the "right to self-determination" and proclamations printed for Batumi.

On 25 June Georgian Telegram Agency reported that a conspiracy against the Democratic Republic of Georgia was disclosed in Sukhumi and Gagra. The plot involved communists: Kukhaleishvili, Vigryanov,



Artillery of the People's Guard in Sochi, 1918



Valiko Dzhugeli

Svanidze, and others. The investigation found weapons, grenades, explosives, and military maps in their possession. Together with them, Georgian counter-intelligence arrested Bolshevik terrorists who had escaped from Batumi – Akakia Surguladze and Germane Dzhibladze, who had been serving their sentences before the Russian occupation in 1921.

In July 1920, the British left the Batumi district and handed Batumi over to Georgia. The Georgian army and the People's Guard entered the city. Muhammad-bey Keskin-zade Kiknadze, commander-in-chief of the Ajarian army and leader of the Batumi Islamic Council, was secretly linked to the Georgian government. Although Keskin-zade held out hope for his allies, the Bolsheviks of the Batumi district, he did not resist the Georgian armed forces. He disbanded his army and moved to Khopa. After two years of fighting, Batumi was returned to the Georgian Democratic Republic.

THE YEAR 1921 – DUSK

Soviet Russia and its leader Vladimir Lenin, recognising the global political order of the new world based primarily on the principle of self-determination of nations, viewed the restoration of the Russian Empire in a new form with caution. His policy did not initially involve direct intervention and occupation. He preferred to take over targeted countries by organising internal coups and uprisings. From 1917 through 1920, all Russian attempts to overthrow the government of the Democratic Republic of Georgia through rebellion and the expenditure of vast financial resources failed.

In early 1921, the de jure recognition of Georgia by the Supreme Council of the Allies and the arrival of the Georgian-friendly Aristide Briand in the French government was the precipitating factor for Soviet Russia to launch a direct intervention against Georgia, which Lenin did after the persistent persuasion of the Russian People's Commissar for Nationalities, Joseph Stalin, and the head of the cabinet, Sergo Ordzhonikidze. Although Soviet propaganda for decades built a myth that in February 1921 in Georgia there was an uprising and overthrow of the "Menshevik government", in fact it was a direct intervention and occupation. The famous historian Firuz Kazemzadeh in his book "The Struggle for Transcaucasia 1917-21" (published in the United States in the early 1950s) noted that the already weak Communist Party of Georgia disintegrated after the failed coup attempt in 1920 and "fell in spirit". By 1921 it no longer had the resources to organise an uprising.

(The clearest example of this is the secret report of Filipe Makharadze, Chairman of the RevCom of Georgia (06.12.1921), which was published in full in Istanbul in 1922 by the émigré journal of the Social Democratic Party "Free Georgia" with the inscription: "Copy tak-



Giorgi Kvinitadze



Vlasa Imnadze



People's Guardsmen who died in the battle with the Bolsheviks in 1921



Memorial of Heroes of 1918-1921, Alexander Garden, Tbilisi

en from the report kept in the Central Committee of the Russian Communist Party". This emphasised that, despite the military defeat, Georgian politicians and intelligence agents still had great influence and opportunities, even in terms of obtaining secret documents in Moscow. Filipe Makharadze wrote to Moscow:

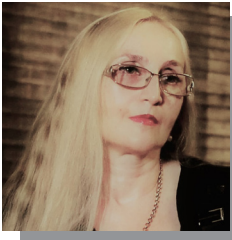
"The following happened: when the Red Army offensive began, none of the party cells, imagine, not a single member of the party in Georgia knew anything about the purpose and intention of this offensive and did not even have any suspicions. Therefore, no preventive measures could be taken on the part of our organisations, as it was unknown that they were still alive. Obviously, this circumstance made it even easier for the Mensheviks, during the Red Army offensive, to settle the scores with our organisations left here and there and to capture not only Communists but also, to a greater or lesser extent, those who sympathised with them." Thus the following took place:

- The entry of the Red Army into Georgia and the proclamation of Soviet power took on the character of an obvious invasion from outside, since no one inside at that time had thought of organising an uprising.
- At the time of the proclamation of Soviet power in Georgia, not a single party cell was found, and even less a single party member who could have organised the establishment of power, so that in most cases this work could have been taken up by dubious or downright malicious elements.

In the 1920s and 1930s, as a result of party purges and mass repressions organised by Stalin, the majority of Bolsheviks who had fought selflessly in 1917-21 "for the establishment of Soviet power in Georgia" were liquidated.

For decades, the Soviet regime deliberately erased, wiped out, and falsified the most important events of Georgia's twentieth-century political struggle. The erasure of Georgia's "lost history" and political identity from the memory of generations is the most reliable tool of the aggressive Russian Empire to subjugate Georgian society. ■





Khatuna Khabuliani

Lia Bagrationi's Asemic Palimpsest



Recently, notions of writing, literacy, fiction and its content have intersected with absurd statements of some politicians and a parodic revival of the seemingly forgotten Soviet censorship. Unfortunately, it is not a novelty in our reality when a fiction text and an author are identified, sometimes even the punishment of a writer for a character's behaviour or opinions expressed may be called for. For some, discussions in the academic space are indistinguishable from political rhetoric; respect for historical figures is equated with blind idolatry, and for the most part, we are dealing with rather insidious demagoguery and manipulation targeted at the less educated part of society.

It was against this tense and surrealistic backdrop that Lia Bagrationi's solo show 'Universal Writing' took place at the Dédicace Gallery. The exhibition was certainly not for those involved in the aforementioned activities, but it is never too late to become interested in education and reflection on the history of writing.

In her talk, Lia Bagrationi skilfully and accurately recounts her childhood memories when, before learning to read and write, she first became interested in writing and, im-



itating her elders, began to fill in pages with imitations of calligraphy. Later, she combined those early, childlike pages covered with “scribbles” with the basics of writing. “Playing grown-ups”, a favourite pastime of pre-school children, often involves the imitation of “slanting” handwriting and has often been a source of inspiration for artists; it seems to express the archetypal signs, the childhood of civilisation, still undeciphered codes of calligraphy, which are then structured and transformed into alphabets or hieroglyphs.

Theoreticians have frequently highlighted the allure that stems from observing writing that eludes our understanding. For instance, the enchantment of lace ornamentation can captivate those unfamiliar with Oriental calligraphy, where the content of the writing may not be entirely benevolent. In such instances, the observer appreciates the formal beauty of the writing without grasping its meaning. Artistic creations in the vein of Assamese painting, akin to those crafted by Cy Twombly, are connected to the influences of nature, spontaneity, and simultaneously, cultural elements. Writing serves as direct evidence of civilization’s existence, and Assamese painting, in turn, manifests as an indicator of civilization’s complex, occasionally tumultuous nature, as well as periodic instances of inevitable stagnation and decay. Peter Schwenger’s work, “Asemic: The Art of Writing,” associates the history of the term with the contributions of Roland Barthes and Jacques Derrida. Specifically, Derrida’s text, “Extensions,” refers to the spaces between words as “asemic intervals,” where signification becomes possible without conveying a specific meaning.

The term “asemic” is formed from the Greek *sema* (“sign”), prefixed with the negation “a”. According to the common opinion among art historians, Assamese painting existed even before the emergence of this term, as evidenced by quasi-calligraphic samples of visual poetry of different eras, sketches, etc.

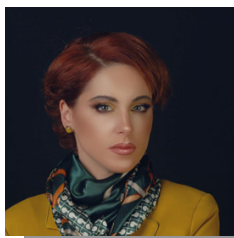
Given our experience, I wonder how we can define Lia Bagrationi’s asemic project. Where do our thoughts lead us when we find ourselves in this spectacular, literally multi-layered exposition? Continuous chains of the infinity symbol adorn the walls, gallery stained glass windows, felt mats, parchment paper and canvases. Felt ‘layered’ curtains of different sizes and colours descend from the ceiling and are periodically covered with transparent fabric. The installation – the symbolic layers of the palimpsest speak a language of texture – the thick, fibrous structure of felt is itself a piece of vast infor-

mation with an energy field, an archaic and ritual memory; the continuous line of ornamental pseudo-calligraphy inscribed on it enriches the endless text with implicit content.

Here and there, parts of the “text” are “crossed out” with a red or black “marker”. The exposition represents the layers of one large text, one great narrative, an eternal story that has been rewritten and unfolded many times, always alive and continuing history. Lia Bagrationi’s interest in form-texture and its content is constantly evolving through different projects, always aiming at meaningful roots, a universal idea. The extension of the relationship between form and content appeared as a strong artistic message in the performance when the solidified form of the granular content of the broken clay pot remained as a sign of emptiness. The title of the project was ‘This is the Pot’ (2015), and the epigraph was Lao Tzu’s phrase: “We shape clay into a pot, but it is the emptiness inside that holds whatever we want.” An earlier installation – ‘Illusion of Money’ (2011) – presented a collection of universal money signs with unexpected hybrids of clay and various precious metals. The interest in universal models that have infinite hypostases in the material world of materials and forms defines the artist’s vision and offers the viewer a variety of creative approaches.

The works of Lia Bagrationi are poetically-philosophical, they touch upon eternal, unchanging themes, the drama of transience and the cyclical nature of this world, although these forms always express a modern, new and lively feeling. ■





Tinatin Kavtaradze

The price of lies, or what do we teach students in school?

Georgia's national curriculum sets high standards. For instance, the 2016 curriculum for Georgian literature even includes a requirement for students to be capable of composing fables. While the development of creative writing and thinking skills is undoubtedly important, the programme lacks guidance on how to achieve these goals, neither for fables nor otherwise, and the requirements are unrealistic and unachievable. What matters is the plan itself – what we will write there and how we will create a façade, what we will show the public and how we will deceive ourselves.

Education is life itself. We primarily acquire education from the behavioral models and examples that the environment provides. What does this mean? The reality is that the student, expected to be capable of writing fables according to the curriculum, feels deceived by the system. Moreover, he soon discovers that books have become boring and contain cheap reading material; that what is taught in school is far from life experience, i.e., not only does he not know how to write fables, but he is lame in reading, it turns out that he is completely unable to withstand the trials of life.

So, what is left for a deluded and ignorant person? He has to become a liar in order to somehow create the illusion of studying at the next level of education (university). Here are some examples that illustrate how falsity becomes a way of life:

Example 1:

A high school teacher asks students to write down what he dictates, yet the material itself is displayed on a projector screen. The students are actively writing under dictation. Suddenly the instructor asks: "Why are you writing? The text is displayed on the screen, can't you take a picture of it? Or ask me for a script, after all, isn't that your right?" The students are surprised, and one of them replies: "I thought about that, but I didn't mean to offend you."

The key words here are "I didn't want to offend you", which means that the main thing is to lie, to create an illusion, to pretend that I didn't do anything here, to be silent and to be patient – even if you realize that you are given a stupid assignment.

Example 2:

The University gives the student the opportunity to study compulsory and elective subjects. Elective subjects may not be directly related to the student's future profession, but the university gives students the opportunity to decide in which direction they

want to acquire additional knowledge. The teacher of one of such elective subjects at the first meeting asks students why they have decided to choose this subject and what their expectations are. The answer of the majority coincides with each other and sounds like this: *I was told that you are a good teacher and I won't have any problems with getting credit.*

It turned out that the most important thing for a student is to get a grade, and the criterion of a good teacher is how easy or difficult it is to get a grade from the teacher.

Example 3:

The lecturer examines the dissemination of propaganda by totalitarian regimes and poses thought-provoking questions. The aim is to analyse the spread of propaganda and its impact on the individual. Students demonstrate a sound understanding of indoctrination, offer insightful responses, criticise the Nazi regime and engage in discussions about the 'banality of evil'. Their attitude to the accountability of individuals who claim to have followed orders at the Nuremberg trial is clear. The teacher is satisfied as there seems to be a clear understanding of personal responsibility and the role of citizens.

However, when asked to give examples of contemporary attempts at indoctrination in modern society, such as in Russia or Georgia, there is a noticeable silence. The teacher rephrases the question, emphasising how attempts to influence our thinking can be overlooked. Despite this clarification, the answer remains: "I haven't thought about that".

When discussing the abolition of personal responsibility, the students did not realise that they themselves were abolishing it when they did not analyse the environment in which they had to live, and this was natural, because their school experience had taught them only to lie, to deceive, and keep silent.

This is how lies shape the morals of young people: when they don't like the truth, they deceive themselves; when they don't want to offend, they lie, and they keep on lying until they forget the truth, but the truth doesn't go anywhere. They do not know that each lie we tell is a debt to the truth, and sooner or later we will have to pay that debt. It is logical that the bigger the lie, the bigger the price we will have to pay.

And we pay the price with an illiberal democracy, which is always prone to dictatorship, with a weak civil society. So, if the national curriculum of Georgia has trained you to be:

“...harmless,
uncomplaining,
submissive,
grateful,
indifferent,
subservient,
enduring like a mule”¹,–

Then get used to it, be patient because you don't have freedom of choice and you won't have it until you find your voice and call out to yourself:

Enough, I want the truth! ■



1 Ilia Chavadze's Poem "Happy Nation"



Mikheil Antadze

WHITE FEVER OF AUGUST

One hundred and one years ago, at the junction where the European motorway E-117 meets E-60 – yes, almost exactly one hundred and one years ago – a light two-seater Tarantas was driving along the road. A pair of horses, one white and one black. According to Baron Tornau, at that time, there were 479 such wagons in Tiflis. “It is like a covered cart in which nobles can sit,” said the lexicographer, and indeed, the most outstanding people traveled on these four-wheelers.

But, the coachman was a blockhead and a scoundrel. He was hungover, practically dying. Sweat trickled down his narrow forehead, then over his squinted eyes, and finally over his coal-black mustache. His face, already expressionless from drinking, was completely wiped out as he steered the horses without thinking.

The wagon nearly overturned in a turn due to his recklessness. The alarmed white horse jumped aside, almost derailing the cart. The coachman quickly regained control of the situation. Everything happened in an instant, and the elderly passengers felt nothing more than the usual jolt.

However, the coachman, still suffering from a hangover, was startled. When he realized that he and the passengers were safe, he took off his hat and sat on the seat with his hat raised in his hand.

It was at this moment that he witnessed a strange sight for the first time: iron monsters approaching him with a roar on the road. He was shocked – the surroundings filled with the thunderous noise of huge metal dragons lined up one after another.

But the godless man didn’t even have time to cross himself; he sat there with his hat in his hand. Only then did it occur to him to look at the passengers. The elderly sat quietly, and the poor man realized that he alone was seeing this horror.

The flickering, roaring creatures were terrifying. They were split the hot air with their huge beaks..... the heads of swallowed humans sticking out of their open throats. Dark green skulls were glistening pitifully in the sun.

But instead two words flashed through the senseless mind of the coachman: white fever. He had heard of it, had heard that it was caused by continuous drunkenness. That’s what he had heard, otherwise how could an uneducated man know that delirium is a psychosis related to alcohol abstinence, provoking nightmares, devils loss of ability to orientate oneself in time and surroundings.... slurred speech – as with the intake of tranquilizers, neuroleptics and barbiturates... “Voices” that berate, threaten, laugh, demand that he be punished and even killed..... paranoia. looking for the enemy in everyone around him. Because of this, he can do unexpected things.

He continued on his way. “Blockhead, blockhead, you are yourself” haunted him from childhood; he was called a blockhead by his peers, and his response was always, “Blockhead, you are yourself.” As he got older, if he was in a bad mood, he would attack whoever said “blockhead” and bite them in the face. Once, he almost bit off Mitra’s nose.

But, they remained friends. He spent those days in Tiflis, drinking vodka with Mitra, the janitor Gora, and the tramp Vitaly. Then they arrived, he saw the commander, and received the order. He accepted it for many reasons; firstly, there was no chance not to accept it because...

His head was exploding with the echoes of the monsters that had just passed by.

But, the Tarantas continued on its way and he saw people running ahead screaming, strangely dressed, but yet undoubtedly Georgians. They were fleeing from danger and terror, from fire and enemy bullets.....

Blockhead glanced again at the elderly. No, they had not seen thousands of men, women and children at all. Evidently it was white fever again..... Hopelessness was the expression on their haggard faces.

But some of them looked at him with contempt, calling him threateningly “Blockhead, Blockhead” as they passed by. His heart bursting with fear, he urged his horses forward. But they did not disappear... He felt that next time on the road, he would encounter the fire that pursued these unfortunates. Here, the gates of the underworld opened, he thought, and the evil vision slowly disappeared.

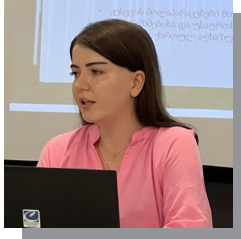
The road ahead appeared calm, but the coachman’s anxiety did not subside. He anticipated the next ordeal, and indeed, a horde of miserable, sleek, dark green-headed imps emerged. Angry and fierce, they carried loot, stolen and plundered, speaking words resembling Russian. They brandished short rifles, unlike anything he had seen before. Where else would he have seen such things if not in the white fever of hot August?

Nevertheless, he passed through that as well. Lo and behold, he received the sign, reached the appointed place, stopped the wagon, and they rushed out of the forest to attack. The old man said something, the woman screamed. They shot, beat, killed, robbed, stole, threatened, and left.

He sat motionless, carefree, as if nothing had happened, stuck on the border of this and that world, in the euphoria of involuntary foresight, intimidated-captured by the Inferno, labelled or marked...

As ordered, he had to wait for someone. He waited. Finally, a constable, a policeman and the guards arrived..... they saw the terrible picture, looked round, then came up to him.... Well, tell us how it happened ... They were dark-skinned, they looked like Armenians, they beat me with rifle butts ... They lifted his clothes, saw that he wasn’t beaten, and realised that he was lying.... they realised. So the investigation was launched! Two years later, on the gallows, before his death, he would think for the thousandth time: How could I have said that, what happened to me. He will not have time to do it again and once again blame what happened on the white fever of August....

But instead... ■



Tako Zekalashvili

Reasons for Continuing the Unsuccessful Geneva Discussions

In order to stop the aggression carried out by the Russian Federation against Georgia in August 2008, a 6-point ceasefire agreement was signed on 12 August with the mediation of the European Union. Point 6 of the plan, prepared on behalf of the European Union through the mediation of French President Nicolas Sarkozy, states “the start of international discussions on conditions for security and stability in Abkhazia and South Ossetia”. In accordance with the above agreement, on 15 October 2008, a format for the Geneva International Discussions was established, with the primary purpose of: (1) the establishment of security and stability in Abkhazia and “South Ossetia” and (2) the return of displaced persons. The first has evolved over the years as a combination of two issues: non-use of force and international security mechanisms. The two main objectives of this format are to harmonise international security mechanisms and ensure the dignified and safe return of IDPs, as well as to address the humanitarian concerns and needs of the conflict-affected population – IDPs and people living along the dividing line.

In 2008, after the recognition of the “independence” of two occupied regions of Georgia, Georgia severed diplomatic relations with the Russian Federation. Since then, the format of international discussions in Geneva has remained the only international platform where meetings between the parties to the conflict take place. This format is unique in that, in addition to Georgia and Russia, it involves other stakeholders. All participants in the dialogue are represented as individuals. In addition to Georgia and Russia, representatives of the proxy regimes of Sukhumi and Tskhinvali, the Chairman of the Government of the Autonomous Republic of Abkhazia and the head of the provisional administration of the former South Ossetian Autonomous District, co-chairs from the United Nations, the European Union, the OSCE and a representative of the United States take part in the discussions.

The format of the international discussions in Geneva also includes a plenary session attended by Georgia, the United States, Russia, the UN, the OSCE and the EU. The plenary session was held only once, during the first round, and thereafter never took place for the remaining 56 rounds.

The position of the State of Georgia in the process of international discussions in Geneva has remained unchanged since 2008. It is in our country's interest for the Russian Federation, which is occupying the regions of Tskhinvali and Abkhazia, to sign an agreement on the non-use of force. If the governments of the occupied Abkhazia and Tskhinvali regions sign the agreement, it implies that Georgia recognizes them as independent states and grants them political legitimacy. The role of the Russian Federation is significant because if it does not become a signatory to the agreement on the non-use of force, it implies a removal of its responsibility.

The position of the Georgian state that the ongoing dialogue within the framework of the Geneva Discussions is the only mechanism for reaching an agreement on the ceasefire has been constantly reaffirmed through official statements of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia since the creation of the format of the international talks. Moreover, the Georgian side expresses its readiness to participate constructively in this process. It should be noted that Georgia has already unilaterally committed itself to the non-use of force in 2010, which was then repeated in 2013. In both cases, this was announced at the international level by the President of Georgia, Mikheil Saakashvili, and in 2013 the Georgian Parliament also adopted a unilateral document with legal force in response to the commitment.

As for the position of the Russian Federation (which is "shared" by the de facto representatives of Sukhum and Tskhinvali), if an agreement on non-use of force is reached, it will present itself as a guarantor of non-use of force together with the European Union and the United States of America. This stance has remained consistent over the years and was declared by the Russian Federation before the commencement of the first round, persisting through the 56th round of Geneva talks to this day.

From 2008 to 2022, a total of 56 rounds of international talks have taken place in Geneva, and it is crucial to highlight the outcomes achieved through these discussions. One significant result is the agreement reached during the 4th round of negotiations in 2009 on the establishment of an "Incident Prevention and Response Mechanism." This mechanism aims to provide an operational response to everyday security incidents. It includes a "hotline" for immediate response to incidents, and, in addition to the hotline, the mechanism involves periodic meetings in Gali and Ergneti.

Representatives of Tbilisi, Tskhinvali and the Russian troops stationed on the ground participate in these meetings, and the chairpersons are representatives of the United Nations, OSCE and the head of the European Union mission in Georgia.

Despite its nearly 15-year history marked by limited success, the persistence of international negotiations in Geneva has resulted in a situation where each party involved finds it in their interest to maintain this format. For Russia, the interest lies in impeding Georgia's Euro-Atlantic integration and thwarting any efforts by Tbilisi to restore its territorial integrity. The mentioned format provides another avenue for Russia to solidify and articulate this position within the framework of international negotiations.

It is in Georgia's interest to talk to the Russian Federation not one-on-one, but with the involvement of Western allies and with their support to force Russia to give up on specific issues. For the de-facto regimes of Sukhumi and Tskhinvali, the Geneva talks are the only format for raising their problems. During the 45th round of negotiations, they even announced that they wanted to participate in the international forums of the United Nations. As for the USA, the UN, the OSCE, and the European Union, their main motivation is a peaceful resolution of the conflict.

An analysis of the 56 rounds of talks shows that the process has been deliberately delayed, with the parties unable to agree on such basic issues as ensuring security and resolving humanitarian problems for the population living in the occupied territories.

It should be noted that the Geneva talks are another platform for the Russian Federation, where it directly expresses its concerns about the western course of Georgia. The statements made at the end of the talks show that the so-called republics of Abkhazia and South Ossetia directly voice the position of the Russian Federation. Like the Russian Federation at the negotiation table, they constantly oppose the issue of strengthening relations between Georgia and NATO. The positions of the representatives of occupied Abkhazia and Tskhinvali are similar to the statements of the Russian Federation not only on this specific issue, but also on every topic of discussion, which shows that the Russian Federation continues to manipulate the regimes of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali.

To sum up, after 15 years of international talks in Geneva, the two main objectives of this format – security and stability in Abkhazia and “South Ossetia” and the return of the IDPs – are still unattainable. The prolongation of the international talks in Geneva and the 58 fruitless rounds show that this format of talks is unsuccessful, but its maintenance brings benefits to each of the parties involved in the talks that have nothing to do with the two main goals of the discussions. ■





Levan Sebiskveradze

The Fate of Athletes in an Oligarchic Country

For several years now, our decades-old perception of athletes has been crumbling before our eyes. After all, we were taught from childhood that athletes are exceptional individuals, akin to the Greek Atlases, standing beyond the limits of human capabilities, capable of achieving remarkable sporting successes with extraordinary strength. We were ingrained with the understanding that athletes deserve utmost respect, and we should always applaud them as they represent the face of our country. One could enumerate numerous sterile and clichéd absurdities that we once believed and still uphold.

In recent years, however, these perceptions have shattered like glass, as we can clearly see that often former or, even worse, current athletes turn into common criminals out to prey on or be apologists for violence, carrying out mostly illegal orders from the Black Hundred in power and going after people the government does not like, whose beating or humiliation seems to be part of the political or geopolitical goals of the ruling forces.

Obviously, not every athlete can succeed, and many veteran athletes are left without any savings, and often without basic living conditions, after their sporting careers are over. This is a sad reality in almost every country, and no one is surprised to see a millionaire veteran athlete next to his colleague living in absolute poverty, because a sporting career, like a human life, is often made up of luck. Obviously, not many people are lucky.

The innovative mass “employment” of veterans and athletes with no income belongs to Russia. Since the 1990s, almost every rich person in Russia has had his own armed gang, usually made up of former athletes. These people are hired for a thousand different purposes for a certain remuneration. It seems that the Russian example was perfectly adopted by the pro-Russian Georgian government, and veteran athletes found a “business”.

Beating people during elections has become an integral part of our lives. It is veteran athletes who are often used against politicians and activists, and it has almost become a shameful tradition.

In Western European countries and the United States of America, both governmental and non-governmental organizations have operated for decades, focusing on assisting veteran athletes who find themselves destitute. These organizations primarily aid former athletes in securing regular employment and frequently advocate on their behalf for job opportunities. Special funds also exist where accumulated resources are directed towards supporting athletes with multiple children or those disabled due to sports-related injuries.

In our country, these people are used for violent purposes, and this is precisely where the Georgian authorities extend their “help” to athletes.

THE ARITHMETIC OF HATRED (DATUNASHVILI’S STORY)

It would take too long to list the belligerent, stone-throwing, swearing, aggressive World and European champions. Some of them have managed to expose themselves as violent criminals even from the chair of a member of parliament, instantly losing the respect and love of the people, which we talked about earlier.

Aggression and violence coming from Georgian athletes does not apply to politicians only. What happened to Greco-Roman wrestler Zurab Datunashvili will probably never be erased from the history of Georgia. The Gegeshidze clan, entrenched in the Wrestling Federation and allied with the government, brutally punished a young athlete who spoke out against them (Datunashvili was captain of the national team at the time); first he was publicly beaten and had his face bloodied, then he was forced to flee the country, and now Zura is receiving championship titles on behalf of Serbia, which is particularly heartbreaking.



Zurab Datunashvili

Unfortunately, society did not properly assess the conflict that began with the president of the Wrestling Federation, Gega Gegeshidze, and we did not do enough to demand that the sports community hold the leadership of the Wrestling Federation accountable. It is not a small story when the first person in the federation beats the captain of the national team to blood and then does everything to remove such a successful athlete from the Georgian national team.

If a similar case had occurred in another country where the rule of law reigns and sports federations do not consider themselves “families”, the president himself would most likely have recognised the need to step down. This would have helped to mitigate the reputational damage to the wrestling federation as a result of the above-mentioned conflict. However, in this case, the situation unfolded differently. Apparently, Gegeshidze had an influential patron, and the society failed to rise to the occasion. Instead, a “who’s who” debate began with a tragic outcome for Georgian sport – Zurab Datunashvili left the country.

After Datunashvili won European gold, many people wrote that they were ashamed because of this boy, which is natural and understandable from decent people. As for those who should be ashamed, we are ashamed instead of them because of what happened, because of such unfairness and injustice, because of expulsion of a young Georgian athlete from the country and, most importantly, because of lost gold medals for Georgia. Indeed, do we have the luxury of losing golden boys and gold medals!

You may recall that a few years ago Gega Gegeshidze became embroiled in a political scandal when, following a beating in the village of Kortskheli in Samegrelo, representatives of the opposition named Gegeshidze and his friends, who are also wrestlers, as the main perpetrators of the beating at the polling station. Gegeshidze was not the president of the wrestling federation at the time, and despite the opposition's accusations, he was elected president of one of Georgia's most popular sports right after the Kortskheli incident, which immediately raised additional questions.

DISDAIN FOR THE CAPTAIN (KASHIA'S STORY)

Despite the fact that sport, and football in particular, is inherently anti-violent and anti-discriminatory phenomenon (and this has been proven by many facts), unfortunately, it is often football that becomes the "arena" for thousands of types and varieties of people who, passionate about their own, or rather "great anti-liberal ideas" imposed on them by the authorities, are ready to restrict the freedom of others, to insult anyone who thinks differently from them, and do it in the name of principles and values.

Guram Kashia, vice-captain of the Georgian national football team, is obviously not



Guram Kashia

the first and probably not the last player who defied the existing "public opinion" and said what he thought was right.

This tenacity was appreciated by the governing body of European football UEFA, and Guram was even given a special award, which many famous legionnaires have never been honoured with. The award was followed by a terrible campaign launched in Georgia against Kashia, as if all the troubles our country is facing are his fault. It is not difficult to guess that this campaign was planned and carried out by pro-Russian groups orchestrated and run by the government.

Social media alone is enough to realise how difficult it is to be an athlete in Georgia, to have a civic position and to defend that position to the end. Fortunately, mass "stoning" did not happen. However, not everyone is as lucky as Kashia..... ■



Painting by Medea Imerlishvili



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