[Reviews]

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Rethinking Georgia[1]

It would not be entirely fair or true to claim that the philosophical and sociological analysis of modern Georgian society in Georgia proper is a blank sheet, and that one has to start from scratch or address only various observations 'from outside'. There *is* a tradition of self-reflective thought by a number of Georgians throughout the twentieth century, predominantly in the formal fields of literary criticism and philosophy. It is worth admitting that the very attempt to eclectically name specific works from this intellectual heritage leaves a wholly artificial impression, and that demarcation of this kind between 'worthy intellectual work' and Soviet-Marxist ideological pulp fiction should be excluded, as it is a matter of individual and highly subjective judgment. In fact, the reader needs to be warned here: this book does not offer any discoveries of forgotten pre-Soviet or counter-Soviet discourse and is of less interest in sorting out rather marginalized (and probably more valuable) critical thought from the more popularized or dominant tradition. This is not a kind of revision that one can find in these essays, although they are indeed strikingly revisionist in their nature.

What this book does offer is indeed unique due to its blend of two fundamental approaches: (a) a spirit of deconstruction of established and mostly popularized myths operating in self-reflections and self-representations of Georgian society today, and (b) a highly polemical style that eschews becoming *ad hominem*, and concentrates more on identifying real necessities and (for the most part) explicitly proposing concrete alternatives. The latter approach seems more than a stylistic technicality as it not only underlines author's reformist image, but also turns the discussion into a more provocative criticism worthy of reflection and comment. As far as the deconstructionist approach is concerned, this fundamental principle provides a good rationale for gathering these five essays together in a single volume.

Tevzadze's critical panorama encompasses issues concerning the state of – and perspectives on – science in Georgia, followed in a subsequent essay by reasoning on the need for the development of the field of political anthropology in Georgia, before touching again on the Georgian 'scientific my-

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1   Gigi Tevzadze, Disenchantment: Five Essays on Contemporary Georgia [in Georgian]. 94 p. Bakur Sulakauri Publishing, Tbilisi, 2009.

thology' of where Georgia and the Georgians stand. Two further essays give a wide-angled view of the problem of 'thieves in law', and an effort to trace the genesis of the modern Georgian nation. Notwithstanding this common framework, each essay can be briefly characterized separately.

The Beginnings of Disenchantment with our Reality Through a Discussion of the Past, Present and Future of Science in Georgia[2]

Armed with a Weberian notion of 'disenchantment' (*Entzauberung*), Tevzadze tries to deconstruct three major popular ideas on the contemporary condition of science in Georgia. These are, he suggests, deeply flawed and rooted in prejudices and societal conjunctures. The first aggrandizes the Soviet-era achievements of Georgian science, while the second is directly related to painful and vehement reactions to the reforms carried out by the government of Georgia since the 'Rose Revolution' (restructuring the infrastructure of scientific and educational institutions implying, among other things, the dissolution of the Academy of Sciences, which was singled out by some as an obvious example of a careless approach by those in power). The third is a rather self-fulfilling prophecy in academic circles: the suggestion that the sole thing needed for Soviet-era success in science (a hypothesis itself scrutinized and doubted by the author) is sufficient state funding from the central budget.

The author casts doubt on the pre-reform achievements of Georgian science, basing his main line of argument on quantitative analysis, specifically on the so-called 'bibliometric method', as an indicator of scientific productivity in order to survey recent dynamics right up to the state of the art. Two major measures are used: the number of articles published per scientist and a citation index, both derived from Thomson Scientific's ISI Web of Knowledge ('Thomson') academic database. One important factor that should be taken into account in relying on this database is at the same time both an advantage and a disadvantage. This shortcoming, acknowledged by the author himself, is that the search methodology excludes publications by Georgian scientists submitted under the auspices of non-Georgian institutions. On the one hand, this actually serves the scope of the research to a certain extent:

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2   The beginnings of disenchantment with our reality through a discussion of the past, present and future of science in Georgia. In: Gigi Tevzadze, Disenchantment: Five Essays on Contemporary Georgia [in Georgian]. Bakur Sulakauri Publishing, Tbilisi, 2009. pp. 5-26.

data that falls into this category could be considered as intellectual potential 'drained' from the academic life of former Soviet and – later – independent Georgia, and so there is no reason to classify this data as relevant to the study of scientific productivity in the country. On the other hand, a limitation of the author's enterprise should be noted: it excludes publications by scientists with routine opportunities to temporarily change institutional affiliation. This would rather make the case for the academic/research mobility of an individual (especially in recent years, but not exclusively), which is a criterion of paramount importance in measuring international standards, to be a qualitative indicator of scientific productivity.

The major findings of this research may be presented as two interesting correlations: (a) Gorbachev-era ideological liberalization *and* the highest productivity rate of Georgian science (i.e., of scientists from the Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic) at the international level, peaking in 1985, and (b) an even higher rate of success of Georgian science coinciding with the initial stage of reforms in the sphere of education and science, that is, roughly in the period 2005–6.

Tevzadze also turns his attention to a comparative analysis of data for the former Soviet socialist space, noting that this recent success is moderate if one looks at opportunities better availed of in neighbouring countries and in other states in the post-Soviet region. Moreover, circumventing the cases of large countries to address 'small nations', he goes further by arguing that, as far as the citation index (an indicator of research quality) for the last three years (2007–9) goes, we are very far from being able to claim that the situation in Georgian science is satisfactory.

In the last section of the article, readers are offered a critique of two popular visions of the future of science in Georgia. The first advocates extensive funding of research in fundamental fields, turning the country into an intellectual island of the sciences. The author rightfully notes that this vision stems from the self-fulfilling rhetoric of an intellectual elite that has lost the ideological function it once had in the Soviet academic superstructure. The second notion of an 'applied' approach – somewhat counter to the previous notion of scientific development – over-emphasizes a practical, innovational approach to scientific policy in Georgia, given the limited resources of a small polity.

Tevzadze sees those perspectives as too simplistic and unrealistic, proposing instead the notion of an 'economy of knowledge'. This is a broader interpretation of the role of academic and scientific circles, with a flavour of a rationalist approach to their capacity to contribute positively to, and to influence, the level of education and critical thinking more extensively. This is

quite a general *belief*, based on an expectation that sustained support for diversified scientific development, including both 'less practical' and 'applied' fields, produces a background for success which might come as a fortuitous, albeit not immediate, outcome. Although the question of how the inevitable problem of limited resources can be overcome is left open, Tevzadze seems right in arguing that the economic well-being of society is a result of a vast, tangible 'investment' in science and not a prerequisite (this is exemplified by charts of post-Soviet and European countries, where a positive correlation between GDP and scientific funding is suggested to be causal).

For the First Time – Political Anthropology in Georgia[3]

The first part of this essay provides a general raison d'être for political anthropology. The basis of the study proposed here is an emphasis on *institutional culture(s)* (with a clear distinction between the categories of political and social institutions), and on the determinants of political choices and general political behaviour in a specific society. Both the justification and the argument for the sub-field are clearly 'culturally aware': the political process in each more or less integrated polity is defined by the working of a sum of behavioural and discursive socio-cultural codes; the solidarity and political support of groups of citizens are also structured along the lines of expectations and the decoding of specific messages from the dominant groups (public figures and the political elite). Hence, institutional culture represents a setting where certain social institutions function as a mechanism for social control and power-sharing, and they usually do so in an implicit way. This then suggests that the results of studies of political institutions, as well as general sociological theories, are limited unless local societal perceptions and uncodified/informal rules are duly addressed.

The main body of the article extensively exemplifies the argument for political anthropology in Georgia, given a situation of polarized government/political opposition groups and their repetitive behaviour (although the analysis is not limited to political organizations, and touches on the *intelligentsia* as well as different professional groups). The author argues that the political crises of recent years (since 2007) are, in fact, a deeper socio-institutional conflict, where an older civic social institution is confronted by

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3   For the first time – Political anthropology in Georgia. In: Gigi Tevzadze, Disenchantment: Five Essays on Contemporary Georgia [in Georgian]. Bakur Sulakauri Publishing, Tbilisi, 2009. pp. 27-46.

a newer one, represented by the governing body and its supporter groups among the citizenry.

On the one hand, Tevzadze aptly justifies his interpretation of the nature of these conflicts as he offers an interesting and convincing characterization of discursive elements from the groups in question. The political rhetoric of the opposing sides is truly too vague in each case to be qualified as a political programme, and it is indeed aimed at helping one identify which political positions are acceptable and which are not. On the other hand, the author, contrary to his stated position, virtually equates specific social groups with respective *cultures of social institutions*, while allegiances and political substructural alliances are in fact far too fussy and unstable to rely on such a rigid approach. However, this is compensated by several examples where certain political agents are confronted with the problem of self-identification and specific (socio-)institutional belonging.

This essay also lays good grounds for a further analysis of the behaviour of the political elite. Recent years have seen a 'drain' of high-level officials from the ruling political group into the opposition arena, and the impact of these agents and groups on institutional cultures and their working would probably shed more light on ongoing processes in Georgia.

Developing a Scenario of the Past: The Case of 'Thieves in Law'[4]

Here Tevzadze addresses the topic of 'thieves in law' as one of the major themes in contemporary Georgian collective memory that define society's axiological character, and thus its future development.

The author reminds us of the two main theories of the origin of 'thieves' as a social institution and as a form of social control: the *romantic* interpretation, portraying criminal circles as outlaws desperately confronting Soviet power, and the alternative, *genealogical* interpretation, seeing *thieves in law* as a successful project of the same Soviet secret services aimed at gaining substantial influence over the population as a whole. At the beginning, the author basically repudiates the first theory and succeeds in highlighting questions that are not covered by the second.

However, the main line of Tevzadze's argument is revealed through an analogy between the *thieves'* code of conduct and that of medieval monks,

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4   Developing a scenario of the past: The case of 'thieves in law'. In: Gigi Tevzadze, Disenchantment: Five Essays on Contemporary Georgia [in Georgian]. Bakur Sulakauri Publishing, Tbilisi, 2009. pp. 46-54.

hinting at the similarity in societal detachment which is to a certain extent common to both ways of live. Here the author tries to apprehend how it happened that *thieves in law* became the implicit ideals of their time and gained respect among wider lay society. Juxtaposing them to the category of political dissidents and comparing them to co-existing elites, this careful reflection on *thieves in law* in effect proposes a fresh perspective on the culture of political disengagement, conformism and non-participation so endemic in the both the Soviet and post-Soviet periods.

The Birth of the Georgian Nation[5]

The theoretical bases of this discussion are the classic theories of nationalism: an overview of the heritage of the main theorists – Gelner, Anderson and Smith – is followed by innovative speculation on the typology of individual identity. Specifically, two main categories of identification are proposed: *societal* (family, kinship/clan and socio-biological) and *politetal* (ethnic and national).

A traditional Marxist approach is adopted, though only in case of pre-modern period, where an ideology supporting nationality, frequently correlated with religious affiliation, is seen as class-oriented and flexible enough to be changed in terms of rational choice. A dividing line is drawn after the emergence of the institutional structures of the mass media and the education system, following which, Tevzadze opines, the existence of a nation is no longer a mere 'inversion' of social reality by hegemonic groups, as the existence of a shared national identity among the masses is self-evident, and realized by the mechanisms mentioned above.

Politetal identities are seen through the lens of Gellnerian-style providence applied to structural evolution, though the author reconsiders Benedict Anderson's traditional understanding of religious communities and concludes that the emergence of the nation-state gave birth to collective *national* as well as *religious* identities; these two co-exist and occasionally compete with each other after the industrialization era, but they do not represent different stages of socio-political development.

Having defined the theoretical framework, Tevzadze tries to date the origin of collective Georgian identity, tracing the project from its initial elitist

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5   The birth of the Georgian nation. In: Gigi Tevzadze, Disenchantment: Five Essays on Contemporary Georgia [in Georgian]. Bakur Sulakauri Publishing, Tbilisi, 2009. pp. 46-54.

state to its transformational phases at the turn of the twenty-first century. As for the present, the author suggests that the political and religious authorities contend with each other as both try to dominate the shaping of a newer version of Georgian politetal identity.

'Georgia at the Crossroads of East and West': A History of the Self-Image and Self-Representation of Contemporary Georgians[6]

This is a truly enlightening insight into the origins and history of a descriptive cliché that has become firmly established in popular as well as academic discussions on the civilizational affiliation of Georgia.

It is suggested that the idea of being a meeting point between East and West, between Europe and Asia, is a recent intellectual by-product of Georgian cultural nationalism, which became a dominant concept during the ideological failure of the Soviet system in the 1970s. This concept serves to strengthen the distinctive characterization, if not the self-image, of the *chosedness* of Georgian society and culture, and represented a cultural-political notion until transformed into a geopolitical idea during Shevardnadze's presidency.

According to the author, the concept of Georgia lying on the *limes* of cultures and civilizations was not a mere rhetorical decoration of the Silk Road and pipeline projects as it also legitimized the destructive ambivalence in Shevardnadze's foreign policy and, as one can understand, cemented a tradition of indecisiveness in terms of European integration as a political and cultural choice. Tevzadze examines this tradition under the new political administration with a slight variation, and returns to the fundamental question that was implicitly addressed in the opening essay: should Georgian society stay loyal to 'traditional' (in fact, recent) modes of self-identification and cultural choices, or should it challenge the rather outdated and inadequate concepts of the Soviet era and essentially rethink the idea of Georgianness?

6   'Georgia at the crossroads of East and West': A history of the self-image and self-representation of contemporary Georgians. In: Gigi Tevzadze, Disenchantment: Five Essays on Contemporary Georgia [in Georgian]. Bakur Sulakauri Publishing, Tbilisi, 2009. pp. 55-81.